1-27-2011

If Not Higher

Alan Stringer

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I.L. Peretz

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Early every Friday morning at the time of the penitential Prayers, the rabbi of Nemirov would vanish.

He was nowhere to be seen.
neither in the synagogue nor in the house of study

nor at a Minyan And he was certainly not at

home. His door stood open.

whoever wished could go in or out. No one would
steal from a rabbi. But not a living soul was there.

In rhythm:

Where could the rabbi be? Where should he be? In heaven, no doubt. A rabbi has plenty of business before the days of Awe. Jews, God bless them need
l.i.v.e-l.i.-h.o.o.d, peace and health and good matches

They want to be good, but our sins are great.

S.a-t.a-n of the tho-u-s.a.n.d eyes watch-es the

whole earth from one end to the oth-er.
what he sees he reports. who can help us if not the
ra- bi!
That's what the people thought.

Faster

poco staccato
But once a Lit-vaks came.

He laughed. You know the Lit-vaks. They think little.
of the Holy Books, but stuff themselves with Talmud
and the law.
So this Lith-vak
points
to a passage in the
German
it sticks in your eyes
where it is written that
even Moses did not ascend to Heaven during his life-time but remained suspended two and a half feet below.

Go argue with a hit-vak.

Slow A tempo

So where can the rabbi be?
"That's not my business," said the Lit-vak shrugging.

But all the while, he was scheming to find

Slower

That same night

dim. to p

rall. into new tempo

right after evening prayers, the Lit-vak steals in-
to the rabbi's room, slides under the rabbi's bed and waits. He'll watch all night and discover where the rabbi vanishes and what he does during

The Penanceal Prayers
Faster

-Some one else might have gotten

drowsy or fallen asleep, but a Litvak

is never at a loss; he recites a whole

tractate of the Talmud by heart.

And at
Dawn he hears the call to prayers.

The rabbi has already been awake for a long time. The litvak has heard him groaning for a whole hour.
whoever has heard the rabbi of Nembrov

groan knows how much sorrow for all Israel

lies in each groan. A man's heart might

break hearing it.
Faster

But a lit-vak's made of iron;

he listens, and he remains where he is

The rab-bi, long life to him, lies on the bed,

and the lit-vak under it.
Then the Lit-vak hears the beds in the house begin to creak. He hears people jumping out of their beds, mumbling a few Jewish words, pouring water on their fingernails, banging doors.
Everyone has left.

It again is quiet and dark. A little bit of light from the

moon shines through the shutters.

A tempo

A tempo
Afterwards the half-volad admitted that when he found him-
self alone with the rabbi a great fear took hold of him.

Goose pimples spread across his skin.
But he was stubborn.
Like a fish in water
and remained where he was.

Finally the rabbi arises,
takes out a bundle of peasant clothes.
lin'en trous-sers, high boots a coat, a big felt hat,

and a long wide leath-er belt stud-ded with

brass nails. The rab-bi gets dressed.

From his poc-ket dangles the end of a heavy pea-sant
Fast again

rope. The rabbi goes out.

And the litvak

Slow

follows him.

On the way the rabbi bends

down, takes an ax from under the bed, puts it in his

Fast

belt, and leaves the house.
The lit-vok trembles, but he continues to follow. The hushed dread of the days of awe hang over the dark streets. Every once in a while a cry rises from some min-yon reciting the...
Penance; prayers or from a sick bed. The old rabbi hugs the sides of streets, keeping to the shade of houses. He glides from house to house with the Lip-vak after him. The Lip-vak hears the sounds of his own heartbeats.
mingling with the rabbi's heavy steps, but he keeps on going, following the rabbi to the outskirts of town. A small wood stands behind the town. The rabbi, long life to
him, enters the wood and stops by a tree.

The Litvak overcome with amazement

watches the rabbi take out the ax and strike down the tree.

The rabbi chops the
tree to logs and chips the logs to sticks and makes a bundle of the wood and ties it with the rope he carries in his pocket. He puts the bundle on his back and shoves the ax into his belt and hurries back to town.
He stops on a back street by a shack and knocks at the wind-

Freely

ow. "Who is there?" asks a frightened

voice. The lit-vak recognizes it as the

voice of a sick Jewish woman. "I," answers the
In rhythm: Faster

rab-bi in the accent of a peasant.

"Who is I?"

Again the rabbi answers

speaking in Russian

"Vassil."

"Who is Vassil, and what do you want?"
"I have wood to sell very cheap."

And not waiting for her reply, he goes into the house.

The Lithvak steals in after him. In the grey light of morning, he
sees her miserable room. A sick woman in rags, she complains bitterly, "Buy?"

How can I buy? Where will a poor widow get any money?"

"I'll lend it to you. It's only six cents."

Archives
ever pay you back?" she asks groaning

"Foolish one," says the rabbi, "You are a poor, sick Jew."

I am ready to trust you with a little wood

Solemnly

while you, who have such a mighty God

Archives
and you don’t trust him for six cents.”

“Who will kindle the fire?” “I’ll kindle the fire,”

answers the rabbi. As the rabbi put the wood into the oven, in a groan, he recited the first portion of the

Archives
Penitential Prayers.

As he kindled the fire and the wood burned brightly, he re-
cited, a bit more joyously, the second portion of the

Penitential Prayers

Archives
when the fire was set he recited the third portion. Then he shut the stove faster.
The Litvak who saw all this became a disciple of the rabbi.
And forever afterwards when a disciple tells how the rabbi of Nemirov ascends to heaven at the time of the Penance Prayers, staccato
Litvak does not laugh. He only adds.

Very Slowly

PP quiet ly, "If not

higher

PP