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A quota of one child for military service had been imposed on Salant, R. Israel's birthplace. The rich began casting glances at the poorer quarters of the locality, as was the custom of those days. To their good fortune, a poor widow came to town. She would go from house to house with her music box soliciting alms. She would be accompanied by her orphan son, who would pick up the pennies thrown to her. The heads of the community were happy at this stroke of luck. They seized the boy, changed his name to that of one of the local children, and enrolled him for military service, intending thereby to fill their quota. The widow became distraught. Her screams echoed to heaven. She kept tearing her flesh, pulling her hair from her head and rushing from house to house, banging on the doors of the communal leaders. To no avail. No one paid any attention to her.

Meanwhile, R. Israel had arranged to spend that Shah-bat in Salant. He arrived in town. Seeing a respectable looking person before her, the woman fell at his feet and implored him to save her son. R. Israel listened sympathetically to her story, calmed her and asked her to come to him after Shabbat. That Friday night and Shabbat morning, R. Israel attended services but made no mention of what he had heard. After the morning services had been concluded, all the local dignitaries repaired to his lodgings to join him in Kiddush. They had barely finished drinking their wine when R. Israel rose to his feet and began calling them names: "Murderers, kidnapers," etc. Knowing them all individually he turned upon them one by one. "You!" he said to the first, "Why! You are such a tzadik that you tie your handkerchief around your neck on Shabbat, not to carry even where there is an eruv. Yet you pay no heed to the verse: 'Whoever steals a person and sells him shall surely die !'" To the second: "Why you! You are so punctilious in performing mitzvot in the most elegant manner possible, careful with the lightest as with the gravest, yet you consider it permissible to hand over a Jewish soul to forcible conversion!" To the third, "You take care to eat shemurah matzah only on Pesach and to provide yourself with the most beautiful etrog, yet you haven't a care for 'You shall not ill treat a widow or orphan,' the punishment for which is death by Heavenly intervention." And so to the fourth and the fifth. All were dumbstruck. No one dared open his mouth. R. Israel sat down, then jumped up as if bitten by a snake, crying out bitterly that it was forbidden to keep company with such criminals, hurriedly left the house, and stalked out of the town in the middle of Shabbat.

The news spread from house to house. Confusion gripped the entire town. R. Israel, the great Gaon and tzadik of the generation had violently denounced the local heads and had fled from the town. They were hurt and humiliated. Those responsible for the deed suddenly realized how dastardly was their crime and saw no other alternative before them than to release the boy and placate R. Israel. Yet no one had the audacity to undertake the mission and confront R. Israel face to face. Finally, R. Elijah of Kretinga, who had been present at the Kiddush that morning, took the task upon himself. After searching all over, he finally discovered R. Israel wandering about the surrounding hills inside the Sabbath

boundary, engrossed in gloomy thought. He hurled the words of the famous D-vine echo at R. Israel: "Have you gone out to destroy the world?" He added: "When R. Simon bar Yochai left that cave and burned everything merely by his looking — he must have been right, otherwise nothing would have been destroyed. Nevertheless, the D-vine echo declared that he was destroying the world, and commanded him and his son: `Go back to your cave.' It is impossible for the world thus to survive. So it is. This is after all a country-wide scourge." Only after R. Elijah had informed him that the child had been set free, did R. Israel consent to return to the town.

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