

# The Seven Good Years

Once upon a time in Turbin, there lived a porter by the name of Tovy. He was very, very poor.

One Thursday afternoon, Tovy stood in the marketplace and looked around for work. He hoped to earn a few cents for Sabbath, but all the stalls were empty. No one was buying anything, and so no one there would need a porter.

Tovy lifted his eyes to Heaven: "Please, dear God, see to it that at least on Sabbath we will not go hungry. See that my wife, Sarah, and our children have a happy Sabbath."

As Tovy was praying, he felt someone tugging him by his coat-tails, which were tucked under a rope around his hips. Tovy turned around and saw a stranger. The stranger was dressed like a hunter, with a feather in his hat and green trimmings on his jacket. The man spoke to Tovy in pure German: "Listen, Tovy! I bring you good news. You have been given seven good years, years of luck and great fortune. You must choose when you want these seven years to come. If you wish, these good years will begin today. You will be a rich man even before the sun sets. You will be able to buy up all of Turbin and

the surrounding lands. After the seven years, however, you will be very, very poor again. But if you prefer, the good years will come to you at the end of your life and you will be a rich man when you die.”

The stranger was, in fact, Elijah the Prophet. As was his custom, he had come disguised, this time as a German hunter. But thinking that the stranger was an ordinary magician, Tovey replied: “My dear sir, please leave me alone. I am so poor that I have nothing even for the Sabbath.”

The stranger, however, persisted. He repeated his offer three times.

At last Tovey reconsidered. “Well, dear sir, if you speak the truth and do not mock my poverty—and if you are not by some chance crazy—then I will tell you something. On important matters I always consult with my wife, Sarah. I cannot give you an answer unless I discuss it with her first.”

“Very well,” said the stranger. “It is always a good idea to consult with one’s wife. Go and speak to her. I will wait for your answer.”

Tovey looked around again, but there were still no customers in sight. What could he possibly lose! He would go home and speak with Sarah.

Tovey went to the outskirts of town, where his small mud hut stood by an empty field. It was summer, and the door was open. When Sarah saw him through the door she ran out joyfully to greet him. Perhaps he had earned some money for the Sabbath. Tovey told her quickly: “No, Sarah, it was not God’s will that I should earn money for the Sabbath. Instead a stranger spoke to me . . .”

And Tovey repeated the stranger’s words to Sarah. He told her of the promised years of plenty, and of the decision they had to make.

“When?” Tovey asked Sarah.



And Sarah immediately answered: "Go, dear husband, and tell the stranger that you wish the good years to begin right now!"

"Why, Sarah?" Tovyte asked, astonished. "After seven years we will be once more poor! After having great riches, won't it be much harder to be poor again?"

"Do not worry about the future, my dear friend. Take what you are offered now and thank the Lord for His blessings. We need the money *now* to pay for our children's education. The teachers sent them home from *heder* because we could not pay the school! See, there they are, playing in the sand."

This news was enough to make Tovyte run back to the stranger with a definite answer: He wanted the seven good years to begin immediately. The stranger seemed surprised.

"Consider carefully, Tovyte. Today you are still strong. You can earn a living—sometimes more, sometimes less. But what will happen later, when you are old and do not have the strength to work?"

"Listen, dear stranger. My wife Sarah wants the good years to start right now. First, she says, 'Thank God for His gifts today, and do not worry about what is to come!' Second, our children were sent home from *heder* because we could not pay for their education."

"If that is so, go home," answered the stranger. "You will be rich even before you get to your house."

Tovyte wanted to ask more question about the future, but the stranger vanished. Tovyte decided to go home. When he came near his mud hut by the open field, he saw his children playing with sand. When he came closer he realized that they were not playing with sand but with pure gold.

The seven lucky years had begun!

Time flew and the seven years passed by quickly. The stranger reappeared to Tovyte. He met him in the marketplace, just as he had done seven years before. Tovyte's old coattails were still tucked under a rope around his hips, and he still looked about for work.

"Well, Tovyte, the seven lucky years are over. The gold in your yard will disappear. So will the gold in your house, and even the gold that you may have hidden away with neighbors."

"Tell this to my wife," Tovyte replied. "She has been in charge of our wealth the last seven years."

The stranger and Tovyte went to the edge of town and came to the same poor mud hut near the open field. They met Sarah by the door. She was as poorly dressed as she had been seven years before, but her face was happy.

"The seven years of plenty are over!" the stranger said.

"Listen, stranger!" Sarah replied. "We did not even begin to have years of plenty! We never considered the gold our own. Only what we earn with our hands is truly ours. Such wealth as came to us without the sweat of our brows was only entrusted to us by the Lord to keep for the poor. The only gold we used for ourselves was to pay for the children's education, to learn God's Torah. If God, blessed be His Name, now has a better keeper for His gold, let Him take it and turn it over to that person."

The stranger, who was Elijah the Prophet, listened to Sarah's words and then vanished. He repeated Sarah's words to the Heavenly Court. The Court decreed that a better keeper for God's riches could not be found on all the earth. The years of plenty continued for as long as Tovyte and Sarah lived.