

# The Rabbi and the Widow

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## Prologue

Ivory stretched her long legs toward the sun, luxuriating in the warmth that enveloped her as she exited the safety of the car. Beginning with her first visit, the Louisiana landscape always had welcomed her, and she could sense the tensions of life being released as she strolled across the huge LSU campus, headed for the Quad. Spreading oak trees created a gentle pattern of shade-sun above the paved walkways and lush landscaping. Pink azaleas and purple crepe myrtles splashed color against the rich greenery, while the lemon scent of magnolia trees wafted through the balmy air.

Yes, she loved the university campus, but Ivory was a sun bunny, not a scholar, and she had come to enjoy the sun, the sights, and the scents.

Now, surrounded by classic southern ambiance and handsome, hundred-year-old buildings enclosing the Quad, Ivory lost herself in daydreams. This was the ideal setting for a picnic, and it perfectly suited her mood. Once the heart of campus life, the “Quad,” as the Quadrangle had been known since its dedication in 1926, now offered a nostalgic look back at what was and what might have been.

Ivory was daydreaming about her first visit to LSU when Lilit intruded: “Ivory, what are you mooning about?”

“Oh, dear,” thought Ivory. “Sunday mornings at LSU should be peaceful ... and quiet.”

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But it was impossible to ignore Lilit, her friend, her protector, the huge, brindle Bullmastiff with the jutting underjaw that exposed her enormous white teeth. “Sometimes,” Ivory thought, “Lilit looks like the hound from Hell.” Only those who knew her well realized how gentle and loving she truly was.

The two friends were a study in contrasts. Alongside the fearsome Lilit, dainty Ivory looked like the picture of sweetness. But looks can be deceiving, and those who knew Ivory understood that the sleek, slim, all-white cat was wary and nervous, fearful of everything and everyone—likely because she was profoundly deaf. Only with her best friend close by could Ivory relax because she knew she would be safe.

Together, they ambled slowly across the lawn, finally arriving at the blanket on which the two others sat. They, too, were a study in contrasts. The man, Lilit’s human, was rugged and serious. The lady who belonged to Ivory was graceful and elegant.

“Funny,” thought Ivory, “I never realized how much Lilit resembles Dr. Broulliette. They both look fierce, but they are two of the gentlest souls a girl could ever meet.”

Just then, Lilit was noticing that Sara and Ivory were also beautifully matched, slender, elegant, and demure.

Sensing each other’s thoughts, Ivory and Lilit realized that they had arrived at the same conclusion about themselves: they both resembled their humans, at least in appearance. As they gazed at each other, Ivory reminisced. “Hey, Lilit, do you remember how they met?”

“Of course. I was there. And so were Jeff and Carlita a little bit later.”

“It’s a good thing all of us were there. Otherwise, no one would understand what really happened.”



“I still find the story amazing,” said Lilit. “We helped make miracles, didn’t we?” She seemed lost in wonder at what she and her feline companion had accomplished.

For Lilit and Ivory, understanding each other did not require talking or a written word, two skills humans had invented because they just were not good at “communicating.” All Lilit and Ivory needed to do to enjoy the story of “The Rabbi and the Widow” again was simple. They would start with the two humans who had recorded many of the details in the story—Jeff, a student who had studied with Dr. Broulliette and had written a journal with all kinds of information about his professor, and Carlita, Sara’s beloved friend, girl Friday, and companion, who had gathered material about Sara from her unique perspective.

Without speaking a single human “word,” both Ivory and Lilit would sail through Jeff’s journal, plug in the chapter contributed by Carlita, and then race through the entire narrative about Rabbi Broulliette and Sara much quicker than a human could read.

Starting with Jeff’s journal, here is the story that delighted them so much.

## The Rabbi

Thirty students sat in various poses, some trying to look cool and composed, others fidgeting nervously in their seats, still others attempting to find something, anything, interesting in their stiff, new textbooks. They all looked up with a start when the professor entered. Even on a huge campus filled with unusual characters, this instructor stood out. Sixty-four years had not disguised his stocky frame or the boxer's forearms that emerged from his short-sleeved shirt, and although he did not move quickly, his gait was still somehow purposeful and athletic. His closely shaven head was crowned with a solid black *kippah*, and his grey beard seemed to have been woven from some form of thick underbrush. His eyes pierced the room, seemingly sizing up each of thirty individual students at once. He did not smile. He did not frown. His grizzled face was totally devoid of expression.

By far the most arresting feature of his physical appearance was the 110-pound Bullmastiff walking silently at his side wearing a jacket on which the words "**MEDIC ALERT**" appeared in bold letters. The service dog also scanned the class, her face equally lacking expression, and waited patiently as the professor placed his notebook on the podium and appeared to straighten a sheaf of papers. Turning to his massive companion, the professor spoke almost in a whisper. "*Lilit, Assis!*" Effortlessly, the dog sat erect facing the class, seeming to dare

anyone to move. “*En bas*” was the next whisper, and the dog’s huge frame settled into the prone position, her eyes never leaving the class.

The professor opened his notebook and addressed the class: “Good morning. I am Baraq Broulliette, and this is Introduction to Judaism.” The voice was a rumbling bass, the eyes deep pools of brown, and the posture would have pleased a marine drill sergeant. Still there was no hint of a smile anywhere on his face.

From the back of the class, a nervous freshman silently mouthed the words, “We are going to die.”

...

My name is Jeff. I was a senior that year, and Dr. Broulliette’s class was the last general education course I needed to graduate with a major in psychology and human behavior. From the moment of Dr. Broulliette’s entry into the classroom that morning, I determined that I had to learn what made this arresting-looking man tick. For the next five years, he and Lilit became my passion and ultimately the subject of my doctoral dissertation.

I got my first break when Lilit accepted me. In each class, she chose one student as her favorite, and I was the lucky winner in Introduction to Judaism that year. I assumed it was because I was seated in the front row and learned only later that any student in a wheelchair, as I was, automatically drew special attention from the service dog. Of course, the best part of being accepted by Lilit was that Dr. Broulliette was willing to spend more time with me. So, along with my formal doctoral research, I was able to incorporate into my collection of data the results of numerous conversations about scholarship, faith, and life. What follows is my compilation of those numerous conversations and

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many hours of research. I think you will find Dr. Broulliette as interesting a character as I do.

Thank God for the internet. I started with a simple Google search and quickly found the explanation for “Lilit.” The details had appeared in the college newspaper five years earlier. Lilit was only a puppy when she was rescued from a kill shelter by the somber professor and then trained by him to act as a seizure alert dog for a high school student with epilepsy. In Dr. Broulliette’s words, “She was the smartest dog I had ever met, and after only eight months of training, I thought she was almost ready to be placed with the epileptic youngster.”

I had to ask: “How do you teach a dog to alert someone of an impending attack?”

“It’s really quite simple,” Dr. Broulliette responded, “but that does not make it easy.” He then explained that dogs are able to hear the human heart beating, smell the chemical composition of the body, and know instantly when physiological changes are occurring.

The heartbeat is particularly significant. “A dog, even simply a family pet, automatically hears the heart beating,” Dr. Broulliette explained, “and establishes a ‘base rate’ for each individual person with whom she is in frequent contact. When that base rate changes, the dog hears and reacts. Most people attach no significance to the behavior of the dog in such moments and thus fail to understand what is perfectly clear to her. But once human handlers learn to observe what the dog does when a heart rate changes, the dog becomes an early indication of impending troubles—a seizure, a heart attack or stroke, even simply a sudden spell of dizziness.”

“So,” he continued, “I start by placing a small kitchen timer on my chest. Its ticks generate a rhythm that is distinct from

the heartbeat. All dogs can hear it, of course, but most will simply cock their heads and perk their ears out of curiosity. The first time I tried it with Lilit, she jumped immediately onto the couch with me and began to whine, wanting me to know that something did not sound right to her. I knew then that she was a keeper.”

I recalled the actions of my own family pet that had always seemed to sense when I had the flu or trouble breathing with bronchitis. “Exactly,” said Dr. Broulliette enthusiastically. “But you did not respond to her signals. The trick is not teaching the dog to notice what is happening but to train the human to interpret the manner in which the dog reacts to what it is experiencing. Every time Lilit seems to be disobeying, I replay in my mind what has happened and always realize that I have overlooked some change in her behavior. She is always right.”

In fact, Dr. Broulliette admitted, “My failure to trust her almost cost me my life.”

Seeing my puzzled look, he continued. “Shortly before Lilit was due to be delivered to her epileptic patient, I awakened early one morning feeling terribly ill and assumed it was something I had eaten the night before. When I took Lilit outside, she began to disobey—the proper word is ‘override’—every command I gave her, and I grew irritated because she had never disobeyed before. Refusing even to relieve herself, she alternately growled and pawed at my legs until she forced me to sit in a patio chair. Once I was seated, she continued to override my commands, continued to whine and growl, and finally reared up to place both giant paws on my thighs, refusing to let me stand from my chair. Then, she literally crashed her ear directly to my chest, trying to tell me what she was hearing. At first I was unable to believe that the dog was warning *me*, but I finally made a cautionary call to a medical doctor friend, who, hearing my

answers to his questions about respiration and chest and arm pains, called for an ambulance to transport me to the hospital.”

I listened in amazement as Dr. Broulliette described his arrival at the emergency room, the oxygen mask, the nitroglycerin pack, the monitors, and the presence of a cardiologist in the room with him. Only four minutes after arriving at the emergency room, he suffered a massive heart attack that surely would have taken his life at home—except home was where Lilit ruled, and her human was not going to die while she was on duty. Wheeled into the operating theater after surviving the attack, Dr. Broulliette had undergone angioplasty, during which titanium stints were implanted into his arteries. Only five days later, the professor returned home to cradle the powerful dog in his arms, to apologize for having doubted her, and to promise that never again would they be separated. He agreed to train another dog for the epileptic youngster, of course. But from that day, the professor and Lilit were always together.

Google yielded scores of other entries, most of them the kind to be expected for a professor with a long career—five university degrees including two doctorates, ten technical books, something more than two hundred articles in learned journals, countless scholarly papers at academic conferences—the list was long and impressive. But the numbers told only part of the story. Unlike many academicians, the professor was not just an expert in one small area of arcane knowledge. Over a period of more than thirty years, Dr. Broulliette had written extensively about an astonishing variety of subjects and issues: the grammar and syntactical structure of several different languages, history, biblical literature, philosophy of religion, theology, Middle Eastern archaeology, Jewish liturgy. He was an ordained rabbi and an invested cantor as well as a scholar and teacher. He spoke

seven modern languages fluently, read a dozen ancient languages and scripts, had taught at two other large universities, had lived in three other countries (Germany, Israel, Iraq), and had served for two years as the epigraphist for an archaeological excavation team. Each country had left an indelible impression on him, and I became curious about his impressions of the countries in which he had resided.

When I asked him about Germany, his response included a story that shocked and saddened me. Planning to spend a full twelve months in the country, Dr. Broulliette had begun with a two-month crash course in conversational German at a famous Goethe-Institut near Cologne to prepare for two full semesters of literature courses at Bonn University under a well-known German Protestant professor of Old Testament literature. When the school year ended, Dr. Broulliette still had one month remaining on his visa and decided to tour the country. His first stop was in nearby Cologne. Standing outside the famous Cologne cathedral, he overheard a German couple standing behind him discussing the bullet marks that still pocked the beautiful structure. Their remarks scathingly decried the American bombing of a stunning architectural landmark. Dr. Broulliette, then only twenty-two years old, finally turned to them and asked in German, “Who started the war?” In his words, “I saw a look of hatred unlike anything I had ever experienced. The man’s face morphed into a mangle of pinched nerves as he spat out his answer: ‘*Die Juden!*’ (‘The Jews!’). I was so shocked and angered by the answer and the hatred that prompted it that I left the next day, refusing to spend another minute in the country that had visited such unspeakable anguish on my people.”

Dr. Broulliette was soft-spoken and deliberate most of the time, but his recall of this one incident revealed that he was

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in fact a deeply emotional man whose feelings about his people were neither hidden nor ambiguous.

“Yes,” he had admitted, “I learned a lot about the literature of the Hebrew Bible, but I also discovered the anti-Semitic leanings of some of Germany’s most famous professors of the Bible whose erudition I had previously admired. This knowledge soured me on Germany, and I have never been back.”

Our next conversation was about Iraq, and I assumed Dr. Broulliette would be equally dismissive of Arab Muslims. I was surprised at his assessment of them. “They are a wonderful people,” he said pensively, “and they have suffered from terrible leadership for most of the past century. Perhaps best of all,” he remarked with a broad smile, “they know how to season their food properly.”

I waited for another story and was not disappointed.

“At supper on my first night with the archaeological team in Iraq, the locals who cooked for us prepared a simple falafel dish, which they dutifully placed on my plate as I came through the line. I had never seen falafel before, and I hesitated with what must have been a quizzical look on my face. The server took a large ladle, filled it with a bright red sauce, and held it up, asking, ‘*Harif?*’ I had no idea what ‘*harif*’ was, and I knew only that the Arabic word meant ‘sharp.’ I figured I should try whatever they offered and answered ‘*Na’am*’ (‘Yes’), so he covered my falafel with it. I noticed that the serving staff followed me with their eyes as I found a table, and I realized that they were watching me take my first bite of *harif*. It was the tangiest, hottest sauce in the land and reminded me of the seasonings my family had always added to food, so I enjoyed every bite, not realizing why the staff seemed delighted when I asked for a second serving. I did not yet know that no other



archaeologist had even tried *harif*, and I had no idea that my eating habits made such an impression on the cooks. But I decided that night that I could relate to any people who produced such delicious food.”

Dr. Broulliette had several other stories about the customs of the local people among whom he had worked, and his description of them was unfailingly complimentary. I was not surprised to learn that he still corresponded with several Iraqi friends he had made almost thirty years earlier.

I asked him next about Israel, and Dr. Broulliette paused for several moments before responding. “Well,” he said softly, “they are my people. I fought in two wars with them, and I feel in Israel that I am home. But I am an American by birth, and this is where I belong. Israel doesn’t need Hebrew teachers, but America does. So, I have remained in America.”

Digging through a stack of scholarly journals in the university library, I found a thirty-year-old picture of Dr. Broulliette taken in Iraq. Back then, his thick beard had been black, his head already well on its way to becoming completely bald. The article containing his picture was a preliminary report of the discovery of a large number of clay food bowls found in an ancient palace. Each tablet contained some kind of magical incantation written by Jewish magicians in ancient Aramaic, and Dr. Broulliette had translated the entire cache for the team on which he served. They were the first scholarly articles he had published.

His explanation about the “magic bowls,” the incantations written on plain food bowls, was intriguing and enlightening. Most scholars of Judaism focus on the standard literature of the first few Christian centuries, the Talmud. Here are found the discussions of life and law and faith carried on

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among the Jewish scholars of the era, and many students of Judaism look to the Talmud for information about true Judaism as it was perceived by these great masters. But at the same time the Jewish creators of the Talmud were debating among themselves the great questions of life and faith, average Jews traveled another avenue in their pursuit of an appropriate way of life. Magic was an essential element in their pursuit.

“You see,” Dr. Broulliette explained, “most people believed that in addition to the physical world experienced through sensory perception, an alternate universe of the spirit world existed, no less real because it was unseen.”

It was indeed an alternate explanation of reality. Spirits that exist in this “alternate universe” were believed to be in control of virtually all facets of life in the physical universe. Some of these spirits were good, but some were evil, and their existence helped explain to common people various negative aspects of daily life. Although such a view embodies the very type of dualism that standard Judaism vehemently denies with respect to God, it was useful for ordinary folk.

Furthermore, the “alternate universe” exhibited its own unique structure, tying each spirit to its own particular guild. According to Jewish legend, a lilit-demon/spirit named Piznai had become infatuated with the beauty of Adam, tricked him into a sexual union, and subsequently bore a host of both male and female demons, so many that their offspring filled the entire unseen world of the spirit. Because she was incapable of bearing *human* children for Adam, he had divorced her to marry Eve, who became the mother of all humanity. It was only natural that the original Lilit and all her offspring would bear deep hatred for Eve and her human progeny.

So, in Jewish folklore, Eve was not the first wife of Adam. That honor had belonged to “Lilit,” whose very name implies darkness or “night.” The fate of all human females was tied to the activities of the spirits that comprise the special group of *lilyata* (“lilits”). Some good spirits in the group could attempt to assist women in their lives, including strategic events like childbirth, illness, or moments of physical danger. But there were mostly evil spirits in the mix, and their goal was to torment and harm women at every possible turn in the road.

The methods of these offspring of the original Lilit and Adam were insidious and evil, and Dr. Broulliette furnished an unforgettable example. “Suppose that a nice Jewish couple has a terrible child, disobedient and fractious. Such a child obviously could not have sprung from two good parents (!). Instead, a male *lili* (the masculine spelling of the word) must have morphed itself into the shape of the husband (an *incubus*) in order to copulate with the wife (whose marital faithfulness is fully assumed), and it was his demon seed that had infested the terrible child.”

As I scribbled notes frantically, Dr. Broulliette continued. “A female *lilit* could also transform herself into the exact duplicate of the wife (a *succubus*) in order to copulate with the innocent husband. Then, she would return to the wilderness to have the child, and the demon offspring would naturally seek to find its father. Her search could explain innumerable incidents that threatened the safety of the nice Jewish home: rattling window shutters, mysteriously disappearing items, unexplained broken dishes or furniture, even a preponderance of headaches or other physical ailments.”

In all such instances, Dr. Broulliette explained, “the innocence of the Jewish parents was safeguarded, but an explanation for the oddities of existence was offered.”

So, how do simple people combat such forces? Enter the magician, whose skill Dr. Broulliette compared only partially facetiously to that of the modern psychiatrist. “He knew all about the lilit, male and female, and he understood their origins from the original Lilit and Adam. When called upon, he could write a protective incantation that would inhibit the ability of the offending spirit to harm the family.”

“Writing, of course, made the document official. But the magician had to appeal to the authority of the guild leader, demanding that she order the lower-ranking member who was the actual cause of the problem to cease and desist. The practitioner could not simply write an incantation containing an open appeal to Lilit, the guild head. He would have to write her name in a secret, magical spelling that she could not undo with her own black magic.”

I remembered that an early scholarly article by Dr. Broulliette was an explanation of the various ways in which the name of Lilit could be permuted in spelling so that she could not recognize and undo the authority that was compelling her, and assumed that I had just learned the significance of Dr. Broulliette’s service dog’s name. When I mentioned the connection, he noted with twinkling eyes: “No, I chose her name for another reason. She is like her master. She looks tough on the outside, but inside, she is all heart and sweetness. In fact, she is a true sabra.”

Noting my puzzled look, Dr. Broulliette explained that a “sabra” is a cactus plant that is rough on the exterior but sweet to the taste once its prickly outer cover has been removed. For this dual reason, it is believed to be quite an accurate description of the modern Israeli: rough and ready for action but loyal and

kind to friends. Seeing Dr. Broulliette and Lilit together, I was convinced that they were two real-life examples of a sabra.

Dr. Broulliette and I discussed many other articles he had written through the years, and that was how I became familiar with his vast range of knowledge mentioned earlier. But far down the list provided by Google, I uncovered a fact that seemed to belong to the life of a different person. As a young man, Dr. Broulliette had spent two years handling a bomb-sniffing dog for the IDF, followed by a third year as a military canine trainer.

Dr. Broulliette was reluctant at first to discuss his career in the Israeli military. But one afternoon in his office, he suggested that he could use a drink and asked if I would like to accompany him. Over his second glass of wine, more relaxed than I had ever seen him, he began to speak. “For three years in the military, a dog was my constant companion. We ate, slept, and worked together every single day, and anyone who thinks animals are incapable of love simply has never given a dog a fair chance.”

Noting that Dr. Broulliette’s hand was gently caressing the massive head of Lilit, I waited silently for him to continue. “You know, we humans are terribly arrogant. We assume that we are the most important animal in the forest, and in truth, we are in many ways. Yet every creature is special, and those we have managed to domesticate and turn into working partners are quite invaluable to us.”

After another sip of wine, he almost whispered. “More than once, my military dog saved my life. And now, Lilit has done that too. I owe these beautiful critters more than I can ever repay.”

When I pressed him for details, he simply said, “Twice I started to enter a building that we assumed had been cleared of explosives, but each time, my canine partner refused to allow me to move. Both times, we backed away from the entrance only seconds before the explosion that would have killed us both. They knew. I did not.”

Sensing that there was more to the story, I waited. He abruptly turned his back to me and turned to face me directly only after several awkward moments of silence. I noticed two silver tears trickling down his rough cheeks that he refused to wipe away. “Once,” and now he *was* whispering, “my partner jumped over a retainer wall rather than let me do it because she could not convince me to stop. The explosion killed her instantly. I never have forgiven myself for failing to listen to her signal.” I was stunned at the inner tenderness no longer hidden behind the external appearance of the serious professor.

An academician who had served in the military with bomb-sniffing dogs, an animal lover who continued to train dogs as service companions for handicapped youngsters, including the faithful partner that now enabled him to lead a normal life! I decided to dig deeper. How had an ex-IDF canine handler become a rabbi, a cantor, a scholar who compiled an extensive academic background? What had brought him to LSU? And how had he become the man I was now studying?

### **The Early Years**

The year was 1944. Millions of Jews were still imprisoned all over Eastern Europe by the Nazi regime; thousands were being sent to gas chambers daily. Far away, in Cajun-speaking south Louisiana, a simple farm wife served as the midwife for an entire

parish that lacked a hospital or a single full-time doctor. Returning to her own tiny farmhouse as midnight approached late one August evening, Agnes Broulliette fought the fatigue that an eighteen-hour delivery had occasioned. Without bothering to eat supper, she fell into her own bed and immediately slept the sleep of the exhausted. She had spoken only one sentence to her family upon her return: "If anyone disturbs me, they'll wish they had never been born."

A mere three hours later, her husband's gruff voice shouted, "Agnes, get up. It's Josephine." Agnes was fully alert immediately. Josephine was her only daughter, the apple of her father's eye, and the first member of the family to have graduated from college.

How, thought Agnes, could things have gone so wrong? Josephine—beautiful, intelligent Josephine—had met a young man at college and had become pregnant by him. In 1944, such a thing was scandalous. But it quickly became worse. Upon learning the news of her pregnancy, the man, whose name Agnes refused to utter, had sneered, "I'm not marrying any Jew" and promptly disappeared. Abandoned and humiliated, Josephine had crept home to the safety of her parents and resolutely determined that she would make a good life for her child and herself.

Snatching her midwife's kit from the dresser, Agnes hurried upstairs to Josephine's bedroom, finding her daughter bathed in perspiration and writhing with the pain of impending delivery. Almost before Agnes could open her medical bag, the baby's head appeared, and within seconds, the robust boy began to scream in protest against being forced from the warm and safe cocoon of his mother's womb.

“Baraq,” said the new grandfather who was observing silently. “The rascal moves like lightning.” In this cacophonous fashion did the child whom I would later meet as Dr. Broulliette begin life in this world.

When Dr. Broulliette told me the story, he chuckled. “Of course, my folks were all Cajun Jews, so I’m fairly certain they added a few salacious details to the drama.”

One of only two Jewish families in the predominantly Catholic parish, the Broulliette clan included young Baraq’s mother, grandparents, four uncles and aunts, and eleven cousins born in the ten years following the arrival of Dr. Broulliette. Together, the extended family comprised a small polyglot enclave. Grandmother Agnes spoke Yiddish with her sisters and French with everyone else; the grandfather spoke French to everyone except his grandson, with whom he spoke only in Hebrew. Baraq’s mother, Josephine, served as teacher of French at a local high school and was the only family member conversant in English. Thus, the medium of communication changed for young Baraq depending on his adult caretaker for the day. By the age of four, he could converse easily in four languages.

But languages were not the only diverse aspect of the Broulliette family. Baraq’s grandfather not only maintained a small forty-acre farm—he also ran a “general store” in the days before Walmart made such entities no longer profitable. And “Monsieur B,” as he was known affectionately, established a reputation for hard work, honesty, and square dealing. He was also widely recognized as one of the funniest men in the area, putting an original stamp on his own brand of Cajun country humor.



When a customer asked him the price of a pair of brogans, the hardy work boots of laborers in the area, he replied that they cost three dollars.

“But Mr. Juneau sells them for *two* dollars,” the customer protested.

“Well, go buy them from Mr. Juneau” was the response.

“But he’s all out of brogans,” said the customer.

“Me, when I’m out of brogans,” noted Monsieur B, “I *give* ’em away!”

“Miss Agnes” was no less notable. In addition to her parish-wide service as a midwife, she was renowned for her baking prowess, especially coconut cakes. But while her cakes melted in the mouth, her temper was pure acid. The woman who thought nothing of sitting up all night with a frightened delivering mom made no attempt to hold her tongue when provoked. Once, given the wrong directions to a house where she was to deliver a baby, she promptly retraced her path for the single purpose of finding the culprit whose directions had misled her. “Mais God damn, but you stupid” was her verdict, shouted directly into the face of the miscreant. Her anger vented, she proceeded to the right house and delivered a healthy baby girl.

Perhaps the outstanding Broulliette family characteristic was a determined intensity that was often labeled as stubbornness. Miss Josephine, needing to borrow money in order to open an insurance agency, was denied because she did not have a male co-signer. When Mr. B volunteered to sign with his daughter, she refused his offer, threatened the reluctant banker with a lawsuit, and obtained the loan. The year was 1950, long before the days of the feminist movement. These characteristics of hard work, humor, explosive temper, and steely resolve all seemed to pass directly to young Baraq.

At the age of four, Baraq had his first encounter with the law. During a trip to town for supplies, Mr. B turned his attention to a purchase for only a moment, and Baraq was gone. He was discovered minutes later standing in the middle of the busiest intersection in town, and adults watched in amazement and horror as the sturdy waif did his best to direct traffic, motioning one car to turn left, to another, granting permission to turn right, and then to a short line of waiting vehicles giving the signal to proceed through the intersection. Snatched to safety by a concerned motorist who stopped alongside him, Baraq remained the picture of calm throughout. Even a stern lecture from a worried city cop failed to dim his enthusiasm or his conviction that he was quite capable of directing traffic. Mr. B could only shake his head.

In 1950, before preschools and kindergarten, Baraq entered grade one in the public school system, where his first teacher quickly recognized the range of personality features that distinguished her newest student: he possessed amazing linguistic skills, he could reduce an entire class to laughter with outrageously funny remarks, and—he was acutely aware that he was “different.” A Jew in a Catholic environment, a fatherless boy among tightly knit families, a country boy sent to school in “town,” Baraq learned early to fight in response to insults hurled in English or French. Once, succeeding in landing only a few blows before being soundly thrashed by an older boy, young Baraq remarked simply: “Well, at least it cost him *something* to call me a son of a bitch.”

1950 also marked another major change in Baraq’s life. His mother moved to a larger town to open a small insurance agency with the bank loan, and the boy was left with his grandparents on the farm. Baraq’s first hero was his grandfather,

a secular Jew who looked upon organized religion as a curse and never attended synagogue services (the closest one was more than thirty miles away, an impossible distance for a family in those days). Yet, Mr. B clung doggedly to several Jewish traditions and culture. Although he was never told why, young Baraq always knew that his family did not eat pork or shellfish, that his grandmother lit candles on Friday evening, and that his grandfather kept a special knife used only for severing the carotid artery of an animal that he butchered. No one spoke of any religious reason for these customs; they were simply a part of daily life.

Riding on a tractor with Mr. B, Baraq watched as his grandfather abruptly stopped and then steered a careful course around a clump of growth. As they passed the clump, Baraq noted the mother dove and her babies ensconced in their nest shielded by the surrounding growth. "They have the right to live too," Mr. B remarked quietly, and Baraq never forgot the incident.

Nor could he fail to notice that during harvest, Mr. B never cut the corners of a field of grain. "Too much trouble" was the simple explanation from Mr. B, and Baraq learned only much later that an entire tractate of the Talmud is devoted to the requirement that harvesters leave uncut the corners of a field so that poor people could be allowed to glean for their daily subsistence.

He also learned the hard way that dishonesty and untruth were never tolerated. Visiting a small grocery store in town with his grandfather, young Baraq filched a candy bar while the store owner spoke with Mr. B. When his grandfather discovered the boy eating the stolen goods at home, the two Broulliette males promptly returned to the store to face the owner, who was still

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unaware of Baraq's act. Red-faced, with a glowering grandfather standing by in a threatening pose, Baraq admitted his crime and agreed to sweep the store every afternoon for a week in exchange for the candy bar. On the way home, Mr. B uttered only one short sentence: "Jews don't steal, Baraq, and they don't lie." Baraq never stole again, and he never lied to his grandfather.

In his stern grandfather, Baraq found the male role model that every small boy needs for another aspect of life. Mr. B's imprint on the boy was also unmistakable with respect to his capacity for hard work. Even for a small boy, chores on the farm began when the rooster crowed and continued until sunset. Before breakfast, young Baraq worked to clean the barn, helped milk cows by hand, fed the family chickens and gathered their eggs, and made certain that all the dogs and cats had fresh water and food. During the summer, he worked alongside his grandfather at the endless variety of tasks demanded by a farm. After supper, in a home that contained no television set, he sat on the porch chatting with his grandmother and her sisters in Yiddish while shelling pecans or hulling peas, or speaking Hebrew as he helped his grandfather sharpen a saw or repair a piece of furniture or a simple tool. Failure to do one's share of the work was not an option.

Mixed with the stern demeanor of his grandfather, Baraq detected what many who knew the man only casually may not have realized. Whether making soup for a sick friend, caring for a wounded or abandoned animal, or helping a neighbor repair his barn, Monsieur B never let an opportunity to perform a "*mitzvah*" pass. Even here, Mr. B's caustic wit never failed. Gruffly handing a pot of chicken soup to an ill neighbor, he brushed away the proffered thanks of the grateful wife. "Ah, Terese, as bad as your cooking is, Baptiste would never get well. And he owes me

for last month's supplies." The small grandson smiled, but in fact, Mr. B's actions in such situations defined the word *mitzvah* itself for Baraq. These multiple acts of kindness and generosity made a deep impression on the young lad, matched repeatedly once Baraq became an adult.

His second hero was a piano teacher who agreed to teach him in exchange for light chores around her house. Baraq's passion for music, born of his need for an energy outlet, proved to be his salvation. Whenever he was left alone while his grandmother delivered a baby and Monsieur B minded the store, the piano became his best friend, and it was quickly evident that his musical talents matched his linguistic ability.

But here, too, his independence surfaced. During a piano recital, Baraq was scheduled to play a piece of modest difficulty which the teacher was certain he could do flawlessly. To her surprise, Baraq began to play an entirely different and much more difficult piece, one to which he had been introduced only a few weeks earlier. His performance was not flawless, but he managed. Defending himself after the recital, sixth-grader Baraq said simply, "What's the point of doing something that is easy?" The teacher had no reply, she but began from that moment to push Baraq harder than she had ever pushed any other student.

During the summer preceding his eighth year in school, Baraq's grandmother died, and the young boy went with his grandfather to join his mother. The small house in Josephine's larger town lacked the open fields that had surrounded Baraq's first home, and the new school produced fresh insults, calling forth the violent response he had perfected long ago. But this time, the social problems were accompanied by academic and legal troubles. Baraq's grades plummeted, and he was returned

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to his mother in the custody of an officer of the law more than once. Baraq and fighting became linked.

Baraq's stepfather, who had married his mother three years earlier, decided that the boy needed discipline. His stern lectures soon escalated to corporal punishment, and the boy who had known tough love from his first male role model, but never corporal punishment, now experienced the back of a grown man's hand to his face for the first time. Partially because he was jealous of his wife's affection for Baraq, but largely because he stupidly believed he was saving the boy, the stepfather, whose name Baraq refused to utter as Agnes had refused to utter the name of Baraq's biological father, increased the level of violence against his stepson, frequently whipping him with his leather belt.

At the age of fifteen, the boy who had learned early to respond to insults from classmates by fighting finally reacted physically against his stepfather, landing a hard blow to the older man's face. But the man was far heavier and more powerful than the budding teen, and the result was a serious beating for Baraq. His nose was broken, one eye was closed and blackened, and two ribs were cracked. In those days, of course, no one turned to child protection agencies in such cases. The stepfather reported his own version of the incident to Baraq's mother, and when her son refused to say a word about it, she was left with no option but to accept her husband's explanation that the boy had attacked him and to pray that the boy had learned his lesson.

Only the grandfather heard the complete story from Baraq, but he refused to excuse the actions of his grandson. "You never sass an adult, Baraq," he said quietly, "Even when he is wrong."

Baraq was never told about the ensuing conversation between the offending stepfather and Mr. B. But the beatings stopped.

Inevitably, of course, Baraq was arrested on a more serious charge—inciting a brawl by breaking the jaw of an opponent in the parking lot of the local bowling alley, where all the high school kids “hung out.” This time, there would be more than a lecture from a finger-wagging local cop, and Baraq found himself standing in the city courtroom facing a judge whose own son was Baraq’s best and only friend. Outwardly defiant, struggling to ignore his tearful mother seated in the front row, Baraq was certain that his friend’s father would go easy on him. The words “Ninety days in the parish youth prison” sent him into mild shock.

Hope and relief flooded Baraq’s mind when the burly police officer who had arrested him stepped forward. “Your honor, I would like for this boy to be remanded to my custody. I will take full responsibility for his behavior.”

But the relief Baraq felt soon dissipated. The officer, a former marine boxer, spoke bluntly on the courthouse steps. “Look, kid, I’m your only chance. Since you are so tough, I will teach you how to fight properly, and you can test yourself against other tough guys in a ring with a referee and rules. Mess with me, and your Jewish butt lands behind bars.”

The 160-pound teenager sized up the 240-pound officer and decided that he was overmatched. So, the boxing lessons began. But as Baraq found an outlet for his aggression, he discovered something quite important. He was fearless, but he was not particularly skilled as a boxer. He won most of his fights on sheer grit but always seemed to take too many punches and seldom felt like a true victor. Realizing that he would never be

the middleweight champion of the world, and knowing that the officer would cut him no slack, Baraq was determined to develop his other skills. Good grades were one product of his new outlook on life, as was a renewed devotion to his beloved piano. When he turned sixteen, his mother gave permission for him to play the piano at a hotel restaurant nearby, and he began saving money for college.

But Baraq was not content simply to play at the restaurant and accept the standard wage. He found a large brandy snifter and placed it on the piano with several bills from his own pocket clearly visible. In short order, his tips often exceeded his salary, and his savings began to grow.

And then, Baraq discovered romance. As the star of French class, Baraq was sought by other students as a partner for class projects and assignments. When a dark-eyed beauty named Janice asked him to help her with an assignment, Baraq was smitten. Janice was the daughter of the local Methodist minister, and she and Baraq could not have been more different. Baraq was bouncy and almost arrogant around people, but with Janice, he became painfully shy. Janice, who was normally shy and soft-spoken around everyone else, quickly became light-hearted and free with Baraq. When she initiated their first kiss, Baraq's world changed, and as he recalled the moment to his mother, from whom he kept no secrets, his description captured the essence of what only young lovers know: "I could not breathe. My face flushed, and my knees buckled."

Josephine seized the opportunity for a serious talk, and Baraq learned for the first time a few of the details of his mother's relationship with his biological donor. Watching his reaction, and seeing realization dawn in his eyes, Josephine believed that Baraq would have the fortitude to avoid the terrible mistake she



had made during her first foray into romance. She was right, but little did she know that Baraq would speak bluntly with Janice, assuring her of his love, while procuring her agreement that they had to be careful. Baraq and Janice remained a couple for their final two years in school together but never ventured into the sexual liaison that could have altered their young lives. And little did Baraq know of how grateful Janice was to be relieved of the awful pressure most young girls feel to “prove” their love.

Upon being graduated from high school, the determined teen was granted a music scholarship to a small Methodist college in Oklahoma. He learned only much later that the father of his beautiful Janice, the local Methodist minister, had recommended him for the scholarship. Janice earned an academic scholarship to a different college, and the two sweethearts were separated. As often happens, their teenage passion did not survive their separation.

### **College Man, Cantor**

Once his college days began, Baraq soon learned that he was still “different.” He had no interest in the religious tenets of the college, did not drink alcohol or play cards, and made few friends among the other students. While they partied, Baraq played piano at an upscale steak house nearby, still saving his money carefully and living simply. While most students took the easiest courses available, Baraq declared a triple major in classics, music, and religion.

Told that he needed a modern foreign language to graduate, Baraq enrolled in a Russian class. When he overheard his Russian teacher, who was the wife of the French professor,

conversing with her husband in French, he joined in the conversation.

“Why are you taking Russian, Baraq,” he was asked, “when you already are fluent in French?”

“Well,” replied the simple country boy, “I was told that I needed a *foreign* language to graduate!”

Midway through the first semester of his freshman year, unable to return home for the Thanksgiving holidays, Baraq wandered aimlessly through the streets of downtown Oklahoma City and spotted a synagogue, the first one he had ever seen. Greeted by the seventy-eight-year-old rabbi as he entered, he felt oddly at home for the first time in his young life. The rabbi was amazed to find a young boy who spoke Hebrew fluently and made a decision that would change Baraq’s life forever.

“A music major with flawless Hebrew! So, you’ll be our cantor.”

The rabbi became Baraq’s third hero. Attending services of worship for the first time, tutored by the rabbi in the intricacies of Jewish liturgy, Baraq proved a willing pupil who absorbed the wisdom of the rabbi and begged for more. Less than two weeks after setting foot in a synagogue for the first time, Baraq assisted the rabbi as he led prayer services in Hebrew, to the delight of his new spiritual family. He plunged enthusiastically into active Jewish life, serving the aging and dwindling congregation in need of a young and talented cantor to lead services of worship. On Saturday mornings, while his college mates lingered in bed after late nights on the town, Baraq sang the melodies of Jewish prayer, finding in the ancient words new meaning for his own young life. Surrounded by people whose lives were grounded in Jewish worship and wisdom, Baraq began to develop a sense of

his own identity that had remained out of reach as long as he had been the only Jewish boy in a Christian high school.

As music had led him to discover his Jewishness, so now languages and music led him to academic excellence. He redoubled his efforts at mastering the piano, began voice lessons, and studied music history, theory, and composition. In his religion classes, he began to learn about the philosophical framework of Christianity, and he was introduced to other great faith systems around the world. To complete the classics component of his tripartite major, Baraq added Greek and Latin to his arsenal. By his senior year, he began to serve as the teaching assistant in Greek and Latin—and French!

During the second semester of his senior year, Baraq was called to the office of the registrar and informed by a strait-laced office worker that he could not graduate because he had not declared a “minor.” Only the intervention of the college registrar himself allowed Baraq to skirt the rules, and thereafter, Baraq often reminded his friends that he had never completed a minor in college—only three majors!

Baraq finished his undergraduate education in three years, and he stayed at the college to pursue a master’s degree in classics. At the age of twenty-one, he wrote a master’s thesis on Greek literature that marked him as a coming star.

### **Israel and First Love**

Upon his graduation in 1966, Baraq embarked for Israel and began living with a Jewish family that had emigrated from Iraq, adding Arabic to his arsenal of languages. Early in 1967, he received a job offer to serve as an instructor of biblical languages at a small Methodist seminary in Kansas City. Because he had

no other option, he decided to accept and purchased a ticket to return to America in late summer. But the Six-Day War of June 1967 interrupted his plans. Baraq became a dual Israeli-American citizen and enlisted in the IDF, where he was assigned to a canine unit.

1967 was also the year when Baraq met Leora, a fourth-generation Israeli beauty who stole his heart. Just before the outbreak of the war, as they discussed their plans for marriage, Leora confided to Baraq her desire to study in the United States, and she promised to return with him when his three-year military tour ended. Baraq's future seemed to have changed for the better.

But Leora was also in the Israeli military, service that was compulsory for male and female citizens. The stray bullet that pierced the heart of Leora several months after the end of the war also shattered Baraq's world. Haunted by the loss of Leora, he spent the following three years completing his military tour and studying at a well-known Yeshiva in his spare time, permitting himself no opportunity for social development or making new friends. In June 1970, Baraq was discharged from the army and graduated from the Yeshiva, accepting ordination as a rabbi.

But he still had no job, no plans, and no vision for his future. When the seminary offer was renewed, he returned to the USA and accepted the position as instructor of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.

### **Home, Faith, and a Third Love**

The advice of his beloved grandfather caused Baraq to rethink the priorities of his life. As had many other Jews before him, Baraq considered the advantages of living as a Christian in a

Christian-dominated society. The old man was convinced that Judaism was destined to die out in America, to be replaced by Christianity. And he believed Baraq would have no future as a rabbi. Swayed by Mr. B's advice, Baraq decided not only to perform his teaching role but also to enroll in the seminary course of study leading to the doctorate in Christian theology, supporting himself by his assignment as instructor of biblical languages. Yet, as he had done in Oklahoma City, in Kansas City as well, he served a small downtown synagogue as a cantor.

During the summer preceding his graduation from seminary, Baraq, presumed by the committee in charge of assignments to be a Christian, was invited to join a team of scholars who were issuing a modern English translation of the Bible. One of the other committee members was James Younger, a Christian professor of the Old Testament at a liberal American Baptist seminary. Watching the younger man work with the other translators, Dr. Younger was amazed at his linguistic skills, his energy, and his willingness to work long hours at a grueling task. The older man and young Baraq developed a warm friendship, and Baraq listened as Dr. Younger regaled him with stories of his own days as a graduate student. And Baraq was fascinated to learn that his new friend had earned his PhD in the quintessentially Jewish environment of Dropsie College in Philadelphia. His doctoral advisor had been Cyrus Gordon, one of the most famous scholars of Judaism in the twentieth century. The idea of studying with a Jewish scholar who was liberal enough to teach Christian students captured Baraq's imagination.

Now fully conflicted, Baraq sought advice both from his rabbi and colleague at the synagogue and his new Christian mentor. Throughout the final year of his doctoral program at the seminary, writing a dissertation on New Testament quotations of

the Old Testament, he seemed trapped between the two sides of his social and religious conflict. The values by which many of his Christian acquaintances lived seemed to him quite similar to the values he had learned from his grandfather. And the conservative Christian culture of Kansas City did seem to indicate that Judaism was on the wane. But the Christian tradition of interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures through the lens of the New Testament bothered him, and he was drawn to the Talmudic rabbinic debates that placed the ancient sacred texts in the service of modern Jewish life. It was the Christian professor who opened Baraq's eyes.

"You are not a Christian, Baraq," Dr. Younger noted gently, "and you should not try to become what you are not. You know the profundity of Judaism. What is more, it speaks to you as the New Testament has failed to do. You must learn to be comfortable in your own skin."

Baraq realized that the wise professor was correct. Having looked openly at the two ways of approaching theological truth, Baraq admitted to himself that he was not, and never could be, a believing Christian. Judaism was meaningful to him, and he believed it was a pathway to God that retained its own independent integrity, perhaps not for everyone but for him. Whether he liked it or not, he was a Jew. He decided to accept the responsibilities of his ordination as a rabbi, and he explained to the seminary faculty that he would not seek ordination as a Methodist minister. With a strong recommendation from Dr. Younger added to his outstanding academic record, Baraq received a scholarship to Brandeis University to study classical Judaism with Dr. Gordon.

But the theological conflict was not the only issue with which Baraq was forced to wrestle. The haunting image of Lyn

stared him in the face. His third true love could not be denied, but the fact that she was the daughter of a Methodist bishop loomed large as well. Weary from his years of living alone, Baraq decided that love would conquer all the differences between the lovely Christian girl and the passionate Jewish boy. What he could not know, what young people in love never know, was that while he was certain that she was really a Jewish soul accidentally born into a Gentile body, she believed in her heart that Baraq would someday become a Christian.

Their marriage was unusual. Baraq insisted that his rabbi perform the actual ceremony, and Lyn's bishop father was invited to offer a prayer of consecration for the new couple. Both partners simply refused to think clearly about the religious and cultural differences that separated them. Lyn accepted a job as an elementary school teacher in Boston, and Baraq immersed himself in his studies at Brandeis University. Lyn attended church faithfully on Sunday, and Baraq agreed to help lead worship on Saturday at a small synagogue nearby. Their worlds began to revolve in different orbits.

The birth of a healthy son and a beautiful baby girl seemed to sanctify their union, and Baraq's academic career continued from one success to another. He discovered in Professor Gordon, who was everything Dr. Younger had promised, his true intellectual father. And Gordon returned Baraq's affection fully. Pushing Baraq to the limits of his capacity as a student, Gordon alternately prodded, chided, and encouraged his young follower to excel.

Sometimes, Baraq thought, Dr. Gordon had too much confidence in him. Noting to his mentor that he had been incorrectly enrolled in second year Egyptian hieroglyphs although he had not taken the first year, Baraq expected Gordon

to approve a schedule change for him. But Gordon dismissed Baraq's concerns. "The only grade that counts will be the final examination at year's end. You will be behind the other students at first, but you are an experienced linguist. You'll catch up in time."

Baraq was not so sure. But he was determined to justify Gordon's faith in him. Although he later confessed, "I was lost for the first semester and one-half," Baraq somehow acquired the first-year material with which his classmates had begun the year, and he earned a "B" on the final. It was the only grade other than "A" that he ever received throughout twelve years in college and graduate school.

As had his master's thesis in Greek literature and his first doctoral dissertation at the seminary on Hebrew grammar, Baraq's second dissertation on Aramaic magic inscriptions marked him as a young scholar with a bright future.

### **A New Career, a New Crisis**

When a major East Coast university created a new department of Judaic studies, Gordon's recommendation was crucial in helping Baraq win the job as their first professor. His future seemed secure. But his decision to accept a position teaching Judaism became the occasion for doubt to begin growing in the mind of his Methodist wife, who despaired of her husband's true intentions for the first time. As Baraq's career blossomed, Lyn slipped ever deeper into depression. She had not signed on to be the wife of a Jew but of a Christian biblical scholar. And Baraq seemed impervious to her feelings and her vision of their life together.



Most egregious of all for the monolingual Lyn, Baraq persisted in speaking only Hebrew to their young son David and their darling daughter Nicole. Not only was her husband Jewish, Lyn realized, but he was teaching their two children to be Jewish as well. The end was predictable, but the note Baraq found upon returning from class one afternoon was devastating. “I will always love you. But I am not the companion you need. And since the children are both more like their father than their mother, I have decided to leave them with you and return to the home of my parents. I wish you well.”

To survive, Baraq immersed himself in his career. But as the single father of two small children, he had no choice except to drag his son and daughter with him everywhere he went—to class, to worship, to shop, to play. Students who applied to serve as Baraq’s teaching assistant knew up front that part of the job was helping with the children. Whenever he received an invitation to offer a scholarly lecture or speak to a congregation out of town, Baraq’s response was uniform: “I’ll be happy to come, but you must agree to underwrite the travel expenses of my two children as well.” Because their hectic schedule made public schooling impossible, Baraq became not only the father but also the private teacher of his two children.

Academically, Baraq flowered. Museums around the world hired him to decipher and publish a series of Aramaic inscriptions etched on various pieces of pottery in their collections, and each new publication added to his stature as an epigraphist. To this growing number of articles in scholarly journals, Baraq added impressive books and articles on the grammar of Hebrew, Aramaic, Babylonian cuneiform, and Egyptian hieroglyphics.

During his third year as a young professor, Mr. B died, and Baraq was called home to conduct the funeral. En route, Baraq realized that everyone present at the secular service would know that Mr. B had never been religious, shunned synagogue worship, and thought organized religion a waste of time. But Baraq was convinced that these facts did not define his grandfather. On the plane ride home, with only a Hebrew Bible and airline stationery in hand, Baraq wrote the remarks with which he would memorialize his grandfather. Yes, he would admit openly, Mr. B had not been “religious,” and some might have judged him harshly as a result. But reaching beyond the boundaries of synagogue, prayer, and formal religious practice, Baraq turned to the great Hebrew prophet Micah, who had asked and answered what Baraq viewed as the quintessential question of life. “What does the Lord require?” Micah had asked. And Baraq affirmed that Mr. B had lived the heart of the prophetic answer: “To practice justice, to love faithfulness, and to live humbly with God.”

After the service, Baraq was inundated with people who wanted to tell him of Mr. B’s involvement in their lives. For the first time, he met people to whom his grandfather had lent money when they had no collateral but needed food and supplies, teachers and nurses from poor families whose tuition Mr. B had paid to allow them to attend college, and friends who remembered Mr. B as the one person who always stood by them in illness or despair. Their testimony confirmed to Baraq that he had assessed his grandfather correctly. Laying to rest the old man who had been his first hero and teacher, Baraq not only found solace for his own heart in the ancient words of Micah but defined for everyone present the essence of the man he had loved.

Shortly after returning to the university, Baraq received a plea from a small nearby synagogue whose rabbi had died suddenly and unexpectedly. Baraq accepted the offer to serve as their congregational rabbi on an interim basis, adding to his paternal and academic responsibilities the burden of spiritual leadership for a group of seventy-five families. Added to his academic responsibilities, *bar mitzvah* classes, adult education courses, hospital visits, family counseling, and services of prayer and worship filled his every waking moment.

Teaching young eleven and twelve-year old boys proved a particularly daunting task. Most were required to attend by insistent parents, and all would have preferred to spend their after-school hours at anything other than studying Hebrew with a rabbi. So, Baraq accepted the challenge of making classes interesting enough to hold the attention of wiggling pre-adolescents. During a vocabulary lesson, Baraq was determined to uncover a secret way to help the students remember difficult Hebrew words. Whenever he could, he linked the foreign words to familiar English ones. “The word for ‘go up’ in Hebrew is *nasa*,” he noted, “just like the American space program.”

But his plans came unraveled one afternoon. “The Hebrew word for ‘tent’ is *’ohel*,” he explained, “just like the swear word.” Reviewing later in the session, he called upon a particularly unruly boy to recall the Hebrew word for “tent,” and when the boy’s eyes rolled back in his head, Baraq reminded him of the earlier clue. “Remember, it’s a swear.”

Again, the eyes rolled, and there was a long pause. Finally, the beleaguered boy asked, “Is it *shit*?” The class roared, and Baraq gave silent thanks to God that most of his classes were conducted at the university level.

Even with his heavy schedule, Baraq remained devoted to his two children. Whenever little David or Nicole needed him to attend a school function, he was there. He served as an assistant coach for David's flag football team as well as for Nicole's volleyball squad. And his secretary was instructed that whenever Baraq scheduled something with his children, their appointments were to be honored as faithfully as if they had been made by an important congregant or professorial colleague. His attitude was obvious to David and little Nicole, as well as to everyone else in his life. They came first.

Still, Baraq needed help. He enrolled the children in public school and decided to hire a retired schoolteacher to tutor them and to stay with them until he could return from the tasks of his day. At home, Baraq was determined to be "Dad," not "rabbi" or "professor." His dedication to fatherhood resulted in the beginning of a lifelong friendship with David and Nicole. And in their presence, Baraq was free to be laugh, to hug, to cry, and often to be just plain silly. His sense of humor constantly delighted them, and their love sustained him.

To both children, Baraq bequeathed his ferocious spirit of independence; little David especially seemed to have inherited his father's sense of humor. One Halloween, the ten-year old boy squirted lighter fluid on his shoes and lit it, then ran through the neighborhood screaming that the devil had set his feet on fire. Learning from his father how to teach the family dog to "speak" with only a hand signal, David convinced his friends that the dog was a mathematical genius. "Ask him to tell you the sum of two plus two," David challenged his mates. Seeing his open hand, the dog began obediently to bark. When he reached the count of four, David slyly closed his hand into a fist, whereupon the dog immediately stopped. To the amazement of his friends, who

never caught on to the trick, the clever dog gave one correct answer after another, no matter how they phrased the question.

Humor was one thing, but independence sometimes became a problem. Although David had been warned not to leave the backyard and enter the forested area behind the fence, Baraq returned early one afternoon to find his son missing. When he found him in the woods, Baraq issued a stern warning based upon his belief that physical punishment of a child was wrong: "The next time you go into the woods, it will cost you five dollars." And then, Baraq came home early again on the following day just to test his son. Once again, he was absent, and once again, he was located in the forbidden area. But before Baraq could speak, the young boy explained: "Dad, you said it would cost five dollars, so I left five bucks on your dresser before I came out here."

Baraq was not surprised to find the bill on his dresser exactly as described, but he wondered how the boy had concocted such a scheme. Sometimes, he thought ruefully, the apple does not fall far from the tree.

Nicole's independent streak also surfaced often. She cut her hair the way she liked it rather than in the style Baraq would have preferred. She refused to eat meat because "It tastes yucky." And then, during a ninth-grade civics class devoted to the topic of women in the military, Nicole boldly asserted that girls were just as tough as boys, and in the event of an attack on the nation, they should fight in combat units alongside the boys.

The teacher badly underestimated his young adversary. "Well, Nicole, how do you think your dad would feel if his little girl were to be killed in battle?"

The tiny beauty stamped her foot and snapped, "Exactly the same way he would feel if his little *boy* got shot!" When the

teacher sent a note home complaining that Nicole had been disrespectful, Baraq listened to the story from his daughter and showed up at school with her on the following morning. “Hey,” he told the startled teacher firmly, “when she’s right, she’s right.”

Baraq’s life was too full to allow time for self-pity—or a social life, specifically female companionship. He simply did not have time to date. To be sure, more than once, he was invited to a social gathering that featured several couples and a lone single lady, always conveniently seated next to Baraq at dinner. But Baraq seemed unaware of what his friends were anxious to accomplish. He was unfailingly polite and charming, yet he remained the rabbi, never the suitor.

For fifteen years, as parent, teacher, rabbi, and scholar, Baraq fulfilled the crushing obligations of the life he had chosen. And then, he crashed.

### **Meningitis and a New Start**

The crash was as complete as it was unexpected. After he failed to arrive in class on time one morning, Baraq was found on the ground outside the building, eyes wide open but unable to speak or move. Meningitis! The fearful word that emerged after a battery of hospital tests was evidence to the hospital staff that Baraq was near the end of his life. He was transported back to Baton Rouge at the insistence of his mother, who now assumed responsibility for her only son and her two grandchildren. Miss Josephine, now a financially successful insurance executive, ordered that no expense be spared to save the life of her beloved boy. But several weeks elapsed with no change in Baraq’s condition. He remained unable to speak.

Then, a young rabbi bounded into Baraq's hospital room like a curious puppy driven to discover everything possible about his new surroundings. Speaking Hebrew, he addressed Baraq. "Dr. Broulliette, I have read everything you have written, and I am thrilled to meet you. Just today, one of the nurses who belongs to our congregation told me you were here. She doesn't know who you are, just saw on the records that you are Jewish, and thought I should visit."

Because she did not speak Hebrew, Baraq's mom had no idea what the young rabbi was saying to her son. He seemed overly enthusiastic to her, but she did not fail to note that Baraq stirred slightly, apparently in an attempt to respond. It was the most encouraging sign in weeks.

The rabbi continued breathlessly, switching to English in deference to Miss Josephine. "I can't wait until you are well. You will attend service with us, you will accept an *'aliyah*, you will chant the Torah for our congregation, you will sing the *haftarah*, and you will become my tutor."

Baraq's mother was furious. How dare this stranger speak to her dying son that way, imposing upon him for his own benefit! If the young rabbi noticed, he gave no indication. But Miss Josephine watched in amazement and then gratitude as her son, for the first time since the crash, began to speak slowly.

"I hope you won't be disappointed, but I don't think I will be able to attend services again. But thank you for the invitation and the kind words."

Even Baraq's negative response did nothing to dull the enthusiasm of the energetic rabbi. "Of course, it will take time. But I know that you will soon be well, and then, you will join us." With that, the young rabbi spread his hands over Baraq's head and prayed. "May the One who blessed Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob now bless you with complete healing of body and spirit. Amen.” Planting a tender kiss on Baraq’s cheek, he swept out of the room as rambunctiously as he had entered. He returned almost every day for the following three months.

According to the later testimony of Baraq, it was the sheer energy and unbounded optimism of Rabbi Green that had given him the will to recover. Soon, he left the hospital, still weak but able to walk short distances on his own. And Rabbi Green began a routine of twice-weekly visits to Baraq’s home. The two men studied, prayed, and discussed subjects ranging from sports to politics.

As Baraq grew stronger, the young rabbi discovered his delicious sense of humor. With a roasted chicken on the table between them at lunchtime, the rabbi asked Baraq to offer a blessing. Expecting the familiar “Blessed are You, O God, King of the universe, who brings forth food from the ground,” Rabbi Green was startled by a version he had never heard before delivered with a straight face in flawless Hebrew: “Blessed are you, O God, King of the universe, who brings forth *chicken from the oven*.” Baraq did not even smile, but the young rabbi collapsed in a paroxysm of laughter. It was a side of Baraq few people had ever seen.

But in every meeting, Rabbi Green never failed to remind Baraq that he expected to see him in the synagogue sooner rather than later. As Baraq’s birthday approached, plans were made for him to attend service for the first time with Rabbi Green—and to sing the *haftarah* portion of the morning.

On the Saturday morning of his fiftieth birthday, Baraq arrived at the synagogue, where about one hundred worshipers had gathered. Because they had heard so much about him from Rabbi Green, they greeted Dr. Broulliette as an old friend rather



than as a stranger worshipping with them for the first time. When it was time for the *haftarah*, two young men had to help Baraq climb the three steps up to the *bimah*, and the congregation, assured by the rabbi that their feeble visitor was a great scholar in their midst, waited nervously.

Slowly, Baraq began to sing the *haftarah*, the prophetic passage of the Bible chosen to augment the Torah reading for the week. At first, his voice was barely a whisper, but the words he sang seemed to infuse him with strength. “Comfort, comfort my people, says our God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her that her difficult service has ended, that she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her transgressions.” Baraq’s voice regained full force as he reached the words “Lift up your voice with strength,” and his powerful bass filled the sanctuary.

When Baraq finished, he was completely spent but triumphant. Helped from the *bimah*, every congregant wanted to touch him and congratulate him in the traditional Hebrew fashion: *Yasher koach*, “Well done.” Tears of joy coursed down Baraq’s cheeks as he embraced his new friends. He felt that he had been reborn.

The succeeding days brought regular small steps of improvement in Baraq’s health. Less than four months later, he was strong enough to attend services regularly, to chant the Torah portion and its *haftarah*, and to lead the congregation in traditional prayers of worship and praise.

Just as he felt his strength returning, his mother died, and once again, Baraq was called upon by the family to speak at her funeral. As he had when confronted with the challenge of honoring his grandfather, again Baraq turned to the Hebrew Scriptures. This time, his theme was designed to answer the

question of Proverbs: “Who can find a virtuous woman?” Describing his mother as the embodiment of the biblical heroine, Baraq sketched her life of care for her family, her strength in the face of adversity, and her unwavering faith in her son. When Baraq cited the verse promising that the children of such a woman would surely “stand and call her blessed,” no one present doubted that he had offered her the ultimate tribute.

### **Back in the Classroom**

Baraq was now a regular at synagogue services. The congregation at one service in the spring of that year included a visitor from LSU, the Presbyterian professor of Old Testament who before that time had been unaware of Baraq’s presence in Baton Rouge but who became convinced that Baraq would make a worthy addition to the university faculty of religious studies. Through his insistence, the dean was persuaded to offer Baraq a teaching position in the department of religion. Able to teach only part-time at first, Baraq gradually increased his schedule to full-time over the following three years and slowly resumed the career that he had assumed his bout with meningitis had ended forever.

But even before his first class, a fascinating minidrama occurred with Rabbi Green. During one of their regular study sessions together, Baraq had effortlessly explained a difficult passage of Scripture to his young partner. When the rabbi professed to be dazzled by the brilliance of the interpretation, Baraq insisted that it was really nothing new or unknown to scholars. Convinced that Baraq’s interpretation was unique, the young rabbi asked him to write the explanation for him to study more in depth. Without Baraq’s knowledge, he typed Baraq’s

handwritten paper and submitted it to a prominent scholarly journal. When the letter accepting the article for publication arrived, Rabbi Green offered it as proof to Baraq that his scholarly career was far from ended, despite his two-year absence from teaching. This incident emboldened Baraq to begin once again to participate in scholarly debates about the significant issues of the day, and as he restarted his teaching career at LSU, he also began once again to produce a flood of scholarly writings.

His personal life was a different story. He was finally strong enough to welcome his two children back into the home that he purchased near the campus, and the family began picking up the pieces of their life. Young David was now grown, and shortly after the move, entered military service to become a tank commander in the US Army Corps of Combat Engineers. But Nicole was entering the difficult teen years without a mother. Remembering his own struggles with only a single parent, saddened by the fact that Lyn had lost contact with her daughter, Baraq became open to the possibility of finding a mate for himself who would also provide Nicole a surrogate mother. A young Catholic lady studying for conversion to Judaism caught his eye, but it was her two-month-old baby girl who captured his heart. Intent on providing a father for the infant Abigail and a mother for Nicole, Baraq ignored the twenty-year age difference between the baby's mother and himself, married the young convert, and legally adopted her infant daughter.

This relationship, like his first two loves, was destined to end badly. Within a year, his new wife abandoned both her own child and Baraq, moving to a distant state. Instead of finding a mother for Nicole, Baraq had merely acquired a second daughter for whom he was responsible. As the father of two

motherless daughters whom he had to rear on his own, he did what he had done before, embracing his children and the task of parenting them, hurling himself into his academic career, and finding spiritual solace in the synagogue.

### **Alone Again**

Day followed day as Baraq settled once again into a routine with which he was all too familiar. Sixteen-year old Nicole bonded with the new baby and cared for her more like a mother than a sister. Baraq taught, wrote, spoke often at scholarly conferences and interfaith gatherings, and fell into an exhausted sleep night after night. The two girls and their father forged a family unit that brought Baraq warmth, love, and comfort. But again, there was simply no time to think about his own loneliness. There would be no more loves for him, Baraq decided. The fear of abandonment overwhelmed any thought he might have entertained about finding lasting happiness with another partner.

### **Once a Rabbi, Always a Rabbi**

Once again, a small congregation came calling. Located 125 miles from Baton Rouge, sixty-five Jewish families in Lake Charles struggled to maintain their distinctive traditions and lifestyle. Unable for years to afford a full-time rabbi, they had witnessed a succession of young rabbinical students or elderly retired rabbis trundle in and out once or twice each month, holding services but seldom finding time for other rabbinical duties—counseling, visitation of the sick, continuing education, etc. Initially, Baraq was invited to spend a single weekend with the tiny congregation, presenting several lectures about the

traditions of Judaism. A mutual love affair blossomed. As much as they needed stable spiritual leadership, Baraq needed a spiritual family. Soon, he was driving regularly to Lake Charles twice each month, serving them as rabbi and finding in them the Jewish family that he needed.

As it had done once before, Baraq's exhausting schedule proved almost fatal. This time, instead of being found unconscious on a university campus, a dog that had not quite finished her training gave Baraq the warning that saved his life. That dog, of course, was Lilit, whose story I had learned in my first Google search about Dr. Broulliette.

Although she was the star of the drama, Lilit was far from the only significant player in this latest health crisis that visited Baraq. Because of his weakened condition following the heart attack, Baraq was preparing to sever his ties to the Lake Charles congregation when he was approached by a student serving as his teaching assistant. Derek was a former linebacker who had wrecked a knee and any hope of a pro career while making a tackle against LSU's chief football rival, Ole Miss. His interest in languages had led him to Hebrew classes taught by Dr. Broulliette, and the two had become friends. As a kinesiology major, Derek was convinced that he could help Dr. Broulliette recover from the debilitating effects of his heart attack.

Seated in the office of his professor, Derek offered two propositions. "I can drive you to Lake Charles, and I can establish a routine of physical therapy that will get you back in good condition." Thereafter, Dr. Broulliette and Derek, the 175-pound professor and the 260-pound ex-linebacker, taught, traveled, and exercised together. And Derek was correct. Slowly, Dr. Broulliette began to regain his strength. After three months on the program designed for him by Derek, Dr. Broulliette was

able to walk, carry his own briefcase, climb stairs, and resume a normal schedule. His restored physical condition also allowed him to increase the frequency of his trips to serve the Lake Charles congregation.

Baraq's home life also changed. Nicole, now an LSU graduate, married, gave him a grandson and embarked on a career of her own, leaving Baraq to share his home with only his adopted daughter, Lilit, and a succession of abused or abandoned dogs taken in for rescue, training, and placement with loving families.

David was now twenty-eight and retired from the army. He took a job a thousand miles away but called often and visited when he could. He would always be Baraq's best friend. Nicole also moved far away, but she, too, stayed in close contact with her father. At home in Baton Rouge, his adopted daughter Abigail was the light of Baraq's life, and she proved invaluable to him by caring for the dogs on weekends that required Baraq's presence in Lake Charles. But he could not shake the feeling that he was unable to connect with her as he had with his two older children.

The dissolution of Nicole's marriage brought Baraq the usual feelings a father has when his daughter has been ill-treated but also produced a salutary effect as well. After two years as a single mother, Nicole entered the world of internet dating and began to regale her father with stories of how easy it was to meet people in this modern, twenty-first-century mode. Never believing for a moment that he would actually find a suitable mate for life, hoping only to find a conversation partner, a friend, Baraq finally succumbed to the urging of Nicole, sending a photo and a short description of himself to a popular internet dating service.

The results were about what he had expected. To be sure, he exchanged numerous e-mail messages with female subscribers, even spoke with some of them by telephone. Once, he even met an attractive Jewish lady living in New Orleans, but he could not bring himself to call for a second date. “The old *buzzeroo* was just not there,” he explained to Nicole by phone.

The most intriguing contact he made was with an oncologist living in Connecticut, with whom he enjoyed several lengthy and engaging conversations. But the distance between them and his hectic schedule set to rest any idea he might have entertained of a meeting in person. “Besides,” he protested, “who would want a beat-up old scudder like me!”

Baraq told himself repeatedly that “One is a good number.” He had his beautiful daughter and his faithful dog for companionship, his teaching and research for intellectual stimulation, and his loyal congregation for spiritual depth. His nights were still lonely, but he gave himself no time for self-pity. “Marriage is a wonderful institution,” he explained to a well-meaning friend, “but I’m still too young to be institutionalized.”

Still, no matter how hard he tried, Baraq could not escape the blunt statement of the Torah found in the second chapter of Genesis: “It is *not* good for a man to be alone.”