

# The Melody

**R**eb Yitzchak was a simple and pious man. He was dedicated to his family and always went out of his way to provide for them. Still, they were rich in spirit but very poor in possessions.

Each Shabbat afternoon as the sun began to set, Reb Yitzchak, who always did so much for his family, did something very simple just for himself. He packed a bag of dried fruits and nuts and took it with him as he went for a walk in the woods. It was during this time that Reb Yitzchak communed with nature and with God. He enjoyed God's world, the world of Creation.

Reb Yitzchak strolled on a familiar path through the woods, always singing along with the birds, enjoying the trees and the sunshine or even the clouds if they should appear. Then he would return to his family before Havdalah (the service that ends the Sabbath) and prepare for the week ahead. Week after week, season after season, year after year, this was Reb Yitzchak's routine each Shabbat afternoon.

Now wouldn't you know it but one particular Shabbat was fantastically beautiful. The sun shone as it had never shone before. The birds sang so clearly you could hear them all the way into the village. Reb Yitzchak couldn't wait for his precious moments alone in the woods.

And so at his regular time he packed his snack, took his bag, and went out. He kissed his wife and children good-bye and said, "I'll see you in a little while, and then we'll have dinner together." He strolled into the woods and sang with the birds and was enjoying the trees, bushes, and flowers when suddenly everything around him became unfamiliar.

As he strolled farther, clouds gathered up above. The day became dark, gloomy, and eerie. Reb Yitzchak realized that he had lost his way, and the more he tried to return to a familiar place to figure out where he was going—or at least to figure out where he had come from—the more lost he became. He was completely confused. He didn't know his left from his right or up from down, and he certainly didn't know which way would get him back home. As he wandered about, he became more and more frightened.

At last, he noticed a clearing in the woods. “Ah, surely, this must be the way back to the village,” he thought.

Yet as he approached the clearing, he realized that it didn’t look familiar either. Still he continued walking, and soon he began to hear a drifting melody, a melody that haunted him. The more he walked, the louder and clearer the melody became, and it became more and more beautiful, pulling at Reb Yitzchak’s heart.

Finally Reb Yitzchak realized where the melody was coming from. He saw a group of men sitting in a circle. They seemed to be enjoying themselves, sharing what looked like a large bottle of wine, some good stories, and that beautiful melody. As he listened, he heard them sing: “*Aye-di-rumbadi-rumbadi-dye. Aye-gadiggy-diggy-diggy-dye.*” Reb Yitzchak started to sway gently to the *nigun*. “*Aye-gadiggy-dye.*” The men danced. “*Aye-gadiggy-dye.*” They jumped for joy. “*Yay-gadiggy-diggy-dye.*”

It was with great horror that Reb Yitzchak eventually realized that the men were Cossacks, those who had persecuted his village for many, many years. So Reb Yitzchak sat quietly behind a bush, listening to their melody and watching their dancing, all the while trying not to make a sound, lest he be found out. Yet it wasn’t long before Reb Yitzchak was hypnotized by the beautiful melody. “*Aye-gadiggy-diggy-diggy-dye,*” he began to sing to himself. “*Yay-gadiggy-diggy-dye,*” he hummed louder and louder until he couldn’t help himself, and finally, without even realizing it, he was singing at the top of his lungs. He closed his eyes and swayed in prayer to God—until he realized he was being watched. Opening his eyes, Reb Yitzchak saw that he was surrounded by angry-looking men, the Cossacks, who pointed at him and accused him of being a spy. “Jew, Jew, come out of the woods. We will take care of you as only we know how.”

Frightened to his bones, Reb Yitzchak stood and went to the men. But the Cossacks were busy having a good time, so they tied Reb Yitzchak to a tree and continued with their drinking and their singing and their dancing.

It was strange that while Reb Yitzchak’s life was in danger, he was enjoying himself. He loved the melody and the dancing. As time passed, he noticed that the Cossacks were enjoying themselves—and their wine—a little too much. One by one, with a *yay-gadiggy*, the men drifted off to sleep, letting out great snores, until all the men were asleep, having all but forgotten about their recently captured prisoner.

Reb Yitzchak wiggled his way out of the ropes they’d used to tie his hands and legs, and he snuck away.

“My, what a beautiful melody I have learned, even amid such a treacherous scene. I hope I never forget it,” Reb Yitzchak thought. So he began to hum it over and over again: *“Aye-di-rumbadi-rumbadi-dye. Aye-gadiggy-diggy-dye.”*

All of a sudden the path became clear once again. And there, before Reb Yitzchak’s eyes, was the field by his village. As he made his way to his house, he sang, *“Aye-gadiggy-dye.”* His wife, his children, his neighbors, and his friends—all gathered around and cried, “Reb Yitzchak, where have you been? We have been so worried about you.” He smiled and continued to sing.

His wife approached him. “Yitzchak, what’s wrong with you?” she asked. “Why don’t you say hello? You’ve been gone so long, and we didn’t know where you were.”

Reb Yitzchak kissed his wife on the cheek and sang, *“Yay-gadiggy-diggy-dye.”*

His children clung to him and said, “Papa, what’s going on?”

*“Aye-di-rumbadi-rumbadi-dye,”* was his response. And so it went on like that, not only hour upon hour but day upon day. His family took him to the doctor; they took him to the rabbi. No one knew how to treat Reb Yitzchak for his seeming loss of mind. Eventually the rabbi, the doctor, the town elders, even Reb Yitzchak’s wife, gathered together and decided to send Reb Yitzchak to the next village, where there were doctors who treated those who had lost their souls.

Sadly Reb Yitzchak’s family packed a bag and took him to the village square, where everyone in the village came together to wish the poor man well. They had loved him all his life, and they didn’t understand how he had gotten so lost.

The carriage arrived. The villagers lifted Reb Yitzchak up to seat him in it. Before leaving, he turned around, smiled, and waved at his family, still humming that haunting melody: *“Aye-di-rumbadi-rumbadi-dye. Yay-gadiggy-diggy-dye.”* The carriage rolled out of the village square. As it drew him away, Reb Yitzchak heard one of his children as he stepped from the crowd. “Papa!,” the boy yelled. *“Yay-gadiggy-diggy-dye,”* he sang. Reb Yitzchak’s wife joined in, as did all the people in the town: *“Aye-di-rumbadi-rumbadi-dye. Yay-gadiggy-diggy-dye.”*

Reb Yitzchak immediately tapped the driver’s shoulder. “Stop!” he said.

“What? Yitzchak? Is that you? Is that really you? Did you speak? You haven’t spoken in weeks,” his wife cried out.

“Of course it’s me,” Reb Yitzchak replied. “I was afraid that this beautiful, haunting melody, this beautiful inspiration of my prayer to God, would be lost forever if I didn’t keep it going. I knew it was my job to share it with every person I encountered until he or she also learned it and made it part of his or her own melody. Now that we have shared it together, this, like every other sacred memory that we join together to create, will never be lost.”

The driver smiled and turned the horse around, and together Reb Yitzchak and the driver sang, “*Yay-gadiggy-diggy-dye*,” and rejoined the townsfolk in joy and celebration. ✨

## Rabbi Eric J. Siroka

of Temple Beth-El, a Reform congregation in South Bend, Indiana, likes this story because it combines two of his favorite aspects of our Jewish heritage: storytelling and the power of melody in our lives—in our prayer life and in our social life. Rabbi Siroka also enjoys telling this story because, he says, “it addresses the wonderful Jewish notion that the sacred memories we try to create as families and communities find their inspiration in different places, some of which are completely unexpected, such as the Cossacks in this story.”