

Emperor Chew Chow Visits Chelm

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Many years ago in distant Cathay, the Imperial Emperor, Chew Chow, became bored. He was aging and no longer were the beautiful young maidens able to please him. His court jesters were telling the same old jokes and doing the same old tricks.

One day, word reached the Imperial Palace of a distant place called Chelm where all of the people were fools. This caught The Emperor's fancy, and he decided to personally visit Chelm. But first, he must send a mission with exotic gifts.

Plans were made to bring spices from the Orient and beautifully embroidered cloth. Advisors told him of the unusual customs of the Chelmers. The people do not eat pork. The men have only one wife. The girls do not have their feet bound. Most surprising of all, they trim the *you know whats* of little boys.

Meanwhile back in Chelm word had reached that an all-powerful and extremely wealthy ruler was sending a mission to their shtetl. There was gossip about where the land was and all about the unusual people and their powerful and wealthy ruler. Some said that he was like Solomon and had a hundred wives—no, a thousand wives.

The mission From Emperor Chew Chow arrived in Chelm. It was like a parade coming to town. There were so many men riding on horses with brilliantly colored clothing. There were drums beating and horns blaring as the procession entered Chelm.

The Yiddish-speaking leader was led into the rabbi's court while the rest stayed outside and were admired by all of the Chelmers. After the meeting, Emperor Chew Chow's mission left Chelm. That night the rabbi gave a report of the visit—this was instead of his lengthy sermon. There was a huge crowd. In fact it was as big as for kol nidre services.

Di khineze mentshn zenen zeyer sheyn ober zey trogn modne kleyder un hobn modne firungen. Di mener hobn lange tseplekh vos heysn kyus. Zey zogn az es iz vi a khazer-veydl.

Oykh, esn zey nisht mit a meser, a gopl oder a lefl ober mit vos zey rufn hak-shtekelekh. Zey haltn tsvey in eyn hant un makhn azoy vi a feygl est—efenen un farmakhn dem shnobl.

Zey hobn gebrakht a geshmakn trunk vos heyst tey. Es iz broyn un gut mit honik un tsitrin. Zey zogn az ven es iz kalt indroyesn, iz take a glezl tey a mekhaye.

For weeks to come the major conversation in the market, and in the street, was the upcoming visit of Emperor Chew Chow. What did he look like? How did he speak? What was the style of his clothes? Would he bring the Empress?

Meanwhile, back in Cathay, the mission had returned and reported at the Emperor's Court. "Their skin is white, and the men wear very long beards. Even the boys have long earlocks. The women have many babies and cook all kinds of tasty foods."

To show the Emperor a little about the Chelmer customs, they brought back a talis and t'filn. When the Emperor saw the *memorabilia*, He knew exactly what to bring as a gift on his visit to Chelm. He ordered the finest silk cloth be made into a talis and above the blue stripes he had *Good Luck* inscribed with Chinese characters.

Then his master craftsmen were ordered to make an exact duplicate of the tefilin made out of the finest pigskin. Instead of being black, it would be a beautiful golden brown. Upon seeing the beautiful finished talis and t'filn, the Emperor exclaimed, "The Chelmer Chief Rabbi surely will be greatly impressed."

Now that the beautifully handcrafted *gifts* were complete, the Emperor's party was ready to make the trek to Chelm.

The trip was quite uneventful. Messengers were sent a day ahead to give the Chelmers time to prepare for the Emperor's arrival. Luckily shabes was over and the plans could go full steam ahead.

The Rabbi's house was the most elaborate home in Chelm. It was decided that the Emperor was to be the rabbi's guest. The long parade of marchers came into Chelm accompanied by drums and bugles. The Emperor's carriage was led to the rabbi's house and the customary greetings exchanged.

However, when the Emperor's gifts were unwrapped, there was a sudden hush and all the Chelmer faces turned white. When asked why they were not excited by the gifts, the Rabbi said, "They are so beautiful—we are speechless."

To this day the Emperor's gifts are hidden in a trunk in the rabbi's barn. If a *Der Bay* reader visits Chelm and takes a photograph of the Emperor's gifts, Fishl has offered \$1,000 and will publish it in full color.