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TWO INSPIRED GIFTS

A wealthy man invited a wandering pauper to join his family for a Shabbat meal. Over the course of the evening the host, his family, and the other guests shared Torah insights. Some were lengthy and complex, others just a simple thought or idea. But everyone contributed.

When it was the pauper’s turn, however, he excused himself apologetically. “I don’t know anything,” he said simply. All eyes turned toward the host for a reaction, but he continued the program without comment.

At the end, following Grace After Meals, the guests prepared to leave. Exhausted, the pauper turned to go. Suddenly, he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was the magnate’s son-in-law, wearing a mocking expression. And he didn’t hold back. He called the pauper a simpleton and an ignoramus, and then yelled at him that he should be ashamed of himself for not having any Torah thoughts to share.

In the middle of the tirade, the poor man found his voice and retorted, “You’re one to talk! You’re going to be a small-town rabbi, living off a weekly salary of two coins. Is *that* something to be smug about?”

The son-in-law fell silent, thrown off by the unexpected response. Comfortably ensconced in his wife’s family, the thought of leaving the supportive fold and becoming a small-town rabbi had never entered his mind.

Incensed by the jab, the son-in-law renewed his rant, which had now become personal.

Meanwhile, the wealthy host was in his room, preparing to unwind from the long week. When he heard the shouts, he went to investigate and found the curious scene in his dining room. “What happened?” he asked.

In a self-assured manner, the son-in-law explained. The wealthy host turned to his guest and asked about the strange insinuation.

“Have a seat and I will tell you my story,” replied the pauper, gesturing to some chairs.

“I am a simple tailor and live rather modestly in a small village. For years my livelihood depended on the residents from the surrounding villages, and on occasion I visited the nobleman’s estate to sew for him. When he decided he wanted to introduce a consistent uniform for all his employees, he asked me to provide an estimate. I gave it some thought and finally determined a price.

“Knowing me to be an honest man, the nobleman agreed and handed over the entire sum up front. Money in hand, I set out for the city to purchase the required material.

“When I arrived, I discovered that the city was in the throes of a distressing scandal: a family—father, mother, and children—had been jailed, thrown in a pit for not paying the rent they owned.

“Seeing the family’s pain sparked a compulsion to help. I remembered the vast fortune sitting in my pocket. When I heard how much they owed, I couldn’t believe my ears! It was the same amount I carried, down to the last coin. I presented the money and strode past the disbelieving onlookers to welcome the family I had freed.

“I hope G-d forgives me for what I did next. With nary a yarn on my wagon, I returned to the nobleman and claimed that I had been the victim of a robbery and therefore unable to acquire the materials I needed for his uniforms. The nobleman believed me and replenished the missing sum without a second thought. This time, I acquired the material and finished sewing his entire order.

“Because our village did not have enough Jews for a prayer quorum, for many years my wife and I traveled to a neighboring town for the month of Tishrei. The year after I freed that family, we arrived at the town as usual. On Yom Kippur eve I headed to the synagogue rather early for *Kol Nidrei*. After all, I reasoned, if I didn’t go to *shul* the rest of the year, I could at least show up early for Yom Kippur.

“I chose to stand next to the entrance. *Tallit* (prayer shawl) covering my head, I opened to the first page of Psalms and began to recite the holy words. While reading, I noticed a figure approaching me. I looked up and recognized the man I had freed just months before. Except—I don’t know how I realized it then—he was after death; the man had come from beyond his grave.

“He explained that he was no ordinary person; he had been one of the 36 righteous men that hide among us. He had no means of repaying my kindness in this world but promised that now I would be rewarded as well as in the World to Come.

“I have come to return the favor,’ he said. ‘Allow me to teach you how the holy day of *Yom Kippur* is experienced in the spiritual worlds above. He then stood at my side for a while, describing something I couldn’t quite understand.

“The man paused, ‘All I’ve said until now,’ he announced, ‘pertains to the spiritual world of *Asiyah*. In the next higher spiritual world of *Yetzirah*, however, it goes like this—’

“He then talked about Yom Kippur in *Yetzirah* and also moved on to explain the even higher spiritual world of *Beriah*.

“As I said, I didn’t understand a word. Everything was foreign to me—the concepts, the terms, the indefinable descriptions. Nothing clicked. But whatever he was saying warmed my heart to tears. I sobbed the entire time as though wrapped in an emotional vortex.

“Suddenly, I felt pushing. I realized I was blocking the doorway and people were trying to pass. It was late; people must be cramming in for *Kol Nidrei*. I took a step back, to make space for the latecomers.

“As though I had been suddenly doused in cold water, I awoke to someone screaming at me: ‘*Just because I’m the gabbai (beadle) doesn’t mean I’m not hungry!*’

“Reality dawned on me: Yom Kippur was over. I had slept through everything. The pushing was from all the congregants rushing home for the meal. The *gabbai*, unable to lock the synagogue because of me, had become impatient.

“The *tzadik* I had freed turned to me, saying, ‘This is only the beginning. Now travel to **the Seer of Lublin**, where you will receive the rest.’ And just like that, he disappeared.

“Gripped by confusion, I wondered about what I had merited to experience. In truth, I was a simple man, elevated to eligibility because of a single good deed. I wasn’t spiritually equipped to assimilate such holy things.

“I arrived at the inn where my wife and I were staying to find a table set with food and drink, but nothing mattered anymore. The only thing on my mind was Lublin.

“I have to get to Lublin,’ I said.

“‘At least have something to eat or drink!’ protested my wife nervously.

“I didn’t care. ‘No! Lublin!’

“When I arrived, the Seer greeted me by saying, ‘I’m well aware that you’re not ready. For me to help you become spiritually attuned, you must stay here for a whole year. We will pray together every day from the same *siddur* (prayerbook).’

“Of course, I stayed and accompanied the Seer for a year, crowding around his yellowed siddur whenever we prayed. When the year was up, the Seer told me to roam the countryside alone for three years, in a self-prescribed exile.

“Before I left, he gave me a parting gift. ‘Whenever you chance upon someone,’ he said, “‘nothing about them will be hidden from you. From their day of birth till their last breath, you will know everything about the person.’

“So here I am,” finished the pauper, “still wandering about. But I know that *you*” —the pauper pointed to the son-in-law— “will eventually be the rabbi of a small town, living off two coins per week.”

Time passed and the wealthy man’s fortune took a dip, and indeed, his son-in-law was forced to search for a rabbinical position. He had two offers: one town would pay a salary of three coins per week, the other town two coins.

The son-in-law chose the latter!

His reason?

“I heard from a holy man we hosted for Shabbat that I am destined for just two.”

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the excellent translation from *Shemuot VeSippurim Vol. 1, page 226*, by **Asharon Baltazar** on *Chabad.org*. (The story also appears in *Sippurei Chassidim* and its English version, “Treasury of Chassidic Tales”.)

Connection: Weekly reading of *Tetzaveh*: the ‘uniforms’ of the Kohanim-priests.

Biographical note:

**Rabbi Yaakov-Yitzchok HaLevi Horowitz** (1745 –9 Av 1815), known as ‘**the Chozeh (Seer) of Lublin**’, was the main successor to the Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, and leader of the spread of chassidism in Poland. Many of his insights were published posthumously in *Divrei Emmes*, *Zichron Zos*, and *Zos Zichron*.