

Along the King's Highway

A. Shaking a Stick

A Chabad chasid once brought a complaint to **Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh**, the celebrated elder chasid of Reb Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch. When he studied Chasidic writings in preparation for prayer, his soul was afire; when he then proceeded to read the daily prayers, this spiritual energy boost left him, and he was unable to pray as he should.

“We have a rebbe,” said Reb Hillel. “Ask him.”

“But is it possible to make the journey to the rebbe for every question that comes up?” objected the chasid.

“So if the festival of Sukkot came and you haven’t got a *lulav* and an *etrog* with which to carry out the mitzvah of taking the Four Species in your hand,” said Reb Hillel, “do you make do with a stick and shake it instead?”

The chasid was persistent; he continued to entreat the respected elder to advise him what to do. Finally Reb Hillel obliged and said:

“So what does it matter to you if you pray before you pray?”

B-WHERE: “*Along the King's Highway*”

Reb Hillel once wanted to travel from Bobroisk to the Tzemach Tzedek in Lubavitch for Shabbos, but the limited available travel time made it nearly impossible. A young man in the vicinity promised him that he would get him to Lubavitch on time — with two conditions: *First*, that Reb Hillel agree to travel on the King’s highway (Reb Hillel never used that road, which had been paved by Czar Nikolai), and *Second*, that he would reduce his customary lengthy prayers along the way. Having no choice, Reb Hillel agreed to both conditions.

After a long day’s travel, they stopped at an inn for the night. In the morning, after the young man finished *Shacharit* and had breakfast, he found that Reb Hillel was still *davvening*. Hours later nothing had changed. When Reb Hillel finally finished, the young man asked him, “Didn’t we make a deal that you’d cut short your usual long *davvening*? Why didn’t you keep the condition? Now we’ll never make it to Lubavitch before Shabbos!”

Reb Hillel replied: “Tell me: let’s say that you’re traveling to the great Leipzig fair to purchase merchandise that’s on sale only there, but you happen across someone along the way with the same merchandise at the same price. Now if you were to say that you can’t buy from him because you *must* buy these goods specifically in Leipzig, everyone would agree that you would be an utter fool. What difference is there between buying in Leipzig, or buying in the middle of the trip — if they’re the same commodities and the price is right?

“Why are we going to Lubavitch? For the Rebbe to give his guidance so our praying should go well.” Reb Hillel concluded. “So if one’s davvening is going OK midway in the trip, you’d have to be an idiot to interrupt!”

They reached Lubavitch well before Shabbos.

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*Sources:*

**A.** Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the translation by **Uri Kaploun** in *Treasury of Chassidic Tales*, the English version of *Sipurei Chassidim* by HaRav S. Y. Zevin. The “Bio note below is also from there.)

**B.** Adapted from the translation of **Tuvia Natkin** for magazine publication, based on the book, *Shemuos v’Sippurim* by R. Raphael Kahn

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh** (1795-13 Av/Shabbat Nachamu 1864) was a chassid of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the *Tsemach Tsedek*, and as the chasidim used to say, "half a rebbe" in his own right. He served as the Rabbi of Bobruisk for many years, and authored *Pelach HaRimon*, a work of deep chasidic thought.

*Connection—Weekly Torah Reading:*

“*Along the King’s Highway*” is in Num. 20:17