



A Story for the Shabbos Table

סיפורי הבעל שם טוב

THE STORY OF "HERSHEL TZIG"

Once when the Baal Shem Tov was visiting the town of Brody, he gathered the Jewish people and was telling them stories from the Midrash.

Suddenly, the Baal Shem Tov stopped. What was this he saw? Along came a ragged old man who was huffing and puffing, a heavy sack of flour balanced on his back. His eyes bulged out and his face was red. And there above his head, invisible to everyone except the Baal Shem Tov, was a shining pillar of pure, white light.

The Baal Shem Tov understood that this man must be a great Tzadik, but who was he?

All the Jewish workers seemed to know him. "Hi there, Hershel, how are your goats?" they laughed. "Good day to you, Hershel Tzig (Goat)." Hershel nodded and smiled, "Zai Gezunt. Be well."

"Who is that?" The Baal Shem Tov asked with wonder. "Why do you call him Hershel goat?"

"Oh," said the people gathered around, "That's Hershel the porter. He carries things for people to make a few pennies but all his money goes to his goats. His wife died years ago, and now he just lives with his four goats. He loves their milk. That's why he's called Hershel Goat."

The Baal Shem Tov wanted to know more. What was so special about this man? He had never seen such a light before! But everybody just said the same thing. "No, there's nothing special about Hershel, except his goats."

The Baal Shem Tov finally met up with Hershel, who told him the following story.

My wife Rochel Leah was a wonderful woman, he began. All her life she helped other people. Ever since she was a girl, she spent all her free time caring for the sick and helping women who just had

babies. She looked after their children, cleaned their homes, and cooked for them. About ten years ago, she passed away.

After she passed away, she came to me in a dream. "Hershel," she said, "Don't worry about me. After I died they took my Neshama straight to Gan Eden, and there, awaiting me were the Neshamos of all those men and women and little children I had helped during the last twenty seven years.

"You can't imagine how much my good deeds are appreciated here. The reward for helping a Jew is very, very great. My dear husband, since you don't know how to learn much Torah, listen to my advice: do lots of good deeds. Pay special attention to poor people who are sick, and to new mothers who need help. Be sure to do it all secretly. Then you, too, will merit a great reward when you come to Gan Eden."

I listened carefully. I bought goats, and all that I earn goes for their food, so that they will produce the healthiest and most nourishing milk. Secretly I take it around to little children and sick people. Then Hashem gives his Bracha and they get strong and healthy.

Now the Baal Shem Tov understood the great zechus that Hershel had and the reason for the great light shining from him. The Baal Shem Tov then arranged for Hershel to learn with one of the hidden Tzadikim in his city, and he became a great Talmid Chochom. But even then, he never gave up his precious Mitzvah of helping thousands of sick and poor people.

When he died at the age of a hundred, and arrived in Gan Eden, he was amazed at the tumultuous welcome he received. Crowds of Tzadikim came to greet him. Malachim that were created by his good deeds thronged around. The Baal Shem Tov and the hidden Tzadikim who had been his teachers all came out to welcome him.