



A Story for the Shabbos Table

סיפורי הבעל שם טוב

BEAUTIFUL TEFILLOS OR SNAKES AND SCORPIONS

The Baal Shem Tov once travelled with his Talmidim, the Tzadikim, to a far away village. In that village, there lived a "Porush" – a *Talmid Chochom* who separated himself from all worldly matters, and spent his whole time *davening* and learning. In fact, this *Talmid Chochom* had even had the *zechus* to see Eliyahu Hanavi. And he let everybody know about it. He was very good at explaining things to people. He could explain a topic to everybody, even to a simple person. Whenever he would speak to someone in learning, he would always finish by saying, "This is what I received from Eliyahu Hanavi."

In that village also lived a simple person, a tanner (a person who takes the hides (skins) off animals and prepares them to be used for different purposes, like making shoes etc). This person used to say a lot of Tehillim, and his lips would always be moving, as he was saying Tehillim, but he knew that he was not allowed to say Tehillim with unclean hands. So, during the actual preparing of the hides, when his hands were dirty and soiled, the simple villager would not say these holy words of *Tehillim*.

The Baal Shem Tov and his Talmidim first visited the simple man. When they entered his house, the Baal Shem Tov instructed his Talmidim to form a circle and place their hands on each other's shoulders, and the Talmidim next to the Baal Shem Tov should put their hands on His shoulders. "Now close your eyes," he said, as he began singing a Niggun. Closing their eyes, the Talmidim were surprised to see such a great commotion in Shomayim that was caused by the *Tehillim* coming from the poor hut.

Afterwards, the Baal Shem Tov and his Talmidim went to visit the Porush. Again, the Baal Shem Tov told his Talmidim to close their eyes and put their hands on the shoulder of their neighbor, and on His shoulders. The Talmidim quickly closed their eyes and formed a circle again, waiting as the Baal Shem Tov sang quietly to himself. Suddenly,

they jumped back in horror: a vision of slithering snakes and scorpions appeared before their eyes!

The Baal Shem Tov explained to his Talmidim. "It is true, that (it says in Tana Devei Eliyahu that) someone who fasts continuously for forty days and removes himself from worldly matters will merit to see Eliyahu Hanavi - even a servant or a maid! However, this does not guarantee Giluy Haneshama- revelation of the soul. This Porush has a problem that he feels greatly about himself – he is a Baal-Gaavah; he is obsessed by his great worthiness. Even though he had the great *zechus* of seeing Eliyahu Hanavi his entire being is permeated with the snakes and scorpions of arrogance that stems from the Nechash Hakadmoni - the original snake that sinned in Gan Eden.

"Try comparing him to the unlearned tanner!" continued the Baal Shem Tov. "Why, every word of this simple Jew pierces the Heavens! It is worthwhile for all of you to hear him say a Bracha."

Having achieved the purpose of their visit, the Baal Shem Tov and his Talmidim left the village. Later, when they heard about the passing of the simple tanner, the Baal Shem Tov gathered ten of his Talmidim and returned to the village. Once there, the Baal Shem Tov himself participated in the burial.

From this story we can learn, how important it is to be humble and not 'full of yourself'. The simple person who said Tehillim, because of his love for Hashem, his tefilos were beautiful in Shomayim. On the other hand, the great Talmid Chochom and Porush, even though he had the zechus of seeing Eliyahu Hanavi, because he was such a Baal Gaavah – in Shomayim, it was like he had snakes all around him.

[Source: Sefer Hasichos 5704 p. 98-99]