



A Story for the Shabbos Table

סיפורי הבעל שם טוב

LEARNING TORAH MUST BE WITH "NESHAMA"

Rabbi Dov Ber who would later become known as the famed *Maggid* of Mezritch, had heard much about the Baal Shem Tov. People travelled to the Baal Shem Tov, and came back telling incredible stories of the miracles and wonders that the Baal Shem Tov was able to make happen, and how he helped people through his Tefilos.

Finally the *Maggid* chose to travel to Mezibush and judge the Baal Shem Tov's greatness for himself.

Rabbi DovBer was one of the biggest Talmidei Chachomim in his generation. He knew very well the whole Shas and the Poskim. He also possessed considerable knowledge of Kabbalah, the esoteric dimension of the Torah. Very Scholarly, the *maggid* spent his days immersed in the study of Torah, and refrained from the slightest waste of time.

After two days on the road, as the *Maggid* saw that he was not able to maintain his regular study schedule while traveling, he started to regret taking this trip, because it was disturbing him from learning Torah. Having already started out however, he decided to complete the trip to Mezibush.

Upon his arrival in Mezibush, the *Maggid* went directly to Baal Shem Tov's home. He thought that he would hear Torah from the Baal Shem Tov, but instead, the Baal Shem Tov started telling him a story. "On one of my recent trips, I had no food for my gentile wagon driver. I finally found a poor gentile carrying a sack of bread, and I was able to purchase some bread for the driver."

The *Maggid* looked at the Baal Shem Tov in surprise. Here he had wasted hours of precious learning to travel and meet the Baal Shem Tov-only to be rewarded with this story Disappointed and disheartened, the *Maggid* left the Rebbe's room and returned to his studies.

The next day, the *Maggid* decided to meet the Baal Shem Tov again, hoping to hear Torah insights from the great Rebbe. "You know," said the Baal Shem Tov as the *Maggid* entered, "once when I was traveling I couldn't find any hay for my horses. I was lucky to find some hay after a while, and was able to feed them."

Now really, these stories had very deep wisdom to someone who understand the deeper meaning of it, but the *Maggid* did not understand this and he thought that he was just wasting his time, hearing seemingly meaningless stories, so he decided to return home immediately. He rushed back to lodgings and announced to his wagon driver: "We are leaving. I want to go home right now! But because it is very dark,

we'll wait here a bit for the moon to rise and shine, and then we must set out straight for home."

By midnight, the moon had lit up the surrounding countryside sufficiently and they got ready to leave. The *Maggid* came to the wagon and was about to step inside when he suddenly noticed the Baal Shem Tov's attendant standing before him. "The Baal Shem Tov wants to speak to you," said the attendant.

Surprised, the *Maggid* decided to follow the attendant, and entered the Baal Shem Tov's room. "Do you know how to learn?" inquired the Baal Shem Tov.

"Yes, I do," responded the *Maggid*.

"So I hear. Are you knowledgeable in Kabbalah?"

"Yes."

The Baal Shem Tov summoned his attendant and instructed him to bring a Sefer of Kabbalah, called *Eitz Chaim*. Opening the book to a certain page, he pointed to a specific paragraph and showed it to the *Maggid*. "Here!" he said. "How do you explain this particular piece?"

The *Maggid* read the paragraph and explained it to the best of his ability. A look of displeasure crossed the Baal Shem Tov's face. "You know nothing!" he said.

The *Maggid* reread the paragraph. After a few minutes of thinking, he turned to the Baal Shem Tov. "I definitely explained it correctly," challenged the *Maggid*. "If, however, you are aware of a different explanation, please let me hear it as well. Then I will decide which of us is correct."

"Stand up!" ordered the Baal Shem Tov and he started reading the paragraph. Now in this paragraph, there were mentioned names of Malochim. As the Baal Shem Tov read them aloud, dazzling light filled the house and a wall of fire encircled the Baal Shem Tov. They were able to clearly see the Malochim whose names the Baal Shem Tov was reading.

The Baal Shem Tov finished reading and the awesome sight disappeared instantly. "Indeed, you read it correctly," the Baal Shem Tov turned to the *Maggid*. "However, your study lacks 'Neshama'."

Overawed, the *maggid* instructed his wagon driver to return home alone. He stayed with the Baal Shem Tov and studied his teachings, rising in level until he joined the Rebbe's circle of chosen Talmidim.