



## A Story for the Shabbos Table

## סיפורי הבעל שם טוב

### THE DESIRE TO LEARN TORAH – Part 2

In part one we read how the simple tinsmith started going into the forest and saying Tehillim with tears, Davening to Hashem that he should be able to learn and understand Torah..

Looking up through his tears in the forest one day, he saw a man with a sack on his back and a stick in his hand. The stranger approached him and asked what he was doing here in the forest and why he was crying.

The poor fellow shared his story, and added that a recent visitor to his home had told him that fasting enabled one to study. He had therefore decided to take this advice -- so long as Hashem would enable him to become a Torah scholar.

"That *is* advice," the stranger agreed, "but if you like I'll give you an easier way to achieve this."

The young man agreed at once, so the stranger said: "If so, give me a document that transfers everything you own -- money, silver and gold, possessions, land -- to me. And come away with me for three years. Then you'll be a *ben* Torah."

The tinsmith eagerly agreed at once, but the stranger said: "Take your time. Discuss it first with your wife and hear how your father-in-law reacts. Come back to this spot next week, I'll be here too, and you'll tell me then what you've decided."

And with those words, the stranger with the sack and the staff went on his way.

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The tinsmith's wife heard the whole story and her answer was simple: "Since you are always so sad that you cannot learn, and now you have been made such an offer, then of course you should agree to it. I'm agreeable, too -- but on one condition: before we give the man everything we own, let him be our guest

for one meal so that we can fulfill the *mitzvah* of hospitality, because we won't be able to practice *hachnassas orchim* when we have nothing left."

As to his father-in-law, he began by saying: "True, it is written that the Torah is 'more precious than gems.' However," he added, "I don't think the law of the Torah allows you to do such a thing. Look, you've got a wife and children to support, so you can't give everything away. There are plenty of unlettered Jews around. If they support Torah scholars and perform the commandments with an unquestioning heart, they are just as good as the scholars. So I don't think you're allowed to give everything away and go off into exile."

These words left their impact. Day after day the young man fasted and wept, confused by doubt and indecision. On the last day, when he told his wife how her father's words had left him confused, she said: "The fact that a doubt has arisen in your mind proves that all your sighs and tears were not utterly truthful. If your desire to study sprang from all the truth in your heart, then when someone gave you a way of becoming a *ben* Torah you would certainly agree."

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"Well, what have you decided?" asked the stranger with the sack and the staff when they met in the forest.

"I am agreeable to everything," said the tinsmith.

But as they sat down to talk, a sigh escaped his heart.

"Why are you sighing?" asked the stranger. "If you have second thoughts, you can still decide not to do it."

The tinsmith then told him the whole truth -- what his wife had said, but also the fact that his father-in-law's words had made a certain impact.

"Your father-in-law is right," said the stranger. "There are certainly many unlettered Jews who support Torah scholars and fulfill the commandments, and they are even worthier than the scholars themselves."

"I hear you," said the tinsmith, "but I have made my decision. I want to give everything away and to wander in exile for three years. My wife, though, has made one condition: before this happens, please be our guest for just one meal. Let us fulfill the *mitzvah* of *hachnassas orchim* while we can."

And off they went to the home of the tinsmith.

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It was already *Maariv* time when they opened the door and found a table set with all kinds of delicacies and candles lit as if it were *Yom-Tov*.

"What kind of a *Yom-Tov* is it today?" asked the guest.

"I don't know," answered the tinsmith. "I'll have to ask my wife."

"What kind of a *Yom-Tov* is it today?!" echoed the good woman. "It's *Yom-Tov* for two reasons. Firstly, today we have the *mitzvah* of *hachnassas orchim*. Secondly: I see that G-d wants to take away everything we own. There are many ways in which He could do this. But with us He is acting out of great kindness -- He is taking away our possessions, but in exchange He is giving us Torah! Tell me: when Hashem chooses such a beautiful way of taking back whatever He has deposited with us, isn't it a *Yom-Tov*?!"

They brought out a big bag and filled it with everything -- money and silver and gold -- as agreed. They then wrote out a

document which transferred everything they owned, including houses and fields, as a gift to the stranger, and two neighbors signed as witnesses. After the meal they went to sleep for the night.

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The next morning, before the two left, the stranger told the tinsmith's wife that though the house was now his, he allowed her and her children to live in it -- as neighbors -- until her husband came home. He presented her with a sack of flour and a bag of potatoes and told her that she could plant in the garden and use the fruit of the orchard -- all as gifts between neighbors, not that she owned it. Finally, having blessed her and her two sons and daughter, he took up the big sack, said goodbye to them, and set out with her husband.

Left alone, the woman found that the garden and the orchard were so extraordinarily fruitful that she was able to maintain her family throughout her long wait.

[At this point, the Rebbe Rayatz remarked that there was much more to be told, but he had to brief. He added no more than the following paragraphs:]

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When the tinsmith came home after three years he and his wife settled elsewhere and became wealthy. In the course of time he became a hidden *tzaddik*.

After they passed on from this world, the tinsmith was granted a palatial place in *Gan Eden* in the company of Torah scholars and his wife was granted a palatial place in *Gan Eden* in the company of other righteous women. Moreover, whenever the time came for his soul to be elevated to a loftier level of *Gan Eden*, her soul was summoned there, too, and it was announced that he was being elevated thanks to her.

[Source: Likutei Diburim Vol 4. Sicha of Acharon Shel Pesach 5698]