



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY
Executive Director, Camp HASCDedicated L'Iluy Nishmas HaChaver
Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

Matan Torah

The Holy Ba'al Shem Tov would often travel the countryside visiting isolated *shtetlach*, sharing words of encouragement and inspiration with the Jews gathered to hear his messages, as well as those fortunate to meet the tzadik along the way. Once he related the following story, as a small crowd of simple townspeople stopped to listen with rapt attention.

"In a certain village lived Shimkeh, a day laborer who was barely managing to support his family and put bread on the table. Awakening before dawn, his prayers were often rushed and incomplete. He would often arrive late to *Maariv* and, exhausted from the day, rarely made it through the prayer without dozing off. He often wished he could learn Torah and invest energy in his Avodas Hashem, but he was just too emotionally and physically drained.

"In the same shtetl, there lived a young *ben Torah*, Reb Moishe, a budding scholar who received a weekly stipend

to sit and learn without any financial responsibilities or worries. He was blessed with the freedom to spend his days and nights in the Beis Medrash, davening with devotional intent and learning with intense focus.

"Every evening following *Maariv* the two would cross paths on the dirt path of the shtetl. Shimkeh, broken from his daily grind, walked bent over. One night, feeling slightly embarrassed to see his scholarly neighbor, he sighed deeply: how he yearned to have the freedom and peace of mind to serve Hashem the way his holy neighbor did! Meanwhile, Reb Moishe the *masmid* greeted his neighbor with a dismissive smirk. What could he possibly have in common with an *am ha'aretz* who slept through davening?

"Years passed, and both Reb Moishe and Shimkeh left the world and arrived before the *Beis Din shel Ma'alah*, the Heavenly Court. With his head held high, Reb Moishe placed all of his years of uninterrupted *limud haTorah*, impressive davening and careful mitzvah observance on the right side of the scales. As the judges were about to hand him a unanimously favorable verdict and Divine reward, a *malach* approached. Without saying a word, the *malach* placed on the left scale the self-righteous smirk that used to pass over Reb Moishe's face when he saw his *shlepper*

neighbor. With a sudden thud, the smirk threw down the scale, outweighing all his *zechuyot*, merits.

The millions of Jews that had gathered together around the mountain became a unified vessel to receive Hashem's Torah

“Soon thereafter, Shimkeh arrived before the heavenly court, humble and teary-eyed. He said before the *Beis Din Shel Ma'alah*: ‘I stand before you shame-faced; I spent most of my life *shlepping*, working hard to make ends meet. I regret that I wasn't able to focus on learning and davening the way I would have liked.” Before he could even finish speaking, a *malach* came forward and placed on the scale Shimkeh's *krechtz*, the heartfelt sigh that the sincere *shlepper* had emitted when he yearned to be more. That holy sigh weighed down his entire scale of judgment to the side of good.”

The Jews who had gathered around the Ba'al Shem Tov wiped tears from their eyes and sat still for some time, contemplating its message.

HUMILITY

Chazal teach us that as opposed to revelation taking place on the highest peak, in the most grandiose setting, the Torah was given on Har Sinai, a small,

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modest mountain. This lowly mountain stood among the higher ones like a person bent over in humility. With this image, we learn the importance of approaching learning and spiritual work with the *midah*, the character trait, of humility.

The Chid'a, Rebbe Chaim Yosef David Azoulay zy'a (d. 1806), in *Sefer Nachal Kedumim*, explains an oft-quoted *drasha* of Chazal in this light: *Vayichan sham Yisrael neged ha'har* — "Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain." (Shemos 19:2) The word *Vayichan* "encamped" is unexpectedly in the singular, as if to say, 'And he, Am Yisrael, encamped there....' Rashi adds, *K'ish echad b'lev echad* — "...as one person with one heart". Through internalizing the message of the place where the Torah was given, and embodying these traits of humility and modesty, the millions of Jews that had gathered together around the mountain became a unified vessel to receive Hashem's Torah. Their humility joined them as one.

Rebbe Leible Eiger of Lublin teaches that the word *vayichan* is a term of *chein*, 'grace'. Because at Mount Sinai we all saw

each other's good points and found grace in each other's eyes, we were unified in receiving the Torah.

Shavuot celebrates *Uba'u kulam b'vriv yachad*; '*Naaseh v'nishma*' *amru k'echad* — "They all came together in the Covenant of the Torah; 'We will perform it and then we will understand it,' they said as one." We all have different entry points, and there are infinite pathways to draw near, but the Torah and the closeness with Hashem belong to all, equally, as one.

REBBE YISRAEL BA'AL SHEM TOV

Shavuot also marks the Yahrzeit of Rebbe Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov zy'a, the revolutionary *Tzadik* and founder of the Chasidic movement, whose contributions have left an indelible impression on the way all of us live and experience *Yidishkeit*. The Ba'al Shem Tov's empowering teachings and perspectives open wide the gates of Gan Eden for all, from the learned intellectual to the hard-working simple person who sighs in yearning for closeness with the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. The light of the Baal Shem Tov tips each of our scales toward the good.

This Yom Tov, may we recognize the *chein* in ourselves and each other, and renew our commitment to serve Hashem with sincerity and simplicity, modesty and humility, and celebrate our receiving of the Torah all together, *k'ish echad b'lev echad*. ■

Tamah 38

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