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The Ba'al Shem Tov: A Baby from the Fake World

This story was told by Reb Refael Berchider, who heard it from the Maggid of Mezritch himself. He said that if he had not heard it from his mouth, he wouldn't have believed it. "And I heard it from a reliable person, who heard it from reliable chassidim, who heard it from him."

Once a man came to the Ba'al Shem Tov and told him that his newborn boys were not surviving – just before or right after their circumcision the babies would pass away, heaven forbid. Now his wife had just given birth to a baby boy and they were deeply troubled that it would happen again. The Ba'al Shem Tov promised the man that he would help him.

On the night before the circumcision, called voch nacht, the baby's father came to request of the Ba'al Shem Tov to serve as the baby's sandak (spiritual mentor) at the circumcision ceremony the following day. The Ba'al Shem Tov said to his illustrious disciple, the Maggid of Mezritch, "Let us travel together so that I can perform the mitzoah of being a sandak."

For the journey, the Ba'al Shem Tov took a needle and stuck it through his garment and the Maggid's garment so that they would be united. "Everything that you see me do, do the same," he said to the Maggid. "Wherever I go, you should go, as well."

On the way, they saw a palace with many noblemen and noblewomen celebrating. The palace was brightly lit and lanterns illuminated the path to the entrance.

When the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid approached with their wagon, they saw that the crowd there had panicked, and all the people were trying to escape. The Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid descended from their wagon and entered the palace. A great commotion ensued. People were running out the door and jumping through the windows.

The entire palace was covered in glaze, studded with jewels inlaid in gold and silver. The Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid walked from one room to the next, until they had walked through six rooms, but did not see anyone. In the seventh room they saw a bed with a woman who had just given birth upon it. The Ba'al Shem Tov took her baby and hid him under his overcoat, turned around with the Maggid and left.

When they reached the circumcision ceremony, the Ba'al Shem Tov requested that they should hand him the newborn. He took the baby, looked at him and threw him out the window. "Here is your son," he said to the mother, giving her the baby he had hidden in his coat. The circumcision took place and all was well.

Exchanging the Fake for the Genuine

This story opens with an exact report of who told it first and who told it to whom, emphasizing that it is one hundred percent reliable. What do we learn from this story? That you may be fake, but in the merit of the Ba'al Shem Tov, you – and anyone else – can find and restore your true self.

This story also teaches us much about a mission – particularly a mission among foreign nations. When two people go together on a mission, they must bind themselves together and remain connected always.

Secondly, they must know that it is possible that everything that they see and all the difficulties they encounter – are all from the fake world. Our role is to exchange the fake for genuine reality. We must contemplate on what our mission is, extract the real baby out of the fake world and at the right moment, return him to his genuine parents. After we contemplate on the fake and identify the lie, we must throw it out the window and come forward with the truth in its stead.

Two Witnesses

Why did the Ba'al Shem Tov need the Maggid with him? He needed the Maggid's power together with his when he entered the domain of the Other Side. Let us explain this wondrous story with mathematical allusions which, as is known, rectify the fake world:

When they are together, the Ba'al Shem Tov and his student-successor have a special power. This is alluded to in the joining of their names. Yisrael (ישראל), the Ba'al Shem Tov's name) together with Dov Ber (דב בער), the Maggid's name, equal 819, which is the value of the term, "simple unity" (אחדות פשוטה), denoting God's absolute oneness. In mathematics, 819 is known as the pyramid of 13 (i.e., the sum of squares from 1^2 to 13^2 , which when drawn as a figure, form a pyramid), where 13 itself is the value of "one" (אחד). This is the revelation of God oneness that annuls the "fake world" of the other side, manifested by their tying themselves together.

The value of the Maggid's name by itself, Dov Ber (דב בער), is the same as "the concealed light" (אור הגנוז), referring to the light of the infinite that God concealed in the Torah after the first day of creation and which the Ba'al Shem Tov merited to reveal in his teachings. Dov Ber also equals "David, king [of Israel] lives and exists" (דוד מלך [ישראל] חי וקים). King David is actually a soul with a predisposition to die, which is revived, "lives and exists," at every moment anew. (We can guess that the Ba'al Shem Tov instructed the father of the baby to call his son David. As is known, the Ba'al Shem Tov himself is the soul of David). Thus, if we add the values of both "Yisrael" and "Dov Ber" it equals the full phrase, "David, king of Israel, lives and exists" (דוד מלך ישראל חי וקים).

The Ba'al Shem Tov also wanted the Maggid to join him so that he would be a witness to what transpired, as the Torah says,¹ "According to two witness shall a matter be determined" (Deuteronomy 19:15). The literal meaning of "be determined" is "rise," alluding to the revival of the genuine child. "Two witnesses" (שני עדים) equals 484 or 22^2 , as well as 11 times the value of "boy" (ילד). If we add this to 819 that we saw above, the sum comes to 1303, which is the numerical value of (Psalms 16:8), "I set *Havayah*

before me always” (שויתי הוי' לגנדי תמיד). The Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid acted with the power of God's Name, *Havayah*, before them always.

It is well known that, Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov (ישראל בעל שם טוב) equals 1000, alluding to the 1000 lights given to Moses at the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Adding 1000 to *Harav Hammagid Dov Ber* (הרב המגיד דב בער) gives us 1547, which is the product of 17 and 91, or the multiplication of “good” (טוב) by “amen” (אמן); 91 is also the triangle of “one” (אחד), 13 (i.e., the sum of numbers from 1 to 13). 91 is the value of the composite Name of God, *Havayah Adni* (הוי' אדני). 1547 is also the sum of God's Name *Havayah* (הוי'), 26, added to its 27 possible fillings. The value of just the 27 possible fillings is 1521, which is the square of 39, or the square of “*Havayah* is one” (הוי' אחד), truly “I set *Havayah* before me always!”

The end of the verse that begins, “I set *Havayah* before me always” reads, “for He is at my right hand, I shall not falter (כי מימיני בל אמוט). These words also equal, “the concealed light” (אור הגנוז), which we saw above equals “Dov Ber,” the Maggid who was connected to the Ba'al Shem Tov's right side. This is the secret of “*Havayah* is your shadow on your right hand” (Psalms 121:5). The Hebrew word for “shadow” (צל) is the first two letters of the Aramaic word for prayer, *tzlota* (צלותא). The Ba'al Shem Tov invoked what he invoked while the Maggid, his exceptional disciple, prayed for his success. From this we learn the core of the service of a disciple for his rabbi. Happy is the rabbi who has a disciple who knows how to pray (for his rabbi). The unification of the two is the unification of Torah and prayer, eternal life (“always”) and finite life, turning to God “before me” – “I set *Havayah* before me always.”

In the verse (Psalms 19:10), “The judgments of *Havayah* are true, they are righteous together” (משפטי הוי' אמת צדקו יחדו) God's essential Name, *Havayah*, alludes to birth (a new being, which in Hebrew is התהוות, cognate with *Havayah*). We mention this verse because from this verse comes the power to judge who is the true or genuine child. The end of the verse, “they are righteous together,” refers to the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid (who is connected with complete nullification and essential connection to his mentor) together.