



BADERECH

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Willingness

A story was related by Rebbe Avraham Yaakov of Sadigora zy'a, the son of the Rebbe Yisrael of Rhizin:

One *Erev Shabbos*, Rebbe Yisrael the holy Baal Shem Tov zy'a appeared in a shtetl unexpectedly. Locals were thrilled to be graced by the presence of the Tzadik, though the Baal Shem Tov declined all invitations for Shabbos and asked to be left alone in the *shteibl*. Throughout the night the Baal Shem Tov remained in shul, davening and reciting Tehillim fervently, without pause. Surely something was wrong! In the morning, the villagers' concerns were allayed when the Baal Shem Tov seemed content and joyous, and accepted the *gabbai's* invitation for the daytime *Shabbos seudah*.

In the course of the meal, they were interrupted by a drunken peasant knocking on doors looking for some vodka. The *gabbai* was about to drive him away, but the Baal Shem Tov asked that he be welcomed. The Tzadik sat him down, poured a large shot of *mashkeh* and asked the gentile visitor to relate what he'd experienced the night before.

The peasant described being summoned with his friends to the estate of the local *poritz*, who was planning a pogrom against the Jewish

community. The locals didn't need much convincing, and were ready at a moment's notice to set out on a murderous rampage:

"We waited all night at the estate for the final go-ahead... but soon after gathering us, the Poritz was called into an important meeting and abruptly locked himself in his office with an unexpected visitor, an old associate that he hadn't seen for nearly forty years! After waiting there for hours, he finally emerged and strangely told us all to go home, and that anyone who raises their hand against the Jews would be punished severely."

This "unexpected visitor", explained the Sadigura Rebbe, "had been dead for years... and was dragged from the grave by the holy Baal Shem Tov's prayers to intervene on behalf of Klal Yisrael in front of his old friend, the Poritz.

"You might wonder why the Baal Shem Tov had to travel all the way to that shtetl for Shabbos in order to avert the *gezeirah* decree," continued the Rebbe. "Couldn't he have just remained in Medzibuz and davened from his own *beis medrash*?"

Said the Rebbe, "The Baal Shem Tov's intent in going to the village was clear: *Halevai* I will succeed in saving the town with my prayers... but if not, then let my fate be together with them!"

Our sedra describes the painful episode of the *Eigel HaZahav*, the Golden Calf, that transpires when Moshe Rabbeinu does not descend from Har Sinai when expected. Impatient, the people create an idol. Seeing them

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celebrating, Moshe Rabbeinu drops the hewn tablets of the *Aseres HaDibros*, shattering the holy stones.

When Hashem proposes to destroy the nation and begin a new history starting with Moshe, Moshe refuses. Our *Rayah Mehemnah*, the Faithful Shepherd, protests, and rises up in our defense: “If You do not forgive them, *macheini na m’sifrecha*, “Blot me out of the book that You have written!”

Moshe’s intent resounds: “Let my fate be together with them!” Indeed, Our Teacher is ready to give up all of his accomplishments, his legacy and place in history — for us. But he is not a mere ‘captain going down with the ship’. Moshe Rabbeinu stands up and ‘fights’ for us with *Azus deKedushah*, holy brazenness. And he models what it means to be a leader: ready to perform *mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice for his people. Not only does he save Am Yisrael, he triggers the revelation of the 13 Attributes of Divine Mercy, paving a way for Tikun and salvation for all generations. He places these Attributes in our hands, as the treasures of our Selichos liturgy.

Our sedra provides us an opportunity to consider:

- In our day to day lives, how do we sacrifice for the wellbeing of others?
- How can I more deeply commit myself to Klal Yisrael and all of humanity?
- To what extent are we willing to receive Moshe’s teaching and give up everything in the service of our People?

From Moshe Rabbeinu and the Baal Shem Tov, our mandate is clear: we must do all that we can on behalf of Klal Yisrael. Our fates *are* inextricably bound up with our brothers and sisters. May we all be blessed with good health, and experience revealed good in every way! ■

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