

PARABLE

A PARABLE WITH A MESSAGE

Parshas Behar-
Bechukosai

וכי ימוך אֶחֶיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ
וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ בְּיָד וְתוֹשֵׁב יְהִי עִמָּךְ.

The cold that winter evening cut straight to the bone. Frost had turned the snow on the roads into solid ice, and a mournful wind whistled through the bare trees of the old forest, as if weeping for the suffering of the Jewish people.

On a cold stone, in the middle of this desolate region, sat a Jew. He could barely be called a man anymore; he was a mere shadow of himself. Wrapped in torn rags that revealed more than they covered, his face was gaunt, cheeks sunken from weeks of starvation, his lips blue from the frost. In his deep-set eyes lay a sea of agony and pain that no pen could ever describe. Shivering from cold, hunger, and thirst, he had no idea where his next piece of dry bread would come from to keep his weary soul tethered to this earth.

As he sat there with a broken heart, begging the Master of the Universe to finally redeem him from his bitter distress, he suddenly heard a sound. From the distance came the heavy crunch of wheels on the frozen snow, accompanied by the galloping of horses and the quiet murmuring of men.

The poor man lifted his weak eyes and saw a convoy approaching. These were several large, heavily loaded wagons, driven by a group of Jewish merchants. But they weren't traveling on the main highway; they were sneaking through the hidden, winding forest paths. Despite his weakness, the beggar immediately understood what was happening. Peeking out from under the hay that was supposed to serve as a cover were expensive, illegal contraband goods! If the border guards laid eyes on this cargo, it would mean confiscation, severe penalties, and long years in the dark dungeons of the Czar.

With his last ounce of strength, the poor man dragged himself out of his corner, stood at the edge of the road, and stretched out his thin, trembling hand toward the first wagon. He gathered all his remaining energy, his weak lungs wheezing from the frost, and let out a cry that could pierce the heavens:

"Jews... Have mercy..." his frail, trembling voice

fluttered in the wild, stormy wind that whipped cold snow into his face. The words tore from his frozen throat with such a pitiful and desperate sound, like a soul standing at the very edge of life.

"You are merciful ones, children of merciful ones! Have a drop of pity on a miserable, lonely man drowning in a sea of suffering.." His weeping mingled with the whistling wind, crying out to the black, starless sky on that deep, freezing night.

On that first, heavily laden wagon—creaking and groaning under the immense weight of thousands of rubles worth of illegal goods—sat a group of sharp-witted merchants. These were not simple men; they were clever, worldly individuals who understood how the world worked. They immediately halted the horses.

As soon as their eyes met the shattered beggar, their instincts kicked in. They didn't just see a starving pauper shivering by the wheels. Absolutely not! Their sharp, penetrating eyes noticed something far more terrifying. They saw that the beggar's gaze wasn't merely weak and glazed over; his large, fiery eyes darted with a sharpness that pierced right through the thick layers of hay hiding their secret. The merchants could see the poor man reading the hidden wooden crates and the expensive contraband peeking out.

A silent, dramatic second passed. Cold sweat began to pour down the merchants' backs, despite the brutal frost. Their sharp minds analyzed the situation at terrifying speed. They exchanged fearful, silent glances that spoke louder than a thousand words:

"Woe to us! This broken man, who looks like a half-dead corpse, is actually a ticking time bomb! He has absolutely nothing in the world to lose. He is dying of hunger; every second could be his last. If he looks with those eyes and figures out what kind of illegal fortunes we are smuggling... if he lets out a single squeak or word, we are all heading straight to Siberia for the next twenty years! He could sell us out here for a single piece of dry bread! This is a terrible danger, a matter of life and death!"

Without a single unnecessary word, the decision was made. Like they had been bitten by a snake, the merchants sprang down from the high wagon with unnatural agility, making themselves look as relaxed and friendly as if they were greeting the greatest nobleman

in the province. They rushed over to the beggar with exaggerated, smiling faces and treated him with a royal respect that completely defied the circumstances.

"Sholom Aleichem, dear Jew!" they said, embracing him with warm, soothing voices. "What are you doing here all alone in this deep, dark forest, in such terrifying, furious cold?! We can see you are terribly weakened and falling off your feet, it breaks our hearts..."

Before the astonished beggar could even open his mouth to explain, the young men plunged their hands deep into the hidden pockets of their expensive, warm coats. They pulled out a heavy handful of coins—a massive, incredibly generous donation.

Large, pure silver coins flashed and sparkled in the blackness of the night. With broad smiles meant to mask their terror, they placed the coins directly into his blood-frozen hand. The cold silver clinked together with a rich, ringing sound that cut through the angry roar of the wind.

Their sharp, penetrating eyes noticed something far more terrifying. They saw that the beggar's gaze wasn't merely weak and glazed over, his large, fiery eyes darted with a sharpness that pierced right through the thick layers of hay hiding their secret.

"Here you go, dear Jew," they said. "May you have a complete recovery and regain your strength as quickly as possible. Go immediately into the city, buy yourself a good, hot meal to revive your heart, and get a warm coat!"

With that, they bid him farewell with great charm and splendor, leaped back onto their wagons, and with sweat on their brows, whipped the horses off to safety and disappeared into the darkness.

The poor man stood rooted to the spot, utterly overwhelmed, as if splashed with hot water. He looked down at his frail, thin hand, now filled with a treasure of gleaming silver coins—a sum of money he hadn't seen in years, even in his wildest dreams. His throat choked with a wave of emotion. Hot, burning tears broke forth from his eyes, cutting through his frostbitten, painful face, falling one by one onto the cold coins.

His heart melted, filling with a deep, indescribable gratitude. He raised both his hands and, from the depths

of his aching heart, with pitiful yet joyous cries that sliced through the air, he shouted after the departing merchants with the warmest of blessings: "May the Creator repay you a thousandfold! You have saved a life from true danger! May you never know any sorrow... May you travel in good health and arrive in peace with great success!..."

His fervent blessings echoed long in the dead forest, accompanying the merchants on their journey onward.

But a little while later, different wagons arrived in that same forest. Upon these wagons sat different merchants—stingy, arrogant men whose wealth had blinded their eyes. They saw only merchandise, not human beings.

The poor man approached their wagon, hunched over: "Jews, do a kindness... a piece of bread... save a life..."

The head merchant looked down at him from his height with a disgusted glare, as one looks at a stone in the road. He scratched around in his pocket, pulled out two or three rusted, worn-out copper coins, and threw them down into the snow with a scowl: "Here, get out of here! Stop blocking the road!"

This cut the poor man to the core. He may have been utterly impoverished, but he still had a Jewish heart and a shred of basic human dignity. He looked at the copper pennies in the snow, and blood rushed to his head.

"This is beneath my dignity," he said to the merchants, his voice catching a firmness he hadn't felt in a long time. "It is not fitting for me to take such pennies and be treated like a dog. You are wealthy tycoons, transporting thousands of rubles worth of goods, and you throw me a few copper pennies in disgrace?!"

Instead of realizing their mistake and backing down, the merchants turned wild as beasts. The fact that a beggar "demanded" something and "had pride" made them lose all their humanity. "What?! You beggar! You make demands?! You really think you are an honorable man?!"

They jumped down from the wagons. With sheer cruelty, they grabbed the weak beggar and began to beat him mercilessly. Murderous blows! A strike here, a punch there. They insulted him and trampled his frail body until he was left lying bruised and bleeding on the cold snow, barely breathing. With wild laughter, the merchants climbed back onto the wagons and drove off, leaving him for the wolves in the forest.

The beggar lay there in the thick darkness. His body screamed in pain, but in his heart, a fire began to burn. Blood flowed from his wounds, and along with it flowed a terribly deep feeling of revenge. *"I am dying of hunger, I asked them nicely, and instead of helping, they crushed me like a worm? Do they feel so secure with their illegal wealth?!"*

With supernatural strength, he picked himself up. Every limb tore with pain, but his anger gave him wings. He walked straight into the city. He didn't stop at the tavern. He crawled directly to the main building of the Tamozhnya—the Czar's border police headquarters.

He walked in, wearing his bloody rags, went straight to the chief commander, and delivered a devastating report: "Listen to me! On the side forest path to the north, several heavy wagons just passed by. They are filled with contraband—expensive silks and illegal goods hidden under hay!"

The reaction was lightning-fast. The commander raised his staff; dozens of armed guards with spears, revolvers, and Russian hounds rode out on horses into the dark night. They set up a surprise ambush for the merchants at the next crossroads. The front and back were blocked off. Bloodhounds barked. The smugglers didn't even have time to think! The border guards slashed away the hay, revealed all the secret merchandise, and with wild shouts, emptied the wagons.

The "smart" smugglers who had shown respect were long gone, safely away. But the stingy merchants, who had stopped to beat and mock the beggar, were caught by the neck. They were shackled hand and foot in chains, their expensive goods were confiscated for the government treasury, and these "great tycoons" were thrown into the deepest, dampest underground dungeon, to await a bitter trial that could mean years in Siberia.

In the dark cellar, the merchants sat broken, beaten, and defeated. They tore the hair from their heads, finally grasping the terrible mistake they had made. "Oh, what have we done?!" They cried with pitiful voices.

"Because of a few cheap coins, because of our cruelty to a poor man, we have lost everything, and our lives are in danger!"

They begged the prison guard to bring the beggar to them. "We must apologize to him! We must pay him off!"

When the poor man approached the small iron barred window of the dungeon, the merchants fell to his feet.

With hot tears, they began to beg him: "Mercy!! Have pity on fellow Jews! Forgive us for the terrible beating. We are ready right now to give you thousands of rubles! Here is all our remaining money, take whatever you want! Take it all! We only ask one thing—do us a favor, go over to the minister, plead on our behalf, see if you can accomplish something for us. Perhaps in your merit, they will forgive us and free us from this dark prison hole!"

But the beggar looked at them with a cold, calm gaze. He didn't get angry and he didn't laugh; he just quietly uttered words that cut like knives into their hearts:

"Gentlemen, you simply don't understand. When you were on the road, you had the merchandise and I had my hunger. Back then, for a few coins and a bit of compassion, you could have satisfied me. It was all between me and you. But now? Now it is no longer with me... The matter is completely out of my hands. You are now in the jurisdiction of the noblemen, of the government! The claims and verdicts are already written in their books, the merchandise is no longer here to negotiate over, and I am nothing more than hot air here... It is already too late!"

THE INTERPRETATION.....

Gentlemen, the application of this parable strikes the face so strongly that it penetrates to the deepest strings of the heart!

Let us reflect with a true, Chassidic perspective on what is happening here. Holy books tell us that on Rosh Hashanah, during the great judgment in Heaven, every single person's budget for the coming year is written down exactly. It dictates how much he will earn, but just as precisely, it is written down how much he will lack—how much money he must lose this year, or how much suffering he must undergo, Heaven forbid, as a "penalty tax" for his sins of the past year. The decree is sealed. That money must leave his pocket.

However, the Master of the Universe is a Merciful Father. He does not want to punish us, so He sends us a messenger. When a poor man comes walking up, knocking on the door, broken and ashamed, asking for a donation or a loan—this is literally a gift from Heaven! The Almighty Himself is giving the homeowner an opportunity to grab a lifeline.

If the homeowner is a Maskil (a wise merchant in spiritual matters), a person with common sense who looks with open eyes—he immediately catches the hint. He says to himself: "Ob no! It is written in Heaven that I must lose several thousand dollars this year, Heaven forbid. But here, the Creator has sent me a 'practical deal'—if I give away a beautiful, respectable sum for charity and kindness, fulfilling the verse:

הֲלוֹא פָּרַם לָרֵעַב לֶחֶמְךָ

'Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?' (Isaiah 58:7)

...then this will be deducted from the Heavenly account! I am buying off the bitter judgment with mere money, and on top of that, I am gaining the tremendous *Mitzvah* of supporting a fellow Jew!"

The wise man receives the poor man with a smile, gives him a handsome donation with love and great respect, they drink

a L'chaim, and he saves himself from all bitter afflictions and troubles. He is the smart smuggler from the parable!

But what sadly happens with the Ksil (the fool)? The arrogant or stingy person lives under the illusion of:

כַּחַי וְעֵצָם יְדִי עָשָׂה לִי אֶת הַחַיִּיל הַזֶּה

'My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.' (Deuteronomy 8:17)

When the broken poor man stands at the threshold and asks for a decent gift, the rich man begins to boil and rage like a fire. "What do you want from my life?!" he yells at him. "Why do I have to give you anything?! Go work! Did I ever make a business deal with you that I owe you something? My money comes to me through hard work, I'm not giving you a single ruble!" He belittles the poor man, gives him a cold penny, and drives him away with a bleeding face.

The poor man walks away with a broken heart. He feels degraded to the abyss. The hot, bitter tears flowing from his eyes know no bounds. He looks up to Heaven and cries out to the Creator. That single groan of the poor man splits all the Heavens and goes straight up to the Throne of Glory! This is a literal handing-over of judgment to the "Heavenly Court." As the verse states clearly, carrying a terrifying warning from the Creator Himself:

וְהָיָה כִּי יִצְעַק אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי חֲנוּן אָנִי

'And it shall come to pass, when he cries unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.' (Exodus 22:26)

The "border guards" of Heaven (the destroying angels and prosecuting forces) immediately descend. The decree turns into reality! The money is no longer going toward charity, but rather toward:

עֲנִיִּים מְרֹדִים *The wretched poor...* (Isaiah 58:7)

Suddenly, a health problem strikes, Heaven forbid. A terrible blow hits the business. Lawyers, doctors, court cases, severe problems, and indescribable anguish consume the funds!

And what happens in the end? Now the rich man grabs his head! He lies, unfortunately, on his sickbed; anxiety and terror surround him. Then he starts distributing charity. He searches for that same poor man, sends him massive sums of money, draws him close, and sends messengers to beg him: "Say a little Tehillim (Psalms) for me! Pray, tear the heavens for my life!"

But in the Heavenly spheres, the poor man's soul answers him exactly as in the parable: "*Rebbi, you are too late! It is no longer in my hands. Your case already lies in the higher courts... The perfect charity you could have done before the judgment has passed. Now there are prosecutors; the verdict has already been issued. Now it depends on only one thing—whether you have great enough defenders (Melitzei Yosher) and the merit of your ancestors in Heaven to see if you will survive this, yes or no, Heaven forbid...!*"

With this crystal-clear and profound foundational principle, we can understand the holy Midrash (Parsha 34:1) which shines a tremendous light on the verse in our Torah portion:

וְכִי־יָמוּךְ אָחִיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחַזַּקְתָּ בוֹ

'If your brother becomes impoverished, and his means fail with you, then you shall uphold him...' (Leviticus 25:35)

The Midrash states:

הָדָא הוּא דְקָתִיב (תהלים מ"א, ה'): אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֵל דֵּל בְּיוֹם רָעָה וּמְלִטָהוּ הֵ"

"This is what is written: 'Fortunate is he who considers [is wise regarding] the poor; on the day of evil, the Lord will deliver him.'" (Psalms 41:2)

Seemingly, what is the explanation here? What is the connection between "your brother with you" and "on the day of evil"? Why does the Midrash call the one who gives charity by the title of Maskil (a wise person)? A person who gives charity is merciful, a man of kindness—so why specifically a "wise" man?

The meaning is so simple, yet so deep: A person can often find himself in a situation where he, too, is going through a difficult period. The market is weak, inflation is high, earning a living is hard, and he feels that, personally, he is also experiencing a "day of evil" (a bad time).

When the poor man knocks on the door at that moment, the homeowner might think to himself: "I wish I had something to give, but right now I don't even have enough for myself!"

The verse comes to teach us: Giving charity when the sun is shining, when business is booming without obstacles and your pockets are full—that is no great feat. As King Solomon

explicitly states:

בְּרִבּוֹת הַטּוֹבָה רַבּוּ אוֹכְלֶיהָ

'When goods increase, they are increased that eat them.' (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

When there is abundance, everyone takes a piece; it's easy to give. The true wisdom and the real test is אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֵל דֵּל —to be a Maskil (wise) and reflect specifically when things aren't going so well for the wealthy man himself!

And why, indeed? Why must he give when he himself is lacking?

Because a Maskil—a person with a deep Jewish intellect—grasps a true and painful fact: The poor man's trouble in every situation is twice as hard as his own!

Think about it truthfully! For example, when a difficult year of drought comes, there is no grain to be found and prices are sky-high. What is the rich man's problem? What is he searching for? He is only searching for the physical existence of the grain; he needs to find the products to bring home. Because paying for it? He has money in the bank! Yes, it is a "day of evil" for him, it is hard to find the goods, but he has the means to buy them.

But the poor man... Oh, the poor man has reached a terrifying level. He must solve both problems at once! First, he has to find the grain, but even if he finds it, he still needs to have those few pennies to buy it! And since he doesn't have a penny, the grain is absolutely out of his reach! His "day of evil" is doubly hard.

Therefore, even when the homeowner feels squeezed, he must be a Maskil and reflect that the poor man's situation is far, far worse.

This is the true meaning of the holy verse: וְכִי־יָמוּךְ אָחִיךָ... עִמָּךְ — Even when your brother's poverty happens "with you" (Imach), meaning, even when the hard times are "with you," and you yourself don't currently see a great ray of success, and you feel like you have nothing—still, you must know and you feel like you have nothing—still, you must know וְהִחַזַּקְתָּ בוֹ—you must uphold him and help him! Because his distress is much greater.

This is the smart merchant. אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֵל דֵּל — Fortunate is the wise man who uses his head, understands the Divine Providence that sent him this poor man to buy off the harsh judgments, and thinks of the poor man in time, with heart and with respect.

What will be his reward? What will be his profit? בְּיוֹם רָעָה הֵ מְלִטָהוּ — Because he helped during a difficult moment, the Creator Himself will protect him, take him out of the hands of every prosecutor, and save him from every evil occurrence, until he merits an abundance of blessing and success, both spiritually and materially. Amen!

As told by the Dubno Maggid

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