

Descending from the Hilltop

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Dedicated to the memory of Yaakov Ben Behora

R' Yissachar Ber from Radoshitz was the pupil of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak ("the Holy Jew") from P'shischa. It once happened that the young R' Yissachar Ber sojourned to the city of P'shischa to visit his esteemed mentor. Ascending a hill on the outskirts of the village, he heard shouts and cries from below. He immediately realized that the sounds were coming from the home of his rebbe. Confused, he hurried down the hill. When R' Yaakov Yitzchak saw his student, he informed him, tearfully, that his son had fallen ill and was on the verge of dying. He then took the child out of its crib and placed him in the student's arms.

"You have come at just the right time," exclaimed the rebbe, "We are in a quandary." Take the child. I am certain that you will be able to return him to me in a healthy state."

Yissachar Ber was perplexed. Never in his life had he healed anybody, neither had he ever felt as if he possessed any such powers. However, he heeded the words of his rebbe and took the baby. He returned him to the cradle and began to rock it. Rocking the cradle, he began to pour out his soul before God. In about an hour the baby had improved to the point where it was no longer in danger.

This anecdote evinces a world of opposites. The young student achieves what his rebbe cannot. This inversion finds expression in every stage of the story. R' Yissachar Ber goes to his rebbe, ascends a hill, and hears crying. The student is up above; the crying from the rebbe's house rises from below. These differing geographical locations allude to disparate spiritual statuses. The young pupil is on top of the hill, while disaster, tears, and sobbing emanate from the hill's foot - from the rebbe's house. The student, hearing these sounds, hurries confusedly down the hill. He is still unaware that something inside of him has changed, that he has been instilled with unique faculties - faculties which place him on the hilltop. The student does not yet know that he is capable of saving the life of the child. He descends the hill to the house of his rebbe. He is contrite, diffident before his rebbe.

The rebbe is distraught, crying. A person who is immersed in pain and suffering is not capable of helping himself. The student approaches from without. He is capable of gathering his energies and uttering a fitting prayer. Sensing this, the rebbe charges his young student with the responsibility of offering supplication on behalf of his son. What we have here is a kind of ordination wherein the aging rebbe "explains" to his young disciple that the time has come for him to take on a position of authority. It has come time for Yissachar to pray on behalf of others.

The student's descent from the hill bears deep Chassidic significance. When, in the wilderness, the Children of Israel committed the Sin of the Golden Calf, God turned to Moses, saying, "Go down, for

your people have sinned." Chassidut has always called upon its pious to "go down to the people," to be sensitive to their tribulations, and to address even their smallest problems - problems which, from the top of the hill, sometimes seem insignificant.

In our story, the student declines the hill; his teacher, R' Yaakov Yitzchak, says, "You have come at just the right time." Indeed, the time has arrived for you to reveal yourself. The time has come for you to effect salvation through your prayers, to perceptively and understandingly aid others.

It is here that R' Yissachar Ber performs the act which inaugurates him as a righteous person who effects miraculous salvation. He prays and the child becomes healthy. We would do well to consider the manner in which this prayer is conceived: R' Yissachar Ber does not know what his teacher expects of him. He never imagined that he had the power to heal the sick. Yet, the rebbe has given his order to save the child.

From this point onward he behaves in the most simple and natural manner: He places the boy in his crib, rocks him, and pours out his prayers before God. R' Yissachar descends. He feels the pain of the child. He feels the pain of the entire family, of his rebbe, R' Yaakov Yitzchak. With these simple and pure intentions he pours out his prayers before the Creator.

Prayer does not necessarily have to be pronounced with calculated focus. Prayer which gushes forth as a result of a true feeling of pain can also achieve salvation. The "inauguration ceremony," wherein R' Yissachar Ber is made aware of his unique capacity to aid others, has come to an end.

The impression left from this event accompanied the young Yissachar Ber wherever he went. R' Yissachar Ber from Radoshitz indeed became known as a worker of wonders who was ever sensitive to the hardships of the Jewish people, and, accordingly, effected miraculous salvation on their behalf.

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