

A Chassidic Story (#19)

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We promised you last week a classic chassidic story. Here it is. For some reason it seems apropos to Parshas VaEra and Avraham Avinu serving guests. But it's classic because of the Rebbe Reb Zushia's simple *tefilah* (prayer) which is so easy to imitate in the saying, but almost impossible to duplicate in the feeling.

After Shachris, the morning prayer, the Rebbe Reb Zushia would never ask his personal attendant to serve him breakfast. Instead he would offer the following prayer: Ribono shel Olam! Master of the World! Zushia is very hungry. Please prepare his meal for him. When the attendant would hear those words he would spring into action and prepare his master's meal.

Now, the Rebbe Reb Zushia had not only an attendant, but other domestics as well who were involved in preparing his meals. One day they all decided that they would not prepare or serve him breakfast until he explicitly asked for it.

In the village of Anipoli of old, where this story takes place, they had no paved streets. When it rained, the streets became a mud bath. Planks of wood were laid out allowing people to walk safely and stay somewhat clean. On the day the

Rebbe Reb Zushia's staff decided to withhold their services, it rained heavily in Anipoli. As he did every morning before Shachris, the Rebbe Reb Zushia left home to go to the mikveh (ritual bath). On the way he crossed paths with a visitor to Anipoli.

The stranger did not recognize the Rebbe Reb Zushia. He saw an old Yid dressed in old, worn clothing, quite unlike what your average, well-known chassidic rebbe wears. The Rebbe Reb Zushia was unlike chassidic rebbes in another way: he walked from place to place alone, without an attendant at his side. The visitor to Anipoli decided to have some fun and he pushed the old Yid off the plank and into the mud.

When he got to his inn, the visitor couldn't restrain himself. He had to share his prank with someone and, laughing all the while, told the innkeeper what he had done. When the visitor described "the old man," the innkeeper screamed, "What did you do?! That's our teacher, our master, the great tzaddik, the Rebbe Reb Zushia, in whose merit we live."

The visitor was distraught. He wished he could undo the embarrassment he had caused the Rebbe Reb Zushia's with his impetuosity. "Oy! What should I do to get his forgiveness?" The innkeeper told him not to worry. "Our rebbe is extremely humble. He will forgive you wholeheartedly as soon as you ask him. However, when you go to ask him, you shouldn't go empty-handed.

"Right after Shachris he always learns and then has something to eat. So bring a bottle of something to drink with some cookies and cake. Make sure to be there as soon as he's finished so that you'll have done something for him in order to appease him for what you did."

The visitor arrived at the Rebbe Reb Zushia's home in time to hear him say, "Ribono shel Olam! Master of the World! Zushia is very hungry. Please prepare his meal for him." It wasn't

the first time, but the servants were sticking to their plan, standing around, waiting for the Rebbe Reb Zushia to ask directly. The visitor, however, heard the Rebbe Reb Zushia and walked right into the Rebbe's room, placing the cake and drink on the table. The Rebbe Reb Zushia had some of what was brought, and wholeheartedly forgave the visitor.

The servants heard that the Rebbe was silent. After a few minutes, they slowly came out of their hiding places to investigate what happened. They opened the door to the Rebbe Reb Zushia's room and saw the leftovers. They understood that somehow, because they didn't want to bring the Rebbe his meal, God sent it to him in an unbelievable way. They also understood that the Rebbe Reb Zushia's way of doing things met with Heaven's approval and that Heaven would make sure nothing got in the way of the Rebbe's serving God.

May the merit of the tzaddikim protect us and all Yisrael.
Amen.

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