The Unusual Dance

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Once there was a poor chassid who stood in the open marketplace all day long, selling salted fish from a barrel. Naturally, during the long, bitterly cold Ukrainian winters, he needed a warm overcoat. But all he owned was an old fur peltz so tattered and worn that it was virtually useless. Without a winter coat, he would not be able to earn even his customary, meager living. He approached one of the elder chassidim for advice.

“Go to the village of Terhovitza,” the equally impoverished sage told him, “and look for a Breslover chassid named Reb Sender. He will help you.”

The man found a ride to the nearby village and met Reb Sender.

A cloth merchant in his youth, Reb Sender had been introduced to Rebbe Nachman's teachings through several of Reb Noson's followers while visiting Uman on business many years earlier. Now he was the Rav of the Breslov shul in Terhovitza.

After warmly receiving his guest, Reb Sender asked what had prompted his visit. With great emotion, the unhappy fellow poured forth his plight. "Don't worry," Reb Sender said encouragingly. "Everything will be taken care of tonight."

In the early evening, the Breslov shul filled with men who regularly studied together before reciting the evening prayer. They prayed with the same intensity that one might expect only on Yom Kippur. And the dance that followed lifted its participants far beyond all earthly concerns as their voices joined together in song.

Reb Sender and his fellow chassidim had a most unusual custom. Before the dance, they would put their wallets on the table in the middle of the room. Reb Sender, who was in charge of the congregation's charity fund, would take whatever was needed for any holy cause that might have been brought to his attention.

This time, Reb Sender took enough money to buy their needy guest a new winter coat and a pair of boots, plus enough cash to help him to invest in a more profitable line of merchandise.

After the grateful chassid had returned home, Reb Sender remarked: "A fur coat has thousands of hairs. But if only one hair from this fellow's peltz accompanies me when I stand before the Heavenly court, my entire life on earth will have been worthwhile!"

Based on a story preserved by R' Yaakov Dov, Oneg Shabbat, appendix