

In honor of Chai Elul, יום הולדת שני המאורות הגדולים, we present our readership with a story about the Baal Shem Tov, based on a reshima by the Friediker Rebbe.

Life wasn't easy for Reb Shlome Bayever. While his wedding to the daughter of the wealthy Reb Elya Moshe was still fresh upon his memory, his wife lost her mind, making a successful marriage, or even a divorce, an impossibility.

Reb Shlome's father, Reb Uri Nosson Nota, was a scholar of note. "I've searched through many a volume of Gemara, *poskim* and *shaalos u'teshuvos*, but have not found a halachic loophole that allows you to free yourself from her," he said to his son dejectedly. Reb Shlome was bound to widowerhood and no end was in sight.

The Baal Shem Tov's visit to their city, Slutzk, generated excitement amongst the people; all the great men of the vicinity went and greeted him with deference, Reb Uri Nosson Nota among them. He muscled through the crowd and approached the Baal Shem Tov. "Rebbe, my son married six years ago. His wife went mad half a year later and he's been trapped in this marriage since. I need your blessing, Rebbe."

The young woman's father made a similar petition and the holy Rebbe met with them in a small room rented by his aides for the visit. The cramped space was occupied by a small desk and chair, Reb Uri, Reb Elya Moshe, Reb Sholme, and the holy Baal Shem Tov. His warm eyes graced the office. "I'm ready to give you a *bracha*, but first I need to ascertain that the in-laws harbor no resentment to each other."

Reb Uri spoke first. "Rebbe, my mechutan Reb Elya Moshe is a great man."

His words bespoke sincerity and warmth; they came from the heart. "He puts business on the back burner at set times daily to learn; he hosts guests at his home with an open hand and has supported my son ever since his marriage. Why, he even supports me when the situation calls for it."

He smiled. "I definitely have no grievances towards Reb Elya."

The Baal Shem Tov stroked his beard and turned towards the second of the in-laws. Reb Elya Moshe too had only good things to say. "Let me tell you something. Scruples would often erupt between the simple folk of our town over supposed business related encroachments. Reb Uri, the *tzaddik*, started to teach these men lessons in Ein Yaakov and Pirkei Avos. The change that overcame them is overtly apparent! They now know that everything is in the hands of heaven and whatever business is due to them, they will receive it no matter who trespasses into

their affairs. A spirit of love has supplanted the strife that was once there. Can anyone level criticism at such a saint?"

The Baal Shem Tov listened with rapt attention. "I'm ready to give the young woman a blessing toward a complete recovery. but there is a condition."

The Baal Shem Tov became stern. "She and Shlome must cease to live with each other and a divorce needs to be administered as soon as she is sane."

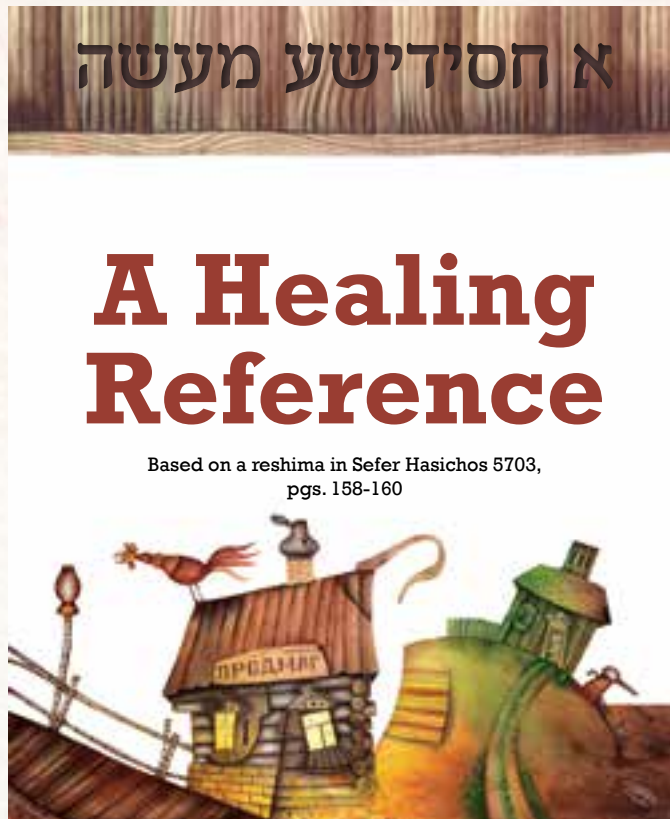
The three lesser men in the room looked at each other in shock. Reb Uri, the youth's father, looked especially upset. Although he respected the venerable Rebbe, a *chossid* he was not. "You know, Rebbe, there are halachic issues with your decision!"

"And my daughter! She'll be upset! She holds her husband in high esteem you know," chimed Reb Elya Moshe, before his in-law could finish his complaint.

The Baal Shem Tov looked to each of the men present with a kind but firm gaze. "If you want my help, these are the conditions. I cannot give the young woman a blessing otherwise."

A few days later the lot returned to the Baal Shem Tov and agreed to follow his condition. "We'll do it, but we cannot guarantee that the young woman will acquiesce."

The Baal Shem Tov nodded in satisfaction. "Good. Here's what



you're to do. Reb Elya, go home to your daughter and tell her that the well renowned miracle worker, Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, requests her presence."

"But, she is deranged; hasn't uttered a word in six years! Do you expect her to understand anything I'd say?"

The Baal Shem Tov just stared in silence. The group got the hint and left the Rebbe's chamber.

They walked down the dirt road that lead to the town's center, in silence, until Reb Elya broke it. "The Baal Shem has never seen my daughter. It's useless to try and talk to her. We've been trying for years!"

This triggered a thought in Reb Shlome's head. *I've been studying chassidus for some time now. A chossid? Not quite yet. Now that I saw the Baal Shem Tov though, it's pretty obvious that he's one to follow.* "Listen; the Baal Shem Tov is well known for his successful blessings. What have we to lose by listening to what he asks?"

Reb Shlome was bound to widowhood and no end was in sight.

Reb Uri agreed. "We did state our acceptance of his condition."

When Reb Elya Moshe arrived home, his daughter was sitting in her usual spot between the old tin oven and the wall. "*Sheifele*, I want to tell you about a special man. This man is known to performs wonders. I've recently heard a story about him..."

Reb Elya was in middle of his first story when her eyes lit up. She spoke; her voice was ragged, its lack of use evident. "Who is this person? Tell me his name."

Upon seeing this clear marvel, Reb Elya Moshe couldn't contain his astonishment and joy. "May He and His name be blessed! A real miracle!"

Reb Elya Moshe's wife watched the scene unfold from near the sink. *My husband is clearly thrilled. So am I, but we must be cautious. I remember the day it happened six years ago, like yesterday. Her sickness was caused by an evil eye. Yes, I recall the man who did it. He praised my daughter's character, was happy for her lot. She was marrying a special man, he said. A few days later calamity struck.* "Elya, she is not to leave the house. Lock the door and let no one know about this! We don't want a relapse."

The young woman ate that night with her elated parents like days gone past but she was still sick. It got worse as the third day came around and worry crept back into her parents' hearts. The young woman lapsed into a crippling fever and began mumbling incoherently, aside from the few snippets of



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intelligent blabber. "The Baal Shem Tov! I want to see the Baal Shem Tov!"

Reb Elya felt as one struck by lightning. *The promise! I had said I would bring her to the holy Rebbe!* "My dear wife, we leave tonight for Slutsk. Let us hope the Baal Shem Tov hasn't left yet!"

He hadn't. The frail young woman was brought before the Baal Shem Tov joined by her parents, in-laws and husband. "We are ready to get divorced."

Her voice was full of emotion. "My husband is great person and Tzadik. The respect and love he accords me is amazing. If the Rebbe wants us to get divorced, though, then it is in our best interest. Obviously, I am not worthy of such a man." She began to cry.

Reb Shlome then enumerated his wife's beautiful qualities and accepted the Baal Shem Tov's decree. Before long, he too began to weep.

The Baal Shem Tov looked to those assembled. "In four days all of you will return and the *get* will be administered."

When the short period, fraught with stress and tears, finished, Reb Shlome, his wife and their families came before the holy Baal Shem Tov. Sitting there were a scribe and witnesses ready to write and authorize the divorce.

Reb Shlome was crying in earnest. "I'm ready Rebbe. This disunion must be in our best interest if the Rebbe so suggests. I wholeheartedly consent."

The silence was palpable as the assembled held their breath. The Baal Shem Tov pushed back his chair and left the room. He returned with a smile. "My dear friends, six years ago a heavenly edict was decreed against Reb Shlome and his wife. She was to lose her mind and he to be a widower trapped in marriage. Because, however, they believed in the truth of a Tzadik to the point of self-sacrifice, the decree has been annulled. Reb Shlome, you and your wife may leave here as one and be blessed with sons and daughters and the longevity to enjoy them." **D**