



A Taste of Poverty

It was a short while before Sukkos. The Baal Shem Tov traveled to the town of Brod, accompanied by the *chevraya kaddisha*—the saintly brotherhood of his closest disciples. They arrived at the home of a local man of means and the Baal Shem Tov asked the *gvir* whether he would host him, along with his disciples, for Yom Tov.

The *gvir* was not a follower of the Baal Shem Tov but he was a prolific philanthropist and he replied, “I beseech you, with all my heart: please stay with me for Yom Tov along with your fellows!”

“Do you have an *esrog*?” the Baal Shem Tov asked. “Certainly,” came the response. “The finest in all of Brod!” The Baal Shem Tov then asked, “Can I use it first?” To this, the *gvir* was slow to reply. Seeing his hesitation, the Baal Shem Tov added, “If you allow me

to *bentch* first on your *esrog*, I will grant any wish you make.” Upon hearing this, the *gvir* agreed.

The Baal Shem Tov and his followers stayed at the home of the *gvir* for the entire Yom Tov. The *gvir* had a *minyán* in his home, but the Baal Shem Tov davened separately, with his own *minyán* in the *gvir*'s house.

As the Baal Shem Tov prepared to head back to Mezhibuzh, he asked the *gvir*, “What is your request?” The *gvir* responded, “I don’t know what to ask for; I inherited much wealth, I have many children who are all G-d-fearing, charitable Torah scholars. I have one request: I have never experienced poverty, so I do not understand what a poor man is lacking. While I give *tzedakah*, I’m concerned that I’m not truly fulfilling my obligation to

remedy that which the poor person is lacking. If I were to experience poverty, I would subsequently be able to give *tzedakah* in an ideal manner.”

“That’s a difficult request,” replied the Baal Shem Tov. “But since I promised to fulfill any request you have, this will be fulfilled as well.” With this, the Baal Shem Tov went on his way.

The *gvir* had a garden surrounding his home, and on the grounds were a bathhouse and *mikveh*, in which he would immerse every Erev Shabbos. His attendants would bring his silken Shabbos clothing, in which he would dress after washing and purifying himself in honor of Shabbos.

One summer Friday, as he walked out of the *mikveh* dressed in silk, he decided to go for a stroll in his garden, as his attendant

waited for him. Suddenly, the *gvir* found himself not in the garden, but in a thick forest with thick trees towering over him. The sun was setting and he frantically tried to find his way out, but to no avail. As Shabbos arrived, he stopped walking, as to continue walking outside the *techum*¹ was forbidden. Alone, terrified and hungry, he remained in the woods.

On Motzei Shabbos, fearing that he would die of starvation, he ventured on into the woods, walking all night. As the sun rose, he found himself not far from a town. He entered a house and asked the residents to borrow a tallis and tefillin with which to daven. When he concluded davening, he asked them for a piece of bread to sate his hunger. This they gave him as well.

“Where are you from?” they asked him. When he said he was from Brod, they

לע"נ
 הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' שלום דובער ע"ה
 בן הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' חיים משה ע"ה
 נלב"ע ד' סיון ה'תשע"ה
 אלפרוביץ
 ולע"נ
 הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' נחמן ע"ה
 בן פנחס ע"ה
 סודאק
 נלב"ע י"ז סיון ה'תשע"ד
 ת"נצ"ב'ה'
 נדפס ע"י
 הרה"ת ר' יוסף יצחק
 וזוגתו מרת חנה שרה
 ומשפחתם שיחיו
 אלפרוביץ



replied that they had never heard of such a city. They found his clothing strange and assumed he was insane. Having no choice, he had to resort to going from door to door, begging for alms. So as not to stand out in his valuable silk clothing, he bartered his clothing for someone's regular garments.

He travelled from town to town, joining local groups of beggars collecting coins and morsels of food. After a while, he joined a group of itinerant vagabonds who traveled from town to town with their families in horse-

drawn wagons, seeking charity. Days, months, and years passed by, and one of his fellow beggars gave him his daughter as a wife. The erstwhile *gvir* had totally forgotten that he was married, and now he wed the beggar's daughter and they had children together. As a dowry, his new father-in-law gave him a horse and wagon, in which he travelled with his new family.

Once, they reached a river in middle of the night and had to cross. There was no bridge, and one by one, the wagons

forded the waters. When it came his turn, his relative inexperience as a wagon driver caused his wagon to founder in the rushing waters, and a wheel broke. He and his wife remained in the broken wagon, as his wife pelted him with curses and derided his ineptitude. "You're different than the others," she said. "You don't know how to drive the wagon!" He tried and tried to figure out what to do, how to proceed.

As he finally left the river, dawn broke and he saw the outskirts of a town that looked familiar.

Sure enough, it was Brod. Suddenly, he found himself back in his garden, with the sun shining. He was dressed in his silks, and his attendant was waiting for him to return from his walk. "What took you so long?" asked the attendant. "It's Erev Shabbos, and it will soon be *shkiah!*"

After Shabbos, the *gvir* traveled to the Baal Shem Tov and told him each detail of the vision he had experienced. The Baal Shem Tov told him, "Good. You've experienced poverty, and perhaps more than you wished." ¹

(Kisvei Harav C.E.
 Bichovsky, p. 41)



1 The 2,000 *amah* boundary outside inhabited land, beyond which a person may not walk on Shabbos. If a person is outside the *techum* on Shabbos, he is rabbinically prohibited from walking outside of his immediate four *amos*.