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CHAPTER ONE

BAMIDBAR

NUMBERS

“When the Tabernacle is to be moved, the Levites shall dismantle it, and when it is to remain in one place, they shall set it up.” *Bamidbar 1:51*

THE BANQUET

AND then there was the time that Rabbi Adam, known in his time as a holy man of great wisdom, had an encounter with the ruler, a Kaiser of an adjoining country who occasionally sought his advice and counsel.

Once, as Rabbi Adam was leaving the Kaiser’s castle after offering his opinion on a certain matter, he invited the Kaiser and his court to a banquet in his home. To the surprise of the ruler’s attendants, the Kaiser accepted the invitation. A date for the banquet was set for the following week.

Rabbi Adam immediately returned to his home, a very small, modest house — hardly suitable to entertain royalty. To prepare for the banquet, he first purified himself by immersing in a mikveh and then entered into a deep state of

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meditation using secret powers entrusted to him through the Book of Adam.²²

He envisioned a king who lived in a large palace. This king wished to invite the ruler of the neighboring land for a banquet. So the king instructed his servants to prepare a grand banquet in the banquet hall of the palace. In the center of the hall was a large dining table covered with gold dishes. The king arranged for the neighboring ruler to attend his banquet on a certain date which coincidentally was the same day the Kaiser would attend the banquet being given by Rabbi Adam for the Kaiser and his entourage.

Among the Kaiser's ministers was one who was well-known for being an anti-Semite. He tried his best to dissuade the Kaiser from visiting Rabbi Adam with statements like, "Your Excellency, the Rabbi lives in a tiny house in a village. It is not fitting for the honor of the Kaiser to dine in such a place."

²² HaSefer HaAdam — The Book of Adam, in which is contained the TETGRAMATON — the secret, mystical name of the Eternal Being. Only six others were worthy of its secrets: Adam, Abraham, Yosef, Moshe, Joshua and King Solomon.

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But the Kaiser recognized Rabbi Adam's wisdom and enjoyed their discussions, so he paid no attention to his minister.

Finally, the day of the banquet arrived and the Kaiser and his entourage traveled towards Rabbi Adam's town. Again the minister tried again to convince the Kaiser to abandon the idea and return home to the palace.

With the minister's constant harangue about Rabbi Adam's simple house, hardly befitting a monarch, the Kaiser started to worry how he and all his attendants would be able to dine in such a small house. He instructed one of his guards with the fastest horse to ride ahead and to report back as to the banquet preparations.

The messenger soon returned and reported that Rabbi Adam's house was a small cottage and he did not see any special preparations being made.

The Kaiser was now completely unsure, but as they were almost at their destination, he decided to continue to Rabbi Adam's home.

As the royal carriage entered the small town, the residents stood in disbelief. The Kaiser himself was in their town! When the Kaiser's carriage turned onto the street where Rabbi Adam lived, he beheld a magnificent palace! The Kaiser stepped out of his golden carriage with a great smile. Rabbi

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Adam's servants took the horses to the stables, while palace waiters silently escorted the Kaiser and his attendants to the banquet hall.

Rabbi Adam greeted the Kaiser in the banquet hall, and soon the Kaiser and his court were sitting with Rabbi Adam enjoying a lavish feast fit for a king.

During the festivities, Rabbi Adam said, "I welcome you my King to this palace, and I invite you and your attendants to eat and drink to your fill! But I have one request. Please do not remove any of the table settings from the room."

Following the feast, Rabbi Adam turned to the Kaiser and announced: "Any person among you who has a particular wish should say to me — 'I want this, or I want that' — and then put his hand in the pocket of his coat, and he will find the object that he wished for."

The Kaiser was first. He wished for a gold watch — and found it in the pocket of his coat. The ministers were beside themselves with excitement. They each told the Rabbi their requests, and each reached his hand into his pocket and withdrew the item that he specifically requested.

When it was the turn of the minister who hated Jews, after telling Rabbi Adam his wish, everyone watched as he reached into his pocket.

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But then suddenly he screamed as he felt something disgusting in his pocket! When he pulled out his hand, it was covered with putrid slime! The smell was nauseating! He ran to wash his hand, but no matter how hard he tried, he could not wash away the foul smell that by now had overtaken his whole body. The minister turned to Rabbi Adam: “Please help me! I am going to faint from this terrible smell!”

Rabbi Adam replied: “If you will swear to me in front of the Kaiser never to express your hate for the Jewish people again, I will help you. If not, you will bear this filthy odor for the remainder of your life.”

The minister began to weep and moan — and then he swore to never again express his hate for the Jewish people.

Then Rabbi Adam told the minister: “The only remedy is to wash your hand in the urine from a Jewish person. This is the only way to take away the smell.” The minister immediately followed Rabbi Adam’s instructions and the smell disappeared.

The Kaiser decided to test the Rabbi’s request, and hid two gold cups from the banquet table in an inner pocket of his coat. Then the Kaiser thanked Rabbi Adam and departed. As soon as the Kaiser and his entourage left the town, the palace

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and all that it held, disappeared. Only two gold cups were missing.

Word of a strange event spread throughout the land — A palace ready for a great banquet, belonging to a king of another country and all of its contents, had briefly disappeared and then suddenly reappeared, except for two missing gold cups and all the food and drink.

Sometime later, the Kaiser sent a letter to the king of the nearby country in which he wrote: “I know the Rabbi who mysteriously brought your palace to his town, where we ate and drank the fine food and wine you had prepared for a banquet. As a sign of my respect, I am returning to you your two gold cups.”

And so it was.

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“Thus shall you do for them so they shall live and not die.” *Bamidbar 4:19*

REB YOSSELE

AND it happened that the father of Reb Yossele Chatiner was a Chassid of the Baal Shem Tov. Before Reb Yossele’s father had any children, he begged the Baal Shem Tov, “Please, Rebbe, give me a blessing to have a son.”

The Baal Shem Tov answered, “I will give you a blessing to have a son. But, you must know that your son will become rebellious (ben sorer u’moreh).”

The father asked, “But Rebbe, will my son return to the path of Judaism?”

The Baal Shem Tov thought for a minute and then answered slowly, “Yes, eventually.”

Without another thought, the father answered, “Yes, Rebbe, please give me a blessing for a son.”

And so, within the year, Yossele was born to overjoyed parents. For awhile, everything with Yossele seemed normal. But after his Bar Mitzvah, Yossele started to become rebellious, and eventually declared himself an apostate, i.e., he renounced his

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Jewish faith. With time, Yossele fell so low that he completely lost all semblance of his Jewishness.

After many fights with his parents, Yossele left his parent's home and went to live and work with a cobbler, who was also a Jewish apostate.

Yossele's father was extremely distressed over this situation with his son. He went to the Baal Shem Tov and said, "Rebbe, if I had known that my son would turn out this way, I would not have begged you for a blessing to have a son. It would have been better if my son had never been born!"

The Baal Shem Tov reminded him, "After all, I did tell you that the boy would turn rebellious."

"That's true Rebbe, but I didn't know then how I would feel about it. Every day I feel sick when I think about how my son is acting," said the father.

The Baal Shem Tov felt compassion for the anguished father and said, "I will give you an amulet." So the Baal Shem Tov wrote out an amulet on a piece of parchment and gave it to the father. "Now, if you can arrange for your son to touch this amulet, he will do teshuva."²³

The father took the amulet home and patiently waited until his son was away. Then he

²³ Return to the Jewish path of serving G•d.

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snuck into the cobbler's house and hid the amulet among a pile of his son's things where he would certainly touch it.

Later, Yossele returned and eventually reached into the pile of his things where the amulet was hidden. When Yossele touched the amulet, he was suddenly overcome with tremendous shock and fear. "What have I done!?" he cried. He immediately regretted all of his many sins and decided to travel to the Baal Shem Tov and beg for help in returning to the Jewish path followed by his father and forefathers.

The Baal Shem Tov greeted him warmly and asked, "What can I do for you, Reb Yossele?"

"Please Rebbe, I've fallen from the path. Help me return."

And so the Baal Shem Tov taught Reb Yossele the path of teshuva.

In time, Reb Yossele became a great Tzaddik and traveled around the Ukrainian countryside, urging Jews to return to a Jewish life.

Wherever R. Yossele went, he would tell his own story. He would always end the story with, "Look, my dear brothers and sisters, just how far teshuva reaches. I was already at the forty-ninth gate of impurity as the Jews were in Egypt when G•d personally came and took them out. Now,

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through doing teshuva and following the path of the Baal Shem Tov, I've reached such a high level that I can read people's thoughts. But you my brothers and sisters, who have not sinned very much, can you imagine what spiritual levels you can reach if you do a heartfelt teshuva?"

And so it was.