

“What Ten *Hasidim* Can Accomplish”

Adapted by Rabbi Jon Roos and then adapted by Rabbi Hannah L. Goldstein from the Stories of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak of Lublin “The Seer”, Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim, p. 305-6

As we begin our holiday together this evening, I want to share a Chasidic folktale with you. Our story begins with a newly married young scholar, who decided to leave his family for Shabbat. He wants to go to Lublin, to meet with the eminent Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Ha-Levi Horowitz also known as the Seer of Lublin because he was known to be able *to see* the future. And he was also known as *a tzadik*...a righteous one. The young man was hoping that after meeting this *tzadik*, he might be selected to be one of the *tzadik's* disciples.

When the young man finally made it to Lublin, he went and met Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Ha-Levi Horowitz. The Rabbi looked at him closely, and without explaining why, sent him home. The rabbi urged him not to delay, so he would be home in time for shabbat with his family.

The young man was devastated, he begged Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Ha-Levi Horowitz to let him stay, but the *tzadik* could not be swayed. So, the young man left, deeply disappointed.

On his way back home, the young man stopped to spend the night at an inn. He fell into bed, weeping. While he lay there, unsleeping and miserable, a group of *hasidim*, on the road to see the *tzadik*, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Ha-Levi Horowitz aka The Seer of Lublin, arrived at the inn.

So when the *chasidim* arrived at the inn, they heard the young man weeping in his room. They knocked on the door, and they asked him what was wrong. He shared the story of his encounter with the *tzadik*, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Ha-Levi Horowitz. And after they listened to his tale, they got some brandy. They filled up their glasses, and they filled up his glass. They drank to one another, and they drank to him. “*L’chaim, L’chaim*...to life,” they cried.

They told stories, shared their favorite Jewish teachings. One by one, they took his hands and they sang with him. They told him, “No way you’re going home– you’re coming to Lublin with us! We’ll spend Shabbat there, and we’ll tell that rabbi that we need you. We’ll tell him what a great addition to our community you will be.”

They danced, and they sang and they talked until morning. Then they prayed together, drank and ate together, and went merrily toward Lublin, taking him between them the entire way.

And then, they arrived at their destination. They went to Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Ha-Levi Horowitz and greeted him. The rabbi looked at the young man for a long time, with a great deal of intensity. Finally, he asked, “Where have you been? Tell me all that has happened.” Once he heard everything, the Rabbi explained: “It had been decreed from heaven that you would die on this sabbath and so I sent you home to be with your family one last time. Your fate, however, has been averted. As for me, I now see that no single *tzaddik* can bring about what ten *chasidim* can accomplish.”

On Rosh Hashanah, our prayers talk a lot about our “fate.” We imagine what might be waiting for us in the new year, the joy, the pain, the challenges and the celebrations. Our liturgy imagines that these are decreed by God. But, our tradition also teaches that you can change your fate.

Here’s what I love about this Hasidic story, and here’s what I want you to take away from this story as we begin these holiest of days: The rabbi can’t change your fate. And you can’t necessarily change your fate alone...sometimes it takes ten *hasidim* to change your fate.

Now in this story, it was a severe decree. *The tzaddik*, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Ha-Levi Horowitz, said that it was the young man’s fate to die. The *chasids* saved his life. But I would argue that ten *chasids* can change your fate in lots of other ways too. They can elevate your

joy, they can envelop you when you mourn, they can carry signs at your protest, they can sing a harmony in your choir, they can hold your baby, they can meet you for lunch, they can send you funny socks, they can text you an old photo that makes you smile.

We are not meant to confront these holy days alone, we're not really meant to confront any days alone. We are meant to be each others' *chasids*, to pour ourselves a drink, and then to pour one for someone else who needs it, to offer a *l'chaim*. We are meant to take each other's hands, and dance, and sing, and learn and listen. We are meant to scoop each other up, and carry each other along with us wherever it is that you need to go.

During the next ten days, you might be the young man weeping in the inn, or you might be the *chasidim* surrounding him. If these holidays do what they are supposed to, you will likely be both. It's not really about the rabbis, or the cantors...but there is no telling what ten *chasidim* can accomplish.

May we all be inscribed for blessing in the book of life.