

PARABLE

A PARABLE WITH A MESSAGE

ROSH HASHANAH

יום תרועה יהיה לכם

In a distant land, surrounded by towering mountains and broad rivers, stood a mighty kingdom. At its heart rose the royal palace, with high stone walls, golden gates, and rows of soldiers standing guard day and night. People traveled there from every town and village: one to request a favor, another to present a gift, and a third to hear the judgment of the great king.

The king was known throughout the world for his wisdom and compassion. He had many ministers, generals, and trusted advisers, but dearer to him than all of them was his only son. **The prince was his greatest treasure, the joy of his life.** He studied with him, walked beside him through the royal gardens, and prepared him to one day lead the kingdom.

The boy grew up among the palace's magnificent rooms, knowing every corner, passageway, and hidden door. He knew his father's voice, and the king knew his—even when the child spoke softly. Whenever the young prince ran into the great hall and called, "Father!" the king turned toward him immediately, even if hundreds of people were gathered around him.

As the years passed, the prince grew older. One day, the king summoned him to his private chamber. A large map lay across the table, marked with distant countries, unfamiliar cities, and roads the prince had never traveled. "My dear child," the king began, "you are more precious to me than anything in the world. But there is something you must learn."

"If you are to lead a kingdom one day, you must see more than the walls of this palace. You must visit other lands, learn from their wisdom, and understand how people live beyond our borders." The prince lowered his eyes. He had never been separated from his father for very long, and the thought of leaving weighed heavily on his heart.

The king rested a hand on his son's shoulder. "You will be traveling far," he said gently, "but remember: **you will always remain my son. Never forget where you come from. Never forget why you are going. And**

never forget the road that leads back home.” The prince listened closely, trying to hold on to every word his father spoke.

A royal carriage was prepared, together with strong horses, fine clothing, and several bags of gold coins. The king gave his son letters of introduction to the rulers of distant lands. He also entrusted him with a royal emblem, so that wherever he traveled, people would recognize him as the son of the great king and receive him with the proper respect.

On the appointed morning, the entire palace came out to see him off. Soldiers sounded their trumpets, and servants loaded the last bundles into the carriage. The king stood beside the gate, his face heavy with the pain of parting. Turning back one last time, the prince called, “I will come back, Father! I will not forget!” Then the carriage began its journey.

At first, the prince remembered every word his father had spoken. In each city, he visited places of learning, spoke with wise men, and carefully recorded their teachings. Every few weeks, he sent a letter home. Whenever a reply arrived from the king, he read it again and again, feeling for a moment as though his father were standing beside him.

But the journey was long, and the foreign lands were filled with things the young prince had never seen. In one great city, the streets remained brightly lit until late at night. Music drifted from grand houses, lavish meals were served at the inns, and groups of young men spent entire nights enjoying games, laughter, and entertainment.

“You can go and study tomorrow,” his new companions told him. “You have plenty of time. You are the son of a wealthy king! Why are you in such a hurry?” At first, he agreed to stay for just one evening. Then another night. Before long, he had remained for an entire week, hardly noticing how quickly the days were passing.

The letter he was supposed to send his father lay unsent on the table. His books remained in a dusty chest. “Tomorrow,” he reassured himself, “I will return

to my studies.” But tomorrow came and went, followed by another week and another month. Whenever a memory of the palace stirred within him, he quickly found another reason to push the thought aside.

One of the attendants whom the king had sent with him tried to warn him. “My prince, this is not why we came here. Your father is waiting to hear of your progress. We must continue our journey.” The prince grew angry. “You will not tell me what to do! I have enough money, and I can stay here as long as I please!”

The attendant tried several more times to bring him to his senses, but the prince refused to listen. Eventually, his faithful attendants left the city, one after another, and returned to the king. The prince remained behind among strangers who valued his company only as long as he had money to spend and pleasures to share with them.

His new friends disappeared. No one wanted anything to do with him anymore. When he knocked at the houses where he had once been welcomed with honor, the doors were shut in his face. Those who had laughed at his jokes and eagerly shared his meals now looked away, pretending they had never known the ragged stranger standing outside.

His supply of gold grew smaller and smaller. He sold one of the horses, then the carriage, and eventually some of the fine clothing his father had given him. Each time, he told himself that it was only temporary. “I can still go back,” he thought. “My father is a great king. There is no reason to worry.”

But a person does not always fall in one sudden plunge. Sometimes he descends one small step at a time, until he finally turns around and no longer recognizes the place where he is standing. The prince who had once sat beside the royal table now found himself begging strangers for a piece of bread to quiet his hunger.

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Years passed. The prince wandered from town to town, doing hard labor for a little food and sleeping in inns, barns, and abandoned buildings. His hands grew rough, his face became weathered by the sun, and his clothing hung in tatters. Gradually, he began speaking the language of the foreign land, using it wherever he went.

At first, he still remembered the language of his homeland. But little by little, familiar words slipped from his memory. He forgot how to address the ministers, how to greet the king, and the expressions the servants had used in the palace. One day, he tried to recall his father's voice and realized, with a shudder, that he could barely remember his words.

One bitterly cold evening, he sat beside a road, hungry and shivering. A small group of merchants passed by, and one of them was singing a quiet melody. It was a tune that people used to sing in his father's kingdom. The forsaken prince raised his head. Something about the melody reached into his heart and made it pound.

The tune carried him back to a great hall, to golden windows, and to the paths winding through the royal gardens. Then his father's face rose before him, and the memories came flooding back. He remembered the palace, the gate, and the king's final words: **"Never forget where you come from. Never forget why you are going. And never forget the road that leads back home."**

He buried his face in his hands and burst into bitter tears. "What have I done?" he whispered. "What has become of me? My father sent me to acquire wisdom, and I have squandered everything he gave me. How will I ever be able to face him? What could I possibly say after all these wasted years?"

Yet beneath the weight of his shame, a small spark of hope began to glow. Perhaps his father was still waiting. Perhaps he would still let him in. That night, he made his decision: **"I am going back. Even if I have to walk the entire way, even if no one believes me—I am going home to my father."**

The journey was harder than he had imagined. He no longer had a carriage, horses, or bags of gold. He

traveled on foot along stony roads and through forests, enduring sleepless nights and days without food. When his feet bled and his exhausted body begged him to stop, he pictured the palace and forced himself to take another step.

Days became weeks, and weeks became months. He asked the people he met which road led to the kingdom. Some laughed when they heard his story. "You are the king's son?" they mocked. "Look at your reflection in the water! Does a prince dress like that?" He did not answer their laughter. He simply lowered his head and kept walking.

Then, one morning, he saw the towers of the capital rising in the distance. His breath caught. They gleamed in the sunlight exactly as he remembered them. Despite his aching feet, he began to run. He crossed the bridge, passed through the city gate, and hurried into the crowded streets, searching the familiar surroundings with eyes full of longing.

But no one recognized him. People drew back from the filthy stranger in his torn clothing. Children followed him, staring. Even older residents who might once have seen the young prince could never have imagined that this bent, weary figure was the same royal child. He passed among them like a stranger in the city that had once been his home.

At last, he reached the palace. The golden gates stood before him, just as they had in his childhood. Two soldiers immediately blocked his path with their swords. "Where do you think you are going?" they demanded. The prince opened his mouth to answer in the language of the kingdom, but the words would not come.

Foreign expressions tumbled out, mixed with a few broken words from the language he had once known so well. "King... my father... I... son..." The guards burst out laughing. "The king's son?" one shouted. "The prince wears silk garments and a golden crown. Look at yourself! You are nothing but a wandering beggar. What business could you have here?"

"No!" he cried. "You do not understand! Let me in! I am... I am..." But the harder he tried, the fewer words he could find. He searched for the royal emblem his father had given him, but it had been lost long ago. His fine clothing was gone, his letters had disappeared, and he had nothing left to prove who he was.

The guards pushed him away, and he fell onto the

hard stones outside the gate. "Leave," the chief guard ordered. "The king has no time for people like you." The prince sat there, crushed and humiliated. He had traveled such a long way, and now the palace stood before his eyes. His father was inside, so close—and yet he could not reach him.

Between him and his father stood the locked gates, the guards, and the words he could no longer remember. "I have lost my clothing," he thought. "I have lost the royal emblem. I have even forgotten my father's language. How will I ever reach him?" He looked helplessly toward the palace, unable to take his eyes from its doors.

Suddenly, a commotion arose in the courtyard. The great palace doors opened, soldiers formed two straight rows, and the royal carriage was made ready to depart. Then the prince saw him: his father. The king sat in the carriage, his face bearing the same dignity and kindness the prince had spent so many lonely years trying to remember.

In that instant, the son forgot the guards, the watching crowd, his filthy clothing, and his shame. He wanted to call out to the king, explain who he was, and tell him everything that had happened. But he had no words. His lips trembled, his whole body shook, and the speech he desperately wanted to give remained trapped inside him.

Then, from the deepest place in his heart, a desperate, broken cry burst forth. It was not an eloquent speech or a carefully worded royal greeting. It was the same voice with which a little child calls for his father. **"Father! Father! Save me! Father—I am here!"** The cry pierced the air, rising above every other sound in the courtyard.

The horses stopped. The guards turned. The entire courtyard fell silent, and the king sat motionless. He did not recognize the clothing. The face had changed, and the language was broken. **But the voice—the voice of his only child—he recognized at once.** "Stop the carriage!" the king cried. "That is my son!" The guards could scarcely believe what they were hearing.

The king himself sprang from the carriage and hurried toward the ragged prince. The son fell at his father's feet, but the king lifted him and gathered him into his arms. "Father," the prince sobbed, "I have lost everything. I forgot the mission you gave me. I squandered all that you entrusted to me. I even forgot your language."

The king held him close. "But there is one thing you did not forget," he said. **"You did not forget that I am your father. And I never forgot that you are my son."** The prince wept in his father's embrace, no longer struggling to prove his identity. His father knew him, and at last he was home.

They brought the prince into the palace, washed him, dressed him in clean clothing, and gave him food. But more than anything else, he was warmed by his father's hand, holding him close and refusing to let him go. After years of rejection and wandering, he once again felt the quiet certainty that he belonged beside his father.

The prince still had a long road ahead. He would have to learn the language again, reacquaint himself with the ways of the palace, and repair what he had damaged. But the first and most difficult door was already open. **The cry that rose from the depths of his heart had brought him back to the palace and into his father's embrace.**

THE INTERPRETATION.....

When we reflect on this parable of the holy Baal Shem Tov, it stirs something deep within us. This is more than the story of a prince who once lived in a faraway land. **It is our own story.** The prince is the holy neshamah of a Jew, a beloved child of Hashem who has been sent on a distant mission.

Before the neshamah descends into this world, it is close to its heavenly source, beneath the Throne of

Glory. It knows the language of the palace. It knows who its Father is, where it comes from, and why it is being sent. Then the King sends His beloved child into a body, into a world filled with work, worries, temptations, and distractions.

The prince received money, clothing, a carriage, and letters from the king. In the same way, every neshamah receives a treasury of gifts for its mission: years and days,

a mind and a heart, strength and abilities, opportunities, family, Torah, and mitzvos. **These are royal treasures, entrusted to the neshamah so that it can fulfill the purpose for which it was sent.**

But the foreign countries are noisy. The world whispers, “Tomorrow you will learn. Tomorrow you will daven with greater care. Tomorrow you will make time for your neshamah. Today, you are too busy.” And the person reassures himself: One day will not hurt. One tefillah without concentration is not so terrible. Missing one Torah shiur is not the end of the world.

One day becomes a week, and a week becomes a month. Slowly, the person grows comfortable in the foreign land. The prince’s greatest tragedy was not simply that he had wasted his money. **It was that he had forgotten why he had set out in the first place.** He began to imagine that the foreign city was his home and its pleasures were his purpose.

The same thing can happen to a neshamah. It becomes caught up in the pressures of daily life—in money, honor, jealousy, anger, and the many challenges that fill a person’s days. Little by little, its voice grows quieter. A person may still know that he is a Jew, yet no longer feel the depth, privilege, and responsibility of what that means.

He may recite the words of the siddur while his heart remains asleep. He may stand in shul while his thoughts continue wandering through the streets of the foreign country. Outwardly, he is in a holy place, holding a holy book. Inwardly, however, he is still occupied with the concerns that have followed him through the door.

Eventually, the neshamah may seem to have forgotten even the language of the King. A person wants to pour out his heart before Hashem, but he does not know what to say. He wants to do teshuvah, yet feels so distant and broken that he wonders, “How can I possibly appear before the King? Who would believe that I am still His child?”

And this is the extraordinary gift of Rosh Hashanah: **when we can no longer find the words, Hashem gives us the shofar.** The shofar delivers no lengthy speeches and uses no elegant expressions. It does not play an elaborate melody. From a simple shofar comes a piercing sound, carrying a cry that even the most carefully chosen words cannot fully express.

“Father! I have lost my way. Father! I have forgotten.

The long journey has left me stained and weary. But I am still Your child—please save me!” This is the inner meaning of יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יְהִי לָכֶם — **“It shall be a day of shofar sounding for you.”** Rosh Hashanah is the day when the cry of a Jewish soul breaks through the closed gates.

The mouth cannot explain, and the mind is confused. The clothing may no longer look royal. **But the voice deep within the neshamah is still the same voice.** The guards looked at the prince’s clothing and demanded proof. The king needed no such evidence. A father recognizes his child’s voice, even when the child has changed so much that no one else recognizes him.

Sometimes, a Jew can barely recognize himself. He looks at his actions, the opportunities he has missed, and the years that have slipped away, and asks, “Can this really be me? Am I still the same neshamah that once descended from beneath the Throne of Glory?” The distance between the person he hoped to become and the person he sees today can feel overwhelming.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches us that beneath the dusty clothing, beneath the foreign language, and beneath all the failings and weaknesses, **the voice of the King’s child remains.** We must allow it to be heard. However much has changed on the outside, the deepest bond between a Jewish neshamah and its Father has not disappeared.

Rosh Hashanah does not ask a person to pretend that he has already returned to the palace. But he must stop running away. He must turn toward the King and cry out with the honest voice of his heart. He must acknowledge where he is, remember where he belongs, and awaken the longing to begin his journey home.

It is true that the cry itself is not the end of the journey. The prince still had to learn the language again and repair the harm he had done. So too, after Rosh Hashanah, a Jew must enter the Ten Days of Repentance ready to do teshuvah, correct his actions, accept meaningful resolutions, and return to the proper path.

But the return begins with that first cry. As long as the prince keeps pretending that the foreign country is his home, he will never set out for the palace. Only when his heart cries, **“I want to go home!”** does the road begin to open before him. That honest longing is the beginning of his return.

When the shofar sounds, a Jew must do more than

listen to a sound coming from outside him. He must listen to what his own neshamah is crying within. Perhaps it is saying, "I want to return to my Torah learning." Perhaps, "I want to feel the warmth of tefillah again." Perhaps, "I want to come closer to Hashem."

Perhaps the neshamah is crying, "I want to free myself from this anger, from this temptation, from this cold and empty routine." Or perhaps it can manage only one word: **"Father!"** A person must never say, "I have gone too far." The prince was ragged, ashamed, and unable to find the words, but he was never beyond his father's listening ear.

The souls of the Jewish people have left the royal table and descended into this physical world. Throughout the year, we become absorbed in the journey. We run, work, struggle, and search for the things we need. Our days are filled with responsibilities, and amid all the demands upon us, we can lose sight of the purpose that brought us here.

But when Rosh Hashanah arrives and the shofar

pierces the air, the neshamah remembers: **"I am not a stranger. I am the King's child. I have a Father. I have a palace. I have a way home."** And Hashem, our merciful Father, recognizes the voice of His child calling to Him from the midst of the long and difficult journey.

He recognizes it even though our clothing is not yet clean, our actions are not yet whole, and we cannot explain everything that has happened. For within that cry lies the deepest truth of a Jew: **"Father, Father, help me! I do not want to remain lost. I want to return to You!"** Beneath everything else, that desire is still alive.

This is the voice of the shofar and the cry of the neshamah. This is the meaning of יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יְהוָה לָכֶם — **"It shall be a day of shofar sounding for you."** When a Jew calls out sincerely, **"Father!"** the King recognizes the voice, opens the gates, and the road back to the royal palace becomes open once again.

Adapted from a parable of the holy Baal Shem Tov.

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