

Weekly Teaching

June 23, 2017

When the Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple, the Maggid of Mezritch, had occasion to intercede with heaven for the same reason, he would go to the same place in the forest and say "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I still can say the prayer," and again, the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, Rabbi Moishe Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say, "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rhizin to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God. "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient."

And it was sufficient.

Stories make us who we are. Think of the power of our Passover Story told each and every year.

Jews who know their unique Jewish stories well stay firmly anchored within their sacred identity.

Jewish education should begin with acquiring literacy in knowing our sacred stories.

It's from this place of Jewish literacy that we can continue to most effectively transmit the Jewish wisdom that has been accumulated over thousands of years.

I would like to suggest that this summer's reading list includes some time for further mastery of our Jewish stories.

Consider any of the following suggestions:

- *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classical Jewish Texts*, Barry W. Holtz
- *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, by Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg
- *The Five Books of Moses*, translated by Everett Fox
- *A History of the Jewish People*, edited by H. Ben-Sasson
- *Jerusalem: A History of Forty Centuries*, by Teddy Kollek and Moshe Pearlman
- *Legends of the Jews*, by Louis Ginzberg
- *Tales of the Hasidim*, by Martin Buber
- *This is my God*, by Herman Wouk
- *Twenty-One Stories*, by S. Y. Agnon
- *Voices of Wisdom*, by Francine Klagsbrun

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

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