

Candles for the Journey

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ה"ה

Parshat Shoftim

A man planning a lengthy journey once came to the Baal Shem Tov. "Before you go," the Baal Shem Tov said to him, "I want to give you something." He then gave the man two candles and said, "Do not travel without these candles."

Wherever the man went in his travels, he took the candles with him. He never light them, never even took them out of his bags, but he kept them with him always.

One night he came to an inn, a strange-looking inn. The innkeeper gave him a small candle, a very small candle, to light his room. After just a few minutes, however, the candle burned out. There was something in the air, and the man knew there was something wrong. He tried to open the door to ask the innkeeper for another candle, but the door was locked from the outside!

He started to become frantic, but then he remembered the two candles he had received from the Baal Shem Tov. He took them out of his bag, lit them, and looked at the bed. Everything looked alright, but, feeling that something was wrong, he pushed the bed aside. Under the bed he saw perhaps ten dead bodies. Each night, it seems, the innkeeper was killing his guests and stealing the possessions which they had given to him to hold.

Seeing by the light of the Baal Shem Tov's candles, the traveler put one of the dead bodies on the bed, and he himself crawled underneath the bed. After a while, the door opened and the innkeeper came in with a knife, stabbed the body in the bed, and then walked out.

In the morning, the man tried to open the window, but, as the door was locked, the window was barred. Seeing people walking in the street, he cried out. "Help!" he shouted. "I'm trapped here in a murderer's inn! Please get me out!"

The police were called, and, when they came to the inn, they found some fifty-six bodies – people the innkeeper had murdered.

The traveler returned to the Baal Shem Tov to tell him the story and to thank him for the candles.

"When Moses spoke to us about going into the desert," the Baal Shem Tov replied, "he said (Deuteronomy 19:3), תכין לך הדרך; **takhin lekha haderekh; prepare the way for yourself.**" The letters of תכין (takhin, prepare) are the initials of תפילין (t'fillin, prayer garments), כיכר (kikar, loaf of bread, nourishment), יין (yayin, wine, physical and spiritual refreshment), and נר (ner, candle, light). Wherever you travel, take your t'fillin, a little bread, wine for kiddush, and a candle.

Shabbat shalom.