

THE ANGUISH OF SHABBOS

Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh used to spend a substantial part of every year traveling through the towns of the southern parts of Russia in order to give instruction in the applied ethics of Chassidism, and to arouse people to repentance wherever the need arose. He once arrived in a town where the Jewish tavernkeepers kept their businesses open on Shabbos. Reb Hillel was shocked to hear this, and invited them all to meet him. When he had explained to them what a serious matter this was they all undertook to conform to proper observance-though on one condition: that he persuade a certain wealthy tavernkeeper, whose turnover was the highest in town, to do likewise, for otherwise they would not be able to survive competition with him. The tzaddik thereupon sent for that man-once, twice, three times-but he ignored the invitation. Reb Hillel stayed on in the town for Shabbos. In the morning the wealthy tavernkeeper suddenly suffered increasingly severe pains in the stomach, and his wife, fearing that they were brought on by the disrespect her husband had shown the tzaddik, hastened to seek him out so that he should intercede on his behalf. While Reb Hillel was at the Shabbos midday meal surrounded by a large company of chassidim, she burst into the room, and with tears in her eyes implored the rebbe to give her husband his blessing for a speedy recovery. The tzaddik remained silent. His chassidim were dismayed: "Rebbe, at least give the blessing that is traditional in such cases on the holy day - 'It is Shabbos, when one may not cry out; healing will come soon!' "But Reb Hillel said not a word. The woman left bitterly disappointed, On Saturday night, the tzaddik was discoursing with his chassidim at a table on which stood a samovar, in fulfillment of the Talmudic dictum: "Hot beverages after the departure of Shabbos serve as a cure." In ran the same woman, weeping and wailing, begging the tzaddik to have pity on her husband and to pray for him. Reb Hillel simply said: "It is Shabbos, when one may not cry out; healing will come soon." The chassidim were amazed. On Shabbos itself the tzaddik had said nothing-and now, when the holy day was over, he said these words usually uttered only on Shabbos? Reb Hillel continued: "If Shabbos itself will no longer have cause to cry out against him, then healing will come soon! Go along and tell him that if he gives a solemn handshake in the presence of three witnesses that he will close his business on Shabbos, then he will be cured." Three chassidim hastened to his bedside to convey the rebel's words - and he earnestly gave his word of honor. His illness passed, and the sanctity of Shabbos in that town became something noteworthy indeed. [Adapted by Yrachmiel Tilles from the rendition in A Treasury of Chassidic Tales (Artsroll), as translated by the incomparable Uri Kaploun.] **Biographical note:**Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh (1795- 13 Av 1864) was a chassid of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the Tsemek Tsedek, and as the chassidim used to say, "half a rebbe" in his own right. He served as the Rabbi of Bobruisk for many years, and authored Pelach HaRimon, a work of deep chassidic thought..] - ascent.org.il