

Rabbi's Column

The tale I did not tell was the tale of the miser.

In one of the many small towns we have lived in, there was, naturally, a rich man. The town's misfortune is that the rich man was a stingy miser. Not once was a poor person invited to share in a meal. Never was any fundraiser given anything but a boot out the door. Even the local merchants, who would beg him for a better deal on their rents, even they could never get him to do any good in the town.

Then he died.

There was a minyan for the funeral. The Rabbi had to be there, and so did the gravediggers. The merchants showed up too, as if to be certain that their nemesis was finally going to be laid to rest.

Life went on until Erev Shabbat. One of the poor ran to the Rabbi. "Rabbi, the butcher is charging too much this week for the meat! The price went up more than double!" The Rabbi went to check it out. The butcher took him into the back and said, "I know, everyone is complaining that the meat is too high. I don't think that's the only complaint you will hear today."

Sure enough, even though the Rabbi was not satisfied with such an answer, as soon as he stepped out of the butcher, a whole group of people were coming to complain about the prices - practically everywhere the poor went to get their food and candles for Shabbat. The Rabbi went back into the butcher's and asked the butcher who would be able to answer the Rabbi. The dressmaker, on the other side of town. That is what he was told, so that is where he went.

This is what he was told when he went there. "Nobody comes here that often, so I was never sworn to the same level of secrecy that the others were. You see, every time one of the merchants visited the miser, they would tell him the difference between what they had collected and how much the items really cost. The miser would match that amount, and give them a little something extra, so they could also afford to shop for the things they needed. The miser never knew who else had benefited from his Tzedakah, and nobody ever guessed that he was responsible. Until we get another miser, nobody is going to be able to afford as much as they used to, I'm afraid."

Everyone was waiting for the Rabbi to let them in on the secret.

"The secret? There isn't much of a secret, I am afraid. I know who was at the funeral, and I know who could not make it, and I know who just did not show up. A miser is still a human being, and when a person is glad that a human being is dead, then the Holy Blessed One allows prices to go up. Not always, mind you, because nobody can know the mind of the Almighty

One, but sometimes - and this is one of those times. We will have to be extra kind to each other to make up for how we treated him."

Knowing myself is difficult enough. Knowing another is almost impossible. Sometimes, when we think we know another, we mislead ourselves. As we get closer to Purim, let's strive to keep that in mind.