

## WHAT THE FROG SAID TO THE RABBI

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Once there was a Rabbi by the name of Zalman. Every morning for several months he would wake up just before the sun came up. Rabbi Zalman would dress quickly and rush to a pond not far from his house. He would get there just in time for the sun to rise, and he would sit down in the cool grass, as if he were listening to some beautiful music.

Rabbi Zalman took this trip to the pond so often that some people began to wonder. Why would a smart man like the Rabbi rush every morning to a small pond just to sit in the grass? And if Rabbi Zalman was really listening to something that early in the day - to what was he listening? It seemed that no one would ever learn this secret from the famous Rabbi.

Rabbi Zalman had a number of students who thought he was the greatest man of his time. They decided to study everything he did in order to try to find out what unusual thing he was doing at the pond. One of the students followed the Rabbi home from the pond, and he saw that the Rabbi sat down to breakfast and began singing a joyful song in Hebrew. The student wrote down the words of the song and saw that they were all words of thanks to God. The student himself said a daily prayer of thanks before breakfast, but the words of his prayer were different from

page 2

Rabbi Zalman's. Rabbi Zalman thanked God not only for the food on the table but also for the blue air, the gentle rain, the lovely flowers, the shady trees. This student thought to himself, "Wherever did the Rabbi learn that beautiful prayer of thanks?"

A second student followed the Rabbi after the morning class at school. He followed the Rabbi across a field filled with flowers. He saw the Rabbi stop short and stand still as if he were watching something very important. The Rabbi stood there - very quietly and very still for a long time. Then, the Rabbi went home for lunch. After lunch, the same student watched as the Rabbi got up from his chair and started to dance. At first, the Rabbi danced slowly, then, faster and faster; and all the while as he danced, the Rabbi kept his eyes closed and said nothing at all. The student could see a big, broad smile on the Rabbi's face. The student thought to himself, "Never have I seen a happier man". Then the student ran to the other students to tell them of his adventure.

A third student followed the Rabbi after the afternoon class. He followed the Rabbi across the village to a place with very tall trees. The student was surprised to see the Rabbi start climbing one of the trees. Up, up, the Rabbi

Page 3

climbed, and he seemed to cling to the tree almost at the very top, as if he were hung in the air. After what seemed like an hour, the Rabbi climbed down and went home for dinner. The student followed him. The Rabbi seemed to eat quickly, and the student noticed that he ate very little of the food on the plate. Indeed, the Rabbi seemed to place most of his share of the food in a special plate which he then put in a bag. Following the brief meal, the Rabbi arose and left his house carrying the bag. The student followed him up a large hill which was difficult to climb. Finally, the Rabbi came to a small cabin. He knocked at the door and entered. The student peered through the window and saw the Rabbi speaking to a man. The man seemed to be blind. Soon, the Rabbi left the cabin but without the bag and the plate. All the way home, while the student followed, the Rabbi danced and sang joyfully, his eyes shining with a great happiness.

The next day all of the students gathered to discuss what they had learned about the Rabbi. They all marvelled at the stories, but they still couldn't clear up the mystery of the pond. It seems that for all their labors they now had not one mystery - but three! Not only didn't they know what the Rabbi listened to at the pond, they didn't know what he saw in the field before lunch, and they didn't know why he climbed to the top of the tree. All they knew was they had a happy and kindly

Rabbi who loved to sing and dance and give food to needy people.

Fortunately, for the students, the Rabbi happened to pass by while they were meeting. He did not know that he had been followed by the students, and he was surprised to learn that his visits to the pond were such a puzzle to other people. "Why didn't you ask me about my visits?", said the Rabbi, "I am pleased to answer all of your questions".

The third student who had followed the Rabbi into the woods where he had climbed the tree was quick to ask, "Rabbi Zalman, what were you doing at the top of the tree for almost an hour?" The Rabbi replied, "I knew there was a bird nest at the top of the tree, so I climbed the tree to visit the birds in their home. I watched and marvelled as the mother bird carefully fed the babies one by one. I thought to myself, God provides for each of his creatures, and everything is precious to God". After I climbed the tree, and as I walked home for dinner, I remembered the blind man and I thought, "Who is feeding him?" That is why I took him part of my dinner. The students looked at each other and talked excitedly. Then, the second student said, "Rabbi, I followed you after morning class, and I saw you go into the field and bend over and watch something near the flowers for the longest time. Then you walked home, ate lunch, and danced joyfully around the house. Why did you do this?" The Rabbi smiled

and said, "In the field I came across a group of bees. They were busy dancing from flower to flower spreading the pollen and making possible the growth of new flowers. They helped God do his work as a joyful partner. So, when I had my lunch, I danced joyfully also. Like the bees I get such pleasure from doing little things to help God help people.

The best had been saved for last. The students couldn't wait to hear the answer to the next question. They were almost afraid to ask the last question. Finally, the first student said, "Rabbi, I followed you to the pond one morning and you seemed to be listening to something I couldn't hear. Then you went home, had breakfast, and sang a song of thanks to God, a song so beautiful I have never heard anything like it. Can you explain this to us?"

"The answer to your question is very simple, " said the Rabbi, "for those who understand. I go to the pond before the sun rises, because the frogs wake up then. At sun-rise they begin to praise God in their own special song. Some people think the song of the frog is ugly, but if they listen closely as I do, they will hear that it is unusually beautiful. The frog thanks God for the blue sky, and the warm sun, for shady trees, and just for being alive".

"But", said the first student, "you have been going to the pond every morning for three months. Why do you go so often?"

Page 6

The Rabbi smiled and said, "The frog's song is easy for a frog to learn but very hard for a man to learn. I shall continue to visit the pond until I learn a great deal more from the frog. The students looked at each other in amazement. They were not sure they understood the Rabbi. Do you understand him?"