

Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from
the famed Maggid of Dubno
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

Who Pays for Shabbat Expenses?

The Two Brothers

There were two brothers who lived in a town far away from their wealthy father. One brother lived comfortably, but the second brother had a hard time making a living. In fact, he was quite poor.

One day the well-to-do brother received a letter from their father. It was an invitation to attend the wedding of their youngest brother. The father wrote not to worry about the costs involved; the father would reimburse him for all his expenses for the wedding.

The brother happily went out and bought a new suit for himself, a beautiful dress for his wife, and fine clothes for his children. However, things did not turn out the way he expected.

Shortly before the trip he told his impoverished brother about the wedding. "Come quickly, and we will travel together to our brother's wedding."

The two brothers arrived at their father's house in the midst of the celebrations. The well-to-do brother and his family were all dressed beautifully; but the poor brother arrived wearing rags.

At the end of the festivities, the brother went to his father with a detailed account of all his expenses for the wedding. The father, however, stated firmly that he would not pay a penny.

The son was shocked. "But I only made all of these purchases because you promised to pay me back! Perhaps you have forgotten, but here is the letter you wrote in which you promised to cover all expenses."

The father responded, "I don't deny promising to pay your expenses. But read carefully what I wrote you: 'I will cover all expenses that you have incurred on my behalf.' Now, if you really intended to honor me, why didn't you remember to buy some nice clothes for your brother, so he shouldn't have to appear at the celebrations wearing rags? It is clear from your actions that you did not have me in mind at all when you bought these clothes, but only your own personal benefit and enjoyment."

In Whose Honor?

The Sages taught that G-d wants us to enjoy Shabbat, and that He will

cover all expenses. As it says in Beitza 15: "All expenses for the year are set from Rosh HaShana, except what one spends to honor the Sabbath and holidays."

We are expected to spend money to honor Shabbat. But if we only feed and cloth our own family, and fail to take care of our brother - our fellow Jew who spends Shabbat in bleak poverty and loneliness - then clearly our intention is only for our own enjoyment, and not L'SHEIM SHAMAYIM, for G-d's honor.

If that is the case, we cannot come to G-d and demand that He cover our expenses for Shabbat, as it says, "Borrow from Me and I will pay it back" (ibid). G-d will respond: "Why do you think that I should pay these expenses? They were made for your own honor and benefit, not Mine!"

Adapted from Mishlei Yaakov, pp. 286-287