



## 2. ELIJAH THE SLAVE

In ancient times, in a distant land, there was a large city where many rich men lived. It had magnificent palaces, broad avenues, parks and gardens. In their midst was a tiny street of broken-down houses. They had narrow windows and doorways, and their roofs leaked. In the humblest of these, there lived a holy man. Tobias was his name, and his wife was called Peninah, which means Pearl. They had five children; three sons and two daughters.

Tobias was a scribe who copied the sacred Torah scrolls. In this way he was able to earn a meager living. But suddenly he was taken ill and lost the use of his right hand. Soon there was no bread in the house. The larder was so empty that even the mice ran away. The boys could not go to school because they had no shoes. Tobias' clothes were in rags and tatters. When the neighbors saw their need, although they were poor too, they tried to help. But Tobias refused their offers, saying, "There is a G-d and He will help us."

It was already the second night of Hanukkah and they had nothing in the house with which to celebrate the holiday. No oil for the menorah, no potatoes to fry nor flour and sugar to make doughnuts, and no dreidels or prizes. Tobias' wife said to him, "If G-d intends to help us, it better be soon. But whatever He might do, for you to just sit at home doesn't improve matters. You must go out into the city. Even while waiting for a miracle, it's good to do something. Man must begin and G-d will help him." "How can I show my face among people when I have no decent clothes to wear?" "Wait, my husband, and I will take care of that." Peninah went to a neighbor and borrowed a

coat, a hat, and a pair of shoes. She helped Tobias dress, and truly, he looked like a new man. "Now go," Peninah said, "and G-d be with you."

As Tobias approached the center of the city, a stranger stopped him. He was tall and had a white beard. He wore a long coat and carried a staff. "Peace be with you, Tobias," he said and held out his right hand. Tobias, forgetting he could not move his right hand, clasped the stranger's with it. He was baffled by this miraculous recovery.

"Who do I have the honor of greeting?" Tobias asked.

"My name is Elijah and I am your slave sent from Heaven. Take me to the marketplace and sell me to the highest bidder."

"If you come from Heaven, I am your slave," Tobias answered. "How can a slave sell his master?"

"Do as I say," Elijah replied.

Since Elijah was a messenger from G-d, Tobias had no choice but to obey.

In the marketplace, many rich merchants gathered around Tobias and Elijah. Never before had a slave who looked so noble and wise been offered for sale. The richest and most forward of the merchants addressed him. "What can you do slave?"

"Anything you wish," Elijah said.

"Can you build a palace?"

"The most magnificent you have ever seen."

"Even more splendid than the king's?"

"More splendid and bigger!"

The merchants, sensing that this slave had supernatural powers, began the bidding at once. "Ten thousand gulden," one shouted. "Fifty thousand," called another. "One hundred thousand!" offered a third. The highest price - 800,000 gulden - was finally offered by the richest merchant, and he paid the money to Tobias. Turning to Elijah, the merchant said, "If the real palace is as beautiful as you promise, I will make you a free man."

"Very well," Elijah replied. And to Tobias he said, "Go home and rejoice with your wife and children. Your days of poverty are over."

Tobias stopped to purchase oil and wicks for their big brass Hanukkah menorah, food and wine for the holiday, and gifts for his wife and children, including a new dreidel to play with. When he returned home, the joy of his family was great. They could truly say, "*Nes gadol hayah poh!* A great miracle happened here!" As always, Tobias gave a

tenth part of his money to the poor; and even though he now was a rich man, he decided to go back to his beloved work as a scribe.

That night, Elijah spoke to G-d: "I sold myself as a slave to Your servant Tobias. I pray that You will now help me build the palace." Immediately a band of angels descended from heaven. They worked all night long. When the sun rose the palace was finished. The rich merchant came and gazed in awe. Never had a building of such splendor been seen by human eyes.

"Here is your palace," Elijah said. "Keep your word and give me my freedom." "You are free, my lord," replied the merchant, and he bowed low before G-d's messenger. The angels laughed happily. G-d looked down from his seventh heaven and smiled. The angels spread their wings and, together with Elijah, they flew upward into the sky.