



1. OLLIE AND POLLY - The Story of Two Leaves

The forest was large and filled with all kinds of leaf-bearing trees. It was early December. Usually it was very cold, maybe even snowing, at this time of year, but this December was relatively warm. The nights were cold and windy, but it warmed up during the day. You might have thought it was summer except that the whole forest was strewn with fallen leaves - some yellow as saffron, some red as wine, some the color of gold, and some a blend of beautiful Autumn shades. They formed a deep carpet over the forest floor.

The birds that don't migrate to warmer climates in the winter perched on the bare tree limbs. Among them were sparrows - tiny birds, but endowed with much courage and the experience accumulated through thousands of generations. They hopped, twittered, and searched for food that the forest offered this time of the year. Many, many insects and worms had perished in recent weeks, but no one mourned their loss. G-d's creatures know that death is merely a phase of life. With the coming of spring, the forest would again fill with grasses, green leaves, blossoms and flowers. The migrating birds would return from far off lands and locate and repair their abandoned nests.

On the tip of a tree which had lost all its other leaves, two still remained. One leaf was named Ollie and the other Trufa, but her friends called her Polly so we will do the same. Ollie and Polly both hung from one twig. Since they were at the very tip of the tree they received lots of sunlight. They had survived all the rains, the cold nights and winds, and still clung to the tip of the twig. Who knows the reason one leaf falls and

another remains? But Ollie and Polly believed the answer lay in the great love they had for one another. Ollie was slightly bigger than Polly and a few days older, but Polly was prettier and more delicate. During the worst storms, when the thunder clapped, the lightning flashed, and the wind tore off not only the leaves but even whole branches, Ollie pleaded with Polly, "Hang on, Polly! Hang on with all your might!"

One particularly windy day Polly cried out, "I think my time has come, Ollie, but you hang on!" "What for?" Ollie asked. "Without you my life is senseless. By day I look at you and admire your beauty. At night I sense your fragrance. Be the only leaf on the tree? No, never! If you fall, I'll fall with you." Just as Ollie spoke these words, that which Polly had feared happened - a strong gust of wind came up and tore Ollie loose from the twig. Polly began to tremble and flutter until it seemed that she too would be torn away, but she held fast. She saw Ollie fall and sway in the air; then he vanished from sight. He blended in with the other leaves on the ground and Polly was left alone on the tree.

As the sun set and darkness fell, Polly didn't think a night could be as lonely as this one - so dark, so frosty. She began to sink into despair. Then, she noticed little lights starting to flicker in the window of the woodcutter's hut, which stood a little way off in the forest. One, then two little lights shone in the darkness. It was the first night of Hanukkah. The warm, golden glow of light united the two candles and the sight somehow calmed and comforted Polly. After a while, she dozed off. This wasn't a sleep but a strange drifting. Then Polly awoke and to her amazement found that she was no longer hanging on the tree. The wind had blown her down while she was asleep. This was different to the way she used to feel when she awoke on the tree with the sunrise. All her fears and anxieties had vanished. She knew that she wasn't just a leaf that depended on every whim of the wind, she was a part of the universe. Somehow, she understood the miracle of her molecules and atoms - the enormous energy she represented and the great plan of the Creator of which she was a part.

Next to her lay Ollie and they greeted each other with a depth of love they hadn't realized before; a love as strong and eternal as the universe itself. That which they had feared turned out to be not death but redemption. A breeze came and lifted Ollie and Polly in the air, and they laughed with delight and soared with the joy known only by those who are set free and have joined with eternity.