

The text of this tale was first published in Hebrew by rabbi Yitzhak Farhi (Safed 1779 -- Jerusalem 1853) in his book *Matoq Mi-D'vash* [=Sweeter Than Honey], Jerusalem, 1842

English translation by Zvi Zohar ©

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An awesome tale

that occurred in the city of Damascus

in the time of rabbi Moshe Galante of blessed memory.

10 Rabbi Galante was a righteous and completely pious man, wise in all the Seven Wisdoms,
and there was in his generation no one comparable to him --- except for one Muslim gentile
who was perfect in all of the Seven Wisdoms. This gentile also had one advantage over
rabbi Moshe, of blessed memory: namely, that whoever had a sick relative would go to that
gentile Sheikh, and plead with him to pray for the sick person. And the Sheikh would pray
15 in solitude for half an hour, and would then say: this one shall live, or, this one shall die (far
be it from us!) – as did (*le-havdil*) rabbi Hanina Ben Dosa.

When news of this came to the ears of rabbi Galante, he was very amazed by this,
and he said to himself: This gentile is more holy and pure than I am, for the Books of Life
20 and of Death are revealed to him. Yet I serve God, and engage throughout the day in the
Torah of God and in His commandments; so why am I not like this Gentile Sheikh –
“should a daughter of Priests not be equal to a chambermaid”? And the rabbi’s sorrow was
very deep. And he sought for some way to enter the home of that gentile Sheikh and to
frequent his company, so that by and by the Sheikh might possibly reveal to him the reason
25 whereby he attained that great honor.

So the rabbi summoned to him the head of the community and commanded him: “Go
to the Sheikh, and say to him: ‘The rabbi of the Israelites has heard highly of you, and
would like to come and greet your visage, if you permit him to do so’ ” [for that Sheikh was
30 greater than all the [Ottoman Imperial] officials, and all the great officials were wont to
offer many presents so as to attain the privilege of an audience, and they would come and
bow down before him to obtain his blessing, but he never set foot outside of his palace and
never revealed himself to the multitude]. So the head of the community went to the Sheikh
and told him all the words of the rabbi. And the Sheikh said to him: “I, too, have heard tell
35 of your rabbi, that he is a wise man. And I wish to meet him. Therefore, go to your rabbi
and say to him, that he should indeed come and tarry not”. And the head of the community
returned to the rabbi and told him all the words of the Sheikh. So the rabbi arose and went
there.

40 Now, when the Sheikh saw the face of the rabbi, he found favor in his eyes, and he
received him with honor and with good countenance, and sat him down before him and
inquired as to his well-being. In the course of their conversation the Sheikh asked the rabbi,
saying: “I have heard tell of you, that you are a man of wisdom. Have you perchance

45 knowledge of the wisdom of [such-and-such]?” And the rabbi answered: “Sir, God has granted me a little of that wisdom”. The Sheikh began to test the rabbi, and the rabbi opened his mouth in that wisdom, and the Sheikh realized that he was chock full of that wisdom. Now, the Sheikh had thought that no-one was like him; when he recognized the wisdom of the rabbi, he was bound to him by a great love, and said to him: “My brother, my friend: know, that today you have caused me great joy by your wisdom. I therefore entreat you not to refrain from visiting me at least once a week, so that I may enjoy conversing with you about matters of wisdom”. And he parted from him with great honor.

55 After two days had passed, the Sheikh could not resist his great desire, and he sent to the rabbi two servants and a horse to ride upon, so that the rabbi might come to him in great honor. The rabbi arose and went to the Sheikh, who received him with great honor, and embraced and kissed him, and said to him: “Know, my friend, that since we parted, my soul became linked to your soul, and I could no longer wait and restrain myself, until I sent for you to come to me to quiet the flame of passion”. And immediately the Sheikh asked him: “Have you knowledge of [such and such] wisdom?” And the rabbi answered: “God has been kind to me and given me also that”. And they began to discuss that wisdom, and the Sheikh saw that he was chock full of that, too. And he was filled with a great joy, and said to him: “If I have found favor in your eyes, come to me every two days”. And the rabbi did so, for he wished to achieve his purpose, and he came to him two times each week, and the Sheikh realized that he was completely proficient in all of the seven wisdoms.

65 Now, the Sheikh was missing an element of one of the wisdoms, without which he could not be perfect in that wisdom. With regard to this, the Sheikh asked the rabbi: “Do you have knowledge of that wisdom?” and the rabbi replied: “Thank God, I am expert in that wisdom”. Then the Sheikh fell at the rabbi’s feet and said to him: “If I have found favor in your eyes, please instruct me in this wisdom, for it is unknown to me”. Whereupon the rabbi said to him: “Sir, when I learned all these wisdoms, it came very dearly to me, for they were not taught to me without fee; so too, I will not teach you without recompense”. And the Sheikh said to the rabbi: “Cite whatever sum you wish, and I will pay whatever you ask, for [except for this] I am perfect in all seven wisdoms, and if I give much silver and gold so as to be lacking in nothing, it is insignificant to me”. So the rabbi said to him: “Far be it from me to ask silver or gold for this wisdom; rather, I ask from you to teach me another wisdom in return”. The Sheikh said to him: “Is there anything unknown to you? Why, in all that I know, you are more proficient than I. What wisdom do I know, that you do not?”. The rabbi said to him: “You have a wonderful wisdom, that is beyond me”. He said to him: “What wisdom is that?” He said to him: “That you pray about the sick, and the Books of Life Etc. are open to you. That wisdom is beyond me. If you reveal to me the secret of that wisdom, I too will tell you the wisdom which is hidden from you”.

85 The Sheikh said to him: ‘What you ask is exceedingly difficult, and it is impossible that I reveal this thing to any creature in the world’. The rabbi said to him: “So too, I cannot reveal this wisdom which is hidden from you, except by barter: Wisdom for Wisdom”. The Sheikh said: “Know, my friend, that my fathers bound me by oath not to reveal this thing to any person”. And the rabbi said: “I too am bound by oath not to teach this wisdom to any person. But I say, that since it is for my benefit, so as to acquire a different knowledge in

90 which I am lacking, surely it is permitted to me, and the oath does not relate to suchlike; so too your oath is permitted, since you are not selling that wisdom for money but only to acquire a wisdom in which you are of need and by virtue of which you will become perfect in all wisdom”.

95 Thereupon the Sheikh said to him: “Even be it as you say – the matter is too hard for you, and I fear that you will not be able to do that which is necessary in order to know this great secret; for the matter is too heavy for you, and you will not be able to do it”. Then the rabbi said to him: “I am willing to take upon myself all this difficult thing, and I will do all that you require of me”. Then the Sheikh said to him: “If so, hearken to my voice and do
100 what I command you: go now to your home and prepare yourself today to accept upon you, beginning this evening, a fast of two successive days. And take care at your meal neither to eat meat nor to drink wine. And after eating, go and immerse yourself, and put on pure clothes. And on each of the two days of your fast you must immerse morning and evening, and search your soul with regard to your past actions, for ‘there is no man on earth so
105 righteous [that does only good and does not sin]’ ”.

When the rabbi heard the words of the Sheikh, his heart was very moved, and he said to him: “I will do just as you said”. And he replied: “Go in peace; and on the third day come to me, and I will tell you the secret of this great thing”. And he went to his home with a
110 broken and humble heart, and he did all that he commanded him. He went down and immersed himself, and put on white clothes, and so too on the following two days he did as he commanded. And he added to this, by not breaking his fast on the eve of the third day. In the morning after completing his prayers, he went to the Sheikh. And the Sheikh raised up his eyes and saw the rabbi arriving without strength, and he hurried towards him and said:
115 “Come, blessed of the Lord; your countenance reveals that you have done all that I told you”. The rabbi said to him: “And I am still in fast”. The Sheikh replied: “You have done well, and may you increase in strength. Now, come with me and I will show you this secret”.

120 And he went with him to a certain room, the key of which was not given to any person but was always only in his hand. And the Sheikh opened the door, and they both entered, and locked the door so that no stranger might enter there with them. And they went out of the room into a beautiful orchard, and in the middle of the garden there was a pool of living water channeled from the waters of Amana and Parpar. And by the side of the pool
125 there was a bench, and upon it were ready two outfits of white garments, one for the rabbi and one for himself. And the Sheikh said to the rabbi: “Let us now go down and immerse before we come to the holy place”. And they both went down into the pool and immersed and changed their garments. And the two of them went together to the heart of the orchard. And the rabbi was silently wondering, to know what would be the end of the matter. And
130 the rabbi raised up his eyes and saw a structure built in perfect beauty, with doors of pure silver, covered with all manner of lovely designs the like of which could not be found in the palace of any king.

And when the Sheikh drew near to open the door of the building he said to the rabbi: “Take care to enter this house in fear and trembling; see how I act, and do likewise”. And he
135 opened the door, and beheld an utterly glorious interior. And on the side opposite the door

there was a small sanctuary of perfect beauty, covered by a curtain amazingly embroidered with pearls and gems. And the Sheikh entered the building with great awe, and bowed down seven times before the sanctuary. And the rabbi was exceedingly distressed, and thought in his heart, that perhaps in the sanctuary there was a foreign god or a figure, and how can I do
 140 so? For the Sheikh had warned him that he must bow down. And so the rabbi rolled up his eyes and said to himself: “I envision God before me”, and he prostrated himself to the earth as the Sheikh had done. And a great fear fell upon him. And the Sheikh said to him: “Draw near to the sanctuary and open it, and there you will find your wish”; and he said this to him in a whisper and with humble heart. Immediately the rabbi drew near and opened the doors
 145 of the sanctuary, and they were of pure gold inlaid with gems. And he saw in the sanctuary a most beautiful tablet engraved with a most fine design of the Menorah, above which were written the words “I envision YHWH before me always” – with the Tetragrammaton in very large letters. And when the rabbi saw this he was filled with great joy, that he had not bowed down in vain; and he stepped back, and bowed down, and went out – and they both
 150 went out together.

And the rabbi said to him: “You said to me that I would find there what I asked for, but nothing was revealed to me except what I saw”. The Sheikh said to him: “Know, my brother, that those large letters which you beheld are the name of He Who Spoke and the universe was created; He is the Creator, He is the Maker”. And the Sheikh thought that this
 155 was not revealed to any person. And the Sheikh added: “Know, my brother, that when a person comes to me to pray for his sick one, I go down and immerse and enter this building which you saw, in fear and trembling. And I pray there before the sanctuary. And when the prayer is done, I open the gate of the sanctuary. And if I see the letters of the Holy Name shining brilliantly, I know that he lives; but if I see cloud and fog around it, I know that he
 160 dies. And see how greatly you are loved, my brother, that I revealed to you that which I revealed to no creature”.

And the rabbi went back to his home, and shed copious tears, and said thus: “Woe
 165 shall be to us on the day of judgment! For see this gentile, who knew the Name of The Holy One, blessed be He – how great was the honor that he accorded Him, and how much fear and awe were upon him when he entered therein; and for this reason he was worthy of all that honor! While as for us [=Israelites] – what can we answer, and what can we say -- for it is becoming upon us to do even more than that, and especially when enunciating God’s
 170 Name to be filled with trepidation!”.

This is the end of the awesome tale.