

mitigated, and paths lead from the mountain to a place where the flames become a constructive force. Thus, in the kitchen the fire consumes evil, but it also extracts and prepares nourishment for the world, turning bitter into sweet. In this it is assisted by the birds, who represent human souls. It is here, where hell fire is moderated, that the inhabitants of the country of wealth are purged of their depravity in a conclusion that is both pious and hilarious. When this happens, the primal harmony of the world is restored.

The Clever Man and the Simple Man

Once there were two householders who lived in the same town. Both of them were very wealthy, and they owned great houses.

Each of these householders had an only son, and the two children studied together in the same class. One of them was clever, and the other was simple; he was not stupid, but he had a plain mind, not subtle. Despite their different natures, the two children loved each other dearly.

After a number of years, the two householders began to lose their money. They sank lower and lower, until finally they lost almost everything. They became very poor and had nothing left but the houses in which they lived. The children were growing up, and their fathers told them, "We are no longer able to support you, and we cannot keep you at home. Make of yourselves whatever you can."

The simple lad went off and learned shoemaking. The clever son, who understood things, did not want to take up such a simple trade, and so he decided to go out into the world and look around before making up his mind. He went to the marketplace, and there he saw passing through the town a great covered wagon drawn by four horses.

"Where are you from?" he asked the merchants. "From Warsaw."

"Where are you going?"

"To Warsaw."

"Perhaps you need a serving lad?"

The merchants saw that he was clever and quick, and he caught their fancy. They took him with them, and he served them diligently along the way.

They arrived in Warsaw. Since he was a clever fellow, he said to himself, "Now that I am here, why should I stay with these merchants? Perhaps I can better myself elsewhere. I shall look around and inquire."

He went to the marketplace and asked about the people who had brought him and about his chances of finding a better position. People answered him that the merchants who had brought him were honest people and good employers, but that working for them was difficult, because their business took them to distant lands.

As he walked around the marketplace, the youth saw shopkeepers' servants going about their business. He noticed their fine manners, their fancy hats, and their pointed shoes. He was a sharp and an understanding lad, and he liked the idea of doing such work, both because of its elegance and because one could do it without traveling. He returned to the merchants who had brought him, thanked them, and told them that he did not want to stay with them, and as for their having brought him to Warsaw, he had already repaid them with his service on the journey. He left them and found employment in the service of a shopkeeper.

The position of a servant is determined thus: at first he is an underservant and has to do heavy work for little pay, and only after some time can he rise to a higher position. This shopkeeper made the lad work hard. He would send him to the homes of the gentry to deliver merchandise, and the youth strained his arms, as servants do, carrying the heavy loads of cloth. Sometimes he had to carry merchandise up several flights of stairs. As he was a philosopher and understood things, he said to himself, "What's the point of my working like this? After all, the main reason a man works is to be able to marry and make a living, but I don't have to think about that yet. Meanwhile, I can better myself by traveling around the world and seeing different countries."

The youth went to the marketplace, and there he saw a group of merchants traveling in a large wagon.

"Where are you going?" he asked them. "To Livorno."

"Will you take me there, too?"

"Yes," they answered, and they took him to Livorno. From there he journeyed through Italy, and from Italy he went on to Spain.

His wanderings took him to many different countries, and this made him even more wise. After several years he said to himself, "Now the time has come to decide what I'm going to do with my life." He began to think philosophically about the profession he should take up. He liked the idea of being a goldsmith, for this is a great and beautiful craft and entails much wisdom as well. Furthermore, it promises a good living. He apprenticed himself to a goldsmith, and since he was sharp-witted and a philosopher, he mastered the trade in three months, though usually this takes several years. He became a master craftsman, and his skills surpassed even those of the goldsmith who had taught him. Once he had accomplished this, however, he said to himself, "Even though I have this trade in my hand, it's not enough. One can make a good living from it now, but that can change." So he apprenticed himself to a cutter of precious stones, and since he was so clever, he mastered this craft, too, in a short time, about three months.

Thereafter he reflected philosophically, "I have mastered these two trades, but, who knows, perhaps someday neither of them will be required. It would be prudent to study a profession that will always be needed." Deliberating with all his understanding and philosophy, he decided to study medicine, which is always needed and important.

In order to study medicine, one must first learn Latin, both to read and to write it, and philosophy as well. Since he was so clever, he learned all this in a short time, just three months. He became a great physician and philosopher, a master of all the sciences.

After a while, he began to find the whole world worthless. He was so clever, so skilled a craftsman, so wise a sage, and so great a physician, that everybody else in the world seemed of no account.

He then decided that it was time for him to settle down and take a wife. "But if I get married here," he thought, "who will notice? I shall

return home, so that people will see what has become of me. When I left I was just a boy, and now I have attained greatness."

He set out on his way home. He suffered much on the journey. Because he was so wise there was no one with whom he could converse, and he could never find an inn to his liking. He was constantly suffering.

Let us now put aside the story of the clever man and begin to tell the story of the simple man.

The simple man learned shoemaking. Since he was simple, it took him a long time to acquire the skill, and even then he did not master it entirely. He took a wife and made a living by his trade.

Since he was a simple man and was not skilled at his craft, he earned his living with great difficulty. He had to work all the time and had no time even to eat. He would snatch bites of bread as he sat over his leather, piercing holes with his awl and sewing the heavy stitches.

The simple man lived in great happiness. He knew nothing but joy. He had every kind of food and drink and clothing that he desired. "My wife," he would say, "bring me something to eat." She would give him a piece of bread. When he had finished eating it, he would say, "Bring me some chicken soup with kasha." She would cut him another slice of bread, and he would eat it, praising its fine taste. "How delicious and satisfying this soup is," he would say. Then he would tell her, "Bring me some meat." Again she would give him bread, and as he ate it he would enjoy it and praise it handsomely. "This meat is delicious!" he would exclaim. Every time he asked her to bring him a fine dish, she would give him a piece of bread. He would enjoy it immensely, praise its quality, and talk about how delicious it was, exactly as though he were really eating the fine dish he had asked for. Because of his great innocence and happiness, he actually tasted in the bread he ate the flavor of any food he desired.

After the meal, when he said, "My wife, bring me a drink of beer," she would bring him a glass of water. "How delicious this beer is," he would exclaim. Next he would say, "Bring me some mead." She would give him more water, and he would praise the fine quality of the mead. "Bring me wine," he would demand, or perhaps he wanted some other beverage – whatever it was, she always gave him water, and he would enjoy and praise it exactly as if he were really drinking the beverage he had requested.

And so it was with clothing. He and his wife had but a single sheepskin coat between them. Whenever he needed the sheepskin to go to market, he would say, "My wife, give me the sheepskin," and she would give it to him. When he went visiting and needed a cloth coat, he would say, "My wife, give me the cloth coat." She would give him the sheepskin. In delight he would exclaim, "What a well-made cloth coat this is!" To go to the synagogue, he needed a caftan. "My wife, give me the caftan!" he would say, and she would give him the sheepskin. "How fine and how beautiful this caftan is!" he would declare. Sometimes, too, he had occasion to wear a fur coat. His wife would give him the sheepskin, and he would praise it, taking pleasure in the fine quality and beauty of his fur coat.

He did the same with all things, and so he was always filled with joy and happiness.

As he was not a master of his craft, it sometimes happened that when he finished a shoe it had three points instead of two. He would take the shoe in his hand, praise it highly, and take great pleasure in beholding it. "My wife," he would say, "how pretty and fine this shoe is, and how sweet. It is a shoe of honey and sugar."

"If that is really so," she would answer, "why do the other cobblers take three kopecks for a pair of shoes, and you take only a kopeck and a half?"

"What does that matter to me? What they do is their business, and what I do is my business. Anyway, why should we talk about what other people do? Let's reckon up how much profit I make on this shoe. The leather costs so much, the glue and the thread so much, and all the other materials so much. So altogether I earn ten pennies. But what does it matter to me if I make so much profit?"

So the simple man was always happy and cheerful. However, everybody used to mock him. He was just what they needed, a butt for their jokes. People considered him a lunatic. They used to come and start conversations with him in order to make fun of him. "No fooling, please," the simple man would tell them. If someone answered, "No fooling," he would listen and talk with him seriously. He did not want to think deeply and to wonder whether this answer itself was a joke. If, however, he saw that someone was really bent on making fun of him,

he would say, "What if you are more clever than I am? That only makes you a fool. After all, what am I? If you are just more clever than I am, you are really a fool."

Meanwhile, the news that the clever man was coming and that he had become a very great and wise man caused a stir in the town. The simple man, too, went running joyously to greet him. "Quickly!" he said to his wife. "Give me the fur coat. I am going to meet my beloved friend. I'll see him at long last!" She gave him the sheepskin, and he rushed off to meet the clever man as he rode up in grand style in his carriage.

The simple man greeted him with great joy and affection. "My dear brother, how are you? Blessed be God who has brought you here and allowed me to see you."

The clever man looked at him. As the whole world was as nothing to him, he could not see much in this man, who looked like a lunatic. Nevertheless, because of the great love they had had for each other as youths, he took him into his carriage and rode with him into town.

Meanwhile, the two householders had died, and they had left their houses to their sons. Because the simple man lived nearby, he had entered his father's house and taken his inheritance. The clever man, however, had been away in foreign lands. There had been no one to take possession of his house, and it had fallen into decay and ruin. By now nothing remained of it, so on his return he had nowhere to live. He went to stay at an inn, but it was not to his liking, and he suffered there a great deal.

The simple man now had a new pastime: he began to visit the clever man frequently, always in a mood of affection and joy. He soon saw that his friend was suffering at the inn. "My brother," he said, "come to stay with me at my house. I will gather all my things into one corner, and my whole house will be at your disposal." The suggestion appealed to the clever man, and he came to stay with the simple man.

The clever man suffered all the time. It became known that he was a very wise man, an artist and a craftsman and a great physician. One day, a nobleman came by and asked him to make a gold ring. He prepared a most exquisite ring, cutting the designs with great skill and engraving on it a wonderful tree. However, when the nobleman returned, he did not like the ring. The clever man suffered terribly from this. He knew

that in Spain this ring, engraved with the image of such a tree, would be highly regarded; here, however, there was nobody who could appreciate it. On another occasion a great nobleman arrived, bringing with him a precious jewel imported from some distant land. He had another jewel with an engraving on it, and he commissioned the clever man to copy this design onto the first jewel. The clever man made an accurate imitation that greatly pleased the nobleman. The clever man knew, however, that his work was flawed and that he had made a minute error that no one but he himself could notice. This, too, caused him great suffering. "Even though I am so clever," he said to himself, "I can still make mistakes."

His work as a physician was also a source of suffering. One day he visited a sick man and gave him a remedy. He knew that the patient's only chance of recovering was to take this potent draft. But the man died nevertheless, and everyone said that it was his fault. He suffered greatly from this. On the other hand, if a patient he had treated did recover, everyone said that it had happened by chance. He was always suffering.

When he needed some new clothes, the clever man went to the tailor and explained at great length exactly how he wanted the garment to be sewn. The tailor did as he was told, but he made a small error, and so one of the lapels turned out crooked. This, too, upset the clever man. "Here no one will notice anything," he said to himself, "but if I were in Spain with this lapel, I would be a laughingstock." He was always suffering.

The simple man was always running, happy and content, to his clever friend. Finding him sorrowful and suffering, he asked him, "As wise and as wealthy as you are, why are you always suffering? And why am I always so happy?"

The clever man was amused to hear such words from someone he deemed a lunatic. The simple man noticed this, and he continued, "Ordinary people are no more than fools when they mock me. Even though they're smarter than I am, that doesn't make them more than fools. How much more does this apply to a clever man like you! What's the point of showing that you're more clever than I am?"

"How much better it would be," the simple man suddenly exclaimed, "if you were to become like me!"

"It is indeed possible that I could become like you," replied the

clever man. "If God were to take away my reason, or if I were to fall ill and go mad, I could indeed become a lunatic like you. But you couldn't possibly become like me. You could never become as wise and clever as I am."

"For God, everything is possible," answered the simple man. "I could attain your wisdom in the twinkling of an eye."

At this, the clever man laughed heartily.

The two sons were known to everybody by the names "Clever" and "Simple." There are any number of clever people and simple people in the world, but these two were exceptional, for they both were from the same town and had studied together in the same class, and the one had become so extremely wise and the other so utterly simple. Even in the official register of the country, where everyone's name is recorded, these two sons were listed as "Clever" and "Simple."

Once the king happened to peruse this register, and he was surprised that two people should have names like "Clever" and "Simple," and he wanted to see the men who bore them. "But if I just summon them to appear before me," thought the king, "they will be frightened. The clever man won't be able to speak his mind, and the simple man may well go mad with fright." The king decided, therefore, to send a clever messenger to the clever man and a simple messenger to the simple man. But how does one find a simple man in the royal capital, where all the people are generally so clever? There is always at least one simple man in the city, the king's treasurer. It is not desirable to make a clever man treasurer, because, being clever, he is likely to squander the country's wealth, and so a simple man is generally chosen for this task. The king called for a clever man and for the simple treasurer and charged them to send for the two sons. He prepared letters addressed to each and also sent a note to the governor of the province in which the two sons resided. In this note he commanded the governor to send letters to the two men in his own name, so that they would not be frightened. The king told him to write that the matter was not urgent. The king was not insisting that they come, it was up to them to choose. They could do as they liked, but the king would like to see them.

The two messengers set out and traveled to the governor's residence. On their arrival, they gave the governor the note addressed to

him. He read it, and he then asked them about the two sons. They told him that the clever man was extraordinarily brilliant and was also very wealthy, while the simple man was indeed simple and had one sheepskin which was, to him, every kind of clothing. The governor decided that it would not be appropriate for the simple man to appear before the king in a sheepskin, so he had some more suitable clothes made, and he put them in the simple messenger's carriage. Then he gave the messengers the letters the king had requested, and they set off on their journey once again.

The messengers arrived at the home of the two sons and delivered the letters, the clever messenger to the clever man and the simple messenger to the simple man.

As soon as he was given the letter, the simple man told the simple messenger, "I cannot read what's written here. Read it to me."

"I'll tell you in short what it says," answered the messenger. "The king wants you to come to him."

"You're not fooling?"

"It's absolutely true, no fooling at all."

The simple man was immediately filled with joy. He ran to tell his wife. "My wife, the king has sent for me!"

"Whatever for?" she asked. "Why has he sent for you?"

He had no time to answer her, for he rushed out happily and got straight into the carriage to go with the messenger. When he climbed inside, he saw the clothes the governor had prepared for him, and he was even happier. Now he had clothes, too. He was overjoyed.

Meanwhile, the king received word that the governor had been acting improperly, and he dismissed him from his office. "It would be good," thought the king, "if an ordinary person, a simple man, were to be governor. A simple man would rule the country truthfully and honestly, because he knows nothing of subtleties and deceit."

So the king issued an order appointing as the new governor the simple man whom he had summoned. Since the simple man had to travel through the capital city of the province, guards were to be posted at the gates of the city to stop him as soon as he arrived and give him the official letter of appointment.

As the king had commanded, so it was done. The gates were

manned, and as soon as the simple man arrived, he was stopped and told that he had been made governor.

"No fooling?" he asked.

"Of course not," they answered him. "No fooling."

The simple man immediately became governor and ruled with power and might.

Now fortune had raised him up, and since fortune makes wise, he gained a little more understanding. However, he did not use his newfound cleverness, and he conducted himself as simply as before. He governed the country with sincerity and truth and with decency, and he never acted dishonestly toward anyone. Indeed, to govern a country one needs no great intelligence or wit, only honesty and straightforwardness. When the people came before him for judgment, he would say, "You are innocent, and you are guilty." His decisions were guided by his straightforward grasp of the truth, with no guile or deception. He governed honestly, and he was much loved among the people.

The simple man had faithful advisors who were sincerely devoted to him. One of them, out of love for him, gave him some advice: "You know that one day you will have to appear before the king, for he has already summoned you. Furthermore, even in the ordinary course of things, a governor must appear before the king. Now, you are very honest, and the king will find no fault in your governance of the country. However, when the king converses, he frequently moves from topic to topic and discusses sciences and languages. It would be proper and polite for you to be able to answer him, and so perhaps I should teach you sciences and languages."

This pleased the simple man. "I don't mind learning sciences and languages," he said to himself. He studied and mastered the sciences. Then he recalled what his friend the clever man had said to him, that it would be impossible for him ever to attain the other's intellectual capacity. "Now," the simple man thought, "I have attained his wisdom." Although he had become versed in sciences and arts, he did not let this interfere with his affairs, which he conducted straightforwardly as before.

Soon the simple man had his audience with the king. At first the two spoke about the governance of the province. The king was very pleased with the simple governor, for he saw that he acted justly and

truthfully, without any corruption or dishonesty. Then the king began to discuss sciences. The simple man answered appropriately, and this pleased the king all the more.

"I see that he is a wise man," thought the king, "and yet he behaves with complete simplicity."

The simple man won great favor in the eyes of the king, and the king appointed him chief minister. He gave him an official letter of appointment to his post, and he ordered that an estate be given to him as his residence and that a beautiful palace, befitting his new status, be built there for him. All this was done: the palace was built on the estate that the king had given him, and the simple man assumed his great role with power and authority.

Now when the letter from the king had been delivered to the clever man, he said to the clever messenger, "Wait. Stay here overnight. We shall discuss the matter and come to a decision."

That night the clever man made a grand dinner for the messenger, and over the meal he began to analyze the situation, using all his learning and philosophy. "What can it mean," he exclaimed, "that such a great king sends for a lowly person like me? Who am I that the king should send for me? What can it mean? He is a great king, who rules a vast dominion and wields much power, and I am as nothing compared with him. Does it stand to reason that such a king would send for me? One could say that he summoned me on account of my wisdom, but what am I to the king? Has the king no wise men about him? The king himself must surely be a great sage! Why, then, should the king send for me?"

The matter confounded the clever man. As he wondered about it, he declared to the clever messenger, "Do you know what I think? There is no king, and everyone in the whole world is mistaken in believing that there is. Listen, does it stand to reason that the whole world should submit itself to one person and make him king over everything? No, it is clear that there is no king."

"But I brought you a letter from the king!" protested the messenger.

"Did you receive it from him personally?" the clever man asked him.

"No, someone else gave it to me."

"There! You can see for yourself that I am right. There is no king."

Now tell me. You are from the royal capital, and you grew up there. Have you ever seen the king?"

"No."

"Now you can see that I am right. There is no king, for even you have never seen him."

"If that is so," returned the clever messenger, "who governs the country?"

"Ah, I can easily explain that. I am an expert in such matters, so you've asked the right person. I've traveled a great deal, and I spent some time in Italy, where I was able to learn the local customs. The country is ruled by seventy counselors who remain in office for a limited period of time. All the citizens of the country take turns holding office, one after another."

His arguments began to influence the clever messenger, and finally the two agreed that there was no king.

"Wait," said the clever man. "Tomorrow I'll demonstrate even more convincingly that there is no king."

In the morning the clever man rose early and woke the clever messenger. "Come outside with me. I'll prove to you that the whole world is in error, and there is no king," he told his companion.

They went to the marketplace, and there they saw a soldier and stopped him short.

"Whom do you serve?" they asked him.

"The king," he replied.

"Have you ever seen the king?"

"No."

"You see!" exclaimed the clever man. "Could there be folly greater than this?"

Next they approached an officer, and they talked with him until they found an appropriate opportunity to inquire, "Whom do you serve?"

"The king."

"Have you ever seen the king?"

"No."

"So!" cried the clever man. "Now you can see with your eyes that they are all mistaken and there is no king!"

The two were now in full agreement that the king did not exist.

"Come, let us travel around the world!" exclaimed the clever man to his new friend. "I'll show you more examples of how everyone in the world is deluded by folly."

They departed together and traveled around the world, and everywhere they went they found the world to be in error. For them the matter of the king exemplified all delusions. Whenever they found people to be in error, they would tell each other, "That's as true as the story about the king!"

They continued traveling around the world, and eventually they used up all their money. They sold first one of their horses, then the other, and then the rest of their salable possessions, and had to wander around on foot. Still, they were bent on investigating the world, and they continually found confirmation that the world was in error. They became footloose beggars and lost all their dignity and distinction. No one takes any notice of such beggars.

Eventually, they came to the city in which the minister, the simple friend of the clever man, resided. In that city there lived a true Baal Shem, a Master of the Holy Name. This Baal Shem was highly regarded in the city, for he performed truly wondrous deeds, and he was renowned and held in great esteem even among the lords and nobles of the land.

The two clever men entered the city. As they walked around, they came upon the home of the Baal Shem and saw forty or fifty carriages with sick people waiting outside. The clever man thought that this must be the residence of a physician. As he was a great physician himself, he wanted to go in and make the other's acquaintance.

"Who lives in there?" he inquired of the people.

"A Baal Shem," they replied.

The clever man burst out laughing. "This is another lie, a further folly," he said to his companion. "This is even sillier than the fable about the king! Brother, let me explain this deception to you. The whole world is in the grip of error and lies like this one."

Meanwhile, they had grown hungry. As they had only three or four pennies left, they went to a cheap kitchen where one could get something to eat for such a tiny sum. "Give us something to eat!" they demanded, and they were served. While they ate, they talked and joked about the delusion and folly of believing in the Baal Shem.

The owner of the kitchen heard their banter and became very annoyed, for the Baal Shem was highly esteemed in that city. "Finish what's on your plates," he said, "and get out of here."

Then the Baal Shem's son came into the kitchen, but even then the two did not stop making jokes about the Baal Shem. The owner of the kitchen upbraided them for mocking the Baal Shem in the presence of his son, and finally he thrashed them and threw them out.

The two were most insulted, and they decided to bring a suit against the man. They consulted the owner of the hostel where they had left their packs about how to go about bringing such a suit. They explained that they had been assaulted by the owner of the kitchen. He asked them why the man had done such a thing, and they told him that they had been discussing the Baal Shem. "It is surely not right to beat people," replied the innkeeper, "but you had no right to talk about the Baal Shem as you did, for he is held in very high esteem around here." They saw that he too was in error, so they left him.

Next they approached a government official, a gentile. They told him the story of how they had been beaten up, and he too asked them why. When they told him that they had been speaking derisively about the Baal Shem, he too thrashed them soundly and threw them out. They then went to a higher official, and then to an even higher one, but no one would give them a hearing. In every case they were thrashed and thrown out. Finally they reached the chief minister, who was the simple man.

The minister was informed by the guards in front of his residence that someone wished to see him. He gave orders that the man be allowed to enter, and so the clever man came before him. The minister recognized his old friend immediately, but the clever man did not recognize him, because he had achieved such high rank.

The minister spoke to him at once. "You see," he said, "where my simplicity has brought me: to this eminence! And where has your wisdom brought you?"

"So you are my old friend, the simple man!" exclaimed the clever man. "But we can talk about that later. Just now, I'm seeking justice against someone who beat me up."

"Why did he hit you?" asked the minister.

"Because I was talking about the Baal Shem," he replied. "I said that he was a liar and that the whole thing is nothing more than a big swindle."

"So you still cling to your cleverness!" exclaimed the simple minister. "Listen, once you said that you could easily reach my level, but that I could never reach yours. Now look. I attained yours long ago, but you have not yet reached mine. Now I can see that it is indeed more difficult for you to attain my simplicity."

Nevertheless, since he had known the clever man for a long time and remembered his former greatness, the minister instructed his servants to bring him clothes and dress him properly, and he invited him to dine with him.

During the meal the two began to converse, and the clever man expounded his opinion that there was no king.

"What are you saying?" cried the simple minister. "I've seen the king myself!"

"How do you know he is the king?" answered the clever man with a laugh. "Do you know him, and his father and his grandfather who were also kings? How do you know that he really is the king? People told you that he was the king, but they deceived you."

It greatly angered the simple man to hear his friend deny the existence of the king.

Meanwhile, someone approached them and said, "The devil is looking for you."

The simple man was terrified. He ran to his wife and told her fearfully that the devil was looking for him. "Send for the Baal Shem," she advised him, and so he did. The Baal Shem came and gave the minister amulets and other ways of protecting himself and told him that he need no longer be afraid. The simple man accepted what the Baal Shem told him with great faith.

Afterward, the simple man and the clever man sat down together again. "What frightened you so?" the clever man asked his friend.

"The devil was looking for us!" replied the simple man.

The clever man laughed at him. "Do you really believe that there is a devil?" he asked.

"If not, then who sent for us?"

"It must be my brother," answered the clever man. "He wants to see me, and he made up the whole story."

"If that's really so, how did he get past the guards?" asked the minister.

"He probably bribed them, and they are lying when they say they haven't seen him," his friend replied.

Meanwhile, someone again entered, bearing the same message as before, "The devil is looking for you."

This time the simple man was not at all frightened, because the Baal Shem had given him protection. "What have you got to say now?" he exclaimed to the clever man.

"I'll tell you what's going on. My brother is angry with me, and he's trying to frighten me with this trick."

He stood up and asked the person who had come with the message, "This fellow who has sent for us, what does he look like? What color hair does he have?" He asked a few more such questions, and the messenger answered accordingly.

"You see!" exclaimed the clever man. "My brother looks just like that!"

"Will you go with him?" asked the simple man.

"Yes, I'll go with him, but give me an escort of a few soldiers so that I won't be harassed."

The minister gave him an escort, and the clever man and his clever friend went off with the person who had come with the message. The soldiers soon returned alone. "Where are the two clever men?" inquired the minister. The soldiers replied that they had no idea. The two clever men had disappeared.

Actually the messenger had carried off the clever companions and thrown them into a swamp filled with dirt and lime, and there in the middle of it sat the devil on a throne. The mud was as thick as glue. The clever pair were stuck fast in it, unable to move. "Villains!" they cried. "Why are you tormenting us? There's no such thing as the devil. You're just scoundrels, and you've no reason to torment us like this!"

So the two of them wallowed in the swamp, and still they continued to inquire, "What is all this? They're just a bunch of hooligans. We must have quarreled with them on the road, and now they're getting their own back."

They remained in the swamp for several years, suffering horrible torments and afflictions. One day as the simple minister was passing by the home of the Baal Shem, he recalled his friend, the clever man. He went in to see the Baal Shem, bowed to him respectfully, and asked him, "Do you remember the clever man who was summoned and carried off by the devil and hasn't been seen since?"

"Yes, I remember," answered the Baal Shem.

"Could you possibly show me where he is and get him back?" the simple minister besought him.

"I can certainly show you the place," the Baal Shem replied, "and I can get him out, but no one else must go there, only you and I."

The two departed together. The Baal Shem did what he had to do, and they arrived at the place. The simple man saw the clever companions wallowing in the thick, muddy swamp. When the clever man saw the simple minister, he shouted, "Brother, look! They're beating me! These scoundrels are tormenting me cruelly, and for no reason!"

"Still you cling to your cleverness!" the minister exclaimed. "Do you still refuse to believe in anything? Do you still say that it is human beings who are doing this to you? Look, this is the Baal Shem whom you belittled, and he is the only one who can get you out of this."

The simple minister besought the Baal Shem to extricate the two and to prove to them that their tormentor was the devil and not humans. The Baal Shem did what he did, and the two found themselves standing on dry land. The swamp had disappeared, and the evil spirits had turned to dust. Only then did the clever man see the truth. He was forced to acknowledge that there really is a king and there really is a true Baal Shem.

Commentary

"The Clever Man and the Simple Man" is unique among Nachman's major tales in that the basic idea is explicit from beginning to end and is never veiled by allegory and symbolism. Nevertheless, allegory and symbolism are present and are essential to the story; the reader must understand the way they are employed in order to perceive both the deeper significance of the theme and the references to historical personalities and events.