

# THE TZADDIK'S Accomplishment



VOLUME 1



הכתובת להשיג את הספר הקדוש הזה וכל ספרי  
אדמו"ר מוהר"ן מברסלב זי"ע וספרי תלמידיו הקדושים

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 . . . **INTRODUCTION**

Who doesn't appreciate a good story? A master storyteller can magically transform an ordinary occurrence from the past into a vivid and exciting experience in the present. An insightful story drives a point home faster and sharper than a lengthy speech or lesson. The question may be posed: does the story itself wield the power, or does its impact depend upon the storyteller and the listeners?

Rabbi Nachman teaches us that the power of a story lies in the actual story itself. Each repetition of a narrative about a righteous person arouses the impact of this *tzaddik's* actions, and this has a direct, positive influence on the person. The merit of the *tzaddik* ignites a yearning in the person's heart, so that he becomes motivated to emulate the *tzaddik* and begin serving Hashem with renewed passion. That is why our sages say, 'Happy are the righteous, for not only do they merit (greatness); they also continue to inspire their children and children's children forever after' (*Yoma* 87).

The Rebbe strongly stressed the importance of relating tales of the righteous, for 'When a person repeats stories of *tzaddikim*, he merits to come closer to them' (*Sefer Hamiddos, Tzaddik*, 157). In *Sefer Hamiddos, Mashiach*, the Rebbe states that recounting stories of *tzaddikim* ignites the light of *Mashiach* and of healing, while dispelling darkness and suffering.

Each generation has its own share of righteous individuals, for 'God saw that the righteous are few, therefore He planted them in each and every generation' (*Yoma* 38). These *tzaddikim* teach and inspire

people to live according to Torah directives and to cleave to Hashem. In recent generations, when simple faith seems almost beyond reach, we have been privileged to bask in the presence of the holy *tzaddik*, **Rabbi Nachman of Breslov zt”l**, who paved a path in *avodas Hashem*. All who follow in his path, be it even the lowliest Jew, can draw closer to God and attain the loftiest heights.

Sometimes when people hear stories about *tzaddikim* and their exalted achievements, they regard them as archaic and irrelevant to their own lives. They consider concepts such as righteousness, or serving God and developing a connection with Him, as relevant only to the poor man who used to live in a rundown shack at the edge of town, his clothing torn and his pantry bare. Spirituality seems to have no place in a lifestyle that encompasses electronics, late-model cars, and instant communication.

However, the Rebbe’s teachings challenge this theory. The Rebbe teaches us that wherever a person is, God is there with him, waiting for the person to acknowledge Him. Whether one is at work or in transit, at a restaurant or in a park, one must realize that God is there, too. And when this realization dawns and a person begins talking to God in whatever language he feels most comfortable, he is emulating the holy Rebbe, whose primary practice was *hisbodedos*, conversing with God in simple words. By engaging in this unpretentious practice, a person will develop a connection with God, until he will merit to attain lofty spiritual levels.

A typical excuse people give for not attempting to pursue the path of righteousness, is “I’m a simple person from a simple background. How can I compare myself to *tzaddikim* who were descendants of holy and distinguished rabbis?” The Rebbe did not accept such an excuse. He would become very angry when someone said that he, the Rebbe, had attained his remarkable greatness thanks to his holy soul, because he was a descendant of the Baal Shem Tov. The Rebbe emphatically refuted this claim, saying that a person’s background is not a deciding factor in the attainment of spiritual achievements; the only things that count are a person’s own efforts, prayers, and determination. Our sages say, ‘If a person wants to become a *Kohen* or a *Levi*, it is impossible if his father was not a *Kohen* or a *Levi*. However,

if a person, even a gentile, wishes to become a *tzaddik*, he absolutely can' (*Bamidbar Rabba* 8:2). This is so because 'Tzaddikim do not inherit their righteousness from their father's house; (they accomplish it) only through their own sacrifice and love for Hashem' (*Shochar-Tov, Tehillim* 146).

The Rebbe was uniquely gifted in his ability to repeatedly make a fresh start. Unlike other great *tzaddikim* who were satisfied with the spiritual level that they had attained, the Rebbe always strove for greater heights. He said, "If I remain on the same level today as I was yesterday, my life is not worth living." Ever since his early childhood, the Rebbe spent countless hours every day pouring his heart out to God in prayer and supplication. Through intense, relentless efforts he scaled unfathomable spiritual heights. When he accomplished a goal, he sometimes initially displayed his happiness, announcing that he had just achieved some new exalted concept; but immediately thereafter he was back at the beginning, begging and praying for the simple privilege of serving Hashem, as if he had forgotten all the spiritual heights he had just attained. He lived his entire life in this way. Often, he was heard to murmur wistfully, "What can I do to merit being a Jew?" He frequently became brokenhearted and filled with self-pity, genuinely regarding himself as the lowliest of the lowly. The extent of his feelings of remorse and self-pity was greater than the penitence and shame felt by a person who is repenting after repeatedly transgressing each and every commandment of the Torah.

On more than one occasion, after revealing the most brilliant and deep *chiddushim*, he declared to his disciples "I know nothing! Nothing at all!" The Rebbe testified that although his Torah was unique, his statement of "I know nothing" was even more exceptional.

This is the secret behind the Rebbe's inimitable power to draw every Jew closer to God. By lowering himself to a spiritual abyss and then scaling ever greater heights, he paved the way for individuals to rise up from their rock bottoms, too. Every man, regardless of his past and of whether he had ever made the slightest effort to repent, is enabled by the Rebbe to escape from the darkness and evil that engulfs him and to merit being enfolded in God's embrace, for God awaits the return of every Jew.



Therefore, the Rebbe stressed the importance of spreading his teachings to all Jews, so that everyone should be able to follow in the holy path that he has forged, and thereby merit the same greatness. This was the goal of his prime disciple, Rabbi Nosson of Breslov, in recording the Rebbe's daily discussions, struggles, and achievements in his works "*Shevachei V'Sichos Haran*", "*Chayai Maharan*" and "*Yemei Maharan*". By describing in detail every exertion the Rebbe made, and all the struggles and obstacles he surmounted on his way to accomplishing such exalted achievements, Rabbi Nosson wished to demonstrate the power of free will, and that anyone with a strong willpower can also achieve the exact same great heights as the holy Rebbe, for all the "tricks of the trade" were made public.

The path to righteousness is naturally rough. We read about the Rebbe's struggles: how he stumbled, stood up and started all over again, only to fall once more. When we consider that this cycle was sometimes repeated a thousand times in a single day, we clearly see that through perseverance and determination one can surmount the greatest obstacles and achieve lofty goals.

In reading "*The Tzaddik's Accomplishments*" the reader will notice that scant attention is paid to the awesome miracles that the Rebbe performed. In truth, portraying the Rebbe as a miracle-worker would detract from his praises, for his holiness and spiritual attainments were even greater than his performance of miracles. That is why we have focused instead on describing all of the Rebbe's efforts and accomplishments in *avodas Hashem*, so that the book may serve as a guide for those who sincerely seek to come closer to God. ●



## ... ABOUT THE AUTHOR - “MOHOROSH”

Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Schik (1940-2015) was known to his followers by the acronym “Mohorosh”, which stands for “**M**oreinu **H**a**R**av **E**liezer **S**hlomo”. He was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of *Iyar*, 5500 (1940) to his father, Rabbi Menachem Zev, a brilliant Torah scholar, who had been *Rav* in the city of Tokay, Hungary before the second World War, and his mother, Rebbetzin Malka, a righteous and courageous woman. Mohorosh was descended from an illustrious line of *Rabbanim*.

Mohorosh grew up in Israel during the turbulent days of the Israeli War of Independence. His childhood memories included such horrors as rockets falling all around him while the family ran to hide in bomb shelters. Eventually the danger became so great that they were forced to sleep in the shelter, at which point his parents relocated to the Bayit VeGan neighborhood of Jerusalem.

There Mohorosh made the acquaintance of many *tzaddikim* who either lived in that neighborhood or who came to visit. The impressive list of these great people includes Rabbi Mordechai of Slonim, Rabbi Aharon Roth and his son-in-law, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchok Kohn, Rabbi Yosef Zvi Dushinsky, Rabbi Aharon Rokeach of Belz, and Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar. Mohorosh had the opportunity to observe some of these *tzaddikim* on a daily basis, and the experience of watching these great people serve Hashem with fiery devotion left an indelible impression on his young, inquisitive mind.

He frequently asked his father to buy him books about *tzaddikim*, which he avidly read. Inasmuch as he was inspired by these stories, he was bothered by two questions. One: Why did only a select number of individuals in a generation achieve the status of *tzaddikim*? Was there no way for an ordinary person to attain that level of righteousness? Two: What exactly was “*aliyas neshama* (ascent of a soul on high)” that *tzaddikim* engaged in? How did they accomplish it, and what did it mean?

When Mohorosh was eleven years old, his father had to travel to the United States. One year later his older brother joined his father, so that Mohorosh remained in Israel with alone with his mother. This situation was very difficult for the young boy. His *bar mitzva* was a lonely affair, with his mother taking him to Rabbi Aharon of Belz for the occasion of donning *tefillin* for the first time. After several months, however, he traveled with his mother to New York to join his father and older brother.

They settled in the Bronx. Since there was no yeshiva in the vicinity, Mohorosh traveled by train to Williamsburg in Brooklyn every day in order to study at the Kasho Yeshiva, a two-hour trip each way. In order to spend his traveling time wisely, he always took along a *sefer* from which to study.

One day, as he was rushing to catch the train, Mohorosh grabbed a small book from his father’s extensive library, as usual, and slipped it into his pocket. After settling himself on his seat, he opened the *sefer*, which happened to be “*Meshivas Nafesh*” by Rabbi Alter of Teplik. Mohorosh became deeply engrossed in this book, which was full of encouragement and guidance in ways of drawing close to Hashem. He was entranced with each word he read, which, though simple enough on the surface, succeeded in piercing his soul.

That day he could not concentrate on his studies at the yeshiva. He read the entire book three times, becoming filled with a burning desire to learn more about the wonderful new ideas expressed therein. Where did they originate from, he wondered. When he came home and asked his older brother about this *sefer* and its originator, he was informed that the author was a Breslover *chassid* and that



the material was gleaned from *Likutei Halachos*, compiled by Rabbi Nossou of Breslov and based on the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

At the age of fifteen-and-a-half years this was the Mohorosh's first exposure to Breslov *chassidus*. In fact, Mohorosh was always grateful for the fact that he had never heard of Breslov, and that he had never encountered any followers of Breslov, before this occasion, for otherwise he might have been exposed to certain tainted interpretations of Rabbi Nachman's teachings, of which many abounded at the time. Later, when he did meet other Breslov followers, his familiarity with the Rebbe and his teachings was already superior to theirs, so that he was not swayed by anyone trying to distort the Rebbe's words.

Mohorosh began studying every Breslov book that he could find, and his life became transformed. He familiarized himself with the Rebbe and his teachings until eventually he knew each book by heart.

At first he found "*Likutei Maharar*" difficult to grasp, so he studied "*Sefer HaMiddos*", "*Hishtapchus HaNefesh*", and "*Likutei Halachos*" instead. It was here that he encountered the concept of *hisbodedus*, which included the practice of conversing with Hashem in a simple and sincere manner. Suddenly Mohorosh had the answer to his two questions. One: Rabbi Nachman says that anyone who perseveres in simple prayer to Hashem can, and will, become a *tzaddik*; and, two: through *hisbodedus* one merits purification of one's mind and complete connection to Hashem, thus enabling one to attain lofty spheres such as those reached by great *tzaddikim*.

At the time there were hardly any books by Rabbi Nachman and his disciples in circulation. With great difficulty Mohorosh succeeded in obtaining a complete set of "*Likutei Halachos*". Each volume of the set that he obtained, as well as all the other *sefarim* by Rabbi Nachman that he managed to procure, was cause for him to dance for joy. He studied them thoroughly and repeatedly, promising that when he got married he would publish all of the Breslov books and distribute them for a pittance, so that more Jews would have access to these wonderful books.

Indeed, in the first year after his marriage, Mohorosh printed 85,000 copies of the Rebbe's books at great personal expense, despite struggling just to pay his rent and put food on the table. In subsequent years he continued to reprint the Rebbe's books in vast quantities, distributing them worldwide. Now, almost sixty years later, practically every Jew in the entire world has come across one of these books at least on one occasion, deriving much inspiration from them, thanks to Mohorosh.

With the spread of Rabbi Nachman's books many people became acquainted with his teachings. In 1965 some young people began corresponding with Mohorosh, asking for encouragement, and Mohorosh responded with heartwarming letters full of encouragement and guidance based on the Rebbe's teachings. These letters comprised the beginning of the series "*Asher Banachal*", which grew over the next 55 years into a collection of more than 70,000 letters, 30,000 of which have been published in over 100 volumes, while the rest are still waiting to be published.

Mohorosh wrote prolifically throughout his lifetime. He understood the eternal power of the written word. He also penned numerous books, all based upon, and expanding, different aspects of the Rebbe's teachings. He wrote "*Erech Apayim*" on mastering patience; "*Mekor Hasimcha*" on finding happiness; "*Shmiras Hazman*" on using one's time wisely; "*Peulas HaTzaddik*" on the life of Rabbi Nachman and everything that can be learned from his every nuance. His works also included numerous commentaries, such as "*Sefas Hanachal*", a commentary on the Rebbe's "*Likutei Moharan*", and "*Neharei Afarsimon*" on the Rebbe's famous stories (*Sippurei Maasios*). He also wrote commentaries on many Jewish books, including the daily *siddur*, the *Rosh Hashana* prayer book; the Book of Esther; the Passover *Hagadda*, and several volumes on *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of the Fathers).

Mohorosh also wrote hundreds of small pamphlets on a wide variety of topics, so that anyone in need of encouragement and guidance would have a source of inspiration and be uplifted by the Rebbe's call to every Jew never to despair because there is no such thing as hopelessness. These works continue to inspire Jews around

the world from all walks of life. They have been translated from Hebrew into several languages, including English, Yiddish, Spanish, Russian, and French.

The annual pilgrimage to Uman for *Rosh Hashana* is one of the highlights of Breslover Chassidus. The Rebbe obligated his followers to do this and to encourage others to follow suit. He said that the entire world is dependent on *Rosh Hashana*, and he promised to help anyone who comes, even one who has sunk to the lowest levels of depravity, by pulling him out holding onto his *peyos* (side locks)! Since the fall of communism and subsequent opening of the Ukrainian border, Mohorosh has stirred the masses to visit Uman, especially among *sefardic* Jews in Israel. The numbers increase by the thousands each year. Mohorosh conducted the prayers every *Rosh Hashana* for his congregation that numbered over one thousand strong in a large building, known as *Megameter*, near the Rebbe's gravesite.

Mohorosh took all the Rebbe's words literally, putting them into practice in everyday life. The Rebbe had said, "Through each of my discussions one can merit to become a righteous Jew, according to my interpretation of 'righteous.'" In a similar vein, Mohorosh emphasized each and every one of the Rebbe's teachings, even those commonly overlooked by others. One example of this was his lifelong promotion of the Rebbe's unique guide to studying Torah. Mohorosh encouraged everyone to study *Mikra*, *Mishna*, *Gemara*, and *Midrash* daily, regardless of whether or not he understood the text. For the Rebbe teaches that just mouthing the words has a powerful influence on the soul, drawing the person closer to *kedusha* and protecting him from sin, until he will become so familiar with the text that he will begin to understand it.

Many people argued that this is not the way to study Torah, and that the Rebbe's words are not meant to be taken literally. But Mohorosh was not swayed. He understood that people are often busy, distracted, or exhausted, so that they are unable to muster the concentration to study Torah in depth. Sometimes they will go to sleep at night without having opened a *sefer* all day. But if a person knows he has a fixed learning regimen, and that it's fine to just open the *sefer* and read several lines, even without concentrating, then

he will never skip a day of learning. The daily regimen of study that Mohorosh suggested included:

Chumash, Rashi, Targum

Tanach

Mishnayos

Talmud Bavli

Talmud Yerushalmi

Tosefta

Midrash Rabba

Midrash Tanchuma

Rambam

Tur

Shulchan Aruch

Zohar

Tikkunim

Likutei Mohara”n

Likutei Halachos

By advancing each day in each *shiur*, even if just by one line, a person will eventually cover the entire Torah, an accomplishment that most people do not even begin to dream of.

Although Mohorosh was *Ashkenazi* by background, he was drawn to *sefardic* Jewry, especially in Israel, where so many of them were, unfortunately, torn from their rich heritage. Thousands of *sefardic* Jews have returned to Judaism through the books of Mohorosh that are widely distributed in every city. Many of these newly religious Jews became followers of Rabbi Nachman through Mohorosh, thus creating the interesting phenomenon of ‘*sefardic chassidim*’.

In the 1980’s Mohorosh established a Breslov settlement in the picturesque town of Yavniel, located on the hills surrounding



Tiberias. In this quiet town, bereft of any trace of Jewishness, one million naive Yemenite and Tunisian Jews were forcibly inducted into the Israeli kibbutz system, thereby totally cutting them off from their rich Jewish heritage. It was precisely there that Mohorosh chose to establish his community, turning the place into a blossoming religious neighborhood.

Despite bitter opposition from local residents, spearheaded by their leader who continuously sought to thwart his progress, the community has blossomed into a thriving religious neighborhood that attracts families from all over Israel. The Breslov community in Yavniel today comprises over 450 families, and boasts every resource that is requisite in a religious neighborhood: boys' and girls' schools with a combined student body of over 1,200; yeshiva; seminary; several synagogues with *minyanim* from dawn to midnight; a yeshiva for *baalei teshuva*; ritual bath; rabbinical court; rabbinical training college; and a soup kitchen where over 1,000 portions are served daily to all needy local families and visitors.

A recent milestone in Yavniel was the completion, in 2010, of a magnificent, large synagogue with a wedding hall on the lower level. This project had been frequently sabotaged by the local leader who fought tooth and nail against construction of the building. But Mohorosh never gave up, praying every day for twenty years, begging Hashem to help him realize his vision, until ultimately his dream was attained.

Mohorosh always shunned a rabbinical lifestyle, with its attendant publicity. Only at the insistence of his disciples did he begin wearing the customary rabbinical garb. Otherwise, he displayed no trace of a typical "Rebbe", living a 'regular' life as a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. Yet, those who merited being in proximity to Mohorosh, knew that he was a *tzaddik* who did not deviate for one moment from serving Hashem. His entire life was devoted solely to the purpose of glorifying His Name by bringing more Jews closer to Hashem through spreading the light of Rabbi Nachman's teachings. He pursued this goal with utmost *mesiras nefesh* throughout his lifetime. Even as he endured indescribable personal suffering, in addition to the fierce opposition that confronted him from all sides,



Mohorosh never surrendered. Through constant prayer, and an iron will, he overcame every obstacle and merited to see his dreams fulfilled.

Although Mohorosh never called himself a Rebbe, he attracted a large following of *chassidim* from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some came from a different *chassidus*, some were *litvish*, and many were of *sefardic* background. Mohorosh encouraged everyone to retain his family's customs, traditions, and dress code, for the change that he inspired in each of his followers was internal, and not dependent on outer trappings. He encouraged and guided everyone to persevere in prayer and *hisbodedos*, to learn every day, and to maintain a positive attitude towards everything in life, by remembering that Hashem's loving hand is involved in each aspect of a person's life, whether he sees the good in it, or not. He always emphasized the importance of domestic harmony, devoting hours of his precious time in conversation with couples who required guidance. He was always available to anyone who sought his blessings, advice, or even just a listening ear.

Mohorosh resided in Boro Park, where he led his congregation "*Heichal Hakodesh*". His inspiring weekly *shuirim* attracted followers from all over New York. Every couple of months, he traveled to Yavniel to personally oversee affairs of the community, since he was involved in every detail. His congregation "*Heichal Hakodesh*" has also branched out to various localities worldwide, such as Williamsburg, Monsey, Monroe, London, as well as several cities in Eretz Yisroel. Aside from the boys' and girls' schools in Yavniel, he also established a Breslov *cheder*, *school*, and *yeshiva* in Brooklyn, where the Rebbe's teachings are ingrained in the children from when they are still young.

Even as Mohorosh advanced in age, he never slowed down, maintaining a daily schedule that even a much younger man would have found strenuous. He replied to correspondence, wrote commentaries, accepted phone calls and personal visits, and oversaw the day to day activities in Yavniel. All this was aside from his personal agenda of studying, praying, and spending time with his family. In 2011, Mohorosh suffered several massive heart attacks,

undergoing cardiac surgery, from which he miraculously recovered. According to his doctors the recovery of a person in his situation was a rare event; Mohorosh acknowledged that he was alive only thanks to all the heartfelt prayers from his followers worldwide.

Four years later, in February of 2015, Mohorosh suddenly became very weak, and was hospitalized for about two weeks, during which his health severely deteriorated. Even in his weakened state, as his end was clearly drawing near, Mohorosh continued to learn his daily *shiurim* and he also wrote several letters of encouragement and guidance to his followers. During his last week in the hospital, he constantly indicated to the family members surrounding him that he was preparing to die. His strength was slowly ebbing away, yet his mood remained happy and peaceful. Mohorosh had lived his entire life as if it were his last day, and now that his last day had arrived, he was more than ready...

On Thursday night, 17 Shevat, he prayed *maariv* at the earliest possible *zman*, after which he continued smiling, glancing at his watch, and obviously waiting... After midnight his holy soul departed from this world. On Motzei Shabbos, he was flown to Eretz Yisroel, where he was buried in the cemetery of Yavniel, as per his wishes. In his will, he promised that any single girl or boy, who will come to his grave and recite the entire *tehillim* there, will merit finding their *shidduch*. In the few months since his passing, hundreds of girls and boys have already become engaged soon after trying this *segula*. His gravesite has become an official attraction, with buses coming daily from all over Eretz Yisroel, bringing people who wish to pour out their troubles and pray for a salvation.

Even after his passing, Mohorosh's legacy lives on, as his *talmidim* continue to lead their lives according to his teachings, as well as by studying his books, particularly "*Asher Banachal*", where one can find Mohorosh's opinion on many topics. They also continue spreading the Rebbe's teachings, just as Mohorosh had always wanted.

Our generation was truly privileged to have had such a *tzaddik* in our midst. Clearly it is solely in his merit that the teachings of Rebbe Nachman have spread all over the world, touching and transforming

so many lives. Thus, Mohorosh has brought to fruition the Rebbe's promise that "*my fire will continue to burn until the coming of Moshiach*". May we merit the redemption speedily in our days, amen. ●

 . . . **BIRTH AND THE  
NOBLE LINEAGE**

In the year 5532 (1772) *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* coincided with *Shabbos Parshas Sazria* and with *Parshas HaChodesh*. On that auspicious day a baby boy was born to Reb Simcha and his wife Feige, in Mezibuz. That child would grow up to be the famous Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, brightening the world with his piety and inspiring it with his virtue until the arrival of *Mashiach*.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was named after his paternal grandfather, Reb Nachman Horedenker, who was a devoted disciple of the *Baal Shem Tov*. His maternal grandmother, Adel, was the daughter of the *Baal Shem Tov*. Rabbi Nachman's mother, Feige, also had two famous righteous brothers, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim Sadilkov, the author of *Degel Machne Ephraim*, and Rabbi Boruch of Mezibuz.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was born in the room in which his holy grandfather, the *Baal Shem Tov*, used to spend hours serving his Creator. Prior to his passing, the *Baal Shem Tov* had presented his daughter Adel with the house, as her brother, Rabbi Tzvi, who was independently wealthy, had no need for it. Ultimately, Adel's daughter, Feige, inherited the house, since Adel's two sons, Rabbi Ephraim and Rabbi Boruch, were both famous Rabbis whose financial needs were provided for by their followers. That is how Rabbi Nachman came to be born in this special house, in which he also spent much of his childhood years.

Regarding Adel, it is well-known that she was so devoted to her father, the *Baal Shem Tov*, that he considered her as one of his disciples. Her name was actually taken from an acronym of the words in *Devarim* 33:2, “**A**ish **d**os **I**amo” – “(from His right hand He presented) the fiery Torah to them”. The *Baal Shem Tov* often said that Adel’s soul originated in the repository of pure souls. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was once asked, “What did Adel do that she earned such great respect on her father’s part?” He replied, “Adel was always burning with the desire to draw near to G-d, and her thoughts were always focused on how to serve Him.”

Adel’s husband was the “hidden *tzaddik*”, Rabbi Yechiel Ashkenazy, who was referred to as “*Der Deutscher*”, since he hailed from Germany. His greatness remained hidden from the world. This devout couple had two sons and one daughter, as mentioned above.

After the *Baal Shem Tov* became famous, he attracted numerous followers, including many great and righteous individuals. One of these was the young Rabbi Nachman of Horedenka. Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka was so devoted to his *Rebbe* that he became his trusted attendant and was frequently dispatched by his master on important missions.

One day the sister of Rabbi Yitzchok of Drohovich visited the *Baal Shem Tov* to beg him to assist her in finding her mate. The *Baal Shem Tov* advised her to meet his devoted disciple, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka. Soon the couple became engaged. At the engagement celebration, the *Baal Shem Tov* asked Rabbi Nachman, “What are you planning to pay me for being your *shadchan*?” Rabbi Nachman remained silent. The *Baal Shem Tov* continued, “When you will have a son, and my daughter Adel will have a daughter, let them marry each other, and that will be my payment!”

But Rabbi Nachman was dubious. “Is not the *Rebbe* aware that I come from a noble lineage? I am a direct descendant of King David?” The *Baal Shem Tov* responded by showing him his own family tree, which indicated that he, too, was descended from royal lineage all the way back to King David. Thus it was that at his own engagement,



Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka committed himself to the engagement of his son with the granddaughter of the *Baal Shem Tov*.<sup>1</sup>

On the wedding day calamity struck. After the *chuppa* ceremony had been performed, but while the wedding celebration was still in full swing, the groom, Rabbi Nachman, disappeared without a trace. The bereft bride waited in vain for her husband to return. After several days during which he still failed to appear she rushed to the *Baal Shem Tov*, pouring out her heart to him and weeping profusely as she recounted the tragic turn of events. The *Baal Shem Tov* was shocked by her story. He instructed her to return to him after several days while he would investigate the matter.

As soon as the young woman left, the *Baal Shem Tov* used his powers of *ruach hakodesh* to discover the whereabouts of his disciple, Rabbi Nachman. He promptly dispatched a messenger to summon him. Upon Rabbi Nachman's arrival, the *Baal Shem Tov* asked him, "Why did you abandon your bride after the *chuppa*?"

Rabbi Nachman responded, "During our *chuppa* I had a premonition that my new wife will die during the birth of our firstborn son. I wished to spare her this fate. That is why I fled."

The *Baal Shem Tov* summoned the young woman and repeated her husband's words to her. She replied, "I feel so privileged to have a husband of such a high caliber as Rabbi Nachman, that I am willing to give up my life in order to have a child with him!"

Rabbi Nachman came home, and in time the couple was blessed with the birth of a baby boy. During the birth, the new mother wept incessantly. "Father in Heaven," she prayed, "I beg You, please grant me another month to live so that I might enjoy my precious son!" Indeed, her prayer was answered and she lived for one month after giving birth. During the mourning period for his wife, Rabbi

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<sup>1</sup> *Rabbi Nachman of Hordenka was a seventh-generation descendant of the Maharal of Prag, whose ancestors were Rav Hai Gaon and Zerubavel the son of Pedaya the son of Shealtiel the son of Asir the son of King Yechonya of Yehuda, a member of the royal family of King David. In addition, he was also a seventh-generation descendant of the famous sage Rabbi Avraham Chaim of Apta, Chief Rabbi of the Rabbinical Court in Nikolsburg, who was himself descended from the Maharshal and Rashi, who was a thirty-third generation descendant of Rabbi Yochanan Hasandlar, nephew of Rabbi Gamliel the Elder and descendant of Shefatya the son of King David.*

Nachman noted with a deep sigh, “What a pity that she prayed for only one additional month of life, for during those holy moments the gates of Heaven were open and had she asked, the entire decree would have been annulled.”

Rabbi Nachman was left alone to fend for his infant son, which was exceedingly difficult for him, in particular because the *Baal Shem Tov* periodically sent him on faraway missions. He therefore entrusted his little son, Simcha, to the care of Adel, the *Baal Shem Tov*’s daughter. Simcha was raised in Adel’s home.

On one occasion when the *Baal Shem Tov* visited Adel his eye fell on little Simcha, and he commented, “I like this child.” At the time Adel was intrigued by her father’s comment, but she filed it away in her mind, figuring the day would come when she would understand it.

Simcha was ten years old when the *Baal Shem Tov* passed away.

During the *Baal Shem Tov*’s lifetime Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka had always aspired to travel to the Holy Land. However, since the *Baal Shem Tov* disapproved he was unable to fulfil his dream. Each time he was overtaken by a yearning for the Holy Land he would ask the *Baal Shem Tov* for permission to undertake this trip, but permission was never granted. On one such occasion the *Baal Shem Tov* responded to his request for permission with, “You may go, but before you embark on this journey you must first immerse yourself in a *mikva*.” Rabbi Nachman promptly set off to the *mikva*, and after immersing four times he returned to the *Baal Shem Tov*.

“What did you see during your first immersion?” the *Baal Shem Tov* inquired.

“I saw *Eretz Yisrael*,” Rabbi Nachman replied.

“And during the second immersion?”

“I saw *Yerushalayim*.”

“And during the third?”

“I saw the *Makom Hamikdash* (the site of the Holy Temple).”

“And during the fourth?”

“I saw the *Kodesh Hakodoshim* (Holy of Holies, the holiest chamber of the Temple),” was Rabbi Nachman’s response. “But I did not see the *aron* there.”

“The *aron* is here in Mezibuz,” the *Baal Shem Tov* informed his disciple.

Rabbi Nachman understood from these words that his *rebbe* was opposed to his undertaking such a trip. As long as the *Baal Shem Tov* was alive, he never again brought up the subject. After the *Baal Shem Tov* passed away Rabbi Nachman of Horodenke frequently visited his gravesite, where, due to his holiness and total detachment from all worldly matters, he was able to converse with him much like he had done during his lifetime. However, permission for him to undertake a trip to the Holy Land was still not forthcoming. Since Rabbi Nachman was unwilling to relinquish his lifelong dream he persevered with his requests.

One day Rabbi Nachman was delighted to receive a positive response from the *Baal Shem Tov*. He skipped home with a song in his heart, “I’m going to *Eretz Yisrael!*” Indeed, he spent the remainder of his life in *Eretz Yisrael*, and when he died in peace he was buried in Tiberias.

Simcha grew up and reached the age of *bar mitzvah*. Meanwhile, Adel’s daughter, Feige, had also attained marriageable age. Adel recalled her father’s statement regarding Simcha: “I like this boy”. She wondered whether her father had been trying to hint that Simcha was Feige’s match. After much deliberation she concluded that her father had intended to hint just that, and Adel arranged the marriage of Simcha and Feige.

For a number of years the young couple remained childless. The righteous Feige frequently visited the grave of her grandfather, the *Baal Shem Tov*, to pray for children. Finally, her prayers were answered and she gave birth to a son, who was named Yisrael after her grandfather. During his childhood Yisrael became deathly ill. His mother wasted no time carrying him in her arms all the way to the

grave of her grandfather, the holy *Baal Shem Tov*, where she cried out in desperation, “Grandfather! My one and only child is dying! Have mercy on me! Please heal him!” (According to one version of this story, the child had already died, and she begged her grandfather to restore his life.) Pouring out her heart at her grandfather’s grave, she cried until she had no more tears left. Then she gently placed her son at the grave and returned home, confident that her son’s life and health would be restored in the merit of her holy grandfather. Soon after, some people who were nearby heard the sound of a child crying at the *Baal Shem Tov*’s gravesite. Upon investigation, they found little Yisrael, and returned him to his mother.

That night the *Baal Shem Tov* appeared to Feige in a dream. “Why did you do that? I was forced to search amidst tens of thousands of souls for your son’s soul.” After a while, Yisrael’s face became disfigured, resembling that of a dead man. When people saw him on the street they became frightened, and began referring to him as “Reb Yisrael, the dead one”. Yisrael died young.

Eventually Feige gave birth to a daughter, Perl, who, unlike her brother, lived to a ripe old age. Her first husband was Rabbi Tzvi of Tcherin. When he passed away, Perl traveled to *Eretz Yisrael* and married Rabbi Pinchos Meir. Unfortunately, he, too, soon passed away, and Perl was widowed for the second time.

The third child of Simcha and Feige was a son. He was named Yecheil, after Feige’s father, Adel’s husband.

Rabbi Simcha was a hidden *tzaddik* whose life was entirely dedicated to serving his Creator. Sometimes, when he was fervently involved in prayer and meditation he completely forgot where in the world he was, so utterly was he disconnected from worldly matters.

On one of his customary expeditions Rabbi Simcha remained absent from his home for a period of several weeks. When Feige’s *leil tvila* fell on Friday night and there was no sign of her husband that Friday morning, she became apprehensive. While the righteous Feige performed the *mitzvah* of *challah*, she summoned her holy powers of *yichudim* to discern the whereabouts of her husband. But her efforts bore no fruit. She made a second attempt during the lighting



of *Shabbos* candles, but to her dismay she was still unable to come up with the information she was seeking.

Since Feige always lit the *Shabbos* candles two hours before nightfall, she decided after candle lighting to visit the grave of the *Baal Shem Tov*. She wept upon his grave, begging her grandfather to reveal to her whether or not she should visit the ritual bath, as this requirement was dependent upon her husband's imminent homecoming. Once again she made use of her spiritual powers of meditation, until, at last, the *Baal Shem Tov* revealed himself to her, informing her, "He will arrive soon; he's already within the *t'chum Shabbos*."

While Feige visited the ritual bath, Rabbi Simcha reached the town and headed directly to the synagogue for Friday night prayers. He prayed for a long time, and with particular devotion. Indeed, his entire conduct that Friday night was extraordinary. His preparations for *kiddush* were extensive, and the entire meal had a sublime character. On this special night the holy Rebbe's soul descended to this world, to join the body of the child conceived by Feige.

During her pregnancy Feige frequently visited the grave of her holy grandfather, the *Baal Shem Tov*. While there she shed copious tears in prayer on behalf of her unborn child. She lingered there for many hours, in devout contemplation. In her later years, when she reflected on this pregnancy, she stated that it was impossible to describe the brilliant visions she often perceived during the months leading up to the birth of her son, who was born on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, 5532 (1772).<sup>2</sup>

His *bris* was performed on the eighth day of *Nissan*, *Shabbos Parshas Metzora*, which coincided with *Shabbos HaGadol*. The baby was named Nachman, after his paternal grandfather, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka.

At the *bris*, the baby's uncle, Rabbi Boruch of Mezibuz, stated that "Nachman (a consolation) is alluded to in the verse (*Beraishis* 5:29):

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<sup>2</sup> The story goes that the moment the Rebbe was born, his mother washed his hands three times according to Jewish ritual. Similarly, each time the infant woke up for a feeding his mother first washed his hands. In addition, before she gave birth, his mother knitted a cap for the baby, and as soon as he was born she covered his head with it.



*This one will bring us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands, from the ground which Hashem had cursed.*” The Sages comment on this verse (*Sanhedrin 113*): “The birth of a *tzaddik* benefits the world.” When Feige heard her brother’s words, she said to him, “Boruch’l, bless him that he should have no opposition.”

Rabbi Boruch replied, “Feigele, this cannot be. He will inevitably be forced to withstand a great deal of opposition.” (From her words we may discern that Feige was possessed of *ruach hakodesh*. In fact her holy brothers referred to her as “Feigele, the Prophetess”.)

Feigele watched protectively over her son. She frequently took him along on her trips to the grave of the *Baal Shem Tov*. She would place his cradle upon her grandfather’s grave while she prayed long and hard for the child’s future. Later the Rebbe always expressed gratitude to his mother for the efforts she had exerted on his behalf. To demonstrate his gratitude he requested that whenever people will pray for salvation in his merit they should combine his mother’s name with his name, as opposed to the usual practice of combining the father’s name with the *tzaddik*’s name. ●

 . . . **EARLY LIFE**

The Rebbe's life was founded on purity and holiness. His piety was intensely affected not only by the sanctity of his parents, but there was also an additional contributing factor. His parents' house, which had originally belonged to the *Baal Shem Tov*, often hosted disciples of the *Baal Shem Tov* and the *Maggid* during the latter's pilgrimage to Mezibuz. These pious individuals frequently sat around the Rebbe's parents' table, discussing Torah topics, delving into intricacies of *avodas Hashem*, and recounting inspiring tales of the *Baal Shem Tov*. When the Rebbe was a youngster of four or five years old he thirstily imbibed every word that was uttered in his home, permanently engraving them on his impressionable young heart. He became filled with a passion to follow in the path of these righteous men.<sup>3</sup>

Of all the stories he heard, there was one in particular that struck a chord with the Rebbe, motivating him to devote his life to serving Hashem. It was the tale of how the holy *Baal Shem Tov* began serving *Hashem* when he was just five years old.

*When the Baal Shem Tov was born, his father, Rabbi Eliezer, was 100 years old. His mother, Sarah, died during childbirth. When the Baal Shem*

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<sup>3</sup> On one occasion several of the *tzadikim* who stayed there arranged a trip to visit the saintly author of "Toldos Yakov Yosef". The Rebbe, a child of four or five at the time, wished to join them, and he begged them to take him along. However, due to his tender age, they declined, as they did not wish to take responsibility for him. The Rebbe responded by placing his legs between the wagon wheels, preventing them from leaving, refusing to budge until they would comply with his wish. When the *tzaddik* Rabbi Chaim Krasner saw how adamant he was, he extended his hand to the Rebbe and helped him up to the wagon, accepting full responsibility for him. Thus the Rebbe ended up traveling with this group. The Rebbe was forever grateful to Rabbi Chaim for this once in a lifetime opportunity to see the "Toldos Yakov Yosef".

*Tov turned five, his father, who was extremely frail, summoned him to his bedside. "I want you to know," he said to little Yisrael, "that the time has come for me to leave this world. My child, have no fear, for Hashem's presence fills the world. Always remember that He is with you and that He is beside you. If you should ever be in need of something turn to no-one but Him. Nothing exists other than Hashem; therefore learn to speak to Him in your own words. Always turn only to Him."*

*With these loving words on his lips, Rabbi Eliezer took his last breath. Little Yisrael ran outside to raise the alarm. People came to help arrange his father's burial, after which the five-year old child remained all alone in this world, bereft of father and mother. The orphan's situation deteriorated rapidly; no-one bothered to provide him with his daily needs. Little Yisrael wandered from village to village, never resting by day in the place where he had spent the night. In spite of his unfortunate circumstances, the child remained steadfast in his belief that Hashem is with him always, as his father had clearly stated. He drew strength from the awareness that nothing exists other than Hashem, and that Hashem is behind everything that happens in this world. It was during this stage in his life that the Baal Shem Tov began his lifelong practice of conversing with Hashem and discussing everything with Him.*

Upon hearing this anecdote the Rebbe firmly decided that he, too, would adopt the habit of talking to *Hashem*. At the same time he resolved that he would conceal his spiritual efforts from everyone, including his own parents. From then onwards, the Rebbe always spoke to *Hashem* in Yiddish, his mother tongue.

In 5538 (1778), when the Rebbe turned six, he decided to detach himself from all worldly pleasures. The first passion that he chose to eradicate was his enjoyment of food. Even at that tender age, the Rebbe knew that no-one can survive without food, so in order to eliminate the pleasurable aspect of eating he decided to swallow his food whole, without chewing it. This made his throat sore and swollen.

Even during his childhood the Rebbe's heart burned with desire to serve *Hashem*. He frequently spoke to *Hashem*, beseeching Him for help in growing up to be an upright Jew and pleading with *Hashem* to

draw him close to His service. The Rebbe maintained this practice of talking to *Hashem* throughout his childhood.

The Rebbe had a favorite spot on the roof of his father's house, among bales of hay. He spent endless hours there, reciting *Tehillim*, while silently imploring *Hashem* to grant him the privilege of being His servant.

Even though the Rebbe spent every spare moment in meditation and conversation with *Hashem*, he felt that his efforts were not bearing fruit, and that he was still very distant from *Hashem*. In fact, he felt as though his pleas were being rebuffed, and that he was actually being prevented from serving *Hashem* properly. In spite of this disconcerting prospect he did not give up; he only stopped talking to *Hashem* periodically for several days at a time, until his deep faith resurfaced and reminded him that *Hashem* is merciful and that one must continually pray to Him.

The Rebbe was particular to keep his spiritual efforts a secret. In public he acted like an ordinary child, even to the extent of appearing unintelligent and lazy. It never occurred to anyone that this child was scaling spiritual heights.

When he was little, the Rebbe practiced an unusual method of donating money for charity. He would exchange several large bills for pennies. Then he would enter the synagogue inconspicuously, for example, through a window. He always brought along his *sefer* "*Shaarei Zion*" from which to recite the *l'shem yichud* prayer. After depositing a coin in the charity box, the Rebbe would avert his thoughts from the *mitzvah*. This enabled him to recite the *l'shem yichud* prayer again, after which he would deposit another coin into the charity box. Once again he averted his thoughts from the *mitzvah*, repeating this cycle, until all the coins had been deposited in the charity box. His objective was to perform as many *mitzvos* as possible, plain and simple, without logical questioning or reasoning. This attitude permeated all of the actions he performed in service of his Creator. It is well known that the Rebbe possessed a superior intellect even during his childhood and youth, but when it came to serving *Hashem* he chose to set all of his wisdom aside and to serve *Hashem* as a simple man. Herein lay his



wisdom, for he came to understand that the ultimate goal of wisdom is to set it all aside and serve one's Creator in utmost simplicity.

In school the Rebbe frustrated his teachers, who thought he was constantly daydreaming. In reality, he was trying to meditate upon the holy Names of *Hashem*, and this distracted him from his studies and earned him the wrath of his teacher. Nevertheless, the Rebbe also frequently played, running and jumping around just like other children.

As the Rebbe grew his passion for learning increased. He offered his tutor three additional rubles from his own money for each page of Talmud that the tutor would study with him, on top of the salary that his father was paying. The Rebbe wished to motivate his tutor to increase the amount of material he was learning with him. Indeed, his tutor studied several additional pages with him daily, and the Rebbe paid him three extra rubles for each page.

Before long the Rebbe was learning independently, fervently immersing himself in all areas of Torah study. In addition to covering *Shas*, *Poskim*, *Tanach*, and *Ein Yaakov* numerous times, he also studied *Zohar*, *Tikunei Zohar*, all of the writings of the *Arizal*, texts on ethics, and more. He testified that he was familiar with every ethical text that was found in his father's house, adding that he reviewed the *sefer "Reishis Chochmah"* numerous times.

Consequently, the Rebbe personified a huge repertoire of wisdom. The entire Torah lay before him like a set table upon which everything is arranged, to be chosen at whim. From the holy books that the Rebbe wrote one can perceive but a fraction of his vast fount of knowledge. The Rebbe maintained this fast-paced learning style throughout his life, even during his final, difficult illness.

With such an extensive base of Torah knowledge one might think the Rebbe had no concerns other than studying. In truth, he shouldered so many responsibilities, that one wonders where he found any time to study at all. He was frequently engaged in helping his fellow man, drawing people closer to *Hashem*, and advising them in all sorts of matters. Even though his mind was occupied with lofty spiritual concepts, he was always calm and collected, studying Torah



daily as though it was natural and simple, finding time for everyone and everything.

The Rebbe had a unique approach to Torah study. It entailed studying at a very rapid pace, thereby covering more ground, albeit at the expense of not delving into each and every word. In one hour he was able to study several pages of *halacha* with all of its accompanying commentaries, including *Turei Zahav*, *Magen Avraham*, *Be'er Hagolah*, *Pri Chodosh*, and more.

The Rebbe said that in the time it took most people to prepare themselves for morning prayers, he was able to complete the study of four pages of *halacha*.

The Rebbe strongly emphasized his unique approach in learning to his disciples. He taught that it is unnecessary to distract oneself by delving into each and every word at length. Instead, one should strive to understand the gist of the text, and move on, skipping over the difficult parts. By constantly advancing, as opposed to stalling, a person will complete the material several times, and eventually all difficulties will be resolved of their own accord.

Furthermore, he taught that merely pronouncing the words, even without understanding them, was the most effective study method. He maintained there was a double advantage to this method. First, one becomes familiar with the entire Torah in this way, and second, one eventually acquires a clear grasp of all the material he repeatedly recites. Moreover, the Rebbe said, even if there remain sections that are not understood after numerous repetitions, one should still revise them repeatedly, for our Sages have stated (*Avoda Zara*, 19): “First learn, later you will understand, even if you do not know what you are saying,” as it is written in *Tehillim*, 119:20): “My soul is crushed from longing for Your judgments at all times.”

By means of fast-paced learning a person attains an extensive familiarity with all aspects of the Torah, an accomplishment that eludes one who learns slowly and thoroughly, and who insists on grasping each concept before proceeding to the next one. Many who follow this drawn-out method of studying succumb to the difficulty and

frustration it entails, giving up their learning entirely, and remaining empty-handed at the end of the day.

That is why the Rebbe constantly stressed the importance and benefit of this approach to learning Torah. Indeed, those who follow his method, covering a lot of ground without emphasis on comprehension, ultimately merit to study the entire Torah numerous times, including *Gemara, Halacha, Tanach, Midrash, Zohar, Kabbala* and many other *sefarim*.

The Rebbe also outlined in detail which *shiurim* a person should study each day: *Shas* with *R"if* and *R"osh*, divided in such a manner that the entire *Shas* is completed each year; the four sections of the *Shulchan Aruch* with all its commentaries; all *sifrei Zohar* and *Tikunim*, as well as the *Sifrei Kabbalah* of the *Arizal*. The Rebbe also recommended that everyone should study one *shiur* in depth and recite *Tehillim* every day, along with many other prayers and supplications.

Being realistic, the Rebbe realized that not everyone would be capable of maintaining the rigorous study program that he outlined. He worried that such people might despair of ever accomplishing anything at all. Regarding them, the Rebbe stated that it is possible to be an upstanding Jew, even a righteous one, without learning at all. The Rebbe asserted that even an ignoramus has the potential to achieve the level of purity of the most virtuous Jew by practicing *hisbodedus* (meditation), though admittedly it is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the lofty concepts associated with these methods of worship without the benefit of *Gemara, Rashi, and Tosafos*. Still, he reiterated that anyone can attain the level of a righteous and pure *tzaddik*, as our Sages say (*Avos 2:21*): "It is not up to you to complete the job, but neither are you free to desist from it."

The Rebbe related that he completed all of the four sections of *Shulchan Aruch* three times. Each time he attained a deeper level of understanding than before. The first time around he studied the laws on a simple level, the second time he understood the commentaries' source for each and every law, and the third time he merited to understand the esoteric reason for each law.

He also stated that he was familiar with all of the works of *Kabbala*, the *Eitz Chaim*, *Pri Eitz Chaim*, all of the writings of the *Arizal*, the *Zohar*, and the main points of *Tikkunei Zohar*. All of this he apparently accomplished at a young age, after which he reviewed it all numerous times.

The Rebbe often described his own virtues and accomplishments. His goal was to inspire his disciples to follow his example. However, he stressed that nothing came his way easily, and that he encountered numerous obstacles at every step of the way.

Initially, when he began the practice of isolating himself in a room for hours and talking to Hashem, he found it extremely difficult to concentrate, according to his own account. Only by forcing himself to go against his nature did he manage to overcome the difficulties it entailed.

Thus it was with every spiritual practice that he undertook. He set himself extremely challenging goals daily, so that he found the resulting burden impossible to bear. Not one to give up, the Rebbe came up with a method that enabled him to succeed in even the most difficult *avoda*.

The secret of his method was to take one day at a time, imagining that only this day existed. For this day only, he would succeed in carrying out his desired *avodos*. Somehow, for just one day it was not that hard to complete his devotions, for it was, after all, merely a one-time undertaking. With this amazing method, he managed to carry out the most grueling *avodos* day after day: the trick was to consider no more than one day at a time. The Rebbe was very young when he came up with this idea, and he used it throughout the years, explaining that if not for this method he would not have managed to accomplish anything at all.

The Rebbe had another technique to assist him in his perseverance. Several times a day he would vow to complete whatever goal he had set for that day, so that even when the pressure became unbearable he was forced to carry out his goal because of the vow. He used this technique in the event he wished to break a particular bad habit, or to

improve a character trait, or to overcome an evil desire. This created a strong barrier, as he was prevented from violating his oath.

Rabbi Nosson once questioned the Rebbe regarding this practice, for, according to the *Gemara*, one should not make vows. The Rebbe replied, “The *Gemara* is referring to such *shlimazelnikes* (hapless folk, unlucky ones) like you!” What he meant by this was that since most people could not be trusted to carry out their vows they were forbidden to make a vow in the first place, unlike himself, the Rebbe, who was completely confident that he would fulfil his vows.

In order to help him achieve ever greater heights in *avodas Hashem*, the Rebbe often enlisted the assistance of his great-grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, by spending many nights in prayer at the latter’s grave, beseeching him to draw him closer to Hashem. When he was done, he would head directly to the *mikva*, which was quite a distance from the cemetery, arriving there frozen to the bone from his lengthy exposure to the frigid Russian elements. Then he would immerse in the icy water of the outdoor *mikva*, foregoing the available option of the indoor one. This was but one of the ways in which the Rebbe tormented his body, unbeknownst to anyone, deep in the middle of the night. By his own testimony the Rebbe was all of six years old at the time.

The Rebbe credited all of his accomplishments to the power of tears, for, as we have noted, nothing came easily to him. He related that when he first started learning *mishnayos* his young mind was unable to grasp the material, and he shed copious tears of supplication to Hashem, until he merited to understand the *mishnayos*.

The study of *Zohar* and the writings of the *Arizal* are difficult to comprehend, even for adults. When the Rebbe was still a young lad he had a burning desire to learn the entire Torah, so he cried and pleaded to Hashem for divine assistance, and soon he found himself understanding the meaning of these holy words. The Rebbe suffered similarly with each new *sefer* he encountered and wished to master; yet he continued with determination, refusing to give up despite the difficulty. Eventually, after numerous prayers accompanied by many tears, he began comprehending the elusive material.



When he was six years old the Rebbe experienced a yearning to greet the *Shabbos* properly and to feel its holiness. One Friday afternoon he rushed to the *mikva* earlier than usual and dressed for *Shabbos*. When he arrived in *shul* he began pacing back and forth, eagerly anticipating the sensation of holiness that one ought to feel on *Shabbos*. As the first of the congregants began arriving to *shul* the Rebbe realized that he was feeling no change. In great distress he ducked under the lectern of a prominent congregant who was reciting the *Shir Hashirim*. Seeing that it was just a little boy, the man let him be. The Rebbe buried his face in his hands and cried bitterly for hours, until his eyes became swollen from so much weeping. When he raised his head and scanned the *shul* it was already dark, but the combination of candlelight together with his tear-filled eyes resulted in his perceiving a glow in the atmosphere, and this comforted him.

The Rebbe frequently cried to Hashem, not only during his youth but throughout his lifespan. He attributed it to the fact that he was descended from King David, author of *Sefer Tehillim*, who frequently poured out his heart to his Creator. In a similar vein, the Rebbe's uncle, Rabbi Boruch of Mezibuz, was also known to be rather somber and serious-minded. On one occasion when the Rebbe sat in his room pouring out his heart to Hashem the tears rolled down his cheeks in such profusion that his heels got stuck to the floor. One *Sukkos* in his later years, as he was circling the *bimah* with the Four Species people noted that the floor in his path was drenched with his tears.

On another occasion the Rebbe presented someone with a gift of his old *tallis*. As he handed it over, the Rebbe commented, "Treat this *tallis* with respect, for as many fibers as it contains, that many tears did I shed before I merited to understand the true value of a *tallis*."

Thus we see that the Rebbe spent his entire life meditating and crying to Hashem with utmost simplicity, to which he credited the attainment of his lofty spiritual heights. Moreover, the Rebbe explained that anyone else who persevered in this same course would also ultimately accomplish all of his spiritual goals.

As a child the Rebbe used to compose his own private blessing in Yiddish to thank Hashem after every meal. For him it did not suffice

to merely recite *birchas hamazon*. He thanked Hashem separately for each item that he ate: wine, cake, onion, bread, etc.

All the while that the Rebbe lived in Mezibuz the townspeople had no idea that a *tzaddik* was living in their midst, because the Rebbe went to great lengths to assume the image of an ordinary young person, even pretending to be ignorant and impish.

One frigid winter day the Rebbe walked home from the *mikva* with wet *peyos*. People who noticed it were incredulous at his “stupidity” in going out with wet hair in such freezing weather. It never dawned on them that this young boy had just immersed in the *mikva*. They merely assumed that he knew no better than to expose himself to the cold after washing his head. In this way the Rebbe managed to conceal his greatness behind a façade of childish immaturity.

During this time the Rebbe was amassing a colossal amount of knowledge in all areas of Torah learning, including *Shas*, *Poskim*, *Tanach*, *Ein Yaakov*, and *Midrash*. He had the profound ability to “understand one thing from within another”, that is, by building on his understanding of one concept to grasp a totally new concept. His brilliant insights comprise Part One of his book on the *alef bais*, which he named *Sefer Hamiddos*. It is a compilation of all references to *mussar* and appropriate attributes and behaviors found in the words of our Sages. In addition to the direct references to this topic, he also composed numerous beautiful insights on the topic that are not mentioned outright anywhere else. He used his ability of “understanding one thing from within another” to infer these wonderful insights from Biblical verses and the words of our Sages.

Whenever the Rebbe came across a phrase that stressed the value of a good character trait or the disadvantage of a bad one, he wrote it down in alphabetical order. He recorded these insights for himself, in order to commit to memory all appropriate and inappropriate traits, so that he might follow in the path of the righteous. This was all completed before his *bar mitzvah*. Regarding this book he would say, “This has made me into a Jew.” This book of *alef bais* helped him to totally conquer his evil inclination, until he attained perfection in character. ●

 . . . **INITIAL YEARS  
OF MARRIAGE**

On *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* 5545 (1785), which fell on *Shabbos Parshas Vayikra*, the Rebbe turned thirteen. For his *bar mitzvah* the Rebbe was joined by his illustrious uncle, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sadilkov, author of *Degel Machne Ephraim*, who blessed the Rebbe, quoting the verse (*Tehillim* 2:7) “Today I have given birth to you”, which, according to *sefarim*, alludes to the day that a young man becomes *bar mitzvah*. The *Degel Machne Ephraim* also spoke some brief words of encouragement and rebuke, based on what he had heard from his grandfather, the *Baal Shem Tov*. The Rebbe cherished these words, which were as dear to him as “one who comes upon a vast fortune” (*Tehillim* 119:162).

On Sunday of *Parshas Tzav*, the second day of *Nissan*, the Rebbe began to lay *tefillin*. His *tefillin* had been written by the hidden *tzaddik*, Rabbi Ephraim Sofer, famous for his sanctity and purity.<sup>4</sup> The Rebbe always treasured these *tefillin*.

The Rebbe immediately began to don two pairs of *tefillin*, one *Rashi* and one *Rabbeinu Tam*, maintaining that everyone should begin wearing two pairs of *tefillin* at the age of *bar mitzvah*. Indeed, Breslover *chassidim* follow this custom until today.

After his *bar mitzvah* the Rebbe became engaged to the daughter of Rabbi Ephraim, a wealthy businessman who was also a learned

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<sup>4</sup> See below, Section ו"חח (Needs to be fixed when we know the page number)

Torah scholar and a descendant of illustrious forebears. Rabbi Ephraim hailed from Zaslav, but after moving around for a while he settled in the village of Ossatin. Rabbi Ephraim owned several villages in the vicinity of Medvedivke, including Ossatin, and he was renowned for his generosity and hospitality, particularly towards contemporary *tzaddikim*, whom he hosted graciously. His wife, too, was a righteous woman who came from an illustrious lineage.

The wedding was scheduled to take place in Medvedivke. The Rebbe's parents accompanied him, and he was brought under the *chuppa* with his bride, Soshia.

Right after the *badecken* (veiling of the bride), but before the marriage ceremony took place, the Rebbe approached several young men, addressing them privately, in order to test their wisdom and to assess their level of piety. One of these, Rabbi Shimon, was an exceedingly straightforward and simple young man, whose heart burned with love towards Hashem. When the Rebbe cleverly steered the conversation towards a discussion of worldly pleasures, Rabbi Shimon remained silent, for these pursuits held no appeal for him.

“Are you not human?” the Rebbe probed. “Don't you care for any of these delights?”

“I'm a simple man, and that is what I wish to remain,” was Rabbi Shimon's response.

“We should get to know each other better,” the Rebbe responded. He then informed Rabbi Shimon that when he had spoken with the others, he was actually testing them, but they had turned out to be very distant from Hashem and steeped in depravity and sin, Heaven forbid. The Rebbe immediately went out to the fields with Rabbi Shimon, where they discussed important aspects of *avodas Hashem*. The Rebbe explained to Rabbi Shimon that there is no purpose to this world other than separating oneself from all earthly desires and serving Hashem. “As for myself, on my wedding day - when all my sins are forgiven – I certainly have to make a serious reckoning for all of my deeds ...” the Rebbe said, and in this vein they conversed until it was time for the wedding ceremony.



From that day on Rabbi Shimon became close to the Rebbe. In fact, he was the Rebbe's first follower. The Rebbe continually urged him to detach himself entirely from this world and to concentrate only on serving his Creator. Rabbi Shimon's response was, "One day you will surely become a famous *tzaddik*. It is my desire to serve as your attendant." And so it was. After many years he merited to serve as the Rebbe's attendant, and he even received the Rebbe's promise that he would merit to attend the Rebbe in the World to Come.<sup>5</sup>

Since he took the Rebbe's words of inspiration to heart, and began to follow in the Rebbe's ways, particularly in the areas of prayer and meditation, Rabbi Shimon became extremely pious and righteous. He was able to compile many Torah insights, and the Rebbe once testified that Rabbi Shimon had totally eradicated all of his negative character traits.

Upon his marriage the Rebbe received a dowry of three hundred rubles, a small fortune at the time. Since he was consumed with an ever-increasing drive to attain greater heights in *avodas Hashem*, he devoted himself entirely to Torah study, prayer, and meditation, with a passion that by far surpassed that of childhood years. He did not spend a moment on worrying about income, instead living off his dowry and not giving a thought as to how he would manage once the money ran out.

The Rebbe's entire *avoda* was performed in secret. He went to great lengths to hide his actions from his father-in-law, Rabbi Ephraim. Only his wife knew the secret of his greatness and he made her promise not to divulge it to anyone. He thought of several ideas, by which he planned to conceal his greatness from people, even contemplating going from door to door begging for alms, so that no-one would suspect who he really was.

Vast fields, thick forests, and towering mountains surrounded the village in which the Rebbe's father-in-law lived. Since there was no soul in sight for miles around the Rebbe chose the outdoors for

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<sup>5</sup> (see below *Siman v" opan*)

his spiritual devotions, spending the majority of days of his youth outside, crying out to Hashem to help him perform His will, without anyone ever finding out.

Whenever he returned to the village, to his father-in-law, the Rebbe became a different person, joking around with the other youths. Rabbi Ephraim was terribly disappointed with his new son-in-law's conduct. He had assumed that after choosing a grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov* as a husband for his daughter he would have the pleasure of observing him studying Torah and serving Hashem, but in reality he never even saw him open a *sefer*. The Rebbe hid his *avoda* from everyone, indulging in it only behind locked doors in his room while his wife covered for him, or among the tall mountains and trees in the fields and forests.

One winter, when Rabbi Ephraim was traveling over a frozen river, he spotted his son-in-law playing on the ice with some friends. Now his suspicion was confirmed: his son-in-law was a no-good who wasted his days. This caused him suffering and aggravation. At the time one of the famous disciples of the *Maggid* happened to be staying in Rabbi Ephraim's home, and Rabbi Ephraim decided to unburden himself to his guest. He described how he had married off his daughter to a grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov*, but the young man was illiterate. The guest maintained that this was impossible, for he was afraid to talk negatively about a grandchild of the *Baal Shem Tov*.

But Rabbi Ephraim was adamant. "It is true. My son-in-law never learns; he just wastes his time. He can't even read Hebrew properly!"

"Is that so?" the guest responded. "Bring him here. I'll ask him to read, and we'll test him."

Rabbi Ephraim summoned his son-in-law, opened a *mishnayos Bava Kama* to the second chapter, and asked him to read. As the Rebbe read "the dog and the goat that jumped from the top of the roof", he purposely misread the word "*m'rosh - from the top*", pronouncing it as "*marsh*". The guest was deeply embarrassed.

“See, I told you that he has even forgotten how to read!” the father-in-law said to the guest. Even so, the latter refused to speak negatively about the Rebbe in the presence of his father-in-law, wishing to prevent a rift between the two, especially as the Rebbe was a grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov*.

Later, he cornered the Rebbe privately, reproaching him, “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, a grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov* and of Rabbi Nachman of Horodenke, with a father-in-law who gave you such a large dowry because of your prestigious lineage, and yet you don’t bother to study at all?! In fact, you have even forgotten how to read!” To reinforce his words he slapped the Rebbe smartly twice on the cheek. The Rebbe burst into tears, but said nothing.

Several days later, the guest found himself in a forest on his way home. Suddenly he heard loud cries from within the forest.

“Do you hear something?” he asked his wagon driver.

The wagon driver perked up his ears. “It sounds like a man’s voice.”

They stopped the wagon and followed the voice until they came upon a man wrapped in *tallis* and *tefillin*, crying bitterly as he recited the morning prayers, totally oblivious to his surroundings. The *tzaddik* could not contain his curiosity: who was this person that was praying with such utter devotion? As soon as he drew near, he recoiled in horror! It was none other than the young man whom he had struck on the cheek the other day! He waited in trepidation until the Rebbe had finished praying, then he approached him to beg forgiveness for the rebuke and for the slaps.

The Rebbe replied that he would forgive him only on one condition: namely that as long as the Rebbe lived he would not divulge a word of what he had witnessed. However, the *tzaddik* managed to convince the Rebbe to permit him to advise his father-in-law to cease interfering in his son-in-law’s life, with the excuse that it is difficult to understand the ways of the *Baal Shem Tov*’s descendants.

This he did, immediately returning to Rabbi Ephraim, appeasing him and praising the descendants of the *Baal Shem Tov* to such an extent, that Rabbi Ephraim began showing great respect to his son-in-law from that day on. This *tzaddik* outlived the Rebbe, and when R. Chaikel, the Rebbe's *chazzan*, once visited him, the *tzaddik* recounted this incident.

Thus the Rebbe continued to serve Hashem in secret with great fervor and self-sacrifice. He would venture deep into the woods, where he spent many hours, or even days on end, in meditation. Sometimes he would take one of his father-in-law's horses, riding deep into the forest, where he would dismount and tie the horse to a tree, while he went to do his *avoda*. On several occasions the horse managed to free itself and gallop home. Upon seeing the riderless horse, the family panicked, assuming that the Rebbe must have fallen off the horse, Heaven forbid. On several occasions the Rebbe got caught in a heavy downpour while in the forest, yet he remained there all day and only came home after dark, soaked to the skin.

A wide river ran through Ossatin, where the Rebbe resided with his father-in-law. Thick grass and reeds grew on its banks. Sometimes the Rebbe took a small rowboat and, even though he was not very skilled with the oars, rowed far out on the river, past the grass and reeds, where there was no-one to observe him. There he devoted himself to serving Hashem in prayer and meditation. On one such occasion the boat almost capsized. The Rebbe did not know how to right it, so he cried out loudly to Hashem for salvation. A miracle occurred and he was saved.

He frequently recounted this episode, for this is what everyone ought to do: scream to Hashem for salvation, as though one is in the middle of the ocean and one's life is hanging by a thread, with storm winds blowing in every direction, and one is at a total loss, feeling that even screaming won't help. This is how one should cry out to Hashem, for in truth, every moment in this world is fraught with danger.

The Rebbe used to describe the strenuous efforts in *avoda* that occupied these early years of his marriage. Later on, when he was



already famous, he would talk about the lofty spiritual levels that he attained in those years, adding, “But I worked very hard to accomplish it. I fasted a lot.” His main motive in recounting these incidents was to inspire his disciples to follow in his path, for we, too, can attain these goals if we work as hard at it.

Once, the Rebbe “bragged” to someone about his own greatness and spiritual accomplishments, hoping to inspire that person to greater spiritual goals. “But how can we aspire to such heights, when we do not possess a special soul like the Rebbe has?” the man responded.

This attitude angered the Rebbe. “Your problem is that you think *tzaddikim* attain their high spiritual levels because they have a special soul. You should know this is not true. Each and every individual has the potential to arrive at the exact same level of holiness that I reached, and to be exactly like me. This depends entirely on hard work and sacrifice.”

Towards the end of his life, the Rebbe once described one of the main methods by which he reached his high spiritual level. He referred to it as “prostik”. It entailed much conversing with one’s Maker, as well as reciting numerous chapters of *Tehillim*, the combination of which results in the attainment of very high spiritual levels. The Rebbe explained, “Had I known that Hashem would make me into a novelty and wonder, I would have accomplished in a day what I have accomplished in a year.” What he meant was, had he been aware of the great power of these “simple” practices, he would have carried out his *avoda* at an accelerated pace, so that whatever he achieved in *avodas Hashem* throughout an entire year, he could have accomplished in one day. The Rebbe spoke longingly of the marvelous value of serving one’s Creator with simplicity in the aforementioned manner of “prostik”, sighing “Ay, ay, prostik!” The Rebbe noted that he had discussed this topic with many prominent *tzaddikim*, and they all acknowledged that they, too, achieved their greatness by means of this “prostik” approach, that is, by serving Hashem sincerely and conversing with Him regularly in utmost simplicity.

During this time period the Rebbe had an intense desire to witness a miracle; he felt that it would considerably strengthen his faith. After much arguing and pleading with *Hashem* his request was granted and he witnessed three miracles.

In the great outdoors where the Rebbe frequently strolled during his spiritual devotions, there stood a large cross. Although this was a common sight in rural areas in those days, it caused much distress for the Rebbe each time he passed it. He, therefore, prayed to *Hashem* for a miracle, namely, that the cross should be uprooted. As soon as the Rebbe uttered the prayer the cross immediately toppled over.

The second miracle involved fish. The Rebbe sometimes strolled along the banks of a river that contained a lot of fish. The Rebbe wanted the fish to come to him without any effort on his part, and his request was granted.

The Rebbe had a yearning to see a dead person. He begged *Hashem* to show him one. One day, shortly after his marriage, when the Rebbe was lying in his room in his father-in-law's house, a dead man suddenly appeared before him. The Rebbe was terrified, as this was the first time in his life that he glimpsed a dead person. Later he explained that this dead man had been an extremely wicked person. The Rebbe began screaming in terror, so that all of his family members came running to his room. However, they were unable to enter because the Rebbe had locked the door from the inside. They were forced to figure out a way to enter, and only then did the Rebbe calm down.

In 5547 (1784), when the Rebbe was fifteen years old, his wife gave birth to a daughter, whom he named Adel, after his grandmother, the *Baal Shem Tov's* daughter.

From time to time the Rebbe traveled to Mezibuz, to visit his parents and to pray at the grave of the *Baal Shem Tov*. Because the trip from Ossatin to Mezibuz entailed traveling more than 350 kilometers he could not undertake this trip as often as he would have liked. He, therefore, came up with a means of communicating with the *Baal Shem Tov* without actually traveling. He would go to

the nearby town of Samila, to the grave of Rabbi Yeshaya of Yanov, one of the greatest disciples of the *Baal Shem Tov*. There he would empower this *tzaddik* to be his emissary and relay his request to the *Baal Shem Tov*, as well as to his grandfather, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenke, who was buried in Tiberias.

The Rebbe was in the habit of secretly visiting the grave of Rabbi Yeshaya of Yanov, before daybreak. He paid his father-in-law's wagon-driver extra to drive him there before dawn in the winter and to return him before daybreak so that his father-in-law would not suspect a thing. One day his father-in-law noticed that the horses were sweaty. When he questioned the wagon-driver about it, the latter was forced to divulge the Rebbe's secret.

In the years after his marriage the Rebbe fasted frequently, sometimes from *Shabbos* to *Shabbos*, while he was still in his teens. Sometimes he fasted for two consecutive weeks from *Shabbos* to *Shabbos*. Despite having grown up as an overprotected child with a delicate constitution, he ignored his wellbeing and continued with his frequent fasts, altogether fasting eighteen times from *Shabbos* to *Shabbos*.

Neither his parents nor his relatives were aware that the Rebbe was fasting. Only his wife knew about it, and he had sworn her to secrecy. He went to great lengths to ensure that no-one would find out that he was fasting.

After fasting an entire week, from *Shabbos* to *Shabbos*, the Rebbe did not prepare light foods, such as dairy products or hot tea, with which to break his fast. No-one knew he had been fasting, and he ate the regular *Shabbos* meal. One Friday night he felt extremely ill, much to the concern of those around him.

Even though he was fasting all week, he would go to the *mikva* on Friday and immerse himself in the freezing cold water for up to two hours, a feat that even a healthy person would find impossible to accomplish.

In those days the Rebbe would lose himself to the world, maintaining contact only with Rabbi Shimon. He would inspire

Rabbi Shimon to follow his methods of serving *Hashem*, and Rabbi Shimon attended to the Rebbe's needs. In later years, he related that when the Rebbe was young, he was once together with him when he was fasting the entire week. That Wednesday the Rebbe was bleeding from his nose, eyes, ears and mouth. Rabbi Shimon cried out, threatening to inform the Rebbe's family about his poor state of health, but the Rebbe cleverly thwarted his efforts by explaining, "It's perfectly normal for the fast to be most difficult exactly in the middle. You'll see that tomorrow it will be easier." Rabbi Shimon was forced to remain silent, for he, too, had been sworn to secrecy by the Rebbe.

On another occasion when the Rebbe was fasting all week, he felt so faint that he had to lie down and elevate his feet by supporting them on a bar.

During this time the Rebbe succeeded in completely subjugating his sensual desire. Words do not suffice to describe the enormity of this desire, which encompasses many other evil cravings. The Rebbe testified that he fought numerous moral battles before emerging victorious in this arena. He stated, "If our Sages had not explicitly forbidden us to say 'A dagger in the eyes of the Satan' (*Kiddushin* 30a), I would have said 'A dagger in the eyes of the Satan'. I don't understand all the stories that are brought down in the words of our Sages regarding the difficulties encountered by the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* in overcoming this temptation, since for me it does not exist at all. It is not even an issue for me to consider. One should be aware of *Hashem's* greatness, as it is written in *Tehillim* (135:5) 'For I know that God is great'. I am certainly aware, and for me this is not even a temptation. To me a man and a woman are the same. I see this temptation the way I see you. I resisted many other temptations, but this is not even an ordeal for me."

Moreover, the Rebbe said that any wise person, even non-Jewish, if he is truly wise, should not see this as a temptation at all. For if he is intimately familiar with anatomy and with the make-up of the human body, this lust should be utterly repulsive for him. He often spoke of the abhorrence of sensual desire.



But before he reached this state of utter subjugation of all desire, he encountered numerous extremely difficult hurdles, the details of which are indescribable. This occurred particularly during his youth, when he was most vulnerable. Each time he was tempted he was in danger of succumbing, and he had to muster supreme strength in order to pass the test.

Despite the enormous risk and difficulties involved, the Rebbe did not attempt to avoid further temptation. On the contrary, he welcomed it and even prayed that God should test him, so confident was he in his ability to resist the temptation. In the Rebbe's opinion only a person who has lost his mind would ever sin; anyone who is mentally sound cannot sin.

The Rebbe was tested countless times, and during each of these occasions he was in grave danger. He beseeched the Heavens for salvation, and God stood by his side, until he merited to utterly destroy this all-encompassing desire, attaining an awesome level of holiness and piety in the process.

The Rebbe said that the Satan was willing to let him have his way with everything in exchange for this one thing. So the Rebbe offered the Satan the opposite: he would relinquish everything, but he would not give up on this one conquest. In other words, the Satan was prepared to allow the Rebbe to overcome all evil desires, in exchange for leaving this particular one unconquered. The Rebbe, however, was willing to forego the mastery of all other impulses, as long as he crushed this particular one in its entirety.

This is why, when the Rebbe first set out to vanquish this desire, he made no effort to overcome his desire for food. On the contrary, originally the Rebbe consumed vast quantities of food, far greater than the norm. He would say that he was channeling all his temptations into the craving for food. Later on, of course, he overcame the desire for food, too.

The Rebbe concentrated all his efforts into fighting innumerable battles and resisting the enticing temptations he encountered while attempting to crush wanton desires. He repeatedly poured out his heart to God, crying and begging Him to save him from falling prey

to this malevolence. Ultimately he succeeded in totally disengaging from this desire, to the extent that he wondered why other people had a problem with it when for him it held no enticement whatsoever.

The Rebbe frequently discussed the emptiness and vileness of sensual desire. He further said that it is impossible to explain its vulgarity to people who are already caught in its grip, for it becomes so much a part of them that it affects their mind. They cannot, and will not, understand that it is actually possible to be repulsed by this temptation. Therefore, it is best not to discuss this topic too much with such people. However, anyone with just a bit of true intelligence can reach the state of being completely repulsed by this temptation. The Rebbe added that there must be a secret reason for referring to this as a great temptation, for in reality it is no temptation at all.

The Rebbe marveled at his own great strength in conquering this desire, and he reached awesome levels of holiness in this area, to the point that in his eyes there was no difference between a man and a woman. In other words he did not have to fight a battle to avoid impure thoughts when he looked at or spoke to a woman.

He also said that for a true *tzaddik* even marital relations are difficult. Not only does he derive no pleasure from them, but they cause him as much suffering as a child who is being circumcised, and possibly even more. An infant is not totally aware, so his pain is not that great. But a *tzaddik* is fully aware, so he suffers more than the infant. For the Rebbe this was a simple concept to grasp, and he even said that every person can potentially reach this level. From these words one can infer his awesome holiness.

The Rebbe once said that he feared neither woman nor angel. This requires some explanation. One who still has the slightest fear of having an inappropriate thought regarding a woman, even if he is more or less cleansed of this desire, must also fear an angel. But since the Rebbe prided himself on not having the slightest fear of unseemly thoughts, he had no need to fear an angel, either.

This is somewhat alluded to in the words of our Sages (*Kiddushin*: 81a), where Rav Amram Chasida said to an angel, “I am flesh and

you are fire, and I am better than you.” The Rebbe expounds on this in *Likutei Maharar*, Part II, Chapter 1.

With regard to subjugating his desire for food, the Rebbe also struggled mightily. One reason for this was that while he was working on eliminating other desires the Rebbe paid no attention to this one. Then, when it came to eradicating this desire, the Rebbe found it so difficult that he feared he would never conquer it and that he would be forced to give it up.

Ultimately, the Rebbe won, succeeding to completely eliminate his desire for food. His holiness with regard to disengaging from the pleasure of eating is well known. He ate almost nothing, just the barest minimum required to sustain life, and even that only by forcing himself.

The Rebbe said that at first when he began working on eliminating this craving he ate a fraction of what he had been eating before. When he realized that he was still enjoying food, he decided to eat even less. No matter how many times he reduced his food intake, as long as he felt he was deriving pleasure from food, he kept reducing the amount he was eating, until he finally attained absolute self-control. At this point he was eating no more than a minuscule amount each day.

Even at this stage the Rebbe still felt there was a trace of desire involved, and he decided to work on this, too, until he destroyed every last vestige of craving for food. Soon the Rebbe was unable to eat at all. But it appears from his words that he eventually gained the ability to eat even large amounts with absolute holiness, without a trace of desire. In reality, though, he was usually unable to eat too much, for he had already accustomed himself to eating very little.

The Rebbe said that when he was at sea on his way to the Holy Land he realized that in the absence of food he had no way of sustaining his life. That was when he forced himself to eat a little, and from then on he got used to eating small amounts. But prior to that he had been eating tiny portions.

The Rebbe described the huge amounts of food he used to eat when he was younger. “I ate the equivalent of nine bagels three times a day: at breakfast, lunch, and dinner!” he related. This was in addition to the other dishes that were served at the meal. Yet, he later succeeded in completely subjugating his appetite for food, until he was eating almost nothing at all.

Furthermore, the Rebbe related how in the beginning, when he was troubled by his big appetite he resolved to eradicate this craving and drastically reduce his portions. But when he realized he was still deriving some pleasure even from this reduced amount the Rebbe gave up on his efforts to subdue this desire and began to eat normally. He reasoned that there is no difference in deriving pleasure from a small portion or a large one, so why should his body suffer in vain? That was when he channeled all desires into this one craving for food.

Once he was in his father-in-law’s house during the third meal of *Shabbos*. The room was dark, and the Rebbe was seated in a corner, involved in his usual *avoda*. He began to pray that *Hashem* should allow him to see the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. He promised that if *Hashem* would grant him this wish he would cast away this remaining craving (for food), too.

After meditating deeply he fell asleep. In his dream he saw his grandfather, the *Baal Shem Tov*, coming to him, quoting the verse (*Devarim* 11:15): “*I will provide grass in your field for your cattle.*” Upon awakening, the Rebbe was baffled by his inability to find a connection between this verse and his request. After some pondering he came up with the following: In *Tikkunim* it is written that “*Esav*” (grass) comprises three letters, *ayin*, *shin* and *bais*. *Ayin* and *bais* together are *bas ayin* (apple of the eye), and *shin* represents the three Patriarchs. This is the meaning of the verse: In order for your **eyes** to see the three **Avos**, then “**bsadcha livhemtecha**” – you must overcome your animalistic nature, that is, conquer your desire for food.

After this the Rebbe totally eradicated his desire for food.



(See *Likutei Maharan I*, Chapter 57, for a discussion of this subject, describing how eating with holiness kindles in a person the glow of *zechus avos* (ancestral merit).<sup>6</sup>)

In his early years the Rebbe was involved in self-torture. From his words it is apparent that he indulged in all sorts of torments, for example rolling naked in snow, and more. But the greatest torment of all, the Rebbe explained, consists of refraining from scratching oneself when one feels an itch. The Rebbe accepted upon himself never to scratch or even move his body when he felt a tickle or an itch. Instead he would remain perfectly still, allowing the itching sensation to increase and to be intensely felt by his brain, which, he said, is the greatest form of torture.

He experimented with all sorts of self-torture, all in good faith and purity of heart, until he merited lofty spiritual levels. Happy is he! There are also numerous torments that many *tzaddikim* are subjected to, and the Rebbe was not spared these either. Hardly ever has a living person suffered more pain than he had. He was full of afflictions, inside and out, particularly in his later years, when the Rebbe suffered excruciatingly. The Rebbe related that he was totally in control of his pain; it was in his power to summon these torments upon himself as well as to call them off. It is said in the Rebbe's name that his suffering was so intense that he could have bitten a piece of wood in two.

By means of his supreme struggles and efforts to overcome his physicality, the Rebbe succeeded in completely eradicating all evil traits and desires. He even said of himself, "*er hot a rein felechel* - he has utterly clean skin". Some *tzaddikim* are comparable to animal hide that has been tanned and cleansed, but it still has traces of an unpleasant odor. These *tzaddikim* have crushed their desires, but some slight traces of lust still lingers. The Rebbe said, however, that

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<sup>6</sup> The publisher added the following: *I heard that Rabbi Nissan Kavelier, one of the closest disciples of the holy tzaddik Rabbi Baruch of Mezibuzh, told the Maggid of Terhovitzta that he once visited Rabbi Boruch and noticed that the latter was very sad. When he asked Rabbi Boruch why he was sad, Rabbi Boruch replied, "For a long time now I haven't seen the Baal Shem Tov. Every time I visit his grave he's not there. This time I saw him, and when I asked him about it, he answered that it's because he's with Rabbi Nachman!"*

he was comparable to an animal hide that has been treated and washed until not a trace of offensive odor remains. He said that just like animal skin is treated and turned inside out in the cleansing process, so must a person's body be treated and purified from all worldly desires, until one can literally turn him inside out to see that he is indeed absolutely cleansed and pure.

The Rebbe reported that he was by nature quite ill-tempered. Since he aspired to become a better person and to perform *Hashem's* will, he decided to overcome his quick temper. In order to achieve absolute eradication of anger, a person must attain the extreme opposite nature, and become utterly benevolent. Nothing in the world should be able to provoke his temper. This is the level that the Rebbe attained in the Holy Land, where he merited to completely nullify all traces of anger. From then on nothing in the world ever annoyed him anymore. He never bore the slightest grudge towards anyone; even his fiercest opponents were unable to provoke his wrath. On the contrary, he felt only love towards them. His heart was so filled with goodwill that there was no room in it for hatred. His absolute patience and kindness were legendary among all his acquaintances.

The Rebbe recounted how, in his youth, he would work very hard at visualizing his own death, to the point that he felt he had actually died and was being mourned. He added that it is extremely difficult to imagine this clearly. For the Rebbe this was a particularly tortuous *avoda* because he was terrified of anything related to death. In spite of his phobia he prayed to God to grant him the privilege of dying a martyr's death. For a long time he included this request in his daily prayers and conversations with God. Due to his strong fear, for him it was as though he was actually sacrificing his life for the sake of *Hashem*.

The Rebbe cautioned against being overly stringent with Torah observance. He recounted that in his youth he accepted upon himself numerous restrictions, frequently thinking up new ones. For example, with regards to the use of water for Pesach, he worried that a trace of *chametz* would fall into the water after it was drawn from the well. Even the common solution of preparing all the water

before the holiday did not satisfy him, for it would be too difficult to guard the water from *erev Pesach* for all the days of the holiday. In his opinion, the most appropriate water would be fresh spring water. Since there was no such spring in his town he actually considered spending Passover elsewhere, in a location that had a fresh spring. To this extent the Rebbe engaged in unnecessary and depressing stringencies in his observance of *mitzvos*.

Similarly, the Rebbe went to extremes with regard to bodily cleanliness, employing measures that nearly led to life-threatening dangers and illnesses, God forbid.

In his later years, the Rebbe repeatedly warned his followers to steer clear of all excesses in stringencies, even on Pesach. He ridiculed them all, especially the ones involving bodily cleanliness, which he referred to as obsessions. He said the only way to serve God is with simplicity and sincerity, without self-imposed stringencies, and he spoke at great length about this. He stated that the foundation of serving God is simplicity without sophistication. (See *Likutei Maharan*, Section 2, Chapter 44; and *Sichos HaRan*, Chapters 30 and 235 for remarkable discussions on this subject.)

In this way the Rebbe spent the early years of his marriage, relentlessly pursuing *avodos* and self-imposed torments in an effort to serve *Hashem* properly. His days were spent either in diligent Torah study, or in prayer and meditation in forest and field. In the meantime he lived off his dowry, until eventually it was all depleted.

His financial situation deteriorated until, one evening, there was literally no food in the house. The Rebbe went out as usual to the fields. While there, he stumbled upon a small sack of beans, which he brought home to cook. Later he related, that for him finding a source of sustenance in the field after he trusted in *Hashem* was as precious in his eyes as finding a vast fortune. He added that his trust in *Hashem* was so ingrained, that he knew *Hashem* could support him even when he spent his days in the fields. Indeed, because the Rebbe did not allow himself to become worried or distracted, *Hashem* provided him with all his needs in wonderful ways.

The Rebbe also said that had he not waited patiently for *Hashem's* salvation, he would have been like so many others who travel around in pursuit of a livelihood. Every person lacks something in the physical realm. Some lack basic necessities such as clothing and shelter, while others feel that they are lacking expensive clothing and homes. In any case, the Rebbe taught, one must not force the salvation to come prematurely; instead one should wait until *Hashem* has mercy and sends it to him. He said that had he demanded immediate gratification every time he lacked something, he would have had to borrow money to satisfy his needs. He would have incurred debts, and ultimately been forced to travel around to earn the money with which to repay the debts. This is a never-ending cycle; these people are always in debt and always on the road. Only one who places his trust in *Hashem* and is patient will never lack anything. ●



 . . . **A GROWING REPUTATION**

During the early years of his marriage the Rebbe had planned to lead a quiet and unassuming life, devoting himself to serving *Hashem* in utmost secrecy. He had no desire to be a leader, and, more than anything else, he wished to avoid being dependent on people. After giving this matter much thought, he came up with a practical idea by means of which he would be able to achieve both these goals simultaneously.

His plan entailed going around and begging from door to door. It suited both his purposes well, and, indeed, it helped him to keep his secret for quite a few years after his marriage. The only person who was aware of the Rebbe's greatness was Rabbi Shimon, who visited occasionally. However, *Hashem* had other plans. When the time was right He arranged the circumstances in favor of His will.

One day the Rebbe's father-in-law, Rabbi Efraim, had *yahrzeit* after his father. The pair travelled together to the village of Alexanderivka, near Ossatin. Immediately upon entering the *Beis Medrash* there, the Rebbe attracted the attention of several young men who were captivated by his radiant countenance and who sensed that they were in the presence of a holy man. They wished to engage him in conversation, but this was no easy feat, especially as the Rebbe was standing facing the wall, in complete silence.

After prayers were over, Rabbi Efraim distributed liquor to all those present, as is customary. The young men approached Rabbi Efraim, requesting that he ask his son-in-law to first study a chapter

of *mishnayos*. Rabbi Efraim gladly complied, and handed the Rebbe a *mishnayos*. The Rebbe took it from him, placed it on the lectern, and promptly turned his face back to the wall. He spent a long time studying that chapter of *mishnayos*, while the youths waited for him to finish so that they might partake of the liquor, as well as engage the Rebbe in conversation after wishing him *l'chaim*. Seeing how long it was taking, the youths once again approached Rabbi Efraim, this time requesting that he ask his son-in-law to hurry up. As Rabbi Efraim approached the Rebbe, the latter waved him away. Rabbi Efraim promptly fell to the floor in a faint.

When he came to, Rabbi Efraim was asked to explain what happened. He related that the moment his son-in-law had waved his hand in front of his face, he had a vision in which he saw his father, whose *yahrzeit* was that very day, standing near him and asking, "A son-in-law such as this one you command to learn *mishnayos*?" Rabbi Efraim added that he had fainted out of sheer fright at the sight of his father.

From that day onward, the Rebbe became famous as one of the most righteous individuals of his generation. People began flocking to him, and the Rebbe was instrumental in bringing these people closer to the service of God.

One of the Rebbe's first followers was the holy *tzaddik* Rabbi Yekusiel Landau, the *Maggid* of Terhovitz, who preached in eighty-five towns. *Tzaddikim* dubbed him "*der staroz fun die grenitz* (Guardian of the Border)", for Terhovitz was located on the border between the provinces of Kiev and Kherson, and Rabbi Landau prevented the negative influence of Kherson from infiltrating the Jewish community in Kiev.

It was Rabbi Landau's custom to travel around the territory, making an annual stop at each town and village where his sermons were in demand. Wherever he arrived, the townspeople closed their shops and welcomed him with great joy, dressed in their *Shabbos* finery. They were all very fond of him, from the ritual slaughterers who brought him their knives for inspection, to the local Rabbis who came to hear his opinion on important communal issues.

Rabbi Landau had personally met with the *Baal Shem Tov*. He was also a close friend of Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl. In fact, for many years the two alternated visiting each other for the holiday of Shavuot, when they would dance non-stop the entire night. When Rabbi Nachum was already advanced in age and no longer had the energy to dance all night, he stopped frequently and bade his son, Rabbi Mordechai, to take his place in dancing with the *maggid*. The *maggid* was deeply respected by all the righteous Jews of his generation. Even Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (famed author of *Tanya* and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*) requested the *maggid*'s approbation for a *siddur* which he published.

By Divine Providence, the *maggid* arrived in Ossatin, which was included in his preaching territory, just when the Rebbe's fame began spreading after the aforementioned story in Alexanderivka. All the townspeople came out to welcome him, sharing with him the news about the Rebbe. Even though he was forty years older than the Rebbe, who was not yet twenty at the time, the *maggid* decided to go meet the Rebbe and verify for himself all that he had just heard about his greatness. When he engaged the Rebbe in conversation he was so enthralled by what he saw and heard, that he made up his mind then and there to remain at the Rebbe's side.

It was a strange sight indeed – the elderly, famous *tzaddik* paying homage to a youth who was still in his teens! In fact, once when the *Maggid* of Terhovitz was travelling together with his friend, Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl, they happened to pass by Medvedivka, where the Rebbe was living at the time. “Come, let me show you my Rebbe,” the *maggid* said to his friend. Upon setting eyes on the Rebbe, Rabbi Nachum commented, “*He has fair eyes and a pleasing appearance...*” (*Samuel I 16:12*), adding, “The verse “*in order that his awe shall be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin*” (*Shemos 20:17*) is referring to this young man!”

One winter day, the Rebbe was invited to a *bris milah* in Alexanderivka, which was close to Ossatin. A man approached him with a tale of woe, crying bitterly that a non-Jew had convinced his daughter to convert, God forbid, and she had disappeared. All the

surrounding villages had been searched, but she was nowhere to be found. The distraught father was at his wits' end.

When the Rebbe told the father that his daughter was with the priest, the father was shocked for he was very friendly with the priest. He asked the Rebbe how he should proceed to search for her and to bring her back. The Rebbe replied that two men should promptly be dispatched with a covered wagon to the priest's house, where they would see his daughter standing outside. As soon as she would see the men, she would agree to return home with them. And so it was. The girl was back while the Rebbe was still at the *bris milah* meal.

However, the danger was not over yet, for when the peasants discovered that they had been outwitted, they armed themselves with clubs and spades, in preparation for fighting with the Jews who had rescued the maiden from the priest's house. The Jews were panic-stricken, but the Rebbe reassured them, advising them to arm themselves, too, and face the non-Jews, who would miraculously panic and leave. And so it was. When the peasants saw the tiny band of Jews facing them with their clubs, they uncannily beat a hasty retreat, despite the odds.

After this incident, the Rebbe wasted no time in finding a suitable husband for this girl. She became engaged to a boy who was apprenticed to a shoemaker in that village. The Rebbe warned the young man, "Be very careful if you ever have an argument with your wife, for you should never insult her by referring to this incident! If you will heed my words, I promise you that you will have wonderful children with her."

This couple eventually established a beautiful family. Their children turned out to be eminent Rabbis and celebrated Torah scholars.

Word got around, and the Rebbe's fame began to spread throughout the land. People came to him from all over. The Rebbe engaged each person in a discussion of *avodas Hashem* in his typical fashion, encouraging them strongly to practice meditation and conversing with *Hashem*, as well as setting aside regular time slots for Torah study.



In the year 5550 (1790) the Rebbe's mother-in-law passed away. The Rebbe accompanied his father-in-law to Mohyliv for the purpose of finding a new wife. After extensive efforts on the Rebbe's part, a *shidduch* came about, and his father-in-law got married there. Despite the Rebbe's tender age – he was only eighteen at the time – the townspeople held him in high esteem, in part because of his illustrious lineage going back to the *Baal Shem Tov*, and in part due to the fact that they recognized the Rebbe's own greatness. It was clear to the astute observer that this young man was destined for greatness.

During his visit to Mohyliv, the Rebbe stayed with a distinguished, wealthy individual who had been a devotee of his uncle, Rabbi Baruch. This gentleman welcomed the Rebbe warmly, preparing a special dinner in his honor. Many of the guests were important people who had been very close with the Rebbe's late uncle, Rabbi Baruch, and they wished to hear the Rebbe speak.

Normally, the Rebbe was rather withdrawn and loathe to speak words of Torah in public. However, thanks to the wine served at this dinner, his heart was mellowed, and he began to speak. His audience was stunned by the astounding revelations that emerged from his mouth.

After his father-in-law's wedding, they returned to their house in Ossatin. Around that time an important visitor arrived in Mohyliv: the famous *tzaddik* Rabbi Dov of Zaslov, one of the great disciples of the *Baal Shem Tov*. He was known to all as Reb Ber the son of Reb Bunim who merited to travel to *Eretz Yisrael* and died there. The Mohyliv townsfolk repeated to him what they had heard from the Rebbe, and the *tzaddik* was impressed with their words. "This young man will one day be world famous!" he declared.

That year a second daughter was born to the Rebbe. He named her Sarah, after his grandmother, the mother of the *Baal Shem Tov*.

The Rebbe was still living in his father-in-law's house, but at this point his stepmother-in-law did something which prompted him to leave. The Rebbe had a private room in the attic where he spent time in prayer and devotion. One day he travelled out of town for a few

days, and when he returned he saw that his stepmother-in-law had moved her own bed into that room, with the intention of making it her own. As soon as the Rebbe realized that his room, in which he had spent several years serving God, was taken from him, he knew he could no longer stay with his in-laws. He left Ossatin, and settled in nearby Medvedivka.

The Rebbe's move took place in 5551 (1791). At the time of his relocation to Medvedivka the Rebbe was already quite well known in the surrounding areas. The people decided to offer him a weekly stipend of one *rendel* - ducat, or gold coin - as a token of their support. Thus he was able to live peacefully and worry-free in Medvedivka. People began streaming to him in increasing numbers, and not only from nearby, but even from greater distances. Everyone who came to him was filled with the fear of God. The Rebbe steered many of them away from sin and drew them closer to Hashem.

That year the Rebbe's third daughter was born. He named her Miriam. According to some, she was named after his mother-in-law.

In 1792, the Rebbe was twenty years old. He was living in Medvedivka, where he continued his practice of going out into the woods from time to time, to spend time in devotion to God.

At a distance of about 210 kilometers from Medvedivka, in a small town named Dashiv, there lived a famous *tzaddik* by the name of Rabbi Yudel. Rabbi Yudel was a devoted disciple of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz. He was the son-in-law of Rabbi Leib of Trastinietz, who was a disciple of the *Baal Shem Tov*.

Rabbi Leib was an awesome individual. Unfortunately he passed away at sea, en route to the Holy Land. At the time he had stated: "If my son-in-law, Rabbi Yudel, was with me, he would not have let me die here." Before he died, a large animal reared its head above the water, and charged the ship. The people on board panicked, for it appeared that this animal would capsize the ship. Rabbi Leib donned his *tallis* and *tefillin*, and advanced on the ship's deck towards the animal, which promptly disappeared into the depths of the ocean. Rabbi Leib gave instructions to be carried out after his passing: he was to be placed onto a board and lowered into the water. As soon

as he finished talking he died. His fellow passengers immediately placed his body onto a board, which they then lowered into the water.

The board floated away, until it reached the shores of a certain town, while a pillar of fire burned on it. The people of that town all came out to welcome it, for they knew what they were to do with the *niftar* (dead person). Several years before, a certain *chacham* had passed away in this town, and had stated in his will that no-one was to be buried beside him other than a *chacham* who would arrive from Poland with a pillar of fire burning at his head. Thus, when these people observed the pillar of fire, they arranged a funeral and buried the *tzaddik*, Rabbi Leib, beside the *chacham*.

A short while thereafter Rabbi Leib appeared in a dream to the Rebbe, with a request that the Rebbe should encourage Rabbi Leib's children to be close to him. Indeed, most of Rabbi Leib's children became devoted followers of the Rebbe, especially his son-in-law, Rabbi Yudel. During this dream he also revealed to the Rebbe a fascinating secret, which is quoted in *Likutei Maharan I, Chapter 96*, beginning with the words: "Know, I have a tradition, that when there is opposition to one *tzaddik*, an inappropriate thought related to this opposition occurs to another *tzaddik*, and since he desires to elevate it, even though he is not successful, through his willpower he breaks all of the individuals who are involved in the conflict." Refer to the source for additional details. This dream was the origin of the aforementioned "tradition".<sup>7</sup>

Rabbi Yudel belonged to a circle of men in Dashiv who, like him, were entirely devoted to serving God. One of the most prominent

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<sup>7</sup> Breslov chassidim say that he told the Rebbe as follows: "Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl took to the World to Come the principle of the reward for his righteous deeds, but the fruits (interest) he left in this world. That is why his offspring have important positions as Rabbis and leaders. But I took to the World to Come also the fruits (interest) of my deeds, therefore my children hold no important positions of leadership. That is why I am asking you to be friendly to them." Rabbi Leib had been one of the most prominent disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. Once when an evil decree was issued against Jews, the Baal Shem Tov said, "I need my disciple, Rabbi Leib, for only together with him can I nullify this evil decree." Words do not suffice to describe the extent of Rabbi Leib's holiness. Many wondrous miracles are attributed to him, and even Rabbi Baruch of Mezibuz praised him highly. One Sukkos Rabbi Leib was sleeping in Rabbi Baruch's sukka, when his pillow burst and the feathers scattered all over the sukka. People worried that Rabbi Baruch would be angry, but instead Rabbi Baruch said, "Rabbi Leib's feathers are my sukka decorations!" This shows how venerated Rabbi Leib was in Rabbi Baruch's eyes.

members of this group was Rabbi Shmuel Isaac, a holy *tzaddik* in his own right, who served God with a fiery passion and always prayed with intense fervor. Similarly, there were other God-fearing and pious individuals in the group that he led.

Hashem has His ways of orchestrating events for the good. One day a young man by the name of Reb Ber, who came from a village that was located near Medvedivke, where the Rebbe lived, married and settled in Dashiv with his in-laws. Since he was an extremely pious and God-fearing individual, he soon became attracted to Rabbi Yudel's group. Soon the time came for the young couple to visit his parents in his hometown near Medvedivke. Upon taking leave of Rabbi Yudel, the latter cautioned him, "You are now returning to your hometown, which is near Medvedivke where a certain young *Rebbe* lives. For the sake of your eternal wellbeing do not step foot near him!" He warned him sternly not to even entertain the thought of visiting the Rebbe, and Reb Ber gave him his word.

Due to his tremendous love of Rabbi Yudel, the latter's words penetrated Reb Ber's heart, and he did not go to see the Rebbe after he reached his hometown.

With the passage of time, Reb Ber experienced numerous ups and downs in his service of God, just like many pious people do. His life was fraught with challenges, not the least of which was that several years after his wedding he still remained childless. He struggled valiantly to overcome the waves of depression that threatened to engulf him, tormenting and confusing his mind. Additionally, his approach to serving God, as he had learned it from Rabbi Yudel, was zealous to the extreme and quite unrealistic, which increased his agitation. In particular, his ardent desire to arise at midnight to recite *tikkun chatzos* robbed him of his peace of mind, for his efforts to get up on time were unsuccessful. He tried hiring a gentile to wake him each night, but as soon as the man left Reb Ber fell asleep again, so that method was scrapped. He proceeded to instruct the gentile not to leave until he was up and fully clothed, which worked for a while. However, he became so preoccupied with this issue, that he began suffering excruciating headaches, which took its toll on his health, so that he almost lost his sanity.



One day he decided that since the Rebbe was so famous in the vicinity of Medvedivke for being a great and holy *tzaddik*, and he, Reb Ber, was plagued by so much suffering and trouble, he had nothing to lose by paying the *tzaddik* a visit. Soon he found himself in the Rebbe's presence, proceeding to unburden himself of all his problems, particularly about his state of childlessness. The Rebbe advised him to donate money to charity, but Reb Ber replied that he could not afford that. So the Rebbe advised him to be strong in his faith, and it would be reckoned for him as though he gave money to charity, as it is written about Avraham (*Braishis 15:6*) "*And he trusted in God, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness – charity.*" The Rebbe added that by means of faith one can merit having children, as the Hebrew word for faith – *emuna* – has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for children – *banim*.

Reb Ber proceeded to enumerate to the Rebbe all the trials and tribulations that he was suffering. The Rebbe responded with soothing, kind words that restored his heart, so much so that he decided this was where he belonged, for this was where he felt at ease. From then on he came to the Rebbe frequently and began serving God with renewed vitality.

When R' Ber's mother noticed that her son was so attached to the Rebbe, she came to him complaining that her son was suffering from excessive agitation and poor concentration brought on by sleep deprivation. When he once again came to the Rebbe, the Rebbe told Reb Ber, "Sleep and eat, but be wary of time! After a while come back to me, and ask me how to continue." And so it was. When he returned to the Rebbe, he was told to rise at 3 a.m. ("Your midnight will be at 3 a.m." were the Rebbe's words. Indeed this became Reb Ber's lifestyle, and the people who were awake in *shul* knew that when Reb Ber arrived, it was always 3 a.m.)

From then on Reb Ber practiced his *avoda* with remarkable restraint, as per the Rebbe's directives. He eventually opened a business, which turned out to be very successful and made him fabulously rich. The Rebbe instructed him to donate one-fifth of his profits to charity, which he did for the remainder of his life. (Before

he died he was heard to boast, “With my ‘fifth’ I have nothing to fear of the Heavenly Court. It will only serve to protect me.”)

The Rebbe praised Reb Ber’s fear of Heaven, describing it “as great as the fear most people have of being flogged by the Russians”.

One day Reb Ber’s wife decided to visit her parents in Dashiv. Reb Ber inquired of the Rebbe how he should act in the presence of Rabbi Yudel and his friend Rabbi Shmuel Isaac, who had warned him never to go to the Rebbe. The Rebbe replied, “Continue practicing your *avoda* with simplicity and innocence, and do not allow yourself to be distracted by anyone at all. Just speak to Hashem on a regular basis, and serve Him with joy, even in the presence of these people. If anyone should question where you derived this extraordinary enthusiasm and joy, you must clearly state that it is thanks to my influence!”

When Reb Ber arrived with his wife in Dashiv he promptly went to the synagogue, where he prayed with fervor and joy, clapping his hands enthusiastically. Rabbi Yudel immediately understood that Reb Ber had joined the ranks of the Rebbe’s followers. Since Rabbi Yudel sincerely sought the truth, he was not offended that Reb Ber had not heeded his warning. On the contrary, seeing the drastic change for the better in Reb Ber, he asked him for a detailed description of the Rebbe’s ways.

Reb Ber related all that he knew, and Rabbi Yudel was so excited by what he heard, that he called over his friend, Rabbi Shmuel Isaac, and enthusiastically repeated to him all that he had just heard. Since these two *tzaddikim* were sincere and passionate in their quest for the right path in *avodas Hashem*, they decided immediately that they must travel to the Rebbe. Despite the fact that the Rebbe was several years younger than they were, their fiery enthusiasm was so contagious, that soon their entire group was persuaded to join them in preparation for traveling to the Rebbe.

Dashiv is quite far from Medvedivka, and these men were so poor that they had no money whatsoever for travel expenses. Yet they were not deterred. Their hearts aflame with yearning, they set out on foot.

On the way they reached the town of Terhovitz, where they entered the *bais medrash* of the Maggid. There, too, they heard wondrous praises of the Rebbe, for the Maggid of Terhovitz was already a follower of the Rebbe. They even managed to inspire several more individuals to join them in their trek to the Rebbe.

When they finally arrived in Medvedivka their joy was boundless. Even before they met the Rebbe in person, their souls were already suffused with feelings of intense sweetness and pleasure, in accordance with the words of *Chazal (Sanhedrin 94)*: “Even though he does not see, his *mazal* - spirit - (senses and) sees.”

Since Rabbi Yudel was the oldest, the group unanimously agreed that he should be the first one to go in to speak with the Rebbe.

The Rebbe was pacing back and forth in his room with intense devotion. When Rabbi Yudel entered, and saw the Rebbe pacing back and forth, totally oblivious to his presence, he just stood and stared at the Rebbe with fear and trepidation. Suddenly the Rebbe stopped in front of Rabbi Yudel, and asked him, “What do you want?” Rabbi Yudel was a *tzaddik* and learned scholar who was well-versed in the writings of the *Arizal*. He responded, “I have come here so that the Rebbe may teach us a way to serve God.”

The Rebbe replied skeptically, quoting (*Tehillim 67:3*) “ ‘To make known your ways on earth?’ One who is still deeply entrenched in earthly matters wishes to know how to come closer to God?” These words threw Rabbi Yudel into such a panic that he retreated to the doorway, terrified to come any closer or even to utter a word.

The Rebbe proceeded to smile benignly to him, and slowly his fear melted away. “Why should you fear me?” the Rebbe asked. “I’m a human being just like you, except that I’m smarter than you.” He continued speaking to him in this vein, until Rabbi Yudel found himself back in his former spot, right near the Rebbe.

Once again the Rebbe began casting a powerful fear over Rabbi Yudel, so that the latter was soon backed up against the doorway for the second time. Then the Rebbe became friendly to him, repeating

his previous words, “Why do you fear me? I’m a person just like you, except that I’m smarter than you.”

This scenario repeated itself several times, until Rabbi Yudel became so shaken up and broken-hearted that he burst into tears. He began speaking to the Rebbe with great simplicity and truth. The Rebbe, in turn, shared with him marvelous and awesome thoughts, until Reb Yudel submitted himself completely to the Rebbe, resolving to remain by his side forever.

Now it was Rabbi Shmuel Isaac’s turn to go in to the Rebbe. As big and strong as he was, he spoke from the heart, with complete simplicity and innocence. The Rebbe revealed to him the idea of *hisbodedus*, to make a habit of speaking to God the way one converses with a friend, and to tell Him everything that presses on one’s heart.

The Rebbe seized Rabbi Shmuel Isaac near his heart, exclaiming, “Because of a little blood you should lose this world and the next?! You ought to be sighing a lot!” The Rebbe explained to him that he should get into the habit of sighing frequently, as well as talking to his limbs, until he would merit to purify himself and reach the level of feeling (*Tehillim 109:22*): “And my heart is hollow within me.” The Rebbe cautioned him to indulge in the habit of talking to his limbs during times of spiritual devotion, and that he should explain to them that all physical enticements are meaningless, for ultimately every person dies and is buried, and all the limbs disintegrate.

The Rebbe continued in this vein until Rabbi Shmuel Isaac became inspired to throw himself with his whole being into the service of God. He, too, decided then and there that he would always stay with the Rebbe.

In a similar fashion the Rebbe influenced the entire Dashiv group, so that when they returned home they became devoted to serving God with sincerity and prayer, going out regularly into the fields and forests where they spent entire days engaged in spiritual devotions. Within a short time they all rose to tremendous spiritual heights, composing numerous wonderful insights on Torah topics.



Rabbi Yudel and Rabbi Shmuel Isaac soon came to a conclusion together: It made no sense for them to have such a great Rebbe and live so far from him. They began making the necessary arrangements to move with their families to Medvedivka, to be close to their Rebbe and to be able to visit him every day. The Rebbe was very attached to them, and they joined the ranks of his most important disciples.

When Rabbi Yudel and Rabbi Shmuel Isaac moved to Medvedivka, the Rebbe told them that he wished he could possess the trips that they made to him, because for each step that they took in their travels, an angel was created. They promptly responded, “Even before setting out on the trip, we invested a lot of effort to prepare for the trip. For example, procuring the wagon was itself a major hassle.” “And that is certainly included in the deal,” replied the Rebbe. “Even from the steps you took to procure the wagon an angel was created.”

When he first became close to the Rebbe, Rabbi Yudel once asked the Rebbe to show him a miracle. “Wait till after *Shabbos*,” the Rebbe replied. Rabbi Yudel did so, and after *Shabbos* he came to the Rebbe, who told him the following story.

“In a nearby village lives a man with whom I am somewhat acquainted. For several years he had no children, so he came to me several times to beg me to entreat God on his behalf. I promised him that, with God’s help, he would have a son, but I attached a condition to my blessing: every six months he was to bring me one *rendel*. Next Tuesday this man is supposed to bring me my *rendel*, but I know that he will not keep his word and bring it to me, because his brother-in-law is pressuring him not to give it to me, with the excuse that this miracle came about thanks to other *tzaddikim* whom he petitioned on his brother-in-law’s behalf. The brother-in-law spoke so convincingly to him that he persuaded him to stop bringing me the *rendel*. You’ll see that instead of bringing me a *rendel* on Tuesday he will bring me his dead child.”

Everything turned out exactly as the Rebbe had predicted. On Tuesday the man came crying bitterly that he knew his child had died because he had decided to stop bringing the *rendel* to the Rebbe due

to his brother-in-law's persuasion. He deeply regretted his decision, but it was too late.

From the Rebbe's words it is apparent that the semi-annual donation of a *rendel* served to redeem the child from an unfortunate fate of harsh judgment, but as soon as the donation was no longer forthcoming the harsh judgment prevailed and the child died. Had he continued to obey the Rebbe, the child would have lived.

From then on, Rabbi Yudel was drawn ever closer to the Rebbe, who guided him in his service of God according to his level, until he merited, thanks to the Rebbe's advice, to rise to great heights in serving Hashem, spending hours immersed in devotions and holy concentrations.

Right from the start the Rebbe said to him, "I demand one thing from you: that you not become a *chassid*." The Rebbe went on to explain that he was referring to various practices, such as those connected with bodily cleanliness, drinking tea in the mornings, smoking a pipe, etc., practices in which Rabbi Yudel indulged. The Rebbe enlightened him with his advice regarding serving God in simplicity and innocence, revealing to him that only through talking to God like a real "prostak" would he merit to ascend to great spiritual heights and to cleave to God, so that he would merit seeing the Names of God glowing before his eyes at all times.

The Rebbe was extremely fond of Rabbi Yudel, and frequently spoke with him at length about the awesome spiritual heights he had attained. On one occasion the Rebbe boasted to him about his own accomplishments with respect to abolishing all of his earthly desires. He explained that many *tzaddikim* were able to destroy their desires, but only when they were old. That someone should do so at the Rebbe's young age was unheard of. The Rebbe stated that he knew for a fact about several great *tzaddikim* who had divested themselves of all worldly desires in their older years, while he had reached that level during his early teenage years. He went on to elaborate how far removed he was from physical desire, so much so that he was actually repulsed by food, and it was extremely difficult for him to eat anything. He would think about what happens with the food once

it is digested, at which point the only way he could continue eating was by distracting himself through talking during mealtimes. This was the only way he could partake of the minimum amount of food required to sustain life. With regard to his success in overcoming all sensual desire, the Rebbe testified that he was indeed unique in this respect.

Many hardships lie in the path of one those who desire to be close to the Rebbe, and Rabbi Yudel was no exception. The Satan knows that if one merits to get close to the Rebbe, even if he is the lowliest person on earth, he will eventually find his path to God through the Rebbe's guidance and advice, and if he is already quite righteous he will attain unimaginable heights. Therefore, the Satan plants seeds of doubt in the person's mind, or he places other seemingly impregnable barriers in the person's way, in order to discourage him. Therefore, the Satan made numerous attempts to cool the relationship between Rabbi Yudel and the Rebbe. At one point people came to tell Rabbi Yudel that the Rebbe was angry with him. Rabbi Yudel was so upset that he became terrified to go see the Rebbe. However, after three days of pining away with intense longing he decided that, come what may, he would muster all his courage and go in to the Rebbe.

By means of divine inspiration the Rebbe understood how people had attempted to distance Rabbi Yudel from the Rebbe by lying to him. As soon as Rabbi Yudel entered, the Rebbe addressed him, "When one wishes to approach truth, falsehood intensifies. And when one surmounts the barriers and destroys them, then *sheker* (falsehood) becomes *kesher* (attachment). From now on you will remain attached to me as long as you live!"

Rabbi Yudel also suffered another agonizing experience. One day the Rebbe was discussing a Talmudic topic with some of his disciples, who disagreed with his view. Rabbi Yudel was asked to decide who was right.

Rabbi Yudel declared that the disciples were right. The Rebbe declared, "Do you agree that if I prove to you that I am right, you will be flogged?"

Rabbi Yudel accepted this decision.

The Rebbe went on to demonstrate the accuracy of his point of view, and Rabbi Yudel received a beating. During the beating, Rabbi Yudel began feeling sorry for himself, regretting his decision to agree to the flogging. When he arrived home, he found his daughter in a very weak condition.

He immediately returned to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe told him, "There was once a miller in Danzig who ground flour on twenty-four millstones. The mill was haunted by an evil spirit who ruined all the work at the mill. The miller consulted a witch, who advised him to leave one of the twenty-four millstones for the evil spirit, so that at least the remaining twenty-three stones would work."

The Rebbe was referring to Rabbi Yudel's daughter. He continued, "If you had not had negative thoughts regarding the beating, your daughter would have recovered completely. As it is, she will lose one body part, but will regain the use of all her other body parts." Indeed, one of her little fingers atrophied, but she recovered from her illness.

Stories like this happened only in the beginning of Rabbi Yudel's attachment to the Rebbe, when he encountered numerous obstacles. However, after he surrendered his mind completely to the Rebbe he rose to tremendous spiritual heights and achieved phenomenal greatness throughout his life. He performed open miracles and perceived many wondrous and awesome miraculous visions.

The Rebbe's fame continued spreading in Medvedivka, where he attracted numerous followers. He brought them all closer to God, until they became *tzaddikim* in their own right. The Rebbe advised many of them to study the holy book *Mesillas Yesharim*.

The Rebbe also became famous for performing miracles and dispelling judgments that hover over an individual. He once said, "I don't know how other *tzaddikim* are able to make a *pidyon* (redemption), for it is necessary to be familiar with all twenty-four Heavenly courts. Thus, when one brings a *pidyon* one must know in which of these courts the person is being judged. Otherwise, he may make a certain *pidyon* which removes the judgment of one Court, but in reality the person is being judged by another Court. It is vital



to know in which Court the person is being judged, and which *pidyon* dispels judgment there.

“I am familiar with all twenty-four Heavenly Courts. I can even take an appeal from one Court to another. In other words, if I am not pleased with the judgment of one Court, I can appeal to any of the other twenty-three Courts in succession, until I am satisfied with the verdict. At the very least, by means of these lengthy appeals I accomplish a postponement of the verdict. If the individual should happen to perform a good deed in the meantime it could influence the verdict in his favor.

“If all else fails, I still have the option of appealing directly to the King, an act that requires profound skill and wisdom, so much so that no-one in this generation or in any previous generation was able to achieve this. One must know how to present the request succinctly, while simultaneously according the proper respect to the King by not sending Him too many appeals, etc.”

The Rebbe also said, “I do not know how to make a *pidyon*, for one can only do this if one knows how the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) handled the scapegoat on Yom Kippur.”

Bearing in mind that the Rebbe never stopped for even a moment in his pursuit of *avodas Hashem*, one can construe from the Rebbe's greatness and his accomplishments during his early years in Medvedivke how much more he achieved in his later years.

With reference to his statement regarding appealing a case before the King, the Rebbe stated, “Sometimes you might see me write something on a piece of paper, after which I burn it. *I am sending a message via the smoke.*” Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai also makes reference to this matter in the *Zohar*.

The Rebbe once said that he could not understand how a person could accept a *pidyon* (donation) from a supplicant, listen to a description of his afflictions, and not feel the pain as though he himself was suffering from that illness, etc. From his words it is clear that when someone came to ask him to pray on behalf of a sick person he felt as though he himself was that sick person. He

expressed this on several occasions. The Rebbe also stated, “In the beginning I used to pray to God that I should feel Jews’ pain, for it happened several times that a person came to tell me about his problems and I did not feel the pain. So I begged Hashem to help me feel Jews’ pain. Now, when someone tells me his problems, I hurt more than he does, for he can get distracted by other thoughts whereas I cannot.”

One of his followers once requested of the Rebbe not to forget about him. “How could I forget about you?” the Rebbe replied. “Each of you has a place in my heart!”

The Rebbe also asserted that he found it difficult to fall asleep, because before he sleeps the six hundred thousand letters of the Torah come and stand before him.

He said that before a person falls asleep he sees the souls of his deceased relatives and of those who are descended from the same branch of the family as he is, just like a person sees before he dies. And yet, even before death there are various level of seeing. A holy person sees the souls clearly, while an average person sees the vision pass before his eyes in a flash. Since sleep is equivalent to one-sixtieth of death, the images that flash by before one falls asleep are likewise equivalent to one-sixtieth of the images one sees before death. That is why a person is not aware of it. But in reality everyone sees this before falling asleep.

During this period, a certain young man by the name of Rabbi Aharon became a follower of the Rebbe. Rabbi Aharon, who was an exceptional scholar and very pious, later became the *Rav* in Breslov. Rabbi Aharon’s encounter with the Rebbe came about because Rabbi Aharon had an aunt, his mother’s sister, who lived with her husband in Medvedivke near the Rebbe. His aunt was an ardent believer in the Rebbe. Once when she celebrated a family *simcha* to which she invited all her relatives, including Rabbi Aharon, the Rebbe said to her, “If your nephew shows up, send him to me immediately.”

As soon as Rabbi Aharon arrived she gave him the Rebbe’s message, but unfamiliar as he was as yet with the Rebbe, he was in no hurry to go. He had just arrived from a long trip, cold and

exhausted, and he had no intention of going out. However, his aunt insisted, “You must go to the Rebbe; he asked for you.” Having no choice, he set off, bundled up in his heavy winter coat, as he was still thoroughly frozen from his frigid journey.

As soon as Rabbi Aharon entered the Rebbe’s room, the Rebbe welcomed him. “I see you’re cold. Here you will have a chance to warm up!” The Rebbe proceeded to talk to him in his inimitable ingenious manner. Before long Rabbi Aharon was confessing to him and confiding in him, becoming so entranced by the Rebbe that he decided then and there to become a devoted follower of the Rebbe. He even extended his visit with his aunt so that he would have a chance to spend more time in the Rebbe’s proximity.

One day, when they both went together to the *mikva*, the Rebbe said to Rabbi Aharon, “You performed a fine immersion, but when you’ll be a more devoted follower of mine, you’ll be able to immerse with even greater spiritual devotion.” Apparently, the Rebbe knew through divine inspiration exactly which holy names and devotions Rabbi Aharon had in mind during his immersion, which was why he said that to him.

The Rebbe was extremely fond of Rabbi Aharon, even telling him outright, “I love you very much, and therefore I shall bless you. My blessing to you is that in the World-to-Come you should merit to understand the deep meaning of my casual talk.”

Another new devoted follower of the Rebbe during this period was R. Chaikel Chazan, whom the Rebbe extolled, saying that he possessed the power of song from its source. R. Chaikel’s great love for the Rebbe resulted in his becoming almost like a family member in the Rebbe’s household, for he came very frequently. R. Chaikel’s brother, R. Yitzchok, also became a devoted follower of the Rebbe.<sup>7</sup>

During those days in Medvedivke, the Rebbe used to fast frequently, a fact that he kept secret from all, including his own wife. Only his attendant knew, and he was sworn to secrecy. All the food that his wife prepared for him, the Rebbe gave to his attendant to eat. This went on for a long time.

Since R. Chaikel was practically a member of the Rebbe's household, he began to suspect that something was amiss with the Rebbe's eating habits. Soon he figured out that the Rebbe was, in fact, fasting, while the attendant was consuming his meals. One Wednesday, R. Chaikel found the Rebbe in an extremely weakened state, for in those days he was fasting from one *Shabbos* to the next. He said, "The Rebbe should eat, for the Rebbe is very weak. If the Rebbe will not eat, I shall tell the secret!"

Since the Rebbe's principle was not to be insistent, he replied, "Nu, Chaikel, prepare some soup."

R. Chaikel immediately sprang into action. He ran to the *shochet* with a chicken, plucking its feathers on his way back so as to speed up the process and have the soup ready for after *maariv*. He prepared the soup and put it up to boil. By the time the Rebbe finished *maariv*, R. Chaikel presented him with a fresh bowl of chicken soup.

Before he even looked at the soup, the Rebbe ordered, "Nu, Chaikel, sing the *frummer niggun* (referring to the familiar song "*Me'in olam haba*")!" When R. Chaikel finished the Rebbe asked him to repeat it, and this went on several times, while the Rebbe sat and listened, deep in thought. Each time R. Chaikel finished the song, the Rebbe motioned with his hand for him to repeat it. Finally the Rebbe asked him to go outside and check whether it was still nighttime. In fact, a new day had dawned while R. Chaikel was singing. The Rebbe left the soup untouched as he went to pray *shacharis*. He resumed his fast and broke it only after the week's end.

As the Rebbe's followers increased in number he began facing some opposition in Medvedivke. Once, while he was leading a *tisch* the Rebbe repeatedly sang (*Tehillim 124:1*) "*If not for Hashem Who was with us...*" Then he turned towards his followers and said, "None of you can, as of yet, consider himself to be my follower, for there will come a time when the entire world will rise up against me, and only then whoever will stand by my side can truly be considered as a follower of mine." In the end the Rebbe had so many close friends and followers that all his enemies fell before him.



During this time, a match was suggested for the Rebbe's daughter. Yitzchok Eizik was the son of Rabbi Leib Dobrovner, a prosperous man who lived in the town of Krimenchuk. He was the same age as the Rebbe's second daughter, Sarah. Rabbi Leib sent word that he was willing to go ahead, but the Rebbe was not interested. "Rebbe, you're inviting additional opposition by refusing this match!" Rabbi Chaikel blurted out to the Rebbe, for Rabbi Leib was already related by marriage to several contemporary *tzaddikim*, and by declining the match the Rebbe was hinting that they were all not good enough for him, thereby triggering renewed opposition. Once again, in accordance with his policy of not being insistent, the Rebbe declared, "Let him pay one thousand *rendlech* (an exorbitant amount of money)!" He was sure that Rabbi Leib would not agree to this condition. However, Rabbi Leib immediately agreed and the match was finalized between his son, Yitzchok Eisik, and Sarah, the Rebbe's second daughter. (The Rebbe's oldest daughter, Adel, was not yet engaged.)

Rabbi Binyomin Peterburger was another close follower of the Rebbe. He was the one who used to write down the Rebbe's Torah discourses, and wherever the words "*lashon chaverim*" are found in *Likutei Moharan* they refer to Rabbi Binyomin Peterburger, though his language is not precise.

Although he already had many followers who demanded his time and attention, the Rebbe still spent much of his days in Medvedivka serving Hashem with utmost devotion, locked in his room. Often he would also go out to the fields and mountains around Medvedivka, where he would stay all day and sometimes all night.

One of his favorite spots for *hisbodedus* was a plateau at the top of a very high mountain. He also had other spots where he like to hide out from society, spending days on end there, in simple isolation with his Creator, disregarding the fact that he was already by then a famous *tzaddik*.

After numerous years spent in spiritual yearning, the Rebbe attained such a high level of devotion to God, that he became completely nullified before Him. The Rebbe once expressed himself

by declaring that he had reached the point where he could only perform his public duties with great self-sacrifice.

He related that every time he was about to recite *kiddush*, even before he uttered the first word he felt like he was going to pass out. So, too, before he was about to repeat words of Torah. This is why the Rebbe never led the congregation in prayer, nor anything similar, such as reading the *megilla*, reading from the Torah, or announcing the *tekios* before blowing the *shofar*. He said that even reciting the *kaddish* on his mother's *yahrzeit* was difficult for him.

The Rebbe attained such a lofty spiritual awareness and devotion to God, that he actually felt mortified before Him, just like a person who is ashamed in front of his friend. When contemplating the enormity of God's greatness he would feel his face turning all colors due to embarrassment.

His eyes would sparkle, particularly on Friday nights, when his entire countenance was aflame. Those who were fortunate enough to behold it, to hear him reciting *kiddush*, to be present at his *tisch*, to hear him singing "*askinu seudasa*", "*azamer bishvachin*", "*kol mekadash*", "*menucha vesimcha*", "*aishes chayil*", and "*me'ein olam ha'ba*", treasured it their entire life. They felt sure that until the arrival of *Mashiach* there would never again exist such a blissful experience. (It is impossible to convey the breathtaking beauty and awesome holiness of the Rebbe's wondrous devotions, all conducted with extreme humility. This was only what we were able to grasp with our limited understanding, and does not include the profound secrets hidden therein.)

Before *kiddush* the Rebbe stood, holding the cup in his hand, while a soft sound of yearning emanated from his lips as he rose to great spiritual heights. After a long while he finally began, with breathtaking sweetness, "*Yom hashishi...*"

It is impossible to describe the holiness and trepidation felt at the Rebbe's Friday night *tisch*. One Friday night, the Rebbe and his *chassidim* all washed for bread, and after the Rebbe partook of his slice he went into a deep trance, sitting silently, with eyes wide open, all night. No food was served, for fear of disturbing his lofty thoughts.

At daybreak the Rebbe said *birchas hamazon* (Grace after Meals) and left the room.

The Rebbe's brother, Rabbi Yechiel, once visited Medvedivke to spend a *Shabbos* with him. Rabbi Yechiel ended up joining the ranks of the most ardent followers of his brother as a result of this visit. On Friday night he was very impressed with the Rebbe's conduct, but at the *Shabbos* day meal he disapproved of the mundane topics of conversation that he heard the people discussing with the Rebbe.

On *Motzei Shabbos* he went to see the Rebbe in his room and spoke to him at length about his concern. After listening to his complaint, the Rebbe asked, "Do you recall all the stories that you heard at that meal?" Rabbi Yechiel replied in the negative. "Well, I do," the Rebbe responded. He closed the door and proceeded to repeat each story in great detail, explaining the deeper connotations of each one. The hours flew by, and the two brothers were oblivious to the fact that the sun had come up a while ago, for the window shutters were closed. Glancing at the clock the Rebbe was taken aback when he realized that it was already time to recite the morning *Shema*, and he stopped talking.

Rabbi Yechiel left the room, crying profusely. For several days he was unable to eat or sleep, due to an overwhelming spiritual yearning that the Rebbe's words had aroused in him. All he did was cry all day, longing for more words of awakening and spiritual arousal from his brother. From then on, Rabbi Yechiel became attached with a singular devotion to the Rebbe, remaining his ardent follower for the rest of his life.

The Rebbe was extremely concerned for the welfare of each of his followers. In every conversation he sought to instill in his listener's heart a genuine yearning for *avodas Hashem*. Indeed, his words found their target, arousing the people to abandon everything and devote their lives entirely to serving God, simply and truthfully.

When one of his people once complained to the Rebbe about a lack of money, the Rebbe reprimanded him, saying, "I don't know how you have the heart to bother me with such worldly matters. Am I not like one who spends day and night in the desert, trying

to turn it into a habitable place? Every one of you has a heart that is like a barren desert. There is no place for God's presence in your hearts. I am constantly engaged in trying to cleanse and prepare a dwelling place for the *shechina* in your hearts. Just as much effort and time must be expended to make beautiful items from the wood of a barren tree, by cutting, carving, cleaning, and repairing it with all kinds of tools, so too must I work hard and exert myself for each and every one of you to achieve some sort of rectification – and you disturb me with such nonsense!”

The Rebbe had a knack for engaging in discussions of stories as well as current events, and finding exceptionally lofty concepts embedded in them, so that he always managed to steer the conversation to a spiritual concept, ending up with inspiring discussions of Torah, prayer, and fear of God. Sometimes the discussion would go from one thought to another, until a complete Torah lesson emerged. Thus, the Rebbe elevated the mundane talk of people, utilizing it to imbue them with yearning for Hashem.

Just observing the Rebbe as he was speaking, even of mundane matters, was an inspiring lesson in itself. His face always reflected intense fear of Heaven, and his entire body trembled with fear of Hashem. If he leaned on a table then anyone who touched that table shook, such was the extent of his fear of God.

Only one who merited witnessing his awe can appreciate the meaning of truly living in fear and trepidation of God. His every limb reflected deep love and fear, and bore evidence that here was a *tzaddik* who had literally detached himself from all worldly desires and evil traits, attaining the ultimate level of self-nullification. Although his holiness was far beyond the grasp of an ordinary human mind, it lent him a certain charm, so that by looking at him one sensed one was in the presence of unusual greatness. How had the Rebbe ascended to such unimaginable heights? He had achieved it by years of painstaking effort and toil in prayer and devotion, the primary emphasis of all his holy work. ●



 . . . **JOURNEYS**

One winter's day early in 5558 (1797-1798) Rabbi Shimon visited the Rebbe in Medvedivka and the Rebbe told him, "I have to go somewhere but I don't know where to!"

Rabbi Shimon laughed. "How is that possible? How does one travel without knowing the destination?"

"It is as I say," replied the Rebbe. "I do not know where I must go."

In spite of his qualms, Rabbi Shimon prepared a coach and horses, and everything else the Rebbe required for traveling.

"Can you come along with me?" the Rebbe inquired.

"Why not?" replied Rabbi Shimon.

The Rebbe then explained that there was no telling how long this journey might take. It could last a week or two, one month or three, half a year or even an entire year. Rabbi Shimon found it very strange that a person should set out on a journey without knowing where he was going or for how long. Still, when he saw how earnest the Rebbe was about it, he declared that he was willing to drop everything and accompany him, even if it should turn out to be a lengthy trip.

They set out on the road to Mezibuz, and in the middle of the way Rabbi Shimon requested that they pass the village of Volkhivitz. There they picked up another individual, who joined them. All the way to Mezibuz the Rebbe claimed he still did not know where he was going.

The Rebbe stopped in to visit his parents, who were delighted to see him. After spending about an hour with them, his mother asked, “My son, when will you visit the gravesite of your holy grandfather, the *Baal Shem Tov*?”

“If my grandfather wishes to see me, he will come to me!” was the Rebbe’s reply.

After this the Rebbe went to sleep, and in the morning his mother said to him, “So, now that your grandfather already came to you when will you go to him (to his gravesite)?”

“Later,” the Rebbe replied. “On my way back, God willing, I will go.”

The Rebbe was informed through Divine inspiration that he was to travel to Kamenitz. When they had arrived in Mezibuz Rabbi Shimon fell ill, and the Rebbe was forced to leave him behind. As they parted Rabbi Shimon tearfully asked, “When will I see the Rebbe’s face again? Who knows how long this trip will take, as the Rebbe himself told me in Medvedivka?”

“I won’t be gone for more than eight or ten days,” the Rebbe replied.

“But, Rebbe, you told me back home in Medvedivka that you don’t know yourself how long this trip will take.”

“Then I did not know. But now I know. I must travel to Kamenitz for the length of time that I specified to you earlier.”

Rabbi Shimon refused to allow the Rebbe to leave until the Rebbe promised that upon his return he would find Rabbi Shimon in perfect health and would take him back with him. The Rebbe promised.

That night, in Mezibuz, the *Baal Shem Tov* had appeared to the Rebbe and informed him that he was to travel immediately to Kamenitz.

The Rebbe set out for Kamenitz with the person whom they had picked up in Volkhivitz. Even though the Rebbe was already famous by then, they traveled under the guise of ordinary merchants, with

no publicity or fanfare whatsoever. In fact, the Rebbe warned his travel companion not to reveal his identity to anyone.

Finally, they arrived in Kamenitz, a distance of approximately 150 Km from Mezibuz. At the time it was illegal for a Jew to reside or even spend the night in the town. Any Jew who had business dealings in Kamenitz came there for the day, but left in the evening. The Rebbe entered the city and remained there until dusk, when he instructed his companion to leave together with all the other Jews. He told him to return the next day, when they would meet at the same spot. The Rebbe remained in Kamenitz overnight, unbeknownst to the authorities. To this day no-one knows what he did there all night.

When his companion arrived the next morning at the rendezvous, the Rebbe was already waiting for him. They proceeded to visit several houses, finding a different pretext for visiting each one. In some of the houses the Rebbe offered the inhabitants a drink of whisky, and such. They ended up visiting a good number of houses. No-one knows why.

They returned to Mezibuz, where the Rebbe fulfilled his promise to his dear mother to visit the grave of the *Baal Shem Tov*. Then he fulfilled his promise to pick up Rabbi Shimon. After parting warmly from his parents he returned home to Medvedivka.

After the Rebbe's mysterious overnight sojourn in Kamenitz the law forbidding Jews to live there was repealed. (History books credit Paul I, Tsar of Russia, with introducing the new law permitting Jews to reside in Kamenitz in 1797.)

The trip to Kamenitz was shrouded in mystery. It generated a great deal of speculation, with the spectrum of opinions ranging from positive to negative. However, all of them were mistaken, for even those who found a positive motivation for the Rebbe's trip did not even come close to the Rebbe's real reason for traveling there. And those individuals to whom the Rebbe hinted at the truth, could not fathom the complete truth.

Some said that the Rebbe had gone to find writings of the *Baal Shem Tov* that were entombed in a rock, hidden somewhere in

Kamenitz. When he heard this one, the Rebbe chuckled, saying he had no need for these writings, and that if he had needed those writings they would have been delivered to him in his house.

No sooner had the Rebbe returned home to Medvedivka, than he expressed his intention to travel to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Holy Land). On the first *Shabbos* after he was home he delivered a fiery discourse on the verse (*Tehillim 63:9*) “*My soul cleaves after You*”. He explained, “If after returning from Kamenitz I am able to teach such an awesome lesson, how much more so will I be able to reveal beautiful Torah thoughts after I return from *Eretz Yisrael*.”

Around the time he returned from Kamenitz the Rebbe’s fourth daughter was born, but she died even before he had a chance to name her.

The Rebbe said, “Whoever knows why *Eretz Yisrael* was given first to Canaan and then to the Jews – he knows why I went first to Kamenitz and then to *Eretz Yisrael*.”

On *Erev Pesach*, (when he was just twenty-six years old), as he was leaving the *mikva* he told his companion that this year he would definitely be in *Eretz Yisrael*. On *Pesach*, too, he explained a difficulty in the verse (*Tehillim 77:20*): “*And Your path went through the mighty waters, and Your footsteps were not known*”, whereby he clearly implied that he intended to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*.

During that *Pesach* holiday he also said that he wished to go to *Eretz Yisrael* in order to observe all the 613 commandments in a spiritual sense, so that he should eventually be able to observe all of them physically, by combining those that can be performed only in the Holy Land with those that are performed in the Diaspora.

The Rebbe offered another reason for his desire to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*, namely, he wished to acquire *chochma ila’a* – the Higher Wisdom – for he had already mastered *chochma tata’a* – the Lower Wisdom.

Another reason the Rebbe cited for his wish to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*: until then whenever he had the need to communicate with his grandfather, Rabbi Nachman Horedenker, who is buried in *Eretz*



*Yisrael*, he would send him a message via Rabbi Yeshaya of Samila. However, his grandfather had now ascended to a higher spiritual place, where Rabbi Yeshaya was no longer able to reach him. Thus the Rebbe was compelled to communicate with his grandfather in *Eretz Yisrael* to arrange a different mode of access whereby he would be able to contact him at any time and for any reason.

In addition to all the aforementioned reasons, there were numerous other motives for this journey, motives that the Rebbe only hinted at, or that he did not divulge at all. The Rebbe never did anything for only one reason; he always had numerous deep and esoteric motives for each of his actions. How much more so must he have had numerous important reasons for undertaking this difficult trip, for which he sacrificed himself beyond measure.

When the Rebbe told Rabbi Yudel about his impending journey, Rabbi Yudel gave him his blessing, “Rebbe, surely you intend to accomplish great things there. May God help you achieve your goals,” to which the Rebbe nodded his head in acknowledgement.

Then the Rebbe added, “In truth, everything that I wish to accomplish in *Eretz Yisrael* I could accomplish here, too, through prayer and entreaty alone. I should not need to travel all the way to *Eretz Yisrael* for that. The only difference is that when I merit being in *Eretz Yisrael* I am able to attain my objectives cloaked in garments, whereas here, in the Diaspora, I can only attain them without garments. And this is actually the difference between *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*.”

He proceeded to open the *Arizal's siddur*, showing Rabbi Yudel the *kavanos* describing the difference between *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*: on *Shabbos* the light is cloaked in garments, while on *Yom Tov* the light is not cloaked in garments, as is well-known.

When his wife heard of her husband's plans, she sent her daughter, Sarah, to ask him how they would subsist while he was gone. He replied, “You, Sarah, will go to your in-laws (at the time she was already engaged to the son of Rabbi Leib Dubrovner); your sister, Adel, will take a job as a maid in someone's house; your sister, Miriam, will go to live with someone who will have pity on her; and

your mother will become a cook. I will sell everything I own in order to raise traveling expenses.”

Upon hearing these plans, the ladies of the family burst into tears, crying for days on end. But the Rebbe had no pity on them, insisting that he was going ahead with his plans, for “in any case the greater part of me is already there, and the rule is that the minority must follow the majority.”

The Rebbe told his men, “I want to go to *Eretz Yisrael*. I am fully aware of the numerous obstacles that I will encounter. The Satan will even orchestrate a world war in order to prevent me from taking this trip. (This prophecy was fulfilled when Napoleon set out to conquer the world, as we will see later.) But as long as I am alive I will sacrifice everything in order to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*, and God will do as He sees fit.”

He added, “Each step I take in my quest for reaching *Eretz Yisrael* will come at great expense and sacrifice. Nevertheless, I would like to set out immediately even though I do not have sufficient funds to cover this trip.” His loyal followers promptly went collecting on his behalf in nearby towns, until they gathered a sum that sufficed at least for the first leg of the journey, for the Rebbe was clearly in a hurry and would not be detained much longer.

In the days right after *Pesach*, the Rebbe made his preparations to leave. There was one wealthy and prominent individual who yearned to accompany the Rebbe to *Eretz Yisrael*. He sent several friends to ask the Rebbe on his behalf that the Rebbe should take him along.

The Rebbe summoned this man to him. “I hear that you wish to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*. Is that so?”

“Indeed, it is,” replied the man.

“So what’s keeping you from going?”

“If the Rebbe will take me along, I’ll go!”

“May I ask what is your reason for wanting to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*? You must have a good reason, since there are others, even Arabs, who also desire to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*.”

The man began hemming and hawing. Suddenly the Rebbe's face turned crimson, as he called out passionately to the crowd that was around him, "When someone truly desires to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*, does he say 'if you'll take me, I'll go'? That's how much he wants to travel to *Eretz Yisrael*? If one really wants to go to *Eretz Yisrael* one sets out on foot, as God said to Avraham (*Beraishis 12:1*) '*Go for yourself, from your relatives ... to the land that I will show you.*' God specified '*lech lecha*', to show that if one wishes to merit being in *Eretz Yisrael* one must be willing to literally *walk* there!"

After *Pesach* the Rebbe remained locked in his room for hours on end, without exchanging a word with anyone, much to the dismay of his disciples. Clearly he was preparing for his impending pilgrimage. One of his students plucked up the courage to ask the question that was on everyone's mind. "Rebbe, why are you not talking to us, and why are you not giving us encouragement?" The Rebbe replied that he had nothing to say at this time. Then he added, "I have just discovered, in connection with the verse (*Yeshaya 43:2*) "*When you pass through water, I am with you,*" how one can see the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, whenever one wants to see them. However, I was wondering how it was connected to this verse in particular. Then I realized it must be because I shall soon be crossing the ocean. But this is of no concern to you. I really should present this to you as *mussar* (rebuke), so that it would pertain to everyone, but I don't have the right words now."

The Rebbe began pacing up and down, while the aforementioned student stood before him, quivering with fright at the Rebbe's mysterious words. Suddenly the Rebbe spoke again. "I am the most poverty-stricken of all the great ones! One has money, one has silver, one has villages – but as for me, I have nothing at all! My only consolation is that I keep reminding myself that in the World of Truth they will all need me, and they will all thirst to hear the original Torah insights that I compose every moment. What am I? I am only that which my soul composes. I am the one that the world needs, and I am not referring to such types as you and your ilk. But you are aware of that. I refer to *tzaddikim* who already know how to pray, and yet I can show them that they do not have the faintest idea what prayer

is all about. I can teach them how to pray properly. As for the really great *tzaddikim*, who deal only with *yichudim*, I can show them that they have no inkling of even the basics of these *yichudim*, and I can teach them the correct way of going about with *yichudim*.” And for quite a while the Rebbe continued to speak in this vein. ●



## ... HOLY LAND

A few days before the Rebbe embarked on his trip he shared a secret with Rabbi Yitzchok, the brother of R. Chaikel: he would be accompanying him to *Eretz Yisrael*.<sup>8</sup>

On the eighteenth day of *Iyar*, *Lag Ba'omer*, which fell on Friday, *Erev Shabbos Parshas Emor*, the two left the Rebbe's home in Medvedivka to embark on their trip. They spent *Shabbos* in Sokoly. Later, Rabbi Yitzchok described the incredible miracles that he had witnessed on this trip: As soon as they began traveling they immediately had *kefitzas haderech*. The Rebbe sat in silence, concentrating on his devotions, while the horses flew with astonishing speed, the likes of which Rabbi Yitzchok had never experienced before.

Indeed, in the normal course of events, it would have been impossible to cover a trip between Medvedivka and Sokoly in one day, and especially not on *erev Shabbos*, as it involved a distance of over 188 kilometers. The Rebbe commented that Sokoly would one day be a large town, a prediction that came true when the settlement of Sokoly was transformed into a city by the name of Voznesensk.

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Rebbe's original travel plans, someone other than this Rabbi Yitzchak was going to accompany the Rebbe. But when that individual came to the Rebbe and bragged that he had succeeded in procuring delicious apples to take along as provisions for the trip, the Rebbe's reaction was, "If all you can think about is apples, then you're not the one to travel with me to *Eretz Yisrael*." After all, the purpose of the Rebbe's trip was a spiritual one; food was not the most important item on the agenda. The trip was going to be fraught with danger, so that someone who was busy thinking about apples could surely not be of the spiritual caliber required for undertaking such a trip. Consequently, the Rebbe chose Rabbi Yitzchak, the brother of R. Chaikel, who was very serious in his service of God.

In Sokoly, the *tzaddik* Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, who had passed away ten years earlier, in 1788, appeared to the Rebbe. He revealed to the Rebbe that the holy Name “*Atah - You*” may be used to calm stormy seas, based on the secret meaning of the verse (*Tehillim 89:10*): “*When its waves rise, You calm them*”. (See *Likutei Maharan I, Ch. 256*, where the Rebbe describes how to subdue a storm at sea. Take five pieces of paper, and write on each one the words “*v’rav chesed*” in Hebrew, which has the numerical value of 280. Five times 280 equals 1,400, *alef tav* in Hebrew. Add the letter *hay*, for the five papers, and you have *alef tav hay*, which spells *Atah* in Hebrew. During a storm you cast these five papers into the sea and the storm abates.)

From Sokoly the Rebbe traveled to Nikolaev (Mykolaiv), where he promptly found passage on a merchant ship that was transporting grain to Kherson. They arrived in Kherson several days before *Shavuos*. The Rebbe delivered an inspiring discourse on the verse (*Tehillim 107:29*): “*He would halt the storms to restore calmness*”, as well as on other topics. Several of the followers of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi were present, and they discussed some of their leader’s ideas with the Rebbe, but the Rebbe contradicted the ideas and proved their leader wrong.

On the night of *Shavuos* the Rebbe remained awake all night, as is customary. Before daybreak he went to the *mikva* together with Rabbi Yitzchok. As they were walking, the Rebbe kept asking Rabbi Yitzchok, “Do you hear anything?” but Rabbi Yitzchok replied that he did not. “How can you not hear such sounds?” the Rebbe asked, incredulous, as they continued on to the *mikva*. “Could it be that I am hearing the sound of an orchestra playing?” the Rebbe asked. But Rabbi Yitzchok reassured him that he was hearing nothing of the sort. The Rebbe was mystified. Finally it dawned on Rabbi Yitzchok that the Rebbe must be hearing the thunder and lightning that accompanied *Kabalas haTorah*.

When they reached the *mikva* the Rebbe immersed many times. After he emerged, he told Rabbi Yitzchok, “Now, during *Kabalas haTorah* I finally grasped what is explained in the holy *Zohar* (*Tikkunei Zohar, Tikun 33*): “*There is fear, and there is fear, etc.*” I now know

that there is a type of fear that is even greater than the *yirah ela'a* (higher fear) mentioned there. I have now been granted the privilege of understanding *yiras elokus* (Fear of God), a superior, exalted level of fear and awe.”

Moreover, he said (*Likutei Maharani I, Chapter 148*): “The attribute of fear also has a fear of God, and that fear also has a fear of God, in an endless chain, with each level of fear leading to a higher level of fear encompassing all the previous levels, ad infinitum.”

That year, right before *Shavuot*, on *Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar* (May 19, 1798), Napoleon set sail for Egypt with an army of about 38,000 men. In spite of the havoc this created for travelers, the Rebbe decided to disregard the dangers of traveling during wartime and continue with his itinerary. Immediately after *Shavuot* the Rebbe boarded a ship traveling from Kherson to Odessa.

In those days hardly anyone traveled to *Eretz Yisrael* via Odessa, as this route was considered dangerous. But the Rebbe understood with his superior intellect that it was preferable to travel by boat from Odessa to Istanbul, Turkey, for several reasons. To begin with, it is much shorter than the route commonly traveled at the time, which ran through Galatz (a town in present-day Romania). Additionally, traveling through Galatz involved traversing the dangerous rapids formed by the Danube rushing into the Black Sea. For these reasons, the Rebbe decided not to go with the popular route through Galatz, choosing instead to pave the way for a new, more convenient route. After the Rebbe traveled by this route, it became the preferred one for people traveling to *Eretz Yisrael*.

When they arrived in Odessa, the Rebbe instructed his companion, Rabbi Yitzchok, to purchase a lot of writing paper and ink for him. Then they booked passage on a ship sailing to Istanbul. They departed Odessa with great fanfare, accompanied by a large procession of people singing, dancing, and feasting.

As soon as they boarded ship the Rebbe began writing his Torah insights, warning his companion not to read them. After Rabbi Yitzchok gave him his word, the Rebbe let him have the keys to their cabin.

Right at the start of their voyage on the Black Sea, a violent storm arose threateningly, with gusty winds and heavy downpours. Powerful waves rocked the boat, threatening to engulf it. The passengers were forced to remain in their cabins, for fear of being inundated by water. The din of water pounding on the boat was ear-splitting, so that the passengers were terrified and found it impossible to sleep.

Right there on the boat, the soul of a certain individual who was recently deceased came to the Rebbe and spoke with him. Afterwards, the Rebbe asked his companion, “Did you happen to see here the young man from Volkhovitz?” (Some say this was the young man who had accompanied the Rebbe to Kamenitz, and who died shortly thereafter.) Rabbi Yitzchok replied that he had seen nothing.

After four days at sea, the boat arrived at Istanbul. All the passengers disembarked and scattered to their destinations, but the Rebbe and his companion remained at the shore, for they had no idea where to go. In addition to not speaking the local language, they were unable to discriminate between Arab and Jew. They were hoping someone would come along who spoke their language, and who would be able to act as interpreter for them, as well as assist them. Finally, *Hashem* sent someone, who knew their language and who was willing to act as their guide. He helped them find comfortable lodgings in Galata, the northwestern section of Istanbul.

After spending an hour or two in the guesthouse, the Rebbe expressed a desire to leave. The interpreter suggested that perhaps the Rebbe would like to stay in the main section of Istanbul, home of the royal residence of the Turkish Sultan, where it was forbidden for couples to enter, as only males were permitted there. The Rebbe was agreeable to this suggestion, and they took up lodgings in the Old City of Istanbul.

Some of the locals told them that there were several emissaries from *Eretz Yisrael* in Istanbul, including two from their home country, Ukraine, who were on their way home from *Eretz Yisrael*. Upon hearing this, the Rebbe turned to Rabbi Yitzchak and said, “I warn you not to divulge my identity to anyone, even if they should ask you who I am.”



The warning was justified, for immediately upon meeting the two emissaries, one of them recognized Rabbi Yitzchok. “What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I’m traveling with this young man to the Holy Land.”

“And who is he?”

Mindful of the Rebbe’s warning, Rabbi Yitzchok merely replied, “He has a traveling visa from the Austrian Emperor.”

The emissaries concluded that the Rebbe must have been hired by the government to incite controversy against the *tzaddik*, Rabbi Avraham Kalisker and his followers. (At that time a fierce conflict was raging between Kalisker *chassidim* and followers of the “*Baal HaTanya*”. These men suspected that the Rebbe had been hired by the authorities to instigate adversity against Rabbi Avraham Kalisker.) The more they thought about it, the more they were convinced. They began interrogating Rabbi Yitzchok as to whether the Rebbe was carrying a letter of some sort, to which Rabbi Yitzchok responded in the negative.

“What is the purpose of his trip?” they asked.

Rabbi Yitzchok replied, “I don’t know.”

But they refused to believe him, until they were convinced that he, too, was deceiving them. “In truth we have always regarded you as an honest man,” they said to Rabbi Yitzchok, “but we are no longer sure about that. Did you ask your Rebbe, Rabbi Nachman of Medvedivka, whether you should travel with this person?”

“Indeed, I did,” replied Rabbi Yitzchok. But it was to no avail. These men still felt he was hiding something and that the Rebbe was a no-good fellow who was looking to stir up trouble for the Jews in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Finally they approached the Rebbe himself to interrogate him as to his identity and his origins. But he refused to reveal anything. With his profound wisdom he managed to evade their probing questions, leaving them completely baffled. He outwitted their every attempt to extract identifying information from him, until they were totally

confused. Each time they spoke to him he appeared to them as a different person. For example, one day when they asked him whether he was a *Kohen*, he replied, “Yes.” The next day they asked him, out of the blue, whether he was a *Yisrael*, and he again replied, “Yes.”

“How can it be?” they asked. “Yesterday you said you’re a *Kohen* and now you’re saying you’re a *Yisrael*?!” The Rebbe replied, “*Kohen* refers to the attribute of *chesed*, and *Yisrael* refers to a different attribute. Thank God, I have acquired both attributes!”

They became enraged at this response. “Clearly, you are a trouble-maker, which is why you are hiding your identity.” They became filled with such a passionate hatred towards the Rebbe that they began cursing and insulting him. One of them, in particular, tormented the Rebbe for many days on end.

Finally the Rebbe began pleading with them. “I want you to know that I will never reveal my true reason for traveling to *Eretz Yisrael*. I haven’t stated it aloud to anybody. But still, “*How good and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers, moreover, in unity*” (*Tehillim 133:1*), even when one does not know the exact motives of the other?”

“If you will tell us your intention, it will be of great benefit to you,” they replied.

“I have no need of your favors, and I have no intention of telling you my private affairs. On the contrary, it is you who may greatly benefit from me, if you so desire.”

“You speak like one of our famous *tzaddikim*, perhaps like Rabbi Baruch (of Mezibuz), or Rabbi Shalom (Shachna of Prohovich), or even like Rabbi Nachman (himself), all of whom have a similar cryptic manner of speech. But you are certainly not one of them, for you are surely an opponent of the aforementioned *tzaddik*.”

The two men warned the Rebbe that before he even sets foot in *Eretz Yisrael* there will already be a letter there, announcing that he is an enemy spy and an instigator, so that he will not succeed in fooling anyone.

Seeing that their threat did not have any effect whatsoever on the Rebbe, the two plotted a new scheme to prevent him from

continuing on to *Eretz Yisrael*. They approached the ship's agent, a Polish Jew who had married a Sephardic woman from Istanbul. Since he arranged tickets for any Jew who wished to travel he was an influential figure in the city. Additionally, he had ties with the higher authorities through his father-in-law, who was friendly with the governor.

The two mischief-makers approached him. "Please, for Heaven's sake, do not allow this individual to continue his trip. He's out to make trouble, and intends to stop at nothing less than the total expulsion of all Jews from the Holy Land, God-forbid. If you could 'arrange' that something should happen to him, you will be richly rewarded from Heaven."

The Rebbe and his companion were totally unaware of this encounter.

For the remainder of their sojourn in Istanbul the two emissaries went out of their way to harass and abuse the Rebbe. Still the Rebbe refused to divulge his identity, occasionally throwing them off course by speaking in such a way as to cause them to jump to erroneous conclusions. On one occasion he made it seem like he was from Lagorna, and when they realized that he was not, they were furious, multiplying their efforts at antagonizing him. On another occasion it appeared to them from his words that he was the son of the Maggid of Komarna, a controversial figure at the time. When the Rebbe began cursing the Komarner, they retorted, "But isn't he your father!" They realized he was making a fool of them. Every time they called him by a different name he responded automatically. Suddenly they called out, "Yeshaya", for that was the name of the Komarne Maggid's son. The Rebbe immediately responded. For them this was sufficient proof that he was, indeed, the son of the Maggid of Komarna. "So in truth you are the son of the Komarner," they taunted gleefully. But the Rebbe denied it vehemently. When, in the course of conversation they mentioned a certain gift that the Komarner had sent for his son, and the Rebbe begged them to show him the gift, they were once again convinced that this was proof that he must be the Komarner's son. But then the Rebbe again cursed the Komarner.

By now they were infuriated, heaping curses and verbal abuses upon his head. “Why do you keep saying your name is this and your name is that, that you come from here and you come from there?” they shouted. The Rebbe calmly responded, “Each name represents a different attribute, and thank God I embody them all (*Pardes Rimonim, Shiur Koma 5*)”.

The Rebbe made their abusive task easier, by going to great lengths to incite their anger. For example, he would wake them up and begin talking to them, so that they were livid with rage, showering him with the worst curses and insults. One Friday they came home from the *mikva* to find the Rebbe sprawled on his bed, barefoot, and without hat or belt. The Rebbe posed a question to them: “Why is it that during the week my body feels light, and now I feel so heavy I can hardly get up?”

Without batting an eyelash the rascals responded, “Every *erev Shabbos* one’s soul ascends on High, and the *neshama yeseira* comes down to the person (see *Beitza 15b*). With you, your soul left, but you’re not worthy of receiving your *neshama yeseira*, so your body is heavy like a rock.”

“Woe unto you!” the Rebbe replied. “You have no idea what you’re talking about even regarding such a simple topic.”

The Rebbe then requested that they invite him over for *Shabbos*, but they would not hear of it, permitting only the Rebbe’s companion to join them for meals. That *Shabbos* the Rebbe was forced to eat only dairy foods, because they were the only ones in town who had meat from a reliable *shechita*. Even though the Rebbe did not take his meals with them, they still managed to get into a squabble with him that *Shabbos*, with the result that they wanted to throw him out in the street.

In Istanbul the Rebbe invited additional disgrace upon himself by acting ridiculously foolish, running around outside dressed in rags, without shoes or hat, like a lowly peasant, playing ‘war’ with the other youngsters, shouting battle cries and pretending to ‘shoot’.



The Rebbe told Rabbi Yitzchok that he had a reason for inviting ridicule and belittlement upon himself, for without it he would never reach *Eretz Yisrael*. Every bit of disgrace and disparagement was added to his credit, both on the way there and on the way back. The Rebbe knew that numerous obstacles stood in his way to prevent him from arriving in *Eretz Yisrael*. If not for these humiliations and degradations he would have to remain in Istanbul forever, and even die there. Before one can attain greatness, the Rebbe said, one must first descend to the depths of lowliness. This was the reason that his grandfather, the *Baal Shem Tov*, had never reached *Eretz Yisrael*, for he could not lower himself to such depths.

The two emissaries finally prepared to depart for home. The Rebbe instructed Rabbi Yitzchok to present them with food and drink from his own provisions for the way. The Rebbe wanted to send a letter home with them, but they refused to take it. They only agreed to take a letter from Rabbi Yitzchok. So the Rebbe cleverly inserted his letter into Rabbi Yitzchok's letter without their knowledge, and they left.

On their way they were tempted to open the letter, as they were burning with curiosity to learn the identity of Rabbi Yitzchok's mysterious traveling companion. They were hoping to find some clue in the letter. But for some reason they could not find the letter, having forgotten where they had placed it. Only at the border, at Walichei, did they find it, and that was when they learned that the person whom they had so callously antagonized was actually the Rebbe. They were mortified beyond words. The one who had excelled in his vilification of the Rebbe actually died immediately upon his arrival home.

Upon hearing about his death, Rabbi Yitzchok asked the Rebbe, "Doesn't it say (*Mishlei 17:26*) that *'Even for a tzaddik it is not good that someone is punished because of him.'*"

The Rebbe answered him with a parable. "There was once a king who was very fond of the son of one of his ministers. As the boy matured the love that bound them only increased. One day the young man disobeyed the king. The king said, 'Know that even though I love you very much I cannot override the laws of the land.

You deserve the death penalty.’ The king immediately ordered him to be handcuffed and he was thrown into prison.

“While he was languishing in jail awaiting his sentence, the youngster had plenty of time to contemplate his fate. He realized that his agony would be relatively short-lived, lasting only until his death, whereas the king’s agony would be prolonged, for he knew that the king loved him very much and would mourn his death forever. Because he felt sorrier for the king than for himself, he began to think how he could spare the king all that pain.

“After much contemplation he recalled that ‘humiliation is considered like death’ (see *Bava Metzia 58b*). He asked to be brought in front of the king, whom he addressed as follows: ‘Your Majesty, I have come to the conclusion that if my sentence is carried out your suffering will be greater than mine. Yet, you cannot override the law of the land. Therefore, I have devised a plan that would satisfy the law, while sparing Your Majesty the pain of my demise. Allow me to provoke someone’s anger so that he will abuse and humiliate me in public, and let that be considered as though my death sentence has been carried out.

“Moreover, in order to preserve the king’s honor, it will be necessary to issue a death sentence for the person who abused the king’s beloved servant. Therefore, let it be arranged that the one who will be provoked to abuse me is chosen from among the criminals on death row, though people will think that he was executed for mistreating the king’s beloved servant.

“In this way,” the Rebbe explained, “sometimes, when a person humiliates a *tzaddik* he is really doing him a big favor, for if the *tzaddik* was destined to die, the humiliation atones for it, and the *tzaddik*’s life is spared. Still, it is not fitting that one who brings shame upon God’s beloved servant should go unpunished. On the other hand to penalize someone for hurting a *tzaddik* is also not a simple matter, for ‘*Even for a tzaddik it is not good that someone is punished because of him*’ (*Mishlei 17:26*). Therefore, God arranges for the individual who abuses the *tzaddik* to be someone who already deserved to die for other reasons, so that in reality his death is a case of (*Sanhedrin*

91a) 'A dead man died', since he already deserved to die in any case. 'For the ways of God are straight' (Hoshea 14:10) ... 'in Whom there is no wrong' (Tehillim 92:16)."

As soon as the two emissaries departed Istanbul, the ship's agent visited the Rebbe. He showed the Rebbe some letters he had received from contemporary *tzaddikim*, requesting assistance from him on behalf of Jewish travelers, for he was influential with the authorities.

"I want you to know," he said to the Rebbe, "that if you tell me the truth, and reveal to me who you are, all will be well with you. But if not, I am capable of causing you so much trouble, that no amount of money or intervention will save you. Not only will you never reach the Holy Land, but you will end up in prison instead."

Realizing this was no empty threat, the Rebbe immediately revealed the truth to him: that his name was Rabbi Nachman, and that he was a grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov* and of Rabbi Nachman of Horodenke. The agent left in silence.

The next morning the agent reappeared before the Rebbe, with deep respect and humility. "Rebbe, God is with you! You will have much benefit from me, but most of all you will be richly rewarded from Heaven, because of your honesty. If you had not admitted the truth, I would have incarcerated you, and for that I would have had to pay dearly in this world and the next. Now I beg you, please do me the favor of allowing me to help you in any way I can. Perhaps I can book passage for you on a ship, or perhaps there is something else I can do for you, for I am prepared to assist you in any way possible."

The following day the agent once again appeared, bringing good news to the Rebbe. A ship had arrived with Jews from the Diaspora, one of whom was a reliable *shochet*. Among the numerous distinguished passengers on their way to *Eretz Yisrael* was HaRav Zev Wolf (of Czarny-Ostracha), a disciple of the Maggid of Mezrich. When Rabbi Yitzchak was asked by these Jews who his companion was he told them the truth. HaRav Zev Wolf immediately sent for the Rebbe, inviting him to share his lodgings. But the Rebbe refused the offer, stating he was content to remain where he was. The Rebbe still wished to continue engaging in puerile behavior, walking barefoot, without

hat or belt, wearing only the lining of his overcoat, running around the marketplace with the children, laughing and yelling, playing their favorite game, “war”, naming one child “France” and another child another country, engaging in mock battle and pretending to “shoot”, etc.

Unfortunately, an epidemic soon broke out in the house where the Rebbe was staying. Several people sickened and died, so that the Rebbe was forced to leave. Now he had no choice but to accept HaRav Zev’s invitation, at which the latter’s joy was boundless. Rav Zev prepared a lavish welcome feast in honor of the Rebbe, according him the utmost respect and honor.

However, the Rebbe insisted on attempting to ruin the feelings of reverence and love that Rav Zev harbored towards him. Still, “*ahava mekalkeles hashura – love upsets the natural order*” (*Beraishis Rabba, 55:10*), and Rav Zev continued to love the Rebbe unwaveringly. The Rebbe would pray early, so that when Rav Zev led the congregation in prayer, as is customary for a famous leader, the Rebbe would be sitting and eating his meal. He would do this on Friday night, and on *Shabbos* at *shacharis* and *seuda shlishis*.

When Rav Zev sat down to the third meal of *Shabbos*, the Rebbe had already finished *benching* (saying Grace after Meals). He instructed his companion, Rabbi Yitzchok, to go outside and check whether the stars were already visible. Then he quickly prayed *ma’ariv* and recited the *havdala* prayer. He took his pipe and went in to Rav Zev, who had just started *seuda shlishis*. The people who had gathered around Rav Zev watched, open-mouthed, as the Rebbe strode into the room, without his hat or belt, and holding a pipe, no less, in a blatant display of disrespect towards Rav Zev, who was still conducting his *Shabbos* meal. Nevertheless, Rav Zev welcomed the Rebbe warmly, immediately recited Grace after Meals, prayed *ma’ariv*, and recited the *havdala* prayer. Then he proceeded to converse with the Rebbe almost the entire night. Thus, in spite of the superficial conflict, there was still a strong bond between these two *tzaddikim*.

Words do not suffice to describe the details of all the trials and tribulations that the Rebbe suffered in Istanbul, as well as all the



derisive behaviors he engaged in. From his words it is apparent that he was in grave danger there. He was convinced he would remain there, that is, he would die in Istanbul. But *Hashem* in His kindness performed numerous miracles on the Rebbe's behalf, and he survived. However, he did say later that his immature behavior as well as the insults he suffered saved him from certain death.

While in Istanbul, the Rebbe used the opportunity to visit the grave of Rabbi Naftali Katz, author of the *sefer* "*Semichas Chachamim*". This *tzaddik* had also yearned to reach the shores of the Holy Land, but he never lived to see his wish fulfilled, for as soon as he arrived in Istanbul en route to *Eretz Yisrael*, on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of *Teves*, 5479 (1719) he died and was buried there.

Immediately upon his return from visiting the grave of Rabbi Naftali Katz, the Rebbe fell to the floor and lay there for several hours. Then he was gently placed on his bed, where he lay deathly ill all night, as well as the next morning till noon. Eventually he miraculously regained his strength. (According to some, the Rebbe said that Rabbi Naftali Katz had wanted the Rebbe to be buried near him, claiming that "I am lonely here".)

While these events were going on, the world was anxiously following the developments of a major naval war. On the 28<sup>th</sup> day of *Sivan* (June 12, 1798) Napoleon defeated the British, and invaded the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of *Tammuz* (July 1, 1798) Napoleon landed in Egypt, and on the next day he captured Alexandria. Three weeks later, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of *Av* (July 21, 1798), the Battle of the Pyramids took place, during which Napoleon conquered all of Egypt.

However, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Av* (August 1, 1798), at the Battle of the Nile, the English, under Rear Admiral Nelson, defeated the French, who lost all but two of their ships. Napoleon's days of glory were over.

During the month of *Elul*, when the Rebbe was still in Istanbul, Turkey declared war on France, since Egypt had been ruled by the Turkish mamluks. As soon as the Jews of Istanbul became aware of this latest development, especially of the fact that the French were

advancing towards Turkey by sea, the community forbade any Jew from embarking on a sea voyage.

The Rebbe would hear none of it. He was willing to risk life and limb in his quest to reach *Eretz Yisrael*. However, since he did not wish to risk his companion's life, he told Rabbi Yitzchok, "If you do desire you may take money for traveling expenses and return home. I will resume my journey secretly on my own, without the knowledge of the people of Istanbul."

But Rabbi Yitzchok categorically refused to take him up on his offer. "Wherever my lord goes, your servant goes, to death or to life!"

*Hashem* arranged circumstances in such a way that it was not even necessary for them to sneak out behind the back of the Istanbul community. After a day or two they heard that a certain *chacham* from Jerusalem had come to Istanbul to collect funds for the needy of Jerusalem. He had intended to remain in Istanbul for one year, but suddenly he announced, "It has been revealed to me that I must return to Jerusalem immediately, for my last day on earth is approaching. With regard to the French threat, you and your fellow-travelers have nothing to fear, for, with the help of God, no harm will befall you. God will protect you all and ensure your safe arrival, because my burial site has already been established in Jerusalem."

Passage on a big ship was immediately booked, while a call was issued that whoever wished to travel now should come promptly. A huge crowd showed up – men, women, and children, *Sefardi* and *Ashkenazi* alike. The Rebbe and his companion were also among the passengers, having struck a deal with the *chacham* that he would take the Rebbe along with him to Jerusalem, for the Rebbe said he did not wish to remain in *Tzfas* (Safed) or *Teveria* (Tiberias).

On Monday of *Parshas Netzavim*, the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of *Elul*, the ship set sail on the Mediterranean Sea. From the start it encountered a violent storm that placed it in grave peril. Mighty waves "*rose to the Heavens and descended to the depths*" (*Tehillim 107:26*) so that it appeared the ship would capsize at any moment.

The passengers despaired of surviving, and cried out to God in anguish. That night seemed like *Yom Kippur*, with everyone wailing and confessing their sins, praying for forgiveness and salvation. They recited *selichos* and other prayers, and all the while the Rebbe sat in stoic silence. When people noticed this they approached him to inquire why he remained silent and aloof in such a grim time, but he did not respond. Finally, the wife of the Rav of Chatin, who was a learned woman and who had also been screaming and crying all night, came over to the Rebbe, demanding to know how he could remain so quiet. The Rebbe replied, “If only you would all be silent, too, you would accomplish so much more. Try it and see. If you will quiet down the waters will also quiet down.”

And so it was. As soon as they stopped wailing and became silent, at the crack of dawn, “*He halted the storm to restore calmness, and their waves were stilled. And they rejoiced...*” (*Tehillim 107:29-30*).

After a couple of days the ship’s entire supply of drinking water was depleted. All that was left was one container of putrid water, crawling with worms. It was rationed evenly among the passengers, with each one receiving about one ounce. The danger they now faced was even greater than their previous peril, for they were now at serious risk of becoming dehydrated. Once again every man, woman, and child prayed for their lives. Presently a mighty wind gathered speed overhead, but this time it was to their advantage. Within forty-eight hours the ship entered the port of Yafo, pushed by a fast wind that blew in the right direction.

The Rebbe wanted to disembark immediately in order to go with the *chacham* to Jerusalem. But *Hashem* had other plans. Some Arabs, taking note of his foreign clothing and strange appearance, including his long *peyos*, decided that he must be a French spy, particularly as he did not speak their language. No amount of begging or pleading would convince them otherwise.

Thus the Rebbe had no choice but to remain on the ship, although it was two days before *Rosh Hashanah*. The captain had planned to rest at anchor for several days, but suddenly, mighty waves appeared out of the blue, threatening to sink the ship. The captain was totally

baffled, for nothing the crew did seemed to help. He had never seen anything like this before. When he began asking around for some explanation to this mystery, some *sefardi chachamim* told him that according to their tradition this was the very spot where the prophet Jonah had been cast into the water. Since in any case the ship could not remain there for one more night, the captain decided to hurriedly raise anchor and move from there.

On the eve of *Zechor Bris* they arrived at the port of Haifa, dropping anchor near Mount Carmel, opposite the Cave of Elijah. At daybreak the entire assemblage joyously recited *selichos*, after which they prayed *shacharis*. Then they all disembarked from the ship and set foot on the Holy Land. ●



 . . . **IN ERETZ YISROEL**

On *Erev Rosh Hashana* 5559 (1798), the Rebbe disembarked from the ship, at the foot of Mount Carmel, opposite the Cave of Elijah. He had finally arrived at the destination of his dreams, for which he had yearned during so many years, and for which he literally risked his life. Words are inadequate to describe the Rebbe's ecstasy at that moment. In those first moments, after walking four cubits in the Holy Land, he declared that he had already accomplished all of his intended goals for this journey.

The Rebbe and his companion rented lodgings in an inn. In the afternoon they went to the *mikva* and from there they went to *shul*, where they remained till nightfall. On that first night of *Rosh Hashana* the Rebbe prayed at length, as was his custom, though this time he prayed with unusually intense devotions. In fact, Breslover *Chassidim* have a tradition that this was then the Rebbe merited divining the true concept of *Rosh Hashana*, and that this was the first *Rosh Hashana* when many people gathered around the Rebbe. The Rebbe himself stated, "My *Rosh Hashana* is special. *Hashem* knows that I did not inherit this from my forebears, but that it is a gift which He gave me Himself: namely, I have grasped the deep secret of *Rosh Hashana*. The entire world is dependent on my *Rosh Hashana*."

After the Rebbe concluded his prayers, he returned to his lodgings in a joyous frame of mind. Every couple of minutes he told Rabbi Yitzchok, "You are so lucky to be here with me!" He asked him to read aloud the list with names of people who had requested that

he pray for them in *Eretz Yisroel*. Then they partook of the *Yom tov* meal, while the Rebbe was in a state of extreme joy. After the meal they went to sleep.

The next morning, they went to *shul* for prayers. When they came home the Rebbe's joy abruptly evaporated. He became somber and morose, refusing to exchange a word with anyone.

On Thursday, *Tzom Gedalya*, (the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of Tishrei), the Rebbe suddenly decided he wanted to go home. He had no desire to visit any site in *Eretz Yisroel*, not even Tzefas or Teveria. Rabbi Yitzchok, on the other hand, had a strong desire to visit the holy sites. Consequently, he did not want to return home yet. He came to inform the Rebbe that a caravan was about to depart for Teveria. The Rebbe replied, "You want to go to Teveria? Go hire some donkeys."

Rabbi Yitzchok did so, and gave a deposit for the donkeys. When he returned, the Rebbe asked him, "So, did you hire donkeys?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Go right back and ask for a refund of your deposit!" the Rebbe ordered. "If they won't comply, let them keep the deposit. I don't want to go there."

After a couple of hours Rabbi Yitzchok began feeling unwell. Now he was grateful to God for having prevented him from traveling with that caravan.

In the meantime, news of the Rebbe's arrival had reached the cities of Tzefas and Teveria. Several leaders of the Sephardic community, as well as Rabbi Avraham Kalisker, sent a delegation to the Rebbe inviting him to visit them. These men arrived just before *Yom Kippur*, bearing a letter signed by many great *tzaddikim*, all of whom requested that the Rebbe join them in Teveria for *Sukkos*. But the Rebbe ignored their request.

The Rebbe spent *Yom Kippur* in Haifa with the delegation from Teveria. Then he sent Rabbi Yitzchok to purchase *esrogim*. Rabbi Yitzchok went to a certain *chacham* who lived there, paid him twenty *paries*, and obtained three beautiful *esrogim* from an Arab's field.

While the Rebbe was in Haifa a young Arab frequently visited him, sitting near him and talking to him in an incomprehensible language. He showed up at each meal, both during the day as well as in the evening, displaying great affection towards the Rebbe. On one occasion he arrived in an uncharacteristic rage, armed with weapons, and began shouting at the Rebbe. Due to the language barrier the Rebbe had no idea what he was saying. A woman from Wallechai who happened to be present said to the Rebbe, “Run for your life! The Arab is saying he wants to engage you in a duel.”

The Rebbe escaped to the house of Rabbi Zev of Charne-Ostroho, who also happened to be visiting Haifa at the time. The latter concealed the Rebbe in a hidden chamber.

Soon thereafter, the Arab reappeared at the Rebbe’s inn, asking, “Where is my friend? I want to tell him how much I love him. I want to give him my horse and donkeys so that he can join the caravan to Teveria. From now on he has no reason to fear me!”

Indeed, when the Rebbe returned to his inn, the Arab sat in silence near him, smiling benignly. From then on the Arab displayed only friendliness towards the Rebbe.

This entire incident with the Arab is very strange and mysterious. The Rebbe explained that he suffered more from the Arab’s love than from his hatred and anger. (Later the Rebbe said that he had been in mortal danger from this Arab, who was none other than the Satan in disguise, and he thanked God that he was spared from his evil clutches.)

The Rebbe spent *Sukkos* in Haifa. On Friday, the second day of *Chol Hamoed*, they all visited the Cave of Elijah on Mount Carmel, including the Rebbe. There they sang and danced with great joy, that is, everyone but the Rebbe, who appeared somber and heartbroken. Rabbi Zev asked Rabbi Yitzchok to explain why the Rebbe was so despondent since *Rosh Hashana*, but Rabbi Yitzchok had no answer. Years later when the Rebbe was describing his visit to the Cave of Elijah he commented, “I envisioned *Eliyahu* standing on this very spot and having *hisbodedus*.”

On Wednesday, *Simchas Torah*, there was lively dancing in *shul* during *hakafos*, especially amongst the *Chassidim*. Once again, the Rebbe was present but did not participate, merely sitting in silence, with bowed head. (This was typical of the Rebbe: before he attained his spiritual objectives he was frequently heartbroken, engaging in continuous prayers and *hisbodedus*.)

On Thursday, *Isru Chag*, the Rebbe said to Rabbi Yitzchok, “*Baruch Hashem* I have accomplished my goals on the most excellent terms. Originally I had planned to say a while longer out of my love for the Land, but now I have decided to return home. Please book us passage on a ship to Istanbul.”

Rabbi Yitzchok refused to hear of it. He did not want to return home before going to Teveria, etc. Once again the Rebbe said to him, “You wish to visit Teveria? Go hire donkeys for the trip,” in his characteristic manner of never insisting on having his way. Rabbi Yitzchok hired donkeys, and soon they were on their way to Teveria.

They arrived to Teveria on Tuesday evening, the 29<sup>th</sup> of *Tishrei*. That entire night the Rebbe did not have a chance to sleep, for a steady stream of people came all night to see him, many of them dressed in their *Shabbos* finery in his honor.

The Rebbe’s first host in Teveria was his cousin, the son of his uncle, Rabbi Shimon, who was a son of the Rebbe’s grandfather, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka. Since his cousin’s house was rather small, more spacious accommodations were found for him. The next day the Rebbe moved to the house of R. Zvi Harker, a very special person who was one of the leading disciples of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Avraham Kalisker sent a message to the Rebbe, apologizing that he could not come to welcome him because he was undergoing a bloodletting procedure that day. The Rebbe replied that he had in any case intended to visit him, which he immediately proceeded to do. Rabbi Avraham Kalisker greeted him warmly, showing him boundless love and respect. He begged the Rebbe to honor him by being his guest, but the Rebbe replied that although



it would be impossible to stay with him the entire time, he would spend a *Shabbos* with him. Then the Rebbe returned to his lodgings.

The next day, Thursday, Rabbi Avraham Kalisker dispatched a messenger to the Rebbe, inviting him for that first *Shabbos*, which was *Parshas Noach*. The Rebbe complied, and spent *Shabbos* at the home of Rabbi Avraham Kalisker.

On Friday night the Rebbe bowed his head for a blessing from his host. Rabbi Avraham was caught so off guard, that he took several steps backward out of shock. Then he began speaking excitedly, so that it was impossible to understand a word of what he was saying. Only his concluding words were comprehensible: “How humbled are we in front of a descendant of the *Baal Shem Tov*!” He refused to bless the Rebbe, agreeing only to bless Rabbi Yitzchok when the latter bowed his head before him.

That Friday night meal was a joyous one. Rabbi Avraham Kalisker requested that the Rebbe should expound some Torah thoughts, but the Rebbe categorically refused. So Rabbi Avraham Kalisker delivered the discourse himself. This was repeated by both the second and third *Shabbos* meals, at both of which the Rebbe refused to comply with his host’s invitation to talk in Torah, and Rabbi Avraham speaking instead. He spoke with such fervor and excitement that it was impossible to understand a word of what he was saying, except for his conclusion, “This is the chief way of serving *Hashem*!”

Apparently the Rebbe did understand Rabbi Avraham Kalisker’s discourse, for he praised it highly. (The Rebbe once said, “I’ve seen many *tzadikim*, but perfection itself I only saw in Rabbi Avraham Kalisker.”)

On *motzei Shabbos* the Rebbe returned to his inn. On Sunday Rabbi Avraham visited the Rebbe and they spoke privately for a long time.

After a couple of days the Rebbe fell ill. He sent a *pidyon* to the holy Rabbi Avraham Kalisker, after which the latter came to visit him every day until he recovered. They were extremely devoted to each other.

During his entire stay in *Eretz Yisroel* the Rebbe was mostly engaged in Torah study and prayer. Each day he wrote down his Torah thoughts, of which he was exceedingly proud, claiming that Torah of the Diaspora is as far from Torah of *Eretz Yisroel* as east is from west. Each day that the Rebbe was in *Eretz Yisroel* he was visited by people from all walks of life, who came to hear his words of wisdom and holiness.

One day he was visited by a great Rav, famous both in *Eretz Yisroel* and in the Diaspora for knowing most of *Shas* by heart as well as being quite knowledgeable in *kabala*. Before he began to speak with the Rebbe, he asked that everyone leave the room. Only Rabbi Yitzchok remained. This Rav began pleading that the Rebbe should reveal to him his real reason for coming to *Eretz Yisroel*. “We know that his honor did not come to *Eretz Yisroel* with *mochin dekatnus*, the usual, small-minded intentions of most simple men, such as walking four cubits in the Holy Land in order to merit the World-to-Come, and such. Surely his honor came here with *mochin degadlus*, namely, to attain lofty concepts in *avodas Hashem*. It is our wish, therefore, to learn which aspect of *Eretz Yisroel* his honor had in mind, and what did he aspire to attain in *avodas Hashem*. For this we are prepared to serve his honor with body, soul, spirit, etc.”

The Rebbe replied, “My dear friend, please do not upset me with this request. It is no small matter for me to reveal to you, Heaven forbid, what this *avoda* is all about, and why I came here. Perhaps I have even sworn not to divulge it ...”

But the Rav would not give up. “Please, I beg his honor, at the very least to reveal to us one of the delightful and most pleasant revelations with which *Hashem* has endowed his honor. Please favor us and endow us, too, with this gift. We have no ulterior motives with this request, other than to hear *chiddushei* Torah from his honor’s mouth, so that it may arouse our hearts anew to serve Him. Perhaps, as an aside, we will also merit to learn and to understand at least a hint regarding our previous question.”

Hearing this the Rebbe’s demeanor was transformed into a flaming, fiery passion. His face blazed with a holy fire. The hair on

his head literally stood on end, and he threw his hat to the floor. Then he began to speak.

“Are you familiar with the secret *kavanos* of *tefillin*?” he asked.

“Some of them,” the Rav replied.

“Impossible! That is not the approach to the *kavanos* of *tefillin* at all! And since you don’t know the *kavanos* of *tefillin* you cannot know the secret of the four *ruchos* (spiritual aspects) of *Eretz Yisroel*. But I shall reveal a hint of this to you.”

As the Rebbe was about to continue, blood began to trickle from his throat.

“You see with your own eyes that I do not have Heavenly consent to reveal this to you.”

The Rav, traumatized, bowed his head in remorse and begged the Rebbe to forgive him for troubling him so, refusing to leave until he had obtained the Rebbe’s forgiveness.

While the Rebbe was in Teveria he received a message from a prominent wealthy *chassid*, Rabbi Moshe, the son of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, suggesting that their children get engaged to each other.

“How can I prevent such a match?” replied the Rebbe, thoughtfully. “Apparently it is *Hashem*’s will that my daughter should be in *Eretz Yisroel*.”

That was all he said. The matchmaker, perceiving this answer as affirmative, brought back the Rebbe’s positive response to Rabbi Moshe, who promptly prepared a lavish feast in honor of the occasion. All the distinguished people of *Eretz Yisroel* attended, both of Lithuanian as well as of Polish origin, to join in the festivities. During the meal there were lively Torah discussions, with the main speaker being the aforementioned Rav who had come to the Rebbe requesting to learn his secret. At one point in their discourse they tried to recall the source of a particular *Rashi*, but it had slipped everyone’s mind. The entire conversation came to a halt, as the elusive *Rashi* was crucial to the discussion. Strangely enough, not

one of the learned guests – each of whom had recently completed reviewing all of *Shas* – was able to recall this source.

All this time the Rebbe was silent, feigning ignorance. But when he noted their anguish, and after they pressed him relentlessly, he finally gave in and declared, “Isn’t this *Rashi* found in the tractate *Zevachim* at the top of this-and-this page?” (Some say he was referring to Page 47a, while others say he was referring to Page 45a, to the section beginning with the words “*hilchesa limeshicha*” – which *Rashi* explains as referring to a law that is applicable only after *Mashiach* comes, and does not pertain to us now. The latter is the more probable reference.)

When they looked up the source their joy knew no bounds, as it was, indeed, exactly what they were looking for. The festivities resumed and even intensified, lasting from the time of *mincha gedola* until dawn, celebrating the engagement of R. Shmuel, the son of Rabbi Moshe, and Miriam, the daughter of the Rebbe.

(After the Rebbe left *Eretz Yisroel* for home, Miriam’s fiancé, R. Shmuel, died. Three years later his father, Rabbi Moshe, also died. In 5565 (1805) Miriam became engaged to the son of Rabbi Leib of Volchisk. Sometime after they were married Rabbi Leib traveled to *Eretz Yisroel*, taking along his son, the Rebbe’s son-in-law, in order to learn with him. After a while Miriam joined her husband in *Eretz Yisroel*, in fulfillment of the Rebbe’s words, “Apparently it is *Hashem*’s will that my daughter should be in *Eretz Yisroel*”, for nothing the Rebbe said ever failed to be realized.)

While the Rebbe was in Teveria there occurred a famous incident involving an informer. This was a man who came from abroad and wished to gain favor in the Pasha’s eyes. He ruined many people’s lives by informing on them to the Pasha. At the time, a number of prominent people had been languishing in a dungeon for nine weeks as a result of this informer’s heinous work, until a delegation of *Sephardim* came to the Pasha bearing an exorbitant sum of money for their release. They caught the informer and choked him, leaving him for dead. In reality he was still alive, having merely feigned death.



As soon as he had a chance, the informer went to the Pasha to vilify the Jews and to denounce their defiance of the Pasha's rule. He continued his vile rantings until the Pasha granted him permission to deal with the Jews as he saw fit.

Accompanied by a procession of Arab soldiers, the slanderer made a grand entrance to the city. A state of panic ensued. Terrifying cries were heard from the people, who saw no way out but to flee the city. Soon there was not a man, woman, or child in town. The Rebbe also decided to escape, but he happened to feel weak at the time, so that he had barely gone a small distance when he was forced back. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

The informer visited the Rebbe, displaying a great deal of respect for him, kneeling reverently before him, and putting on a show of piety and righteousness. With his unique blend of wisdom, the Rebbe was able to cunningly manipulate the informer until he genuinely submitted himself to the Rebbe. The Rebbe instructed Rabbi Yitzchok to announce that it was safe for everyone to return home, which they did.

The informer was a conniving fellow. He had pretended to be a *chassid*, insidiously engaging the Rebbe in talk of *chassidus*, until he was sure the Rebbe was convinced of his piety. Meanwhile, the Rebbe was not fooled, he just played along. The Rebbe manipulated their conversation until he was able to convince the informer that a leader such as he ought to be humble and pious, praying on behalf of his suffering fellow Jews. The Rebbe persuaded him to recite *Tehillim* every day. "This will be a sign for me that you are free of arrogance: if you will tearfully recite several chapters of *Tehillim* in my house, in the presence of several young men."

Eager to prove himself, the imposter began chanting verses of *Tehillim*, while copious tears flowed from his eyes. When he was finished, he felt terribly weak.

Meanwhile, the people of Teveria were in desperate need of funds from abroad, but there were guards posted at every entrance to the city to accost anyone who was bringing money, because the informer

had notified the Pasha that vast sums of money were pouring into the city from abroad.

While the informer was out of commission, Rabbi Yitzchok was sent to Haifa to pick up the money from the messengers who had come from abroad. He brought the money to the Rebbe, who distributed it among the needy.

When the informer recovered from his weak state and learned what had occurred, he was so furious that he threatened revenge. However, before he had a chance to execute his evil scheme, he fell ill and died. The Rebbe was delighted to have played a central role in this event, for thanks to him everyone was able to return home, resulting in great joy for all.

After this event the Rebbe visited the gravesite of his grandfather, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka, in Teveria. Then they hired donkeys and set out for Miron, together with a group of young men, to the gravesite of the *tanna* Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. When they entered the cave the Rebbe instructed his companions to pray and study the *Zohar*, while he himself did nothing at all, merely appearing to be extremely joyous. He kept going over to Rabbi Yitzchok, saying, "Happy are you ...". At night he went from room to room, urging the men to recite passages from the *Zohar*, while he recited nothing. All night he walked around, humming happily to himself, until daybreak. Then he donned *tallis* and *tefillin* and prayed for several hours.

From there the entire group proceeded to the cave of Hillel, where the Rebbe recited Psalm 33 and 34. There, too, he was in an elated mood. The next stop was at the grave of Shammai, on top of the mountain opposite Hillel's cave. There his joy dissipated and he became very dejected. The Rebbe himself was hard pressed to explain his sudden mood swing, though later he did say there was a reason for it, without enunciating the reason.

They continued on, visiting other caves in the area. One of these caves, the burial site of the *tanna* Rabbi Kruspedai, is situated on the summit of a steep mountain near Tzefas, and it was impossible to ascend with the donkeys. When they arrived at the foot of this mountain, the Rebbe and his companion dismounted from their

donkeys, clambering up almost on hands and knees, until they reached the cave, where they remained for quite a while.

Then they visited another cave, the burial site of a certain child. People were afraid to go there because it was rumored that a snake was coiled at the entrance of that cave. In addition, there was a large tree blocking the entrance. The Rebbe was the first one to enter the cave. He grasped the roots of the tree which extended into the hollow cave, finding no snake there at all. From then on people were no longer afraid to go there. After visiting some more caves in the vicinity they returned to Teveria.

The Rebbe instructed Rabbi Yitzchok to go to Haifa and purchase tickets for the return trip home. When Rabbi Yitzchok arrived in Haifa, a ship full of Jews had just docked there. One of its passengers was the famous Rav and *tzaddik*, Rabbi Yakov Shimshon of Shepetivka. There were also several *meshulachim* from *Eretz Yisroel* who were returning from abroad with money that they had collected. In those days everyone was fearful of bringing money into Teveria because of the informer. Therefore these *meshulachim* handed over their money to Rabbi Yitzchok that he should take it to Teveria before news of their arrival reaches the ears of the informer.

Rabbi Yitzchok was compelled to return to Teveria with the money. When he related to the Rebbe the reason for his return to the city, the Rebbe commented, "It seems to be *Hashem's* will that we should linger in *Eretz Yisroel* for a while."

The Rebbe said they should hire donkeys for a trip to the holy city of Jerusalem. When Rabbi Avraham Kalisker heard about the Rebbe's plan, he asked him not to go.

Soon Rabbi Yakov Shimshon of Shepetivka arrived in Teveria. That night he hosted a meal in honor of the Rebbe, whom he loved exceedingly. They spoke privately with each other. No-one knows what they discussed, but that was when the Rebbe made peace between the holy Rav of Shepetivka and Rabbi Avraham Kalisker. Apparently they were in conflict over how the money should be distributed. Many *tzaddikim*, including the Rav of Shepetivka, sided with the Rav of Liadi in this dispute. Now, by the festive meal that the

Rav hosted in the Rebbe's honor, the Rebbe succeeded in making peace between them.

During the meal there were lively Torah discussions, as usual. In the course of the discussions, the Rav of Shepetivka raised a question regarding the words of our Sages (*Bava Metzia 37a*). The Sages are discussing a dispute between two people, each of whom claims that \$200 belongs to him and \$100 belongs to the other, and they conclude: "the matter should wait until the arrival of Eliyahu". In other words, Elijah the Prophet will determine who is right. The Rav's question was, "Eliyahu is a single witness. Does not the Torah state (*Devarim 19:15*): 'By the testimony of two witnesses ... shall a matter be confirmed'?"

Everyone, including the Rebbe, was silent, seemingly unable to come up with an appropriate response. However, the expression on the Rebbe's face showed that he was unmoved by this question. When he was pressed for an answer, the Rebbe replied off-handedly, "Our Sages say (*Eidios 88b*) that Eliyahu will come only to draw near those who are far, and so on. That is to say, he will push away falsehood and draw in truth, as our Sages say (*Shabbos 104a*): The letters that comprise the word *sheker* (falsehood) are close to each other (in the Hebrew alphabet), while the letters that comprise the word *emes* (truth) are far apart. Thus, we find that when Eliyahu will come and draw the world close to truth the world will no longer have a need for his testimony, for the one who made the false claim will admit the truth of his own accord regarding who is the rightful owner of the \$200 and of the \$100."

All the assembled nodded their heads in assent to the Rebbe's exceedingly pleasing and satisfactory response to the Rav's question.

While the Rebbe was in *Eretz Yisroel*, Napoleon and his army were steadily advancing towards it as part of their "Egyptian Expedition". On the 30<sup>th</sup> of *Shevat* (Tuesday, February 5, 1799), after five months of British blockade, a letter was finally delivered to Napoleon, via a merchant ship carrying wine from Ragusa. One month later, on Thursday, *Parshas Pikudei*, the 30<sup>th</sup> of Adar I, 5559 (March 7, 1799), Napoleon conquered Jaffa, after three days of brutal siege.



When a plague broke out in Teveria, the Rebbe was forced to change his lodgings. But when the plague reached his new lodgings, too, the Rebbe decided to flee the city entirely.

He escaped through a tunnel that led to the city walls. However, when he emerged from the tunnel he saw that there was no exit to the outside in the wall. In desperation, he began to climb the wall in order to reach the other side, which was out of the city limits.

As he reached the top and swung himself over in preparation for clambering down the other side, the Rebbe was shocked by the sight of the shimmering Sea of Galilee below him. The Rebbe had not been aware that this tunnel was, for all practical purposes, a dead end. There he was, suspended by his hands and feet on top of the wall, with no viable means of salvation. If he were to release his grip on the wall he would plunge into the aquatic depths below. To climb back in to the city was impossible for him, as he was already over the edge and it was too difficult for him to raise himself back over the top of the wall.

So the Rebbe resorted to the skill at which he excelled, namely, prayer. He entreated *Hashem* to rescue him from this terrible danger. He prayed hard and long, and in the end his prayers were answered and he was miraculously saved.

Later, whenever the Rebbe recalled this incident he would add that a person should always pray from the depths of his heart, as though his life was literally hanging by a thread and nothing short of a miracle could save him from drowning. Praying as though one's life depends on it is the most sincere type of prayer, as the Rebbe himself was able to testify from personal experience when he had been suspended over the wall of Teveria and almost fell into the Sea of Galilee. ●

## . . . **HOMEWARD BOUND**

After his escape from Teveria the Rebbe headed for Safed and stayed there for several days. On Thursday, the 7th of Adar II, 5559 (March 14, 1799), word got around that Napoleon and his army had set their sights on Acre (Akko) after having captured Jaffa the week before. The Rebbe immediately dispatched a messenger to procure passage for himself on a ship belonging to the Republic of Ragusa, a neutral country on the island of Sicily. Any ship flying the Ragusan flag would be safe from attack by patrolling warships. The Rebbe's messenger succeeded in booking tickets for the Rebbe on a Ragusan ship.

When Rabbi Avraham Kalisker heard that the Rebbe was about to return home and had already booked passage on a ship, he sent an express messenger to deliver two letters to the Rebbe. The *Rav* of Shepetivka also wished to send a letter, but since the Rebbe was in a hurry to leave he could not wait for it. That evening the Rebbe left Safed. After traveling all night they arrived in Akko three hours before the onset of *Shabbos, Parshas Zachor*.

Immediately upon their arrival in Akko they sent for the ship's agent, requesting to be allowed onto the ship. However, the latter replied that it was impossible to fulfil their request, as the ship was already filled to capacity with people who had arrived earlier. The Rebbe and his companion had no choice other than to remain in Akko over *Shabbos*. They spent *Shabbos Parshas Vayikra*, which was also *Parshas Zachor*, at the home of the prosperous individual to

whom Rabbi Avraham Kalisker had addressed one of the letters that they had brought.

On that *Shabbos* the city gates were locked, preventing all ingress and egress, and resulting in a great panic among the populace. An army of more than fifteen thousand Turkish soldiers, under the capable leadership of Jezzar Pasha, was mobilized to confront the Frenchman, Napoleon.

During prayers that *Shabbos* morning, the ship's agent came to tell the Rebbe that there were no longer any Ragusan ships available, and that the only ships still operating were Arab merchant ships transporting goods to Istanbul. The agent urged the Rebbe to consider this option. "I know it's dangerous to be at sea during wartime because of the risk of capture by the enemy. However, I still think it's the better of two evils. I've heard that the order has been given to attack Akko in a couple of days. Many will be killed here. Why take the risk? I respectfully request that the Rebbe permit me to book passage on one of these merchant ships, even though it is *Shabbos*, for in matters of life and death it is permissible to violate the *Shabbos* (*Shabbos 132a*)."

The Rebbe concurred, and the agent booked their tickets on a merchant vessel, paying a deposit of one gold *dinar*.

In the meantime a Royal Navy flotilla arrived at Akko to reinforce the Ottoman defenses and supply the city with additional cannon manned by sailors and marines. Commodore Sidney Smith's ship, the *Tigre*, was accompanied by two large frigates, the *Theseus* and the *Alliance*. Due to the influx of soldiers the city became unbearably overcrowded; besides, people were terrified of the British soldiers. That terrifying *Shabbos* the entire Jewish community cried out to their Father in Heaven, begging Him for salvation.

The Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok were somewhat relieved that at least they had secured passage on a ship that was homeward bound. However, they were extremely concerned by their lack of provisions for the journey, having absolutely no food or drink whatsoever to take along. They recalled how well they had prepared for the trip to *Eretz Yisrael*, packing sufficient food for a period of four or five months, as

was customary at the time for anyone undertaking an ocean voyage. Now, because of the sudden turn of events, they had nothing.

On Sunday, *Parshas Tzav*, 10 Adar II, Napoleon stood outside the city walls, ready to attack. The Rebbe urged his companion, Rabbi Yitzchok, to go with the ship's agent and try to buy provisions for the trip. However, there was nothing to be bought at the marketplace, and they returned home empty-handed. The Rebbe, wrapped in his *tallis* and wearing his *tefillin*, did not say a word. Out of sheer despair, Rabbi Yitzchok sank down onto the bed and fell asleep, the Rebbe totally oblivious to his presence.

With the approach of the vast French army, the Pasha announced that anyone who was incapable of bearing arms had two hours to leave the city by way of the sea, or he would be killed outright. At that time all the gates in Akko's wall were locked, so that no-one was entering or leaving. This drastic step was necessary because the density of the crowds prevented the troops from moving efficiently.

The Pasha's announcement was met by an outcry of hysteria and anguish. Amidst the ensuing chaos the Rebbe quietly slipped away to the docks, leaving Rabbi Yitzchok behind, as he was not aware that Rabbi Yitzchok was asleep in the room. The Rebbe boarded a small boat and waited.

When Rabbi Yitzchok awoke, he saw that the Rebbe was not there, so he waited for a long time for him. When the Rebbe failed to show up Rabbi Yitzchok went out into the courtyard, where all he saw and heard was men, women, and children crying hysterically. Their screams pierced the heavens. The lady of the house said to him, "Poor thing, you're too young to die! We, at least, have enjoyed living here so now we must accept whatever fate is decreed for this place. But you are truly to be pitied, for you will be forever lost from your family ..." She continued lamenting in this vein, until Rabbi Yitzchok, in the grip of sheer terror, was unable to lift a finger.

"Where is the Rebbe?" he asked.

"He must have escaped to the sea," she replied.



Upon hearing these words, Rabbi Yitzchok ran to take the chest that held their belongings and their money, for the Rebbe had taken nothing with him when he had escaped. But the chest was too heavy for Rabbi Yitzchok to carry by himself. *Hashem* sent along a *Sephardi* man who offered to carry it for him, and together they ran towards the sea. The streets were treacherous, so that walking around carried a real risk of being stabbed. It was all but impossible to push and shove through the heaving crowd.

Once again *Hashem* helped. Several Arabs were broadcasting some good news from a rooftop, which attracted many people in their direction, thus clearing a path for Rabbi Yitzchok to flee to the docks. Once he got there he saw many ships, but he still could not locate the Rebbe. Finally he found the Rebbe sitting in a small boat, surrounded by Arabs. Both men were overjoyed to see each other, for they had both worried about each other. At first they sat in the boat named *Barkis*, which was supposed to take them out to a bigger ship named *Okreana* in the Haifa port. They were surprised to note that their ship was equipped with artillery and cannon, but they assumed that during war time even “merchant ships” were armed. In actual fact, their ship was actually a frigate, fully outfitted with equipment and manpower for active combat.

It was extremely dangerous for the Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok to seclude themselves at sea in the company of these ruthless Arab warriors. Due to great confusion and terror the Rebbe had boarded the small boat, thinking it would bring him to the ship on which he had booked passage. He could not have imagined that it would bring him to an actual warship.

The Arabs gave them a private cabin. They even provided Rabbi Yitzchok with a loaded shotgun, but other than that, the two Jews were unable to communicate with them due to the language barrier. There was no food or drink on board for them. Several hours after nightfall they locked their cabin door and went to sleep on empty stomachs. They both lay in bed wide awake, hungry and anxious. Suddenly the door of their cabin was opened.

“What are you doing here?” someone asked in Russian. “Don’t you realize this is a warship, equipped with fully loaded cannon? You could perish here, Heaven forbid!”

They both jumped out of bed. There stood a man, wrapped in some kind of cloth from head to toe, whose face they were unable to discern. They held onto his “garment” for dear life and begged him to rescue them by taking them back to the Holy Land, for they had come to realize that to remain on this ship meant certain death. The sounds of gunfire were already audible around the ship. Either option involved their demise, but if they were to perish in the Holy Land at least their bones would remain there. The man who spoke Russian replied that he would require a sizable amount of money if he were to assist them. Then he left, saying he was off to see the captain.

Rabbi Yitzchok opened their chest in order to take out some money. After waiting a while, he went to the captain himself to hand him the money, thinking that the man had already asked the captain to drop them off on land. But the captain raised his voice and began shouting at him, showing not the least bit of interest in helping them. Rabbi Yitzchok began searching high and low for the man who spoke Russian, but he seemed to have disappeared into thin air. No-one on board spoke Russian. Wherever he went he saw only Turkish Arabs.

Now they were truly terrified, for they saw no way out of their dilemma. They trembled so with fear that they were even unable to lie down in bed.

The next morning some border patrol soldiers came on board ship. The Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok decided they would try once again to beg the captain to permit them to disembark. In the meantime the sailors raised the anchors and let the ship sail away with the wind, for the fighting had already begun. The deafening roar of cannon shots and explosions was audible from miles away, adding to the sheer terror and panic of the two men. They both collapsed onto their bunks, completely spent and parched. Since they did not have even a drop of water to drink, or a morsel of food, it seemed that between the two-fold peril of war and dehydration their end was imminent.

But God did not forsake them. In His great mercy He sent salvation in the form of an Arab, the captain's cook. This cook took a liking to the two Jews, sneaking in to them two cups of black coffee each morning and evening. This just about sustained them, although they were both ill and could not move out of bed. They knew nothing of their whereabouts, only that the ship was being blown in one direction by a storm wind. They had no idea where they were headed.

After a while they heard that the ship had reached land. They emerged from their cabin in order to find out where they had arrived. It was definitely not Istanbul. When they asked the Arab cook, he informed them that this was Adalia (today it is called Antalya), in Turkey. Upon hearing this information the Rebbe and his companion retreated fearfully to their cabin and remained locked in there, for it was a known fact that any Jew who fell into the hands of native Adalyans was killed as a human sacrifice to their gods.

For three days they remained holed up in their cabin, keenly aware of the grave danger they were in. Suddenly a storm began to brew, whipping up a mighty wind that snapped the rope that held the anchors. The anchors remained in the water, while the ship drifted off to sea, even though the captain had not planned to depart yet. A great cry rose from all the Turks as the ship was tossed about in the stormy waters all night. From their cabin where they huddled in fright, the Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok were able to hear the Arabs cry out in anguish, "Woe! Woe!"

Finally, with the arrival of dawn, the storm subsided, much to everyone's relief. How disappointed they were to learn that the storm had swept them back to only one day's distance from Akko. That afternoon another storm kicked up. For several days the ship was again tossed about at the mercy of wind, water and waves, while the sailors stood helplessly by, unable to control their vessel.

On Thursday, at noon, the sailors began pumping out water from the third compartment, which had begun to flood. Usually it took about fifteen minutes to pump out all the water that accumulated in the bilge each day. This time, even though they continued pumping all day, by nightfall there was still no end in sight. Soon the water

began seeping in to the Rebbe's cabin, so that it was impossible to sleep in the bunk. The Rebbe and his companion both had to climb up to a higher spot in order to lie down, preferring to remain in the cabin so as not to be seen by the Arabs.

The water continued to rise faster than the pumps could remove it, so the sailors tore out the pumps and replaced them with pulleys attached to large buckets in a desperate attempt to bail the ship. All night the storm raged in full fury, whipping up waves as high as mountains, with troughs between them as deep as valleys, upon which the ship was mercilessly tossed.

When daylight broke the Rebbe said to Rabbi Yitzchok, "My heart is faint with terror. I realize we are in grave danger. Even though my eyes cannot see what they're doing, my heart sees."

Rabbi Yitzchok tried to comfort the Rebbe. "Don't worry. With God's help everything will be fine." Then he went out to check what was really going on in the hold where water was being bailed out. He was shocked to stare at what resembled a rippling river. The ship was so heavily weighted down by water, that the crew had already dumped most of the cargo overboard. Now all the ship's ballast consisted of water, a dire situation indeed. As feverishly as the sailor's pumped it out, more came in.

Rabbi Yitzchok grimly concluded that, barring a miracle, they were all going to drown. He returned to their cabin dumbstruck and shaking like a leaf.

"What's going on? Didn't you just tell me there's nothing to worry about? Why are you so frightened?" the Rebbe asked.

Rabbi Yitzchok replied that in his opinion they truly required a miracle in order to survive, for the water level was rising alarmingly, and the deckhands had no more strength to bail, having been at it for more than twenty-four hours, without stopping to eat, drink, or rest.

"I haven't prayed yet," Rabbi Yitzchok said.

"You don't have to pray now," replied the Rebbe. "Just accept the yoke of Heaven by reciting the first verse of *Shema Yisrael*, and then recite the first and last three blessings of the *Shemone Esrei*."



Then the Rebbe added, “Take all our money and divide it in two. Tie half of it onto your body, and I will tie the other half onto my body.”

“What on earth for?” asked Rabbi Yitzchok. “Won’t the fish be able to eat us without the money?”

But the Rebbe just reiterated, “Do as I say. The Jews were already in the sea, and yet they were saved, while we are still in a ship...”

After the Rebbe finished whatever it was he was doing, he ordered Rabbi Yitzchok to get dressed and tie a belt on his fur coat. The Rebbe did likewise, just as though he was about to embark on a trip. Rabbi Yitzchok plucked up his courage to ask, “Rebbe, I don’t know how to pray properly even from a *siddur* at best of times, and now I am certainly not up to praying. But the Rebbe knows how to pray, both for the public and for the individual. Why does the Rebbe not pray now?”

“I am now in a state of *mochin dekatnus* (constriction), which places me at a distance from *Hashem*. But I have an idea to which I will resort due to the lack of alternatives and to the great danger that we are in. *Hashem* knows that I have never appropriated the merit of my predecessors for my own benefit. But now I am forced to do so. I beseech God to save us in the merit of my grandfather, Rabbi Yisrael *Baal Shem Tov*; my grandmother, Adel; and my grandfather, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenke.” Then the Rebbe said no more.

Suddenly they looked up and saw, above in the sky, an ominous funnel-shaped cloud looming in the distance. This threw them into an even greater panic, for such clouds often created a waterspout. If the ship was drawn into that waterspout they would all go down with it. Perhaps if they fired at the cloud with cannon it would break up, but all hands were busy bailing out water, and there was no-one available to man the cannon. It seemed like there was no end to their troubles, which were piling up on each other “*like a wasp and a scorpion biting simultaneously*” (*Chagiga 5a*), with each problem requiring an opposing remedy.

Once again *Hashem* showed His mercy. A sudden strong gust of wind sent the ship flying swiftly over the waves, like an arrow shot from a bow. As it approached the waterspout the clouds parted, and the ship passed through safely.

At the same time *Hashem* opened the sailors' eyes so that they located the leak in the ship's hull. They slaughtered a ram and plugged the hole with its hide.

Finally, they were safe. That Friday the Rebbe recited "*Hodu Lashem*" (*Tehillim 107*), as is customary to do before *mincha*, amid great rejoicing.

The ship resumed its voyage, making many ports of call. Their only source of sustenance was some wormy hardtack (crackers), for which they had to implore the cook daily, with outstretched hands just like beggars, until he took pity on them. They ate nothing else besides the hardtack.

With the passing of days, it dawned on them that *Pesach* was around the corner. What would they eat? After all, it was impossible to fast during the entire holiday. After an hour or two they docked at a city built upon a rocky mountain that jutted out from the sea. This was one of the Dodecanese Islands. There the Arabs purchased large quantities of fruit, while the Rebbe and his companion managed to procure a thaler's worth of carob, which turned out to be a substantial amount.

"For the time being," the Rebbe said, "this is very good, for it is possible to subsist during the eight days of *Pesach* on carob alone. But, oh, how I wish that *Hashem* would grant us the merit of performing the *mitzvos* of eating matzo and drinking the four cups of wine!"

It is impossible to grasp the extent of the dangers they were in on their trip home. Not only were they on an active warship, surrounded by Turkish soldiers, but they were the only two Jews on board. In those days it was very common for Arabs, and particularly warriors, to seize Jews and sell them in distant lands as slaves. The Rebbe worried about this incessantly. He said he was already thinking about what he would do if he was sold in a place where there were no Jews.

Who would ever find out about it? How would he observe *mitzvos* there? He contemplated this matter in such great depth, until he realized that it is possible to serve *Hashem* even when one cannot observe the *mitzvos*, Heaven forbid. He perceived the *avoda* of our Patriarchs, who lived before the Torah was given, yet they performed the *mitzvos*. However, they did not literally observe the *mitzvos*, but rather, symbolically. Thus, for example, Yakov performed the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* through the sticks that he peeled while guarding Lavan's sheep (*Beraishis 30:37*), as is described in the *Zohar I, 162b*, and so on. The Rebbe delved so deeply into this matter, until he understood exactly how he would observe each *mitzvah* under these forced conditions, should he be sold into slavery, God-forbid.

As soon as he attained this lofty spiritual level God helped him. On *erev Pesach* the ship arrived at Rhodes, a Greek island in the eastern Aegean Sea. Not only was Rhodes a large city, but it was also home to a thriving Jewish community. The Rebbe was overjoyed. This was the night before *Pesach*, and they were still hoping to procure matzos and wine. But they knew that the captain and the Arabs would not permit them to enter this city. They were well aware that the Arabs had an eye on them, with sinister plans of robbing and possibly kidnapping them, and perhaps even selling them into slavery.

On Friday, *erev Pesach*, as the captain and several sailors were about to set off in a small skiff for Rhodes, the Rebbe and his companion approached them, and, using sign language, communicated to them their need for some kind of bread. The captain responded in kind that "there are Jews in this city from whom you can purchase bread".

Then an open miracle occurred. The One in Whose hand the hearts of kings and princes lie moved the captain's heart and confused his mind, causing him to mindlessly offer to take one of them along with him to purchase the bread. Rabbi Yitzchok went along with them to the city, accompanied by a sailor whose task it was to watch that he did not abscond. It was quite dangerous for him to walk around in this city during wartime, as he could have easily been accused of being a spy, with his obviously foreign appearance. But *Hashem* once again protected him and he successfully passed through all checkpoints.

Once inside the city he immediately went to the Chief Rabbi and related their story to him: how they were trapped unawares on a Turkish warship, and that there was no telling what the captain planned to do with them, so that they were in grave danger. Although Rabbi Yitzchok only spent several minutes in recounting his tale, it seemed to him as though it took hours. He desperately wanted to hurry back to the Rebbe before nightfall with matzos and wine. But this Rabbi was in no rush, desiring to hear every little detail of the war, etc. He kept reassuring Rabbi Yitzchok, “Have no fear!” while Rabbi Yitzchok could hardly contain his anxiety.

Suddenly a light went off in Rabbi Yitzchok’s head. He recalled that in his lodgings in Teveria Rabbi Zvi Harker had mentioned that his wife – who came from a renowned family – had a brother in Rhodes who was a great sage and very righteous. He could not recall his name, though he did remember the name of Rabbi Zvi’s wife. When he asked the Chief Rabbi whether he knew of a *chacham* who had a sister in Teveria, the Rabbi knew exactly who he was talking about. He notified the sage and sent Rabbi Yitzchok to his house. The sage had already been informed of all that he had told the Chief Rabbi.

As soon as Rabbi Yitzchok entered the home of the sage, who, incidentally, was indeed the brother-in-law of Rabbi Zvi Harker, the sage said to him, “Have no fear! You will tell me about all your adventures at the *seder*, God willing.” Rabbi Yitzchok could not believe his ears. He had never imagined that the salvation would be so swift. In his wildest dreams it had not occurred that he would attend a real *Pesach seder* in a Jewish home!

The sage continued to speak. “We have already bribed the captain to allow you off the boat. You must thank God who has saved you so miraculously and has brought you here. You should know that this captain is a notorious thief. In fact, thievery runs in his family, as he himself claims each time he proudly signs after his name ‘descendant of the Five Lords of the Philistines’. But this is no time for stories. We have to get you to the barber for a haircut in honor of *yomtov*.”



After Rabbi Yitzchok had his hair cut, he bathed, and then he sat down to a cup of coffee. “Who is the other person with you?” the *chacham* asked.

“Have you heard of the *Baal Shem Tov*?” replied Rabbi Yitzchok.

“Yes,” replied the sage, for in Rhodes there were *sefarim* written by the righteous goan, the Av Beis Din of Polnoa.<sup>9</sup>

“The man I’m traveling with is his grandson, as well as the grandson of Rabbi Nachman Horodenker. In addition, he’s a special person in his own right, as you will see for yourself.”

The sage was overjoyed. He said it was a great *mitzvah* to rescue any Jew, but how fortunate he was that *Hashem* had sent him an opportunity to rescue a holy *tzaddik* of such illustrious lineage. He hastily prepared to go out and welcome the Rebbe with a group of people. On the way, some of the Arabs got into a fistfight, at the conclusion of which there were several dead bodies on the floor of the marketplace. As soon as they heard of this, the Jews retreated to the sage’s courtyard, where they locked themselves in for several hours. By the time it was safe to leave it was too late to go to the Rebbe, for the sun was already setting.

The sage turned to Rabbi Yitzchok, and said, “I want you to know that ever since I was a young man I have always engaged in Torah study, serving *Hashem* and performing *mitzvos* and deeds of charity. For all of this I will surely be amply rewarded, in addition to the portion that is prepared for each and every Jew, in the World-to-Come.

“I give you my word of honor, that if I will not do everything in my power to secure your release, I am willing to forego my entire reward. I don’t mean to boast; I just want to assure you that I will not abandon you, Heaven forbid. However, there isn’t enough time now to work on it. Therefore, please take *matzos*, both *shmura* and regular, if you so desire, and take some of my best wine, and all the vegetables and other items that you will require for the *seder*.”

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<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Yakov Yosef HaKohen, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, was the author of “Toldos Yakov Yosef”, “Kesonos Pasim”, et al.

Rabbi Yitzchok returned to the frigate, laden with provisions. It was quite a distance from the city, and as soon as the Rebbe heard his voice he was filled with joyous relief. He ran out to welcome him. “*Baruch Hashem* that I see you’re alive and well. I was afraid they had drowned you in the ocean, and that I would be next. But now, I thank God ‘who gives strength to the weary’, for I had no more energy left. I could hardly wait for you to come back. I was sure I would die first!” During the long hours that Rabbi Yitzchok was gone the Rebbe had been agonizing about his return, until he could bear it no longer.

On the first night of *Pesach* they *davened maariv*, after which they conducted a proper *seder*, with food and drink. Rabbi Yitzchok shared his experiences with the Rebbe, describing the promise of the *chacham* to redeem them at all costs. The Rebbe was overjoyed at the good news.

On *Shabbos*, the first day of *Pesach*, the order was given to bring the ship to Rhodes and tie her up at the dock. On the second night of *yomtov* they also conducted a *seder* on board ship. Sunday, the second day of *yomtov*, Rabbi Yitzchok walked in to the city in order to pray at the synagogue. Afterwards, the *chacham* invited him for the meal. During the festive meal the sage delivered an original Torah discourse, which included ideas generated by contemporary *tzaddikim*, even Europeans. He then invited Rabbi Yitzchok to relate something in the name of the Rebbe, which he did. The sage was delighted at what he heard, and quoted from the Talmud (*Bava Metzia 83b*): “*My innards rejoice...*”

After the meal Rabbi Yitzchok returned to the ship, followed by an attendant bearing choice delicacies for the Rebbe. When Rabbi Yitzchok boarded the ship the Rebbe took one look at his face and was convinced that matters had taken a turn for the worse, because Rabbi Yitzchok appeared downcast. This distressed him so, to the extent that he was unable to eat any of the food.

In reality, Rabbi Yitzchok was suffering the effects of too much alcohol, for the sage had urged him to drink so much wine that he had become intoxicated. That was the reason behind his morose expression. When the Rebbe questioned him, he did not reply. He

just went to bed and slept for several hours, after which he woke up totally refreshed.

Realizing what had occurred, he excused himself to the Rebbe. “Did you not realize that I was simply drunk? They kept plying me with drink, until I couldn’t handle it anymore!” And he broke into laughter.

After he related to the Rebbe how well he had been treated at the *chacham*’s house, the Rebbe could finally enjoy his *yomtov* meal.

On Monday, the first day of *Chol Hamoed*, Rabbi Yitzchok went in to the city once again to meet with the sage. The latter advised him to sneak all their money off the ship and hide it in town, in order to prevent it from being stolen.

After this was done, the *chacham*, together with two prominent members of the community, visited the captain. “Give us these two men,” they said.

“What’s your connection with these two? They belonged to no-one when they came to me!” the captain replied, adding a detailed description of all the troubles that had befallen them on the way. “Not only that, but there was not a moment’s peace on this voyage. We could have easily drowned these two men, or sold them into Arab captivity, in which case all of their money and possessions would have become ours. No-one in the world would have objected. These two men are incredibly lucky!

“Not one miracle did God perform for them, but many, many miracles. It’s a miracle that the ship arrived here in the first place. Then God performed a miracle within a miracle by making me take leave of my senses and bring one of them in to Rhodes. So after all this, I have no right to take a thing from them. However, I must take two hundred thalers just to satisfy my crew. After that they’re yours!”

The money immediately exchanged hands, and the Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok were free men.

As they proceeded to walk to the city, several Arabs began whispering that they looked like spies. The local Jews, terrified at this accusation, immediately brought them indigenous clothing to put on. The Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok had to change into local garb, which

Rabbi Yitzchok found highly amusing. But the Rebbe was very upset. "You have no idea what a huge Heavenly *kitrug* there is against us," he scolded. He then proceeded to tell Rabbi Yitzchok something wondrous (which he never wanted to reveal).

Upon entering the city the Rebbe was warmly welcomed by the community leaders, who were very impressed with him. The Rebbe exclaimed, "Thank God that we merited to be rescued in such a miraculous manner!"

The Rebbe spent the remainder of the holiday in Rhodes, where he was treated as a revered and honored celebrity. The community insisted on paying the two hundred thalers themselves, refusing to accept a penny from the Rebbe, even though he had sufficient funds.

After *Pesach* tickets were purchased for the two men aboard a ship bound for Istanbul. The people of Rhodes gave them a letter of recommendation requesting anyone to assist them in the event that any misfortune befell them on the way, God forbid.

The ship bound for Istanbul was full of Greeks, and there was an unbearable stench on board. People were dying, and no-one knew what to do about it. Once again the Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok feared for their lives, and once again *Hashem* came to their rescue. A mighty wind blew the ship to Istanbul at full speed. Although they were seasick due to the turbulence, in the end it was for their benefit, for they reached Istanbul in record time, after just three days.

While they were en route, and before they reached Istanbul, they had a set of *mishnayos* with them which the Rebbe was perusing. When he reached the second *mishna* in Tractate *Sotah*: "*Rabbi Yehoshua says: 'Who will remove dust from your eyes, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, for you used to say, 'There will be a future generation...''*" the Rebbe's face was set aflame. He clapped his hands together, and said, "Who sees like I do? Something has been revealed to me in this *mishna*." But he would not reveal what it was. The only thing he revealed to Rabbi Yitzchok was that he merited something which even the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* had not merited. He then went on to discuss some other astounding topics with Rabbi Yitzchok, who never revealed them to anyone, as per the Rebbe's instructions.



During their ten-day stay in Istanbul they were in grave danger. Since they had arrived illegally and had never shown their passports, the authorities were unwilling to permit them to depart now unless they obtained new passports from the Turkish Sultan himself, at an astronomical fee which was far beyond their means.

This time, as always, *Hashem* did not forsake them, sending salvation in the form of a complete stranger. This person offered to procure new passports for them. He managed to cajole a Turkish minister into releasing the necessary documents for an undisclosed fee, and when he handed them to the Rebbe and his companion all he asked from them was not to breathe a word to anyone as to how they had obtained it.

They traveled by boat to Galatz (Galati, Romania). Along the way they landed on Snake Island, aka Fidonisi, a Ukrainian islet located in the Black Sea near the Danube delta. There they were imprisoned and only released after a ransom of four rubles was paid for each. Finally they returned to their boat, and continued with an uneventful voyage, save for some minor storms at sea. On the way they passed a ship full of Greeks that broke up and sank, with only a handful of survivors.

They clearly saw God's merciful hand guiding them to safety. Finally, on Friday, the fourth day of *Sivan*, they arrived in Galatz, Romania, just in time for *Shavuos*, which fell on Sunday. They spent *Shavuos* in Galatz.

Immediately after *Shavuos* the Rebbe left Galatz, traveling via Iasi. In Iasi they encountered a great plague. The epidemic had spread to all surrounding towns and cities, hampering the progress of their trip, as it was extremely difficult to obtain permits for travel between towns, in an attempt to prevent the spreading of the epidemic.

The Rebbe and Rabbi Yitzchok were forced to disguise themselves as young merchants, as a result of which they were treated as ordinary lowly peasants. They crossed the Dniester and Bug rivers, reaching Teplik on *erev Shabbos Behaaloscha*. In Teplik no-one recognized the Rebbe, and the two men were even suspected of being bandits. When they begged a certain *melamed* to take them in for *Shabbos* he refused, because the Rebbe had the appearance of a thief, God-forbid.

On Sunday, the 20th of *Sivan*, the Rebbe arrived in Uman. Unfortunately the wagon-driver stopped to let them off in front of a house of ill repute. As soon as they realized that they were in a place of vice and sin, the Rebbe and his companion took off immediately. Still, the Rebbe attempted to judge the world favorably. “Know that our entire approach involves an awareness of the world, which is full of trials, and it is so easy to stumble!” With a deep sigh he continued, “Woe that places such as this exist at all, for their sole purpose is to entice people to sin and immorality!” Afterwards he said that, with God’s help, his stopping there would accomplish a lasting benefit, as from then on all sinful activities at that house would be discontinued. Only then did the Rebbe calm down from this inadvertent unsavory encounter.

The Rebbe left Uman, traveling through Kanivlad. There one of the followers of the *Maggid* of Terhovitse recognized the Rebbe. At the time, the *Maggid* was in the vicinity of Terhovitse. He was extremely excited at seeing the Rebbe so unexpectedly. The Rebbe told him to secretly notify the *Maggid* to meet him in a nearby village, as the Rebbe did not wish to be delayed by entering the town.

The man ran off in a flurry of excitement to tell the *Maggid* that the Rebbe was on his way back from *Eretz Yisrael* and wished to see him. At that moment the *Maggid* was talking outside to some people, wearing neither hat nor belt. As soon as he heard that the Rebbe was there, he cried out in joy and ordered the man, “Quick! Prepare my carriage and follow me to that village! I’ll run ahead until you catch up!”

The *Maggid* broke into a run, forgetting to put on his hat and his belt. He ran so fast to the outskirts of the town, that even though the man had speedily harnessed the horses and rushed after him with the carriage, he could not overtake him. The *Maggid* continued running breathlessly until he reached that village on foot. Words cannot describe the *Maggid*’s elation at the moment he met with the Rebbe.

On Tuesday, the 22nd of *Sivan*, the Rebbe arrived in S., Finally he changed out of his merchant’s disguise, which he had been using until then. He was warmly welcomed by the Mentor of S., who treated him

with the greatest respect and love, and served a feast in his honor. All night the two sat together at the table, in the company of many prominent people who had been invited. Every guest who arrived was addressed by the Mentor of S. as follows: “You can testify that I never eat a meal at night, except for now, when I am doing it out of deep affection towards this cherished guest. I am enjoying his visit so much that I literally don’t know what to do for him.”

In the morning they continued to converse affectionately, for then he was still on best terms with the Rebbe.

When the Rebbe left S. he suddenly remembered that he had promised Rabbi Avraham Kalisker that as soon as he arrived in the Diaspora he would visit Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi to discuss with him and settle the conflict between them regarding the matter of collecting money for the needy in *Eretz Yisrael*. Therefore, he immediately changed his itinerary and instead of heading directly home, a mere 70 Kilometers from S. to Medvedivke, he made a detour to Liadi. The *Rav* welcomed him with open arms, inviting him to speak in Torah. When the Rebbe declined to do so, the *Rav* himself delivered a lengthy discourse, concluding with an interpretation of the verse (*Tehillim 119:156*): “*Your mercies, Hashem, are abundant*”. The *Rav* interpreted this verse as “*It is a great pity on You, Hashem*”. To this the Rebbe commented, “With this he is right on target!” They had a long conversation, and then the Rebbe set out for Medvedivke.

On the way home from Liadi the Rebbe heard that the holy Rabbi Mordechai of Neshchiz was deathly ill. The Rebbe still wished to see him alive so he rushed over to visit him. Rabbi Mordechai of Neshchiz was overjoyed to see the Rebbe. At that point he had been bedridden for six months, being afflicted with a debilitating illness. He could not tolerate light, so he lay, immobile, in semi-darkness. Since he was very sensitive to the smell of food, he was unable to eat any cooked food unless it was strained several times. Cooked food was not even allowed to be brought into his house, as he could not tolerate the smell.

The Rebbe’s visit was like a breath of fresh air for Rabbi Mordechai of Neshchiz. When Rabbi Yitzchok came in to tell him that the Rebbe

was on his way, he became so happy. “You have literally revived me!” he exclaimed. Then when the Rebbe entered he greeted him with immeasurable joy and respect. According to Rabbi Yitzchok, who was with them, they discussed the lofty topic of Heavenly visions that true *tzaddikim* sometimes merit to perceive, and they also discussed angels, including the Angel *Matat*, etc.

The *Rav* of Neshchiz gave instructions that a meal be especially prepared in his house in honor of the Rebbe. His great affection for the Rebbe prevailed over his severe sensitivity to cooked food. The Rebbe sat at the head of the table, while the holy *Rav* of Neshchiz got up and put on his gold coat. Then he came to sit near the Rebbe at the table, all this despite the fact that for the previous six months he had not stepped out of bed, nor had he sat at a table, and this was five days before his demise. The Rebbe remained there for *Shabbos*. Initially he had not planned on eating there, but due to the *Rav*'s urging he agreed.

After *Shabbos* the *Rav* sent a *pidyon* of ten *adumim* to the Rebbe. However, the Rebbe sensed that it would soon become necessary for the *Rav* to give away all of his money, which was unrealistic, so it had to mean that he was close to death. The Rebbe departed before the *Rav* passed away.

(Years later, the son of the attendant of Rabbi Mordechai of Neshchiz told Rabbi Nossan, that his father told him that when the Rebbe left the *Rav*'s house, the *Rav* accompanied him beyond the door, paying no heed to the pain and exertion involved. When he returned, he commented, “Had I been created for the sole purpose of having Rabbi Nachman step over my threshold, it would have also been worthwhile!”)

After the Rebbe departed from Neshchiz he stopped to see Rabbi Zvi Arye of Alik, a disciple of the *Maggid* of Mezritch. The Rebbe marveled at his greatness, describing him as a *chacham* (wise man).

Rabbi Tzvi Arye was ecstatic at the Rebbe's visit and welcomed him warmly. The two men discussed the topic of visions, for Rabbi Tzvi Arye had heard all the details of the Rebbe's conversation with the *Rav* of Neshchiz on this matter. The latter had told the Rebbe, “I



have clearly seen the angel *Matat*; he appeared as such-and-such. And before you arrived in town he appeared as such-and-such.” The Rebbe had disagreed, saying, “This is not how one sees the angel *Matat*.” Since the *Rav* of Alik had heard all the arguments, he was confident that he could prove to the Rebbe that he had truly seen these visions.

The Rebbe had arrived right before *Shabbos*, so he was the guest of the *Rav* of Alik for *Shabbos*. At each meal the *Rav* of Alik discussed Torah topics and related stories, all of which contained hints to the Rebbe that he was, indeed, seeing these visions properly. But the Rebbe remained silent throughout *Shabbos*, for he had foreseen that this would happen, and he had prayed to God for guidance.

On *motzei Shabbos* the Rebbe entered the *Rav*’s study, and the *Rav* of Alik said to him, “You still don’t believe that I see? I will show you an open miracle to prove that I see!” He launched into another lengthy Torah discourse, by means of which he attempted to prove his point. Finally the Rebbe spoke, quoting (*Megilla 24*), “*Many are they who yearn to see Heavenly visions, but they never see them.*”

From there the Rebbe went directly home, arriving in Medvedivke in time for *Shabbos Parshas Chukas*, the 10th of *Tammuz* – fourteen months after he had set out on his trip to the Holy Land. That Friday night he gave a lesson on the verse (*Bamidbar 21:8*): “*Make for yourself a fiery snake and place it on a pole*”. At the third *Shabbos* meal he discussed the verse (*Yeshayahu 43:2*): “*When you pass through water, I am with you*”. This lesson was particularly cherished by the Rebbe, and is printed in *Likutei Maharan I*, Chapter 73.

Shortly after his homecoming, the Rebbe arranged a match for his oldest daughter, Adel, with Rabbi Yoske, son of the holy *tzaddik*, Rabbi Avraham Dov of Chmelnik, a disciple of the *Maggid* of Mezritch. ●

## ... CONTROVERSY, AND ACCLAIM

*Rosh Hashana*, as well as that entire year, the Rebbe remained in Medvedivka. Then, for reasons of his own, he decided to move to Zlatopol.

None of the Torah lessons that he taught that year (5560-1800) were recorded. We only know that the *Maggid* of Terhovitse spent one *Shabbos* with the Rebbe, and on that *Shabbos* the Rebbe discussed the verse (*Tehillim* 24:6): “*This is the generation of those who seek Him*”, explaining that “according to the generation, so are the teachers.” Unfortunately, the words of Torah that the Rebbe spoke were not written down. But we do know that the Rebbe then told the *Maggid*, “For example, you are the generation, and I am your teacher!”

We also know that that year the Rebbe received a letter from Rabbi Avraham Kalisker. It read as follows:

*“Peace and prosperity to the one who is embedded in my heart, the renowned Rabbi; ‘holy’ may be said to him; wisdom, understanding, and divine knowledge are with him; our honorable teacher, the Rav, Rabbi Nachman; descendant of the holy dynasty of the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, may he (his merit) protect us and shine forever. May the light of Hashem shine upon you and your household and all who are in your company.*

*“An abundance of peace! Amen! May it be His will!*

*"I am sending you news from the Land to inform you of the return of our annual representatives this past Shevat. We were very happy to hear that you are well, that you arrived home safely, and that our love has not disintegrated, for you are working on our behalf with all your heart, having undertaken to travel to the State of Reissin. May Hashem be with you!*

*"You have surely heard via our last year's representative, the honorable Rabbi Eliezer, of the incident which we experienced after you left us, and about the compromise that we reached with the people of Volhynia. We have yet to receive a penny from them, and we have no idea how this episode is going to end. Here in the Land we are perplexed with grief and worry. We hope for Hashem's salvation at every moment, for as of yet there is no relief from any direction. Even from the State of Reissin we have no information as to what they decided as a result of your visit, when you met with them personally and told them of our difficulties. We look forward to your informing us the details of what you accomplished there.*

*"Please note that we owe a lot of money to our governor, which in the end we will surely have to pay. The (financial) load is unbearable, for they keep threatening us and demanding payment. (Nonetheless,) we can still see the wondrous miracles through which God provides for us.*

*"I hope to God, Who hides His face; I am awaiting His salvation, and I trust only in Him. He will once again have mercy on us; as He has given us days of suffering, so will He gladden us.*

(From here onwards the letter is written in the holy handwriting of the great Rabbi Avraham Kalisker himself.)

*"I am steadfast and constant in my love, your praises are in my mouth, crowned and bound with my soul to Hashem; may Hashem shine His face upon you from the dwelling-place of His Presence, shining with an ever-increasing and everlasting light upon your head; may you be strengthened and fortified by God; the goal of the work, first in thought; the one that my soul knows well, forever dear, seeking your welfare and praying on your behalf; please do the same, and pray for me all the time.*

*“Signed: Avraham, the small one, son of my master, my father, our teacher, Rabbi Alexander Katz, of everlasting memory.*

*“My young grandson, Rabbi Yisrael Eliezer, may he live, asks about your welfare, sends you heartfelt greetings, and longs for your prayers.”*

Towards the end of that year, on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, the Rebbe married off his oldest daughter, Adel. The wedding took place in Chmelnik, and the Rebbe traveled there together with his entire family, as is customary. The Rebbe’s mother, the righteous Feige, also attended the wedding. She saw the *Baal Shem Tov* at the *chuppa*, since she was such a *tzaddekes* that her brothers regarded her as a prophetess.

After the wedding the Rebbe arranged a *shidduch* for his third daughter, Miriam. The groom was Rabbi Pinchos, son of the saintly *Rav*, Rabbi Leibush of Volchisk, a disciple of the *Maggid* of Mezrich. Miriam had previously been engaged to Rabbi Moshe, son of the Rabbi of Vitebsk, as was mentioned above, but both her fiancé and his father died after the Rebbe left *Eretz Yisrael*. Consequently, this was her second *shidduch*.

After Adel’s wedding and the *shidduch* with his daughter, Miriam, the Rebbe did not return home to Medvedivka. Instead, he traveled to Zlatopol, which is 263 kilometers from Chmelnik. The Rebbe arrived in Zlatopol, only 28 kilometers from the city of S.

The Rebbe did not notify anyone of his intended move. He simply arrived in Zlatopol unannounced, and proceeded to rent an apartment there. Despite his unexpected arrival, the community welcomed him warmly, showing him great respect.

On *Rosh Hashana* 5561 (1801) a large gathering of over one hundred people joined the Rebbe in Zlatopol. The Rebbe had not prepared anything for company, since he was a guest himself, having arrived right before *yomtov*.

The local community extended a warm welcome to the Rebbe’s followers, gladly hosting them all for *yomtov*. They also begged the



Rebbe to pray in their spacious *shul* together with all his people, an offer which the Rebbe accepted. The people relinquished their *shul* completely to the Rebbe, allowing him to make all the decisions, such as who should lead the prayers and blow the *shofar*, etc. *Rosh Hashana* thus passed in a joyous and harmonious atmosphere. The Rebbe taught a lesson (*Likutei Maharani I, Lesson 78*) on the verse (*Samuel I 2:10*): “*May He give power to his king*”, which is part of the *haftara* of the first day of *Rosh Hashana*.

On *Yom Kippur*, too, the Rebbe decided who would lead the prayers, until it was time for *mincha*. At *mincha* a man stood up of his own accord and began to lead the congregation for *mincha* against the Rebbe’s wishes. When it came to the *ne’ila*, this man’s son-in-law stepped up, also against the Rebbe’s will. But as soon as he began to pray, he suddenly fell silent. Try as he might he could not utter another sound; he had turned completely mute. He was forced to step down in shame, while someone else led the *ne’ila* prayer.

On *motzei Yom Kippur* the Rebbe referred to the matter of the two cantors, jokingly comparing it to the coin of *Avraham Avinu*, one side of which was engraved with the image of an old man and woman, and the other with the image of a young boy and girl (*Tractate Bava Kama 97*). Both the first man and his son-in-law, the Rebbe explained, were praying to impress their wives who were listening from the women’s section; their only focus was that their wives should admire their voices. Both men were followers of the Mentor of S.

The Rebbe added that at that point in the prayers he had intended to beseech *Hashem* to retract the Russian laws that threatened to take away the Jews’ distillery rights, one of the main sources of livelihood for Jews at that time. “And if you would know how the Satan fights against anything holy, how he does his utmost to restrain and confuse, and here this man went up to pray – I just had to push him away.”

Upon realizing that they did not find favor in the Rebbe’s eyes, the two men resolved to instigate conflict against the Rebbe. They traveled to S. and embarked on a smear campaign against him, fabricating stories and slandering him to all who would listen. In

particular, they spoke disparagingly of the Rebbe to the Mentor of S. Unfortunately the Mentor of S. accepted their slander and libel, as a result of which he became one of the Rebbe's greatest antagonists. Since the Mentor of S. had formerly served as a *shamash* in Zlatopol, he was able to exert a great deal of influence upon the entire city, so that the people listened to him and all were turned against the Rebbe.

It is impossible to describe the extent of the suffering that the Rebbe underwent as he faced relentless opposition and antagonism from the entire city. For him it was as painful as sitting on a bed of thorns. Moreover, the Rebbe said that he was being forced from Above to remain there, as he was rectifying the sin of Yeraveam ben Nevat.

After *Sukkos* the Mentor of S. visited Zlatopol, where he made his rounds, slandering the Rebbe unremittingly. Wherever he went he influenced an increasingly larger circle of people to turn against the Rebbe, until the entire city was united in fierce opposition against him.

Thus commenced the worldwide controversy that would accompany the Rebbe for the remainder of his life – and it all started with the *lashon hara* that the Mentor of S. heard from the two men from Zlatopol, believing their every word. These two individuals later earned a curse from the holy Rabbi Yakov Shimshon of Shepetivka. When the latter heard the extent of the discord that they had instigated with their baseless slander, he cursed them that “*their tongues should stretch until their bellies*” (Tractate *Sotah* 35).

As for the Mentor of S., he did not rest on his laurels. He traveled around, slandering the Rebbe wherever he went, and spreading appalling lies about him. When the Rebbe heard of this, he exclaimed, “I am deeply pained that this was given over to him.”

The Rebbe added, “I knew that the Satan would oppose me, but I'm surprised that it was given over in *his* hand.” Then he jokingly remarked, “Our Sages have said that it is preferable for a person to enter a lion's den than to fall into the hands of his enemy. But what

does one do when the enemy himself is a lion?" Then he added, "In the next world there'll be a fine play with him!"

Later he explained that this is what King David meant when he said (*Tehillim* 118:7) "*and I shall see revenge in my foes*". One might wonder why would King David desire to see revenge in his enemy, when he knew that it was King Saul who was after him, and God had told him (*Tractate Moed Katan 16b*): "If you were Saul and he was David, you would not be able to overcome him (for he is greater than you)."

But in reality David was asking God, "Allow my eyes to see where my enemy is up to, what is his spiritual level, so that I may clearly know where he stands."

Then the Rebbe told the people who were around him, "My brothers and friends. I will reveal something to you, which you must guard as a secret among yourselves, lest it spread even more controversy..." (The remainder of the Rebbe's words spoken on this occasion are recorded in a manuscript written by the Rebbe himself which was never published.)

When word of the raging controversy against the Rebbe in Zlatopol reached the *Maggid* of Terhovitse, he hurried to the Rebbe. "Why did you not send me to Zlatopol before you arrived," he asked, "so that I should speak with the leaders there, to ensure that you are welcomed into the city with all due honor and respect?"

"Had I been willing to wait," replied the Rebbe, "I could have entered the city with great pomp and honor in a splendid carriage. But I was unable to delay, for I was forced from Above to enter the city at that moment in time."

Despite the controversy, many people, even great *tzaddikim*, continued to flock to the Rebbe. One such person was Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, whom the Rebbe praised very highly. He became close to the Rebbe after the following incident.

The Rebbe had a vision in which crowds of people were jostling each other in order to hear words of Torah. They said to someone, "Please tell us some words of Torah!" which he did. As an expert on

topics of Torah, the Rebbe was extremely impressed with what he heard, even commenting that he had never heard anything like it. When he asked whether this soul was in this world, the Rebbe was shown who this person was.

The Rebbe sent for him, praying fervently that this soul should become close to him.

This soul resided in Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, a follower of the *Maggid* of Terhovitse. Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac earned his living through money changing. When he came to the Rebbe he became infused with a fiery passion towards serving *Hashem*. The Rebbe guided him by outlining specific practices which he should perform, which are in accordance with the roots of his soul. One of these practices – indeed the most difficult one – involved refraining from talking even one word to anyone for an entire year, save for the *Maggid* of Terhovitse.

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac returned home, intent on carrying out the Rebbe's instructions. He detached himself fully from all mundane matters, spending his entire day immersed in Torah and prayer, without exchanging a word with anyone. This eccentric behavior incurred the wrath of his entire family, in particular of his wife and her father. They attacked him verbally with vicious tirades and with endless criticism, even accusing him of having taken leave of his senses, and worse.

With his divine wisdom the Rebbe perceived how much Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac was suffering by being constantly harangued. Fearing he would not have the strength to resist for much longer, the Rebbe immediately ordered one of his loyal men to hire a carriage for him to travel to Terhovitse. In no time at all, the Rebbe was on his way, arriving in Terhovitse at night. He ordered the wagon to stop at the house of where Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac lived with his father-in-law, knocked on the door, and entered.

The father-in-law was shocked to see the Rebbe in his house. He did not know what to make of this unexpected visit. Meanwhile, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac was in his room, reciting the *Shema* before going to sleep, pronouncing each word with deep concentration and



devotion. The Rebbe did not wish to disturb him by entering his room, so he waited outside.

In the meantime, the Rebbe began admonishing the father-in-law for his shameful treatment of his son-in-law. The Rebbe asked him, “If, one morning as you are donning *tefillin*, a non-Jew, who never saw *tefillin* before, sees you wrapping a strap of animal hide around your arm while you refuse to speak to anyone, would he not say to you that you are crazy? (The Rebbe was hinting that he, too, was accusing his son-in-law of being crazy for serving his Creator in a unique way and guided by true *tzaddikim*, just because he, the father-in-law, did not understand it.)

In this vein the Rebbe continued his rebuke, until the words penetrated the father-in-law’s heart. He was filled with remorse, and committed himself to henceforth desisting from tormenting his son-in-law.

By this time Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac had concluded his recitation of *Shema*. He was overjoyed to see the Rebbe. The visit revived his broken spirit and imbued him with renewed strength. The Rebbe spent the night in their house, and in the morning he rose early and went home. From then on Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac was free to continue serving *Hashem* undisturbed in the way that brought him closest to God.

In spite of the fierce opposition to the Rebbe, his disciples continued to stream to Zlatopol from all the surrounding villages, paying no heed to the great controversy and the public’s antagonism towards the Rebbe, which had been started by the Mentor of S.

The Rebbe used to say, “Other great *tzaddikim* rose to spiritual heights, but then they remained in their positions. On the other hand, I become a new person with each passing second, thank God.”

The Rebbe even explained why it was necessary for him to have constant opposition. “A *tzaddik* is compared to a tree, with roots and branches,” he said. “Every *tzaddik* must endure opposition before he attains his ultimate level in *avodas Hashem*, for our Sages say (Tractate *Sanhedrin 7a*): “Strife is comparable to a breach in a dam.”

Just as water helps a tree to grow, so does strife help the *tzaddik* to grow. But I am constantly rising, so I must face constant opposition. If I were to know that I am standing now on the same level as I stood one hour ago, I would have no desire to continue living in this world!”

Once during the height of the opposition, some of his people complained to the Rebbe about the bitter antagonism and humiliation that they must endure.

The Rebbe responded, “Believe me, I could easily make peace with the entire world and immediately end all the controversy against me. But what can I do? Certain spiritual levels and chambers can only be attained through strife.

“What better proof can I bring than Moshe Rabbeinu himself? Moshe definitely had the power to draw all of *Klal Yisrael* to him, as it is written (*Shemos 35:1*): “*And Moshe gathered the entire assembly of Jews.*” Even he, who was the essence of Knowledge, and who had the ability to gather all the Jews around himself, was confronted with opposition, as it is written (*Shemos 33:8*): “*And they gazed after Moshe*”. Our Sages explain (*Yerushalmi, Bikkurim Ch. 3, Halacha 3*) that they checked up on him and concluded that he was using their money for his personal benefit!

“Similarly, our Sages explain the verse (*Bamidbar 16:4*): “*And Moshe heard and he fell on his face*”. What did he hear? That they were accusing him of adultery!

“Moshe suffered all of this because certain levels can only be attained by a *tzaddik* when he is subjected to strife and controversy. As I have said before, our Sages compare conflict to water (*Sanhedrin 7a*), as it is written (*Mishlei 17:14*): “*The beginning of a quarrel is like releasing water*”, and it is also written (*Devarim 20:19*): “*A person is (like) a tree*”. The more it is watered the better it grows.”

The Rebbe was not swayed in the least by the fierce opposition, continuing with his holy *avodos*. In Zlatopol he also fasted a lot, sometimes for an entire week, from Shabbos to Shabbos. During one such fast the Rebbe was so weak by Friday that he had to be

driven to the bathhouse, for he had no strength to walk. He then explained that this unusual weakness was due to the fact that his fasting had become public knowledge, for until then it had been a well-kept secret.

While in Zlatopol, the Rebbe began to be involved with “rectifying souls” (see below).

In one of the villages near Zlatopol there lived a Jew who leased the bar and all the inns from the local *poritz*. He then sub-leased the inns to Jewish innkeepers. The wife of this man was very kindhearted and righteous. Often, when the innkeepers did not have the funds with which to pay her husband, she was overcome with pity for them and she would give them money with which to pay.

One day this woman fell ill with a fatal disease. Her husband summoned several doctors but none of them was able to find a cure. The Jewish innkeepers were particularly devastated by her grave situation, for they were well aware that if she were to die, God forbid, no-one would have mercy on them. Therefore, they all resolved to find a cure for her, bringing in the biggest doctors and trying every available remedy.

One of these innkeepers was somewhat of a follower of the Rebbe. From time to time he would travel to Zlatopol to the Rebbe. Now this man approached the husband of the sick woman, urging him to send him with a *pidyon* to the Rebbe with a request that the Rebbe pray for the woman’s recovery. Since the woman was already at death’s door, her husband agreed to send the *pidyon* to Rebbe via this innkeeper.

When the man brought the *pidyon* to the Rebbe, the Rebbe asked him to bring him one *rendel*. The Rebbe took the *rendel* in his hand and promptly stated that it did not have the correct weight. So the man brought a different *rendel*, which the Rebbe once again rejected, stating that it, too, did not have the correct weight. After several attempts at finding a *rendel* of the correct weight, the man returned to the Rebbe accompanied by a moneychanger bearing numerous *rendlech* and a scale. Finally the Rebbe found a *rendel* of the proper

weight, after which he told the man, “You may go home now, for the woman is already on the road to recovery!”

The innkeeper was incredulous at these words. He glanced at his watch to note the exact time, then he set off for the village, curious to learn what was happening there. Upon his arrival at the woman’s house he was welcomed excitedly by the family, who began relating to him what had transpired in his absence.

As soon as the innkeeper had left the village the woman’s situation became critical, so that she was on the verge of dying. The entire household erupted in a cacophony of weeping and wailing. Suddenly, she woke up and requested a sip of water. She then proceeded to tell those present that after her soul left her body it appeared before the Heavenly court, where they weighed her deeds, both good and bad, on a scale. Since the bad deeds weighed more, she was sentenced to die. Just then, a young man appeared (whose features, as she described them, matched those of the Rebbe exactly). He threw one *rendel* onto the side of good deeds, and it tipped the scale in her favor. She was permitted to live.

The innkeeper asked what time this crisis had occurred, and it turned out to be precisely the moment that the Rebbe was weighing *rendlech* on the scale. Everyone was amazed to learn of the connection between the Rebbe’s *avoda* and this woman’s fate. Now the innkeeper understood why the Rebbe had been so particular about having a coin with the precise weight.

On Rosh Chodesh Adar a fourth daughter was born to the Rebbe. Contrary to the custom, the Rebbe did not name her right away. His followers were surprised when one week, and then another, passed, and still the baby had no name.

One of his disciples, Rabbi Chaikel, the Rebbe’s *chazan*, came in to see the Rebbe. “Rebbe,” he said, “now people will have another reason for talking. They’ll say we don’t even name our children ...”

Since the Rebbe had the custom of never insisting on anything, he said, “Let her be named ‘Chaya!’” He immediately went off to *shul* to give her the name “Chaya”.



Later, on the same day the baby was given a name, Wednesday, *Parshas Ki Sisa*, the 19<sup>th</sup> day of *Adar*, the sad news arrived from Mezibuz that the Rebbe's mother, the righteous Feige, had passed away. Now it was clear why the Rebbe had procrastinated with giving the baby a name, for he had wanted to name her for his mother.

Rabbi Chaikel, devastated, cried out, "When will I finally learn not to interfere in the Rebbe's affairs?"

Before Pesach, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, who had become the Rebbe's follower that year, came to the Rebbe. On the way he slept over in a hotel, where he saw in his dream the entire Torah that the Rebbe had heard at the time.

In the morning he rose early and traveled directly to the Rebbe. He fearfully related the entire dream to the Rebbe, terrified of its implications. When he finished, the Rebbe left the room without saying a word. Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac collapsed in a dead faint, from which he was revived with great difficulty. Soon thereafter he was laid up with a fatal illness. One day the Rebbe fed him some juice, while commenting, "Today I served a true *talmid chacham!*" But before long Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac died.

It was around that time that Emperor Paul I of Russia was assassinated. No-one knew which of his two sons, Alexander or Nicholas, would succeed him to the throne. One was fanatically religious, posing a physical threat to Jews, while the other was more liberal. Although having a liberal ruler might seem ideal for the Jews, it came at a spiritual cost, for the universities would be thrown open to all Jews.

Contemporary *tzaddikim* were divided as to which of the two choices was preferable. After *Pesach* the Rebbe was discussing this topic, when the door opened and in walked his disciple, Rabbi Shmuel Isaac. He was so emotional at this encounter, not having seen the Rebbe since the latter's departure for *Eretz Yisrael*, that he fainted at the Rebbe's feet. The Rebbe then remarked that in Heaven they were also asking him who should succeed to the throne.

In the end Alexander was crowned. For the next twenty-six years, until his death, there was strife between him and his brother, Nicholas. In 1827, when Nicholas ascended the throne, a law was passed, making it mandatory for Jewish children to be drafted into the army. That same year Rabbi Shmuel Isaac passed away. He had been heard to say on that *Simchas Torah*, “It’s either me, or him...”

Before he had come to the Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Isaac had dreamed a terrifying dream. He dreamed he was standing in a vast forest from which he was unable to find the way out. Suddenly, he saw a man in front of him, carrying a sharp, double-edged sword. Rabbi Shmuel Isaac began to panic, but the man seemed friendly, saying, “Don’t be afraid! Just come with me!”

He walked with the man, until they arrived at a large house in the middle of the forest. The man said to Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, “Go into the house, and there you’ll see many swords, large and small. You may pick one sword for yourself, but you must be sure to know how to use it.”

Rabbi Shmuel Isaac entered the house. An old man who was sitting there said to him, “You may only take a sword from here after you feel certain that your entire body is stain-free. Additionally, you must also know how to use the sword that you are taking from this place.”

As he was talking, dark clouds appeared in the sky. The old man pushed him outside, and said to him, “You are not yet worthy of taking a sword from here, because of the clouds that surround you. But if you can manage to go deeper into the forest you will come across a beautiful building in which a craftsman sharpens swords. Even the man you saw before, who knows perfectly well how to handle his double-edged sword, must also have his sword sharpened by this craftsman. But who knows whether this craftsman will open the door for you at all?” (This was all part of the dream.)

When Rabbi Shmuel Isaac awoke his heart was pounding so hard that he decided he must go to the Rebbe. He walked for a good part of the way, not having the money to pay for transportation, until he finally arrived in Zlatopol. Since he had no idea where the Rebbe lived, he asked someone for directions. “What business do you have

with him? Don't you know the entire city is in a fight with him?" was the stern response he received. Rabbi Shmuel Isaac immediately recalled the old man's words, "Who knows whether this craftsman will open the door for you at all?"

He plucked up his courage and made his way to the Rebbe. As soon as he opened the door, he ran to the Rebbe and fainted at his feet.

Soon more people came to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe taught the lesson "*Emor el HaKohanim*" (*Likutei Maharan I, Chapter 2*). In this lesson the Rebbe hinted at Rabbi Shmuel Isaac's dream. Rabbi Shmuel Isaac was amazed that the Rebbe knew everything. From then on he began to spend his time praying with deep devotion, and cleaving to his Creator with great *mesiras nefesh*.

On *Shavuot*, between the first and second days, the Rebbe told the following story: One of the *Baal Shem Tov's* disciples was once very ill and weak. He sent a messenger to the *Baal Shem Tov* requesting that his Rebbe should please come to him, if possible. When the messenger relayed the request to the *Baal Shem Tov*, he agreed to go, and they returned together. On the way the messenger asked the *Baal Shem Tov*, "I once heard you say that if a person repents wholeheartedly he will not die prematurely. It seems to me that this sick man has genuinely repented and he's a righteous person, and yet he is so young. Why is he not healed?"

The *Baal Shem Tov* replied, "Indeed I said that, and it's true. And this sick man has genuinely repented for all of his sins. The reason he is not healed yet is because he did not confess his sins before a true *tzaddik*. That is why I am traveling to him now, to give him the opportunity to confess. If he will confess, he will recover right away. But if not, his condition will immediately deteriorate. He will begin to scream in agony from pain in all his limbs, and then he will expire.

"For in truth, according to the Heavenly Tribunal he is free of iniquity, for he has repented for all his sins. After his death no evil force will have the power to harm him; he has already rectified all of his shortcomings. However, only if he will confess to me, will he recover immediately. Otherwise the evil forces will be empowered to

have their revenge on him in this world by attacking his body and his limbs until he dies.”

And so it was. The *Baal Shem Tov* came to him and said, “Say that which you know, and which God knows, and which I, too, know,” meaning that he should confess his sins. Three times the *Baal Shem Tov* repeated this, but the man had no desire to confess.

Suddenly he began to yell, “Ouch! It hurts! It hurts!” He suffered agonizing pains in all of his body parts, for his bones had started to disintegrate. After screaming in agony for a while, he died, just as the *Baal Shem Tov* had predicted.

When the Rebbe finished telling this story he gave the lesson of “*Onochi*” (*Likutei Maharani I, Ch. 4*). There the Rebbe discussed the idea of verbally confessing one’s sins to a *talmid chacham*. From then on the Rebbe’s followers were dubbed “the *viduy’nikes*” – “the confessors”.

After *Shavuos* that year, Rabbi Yitzchak, the son-in-law of the *Maggid* of Terhovitse became close to the Rebbe. Not only did he possess noble character traits, but he was also a learned Torah scholar and a great *oved Hashem*. Rabbi Yitzchak had grown up in the house of the holy Reb Zushe of Anipoli, who was a disciple of the *Maggid* of Mezerich. Before Reb Zushe died, which occurred on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of *Shevat*, 5560 (1800), Rabbi Yitzchak had approached him to inquire, “To which *tzaddik* should I go after you (are no longer with us)?”

Reb Zushe had responded, “Go to a *tzaddik* who tells his followers to verbally confess their sins, and who gives them *tikkunim* (rectifications) for everything.” From then on, Rabbi Yitzchak had searched unsuccessfully for a *tzaddik* who demanded confessions from his followers.

His father-in-law, the *Maggid* of Terhovitse, always tried to convince people to come to the Rebbe, to whom he was so deeply devoted. He also tried to convince Rabbi Yitzchak, but the latter never wanted to come. However, after that *Shavuos* he heard people derogatorily referring to the Rebbe’s followers as “*viduy’nikes*”, which reminded



him of Reb Zushe's instructions that he should go to a *tzaddik* who demands that his followers confess to him. It occurred to him that perhaps this was the *tzaddik* whom Reb Zushe meant, and he traveled to Zlatopol to see the Rebbe.

Upon his arrival he watched as people came out of the Rebbe's chamber, with tears streaming down their cheeks after they had confessed their sins to him. Rabbi Yitzchak went to the *Bais Hamidrash* to await his turn together with the crowd that had gathered there. Suddenly the Rebbe came in, and indicated that everyone should leave. They all doffed their *tallis* and *tefillin* and left. Rabbi Yitzchak also got ready to leave, but before he reached the door the Rebbe grasped the doorknob and locked the door.

Rabbi Yitzchak remained alone with the Rebbe in the *Bais Hamidrash*. The Rebbe lit his pipe and began pacing back and forth. Rabbi Yitzchak became so frightened, that he began to recall his entire past, from when he was little until that day.

Suddenly the Rebbe approached him and said, "*Heint zog!*" ("Today, say!") Rabbi Yitzchak began to bare his soul before the Rebbe, telling the Rebbe everything that had transpired to him during his lifetime. The Rebbe spoke with him for a while, and from then on Rabbi Yitzchak's eyes were opened to the extent that he perceived some of the *Or Haganuz* - the ancient primordial light that God concealed after the world was created. He became strongly attached and utterly devoted to the Rebbe, following the Rebbe's guidance in *avodas Hashem* to the end of his life. It was around this time that the Rebbe gave the lesson "*Or Haganuz*" (*Likutei Maharan I, Ch. 15*).

After *Shavuos* the Rebbe recounted the following:

"One of my people has been having thoughts of the World-to-Come for several years already. He wished to discuss it with me, but was unable to do so. Who could know of this? Who is a prophet to know what others are thinking?

"This past *Shavuos* he was here. I dreamed that two men appeared: the first one came for a reason, while the second one

merely accompanied him. When I asked them, “What are you doing here?” the first one replied that the person who was troubled by his thoughts about the World-to-Come had made him swear by a *Sefer Torah* that he will come here, so he came. He informed me of the thoughts that were troubling my disciple – and then I awoke.

“Later, when my disciple came to take leave from me, as is customary, I spoke to him about the thoughts that had been bothering him. He was overjoyed that I knew what he had been thinking.”

This story turned out to be the basis for a wondrous revelation the Rebbe made regarding the World-to-Come. The Rebbe said, “It would be ideal for a person to accustom himself to life in the World-to-Come, by abstaining from worldly pleasures such as eating, drinking, etc., just as we see when a person is ill he loses his appetite for food, drink, and sensual desire. Not only do these delights seem unappealing to a sick person, but he is even revolted by them. The reason for this is that he is somewhat closer to the World-to-Come, where these desires have no place.

“Therefore, it is advisable for a person to detach himself from these desires while he is in good health. In fact, if he were to contemplate the sheer delight that exists in the World-to-Come he would lose all interest in the so-called pleasures of this world. In this instance forgetfulness is a good thing, even though usually it is a drawback, for it is only through forgetting that a person is able to survive in this world. Imagine if one constantly remembered the pleasures of the World-to-Come ...

“And what are these? There is a huge angel with a thousand heads; each head has a thousand tongues; each tongue has a thousand voices; each voice sings a thousand songs. When this angel gets up to sing, a melody of unparalleled sweetness emerges. Were a person to recall how lowly and worthless he is compared to this, he would lose his will to live and he would die before his time. This is especially true in the case of a person who is steeped in the filth of immorality and sin. If he possessed no forgetfulness he would never manage to rise up to serve his God.

“From this vantage point forgetfulness is a good thing. On the other hand, a person should remind himself that it’s a shame to lose his World-to-Come, Heaven-forbid. Our Sages say (*Akotzin*, at the end of Chapter 3) that in the future God will give each *tzaddik* an inheritance of three hundred and ten worlds, and so on. Imagine the magnitude of one world, how many houses and courtyards it contains, how many towns and countries, how vast it is, how innumerable are its planets and constellations – and these all comprise just one world! Now multiply that by three hundred and ten, so many worlds, *for each tzaddik*! This is virtually impossible to contemplate!

“Furthermore, the three-hundred-and-ten worlds for each *tzaddik* are built by means of all the strife and opposition that the *tzaddik* endures, for all the words of gossip and slander are transformed into stones. Since a *tzaddik* usually has numerous detractors who spend a lot of time ridiculing him, he has lots of stones. But since they are fashioned out of strife, they are not connected to each other.

“The *tzaddik* must make peace between all these stones, an aspect of creating *shalom bayis* (lit. peace in the home). After binding them together, a house can be built with them. Soon these new houses form cities, with the cities eventually forming entire countries, and so on, until three hundred and ten worlds are created for the *tzaddik*.

“This is alluded to in the verse (*Mishlei* 8:21): “*Lehanchil ohavei yesh* – I have what to give to those who love Me”. The word “*yesh*” has the numerical value of 310. For the *tzaddik* is so full of love for every Jew, that he judges even his opponents favorably. Thus he is able to make peace amongst all the stones that are thrown at him, turning them into building blocks to form his 310 worlds in the World-to-Come.

“As Avigail told her husband, King David, when he was being relentlessly persecuted by his enemies, ‘*Hashem* shall certainly make for my lord an enduring house’ (*Shmuel I*, 25:28), meaning that God is building a house for him out of all the ‘stones’ that were thrown at him, as mentioned above.

“The *tzaddik* bears no grudge against his antagonists, always judging them favorably by assuming that they have good reasons for

opposing him. For in truth, the world would be incapable of tolerating the tremendous light that the *tzaddik* radiates. Thus, it is only in the merit of his detractors that he continues to exist. The *tzaddik* even believes that his opponents are motivated by this worthy intention when they persecute him.

“Furthermore, since numerous evil forces are constantly attacking a true *tzaddik*, his detractors persecute him, thereby silencing these evil forces. We see, similarly, when someone is threatened by others for whatever reason, his detractor might zealously declare, “I’ll take care of him and make sure he gets what he deserves!” By saying this he is actually calming the fury of the person’s opponents so that the person is spared their violent attacks, to which he may have otherwise succumbed.

“So, in reality, the zealot is performing a huge favor for this person, exchanging a devastating assault from several opponents for one relatively mild act of revenge. We see an example of this with the incident of Pinchas and Zimri. If not for the zealot, Pinchas, the entire Jewish nation deserved to be annihilated, Heaven forbid. It was only thanks to Pinchas’ act of extreme bravery, by which he avenged Hashem’s honor, that the rest of the nation was spared a terrible fate, as it is written (*Bamidbar 25:11*): “*When he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so I did not consume ...*”

“Thus, we see that the one who opposes a *tzaddik* and says, “I’ll teach him a lesson and show him who’s the stronger of us two!” is actually rendering him a huge favor, for the *tzaddik* is thereby being spared much harsher opposition, as mentioned above. This opponent is also doing a favor for the *tzaddik* in that when the *tzaddik* needs to ascend from one high level to the next he is tested to see whether he can stand in the King’s chamber. This chamber is comparable to the *tzaddik*’s mouth, which is also referred to as ‘chamber’ (*heichal*), whose numerical value is 65, just like the numerical value of Hashem’s Holy Name, *Alef Daled Nun Yud*, which is also an aspect of ‘mouth’, as we find in the introduction to *Tikunei Zohar*, on side one of Page 17: “*malchus peh*”.



“If the *tzaddik*’s opponent is a *tzaddik*, he is being tested to see whether he can stand in the King’s chamber, which is alluded to by the mouth of the *tzaddik* who is opposing him. Then he can rise to a higher level in the Heavenly realms. So we find that he actually performed a huge favor for him.”

After this lengthy discussion the Rebbe gave the discourse that is mentioned in *Likutei Maharani I*, Chapter 241: “When a person faces harsh judgment, God-forbid, the judgment threatens to destroy the person ...”

After this discussion, many people became inspired to attempt to make peace between the Rebbe and the Mentor of S. A perfect opportunity soon presented itself, when they both found themselves together in the same place. The Mentor of S. approached the Rebbe and said, “How is it possible that an old toothless man like me, should instigate a fight?” To prove his point, he grasped the Rebbe’s finger and placed it in his mouth to show him that he was edentulous. “I only wish to ask you about some statements that you have made. Is it true that you said that there is another Zlatipoli in Heaven?”

The Rebbe responded, “Our Sages have clearly explained the verse, ‘*cities that are great and fortified up to the heavens*’ (*Devarim* 9:1) to mean that just as there are cities down below, so, too, are there cities up in Heaven.”

The Mentor of S. continued. “And is it true that you said that in Zlatipoli you are rectifying the sin of Yeravam ben Nevat?”

“True!” the Rebbe replied, and he went on to explain the concept that is discussed in *Likutei Maharani II*, Chapter 62, describing how the sin of idolatry (*eileh elohecha Yisrael*) is rectified by wanderings (*eileh masei Bnei Yisrael*).

“And is it true that you said you have been in *Mashiach*’s chamber?”

“What about it? You were there and you did not see me there? But since you’re asking, I would like to invite you to my house for a cup of tea or coffee, and there you will publicly announce that you rescind all your words and that you regret having entered in a conflict with me. After you do that I will explain this matter in detail.”

“I’ll go home first, and then I’ll come to visit you,” the Mentor of S. responded. As he was walking away, the Rebbe heard him muttering to himself, “What will the wealthy people say if I’ll visit him and make peace with him?”

After that the Mentor of S. never returned to the Rebbe. The Rebbe said, “He will never make peace with me anymore; if anything, he’ll only intensify his fight against me. Nevertheless, I do not fear him at all, for he has already shown me that he has no teeth ...” ●

 . . . TO BRESLOV

On *Rosh Hashana*, 5562 (1801), the Rebbe taught the lesson that is written in Chapter 35 of *Likutei Maharani I*, and on *Sukkos* he expounded on the lecture that comprises Chapter 33 of *Likutei Maharani I*.

During the winter of 1801-1802 a great controversy raged between *tzaddikim* of that period regarding the collection of funds for the poor of *Eretz Yisrael*. There were those who sided with Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, author of "*Tanya*", and those who supported Rabbi Avraham Kalisker. In this connection the Rebbe taught the lesson described in Chapter 64 of *Likutei Maharani I*.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of *Shevat*, *Shabbos Shira*, the Rebbe explained the topic brought down in Chapter 38 of *Likutei Maharani I*. The next Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> of *Shevat*, *erev Shabbos Yisro*, the Rebbe concluded reciting *Kaddish* for his mother's passing.

Before *Purim* some individuals vilified the Rebbe to the *Maggid* of Terhovitse. The latter inquired of his son-in-law, Rabbi Yitzchok, a loyal disciple of the Rebbe, whether he was in possession of any of the Rebbe's manuscripts. Rabbi Yitzchok showed him the Rebbe's lesson "*Emor el haKohanim*" that is brought down in Chapter 2 of *Likutei Maharani I*. The *Maggid* was beside himself with excitement. "What do you say to this? Is it *Zohar*? It's even higher than *Zohar*! Is it *Tikkunim*? It's even greater than *Tikkunim*!" He then spoke disparagingly of those who had denounced the Rebbe.

Around this time the incident with Rabbi Shimon occurred. Rabbi Shimon had traveled to Medvedivke to collect funds for the Rebbe. On the way home, he unfortunately decided to appropriate this money and invest it in a business venture. The deal failed and he lost the money, so that upon his return he was unable to repay the Rebbe. “For this you deserve to be banished,” the Rebbe declared. Shortly thereafter *Hashem* caused a chain of events to transpire, resulting in the necessity for Rabbi Shimon to travel to a town over 200 miles away from Medvedivke, deep in the Russian countryside, where there were very few Jews. Although Rabbi Shimon had intended to return immediately, three-and-a-half years passed before he came home.

After *Pesach* the Rebbe recounted a certain astounding tale about bread. (Since he warned us never to share this story with outsiders, this story has not been printed. It remains only in manuscript form.) The Rebbe instructed his disciples to continually review this story, explaining that it would benefit both those who were present at the time as well as those who were not present, adding, “You will understand the outcome of this story after a while.” He repeatedly warned his people not to share this story with strangers. “If you will share this story with an outsider I will still love you, but that love will be like the joy of Chaikel Chazzan, which is not real joy at all.”

The Rebbe asked everyone to look out for each other in this regard. There was, however, one individual about whom the Rebbe’s followers worried whether he could be trusted to maintain silence. The latter did not voice their concern to the Rebbe, but even as they were thinking about it, the Rebbe commented, “For this individual I take responsibility! He will not repeat my story to anyone.” After leaving the Rebbe’s presence, his followers questioned the man about the story they had all just heard, but the man had no idea what they were talking about. Finally they understood that the Rebbe’s powerful statement “For this individual I take responsibility...” had resulted in the man forgetting the entire episode.

After *Shavuos*, the Rebbe prayed early one morning, and then he sent his daughter, Sarah, to summon one of his people. When the individual arrived, the Rebbe said to him, “Come with me. Let’s go for a walk.”



They walked past the city limits, strolling in the grassy fields. The Rebbe remarked to his companion, “If you would only merit to hear the songs and praises of each and every blade of grass as it sings to its Creator with no ulterior motive, impure thought, or expectation of remuneration. How wondrous and beautiful it is to hear such song! How good it is to serve *Hashem* in awe, among these blades of grass!

Soon they came upon a mountain that was near the town. The disciple asked, “What’s here?” The Rebbe explained that this mountain contained a hollow area. “Let’s go inside,” the Rebbe said. Once inside they were not visible to anyone on the outside. The Rebbe sat down upon the ground, retrieved the book “*Sha’arei Zion*” from his sleeve, and began reciting page after page without pause, all the while crying profusely. The disciple stood nearby in astonishment, holding his pipe, for a long time. When the Rebbe stopped crying he asked the man to go outside to find out what time it was. The man was shocked to see that the sun was already setting. This meant that the Rebbe had spent an entire summer’s day crying unceasingly.

The Rebbe then instructed him to light his pipe, and he sat there for another while, smoking in silence. The Rebbe commented to his companion that there would come a time when it would be extremely difficult to draw near to him, but that “now I am in your hands, and if you and Rabbi Yakov Yosef wish, I can turn you both into *tzaddikim* as great as myself!”

That summer the heated controversy against the Rebbe intensified. The Mentor of S. kept slandering the Rebbe and claiming that he was in possession of letters from all the great leaders of the time in which they supported him (the Mentor of S.) and condemned the Rebbe.

In reality the opposite was true. The Rebbe had actually received letters of support from all the great *tzaddikim* of that era, written with utmost love and respect, and expressly stating their endorsement of the Rebbe. The following holy *tzaddikim* wrote letters of support to the Rebbe:

- The holy Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev;
- The holy Rabbi Gedalya of Linitz;

- The Rebbe's uncle, the holy Rabbi Baruch of Mezibuz;
- The holy Rabbi Zev of Czarny-Ostracha;
- The holy Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk;
- The Rebbe's *mechutan*, the holy Rabbi Arye Leibush of Voltishisk;
- The Rebbe's *mechutan*, the holy Rabbi Avraham Dov of Chmelnik.

Although all of the aforementioned great men denigrated the Mentor of S., the latter paid no heed to their words, persisting relentlessly in his baseless vendetta.

That summer an important meeting was scheduled to take place in Berdichev, to be attended by many famous *tzaddikim*. The Rebbe's father, Rabbi Simcha, visited the Rebbe in Zlatipoli, inviting his son to accompany him to Berdichev.

The Rebbe agreed to accompany his father. But before he embarked on the trip he locked himself in a room with a *minyán* of ten men, and engaged in a debate with the *Satan*. The entire episode is exceedingly mysterious, and until today the details of what transpired in that room are unknown, for the men refused to divulge any of it. When the Rebbe emerged from the room he stated that from that day on the *Satan* will use every possible tactic to ruin everything that the Rebbe attempts to accomplish.

The Rebbe accompanied his father to Berdichev, where a large contingent of well-known *tzaddikim* had gathered. A unanimous decision was made to excommunicate the Mentor of S. due to his unjustified persecution of the Rebbe. They were about to carry out the *cherem* when someone interfered and convinced the Rav of Berdichev, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, that it was inappropriate for such a controversial act to be committed under his jurisdiction. The plan was abandoned. Later when the Rebbe met with the Rav of Berdichev the latter received him warmly and with utmost love.

From Berdichev the Rebbe traveled to Tulchin to visit his uncle, Rabbi Boruch of Mezibuz, who used to spend two months each year in Tulchin, one during the summer and one during the winter. The Rebbe asked his uncle to select a local town which would be

suitable for him to move to. Rabbi Boruch replied that there was a town near Tulchin, by the name of Breslov that would meet his needs perfectly. Rabbi Boruch immediately wrote to the community leaders in Breslov, summoning them to appear before him in order to discuss the matter. Two partners, by the name of Rabbi Moshe Chinkes and Rabbi Avraham Payes, duly arrived to invite the Rebbe to settle in their town as per the wishes of his holy uncle, Rabbi Boruch. The Rebbe requested them to write a contract in which they agreed to provide him with one *rendel* per week. The matter was easily settled to the satisfaction of all parties involved, after which the Rebbe returned to Zlatipoli in order to move his family to their new home in Breslov.

The Rebbe fervently desired that his cantor, Rabbi Chaikel, join him in Breslov, promising him, “Just as I am unique in my specialty, so, too, will you be unique in your specialty – *chazzanus* - if you join me.” To his chagrin Rabbi Chaikel did not accept his offer, a decision the *chazzan* later lived to regret. ●

## ... GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

*Adar*: the sixth month in the Jewish calendar

*Alef Bais*: the Hebrew alphabet

*Amoraim*: renowned Jewish scholars who “said” or “told over” the teachings of the Oral Torah, from about 200 to 500 CE in Babylonia and the Land of Israel. Their legal discussions and debates were eventually codified in the Gemara. The *Amoraim* followed the *Tannaim* in the sequence of ancient Jewish scholars. The *Tannaim* were direct transmitters of uncoded oral tradition; the *Amoraim* expounded upon and clarified the oral law after its initial codification.

*Aron*: chest containing the Tablets of Stone upon which the Ten Commandments were inscribed

*Arizal*: Rabbi Yitzchok Luria Ashkenazy (1534-1572), considered the father of contemporary *kabbala*

*Avodas Hashem*: service of God

*Avoda Zara*: the name of a tractate in the Talmud, located in *Nezikin*, the fourth Order of the Talmud dealing with damages.

*Avraham Avinu*: “Abraham, our Patriarch,”

*Bar mitzvah*: the age of 13 years at which a Jewish male ritually comes of age



*Bava Kamma*: lit. “The First Gate”; the first of a series of three Talmudic tractates in the order *Nezikin* (“Damages”) that deal with civil matters such as damages and torts

*Baal HaTanya*: lit. “author of Tanya”, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi

*Baal Shem Tov*: Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer (1698-1760), considered to be the founder of Hasidic Judaism

*Bamidbar*: the Book of Numbers

*Baruch Hashem*: “thank God”

*Bava Metzia*: lit. “the middle gate”, a Talmudic tractate

*Be’er Hagolah*: the classic defense of rabbinic Judaism authored by the *Maharal* of Prague

*Beis Medrash*: Jewish study hall located in a synagogue or other building

*Beraishis*: Genesis, the first of the Five Books of Torah

*Beraishis Rabba*: a Midrashic text on the Book of Genesis

*Bimah*: a podium in the center of the synagogue upon which the Torah scroll lies while it is read

*Birchas Hamazon*: Grace after Meals

*Bris*: (lit. “covenant), aka *bris mila*, the *mitzva* of circumcision of a Jewish male

*Chabad*: a Chassidic movement; the name is an acronym of *Chochma, Bina, Daas* (Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge)

*Chacham*: Hebrew title of respect for a wise man

*Chagiga*: the last tractate of the Mishnaic order of *Moed* (“festivals”)

*Challah*: the *mitzvah* of separating a portion of dough/bread and donating it to the *kohain*

*Chametz*: leavened foods that are forbidden on the Jewish holiday of Passover

*Chassid*: (pl. *chassidim*), follower of a particular Rabbi

*Chazal*: acronym for the Hebrew “*Chachameinu Zichronom Livracha* – Our Sages, of blessed memory)

*Chazan*: cantor

*Chidushei Torah*: Torah insights

*Chol Hamoed*: the intermediate days of *Pesach* and *Sukkos*

*Chuppa*: wedding canopy

*Davened*: (Yiddish) “prayed”

*Degel Machne Efraim*: Rabbi Moshe Chaim Efraim of Sudilkov (1748-1800), grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov*, and author of a work by the same name

*Devarim*: Deuteronomy, the fifth of the Five Books of Torah

*Eiduyos*: lit. “testimonies”, a tractate in *Nezikin*, the fourth order of the Mishna

*Ein Yaakov*: a compilation of all the Aggadic material in the Talmud together with commentaries

*Eitz Chaim*: a kabbalistic text written by Rabbi Chaim Vital

*Elul*: the sixth month in the Jewish calendar

*Eretz Yisrael*: lit. “the land of Israel”

*Erev Pesach*: lit. “Passover eve”, the day preceding Passover

*Erev Rosh Hashana*: lit. “*Rosh Hashana* eve”, (the day preceding *Rosh Hashana*)

*Erev Shabbos*: lit. “*Shabbos* eve”, a reference to Friday (“the day preceding *Shabbos*”)

*Gemara*: Talmud

*Hakafos*: (singular: *hakafa*), walking or dancing around the *bimah* in *shul*

*Halacha* (adj. *halachic*): Jewish religious law

*Havdala*: the prayer recited when taking leave of *Shabbos*

*Hisbodedus*: lit. “self seclusion”, an unstructured, spontaneous and individualized form of prayer and meditation taught by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

*Hoshea*: one of the later prophets, a chapter in the Bible

*Isru Chag*: the day after each of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals

*Iyar*: the second month in the Jewish calendar

*Kabbala*: the ancient Jewish tradition of mystical interpretation of the Bible, first transmitted orally and using esoteric methods (including ciphers)

*Kavanos*: mystical secrets

*Kaddish*: a hymn of praises to God found in the Jewish prayer service, usually referring specifically to the “Mourner’s *Kaddish*”

*Kefitzas haderech*: a Jewish Kabbalistic term that literally means “contracting the path.” Kefitzas haderech refers to miraculous travel between two distant places in a brief time.

*Kiddush*: the prayer recited before meals on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*

*Kiddushin*: lit. “betrothal”, the last tractate of the third order of the Mishnah *Nashim* (“Women”)

*Kitrug*: accusation

*Klal Yisrael*: a reference to “all of Jewry”

*Kohain*: priest (descendent of Aaron, the first kohain)

*Lashon hara*: derogatory speech

*L’chaim*: “to life”, a toast

*Leil tvila*: the evening of a woman’s ritual immersion in a *mikva*

*Likutei Mahararan*: the magnum opus of Rabbi Nachman’s teaching

*L’shem yichud*: lit. “for the sake of the unification (of Hashem’s Name)”, a short prayer recited before the performance of a *mitzva*

**Magen Avraham:** Rabbi Avraham Gombiner, (c. 1635 – 5 October 1682), known as the *Magen Avraham* for his commentary on the *Orach Chayim* section of Rabbi Joseph Karo's *Shulchan Aruch*,

**Maggid:** lit. “maggid”, Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezrich, a disciple of the *Baal Shem Tov*, died: 1772

**Maharal:** Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, (c. 1520 – 17 September 1609) widely known as the Maharal of Prague. MaHaRaL is the Hebrew acronym of “*Moreinu ha-Rav Loew*,” (“Our Teacher, Rabbi Loew

**Mariv:** the evening prayer

**Mashiach:** the Messiah

**Matza** (pl. *matzos*): unleavened bread

**Megilla:** lit. “scroll”, the Book of Esther

**Melamed:** a teacher of children

**Meshulach** (pl. *meshulachim*): 1. a Rabbinical emissary sent to collect charity. 2. a collector of charity

**Mesillas Yescharim:** lit. “Path of the Upright”, an ethical text composed by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707–1746).

**Midrash:** the body of homiletic stories told by Jewish rabbinic sages to explain passages in the Tanakh

**Mikva:** ritual bath

**Mincha:** the afternoon prayer

**Mincha gedola:** the earliest time for reciting the *mincha* prayer

**Mishlei:** the Book of Proverbs

**Mishna:** 1. the first major written work of the Oral Torah, redacted by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi between the years 180-220 C.E. 2. a single paragraph or verse of the work itself (pl. *mishnayot*)

**Mitzva:** one of the 613 precepts in the Torah, pl. *mitzvos*

**Mochin degadlus:** “expanded consciousness” (a kabbalistic concept)



*Mochin dekatnus*: “constricted consciousness” (a kabbalistic concept)

*Mo’ed Kattan*: lit. “minor feast”, a tractate in the Talmudic order of *Mo’ed* (“appointed seasons”)

*Motzei Shabbos*: the time in the evening immediately following *Shabbos*, Saturday night

*Motzei Yom Kippur*: the time in the evening immediately following *Yom Kippur*

*Mussar*: ethics

*Ne’ila*: the closing services of *Yom Kippur*

*Neshama yeseira*: the additional soul that comes to a Jew on *Shabbos*

*Nissan*: the first month in the Jewish calendar

*Orach Chaim*: a section of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher’s compilation of Halacha (Jewish law), *Arba’ah Turim*. This section treats all aspects of Jewish law primarily pertinent to the Hebrew calendar

*Oved Hashem*: a servant of *Hashem*

*Pardes Rimonim*: a primary text of *kabbala*

*Parshas Hachodesh*: 1. a section of the Torah by the name of *Hachodesh* 2. the *Shabbos* when this section is read in the Torah

*Parshas Metzora*: 1. a section of the Torah by the name of *Metzora* 2. the *Shabbos* when this section is read in the Torah

*Parshas Noach*: 1. a section of the Torah by the name of *Noach* 2. the *Shabbos* when this section is read in the Torah

*Parshas Pikudei*: 1. a section of the Torah by the name of *Pikudei* 2. the *Shabbos* when this section is read in the Torah

*Parshas Sazria*: 1. a section of the Torah by the name of *Sazria* 2. the *Shabbos* when this section is read in the Torah

*Parsha Tzav*: 1. a section of the Torah by the name of *Tzav* 2. the *Shabbos* when this section is read in the Torah

*Pesach*: festival of Passover, celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of *Nissan*

*Peyos*: sidelocks

*Pidyon*: a sum of money donated to a *Rebbe*, usually used to support the poor

*Poritz*: non-Jewish nobleman or landowner

*Poskim*: writings of scholars

*Pri Eitz Chaim*: a kabbalistic text written by Rabbi Yitzchok Luria Ashkenazy (the “*Arizal*”)

*Pri Chodosh*: a commentary on the *Yoreh De’ah* compiled by Rabbi Chezkiya ben David da Silva (1659-1698)

*Rashi*: Rabbi Sholomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), author of a commentary on the Talmud and on *Tanach*, lived in France

*Rebbe*: Rabbi, master, teacher, leader

*Reishis Chochmah*: an important book of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), ethics and morality, written by the 16th century scholar Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas

*Rendel*: (pl. *rendlech*), ducat, gold coin

*Ri”f*: Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi (b. 1013 in Morocco – d. 1103 in Spain), a Talmudic scholar who wrote a codification of the Talmud known as *Sefer Hahalachos* (Book of Laws)

*R”osh*: Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel (b. 1250 in Germany – d. 1328 in Spain) a prominent Talmudic scholar, often referred to as *Rabbeinu Asher*, or by the Hebrew acronym for this title, *R”osh*

*Rosh Chodesh*: the first day of a Jewish month

*Rosh Hashana*: the first day of the Jewish new year

*Ruach hakodesh*: a spirit of prophecy

*Sanhedrin*: lit. “court of justice”, the fourth tractate in the Talmudic order of *Nezikin* – “damages”

*Seder*: lit. “order”, a feast conducted on Passover

*Sefer* (pl. *sefarim*): book, usu. a holy book, or a book of Rabbinic literature

*Sefer Hamiddos*: “Book of Traits” by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

*Selichos*: special prayers that are said in the period leading up to the High Holidays, and on Fast Days.

*Seuda shlishis*: the third meal of *Shabbos*

*Shabbos*: 1. the Sabbath, seventh day of the week, a day of rest 2. the first tractate in the Mishnaic order of *Moed*

*Shacharis*: the daily morning prayer

*Shadchan*: matchmaker

*Shamash*: attendant, caretaker

*Shas*: aka the Mishna, the first major work of Rabbinic literature

*Shavuos*: a Jewish holiday that occurs on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan. *Shavuos* commemorates the anniversary of the day God gave the Torah to the entire nation of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai,

*Shechina*: Diving Presence of God

*Shechita*: Jewish ritual slaughter

*Shema Yisrael*: lit. “Hear, Yisraell!” The first two words of a verse in the Torah that is an important Jewish prayer

*Shemona Esrei*: lit. “eighteen”, the central prayer of Jewish liturgy (that used to consist of eighteen blessings), aka *amida* (lit. “standing”) because it is recited while standing

*Shidduch*: match(making) for the purpose of marriage

*Shir Hashirim*: Song of Songs

*Shiur* (pl. *shiurim*): a lesson (or lessons) on any Torah topic

*Shmura*: lit. “guarded”, a reference to *matza* baked from wheat that is guarded from the time of reaping

*Shochet*: ritual slaughterer

*Shofar*: ram's horn that is sounded on *Rosh Hashana*

*Shul*: synagogue

*Shulchan Aruch*: Code of Jewish Law, compiled by Rabbi Yosef Karo in 1563

*Shulchan Aruch HaRav*: a codification of *halacha* by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi

*Sichos Haran*: lit. “Conversations of Rabbi Nachman”, the name of a book

*Siddur*: prayer book

*Simchas Torah*: lit. “rejoicing with the Torah”, Jewish holiday that celebrates and marks the conclusion of the annual cycle of public Torah readings, and the beginning of a new cycle,

*Sotah*: the fifth tractate in the Talmudic order of “Women” that deals with the suspected adulteress

*Sukka*: lit. “booth”, see *Sukkos*

*Sukkos*: Festival of Tabernacles (or Booths), celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Tishrei

*Tallis*: a Jewish prayer shawl

*Talmid chacham*: lit. “wise student”, used in reference to a Torah scholar

*Tanna*: (pl. *Tannaim*), one of the Rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, from approximately 10-220 CE

*Tanach*: Hebrew Scriptures (*Tanach* is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of each of the three subdivisions of Scriptures: Torah, Nevi'im, Kesuvim)

*Tanya*: a work of *Chabad* philosophy authored by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812)

*T'chum Shabbos*: the distance from the edge of a city in which it is permissible to walk on Shabbos (2,000 *amos* – cubits)



*Tefillin*: a set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah, which are worn by observant Jews during weekday morning prayers

*Tehillim*: Psalms

*Tekios*: sounding of the *Shofar*

*Tikun Chatzos*: lit. “midnight rectification”, a Jewish ritual prayer recited each night after midnight as an expression of mourning and lamentation over the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem

*Tikunei Zohar*: aka *Tikkunim*, a main text of Kabbalah, composed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar

*Tisch*: (lit. “table”), the gathering of *chassidim* around their *Rebbe*

*Tishrei*: the seventh month of the Jewish year

*Tosafos*: commentaries on the Talmud

*Turei Zahav*: Rabbi David ha-Levi Segal (c. 1586 – 20 February 1667), one of the greatest Polish rabbinical authorities, known as the *Turei Zahav* (abbreviated “*Taz*”) after the title of his significant *halachic* commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*

*Tzaddik*: a righteous person

*Tzom Gedalya*: “the fast of Gedalya” lamenting the assassination of the righteous governor of Judah of that name, whose murder ended Jewish autonomy following the destruction of the First Temple

*Viduy'nikes*: “those who are always confessing their sins”

*Yahrzeit*: anniversary of death

*Yerushalayim*: Jerusalem

*Yichud* (pl. *yichudim*): “unifications”, a form of Kabbalistic meditation

*Yom Kippur*: Day of Atonement, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*

*Yom Tov*: religious holiday

*Yoreh De'ah*: a section of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher's compilation of halacha (Jewish law), *Arba'ah Turim* around 1300. This section treats all aspects of Jewish law not pertinent to the Hebrew calendar, finance, torts, marriage, divorce, or sexual conduct.

*Zechor Bris*: the *selichos* prayer recited on *Erev Rosh Hashana*

*Zevachim*: the first tractate in the Mishnaic order of *Kodashim*, deals with sacrifices

*Zohar*: the foundational work in the literature of Jewish mystical thought known as *Kabbalah* ●

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