

Just Look and Remember

# **JUST LOOK AND REMEMBER**

## ***Memories of Bygone Days***

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## FOREWORD

Hundreds of books have been written about events in the Soviet Union during the tragic years of the reign of the Communist party and the KGB. However, the world knows almost nothing about the incredible, heroic and victorious struggle of the Chassidim – followers of the Lubavitcher Rebbe – against the Communist policy of forced assimilation of all Jews. This struggle bore a strong resemblance to the events in ancient Israel more than two millennia ago. Then, in a similar struggle of the few against the many, the *Hashmonaim* conquered the Hellenists, and the Almighty caused a miracle with a jar of oil in the *Beit Hamikdash*, which we commemorate on Chanuka. The struggle of the Chassidim in the former Soviet Union not only achieved its goal – preservation of Jewish education and Jewish identity, at least among a minority of Jews – it clearly demonstrated that the mighty power of the Communists is surmountable.

Rabbi Nathan Barkan, the Chief Rabbi of Latvia, the author of this book, was one of the pillars of this struggle. The story of the hero of this book, Meir Sorkin, has little in common with Rabbi Barkan's biography. Nevertheless, those who know Rabbi Barkan will easily recognize that many of Meir's thoughts and emotions are indeed characteristic of Rabbi Barkan.

The book is permeated with the spirit of the teachings and guidance of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, whose miraculous powers made the struggle both possible and victorious. The Rebbe leads both the characters in the book and people in the real world to the final redemption and to the kingdom of Moshiach.

The author introduces us to a world which is unfamiliar to most of us, and therefore at first glance seems unreal, but the more we read, the more real this world becomes.

As one of the many people whom Rabbi Barkan helped make the long journey from atheism to a Jewish lifestyle and world outlook, to do *Teshuva*, I want to express my infinite admiration and gratitude to him for yet another wonderful deed.

Professor Herman Branover

15th Tevet 5759

16 January 1999

Just Look and Remember

Dedicated to my helpmate and true friend,

My wife Zipporah,

and to my devoted friend,

Professor Herman Branover,

In recognition of our exceptional, unfaltering 37-year-long friendship.

August, 1997

## **PREFACE**

In the past I destroyed my diaries and notes, so I am going to describe here those little things that remain in my memory, so as not to consign them to oblivion.

This story is not intended for a wide range of readers, but it seems to me that readers in the younger generation might be interested in the past and in the way of life of people in the former Soviet Union whose luck saved them from arrests and labor camps.

All the events described in this book actually took place; I have only changed the names of people and places.

Rabbi Nathan Barkan,  
Chief Rabbi of Riga and Latvia

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## Chapter One

### ***MEIR'S DEPARTURE***

Meir Sorkin is leaving for *Eretz Yisroel*. He is departing alone. His wife Miriam and their grown children Frida and Mark will remain in Russia for the time being. Only after long and painful deliberation has he finally arrived at the decision to go to Israel alone.

Who can imagine how difficult it had been to get permission to leave the country? How complicated it had been to obtain all the necessary documents in numerous state offices, while keeping everything secret, so as not to cause trouble for his children, who are studying at institutions of higher education. All that paperwork was followed by handing in the documents to the Visa and Immigration Department, and waiting for the reply. Indeed, it was a troublesome and arduous process, but the most difficult burden to bear is parting from his family.

There is much tumult in the small apartment on the quiet street in the Moscow suburb. Doors bang incessantly. People come and go in a never-ending stream: neighbors, friends, mere acquaintances. They drop in for the sole purpose of bidding farewell to a worthy man who is going far away. Voices buzz in the room as people chat about one thing and another without mentioning anything connected to the past or the future.

Meir's favorite daughter is looking at her father with devotion and love, not taking her eyes off him.

His friend Daniel has arrived from afar. He is sitting quietly in a corner, waiting for the proper moment to say something heartfelt. The moment comes, but the necessary words disappear. Friends sit side by side on the sofa, singing a sad Jewish melody which expresses more than those words could possibly have said.

Everybody tries to spend their last hours together conversing with the head of the family. A sleepless night has passed. It is time for the journey.

They arrive at the Sheremetyevo airport. People are hurrying about the building with concerned expressions, each in his own direction.

Meir tries to look calm as he embraces and kisses his relatives and friends one by one. He hugs his favorite dark-eyed daughter to his heart tightly. Her eyes glisten with tears. They stand together without saying a word. Only their trembling lips betray their emotions.

Meir passes through Customs and Immigration without any problems. He waves farewell to his kinsmen. He enters the departure hall. A glass wall separates them now. To his relatives, Meir is already "abroad," in the emigration zone where there is no admittance for ordinary citizens. His relatives want to see him one more time, so they go out on the balcony. "Oh, who knows when we will meet again! We will, won't we?"

Standing at the steps to the airplane, Meir turns his head in their direction and hears a heart-breaking cry, "Daddy, Daddy, when will we meet again? When?!"

Boarding the plane and standing in the aisle, Meir cannot restrain himself anymore; he sinks heavily into his seat and bursts out sobbing, sad and inconsolable. This is the first time in his life such a thing has happened to him.

Gradually Meir calms down. His plentiful tears have relieved his soul. He wipes his eyes and sighs deeply. Though he has regained some of his inner balance, when he ponders over their

parting, he can clearly visualize his dark-eyed daughter in her gray coat and white shawl, and her soft voice still rings in his ears.

Meir tries to make himself think of other things.

He has a fantasy that in Vienna, at the airport, he will be met by an Israeli representative, a friendly *kibbutznik* who will shake hands with him and embrace him with a warm Jewish “*Shalom Aleichem*” (“Peace to you.”)

The steady drone of the motors lulls Meir, and he falls asleep.

When he awoke, the plane was starting its descent to Vienna.

Nobody met them in Vienna.

The airport officials led the arriving passengers to a separate hall and informed them that an Israeli representative would come soon. Shortly after that a Polish Jew appeared – a man close to fifty, with a red face and a bluish nose. He took their documents and filled in the forms which would ensure them an easy crossing of the Austrian border; meanwhile, a stout Austrian driver loaded their suitcases into a bus standing at some distance.

When the bus arrived in Shinau, a suburb of Vienna, it was already dark. The new arrivals were given accommodations in the rooms of an old castle.

Among the officials who were tending to the newcomers was an elderly, beardless man with kind smiling eyes. His surname was Toshma, and he was responsible for the kosher food for the repatriates.

People were crowding at the registration table waiting for something to happen. Only Meir was standing at the side, patiently waiting for the moment when he would be taken care of. At last he was guided to his room. He sat down on the bed and suddenly felt the exhaustion after his long and tiring journey. His sole wish was to lie down and fall asleep, but at that moment the bell rang inviting people to supper. He had to stand up again and go quickly.

People were moving one after another from all corners of the old castle to the spacious room where the tables had been set for them. Everyone found a seat. Meir was surprised to discover how hungry he was. As the meal was coming to an end, one of the officials announced that the following day they would be taken on a sightseeing excursion in Vienna. In the evening, he said, they would fly to Israel.

One cannot imagine the people’s response to the announcement! Everyone clapped their hands, overjoyed at the news. They all started singing at once, though many of them were singing out of tune.

After supper, everybody went to the synagogue and praised the Almighty for His grace.

The following morning a loud bell called them to breakfast. The meal was abundant and tasty, but everybody ate hastily, as the excursion bus had already arrived.

The tour of the city turned out to be boring, since for some reason there was no guide. Returning to Shinau ahead of schedule, they were pleased to meet the Viennese Jews who came to greet the new repatriates and bring them presents. Each person received two pairs of high-quality shoes of the proper size.

At last, in the evening, they boarded an Israeli Boeing 707. They were all were seized with a pleasant anxiety while they were taking their seats in the plane. After taxiing along the runway, the airplane soared upwards and set its course toward the place every Jew has longed for since time immemorial.

The stewardesses served the passengers efficiently, although they were trying to speak



their language, but were incomprehensible. Israeli music was playing; it was the familiar song, *Heveinu Shalom Aleichem*. When the plane landed everybody applauded joyfully.

It was very touching to see the old men kneel and kiss the Holy Land.

Time dragged while the newcomers were being registered at the Absorption office.

When the winter sun lit the new day they were at last driven to their lodgings. Meir was taken to an Immigrant Absorption Center. He felt empty, his heart wrenched by the memories of parting from his family and friends. He dropped on the bed without even taking off his clothes, and immediately fell asleep.

## Chapter Two

### **YUD TET KISLEV IN KFAR CHABAD (19<sup>th</sup> of Kislev - the day the Alter Rebbe was released from Peter-and-Paul fortress in 1870)**

Meir awoke long before dawn. It was still very dark. He went out on the wide terrace to catch a breath of fresh air. Only the air of one's homeland can be so crisp and mellow. Meir could not stop inhaling it. Perfect silence was reigning. The dark blue sky was densely studded with large glistening stars. Meir's soul was overwhelmed with prayerful ecstasy. He said to himself, "That's the same heaven and the same stars which G-d showed to *Avraham Avinu*," and it seemed as if the stars responded, "Quite right," and every star was blessing him, "*Baruch Haba*. Welcome."

His fatigue disappeared, and he felt that the strain of his troubles was gradually lessening: parting from his wife, with whom he had lived in harmony for a quarter of a century, parting from his dearly-loved children, the tumult at the airport and the absorption procedure at Immigrant Center.

Meir lingered on the terrace, then returned to the house. Near the office was a hall decorated with drawings and posters. He started to examine them. One of the announcements attracted his attention; it invited everybody to Kfar Chabad to take part in the celebration of the 19<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. The leaders of the country and even the President himself were expected to participate. As if rooted to the spot, Meir stood rereading that invitation over and over again. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not notice as the day dawned and everything around him began to wake up and bustle about.

The manager of the Immigrant Absorption Center, Mr. Shimony, a man rich in life experience, glanced at Meir staring at the announcement, and realized that something was happening to Meir. He approached Meir, greeted him and said, "I see you are interested in that invitation. Today is Yud Tet Kislev, and there will be celebrations in Kfar Chabad. People from all over the country will be there. My father is from near there, and I'll be going there too. If you wish, I can take you with me."

Meir was glad to hear such a pleasant offer and he quickly thanked Mr. Shimony. "More than forty years have passed since I took part in the celebration of Yud Tet Kislev, but I still remember some faces, and the warmth and humanity which surrounded me then. Yes, it grieves me to think of what is gone but unforgettable..."

Towards evening Mr. Shimony came to get him, and they set out for Kfar Chabad. On the way, Mr. Shimony told Meir about the places they were passing. Approaching Tzrifin, Shimony slowed a bit to show Meir the vast area jammed with cars and tanks, "Look there. These are the spoils of the Six Day War." He started to describe some episodes of that war he had participated in.

On approaching Kfar Chabad, they noticed that the traffic had increased considerably and policemen were directing traffic to maintain order and safety. Dozens of automobiles and buses were parked in the square and on the roadside, near the big synagogue which was filled with people. Those who could not get inside were crowded together in the square.

Everyone was given vodka so that they could toast, "*L'Chayim*." Loud music was playing,

and young and old, bearded and clean-shaven had joined hands in a circle dance.

“Congratulations, Mr. Shimony,” a young man in charge, with a band on his sleeve greeted them. He led Mr. Shimony and Meir into the synagogue, toward where Rabbis, the elder Chassidim, government ministers and officers were sitting in rows. The President of Israel, Mr. Zalman Shazar, was in the center. The master of ceremonies, a tall young man in glasses, with a beard and *pe'os* hanging to his shoulders, was efficiently conducting the meeting. He was alternating speeches and orchestral interludes very skillfully.

The Chassidic tunes transported Meir back to bygone times, to his father's home. Happy tears began pouring from his eyes and he thanked G-d for having returned him to his roots.

At last the President took the floor; he told the audience about the importance of the holiday and shared reminiscences about his father, who had been a Chassid.

Suddenly Meir was shocked to hear the master of ceremonies say that among the respected guests was a man belonging to a dynasty of Chassidim who had arrived the day before from behind the Iron Curtain, Reb Meir Sorkin.

“Come to the microphone, please, Reb Meir,” he addressed him. “Come to the microphone and say a few words; bring us live greetings from there!”

Deeply agitated, Meir approached the microphone accompanied by the song *Mitza'im Ge'altanu* (You rescued us from Egypt). Everyone silently turned their eyes toward Meir, nearly sixty, broad-shouldered, with kind features, shining eyes and a distinctively high forehead and thick brows.

Complete silence reigned in the synagogue as Meir started speaking. “Dear brothers, fellow Jews, congratulations. First, I must thank G-d for my arrival in *Eretz Yisrael*. Second, for coming here exactly on Yud Tet Kislev.” He took a small *siddur* (prayer book) out of his pocket and uttered the blessing *Shehechyanu* (“Blessed art Thou, Oh Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has kept us in life...”) in a trembling voice, with his Russian accent.

“I am not talkative. I was born and raised in a country where keeping silent is good, but today, on Yud Tet Kislev, I cannot be silent any more. Almost half a century has passed since the day my father took me with him to Leningrad, to the Rebbe. Today I recall how, when we came to see the Rebbe, he put his saintly hands on my head and blessed me. I don't remember the words of the Hebrew blessing, but the words he addressed directly to me are still ringing in my ears. ‘Every Jew has a soul which shines like a diamond. Just look at me and remember me.’ After that the Rebbe spoke with my father for a long time and then we went to Detskoye Selo, a suburb of Leningrad.

“Some Chassidim had gathered there, and they celebrated the holiday until dawn. I repeated the Rebbe's words many times over that day. One of my father's friends said, ‘Moishe Aharon, it seems to me your son is predestined for a difficult life, but he will withstand it.’ He took a photo of the Rebbe from his pocket and gave it to me, saying, ‘Take this photo, Meir; keep it and always remember!’ Yesterday, when I descended from the plane, I rushed to kneel down and kiss the Holy Land, since I had yearned for it so long, but there was only cold asphalt under my lips, and I was disappointed. Then I remembered the Rebbe's words and started to kiss the asphalt again, bearing in mind that the warm earth of the Holy Land is beneath it.

“My wife and my children have remained in Russia. Here in Israel I have nobody,” continued Meir, mixing Russian words with Yiddish words. “Be my brothers, and I am your brother.” Meir shouted these words in agitation, then fell silent.

Meir's speech made a great impression, and many people reached to shake hands with

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him. President Zalman Shazar also stood up and shook his hand and wished him an easy absorption and settlement in Israel.

## Chapter Three

### ***A MEETING WITH YANKELE***

One of the young men pulled Meir by the sleeve and whispered, "Follow me." Before he had time to think, Meir followed the young man to a beautiful house which stood in the middle of a well-kept yard. Dozens of guests were sitting at the laden tables: high ranking military officers and functionaries, businessmen and others.

The news of Meir's arrival had reached them too. To everybody's delight, Meir was given a place at the head of the table. The host greeted him with the traditional Russian welcome, "*Dobro pozhalovat.*" Mr. Shimony also came to join in the feast. The glasses were filled to say, "*L'Chayim.*" Everybody was waiting for Meir to propose the first toast, as he had just arrived from behind the Iron Curtain, but he was sitting, deeply absorbed in his thoughts and playing with his glass. "It's strange," said Meir, at last coming to himself. "I was an officer of the Soviet Army. Many times I took part in officers parties where a cistern of vodka would not be enough. Now I am sitting among Jewish officers who defeated their enemies time and again, and they cannot drink up one bottle! *L'Chayim!*"

"Excuse me, please. Waves of reminiscences are overwhelming me, and my heart is full of feelings which are not easy to express. Well, perhaps that's natural. When I was a boy," continued Meir, "I studied in a synagogue situated in the outskirts of a small town. One day militiamen came to arrest the teacher and the pupils. We started to jump out of the window into the street. My friend Yankele Shamunov and I hid in a cabin on the wharf of the ferry that brought workers from one bank of the river to the other. The autumn day was cold and windy. We made ourselves comfortable side by side on a bench and started dreaming of a miracle: it would have been so wonderful if a strong wind would blow and carry our cabin straight to *Eretz Yisroel!* Dreams, dreams – how sweet you are!"

"Several years passed, and the Shamunovs managed to leave for *Eretz Yisroel*. About forty years have passed since that time. Who knows what happened with Yankele – even whether he is alive or not."

Everybody listened attentively to Meir's words; it became very silent in the room. Suddenly one of the guests, a broad-shouldered man with a wrinkled, beardless face and a *kippa* on his head, jumped up and reached his big hands toward Meir, shouting in a loud voice, "Meir, it's me, Yankele! It's me, Yankele!"

Everybody was excited and deeply moved by the scene. Women came from another room, and crowded in the doorway, tears in their eyes. It turned out that Yankele was Mr. Shimony's father!

The people had not yet recovered from the excitement when a tall old man with a long white beard appeared in the doorway. Limping, holding a stick in his hand, he rushed to Meir. "Is it really you? Are you the son of my friend Moishe Aharon and the grandson of Reb Elimelech the water carrier? You are, aren't you?" He started making the *Shehechyanu* blessing, hugging Meir tightly, and kissing him tenderly. Meir was dumbfounded at the turn of events, the tears of happiness streaming from his eyes. The people spontaneously began singing, "Oh how good it is for brothers to be together!"

## Chapter Four

### **SABBATH IN KFAR CHABAD**

Late in the morning the day after the celebration of Yud Tet Kislev in Kfar Chabad, a knock at the door woke Meir. When he opened the door, he saw a young man with a beard, wearing a military uniform, with rolled-up sleeves.

“My name is Yossi. I am a grandson of Reb Yehuda. Grandfather asked me to bring you a package. You are invited to us for the Sabbath. I’ll fetch you later. Please excuse me now because I am in a hurry. Shalom.” The soldier left. Meir impatiently opened the package. There were some home-made pies and fruit. He also found a *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (two leather boxes with Torah prayers on parchment) packed in a beautifully embroidered velvet bag. “Oh, G-d,” sighed Meir, “I have been here in the country three days already and I haven’t put on *tefillin* yet. Why didn’t I ask for these when they inquired what I needed?!” Meir decided that such a thing would never happen to him again. It was high time to return to his roots.

Meir awkwardly put on the *tefillin* and the *tallit* and prayed diligently. Then he tasted the delicacies and decided to go for a walk to see the town. For a long time he walked without a specific goal, and did not notice when he left the boundaries of the town.

The weather was fine. Meir sat down on a warm stone at the edge of a grove. A grayish-green grass carpet with many colored flowers was spread before him. That beauty charmed Meir. Suddenly, he felt so lonely for Miriam and the children. When would he see them again?

Dusk fell, and Meir hurried back as he was afraid of getting lost in the deserted streets. Lights were already shining in the windows. An automobile suddenly stopped near Meir and a dark-complexioned driver with curly hair addressed Meir in broken Yiddish. He said that he would take him to the Absorption Center. The driver, a Yemenite Jew, wanted to show Meir that he knew Yiddish. He invited him to be his dinner guest but Meir was too tired. He thanked the driver and returned to his lodgings.

On Friday, Yossi, as promised, came to get Meir. At once they found a common language. Yossi turned out to be a good guide. He made detailed comments on the places they were passing and on the events connected with them. One could feel deep love for his country in his stories.

They arrived in Kfar Chabad. Pre-Sabbath tumult could already be felt there. Children dressed for Shabbat were playing in the streets. The car stopped in front of Reb Yehuda’s big house. The host, his wife, and the other members of his household came out to meet the guest and greeted him warmly. Meir was given accommodations in Yossi’s room. Everybody was busy preparing for the Sabbath. Meir and Yossi joined them.

Soon a long siren rang out. It called everybody to finish their work, as the Sabbath was beginning. A second siren was heard; the women and girls lit their Sabbath candles, and the house started to shine with the warm glow of the candlelight.

The hostess sank tiredly into a soft armchair. Reb Yehuda, with his sons, grandsons and Meir, went to the Synagogue where people were gathering from all corners of the little town.

When the *Minchah* (afternoon) prayer had finished, the men took seats at the tables and began to study. Young men with beards of different lengths surrounded Meir. They led him to a terrace and asked him numerous questions. They were interested in everything. How is life in

Russia? What's the weather like? Many of them tried to show that they knew about Russia. Some of them even knew several Russian words. Meir listened patiently to all of them and he tried to answer everyone, although it was not easy.

Then the *gabbai* banged his hand on the table and called everybody to *Maariv*. The cantor came to the *Aron Hakodesh* (the Holy Ark). He was praying in a melody that Meir remembered from his youth. Although he still felt like a stranger, he soon became accustomed to his new surroundings.

The table in Reb Yehuda's house was very long, with two silver candelabra and numerous little candles for his daughters and granddaughters. Meir was seated next to Reb Yehuda, whose grandsons were arguing about who would sit on the other side, as everybody wanted to be near Meir.

Reb Yehuda made *Kiddush* over red wine, then invited Meir to do the same. Meir was embarrassed, but Reb Yehuda encouraged him by saying that he would gradually remember everything. With a trembling hand, Meir raised a glass of wine and slowly made *Kiddush*. Reb Yehuda tried not to distract him, and pretended that he was not looking at him, although he was watching him surreptitiously.

After washing their hands, everyone sat down at the Sabbath table. Meir, who was not in the habit of sitting at somebody else's table, felt a little awkward, though everybody was very kind to him.

After eating the first course of fish, they started singing a song which Meir remembered from his childhood, from singing it in his father's home.

Reb Yehuda asked his grandsons (each in turn) to tell what the week's Torah portion was about, and the children explained it rather well. The meal lasted for a long time, and when they finished Yossi and Meir went out for a walk. Yossi gave Meir a general description of the history of the small town and promised to tell him the details some other time. Though the weather was wonderful and the air was clear, Meir felt tired. Yossi noticed and offered to return home.

As the Sabbath morning began, the men, old and young engaged in studying Torah and Chassidism in groups and in pairs. Yossi offered to study together with Meir, and Meir agreed gratefully. Yossi chose the section of Gemara about a man who had found something in a public place. He thought that Meir probably once knew that section well, and it would help him to refresh his memory.

He took two similar volumes of the Talmud and they sat down in a corner to learn. Meir, disconcerted, started humbly reading the words once so familiar to him but long forgotten. Gradually, absorbed in the text, he began to recollect the meaning of these words and their deep interpretation, to recall where and when he had heard them, and his favorite old teacher appeared before him. The deep strain on Meir's face changed to an exultant expression, and Yossi watched Meir's naive happiness with satisfaction and admiration.

The *Gabbai's* bang on the table interrupted their studies and called them to prayer. At that moment, although only half a day had passed, Meir stopped feeling like a stranger. He prayed with diligence and listened attentively to the Torah reading. After the service there was a big *Kiddush*. Everyone who could, sat down at the set table and those who had no seat stood around it.

The *Mashpia*, Reb Shloime Chayim, sat at the head of the table. He placed Meir next to himself in a paternal manner. He spoke about the importance of Yud Tet Kislev, which is the New Year of Chassidism. He explained the difference between the conduct of the Alter Rebbe,

founder of the Chabad movement, prior to his arrest and after his return from St. Petersburg. He stressed that Yud Tet Kislev is relevant to every Jew, and he also explained that one of the differences between Chabad Chassidism and other branches of Chassidism is that Chabad Chassidism demands diligent work from everybody. He quoted a verse from the Torah which states that holiness is given from the Heavens, but you should wash your clothes yourselves.

His speech was interspersed with other stories and examples. Meir was sitting as if bewitched, trying to comprehend Reb Shloime Chayim's each and every word. During the intervals they sang melodies both with and without words which Meir had heard long ago; all that prompted reminiscences of his remote past.

Meir was surprised at Reb Shloime Chayim's question addressed to him: "Do you know what a Chassid is like? A Chassid is like a hen sitting and gathering dust. But then he stands up and at one stroke shakes off all that dust and starts a new life."

The people, sitting at the table and standing around it, were all ears, eagerly absorbing Reb Shloime Chayim's words, watching his closed eyes and wrinkled forehead aflame with feeling.

The *Kiddush* lasted for a long time but Reb Yehuda's grandsons did not give Meir the option of waiting until the end. They led him home. Sitting at the table, they discussed Reb Shloime Chayim's teaching about the weekly Torah portion. Though Meir still did not understand a lot, he felt a spiritual awakening. He felt a desire to enter into the conversation and share his own thoughts.

Meir Sorkin did not feel so lonely anymore.

Reb Yehuda's family invited him frequently, and everybody was glad to see him, especially Yossi, who had become attached to him and took every opportunity to spend time together. Meir felt as if he were among family. Meir and Yossi found a common language and topics that were interesting to both of them. Although it was sometimes not easy to express their thoughts in Yiddish, they understood each other quite well.

Meir, who was formerly considered a rather silent person, became talkative now. Almost every Saturday he visited Reb Yehuda and he even had his own established place at their table.

He enjoyed the Sabbath days when Reb Yehuda's grandsons surrounded him. The little ones tried to stay close to him, and Meir would stroke their heads. Reb Yehuda looked at Meir with love as he saw how much he had changed in a short period of time.

Meir was not a stranger in Kfar Chabad anymore. He had many friends and acquaintances there now.



## Chapter Five

### ***THE HISTORY OF KFAR CHABAD***

Meir admired Yossi's patriotism both to the country as a whole and to the village of Kfar Chabad, the history of which he knew in detail and related with great pleasure.

The fate of the state of Israel was at stake in 1948 and 1949. Israel opened wide to receive the refugees from the camps in Germany. The towns and villages that served as fortresses for Arab bandits were seized by the small but valiant Israeli army, which had conquered the armies of the Arab states. Crowds of new immigrants began to move to Israel in order to rebuild their country. Thus, the thousand-year-old dream of the Jews came true.

One day a member of the Board of the Jewish Agency, the *Sochnut*, Mr. Zalman Shazar, (Rubashov) came to New York and paid a visit to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson, whom he respected and valued very much. The Lubavitcher Rebbe rejoiced at that visit. During their talk he said to Shazar that he had decided once and for all that he would instruct his adherents that the Chassidim who had escaped from Russia and had lived in the German refugee camps should move to Israel. The Lubavitcher Rebbe added that in Israel his Chassidim should also live together. He also did not want his Chassidim to join any political movement. That is why he wanted them to be given a separate village. Zalman Shazar promised to do his utmost to assist the Rebbe.

When Shazar came back to Israel he was met by the representative of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Israel, Reb Pinchas Althaus, an energetic, black-bearded man. Shazar fulfilled his promise. Several days later the Lubavitch Chassidim were given a deserted village, Safaria, for their settlement which is situated not far from Sarafanda and the highway connecting Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The Rebbe then commanded his Chassidim to leave for Israel and permanently settle in the Holy Land.

One fine summer day in 1949 the first group of Lubavitcher Chassidim arrived at their new residence. They unloaded their goods and settled down in the old village shacks. From that very day the passers-by noticed the new road sign, "Kfar Chabad," and the sandy road which led there. Every time the Rebbe mentioned the village, he quoted the same verse from the Torah: "... and there G-d gave His blessing."

The village was not kind to the new settlers. There were destroyed houses, huge impudent rats, rusted pipes, dilapidated wells with stagnant water and a lack of food. Everybody had to provide himself with everything he needed, and bring provisions from Tel Aviv, Rishon le Tzion or Ramle. The most difficult part was carrying the provisions home from the highway, as the long sandy road among thorny cactuses was simply unbearable on hot days. In spite of all those difficulties, people tried stubbornly to create normal living conditions and they always welcomed guests.

Among the new settlers there proved to be some very good agricultural technicians who, in due course of time, converted the village into blossoming farms. Hen-houses, dairy-farms and so on were constructed. The old dilapidated houses were repaired and others built.

Gradually the number of settlers was increasing as both North African immigrants who were brought up in the spirit of Chabad, and Yemenite Jews joined them. Despite exhausting labor, people were always ready to help one another, to render material and spiritual assistance.

They built a secondary school, a *Yeshiva*, and a vocational school for carpenters, metalworkers, printers, etc. Many people prepared to study there.

Everything would have been fine if it were not for the Bedouins who attacked the printing school during the morning prayers one day and killed five apprentices. To commemorate that day, the school was named *Yad HaChamisha* (in memory of five youths). On another occasion, Bedouins caught one of the young settlers, stripped him naked, and threw him in the cactuses, where he died. After that incident, the settlers organized self-defense groups.

In the evenings Chabadniks used to visit both nearby and remote settlements and kibbutzim in order to share their thoughts, teachings and opinions and tell about the years spent in communist Russia.

War shattered their peace and quiet. Men of all ages went to the front to defend their freedom when it was required. Many sons of Kfar Chabad have heroically fallen on the battlefields during the wars for the independence of the State of Israel, even though they had not joined any of the political movements.

## Chapter Six

### ***A LETTER FROM THE REBBE***

When Meir told Yossi about his life during their first meeting, Yossi asked him, “Have you written to the Rebbe to tell him that you have come to *Eretz Yisroel*?” At first Meir did not understand him, and answered that he had never met the Rebbe. What right does he have to write to him at all?

Yossi realized that he could not explain to Meir the Rebbe’s connection to each Jew. The word “Rebbe” is an acronym of “*Rosh Bnei Yisroel*,” (the head of all Jews). Just as the brain coordinates the work of nerve cells, so all the Jews are connected in the Rebbe’s soul; especially old Chassidim and students of the Lubavitch Yeshiva Tomchei T’mimim.

“That’s why,” Yossi said to Meir, “you ought to write a detailed letter to the Rebbe without any delay; an answer is sure to come. You should write everything, down to the smallest detail: who you are, where you come from, all your problems, both spiritual and material. You’ll see – the Rebbe won’t leave your letter unanswered.”

Meir had accumulated a great number of questions about matters related to the Rebbe which he could not grasp, and Yossi tried to explain everything to him. After that talk Meir started thinking. Yossi’s emotional words penetrated deeply into his heart. Meir decided to write a letter to the Rebbe:

“Deeply revered holy Rebbe! Meir, the son of the chassid Moishe Aharon (may G-d revenge his shed blood) and Freidl, daughter of Elimelech the water-carrier, from the town of Borovukha, is writing to you,” Meir started writing. Tears gushed from his eyes, but he continued to write about the past and the present without hiding anything. He wrote about his wife, his children who still remained in Russia, his prodigal son. He begged for the Rebbe’s blessing and a bit of advice. Only after putting the letter in the mail did Meir sigh heavily and calm down.

Just as Yossi had predicted, he did not have to wait long for an answer. He received a whole page of densely printed text in response. The signature of the holy Rebbe was at the end. The Rebbe thanked Meir for his letter, encouraged him and gave him advice about how to settle down in his future life. He filled Meir’s heart with hope for a forthcoming reunion with his family and wished him *naches* from his son, about whom Meir had written with bitterness. He expressed his confidence that Meir would take part in all the Chabad activities. The Rebbe also asked Meir to write him more often. In a postscript the Rebbe expressed his belief in a forthcoming meeting with Meir.

Reb Yehuda and his family congratulated Meir. For his part, Meir was surprised, as he did not understand why he was honored with such an answer. Only then did Meir understand that Yossi was right, and he respected him even more. Gradually Meir began to interpret and understand many things more easily. He cheered up and his face started to shine. He anticipated the moment of his meeting the Rebbe.

In Reb Yehuda’s house they began discussing when would be the most suitable time for Meir to go to the Rebbe. Yossi suggested that he go at once, but Reb Yehuda thought it would be better to wait until the holiday began; then he would see “the Czar” in his full beauty, and besides, he could use the remaining time to better prepare for his trip.

## Chapter Seven

### ***A VISIT TO THE SUEZ CANAL***

Days and weeks passed. Meir tried to take every opportunity to participate in Chabad activities. He delivered speeches in kibbutzim, other settlements, and especially for soldiers at military bases.

He had already become well-known, and he received many invitations. Meir's outward appearance had changed too. His hair became thinner and he had grown a bristly beard.

Representatives of religious parties started to visit him to try to lure him to their side, even promising some profit for him. Meir refused to accept their proposals.

The Purim festival was approaching. Meir and two Chabadniks set off to the Suez Canal to read *Megillat Esther* and distribute *mishloach manot*. They departed the day before Purim, on *Ta'anit Esther*. They were driven in a truck loaded with cardboard boxes. When they arrived at a military airfield they loaded everything onto a plane which delivered them to Sinai.

At the Sinai airport they were met by Colonel Chayim Eitan, who was acquainted with one of Meir's companions. After exchanging greetings, he put them in the charge of a young officer, Abraham Yaniv, who worked in cultural education. He was instructed to accompany them and show them all the military objectives.

Meir sat next to the driver and looked around, enchanted. The air was pleasantly cool. The desert spread out around him, beautiful in its own way. In the distance Meir noticed something like a huge curtain between heaven and earth, reflecting all the colors of the rainbow.

While driving along a narrow strip of asphalt, Abraham Yaniv turned the attention of his fellow-travelers to the burnt military vehicles scattered beside the road, and began his story. "During the Six Day War I served in a tank sub-unit here. We received an order to move as close to the Suez Canal as possible. We formed a long column and started moving ahead.

The Egyptians, who knew our intentions, started moving toward us as if they did not see us through the dense cloud of dust, though we formed a big column. When we got close we were given the order to move aside and let their column pass by. When the last tank of the Egyptian column was parallel with our lead tank we received the order: "Fire!" You see, here they are – all the burnt tanks from that column. It is inexplicable, but it was surely one of G-d's miracles!"

At that time they were working on construction of the Bar Lev defense line. Meir and his friends set to work, hastily moving from one military site to the next distributing their Purim gifts. When they returned to the base, they were given an old bus as shelter for the night.

Although they were very tired they could not fall asleep. They heard singing in one of the barracks, on which was a sign, 'Discotheque.' Inside, simple food lay on a board covered with paper. A dark-complexioned soldier was holding a microphone in his hand and singing gentle, warm Jewish songs like a nightingale. Other people joined in the chorus.

The Chabadniks were warmly welcomed. People shouted with approval when they were treated with the *Hamentashen* brought by the Chabadniks. One of the guests read *Megillat Esther*. After that, everyone was offered a glass of cognac in honor of Purim, but only a few people drank it, whereas the *Hamentashen* and other sweets were eaten with pleasure. The merry-making lasted all through the night.

The guests had no time to sleep. They wanted to go further afield in order to read

*Megillat Esther* again and to distribute more *mishloach manot*. Only in the afternoon, when the work was finished at last, could they think of returning home.

On the way back, Abraham Yaniv showed Meir a man lying on the sand near one of the burnt tanks. “He is a stinker, an Arab Bedouin, an informer and a thief, who serves both sides, ours and theirs.”

At the airport they were again met by Colonel Chayim Eitan.

“How did you like it?” he asked Meir.

“Oh, it reminded me of Alexander Dumas,” said Meir.

The Colonel was astonished at his words. “What is the relationship between Dumas and Chabadniks?”

Meir explained. “Once Alexander Dumas wrote, ‘The nation which managed to give a Code of Ethics to the whole world in ten lines has the right to call itself The Chosen People.’ We were given the Torah in that same awesome desert 3500 years ago. The Torah has not faded and is still shining brightly for all the world. Today, in the twentieth century, in that very same desert I met a Bedouin who was lazily lolling about in the sand just like it was 3500 years ago.”

Colonel Eitan listened to Meir’s words with understanding, wished him a happy journey and waved good-bye with the words, “*L’hitra’ot.*”

## Chapter Eight

### ***AT YANKELE'S HOUSE ON KIBBUTZ***

Although it had been nearly two months since Meir had arrived in the country, he had not had time to visit Yankele, his childhood friend. One day Yossi made an appointment to take Meir to the kibbutz where Yankele lived.

During the trip they were favored with good weather. After two rainy days the sun was shining pleasantly and the blossoming citrus trees filled the air with an intoxicating smell. The old car was moving rapidly along the highway through green fields of the Jordan valley. The leaves of the trees were light and dark green. Meir was deep in reminiscences and Yossi did not disturb him. When they heard occasional shots in the distance he explained that the Jordanians prevented people from cultivating their fields and plantations situated along the Jordan River.

The iron-barred fence of the kibbutz came into sight. An elderly man with a rifle over his shoulder was standing at the gate checking everyone who wanted to enter. He recognized Meir from Yankele's description and heartily greeted him, "Welcome!"

He showed Meir a two-storied house. Yankele lived on the first floor. There were soft yellow carpets near the house and at every door. Altogether there were four apartments in the house. Helmets and soldiers' uniforms were hanging everywhere. One could see that they were used often.

Yankele's wife Olga greeted the guests heartily, invited them into the house, and brought them a cool soft drink. Soon the host came. He had been busily preparing for their visit all day long. Meir's visit had even been discussed in the secretariat of the kibbutz and they had decided to give a proper welcome to the man who had come from 'over there,' behind the Iron Curtain.

All day people kept coming, extending their greetings and bringing things that might come in handy. First came an old man of seventy, slim and beardless, his thin face adorned with a thick moustache, a black skull-cap on his head. That was Kalman. Yankele had no time to tell Meir about him. Kalman congratulated Meir on his arrival, and said that he had heard about him from Yankele. Kalman hugged Meir tightly, kissed him and said the blessing *Shehechyanu*. Meir was touched, and Yossi was greatly pleased.

Kalman had studied in Lubavitch in his youth, but in 1916 he was forced to leave Lubavitch and the Yeshiva. His parents managed to move to Israel. The life of the Jewish population was very hard at that time. There was no work, and people often starved. Most of Kalman's friends were *chalutzim*. He gradually felt more and more drawn to them and eventually abandoned his religious way of life and settled down on kibbutz. There he met his future wife, married and brought up two children. He took part in establishing the kibbutz and fought for the freedom of Israel during wartime.

In 1952, just before Pesach (Passover), the chairman of the Kfar Chabad town council, Reb Pinya Althaus, came to Kalman and said that the Lubavitcher Rebbe had sent him *shmura matzah* for Pesach and told him to share it with his friends. Reb Pinya added that the Lubavitcher Rebbe was the son-in-law of the previous Rebbe. Reb Pinya stayed with Kalman for about an hour. They were recalling Lubavitch and telling each other Jewish jokes and laughing merrily. That night, after Reb Pinya left, Kalman, who was greatly impressed by their talk, could not fall asleep. He could not settle his thoughts; time and again the town of Lubavitch came back to

mind. His former rabbis Groinom and Shilem in Lubavitch were passing before his eyes. It seemed to him that he heard their voices, but he could not distinguish the words which they were saying. Only at dawn did he manage to fall asleep. He saw the Rebbe Rashab in his dream who told him, "If you throw a stick high up, it will fall back in its place."

Kalman woke up. He understood why the Rebbe had remembered him and what was required of him. He decided to write a letter to the Rebbe and thank him for the *shmura matzah*. That is how their exchange of letters began. Sometimes the Rebbe gave him advice and entrusted him with important missions. Meir was not surprised when he heard Kalman's life-story, as he also kept up a correspondence with the Rebbe whom he had never seen.

Yankele and Kalman led Meir to the cemetery where many people who had given their lives for the Jewish state were buried.

In the evening, everybody gathered in the canteen on the ground floor of a two-story building. The second floor was occupied by offices. On the ground floor was a cultural center, a library and a reading-hall. They held general meetings and lectures there. On that day the tables were covered with tablecloths and the menu was diverse, all specially made to honor Yankele, who had rendered great service to the State of Israel and to the kibbutz.

In spite of the numerous military awards and certificates of honor which Yankele had received for the fulfillment of various errands in many countries of the world, his wife Olga ruled over their household, and Yankele was subservient to her.

When all the kibbutz members seated themselves at the tables, Aryeh, secretary of the kibbutz, officially began the party. He congratulated the guest on his arrival, told those present about the sufferings of the Jews in the Soviet Union and said that he knew about it personally, as he had been present at the Moscow Youth Festival in 1957. Aryeh spoke about the achievements of the kibbutz, about the heroism of its sons, and praised Yankele for his activities. Meir did not understand much and it felt to him like a Soviet meeting.

A woman recited a poem in honor of Meir. Yankele shared with the audience reminiscences of his childhood and stories about Meir's father, Moishe Aharon. The audience listened attentively to his words, and dead silence fell upon them.

After that Meir was given the floor. He took the microphone and thanked everybody in broken Hebrew. He apologized for not speaking the language well and promised to study it. He also asked permission to say some words in Russian. Somebody volunteered to translate his words.

"Today, my children and my friends, my people are still under the yoke of the communists in the USSR, where one prays to G-d to let him live until the evening, and in the evening one prays to G-d to let him live until the morning. I cannot keep silent. How can it be properly grasped by someone who was born in a free world, or by one who left that country long ago and has forgotten the taste of fear? I cannot be indifferent and silent while they try to annihilate the spiritual life of our people with their slogans and precepts.

"A people who have no culture, no language and no land cannot be considered a nation. Hence, we have no wish to trade our native homeland, Israel, for any other country, no matter how good it is, just as we have no right to betray our Torah and our culture, which were given to us by the Creator on Mount Sinai. Our Motherland is the best there is, because it is ours."

People applauded and cheered his speech. The party lasted until midnight. Everyone was singing and talking at the table. Meir was invited to spend the night at the kibbutz, but he preferred to return with Yossi to Kfar Chabad. He promised to come again another time.

## Chapter Nine

### ***A VISIT TO THE REBBE***

In the summer, Meir received several encouraging letters from the Rebbe with bits of advice and various instructions, and he livened up, though he was grieved by the fact that letters from Miriam and the children didn't come regularly. The Rebbe promised a forthcoming meeting which Meir anticipated eagerly. Reb Yehuda was preparing Meir spiritually for the visit.

The month of *Elul* (August-September) came, and the first *shofar* sounds were stirring everybody. Both the small boys in *cheder* and the youths in Yeshiva felt the approach of Judgement day.

On the Saturday before *Chai Elul* (the 18<sup>th</sup> of Elul), the *Mashpia*, Reb Shloime Chayim spoke about the birthdays of the Alter Rebbe and the Baal Shem Tov, which both fell on *Chai Elul*. He reminded everyone that on that very day the Yeshiva Tomchei T'mimim had been opened in Lubavitch. He spoke about it with passion and love. He told about the deep meaning and the purpose of its establishment by the Rebbe Rashab, who entrusted every pupil with being a "candle" to those surrounding him. Reb Shloime Chayim also blessed those who would be the first to visit the Rebbe after Shabbat.

On the day of the visit Yossi brought Meir to the airport; he also gave a lift to two other departing travelers. All of them were very serious in spite of their great excitement. It was a charter flight which lacked some conveniences because the plane was very crowded. It resembled a Russian delivery van, but the stewardesses somehow managed help the passengers to their seats and to stow their luggage, as everyone had brought several pieces.

At last the motors started to buzz. The plane gained altitude, with G-d's help, and soared upwards. They faced a long flight – first an intermediate stop in London, then at last they arrived in New York.

Reb Moishe met them at the airport and provided lodging for them. Before the guests had time to settle into the hotel, they were told that the Rebbe would hold a *farbrengen*.

A stream of men and women of all ages was flowing in the direction of the building at 770 Eastern Parkway. When Meir entered the synagogue, he saw that its huge hall was crowded with people. With the air of a Czar, the Rebbe was sitting on a special dais at the ten-meter-long table, which was covered with a white cloth. White-bearded old men were sitting around him in the form of a crown. Near the walls of the hall a five-tier pyramid of people rose on bleachers up to the ceiling. It was extremely quiet. One could hear clearly only the even and monotonous voice of the Rebbe. Somebody led Meir to the pyramid. People moved closer to make room for him. It was not a comfortable place, but it was right opposite the Rebbe.

The Rebbe was speaking with his eyes closed, keeping his hands under the table. His speech lasted for more than five hours, with short intermissions. During the short pauses thousands of voices sang while the Rebbe waved his hand vigorously, encouraging the people. The black-and-white mass of people was swayed to and fro like ears of grain in the wind.

The Rebbe spoke about the great importance of *Chai Elul*. He linked the birthdays of two great luminaries – the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe – with the fourth day of the creation of the world, when the Sun and the Moon, the great heavenly bodies were made. The Baal Shem Tov's main goal was to encourage the common people after Bogdan Khmel'nitsky's pogroms,



which had annihilated hundreds of Jewish communities fifty years before the Baal Shem Tov's birth. The Alter Rebbe worked mostly with scientists, who were studying the Torah with great zeal, to remind them to keep the Creator of the Torah in mind. The studies at Tomchei T'mimim Yeshiva had begun on *Chai Elul* in order to strengthen and fulfill G-d's covenant with Jacob, as stated in the Torah (*B'reshit* 28:14) "and you shall spread abroad to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south."

Hundreds of hands holding small glasses of vodka stretched out to the Rebbe to say, "L'Chayim." The Rebbe glanced over everybody and by nodding his head he answered "L'Chayim." His glance stopped at Meir. In spite of the distance separating them, he was looking at Meir with a kind smile. With a gesture he indicated that someone should fill Meir's glass. Everyone could hear how the Rebbe said, "L'Chayim" to Meir. People started to sing "*Mi Mitzra'im ge'altanu*" (You rescued us from Egypt). Meir was so fascinated that he felt rooted to the spot, but the crowd carried him out into the street. From all sides hundreds of people were stretching their hands to him with the happy greeting, "*Shalom Aleichem!*"

It became even more crowded in the Rebbe's synagogue. Every day new guests arrived from all countries of the world – both elderly men, with beards of all different lengths and young, energetic boys.

The days were filled with events, especially during the week before Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year – when special *Slichot* prayers asking for forgiveness are said. A great *farbrengen* took place on the third day of *Slichot*. The huge synagogue (43 meters long by 26 meters wide and 9 meters high) was packed with people. Everybody tried to move forward, nearer to the dais where the Rebbe was sitting, in order to be able to see him.

The Rebbe prayed in a majestic way, and after the public services he held his *siddur* and looked at everybody with paternal gentleness. He waved his hand, encouraging a particular chassid, Zusya-Partisan<sup>1</sup> to climb on a bench and start singing. All the people joined in. Afterward, people opened a pathway through the crowd for the Rebbe, and those toward whom he directed his glance were especially happy.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah the Rebbe accepted notes with requests for prayers, blessings, or advice. He stood for long hours taking the notes and wishing everybody a sweet New Year.

The month of *Tishrei* (September-October) was filled with festive *farbrengen* gatherings, during which the Rebbe explained excerpts from the Torah connected with each day. He spoke about critical issues of the day, in particular about the Israeli law regarding who is a Jew. He spoke in a monotonous way, occasionally adding emotional expression or even shouting from time to time. He blamed certain circles of rabbis and public figures for their cowardice concerning the assimilation of thirteen million Jews with three billion non-Jews. When he spoke about the integrity of our Holy Land he explained it so clearly that everybody understood him well.

The Rebbe discussed the plans of the Israeli leaders who, in his words, "showed indulgence" towards the Arabs and were ready to cede them everything, including Jerusalem, though the Arabs did not respond, as they were afraid of getting into a trap. The Rebbe asked in a derisive tone, "Who gave them the right to cede Jewish land to anybody else?"

Toward evening he shared *Kos shel brachah*, blessing those present. Thousands of Jews

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<sup>1</sup> "Partisan" is the Russian word for a guerilla fighter. There were tens of thousands of them fighting against the Nazis during WWII in the USSR.

came to him to get a drop of wine and his blessing. Nobody left without receiving his attention; the Rebbe stood long hours, almost until dawn, sharing his blessings and love for people.

At ten o'clock the next morning he came to the prayer services as usual, and there was no sign of tiredness on his holy face.

Meir would always remember those days, when the Rebbe received people in his office for *Yechidus* (private meetings) from eight o'clock in the morning until late in the evening. Lots of people came. They were serious, with *Tehillim* in their hands. Everyone was diligently reading, shedding tears. Who could know what was in one's heart of hearts? When a person's turn would come, he or she would enter the holy of holies, to appear before the Rebbe. He, like his father, saw through everyone. He would listen to everybody and give good advice and blessings.

After midnight a young Chassid was standing at the door, waiting for the previous man to come out, so that he could go in. He was not wasting time; his lips were whispering; he was trembling all over. He had been praying for several days with a *tallit* on his shoulders, standing apart from other people. His eyes were serious and wistful. Every year he came to the Rebbe. He crossed the threshold, quietly saying the *Shehechyanu* blessing and the Rebbe answered, "Amen." With a trembling hand he gave the Rebbe his *pidyon*, still wet with tears. He complains of the toughness of his body that prevents him from serving the Almighty faithfully. He asked the Rebbe to pray for him.

The Rebbe, his face serious, underlined something in the *pidyon*, then raised his eyes and looked at the lean face of the visitor. He gave him advice, promised to mention him at the grave of the previous Rebbe, his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson. With a caring smile, he asked the man about his life, took out fifty dollars, and gave them to the young man, telling him to buy a present for his wife. With a jubilant face the man came out of the Rebbe's chamber feeling soothed and happy.

Dozens of hands were stretched out to the man, accompanied by the words, "*Mazal Tov*." People took him to dance with those who had already been received by the Rebbe. He is given a glass of vodka to drink for his wish to come true.

The next visitor is an American of small stature. He has arrived together with his wife and their twelve-year old son. He comes in and greets the Rebbe in a loud voice. His face is beaming with pleasure. The Rebbe smiles back broadly and asks in English how things are. The American answers, "OK," and thanks the Rebbe for the good advice he was given last year. He talks about his business affairs and that he gives support to the Chabad organization in his town, helping them to build a new house. Yet he has a problem. He intends to present his wife with a car on her fortieth birthday but he doesn't know which model to choose.

The Rebbe listened to his words attentively, and then he turned to the son. He asked the boy about his studies and his preparation for his *Bar Mitzvah*. He presented the boy with a *siddur* and some good advice which later proved to be useful to his parents too. The Rebbe congratulated the wife on her fortieth birthday and wished her every happiness. The family left beaming with delight and greatly satisfied that the Rebbe had recommended the same model of car that the wife desired. The boy would remember his blessing for years. The family was also congratulated and led to the circle dance.

Next was a young couple. They had been married only half a year. Now they were preparing to go somewhere far away, as the Rebbe's representatives at the ends of the Earth. Are there any Jews at all in those places? Their parents are displeased; they don't understand them,

and they themselves are far from Judaism. They were dreaming of their son as a future lawyer and everything was going well. He was studying at the university, but one day a black-bearded Chabadnik appeared and invited the students to a Sabbath meal. He did not insist, but simply repeated his invitation the following week.

These two students were attracted by the man's attitude. He answered questions in a clever and sensible way. His wife, a pleasant and kind woman, became their friend. She was able to hear them out and give advice, so they frequented their house. They became interested in the Rabbi's lessons and kept his words in mind. They rejoiced at the things they learned.

One day, just after their lesson, the Rabbi's wife treated them to coffee and a home-made pie, and the rabbi, Chayim Yitzhak, told them that he had just been to see the Rebbe. He recommended that they go to the Rebbe too, and they agreed.

After they had visited the Rebbe and received answers to their *pidyon* through Chayim Yitzhak, something changed in them. They started to observe the Jewish laws. That did not interfere with their studies. On the contrary, the study of Chassidism changed their world outlook and broadened their minds. They got to know each other better. After receiving a blessing from the Rebbe they got married.

Now, with their degrees in their pockets, they are leaving for far away places as the Rebbe's envoys in order to spread Judaism. Prior to their departure they'd like to get the Rebbe's parting words of advice.

## Chapter Ten

### ***MEIR'S FIRST YECHIDUS***

Meir followed Reb Yehuda's advice and tried to watch the people who were coming to the synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway, known as "Seven Seventy." He used to find a place close to the Rebbe during the Sabbath and holidays and when he spoke to the people.

He could glance around and see all the people from his place. It was pleasant to watch when friends who had not seen each other for a long time met and embraced. The people who were sitting behind the Rebbe during his *farbrengen* resembled a living shield; their black clothes and white beards merged together and their faces reflected their concentration on the meaning of the Rebbe's speeches.

In the big hall of the synagogue people of all ages occupied benches along the walls. They were indifferent to everything that was happening around them. Deeply absorbed in their thoughts, they were wandering in high spheres trying to approach the divine wisdom with all their hearts and souls. One lean, middle-aged man would sit thoughtfully stroking his long beard. On the Sabbath and on holidays, when it is forbidden to write or record, he acts like a tape recorder, listening to every word pronounced by the Rebbe during his hours-long speech. Afterwards he repeats it to his friends so that he can write it down later and show it to the Rebbe to make sure it is right.

One elderly Jew with a kind and clever face sits in the crowd, his eyes are scrutinizing people. He is the *shames* of the Synagogue, Reb Abeh, an old preceptor, a Chabad "General." He moves with light steps and notices everybody and everything. He is interested only in one thing – how to help the people who need "spiritual food." That is why Reb Yehuda directed Meir to him to get instructions and advice and to enable him to come to the Rebbe for *Yechidus* in the proper way.

Reb Abeh welcomed Meir and helped him get ready for the moment when he would enter the sanctum – the Rebbe's office. Reb Abeh invited Meir to his home, which differed from the others. It had almost no furniture, but was filled with kindness, love, and wisdom. Reb Abeh taught Meir how to "find himself" and get to know his own place on earth, as well as how to appreciate his true value and not be disappointed. He would open one of the Chassidic books and in several hours they managed to study a whole chapter filled with deep philosophic insight about how to conduct oneself in mundane affairs.

Reb Abeh had opened Meir's eyes, taught him how to look at the Rebbe, how to set out in writing all that is necessary to put in a *pidyon* for handing to the Rebbe. The Chassidic proverb says, "What you take to *Yechidus* with you is what you bring out again."

At last the day came. In the morning Meir devoted his time to reading *Tehillim*. He sat in a quiet place where nobody would disturb him. The whole day he read psalms and wiped his tears from time to time. Toward evening he went to the *mikveh*, put on his best clothes and came to the waiting room called "the earthly paradise." He was standing under the staircase anxiously awaiting his turn and trying to take up as little space as possible.

For six hours the Rebbe received visitors. Some of them stayed inside for several minutes and the others for much longer. Finally, at two o'clock in the morning, Meir's turn came. He entered the Rebbe's room, whispered "*Shehechyanu*," and felt weak in his legs. The Rebbe was

sitting at the table and he looked bright and cheerful.

The Rebbe greeted Meir with a smile and said, “Welcome.” Meir felt relieved and calmed down a little. He handed the Rebbe his *pidyon*. The Rebbe held it on his palm and read it. He thanked Meir for a manuscript by the Chofetz Chayim sent by Professor Solovey. With an encouraging smile he asked Meir about his life and whether he received letters from his wife and daughter. He assured Meir that he would have *naches* from his son in due course, and that his son would come to the Rebbe too.

The Rebbe asked Meir to repeat the words which he had heard as a child from the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe. Then he said to Meir, “The Baal Shem Tov once said, ‘Everything that a man sees in the world is a commandment and a teaching in his service to the Lord.’” The Rebbe added that everything that Meir had studied and all his knowledge should be used for the service of the Most High. When Meir worked as a foundry worker, he manufactured shields for tanks – that is an example which proves that Torah and *mitzvot* are a kind of a shield that can protect a person from something undesirable. The Rebbe told Meir that he ought to make use of his life experience in order to bring people who are still far from G-d closer to Him. The Rebbe gave Meir the names of people who could help him to get help in this job. Then he took a copy of the book *Tanya* from his table and gave it to Meir. Moving backward toward the door, Meir left the Rebbe’s room. From that moment on Meir was quite a different man – a soldier in the great army headed by the Rebbe.

Half a year later Meir received wonderful news: his wife, his daughter and her husband’s family had received exit permits.

Just before *Shavuot* they all met. Only his son was missing, but Meir remembered the Rebbe’s prediction and he was sure that, in due course of time, his son would come to him too.

## Chapter Eleven

### *IN HIS NATIVE LAND*

It seems that G-d himself had chosen the location for the small town of Borovukha. It is one of the most beautiful places in the world! Its oldest inhabitants still remember the elderly men who, in their childhood, had known the first settlers – the people who had built the first houses in the dense forest. There stood slender pine trees dressed in festive silver “uniforms,” stitched with black threads that made them look stately.

The first Jewish settlers had grubbed out the stumps from the ground and the evil from people’s hearts. They had built their houses and sown love in their hearts. The settlement was rapidly growing. It acted as one big family that brought up great scholars of Torah, Chassidism and men of virtue – *tzaddikim*. Even common people – craftsmen and peddlers – possessed as much virtue as there are seeds in a pomegranate.

It was always crowded in the synagogue. Someone was studying Torah there day and night. The “early birds” hastened to replace those who were studying late into the night. They became eminent rabbis and spiritual teachers afterwards and the last of them was Rabbi Benjamin.

For more than fifty years he served his people in the small town of Borovukha. When he was old the violent winds of the Revolution started to blow. They brought seeds of envy and hatred that spread all over the country. Reb Benjamin had three friends: Elimelech, the water-carrier, who was considered a hidden *tzaddik*, Kopl, the smith, a great Torah scholar, and Chayim Abraham, a man of virtue. They still remembered the glorious times when the little town flourished, before they witnessed its decay.

Each of them is worth a separate book but we shall only dwell on Reb Chayim Abraham, one of the most esteemed Jews in the town. He was a kind and honest person, famous for his great Torah knowledge. He loved everybody and in turn was loved by everybody. He was considered one of the wealthy Jews. He made his fortune by manufacturing ropes. He was pedantic and punctual. He had not changed his daily schedule since his childhood. The working hours were sacred to him and he strictly observed the morning and evening hours of Torah study.

Reb Chayim Abraham had brought up his children to be honest and G-d-fearing. His happiness was overshadowed only by one thing – his favorite daughter, Sheindl, was already thirty years old and still unmarried, though she was clever, beautiful and intelligent. The whole family grieved because she was alone.

One day a small lean Jew appeared in Chayim Abraham’s house. He had a trimmed beard and an aquiline nose. By some miracle he had preserved an old worn out tail-coat. A tie decorated a shirt that had been white years before.

He was Reb Gedaliah, the matchmaker.

Reb Gedaliah was invited to the table. He did not make them wait; he washed his hands and sat down at the table. He drank one or two glasses of fruit liquor and then ate a little, taking his time.

Reb Chayim Abraham was patiently waiting. He wanted to know the reason for Reb Gedaliah’s visit. Reb Gedaliah wiped his lips and then said that he had a bridegroom for Sheindl. He started to describe the bridegroom: how handsome and clever he is, what a great Talmudist

he is, and so on. Then he praised his late father, an ordinary tailor, but a well-known Talmudist in Vilnius. Though the bridegroom was five years younger than Sheindl, Reb Gedaliah thought that he would be a good partner for her.

Reb Chayim Abraham listened patiently to the speech of praise. He talked things over with his wife Dvoira and agreed to see “the goods.”

In a week, Reb Gedaliah, the bridegroom, and his mother arrived, as they had agreed. The mother was a small woman, with bright shining eyes and thin blue lips on her lean, high cheek-boned face.

And the bridegroom! His name was Yaakov Glomb. He was far from being as handsome as Reb Gedaliah had described him. Moreover, he was small of stature, and his high forehead did not add any intellect to him. His glasses, with thick lenses, were perched on the tip of his nose.

His mother and Reb Gedaliah vied with each other in praising the bridegroom, while sitting at the table laid in their honor. At last the parties came to an agreement – there would be a wedding! The date of betrothal was fixed and they raised their glasses to say “*Mazal Tov.*”

In a moment the news of Sheindl’s engagement spread all through the town and its surroundings. Everybody was happy that Sheindl’s sun had finally risen. Both the parents and Sheindl seemed to be glad.

Nevertheless, everyone was hiding something in their hearts which they did not tell anybody.

Some time passed, and they celebrated the engagement. On the wedding day relatives, friends and acquaintances came from all around the village. The wedding was joyous. The *klezmer* orchestra was playing. The honored guests congratulated the newlyweds and wished them happiness. The bridegroom delivered a brilliant speech which revealed his conceit. That grieved the listeners but they tried to conceal their opinions.

Reb Chayim Abraham cleared out his house for the newly married couple. He and his wife moved to a small house at the end of Kozya street, next to the houses of his friends, Reb Elimelech the water-carrier and Kopl the smith. At last he could fulfill his longstanding dream and devote himself entirely to serving G-d.

Yaakov Glomb sought honor but it eluded him. He often put on airs in front of young people and neglected the old ones who were gradually alienated from him. Yaakov did not find his place in the synagogue; nevertheless, he asked people to call him “Rav,” but everybody began to ignore him. When he wanted to participate in the pupils’ debates he was interrupted politely out of regard for Reb Chayim Abraham who was worried by the behavior of his son-in-law. Old Rabbi Benjamin patiently tried to persuade Yaakov to change his conduct, as it wounded his father-in-law’s pride, but all that was in vain. Yaakov aspired to the old Rabbi’s place!

Nobody knew what was happening in the home of the young couple, as Sheindl’s friends stopped coming to visit. There was gossip that all was not running smoothly there, although every Sabbath one could see them taking a walk together and Sheindl could not but praise her husband.

One of Yaakov’s friends, named Fyodor Spokoyno exerted great influence over him. He was an educated man of about thirty. Fyodor had intelligent features, a finely modeled nose and icy gray eyes behind his thick glasses. He was always neatly dressed in a long Tolstovka<sup>2</sup> shirt, with a belt and tassels and carefully polished boots. He was not talkative, but when he spoke, he

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<sup>2</sup> A tolstovka is a long, Russian styled shirt, similar to a smock. As the great Russian writer, Count Leo Tolstoy wore one, it became known as a Tolstovka in his honor and tens of thousands of Russian men wore them.

Just Look and Remember

possessed the gift of eloquence and persuasiveness. Fyodor was a teacher by profession. Like Yaakov, he had no place in the synagogue, but he did not seek one either.



## Chapter Twelve

### *THE DISPUTE*

The Jewish section of the Russian Communist Party Committee was established in 1915. A certain Dimantstein was placed at the head. In his youth, he studied at a well-known Yeshiva. While a senior, he fell under the influence of the organization called *Mefitsey Hatskala*<sup>3</sup> which was known for its hatred of Judaism. In their activities, they used many nefarious means, including denouncing people and provocations with firearms. In one case they even shot at a rabbi. They succeeded in winning Dimantstein over to their side.

Dimantstein was joined by Gursky, a famous American Communist who came to Russia. He was the worst enemy of religion. He even boasted, “What the Czars failed to accomplish in two hundred years I can do in one year.” To tell the truth, he succeeded.

At the same time, the movement called “Fighters Against Religion” appeared. They had their own newspaper, *Bezbozhnik* (Apostate), in which they published articles directed against religion and the clergy as a whole.

A number of Jews joined these movements, though they all had been ardent Zionists and socialists in the past. They remained in Russia and started to serve the ideals of Marxism. They were joined by some Yeshiva students, and even by several young rabbis who had accumulated some knowledge but not enough fear of G-d. In general they became members of those organizations due to their vanity and material incentives. They did not possess any firm ideological principles.

Fyodor Spokoyno and then Yaakov Glomb joined them too.

*Yevseki* – members of the so-called Jewish section – were not fastidious about which means they used in order to achieve their goal – to destroy and abolish Judaism.

Their newspapers, especially the *Bezbozhnik* served them faithfully. Day after day they printed articles containing false accusations and instigation against religion and its ministers, as well as malicious and humiliating caricatures of rabbis. Those articles helped to provoke anti-Semitism, as people accused the Jews of the dethroning of the Czar, causing the Revolution and establishing Soviet power.

Many people were arrested and accused of counter-revolutionary activities. The prisoners were prosecuted by a special commission, the so-called *troyka* which consisted of three people at best. Such “courts” sentenced people to be shot. They usually attached the “confession” of the defendant, procured through insufferable torture, so that nobody could doubt the fairness of the sentence.

Draconian measures were taken in cases of absence from work. If a worker or a clerk was twenty minutes late for work he was put in prison for two years. That law forced many loyal and honest Jews to break the sanctity of the Sabbath. Furthermore, the Jewish butchers who sold kosher meat were accused of fraud and making a profit at the expense of the common people, so they established co-operatives which united all the butchers. As a result, all the meat products were mixed together, and the kosher food gradually disappeared.

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<sup>3</sup> *Mefitsey Haskala*, which means “The promulgators of Enlightenment” i.e., secular knowledge, was an anti-religious educational movement founded in 1863 based on the teachings of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786).

The priests and their families were called *lishentsy* (deprived) as they were deprived of the right to work and not allowed to establish a permanent residence in capital cities. The worst thing was that bad living conditions in big cities encouraged people to become informers. The life of poor people in cramped municipal housing aroused envy that caused them to give false information about their neighbors.

People were persuaded to enter institutes of higher education where they had not been admitted during the Czarist era. Previously their future had been limited to the professions of craftsmen and small merchants. Now they could become doctors or engineers after graduation, but those institutes were preparing atheists.

Most of the Jewish community leaders – *gabbais* of synagogues, rabbis and kosher slaughterers were frightened, but they decided to wait for the time when the system would change. Only the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson and his followers and adherents defended Jewry. The bones of many of them are scattered over the Far North, the tundra and the taiga forests of Siberia. The Lubavitcher Rebbe was arrested and sentenced to capital punishment. He only survived due to world-wide protest and his personal fortitude.

The *Yevseki* and the *Bezbozhnik* used medieval methods of anti-Semitism – among other means, by holding public debates that were very dangerous. No matter who was right, it was the defendant who would ‘pay’ for all. That is why our Rabbi, Reb Benjamin, tried to avoid participation in such disputes, though the *Yevseki* tried hard to make him do it. The Rabbi’s friends and representatives of the community attempted to persuade Reb Benjamin to accept the invitation to debate, as they thought that his refusal might be interpreted as an inability to answer their questions. Reb Benjamin had to yield to their pressure.

Big posters appeared in the town in the summer of 1926 announcing that in the House of Culture there would be a public debate between the *Yevseki* and the Rabbi, and that some famous scientists would also participate.

The Rabbi spent the days before the debate in solitude. He did not receive any visitors. On the appointed day, crowds started to gather at the House of Culture long before the starting time. The hall was packed with people. The podium was covered with a red cloth. There were slogans hanging on the walls. The moment came when the Rabbi entered the hall – tall, broad-shouldered and slender. He was wearing a *streimel* and a long silk *gartle* wrapped several times around his waist over his jacket. His boots were polished with care. His kind face was especially serious and his white beard added patriarchal character. He resembled an archangel.

The arrival of the Rabbi had attracted everybody’s attention, and involuntarily all the people stood up. Yaakov Glomb stood up too but Fyodor Spokoyno pulled him back down. That incident caused some confusion in the ranks of the Presidium but soon they recovered their peace of mind.

Fyodor Spokoyno, the chairman, began his speech with praise for the new system and for the wisdom of the Party and the Government which was promising a sunny future to the industrial and office workers. The only thing that hindered the fulfillment of that promise was, in his words, the heritage of the past: the remnants of the bourgeoisie, religion and the clergy, but that would soon be done away with. Fyodor Spokoyno then gave the floor to the representatives of the capital, Professors Zotov and Yegorov, who had come especially for the debate. They delivered long speeches using pompous language, but with little sense in them. All their animosity was directed against religion and the clergy.

Then the floor was taken by the chairman of the *Yevsection* of Minsk, comrade

Avigdorov. He introduced himself as a former Yeshiva student, and said that he had been ordained as a rabbi and was a scholar of Torah. He said that while he was working as a rabbi he had witnessed crimes committed by clergymen who were making a profit off of the common people. He cursed the prophets and the sages because, to his mind, they served the interests of the Czars and the rich exclusively, and were oppressing people. He mocked belief in G-d and the commandments, especially *brit milah* (circumcision). The speaker proved his words with quotations and scraps of sayings from Talmud. When he quoted the story of King David and Queen Batsheba, he padded the details in a coarse and unscrupulous way. One could see that Avigdorov simply wanted to drag out the time.

Fyodor Spokoyno closed the first day of the debates and the people went home. The Rabbi returned home in a distressed and jaded mood. He was suffering at the thought that the Jews would fall asleep that night with doubt in their souls.

The next morning, long before the beginning of the debate, people gathered again at the House of Culture. Everybody wanted to get inside, but it was even more crowded than the day before.

The Rabbi was a little late, but, as on the previous day, the people stood up to greet him when he arrived.

Fyodor Spokoyno gave the floor to Professor Borukhovich, a well-known Jewish surgeon from Kiev and later to Professor Leventov. On the basis of scientific data, Professor Borukhovich explained to the audience the medical benefits of *brit milah*, as it reduces the incidence of venereal disease. He finished his speech with the words, "I would be happy if everybody underwent that operation."

He was supported by Professor Leventov who said that, according to the words of Heinrich Heine, the Jews had parted with everything, but they saved the Torah from the flames. "In conclusion," the Professor said, "the commandment of *brit milah* is a fine pearl which the Jewish nation has been carrying through two thousand years of exile as a gift to all the peoples of the world."

A storm of applause accompanied the speeches of doctors Borukhovich and Leventov.

The organizers of the debate were greatly annoyed by the joyful voices of the well-wishers who started to shout, "Let the Rabbi speak! Give the floor to the Rabbi! We want to listen to him!"

The members of the Presidium were taken aback but the Rabbi did not miss the opportunity to praise the name of G-d in public. He rose to his full height and started speaking fine literary Russian in a loud voice. The Rabbi did justice to the new power that had replaced the Czarist regime, under which the Jews had been oppressed and restricted in their human rights. He spoke about the sufferings of the Jewish nation, the pogroms of the Black Hundreds (special punitive units), and deprivation of Jews' right to choose their place of residence.

He said, "Now the Jewish people, like any other nation, are granted freedom. The Soviet law does not encourage religion, but it does not prevent anybody from performing religious rites. Now the Jew has the right to live and educate his children in his own way. But some people, who consider themselves to be representatives of the Soviet power, have started to break the Soviet laws, depriving other people of the right to adhere to one's belief and traditions."

After that the Rabbi enumerated the Jewish religious observances one by one. He stressed that he had nothing to add to the words of Professors Borukhovich and Leventov about *brit milah*. Raising his elderly voice, the Rabbi exclaimed, "As for our Prophets, they were the light

of mankind in all respects. They were genuine revolutionaries who were fighting for social justice against the kings and the rich. The Prophet Elijah reproached King Ahab and the Prophet Nathan reproached King David in that very case with Batsheba which Comrade Avigdorov mentioned yesterday.

“We ought to take into consideration the fact that King David was a man of flesh and blood and it happened that he did an improper action. King David was a strong and imperious man and he begged the Prophet Nathan not to make his action public, but the Prophet declined his request, and the Torah discloses the whole story. The king ought to be an example for the nation and if he committed an offence the people should know about it.

“And what do we see now?”

“It is only now, after the Revolution, that people are getting to know what had happened in the Czar’s family, the Romanovs, how many crimes, how much dirt... If anybody had been brave enough to disclose it, it would have cost him his head. The Torah does not hide anything; it gives the sinner a chance to repent. Both the very spirit of our nation and its particular emotional attributes symbolize its purity and sanctity.”

The audience got excited. People cheered the Rabbi, and most of them stood up, preventing the Chairman from closing the meeting in an organized way.

The people left the hall satisfied, whereas the organizers of the debate hung their heads.

The Rabbi returned home content with the course of the debates, however he understood well that retribution would follow; the *Yevseki* would not forgive him his victory.

## Chapter Thirteen

### ***THE TRIAL: HEARING THE RABBI'S CASE***

Some days passed and then two militiamen appeared at the Rabbi's house and led him away for interrogation. The interrogation lasted for several hours. After that the Rabbi appeared in "court." The "judge" read the indictment with an air of importance. "The Rabbi is sentenced to one year of imprisonment for his anti-Soviet activities, but in consideration of his advanced age, three months of hard labor will substitute for imprisonment. Thus, starting next Monday, he will be placed at the command of the Town Executive Committee – the *Gorispolkom*."

When the Rabbi came home towards evening, he was extremely exhausted. He would not speak to anybody. He just locked himself in his room. On the following day, a Friday, he got up earlier than usually, he prayed *Tikun Chatzot* (the midnight service) with deep intention for a long time. After that he started his Torah studies, still refraining from speaking to anybody.

One could feel special zeal in his Sabbath prayers. After the Sabbath meal people began to gather in the synagogue to listen to the Rabbi. People hoped that the sermon would be especially impressive after his victory in the debate and after the pronouncement of his sentence.

It proved to be true.

The synagogue was overcrowded. Some *NKVD* (Home Affairs Committee) informers were glimpsed in the hall. The Rabbi ascended to the pulpit and began his sermon, as usual, with an explanation of the weekly Torah portion. Then he continued his speech, "For ten years we have been watching the Jewish soul fluttering between life and death. This situation has captured a considerable part of our nation which is weakened by winds of violence that are gaining strength from day to day, trying to tear us away from our heritage like leaves from their stem. It pains us to see that those who were tied to the spirit of Judaism, to the source of spiritual life with all their hearts are feverishly fighting for spiritual survival now. We ought to gather all our strength and raise our voices against the winds that are trying to raze Jewry to the ground. We are threatened with the danger of spiritual lapse. G-d forbids us to lose all hope! Even if we lose our spiritual strength and our way of belief and our confidence, G-d forbids us to be called dead (that is, sinners) during our lifetime!

"All the Rabbis of this country will appear in the Court of history, the most severe court. They have lost their ship; they are being abandoned by everybody, considered unnecessary; nobody cares about them. Our Sages said in the Talmud, 'If a man sees that suffering is overcoming him, he ought to check his actions.' Weren't we, the rabbis, sleeping all the time when we should have been purifying the spirit of our people? Perhaps, if we had paid more attention to morals and had been living examples for our people, as the chosen ones, we could have shown the people the Chassidic way that they ought to follow – raising one's spirit to the heights. Then we would not be witnessing the rudeness and brutality that is being committed by some Jews. They call down curses not only on the Jewish people, but also on all mankind.

"I'd like to remind you that the seventh fast, which is on the third day of *Tishrei*, is the day when Gedaliah ben Ahikam was killed. The Talmud says that Ishmael ben Netaniah was his murderer and many people ask, 'Why does the Talmud make public the murderer's name and why is that date set as a fast day?' Everyone knows that there were many similar cases in our history, for instance the murderer of King Saul and his sons, or King Yehoash. Those people

were the chosen among the chosen, but the days they were killed were not established as fast days. Why? Gedaliah ben Ahikam was killed by Ishmael ben Netaniah. When great sons of the Jewish nation fall victim at the hands of non-Jews, there is no danger to the existence of the nation, as their places will be taken by others. The biggest misfortune is when our compatriots kill their leaders. In that case the nation is in danger. G-d save us from that, as that is a sign of the fading of our nation and the loss of its vitality, so that unusually strong gusts of wind may tear it up by the roots.

“The Talmud tells us that when Reb Yochanan ben Zakai lay down in a coffin to prepare for his meeting with Vespasian<sup>4</sup>, troublemakers wanted to prick or strike him in order to check whether he was really dead. But Reb Yochanan’s disciples said the gentiles would say, ‘What have the Jews come to? They want to prick or hit their own spiritual leader!’

“The fast day was set on the day Gedaliah was murdered because his murderer was from the House of King David. That House gave birth to creators, and now it produced the one who killed the last king who could have united the remaining people in the land of Israel. The blow which comes from a son of the Jewish people is dangerous; nevertheless we ought to remember that the Jews are not orphans. Our Prophets said, ‘It is a time of trouble unto Jacob, but he will be saved.’

“We ought to stand firm ourselves and consolidate others, ‘as the Lord shall not abandon Thy people, shall not forsake Thy destiny.’ We should realize that those compatriots who try to destroy everything that is sacred and dear to us will prove to be low people. That is why they raise their heads in conceit and trample upon all holy things. Nobody should believe them, for just as they have deceived G-d and their people, they could betray the ruling system as well.

“I am also concerned about the fact that many common honest people have turned their backs upon the old Jewish morality because they think its time has passed. They think they have found a new Torah for themselves, but are actually digging a grave for themselves. However we, the believers and the children of the believers, are convinced of their forthcoming “recovery.”

Early Monday morning the Rabbi prayed, studied Torah and directed his steps to *Gorispolkom*. Its chairman, Fyodor Spokoyno, ordered him to sweep the town square.

The Rabbi left *Gorispolkom* keeping his head high. Holding a broom in his hand, he made his way to the town square. A crowd of people was following him. They were shouting indignantly at the town authorities. Lots of people, Jews and non-Jews, had gathered in the square. When the Rabbi appeared, a Russian woman snatched the broom from his hand and cried out, “I won’t let the holy man do that humiliating job!”

Non-Jews began to pray and Jews led the Rabbi home.

He returned home weary after the incident in the square. He needed some rest and tried to fall asleep, but in vain. The Rabbi was worried about the fate of the town where he had served faithfully for more than fifty years. What could be done? The position of the Jews was worsening from day to day. How could he improve it? The scum and the grovelers remain in power and the

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<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, a Jewish leader who opposed the rebellion against Rome, was living in Jerusalem during the Roman siege of the city. He realized that the Romans would soon enter and destroy Jerusalem and possibly Judaism as well. He determined to leave the city, but the Jewish rebels would not permit any inhabitants to leave. Rabbi Yochanan feigned death and had two disciples smuggle him out in a coffin. Rabbi Yochanan went to see the Roman general, Vespasian. Delighted at the surrender of this prominent leader, Vespasian offered to grant Rabbi Yochanan one request. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asked for permission to establish a center of Jewish learning in Yavneh, an outlying town. In this way, Rabbi Yochanan guaranteed the survival of Judaism even after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple.

young people are making a row. What is more, the Rabbi was suffering from the thought that he had nobody to take counsel with. The older people were already dead, some people had left the town and the others didn't take the situation seriously. Among the young people he saw only one man he could rely on: Moishe Aharon Sorkin, the son-in-law of Elimelech the water carrier, but the agents of the *Yevsection* were keeping an eye on him. It would be dangerous to arrange a meeting with him.

## Chapter Fourteen

### ***THE RABBI'S DEATH***

One day the Rabbi lingered in the Synagogue after the evening prayer. Under the cover of darkness, when the streets were deserted and the townsfolk were staying in their houses, the Rabbi left the synagogue. First he made sure that nobody was watching him, then he hurriedly disappeared down one of the small streets leading to the house of Moishe Aharon.

He could hear the sounds of a heart-breaking song coming from the house. "*Habet m'shamayim u'r'ey* – Turn your eyes on us from heaven and see, we are suffering from mockery and humiliation." The Rabbi cautiously knocked at the door and when the door opened, he quickly entered the house. The Rabbi's visit frightened and surprised Moishe Aharon, but he tried to hide his feelings.

"What's up?" he asked, offering a chair to the guest.

"Oh, nothing special," answered the Rabbi, seating himself with some effort. "I'd like to talk things over with you. You know there is nobody in the whole town I can rely on." He uttered these words with a heavy sigh. "It was not so easy to reach your house," continued the Rabbi, "as they are spying on you."

"You are right," sighed Moishe Aharon. "I cannot but praise them; they 'respect' me and keep a close watch over me. Even during the night they open the shutters and scan the room with torches in order to see what is happening inside."

"Well, I don't have much time," interrupted the Rabbi. "Do you have a place where we can hide and talk a bit?"

"The only place is over there in the big chest. I used to talk to the messengers who visited me inside it."

The Rabbi and Moishe Aharon made themselves comfortable in the huge wooden cabinet.

"I am very worried about the prospects for the future," said the Rabbi.

Moishe Aharon told him everything he knew about the activities of the *Yevsekitsya*: their plans and the 'black lists' compiled with the purpose of arresting suspected people, including, by the way, his, Moishe Aharon's, name. He also told the Rabbi about the despotism and secret decrees aimed at annihilation of Jewish spiritual life, (kosher food, celebration of Shabbat, etc.) and the Jewish system of child rearing.

The words stuck in the Rabbi's throat as he said in a muffled voice, "What will happen then? How can we sit with our arms folded and do nothing? True, I am an old man and I have nothing to lose in this world, though I want to live and I love life, but Jewish life. Who can grasp the majesty of even one of the smallest commandments? But you, Moishe Aharon, you are still a young man; you have little children. I have no right to demand self-sacrifice from you, have I?"

Moishe Aharon quickly responded, "One must not be idle now, when we are experiencing such a difficult period. I've already prepared some building materials and I've started to repair the *mikve*. By the way, last week one of our messengers visited us. He told me about the state of affairs in other towns, and about a very difficult situation in the Yeshiva. The students are being hidden away one by one, now here, now there. He asked whether we could take five boys in our town, so I am thinking the matter over and trying to decide how to settle it."



“No problem,” answered the old Rabbi with confidence. “I can bring two of them into my house as my nephews, and I am sure you will find where to house the other three. I am sure Elimelech, your father-in-law, won’t let such respectable guests be accommodated elsewhere. I will look after them and teach them. I am sure the *gabbai*, Yankel David, will let them study in the women’s section of the synagogue.”

They continued their conversation for about an hour. Then, after Moishe Aharon peeked out into the street to make sure that nobody was spying on them, he accompanied the Rabbi home.

A few days later, five fifteen-year-old youths came to the town. Two of them settled at the Rabbi’s house as his nephews, two others with Elimelech the water-carrier, and one at Shimon the shoemaker’s. They were joined by five local youths of the same age, and they formed a class. The boys tried not to appear together in crowded streets. They were studying diligently in the synagogue, and the spirits of the old Rabbi improved.

The local authorities knew about it but for the time being they did not let on in any way.

It was hard to persuade the *gabbai* to let the boys study in the synagogue as he was very afraid, but once he gave his consent he tried to treat the boys nicely. He pitied them, as they sacrificed so much for the cause of studying the Torah.

One evening a stranger appeared in the synagogue under the pretext of saying *Kaddish*, but his questions seemed suspicious to the pupils. The boys already had some experience and they knew how to escape from him. That evening neither the Rabbi nor Moishe Aharon was present in the synagogue.

The following day militiamen encircled the synagogue during the lessons and they caught some pupils and the Rabbi. The others somehow managed to jump out of the windows and run away. Among them were Moishe Aharon’s son Meir and Yankele Shamunov. The militiamen ordered the Rabbi to follow them. He took off his *tallit* and *tefillin* and put them carefully into the bag and went out with the soldiers. On the way he stumbled and fell down. He was an old and heavy man; he could not stand up again by himself. People carried the Rabbi home and called the doctor who stated that the Rabbi had suffered a brain hemorrhage.

For many weeks the Rabbi hovered between life and death.

On the eve of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) his condition became worse. Fear and trepidation seized the Jews of the town. On Yom Kippur all the people prayed with zeal and begged the Lord to restore their Rabbi to health. Evening was approaching. The last prayer, *Neila*, was over. The Cantor took the *shofar* with trembling hands, and the walls of the synagogue started to tremble from the blasts of the *shofar*. Everyone shouted, “*L’shana haba’ah b’Yerushalayim!* Next year in Jerusalem!”

At that very moment sobbing was heard from the Rabbi’s house. He had returned his holy soul to the Almighty. Terrible pain seized everybody’s heart of hearts. Sobs stuck in people’s throats. All through the night people were praying, taking turns with one another, taking shifts.

On the following day the townspeople followed the Rabbi’s coffin. Everybody knew that they were burying a wonderful man, a tzaddik, the father and judge of the Jews. G-d bless his holy memory.

## Chapter Fifteen

### ***THE DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD*** ***(The arrest and release of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson)***

The Lubavitcher Rebbe Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, 5630 (July 11, 1870). His parents were the Rebbe Shalom Ber (known as the Rebbe Rashab) and Sterne Sarah. The Rebbe Rashab died in 1920, and Yosef Yitzhak immediately became his successor.

The family left the town of Lubavitch in the Smolensk region in 1916. They moved to Rostov-on-Don and endured a great deal of suffering from gangs and the horrors of World War I, but the Rebbe did not suspend his work even for a day.

The consolidation of Soviet power and the establishment of the *Yevsektion* resulted in persecution, especially against the Rebbe, though he prevented other public figures from becoming panic stricken and surrendering. The Rebbe sent encouraging letters to his followers, asking them to remain where they were. He sent his disciples to those places where the Jewish spirit was weakening. He sent them there to occupy the vacant posts of rabbis, *shochtim*, *mohelim*, and *melamdin*, and to build or repair *mikves*. The Rebbe also contacted the American Joint Distribution Committee and other organizations in order to obtain funds for organizing workplaces for the Jews, so that they could observe the laws of the Torah.

All that irritated those in power especially the *Yevseki* and the GPU (Chief Political Administration) who sought a means to get rid of that enemy of the Revolution. It was easy to deal with other rabbis who were more passive. When they received warnings, they were deterred, and awaited better times. It was more difficult to deal with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The whole world knew him. He had many disciples and adherents who were as fearless as he was.

State authorities made him move to Leningrad. 22/12 Mokhovaya Street became the center of religious activities. The Rebbe's work went on and people kept visiting him from all the parts of the country.

The Rebbe was a tzaddik, a prophet. He sent his emissaries to places where everything was not yet destroyed: to the Bukhara region, to Georgia and elsewhere. As a result, some of his emissaries even managed to persuade local authorities to grant funds for supporting several religious objectives. When the state authorities found out about that, they decided it was time to end it all.

On the fourteenth of Sivan, 5687 (June 14, 1927), the Rebbe received people throughout the day. Just after midnight he finished his work. Exhausted, he sat down at the table for a meal with the members of his household. Suddenly the doorbell rang persistently and representatives of the GPU burst into the house. Armed soldiers were immediately stationed at every door. They received commands from two Jewish men from chassidic families: Nakhanson and Lulov. They tried to scare everybody, especially the Rebbe, with their shouts and threats, but the Rebbe maintained his calm and dignity. The intruders conducted a thorough search, but they could not find anything suspicious. They arrested him nevertheless, but the Rebbe did not move from his place until he was given permission to take his *tallit* and *tefillin* with him and to make use of them.

The prayers and the tears of his old mother and his daughters did not move the hard

hearts of the persecutors.

That day was the beginning of twenty-eight days that shook the world and brought hell's torments to the Rebbe. He stayed resolutely unafraid of the threats and physical suffering which is all described by the Rebbe in his diary.

A miracle saved the Rebbe from being shot during the first night of his imprisonment. The events took place as follows. When Nakhamson and Lulov brought the Rebbe to the Shpalernaya prison he was led into a dark corridor. Later the Rebbe discovered that there was no way out. The Rebbe was so tired that he was hardly able to drag himself along. He saw an open door and benches somewhere, went in there, and seated himself in order to regain his strength.

At that time intercession for his release began. He found out later that as the Rebbe was arrested and escorted to prison his most devoted Chassidim, Elichayim Althaus and a young man, his daughter's bridegroom, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (the Rebbe's future successor) were standing in the street, just round the corner. At once they raised the alarm and news of his arrest immediately spread not only through Leningrad, but throughout the country and around the world. Prominent Jewish public figures took all possible measures and used their influence in the government circles of Russia. Mrs. Peshkova, Maxim Gorky's wife, also took part in saving the Rebbe. Within a week of his death sentence, the Rebbe's sentence was changed to ten years of penal servitude in the Solovetsky Monastery prison. Later that sentence was changed to three years of exile in the Russian town of Kostroma. Some of the Rebbe's adherents went to Kostroma in order to organize everything that would be needed for religious purposes.

The Rebbe spent two more days in the Shpalernaya prison so as not to break the Sabbath.

Lulov, who had arrested the Rebbe and was his investigator, did not stop harassing the Rebbe while he was in prison. Little did he know that in less than ten years he would be humiliated and shot in the cellars of the GPU.

The Rebbe was escorted to Kostroma without handcuffs, free. Many people gathered at the railway terminal to bid him farewell in spite of the strict guards and numerous disguised spies. A few minutes prior to the train's departure the Rebbe addressed the people, trying to soothe them. "We pray to G-d to be with us, just like He was with our forefathers, and not to leave us."

The world community exerted every effort to free him. As a result, in ten days, on the 12th of Tammuz, the Rebbe was released. Due to the efforts of the head of the Jewish community of Riga, Mordechai Dubin, and through the mediation of the Latvian government the Rebbe was allowed to leave Russia for Latvia. There he continued his activities aimed at rendering help to the Jews of Russia. The link between the Rebbe and Soviet Jewry was not broken until his last day, the 10th of Shevat, 5710 (January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1950). His activities were taken over by his son-in-law and successor, the following Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

## Chapter Sixteen

### ***THE ARREST OF MOISHE AHARON.***

Yaakov Glomb's hatred for Moishe Aharon was limitless. He knew what impression he had made on Moishe Aharon during their first meeting and that the latter was against his marriage to Sheindl. Besides, it was Moishe Aharon who insisted that he, Yaakov Glomb, a Communist, give Sheindl a religious divorce. At first, some inner dread prevented him from making trouble for Moishe Aharon for the time being. Later on, however, after the Rabbi's death and the arrest of many Jewish activists in the town, Yaakov decided that Moishe Aharon had overstepped the limits of impudence. It was time to get busy on Moishe Aharon's case.

One night, when the townsfolk were fast asleep, Moishe Aharon finished his studies and prayers and went to bed but he could not fall asleep as a vague foreboding was tormenting him. He knew that Glomb and his friends were keeping permanent watch over him and preparing a trap for him. It was quiet in the house. A burning wick dimly lit a corner of the big stove and only the measured ticking of the wall clock could be heard.

Suddenly a loud knock at the door broke the silence. People in the household woke up, but they did not rush to open the door as everybody knew who it was. When the knocks grew louder, Moishe Aharon's wife Freidl went to the door and asked, "Who is it?"

"Open the door. It's the militia!" a harsh voice replied.

Before Freidl had time to open the door, half a dozen armed men burst into the house. The senior officer produced warrants to search and arrest Moishe Aharon. Moishe Aharon slowly got up from his bed and started to dress. The senior officer demanded that all their jewels, gold and anti-Soviet papers be given to him. Moishe Aharon denied the presence of anything of that kind, but the militiamen proceeded with their search. They rummaged through the whole house, throwing everything out of the clothing wardrobes and linen chests. They poured water out of the storage barrels and even upset the firewood stacks. They finished their work towards morning but failed to find anything which would discredit Moishe Aharon.

Moishe Aharon used the early morning hours to put on *tefillin* and *tallit* and pray. Then he put his *tallit* and *tefillin* into a bag and got ready to depart. Where to? For how long?

Freidl and the children begged the men to leave Moishe Aharon in peace as he had not done anything wrong. The militiamen stood like stuffed dummies. The senior officer ordered Moishe Aharon to follow him. The children burst out crying but that did not move anybody. The frightened neighbors were watching everything from behind the fence. They were afraid to go outdoors. Freidl's parting words were, "Take care of yourself."

A tremendous threat hung over Moishe Aharon, as Glomb and Spokoyno were planning to give false testimony against him, but, as the Prophets say, "Plan a conspiracy and it will be annulled; speak your piece and it shall not stand, for G-d is with us." (Isaiah 8:10) Who knows what sentence would have been passed upon Moishe Aharon if it were not for the senior investigator's intervention. He was a non-Jew, who came from the village of Shchukino where Moishe Aharon had lived long before. The young man remembered all the good that Moishe Aharon had done for his father and his family. He knew him to be an honest and respectable man. He insisted that the sentence be commuted and Glomb and Spokoyno had to obey him.

Moishe Aharon was sentenced to one year of hard labor at the construction site of a local

plant. His relatives and friends felt a sense of relief, and they thanked G-d for His grace. Two days later Moishe Aharon went to his new workplace. The plant was situated behind the railway tracks not far from the Jewish cemetery. The plant management knew that Moishe Aharon had to work there for the whole year. They were glad to hear that news, as they knew him to be a highly qualified specialist and inventor.

Soon Moishe Aharon won the respect and confidence of both the plant management and the workers. He gave himself wholly to his work and did everything in his power regardless of the time spent. He helped other people and taught them new methods of work. Local authorities appreciated Moishe Aharon's work and they recommended that the court commute his punishment to spite Glomb and Spokoyno. Due to his good attitude, Moishe Aharon was allowed to observe Sabbath and was even permitted to spend nights at home.

One evening, when Freidl was occupied with her domestic work and Moishe Aharon was still at the plant, somebody knocked at the door. Freidl hurried to open the door. She was surprised to see their former neighbor, Alexei Shchukin who had formerly been the owner of the Shchukino estate. Cheerfully Freidl invited the old man to come in. He thanked her with a bow, took off his fur coat and seated himself. He looked very exhausted but his features still retained traces of refinement. Freidl treated him to a glass of hot tea and some simple food. She heaped questions upon him, as she wanted to know everything. She also made casual mention of his kind attitude towards them. If it were not for Moishe Aharon's brother-in-law (his sister's husband, Mordechai the miser) who had come especially from Kiev to take them away, they would never have left their former home. The old man answered all her questions with pleasure, with frequent long coughs in between. Then he started to question her about their problems.

When Moishe Aharon returned home, he was pleased to find their esteemed visitor. They embraced and kissed each other. While Moishe Aharon was busy praying, Freidl set the table, brought out sour cabbage and pickles, and took out hot potatoes from the stove. During the mealtime the old man spoke a lot, recollecting bygone times and expressing his doubt as to whether the new power could provide working people with "life in paradise" as they had promised, while plundering and violence were ruling the whole country.

The old man drank a glass of vodka and after a pause he exclaimed, "What a pity that I am not a Jew! You are happy to have your Torah. That is wisdom, not just laws. More than twenty years have passed since we first became acquainted. I saw your way of life; I used to sit beside you and listen to the wise judgements which you derived from the Torah. Yes indeed, your life makes a lot of sense! I'll soon be eighty, and what will happen to me then? What have I done for the benefit of others? I've wasted my inherited wealth, and I've used my talents and knowledge only for satisfying my passions. Have I been better than a beast?"

Shchukin fell to thinking, then he continued, "If I were born again, I would adopt Judaism, though you have a hard life now and you are always persecuted! I envy you and your children who follow in their parents' footsteps. I have only one son, Vassily. He is an honest and decent young man, but he refuses to get married, and he is the last one in the Shchukin dynasty. Our views differ. He believes in the new regime, in the future, though he does not accept all their methods. To my regret, we have not found a common language. My son visits me from time to time. He is a person of influence. By the way," he added, and held out an envelope, "my son is your friend; he respects you for your honesty. Here is his address. In case you need something, you can ask him. It is a pity that even among your people some improper things occur.

Nevertheless, history has proven that when such cases occur, people make a fuss for a while and

then they return to doing good deeds. The Guardian of the Jews is not sleeping. He is keeping His watch.

“You want to know why I am here, don’t you? Actually, I feel that my death is approaching.” He started to cough vigorously, and then he calmed down and went on. “I’ve got some jewels and gold coins that I inherited from my parents; I don’t need them any more. I am going to keep some coins for myself in case Heaven doesn’t take me soon. I’ve given paintings and some other pieces of art to my son, but I do not want to give him gold because he will hand it over to the state. I don’t want it. That is why I have decided that it would be better to give it to you. You are honest and respectable people. Maybe it will come in handy.” He offered them a small velvet bag.

Moishe Aharon and Freidl were taken aback, but the old man persuaded them to take the jewels. Moishe Aharon took the present in spite of his reluctance, as he realized that it was the Almighty One in Heaven who was helping him. Shchukin stayed with them for the night, and on the following day he returned to his village.

After some weeks passed they received news of old Shchukin’s death.

## Chapter Seventeen

### ***MOISHE AHARON'S DEATH***

Nothing changed in the Sorkins' daily routine. Every morning Moishe Aharon went to work. He was respected and valued, as he contributed much to the successful construction of the plant. The plant management intended to apply to have his sentence commuted. At the same time, they hoped to persuade Moishe Aharon to stay at the plant after serving his time, though they did not know whether Moishe Aharon would want to stay. Actually, he dreamed that after his release he would leave that town for good, and go somewhere farther from Glomb and Spokoyno who would otherwise never leave him in peace.

The *Yevseki* were raging. NKVD was holding a fund-raising campaign for gold. They needed gold and jewels to build a new life, a "paradise" for the working class. Meanwhile, one arrest was following another; people were tortured and were pressured to reveal the places where their gold and jewels had been hidden. In order to feed the family people had to go to the countryside to exchange goods for provisions. Many people were accused of financial speculation and put in prison. The prisons were congested. In order to make room for new prisoners, the people in charge of the prisons would shoot the convicts. Although events such as these took place, as the saying goes, "Life goes on. Although the house is on fire, the clock is still ticking away the time."

The workers were being brainwashed at political meetings and the remaining bourgeoisie and the clergy were being blamed for the disorder. The wise new system declared five-year plans for the construction of Socialism – the first step on the way to Communism.

The town administration was glad that the construction was being completed. They thanked the management of the plant "Red Banner" who had presented them with a large steam-boiler which was expected to arrive soon. The new plant would provide work for hundreds of men and women.

At the end of winter they held several meetings. They explained the situation. The working committees and schools were instructed to accept the "present" in a proper way. They were to prepare flags, posters, speeches; the firemen were responsible for the musical program. The day of the receipt of the "present" was declared a holiday.

At last the festive day arrived. The weather was fine. The sun was shining. It was warm. The snow had started to melt. Fyodor Spokoyno was placed in charge of the celebration. Everything had been thought over and planned carefully. After the festive meeting people were free to go. Then the railroad car with the boiler would be diverted to a side-spur.

The town authorities had agreed to commute Moishe Aharon's sentence. They promised to free him after the installation of the boiler. On that day, Moishe Aharon got up early as usual. He went to the synagogue to study his lessons and unburden his heart to the Almighty. He met some old men in the synagogue who were reciting psalms. Their eyes were moist with tears. Pity ran through his heart and tears were choking him. He went on praying with a broken heart. After his prayers he set off for the railway terminal. He ought to be present during the unloading of the boiler. Big sledges pulled by a team of horses were waiting near the track. They had prepared logs for rolling the boiler and thick ropes for preventing it from rolling back down.

Everything was ready. The people were impatiently waiting for the arrival of the train. At

last, the long-awaited whistle of the steam locomotive was heard. The crowd stirred and people tried to make their way nearer to the railway line.

What fervor Yaakov Glomb displayed! He was responsible for keeping order. He was dressed in a leather jacket and cap, his polished leather boots fitted close to his crooked legs. He showed off a big clumsy revolver which was hanging in a leather holster. He resembled Goliath in miniature. If it were not for fear of the authorities, one could have laughed at him, especially at his glasses, which were jumping on his long nose all the time as he busily gave instructions to the militiamen.

At last the locomotive approached, decorated with posters and the portrait of the great leader. The train stopped. The authorities of the two towns met one another. The brass band started to play the anthem. Everybody stood at attention. The parade began. Speeches were delivered. Leaders of the Party were praised. A schoolgirl recited festive poems. People started to line up to get provisions which had been brought to the stores for the special occasion.

The railway car with the steam-boiler was put on a side-track waiting to be unloaded. Moishe Aharon took his place near the railway car; he was going to supervise the unloading operation.

Fyodor Spokoyno went home to arrange the reception for the honored guests.

Yaakov Glomb remained on guard, although nobody had asked him to do so. He wanted to attract attention to his activity, so he started to run from one place to another acting important, while he was actually disturbing the people who were performing their job. They tied thick ropes around the steam-boiler, made a log platform between the railway car and the sledge, and then the workers started to roll the boiler carefully. The operation was almost completed when Glomb made a sudden awkward movement which frightened the horses, and they moved. The boiler started to roll back on its own, and the startled workers shrank back, failing to hold the boiler. It rolled over Moishe Aharon, who was standing in its path.

In a moment the workers came to their senses. They pulled the boiler aside and rescued Moishe Aharon. He was lying on the ground, with a pale face and closed eyes. Beside him a pool of blood turned the white snow crimson, as red as the banner flying not far away.

Meir rushed to the site of the accident. He bent over his father and heard him whisper his last words, "Remember, my son, who you are, whose son you are. Don't forget what the Rebbe told you."

The town medic was brought quickly. He bustled about but, alas, he could only certify that it was too late.

The following evening everybody came to accompany Moishe Aharon to his eternal rest in the Jewish cemetery which was situated not far from the place where the accident had occurred.



## Chapter Eighteen

### *MIRIAM*

Among the children of Borovukha, Miriam, the daughter of Chayim Aharon, the granddaughter of Kopl the smith was quite noticeable.

At the end of Kozya street, just opposite Elimelech the water-carrier's small house, was the even smaller house of Reb Kopl which he had inherited from his father-in-law. Kopl used to say that a special blessing reigned in that house; even its walls were imbued with holiness. He used to say, "How many Jews has that ceiling witnessed!?"

Next to the small house stood the framework of Chayim Aharon's big new house, surrounded by a high fence. Chayim Aharon, Reb Kopl's son, respected his father, who would not move to the new house, but he had other notions and needs. His family was big – he had six children. Many of the town children enjoyed coming to his yard. The gates of the smithy were wide-open on the left side of the fence. The smithy stood at the far end of the yard. One could hear the clear ringing sounds of the sledge hammer on the anvil and the sputtering of the red-hot iron in cold water.

Shmuel, the son of the blacksmith, was proud of his job. He wore a leather apron which fitted close to his thin thighs. He assisted the smith by pulling the rope which blew the bellows. Shmuel liked the children. They were not much younger than he was, but from the height of his position he felt much more grown-up. He collected iron scraps and nails for them. They were heavy and weighed down and tore their pockets, but they used them for playing games. They were attracted by the large orchard where green fruit was especially tasty though hard to reach. Who could resist the temptation? Chayim Aharon's cart stood parked in the cattle shed, right near the barn. In the summer, after the Sabbath meal, while the grown-ups were having a rest, the children got together, seated themselves in the cart and "set out" either to a village about ten miles from Borovukha or, on Chatskele's suggestion, they "went" straight to Jerusalem.

When little Moishele asked in surprise, "How is it possible to sail over the sea on a cart?" Chatskele answered with an air of importance, "Take off the wheels, and your boat is ready. The horses can swim. I saw it with my own eyes, take my word for it!"

Time and again the boys "set off" to Lubavitch before a holiday. They knew the way from the stories told by their parents. They would pretend to put their things on the cart and walk at its side or sit down on it, and Shlomka would start singing a Chassidic tune. He had a pleasant voice, and it attracted even older boys to join in the singing.

Miriam also attracted them. Chayim Aharon's daughter was a gentle and delicate girl with long braids. She was not very beautiful, but she was cute, with an oblong face and wistful eyes. She could watch small flowers or flying butterflies for hours. Her favorite place was behind the house where there was a small hill of clay. She skillfully made various figurines out of clay: small horses, sheep or men. She had her own corner in the barn where she kept her things. Miriam liked to spend her time on her own or with her best friend, Rivka, Meir's sister.

Children liked to tease her and some of them even broke her toys out of envy. She got angry with them, but she did not shout at them. Besides, her brothers defended her, their only sister.

After Moishe Aharon's death she came to console Meir's relatives. She always found

Just Look and Remember

some gentle and warm words for Freidl and her children at that hard time. She was on friendly terms with Meir, and when Meir was leaving town to continue his studies, she bid him farewell warmly, as if she knew that fate would bring them together again.

## Chapter Nineteen

### ***MEIR'S STUDY AT A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL***

In spite of the blow of Moishe Aharon's death, Freidl surrendered to the Almighty's will which forced her to continue the struggle for life. She was greatly concerned about her children's fate, both her son, Meir, who was lounging around, and her daughter Rivka, who did not obey her, and was constantly searching for a pretext for leaving her parent's home.

Time went by. The festivals of Purim and Pesach were celebrated.

The absence of the head of the family was sorely felt. Freidl thought of sending Meir somewhere to study, but she did not know where. After the arrest of Moishe Aharon the Yeshiva's envoys had not appeared in the town any more. At last Freidl decided to send him to Kiev, to the school of Rabbi Benjamin Gorodetsky. She collected Meir's belongings, cooked some food for the long journey, and gave him money for his personal needs and *tzedaka* money for the Yeshiva.

Meir arrived in Kiev. With some difficulty he reached his destination. Though the Yevseki were persecuting him, Reb Benjamin accepted Meir as his new pupil. He gave him a paternal welcome and found him a partner for his studies.

It was not easy for Meir to get accustomed to the new rhythm of life. His father's death and the long period of idleness afterward had left their marks on him. Besides, to avoid being persecuted, he had to make himself inconspicuous in the synagogue or frequent a different synagogue each day. Living conditions were difficult; nevertheless, Meir studied hard.

Autumn was approaching. Meir asked Reb Benjamin to let him visit his relatives. Reb Benjamin gave his consent. Then he asked Meir, "You will leave your *tefillin* here, won't you?" "Why do you ask?" Meir was surprised.

Reb Benjamin answered cynically with a bitter smile, "You know, you won't use them there."

Meir collected his things, including his *tefillin*, and started on the journey. He had to go via Moscow. Meir managed to find a place near a window, though the railway carriage was rather crowded. To the measured rumble of the wheels he fell to thinking of his father and the bygone years. He felt a depression and emptiness that frightened him somewhat. The train was moving fast, but it was stuffy. Somebody's legs dangled from the upper berth and a man got down. He glanced at Meir in surprise and asked, "You are Meir, aren't you?"

"Yes, it's me," answered Meir joyfully, as he recognized Vassily Shchukin, the son of the landlord, their former neighbor.

Shchukin started to question Meir with great interest. Vassily was deeply upset when he heard the news of Moishe Aharon's death, as he had respected him very much. Their conversation lasted a long time. When Vassily heard that Meir had not found his place in life yet, he tried to persuade him to stay with him in Moscow. He promised to assist him in entering the vocational school where he worked as deputy director. Vassily knew about Meir's religiosity so he also promised to help him observe the commandments.

Actually it was very difficult for Meir to make the decision. He knew why his mother had sent him to study at Reb Benjamin's synagogue. On the other hand, the offer was very attractive to him, so he thought the matter over all the way to Moscow.

Upon arriving in Moscow, Meir consented to stay in Shchukin's place. Vassily kept his word. He helped Meir enter the vocational school and found him accommodations in the dorms. He even promised to find him good neighbors. In the meantime, Meir stayed in the Shchukin's home. He was given a small separate room. Vassily's wife helped him to prepare for his studies. Every day Meir put on *tefillin* and prayed. He tried in every way to keep the Sabbath.

Meir took up his new studies with diligence. General subjects were difficult for him because he had never learned them before, but he worked with fervor, made progress, and won the respect of both his teachers and friends.

Freidl was not pleased with her son's decision but what could she do? Moreover, she was afraid to write to him about it because of the mail censorship. She only wrote that he should remember who he was and whose son he was.

The time passed quickly, and exams began. Like others, Meir studied hard; he learned day and night. He could endure it as he had been trained to be diligent from early childhood. On the eve of his exam, Meir spent a sleepless night studying hard. At dawn he was overcome by sleep, and when he woke up, it was already rather late. At once he ran to the vocational school. There he repeated the material over and over to himself until he was called in.

He passed the exam successfully. In the evening they celebrated that event in his circle of friends. Meir was very satisfied with the results. Tiredness overcame him, and Meir fell asleep. When he got up, he was startled to remember that he had not put on *tefillin* that day. Meir rushed into the street. He cried and cursed himself, but nothing could be done – the day was over. It could not be retrieved.

Gradually Meir calmed down. When the same thing happened a second time, he was also worried about it, but less so. By the third and the fourth time he got used to it. Little by little he lost the habit of putting on *tefillin*, praying and so on.

During the summer Meir came home to visit his mother. He went to the synagogue that had previously been his home; but now he felt himself a stranger there, although he still remembered his friends and the time they had spent together. He now longed for Moscow and his new friends just like he had been drawn to the synagogue in the past.

Some years passed. Meir finished vocational school, and then technical school. He was assigned to a metallurgy plant in the Donbass coal region just before the outbreak of World War II.

## Chapter Twenty

### MEIR'S SISTER RIVKA, AND YOSEF

Rivka had been an ailing child and she had been spoiled by her parents. She always yearned for the extraordinary – for instance, she envied her girlfriends who went to study away from home. Meir's behavior gave her the opportunity and the pretext to break away from her little hometown and go to Leningrad. She dreamed of entering the Medical Institute there; perhaps because she had been ill so often in her childhood, she wanted to become a doctor, or at least a registered nurse.

It was very difficult for Freidl to resign herself to her family's current situation. Her two elder daughters were married. They did not give her any trouble, yet she took the fate of their husbands and the upbringing of their children to heart. Her daughters' husbands were following in Moishe Aharon's footsteps, and, naturally, they were in constant danger. And what would happen to Meir? He had changed so much recently. And what about Rivka? Freidl's heart was breaking with anxiety, but she felt there was nothing she could do. One had to submit to one's fate.

Freidl agreed to let Rivka go away. She even made some arrangements for Rivka's accommodations in Leningrad. She wrote to her friends, the Raskins, who understood her and agreed to provide shelter for Rivka. They greeted Rivka warmly and helped her to enter medical school.

Although the Raskins' house had been under surveillance, people often visited them. The Raskins made up their minds to marry off Rivka, and they tried to find a proper bridegroom for her.

Then he appeared! He was a senior at the Polytechnic Institute – almost an engineer. Yosef was a beardless, tall and handsome young man, religious and very clever. The young people got acquainted and they liked each other. Freidl was glad to get such good news.

Some time passed, and they celebrated their wedding. Then the young couple left for central Russia where Yosef was assigned to work, and Rivka went to work as a trained nurse. They modeled their family on the example of their parents, and they had three children. They had been living quite happily until the outbreak of the war.

The war disrupted their daily routine. Yosef was called up to the army. Rivka joined her husband's relatives when they moved to Samarkand, in Central Asia. In the winter of 1942, Yosef was badly wounded. He underwent a serious operation and stayed in the hospital for a long time. At that time famine was raging all over the country. People were starving to death or dying of infectious diseases. Rivka worked at a base hospital. She tried to help the wounded people, especially the Jews, in every possible way. If a Jew died she went to the synagogue and did her best to arrange for him to be buried according to the Jewish laws.

Things were not going well in the family either. First Yosef's father passed away and then his mother died too. Rivka and her three children remained with Yosef's sisters. As 1943 began, in spite of the decisive changes at the front line, the war situation was strongly felt on the home front.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The victory in the battle of Stalingrad (September 1942 to February 1943) was a turning point in the

One fine day Rivka received the happy news that Yosef would return soon. He came home in an officer's uniform, his wounded hand hanging uselessly at his side. Yosef did not have much time to rest after his return from the front line, as Reb Mendel requested that Yosef come to him. He worked at a soap factory at the outskirts of town. At a pre-arranged time, Yosef came there. Reb Mendel greeted him with his usual friendly smile, asked him about his health and his plans for the future, and only after that did he get to the heart of the matter.

Yosef was following Reb Mendel's words attentively. His lean face and long beaked nose expressed worry as Reb Mendel described the general situation. It was extremely hard, especially among his fellow Jews. Many women remained alone without any help. Their husbands were at the front line or in labor camps. Hunger and illnesses were rampant. The death rate was high, especially among children. It was necessary to take care not only of those who were alive, but also of the dead, and to arrange burials according to the Jewish rules. Reb Mendel also told Yosef about the underground Yeshiva he had established where 180 pupils were studying. "You know, the Yeshiva Tomchei T'mimim is as dear to all of us as the apple of our eyes. How can we support them?"

Yosef considered Reb Mendel's words, and then said, "I'll think it over."

As Yosef was leaving the office, Reb Mendel followed him with eyes full of hope. He knew that Yosef would think the situation over thoroughly and find a way out.

When he came home Yosef tried to smile, but could not. Rivka saw the worry on his face but did not ask any questions. Yosef sat down beside his younger son's cradle and started singing a heartfelt tune to lull him to sleep. Reb Mendel's words did not let him have a moment's peace. Yosef tried to put his thoughts in order as they were entangled in his head.

In the morning he awoke in a cheerful mood. He had prepared his plan of action. Now he knew how to help his fellow Jews. He had to pray first. He put on his *tallit* with some difficulty and his five-year-old son helped him to put on *tefillin*. He took a bite of food, put on his uniform and went to Reb Simche Gorodetsky and Rafael Khodaيداتov. He was sure that only they could help him get in to see the First Secretary of the *Obcom* (the Regional Party Committee), Comrade Abdullaev, without long hours of waiting.

Yosef had guessed right. Both of them were old-timers, and they knew all the "ins and outs" to Comrade Abdullaev. Thus, several days later, Yosef, in full uniform, with orders and medals and shining boxcalf boots, went to the Obcom. Before he went, he unburdened his heart to the Almighty, praying for his poor, miserable fellow Jews.

Abdullaev received Yosef with dignity. He liked Yosef, and of course the bribe played a role too. They talked for more than an hour, and when Yosef left the office of the First Secretary of the Obcom he was in high spirits. Comrade Abdullaev had promised to help him establish a production artel (co-operative enterprise) named after Mikhail Kalinin.<sup>6</sup>

Reb Mendel's heart filled with joy at Yosef's success. Yosef set to work. He had to go through all the bureaucratic "red tape." There were lots of problems to solve. They needed a lot

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course of the war against the Nazis, as offensives were begun on all fronts after that victory. Much more weaponry, ammunition, and military supplies were necessary to provide for the needs at the front. Hence, the workers "on the home front" of the USSR had to work 14 to 16 hours per day. About 80% of them were teenagers, women and old men, as all the young and middle-aged men were fighting against the Nazis on the front lines.

<sup>6</sup>Mikhail Kalinin (1875-1946) was a Communist leader and statesman who was the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Soviet Russia from 1922-1938 and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR from 1938-1946. He was called the "all Russian *Starosta* (Elder statesman)" by the common people, as he enjoyed wide popularity.

of money for bribing various officials, as well as investors for the construction of the production artel.

Actually things went more quickly than they had expected. They found some businessmen who possessed working capital and were influential people who supported Yosef's idea. Besides, Yosef himself was a perfect candidate for the position of chairman of the co-operative enterprise: he was a member of the Party, an officer, a war invalid and an energetic and business-like man.

Finally the day came when a new sign decorated one of the buildings in the center of the old town saying, "Artel named after M. Kalinin."

Yosef managed to find good reliable workers for his staff. First they opened a weaving workshop. The personnel department worked intensively. They hired new workers and gave orders for the distribution of bread ration cards. Many extra bread ration cards were filled in for dead souls. After the first month, people became more cheerful as bread appeared in their homes. The artel was developing. People started to earn money. The sales of woolen yarn were increasing.

Yosef needed a skillful accountant to control the artel's production activity. He searched for such a man among the people arriving in Samarkand. Then he found out that a childhood friend of his, Boris Nevelov, a generally well educated man, an experienced bookkeeper, and a sociable and honest person lived twenty kilometers from Samarkand. He could not think of a better candidate for the job of accountant. The *Raicom* (District Party Committee) was pressuring him to hire someone else as Chief Accountant. Nothing could be done about that, but he could hire his friend as Deputy Chief Accountant.

So Yosef hired a cab and went to visit his friend. The weather was fine. The road led through the beautiful orchards and cultivated fields of the farms of Korean peasants who had proved to be extremely hard-working farmers.

On the way he met some Uzbeks riding on horseback to Samarkand. Some of them were holding packages in their hands. They were singing songs that they made up on the spot (guided by the principle, "I sing about what I see around me"). They sang about how they were riding to Samarkand, bringing eggs for sale, about how they dreamed of selling their goods for a good price at the market and how they would enjoy drinking tea in a *chaikhana* (tea house). In the evening, on their way back, they sang about the nice day they had spent in town, and how happy they were to have visited the *chaikhana*.

Towards evening, Yosef reached the mountain village. He recognized his friend's gait from a distance. One of Boris' shoulders was a little lower than the other, and he walked with a limp. He was thoughtfully stroking his neatly trimmed black beard.

Boris used to say that a man should live in clear air; it is impossible to live without it. The air is cleared by words of Torah, and one should not waste a single moment which could possibly be spent repeating psalms and citations from the holy books.

The friends' meeting was touching. They were both happy to be alive in spite of all their misfortunes.

Boris' wife Sonya, a woman with a heart of gold, met the guest in the old pise-walled little house. After questioning each other, they sat down at the table. In honor of the guest they drank genuine green tea which was hard to get at that time, and not simply boiled water as usual. Sonya boiled a cast-iron pot of potatoes in their skins. The friends chatted about this and that for a long time, and only then did they begin to speak about business.

They had barely enough time to complete their conversation before the house started to fill with people. It turned out that the Polish Jews who lived in that village used to convene in Boris and Sonya's house every evening after work to talk to one another. They would listen to Boris' wise aphorisms and eat hot potatoes with an onion which they would each take from a basket under the table.

Boris was full of faith and hope. He often repeated that G-d even knew what was taking place in his cupboard. Here's the proof. One Friday evening, two hours before the time to light the candles for the Sabbath, it happened that there was no food in the house for the second day running – just nothing. Hunger was pressing in on them, and it was hard for their little daughter not to cry as she dreamed of something to satisfy her hunger. Boris put the cast-iron pot on the wood stove and poured some water in, so that at least something would be there in place of the usual potatoes in skins.

Suddenly a horseman rode by and started to shout, "Where's the bookkeeper?"

Boris retorted in an angry voice, "What do you want with him?"

The horseman replied, "The chairman of the collective farm *Yanggy Yul*, Comrade Rakhimov, is sending you a *pood*<sup>7</sup> of flour, some fish and oil."

"Thank you G-d! You don't let us starve on the Sabbath."

They managed to finish making unleavened flat bread and to fry the fish just before candle lighting time. On that occasion there were no potatoes on the table, but everyone was given a flat bread and a small piece of fish. The house filled with the holiness of the Sabbath, and they sang a song to praise the One who gives food to the hungry, "*Shalom Aleichem*, Welcome, ministering angels, messengers of the Most High, of the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

Yosef became well-known both in the Party and in industrial circles. People enjoyed listening to his flaming speeches delivered from the dais of Party meetings. Among his fellow Jews he conducted himself modestly. He was rarely present during public prayers as he was afraid of being exposed, but in his family circle, at home, and where his uncle Rahmiel lived, Chassidim of the oldest Lubavitch disciples convened on Sabbath evenings and on festive days. The older men would sit at the table, the younger ones would stand around it. Everybody would listen intently to Chassidic sayings, philosophic interpretations, and homiletic examples. Gentle Chassidic songs would lead them far away, to the place each one longed for in his dreams, and to the Rebbe. Yosef did not isolate himself from the others. He added his remarks, which were usually well-aimed and to the point.

The continuing development of the production artel and the improvement in people's living conditions enabled Reb Mendel to receive charity money for the upkeep of the Yeshiva and for the needs of the community.

Yosef used to get up early. He would pray behind the wardrobe, where he couldn't be seen by the people spying on him, asking G-d's grace for his close relatives, hungry and miserable people, orphans and widows. Then he washed the tears from his face, put on his uniform, sat down in his phaeton, and set off for Party meetings. In the evenings he returned home when the daily routine was over. He did not ask any favors for himself, but tried to do his utmost for his fellow Jews. Rivka went along with him hand in hand. She assisted him in every possible way.

At last the war ended. People began to prepare for their departure from Samarkand. Most

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<sup>7</sup> A dry measure equal to about 36 pounds.



of his fellow Jews, including Polish Jews, went to live abroad, back to those places where Jews had been striving since time immemorial. Yosef remained in Samarkand for several more years. Illness overcame his body but not his spirit. He ceased to work but was always busy with something useful.

Yosef did not reach old age. With a gentle smile he bid farewell to everybody and departed from life. He did not take anything with him but his good name. Someone knocked together a coffin for him from the boards of that very same table which had witnessed so many Chassidic gatherings and kind deeds. On a simple gravestone his epitaph read, “*Hatamim* Yosef, a *tzaddik*, is buried here. G-d bless his memory.” He left fond memories in the hearts of his children, grandchildren, and friends.

## Chapter Twenty-One

### *THE ARREST OF LENA GLOMB*

After the murder of Sergei Kirov,<sup>8</sup> the peace of thousands of Soviet people was lost. The Kremlin leaders vented their anger on the oldest Party members, including those who had not spared their lives for the sake of the Revolution and the building of the new social system. With the increase in the number of arrests, the seeds of doubt were sown in the souls of the people. Maybe those arrests were not mistakes, but part of a systematic attempt to annihilate the best representatives of the Party, the army, and the culture. Could it be that behind that plot stood none other than Comrade Stalin himself?! One could neither speak, nor even think about that, as it was extremely dangerous...

After his divorce from Sheindl, Yaakov Glomb moved to the capital city of Minsk. He managed to find work at a large plant on the editorial board of the workers' newspaper.

Yaakov had changed greatly within the last few years. He had received both a general and a Party education and had become more even-tempered. There, in the editorial office, he met his future wife Lena, an educated and attractive woman. She was the sole daughter of famous Jewish-revolutionaries and a devoted communist. She believed blindly and fanatically in the rightness of the Party and Joseph Stalin.

Lena and Yaakov got married, and a daughter was born. Their family was considered "exemplary."

The year 1935 arrived. There was no more peace in the Glomb's house. Every day they heard reports of new arrests and the execution of famous people. The spouses began to argue about the reports. Lena tried to justify the actions of the NKVD. She said that they succeeded in disclosing hypocritical and disloyal Party members. She was sure that after the purge of the Party there would be happy and quiet times.

One morning Yaakov felt a foreboding of evil. He made futile efforts to suppress it. Towards evening it struck him that Lena had not phoned him even once during the day as was usual with her. His anxiety grew stronger. When he came home, he found Lena in tears. He had hardly stepped over the threshold before she pounced on him and blamed him for being insufficiently loyal to the Party, for not having completely overcome his religious past. Unsuccessfully, Yaakov tried to soothe her and find out what had happened.

He went out in order to avoid her scolding. He wanted to take a walk and calm down a bit. Then he saw a suspicious person loitering near their house; he suspected that someone was shadowing him. Yaakov gave no sign of acknowledgement, but began to worry. Wasn't that evidence that the noose was fastened around his neck too?

Upon returning from his long walk, Yaakov noticed the same man near their house again. Lena had calmed down a bit, and she began her story. They had held a general Party meeting at work that day. The hall was full of people. On their faces one could see that they wished to say something, but people preferred to keep their thoughts to themselves. The secretary of the

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<sup>8</sup> Sergei Kirov (1886-1934) was one of the most prominent public figures of the Communist Party and the Soviet State. From 1926 he headed the Leningrad regional Communist Party Committee (the second largest and most important Party organization in Soviet Russia); he was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. He was assassinated by a terrorist in Leningrad on December 1, 1934.

*Partcom* (the Party committee of the office) was not at the table of the Presidium. Instead of him there sat an unknown man, a representative of the *Gorcom* (the City Party Committee) who declared the meeting open. He told them that their secretary's case was under consideration, and that time would tell whether he had sinned against the Party or not. A new candidate for the post of Partcom Secretary was proposed, introduced to people and unanimously elected right on the spot. The new Secretary began his speech by praising the leaders of the Party and the state bodies which were carrying out the Party's "combing-out." As if by chance, he demonstrated that he was well-informed about the contents of the personnel files of every Party member. He mentioned Lena indirectly as being among those whose families had not gotten rid of the traces of the past. That was why she was crying. Yaakov failed to comfort her.

Every morning brought news. People were interrogated and accused of all the mortal sins. The new Secretary was ardently performing his duties. He suspected everybody of everything and demanded that people inform against one another. New "cases" were opened and new arrests were made.

The winter of 1936 came. People got used to mass arrests. The Glombs hoped that they were forgotten and not included in the lists of the criminals as they actually were devoted communists. But one day a stranger came to Lena's office. He seated himself in the reception room of the Partcom and started to look through the personnel files of the officials. He turned out to be a representative of the Obcom. He was a stout and clumsy Jew. He had bushy eyebrows and a round face; his thick wet lips had a cynical smile stuck in place. His visit inspired terror in people, and they tried to guess who the next victim might be.

Some days passed, and the man started to call the officials in for a talk. He spoke in a calm voice, but his cynical smile did not leave his lips even for a moment.

Lena's turn came. The man asked her to write her autobiography and to fill in a form, though a similar form had already been in her file. Then he asked her to tell him about her parents and their activities during the Revolution. He was interested in the fact that Lena had published an article some time before in which she had defended the editor of a local newspaper. He inquired whether Lena had changed her opinion recently, now that the editor had been accused of treason and shot. Lena tried to justify herself by explaining that it seemed to her that her article had been misinterpreted. Now that his "true face" had been disclosed, she would surely blame him too.

The Obcom representative tried to involve her in debates on various political issues. Lena could not grasp what was behind most of his questions and gave naive answers. When she was asked whether she was ready to fulfill a responsible and dangerous task for the Party, she answered, "Yes, of course."

"In that case, be ready to do it," said the new Secretary. He took a bundle of papers from his safe and gave them to her, asking her to sign them. He explained that the papers were irrefutable proof of the crimes committed by her colleagues and that in order to condemn them, her signature was required. Lena took a pen with a trembling hand and signed the papers without reading them. She was warned not to say anything about it to anybody.

On the following day there was a Party meeting. The new Secretary delivered a long and tiresome speech, mostly concerning those people who had betrayed the Party by joining the Trotskyites. Raising his voice, he added that among those present were some people who supported alien, anti-revolutionary movements and views. He named Lena, mentioned her newspaper article, and then he declared that they should vote on his proposal that Lena must give

back her Party membership card.

Most of the people raised their hands, though reluctantly. Having heard and witnessed all that, Lena got up from her place to object to his statements, but she was not given a chance. She was forced to return her Party membership card. She could not stand the experience and she fainted. Nobody dared to help her until a medical assistant was called who revived Lena.

When she returned home, she felt as if the world had collapsed and crushed her. Lena spared her husband's feelings and did not tell him everything in detail when she came home. She only said that she had to hand in her Party membership card.

That night Lena had a fever. She was delirious, but Yaakov could not distinguish the words she was uttering. He only knew that misfortune was overcoming them. Moreover, he understood that it was time to arrange some urgent business before it was too late. First of all, he had to save their daughter, to bring her to his mother while it was still possible, but that was not so easy to arrange as his wife was very ill. The weather was very cold and his mother lived far from them. He was lucky, as some relatives came to see them. They wanted to express their sympathy about the arrest of Lena's parents. When they saw that Lena was ill and Yaakov was quite helpless, they agreed to bring the girl to her grandmother.

Lena stayed in bed for about two months, and when she got up at last she was still very weak. Upon arriving at the editorial office, she got the news that ten more colleagues had been arrested, including the new Secretary of the Partcom. That fact made her happy to some extent, but her heart was filled with compassion for her colleagues.

One night when Lena and Yaakov were returning home from the theater they saw a man on the porch of their house. The man addressed Lena and asked her to come with him in order to clarify some urgent matter. He promised not to detain her long. Yaakov did not have time to say a word as they got into a car and drove away.

On entering his home, Yaakov saw that somebody had been there in search of something. He understood that he might not see Lena for a long time and probably, "his hour" was approaching too. Lena did not return the following day. To all his inquiries Yaakov got the same answer, "Unknown."

He had little information about Lena's fate. She was exiled to the far eastern town of Magadan, and died in a labor camp.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

### *NO WAY TO ESCAPE*

Yaakov Glomb had appraised the situation properly. He had anticipated the possible arrest of his wife Lena, and during her illness he had managed to send his little daughter Maya to his mother and had started to burn all his unnecessary notes and addresses.

Yaakov kept the Tashkent address of Zalman Verbin, thinking that it might serve him as a shelter in case he needed to escape from his town. That would be the only way to save himself from the inevitable persecution after Lena's arrest. The noose was tightening more and more. Almost nobody remained from those who used to serve the Party with such enthusiasm. Now, deep in his soul he regretted that he had chosen that way, but it was not the proper time for soul-searching. He had to think of rescuing himself. Secretly he carried away everything essential from his house; those things that might come in handy later he brought to one of his friends he could still rely on. Immediately after Lena's arrest Yaakov left his flat and never returned there. He found a temporary hide-out. During the ten days he was hiding in the town he kept watch on his house, which was sealed up. Rescuing Lena was out of the question. He tried to pass her some food through other people but it was not accepted. When people inquired about where she was imprisoned they always got the same answer, "Unknown."

There was no way out. The situation was desperate. It was necessary to slip away from the town but in what direction? It was too dangerous to move to central Russia, the Ukraine or Byelorussia as there were daily arrests there too. People were embittered. They suspected everybody and reported the arrival of any unknown person. Most part of them lived in cramped municipal housing where man was a wolf to man.

Yaakov set out for the town of Tashkent. He was counting on Zalman Verbin's help, though he, Yaakov, knew well that he did not deserve it. Nevertheless, he was sure of one thing: Verbin would not betray him.

The way to Tashkent was long, difficult and dangerous. He had to hide his anxiety from everyone during the seven-day-long journey. He had to keep his mouth shut and listen to the hourly radio announcements about the disclosure and arrest of new "enemies of the nation," spies and so on. Yaakov arrived in Tashkent early one sunny morning. He made sure that he was not being watched, then he left his bag in the baggage room at the train station and made his way to the Verbins' house.

Though the arrival of Yaakov Glomb did not evoke any joy, and the hosts were surprised and uneasy, Verbin invited the guest in with a pretentious good-naturedness and offered him something to eat. Yaakov felt guilty and confused. During the meal he tried to explain the reason for his unexpected arrival, spoke about his desperate situation, and added that he hoped nobody would be informed about his coming. Yaakov told Verbin about everything, expressed regret for his past actions and sighed a deep and heavy sigh.

Verbin had many questions for Yaakov, but he left them unasked that day. The only thing that really worried him was whether Yaakov was a traitor or not. Verbin had not harbored any hatred towards Yaakov. Mostly he simply felt sorry for him. However, he had to give shelter to the man.

Though the people of his house knew how to take precautionary measures, Reb Zalman

gave additional orders so as to enable Yaakov himself to feel safe. The guest was given a separate room where he could rest.

It could be said that in fact Yaakov was a rather cruel man by nature, but Reb Zalman's kindness and timely care helped Yaakov overcome his cruelty and soften his soul. Several days passed. Reb Zalman satisfied himself that Yaakov's story was true and that he should not be afraid of him. He decided to let Yaakov stay in his house for the time being.

Yaakov came to Verbin and asked with some unease whether he could help him.

"How?" asked Verbin in surprise.

"I need a *tallit* and *tefillin*."

"All right," answered Reb Zalman with joy.

He went to the chest of drawers, took out a *tallit* and *tefillin* and gave them to Yaakov.

At last Yaakov felt safe. He started to analyze his situation, recalled the mistakes he had made and how he had ruined his life with his own hands. He could have been so happy!

Nightmares haunted him. Again and again in his dreams he saw old Rabbi Benjamin, or Moishe Aharon lying in the puddle of blood, or he heard Freidl crying over her dead husband, when she was left a helpless widow with children to care for. He saw Lena in his dreams too. What happened to her? He did not know whether that fragile woman could withstand torture. Besides, she still believed fanatically in the rightness of the Party.

Yaakov jumped up from his bed and gripped his head as pangs of conscience completely overwhelmed him. He spoke to Reb Zalman, asking his advice. What must he do in order to atone for his guilt? With paternal kindness Reb Zalman tried to console him. He said, "When a man loses his way he must return to the starting point by himself. It is true, you have done many unnecessary things, but you possess power, and from Above you are given the possibility of reforming yourself, as it is said, 'Thou, Oh G-d, desire not the death of the wicked, but that he return from his sin and live.' You have done much evil to people. Try to do more kind deeds now. You have prevented others from studying the Torah; now study it yourself and help other people to do so too. You must be engaged in some activity. We'll help you to get a job; you will work, and before going to bed, while reciting the bedtime prayer you should think over and fully acknowledge what you have done. Washing your face with tears wouldn't do you any harm, either, but that must come straight from your heart, sincerely. Then G-d is sure to help you."

Reb Zalman used his connections to get a passport in a false name for Yaakov. He also helped him to rent an apartment, get a job and bring his mother and daughter to Tashkent.

From the very beginning of the war Tashkent was one of the cities that sheltered thousands of refugees, among them Polish Jews who had been released from concentration camps, as well as Chabadniks. Yaakov made friends with them, and they helped Yaakov follow the right path. Following Reb Zalman's advice, Yaakov kept busy doing good deeds. He used every free minute for studying Torah, and even at work his lips were whispering psalms.

The war ended, and the Polish Jews began to prepare for their return to Poland. Yaakov, his mother, and his daughter joined them. They bid a warm farewell to their rescuers – Reb Zalman and his family – and left for Poland. Later they moved to *Eretz Yisroel*.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

### **SHNEUR ZALMAN VERBIN**

Reb Menahem Mendel Verbin was one of the distinguished Chassidim of the Rebbe Maharash and a well-known person in the town of Vitebsk. He was a scholar of Torah and Chassidism and, in general, a philosopher of Chassidism. He was a rich and righteous man. All his sons and sons-in-law held good positions in the Jewish community, but our story will only be about one of them, Shneur Zalman, who also possessed deep knowledge of Torah and Chassidism and was noted for his wisdom.

Many people used to come to talk to him and ask his advice. He owned a clothing factory, a nail factory and a horseshoe factory. He treated his workers well, and, in turn, he was respected by them. During the years of World War I, as an outfitter for the Czar's army, Shneur Zalman earned a lot of money, and he gave away a lot of money to render assistance to refugees.

He often went to Lubavitch, to the Rebbe Rashab for advice, and he tried to fulfill his instructions exactly as he had been told. In 1916, when the confusion connected with World War I was reigning in Russia, Shneur Zalman set out to the Rebbe for advice. His *Yechidus* lasted for a long time. All we know is that the Rebbe gave him advice about his future. One piece of advice was to learn to be a professional watchmaker.

Shneur Zalman was very close to Reb Medaliah of Vitebsk, and held strictly to set hours for Torah study. He was loved and respected by people, as he neither joined in arguments nor took part in intrigues. He was very modest and never tried to surpass other people. Shneur Zalman was a very hard-working and honest man even in his intentions. His morning Sabbath prayers lasted a long time. He would sit in a corner, his head covered by his *tallit*, lost in deep meditation. Humming a melody and swaying, he uttered a phrase from the prayers over and over, and went on that way for hours. Some congregants remained longer in the synagogue in order to listen to his pleasant voice during the prayers. If *Kiddush* was said, he always took a seat at the table and listened to the wise sayings of the old men and the teachers.

In 1917, when the Revolution broke out, Shneur was prepared for it. He had turned his fortune into valuables and, seemingly following the Rebbe's instructions, he bought a private house in Tashkent. Even when strikes started to spread in Vitebsk, as everywhere else, it was quiet at his factories, as he had always tried to avoid conflict and satisfy the workers' needs.

When the revolutionary powers gained strength, Zalman gave his factories, and all their equipment, to the *Revcom* (Revolutionary Committee) on his own accord and was even granted an Honorary Diploma for that. For some time he helped the workers' committee to manage the factories, and when a favorable situation presented itself, he moved with his family to Tashkent.

Once more Zalman's confidence in the Rebbe who had advised him to learn the watchmaker's trade was confirmed. Zalman made a big fortune, but in spite of his wealth, he did not try to stand out from the others. As far as anyone knew he was simply a modest watchmaker and a common member of the community.

Things went on that way until the following events.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

### *THE WAR*

The year was 1941. The stern sounds of military marches blared from the loudspeakers. People crowded near them in the hope of hearing reassuring news, which failed to materialize. Even if somewhere a small populated area was heroically won back, that did not affect the whole situation, which was dreadful. Towns were occupied by German troops which were spreading their tentacles over the Russian territory with a swift thrust. Local public authorities and the Party leadership were feverishly dismantling plants and transferring their equipment far inland in Russia. The front line was approaching the Donbass coal region. The Party leadership tried to do their utmost to consolidate the ranks of the town's activists.

Since Meir seemed to be an honest and loyal man, he was also invited to the meeting hall of the plant where the Party members had gathered. Those present were impatiently awaiting important news. At last the general manager and the Partcom secretary arrived dressed in military uniform, tired and with eyes inflamed by sleepless nights. They were accompanied by high ranking Red Army officers. The meeting was opened by Colonel Ferdenko. He tersely and clearly described the current situation at the fronts and called upon the people to defend the town staunchly and to make every effort to prevent the enemy from seizing the socialist property.

Then the general manager, Comrade Khamorenko, and the Partcom secretary, Comrade Shvartserov, took the floor. They were sure that there were no traitors among the Party activists, so they gave a detailed account of their plan of operations; they set up action groups of three to five men each. Those people were responsible for dismantling the plant equipment and its evacuation. The machinery was hastily loaded on platforms. The families of the Party officials and the plant management were given wagons.

Among them was Freidl, Meir's mother, who had come to visit her son not long before the outbreak of the war. Meir's group had to blow up everything that was impossible to dismantle, including the blast-furnaces. One of the members of his group was the workshop foreman, Matrenko, a Ukrainian, under sixty, with a malicious smile, who was always ready to boot-lick and please the authorities.

Meir was on guard against that man, but he did not display his distrust, keeping his eyes on Matrenko's actions. When Meir was certain that Matrenko tried to prevent the explosion of the plant he told his coworker. They decided that it was necessary to "do away" with him. Under some pretext they called Matrenko to a secluded corner, and the matter was "solved" with a hammer blow to his head.

Then the workers managed to put explosives in the plant, and when the vanguard of the German troops appeared in the outskirts of the town the air was shaken with the powerful rumble of the explosion at the plant. As for Meir and his coworker – they saddled their horses and galloped away from the town.

They had no idea in what direction they should ride. All the roads were swarming with refugees and soldiers who had lost their regiments. Among them were some officers who tried to unite the individual soldiers into a military squad, but that was not always successful. The units disintegrated quickly. When soldiers formed small defense groups themselves, they appointed squad leaders from their circle and set to the task of breaking through to the front line.



Meir, together with some officers, determined roughly the location of the front line and hastened in that direction. Several times someone tried to take away their horses by force and even threatened them with a pistol or the tribunal but they defended their property and broke through.

Two days had gone by. They were exhausted from riding on horseback, and Meir was dead tired as he was not used to riding. They had only made short stops to rest and water the weary horses.

At last Meir heard the rumble of guns. The front line was not far, but he grew completely worn-out with fatigue and terrible pain from his endless time in the saddle. It was a miracle that they did break through to the front line. Meir's horse was all in a lather. It was breathing heavily and its eyes were protruding. It fell on Meir's leg – and he fainted. A young nurse tried to free Meir from under his horse, but in vain. Shells were exploding all around them. At that moment two soldiers came to assist her, and they managed to pull Meir out. He could not stand up, as one leg was broken. The tired nurse was soothing Meir. She begged him not to fall down. She pulled him to a safe place, and later medical orderlies brought him to the hospital at the front line. He was given first aid, and the fracture was bandaged. Then the wounded soldiers, including Meir, were taken by truck away from the front line to a village school that served as a field hospital. Blood stained soldiers were lying on the floor groaning, or simply suffering from unbearable pain. Two military surgeons were operating on the wounded day and night, almost without rest. They succeeded in saving the lives of some of the soldiers, but unfortunately it was impossible to save the others. Meir was considered lucky, as he was not seriously wounded. He was lying on the floor, near the door, covered with his great coat, trying somehow to overcome his pain. He saw a literature textbook on a bookshelf above him, and asked a nurse to give it to him. Meir lay on the floor reading; others looked at him as if he were a malingerer, but it was not true.

When the doctor on duty, Menachem Solovey, later a famous professor, was making his rounds of the wounded, he was attracted by the unusual scene: a soldier lying there reading a book! The doctor came closer and examined him, then instructed his assistant to put a cast on his leg. He also told Meir that his intestines had been damaged by the long hours of horseback riding, and that he needed a simple but urgent operation. When the doctor noticed that Meir was an intellectual, he began to question him about who he was and where he came from. It turned out that Doctor Solovey had known Meir's father and had heard about his tragic death. He explained some details to Meir about the condition of his health, and promised to help him, so that the operation would be performed in better conditions.

On the following day, Doctor Solovey told Meir that he would be taken to a base hospital. He gave Meir a letter to a friend of his who served at that hospital, so that the latter would know how to treat him.

A few words about Professor Menachem Solovey: he was born into a poor Jewish family in the town of Kreutzburg (Krustpils) Latvia, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until the age of fifteen he had studied in the *shul* of a well-known Talmudist, Reb Yeshuah Arsch from Dvinsk.

A wealthy man noticed the gifted youth and decided to marry him to his daughter, to make him his son-in-law. His daughter gave her consent on the condition that he would become a doctor. The young man was sick of poverty, and medicine attracted him, so he agreed to that proposal. The future father-in-law took him to a big city where Menachem started toward his career, being a talented and industrious person. He made good progress in his studies and eventually received a medical diploma.

During the events described in our story he had already been a practicing doctor, and he was well-known to many Jews. He devoted himself to research work in medicine. With time, Menachem Solovey became an honorary professor in Moscow. He carried his love for his fellow Jews and the study of Talmud throughout his life. He even wrote a book on Gemara *Brachot*. He died in his seventieth year, leaving a good name behind. He did not accomplish his dream of moving to Israel. G-d bless his memory.

As for Meir, the operation proved to be rather complicated, and he stayed at the base hospital for a long time. He then advised Freidl about his whereabouts, and she waited impatiently for her son's return to the Urals, to Nizhny Tagil.

The manager of the local plant was his friend. They had become acquainted with each other while students. He had taken care of Freidl when she visited her son in Donbass and he was also waiting for Meir's return to Nizhny Tagil. Actually, they had been colleagues for more than thirty years.

Before leaving for *Eretz Yisroel*, Meir visited Professor Solovey who was suffering from minor paralysis in his old age. He gave Meir a precious manuscript, Chofetz Chayim's *Mishneh Brurah*, to present to the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

### ***SAMARKAND, TASHKENT AND TOMCHEI T'MIMIM***

Two towns, Samarkand and Tashkent occupy a special, distinguished place in the history of the Chabad movement. Their glorious history is well known. In the twenties, when the persecution against religion and clergy was especially strong, the Holy Lubavitcher Rebbe Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson sent his emissaries to all corners of Russia to do everything possible to strengthen Judaism.

One of outstanding graduates of the Lubavitch Yeshiva, Reb Simche Gorodetsky, was sent to Uzbekistan. He possessed all the qualities that were necessary for an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Reb Simche was an extremely honest and clever man completely devoted to the cause. He possessed love of man and was loved by everybody. When he came to Samarkand he won the sympathy of all the people he met, and he managed to achieve much during those years.

He set up something like a fortress for the Bukharan Jews. His assistants were people devoted to the cause of Chabad, such as Reb Khizkiya, *Molo*<sup>9</sup> (Reb) Dzhurah, Menachem, Zvulun Levayev and others. When Meir's sister Rivka came to Samarkand in 1941, many Chabad families already lived in the town.

Reb Rafael Khaidatov used to send his children to the railway station in search of Jewish refugees to offer them shelter. His large yard resembled an evacuation station. Reb Mendel Deitch made soup and beet salad and distributed them among the hungry. Many people shared their last piece of bread with their friends.

Among the refugees was a middle-aged Jew with a clever face and penetrating eyes. Many people knew that he was a former student of the Lubavitch Yeshiva – Reb Mendel. First of all, Reb Mendel and his friends established an underground Yeshiva, and Reb Zusya Poz opened a *heder*.

Now it is difficult to imagine why the education of children in the Chassidic spirit and studying the Torah was the paramount task of those people. That was during the dreadful conditions of war, hunger and epidemic, when most schools were closed, and nobody cared for the children. The reason is both simple and complicated at the same time: love for the Rebbe and Tomchei T'mimim is indivisible from love of life, because they are both the wellsprings of our spiritual life.

In spite of the fact that only half a century has passed since the day Tomchei T'mimim was established (of which more than twenty years were spent underground), the love for Tomchei T'mimim is boundless. It was passed on from the founding generation to descendants who had not been taught in Lubavitch.

Perhaps, the readiness for self-sacrifice for the sake of the cause and one's fellow Jews was the very quality that had been laid down as the foundation of the Yeshiva by Reb Rashab. The preparation for its opening took about ten years, which he spent in holy places. There had been many Yeshivas and great Rabbis in Russia, but only T'mimim remained in the front line of the struggle against Communists. Tomchei T'mimim differed from previous Chassidim in their

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<sup>9</sup> *Molo* is the Uzbeki word for Reb or Rabbi.

keen intuition and wider world outlook. They were predestined to withstand the struggle against their mortal enemy – Communism.

In the course of time a special feeling of family attachment, intimacy and confidence had been cultivated among Chassidim and, especially, among T'mimim. Whenever a teacher wanted to teach a lesson, he did it whole-heartedly, with good intentions. When one's soul was restless and something was bothering it, one could unburden it by coming to a friend, pouring out a glass for appearance's sake, and starting to sing Chassidic tunes. Later one could pour the untouched liquor back into the bottle again and go away, having uttered not a single word to each other, but feeling much better.

Vital problems were solved; though the Rebbe Rayatz was far away, across the ocean, over there, in America, his presence was felt in Russia. It was just as the Rebbe had said upon parting from his adherents and disciples in 1927, "Nothing and nobody can separate us."

That was particularly true when a T'mimim felt bad and he was far away and lonely. It was impossible to write to the Rebbe due to censorship, or if the man was in prison, in Siberia or in the tundra region. Then he would send a letter to the Rebbe by word of mouth: he would unburden his soul, and the wind would transfer the message mentally straight to the Rebbe – and the problem would be settled.

That is inexplicable, and so are some other miracles that happened to us. The main miracle is that those who have tasted Tomchei T'mimim's "fruit" will not perish. Numerous facts prove that.

The years go by...

Time may carry a man far away, but the Tomchei T'mimim 'experience' does not leave man's soul in peace, does not let him be satisfied with a non-Chassidic life. It gnaws away at his soul from the inside, and brings it back to the wellsprings. As the saying goes, "Throw a stick high up – it will fall down on the same spot."

If the members of two or three generations of T'mimim get together, the difference in their age or knowledge does not prevent them from meeting each other like a grandfather and a grandson, if the password is "T'mimim."

No wonder that in the hard times of war they had put the issue of Tomchei T'mimim on the agenda on a par with the problem of survival, as life was purposeless without Tomchei T'mimim.

In the thirties rumors circulated in Russia that the Rebbe had initiated a movement for girls and called it *Achot HaT'mimim* (Sister T'mimim). That gave strength to women to keep up with men, shoulder to shoulder, and they held the first ranks of the "defense line" of Judaism.

They passed on all those qualities, together with their mother's milk, to their children who have lived to meet the Rebbe and have filled the ranks of the great army of G-d. Having conquered the whole world, they are awaiting the coming of Mashiach, firm in their belief.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

### ***A CHANCE MEETING WITH MIRIAM***

When Meir was discharged from the base hospital, he had to solve some problems. He had to go to the commandant's office to get all the necessary certificates to be presented on the way to Nizhny Tagil. He had to go to the railway stationmaster in order to reserve a place in the room for officers and the wounded. In addition, he had to go to the bazaar to buy a present for his mother.

First Meir directed his steps to the bazaar. Fine weather had settled in after several rainy days which had left thick clay mud everywhere. Taking his time, Meir was looking attentively at the Central Asian landscape, at the mountains which encircled the town. He was listening to the ringing of a small bell hanging on the neck of the little donkey that was walking in front of the camel caravan. A long-legged Uzbek was sitting on the donkey. He was dressed in a traditional Uzbek robe and a picturesque turban was on his head. The local panorama carried Meir's thoughts far away. It seemed to him that he was in Israel, and he exclaimed, "Oh, Jerusalem, surrounded by mountains!"

The noise of the bazaar could be heard from a distance. When Meir entered it he noticed a woman in rags. She was standing in the mud holding a silk summer dress in her hands but nobody took heed of her. Meir could not explain why he was attracted by that sight. He came closer and recognized Miriam, his old friend, Chayim Aharon's daughter from his native town of Borovukha.

Upon approaching her he exclaimed, "Is it really you, Miriam?!"

The woman could not utter a single word. She staggered, and if it were not for Meir's help she would have fallen down into the mud. In a moment a crowd gathered. Some people wanted to help her; others wanted to "free" Meir of his knapsack. A young Polish Jew with a red beard helped Meir to revive Miriam and lead her out of the bazaar square. Meir seated Miriam on a stone, took some lumps of sugar out of his knapsack and gave them to her to suck. He realized that hunger was the cause of Miriam's weakness.

An elderly Polish Jew with a white beard passed them by. One could see a long *capote* (frock coat) sticking out from under his padded jacket. A small traditional Polish cap was on his head. He was holding a kettle in his hands. Meir and Miriam decided to follow him and soon they came to a big mosque that served as a chaikhana. Polish Jews dressed in multicolored clothes were crowding round the chaikhana. They were speaking Yiddish or Polish loudly; some of them were selling goods. The others were discussing the situation at the front line and predicting the coming events.

A fat Uzbek with a moustache and swollen eyelids was standing by the entrance to the chaikhana. He was pushing away those people who did not have fifty kopecks for a pot of tea. Meir paid for the tea, and they went inside. People were sitting at little tables, warming themselves up by the tea kettles. The hall was large and the dim light of small candles was hardly lighting it up. Meir and Miriam found a quiet corner, sat down at a table, and began to drink hot tea. Meir treated Miriam to rusks and sugar from his daily ration.

Color returned to her face, and a beautiful smile appeared on her lips. She told Meir that she had not eaten anything for three days, and if it were not for their meeting, who knows what

might have happened to her. She told Meir how the war had found her at her aunt's house in Toroptsy, how they had run away from the town, how the bombing had separated them, and how she had reached Andizhan.

At the same time, in a dark corner of the chaikhana, Reb Leizer, a refugee from Minsk, was sitting embracing a warm kettle. He started singing the Kol Nidrei prayer in a cheerless voice. The homeless and hungry people who had been released from labor camps not long before were thrilled to hear the melody, and when they tried to join in the singing they simply burst into tears. That gave Meir the shivers. He bent his head on his palms, seized by memories of the bygone times when, in his native town of Borovukha, the Rabbi had stood in the big synagogue near the *Aron Kodesh* and chanted the prayers of Yom Kippur in his elderly voice, with a broken heart...

Meir also remembered the people who used to stand in the corner by the eastern wall. Reb Aharon, with his head half covered by his *tallit*, would stand with his hands stretched up high, silently praying. In the opposite corner Reb Mordechai, sitting still, half turned to the wall, tears streaming from his eyes, would sigh from time to time, "Oh, Lord, have mercy on us, our Father!" He would utter some words from a prayer and then join in the singing. Then Meir became absorbed in reminiscences of his grandfather, Elimelech the water carrier, and his way of serving G-d. Something gave a start in his soul. So many years had passed since he put on *tefillin* and kept the Sabbath! He wanted to come to some decision though he could not define it, but he felt one thing for certain: he must return to the past.

Meanwhile, Miriam became frightened. She was sure that Meir intended to get rid of her. What would become of her then?

The singing stopped but Meir was still deep in thought. When he raised his head his face was red and his eyes were filled with tears. He understood what was happening in Miriam's soul and hastened to assure her that he would take her with him to Nizhny Tagil. He was sure that his mother Freidl would be glad to see her. They rested a bit and recovered. They had two more problems to solve to bring Miriam to a normal state: getting her a change of clothes and finding her some lodging for the night.

When they left the chaikhana, it was already daytime. Meir noticed the same man with a red beard in the crowd, the one who had helped to revive Miriam. Meir was glad to meet him again. He told the man about his problems. The latter told him not to worry and led him to Pan Yanek.

Pan Yanek, a young Polish Jew from Lodz, boasted of his polished officer's boots, his jacket, and the *ushanka*<sup>10</sup> cap. He knew Yiddish well, but preferred to speak Polish and looked at everybody in an arrogant manner. Pan Yanek led Meir and Miriam to a small house that stood in the far corner of his yard. There they found suitable clothes for Miriam and she was transformed at once. Her beauty came back to her immediately.

She was put up for the night at the red-bearded Jew's place. His name was Shmuel. Though it was rather crowded in the pise-walled little house, they made room for Miriam.

On the following day Meir visited Miriam and the hosts invited them for Sabbath. First they completed their errands connected with the preparation for their departure, and only then, in the afternoon, did they return to the little house. One could already feel some excitement in the yard due to the preparations for Shabbat. The hosts greeted them joyfully. The table was laid with a white cloth. A napkin covered two gray flat breads. Two small wicks were lit on a saucer,

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<sup>10</sup> This was a hat with ear flaps worn by millions of people in the winter, not only by soldiers.

soaked in oil. They lit the house with heavenly warmth driving away all the misfortunes of the work days.

Not far from them, in the house of another Polish Jew, about twenty Jews convened to pray to the Almighty, praising Him for the precious gift that had been given to the Jews – the Sabbath. The *chazan* started the prayer, “Oh come, let us exult before the Lord; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation.” Everybody was praying with great zeal in a loud voice, and when they came to the prayer, *Lecha Dodi* (“Come, my friend, to meet the bride. Let us welcome the presence of the Sabbath...”) everybody sang it to a special melody, raising their hands high and straightening themselves up.

When they came back to the house, they were met by the words, “*Gut Shabbes, Gut Shabbes*,” and all the people broke out into the song, “*Shalom Aleichem*.” At once everyone felt as if everything had changed: there is no war, no hunger, no epidemic. The Jews rejoiced with the Almighty.

In two days Meir and Miriam, with the assistance of the stationmaster, managed to get seats on a train that delivered them to their destination, Nizhny Tagil.

Freidl was overwhelmed with joy when she saw her son and Miriam, the granddaughter of Kopl the smith, the friend of her late husband Moishe Aharon.

Meir found a position as an engineer. He had to work hard, day and night, twelve to fourteen hours a day, without any break. The winter was severe, and hunger made itself felt. Meir was wholly absorbed in his work, especially after he was appointed assistant manager of the department.

Freidl considered Miriam the right person to be Meir’s future wife, and she told him so. Although Meir thought it was not the right time for marriage, he obeyed his mother.

Freidl went to the market to see her friend, a lame photographer. She wanted to talk about the wedding with him. The photographer was a bearded Jew who had been sent into exile for his religious views and “anti-social” activity. He called ten Jews, a *minyan*, to his house and arranged the *chuppah* for Meir and Miriam according to the laws of Moshe and Israel.

The photographer had heard from Freidl about her husband, and he treated the newly-weds with special respect. Nevertheless, he asked Meir for a favor: to assist him in getting a job for a certain man in order to release him from being sent to the front that was mercilessly “devouring” soldiers.

One day Miriam came home from work and saw that Freidl felt uneasy. “Mother, what’s up?” asked Miriam.

“I feel unwell somehow,” was the answer.

Freidl asked her to bring her bag. She searched in there and then took out a gold chain. She put it around Miriam’s neck and then gave her some other jewels as a present. She told her the story of the jewelry which she had received from the landlord Shchukin. In addition, Freidl handed her some letters and family photographs. “It seems I won’t live long; my days are numbered.”

Some time passed, and she caught a fever and was delirious. When Meir came home they called the doctor who stated that Freidl had typhoid and that she would have to be brought to the hospital. For two weeks Freidl struggled for her life, but the illness overcame her. Without regaining consciousness, Freidl passed away.

May our remembrances of her be fond!

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

### *FATE*

The meeting of the plant management dragged on until dawn. It started to break up when the sky had already begun to turn crimson, and the fresh spring air was blowing into the window.

At the request of Fyodor Vassilievich, the director of the plant, Meir and Partcom Secretary Nikolai Ivanovich stayed longer. They went to the director's reception room. He went to his safe, opened it and took out a bottle of vodka and two glasses. Then he smiled, turned to Meir and said in a derisive tone, "You still abstain from drinking, don't you? It's a pity for good stuff to go to waste."

Nikolai Ivanovich and the director drank up, took a sniff of their jacket sleeves<sup>11</sup> instead of getting a bite, and started discussing the meeting. They recalled the critical remarks, then waved their hands and drank again.

They started a friendly talk about this and that and recalled their student years. Thirty years ago fate had brought them together, and they had never parted since that time. Everyone was sitting sunk in his thoughts. Meir was silently watching his friends.

"What's the matter, Meir?" asked the director suddenly. "I don't recognize you. Are you sick? Miriam complained about you, that you don't sleep well. You know, we have decided to send both of you to a spa in the Caucasus. Do you have anything against that? Miriam gave her consent. Indeed, during the last few years you have not had a vacation. You should go there; we'll help you to cover your traveling expenses."

Meir agreed with thanks. In fact, he was tired both physically and spiritually.

Two months remained until their departure for the health resort, but Meir and Miriam began to make preparations. They had to hand over business documentation competently and settle household affairs.

One Sunday Meir decided to visit his old friend, the lame photographer who used to work in the market square. He had not seen him for a long time, and when Meir went to the square he did not find him there. Meir thought that his friend might be ill and he headed for his place.

On approaching the house, Meir was surprised to see many people bustling about. One was knocking together boxes; another was packing furniture in the house of Mendel the photographer. Meir wanted to leave, but Mendel noticed him; he embraced him joyfully and led him aside.

They sat down on a box. Mendel anticipated Meir's questions. He explained to Meir that he was leaving for Israel and was preparing his baggage to be sent.

Although Mendel had grown older during the thirty years of their acquaintance, his eyes were still radiating youthful ardor and kindness. Mendel told Meir how difficult it had been to get permission for *aliyah*. Then he added, "Now it's much easier, and one need not to be afraid of being imprisoned any more, though some trouble may occur at work."

Meir bid a warm farewell to Mendel and returned home. On the way home he became

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<sup>11</sup> There is a custom in Russia that when somebody drinks a glass of vodka, he often says, "I am not in the habit of getting a bite to eat after the first glass." The same words are said after the second, and even the third glass. Only after that does one eat a piece of bread, a pickle, etc. or one simply takes a sniff of the piece of bread and puts it back in place. In a situation in which there is nothing to eat, one takes a sniff of one's sleeve.



absorbed in his thoughts and he envied Mendel in a kind way. Mendel was an invalid from the Finnish war, but despite his lameness he had raised a good Jewish family. His children had received a secular education, but they remained religious Jews nevertheless.

Meir thought, "As for me, I am the son of such a father! I got a good Jewish education and what of it? What good does it do that I'm an honored engineer?"

He had become acquainted with the lame photographer in the autumn of 1941, when Freidl, Meir's mother, came to Nizhny Tagil after the evacuation of the plant. That was during the hungry times of war. Millions of people were left homeless, forced to leave their native towns which had been occupied by the enemy.

Nevertheless, Freidl was seeking spiritual support. She met Mendel the photographer at the market. It was not by chance that Mendel was in Nizhny Tagil. When the persecution of the Jewish clergy had become intense he had left his native town of Zhlobin and gone to a far-off town in the Urals. The Finnish war found him there. He was wounded and was lame the rest of his life. He owned a small house, worked as an amateur photographer and was an energetic person of great vitality. When Mendel was a student in the Lubavitch Yeshiva, he used to say, "If one sits by with his arms folded, there's no sense in life." Mendel was not idle. He united people around himself. Mendel helped the needy whenever he heard about them. When the stream of refugees started to come to town, Mendel invited distant relatives and friends to stay with him. He even prepared lodging for some of them beforehand. Thus, by 1942 about two dozen families had found refuge there. He would hobble on his crutches and search for Jews among the refugees in order to help them. Many Jews who had come from Poland had been released from labor camps, including some Talmud scholars. Reb Mendel succeeded in finding premises for the synagogue that became a center for the many Jews who were attracted there. Mendel also managed to find some wealthy Jews among the local population who were ready to render assistance to the many Jews who needed help. They went to the hospitals in search of Jews and paid their last respects to the dead by giving them proper burials in the Jewish cemetery.

Freidl was looking for people like her late husband. Mendel and his friends proved to be people of that sort, and she joined in their activities, rendering assistance to people. Her duties were not always pleasant. Sometimes she washed dead women before burial. She caught typhoid, perhaps from doing that, and died at the end of 1942.

During the war, the Urals became an important industrial center. Nizhny Tagil and its surroundings was the site of military plants. At every plant one could find Jews among the managing officials. They did their best to help people at Mendel's request: to get exemptions from military service, to find jobs, etc.

It was during those years that Meir and Mendel became friends. Mendel arranged the wedding *chuppah* for Meir and Miriam, as well as the *brit milah* for their son Mark.

On the day when Meir found out about Mendel's departure he felt very lonely. "Will we ever meet again?" he thought to himself on the way home. He was watching familiar houses and streets from the tram window but they became alien to him. Moreover, he was sick of his plant. Only bad memories haunted him, though many good things occurred during those thirty years. All the positive emotions had vanished. Only bitterness remained...

The days went by. Sometimes they simply dragged on and seemed endless, but at last came the long awaited day when they would depart for their vacation. Their things were packed, presents for the children were bought and they even found time to say good-bye to Mendel, who was going to leave soon. Mendel had no idea when they would meet again.

The journey to Moscow took more than two days. It was stuffy in the railway carriage. On the third day, tired and exhausted, they arrived in Moscow early in the morning. On the platform they were met by their son Mark, their daughter Frida, and her friend Pinya, a student, a handsome young man, neatly dressed, with an embroidered Uzbeki skull cap on his head.

The meeting between the parents and their children was touching. As they were about to leave the railway station, Frida's friend invited Meir and his wife to be his guests, as he lived with his parents in their own house not far from Moscow, whereas Frida lived in a small room. Meir agreed, and in forty minutes they got off at the Ilyinki station. Twenty minutes later they came Pinya's parents' house.

The hostess met the guests with the hospitable greetings, "*Shalom Aleichem*," and "Welcome." Pinya took their luggage to a room that had been specially prepared for them. Soon the host came. The head of the family was a man over fifty, with a white beard and starry eyes.

"It's so strange," thought Meir, "All of them – Mendel, the host, and my late father – all look similar, as if they were all cut from the same cloth."

Meir and Miriam tidied themselves up and entered the dining room. At breakfast they talked trifles, leaving important matters for the evening.

At noon Mark excused himself and went to Moscow. The guests had a good rest. The hosts tried to do their best to make the guests feel comfortable. At dinner they found plenty to talk about. It turned out that in 1926 the host had also been present at the celebration of Yud Tet Kislev in Leningrad and he even remembered Meir vaguely. He had heard about the tragic death of Moishe Aharon too; besides, he recalled that they had spoken about Meir's fate in their house at that time. Who could imagine that they would meet in such circumstances so many years later?

Everybody was listening attentively to their conversation, trying not to miss a single word. All of a sudden the host addressed Meir, "As you see, fate has brought us together. When Pinya got acquainted with Frida and brought her to our house, we liked her very much and became very attached to her. If you don't mind, we are ready to marry them off."

Miriam and Meir were thunderstruck by this sudden statement by Reb David, Pinya's father. Without waiting for their answer Reb David filled a glass of vodka and said the following words, "We hope you'll give your consent to this marriage. *Mazal Tov! Mazal Tov!* Let it be for good luck! The children have already agreed to marry, they are only waiting for your blessing. *L'Chayim!*"

All of them raised their glasses, and the young people flushed and went into the yard. They had many things to talk over, dreaming of the future, but, of course, they could do that better by themselves.

The guests stayed at the table until late at night. After midnight Reb David started to pray. Meir and Miriam went out to take a breath of fresh air and talk about the things that had all happened so unexpectedly. They thanked G-d, "It seems that our ancestors have prayed for us, so that we and our children could be happy." They sighed deep sighs and recalled that their son Mark had been seeking friendship with non-Jews. Nobody knew what would happen to him. He was a proud and egotistic person. He had no friends in spite of his abilities and handsome features.

On the following day everybody got up early; it was a busy day, as in the evening Meir and Miriam had to continue their journey to the spa.

Frida and Pinya were beaming with happiness. They would wait impatiently for Frida's

parents to return as their engagement would be then, and the preparation for their wedding.

In the evening everybody went to the station to see off Meir and Miriam. They were in high spirits. Only one thing worried them. Mark had not freed up time to come along.

The Sorkins made themselves comfortable in the compartment. The train started to move. Only then they began to realize what had happened. At first they laughed, then Miriam burst into tears: How can it be? They had not even had time to get acquainted properly!

Meir went to the wagon's passageway. He was standing at the window a rather long time, and when he came back to the compartment, he said to his crying wife, "Well, why are you crying? You must thank G-d that he turned out to be a young man from a good Jewish family and he asked your consent. Frida says Mark has fallen in love with the dean's daughter. He didn't even think it necessary to come and see us off!"

Meir wiped Miriam's tears and said, "Stop crying; don't worry."

In the morning the train passed Kharkov. Some hours later the conductor announced the station: Rostov-on-Don. Meir's heart sank: so many things were linked with Rostov-on-Don. The Rebbe Rashab was buried there. Meir's father had come to visit the Rebbe from Lubavitch time and again.

Late at night they arrived at the spa in Tskhaltubo. The registration took more than an hour. For the first night they were separated. Miriam was given a bed in a women's room; Meir shared a room with other men. On the following day they were given a room together.

The days dragged by slowly and monotonously: curative baths, breakfast and lunch, treatment, promenade, dinner and supper – day after day in the same way. They might have rested like this the whole vacation if it were not for a Georgian Jew named Shato who became attached to them. He was very talkative and spoke loudly, laughed and gesticulated all the time. The Sorkins could not get rid of him, but, as the saying goes, "Whatever happens, happens for the best." Everything is foreseen by G-d.

One day Shato asked the Sorkins whether they knew that the following week would be Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and he invited them to celebrate it at his place in Kutaisi, an hour's journey from the resort. He did his best to persuade them, promising to offer good facilities. At first they were hesitant about whether to accept his invitation or not. Finally they agreed.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

### ***JUST LOOK AND REMEMBER***

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah the Sorkins' course of treatment was completed, and they went to Kutaisi by a suburban electric train. Shato met the Sorkins at the station and drove them to the Jewish block of houses named after Shaumyan.<sup>12</sup>

They were greeted warmly in Shato's house just like old acquaintances. Shato's wife Esther and his mother Hannah embraced Miriam and led them both into a richly furnished living room. A festive atmosphere reigned. The children and the adults were scurrying about with trays full of various foods. Delicate aromas were wafting from the kitchen. The women were soon coming in with a different dish each time and asking the Sorkins to taste everything.

The family gathered and the bustling about increased. Shato's father Bagrat and his brother Roman came, as well as other relatives.

It was time to go to the synagogue. Shato called his younger son Muraby, a seven year old boy, and instructed him to see to it that nobody took their guests with them to another house. He said to Meir, "You are my guest, and you should only come back to my house." Then they went, with an important air, along Shaumyan street in the direction of the synagogue.

Meir and the host entered the big synagogue, which soon filled with people. Men of Georgian and Ashkenazic origin were holding an animated conversation in the yard; then everybody was summoned to the prayers.

The *chazan* started to sing a monotonous tune, and all the people joined in the singing in the eastern manner. Meir had not been in a synagogue for a long time, especially one like this one, so he stood as if enchanted. The prayers were either accompanied by singing or were read in silence. Meir wanted to go deep into the prayers that he was reading from the prayer book with some difficulty, but the unusual melodies distracted him. After the service, people greeted each other with the New Year blessing, "*L'Shana Tova!*" Everybody came to greet the *Chacham* and kiss his hand. Meir was not forgotten either. He was congratulated and children even tried to kiss his hand but he did not let them do it. Muraby was deflecting the attempts of those who wanted to invite Meir for the celebration in their house.

Shato, his father, and his brother also exchanged New Year's greetings with other people. The women who were waiting for them in the street joined in the congratulations too, wishing everybody all the best. The street was buzzing with people's voices.

The holiday mood could be felt in the house. Everybody took their seats at the table. Bagrat said *Kiddush* and offered Meir the opportunity to do the same. Meir thanked him but declined. They washed their hands before the meal, broke the specially baked bread, and dipped a sweet apple into honey. After that, someone started to bring dishes in. The hosts asked Meir and Miriam to feel at ease and eat whatever they wanted. They were treated to wine and everybody pronounced a long, monotonous toast in Georgian. The Sorkins sat at the table feeling happy and admiring the feast, enjoying the cheerful atmosphere of the Festival mixed with the trepidation of the Holy Day.

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<sup>12</sup> Stepan Shaumyan (1878-1918) was a revolutionary, one of the so-called "26 Baku Commissars" who established Soviet power in Azerbaijan. He perished in September 1918 together with the other commissars at the hands of the English, the Entente and counter-revolutionaries.

The festive meal lasted until late at night, when everyone went to their rooms. Only Bagrat made himself comfortable in an armchair in the corner of the room and began to recite psalms. He sighed, pronounced the words of the prayers in Georgian in a lamenting voice, then wiped his tears, and went on praying anew. Meir did not understand the words of the prayer. He simply imagined to himself that Bagrat was begging the Almighty to give him life in the following year.

When Meir woke up Bagrat was still praying. His face was tear-stained, and Meir judged by the tone of the prayer that he was repenting for all his sins.

Although it was a work day, the synagogue was full of people, especially during the time when the *Shofar* was blown. The *Chacham* told the people about the importance of the day, citing quotations from the Torah. It was quiet in the synagogue. Everybody was listening attentively to the *Chacham's* words. From the women's gallery one could hear a deep sigh from time to time. The Sorkins felt relieved. They also sighed deep sighs and, just like the others, they prayed to G-d to make the coming year the year of liberation so that every Jew could become free.

Meir still remembered well how they used to celebrate the Festival of Rosh Hashanah at home, though it was long, long ago, and none of those people were still alive. The images of those days passed through his memory in a long sequence. The month of *Elul* was the month of mercy, when one could hear the sound of the *Shofar* that stirred the heart in expectation of the Judgment Day. Right away people became more serious, and that was reflected in their appearance. Even during the Soviet reign, a time of persecution and discrimination, a time that forced many Jews to break the Sabbath and other Commandments, they remained loyal to their G-d and their belief.

Before daybreak, before going to work, the Jews went to the synagogue and unburdened themselves to G-d. The last week before Rosh Hashanah, people got up very early, long before dawn and went to pray *Slichot*, though in Soviet times the *shames* no longer knocked on the window shutters summoning the Jews, "Get up and serve the Almighty."

Meir remembered how it would still be dark and cool in the street, and how he could hear the crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs. But it was light in the synagogue, already full of people, and when the *chazan*, covered in his *tallit*, started praying in a loud lamenting voice, all the people would begin to sway like reeds in the wind, repeating the *chazan's* words. The *chazan* sang the words, "The soul is Yours and the body is Your handiwork; take pity on Your labor," to a special melody, and when the Ark was opened, the leader sang, "The soul is Yours and the body is Yours; Oh, HaShem, act for Your Name's sake." Everyone would repeat the words, praying with ardor and shedding tears...

The *Chacham's* call to prepare for the sounds of the *shofar* brought Meir back to his present reality. The "*LaM'natze'ach*" section of Psalms was pronounced seven times before sounding the *Shofar*, then special tunes and treatises followed, and it became extremely quiet in the synagogue.

The *Chacham*, his head covered with his *tallit*, bent over the table and broke out sobbing in his elderly voice, while all the congregants waited with serious faces. At last the *Chacham* raised his head, wiped his face, took the *shofar* in his hands and the long or trembling sounds filled the air, resembling sighs and sobbing in turn.

An unusual feeling overcame Meir, as if his soul were renewed. He started praying with fervor and his reading from the prayer book became quicker and more precise. He was still

praying when everybody else had already finished their prayers.

Muraby managed to resist the attempts of those who wanted to invite Meir to their houses for the celebration. Then something unexpected occurred: when Shato came up to greet the *Chacham*, the latter said in a firm voice, “Shato, your guest will go with me today.” There was nothing to say in reply. One had to submit.

The crowd was breaking up. The *Chacham* approached Meir and told him in Yiddish that he and his wife would be his guests. His sons took Meir by the hand and the women took Miriam, while little Muraby stood crying, “Why are they taking our guests away?”

The *Chacham* was notable for the numerous bookshelves installed along the walls in the hall of his home, as well as for keeping some customs which other people did not observe. The *Chacham* had studied at the Lubavitch Yeshiva; he spoke Yiddish fluently. A well-known Chassid, Reb Zalman Altschuler was his teacher in Kutaisi.

On arriving home, the women busied themselves with preparing the table. The *Chacham* went to his room, while Meir remained in the hall awaiting the time when he would be called to the meal. He usually felt drawn to books; they had attracted him since his youth, to such an extent that they did not let him fall asleep at night, but on that day they seemed alien to him. Meir stretched out his hand and took down a big volume of Talmud in a leather binding – the very same edition which he had last studied in his home town.

He opened the book and was surprised that he was still able to read the printed words, though with some difficulty. He read some lines and returned the book to its place. Then he chose another volume. He satisfied himself that he still remembered something. He was as happy as a child. When he opened the third book he exclaimed, “Oh!” and almost fainted: there in front of him lay a photo of the Rebbe – the same one that had been given to him at the Rebbe’s place on Yud Tet Kislev of 1926!

He remembered clearly how he had stood in front of the Rebbe, who laid his holy hands on Meir’s head and blessed him, saying, “Just look at me and remember: every Jew has a soul that is shining like a diamond. Sometimes it is covered with dust and for the time being it ceases to shine, but when the dust is removed, it starts shining anew.”

“Meir! It’s high time to remove the dust,” he said to himself, and thought that he had to return to his wellsprings after so many years, as it was predestined from Heaven.

Meir told the people who had flocked around him on hearing his cry all about his decision.

Meir changed greatly from that very moment. Though Miriam was pleased with his change, she nevertheless looked at her husband with a mixture of admiration and surprise.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Meir was absorbed in praying and reading Psalms. During the meal he sat silently. One more guest was present in the house at that time – Bagrat’s younger brother, named Moshe. When he heard about what had happened to Meir, he began trying to persuade him to stay in Kutaisi until Yom Kippur and Succot and then come to his house in Sukhumi. He promised that it would be very interesting to Meir, as many young men from different towns would gather there, since they were afraid to hold these celebrations in their native towns.

Meir hesitated. They had to return to Moscow to their daughter, but Sukhumi attracted him very much. They discussed the offer with Miriam, phoned Frida, and then accepted the invitation. On arrival at Sukhumi they went straight to Moshe’s house, where they were given a hearty welcome and felt as comfortable as they had at Shato’s.

It was crowded in the Sukhumi synagogue early in the morning. In the yard, at the entrance to the Ashkenazi synagogue, crowds of people in oriental skull caps were talking to one another. The crowd excited Meir's curiosity. It was easy to make their acquaintance, though some people looked at Meir with suspicion. There were some men from Moscow there too. One of them turned out to be a relative of Pinya's, and he had even heard of Meir previously.

The people willingly admitted Meir into their company. When Meir said that he had no *tallit* and *tefillin* with him, the new acquaintances took care of that and provided him with everything necessary.

With Moshe's permission, Meir started going to the Ashkenazi synagogue for the prayers. He felt as comfortable there as if the old times had returned. Though the schedule of studies was strict there, and Meir had been separated from all that for a long time, he was always present during the lessons, happy at the thought that he could understand what was being said.

In the evenings people came to visit Moshe. They held debates on various themes, spiced by a small glass of vodka.

Meir was surprised at the fact that his thoughts had changed. When he told his new friends about his experience in Reb Elichaim's house he was told it was a sign for him to change his way of life. Only if he did would his soul shine anew, just as the Rebbe had said.

Everybody said "*L'Chayim*," and blessed Meir to meet the Rebbe in the near future.

The preparation for Yom Kippur was completed, and then the celebration of Yom Kippur was over and at last came Succot. A big Succah was built in Moshe's yard, and the hosts welcomed their guests. There were about a dozen men. Though they were younger than Meir, they were interesting to him. They spent the whole day in the Succah, said "*L'Chayim*," and sang joyous or meditative songs. It seemed as if they were rising high up, far, far away, in the highest worlds, as if they were in Jerusalem, in the Temple where people had gathered for celebration. It seemed to Meir that the High Priest was pouring water on the Altar, and his happiness was limitless. Then another melody was sang, a cheerful one, and the friends pulled him into a circle dance.

On the day of Simchat Torah all the people, both the Georgian and the Ashkenazic Jews, danced holding the Holy Torah in their hands. Everyone felt attached to the Torah.

Miriam was amazed and at the same time delighted by Meir. She had never seen him so joyful.

The festival was over. They had to part with Moshe, his family and their new friends. It was time to return to Moscow, as their daughter was impatiently waiting for them to arrive.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

### ***MEIR'S DECISION TO MAKE ALIYAH***

Their acquaintance with Reb David, Pinya's father, and the festivals that they had celebrated in Sukhumi made the Sorkins think about their way of life. They wanted to change it, but how? Their new friends had informed them about the possibility of leaving for Israel and starting a new life there, but Meir and Miriam had no idea how to accomplish that. They were satisfied that Frida had found a decent young man from a good family. They need not worry about her at present. All their troubles were linked with Mark. He had simply gotten out of hand.

Their talk about the future made the time pass quickly while they traveled to Moscow. The train arrived early in the morning. Frida and Pinya were waiting to take them to the Ilyinki station.

In the evening, when everybody gathered at the table, they had a serious conversation, not without tears. Pinya's parents took the responsibility for making wedding preparations on their broad shoulders.

Everybody was concerned about the problem of making *aliyah*. Exit permits were given only to close relatives. The problem was where to find them. Having discussed the situation, they came to the conclusion that the Sorkins should be the first to hand in their documents for visa applications, and later, after arriving in Israel, they would apply for the *aliyah* of the others. However, Miriam began to be obstinate. She refused to leave the country because she was worried about the problems with Mark. There was not a glimmer of hope that they might have any influence over him, so her "mother's heart" could not be quiet. "Maybe the Almighty will hear our prayers and won't reject our tears, and then our son might come to reason. I cannot leave him now; it's quite impossible."

Miriam stood her ground. In the end, they decided that while the preparations for the wedding were happening, Meir would go to Nizhny Tagil to get his discharge from work, draw up documents for his pension, collect all the documentation necessary to hand in to the Visa and Immigration Department, and exchange their apartment for at least one room in Moscow or in the Moscow area.

Meir left. Meanwhile, Reb David got busy with the forthcoming wedding. He had to worry about everything that was required, send invitations, etc. Shlomo Geizgori, who worked as manager of a grocery store, assisted him in many ways. Also, by making use of his connections, Reb David succeeded in arranging and receiving an invitation for the Sorkins from an Israeli "close relative."

With the help of the manager of the plant and his acquaintances, Meir managed to exchange his apartment for a room in a Moscow suburb. Meir had to prepare the documents. Miriam was suffering at the thought of the imminent parting from Meir. Her heart was breaking into pieces. Were they parting for a long time or not? She simply could not drive her troubling thoughts away. After all, Miriam had not given her consent to join Meir and leave her children behind.

So Meir handed in his documents, and the tedium of waiting for the reply began.

The preparations for the wedding were almost completed. During that period Frida and Pinya did not see each other, according to the Chassidic custom. The bridegroom and the bride



were preoccupied with themselves. They were faced with building a Chassidic home, and they had to prepare for that spiritually.

On the wedding day it was a real pleasure to look at the young Chassid and maiden who were ready to begin a family. They devoted the whole day to prayers, asking the Almighty to give them good luck so that their marriage might be happy for ever; they were fasting and meditating on their new roles in life. Towards evening many guests gathered – many more than they had invited, because some friends and acquaintances who happened to be in Moscow en route to Israel also came.

Everybody was excited. At last the time came to lead the bridegroom and the bride to the *chuppah*. Someone had tied a *tallit* to four poles and set it in the yard, behind the house. First the bridegroom was brought there. He was standing under the *chuppah* with a serious air while his lips were whispering prayers. Then came the bride in a snow-white dress, with a bridal veil, accompanied by her parents. They walked around the bridegroom to the sounds of the Alter Rebbe's melody. Reb Yehudah and Reb Getzl conducted the solemn *huppah* ritual. At the end of the ceremony everyone heard the crunch of the glass being broken. Everybody shouted, "*Mazal Tov!*" and started to hug and kiss one another. Happiness reigned in the house.

Then the feast began. There were hardly enough seats for all the guests at the tables squeezed close together in the two small rooms. Nevertheless, the celebration was merry; everyone sang and danced until morning, sometimes even forgetting about the newly married couple. Old friends who had not seen one another for dozens of years were discussing their plans and trying to guess what their life would be like in the future. Everybody rejoiced, especially those who were going to bid farewell to the Soviet Union in a couple of days. Others proposed toasts wishing the people who were departing an easy resettlement, and reminding them not to forget their fellow Jews who remained behind.

## Chapter Thirty

### *VISITING FATHER'S GRAVE*

The long wait for the exit permit to Israel caused great tension in the Sorkin home. Even Miriam, who was usually calm and reserved, seemed to be nervous, but Meir was more worried than the others. He was unsure whether or not he had acted correctly when he decided to leave alone, without his family.

Miriam suggested that he use his free time to go to see the grave of his father, Moishe-Aharon. Who knows when he would have a chance again? Meir agreed with her. He prepared everything for the journey, and in a week he set off. The journey was rather long. At last Meir came to the town.

The cool nights of late autumn had arrived, but during the days it was still warm in the caressing rays of the sun. Before dawn Meir went to the very square that had witnessed the death of his father. He was standing deep in thought, the events of the bygone years passing before his eyes, one by one. His heart was pained.

At daybreak he crossed the railway track and went along the road which led through a pine forest to the cemetery. The fence was dilapidated; the graves were overgrown with tall weeds. Overturned tombstones were scattered in the thicket. Meir searched for his father's grave by the landmarks that he remembered from his youth for some time, but in vain. As he was about to leave, a toothless old woman appeared in front of him, as if from under the ground. She asked, "Who are you looking for?"

Meir hesitated a bit, then answered.

"Oh, yes," sighed the old woman and went straight ahead. Meir followed her to a well-kept section of the cemetery. Only fallen leaves were covering the graves. It was there that Meir found his father's grave. The old woman stood aside in silence, trying not to disturb Meir's thoughts about his father.

Meir stayed a long time at the grave whispering to himself and wiping his tears. Then he turned around and went back. The old woman was still waiting for him. She heaped questions upon him, and when he asked her name, she said "Anastassia." She invited Meir to her little house, and on the way home she told him about all the horrors she had witnessed. Meir found out from Anastassia that Sheindl was still alive, and that after her divorce from Yaakov Glomb she had remarried and had gone to Poland with her new husband in 1956.

After resting at Anastassia's place, Meir decided to go to see the house where he was born. It was hard to recognize the little town – almost none of the old houses remained. One- or two-storied new buildings were constructed along the main street. The road and the sidewalk were cobbled, and electric lamps lit the street that crossed the town from end to end. Meir walked around the market square that had changed greatly too. There was no sign of the numerous small Jewish shops that used to be there.

Meir entered a small buffet, seated himself at a table, and asked for a glass of tea. A lazy waitress scrutinized him with some suspicion. People were in the habit of ordering vodka and not tea there! Through the window Meir could see the square. He recalled that farmers used to fill it up with carts standing in many rows, two by two, with the shafts close to one another. Women would sell their products directly from the carts and men used to toss off a glass or two of vodka.

Meir went out, turned down a small lane and slowly walked in the direction of his original home with a heavy heart. He counted five houses from the corner and realized that he was standing in front of the house of his childhood. It was planked with boards, the old shingled roof was replaced by tin, and an enclosed porch was attached to it. For a long time Meir stood in front of the house in deep reverie. He had no idea what he should do. Somebody was watching him through the curtain.

At last a woman came who lived next door. She asked Meir what she could do for him. Meir explained her that it was his former house, where he had not been since pre-war times.

The woman invited Meir to her place. He came in, and sat down on a bench at the window. He hardly had time to answer the woman's questions when he heard the shuffling of feet and a man came from the adjoining room. A padded jacket was hanging from his shoulders; he wore felt boots and a cap. His face looked unhealthy and thin. He was coughing frequently. The man greeted Meir politely and asked where he was from. He listened attentively to Meir's words, and then he began to speak about himself.

His name was Ivan Petrovich. A long time before he had lived in the village of Shchukino, then he and his family moved to this town and settled in Kozya street, not far from Elimelech the water-carrier. He told Meir about the horrors of the war, and about his participation in the partisan movement. He did not hide the truth about the head of the family that settled in Meir's house – he was a traitor. He also told Meir about the fate of the house which had belonged to his grandfather, Elimelech the water-carrier; the house had been spared by the flames during a great fire that had spread all through Kozya street.

Meir spent many hours together with Ivan Petrovich. On parting, the host presented him with some family relics which had survived the fire. There was a small Torah scroll that had been taken from the Synagogue, the *mezuzah* from the door frame of Elimelech the water-carrier's house and a manuscript of the Torah.

Meir was deeply touched; he cordially thanked the old man for the presents.

On the following day he left for Moscow.

## Chapter Thirty-One

### *SHEINDL*

On the 9th of May, 1945 the familiar, firm, and distinct voice of the speaker Levitan announced on the radio that the war was over – and everyone, young and old, immediately rushed into the streets. Everything merged together in the common outburst of joy. Happiness mixed with tears. Even strangers kissed and embraced one another.

With every passing day the hopes of women and their children rose that they would see their husbands, sons and fathers again at last. Alas, immeasurable was the grief of those who received notices about their missing relatives or greeted their husbands who had become cripples.

Sheindl became agitated; she felt drawn to her native town. Deep in her soul she hoped, perhaps, that at least somebody had survived. Perhaps she might get news of her missing children whom she had lost when she was trying to escape from the German troops. On the way she fell ill, and kind-hearted people had not left her to the mercy of fate. During one of the bombings, Soviet officers who happened to be there gathered all the homeless children and brought them to a children's home at the rear of the fighting. Among them were Sheindl's children. She learned about it when she recuperated, but she could not trace her children. Since the war had ended, Sheindl had tried to get information through different channels, though without any results.

In 1944 she had become acquainted with a Polish Jew named Yosef Shleime Erlich and cast her lot in with his. He was a decent man, kind and God fearing who had also lost his family. They celebrated their wedding according to the Jewish tradition.

After the war, she heard rumors (which proved to be true) that Soviet authorities would permit Polish citizens to return to Poland. That rumor aroused all the Polish Jews and worried the Soviet Jews, especially the Chabadniks, who were afraid of losing their chance to escape from Russia. They started to devise various ways to escape; in particular, they would buy the documents of the deceased and forge them, filling in their own age, the number of their children and the names of their "relatives."

Actually, in a short time the registration of the former Polish citizens began, and within several months, at the beginning of 1946, the first trains left carrying Jews bound for Poland. This encouraged many people who had hesitated before.

There was some discord in Sheindl's family. Yosef Shleime wanted to hand in their documents to apply for an exit visa, while Sheindl wanted to go back to her native land first, because she hoped to receive news of her children who might still remember their old address. Yosef Shleime submitted to his wife's will, but he laid down one condition: in case of failure, they would immediately go to Poland. He was an energetic man and did not lose any time making preparations for the long and difficult journey. Railway stations were overcrowded with the demobilized. There were enormously long queues at the ticket offices. People spent nights waiting in the same place. The railway carriages were packed. People crowded on the platforms, and even on the roofs of the trains, which caused many accidents. Nevertheless, Yosef Shleime succeeded in getting tickets, and, after a hard, ten day long journey with several intermediate stops, they arrived at their destination.

Sheindl had no sooner stepped onto her native soil when bitter disappointment struck her. She saw the ruins of burnt houses and the hatred in the glares of the local inhabitants. She walked silently behind the cart loaded with their shabby belongings. Soon she approached the site of a fire which had burned a big house, leaving only the Russian stove and the chimney intact. Sheindl could not even make herself cry as the tears had completely disappeared.

From a little house in the yard out came the kind old woman Anastassia, who used to work in their father's house long ago. Sheindl still had fond memories of her from childhood. The women recognized each other, embraced and exchanged kisses – and only then did Sheindl involuntarily burst into tears.

Anastassia invited them inside and put a small room at their disposal. That day they tried not to touch upon old events. On the following day the kind woman told them in detail about all the terrible events that she had witnessed.

Several days prior to the arrival of German troops some local men had united into a so-called the *Schutzpolizei* (an action group which later took an active role in the shooting of Jews) and started to jeer at the Jews who had remained in the town. They broke the doors of the abandoned homes.

When the German regiment came, the *Schutzpolizei* joined them. On the second day of the occupation, all the Jews were ordered to gather in the town square. The people were informed that they had to choose a victim from amongst themselves within half an hour, otherwise everybody would be shot. Their souls were fear stricken as nobody wanted to be the victim. The German officer repeated the warning several times. The time went by...

Suddenly an elderly Jew appeared, dressed in white *tahrim* (shrouds), wearing a *tallit* and *tefillin*. His face was aglow. He announced that he was ready to be the victim and warned the Jews that the Germans would not stop with murdering him. They were sure to shoot all of them. He summoned to them to repent to the Almighty, and that everybody should say, "Let my death be the atonement for my sins!" and that they should repeat often the words, "*Shema Yisra'el* Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One!" At the very moment that he cried out the word "*Echad*" (One), a bullet ran through his heart, and he fell dead.

That old man was none other than Elimelech the water-carrier, who was well known in the town as a *tzaddik*, a righteous man. May G-d avenge his blood!

## Chapter Thirty-Two

### ***SHEINDL'S DEPARTURE AND THE LONG-AWAITED MEETING WITH HER SONS***

In spite of the fact that Sheindl did not hope to get any reassuring information from her trip to her home town, and in spite of the fact that while preparing for their departure to Poland they were already “living out of their suitcases,” they had missed the deadline and did not manage to leave until 1955.

Though Yosef Shleime was displeased, he submitted to G-d's will and did not reproach Sheindl, who felt it keenly. Their kind hostess, Anastassia, cleared out the house for them, as she had found another lodging for herself.

Sheindl and Yosef Shleime found jobs. Yosef Shleime was a hatter by profession, and that trade proved useful. Sheindl got a job as a bookkeeper and continued searching for her children who seemed to have completely disappeared. Though everybody doubted that her children were alive, Sheindl reminded Yosef that he had previously told her that our patriarch Yaakov said, “While a man is alive he ought not to forget.”

Some time passed. The terrible years before Joseph Stalin's death went by. The hope that former Polish citizens would be allowed to leave the Soviet Union revived. They began to lend an attentive ear to the talks and rumors so as not to miss their opportunity. In 1957 they succeeded in leaving Russia. They moved to Poland, but Poland was not their aim. They longed for Israel.

The Embassy of Israel rendered them assistance, and at the end of 1957 Sheindl and Yosef Shleime descended the airplane's ladder and knelt down to kiss the Holy Land.

Though Israel experienced hard times after the Sinai campaign, Sheindl and her husband felt themselves at home there. They settled down in Petach Tikvah. Soon Yosef Shleime made friends with people and even met some fellow countrymen. He started to work as a hatter. Sheindl also found a job, and they lived in harmony. The only grief that overshadowed their life was the missing children. Years went by but their pain was as strong as ever.

One day a new friend invited them to his daughter's wedding. They had already lived in the country for several years, but until then they were rarely present at such celebrations. That wedding was a special one. Among the guests were many rabbis and Torah scholars of high rank. It was quite crowded.

Dressed in a glittering, snow white gown, the bride sat in an armchair decorated with flowers, and although the bridegroom was only of medium height and was wearing glasses, he looked elegant.

Her father and mother led the bride to the *chuppah*, and friends accompanied the bridegroom, as he had no relatives. After the ceremony everybody took seats at the tables. Sheindl felt excited, but also worried for no obvious reason. People were admiring and praising the bride and the bridegroom. A woman sitting next to her said that she had known the bridegroom, Shalom Gicherman, for many years, that he was an educated young man and did well at the Yeshiva, in spite of the fact that he was raised in an orphanage.

“Do you see that man?” she asked, pointing to a man sitting near the bridegroom. “He took that boy and his brother from an orphanage in the Urals. The elderly woman sitting next to the bride is his wife.”

Sheindl was not able to listen to the woman any more. She could not control herself; she wanted only one thing: to see whether it was her own son or not. She went up to the partition that separated the men's and the women's halls. She was looking intently at the bridegroom and satisfied herself more and more that he was really her son.

"Oh G-d, help me!" she was praying. She came up to the woman that was sitting beside the bride and asked her if she could spare her a few moments of her time.

"I'd like to clear up something. Would you please be so kind as to step aside for a moment with me?" The woman followed Sheindl in bewilderment.

"You took the boy from a children's home, didn't you? Do you know his real name? It isn't Gicherman, right?"

"Well, Gicherman is the adopted name we left Russia under. Actually, I don't remember the real surname of the boys; it was so long ago. It seems to me it began with the letters 'K' or 'G'."

"Could it have been Glomb?" asked Sheindl, with her heart in her throat.

"You are right," recalled the woman and Sheindl fainted.

There was some tumult. She was carried into a room, and she came to. The bridegroom came up to Sheindl and asked her how she felt.

When Sheindl saw him, she cried out, "Oh, my son, you are alive!" and she fainted again.

The word went around that the bridegroom's mother had been found. Sheindl, who had not completely come to herself yet, was sitting in an armchair, still weak. At that moment a young officer approached her. He embraced her and said, "Mother, it's me, your younger son, Israel!"

Sheindl exclaimed, "Oh, Lord, how can I be thankful enough to You for having returned my sons to me?"

The people continued the celebration. Everybody was glad for the mother's sake as she had finally found her children.

The sensational story of the mother who had met her sons went round the country. Everyone wrote about it in the newspapers. That is how the story reached Yaakov Glomb, and how he came to know that his children were alive. They met with one another and the children did not have to be ashamed of their father any more because he had redeemed his faults and had become a new man.

## Chapter Thirty-Three

### *MARK SORKIN*

Mark Sorkin, Meir's son, had completely lost his mind. His head was in the clouds. He had fallen in love with Kosba Medyanenko, the Dean's daughter.

Dressed in his holiday clothes, carefully groomed, with a huge bouquet of roses in hand, he came to the house where the Medyanenko family lived. As he mounted the stairs he heard loud voices and crying from his sweetheart's apartment. He listened attentively and understood that the talk concerned him, but he was not about to retreat, so he rang the doorbell. The door was immediately opened by Kosba's mother; behind her shoulder he could see the weeping Kosba.

"Oh, Mark!" said Mrs. Medyanenko with hypocritical courtesy. "Come in, my dear fellow. We were just speaking about you, and we came to the conclusion that your efforts regarding Kosba are fruitless. She is not a match for you. I advise you to find a Jewish young woman!"

Mark had no time to come to his senses as they opened the door leading to the staircase in front of him. Everything went dark before his eyes, and he felt giddy. Mark went out into the street with some difficulty. He stood frozen there for some time; gradually he came to himself, handed the flowers to the first passing stranger, and plodded along home.

For three days he lay in bed. He would not eat or drink anything as he took the insult very hard. He partly regained his normal state of mind only when his fellow university students called him, worried by his absence. He told them that he was unwell; in the evening his friends came to see him and attempted to console him. Nevertheless, for ten days Mark was in bed with a high temperature that caused delirium. The whole time he was attended by Maya, a pretty, moonfaced Jewish girl from a Moscow suburb.

Little by little Mark recovered, but he did not forget his last visit to the Medyanenko home for a long time. Some more weeks elapsed. Only then did he venture to attend the lectures at the university. He had changed so much his friends could hardly recognize him. He grew quiet and lost his former conceit. He did not want to see anybody and could not make himself speak to people. The only person he kept in touch with was Maya. She heard him out, reassured and consoled him.

Some time passed. Mark and Maya fell in love with each other and decided to get married. The wedding was celebrated in the summer, just after exams. Only their dearest friends were present.

After the wedding the young couple decided to set off for their honeymoon by hitchhiking. They found themselves in Samarkand. They were standing in the railway station square and pondering what direction to choose when a Russian man approached them, saying, "You seem to be newcomers. Do you have a place to stay?" When he heard a negative answer, he invited them to stay at his place. The man brought them in, gave them accommodations in a private room, and in the evening he invited some neighbors to celebrate their arrival.

At the hearty meal, with abundant food and drink, the guests got into conversation, then started to tell anecdotes, including anecdotes about Jews. Suddenly one of the men asked Mark whether he was a Jew. Mark was a little taken aback but firmly answered, "Yes, sure." At once



the atmosphere changed at the table and the guests began to disperse; the host “remembered” that he had promised their room to other guests, so he led Mark and Maya to a neighbor’s house for the night.

Discouraged, Mark and Maya discussed the incident the whole night. Actually they did not look like Jews, and besides, they had gotten a regular Soviet education; after all, what is the difference between people of various nations? (As is obvious from the statement of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, a Jew does not want and cannot be alienated from his roots. Oh, he was perfectly right!)

To their regret, neither Maya nor Mark knew anything about Judaism except some vague information: the Jews don’t eat pork or something like that. They decided to become vegetarians.

Upon returning to Moscow, they became interested in literature on Jewry and Israel and little by little they started to lead a more Jewish life. They began to write letters to their parents more often. Gradually Mark found himself among those Jewish activists who wanted to make *aliyah* to Israel.

Seven or eight years passed until Mark met his parents in the Holy Land.

Meir thanked the Almighty for His grace and he was happy to inform the Rebbe that his blessing had been fulfilled.

## Chapter Thirty-Four

### ***SOME FACTS ABOUT EVERYBODY***

Only six men remain of the people who founded Kibbutz Rukhama; the oldest of them is Kalman. He is over 90. The others are almost as old, but under 80. The Kibbutz takes good care of them. They are afforded special facilities, so that each of them can feel at ease and comfortable. They have lived their lives each in their own way, though, to some extent, they are similar. Each of the six men had a family, but later they remained alone, and, if it were not for the Kibbutz, they would have been most unhappy.

Kalman's wife died long ago, and he did not remarry. His children live elsewhere. Kalman devotes himself to preparing the Kibbutz children for Bar and Bat Mitzvah; he is concerned about matters of belief and ritual. He has a favorite hobby: planting flowers and grass in the yard of the Kibbutz, and he looks after them regularly. Greenery covers the central part of the Kibbutz like a downy carpet. Kalman has educated many pupils who follow his example.

Aryeh and Yankele came to the country almost at the same time. Their fates have much in common. Together they fought for independence at the front and took part in the construction of the Kibbutz. Aryeh had fallen passionately in love with Goldie, the best girl, in his opinion. She often risked her life on dangerous missions on a par with the men. She was noted for her wit and courage. All the young men dreamt of her, but Aryeh did not cede her to anybody. He courted her, and they got married. They gave birth to three children. Aryeh loved his wife to distraction and was ready to do anything for her sake, but in old age his life became unbearable. Goldie turned into a shrew. She ordered him to do whatever she wanted, and he turned into a wimp. His friends, who had envied him in his youth, now thanked G-d that He had saved them from her.

Their children's fate is hard too: their elder son, an invalid, is a clever man, but he has joined the extreme "leftist" movement, so that even the "leftist" government is afraid of him. The second son is a deaf-mute, and the daughter is an old maid. She has moved to live in America. Aryeh suffers from bad eyesight in his old age.

Yankele turned to be the happiest of the old-timers, although his story is similar in many respects. He fell in love with Olga in his youth; he was jealous of everybody and persisted in winning her heart until she agreed to marry him. Although in his day he had been a skillful manager and commander in other realms, his wife Olga ruled over the household. He could never do what he intended to do, as Olga always opposed it. Unlike Goldie, Olga left Yankele in old age in order to "make another man happy."

When their son Shimony grew up, he followed his mother's advice and married a girl who came from England, a volunteer in the Kibbutz. Yankele was against the marriage; he doubted the seriousness of her attachment to Judaism, and later on he proved to be right. When their son Shimony perished in Lebanon, his wife brought the children back to her homeland. She returned to her people in England.

Yankele worships his daughter Vered. He was very happy when she and her family came to celebrate his eightieth birthday. Although people looked askance at Vered and her children, Aryeh caressed the boys' long *pe'os*, and tears of envy and pity for his wasted life streamed from his eyes.

Their daughter Vered, contrary to her mother's will, tried to live in her own way, as her mother was against giving her children a traditional Jewish upbringing.

When her term of service in the army was over, Vered had set out to see the world. She visited India and Hawaii, and took an interest in different sects, which worried her father. While wandering around the world, Vered and three other Israeli fellows came to Los Angeles with empty purses and hungry stomachs. One day a group of students invited her to go celebrate the Sabbath with them. They decided to make a laughing stock of the Chabad emissaries: to visit them and at the same time to dine out. They did not have the slightest idea who these people were, or what experience and good intuition they had.

Chayim Yitzhak gave them a cordial welcome. He fed them well. His wife also tried to please the guests. Someone started singing Israeli songs. Chayim told them about Israel and its beauty. His story was filled with love for his native land. The guests were carried away and forgot their intentions. They were all ears. The young people felt the emptiness in their souls filling up with warmth. They stayed until late in the evening and did not want to leave. They felt as if they were in their homeland and pride for their people filled their hearts.

Sabbath was over. The host started to recite the *Havdalah* prayer, holding a silver goblet in the light of a braided candle. Then everybody started to sing the well-known song about the prophet Eliyahu. As if reading their thoughts, the host asked, "Maybe you are in need of something? Maybe you are short of money? I can lend you a little."

The young people got embarrassed and refused to take money. They asked permission to visit them again on the following day.

"All right," answered Chayim Yitzhak and invited them for breakfast.

Vered asked whether she could stay for the night and the hosts gave their consent. Vered beamed with delight. She helped the hostess to clear the dirty dishes; after that the table was set anew for *melaveh malka* – the meal for seeing off the Sabbath Queen. The traditional herring and potatoes in their skins were served, and afterwards tea and a delicious cake. The host was telling Chassidic tales and teachings. Fascinated, Vered listened to Chayim Yitzhak's words.

Then came her turn to tell about herself and her parents, but she did not know anything about her forefathers. "Today," Vered went on, "having visited you, I feel my soul being filled up. How can I join you? Is it possible?"

Chayim Yitzhak and his wife Sterna were listening closely to Vered's words. They revealed the purity of her soul. The hostess stroked her hair and kissed her. She invited Vered to stay in their house for the time being.

On Sunday the same youths came for breakfast. Chayim Yitzhak received the guests cordially, like good friends. The lads came from Israel. Two of them, Adiv and Ran, were from the same Kibbutz. The third one, Yaron, was the son of a well-known Israeli manufacturer. All of them had served as junior officers in parachute troops. After demobilization they went to look for something that would fill their spiritual emptiness. Something was tormenting them and did not leave them in peace. They made up their minds to seek adventure in foreign countries. They were attracted by the Far East, India and South America.

Adiv and Ran met Yaron in the Bahamas. They found each other in a Hindu ashram. There were several hundred young Jewish men and women who sought adventure there. Their guru was a Jew by origin. Young people were told to hold public worship. The guru cited different aphorisms and sayings but when Yaron asked questions he stirred up the guru's anger and felt that he was being shadowed. Yaron heard rumors that one should not trifle with sects.

One day he went to bed and by chance he felt a small book of psalms in his pocket. The Chief Rabbi of the Army, Reb Goren, had presented it to him when Yaron lay wounded in a military hospital. He had never parted with that memento, though he did not make use of it. He opened the book and started reading it. Suddenly a thought dawned upon him: "Why should I search for something alien when we have our own spiritual values?"

He discussed that with Adiv and Ran, and they took their things and secretly left the ashram. For a long time they wandered, doing odd jobs to provide themselves with food and continue further on their way.

In Bolivia, Ran fell ill; for two weeks he was lying sick in terrible living conditions. The lads became acquainted with some local people who turned out to be fanatic Catholics who observed a strange custom. On Friday afternoon they went down to the cellar, closed the door and lit candles. They did not have any explanation when they were asked why. They happened to meet an old man who boasted that he was descended from King David. Only then did they understand that they were dealing with descendants of the Marranos. That is why they treated the youths well.

In Los Angeles, when they chanced to find themselves in Chayim Yitzhak's house, they realized that it was there that they should seek the things they did not possess. Chayim Yitzhak took good care of them. He helped them to get office jobs, so that they were supported both materially and spiritually. The young men began to get accustomed to the new way of life, especially Adiv and Ran; Yaron was not involved in it seriously, and later he parted from his friends.

Some time passed, and Chayim Yitzhak took Adiv and Ran with him to celebrate Rosh Hashanah with the Rebbe. During *Yechidus*, each of them told the Rebbe his own story. One thing united them: they were not youths with empty souls any more; they lived a full life, and their souls were casting light on the people around them. They married, and their homes became "lighthouses" for others. They were visited by people of the same sort as they had previously been themselves.

Some years later a morally degraded Yaron reappeared. His soul was completely mutilated. The friends accepted and took care of him as they hoped he might become a real Jew, but Yaron's life turned out not to be very successful. He went from one extreme to another, as he lacked fortitude. He was married twice, but did not bring happiness either to his wives, his children or his parents.

Sterna got to know Vered better, and grew fond of her. She looked at Vered with a heavy heart. How many Jewish girls of that sort are roaming around the world, kids who cannot find themselves because their parents sacrificed their children for the sake of their own imaginary freedom? Chayim Yitzhak got in contact with Machon Hannah, a seminary in Brooklyn. Vered was admitted there, and she went to Brooklyn. After studying there for about half a year, and having acquired some knowledge, Vered became attached to the Rebbe.

One Sunday, Vered, like many others, was standing in line in order to receive a dollar from the Rebbe, just as she had already done many times before, but on that day the Rebbe gave her an additional dollar for her father. "You are from a Chassidic family, aren't you?" he asked, and he advised her to think of marriage. She was surprised, and told her instructor about it. The latter immediately phoned Sterna in Los Angeles, and they started the search for a proper fiancé for Vered.

Soon they found such a young man among their students. Vered imparted the news to her

parents. Yankele was happy, but her mother received the news rather coldly.

The time for the wedding was approaching. The bridegroom's parents were well-to-do people. They were fond of Vered. Yankele came to the wedding, but his wife Olga stubbornly refused to come.

The wedding was celebrated and the young couple settled down to a happy family life.

Olga decided to leave Yankele. They got divorced and in a short time she married another man and left Israel.

As for Yankele and Kalman, they are both involved in public events. They help to spread Jewish traditions among the rising generation of the Kibbutz. The synagogue is being frequented. Its light is attracting people. People often celebrate Bar and Bat Mitzvahs there. The wedding canopy is set up more frequently than it used to be.

## Chapter Thirty-Five

### *EPILOGUE, Part One*

We hold to the principle of the Lubavitcher Rebbe that one should look at a Jew with his right, i.e. kind eye. That is why I have chosen mostly positive episodes for my story, but it does not mean that nothing bad happened.

I have not tried to reproduce the strict chronology of the events because, I am sure, the others will write about everything in their own way.

It is true that all these events actually took place, but the names of people and places have been changed. Nevertheless, I am sure that some of the people might recognize themselves, or people who have witnessed the events I describe.

I will try to bring our story to its conclusion, though it might be endless.

I have shared only a small part of my reminiscences in order to find consolation in the fact that I have at least told you something about that wonderful and holy tribe of Chabadniks, at whose head stood, and will ever stand, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. It was he who told me during my second *Yechidus*, “Tell the new *Olim* that they should write, and let them not be worried that there might be some discrepancies between one or another version of the events and their descriptions of people. They can clear them up later.”

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A special, festive and warm family atmosphere reigned in Meir’s house. People were celebrating Yud Tet Kislev in the moshav synagogue, and they heard about Meir’s holiday, so most of the people turned their steps towards his place. White-bearded old men and other elderly people sat down at the festive table, and the young ones surrounded them. They were absorbed, eagerly perceiving the point of the conversation being held by the respected old men. There was no microphone and no reporters. Everything was as it used to be before...

It all reminded Meir of his childhood in Borovukha, how on that solemn day the synagogue would fill with people, so many that they could hardly find places. There was a holiday mood there. The *chazan* would recite the prayers to the traditional New Year’s melody. Then the *gabbai* would announce that Reb Elimelech the water-carrier was inviting everybody to his place, as he usually did on the same day every year.

On that day Meir’s grandfather would beam with pleasure, perfect bliss in his every movement. When it became dark, someone lit an additional kerosene lamp. They set out a white tablecloth and many candles, and that gave a particularly festive atmosphere to everything that was happening there.

Children took their seats in the sleeping place of the Russian stove, called a *polaty*.<sup>13</sup> Severe frost settled outside; the wind was howling in the chimney and in the entryway one could hear coughing, the heavy tramping of feet as someone stomped the snow off his felt boots.

The house gradually filled with guests. It is incredible how many people could find room in the little house.

Rabbi Benjamin sat at the head of the table. He spoke in a mild, clear voice, so that both

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<sup>13</sup> This consisted of wooden planks between the ceiling and the Russian stove. It was the most convenient place to sleep in the winter, and was usually used by children and old people.

the old and the young were able to understand everything. Meir remembered how he, together with the other children, would watch everything that was going on in the room. Men of venerable old age, their faces shining, were sitting at the table with closed eyes, singing Chassidic tunes with fervor.

During the intervals someone told stories and sayings. Most of them were familiar to everybody, but the young people and the children were happy to listen to them over and over again. Everyone said “*L’Chayim*,” congratulated each other and blessed one another to hold on tightly to the tree of life.

When the moment came for singing the Alter Rebbe’s melody, everybody stood still and joined in the song, following the leader with a serious air, inspired by the holiness of the melody. When grandfather Elimelech and Reb Kopl would enter, everybody would enjoy the special way they danced the Chassidic *kazachok*. They felt a burst of energy, and the others caught it too.

Now, on Meir’s eightieth birthday, Reb Shakhno was guiding the feast. He began with a clever joke, as usual, in order to win the favor of the guests. People said “*L’Chayim*,” cordially greeted Meir, and then sang the traditional song about the Alter Rebbe’s release from prison.

Shakhno said that since the beginning of time people had been telling the history of the New Year of Chassidism, of the arrest and the redemption of the Alter Rebbe. Now that more than 200 years have passed and everyone has experienced so much, we can appreciate the true value of the fact that Chassidism was given to the Jewish people by G-d’s grace. The Alter Rebbe’s courage enabled him to reveal and spread the secrets of the Torah and Chassidism among the Jewish people. That displeased even Heaven. He wrote the *Tanya*, comprising fifty-three chapters, and he had to endure fifty-three days of trial in the Peter-and-Paul fortress for it. The *Tanya* has been, and will ever be, the life-giving dew for thousands of Jewish souls that are seeking their way in the service of G-d.

The Alter Rebbe inherited his capacity for *mesirut nefesh* from Avraham Avinu through Rabbi Akiba, and then passed it on to us through his descendants and the Rebbe Rayatz to enable us to survive in hard and dangerous times and live until the present time.

To keep up the old traditions, Kalman and Shakhno went into the circle for a *kazachok* dance in time to the singing. Everybody stood singing and clapping hands.

When Reb Shakhno finished his story of Yud Tet Kislev, everybody raised his glass and said “*L’Chayim*.” During the breaks between songs someone was citing the Alter Rebbe’s talks and telling edifying stories and parables.

Then they recalled bygone events... Every old man had many things to share.

Shakhno began his life story with the words, “I’m the son of wealthy parents who are descendants of honored Chabad families. I was sent to Yeshiva in Nevel. To tell the truth, I was not eager to study, but I was not dismissed from Yeshiva, it seems, for the sake of my parents. I am still thankful to the teachers for that.

“You know that Yeshiva *bocherim* were persecuted at that time, so I was forced to move from place to place. I was caught up by the current. Later I entered an Institute and being a capable student, I graduated with an honors diploma. In a short period of time I was entrusted with being in charge of 10,000 workers. I felt the power of authority and the independent life, but Tomchei T’ mimim’s stuff was stuck in my gullet. It prevented me from enjoying life to the fullest, just as had happened to others. I was on friendly terms with many people and most of them sought even closer friendship with me.

“Fortune turned away from me. I was imprisoned for ten years, and there, in the labor camp, I was put in charge of the work of thousands of prisoners. After my release, I did not find any of my former “friends.” Everybody had forgotten me. My situation was difficult, but the Almighty’s grace is immeasurable. One day I came across a friend from Yeshiva. He was as overjoyed to see me as if I were his relative. He put me up at his place for a while, and later he helped me to get a job in his office without binding me with obligations or reproaching me.

“Several years later, my house was chosen for the celebration of Yud Tet Kislev, seemingly because I had almost a private apartment, and we did not need to be afraid of the neighbors. We distributed the tasks: one man got some fish, another brought a chicken; each one did something else. Everybody came dressed in holiday clothes, with his wife and children, in high spirits. We were free to do whatever we wanted, but we tried not to attract the attention of other people or arouse unnecessary suspicion. We celebrated until morning, and we enjoyed it very much.

“When all the guests left the house, my wife and I collected our non-kosher dishes, though among them were some expensive dinner sets. We broke them to pieces and threw the fragments away. Together with the cups and dishes we threw away the unnecessary past.

“Thank you, Lord, for Your grace!”

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When Meir’s turn came, he did not keep the people waiting. Meir wanted to mention several stages of his life: he shared reminiscences of his native Borovukha and the atmosphere of the celebration of Yud Tet Kislev long ago, and then he was silent for a minute or two.

New currents of memory flooded in on him, and he went on. “I remember my early childhood – those winter evenings when snow storms would rage and the wind would howl in the chimney, but it was warm in the house. The dim light of the kerosene lamp hanging on the wall would barely light the room; it would throw fantastic shadows on the walls. Logs would crackle cozily in the stove. Grandmother would put me to bed. She would cover me with a blanket with her caressing hands and tell all kinds of stories in her soft and gentle voice before I fell asleep. She always told me stories about *tzaddikim* or quotes from the book *Tzena U’Rena*. She would narrate stories so vividly that the places, events or people formed pictures before my eyes. Her kind voice would lull me to sleep, but I tried to resist sleep in order not to miss any of the stories. Most of all she liked to tell me about the Baal Shem Tov, the Alter Rebbe and other *tzaddikim*.

“Once upon a time,” she would say, “there lived a great *tzaddik*, the Baal Shem Tov. His parents were also righteous people. As a reward for their hospitality and kindness a son was born to them in their old age. They named him Yisroel, and he became known as the Baal Shem Tov. Unfortunately, Yisroel’s father and mother died when he was still a little boy. Feeling the approach of death, his father called his five year-old son to him and said, ‘My son, don’t fear anything except G-d.’ The boy grew up; he studied well and was extremely modest. His soul was burning with love of G-d, the Torah that he was learning diligently and his people. When he grew up, everybody saw his holiness, so people started to come to him and learn his way of serving the Almighty. He taught them many wise things and transmitted the following principles of service to G-d:

One should love the Almighty because He is Creator of everything, and not only because He gave you life, feeds you and gives you children.

One ought to love the Torah because it is G-d’s Torah and study it because it is ruled over



by Him; it is not only wisdom and knowledge, but also G-d's gift.

To love a Jew means to love not only righteous and average people, but also the sinners and those who are connected with Jews even by the thinnest thread, because, as the saying goes, 'Love a Jew because he is a Jew.'

"Time and again Grandmother repeated her story about how the Alter Rebbe incorporated the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, whom he called grandfather, and about the three kinds of love that were set as the principles of Chabad Chassidism. She used to say that from early youth the Alter Rebbe made a habit of coming to the main square on market days, climbing on a cart and calling upon the Jews to take up farming. She would tell how even when the Alter Rebbe was absorbed in his prayers he would hear if a baby cried in his cradle. He showed love to people always and everywhere, including those who had done him evil. In a letter to his disciples and followers he advised them to follow the example of Joseph and his brothers and to pay back everybody with kindness. I carefully guard Grandmother's words in my memory.

"Later, when I grew up, I read the *Tanya* in which, in chapter thirty-two, the Alter Rebbe persuades us to love even a sinner, as it is necessary to hate evil itself, but not the man, for he possesses goodness, and we ought to love his good deeds. Every succeeding Rebbe has inherited everything from the Alter Rebbe, and represents him in full. We feel the love given to us by the Rebbe, who sends his emissaries around the world and imbues them with strength to withstand all misfortune. True, sometimes it is very difficult to be alone in some far corner of the world, far from the center and one's fellows, without any material wealth. What for? For the sake of some Jews that happened to be brought there by the winds of fortune, in order to save them from full assimilation. Is there a stronger love than this?

"The second moment that is distinct in my memory," Meir continued, "is a joint trip with my father to the Rebbe Rayatz, to Leningrad, and from there to Detskoye Selo.

"The third distinct recollection is connected with the Yud Tet Kislev festival with the Rebbe at "770" more than forty years ago.

"Today we are celebrating this day at our home in Petach Tikvah, with the hope of meeting together with Mashiach next year."

## Chapter Thirty-Six

### *EPILOGUE, Part Two*

It is rather noisy in Moshav Tikvah in the Shomron, especially in the Sorkins' house, as the Festival of Yud Tet Kislev has arrived. Meir considers this his birthday: the day he had been at the Rebbe's in Leningrad for the first time, the day of his arrival in *Eretz Yisroel*, the day that returned him to his wellsprings...

Meir has no idea what the household has planned. Some noise in the big salon of his two storey house makes Meir come downstairs. To his great joy and surprise, he finds most of his relatives and friends there: Rivka, Sheindl, Yankele and others. Everybody came to congratulate Meir on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. The festive occasion was arranged secretly by Meir's son, his son-in-law, and his eldest grandson.

Yaakov Glomb came too. Meir does not nurse any grudge against him, or seek revenge. He has seen how Yaakov has changed within the past few years and heartily repented of his former actions, and Meir has forgiven him.

Yaakov Glomb has become an old man, but his sin still plagues him and his heart is still heavy with this load. He often comes to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, and pours out his heart to the Almighty in silence, asking for absolution. He is respected for his modesty and kindness. He has *naches* (happiness) from his children: two sons from Sheindl and a daughter from Lena. They already have their own families and grandchildren who are heading down the right road.

Meir's best friend Daniel came a little late; they embraced and kissed each other. Daniel took a seat aside, patiently awaiting a convenient moment when they might have a talk in private. An imprint of tiredness lies on his angel-like handsome face. Daniel looks affectionately at everybody.

Two men join them: one of them is old Kalman, already over ninety, but still full of strength and energy. But who is that old man of strong build, with a wrinkled face and a white beard? His face seems familiar to Daniel, but he cannot place it.

The old men approach Daniel, say, "Good afternoon," and greet him with Yud Tet Kislev greetings, and wish "*Mazal Tov*" to their common friend, Meir.

"Don't you recognize me? I am Yankele, Meir's childhood friend!" They embrace each other joyfully. Yankele leads Daniel to the yard to show off his grandsons who are playing there – mischievous children with long earlocks decorating their nice features. They have come to stay with Meir for a while. Their father, Naftali, is a famous scientist; he has been invited to work in the town of Rehovot, at the Weizman Institute.

Daniel did not ask Yankele about the changes in his life, as Kalman had already told him about them: how his wife Olga had left him – and Kalman quoted the Torah right away, "...and revived the spirit of Yaakov."

As for Daniel, he had followed Meir's example; he came to live in *Eretz Yisroel* after Meir. As soon as Daniel arrived in Israel, he started spreading Yiddishkeit by delivering lectures to large audiences of assimilated Jews. His distinct voice expressed his thoughts clearly, and his passionate heart captured the hearts of the audience. He was worried about the low level of moral education as well as the behavior of the younger generation, because love for the Jewish people and homeland is the very essence of Daniel's nature. It hurt him to see how ignorance was

gradually embracing a great number of youth. Daniel was angry with those politicians who, for their own sake, were accomplishing things that caused irreversible consequences. Daniel's speeches became even more convincing after his meeting with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, as he was devoted to him with all his heart. He ardently shared the ideas that were his guiding star. He penetrated into the depths of the Rebbe's thoughts and they were so understandable to him that he could efficiently pass them on to others. He was passionately transferring the Rebbe's love for the Torah, and fighting for its integrity. When Daniel delivered his lectures, he supported them with logical arguments, and the listeners' hearts were filled with belief which lit up the darkness with warmth and light.

Daniel has become an outstanding person. His achievements in the field of science are considerable; nevertheless, he conducts himself in a modest way and is a loyal friend. Daniel is a herald of the coming of Mashiach. He believes deeply in Mashiach and often wonders why he has still not come. Both Daniel's grandchildren and great-grandchildren are taking the road lit by the Torah.

## Chapter Thirty-Seven

### CONCLUSION

Daniel went out to the balcony to take a breath of the fresh spring air of Jerusalem. The clear blue sky was embracing Jerusalem, and the surrounding mountains had just started to put on their usual white *yarmulkas* (skull caps) which give them a patriarchal look. Daniel looked in the direction of Hevron, to see whether the sky had turned crimson there, to see whether his forefathers Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov had woken up, to see whether Mother Rachel was standing on the road. What news might the morning bring?

The angelic, handsome, old face, with a snow-white beard and thick eyebrows, with tired eyes, expressed anxiety. His heart began to palpitate; he was waiting so long for the loud sound of the *Shofar*!

Joyful cries were increasing by the minute. “He has come!” cried Daniel, waking up his wife and everybody at home. “Get up, get up! Mashiach has come! I’ve always believed in his coming – and at last he has come!”

Swiftly, like a young deer, Daniel took his small great-grandsons in his arms and everybody ran after him in the direction of the Wall where nobody was crying anymore. “The Lord has heard our prayers and accepted our tears – and the Mashiach has come!”

Those who had formerly laughed at, profaned and betrayed our Motherland present a sorry spectacle now. They want to join the fleeing Arabs, but the latter push them away. “You traitors, be off with you! May you fall in the abyss, together with your sin!”

One could hear the drone of airplanes: Jews from all over the world coming back to their native land. There will be no war any more; reason has triumphed. It is covering everything, just like water covers the sea. All people recognize the great Creator, the Savior of the people and the Land of Israel.

Daniel is marching in the front ranks, holding the banner of Mashiach in his hands. His children and grandchildren are singing loudly with him, “Mashiach, Mashiach, Mashiach.”

In response, Mashiach smiles back at him. He recognizes him from those times when he was speaking to people, predicting his coming.

Motik is hurrying there, holding plans for the third *Beis HaMikdash*. He is followed by architects, stonemasons and plasterers.

Women are carrying needlework articles.

From all the countries of the world people are bringing tribute: gold, silver, copper and other valuables in order to build G-d’s Holy Temple for ever.

All the people rejoice; they love one another. Eternal peace has come; there is no more hate – only friendship and love. Justice reigns. Righteous people are crying, “How did we find strength to hold out in those hard times?” It’s unbelievable!

Sinners are crying with shame, “It was such a trifle. We could easily have observed the commandments of the Torah – and we failed to do it! Shame upon us!”

Mashiach’s voice is heard. “Don’t worry, my people, G-d has washed off the grime of your sins and has forgiven you. All my righteous people will inherit the land for ever...”