**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayeitzei 5773**

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**The Bearskin Dance**

**Of the Cossacks**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

It was a beautiful autumn day in the Ukraine. The open fields were in blossom, the warm sun was illuminating the distant mountains, the winter was still weeks away, and the weather was perfect for a stroll or a picnic.

But Shlomo the innkeeper was preparing to die. Tomorrow night they would take him out of his one-man dungeon and hundreds of drunken barbarians would stab him to death when he fell down in the ‘Dance of the Bears’.

**Pleading to Hashem for Help**

He was so sick and depressed he wished it were over right now, that he would just die in his sleep tonight. “Oy, Hashem” he whispered to himself “Please do something, please help me!”

For almost a year, since he had been thrown into the pit for not paying his rent, he’d been saying the same prayer in a hundred different variations, but now he understood that it must be that G-d wants another martyr.

He thought about his wife and six children, what would become of them? And he began crying again for the thousandth time. “Oy! Rebono-Shel-Olom, help me!! Ratavet! (Save me) Have mercy!” But the only reply he heard were the crickets outside and the drunken guard singing near the hole above him in the still night.

**Shuddering from Cold Fear**

“They will come down to get me tomorrow night from that hole.” He thought to himself and he shuddered from cold fear, huddled up on his straw and tried to close his eyes.

Maybe he slept, suddenly he heard someone open the lock above him, slide away the bars covering the hole, throw down the rope ladder and begin to descend. He noticed that the singing had stopped, and his eyes were glued to the man descending

**It Was an Old Jew!**

Gevalt!!! It was a Jew! Maybe it was an angel! It was an old Jew, maybe sixty, maybe ninety years old, with a long white beard and a shining face climbing down the ladder!

When he had finally descended he brushed himself off saying, “Don’t worry, the guard is good and drunk! I told him it was my birthday and wanted to drink with him, after two bottles and all the singing and dancing he did, he’ll sleep soundly for a while.”

Shlomo’s heart was pounding with excitement, he recognized the old man! It was none other than the great Tzadik, the Shpola Zaide (Grandpa of Shpola). They say that this holy man received a blessing from the Baal Shem Tov when he was just days old for warmth and enthusiasm in serving G-d and to be “A Grandfather (Zaide) in Israel”. From then on he was called “Zaide” and was renowned for his wisdom and Joy.

**Dancing According to**

**Deep Kabalistic Secrets**

He was also famous for his dancing and sometimes on Motze Shabbos (Saturday night) he would call the musicians and dance for hours. (Some said that with each step and graceful turn he was really fighting spiritual battles and fixing unseen problems, all according to deep Kabalistic secrets.)

“Now,” continued the Tzadik to poor Shlomo “I’ve come here tonight to come to teach you how to dance. Tomorrow night they will take you out, dress you in a bearskin and force you to dance in a contest against a strong Cossack.

Whoever doesn’t perform gets jabbed with pins, and whoever falls, dies. I tried to collect money to get you out, but there is no money, as you well know.

**Tries to Encourage the Prisoner**

Your only chance is to be brave, and dance as well as you can. You have to try or you are lost, and I’m here to help you. If you run away they will just take another Jew or maybe even more, in your place. So let’s begin, don’t worry I can teach you, you will win, DON’T WORRY.”

But poor Shlomo was so weak and sick that try as he would, he could barely move his feet. And after a futile half-hour the Tzadik realized that he had to think fast.

“Nu, Shlomo. Put on my coat! Good! Now take this money, climb up the ladder and run home! Take your family to Shpole. The people there will care for you. Go!!! Go home!! Just remember, when you climb out of the hole, pull up the ladder and, oh yes, here is the key, pull the bars back over the hole, lock the lock and put the key in the guard’s pocket, and RUN!!!”

**Dressed in a Bearskin**

The bewildered man did as he was told and in minutes the Tzadik was alone. Twenty-four hours later, the next night at midnight, he was lifted out of the pit, dressed in a bearskin and lead to a macabre, torch-lit, makeshift arena. There, facing him was a huge Cossack also in a bearskin and surrounding them were several hundred noisy, drunken, red-eyed townspeople sitting on improvised stands, with the eerie flickering torchlight flashing off their knife blades and gold teeth.

They began to sing and stamp their feet with the tune. It was a known Cossack song that began slowly and gradually built up, little by little, finally reaching a maddening speed with the words “Hup Cossack! Hup Cossack!!!”

**Hard to Discern Who was the Cossack**

After just a few minutes it was hard for the crowd to discern who was who. The Jew moved and danced with such agility that they were sure that it was their Cossack inside, so they randomly jabbed whichever ‘bear’ was slowest with long needles and roared with laughter when he screamed and quickened his pace.

“Hup Cossack! Hup Cossack!” they all chanted, clapping their hands faster and faster, and the pace of the dance increased furiously from minute to minute. The Tzaddik began spinning and his opponent had to keep up with him. He jumped agilely from foot to foot, twisted, and leapt in the air faster and faster, five minutes, ten minutes, now fifteen. “HUP COSSACK!!!! HUP COSSACK!!!” The crowd was screaming, clapping, on their feet; their eyes were bulging with excitement! “HUP COSSACK!!! HUP COSSACK!!!!”

Suddenly one bear stopped…. He was dizzy, exhausted, confused and…. He fell!

OOOUUUUPPPAAAA!!!!! Screamed the crowd as they ran into the circle and pushed their knives into the fallen dancer while the other contestant, still dressed in his bearskin, made a silent, unnoticed getaway. Imagine their disappointment when they removed the bear head and revealed …. poor Yorik.

The Tzadik had saved the Jew, himself, put awe in the hearts of the gentiles and won a bearskin to boot.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**The Bar Mitzvah Reception**

Mr. Zvi Kahn of Golders Green, a London neighborhood, prepares boys for their bar mitzvahs. He teaches the boys how to read the Torah and the Haftarah, how to be the chazzan, and how to deliver a dvar Torah (Torah thought) in the synagogue or at a reception. Mr. Kahn's reputation as a masterful teacher proceeds him, so his clients include a wide gamut of boys coming from all sorts of families - Orthodox as well as non-observant.

In the winter of 1998, Mr. Kahn was contacted by a non-observant family, the Robinsons, (not their real name) to prepare their son Shawn for his bar mitzvah. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson were not antagonistic to Orthodoxy, rather, they were just ignorant of traditional Judaism.

**A Simple Enough Desire**

Neither of Robinsons had had a formal Jewish education, but their friends had celebrated the bar mitzvahs of their sons, so they were doing the same. All they wanted was that Shawn be able to recite the blessings at the Torah reading and make a little speech at the reception. It sounded simple enough.

After a few weeks of lessons, the Robinsons asked Mr. Kahn if he would grace them by attending the Sunday afternoon reception. Mr. Kahn said he would be happy to attend, but he would do so only if the food was kosher. "What does one thing have to do with the other?" Mr. Robinson asked. "We don't keep kosher at home, so why should we have a kosher celebration outside the home?"

**Giving the Total Package**

"When I teach the boys," replied Mr. Kahn, "I give them the total package. Becoming a bar mitzvah boy is not merely a 13th birthday celebration, it is a time for commitment. We do not only study the blessings and the speech. I explain the concepts of mitzvos, we discuss Sabbath observance and rules and guidelines of kashrus."

"That's fine," said Mr. Robinson, "but that does not obligate me to make a kosher affair." "Certainly not," said Mr. Kahn respectfully. "But then you must appreciate that I am not obligated to attend a non-kosher bar mitzvah affair which is totally against all I have been teaching your son." "I can respect that," said a disappointed but obstinate Mr. Robinson.

**Parents Capitulate to**

**Their Son’s Request**

Over the next few months, Shawn (who enjoyed Mr. Kahn calling him Simchah, his Hebrew name), became inspired by his teacher. He told his parents that he wanted Mr. Kahn to **be** able to attend his bar mitzvah. The Robinsons knew what that meant — they would have to have a kosher affair. They were not happy with that prospect for it would mean that some of their favorite foods could not be served. Reluctantly they capitulated to their son's request and called Mr. Kahn.

Mr. Kahn could tell from the conversation that the Robinsons were not enthusiastic about the change of plans, but nevertheless, they asked him to recommend a kosher caterer. Mr. Kahn suggested they call Mr. Josh Bleier\* of Royal Kosher Catering.\*

**Doubt Concerning the**

**Parents’ Commitment**

Weeks went by and the issue of the kosher catering did not come up again. Every once in a while Mr. Kahn wondered if indeed the Robinsons had called Royal Kosher. He was hesitant to bring up the matter for fear that it might look as though he were questioning their integrity. Yet the question gnawed at him.

On the Sunday morning of the bar mitzvah reception, Mr. Kahn decided to call Josh Bleier and see if indeed he was catering the event. He called Mr. Bleier at home but there was no answer. He called a half hour later and again no answer. This time he left a message on the answering machine that he needed to be called back immediately. He waited impatiently but received no call.

**Unable to Reach the Caterer**

He tried every 20 minutes and each time hung up in frustration at not reaching anyone. He decided to call the office of Royal Kosher, and there, too, all he got was an answering machine. He couldn't understand how a catering outfit could be working at an affair and not have a way of being contacted.

Now Mr. Kahn began debating whether he should go to the reception altogether. If it wasn't going to be kosher, he would have to walk out and that would be insulting. He certainly couldn't stay there he reasoned, for it would be a chillul Hashem – a desecration of Hashem’s name, for someone in his position to sit at a table where non-kosher food was being served. If he didn't go, however, and the affair was kosher, the Robinsons would be upset that the Orthodox teacher had lied to them about his coming, and that would be an even bigger chillul Hashem. Mr. Kahn tried Mr. Bleier's home and office one more time and again he reached no one.

**Decides to Go to the**

**Bar Mitzvah Reception**

By 1:00 p.m. Mr. Kahn decided that he would go to the bar mitzvah. It was the lesser of two evils if he had to leave. At least the Robinsons would see that he made the effort.

As he walked into the hall where the bar mitzvah was taking place. Mr. Sandy Pilberg of Prince Prestige Caterers came running towards him. "Zvi," he said excitedly, "it's only because of you that this bar mitzvah is kosher. What a zechus you have that no one here today will eat treif!" (Reflections of The Maggid, p.188 Rabbi Paysach Krohn)

The Torah tells us in last week’s parshas Toldos, of how Eisav sells his birthright to his brother Yakov for a plate of lentil beans. The verse quotes Eisav as saying to his brother Yakov, “Pour into me, now, some of that very red stuff (the lentils) for I am exhausted.” (Bereishis 25:30)

**The Temptation of Giving**

**Up One’s Birthright**

We see from here the character of the evil Eisav, namely, that he was a man of unquenchable physical ta’avos – specifically the desire for food. Eisav was willing to give up his birthright for food. Sadly, we see that many Jews today are willing to give up their birthright in exchange from some good tasting food.

We Jews must take strength in the fact that we are members of a special club. The club has rules of behavior. One set of rules of the Jewish club is the rules of eating kosher. Many Jews exclude themselves from the club and therefore squander their birthright by eating non-kosher food.

**A Paradigm of All that is Jewish**

Keeping kosher is a paradigm for all of Judaism, in that it involves putting the will of Hashem above our own individual desires. Making a decision to keep kosher means taking a step in the direction of controlling our desires. Keeping kosher means making a statement to the world that: “I do not eat everything that smells good. Rather, I control my desires by not eating certain foods.”

Through keeping kosher, we will all merit to retain our membership and to ensure our grandchildren’s membership in the Holy Jewish nation. The Jewish club has a lot of rules, and a lot of benefits. Only one who keeps the rules will get the benefits.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone.*

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Strange Dance**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

The Torah discussion between Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacohen — the rav of the Latvian community of Dvinsk and author of the”Ohr Somayach” — and one of his disciples was interrupted by the arrival of a young couple.

The rav invited them into his private chamber while the disciple waited outside. After a while the sound of singing and dancing came from

the rav’s room, arousing the curiosity of his disciple, who rushed to peek through the keyhole.

To his surprise he saw the rav and the couple singing and dancing around the table. After the rav came out of his room and bade the couple

farewell he explained to his disciple what had transpired.

“Don’t be surprised,” he told him, “why I spent so much time with that couple. Their parents are the most respected people of the community and dear friends of mine.

“For some silly reason the husband came to me the other day asking for a divorce. I asked him to bring his wife to me, and when they arrived I spent a long time convincing the young man to abandon his idea of divorce. When I finally succeeded I decided to put the final touch on domestic peace by dancing around the table with them.”

*Reprinted from last week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**Be a Soldier in Israel's**

**Operation Pillar of Defense**

**By Yishai Fleisher**

Shalom Friends,

Once again our country Israel goes to war. The news media has non-stop coverage to the South, and now, even to Tel Aviv. The radio wraps you up in the drama of it all, they don’t attempt to lighten the mood. Rockets fly at us, while our army pounds Gaza, right next door. Jews were killed today. Mira Scharf was killed by a rocket while in Israel to attend the memorial of Rivka Holtzberg who was killed by terrorists in Mumbai four years ago. Mira had a baby in her belly.

**A Lot of Intense Emotions**

Indeed, there are a lot of intense emotions in the county right now: on the one hand there is the ever present thought of our fellow soldiers and civilians under fire, and the fear for their, and our, lives. And on the other hand there is the need to fight, to push back the threat, to repel the war machine that has surfaced against us, right next door.

So many of us Israelis are tired of allowing our people to be terrorized, and that is what motivates us to overcome the fear of the here and now, the fear of the loss of our lives today in the hopes of a better tomorrow. We are a nation who takes proclamations and efforts to kill us seriously. And we are tired of the fear. We have come a long way to have our country, and we are not about to give it up. We know it is time to destroy the threats that we live with daily. This is a message to Iran. To Egypt. To Syria. Even to Saudi Arabia. We will survive and we will not be pushed around.

**Putting Personal Pains**

**And Challenges Aside**

Right now, as a nation, we must set personal issues aside. Personal pains and challenges must give way to the national issues. The focus must be on helping the other and coming together. My wife Malkah signed us up to receive guests for Shabbat from the South, people fleeing from the war zone. I really hope they don’t need it, but if they do, I hope they come to me, so that I can feel that I am helping. We all want to help. Many are saying Psalms on the buses and trains and others pray in any way they know how.

There are tanks, and choppers, and rockets and guns out there, and they are very real. But this is a spiritual war. It’s about what this world wants to be. Does this world want to be cowed into submission, or does it want light to finally penetrate the gloom and dread of terror.

**A Fight for Justice Over Evil**

This is a fight for the victory of justice over lies - Israel is a just cause and a force for good in this world. The enemy are those who want to stamp out our nation, our country, and the goodness we stand for. But our goodness is willing to fight evil, willing to stand up to it. Our goodness, and our will to fight for it, overcomes our fears, and instead fills us with pride. We should be proud of this war, because it is a point of pride to merit to combat evil instead of being a victim to it.

This is the month of Chanukah, the time in which we remember the unlikely rebellion of one Jewish family against a whole civilization that wanted to eradicate the Jewish way. The courage of the Maccabbees gives us light to this very day in the form of the Chanukiah (8 candled Menorah) and it reminds us of the miracles: The miracle that the light of Israel could not be stamped out, and the miracle (As Rabbi Chaim Richman told me) that there were a group of Jews who stood up and were willing to fight for that light.

G-d bless the soldiers of Israel.

*Reprinted from last week’s email “Eye on Zion.”*

**Who's Who**

**Rivka (Rebecca)**

Rivka (Rebecca) was the daughter of Betuel and sister of Laban. Rivka was born at the exact moment that Yitzchak was brought by Avraham as a sacrifice. She was renowned as a person of sterling character traits from a young age. She married her cousin Yitzchak (Isaac) and they had twin sons, Esau and Yaakov (Jacob). Rivka, like the other matriarchs, was a prophetess. She is buried in Hebron in Maarat HaMachpela.

**The Maharsha**



Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Halevi Edeles, known as the Maharsha, was born in Posen in the 16th century. He became renown as a brilliant scholar at an early age, and was chosen as a son-in-law by Rabbi Moshe Ashkenazi. His in-laws founded a yeshiva and placed it under his leadership. His mother-in-law, Edel, supported the students and he took on the last name Edeles in appreciation.

His commentary on the Talmud has become so popular, that it is printed in all the standard editions of the Talmud, and is regarded as a "must" for all Talmud scholars. He passed away on 5 Kislev, 1631.

*Reprinted from recent issues of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, New York.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Innkeeper Learns**

**An Important Lesson**

Once the Rav of Brisk, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichik, was traveling and stopped at a Jewish-run inn in Benowitz. It was the Rav's custom to travel incognito, so when he knocked on the door of the inn he received no special treatment. The weather was frigid and when Rav Yosef Dov saw the lights of an inn he was relieved. Finally, he anticipated a warm fire and a bed on which to stretch out his very weary body.

**An Altogether Different**

**Kind of Greeting**

He knocked expectantly on the heavy wooden door, but to his surprise, the Rav received an altogether different kind of greeting. When he opened the door, instead of welcoming the frozen man inside, the innkeeper brusquely said, "I am expecting a party of travelers to arrive any time now, and I have no room for you."

Despite the bitter, biting cold, the innkeeper was about to slam the door in the face of the frozen Jew. Rav Yosef Dov began to plead with him. "Please, let me come in. I don't even need a bed. Just a warm spot on the floor will do. Please, don't turn me out on this terrible night. Why, it's possible I could even die in this cold."

**Led to a Cold, Dark Corner of the Hallway**

After a few moments of this kind of pleading the innkeeper couldn't refuse, and so, he admitted the Jew into his premises. He led the man through the brightly lit central room with its blazing fire and showed him to a cold, dark corner of the hallway. There the poor Jew was permitted to curl up on the floor and rest.

Once he was settled on that spot, the Rav Yosef Dov removed a candle from his pocket and began to study Torah by its light. It wasn't more than a few moments before the innkeeper came raging into the hall, crying, "You can't light a candle here! You are keeping the other guests awake! Put it out immediately!"

Without a word, Yosef Dov obliged and put out the candle. Then he continued learning by heart. He was quickly immersed in his thoughts and the cold, hard floor ceased to bother him. Many hours went by and very late into the night the sound of horses and carriages could be heard approaching. The rumble stopped outside the inn door and the innkeeper ran out to greet his guests.

In came a group of Chasidim accompanying their Rebbe, Reb Aharon of Koidenov. Removing their coats, the men sat around the blazing fire, rubbing their hands together and warming themselves. Reb Aharon prepared to pray the evening service. As he stepped across the room to wash his hands he noticed a huddled figure lying in the dark hall. He studied the form for a moment and then cried out, "Reb Yosef Ber, is that you? What is the Rav of Brisk doing lying on the floor?!"

**The Innkeeper Began**

**To Tremble All Over**

When the innkeeper heard Reb Aharon's exclamation of horror, he began to tremble all over. His knees felt weak and he saw black before his eyes. Overcome with shame and remorse, he thought back to how he had treated this great man. After he recovered from his shock, he slowly approached the Rav. With downcast eyes, he said in a very small voice, "Rebbe, please forgive me. I didn't know it was you or I would never have treated you in such a disgraceful manner."

Reb Yosef Dov replied with a smile, "Of course, I forgive you. You needn't worry about that. However, I am making one stipulation." The innkeeper nodded his head vigorously. "Of course, Rebbe, anything you wish." He was ready to do any penance, give any sum to charity, anything to receive the forgiveness of the renowned Rav.

**A Condition for His Forgiveness**

"I will forgive you on the condition that you travel to Brisk and spend two weeks as a guest in my home."

The innkeeper agreed at once. Within several weeks he arrived in Brisk and was warmly welcomed into the Rav's home. For two weeks the innkeeper observed the Rav's every movement. He watched the great care with which the Rav cared for each Jew who entered his study, burdened with questions and problems great and small. He took note of how gently the Rav treated the poor and despondent and he learned many a lesson about the art of hospitality.

When, after two weeks, the innkeeper returned to Benowitz, he had learned his lessons well. It wasn't long before his inn earned a well- deserved reputation. It became known far and wide as the place where every guest was treated with the greatest kindness and hospitality. The innkeeper never forgot the two weeks he spent as a guest of the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichik.

*Reprinted from the Chaya Sarah 5773 edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, New York.*



**Parshat Vayeitze**

**What’s In It for Me?**

**By Simcha Groffman**

"Hi Jake, how are you doing?"

"Hi guys. Just fine. What's up?"

"We're on our way up to the school's library to help move and cover the books. They're going to paint the room and they need lots of help. Do you want to come?"

"Are they paying you anything to help?"

"Well, we never asked. I don't think so."

"Are they giving you free food?"

"We didn't ask about that either. We just wanted to help out."

"Are they at least putting the names of the volunteers on the bulletin board so everyone can see who they are?"

"Guess what. We didn't ask about that either."

"Well, guys have a good time."

"Does that mean that you are not coming?"

"Why should I come? They are not giving you any money, food, or recognition. What's in it for me?"

"What's in it for you, Jake?"

"That's right. What's in it for me?"

**Answering a Question with a Little Story**

"Do you mind if I answer your question with a little story?"

"Sure. I love stories."

"Yaakov Avinu, our forefather Yaakov, went to the home of his uncle Lavan to find refuge from Eisav, his brother, and to look for a wife. He met Rachel, Lavan's daughter, and the two decided to marry. He asked Lavan for his daughter's hand in marriage. Lavan replied that he must work for seven years in order to marry Rachel.

The time flies by, due to Yaakov's great love for Rachel. As the wedding day approaches, Rachel senses trouble. She knows that her father is a trickster, and may try to give her sister Leah to Yaakov as a bride. She makes up secret signals with Yaakov, so that he can identify her as the true bride.

**Whom Will She Now Marry?**

The wedding night arrives, and sure enough, Lavan comes to get Leah. Rachel is put on the spot. Should she let Leah go without giving her the secret signals? Then Lavan's devious plot will be exposed. But what about poor Leah? She will be so embarrassed. An unwanted bride. What a humiliation. Of course, she should give her the signals. But what about Rachel? She is finished. She will never marry her beloved Yaakov. Who knows whom she will marry? Perhaps his cruel brother Eisav. What should she do? What do you say Jake?"

"She should expose the plot. After all, she must worry about herself. She has her future to think about. Why should she give up a husband like Yaakov? What's in it for her?"

**Better to be Thrown into a Fiery**

**Furnace than Embarrass Someone**

"That is one way of looking at it. I'll tell you what's in it for her. She saves Leah from embarrassment. Our sages tell us that it is better to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass someone. More importantly, she masters the art of self-sacrifice and giving to other people."

"That sounds interesting. Can you tell me about it?"

"Jake, there are two ways that we can relate to people. One is, 'What can I get from them?' The second way is, 'What can I give to them?'" The one who always looks at people the first way will never be truly happy or fulfilled. He is always looking to get something. His wants will never be satisfied, because he can never have everything. He will always want more than he has. And, he will dislike people who do not give him what he wants. People will not like him because they know that he only wants to take from them."

"That sounds pretty miserable."

**The Truly Happy Person**

"It is. The giver, on the other hand, is a truly happy person. He is happy with what he has because he is not always looking to get things. He only wants to help people. By giving to people, he grows to love them. And they grow close to him."

"What a beautiful thought."

"Jake, it is reality. 'What's in it for me' is a good question. Helping others without pay or recognition is the best thing that you can do for yourself. You get much more than just a little money or a free meal. You get true happiness and good relationships with people. That's what's in it for you."

"Where's the library? I'm on my way to help. Now I really see what's in it for me."

*Reprinted from the 5761 archives of the Ohr Somayach website (ohr.edu).*

**Chasidic Story #782**

**"No Farbrengen?**

**Why Not?"**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000gOG0:001Gcrez000009Cn&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1352904445&randid=220458232&content=central##)

It was late in November, 1974. Outside of 770 Eastern Parkway, Chabad headquarters crowds milled about, buzzing with casual conversation after the completion of the morning service. The synagogue attendant arose to make the usual announcements. The congregation at 770 waited perfunctorily, already expecting what to hear.

According to system, the attendant would look to **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** while making the announcements. If the Rebbe walked away before the time for *mincha*, the afternoon prayer, was announced, it was understood that a *farbrengen* ("gathering" of chasidim) would take place, with *mincha* following afterward. If the Rebbe remained in his place, there would be no *farbrengen* that afternoon and the usual time for *mincha* would be announced.

Although many years earlier the Rebbe had conducted *farbrengens* frequently, the gatherings eventually dwindled to either the monthly Shabbos before the New Moon or a special Shabbos on the Jewish or Chabad calendar.

That particular year, 5735, the Rebbe had *farbrenged* more often than usual, which was why the chasidim assumed a *farbrengen* would take place, and especially since this Shabbos was 9 Kislev, both the birthday and *yahrzeit* of the Mitteler (Second) Lubavitcher Rebbe, and the following day, Sunday 10 Kislev, would mark the commemoration of his release from prison.

**The Rebbe Remained in His Place**

The attendant, too, was certain. He began making his usual announcements--*mitzvah* tanks that would go out Sunday to Manhattan-expecting the Rebbe to walk away from his place, the signal to announce that day's *farbrengen* at 1:30. But instead the Rebbe remained in his place.



**The Lubavitcher Rebbe speaking at a non-Shabbos farbrengen in 770**

The attendant, still certain of a *farbrengen*, continued making announcements. He urged people to participate in all the Rebbe's *mitzvah* campaigns, mentioning those the Rebbe had initiated over the years. But after he had drawn out saying anything he could, he saw the Rebbe still standing there. The hint was clear: the Rebbe was not going to *farbreng*.

The attendant gave one final look, then announced, "*Mincha* at four."

**The Chasidim Groaned in Disappointment**

The chasidim groaned in disappointment. Quietly the Rebbe left and went up to his room, followed by his chief secretary, Rabbi Chadakov.

Groups of students gathered around, trying to find the reason why they didn't merit a *farbrengen* on that special Shabbos. Perhaps the Rebbe wanted to announce a new *mitzvah*, which he would save for the *farbrengen* that would surely take place the next day and could be broadcast the world over.

*At the same time the Chassidim were leaving 770, the morning service ended in the Franklin* shul *on the edge of Crown Heights. As* Kiddush *was being prepared, a young and somewhat different-looking boy sat excitedly at the head of the table. It was his* bar mitzvah*, the day he was "now a man" and would be religiously responsible. Around him adults chatted about the* farbrengen *that day for 9 Kislev, urging everyone to finish before 1:00 so they could walk over to 770.*

*As guests hurried past the boy and wished him* mazel tov*, the boy nodded and smiled back, yet sighed, resigned to a short ceremony. This significant event in his life would be finished in less than an hour.*

*Just then a neighbor who prayed at 770 walked in. "Sorry, folks, no* farbrengen *today."*

*The Franklin congregants were both shocked and disappointed. Nevertheless, now free of any rush, they raised their glasses in toast to the boy, and the* Kiddush *turned into a mini-*farbrengen *that lasted almost until* mincha*. The* bar mitzvah *boy was delighted.*

**Waiting for the Rebbe’s Return**

The next day, Sunday, was 10 Kislev, so the Rebbe went as usual to the *Ohel* (burial place of his father-in-law and predecessor) that morning. The chasidim eagerly awaited his return. Naturally the Rebbe would go to his office for the afternoon prayer, then speak to Rabbi Chodakov about a *farbrengen*.

To their dismay, the Rebbe returned in the late afternoon and went straight to the afternoon service. He left his office afterward without a word to Rabbi Chadakov.

It was clear: no *farbrengen* that day, either.

**Discovering the Reason for the No Farbrengen**

Rabbi Nachman Yosef Twersky, a young student at the time, just knew there had to be a reason behind all this. He managed to contact someone "in the know," who related the most wondrous story.

*It began a few months earlier. The mother of a boy in a Chabad school in New York sent the Rebbe a letter complaining about her son who, because of his unusual appearance, was being teased mercilessly by his classmates.*

*The Rebbe advised the woman to speak to the principal, who would certainly intervene. A few weeks later, the woman wrote back. Apparently the principal did little and the teasing continued.*

*The Rebbe called for Rabbi Chadokov. He asked his secretary to contact the school and ask, on the Rebbe's behalf, why this painful situation had not been corrected.*

*"What are they waiting for?" the Rebbe demanded. "That I myself visit the school and handle this?"*

*Rabbi Chodakov phoned the school. After hearing the Rebbe's instructions, the principal immediately took action, and the bullying stopped.*

That Shabbos, 9 Kislev, after the Rebbe finished *mincha* and went to his room, he again summoned Rabbi Chodakov and explained that the boy's *bar mitzvah* was taking place that Shabbos afternoon.

"The boy must not feel cheated that his *farbrengen* ended earlier than usual because of mine," the Rebbe insisted. It was for this reason that the Rebbe chose not to *farbreng*.

**Not Wanting to Ruin the Boy’s Celebration**

The next day, continued the Rebbe, would be the boy's *bar mitzvah* celebration. Had the Rebbe conducted his usual *farbrengen*, the hasty departure of so many guests would ruin the boy's celebration.

So on 10 Kislev 5735, there was no *farbrengen* either.

***Source*:** Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an Avner Institute mailing Rebbebook@Gmail.com.

*Biographical note*: **Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**, ***the Lubavitcher Rebbe*** (11 Nissan 1902 - 3 Tammuz 1994), became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, passed away in Brooklyn on 10 Shvat 1950.

He is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Jewish leaders of the second half of the 20th century. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet.

His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.

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