

MEMOIRS
of
REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON

wife of
RABBI LEVI YITZCHAK SCHNEERSON
and
mother of
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE
RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON

זצוקללה"ה נבג"מ זי"ע



Installment 1



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MEMOIRS
OF
REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON

INSTALLMENT 2

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PREFACE

We are pleased to present Installment 2 of *Memoirs by Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson*—an annotated English translation of the memoirs by Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson, wife of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson and mother of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory.¹

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May the increase in the dissemination of the Chasidic wellsprings hasten the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days.

Kehot Publication Society

13 Tishrei 5772

1. For further details see the Preface to Installment 1.

(**continuation**, Wednesday, Fast of Gedalya, 5708 / September 17, 1947)

Declaration of faith in the stronghold of heresy

Before Passover of that year,¹⁷ the government conducted a census of the entire population. One of the questions was, "Are you a believer in G-d?" and some believers were fearful to identify themselves as such. So my husband ascended the *bimah* in the synagogue on Shabbos, when a large crowd was assembled, and declared: "Failing to respond correctly is true heresy; no Jew may do so!"

His words had such a remarkable impact, that one individual with a position in a government office whose wife had already written on the form that he was a non-believer, went to the statistics office and asked for the erroneous information to be corrected—that he was, in fact, a believer. Very pleased that he had mustered the courage to do this, the fellow came to thank the Rav for having influenced him so.

Wise and clever responses

In the course of his interrogations—they were usually held around 3-4 a.m.—he was asked: "How were you able to carry out such a major (matzoh baking) operation, and for religious purpose, no less, during a year when there was a shortage of flour and food in general?!"

My husband replied simply: "When I visited Kalinin,¹⁴ I bribed him, so he gave me a permit." The interrogator, may his name be erased, was speechless.

The second thing they asked concerned his public address about the census question on faith. It was clear that everything he said in the synagogue had been relayed to them, word-for-word. They had, evidently, planted an agent to watch my husband's behavior, and to observe his influence

17. 1939.

over the people. We later learned that one of the congregants had been the informer.

My husband replied that the Soviet regime achieves all its objectives only through truth. So for a Jew to openly misrepresent his true belief, out of fear for losing his livelihood etc., would be untruthful! He dutifully insisted that no one deceive the census-takers.

Oh, how wisely and cleverly he deflected their questioning! His responses put an end to both of these lines of inquiry.

11 Shevat, 5708 / January 22, 1948

Food packages – but not on Shabbos!

For five months, I searched in vain to pinpoint my husband's whereabouts, and also tried to ascertain whether he received the packages that I sent to Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk in his name. They would always respond, "He is not here."

While seeking solutions—no one would advise me, for everyone was afraid to get involved—I received a notice from the Yekaterinoslav¹⁸ prison informing me that Levik Zalmanovitch Schneerson¹⁹ is being held in cell number..., and that I have permission to supply him with food and money.

First and foremost, I was overjoyed to know that my husband was alive. Furthermore, I would be able to bring him whatever possible. After all the difficulties and formalities that I had been forced to endure, I supplied him with a package of food.

18. The city was named Yekaterinoslav until 1926, when it was changed to Dnepropetrovsk.

19. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's full Russian name.

The day for receiving packages at the prison was determined by the alphabet, divided over the course of ten days. The first time I gave them a package, he did indeed receive it, and I received a receipt with his signature. His second turn, determined by the first letter of his name, occurred on Shabbos. I prepared everything on Friday, and on Shabbos morning I took along a Russian girl to carry the package to the prison. Now, more than four kilograms of food, including bread, could not be sent, and if I didn't go on the allotted day, I would have had to wait another ten days. Also, of the four kilograms of bread that I had brought, the guards "took tithes" twice. I was also certain that he did not eat any of the prison food. Taking all this into account, I reasoned that it was permissible to do this on Shabbos.²⁰

Yet, after waiting from seven in the morning until seven in the evening—by which time it was completely dark—I received a note which the commanding officer read out aloud in the presence of many others also standing in line (although they didn't understand its message): "Since today is Shabbos, I did not take the package."

To cope with such an experience one needed my husband's resoluteness and piety. This, despite the fact that for six months he had existed only on black bread and water, living through incredible suffering, and knowing that he would need to wait quite a while until he could receive another package.

After great effort I managed to convince the prison administrator to give him the package in three days' time—although my husband derived more pleasure from *refusing* to take the package on Shabbos than of receiving it ahead of his next turn.

20. The preservation of a life overrides the laws of Shabbos, thus, one is permitted to violate Shabbos in order to save a life.

From then on the staff dubbed him: “The man who refuses to receive packages on Shabbos.”

The Rebbetzin is interrogated

On a Shabbos day, two weeks after my husband was transferred back to Dnepropetrovsk, three NKVD agents paid a visit to our home to conduct another, more thorough search. All my husband’s books and manuscripts which he guarded more than his very life²¹—were confiscated and placed in their automobile. My impassioned pleas that they leave the books in the house led them to consult, by telephone, with their superiors, and in the end they returned the books to me. Alas, I could not save them²² from Hitler’s hands...²³

—On the morning immediately following his arrest in our home before Passover, he was transported to Kiev, and incarcerated in the Narkomat Prison²⁴ in the company of the worst criminals. A certain Jew noticed, with distress, how two guards led my husband to the second class cabin of the train and started off in his direction. One of the guards said to him,

21. See the Rebbe’s letter of the beginning of Tammuz 5734 to Rabbi Isser Klwugant (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 29, p. 191): “In Moscow, my mother, of blessed memory, entrusted your brother, may he rest in peace, with a large-size two-volume set of Midrash Rabbah, in the margins of which my father wrote numerous glosses. Can you please ascertain for me what became of them? Please understand the tremendous significance of this... ” Also, see the talk of 6 Tishrei 5750, secs. 2, 4 (Torat Menachem–Hitvaaduyot 5750, vol. 1, p. 61 ff; *ibid.* p. 64 ff.).

22. See the Rebbe’s talk of Ekev, 20 Av 5750 (Torat Menachem–Hitvaaduyot, vol. 4, p. 150), fn. 51: “I wish to point out a wondrous fact. The vast majority of my father’s published works are taken from manuscripts that he wrote while in exile. By Divine Providence, these writings have been made public, while the vast majority of his writings, (thousands of pages!), which he wrote while serving as a rabbi in his community, are not yet in our possession.”

23. This suggests that the books and manuscripts that were left behind in Dnepropetrovsk were lost during the Nazi conquest of the city.

24. Prison of the People’s Commissar.

“When the priests recite the priestly blessing, it is forbidden to gaze at them. No one should approach the railcar, and do not divulge what was seen here!”—

As strong as the desire must have been to relay this report to me—fear prevented anyone from doing so, even at a time when I was unsure whether my husband was still alive. Only later, after my husband was in exile, and I had already met him, was I told of this encounter.

The purpose of the second search was to dig up additional material in order to make his crimes more grievous. Exactly what material, I don’t know.

After the search I was summoned to the NKVD office, where they badgered me for several hours to disclose what I knew about my husband’s public Yom Tov talks, what I knew about his correspondence overseas, and what my children write to us, particularly my son²⁵ in America.²⁶ In the end, despite all their intimidation, my answers offered them no new information, and the state of affairs remained the same.

25 Shevat, 5708 / February 5, 1948

Regards from prison

During this entire time I was not given the opportunity to see my husband. I did, however, receive written regards. This was in the form of a letter that arrived from Nagayeva Bay,²⁷ from a fellow who spent Passover in a cell in Kiev together with my husband. My husband later told me that he was a non-Jewish professor who was on the verge of committing

25. The Rebbe.

26. Apparently meaning the Free World, for it was not until 1941 that the Rebbe reached the shores of America.

27. This bay is situated next to the city of Magadan in Central Russia, on the northern coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. During the Stalin period, it served as a point of transfer for prisoners on their way to the camps of Kolyma and Magadan.

suicide, and my husband dragged him away from a prepared noose.

This information was very welcome to me. In reporting on my husband's health, he wrote that he will never forget Levik Zalmanovitch—his sharp mind and his broad knowledge. He reported that they were four people in one cell, and that the other three survived only due to my husband's encouragement not to allow all the torment to demoralize them.

The man was also impressed by my husband's fortitude. Like the other prisoners, my husband was ordered to remove his beard. Amongst the prisoners were rabbis and elderly religious Jews who tried to prevent their beards from being removed, but to no avail—they were forcibly shaven. But when "S's"²⁸ turn came, he stated defiantly: "You will not remove my beard!" Frightened, they relented and let the matter be.

Indeed, as I later observed for myself, he was the only prisoner with a beard. Naturally, many pious Jews were envious of him for this.

Hope of release

At the end of August 1939, my husband was brought back to Dnepropetrovsk, and I was able to bring him a package of food every ten days.²⁹ Yet, I had no way of knowing his condition. There were doctors in the prison whom we knew that saw him, as well as various prison employees who saw him daily. But they would not tell me a word. When some of the employees eventually did convey regards from him, it later turned out to be incorrect.

However, I did receive factual regards from my husband, one time, on a Shabbos day. My husband had been brought to

28. Schneerson's

29. As recounted above, p. 00.

back to Dnepropetrovsk, and dropped off several kilometers from the city proper. An acquaintance happened to be there, and feigned a cough, indicating to my husband that he recognized him. My husband, too, responded with a cough. This report, which was conveyed to me immediately, enlightened me on my husband's condition that he looked healthy and was holding up well. He later told me that at that time he was under the impression that he was about to be released, so he was in better spirits. Alas, soon afterward, everything changed for the worse.

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May they be blessed with healthy, happy, long lives filled with true *yiddishe, chasidische nachas* from their children and abundant success in all their endeavors