

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 3



KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY
770 Eastern Parkway / Brooklyn, NY 11213
5772 • 2011

PREFACE

We are pleased to present Installment 3 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

*

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

Kehot Publication Society

28 Tishrei 5772

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

MEMOIRS

OF

REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON

INSTALLMENT 3

Published and Copyrighted © 2011
by

KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

770 Eastern Parkway / Brooklyn, New York 11213

(718) 774-4000 / Fax (718) 774-2718

editor@kehot.com

Orders:

291 Kingston Avenue / Brooklyn, New York 11213

(718) 778-0226 / Fax (718) 778-4148

www.kehot.com

All rights reserved.

The Kehot logo is a trademark of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch.

Manufactured in the United States of America

נסדר והוכן לדפוס על ידי חיים שאול בן חנה

נדפס בדפוס: 628-6700 (718) 11237 Johnson Ave. Brooklyn N.Y. 11237 The PrintHouse

An Unforgettable Yom Kippur

Time passed in this way, until the month of Tishrei arrived. My husband's turn to receive packages occurred on the day before Rosh Hashanah and on the day before Yom Kippur. This was comforting as I would be able to send him various foods—meat and fish—which would remind him somewhat of Yom Tov at home.

In anticipation of Yom Kippur, I secretly requested from a Jewish doctor that worked there that he pay a visit my husband. Indeed, late at night after Yom Kippur and *havdalah* he visited my husband's cell, handed him a cigarette—quite a treat under the circumstances—and spent some time with him observing how he ate as he broke his fast.

One day, on an afternoon in the month of Cheshvan, a young man entered our home. He ascended the steps, walked into our apartment, and went straight to the dining room. He asked no one for directions; it was as if he knew the house well. The young man seated himself on a chair and introduced himself by asserting that if I breathe a word to anyone about his visit, we will both be in danger!

Rachel,³⁰ the girl who stayed in our home for many years, was present in the room when the man entered.

—She was so devoted to us that she had pleaded with the NKVD agents that they arrest her and spare the Rav, insisting that she will gladly, with all her heart, be imprisoned in his place for the entire term of his sentence.—

When the young man noticed her, he said that “her presence did not concern him, and proceeded to state that he wished to convey regards from “Levik Zalmanovitch.”³¹ It is impossible to express in writing the feelings that I experienced at that moment...

30.

31. I.e., Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson.

He continued: “Your husband gave me an exact description of your home so that I would not need to ask anyone for directions, and would go unnoticed. Levik Zalmanovitch was thirty-two days in solitary confinement and on the thirty-third day I was confined to that cell with him.”

He was a Christian, and an engineer, who was released after sixth months of incarceration. Before his release, he promised my husband that as soon as he would return home and change out of his prison uniform, he would bring regards from him. This he did, and immediately came to our home.

He related that he had spent the month of Tishrei together with my husband. “As long as live, I will never forget his Yom Kippur. He wept and cried out aloud the entire day, reciting chapters of Psalms by heart until late at night. He didn’t say a single word to me the entire day, and I didn’t have the courage to initiate a conversation.”

Later, when we were already in exile, my husband told me that not having a *siddur* or *machzor* on that Yom Kippur he, he recited what he remembered by heart—which was enough to keep him occupied for the entire day.

“Of what crime has my husband been accused?” I asked. “He built a “*meeka*” (i.e., a *mikveh*) in the courtyard of the synagogue—this is what he is being accused of.³² The *shammes* (beadle) had divulged some information about him.”

Indeed, at that time there were discussions about building a *mikveh*. The *shammes* of the *shul* had disclosed that the Rav had raised a large sum of money to build it. He also testified that there was a collection in our home, on *Simchas Torah*, for

32. In the Russian: “This is the garment they have sewn for him.”

Tukhachevsky's and Bukharin's widows,³³ and that the main solicitor had been my husband, of blessed memory.

In order to confirm this testimony, they brought together the witnesses and my husband for a joint, face-to-face interrogation. The moment the *shammes* and a *shochet*³⁴—who was also in prison—saw my husband they repudiated their earlier testimony, declaring that they had only signed because they had been placed under duress.

Then the engineer said to me, since sending notes is forbidden, find a way to inform your husband whether *Rosh Chodesh*³⁵ of the month of Kislev will be celebrated this year for one day, or two.³⁶ "This question is weighing heavy on him. It is connected to the Maccabees." He meant to say that it was related to the festival of Chanukah.³⁷

"Schneersohn's group"

This took place in the beginning of Kislev. Time passed and all the while I sought ways to prevent my husband from being brought to trial. I approached the director of the division of the NKVD where he was being held, and although he was Jewish, he cruelly rebuffed me every time.

From the prosecutor I learned that the prosecution has classified the matter as a group of religious counter-

33. Mikhail Tukhachevsky (1893-1937)—commander in chief of the Red army. Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938)—Soviet revolutionary and politician. Both were accused of treason and executed by the Soviets..

34. Ritual slaughterer, pl. *shochtim*.

35. The Rosh Chodesh of the month of Kislev could sometimes be two days or only one.

36. See p. 000.

37. Only by knowing when the month of Kislev begins can one know which day is 25 Kislev—the first day of Chanukah.

revolutionaries, headed by Schneersohn.³⁸ This was terrifying news.

In my search for ways to save my husband, I travelled to Moscow with a petition in hand to the chief prosecutor. After several days I located the waiting area to his office, and spent several hours a day waiting there. Eventually, he received me quite graciously, and assured me that my husband's file would be re-examined. As I sat before him, he looked through all the documents in which I made out the title "Schneersohn's Group."

I sensed that his civility was insincere. Yet when he told me to return home and that he would send me a response—I wanted to believe that the outcome would be positive.

I returned home with a hopeful heart.

A trial by "Special Council"

Shortly afterward, reports began to circulate that the case will be transferred to Moscow, and that it would be tried by a "Special Council."³⁹ This meant a "trial" tightly supervised by a team of four representatives of the highest civil and military administrations. They would also decide from the outset, even before the trial, the category of criminal to which the accused belonged.

This was despite all the petitions that I had presented to the authorities, and after all the telephone calls that I had made to the prosecutor and the interrogator. After all this, they sent me a message informing me that they had already compiled all the evidence against my husband, and that it has

38. Most likely a reference to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe.

39. See Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's autobiographical note concerning his name, imprisonment, and exile (note 1): "They informed me that my case had been assigned to the "NKVD Special Council" on the night of Hoshanah Rabbah, close to daybreak, in the prison in Dnepropetrovsk. They sentenced me to five years in exile."

been dispatched to Moscow, to the Department for Special Matters. They even added venomously, "See how prominent your husband is—that we are transferring his case exclusively to Moscow, the capital city."

From all this it was clear that they were planning to sentence my husband to exiled, and this was a very unpleasant notion to come to terms with. Considering that his passport confirmed that he was more than seventy years old⁴⁰, and he had papers diagnosing a heart condition. I pressed hard to win approval for a special escort to accompany him on the journey. After all my efforts, I was informed that they expected him to make the journey in good health.

When I asked for permission to include more than four kilograms of food in the package for my husband, they responded that he had become so healthy that I wouldn't recognize him, and that he eats all the prison food...

However, once they had set the day that my husband was to be exiled, the interrogator told me to bake something for him for the journey, because he had not put any of their food into his mouth during his entire stay in prison...

40. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was born 18 Nissan 5683 (1878), but his official documents listed other dates. Exhibit on p. 000 indicates that he was 66 years old in 1937.

This publishing effort has been generously funded by a group of individuals who have taken a leading role in publishing the Torah teachings, life story, and recordings of the Rebbe

Benyomin and Rochel Federman

Yossi and Nechama Dina Katz

Uri and Bassie Laber

Sholom and Esther Laine

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