

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 5



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OF

REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON

INSTALLMENT 5

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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

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PREFACE

We are pleased to present Installment 5 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

11 Cheshvan 5772

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

*Isru Chag Pesach [5708—1948]***Our parting in Kharkov**

As I have noted, I wish to record my recollections of that period to the best of my ability. But eight years have passed since then, and during the past few years I have experienced so many hardships that it seems I have started to forget some of those events.

From⁵² the outside, the prison in Kharkov seems less forbidding than the one in Dnepropetrovsk. It is cleaner, and to some degree resembles a private dwelling, giving the impression that perhaps things are not so bad for those inside. But the reality is very different; on the inside, it's the identical situation.

My husband came out to meet me, again accompanied by a guard, and we spoke through a wire grate.

Since the last time I had seen him, his appearance had changed dreadfully. Naturally, he was happy I had come. It was very difficult for both of us to share everything we wanted to say. Here, too, they barely let us speak. My husband did not yet know when the prisoners were to be deported.

When we parted, he again wept profusely, trying to compose himself. He was wearing a fur hat with leather flaps down over his ears—not his usual mode of dress—and in general he seemed in very low spirits. It was painful to see him without his usual fortitude. He had become very emaciated.

Deportation

I hoped to observe the prisoners' trip to the train station, but information about it was not forthcoming, and I had no way of finding it out.

52. This continues the narrative from 4.

So I wandered around the prison courtyard, and as night approached, I saw a truck leaving the yard. It was so tall that a ladder was needed to get in. Across its width were benches made of wooden planks, on which sat a group of men, each wearing the clothing he possessed. Some had covered themselves with blankets, and among them were also several women. It did not seem to me that my husband was among this group. But I scrutinized the truck carefully and noticed that everyone held their heads down so that their faces would not be visible.

Later my husband told me that, in fact, he had been in that group, which was being deported to exile. The truck took them out into the countryside, where they were taken onto a waiting train. So began the *etap* convoy into exile.

I kept them in view the whole time, following those poor sufferers with my gaze.

(The journey took one month to complete, during which they were absolutely without any water for eleven days. My husband later described to me with deep emotion how difficult it was for him to have no water for *negel-vasser*.⁵³ I saw that he was unable to forget this experience. I was amazed when he told me what he did for drinking water to quench his thirst; he just shrugged off my question and told me that one of the convoy guards had given him glasses of water several times, which he used for *negel-vasser*. ("You can't imagine what a wonderful 'taste' that had for me!") The guard handed him the water in exchange for some food my husband had given him from his provisions for the journey.)

Meanwhile night had fallen and I returned to where I was staying. I would have liked to stay another day in Kharkov to find out more clearly what would happen to my husband, but I could no longer remain concealed in [Hirscheh Rabinowitz's] house, and it was dangerous for my presence there to become known.

53. Ritual hand washing upon awakening from sleep.

So I returned to the train station to travel back home. The train was scheduled to leave at 10:00 p.m., but did not actually leave until 4:00 a.m. There was no heating in the station, or anywhere to sit. Many passengers were waiting to leave, and since it was so bitterly cold, it was impossible to stand outside, so everyone gathered inside the station. I found a corner where I could rest on a small cushion I had with me.

Mr. Rabinowitz had escorted me to the train station and didn't leave until I boarded the train at 4:00 o'clock in the morning. Getting into the carriage was not at all easy, either. Mr. Rabinowitz actually had to push me in. I don't think I would have had enough strength to do it on my own. Until today I feel deeply grateful to him for the fine manner in which he gave me his help.

After a very uncomfortable trip, I finally arrived home in the evening, satisfied to have accomplished all that I was able. All that was left for me to do now was to await news about my husband's situation.

A telegram from Chi'ili

Several weeks later, I received an unstamped postcard. From it I learned that my husband was alive and still in transit. But I did not know from where it had been sent.

More than two weeks later, at 1:00 o'clock in the middle of the night, there was a knock at my window; we no longer had a bell at our door. It was a telegram delivery, informing me that my husband had arrived at his destination.

Normally there was no mail delivery at night. But the postal workers had realized that the telegram had news about the *Rav*, and all of them were interested. One of the workers, a Jewish girl, volunteered to take care to bring me the telegram in the middle of the night.

We began examining the telegram to find out from where it had been sent, so that we could try to discover the location of the village where my husband was now staying.

Talit and tefillin—for the first time in a year

The convoy of exiles had been brought to the capital city of Kazakhstan⁵⁴ in Central Asia. From there they were sent in separate groups to their ultimate destinations. The date was the 15th of Shevat⁵⁵ [1/25/1940].

Later my husband told me of the joy the exiles experienced as they felt their new-found freedom. Now they were able to move around without a guard, board a trolley and travel whenever and wherever they desired. After eleven months of painful—and, we should add, frightful—experiences, this was a feeling most difficult for him to express to others. He deeply desired to celebrate this elation in some way, but he was still alone among strangers. The local population consisted of strange natives, Kazakhs. So he had no one with whom to share his feelings, and had to suffice with just the thought itself.

From Alma-Ata, they were sent in groups to the various regional centers. His regional center was Kzyl-Orda. All the exiles wanted to be permitted to remain there, because it was a city, and must have had some Jews living there, too. But they were not allowed to stay there—except for one former government official among them, who was given lodgings near a railway. Naturally he was overjoyed to remain there instead of having to stay in some remote village.

The other exiles stayed only overnight in that city, with no opportunity to see anyone there. Two of the group

54. Alma-Ata (now known as Almaty)—see autobiographical note mentioned cited in Installment 1, footnote 2.

55. It is noteworthy that exactly twenty years after this day (15 Shevat, 5700) the Rebbe mentioned his father's notes for the first time (*Torat Menachem—Hitva'aduyot* 5720, Vol. I, p. 365ff.).

[my husband and another Jewish exile] were then sent off to Chi'ili,⁵⁶ four hours journey from the regional center.

[26th Iyar, 5708]

Late at night they arrived in Chi'ili. It was so dark that they had no idea where to get off the vehicle that brought them. It was dreadfully cold. They didn't understand even a word of the Kazakh language. Using Russian, however, they managed to find out that one Jewish resident lived there, and they somehow reached his home. He was a tailor who had once been exiled there, but while there had married a Christian woman and remained there to live.

After such an exhausting journey, the two exiles probably did not look their best and, upon seeing the two, the tailor apparently found them not to his liking. Despite all their appeals, he absolutely refused to let them into his home.

With their last strength, they were forced to continue their search. The ground there is so swampy that it almost never freezes. As my husband later told me, it was almost impossible to pull one's feet out of the quagmire.

Noticing a light shining through a window, they went into that "house." Like all houses in that region, it was constructed of clay, which was more often damp than dry. Nor did the house have any floor other than earth smeared over with clay.

The homeowner and his non-Jewish wife, apparently feeling some pity for them, allowed them into their home. They let them stay in the kitchen, where they spread out a blanket for them on the ground near the door. Without taking off their clothes, the two guests lay down to sleep in their coats. Lying there in the cold and damp, some of which penetrated their coats, it was obviously most difficult to fall

56. In the diary entry mentioned on p. 00: "They sentenced me to exile in the town of Chi'ili, which [as spelled in Hebrew] is related to the word צל [tzeil—'shadow'], and has the same numerical value as ג-א צל [shadow of G-d]."

asleep. But the owners gave them glasses of hot water to drink, and eventually they fell asleep for awhile.

Before long, a new day started to dawn. They needed to rise and think about securing more permanent lodging. The owners sized up their two guests and decided to allow my husband, of blessed memory, to remain in their home. But they absolutely refused to let the other Jew stay as well. Naturally, my husband found it uncomfortable to keep the accommodation only for himself. However, he had no choice but to agree. His place to stay was in the kitchen, in which the owners and their two children needed to eat their meals and through which they needed to pass.

In spite of all, at least my husband now had a roof over his head, and a home address. He immediately sent me a telegram that, before anything else, I should send him *talit* and *tefillin* and a package of food.

After all my investigations at the post office, I finally managed, with difficulty, to find a way to establish contact with his local post office. Of course, I sent off both the items he requested. The *talit* and *tefillin* arrived within three weeks, but the package of food took seven weeks to arrive.

It was the first time in almost a year that he had clothed himself for prayer the way a Jew is required to do. As he later told me, he would never forget the delight he then experienced. But it was a purely spiritual delight.

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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