

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 7



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MEMOIRS

OF

REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON

INSTALLMENT 7

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PREFACE

We are please to present Installment 7 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

In honor of the annual International Conference of Shluchim taking place this week, we have included, as a supplement, several pages from a different section of the Rebbetzin's memoirs in which she discusses her illustrious son the Rebbe ז"ל.

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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

25 Mar-Cheshvan 5772

1 For further details see the Preface to Installment 1.

+Two weeks before Passover and nowhere to live

As Passover approached, new problems arose. The house was full of *chametz*⁶¹ and, living at such close quarters with the owners, we couldn't avoid having it nearby. Thinking that the Tatar owners, observant of their own religion, might sympathize with our predicament, we mentioned it to them. They, however, didn't seem to understand what we were talking about, and were upset most of all by any extra bucket of water we used.⁶² In short order, they ordered us harshly to vacate the premises!

Oh, how distressing it was for us to have to wander around just two weeks before Passover, looking for a place to live, especially considering the problems common to all local houses. I have little desire to write about all this.

Briefly, not far from our residence lived a non-Jewish woman, whose home had an extra room with its own entrance, something quite uncommon there. It even had a wooden floor, which was especially rare. Very fond of money, she agreed to rent us this room for fifty rubles a month. Her children, though, were hooligans, and everyone warned us they would be impossible to live with. Having no other choice, however, we agreed to move in.

A week before Passover, we loaded all our baggage onto a cart and brought it to the new apartment. It was very difficult to watch my husband—together with a fellow deportee—hauling it all.

The landlady provided us with two cots, but they were so infested with roaches that it was impossible to clean them out, making it very difficult to sleep on them.

With a concerted effort, I tried to create a festive spirit, as befitting the approaching *Yom Tov*.

61. Leavened food, forbidden for Jews on Passover.

62. Apparently for Passover cleaning.

The Festival of Freedom—in exile

On my trip to Chi'ili, I had brought two new pails [for Passover use], which I had finally managed to buy after standing in line⁶³ for an entire day. During the journey, however, they had disappeared, as could be expected. I sent telegrams to Moscow and Yekaterinoslav⁶⁴ about the loss, but they could not be found. The railroad authority promised to compensate me for this with seven rubles, but to collect I would need to travel to the main office in Tashkent. As usual, this didn't resolve the problem, and the pails were not found.

Without Passover utensils, my husband was unequivocal that he would not eat during the entire festival. I resolved to do something about it.

A four-hour journey from us lived a group of Jewish deportees from Kiev in close proximity to each other. Evidently, it was a relatively well-organized community. Among them were a Rabbi,⁶⁵ a *shochet*,⁶⁶ and a communal leader named Kalyakov,⁶⁷ who had been among the wealthy Jews of Kiev. I traveled there in an effort to find a solution for my serious problem.

During the two days I spent there, I had a tin-plate pail made for me from new materials. Then I ordered meat and fish, requesting that they be delivered the day before Passover.

Best of all, after I arrived at the train-station, someone gave me more than a kilo of black bread. In retrospect, I don't understand how we were able to eat that kind of bread. (I

63. In the original: "in *otchered*"—integral to life in the Soviet Union, where everyone had to wait in line for bread and other basic necessities.

64. The original name of Dnepropetrovsk until 1926.

65. Rabbi Aryeh Leib Kaplan (Kussevitsky) אריה (1887-Yom Kippur, 1943). Concerning him see *Tol'dos Levi Yitzchak*, Vol. II, p. 606ff.; *Kfar Chabad magazine* #345, p. 70ff.).

66. R. BenTziyon Geisinsky—see sources mentioned in previous footnote.

67. R. Moshe Kalyakov—see sources mentioned in footnote 5.

should add, however, that the black bread never harmed us. In fact, after falling ill with dysentery later that summer, I recovered by eating black bread.⁶⁸)

I was filled with inestimable joy at these successes; especially by the new tin pail, which sparkled!

Meanwhile, life went on.

I even invited a guest for Passover. The dishes I had brought from home were still clean. We put together a makeshift table from some boards, over which I spread a white tablecloth. The Kazakh who delivered the chicken and fish on the day before *Yom Tov* couldn't stop talking about the "wealth" he saw in our home! Parenthetically, in the course of his four-hour trip, the chicken and fish spoiled from the heat, and became too dangerous to eat.

Thus the three of us sat down to conduct the Passover *Seder*.

Outside our windows stood a group of young gentiles who mocked us, imitating what they referred to as our "wailing." Inside, however, we loudly and wholeheartedly chanted [the words of *Kiddush*] "the Season of Our Freedom... You have given us Your holy Festivals, in joy and gladness, as a heritage." These words felt so real, as well; considering that my husband had spent the previous Passover in prison, this year was certainly an improvement.

We continued our celebration until 2:00 a.m., when our guest returned home to sleep. He had a long walk through fields to get there.

I should mention our *bedikas chametz*⁶⁹ and *biyur chametz*⁷⁰ before *Yom Tov*. Chi'ili never imagined such an intensive search, nor had I ever witnessed anything like it.

68. See p. 000.

69. The required search for *chametz* on the evening before Passover.

70. The required burning of *chametz* in the morning before Passover.

Our “furniture” consisted mostly of the various crates in which our possessions had been transported over the course of time. I had turned them into small closets. In the part of our room we called the “kitchen,” and on the table, I had set up a sort of buffet and other inventive domestic conveniences. For Passover, all this was thrown out into the “yard,” i.e. the other side of the room.

On the evening before Passover, while I was busy preparing everything for Passover, I noticed that my husband seemed deeply emotional during the entire process. The next morning, as the *chametz* burned, he wept so profusely that it was difficult to watch and to listen to. In the past I had not usually observed this being done. Now I managed to hear only a few words of his recitation, “Just as I am removing *chametz* from my house and from my possession, so shall You destroy all...”⁷¹ Beyond that I couldn’t make out an additional word, due to his copious weeping which muffled the rest of the words.

That’s how we prepared for the Yom Tov, and how we celebrated the first *Seder*. Our guest joined us again for the morning meal and the second *Seder*, as well as for all the meals throughout the eight day festival.

We did everything we could to introduce a festive spirit and to banish the weekday mood. In that milieu and under those circumstances, it was no easy task. But we managed at least partially. Of course, we spoke only about the past, for there was nothing particularly gratifying about the present. We did, however, hold out hope for a better future.

71. “...so shall You destroy all the extraneous forces [of evil] and remove the spirit of impurity from the world...destroy all the wickedness in smoke, and remove the rule of evil from the world...”(*Siddur*).

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

In honor of the Shluchim Convention, 5772-2011

Note: The following is not a continuation of the main body of Rebbetzin Chana's memoirs, but a separate section comprising some reminiscences of the early years of her son, the Rebbe זי"ע

I would like to record some reminiscences [of my son's early years]. Many other episodes may be of even greater importance, yet, as I understand it, it is the minor episodes that reveal the greatness of his soul.

•

I recall¹ that, when he had just turned two, my son שליט"א recited the traditional "Four Questions" at the Passover *Seder*. While memorizing them on the day before the festival, he understood them like an adult.

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In 1905,² when there were pogroms in Russia, I and my children, together with other mothers and children, hid in a pharmacy.³ As is common at anxious times, the children cried a lot. The pharmacist was fearful that the noise would expose him as sheltering Jews, placing his own life in peril.

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1. The following episodes were publicized in the Yiddish section of "*Di Yiddishe Heim*" quarterly, Kislev, 5724 (fall, 1963), by N. Ben-Yochanan (pen name of R. Nissan Gordon), as heard from Rebbetzin Chana.
 2. At that time, Rebbetzin Chana and her family were still living in Nikolayev, Ukraine. In 1909, they moved to Yekaterinoslav.
 3. In "*Di Yiddishe Heim*," the Rebbetzin is quoted as saying that the pharmacy was on Bolshoya Morskaya Street.

It was remarkable to see how my three-year-old son שליט"א, walked around the room and quieted down all the children. It was dangerous to talk, lest the voices be heard outside, so he silently motioned to them and gestured with his hands to keep quiet, calming each child in a different manner.

The pharmacist kept returning to watch my son's performance and to see how he had the desired effect on the young children, with such maturity.



In 1911, my son accompanied me to a health resort in Balaclava, Crimea.⁴

A grotto there was joined to the [Black] Sea by a narrow channel of water between two rock walls, through which water flowed with a powerful current. This created a dangerous situation, and even experienced swimmers were cautious.

One day, while spending time at the shore, I heard that a boy was drowning, and went to see what was happening. The following is what I observed and heard from others:

A boy had taken out to sea one of the kayaks that were there. They were made for one person using a single oar. Coming close to the above-mentioned danger zone, he had lost control and his kayak, caught in the powerful current, started to sink.

When my son noticed this, he swam out to the kayak, climbed inside, and grabbed the oar from the exhausted boy, who by then was barely conscious. Taking control of the kayak, my son steered it out of the danger zone and brought it to the sea shore, saving his "passenger's" life.

4. Balaclava is now part of the city of Sevastopol, on the Crimean peninsula of southern Ukraine.

This difficult and extraordinary feat, however, strained my son both physically and emotionally, because he had to employ a complicated strategy to determine in which direction he could safely swim, and which areas in the sea were less perilous. Consequently, he became so exhausted that, as he reached the shore, he himself started to drown. When I saw him, he was terribly exhausted and pale, and his clothes were drenched.

Thank G-d, we had brought him.

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Benyomin and Rochel Federman

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Uri and Bassie Laber

Sholom and Esther Laine

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