

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 9



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PREFACE

We are pleased to present Installment 9 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 Kislev 5772

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

MEMOIRS

OF

REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON

INSTALLMENT 9

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Rebbetzin Chana returns home

At the beginning of Elul,⁸¹ I returned home to Dnepropetrovsk. I traveled via Moscow where I again visited all the appropriate government offices, submitting documents and appeals for commuting my husband's term of exile. While there, I also made arrangements for sending him some food parcels.

The reception I received from the Dnepropetrovsk community was most sympathetic, friendly and respectful. Even gentiles came to inquire about our welfare.

Clandestinely, the community continued to pay my husband's salary throughout this time, although it was illegal to do so openly. In the synagogue, they had fenced off his seat, allowing no one to come close.

During the years before his arrest, there had been some differences of opinion between him and some congregants concerning the *nusach*⁸² of the prayers, the sounding of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* even during the silent *Musaf* prayer,⁸³ holding *hakafot* on the eve of both *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*,⁸⁴ and the like. Now, however, there were no differing opinions, and everything was conducted as if my husband was still present. Even his greatest erstwhile opponents now proclaimed that the *Rav's* wishes, whatever they were, should be followed.

81. September, 1940.

82. Chabad Chasidim follow the prayer text based on the works of the Arizal—Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572)—as arranged by Rabbi Schneur Zalman (1745-1812), the founder of Chabad.

83. See *She'elot Uteshuvot Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim*, Vol. 2, #445-7. See also *Torat Menachem, Hitvaaduyot 5726*, vol. 1, p. 46, where source references are provided.

84. Following Rabbi Schneur Zalman's ruling in his *Siddur* to hold *hakafot* also on *Shemini Atzeret*. See also below, p. 000.

Later, when I related all this to my husband, he was deeply gratified and pleased with this report.

Now the congregation and the *chazzan* sang all the *Yom Tov* tunes that my husband would use for the prayers, and on *Simchat Torah* sang the melodies he used to sing.⁸⁵

Some members of the congregation had been summoned by the NKVD for interrogation, ostensibly for other reasons. But their interrogation focused mainly on why my husband was being accorded such honor.

Everyone took an interest in my plight and sincerely desired to help alleviate it. They were afraid, however, to approach the courtyard where I lived. I remained alone all day, until Rachel would come home from work.

The only exceptions were two good friends, members of our community, who would come to visit me clandestinely, almost every night, at 11:00-12:00 o'clock, so that even their families remained unaware of their visits. They came to keep me informed of any news. How I enjoyed those visits! On leaving, they would return home through as many as ten different side-streets, so that it shouldn't be apparent where they had come from. Although always convinced they were being watched, they still would return the following night.

Groups of several visitors often formed, and their discussion focused on the *Rav*, his accomplishments, his effect on the community, his sermons and his exhortations to the community. Although he almost always had opponents, in the end they all become reconciled with him, often becoming loyal friends.

“Guard my soul, for I am a Chasid”

I recall an incident when I once left my house late at night and encountered an acquaintance who belonged to the most

85. See *Sefer Haniggunim*, Vol. 2, #185, where it is recorded concerning “Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s *Hakafot* Melody” that he had a tradition that this melody had been sung at the *hakafot* of Rabbi Schneur Zalman.

secular Jewish circles. He approached me, furtively glancing all around to make sure no one saw him speaking to me. When he was certain no one was looking, he asked whether I remembered the banquet at the home of "a certain communal activist."

Present at that banquet was a certain Dr. Friedman, a university lecturer who belonged to non-Chasidic circles. He had received rabbinic ordination and considered himself a significant Torah scholar. At the dinner, he had asked the *Rav* about the verse,⁸⁶ "Guard my soul, for I am a Chasid" [literally: "pious"]. It implies, he teased, that being a Chasid requires careful vigilance.

My husband, the *Rav*, replied, "That's because, for a *mitnaged*,⁸⁷ even careful vigilance wouldn't help!"

Dr. Friedman, together with everyone present, applauded my husband's witty response.



[Written on] the 28th of Menachem Av, 5708 [9/02/1948]

Letter about the 19th of Kislev

Eight days ago was the fourth anniversary of my husband's passing. "What a misfortune is the loss of those who have left us and left none like them!"⁸⁸

I would like to continue recording my memoirs of that period, and will attempt to do so.

Time passed, month by month, with the established routine. My husband had been charged with certain crimes – propaganda against the government, for which purpose it was claimed that he maintained contact with foreign

86. Psalms 86:2.

87. An opponent of Chasidism.

88. Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 111a.

embassies, rendering him an “enemy of the people,” which was punishable by death. But since they were unable to prove this by any of the means they employed, he was arrested as a “danger to society.”

Consequently, he wasn’t allowed to live in any community—mainly of Jews, of course—so that he would be unable to utilize his spiritual powers to influence others.

Accordingly, his correspondence was strictly censored. Letters between us always took a long time, which was very upsetting. He was prohibited from corresponding at all with anyone else, and people were afraid even to send him regards through my letters.

At the end of the month of Cheshvan,⁸⁹ I received a letter from him. He had hurried to send it out as early as possible for fear that it might otherwise not arrive in time. In the letter, he asked that I should see to it that the mood in our home on the 19th of Kislev⁹⁰ should be a *Yom Tov* one, with good food etc. He even listed all minor details necessary for preparing the celebration, particulars he would usually not be involved with while at home. He also directed me to cast all negative feelings out of my mind, and to ensure that the day be a real *Yom Tov*.



Attempts at extortion

As time went on, I started planning another trip to join my husband close to Passover.

During the winter months, I was subjected to repeated provocations. Almost daily, I received reports that my

89. November, 1940

90. Anniversary of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s 1798 release from Czarist imprisonment in S. Petersburg.

husband had been brought back to prison in Yekaterinoslav—reports usually whispered to me as top-secret information.

A Christian woman, claiming to be a priest's daughter, told me my husband was incarcerated in the same cell as her father. A young Jewish man, involved in construction, informed me he had seen my husband at a prison in a location near Kiev, and that he had requested I send him clothes and the like.

Whenever I received such reports, I was directed to appear on certain street-corners, usually in the evening hours when no one would see us talking together. As much as logic dictated that I pay no attention to all this, yet in the final analysis, I couldn't ignore it, thinking that perhaps there might be some truth in it and that I really ought to help my husband at such a time.

Unable to decide on my own what to do, I waited until late at night, when I could consult with friends about these offers. It was most difficult when I was advised to go to the place where I had been directed. I did not follow this advice, simply because it was too frightening to do so—the places were either near the local jail or near the NKVD headquarters.

Eventually, these incidents proved to be attempts at sheer extortion.

The Rebbetzin's second trip to Chi'ili

I started to prepare for my second trip during the month of Adar,⁹¹ just as I had done for the previous trip. I would have liked to believe it was getting closer to my husband's liberation and his speedy return home.

After my necessary preparations, I traveled again via Moscow. I experienced similar problems to the previous time, but good friends helped me, supplying me with whatever was possible.

91. March, 1941.

I again visited all government offices that could grant commutation of his bitter exile. Unfortunately, those visits only depleted my health but contributed nothing positive.

Two weeks before Passover, I arrived back in Chi'ili. My husband's appearance had changed, and he was also dispirited, which disturbed me deeply. Until my arrival, the man I had asked to move in with him had been staying there. This roommate had no food of his own and was always hungry. Consequently, whenever my husband received a food parcel, he shared it with his roommate.

When subjected to such living conditions, people's personalities usually change; they usually turn into different people. My husband, however, remained the same. As soon as he would find sheet of paper, even a few scraps, he would use them to record his Torah insights. On one occasion he walked into our room, his face radiant, saying, "I should really *farbreng* with someone now, because I've completed writing a novel essay that is truly extraordinary." Unfortunately, because of the subject's profundity, he couldn't share it with me, nor was anyone else available.

Efforts to obtain bread

A month before my arrival, they stopped giving my husband his allotted bread-ration. To get it reinstated, I visited various government departments, trying to meet senior officials with whom I had become acquainted in the past. Unofficially, I even visited some at home.

They genuinely wanted to help my husband, but a ration card system had been introduced which entitled only those who worked to receive bread rations. My husband, however, was unable to work, both for health reasons and because he would not work on *Shabbat*.

For myself, I was able to arrange documents enabling me to receive bread rations to which I was entitled as an

evacuee.⁹² A Jewish member of the Communist party, the head of his department, arranged this for me, but he was unable to intervene on my husband's behalf since he was a deportee.

My ration, which I divided into two, was insufficient for the two of us, as much as we tried to skimp. This went on until a day before Passover. I had been running around to government offices seeking every possible way and means to ensure that we not be condemned to absolute starvation.

Through a lawyer I discovered a law stating that those 70 years and older⁹³ had to be given bread even if they didn't work. I wrote down the relevant details of the law and took it to the director of the local *Ispolcom*. He asked for whom I was making this request. When I showed him my husband's documentation and he saw his name, he immediately declared. "Even if he were a hundred years old, I still wouldn't grant him the right to receive any bread unless he works!" His statement contravened the government's own economic policy laws, but that was his decision—no one could tell him what to do!

Despite his ruling, however, I managed to get through to an inspector who came to do an inspection at the regional headquarters. He gave me a written order that the deportee of this name—my husband—should be given the same bread ration as everyone who works, for his age entitled him to that.



92. This must have been a few months later, after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, which began on June 22, 1941.

93. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's official documents showed his age as over 70 years old.

Asking for leavened bread on the eve of Passover?

All this happened a week before Passover. A day before Passover, when I was busy preparing for *Yom Tov*, my husband had to go himself to submit his request for the bread ration.

It's impossible for someone who has never experienced it to imagine the dread of remaining absolutely starving for bread. Now, thank G-d, I am one hundred percent sated, but I still remember very vividly the dread I experienced then.

On the day before Passover, it was most unpleasant for my husband to be involved with submitting a request for *chametz*. But he had choice, because this matter couldn't be delayed.

While on his way, the manager of a large government store which sold merchandise for members of the highly privileged class, happened to notice him. He approached my husband very respectfully and said,

"I understand the reason why you're here. You appear to me to be a Schneerson. Tell me, aren't you from Yekaterinoslav?" He continued, "My brother-in-law once had a *din Torah*⁹⁴ before you, of the type where each side selects a representative rabbinic judge, and the two judges together designate a third, impartial judge. It was in the year... The two sides traveled for this purpose from Homel and Retchitza. The details aren't important now.

"But how can I help you? Perhaps you could use utensils for Passover? I'll provide you with some on condition that you conceal them so that they shouldn't be visible. Otherwise it can place me in danger, as this is illegal for me to do."

After taking many precautions, the man brought out four new glasses and saucers. How festive they looked under the circumstances! I simply cannot describe how special it was.

94. Rabbinic court case.

This was in addition to the *kashrut* aspect—they were brand new utensils!

My husband's request that day concerning his bread ration was refused. Meanwhile, however, he went to immerse⁹⁵ the new glasses, and was happy with that accomplishment.

But when he returned to our room, he began to lament, "How did I spend the day before Passover—submitting a request for *chametz*?" As he started thinking about the details of it, he burst out crying, with heartfelt sobs.

Since our year-round *chametz* utensils were in the same room where we were to be during Passover, he took the new glasses he had obtained to set them in a place as far as possible from the year-round utensils. He was in such a tense mood, however, that all the glasses and saucers slipped out of his hands and broke on the floor! Only one saucer was left unbroken.

Throughout Passover, we drank from the wash cup normally used for ritual hand-washing.

95. *Tevilat keilim*—immersing new food utensils in a *mikveh*, spring or body of flowing water.

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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