

# The Jewish Weekly

## A Great Height, Vicious Dogs, and a Spiked Stone Wall

By Asharon Baltazar

When Rabbi Schneur Zalman [the future first Chabad Rebbe] was still a young student under the tutelage of the famed Maggid of Mezerich [successor to the Baal Shem Tov], he boarded at a house owned by a local widow. One day, the young scholar arrived home to find his landlady on the floor wailing hysterically. Her only son, she sobbed, had decided to convert to Christianity, and was being held in a locked room in a monastery.

"Don't worry," Rabbi Schneur Zalman comforted her, "with G-d's help, we will bring your son back."

Easily said, but not so easily accomplished. Bringing this woman's plight to the Maggid would be difficult. The Maggid stayed locked in his room throughout most of the day which enabled him to quietly contemplate Torah. Outside his door stood his wary attendant, who was adept at keeping people away when the master wished to be alone.

"Listen to what I say," Rabbi Schneur Zalman said to the widow. "Tomorrow, Friday afternoon, while the attendant is away from the door for his pre-Shabbat immersion, I will be able to open the door for you. Do not waste a second. Run inside and inform the Maggid of your dilemma."

The next day, Rabbi Schneur Zalman took advantage of the attendant's absence to open the door for the distraught widow. Inside, the Maggid, who was occupied with his spiritual preparations for the holy day of Shabbat, did not expect a strange woman to burst into his room, weeping uncontrollably. But the poor woman was so shattered that she stood silently at the door, unable to emit a single word.

Apparently seeing no use for the interruption, the Maggid waved his hand, signaling her to leave. The woman emerged from the brief audience shattered and bitterly disappointed with herself.

But Rabbi Schneur Zalman was confident that the Maggid knew of the widow's misery down to the last detail. After all, righteous people are not bound by the conventional ways of learning information.

After the widow left, the Maggid did not make any mention of her or the purpose of her visit. But when the attendant returned from the bathhouse, the Maggid suddenly instructed all of his students to enter his room to welcome the Shabbat together. Despite the unusual nature of the request, the group heeded the Maggid's words.

Immediately after prayers, the attendant rushed to set the table for the evening meal. Generally lengthy and peppered with mystical Torah insights, the Shabbat meal was eaten in a hurry, again leaving the students wondering at their master's unusual behavior. Birkat HaMazon (Grace After Meals) was recited promptly after the meal.

All this time, the Maggid maintained deep concentration and spoke with a booming and forceful tone, a marked departure from the unassuming voice the students usually heard. Torah insights, the likes of which were never

heard before, were expounded upon, his holy words interspersed with the occasional call to "listen, my brothers, to the Torah's sweetness."

Of all the students, only Rabbi Schneur Zalman knew the reason for the unusual change in routine. He sensed that from the moment the widow left the Maggid's office, the Maggid busied himself with reigniting her son's soul.

Suddenly, a mighty wind began to roar outside, steadily picking up speed. By this point, the Maggid's face was shining like a glowing torch. The students listened with growing trepidation to the wind that howled violently around them.

BOOM!

Something thudded against one of the walls of the house and the students, concerned that the roof would collapse from the wind, bolted out of their seats. Unperturbed, the Maggid stopped his discourse and turned to his attendant: "Quickly take him to the nearby inn," he ordered.

The attendant hurried out the door and immediately stopped in his tracks. Lying on the ground outside the house was the widow's son, softly weeping. The attendant did not waste a second and proceeded to whisk the son away to the inn.

After the attendant left, the Maggid's serious demeanor, which had persisted throughout the entire evening, transitioned to joy, and he finished the discourse on a euphoric note.

The Maggid then retired to his room, and Rabbi Schneur Zalman headed for the inn, curious to learn what led to the son's seemingly impossible release from the second floor of the monastery.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman found the young man sitting on the bed and reading the weekly Torah portion with large tears streaming down his face. "How did you escape?" Rabbi Schneur Zalman asked gently.

The widow's son paused his tearful reading and began to tell his story.

"The beginning of my escape started two hours before nightfall. I was lying on my bed in a small cell on the monastery's second floor, determined to follow through with my choice. No amount of convincing would have made me change my mind.

"But then, for some reason I still don't understand, I had an overwhelming bout of longing for the G-d of my people, an urgent need to leave and reestablish my connection with the Jewish faith.

"I bolted from my bed and quickly strode to the cell door, intending to break it down. But the door remained steadfastly bolted from the outside. Discouraged, I collapsed back on my bed for about half an hour.

But the pangs of yearning and love toward Judaism continued to intensify until I sensed my materialistic desires melt away. This is how a dead person must feel, I thought; none of the things that had mattered so much to me seemed to have any consequence anymore.

"Lying there in bed, becoming more restless by the moment, I understood that this love could not have developed from myself. G-D was actively trying to protect my Jewish soul from self-destruction.

"Again, I unsuccessfully struggled to break down the door. There was no way out.

I slumped on the bed, tears streaking my cheeks, and began to deliberate with myself. If G-D allowed me to

## It Once Happened...

experience this indescribable arousal of G-dly love, I had no doubt that He would surely come to my aid. I had to continue to try.

"I walked over to the cell's small window. I pushed it and, to my relief, it swung open. However, peering over the precarious ledge in the failing light, I was greeted by the sight of the hard flagstones far below. To jump from this height would leave all of my bones shattered, leaving even the prospect of a Jewish funeral nonexistent. I was unsure what to do next.

"I rethought my decision several times, and made my way to the window, only to be discouraged again and again by the sheer drop.

"Darkness had already set in when I suddenly felt my legs dash across the room, leap onto the windowsill and carry me through the open window. I landed miraculously intact, aside from some minor pain in my feet.

Despite this, my excitement was short lived. During my brief stay in the monastery, I had learned of the vicious dogs who guarded the premises. Chained away during the day, the dogs were set loose on the monastery grounds at night. Even if I managed to fend them off, their barking could easily alert the priests, who would surely take me back, and who knew what they would do to me then?

"G-D will help, I thought, and fearlessly strode towards the pack of dogs. They bounded towards me excitedly and circled around me eagerly, as though reuniting with one of their masters. Thankfully, they also kept silent, and I was able to slink cautiously across the monastery grounds.

But then my heart fell. A towering stone wall separated me from my freedom. Topped with sharp spikes and the height of two men, the wall surrounded the monastery, its smooth surface providing no grip. It was impossible to scale.

"Raising my eyes once more, I pleadingly explained to G-D that I had tried everything that was humanly possible to escape, risking my life in the process. Now, standing beside the wall, I had nothing more to do.

"I was answered in the most incredible way. A strong gale immediately swept me off my feet and lifted me into the air. I was tossed over the unpassable wall and into the sky, tumbling over the countryside until I landed right beside the Maggid's house."

Displaying a zeal and aptitude that he had never known before, the young man applied himself to Torah study and the performance of good deeds for the rest of his days.

Years later, when Rabbi Schneur Zalman would have his own followers, he would recount this story that testified to the Maggid's greatness on numerous occasions, carefully noting that the young man's change of heart happened right around the time the Maggid began his devotions.

*Reprinted from an email of Chabad. Org Magazine.*



### Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Mikeitz

|             | Candle Lighting | Motzei Shabbat | Motzei Shabbat ר"ת |
|-------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Jerusalem   | 4:03            | 5:19           | 5:57               |
| Tel Aviv    | 4:17            | 5:20           | 5:52               |
| Haifa       | 4:06            | 5:18           | 5:53               |
| Be'er Sheva | 4:22            | 5:22           | 5:57               |



## How the Gulag Judge Lit the Menorah

By Asharon Baltazar

Repeatedly arrested for his “counter-revolutionary” activities to preserve the flickering flame of Judaism in the Soviet Union, Reb Mordechai Chanzin frequently found himself behind bars. His first sentence amounted to 10 years in a forced-labor camp. After his release, Reb Mordechai was again found guilty and punished with five more years. His third and final sentence resulted in six years. Overall, between the years 1935 and 1956, he spent 21 years in Soviet prisons and camps. In his short stints of freedom he selflessly devoted himself to preserving Judaism behind the Iron Curtain.

Among his many experiences, there was one story that he would tell again and again:

As the Siberian winter deepened, Chanukah came, and a group of young Jewish men, all prisoners of the Gulag, convened for a short meeting. The topic: how to obtain and light a secret menorah. One promised to supply margarine to be used as fuel. Some frayed threads from standard-issue camp garb would suffice as wicks. Even small cups to hold the margarine were procured from somewhere. Of course, all this was against camp regulations, and they all understood the implication of their actions should they be caught.

Reb Mordechai was the eldest of the group of 18 men, and was therefore honored to usher in the holiday by lighting of the first candle. In the dead of night, in a small garden shed, the hardy crew crowded around their makeshift menorah and listened to Reb Mordechai’s emotional voice as he recited the first blessings, tears trickling down his cheeks. Reb Mordechai and his comrades gazed silently at the small yellow light, each one recalling Chanukah in his parents’ home.

The loud crash of the door opening shattered the men’s reverie. Camp guards rushed through the doorway and flooded the cramped space. The Jewish inmates were grabbed by brutish hands and shoved through the camp. When they reached a small dank cell, they were ordered to pile inside.

The first to be brought to trial was the ringleader, Reb Mordechai. Inside the small courtroom, which consisted of the judge’s desk and a bench for the defendant, the proceedings were all but pro forma. Reb Mordechai had already predicted his indictment, and solemnly awaited the verdict.

“This is an act of treason,” said the prosecutor. “By lighting the candles, you intended to signal to enemy forces. The penalty for this is death.”

The judge regarded the young man standing in front of him. “Do you have anything to say for yourself?”

Reb Mordechai’s heart pounded in his chest as he approached the judge. “Is it just me, or is it the rest of the group too?”

“All of you,” enunciated the judge dryly.

Reb Mordechai was devastated.

The courtroom began to spin around him. Whatever indifference he was able to afford until then vanished in the terror-stricken realization that his fellow brothers would be led to their deaths. He blamed himself.

Reb Mordechai burst into bitter tears, and for a few minutes he stood in front of the judge, sobbing uncontrollably. Years of crushing pain and pent-up emotions overwhelmed him and couldn’t be stopped.

“Come close,” said the judge.

Reb Mordechai took a step towards the judge’s desk. Softly, the judge asked about his relatives, their means of livelihood and other personal details. Reb Mordechai answered the judge’s inquiries.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” the judge pressed on.

Mustering temerity he did not feel, Reb Mordechai addressed the judge, “We are Jews, and we lit the candles that night to observe the holiday of Chanukah.”

“You lit Chanukah candles? You lit Chanukah candles?” the judge repeated to himself, clearly unsettled. “You don’t say . . . Chanukah candles.”

Recomposing himself, the judge called to the two guards present in the courtroom and asked them to stand outside. When the door clicked closed, the judge turned his attention back to Reb Mordechai.

“If you lit Chanukah candles, let me demonstrate the right way to light them.”

Reb Mordechai watched the judge light a small lamp. Picking up the incriminating documents gingerly, with trembling hands, the judge slid the first one off and held it to the flame. The paper caught fire and disappeared quickly in an orange blaze and a few wisps of smoke. As if he were afraid to delay lest he change his mind, the judge worked quickly through the pile, saying “You see? This is how you light Chanukah candles.” Soon there was nothing remaining of the pile.

Finished, the judge scooped up the scattered ashes, strode over to the window and tossed them into the Siberian wind. Sitting down, the judge reached for the buzzer on his table and summoned the guards.

“Take this group of 18 men,” the judge barked, “and separate them, making sure that it would be impossible for them to see one another. There’s no point in killing them; they are not worth even one bullet.”

The guards marched out, and Reb Mordechai was again left alone with the judge. The latter faced Reb Mordechai and said in a trembling voice, “I too am a Jew, and I beg you to make sure that the future generations of our people will know to light the Chanukah candles.”

In 1956, a few years following Stalin’s death, hundreds of thousands of prisoners were pardoned and their names cleared. Among them was Reb Mordechai Chanzin, who was finally given permission to leave the camps that had robbed him of decades of life. Chanzin moved to Moscow, where he became secretary to Chief Rabbi Yehudah Leib Levin. A decade later, through the efforts of the Rebbe, he was allowed to immigrate to Israel, where he was reunited with his brother Dovid, the rabbi of Petach Tikva

*Reprinted from an email of Chabad.org maagazine.*

How did King Pharaoh of Egypt know Yosef was giving him the correct interpretations of his dreams?

At the beginning of Parshat Mikeitz, the Torah tells us all the details of the two dreams of the king. Then we’re told how Yosef was suddenly elevated to stand in the presence of the king. The Torah could have easily just said Pharaoh then told Yosef all about the content of the dreams. But no, we find that Pharaoh goes into all the details, and we hear about the dreams a second time.

Intriguingly, however, there are some small differences in terms of how Pharaoh explained his dreams as opposed to what really happened in the dreams. For example, in the original dreams, we’re told Pharaoh was standing on the river, and then Pharaoh says to Yosef, “I was standing on the banks of the river.”

The Midrash Tanchuma tells us that on every occasion on which Pharaoh deviated slightly from what he had originally seen, Yosef corrected him and said, “No, it’s not on the river; it’s on the banks of the river.” At one point, Pharaoh cried out to Yosef, “Were you eavesdropping on my dreams?”

It was this that convinced Pharaoh that Yosef was not only somebody who knew the interpretation, but someone who knew the dreams. And this extraordinary fact convinced him that what Yosef was saying was the word of Hashem.

Now, I believe that there is such an important message for us all, which goes well beyond Pharaoh, Yosef, and Egypt at the time, and anything to do with dreams. It’s all about interpreting a situation and problem-solving.

If you want to know how to understand a situation in order to provide a solution for it, if some of your facts are wrong, then your capacity to provide a solution will be impeded.

For example, right now, we continue tragically to witness an ongoing war in the Middle East, and we’re finding continuously that there are people right around the world who have all the solutions.

They are pronouncing, “This is what must be done in order to guarantee ongoing peace and security.” Sadly, however, a lot of the information they have is simply not correct. And sometimes, they are basing their own interpretations on the feelings that they have, because of the images they have seen.

From Yosef, we learn that if you want to provide a solution, the facts need to be correct.

No wonder, therefore, that our tradition tells us: Knowing the question properly is half the answer.

So let us take this opportunity to thank Hashem with all our hearts for the great miracle we have witnessed - the release and safe return of the living hostages. With hearts full of thanks, we acknowledge His endless kindness and mercy, and we pray that those who have returned home find healing, strength, and peace after all they have endured.

We also continue to pray for the release of the one remaining hostage body and Divine Protection over our courageous IDF soldiers, police officers, medical teams, firefighters, ZAKA members, security forces, and every individual who stands in defense of our people - in Israel and throughout the world.

May all who are in need, be blessed with healing, yeshuot, shidduchim, children, and parnassah tova, and may we be blessed to have just continuous joy and to only go from one simcha through to the next, the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, happy, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, sweet Shabbat and Happy Chanukah.

*Yossi*

## The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 112

NUMBER OF WORDS: 1558

NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5972

Shabbat Chanukah / Day 6.

FIRST DAY ROSH CHODESH TEVET

This year, We take out three Sifrei Torah; in the first Sefer Torah we have six Aliyot in the weekly Parsha (Mikeitz). In the second Torah we have one Aliyah in Parshat Pinchas - (Bamidbar 28:9-15) the two paragraphs "וביום השבת" and "ובראש חדשים".

The Maftir reads in the third Sefer Torah from Parshat Naso (Bamidbar 7:42-7:47) from "ביום הששי" until "ביום דעואל" אלוסוף בן דעואל.

The Haftarah is read in Zechariah 2:14 4:7 "רוני ושומתי", some add the first and last Passuk of the Rosh Chodesh Haftarah, followed by the first and last Passuk of the Machar Chodesh Haftarah.

# מקץ

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