

א ציור פון א חסיד

Reb Chayim Yehoshua

By Reb Avraham Abba Persan¹

The Famous Chassid Reb Dov Zev Of Yekaterinoslav² related the following story:

While he was a *Shadar* of the Rebbe Maharash, Reb Dov Zev regularly visited the city of Gluchov, where one of the elders of the chassidim, Reb Chayim Yehoshua, lived. Whenever Reb Dov Zev visited Gluchov, he delighted in listening to Reb Chayim Yehoshua tell stories of the chassidim of the old days.

When Reb Dov Zev arrived in Gluchov in the year 5637, Reb Chayim Yehoshua was already an old man of eighty-seven. He felt his end approaching, and so he sent for the elder chassidim of the city: Reb Avraham Zalman HaKohen, Reb Shlomo Menachem the melamed, and Reb Ephraim Fishel the melamed; he requested that they also invite the visiting *Shadar*.

Upon discovering that the chassid Reb Chayim Yehoshua was sick, the gaon Reb Dov Zev went to visit him. Reb Chayim Yehoshua's illness lasted for a month. Although his strength gradually ebbed, he remained in full possession of his mental faculties until the very end, and he told his visitors various stories. The following is his deathbed declaration, as he dictated it to them:

During the year 5593 or 5594 I spent all eight days of Chanukah in Lubavitch with the Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek. There, I heard three Maamorim, all based on the theme that the war against the Greeks was a spiritual battle. As Chazal teach us,³ [the Greeks demanded of the Jews that they,] "Write upon the horn of an ox that you have nothing to do with the G-d of Israel." But through mesirus nefesh the Jews overcame them. The Rebbe spoke highly of the avodah of mesirus nefesh to sanctify G-d's Holy Name, as was performed by Rabbi Akiva and others like him.

At the time, I was a little over forty years old. I, my four brothers, and my two brothers-in-law, lived in a hamlet called Zastke, near Kalisk [in Vitebsk County of White Russia]. Our father Reb Avraham Yisrael - a chassid of the Alter Rebbe and of his son the Mitteler Rebbe - had originally settled there. He brought us up to study Torah and to be farmers. We also took great pains to observe the mitzvah of catering to guests.

One winter's night during the year 5595 or 5596, we suddenly heard a knocking at the door. Getting out of bed and opening the door, I saw two Jews wrapped in winter cloaks, covered with snow, standing in the doorway. I extended my hand in greeting, and invited them to take off their cloaks and sit near the stove to warm themselves. I also offered them glasses of tea, and bread with butter and whey.

While they sat down to eat, I went out to check the barn. Once outdoors, I heard what sounded like a child crying. I paid no attention to it, for I assumed it was a cat. But when I came closer to the source of the sound, I heard that it was the voice of a child.

"Who's that crying?" I called.

"It's I, Binyomin!" a trembling voice replied.

Following the sound of the voice, I approached the sleigh that the guests had parked at the edge of the courtyard. When I looked inside, my whole body began to quake. I saw two small boys lying there, bound up in chains: one was sleeping, the other crying.

In those days, there were many "snatchers" - men who would kidnap Jewish children, take them away, and sell them to other communities to be handed over to the military. Seeing the children, I immediately guessed that the men were snatchers,



and that these were stolen children. I was afraid that they would also kidnap some of our own children.

I quickly removed the chains from the two boys, lifted them from the sleigh, and took them to the home of my brother Michael, out in the garden. My brother Michael had already woken from his sleep; I told him of my suspicions, and hurried home.

When I arrived home, I found one of the guests sitting next to my son Ephraim Zalman. I woke everyone in the house and whispered to them that these Jews were snatchers, and that they were carrying two boys bound in chains, who had undoubtedly been kidnapped.

The Jew seated near my son Ephraim Zalman said, "He looks like a good boy. G-d in Heaven has burdened me with two sons who are insane, and speak lies. I have no choice but to chain them up and take them to the psychiatrist in Vitebsk."

Meanwhile, my brother Michael gave the children food and drink, and locked them in a room. He then came to my house, and seeing the two Jews he became furious. He went over to them saying, "Shalom Aleichem, Jewish snatchers! Leave this house immediately, or you'll be sorry!"

The two Jews did not yet realize that they had been found out, and one said to the other, "Let's get out of here. As you can see, we've fallen in among heartless Jews who have no pity for an unfortunate person such as yourself, who is taking his insane sons to a psychiatrist.

"I myself," the Jew continued saying to us, "live in a small village, just like you. And when I found out that the tar maker who lives in the forest nearby had children who had gone incurably insane, I took pity on him. I harnessed my horse, and am now conveying him and his two sons to the psychiatrist in

Vitebsk."

The Jews left my house in a huff. When they came to the sleigh and discovered that the children were gone, they immediately returned screaming. But they soon realized that screaming would do them no good, and they hurriedly fled the village, leaving the children behind with us.

A month later, it was my brother Michael's regular time to visit Lubavitch and see the Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek. When he entered the Rebbe's room and told him about the children, the Rebbe's face beamed with joy. He gave us all his blessing, instructing us to keep the children for a year and then to take them home. The children remained with us and studied together with our own sons under the melamed Reb Yeruchem Zev, doing very well.

From that time on I had an overpowering desire to work at pidyon sh'vuyim. Unable to restrain myself, I went to the Tzemach Tzedek and told him of this great desire. The Rebbe agreed, and prepared an itinerary for me to follow in this work. Three or four months a year - sometimes in the summer and sometimes in the winter - I would journey to various places, and ransom children who had been kidnapped and handed over to become "cantonists." I pursued this work for seven years, until I was finally caught and came within an inch of losing my life.

To be continued...

1. In HaTamim, the subtitle reads, "From stories told by Reb Avraham Abba Persan." It seems, however, that the article was actually written by the Frieddiker Rebbe himself. Apparently the Frieddiker Rebbe had heard the stories from Reb Avraham Abba, and recorded them in his diary. The editors of HaTamim included - as a footnote - a brief biography of Reb Avraham Abba; (a translation appears in a later chapter).

2. See later page 14 for another story figuring Reb Dov Zev.

3. Bereishis Rabbah 16:4.



שער
מורה

Rambam

פרק א'	שלושה פרקים	ו' כסלו
פרק י	פרק ח-י	
פרק יא	פרק יא. הט לבי וגו'. ספר נזיקין הל' נזקי ממון פרק א-ב	ז' כסלו
פרק יב	פרק ג-ה	ח' כסלו
פרק יג	פרק ו-ח	ט' כסלו
פרק יד	פרק ט-יא	י' כסלו
פרק טו	פרק יב-יד	י"א כסלו
פרק טז	הל' גניבה.. בפרקים אלו. פרק א-ג	י"ב כסלו