

R' MICHELE ZLOTCHIVER'S GA'AGUIM NIGGUN

The Tzaddik, Rebbe Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov (presently spelled Zolochiv in Ukraine), was one of the Talmidei HaBa'al Shem Tov, and later became known as the Maggid of Zlotchov. Born in 5486 to the Tzaddik R' Yitzchok of Drohovitch, R' Michel was around 33 years old when the Baal Shem Tov passed away in shnas "Nachas" (5520), and lived until thirteen years after the passing of the Maggid Mezeritch in 5541, when the Alter Rebbe was already established as Rebbe.

As a Talmid of the Baal Shem Tov, R' Michel's peers included: R' Yaakov Yosef of Polnoeh (Polony), R' Zev Volf Kitzes of Mezibuzh, R' Pinchas Koritzer, R' Nochum Tchernobler, the Shpoler Zeide, and many other notable Talmidim. (It is known that the Ba'al Shem Tov had sixty, specially selected Talmidim, each outstanding in stature.)

R' Michele Zlotchiver was a big composer of Niggunim¹, and he was the 'Mesader Niggunim' by the Baal Shem Tov. Describing his qualities as a Baal Menagen, the Baal Shem Tov once said: "*The Tzaddik R' Michele enters on a regular basis to the "Chamber of Song" (Heichal Hashir) and chooses out Niggunim of His'orrirus and Tshuka (arousal and desire).*"

Every Niggun reflects the spirit of its composer. That's why every Niggun has its own unique name, conveying how it was *born*; who composed it, in which *manner* it was composed, for certainly it was triggered by a certain event or period of time, etc. A Niggun can therefore serve twofold: A person reliving those feelings can surely express themselves once more through singing the

Niggun; and it can *create* those emotions as well.

R' Michel once fell ill, to the extent that he couldn't travel to his Rebbe, the Ba'al Shem Tov. Reflecting his intense yearning to be by the Baal Shem Tov and his sadness at not being able to travel, R' Michel composed a niggun that has come to be known by Chassidim as "R' Michele Zlotchiver's Ga'aguim Niggun."

The Niggun has three *falin*, with each *fal* expressing a different emotion. The first *fal* begins with R' Michele describing his intense yearning to be by his Rebbe, and in the second *fal* he describes the joy of actually being fortunate to see the Ba'al Shem Tov. The third and final *fal* concludes with arousing *dveikus* and a sense of giving oneself over to the Rebbe, the Ba'al Shem Tov.

The Alter Rebbe, a born Baal Menagen, conveyed this Niggun to his Chassidim. While he had been in Mezritch he heard many Niggunim that were sung before the Baal Shem Tov, and he memorized them precisely as they were sung, including this Niggun of R' Michele.

This Niggun was always a special one, in fact the Tzemach Tzedek was known to sing it during "*ernste tzaitin*" (serious times)². Yet, many years later, Chassidim found out even more details of how much the Baal Shem Tov in fact regarded it.

Let us go back one hundred and fifteen years to the year 5657, to the town of Lubavitch during the Sheva Brochos of the Frierdiker Rebbe³. It was the night of Chai Elul and a large crowd gathered for the simcha. Two famous Chassidim: R' Yaakov Mordechai Bezpalov



[also known as R' Yaakov Mordechai Paltover; he was a Rov in Paltova and a Chossid of both the Rebbe Maharash and the Rebbe Rashab] and R' Asher Grossman, started to sing R' Michele Zlotchiver's Niggun. The Rebbe Rashab closed his holy eyes and sang quietly in *dveikus*, tears rolling down his cheeks. A chossid named R' Mendel ben Zecharya Yaffa from Yekatrinoslav – a young musician – accompanied the Niggun with his instrument, and two more musicians who had come from Vitebsk joined him. They played along softly, following the notes of the Niggun, pulling the heartstrings of all those present; the room became absolutely still, as if no one was there, a glorious holy sight...

The Rebbe Rashab, along with these two Chassidim and the musical ensemble, sang the Niggun three times in succession, their voices growing stronger each time. (in addition to the general raise of volume from one *fal* to the next). When the Niggun concluded for the third time the Rebbe Rashab finally opened his eyes and, after pouring everyone some mashke to say L'chaim, addressed all the Chassidim.

"It is a 'kabala biyadeinu' (something passed down to us) that the Ba'al Shem Tov called this niggun the 'His'orirus Rachamim Rabim Niggun.'" My father the Rebbe Maharash told me that he heard from his father the Tzemach Tzedek who had heard from his Zeide the Alter Rebbe who heard from the Maggid, who attended a special gathering by the Baal Shem Tov shortly before his Histalkus, where the Baal Shem Tov had instructed to sing the 'His'orirus Rachamim Rabim Niggun'. The Talmidim sang the Niggun, after which the Baal Shem Tov said: "I give a promise for all generations that whenever, wherever, and whoever will sing this 'His'orirus Rachamim Rabim Niggun" with a genuine desire for teshuva, I will hear them singing, no matter which heavenly chamber I might be in – there are malachim who give news and notify the souls above about what is happening below – I will sing along together with them and arouse mercy for the Ba'alei Tshuva who will sing this Niggun."

Talk about amazing!

Later on in the Sheva Brochos, the Rebbe Rashab continued to explain the Niggun.

"My father, the Rebbe Maharash, explained to me the

Neshomo of most Niggunim, among them the "His'orirus Rachamim Rabim Niggun" of R' Michele Zlotchiver.

"The Neshomo of this niggun is *"Isha kshas ruach anochi"* (I am a woman of aggrieved spirit – referring to the story of Chana, Shmuel 1, Perek 1, Possuk 15), and the Toichen of the niggun is *"Voeshpoch es nafshi lifnei Hashem"* (I have poured out my soul before Hashem).

"Isha kshas ruach anochi" refers to Kneses Yisroel, ie. Malchus D'Atzilus. While Malchus is in Atzilus it is 'b'chedvah visimcha' (joyous and happy). Yet the way it is down below, in the form of 'Nishamos Yisroel' (whose

"THE ROOM BECAME ABSOLUTELY STILL, AS IF NO ONE WAS THERE; A GLORIOUS HOLY SIGHT..."

source is from Kneses Yisroel in Atzilus), it is possible for it to be quite the opposite: 'Kshas ruach' mamesh.

"The Toichen of the Niggun is *"Voeshpoch es nafshi lifnei Hashem,"* to inspire rachamim rabim to receive from the 'chedva visimcha' (joyousness) of Kneses Yisroel and bring the simcha in Nishamos Yisroel below.

"The Ba'al Shem Tov promises that when we sing this Niggun with an His'orirus of Teshuva, he will help us in the Hisorirus Rachamim Rabim. Therefore, being that tonight is already Chai Elul, the beginning of the hachono for the Avoda of Rosh Hashono, let us sing this His'orirus Rachamim Rabim Niggun with a Tshuva His'orirus."

The Chassidim then sang R' Michele's Niggun once more...

The Friediker Rebbe, during Pesach 5701⁴, shared another interesting episode that happened with R' Michael Dvorkin in the Rebbe Rashab's later years. [R' Michael Dvorkin was a big Chossid of the Rebbe Rashab and the Friediker Rebbe who ultimately came to live in America. He was also a Ba'al Menagen and was in fact

instructed by the Frierdiker Rebbe to teach old Lubavitcher Niggunim to the American Bochrin.

(An interesting side note: After trying to speak to the American bochrin, R' Michoel returned to the Frierdiker



REB MICHOEL DVORKIN

Rebbe Michoel Dvorkin sang R' Michele Zlotchiver's Niggun by the Farbrengen. All throughout the niggun, the Rebbe's Rashab's holy face shone, and it was clear that the Rebbe Rashab was reliving an event from years gone by.

When the Niggun ended, the Rebbe Rashab said: "I remember Chassidim singing two nuschaos of this Niggun during the second night of Pesach of 5638, and my father, the Rebbe Maharash, chose the nusach that was just sung by R' Michoel.

"This Niggun creates an opening of one's heart, a chassidishe "Yir'as Hakovod," sparks an intense yearning and inspires hope. This "three-stranded rope" is what the Rebbeim imparted to their Chassidim by a chassidishe Farbrengen, when Chassidim join in a chassidishe 'Ahavas Achim Tanz'."

One can actually listen to a recording of R' Michoel singing this Niggun [in the first tape of Heichal Neginah] shortly before his passing in 5709; most likely the exact same way he had sung it in front of the Rebbe Rashab

almost one hundred years ago.

It is interesting to note that in 5708, R' Michoel Dvorkin, who was already in America, attended the Frierdiker Rebbe's seuda on the first day of Pesach, and he sang R' Michele Zlotchiver's Niggun. Afterwards, the Frierdiker Rebbe recounted how R' Michoel had sung

"I GIVE A PROMISE FOR ALL GENERATIONS, THAT WHENEVER, WHEREVER, AND WHOEVER WILL SING THIS NIGGUN...I WILL SING ALONG TOGETHER WITH YOU..."

this Niggun thirty-two years earlier in Rostov, in front of his father, the Rebbe Rashab. The Frierdiker Rebbe added that his father had said that he enjoyed the Niggun and that one can hear the Baal Shem in this Niggun ("Es hert zich Ba'al Shem").

At yet another Pesach Farbrengen, during the meal of Acharon Shel Pesach 5704, R' Michele Zlochiver's Niggun was sung, and when it concluded, the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed that the Niggun be sung again. After the Niggun ended the Frierdiker Rebbe said: "We just finished singing this Niggun and can therefore connect ourselves both to R' Michele Zlochiver and the Ba'al Shem Tov, yet we have to garner the strength in order to connect ourselves."

May we merit very soon a true Hisoirirus Rachamim Rabim, that the Aibershter should bring Moshiaich very speedily, when we will be united with our Rebbe once more and experience the ultimate "Mimitzrayim Gealtanu," Bimiheira biyameinu Mammosh! ■

1. 2nd day of Shavuot 5740

2. Yud Gimmel Tammuz 5692

3. Reshimos of Frierdiker Rebbe, can also be seen Sefer Hasichos 5703 pg. 169.

4. shvii shel pesach at night 5701

For more information on this Niggun, see Sefer Hasichos 5706-5710 pg 99.