



The Midnight Encounter

At the approach of Tishrei 5678, Reb Leizer Nanas was in the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim in Kremenchug, which was separate from the Rebbe Rashab who had moved to Rostov.

As Tishrei approached, the Bochorim in Kremenchug began planning their well-anticipated journey to the Rebbe, not a single one of them wanted to remain behind. “How is it possible to spend Yom Tov anywhere but with the Rebbe,” was the feeling shared by all.

The 800-kilometer (approximately 500 miles) journey was fraught with danger. Along the way, one would be exposed to the brutality and cruelty of the Cossack and Communist troops.

In addition the Bochorim would collect penny by penny until they had enough to buy a precious ticket.

But with a burning desire to spend Yom Tov with the Rebbe, Reb Leizer along with his fellow Bochorim made the arduous and expensive journey to Rostov.

CONFUSION AND WORRY

Every year on Motzei Yom Kippur someone would announce in the name of the Rebbe that all the Bochorim should return to Yeshiva the next day. Whoever did so had his travelling expenses paid for. Anyone who chose to remain in Rostov for Simchas Torah would have to arrange their own accommodations, meals and way back. This system was put in place to encourage the Bochorim to remain in Yeshiva for Simchas Torah.

A handful of Bochorim were able to fend for themselves, but for most it was time to leave, as difficult as it was.

Reb Leizer Nanas was part of the small group who were able to remain for Simchas Torah. His benefactor was Reb Folik Gourarie who lived in the same city as the newly resettled Yeshiva – Kremenchug.

For a number of years already Reb Folik was unable to make the long, difficult journey to Rostov, so he appointed Reb Leizer as his personal Shliach. He supplied him with the necessary travel tickets for his return journey and plenty extra for his personal needs.

As the line at the train station began to fill with Bochorim waiting to acquire their return ticket to Yeshiva, Reb Leizer went to his lodgings and went to sleep.

Suddenly he felt himself being woken up from his sleep and was shocked to see Reb Shilem Kuratin the Mashpia of his Yeshiva standing in front of him.

Utterly surprised, he quickly washed Negel Vasser and turned his gaze to the Mashpia.

“This evening,” began Reb Shilem, “I showed the Rebbe the list of Bochorim who had traveled from Kremenchug to Rostov for the Yomim Noraim. As he was going through the names, he paused by yours and told me to hurry to where you are staying and awaken you. The instructions are clear: you are to go immediately to the train station and buy a ticket to your hometown, not to the Yeshiva.”

Hearing this sudden news, Reb Leizer was shaken to the core. “What is the meaning of this sudden ‘eviction’ in the middle of the night? Perhaps something terrible has happened to someone in my family and the Rebbe has received a telegram informing him of this. Surely this is why he told me to go home and not to Yeshiva.”

Overwhelmed, he stepped out into the cold night. He went to seek the advice of his friend Rabbi Yaakov Landau, an assistant in the Rebbe Rashab’s house and one who took care of the Yechidus roster at the time. He had a room in the Rebbe’s house from which he organized the schedule of those going in to see the Rebbe.

Rushing into his room, he poured out his heart to Reb

Yaakov and begged him to allow him to speak to the Rebbe that same night.

AN UNUSUAL YECHIDUS

Reb Yaakov was adamant, “A Yechidus on Motzei Yom Kippur?” This was something unheard of and could not be arranged.

Feeling his pain, Reb Yaakov advised him: “Rebbetzin Shterna Sorah is busy with some things and has not gone to bed yet, she holds you in high esteem, why don’t you go to her and see what she suggests.”

Reb Leizer hurried off and met the Rebbetzin in Gan Eden Hatachton. He burst into bitter tears as he explained to her the situation. However, the Rebbetzin also had the same response: a Yechidus on Motzei Yom Kippur was impossible.

Standing helplessly outside the Rebbe Rashab’s room, Reb Leizer was at a loss about what to do next. Suddenly, two men rushed by him and headed into the room. “They certainly were dealing with a matter of extreme importance that won’t be delayed at all,” thought Reb Leizer.

The Rebbetzin, who was still standing nearby, understood what was going through his mind and suggested, “Stand opposite the door and wait. Perhaps the Rebbe will notice you and signal that you can come inside.”

Following her advice, he stood there waiting with hope in his heart. After about five minutes the two men left. The Rebbe’s seat was positioned opposite the door, so when he sat down he noticed Reb Leizer and motioned for him to approach.

Tears were already streaming down his face. “Rebbe,” he cried, “If I am not Zoiche to spend Simchas Torah here, then at least grant me permission to be with my friends in Yeshiva. Has something happened at home?”

The Rebbe calmly reassured him that nothing had happened.

The next question came out of Reb Leizer’s mouth

almost against his will, “Then why is it necessary for me to return home?”

The Rebbe gazed intently at him and replied, “Not everything can be said. I am telling you, go home.”

Seeing Reb Leizer’s crestfallen face, he added, “You will be my Shliach. When you pass through Yekaterinoslav, please deliver a letter to Horav Levi Yitzchok. Now hurry to buy a ticket, and tomorrow at ten o’clock in the morning come back here and I will give you the letter.”

He quickly rushed to the station. As he approached the crowded station, he saw many of his friends who had been standing in line for hours already. Without thinking he rushed passed all of them and positioned himself at the head of the line.

Seeing this, his fellow Bochorim cried out in protest. “I am a Shliach,” he told them proudly and they let him keep his spot.

At five o’clock in the morning, after many hours of waiting, the ticket booth finally opened up. Being first in line, Reb Leizer quickly paid for his ticket and

got his passport stamped.

At exactly ten o’clock, following the instructions he had received the day before, Reb Leizer went to get the letter for Horav Levi Yitzchok. He was now ready to leave; yet he could not. Rooted to his spot, a terrible fear overcame him. “Rebbe,” he cried out, “am I to travel on the train all alone?”

The Rebbe’s forehead creased and he turned his sharp gaze to the trembling Bochor, “Alone? How can you say that? Alone? There is no place empty of His presence.”

Staring at him sharply, the Rebbe concluded, “Hashem should help you, may you merit a Refuah Shleima.”

These words struck him with great surprise; being a healthy and strong young man he did not understand them at all. Yet he knew that his time was up and there



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was no way he could ask the Rebbe a question.

THE SPECIAL DELIVERY

The train stopped in Yekaterinoslav on Friday afternoon. Reb Leizer went directly to Horav Levi Yitzchok's house to hand him the letter.

Horav Levi Yitzchok himself opened the door. He read the letter and said, "Being that you are not returning there now, I will send my response with someone else."

After a short pause he told Reb Leizer, "Come with me, I want to show you something."

Horav Levi Yitzchok headed to a nearby room and opened the door. Sitting in the room was a young Bochor of about sixteen years old learning Chassidus, completely oblivious to the arrival of the 'guests'. "Take a good look at him," he said to Reb Leizer, "you will certainly benefit from this." [This Bochor was none other than our Rebbe.]

At long last he arrived home and celebrated Simchas Torah with a group of Bochorim who were in the city at the time.

THE NEED FOR A CURE

The morning after Simchas Torah, Reb Leizer awoke, but something was awfully wrong. He tried to open his eyes and lift up his head, however he was too weak. His head was burning with fever and he was in a terrible condition.

The doctor was quickly brought in to see him. After a short check, the doctor announced that he was a victim to the dreaded Typhus disease.

His illness dragged on for weeks. Finally when the doctor established that he was healthy enough to get up from his bed, he discovered that his feet were unable to support him; he couldn't walk properly.

As the months went by, his strength had still not fully returned. In the days following Pesach a letter arrived from the Rebbe Rashab with instructions for Reb Leizer. The Rebbe instructed him, along with another Chossid who was also weak, to travel to an inn for the summer months. This would be very beneficial for their health, the letter stated.

Reb Itche Der Masmid's father owned the inn and all expenses had been taken care of already. The innkeeper dedicated himself to nurturing them back to their full strength and slowly but surely improvements could be

seen.

THE CHALLENGE

In the meantime a group of secular youngsters also moved into the inn. Their schedule and lifestyle was completely different to that of the Bochorim. They would work during the day and sing and dance at night.

Yet as happy and content as those youths appeared, there was one boy who seemed somber and dejected. His mannerisms and conduct gave off the impression that he had also been a Bochor in Yeshiva until not so long ago.

Reb Leizer and his friend realized this and decided that they must come up with a way to save this boy.

After much thought, they concocted a scheme. They approached the group and boldly stated, "We are ready to debate you, do you accept the challenge?"

The arguments were heated; back and forth they went, until the youths were stumped and completely defeated.

The debates continued throughout the summer.

Through these arguments the Bochorim were able to approach the boy and build a connection with him.

As Tishrei approached, the Bochorim began preparing themselves for the trip to Rostov. Their hearts filled with excitement as they busied themselves with the necessary Hachonos.

As the day of the trip approached, the Bochorim discussed what they should do with their new friend with who they had managed to build a relationship. They agreed: "Let's invite him to come to the Rebbe with us."

The Bochor readily agreed to travel with them.

REALIZATION AND CLARITY

As the train pulled into the Rostov station, Reb Leizer, his colleague, and their new friend stepped off. And as they headed into the city, an incredible flash of inspiration entered Reb Leizer's mind.

"Aha, now I understand everything. The Shlichus that began last Motzei Yom Kippur had come to an end today, nearly a full year later. The Rebbe foresaw all the events and knew that in order for me to save this Bochor, I had to become ill at home and then be sent to that specific inn for recuperation."

That Bochor who was saved from the clutches of those not true to the Torah and its Mitzvos, eventually became a respected and esteemed individual, thanks to the Rebbe Rashab's foresight and care. ■