



# The Cost of Concentration

*In honor of Chai Elul, which marks the birthdays of the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe, and the beginning of the dissemination of Chassidus, we present the following story.*

“We have no place to go and no way to make a livelihood” cried the crestfallen Yidden of Poland.

The government’s new round of decrees, banishing Yidden from the villages and countryside, dealt a harsh blow to the many Jews who leased inns, breweries and mills from the local landholders. With nowhere left to go, the Jewish refugees poured into the big cities by the thousands, in search of some food and shelter for their worn out spirits.

Hearing of this calamity, the Alter Rebbe immediately set out on the road, visiting Jewish communities throughout Poland and Lithuania to raise the large sums needed to feed and shelter the homeless, and to bribe the government ministers to alleviate the decrees.

Arriving in the town of Tulchin, he went to pay his respects to Reb Boruch, an einikel of the Baal Shem Tov.

“What brings you to this part of the country?” asked Reb Boruch with surprise.

The Alter Rebbe proceeded to explain the purpose of his journey.

“Fundraising for bribes!?” objected Rabbi Boruch. “Surely, the matter can be dealt with without recourse to such tactics. Perhaps instead you should teach the Yidden the meaning of *Echad* the way my holy Zeida would say it. Certainly that should suffice to thwart the decrees of our enemies!”

“On the contrary,” replied the Alter Rebbe. “It is your Zeida’s *Echad* that is the cause for this situation.

The Ater Rebbe explained.

“Three hundred years ago the Yidden were driven from Spain. They wandered from port to port and from land to land, but none of the kings of Europe would allow them to settle in their domains. Among the wandering Yidden, a handful had salvaged a considerable portion of their wealth, and they offered huge bribes to the local rulers in return for a safe haven; but each and every time they were cruelly turned away.

“Why did the rulers of Europe—whose appetite for silver and gold was legendary—refuse these profitable offers? Because this was but the earthly reflection of what was unfolding in the heavens. The *Sarim* who embody the spirit of these nations refused to host the Yidden in their domain. ‘We know these Yidden,’ complained the Malachim, ‘No sooner do they settle in a new place than they erect houses of study and Shul’s, where they learn Torah and proclaim the unity of Hashem. Soon the cry, *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*, will resound throughout our lands. And what will become of us? We shall disintegrate, as darkness gives way to light and folly is banished by wisdom. No, we’ll do without Jews.’

“But the Malach of Poland had a

different reaction. ‘I have nothing to fear from them,’ he proclaimed calmly, ‘On the contrary, I shall only profit from their presence. Yes, they’ll build study halls and learn Torah, but they’ll do so for their own selfish agenda. Yes, they’ll build Shul’s and scream out “*Echad*” but it will be their own piety that they are proclaiming, not the unity of Hashem. The flow of Chayus that was destined for Hashem’s chosen people will drain right out of their cracked vessels and into my own coffers.’

“The events here on earth followed Poland’s heavenly decision. The king of Poland had his tallest knight mount his horse and hold his lance aloft, and the Yidden amassed a pile of gold and silver that topped the tip of the raised lance. This accomplished, the Yidden were permitted to settle in Poland.

“For close to three hundred years this agreement was held in place. Then your Zeida came along and taught the true meaning of *Echad*. When the Malach of Poland learned of this he began to have second thoughts. ‘I agreed to accept the Yidden of the old *Echad*, not the new!’

“Well,” concluded the Alter Rebbe, “since we’re not about to give up the *Echad* your holy Zeida has taught us, we need to throw some more silver on the pile.” **D**