

# The Fire of Simchas Torah

*The following story was told by Reb Pinchas Reizis of Shklov and recounted to Reb Nochum, the son of the Mittlerer Rebbe.*

## Cold Devoured

The year 5547, related Reb Pinchas, suffered a terrible winter. In Liozna, the first snow of the season fell during *Chol Hamoed Sukkos*. We had to wear fur coats and warm shoes in order to sit in the *Sukkah*, and often had to shovel the snow off the *schach* prior to eating.

Shmini Atzeres fell out that year on Shabbos, and since snow fell the entire night, the [Alter] Rebbe directed us to tell the Goy “Kumza” that we needed to eat in the *sukkah*, and as long as snow is covering the *Sukkah*, it is forbidden to eat there. Kumza thereby removed the snow from the *schach*, enabling the Rebbe to make Kiddush and eat the Seudas Yom Tov.

Most of the Chassidim who came to Liozna for Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, arrived with terrible colds, and many partially frostbitten.

On Friday, Hoshana Rabba, I entered the Rebbe’s Room to submit the fulfillment of a *shlichus* he had given me. At that time, I took the opportunity to inform the Rebbe of the large number of Chassidim who had arrived ill with flues and colds, and that many of them had come down with dangerously high fevers.

The Rebbe then leaned his holy head on his hands for some time in a state of *d’veikus*. When he finally opened his eyes, he said with his well-known tune:

“Regarding Torah, the Torah says ‘*Eish das lamo!*’ (A fiery Torah he gave to them). As today is Simchas Torah, everyone should be brought to *Hakafos* and ‘*Eish* will consume *Eish*’, the fire of Simchas Torah will devour the fire of the cold”.

## Disbelief

In Liozna there lived two elderly Yidden who were *Misnagdim*. Although they had a deep reverence and admiration for the Rebbe, they were very opposed to Chassidus. The first one was named Reb Eizik Mechadesh, and the second was Reb Naftoli Zahir.

Reb Eizik had a nephew named R’ Moshe Uptzuger who was a Chossid of the Rebbe. For Simchas Torah that year R’ Moshe arrived in Liozna with two of his sons and his son-in-law, as guests of his uncle Reb Eizik.

Reb Moshe Uptzuger was an elderly and very frail individual, and the journey and bitter cold had harmed him most dreadfully. He lay ill with a burning fever,

and his sons and son-in-law had been badly affected as well. Avrohom the Doctor said that while the *yungeleit* will hopefully recover, with HaShem’s help, from their poor condition and return to good health, Reb Moshe had a far less promising prognosis. In addition to being old and weak, he has a very high fever, feels as though his sides are being poked and as such, his chance of survival was doubtful.

Reb Eizik was terribly distraught and argued that such rash actions – coming to the Rebbe in such a state – was not only a bad idea, but in fact a *Mitzva habo’ B’aveirah*.

On Shmini Atzeres after Maariv, I went around with Efraim Michel of Shklov, Chaim Eliyahu of Dubrovna, and a few more *yungeleit* to all of the inns and motels to help bring all of the sick Chassidim to the shul for Hakafos, so that they may warm up and be healed by the “*Eish das lamo!*” of Torah.

Although the Rebbe’s words were by then well known to all (as I had immediately, upon leaving the Rebbe’s Room, gone into the *Zal* and relayed what the Rebbe had said regarding the sick Chassidim), nevertheless, when we



## “‘Eish’ will consume ‘Eish’, the fire of Simchas Torah will devour the fire of the cold...”

arrived at the lodgings of the Chassidim they all insisted that I repeat the Rebbe’s remarks word for word.

What a delight it was to witness the great joy that the Rebbe’s words brought to all of the quarters of the ill Chassidim. Even the *baalei-batim* and young children were thrilled and inspired by the Rebbe’s statement, and everyone was certain that all of the sick people would recover, *B’zras HaShem*.

That night, the weather was frightful. Yet even the snow, rain, bone chilling wind, and mud filled streets failed to deter the sick and ailing from coming to Shul. While some were able to walk with a bit of support, many others were not able to move on their own at all and we were forced to carry them.

### Sincere Emunah

When we arrived at the house of Reb Eizik, we found him arguing with the children of Reb Moshe. They insisted that the *yungeleit* be asked to come help them get to the Rebbe’s *Hakafos*, and to transport their father there as well. Reb Eizik on the other hand, argued that it was just too dangerous for them to leave the house, and that attempting to even

move their father was absolutely out of the question. Not only was Reb Moshe suffering from a terrible fever, he was not even conscious of his surroundings. Avrohom the Doctor’s opinion could not be ignored, Reb Eizik maintained. Someone that critically ill must not be taken outside as just one small wind would be enough to finish him off, *chas ve’sholom*

When Chaim Eliyahu of Dubrovna, myself, and a few others entered the house of Reb Eizik, the sons of Reb Moshe began shouting with joy:

“Boruch Hashem, we and our father are saved!”

Reb Eizik – on his part – was shouting:

“Murderers, Killers, your actions are against the holy Torah!”

As I approached Reb Moshe and saw him laying like a block of wood, blue and black with closed eyes and a burning fever, I was overcome with freight and a feeling of helplessness.

“What do you say?” yelled Reb Eizik. “They want to take this critically sick person to shul for *Hakafos*! Even regarding the time of the Beis Hamikdosh in Yerushalayim, the *Gemara* in *Chagiga* clearly states that one who is

ill is exempt from *aliya l’regel*. If you will take Reb Moshe outside it will be true murder!”

At the same time, Reb Moshe’s children argued that if the Rebbe said that this is the cure, they believe with complete faith that by being brought to the *Hakafos* he will be healed.

I must admit that at the time I did not know what to say; I was truly confused. On one hand, I heard the arguments of Reb Eizik and saw how Reb Moshe was burning with fever. On the other hand, I heard the words of his children, full of pure and unwavering *emunah* in the Rebbe. It was they, those simple men, who demonstrated definitively the truest *emunas tzadikkim* and absolute self-sacrifice.

With each moment, I became more and more impressed by the devout *emunah* displayed by Reb Moshe’s children. To this day, I remember the shame I felt welling up inside. So great was its affect on me that I decided I must go in for *yechidus* at the first possible opportunity to discuss this with the Rebbe.

I thought to myself: “Pinye, the son of the great Reb Henoah, student of the

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greatest *geonim* of Shklov, and a Chossid for over seven years nevertheless, is still obedient to his natural feelings and understandings. Yet these *yungeleit*, who come to the Rebbe out of *kabolos ol* and do not even understand the Rebbe's Torah, are able to express such sincere *emunah* of the *Nefesh Elohis*... be ashamed, Pinye, before the simple Chassidisher tailor and merchant!"

I was so lost in thought, that I did not realize what was going on around me until Chaim Eliyahu shoved mesaying that Avrohom the Doctor proclaimed these to be Reb Moshe's last hours, *rachmona l'tzlon*.

Before having a chance to think, I heard Boruch yelling at his father Reb Moshe:

"Father! The Rebbe sent messengers to bring you to *Hakafos*! Father, wake up! We must go the *Hakafos* with the Rebbe!"

In Reb Moshe's room, a great tumult broke out. When I walked in, I saw him lying with his eyes open and a happy countenance, waiting to be brought to the Rebbe's *Hakafos*.

Chaim Eliyahu hurriedly called in a few more Chassidim who then helped dress Reb Moshe in warm clothes. On his own he could not move a limb, so the *yungeleit* put him on their hands and carried him to Shul.

The stifling heat of the packed shul overwhelmed me as we entered. Part of the ailing crowd sat leaning on their hands while some did not even have the strength to do that and were just lying quietly. Many coughed constantly, and there were those whose groans were just heartbreaking.

The worst case was Reb Yaakov Yeshaya of Chotimsk, a sixty year old Chossid, *talmid chacham* and *baal avoda*, and a generous *baal tzedaka* well known for his hospitality. While Avrohom the Doctor claimed that he would recover, he was currently lying like a lump of clay, burning up with fever. It was truly an awful sight to behold.

### Beis Din's Verdict

The *seder* of Shemini Atzeres with the Rebbe was as follows: In the early afternoon the Rebbe would daven *Mincha* with a small *minyán* near his room, in *Gan Eden Hatachton*. Immediately after *Mincha*, one began to feel the atmosphere of excitement and joy that surrounded the Rebbe.

In the evening, the Rebbe would say Torah for an exclusive group of Chassidim and guests, and a few hours later would daven *Maariv* and then dance *Hakafos* – known as "*Yechidus Hakafos*"

- with a select group of *talmidim* and guests.

The Rebbe himself would say all of the *pesukim* of *Atah Hareisa*, head the procession around the *bima*, and say all of the *pizmonim* and *pesukim* of *Hakafos*.

For every *Hakafa*, the Rebbe would walk almost a full circle move the Torah from his right shoulder to his left, put his right hand on the shoulder of one of the *mekuravim*, and go out in a dance.

During these *Hakafos*, one felt as if he truly saw *Elohis*. Each one felt as if he was standing in the Beis Hamikdash and every second of it was precious. During each and every moment one was able to reach extremely high levels in Torah, *avoda*, and *teshuva*.

When the *Yechidus Hakafos* concluded, the Rebbe made *kiddush* in the *sukkah*, and immediately entered the big *Beis Hamedrash* for *Hakafos*.

That year, something special took place. When the Rebbe entered the *sukkah* to make *kiddush*, he called for Reb Michoel Aharon of Vitebsk, Reb Shabsi Meir of Beshenkovitz and Reb Yaakov of Smilian. When the three of them came into the *sukkah*, the Rebbe said to Reb Michoel Aharon, "You're a Kohen"; to Reb Shabsi Meir, "You're a Levi"; and to Reb Yaakov, "You're a Yisroel".



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“I need a *beis din* of three in which a Kohen, Levi, and Yisroel will be present, and I have chosen the three of you.

“Listen to *kiddush*, answer amen after all of the *brachos*, and have in mind all of the *kavanos* that I am currently thinking”.

Before beginning, the Rebbe ordered a large amount of wine to be brought.

The Rebbe recited *kiddush*, and poured the leftovers into one of the wine bottles. He then told the *beis din* whom he'd appointed for the special mission of healing, to take the wine, mix it into the other bottles, and distribute it to all of the sick and ill, and this will bring them a *refuah sheleima*. He also added that they should announce in the women's section that any woman who has not borne children or had suffered miscarriages, should drink from the wine as well.

Immediately it became known that all those who tasted the leftover wine of the Rebbe's *kiddush* would be cured from all sickness, and all the woman who could not give birth would find salvation.

When the *beis din* entered the *Beis Hamedrash*, a hush fell over all those assembled. Everyone understood that they were the “*Beis Din Tzedek*”; that the Rebbe had chosen them and made them messengers of healing and salvation.

We all looked upon them with awe and reverence.

The *beis din*, together with the Chassidim appointed to assist them, stepped up onto the *bima*, and Reb Yaakov of Smilian – the Yisroel – repeated what the Rebbe said, word-for-word.

When he finished, he stated:

“What I have told you until now, were the words as we heard them from the Rebbe; now I would like to add some words of my own regarding the current situation. It is well known, that in order for a *brocha* to be fulfilled, the one being blessed must fulfill the following two conditions: Firstly, he must have complete faith that the *brocha* will be fulfilled, beyond any shadow of a doubt. Secondly, he must be completely devoted and dedicated to fulfill the Rebbe's will”.

Although everyone had heard what Reb Yaakov said, it was nevertheless decided that Reb Michael Aharon, the Kohen – who had a powerful voice – would repeat everything that Reb Yaakov said, and as soon as he finished, the distribution began.

### Wonders!

When the Rebbe arrived for *Hakafos*, a palpable silence immediately filled

the room. One could hear a pin-drop. The Rebbe recited the first *possuk* “*Atah horeisa*” as well as the final *possuk* “*Ki mitziyon*”, and participated in the first and seventh *Hakafos*.

The next day, everyone spoke of the wondrous miracle that occurred. Avrohom the Doctor claimed that for the elderly patients this was true *techiyas hameisim*. According to the medical textbooks, they were beyond any prospect for recovery and their salvation was an indubitable miracle.

The recovery of Reb Moshe prompted Reb Eizik to become a Chossid.

“That simple *emunas chachomim*” he said, “which I saw by my nephews amazed me. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it”.

Reb Eizik was by nature a diligent learner and deep thinker. Every Torah that the Rebbe would say publicly would be reviewed a number of times by Reb Eizik, and he would inquire about anything that was beyond his comprehension until he became proficient in it. **D**

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*This story is based on  
Likkutei Diburim vol. 2 likkut 14*