

# A Question of What and Why

Reb Shmuel Pinchas Levin usually woke up at the rooster's crow. He enjoyed being up then, as the streets of Homil were always quiet and empty at that time. Walking to the stream for mikveh in such a setting was conducive to thinking Chassidus, something this great chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek craved. "There isn't much opportunity for *avoda* in a busy work day," he once remarked.

One morning, while the stars were still out, Reb Shmuel Pinchas peeked through the window, and his mind gravitated to thoughts of his business. "I need to collect that debt from Peshovsky this week being that the new shipment is due to arrive next week." Reb Pinchas Shmuel stroked his short black beard. "I wonder if the day of collection has even come." But then he caught himself, "Oy! I'm putting my own needs before the I do as the Aibershter demands of me! For what purpose do I study Chassidus?"

It was only after davening that Reb Shmuel Pinchas allowed himself to examine his loan documents. The old chest where he kept those papers was in the attic, up the rickety ladder and through the trap door. Dust covered

everything like the *mon* from heaven, aside for a path created by his previous visits. This scene reminded Reb Shmuel Pinchas of *krias Yam Suf*. The hinges squealed as he opened the ancient oak case and he blanched. Red Shmuel Pinchas was staring at the bottom of an empty box.

"What?! They were here yesterday!" He exclaimed. "What should I do? Go to the police?" His hands were shaking. "Nah, they'll give me trouble. They'll accuse me of tax evasion or whatever. You never know with those fiends." The confident Reb Shmuel Pinchas was replaced by his bewildered double.



A frenzied knock rings through the door at the home of Reb Isaac, begging for a reply.

"Who's there?" a kind voice responds.

"It's, it's me, Levin from Niezgarim Street. Is Reb Isaac there?"

"Yes. Just a moment."

An old and wise face appears at the door. "What is it Reb yid?"

"I need to speak with you! Something terrible has occurred..."

It took time for the episode to be

related. Reb Shmuel Pinchas, after all, wasn't in the best of states. Reb Isaac Homiler advised him to travel to Lubavitch. "The Rebbe will know what to do," he reasoned.

The coach fare was expensive but well worth the money. And so, it was early the next morning, when the moon still hung over the snow covered houses, that the buggy carrying a drowsy Reb Shmuel Pinchas, squelched into the quiet town of Lubavitch.

"Ah, Reb Shmuel Pinchas. Is that you?" Reb Chaim Ber, the Rebbe's secretary, was trudging through the frost on his way to open the shul.

"Yes. Oy! It's so good that we met. Is the Rebbe able to receive me for *yechidus* today? Something terrible has happened!" Little puffs of steam issued from the hot tears rolling down his face.

"I can see that you're in pain. *Der Aibershter vet helf'n*. Yes, yes, come inside and warm yourself by the fire, have a hot glass of tea and I'll see to it that you have a *yechidus*. But never despair! The Aibershter always provides a *yeshua*."

The two must have looked odd together. A downcast young man of large

physical stature, yet stooped as though he carried the weight of hardship on his broad back, walking slowly behind an upbeat older man, small in size but confident in disposition. Troubled eyes were the only things they shared; one man suffered and the other was known for his empathy.

“How sweet it is to be back in Lubavitch,” Reb Pinchas Shmuel sighed. “If only it were for a more joyous occasion.”

“What?! They were here yesterday!” He exclaimed. “What should I do? Go to the police? Nah, they’ll give me trouble...”

The pair entered Reb Chaim Ber’s office. A simple desk stood in the middle of the room filling a third of the cramped space. A fire burned in the hearth, defying the frigid weather outside the paneled wooden walls. Over the crackling flames, Reb Shmuel Pinchas heard a voice from the nearby room.

“The Rebbe begins his day by reading a portion of Tehillim and his holy chamber is adjacent to this room,” Reb Chaim Ber whispered in explanation. “I’m going to request of the Rebbe that he permit your entrance as soon as possible.”

Oh, how wonderful it was to listen to the Rebbe’s sweet recitation of Tehillim! Reb Shmuel Pinchas began to cry softly, the tears already accustomed to their trail down his cheeks.

After immersing in the mikva and davening fervently, Reb Shmuel Pesach was allowed into the Rebbe’s room. He poured out his dreadful plight with tears in his eyes, and the Rebbe acknowledged the hurt expressed on his face and sighed.

“Sometimes,” the Rebbe began, “when tragedies of this nature occur we must stop asking ‘what’ and begin asking ‘why.’ Heaven may be sending us a message to remind us of our obligations.

“Now I will instruct you on how to proceed,” the Rebbe said, and Reb Shmuel Pinchas listened intently to his holy guidance.



Snow fell incessantly and it was hard to maneuver the carriage. Tall pines hugged the small path and their needles sagged under the weight of the white deluge. The blizzard intensified; the branches couldn’t handle the burden and a tree unloaded onto the ornate coach driving below.

Thump!

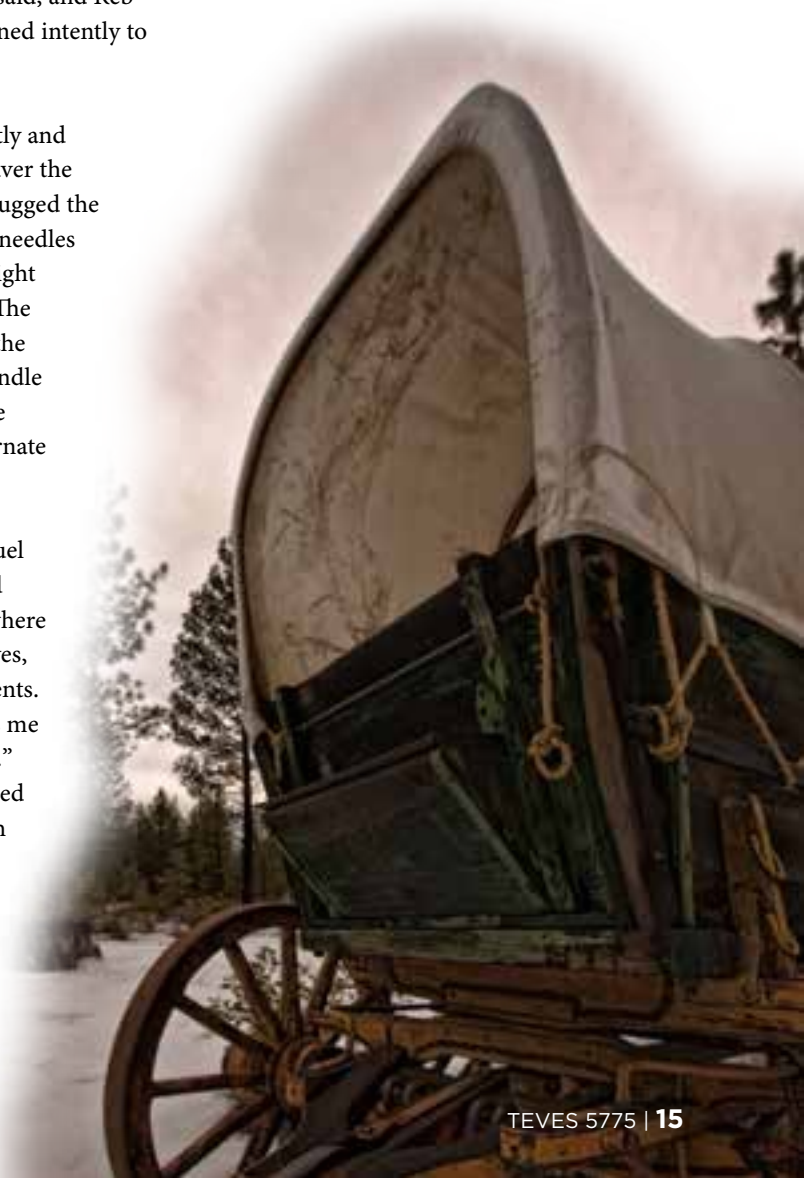
Startled, Reb Shmuel Pinchas woke up and attempted to recall where he was. “Yawn! Ah, yes, yes, the loan documents. The Rebbe. He wants me to travel to Bobruisk.”

His legs felt cramped and he rose to stretch them. “I remember. That wasn’t the only command he gave. The Rebbe also mentioned an inn near Bobruisk.

What inspiration can I possibly receive there? I must spend Shabbos amongst peasants, he said.”

Reb Shmuel Pinchas looked outside. “I wonder what time it is.”

The vehicle halted suddenly, flinging its standing passenger onto the thick wooden floor. Reb Shmuel Pinchas tasted blood. The wagon driver entered the cabin dressed in a



Raucous peasants, drunken singing, clanking glasses, smoke, and the stale smell of spirits and broiled meat overwhelmed him; but his new attitude gave him comfort despite all.

heavy wool parka with matching gloves. Icicles hung from his blonde mustache. “My good sir, *mne zhal*, I’m sorry.”

Reb Shmuel Pinchas wiped the dust off his short black jacket. “What happened?”

“Sir, we’ve arrived at the inn. Sunset approaches.”

“An arrival indeed,” Reb Shmuel Pinchas muttered as he pulled his trunk through the snow. “An arrival indeed.”

The small log cabin looked cozy enough to him; smoke billowed from the red brick chimney, testifying that a warm room awaited. Timing was what bothered the chossid. “Quite a mundane place to spend a holy day,” he thought.

But as Reb Shmuel Pinchas tugged at his beard, he concluded, “Actually, the destination becomes sanctified by the Rebbe’s designation.”

All of his senses were engaged when he entered the inn. Raucous peasants, drunken singing, clanking glasses, smoke, and the stale smell of spirits and broiled meat overwhelmed him; but his new attitude gave him comfort despite all.



Solitude was Reb Shmuel Pinchas’s companion during Shabbos, and he had half the mind to invite some gentiles to dine with him, but thought the better of it. The little food that he brought with him combined with the vodka he acquired, satisfied his frugal appetite, and

before long the sun set, bringing Shabbos to an end. For the first time that he could call to mind, Reb Shmuel Pinchas was actually glad that it had. “I have yet to discover the purpose of my trip here; although I of course have faith that it will eventually become evident.”

The men at the inn weren’t at all courteous and sleep wouldn’t come to him then. As he paced his tiny quarters, he thought, “In any event, I will leave at first light tomorrow. Bobruisk proper will be the last phase of this taxing journey.”

At dawn, an exhausted Reb Shmuel Pinchas left the inn and its memories behind. He climbed the iron steps to his wagon, and promptly fell into a slumber. Suddenly, after what felt like a mere moment, Reb Shmuel Pinchas was roused by relentless knocking. “Who is it?” he called while rubbing his bleary eyes.

A familiar looking heavy-set man entered. It was one of the peasants he had spent Shabbos with in the inn.

“My esteemed friend! How is the good sir?” His chin wobbled as he spoke and his cheeks quivered. His bulbous nose, filled with broken veins, sat awkwardly on his face.

“Good, thank G-d. What do you want?”

“As you can see, my dearest acquaintance, I am a merchant, and I assume that you are too.” His breath

reeked of stale alcohol, and although he wore the usual green tunic and black caftan, one couldn’t help but notice the frayed sleeves and the haggard look about him. He definitely did not play the part of the merchant that well.

Reb Shmuel Pinchas took pains not to reveal his suspicion. “How may I be of service?”

“My friends and I deal with jewels and we’re going to Bobruisk to obtain more of those precious stones.”

“Okay, so what have I got to do with this?”

The man smiled. “Well, we only have unpaid loan documents as barter and we want you to establish the trust between us and potential vendors.”

Reb Shmuel Pinchas suspected that these documents were the ones stolen from his attic. His mind flooded with the Rebbe’s instructions, and he found himself agreeing to accompany the peasants. “I believe we have a deal, sir.” The luxurious cart, previously carrying one man, now carried four.

Reb Shmuel Pinchas sat between the window and a skinny, tall fellow with glasses. “I’m almost certain that I’ve found my documents; I lack only the certainty attained by sight.”

This precisely was what he demanded when they arrived at the bustling city and parked at the house of his fellow chossid,



Reb Moshe Meshl. "I feel it is only right that I be shown the objects I'm to vouch for."

"Of course, sir," agreed the heavy one, who proceeded to immediately pull a bundle out of his sack. "My friend," he said with a flourish, "the parchments."

Had Reb Shmuel Pinchas not suspected them already, he would have screamed. He could recognize that handwriting anywhere. "May I analyze these privately?"

Reb Shmuel Pinchas flipped through the documents. "Hmm... a Prezwelska, two Stefanovitchs. It seems they're all here!"

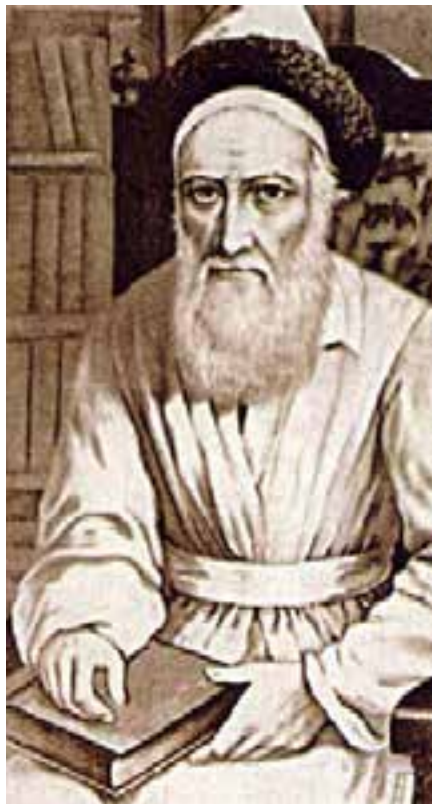
He sidled up to Reb Moshe Meshl and whispered of his discovery. "Loan documents were stolen from me last week and I'm certain these are they."

A troubled look registered on Reb Moshe Meshl's face. "We have found the mouse but have not any poison!"

He looked up thoughtfully. "Hashem always provides a solution. Let us call the boys..."



Besides the large oak tree and duck pond, a passerby on Nikolai Avenue that morning would have noticed that the street was recently the scene of a struggle. Indeed, Reb Moshe Meshl gathered his sons and nephews, all strong youth, and told them what had occurred,



encouraging them to take action. The confrontation was brutal with a few teeth lost and a broken arm, but the younger men prevailed over their grayer opponents, and before long they had them trussed up in a cellar. Reb Shmuel Pinchas was relieved at last. "Thank you my dear friend. I'm forever indebted to your courage and wits."

"Don't thank me for I am but a messenger. Offer gratitude to the Rebbe who guided you in the endeavor."

One additional thing had to then be accomplished. "We must summon the police and have these men imprisoned."

"A fine idea, Reb Shmuel Pinchas, but on Sunday the station is closed," explained Reb Moshe Meshl, the Bobruisk native.

"Tomorrow will bring the same results as today. At least, boruch Hashem, I've recovered my property!"

A fate other than the one planned by the aforementioned mortals awaited the thieves; Reb Moshe Meshl's son came in later that day with a police officer. "The name is Borisohn. I heard you men found some robbers. What happened?"

After the details were related to the law enforcer by cacophony of eager voices, the crowd learned that this wasn't the crooks' first incident. "We've been searching for these criminals for months now," Borisohn related.

Armed men arrived soon after and everyone headed home. Reb Moshe Meshl to his quaint cottage, Reb Shmuel Pinchas to Homil, and the criminals to prison, for isn't that an outlaw's true abode? **D**

*(This story is based on a letter by the Frierdiker Rebbe; Igros Kodesh vol. 8. p. 491)*