



לזכות הילדה בצבאות ה' מושקא שתח' זעלערמאיר
נולדה י"א כסלו ה'תשע"ו

שתגדל לתורה לחופה ולמעשים טובים כרצו"ק כ"ק אדמו"ר

נדפס ע"י הוריה הרב שלמה יוסף וזוגתו מרת אסתר שיחיו זעלערמאיר

וזקניה הרה"ת ר' יצחק יהודה וזוגתו מרת חנה שיחיו קופפער ומרת דבורה תח' זעלערמאיר

A Heated Quarrel

THE ATTEMPTED CHEREM

The years 5546-5549 (תקמ"ו-תקמ"ט) were fraught with tension for the Alter Rebbe. The students of the Mezritcher Magid, headed by Reb Mendel Horodoker, had appointed him to lead the Chassidim in all matters of public relations. After all, it was the Alter Rebbe whom the holy Magid relied upon to stand up to the opposers of the Chassidim and Chassidus. Often, delegates from Chassidic groups across Belorussia would consult with the Alter Rebbe about such concerns. It was then that the *misnagdim*, centered in Shklov and Minsk, focused their efforts squarely against our great Rebbe. While the Alter Rebbe spent most of his time fortifying the foundations of the Chassidim and Chassidus, he still found the time to travel to the big cities and deliver deep *pilpulim* in *nigleh* and fiery discourses in Chassidus.

A large debate took place in Shklov at that time which attracted scholars from around the region. People came from Tzaos, Mstsislaw, and other cities, joining the erudite Shklov residents. They sat together in one of the city's large study halls and devised many questions in intricate *sugyos*, intending to stump the Alter Rebbe. Upon answering the questions they posed, the Alter Rebbe countered with a few queries of his own, which proved too difficult for our gaggle of intellectuals. Our great Rebbe then said:

"Yidden, Torah, and Hashem are one. When one knows how things are in the Torah above, he will know the explanation in its revealed counterpart down here. Every day Torah must be new in one's eyes, because it is given to us daily. The Holy One, blessed be He—that is, the part of G-d that is in every Jew—speaks [the Torah],

and Moshe—the *da'as*, knowledge, that exists in the Jew—writes and reveals it; as it is written (Iyov 32:8), 'And the breath of the Almighty permits them to understand.'"

The scholars, confounded, begged the Alter Rebbe to tell them the solution to the difficulty he presented, but the Rebbe didn't answer. Ten of the young men, geniuses all of them, followed the Alter Rebbe after that, among them Reb Pinchas; this angered the *misnagdim* terribly. As the opposition recovered in Minsk, the Alter Rebbe arrived there and once again debated the local sages. They were greater scholars than those he confronted previously, but the Alter Rebbe did the same there as he did in Shklov. Here, however, the elders did not allow the young men entrance to the hall where they debated, so only three youths ended up changing camps. The elders and middle aged among the opposition didn't have the fortitude to follow our Rebbe. Despite this, the contest bore its fruit; messengers were sent to the Vilna Gaon telling him that he had been hearing false rumors. "The leader of the Chassidim is a great genius who has the whole of Torah at his fingertips."

For four years subsequently, the *misnagdim* quieted their resistance.

During that time the Alter Rebbe worked a lot on his students, both the old ones and the new. He placed a great deal of pressure on them to learn and to know the subject matter well. He would often enter the *beis midrash* at night to see if anyone was sleeping, and even the way in which they rested. The strict regimen also included a private visit with the Rebbe at his discretion; one couldn't just enter the study when he wanted.

During the calm, the Alter Rebbe also engaged in strengthening the Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes fund for the poor in Eretz Yisroel, by sending special delegations and letters (many of them printed in *Iggeres Hakodesh*), inspiring Yidden to donate. Another regular occurrence at that time was that many Yidden came to ask the Alter Rebbe questions in *avodas Hashem*, and the Rebbe stirred their hearts through teachings and blessings.



At that time, the *misnagdim* turned their attention to the other students of the Magid, leaders in Volyn, and stifled anything they sought to achieve.

The leaders of Volyn gathered on the day before Pesach, and decided to place the Vilna Gaon under *cherem*. The Alter Rebbe, occupied with other matters, wasn't present at the meeting. They chose ten from amongst them to look into the matter and determine Torah's stance. The *minyán* fasted and prayed for almost two months, and on Shavuos they asked of Heaven if they agreed with the proposal. Heaven answered, "This has to come from the strength of a *beis din*. You need someone as proficient in Torah as the Gaon."



The Mittler Rebbe, an adolescent at the time, was sitting and studying at home with his friend Reb Aharon Strasheler. They heard noise outside the house and saw that two men had arrived on a simple wagon. One remained seated there and the second, a man with an awe-inspiring presence, entered their home.

"Can I see the Rebbe?"

The boys pointed in the direction of the study. Upon hearing this exchange, the Alter Rebbe came out of his room and warmly embraced the man, inviting him inside. The Mittler Rebbe and Reb Aharon watched in surprise. Out of the room came the sounds of a heated argument

but the boys couldn't decipher what it was about. After a while the door swung open and the man stormed out.

"And what is your final decision? Are you in agreement?"

The Alter Rebbe stared somberly. "I cannot go against the opinion of my colleagues, but I will take no part in this. We have learned that when one ostracizes another, he severs the bond that exists between the victim's *neshama* and Hashem, which may lead him to deny G-d's existence! This will cause a great *chilul Hashem* and is therefore forbidden."

The man retorted angrily, "And what if the desecration of His name will come from the Rebbe's own house?"

"Hashem knows I'm sincere. Hashem knows that I cried before Him and our Rebbe about the load that he placed upon me, the public leadership of the Chassidim. He has blessed me and assured me. I trust in Hashem and will not stray from the Torah at all!"

When he left, the Mittler Rebbe became ill with worry. On the one hand, he knew that something serious transpired between the guest and his father. On the other hand, however, the Mittler Rebbe couldn't get himself to ask what had happened. Later, the Alter Rebbe visited his son and asked about his pale appearance.

"Ever since the visit of that guest, and the mysterious conversation he brought with him, I've been sick with worry."

The Alter Rebbe told him what happened and assured him that all would be okay.



[Because the Alter Rebbe refused to join the *cherem*, it never materialized and the Gaon was left alone.] **T**



(Based on a letter of the Frierdiker Rebbe, *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 14, pg. 164)

