



# LIVING IN THE TRENCHES

*Jewish soldiers in the trenches of Shanghai, the Baal Shem Tov's poverty-stricken youth, and how it all comes together in the theme of Pesach.*

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During the war between Russia and Japan in 5664 (1904), the Rebbe Rashab endeavored, and succeeded, to send matzos, wine and all other Pesach needs to the Jewish soldiers on the front lines in Japan. A telegram was sent in response, thanking the Rebbe for his efforts, signed by “Soldiers in the *‘akopi’* (trenches) of Shanghai.”

Years later, during Pesach 5696 (תרצ"ו), the Frierdiker Rebbe repeated this story, and added in the name of the Alter Rebbe, that although the Baal Shem Tov was born in Tlust, he would sometimes sign his name as “Yisrael from Akup.” The Frierdiker Rebbe explained:

The city/village of Tlust originally had walls surrounding it. With time, these walls disintegrated, and the only thing remaining from the walls were the trenches dug for

foundations. The Baal Shem Tov's parents were extremely poor, and could not even afford a proper home, and so they lived in these trenches. It was this “home” of his that the Baal Shem Tov referred to when signing as “from Akup.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe concluded, “With the power of these *‘akopes’* [those living in the trenches] we will be able to push away other *‘akopes’*, because the power of the Baal Shem Tov is unending; we just need to stand close enough.

The connection between this story and Pesach (when the Frierdiker Rebbe said the story):

The experience of *yetzias Mitzrayim* is seemingly paradoxical. At the time, the Yidden were at a spiritual low point. The Arizal writes that the Yidden had sunken to the 49th level of



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לזכות  
 הת' אברהם יצחק הכהן שיחי'  
 לרגל הגיעו לעול מצוות  
 ביום י"ז ניסן ה'תשע"ז  
 נדפס ע"י הוריו  
 הרה"ת ר' אהרן הכהן  
 וזוגתו מרת מנוחה רחל שיחיו  
 פינק  
 פלענטישן, פלארידא



*tumah*, and therefore the *geulah* had to be “in the blink of an eye,” because if things had continued any longer they would reach the point of no return, at the 50th level of impurity.

On the other hand, they experienced unparalleled revelations of the highest levels of *Elokus*, where “נגלה עליהם מלך מלכי המלכים הקב”ה בכבודו ובעצמו.”

The truth is, however, that it was precisely because of the depth to which they had fallen that the Yidden were able to reach so high. As the *possuk* says, when we cry out to Hashem “from the depths,” He will respond to us “in expanse.”

Along similar lines, when speaking to people about the possibility of Moshiach coming in a moment from now, they may have their doubts. Considering how dire the situation is in the world at large, as well as their

personal spiritual condition, how can we possibly make such a great switch, from the most deprived to ultimate freedom?! It seems impossible.

So the lesson from Pesach is, that not only is it possible to make that leap, but even the fall itself drives us to reach even higher revelations of G-dliness than ever before.

The story above serves to illustrate this point. When the Baal Shem Tov was born, world Jewry was at its lowest point, and his birth—his life in general—was to be the “wake-up call” from the state of spiritual unconsciousness the Yidden had fallen into. This is also why he was named Yisroel—the collective name for Yidden—because when a person has fainted, one of the most effective ways of awakening him is by calling his name. The Baal Shem Tov’s birth was also characterized by this low-point—

that when he entered the world, his parents didn’t have a house to be in, and he was therefore born in a ditch.

And it is specifically from this depth—the trenches of *golus*—that we will reach ultimate expansiveness, with the *geulah*. As Moshiach told the Baal Shem Tov, the spreading of the wellsprings of Chassidus will lead to the forthcoming redemption.

Every generation since the times of the Baal Shem Tov, and even from year to year, the *geulah* continues to approach even closer, such that although to all appearances the *golus* is as strong as ever, beneath the surface Chassidus has cleansed the world, preparing it for Moshiach’s arrival. Through the continuous spreading of the Chassidic wellsprings, we will be victorious in all our battles. **T**

(Based on the *sicha* of the second night of Pesach 5720)