The Life of
Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke Klein
The Gaon of Selish

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by Rabbi Shlomo Klein

Translated by Azriel Winnett

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The Life of

Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke Klein

The Gaon of Selish

This Book Is Dedicated
In Honor of Our Father

ר׳ אליהו בן דוב בער ז״ל

נפטר י״ב חשון תשנ״ו



תהא נשמתו צרורה בצרור החיים

לזכרון עולם לאבותינו

זקני הק׳ הגאון והצדיק המפורסם
רבי שמואל שמעלקא בן יוסף קליין זצוק״ל
רב דק״ק סעליש
ואשתו הרבנית הצדקית מרת דבורה בת שלומו

בנו הרה״ג מוהר״ר ר׳ אליהו קליין זצ״ל
אב״ד ור״מ דק״ק הלמין
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ואשתו הרבנית הצדקית מרת גיטל
שנהרגו על קידש השם בי״ג סיון תש״ד הי״ד

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דיין מצויין בק״ק הלמין
ואשתו הרבנית המהוללה במעשיה מרת שרה רבקה
שנהרגו על קידש השם הי״ד

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PREFACE

From Rabbi Baruch Klein
In Honor of the *bachur HaBar Mitzvah*
Yehoshua Yitzchok Eliezer Klein נ"י

THIS TRANSLATION was done in honor of our son Yitzchok's bar mitzvah; in loving memory of his *zaide*, R. Eliahu Klein, who we are not fortunate to have with us. *Zaide* was so proud and aware of his heritage. Had he lived to be here with us today, these are some of the words he would have wanted to share with his grandson Yitzchok:

Dear Yitzchok,

You are becoming a full-fledged member of *Am Yisroel*. This is the dream and hope which kept me through the years of pain and hardship. You come from a heritage steeped in Torah and *yiras shamayim*. Be proud of your ancestors, your roots, so that you too may yearn to be like them. Learn to say "מתי יגיע מעשי למעשה אבותי" — "When will my deeds be like those of my forefathers?" Even to "touch" their ways a little would be a great accomplishment. You only have to open the door and the Torah will always be your guest and companion, for as Chazal said:

"תורה מחזרת על האכסניה שלה" — "The Torah is faithful to those who welcome her in." Your grandfathers were loving hosts of the Torah; they cherished her above life itself. Their numerous generations of Torah scholars will act as a "חוט המשולש" — a three-strand rope that cannot be torn apart. It will insure that the light of Torah will remain with our family forever. "הפוך בה והפוך בה" — toil in her continuously, for she contains everything. May you learn to serve Hashem with joy. I will always pray on your behalf. May Hashem bless you with all manner of goodness, both spiritual and material, in this world and the in next forever.

FROM THE EDITOR'S FOREWORD TO THE ORIGINAL HEBREW EDITION

THIS BOOK chronicles the life and times of Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke Klein, a prominent Rav and Gaon in the Hungary of the last century, who was often referred to as "Rabbi Shmelke of Selish," or "Ba'al Tzror HaChaim" after his famous work, which was published after his death.

Rabbi Shmelke, a descendant of the illustrious Shla'h HaKodesh on his mother's side, was born in a Transylvanian village in the year 5665 (1805), into a generation already replete with Gaonim. They found in Rabbi Shmelke a loyal partner in the building and consolidation of those institutions which are vital to Jewish life. Although he was an "Ashkenaz" (the usual appellation for a "misnagid" in Hungary) in his outlook, and for a period of close to fifty years all his energies were concentrated on disseminating the knowledge of Torah in the various communities where he was stationed, he also acquired a reputation as a miracle worker. In this capacity, he was the subject of many popular tales which circulated among the masses.

This story of his life, which was hidden until now in its original manuscript form, was written about 1910 by his grandson, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, z'l. With the wholehearted enthusiasm of a descendant who longed to emulate his grandfather's holy ways, the author composed it as a

small personal tribute to Rabbi Shmelke, with whom he obviously enjoyed a close relationship.

But not only does he sharply delineate for us the saintly image of his hero, but within the pages of his biography he also presents us with a clear picture of an entire generation — its special atmosphere, its leaders, and the prevailing lifestyle of those who lived in it. Small in size but rich in scope, this composition also includes a vivid graphic description of the wonderful scenery of Rabbi Shmelke's homeland, its mountains, valleys and rivers, an idyllic environment in which the author was also born and raised.

How this short work came to be published is a story in itself. Its writer, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Klein, was for sixty-one years the Rav of the Transylvanian town of Szilagycseh and its district, which comprised more than ninety settlements. He departed this world at the age of ninety on the ninth of Cheshvan 5702 (1942).

The vast majority of the members of his community perished in the Holocaust, and their property was either plundered or confiscated. In 1949, the undersigned was sent by the Israeli government on a diplomatic mission to Romania. I was stationed in Bucharest, where I received a visit from one of the local residents who told me that various manuscripts in the hand of his father (our author), were now lying in the home of a non-Jewish citizen of the city. This man had taken them from their house during the war and was apparently keeping them as a lucky omen. My visitor requested that I approach the gentile and endeavour to redeem the precious documents for their full price.

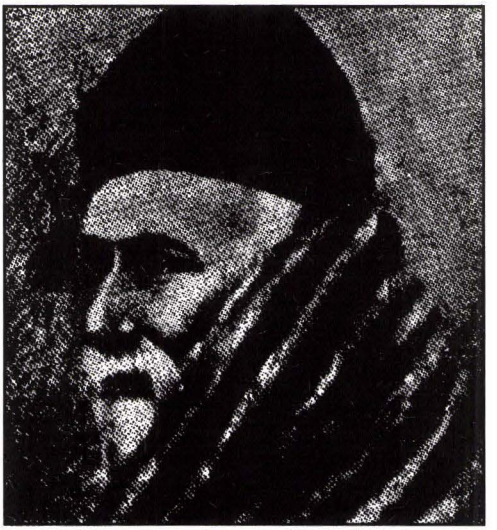
I went and introduced myself to the person and explained that I was interested in purchasing the manuscripts of a rabbi which he held in his possession. When this righteous gentile heard that the son of the rabbi was still alive and wanted to claim this inheritance from his father, he returned all of them without hesitation and without requesting any payment.

Among the various writings which were handed to me, I found a number of veritable spiritual treasures from the hand of the late Rabbi Shlomo Zalman. There were responsa addressed to his contemporaries in the rabbinate, sermons for Shabbat and the Festivals, commentaries on the Torah and on *Pirkei Avot*, the second part of a *halachic* treatise, the first part of which has been lost, and various items of correspondence. Above all else, however, the heart of his son was drawn to this delightful biography of his great-grandfather, Rabbi Shmelke, and he was anxious to have it published at the first opportunity.

Besides all its other merits, this composition serves as a useful historic document. The few minor inaccuracies that it contains do not detract from its great value in this regard. It sheds new light on an era which has not yet received sufficient attention, on the growth and development of Jewish life in Hungary and on the spark of Judaism which shined so brightly in the region bounded in the East by the Carpathian Mountains and in the west by the River Danube.

D.G.

Tammuz, 5716



Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke Klein זצ"ל

The Life of Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke Klein

The Gaon of Selish

The following chapters have been translated from the book *Rabbi Shmelke; Sippur Toldosav shel Rav Gaon*, by R. Shlomo Klein. Additional anecdotes and teachings have been taken from Rabbi Shmelke's classic work *Tzror HaChaim*. These are presented here in separately framed pages.

Chapter 1

The Antics of Childhood

AROUND TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, a simple but unquestionably God-fearing Jewish couple lived in the province of Szilagy in the state of Hungary.

Their small village, known to the Jews as Ever Savatish and called by the gentiles Felso-Szivagy,[1] was located atop of one of the mountains which formed part of the vast range originating at the great forest covered Bukk Mountain and extending for a great distance to form the border between three Hungarian provinces.[2] This settlement was home to the pious Reb Yosef, the son of Reb Natan, and his young wife, Faisal.

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[1] This village is in Szilagy which is situated in Transylvania. The province belonged to Hungary until 1919, when it was annexed by Romania.

[2] The three provinces were Szilagy, Szatmar, and Kozcp-Szolnok. The last named was abolished when the map of Hungary was redrawn in 1948.

Reb Yosef earned his livelihood in a means similar to that of many village-dwelling Jews of the period. He would brew spirits from grain or fruit in a large copper cauldron and, having acquired the right from the local squire to trade in liquor, would then sell his product to the public. In addition, he supplemented his income by trading a little in meat, having made arrangements for a head of cattle to be slaughtered on his premises once every two weeks. From these enterprises, he managed to support himself and his household.

Reb Yosef was an unsophisticated man who had had little opportunity in his youth to learn Talmud. But he did know Tanach, and his personal lifestyle was certainly righteous, for his every action was regulated by an overriding fear of Heaven.

He would stand each day, wrapped in *tallis* and *tefillin,* completely absorbed in prayer. Until midday, he would recite Psalms and read Scriptural passages. During this time, he would also review basic religious laws from a certain book which he possessed. (Most probably, this was a plain edition, without annotations or commentaries, of *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim,* which he would have been able to understand.)

During the hours that Reb Yosef was occupied in prayer and meditation, his wife Faisal would attend to the liquor store or the meat stall. After returning from his prayers, he would eat a bit, and then begin his labors at the cauldron, taking over from an assistant who performed the work in his absence.

In the course of time, his wife gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Every nook and cranny of Reb Yosef's house was filled with joy and light, for it was the couple's first son. On the day of the infant's *bris,* his father named him Shmuel Shmelke, after his own teacher, Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolesburg. Faisal, the boy's mother, had hailed from the family of Rabbi Shmelke and of his brother, the Ba'al Haflah.

The child Shmelke was a beautiful baby, and his mother took special precautions to safeguard his soul. Often, when she would be standing on duty at the tavern or meat stall, and a local peasant would walk in to make a purchase, she would immediately cover her son's face. She was determined that the boy should not as much as look at a gentile until he was old enough to be enrolled at the *cheder* and study Torah all day. Even during her pregnancy, his mother had scrupulously refrained from gazing at the face of a gentile or from observing anything impure.

But tragedy was soon to strike. After having borne two children to her husband — Shmelke and a daughter — Faisal, still a young woman, was suddenly taken from this world.

Shmelke, deprived of a mother's care and virtually a baby, had to develop almost unaided until he was four. Then his father hired for him a private tutor in the Hebrew language and Chumash. From the first day, the boy proved himself to be an extremely capable pupil, who grasped the material with remarkable speed. After four weeks, he was familiar enough with Hebrew that his instructor could teach

him verses of Chumash. The young Shmelke would review his lessons diligently and with much understanding.

On the other hand, the lad was very much inclined to wildness and mischief, and possessed an adventurous spirit. He loved to wander in the fields to pick flowers, or take leisurely walks on the mountain trails, or to roam deep into the forests which bordered on his village. He would energetically climb fruit trees to pluck fruit, or maneuver his agile body onto branches in search of bird's eggs.

One could speculate that this wild behavior was the outcome of the premature death of his mother. Reb Yosef, his father, continued to spend the first half of his day in prayer and study, according to his custom. There was nobody to discipline the boy, to guide him towards appropriate conduct, or to teach him early in the morning or late at night.

But it is also logical to assume that little Shmelke's restless temperament, and in particular his attraction to the world of nature, were influenced by the rustic environment into which he was born. The village in which he was reared was situated at the very edge of the Bukk forest. The crude hut in which he lived was built with beams of timber and branches of trees plastered over with yellow clay, and covered with a roof of straw. The stately trees of the ancient Bukk forest provided shade for the primitive house, and the chirping of the birds of the forest would soothe Shmelke to sleep each night.

The eerie sounds of wild animals could be heard regularly echoing from the woods. Sometimes, in the early

nights of the winter, a defiant Shmelke would refuse to go to sleep. Then his father's threats that a fox, or wolf, or wild boar, whose cries could be heard in the distance, would enter the house, would often be enough to get him to bed.

But the young boy's impish and unruly behavior was not limited to the heady summer days, when the bounty of Providence was in evidence everywhere, and the green forests and hills, covered with sweet-smelling lilies, would beckon enticingly to the young at heart. Even during the frosty winter months, when the mountains and valleys would glisten in pure whiteness, Shmelke would not be content to remain for too long within the warm confines of his home or his schoolhouse.

Every now and then, he would make tracks for his favorite playground, the Bukk Mountain, where he would watch with fascination as lumberjacks of seemingly unlimited strength effortlessly felled trees of gigantic proportions. He admired the skill of workers who would burn off the rotten parts of old trees to make a medication from the ashes which was used to cure various ailments.

All the people living in the vicinity, Jews and gentiles alike, recognized the nobility of spirit and potential for greatness that lay within this youngster's breast — his mischievous behavior notwithstanding. Even the priest of the Rumanian church predicted to his father: "You should know, Yosef, that your son Shmelke will become a great man!"

One day, when Shmelke was five or six years old, the boy happened to be strolling near the church of the

Rumanians, which they called the Biserica. As fate would have it, his sharp eyes, forever on the lookout for some interesting mischief, lighted on the carcass of a lamb which some careless individual had cast out into the middle of the road. His quick mind did not take long to work out a plan to have some fun with the dead animal.

The churches of this religious sect were not designed like most country churches nowadays, with a tall bell tower protruding from the roof. Next to the building was a self-standing tower, supported on four wooden pillars and with open sides at the bottom. Only near the top, beginning at a height beyond the reach of most men, were the sides bricked up like a wall. Bell ropes, reaching almost to the ground, were dangling inside the tower.

Shmelke's sharp eyes carefully scanned the surroundings. Having satisfied himself that no one was watching, he strained his muscles, lifted the abandoned carcass and nimbly tied it to one of the hanging ropes. He then ran from the spot and, upon reaching a safe distance, innocently resumed his stroll as if nothing at all had happened.

Not too many minutes passed before the mouths of the ever-hungry village dogs began to water, and their keen noses led them in a frenzy to the bell tower where they surrounded the carcass from all sides. The rope began to sway violently as the dogs fought viciously for the honor of taking the first — and subsequent — bites. Within seconds, the weirdest medley of sounds began to pierce the stillness of the countryside as the bells pealed softly, then louder, then softly again.

Panic and terror gripped the hearts of the villagers as they sought to identify the cause of these strange sounds from the church tower. They all knew that when one of the villagers would strike the bells in some unusual way, it would be a sign of impending danger. Yet none of their houses had caught fire, there were no wild animals roaming the streets, and neither was there any sign of an enemy or adversary.

Their hearts beating wildly, the bravest of the village men approached the church site, and shouted to the sexton to present an explanation for all the commotion. The sexton was nowhere to be found, but their query was soon answered when a dozen now satiated dogs jumped out from their hiding-place inside the tower and ran for their lives. And there, before the bewildered men's eyes, was the rest of the evidence — the much-bitten skin of a dead lamb hanging from the rope of a bell.

When it dawned on the hapless villagers the extent to which they had been made fun of, they sat down quietly and put their minds to work. Who could be responsible for a devilish prank like this? Could there be any doubt? They nodded at each other, rose to their feet, and yelled for the head of Shmelke.

But the young rascal's father was already prepared. After hiding Shmelke for several days, he secretly whisked the boy away to the distant town of Sziner-Varalja (Varahal in Yiddish) in the province of Szatmar. There the lad began a new life under the tutelage of a *melamed.*

The boy took the abrupt transition from the carefree

world of the outdoors to the solitary confinement of the scholar's world surprisingly well. He adapted quickly to his new routine as a young student of Torah and learned with remarkable diligence and comprehension. His mentor, like most *melamdim* in that part of the world, probably hailed from Lithuania. The youngster's material needs were provided by a relative, Reb Zundla.

Either to escape the clutches of his angry gentile neighbors or for some other reason, Shmelke's father, Reb Yosef, himself relocated shortly thereafter to the village Benedekflava (Benafala in Yiddish), near the river Szamos. Eventually he remarried and returned to Ever Savatish. From time to time, Shmelke would travel to visit his father in his new home.

In due course, Shmelke took leave of his teacher in Sziner-Varalja to study under a new Rebbe in a town known to the Jews and Rumanians as Nigrashed, and as Avas-Felsofalu in Hungarian. He was supported there by another relative, whose name is unknown. From there also, he occasionally broke from his studies to visit his father, with whom he would remain from the first day of selichos until the end of Succos.

To Reb Yosef's chagrin, his son's overly exuberant disposition and wild behavior did not leave him when he departed from his home town. Whenever he took a holiday at his father's house in Benafala, it was business as usual for a boisterous Shmelke, who was constantly on the lookout for some interesting mischief.

He could seldom resist jumping over the fences of the

gardens in the village or in the neighboring settlements of Szeplak, Kod and Naprad, where, working with breathtaking speed, he would pluck as much fruit as possible from the branches of the trees and stuff them adroitly under his shirt. Should he get wind of someone in the garden who might disturb his fun, he would jump like lightning over the fence or burrow underneath it with the efficiency of a mole. Before anybody knew it, he would be miles away from the scene of the crime.

Once, he entered his stepmother's room and requested that she give him her large laundry basin. What would he do with such a thing, she asked. He replied that he wanted to play inside it. Of course, his stepmother could hardly refuse, and the little boy placed the tub on his head and went happily on his way.

Hardly a half an hour had passed when some Rumanians approached Reb Yosef's house at great speed. Panting heavily, they hastily explained how they had observed Shmelke sailing contentedly down the river Szamos — inside his stepmother's laundry basin! The trouble was, the current was rapidly moving his tiny makeshift vessel — hardly adequate to cope with the treacherous waters — downstream. Who could tell where the river might lead him?

After summoning a few more men to assist in the rescue, Reb Yosef made a beeline for the river's edge and found his son still advancing downstream. Shmelke showed no signs of fear. He sat slowly turning his head from side to side, his attention focused only on the awe-inspiring sight

of two magnificent forest-covered mountain peaks rising on either bank of the river. He was full of admiration for the sheer beauty of the location, which is known today as Cikoi Szoros.

The gentiles who had accompanied Reb Yosef pursued the adventurous Shmelke in small boats until one of them reached him and returned him to the shore. Back home, his father delivered a painful lashing before asking his son what had prompted him to undertake such a risky expedition. The boy explained that he had been exploring the mountains bordering on the river when he had noticed sailors ferrying from one bank to the other in small craft. Though he had begged them repeatedly, they had refused to give him a joy ride across the river.

Undaunted, and determined to cross the river come what may, he had run home to fetch the washing tub. After placing it on the river surface, he had climbed into it and using a big stick pushed himself into the water.

But since, after all, he was a little lad hardly older than seven, his skills and strength had not quite matched up to his confidence and courage. He had not sailed very far before his primitive vessel had tilted heavily to one side, and a large quantity of water poured in. Since there was not very much he could have done to rectify the sad situation, he had to contend himself with the spectacular view. He had remained thus in deep contemplation of the tree-clad mountains until his father had rescued him.

There and then, Shmelke's father made a firm resolution that his beloved but intractable son should not cross his

threshold again, until he had finally learned to conduct himself like a man, and his unruly and unbecoming behavior had become a thing of the past. The boy returned immediately to his *cheder* in Nigrashed. He applied himself to his studies with unremitting perseverance, and his keen intellect and memory stood him in good stead.

By the time he had reached the age of bar mitzvah, Shmelke was known as a brilliant student. He had already acquired a basic knowledge of the three most difficult tractate in the entire Talmud — *Eruvin, Niddah* and *Yevamos* — and was a source of tremendous pride to his teachers.

"Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will support you." (Psalms 55:23)

In this Psalm, the Hebrew word *hu,* translated as "He," is apparently superfluous, because the verse could have been phrased: "Cast your burden upon the Lord, who will support you."

A parable, however, will illustrate the Psalmist's intention. A man is sitting in prison, serving a sentence of indeterminate length. A high-ranking officer then promises him that the day is coming when he will be set free. The prisoner is not informed, however, of the date of his release. Nevertheless, from then on, the man lives out each day in pleasant anticipation of his forthcoming liberation. The prospect of being released at any time sweetens the ordeal of prison life, and this hope lightens his burden.

Our verse from the Psalms can be explained as reading "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and *that* will support you." (The word *hu* can also mean "that.") For the very action of casting one's burden upon the Creator is in itself a source of support and encouragement. He who puts his trust in God will find the strength and courage to comfortably bear the burden which has been placed upon his shoulders.

Chapter 2

Young Man Against Six Wolves

IT WAS not long after the budding scholar had reached the age of bar mitzvah, that Shmelke's tutor called the boy to his study to make a frank confession.

"My beloved pupil," began the rebbe, "you know that I have treated you as if you were my own son and imparted to you all my knowledge to the best of my ability. I do not believe, however, that you will continue to profit from studying at my feet.

"The plain truth is that you know how to learn far better than I do. The time has come for you to seek out a suitable yeshivah headed by a rav of standing. He will be able to guide you towards the destiny which I know is yours."

The young man bade farewell to his *melamed* and made his way to Vasvar in the province of Szatmar. There, the

Gaon Rabbi Shmuel of Vasvar had planted the roots of a blossoming center of Torah.

Separating himself from all outside influences, Shmelke took his place in the yeshivah and resumed his studies with the same intensity which he had shown in Nigrashed. His conduct was impeccable and utterly consistent with the holy goals to which all serious yeshivah students aspire. This was not the place — nor could he afford the time — to indulge in undesirable thoughts or childish frivolity. Nor would he give reign to the evil inclination of former days which could have goaded him on to impetuous pranks.

Secure in an environment conducive to spiritual growth, he developed a deep love for Torah learning. His only ambitions were to master the secrets of the Talmud and to uncover satisfying solutions to the difficulties posed by the Rishonim and Acharonim. He rose to ever higher levels both in scholarship and in the fear of Heaven, and won the respect and admiration of his teachers and fellow students, who quickly recognized his special qualities. By the time he turned fourteen, he had acquired a remarkable expertise in practical *halachah* as well.

One day, a few weeks before Pesach, Shmelke was sitting in an antechamber of his rebbe's house when a certain man entered the room. He asked to see the rav to enquire about a problem he had encountered with his Pesach flour.

"Before you go in, please tell me also what your question is," begged the young scholar. The visitor gladly obliged. A few minutes later, a rather disappointed enquirer

left the Rav's study and informed Shmelke that Rabbi Shmuel had ruled that the flour was forbidden.

"Return to the rav at once," Shmelke advised the astonished flour owner. "Request him to take a look in the work *Chok Yaakov,* and hopefully, he might find something there that will enable him to pronounce the flour kosher. But whatever you do, please don't let him suspect that I was the one who gave you this advice."

Rabbi Shmuel duly perused the passages in *Chok Yaakov* relevant to the problem at hand. He found that there were indeed grounds for regarding the flour as kosher, and he revised his original verdict accordingly.

"But please tell me," added the intrigued rav, "who on earth gave you the idea that I should examine this *sefer*? I know that you are not learned enough to have thought of it yourself!"

The flour owner was left with no choice but to divulge the secret. Within minutes, the young Shmelke was standing in his rebbe's presence to hear instructions not unlike those which he had received several months before.

"You must know, my son," said Rabbi Shmuel affectionately, "that there is no longer any point in your staying here any longer. It seems that you are even better qualified to decide matters of *halachah* than I am. I urge you, therefore, to take to the road again and look for another yeshivah and a rebbe superior to me."

Reb Shmelke took heed of his mentor's counsel and left town in the company of two other students who also sought new vistas in the world of learning. The young men

made up their minds to head for the yeshivah town of Karoly. In due course they arrived there safely, but immediately decided to resume their journey.

It appears that when Shmelke and his companions arrived at the outskirts of the city, they happened to meet the local rav who was traveling home along the same road. Naturally enough, the rav invited the weary young travelers to ride with him in his coach. But on arrival at their destination, he requested that the youths contribute towards his expenses in operating the vehicle. There and then, the three friends resolved not to stay and learn from a rebbe who demanded payment from impoverished young students just because he gave them a ride.

They continued on their travels for many weeks, stopped at many places and investigated a variety of academies. But it was not until they arrived in the city of Bonyhad, a prominent stronghold of Torah and communal life, and the home of the Gaon known as Reb Herschele Charif (the Sharp One),[3] that they felt that their search might at last have come to an end.

However, after hearing some of Reb Herschele's Sabbath sermons, Shmelke felt that he could not accept some of the Gaon's interpretations and decided to resume his journey. He eventually arrived in Lacompak, where the

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[3] This refers to Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Heller, who served as Rav in Bonyhad and later in Obuda. He was born in Zamoshitz in Poland, and was the son of Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heller, Av Beit Din of Zamoshitz. He was the author of *Tapuchei Zahav, Tiv Gittin, Kuntress Zvi Charif*, and other works. In his younger days, he served as Rosh Yeshivah in Braude.

rav of the community was Rabbi Shalom Charif Ullman.[4]

Here, this distinguished Gaon maintained a large and prestigious yeshivah. Rabbi Shalom's son, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ullman, the author of Yeriot Shlomo,[5] then still a young man, also lived in the town and ran a parallel yeshivah for younger students. Exhausted following day after day on the road, and more than eager to be back in his natural habitat — the study hall, Shmelke proceeded directly to the home of Rabbi Shalom, and requested that he be admitted to his yeshivah. But the Gaon replied that since the lad was still young in years, he really belonged in the yeshivah of his son, Rabbi Zalman, who learned with the younger pupils. Shmelke duly approached Rabbi Zalman and was enrolled as one of his students.

Unfortunately, Rabbi Zalman did not find the newcomer a pleasure to teach. From his very first day in yeshivah, Shmelke began, innocently and unwittingly, to plague his teacher with profound observations and intricate questions — most of which the rebbe found difficult to answer. After four grueling weeks during which his brilliant

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[4] A native of Germany, he came to Hungary in about 1792 to serve in the rabbinate in Stomfa. He was Rav of the province of Somogy, and afterwards of the community of Boldogasszony, where he was once taken captive by soldiers of Napoleon and released on payment of a ransom fee. In Lacompak, he headed a large yeshivah up until his death on Adar 17, 5595 (1835). He was an authority on the mystical side of the Torah, and passed on his vast knowledge of Kabbalah to his outstanding disciple, Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke Klein.

[5] A collection of responsa, commentaries and halachic novella. Rabbi Shalom Zalman Ullman was famous for the battle which he waged against the "mechadshim" (those who attempted to introduce innovations) when he was Rav in Mako.

student had raised increasingly complex issues daily, Rabbi Zalman, now at the end of his rope, begged his father to allow Shmelke to transfer to the senior yeshivah.

An astounded Rabbi Shalom Charif was happy to oblige. Under the wing of his illustrious mentor, Shmelke cut himself off completely from the vanities of the world. Nothing held interest for him now save the Torah, which he studied purely for the sake of Heaven. Nothing would distract him from his learning. If, as a result of his commitment, he would have to deprive himself of the small pleasures of life, that did not concern him.

He would often fondly recall this period of his life after his own turn had come to assume the mantle of rabbinic leadership and to head his own yeshivah.

"My dear sons," he would lovingly but resolutely admonish the young scholars under his charge: "Have you ever wondered why the students of today cannot compete with their counterparts of previous generations in their grasp of Torah? When I was studying at yeshivah, it was common for a student to be familiar with many tractates and to be expert in numerous passages of the Talmud and other works. As you know, this is not the case nowadays.

"The reason is that most young students of this generation are preoccupied with finding an adequate livelihood. And why? So that they should be able to afford stylish hats, elegant and expensive clothing and shoes, neat pressed shirts and attractive ties. What is more, they spend every available moment ensuring that their garments are presentable and in perfect order.

"This being the case, it is no wonder that they lack the skills to learn properly. They are so concerned with finding the wherewithal to finance these beautiful clothes and similar luxuries, that they are deprived of the peace of mind necessary for learning . . .

"But how different it was in my own days! We did not worry about such things. We wore old, inexpensive clothing and shoes. We did not care if our coats were torn or our hats had holes in them, and we were not particular if there were dirt or feathers on them. It was enough for us if we cleaned our clothes once a week, in honor of the Sabbath. Since we did not have the same financial pressures, we had plenty of time to learn.

"How appropriate is the words of the Midrash to the Song of Songs, one the verse, 'I am black, yet comely . . . like the tents of Kedar.' Torah scholars are compared to the tents of Kedar. But just as the tents of the Ishmaelites are ugly outside but appealing within, so too Torah scholars, as unattractive as they may appear on the outside to the uneducated masses, are nevertheless full to the brim inside with the beauty of Scripture, Talmud, Halachos and Aggados.

"We can thus infer from the words of the Midrash," Rabbi Shmelke would conclude, "that it is the destiny of the Torah scholar to appear uninviting on the outside, since he has turned his back on the frivolous days of his youth. He does not fritter away his time by grooming himself constantly, or by squandering his resources on the vanities of this world. Only after eschewing such activities and the

unnecessary expenses that go with them, can he turn his attention to a different type of merchandise, of everlasting value."

The head of the yeshivah, Rabbi Shalom Charif, grew to love his new student very much. Often, the humble Gaon would ask Reb Shmelke to accompany him on walks, during which he would they would discuss highly complicated topics in profound depth. At all times, Shmelke would approach his rebbe with the greatest respect, in fulfillment of the admonition of the Tanna: "Let the fear of your teacher be as the fear of Heaven."

Once, the Rosh Yeshivah surprised him with the question, "Shmelke, why have you not lit your pipe?" Reb Shmelke had deemed it disrespectful to indulge in this pastime in his rebbe's presence. The young man was silent, whereupon the Gaon plucked a coal from the fire, lit his student's pipe with it, and invited him to enjoy the taste and aroma of the tobacco.

There is a famous story of an amazing occurrence which took place during our saintly grandfather's first term of study at Lacompak.

It was a well-known practice in the eastern Europe of old for yeshivah students to be allocated "eating days" with householders of the local community. In other words, the yeshivah administration would assign each of the students under its care to a particular family, which would be responsible for providing him with his meals. This was not the custom in Lacompak, however, except in the case of senior students who had already been studying at the

yeshivah for some time. Most of the younger students would receive their sustenance in another way; every Thursday evening each of them would travel to one or other of several villages close to the city. There, one of the villagers would supply him with bread, potatoes, onions, beans and other basic foodstuffs, in sufficient quantities to last him the whole week.

This, too, was the way by which young Shmelke was provided with his daily needs. Every Thursday, towards dusk, he would set out for a nearby village, pass through a dense forest on the way, and remain in the village overnight. Early next morning, he would gather all the bread and other rations which his host had handed to him, pack them into a sack, and head back to the yeshivah.

One wintry Thursday, Shmelke interrupted his studies towards evening and, braving the icy winds and plummeting temperature, began his customary trek to the village nearby. Throughout the journey, as well as after his arrival, he was in an especially pensive mood, for he was grappling with some highly complicated concepts in the writings of the Sha'ar Hamelech. He had been troubled by certain postulates which were not clear to him and which gave him no rest.

Finally, he reached his benefactor's home. Utterly exhausted, he fell asleep, but his active mind did not allow him to slumber for very long. A short time later he awoke and, still in a state of semi-consciousness, glanced out of the window. The night did not seem as dark as usual, and he assumed that the first rays of dawn were probably easing up

over the horizon. Wiping his eyes from sleep, he quickly dressed, grasped his sack of provisions, and hastened homewards — anxious, as usual, to minimize the time away from his study bench.

He did not notice how brightly the moon was shining in the winter sky, for not more than two hours had passed since midnight. But Shmelke was already too deep in contemplation over the words of the Sha'ar Hamelech to waste time stargazing.

Now, let us turn to the movements of the Gaon, Rabbi Shalom Ullman. At the very hour Reb Shmelke had left the home of his Thursday night host, his revered rebbe was preparing for a journey in precisely that direction.

A bris milah was taking place that Friday morning in a nearby village and Rabbi Shalom, who was a mohel, had been requested to perform the *mitzvah.* The road to his destination passed through the same forest through which Shmelke was now traveling on foot.

Rabbi Shalom rose long before dawn to set out on the journey, for his objective was to perform the bris as early as possible after daybreak. Like Avraham our father, who "rose early in the morning," Rabbi Shalom was eager to carry out the *mitzvah* at the earliest opportunity.

And so it happened, as the Rosh Yeshivah was traveling along the road in the dead of night, that his eyes beheld the most astonishing sight. There in the distance, were six wild wolves marching in a straight line, while two humans — an old man and a younger one — were walking with them at their side.

A few minutes later, the wolves crossed his path of vision again. This time they were fleeing in the opposite direction, and disappeared into the thickness of the forest. The older man had also disappeared, but the younger one was walking in the direction of the carriage. As he drew near, the Gaon blinked in surprise. The youngster was none other than his beloved student, Shmelke!

"What happened?" gasped Rabbi Shalom, who began to pose one question after another to the bewildered youth. "What were you doing among a pack of wild wolves? And who was that old man?"

"I really do not know," was all a bashful Shmelke seemed prepared to say.

"I order you with all the authority at my command to reveal to me everything," said the Gaon sternly.

So Shmelke told his Rebbe how he had set out, in error, in the middle of the night. As he was walking through the forest, a pack of six wild wolves had attacked him from out of a thicket. But before they could pounce, an old man appeared from nowhere and rescued him. What happened next was even more astounding.

"Shmelke, my son," the old man said, "You were just in very great danger. But in the upper realms there was a tremendous uproar; the Heavenly assembly protested your premature death.

"It was immediately decreed that since you had brought yourself to this situation of danger precisely because you were so deeply preoccupied with my writings, I should be the one to save you. Therefore I came to deliver you from the jaws of the wild beasts."

No sooner had he finished these words, than he had disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Beaming with pride at his protégé who had merited this open miracle, the Rosh Yeshivah invited Shmelke to accompany him to the bris milah and the following festive meal. Straight after the Sabbath, the Gaon arranged that the young man be provided with all his meals in the vicinity of the yeshivah, so that he should never be burdened with having to travel to the villages again.

Chapter 3

Encounter with Chassidim

YOUNG SHMELKE grew in the esteem of all — in Lacompak and beyond. He threw all his energy and mental gifts into Torah study, and his reputation spread far and wide. Only when he had reached the age of eighteen did Shmelke, already a scholar of stature, reluctantly take leave of his beloved rebbe and comrades, to return to his father's home. His intention was to fulfill the counsel of our Sages; that eighteen years is the age for marriage.

Every community which he visited on his way home showered him with honor, for his good name had preceded him. Almost immediately after his arrival at his father's residence, a fitting match was arranged for him with the daughter of a prominent and respected scholar. His young bride was Devorah, daughter of the great rabbinic authority, Rabbi Shlomo Melmesh, who was then living in

Aranyos Medgyes,[6] a city full of sages and scribes in those days.

Following the wedding, Shmelke lived with his new wife in his father-in-law's household. He remained there for many years, learning with unabated intensity. After his father-in-law moved to the town of Almas,[7] he continued to support Shmelke at his table for some time.

It was during this period that the Jewish community of Balkany, in the province of Savolitz, decided to appoint a rabbinic leader. A call was issued to the distinguished son-in-law of Rabbi Shlomo Melmesh, who agreed to take up residence in the town. Reb Shmelke now became known as His Excellency, the holy Gaon, Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke, Rav of Balkany.

However, despite this newfound prestige, Rabbi Shmelke's life was characterized by great hardship. The food and water which were his daily allotment were barely enough on which to survive. Adversity, though, was no deterrent to the ongoing pursuit of his spiritual goals, and he did not depart from the study hall for even one moment. Besides his daily responsibility of teaching his congregation halachot and ruling on questions which arose, the young rav assigned high priority to imbuing the people with a love for Torah and a fear of Heaven. He founded a yeshivah, to

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[6] A town in the province of Szatmar, within the area in which Jews were allowed to settle before 1848.

[7] Among the rabbis who served in this town, in the province of Szatmar, was Rabbi Aharon Shlomo Katz, mentioned in the volume of responsa, *Imrei Aish,* chapter 68.

which eager students flocked from all corners of the land, many of them from the province of Transylvania.

An eminent rabbi and communal dignitary from the village of Kolozs-Monoster in Transylvania, Rabbi Avraham Rata, related to me how there was not one Jew of standing in the whole of Transylvania, who did not have a son enrolled in the Balkany yeshivah. Rabbi Shmelke's students, moreover, were noted for their rapid progress and remarkable diligence.

The Rav's single-minded devotion to his community and his students, as well as his never-ending pursuit of Torah knowledge, were in no way affected by his difficult life of privation. When his rebbetzin, Devorah, gave birth to their first child, she was ill for some time and was unable to give the infant her full attention. Since the family was too poor to hire a nursemaid, it was left to Rabbi Shmelke to rock the baby to sleep every day. He would attend to these domestic responsibilities with one eye on his little son and the other on an open Gemara in front of him.

During the rainy season, icy water would leak through the cracks in the roof and seep down into the house. Unfazed by the discomfort, Rabbi Shmelke would be too deeply immersed in his holy studies to budge. He would merely throw his outer garment over his head and continue learning. The pleasures and comforts of this world were naught in his eyes, the most coveted of material possessions of little worth. Torah study was the only enterprise which had any meaning or authentic value.

Abraham acknowledged: "I am dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). David confessed: "I am a worm and not a man" (Psalms 22:7). But Moses' humility surpassed them all, when he declared: "And what are we?" (Exodus 16:7).

Chulin 89a

The Hebrew word *mah,* "what" or "how," can have two contrasting connotations. It can be used in a positive sense as a superlative, such as in the verse "How great is the good which you have stored up for those that fear You!" (Psalms 31:20). Or, it can be used to denote a concept or object devoid of significance, such as in Moses' exclamation: "What are we?"

A man who is charged by the Almighty with the onerous responsibility of being a faithful shepherd to His people, of going out and coming in before them, and instructing and guiding them in the path of truth, requires, simultaneously, to possess the qualities expressed by both these connotations. At times, he needs to be as soft as a bulrush, tender and gentle in his words, in order to draw the hearts of the people with bonds of love to their Father in Heaven. But there are other times, however, when he needs to be as strong as a pillar of iron, to withstand and counter any erosion in spiritual values on the part of his flock. At these times, excessive humility is not appropriate.

Therefore, the trait of humility possessed by Moses was of a higher order than that of the other Biblical figures, and his own statement reflects this. The word *mah,* with its two connotations, hints at his ability to push aside his humility when the welfare of the community demanded it. Abraham and David did not reach this high level.

A renowned Gaon, the Rav of Kisvarda,[8] once suddenly arrived at Rabbi Shmelke's home in a state of great agitation. On entering his study, he found Rabbi Shmelke huddled over his Gemara and lost in thought, his countenance lined with the wrinkles of intense concentration. In spite of the clearly pressing nature of his visit, the visiting rav was reluctant to disturb his colleague and restraining himself, waited patiently.

"A hearty welcome, Rav of Kisvarda!" exclaimed Rabbi Shmelke after finally lifting his tired eyes from the page. "Please, come and sit next to me."

"Now is not the time for sitting," pointed out the visitor, excitedly. "This is the time for action. Has the Rav of Balkany not heard the news about the Rav of Nagy-Kallo?[9] He is seeking the government appointment as Rav of our province, the province of Savlatish. If he succeeds in his plans, he will surely remove us from our posts, and take our incomes.

"The hour is not appropriate for sitting at home; on the contrary, the hour has arrived for urgent action. Rav of Balkany, help us to rally all the rabbis of Savlatish into a strong, united force, in order to frustrate the designs of the Rav of Nagy-Kallo!"

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[8] A famous community of pious Jews, which was served by outstanding rabbinical personalities. The rav is referred to here is Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Weinberger, the author of *Pnei Yitzchak, Malal Avraham*, etc.

[9] The reference is to Rabbi Yitzchak Aisik Toiv, rav of this community as well as of the province of Szabolcs. He was a legendary figure, who had wandered in his youth to Galicia, and was one of the founders of Chassidism in Hungary. He was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, as well as of Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolesburg. He passed away on Adar 7, 5598 (1838).

Rabbi Shmelke pondered this passionate plea for a few moments before responding gently: "But why must we be afraid? Even if he does deprive us of all these things, he could never strip us of our Gemaras or take away our learning." These words had a wonderful soothing effect on the Gaon from Kisvarda, who calmly conceded that they were the truth.

Although the Rav of Balkany was still a young man, he enjoyed a growing reputation among rabbis and Torah scholars throughout the country and beyond. He was known as a highly gifted and erudite interpreter of the Torah. Furthermore, his rare piety was well known to the devout and upright Jews of Poland, who would frequently send their sick to him for his blessing. He would invite these ailing people to participate in the learning at his yeshivah, in the merit of which they could be sure of a speedy recovery.

The impact which our revered grandfather made on the Jewish world of those days is well illustrated in a tale told to me by the noted Chassidic leader, Rabbi Itzik Simcha, from the town of Magyar-Lapos.[10]

This Rabbi Simcha once traveled with a group of Chassidim to spend Rosh Hashanah with the saintly Rabbi Meir of Premishlan, a veritable angel in human form. They travelled by coach from Samson to Premishlan, a journey which normally lasted between ten and fourteen days.

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[10] He was born in Samson, in the province of Hajdu, near Debreceen, one of the major cities of Hungary, and passed away in the Holy Land. Magyar-Lapos is a town in the province of Szolnok-Doboka.

It was already late in the week when they set out on their arduous pilgrimage, and the travelers immediately began to debate among themselves as to the best place to spend the Sabbath. This was a decision to make with care, because motzoi Shabbos was the first night of Selichos. One of the company suggested that they proceed to the town of Balkany, because there, prior to the recital of Shema Koleinu on the morning of the Selichos prayers, they were bound to hear inspiring words from the local Rav.

This innocent suggestion was met with derision and scorn on the part of some of the Chassidim. "We are on our way to spend Rosh Hashanah in the company of a holy prophet of the Almighty," they pointed out mockingly. "What benefit will we derive from the discourse of the young and inexperienced rabbi of Balkany?"

But the chassid was not so easily defeated. "Come with open minds and see for yourselves," he urged, "If not, who knows whether you might regret it later?"

And so it happened that the company of Chassidim converged on the town of Balkany to pass the Sabbath there. In the very early hours of the following morning, they entered the synagogue for the solemn Selichos service. When the cantor reached the *Shema Koleinu* prayer he paused, and the rabbi ascended the pulpit, a volume of the Rambam in his hand.

Rabbi Shmelke opened his book and looked up briefly at the hushed assembly before launching an impassioned appeal.

"My masters and brothers! In his treatment of the Laws of Repentance, the Rambam draws our attention to an

authoritative principle." The thunderous voice of the Rav of Balkany seemed to cleave shafts of fire. The gathering trembled with awe as it reverberated through the synagogue. But the penetrating eyes of the speaker betrayed both compassion and concern.

"My dear friends, Repentance helps! Do not imagine that all is lost! No, the choice is ours. Now is the time for action — the time for Repentance has arrived!"

Seldom had the gathering heard words uttered with such sincerity and conviction. As the preacher proceeded to decry the enticements of this world which ensnare the hearts of Jews and divert them from their holy objectives, an overpowering sensation of remorse welled up within the heart of each worshipper. Before long, the sound of wailing began to pierce the air, and, unable to quench the fires raging within them, the congregants began to throw themselves on the ground in tears.

And those very Chassidim who had originally opposed the visit to Balkany were among the first to throw themselves on the ground, through the fear of the Day of Judgement which this Rav had awakened within them.

Finally, after a long and tiring journey, the Chassidim reached Premishlan on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. Without pausing to rest, they hastened to the home of the saintly Rebbe Meir to receive his blessings. While they were still standing on the threshold of his house, the Rebbe stepped out of his study and, before even greeting them, pressed them to reveal the town in which they had stopped over on their way to Premishlan.

The puzzled Chassidim, who had evidently forgotten about their moving Selichos experience, tried to think of all the towns and villages through which they had passed. But at each mention of a specific locality, Rebbe Meir merely shook his head and said, "This is not the place I intended." Only afterwards did it dawn on the travellers that perhaps it was the preceding Shabbat which they had spent in Balkany, that the Rebbe had in mind.

"Please tell me everything that transpired there in Balkany," begged holy Rebbe, "and don't omit a single detail!"

After a full account of Rabbi Shmelke's highly powered words, the saintly Rebbe Meir lifted up his hands and exclaimed enthusiastically:

"A holy fragrance has accompanied you here. I became conscious of it as soon as you approached my home. You were indeed at a good place."

Only then did he greet his Chassidim warmly.

Another remarkable story is even more famous. In those days, it was not yet Rabbi Shmelke's custom to wear a *shtreimel,* as was the custom of Polish Chassidim on the Sabbath. But one Sabbath, he happened to be visiting the illustrious Gaon, Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum of Satoraljaujhely.[11] Many prominent rabbis, both young and old, were gathered there on that very special Sabbath day.

When the time for the *seudah shlishis* meal arrived, the

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[11] Author of *Yismach Moshe,* and among those who laid the foundations of the Chassidic movement in Hungary. Satoraljaujhely was an important center of Torah.

Rebbe of Satoraljaujhely took his place at the head of the table. Around him sat distinguished rabbinic personalities, renowned community leaders, and simple Chassidim. At the other end of the meal, sat the Rebbe's saintly grandson, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah.[12] At the end of the meal, he asked the Rebbe who should be awarded the honor of leading the after-blessing.

"The Rav of Balkany," replied the holy Rebbe.

"There are so many distinguished rabbis, and older ones at that, sitting around this table, and yet you honor the Rav of Balkany for *Birchas Hamazon*?" remarked his grandson in surprise.

"You must know, my son, that the Rav of Balkany occupies himself with Torah study purely for the sake of Heaven, and therefore this honor is fitting for him."

"Even though he does not wear a shtreimel on his head?"

"Go and fetch my own shtreimel" instructed the grandfather, "place it on his head, and he will lead the *Birchas Hamazon.*

So it was. And from that time onwards, Rabbi Shmelke would don a shtreimel every week on the holy Sabbath.

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[12] Author of the work *Yetiv Lev,* Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Teitelbaum was Rav of Hroszko and then of Maramaros Sziget. He later emigrated to the Holy Land, and passed away in Safed.

Chapter 4

His Method of Learning and Personal Conduct

WE HAVE already described how all our saintly grandfather's energy was directed at disseminating Torah knowledge, and how his only interest was to draw his flock nearer to God. No other occupation in the world held any attraction for him. Nevertheless, Providence decreed that he take upon himself two further vocations, that of prayer-leader for the Days of Awe, and that of community *mohel.* These roles were assumed following two separate extraordinary occurrences.

Rabbi Shmelke first officiated as the High Holiday *Ba'al Tefillah* after a communal dispute in which his authority as rav was openly defied.

The community had already decided to engage the services of a certain chazan for the upcoming Days of Awe.

The individual in question had led the congregation in prayer one Sabbath and his sweet and stirring voice had made the desired impression upon the worshippers. But they were not too concerned with the fact that his personal qualities — not up to par with his singing — may have rendered him unfit in terms of the *halachah.*

On hearing of these plans, Rebbe Shmelke summoned the president of the congregation and warned him not to proceed with the appointment of this candidate. The president thereupon convened a general meeting of the members, to whom he conveyed the orders of the Rav. The only result of the meeting, however, was the unanimous endorsement of the appointment.

Visibly shaken by his flock's defiance of his ruling, which was based on the Torah itself, Rabbi Shmelke was quick to show his displeasure. In sharp contrast to his usual mild manner, he roared that the anger of the Almighty would burn against those who show disdain for the Shulchan Aruch. Their plans would be frustrated, he announced, and the chazan would not officiate as planned.

The congregants, however, took this warning as little more than a joke, for after all, the man of their choice was strong and healthy. On the *Mussaf* service of the Sabbath preceding Rosh Hashanah, he sang with such consummate beauty that all who heard him completely forgot their Rav's admonition.

On the first morning of Rosh Hashanah, the chazan stepped up to the lectern to begin the introductory prayer of *Mussaf.* A hushed congregation waited in anticipation.

"Of the making of many books there is no end" (Kohelet 12:12).

As is well-known, three books are opened before the Heavenly Tribunal every Rosh Hashanah – the ledgers of the righteous, of the wicked, and of those in-between, respectively. This will not be the case, however, at the time of the Redemption at the end of days. Our Sages have revealed that the Son of David will not arrive unless the entire generation at the time of his coming is either meritorious or guilty, completely wicked, or completely righteous. There will be no necessity, therefore, for many books; one will suffice — either the book of the righteous or, God forbid, that of the wicked.

When the author of Kohelet, therefore, talks of "many books," he refers to the present pre-Messianic era, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, must keep several ledgers. May we witness the Redeemer's arrival speedily in our days, and may he come to a generation that is unquestionably righteous.

The chazan opened his mouth, closed it, and then opened it again . . . but, try as he might, he could not emit a single sound, loud or soft, in or out of tune.

After their initial astonishment, the worshippers began to hang their heads in shame at the frightening fulfillment of Rabbi Shmelke's prophecy. Moments later, they begged Rabbi Shmelke himself to lead in prayer.

From that year onwards, Rabbi Shmelke conducted every *Mussaf* service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. When he eventually transferred to Selish, he found that the community already had a chazan — a former student and friend from the yeshivah in Lacompak, Rabbi Matiel Balevi. On one of the days of Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Matiel would conduct the Morning Service and Rabbi Shmelke would officiate at *Mussaf,* and on the other day, their roles would be switched. On Yom Kippur, Rabbi Shmelke would lead the *Kol Nidrei* and *Mussaf* services.

He began his career as a mohel following another miraculous incident. One night, his famous ancestor, Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolesburg, for whom he had been named, appeared to him in a dream. "You should know, my son, that the knife which I used for *milah* is in the possession of my daughter, who is now living in such-and-such a city. Travel there and request it from her; she will gladly give it to you."

Rabbi Shmelke hurried to fulfill the request of his forefather. He arrived at the address which had been revealed to him and introduced himself to the daughter of the famed Rav of Nikolesburg. Before he had a chance to

explain the purpose of his visit, however, she divulged that her father had appeared to her, too, in a dream and had instructed: "The Rav of Balkany is on his way to you; give him the *milah* knife which you have been keeping, for it is rightfully his."

She handed over the knife with great joy. Rabbi Shmelke also rejoiced in his heart, and he accepted upon himself yet another *mitzvah* assigned to him by Heaven.

Rabbi Shmelke remained in the town of Balkany for about twenty years. There he amassed the greater part of his seemingly inexhaustible Torah knowledge, and there, to a large extent, he laid the foundations for a lifetime of purity and sanctity. He would often say that he had been successful in his learning in Balkany, even though economic hardship had been his daily lot.

It would be appropriate here to expound a little on his distinctive method of learning as well as on his personal conduct, which was permeated with the fear of Heaven and a passion to perform *mitzvos.*

His foremost priority in learning was to master thoroughly the topic at hand. With great depth and insight, he would clarify and explain the relevant passages in the Gemara, Rashi, the Rishonim and the Acharonim, all according to their simple meaning. He attached great importance to the study of the Acharonim, and would often remark that "whoever does not study the Acharonim will find difficulty in understanding the Rishonim."

Only after he had gone through this process assiduously, would he begin to formulate his own novella. With

his incisive analytical powers, he would penetrate to the heart of the subject with novella of incredible profundity. "The Holy One, Blessed be He, delights in pilpul," he was fond of commenting.

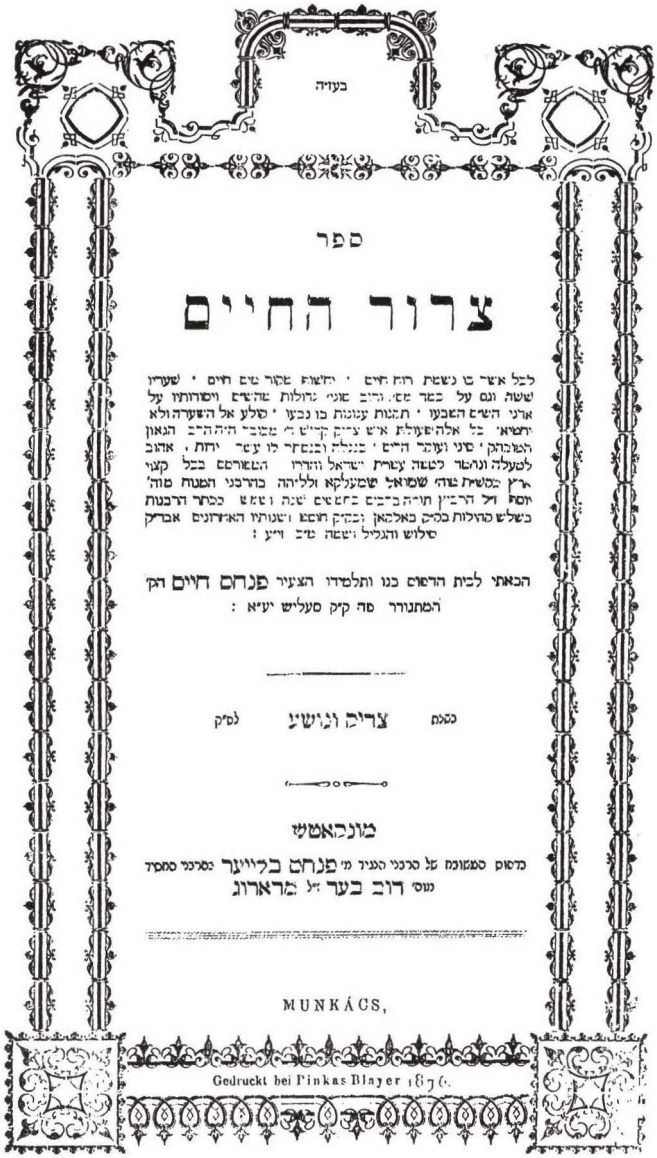
But the scholarly legacy of our saintly grandfather was by no means limited to such intricate dialectics or perceptive analogies of Talmudic passages. As we have stated, before everything else, he would painstakingly remove all the obstacles until he elucidated a Talmudic passage according to its simple meaning. Only afterwards, would he proceed to apply his expertise and his remarkable astuteness of mind to make comparisons between one case and another.

I will quote here two witnesses who testify to this contention. The first is my father and teacher, the son of Rabbi Shmelke, Rabbi Moshe Klein, head of the Beit Din at Szilagycseh.[13] After he had succeeded in publishing Rabbi Shmelke's book *Tzror HaChaim*, he called me and commented:

"Believe me, my dear son, that this book does not represent the only method of study which was practiced by my holy father. For when my father taught a lesson, he would expound on the commentaries of the Maharsha and the Maharam on their most basic level, sometimes even offering thirty such explanations on one page of Gemara with Tosafos and Rishonim. Indeed, it is a great loss for us

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[13] In this city in the province of Szigaly, both Rabbi Moshe and his son, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, officiated as rav.



בעזה״ת

ספר

צרור החיים

לבל אשר יו נשמת רוח חיים ׳ והשוה שהר שם חיים ׳ שערין
ששה וגם על בשר שם. הוסב שני גאולות שהשם ויסדותיו על
ארני השרש השבעי ׳ תשעה עשרות בו נבעו ׳ סלע אל השערה ולא
יחשוב בל אלהי שעלת איש ציון קדוש ה׳ משבבי היה הרב הגאון
המובהק ׳ סני ועמר החיים ׳ בונלה ובנשרי בו עשר יחת ׳ אהוב
להעלה ונאשר לטשה עטרת ישראל והדרו השערשם בכל קצוי
ארץ בקשת שהי שמואל שמעלקא ולליהה בודרבני המטה מוה׳
יוסף זול הרבין תוה בריבים בשנים שנה ושנש כמתר ורבנות
בשלש קהלות בקיק באלכאן ובקיק חוסש ושנותיו האחרונים אברק
סלוש והגליל ושנה שנב ויע :

הנאתי לבית הדפוס בנו ותלמידו הצעיר פנחם חיים הק
המתנורר סה קיק סעליש יעיא :

בשנת צרים ונישע לפ״ק

מונקאטש

מדפוס סמצומה של מרכני הגדיל מו״ה פנחם בלייער נסרכני סמסדר
נעסי דוב בער זיל מראראן

MUNKÁCS,

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Opening page of the first edition of *Tzror HaChaim,* 1876.

Rabbi Shmelke was always thrilled when an astute or discerning Talmudic question was raised by one of his students, or when a rational and satisfying solution or theory was proposed. Thus, he interpreted the following verse:

"Then those who fear God consulted together, each one with his friend" (Malachi 3:16).

In the far corner of the world sits a Torah scholar, painstakingly analyzing a Talmudic text and coming upon a profound question. He is in a state of great distress, however, because the solution is eluding him.

Simultaneously, on the other side of the world, another scholar is toiling over the Torah with equal care and diligence, and an original and lucid line of reasoning enters his mind, a satisfying and logical theory, but he is at a loss to find a difficulty to which his proposition would be the key.

But the Holy One, Blessed be He, who is in every place and who knows the thoughts in the heart of every man, who is concerned over the pain of His scholars and records the achievements of those who fear Him — attributes to each of these scholars a complete and perfect Torah *chiddush*. The reward each will receive will not be for merely half a notion, but for an entire novel interpretation of the Torah.

that these interpretations have not been collected and written down."

The second witness is my father-in-law, the Gaon, Rabbi Yekusiel Schwartz, Rav of the holy community of Kopolnok Monoster. After my marriage, while I was still living in his home, supported by him, we would regularly learn Gemara together. Often we would consult the novella in *Tzror HaChaim* relevant to the topic we were studying. My father-in-law would remark that it was a source of wonder to him that of all my grandfather's Torah writings and comments, it was apparently only these novella that were deemed worthy of being preserved for posterity.

"When I was learning at the yeshivah of our master, the illustrious Ketav Sofer of Pressburg," he explained," and a letter full of Torah thoughts would arrive from your revered grandfather, there would be great rejoicing, as if a priceless treasure had just been unearthed. It was the Ketav Sofer's practice to read and comment on the letter before the entire yeshivah. The directness and clarity of your grandfather's reasoning and the profundity of his insights were more precious than gold. What is interesting is that all these comments were straightforward interpretations based on the plain meaning of the text, and not on sophisticated analyses."

All this supports what we have already pointed out, that only after thoroughly examining a passage or topic from the standpoint of its simple denotation, would Rabbi Shmelke use his penetrating analytical skills to create original perspectives of the subject on hand.

With regard to the wisdom of the Kabbalah, great tzaddikim who were acknowledged experts in this field, have testified that Rabbi Shmelke had a wide-ranging knowledge of the subject. Many of these sages have remarked that although the whole of his work *Tzror HaChaim* is noted for deep insights and *pilpul*, its treatment of the hidden aspects of the Torah is especially brilliant. His elucidation of such topics would help to draw near those souls that had strayed far from their heritage.

With regard to the subject of his personal conduct, his lifestyle and his righteous deeds, it was known throughout the Jewish world that Rabbi Shmelke was destined for saintliness from his first days on this earth. The holiness of his soul was guarded while he was still in his mother's womb, and from the day of his birth right up to his death, he steered clear of the minutest spiritual imperfection. His soul was pure and unblemished.

All the actions of this righteous man were pleasant, without reservation. His only desire was to fulfill the commandments of his Creator with love, and as he was extremely careful to separate himself from anything bordering on transgression, he was exceptionally vigilant of all his actions. His thoughts were confined to contemplation on the Torah; his speech was holy, and his deeds untainted.

His pure soul was cherished on High and beloved here on earth. He would flatter no one nor show favoritism to any man, whether rich and powerful or the poorest of the poor, but would receive all who sought his presence cheerfully and with respect, as long as this did not involve a neglect of his studies.

Indeed, Rabbi Shmelke was extremely particular that he not be disturbed when he was immersed in study. Anyone who sought his attention while he was involved in a *shiur* would simply be ignored until the lesson was over. If he had to attend a wedding or undertake a journey to perform some *mitzvah,* immediately on his return home he would request of whoever was with him: "Please fetch me a Gemara right away; it seems as if a thousand years have passed since we last learned."

In fact, he would often admonish his students with the words: "In one night, if he wants, a man can become a great scholar, but in the same length of time one could also become a whopping ignoramus."

He was also fond of remarking that the Gemara with Rashi, is equivalent to "borsht with bread," that is to say, without it a Jew is not able to exist, for it is the very life of the soul. For this reason, he would not brook the smallest interruption to his regular learning schedule, whether in regards to his scheduled lectures in the yeshivah or to his personal learning routine at home.

Nevertheless, whenever the timing was appropriate, so that his Torah study would not suffer, Rabbi Shmelke would go out of his way to welcome all those who crossed his threshold. Even if the caller was one of questionable character or whose deeds were suspect, he would draw him near with a cheerful disposition and kind words, in the hope that that person might mend his ways. He was like Aharon the Priest, for he loved people and brought them closer to the Torah.

The words of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa could truly be applied to him: "If the spirit of one's fellows is pleased with him, then the spirit of the Omnipresent is pleased with him."[14] He had no opponents or foes. Ashkenazim and Chassidim alike, and even transgressors, honored and loved him, for they all could clearly recognize that this was a man who served his Maker with every breath. They also knew instinctively of his elevated status in the eyes of Heaven, as though his soul had been demarcated for greatness even before his birth.

We already mentioned how Rabbi Shmelke's mother, our great-grandmother Faisel, would protect her infant son from impure sights. This state of purity was maintained throughout the boy's childhood. And although we described earlier how the young Shmelke had a reputation as being a wild and mischievous rascal, this does not mean that he would transgress the Divine Commandments, Heaven forbid. Quite the contrary, when it came to all matters pertaining to the Torah of the Almighty, Shmelke's righteousness was discernible even from that age. Even in those heady childhood days, he was extremely careful in his observance of *mitzvos,* and many predicted that he would grow up to become a leader in Israel; for the degree of his piety was without limit.

Our Sages teach us that the trait of humility leads to the fear of God. Like Hillel, humility was a hallmark of Rabbi Shmelke's character. Status was of no concern to him

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[14] *Pirkei Avot* 4:13.

and he shunned fame and honor. He was content with his portion, and never requested an increase in his stipend. Whether or not the community decided to make his material lot a bit easier, he was satisfied with what he already had.

He never made any personal demands, nor did he expect outside communities to invite him to preach on Shabbat or participate in a *din* Torah. Whenever he did receive such an invitation, however, he was happy to oblige, provided it carried the blessing of the local rabbinic authority.

In truth, the responsibility to lead his own community with wisdom, insight and discernment, was enough for him. If, for any reason, he journeyed to a locality where he was not well known, he would endeavor to remain as inconspicuous as possible and to reveal to no one his communal and scholarly standing. Even if somebody did happen to recognize him, he would not deliver a discourse or lead a Torah discussion, unless pressed to do so. However, whenever he would encounter men of learning, he would promptly initiate a lively *halachic* debate with them.

Once, Rabbi Shmelke was returning home by train from a certain mission when a fellow passenger, who hailed from a distant region and did not know him, entered into conversation with him. In the course of their exchange, the stranger mentioned that he intended breaking his journey at Selish, because it would provide him an opportunity to visit Rabbi Shmelke, with whom he had long wished to become acquainted. The stranger then asked his companion

what his occupation was, and the rabbi answered, "I am a merchant."

The train pulled up at the railway station in Selish and the two travelers alighted. A group of prominent Jews who had been waiting patiently on the platform rushed to the Rav and kissed his hand in respect. The eyes of the stranger widened in amazement as he tried to fathom why so many warm greetings were being extended to this "merchant."

"Who is this man whose hand they are all kissing?" enquired the traveler in bewilderment. "He is our revered Rabbi Shmelke," came the reply. The visitor thereupon ran up to the Rav and kissed his hand as well. Later, on visiting Rabbi Shmelke's home, he again expressed his deep admiration for the Gaon's humility.

As great as was his modesty, so was his continual fear of sinning. This dread of sin was the reason why he prayed so fast, often finishing before the rest of the congregation.

"When a wagon is travelling at great speed," he would say, "vermin are unable to catch it; and through a strong fence, swine are not able to burrow."

In other words, when one prays quickly, alien thoughts are less likely to enter the mind in the midst of the prayer and to wreak havoc with one's concentration.

This manner of praying was endorsed by the holy master, Rabbi Mendel of Vishnitz, who would visit Selish from time to time.[15] On these occasions, Rabbi Shmelke

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[15] Selish was situated in a region of vineyards, and people would visit here in the autumn months for a "healing of grapes."

would conduct the *Mussaf* service — at his customary speed — in the distinguished visitor's honor. Rabbi Mendel would sometimes be questioned by his Chassidim about the propriety of praying in this way. The Rebbe would reply that it guaranteed that the one reciting the prayers would concentrate properly on all the mystical intentions of the Ari z'l.

And just as he was characterized by the fear of sin, so was he holy, pure and wholehearted in all his deeds, fulfilling the Biblical injunction to "walk humbly with the Lord your God."

I have heard from a reliable source that although visiting the *mikveh* was not his daily practice, he never failed to immerse himself whenever he felt the need, whatever the hour of day or night. Often, he would visit the *mikveh* late at night, and in my opinion, this included many occasions when he had been occupied with the study of Kabbalah. At such times, he would adjure the young man who accompanied him not to disclose to any party where he had been.

He continued these visits even when he was already very old, and was living in Selish where the *mikveh* was far from his home. On one such occasion, it was already long past midnight when he had completed his immersion. He requested his young companion to go out into the streets and find a wagon driver to take them home.

"But Rebbe," protested the puzzled youth, "where on earth will I find a wagon at this time of night? Surely everyone is fast asleep!"

"Didn't I already tell you — go and look for a wagon driver immediately!" commanded his Rebbe.

No sooner had the young man run out into the street, than he saw, to his great surprise, two sturdy horses hitched to a cart, standing right outside the synagogue. Sitting in the wagon, holding the reins, was a gentile driver, appearing for all the world as if he been specially arranged to meet Rabbi Shmelke. The man agreed to take the passengers home and the youngster quickly ran back into the *mikveh* to tell his Rebbe the good news.

Let us turn our attention briefly to the major milestones in the lives of the members of our grandfather's family. All his children — seven sons and two daughters — were born during the years of his appointment in Balkany. His sons were Rabbi Yaakov, who served as Rav of Tecso and later of Bilke, where he is buried; Rabbi Shalom, who served as Av Beit Din of the community of Halmi, where he is buried; Reb Libush of Maramaros Sziget; my father, the Gaon Rabbi Moshe, Av Beit Din of Szilagycseh, where he was laid to rest; Reb Ozer of Vasaros-Nameny; Rabbi Pinchas Chaim, the righteous Gaon of Selish; and the pious Gaon, Rabbi Eliyahu of Halmi.[16]

His two daughters were Raizel, wife of the Rav of Aranyos Medgyes, and Leah, wife of Rabbi Sinai Lev Weiss of Szatmar.

Rabbi Shmelke's sons and daughters grew up with a

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[16] He accepted the position of Rav of Halmi after the death of his brother, Rabbi Shalom.

single goal: to labor in the vineyard of the Almighty, and to emulate the holy ways of their father and their righteous mother, Devorah. In Balkany, two of his sons grew into fine young men, full of wisdom and fear of Heaven. These were Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Shalom, who were sent to study at the feet of the holy Gaon, Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt.[18] His other children were still young at the time that he left Balkany.

This concludes our account, which includes all the facts that are known to us, of Rabbi Shmelke's period of service in Balkany.

[18] He was among the main disciples of the Chatam Sofer, and author of *Imrei Aish* and *Imrei Binah*. A Gaon of repute, he maintained a large yeshivah in Ungvar, in the province of Ung.

Chapter 5

From Balkany to Huzst

IN CONNECTION WITH the Gaon, Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt, I was also privileged to hear an astonishing story concerning our grandfather.

On the very day that Rabbi Meir departed from this world, Rabbi Shmelke sent an urgent message for the entire community of Balkany to immediately gather in the synagogue. Rabbi Shmelke then solemnly informed his congregation that he had received sad news from Ungvar that the holy master, Rabbi Meir, had passed away. Amidst tears, he proceeded to deliver a moving and bitter eulogy, stressing the magnitude of the Jewish world's loss at the departure of such an elevated soul.

The community was astounded by the fact that their Rav had known about the Gaon of Ungvar's demise on the very day it happened. In fact, a letter bearing the unhappy tidings arrived only several days later, and in any case —

before the era of the telegraph and telephone, when there was not yet even a railroad — no messenger could possibly have brought the news in a single day!

The people of Ungvar issued a call to Rabbi Meir's son, Rabbi Menachem Eisenstadt, who was then serving as head of the Beit Din for the city of Huzst and district, to fill the place of his father as Rav of their city. This meant that the prestigious rabbinical seat in Huzst now became vacant. Thereupon, the members of the Huzst and district community unanimously decided to invite the Rav of Balkany to assume the position as Rav and Av Beit Din.

How the people of Huzst came to choose Rabbi Shmelke out of all the rabbinical talent in the country is an interesting question and, on the surface, somewhat mysterious. After all, he had no family connections in that part of the world; his mother and father did not hail from that region, and his relatives were living in Szilagy. Moreover, Rabbi Shmelke was a still a relatively young man at the time; he had not yet reached forty, and did not yet know anybody at all in the Huzst area.

When, in my youth, I learned at the yeshivah of my uncle, the righteous Gaon, Rabbi Pinchas Chaim in Selish, my fellow students told me of a rumor that purported to solve the mystery. It was said that the good folk of Huzst had opened a volume of responsa by the Chatam Sofer which had just been published, and had found there the response to a *halachic* query which had been posed by the Rav of Balkany. On reading this, they had reportedly decided to appoint him as their Rav.

It is not feasible, however, that this is the real explanation. I, too, have seen the response in question in the work of the Chatam Sofer, but my grandfather's name appears there without any special title of honor or eminence. On the other hand, there were in those days many important rabbinic authorities whose names are also included in the Chatam Sofer's book, but with suitable titles indicating their prominence. The response sent to Rabbi Shmelke, however, dealt with a relatively minor matter and makes no reference to any illuminating Torah insight of his, from which the reader might be able to infer his great stature.

There can only be one explanation for the decision of the community of Huzst. Very simply, Rabbi Shmelke had by that time already made a deep impact on Jewish life countrywide, and had won for himself a special place in the hearts of his brethren, wherever they were living. His reputation as a man of truth and elevated sanctity, and as a Gaon and a tzaddik, had, in fact, reached far beyond the national borders. Bearing this in mind, it was not a great surprise, after all, that the residents of Huzst, known to be God-fearing and wholehearted Jews, should have selected Rabbi Shmelke to be their spiritual leader.

The Jews of Huzst were delighted. Sadness and bewilderment reigned in the streets of Balkany, however, for the community did not relish the thought of Rabbi Shmelke's impending departure. The leadership begged him to reconsider his decision to accept the call from Huzst and offered to increase his salary.

For two reasons, Rabbi Shmelke decided to reject the

petitions of the Balkany congregation. The first was a pragmatic one: his family had, thank God, grown over the years, and some of his children were now approaching adulthood. It was now almost impossible to maintain them on the income which the rabbinate of a small community like Balkany provided. His stipend would be higher in his new position because his constituency would be much larger; half the province of Maramaros, as well as the city of Tecso, fell under the jurisdiction of the Huzst rabbinate.

Secondly, he realized that, since his new community was several times the size of the one in Balkany, he would find greater scope to continue with his life's mission of disseminating Torah knowledge. He welcomed the opportunity to broaden his field of activity in inspiring his people with a love of Torah and the fear of Heaven.

When Rabbi Shmelke and his family arrived in Huzst, he was received with great honor and acclaim. Within a very short time, a close bond had developed between the Rav and the local residents, who made no secret of their deep respect for their new leader.

As was the case when he had arrived in Balkany twenty years earlier, one of his first actions as Rav was to establish a large yeshivah in Huzst, to which students flocked from around the country. They pursued their studies with exemplary diligence. In addition to their regular learning program, they attended many auxiliary *shiurim,* and would stay up late every Thursday evening, learning Chumash with Rashi. Their Rosh Yeshivah loved each one of them deeply, and would not countenance any person who would

A young man in Rabbi Shmelke's community had begun, with pious intentions, to isolate himself from society and had taken to excessive abstinence. Rabbi Shmelke called him in, and spoke with him the following:

"The verse says: 'These are Aharon and Moses, to whom the Lord said: Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt . . .'" (Exodus 6:26).

"Rashi comments on this verse that in some passages, the Torah mentions Aharon before Moses, while in others, Moses is mentioned before Aaron. This is in order to demonstrate that the two brothers are equal in the Torah's eyes.

"This is true even though Moses separated from his wife, whereas Aharon did not. Moses did so for reasons of holiness, and the Almighty concurred with his decision. Aahron could have also separated from his wife, following the example of his saintly brother, but as his only desire was to carry out the will of his Creator, he knew that such an action would be inappropiate in his case. Had Aharon made a similar decision, it would have been, on the contrary, a transgression. But even though he remained with his wife, he was considered to be on a par with Moses in stature.

"If a Jew strives to be numbered among the disciples of Aharon, he may rest assured that he will be counted among the disciples of Moses as well. He may eat his bread with joy and with a clear conscience, as long as he is careful that all his actions are for the sake of Heaven."

say something unfavorable about his students.

I have had heard it related by former students of the yeshivah in Huzst, that there was once an outbreak of cholera in the city. Panic and fear gripped the students, many of whom requested permission to return to their homes.

"Listen, my dear students!" proclaimed Rabbi Shmelke in reply. "I am prepared to guarantee that whoever among you chooses to remain at his desk and continues to learn with his usual diligence, will not be touched by this disease."

On hearing such words of reassurance from their Rebbe, every student decided to remain at his place. But a few days later, it was reported to the Rosh Yeshivah that one of the students had taken ill with the dreaded cholera.

"I do not believe it!" was the Rav's terse reply. He grabbed his hat and his walking stick, and motioned to the student who attended to his needs to accompany him. They soon arrived at the lodgings of the young man who had been stricken. While Rabbi Shmelke and his attendant were still standing outside, they heard shrieks of pain emanating from the house. "Oy, my stomach! Oy my stomach!" the wretched boy was moaning over and over. Rabbi Shmelke hastened inside and asked the patient what was ailing him. He confirmed that sharp pains in the stomach were the problem.

"Why have you been eating so many apples?" enquired the Rav in a very definitive tone. "Very shortly, the pain will stop; but whatever you do, do not consume any more

apples, or any other fruit, as long as the plague rages in the city."

As the tzaddik decreed, so it was. No sooner had the Rav left the house than the pain ceased. On his return to the yeshivah, Rabbi Shmelke warned his students not to partake of fruit until the threat of cholera had passed. This warning undoubtedly saved lives, and not one student took ill after that.

Rabbi Shmelke was blessed with much happiness in his personal life during his years in Huzst, but sadly, he was plagued with suffering as well. His happiness came because most of his sons were married during this period. The anguish resulted from the fact that his beloved wife, Devorah, was confined to bed with a crippling illness for seven consecutive years.

The rebbetzin had always been a devoted and capable helpmate, who had taken pains to ensure that her husband could study at all times with peace of mind. She was content with little, and never hankered after what was beyond her reach. Not once did she ask the Rav for fine clothes or the like, though she richly deserved them. Since the first day of her marriage, her only ambition had been to assist and encourage Rabbi Shmelke in his labors at Torah.

Another sorrowful event that overtook Rabbi Shmelke at that time was the untimely demise of his son-in-law, the outstanding scholar, Rabbi Yosef Wolfson of Kolozs-Monoster, near Klausenberg. He was the husband of Rabbi Shmelke's daughter Raizel, who later became rebbetzin in the town of Aranyos-Medgyes. Yet a further cause for

distress was the fact that Rabbi Shmelke's eldest son, Reb Yaakov (who married the sister of Rabbi Yosef Wolfson), was finding no success in his efforts to earn a living in Klausenberg.

My grandfather set out on a trip to find out how he could be of assistance to his son, Reb Yaakov, and his widowed daughter, Raizel, in Klausenberg. During the journey, two holy tzaddikim of elevated stature — Rabbi Shmelke and the great Gaon, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Panet, Rav of the state of Ziebenbergen (Transylvania) — came face to face. The road to Klausenberg passed through the village of Orisor, where Rabbi Panet resided, and Rabbi Shmelke naturally took the opportunity of paying him a visit.

I have heard from reliable witnesses, that when Rabbi Mendel, who was busy delivering a lecture in the beis medrash, was interrupted with the exciting news that the Rav of Huzst was standing outside and was anxious to visit him, he rose in wonderment and was filled with fear and dread.

"Is the Rav of Huzst really here?" he queried several times in disbelief. Finally convinced, he ran outside to greet his guest and, full of emotion, embraced him and kissed his forehead. He then led Rabbi Shmelke into the study hall, where the two Gaonim immersed themselves in a profound Torah discussion, before separating from each other in peace.

This incident is further testimony to the fact that our grandfather's fame had spread to the most distant parts of

the land. No less a personality than the great Rabbi Menachem Mendel Panet had become excited on hearing that Rabbi Shmelke had arrived on his doorstep. These two Gaonim met a second time when Rabbi Panet was journeying by coach to Galicia to visit the holy Rebbe of Sanz. Passing through Selish, he lost no time in seeking out the dwelling of Rabbi Shmelke, who had relocated to this city by that time. The two spent fruitful hours together, lost in the world of the spirit.

When Rabbi Mendel arrived home after his journey to Sanz, he related his experiences to his acquaintances. He exclaimed enthusiastically that the mind of Rabbi Shmelke was like an enormous crate filled with books. He added that if the Rav of Selish had been living in the age of the Tannaim, then he, too, would have ranked as a Tanna.

To return to our grandfather's trip to Klausenberg; though he arrived in the city with troubles of his own, he also shared in the sorrow felt by many members of the community, for the prestige of the Torah had just suffered a grievous blow there. The distinguished Rav of Klausenberg, Rabbi Hillel Lichtenstein had recently been dismissed, and the communal leadership had replaced him with a man who could deliver sermons in German.

Rabbi Shmelke was pained that the honor of the Torah had fallen so low in Klausenberg that the community elders could feel free to drive out a tzaddik such as Rabbi Hillel. Moreover, they had chosen in his place a Rav who introduced novelties into the community such as our fathers would never have dreamt of; among them, discourses in

"The best of physicians is destined for Gehinnom" (Kiddushin 82a).

If a man insults his fellow, and the injured party declines to retaliate but remains quiet, then the person who caused the embarrassment can be described as a physician. Albeit unknowingly, he may well have saved his friend from the pain of crippling diseases, and all kinds of afflictions, and may even have delivered him from death itself. Of course, the "physician" himself is not in such a fortunate position, for his sin will surely cause his descent to Gehinnom.

This is why our Sages describe a man who derides his fellow as "the best of the physicians." Such a man is certainly superior to any doctor. Any other physician must prescribe bitter medicines to his patient in order to heal him, but the "doctor" who insults his friend need not resort to such medication to effect a cure. His "patient" is punished for his transgressions with mere words, as hurtful as they may be, and is spared the agony of physical affliction or material loss. His friend has unwittingly saved him from all this.

This most efficient of all "doctors," on the other hand, will ultimately receive his just deserts in Gehinnom.

the specifically geared to those of low spiritual standards. Although, as we already pointed out, Rabbi Shmelke was generally reluctant to interfere in the affairs of communities other than his own, he was not able to restrain himself in this instance. "Do you need a Rav who appeals to ignoramuses?" he asked sarcastically.

Happily, Rabbi Shmelke did find a measure of consolation from his visit to Klausenberg in that the fortunes of his children changed for the better. Providence found a suitable match for the young widow, Raizel, and she married an eminent rabbinic scholar, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Ginsberger, who later became Rav of the town of Aranyos-Medgyes.

There is a fascinating sidelight to the episode of the arranging of this match. Our grandfather wrote to the Rav of Pressburg, the Ketav Sofer, requesting that the Gaon send him an outstanding young scholar. The young man that the Ketav Sofer chose was Zvi Hirsch Ginsberger, who traveled to Huzst in the company of his mother, who lived in Zelhem.

The young scholar and his mother arrived at Rabbi Shmelke's dwelling and knocked at the door. The Rav opened his door and gasped in pleasant surprise when he noticed the woman.

"Are you not from Lacompak?" he asked, hardly believing his eyes, and without even waiting for confirmation, continued: "During my student days, I was allocated to your family for some of my meals, and you were a young girl at the time. I remember well how many times, as I was about to leave the house after the meal, you would

follow after me with a chunk of bread which you would hand to me with the words, "Here, bochurel (young man), take this, you might be hungry later on!'"

The woman smiled with satisfaction as she, too, recalled those halcyon days of her childhood.

What is remarkable is that almost fifty years had passed since that incident had occurred, and the young girl which Rabbi Shmelke remembered was now an elderly woman. The incident testifies to his unbelievable memory. The Rav was once quoted as saying, in fact, that from the day he was weaned as an infant and onward, he remembered everything that happened to him.

As for Rabbi Shmelke's eldest son, Rabbi Yaakov — Providence was kind to him also. His father found him a position in a community under the Huzst rabbinate jurisdiction. Rabbi Yaakov was appointed as Rav of Tecso in the province of Maramaros. Finally, an happier event occurred with the complete recovery of Rabbi Shmelke's rebbetzin, Devorah, after she had been confined to her sickbed for seven years.

With the passage of time, Rabbi Shmelke's inspiring leadership was cherished more and more by his community, and the local yeshivah grew and flourished. Students came eagerly to learn from the regions of Maramaros, Bereg, Ungvar and Nyir. The majority of these young men — if not all — eventually left the yeshivah for the outside world as devout and God-fearing Jews and as top-rate scholars, devoted to the Torah and its precepts.

Among them was the outstanding student, Yosef Meir

"For a thousand years in Your eyes are but a day gone by" (Psalms 90:4).

From the perspective of the Master of the Universe, a time span of a thousand years passes as quickly as one day in the calendar of a human being. In the case of a mortal, however, precisely the opposite can hold true. If a single day would pass without his having learned Torah with his students, Rabbi Shmelke would feel as if a thousand years had gone by.

"How sad that we have not learned together for a thousand years!" he would exclaim with longing to his students, and then eagerly resume his learning with renewed enthusiasm.

Weiss, son of Rabbi Yitzchak Izik Weiss, Av Beit Din of Munkas. This young man later became the Rav of Safinka and was known as a very special tzaddik. Rabbi Shmelke was said to have predicted that the young Yosef Meir would become famous all over the world as a Gaon of exceptional piety.

While in Huzst, Rabbi Shmelke conducted a correspondence with the Divrei Chaim, the saintly Rebbe of Sanz. The two great authorities exchanged insights and *halachic* conclusions on the subject of *agunot.*

Chapter 6

In the Dead of Night

OUR GRANDFATHER had served as Rav of Huzst for about thirteen years, when a vacancy occurred in the rabbinate of Selish. At that time, our uncle, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Ginsberger was sitting in his father-in-law's house without any means of support, and Rabbi Shmelke strongly recommended to the lay leaders of Selish that they appoint his son-in-law as new Rav.

However, the congregation of Selish had other ideas. They had already made up their minds that their new Rav should be none other than Rabbi Shmelke himself. They were prepared, however, to appoint Rabbi Shmelke's son-in-law on a temporary basis. As soon as Rabbi Ginsberger would find a permanent position, Rabbi Shmelke would take up his rightful place as the new Rav of Selish.

Messengers were dispatched to Huzst to inform the Rav of this proposal and to respectfully enquire whether he

would be willing to accept the spiritual leadership of Selish under these terms. To the delight of the emissaries, Rabbi Shmelke agreed. On hearing the news, the city of Selish was exultant. The people had merited that a Torah giant would illuminate their town, and their jubilation knew no bounds.

In Huzst, by way of contrast, a mournful spirit overcame the town. Shock waves reverberated throughout the community as news of Rabbi Shmelke's decision leaked out. Unable to contain themselves, a host of men, women and children converged spontaneously on Rabbi Shmelke's home to make the heartrending plea:

"Our holy Rebbe! Please, please, do not abandon us! We will gladly give you everything that you are lacking, and we will provide for your son-in-law until he finds a suitable rabbinical post. But we beg you, our master, do not abandon us!"

The Rav's gentle manner belied his empathy, but his reply was short and conclusive:

"My precious friends, I have already given my word to the men of the holy congregation of Selish. It is no longer possible to retract."

The residents of Huzst, however, would not part with their leader so easily. There must be a way, they thought between sighs, to annul the designs of their brethren in Selish without compelling Rabbi Shmelke to renege on his commitment.

"If all else fails," they eventually decided among themselves, "we will have to use force!" Should a delegation from Selish enter the town to make plans with Rabbi Shmelke,

or to accompany him out, they would drive the intruders away with axes, pitchforks and swords. Surely, they reasoned, the men of Selish would tire of returning to the town after a few futile attempts to claim their holy prize, and ultimately they would abandon the whole project. And as the men of Huzst resolved, so they did in practice several times.

The unseemly conflict between the communities of Huzst and Selish precipitates a compelling question, to which we must search for a satisfactory answer. What was it, after all, that prompted our grandfather to leave the town of Huzst for new pastures?

The fact is that the community of Huzst was at least as prestigious as that of Selish, and since almost half of the province of Maramaros fell under the jurisdiction of the Huzst rabbinate, the Jewish population of the affiliated communities was double that of Selish and its districts. And if anyone were to suggest that the people of Selish simply offered Rabbi Shmelke a larger stipend, there are two reasons why such an explanation is insufficient.

Firstly, it was common knowledge that the Rav's high spiritual standards precluded him from pursuing anything beyond the bare necessities of life. The Huzst community provided him with sufficient funds for his modest needs, and there was no reason to suspect that he desired anything more. After his arrival in Selish, it did happen, in fact, that other communities made overtures to him with promises of double remuneration, yet whenever such an offer was made to him, he would patiently but firmly explain to his suitors:

"When I was serving in Balkany, and we were forced to survive on four gold coins a week, my wife found it difficult to manage and she would ask me for eight. When I transferred to Huzst and I was handed fifteen gold coins weekly, again my rebbetzin could not make ends meet and she would request double every week. Now that I have come to Selish and I am fortunate enough to receive twenty coins every week, the rebbetzin finds trouble in balancing the budget on less than forty!

"And now, my dear brothers, can you imagine what would happen if I would be earning forty coins a week? My poor rebbetzin, for sure, would be short of forty coins! What do I need such problems for? I am much better off here in Selish, where her weekly shortfall is only twenty. As our Sages expressed it: Whoever has a hundred zuz, desires two hundred."

There is a second reason why the move to Selish could not have been motivated by financial considerations. Our grandfather was well aware that the hearts of the Huzst residents were loyally bound to his own. If he would have given them the slightest hint that he needed a larger allowance, they would have rushed, without a shadow of a doubt, to provide him with what he needed and more. We have seen, in fact, that in the end they did promise to provide whatever both he and his son-in-law lacked, should Rabbi Shmelke only agree to remain with them.

Thus, the burning question still awaits an answer. Why did Rabbi Shmelke consent to relocate to Selish?

There is no other solution to this perplexing mystery

other than what I have heard from trustworthy sources. Some prominent individuals once posed this question to the Rav himself, and his answer was to the point: "I have been informed by Heaven that I must go to Selish!"

The men of Huzst, however, were determined not to give up. Day in and day out, they stood at their watch, and should a Jew from Selish dare to approach the Rav's house, the hapless visitor would be driven out of town with axes. But if the men of Huzst had expected the status quo to remain in force forever, it was a vain hope. Two years after Rabbi Herschele Ginsberger had, in terms of the original agreement, entered Selish as a temporary substitute for Rabbi Shmelke, the former was appointed to the rabbinate of Aranyos-Medgyes.

The hour had now arrived, declared the men of Selish, for Rabbi Shmelke to take his place of honor in their city. The small problem, remained, it was true, of how to bring this about in practice. A way would have to be found to circumvent their militant brethren's tactics of intimidation. The men of Selish took counsel together, and concluded that their only hope of penetrating the well-guarded lines of the "enemy" would be to devise a brilliant military strategy of their own.

After some deliberation, an elaborate blueprint for the operation was agreed upon. The "attackers" would divide themselves into two main groups, and, making as little noise as possible, they would "invade" the territory of the community of Huzst in the dead of night, also armed with axes, pitchforks and swords. They would be riding in three

coaches. One coach would be carrying the first company of men, and would park directly outside the Rav's home. The men of the second company would be riding in the other two coaches, and they would position themselves at a distance from the house.

Should the men of Huzst get wind of the fact that a coach from Selish was standing right opposite the Rav's doorstep, and come running towards it brandishing their weapons, the first group of men from Selish would entice their opponents to come chasing after them. The crafty invaders would ride up and down the streets, thus keeping the local defenders distracted for an hour or two.

Meanwhile, a messenger would alert the second company who would be waiting some distance away. At the given signal, one of the coaches would rush to the house at top speed, and come to a halt under the window of the Rav's study. Working as quickly and as quietly as possible, some of the men of the second company would help Rabbi Shmelke and his family to exit the house through the window and to climb on to the coach. Taking an unusual route out of town to minimize the chances of the local men giving chase, this coach with its valuable cargo would hastily make tracks for Selish.

As they planned, so they did. Late one dark night, a large contingent of able-bodied men from Selish stealthily descended upon Huzst in three coaches. As they approached the edge of the city, they divided themselves into two companies. The smaller group, with two coaches, withdrew into the distance, and waited patiently in the stillness of the

night for further developments. The other company, traveling in the third coach, made straight for the dwelling of the Rav. Stationing themselves right outside the entrance, these men prepared themselves to evacuate Rabbi Shmelke and his family on the spot — unless, of course, the defiant men of Huzst had heard their approach.

And so they had. The residents of the city had not relaxed their vigilance for a moment — even in their sleep. Despite the very best efforts of the intruders to carry out their work in silence, an eerie medley of strange sounds, hardly regular for that late hour, roused Rabbi Shmelke's aggrieved followers from their short-lived slumber.

Within moments, the entire town was in tumult. One man after another rose from his bed in shock and ran to warn his neighbors that the men of Selish had come to town to grab possession of their priceless treasure. Minutes later, a group of the hardiest men in the city, in the most aggressive of moods, had surrounded the Rav's house — armed to the teeth with their axes, pitchforks and swords.

They came face to face with their brethren from Selish, who put up a show of a fight for a while, but then pretended to flee from the "enemy" so as not to bring about bloodshed, God forbid. The men of Huzst then filled the courtyard of Rabbi Shmelke's residence and took up position at the doors, keeping careful watch over every entrance and exit to the house and courtyard.

But if the zealots of Huzst thought that their opponents had disappeared from the scene entirely, they soon realized their error. Their opponents had already regrouped on a

low hill not far away, and from there they roared to the defender's of the rabbinical castle: "Let's see who will grow tired first!" On hearing these provocative words, the men of Huzst yelled back: "Yes indeed, we'll see who will be the first to tire!"

The warriors of Selish, however, did not remain at that spot for long. After a few minutes of tense silence, they suddenly charged at surprising speed, while shouting for all they were worth, back in the direction of the house of the Rav. Bellowing triumphantly, axes and sticks in their hands, they drew near once again to the doors and the courtyard. Shouting just as loudly, the local men ran to ward off their opponents.

Amidst all this commotion, and unnoticed by the defenders of the castle, a messenger of the camp of Selish had made furtive tracks for the men of its second company, who were waiting at a prearranged spot. Taking care not to make the slightest noise, they crept up on tiptoe to the embattled house, until they were standing directly under the Rav's window. Meanwhile, in the vicinity of the courtyard, the two opposing camps were still screaming at each other: "Let's see who'll tire first!" By this time, the messenger of the camp of Selish had returned to its first company, to report that two coaches were now waiting right outside the window of the Rav.

Shouting lustily, the Selish invaders endeavored to create bedlam and confusion at the scene of the confrontation. The men of Huzst heartily reciprocated by making their contribution to the resultant chaos. All the while, the men

of Selish were fleeing and returning, fleeing and returning. "Yes, let's see who'll get tired first!" cried the men of Huzst for the umpteenth time. "We'll see" came back the now familiar refrain.

Meanwhile, the second company from Selish was taking full advantage of the furor. Candlelight could be seen through the window under which its men had positioned themselves, a sure sign that the Rav and his family had awakened, no doubt by the rumpus just outside their home. In fact, Rabbi Shmelke was pacing nervously up and down his room, trying to fathom the cause of the bizarre commotion. As he passed by the window, he heard someone knocking on the pane.

Startled, he peered out to see who it was, and was surprised to discover a representative of the community of Selish standing in the street and beckoning to him. In a whisper, the man proposed to Rabbi Shmelke that he and his family prepare themselves for a long journey. Then, if the Rav would be good enough to stand by one window, and the rebbetzin by another, his comrades would assist them as well as their children to climb down into the street and to board the coaches which were waiting for them.

The Rav and his family members agreed. Before anyone could turn around, they were all safely and comfortably seated in the designated coaches, thanks to the efficient assistance of the heroes of the second company.

While the evacuation of the Rav's family was in progress, a nimble-footed messenger was rushing back and forth between the two companies, keeping both informed

of latest developments. The men of the first company initiated a deafening racket which must have penetrated the very high heavens. The men of Huzst responded with a rumpus of their own, and this posturing on both sides lasted about a half an hour.

Eventually, the messenger was able to report back to the first company that the evacuation was accomplished and that the coach conveying the rabbinical prize was already almost a half-hour's journey from the city. The men of Selish discontinued their noise-making exercise and rushed back to their previous vantage point on the hill opposite the house of the Rav.

"Let's see who'll give up first!" they resumed their challenge to the defenders of the castle.

"Fine, let's see!" sneered the local men in retaliation, not allowing themselves to be unnerved by provocation.

Then, for a moment it seemed as if the strong defense of the men of Huzst was paying off, for the next thing they knew, the Selish folk were beginning to sing a different tune entirely.

"You're right, you're right. You are the strong ones and we are the weak," they now shouted out sheepishly, "for we have grown tired first."

Having blurted out their rather unexpected confession, they almost flew down the hill, jumped on to their coach, and fled out of town at incredible speed, taking the same road which they had used to enter the city. Rabbi Shmelke's coach had departed on a different route.

The local men watched with disbelief as the fierce

aggressors of minutes before fled from town as if their lives were in danger. Suddenly, a dark suspicion welled up in their hearts. It became even stronger as they knocked on Rabbi Shmelke's front door, and the only response was silence. Suspicion was finally overtaken by panic and chagrin as they knocked down the door and incredulously inspected the empty house — and open windows. No wonder their visitors had bolted in such unseemly haste!

The men of Huzst did not waste a minute. Working as if their very lives were at stake, they harnessed their fastest stallions to their wagons, packed themselves inside and set off in hot pursuit of the men of Selish, along the road on which they had fled. Little did they realize, of course, that the Rav and his family had left via a different road.

And thus the triumphant team from Selish gradually became conscious of the clatter of horses' hoofs and the squeaking of wagon wheels in the rear. They turned their heads, and, as the first rays of morning sun were now peeping above the horizon, were just able to discern the shadowy figures of the furious citizens of Huzst chasing after them like men possessed. The delegation from Selish increased speed, but their horses were no match for the stallions of the men of Huzst, who soon caught up to their opponents. The coach of the Selish Jews ground to a halt as its occupants tumbled out, one after the other, and threw their weapons to the ground.

"Didn't we already admit that we were the first to get tired?" they asked in mock indignation. "And now, we deliver ourselves into your hands."

"Stand clear, all of you, while we climb up onto your coach and take a good look!"

The sharp order of the local men pierced the crisp air of the dawning day. They were clearly under the delusion that victory was within their grasp. In the semi-darkness which still prevailed, it had been almost impossible to identify all those traveling in the open coach of their opponents, but they were convinced that Rabbi Shmelke and his family were among its passengers.

On boarding the vehicle, however, all they found were a few of the indolent members of the Selish crew. These greeted the intruders most cordially, and informed them, amidst chuckles, that if it was the Rav and his family they were seeking, they would most certainly already be in Selish, resting on their beds from the fatigue of the journey. As the realization struck home that their unrealistic schemes, designed to prevent Rabbi Shmelke's exodus, had come to nought, the men of Huzst accepted the decree of Providence with love.

And as the sun rose majestically in the sky, the loyal men of the two communities recited their morning prayers together in the shade of the forest on the side of the road. Afterward, they drank toasts to each other in a true spirit of brotherhood, before parting company in love and harmony. By this time, indeed, Rabbi Shmelke had arrived safe and sound in Selish.

Chapter 7

Bringing Greatness to Selish

IT WAS STILL early in the morning when the glad tidings circulated throughout town that His Excellency, Rabbi Shmelke had arrived in Selish with his wife and children.

Every Jewish soul in the city, man, woman and child, gathered to accord their new leader a rousing welcome. Their joy knew no bounds, and from one end of the settlement to the other, they rejoiced as if a priceless treasure had been discovered in their midst.

Rabbi Shmelke settled down well in his new community, and was remarkably successful and content in both matters of the spirit and the physical. On the spiritual plane, he merited to establish a yeshivah even more successful than that of Balkany and Huzst. Young men came in droves from all corners of Hungary, and studied under their Rosh Yeshivah's wings with phenomenal stamina and depth.

Rabbi Shmelke drew up a curriculum for the yeshivah in accordance with a specific methodology. The main program of traditional daily *shiurim* was supplemented, in the case of the junior students, with an auxiliary shiur on a different text, while the senior students were allocated a tractate of Talmud to learn on their own on a superficial level. On Thursday evenings, he would conduct a shiur on Chumash with Rashi, and would teach or practice with his students a *nigun* in honor of the upcoming Holy Sabbath; for Lecho Dodi was always sung with a *nigun* in his beis medrash.[18]

A man who once spent a Shabbat in Selish and participated in the prayer services in our grandfather's beis medrash, told me that he heard Rabbi Shmelke instruct the prayer leader: "Now, sing a new *nigun* in honor of this Holy Shabbat, for this Holy Shabbat is a new one, which we have never experienced before!"

Rabbi Shmelke gave high priority to educating his community in the path of Torah, for though most of the Jews of Selish were devout and God-fearing individuals, many of them had grown up with little opportunity to study. After Rabbi Shmelke's arrival in the town, every local Jew enrolled his sons at the yeshivah, as did most of the villagers in the surrounding areas.

The love of the Selish community for their holy Rebbe was without limit. Their hearts were bound to his by an

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[18] Rabbi Shmelke was a composer of *nigunim,* as were his son Rabbi Moshe and his grandson Rabbi Shlomo Zalman.

unbreakable cord, and his will was their will. His orders were sacrosanct and the community would speedily fulfill whatever he requested. When Rabbi Shmelke was once asked why he was so successful in eliciting obedience from he congregation, he replied with characteristic wisdom and modesty: "They obey me because it is not my practice to command or request anything."

Be that as it may, whenever there was something that needed to be corrected in the community, Rabbi Shmelke rarely had to ask twice. More often than not, the people did not even wait for his instructions, but exerted themselves to the utmost to anticipate the wishes of their Rav on all matters and occasions.

This tenacious emotional attachment to Rabbi Shmelke was not confined to the residents of Selish and the surrounding district. The same fierce affection glowed in people's hearts in every place where he was known.

"If you really want to know what he meant to me," an old man who had been a member of his community once proudly proclaimed to the writer of these lines, "if Rabbi Shmelke's well-being depended on whether or not I would consent to have two fingers cut off from my hand, I would agree with a full heart to the amputation of two fingers, rather than be forced to witness our Rav's separation from us."

Possibly, some of my readers will question the genuiness of this love for our grandfather, and point to a statement of our Sages, that if the common people love a Torah scholar, it is not out of admiration, but because he does not rebuke

"And you shall love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

Every Jew has a share in the Torah. Since the Torah's dimensions are vast beyond description, it has the capacity to accommodate everyone's portion very comfortably. Even more, it has room to allocate to every Jew a share of the size which he desires.

Therefore, a man should never say to himself: "The share which I already have in Torah is enough for me. Why should I exert myself in learning?" The Torah itself anticipates the danger of such reasoning by exhorting one to "love your fellow" — that is to say, "love your fellow's portion in the Torah." If you really love the share in the Torah which your friend has carved for himself, you will obviously want to emulate him and acquire a similar helping for yourself.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Love your fellow as yourself — this is a fundamental principle in the Torah." The cardinal rule here is that a man must never be satisfied with learning one Mishnah or one page of Gemara. On the contrary, he should claim the share which is his for the taking, by striving to learn the whole Torah. The Torah itself offers him this opportunity; thus he will reach his full potential, and the eternal reward that comes with it.

them sufficiently for their shortcomings. But such an objection would be invalid in this case. Our Sages refer to the affection showered upon a scholar which is not accompanied by appropriate fear and respect. The Sages are speaking of people who are not accustomed to being admonished, for if they were, they would fear their teachers as well as love them.

In our grandfather's case, however, although he was the recipient of the steadfast love of all his acquaintances, and although it is well nigh impossible to describe in words the fierce love which the men of his own community and the neighboring settlements felt for their Rav, this powerful emotion was accompanied by a deep reverence, awe and fear for their saintly master.

No one could draw near to him without being overcome by fear and trembling, and no one would think of approaching him without the appropriate honor and respect. Irreverent conduct or flippant speech were unthinkable in his presence. This was precisely because of his diligence in guiding his flock gently but firmly in the way of the Torah, and his readiness to administer rebuke when the Torah required it of him.

But as much as the Jewish people loved Rabbi Shmelke, he loved them even more. His abiding affection for all the sons and daughters of Israel, the most insignificant among them no less than the most esteemed, was unsurpassed. He would not tolerate the slightest disparaging remark about a fellow Jew. He had only good things to say about the assembly of Israel, the only exceptions being those who

individuals who declined to provide their children with a Torah education — especially those parents who sent their offspring to receive a secular education as a substitute for Torah knowledge. For these people he would find no merit, though he spared no effort to dissuade them from allowing their children to pursue secular studies.

They say that a certain member of the Selish community once decided to teach his son French. Rabbi Shmelke approached that man and chided him: "Why are you so keen to teach your son French? You can believe me when I assure you that all the children in France, even those of the simple peasants, know that language perfectly. So what great accomplishment would it be if your son speaks French?"

To the young men who were fortunate enough to be his students, he showed a very special affection. He dispensed money from his own pocket freely for their welfare, though he often had little left for himself. All his efforts were to direct these young men towards one end — that they should acquire a genuine and unshakable fear of Heaven and love of learning. Although many of them ultimately became distinguished rabbis and *halachic* authorities, this was not the main objective, and their Rosh Yeshivah was content if they turned out to be God-fearing and learned householders and lay leaders.

It would be difficult to overestimate the precious time, draining effort, and scarce financial resources which Rabbi Shmelke invested in negotiating *shidduchim* for his students and in arranging their weddings. The Almighty

strengthened his hand, though, and granted him success in raising a generation of outstanding scholars, dedicated communal leaders, *halachic* authorities, competent *shochtim,* and simple householders motivated by a deep fear of Heaven.

With regard to my comment above, that Rabbi Shmelke enjoyed physical success does not refer to material prosperity. It should not be imagined that he amassed wealth and property in Selish, or anywhere else. Rabbi Shmelke remained a poor man throughout his life, for he had no other source of income besides the modest stipend which he received in the rabbinate. He often confided to others that he longed to go to settle in the Holy Land, "and indeed I would, if only I possessed two thousand *forints* of my own, so that others should not have to send money to me even there."

Without even two thousand units of money "of his own," it is impossible to say that Rabbi Shmelke was financially successful. Rather, my reference was to the one area where tzaddikim do hope for success in the physical world, and that is in the area of raising children and directing them on the path of Torah.

In this area, our saintly grandfather certainly did succeed. Those of his children who were young when he arrived in Selish, grew there to maturity. Whereas his married children spread out throughout the surrounding region to perpetuate the spiritual ideals instilled in them by their father.

"And Moses assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel, and said to them, These are the things which God has commanded, that you should do them" (Exodus 35:1).

Rabbi Shmelke, who attached great value to any gathering of Jewish people for the study of Torah or the service of God, would often explain that implicit in these words of the Torah is a Divine command directed not only to the generation of the wilderness but also to the Jews of all generations.

"'The things which God has commanded' is an injunction valid for all time — for the people to gather together on regular occasions. As the verse says: "The glory of the King is found in the multitude of the people" (Proverbs 14:28). Nothing is more praiseworthy than the Torah study or prayers of a community acting in unity. The joy of an individual who performs *mitzvos* cannot be compared to that of a group of people performing them together. In the assemblies of the myriads of the people of Israel, the Divine Presence is found in greater force, and the channels which convey Divine inspiration and mercy to the world are opened faster and more effectively.

We present here details of the matches which Rabbi Shmelke arranged for his sons and daughters:

With regard to his oldest son, Rabbi Yaakov, we have already mentioned that he married an important young woman from a highly respected family in Transylvania, the daughter of the righteous Reb Wolf of Kolozs-Monoster, near Klausenberg. His second son, Rabbi Shalom, married the daughter of a distinguished scholar, Rabbi Hertzke of Nyir-Mada, who married several of his daughters to pious rabbis. The third son, Rabbi Ozer, was married to the daughter of the distinguished Rabbi Moshe of Vasaros-Nameny, in the province of Bereg.

Rabbi Shmelke's fourth son, Rabbi Moshe, married the daughter of the prominent Rabbi Menachem Mendel Deutsch of Namparad, the *mechutan* of the Ketav Sofer of Pressberg. His fifth son, Rabbi Pinchas Chaim, married the daughter of the outstanding sage in Torah and Chassidism, Rabbi Yisroel Raiz of Selish. His next son, Rabbi Eliyahu, married the granddaughter of Rabbi Shmelke's rebbe in the junior yeshivah in Lacompak, the Gaon, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ulman of Mako, author of *Yeriot Shlomo*. His son, Rabbi Leibush, married a scion of the distinguished family of Rabbi Eliyahu Festinger of Maramoros Sziget.

Our saintly grandfather was thus privileged to witness all his sons reach maturity as tzaddikim and scholars in their own right. A number of them were rabbinical leaders in prominent communities: Rabbi Yaakov was Rav and head of the Beth Din of Bilke and district (after his father transferred to Selish, he also vacated his previous position

in Tecso to become Rav of Bilke); Rabbi Moshe was Rav of the community of Szilagycseh and district; and Rabbi Shalom was Rav of the holy community of Halmi.

As for his daughters, we have already pointed out that Raizel was married to the Gaon, Rabbi Zvi Ginsberger, Av Beit Din in Aranyos-Medgyes, and Leah, his second daughter, married Rabbi Sinai Lev Weiss, son of a prominent personage from Debreceen. Rabbi Shmelke's sons-in-law, like his sons, never deviated from the path of holiness and piety.

Surely, no man achieved greater success in this world, in the truest sense, than did Rabbi Shmelke, who saw, in his children, the fulfillment of his deepest desires. They would gather around his table and drink in his words of wisdom with thirst, while contributing their own original insights into the Torah. Thus they worked together, single-mindedly, towards the objective of sanctifying the name of the Almighty.

Chapter 8

Leader of the Generation

FROM SELISH, Rabbi Shmelke's fame spread throughout the Jewish world. He was recognized as a holy man whose life's goal was to attain ever higher levels of sanctity, whose every action was regulated towards this end, and who carefully weighed every word before he uttered it. He would not lift a finger unless he was sure that his motivation was pure and consistent with his desire to serve God.

He was a classic example of a sage whose every word, and even mundane conversation, bore great wisdom. Indeed, he was famous for his ability to draw near to Torah those who were far away, with both the depth of his insights, and his most common conversation.

It is true that already as a young man, Rabbi Shmelke bore the imprint of greatness. The comments which we cited earlier in the book, of tzaddikim such as Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum and Rabbi Meir of Premishlan, testify to this.

But in those days, the masses of the Jewish people were as yet unaware of it. After his arrival in Selish, however, word of Rabbi Shmelke's greatness rapidly spread to the world at large.

From that time on, large numbers of Jews, particularly those living within a reasonable distance of Selish, were overcome with longing to visit the court of our saintly grandfather, to bask in his warmth and to drink from his wisdom. On the first day of Selichos, for instance, hundreds of Jews of all ages, from across the country, would converge on Selish. Often, Rabbi Shmelke would have to deliver his sermon outside the synagogue, because the building was too small to hold the large numbers in attendance.

His stirring words would ignite sparks of enthusiasm in the hearts of his listeners, and arouse them to sincere repentance. The undisguised love he felt for every Jew would shine through each of his words and penetrate into the hearts of those who had gathered. There was no mistaking his sincerity when he addressed his audience as "my dear brothers and friends." At the same time, however, the congregation would be gripped with fear at the impact of his fiery exhortations, and would resolve to mend their ways and improve their conduct.

It was not only through his sermons that Rabbi Shmelke turned the hearts of the people to God. All that he did in the service of his Creator was to this aim. Even though he was accustomed to recite his prayers quickly, his pleasant voice and sweet melodies were so full of charm and emanated such spirituality, that all those who heard were moved to a fear of Heaven.

A very prominent Chassid, who had always been a man of good spirits, appeared before Rabbi Shmelke. In recent months, he had descended to ever lower points on the moving wheel of fortune, and was presently experiencing great difficulty in earning a livelihood. The trials of poverty and the visitations of the Attribute of Justice were becoming almost impossible to bear, and a deep depression had since overtaken him.

How could he shake off his depression, he asked, and how could he return to his former joyous and optimistic spirit?

"My dear friend," responded the Rav, "reflect for a moment on the thoughts that pass your mind each morning, when you recite the blessing, "Who has not made me a gentile." If your intention is to praise the Almighty for not making you a lowly woodcutter or a watercarrier, who breaks his back every day for the sake of a few meager coins and receives no honor in this world — then your intention is inappropriate.

"However, if you are expressing gratitude for not being a non-Jew — even a rich one, whose life is easy and who enjoys all the honor in the world — then your intention is fitting and valued. If you are genuinely prepared to reject all that wealth and honor for the sake of your Master, who created the world and gave the Torah, then you can be happy all day long. You may rest assured, moreover, that whoever fulfills the Torah in poverty, will ultimately carry out its precepts in wealth."

The Chassid instantly felt as if a great burden had been lifted off his shoulders. His depression vanished, and his faith in God was immeasurably strengthened.

I have heard it said that whoever merited to sit Pesach night at Rabbi Shmelke's Seder table and to hear his beautiful rendition of *Keil B'nei* with his Yiddish interpretation, in the Ashkenazic melody taught to him by his rebbe in Lacompak; whoever beheld his sublime countenance burning with intensity and longing at this sacred moment; whoever experienced the enchantment of this song of praise recited in a voice of unsurpassed sweetness, such a person could be considered as if he had been present in the Holy Temple when the Levites were singing in praise of the Master of the Universe. He would find it impossible to refrain from tears while observing the fervent yearning of the tzaddik for the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, may it be speedily built in our days!

Similarly, who ever overheard his discussions with great Torah sages and his brilliant resolutions of the intricate *halachic* problems, or the novel interpretations which he proposed to his colleagues and students; and who was acquainted with the remarkable enthusiasm with which he expounded on sacred texts; and who was aware of the unquenchable love of Torah and fear of Heaven which cleaved to his heart — who experienced all this without being deeply aroused himself to love the Holy One, Blessed be He, and His Torah?

It was not only in Selish, however, that Jews from far and wide sought him out; to request his blessings, to hear and be inspired by his *derashos,* and to receive guidance from him on how to serve the Creator. Whenever he would leave the city to attend to some *mitzvah* in a distant place,

no sooner would word leak out that Rabbi Shmelke of Selish had arrived in a certain town, than hundreds of people, from settlements large and small, far and near, would converge on the location. In their eyes, an announcement that Rabbi Shmelke of Selish had come to town, was equivalent to a notification that an angel of God had appeared in that place.

I remember when I was a boy, our saintly grandfather twice visited our province, Szilagy — as far as I recall, once when we were in Naprad and once in Szilagycseh, when my father was already the Rav of that city. On both those occasions, every available space was packed to capacity with people.

It was, in fact, a mystery how so many Jews, from villages near and far, got wind of the fact that Rabbi Shmelke was traveling to Naprad or Szilagycseh. When my grandfather would set out on a journey, he would generally keep his destination a secret, and in this case also, no one knew of his plans in advance. Even assuming that he did give prior notice of his itinerary, there was no means then, as there is today, of transmitting the news to the whole country of his impending arrival in the town.

At any rate, hundreds of people were on hand to greet him on his arrival in Szilagycseh, and nobody is sure how they all knew to come. It seems to have been the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, for Jews to flock there. Heaven must have arranged it for the Jews of the region to learn of Rabbi Shmelke's approach, for by paying homage to God's righteous servant, and by learning how to fear their Creator

through his example, the people would come to honor the Almighty.

Likewise, when he would vacation for several weeks in the Bikszad mineral baths, in the province of Szatmar, large numbers of people would gather around him, or invite him to spend Shabbat in the neighboring communities. Even while vacationing, he never ceased speaking Torah, and his *avodas Hashem* was never interrupted, for this was his only pleasure in this world: to learn, teach, safeguard, and fulfill the commandments.

From Selish, his reputation spread as a leader of the generation, one of the greatest rabbinical authorities both within the country and abroad. Naturally, rabbis from the surrounding states turned to him to resolve their difficulties in the Talmud and the Codes, or decide on *halachic* matters. Scholars would likewise approach Rabbi Shmelke for rabbinical ordination. (The Gaon, our master Rabbi Azriel Isaac Keller, Av Beit Din of Nagy-Somkut[19] told me that he was among those who received their first rabbinic ordination from my saintly grandfather.)

Moreover, whenever a dispute arose with regard to a financial matters, the litigants, even if they lived outside the area of his jurisdiction, would call upon Rabbi Shmelke to arbitrate. They were confident that he would bring the truth to light and would deliver a just verdict. Once, to adjudicate a dispute on the division of an inheritance, he

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[19] Rabbi Azriel Isaac was the son-in-law of the author's son, Rabbi Eliyahu. Nagy-Somkut is a town in the province of Szatmar.

was invited to the city of Nyir Medesh, where he formed a Beit Din with the Gaon, Rabbi Zvi Hershele of Olaszliszka[20] and the great Gaon Rabbi Meir Perlis of Nagykaroly.[21]

Several times, these three scholars studied together until late into the night. His companions were of one voice in acknowledging Rabbi Shmelke's expertise in the Talmud and Codes. They say that the Rabbi Perlis once posed an extremely difficult Talmudic problem to my grandfather, who answered it with great depth and erudition.

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[20] Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Friedman, author of the works Ach *Pri Tevuah* and *Ha'Yashar ve'Hatov,* Rav and Av Beit Din of Olaszliszka, who passed away in 1874.

[21] He was among the famous scholars of Hungary, but nothing remains of his writings. He passed away in 1894.

Chapter 9

Reflections of the Writer on Miracles

BESIDES ALL WE have said above, Rabbi Shmelke was considered to be a holy man, through whom God wrought miracles for the Jewish people.

I realize that the reader might question the need to discuss this topic. Perhaps he will consider it superfluous. After all, we have already dealt at length with Rabbi Shmelke's spiritual accomplishments, his remarkable level of Torah scholarship, with his deeds of lovingkindness, and with his tireless activity in teaching Torah and the fear of God to the people.

Is it then necessary to elaborate on the wonders that were performed through him? Since he was already exalted through his piety and pure conduct, should it also concern us that he was a miracle worker? Furthermore, given the "enlightened age" in which we live, perhaps it is out of

place to talk of a great man of Israel who performs wonders.

Yet such objections seem unwise. We might just as well point to our Holy Torah, the Divine blueprint for life, and ask why it takes such pains to elaborate on the miracles which the Almighty performed for our forefathers.

Every intelligent person appreciates the supreme significance of our Torah, and the commandments, statutes and ordinances which it contains. The Ten Commandments are the roots from which civilization itself springs, and even the gentile nations acknowledge them to be the legal and moral foundation upon which modern society is built. Contemplate, if you will, our sacred text, studded with such imperatives as "Love your friend as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18); the injunction to help your enemy unload his overburdened mule (Exodus 23:5); or to support the needy with a full heart, even when the Sabbatical Year is near (Deuteronomy 15:10), and so many more — the laws and statutes which are the very pillars on which modern civilization rests — and ask yourself why the topic of miracles should find a place within its columns. Why should the same Torah that enjoins us to observe such exalted precepts, also talk about the marvels and wonders wrought for our ancestors in ancient times?

This question has a profound answer. At every stage of his life, a Jew is confronted with numerous trials and tribulations. These have the pernicious effect of weakening his religious beliefs and weaning him away from the knowledge of his Maker. We need to realize that the

Creator of heaven and earth, who bestowed on us His Torah, can and does deliver those of His servants who truly trust in Him, and that everything depends on the strength of our faith. If a pious man believes with all his heart that the Almighty will save him — even though he is not permitted to rely on miracles alone, and must still do all he can to save himself through natural means — then the Holy One, Blessed be He, will be sure to send one of His righteous messengers — the tzaddikim in every age — to redeem him from his troubles.

The reason why the Torah recounts all the miraculous events which occurred to our ancestors, is to deepen our conviction that the world has a Creator, for whom no feat is too difficult. Is there any miracle more spectacular than this magnificent universe and the myriads of diverse creatures which inhabit it?

If a man lifts up his eyes to the heavens, and studies the sun, the moon, the planets, the constellations and galaxies of stars and other heavenly bodies; if he reflects on the world in which we live, on the infinite variety of creatures which wander about on its surface and above it, and on how their bodies are designed, their movements synchronized, and their sustenance provided; if he contemplates the construction and maintenance of his own body, his five senses and the different physiological systems, all of which are beyond human comprehension, not to speak of all the other wonders of nature which cannot be described within the scope of this short biography — his own intuition will tell him that the One who designed and fashioned the

marvels of the natural world, can just as easily operate on a level which is beyond nature. His chosen tzaddikim are the instruments through whom these supernatural acts are performed, for He hearkens to their prayers and sends aid to His people in their merit.

This salvation hinges on the strength and quality of our faith. To the extent that a Jew believes that the Almighty will send succor through His tzaddikim, to that extent we can expect his deliverance. Ever since we have been driven out from our land and scattered to the four corners of the earth, what else has been able to fortify us in our religious observances and convictions, and enabled us to withstand the bitter trials of a seemingly endless exile?

Two thousand years have passed since the destruction of the Second Temple and we have still not been redeemed. We must strengthen ourselves and each other in our faith in the Holy Torah and the Prophets, and in our conviction that the Almighty performs wonders for His people through His tzaddikim. We will then be able to continue along the path of history, rock firm in our faith and undaunted by the vicissitudes of life, until the advent of the Messiah and the redemption of the world, may it happen speedily in our days!

Possibly, you will object: "Did not our Sages write: '*Esther sof kol hanisim*' — that the era of miracles came to an end with the story of Esther. How can I then accept that Rabbi Shmelke performed such miracles?" But such reasoning is also faulty. These words of our Sages are clearly not meant to be taken literally, for in the Talmud we find

numerous instances of miracles performed by the Tannaim and Amoraim — such as the famous cases of Choni Hamagel, Elisha Ba'al Kanfaim, and Nachum Ish Gamzu, among the many others.

It is important to emphasize, moreover, that the miracle of Purim occurred through natural means, and many such miracules saved the Jews from disaster during the Middle Ages. Examples of these are the marvelous deliverances following the edicts of Mainz, in Frankfurt-on-Main,[22] and the wicked decrees of Ibrahim, Pasha of Egypt, who passed a law calling for the destruction of his Jewish subjects, God forbid. In both cases, the Holy One, Blessed be He, came to the rescue of His people, and even today the Jews of these communities recite the Megillahs of Frankfurt or Egypt respectively at the appropriate seasons, praising the Almighty for his miraculous deeds of former centuries. How then, could our Rabbis have suggested that miracles ceased altogether after the age of Esther and Mordechai?

Therefore, concerning our Sages statement: '*Esther sof kol hanisim*,' I humbly propose the following interpretation:

At the time of the episode of Purim, the salvation of the Jewish people was a direct result of their return to God in sincere repentance, and their renewed acceptance of the Torah with love. This is the meaning of the words of the Megillah (Esther 9:27): "They confirmed and accepted" — that is to say, they confirmed now what they had previ-

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[22] The author is apparently referring to the decrees of the Bishop of Mainz against the Jewish community of Frankfurt-on-Main at the beginning of the 14th century.

ously accepted, for now they accepted the Torah out of love (Shabbat 88a). Similarly, the underlying purpose of every miraculous deliverance is to provide the Jew with an impetus to accept upon himself the Torah and its precepts in love. In this way, he demonstrates his gratitude to the Creator who had wrought miracles for his benefit. This is what our Sages meant when they said that "Esther is the end — that is , the purpose — of all miracles."

Indeed, it is impossible to interpret this aphorism of our Sages literally. Does not the miracle of Megillat Esther repeat itself before our eyes daily? Thank God, we can still see the working of Divine Providence in the midst of the people of Israel.

Anyone who has studied our Bible or has perused the chronicles of the nations, knows that a long line of great and prosperous peoples, pre-eminent in wisdom, wealth and power, in turn occupied the center stage of the world in ancient times. The Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, the warriors of Tyre and Carthage, the ancient Greeks and Romans, all attempted to impose their domination over our tiny race.

But where are these all-powerful nations now? They have long perished from the face of the earth and have passed into oblivion. But the people of Israel, scattered across the world, a defenseless lamb at the mercy of innumerable hungry wolves, still survives. Who is the power that has preserved us in life, if not the Almighty, our Rock, our Redeemer and our Guardian, as the Psalmist declares: "Behold, the Guardian of Israel shall not slumber nor sleep."

To be sure, Purim-like miracles are being enacted before our eyes day and night. Therefore, why should it be difficult to believe that the Creator of the world can respond in supernatural ways to those that fear Him? He communicates with them, hearkens to their prayer, and fulfills the requests of His righteous ones immediately. Similarly, He performs miracles for their sakes.

"And Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the ears of the people; and they said, 'All that Hashem has spoken, we will do and we will hear'" (Exodus 24:7).

When the people declared: "We will do and we will hear," they accepted the Torah even before learning of its contents. But this was no more than their natural inclination, for they were the children of the Patriarchs, who had readily nullified their own wills before that of the Creator.

Moses understood that this capacity for unconditional surrender was inherent in the people of Israel, and that all he had to do was reveal what was already in their hearts. Thus he read to them the Book of the Covenant, which recounted the Almighty's act of creating the world, and the great deeds of the righteous souls of the past (see Rashi, loc. cit.). This awakened a powerful force in their hearts, so that they easily exclaimed: "All that God commands us, we will do and hear" — the very words used by the ministering angels above.

In the same way, in every generation, recounting the holy deeds of tzaddikim can arouse the heart of the Jew to new heights in Divine service. The achievements of our spiritual leaders, as related in the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash and the Zohar, and the wondrous tales of the later tzaddikim, such as the Baal Shem Tov, can rekindle the passionate desire that lies within each of us to perform the will of our Maker — to declare, as did our forefathers, "We will do and hear!"

Chapter 10

His Wondrous Deeds

THE CONTEMPORARIES of Rabbi Shmelke never tire of relating the miraculous occurrences through which the Rav of Selish saved so many Jews from danger and distress. We present some of these wonderful stories in this chapter.

At the outset it should be noted that he purposefully refrained from imitating the practice of the tzaddikim of Poland, and refused to accept slips of paper, known as *kvitlach*, on which the supplicant had written his request, accompanied by the customary redemption money. Whenever a petitioner would present him with such a *kvitel*, the Rav would gently protest: "Do you really want to turn me into a mailman?"

A year or two before his passing, however, he did relent on this issue, after many people had urged him to accept these written requests. In particular, his sister from Huzst told him that she had dreamt that Heaven was displeased with him, for his reluctance to accept *kvitlach* was impeding

the flow of goodness to the world. Many others pleaded similarly that the notes could be a vehicle for bringing good to the world. He then began to accept *kvitlach* for the first time.

Until then, whenever a person would approach Rabbi Shmelke and request his prayers, he would modestly make every attempt to dissuade the supplicant and refer him to someone else. If this was not possible, the Rav would plead for God's mercy with every ounce of his strength. And whatever a tzaddik decrees, the Holy One, Blessed be He, surely fulfills. All that Rabbi Shmelke demanded for the safety and well-being of Israel was invariably achieved.

In the vast majority of cases, he did not prescribe a *segulah* — a specific activity as a good omen or remedy — and he never suggested the use of amulets or the like. Instead, all the salvation which he brought about came through the power of Torah, which was his only weapon. For example, when he was teaching his students in the yeshivah, and a distraught father would burst into the room and beseech the Rav to intercede for a critically ill son, Rabbi Shmelke would respond by announcing: "This new Torah insight with which we are presently occupied will be dedicated to so-and-so who is ill, and in this merit may he have a speedy recovery," or, "In the merit of the Holy Torah which we are learning now, may the sick person so-and-so be healed completely." And the Almighty would hasten to carry out what the tzaddik had ordained.

We will proceed to relate some of the wondrous deeds performed by our saintly grandfather for the benefit of his

beloved flock. It will be understood that only a fraction of them can be included in a volume of this size.

* * *

A group of wine merchants from Lemberg once traveled to Selish on business. They were determined not to leave town without first paying their respects to its Rav, about whom they had heard so many wonderful things. The traders were awe-struck when they entered his room and beheld the Rabbi Shmelke, who resembled in their eyes an angel of God.

"From where do Your Excellencies come?" enquired the Rav, after welcoming the travelers.

"From Lemberg."

"How is Rabbi Yosef Shaul faring there?"[23]

"Very well, thank you. When we left Lemberg, he was in good health."

"How is that tzaddik, a pillar of the world, Rabbi Yosef Shaul doing?" urged Rabbi Shmelke a second time, as if he had not heard his visitors reply.

"He is well," repeated the puzzled merchants weakly, as they stared at each other in amazement.

"Isn't Rabbi Yosef Shaul one of the leaders of our generation, upon whom the entire House of Israel leans? Please tell me, how is he doing?"

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[23] Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson, author of *Teshuvot HaSho'el V'Hameishiv.*

The travelers gaped in disbelief. What was the meaning of the repeated question? Was the tzaddik hard of hearing? And if not, had they misinterpreted his enquiry? What on earth was Rabbi Shmelke expecting them to say?

Bewildered, they ventured another reply, which still did not seem to satisfy the Rav, who asked yet again . . . .

After leaving his house, the men from Lemberg recounted this baffling encounter to the members of the Selish community. They reassured the visitors that their Rav undoubtedly had good reason for his unusual questioning.

"When you arrive back in Lemberg, go straight to the home of Rabbi Yosef Shaul; you will surely find a clue to the mystery there. And next time you come to Selish, please tell us everything that you discovered."

As soon as the merchants returned to their town, they hastily approached the home of Rabbi Yosef Shaul, and enquired after his welfare.

"You didn't yet hear?" enquired one of the Rabbi's attendants. "Last week, our holy master was suddenly struck with a serious illness — so serious, in fact, that the doctors held his life to be in grave danger. But a couple of days later, there was a sudden change for the better, and the illness disappeared as abruptly as it had come."

Gradually, as the wine merchants learned more about the incident, they began to realize that at the exact date and hour of Rabbi Yosef Shaul's miraculous turnabout, they were sitting in the presence of the Rav of Selish. They understood now that through his questioning, Rabbi

Shmelke had been clarifying the merits of their beleaguered Rav — preparing his case, as it were, before pleading with Heaven to spare his life.

Four weeks later, these businessmen made another trip to Selish. The local people listened with intense interest to what they had to tell. Everybody marvelled at the Divine Inspiration with which Rabbi Shmelke was blessed. May his merit protect us for ever!

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Rabbi Shmelke was sitting in his beis medrash one day, toiling with his students over the Talmudic passage of *kinyan chalifin*. A certain local resident ran into the beis medrash, tears rolling down his face and white with anguish.

"Rebbe, help!" he pleaded between sobs. "One of my sons is very close to death, God forbid!"

"Do you own a pair of boots?" the Rav enquired.

"I have only the ones which I am wearing now."

"Walk back home," ordered Rabbi Shmelke, "and give your boots to the first poor man that you meet on the way. Then your son will return to perfect health."

The distraught Jew carried out the Rav's instructions and his son merited a miraculous and immediate recovery. When the man returned, his heart bursting with joy, to tell the Rav the wonderful news, the latter was still delivering his discourse in the beis medrash. His students looked at each other in astonishment. What could be the connection

between the Rav's puzzling directive and the boy's recovery.

"Didn't we learn the explanation only just now?" declared Rabbi Shmelke, as he noticed the bewildered looks on his students' faces. "We interpreted the verse in the Book of Ruth (4:7): 'Formerly this was done in Israel in cases of redemption and exchange transactions to validate all matters: one would draw off his shoe, and give it to the other.' In the present case, the meaning of the verse is 'the redemption of a man from the grave, and the exchange of his death for life.' In order to achieve this, the shoe had to be drawn off from the foot and given to a poor man . . . ."

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Studying in the yeshivah of my revered father, Rabbi Moshe, in Szilagycseh, was a young man who was known as Mendel of Letka.[24] When this Mendel — who later became a very prominent and God-fearing member of the Jewish community of Letka — was 14 years old, he was overcome with madness, without any discernible cause.

His frantic father, Reb Mordechai, took the lad straight to Rabbi Shmelke in Selish, and implored him to intercede with Heaven on behalf of his son. The Rav of Selish listened compassionately, but firmly declined to help, insisting that it was totally beyond his capacity.

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[24] A village in the province of Szolnok-Doboka. Prior to the redistribution of the provinces of Hungary at the end of the last century, the village fell under the jurisdiction of the now defunct province of Kovar.

Deeply disappointed but undeterred, Reb Mordechai traveled with his son all the way to Sanz to beseech our holy master, Rabbi Chaim Halberstam. After listening to the tragic problem, the Sanzer Rebbe asked the father, "In what country do you live?"

"We come from the state of Transylvania," replied Reb Mordechai.

"If so, why did you travel all the way to me? Right on your own doorstep, lives the great tzaddik Rabbi Shmelke of Selish. Go to him, and he will help you in your grievous plight."

"We already consulted the tzaddik of Selish!" protested Mendel's father. "But all he did was put us off, claiming that he does not know how he can help."

"Nevertheless, return to him at once, and ask him again to help your son," advised the Sanzer Rebbe. "If he refuses you again, then — take hold of his beard, and do not let go of it until he agrees to help!"

Encouraged a little by the counsel of the Sanzer Rebbe, Reb Mordechai return to Selish and presented himself once more before the Rav. He respectfully informed Rabbi Shmelke that the Sanzer Rebbe had advised him to return and entreat him a second time.

Rabbi Shmelke was seemingly unmoved, however. Once again, he protested that there was nothing he could really do, whereupon Reb Mordechai promptly seized his beard, proclaiming that, on the instructions of the Sanzer Rebbe, he would desist until the tzaddik of Selish promised to save his son.

"Very well, so be it!" said Rabbi Shmelke in resignation. "If I am to help, remain here with your son until after Sabbath."

And so they did. As the holy Sabbath drew to a close, Rabbi Shmelke requested his students to summon Reb Mordechai and his son. The Rav looked affectionately into the eyes of the young Mendel and gently admonished him to pay careful attention to the words of *Havdalah,* and particularly the blessing over the wine, that he should be sure to respond 'Amen' to the blessing and have the intention of fulfilling his obligation thereby. The boy nodded that he understood.

The tzaddik then recited *Havdalah* with his customary sweetness and devotion, and after drinking a little from the cup of blessing, passed it to Mendel and ordered him to drink the wine that remained. He did so, and at that precise moment he felt as though a crushing burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He recovered from his insanity in an instant. For the rest of his life he remained in excellent health, physically strong, of settled and clear mind, dedicated to the service of God through Torah and *mitzvos.*

After this incident, this Mendel came to learn at my father's yeshivah in Szilagycseh. As the news of his deliverance spread, the new student emphasized that the Holy One, Blessed be He, had sent his salvation through the merit of the tzaddik of Selish.

* * *

A resident of Selish left his home early one morning, as usual, to attend morning prayers in the synagogue. Little did he realize what a horrendous calamity was about to overtake his household.

Inside the house, a maidservant was hard at work, cleaning the beds and rearranging the bedclothes. She removed the blankets and pillows from each bed in turn and piled them all on one bed. She had not noticed that one of the children of the family, a one year old toddler, was lying fast asleep on that very bed. The hapless little boy quickly suffocated under the weight of the heavy material stacked upon him, until he died.

The maid continued to work assiduously at her task, oblivious to what had happened — that is, until the mistress of the house strolled into the room. A piercing shriek of terror escaped her lips as she spotted the tall heap of bedclothes. She already feared the worst, and screamed hysterically at the maid to remove the bedclothes to see what had happened to the child. The heartbroken mother's suspicions were confirmed as the last blanket was frantically whipped off the bed.

Howling with grief, the woman ran through the streets toward the synagogue, called out her husband, told him the tragic news, and begged him to rush to Rabbi Shmelke and ask him if anything could be done. Weeping silently, the farther dashed to the home of the tzaddik. He struggled in vain to hold back his tears while apprising the Rav of what had happened.

"You don't have to worry," said the Rav softly. "Just return home and all will be well."

Their pain assuaged by the Rav's reassurance, though with a gnawing skepticism in the back of their minds, the man and his wife walked back home, not quite knowing what to expect. But their doubts evaporated as they came within eyeshot of their home, for there in the distance, beckoning triumphantly to them from the threshold of the house, stood a beaming maidservant — and in her arms was the young child, bubbling over with life. Once again, tears ran down the faces of the two parents, but this time they were tears of relief and happiness. As never before, they hugged and kissed the child who had returned to them, safe and sound, after a brief sojourn in the valley of death.

Once their excitement had subsided a little, the parents asked their servant to tell them all that had happened since her mistress had run out of the house.

Her voice choking with emotion, the maid described how twenty minutes previously — at the exact moment when Rabbi Shmelke had guaranteed that all would be well — a certain "Greek" (as they were called on account of their religion)[25] had marched into the house, a hollow reed in his mouth. Without looking to the left or the right, he had gone directly to the little body lying motionless on the bed. After blowing air into the infant's nostrils for a few seconds, the mysterious stranger quickly departed. Immediately, the little boy started to breathe again. Two minutes later, color had returned to his cheeks, after which he had

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[25] "Greek" is the term used by the Jews of that period for a Christian from Carpathian Russia who belonged to the Greek-Catholic or Greek-Orthodox churches.

jumped off the bed, as if nothing had happened.

"Do you know this Greek?" the master of the house queried. "If so, please go and find him; I must pay him for his services."

"Strangely enough, I did not recognize him, " apologized the maid. "He must not live in these parts."

"All the same, please try and find him!" ordered her master.

The maidservant scoured every nook and cranny of the town, as did the father and mother after her, for they were loathe to leave such a debt unpaid The townspeople also searched in vain. The people of Selish thought deeply about the matter, and concluded that in the merit of their saintly Rav, either the angel Rafael or Elijah the Prophet, had been dispatched by Heaven, in the guise of a "Greek," to bring the child back to life. May the Almighty continue to help us in the merit of this holy tzaddik!

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It once happened that Rabbi Shmelke was in urgent need of a very large sum of money for an important *mitzvah.* He summoned the officers of the community before him, explained the urgency of the situation and requested that each of them participate in the *mitzvah* by contributing a portion of the sum required.

Among the officers present, however, was one known to be a miser. He was reluctant to part with a sum of money the size of which Rabbi Shmelke had suggested. He

stammered and wavered, unwilling to commit himself, but lacking the effrontery to refuse the tzaddik outright. The Rav, of course, was quick to notice his hesitation, and urged him to hand over the requested donation now, adding that if the man would be overly inconvenienced thereby, then he, the Rav, would repay him personally, later the same day.

"But the Rav won't be able to find me, since I have to travel out of town today," protested the officer. "And I'm not in a position to wait until tomorrow, for I myself have a large debt to repay early in the morning."

"Nevertheless, give me the money!" insisted Rabbi Shmelke. "Before the day is out, I will see that the sum I owe you is in the hands of your wife."

Having been thus reassured, the officer handed over the requested amount, and took to the road to attend to some business in a nearby village.

A few minutes later, Rabbi Shmelke knocked on the door of this man's house. He related to the man's wife the entire story; how the duty had fallen on his shoulders to raise money quickly, and how her husband had declined to make a contribution except by way of a loan. The Rav confirmed that he had promised to pay back the money that very day.

"But where will the Rav find the money?" asked the woman incredulously.

"That's not your worry," replied Rabbi Shmelke tersely.

Late that afternoon, this woman was sitting in her husband's shop, which she was managing in his absence. It

had been a quiet day, and she was wondering whether there was any point in keeping the doors open any longer. Just then, a large group of well-dressed but rowdy Italians, about 50 men in all, burst into the store. Talking all at once, they explained that they had just concluded a long and tiring journey, and asked her if she had any wine for sale.

She was about to answer that they did not normally trade in wine, when she remembered that there was a small barrel in the cellar below the shop, albeit that it was sour and moldy. She told her worthy customers that there was indeed a bit of wine on the premises, but she could not guarantee the quality. "Bring us a little and let's see for ourselves," they told her.

The woman descended to the cellar and fetched a glassful of the rancid and moldy liquid. With jittery hands, she handed it to the leader of the Italians, who downed it in one gulp.

"It's good stuff!" he exclaimed. "Very good indeed!"

Delighted by this unexpected response, she went down to bring some more . . . and then some more . . . and still more . . . . It was only after many trips up and down the steps that she suddenly realized that she had been pouring the beverage from a very small barrel, which did not seem to be getting any emptier.

It was already dark when the intoxicated Italians staggered out of the store, singing lustily. However, they did not neglect to leave behind them several hundred gold coins — a handsome profit from a small barrel of wine, which was bad and moldy at that!

When the master of the house returned from his journey later that evening, his first question was whether the Rav had sent the money. His wife informed him that he had done so, and she showed him the huge pile of coins, which she had not even managed to count.

Her husband could not contain his amazement as he gazed at the gold coins, surely many more than the amount which he had advanced the Rav. With a firm resolution to uproot the miserly inclination from his heart and to share his wealth with the poor, he ran as fast as his feet could carry him to thank the holy tzaddik.

* * *

"What am I to do now, Rebbe? Everything is lost!" bewailed a pious old Jew who appeared before Rabbi Shmelke early one evening.

Greatly agitated, the wizen-faced veteran of the community, a poor hawker who dealt in haberdashery, explained his predicament. That day had been market day in Selish, and half an hour earlier, the old peddler had returned home, fatigued after a successful day of trading.

All the way from the market, he had been hauling a large wooden chest, containing all his merchandise. Every muscle of his body had been aching by the time he had arrived at his house, and it had felt as if a ton of bricks were packed inside his crate. Convinced that he would collapse in exhaustion were he to carry his goods one inch further, he set it down on the porch outside before entering

his house to rest a bit.

About ten minutes and a cup of coffee later, the old man returned to the porch, somewhat refreshed, to bring his merchandise into the house. He looked to the right and to the left, and his heart sank. The chest had vanished.

"What can I do now?" he repeated anxiously. "How can I explain what this loss means? Without my stock, never mind everything else which I kept inside there, I'm a ruined man — as good as dead."

"Where is the key to the chest?" asked Rabbi Shmelke after comforting the peddler. "Was it left inside the lock, or do you still have it?"

"The key? It's still in my pocket. But what good is it to me now? As for the thief — curse him — all he has to do is break the chest open with an ax."

"Don't worry, don't worry," assured the tzaddik. "The one who is in possession of the keys to an object is the one who is in control. Go your way in peace."

On his arrival home, the hawker found his chest lying on the porch exactly where he had left it, intact and undamaged. A few minutes earlier, for no accountable reason, the heart of the thief had started to flutter wildly, and he was overcome with fear. He had hardly been able to move fast enough to return the crate to its place.

* * *

Not long after Rabbi Shmelke had taken up his position as Rav of Selish, thus causing a vacancy in the rabbinate in

Huzst, Rabbi Yoel Rothe came to visit him in his new community.

"I should address Your Excellency as the Rav of Huzst," Rabbi Shmelke told him. "You have a rightful claim to that position, since your late father once served in the rabbinate there."

Rabbi Rothe pondered over these enigmatic words for many months after his meeting with the Rabbi Shmelke. What had he meant by referring to him as the Rav of Huzst? He surely had not intended his statement to be taken literally, for shortly thereafter, the Jews of the city of Huzst decided to appoint the renowned Maharam Shick to the vacant post of Rav. After the passing of the Maharam Shick, moreover, the Gaon, Rabbi Amram Blum[26] was appointed as his successor.

Not long afterward, however, Rabbi Blum, after some kind of dissension within the Huzst community, decided to resign from his post and to leave the city. Rabbi Yoel Rothe was then invited to become the next Rav of Huzst. He accepted the call, secure in the realization that not a single word ever passed from the lips of Rabbi Shmelke in vain, and that the Holy One, Blessed be He, fulfills the prophecies of his servants.

* * *

[26] The author of *Beit Shearim,* Rabbi Amram Blum was one of the great Gaonim of Hungary. After leaving Huszt, he became Rav of Berettyo-Ujfalu.

We mentioned above that towards the end of his life, Rabbi Shmelke finally agreed to accept *kvitlach* from his followers. During this period, Rabbi Shmelke once paid a visit to Szatmar. Living in that city was an outstanding scholar and Chassid, Rabbi Mordechai Freund (who later married Rabbi Shmelke's granddaughter). He saw how the townsfolk all stood in line to present their *kvitlach* to the visiting Rav.

"Perhaps I will also write such a note and hand it over to him," thought Rabbi Freund to himself. "Then I will see for myself whether the Rav of Selish really knows how to read a *kvitel*."

Rabbi Freund wrote his *kvitel* and soon presented it to Rabbi Shmelke. The latter took the note graciously, but them looked Rabbi Freund sternly in the eyes. The latter squirmed uncomfortably, wondering whether the tzaddik was reading his mind.

"Let's see now whether I can read a *kvitel*!" exclaimed Rabbi Shmelke. He repeated these words several times, slowly and deliberately. The young scholar nearly jumped out of his skin. He broke out into a cold sweat, his knees knocked together, and his whole body began to tremble and quiver. "So he really knew my intentions," he thought to himself, overcome by a mixture of contrition and astonishment. "Surely, the *Shechinah* hovers over this tzaddik, and he is guided by Divine Inspiration."

* * *

There are endless stories we would recount concerning the marvelous and awe-inspiring miracles which were performed through Rabbi Shmelke for the benefit of the people of Israel, whom he loved beyond measure. He achieved all this because of his great care to guard his speech. Every word that he uttered was holy, and he spoke only for the glory of the Torah or the fear of heaven. He never once uttered a superfluous word.

Our sacred texts assure us that whoever carefully watches his speech and never utters a thought without a good reason, whose conversations are motivated only by a desire to serve his Creator, will be rewarded "measure for measure." When words do pass from his lips — a promise of salvation to a Jew in distress, or a prayer to the Almighty to deliver His folk — then the Holy One, Blessed be He, will fulfill his words.

This is possibly the meaning of the verse (Proverbs 21:23): "He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards himself from the troubles of his soul." This teaches us that by guarding one's mouth, one is granted the means to guard oneself from "the troubles of his soul." If a person who is meticulous in this regard is overwhelmed by troubles, he should beseech the Holy One for salvation. The Almighty, in turn, will ensure that not a word of his prayer will be in vain, and will grant him deliverance from his distress.

A hand written letter from Rabbi Shmelke.

Chapter 11

His Passing

RABBI SHMELKE spent out his days in Selish, surrounded by his closely-knit family and loyal community, faithfully discharging his responsibilities as a foremost leader of the entire Jewish people.

His perspective on life propelled him ever along the path of holiness, with the conviction that the only cause worth fighting for is the honor of God and His Torah, and spiritual perfection the only goal worth pursuing. In terms of this world view, his life was eminently successful, and his family, his community, and the Jewish people at large, were active partners in his success.

He had the special satisfaction of seeing all his children blossom as tzaddikim and tzaddkaniyot in their own right. His brothers and sisters, even though they were simple people without much learning, were devout and whole-hearted Jews without flaw.

A interesting feature of the family was that even though his brothers and sisters, with only one exception, were born to a different mother, they all resembled Rabbi Shmelke to a lesser or greater extent, and with some of them, the resemblance was particularly striking. His only sibling from his mother, Faisel, was the wife of Reb Akiva, a *shochet* in the town of Marosujvar in Transylvania. His half brothers were Reb Dovid of Berekszo, Reb Yechiel and Reb Natan of Felso-Szivagy, and Reb Moshe of Alsovarca. His half sisters were Esther of Mosobanya, Ferel of Huzst and Aidel of Klausenberg. Few things made Rabbi Shmelke as happy as a visit from one of his relatives. Similarly, he was always thrilled to receive a visitor from the province of Szilagy, the place of his birth.

Shortly before his own departure from the world, a dark cloud marred the tzaddik's happiness with the untimely passing of his first-born son, the Gaon, Rabbi Yaakov, Av Beit Din of Bilke. News of Rabbi Yaakov's illness had been withheld from Rabbi Shmelke, and only after his son's death did he hear about it for the first time. Very shortly after, tragedy struck again when another son, Rabbi Shalom, Av Beit Din of Halmi also left this world.

In a stirring eulogy delivered at Rabbi Shalom's funeral, his grief-stricken father expounded on the teaching of our Sages that a man is duty-bound to recite a blessing at the time of sorrow just as at the time of good fortune. For a man to praise God spontaneously and with a full heart for a tragic occurrence just as he would for a favorable one is not humanly possible, pointed out Rabbi Shmelke. It was

exactly for this reason that our Sages, in their wisdom, obligated us to disregard what would be our natural inclination at the time of grief and to recite a blessing nevertheless.

During the winter of the same year, at the age of sixty-nine, Rabbi Shmelke was stricken with the ailment that claimed his life several months later. Confined to his sickbed, he suffered excruciating pain day and night. The Torah giants of the country, notably the Maharam Shick and Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Teitelbaum, were among the many who streamed to his bedside from far and wide, to offer solace and their heartfelt prayers for his speedy recovery.

While on his sickbed, Rabbi Shmelke composed a masterly discourse, into which he skillfully interwove a hundred and twenty different Talmudic topics, to present before the Heavenly Court. He repeated this brilliant dissertation to Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah when the latter came from Maramaros Sziget to visit him. During the course of his illness he was heard frequently to utter: "Would that this body be cast off from me!" — an indication of his soul's desire to be freed from its earthly trappings. As is well-known, the body serves as clothing for the eternal soul, which is the essence of man.

On the ninth of Adar in that year, his pure and holy soul soared heavenward. Three days later, two thousand Jews from all parts of the continent assembled in Selish to accord due honor to the Holy Ark, which had been snatched from the possession of the Jewish people. Moving

eulogies were delivered by Rabbi Shmelke's sons, leading Torah authorities such as the Maharam Shick and Rabbi Teitelbaum, and other distinguished Gaonim. Our saintly grandfather was buried amidst lamentation and weeping.

A memorial structure was erected over his grave, which is the regular gathering place for great numbers of his students and followers, particularly each year on his *yahrzeit.* This structure also contains a special receptacle in which the needy and brokenhearted can place their *kvitlach.* All who visit the grave pray that the holy tzaddik should be a righteous advocate on behalf of his people before the Divine Presence. For many, the grave is a compulsory stopping point in times of personal and communal crises, and those who are unable to make the trip themselves, send messengers to pray at the site on their behalf.

The members of the Selish community unanimously decided to invite Rabbi Shmelke's son, the Gaon, Rabbi Pinchas Chaim, to occupy his father's position. The older brothers of Rabbi Pinchas Chaim, who were also fit to assume this honored role, did not voice any opposition, but accepted the community's decision with grace, because they perceived that it reflected the will of Heaven.

Rabbi Pinchas Chaim, who was operating a large business at the time, agreed to the invitation; not because he was in need of a livelihood, but solely in honor of his late father. Leaving his business in the hands of others, he donned the mantle of the Selish rabbinate, in the city where his father had labored faithfully for so many years.

Certainly, the apple does not fall far from the tree, for Rabbi Pinchas Chaim filled the role of Rav of Selish with

great wisdom and dignity. His fame spread as an outstanding Torah scholar who was able to expound on difficult Talmudic passages and elucidate complex *halachic* issues with clarity and analytical powers. His inspiring discourses and powerful words of rebuke aroused the hearts of his listeners, and he was acknowledged as a true tzaddik and Gaon. He consolidated the standing of his father's yeshivah, promoted the honor of the Torah, and inspired many with the fear of Heaven. The charm of his father rested on him, and I personally experienced this when I spent six years in my righteous uncle's household as a student in the yeshivah.

We have now come to the end of this short biography of my saintly grandfather, Rabbi Shmelke of Selish. Some notable preachers of the day were fond of asserting that during the time that Rabbi Shmelke was active in Selish, the Gaon, Maharam Shick was living in Huzst and our master, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Teitelbaum, author of Yetav Lev, was in Maramaros Sziget, these three giants were like three brilliant stars in the firmament forming the pattern of the Hebrew vowel sign, the Segol. This was because the geographical positions of their three communities, relative to each other, appeared on the map as the three points of a Segol.

To this idea, I would like to add that while the Gaon of Maramaros Sziget was a great illuminary principally for the Chassidim, and the Maharam Shick was a guiding light, in the main, for all the Ashkenazim, the star of Selish, Rabbi Shmelke, effectively and brilliantly illuminated the lives of both Chassidim and Ashkenazim alike.

Such is the honorable and magnificent legacy which our great master and teacher Rabbi Shmelke left behind him. None of those who were inspired and influenced by him will ever allow the light which he shed in his lifetime to be extinguished. May his sacred memory serve as an inspiration to countless generations, and may the merit of the tzaddik protect us and our descendants forever.

I have hereby completed this book on the second day of the week, in the Torah portion of Mishpatim, the 22nd day of the month of Shevat in the year 5671 (1911), in the city of Szilagycseh.

ואלו ממשפחתנו יעמדו על הברכה
בשביל שנדבו סכום הגון להדפסת הספר

אמנו הנצ"י פרומט בת ברוך שתח"

ולזכר הוריה ברוך בן צבי
וזגותו שרה בת יעקב הי"ד

* * *

דוב בן אליהו וזוגתו צארטל שיינדל בת ברוך
ובניהם
אשר זעליג, שרה רבקה, נעכא ליבא,
רחל מלכה, אסתר אלכסנדרה

ברוך בן אליהו וזוגתו חייה צירל בת יצחק אליעזר
ובניהם
אסתר בילא, סערל שיינדל, שרה רבקה,
יהושוע יצחק אליעזר, דבורה גיטל,
תהלה, מרים, יעקב שלום

יעקב שלום בן אלי' וזוגתו רבקה בלימה בת אברהם שלום
ובניהם
משה צבי דוב, אברהם יואל,
אסתר גיטל, שרה מלכה