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From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

Elul Leeches

When **Rabbi DovBer, the 2nd Chabad Rebbe**-to be, was five years old, he studied under Reb Ber the *melamed* (tutor), in the home of Reb Avraham the doctor. Once he overheard Dr. Avraham bemoaning, "We are already far into Elul, but I haven't yet prepared the leeches!" [Leeches were used for healing purposes and were only out during the warm summer months.]

When young DovBer came home after *cheder* (elementary school level for boys in the *yeshiva* system), he used to spend time in the company of the chasidim who were in the room next to the room of his father, Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the 'Alter Rebbe' of Chabad. One day he saw them sitting around and talking, when they suddenly began to laugh. Hearing them, the young boy reprimanded them, "We are deep into Elul, you haven't yet prepared the leeches, yet you sit here laughing?!"

And he left the room.

They immediately assumed that this was a *vort* ('word' of Torah) he had heard from his father, the Rebbe, and began to think deeply into its meaning. They concluded that just as leeches are used to draw out a patient's diseased or overheated blood, during the month of Elul, the final month of the Jewish year, so one should do away with one's negative desires in preparation for *Rosh HaShana*, the start of the new year.

When word of their discussion reached the Alter Rebbe, he said, "Such is the way of the *Baal Shem Tov* (founder of the Chasidic movement) - to learn a lesson in *avodas HaShem* (serving G-d) from every physical thing that one sees or hears. Whoever follows this path and uses all physical things for spiritual improvement, will instill in himself and in his descendants a spark of inspiration in serving G-d."

Successive generations of chasidim recall how on that Rosh HaShana, the floor was wet with tears from the impact of the five-year-old Rebbe-to be's *vort*; and how on Simchas Torah, the shoes of the chassidim were worn out and torn by the exuberant dancing inspired by the Alter Rebbe's promise.

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Source: Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the translation in *The Weekly Farbrengen* #425 (MerkazAnash.com) from *Sefer HaSichos 5696* [of the Rebbe HaRayatz].

*Connection:* Seasonal – the month of **Elul**.

*Biographical notes:*

**Rabbi Shneur Zalman** [of blessed memory: 18 Elul 5505 - 24 Tevet 5573 (1745 - Dec. 1812 C.E.)], one of the main disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, successor to the Baal Shem Tov. He is the founder of the Chabad-Chassidic movement and the author of *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and *Tanya* as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

**Rabbi DovBer Shneuri** [of blessed memory: 9 Kislev 1773 - 9 Kislev 1827] was the eldest son and successor to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of the Chabad movement. The author of numerous deep, mystical texts, he is known in Lubavitch circles as "the Mittler (Middle) Rebbe."