

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

Story #1250 (5782-12) 21 Kislev 5782 (Nov. 25, 2021) FREE [email subscription](#)

Discover! the "TillesTells Saturday Night Stories" [WhatsApp group](#)

The Chassidic Megillah

Rabbi Nachum son of **Rabbi Dov Ber** and the grandson of **Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi**, was an eye-witness of the events of the *Yud-Tes Kislev* epic. He took upon himself to describe it in all its details, year after year. He would start as follows.

"For ten years my grandfather was a disciple of **Rabbi Dov-Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch**,¹ and for five years the leader of the 'holy brotherhood' – until he became renowned as the preacher of Liozna. For twenty years he toiled in a number of tasks.

"The first of these was the establishment and consolidation of the three celebrated *chadarim*. In the first of these three study halls, which he founded in 1778, he taught his disciples for five consecutive years. The entrance requirements included a thorough familiarity with the Talmud, *Midrash*, *Sefer HaIkkarim* and *Kuzari*, and a knowledge of *Zohar*.

"The second *cheder* was established in 1780, and the third in 1782; the usual period of study in each of these more advanced stages was three years.

"My grandfather's other tasks in this period included the guidance of his chassidim, and his endeavors at spreading and explaining the doctrines of his teachers, the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid of Mezritch. When the various regions were allocated to the disciples of the Maggid for this purpose, my grandfather undertook the most difficult, for this area was nearest to Lithuania.

"When *Tanya* first appeared – and by that time there were already (thank G-d) tens of thousands of chasidim, including scholars and *halachic* authorities who followed his legal decisions (as in the construction of the *mikveh*, the insistence on honed slaughtering knives for *shechitah*, and so on) - that was when the libelous accusation took place."

(Actually, the title used by Reb Nachum for *Tanya* was "*Kuntresim*". Before *Tanya* was first published as a book in 1796, its subject matter was disseminated among the chasidim in the form of single handwritten chapters and even half-chapters, which were called *kuntresim* – 'leaflets'. For

¹ The Maggid passed away on Yud-Tes Kislev, a quarter century before R. Shneur Zalman was liberated on the same date. His last words to his precious disciple were: "*Yud-Tes Kislev*, a day of celebration for me and you!"

this reason, the older chassidim who remembered those days continued to use this name for the work even after it was printed as a book with a title.)

At this point Reb Nachum would proceed to describe in detail the libelous accusation which the *misnagdim* (opponents) brought to the Czarist authorities and the exultation in their camp when the Rebbe was taken to St. Petersburg. For example, when on Sunday, the twenty-seventh of Tishrei 1798, word reached their main cities of Vilna, Minsk and Shklov that he had been taken off to St. Petersburg in the black wagon, guarded by gendarmes with swords drawn, it was announced publicly that on the next day, Monday, all the synagogues should introduce the Psalms of the *Hallel* into the morning service and the townsmen should conduct a festive meal to mark the occasion.

Fortunately, this announcement encountered opposition from some of the older sages in the *misnagdish* camp, for in each of these three towns there were scholars who had the opportunity of getting to know Reb Shneur Zalman, and they exerted whatever influence they could have to restrain these expression of vindictiveness. Thus it was that in the majority of synagogues in these three towns the announcements encouraging merrymaking were ignored.

From this Reb Nachum would move on to the Alter Rebbe's stay in prison, the liberation, the way in which the glad tidings spread, and the itinerary from St. Petersburg to Liozna.

All this was recounted clearly and succinctly. When he recalled the arrest his voice would drop unawares, as if he were weeping; when he reached liberation, his voice would rise with the joy of a remembered triumph.

In addition, he adopted the rule in force for the reading of the *Megillah* on Purim – once at night and a full repetition by day. Moreover, if one of the dignified old chassidim would join the gathering after it had begun, he would go back to the very beginning and start all over again.

~~~~~

*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals* by Rabbi S.Y. Zevin, as translated by R. Uri Kaploun.

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi Nachum Shneuri** was the eldest son of the second Chabad rebbe, Rabbi Dov-Ber. Upon his father's passing at age 54, many turned to Rabbi Nachum to assume the role of successor, but he deferred to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Schneersohn, the eventual third rebbe, known as the Tzemek Tzedek.