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The Not Yet Celebrated Celebration

[All square-bracketed [] insertions are mine – Y.T.]

Among the genuine historic letters retrieved from the repository in Cherson, (and reprinted in the “*Hatamim*” journal), are several which record the day of festivity proclaimed by the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples in the wake of their victory over the Frankist sect. For example:

The Letter, with two sets of Signatures:

By the grace of G-d.

We, the undersigned, undertake in our own names, and the names of our descendants and all our followers, to make **the 26th of Tammuz**, on this and every succeeding year, a day of joy and festivity, by virtue of the genuine miracle and the conspicuous good that G-d wrought for us on this day.

A heinous and implacable adversary, Jacob Frank – may his name be blotted out – rose up against us. Let the name of the impious rot, this fiend who inflamed and seduced a multitude of our Jewish brethren [a self-proclaimed Messiah, who eventually converted (with some of his more naïve followers) to Christianity].

Now, G-d has confounded his evil designs – may his name be blotted out – brought his machinations to nothing and him to his just desserts.

This [festival being proclaimed] is in payment for the following: That the Bishop Tikolski, of the city of Lvov, summoned us, the three undersigned, on the 23rd of *Tammuz*, 5519 (1759), to his city, in order to set forth the terms of our opposition to these sinners [in debate], ranged to the left of us.

In the event -- in the debates, the wrangling, in the hard questions that were traded -- G-d stood to the right of us, a bulwark to our righteousness, and vindicated the name of our people Israel.

On the 26th of *Tammuz* of the above year, we triumphed over the agents of wickedness – may their names be blotted out – and saved innumerable Jewish souls from a terrible fate, Heaven forbid.

We have resolved, therefore, on our own behalf and on behalf of our descendants and those who follow us, to make this day a day of feasting and gladness, of joy and jubilation, to the end of time. In the resolve thereof, we

append our names to this, on this day, the 27th of *Tammuz*, in the year 5519 (1759), in our community of Lvov.
(signed)

Chaim HaKohen Rappaport, *dayan* [chief Rabbinical judge] of Lvov

Yisrael ben Eliezer Baal Shem of Mezibuzh

Yitzchak DovBer Margolies [Rabbi of Yazlowitz, a close disciple of the Baal Shem Tov (not to be confused with his brother, Rabbi Meir Margolies, one of the foremost disciples of the Besht).]

At the behest of our master, leader of the Jewish people, the *Baal Shem Tov* [the middle signature above], we hereby append our signature, in our community of Mezibuzh, this Sunday of *parshat Vaetchanan*, 5519 [1759]:
(signed)

DovBer ben Avraham [the *Maggid*] of Mezritch

Yaakov Yosef HaKohen of Polnoa [author of *Toldos Yaakov Yosef*]

Ze'ev-Wolf Kitzes [leading follower of the *Besht*]

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The Question that Begs to be Asked

How is it that this festival is so little-known, in spite of the fact that it was proclaimed by the Baal Shem Tov himself and his disciples? In a letter of 8 *Kislev*, 5720/1959 [the 200th year after the signing of the letter], the **Lubavitcher Rebbe** gives the following explanation:

I have not heard of a specific explanation for this, but it seems to me that it can be compared to the case of a festival whose form and manner of acceptance is fixed only after the passage of time, ...[such as] with the miracle of *Chanukah*, the annual celebration of which was only instituted in the following year.

Since its acceptance was in [the summer of] 5519 (1759), what emerges is that even before the first celebration of this festival was to take place, the passing of the Baal Shem [on Shavuot 5520] intervened and the group disbanded. We know something of the state of mind that existed among his disciples at that time. We are speaking, then, of a date that never became the occasion of an actual celebration.

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "*Days in Chabad*" (compiled by **Rabbi Yosef K. Kaminetzky** and translated by Yosef Cohen).

Connection: The date of the main event of the story is *Tammuz 26* (2019: July 27).