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## ***The Haunted Bride***

There was once a chasid from Warsaw whom everyone nicknamed *Der Kleine Moisholeh* ('the Small Moses'), who arranged a match for his daughter. Soon after, though, the family discovered that the *chatan* had a lung disease, and when the *kallah* found out, she refused to continue with the *engagement*. The father of the *kallah* received permission from a *Bais Din* (rabbinical court) to dissolve the betrothal.

When the *chatan* heard this, he suffered such great distress that the *anguish* amplified his disease. His condition worsened from day to day, until finally he died, sick and heartbroken.

Afterwards, the former bride also grew ill. As she lay in her sickbed, she complained that the departed spirit of her former *chatan* kept vigil at her side, constantly imploring her to follow him, insisting that he was summoning her to the Heavenly Court.

This continued for some days and her condition worsened, until her father was so worried and the doctors began to despair of her ever getting better. Her father decided to travel to **the Sochatchover Rebbe, R. Avraham Bornstein** (often referred to as "the *Avnei Nezer*" after the title of his monumental work on Jewish law). When the holy *Rebbe* heard how the departed *chatan* stood by her bed ordering her to follow him to the Heavenly Court, he grew excited and roared:

"Heh! The *halacha* (Torah law) is that we rule that he who sues in rabbinical court must follow the sued to the court in his locale! Now go back home and tell your daughter in my name that if the departed *chatan* returns, she should tell him that in Sochatchov they say that if he has any reason to sue her in rabbinical court, he should take the matter up with me right here in Sochatchov. There is no justification to force her to the Heavenly Court. She should repeat this to him three times."

And so it was. She did so and after the third time he never returned. She recovered and never saw or heard him again.

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### **#2 Like Father, Like Son**

The Sochatchover's father, Rav Ze'ev-Nachum, was the chief rabbi in Biala. His future father-in-law, **Rabbi Menachem-Mendel of Kotzk**, once revealed to Rav Ze'ev Nachum how he merited having such a holy son: It was *Purim*, and all over the world the Jews rejoiced. So much so that even all the greatest scholars, those special Jews who sat and studied *Torah* day

and night, were also busy with the Purim *mitzvot* and joyful celebrations. No one was studying Torah!

No one, that is, except Rabbi Ze'ev Nachum. Since the world cannot exist if there is no Torah, Rabbi Ze'ev Nachum was at the time supporting the entire world!

Meanwhile, in Heaven there was a great uproar, because no one was studying *Torah*...until they discerned Rabbi Ze'ev Nachum, causing great delight Above. It was decided on high that his reward would be a gifted son, a child whose light of *Torah* would illuminate the entire world that he had saved. This was the reason his first-born son would grow up to be such a great scholar and spiritual leader. So revealed the Kotzker.

Even in his youth, the *Avnei Nezer's* power in Torah study was already apparent. He once sat learning *Torah* in the *Beit Midrash* study hall when a crowd of crying Jews came in. The crowd began to tearfully recite Psalms and pray for the healing of a terribly sick Jew whose end was near. Perhaps Heaven would have mercy!

Their cries and loud *tefillot* disturbed the *Avnei Nezer's* learning. "Listen," he told them, "if you promise to pray quietly and not disturb my study, I in turn promise you that he will recover." The crowd heeded the young *Torah* scholar and, amazingly, the dying man recovered!

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### **#3 Abraham and Sarah Revisited**

The *Divrei Chaim* of Sanz tested the young genius as a possible suitor for his daughter. Afterward he remarked, "Even though he learns like the *Noda BeYehuda* (the remarkable Torah scholar, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, 1713-1793), I cannot take him as a *chatan* for my daughter – he is too sharp for me!"

Instead, the Kotzker Rebbe took him for a son-in-law, and as they stood under the *chupah* (wedding canopy), the Kotzker intoned, "May it be Your will, G-d Al-mighty, that his sick, weak body be able to hold such a great, genius mind!"

Not long after they were married, the Kotzker's daughter, the *Avnei Nezer's* wife Sarah, burst into her father's home, crying uncontrollably. Amid sobs she explained that her young husband had contracted pneumonia and was coughing up blood.

"No need to worry," the Kotzker told her, "he will live a long life. He is named Abraham and you are Sarah, and the verse says, "Avraham and Sara were old, coming along in days..."(Gen. 18:11).

Indeed, this blessing was fulfilled; the *Avnei Nezer's* wife lived until age seventy-two.

Soon thereafter, the widower grew weak and sick, and realized that the verse that his father-in-law had blessed them with had tied him to Sarah's life span. Now that hers had ended, his blessing was up as well. When the *Imrei Emmes* Rebbe of Gur (R. Avraham Mordechai Alter, 1866-1948) came to console him on his wife's passing, he related the above story, his father-in-law's blessings, and the explanation of how he realized that now his end was near as well.

On the last day of his life, he arose early. His son and family were at his bedside. His condition had rapidly deteriorated since his wife's passing and they saw he was breathing his last. He motioned them to help him and he prepared and purified himself, and donned his *tefillin* for the final time. As he *davvened* the *Shemone Esrei* prayer, he grew weaker, and when he reached the blessing of *mekabetz nidchei amo Yisrael* ("Who gathers the exiles of the Jewish nation"), he motioned for them to remove his *tefillin*. A light of peace and tranquility shone from him as he recited this blessing, and he passed away with a 'heavenly kiss' (i.e. gently).

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*Source:* I don't remember how this story came to me. I did a deep edit. The source credits following are from the original author: *Al HaTzaddikim ve'al HaChassidim*, p. 186-191, *Abir HaRo'im* 7, *B'darhei Polin HaAveilos*.

*Biographical notes:*

**Rabbi Avraham Bornstein of Sochatchov** [6 Cheshvan 5600 - 11 Adar 5670 (Oct. 1839 – Feb. 1910 C.E.)] was a descendant of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Torah giants, the *Ramah* and the *Shach*. Years before his bar mitzvah he was recognized as a Torah genius. At age 13, he married a daughter of the Kotzker Rebbe. In 1883, already a leading authority in Jewish law, he became the rebbe of thousands of chasidim and the founder of the Sochatchover dynasty. His writings include the classic, *Avnei Nezer* (seven volumes of posthumously-published responsa), and *Eglei Tal* (on the laws of Shabbat). He was succeeded by his only son, R. Shmuel (1856-1926), author of *Shem MiShmuel*.

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk** [5547 - 22 Shevat 5619 (1787 - Jan. 1859 C.E.), although born into a non-chasidic family; early became a disciple of R. Yaakov Yitzchok [the "Seer"] of Lublin, R. Yaakov Yitzchok [the "Yid HaKadosh"] of Pshischah, and ultimately of R. Simcha Bunim of Pshischah. Superficially stern, he practiced and preached a zealous and unrelenting search for truth, whose prime enemy is self-centeredness. His oft-quoted aphorisms are characteristically pungent and unsugared. Stressed earnest Torah study. Spent the last two decades of his life in isolation. After his passing, the majority of his followers recognized his disciple R. Yitzchak Meir of Ger as their rebbe.  
[from Uri Kaploun in "A Treasury of Chassidic Tales"]

*Connection:* Seasonal -- 11 Adar (this year: Shabbat, March 7) is the 110th *yahrzeit* of the first Sochatchover Rebbe.