

Three Spiders

PART ONE - Biography

Rabbi Baruch-Shalom Schneersohn [1805 – 16 Shvat 1869] was the firstborn of the 3rd Rebbe of Chabad, the *Tzemach Tzedek*, and the great-great-grandfather of the 7th Rebbe (1902-1994).

R` Yosef-Yitzchak Schneersohn (the *Rayatz*, the 6th Rebbe) wrote of him:

“The *Alter* (1st - lit. Old) Rebbe had a great fondness for my great-uncle, the Rabash. From the time he was a tiny child in *cheder* (schoolroom) and onwards, he would have him over to his house every day, and from when he turned six, tutored him personally in various subjects. When the *Alter* Rebbe had to flee from Napoleon [who was pursuing him personally – in 1812], he kept the Rabash always by his side, including sleeping in the Rebbe’s room.”

The *Rayatz* wrote that the Rabash also once told his father (R. Sholom-Ber Schneersohn (the 5th Rebbe):

“Starting with that bitter evening of Thursday, 25 Menachem Av, when word reached us that Napoleon was advancing triumphantly towards Liadi, until his last day on earth at the close of Shabbat before the melancholy day of Tevet [when the 1st Rebbe left the physical world], I merited to spend 142 consecutive days and nights in the company of my great-grandfather, the *Alter* Rebbe.”

“From that grievous day on, the Rabash was heart-broken.”

As an adult, he was renowned for his extreme humility. While each of his five brothers became the head of a Chassidic community, he remained inflexible in his determination not to accept any position [saying he knows too well from his early years with the *Alter* Rebbe what a genuine Rebbe is], even though he was eminently qualified.

After his passing, numerous manuscripts that he had authored came to light, containing writings on both *nigleh* [‘the revealed’ Torah – primarily Talmud and Jewish Law] and on *chasidut*. When his will was unsealed and his manuscripts were read, all were dumbstruck by the evidence of his profound intelligence and wisdom.

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*Source:* Excerpted and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from several entries in “Days of Chabad”(Kehot). All insertions in parentheses and brackets are mine.

*Connection* – Weekly reading of *Shemini*: the entire latter half is about which living creatures may be eaten and which not.

PART TWO – Stories (2)

## A. “Three Spiders”

### B.

One year, **Rabbi Baruch-Shalom Schneersohn** (referred to as the *Rabash*) attended the *brit mila* of a grandson in the village of Slavat. After, at the celebratory meal, a careen of meat stew was brought to the table and placed in front of him.

Before he was able to dip in the ladle, a spider descended into the careen. He ordered that the large bowl should be removed from the table and the spider extracted, and then a fresh bowl be brought in its place. But a spider also descended into the second serving bowl, and again he ordered that it be removed and another fresh bowl be brought out. But this third bowl was also ‘invaded’ by a spider.

Eye-witnesses to the event insist forcefully that it was clearly three *different* spiders.

The Rabash asked the ones who had provided the food where they had obtained the meat. They replied that they had slaughtered a lamb for the sake of the circumcision Mitzvah Meal. When he next asked from where they purchased the lamb, they said from a certain non-Jew in a certain nearby village.

The Rabash requested that they please ask the man to come to speak with him. They did so, and when the man arrived the Rabash asked him if there was anything unusual about this lamb, and make sure to tell him the truth. “I shall tell you the truth,” declared the gentile. “This lamb was ‘orphaned’ from its mother, so I took him to a sow to suckle. And indeed, he stayed with her and she fed him until he was grown.”

Upon hearing this, the Rabash commanded that all the vessels in which the lamb meat was cooked should be broken.<sup>1</sup>

The *shamesh* (attendant/shul manager), Avraham-Eliyahu, from whom we know this story, was a simple, sincere, pious Jew, whom no one ever suspected of being untruthful. He would tell what he personally saw that day with great enthusiasm, including all the details.

Once again was proven the Talmudic dictum,<sup>2</sup> “The Holy One, blessed be He, never brings *tzadikim* (the perfectly righteous) to stumbling blocks.” *Tosfos* (a primary commentary) states<sup>3</sup> that this principle manifests particularly in matters of eating and drinking.

### B.

A Jewish merchant once came to **Rabbi Baruch-Shalom Schneersohn** (referred to as the *Rabash*) and complained that his buying and selling were dependent on a lot of snow falling very soon, so that the winter paths would be densely packed enough to allow transporting merchandise by sleigh.

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<sup>1</sup> This was not 100% necessary. See *Shulchan Aruch Yorah Deah* 60:1 and the learned commentaries there. See also *Tzemech Tzedek Responsa* #15 (end).

<sup>2</sup> *Yibamos* 99B

<sup>3</sup> *Gittin* 7A

The Rabash replied, “If you leave a charitable donation with me of 25 rubles I’ll pray for the snow that you need. The man agreed.

That night there was a very heavy snowstorm.

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Source: Translated from a Hebrew booklet by a great-grandson of the Rabash, which was distributed at the wedding of a Schneersohn descendant of his. Unfortunately, I no longer recall the names of the *chatan* and *kallah*. ☹

Biographical note:

Rabbi Baruch-Shalom Schneersohn [22 MarCheshvan 5566 – 16 Shvat 5629 (Oct. 1805 – Feb. 1869)] was the firstborn of the 3rd Rebbe of Chabad, the *Tzemach Tzedek*, and the great-great-grandfather of the 7th Rebbe (1902-1994). Unlike his younger brothers became the, he remained inflexible in his determination not to accept any position as head of a Chassidic community, even though he was eminently qualified. He was exceptionally humble. It was only after his passing that numerous manuscripts he had authored came to light, which provided evidence of his profound intelligence and wisdom.