

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

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CHILDHOOD BRILLIANCE AND FRIGHTENING DREAMS

1) FRIGHTENING DREAMS

At the age of eight, Rabbi Shneur-Zalman (later in life to be known as “the Alter Rebbe” of Chabad) wrote a commentary on *Chumash* (‘Five Books of Moses’) incorporating three of the greatest previous commentaries, those of *Rashi*, *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban*.¹

When he was ten, the Alter Rebbe had a frightening dream. In it he was learning in the Liozna *shul*’s second room, when Reb Reuven Baal-Shem appeared and told the Alter Rebbe that he was being called to judgment. The Alter Rebbe was then instructed to enter the *shul*.

Upon entering the *shul*, the Alter Rebbe saw the *beit din* (rabbinical court) sitting near the southern table with three elders standing at a distance. The middle one of those seated motioned for them to approach, and R. Reuven Baal Shem led him to the table. The judges of the *beit din* were wrapped in their *talleisim* and the elders were dressed in white.

When he stood in front of the *beit din*, the judge in the center turned to the Alter Rebbe and said, “These three elders, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban, are calling you to court because you would deprive them of being among those who bring merit to the many through studying their commentaries, as your commentary encompasses their three commentaries.”

The Alter Rebbe had nothing to say in his defense, and with sincerity and much sobbing he said he would burn his commentary. The elders placed their hands on his head and blessed him with success in his learning. They blessed him to be *mechadesh chiddushim* (develop new insights) in Torah study and *avodas Hashem* (serving G-d), which tens of thousands of Jews in all generations would follow, until the coming of the Redeemer.

When the Alter Rebbe awoke from his dream, he was terribly distressed and concerned, and he took upon himself a fast. After dreaming the same dream twice more, he burned his commentary.

¹ *Rashi* [Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak: 4800-29 Tammuz 4865 (1040 – July 1105], *Ibn Ezra* [Rabbi Avraham ben Meir: 4852 - 1 Adar B, 4927 (1092- March 1167)], and *Ramban* [Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman: 4954 - 11 Nissan 5030 (1194 – April 1270)]

[Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article in the Jerusalem weekly, "Living Jewish" (#615), based on *Reshimos Lubavitch of the Rebbe Rayatz*, printed in *Bitoon Chabad*.]

2) **CHILDHOOD BRILLIANCE**

2A) When the Alter Rebbe was nine he studied geometry and astronomy. At ten he composed a calendar for fifteen years.

When he was twelve years old, it happened that he lectured publicly on Rambam's Laws of *Kiddush HaChodesh*, much of which is devoted to complex astronomical calculations relative to projected appearance of the new moon, etc. The preeminent Torah-scholars who were present at that time in the study-hall were utterly overwhelmed. [*Hayom Yom*, Shvat 7]

2B) When Schneur Zalman reached the age of Bar Mitzvah, in accordance with custom he delivered his first public discourse on the Talmud. He was acclaimed as an outstanding Talmud scholar, elected as an honorary member of the local *Chevra Kaddisha* Burial Society, and entered into the *Pinkas* (Registry) of the community with titles and honors given only to mature scholars of exceptional merit. [from *L'ChaimWeekly*]

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*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Shneur Zalman** [of blessed memory: **18 Elul** 5505 - 24 Tevet 5573 (1745 - Dec. 1812 C.E.)], was 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.

*Connection:* This Thursday, 18 Elul, is the 276th anniversary of the birth of the Alter Rebbe (and the 323<sup>rd</sup> of the Baal Shem Tov).