

ת"ו

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

Story #1246 (5782-07) 18 Cheshvan 5782 (Oct. 25, 2021) FREE [email subscription](#)

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

## “The Queen of Early New York City Jewry”

She was a familiar figure in the alleyways of the Batei Hungarim neighborhood in the Meah Shaarim section of Jerusalem. An aged widow who lived alone for many years, known for her righteousness. Every morning she would rise early in order to open the doors of the Chasidic *shul* (synagogue) where she would *davven* (pray) the dawn morning service from her place in the women's section. She would be careful to also pray the afternoon and evening services.

Her acts of kindness were known to all, though her amazing personal story was known to only a few.

Her name was **Devorah-Miriam Queen**. She was born in the year 5633 (1873 c.e.) in of Dvinsk, Latvia She was orphaned from her father as a young child and her mother was left alone with her small children. The mother's brother-in-law, her late husband's brother, took them into his house and took care of all their needs.

Devorah Miriam was brought up in an atmosphere of piety and positive habits. When she grew up she wanted to marry a Torah scholar. Her uncle though wanted her to marry his son, so Devorah Miriam's dream stayed hidden and in the year 5654 (1893 c.e.) she married her cousin.

The years went by. The couple maintained a religious household, but their childlessness caused them great worry. After ten years of marriage and disappointments the family started thinking that maybe Devorah Miriam and her husband should divorce.

After prolonged deliberations the two decided to present their dilemma for consideration to the **Rogatchover Gaon** (genius), **Rabbi Yosef Rosen**, who was the chief rabbi of the Chasidic residents of Dvinsk<sup>1</sup> where they lived, and was considered one of the greatest Torah scholars of the century,

He listened to their story and replied: "If your question is if you are *allowed* to divorce, the answer is yes; but whether you *should* do so is not a question for a Rabbi but for a Rebbe."

Devorah Miriam's family belonged to *chasidut* Chabad. So from the house of the Gaon the couple traveled to the town of Lubavitch, to **Rabbi Shalom-Dovber Shneersohn**, the **Rebbe Rashab**. They related their troubles to the

---

<sup>1</sup> The chief rabbi of the non-chasidim was also a renowned Torah scholar, Rabbi Meir Simcha *ha-Kohen*, the author of *Ohr Samayach* and *Meshech Chochma*.

Rebbe's *gabbai* (attendant). They asked him to arrange a *yechidut* (private meeting) for them with the Rebbe. To their regret the *gabbai* couldn't help them, as there was already a long line of people requesting audience with the Rebbe.

The couple's disappointment and sorrow was obvious on their faces. Moved, the *gabbai* advised them to wait next to the Rebbe's door. "When the Rebbe will come out of his room he will see you and will listen to your trouble."

Indeed, when the Rebbe left his room he noticed them waiting outside his office and invited them to enter. Before they even had a chance to say a word, the Rebbe said "The advice you were given to divorce is incorrect. My advice is that you fulfill the saying of our Sages 'He who changes his place changes his *mazal* (fortune) for good and blessing.' Go to America and there you will have children and many blessings."

They left the Rebbe's presence in great emotional turmoil and amazement, because of the Divine Spirit that the Rebbe revealed and because of the unexpected advice he gave them. America in those days was a spiritual desert, almost without the availability of a suitable Jewish life.

But they followed the instruction of the Rebbe and the next day they started the arrangements for their immigration. The news of their intended departure spread quickly throughout Dvinsk, for a trip to America was not a usual thing in those days.

Equipped with the blessings of the Rogatchover Gaon and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the husband and wife set out on their travels. The next year they were in America, trying to get used to the strange new reality. Both made the decision not to be drawn after American culture and to keep their Jewish values come what may.

Very soon they became the mainstays of the establishment of Jewish life and the world of Torah in New York. Among other things they founded a *Talmud Torah* (Torah exclusive elementary school) so that the children would be brought up on Torah values alone. In time this became the famous *yeshiva* "Torah VeDa'as". They also instituted kosher slaughter and other religious institutions.

Indeed, the blessing of the Rebbe Rashab was fulfilled. The couple had eight children and all merited long lives. They lived in Williamsburg in Brooklyn and *davvened* in the Tzemach Tzedek shul. When for various reasons this shul was sold, the money was transferred to the Chabad shul in Jerusalem of the same name.

The couple merited that their descendants remained Jews faithful to the ways of their ancestors. Devorah Miriam was widowed in the year 5687 (1926 c.e.). She remained in the USA until reaching the age of eighty when she decided to

move to Israel. Her firm decision and strong character eased the difficulties of the change. She went to live in Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Devorah Miriam merited great longevity and all the while didn't cease from prayer and acts of kindness. Once, one of her sons came to visit her, and brought her an expensive present, an electric refrigerator, something that was a rarity at that time. When next year he visited her again he was taken aback to find the refrigerator gone. "I gave it to *hachnasat Kala* (assistance to a new bride)," she explained. Her son felt compelled to buy her a new one. But this time he made a condition: she is not allowed to give it away; the refrigerator stays in his possession and he is just allowing her to use it!

This amazing woman passed away in 5744 (1984 c.e.) at the age of 111. Today, her great-grand child, Rabbi Daniel Cohen, is the highly successful *shaliach* (emissary) of Chabad in Hebron.<sup>2</sup> A few years ago Rabbi Cohen initiated the restoration of Beit Romanov that the Rebbe Rashab had bought and turned it into a lighthouse of the spreading of Chasidic values. He saw this as a closing of a circle – the great-grandchild who was born from the blessing of the Rebbe Rashab merited to renew his asset in the city of our patriarchs, Hebron.

~~~~~

*Source:* Translated from *Sichat Hashavua* #1577 by **C.R. Benami**, long-time editorial assistant for AscentOfSafed.com. Edited and supplemented by R. Yerachmiel Tilles.

*Connection* – this week's Torah reading, 1st verse (Gen. 23:1): "The life of Sarah was 127 years..." Rashi: "All the years she was equally good."

*Biographical notes:*

**Rabbi Yosef Rosen**, known as the **Rogatchover Gaon** [of blessed memory: 5618 - 11 Adar, 5696 (1858 - March 1936 C.E.)], was an unparalleled genius, whose in-depth understanding of all Talmudic literature left the greatest of scholars awestruck. He authored tens of thousands of *responsa* on the Talmud and Jewish law, of which many have been compiled in the numerous volumes of *Tzafnat Paneach*. He served for decades as the chief rabbi of the chasidic congregations of the Latvian city of Dvinsk (Daugavpils).



**Rabbi Sholom-Dovber Schneersohn** [of blessed memory: 20 Cheshvan 5621 – 2 Nissan 5680 (Oct. 1860 – April 1920)], known as the **Rebbe Reshab**, was the fifth Rebbe of the Lubavitcher dynasty. He is the author of hundreds of major tracts in the exposition of Chasidic thought. In 1915, after 102 years of four Chabad rebbes living in Lubavitch, he transferred the center of the movement to Rostov-on-the-Don.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.chabadhebron.com/>