

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

Some two hundred plus years ago, there lived a great chasidic master named **Rabbi Mordechai ('Mottel') of Chernobyl**. Not only was he renowned for his erudition and holiness, he even had thousands of followers, many of whom he 'inherited' after the passing of his even holier father, **Rebbe [Menachem-] Nachum of Chernobyl**.

One time, Reb Mottel became so critically ill that he slipped into a coma. Soon he was hovering between life and death.

His Chassidim and followers were in distress. They gathered together, prayed and said *Tehilim* (Psalms) non-stop, and after four days it helped; G-d accepted their prayers. The Rebbe regained consciousness!

Several weeks later, when he had totally recuperated, they held a great thanksgiving meal for the kindness G-d had shown them. The meal was unusually joyous, replete with song and dance. Later on, one of the older Chassidim, who had taken more than a few *L'chayims*, mustered up the courage to stand and ask the Rebbe if he would please give a description of what he'd seen in the four days he was "gone."

After a few minutes of pregnant silence, the Rebbe cleared his throat, closed his eyes and began to speak.

"I left my body and felt my soul rising, rising to heaven. I was sure that my time on earth had terminated. I was brought before the heavenly court and they were about to decide my fate. I protested that I didn't want to die. I cried and asked for mercy, but it didn't help.

In desperation I demanded that I be allowed to see my holy, departed father, Rebbe Nachum. I knew that if he could intercede for me, I might have a chance.

"My request was granted! My father was brought down from the highest heavens! We were face to face and I was bursting from joy to see him again after all these years, but...but... he didn't recognize me!

"I pleaded; I tried to make him remember; but to no avail. He believed that I wasn't lying, but he simply didn't recognize me at all.

“Finally, he asked if I had done some sin after he left this world and that is the reason he didn't know me. And then he disappeared.

"So for three days, I tried to remember if possibly I had done something forbidden, even the most seemingly inconsequential act, but with no success. I again began weeping and praying and, behold, my father re-appeared!

“He told me that he also had been searching in the heavenly records, but he too came up with nothing. All he could conclude was perhaps it was something very small I had done, perhaps shortly before my illness, that was inaccessible to him. He asked me if I remembered anything unusual.

"Suddenly something came to my mind. It certainly wasn't a sin, but it was all I could think of. I told him that I remembered that just before my illness, a wealthy Jew, who had recently become a pauper came to ask me for a loan of several hundred rubles to help him get back on his feet.

“Unfortunately, I had to turn him down. I simply didn't have anything close to that sum. Still, I gave him what I could and tried to comfort him as best as possible.

"‘Comfort him?’ My father asked, ‘What did you say?’

“A saying from the wisest of men... King Solomon. ‘I said, “*Who is beloved, G-d reproves*” (Proverbs 3:12).

"‘And what did you mean by that?’ My father asked immediately, as though he was on to something.

"‘What did I mean?’ I replied, not really understanding what he was getting at. ‘Why, I meant the simple meaning. Sometimes G-d makes people suffer because He loves them, and the suffering can sometimes help clean them of their sins. ‘Who is beloved, G-d reproves.’ Therefore, he needn't feel bad—it is a proof that G-d loves him.”

"‘Aha!’ My father replied. ‘Now I know why I didn’t recognize you. I never would have said such a thing. Indeed, up here in Heaven we learn that verse completely differently.

"‘We interpret it like this: ‘*Whoever is beloved*’ namely if you see someone that you love (and we are supposed to love every creature) who is suffering... then.... ‘*G-d reprove.*’

"That is, you should reprove G-d! Like Moses did when he challenged G-d, saying, 'Why do you make Your people suffer?' (Ex. 5:22), and G-d listened!

"'My son' my father concluded, 'when it comes to the suffering of others we have to protest! We must try to change G-d's mind and not justify Him!'

"And that's when I came back to life."

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of **Rabbi Tuvia Bolton** on his website, *OhrTmimim.org*.

*Biographical notes:*

**Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl** [of blessed memory: 5490 - 11 Cheshvan 5548 (1730-1787 C.E.)], was a disciple of the *Baal Shem Tov* and senior disciple of the *Maggid of Mezritch*. He is the author of *Meor Enayim*.

**Rabbi Mordechai ("Mottel") of Chernobyl** [of blessed memory: 5530 - 20 Iyar 5697 (1770 – May 1837 C.E.)], was the second rebbe in the dynasty and a leading rebbe of his generation. He was the son-in-law of Rabbi Aharon the Great of Karlin, perhaps the most well-known follower of the *Maggid* in that generation, and subsequently of Rabbi **David Seirkis**, an important disciple of the *Baal Shem Tov*. His eight sons all became major Chasidic leaders [: Rebbe Aharon of Chernobyl, Rebbe Moshe of Karistachov, Rebbe Yaakov Yisrael of Cherkasse, Rebbe Nachum of Mekarov, Rebbe Avraham of Trisk, Rebbe David of Tolna, Rebbe Yitzchak of Skver, and Rebbe Yochanan of Rachmistrivka].

*Connection:* Shabbat, 11<sup>th</sup> of the Jewish month of Cheshvan, was the *yahrzeit* of Rebbe Nachum Chernobler.