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THE REAL THING

When the *Tzemach Tzedek* [**Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Schneersohn, the 3rd Lubavitcher Rebbe**] returned from the Rabbinical Conference of 5603 (1843), the chasidim spoke in awe of his steadfast *mesiras nefesh* ('self-sacrifice' at risk of life). How even after being arrested twenty-two times in a period of a few months, he wasn't intimidated and didn't cave in to the pressure and threats of the government of being charged of treason.

The Rebbe heard this and said "That was not *mesiras nefesh*, for I did it to protect the Torah. **Reb Boruch of Mezibuzh** had *real mesiras nefesh*." The Rebbe then proceeded to relate the following story:

There was a chasid of Reb Boruch who sold wine. He borrowed money and bought a few barrels of wine, loaded them up on his wagon and went from village to village selling smaller amounts to each customer. After selling what he had, he returned home, paid off his creditors, paid his family's debts and once again bought on credit and some loans.

One Thursday night as he was saying *Krias Shema* [the prayer before going to sleep], he contemplated his actions of the day (and of the last few weeks) and felt that his actions and conduct are not the way they should be for a Jew and especially a chasid of the great *tzadik*, Reb Boruch the grandson of the **Baal Shem Tov**.

Being that he fortunately was close to Mezibuzh he decided to spend the Shabbos with his Rebbe. Hopefully he would be allowed to ask the *tzadik* how he can correct his flaws. He received permission from the innkeeper to leave his

wagon in the stable over Shabbos, and off he went to his Rebbe.

Friday night the chasidim would come to the Rebbe's *tish* (a gathering around the *tzadik's* Shabbat Meal table) to hear his explanations or thoughts on some aspects of the weekly Torah reading and be inspired. This week, however, in front of everyone, Reb Boruch berated the chasid for leaving his wagon in the inn without proper supervision. "What were you thinking," asked Reb Boruch.

The chasid was humiliated, but accepted it, thinking, most probably the Rebbe did this to atone his flaws.

However, during the meal on Shabbos day and during the third meal late Shabbos afternoon as well, the Rebbe, Reb Boruch, continued to berate and embarrass this chasid.

It came to a point that another guest who happened to be related to the Rebbe couldn't contain himself anymore, and spoke to Reb Boruch privately, saying, "My dear *mechutan* (relative by marriage), our sages tell us whoever shames a person in public has no portion in the world to come, and you did so on three occasions."

Reb Boruch replied, "*Mechutan*, don't you think that I am aware of that statement! But what was I to do? This chasid in his sincerity came to seek guidance and left his wagon with barrels of wine in the barn of the inn in a nearby village. The inn has many customers and some of them noticed that this wagon was left unattended and were discussing among themselves that it is a golden opportunity to enjoy the wine, after all it is 'on the house'.

"If that would have happened, this chasid would have been financially ruined. He would not be able to pay off his debts, the wholesalers wouldn't trust him anymore, and he would lose his source of income.

"So I decided to humiliate and indeed mortify him. The anguish that he received from this equaled the anguish he would have experienced had his wine been enjoyed by those

customers in the inn and been left without a source of income. By doing this heaven decided that he should not have additional anguish and caused that the other people in the inn left his barrels alone.

“I am willing to forgo and lose my share in the world to come if that prevents a single Jew from losing his livelihood.”

“That”, concluded the Tzemach Tzedek, “is *mesiras nefesh*. What I did was for the entire Jewish nation as well as for the honor of the Torah, and that is something anyone would have done, no matter the price he would have to pay.”

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*Source:* Adapted and annotated by Yerachiel Tilles from a weekly emailing of **Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon**. Rabbi Avtzon <avtzonbooks@gmail.com> is a veteran educator and the author of numerous books on the seven Chabad Rebbes and their chasidim. He explained his choice of the story above and his source for it: “Going beyond the letter of the law, is called *mesiras nefesh*. So I will post a story about *mesiras nefesh* that I heard at a *farbrengen* of **Rabbi Nissim Mangel**.”

*Editor’s personal note:*

Rabbi N. Mangel was my main chasidut teacher during the five years I lived in Brooklyn.

*Connection to weekly Torah reading:* The beginning relates the extraordinary *mesiras nefesh* demonstrated by Yehuda, the 4<sup>th</sup> of our patriarch Yaakov’s twelve sons, by offering himself to be the slave of Pharaoh’s viceroy in place of Benjamin, his youngest brother.

*Biographical notes* (in order of appearance):

**Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Schneersohn**, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lubavitcher Rebbe [29 Elul 5549 - 13 Nissan 5626 (Sept. 1789 – April 1866)], the third Rebbe of Chabad, was known as the **Tzemach Tzedek**, after his books of Jewish Law responsa and Talmudic commentary called by that name. He was renowned not only as the Rebbe of tens of thousands of chasidim, but also as a leading scholar in his generation in both the revealed and secret aspects of Torah.

**Rebbe Boruch of Mezibuzh** [1753 - 18 Kislev, 1811] was the son of R. Yechiel Ashkenazi and Adel, the daughter of the Baal Shem Tov. He moved from Tulchin to assume the Chasidic leadership in Mezhibuz, the town of his holy grandfather. He was one of the pre-eminent Rebbes in the generation of the disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch and had thousands of chasidim.