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A COURAGEOUS OUTRAGEOUS TIPSY SIMCHAT TORAH BLESSING

Rabbi Shneur Lipskar tells a moving story about his experience at the home of Rabbi Asher Tumarkin, the Chabad *shaliach* (emissary) in Kazakhstan when he was a *bochur* (yeshiva student).

Lipskar, who lives in Jerusalem, traveled with two other Chabad yeshiva students to Karaganda,¹ Kazakhstan for Tishrei (the month of holidays that begins with *Rosh Hashana*) in the year 5780 (Sept. 2019) to assist Rabbi Tumarkin, who arrived there in 2015 with his wife Rachel to establish Chabad of Karaganda.

“When we entered his home for the first time, I didn’t see any children,” Lipskar wrote. “After a few hours passed and no kids returned from school or child care, I suddenly understood that they don’t have children, although they had been married already for almost ten years.

“The thought that they didn’t have children struck me hard. How is it possible to run a Chabad house, to conduct classes and deliver lectures, to help Jews with the daily mitzvos and other good deeds, and then return to a childless home? A clean and neat house – too neat, no toys on the floor. No sleepless nights, no children to gently cover with his *tallis* during *birchas Kohanim*.² How is it possible?

“We spent the time building a *sukkah* in the courtyard, *davvening* (praying) with the congregation and helping Jews to bless on and shake the *lulav*. And then came *Simchas Torah*. Back home we were used to enthusiastic crowds on Simchas Torah, but in Kazakhstan it wasn’t like that. Mainly elderly Jews attended and it was quiet.

“But we didn’t want to simply fulfill our obligation by dancing. We wanted to truly rejoice. So we began to drink and toast *l’chaim* (‘To life!’)– another cup and another cup and..., in between singing and taking turns to hold and hug the Torah scrolls.

¹ The fifth most populous city in Kazakhstan, 1st and 2nd being Almaty (Alma-Ata) and Astana the capital. Karaganda has a population of approximately half a million.

² A blessing delivered to the public once on each biblical festival (in the Land of Israel it is done on Shabbat as well, and in Jerusalem daily).

“Afterward we had the festive holiday evening meal. The other two students sobered up somewhat. I didn’t. Rav Asher said a short Torah interpretation. We sang some more and then I requested that we sing *Yeladim* by Eviatar Banai [a moving song about children by a well-known Israeli singer]. No one else knew it so I sang it by myself and everyone was quiet and listened.

The song is about children, on the emotional moment that one’s child leaves to yeshiva boarding school with only his parents’ prayers for well-being and success to accompany him. The song suddenly reminded me of the ‘matter’ that no one mentions. But I was drunk enough not to think about what’s appropriate to say or not say.

“I shouted with great pain: ‘Reb Asher, you are a good Jew! And you have a heart of gold! You could have been a stay-at-home Chabadnik in Kfar Chabad, but you chose the difficult path of being a shaliach of the Rebbe in a distant, very foreign, Muslim land! You gave your whole life for the Rebbe! You deserve children!’

“There was silence. R’ Asher turned white. but I continued to talk. ‘We three are issuing a *pasak* (a rabbinical ruling that you deserve a *ben zachar* (a baby boy) before the end of this new year. I *swear* to you that you and your wife will have a ben zachar within this year!’

“I then hugged him enthusiastically. R’ Asher whispered ‘Amen’ with intense *kavanah* (focused intention), whereupon I was immediately carried to my room by my friends (where I promptly threw up).

Lipskar concluded his story: “An hour ago I got a phone call from the two bochurim that were with me. After almost ten years with no children, a baby boy was born to R’ Asher that day!

“And that day was *exactly* nine months since my *shelichut* mission in Kazakhstan.”

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Source: Adapted and annotated by Yerachmiel Tilles from the report in “*Yeshiva World News*,” as posted on //theyeshivaworld.com (July 13, 2020).

*Editor’s note:* FYI, under the online post mentioned in the above source note, several readers posted comments and theories and calculations, attempting to debunk the claim made in the last sentence of the story. All are based on a false premise: that “since my *shelichut* mission in Kazakhstan” means “since the date of my blessing.” How silly. If that is what the author meant, that is exactly what he would have said.