בס"ד
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THE MIRACLE OF FIRE IN THE SNOW

Many years ago, in the year 5547 (1786), winter arrived very early. It was unusually cold on *Sukkot* , and it had already begun to snow. Sitting in the *sukkah* required a fur coat and fur-lined boots, and on several occasions the snow had to be removed from the *sukkah*. Consequently, throughout the day of *Hoshana Rabba*, most of the ch*asidim* who arrived in Liozna for *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* had frozen fingers and toes, and many had caught a nasty flu and a high fever, due to the unexpected cold.

When **Rabbi Schneur Zalman** was informed of the terrible situation, he leaned his holy head on his hands and for a long while he remained deeply engrossed in his thoughts. When he opened his eyes, he, declared melodiously: "The *Torah* states, 'It is a law of fire for them.' Tonight is *Shemini Atzeres*. Everyone must be brought for the *hakafos*[1] , and may 'the fire consume the fire' – the fire of the holiday will consume the fire of fever."

Before the *hakafot* , *Rabbi* Pinchas Reitzes of Shklov, accompanied by a number of young chasidim, made the rounds among all the inns and hostels in the city to invite visitors, many of whom were suffering from very high fevers. When the sick ch*asidim* and their families heard the encouraging words, they were overjoyed. With complete faith, they went out into the stormy night and made their way to the synagogue, braving hail, torrential rain and fierce winds that penetrated their very bones. In addition, great masses of mud clogged the streets. Many had to be helped to walk, while others had to be carried on shoulders.

[1] Sefardic and chassidic custom is to have seven joyous Simchat Torah hakafot also on the night ofShemini Atzeret, in order to be in harmony with the Jws of the Holy Land where Shemini Atzeret and Simchas Torah are compressed into one 25-hour span. [In parallel, the custom in Israel in the night following the holiday and the *Havdalah* ceremony, to have seven joyous hakafot in harmony with the Simchat Torah holiday outside Israel, which is just beginning then, only this time it is to the accompaniment of joyous live (or recorded) music, as our holiday has already been completed. This custom began here in Tsfat, as originated by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the holy Ari-zal]

The synagogue, packed with ailing people, was a pitiful sight. Coughs and groans could be heard everywhere, and the heat was unbearable. Some of the visitors were so weak that they couldn't even sit on the benches; they had to be pushed against the walls. Others lacked even the strength to sit at all; they lay quietly on the hard floor.

Every year on *Shemini Atzeret* night, the *Rebbe* would, after the prayers, lead his own private *hakafot* with a *minyan* in the small synagogue adjoining his room. Afterward, he would go to his *sukkah* and make *Kiddush* and eat a bit. Only then he would proceed to the large synagogue in the courtyard for the public *hakafot.*

This year, however, something unusual occurred. Upon entering his *sukkah* the *Rebbe* summoned three elderly *chasidim:* Reb Michael Aaron of Vitebsk, a *Kohen;* Reb Shabbetai Meir of Beshenkovitz, a *Levite* ; and Reb Yaakov of Semilian, an *Israelite*. "I require you three –Kohen, Levite and Israelite—to be a rabbinical court of three," the *Rebbe* told them. "You must now listen to my *Kiddush* and respond '*Amen*' to each of my blessings, with the intention that your 'Amen' approval will apply to all the spiritual thoughts and invocations I will concentrate on."

After reciting the *Kiddush*, *t*he *Rebbe* requested that, several large flasks of wine were brought out of the *sukkah.* After He then poured the remaining wine from his cup into one of the flasks and appointed his three-member tribunal to be 'emissaries of healing'. He instructed them to mix the wine from Kiddush with the wine from the other flasks and distribute it among the sick, who would drink it and with G-d's help be completely cured.

The *Rebbe* also asked them to go up to the women's balcony and serve wine to those who had not been blessed with children or who had suffered miscarriages.

News of the *Rebbe*'s wine spread like wildfire, and the synagogue was abuzz with excitement. When the three elderly *Hasidim* entered the great synagogue with the wine, an awed silence fell over all present. The three ascended the pulpit, and *Reb* Yaakov of Semilian, the *Yisrael* of the rabbinical court, repeated aloud the *Rebbe* 's instructions, word for word. In conclusion, he said he would like to add a few words of his own, which were especially pertinent to the situation:

"There is an accepted tradition, passed down among the chasidim from generation to generation, that for a *tzaddik*'s blessing to be fulfilled, two conditions must be

met: first, the persons being blessed must believe in the blesser and the blessing with simple faith, without equivocation. Second, they must commit themselves to carrying out the will of the one granting the blessing, in all that pertains to Divine Service--Torah study , prayer, and pious conduct."

The wine from the Rebbe's cup was then distributed in an orderly fashion, with the help of several robust young men whom the 'judges' chose for this task. After everyone had received their wine, the *Rebbe* entered the synagogue and the *hakafot* began. As was his custom, the Rebbe recited the first and last verses of the *Atah Horeita* which precede, and participated in the first and seventh *hakafah*.

The next day, everyone was talking about the miracle. In fact, Abraham the doctor stated that for a number of the elderly patients, what occurred was literally a true resurrection from the dead. He maintained that, from a medical point of view, there was no hope for them, and their recovery was undoubtedly due to supernatural intervention.

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Source: A number of versions of this story are in print, all similar in the main facts, but differing in the amount of detail. Ultimately, they are all derived from the very lengthy telling in "*Likutei Dibburim*," written by the sixth *Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880–1950),* based on the detailed report of *Rabbi Pinchas Reitzes of Shklov,* a leading disciple of Lubavitch-Chabad's founder, *Rabbi Schneur Zalman* (1745-1812).
I compiled and freely adapted and supplemented my presentation from a posting in 2022 on the Portuguese-English website, *NashimTsidkaniot.com*, which is taken from the book *"Once Upon a Chassid", by Michoel Green,* (with permission from the *"Likrat Shabbat"* of Yeshiva Tomchei Tmimim), with a few clarifying inserts from the three-times-as-long report [now only twice as long ☺] on Chabad.org.
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