

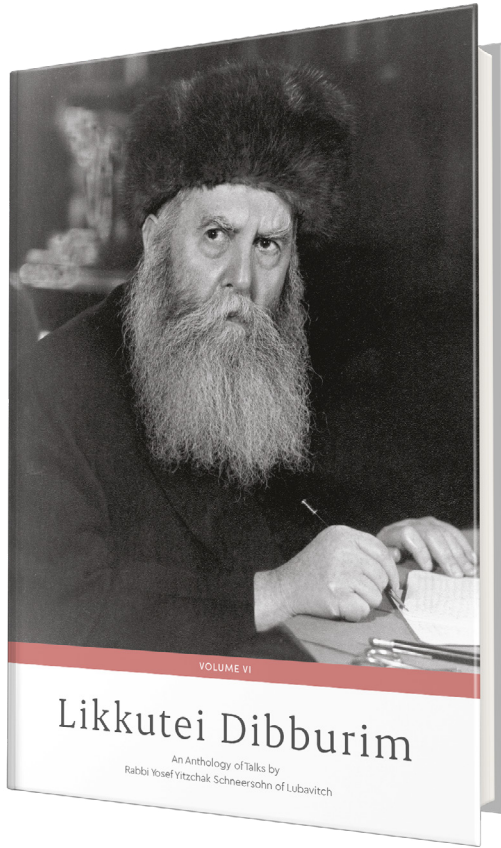


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# Likkutei Dibburim

An Anthology of Talks by  
Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch

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# THE ARREST OF THE REBBE RAYATZ, 1927

A chapter from the forthcoming volume of  
the new edition of Likkutei Dibburim



Published in honor of  
the yahrzeit on 22 Shvat of  
Rebbitzin Chayah Mushka נ"ע  
5661-5748 / 1901-1988  
saintly daughter of the Rebbe Rayatz  
and wife of the Rebbe



SICHOS IN ENGLISH  
788 Eastern Parkway | Brooklyn, New York 11213



## Preface

One of the most agonizing and turbulent epochs in all of our turbulent and agonizing history peaked in 5687 (1927). In that year, after incitement by the Yevsektsia, the virulently anti-religious Jewish Section of the Soviet Communist Party, the sixth Rebbe of Lubavitch, the saintly Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Scheersohn ז"ע, was incarcerated under capital arrest in the dreaded Spalerno Prison in Leningrad. He was interrogated, tortured and exiled, until ultimately – and miraculously – he was liberated, on *Yud-Beis* Tammuz.

The present booklet, presenting his first-person description of the night of his arrest, is a chapter from a forthcoming volume of the new edition of *Likkutei Dibburim*. It is published now to honor the *yahrzeit* on 22 Shvat of his noble and softly-spoken daughter, **Rebbitzin Chayah Mushka** ז"ע, who accompanied him in his exile to Kostrama, and wholeheartedly devoted her self-sacrificing life to supporting the Rebbe in his lifework.

Her name appears in the present booklet in a significant context. When the dreaded interrogators of the Secret Police came to the home of the Rebbe Rayatz to arrest him for his “counter-revolutionary activities” by disseminating the practice of *Yiddishkeit* throughout Communist Russia, they asked her and her sister Sheine, “What party do you belong to?”

They replied: “We belong to our father’s party.”

Sichos In English

*Chaf-Beis* Shvat, 5781 (2021)



THE IMPRISONMENT OF 1927  
PART I  
[RIGA]<sup>1</sup>

## Chapter 34

### Publisher's Foreword by the Rebbe

*Gimmel Tammuz* 5712 (1952)

Brooklyn, N.Y.

ב"ה

In honor of the forthcoming Festival of Liberation, *Yud-Beis-Yud-Gimmel Tammuz*,<sup>2</sup> celebrating twenty-five years since the deliverance of my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe [Rayatz], whose soul is in the hidden realms on high, we are hereby publishing one of his *maamarim* of *Chassidus*, and a memorandum written by him, each in a separate booklet.

The *maamar*<sup>3</sup> was written on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, 5687 [1927], during his incarceration at Spalerno Prison. The memo-

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1. The Rebbe Rayatz lived in the capital of Latvia from late 1927 until he moved to Warsaw in 1934.

2. *Gimmel Tammuz* is the date on which the Rebbe Rayatz was released in 1927 from imprisonment under capital sentence in Leningrad, and exiled to Kostrama. The Rebbe discusses the significance of this date in *Sefer HaMinhagim: The Book of Chabad-Lubavitch Customs*, pp. 88-89.

3. It was not reprinted in *Likkutei Dibburim*.

randum,<sup>4</sup> describing his imprisonment, was completed in Riga on 15 Sivan, 5688 [1928], the first anniversary of his arrest. It is introduced here by a letter<sup>5</sup> (dated 17 Iyar, 5694 [1934]) in which the Rebbe [Rayatz] outlines his seven terms of imprisonment.

\* \* \*

The significance of this celebration has already been explained in the letter<sup>6</sup> which the Rebbe [Rayatz] wrote [also on 15 Sivan] in 5688 [1928] in anticipation of the first anniversary of *Yud-Beis-Yud-Gimmel* Tammuz. In it he urges that these days be set aside as a time of *farbrengen* — “a day on which people arouse each other to buttress the Torah and *Yiddishkeit* in every place according to its needs.”

Moreover, he blesses “all our brethren who love the Torah and who study and teach it — that G-d open wide His goodly treasure-store and bestow upon them and upon all our fellow Jews life and blessings in endless abundance; that He fortify their hearts with growing resoluteness in the dissemination of Torah and in the upholding of *Yiddishkeit*.” He concludes: “And may we all be found worthy of seeing children and grandchildren engaging in Torah and in *mitzvos* and being blessed with ample livelihoods.”

May G-d fulfill the blessings of a *tzaddik*, the *Nasi* of our generation, in full.

Menachem Schneerson

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4. Known in the original as *Reshimas HaMaasar*.

5. It appears in *HaTamim*, Vol. 7, p. 60, [and in *Igros Kodesh* (Letters) of the Rebbe Rayatz, Vol. 3, p. 79ff.].

6. It appears in *Kuntreis 59* (published in honor of *Yud-Beis Tammuz, 5708 [1948]*), p. 263 [and in *Igros Kodesh* (Letters) of the Rebbe Rayatz, Vol. 3, pp. 80-82. The complete letter, together with the *maamar* it accompanies, appears in Eng. translation in *Defiance and Devotion*, pp. 96-101. For its historical setting, see footnote 5 there, or *Sefer HaMinhagim: The Book of Chabad-Lubavitch Customs*, footnote 155 on p. 40.]



## A Letter of the Rebbe Rayatz<sup>7</sup> On his Seven Terms of Imprisonment<sup>8</sup>

17 Iyar 5694 (1934)

In reply to your question about my imprisonment and my subsequent exile in Kostrama: Though everything is recorded in my notes, for various reasons the only things that may be revealed are a number of excerpts and general impressions that will be offensive to no one.

The imprisonment in 5687 [1927] was the seventh, because I was imprisoned five times under the old [i.e., czarist] regime, and twice under the new [i.e., Communist] regime.

The first imprisonment took place in Lubavitch when I was eleven years old. At that time, following the advice and directive of my teacher, R. Nissan, I began (in 5652 [1892]) to record my recollections in a book. This incident, too, was recorded there, in 5653 [1893].

The second imprisonment took place in Lubavitch in Iyar, 5662 [1902]. The informers<sup>9</sup> to the authorities were the teachers of the school that had been founded in Lubavitch by the Society for the Dissemination of the Haskalah (the “Enlightenment”).

The third imprisonment, also in Lubavitch, in Teves, 5666 [1906], resulted from the participation of members of the [secular] Poalei Tziyon Party<sup>10</sup> in an uprising against the local police.

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7. Indexed by the Rebbe as having been addressed by the Rebbe Rayatz “to one of his sons-in-law.”

8. For a graphic description of those seven terms see above, Vol. 1, ch. 4a, sec. 15-17. **Notes concerning the first three terms were published in *HaTamim*, Issues 7-8.**

9. See *HaTamim*, p. [ט"ג].

10. “Participation” in the above text is a euphemistic understatement; their initiatives in fact endangered the life of the Rebbe Rayatz. See *HaTamim*, p. [ט"ד]. In En-

The fourth imprisonment took place in Petrograd in Teves, 5670 [1910]; the informer in this case was an educated Jew called K.

The fifth imprisonment, also in Petrograd, in Shvat, 5676 [1916], resulted from my efforts to obtain legal information concerning military exemptions for people serving in rabbinical positions.

The sixth imprisonment, in Rostov on the River Don, in Tammuz, 5680 [1920], followed my denunciation to the authorities by D., the head of the local Yevseksia.<sup>11</sup>

Each of the above arrests, however, resulted in imprisonment for a number of hours. The seventh was somewhat weightier.

\* \* \*

Normally, an analogy is less earnest than its analog. Consider, then: If imprisoning a body in a jail of wood and stone is called suffering, then how intense must be the suffering of the Divine soul when it is imprisoned in the body and the animal soul. This is something worth thinking about deeply.

\* \* \*

I will not deny that from time to time the seventh imprisonment brings me particular pleasure. As witness: Even now, some seven years after the event, I occasionally set aside time to spend alone — to picture in my mind's eye the sounds and words, the sights and the dreams, that I heard, saw and dreamed in those days.

A lifetime spans a certain number of changing stages — childhood, boyhood, youth, young adulthood, adult-

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glish, see Vol. 3 of the present work, p. 118 (and the extensive documentation listed in the footnote there), and p. 229.

11. Lit., "Jewish section" [of the Communist Party].

hood, advancing years, and old age. People also vary in their gifts — whether common and mediocre or wonderfully luminous; likewise in their natures — for example, whether bashful and morose, or jolly and exuberant. But apart from all these variables, in the course of a lifetime Divine Providence engineers particular periods which sometimes change a man's very nature. They develop his gifts and set him up at a particular height, so that he can gaze upon the ultimate purpose for which a man lives his life on the face of the earth.

Above all, a man's personality and gifts are most intensely escalated by a period rich in suffering which is inflicted on account of his vigorous endeavors for an ideal. This is particularly so if he struggles and battles with his pursuers and persecutors for the sake of preserving and advancing his religious faith.

Such a period, though fraught with affliction of the body and suffering of the spirit, is rich in powerful impressions. Such days are the luminous days in a man's life.

Every single incident in such a period is significant. In particular, if imprisonment is involved, the resultant spiritual benefit is so great that it warrants the recording not only of days and nights but even of hours and minutes. For every hour and minute of torment gives rise to inestimable benefits: it makes a man so resolute that even a weakling is transformed into the most courageous of men.

\* \* \*

My arrest began at 2:15 a.m. on Wednesday, 15 Sivan, 5687 [1927], and continued until 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, 3 Tammuz, 5687 [1927], in Leningrad (Petersburg).

After these *eighteen days, eleven hours and fifteen min-*

utes, I spent approximately six hours in my home, and at 7:30 p.m. took the train to Kostrama.<sup>12</sup> I arrived there on Monday, 4 Tammuz, and remained in exile until 12:30 p.m. on Wednesday, 13 Tammuz, for a total of *nine days and seventeen hours*.

Finally, in response to your request, I am now sending you selections from my notes concerning the respective terms of imprisonment.

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12. I.e., after the capital charge had been quashed, the prison sentence was commuted by stages — first to ten years' exile in Siberia, then to five years there, and finally to a three-year exile in Kostrama, on the Volga River. (See Appendix on p. 287 below.) The following week, however, on 12 (*Yud-Beis*) Tammuz, the Rebbe Rayatz was informed of his impending release, and on 13 (*Yud-Gimmel*) Tammuz he was in fact liberated.

## THE IMPRISONMENT OF 1927<sup>1</sup> PART I

### 1.

### The year of fury erupts

This is the first day of the imprisonment in the year of fury.

After twelve during the night between Tuesday of the week of *Parshas Shlach*, 14 Sivan, and Wednesday, 15 Sivan, I received the last of that night's callers. The time set aside

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1. Among the historical sources available in English (and this is a very partial list): Volume 6 of the present work, which includes newly translated documents penned by the Rebbe Rayatz and by others; a powerful and readable major study by Rabbi Dr. Alter Ben Zion Metzger entitled *The Heroic Struggle*; a documented article by Dr. William W. Brickman entitled "Unyielding Yiddishkeit: The Jewish Response to the Communist Campaign against the Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, 1917-1938," with an appended list of historical sources, in *The Uforatzta Journal*, Winter, 1978; a colorful article by Daniel Goldberg entitled "Mesiras Nefesh" in the same Journal, Winter, 1978; and the *Yud-Beis Tammuz* issues of this and other English-language Chabad-Lubavitch publications such as *Di Yiddishe Heim*.

For the chronology and spiritual circumstances of the arrest as described by an elder chassid who witnessed and personally experienced them in the company of the Rebbe Rayatz, see the extract (in English translation) from *The Imprisonment and the Liberation* by R. Eliyahu Chayim Althaus, in *Sefer HaMinhagim: The Book of Chabad-Lubavitch Customs*, p. 40, footnote 155.

Major Hebrew sources include: *Sefer HaSichos 5680-5687 [1920-1927]*, which appends contemporary documents; *Sefer HaToldos* of the Rebbe Rayatz (4 vols.; ed. Rabbi Chanoch Glitzenstein); and the *Yud-Beis Tammuz* issues of *Iton Kfar Chabad. Toldos Chabad BeRussia HaSovietis* (i.e., "The History of Chabad in the USSR, 1917-1950," compiled by Rabbi Shalom Dovber Levin, chief librarian of the Rebbe's library) is a comprehensive and illustrated treasure-house of information on the heroism and martyrdom of this period, based on private and official documents which in most cases are published there for the first time.

for this was always Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m., but it generally lasted for another hour or two, especially in the summer, when the earliest possible time for *Maariv* was 10:30.<sup>2</sup> In the summer, *Minchah* would be held at 6:00 and *Maariv* at 11:00. (At other times, *Minchah* would be at 9:00 and *Maariv* would follow at nightfall.)

I had a regular *minyán* three times a day. After *Shacharis* people would read a daily allotment of *Tehillim* (as divided up in a monthly cycle). By reason of a directive that remained unexplained, I requested<sup>3</sup> the members of the chassidic brotherhood<sup>4</sup> everywhere to establish this custom — the daily reading being followed by the Mourner's *Kaddish* — in all *shuls*. This proposal has been accepted by people in many places, thank G-d; happy is their lot, both materially and spiritually. This request still stands. *Tehillim* is to be followed by a regular session in the study of *Mishnayos*; between *Minchah* and *Maariv* is the time for *Aggadah*;<sup>5</sup> and *Maariv* is followed by a *shiur* in *Gemara*.

On this day there were very many callers. I had to begin at the appointed time, I finished at 11:30 p.m., and then it was time to *daven Maariv*. My labors left me exhausted. In addition, for me those were most distressful days, because on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday there had been verbal exchanges — via R. Aronovski, the Rav of Velizh, and the

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2. **According to the evidence of early chassidim, this was the ruling and the custom of the Alter Rebbe when he [too] was in Petersburg during his second prison term, in 5561 [1800].**

3. **For details, see *Kuntreis 59*, issued for *Yud-Beis Tammuz*, 5708 [1948], p. 27.** [In English, see *Sefer HaMinhagim: The Book of Chabad-Lubavitch Customs*, p. 41, footnote 155.]

4. In the original, *Anash*.

5. I.e., the group study of *Ein Yaakov*.

Rav of Sdeh Menuchah<sup>6</sup> — with the elderly R. David Tevel Katznelenbogen, concerning a general meeting which the Leningrad Congregation had wanted to call.

## 2.

### Ominous rumblings

I find it difficult to speak about this subject at the length that it deserves, but here is a summary. R. Katznelenbogen did not realize that the members of that congregation were acting deviously. Moreover, as he told one of the above rabbis explicitly, his intention was to oppose my stand: since I held that this meeting should not be held, he was not interested in discussing the rights and wrongs of the actual question, but felt himself obliged to side with the opposite party.

This episode was a long one. At this point, since for various reasons (thank G-d) the proposal was never realized, it is better left undiscussed. At the time, however, it was a cause of painful anxiety: it affected the whole state of *Yiddishkeit* in our country. There is abundant evidence that the proposal to hold that meeting was a conspiracy to smite our country's Jews in the apple of their eye.

“Praise G-d for His kindness,”<sup>7</sup> for having arranged the circumstances that made that proposal fall away. And “May G-d bless His people with peace.”<sup>8</sup>

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6. Lit., “Field of Repose”; name of a chassidic village near Moscow.

7. *Tehillim* 135:1.

8. *Ibid.* 29:11.

## 3.

**“Who is Schneersohn?”**

A few minutes after midnight, weary and fatigued, I washed my hands in preparation for the evening meal together with my family. Before ten minutes had passed the doorbell rang noisily. The door opened and two men rushed into the dining room, shouting: “We were sent by the administration of the GPU.<sup>9</sup> Who is Schneersohn? Where is he?”

Within a moment a unit of armed men entered, stood in line, and awaited orders.

I answered coolly and clearly: “I don’t know which Schneersohn you are looking for. If you come to a man’s home you no doubt already know who lives there. So there’s no need for all the threatening noise. Say what you have to say, what you want and whom you want. Besides, the official in charge of the courtyard is with you, and he knows all the residents by sight. So why shout?”

Their spokesman responded: “I’m not shouting; that’s just the way I talk. It looks like you’re not yet familiar with the ways of officers dispatched by the GPU. Show us all the ins and outs of your home so that we’ll be able to watch it as the law prescribes. You, as head of the family, will accompany us to observe our search through the house.”

“True,” I replied, “I don’t know the ways of your administration’s officers, nor do I want to know them. It is clear to me that you have either made a mistake, or else there is an intentional libel. It’s all the same to me. As to the officers of the said administration, I have not feared them, I

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9. The dreaded Soviet secret police, later called the NKVD, the MGB, and finally the KGB.



do not fear them, and I shall not fear them. And as to the ins and outs of my home, the man in charge of the courtyard can show you around. My home is in your hands: you can search and probe according to your desires, or according to the law of which you speak. At any rate, I am sure that you will not disturb me at the supper table.”

This cool and unimpressed response — or, more precisely, the naive scornfulness of a Lubavitcher citizen — left a deep imprint even on those rocklike men. Their wings drooped for a moment; they looked at me in astonishment; the house fell silent.

A couple of minutes passed before Nachmanson spoke up. He was a Jewish lad from Nevel whose father used to visit Lubavitch; he himself had gone to school in Nevel. He gave the armed men their orders: “Go out and stand guard at the doors. If anyone wants to enter, open wide. If people want to move about, even from room to room, or even to talk with each other, don’t let them! You’ve been warned!”

He turned to Lulav, his aide, one of the Lulav family of Riga, and added: “Let’s get down to work.”

To me he added: “We won’t disturb you from eating — if you’re *able* to eat...”

With that, he posted one of the armed guards in the dining room to police his orders.

#### 4.

### “We belong to our father’s party”

They began their search in the room of my daughters, Chayah Mussia and Sheine, and asked them: “What party do you belong to?”

“We belong to our father’s party,” they replied; “we are non-partisan daughters of Israel. We are fond of the old ways of our Patriarch Israel, and detest the new aspirations.”

We heard Nachmanson’s demand: “But why?”

My daughter Sheine answered: “Why? I’m not obliged to answer that question. You asked for my views and I answered you, but as to the question Why, I am under no obligation to reply nor to give reasons. After all, you didn’t come here to rummage through all my notes and letters just for the sake of conducting a discussion! What we have always been, that is what we are now. And what we are now, we are telling you, irrespective of whether it makes you happy or not.”

“You should really take into account our power and our opinions,” Nachmanson warned. “The GPU administration which we represent can open even a dumb mouth, and make it talk about whatever is hidden under the heart. Our interrogators are remarkable craftsmen: people tell them *everything*. Over there there’s no saying No; over there people *talk*, sometimes willingly and sometimes not; over there everything melts: even a stone will become talkative.”

“That’s the whole calamity,” replied my daughter. “People want to take everything by brute force. What a repulsive and unjustifiable thing it is to take hold of men with minds and opinions by the might of a fist and by the threat of a revolver!”

I cannot deny that I found it pleasing to hear the way she spoke so sensibly, in such a decisive voice, and with such coolheaded (though simulated) calm. At the same time, however, I was anxious lest this Nachmanson, who boasted so loudly about his power and violence, should have her punished by a prison sentence.

## 5.

**“You are under arrest!”**

They spent about an hour-and-a-half ransacking every room, but this did not appear to be their real purpose. Next, they wrote up a document and handed it to me to sign. It stated that they had searched the house, that I testified that all the laws governing such a search had been observed, and that I had been informed that I was under arrest.

I explained that I could not sign that everything had been according to the law when the whole notion of a house search appeared to me to be questionable. Everyone, I explained, knew the identity of Rabbi Schneersohn and his activities. It was clear to me that here was a case either of a mistake or a libel; I could not sign and give my assent to either.

I continued: “As to your desire to arrest me, it appears that the requests of my family here are to no avail — but I too have something to say about your desire.

“Whether this is a mistake or a libel, it will be clarified in a day or two. Everyone knows who I am and what I do. I have not hidden myself away. I live in one of the largest cities in the country; my home is in the center of town; I have a synagogue; and I deliver discourses on *Chassidus* on Sabbaths and festivals.

“From this you see that I am not in hiding. It would appear to me that such an arrest would arouse undesirable publicity. I think it would be preferable to wait with the arrest until you can establish the truth — that is, if the truth interests you. If, instead, you intend to becloud the mistake or the libel with layers of untruth, it is clear to me that you will regret it. You are capable of doing anything —

but you will not arrest Schneersohn with ropes of libelous deception!”

Nachmanson interrupted me: “The administration of the GPU is responsible for its own activities. It is not afraid of criticism from the surrounding world. When it issued the order to have you arrested it obviously had the necessary power. I am surprised that you speak as you do. At any rate: For your information, you are under arrest.”

I replied: “But I do not understand why I was interrupted before I managed to express my request.”

Nachmanson was losing patience: “If you have a request, then you’re allowed to make it. That’s a right that every prisoner has. But why are you talking so harshly? Don’t you understand the situation? We didn’t come here to make conversation! Nor did we come here to listen to the requests of your daughters or the rest of your family! As to you,” — he turned in anger to my daughters — “get out of here! Just talk one minute more and you’re all arrested!”

He held up his revolver and said: “With *this* I’ll talk to you, and then you’ll give up your pretty phrases!”

My daughter Chanah spoke up: “We speak the language spoken by those who at all times have been human. We don’t speak the language of those who have just come up out of the mire, who are unable to speak honestly, and who are interested only in pointing revolvers and making threats of imprisonment. Leave our father alone! Don’t take away the apple of our eye! My sisters and I will happily go to jail in his place. He is weak, and his doctor doesn’t allow him to go outside. Bring a doctor to examine him and establish whether he can be taken to jail. Take *us*, and leave a guard here until the doctor decides that our father can go out. You

are human beings, too, aren't you? Surely you, too, have what the world calls feelings? Surely you, too, have what the world calls decency?" And she burst into tears.

Smiling, I explained to my wife and daughters: "Only wishful thinking could imagine that tears and pleas could help. There's nothing in common between a cruel gentile and *pleas*."

I addressed Nachmanson in a voice of authority: "Why did you not let me finish talking? All your threats and your moral explanations about how people should talk you can tell me in jail. Here, you have to hear what I have to say. I am still within the walls of my home, and I want it all to be heard by my family, by reliable witnesses whose testimony you will not be able to refute."

"Your words," said Nachmanson, "smack of poison. So you don't like the laws of the new regime? Well, we'll have time to talk about *that*.... Now, say whatever you have to say so that it will be heard by your family, by reliable witnesses whose testimony we will not be able to refute." And he winked at Lulav and the three armed men who were there at the time.

It was my turn to speak: "I demand that I be given permission to put on *tefillin* and to pray, and if the law allows it, that my food be brought to me by no one apart from members of my family."

"You're asking for permission to pray?" said Nachmanson. "I'm telling you that you can take along your *tefillin*, as well as books, and pencil and paper. I promise you faithfully that no one will disturb you from praying, or reading and writing. You'll be back here today. When you arrive there, the officer in charge will be waiting for you. He'll ask you a few questions and you'll be able to return to your home."

## 6.

**“They’re taking our son Yosef Yitzchak!”**

At that moment, when all the talking was over, and they were simply waiting for the vehicle that was to take me to the new building of the Spalerno Prison, my revered mother<sup>10</sup> walked in. Until this moment she had been in her room and had not known what was going on, because Nachmanson had ordered everyone to move quietly so that she should not be woken. I do not know how she found out, but at this point she walked in and discovered the uninvited guests.

“What is this?” she exclaimed, and clapped her hands together in consternation. “Why did they come? Would they force their hands even on innocent people like you, my son, who work for the good of others?!”

Quickly sizing up the situation, she declared boldly: “No, my soul’s precious one! I will not let them take you away. I will go instead of you.”

She addressed herself to Nachmanson. “Take me!” she pleaded. “Don’t disturb the repose of my only son, who is always responsive to the distress of others. Do you judge even honest men so harshly? No, no! Not arrest!”

She sobbed bitterly: “My husband! They’re taking our son Yosef Yitzchak! They’re taking your only son, who sacrifices his very life to do good! Your only son, who fulfills your instructions with self-sacrifice! Brigands have come, murderers of an upright soul — and for what? Holy forebears: They want to extinguish your lamp! My son: Come what may, I won’t let them take you away!”

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10. I.e., *Rebbitzin* Sterna Sarah, widow (and cousin) of the Rebbe Rashab; she was then in her late sixties.

Nachmanson now turned to me: “Please be so kind as to calm her down. Take her to her room. It’s not my fault that she is so upset. We were quiet enough; we didn’t want to disturb her rest. Just talk to her gently.”

At that moment it appeared to me that even in the depths of evil there is an ingredient of good. Words of this kind sounded incongruous when mouthed by a cruel individual whose hands were stained with human blood. This man of rock, I mused, does he too have a heart? Does he, too, have a sense of decency? Does he, too, have a conscience? Can he, too, feel compassion? Can it be that he realizes that the sobbing woman standing before him is the Lubavitcher *Rebbitzin*, whose good name is known far and wide? Can it even be that he feels a flutter of regret over the stroke of fortune by which he has come to be an official of the GPU...?

I accompanied my mother to her room, where I spoke of things which could not be discussed in the presence of our visitors. In fact they did not disturb me at all: they had gone out for a stroll, leaving behind only armed guards to wait for the van.

## 7.

### **“Continue my work in an orderly fashion!”**

Though I had reasons to suspect this party or that, I could not determine who was responsible for my distressing predicament. It only appeared to be clear — and this conjecture I shared with my family — that I was being taken as a kind of hostage.

“For what?” asked my son-in-law, R. Shmaryahu Gourary.

“I don’t know,” I said, “but these are the facts.”

“There’s an informer,” said my mother.

“That’s it,” my wife and daughters agreed, “an informer.”

“No,” said I. “I do not believe that they would inform on me, nor do I see a clear reason for it. I am simply being taken as a hostage.”

“What do you think we should do?” asked my son-in-law.

“What to do?” I replied. “First of all, convey the message at the resting place of my revered father, the Rebbe [Rashab], and at Lubavitch, Niezhin and Haditch,<sup>11</sup> and ask the members of the chassidic fraternity to recite *Tehillim* in the synagogues during the first days.”

“The first days?!” they all chorused. “What are you thinking, G-d forbid...?”

“That,” I said, “we shall see later, with G-d’s help. There’s no need to make a noise: in no time this business will be known in many places. Whatever chassidim will do here and in other places, let them do. For your part, do what you can through contacts that you know. Above all, make it known in all the places of learning that the chassidim should not interrupt their holy work. Now, no doubt, it will be even more difficult to collect money for their support, because all the willing workers will be terrorized and intimidated, and this will apply even more to those people who do this work out of obligation: they will have a reason to withdraw.

“Let my directives therefore be clear to you: Irrespective of the loans which I owe, make every endeavor to continue borrowing so that you will be able to send the money that is needed wherever classes are conducted. Until G-d brings

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11. The *Ohel* of the Rebbe Rashab is in Rostov-on-the-River-Don; Lubavitch is the site of the *Ohel* of the *Tzemach Tzedek* and his son the Rebbe Maharash; Niezhin is the site of the *Ohel* of the Mitteler Rebbe; and the *Ohel* of the Alter Rebbe is in Haditch.



me home, it is your duty to continue my work in an orderly fashion.”

## 8.

### **Consternation, hope, fondness, compassion**

According to what I was told by one of my family, it was clear to me that my secretary Mr. Chaim Lieberman already knew what was happening in my home. He had no doubt already destroyed all the documents that could implicate him as my secretary. It would be advisable, I thought, that he leave his home until the storm had abated. Why should he, too, suffer? Besides, he was the one who would know how to keep the work going, for he knew exactly what had to be done. Hopefully, thank G-d, they would find nothing incriminating in his home.

Meanwhile my family all stood around me, their faces white from shock, their eyes tearful, their tongues speechless. They gazed at me with looks of consternation, hope, fondness, compassion, entreaty — without breathing a word.

Remarkable, was it not? After all, we were waiting for the vehicle to arrive any minute to take me to the Spalerno Prison.

## 9.

### **Spalerno Prison – dread and horror**

Spalerno! The very word casts dread and horror upon whoever hears it. It takes its name from the street over which it looms, and is popularly known as Spalarka. It is

a nightmare to all men, irrespective of religion, nationality or party. Even children know that being taken there is no laughing matter that will pass in a day or two.

Being sent there means either that one's sentence is already final, or that the prisoner is about to undergo cross-examination and, more particularly, a grilling interrogation. I assume that some readers are unaware of the distinction, but for a number of reasons I shall be brief. Cross-examination is verbal — questions and answers. Interrogation involves devices that compel speech. As Nachmanson expressed it, "Over there people *talk*; over there mouths *open*; they talk, and tell, and keep on telling!" Cross-examination is lightweight; it is conducted at other addresses. Spalerka is for the heavy treatment. And Spalerka is the address which I am waiting to be taken to in the military vehicle which is due at any moment.

## 10.

### Material for a major libel

In these limited moments there is much to say, much to request, much to order, much to organize — but at this very time the mouth will not speak, and the brain does not rule the heart. The heart is deeply excited; it does not allow the brain to contemplate nor the mind to think nor the power of speech to speak.

Nevertheless, thanks to G-d's kindness, I stood firm, and addressed a few compact words to my family on the organization of the work that had to be continued, as follows: "It is obvious that they have cast a net to ensnare me with extremely serious accusations and libels. They will also try to force me to confess on matters of which I am not guilty, that

is, on matters which are unconnected with my work of buttressing the practice of *Yiddishkeit* and the study of Torah. Come what may, they will not succeed in the slightest. If they ask me about my work I shall tell them everything — that in some measure I support the Torah and its students. If they ask me who are my associates, I will take everything upon myself. Therefore, if they arrest anyone else, G-d forbid, and attribute it to my information, know that this is an outright lie. They will get nothing out of me. Nothing in the world will force me to change this decision, and this must be clear to you.

“It is obvious to me that they already have material for a major libel against me; otherwise they would not have taken such a step. I can read in Nachmanson’s face that they know exactly what they are doing. They have no doubt created material with which they imagine they will be able to harm Jewry in general by means of the present arrest. I have perfect trust, however, that the G-d of our holy forebears will rescue me from their hands, and that I will return to my work as before.

“Make sure that you observe what I have directed you to do. Let your spirits not fall — and G-d will help us. Just make sure that you remove all the chassidic manuscripts from the house and hide them away in various safe places.”

## 11.

### I replied in Yiddish...

Barely had I finished, when Lulav returned to tell me that I should hurry into the waiting vehicle.

I replied in Yiddish: “That’s one of the things which in Russia’s current situation one can’t miss.... Even those who

arrest others may rest assured that their turn, too, will come. One mustn't hurry; no one is going to miss out!"

I put on my coat, received farewell blessings from my revered mother, my wife, and my daughters Chanah, Chayah Mushka and Sheine, and went to the room of my daughter's son, Shalom Ber, to see him before I set out for Spalerka.<sup>12</sup>

The sweet and precious child slept softly in his little iron crib. May G-d grant him long days and years and, to the joy of all our family and friends and well-wishers, may his father and mother bring him up to a life of Torah, to the marriage canopy, and to the practice of good deeds.

For a few moments I stood in his room, and a sigh escaped my heart: "May it be G-d's will that this child (*May he blessed with long and good days!*) grow to be the greatest of his brothers, and stand firmly on the same basis on which his grandfather is standing, fearing nothing in the world. G-d grant that he tread the same path that was boldly trodden by my holy forebears, for in his veins flows holy blood that is bequeathed from a father to his son, to his grandson, and to his great-grandson."

My father once told me, as I recalled during those moments, that when I cried of pain at my circumcision, my grandfather the Rebbe Maharash had said: "Why are you crying? When you grow up you will be a chassid<sup>13</sup> and you'll teach *Chassidus* articulately."

Standing now near my grandson, I thought: "Let us hope that when my grandson grows up he will staunchly tread the path blazed by our holy forebears; that he will stand

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12. Cf. Vol. 2 of the present work, p. 202.

13. For a variant version of this incident as narrated by the Rebbe, see *Proceeding Together*, Vol. 1, p. 10.

firm in the cause of Torah and the awe of Heaven, undaunted by any obstacle; that he will battle for the preservation of Torah observance and the fear of Heaven; and that he will always be of help to those who stand in awe of G-d.”

## 12.

### “Who is the commander?”

I then said goodbye to the household staff. Once the guards freed them from the kitchen, they were so shocked by what they heard and saw that they averted their gaze from me and looked at the floor, unable to return my greetings.

I kissed the *mezuzah* at the entrance to my home and sat down on a bench, while Lulav and his armed henchmen surrounded me from all sides in keeping with prison regulations.

One travel bag contained my *tefillin* (of *Rashi*, *Rabbeinu Tam* and *Shimusha Rabbah*), my *tallis*, and a *gartl*; a *Siddur*, *Tehillim* and *Tanya*; as well as a change of clothes, a handkerchief, some food, Valerian, and a small pillow. This bag, marked with the initial letters Sh. Sh., was bought and used by my revered father for all his travels from the year 5673 [1913]. I was also given a blanket.

Not wanting to carry these things myself, I handed the bag to one of the guards. Lulav sprang forward said: “Give it to me; I’ll carry it. Chassidim remain chassidim! My grandfather carried parcels for your grandfather, and I want to carry your parcel.”

Taking it from his hand I said: “Your grandfather was a chassid, so he had the good fortune to carry my grandfather’s parcels wherever my grandfather went; *you* want to carry this parcel so that I should go (G-d forbid) where *you* want

me to go. No, that cannot be! I'm not going to go *your* way. You're right: *chassidim* remain *chassidim*...!"

I returned the bag to the hands of the guard, kissed the *mezuzah*, and left, with armed guards surrounding me on all sides.

On the way down the stairs I could hear the entreaties of my family: "Let us accompany my son; ...my husband; ...our father!" As I reached the waiting vehicle in the courtyard I turned around and saw an armed guard barring their way. I called out aloud to Lulav: "Why don't the guards let them accompany me? Do you have permission to prevent that?"

My self-assured words made an impact. Lulav ordered the guard to leave, and allowed my family to walk together with me. I was even able to exchange a few words with my son-in-law, R. Shmaryahu Gourary.

The courtyard was quiet. There was no one to be seen apart from my family, the guards, and their officers, Nachmanson and Lulav.

"Here, at the entrance," said Nachmanson with a smirk, "you will have to kiss each other goodbye, as aristocrats are accustomed to do, because I will not allow you to go out into the street."

I turned to him: "For a high-ranking official who demands a signature to testify that he visited and searched the house with all due politeness and respect, it is inappropriate to prevent family members from accompanying someone dear to them."

"Go!" roared Nachmanson. "It seems that you can't yet get used to the idea that you are under arrest and have to take orders from your commander!"

"Who is the commander," I asked, "and what is the command? You can see that with all your tough words you are

not going to intimidate me. I ask you again: Fulfill my family's request!"

He immediately stepped aside and we all went out to the street.

The van was surrounded by armed men. Inside sat a dignified foreign traveler of about forty, his face white as snow, his eyes filled with terror. An armed guard faced him.

I caught sight of the big clock in the window of the watchmaker's over the road, its face as white as the faces of my family. Its crow-black digits told me that it was 2:20 a.m.

In the course of the last two hours and ten minutes, I thought, how much pain, fear and distress had my family undergone! And the cause? — A false libel; an informer; and my efforts for the preservation of *Yiddishkeit*, of Torah study!

After we had stood together for a few moments, one of the guards helped me up and I took the seat that I had been shown. The guard facing me was Lulav, because Nachmanson sat next to the driver. He held his revolver in hand, no doubt in keeping with prison regulations.

"Be well," I called out to my family, "and keep your spirits strong! May G-d grant that we all meet soon in good health!"

And off we drove.

### 13.

## The perspiration of a murderer's rage

Through the window I saw a chassid who was a friend of our household — R. Eliyahu Chayim Althaus — standing on a street corner. He was quaking and terrified, and about to burst into tears. I nodded him farewell, but evidently he did

not understand what was happening. As soon as we turned left into Lityeine Avenue I spotted his son, Pinchas. I was shocked to see the young man's white face and dark eyes as he bent over in an effort to see who was inside the van, but it seems he saw nothing. A moment later we returned right into Spalerno St. The formidable building standing there, at number 24, was Spalerka.

It was closed and fortified from all sides. Nachmanson and Lulav ordered the guards to keep vigilant watch over "those honored citizens," myself and my companion, and hurried to speak to the sentry. Surprisingly, he did not grant them admission, nor did he answer them. The watchman inside the gate opened up a peephole and asked a question. What he asked them I did not hear, but I could see that as Nachmanson and Lulav spoke they were tense and stressful. Suddenly, while Lulav returned to approach our guards, Nachmanson tried to force his way through the gate. The inside watchman closed the peephole and Nachmanson was left outside, one hand sheepishly holding on to the lock, and the other wiping perspiration from his very red face.

There are so many kinds of perspiration. One kind of perspiration expunges a man's sins; some people perspire out of sheer exuberance in the performance of a *mitzvah* or in the study of Torah; others perspire as they make a living from the pure and untainted toil of their hands; but there is also the perspiration that erupts from the violent rage of a murderer.

Lulav called out to Nachmanson: "Quick! We're going to miss out! Curses upon the head of...! To us he says one thing, while he himself enjoys his lazy sleep. We'll have to tell..., and once... takes the business in hand, he won't sleep any more. Either that, or else he'll sleep for evermore!"



We heard the lock being opened, but Lulav told us to await orders.

My companion was pallid and trembling. Without respite, his private watchman scrutinized him with seven eyes, the lance of a weapon in his left hand and the revolver in his right. My companion's clothes were tailored in immaculate European taste and his gloves were of silk, but his awestruck look was ominous: it appeared that at any minute he would die of fright.

We now received our orders: "Honored citizens, stand up and climb down!"

Instantly, all the watchmen stepped back and formed two lines between which we were to pass from the van to the gate.

My companion, who had been sitting at my right and nearer the door, got down first. I saw that I had done well by not hurrying to get out, because the moment he climbed down his possessions were taken from him. They were in the large and finely-worked trunk on which his guard had sat; it was an imported luxury not commonly seen these days.

My companion was obviously a foreigner who spoke no Russian, because he was shown by sign language that he was expected to enter the gate. As soon as two men had come out and taken the trunk, Nachmanson made a signal from inside to Lulav, who now turned to me with barely-disguised joy and addressed me in Yiddish: "Now be so kind as to walk straight ahead. *I'm* going to carry your bag, whether you want me to or not. Right now you are *our* guest, and you'll have to submit to our orders."

"That's a really big victory," I said, deliberately and confidently, "but I hope it's only for a short while."

“No talking!” ordered one of the armed guards. It seems he could not control his hatred towards Jews, especially towards a Jew who was regarded as being respected by his observant coreligionists.

#### 14.

### The task of the GPU was to terrorize

Nachmanson walked in front of me, two new armed guards were at right and left (for the previous ones had stayed outside), and Lulav followed us.

We passed through a large courtyard enclosed on each side by a building of six floors and two or three entrances. There was no one present but the sentries. Nachmanson wanted to walk fast, but had to wait for me. My feet were hurting; besides, I was in no hurry. Even before we entered the building I began to demand that he fulfill his promise regarding my *tefillin* and *davenen*.

With one heavy step after another, and with brief pauses at each floor, I climbed the staircase that led up to the headquarters of the commanding officers.

Crimson with rage, Nachmanson turned around to face me and said: “You have not yet stepped over the threshold of the headquarters in order to do what you have to do, yet you’re already coming up with demands like these?! It’s amazing that you are not even interested in finding out your situation! Don’t you know the laws governing people under arrest? First of all, at headquarters, you’ll answer all the questions in the questionnaire. You’ll pray when you reach your cell. Anyway, I think that within an hour you’ll have forgotten everything. You’ll be a little wiser concerning your real situation, and you’ll

stop demanding such kinds of nonsense. Just forget that you are Schneersohn, revered by *bogamolnikess*, the people who pray. You're just an ordinary person who is being punished by imprisonment or whatever in accordance with his offenses. You have transgressed enough and more than enough against the proletarians, but now you will pay for it all!"

My response was a wordless look that pierced him through and through; it humbled him more effectively than any argument.

He now addressed himself to Lulav: "Wouldn't you agree that when our honored citizen, who for decades has been savoring the lush delicacies of the bourgeoisie, is introduced to his new lodgings — the Spalerka salon! — and will not be enamoured of the aroma of our black bread and gruel, he'll soon forget his pride? Once he's in there, in front of the table of ..., he'll talk and talk and answer questions!"

He turned to me: "Isn't that so, honored citizen?"

I answered him as if I had not heard what he had just said to Lulav: "What has happened to your promise? You promised me, on the word of honor of a representative of the GPU high command, that you would allow me to put on *tefillin* and to pray. Why didn't you tell me otherwise when you were in my home? Who prevented you from telling the truth? Whom were you afraid of? Why did you give me your solemn promise? Does such conduct befit a representative of the GPU high command?!"

As soon as I heard his laugh of vengeful triumph, I realized that I was now dealing with a different man. This was not the Nachmanson who had been in my home; this was not even the same man who had stood here in the courtyard. He was now an official of the GPU whose prime task

was to terrorize and alarm his prisoners so that it would be easier to impose submission and to extract confessions on baseless charges.

\* \* \*

At that moment I was reminded that *Reishis Chochmah*,<sup>14</sup> at the beginning of *Maseches Gehinnom*, quotes the verse, “Who can stand and face His indignation, and who can withstand the fierceness of His anger?”<sup>15</sup> R. Zeira introduced his [mystical] comment [by quoting another verse]: “The leech [a metaphor for *kelippah*] has two daughters [who cry]: ‘Give, give!’”<sup>16</sup> And R. Elazar said: “Two groups of angels stand at the entrances of *Gehinnom* and say: ‘Give, give! Come, come!’”<sup>17</sup>

\* \* \*

A few steps later, Nachmanson opened the door of a corridor leading to the office, whistled for one of the wardens, and ordered him, “Take this citizen!” Handing him some papers he added: “These are his documents. Accompany him to Head Office and give the papers to...”

He then addressed himself to me: “Now you’ll begin to understand where you are!” — and raced off after his colleague, Lulav, who had already gone downstairs. They were obviously in a hurry to complete their all-important tasks.

My escort indicated that I should continue to the open door at the end of the corridor. “Speak to one of the secretaries there,” he said, “and she will give you a questionnaire to complete.”

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14. *Shaar HaYirah* 13:13.

15. *Nachum* 1:6.

16. *Mishlei* 30:15.

17. Cf. *Avorah Zarah* 17a.

## 15.

**Tractate *Gehinnom*, Stage One**

The corridor, twenty-five meters long and two meters wide, was lined with closed doors on both sides, and illuminated by small ceiling lamps at intervals of five meters. Ten or twelve sentinels were stationed along its length. Each of them was armed with a Cossack pike that hung over his back, a shiny sword in his left hand, and a revolver in his right hand. They all stood motionless, like marble statues, except for their constantly roving eyes.

This strange and awesome sight must fill any normal person with dread. For whom could these weapons be possibly intended? Where could one possibly find a band of people sufficiently depraved to be able to use such weapons? And could any man possibly be such a wild beast that his rehabilitation calls for punishment of this kind?

The noiseless gloom, the dark walls and the little lamps; those tall and formidable statues with their broad shoulders and tough faces; their red and black uniforms embellished by pike, sword and revolver; — all these shock the eye of the beholder and jar his heart.

I walked the length of that corridor between those rows of native Russians, in dismal darkness and deathly silence. I asked myself: Where am I going? Why am I going there? What should I do? How will all of this end?

And as I asked myself these questions, the answers came with utter clarity: I was told clearly by the guard at the entrance to this corridor that I would arrive at a door that was open to every prisoner, and there I would complete a questionnaire.

What would be next? Next! Next would no doubt come the fulfillment of Nachmanson's assurance: I had been brought to a place in which people *talk* — willingly or unwillingly, voluntarily or under duress. And as I walked on slowly I told myself: Tractate *Gehinnom*, Stage One.

## 16.

### The second team of Hell-angels

Whether unwittingly or intentionally I do not know, but evidently, because I was immersed in thought, or because of confusion, when I approached that open door I turned into another long corridor which branched off to the right. It was as long as the other, but whitewashed, and the wall facing outside was relieved by many windows. Benches lined both walls, and there were no armed guards. The numerous white doors on the inner wall were numbered and neatly labelled. I did not take the trouble to observe what was written on them, being overwhelmed by the striking contrast between the gross darkness and the armed guards of the former corridor, and the civilized light of the present one. In this spirit I walked on with bolder and surer steps, and no man asked me a word or told me a word.

As I walked I recalled that I had erred: I was meant to continue straight on to the door that was open to every prisoner. How had I come here? Would this add to my offenses? Would they trump up a charge that I had transgressed by walking in a place where prisoners like myself were not allowed to go? Would this digression supply material for a libel that I was spying out the inner byways of Spalerka?

Nevertheless, I did not hasten to retrace my steps. In the

first instance, I told myself, I would not have dared to go there, but since I was now walking down this corridor, then this was one of the workings of Divine Providence. After all, I asked myself, was this detour of mine less significant than the turning over of a crushed bit of straw, or a leaf driven from side to side? For, as our mentor the Baal Shem Tov teaches, even these subjects are governed by Divine Providence (as is explained in the *maamar* known as *Tik'u 5688 [1928]*).

Seeing a long bench a few steps ahead I sat down to rest, and recalled that my bag was not with me. I was surprised that I had forgotten it until this moment, and wondered where I had lost it. I then realized that since I had taken my leave of the second team of Hell-angels — Nachmanson and Lulav — and had come into the orbit of the watchman in charge of the dark corridor, my alarm had apparently made me forget it.

“Just as I am in this place,” I thought, “my bag is no doubt here too. At any rate, no one is going to steal it.... If Lulav took it in order to bring it to the Head Office, then it is there; if he deposited it with the watchman in charge of the dark corridor, then it is with him. Wherever it may be, I will no doubt find it safe and sound. The present moment I must exploit in order to consider my current situation, and to prepare myself for the manner in which I shall conduct myself in the room behind the door which is wide open to every prisoner.”

17.

**What of my future son-in-law, R. Menachem?**

*What is going on in our home at this moment?*

This thought crushed me. Knowing well the nature and spirit of each member of the family, I was able to picture the total situation — my mother's weeping, my wife's ashen looks and wordless sighs, the brokenhearted consternation of my forsaken daughters, the anguished concern on the face of my son-in-law. What was happening with my future son-in-law, R. Menachem, who had gone to the home of my secretary, Mr. Lieberman? Had he (G-d forbid) been caught in the act? What was doing with our friends of the chassidic brotherhood? And what were they doing?

The total picture overwhelmed me with hot tears, my heart was astir and my body trembled. Had the manuscripts been taken away? Someone was clearly taking revenge on me. It was obvious from Nachmanson's angry words and his conversation with Lulav that I was now confronting conspirators who had initiated a heavy libel, and for all I knew, they could have laid hands on the apple of my eye — the chassidic manuscripts.

And if (Heaven forfend!) this had indeed happened, that fact in itself was an awesome calamity. Would they imprison manuscripts, too?

My mind lit up as with a lightning flash: Enough of those thoughts! What about G-d? Who brought all this about? After all, everything proceeds from Him. It is true that I am a son, a husband, a father, a father-in-law, loving and beloved. They are dependent on me, and I am dependent on Him-Who-spoke-and-the-world-came-into-being. I have done what I had to do and He will do what He has willed.

At that moment I left my lowly state behind me and ascended to heavenly heights with thoughts loftier than those who dwell in houses of clay, through a pure faith and an



absolute trust in the Living G-d. And by virtue of the merit of our holy forebears,... (— The continuation of this thought is spelled out in thought-letters.)

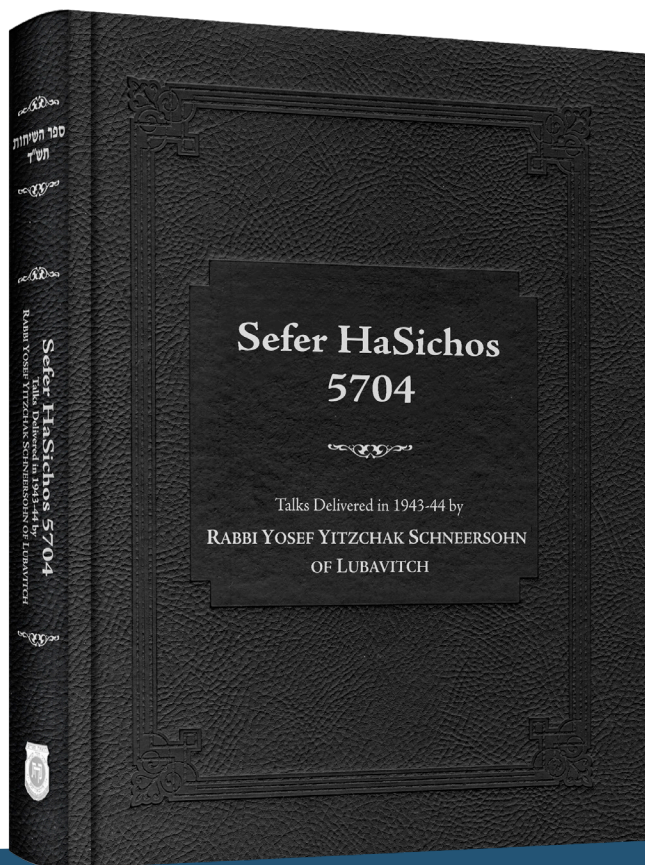




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