



The Chossid & The Gvir

Rishe Deitsch

It is possible to be completely immersed in the brilliant minutiae of Talmudic logic, or to be meticulous in the observance of every nuance of the mitzvos, but to be as spiritually lifeless as a soulless body. The teachings of Chassidus introduce the soul into Torah and mitzvos, explaining the profound spiritual meaning of every mitzvah in its supernal source, as well as the ‘spiritualization’ of character which that mitzvah is intended to achieve in the heart and mind of the one doing it.” – Rabbi Naftali Silberberg, Chabad.org

There was a poor but happy family of chassidim living in the shtetl. They sang heartily on Shabbos and Yom Tov, danced any time there was an excuse to, and were grateful for every day. The chossid and his family didn't take their poverty too seriously, and served the Eibershter with great joy. They lived with the words *Ein Od Milvado*—there is nothing and no-one besides Him.

Not too far from the chossid lived a gvir (wealthy man). He always davened exactly at the zman, made sure to hear the proper number of tekios, and of course his sukkah and schach were precisely as mandated by halachah.

But his Yiddishkeit was soulless.

The chossid and his family were especially happy during zman simchaseinu, “the season of our rejoicing.” The singing and dancing that took place in their sukkah were more lebedig and freilich than ever, and sometimes the farbrengens lasted into the wee hours. The gvir, trying to sleep in his sukkah as was his custom, was annoyed by all of it, and he resolved to put an end to the merriment once and for all. The next Erev Sukkos rolled around, and he put his plan into action...

Of course the chossid didn't own a real sukkah and couldn't afford to purchase boards. Before Sukkos, he would go around to his neighbors collecting spare pieces of wood with which to build his own sukkah.

The gvir was, well, a gvir. Not only that, but he was the only gvir in the shtetl. Everyone needed him for something. Nobody wanted to get on his bad side. So when the gvir warned everyone in town not to give his neighbor the chossid a single stick of wood, everyone obeyed him.

“I'll get some peace and quiet at last,” muttered the gvir with satisfaction, just a few hours before Sukkos was set to begin, as he put the finishing touches on his own sukkah while, down the block at the chossid's house, all was silent.

Much to his chagrin, a few hours later, after he made kiddush on exactly the right quantity of wine in his perfectly measured becher, the gvir was shocked to hear the sounds of animated singing and table-thumping coming from down the block. Enraged, he stormed over to the chossid and burst into his sukkah.

“Who gave you these boards?” he demanded. “Tell me now!”

“Of course I'll tell you,” replied the chossid with a smile. “Please, have a seat. Children, bring our guest a cup of tea.

“On Erev Yom Tov,” explained the chossid, “nobody would give me any wood. With no way to build a sukkah, I became upset. Not wanting to bring my bad mood into my house, I decided to take a walk. I walked all the way to the cemetery.

“On the way, I met the Angel of Death walking to-

wards me, carrying a coffin. ‘Where are you going?’ I asked him.

“I'm on my way to your neighbor, the gvir.”

“What for?” I asked him.

“His time is up,” replied the Angel of Death with a heartless shrug.

“Don't bother,” I advised him. ‘He's already dead. Give me the wood.’

“The Angel of Death shrugged again, and then let me have the coffin. I took it apart and used the wood to build this sukkah.”

The gvir did teshuvah right then and there. The farbrengen went on until dawn, and was lebedig and freilich.

Of all the stories told in our sukkah last year (and the sukkah enhances the flavor of the stories like salt to soup), this one was my favorite. It was told by Rabbi Mordechai Lipskier.

This summer, quite by accident, I bumped into a novel that illustrated the point of this story perfectly: “One Day and Forever,” by Sarah Birnhack, a woman I admire and am proud to say I know personally.

The story begins in the wealthiest section of Lublin in the year 1850. Zeesala Hartstein is growing up in a very wealthy home where family members don't even reach for their own handkerchief when they sneeze. Cooking, cleaning, laundry and baby care are of course tended to by the servants. And now Zeesala is happily engaged to her father's number one pick, the most promising young Torah scholar around, the iluy of Kutno and grandson of Rabbi Yakov Moshe Posner.

Zeesala scandalizes her friends by insisting on speaking with her chassan face to face for a few minutes before they get married. Aryeh Leib is a fine young man who agrees to study Torah with Zeesala after they are married, further shocking and mystifying her friends. After they get married, Aryeh Leib and Zeesala live in their own apartment in her parents' mansion with all the servants. All is well until Aryeh Leib is drawn to Chassidus. Now there's trouble in paradise. Zeesala's parents cannot accept this turn of events; they are angry, embarrassed in front of the whole community, and feel betrayed. Zeesala is torn. When her parents are out of town, Aryeh Leib plans a trip to his Rebbe.

...Zeesala sat mutely as her husband excitedly outlined his plan. Every word he uttered made perfect sense, yet her heart pounded and her head began to ache. And when Aryeh Leib begged her to give voice to her thoughts and promised not to set out until he had received her wholehearted consent, Zeesala could only turn away and sit speechless as hot tears cascaded down her cheeks.

“I thought you understood my soul's yearning

to elevate itself through the teachings of Chassidus," he whispered, as if the mere voicing of such words under Elyokim Mayer Hartstein's roof was somehow sacrilegious.

"I... I understand, Aryeh Leib, believe me, I understand," she replied. "I... I even explained it to Rochel Leah and the two Kacyzne girls."

"What in the world could have prompted you to tread on such dangerous ground?"

Zeesala's eyes flashed. "I could not abide hearing them demean some of their former friends solely because their fathers now daven in a [chassidische] shteibel instead of in the shul."

"So you gave them their first lesson in Chassidus?"

"When they saw how provoked I was they... they begged me to tell them why. I... I knew I could never completely change their opinion but I felt that since they were prevailing upon me to share my thoughts I should not waste the opportunity."

From the corner of her eye Zeesala studied her young husband's countenance. Detecting not a trace of condescendence, she continued. "Understanding that their attention span is limited, I merely told them to view Chassidus as they view the fire in their mother's cooking stove."

Aryeh Leib's appreciative smile warmed her heart and she continued in a rush of earnestness.

"...they fully understood that Chassidim believe that without the fire and enthusiasm engendered in their souls by their Rebbe, their service of Hashem is as useless as an uncooked pot of food."

Aryeh Leib's hearty laugh filled the room, banishing, if only for a short while, her sense of impending doom.

Zeesala hopes her father never finds out about her husband's trip to his Rebbe, but an incident on the road demolishes that hope. Aryeh Leib and some friends have hired a driver to take them to their Rebbe. An aged vagrant is seen lying half-frozen at the side of the road, where he had collapsed from hunger and cold. Their non-Jewish driver roughly insists they keep moving, and the vagrant be left where he is. Aryeh Leib allows all his friends to continue to safety, while he, the youngest and healthiest among them, stays with the old gentile until they can both be fetched into town.

During the two hours it took them to return with a Jewish driver, Aryeh Leib dribbled the fiery liquid [schnapps] between the vagrant's lips, while rubbing his extremities in an effort to keep him alive. His heroic efforts were crowned with success. The old beggar survived. But within hours the entire area was abuzz with the story and within a



Mrs. Sarah Birnhack, a great-grandmother who lives with her husband in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, New York, is currently the managing editor of *Inyan - Hamodia's* weekly magazine. She has served as general studies principal in girls' elementary and high schools; she also supervised a life insurance agency for a decade during which she earned her degree from Empire State College.

Mrs. Birnhack is the published author of five novels, many short stories, and several popular children's coloring books which she illustrated, as well as the writer of several full length plays that have been performed by school and camp groups around the world.

On Sunday, October 20, Mrs. Birnhack will IYH meet some of her fans at the Palm Beach Jewish Book Club (palm-beachjewish.com/bookclub), a project of Chabad of Northern Palm Beach Island. The women of the book club have read Mrs. Birnhack's writing and are curious to learn more about her and the values she promotes in her books. Though a busy and highly successful editor and unaccustomed to public speaking, Mrs. Birnhack has agreed to appear at the book club meeting because, she says, "If it will help in your avodas hakodesh, who am I to allow stage fright to interfere?"

day word had filtered back to Lublin that Aryeh Leib counted himself among the loyal Chassidim...

Now that Zeesala's father knows for a fact that his son-in-law has crossed the aisle and joined the Chassidim, he rejects him forcefully. The young couple is not even invited downstairs to the Purim seudah.

"What do you want from me, Father?" she cried, unable to bear the avalanche of guilt and remorse that threatened to bury her.

Father's anger exploded in derisive laughter. "You know where your duty lies! To whom you owe your first allegiance! ...Woe is me that all my dreams should dissolve into ashes. Woe is me that such a tragedy should befall my house. ...Either you get your precious husband to stop associating with the Chassidim or I will be forced to insist that you demand a divorce."

...He had not come to her apartment for rational discussion but rather to repeat accusations that had been printed against Chassidim and hurled at them personally for more than 50 years.

On the one hand, Zeesala loves and respects her husband and feels intensely loyal to him; he loves and respects her in return, and treats her beautifully. He is the father of their beloved baby. On the other hand, she

knows that if she wants to remain Aryeh Leib's wife, they will be completely on their own. And she was coddled by the servants all her life and now has no idea how to shop, cook, clean, or wash clothes. She can't even change her baby's diaper. All Zeesala can do, domestically speaking, is rather useless decorative embroidery.

"But... but then where would we go?" she cried [to her father].

"To the mud-filled streets of your Rebbe or to the moon. I don't care. And Zeesala, if you choose to defy me, you will leave with whatever can fit in one traveling bag, nothing more!"

"One Day and Forever" powerfully illustrates the philosophical differences behind the clash between the two neighbors, the chossid and the gvir. ■

"One Day and Forever," the best novel I read this summer, is out of print and cannot be bought in bookstores or online. A small stock of these hardcover books has been set aside at a discount price for *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* readers only. To order, contact the seller directly at bookbysarahbirnhack@gmail.com.

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Is pleased to announce that

Dr. Helen Marcus, Pediatrician

Has joined our practice in a full-time capacity

Dr. Marcus is a graduate of Brooklyn College. She attended the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed her residency in Pediatrics at Long Island Jewish Children's Hospital.

We would also like to congratulate **Julie Schnur** on receiving her Doctorate in Nursing Practice.

Eli Rosen, MD
Sherrie Neustein, MD
Julie Schnur, DNP, CPN

Avraham Gottesman, MD
Howard Levine, MD
Rita Sachs, RPA-C