

"She Spoke Softly To Him"

STORIES OF REBBETZIN SHTERNA SARAH, WHOSE YAHRZEIT IS ON 13 SHVAT

Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah was the wife of the fifth Chabad Rebbe, the Rebbe Rashab, and the mother of the sixth Chabad Rebbe, the Rebbe Rayatz, also known as the Frierdiker Rebbe.

As

a small child the Rebbe Rashab (Reb Sholom Ber) used to spend most of his day in the home of his grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek. One day in 1865, when the Rebbe Rashab was five years old and his first cousin, Shterna Sarah, also five years old, was there too, the Tzemach Tzedek looked at them and said, "*Chosson-kallah.*"

Her father, Reb Yosef Yitzchak of Avrutch, asked, "But what if when he grows up he won't be worthy of her?" The Tzemach Tzedek answered, "This boy will grow up to be greater than you!"

On Yud Sivan of that year, her father (Reb Yosef Yitzchak of Avrutch) and his father (the Rebbe Maharash)—two brothers, both sons of the Tzemach Tzedek—signed the *tena'im* in the presence of both children's *zaide*, the Tzemach Tzedek. The date of the wedding was set for 10 years later. Their wedding took place on Yud Alef Elul, 5635 (1875), in Avrutch, her hometown.

The *chassan* was accompanied by his mother, Rebbetzin Rivkah. They brought a gift for the *kallah*, a new hat, which was placed inside a box in the wagon. The Rebbe Maharash asked what was in the box. When they told him it was a new hat for the *kallah*, he asked to see it. He removed the feather from the hat.

Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah said, "When I arrived in Lubavitch from Avrutch as the daughter-in-law of the Rebbe Maharash, I noticed that all the other children were taller than me and only I was short. My father-in-law said to me, 'Don't feel bad about your height... Short trees produce the best fruits.'"

In the early years after her wedding, Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah used to write

summaries of *maamarim* that the Rebbe Rashab heard from his father, the Rebbe Maharash. The Frierdiker Rebbe writes that copies of some of these summaries are in his collection of *kisvei yad*, handwritten manuscripts of *maamarim*.

Eighteen Rubles of Your Own Money

A few years passed after their wedding and the Rebbe Rashab and Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah had not yet been blessed with children. Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah was very upset by this, on top of the fact that she was young and far from her parents. She tells this story:

“Once on Simchas Torah at the *kiddush* of my father-in-law, the Rebbe Maharash, a *mi shebeirach* was made for all those present. Afterwards the congregation entered the room where all the daughters and daughters-in-law were and made a *mi shebeirach* for all the women. For some reason they skipped over me, and even though they remembered right away and corrected the oversight, it still bothered me very much.

“After the *kiddush* I went into my room. I thought about the fact that I had not yet conceived, about my loneliness and what had happened at the *mi shebeirach*. Awash in these bitter thoughts, I burst into tears and fell asleep.

“In my dream I saw a Jew who approached me and said, ‘Why are you crying, my daughter?’

“I poured out to him everything that was weighing on my heart. He answered me, ‘Don’t cry. I promise you that within the year you will have a child, but on two conditions. One, right after Yom Tov you must give 18 rubles to *tzedakah* from your own money. Two, you must not mention this to anyone.’

“After he finished speaking he disappeared, but immediately returned with two additional people. He repeated before them his promise and the two conditions, and they agreed. The three blessed me and left.

“When I told my husband about the dream, he told his father, the Rebbe Maharash, about it. The Rebbe Maharash called me in and asked me to tell him the dream with all the details. Afterwards he asked me to describe the three people I had seen. When I finished, he said, ‘The first person you saw was my father, the Tzemach Tzedek. The other two were my zaide, the Mitteler Rebbe, and my elter zaide, the Alter Rebbe.’

“After Yom Tov I had to fulfill the two conditions. But where would I get 18 rubles of my own money? I had a dress that was made in the latest style, but my father-in-law did not want me to wear it, so it hung in the closet. I went over to a woman who was active in community affairs and asked her to sell the dress. I added that nobody should find out about it, because what would people say if they heard that the Rebbe’s daughter-in-law was selling her clothes? Through this and other means, I managed to put together the 18 rubles. That year [about ten months later], on 12 Tammuz [1880], our son Yosef Yitzchak was born.”

Supporting Tomchei Temimim

In 5669 (1909), Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah founded a ladies auxiliary to support students of Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch who were from poor families. They also provided assistance to *cheder* students. Among their activities was building a spacious hall for Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim.

Water in a Dream

Shortly before the passing of the Rebbe Rashab, Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah had a dream.

“In my dream I was in shul and a big crowd of people was there too. Suddenly my mother-in-law, Rebbetzin Rivkah, entered the shul. She went over to the *aron kodesh*, took out the Torah and carried it outside.

“The people in shul tried with all their might

to take the Torah away from her, but she fought with them and refused to give it up. Finally, Rabbi Shmuel Gourarie managed to get the Torah away from her and held it tightly in his arms so she could not take it back.

“Rebbetzin Rivkah did not give up and she again tried to take the Torah. This time she was successful. She ran outside with the Torah in her arms and everyone ran after her. I joined them and we all ran until we came to the river. I went into the river and *toiveled*, and then I woke up.

“In the morning I told my husband about the dream. He smiled and said, ‘Nu, water in a dream is a good sign.’”

The Floor Soaked With Tears

In 5683 (1923), Rabbi Simcha Gorodetzky traveled throughout Russia to collect money for Tomchei Temimim. In the course of his travels, *chassidim* would give him various messages to transmit to the Frierdiker Rebbe. When he was in Charkov, one *chossid* asked him to inform the Frierdiker Rebbe that he was unable to complete a certain mission that the Frierdiker Rebbe had given him, because his only son had passed away. Another *chossid* said that he had become seriously entangled in his business affairs and asked for a *brachah*.

When Reb Simcha returned from his journey he entered into *yechidus* and gave over the messages to the Frierdiker Rebbe. Each time he reported sad news, the Frierdiker Rebbe broke into bitter tears. He usually cried like that only on Rosh Hashanah at *tekias shofar*.

When Reb Simcha left *yechidus*, he told Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah about her son the Rebbe's reaction to his words. He added that he was sorry he had given the news to the Rebbe, because even the people who had the misfortune did not seem as broken as the Rebbe when he found out!

The Rebbetzin answered, “I don't know what to do. Every time he receives people for *yechidus*, the floor is soaked with tears.”

Imploring the Rebbe

On Purim 5687 (1927), the Frierdiker Rebbe was in Leningrad. At a *farbrengen*, the Rebbe began to speak sharply against the Yevseksia, the Jewish branch of the Soviet Communist Party. The *chassidim*, who knew that agents of the Yevseksia were in the crowd, were very worried.

One of the *chassidim* described the scene in his diary:

“Every time the Rebbe mentioned the Yevseksia, those who knew who they were would turn to look at them and we could see the rage on their faces. We knew that everything that was said at the *farbrengen* would be reported and nothing good would come of it.

“Therefore I decided to try my best to interrupt the *farbrengen*. The best way to do this was to ask his mother, the Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah, to speak to him. I went to her and told her what was going on and asked her to come quickly.

“When she entered the room, all the *chassidim* rejoiced and made way for her to get closer to the Rebbe. When she was near him he stood up, and before she said a word he turned to her with great *derech eretz* and began to gently plead with her: ‘Mother, please go back to your room and say *Tehillim* and cry that [what was spoken here tonight should not fall into the wrong hands]. That will help!’

“As he was speaking, tears poured from his eyes down his cheeks. When the Rebbetzin saw the flood of tears on the face of her only child, she began to cry as well and they both cried together silently. The fearsome sight made a powerful impression on everyone standing there and everyone present broke into tears as well.

“After a few moments the Frierdiker Rebbe said, ‘I don't do anything on my own. I asked my father.’ His father, the Rebbe Rashab, was gone from this world for seven years at this point.

“Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah begged him to take care of his health and to take a break, to rest. She spoke softly to him for a long time



Rebbetzin Shterna Sara. Photo courtesy of JEM.

until he fainted out of weakness and over-exertion and was taken out of the room.”

The Passing of the Rebbetzin

In 5700 (1940), Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah arrived in New York with her son, Reb Yosef Yitzchak, the Frierdiker Rebbe. She passed away two years later, on Shabbos, Yud Gimmel Shvat, 5702 (1942), and is buried in Old Montefiore Cemetery. She was the first one to be buried in the Chabad section of the cemetery, and her son the Frierdiker Rebbe was later buried across from her.

When Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah passed away, the Frierdiker Rebbe was in Chicago and found out the news on Motzoei Shabbos. He wanted to leave Chicago immediately, that night, but the Rabbanim of Chicago asked him to remain until the next morning. He told them, “From the time my father passed away, my ‘self’ was taken away. I no longer do what I want to do but what needs to be done. If Rabbanim are asking me to stay, I will do as they wish.” ❧

Excerpted and translated by Chaya Shuchat from the sefer Ateres Malchus, a compilation of stories of the Rebbetzins, compiled by Mrs. Chedva Segal and edited by Rabbi Alter Eliyahu Friedman.

We Have a Large Selection of
 ש"ס • שולחן ערוך • טור
 משניות • רמב"ם • חומש • נ"ך
Chosson, Bar Mitzvah Gifts and much more...



WE SHIP THROUGHOUT THE USA • FREE DELIVERY IN CROWN HEIGHTS*

Zalman Sosover
 524 Empire Blvd. • Brooklyn, NY 11225
 Phone: 347-446-5884
 Email: info@seforimsets.com

visit us at:
www.SeforimSets.com

*FOR ORDERS OVER \$75

B.II.

Put 30 years of experience to work for you!

FUND RAISING EVENTS

with

Ruchie Stillman

and

Shaina Friedman

Comprehensive Event Planning

Concept

Program Format

Audio Visual Design

Décor

Theme

Implementation

Consultation available by phone:

818.343.5576