



ROYAL SERVICE

Rabbi Chesed Halberstam worked in the home of the Rebbe and the Rebbetzin for 18 years, from 1970 until the passing of the Rebbetzin in 1988. The Rebbetzin had a special fondness for his son, Aharon Yosef (Ari), *Hy”d*, who was murdered *al kiddush Hashem* in the Brooklyn Bridge attack in 1994. These stories, told by Rabbi Halberstam, are excerpted from *The Rebbetzin*, a collection of stories compiled by Mishael Aronson and translated into English by Rabbi Daniel Goldberg.

When the Rebbe Listened to Chazzan Yossele Rosenblatt

Among my jobs was to clean all the books in the Rebbe’s home before Pesach. In one of the early years of my work there, the Rebbe was sitting at his desk studying Torah while I stood in his room cleaning the books.

In the Rebbe’s room was a record player, and the Rebbe asked me several times to play a record of the renowned *chazzan* Yossele Rosenblatt. When the *chazzan* sang the words “*Rachem na Hashem Elokenu*” (“Have mercy, we beseech You, G-d, our Master”), I heard the Rebbe humming the melody along with him.

Chumash, Siddur, Tehillim and Tanya

On the last day of the *shivah* week of mourning for Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, the Rebbe told his secretary Rabbi Leibel Groner that he wanted to see me privately together with my son Aharon Yosef, *Hy”d*.

When we entered the Rebbe’s room, he thanked me for my 18 years of service to the Rebbetzin and to him, and told me he wanted to reward me with something that I knew to be most dear to him. He took out a *Chumash* that was very familiar to me.

The Rebbe had received this *Chumash* from his father-in-law, the Rebbe Rayatz, for his wedding, and at the end, bound in the same *sefer*, there was also a “Rostover *siddur*” (prayer book published in Rostov). Every day the Rebbe used this *Chumash* to study the daily portion. After the Shabbos meal every Friday evening, he recited from it the weekly parshah, each verse twice with its *targum* (Aramaic translation) once, as required by Jewish law. The Rebbe used the *siddur* bound at the end for reciting *birchas hamazon*.

The Rebbe handed me this cherished possession and said: “As you have seen, I used this *Chumash* to study *Chitas* and ‘twice the *parshah* with its *targum* once.’ If someone has ever missed studying *Chitas*, he can make amends by using this *Chumash*. Generally speaking, this *Chumash* has the advantage of including several commentaries [in addition to Rashi] – Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rashbam, etc.”

Then the Rebbe told me the background of the Rostover *siddur*. During World War I, he explained, many young Jews were drafted into the Russian army. When the Rebbe Rashab

was living in Rostov, he directed his son, the Rebbe Rayatz, to publish a *siddur* with no prayer repeated in it, in order to make it as thin as possible, and to distribute it to Jewish soldiers, who could easily carry it with them. It became known as the Rostover *siddur*, and a copy was bound together with this *Chumash*.

The Rebbe then gave me a pocket-sized *Tehillim* and a *Tanya*—so that I received a full set of *Chitas*—and showered blessings upon me.

Then the Rebbe turned to Aharon Yosef. The Rebbetzin was especially fond of him, for she had watched him grow up from the time he was a baby and he was very often in their home over the years. The Rebbe said to him: “Thank you for the happiness you brought to my wife.” And the Rebbe gave him the *siddur* (Torah Or edition) from which the Rebbetzin had *davened* in her later years.

“Together With My Father-in-Law”

Before Pesach 5748 (1988), the first Pesach after the Rebbetzin’s passing, my wife suggested that we invite the Rebbe to be with us for the *seder*. We decided to do it when we stood in line to approach the Rebbe outside his room after *maariv* on the first evening of Pesach, to receive from him pieces of

shmurah matzah (baked that afternoon) to use at the *seder*.

Since I was too embarrassed to invite the Rebbe, we agreed that our son Aharon Yosef would issue the invitation. When our turn came to approach the Rebbe, Aharon Yosef said to him: “My mother invites the Rebbe to us for the *seder*.”

The Rebbe smiled and said: “It would create a *halachic* problem concerning the blessing.”

I did not understand what the Rebbe meant, so I approached the Rebbe’s secretary, Rabbi Groner, and asked him. He explained that when reciting the blessing on the Yom Tov candles, we need to have in mind the place where we intend to eat, and the Rebbe, when he lit his candles, had the intention of eating in his room.

The following year, in order to avoid that problem, we decided to invite the Rebbe earlier. My wife sent in a letter to invite him to our *seder*, and wrote there among the rest: “Why should the Rebbe be alone?”

We received no response. When we approached the Rebbe on Pesach evening to receive *matzah* from him, Aharon Yosef said again: “My mother invites the Rebbe to us for the *seder*.”

The Rebbe smiled again and said: “Tell your mother that I’m not alone.” He pointed inside his room: “I’m here together with my father-in-law.” •

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