

WHERE DID BAIS RIVKAH GET ITS NAME?

REBBETZIN RIVKAH ON HER 100TH YAHRTZEIT

Miriam Smetana

This article is based on selections from Ateres Malchus, a Hebrew sefer containing stories and information on Chabad Rebbetzins culled from Igros Kodesh of the Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe, Likutei Diburim, and Sefer Hatamim. The information was compiled by Chedva Segel and edited by Rabbi Eliyahu Hacohen Friedman, with guidance from Rabbi Yaacov Chaim Jacobovitz. Ateres Malchus was published by N'shei Chabad of Eretz Yisroel in 5751.

In the 1940s when the Frierdiker Rebbe established the network of girls' schools in France, the United States, Israel, and other countries, he called these schools Bais Rivkah, honoring his grandmother, Rebbetzin Rivkah.

This year Yud Shvat marks the one hundredth yahrtzeit of Rebbetzin Rivkah, the wife of the Rebbe Maharash. Famous in her own right for her tzidkus and chessed, she is most well known as a repository of our Chassidic heritage, a veritable treasure trove of stories.

Her grandson the Frierdiker Rebbe included in his memoirs many stories that he heard from her, and fondly recalls, "Every day when I came home

from cheder I used to go to Bubbe, the Rebbetzin Rivkah, to request a story. My visits continued until her histalkus, and my grandmother's stories occupy a special place in my diary and memoirs."

Once when the Rebbe Rashab was in yechidus with his father the Rebbe Maharash, his father explained to him a specific Chassidic concept. When he finished, the Rebbe Rashab told his son, "The real innermost pleasure you will experience later when you will hear a story from your grandmother Rebbetzin Rivkah that she heard from my father [the Tzemach Tzedek]." Then he added, "She is a baalas shemuah," a master of stories, or a "master listener."

Orphaned of both parents at a young age [exact age not given], Rivkah grew up in the home of her grandmother, Rebbetzin Shaina, the wife of the Mittlerer Rebbe. She was raised on stories of the Baal Shem Tov and the Mezritcher Maggid and other Chassidic luminaries. "When I turned nine years old," said the Rebbetzin Rivkah, "my mother gave me a sefer my father wrote. I treasured this sefer and read it every day until I became an expert in all the stories and customs.

"I already wrote stories myself at age 13 from everything I had heard and from what I had seen. I was especially particular to note the details of how, when, and from whom I heard the story. In those years I used to gather the small children of our families and tell them many different stories from our rich Chassidic history. Before my wedding, my mother left me two additional seforim written by my father which I cherished very much. In one he wrote what he had heard from the Alter Rebbe and was personally privileged to see. In the second he wrote about the daily conduct he saw by the Mittlerer Rebbe, who was his father-in-law."

Why Do We Eat?

In 1851 when Rebbetzin Rivkah was 18 years old (already married to the then-future-Rebbe Maharash) she became very sick and the doctor ordered her to eat immediately upon rising in the morning. She didn't want to eat anything before davening, so to comply with the doctor's orders, she woke up extra early so she could still daven first and then eat her breakfast. When her father-in-law the Tzemach Tzedek heard about this, he called for his daughter-in-law and told her, "A Jew has to be healthy and have energy. It is written [Vayikra 18, 5] vechai bahem, to live with them, with the mitzvos. This means to bring life, vitality, into the mitzvos. And in order to accomplish this you have to have energy and always be happy." And the Rebbe concluded,



Bais Rivkah of Crown Heights



Bais Rivkah of Kfar Chabad

“It is better to eat in order to daven than to daven in order to eat.”

Rebbetzin Rivkah writes, “Once a tailor delivered a garment which he had sewn for me. While I was checking the quality of his handiwork my four-year-old son approached me

with a piece of fabric he had taken from the pocket of the tailor. The tailor excused himself and said that he didn’t mean to steal it, he had simply forgotten about the extra piece of fabric. After the tailor left I said to my son, ‘See what your act

caused-- you embarrassed the tailor.’ The child began to cry bitterly. After a few hours he went to his father the Rebbe Maharash and asked how he could fix the sin of embarrassing someone. When his father asked him why, he would not repeat what had

happened. Afterwards when I asked him why he didn't tell his father the whole story, the boy answered, 'It's not enough that I erred in embarrassing someone, now I should also sin with slandering and lashon hara?'

The Custom of Telling Baal Shem Tov Stories Motzoei Shabbos

The Tzemach Tzedek called in his daughters-in-law who were living then in Lubavitch and asked them to arrange among themselves a schedule taking turns to come each Motzoei Shabbos and he would tell a story about the

are two opinions in Gemara, one, to believe it and the second, not to."

Then he turned to me and said, "But a good dream should certainly be obeyed."

When he left I remembered my Yud Kislev dream and I decided to tell my husband the dream, but when I returned home my daughter Devorah Leah had a sore throat with high fever and I became busy taking care of her and I forgot the whole matter. Then on Yud Tes Kislev I had the dream again and this time there was an additional person, an elderly

called my husband and instructed, "Call the sofer to my room, and call your mother, and quietly complete the sefer Torah."

I sewed the cover for it, and when I brought it to my father-in-law's room he said to me, "Mazel Tov! Hashem should fulfill the blessing that my father-in-law the Mitteler Rebbe and my grandfather the Alter Rebbe blessed you." And one week later, on Monday, the 20th of Cheshvan, at 9:00 a.m. in the morning I gave birth to my son [the Rebbe Rashab], to mazel tov and long life."

WHEN HE LEFT I REMEMBERED MY YUD KISLEV DREAM AND I DECIDED TO TELL MY HUSBAND THE DREAM

Baal Shem Tov. What each one heard she would then tell over to the others.

A Good Dream Should Be Obeyed

Rebbetzin Rivkah writes:

On Yud Kislev [1859], I dreamed that I saw my mother [Rebbetzin Sara, daughter of the Mitteler Rebbe] and my grandfather the Mitteler Rebbe. They looked at me with glowing faces and my mother said, "Rivkah, you and your husband should write a sefer Torah." Grandfather said, "And you should have a good son, and please don't forget my name."

My mother added, "Rivkah, do you hear what Father told you?"

I did not tell my dream to my husband. A few days passed, and my mother-in-law developed a fever and I took care of her. The next day she was feeling better and I went to visit my parents-in-law. My mother-in-law told me she had had a dream. The Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, responded, "It says in Gemara that a dream is good for a sick person. About dreams there

man, there. After Grandfather [the Mitteler Rebbe] bentched me, "You should have a good son," the elderly man said, "Amen!" Then my mother asked him to bless me. Both the elderly man and my grandfather and mother answered Amen and I then answered Amen in a loud voice, and I woke up. My husband who was already awake asked me for the meaning of the Amen. So I told him about my two dreams. "It's a good dream," he answered. "Why didn't you tell me immediately on Yud Kislev? Good dreams like this are from the matters that stand b'rumo shel olam, that come from a higher World."

The Tzemach Tzedek instructed my husband how to go about this. The best, most mehudar parchment was obtained, and the writing began on the 15th of Shvat. In Elul it was almost complete. During the aseres yemei teshuvah, the news was publicized that after Yom Kippur would be a festive seudah. A month later on the 13th of Cheshvan my father-in-law

evening and learning, so she sat on the steps near the door of the room and waited the whole night until the Rebbe left the room.

Rebbetzin Rivkah used to sit in the women's section and listen to the ma'amarim of her son the Rebbe Rashab. Once after he recited a deep ma'amar, she asked her son for whom it was said. "For a young man from Zjembin and he understands," the Rebbe replied. He was referring to Reb Grunem Esterman, who later became a famed mashpia.

When she wanted to request something from her son as a chassidite, she would enter at the appointed time for yechidus. Once she entered to ask for a brachah and a promise for a relative who was being conscripted into the army, that he be given an exemption.

"Mammeh, I can't promise. Hashem will help to free him," replied her son the Rebbe.

Again the Rebbetzin pleaded for a promise. "With the help of

The Rebbetzin as Chassidite

Once Rebbetzin Rivkah was walking out of the room of her husband [the Rebbe Maharash] and when she closed the door behind her, a piece of her dress got caught in the door. She didn't want to knock on the door and disrupt her husband's davening and learning, so she sat on the steps near the door of the room and waited the whole night until the Rebbe left the room.



Bais Rivkah of Montreal

Hashem,” replied her son, “he will be exempt.” At this, Rebbetzin Rivkah went out happily and said to the people outside the yechidus room, “Certainly a telegram will arrive immediately.” A few hours later the

telegram arrived, stating that the young man was exempt.

Rebbetzin Rivkah passed away on Erev Shabbos, Yud Shvat 5674 (1914). Her honored resting place is in the city of Lubavitch near

the Ohel of her father-in-law, the Tzemach Tzedek, and her husband, the Rebbe Maharash. ■

More on the Rebbetzin Rivkah IYH in Pesach issue of N’shei Chabad Newsletter...

“The time preceding a wedding is as precious as time can be, since the preparations that are made then affect one’s entire life.”
(Igros Kodesh, XIV, p82)

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