



*The*  
**Purim**  
**Farbrenges**

And memories of the  
**Rebbetzin**  
**Chaya Mushka**

**ESTHER STERNBERG**

## The Purim Farbrengen

**T**he Friediker Rebbe was arrested by the Soviet Communist regime on 16 Sivan, 1927, and was sent on 3 Tammuz of that year to exile in Kostroma. On 12 and 13 Tammuz he was released completely.

Prior to his arrest, the Russian government had him under constant surveillance. The Communists were always after the Friediker Rebbe because he would not give up on authentic Jewish education and maintained a network of secret *chadarim*. The government would discover them and close them down, and the Friediker Rebbe would just open another one in a new location. The teachers had pure *mesiras nefesh* to keep Yiddishkeit alive and to teach children Torah.

The Friediker Rebbe's most virulent foes were the Jewish Communists, the Yevsektzia. These young Jewish Communists were idealistic, hot-blooded, and self-confident to the point of arrogance—a toxic combination. They kept reporting to the government on the Rebbe's activities.

On Purim of 1927, hundreds of people attended a *farbrengen* with the Friediker Rebbe in Leningrad. The mood was joyous, in contrast to the somber times they lived in. A *chossid* who was there, Reb Elya Chaim Althaus, wrote in his diary about those events. He said, "We noticed some people there who were not our *chassidim*, possibly Yevsektzia."

Suddenly, the Rebbe stood up and said, "Everyone listen! We are in very big danger. The Yevsektzia *yemach shemam* have completely removed the Aibershter from their schools! Whoever you are, whatever line of work you're in, you must all know not to send your children to the Yevsektzia, *yemach shemam*. It is like killing your child... If you see someone setting a fire and he says, 'Either send your child to this school or throw yourself into the fire,' throw yourself into the fire!"

The people listening to this were terrified. They knew the Yevsektzia who were present at the *farbrengen* would go straight to the government and report this.

They had to get the Rebbe to stop speaking this way, but how to do it? Who could tell a Rebbe what to do?

They went to his mother, Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah, and asked her to stop him.

She went into the room where the *farbrengen* was taking place, and he said, "Mammeh, why are you here? It's best



you should stay in your room and say *Tehillim*.”

She replied that the way he was speaking was dangerous.

The Friediker Rebbe then said to her, “I asked the Tattah [the Rebbe Rashab] what to do, and he said to do this. I asked, like Nikolai? He said, yes, like Nikolai.” And then the Rebbe fainted.

One *chossid* explained that he was referring to Czar Nikolai, son of Pavel. Pavel trusted his son a lot. One day he said to Nikolai, “Let’s make a rehearsal for war. Can you arrange it?”

Nikolai agreed and set a date.

Pavel didn’t know that Nikolai had offered soldiers a financial reward if they pleased his father.

Pavel came, watched the soldiers, and was impressed. He was proud of Nikolai.

Then someone leaked and told Pavel what Nikolai had done. “Nikolai, you had no right to do that! You’re using up way too much money! You are banished for two years because of what you did.”

The way the *chassidim* understood it, the Friediker Rebbe was hinting that he, too, would “overspend”—i.e., have *mesiras nefesh*—just to make his father happy. The Rebbe Rashab had replied, “Yes, like Nikolai,” meaning, regardless of the consequences.

Everyone knew there would be fallout for the Friediker Rebbe due to the Purim *farbrengen*.

Indeed, not long afterward, the Communist government arrested him and very nearly executed him. When the Friediker Rebbe was in Spalerke Prison, he was told to go to the right, but he went to the left instead. Had he gone right as he had been told, he would have been shot on the spot.

There was a great outcry from governments around the world who pressured the Russians to release the Friediker Rebbe and spare his life. First, he was sentenced to death, then to

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ten years of exile, then three years of exile in Kastroma, then finally on Yud Bais Tammuz he was freed entirely.

The late 1920s was a very dangerous time for him and his family.

After his arrest and near-death, he could no longer stay in Russia. He was released from prison in Tammuz and was expelled from the country by the Communists. That very Tishrei, he went to Riga, Latvia, and it was decided that the long-awaited wedding of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin would be held on 14 Kislev, 1928 (5689), and that is exactly what happened.<sup>1</sup>

1 *IYH* we hope to bring you the full story of the famous wedding in the Kislev (2024) *N’shei Chabad Newsletter*.

### The Bond

**T**he Rebbe famously said of 14 Kislev, “This is the day that bound me to you and you to me.”

As a girl, when I heard that, I thought, okay, obviously he became connected to us because he married the Rebbe’s daughter.

But as the years passed, I realized more and more that the Rebbe’s greatest happiness was becoming bound to us, to all *chassidim*. I feel as if the Rebbe is looking at us and saying, “I am bound to you and I want to keep it that way, and I want you to show me that you feel that bond.”

Are we doing it? Are we fulfilling our task and making the Rebbe proud?

A Chabad House donor had very expensive box-seat tickets to a baseball game and invited his *shliach* to join him. The *shliach* asked the Rebbe if he should go. The Rebbe said, “If you have a *shailah*, ask a Rav. But if you’re asking me, remember, wherever you go, you take me with you.”

Wherever we go and whatever we do, we take the Rebbe with us.

Wherever we go, we need to ask ourselves: Does the Rebbe want to be there? Does he want to go along to the places where we take our children?

Does the Rebbe want to be in our homes?

### “Hashem Is Feeding Billions...”

**I** was fortunate to inherit a relationship with the Rebbetzin by way of my father’s family. For seven generations in Russia, the Gurary family was close to the Rebbeim and their families. The relationship continued once they immigrated to America, and my father would frequently visit the Rebbetzin and tell her about his life and his children’s lives.

Before I met my husband, my parents wrote to the Rebbe about the *shidduch* and the Rebbe agreed that we should go out. My future husband was then living in Israel and was not able to leave the country, so I flew to Israel to meet him.

When my husband asked the Rebbe about going out with me, the Rebbe said yes, on the condition that he would learn for two years after the wedding. Because the Rebbe had referred to “the wedding” even before we met, we both had a sense that this was it. But my father wanted to make sure that I really wanted to marry him and wasn’t just going along with it because of the Rebbe’s answer. He wanted to set me up with other *bachurim*. But after I met my husband, I insisted that I wasn’t interested in anyone else.

The two years of *kollel* ended right before Pesach and my husband started looking for a job in the field of *chinuch*. There were no jobs available. I complained a lot to my parents about this.

I went in for *yechidus* with the Rebbe when I was in my ninth month of pregnancy (as was the practice then), and he said, “I hear you are worrying about *parnassah*.”

My father had told the Rebbetzin about my comments and she had told the Rebbe. There were a few times I got into trouble this way.

The Rebbe then said, “Don’t you know Hashem is feeding billions of people? And you think He doesn’t have enough for you?”

I felt embarrassed and terrible, so I said, “I’m not worried about *parnassah*, but my husband wants to be in *chinuch* and if he doesn’t find anything he may end up in business.” The Rebbe told me not to worry and everything would be okay. A short while later, my husband got a job in *chinuch*.



Mrs. Esther Sternberg

### The Woman Who Fled From Honor

**W**hen the Rebbetzin was sitting *shivah* for her mother, Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, I went for a *shivah* call. I had recently had my first son after four daughters. The Rebbetzin asked me questions about him. She was eager to know if he was the same type of child as my father was when he was a child. My father was rambunctious, the type of child who would pull off the tablecloth, and she wanted to know if my son had that same personality. As it happens, this son is quieter and more reserved, but through our discussion I realized just how well the Rebbetzin knew my father from the time he was a child in Russia.



Whenever the Rebbetzin would host guests, she would set a beautiful table with real china and pastries. One time while the Rebbetzin was shopping in the bakery for these pastries, a young man recognized her waiting in line. He went to the manager and said, “How could you let this woman wait on line? Don’t you know she is the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s wife?”

The manager was surprised and said he never knew who she was. He went over to the Rebbetzin and told her to come to the counter and he’d take her order so she wouldn’t have to wait. The Rebbetzin refused, saying she didn’t want to be treated differently than anyone else in the store. She waited in line, bought what she needed, and went home. After that, she never went back again because she knew they’d recognize her and treat her differently.



During the years that the Rebbe was giving people private *yechidus*, he would see people on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights, and often spoke to them for hours, only coming home in the wee hours of the morning. Sometimes *yechidus* took so long that the Rebbe would first *daven Shacharis* for the next day before returning home. All those nights the Rebbetzin spent alone at home. My father told me that one time he spoke with her and said, “If you would tell your husband you’re afraid to be alone for so many hours, he would curtail *yechidus* at a certain time to be home with you.”

The Rebbetzin just smiled back as if to say, “You don’t understand... I would never do that.”

She realized the Rebbe was there for the *chassidim* and for the world, and she didn’t want to interfere with that or take him away from that.





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Therefore, she took a step back and remained behind the scenes. She knew if she would go out amongst us, she would receive attention and honor from everybody. The Rebbetzin kept away from the public so people wouldn't give her that honor.



The Rebbe treated the Rebbetzin with the utmost respect, like she was a queen. My father at one point was in the business of importing cultured pearls from Japan. One time, the Rebbe asked my father to order pearls because he wanted to make a necklace for the Rebbetzin. My father, of course, ordered the most beautiful pearls. The

shipment arrived and was given to the Rebbe. The next day, my father got a call from the Rebbe. The Rebbe said, “The pearls are not beautiful enough for my wife. Please order new pearls for her.” My father ordered larger, shinier, and more expensive pearls. When the second shipment arrived, the Rebbe said that they were still not beautiful enough. Only after my father ordered a third shipment of even more special pearls did the Rebbe accept them. This is just one small example of how the Rebbe treated the Rebbetzin as a queen.



After the Rebbetzin's passing, the Rebbe said: *Vehachai yiten el libo*. The living should take to heart. We should take to heart her life, what she stood for, and strive to emulate that. The Rebbetzin gave up everything for the Rebbe to be with us. She knew that the Rebbe needed to be there in order to guide us, the *chassidim*, to prepare the world for Moshiach. In her honor, let us do what the Rebbe told us is our mission: to help our fellow Jews and bring them closer to Yiddishkeit, and through this prepare the world for the coming of Moshiach.

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*This article is based on several talks that Mrs. Esther Sternberg gave for the Crown Heights Women's Circle. For more information about the Women's Circle, please visit [chwomenscircle.com](http://chwomenscircle.com) or email [info@chwomenscircle.com](mailto:info@chwomenscircle.com).*