

Excerpts from HaNidach

Chapter 1

(9) Great snow fell all that week, from the celestial level to the lowly world. The black earth turned white, and the heavens remained dull, and people entered their homes, between oven and stove,<sup>1</sup> and in the city no one departed or entered.<sup>2</sup> But on the fifth day to Shabbat the trait of *chesed* triumphed.<sup>3</sup> The sun shone over the land, and the snow began to melt...

The day descended and those who trembled at the word of Gd began gathering in the study hall. The learned closed their books, and the youths ceased their singing. The *shamash* lit the candles, and the prayers washed their hands and prayed.

They were praying, and two elderly women broke through the door, wailing, to seek mercy for Aydele, modest and pious. They opened the Ark and hugged the Torah scrolls and called to Gd mightily, "Gd, please heal her,<sup>4</sup> on behalf of her chicks who have not sinned." And so they cried, until their tears met and merged.<sup>5</sup>

Between minchah and maariv news was heard in the study hall – a *tzaddik* had come to town.<sup>6</sup> His few allies were strengthened and filled with joy, that their Rav had had mercy on their city, to visit them on this Shabbat. They prepared their hearts and spirits to greet his holy countenance. The uninformed thought that the Rav had come to the city only to heal Aydele, daughter of Rabbi Avigdor the Parnas, but those who knew the hatred of the Parnas for the sectarians knew that this tough person would overturn the entire world to keep that *tzaddik* from stepping foot in Shibush.<sup>7</sup> [But] they still had some hint of a thought; Rabbi Avigdor was in pain, and it would be a burden for him to evict [the Rabbi].

(10) When day broke, the few Chassidim left the city to greet the *tzaddik*. Some of the people of Shibush joined them, to see his entrance. They said, "If he is a *tzaddik*, the entrance of *tzaddikim* induces awe of Heaven." And anyone whose heart was uncertain about belief in *tzaddikim* convinced himself, saying, "If people thirst to see him, this is a sign that the Shechinah is upon him."<sup>8</sup> While they were anticipating him, the wheel of a wagon began hammering along in the street of the city. The entire place was filled with joy; "The Rebbe has come, the Rebbe has come!"

His intimates were energized, and they drew close to the *Merkavah*.<sup>9</sup> They greeted the Rav and untied the horses from their reins and took their places to draw the *Merkavah* along. Immediately, the Rav descended from the *Merkavah* and mixed with those who had come to greet him. They said to him, "Rebbe, why did you descend? We have come to greet you and you descend from the *Merkavah*?" He told them, "I saw that you fulfill the mitzvah of greeting guests with great passion, and I descended from the *Merkavah* to include myself with you in this mitzvah."...

A Jewish householder, childless, who had never entered Chassidut, made his house available in order to be perfumed with the blessing of that *tzaddik*... The people could not separate from him, and he could not separate from them, and he was warmed by the light of their love.

(11) At that same time, Rabbi Avigdor left the room of his sick daughter, Aydele. He heard the voices of the Chassidim, joyously escorting their Rebbe. He trembled and said, "How long will this sin be stored with me?"<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Avigdor cloaked himself in Shabbat clothes, scrubbed his head with water and coiled his *peiot* with beer, fixed up his hat and prepared his cloak and looked in the mirror for beauty. Why all of this? So that he would impress the *poritz*, and he would listen to him...

<sup>1</sup> A talmudic phrase for a small place in which one might sit while grieving (Taanit 30b)

<sup>2</sup> A biblical phrase used to describe the city of Jericho when it anticipated a military assault (Joshua 6:1)

<sup>3</sup> A popular phrase in Chassidut; see Sfat Emet Lech Lecha 5647

<sup>4</sup> Moshe's prayer for Miriam in Bamidbar 12:13

<sup>5</sup> This may be connected to Hosheia 4:2 and Gittin 57b on the merging of blood of martyrs.

<sup>6</sup> לעיר בא לעיר is a standard announcement in Chassidic communities, heralding the arrival of a Rebbe.

<sup>7</sup> Shibush is S.Y. Agnon's regular stand-in for his hometown of Buczacz, which had its own troubled history with Chasidim and Mitnagdim. See Israel Cohen, The Buczacz Community, <http://www.karniel.org/buchach/book/Community.htm>

<sup>8</sup> This is a Chassidic saying; see, for example, [http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks\\_org\\_24376\\_47.pdf](http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks_org_24376_47.pdf) and [http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks\\_org\\_23187\\_29.pdf](http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks_org_23187_29.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> This is a kabbalistic term for the Divine throne, based on various passages in Tanach

<sup>10</sup> Sanhedrin 95a; Gd asks King David how long the guilt for the massacre of Nov will go unpunished

The intimates of the *tzaddik* were energized, and they took white clothing, abandoned their mundane activities and went to the bathhouse to purify themselves for Shabbat and to stand before their Rebbe with a clean body. And Jewish girls baked challot and cooked meat and fish and increased various types of kugel for the pleasure of Shabbat, with a guest like this. But the hope of Man is worms. The Satanic deed triumphed, and the noble complied and sent an officer to chase out Rabbi Uriel from the city, for Rabbi Avigdor had brought bad speech against him.

At that same time, Rabbi Uriel stood cloaked in a tallit and crowned in tefillin, and his face shone from his prayer. The officer entered and saw the illumination of his face, and stood in confusion, waiting for him to finish his prayer. After he completed his prayer, [the officer] said to him, "My master has decreed to remove you from the city, please leave." Rabbi Uriel removed his tefillin, and wrapped their straps like the wings of a dove.<sup>11</sup> He did not finish before the officer grabbed him by the hand and said, "Take them and go."

(12) His group of Chassidim stood and cried *Chamas!* and sought revenge upon their enemies to punish them properly, for the Heavenly Name they had disgraced and for the Shabbat pleasure which had been destroyed. His holy heart was awakened, but he said, "Uriel, Uriel! Are you truly concerned for the honour of His Name, or are you concerned for your own honour? And how will you know the truth?" But nature triumphed and he cursed the Parnas,<sup>12</sup> and a harsh curse was uprooted from his mouth, that one who was banished would be banished from him.<sup>13</sup> And all who were present nodded their heads and said, "He has bitten Avigdor in his tail like a serpent, woe to him, woe to him, so is good for him, so is appropriate for him."

Rabbi Uriel left the city, and his group of Chassidim left with him. The snow was melting, and the rain descended with force, and the land was partially smooth and partially sunken. They hesitated and walked, hesitated and walked, reciting Song of Songs.<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Uriel walked and recited, "Do not look upon me that I am dark, that the sun has blackened me, the sons of my mother have attacked me,<sup>15</sup>" and his group of Chassidim recited after him, "Behold, my beloved is pleasant, even pretty.<sup>16</sup>"...

(13) The innkeeper saw them and his blood chilled with fear; Gd forbid, there was trouble in the city and they had fled here! He ran and brought them into his house and asked, "Why has my friend come to my house?<sup>17</sup>" They told him the entire story. The innkeeper was filled with the joy of a simpleton.<sup>18</sup> This Avigdor, who would not let them make a minyan in the village – now Gd had brought him something to anger him. Immediately, he turned to them with a happy face and told them, "Remove all worry from your hearts, my masters. We have meat and fish here, thank Gd, and no lack of beverage, to eat and drink according to Gd's word." And he bowed before the Rav and greeted him, and looked with shame at his own clothing and his pants of animal hide. He said, "A tzaddik comes to my inn and I greet him with mundane clothing!" The Rav nodded in the manner of satisfaction, but in the depths of his heart he groaned for the children of Gd who greet the holy Shabbat in such clothing. And when the Rav groaned, so did his Chassidim. Shabbat is a day for Gd, and they were grieving and tossed and moved about and away from their families. And so they groaned, until the Rav rebuked them. They repressed their groans in their hearts, and were silent...

And the Rav led the prayers with holy passion, and when he arrived at *Lecha dodi* he actually left physicality, and he applied his two legs and went out to dance to greet the bride. And all who were present were elevated from level to level, until the end of the entire prayer...

(14) And Rabbi Uriel would [normally] minimize Torah speech, for Rabbi Uriel would say, "It is not speaking of Torah that is important, but doing and fulfilling the words of Torah." Now Rabbi Uriel did not repress his holy speech, and he intentionally brought himself down to simple speech, so that even the simplest of his intimates would understand, and he taught the weekly parshah, Parshat Vayetze Yaakov...

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<sup>11</sup> A reference to the tefillin of a Jew who was persecuted by the Romans for wearing tefillin; they were transmuted into dove wings so that he could escape detection. Shabbat 49a, based on Psalms 68:14.

<sup>12</sup> To truly appreciate this scene, one must see Sefer Dorot heChadash with a similar and yet very different story involving R' Avraham Dovid of Buczacz. See תהנהג ביצירה החסידית של עגנון pg. 82-83.

<sup>13</sup> See Samuel II 14:14. And one must see Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Sichot haRan 189, <http://breslev.eip.co.il/?key=2330>

<sup>14</sup> Reciting Song of Songs is an ancient practice for Friday afternoons

<sup>15</sup> Song of Songs 1:6

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 1:16

<sup>17</sup> Yirmiyahu 11:15, although taken out of context

<sup>18</sup> This phrase is used in Tanya 1:33 to describe the joy of a simpleton when he can host a human king

After *Birkat haMazon* they spread out on long benches and coloured boxes, and the host and his wife ascended over the oven, and the house was silent... The candles were guttering and the smoke column rose, and the Rav did not move from his place, and he drank the smoke of the Shabbat candles. The members of the group lay with open eyes and did not sleep in the bosom of their pleasures, and they cloaked and crowned every statement that came from the mouth of that tzaddik, and they taught mountains upon mountains of intentions<sup>19</sup> from his every motion.

## Chapter 2

(17) There is no snow as attractive as the snow of the end of Shabbat. What is that snow like? Like the feathers of angels' wings. Israel is beloved, for even the ministering angels remove their wings in their honour and spread carpets for them from the entrance of the synagogue to the entrance of their homes when they depart to recline at the meal of King David<sup>20</sup>...

And Rabbi Uriel sat and sang songs of the end of Shabbat, and he sighed and waited and delayed until making Havdalah, for as long as Rabbi Uriel did not make Havdalah, the keys of Gehennom<sup>21</sup> were in his hands, and out of mercy for the wicked who would be returned to Gehennom it was hard for him to pick up the cup of Havdalah in his hand, until they showed him the light of the next Shabbat...

(18) And so they sat. The most holy, the Rav, Rabbi Uriel, crowned in reverence and the light of his face like the light of the seven days.<sup>22</sup> To his right Elyakim Aryeh, a Jew who knew to rejoice on Simchat Torah and cry on Tishah b'Av. And beside Elyakim Aryeh, Leib the Silent, who prayed with force until his teeth flew from his mouth. And beside Leib the Silent, Maharam the Mohel, a Jew of stature. And beside Maharam the Mohel, the elder from the village. He was the one who had brought the Torah scroll, from which they read the weekly portion. And beside the elder from the village, Natan Nata, husband of Chayah Sarah the storekeeper. And beside Natan Nata, husband of Chayah Sarah the storekeeper, Yaakov Yehoshua, who was counted in the assembly of important people. And beside Yaakov Yehoshua, Ephraim Shlomo, the great drinker. He began to spice the Rav's table with his jokes. Beside Ephraim Shlomo, the great drinker, Zanvil Berish the shocheit, a Chassid who had been removed from shechitah by the Parnas. And beside Zanvil Berish the shocheit, a Chassid who had been removed from shechitah by the Parnas, Elimelech Meizlovitz, descendant of Elimelech the water-drawer, about whom the Baal Shem Tov – his soul stored in the heavens – had said, "Have you seen my friend Elimelech? When he prays, the gates of Heaven are open." Each day he would draw water and fill the barrels of the needy for free, and pray at sunrise. Once he was coming from the well, and he went to pray. It was harshly cold, and his sleeve froze and stuck to his skin, and he could not put on tefillin. He lowered the sleeve by the handles of the bolt until the flesh of his arm peeled, and his blood flowed, and he put on tefillin, as it is said, "And my hands dripped myrrh upon the handles of the bolt."<sup>23</sup>...

(21) Rabbi Uriel remembered how the entrance of Shabbat was in silence and tearful faces, and now it departed with great noise and the light of honour. Great fear befell him – might this light only be from the *kelipah* of Nogah,<sup>24</sup> Gd forbid? He turned his eyes from the joy and said, "Master of the Universe, who sees the shame of the shamed and my broken heart, give Your light and truth to those who walk before You." Immediately, his limbs were moved by the light of truth. At that time Rabbi Uriel turned his mind from the expulsion, and put his heart to the secret of the Creator's deeds, for all that happens in this world is at Gd's supervision, and there is no difference between that which happens according to His will and that which happens that is not according to His will...

(22) Rabbi Uriel arose and looked at the world itself, and he was inflamed with an awesome passion from the chain of worlds and the refined realms, until he was afraid that he might cease to exist. He put his forehead upon the window glass to chill his awesome *dveikut*, so that he could keep his soul in his body.

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<sup>19</sup> Eruvin 21b uses this phrase for deducing mountains upon mountains of laws from every element of a biblical letter

<sup>20</sup> This name for Melaveh Malkah is brought in Rabbi Tzaddok haKohen's Pri Tzaddik Devarim Motzaei Yom haKippuim 11

<sup>21</sup> The concept of keys of Gehennom appears in various midrashim

<sup>22</sup> See Chagigah 12b, on the light of the first seven days of Creation, created on Day One and replaced by the light created on Day Four, and stored for the righteous in the future

<sup>23</sup> Song of Songs 5:5

<sup>24</sup> A mystical element which is situated between purity and impurity; on Friday night it becomes holy, but that leaves with the departure of Shabbat

### Chapter 3

(23) On a bed of grief Aydele lay, and there was no cure for her illness... Suddenly she saw an angel before her, his length from one end of the world to the other, full of eyes from the sole of his feet to his skull, his garb fire, his clothing fire, entirely of fire, with a knife in his hand and a drop of bile suspended from it.<sup>25</sup> Immediately, her face turned green and the joints of her spine popped and her bones separated and Gd in His holy presence descended to her, as it were, and appeared to her, and she gave Him her pure soul.

Snow covered the ground, and the house was covered in shrouds...

(25) [The children were reading a book of wondrous deeds of tzaddikim, including a tzaddik bringing miraculous healing.] Rabbi Meshulam spread his two hands and cried out from his heart, "All of the 'ends' have come and gone,<sup>26</sup> this cannot be, this cannot be." And he jumped up and left the house. Where did Meshulam go? Where did he turn? Rabbi Meshulam descended to the village, to Rabbi Uriel, to seek mercy for his wife Aydele, that she not die.

Rabbi Avigdor knew all that had been done.<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Avigdor turned his two ancient eyes down upon his only daughter as she was expiring, and his heavy tears flowed into her tears. He strengthened his heart with [thoughts of] the merciful Gd, of great mercy, who would have mercy upon her and send His help from His sanctum.

At that same time Rabbi Avigdor had a thought in his heart – perhaps they would say that in the merit of the prayer of Uriel his daughter Aydele had been healed, and people would then stumble because of her! Rabbi Avigdor turned his two eyes heavenward and he said, "Master of the Universe, please take her life immediately, lest the power of falsehood<sup>28</sup> increase in the world because of her, Gd forbid." Not even a few moments passed before the 'end' of the body was completed, and her soul exited in purity<sup>29</sup>...

(26) The dead are forgotten from the heart,<sup>30</sup> and her son Gershom entered their hearts, sitting in the yeshiva of Torah with his relative, the Rabbi, several parasangs away from Shibush. When they remembered Gershom, all of them began to speak of the glory of the Talmud which his [future] father-in-law, Rabbi Zundel had bought for him, and they spoke in praise of its commentaries...

(28) [From the letter Rabbi Avigdor sent to Gershom after the shivah:] But after my return I have some comfort when I remember that your mother, of blessed memory, when she was about two years old, her nursemaid brought her to see the Strypa river, and for an instant she turned her attention from your mother z"l, and your mother z"l fell into the Strypa, and she sank in mighty waters beneath the bridge, where the water was very deep, more than the height of two men. And when a man from the butcher shop saw, he did not remove his clothes, and he jumped into the water and he saved her from death and he brought her to my home. And now see the wonders of the Perfect Intellect.<sup>31</sup> The deeds of Gd are great, for He wanted her to leave behind sons and daughters...

I ask one thing of you, this I request.<sup>32</sup> Although I know that you will not join with empty, reckless people, but only with those who revere Gd, of great hearts, still, I see fit to warn you firmly against the sect of Chassidim who are suspected of nullifying the *brit [milah]*, drunkards who have spread like weeds...

### Chapter 4

(29) During this season the luminaries in the heavens are muddled, and they did not finish the Shacharit prayer before the time for Minchah arrived, as though the sun had stopped serving its duty before Gd to benefit the creatures from its light.

In the study hall, the oven was cooled and a damp darkness enwrapped the household implements, and a damp, cold draft blew from the books and fluttered into a person's limbs and sapped the desire to learn, as though Gd forbid all love of Torah was gone from the world.

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<sup>25</sup> The image of a person on the deathbed witnessing the "angel of death", with this appearance, is found in Avodah Zarah 20b.

<sup>26</sup> Psikta Zutrita Shemot 3:20, among other places

<sup>27</sup> Esther 4:1

<sup>28</sup> The concept of כח השקר is popular in chassidut; see Shem miShemuel

<sup>29</sup> See Sanhedrin 68a on the death of Rabbi Eliezer

<sup>30</sup> Berachot 58b speaks of the dead being forgotten from the heart

<sup>31</sup> Job 37:16

<sup>32</sup> Psalms 27:4

Gershom triumphed and studied. In the corner, between the Ark and the window on the east side of the study hall, he sat and read and learned and immersed himself in Torah. This even though a spirit of sorrow hovered over him every day; from the time of his mother's death he imagined that the heavens were with him in his pain...

When he remembered that she was dead he began to moan and cry, and to desire and yearn and long for the day when he would return to his house and take her siddur and join his voice with those of his young brothers when they stood in the synagogue and recited Kaddish, and he would cry on the neck of his father until his eyes wore out from tears. This is Gershom, who studied Torah and mourned for his mother...

(30) The youths were stretched out on their benches, and they devoured their nights in their sleep. The entire world was deep in sleep, and the candle burned and drew near to its end. The yahrtzeit candles were quiet in their sediment, and the clock awoke people for midnight, and the time had arrived for Gershom to sleep. But Gershom knew himself, that even if he would go to his dwelling and lie on his bed, his rest would not be restful. Gd had cut his life with suffering, and even if he would return to his dirt, his troubles would return with him.

At that time, Gershom began to question Gd's justice, why He had created him...

(31) The day was not yet lit, and the *shamash* called for service of the Creator. But Gershom did not rise like a lion to the service of his Creator.<sup>33</sup> Not only did he not awaken the dawn,<sup>34</sup> but he did not even merit to awaken himself. The shades were sealed, and the light of sunrise did not shine through, and the household implements made black, long shadows, to which the imagination gave life. Gershom kept himself in bed, and they moved along and came to the point of reaching him.

(33) From evening to evening Gershom involved himself in Torah, and his thoughts floated in the higher wisdoms. Most of the day, he stood on the ladder of the book repository and read books and ascended the *sansinim*<sup>35</sup> of wisdom. His mourning became sweeter, and Divine kindness sheltered him all day. His heart was softened by this sensitivity he had inherited from his mother, and he also softened it with popular *aggadot* which draw a person's heart to love of Gd. Gershom did not yet know the light of the truth of the tzaddikim...

## Chapter 5

(34) "Do not arouse, do not awaken," the text says, and because the yeshiva students mentioned his betrothed to [Gershom], all sorts of affection were awakened in his heart...

And when Gershom arrived near his city, he found his brothers and sisters standing by the *eruv* and waiting for him. They mobbed him and took his bags from his hand, and while one embraced and hugged and kissed him,<sup>36</sup> another hung on him and kissed him...

Rabbi Avigdor asked Gershom whether he had completed a tractate, and which tractate he had completed. He told the cook, "Give him something to eat."...

(36) [This scene takes place at the Passover Seder at Gershom's future in-laws:] They poured the cups and took their *Haggadot*. Rabbi Zundel had one, his wife had one, and Menuchah had one. Gershom began to fear that they might combine him to read with his betrothed from the same book. In truth, Rabbi Zundel had ordered a *Haggadah* for Gershom, but since the craftsman had bound it close to Pesach when he bound the Talmud, they had decided not to use it because of some bit of chametz.<sup>37</sup> Rabbi Zundel stood and took an old siddur from the rafter and gave it to Gershom, and Gershom's mind was eased.

They made Kiddush over wine and read the Haggadah, they drank and ate and drank and blessed and finished. Rabbi Zundel took his pipe, and before he had put it in his mouth, sleep caught him and he slept. And even the hostess did as her husband, and dozed. And Gershom read and added, and since he had drunk four cups his heart was full, and he sang in a pleasant voice. Menuchah heard and was happy, as though a brother had been given to her and he was filling the house with the sound of Torah. Gershom read *Chad gadya*, and Menuchah answered him *Chad gadya, chad*

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<sup>33</sup> Avot 5:20, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 1:1

<sup>34</sup> Psalms 57:9 and Berachot 4a

<sup>35</sup> See Song of Songs 7:9

<sup>36</sup> See Song of Songs Rabbah 8:1, which uses this phrase for a reunion of long-lost siblings

<sup>37</sup> The fear is that chametz in the paste might not dry out and become inedible before Passover. See <https://books.google.ca/books?id=B8b8LEI2nAoC&pg=PA190&lpg=PA190>.

*gadya d'zabin Abba*. And so they added and read in Song of Songs,<sup>38</sup> him a verse and her a verse, until they completed the entire book and parted from each other.

Gershom came to sleep in his grandfather's room. While it was still day, they had brought there his mother's bed on which to sleep, so that his body would lie in rest and pleasure. He ascended the bed, recited the first paragraph of Shema, and covered himself in his mother's cover. He had some childishness in him, as though he was a baby lying beside his mother, until the Master of Dreams came and made him sleep with verses of Song of Songs and the image of his betrothed...

(38) A spirit of the outdoors grabbed Gershom by his cloak and drew him to tour a bit in the city. Close to minchah, Gershom came to a street, hidden from the major road. He saw two men standing by a house, looking for a tenth to come complete the minyan, and he entered.

Although Shibush was a small town and Gershom was well-known in the town, they did not recognize him when he entered. Once they recognized him, they thought he had been sent by the Parnas, to harm them. [But] they remembered their Rebbe's curse and they said, "He is a dead man, and we need not fear him. If someone should fear, he should fear." When they saw his depressed appearance and his charm, they understood that it was chance that he had come here.

The room was small, its form like a dwelling. When he entered, Gershom thought some Jew had set up a minyan in his home. When they reached *Kedushah* and he heard them say *Nakdishcha*,<sup>39</sup> he realized he had entered the domain of "the sect". He leapt from his place as though bitten by a snake, but the pleasantness of the prayer enveloped his heart, and he did not leave. The enthusiasts saw him, and they no longer said it was chance that he had come here...

(39) After they finished *Maariv* they went out to dance, and they sang pleasantly *Atah Bechartanu*.<sup>40</sup> Gershom stood from the table and took a book in his hand and covered his face, lest he see Jews acting immaturely. One of the group patted his shoulder and pointed to the dancers, saying, "How beautiful are your feet, O princess."<sup>41</sup> After only a few moments, Gershom put down his book and concentrated fully on watching the dance. Even though he knew the dance was a dance, he contemplated each movement, and his lips began to move with the pleasant tune, until they finished dancing and they blessed each other *Moadim l'simchah*.

Gershom left the *shniebel*, and a sort of elixir of life bubbled in his limbs. The nights of Nisan were at the height of their beauty, and a sweet smell came from the fields close to the city, and he enjoyed the beauty. While walking he met an old man. Gershom said, "Shalom." The man brandished his stick and said, "Empty one! I am about seventy years old,<sup>42</sup> and I have lived near their temple all my life, and I never entered there! You, once you arrived here your spirit rose rashly upon you and you entered their house."

(40) In those days he did not read Psalms or Job, which bring rest to the soul; sadness was even more beloved to him than a page of Talmud, Gd forbid.

Sometimes he read *Reishit Chochmah* and he dampened the pages with tears, and he saw himself dwelling in the seven levels of Gehennom, and he mentally accepted upon himself all manner of punishment for his very existence... When he remembered his betrothed, it was only with painful emotion, for she bound him to this lowly world...

(42) [While trying to sleep] Gershom could not repress his tears any longer, and he cried bitterly from the great pain. Rabbi Avigdor jumped from his bed and awakened his household. Rabbi Meshulam came and soaked a towel in vinegar and rubbed it on his son's chest, as he had done for Aydele of blessed memory, for they thought he had heart pain. In truth, there was pain in Gershom's heart, but not as his household thought...

## Chapter 6

(43) Rabbi Avigdor wanted to ease the heart of his household. Rabbi Avigdor said, "Since my son-in-law Meshulam has entered his 36<sup>th</sup> year, I will make a feast of thanks, for he has left the category of 'Men of blood and trickery, they will not live out half their lives.'<sup>43</sup>" He sent the *shamash* and invited his relatives to a cup of blessing that evening...

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<sup>38</sup> There is an old practice of reading Song of Songs after the Seder, until falling asleep. See the Haggadah of the Shelah pg. 170a.

<sup>39</sup> This is the text of *Kedushah* in the siddur popular among Chasidim; others say *Nekadeish*.

<sup>40</sup> From the amidah of holidays.

<sup>41</sup> Song of Songs 7:2

<sup>42</sup> A loaded phrase for Passover! See Mishnah Berachot 1:5, cited in the Haggadah.

<sup>43</sup> Psalms 55:24

[Menuchah's] friends began to embrace her and hug her and kiss her. One of them held her with her two hands and said to her, "Come, I will tell you what I heard from Father. So I heard from Abba: All day, Regional Rabbi discussed fine points of Torah with Gershom. You think he defeated Gershom, it is not so, Gershom defeated him. You think he did not admit it, it is not so, he said explicitly, 'No one ever defeated me, only this young one.' You think he was angry, it is not so, he was ready to give Gershom a gift. And what was it? Ordination. When? When you and Gershom are sitting and rejoicing at your wedding."

Menuchah arranged a basket of fruit before her friends, to interrupt their prattle...

(45) The Rabbi agreed [to participate]. Rabbi Avigdor added and invited the seven councilmen.<sup>44</sup> A minyan gathered, and they recited *birkat hamazon* with "Elokeinu".

To fulfill the statement of our Sages<sup>45</sup> that those of refined mind in Jerusalem would not recline at a feast unless they knew with whom they were reclining, Rabbi Avigdor opened and said, "Rabbi, the elder official who sits to the right of his eminence is Rabbi Yaakov, son of Rabbi Yitzchak, may Gd avenge his blood, from the grandchildren of the milkman who would not eat meat from Shabbat to Shabbat, and from the line of the holy Sh'lah. And the official who sits behind him is Rabbi Moshe haKohen, grandson of the Ot Emet who is mentioned by the rabbis of the generation in their responsa, who struck the men of the accursed sect of Shabbtai Tzvi with the rod of his mouth. And the official who sits behind him is Rabbi Yosef Shemuel, whose name is like that of his grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Shemuel who studied Torah standing<sup>46</sup> for 25 years, and learned the entire Talmud 42 times, fulfilling *v'dibarta bam*...

(46) The Rabbi shut his eyes and focused his thoughts and began to speak on the matter of the day, and he presented a sharp *pilpul* until the faces of those reclining there were illuminated from his Torah. When he had finished, he said to Gershom, "Gershom, what do you respond to this?" Gershom leaned over and repeated the Rabbi's words in summary, including the entire *pilpul* in a few words to ensure he had heard it properly, and in his words he answered part of it and refuted part of it, and tied to it a great *pilpul* on the matter of the day. The Rabbi's face glowed, and he said, "Beautiful, beautiful!" and he did not stop showing love. Gershom bent his head and repeated verses which keep people from arrogance...

(47) While they were eating, the chazan arose and gave his voice pleasantly and blessed with the *Mi sheBeirach* Rabbi Meshulam, the focus of the meal, and all of the guests answered Amen with pleasant hearts. Even the Regional Rabbi, who rebuked chazanim for going on at length with tunes, enjoyed it and said "Yeyasher kochacha Chazan."

The officials asked the Chazan where he had heard the tune. The chazan deceived the higher mind and that of the officials, saying, "I received this from my father, and my grandfather, the tune from Sinai." The chazan knew that the Regional Rabbi did not tolerate new tunes, how much more so a tune which he had heard from a passerby, such that one might be concerned that he was from the sect...

Once they had mentioned the sect, the Regional Rabbi said, "I will also tell you a story: Once an *avreich* fled from his father-in-law's house and went to his Rabbi's house. They brought him from the road, to me. I instructed to cut off one *peah* and half his beard,<sup>47</sup> so that people would hear and see."...

(49) Once Rabbi Meshulam found [Gershom] upset, and decreed that he wander about each day. The fields surrounded the city, and he wandered in the fields or sat in the shade of a tree and looked at the gardens and the flowing rivers. Creation smiled upon him. The Sun decorated the entire world, the trees and bushes stood in their beauty, and the field produced pleasant aromas. But if you have lost faith, there is nothing that all of the gifts of Creation can give or add.

An *avreich* said to Gershom in the study hall, "Do we not say, 'The commandments of Gd are straight, they gladden the heart,<sup>48</sup>' and you learn with an angry face!" Gershom's eyes streamed tears. "What can I say, what can I tell? Gd has found my sins.<sup>49</sup>" "She has fallen, she will not rise again,<sup>50</sup>" a verse fell into his mouth,<sup>51</sup> from a high roof to a deep

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<sup>44</sup> The *עיר טורי העיר* were the city council in the times of the Talmud, and similar bodies were appointed in Jewish communities throughout the ages.

<sup>45</sup> Sanhedrin 23a; and Agnon used this passage to introduce himself in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech

<sup>46</sup> Per Megillah 21a, this is the way Torah was learned until the death of Rabban Gamliel, when people weakened and they began to sit

<sup>47</sup> A sign of humiliation; see Samuel II 10:4

<sup>48</sup> Psalms 19:9

<sup>49</sup> Genesis 44:16

<sup>50</sup> Amos 5:2; and see Berachot 4b on ways to read this verse positively and negatively

<sup>51</sup> On the significance of a verse falling into one's mouth as an omen, see Berachot 55b

pit.<sup>52</sup> Man only sees with his eyes. They said, "Gershom is crushing his body with Torah," and they blessed themselves, "We wish that we would be like Gershom." And the sectarians opposite them pointed at him with their fingers and said, "The curse of the tzaddik, the curse of a tzaddik makes a mark." What was Gershom like? Like silk the tailor cuts, from which he makes a beautiful garment. Had he not cut it, he could not have made a garment from it...

(50) [The students who followed tzaddikim] said to Gershom, "You have black bile.<sup>53</sup> With our Rebbe, you could see how to serve the Creator with joy." But Gershom sealed his ears and did not wish to hear their words. An avreich said to Gershom, "Gershom, I will tell you something the likes of which you have not heard. When I was a youth, I was troubled by doubts in faith, Gd save us, until my spirit was dark and my life was not life. Once I told myself, 'The world says there are tzaddikim who help people with their counsel,' and I began to draw close to them and I merited faith in the sages..."

Daily they spoke to him and their words did not enter his heart. One time his heart began to beat powerfully, and he desired and yearned to see the Rav, Rabbi Uriel. The thirst inflamed his heart, and he cooled his heart with Torah. And yet, the thirst reignited, like an oven. Even if he put his entire soul into Torah, he could not extinguish the love.<sup>54</sup> If he would tell his relatives, he would be disgraced with them and they would mourn him as for the dead. If he would not tell, how could he bear it? He turned his eyes heavenward and said, "Master of the Universe, I can depend only upon Your mercy." And he picked himself up and went out in secret.

The Mitnagdim were battling the Chassidim, and they exiled the Chassidim, each from his in-laws' home, and they separated them from their wives. They broke their windows and dirtied their tzitzit, and they even sent their hand against their house of prayer. If the Chassidim stood on Friday night to pray, then uncircumcised ones, drunk from the wine of the Mitnagdim came and extinguished the Shabbat candles, and did not leave light in the house of prayer, or a candle, candelabra or lantern. And when the Chassidim complained to the noble, the noble sent his servants and they destroyed the house of prayer at night...

(51) That day, Zusha the Butcher travelled to the village, to Zanzvil Berish the Shocheit, to slaughter an animal. On the way he found a youth lying, arms and legs outstretched. He pushed him with a rod and called out, "Arise, why do you sleep? Are there insufficient benches in the study hall, such that you lie down to sleep at a fork in the road?" When this one did not rise, Zusha jumped from the wagon and saw that it was Gershom, grandson of the Parnas, lying on the ground as if dead. He picked him up in his arms and revived him and put him in the wagon and returned to the city with him. Had Zusha known that Gershom had sought to go to Rabbi Uriel, he would have carried him there himself... In the time of his illness Gershom read stories of wars and chronicles and *Tzitzat Noveil Tzvi* about the deeds of Shabbtai Tzvi and his group. This reminded Gershom of the Chassidim, and he remembered that he had been headed to that Uriel, and his eyes darkened in shame. He said to himself, "Had my illness not grabbed me on the road, I would have strayed and left the path." He justified the [Divine] verdict and saw his illness as a Divine kindness. He said of himself, "To oppress you, to benefit you in the end,<sup>55</sup>" that Gd had made him suffer in order to help him in the end. And from then on he read and studied and learned *pipul* as did the schismatic students, until the *Chozar*<sup>56</sup> arrived and brought him back to his root.

## Chapter 7

(52) [The following scene takes place on Shabbat, when a *Chozar* visits Shibush, and ends up at the table of Gershom's family:] The *Chozar* saw the host sitting, his head and bulk<sup>57</sup> in a book, and his son-in-law sitting opposite him, his head and bulk in a book, and the eyes of the holy matron, the Shabbat Queen, gazing at them from the gravy, and them not looking at her. The *Chozar* remembered his holy Rebbe, who was actually greater than any man by two heads, and whose holy body was different from on all other days, from Friday after immersing until after Shabbat. The *Chozar* cried in his heart, "Master of the Universe, why have You chased me out of the lot of Your beloved,<sup>58</sup> to crush my feet in a

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<sup>52</sup> See Chagigah 5b

<sup>53</sup> In Greek medicine, this was a cause of depression; Rambam and others mention it in this connection, too.

<sup>54</sup> Song of Songs 8:7

<sup>55</sup> Devarim 8:16

<sup>56</sup> A *Chozar* is a follower of a Rebbe who also has an unusually strong memory; he is tasked with memorizing the Rebbe's speech on Shabbat, and recording it after Shabbat.

<sup>57</sup> A mishnaic expression for one's entire body being immersed in something; see Eruvin 10:6 and Succah 2:7.

<sup>58</sup> See Samuel I 26:19, where King David says something similar



desolate wilderness? I said I would travel from city to city to educate properly the humble of the land,<sup>59</sup> to guide them in paths of righteousness for Your Name,<sup>60</sup> and I would keep myself from benefit, and I never challenged Your actions, Gd forbid, but now sadness and worry almost fell into my heart on Your holy Shabbat."...

(53) The *Chozzer* joined in their battle of Torah. At first he wanted to show them Torah with pleasant paths, but he realized that this was neither the place nor the time, lest the Parnas recognize his type and expel him. He wanted to stay here, since he had smelled the bottle of the youth<sup>61</sup> and found him to be a precious vessel, ready to receive purity. He hid his deeds and concealed his ways...

One day, the *Chozzer* said to Gershom, "Today we will learn a simple page of Talmud." Gershom was surprised; this genius who had left no great matter [unlearned] wanted to learn a simple page of Talmud? The *Chozzer* saw that Gershom was surprised. The *Chozzer* said to Gershom, "Come and see how blind are the eyes of men. A man sees something and thinks, 'How simple this is,' and in truth it contains many hints, and many matters depend on it. Regarding them the verse says, 'They do not look at the deed of Gd.'<sup>62</sup>" And so he clarified and went in this matter, many awesome lessons. And once Gershom's heart was opened, and the secret of Gd hinted in the simple words was revealed, the *Chozzer* began to guide him from level to level on the rungs of wisdom, until Gershom saw things that no one in Shibush had ever seen...

(55) And [now] Gershom had already left all of the books and he did not read them; he only remained alone in the house, sitting in the shadow of Gd and nursing from sacred thought...

(56) Gershom stood and stood and reviewed all that his ears had heard, and from the great energizing of his spirit he began to cry. He leaned against the wall and stood as long as he stood.<sup>63</sup> In the end he drew out his head and said, "The time has come to accept Shabbat." He uprooted himself from his place and went to the study hall.

He came to the study hall and found that most of the congregation had already gathered for prayer and were sitting, saying Song of Songs. Some of them said it aloud, with a tune, and some said it quietly. Gershom took a siddur and went to his place by the *bimah*. He opened his siddur and put his head between his two arms, and he stood for a brief time, until he drew out his head and began to recite Song of Songs with terrifying passion and awesome might. He recited and went until he reached the verse, "Draw me forth, I will run after you."<sup>64</sup> Then, when he arrived at the verse, "Draw me forth, I will run after you," his soul departed in purity. His lips were still moving, "The King brought me to His chambers,<sup>65</sup>" "My soul left when He spoke."<sup>66</sup> So died Gershom, grandson of Rabbi Avigdor, for Rabbi Avigdor had fought with Rabbi Uriel, with the Chassidim he had fought.

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<sup>59</sup> Isaiah 11:4

<sup>60</sup> Psalms 23:3

<sup>61</sup> An expression for testing someone, usually intellectually; Shabbat 108a and Bava Batra 22a

<sup>62</sup> Isaiah 5:12

<sup>63</sup> Agnon uses the same phrase for someone whose death is pending in *לפנים מן החומה* pg. 32.

<sup>64</sup> Song of Songs 1:4

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 5:6