

# SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS KORACH 5783

Volume 14, Issue 41 – 5 Tammuz 5783/June 24, 2023

Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

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## Logs, Rain, and a Rebbe's Promise

By Aharon Loschak



*Art by Sefira Lightstone*

The situation looked bleak. For months on end, the heavens had been hermetically sealed, with nary a drop of rain in sight. For Reb Aharon Safir, his brother Reb Yitzchak, and their partner Reb Moshe Shwartz, this spelled certain financial ruin.

The three were loggers, spending the spring and summer months in the Polish forests, chopping down trees. When the season drew to an end, they and their crew

would tie the logs together in large rafts and send them downstream on the giant Vistula River, where they would float along until they reached the big industrial factories in the port city of Danzig (known as Gdansk in Poland).

### **Hopelessly Waiting for the Rain that Simply Refused to Come**

That's how it was every year. But this year, with a totally dry season, the normally majestic Vistula was parched and low. The water wasn't deep enough, nor the current strong enough to carry the enormous logs along the long winding path to Danzig. Giant piles of logs lay strewn all over the forest floor, hopelessly waiting for the rain that simply refused to come.

Reb Aharon and Reb Yitzchak were devout Chassidim; Reb Moshe, not so much. With no other possible recourse, the brothers decided to pay a visit to their Rebbe, the esteemed and saintly sage, Rabbi Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam, the Shinover Rebbe. Reb Moshe passed, opting to stay in his hometown of Zhikov instead.

When the brothers arrived in Shinova, they hurried into the Rebbe's chamber and threw themselves before him with a desperate plea. "Rebbe, please help us! Our entire life's fortune lies at stake and the rafts won't budge! Please, pray to G-d to bring us blessed rain!"

### **"What Do You Expect from Me?"**

"You want me to bring rain?" the Rebbe replied in surprise. "Am I G-d? The Talmud tells us that G-d holds three keys tightly in His hands—and one of them is rain! What do you expect from me?!"

"But Rebbe, you must help us," they insisted. "It's not just our personal fortunes at stake. Our bankruptcy would cause a tremendous desecration of G-d's name and impact the lives of so many others. Due to our stellar business records, hundreds of average Jewish families invested their fortunes with us, eagerly awaiting their returns when the logs arrive in Danzig and our vendors pay us. If we go under, we take them with us!"

"And Rebbe, think of all the vendors who will be furious at us, Jewish merchants. The landowners from whom we leased the forested woods, the merchants in Danzig expecting our logs, not to mention the hard-working loggers who sweated away deep in the forests. Please, Rebbe, you must help us!"

Moved by their passionate pleas, the Rebbe relented. "You know what? Stay here for Shabbat, and let's see what can be done after Shabbat."

When Shabbat ended, the brothers returned to the Rebbe.

"I must tell you," the Rebbe began, "I insist that rain is beyond my realm and is in G-d's hands alone. But there is something I can help you with: I have a personal



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**Mordechai Lach**

**in memory of his father –**

**Zev Yehudah ben  
Mordechai Zvi, a”h.**

tradition from my revered teacher, the Seer of Lublin, that anyone who helps the descendants of the saintly Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk will merit immediate salvation.

### **Help a Poor Orphan Girl Get Married and the River will Indeed Flow**

“And what do you know? Right here, in my home, lives a poor orphan whom we’ve raised since she was a young child—and she is from the family of Rabbi Elimelech. Alas, my wife and I lack the funds to properly marry her off. So, if you commit to underwriting all of her wedding expenses, I assure you that before the week is out, the Vistula will still flow.”

That was all the pious brothers needed to hear. Without batting an eyelash, they pulled out whatever cash they had on hand, more than enough to pay for the wedding and then some.

The Rebbe accepted the money, and the brothers set off back to the forests to take care of business. In the meantime, they sent a message ahead to their third partner, Reb Moshe, to prepare the logs for passage. To his credit, Reb Moshe followed their orders despite his skepticism, and his workers immediately started preparing the logs for travel. The laborers sweated and grunted as they collected massive piles of twenty-five logs apiece, and bound them with thick rope.

### **Mocked by All the Other Loggers**

All the while, the other merchants and loggers laughed at them. “The sky is blue like the sea, the air thick like a blanket, what are you doing?!” they taunted. “You’re wasting your time. It’s not going to rain anytime soon!”

But the three partners paid no attention to their mockery, confident in the *tzadik’s* blessing that before the week was out, rain would come. And sure enough, Friday started like every other day of the week: hot and bright. But as the day wore on, the skies turned a dark gray, thunder clapped, lightning flashed—and sweet, sweet rain roiled the earth with a vengeance.

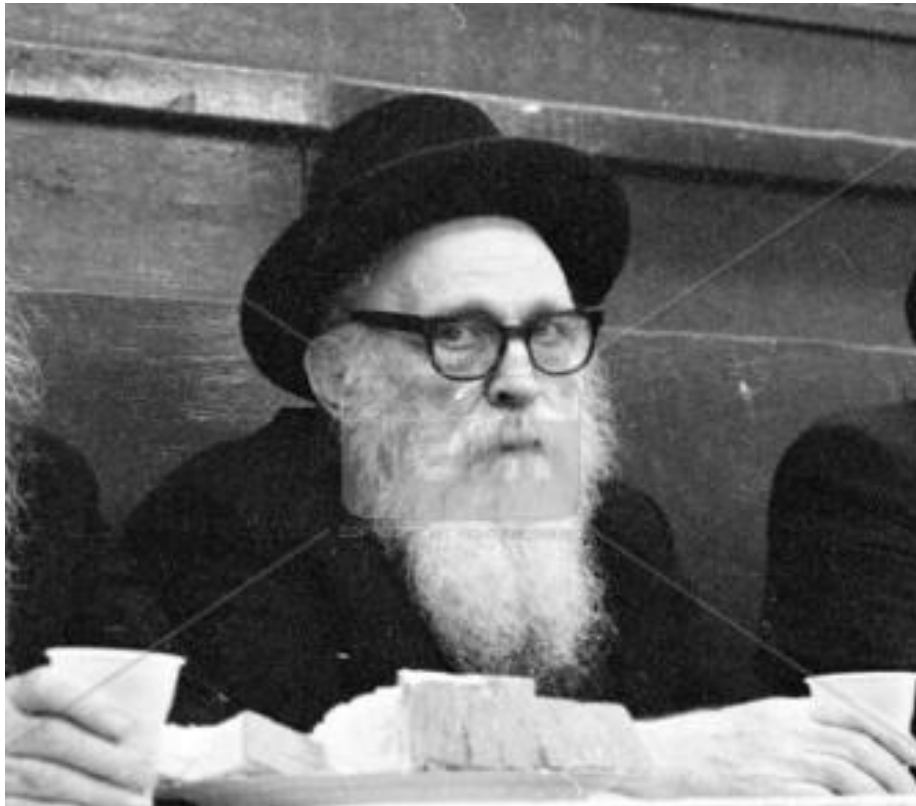
All the logs in the forest were pulled into the raging river chaotically, smashing into each other and the banks to the point that they were rendered useless. Only the sturdily bound piles of Safir and Shwartz were peacefully lifted off the ground and sent blissfully downstream to their final destination, their trust in the *tzadik’s* blessing vindicated.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shelach 5783 website of Chabad.Org*

## A Blast from the Past (1999)

# A Miraculous Story

by Rabbi Eliezer Avtzon



**Rabbi Meir ben Gershon Avtzon, of blessed memory**

The year was 1941 and the world was the darkest it had ever been. In the midst of the horror, Hitler's Nazis turned on their loyal friends in the Kremlin and invaded the Soviet Empire.

My father's family was living in the city of Lughansk in Eastern Ukraine at the time. He had already been exiled to one of Stalin's colonies for "prisoners of the state." He spent over seven long, horrible years there for the "crime" of being a yeshiva bachur (student), otherwise known as a "counter-revolutionary."

Upon his release after the war, my father began a desperate search for his family. He had no idea what had happened to them, but his deep faith and relentless optimism drove him ceaselessly to try every avenue possible to find them.

He was told that there were no survivors from his town. The Nazis had surrounded and sealed off the city, rounding up all the Jews and killing them.

Bereft at the news, my father found himself with no choice but to accept the tragedy and mourn for his parents. Not knowing their actual date of death, he was instructed by his rabbis to commemorate his parents' yarzeit on the same day as he said the Kaddish for my mother's parents, who both died during the war of hunger. Shortly thereafter, my parents, together with my mother's two surviving sisters, escaped Russia by posing as Polish citizens who had been given permission by the Russian regime to return to their homeland after the war.

### **From Poland to France and Eventually the United States**

From Poland they made their way to France where they lived for almost five years, finally immigrating to the United States with the help of HIAS in 1957. Through all the years, my father rarely spoke about his family. Any mention of them brought with it such terrible pain and nightmares about what they might have endured. He could not bear the thought that he had not been able to see them one more time or say good-bye to them.

What neither he nor anyone else in our family knew all this time was that, in fact, his parents had actually escaped Lughansk six weeks before the Nazis sealed its borders.

In the chaos of the war years and their aftermath, so many people were lost that finding accurate information about what had happened to individuals was often impossible.

Now this story takes a leap forward to 1996. A granddaughter of my father's niece was working for the Jewish community in Kharkov, Ukraine under the leadership of Rabbi Moshe Moscovitz, the Rebbe's emissary to that city. She was the artist for his monthly magazine.

### **A Young Woman's Question Reunites a Family**

In the course of one of their many discussions, this young woman happened to mention to Rabbi Moscovitz that her grandmother had once told her that she (the grandmother) had an uncle, Meir Avtzon. She said that they had not heard anything of him since the war and she wondered whether the Rabbi might have ever heard of the Avtzon family.

Rabbi Moscovitz didn't have to look very far. He and I had been classmates and close friends and, at that time, in 1996, we were working together. The Global Jewish Association Relief Network (GJARN), which I direct, had opened an office in Kharkiv in 1992 and Rabbi Moscovitz and I were often in contact with one another. He immediately called me and I confirmed to him that my father's name is indeed Meir.

When I called my father, he couldn't comprehend what I was telling him. He had been convinced for so many years that his entire family was killed by the Nazis, that the shock of this news was more than he could accept on the spot.

Several more transatlantic phone calls were made, and after hearing all the names of his brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles, my father, with trembling hands, finally took the phone and spoke to his niece. It was the first time he had spoken to any member of his family in nearly 50 years.

### **Bringing Gifts to Our Newly Reunited Relatives**

One-and-one-half months later, on a routine visit to the Kharkov office, I went to visit my new relatives and bring them presents from America. Before I left to go there, my father sat down with a tape recorder and told his family everything that had happened to him since they lost contact with each other. He filled a 90-minute tape and could probably have filled many more.

During that trip when I first met my family, I learned all the exact dates of death of almost everyone, except for my father's father for whom we only had the month and the year since he died running from the Nazis. My father's mother, on the other hand, lived to be well over 90 years old. She never knew that her son had survived, immigrated to America, and had a family of 15 children and dozens of grand- and great-grandchildren, *keniena hora*.

### **Recited Kaddish for His Mother in a Hospital Room**

My grandmother's *yarzeit* is the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, the day all Jews mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple. The first time my father would have been able to commemorate her true *yarzeit*, he was unfortunately hospitalized for severe pneumonia, so a *minyán* [quorum] was brought to his hospital room, where he led the services from his bed.

Thank G-d, he recovered and is doing well, and we take this opportunity to extend him our best wishes for many more years of good health and *nachas* from all his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I think this personal story illustrates that we are indeed all one Jewish family around the world - in the United States, in Ukraine, in Israel, everywhere - and that we are truly linked to each other more strongly than any of us might ever imagine.

By helping each other - by caring and sharing - we carry out our responsibility to one another as compassionate human beings, and, at the same time, we sometimes end up helping ourselves as well, as happened to me when, through GJARN, I found family that we thought had been lost.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shelach 5760/1990 edition of L'Chaim, a weekly publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn.*

# Walking into A Revolution

By Risa Rotman



**A.D. (Aaron David) Gordon, founder of  
Israel's first kibbutz - Kibbutz**

In the summer of 2006, my husband and I unwittingly walked into a battlefield or rather a revolution.

My husband's office offered a discounted price at a resort on Lake Kinneret. You had to go on the dates they reserved, so it didn't often work out that we could leave our children and go. On the few occasions that we were able to take advantage of the offer, it was a lovely vacation for the two of us. Sometimes when deemed necessary the youngest family member accompanied us as well.

Once up north, we would take advantage of the local attractions. We were sure to visit *kvarim*. We had our favorites, but we would search for new ones that we had never encountered before. There is something so uplifting being next to the resting place of a famous *tanna* from the *mishnayos*. These people were real; not just characters from some made-up book of fables.

We also made sure to have some fun. One year we went rafting. We felt like two little kids, rowing our boat along the Jordan River. Another time we took a Jeep tour. We drove our own jeep, following the lead jeep through small streams and a mango grove.

The year in which this story happened, my husband suggested we visit the dam where Lake Kinneret and the southern Jordan River meet. I am fascinated by seeing where two bodies of water meet. In the vicinity, was a museum belonging to Kibbutz Degania Aleph. My husband thought it was a nice outing to round out our



mini vacation and so we drove into Israel's first kibbutz, a mere 106 km due north from my home in Jerusalem.

Before continuing on my story, I need to fill in a small detail. My husband, Chaim, felt it was his obligation to create a *Kiddush Hashem* at every moment in his life. He felt strongly about dressing as a *chareidi* Jew wherever he went. Then people who only knew about *chareidim* from the negative media attention would encounter a polite, helpful, caring man, who happened to be wearing a black hat and jacket. He made a great ambassador for his cause.

### **An Abundance of Rain for the New Dam**

Back to our mini vacation. We had just spent two nights at the resort and were on our way home. We stopped first at the dam separating the bottom of the Kinneret and the southern Jordan River. I thought back to 1991. While there had been almost no rain that winter, Sadaam Hussein had rained 38 missiles over our heads. By untold miracles, only one person was killed through those missiles. But our prayers for rain were answered the very next year. In fact, it rained so much that the dam was opened to allow the rising waters of the Kinneret to flow down to the Jordan so that the city of Tiveria and surrounding areas wouldn't flood.

Chaim followed his map over to the kibbutz and we entered through the gates. We were greeted with well-manicured lawns surrounding low buildings. Midday I suppose most people were at their work. There was a stillness in the air. We asked for directions for the museum and were pointed in the direction of the office. Chaim parked and we opened the worn-looking door of the museum office. We heard a woman speaking in excited tones before we actually came into the room.

### **A Dispute of Where to Put the New Synagogue**

"We will not put the *Beit HaKenesset* there," she said emphatically. At that moment, she saw my husband, black hat and suit. Her mouth gaped. She swallowed. She looked back at the phone she was speaking into and said hastily, "I'll speak to you later."

She looked at our curious faces and said, "I will NOT discuss this with you." We shrugged our shoulders as if to say, that's your choice. Suddenly she took an abrupt turn and started to explain the dilemma.

"We have decided to build a *Beit HaKenesset* here on Degania Aleph and that's fine..." the woman explained.

My mind ran fast. *That's fine...* I looked at the 60-something woman in a short-sleeved shirt, short pants and sandals. She probably lived her entire life here on Kibbutz Degania, having never stepped foot in a *Beit HaKenesset*. And now she thinks it is fine to have one on the kibbutz?



**At Kibbutz Degania Aleph, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak (“Fitchi”) Blau, left, director of Chabad at Kibbutz Kinneret who also serves Kibbutz Degania Alef, stands with Bentzion Chanowitz, administrator of the Beis Yisroel Torah Gemach in Brooklyn, N.Y. with a special Sefer Torah donated to Kibbutz Degania Alef.**

Now came her problem. “A *Beit HaKenesset* is a good thing,” she repeated. I still couldn’t believe I was hearing this out of this ultra-secular woman’s mouth. “But they want to use the house that belonged to our founding father, A. D. Gordon. It’s just not right,” she exclaimed.

My husband and I were just absorbing the idea that this woman is accepting of the idea of building a shul on Kibbutz property. If this had been suggested just a couple of years earlier, she would never have agreed. But times were changing, and a kosher kitchen and *Beit HaKenesset* attracted more tourists. Not to mention that

the younger generation who grew up with no knowledge of their Jewish heritage were showing signs of restlessness. In order to save the kibbutz, they would need to build a Jewish house of worship. But, where?

“You have to understand,” the kibbutz-reared woman explained passionately, “A.D. Gordon was a great man of values; a man of philosophy, of science and literature.” Her eyes shined as she described the kibbutz’s founding father. “But no, he was not a religiously observant man. To put a *Beit HaKenesset* in his home would be unheard of.” I was thinking she needed the word, sacrilegious, but this conversation was going on in Hebrew and it was better I said as little as possible.

The wheels in my mind turned furiously. It seemed in my limited world view that a shul was better anywhere on the kibbutz than in a specific place. I also wondered if this anti-Torah Zionist even deserved to have his home turned into a *Beit HaKenesset*. After all it would be a huge *zechus* for him. Who says he deserved to have that *zechus*?

The words came out of my mouth, “Why don’t you build the *Beit HaKenesset* in a central location where it will be easy for everyone around the kibbutz to access it?”

Her eyes lit up and she said, “Yes! That’s a perfect solution. The *Beit HaKenesset* should be in a central location where everyone can get there easily.” I wondered if she even heard her own words. She was suggesting that a Jewish house of worship, a place she possibly never visited in her 60 odd years, should be easily accessible to everyone on the kibbutz. Stranger things have happened.

We paid for our entrance fee and the woman quickly picked up her phone to share my suggestion with her fellow kibbutz members. A shul does exist on the kibbutz today. I hope this nameless woman visits it often.

*Reprinted from the June 11, 2023 website of The Jewish Press.*

## **The Rebbe Who Refused to be Bitter**

Rav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam, zt”l, the Klausenberger Rebbe, lost everything to the Nazis, ym”sh. He lost a wife and eleven children, a life of holiness and purity, and a community of followers and students. When the Rebbe arrived in New York after the war on an Erev Shabbos, people expected to see the broken individual of someone who exemplified the Malchus of Torah.

However, this is not what they saw. Throngs of Yiden, who themselves were survivors of the Holocaust, many of them, like the Rebbe, had lost just about

everything, walked through the streets of Williamsburg to catch a glimpse, greet, and Daven with, this holy Tzadik.



But they were shocked at what they saw. When they entered the Bais Medrash, they could immediately hear the Rebbe's powerful voice rising above the sounds. Rav Yisrael Besser describes the scene. The Rebbe was the Shliach Tzibur, leading the service and reciting the Tefilah of Modim Anachnu Lach, “We thank You, Hashem!”

The energy and passion that accompanied his tears of gratitude could be felt by everyone. As the Rebbe repeated the words of thanks, his mood swept through the crowd, as they too, all joined in by reflecting upon their personal gratitude to Hashem.

Here was an individual who was taken out of the depths of pain and despair by Hashem, and he was expressing his gratitude for this. He did not focus on the negativity felt by many after losing so much. They had all suffered, but they were here, and they were given a chance to rebuild what they once had.

Every moment of life, for the Klausenberger Rebbe, was a gift of infinite kindness from Hashem. Regardless of how much he had lost, the Rebbe reminded people to always look at the positive in life!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shelach 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*

# A Welcome Visitor

By Rabbi Yechiel Spero

The smile on the Rebbe's face could hardly be contained. His demeanor was always one of infectious joy, but his elation on this day was unusual. The Rebbe was at the berit milah of the son of a Bobover Hasid and had been honored with the distinction of being the sandak. When asked about his incredible happiness the Rebbe could not help but share with the crowd an extraordinary tale of kindness and hope.

## The Couple Despaired, Not Knowing Where to Turn

Meir and Rifka Zoberman were terribly despondent. Nothing seemed to work. Not the doctors' advice, not the berachot and, as of yet, not their prayers either. Their dream of becoming parents was fading away. Meir had been the beneficiary of berachot from the Rebbe on many occasions, and the Rebbe's blessings had always been fulfilled - until now. The young couple despaired and did not know where to turn.

With a lot of extra time on her hands, Rifka decided to visit local hospitals. She initiated many friendships on these visits, and felt fulfilled to be helping those in need.

One day as she was about to leave Maimonides Hospital, Rifka heard a woman groaning in one of the rooms. Peeking in, she noticed an elderly woman, all alone, so she walked in and sat down on the chair next to the bed. The woman, who seemed to be in her 70's, was not at all interested in making conversation with Rifka, and was even a bit rude, but Rifka somehow sensed desperation and loneliness in the woman's tone. The room, Rifka noticed, was bare - not one card, not a single flower. Just bare walls. Carefully, Rifka asked, "How long have you been here?"

## The Woman Had No Family

The woman ignored her and stared at the vacant wall next to her bed. But Rifka would not back down. She prodded, until the elderly woman finally began talking, although with some resentment in her voice. Rifka was satisfied that she had won a round in this struggle. An hour passed and Rifka had even elicited a smile from the woman. As it turned out, this woman had no family and no one to whom to turn. Rifka promised her that she would be back and she kept her promise.

The next day Rifka returned and was greeted with a smile. The two spoke for an hour. The woman had so much to say and finally had someone who would listen to her.

Day in and day out, Rifka visited with this lonely woman and slowly the barriers were worn down. Their relationship continued to develop - clearly the highlight of this woman's day was Rifka's visit. But as her happiness improved, her health deteriorated. Sadly, within a few months, her illness ravaged her body. Rifka sat by her side and cared for her as if she were a longtime friend.

Finally, the day came. Her breathing slowed and it was becoming more and more evident that she was going to die. Rifka sensed that her older friend was anxious and worried. Rifka assuaged her fears and noticed that for the first time the woman was crying. She wiped the tears from her wrinkled cheek and calmed her.

An uneasy silence filled the room when, finally, the woman spoke. "Rifka, I don't know how I can ever repay you for what you have done. I have no money and no family who can pay you for your time. But one thing I can promise you. After I go up to Heaven I will approach the Heavenly throne. I promise I will not leave there until the A-mighty grants you the child that you want."

And then she closed her eyes one final time.

The Rebbe smiled at the entranced crowd, "And this is that child." (Excerpted from the ArtScroo book - Touched by a Story 2)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shelach 5783 email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.*

# The Buzz in the Back of the Room

**By Rabbi Yaakov Bender**

I was once delivering a shmuess to junior high school boys, and I noticed some activity in the back of the room. It was unusual, and even though I waited for silence, the slight commotion persisted throughout the shmuess. I tried to ignore it and focus on the message, but it was surprising.

As soon as the shmuess was complete, the two bachurim who had been busy with each other during the shmuess came up to me. Shmuli Seltzer was a sweet boy and a hard worker. He was also hearing impaired, and the only way he followed the weekly shmuess was by sitting in the front and reading my lips — but this week, he had come late and could not get to the front.

He had been alone in the back, resigned to the fact that he would not be able to follow the shmuess, when his friend, Moshe Blinder, came over. Moshe, in an act of perfect friendship, had taught himself sign language in order to communicate with

Shmuli, and as I spoke, Moshe “repeated” each sentence to Shmuli using sign language. That had been the buzz in the back of the room!

I was deeply moved by the story, inspired by the purity and goodness of the talmidim. It was a reminder that welcoming handicapped bachurim or boys with other struggles to our yeshivah only enhances the middos of those around them and brings out the best in everyone.

I was determined to pay these boys back, and at Moshe’s bar mitzvah I had my chance. I rose to speak, but instead of delivering a derashah, I shared the story with the audience, telling them of Moshe’s selflessness and achrayus. Then I called up a special guest to say mazel tov.

Shmuli Seltzer came up, his face beaming with pride and pleasure, and communicated, via sign language, his wishes to his good friend, Moshe Blinder. That was the speech, a short, powerful derashah about true shmiah, even from one who cannot hear. If there is true ratzon, the desire to take — to be a lokei’ach — then the doors of hashpa’ah, of inspiration, never close.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shelach 5783 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table.*

## **The Stumbling Chazan**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Levin**

Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel, known as “the Alter from Slabodka,” was an uncommonly humble person. Although he single-handedly created the Slabodka Yeshiva, ran it for half a century, and educated thousands of students therein, he resisted any signs of power or honor. In fact, he never attached his name nor any title to any of the numerous communications that were sent out from the yeshiva, preferring to lead via anonymity.

A classic story detailing his humility, and his caring for others occurred one afternoon in the Slabodka Yeshiva. The Alter walked into the Beis Medrash right before Mincha, and uncharacteristically strode directly to the amud and began davening as the shaliach tzibbur (chazan). To the wonder of all, he stumbled over the words of Kaddish, as if he was unfamiliar with the correct pronunciations.

Afterwards, his disciples uncovered the truth behind his unusual behavior. A local businessman had become an avel, mourner, yet was embarrassed to be a shaliach tzibbur because he had difficulty pronouncing some Hebrew words. The Alter wished to mollify this man and lessen his embarrassment. He made the man believe that the Alter was like him; that even the Alter sometimes had “difficulty” pronouncing certain words.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shelach 5783 email of Torah Sweets.*