The Life and Story of the Chalban

Rabbi Chaim Cohen of Givatayim, as those who stood beside him saw him

NISSIM KAFRI AND RABBI SHLOMO BATZRI

SWIFT SOFER

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Told by

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Prepared by Swift Sofer

The Life and Story of the Chalban: Rabbi Chaim Cohen of Givatayim, as those who stood beside him saw him

Told by Nissim Kafri and Rabbi Shlomo Batzri. Translated from the Hebrew of three recordings and edited by Swift Sofer, swiftsofer.com.

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Hakdamah

A Word Before You Begin

Rabbi Chaim Cohen of Givatayim was known as the Chalban, the milkman. For close to fifty years he sat in one seat in the shul Beit Yosef on Rechov HaGilboa, and people came to him there and at the dairy where he worked.

The stories in this book are told by men who stood beside him. Nissim Kafri was his shamash and the gabbai of his shul. Rabbi Shlomo Batzri davened with him for more than twenty years. A few stories come from others who were in the room when these were told. Each story stands under the name of the one who tells it, in his own words, as he saw it.

They were told aloud, in the shul and before a microphone, and not in the order of a life. Here they are gathered in that order: his early years, how his shamash came to him, the years of his life, his passing, and what was seen after it.

Before the Stories

Who he was, and why these stories are told



The Chalban

In every generation, the Ribbono shel Olam, in His chessed and goodness, sends Klal Yisrael messengers of kedushah and taharah: tzaddikim whose body and neshamah are given over entirely to avodas Hashem, to ahavas Yisrael and to matan beseser. One of these was Rabbi Chaim Avishalom HaKohen ben Blanka, zechuso yagen aleinu, known to everyone with affection and with awe as the Chalban, the milkman.

Rabbi Chaim came from a family of Kohanim. All his life he ran from kavod, out of anavah and simplicity. He merited to be a vessel for berachah, for yeshuos and for mofsim: a great vessel full of love for the good of Klal Yisrael and of the whole world. Everything he did, he did lesheim Shamayim, in purity and with a holy heart. Through him and in his zechus, Hashem gave the hearts of Yisrael hope, emunah, and a wonderful, sweet chizuk lesheim Shamayim.

Nissim Kafri merited to serve him closely for some thirty-eight years. With his own eyes he saw the wonders of Hashem, the great siyata diShmaya, and the secrets hidden behind the figure of the Chalban.

Why I Tell These Stories

Told by Nissim Kafri

By nature I was always like the Rav: behind the scenes, never out in front. That is part of the Torah of standing beside a tzaddik: you do not make yourself stand out. Many times, when the Rav thought I was putting myself forward too much, he made sure to show me that we have to make ourselves small.

Before I began to tell these stories, I took counsel with Rav Shlomo Batzri, my rav today, and with several other rabbanim. Our dear friend Nachman, Oded ben

Dalia, zichrono livrachah, is no longer with us. It was he who founded the website Chesed Hashem, where he made the Rav known. He was very beloved, truly beloved. I remember when we first began to be together; it was I who brought him to the Rav and drew him close to him, and I merited to see many things together with him. After the Rav's petirah, Nachman came and told me that we must make the Rav and his legacy known.

We never called him "the Chalban." We called him Rabbi Chaim. And here is something that used to amuse me: whenever he phoned me and I answered, he would say, "Chaim speaking." Never once did he call himself Rabbi Chaim.

We decided to make the Rav known to the public in order to bring people closer to Hashem Yisbarach, because we saw that many people do teshuvah in the zechus of these wonders. That is how people are: they love to see and to feel that there is a Borei Olam, Hakadosh Baruch Hu. So we decided to carry on what Nachman began, and I took it upon myself to tell stories of Rabbi Chaim that I saw firsthand.

CHAPTER ONE

His Early Years

His father's house, and the tzaddikim of his youth



THE SEFER BEHIND HIS BACK

Told by Nissim Kafri

Rabbi Chaim said of himself that a neshamah like his does not come down to the world even once in a thousand years.

How did he come to Kabbalah at all? When he was about eight or ten years old, his parents, Rabbi Ezra Avraham and the Rabbanit Blanka, lived on Rechov HaShuk in Tel Aviv. All the gedolei Torah of that time used to stay in their home. Rav Ovadia Yosef stayed with them, and Rav Adess stayed with them; all the great rabbanim came. When they came from Yerushalayim to Tel Aviv, they would stay in his father's house for a few nights and sleep there.

One day his father saw him come home hiding a sefer behind his back.

"What's that?"

"A sefer."

"Show me which sefer."

He saw that it was a sefer of Kabbalah. "You read sefarim like this?" his father asked. "Do you understand them?"

"Yes."

"Come, open it and explain it to me."

He opened it and began to explain it to him. So at about eighteen, he already knew it all.

WINE FROM THE WALL

Told by Nissim Kafri

This story the Rav told many times; I was not with him in those years. One day all four of them sat together, the Sandler, Rav Fish, Rav Patilon and Rav Waltuch, and made a siyum on a masechta in some house. They brought food and refreshments, and everything was fine. Then one of the tzaddikim asked Rav Chaim, "And wine to make kiddush on, did you buy it?"

They looked at one another: "Oy, we forgot."

In those days it was not like today, when the grocery stores and supermarkets are open twenty-four hours. At seven in the evening they closed and everyone went home, and by now it was eight. "What will we do?" they said. "The grocery is closed."

Rav Chaim Cohen said, "There is no problem. What is the problem?" He said to Rav Patilon, "Draw a tap here on the wall, and we will take wine from there." For them this looked perfectly normal. A tap was drawn on the wall of the room, and Rav Chaim went over to it, moved his hand like this, put a cup under it and filled it. A cup full of wine, real liquid wine. They drank, they made the berachos, and everything was fine.

More than that: the Rav told one of the chaveirim to go the next morning and pay at the grocery, because they had taken wine from it. "Kevod HaRav, what do you mean, we took wine?"

"There is a grocery here belonging to Yaakov. It was closed, and up on his high shelves he has bottles. We took five bottles from there. Go and tell him that we want to pay him for five bottles, because we emptied them."

The next morning that man took money and went to the grocery. "Yaakov, we came to pay you for the five bottles we took from you last night."

"What five bottles?"

"Up there, on top. They are empty. We took them from you."

"What do you mean, empty?"

"Climb the ladder and go up," he told him. Yaakov went up and saw the bottles still corked and sealed, yet empty. He could not understand it; he could not believe it.

Chapter Two

How I Came to Him

Nissim Kafri, from the soccer bench to the seat beside the Rav

The Place Beside Him

Told by Nissim Kafri

People have always asked me how a simple man like me came to stand beside a tzaddik at all. Before I did teshuvah, ba'avonosai harabim, I was on the management of Hapoel Tel Aviv, and soccer was the only thing that interested me.

In 1981 (I give the years by the secular count because that is what comes naturally to me), I was walking down the street when I met a girl I had gone to elementary school with.

"Nissim, how are you?" she asked.

"Everything's fine."

"What do you do on Shabbos?"

"On Shabbos I'm at the soccer games."

"Listen, I have something special for you. Come to our shul."

"Why would I go to a shul? In shul people daven. They don't talk soccer."

"No," she said. "There's a shul in Givatayim (a town bordering Tel Aviv), not far from here. We go there, my husband goes there too, and there's a group of men there who sit and talk soccer during the selling of the mitzvos: Hapoel Ramat Gan, Maccabi Tel Aviv, Hapoel Tel Aviv (Israeli soccer clubs)."

"Oh, that's a shul that suits me very well," I said. "I'll come."

That very Shabbos I went to the shul and sat down with the group. It was the same bench the Rav sat on. He always sat at the far end of the bench, because he was always hiding, so that nobody would know anything about him. In fact, until he became known to the public, none of the mispallelim had any idea that a tzaddik was davening with them. They called him Chaim: an older man in a cap, sitting in the corner. He never called himself Rav; to himself he was simply Chaim.

I was sitting about ten seats away from him, and the talk turned to soccer. Then he turned toward me and beckoned with his finger: come here. It was my first time in that shul, and I thought: this man is calling someone, but surely he doesn't mean me. I pointed past myself, as if to ask whether he meant somebody over there.

"No, you, you," he said, and beckoned again. "Come, sit here next to me."

So I went and sat down next to him. "But my place is over there," I said.

"No, no. Your place is here, next to me." That is what Rabbi Chaim told me.

I looked at him, and then I looked at my friends. I was stuck. He picked up a sefer Tehillim and said, "Instead of talking, take this and say Tehillim." I took the Tehillim, read a few pesukim, looked up at him, and thought: what happened here? How did I get here?

That is how I first came to sit beside him. And yet it was not truly the first time, for we had already sat together a great deal from when I was about ten.

I sat beside him and said Tehillim until the davening ended, and then I went home. A week later I came again, and it was the same scene all over: he looked at me, beckoned with his finger, and said, "Come, sit here next to me." I thought: this old man has latched onto me. What does he want from me? I looked over, and all my friends were sitting there rolling with laughter.

The following week I decided to try a trick. I would not come, he would forget about me and find someone else, and I would have peace. So I stayed away for a week. Two weeks later I came back, and the moment I sat down, he looked at me: "Come, sit here next to me."

After davening he asked me, "Why don't you want to sit next to me?"

"I'll tell you the truth, Chaim," I said. "I see you're always reading sefarim. I came to this shul to talk soccer with them. I love soccer. I'm a Hapoel Tel Aviv man."

"But your place is here, next to me," he said. "In a few years you will understand that your place is here, next to me."

"Yes, but I came here for my friends, to talk soccer."

"Ah, your friends?" he asked. I nodded.

A day or two after that Shabbos, one of my friends came to me. "Listen, my wife has been driving me out of my mind for years that she wants to move. We're moving to Herzliya (a city north of Tel Aviv)." And he moved to Herzliya. A week later another one of the group, one of the friends I used to discuss soccer with, came and told me, "My wife wants to go to Be'er Sheva (a city in the Negev, in the south)." A third got a job somewhere else. Within a month, every one of my friends had been scattered.

I was left alone. The next time I came, I sat there by myself. He beckoned to me with his finger and said, "Now you have nothing to say. Sit here. You don't have anyone to talk to anymore. Now your place is here."

"Fine," I said. "If that's how it is, all right."

From then on I began to see all sorts of hanhagos of his that I did not yet understand: first of all his tznius, his hiddenness; the special qualities he had; his ahavas Yisrael; and his love for children. From 1981 I merited to be at his side for thirty-eight years.

Once I asked him, "Kevod HaRav, what is my zechus, little Nissim, that I am beside the Rav at all?"

"I'll tell you the truth," he said. "That I am not telling you. But after a hundred and twenty years of both of us, you will know exactly." To this day I do not know. There were also secrets he made me swear not to tell, and as long as he was alive I did not tell them.

How I Became His Shamash

Told by Nissim Kafri

He never told me that he was a tzaddik, nothing of the kind. Nor did he ever tell me that I was serving him. It was only, "Do this for me, do that for me." I had no idea what shimush even was. I did not understand such concepts, for I had not yet done teshuvah. I began beside him before I did teshuvah, and only afterward did I do teshuvah. And never once did he tell me to do teshuvah. Never. I sat beside him, and he never said a word about it.

One day someone came up to me and asked, "Do you know whom you are sitting next to?"

"No."

"Next to the great tzaddik."

"What great tzaddik?"

"The great mekubal, Rav Chaim Cohen the Mekubal."

"What rav? I call him Chaim. I don't call him Rav."

"You people don't understand whom you are sitting next to."

There were shiurim given in our shul, and he would sit in the shiur and listen as if he were hearing those halachos for the first time. He even asked questions: "I have a question. What if a person does this? And what if a person does that?" As though he understood nothing, when he knew it all by heart, inside and out. He did this so as not to hurt the rav giving the shiur. He made himself like any other student so that the rav would feel at ease.

As for my shimush, I was always helping him: "Do this for me, do that for me." I did not realize that I was in fact his shamash. To me I was something like his helper, and it seemed natural to help him. It was not only on Shabbos; I was with him all the time. During the week he would call me: "Listen, I'm going to a bris now. Do you want to come with me?" And I would say yes.

Later I was the one arranging the brissos for him. We had a schedule. Every Friday, after davening, we would meet and I would arrange his schedule for the coming week: a bris here, a wedding there, all those things.

REVEALED IN TZFAS

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav's revealing, the hisgalus of Rav Chaim, came about like this. Once a group of us from the shul went to kivrei tzaddikim, without the Rav, and we were in Tzfas. We passed Yeshivas Karo there; the house of Rav Karo[1] is in that very building. Suddenly a man came up to us and asked, "Where are you from?"

"From Givatayim" (a city bordering Tel Aviv), I told him.

"Oh, you are with the great tzaddik, Rav Chaim Cohen! You don't know beside whom you are. Now you can tell the Rav that he has been revealed." Rabbanim who sit in a yeshivah of mekubalim were saying that now he could be revealed. That was the revelation of Rav Chaim.

When I came to him and told him, he said, "Oy va'avoy, oy va'avoy! Now everyone will know. What will be?"

That same day we also merited to go inside Rav Karo's house. Nobody was allowed in, but we went in and sat there, and I sat on Rav Karo's chair. When I told the Rav, he was overjoyed.

That is how I came to the Rav.

THE MEKATREG ON FRIDAY MORNING

Told by Nissim Kafri

We had a set routine on Fridays. After Shacharis, while he was folding his tefillin and tallis, I would ask him, "Kevod HaRav, nine o'clock as usual at your dairy?" He would say yes, and at nine I would come to the dairy with my diary to arrange the week. All those years I kept working at the Electric Company; I only retired three years ago.

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[1] Rav Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulchan Aruch, lived and taught in Tzfas in the sixteenth century.

One Friday I came as we had arranged, at nine. I walked into the dairy, put my things down on the table, and sat down. He sat facing me on the other side of the table, the way you and I are sitting now.

He looked at me and said, "Did anyone invite you?"

I looked at him and said to myself: oy, what have I done? I quickly started going over everything. This was already some time after I had done teshuvah. I had been to the mikveh that morning, I had davened well; everything was in order. So why was he shouting at me? I had no idea.

"Go away from here," he told me. "I don't know you. I don't want to see you."

Now, outside a crowd of people was waiting to go in to him. On Fridays we would invite people, special people, to come for berachos or with their questions. All of them were watching. He took hold of me by the shirt, opened his door, put me outside and shouted at me: "Get out of here! Who wants you? I don't want to see you anymore! I don't know you, I don't need you. You're not my shamash, you're nothing!"

I backed out, not knowing what to do, with everyone staring. There were at least twenty people standing by the door, and they all knew me as the Rav's shamash. I walked to my car, which was parked outside, saying to myself the whole way: what did I do? What had we arranged? What did I say to him? What happened? I had no idea at all.

I got into the car. In those days the phone was built into the car, and as soon as you started the car you could see on the phone's screen who had called. I saw that someone had called me. Who? The Rav. The screen said "HaRav Chaim, work." I called back: "Yes, Kevod HaRav?"

"Nissim, where are you?"

"I'm here, outside in the car."

"I'm waiting for you! We set nine o'clock!"

I looked at myself, not knowing what to make of it. I went back in and sat down with him, and he acted as if nothing had happened at all. I said to myself: what is going on here?

When we had finished arranging everything, I said, "Kevod HaRav, I have to ask you something. What was that, shouting at me like that in front of everyone and embarrassing me?"

"There was a great kitrug against you from Shamayim," he said. "There were great dinim on you, and I had to cut you off. You needed ten humiliations. I wanted the mekatreg to leave, so I needed you to leave here in disgrace. Then he left too. Once he had gone, I called you back."

Chapter Three

His Day and His Shabbos

The night's learning, the tefillah and the holy day

His Day

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav always said that a person can both work and learn, and that was the Torah he lived by. In the mornings he worked in the dairy.

His day went like this. He rose at chatzos, said Tikkun Chatzos, made tikkunim for niftarim, and learned through the night until morning. At a quarter to five I came to his home and took him to the mikveh. We drove there and toveled, and at a quarter to six we began Shacharis. We finished at half past six or a quarter to seven, and then he went to work and I went to mine. He drove himself, in his own car.

If he needed me in the middle of the day he called me, and I punched out at work and went to him. Everyone knew that I was connected to the Chalban. People asked me for help, and I helped many of them.

He finished work at around two in the afternoon. He went home, rested a little, and learned again. Then he went to daven Minchah and Maariv, came home, and at eight o'clock in the evening, exactly, he was asleep.

Eight O'Clock

Told by Nissim Kafri

One day we finished davening Minchah and Maariv, and the Rav said to me, "Nissim, come up to my home. I'll make you a cup of tea and we'll drink together." This was nothing unusual; I often had a drink with him in his home. I said, "Fine," and went up with him.

We sat down, and he asked me, "Do you want something to eat?"

"No, no," I said.

His wife Idit, a"h, was standing behind him. I was very fond of her. She looked at me and asked, "Do you want to eat?"

"But I'm not hungry," I said.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said, and in the end I told her that yes, I was hungry. She made him supper, and I ate supper as well.

While we were eating and drinking, I did not notice that it had become one minute to eight. Suddenly the Rav got up. I thought he had perhaps gone to the restroom, so I sat and waited. Five minutes passed.

"What are you waiting for, Nissim?" Idit asked.

"I don't know. I'm waiting for the Rav to come back."

"Come back? He has already gone to sleep. It's eight o'clock; he's in bed. Come, come."

She brought me to his room, and I saw him already asleep in his bed, lying with his hands on his chest.

"At twelve at night, exactly, he will wake up," she told me.

So I merited to see it with my own eyes. At eight exactly he went to sleep, and at twelve at night he was up.

Idit often helped me in this. When people called me after eight in the evening, with troubles, lo aleinu, and also with good things, I passed the message on through her. If, for example, there was a complication in a birth, I called her, since he was already asleep, and gave her the name of the yoledes, so that as soon as he got up he would daven that the baby come out in peace and the mother stay well. I passed many such messages on to her, and he davened at night.

HIS SHABBOS

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

On Shabbos he hardly slept at all.

On Erev Shabbos he came to daven Minchah and Maariv with us, and then he hurried home. I could not understand why he was rushing. In the winter we finished davening at five o'clock, half past five. Why the rush? I was amazed; we wanted to feel a little of the Rav's light. Right after davening we walked with him, and he ran home. He said, "I am hurrying to make Kiddush."

After that he went to sleep, and he got up at chatzos and learned until morning. Before morning, as long as he had the strength, he went to the mikveh on Uziel Street. Then he came here to shul, already at five or six in the morning. We begin

davening here at half past seven or eight, and he was here an hour and a half or two hours before, sitting here and davening.

We finish davening here at half past ten. He ran home quickly, made Kiddush, and came back. By twelve o'clock he was sitting here again; within an hour he had gone home, made Kiddush and returned. At twelve he began his Ben Ish Chai shiur. The first thing he did was take hold of the sefer Ben Ish Chai, and he gave the Shabbos shiur from it.

Whoever came here on Shabbos saw how the Rav read the halachos of the Ben Ish Chai: with what sweetness, what light, what simchah, what love, what pleasantness.

Shabbos Was His Very Soul

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

The thing closest to his heart, the very core of his soul, was Shabbos. He once told my older brother, Rav Yitzchak, that he had been given the power from Shamayim to see about every person whether he kept Shabbos or not. The moment a man came to him, he saw where he stood in shemiras Shabbos. This was his very soul.

For years on end he spoke only about Shabbos, Shabbos and Shabbos. Every Jew who came to him for a yeshuah, he told, "Keep Shabbos and you will have a yeshuah."

A Jew came to him once and said that he was having a hard time with parnassah. Rav Chaim told him, "I promise you that you will be very, very rich, but only if you keep Shabbos. You want to be a millionaire? Keep Shabbos. Accept it upon yourself." For such people this was not easy. But Shabbos was the core of his soul.

Every Tuesday he gave us his set shiur, the main shiur of the week. One year, beginning from Bereishis, he told us, "This year I am giving the shiurim on the parashah of the week, and every week I will bring something from the parashah about Shabbos." So every week he spoke about Shabbos. A whole year, every single week, he spoke only about Shabbos. That is how deep Shabbos lay in his heart and his soul, with mesirus nefesh.

The Old Man Who Interrupted

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

There was an elderly Jew here once who did not know who the Rav was. He sat right here, in this very chair, near Rav Chaim's place. Rav Chaim would be reading the halachah, and this man would interrupt him in the middle with a question.

I sat over there to the side and watched Rav Chaim, and I tell you, a thousand sifrei mussar could not hold what I saw.

In the middle of the reading the man would start talking, and Rav Chaim stopped and listened to him. Rav Chaim went on, and suddenly the man jumped in and talked again. Rav Chaim stopped and was silent. Not one remark; he never said a word to him. He gave him kavod. And it was not one Shabbos; it was another Shabbos and another Shabbos. It disturbed me, and it disturbed all the mispallelim and everyone at the shiur. Rav Chaim was silent, every single Shabbos. You saw what middos he had, what yiras Shamayim.

Rav Chaim used to read Shir HaShirim here. He read all of Shir HaShirim sitting, but when he said the Yehi Ratzon afterwards, he stood. Then we all stood, out of kavod for Rav Chaim: when he stood, we stood.

One day this old man came over to him and said, "There is no need to stand. You can say it sitting."

From then on, every Shabbos, Rav Chaim sat. Even though he wanted to stand in order to raise up that tefillah, from the time that man said it should be said sitting, he sat, because of him.

SEATS ALREADY TAKEN

Told by Nissim Kafri

When the Rav lived in his old house in Givatayim, we used to sit in his succah downstairs. One day he came home from work, we davened Mincha, and he said, "Nissim, come be my chavrusa for my lunch in the succah."

"Gladly."

I went and sat with him. They brought his food and put it on the table. He sat at the head of the table, and I went to sit down. The moment I sat down, he said, "Get up, get up, get up!"

"What happened?"

"Don't you see? You are sitting on Yaakov Avinu. He is sitting here."

I came and sat in the next place. "No, get up, get up, get up!"

"What happened?"

"Don't you see? You are sitting on Yitzchak Avinu."

In short, he moved me all the way down to the end of the table. They had all come and were all sitting there, Yosef and all of them. At the end he said, "Now this is your place. Now come."

Chapter Four

The Mikveh and the Springs

Tevilah and taharah



The Aura of a Spring

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav held very strongly that men should go to the mikveh. Women, of course, are obligated, but for men too he held by it very much. He said, "Whoever cannot go every day should go at least twice a week, on Tuesday and on Friday."

He said that there are three kinds of taharah in tevilah. The highest is to tovel in a natural spring. The second is the sea. The lowest, though it is also important, is the mikveh we go to. But the aura of a spring stays around a person for three days.

Once, while he was receiving people, a man came in, and the Rav made a gesture toward him and said, "What, did you just tovel?"

"No, no, Kevod HaRav. Why? I toveled three days ago."

"Where did you tovel?"

"In the spring, in the mikveh of the Arizal (the mikveh in Tzfas fed by a cold natural spring, where the Arizal toveled)."

The man looked just like the rest of us, yet the Rav saw him shining. "Know," the Rav told him, "that until now I see the aura around you from toveling in the spring. Yishar koach. Know that this is the most important thing there can be."

He said that every spring has this great power.

Not Hot and Not Cold

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

I once watched the Rav tovel, and it was a breathtaking sight. He would tovel with cries of deveikus in the Borei. I asked what it all was, and the answer was: deveikus in the Borei.

Look what zrizus that was, and what nisyonos! All of us are taken up with the troubles of the moment. But he was not hot and not cold; such was the feeling the tevilah gave him. It was a sight that will never be forgotten.

THE SPRING AT MOTZA

Told by Nissim Kafri

One day we went to Yerushalayim to daven Shacharis at the Kosel, and before that the Rav told us he wanted to pass by Motza (at the western entrance to Yerushalayim), where there is a spring: a natural spring in the middle of an orchard, a pit with water flowing into it all the time. It was winter, and the water was freezing. There were three of us: Menachem Schwartz, the Rav and I.

We arrived, and the Rav went into the spring and toveled. Then he said to us, "Why aren't you going in to tovel?"

"Kevod HaRav," Menachem said, "I can't go into the spring. I only dipped my finger, and the water is freezing. I am very sensitive; if I go in, I'll turn all blue. It is dangerous for me."

"What's the problem?" the Rav said. "I'll warm it for you. Do you want me to warm the water for you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll warm the water for you. Come in."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Menachem put his finger in and found the water lukewarm.

"Now can you go in?"

"Yes."

Then I saw the two of them inside the pit of the spring. How nice, I thought, warm water; I'll jump in too. I jumped in, and I could not breathe! I jumped right back out. Warm water? It was freezing!

The Rav said to me, "You didn't ask. He asked, so I warmed it for him. You didn't ask!"

We were in the same spring, in the same pit. He had warm water, and I had freezing water.

There was another man with a similar story. He traveled to Uman (in Ukraine, where Rebbe Nachman of Breslov is buried; thousands travel there for Rosh Hashanah) and wanted to tovel there, but he was afraid of the cold. The Rav gave him a berachah, and in that cold country he went about in a T-shirt, because he was

warm. When he came back to Eretz Yisrael, he asked the Rav to take away the extra warmth.

Be'er Miriam

Told by Nissim Kafri

The whole world knows that in the Kinneret there is Be'er Miriam, the well of Miriam that, according to tradition, lies hidden there. The Rav would see it. He told the people with him to look, and they said, "We don't see anything."

"You don't see it?" he said. "There it is, right in front of your eyes."

We saw him there at the Kinneret, at Be'er Miriam.

Once someone brought him water from the tap and said to him, "You know, this water is from Be'er Miriam." The Rav said to him, "Bring it here. Open it, neshamah. Come, say Mizmor L'Sodah over this bottle. It is good for refuah."

The Mikveh That Waited for Rain

Told by Nissim Kafri

When the Rav moved to his new apartment, we built him a mikveh. All his life he had wanted a mikveh in his own home. He had repaired several mikvaos, and he used to say to me, "Nissim, if I have a mikveh, you will see how many gezeiros we will annul from Klal Yisrael."

We bought the apartment and everything was fine. It fell just after Tisha b'Av, a day or two after, that we signed the contract. He himself had not seen the apartment. He said to me, "Nissim, you promised me you would arrange a mikveh for me."

I went to the Rebbetzin and told her we wanted to build a mikveh. "A mikveh?" she said. "Inside the house? He goes to the mikveh every morning. What does he need a mikveh at home for?" In short, she refused to have a mikveh built.

So we decided to build it in his bedroom, in the corner where the private bathroom was. We took the plans of the building and studied them: no pipes there, no sewage line, nothing. Wonderful. We began drilling to test it, and suddenly we saw that half the building's lines ran right through there, though the plans showed nothing. "All right," I said, "we'll do it on the Rebbetzin's side." I went to the other room and tried there, and it was the same. In short, we searched until in the end we decided to build the mikveh outside the house, right up against the mirpeset (the porch). Rami Abudi, who is here with us, went through this whole ordeal with me, yibadel l'chaim.

It took time until we found a contractor. Rami signed the contract with him, by now after the Yamim Tovim. The very next morning, what happened to him? They hauled him off to prison! The contractor who had signed with us was arrested.

"All right, Nissim," I said to myself. In the meantime we asked the contractor to send someone else to carry on with the work, and he sent workers, Arabs. They said, "Why didn't you come straight to us? What do you need a contractor for? We'll do a better job for you." We said, "Whatever it takes, fine. Start working."

We had them dig with a Bobcat. Do you know what a Bobcat is? It is a small tractor, because this was in the yard. We started digging, and suddenly the worker called me. "Nissim, there's a problem. The sewage pipes of the whole building are exactly where you want to build the Rav's mikveh, right in the middle."

What do we do? "Kevod HaRav, what do we do?"

"Move it to the side," he said. "Arrange it like this, and like this, and like this."

"Good, fine." We moved it to the side. Understand how many delays there were! One of the things the Rav taught us is that when there are delays in a matter of kedushah, you should understand that there is great kedushah here. The sitra achra fights as hard as it possibly can, with all its strength.

We finished rearranging that, and then there was another sewage line there. In short, we had to dig about six meters down so the whole area would be clean, so that it would be deep and no sewage would be near it. We have a photo that shows the Bobcat digging six meters down, standing tilted up, like this, raised up like this. The operator said to me, "I think my Bobcat is about to fall in, six meters!" I called the Rav. He said, "Tell him to carry on. It's fine, it's fine." I was afraid the operator would fall down into the pit.

In short, we finished that, and everything was good. A few days went by. All around it was sand; we had no solution for it, nothing. Then came rain, and all the water from the building poured down. The water went into the neighbors' house next door, and it turned into a swamp of mud. Heaven help us.

Now understand: how big does a mikveh have to be? A small pit, about two meters by two meters. You can see in the photo, which we will show you, that it is six meters deep, so the pit there was at least five meters by five meters. In short, it filled with water and the water went into the neighbors.

To make a long story short, we built the mikveh. We finished it in concrete. There were clouds; it was the middle of winter. And we did not know what to do.

"Kevod HaRav, Kevod HaRav, what will be? In the end we won't be able to get rainwater."

He said to me, "If the Borei Olam wants Chaim (that is what he called himself) to tovel in the mikveh, there will be water. If not, there won't be."

"Kevod HaRav," I said, "I heard there's a way to do it with ice."

"Nothing, nothing! Only rainwater."

So it went until Pesach came. "Kevod HaRav, we can't move ahead any further. The contractors are all after Rami, 'What will be already? It's Pesach already!'" There were delays of every kind: suddenly this messenger didn't come, then something else, story after story.

Pesach passed. "Kevod HaRav, there is still no rain." Not a drop had fallen.

"If the Borei Olam wants, I will tovel."

Then suddenly he told us, "On Shavuos, b'ezras Hashem, I will tovel, and it will be fine. By Shavuos there will be rain."

"What, rain?" I said. "On Shavuos?" Understand, this was Sivan! Where have you ever seen rain in Sivan?

And so it was. Four days before Shavuos a flood came down, and what a flood! It filled all four of our otzaros (the pits of rainwater that make a mikveh kosher) to the top, all four of them. Then, on Erev Shavuos, he said to me, "Nissim, today we will make Shehecheyanu, before Yom Tov."

CHAPTER FIVE

What He Saw in People

Whoever stood before him could hide nothing



TRANSPARENT

Told by Nissim Kafri

When people told me that the man I was sitting beside was a very great mekubal, I did not understand what they were talking about. I went and asked the Rav, "Kevod HaRav, people say you are something special."

"Don't get excited by what people say," he told me.

But I was curious all the same. One day he said to me, "Look. When a person walks into this room, I can know everything about him."

"What do you mean, you can know everything about him?"

"The person becomes transparent before my eyes. I see everything about him, and he cannot hide anything from me." And that is how it was: whoever stood before the Rav could hide nothing from him.

We were sitting there when a man in a cap came in. "Look, I'll give you an example now," the Rav said. "Do you see that man in the cap who just came into the shul?" The man had not said a word; he was only standing at the entrance. "Listen," the Rav said, "he has a story called middah keneged middah."

"What do you mean?"

"When he was young he went abroad, to America. He married a non-Jewish woman and caused his parents great pain. Now he is coming back to Eretz Yisrael, because the son he had from that non-Jewish woman is making trouble for him."

I listened, and said, all right. Then the Rav said, "Now go ask him what he wants."

I went over to him, and he said, "I want to speak with the Rav."

"No," I said. "I need to know what you want to speak with him about. I don't bring just anyone in to the Rav."

"Listen, it's a long story."

"So, what's the story?"

"Listen. Today I am fifty. When I was young, about twenty or twenty-one, I finished the army and went to the United States..." Word for word, it was the story the Rav had told me before the man had said a single thing.

I brought him to the Rav and said, "Now go on with it here, in front of the Rav."

The Rav told him: "Listen, it won't help you at all. What you have here is middah keneged middah, and what you have to fix will take a long time. I will tell you how to fix it. Your wife must now go through giyur, and your son must be made a Jew. Only then will we put everything in order."

He gave him a way to make his tikkun, from the very beginning. That was the first thing that astonished me: how a person had only to walk in, and the Rav knew.

A MAN WHO WAS TRANSPARENT

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav saw everything about a person. A man came in to him, and he was as if transparent: the Rav saw it all, his aveiros and his zechuyos. Nachman told the story of how the Rav would say to a man, "Bring me your esrog." He would look at the esrog, and from it he would tell the man how he had davened on all the Yamim Tovim. It was like an identity card.

When we davened Shacharis, someone would sometimes be standing near us, and the Rav would look at me and make a sign with his hand. I understood. As soon as the Rav finished his tefillah, which did not take long, he said to me, "Look at the one davening over there. He is not davening." He waved his hand. "His thoughts left here long ago. Tell him not to daven next to me. All his thoughts are bad thoughts. I do not want to go into it. Let him daven outside, not next to me."

How could I go and tell a man that? I did not want to embarrass him. So I said it gently: "Friends, the Rav asks that people not stand so close. Spread out, please, everyone move off a little. He does not want people right beside him; it disturbs his concentration." Could I hurt a person by telling him the Rav was reading his thoughts? You have to know how to carry the Rav's words to the people in front of you.

Most of what the Rav saw was happy. But there were also things that were not happy, and those were frightening. Those frightened me most of all.

Every Man's Heart Was Open to Him

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

We are sitting in Rav Chaim's shul, Beis Yosef, at 11 HaGilboa Street in Givatayim (a city right next to Tel Aviv). This is the very place where Rav Chaim sat and davened for some fifty years, and this was his chair. I merited to daven here for more than twenty years, on Shabbos and on Yamim Tovim, together with the Rav. Davening with him moved you deeply. He would bring us to yiras Shamayim and to teshuvah.

He could sense, about every man who walked in, whether he had been to the mikveh or not, whether he was tahor or not, and what aveiros he had done. We would pass by him; to one man he gave his hand, to another he did not. This one had toveled, that one had not, that one was not in order. He saw each man's sin and everything about him.

Once he was sitting here in his place during davening, and I was standing right beside him. He turned to me and said, "Why isn't the chazzan concentrating? Bring me a sheet of paper and I will write down for you every single thought the chazzan is thinking. Now he is thinking about this song, now about his house, now about the tunes, now about this and now about that. Tell him to daven."

It went so far that once he was very angry at the chazzan, and Rav Chaim said the Kaddeishim himself, from his place. He said that the chazzan was not being motzi us, and so he said the Kaddeishim himself in order to be motzi us.

I was frightened. He saw every thought the chazzan thought, and whether it was accepted above or not.

The Name Running in the Air

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

In his last years I merited to be his chazzan a number of times, and I was terribly afraid. Each time, before Mussaf on Shabbos, I would go over and ask him, "Rav Chaim, perhaps the Rav will go up to be chazzan? We want the Rav to go up."

He answered, "I have pains. It is hard for me to have kavanah through the whole tefillah."

I said, "Then let the Rav do it this way: I will say the words aloud, and the Rav will have the kavanah to raise up the tefillos. I will only be saying it aloud, but the Rav will be the chazzan." In that way I was the chazzan by the Rav for a good number of years, and after davening he would tell me whether I had davened with kavanah or not.

One year, before Rosh Hashanah, I was at my father's house, and my father taught me a kavanah to have in davening. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we say, "Vesimloch Atah Hu Hashem Elokeinu al kol ma'asecha, beHar Tziyon mishkan kevodecha, uviYerushalayim ir kodshecha." Afterwards we say, "Elokeinu vEilokei avoseinu, meloch al kol ha'olam kulo bichvodecha, vehinasei al kol ha'aretz bikarecha, vehofa bahadar ge'on uzecha al kol yoshvei sevel artzecha, veyeda kol pa'ul ki Atah pe'alto, veyavin kol yetzur ki Atah yetzarto, veyomar kol asher neshamah be'apo, Hashem Elokei Yisrael melech, u'malchuso bakol mashalah."

In these words we crown HaKadosh Baruch Hu over all the olamos: Atzilus, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah (the four worlds of the Kabbalah, from the highest down to ours). When we say "u'malchuso bakol mashalah," the word bakol, בכל, has the gematria of a holy Name, Shem Ban (the Name Havayah spelled out in full in the way that comes to fifty-two). This Name has the power to crown HaKadosh Baruch Hu all the way down, to the very depths of the kelipos (the forces of tumah). Once you crown HaKadosh Baruch Hu down below, the kelipos have no more power at all, and they are all nullified.

So I had that kavanah, with all my strength. After davening Rav Chaim said to me, "Which Name did you have in mind? I saw the Name running through the air like this. What did you have in mind there?"

I told him, "My father taught me something, and that is what I had in mind."

See what sight he had into a person's thoughts. He saw a man's thought going out of him, and he could tell you which kavanah you had.

YEARS WITHOUT AN ALIYAH

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

Once, on Shabbos at Minchah, Rav Chaim came here for davening, and there was a Jew here who had come to daven with us, a guest. Rav Chaim said, "Call him up to the Torah."

Fine, we davened. But I wondered why Rav Chaim wanted this guest called up, and I looked at the man. Rav Chaim read my thought at once and said to me, "It has been several years since he went up to the Torah. I saw it on him."

I went over and asked him, "Is it several years since you went up to the Torah?"

He said, "Yes." And Rav Chaim had him called up.

He saw into every single person who came into this shul. We felt that people came here only so that he could fix them, that he was the one to fix them.

Stop Lying

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

Once a Jew came in here and tried to get to the Rav, but whatever he tried, he could not manage it. At the end of the shiur, as Rav Chaim was leaving in his wheelchair, he raised his eyes for one second and looked at the man.

Then Rav Chaim said to him, "Accept upon yourself to stop lying, and you will have every yeshuah, everything you need." The man was a liar through and through; everything that came out of his mouth was a lie.

That was all. The man had not even had time to tell Rav Chaim what he wanted. Rav Chaim said one thing to him: accept upon yourself to stop lying, not to be a liar.

In one second he saw a man's aveirah and all his deeds, what he had done and what he was doing. It was a wonder of wonders, that sight of his, and with it he brought people to teshuvah.

"I Saw What You Wrote"

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav's shiurim lasted three hours. Understand what that means: he would sit on his chair for three hours without moving. We would doze off, get up to go out, eat, drink, all of us; he sat for three hours and spoke.

Ba'avonosai harabim, I used to sit there with my phone and look at it every so often. Once I wrote to my dear wife, tihyeh bri'ah ad me'ah ve'esrim, on WhatsApp: "I love you." Every time I remember it, I get a shiver. In the middle of the shiur the Rav lifted his head, looked at me and said, "And especially this: people must always tell their wife that they love her." I stared at him. Is he reading my phone?

On the way home I asked him, "Kavod haRav, what was that? In the middle of the shiur you said that?"

He said, "What do you think, that I didn't see you write to your wife 'I love you'? The words came out like this, and that is how I saw you."

Let me tell you, it is frightening, frightening.

The Woman He Would Not See

Told by Nissim Kafri

One day a woman came asking for a berachah for children. "All right," I told her, "I'll go tell the Rav."

"No," the Rav said to me. "Don't bring her to me."

"Why?"

"I can't tell her."

"Why can't you tell her?"

"I can't tell her."

So I went and told her, "Listen, the Rav can't see you today. I'm very sorry. Another time."

After she left, I said to him, "Kevod HaRav, what exactly happened here?"

"What could I tell her?" he said. "In a few months she will no longer be in this world. What can I give her? I cannot tell her anything. So let her live like that, thinking she will conceive and that all will be well."

When you are with a person like that, you see things above nature all the time. There is no doubt about it: it was above nature.

THE CHILD IN HER FATHER'S ARMS

Told by Nissim Kafri

This is hard for me, but I will tell it.

One day a man came to the shul carrying a little girl in his arms. He was crying that she was very sick, and he wanted the Rav to daven for her. I brought him close to the Rav, and the Rav made a sign to me with his hand. I brought him close again, and the Rav made the same sign, as if he did not see him. I already understood that it was not good, and I did not know what to do.

The man was crying and saying he wanted the Rav to give him a berachah. The Rav said, "Tell him the Rav will daven."

I told him, "The Rav will daven."

"No, no," the man said. "I want him to touch her and bless her."

I looked at the Rav, and I saw that he did not want to. There I stood, in a terrible position, with the baby in the father's arms. I am telling you the truth: it was a very, very hard moment, and I did not know what to do.

The man kept insisting. Suddenly the Rav cried out, "I cannot tell you what will be with her!"

The father said, "Kevod HaRav, I will accept whatever you say. I will accept it with love."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Within a week, she is going."

Even now, as I tell it, I am shaken. You stand beside a tzaddik, and he sees everything, the truth as it is.

Some time later, I was at Itzkovitz in Bnei Brak, and a man said good evening to me. I did not recognize him; I have seen so many people that I do not remember faces. He came up to me and said, "Nissim, I have to tell you: tell the Rav thank you. Do you remember the little girl I had in my arms?"

"Yes," I said.

"It was just as the Rav said, exactly a week. And one thing more: just as the Rav promised, she went easily. Until the last moment she smiled and laughed. I brought her toys, there was a clown beside her, everything. Then, in one second, it was over. No hospital, nothing. One second, and that was all. At least we merited that she did not suffer."

CHAPTER SIX

His Berachos

The sick, the childless and the troubled who came to him

LIKE AN IDENTITY CARD

Told by Nissim Kafri

When people came to the Rav, he would ask for the person's name and his mother's name. Say, for example, Avraham ben Sarah. Now, there are a great many Yidden in the world named Avraham ben Sarah.

Once I asked him about it. "Kevod HaRav, I do not understand. I bring you a note that some Yid gave me. The man is not even here beside you. I bring you the note, Avraham ben Sarah, and you tell me exactly everything about him, things he never told me, and then you tell me what to tell him afterwards, how you are solving his problem. How can it be? With only his name and his mother's name, there must be thousands of people in the world, maybe millions."

He said to me, "Nissim, I have the zechus to enter the sefer chaim of that Yid. For me it is like a teudas zehus (the identity card every Israeli carries, with his own number). You tell me 'Avraham ben Sarah,' and that is his teudas zehus. It is like typing in a man's identity number and getting all his details. That is how I see. I see what will be with him, what was in his past, what his present is, and what his future is. I know everything about him, from his beginning to the end of his life. That is the book of his life."

He saw it in his mind, just like that. Without this you cannot understand what I saw.

One Friday, as I have told, I sat with the Rav at the dairy arranging the schedule for the coming week. It was already twelve noon, and he said to me, "Nissim, enough, home. Shabbos is coming soon, we have to go home." I helped him put his things into his car and he started to drive off. I was walking toward my own car when an elderly woman came running, crying. "Do me a favor, I need the Chalban, urgently, urgently!"

I could see him already driving away. In a moment he would reach the gate, the gate would open, and he would be gone. I began to shout, "Kevod HaRav! Kevod HaRav!" He stopped and said, "Nissim, what happened?"

"A woman has come here, and she has a problem."

"What is her problem?"

I asked her, and she told me that her husband was lying in Ichilov (the big hospital in Tel Aviv) and the doctors had given him a few hours to live. They had called the family to come and take leave of him. They could not bear it: they were a family of seven, he was the main earner of the house, and if he died, woe to them.

The Rav said, "Tell her to write down his name and his mother's name." I wrote it and held it before his eyes. He looked at it and said, "But he will live. Why is she saying he will die? Tell her that he will live, and on Sunday he is leaving the hospital."

She was standing right behind me, and I said to myself: Nissim, she has just told you that the doctors gave him a few hours, and the Rav says that on Sunday he goes home. So I said to her, "Listen, the Rav said that he will daven for him. Call me on Motza'ei Shabbos and tell me what happened." I said it that way because I did not know how to get out of it. Where would I know such a thing from? I am a small man. And she went.

On Motza'ei Shabbos she called me. "Don't ask!" she said.

"What happened?"

"Isn't it true that I was with the Rav at about twelve, twelve-thirty?"

"Yes."

"From that very moment, when he gave him the berachah, all the readings started to rise. The doctors were going out of their minds; they did not understand what was happening. From a state of catastrophe, all the readings started to rise!" The daughters who had stayed by his bed saw it happen.

Yishtabach Shemo. By Shabbos morning everything was already in order; he had become completely stable. On Sunday morning, at the rounds, the professor of the department came and asked the doctors on duty over Shabbos for a report on everyone in the ward. They told him about this man. "This one came to us and we already thought he was on his way to Olam Haba. Then suddenly, and we cannot explain it, we did nothing at all, he recovered. He is healthy and everything is fine. Shall we discharge him?"

"I will tell you the truth," the professor said. "After the state he was in, I am afraid to discharge him. Let us keep him one more day under observation, see that it holds, and then we will discharge him."

So it was. Just as the Rav had said, they should have discharged him on Sunday; they discharged him on Monday instead. And the man lives.

The Rav saw things above nature.

Even at Midnight

Told by Nissim Kafri

I was always ready. When someone came to me with a request that was a matter of life and death, I would call the Rav's wife even at twelve o'clock at night and say to her, "Please wake him. I need you to give him someone's name right now. It is urgent."

Baruch Hashem, we merited many such cases. People were saved from all kinds of pigu'im (terror attacks) and all kinds of troubles. He would daven, and we would see results, real yeshuos. It was astonishing, more than words can describe.

The Drawing on the Yellow Note

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav saw things beyond nature. One day a man came into the dairy to see the Rav. Before he could say a word, the Rav looked at him and asked, "Are you healthy?"

The man looked at him. "Yes, Kevod HaRav. I came to ask for a berachah for a shidduch for my daughter."

"No, no, no. That will be arranged later. First we have to talk about your health."

"Kevod HaRav, baruch Hashem, everything is fine with me."

"No, not everything is fine."

On his desk there was a cube of small square colored notes. He took a yellow one and drew a person's skull, and the brain with its two lobes, right and left.

"Do you see here?" he said. "In this lobe you have a large growth, lo aleinu. You must have it removed quickly. And I'll tell you something else: behind the large growth a small one is hiding. I will send you now to a professor at Tel HaShomer (the large hospital near Tel Aviv). Tell him you were with the Chalban and show him this drawing, and he will operate now, because you must have this surgery urgently."

The man looked at him. "But Kevod HaRav, baruch Hashem I am healthy. Everything is fine."

"Listen to me," the Rav said. "Tomorrow morning go to Professor so-and-so at Tel HaShomer and tell him."

The man had emunas chachamim, and the next morning he went to that professor at Tel HaShomer.

"Excuse me, sir," the secretary said, "do you have an appointment?"

"No. I came from the Chalban; he sent me here urgently."

The doctor heard "the Chalban" from his room. "Let him in, let him in. He has come to me."

He brought him in and asked, "What is the problem?" The man showed him the drawing the Rav had made.

"Set him an appointment, urgently," the professor said. "He has this growth. Tomorrow an MRI and a CT; check everything, and get him into surgery as quickly as possible."

And so it was. The growth was exactly as the Rav had drawn it; that is how it looked on the MRI and on every scan. He went and had the surgery.

THE MAN WHO WAITED

Told by Nissim Kafri

About half a year after the Rav sent a man with a growth in his head straight to the professor at Tel Hashomer (the large hospital near Givatayim), I came to the Rav one day and he said to me, "Do you want to hear a story?"

"What story?" I asked.

"Do you remember the man with the growth, whom we sent to the professor?"

"Yes."

"Another one like him came to me now," he said. "I sent him too, but this one had no emunas chachamim."

"What do you mean?" I asked, and he told me.

This man had come to the Rav and said that he did not feel well. The Rav looked at him and did exactly as before: he took a slip of paper, drew on it where the growth was in his brain, gave him the note, and told him, "Go to this professor."

The man had no emunas chachamim. He went to the professor in the ordinary way and made an appointment, and they gave him one several weeks away. The time passed. When he finally came to the professor, he told him that he had headaches and this complaint and that one. "Fine," said the professor. "If it is not urgent, we will send you for a CT." He waited about two more months, and after that he had an MRI. In the end, when the professor had all the results before him, he called the man in and said, "I must tell you that you have this illness, a growth in the head." He showed him the images: "Do you see, here and here?"

Then the man put his hand into his pocket, took out that same note, and showed it to him.

"What? You were at the Chalban?" said the professor. "Why didn't you tell me from the start?"

"I will tell you why," the man answered. "I thought that if I came and told the professor that I had been to a Rav, and the Rav had seen it before him and knew what was going on, he would say I am not a modern man."

The Man Who Wanted to Sell His Apartment

Told by Nissim Kafri

Every Tuesday the Rav received the public. The first ten people who phoned me were the ones I wrote down, and they went in to the Rav. The hours were from four-thirty to five, exactly half an hour; that is what the Rav set aside for it. Those first ten went in, and if I really managed to, he would let me bring in one more person.

One Tuesday the Rav finished with the first ten at five minutes to five. "Kevod HaRav," I said, "may I bring in one more?"

"But only one."

"I have two outside."

"Go ask each of them what it is about, and come tell me whom you are bringing in."

I went out and asked the first one, an older man sitting there: "Yes, you want to go in? What exactly do you need to say?"

"Listen," he said, "I live in Yerushalayim, and I want to know whether to sell my apartment or not."

Fine. I went over to the woman, and she started to cry. "Why are you crying, ma'am?"

"I must go in to the Rav. I can't give it up."

"Why, what happened?"

Lo neida mitzaros, she told me that she had a four-year-old boy with a growth in his head. The following Tuesday, in a week's time, they were going to operate on his head. She was terribly worried, and she was asking to go in to the Rav for a berachah.

In my own simple way of seeing things, as a simple person, I said to myself: first the woman, of course. But I decide nothing. I went in to the Rav and told him: "Kevod HaRav, there are two people outside. There is one man with a problem: he wants to know whether to sell his apartment. And there is a woman with a four-

year-old child who is sick, lo neida mitzaros, with a growth in his head. His operation is next Tuesday, and she wants to come in for a berachah."

"No problem," he said. "Bring him in."

I looked at him, and I said to myself... but I could not say a word. He told me to bring the man in, so I brought him in. As a rule I tried not to stay in the room while people told their troubles, out of respect for their privacy, so I went out and closed the door behind him.

The woman said to me, "What, you're not letting me in? You're not letting me in?"

"Listen," I said, "it's the Rav who decides. I'm small; I don't understand any of this." She started crying and crying, and you hear her crying and you don't know what to do.

Within about five minutes the man was finished. The Rav blessed him, and he left. Before the Rav came out, I said to him, "Kevod HaRav, explain to me what happened here. I don't understand. There is a sick child here, lo neida mitzaros, with a growth in his head, and you take in the man who wants to sell his house?"

He smiled at me. "Nissim, take the child's details from her and the mother's name. I will daven for him and give him a berachah, and it will be fine. He will come out of it healthy and whole. It is nothing. But that man was a big story."

"Kevod HaRav, what big story can there be in selling an apartment?"

"Listen to the story," he said. "This Yid who came to me has a son who is an illui in Torah. A very wealthy man came from chutz la'aretz looking for a shidduch for his daughter. He went to the rosh yeshivah and asked him who the greatest illui in his yeshivah was, and the rosh yeshivah pointed to this man's son. The wealthy man said he wants him for his daughter. He will pay for everything, support him, let him learn; they need not lay out a thing. He has only one condition: the boy's parents must put up ten thousand dollars. And they don't have it. The man has eight children and a small three-room house with ten souls living in it, and he doesn't know what to do. He says the only way is to sell the house so that the couple can get married."

Then the Rav said to me, "See what the yetzer hara is. He does not want this couple to marry. Why? Because from this couple a child very great in Torah is meant to come. So the yetzer hara wants to stir up strife between them, and what can he look for? The weak point of the other family, of this Yid."

The Rav had told him: "I will arrange everything. Sell the apartment. After you sell it, within two or three years everything will work out. They will raise your salary where you work, and you will go back to a bigger apartment. But first of all, let us move this mekatreg out of the way."

A Kallah by Chanukah

Told by Nissim Kafri

Moishe Leibovitz was married, and after three years he and his wife parted. Why? Because he was becoming very strong in his Yiddishkeit. Every Shabbos he came from Petach Tikvah (a city just east of Tel Aviv) to the Rav's shiur, in rain, in winter, in summer, in the heat; nothing stopped him. He grew very, very strong. They tried to make it work and did not succeed. So he and his wife parted. He had a daughter, a little girl of three; today she is nineteen.

About two years after the divorce he came to the Rav and said, "Kavod haRav, I want to get married."

"It's all right, don't worry."

And so it went, every time, again and again, until one day the Rav said to me, "Tell Moishe: when your zivug comes, I will tell you. Until then, sit quietly."

Before Rosh Hashanah the Rav said to me, "Call Moishe." I called him: "Moishe, the Rav is calling for you, downstairs at his house." The Rav told him, "Moishe, you have a zivug, soon, b'ezras Hashem. On Chanukah you are getting married."

"But I have no kallah! How will I get married on Chanukah?"

"Don't worry. Do you have emunas chachamim?"

"Yes."

"Good."

Two or three days went by, Rosh Hashanah came, and he came back to the Rav: "Listen, now I have no kallah and no job either. They fired me."

"Do you have emunas chachamim?"

"Yes."

"It will be fine."

After Rosh Hashanah he found another job and went to work there, between Rosh Hashanah and Succos. He was sitting there eating breakfast with a young man, who asked him how old he was and all sorts of questions, and he told him about himself. The young man said, "I have a sister. Would you like to meet her?"

"Why not?"

To make it short: on Succos he brought her to the Rav's succah, and the Rav said, "Oh! That's the kallah!"

After Succos he went back to the second job, where he had met the young man, and the owner came to him and said, "I don't need a man like you here," and fired him. He came to the Rav: "What now?"

"Don't worry, everything will be fine. Now you two will get married. As I told you, you will get married on Chanukah."

And baruch Hashem, they have been married to this day, more than twenty years.

Just notice: so that he would meet the girl, he had to be fired, go to another job and meet her brother. The Rav arranged everything so that he would meet her. Then he went back to his first job, and the boss there told him, "Come, come, come, I need you. I didn't find anyone better than you." It is a story to show that nothing is by chance; everything is from Shamayim.

THE NAMES AT MERON

Told by one of the mispallelim

Yesterday a man told me this story on the phone. He knows the people; they told it to him this week.

A couple traveled to Meron. Another couple who were staying with them had no children, and they wanted children very much. The first couple said to them, "We are going to Meron. Give us your names and we will mention them at Rabbi Shimon."

In the morning they went to Rabbi Shimon and davened there. They were told that the Chalban was supposed to come to Meron, and the husband said, "We will bring the names to Rav Chaim." Rav Chaim came and passed by, and the man said to him, "Rav, Rav, I have some names here. Can the Rav give a berachah?"

The Rav said, "Fine, bring them." He looked at the names and blessed them one by one. When he came to the names of the couple without children, he looked and looked and looked, for about two minutes, the man told me. The Rav lingered over them. Then he went on with the rest of the names, gave them back, and said, "Fine, there will be yeshuos."

The man was very moved. He met up with his wife and called the other couple, who did not know the Chalban at all. He told them, "Listen, we saw the Chalban at the tziyun, and he lingered over your names. You will surely have a yeshuah." For years they had had no children, and that very year they were blessed with a child.

In the fifth month they had an ultrasound (a picture of the unborn child made with sound waves), and they were told that the child had Down syndrome (a condition a child is born with that holds back his mind and body). They were very frightened. These were G-d-fearing, wholehearted people; they would not end the pregnancy, but they wanted to know for certain whether it was so, and they went to have more tests.

That night Rav Chaim came to the husband in a dream. He did not know Rav Chaim at all. Rav Chaim said to him, "Don't listen to the doctors. They don't know anything. The child is healthy and whole."

In the dream the husband asked, "Who are you?"

He answered, "I am Chaim Cohen from Givatayim."

The husband said to himself, "Chaim Cohen from Givatayim? Who is Chaim Cohen? I don't know him at all. I have never seen him in my life!"

Later they showed him a picture of Rav Chaim, and he said, "Yes, that's him! He came to me in the dream." The man who told me the story said he would give me the names if I wanted them.

A wonder of wonders. See how the Rav cared for Jewish neshamos, for people he did not know at all. He brought about yeshuos for them, and he came to the husband in a dream to calm him.

Chapter Seven

His Love for Every Jew

No Jew was ever written off



He Loved Every Jew

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav made no distinctions between one Jew and another. Rabbi Chaim told me:

"I love Am Yisrael, all of them. To me they are all good Jews, and I love them. With me there is no Sephardi and no Ashkenazi, no chiloni, no masorti and no chareidi, nothing. With me there is no Gur and no other chassidus. I love every one of them the same.

"Because of this they come to me from Shamayim every time and tell me: 'Stop receiving people who are mechallel Shabbos b'farhesya. Stop receiving them, and we will stop troubling you. You have great kitrugim in Shamayim against you for helping Jews who do not deserve it.'"

The Rav told them no. "For Am Yisrael I am ready for anything. However much I must suffer, I will do everything for them."

That was his love for them.

Tell Him I Love Him

Told by one of the mispallelim

The Rav's care for people was something to see. I remember a bochur who came here and sat over there, far from Rav Chaim. He never said shalom to Rav Chaim, did not know him, and never spoke a word with him. He came for two or three months, sat and davened here, and did not say a word to Rav Chaim. Rav Chaim only watched him.

Then suddenly he stopped coming. I remember Rav Chaim calling someone over and saying, "Tell me, where is the bochur who used to sit over there? Why

isn't he coming anymore? Go and tell him that I love him, that I worry about him, that I daven for him, and that I miss him."

He had never spoken a single word with him. See what love the Rav felt for every Jew who came in here.

THE SPARK IN THE PICKUP TRUCK

Told by Nissim Kafri

There is another story I tell about the wheelchair. Every Shabbos morning I took the Rav, serving him. For a man in a wheelchair it is not comfortable going up and down curbs; it hurts him. We tried to cause the Rav as little pain as we could, so we walked with him in the road, close to the edge.

One day I was walking the Rav like that along the edge of the road. It was six in the morning, and someone came up behind us honking, beep-beep-beep, on Shabbos. I saw that we were not in his way.

The Rav looked at me and said, "What, are we in his way?"

I said, "No, kevod haRav, we are right against the sidewalk."

He said, "Then why is he honking?"

I said, "I don't know."

Suddenly the man passed us in his pickup truck, stopped some fifty meters ahead, and got out. I said to myself, "Oy va'avoy, what is he going to do now?" I was afraid; he was a huge man. What was I going to do, on Shabbos morning?

He came toward us, a cigarette in one hand and a cell phone in the other. He had driven on Shabbos, and he came right up to the Rav. I did not know what to do. Then he bowed his head and said, "Kevod haRav, bless me."

Desecrating Shabbos, a cigarette, a phone, every aveirah possible, and he asked for a berachah. The Rav took him, blessed him, and told him what he needed to hear. The man was delighted. He said, "Wonderful," went back to his truck and drove off.

I said, "Kevod haRav, explain it to me. I don't understand what happened here. He drives on Shabbos, he honks at us on Shabbos, he comes with a cigarette and a phone."

He told me, "Know that this is a Jew who will do teshuvah."

I asked, "Why? How?"

"Know that if he comes to ask for a berachah, he has the spark. He knows that what he is doing is not right, but he has the Jewish spark."

First of all, he never called himself a tzaddik. But once he told me, "You know, the true tzaddikim, the real ones: you bring them a black page, and they don't see

black. They see some small white dot, and they say, 'Look how beautiful, there is white!'"

That is how he saw every Jew. He saw that little white dot on every Jew. With him there was no such thing as writing off a Jew.

For Klal Yisrael

Told by Nissim Kafri

Once I took him for tests at Ichilov (the large hospital in Tel Aviv). We set an appointment for early Friday morning. At seven o'clock nothing was open yet; there was no one there. Then the nurse who was taking care of him came and said, "Get ready, get ready, everything will be fine."

I helped the Rav lie down on the bed and took off his shoes and socks. She connected him to all kinds of electrodes and looked at her computer, and the whole screen was flickering, everything jumping. She asked me, "What is wrong with him?" and tapped the computer, thinking it was broken.

The Rav said to her, "No, wait one moment. I will lower the voltage." She looked at him and did not understand at all what he was talking about. He said, "Just a moment, wait one second." She looked, and suddenly the whole graph became quiet. She could not understand it at all.

Then she came with a needle. I will never forget it: it was this long, like a pencil, and thick too. They wanted to check the nerves in the sole of the Rav's foot, because he could not stand on it then; some nerve there was damaged. She came at him with a swing and, tach, stuck it in, and the Rav began to cry out, "Ai, ai, ai, ai!"

I did not feel good; I was standing beside the Rav, he was in pain, and what could I do? I said to her, "Can't you do it more gently?"

She said, "Look, this is the skin of the foot. It is hard skin. If I do it slowly it will hurt him more. It is like an injection: you don't give a person an injection slowly, slowly. You put it in with one stroke. I have to do it this way. I cannot do it any other way."

The Rav said, "Then don't do it to me."

I remembered that in his shiur that week the Rav had said that for Klal Yisrael he was ready to do anything. So I said, "Kevod haRav, it is not for you. It is for Klal Yisrael."

"Oh, for Klal Yisrael? Do as much as you want."

From the moment he said "Klal Yisrael," it was over. It was as if the pain had gone out of him; he had no pain at all. From that moment it was as though he had

changed. She did the test on him several more times, and there was nothing, no pain at all.

THE GRANDFATHER IS THE SANDEK

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

The Rav was sandek dozens of times, here in this shul and in the shul Beis Tiferes Tzvi.

One year one of the Rav's talmidim, a man I know who lives here in Ramat Gan, had a son, and he told Rav Chaim that he wanted the Rav to be sandek. Rav Chaim told him, "Fine."

On one of the nights before the bris, they came to Rav Chaim in a dream and said to him, "How can you want to be sandek, when there is a kepeida of the grandfather there? The grandfather wants to be sandek. How can you be sandek?"

In the morning he came straight to Nissim Kafri, the gabbai, and told him, "Tell the baby's father that I am not the sandek. The grandfather is the sandek. They told me in Shamayim that he is hurt and that he wants to be sandek."

Nissim called the father and asked him, "Tell me, is there a grandfather involved?"

He said, "Yes, he wants to be sandek, but I don't want him to be. I want Rav Chaim."

Nissim told him, "No, no. Rav Chaim said that the grandfather will be the sandek, not he."

At the bris Rav Chaim came, and the baby's father still wanted him to be sandek. Rav Chaim said, "No, the grandfather will be." The grandfather sat as sandek, and Rav Chaim stood beside him the whole time.

Such were Rav Chaim's middos that they would warn him from Shamayim to be careful not to hurt another person.

THE KOHEN AT MY SON'S PIDYON

Told by Rabbi Shlomo Batzri

When my son had his pidyon haben, I called Rav Chaim to be the Kohen. I told him, "I want the Rav to come and be the Kohen."

Rav Chaim looked with ruach hakodesh and said to me, "I see that there is a Kohen in your wife's family. I see that there is a Kohen there."

It was true: my wife has an uncle who is a Kohen. I said, "He won't mind, he won't be hurt. We want Rav Chaim; she wants Rav Chaim."

He asked me, "Are you sure he won't be hurt? Then fine, I agree." He came and was the Kohen.

May his zechus protect us, and may we merit the geulah sheleimah and Mashiach Tzidkeinu.

More Important Than My Tefillah

Told by Nissim Kafri

It is hard to believe how much the Rav loved children. Children were everything to him.

I used to daven beside him on Shabbos morning, and he always had a package of candies next to him, Elite toffees (from the Israeli candy company). Today there are gummies and all sorts of things; then there were only Elite toffees, all the same inside, only the wrapper different. A child would come over to him, and the Rav would motion to him with his hand to come closer; I stepped aside to let him pass. The child would say, "Kavod haRav, I want a red one." The Rav would reach into the package, and what came out was a yellow one: "Here, take a red one." The child went off, and five minutes later he was back: "No, I want a green one." And the Rav was in the middle of Shemoneh Esreh. I stood there beside him getting annoyed: how can he disturb the Rav like that? When the tefillah ended I said, "Kavod haRav, may I also give the children candies?" "Of course!" he told me. "That is more important than my tefillah. My tefillah today was the best in the world. The joy I gave that child did everything for me."

One Shabbos afternoon, children were saying Tehillim upstairs in the ezras nashim; we run Tehillim for children there. The Rav gave his shiur downstairs in the big hall, in the corner, and at half past one they were supposed to daven Mincha there. Half past one came, and the children went on saying Tehillim. Someone came and shouted, "Kavod haRav, the shiur needs quiet! You agree to this? The children are disturbing us!"

"What quiet?" the Rav told him. "Your whole tefillah is worth nothing. Let them go on with the Tehillim. I am ready to daven at four o'clock, as long as they go on saying Tehillim." And he said, "The children's Tehillim is more important than the tefillah of all of us. Why? None of us has kavanah, so at least they have good kavanah: they are saying Tehillim with simchah."

WINE ON HIS FINGER

Told by Nissim Kafri

Once one of the sons brought his son Nosson, sheyihyeh bari, to the Rav's succah in a baby carrier. The baby was about a month old. We sat down to hear the shiur, and the baby started to cry; maybe he was hungry, maybe something else. The father felt uncomfortable that he was disturbing the Rav's shiur. "Leave him, leave him," the Rav said.

What did the Rav do? There was wine on the table. He dipped his finger in the wine, put his finger in the baby's mouth, and went right on with the shiur. And the baby sucked the wine off his finger while the Rav kept going. He even sat the baby on his knees, in the middle of the shiur.

Chapter Eight

His Kedushah

Guarded from Shamayim

Charged with Kedushah

Told by Nissim Kafri

Whenever I came to clip the microphone onto the Rav, I always got an electric shock. Once I asked the Rav what it was. He was entirely charged, like electricity, because during his shiur the Rav was in other worlds altogether.

The Candy from London

Told by Nissim Kafri

Since we are talking about candies: one day there was a simchah in the shul, and they threw candies down from the ezras nashim into the shul. There was one of those wrapped lollipops, and someone brought it to the Rav. The Rav looked at it, liked it, made a berachah and ate it.

Five minutes later someone came to me and said, "Nissim, I checked those candies. They have no hechsher at all." Oy, the Rav ate one of those! I went to the Rav and said, "Kavod haRav, where is the candy they brought you before?"

"I ate it. Why?"

"Because they have no hechsher."

He looked at me, standing there all on fire, and said, "If I were about to put it into my mouth, they would give me a slap on the hand. In Shamayim they would not let me put it into my mouth. It cannot be that I put something not kosher into my mouth. Go check again."

I went upstairs. The moment I asked who had brought the candies, everyone understood that the Rav had sent me. Everyone went quiet; nobody spoke. I said, "No, the Rav just wants to see. There's no hechsher; tell me where you bought

them." Suddenly an older woman came over and said, "I bought them, but they are kosher. They are under Badatz London." I asked where the package was, and she showed it to me. And really, I saw that it said Badatz London. I went downstairs and showed the Rav.

He said, "Now my mind is at rest. I was already thinking that ruach hakodesh no longer guards me."

THE LAMB AT THE SIYUM

Told by Nissim Kafri

Once Rav Batzri invited us to a siyum masechta. They also slaughtered a lamb there, and they were going to give from it, as one gives to Kohanim, the zeroa, the lechayayim and the keivah. Before the meal began, just as they were going to slaughter the lamb, the Rav suddenly grabbed me from behind: "Come, come, come, quickly, we're going home!"

"What?" I said. "They're making a barbecue now..."

"Come, come, come quickly. We're getting on the buses."

So we got on the buses, and I asked, "Kavod haRav, what happened?"

He said, "They don't know it, but the lamb they are slaughtering now is pasul. Its whole stomach is full of worms. I saw it. I didn't want to embarrass Rav Batzri, who invited me to the meal, by telling him the lamb is pasul."

As we were going down the road out of Yerushalayim, Rav Yitzchak Batzri called. "Kavod haRav, what luck that you left!"

"What happened?"

"We are truly ashamed. We just slaughtered the lamb and opened its belly, and it is all full of worms."

You understand? He saw it beforehand.

By the way, when he ate meat, there was no need to tell him whether it was kosher. He simply saw the Shem Havayah spelled out letter by letter, Yud-Kei-Vav-Kei, on the meat, and he would say, "This is kosher, this is not kosher." He could see whether it was under a Badatz or not. That is how the Rav saw.

THE ARBA MINIM

Told by Nissim Kafri

The arba minim by the Rav were something special. Everyone should understand that the arba minim are not only a matter of taking them and shaking them as the mitzvah requires. For Rav Chaim Cohen, and for all the mekubalim, they are more

than that: they are a protection for Klal Yisrael. Whenever there were troubles, whatever the time of year, the Rav took out his esrog and lulav. Nothing happened to them; they stayed fresh all year. His esrog stayed fresh from one year to the next.

In the war with Saddam Hussein, the Gulf War (in 1991, when Saddam Hussein, the ruler of Iraq, fired missiles at Eretz Yisrael), the Rav would come to us at noon, and we made yichudim there with his esrog and lulav. His lulav was green. Not yellow: green! There was a bimah there, and he went around it with them, making seven hakafos, and we said Selichos, to remove harsh decrees from Klal Yisrael. The esrog was kept at his home.

He learned this from Rav Waltuch. Rav Waltuch used to go to the mikveh on Rechov Pines in Tel Aviv, in the Shabazi neighborhood (one of the old neighborhoods of Tel Aviv). One day at noon the Rav asked Rav Waltuch's wife where he was, and they told him he had gone to the mikveh. The Rav went there and found him inside the mikveh with the arba minim.

"What is this?" he asked.

"There are troubles for Klal Yisrael now, and I need to make yichudim inside the mikveh."

The Rav asked him, "Are these new? Did you just buy them?"

"No, no," he said.

The same happened to me with the Rav. Many times, when I came to his home in Elul, I saw his esrog and lulav there.

"Kevod HaRav," I said, "have you already bought new ones for the new year?"

"No, Nissim. These are from last year."

They lasted a whole year by him.

Why in the mikveh, I do not know. He did not say, and I did not ask. But with us he made yichudim many times, with hakafos and the arba minim. He did it with Rav Shoshan too, who would come to us.

I advise everyone not to throw away the lulav, the esrog and the hadassim, but to keep them at home. An esrog, as a rule, simply shrinks, unless someone has a nes like this.

The Bigdei Kehunah

Told by Nissim Kafri

At Machon HaMikdash in Yerushalayim (an institute that prepares the keilim and the bigdei kehunah for the third Beis HaMikdash), all the bigdei kehunah are made to the Rav's measurements. When Machon HaMikdash was being set up, the one who guided them in what to do and how was Rav Menachem Makover, and he used

the measurements of Rav Chaim Cohen for the kohen. They brought the Rav to someone who sewed them to fit him. These were prepared just as they prepared the Menorah and many other things; all the keilim of the Mikdash are ready there.

The Rav loved to go around the museum there, and he guided them. He explained all the keilim there and told them how to make them, b'ruach hakodesh. He told them exactly how each one looks: "Fix this like this, make this like this, and make that like that."

THE LION OF THE GROUP

Told by one of the mispallelim

Speaking of the Ben Ish Chai, I once had a dream about the Rav, and I told it to him.

In the dream I was in some shul, looking down from the ezras nashim into the shul. I saw tzaddikim sitting there, real tzaddikim, their faces shining, sitting and learning together as a chaburah. I watched, overwhelmed by the sight, and then someone tapped me on the back. I turned around and saw Rav Chaim.

He said to me, "Do you want to go inside? Shall I take you in?"

I said, "Of course, Rav!"

We went inside, and there I saw the Ben Ish Chai at the head of the chaburah. The moment Rav Chaim came in, the Ben Ish Chai and all the tzaddikim stood up, and the Ben Ish Chai announced, "The lion of the chaburah has arrived! Everyone stand!" Everyone stood, and I hid under some bench. Then Rav Chaim came over to me and said, "Come, come quickly! They are giving kavod here. Let's run away from here, fast!" The two of us ran out and fled. That was the dream.

I told it to Rav Chaim, and he just smiled and smiled. Then he said to me, "You merited to see the Ben Ish Chai."

But if the dream was a true one, and I really merited to see the Ben Ish Chai, then he was the lion of the chaburah. A wonder of wonders.

CHAPTER NINE

Above Nature

Wonders seen beside him



LIGHTING THE CANDLES

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav had a minhag to light eleven candles of olive oil every Erev Shabbos. In the morning he also lit candles, but in another place, at Tiferes Tzvi. On Erev Shabbos he lit them in our shul, Beis Yosef in Givatayim. Once I asked him what those candles were. "They are l'iluy nishmas special tzaddikim," he said, "eleven tzaddikim, whom I light for regularly."

"Who are they?"

"Don't ask."

I prepared the candles for him, and we always arrived at the shul before everyone else, the Rav and I. The Rav always came early. With the Rav, four o'clock meant three-thirty; every time was moved earlier.

One Erev Shabbos in the winter, when Shabbos came in at about four-thirty, we came to light the candles, and he said to me, "Nissim, where are the matches?"

"Here, next to this."

"But I do not see them."

I looked in front and behind; I searched and found nothing. Then the Rav said to me, "Nissim, is there anyone else in the shul besides you and me?"

"No," I said.

"Good. What you are about to see, you may not tell until my hundred and twenty. Watch what I do now. Do you see? And you tell no one."

He looked to the left and to the right. He stood before the candles and did this with his thumb, and from it came a spark, like the spark of a gas lighter when you light the stove: tak! A real spark. He held it to the wick and it lit. Tak, a spark, and another candle lit. Like that, the Rav lit all eleven candles before my eyes.

When I saw it I was in shock. I looked at him and said, "Kevod HaRav, what is this?"

"This you tell no one," he said. As long as he lived, until his hundred and twenty, I was not to tell it. Now it is permitted.

He had powers like this. He could open a door without its key: he would take a different key, turn it this way and that, and open it.

Later, when he was in a wheelchair and could not get close enough to light them himself, he appointed me to carry it on. "I permit you to light in my name," he told me. "Say: lizchus hatzaddikim." Baruch Hashem, to this day I light those candles every Erev Shabbos.

When you live beside a tzaddik, you live above nature all the time. You see things and more things and more things. All the stories I tell: in the middle of one story there is another story and another, because you live beside him. You do not feel it, but you know that something here is above nature.

Baruch Hashem, I was greatly strengthened by it. As I said, at first I was not frum. Once you have tasted and seen, you cannot deny it: you see that this world is run by Borei Olam. It cannot be otherwise.

THE CHAIR THAT ROLLED BY ITSELF

Told by Nissim Kafri

In his last years we would walk the Rav here on Shabbos morning, pushing him in his wheelchair. Someone reminded me of this between Shacharis and Mussaf today.

Once I showed people that I was not pushing him at all. I walked behind the wheelchair with my arms folded, and the wheelchair rolled along by itself. I said to them, "You see? I'm not holding it, I'm not pushing, nothing. Look, I'm letting go now, and the chair is going by itself."

Afterwards the Rav looked at me and said, "Why are you showing them that?" He caught me.

HOME BY EIGHT

Told by Nissim Kafri

Baruch Hashem, every Shabbos morning Rav Shlomo Batzri and I come to the Rebbetzin, tibadel lechayim arukim, and make Kiddush for her at her home, on the Rav's silver cup and from his siddur.

The Rebbetzin was always very particular that he should have a life at home, that his home should be his life. He would come home at seven or seven-thirty. At

half past seven he ate supper, they sat and talked a little, and at eight he got up and went to sleep. He slept until midnight, about four hours. At midnight he got up and said Tikkun Chatzos, and then he learned all night, until four or half past four in the morning, when he went to the mikveh; in those days he had no mikveh at home. So he slept only four hours.

One day we had a trip to Yerushalayim, to Rav David Batzri (one of the great mekubalim of Yerushalayim), for some siyum. The Rebbetzin said to me, "I am warning you: at eight in the evening you bring him back. Don't you dare! If you take the Rav, he is not to be a minute late, not a minute!"

We arrived there at five. We stood there a long time; there were drashos and speeches and everything else. I looked at my watch, and it was already six. The drive from Yerushalayim to Tel Aviv takes at least an hour. "Kavod haRav..." I began. He looked at me and said, "Everything is fine." At half past six: "Kavod haRav..." "Fine." At seven they started bentching. What was I going to do? "Kavod haRav, I promised the Rebbetzin," I told him. "I'm going to get it over the head!" He said, "Don't worry, everything is fine."

Friends, only at half past seven did they finish bentching. At seven thirty-five we got into the car, and at twenty to eight we started driving. Remember, I had promised her eight o'clock. Menachem Schwartz was the driver, and the Rav told him, "Now drive straight, straight all the way home." We did not understand. Everything flew past before our eyes. We had kefitzas haderech. At exactly eight I knocked on the door, and as we came in I heard the pip-pip (the beeps of the time signal that used to sound on the hour): exactly eight! "What luck, kavod haRav! How wonderful that we made it!"

The White Car

Told by Nissim Kafri

I remember that we once drove to a bris at the Diamond hall, the same hall where we later made the Rav's hilula. We reached the entrance, and the guard of the parking garage told us the lot was full; he had put up a sign that said "Parking Full."

"Why full?" the Rav said to him. "Here, there's one empty spot."

"What are you talking about, sir? There's nothing. Nobody leaves now; it's twelve noon. This is an office building. People only leave at four."

"Listen," the Rav said, "how much does it cost to go in?"

"Twenty-five shekels."

The Rav took out twenty-five shekels and said, "Here, take another ten shekels as a tip. If I don't find a spot, the ten shekels are yours, and give me back the twenty-five."

By the way, the Rav and tips: he simply gave them out. Apparently it was a way to be rid of the money.

We drove down, and it was really full. He said to the driver, "Keep going, go further down, go further down." We went further down. Then he said, "Now you'll see. We'll come to the elevators, a white car will pull out, and we'll go in."

We went around the curve, came to exactly that spot, and saw a white car pulling out. A quick turn of the wheel, and we were in.

It was nevuah, plain and simple. He knew the car, and he knew its color.

REGARDS IN UMAN

Told by Nissim Kafri

For a period, Chaim Ben Shimon also helped the Rav. Chaim traveled to Uman every year, and just before one of his flights he came to the Rav to ask for a berachah for the trip.

"Chaim, do me a favor," the Rav told him. "Aryeh Deri (the leader of the Shas party and a government minister) usually comes to ask me for a berachah before he travels to Uman. He was surely busy with the government and had no time. Meet him there in Uman and give him my regards and a berachah: Rav Chaim Cohen blesses him with success in everything. But give him regards from me."

"Kevod HaRav," Chaim said, "Uman is not a shul of twenty or thirty people. There are hundreds of people there, thousands! How will I find him?"

"What do you care? Don't worry. You will meet him; it will be fine."

Chaim told what happened. He arrived in Uman, and on the night of Rosh Hashanah, after the meal, he thought, "Why should I just sit around here? I'll go and get myself a good place in front of the tziyun." The chairs were empty, and he sat there all night. He learned as much as he could, and in the middle of it he fell asleep on his chair.

In the morning people began coming in, and someone nudged him. "Excuse me, may I get by? I want to pass over there."

He looked up to see who was standing next to him. It was Aryeh Deri!

"You have regards," he told him, "from HaRav HaChalban."

CHAPTER TEN

His Words and Ways

What he taught about Torah, tzaddikim and money



TALLELEI CHAIM

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav wrote sefarim, Tallelei Chaim. He wrote Tallelei Chaim on all five Chumashei Torah, and there is more Tallelei Chaim besides. It is impossible that a person could write such sefarim, with all the power that is in them, on his own. Everything he wrote in those sefarim was written with ruach hakodesh, and he said so himself.

At present they cannot be bought. There are only a few volumes of Tallelei Chaim, and we hope, b'ezras Hashem, to publish them soon, for a great many people are asking for them.

THIRTY-SIX HERE, THIRTY-SIX THERE

Told by Nissim Kafri

I believe that every single one of us has his own nissim and wonders; only we do not notice them. The zechus of the tzaddikim is that they see.

It was a chiddush for me when the Rav said that there are thirty-six tzaddikim in Eretz Yisrael and thirty-six tzaddikim in chutz la'aretz, and they are not the same thirty-six. I had never known it. Once I asked him, "Kevod HaRav, do you know all of them, all the tzaddikim here in Eretz Yisrael?"

"Yes," he said. "But I also know the thirty-six tzaddikim in chutz la'aretz."

"What do you mean?"

"In Eretz Yisrael there are thirty-six tzaddikim, and in chutz la'aretz there are thirty-six other tzaddikim. It is not the same thing."

He knew them all, and spoke with all of them. They were in contact all the time.

As they say, a man who sits inside a barrel of honey does not know what salty is: everything around him is honey. Because of my many sins, I think about myself today, looking back: why did I not think to ask him more? I was ashamed to ask him, because he was like a flowing spring. All the time, there were things above nature.

A TOFFEE OR A HUNDRED DOLLARS

Told by Nissim Kafri

Once I asked the Rav, "Kevod HaRav, why do we bring so many sweets for the children?"

"Nissim," he answered, "you work at the Electric Company (the Israel Electric Corporation). Do you go to work for the parnassah, or because you love the Electric Company?"

"I'll tell you the truth," I said. "For the parnassah. But I also love my work at the Electric Company."

"The children are the same," he said. "They love the shul, but what they get in shul matters more to them. Take a child and offer him a toffee or a hundred dollars. Which will he take?"

He will take the toffee. For you, the money is what counts; for him, it is the candy. That candy is what he will remember about shul.

And so, to this day, we spoil the children in our shul. Yishtabach Shemo la'ad, ours is a blessed congregation, a wonderful kehillah.

EITHER A GIVER OR A RECEIVER

Told by Nissim Kafri

I used to collect for kimcha d'Pischa, going around to all sorts of wealthy people. The Rav had a list, and I would go to the people on it.

One day I came and told him that a certain wealthy man had said his situation was not good this year, and he could not give money for kimcha d'Pischa. The Rav looked at me and said, "What do you mean, he has no money? Tell him to come to me."

I went back to the man. "I already told you my situation is not good this year," he said. "Why are you here again?"

"The Rav told me you should come to him," I said. "He wants to speak with you urgently."

That Friday the man came with me to the machlavah (the Rav's dairy) and went in to the Rav. The Rav took out his bundle of money (you all know how he would

take out that bundle), counted out hundred-shekel bills, and handed them to the wealthy man.

The man looked at him and said, "Rav, what are you giving me?"

"Listen," the Rav said. "With kimcha d'Pischa there are only two kinds: one either receives or gives. If you receive, it means you are in a hard situation. You told Nissim your situation is hard, so I am giving to you. If your situation is not hard, then give. Decide: here or here. One cannot be in the middle. Either a giver or a receiver."

"It Stinks!"

Told by Nissim Kafri

What can I tell you about the Rav and money? To him it was the most contemptible thing there is; he called it filth.

I used to collect money for him for all kinds of tzedakah, for kimcha d'Pischa or for matanos la'evyonim. Once, before Rosh Hashanah, I collected close to 80,000 shekels and brought it to him at the Tiferes Tzion shul, and he gave it away as matan b'seser.

An hour later I got a phone call. "Nissim, how wonderful! How wonderful!"

"What is it?" I asked.

"I got rid of all the money! There is nothing left!"

"What do you mean?"

"It stinks!" he said. "There was money here, and it stinks! Eighty thousand shekels, and it stinks!"

People chase after a sum like that for five years. To him, it stank. That is what money was worth in his eyes.

Chapter Eleven

His Passing

The last months, and the last Erev Shavuos

"Let Me Go"

Told by Nissim Kafri

When the Rav was already in a wheelchair, I would bring him every Shabbos morning from his home to the shul. I live near him.

Once, as we were on our way, he said, "Nissim, please stop the chair."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Listen," he said, "I am already suffering very much. I cannot go on living. I ask you: let me go. Let me be released from the world; I want to go to Olam HaEmes. Enough, I cannot anymore. I am suffering."

"Kevod HaRav," I said, "we need you. We cannot let you go."

"I ask you, I beg you. I am suffering, and I can no longer help people. And I promise you, I give my word, that the tzaddikim," and he added, as he always did, "not I, the true tzaddikim, can help more after their death than in their lives. Why? While they are alive, they suffer like any human being. They have physical problems: blood pressure, diabetes, heart trouble, all sorts of problems of a physical body. I cannot help people anymore; I am suffering already. But if you let me go and let me be above, that is my task: everyone who comes to my tziyun and asks me to help him. Tell people that I promise them I will come." Those were his words.

"Kevod HaRav," I said, "we need you. I can't."

"Nissim, I ask you, I beg you, I beg you."

This went on for several months. I told him, "We will not let you go." And some time later he was niftar.

Now I will tell some stories of people who went to the Rav's tziyun and were helped. It is very important to go there. Whoever wants to receive a yeshuah and help through the tzaddik should know that the tzaddik is only a keli.

THE LAST BERACHOS

Told by Nissim Kafri

The Rav passed away on the twelfth of Av, but what happened to him, when he lost consciousness and his illness began, happened exactly on Erev Shavuos. I will start with the end, to show that he knew he was going to leave us.

That year Erev Shavuos fell on Shabbos, so that Shavuos began on Motza'ei Shabbos and the Yom Tov was on Sunday. On Shabbos morning there was to be a bris in our shul, and the Rav was to be the sandak. The family had rented a hotel not far from us and made all the arrangements.

On Friday I came to the Rav at the dairy, as I always did, to arrange what we would do for Shavuos. He asked, "Did you prepare everything at the shul for Shavuos?"

"Yes, Kevod HaRav."

"And did you prepare a place for me to rest if I do not feel well? Some bed, something like that?"

"Yes."

"And the bris?"

"What about the bris, Kevod HaRav?"

"I promised them, and they have already made all the arrangements. For the bris I will hold out."

I did not understand those words; to me they seemed in order, since the Rav was already not feeling well. Then he said, "Nissim, come, I want to give you a berachah." When the Rav wants to give a berachah, you bow your head. He put both his hands on my head and blessed me, and blessed me, and blessed me, a great many berachos. I could feel these were not the usual berachos he gave me every Friday. I was happy; what did I care? I was getting berachos.

Then I went to take his things out to the car, because we wanted to drive. He said, "Nissim, I want to bless you again." Again? Fine, you take another berachah. When we were already leaving, he said, "Nissim, one more."

I did not understand it then. It seemed strange, but I did not understand what it was. Three times! Never in my life had I received berachah upon berachah like that. It was as if he were equipping me: take, I am giving you, so that you have as many berachos as possible. He blessed me with success in life, that my children should marry, that I should have grandchildren, health, all the berachos a man asks for himself, for the children, the grandchildren, the parents, everyone. It was hakaras hatov, but he was taking leave. He knew he was going, and I did not understand at all that he was leaving this world, and that this was the last berachah I would receive from him.

I brought him home and told him we would meet in the evening. I took him to tefillah on Friday night and brought him back. "In the morning come as usual," he said.

In the morning I came for him as usual and we went to shul, pushing him in his wheelchair. On the way I told him about something that had nothing to do with holy matters: there were elections, and I said, "Kevod HaRav, the mayor wants to do such and such." My friend David Wahba, may he have long life, said to me, "Why are you talking to him about that now? Tell him something from the parashah."

"You tell him something from the parashah," I said, and we walked on. The Rav was very happy with the divrei Torah David said, and he said to him, "David, I must bless you." I stopped the wheelchair, David came around in front of it, and the Rav began to bless him and bless him and bless him, a great many berachos.

"Kevod HaRav, can I also get a berachah?" I asked.

"Yes, there is a berachah."

Further along the way he said again, "David, I will give you another berachah, one more." And I said, "Kevod HaRav, I also want another berachah." So we came to the shul. He said to me, "Nissim, I have terrible pains in my legs. Tell the chazzan to go quickly, because my legs hurt terribly." And he davened.

When we finished the tefillah I asked him, "Kevod HaRav, how do you feel?"

"I feel really not well," he said.

"What should we tell them? That you will not be sandak?"

"What did I tell you yesterday? I promised them. We will make every effort, and I will hold out." It was just what he had said to me on Friday.

He was the sandak, and everything went peacefully. He sat there, everyone kissed his hand, and he smiled. They were making a kiddush afterward, and I said to him, "Kevod HaRav, I have to stay; they asked me to make the berachah on the wine." But we finished quickly, and he said right away, "Take me home. I do not feel well. I am tired."

I took him home, and he said, "Come and take me at one o'clock for Minchah." On Shabbos we always davened Minchah early, Minchah gedolah, and before it he gave a half-hour shiur in the Ben Ish Chai, from one to one-thirty, and at one-thirty we davened Minchah and went home.

I came earlier, of course, and he was already waiting for me outside in his wheelchair. As we walked we again spoke divrei Torah, and again he gave David and me a berachah. We were very happy. We arrived, he gave the shiur, we davened Minchah, and we went home.

Then he said to me, "Nissim, do not forget to come early. I want to be at the shul early. Come to me at five and take me to the shul."

"Fine," I said.

When I came at ten to five, I already saw people outside, and I did not understand what had happened. They told me that he had been taken to the hospital and was not speaking. From there it went on: he was not well from that day until the twelfth of Av, when he passed away.

EVERY EREV SHAVUOS

Told by Nissim Kafri

It is known that a person who stays up the whole night of Shavuos holds on from one year to the next. We saw this with our own eyes with the Rav. It was not a story we heard from someone else. We watched it happen, year after year.

Six or seven years before his petirah, on Erev Shavuos, I came to the Rav at the dairy. We got everything ready, and he told me that all was in order. "Everything is fine," he said. "Are you ready?" I told him I was. It was an ordinary Erev Yom Tov, not Erev Shabbos, and I told him that everything was in order and prepared.

At about four in the afternoon, Liron Zohar called me. "Nissim, the Rav is not feeling well. What do we do?"

"What do you mean, what do we do?" I said. "Take him to the hospital."

They brought him to the hospital, and the doctor saw him and examined him. Then he said, "I am not releasing him for Shabbos or for Yom Tov. He stays here with us."

I knew the Rav would want to daven. The Rav had never been in a hospital in his life. We quickly made phone calls to the right places and arranged a minyan for him. We brought him a Sefer Torah, they gave us a large room, and we put up a mechitzah between the place where he slept and the place where we davened, and people learned with him all night. We davened with him Erev Shavuos, and we davened with him all of Shavuos, and he felt well the whole Yom Tov. On Sunday morning they saw that everything was in order and sent us home.

That held for another year. A year later, on Erev Shavuos, the same thing happened again, and again they wanted to keep him in the hospital over Shavuos. We came and begged them. "Listen," we said, "this is terribly hard for us." We even signed for them, so long as they would release him. We promised to bring a doctor to stay with him in the house, and if, chas v'shalom, anything happened, we would bring him straight back to the hospital. The Rav has a shul in his house, with a sefer Torah and everything. We put him there, made a minyan, and davened, and he spent the Yom Tov at home. Once again it passed.

Three or four more years went by, and the same thing happened again. It was always on Erev Shavuos and only on Erev Shavuos. It was like a sign from Shamayim. Once more we did not give in, and we davened with him there in the hospital, and once more it passed.

The last time, the mekatreg had already said, "Enough, chevreh. You have been beside him long enough. From now on nobody is to be beside him." They put him into a kind of coma, and there was nothing more to be done. He remained that way from the sixth of Sivan, Shavuos, until the twelfth of Elul, close to three months. We were with him, and there were times he was awake. A few times we really thought they were about to release him. For a long stretch he was in intensive care, and nobody could even go in to him. He did not say a word about his petirah, at least nothing that I know of.

It is very important that people know this: do not give up on the night of Shavuos. These are not empty words. One really must stay awake the whole night, because there is a very great segulah in it. The Arizal said this, and we saw it.

The Envelopes

Told by Nissim Kafri

On Purim we used to make a Purim celebration in our shul. There was a shiur, the seudah was held there, and at the end of the seudah the Rav gave everyone who had been at the seudah a small bottle of wine and a bill, the way the Lubavitcher Rebbe gave a dollar (he used to hand a dollar bill to each of the thousands who came to him). The Rav gave fifty shekels: for every person who came, fifty shekels in an envelope, with something written on it.

When the Rav passed away, Rabbi Shlomo said to the Rav's son, Kobi, "You know, your father always brought us this on Purim. Now there is no one to bring it."

"Why do you say there isn't?" Kobi answered. "There is. I went and looked among my father's things. He had already prepared for next Purim: envelopes with the fifty shekels."

He prepared everything. He prepared envelopes for every need: an envelope for the Sefer Torah, an envelope for the buses to the levayah, the meal for the seudah at the end of the shivah, the shloshim. Everything was ready in envelopes, all the money. He surely knew.

Chapter Twelve

After His Passing

At his kever, in his home and in his shul



The Balcony at Sanhedria

Told by Nissim Kafri

Menachem Cohen, who is a kohen, once asked me, "Tell me, how can I go and see the kever of the tzaddik?" I told him that the tzaddik thought of everything. Here is what the Rav arranged there, so that a kohen, or anyone who does not want to become tamei in the beis hakvaros, can come.

It began about fifteen years ago, when the Rav's oldest brother, Eliyahu HaKohen, passed away. The Rav had bought eight plots in Sanhedria (a cemetery in Yerushalayim, closed in among the houses of a crowded neighborhood): for his father, his mother, Rav Yehuda Patilon, his brother David Cohen, his brother Eliyahu HaKohen and Eliyahu's wife, and for himself and his own wife. He had bought them in the farthest corner of the beis hakvaros, which I did not know.

On the day of the burial we came to Sanhedria. It was my first time there. The Rav could not enter the beis hakvaros and be at the hespedim, so he stood outside. He said to me, "Nissim, I want very much to see my brother's burial. How can I see it?"

"What can I do?" I said.

"Go, run around the beis hakvaros and find some place I can stand on and see."

I did not know the place, and I did not know where they would bury him; he had not told me which section. I said, there will be siyata diShmaya. I ran around the outer wall, in among the houses, until I came to a courtyard and saw a wall. "This must be it," I said. In the courtyard I found a big wooden box and set it against the wall, which was about three meters high. I took a smaller crate, and a smaller one, and made myself a kind of steps and climbed up. Wonder of wonders, I was standing exactly opposite the kever, exactly. The Rav himself is now buried

there, in that same section he bought for his family. How happy I was! What luck, I thought; but everything is planned.

I ran quickly to the Rav: "Kevod HaRav, I found a place." It was a bit of a walk. We came to the spot and I said, "Rav, climb up here, onto this crate." And he saw the whole burial of his brother.

When it was over, I knew I had to make the place usable, because it would not do for every visit. This was only the burial; in a week we would have to come again to the kever at the end of the shivah. What would I do? From Shamayim they sent me a neighbor, who came down and said, "Excuse me, what are you doing here?"

"Do you know the Chalban?" I asked.

"I have heard of him, but I do not know him."

"You see that man? That is the Chalban."

"Let us make a deal," he said. "You ask the Rav to help me with some requests I have, and I will arrange a place here for you to stand on."

So it was. When we came a week later, he had built a kind of ramp: you went up steps to a flat platform, and there the Rav stood, saw the kever and davened for his brother. We came again for the shloshim and for the yahrzeit, and every time the Rav stood there and saw.

Later this neighbor, Yitzchak, called me one day. "Nissim, there is a problem. The neighbors all want to enlarge the building and add a room. There will be no courtyard left, and no place for you to stand."

"Yitzchak," I said, "I am relying on you. Arrange some place there, a balcony, where the Rav can stand."

So it was: he made a special balcony. And what is special about it? On which day did they finish building it? On the day of the Rav's levayah.

We came that day and I said to myself, "What will I do? Where will they stand?" Then Yitzchak said to me, "Don't worry, Nissim. Just today the metalworker finished the balcony."

To this day, any kohen, or anyone who does not want to become tamei, can come there. The neighbors allow it, only without noise and commotion. You stand two meters from the tziyun and see it, the Rav's as well. Kohanim stand there, and people who do not want to become tamei, and women who do not want to enter a beis hakvaros stand there, daven, and ask him for help.

He thought even of this. The Rav thought of everything.

The Picture and the Chair

Told by Nissim Kafri

Baruch Hashem, every Shabbos I merit to make Kiddush for the Rebbetzin, and each time I tell her stories about the Rav. Once she said to me, "Yes, all of you hear stories, nissim v'niflaos. I have no nissim v'niflaos from him at all. We are hungry for nissim v'niflaos. Whatever we need here at home, there is truly nothing, nothing at all."

He heard. Since then he says to her every single morning, "Boker tov!" He says it out loud, and she hears it. Is that not a nes?

She said to him, "But I want to see you."

"I cannot let you see me," he answered.

"Then show me that you are here."

So he moved the picture for her.

"Well," she said, "that is from the wind. There is a shutter, and it swings."

He did not answer. Some time later she said to him, "You know what? Move your chair." At the table there was the chair he used to sit on, and he moved the chair for her.

"Good," she said to him. "Now I understand."

"But see, Nissim," she said to me.

The Esrog That Stayed Fresh

Told by Nissim Kafri

I always went with the Rav to buy esrogim and the arba minim. After his petirah I took it upon myself to go on buying him a set every year, just as I was used to doing. For me it is as if he is alive.

So too with his seat in the shul. There is no plaque on it saying "HaRav HaChalban z"l." Every year I put a label on the seat of every mispallel in our shul, with his name and the words "Seat for the Yomim Tovim 5786," and every year I put one on the Rav's seat too: "Rabbi Chaim, alav hashalom." His set of arba minim is set aside for him as well.

He was niftar in 5779, and at the first Yomim Tovim after that I said, "I'm going on buying him the set." I went and bought it, and one day I made a berachah on it. At first I left it by his seat, but I saw that people kept touching it, so I put it in my office in the shul. This is the Chalban's shul as it is today. It is called Beis Yosef, and it is at 11 Rechov HaGilboa in Givatayim.

After a month an esrog begins to shrivel. A month passed, and I looked at it and saw it still yellow. How could it be? The Rav had not made the berachah on it; I

had. Another month went by, and it was already Chanukah, and I saw it still yellow. I said to myself, "This cannot be; it's two months already." Another month went by, and it was still yellow.

To my great sorrow it lasted only until Pesach, but until Pesach, until the month of Nissan, it stayed fresh. It had not been put in a freezer or anything else; it lay in the simple plastic box I bought it in. Then someone decided to clean the office in the shul for Pesach, and thought, "What is this esrog doing here?" and threw it out. But I have a photograph of it from before Pesach, still yellow.

STORIES HE DOES NOT WANT TOLD

Told by Nissim Kafri

To this day, whenever I tell stories of the Rav, if there is a story he does not want me to tell, something suddenly comes up and I cannot tell it. That happened to me once when I was sitting in the succah at home and began to tell a story that he would not really have wanted told.

THREE JUDGES IN THE BEIS DIN SHEL MAALAH

Told by Nissim Kafri

I will tell you something that happened only now. There is a man named Rav Naim who lives in Givatayim, on Katznelson Street. Last week he told two very special stories, and this is the first.

About two months earlier, a woman came to Rav Naim and told him that she had been clinically dead (her life had stopped, and the doctors brought her back). There she stood in front of him, perfectly well, back in this world, and she said, "I want to ask you a question."

"What is it?" he asked.

"When I went up to Shamayim," she said, "there was a Beis Din sitting there, with three judges: Rav Ovadia Yosef (the great posek and leader of Sephardic Jewry), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and Rav HaChalban. As soon as the Chalban saw me, he looked at me and said, 'What are you doing here?'

"I answered him, 'Kevod HaRav, how should I know what I am doing here? If I am up here in Shamayim, it is because they brought me. I did not come by myself.'

"He said, 'You have nothing to do here. I decree that you go back down.' Then he turned to Rav Ovadia and asked, 'Do you agree?' Rav Ovadia said yes. 'And you, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, do you agree?' Then I went down, down, down, and suddenly I was back."

That was her question to Rav Naim. "I know who the Lubavitcher Rebbe is," she said, "and I know who Rav Ovadia is. But who is the Chalban?" She had no idea who he was.

See, then, where he sits: in the Beis Din shel Maalah.

A Loan for the Avreichim

Told by Nissim Kafri

This is the second story Rav Naim told. During the last year, money had been very tight for all of his avreichim, partly because of the Corona epidemic and partly for other reasons. One day he decided to go up to the Rav's tziyun.

While we are speaking of the Rav's tziyun, let me tell you: whoever has not been there, I recommend that he go. Whatever you ask for, all the berachos, everything is there. Go and you will come to know it for yourself; these are facts. Almost every day I get phone calls with stories that are simply unbelievable.

Rav Naim went there and poured out his heart to the Rav: he was in trouble, he had no money, he had talmidei yeshivah to support. He asked the Rav to help him with a nes, that some nadiv should come and give him money.

He came home and went to sleep. In the middle of the night Rav Chaim Cohen came to him in a dream and said, "You want money? Go and take a loan. Borrow from someone, this much." He showed him with his hand exactly how high a pile. "Take a loan in hundred-shekel bills, hand them out generously to all your avreichim, and you will see yeshuos."

"I came to ask for money," Rav Naim said to himself, "and he tells me to take loans? I am tangled in loans as it is!" But the Rav had said it, so he did it. He went and borrowed from someone exactly that much money, a pile of exactly that height, and began handing out the hundred-shekel bills.

Just as he came to give out the very last hundred-shekel bill, someone walked in and said, "Kevod HaRav Naim, listen. I had a certain problem, and I promised, bli neder, that if I got out of it, I would bring you bills as ma'aser, as a donation." And he brought him a pile of bills of exactly the same height.

"See what this is," Rav Naim said. "nissim from Shamayim." The Rav had shown him: give, and you will receive.

A THOUSAND SHEKEL FROM THE KEVER

Told by Nissim Kafri

One of our fine mispallelim, who was a chassid of the Rav, went last Sunday to the Rav's kever in Sanhedria (the old cemetery in Yerushalayim). He saw a woman sitting there crying, and he asked her why.

She said, "I came to say thank you to the Rav."

He asked, "What do you mean, thank you to the Rav?"

She told him, "For many years I was not blessed with children. I asked the Rav, and he said to me, 'Don't worry, my daughter, you will have children. Don't worry, you will have children.' When he was niftar, I said to myself, 'Oy, now what will be? The Rav promised me!'" A year after the Rav's petirah she gave birth, and now she had come to his kever, and there she met our chassid.

She told him that she had promised the Rav to give a thousand shekel to some place. She gave the thousand shekel to this shul, Beis Yosef, in the zechus of the tzaddik.

THE WOMAN FROM TEVERIA

Told by Nissim Kafri

Two years ago, before Chanukah (I say the time on purpose, because it gives a sense of the story), a woman called me.

"Hello, am I speaking with Nissim?"

"Yes."

"You were the Chalban's shamash?"

"Yes."

"From the Beis Yosef shul in Givatayim?"

"Yes."

"I must tell you a story. I have a story with the tzaddik HaChalban."

"From when?"

"From now, very recently."

She told me that just before the Yomim Tovim, around this time of the year, in Elul, they found a growth in her womb, lo aleinu. She was a young woman with small children. She fell into despair and began crying out to Hashem. Then a woman came and said to her, "Do you want yeshuos? Go to the tzaddik HaChalban. He is buried in Yerushalayim, in Sanhedria. Go to him so that he will daven for you before Hashem, and you will see yeshuos."

So she went. She took the bus from Teveria to Yerushalayim, came to the tzaddik's kever and cried there. She asked him to daven for her, that she was a

young woman, that Hashem should have pity on her and she should come out of this. She simply cried.

That night, she said, the Rav appeared to her in a dream. She did not know him and had no idea who he was. He said to her, "Listen. You were at my tziyun today and asked me about such and such. I davened in Shamayim, and they will remove it from you. But I ask one thing of you."

"What?" she asked.

"Give money, tzedakah, to my shul, the Chalban's shul: Beis Yosef."

That is what he told her. But he did not tell her where this shul was. She wondered: the Chalban's shul, Beis Yosef, where can it be? In Bnei Brak? In Yerushalayim? She made an agreement with him that if everything passed in peace she would give.

The Yomim Tovim came, and after them she was to have the treatment she needed. She went for the tests in preparation for the surgery, and they told her, "Listen, something here does not add up for us. These are not the same results as in the images. Look: here you had it, and here, now, there is nothing." Nothing at all! What could she tell them? She told them nothing. Baruch Hashem, they did not need to operate, and everything passed in peace.

Now she began to search. A Beis Yosef shul of the Chalban in Yerushalayim? There was none. In Bnei Brak? None. She searched in Elad and in Beit Shemesh and found nothing. Then someone told her, "What are you talking about? He lived in Givatayim." She called the Religious Council of Givatayim (the city office for religious services), they gave her my number, and so she came to me. Baruch Hashem, she gave a very handsome sum.

See what this was: the Rav told her this so that it would be a proof for her that he had really been there and that it was no fancy. She did not know the Beis Yosef shul; she knew nothing about it.

The Shorter Leg

Told by Nissim Kafri

The tzaddik helps people, and we see it. This year, on the Rav's yahrzeit, the twelfth of Elul, we were at the kever in the morning for an azkarah, with Rav Shlomo and many of the Rav's talmidim. Suddenly I saw a man standing there and shouting, "Thank You, HaKadosh Baruch Hu! Thank you, Rabbi Chaim, for helping me! Thank you! Thank you all!"

People asked him what had happened. He said, "I have to tell it out loud so everyone hears." This is what he told.

He had quite a few troubles. His wife was expecting, and she went for tests, an ultrasound. They were told, "Listen, there is a problem with the baby. One leg is shorter than the other." When they heard it, they were thrown into confusion and did not know what to do.

Someone who knew him came over and said, "Have you heard of the Tzaddik HaChalban?"

"No," he said.

"Go to his kever. Cry to him that he should daven for you in Shamayim, and you daven too. Together, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will remove this gezeirah."

He went and davened there. He did not know Rav Chaim, so to strengthen himself more he also went to the kever of Shimon HaTzaddik. There he met the mekubal Rav Yehuda Scheinfeld and told him the whole story, and that he had been to the Tzaddik HaChalban.

The mekubal said, "If you were at the Tzaddik HaChalban, you are already taken care of. Know that it is tried and tested: everything is already in order. Go and do a test, and you will see what I told you. If the tzaddik davened for you and you davened, HaKadosh Baruch Hu has heard our tefillos."

"I went," he told us, "and they did tests." They did the ultrasound again, only a week later, and there was nothing. The legs were equal. His wife could not believe it when they told her the scan showed everything was fine. "It cannot be!" she said, and she cried and cried. So they waited another week or two and went to have it done in another place, and again everything was fine. Baruch Hashem, it was a baby girl.

He had come to the yahrzeit to say thank you to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and to the tzaddik who davened for him. I asked him whether he would allow me to publicize it. "Yes," he said, "only without my name." But I have his telephone number.

RABBI CHAIM WIPES AWAY A BAD DREAM

Told by Gideon

Rabbi Chaim does more for us above than he did down here. I want to tell something short that I merited with him myself.

I once had a dream that I woke up from with a very unpleasant feeling. For three or four months I carried it around, heavy on my heart. Then one night, b'chasdei Hashem, I davened to Hashem, and I also said, "In the zechus of Rabbi Chaim." I had become very attached to the tzaddik, and I merited to dream of him many times.

I am a baal teshuvah, b'chasdei Hashem, for about thirty-two years now. In the dream I was walking somewhere, and I saw the vanities of this world as they had been in my past. It was nothing serious, just something general. Suddenly I turned my head, and I saw Rabbi Chaim standing behind me, hugging me from behind. I was so moved that I began to cry in the dream.

I said to him, "Rabbi Chaim, I dreamt an unpleasant dream, and it has troubled me for so long."

"It is nothing," Rabbi Chaim told me. "It is nothing." He gave me a hug and calmed me. Then he opened my mouth, reached in with his hand from the outside, and drew black bile out of me, some thick, creamy substance, black in color. I simply felt that he was cleaning me out, b'chasdei Hashem. I felt good, and I began to cry from happiness.

I also had a certain private request that I had asked of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Rabbi Chaim took out something like a pill, about that request. He did not say it to me in words, but in a dream you understand. He opened my mouth and gave me something to swallow. I felt it was a kind of berachah, as if I were eating the mann. That was only about a month and a half or two months ago. B'ezras Hashem the request will be answered. I believe it with emunah sheleimah: if Rabbi Chaim gave it to me, it will help.

Then, still in the dream, I said to him, "Rabbi Chaim, how is my mother?" She passed away four years ago. "Give her my love."

Suddenly I heard a telephone ringing in my ear, and then my mother answered me. I spoke to her in Ladino (the Spanish of the Sephardi Jews): "Mama, te amo mucho, I love you, Mama." She said to me, "I love you," and I talked with her on the telephone. He had given me the power to place a call to my mother a"h and speak with her from the upper worlds. Then I woke up.

I had to tell this, to show people that a cry to HaKadosh Baruch Hu from the heart, together with mentioning the zechus of the tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim, works. He is truly present. First of all, one must strengthen his bond with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. But the more stories I hear about Rabbi Chaim, from Nissim and from Rabbi Nachman, the more I see that this tzaddik is present in our generation in an amazing way. So many people receive yeshuos through him, and messages, and dreams, and help with every kind of trouble and narrowness and hidden distress that people have. We have a faithful partner in Rabbi Chaim. May his zechus protect us and light our way in the darkness and distress of these times.

THE SILVER CHATZOTZROS

Told by Nissim Kafri

We have silver chatzotzros in our shul, as the Rav too had, to sweeten dinim. In the last war we went with Rav Shlomo Batzri to all sorts of places and blew the chatzotzros there.

What is special about these chatzotzros is that they are made of one piece, mikshah. They are not put together from parts; the silver is drawn out in a single piece and the chatzotzros are made from it, as the Torah writes of the chatzotzros of the Mikdash.

Not long ago, about half a year or a year ago, we went to daven at the kever of Yehudah ben Yaakov (the son of Yaakov Avinu, whose traditional kever is in the town of Yehud). Someone forgot the box with the chatzotzros there by mistake. He went back half an hour later, and it was gone. That is a great deal of money; they are pure silver.

Rav Shlomo Batzri came to me in great sorrow and said, "Nissim, we forgot the chatzotzros there, and when we went back they were gone."

"Kevod HaRav," I said, "put up a note at the tziyun asking whoever found them to call you, and you'll see that they will come and give them back."

So it was. An hour later someone saw the note and gave us back the chatzotzros.

THE CHALBAN'S SHUL TODAY

Told by Nissim Kafri

I run the shul today together with Rav Shlomo Batzri and the other members of the amutah, and the shul keeps growing and flourishing. On this Rosh Chodesh Elul, in the morning, we opened a kollel for retirees. Rav Rosenblum came, and the chief rabbi of Givatayim came as well.

The shul lives only on donations. We receive no budget from anywhere; the only ones who keep it going are people. Whoever wants to merit the great mitzvah of supporting the Chalban's shul is invited: 11 Rechov HaGilboa, Givatayim.