

**MEMOIRS**  
of  
**REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON**

*wife of*  
RABBI LEVI YITZCHAK SCHNEERSON  
and  
*mother of*  
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE  
**RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON**

זצוקללה"ה נבג"מ זי"ע



Installment 18



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## PREFACE

We are pleased to present Installment 18 of *Memoirs by Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson*—an annotated English translation of the memoirs by Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson, wife of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson and mother of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory.<sup>1</sup>

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May the increase in the dissemination of the Chasidic wellsprings hasten the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days.

*Kehot Publication Society*

13 Shvat 5772

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1. For further details see the Preface to Installment 1.

## MEMOIRS

OF

REBBETZIN CHANA SCHNEERSON

INSTALLMENT 18

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by

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### Hamantaschen

The festival of Purim arrived. We had a *Megillat Esther*,<sup>179</sup> which I had once included in a food package I had sent my husband.

For Purim we were visited by two evacuees, a young Jewish man, inclined towards Communism, and his female neighbor, an engineer who had once studied Yiddish and was interested in Judaism.

Some time before, I had set aside some white flour,<sup>180</sup> with which I baked two hamantaschen. Although it's a minor custom, it played an important role in our lives, reminding us that we were still human and still Jews, and that not every day was the same. We were reminded that we could be concerned with loftier concepts—not just with thinking about our daily bread, and drawing the pail of water from the well and hauling it though the mud, always spilling some and making the already swampy ground even muddier.

The two guests were our company for Purim. They regarded hamantaschen as an excessive extravagance and, as was prevalent in that culture, inveighed against the “old-fashioned” customs.

### Bat-Sheva Althaus

Passover approached, and with it the end of my husband's five-year sentence.

One morning, on my way to get milk, I saw a young woman carrying a suitcase, whose clothing and appearance indicated she was not local. When she came closer, she stopped and asked, “If I'm not mistaken, aren't you Chana?”

I was somewhat startled, but when she began talking, I recognized her as the daughter of Eliyahu Chaim.<sup>181</sup> She had

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179. Handwritten Scroll of Esther, read aloud on Purim evening and morning.

180. See above, p. 000.

181. The renowned Chasid, Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Althaus (son of Rabbi Pinchas Todros), a close family friend of the Lubavitcher Rebbes.

traveled specifically to meet us. I was unable to bring her to our home, however, because I had to prepare food supplies for the next 24 hours and within an hour there would be nothing left.

She had been traveling for 48 hours—under the prevailing difficult conditions. She hadn't been able to sleep at all in her extremely cramped seat. After arriving at the station, she had dragged herself more than a kilometer through the mud, and was now so exhausted that she had no strength to remain standing in the mud to wait for me. I asked the young son of a non-Jewish neighbor to direct her to our home, while I proceeded on my way.

After completing my errands, I returned home only to find she wasn't there. The boy had sent her in the wrong direction, taking her far from our home, and I had to go out looking for her.

### **Working to save us**

When Mendel Rabin—who had been staying with us, as I've mentioned—arrived in Alma-Ata, he and his brother Hirsh told their acquaintances about his visit to us. With tears in his eyes, he described our plight and the important steps they had taken to help us with what we needed, how for many reasons it was important to hurry and to find someone to bring us the documentation.

Obtaining all the necessary documents had been very difficult and had cost a fortune. They were "bought" and obtained only after extensive intercessions in various government offices. The funds for all this had been contributed privately by good friends. Some had donated tens of thousands of rubles, a large portion of their wealth.

The release documents were already signed by the government officials of the republic,<sup>182</sup> so the task of bringing them to us could not be entrusted to just anyone. Nor would just anyone accept such a mission; being discovered with documents confirming an exile's release before the end of his sentence would spell extreme danger for the courier and those who had worked to obtain them.

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182. Kazakhstan.

At various train stations—some of them on the line to where we lived—NKVD agents would board the trains and ask to see what the passengers were carrying on their person. Disobeying was never an option.

### **Personal risk in order to rescue us**

At a meeting convened to decide how to proceed with rescue efforts, Bat-Sheva, on hearing for whom these efforts were required, immediately volunteered to take the risk and travel with the documents, as dangerous as it might be.

She stipulated, however, that her children be supported during her absence. She worked at a knitting factory, and asked that her daily production quota be completed and supplied to the factory, and its earnings used to support her children.

The Rabinov<sup>183</sup> brothers accepted her proposal, which would enable the mission to be performed in the finest manner.

At work, she supervised an entire team. The factory manager provided her with documents stating that she was traveling on behalf of the factory to purchase materials, and he delegated someone else to supervise the workgroup during her absence.

When she confided to him the purpose of her trip, he immediately responded that he had heard of this personage—my husband—and in order to rescue him he was prepared even to place himself in peril. He asked, of course, that the mission be carried out in utmost secrecy. This was very important for everyone—for those helping and for those being helped.

Thus, everything required for enabling us to relocate at the end of the five-year sentence was arranged. Official documents were prepared and signed by our “daughter,” accepting responsibility to provide the elderly L. Schneerson and his wife, who were incapable of working, with a residence and support for food and clothing. We had no daughter, of course; it was Rabin’s wife who assumed this identity and signed the documents.

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183. Rebbetzin Chana variously uses the names Rabin, Rabinov or Rabinovitch.

All this had to be authorized at the highest levels to ensure that lower level bureaucrats would not stand in the way when their services would be needed. To accomplish this, complete strangers expended unimaginably large sums of money. Issuing such documents was strictly illegal and was accomplished only with hefty bribes.

Bat-Sheva had now made the trip to us with all these authorizations, thinking everything could be arranged within a few weeks, and that we would all be able to leave together before Passover.

### **Extraordinarily difficult six weeks**

But it was not so easy. It took over six very difficult weeks.

Even ordinary citizens needed an inter-city permit when traveling from one city to another. Exiles weren't permitted in large cities at all, and could reside only in villages.

To get around this, we needed documentation that we were traveling to a village near Alma-Ata. Once again, thousands of rubles were needed for bribes, and our close friends, the brothers Rabinov, wired the money. The initial response to our request was a harsh refusal, asserting that it could not be allowed. But one of our acquaintances paid an exorbitant sum, and it became "kosher." The official who issued this permit requested that we leave as soon as possible, so that the pass bearing the stamp of the travel permits office not remain in Chi'ili for too long.

We were promised the travel pass on the day before Passover, but they could sign it only on one of the days of *Chol Hamo'ed*<sup>184</sup>.

Those six weeks were extraordinarily difficult. A deathly fear hung over us at every moment. I realized that my husband couldn't continue living under these conditions. He seemed to be missing his spiritual and physical strength and was very dispirited.

I needed to accomplish all the required tasks together with Sheva. My husband didn't have the strength to help. There were

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184. The intermediate days of the holiday.

moments when his one-time vigor revived, but he needed great effort to act on it.

### **The last Passover**

Mr. Kolikov, our friend in Kzyl-Orda, supplied us with *shemurah matzoh* and meat for Passover. Two days before the holiday, Sheva traveled there and brought everything back, and we celebrated our third<sup>185</sup> Passover in that room.

Without going into great detail, the first *Seder* proceeded normally. During the second *Seder*, however, my husband fell ill, becoming very weak, and at 2:00 a.m. we sent for a doctor. The fish had apparently spoiled in the heat, and had adversely affected his already debilitated condition.

It was terribly difficult to watch him suffer.

We were happy to see the beginning of our liberation, but somehow we felt no true inner happiness—we had to force ourselves to be joyous.

We had to keep our departure absolutely secret until the last moment, because there were other deportees who had completed their sentences but couldn't even consider leaving. No one had made such far-reaching efforts on their behalf, and in the normal course of events it was impossible. Accordingly, when making arrangements for our departure, we had to guard against envious eyes that could have ruined our plans.

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185. Perhaps one of the Passovers they had spent in Chi'ili since 1941 had been in a different residence.

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**Benyomin and Rochel Federman**

**Yossi and Nechama Dina Katz**

**Uri and Bassie Laber**

**Sholom and Esther Laine**

May they be blessed with healthy, happy, long lives filled with true *yiddishe, chasidishe nachas* from their children and abundant success in all their endeavors