



## In The Path of the Righteous Parshas Re'eh

Jerusalem was festive; Rabbi Aharon Rokeach, the Belzer Rebbe<sup>1</sup>, and his brother the Rabbi from Belgoray had survived the Holocaust and were on their way to Jerusalem. The excitement was great; stories about the Belzer Rebbe were circulating. My father, Rabbi Yisroel Grossman, remembered those days vividly.

As their car entered Jerusalem it was surrounded by thousands of followers. The Rebbe, seeing the crowd, asked modestly: "Why did they bring us in through the market? Is there no other entry?" The Rebbe sat for hours as thousands came to shake his hand with his eyes closed, as was his custom. One of the greeters was Rabbi Mordechai Shmerler, and when he shook the Rebbe's hand the Rebbe 'awoke' and asked: "Is your name Mordechai?" He replied in the positive, and the Rebbe said: "It's a good thing you have come. My conscious has been troubling me for the past twenty years."

Many years before, Rabbi Mordechai had come from Israel to visit the Rebbes of Poland. During his journey he stayed at Rabbi Aharon's home, who was at that point then not yet the Rebbe. When Rabbi Mordechai left for Israel in the morning he went to bid his host farewell, but saw he was deep in contemplation, and left without a word. Rabbi Aharon later inquired about his guest, and when he heard he had left without properly parting he assumed that he, Rabbi Aharon, had somehow offended his guest.

Now, the Belzer Rebbe, still assuming he had somehow maligned his guest, asked for forgiveness. Rabbi Mordechai tried to explain, but the Rebbe begged forgiveness, and so he was forced to announce he forgave him.

My father was deeply impressed by the event. He would tell us: "Learn the way of the righteous, of the Belzer Rebbe. He had endured the horrible years of the

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<sup>1</sup> Aharon Rokeach (1880 – 18 1957) was the fourth Rebbe of the Belz Hasidic dynasty. He led the movement from 1926 until his death in 1957. Known for his piety and mysticism, Rebbe Aharon was called the "Wonder Rabbi" by Jews and gentiles alike for the miracles they claimed he performed.

His reign as Rebbe saw the devastation of the Belz community, along with that of many other Hasidic sects in Galicia and elsewhere in Poland during the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, Rebbe Aharon was high on the list of Gestapo targets as a high-profile Rebbe. With the support and financial assistance of Belzer Hasidim in Israel, England and the United States, he and his half-brother, Rabbi Mordechai of Bilgoray, managed to escape from Poland into Hungary, then into Turkey, Lebanon, and finally into Israel in February 1944.

Holocaust, during which he had lost his entire family.<sup>2</sup> Over two decade had passed, and yet the sorrow of one person laid heavily on his conscious, waiting to appease him."

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This past week was the *Yarzheit* of the Belzer Rebbe. I told this story to youngsters I met in the Golan this week, and added that the Rebbe's laudable conduct is alluded to in our weekly parsha.

"Keep and hearken to all these words that I command you, that it may benefit you and your children after you, forever, when you do what is good and proper in the eyes of the Lord, your G-d."<sup>3</sup>The Ohr Hachayim questions the order of the verse – "**Keep and hearken**" – first one **hears** the commands and then **fulfills** them? Furthermore, what is considered "good and proper"?

The Ohr Hachayim explains that the verse mentions two different commands. The first commandment is to keep the Lord's commands, as mentioned in the Torah. The second one is to upkeep and hear the rulings of our sages throughout the generations. The "good and proper" relates to the fulfilling of these two commands. One should keep in mind that our sages' teachings are so that we will "do what is good and proper in the eyes of the Lord, your G-d."

Rabbi Chaim Vital, in his book *Sh'aary Kedushah* (the Gates of Sanctity), writes that the commandments are written in the Torah, but the Torah does not relate to proper conduct in detail. We learn of good traits from the sages who teach us "the good and the proper." By learning the path of the righteous we merit to do the "good and the proper", for the righteous' sole purpose is to pave the path on which we should all march on.

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As the sun set that Friday night, and the Shabbos entered, many came to see the Belzer Rebbe. One of the attendees was Rabbi Mordechai. My father danced with him after the evening prayers, my father added: "It is such a merit to have such a righteous person among us, from whom we can learn the "good and the proper."

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<sup>2</sup> Rebbe Aharon's eldest son, Moshe, was burned alive in the Przemyslany shul at the same time as Rebbe Aharon was in hiding in that town. Later, Rabbi Moshe's wife and five children were murdered. Rebbe Aharon's eldest daughter, Rivka Miriam, and her husband, Rabbi Shmiel Frankel, both perished along with their seven children. Rebbe Aharon's other daughters, Adel Twersky and Sara Bracha Rosenfeld with their children, and two other sons, Rabbi Yisrael and Rabbi Yehudah Zundel with their children, were also slain.

<sup>3</sup> Dvarim 12:28.