



## Tears at Gravesite in Medzhybizh Shavuot Special

The hall in Bucharest was full with guests from Israel and from around the world. Rabbi Naftali Deutch, the Chabad emissary to Romania, welcomed the visitors. He was celebrating his son's Bar Mitzvah in a country that was just a short time ago a communist stronghold.

I felt it was important to honor him for his endeavors to advance Judaism in Romania therefore I agreed to participate in his joyous event. The guests were all elated by the downfall of communism and their newfound religious freedom. Some were old, Holocaust survivors, who remembered the old world; others were young, and knew very little of their Jewish heritage.

The local Chabad house served as a hub for the many Jewish travelers coming through Romania. One of them was Johnny, a young American, coming from a good family. He left his family and Judaism and now lived in Romania with a non-Jewish partner. After many invitations by the Chabad house he agreed to attend prayers from time to time. He was now one of the guests at the Bar Mitzvah. Rabbi Deutch introduced him to me, and I asked him to sit with me. He felt uncomfortable, but I did not relent.

When Rabbi Deutch asked me to address the invitees I knew what I would say. I prayed to G-d that my words would be well accepted.

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"We are now standing at a moment of immense joy," I commenced. "Another guarantor has joined us this evening, as we know that 'All Israel are guarantors, for one another.' We had a great spiritual leader, the Baal Shem Tov, who is buried not far from here. He taught us that no soul goes to waste. He has taught at length that each soul is a part of the Divine, and as the Divine is everlasting so too is the soul. At times it may become soiled, but with some cleansing the soul can be restored it to its pristine state."

Our Sages teach us in the Talmud<sup>1</sup> that at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai: "And they stood under the mount"<sup>2</sup> - Rav Avdimi Ben Hama Ben Hasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned

the mountain upon them like an inverted cask, and said to them, 'If you accept the Torah it is well; if not, there shall be your burial place.'" Two questions may be presented here. The Jewish Nation had already announced 'We will do and we will hear' – why was there a need for this act of coercion? Furthermore, what is the meaning of '**there** shall be your burial place'? It should state '**here** shall be your burial place'?



Our Sages further teach us that all Jewish souls were present at the giving of the Torah. The Baal Shem Tov explains that at this historical event all the Israelites became a nation of sanctified priests, and therefore the acceptance of the entire nation was required, and all were present to acknowledge this new status.

We can now understand why G-d overturned the mountain upon them after the Jewish Nation already expressed their willingness to accept the commandments. Those present physically had just experienced the ten plagues, the exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the sea. They experienced G-d in the most explicit way and had no problem accepting the Torah. The souls of all the generations, who did not partake in these events, have experienced throughout Jewish history and the exile only G-d's hidden presence. They needed assistance from above. Therefore G-d overturned the mountain upon them.

"In this venue G-d also hints '**there** shall be your burial place' – there, in the depths of the exile, if you do act wisely and observe the Torah and the commandments you will be separated from the source and will not have a life at all. This too the Baal Shem Tov has taught us – a Jew is alive."

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I concluded my words, and Johnny was very moved; he had only one request – to go to the Baal Shem Tov's gravesite at Medzhybizh with me and pray for himself.

A few hours later we were on a plane on our way to Ukraine. Many tears were shed that day at the gravesite in Medzhybizh. Johnny became over time an observant Jew, after returning to his heritage and roots. Another guarantor has joined his people.

<sup>1</sup> Tractate Shabbat 88a.

<sup>2</sup> Shmot 19:17.