



## Heat That Melted Hearts

### Yom Kippur Special/

### A Decade since the Lelover Rebbe's Passing

### Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

### Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

In one of the winter days of 1990 I accompanied Rabbi Shimon Noson Netah, the Lelover Rebbe, through the cold streets of Tsfas. It was freezing outside, and the streets were empty. The Rebbe put on his coat, and I followed him around and heard his words of Torah.

I felt my fingers freeze in the cold, but I didn't dare say a word. I was in the shadow of a man of G-d, and those lofty moments will never be forgotten. The Rebbe abounded in Torah and it was evident that his body was also warmed by his boiling soul and the lava bursting from his pure soul.

He headed for the neighborhood grocery store. Due to the cold, the shopkeeper closed its doors and the shutter was down. The Rebbe did not give up and asked to keep going. We were drawn to a remote neighborhood, where the neighborhood grocery store was open. The Rebbe came in looking for ... chocolates. I stood in amazement; on such a cold day, what was the Rebbe looking for? Chocolates?

The seller packed a variety of chocolates, but the Rebbe was not satisfied. "Is there anything bigger?" He asked, and the seller pointed to boxes of chocolates that came in honor of the upcoming Purim holiday.

The Rebbe was shining with happiness and asked the seller to pack him a nice box. With the chocolates, we left the store on the frozen street and returned to the hostel.

I was bewildered all the way back. For what purpose did the Rebbe go out into the cold? What were the chocolates for? Why did he need such a large box?

Upon returning to the hostel, the Rebbe contacted Zvi Krakowitz, the Religious Affairs Commissioner for Meron. Krakowitz was very supportive of the Rebbe during his visits to Meron and would drive the Rebbe from Tsfas to Meron and back again.

After about an hour, Krakowitz arrived, and the Rebbe went with him to Meron, carrying his mysterious chocolates.

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We learn the virtues of the generation's leader from Moshe. "And it came to pass in those days, that Moshe grew up, and went out unto his brethren, and witnessed their sufferings"<sup>1</sup> Rashi brings the words of our Sages: " He directed his eyes and his heart to be distressed over them."



Midrash Rabbah provides a lengthily account. "He would see their suffering and cry and say 'I feel sorry for you, you do not have a more difficult job than mortar making,' and he would give his shoulders and help each and every one ...G-d said 'you put aside your business to witness the suffering of Israel and

treated them as a sibling, I will put aside Heaven and earth and I will speak to you."

The Midrash adds that because Moshe stopped his business to witness the Israelites' suffering, he merited meeting G-d in the burning bush.

We have learned a fundamental point in the virtues of a leader: To gain the inspiration of the *Shekinah*, one must first go through the melting pot of the sufferings of the Israelites. It is impossible to get close to the Holy One if you do not participate in the sufferings of the Israelites first. This is the way to the G-d, with compassion for its creatures.

Rabbi Yeshayahu HaLevi, author of the Shlah Hakadosh, said that the tribe of Levi was not tasked with the burden of exile and was not enslaved by Pharaoh. However, Levi did not stand aside, and took part in the public's trouble.

"What did he do? He named his sons after the exile, namely Gershon because they lived in a land that was not their's, Kehat because of their blunted teeth, and Merari because their lives were made bitter."

<sup>1</sup> Shmot 2: 11

This is the secret of a "carrying a burden with his friend" that the Sages related to in the Perkei Avos, which is one of the foundations and virtues through which the Torah is acquired. Levi, even though he could stay at home safe and sound because he was not part of the bondage, chose never the less to join the public in its suffering.

"From here the man will learn," the Shlah teaches a way of life, "to participate in the grief of the public, even though there is no individual trouble."

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The car arrived at Meron. A heavy hail enveloped the compound. There was not a soul outside, everyone was hiding inside, but the Rebbe turned to go upstairs, going through the rooms on the top floor. He opened the doors and inquired about the safety of the Jews who were there.

In one of the rooms, he met a Jew who was shaking cold. The Rebbe took off his coat and gave it to him. Krakowitz protested, but the Rebbe smiled broadly and continued to move between the rooms without a coat.

Then he met Yedidya, "my friend," as he called him. "Look what I brought," the Rebbe said, handing him the chocolates. Then the Rebbe opened the box and showed him the assortment, and Yedidya smiled with a smile that he had never smiled until that day. He lived there alone, lonely and sad, without a family and without help or a relative. Who looks at him at all? Whoever gave him something sweet? And here was the Lelover Rebbe serving him a box of chocolates.

And that's not the end of the story. The Rebbe returned to his residence in Tsfas and asked Krakowitz to wait a moment in the vehicle. The Rebbe returned with his blanket, tightly folded, and asked the driver to pass it on to Yedidya.

"I saw that he had nothing to cover himself with, and it was very cold outside," he explained.

That night, the Rebbe went to sleep without a blanket on his body and without a coat, but with the inspiration of the *Shekinah* given to the generation's leader, who came out and saw the suffering of his brothers, and G-d put aside heaven and earth and spoke to him face to face.

His great merit will protect us and all of Israel will be rescued in eternal salvation and be inscribed to a good life.