

An Auspicious Beginning

written by Yehudis Golshevsky
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On the Shabbat of Rosh Chodesh, the first day of Nisan 5532 (April 4, 1772), Rabbi Simcha and his wife Feiga, granddaughter of the Baal Shem Tov, brought a new soul down to the world in the little village of Mezhibuzh, Ukraine. This child would grow up to be Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, known later as "The Hidden Light."

The child's paternal grandfather, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka, was a beloved student of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the

Jewish revival movement known as Chassidut. The child was born in the Baal Shem Tov's home, an inheritance that had been passed down to the Baal Shem Tov's daughter Udel and to her daughter, Feiga. It was a home permeated with sanctity, Torah, and the constant flow of tzaddikim who regularly visited the nearby grave of the Baal Shem Tov to pray and study.

From the moment of the child's birth, his mother took care to wash his hands in the proper way, and would do so every time he woke to nurse. She also prepared a tiny yarmulke for him, so that his head would be covered at all times. Feiga was certain that this would instill a special degree of fear of Heaven in the baby that would carry him through the rest of his life.

The *bris* (circumcision ceremony) took place on Shabbat HaGadol (the Shabbat before Pesach) and the greatest sages of the era were in attendance, including the great Maggid of Mezeritch. Feiga's two brothers, the great tzaddikim Rabbi Baruch of Mezhibuzh and Rabbi Efraim of Sudylkov, were also present. The child was named Nachman after his righteous grandfather, Rabbi Nachman Horodenker.

After the *bris*, Rabbi Baruch approached the baby and looked closely at his features. His face shining, he declared, "This child is destined for greatness! He is filled with precious and rare qualities."

Feiga understood the implications of her brother's words. To the surprise of everyone, she cried out, "My dear brother, please bless him that he won't suffer from opposition! That people won't oppose his path!"

Rabbi Baruch lifted his hand in a helpless gesture. "What can we do? What's done is done." The child Nachman would grow up to greatness, but his path would be filled with obstacles ...