

Samples from the draft of the future R' Rosenfeld Bio

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March 10, 2011



Prologue

1920

QUIET. FINALLY, it was quiet. The silence was eerie, overwhelming. It was a silence that echoed from the city across the vast plains to their hiding place near the riverbed. It was a silence that screamed for revenge.

The year was 1920, just three years after the October 1917 Russian Revolution. The continent was in turmoil—governments were changing and rulers were being overthrown at a dizzying pace. In the Ukraine, over fifty thousand workers and peasants had joined together to form the Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurrection Army. Their goal: to liberate their beloved homeland from Bolshevik domination.

They were known as Makhnovists after their leader, Nestor Makhno, or, more commonly, “Bandits,” after their behavior. The ragged Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurrection Army was fueled by endless bottles of vodka and a raging, all-encompassing hatred of the money-hungry landlords, industrialists, entrepreneurs, and, most of all, what they perceived as the source of all evil—the Jews. As they

“liberated” city after city, they left a tragic path of murder and destruction behind them.

When Reb Yisrael Abba Rosenfeld heard that the Makhnovists were headed toward his hometown, the Ukrainian city of Kremenchug, he grabbed his wife, Liba Leah, and infant daughter, Breina Devora, and fled to the river. From their hiding place, the Rosenfelds were able to see the clouds of dust made by hooves of hundreds of horses as the brutal Bandits entered the city. They saw the smoke of the burning synagogue, and although they could not hear the terror-filled screams, they shuddered at the thought of what was happening to their brethren who had stubbornly remained behind to safeguard their homes and businesses.

Reb Yisrael Abba was a well-to-do businessman, the owner of a profitable lumber business and a prominent member of the large, well-organized Breslov community in Kremenchug. When he fled the city, he left with the knowledge that he would return to nothing. He had heard about the destruction that the Makhnovists had wrought in other cities. He held no illusions and entertained no false hopes.

SEVERAL HOURS had passed since Reb Yisrael Abba and Liba Leah had observed, with bated breath, the cloud of dust that followed the horses as they exited the city. Most of the fires were extinguished. It was time to return.

Liba Leah was the first to enter the city. Leaving her husband and infant daughter behind, she quietly, almost stealthily, made her way across the fields. She walked briskly through the non-Jewish areas of Kremenchug and entered what had once been the teeming streets of the Jewish quarter. But now there was nothing—nothing but silence, silence and smoke. In a daze, Liba Leah walked along the empty streets, eyeing the corpses that seemed to be everywhere. She hoped that the members of her family had managed to escape before the Makhnovists ransacked her beloved hometown. Occasionally she bumped into

other survivors, who were also desperately searching for family members.

She discovered the mutilated body of her brother-in-law, Reb Tzvi Aryeh Rosenfeld, lying in the middle of the street.

Anguished from all that they had lost, yet thankful to be alive, Reb Yisrael Abba and Liva Leah buried Tzvi Aryeh left Kremenchug with their daughter. They never returned.

THE ROSENFELDS moved halfway across Eastern Europe to the port city of Gdynia, Poland. Two years later, on 16 Shvat, 5682 (February 14, 1922), Liba Leah gave birth to a son. They named him Tzvi Aryeh.

Born on the knees of the Russian Revolution, Tzvi Aryeh Rosenfeld grew up to become a different type of revolutionary. Quietly, with a gentleness born of strong convictions, he succeeded in creating a new generation of Torah-observant Jews and reigniting the fire of Rebbe Nachman in the spiritual wilderness of America.

THEY CALLED him “the genius of Bialystok.”

The year was 1939. A young man had recently entered Rabbi Avraham Yaffen’s Yeshivas Beis Yosef Navardok in Boro Park, a new incarnation of the original Beis Yosef Yeshivah in Bialystok, Poland. At seventeen, he was an unassuming young man, not especially tall or short, clean-shaven, with short black hair and keen brown eyes.

He was young, as yet unformed, but it became immediately and abundantly clear to the other *talmidim* that here was an extraordinary individual.

Yeshivas Beis Yosef had only recently opened its doors in New York when R. Tzvi Aryeh joined. Its *rosh yeshivah*, Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, was the son-in-law of the Alter of Navardok, Rabbi Yosef Yozel Horowitz, *zt”l*, who had established the

original Navardok Yeshivah in 1896. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Rabbi Yaffan reestablished the yeshivah in Bialystok and then in Boro Park, when he arrived in America as a penniless refugee from Nazi Europe. The yeshivah was often referred to as the “Bialystok Yeshivah,” a nod to its origins—and young R. Tzvi Aryeh Rosenfeld was known as its genius. In this world of spiritual giants, the other *talmidim* looked up to R. Tzvi Aryeh, awed by his incredible *hasmadah*, lightning-quick grasp of the material, photographic memory, and depth of understanding.

R. Tzvi Aryeh Rosenfeld was a scion of Breslover Chassidus, the son of Reb Yisrael Abba Rosenfeld, a Breslover chassid from the community of Kremenchug, which boasted a strong and vibrant Breslov community. Yet his formal education was decidedly *litvish*.

He had attended Chaim Berlin as a child under Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner’s firm leadership. Undoubtedly he was a good student, though his friends were more impressed by his talents in the school yard: he was the greatest handball player they’d ever seen. It was in high school—in Rabbi Shraga Mendlowitz’s Yeshivas Torah Vodaath—that he found his true love: the study of Gemara. He plunged into his Torah studies with relish, learning practically around the clock. In Torah Vodaath, he discovered the *geshmak* of learning.

It was no wonder that when he arrived in the Bialystok Yeshivah, he became recognized as a diligent, brilliant Torah student—so much so that Rabbi Avraham Yaffan assigned his own son, Reb Yaakov Yaffan, as his learning partner.

And what of R. Tzvi Aryeh’s Breslov chassidic roots?

In those days, Breslov was almost nonexistent in the United States. There were no schools teaching Breslover Torah, and few knew of the Rosenfelds’ ties to Breslov. But in the privacy of his home, Reb Yisrael Abba Rosenfeld tried to

inculcate his family with a strong Breslover identity. At the Shabbos meal, the family studied *Likutey Moharan* together.

By the time he gained entry into Yeshivas Beis Yosef, R. Tzvi Aryeh was an accomplished yeshivah student, educated both in Talmud and Breslov Chassidus. But during the seven years that he learned in the yeshivah, he fully immersed in the very Lithuanian *mussar* style of learning that the Navardok yeshivah offered and viewed Rabbi Avraham Yaffen as his rebbe. It was only later, in when he met his father's rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz, the head of the Breslover community in Eretz Yisrael, that R. Tzvi Aryeh accepted Breslov as his unique path in divine service. But until then, Rabbi Yaffen and the Bialystok Yeshivah played a pivotal role in shaping R. Tzvi Aryeh's destiny.

The yeshivah viewed its students and faculty as royalty, and Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, with his imposing posture and royal bearing, was its prince. Everyone in the administration was meticulous about cleanliness, aware of the Torah scholar's responsibility to present a dignified appearance as HaShem's representative. This *hashkafah* was instilled in the *talmidim*, and R. Tzvi Aryeh was to be noted for his neat appearance throughout his life. R. Tzvi Aryeh's *chavrusa* was not at all like his father. He was short, of slight build, and had red hair. But though he didn't have the princely bearing of the *rosh yeshivah*, when he delivered a *shiur* you felt as if you were listening to a giant twenty feet tall. Rabbi Yaakov Yaffen was a brilliant young man, and he and R. Tzvi Aryeh were well matched.

1945

THERE COMES a time in every young man's life when he has to consider the future—marriage, children, and, of course, the means by which he will support them. It had been six years since R. Tzvi Aryeh stepped through the doors of Yeshivas Beis Yosef, and the time had come for him to make some decisions.

One day R. Tzvi Aryeh and his *chavrusa*, Rabbi Yaakov Yaffen, were discussing the matter of *parnasah*, and the conversation turned to R. Tzvi Aryeh's prospects.

"I know that I want to earn my living," R. Tzvi Aryeh declared, "though I don't know yet what will be my chosen profession. I do know one thing: I'll do anything, even the most menial labor, but I'll never go into business."

"No? Why is that?"

"It's impossible to run a business without ever taking advantage of a customer," R. Tzvi Aryeh asserted. "I won't put myself into a situation where I might have to cheat someone. Nothing is worth that—not all the money in the world."

Raised on the knees of the Great Depression, R. Tzvi Aryeh was adamant that a person must earn his own way in this world. He was extremely particular to never-ever-take something that did not belong to him and to pay for everything in full. Rabbi Yaakov Yaffen, who by then was giving a regular *shiur* in the yeshivah, was so impressed at his *chavrusa's* honesty that he said, "*Im yirtzeh Hashem, ich gei duss ibur zogen in shiur morgen.*" God willing, I will repeat this in my *shiur* tomorrow.

At first, R. Tzvi Aryeh considered becoming a *shochet*, a ritual slaughterer. He sat and learned the laws of *shechitah*, both complex and numerous. Finally he was ready to apply what he had learned. Soon after, he went with his *rosh yeshivah* to a slaughterhouse to watch the *shochtim* in action. Two *shochtim* were working—one had a beard and the other was clean-shaven. R. Tzvi Aryeh followed Rav Avraham as he checked the *chalef*, the knife, of the bearded *shochet*.

"Uh-huh," Rav Avraham murmured.

Then Rav Avraham turned to check the *chalef* of the clean-shaven individual. "Uh-huh," he murmured again.

When they left, Rabbi Yaffen turned to R. Tzvi Aryeh and said, "*Fort ess iz der chalef vus shecht, un nisht der bord.*" It is still the blade that slaughters—and not the beard.

It seemed that the bearded *shochet*'s knife had not passed muster with Rav Avraham. R. Tzvi Aryeh spent the night at the slaughterhouse, watching the *shochtim* work, and saw why the *shochet*'s knife was not as sharp as it should be. Market days for chickens were the latter part of the week, close to Shabbos, and although it's preferable that the *shochtim* check their knives prior to slaughtering each individual chicken, the *shochtim* were not expected to check their knives very often, maybe after every five or ten chickens. In addition, before checking the knives, they plunged them into blocks of wood, which could render the knife unfit for *shechitah*. So if a blemish was found in a knife, it could be blamed on the fact that the knife had been plunged into the wood, de facto rendering the chickens kosher.

That decided it for R. Tzvi Aryeh. When he saw the immense pressure that a *shochet* was under to produce a large number of kosher chickens, he realized that *shechitah* was not for him. He wasn't prepared to compromise his principles in his search for a livelihood.

But *shechitah* was not the only career that R. Tzvi Aryeh was pursuing. He also began taking night classes to earn an accounting degree. It was an era when every Jew went to college and he enrolled in a six-month course that allowed a student to earn his degree on a fast track by doing simultaneous self-study and a lot of homework. With his usual gusto, he tackled the course with exuberance and completed the work in record time, handing in completed assignments on a daily basis. The teacher, who had to spend hours reviewing the work every day, was annoyed by R. Tzvi Aryeh's rapid progress and told him to slow down. More, at this pace R. Tzvi Aryeh would finish the degree before the six months were up and the school would lose out on tuition.

He did, indeed, finish the course before the six months were over—the whole thing took him all of *three weeks* to complete. The professor was incredulous and angry.

When the professor handed him his final grade, r. Tzvi Aryeh received a badly marked-up paper, with red ink written all over it. R. Tzvi Aryeh looked at the mark—he had received a 98, an almost perfect score. He had made just one tiny mistake: in accounting, all totals must be marked with a double underline, and in one place R. Tzvi Aryeh mistakenly marked a total with a single underline. The paper was otherwise perfect, but the teacher took his revenge on r. Tzvi Aryeh by making the paper look bad and marking it up with red ink.

It didn't matter. He had passed the course, and in record time. And he wasn't about to pay the other five months of tuition, not after the trouble the professor had given him. In fact, he had paid for a month's tuition and decided to ask that they return the week's worth that he hadn't used.

R. Tzvi Aryeh went down the office and demanded that the school return his money.

"This is unprecedented," they sputtered. "No one has ever finished the course so quickly, and we don't give refunds."

"That's a shame," said R. Tzvi Aryeh, determined to win his case, "because you owe me a week's worth of courses. I paid for a month of studies and used only three weeks of it."

They relented and said, "Fine, here's what we're going to do. You can attend any course of your choice until the end of the month. You'll get your money's worth, and we won't have to compromise our policy of no refunds."

R. Tzvi Aryeh chose typing. In one week, he became a proficient typist, and even years later he could recite every letter on the keyboard.

BY THE time he was twenty-three, R. Tzvi Aryeh had completed the entire *Shas* twice, a feat that many great Torah scholars never accomplish. During much of this time, he was also taking night classes to earn his accounting degree and helping out in his father's dry-goods store on the Lower East Side.

AFTER THE Scranton fiasco, Rabbi Rosenfeld took a job as congregational rabbi for the Young Israel of Coney Island, and the couple moved into an apartment nearby. Although the synagogue was Orthodox, a large percentage of the members were far from being Torah observant. Rabbi Rosenfeld saw it as his mission to make sure that certain religious standards were met, despite much opposition from the synagogue's lay leadership.

One of his first tasks was to check the kashrus of the synagogue's *simchah* hall. When he saw the level of the kashrus there, he got rid of all the dishes and insisted that the synagogue purchase new ones.

The next day he received an indignant call from the chairman of the synagogue's board of directors.

"I heard something strange," said the chairman. "I've been told that you've removed all the dishes from the synagogue's kitchen."

"That's right," Rabbi Rosenfeld responded. "I took them to be *toiveled*."

"So where are they now?"

"Nearby, at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean."

The chairman sputtered and shouted, extremely upset. But there was nothing he could do about it. Although the members of the board made a big fuss over the financial loss, they eventually purchased new dishes—and the synagogue kitchen was *kashered* according to halachah.

But this was only a foreshadowing of battles yet to come. The synagogue members mocked Rabbi Rosenfeld's insistence on doing things a certain way, to the point of claiming that his way was not in accordance with Jewish law. Rabbi Rosenfeld would return with a *Shulchan Aruch* and show his opponents the source for his opinion, they stopped making fun of him. Though some continued to treat him with skepticism and disrespect, many of the shul's members came to respect Rabbi Rosenfeld and viewed him as their confidant. They shared their innermost thoughts and embarrassing moments with him. They trusted him implicitly and knew that he would never tell a soul something that he had been told in confidence.

Rabbi Rosenfeld did everything in his power to persuade the nonreligious members of the congregation to observe Torah and mitzvos. Since he fully understood the reward for keeping Shabbos, he was able to make promises that would have sounded ludicrous coming from someone lacking his depth of *emunah*.

Once, one of the nonreligious members of the congregation fell deathly ill, and Rabbi Rosenfeld went to visit him. The man was afraid and anxious, knowing that his illness could be terminal, and he looked to Rabbi Rosenfeld for comfort. What the rabbi said to him was more than a comfort—he promised a miracle!

"I promise," said Rabbi Rosenfeld, "that if you start observing Shabbos, you will recover."

"Okay, Rabbi, I'll do it." Faced with the possibility of his own death, what could he lose?

The man recovered and lived for several years but after he returned to his old ways he passed away.

DURING HIS tenure as rabbi of the Young Israel of Coney Island, Rabbi Rosenfeld also got a job teaching the seventh grade in the Yeshivah of Brighton Beach. Here he found his true calling.

When Rabbi Rosenfeld entered the seventh-grade classroom, the first thing eleven-year-old Chaim Spring noticed was his meticulous appearance. When he started their first lesson, Chaim realized that here was a rebbe who knew how to explain the Gemara. The boy had no idea that his new rebbe had a brilliant mind that had earned him the moniker “the genius of Bialystok” and *semichah* directly from Rabbi Avraham Yaffén. Chaim had no inkling of his rebbe’s photographic memory. All he knew was that when Rabbi Rosenfeld told a story, he couldn’t help but be riveted; that the Gemara lessons were so clear and so thorough that Chaim Spring would remember the first page of the Gemara he ever learned with Rabbi Rosenfeld even sixty years later. And he was soon to find out that Rabbi Rosenfeld had that rare ability to get down to the boys’ level—to have good old-fashioned fun with his students—and yet command their respect.

In 1946, Rabbi Rosenfeld was one of the few people who owned a car. When Pesach approached, he piled the boys into his car and drove them to the matzah factory. He liked to drive fast. In a sporty cap, with his tzitzis tied around his belt, and with a clergy sign in the back that was held in respect by police officers in those days, he drove down Ocean Parkway at double the speed limit. His sense of fun and adventure resonated with his students, and they loved him for it.

After a whole year with their rebbe, the boys were not ready to take their leave of him. In the month of July classes at Brighton Yeshivah were not mandatory. The boys who attended were taught *limudei kodesh* until noon, and there were no secular studies. Rabbi Rosenfeld was determined to give those boys who came to his class a good time. At around eleven o’clock each morning, the lesson would stop, and the boys would have a chalk and eraser fight, together with their teacher. Chaim Spring would squeeze under the desk with Rabbi Rosenfeld, while the other boys were perched on top of the closets or behind the tables ready for the fight. It was good

fun and gave the boys an incentive to learn during those hot summer weeks.

A New Beginning for Breslov

1947

RABBI ROSENFELD had a mission: On 22 Av 5707 (1947), Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh's father, Reb Yisrael Abba, succumbed to cancer and passed away. As the eldest son of the family, Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh took over Reb Yisrael Abba's *tzedakah* activities, which included raising money for the tiny Breslover community in Yerushalayim. This involved extensive correspondence with Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz, who headed the tiny nucleus of Breslover chassidim in Yerushalayim.

Rabbi Avraham Steinhartz was also Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh's second cousin—Rabbi Sternhartz and Reb Yisrael Abba were great-grandsons of Rav Aharon of Breslov. Rabbi Sternhartz had known Reb Yisrael Abba back in Kremenchug, where Rabbi Sternhartz had been the Breslov community's rabbi and leader. Rabbi Sternhartz later moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1936, where he became the leader of Jerusalem's fledgling Breslov community.

At first, Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh's correspondence with Rabbi Sternhartz centered on channeling funds to the Israeli community. Eventually it developed into an ongoing discussion on Rebbe Nachman's unique path in divine service and how Rabbi Rosenfeld could best use his talents to bring distant Jews back to their heritage. Rabbi Avraham spoke at length about a lesson from *Likutey Moharan* (I, 59) which speaks about drawing people close to God. Rebbe Nachman teaches, "The person who strives to attract souls to the service of God builds a *Heikhal HaKodesh* (a Chamber of Holiness)! He then explains that holiness is found in the soul which remains steadfast in serving God. The chamber is manifest in God's glory which is increased as a result of these souls, as in (Psalms 29:9) "In His chamber, everyone declares 'glory'." This lesson became

engraved upon Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh's heart and was *the* motivation for his later activities in spreading Breslov teachings and drawing people to serve God.

But although Rabbi Rosenfeld became close with the leaders of Breslov in Eretz Yisrael, he still did not totally identify himself as a Breslover. The seeds, however, had been planted—his father, Reb Yisrael Abba, had sowed them long ago, when Rabbi Rosenfeld was still a child.

When Rabbi Rosenfeld joined his father at the weekly study sessions in 1936, his connection deepened, but it had not yet solidified. When he married, after years spent in *litvishe* yeshivos, he viewed himself as a congregational rabbi who happened to keep Breslover traditions. He did study Rebbe Nachman's works and was faithful to his family's Breslov customs; Breslov was part of his heritage. But it was not yet the definition of his soul.

The passing of Reb Yisrael Abba proved to be a turning point. Reb Yisrael Abba had been suffering from poor health. He had several heart attacks before developing the cancer that eventually killed him. Yet, despite his poor health and the difficulties he confronted in supporting his family, Reb Yisrael Abba was extremely active in raising money for the fledgling Breslov community in Eretz Yisrael. Just before he passed away from cancer in 1947, he instructed his eldest son, R. Tzvi Aryeh, to take over the responsibility of collecting funds for the Breslov institutions in Eretz Yisrael, which involved extensive correspondence with Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz.

This correspondence was the beginning of a close relationship between Rabbi Sternhartz and Rabbi Rosenfeld, a relationship that clinched Rabbi Rosenfeld's attachment to Breslov. Although at first the correspondence centered on financial matters, over time the breadth of their correspondence expanded, and Rabbi Rosenfeld began to appreciate that he was

in touch with a man of tremendous spiritual stature.

"MR. CHAIRMAN, I promise you that if you contribute a hundred dollars to charity, you'll have a child within the year."

Reb Yisrael Abba had died just a few months before, and Rabbi Rosenfeld had been raising funds for the Breslov yeshivah. He decided to ask the chairman of the synagogue's board of directors for a donation. This man had given Rabbi Rosenfeld a hard time from the beginning, ever since the dishes incident. But Rabbi Rosenfeld liked a challenge.

The chairman had been childless for many years, and Rabbi Rosenfeld knew that he was longing for a child. He came to the chairman with an offer. If he donated a hundred dollars to charity, he would have a child within the year.

A hundred dollars was a lot of money in those days, so this was no small request. But the chairman agreed. He wrote a check for a hundred dollars and handed it over to Rabbi Rosenfeld.

But how could Rabbi Rosenfeld make such a promise?

He had been corresponding with Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz for a number of months by now and realized that the rav was a special individual of great stature. He knew that if Rabbi Sternhartz decreed that something would occur, it would be fulfilled (cf. *Moed Katan* 16b). Rabbi Rosenfeld wrote to Rabbi Sternhartz explaining that he had been given a hundred dollars for charity on condition that the man's wife would give birth. It was up to Rabbi Sternhartz to make sure that the promise would not be broken. Rabbi Sternhartz responded that he guaranteed that they would have a child. "The promise will not be broken," he wrote.

A year later, to the date, the chairman's wife gave birth.

1949

FOR TWO years, Rabbi Rosenfeld's relationship with the Breslov elders in Eretz Yisrael was entirely based on the weekly correspondence—sent on thin onion paper because of weight limitations—detailing the spiritual challenges the Orthodox American Jewish community faced and the tremendous poverty of the struggling Breslov community in Eretz Yisrael. While Rabbi Rosenfeld asked for spiritual guidance, the Breslov elders in Israel requested financial assistance.

That year, on 2 Nissan (April 1), R. Tzvi Aryeh and Tzipporah became a family with the birth of their eldest daughter, Gita Genendel, named after Rebbetzin Tzipporah's grandmother and Rabbi Rosenfeld's maternal grandmother. Four months later, with the cessation of hostilities after Israel won the War of Independence, Rabbi Rosenfeld informed the synagogue's board of directors that he was taking a leave of absence to visit Israel

Like most leading rabbis at that time, Rabbi Rosenfeld was an ardent Zionist. He strongly believed in the holiness of Eretz Yisrael, that it is possible to attain a much greater level of holiness while fulfilling the Torah in Eretz Yisrael rather than outside Eretz Yisrael. His dream was to move to Israel, and he was opposed to purchasing property anywhere else. He felt that a home outside of Eretz Yisrael was only a temporary dwelling (see *Avodah Zarah* 9b). He told his wife that he was willing to live in a hovel as long as it was in Eretz Yisrael.

With the conclusion of the War of Independence, Rabbi Rosenfeld wished to travel to Israel to see, with his own eyes, the Holy Land that HaShem Himself had promised to His chosen nation. He also wanted to meet Rabbi Sternhartz and the Breslov elders, with whom he had begun to build a strong bond.

This was a time when most synagogues were paying for their leaders to visit the newborn state. Nearly all American Jews

were very strong in their support of Israel, and for most congregational rabbis, a visit was almost mandatory. Yet when Rabbi Rosenfeld informed the synagogue of his intentions to take a leave of absence, at his own expense, to travel to the Holy Land, they informed him that if he left, there would be no job waiting for him on his return.

Although Rabbi Rosenfeld had made inroads in the congregation and many members trusted and respected him, he still experienced a great deal of opposition from other members who were less than enamored at his zeal. It was obvious that the board of directors was using Rabbi Rosenfeld's leave of absence as an excuse to rid itself of a rabbi who was taking his rabbinical duties much too seriously for their liking. They wanted a yes man, a rabbi who would understand and agree to their lack of adherence to Jewish law instead of challenging them to greater observance.

Rabbi Rosenfeld was not deterred by their threat. He immediately quit his job and sold his car to purchase a ticket. This was the first and last car that Rabbi Rosenfeld would ever own.

IN AUGUST 1949, Rabbi Rosenfeld said farewell to his wife and four-month-old daughter and set off for the airport. There were no direct flights between the United States and Israel. To save money, Rabbi Rosenfeld took the cheapest route possible: New York–Bermuda–Iceland–London–Tel Aviv. It was a three-day journey.

[I'd like to turn the following part about him getting ill into a story. Do you have any more details? What prompted him to visit the doctor? What were his symptoms? What was the doctor's diagnosis? Is this connected with the colitis that he suffered from for much of his life? I think this should be dramatized a bit more, which would also highlight his mesirus nefesh. This two sentence paragraph is too pareve. Also, it's important to break up the factual narrative with anecdotes and

stories with dialogue.]

Keeping in form with Rebbe Nachman's teachings (*Likutey Moharan* I, 66:4), when a person attempts to perform a serious devotion to God which can have an impact on his entire life, obstacles arise to deter that person from his true path.

Just a few days before he was scheduled to leave, it was uncertain whether he would be able to make the trip at all. Rabbi Rosenfeld became extremely ill and developed a very high fever, restricting his movements and restraining him from eating. With a three day trip scheduled, the doctor informed him that travel was completely out of the question, and that if he boarded the plane, he would not leave it alive. But the knowledge of Rebbe Nachman's teaching fortified him. Rabbi Rosenfeld was determined to go and despite his illness he pushed himself. Shortly after takeoff from New York, his fever disappeared and he regained his health!

When Rabbi Rosenfeld landed in Bermuda, it was still daylight. He had hours until he had to catch his connecting flight to Iceland. He went into town to relax until it was time for him to board the plane.

That night, he took a taxi to the airport. He didn't realize that the Bermuda airport terminal was locked up at night—night flights were rarely scheduled, and it didn't pay to staff the airport just for one or two travelers. The taxi driver dropped him off in the middle of the airfield. It was pitch black, and he was alone.

There, in the middle of the night, in an empty field, Rabbi Rosenfeld stood, a lone figure, waiting for his plane, wondering if it would ever arrive. A few minutes later, he heard the drone of a motor and lights appeared in the sky. His plane had arrived. The plane landed on the runway not far from where he stood.

Slowly, the door opened, and a voice called out, "Mr.

Rosenfeld?" It was the pilot.

Sighing with relief, he answered in the affirmative and the stairs rolled down to allow him to board.

It was off the road Bermuda, but it was the cheapest **connecting** flight.

SIGNS OF war were evident in every corner of Jerusalem. Many people lived in bombed-out ruins, with several, sometime dozens of families sharing primitive facilities. Food and water were rationed; people were literally going hungry. Jobs were scarce for everybody, and for a person wearing a yarmulke, they were almost impossible to come by. Almost all of Jerusalem's neighborhoods were within firing range of the Jordanian Legionnaires, snipers who terrorized the residents' lives with their sharpshooting. Despite the extremely difficult physical conditions, the people's idealism sustained them, as if it were infused into the very air. Everyone, religious and nonreligious, were hearty idealists, totally devoted to creating what they perceived as a new and better reality.

When he arrived in the war-torn city, Rabbi Rosenfeld booked himself into the Zion Hotel, a small hotel located on the corner of Ben Yehuda and Yaffo. As soon as he had set down his luggage, he left again to find the tiny Breslov communities which were spread out between Meah Shearim near east Jerusalem, the Shaarey Chesed neighborhood near the city center, and the Katamon section in the south of the city.

Stalin and Hitler had almost completely destroyed the European Breslov community. Those Breslovers who succeeded in reaching Eretz Yisrael were warmly welcomed by their brethren. But the community was extremely poor. It was a type of poverty that we can barely comprehend. The poverty was compounded by the fact that the secular majority in charge of the funds coming in from abroad, made sure, for what they erroneously perceived as

idealistic reasons, not to share them with their religious brethren.

That day, and in the weeks that followed, Rabbi Rosenfeld met giants of the spirit—Jews who had arrived in the Holy Land with nothing but the clothes they were wearing and, rather than throw off their heritage to achieve financial security, strove to grow in their divine service. He encountered families who lived on bread and water, yet their every bite was imbued with the joy of being a Jew. He spoke with people living on a totally different plane, whose reality was completely different from any he had ever encountered before—people who devoted hours to *hisbodedus* and literally spoke with HaShem, like a son to his father.

The highlight of his trip was his meeting with Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz who lived in Katamon, where most of the refugees from the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, found housing after the Israeli War of Independence, including the Breslovers who lived there. The two men spent hours together, discussing important community issues and learning Torah. Rabbi Sternhartz tested Rabbi Rosenfeld on his Torah knowledge. For eight hours the eighty-eight year old Breslover *rav* fired question after question on complex civil and marriage laws, along with the standard questions of Shabbat, festivals and dietary laws. It was a closed-book test; Rabbi Rosenfeld gave detailed answers from memory. When Rabbi Sternhartz saw Rabbi Rosenfeld's phenomenal knowledge, he had no doubt that sitting before him was a man who was learned in all areas of Torah. Right then and there, Rabbi Sternhartz granted Rabbi Rosenfeld rabbinical ordination on all sections of *Shulchan Arukh*, a rare honor.

During that visit, Rabbi Rosenfeld and Rabbi Sternhartz also discussed the different factors—both physical and spiritual—involved in creating a vibrant Breslov Chassidus from the remnants of the Holocaust.

During his visit to Haifa, Rabbi Rosenfeld *davened* in the Tiferet Yisrael Yeshivah. Between *minchah* and *ma'ariv*, the men would “speak in learning,” and Rabbi Rosenfeld would stand quietly in the corner, listening. Then he would pipe up and say a word or two that would answer all their questions.

Although Rabbi Rosenfeld was a Torah scholar of mammoth proportions who commanded the respect of all who met him, he was also a “*kibbitzer*” with a mischievous streak who loved a good joke. He once asked Aryeh Glickman (who, as chief of police, spoke a perfect Arabic) to teach him a few basic phrases. Later on, during a visit to the graves of the tzaddikim in the Galilee, he astonished the Arabs who were carrying a pitcher of water on her head by joking with them in Arabic.

Rabbi Rosenfeld was, by nature, extremely curious and wanted to know everything about everything, including the world of criminals. Rabbi Rosenfeld took advantage of having a cousin in a high position with the police force and often visited the police precinct. He became a familiar figure there, who visited every time he came to Israel. The officers were friendly and vied for the privilege of taking him along on their patrols and showing him the city from the inside. After understanding what made the city tick, Rabbi Rosenfeld visited the prisoners—murderers, thieves, Haifa’s lowlifes—and talked with them. They welcomed his visits and treated him with respect, feeling that he understood them and that he was really interested in what they had to say.

IN THE short three weeks that Rabbi Rosenfeld spent in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Rosenfeld fell in love with the holy atmosphere and the people living there. He was enamored with the purity of the chassidim living in Eretz Yisrael and dreamed of joining them. He wanted to leave New York and move to Eretz Yisrael and join the Breslov community. He expressed these desires to Rabbi Sternhartz, expecting encouragement and support. Instead Rabbi Sternhartz asked a question.

"What are you doing over there in America?"

"I'm a congregational rabbi and also teach in a yeshivah. I'm bringing American youth back to their heritage."

When Rabbi Rosenfeld described the work he was doing in the United States, it became clear to Rabbi Sternhartz that Rabbi Rosenfeld was sorely needed there.

"You must remain in the United States," he told Rabbi Rosenfeld. "Although it is '*kodesh*,' a holy thing, to live in Israel, bringing young American Jews back to their heritage is '*kodesh kodashim*,' holy of holies."

Rabbi Rosenfeld had his directive. As much as he yearned to live in Eretz Yisrael among the Breslov chassidim, he would return to the United States and continue his work with American youth.

RABBI ROSENFELD was scheduled to leave Eretz Yisrael in three days' time. Since there were no telephones, he had to travel to Tel Aviv in person to confirm his reservation at the airline office.

When he arrived, he was in for a big shock. The company was going out of business. That night was to be its final flight, and if he missed it, he would have to purchase a new ticket with a different airline.

It was already late in the afternoon, and in those early days of the State, it was extremely dangerous to travel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem after dark. (Prior to the Six Day War, the Jerusalem corridor was a small strip of land surrounded by Jordan, which connected Jerusalem to the rest of the country.) Where would he find a taxi driver willing to take him to Jerusalem to fetch his belongings and then back to the airport to catch his flight? On the other hand, if he missed this flight, he would have to purchase a new ticket to return home.

Rabbi Rosenfeld found a driver willing to drive him to Jerusalem and back for fifty dollars, a huge sum in those days. He paid the money up front. The driver literally flew to Jerusalem. They drove so quickly that Rabbi Rosenfeld, who was not one to be easily scared, was frightened out of his wits. But they arrived safely in the Holy City at sunset.

After grabbing his things and paying his bill, Rabbi Rosenfeld stopped at Rabbi Sternhartz's home to say good-bye. When he entered the taxi to leave, Rabbi Sternhartz instructed him to pick up some stones from the ground to take with him, and even helped Rabbi Rosenfeld choose them.

The moment Rabbi Rosenfeld closed the taxi's door, the driver took off like a rocket. Within seconds they were enveloped in darkness as they sped along the one-lane, winding road that connected Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Suddenly, ahead of them, their headlights picked up a fallen tree that was blocking the road. Standing in front of the tree were Jordanian legionnaires with their rifles trained on the road and the speeding car.

The taxi was traveling too fast to stop and turn around. When they were close enough to see the smiles on the legionnaires' faces, an entrance to a side road appeared seemingly out of nowhere. The taxi turned onto the side road, and when they returned to the main road, they were already past the fallen tree—and the Arab soldiers.

A while later, they noticed two small lights in the middle of the road, reflecting back at them. A mule was standing in the middle of the road, its eyes reflecting the car's headlights. The taxi driver was petrified. It was a one-lane road. There was no place to turn around, and they were too close to stop. A collision was inevitable. But again, they were saved at the last minute. The mule suddenly moved off the road, and the taxi continued on its way to the airport.

When they arrived, the driver told Rabbi Rosenfeld that, without a doubt, of the two miracles they experienced that night, the biggest one was the miracle of the donkey.

It was difficult for Rabbi Rosenfeld to leave his beloved Eretz Yisrael. He was glad that he would soon be returning to his wife and newborn daughter, yet he was apprehensive about the future. He had no job to support himself. He was leaving a land of spirituality and holiness to return to a land where such concepts were scoffed at. But after meeting the Breslover elders and Rabbi Sternhartz in Jerusalem, Rabbi Rosenfeld was determined to fulfill his mission—to return to the United States and bring youth back to the Torah.

AFTER THAT first visit to Israel in 1949, Rabbi Rosenfeld dreamed of making another trip, but it was financially unfeasible, especially with his growing family. In the summer of 1950, Rabbi Rosenfeld's second child, Yisrael Abba, was born, followed by another boy, Shmuel Eliyahu (Shelly), named after Tzipporah's maternal grandfather in 1951. But then something extraordinary happened.

Rabbi Rosenfeld attended a charity dinner, and the door prize was a trip to Eretz Yisrael. Rabbi Rosenfeld bought a ticket. At the dinner, while everyone else listened to the speeches, Rabbi Rosenfeld stared at the raffle box, quietly repeating to himself, "My ticket will win. My ticket will win."

But a man sitting a few seats away from Rabbi Rosenfeld won the door prize. Everyone congratulated him on his good luck, but the man wasn't excited about it. "I've been there four times already," he said.

Rabbi Rosenfeld was devastated. He returned home and started reciting *tehillim*. The hour grew late, but he kept going, reciting *tehillim*, *davening* that he should attain his dream. At two o'clock in the morning, the door opened. A hand reached in, placed an envelope on the bookcase, and then closed the

door.

The envelope contained the coveted ticket to Eretz Yisrael.

When he retold this story to his students, one of them asked, "Who was it who brought the envelope?"

Rabbi Rosenfeld shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe it was Eliyahu HaNavi."

Maybe.

It was becoming apparent to all who knew him that when Rabbi Rosenfeld was around, the impossible became entirely possible.

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