

# Prologue

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Dear Reader,

You are about to embark on an odyssey of Rabbi Rosenfeld's life. It traverses his youth in yeshiva all the way through his very end.

You'll read of personal charity giving, fund-raising for others (community or otherwise), his photographic memory, his scholarship, and his *raison d'etre* - outreach to alienated Jewish youth.

And yet.

Before his passing he requested that his epitaph read: "Breslover Chassid". With this in mind, his request was accommodated, and his gravestone was inscribed with this identification in large block lettering (see picture in sidebar) while all other virtues are omitted.

The book's title only continues in the spirit of fulfilling his wish, i.e. to be recognized first and foremost as a Breslover. His other attributes are but commentary.

You might have described him as the most average person you've ever seen. Yet throughout his life this unassuming man was a rare powerhouse who broke through impenetrable barriers in Jewish life.

A brilliant, inspiring, dedicated teacher, Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld brought Torah and *yiras Shamayim* to a generation of American Jews, many of whom were tough, ornery, undisciplined kids who came to consider him their *rebbe*.

With uncommon devotion to Hashem and a powerful connection to Rebbe Nachman, Reb Zvi Aryeh taught that nothing in life is more important than to get to the *tziyun* of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. "Nothing else can have so deep an effect on a person's *neshamah*, which is everlasting," he said.

"To get to the *tziyun*...." Today, some 70,000 people converge on the *tziyun* for Rosh Hashanah, and many thousands come at other times of the year, but this was not always the case.

Rebbe Nachman's *tziyun* is located in the city of Uman, in the former Soviet Union, which, from the time of the Communist revolution in 1917 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, was a totalitarian, atheistic, communist state, one that executed or imprisoned tens of millions of people for actions deemed "anti-Soviet." Even foreigners who visited the Soviet Union were sometimes subjected to interrogation or even imprisonment if suspected of subversive contact with local citizens.

Indeed there were places in the former Soviet Union that the government considered to be of interest to foreign visitors, such as the Kremlin, the Czar's palace, and various other sites and cities, but alas, the city of Uman was not among them; it was declared off-limits to tourists. The anguish this caused to countless Breslov Chassidim is indescribable.

Rabbi Tzvi Bronstein, who headed an organization dedicated to seeing to the religious needs of Jews trapped in the former Soviet Union, was instrumental in helping Rabbi

Rosenfeld make his first trip to Uman. He describes how Rabbi Rosenfeld begged him repeatedly, “Try to exert your influence on the Soviet authorities to open the city of Uman to us!”

Finally, in the early 1960s, that dream was actually within reach. Rabbi Bronstein was participating in a meeting with a Russian official at Intourist, the agency that handled most foreign tourists. The official seemed open to the idea, which, he understood, could prove to be quite lucrative to the country. On the spot, Rabbi Bronstein placed an overseas call to Rabbi Rosenfeld, at the school where he taught.

“I am here in the office of the Moscow Intourist,” he said, and I can obtain visas for a minimum of ten persons....”

“I heard a sharp intake of breath, followed by a sharp clattering of the telephone to the floor,” Rabbi Bronstein relates. He said “Hello” again and again, shouting Rabbi Rosenfeld’s name.

Hearing this wonderful news, Rabbi Rosenfeld was so overcome with emotion that he fell to the floor in a dead faint.

The secretary then picked up the phone and screamed, “He’s sick! He’s not breathing!”

Finally, they managed to revive the rabbi, and he took the phone again. “When?” he gasped.

“Now!” Rabbi Bronstein shouted.

Within a few days, eleven Breslov Chassidim were on their way to Uman.

This was the first of many groups Rabbi Rosenfeld would bring to Uman in the years that followed. Each trip was extremely expensive and involved tremendous *mesiras nefesh*. In his numerous attempts to reach the *tziyun* there were times when Rabbi Rosenfeld was interrogated harshly and risked imprisonment. He succeeded in reaching the *tziyun* many times, and he helped many of his *talmidim* get there as well. For as deep and sincere and all-encompassing as his devotion to Rebbe Nachman was, he was no less devoted to his many students.

“Rabbi Rosenfeld loved his *talmidim* as if they were his own children,” Rabbi Chaim Kramer recalled. “He once said that if ever there were a situation where he would have to make a choice between his own life and that of a *talmid*, he would happily give away his life to save his *talmid*.” And even today, decades after his passing, Rabbi Rosenfeld’s many *talmidim* will attest to the truth of that statement.