



Excerpts from HaNidach

Chapter 1

(9) Great snow fell all that week, from the celestial level to the lowly world. The black earth turned white, and the heavens remained dull, and people entered their homes, between oven and stove,¹ and in the city no one departed or entered.² But on the fifth day to Shabbat the trait of *chesed* triumphed.³ The sun shone over the land, and the snow began to melt. Women went out to the market to purchase meat and fish, and from the surrounding villages they came in wagons and on horses. Again the channels of life flowed, as though the flow had never halted.⁴

The day descended and those who trembled at the word of Gd began gathering in the study hall. The learned closed their books, and the youths ceased their singing. The *shamash* lit the candles, and the prayers washed their hands and prayed.

They were praying, and two elderly women broke through the door, wailing, to seek mercy for Aydele, modest and pious. They opened the Ark and hugged the Torah scrolls and called to Gd mightily, "Gd, please heal her,⁵ on behalf of her chicks who have not sinned." And so they cried, until their tears met and merged.⁶

Between minchah and maariv news was heard in the study hall – a *tzaddik* had come to town.⁷ His few allies were strengthened and filled with joy, that their Rav had had mercy on their city, to visit them on this Shabbat. They prepared their hearts and spirits to greet his holy countenance. The uninformed thought that the Rav had come to the city only to heal Aydele, daughter of Rabbi Avigdor the Parnas, but those who knew the hatred of the Parnas for the sectarians knew that this tough person would overturn the entire world to keep that *tzaddik* from stepping foot in Shibush.⁸ [But] they still had some hint of a thought; Rabbi Avigdor was in pain, and it would be a burden for him to evict [the Rav].

(10) When day broke, the few Chassidim left the city to greet the *tzaddik*. Some of the people of Shibush joined them, to see his entrance. They said, "If he is a *tzaddik*, the entrance of *tzaddikim* induces awe of Heaven." And anyone whose heart was uncertain about belief in *tzaddikim* convinced himself, saying, "If people thirst to see him, this is a sign that the Shechinah is upon him."⁹ While they were anticipating him, the wheel of a wagon began hammering along in the street of the city. The entire place was filled with joy; "The Rebbe has come, the Rebbe has come!"

His intimates were energized, and they drew close to the *Merkavah*.¹⁰ They greeted the Rav and untied the horses from their reins and took their places to draw the *Merkavah* along. Immediately, the Rav descended from the *Merkavah* and mixed with those who had come to greet him. They said to him, "Rebbe, why did you descend? We have come to greet you and you descend from the *Merkavah*?!" He told them, "I saw that you fulfill the mitzvah of greeting guests with great passion, and I descended from the *Merkavah* to include myself with you in this mitzvah."...

A Jewish householder, childless, who had never entered Chassidut, made his house available in order to be perfumed with the blessing of that *tzaddik*. And the woman of the house smoothed the ground in his honour, but she did not light the oven, lest she burn the many guests. They brought the Rav to the house, and they removed his cloak.¹¹ And even though the house was full of people, he could not stand before the cold. They sought to bring him into another room,

¹ A talmudic phrase for a small place in which one might sit while grieving (Taanit 30b)

² A biblical phrase used to describe the city of Jericho when it anticipated a military assault (Joshua 6:1)

³ A popular phrase in Chassidut; see Sfat Emet Lech Lecha 5647

⁴ Agnon uses mystical terms here, to describe both snow and life – *netiv elyon* (the celestial level), *shefa* (flow), *tzinorot* (channels)

⁵ Moshe's prayer for Miriam in Bamidbar 12:13

⁶ This may be connected to Hoshea 4:2 and Gittin 57b on the merging of blood of martyrs.

⁷ *צדיק בא לעיר* is a standard announcement in Chassidic communities, heralding the arrival of a Rebbe.

⁸ Shibush is S.Y. Agnon's regular stand-in for his hometown of Buczacz, which had its own troubled history with Chasidim and Mitnagdim. See Israel Cohen, The Buczacz Community, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/buchach/buc089.html>

⁹ This is a Chassidic saying; see, for example, http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks_org_24376_47.pdf and http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks_org_23187_29.pdf.

¹⁰ This is a kabbalistic term for the Divine throne, based on various passages in Tanach

¹¹ Agnon will use multiple terms for "cloak" in this story, but for Rav Uriel he uses the term *aderet* – which is particularly associated with Elijah the Prophet in Tanach. See especially page 16, where he will use language nearly identical to Kings II 2:8. On the other hand, he will use *aderet* with Rabbi Avigdor's cloak later, so I'm not sure what to do with this.

which was small, and all who had come to shelter in his sacred radiance would leave. [But] the people could not separate from him, and he could not separate from them, and he was warmed by the light of their love.

(11) At that same time, Rabbi Avigdor left the room of his sick daughter, Aydele. He heard the voices of the Chassidim, joyously escorting their Rebbe. He trembled and said, "How long will this sin be stored with me?"¹² Rabbi Avigdor cloaked himself in Shabbat clothes, scrubbed his head with water and coiled his *peiot* with beer, fixed up his hat and prepared his cloak and looked in the mirror for beauty. Why all of this? So that he would impress the *poritz*, and he would listen to him.

And when Aydele's sons saw their grandfather this way, they thought he was going to a *brit milah*. They began leaping like young goats, singing, "To a *brit milah* my grandfather will go, I will rejoice and be happy in my heart! A *sandek* he will be, delicacies he will bring, I will rejoice and be happy in my heart!"¹³ Rabbi Avigdor looked upon Aydele's two young sons and sought to hug and kiss them and to speak to them with words of appeasement and consolation – but due to his great stress, he did not draw near to them, and he left with vengeful anger to the court of the authorities. The intimates of the *tzaddik* were energized, and they took white clothing, abandoned their mundane activities and went to the bathhouse to purify themselves for Shabbat and to stand before their Rebbe with a clean body. And Jewish girls baked challot and cooked meat and fish and increased various types of kugel for the pleasure of Shabbat, with a guest like this. But the hope of Man is worms. The Satanic deed triumphed, and the noble complied and sent an officer¹⁴ to chase out Rabbi Uriel from the city, for Rabbi Avigdor had brought bad speech against him.

At that same time, Rabbi Uriel stood cloaked in a tallit and crowned in tefillin, and his face shone from his prayer. The officer entered and saw the illumination of his face, and stood in confusion, waiting for him to finish his prayer. After he completed his prayer, [the officer] said to him, "My master has decreed to remove you from the city, please leave." Rabbi Uriel removed his tefillin, and wrapped their straps like the wings of a dove.¹⁵ He did not finish before the officer grabbed him by the hand and said, "Take them and go."

(12) His group of Chassidim stood and cried *Chamas!* and sought revenge upon their enemies to punish them properly, for the Heavenly Name they had disgraced and for the Shabbat pleasure which had been destroyed. His holy heart was awakened, but he said, "Uriel, Uriel! Are you truly concerned for the honour of His Name, or are you concerned for your own honour? And how will you know the truth?" But nature triumphed and he cursed the Parnas,¹⁶ and a harsh curse was uprooted from his mouth, that one who was banished would be banished from him.¹⁷ And all who were present nodded their heads and said, "He has bitten Avigdor in his tail like a serpent, woe to him, woe to him, so is good for him, so is appropriate for him."

Rabbi Uriel left the city, and his group of Chassidim left with him. The snow was melting, and the rain descended with force, and the land was partially smooth and partially sunken. They hesitated and walked, hesitated and walked, reciting Song of Songs.¹⁸ Rabbi Uriel walked and recited, "Do not look upon me that I am dark, that the sun has blackened me, the sons of my mother have attacked me,"¹⁹ and his group of Chassidim recited after him, "Behold, my beloved is pleasant, even pretty."²⁰ Rabbi Uriel walked and recited...

(13) The innkeeper saw them and his blood chilled with fear; Gd forbid, there was trouble in the city and they had fled here! He ran and brought them into his house and asked, "Why has my friend come to my house?"²¹ They told him the

¹² Sanhedrin 95a; Gd asks King David how long the guilt for the massacre of Nov will go unpunished

¹³ Agnon's selection of these words may be ironic. A traditional poem titled "I will rejoice and be happy in my heart" is sung at Havdalah, and it depicts Elijah the Prophet and Mashiach waging war successfully against our enemies. The grandchildren in our story do not know that the *parnas* is out to wage war against his perceived enemies, but their song alludes to this reality.

¹⁴ The term used for officer here is *sadyot*, which is generally a Roman soldier in rabbinic literature

¹⁵ A reference to the tefillin of a Jew who was persecuted by the Romans for wearing tefillin; they were transmuted into dove wings so that he could escape detection. Shabbat 49a, based on Psalms 68:14.

¹⁶ To truly appreciate this scene, one must see Sefer Dorot heChadash with a similar and yet very different story involving R' Avraham Dovid of Buczacz. See עגנון ביצירה החסידית של עגנון pg. 82-83.

¹⁷ See Samuel II 14:14. And one must see Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Sichot haRan 189, <http://breslev.eip.co.il/?key=2330>

¹⁸ Reciting Song of Songs is an ancient practice for Friday afternoons

¹⁹ Song of Songs 1:6

²⁰ Ibid. 1:16, and the ensuing passages continue to cite Song of Songs, specifically passages about attempts by an enemy to defeat the love felt for the beloved.

²¹ Yirmiyahu 11:15, although taken out of context

entire story. The innkeeper was filled with the joy of a simpleton.²² This Avigdor, who would not let them make a minyan in the village – now Gd had brought him something to anger him. Immediately, he turned to them with a happy face and told them, “Remove all worry from your hearts, my masters. We have meat and fish here, thank Gd, and no lack of beverage, to eat and drink according to Gd’s word.” And he bowed before the Rav and greeted him, and looked with shame at his own clothing and his pants of animal hide. He said, “A *tzaddik* comes to my inn and I greet him with mundane clothing!” The Rav nodded in the manner of satisfaction, but in the depths of his heart he groaned for the children of Gd who greet the holy Shabbat in such clothing. And when the Rav groaned, so did his Chassidim. Shabbat is a day for Gd, and they were grieving and tossed and moved about and away from their families. And so they groaned, until the Rav rebuked them. They repressed their groans in their hearts, and were silent...

And the Rav led the prayers with holy passion, and when he arrived at *Lecha dodi* he actually left physicality, and he applied his two legs and went out to dance to greet the bride. And all who were present were elevated from level to level, until the end of the entire prayer...

(14) And Rabbi Uriel would [normally] minimize Torah speech, for Rabbi Uriel would say, “It is not speaking of Torah that is important, but doing and fulfilling the words of Torah.” Now Rabbi Uriel did not repress his holy speech, and he intentionally brought himself down to simple speech, so that even the simplest of his intimates would understand, and he taught the weekly portion, Parshat Vayetze Yaakov.²³ He began with a parable,²⁴ of a prince who was sent to distant lands, to a lowly village. He received a letter from his father, the king, and wanted to rejoice, but he worried that the villagers would mock him, saying, “Why is today different from other days? What does this joy do?” What did the prince do? He called the villagers and gave them wine and other intoxicants. They rejoiced in the wine, and he in the joy of his father. So, too, the holy soul is ashamed to rejoice on Shabbat in the added soul, which is a letter of greeting from Father, its Father the King, the Holy Blessed One, because of the lowly body which is the villager. Therefore, the Torah commanded to give the body pleasure on Shabbat and festivals. And when the body rejoices in its joy, the soul can rejoice in the joy of the King, the Holy Blessed One...

After *Birkat haMazon* they spread out on long benches (15) and coloured boxes, and the host and his wife ascended over the oven, and the house was silent... The candles were guttering and the smoke column rose, and the Rav did not move from his place, and he drank the smoke of the Shabbat candles. The members of the group lay with open eyes and did not sleep in the bosom of their pleasures, and they cloaked and crowned every statement that came from the mouth of that *tzaddik*, and they taught mountains upon mountains of intentions²⁵ from his every motion. One of them began and said, “I will tell you something. If I were in the generation of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid [of Mezritch], and the Baal Shem Tov lived in Yazlovitch and the Maggid in Potek, I would go for one Shabbat to the Baal Shem Tov and for the next Shabbat to the Maggid, but I would not budge from being a chassid of our Master, may he live...

They were sad in their hearts, for they were in the village and there was no Torah scroll for them to read the weekly portion. They began whispering behind their Rebbe, mentioning stories of salvation, like the story of a merchant who went out in a caravan. Friday came and they arrived in a great and frightening wilderness, and he stopped and would not travel, for he guarded Shabbat from desecration. The head of the caravan told him, “If you go with us, good. If not, we will abandon you here.” He said, “I will not budge and I will not desecrate Shabbat.” They left him and went on. He stood alone in the wilderness, and turned east to pray. At that moment, the gates of the great plaza opened, and the light of the Seven Days began to emerge and ascend. He saw people who looked like ministering angels, and their faces (16) shone like the heavens, their height was like the cedars of Lebanon and the pupils of their eyes were like the orb of the Sun, standing in songs and praises and accepting Shabbat. And in the morning, the seven shepherds²⁶ ascended and read from the Torah.

²² This phrase is used in Tanya 1:33 to describe the joy of a simpleton when he can host a human king

²³ This is the Torah portion in which Yaakov flees his home, before Esav who wishes to kill him.

²⁴ This parable has been published in the name of the Baal Shem Tov, and is discussed in Toldot Yaakov Yosef (Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Pollonye) to Parshat Ki Tavo. Note that this book is considered the first book of *chassidut* ever published.

²⁵ Eruvin 21b uses this phrase for deducing mountains upon mountains of laws from every feature of a biblical letter

²⁶ Michah 5:4

The beloved ones said, "Our Sages said: One who comes to be purified, they help him.²⁷" Where was their assistance? Many traps were dug to cancel their pleasure of Shabbat. Their spirits weakened, and they could not draw near to Gd and pray. They stood, this with his *tallit* in his hand and this with his *tallit* in his hand, and they were silent.

And an elderly Jew lived at the edge of the village, and he was barren and he had not children. And he honoured Gd with his wealth and he wrote a Torah scroll and he gave it to be kept in the house of Gd in the city. And when the festival came and villagers gathered and said to him, "Rise, ascend to the city and take the Torah scroll, and we will make a minyan to pray on the Days of Awe in the village," he went and took the Torah scroll and brought it to the village, and they rejoiced for no longer would they need to wander from their homes for the Days of Awe. But their joy was fleeting, for Rabbi Avigdor did not permit them to arrange communal prayer outside the city, lest this reduce the donations that the villagers dedicated when they came to pray in the city. The minyan did not happen, and the scroll remained in the village, and it was in the man's house for a long time.

And his servant came and told him that the Man of Gd had come to the tavern the day before. And the old man took his cloak and wrapped the Torah scroll and went to the inn. He found the men from the city, standing, holding their *tallitot* in their hands. And he said, "I heard that the *tzaddik* came here, and no longer could I remain in my place, and Gd put counsel in my heart to take the Torah scroll and go to the inn. And I took the scroll and went out..." They stood and prayed out of joy, and read the weekly portion from the Torah...

Chapter 2

(17) There is no snow as attractive as the snow of the end of Shabbat. What is that snow like? Like the feathers of angels' wings. Israel is beloved, for even the ministering angels remove their wings in their honour and spread carpets for them from the entrance of the synagogue to the entrance of their homes when they depart to recline at the meal of King David.²⁸

The snow descends from the heights of Heaven, illuminating the night and darkening it. Hidden realms were revealed, and paths were hidden in silence. And the inn stood in snow, and glowed from the light of the snow. The fire sang in the oven, and the house was filled with warmth. A lamp was burned on the table, and the beloved ones wandered in the room and prayed the evening prayer.

The woman of the house stood and entered the stable, with a large vessel in her right and a burning splinter in her left. And a mist arose²⁹ from the fodder and the spoils of the fat cows that sprawled on the straw mat and chewed their cud...

And Rabbi Uriel sat and sang songs of the end of Shabbat, and he sighed and waited and delayed until making Havdalah, for as long as Rabbi Uriel did not make Havdalah, the keys of Gehennom³⁰ were in his hands, and out of mercy for the wicked who would be returned to Gehennom it was hard for him to pick up the cup of Havdalah in his hand, until they showed him the light of the next Shabbat...

(18) The woman of the house lit a sort of splinter, and descended to the cellar with her maid. They filled their aprons with potatoes, ascended and brought a pot of water and took two knives, one for the woman of the house and one for her maid. They spread a cloth on the ground, folded their legs beneath them, and peeled the potatoes and threw them into the pot. Their knives fluttered and peeled, and the smell of the cellar, absorbing the potatoes, ascended, and they sneezed. The country girl spat and genuflected over her heart, and the woman of the house, *l'havdil*, said, "For Your salvation I hope, O Gd."³¹... The man of the house came and took the plates and brought them to the table. The beloved ones sat, with the potato peels, and dipped them in beet water and ate the *melaveh malkah* meal, to benefit the *luz* bone which benefits only from this meal.³²

And so they sat. The most holy, the Rav, Rabbi Uriel, crowned in reverence and the light of his face like the light of the seven days.³³ To his right Elyakim Aryeh, a Jew who knew to rejoice on Simchat Torah and cry on Tishah b'Av. And

²⁷ Yoma 38b

²⁸ This name for Melaveh Malkah is brought in Rabbi Tzaddok haKohen's Pri Tzaddik Devarim Motzaei Yom haKippurim 11

²⁹ See Genesis 2:6, on the world's state after the initial days of Creation

³⁰ The concept of keys of Gehennom appears in various midrashim

³¹ See Rabbi Avraham Gombiner, Magen Avraham 230:6; this is part of the ritual for one who sneezes.

³² This is a popular concept in the Zohar.

³³ See Chagigah 12b, on the light of the first seven days of Creation, created on Day One and replaced by the light created on Day

beside Elyakim Aryeh, Leib the Silent, who prayed with force (19) until his teeth flew from his mouth. And beside Leib the Silent, Maharam the Mohel, a Jew of stature. And beside Maharam the Mohel, the elder from the village. He was the one who had brought the Torah scroll, from which they read the weekly portion. And beside the elder from the village, Natan Nata, husband of Chayah Sarah the storekeeper. And beside Natan Nata, husband of Chayah Sarah the storekeeper, Yaakov Yehoshua, who was counted in the assembly of important people. And beside Yaakov Yehoshua, Ephraim Shlomo, the great drinker. He began to spice the Rav's table with his jokes. Beside Ephraim Shlomo, the great drinker, Zanvil Berish the shocheit, a Chassid who had been removed from shechitah by the Parnas. And beside Zanvil Berish the shocheit, a Chassid who had been removed from shechitah by the Parnas, Elimelech Meizlovitz, descendant of Elimelech the water-drawer, about whom the Baal Shem Tov – his soul stored in the heavens – had said, "Have you seen my friend Elimelech? When he prays, the gates of Heaven are open." Each day he would draw water and fill the barrels of the needy for free, and pray at sunrise. Once he was coming from the well, and he went to pray. It was harshly cold, and his sleeve froze and stuck to his skin, and he could not put on tefillin. He lowered the sleeve by the handles of the bolt until the flesh of his arm peeled, and his blood flowed, and he put on tefillin, as it is said, "And my hands dripped myrrh upon the handles of the bolt."³⁴ ...

(20) And these in addition to the first, Zanvil the Fleshy, who extended the meal of *melaveh malkah* from Saturday night to Friday. Hershele of the Hundred Blessings, from whose bosom a jug of whiskey never left, so that he might complete 100 blessings every day, over and above the blessings one must recite daily.³⁵ Zusha of the sharp eye, a butcher with a warm mouth and a good heart, who could recognize even in the kugel an intestine that had been stolen from him. Zelike the vegetable seller, a simple man, wondrous for his simple faith. And David the Small, a Jew descended from the world of song, expert in various kinds of musical instruments. The cups were filled and the joy was renewed and all of the singers began in song...

(21) Rabbi Uriel remembered how the entrance of Shabbat was in silence and tearful faces, and now it departed with great noise and the light of honour. Great fear befell him – might this light only be from the *kelipah* of Nogah,³⁶ Gd forbid? He turned his eyes from the joy and said, "Master of the Universe, who sees the shame of the shamed and my broken heart, give Your light and truth to those who walk before You." Immediately, his limbs were moved by the light of truth. At that time Rabbi Uriel turned his mind from the expulsion, and put his heart to the secret of the Creator's deeds, for all that happens in this world is at Gd's supervision, and there is no difference between that which happens according to His will and that which happens that is not according to His will...

Rabbi Uriel said to them, "I will tell you a story of the holy Baal Shem Tov, may his merit protect us." Each of them descended to his place and made their ears as a funnel³⁷ and they designated a space for the woman of the house to hear the words of the master, as the Shunamitess heard from Elisha.³⁸

(22) Rabbi Uriel arose and looked at the world itself, and he was inflamed with an awesome passion from the chain of worlds and the refined realms, until he was afraid that he might cease to exist. He put his forehead upon the window glass to chill his awesome *dveikut*, so that he could keep his soul in his body.

Great snow descended all week. The inn was covered with celestial clarity, and the beloved ones sat in the shade of the sweetened tranquility. No one left and no one entered. But the man of the beloved, whose heart was touched by pure awe of Gd, overcame and broke through all of the obstacles, and stole away secretly from the eye of the city, to ascend to the tabernacle of the *tzaddik*.

Chapter 3

(23) On a bed of grief Aydele lay, and there was no cure for her illness... Suddenly she saw an angel before her, his length from one end of the world to the other, full of eyes from the sole of his feet to his skull, his garb fire, his clothing

Four, and stored for the righteous in the future

³⁴ Song of Songs 5:5

³⁵ See Menachot 43b

³⁶ A mystical element which is situated between purity and impurity; on Friday night it becomes holy, but that leaves with the departure of Shabbat

³⁷ Chagigah 3b, on the proper way to study Torah

³⁸ See Kings II 4

fire, entirely of fire, with a knife in his hand and a drop of bile suspended from it.³⁹ Immediately, her face turned green and the joints of her spine popped and her bones separated and Gd in His holy presence descended to her, as it were, and appeared to her, and she gave Him her pure soul.

Snow covered the ground, and the house was covered in shrouds...

(25) [The children were reading a book of wondrous deeds of *tzaddikim*, including a *tzaddik* bringing miraculous healing.] Rabbi Meshulam spread his two hands and cried out from his heart, "All of the 'ends' have come and gone,⁴⁰ this cannot be, this cannot be." And he jumped up and left the house. Where did Meshulam go? Where did he turn? Rabbi Meshulam descended to the village, to Rabbi Uriel, to seek mercy for his wife Aydele, that she not die.

Rabbi Avigdor knew all that had been done.⁴¹ Rabbi Avigdor turned his two ancient eyes down upon his only daughter as she was expiring, and his heavy tears flowed into her tears. He strengthened his heart with [thoughts of] the merciful Gd, of great mercy, who would have mercy upon her and send His help from His sanctum.

At that same time Rabbi Avigdor had a thought in his heart – perhaps they would say that in the merit of the prayer of Uriel his daughter Aydele had been healed, and people would then stumble because of her! Rabbi Avigdor turned his two eyes heavenward and he said, "Master of the Universe, please take her life immediately, lest the power of falsehood⁴² increase in the world because of her, Gd forbid." Not even a few moments passed before the 'end' of the body was completed, and her soul exited in purity⁴³...

(26) Shabbat passed, and with it the joy of our hearts, Aydele, left life to all who live, and in the house of Rabbi Avigdor the mourners returned and sat on the low stools. The door on which they had not hung winter decorations this year, due to distraction with Aydele's illness, opened and went sixty times each moment, and the townspeople came, their heads bowed and moaning. The scent of lentils and the scent of eggs remaining from the meal of *havra'ah*⁴⁴ wafted through the room, and the children collected lentil after lentil and rolled them in their mouths and remembered their brother Gershom who was not there when such beloved food was present.

The door opened and went and "the holders of the shields⁴⁵" entered and came in low voices and soft speech, recalling the praise of the dead and 'sweetening' the verdict.⁴⁶ And sad and pleasant tranquility was drawn upon the house.

The dead are forgotten from the heart,⁴⁷ and her son Gershom entered their hearts, sitting in the yeshiva of Torah with his relative, the Rabbi, several parasangs away from Shibush. When they remembered Gershom, all of them began to speak of the glory of the Talmud which his [future] father-in-law, Rabbi Zundel had bought for him, and they spoke in praise of its commentaries...

(28) [From the letter Rabbi Avigdor sent to Gershom after the shivah:] My grandson, more precious than anything precious, I received the letter you sent, with the cup of consolation. But I cannot be consoled, for Gd has poured out His wrath upon me, and He has taken from me my only daughter, the pupil of my eye, 33 years old, and she did not merit to bring one of her sons or one of her daughters beneath their *chuppah*. My pain is greater than the sea...

But after my return I have some comfort when I remember that your mother, of blessed memory, when she was about two years old, her nursemaid brought her to see the Strypa river, and for an instant she turned her attention from your mother z"l, and your mother z"l fell into the Strypa, and she sank in mighty waters beneath the bridge, where the water was very deep, more than the height of two men. And when a man from the butcher shop saw, he did not remove his clothes, and he jumped into the water and he saved her from death and he brought her to my home. And now see the wonders of the Perfect Intellect.⁴⁸ The deeds of Gd are great, for He wanted her to leave behind sons and daughters...

³⁹ The image of a person on the deathbed witnessing the "angel of death", with this appearance, is found in Avodah Zarah 20b.

⁴⁰ Psikta Zutrita Shemot 3:20, among other places

⁴¹ Esther 4:1

⁴² The concept of כח השקר is popular in chassidut; see Shem miShemuel

⁴³ See Sanhedrin 68a on the death of Rabbi Eliezer

⁴⁴ The required post-funeral meal, which customarily includes eggs and lentils in many communities

⁴⁵ Torah scholars; cf Berachot 27b

⁴⁶ A term usually associated with reducing the harshness of Divine justice, but here it may refer to easing the pain of the mourners

⁴⁷ Berachot 58b speaks of the dead being forgotten from the heart

⁴⁸ Job 37:16

I ask one thing of you, this I request.⁴⁹ Although I know that you will not join with empty, reckless people, but only with those who revere Gd, of great hearts, still, I see fit to warn you firmly against the sect of Chassidim who are suspected of nullifying the *brit* [*milah*], drunkards who have spread like weeds...

All that day, Gershom did not put down his grandfather's letter from his hand. His eyes were set between the lines, and his tears were stored in his eyes. And the Holy Blessed One (29) set His kindness upon him, and he forgot the pain of his spirit for a brief period. But on this Gershom was shocked; what had caused his grandfather to warn him away from the sect? Gd forbid, for him to be suspected of this. The person who brought him the letter told him that the sect had brought Uriel, the head of the *biryonim*,⁵⁰ and many had been drawn after him, and Rabbi Avigdor, may he live, had been energized to evict him like a *metzora* from the camp of Israel.⁵¹ He also told him, as part of "mockery of idolatry,"⁵² that Uriel had cursed his grandfather that the one who was banished should be banished from him.

Chapter 4

During this season the luminaries in the heavens are muddled, and they did not finish the Shacharit prayer before the time for Minchah arrived, as though the sun had stopped serving its duty before Gd to benefit the creatures from its light.

In the study hall, the oven was cooled and a damp darkness enwrapped the household implements, and a damp, cold draft blew from the books and fluttered into a person's limbs and sapped the desire to learn, as though Gd forbid all love of Torah was gone from the world.

Gershom overcame and studied. In the corner, between the Ark and the window on the east side of the study hall, he sat and read and learned and immersed himself in Torah. This even though a spirit of sorrow hovered over him every day; from the time of his mother's death he imagined that the heavens were with him in his pain...

When he remembered that she was dead he began to moan and cry, and to desire and yearn and long for the day when he would return to his house and take her siddur and join his voice with those of his young brothers when they stood in the synagogue and recited Kaddish, and he would cry on the neck of his father until his eyes wore out from tears. This is Gershom, who studied Torah and mourned for his mother...

(30) The first watch passed, and Gershom still had not budged from the tent of Torah. Gershom knew that a person's heart is vulnerable to all kinds of illness and harm, today he is here and tomorrow in the grave, and one should be concerned lest he leave this world without even learning the six orders of mishnah for the benefit of the soul of his mother, peace be upon her. He made the nights as days, he did not speak mundane speech and he did not sleep in an established way, but he only sat and studied. There was Torah in the world, and he needed to learn.

The youths were stretched out on their benches, and they devoured their nights in their sleep. The entire world was deep in sleep, and the candle burned and drew near to its end. The yahrtzeit candles were quiet in their sediment, and the clock awoke people for midnight, and the time had arrived for Gershom to sleep. But Gershom knew himself, that even if he would go to his dwelling and lie on his bed, his rest would not be restful. Gd had cut his life with suffering, and even if he would return to his dirt, his troubles would return with him.

At that time, Gershom began to question Gd's justice, why He had created him. Who will uncover your eyes, Gershom, that you come to accuse your Creator?⁵³ Your grandfather, Rabbi Avigdor, wrote, "Come and see the greatness and praise of the Holy Blessed One, that your mother fell into the river in her childhood, and she was averted from death so that children would remain from her." And you sit and challenge Gd's attributes, and add straw to the fire of Gehennom? And when Gershom saw that his heart's thoughts were removing him from Torah, he stood and went to his house to sleep, so that his soul would ascend above at night (31) via the Torah in which he had been involved by day...

⁴⁹ Psalms 27:4

⁵⁰ See Berachot 10a, Gittin 56a, Sanhedrin 37a; Jewish antagonists of the Rabbis in Talmudic times

⁵¹ Numbers 5:2

⁵² Per Megilah 25b, this is the only type of mockery that is permitted

⁵³ Agnon is reversing Avodah Zarah 3a, which says, "Gd does not come to accuse His creations."

The day was not yet lit, and the *shamash* called for service of the Creator. But Gershom did not rise like a lion to the service of his Creator.⁵⁴ Not only did he not awaken the dawn,⁵⁵ but he did not even merit to awaken himself. The shades were sealed, and the light of sunrise did not shine through, and the household implements made black, long shadows, to which the imagination gave life. Gershom kept himself in bed, and they moved along and came to the point of reaching him...

(33) From evening to evening Gershom involved himself in Torah, and his thoughts floated in the higher wisdoms. Most of the day, he stood on the ladder of the book repository and read books and ascended the *sansinim*⁵⁶ of wisdom. His mourning became sweeter, and Divine kindness sheltered him all day. His heart was softened by this sensitivity he had inherited from his mother, and he also softened it with popular *aggadot* which draw a person's heart to love of Gd. Gershom did not yet know the light of the truth of the *tzaddikim*...

Chapter 5

(34) "Do not arouse, do not awaken,⁵⁷" the text says, (35) and because the yeshiva students mentioned his betrothed to [Gershom], all sorts of affection were awakened in his heart.

And when Gershom arrived near his city, he found his brothers and sisters standing by the *eruv* and waiting for him. They mobbed him and took his bags from his hand, and while one embraced and hugged and kissed him,⁵⁸ another hung on him and kissed him. From the day his mother had died, he had cried and caused his heart to cry, saying, "My brothers and sisters, when will I see you and cry with you?" And now that they stood with him, there was no tear in his eyes and no words of comfort in his mouth. And when they reached the house, Gershom wanted to enter. His sister said to him, "Wait while I go and tell Father, so that he will strengthen himself before he sees you." Gershom waited until she returned, and he entered with her. Once he entered, his body was caught in his father's body, and his eyes in his father's eyes, until the tears of each of them mixed. His grandfather entered and greeted him, arranged his *peiot* and smothered his cheeks and asked him, "Did you learn? And what did you learn?" He responded to the greeting and replied, "I learned this and this." He stood with his mouth open and his hands trembling, standing and waiting for his mother to come kiss him, and he would hug her. While he stood there thus, his sisters returned and fell upon his neck, and rubbed his face and hands lovingly...

Rabbi Avigdor asked Gershom whether he had completed a tractate, and which tractate he had completed.⁵⁹ He told the cook, "Give him something to eat." Zlata wiped away her tears and brought him a potato cookie. The girl⁶⁰ jumped up and extended her small matzah to him – the kind of matzah made in our area for children to enjoy – and said, "Eat it please, Gershom." Gershom knew how beloved this matzah was for children and how great was this act of giving it. He swallowed his tears and smoothed the hair of her head. His father nodded his head to him and said, "Her mother's heart..."

(35) The study hall was illuminated with every kind of lamp, the dirt was covered with yellow clay and the walls were limed with white lime, and the oven was coloured with all kinds of colour. On all of the tables were spread white cloths, and a new silk curtain, made of Aydele a"h's wedding dress hung upon the Holy Ark. When the congregants saw Gershom, grandson of the Parnas, they greeted him and asked to hear from his own mouth all that had happened in the city of his Rebbe, and whether they had found the baker who had disappeared by the well of the clowns, and why his Rebbe had not signed the ban against the sect. Didn't his Rebbe have a drop of ink and a pen to sign, such that he did not sign? When entering, Gershom had feared that they would burden him with consolation; now he was pained that they had removed their minds from his mother's death, asking him all sorts of questions and shaking his hand in theirs, and wet tobacco had shaken from their hands on to his hand and singed it. When someone is in pain, speaking with him of his pain is hard for him, and removing their minds from his pain is hard for him...

⁵⁴ Avot 5:20, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 1:1

⁵⁵ Psalms 57:9 and Berachot 4a

⁵⁶ See Song of Songs 7:9

⁵⁷ See Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5, 8:4

⁵⁸ See Song of Songs Rabbah 8:1, which uses this phrase for a reunion of long-lost siblings

⁵⁹ To terminate the Fast of the Firstborn

⁶⁰ Mentioned previously in a part I skipped

(36) [This scene takes place at the Passover Seder at Gershom's future in-laws:] They poured the cups and took their *Haggadot*. Rabbi Zundel had one, his wife had one, and Menuchah had one. Gershom began to fear that they might combine him to read with his betrothed from the same book. In truth, Rabbi Zundel had ordered a *Haggadah* for Gershom, but since the craftsman had bound it close to Pesach when he bound the Talmud, they had decided not to use it (37) because of some bit of chametz.⁶¹ Rabbi Zundel stood and took an old siddur from the rafter and gave it to Gershom, and Gershom's mind was eased.

They made Kiddush over wine and read the Haggadah, they drank and ate and drank and blessed and finished. Rabbi Zundel took his pipe, and before he had put it in his mouth, sleep caught him and he slept. And even the woman of the house did as her husband, and dozed. And Gershom read and added, and since he had drunk four cups his heart was full, and he sang in a pleasant voice. Menuchah heard and was happy, as though a brother had been given to her and he was filling the house with the sound of Torah. Gershom read *Chad gadya*, and Menuchah answered him *Chad gadya, chad gadya d'zabin Abba*. And so they added and read in Song of Songs,⁶² him a verse and her a verse, until they completed the entire book and parted from each other.

Gershom came to sleep in his grandfather's room. While it was still day, they had brought there his mother's bed on which to sleep, so that his body would lie in rest and pleasure. He ascended the bed, recited the first paragraph of Shema, and covered himself in his mother's cover. He had some immaturity in him, as though he was a baby lying beside his mother, until the Master of Dreams came and made him sleep with verses of Song of Songs and the image of his betrothed...

The first and second days of the festival of Pesach did not see good in the house of Rabbi Avigdor. Many came to greet Rabbi Avigdor on the holiday, and they sought to rejoice and to gladden, but sadness was in the house, and anyone who entered there, even with his heart filled with joy, released it and left in sadness.

Gershom remained in the study hall, learning Mishnah and Shulchan Aruch. The footsteps of Spring began to knock on the windows, and the spark of sunlight dropped outside. Gershom emerged and stood at the entrance to the study hall to breath fresh air, to restore his spirit for Torah...

(38) A spirit of the outdoors grabbed Gershom by his cloak and drew him to tour a bit in the city. Close to minchah, Gershom came to a street, hidden from the major road. He saw two men standing by a house, looking for a tenth to come complete the minyan, and he entered.

Although Shibush was a small town and Gershom was well-known in the town, they did not recognize him when he entered. Once they recognized him, they thought he had been sent by the Parnas, to harm them. [But] they remembered their Rebbe's curse and they said, "He is a dead man, and we need not fear him. If someone should fear, he should fear." When they saw his depressed appearance and his charm, they understood that it was chance that he had come here.

The room was small, its form like a dwelling. When he entered, Gershom thought some Jew had set up a minyan in his home. When they reached *Kedushah* and he heard them say *Nakdishcha*,⁶³ he realized he had entered the domain of "the sect". He leapt from his place as though bitten by a snake, but the pleasantness of the prayer enveloped his heart, and he did not leave. The enthusiasts saw him, and they no longer said it was chance that he had come here...

(39) After they finished *Maariv* they went out to dance, and they sang pleasantly *Atah Bechartanu*.⁶⁴ Gershom stood from the table and took a book in his hand and covered his face, lest he see Jews acting immaturely. One of the group patted his shoulder and pointed to the dancers, saying, "How beautiful are your feet, O princess."⁶⁵ After only a few moments, Gershom put down his book and concentrated fully on watching the dance. Even though he knew the dance was a dance, he contemplated each movement, and his lips began to move with the pleasant tune, until they finished dancing and they blessed each other *Moadim l'simchah*.

⁶¹ The fear is that chametz in the paste might not dry out and become inedible before Passover. See <https://books.google.ca/books?id=B8b8LEI2nAoC&pg=PA190&lpg=PA190>.

⁶² There is an old practice of reading Song of Songs after the Seder, until falling asleep. See the Haggadah of the Shelah pg. 170a.

⁶³ This is the text of *Kedushah* in the siddur popular among Chasidim; others say *Nekadeish*.

⁶⁴ From the amidah of holidays.

⁶⁵ Song of Songs 7:2

Gershom left the *shtiebel*, and a sort of elixir of life bubbled in his limbs. The nights of Nisan were at the height of their beauty, and a sweet smell came from the fields close to the city, and he enjoyed the beauty. While walking he met an old man. Gershom said, "Shalom." The man brandished his stick and said, "Empty one! I am about seventy years old,⁶⁶ and I have lived near their temple all my life, and I never entered there! You, once you arrived here your spirit rose rashly upon you and you entered their house."

(40) In those days he did not read Psalms or Job, which bring rest to the soul; sadness was even more beloved to him than a page of Talmud, Gd forbid.

Sometimes he read *Reishit Chochmah*⁶⁷ and he dampened the pages with tears, and he saw himself dwelling in the seven levels of Gehennom, and he mentally accepted upon himself all manner of punishment for his very existence... When he remembered his betrothed, it was only with painful emotion, for she bound him to this lowly world...

Rabbi Avigdor prepared himself to sleep. The valet removed his shoes and put socks on his feet and made his bed. Rabbi Avigdor raised a flame in his pipe (41) and wandered here and there, until he removed his cloak and stood in a wool *brosslik*. Even though he wanted to sleep, he did not ascend to bed, because the nights were cold and they had stopped lighting the oven, and they could not warm his blanket with it, so what pleasure would come from the bed? So he went into the dining room.

The room had the silence of the nights of *sefirah*.⁶⁸ The sharp scent of tobacco that Rabbi Avigdor had cut an hour earlier wafted through the room. Gershom sat and read *Reishit Chochmah*, and his eyes swam with tears. Rabbi Avigdor looked and saw the *matmid* ⁶⁹involved with this; he wanted to say something, but because he had already recited Shema he stood in silence. Suddenly, he saw a whole loaf of bread that remained on the table, and he could not be silent, because of "Those who arrange a table for Gad."⁷⁰

(42) [While trying to sleep] Gershom could not repress his tears any longer, and he cried bitterly from the great pain. Rabbi Avigdor jumped from his bed and awakened his household. Rabbi Meshulam came and soaked a towel in vinegar and rubbed it on his son's chest, as he had done for Aydele of blessed memory, for they thought he had heart pain. In truth, there was pain in Gershom's heart, but not as his household thought...

Chapter 6

(43) Rabbi Avigdor wanted to ease the heart of his household. Rabbi Avigdor said, "Since my son-in-law Meshulam has entered his 36th year, I will make a feast of thanks, for he has left the category of 'Men of blood and trickery, they will not live out half their lives.'⁷¹" He sent the *shamash* and invited his relatives to a cup of blessing that evening...

[Menuchah's] friends began to embrace her and hug her and kiss her. One of them held her with her two hands and said to her, "Come, I will tell you what I heard from Father. So I heard from Abba: All day, the Regional Rabbi discussed fine points of Torah with Gershom. You think he defeated Gershom, it is not so, Gershom defeated him. You think he did not admit it, it is not so, he said explicitly, 'No one ever defeated me, only this young one.' You think he was angry, it is not so, he was ready to give Gershom a gift. And what was it? Ordination. When? When you and Gershom are sitting and rejoicing at your wedding."

Menuchah arranged a basket of fruit before her friends, to interrupt their prattle...

(45) The Rabbi agreed [to participate]. Rabbi Avigdor added and invited the seven councilmen.⁷² A minyan gathered, and they recited *birkat hamazon* with "Elokeinu".

To fulfill the statement of our Sages⁷³ that those of refined mind in Jerusalem would not recline at a feast unless they knew with whom they were reclining, Rabbi Avigdor opened and said, "Rabbi, the elder official who sits to the right of

⁶⁶ A loaded phrase for Passover! See Mishnah Berachot 1:5, cited in the Haggadah.

⁶⁷ A 16th century work of moral instruction, based on mysticism

⁶⁸ Because of their length? Or because this is a period when there are no festivities? Unclear.

⁶⁹ A *matmid* is a perpetually dedicated student

⁷⁰ Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 180:2 prohibits adding a whole loaf of bread to the table before the blessing after meals, because of the description of Gad-worshippers in Isaiah 65:11

⁷¹ Psalms 55:24

⁷² The שבע טובי העיר were the city council in the times of the Talmud, and similar bodies were appointed in Jewish communities throughout the ages.

⁷³ Sanhedrin 23a; and Agnon used this passage to introduce himself in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech

his eminence is Rabbi Yaakov, son of Rabbi Yitzchak, may Gd avenge his blood, from the grandchildren of the milkman who would not eat meat from Shabbat to Shabbat, and from the line of the holy Sh'lah. And the official who sits behind him is Rabbi Moshe haKohen, grandson of the Ot Emet who is mentioned by the rabbis of the generation in their responsa, who struck the men of the accursed sect of Shabbtai Tzvi with the rod of his mouth. And the official who sits behind him is Rabbi Yosef Shemuel, whose name is like that of his grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Shemuel who studied Torah standing⁷⁴ for 25 years, and learned the entire Talmud 42 times, fulfilling *v'dibarta bam*⁷⁵...

(46) The Rabbi shut his eyes and focused his thoughts and began to speak on the matter of the day, and he presented a sharp *pilpul* until the faces of those reclining there were illuminated from his Torah. When he had finished, he said to Gershom, "Gershom, what do you respond to this?" Gershom leaned over and repeated the Rabbi's words in summary, including the entire *pilpul* in a few words to ensure he had heard it properly, and in his words he answered part of it and refuted part of it, and tied to it a great *pilpul* on the matter of the day. The Rabbi's face glowed, and he said, "Beautiful, beautiful!" and he did not stop showing love. Gershom bent his head and repeated verses which keep people from arrogance...

(47) While they were eating, the chazan arose and gave his voice pleasantly and blessed with the *Mi sheBeirach* Rabbi Meshulam, the focus of the meal, and all of the guests answered Amen with pleasant hearts. Even the Regional Rabbi, who rebuked chazanim for going on at length with tunes, enjoyed it and said "Yeyasher kochacha Chazan."

The officials asked the Chazan where he had heard the tune. The chazan deceived the higher mind and that of the officials, saying, "I received this from my father, and my grandfather, the tune from Sinai." The chazan knew that the Regional Rabbi did not tolerate new tunes, how much more so a tune which he had heard from a passerby, such that one might be concerned that he was from the sect...

Once they had mentioned the sect, the Regional Rabbi said, "I will also tell you a story: Once an *avreich* fled from his father-in-law's house and went to his Rabbi's house. They brought him from the road, to me. I instructed to cut off one *peah* and half his beard,⁷⁶ so that people would hear and see."...

(49) Once Rabbi Meshulam found [Gershom] upset, and decreed that he wander about each day. The fields surrounded the city, and he wandered in the fields or sat in the shade of a tree and looked at the gardens and the flowing rivers. Creation smiled upon him. The Sun decorated the entire world, the trees and bushes stood in their beauty, and the field produced pleasant aromas. But if you have lost faith, there is nothing that all of the gifts of Creation can give or add.

An *avreich* said to Gershom in the study hall, "Do we not say, 'The commandments of Gd are straight, they gladden the heart,⁷⁷' and you learn with an angry face!" Gershom's eyes streamed tears. "What can I say, what can I tell? Gd has found my sins.⁷⁸" "She has fallen, she will not rise again,⁷⁹" a verse fell into his mouth,⁸⁰ from a high roof to a deep pit.⁸¹ Man only sees with his eyes. They said, "Gershom is crushing his body with Torah," and they blessed themselves, "We wish that we would be like Gershom." And the sectarians opposite them pointed at him with their fingers and said, "The curse of the *tzaddik*, the curse of a *tzaddik* makes a mark." What was Gershom like? Like silk the tailor cuts, from which he makes a beautiful garment. Had he not cut it, he could not have made a garment from it...

(50) [The students who followed *tzaddikim*] said to Gershom, "You have black bile.⁸² With our Rebbe, you could see how to serve the Creator with joy." But Gershom sealed his ears and did not wish to hear their words. An *avreich* said to Gershom, "Gershom, I will tell you something the likes of which you have not heard. When I was a youth, I was troubled by doubts in faith, Gd save us, until my spirit was dark and my life was not life. Once I told myself, 'The world says there are *tzaddikim* who help people with their counsel,' and I began to draw close to them and I merited faith in the sages..."

⁷⁴ Per Megillah 21a, this is the way Torah was learned until the death of Rabban Gamliel, when people weakened and they began to sit

⁷⁵ The *gematria* of the Hebrew word *bam* is 42 – "And you shall speak 42"

⁷⁶ A sign of humiliation; see Samuel II 10:4

⁷⁷ Psalms 19:9

⁷⁸ Genesis 44:16

⁷⁹ Amos 5:2; and see Berachot 4b on ways to read this verse positively and negatively

⁸⁰ On the significance of a verse falling into one's mouth as an omen, see Berachot 55b

⁸¹ See Chagigah 5b

⁸² In Greek medicine, this was a cause of depression; Rambam and others mention it in this connection, too.

Daily they spoke to him and their words did not enter his heart. One time his heart began to beat powerfully, and he desired and yearned to see the Rav, Rabbi Uriel. The thirst inflamed his heart, and he cooled his heart with Torah. And yet, the thirst reignited, like an oven. Even if he put his entire soul into Torah, he could not extinguish the love.⁸³ If he would tell his relatives, he would be disgraced with them and they would mourn him as for the dead. If he would not tell, how could he bear it? He turned his eyes heavenward and said, "Master of the Universe, I can depend only upon Your mercy." And he picked himself up and went out in secret.

The Mitnagdim were battling the Chassidim, and they exiled the Chassidim, each from his in-laws' home, and they separated them from their wives. They broke their windows and dirtied their tzitzit, and they even sent their hand against their house of prayer. If the Chassidim stood on Friday night to pray, then uncircumcised ones, drunk from the wine of the Mitnagdim, came and extinguished the Shabbat candles, and did not leave light in the house of prayer, or a candle, candelabra or lantern. And when the Chassidim complained to the noble, the noble sent his servants and they destroyed the house of prayer at night...

(51) That day, Zusha the Butcher travelled to the village, to Zanvil Berish the Shocheit, to slaughter an animal. On the way he found a youth lying, arms and legs outstretched. He pushed him with a rod and called out, "Arise, why do you sleep? Are there insufficient benches in the study hall, such that you lie down to sleep at a fork in the road?" When this one did not rise, Zusha jumped from the wagon and saw that it was Gershom, grandson of the Parnas, lying on the ground as if dead. He picked him up in his arms and revived him and put him in the wagon and returned to the city with him. Had Zusha known that Gershom had sought to go to Rabbi Uriel, he would have carried him there himself... In the time of his illness Gershom read stories of wars and chronicles and *Tzitzat Noveil Tzvi* about the deeds of Shabbtai Tzvi and his group. This reminded Gershom of the Chassidim, and he remembered that he had been headed to that Uriel, and his eyes darkened in shame. He said to himself, "Had my illness not grabbed me on the road, I would have strayed and left the path." He justified the [Divine] verdict and saw his illness as a Divine kindness. He said of himself, "To oppress you, to benefit you in the end,⁸⁴" that Gd had made him suffer in order to help him in the end. And from then on he read and studied and learned *pipul* as did the schismatic students, until the *Chozzer*⁸⁵ arrived and brought him back to his root.

Chapter 7

(52) [The following scene takes place on Shabbat, when a *Chozzer* visits Shibush, and ends up at the table of Gershom's family:] The *Chozzer* saw the host sitting, his head and bulk⁸⁶ in a book, and his son-in-law sitting opposite him, his head and bulk in a book, and the eyes of the holy matron, the Shabbat Queen, gazing at them from the gravy, and them not looking at her. The *Chozzer* remembered his holy Rebbe, who was actually greater than any man by two heads, and whose holy body was different from on all other days, from Friday after immersing until after Shabbat. The *Chozzer* cried in his heart, "Master of the Universe, why have You chased me out of the lot of Your beloved,⁸⁷ to crush my feet in a desolate wilderness? I said I would travel from city to city to educate properly the humble of the land,⁸⁸ to guide them in paths of righteousness for Your Name,⁸⁹ and I would keep myself from benefit, and I never challenged Your actions, Gd forbid, but now sadness and worry almost fell into my heart on Your holy Shabbat."...

(53) The *Chozzer* joined in their battle of Torah. At first he wanted to show them Torah with pleasant paths, but he realized that this was neither the place nor the time, lest the Parnas recognize his type and expel him. He wanted to stay here, since he had smelled the bottle of the youth⁹⁰ and found him to be a precious vessel, ready to receive purity. He hid his deeds and concealed his ways...

⁸³ Song of Songs 8:7

⁸⁴ Devarim 8:16

⁸⁵ A *Chozzer* is a follower of a Rebbe who also has an unusually strong memory; he is tasked with memorizing the Rebbe's speech on Shabbat, and recording it after Shabbat.

⁸⁶ A mishnaic expression for one's entire body being immersed in something; see Eruvin 10:6 and Succah 2:7.

⁸⁷ See Samuel I 26:19, where King David says something similar

⁸⁸ Isaiah 11:4

⁸⁹ Psalms 23:3

⁹⁰ An expression for testing someone, usually intellectually; Shabbat 108a and Bava Batra 22a

One day, the *Chozar* said to Gershom, "Today we will learn a simple page of Talmud." Gershom was surprised; this genius who had left no great matter [unlearned] wanted to learn a simple page of Talmud? The *Chozar* saw that Gershom was surprised. The *Chozar* said to Gershom, "Come and see how blind are the eyes of men. A man sees something and thinks, 'How simple this is,' and in truth it contains many hints, and many matters depend on it. Regarding them the verse says, 'They do not look at the deed of Gd.'⁹¹" And so he clarified and went in this matter, many awesome lessons. And once Gershom's heart was opened, and the secret of Gd hinted in the simple words was revealed, the *Chozar* began to guide him from level to level on the rungs of wisdom, until Gershom saw things that no one in Shibush had ever seen...

(55) And [now] Gershom had already left all of the books and he did not read them; he only remained alone in the house, sitting in the shadow of Gd and nursing from sacred thought...

(56) Gershom stood and stood and reviewed all that his ears had heard, and from the great energizing of his spirit he began to cry. He leaned against the wall and stood as long as he stood.⁹² In the end he drew out his head and said, "The time has come to accept Shabbat." He uprooted himself from his place and went to the study hall.

He came to the study hall and found that most of the congregation had already gathered for prayer and were sitting, saying Song of Songs. Some of them said it aloud, with a tune, and some said it quietly. Gershom took a siddur and went to his place by the *bimah*. He opened his siddur and put his head between his two arms, and he stood for a brief time, until he drew out his head and began to recite Song of Songs with terrifying passion and awesome might. He recited and went until he reached the verse, "Draw me forth, I will run after you."⁹³ Then, when he arrived at the verse, "Draw me forth, I will run after you," his soul departed in purity. His lips were still moving, "The King brought me to His chambers,"⁹⁴ "My soul left when He spoke."⁹⁵ So died Gershom, grandson of Rabbi Avigdor, for Rabbi Avigdor had fought with Rabbi Uriel, with the Chassidim he had fought.

1. Arnold J. Band

The suspense of the story is created by the deliberately slow pace in which Agnon works his way to the inevitable tragic ending. Situation by situation we learn more about Gershom, begin to understand him as a person, and consequently watch his steady progress to his doom in sympathy and horror.... The drama of Gershom is played out on two levels. On the metaphysical plane he is doomed because of the curse of Reb Uriel, hence the innocent victim of an ideological clash; on the psychological plane he is victimized by his own hypersensitivity. Both tensions, the metaphysical-ideological and the purely psychological convulse the tranquil folkloristic milieu resulting in the inevitable death...

2. Israel Cohen, The Buczacz Community, <https://www.jewishgen.org/vizkor/buchach/buc089.html>

Buczacz was characterized by people like R' Avraham David Ben Asher (1770-1840). His life history and philosophy constitute a very important chapter in Buczacz' history. We shall, however, suffice with a concise account of his story. As a boy he already drew attention to himself by his great Talmudic erudition and sharpness. Tsvi Hirsh, author of *Neta Sha'ashuim*, chose him as a son-in-law for his daughter. At twenty he was ready to serve as the rabbi of Yazlovitsh. Buczacz was a town of scholars and Talmudists who did not believe in the tsadikim and their miracles. The war between the Talmudists and the hasidim reached its peak at that time, and it greatly troubled R' Avraham. When his son fell ill, his wife and friends urged him to bring the sick child to R' Levi Yitskhak of Berditshev. After refusing for a long while, he finally consented. From that day on he was a different man. He was greatly influenced by R' Levi Yitskhak, who helped him in reconciling his Talmudic and hasidic views, positions that were polarized in his town. The hasidim could not imagine a greater joy, for many of them feared his mastery of the Talmud and rabbinical law. Nevertheless, after he inherited his father-in-law's position, everyone marveled at his religious knowledge but opposed his way of life, his following the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov. In the practice of rabbinical law, he would draw his judgment from the Talmud and from rabbinical authorities [poskim], and not from the principles of the Kabbala. His wide-ranging literary

⁹¹ Isaiah 5:12

⁹² Agnon uses the same phrase for someone whose death is pending in לפנים מן החומה pg. 32.

⁹³ Song of Songs 1:4

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 5:6

work was basically rationalistic, Talmudic and exegetic. His essay *Da'at Kedoshim*, as well as *Eshel Avraham*, was incorporated as an independent section of the *Shulkhan Arukh*. In addition to all of his other books, he wrote a Kabbalistic commentary named *Birkat David* [David's Blessing]. At one point in his life his reason was somewhat shaken, and according to tradition he was cured by the rabbi of Sasov. He acted as Buczacz' rabbi till the day he died, approximately fifty years, and bestowed his spirit upon the town.

3. Shemuel II 14:14

כי מות נמות וכמים הנגרים ארצה אשר לא יאספו ולא ישא אלקים נפש והשב מחשבות לבלתי ידח ממנו נדח:

For we will certainly die, and [we are] like water spilled on the ground which will not be gathered in, and Gd will not show favour to anyone, but He plans lest anyone who is banished remain banished.

4. Rabbi David Altschuler, Metzudat David to Shemuel II 14:14

ועוד הלא אין אלקים נושא פנים לשום נפש ושלם ישלם לאיש כמפעלו ולטובת האדם חושב מחשבות לשלם גמול בזה העולם לבל יהיה האדם הנדח במעשיו מוטרד ונדח ממנו יתברך...

Further, Gd does not show favour to anyone, and He repays each person according to his deeds, and for a person's benefit He plans to give just desserts in this world, lest a person who is banished for his deeds be banished from Gd...

5. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Sichot haRan 189, <http://breslev.eip.co.il/?key=2330>

פעם אחת היה נכדו זכרונו לברכה, מטל על ערש מחלי הפאקין [אבעבועות שחורות] רחמנא לצלן והיה קובל לפני מאד שיש לו צער גדול מזה מאד וספר לי אז ואמר שיש דרכי ד' שאי אפשר להבינם כי איתא שאצל האר"י זכרונו לברכה, נסתלק בן אחד ואמר, שנסתלק בשביל הסוד שגלה לתלמידו רבי חיים ויטאל זכרונו לברכה נהלא באמת האר"י היה מקרח לגלות לו כי רבי חיים ויטאל הפציר בו מאד וכשהפציר בו היה מקרח לגלות לו כי אמר שלא בא לעולם כי אם לתקן נשמתו של רבי חיים ויטאל זכרונו לברכה נמצא שהיה מקרח מן השמים לגלות לו הסוד, ואף על פי כן נענש על ידי זה פנזכר לעיל, וזהו דרכי ד' שאי אפשר להבין בשכל בשום אופן. והמוכן מדבריו לענן עצמו שכל צערו ויסוריו וצער בניו שיהיו הכל הוא רק מחמת שעוסק עמנו לקרבנו לד' יתברך ואף על פי שהוא מקרח לזה, כי בנדאי ד' יתברך רוצה בזה כי הוא יתברך חושב מחשבות לבל ידח ממנו נדח ואף על פי כן היה לו יסורים קשים גדולים מאד על ידי זה...

Once his grandson z"l was lying in bed with smallpox, Gd save us, and He complained before me greatly that he felt great pain from this. He told me then that there are Divine ways which one cannot understand; it is found regarding the Ari z"l that he lost a son, and he said that the reason was that he had revealed a secret to his student, Rabbi Chaim Vital z"l. In truth, the Ari had needed to reveal it to him, for Rabbi Chaim Vital had pushed him greatly, and this pushing had required him to reveal it, for [the Ari] said that he had come to this world only to repair the soul of Rabbi Chaim Vital z"l. So Heaven required him to reveal the secret to him, and yet he was punished, as noted. This is one of the Divine ways which one cannot understand rationally, at all. From [Rebbe Nachman's] words it was understood regarding himself, that all of his pain and suffering, and the pain of his children, may they live, were all because he worked to bring us close to Gd. Even though he was required to do this, for Gd certainly wants this, as Gd plans lest anyone who is pushed away remain pushed away, and yet, he suffered greatly in this way...