

SICHA STORY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Volume 15

Vayishlach, Sicha 4 (First Sicha of the week)

- Rabbi Yossi Nemes, Metairie, Louisiana

One of the reasons for Bar mitzvah at age 13 is the level of intellect and emotional intelligence reached at this age. Yet, even according to this, the foundation of BM and observant Jewish life is Mesiras Nefesh - self-sacrifice and total dedication to Hashem.

This Sicha, said Tammuz 22, 5711, at a bar mitzvah, extolled the virtue of Mesiras Nefesh at great length. The Rebbe cited the Rebbe Rashab's unlimited Mesiras Nefesh at the Rabbinical Conference of 5670 (1910). Here is an abridged description of the events at the conference, as well as a story about the Rebbe and Reb Chaim Brisker, that occurred during this conference (shared by the Rebbe, 12 Tammuz, 5711).

The Rabbinic conference of 5670 (1910)

The Russian government held occasional conferences on how to deal with various issues of the Jewish community. However, the gatherings were usually attended by members of the Haskalah who retained control over the proceedings. These individuals, detached from the general Jewish community, did not accurately represent their needs.

For many years, the Rebbe Rashab advocated a gathering of the real rabbonim of Russia, in a conference recognized by the government, where they would effectively deal with the issues and accurately represent the community's needs.

To ensure 'proper' representation, the government oversaw elections in each community to choose representatives for the conference. The Rebbe Rashab worked

tirelessly to ensure that G-d-fearing rabbonim would be chosen. In most cities, the Rebbe Rashab was confident of his success, but when several locations seemed to hang in the balance, the Rebbe Rashab traveled there personally to ensure the success of the traditional candidates. In Chernigov, Yitzchak Schneerson was running the Maskilim's campaign, and the Rebbe Rashab arrived to counter the efforts of his cousin. In Yitzchak's memoirs, he amazingly describes how he was affected! "At the gathering for the elections, the height of the event was the arrival of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, a man with a bold step, a keen eye, and a hadras panim. His mere presence made an impact; we felt that we were in the presence of someone with determination and vigor, a real leader. "Even I, far from being the greatest yarei Shamayim, felt uplifted by the presence of such a great person."

The conference took place in S. Petersburg. Many of the most prominent rabbonim of the time participated, among them, Reb Chaim Brisker, Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, Rada"tz Chein, the Rebbes of Babroisk, Radzin, and Sokolov, among others. The Rebbe Rashab brought along his own contingency of Chassidim and rabbonim, among them the Frierdiker Rebbe, Harav Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, and Reb Mendel Chein.

Reb Chaim Brisker supported the view of the Rebbe Rashab on all fronts. One individual present, Heinrich Slusberg, noted the Rebbe Rashab's towering presence: "The Lubavitcher Rebbe had an immense impact on all of us. He was tough as a rock on all matters pertaining to Yiddishkeit; he would not bend an iota on any Jewish practice..."

The central issue on the agenda was the government proposal that all rabbonim be obligated to acquire a secular education. At one point, a message was conveyed on behalf of Minister of the Interior Stolypin: "If the attendees continue their opposition to the government's requirement of educating rabbonim in Russian, terrible pogroms will break out in 101 cities across the Russian Empire." There were other rabbonim who subtly spoke out against it, but the Rebbe Rashab was the only one who openly took a bold stand. The Rebbe Rashab spoke words which, to the chagrin of the Government, would impact the proceedings "...It was merely our bodies that were sent into exile and placed under the authority of foreign governments. Our neshamos, however, were never sent into exile!" Passionately, he called on all the attendees to ignore the intimidation of the Russian government and stay true to Yiddishkeit. "Yidden!" he called out, "Sanctify Hashem's name in public!" and he fell into a faint. Immediately after this, the Rebbe Rashab was placed under house arrest and prohibited from leaving his hotel room.

Reb Chaim: “Lubavitcher Rebbe we did everything we could!”

Reb Chaim Brisker came to visit the Rebbe Rashab in his hotel room, only to find him crying. “Lubavitcher Rebbe!” Reb Chaim said, “we have done everything we could. From this point on, we rely only on Hashem.” The Rebbe Rashab responded “but the objective was not accomplished!

The Rebbe added an analogy: There are two types of personalities in a business. There is the hired worker and the business owner. The worker, though very devoted, will never lose sleep when the business is struggling. He does all he can to help the situation, but when there is nothing more he can do, he will go home and rest. The owner, on the other hand, will not be able to sleep peacefully. True, he has done all he can to help the situation. But it is HIS business at stake and its failure troubles him deeply.
