

received instruction from the Ba'al Shem Tov, becoming one of his most prominent talmidim. After the Ba'al Shem Tov's passing, Rav Yechiel Michel became a talmid of the Maggid of Mezritch. A master of homiletics - art of preparing sermons and preaching- and a spellbinding orator, he was a highly sought-after lecturer. The Zlotchover Maggid was largely responsible for introducing Chassidus to the Yidden in Galicia, Poland. He suffered a lot from the Misnagdim who opposed the "new sect", judging it dangerous and heretical. In the wake of excommunication and book burnings directed against Chassidim, he was forced to move from town to town, serving

as Maggid in the Galician communities of Brody, Alesk and Zlotchov, finally finding refuge in Yampole in Volhyn, the cradle of Chassidus not far from Meziboz. Rav Yechiel Michel had one daughter and five sons, all eminent Torah scholars. Chassidim call them the Maggid's five Chumoshim. Although he did not write any seforim himself, his thoughts and perspectives have been compiled into a work entitled *Mayim Rabim*. He founded a strong dynasty and had many prestigious talmidim, foremost among them Rav Avrohom Yehoshua Heshel of Apta, also known as the Ohev Yisrael, and Rav Mordechai of Neshchiz, known as the Rishpei Eish.

STORY OF THE WEEK (By Yehuda Z. Klitnick) **The great Tzaddik didn't understand how one can sin**

Rav Yechiel Michel, in his youth, lived in a certain town, where he sat all day in the *Bais Medrash* /study hall and shul, and pursued his Torah studies. In that town there lived a simple Jew who earned his livelihood by transporting travelers and merchandise in his wagon. One day, the wagon driver came to the shul looking for the Rav and was in a state of great distress. "Help me, Rebbe!" he wept. "I have committed a terrible sin. I have desecrated the holy Shabbos. How can I atone for my transgression?"

"Tell me what happened?" asked the Rav. "Last Friday," the man explained, "I was returning from the marketplace with a wagonload of merchandise when I lost my way in the forest. By the time I found my way to the outskirts of the city, the sun had already set. So preoccupied was I with my worry over the merchandise, that I failed to realize that Shabbos had arrived until it was too late" Seeing how broken-hearted the man was, the Rav comforted him and said: "My dear son, the gates of repentance are never closed. Donate a pound of candles to the shul and your transgression will be forgiven." The young Rav Michel, overheard this exchange, and was displeased by the Rav's approach. "A pound of candles to atone for violating the Shabbos?" he thought to himself. "The Shabbos is one of the most important mitzvos of the Torah. Why is the Rav treating the matter so lightly? I won't allow this to happen!"

That Friday afternoon, the wagon driver brought the candles to the shul. Rav Michel watched disapprovingly from his table. He placed them on the *Amud* for the Shamash of the shul to light in honor of the Shabbos. But this was not to be. Before the Shamash arrived, a stray dog carried off the candles and ate them. The distraught repentant Yid ran off to report the incident to the Rav. "Woe is me!" he wept. "My repentance has been rejected in Heaven! What shall I do?!"

"You're making too much of the matter," the Rav reassured him. "These things happen -- there's no reason to deduce that Hashem is rejecting your repentance. Bring another pound of candles to the shul next week, and everything will

be all right." But behold when the Shamash lit the candles on the following Friday afternoon, they inexplicably melted down, so that by the time Shabbos commenced, nothing was left of them. The third week the Yid upon his third attempt of bringing the candles to be lit, out of nowhere a strong wind suddenly blew out the candles just when Shabbos began and it was not possible to relight them.

By now the Rav, too, began to realize, that something was wrong and a spiritual strength is behind this amiss. The Rav advised the wagon driver to seek the counsel of the great Chassidic master, Rav Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov. "Hmm..." said the Ba'al Shem Tov, upon hearing the man's story. "It seems that a certain young scholar, Rav Michel, sitting and studying in the shul in your town finds fault with the path to repentance that the Rav has prescribed for you.

Never mind. Next week, donate another pound of candles to the shul. This time, I promise you that everything will be alright. But go tell that Rav Michel that I would be honored if he could trouble himself to come visit me." Rav Michel wasted no time in abiding by the Ba'al Shem Tov's request. But no sooner had he and his coachman set out that all sorts of troubles beset their journey. First, the wagon tumbled into a ditch. Then, an axle broke many miles from the nearest town, after which they lost their way altogether. When they finally found the road to Mezhibuzh, it was late Friday afternoon and the sun was about to set. They were forced to abandon the wagon and continue on foot. Rav Michel arrived at the Ba'al Shem Tov's door an hour into Shabbos, weary and traumatized by his near violation of Shabbos. "Good Shabbos, Rav Michel," the Ba'al Shem Tov greeted him, "come in and warm yourself by the fire. You, Rav Michel, have never tasted sin, so you do not comprehend the remorse a Yid feels at having transgressed the will of Hashem. I trust that you now understand something of the agony that our friend experienced. Believe me, his remorse alone more than atoned for his unwitting transgression." Rav Michel thanked the Rebbe for this valuable lesson.

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