

CHAIM MEIR'IM
THE ZUTSHKA
PARSHA BLETTEL

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PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI



*Lovingly Dedicated in Memory of
R' Chaim ben R' Yisrael and R' Meir ben R' Yechezkel*

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FORTY-TWO TRAVELS

When the Zutshka Rebbe was hospitalized on Parshas Bechukosai he was told the following well known tale about Rabbeinu Chaim ben Attar the author of the holy *sefer* the Ohr ha'Chaim haKadosh:

During his exile, the Ohr HaChaim ended up one Erev Shabbos in a field. (Rav Mottele Slonimer used to say that there he met a giant who was a lumberjack and with each stroke of his axe, he said, "Lekovod Shabbos Kodesh!" Other traditions add that he took the Ohr HaChaim over the river Sambatyon.) There he rested by a tree, and as he prepared for Shabbos, he sat and reviewed the Parsha of the week. His tremendous dveikus and erudition helped him toil and he arrived at forty-two explanations for the first pasuk in Parshas Bechukosai!

Seeing that Shabbos would soon arrive, the Ohr HaChaim entered the neighboring village and went to the local shul for davening. No one knew or recognized their illustrious guest; he was received as warmly as any wandering beggar Jew and was invited to one of the locals for the Shabbos meal upon the conclusion of the tefillos.

The Ohr HaChaim followed his host home for the seuda and afterward his host told him that they all met after the meal at the local Rav's home for a get-together in honor of Shabbos.

There they sang and shared Divrei Torah and Oneg Shabbos. The host invited his unknown guest to join and Rav Chaim ben Attar agreed.

At the Rav's home they all sang zemiros and watched as the local Rav sank deep into thought. He was a holy man, who, the host explained, could delve into deep mysteries and achieve insight. The Rav was meditating and his face betrayed holy dveikus and otherworldly ponderings. When the Rav came back and his soul returned, he began to speak animatedly, telling them that he had just heard great deep Torah insights in the heavenly academies!

He then expounded on and explained the first pasuk of Bechukosai in fourteen different ways and concluded, "And I heard from the heavenly hosts – the pamalya shel maala – that in the Mesivta Derokiya these chiddushim are said in the name of the holy Tzaddik Rabbeinu Chaim ben Attar!"

Everyone sat in stunned silence, marveling at the Torah insights and novel interpretations – everyone except the stranger. The guest in the back got up and broke the silence and made a motion of dismissal and declared, “He is not a Gaon, or a Tzaddik, or a Kodosh – he is not a Rav, just plain Chaim ben Attar!” No one knew that this wandering stranger was none other than Rav Chaim ben Attar himself, who, in his humility, sought to downplay himself and downgrade his honor. All they knew was that he had some chutzpa! The host tried to calm everyone down and the matter was soon forgotten. Until the next day, that is...

After Shacharis and the seuda, the Jews gathered at the Rav’s home for singing and study. There the Rav again ascended on high and when he returned, proceeded to explain and teach an additional fourteen chiddushim and insights on the first pasuk of Bechukosai. Again he concluded by saying, “And I heard from the heavenly hosts – the pamalya shel maala – that in the Mesivta Derokiya these chiddushim are said in the name of the holy Tzaddik Rabbeinu Chaim ben Attar!”

Again, the audacity and chutzpa of the stranger was heard as he stood up and corrected the Rav: “He is not a Gaon, or a Tzaddik, or a Kodosh – he is not a Rav, just plain old Chaim ben Attar!”

This was getting out of hand. The Jews were angry, the Rav was furious and barely could they all be restrained from attacking the insolent, brazen stranger. Just who did he think he was anyway? Little did they guess that he was in fact Rav Chaim ben Attar!

Finally, Sholosh Seudos came, and again for a third and final time the scenario played itself out: The Rav ascended and heard chiddushim and then he descended and shared with the rapt audience another fourteen chiddushim and insights on the first pasuk of Bechukosai (a total of forty-two explanations) and again he concluded, saying, “And I heard from the pamalya shel maala that in the Mesivta Derokiya these chiddushim are said in the name of the holy Tzaddik Rabbeinu Chaim ben Attar!”

The chutzpadik stranger stood up and again corrected the Rav. “He is not a Gaon, or a Tzaddik, or a Kodosh – he is not a Rav, just plain Chaim ben Attar!” At this point the Rav’s righteous anger could not be held back and he resolved to punish the stranger for the sake and honor of the Torah and had him incarcerated.

Shabbos ended and a strange wind picked up. The skies filled with dark, ominous clouds. An unseasonal storm was brewing, the likes of which no one had ever seen. As the gale rose and torrential rains lashed out, the frightened Jews ran to the Rav for help and guidance. The Rav ascended on high and was told, “The heavenly minister in charge of Gehinnom is in a rage! You have locked up Rav Chaim ben Attar in a cell and while he is jailed he cannot make Havdola. All Shabbos long, every week, Gehinnom is closed and

sealed. The Sar (angel) wishes now to reopen it as he does every Motzo'ei Shabbos but he cannot because the Ohr HaChaim has not yet made Havdola! This dangerous storm is a manifestation of the Sar of Gehinnom's great anger and rage!" The Rav quickly had the Ohr HaChaim released and told him that in Heaven it had been revealed that all the insults and injuries the Ohr HaChaim had suffered had atoned for him and his exile was now over and he could go back home.

(When the Rav Mottele Slonimer would tell this, he added that they all heard a voice ring out and declare, "Return, O you wicked back to Sheol!" The land shook and all present trembled as they stood at the foot of the opening to Gehinnom!) The Rav begged the Ohr HaChaim's forgiveness and once granted the Ohr HaChaim returned to Sali.

Afterwards they told the Zutshka Rebbe how the Degel Macheneh Ephraim (Parshas Ma'asei) cites his grandfather the holy Baal Shem Tov who taught that just as Bnei Yisroel travelled and camped for forty-two journeys in the desert, so does every person in his life have to undergo forty-two travels and journeys in his life in order to rectify a *tikkun* for his soul. Perhaps we can say that the end of the Ohr HaChaim's *galus* and exile since he himself was *mechadesh* forty-two new and novel interpretations on that Shabbos and these *chiddushim* and novel Torah thoughts served to compensate and mend all that needed rectifying. Therefore, once he achieved his *tikkun*, the Ohr ha'Chaim no longer needed to go into exile and he was able to end his *galus* and go back home.

The Zutshka Rebbe enjoyed this explanation, and he himself added, based on this we can also interpret the *pasuk* in Bechukosai as follows:

"*Im Bechukosai,*" then "*Saylechu,*" - If you engage in study and interpretation of My Torah laws then you can walk and leave *galus*! That by treading on the path of Torah and walking on its ways this can serve to mend and rectify you soul exempting you from the need to walk in exile and *patur* you from *galus*! (תש"ט)



The Rebbes of Monsey, Amsane, Bnei Berak, Temeshvar, Shidlovtza and R' Nachman Biderman dancing at the Bar Mitzva of the Rebbe's son.



R' Shlomo Amar at the Bar Mitzva of the Rebbe's son.