

INTO EXILE

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Rabbi Eliezer Berland

One in a
GENERATION

Volume II

BR LEVY & YD BERGMAN

When God sees that a certain tzaddik has the power to draw people to the service of God, He raises enemies against him, in order that he will be able to draw people to God. For when a tzaddik does not have enemies, he cannot draw people to God, just like in the days of Moshiach, when the world will be a peace, and converts will not be accepted.

- Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, writing in the *Sefer HaMiddot*,
Chapter entitled 'Tzaddik', Second Book, #17



Shuvu Banim would like to thank the many wonderful people for the hospitality and kindness they showed to Rav Eliezer Berland, and his *talmidim*, throughout his years of exile.

Your help and generosity sustained so many people, and shone a light in even the darkest of times.

In particular, we would like to thank:

Jackie Kadosh

The Shwer Family of Johannesburg

Yaron Yamin

Avi Gershoni

Yosi Naftali

Danny Gazel

In truth, there are many, many more names that should be added to this list, and we apologize that we can't include all of the holy souls who have helped the Rav over the last few years.

But know, there is an eye that sees, and a hand that records everything, and every precious *mitzvah* and kindness that was done has been noted in Heaven, and will be properly and fully rewarded there.



This page has been dedicated in the *zchut* of:

Danny and Heidi Shwer

And their children:

Yisrael Meir

Aharon

Yakira

Gavriel

Layve

Rachaeli



“For the hatzlachas of Yaakov Shalom Ben Rus,
ves kul mishpachtoi, be’bruchniyus u vigashmiyus”



Dedicated by:

Philip Hymowitz

“In honor of my Ayshet Chayil, Beth Hymowitz.”



Dedicated by:

The Vatter-Gosset Family

“For the coming of Mashiach Tzidkenou”



Dedicated by:

Chaim and Chana Apsan: To our dear sons
Elisha Meir and Yedidya Shalom.

“May you grow in good health to Torah, ch-
uppah and ma’assim tovim.”



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“People used to say of the Rebbe, “There’s no middle way.” Either he was what his opponents – who “speak arrogantly against the righteous” said he was. Or, he really was a true Tzaddik, in which case he was an entirely unique, exalted and awesome figure, quite beyond the grasp of the human mind.”

– Chayey Moharan, #262

INTRODUCTION

“Do we name names, or not?”

That was the question we were wrestling with over the last two years of writing the book you now hold in your hands. So many times, we flipped backwards and forward between clearly laying out all the gory details, and clearly identifying the names and actions of the Rav’s main persecutors – or not.

On the one hand, it often seemed that the only way people would be able to get past the lies they’d been told in the media, and via all those pamphlets full of slander that had been carefully placed in synagogues and learning halls around the country, was if we tried to dissect each lie and libel one by one.

So in some of the iterations of this book, that’s we did. We explained in minute detail how the Rav’s persecutors managed to pull the wool over so many people’s eyes, and all the different people, organizations and institutions who helped them to do it.

But then, just before the manuscript was meant to be sent to the printers, we started to get some hints that this was not what God really wanted. So then, the doubts and the confusion returned, because surely if we didn’t name names, if we didn’t explain exactly who was behind the persecution of the Rav and what their motives and *modus operandi* was, no-one would take us seriously.

We'd be accused of trying to whitewash the whole story, or trying to hide things.

For many long weeks, we were in an agony of indecision and confusion, so eventually, we turned to the book of *Advice*, the *Kitzur Likutey Moharan*, and opened it up randomly, to see if we could get some guidance that way.

It opened to a page entitled “Controversy and Strife”, where we read the following:

“When a person is involved in a dispute, he should never get up and say that whatever his opponent does to him, he will do to his opponent in return. This will only help his opponent to achieve what he wants, which is to see his victim suffer. The best thing to do is to judge his enemies in the scale of merit, and even to do them favors where he can. This is the best way to foil their intentions. In the end, their evil intentions will all rebound on their own heads.”

And that's when we realized that, at least for the authors of this book, naming and shaming the Rav's persecutors is not the right path to take, however tempting it appears. However, for anyone who still wishes to understand that part of that story further, that information is already available online, both in Hebrew and English.

After this revelation, we went back to the drawing board, and totally revised the manuscript to place the focus back on sharing the light of Rav Eliezer Berland, instead of on detailing the dark deeds of the people who are opposing him.

For in the end, their evil intentions will all rebound on their own heads.

Without any assistance from us.

So, this book continues where the last volume of *One in a Generation* left off. We begin this book with a brief digest of the main points shared in the first volume, so that new readers can easily follow the flow of the story.

Completed with God's help in Jerusalem, Erev Pesach, 5779 (April 8th, 2019)

ALWAYS UNUSUAL

On December 26, 1937 Chaim and Ettia Berland became the proud parents of a little Eliezer. The couple had recently escaped pre-War Europe to settle in Haifa. Chaim Berland, a Polish Jew, had made every effort to get to the land of Israel because he said he could see the Holocaust coming. He worked as a partner and baker at one of Haifa's cooperative bakeries, while Ettia Berland worked for a coffee wholesaler.

The Berland family were unusual, even then. Most of their neighbors were diehard Labor Socialists who celebrated Labor Day instead of Yom Kippur, while the Berland household was that rare oddity, a family who still believed in the Torah. As a three year old boy, the young Eliezer Berland was mocked by his friends for being the only religious boy in his playgroup.

In his Bnei Akiva high-school, Eliezer Berland was the only boy who insisted on wearing his hat to school, which raised the ire of the headteacher and nearly earned him a beating. "Why are you insisting on being different from the other pupils?!" the head demanded, angrily. No-one else was making such a fuss about covering their head. But Eliezer Berland was never a person of half-measures. If he was going to do something, he was going to do it 100%.

The young Berland was unusual in other ways, too. While other kids would spend their time playing and swimming, he spent his time with his head in a Gemara, and would stay up all night learning Torah. His friends were struck by how serious he looked, even as a young teen, and his strange way of praying in the local Vizhnitz shul – where he would bend down to the ground, engrossed in his prayers - drew all the neighborhood kids to come and watch him.

At the age of 17, Eliezer Berland went to study at the Lithuanian yeshiva Knesses Chizkiyahu, that had just opened up in nearby Kfar Chassidim. His strange conduct was noticed by the staff and students alike, who'd never seen any other student learn for 20 hours day, even on fast days, when everything else was melting in the pre-airconditioned heat.

They also noticed that Lazer Berland's prayers seemed to get answered. Whenever another student fell ill, someone would ask Lazer to pray for him, and he'd then shut himself in his room, with his book of psalms, and come out again a couple of hours later with red eyes, from crying. And the student would recover.

One of the young Berland's contemporaries at the Knesses Chizkiyahu, Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Shpitzer recalls: "I never once saw him teasing someone else, or heard him speak badly about another person. I never once saw him sitting with the other boys outside the yeshiva after our studies and spending his time chit-chatting. I only saw Rav Berland engaged in holy matters and Torah learning. He really threw himself into his learning with an enormous amount of energy."

But there was no question that the young Eliezer was unusual, and that his strange behavior made a deep impression on people, wherever he went. When he was 21, Lazer Berland left Haifa to learn

in the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. Around that same time, he was set up on a *shidduch* with Tehillah Shaki, daughter of Rabbi Shalom Avraham Shaki, a Yemenite immigrant and member of the National Religious Party.

Before the date, Lazer Berland wrote a question to the Steipler Gaon, Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, who he'd been corresponding with since his time at Knesses Chizkiyahu, asking him if he could keep his eyes closed during the meeting¹. The Steipler responded with his customary sharpness: 'If you're going to keep your eyes closed for the rest of your life,' he told him, "then it's also permitted for you to close your eyes during that meeting.'"

After the wedding, the young man moved from the Ponovezh Yeshiva to study with the Steipler, at the Volozhin kollel. He was the Steipler's study partner for more than three years, and Rav Yaakov was clearly taken with his young prodigy. In one letter, he referred to him as: "The precious young avreich, genius in Torah and fear of heaven, our master and teacher Rav Eliezer Berland, shlit'a."

As news of the Steipler's special treatment of the unusual young man from Haifa spread, another of the young men studying Torah in Bnei Brak, Dovid Chaim Stern, plucked up the courage to ask the Steipler what he saw in Eliezer Berland.

"He was a young man while the Steipler was the Gadol Hador and much older than him. They were study partners, learning many hours together each day, so I was interested in finding out what he had to say about him," explains Rav Stern. "The Steipler told me, 'You should know, he is an expert in the entire Torah, a holy

¹ Rav Berland actually had more than 10,000 written responses from the Steipler Gaon over the course of their correspondence, sadly most of which have been lost.

man and a tzaddik!’ That was the testimony from the mouth of the Gadol Hador.”

But while he was very happy with the Torah learning at the Volozhin yeshiva, Lazer Berland was still feeling something lacking in his religious devotions. He discussed this with the Steipler, and told him: “What’s going to be with my praying?” The Steipler responded, “If you want praying, you need to go to the Chassidim.”

Over the coming months, Reb Lazer went to a number of different *chassidische* shtiebels, shuls and yeshivas, to see where he felt most inspired. In the end, he came across Breslov almost by accident, on the night of Purim, 1961. He was returning back from Megillah reading at the Lelov *beis midrash* in Tel Aviv when he suddenly felt inexplicably tired, so he turned into the Breslov Yeshiva in Bnei Brak², to sit down for a while, and started learning a Likutey Moharan, which he found there.

The yeshiva appeared to be deserted, so when the mashgiach, Rabbi Nachman Rosenthal, showed up, Reb Lazer asked him where all the students were. He discovered that everyone was in bed, asleep, so they could wake up at midnight to go out to the fields and pray. Reb Lazer responded: “What?! There are other people who go out to the field to pray?! That’s what I’ve been looking for!”

But it wasn’t so easy to make the jump, instantly, into Breslov, not least because Breslov had a reputation as being the ‘dead *chassidut*’, and post-World War II, the community was tiny, and in disarray. For the next two weeks, returning to the Breslov yeshiva slipped Reb Lazer’s mind, until he bumped into Rabbi Nachman Rosenthal late one Friday afternoon, and agreed to come and visit him again at the yeshiva that Friday night. When he heard the

² Located on Am Haderech Street, between Chazon Ish and Vizhnitz

davening, and the way the cantor was repeating the same word over and over again for 15 minutes, Reb Lazer was sold. Finally, he'd found the path he'd been searching for.

But first, Reb Lazer first returned to the Steipler, to get his input about all the unusual ideas Breslov *chassidut* seemed to teach about the concept of the "Tzaddik", who exists within every generation. He sat with Rav Yaakov, and went through every detail.

When he got up to the comment where Rebbe Nachman of Breslov stated that the Tzaddik could even get his students out of *gehinnom*, hell, he asked the Steipler: "Can you get me out of *gehinnom*?" The Steipler laughed, and told his young learning partner that it was only with great difficulty that he could get himself out of *gehinnom*. Who'd ever heard of such a thing?!

But Reb Lazer wasn't to be put off. He asked again: "But, what if you found a tzaddik who could get you out of *gehinnom*?" The Steipler responded, "If that's the case — run after him!" So that's what Reb Lazer did, with every drop of his strength.

Very quickly, he became a legend in the Breslov yeshiva in Bnei Brak. No-one could keep up with him, as he spent whole nights doing hitbodedut in the fields, davening for hours on the roof of the yeshiva at full volume, dancing away the judgments, getting up for the *chatzot*, or midnight prayers, and sleeping just an hour a night, in the process.

Whatever advice he found in the Breslov books, Reb Lazer made every effort to fulfill it in every detail. He sought out the Breslov elders in Jerusalem, and spent months and even years as their attendants, building close relationships with luminaries including Rabbi Israel Ber Odesser, Rav Zvi Aryeh (Hersh Leib) Lippel, Rav Tzvi Aryeh Rosenfeld, and Rav Binyomin Zev Cheshin,

Rosh Yeshiva of the 'Shaar Hashamayim' kabbalistic yeshiva in Jerusalem.

Lazer Berland's budding reputation as a miracle worker had also followed him to Haifa, and the Steipler and other rabbinic luminaries at that time, like the famous Sephardi kabbalist Rav Mordechai Sharabi, started sending members of the public over to Reb Lazer for a blessing.

"Go to the Lederman synagogue in Bnei Brak," Rav Sharabi told one of his petitioners. "There, you'll see an *avreich* who prays with a lot of enthusiasm and different movements. Ask him to give you a blessing that you should get your miracle — and don't take no for an answer! Even if he tells you he's nothing and speaks disparagingly about himself and tells you he's not on the level to give you a blessing."

But not everyone in Bnei Brak was thrilled with their strange neighbor, who would often disappear for weeks at a time to pray in the wilderness, like a Biblical prophet of yore. "There were times when the Rav would disappear for whole weeks, or even whole fortnights," recalls Abish Dickshtein, one of the Berland's old neighbors. "Some of the Litvaks who lived on Rashbam Street in Bnei Brak used to laugh at the Rebbetzin and tell her, 'You see! Your husband has run off and disappeared!' The Rav used to go away to pray, so I used to go and talk to the Rebbetzin to give her some encouragement, so she shouldn't be broken by the things her neighbors were saying."

Even then, Eliezer Berland was a polarizing figure. But love or hate him, no-one could really ignore him, or the dramatic events that always seemed to surround him.

When the Berland's only son, Nachman, was four months old, he fell out of his pram and sustained a severe head injury that left him a coma for almost six weeks. The doctors told the distraught parents that he had a one in a thousand chance of surviving, and recommended very high risk brain surgery, as the only possible course of action.

But Eliezer Berland knew about something called a *pidyon nefesh*, which the Chassidic works talk about at length. So he told the doctors that his son would live, even though he needed an open miracle. Lazer Berland left the hospital, and went straight to sell his apartment in Bnei Brak for 10,000 Israeli lira.³ He then distributed all the money from the house sale to charity.

Miraculously, Nachman Berland woke up, and completely recovered.

When a person is sick, a pidyon nefesh (monetary redemption) is the pre-requisite of any cure. Only after the redemption has been made does the Torah give the doctor permission to cure. – Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, in Likutey Moharan, II:3

Over the next few years, Reb Lazer started to make a lot of friends within the still relatively closed circles of Breslov chassidut – but also a few enemies. Over time, he'd grown closer to the Breslov elders, including Rav Shmuel Shapira, and Rav Levi Yitzhak Bender, who in his quiet way had become the *de facto* leader of Breslov chassidut, after the war.

One year, Reb Lazer had astounded the Breslov chassidim gathered together in Meron for Yom Kippur by standing rooted to the spot, in prayer, for the full 25 hours. When Reb Lazer finally

³ Roughly equivalent to around 500,000 shekels, in today's money.

made it onto the bus returning to Jerusalem, he broke his fast with a drop of grape juice, and then launched into a three hour Torah class, which only ended when he decided to get off the bus in the Jerusalem forest, to spend the rest of the night praying in the fields.

The next morning, he appeared for Shacharis in the Breslov shul in Meah Shearim, and again he just stood there davening for hours and hours. When the service was over, he went up to the roof to continue his prayers, and at that point, some of the congregants went over to Rav Shmuel Shapira. “What do you say, about this Rav Lazer Berland?” they wanted to know. Rav Shmuel replied, “It’s already known to us that this is not a person, it’s an angel!”

But not everyone agreed with that assessment. Some people within Breslov eyed the newcomer, and his strange habits and boundless enthusiasm, with a lot of suspicion. They referred to him as the *meshugganer*, the crazy man – and Reb Lazer did everything he could to encourage them.

Ben Zion Grossman explains that this wasn’t an accident, and that Reb Lazer would actively seek out ways for people to disparage him. “One of his spiritual devotions is to bring shame upon himself,” begins Rav Grossman. “It’s not just that he doesn’t go after honor, he literally encourages people to insult him and humiliate him.”

And the more positive attention he was starting to garner for his erudition and sincerity, the more Reb Lazer was looking for ways to cool all the adoration down. From a young age, it seems that Reb Lazer decided to take a leaf out of King David’s book, and to turn himself into a ‘fool’, who didn’t appear to know or understand anything.

Moshe Yosef Haas first met Reb Lazer at the Vizhnitzer yeshiva in Bnei Brak, where he was routinely called ‘Reb Lazer the *Meshugganer*.’ People would mock him and laugh at his funny practices and strange ways – and Reb Lazer heartily encouraged them to continue. It was only a few years’ later, when Rav Haas got interested in Breslov *chassidut* that he discovered that ‘Reb Lazer the Meshugganer’ was actually a Rosh Yeshiva in his own right, and a highly accomplished scholar.

“That’s when I realized that Rav Berland had fooled a whole city for decades,” says Rav Haas. “It was really a miraculous thing, because he was already a Rosh Yeshiva and also the Steipler’s regular chavrusa. Yet despite all that, people in Bnei Brak believed he was a *meshugganer*.”

“I started to understand that as well as being part of his spiritual work to deliberately seek out humiliation, it had also been a strategy to get people to leave him alone so they wouldn’t argue with him about the new path he’d chosen. Now, when I think about it, it’s truly a wondrous thing: How could someone run his own yeshiva, learn with the Steipler, and still get people to believe he was *meshugger*? The Rav is simply a genius at hiding his greatness from other people.”

When members of the community used to approach Rav Bender with negative comments about his young protégé, he told them, “What can I tell you? What I see in Reb Lazer, I don’t see in any other person.” But not everyone was willing, or able, to see through the disguise.



After a couple of years of learning the ropes of Breslov *chassidut*, one of his mentors, Rav Lippel, took him to one side, and told

him that he couldn't teach him any more Breslov Torah until he'd made the trip to Uman. Back then, in the late sixties and early seventies, the USSR was totally barred to citizens of Israel. The Soviet Union had broken off diplomatic ties with Israel after the Six Day War in 1967, and they weren't minded to do favors for religious Jews.

While most people faced with the challenge of getting to Uman would have given up before they ever really began, Reb Lazer was not most people. In 1972, he traveled to America and stayed there for six months, hoping to get the Green Card that would unlock the gates of Uman, as American citizens could still get permission from the Soviets to visit.

But successfully getting into the former USSR was only the first obstacle. While the Soviets permitted foreign tourists to visit the cities of Odessa and Kiev⁴, Uman itself was totally off-limits, because it was home to a Soviet army base. Any foreigner caught visiting illegally would be interrogated, imprisoned — and perhaps even killed.

It was the height of the cold war, and no-one was taking these threats lightly. The first few attempts Reb Lazer made to get to Uman ended in failure, when he was caught by Communist officials and prevented from even crossing the border into the Ukraine. But he didn't give up, and kept trying different routes until nine attempts — and many tens of thousands of dollars later — he finally made it in. The gates to Uman were open.

By the early 1970s, Reb Lazer was making the hazardous trip to Uman every two weeks, each time taking a different route and using a different counterfeit passport, and bringing tens of new

⁴ Both these cities are a couple of hundred miles away from Uman, but the closest big cities in the vicinity.

visitors with him. On each trip, Reb Lazer would give all his fellow travelers careful instructions on what to say and do at the border, and also how to deal with the Communist officials and give them the runaround so they wouldn't make any further trouble or succeed in their repeated attempts to arrest the 'illegal tourists'.

Back in the alleyways of Meah Shearim, not everyone was happy about these trips to Uman. At various points in the 1970s, dissenting voices were heard within the Breslov community that Rav Berland was taking unnecessary risks, endangering people's lives with his clandestine visits to Uman, and charging way too much money for the trips.

While the trip was certainly dangerous and expensive – not least because securing counterfeit documents didn't come cheap, and it was impossible to take a direct route into Uman – the careful observer could also detect a hint of festering jealousy from some of the old-school Breslov chassidim, who'd been pipped to the post on getting to Uman.

True, Reb Lazer was taking risks to get to Uman, but there really was no other way of doing it, and it was widely known that he would fast the whole day of the trip, until his group had successfully crossed the border into the Ukraine. The dangers involved were very real, no-one denied that. But what was the alternative?

On one occasion, Rav Levi Yitzchak saw Reb Lazer in the street, and started screaming at him that he was endangering people's lives. Before World War II, Rav Bender himself had famously risked his life to attend the last Rosh Hashanah gathering in Uman in 1938, where he'd only narrowly escaped being caught and executed by the murderous Soviet authorities. That was the last time he'd been in Uman, and he was keenly aware of the risks involved.⁵

⁵ See *Words of Faith*, Volume II, #53, The Last Rosh Hashana in Uman.

Reb Lazer wasn't fazed by the accusation. He asked Rav Bender: "And what about when you went to Uman, to the grave, [in 1938] and the informer was running after you? How did you get there? Wasn't that endangering people's lives?" Rav Levi Yitzchak started laughing and accepted the Rav's answer. As Rav Bender himself used to say, the only thing more frightening than the idea of going to Uman is the idea of staying away.

So the clandestine trips continued for the best part of two decades, before they finally became legal for Israeli citizens in 1989, when the former Soviet Union imploded, and the Iron Curtain disintegrated.

In 1977, on the way home from one of these trips, where he'd been caught, interrogated, and finally released by the KGB, Reb Lazer finally decided the time had come to open his own yeshiva, for all the hundreds of people he was steadily attracting to Breslov chassidut.

This yeshiva would put the focus on in-depth Torah learning; lengthy, heartfelt prayers, including hours spent talking to God in the fields around Bnei Brak, and getting up for the midnight lamentation every single night; visits to holy grave sites; personal holiness – and accepting criticism and humiliation with love.

And when it came to that last piece of 'spiritual devotion', it would quickly become clear that no-other yeshiva in the world would be able to hold a candle to Reb Lazer, now Rav Eliezer Berland, and his 'Shuvu Banim' yeshiva.

In the meantime, young Jews were starting to throng to Rav Berland in their hundreds and even their thousands, as he criss-crossed the country giving Torah lessons anywhere he believed he could find these 'lost' Jews. Way before the concept of 'outreach'

became popular and acceptable, Rav Berland was spending his days and nights in anti-religious kibbutzes and bars in Tel Aviv, where he'd close his eyes, and just start talking Torah.

He often went door to door for days at a time in the big cities, with no sleep, trying to talk to the people society had rejected, and to find the traumatized, searching people who had a big, black hole which only God could fill. Many of the people who were attracted to Rav Berland at this stage were hippies, who were searching for an alternative to non-stop materialism and the emphasis on making money.

The Berlands' neighbor from Bnei Brak, Abish Dichter recalls that the Berland residence became like a second home for many of these hippies. "He used to travel down to Eilat, and he'd even meet the hippies on the bus and bring them back to Bnei Brak," he recalls. "And that's how he started Shuvu Banim."

Of course, many of the neighbors were less than impressed about what was going on, which is when Rav Berland collected another nickname, this time as the "Rebbe of Wayward People". 'Pious' people were gossiping about what was happening at the Berland home, and the shame and the *shmutz* all these irreligious hippies were bringing into the holy environment of Bnei Brak.

Some residents on the increasingly prestigious Rashbam Street were so upset about all the "outreach" going on at the Berland home, they decided to take matters into their hands. Some of the neighbors started a petition to have the Berlands kicked out of Bnei Brak. The petition was taken around to the important people in the neighborhood – some of whom even signed it – but when it reached the door of the Steipler Gaon, he gave the organizers a scathing look, and killed their petition stone dead.

In Yiddish, he told them ‘Reb Lazer *az ir agroiser, groiser yarai Shamayim!*’ (Reb Lazer is a tremendous G-d fearing Jew) and refused to listen to another word. So the neighbors had to back down, but some of them weren’t done with trying to get Rav Berland out of their neighborhood just yet. They’d just have to be more *creative*.



Just as Rav Berland was coming up to the grave of Shmuel HaNavi, in the Jerusalem suburb of Ramot, the two thugs struck. Some of Rav Berland’s neighbors had received permission from a ‘rabbi’ in Bnei Brak to hire people to beat up the Rav and teach him a lesson, and they wasted no time in following the *psak* they’d been given.

When the Rav went out to the field that night and began to walk into the forest near Shmuel HaNavi, two ruffians jumped out of the bushes where they’d been hiding in wait for him, and started to beat him up. Rav Berland had some students with him, but everyone was too shocked to react. As the beating continued, one of the thugs prepared to deliver the message from the man who’d sent them.

Before he could say the name, Rav Berland got back onto his feet, and held out two 100 shekels⁶ notes to his assailants. “Thank you, thank you,” he told them. “If you do it again, I’ll pay you another 100 shekels each!”

The two thugs were so bewildered and embarrassed by this bizarre turn of events, they ran off. Later, they showed up on Rav Nachman Horowitz’s doorstep, and told him that they’d been paid 20 shekels each by a neighbor, to beat up the Rav. The Rav’s

⁶ 100 shekels was obviously worth way more then, than now.

response made such an impression on them, one of them subsequently joined Shuvu Banim.

Another time, the people who owned the local mikvah in Bnei Brak decided to super-heat the water, to stop Rav Berland bringing all his hippies, drop-outs and irreligious hangers-on from using it. When the Rav and his followers showed up at the mikva at 3am, after a long night of praying in the fields and reciting the midnight lament, they found the water was at boiling point. No-one could use it. No-one, that is, except Rav Berland, who simply carried on as usual and immersed in the water.

One of the people who witnessed this firsthand said: “There’s no way of explaining what happened according to the laws of nature. I still have no idea how the Rav did that.” But finding a yeshiva that would accept his new followers was proving resistant to even the Rav’s very powerful brand of magic.

In a fundraising letter that Rav Berland wrote to a potential donor in July 1976, he explained:

“We have tens and tens of baalei teshuvah coming to us, and we have nowhere to place them. And they davka want to come and learn with us, and to be drawn closer [to Hashem] by us, but many of them are being lost, because there is no yeshiva that is suitable for them.

“We tried to get them into other yeshivos, but they weren’t always received so nicely, and experienced whatever they experienced. Last year, I had one person with me in my home for two whole months, eating and drinking by me. Afterwards, he enrolled in a yeshiva where he was treated so badly, [literally: ‘broken’] that he ran away and completely disappeared from the

scene. We've been looking for him for a few months, and we still have no idea where he is.

“Tens and tens of people, and in truth it's already close to 200 people, if not more [are coming to us], and if we had a suitable institution, with God's help we could save hundreds and even thousands of people... as every baal teshuvah immediately attracts another, and another.”

The Shuvu Banim yeshiva officially opened its doors in the summer of 1978, in Bnei Brak, and from the very beginning, it charted a unique course. Even newly-observant students were obliged to wake up for the midnight prayers, and there was a strong emphasis placed on praying with feeling, and serving God sincerely, and with self-sacrifice. Torah learning was also strongly stressed, as Rav Berland emphasized over and over again that Breslov teachings could only really grow in the soil of long hours spent toiling over a Gemara.

Not everyone was convinced. When they heard that Rav Berland was refusing to run his yeshiva the way 'everyone else' was, he quickly lost the support of his main backers. Unperturbed, Rav Berland explained: “We want to found a yeshiva that follows Rebbe Nachman's path, and Rabbenu's path is hitbodedut and getting up for the midnight prayers. Whoever can't do it doesn't need to stay here. There are lots of other yeshivos in Bnei Brak.”

And many of those first students who enrolled and stayed on have become some of the leading lights of the Breslov community today. Rav Michael Lasry, Rav Shalom Arush, Rav Moshe Tzanani, Rav Michael Goll, Rav Ofer Erez, Rav Shmuel Stern, Rav Meir Malka, Rav Eliyahu Meirav and Rav Eliyahu Succot, to name but a few, are all household names today, in Israel and often beyond.

As the yeshiva continued to grow, Rav Berland sent groups of his students out on more ‘outreach’ missions across Israel, and many more people, numbering into the thousands, returned to the fold of observant Judaism as a result, including top soldiers in the IDF, fighter pilots, and many other highly-talented individuals.

At this point, even the secular establishment started to hear about this “dangerously charismatic” rabbi who could persuade promising officers in the IDF to turn their backs on the base and leave, after just a short conversation. The secular media started to come up with all sorts of strange theories and bizarre ideas about how Rav Berland was exerting so much influence over otherwise ‘normal’ people – and they have continued to do that ever since.



By 1982, things were getting a little out of hand. Shuvu Banim had exploded in popularity, and so a new branch of the yeshiva had opened in Jerusalem, while the yeshiva also continued to operate in Bnei Brak. Also, the Rav was still spending large amounts of time learning at the knee of the Breslov elders in Meah Shearim, and bringing his students with him.

On Thursday nights, seven taxis would leave from Bnei Brak to Jerusalem, filled with students from Shuvu Banim who were coming with the Rav to attend Rav Levi Yitzhak Bender’s *shiur*, which was reinvigorated by this influx of newcomers. At first, Rav Bender continued to speak in Yiddish, but agreed to have a Hebrew translator for the Shuvu Banim students.

Then, as the number of Yiddish speakers attending started to be dwarfed by the Hebrew-speaking *baalei teshuv*as being brought in by Rav Berland, Rav Bender announced that he was henceforth switching to Hebrew – and not everyone in Meah Shearim was

happy about that. Some of the old-school Breslov community were so *unhappy* about that, that they decided to lock Rav Bender out of his own Breslov shul in Meah Shearim, to prevent him from giving the *shiur*.

When Rav Levi Yitzchak saw this, he told the Shuvu Banim students who were stuck outside on the pavement, “Why are you just standing there?! Bring some crowbars and break down the door!” That was the first of many subsequent occasions when extremists based in the Breslov shul tried to prevent Rav Berland and his students from entering. But all that was still in the future, and for now, Rav Berland was far more preoccupied with the question of what to do with his yeshiva.

Despite the Rav’s great willingness to sacrifice himself for his students, the fact of the matter was that with the yeshiva in two separate locations, he had no time to sleep, no time to eat, and was constantly traveling back and forth between Bnei Brak and Jerusalem. It was obvious to everyone that things couldn’t continue like that for much longer, so the Berlands started to look for a suitable building in Jerusalem where the whole yeshiva could be reunited.

By Pesach 1982, they still hadn’t found anything suitable, but then, shortly after the holiday, the sea parted for Shuvu Banim. One of the students, Rav Dachbash, was down by the Kotel that morning, when he heard a man crying his eyes out by the wall. Rav Dachbash went over to him to see if he could comfort him, and discovered that the man, a rich Syrian industrialist by the name of Avraham Dwek, had been double-crossed by the State of Israel.

Dwek had donated money to purchase a half-ruined building called the Chayei Olam courtyard, on Maale Haladia Street in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. He’d been promised by the

quasi-governmental Atara L'Yoshna organization that if he put up the funds, they would turn the building into a synagogue, to honor the memory of Reb Dwek's grandfather, Rabbi Shaul Dwek HaKohen. But Dwek had just discovered that they were planning to turn the place into residential apartments instead, and he was heart-broken.

Rav Dachbash asked Dwek if there was anything he could do to help, Dwek answered: "If you could bring me a kollel of at least 25 or 30 students, we could house them there today and establish our rights to the building. That's the only way of saving the situation." Shuvu Banim had found its new home.

But the State of Israel, and particularly Teddy Kollek, the then mayor of Jerusalem, were very unimpressed with this turn of events, and sent in the army to boot out the yeshiva. But they met their match in Shuvu Banim, many of whom had been elite soldiers in the IDF, and eventually, even the Teddy Kollek had to admit defeat. Shuvu Banim were in the Old City to stay – and the people in the defense establishment started to sit up, and take notice.

After this stunning turn of events, Rav Berland returned to emphasizing what he saw as the main role of the yeshiva. Shuvu Banim had been created for outreach, and to help more people discover the path of Rebbe Nachman, and Breslov chassidut. He stressed that he didn't want a yeshiva where people would start think they were better than others, just because they had long beards and side curls.

Rav Berland said: "I would prefer to sit here with just five students who have simplicity and innocence, because with those five students, I could get a lot more done in the world than if I had the

24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva, who were obsessed with their own honor and status, and thought they were better than other people.”

Who would have thought that Shuvu Banim could ever get close to numbering 24,000 students? But within a decade, Rav Berland found himself the head of an organization that comprised a number of Talmud Torahs, chadarim, nurseries, boys’ schools, girls’ schools, kollelim and seminaries in Jerusalem and many other locations around the country. And his enemies within the Breslov community of Meah Shearim couldn’t stand it.



Shuvu Banim’s arrival in Jerusalem announced the beginning of a worldwide Breslov revival that had slowly been gathering steam for years. The move to Jerusalem’s Old Quarter brought many of the Rav’s students in much closer contact with the existing Breslov community of Meah Shearim, and this clash of cultures led to a lot of resentment and hard feelings on both sides.

On the one hand, there was Rav Berland’s formerly secular, often Sephardi, Hebrew-speaking “new” Breslovers, some of whom were still sporting long, hippy hair, who sincerely tried to fulfill every word that Rebbe Nachman spoke, to the best of their abilities. These guys were making maximum effort to spend Rosh Hashanah in Uman; they were getting up for *chatzos*, going out to the fields to do hitbodedut every night, going to the mikvah every day, learning Torah, praying with feeling and guarding their eyes.

But to the Yiddish-speaking group of Breslov extremists centred around the Breslov Shul in Meah Shearim, these newly-observant Jews were anathema. Whenever students from Shuvu Banim would try to pray in the Breslov Shul, these extremists would yell at them, insult them, and even physically bar them from

entering. More than one of the Rav's newly-religious students left the Breslov shul in tears, stunned at the hostile reception they'd been given by these Breslov zealots.

The obvious aggression at the Shul was paired with a growing campaign of slander and gossip in the backstreets of Meah Shearim. The extremists would go to Rav Levi Yitzchak's house and come to him in shul, to try to turn him against Rav Berland and his followers. Their non-stop slander once prompted Rav Levi Yitzhak to say: "What do they want? I get to shul before dawn and who do I find there? Rav Lazer's people. Who goes to the field [to do hisbodedus]? Rav Lazer's men. Who do I meet in the mikvah before dawn? Rav Lazer's men. What do they want?"

It looks like the extremists wanted Breslov chassidus to stay small and effectively "dead" forever. What they definitely didn't want was for Rav Berland to bring in a flood of outsiders whom they viewed as trying to take over "their" shul and "their" customs. And they were particularly possessive over Uman.

Over Succot in 1989, the year the Soviet Union finally crumbled, Rav Michel Dorfman, a leading Breslov figure who'd spent many years behind the Iron Curtain, publically praised Rav Berland for blasting open the gates to Uman for everyone. It seems that was the last straw.

For years, Rav Berland's enemies in Meah Shearim had been muttering about the "outsider" and the "usurper" who was taking over Breslov and filling it with hippies and Sephardim. As long as Rav Berland continued to have the backing of the Breslov elders, there was nothing they could really do against him openly. But when Rav Bender, the last of the three Breslov elders who'd been shielding the Rav from his opponents, died, the hatred against the Rav and Shuvu Banim erupted into the open.

People started complaining that Rav Berland had taken too much money for the clandestine trips to Uman. Then they started arguing against the Breslov idea that there is a “true tzaddik” in every generation, who had been given the unique ability of passing the Rebbe’s teachings on to the next generation. Either, they said that Rebbe Nachman was the only “tzaddik” required, or they took umbrage at the suggestion that Rav Berland could be the “true tzaddik” of our generation – even though he seemed to have all the necessary credentials.

Who else had hundreds of people beating a path to their door to ask for a blessing? Who else had inspired tens of thousands of people to come back to God and observant Judaism, and to travel to Uman? Who else was trying to follow Rebbe Nachman’s path as sincerely and whole-heartedly, as Rav Berland?

After Rav Shmuel Horowitz and Rav Velvel Cheshin passed away, Rav Bender had become increasingly concerned about what the Breslov zealots would try to do to harm Rav Berland and his community after his own passing. A month before he passed away from cancer on July 25, 1989, Rav Bender made a final attempt to pull the community back together, and to stop all the in-fighting being stoked by the extremists.

Rav Bender said then:

“When I begin to speak about the topic of love, people don’t understand what I’m referring to, they have no idea what I’m talking about, but we need to know that this is what’s lacking, this is what’s lacking by us!!! ... Even if I don’t agree with the other person I still need to love him!”

“We have to be very careful not to lose or even lessen the love between all the Breslov chassidim. When I’m talking about how we need to hold ourselves together in unity, people have no idea what I’m talking about! It seems to them that I’m talking in a different language...!”

“Rebbe Nachman said: ‘I judge everyone to the side of mercy, apart from people who instigate strife and communal discord.’...[T]here is always a punishment for the sin of speaking lashon hara. Whether the punishment will occur immediately or be delayed — this is a decision made Above, but certainly a punishment will come!

“Hashem has mercy on us. We have Rebbe Nachman, a merciful Rebbe, a true merciful leader! Rabbeinu judges everyone favorably. Nevertheless, WATCH YOURSELVES! Watch yourselves with this one point, because about this he is not silent. You will get punished for this [the sin of speaking lashon hara] no matter how great you are!

“We have no idea about the secrets of the arguments between the tzaddikim, therefore, DON’T GET INVOLVED! It seems like they are arguing, but in reality, they are working together in a way that’s deeper than we can imagine... All of a sudden, a third person gets involved and gives his opinion — ‘this one is good, that one is bad...’ He’s messing up the whole thing!”

Rav Bender was giving a stark warning that whoever came after him, Breslov Chassidus should pull together and unite behind him. But the Breslov zealots were too far gone in their hatred and jealousy to heed him.

Following Rav Bender's passing, the zealots' antagonism against Rav Berland only intensified. Rav Berland had maintained the custom of praying the Breslov Shul in Meah Shearim on Friday nights, and also on Yom Kippur, even after Shuvu Banim moved to the Old City. That year, on the first night of the *selichos* service, the Breslov shul was packed to the rafters.

As soon as Rav Berland entered, the zealots started yelling at him and cursing him. Some people even stood on tables to throw things at him and there was a tremendous commotion as they screamed themselves hoarse, yelling at the Rav to leave. Yosef Assulin was with him at the time, and he recalls:

“Throughout the whole ordeal, Rav Berland just stood completely still, with a serene, pleased look on his face. After the storm died down, Rav Berland left to meet his Rebbetzin outside the shul, and he was still wearing a look of amazed delight, as if he'd just experienced the best thing in the world. The Rebbetzin asked him: ‘How was it?’ And the Rav replied: “It was great! I prayed for this for so long. But one thing bothered me, I was hoping it would go on for 2 hrs, why only 20 minutes?!”

As the poisonous storm in Meah Shearim Breslov's community continued to rage, Rav Yehuda Zerachia Halevi Segal, a leading kabbalist of the previous generation, decided to intercede, to try to end the *machlokes*. On November 11, 1991, he wrote a letter to Rav Yaakov Meir Shecter, the official head of the community in the Breslov shul, where he emphasized how important it was to have peaceful relations within the Breslov community.

Rav Segal wrote:

“The very high level of piousness and avodas Hashem of the gaon and tzaddik Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita,

is well known to me. It's forbidden to harm an angel of God... and Rabbeinu Hakadosh (Rebbe Nachman) is extremely upset about recent events... The honor of Rabbeinu Hakadosh forces me to intercede and protest about what is going on."

Thanks to the pressure they came under from Rav Segal and a number of other Rabbis and spiritual leaders to end their attacks against Rav Berland and his followers, the Breslov extremists in Meah Shearim ultimately had no choice but to stop their open persecution of Shuvu Banim.

But these people's hatred of Rav Berland and his students never really disappeared, it just quietly festered underground, watching and waiting for the next opportunity to burst out into the open. Over the next few years, one of their ranks would quietly infiltrate himself into Shuvu Banim, and attempt to destroy the community from within. And he very nearly succeeded.

A HOLOCAUST EVERY 70 YEARS

Rav Eliezer Berland's grandson, Rav Shmuel Isaac Zucker, once explained that: "My mother told me, in the name of her father that in the year 5742 (1981), the Rav told her that every 70 years there should be another holocaust⁷ but, through insults and humiliation, it's possible to sweeten this. He said that if there had been a *tzaddik* at the time of the Holocaust who would have been prepared to accept terrible shame and humiliation upon himself, the Holocaust wouldn't have occurred."

In 2012, sixty-seven years after the Holocaust, the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant had reached its full capacity, and the Iranians were very close to obtaining a full-fledged nuclear arsenal – and everyone knew where those war heads would be aimed.

The Jewish year 5772 (corresponding to 2011-2012) had long been touted as a very likely date for the redemption of the Jewish people to begin. The late Rav Yitzchak Kaduri had publicly stated on a number of occasions that *Moshiach* would come during *Av* 5772.⁸

⁷ The idea that there would be another holocaust in roughly 70 years' time was also passed down in the name of the Chofetz Chaim.

⁸ Rav Kaduri stated this directly to Rav Yehuda Moalem and Rav Yosef Chai Zakkai.

Rav Yitzchak Shlomo Zilberman also publicized the tradition he'd received that the Vilna Gaon had hinted that 5772 was the year of *Keitz*, or End of Days, as had other descendants of the Vilna Gaon's students.

Meanwhile, Rav Yosef Scheinberger publicized the story he'd heard directly from Rav Grosnas, one of the Chofetz Chaim's students, that the Chofetz Chaim had said in 5692 that it wouldn't take more than another 80 years for *Moshiach* to come—again, bringing us to 5772.

Then there were all the sources from the *Zohar* and other holy works, and all the *gematrias* and all the anecdotal traditions which all seemed to be pointing to the year 5772, as the year of redemption. As more and more of this information came to light, the religious public waited with bated breath to see *what will be* in 5772.

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, the saying “We want *Moshiach* NOW!” became very popular in certain sections of the Jewish community, and there were many who believed that *Am Yisrael* had already begun the process of *geulah* and redemption, and that all that was left was to wait to greet *Moshiach*.

A senior student of the Rav, Rav Shlomo Gefen, recalls that when Rav Berland first heard this, he commented, “It's not so simple to say that we've already begun the redemption process. Blood is still going to be smeared on the walls of our cities, and *Am Yisrael* still needs to undergo the selection and clarification process associated with the nuclear bomb.”

THE BIRTH PANGS OF *MOSHIACH*

Before *Moshiach* could come and redeem the nation, the world would first have to undergo the difficult test known as the “birth

pangs of *Moshiach*,” including the War of Gog and Magog. These were known to be such difficult tests that some of the Sages of *Chazal* had said, “Let the *Moshiach* come, but let me not be there to see him!”⁹

If the Jewish people would merit it, the *Moshiach* would come the sweet way. If they didn’t merit it, *Moshiach* would come with enormous wars, suffering, and loss of life. As 5772 approached, the papers were full of headlines screaming about Iran’s imminent nuclear bomb, and many of the nation’s leading kabbalists and Rabbis began to issue detailed warnings about the terrible events they could foresee in the near future.

At this crucial juncture, three of the Jewish nation’s holiest men got together to try to avert the coming disaster, by sweetening the awful judgments at their spiritual root. It’s taught that there are three things that can sweeten even the harshest judgments, namely: death, shame, and exile.

It’s written in Lesson I:260 of *Likutei Moharan* and also in *Bava Metzia* 58b that the embarrassment of losing one’s good name and reputation is akin to dying. It’s taught elsewhere that when a person has no home of his own and is forced to wander from place to place, on some level that’s also considered akin to dying.

LESSON 260, FROM *LIKUTEI MOHARAN*

In Lesson I:260 of *Likutei Moharan*, Rebbe Nachman describes how the one *Tzaddik* who takes upon himself exile, shame, and suffering will save the whole generation from suffering terrible things. And by doing so, this *Tzaddik* will enable the redemption to come with mercy, and without wars:

⁹ Other sages said: “Let me see him, even if I sit in the dung of his donkey.”

The name of a person is his soul, as is taught in chapter 59, as in the verse, “A living soul is his name” (Bereishis 2). Just as we find that a person can sacrifice his soul for the sanctification of God’s name and thereby sweeten harsh judgments, so too can he sacrifice his name, that is, his reputation¹⁰. Sometimes a vast number of Jews need to be killed, God forbid, in order to facilitate a certain spiritual unification.

A person can be famous but not really be famous—that is, everyone knows about him and speaks about him, but he is not really famous, since he is not respected at all. Or, there is the person who against his wish loses his fame, which is a loss of the name, which is the soul...

But there is one person who does this intentionally and consciously, surrendering his soul for the sanctification of God’s Name. He surrenders his fame—his ‘name,’ corresponding to the soul—and on account of this, although he is renowned, he is not famous at all.

On the contrary, everyone talks against him, conjuring stories about him that he would never have dreamed of doing. He experiences this as if he was literally being killed. He does this all intentionally, because it is a literal self-sacrifice of [his] soul, for the name is the soul, as said, and he experiences it as death.

But in this way, he saves the Jewish people from what would have happened to them in order to facilitate this unification, as said, and by thus sacrificing his name, which is his soul, he spares them.

¹⁰ We see an example of this after the sin of the *egel*, when Moshe was begging *Hashem* to forgive the Nation; he said, “If you will not forgive them [on Your own], erase my name from Your book”. In other words, the willingness of Moshe to sacrifice his name will be enough to forgive the entire nation”.

THE SELF-SACRIFICE OF THE TZADDIKIM

Shortly after these three *Gedolei Hador* made their Heavenly pact to do everything they could do, spiritually, to sweeten the terrible situation facing the Jewish people, the first act of self-sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish people occurred.

On the evening of July 28, 2011 (26 Tammuz 5771), Rav Elazar Abuchatzera (also known as the Baba Elazar) was stabbed to death in the waiting room of his *yeshiva* in Beer Sheva. His killer was an outwardly observant *chareidi* man from Elad who had come to speak with the Baba Elazar many times before. Eyewitnesses said that the Baba Elazar seemed to have known in advance what was about to happen and rushed over happily to meet his attacker, who then drew a knife and repeatedly stabbed him.

The Baba Elazar was rushed by ambulance to the Soroka Medical Center in Beer Sheva, but was pronounced dead on arrival. The murder of this holy man shocked the nation to its core, and many thousands of people attended his funeral the following day, when he was buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

THE RAV'S EXILE BEGINS

Shortly before this, in Chanukah 5771 (December 2010), Rav Eliezer Berland's exile from Jerusalem and the Shuvu Banim *Yeshiva* began. From Jerusalem, the Rav went up to the Galilee for a period of time before returning to live in the city of Beitar Illit, located to the south of Jerusalem.

But the next part of the deal—being publicly shamed, insulted, humiliated, and losing his good name—only began two years' later. But the most important thing to remember is that *Rav Berland*

himself agreed to be shamed and exiled, in order to atone for the Jewish people and bring the redemption the sweet way.

Even many years ago, he knew that he would be shamed and exiled, and spent a lifetime preparing himself—and his *yeshiva*—to pass the test.

ACCEPTING AN INSULT LOVINGLY PROTECTS A THOUSAND JEWS

The following excerpt comes from a *shiur* the Rav gave more than 20 years ago, where he described how accepting insults and humiliation with love could save the lives of thousands and even millions of people.

“The Rebbe says that, in the merit of those who accept upon themselves disgrace, people are saved from getting killed. It says in *Likutei Moharan* that when a person accepts an insult lovingly, he saves tens of thousands of Jews from getting killed.

“To accept an insult lovingly is the same thing as a person protecting thousands of Jews.

“It says in *Likutei Moharan* Torah 260 that when a person lovingly accepts insults and disgrace upon himself, it’s the exact same thing as when a person dies for the sanctification of *Hashem’s* Name. It’s the exact same thing! When a person lovingly accepts insults upon himself, he can save the entire Jewish people.

“The Rebbe says that there are those *tzaddikim* who willingly and lovingly accept the insults that come their way, and there are those who are insulted against their will, and they also sweeten the judgments; they also save a number of people. But those who chase after insults, who are looking for people to insult them and disgrace them at every moment, and who are trying to give others a reason to disgrace them and insult them, these people are saving *all of Am Yisrael!* Not just hundreds and not just thousands, they are saving *all of Am Yisrael!*

“A regular person is afraid of getting insulted, because he doesn’t know that through every single insult he merits rising up ten levels. The Rebbe brings here in Torah 260 that the greatest spiritual unification is when a person accepts insults with love. It’s the same spiritual unification that can be achieved by dying to sanctify God’s Name, but every time a person is insulted, it happens again [i.e., each fresh insult is considered a new ‘death’ and a new sanctification of God’s name].

“The Rebbe tells us that there are many different levels. Some people don’t want to be insulted but when they are, they don’t answer back. That is also a level. But there are those who do all different kinds of tricks in order that they should be insulted.

“The students want an explanation! They ask, “Why are you bringing all this *machlokes* on yourself!? It’s hard for us!” So [the Rebbe] says, ‘It’s your life insurance! It would be harder for you to be blown up in a terrorist attack or end up missing an eye, or who knows else would happen to you.’”

“The big *tzaddikim* would seek different ways for people to insult them, any possible way that people should persecute them. That is how they save thousands and thousands, and cancel all of the decrees. They save the entire nation. This is why the *Zohar* says that the greatest thing is to die for the sanctification of *Hashem’s* Name.

“And the Rebbe adds that this is what happens when a person takes all of the insults upon himself and does things in order that the disgrace should only continue. Even if people are saying things about him that he never did, and they are spreading a terrible blood libel against him, he accepts it even more joyfully.”

THE NEW START

Between 2000 – 2010, a number of problematic individuals rose to positions of authority within the Shuvu Banim community, and started throwing their weight around. Some of these individuals demanded large sums of money from anyone who wanted to speak to the Rav or ask for a blessing. Others started to play “power games” within Shuvu Banim, demoting and promoting students on a whim, drawing up lists of those people who would be allowed access to the Rav privately, deciding who could attend the Rav’s weekly *shiurim* and even, deciding who would be allowed to pray with the Rav on Shabbos.

Anyone who was “caught” recording or photographing the Rav’s classes would be blacklisted, as would anyone who tried to talk to the Rav or get a blessing without paying a large sum of money to the people who’d effectively seized control of the *yeshivah*.

The Rav and his family were greatly pained by these developments, and in private, they begged the people responsible to stop. But in public, the Rav kept silent.

So the Rav became a virtual recluse in his home for more than ten years. He stopped *davening* with the Shuvu Banim community in the Old City. He barely gave classes or attended public events. This continued until Chanuka 5771, (December 2010), when, with

the help of two students and one grandchild, Rav Eliezer Berland finally managed to escape.

At that time, Rav Berland recorded a message for his followers where he told them:

“After I ended up being admitted to the hospital three times in just four weeks... after I saw that this is now a situation of pikuach nefesh and that I was on the cusp of a complete physical breakdown, I decided to leave [Jerusalem]...”

“It pains me to leave my family and especially my beloved wife, beloved children and my beloved grandchildren. But [understand] I left because I care for them, I care for my son that he should have a father, and for my grandson that he should have a grandfather.

“When I used to leave my wife for long periods of hisbodedus I would say to her that I left in order to bring you back a husband who is a Rosh Yeshiva, so now I left in order to bring you a Rosh Yeshiva who is alive, not a Rosh Yeshiva who is in the hospital every two weeks, and who every three or four days has a heart attack (G-d forbid).

“I don’t want them to eulogize me in the newspaper, saying what a holy person I was, so I decided to lengthen my days...”

“Now I’m in the North doing hisbodedus and going to kivrei Tzaddikim. I wish you could all be here with me. I learned more Torah on one Shabbos [up North] than I learned in almost all the last ten years...”

“If I can’t return to Jerusalem, where the threats against me are very serious and terrible, I can’t go into details about them here, but the threats being made against me are increasing each moment. The situation in Jerusalem is only getting worse with each passing moment, so there may be no choice except to reopen the yeshiva in the Galilee.

“If the terror continues, so we’ll build a yeshiva here so we can all be together, and serve Hashem, a yeshiva that will accept all different kinds of people, an elementary school for all different kind of boys, and girls school for all different kind of girls so that there will no longer be a possibility that a boy or girl is asked to leave or not accepted because they don’t fit a certain criteria and they have to go to a school for off-the-derech children.

“There will be a place in Shuvu Banim for everyone, for every type, so we can once again raise up the glory of Torah. That’s the goal of Shuvu Banim, my goal all my life, to raise up and glorify the Torah...

“I want to make a new start now. The Rebbe [Rebbe Nachman] wrote in Lesson 64 that every machlokes leads to a new creation of the world... Everything that has been done until now, it’s for the best... The Rebbe explains that it’s forbidden to condemn anyone, or to put anyone down, or to take vengeance against them. Now, we’re getting ready to create the world completely anew. Shuvu Banim is going to get a new lease of life...

THE TROUBLE BREWING IN BEITAR

GOG AND MAGOG IS A SPIRITUAL WAR

In the Yikra D'Shabata,¹¹ R' Nachman of Tsherin expounds on the words of Rebbe Nachman about the time before redemption, when before prestige is returned to the ones who are truly deserving of it, they will first face tremendous persecution¹²: “This is the secret of the ‘birth pangs of Moshiach’ and the ‘war of Gog and MaGog’, because at that time, at the time before the coming of Moshiach when the prestige is meant to be returned completely to those of true [Torah] understanding there will be aroused tremendous machlokes against the talmidei chachamim as in our Sages teaching¹³ “in the generation in which the son of Dovid comes there will be persecution against talmidei chachamim, and as Rashi explains (in Kesuvot 112:b): ‘many prosecutors and people looking to convict them will stand against them’, and

¹¹ Written by R' Nachman of Tsherin (1824-1893), as a commentary to Likutei Moharan.

¹² From portion 66 of Likutei Moharan a very deep teaching that needs to be studied in depth to truly grasp it. The words of Rebbe Nachman in discussion “When it is time for prestige to be returned to the “mivinei mada” (those of Torah intellect) at the beginning there will be machlokes... When the persecuers get together [against the “mivinei mada”] they suck up all the waste very quickly this is what causes their downfall”.

¹³ Gemara ksuvos 112b

that this is the essential ‘birth pangs of the Moshiach,’ as Rashi’s commentary on Shabbos 118 explains.

There, Rashi continues: “This is also true about the war of Gog and Magog that will then occur in earnest, with all the enemies gathering together to fight against Israel, but this will really be for the good of Israel, as the enemies will then be felled completely and forever [the essence of this war is the war against talmidei chachamim].”

According to the late Rav Eliezer Schick, the main thrust of the war of Gog and Magog will be Jewish heresy and the mockery of Tzaddikim, and specifically, against Moshiach himself¹⁴.

The Chofetz Chaim is also reported to have said that there will be a war so big, that even World War I and World War II will look like child’s play, in comparison. But the thrust of this war will be against emuna (faith in God)¹⁵.

In March 2011, the Rav and his wife, Rebbetzin Tehillah, moved into an apartment on Kedushat Levi Street in the *chareidi* town of Beitar Illit, a 20-minute drive south of Jerusalem. After years of being inaccessible to many of his followers and the general public, hundreds of the Rav’s followers joyfully followed him out to Beitar Illit, with many of them even renting apartments close by.

Crowds of people lined up outside the Rav’s home 24/7, as the Rav gratefully stepped back into his public role. Difficult as the last 10 years had been, it was hoped that the worst was now behind the Rav and his community¹⁶. It was time to rebuild. It was time to renew. It was time to look forward to different and better times. Shortly after he’d left Jerusalem to go up to the North of Israel, the Rav had recorded a message for his students, where he told them:

¹⁴ P’ulat Hatzadik pg 507 note 200

¹⁵ Said over by Rav Chatzkel Levistein and brought in “Sh’al Avicha v’Yagedcha” Volume 2, page 57

¹⁶ The full story is told in Volume I of One in a Generation.

“I want to make a new start now.... “It could well be that we will have to continue wandering. We learn in the Gemara, Tractate Rosh Hashanah that after they burned down the Beis HaMikdash the Shechinah experienced 10 different exiles... After they burned down the Beis Hamikdash, I started my exile in Jerusalem [by leaving the Old City]. Now, I’m already in my third exile.

“On Shabbos I was in Chanita, and now I am in Amirim, and I intend to continue wandering onward... we are living on wheels now...until we bring to fruition the vision that we had at the creation of Shuvu Banim, and that vision finally moves from potential to actuality, ‘For My House will be called a House of Prayer, for all the nations’¹⁷...’

“We’re now on the cusp of creating a completely new framework...Just strengthen yourselves, and pray for me, that all the different communities should be reunited, and through being unified the verse will be fulfilled: ‘[And it will happen at the End of Days:] The mountain of the House of Hashem will be [firmly established as] the head of the mountains and it will be exalted above the hills, [and all the nations will stream to it].”

In one of the discourses that Rav Berland gave over at this time, he referred to all the difficulties and hardships that the *yeshiva* had gone through in recent years.

¹⁷ A quote from Isaiah 56.

The Rav said:

“Am Yisrael has been through so many hardships recently, but it’s only so that each of us will learn some humility and not destroy our homes, and God’s ‘house’ (i.e. the Temple) again, God forbid. Here in the yeshiva, we’ve also experienced such tests and difficult situations in recent years. But you should know that we had to go through all of these things, as it’s the only way we could acquire for ourselves the spiritual vessels we need for the Third Temple, may it be built speedily in our days.”

While the Rav was still living in Beitar Illit, Israel was preparing for another election. Some of his students asked the Rav which of the religious parties they should vote for, Shas or Agudas Yisrael. The Rav replied, “It doesn’t really matter who you vote for, either Shas or Agudas Yisrael. In terms of the [proposed law to conscript *chareidi* Jews into the Israeli army], it’s already been decided in Heaven what’s going to happen with that, and the elections aren’t going to change anything.”

No one really understood what the Rav meant, but after the elections it became crystal clear. For the first time in years, a government was formed in the Knesset that didn’t include representatives from any of the religious *chareidi* parties. The law to draft *yeshiva* boys into the army was passed by this anti-religious government, and there was nothing any of the religious MKs could do to stop it.

On January 22, 2013, a new government was elected in the State of Israel, which prompted, many of our Torah leaders to hint that this was yet another sign that *Am Yisrael* had reached that point in history known as the End of Days, just prior to Moshiach revealing himself.

The new government, which included the Yesh Atid party, and which for the first time didn't include any *chareidi* parties, quickly went about the business of trying to change the law that had enabled yeshiva students to receive a deferment from the Israel Army. Yesh Atid proposed that a maximum number of 1800 yeshiva students each year should be exempted from serving in the army – while the rest would face financial penalties and even prison sentences, if they failed to enlist.¹⁸

On March 12, 2014, the Knesset approved a new law that stated that non-exempt yeshiva students either had to enlist in the army or face imprisonment.

This laid the foundation for the next stage of the onslaught against the *chareidi* world in Israel, when the government tried to pull the plug on government funding to yeshivas. Many religious organizations had to close their doors, while others — and the families who relied on them — faced the harshest economic conditions in years.

Against this backdrop, Rav Meyer Maimoni asked Rav Berland during one of his *shiurim*, “[What does it mean that] Moshiach will only reveal himself in a generation where everyone is either worthy, or everyone is unworthy¹⁹?” Rav Maimoni pointed out the obvious problem with this statement, namely, that no generation is ever completely “only good” all of the time, or completely “only bad.” There will always be some *tzaddikim* even in the most evil generations, and some evildoers even in the most righteous generations.

¹⁸ <https://hamodia.com/2014/01/07/setting-record-straight/>

¹⁹ A famous statement from the *Gemara*, in *Maseches Sanhedrin* 98.

Rav Berland explained that according to the *Asarah Maamaros*²⁰, the true meaning of this passage is that before the coming of Moshiach, there will be a period of tremendous *birur*, or clarification and sorting out, where people will be forced to choose whether they want to go down the path of *kedushah* and holiness, or the opposite, God forbid — because they won't be able to sit on the fence anymore.

The Rav continued that it was going to be the same sort of *birur* process that had occurred many centuries earlier, when Eliyahu Hanavi had told the people of Israel: “How long are you going to continue to jump between two camps?! If the Baal is god, then follow him. And if Hashem is God, then follow Him!”

This process was connected to the continuing fight against Amalek, who ambushed all the weak souls as the Israelites were traveling through the desert. This test — of following wholeheartedly after Hashem and believing wholeheartedly in Him, even when we are beset with doubts and troubles — would be the final test before Moshiach comes.

And Rav Berland and his followers were about to find themselves smack bang in the middle of it.



One of the first things Rav Berland did when he moved to Beitar was begin a regular round of visits to the holy graves in the area. Night after night, he'd lead a convoy of cars to Hevron, to pray at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and sometimes, he'd also stop in at the radically Islamised town of Chalchul, where the Prophets Nathan and Gad were buried underneath the local mosque.

²⁰ A famous Kabalistic book written by the Rema of Pano, who lived between 1548 – 1620.

After the failed Oslo Accords, many Jewish holy sites had effectively been given away to the Palestinians, and barred to Jews. Both the secular government and the secular media viewed the holy Jewish graves located in the heart of Palestinian towns and villages as a massive security problem and were only too pleased to prevent Jews from visiting them. But while this view perhaps seemed “logical” from the purely secular standpoint of the Israeli government, from a spiritual and religious viewpoint it was akin to national suicide.

Before, during and also after Oslo, Rav Berland and many other religious leaders continued to stress that while the IDF chose not to protect these holy graves, the *Tzaddikim* buried in these places were actually the ones protecting the IDF and the people of Israel in general. If the secular government succeeded in making it impossible for Jews to legally visit these graves, the implications for Israel’s national security would be very grave.

So Rav Berland and many others, including Rav Shalom Abergel, Rav Golan Mor, and Rav Mordechai Gross, fought hard to maintain Jewish access to these sites. Rav Berland continued to encourage his students to visit these holy sites and to visit them himself at every opportunity, eventually forcing the Israeli government into a partial compromise about allowing Jewish access to these graves.

These visits were roundly condemned in the secular press and also angered many of the leading figures in the army, intelligence agencies and Israeli government, who didn’t want this Rabbi and his followers forcing their hand on security matters and dictating policy to *them*. For as long as Rav Berland had been out of action, the defense establishment didn’t care so much. But now he was back, and he was encouraging hundreds of people to visit the holy graves of *Tzaddikim* like Yosef Hatzaddik, Rachel Imeinu,

the Prophet Natan and many other holy sites that were officially in 'Area A', the area placed under Palestinian control.

On July 31, 2011, shortly after another fatal shooting during an unauthorized visit to Kever Yosef, Rav Berland was visited by the Head of IDF Central Command, who asked the Rav to stop his students from making any more unauthorized visits to Kever Yosef and the other Jewish holy tombs in the West Bank. Rav Berland agreed on condition that the army chief would start arranging more authorized entries to these sites.

Also in 2011, the IDF Commander of Yehuda and Shomron met with the late Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv to try to convince him to issue a statement forbidding any more unauthorized visits to Kever Yosef and other Jewish holy sites. The IDF was clearly very serious about trying to stop the unauthorized visits.

Two years' later, following a rock attack on the Rav and his followers' cars in Chalhul in 2013, the Head of the IDF in Samaria made another visit to Rav Berland, to try to persuade him to stop visiting Chalchul.

The Rav showed the army chief many of the passages in the holy books that describe how all the protection of Israel is only due to the *kivrei Tzaddikim*. He told him that all the miracles that Israel experienced in the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War were in the merit of the holy *Tzaddikim* buried in Israel.

"You are saying it's a danger to go into Chalhul, and I'm saying it's a danger not to go into Chalhul!" the Rav remonstrated. But the army chief was not impressed by the Rav's words and left.



Shortly after Rav Berland’s encounter with the IDF chief — and many months still before the first slanders surfaced in the Israeli press — the Rav mentioned in one of his *shiurim* that he suspected that there were people in Israel who wanted to create a libel against him so he’d end up dying in jail.

Soon afterwards, Rav Berland left the country.



On June 28, 2012 Rav Berland appeared at a huge rally that was held at Tel Aviv’s Winter Stadium. A sell-out crowd of eight thousand people showed up at the venue, with many more thousands of people tuning in from their homes. Back then, the disastrous civil war in Syria that would go on to claim more than 560,000 lives, and destroy two million homes was only just beginning.

As well as speaking about peace and *teshuvah* the whole night, the Rav also demanded that the world should intervene to stop the

bloodshed happening in Syria, where women and children were being slaughtered daily. But Rav Berland's plea to end the violence in the Middle East was a message that did not go down so well with the defense establishment.

EXCERPT OF THE RAV'S SPEECH AT THE WINTER STADIUM, JUNE 28, 2012:

“The Talmud teaches us that we need to do acts of kindness to Arabs; it does not matter what kind of Arab! Other than a terrorist, we need to help and assist every single Arab in every way possible; with money, with encouragement, in every way possible, even to split the sea for him!

All the more so when we see the horrible massacre that is happening two hours from here [in Syria], right under our noses! And the entire world is silent! Kofi Annan says we'll take Ahmadinejad to make peace! He will stop the terrible massacre!

This past Thursday 170 children were killed, two days ago 107 children, every day they are slaughtering right under our noses, and Kofi Annan says, “We'll take Ahmadinejad!” He will make peace! He who creates all the weapons of mass destruction? He will make peace?! What have we come to?! What kind of merciless world have we come to?!

The nations of the world are silent. And we, the Israelite Nation, the Nation of Justice, the Nation of Conscience, the Nation of Fairness, the Israelite Nation is the conscience of the entire world! The entire world lifts up their eyes to the Israelite Nation, the entire world believes in

the Israelite Nation, the entire world knows that the Israelite Nation will bring the redemption, only the Israelite Nation will bring the Moshiach!...

Beloved is man for he was created in God's image.²¹ Every person is in the image of God!... Every person is composed of sparks of Godliness! God created them all! All of mankind! Seven billion people! For "Beloved is man who was created in God's image."

"When we go pray at the kever of Yosef Hatzaddik and I see Israeli soldiers standing there with M-16s, I say to them, "Are you not ashamed?! Here lies Yosef Hatzaddik! What are you afraid of?! Why are you standing here with M-16s?! I used to walk here alone when I lived in Bnei Brak, I walked here by foot! Who needs these M-16s?!..."

When we went to war with Ammon and Moav, the Navi got up and said, "Just play music! Just sing! Throw away all your instruments of war! Throw away all your weapons! Begin singing! Just sing!"

So Yehoshaphat said to them, "If you believe in the words of the Navi then you can win over all your enemies just through song and music." Because all our victories and all the wars that we won with weapons are not considered "victories!" Any war that is won with weapons is not eternal; they also have weapons, they have the atom bomb, and one day everything can turn around.

²¹ Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) Chapter 3, Mishnah 14.

“Victory” is only what we win through the power of song and music which awakens the Jewish spark in every nation, in every gentile, in every single Arab, for there does not exist an Arab or gentile that does not have within him a Jewish spark. We just need to arouse that spark, and then automatically there will be peace in the entire world!”

The Rav’s peace and *teshuvah* rally was widely covered by the media, both in Israel and abroad, and garnered a great deal of attention in both the secular and religious press.

For many of the months that the Rav had been living in Beitar, certain individuals had been demanding large sums of money from him, and threatening to spread outrageous slanders against him if he didn’t comply. The highly publicized event at the Winter Stadium gave the Rav’s opponents new impetus to act. Just two and a half weeks later, the first slanderous lies began to be reported in the Israeli media.

The next stage of Rav Berland’s deal to atone for the Jewish people had come due.

THE TZADDIK IS LIKE A MIRROR

The Baal Shem Tov once taught that the Tzaddik is like a mirror: Whatever a person sees when he looks at the Tzaddik is simply a reflection of himself. The Tzaddik shows the person who he really is. If he comes with a negative attitude and outlook, that’s what he’ll see reflected back at him. And if he comes with a positive attitude and outlook, then that’s what he’ll see when he looks at the Tzaddik. This is one of the tests involved in coming close to the Tzaddik.

This is the reason that the people literally suspected Moshe Rabbenu of committing adultery²².

In his writings on *parashas Korach*, the Baal Shem Tov explained why there were those amongst the Jewish people who accused Moshe of every sin committed by Bilaam the *rasha*: “Let it not be a wonder to you when you see people accusing a complete Tzaddik of the most horrible things, that he never even imagined doing. Those people are the *Erev Rav*, and are completely evil people. Many times, they accuse [the tzaddik] of things they themselves have done. But they are blinded, and can’t see fault in themselves. And if they didn’t do such a thing in this lifetime they certainly did it in a previous lifetime”.

²² The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin 110 states that Moshe Rabbenu’s entire generation suspected him of adultery.

THE ACCUSATIONS BEGIN

THEY HAVE CARVED OUT A MAN, AND THEY ARE OPPOSING HIM

In *Sichos Haran* (“The Wisdom of Rebbe Nachman”), Rebbe Nachman said the following:

“No one is opposing me. They are merely opposing a person who is doing the things they imagine, and they are correct in opposing him.”

Rav Noson of Breslov explains: “Those who were against the Rebbe had invented all sorts of false accusations against him. These were totally without foundation and did not apply to the Rebbe at all. However, a person who was guilty of what was contained in these accusations would certainly be worthy of their opposition.

These people are therefore not opposing the Rebbe at all. If they actually knew the Rebbe’s greatness and holiness, they certainly wouldn’t oppose him — and they’d run to follow him with the greatest zeal and enthusiasm...

The Rebbe said: “They have carved out a man, and they are opposing him.”

For all that Israel is nominally a democratic State, many influential public figures on the political right, and many rabbis in the orthodox world have been investigated by the police in Israel, and even temporarily jailed, solely on the basis of a story in the media.

The media wields tremendous political power in Israel; the Israeli media can initiate a police investigation by the sheer force of its will; and the Israeli media, for the most part, doesn't like chareidi rabbis with large followings.

At the beginning of 2013, when the first incredible stories started to pop up in the press, the battle against drafting *chareidim* into the Israeli army was at its peak, and the political environment in Israel was charged and toxic. Some secular journalists were keen to publish any 'chareidi bashing' story they could find, regardless of whether it was actually true.

A month before the first stories about Rav Berland started to run, an Israeli journalist published a very controversial piece claiming that a five year old girl had been violated in a synagogue in Modiin Illit, and that the community had covered the incident up.

In the wake of that awful accusation, the Modiin Illit municipality and the police went to every effort to verify the details of the report, and to provide the family and girl in question with help and support. Their efforts turned up something very interesting: the story wasn't true. There was no victim. Nothing had happened.

But that didn't stop the media from trying the same trick, again.

Rav Eliezer Berland left Israel of his own free will on February 21, 2013, three weeks before the first false allegations against him began to appear. He flew to Miami, in the United States, where he'd started a new branch of Shuvu Banim just a few months' earlier, before moving on to Switzerland.

Back in Israel, a number of senior Rabbis including Rav Yitzhak Meir Morgenstern and Rav Yehuda Sheinfeld, convened an informal *beis din* to examine the accusations that had surfaced

against Rav Berland. They questioned Rav Berland's persecutors and determined that the evidence being presented was a total web of lies and deceit.

“When Rav Berland was in Switzerland, I spoke to him and he told me that he'd been given a holy mission to do, but that not everyone believed that,” Rav Yehuda Sheinfeld later explained. *“Instead, they believed the testimony of a lone witness²³, and the things that they read on the internet and in the secular media.”*

Once it became clear that the allegations were completely false, a number of the nation's leading Rabbis, including Rav Shalom Arush, Rav Meir Sirota and Rav Shechnazi, undertook to inform the Israeli public of the true facts of the matter.

But, when Rav Berland found out that Rav Arush was attempting to clear his name, he immediately called him from Morocco and urgently requested that Rav Arush should stop what he was doing, and not get involved in the matter. Rav Berland explained that he'd worked very hard to procure all these insults, and he didn't want the whole thing to be ruined prematurely.

So Rav Arush's letter, together with many other letters that were written at the time by other notable Rabbis in defense of Rav Berland, were never published, and stayed hidden within the Shuvu Banim community.

As you can tell from the following letter of support that was written by Rav Aharon Tzvi Rompler, head of Tehillos Israel, who had no prior connection to Rav Berland or the Shuvu Banim community, if these letters had been widely circulated when they were

²³ Jewish religious law requires a minimum of two witnesses to bring a case to court.

things that the gossipers publicize also transgresses many biblical transgressions. All this is explained at length in the Chofetz Chaim, on the laws of *lashon hara*.

All the more so when the words spoken and publicized are against an awesome and huge talmid chacham Torah Scholar.

It's written in the Talmud and in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 334:43) that someone who disgraces a *talmid chacham* should be excommunicated and that also, he has no repair (forgiveness) for his wounds, and that he is considered to be an *apikores*/heretic.

He is also included in “[those who have] despised the word of Hashem” and he has no portion in the World to Come, as it says in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 99b) and in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 243:6). Also, the destruction of Jerusalem came about because a Talmid Chacham was disgraced there.

And, *ben b'no shel kal v'chomer*, so very much more so here, when we are dealing with someone who is an awesome Talmid Chacham; who labors in Torah day and night; who has been known from his childhood to be an *oved Hashem*, serving Hashem with tremendous self-sacrifice; who is completely abstinent from all mundane worldly matters; and who is known to tens of thousands of people to be a Tzaddik of tremendous stature.

It's also taught that even if the person speaking [negatively] is an honest sincere person, and that even if he would be prepared to come to a *beis din*, a rabbinical court, to testify, the *beis din* is required to give him lashes. Since there aren't two witnesses, it is forbidden for [this one person] to talk due to the sin of *lashon hara*.

And all the more so in the situation before us, when the person who is talking and spreading the rumors is someone who is known to be [text omitted for legal reasons], and whose wife is also [text omitted for legal reasons]...

In any event, it is clear that apart from the serious sin of accepting *lashon hara* and the even more criminal sin of spreading rumors and disgracing a *talmid chacham*, and above all, the horrible

chillul Hashem - it is understood by anyone with any intelligence that this *lashon hara* has no basis in truth whatsoever. [Emphasis added]

.....And in regard to those who allow themselves to believe [the rumors], since [Rav Berland] himself, when asked about these things, admitted and said that he made mistakes and must do teshuva, truthfully I have no need to answer this reasoning at all, because anyone who has a brain in his head, even a little child understands that this is the complete opposite of human nature.

Instead of denying the rumors against him, even though he certainly has what to say, as explained, on the contrary, [Rav Berland] admits and disgraces himself, and gives the impression that he is the biggest, notorious criminal...

Therefore, this kind of behavior proves the awesome level of the tzaddikim, who hear their disgrace and do not respond, (and even strengthen the disgrace). Therefore, disproving this reasoning is simpler than *b'ata b'kutacha*²⁴, especially for those who know him and know how he has spoken throughout all the years. They know full well that this is his way of insulting himself in public, and to lower his honor in very extreme ways. No-one else can compete with him in this regard, and there is no one else who does this like him....

There already existed in the world rumors like this against Yosef Hatzadik, and certainly those who believe today's stories [about Rav Berland] would believe the stories told then about Yosef Hatzadik, and they would defame him based on the false evil testimony - just as they are doing today....

[T]here is no doubt that they have some kind of agenda, and a grudge in their hearts, and that their portion is with the arrogant ones of the generation, and the baalei machlokes who speak *lashon hara*, and that they have no repair. [Emphasis added]

²⁴ Literally that an egg can be eaten with dairy. This is a Talmudic term for a very obvious conclusion that goes without saying.

This is even more so, because they are defiling the name of Heaven in a horrible, awful, terrifying way. In particular, that they sent all this to the media and news outlets, and helped the evil doers who are always looking for ways to speak badly against religious people, religion in general and about G-d. They have caused others to revile the Torah-observant community, and to destroy them, by standing against the holy Torah and the safeguarding of religion. They have given up everyone, big and small, for disgrace and abuse in a public way before all the Nations and all the people under the sun....

And it is known what the Gr”a says (in *Idras Eliyahu Parashas Devarim*) and these are his words”

“There are 5 kinds of *Erev Rav* (mixed multitude), #1 *Baalei machloket* and *lashon hara*-speaking gossipers and people looking for arguments... they are the worst and are called Amalekites, and [Mashiach] ben Dovid does not come until they are removed from the world, and about them it says, ‘you should wipe out the remembrance of Amalek.’” Therefore, “Anyone who can, is obligated to protest against them, to fulfil the positive commandment of wiping out Amalek” until this *lashon hara* and *shem ra* are wiped away from the world.

Therefore, anyone who believes these rumors, and all the more so, those who help to spread them, is considered to be an *apikores* heretic, which is how the Sages refer to someone who disgraces a *Talmid Chacham*...

Even those who have disagreed with the path of the Rav in other areas in the past have no reason not to protest against the *chillul Hashem* being caused by those who are spreading the rumors...

[E]ven though I have no connection with this Rav [Berland] and his community at all, nevertheless, after I heard these rumors, and was sickened to my stomach by them - ‘the crying sound I heard, that pains those who hear it’ - I said in my heart woe to the ear that hears these things and is not pained by it and does not go out to protest for the honor of Heaven that because of our many sins is being desecrated in this terrifying way!...

Written and signed with tears, anticipating and waiting for the Redeemer of Israel to raise up the glory of the Torah and Emunah and the Honor of Heaven, speedily in our days, amen.

Rabbi Aharon Tzvi Rompler

Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, the Rav of Kiryat Sefer and one of the successors of Rav Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Dov Kook of Tiberius, and Rav Shalom Arush also signed onto the letter.

Next to his signature, Rav Karp added the following words:

“According to the Holy Torah - and as is known by anyone who learns the “Chofetz Chaim” - it is forbidden to have evil thoughts about someone who is known to be a Talmid Chacham and aTzaddik, and we shouldn’t accept or listen to lashon harah. And this certainly applies to someone who also has turned the masses to teshuva (see Gemara Yoma 87).

And even more so in this case [with Rav Berland], where it’s known that people who hold a grudge against him for monetary reasons and the like are coming against him, as is made clear in the “Chofetz Chaim” that the “voice which goes out” is the voice of haters.

Anyone who is pulled after this nonsense testifies about himself that he himself is stuck in these impure activities. Woe to the generation that this has happened in their days! This is certainly the last birur, the last process of clarification before the coming of Moshiach, when “chutzpah will be common” in public against Hashem and His Torah without fear and without shame.

They are the arrogant of the generation...”

When Rav Dov Kook was given the paper to sign he was standing at the gravesite of Rabbi Akivah in Tiberius. After he read over the letter he signed it and said “May the Erev Rav disappear!”

But none of these letters, none of these protestations, were allowed to reach the public. The Rav stopped them all. Later on, Rav Chaim Reicher, one of the Rav’s grandsons who is closely connected with many of the generation’s leading Rabbis, shed a little more spiritual light on why Rav Berland did this, and why so many of the nation’s spiritual leaders appeared to do very little to openly help the Rav against his persecutors throughout his three years of exile.

“[The nation’s] leading Rabbis speak to me privately and tell me that they have explicit instructions from the Rav not to support him openly,” explained Rav Richter, “except for some things he permits because of the chillul Hashem [that would otherwise be involved]. The Rav, shlita, feels that he must take on himself this disgrace in order to mitigate decrees and ignite the light of teshuvah in all of Am Yisrael.”

So all the Rabbis’ early public protestations against the terrible calumnies being spread about Rav Berland were silenced by the Rav himself. This made the spiritual test of who to believe infinitely more difficult.

“Believe me, if I wanted to I could end all the mochlokes against me, and there would not be a single person against me. But what can I do? There are levels that cannot be reached without controversy”.

– Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

MIRACLES IN MOROCCO

A poor ditch digger found a large diamond and traveled to London by boat with the aim of selling it. The ditch digger didn't have the money to pay for his passage, but he promised the captain that he'd pay his fare from the proceeds of selling the diamond. During the journey, the diamond was accidentally thrown out of the window of his cabin, and the ditch digger knew that if the captain of the ship found out, he'd execute him. So he maintained his happiness despite his great loss.

Shortly before arriving in London, the captain asked the ditch digger if he could put the whole boat and its cargo in his name, to avoid awkward questions on arrival. This was done — and the captain then promptly died on arrival, making the poor ditch digger extremely wealthy.

Rav Berland explained how the pirate's boat, and all the riches it contained, eventually came to the poor ditch digger in the merit of his maintaining his happiness, even when he discovered that his priceless diamond had been thrown overboard. Ultimately, the boat's contents ended up being much more valuable than the diamond he'd lost. Rav Berland explained that the same lesson still applied today, even when *Am Yisrael* and the *yeshiva* had gone through such difficult times.

He said: "If we continue to accept everything that's happening to us with *simchah*, then *b'ezras Hashem*, ultimately God will give us our boat filled with riches. He will give us the treasure that's truly meant for us — but only on condition that we maintain our happiness!"

During September 2012, Rav Berland had been in Uman for Rosh Hashanah, where he'd met one of his followers, Rabbi Nachman Biton, who'd moved out to Morocco some five years earlier.

Reb Biton came over to the Rav to ask for a blessing, but before he left, the Rav called out to him that when he got back to Morocco, he should start to make arrangements to hire a couple of vans — one to transport all of the Rav's books from the airport, and the second to transport all of the Rav's students.

At the time, Reb Biton thought the Rav was joking, as the persecution of the Rav hadn't even begun. Reb Biton couldn't imagine that just a little while later, Rav Berland — together with his books and some of his students — would be with him in Morocco, just as the Rav predicted on Rosh Hashanah.

Throughout the long years of exile, the Rav's attendants confirmed that the decision of 'where to go next' nearly always occurred spontaneously. There was no fixed plan, there was no special strategy. Just as the nation of Israel followed the Divine presence across the desert, resting when it rested, and travelling onwards when it started moving again, Rav Berland's moves were also decided by the word of Hashem.

So despite his comments to Nachman Biton, the decision to travel to Morocco occurred to the Rav spontaneously, while he was staying in Switzerland. From the time he first set foot in Morocco, the Rav himself made it clear to the people who were closest to him that he'd be in exile for three years, and so it came to be. But what was unclear was whether the Rav would stay in just one place.



When he first came to Morocco, the Rav spent some time with his follower Nachman Biton in Casablanca, before moving to the small Jewish community in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh.

The Rav explained that Morocco contained some of the holiness of Eretz Yisrael, because around 3,000 holy *Tzaddikim* were buried there, and as Rebbe Nachman taught, wherever a *Tzaddik* is buried, he creates a spiritual atmosphere around his tomb that's permeated with the holiness of Eretz Yisrael.

Throughout the seven months that he spent in Marrakesh, the Rav frequently visited many of the holy gravesites of *Tzaddikim* buried in Morocco, including the grave of Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan.

In a class he gave over the phone from Morocco before Lag BaOmer, Rav Berland made a point of encouraging all his students to make the trip to the *kever* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron. He explained that all the difficulties involved in making the trip up to Meron would atone for their sins and reassured them that the community was passing through the final test now. "Don't worry!"

he said. “I’m with every single one of you, and everyone needs to believe that I could be there with you again in a split second. Don’t worry! Everything will work out for the best!”

But it was hard for everyone. When one of his students saw how deeply Rav Berland was suffering, he asked the Rav about it. The Rav told him: “What can I do? No one else could have taken on so much suffering in order to atone for the sins of the generation.”

STARTING A COMMUNITY IN MARRAKESH

As more of his followers started to make the trip out to Morocco to be with him, the Rav tried to put more of a communal infrastructure in place, to ensure that not a second should be lost from their Torah learning, *mitzvos* and *avodas Hashem*.

The community in Marrakesh welcomed the newcomers warmly. The old synagogue had been struggling to find a minyan during the week, but with a regular influx of guests from Shuvu Banim, it was enjoying a new lease of life. Very early on, Rav Berland asked the President of the Moroccan Jewish community, Jacky Kodesh, to help him establish a *kollel* in the city, which was even able to provide its students with a modest stipend. Next, the small Jewish community of Marrakesh agreed to help the Rav establish his own Shuvu Banim community there, and to contribute toward its upkeep.

In a phone call to Rav Moshe Beninstock (a leading figure in Breslov *chassidus* and the *chazzan* in the central *minyán* on Rosh Hashanah in Uman), Rav Berland explained, “When I started on my journey, I thought I’d have a maximum of five students with me here in Morocco. But with Hashem’s help, I see that my students are following me even to here.”

On another occasion, one of the Rav's senior students remarked that, "The Evil One (the Satan) thought that once the Rav was exiled to Beitar Illit, his students would stop praying the Shabbos prayers together with him, with the Rav's special *niggunim*... But then, many students started coming to Beitar, on foot, making the four hour walk. The Rav told us that the dust from our footsteps had even reached up to Hashem's Heavenly Throne. The Evil One continued to scheme against the Rav - but now, his students are even coming to Morocco! We truly hope that Morocco will be the last stop, and that from here, we will go straight to the rebuilt Beis Hamikdash, where we will greet the Moshiach."

But together with the tremendous suffering, there was tremendous joy, too. When another of the Rav's grandchildren traveled to Morocco to celebrate their marriage with him, the Rav said that he hadn't felt so free in 40 years. In his latter years in Jerusalem, the Rav had been accompanied by guards everywhere he went, who prevented his community from interacting with him, and vice versa. "But now," continued the Rav, "I finally feel free and able to connect to you again [i.e., his community], as though you were my own family."



Around this time, word first reached the Rav's attendants that the Israeli police were seeking to question the Rav as a result of all the media instigation that had occurred back in Israel.

The police in Israel cannot make an extradition request simply in order to question someone, so the Rav's attendants contacted the Lahav 433 police unit that was responsible for dealing with Rav Berland's case and offered that Rav Berland would return to Israel to clear his name, on condition that he would be dealt with respectfully.

A key requirement of the Rav's attendants was that the Rav should only be questioned in his own home and that he shouldn't be imprisoned without a trial, as had happened to other individuals in the past. They were concerned about the lack of transparency, honesty and goodwill being shown by the Israeli police.

Later events would prove their concerns to be well-founded.

The two sides (Rav Berland's attendants and the Israeli police) were about to come to an agreement that would see Rav Berland voluntarily returning to Israel to clear his name when one of the Lahav 433 police chiefs stepped in and nixed the deal. "I don't care if he's a Rabbi or not a Rabbi," he told the attendants. "I will bring him here with handcuffs!"

A year to the day after Rav Berland left Israel, on *Taanit Esther*, 11 Adar 5773 (March 14, 2014), this man resigned from his position. The following year, on 18 Tammuz 5775 (July 5, 2015) — the same time that Rav Berland disappeared from Holland — this police chief sadly committed suicide.

While all of these negotiations were continuing behind the scenes, the Rav just continued learning, and praying, and immersing in himself in his *avodas Hashem*, the way he always had. But as time went on, more miracle stories involving the Rav started trickling out of Morocco, so more people from the local Jewish community, and also from Israel and further afield, and even some of the local Arabs, started to flock to the Rav to receive a blessing. One of the people who visited the Rav in Morocco at this time told the following story:

"On one of the occasions that the Rav left his house, there was a group of his supporters waiting outside to speak to him. As soon as the Rav came out, one woman

came over to him from the group and asked the Rav if he remembered her. He said, 'Yes, I do. You came to me in Israel and asked me for a blessing that you would be able to find your husband [the woman was an agunah]. I told you which country he was in, which city, which street, and the number of the house where he was staying.'

The woman replied excitedly that she'd found her husband exactly where the Rav had told her that she would, and that he'd been so shocked that she'd been able to find him, that she'd been able to encourage him to return to the family home. Now they were living together in peace once more as husband and wife.

Upon hearing this, the Rav turned to his followers who were standing there and told them, 'You see, I know where everyone is! And I also know who's upsetting their wife by coming to see me without asking her permission first!'"

As the summer stretched on into Elul, the Rav's thoughts turned to Rosh Hashanah. The Rav hadn't missed being in Uman for Rosh Hashanah since the fall of Communism in 1989, but there were many obstacles in the way of the Rav traveling to Uman this year.

The Rav decided to visit the grave of Rav Daniel Hashomer at midnight and spent many hours there dancing and singing. The Rav was overheard praying: "*Ribbono shel Olam*, You brought us all the way to here, please take us to Uman, too!" This was the same song of longing for Uman that the Rav had composed many years earlier, when the path had been blocked by the Iron Curtain.

Afterwards, the Rav remarked that he'd fervently prayed that he would be able to spend Rosh Hashanah 5774 by Rebbe Nachman. "Who knows what could happen in the world this coming year if I don't get to Uman," he said. "The judgments on the world are continuing to pile up and they need a lot of sweetening."

At this time, in August 2013, the Arab world was in an uproar, as part of the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Egypt was in the middle of a revolution; the conflict against Syrian dictator Bashar Assad had officially spiraled-down into a civil war; in March of that year, former Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had said that "Zionism is a crime against humanity" during a speech at the UN; and Iran had just announced that it now had the sixth biggest stockpile of rockets in the world, and that its plans to develop atomic weapon were coming along nicely.

Meanwhile, the Torah world was also coming under unprecedented attack as the Israeli government instituted swinging budget cuts, seen by many as a punishment for failing to comply with the new law to draft *yeshiva* students into the IDF.

The Rav told his students that the tremendous financial difficulty that they and many others had experienced that past year was part of the birth pangs of Moshiach. He said,

"I really hope that next year, 5774, we'll see the coming of Moshiach, as it says in Rashi's commentary on Sanhedrin 98: 'Everyone will say, just let the son of Dovid come already!' because we'll already be so tired, and we'll realize that there's nothing more we can do to change or improve the situation. No one will have the strength to do anything anymore, not the secular people and not the religious people, and that's why everyone will want Moshiach to come right now."

With Rosh Hashana fast approaching, a small group of around 30 of Rav Berland's followers tried to organize a flight to Uman. There were no direct flights from Morocco to Kiev, but the Rav's attendants had managed to find a Ukrainian tour group who had chartered a private plane with spare seat, and who were flying back to the Ukraine a day before Rosh Hashana.

When they got to the airport, they discovered that the airport's flight booking system wasn't recognizing the tickets that had been purchased for Shuvu Banim, and the airport staff also couldn't register any new ticket purchases.

The offices of the tour group who'd chartered the plane were now closed for the day, and the Rav's attendants had no other way of getting in touch with the organizers of the flight. When all this became clear, Rav Berland told everyone to return to Marrakesh, and to start saying the selichot prayers for erev Rosh Hashana. Despite their best efforts, Rav Berland was not going to be in Uman, that year.

The next morning, a number of trucks started arriving outside the Rav's lodgings, bringing all types of different kosher food that had been donated by some of the wealthier members of the Jewish Moroccan community. Then, word arrived that someone had paid for the Rav and his followers to spend Rosh Hashana in a vacation resort.

A number of taxis showed up, to take the students and Rav Berland to their temporary lodgings, and the small entourage of Breslovers had a 'three day' Rosh Hashana at the resort that was described as 'unforgettable'.

But when the news hit Uman that the Rav wouldn't be joining them for Rosh Hashanah, many of his followers were devastated.

A short while before Rosh Hashanah began, Rav Berland contacted Rav Shmuel Stern, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Nachalei Netzach, and asked him to pass on the message that no one should be sad that he hadn't made it to Uman for Rosh Hashanah, because in his heart, he would still be with them.

“The main thing is to be ‘baked’ into the heart of *Rabbeinu*, as *Rabbeinu* himself said,” exclaimed the Rav. “I know how big Rebbe Nachman really is, so please be happy that you are there by him for Rosh Hashanah. The distance between us is only physical,” he continued. “Hashem could still bring me to Uman in the blink of an eye.”



After Rosh Hashanah 5774, the number of people who decided to fly out to see the Rav in Morocco began to rise exponentially. The Rav called one of his students, Rabbi Naftali Biton, to tell him that as many as 1,000 of his followers had been given permission to fly out to Morocco to spend the remaining festivals with him. He asked Rav Nachman Biton for his help in arranging accommodations for them all.

In the end, around 300 people spent Yom Kippur with Rav Berland in Marrakesh, while another 400 flew out to celebrate Simchas Torah and Succos with him, totaling 700 people altogether. This was still more than enough to start garnering a lot of attention from the local Muslim population, who began to wonder why so many hundreds of Jews in traditional *Chassidic* garb were openly walking around the streets of Marrakesh while the “Arab Spring” was in full swing everywhere else in the world...

After the High Holidays were over, the Rav decided to take a break from his teaching schedule and routine in Marrakesh and have a few days “vacation” in Morocco’s capital city, Casablanca.

While in Casablanca, Rav Berland stayed at the home of one of the influential members of the Jewish community. Over the course of Shabbos, tens of citizens and businessmen flocked to this man’s home, to visit the Rav – including a number of local Arabs. They were joined by a few of the Rav’s own students, who’d flown out from Israel after the High Holidays to be with him, and who spent the nights learning Torah with him.

So it continued the whole week that the Rav spent in Casablanca, where he prayed in the Chabad synagogue of Rav Shalom Eidelman. At one point during his visit there, a newly-engaged couple together with their parents flew out to Casablanca to hold the *vort* and break the plate in the Rav’s presence. The Rav told the couple that he would organize their marriage ceremony in Morocco at the hall that was adjacent to the grave of Rabbi Yechia Ben Baruch in the city of Ouarzazate. When one of the Rav’s wealthy hosts overheard the conversation, he came over to tell the couple that he would pay all their wedding costs

Among the many different people who came to visit Rav Berland in Morocco, one in particular stood out. This man had recently been told by the doctors that he had a cancerous growth in his throat. After he received this shocking diagnosis, he went to get a *brachah* from Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Rav Chaim asked him who he had been speaking badly about, and after a long pause for thought, the man responded that he’d spoken negatively about Rav Berland – but that he’d only been repeating the things he’d heard on the news! .

Rav Chaim Kanievsky then told that he should go immediately to ask forgiveness, and that if he did that, he'd be healed. The man took Rav Kanievsky's words to heart, made *teshuvah*, and called the Rav to ask for his forgiveness, which was very freely given. The growth subsequently disappeared all by itself.



For a couple of months, it felt like the good times had returned. Anyone who wanted could come and see the Rav in Morocco, and the Rav and his followers had developed a framework and routine for life in Morocco. But this state of affairs wasn't to last. At the time the Rav was sojourning there, the so-called "Arab Spring" was in full steam, toppling secular Muslim governments and leaders all around the world. If that wasn't enough, a number of terrorist organizations including Al-Qaida were known to be operating in Morocco, and the government was wary of adding any more fuel to what was already a potentially explosive domestic situation.

The remaining Jews in Morocco had learned to keep a low profile. By contrast, the Breslover newcomers were drawing an awful lot of attention to themselves, and the greatest attraction of all was Rav Berland.

As rumors of his holiness and abilities as a miracle-worker spread, even the non-Jewish Moroccans started lining up in the street outside his house to ask for blessings, and would mob him every time he came out of his home. Even some of the King's own advisors came to pay a courtesy call to the Rav. As the Rav's fame spread locally, and as the number of his followers who were coming to Morocco continued to grow, the King of Morocco was told by his advisors that something had to be done to nip this potential problem in the bud.

Back in Israel, the Rav's persecutors started to realize that instead of clipping the Rav's wings, silencing him and destroying his community, his exile to Morocco had actually had the opposite effect. The Rav had been rejuvenated, his followers had been flocking to see him by the hundreds, and new life had been breathed back into Shuvu Banim.

This was not at all the state of affairs they'd been hoping for, and so began the pattern of "persecution by media" that continued throughout the Rav's exile.

The Rav's persecutors back in Israel decided to send the Moroccan press a translated copy of some very negative news stories that had appeared about Rav Berland back in Israel. They again posed as innocent bystanders with no hidden agenda, and no connection to the Rav and his followers, who just wanted the good people of Morocco to know 'the truth' about who the Rav really was.

Their ruse was discovered when members of the Shuvu Banim community contacted the Arabic-speaking Moroccan journalists who were running negative stories about the Rav to ask them how they'd come by their information. One reporter told them about the translated articles he'd received, and gave over the name of the person who'd sent it him. It was one of the Rav's main persecutors.



Then, the local Moroccan press started publishing stories quoting complaints about the Rav's followers from the head of the Marrakesh Jewish community, Jackie Kadosh. Jackie Kadosh was quick to respond that no one should believe the story, and that hosting Rav Berland was a tremendous privilege.

But that story was only the opening shot in the "media war" that the Rav's persecutors waged in every country the Rav fled to during his exile.

As the false stories about the Rav started to appear in the Moroccan papers, the King of Morocco found himself caught in a furious dilemma about what action, if any, he should take.

After a long, painful deliberation, the King of Morocco came to a decision. His aides contacted Rav Berland's host and passed on the following ultimatum: "The King of Morocco can no longer guarantee the safety of Rav Berland's followers. Around a thousand Jews are now in the country visiting the Rav, and it is beyond the King's ability to guarantee their welfare. All of Rav Berland's followers must leave Morocco immediately."

When he heard the King's ultimatum, Rav Berland made it clear that he couldn't stay in Morocco if his followers would no longer be able to visit him and learn with him.

After the Rav decided he had to leave Morocco, one of his students came over to him and asked him, "What do we do now? What should we tell everyone to do?" The Rav replied, "We have to believe that Hashem is running the world. Whatever will be — will be! But our job is to carry on busying ourselves with our prayers and with our *avodas Hashem*, in whatever place we find ourselves next. Tell everyone to study the *parashah* of the week, *parashas*

Vayeitzei, twice in the original and once in the Targum, together with Rashi's commentary.”

And that was that. The Rav was very relaxed, and he sent a very clear message to his students that no matter where the next part of the journey was going to take them all, the main concern should be just to simply carry on studying the Torah, learning its laws and living according to *Halachah*, and not to let themselves get confused by anything that was going on around them.

While his followers scrambled to pack their belongings, the Rav stayed calm and focused on spiritual matters at all times, even though it appeared that no one had any idea where the Rav would go next.

After the Rav left the country, the King of Morocco had a change of heart and contacted the Rav to request that he should return. The King promised him full honor and protection, on the condition that the Rav would return alone, and keep a low profile. Again, the Rav refused. If he couldn't be with his beloved students, he wasn't interested in going back to Morocco, even if he could live there in luxury and peace.

Rav Berland left Morocco on 5 Kislev 5774 (November 7, 2013). It was time for the next leg of his exile.

DEFUSING A NUCLEAR BOMB

A week before the Rav ended up leaving Morocco, he sent his *gabbai* back to Israel with instructions for him to gather as many high-level university books he could find on the topic of nuclear engineering, as well as any books describing the physics and other scientific knowledge required to build a nuclear bomb.

The *gabbai* returned to Morocco with these books very shortly before the Rav left, and later traveled with them to Johannesburg. One of the students who moved with the Rav heard him say: “I’m going to make a big *balagan* in the nuclear reactor!” - clearly, referring to disrupting the Iranians’ plans at the spiritual level.

MAKING “PEACE” WITH IRAN

While hasty arrangements were being made for the Rav to leave Morocco, over in Geneva the heads of the G6 nations were meeting, under orders from the president of the United States, Barack Obama, who wanted to explore a way of “making peace” with the Iranians.

This historical meeting ended with an agreement being signed that would in practice enable the Iranians to create a nuclear missile within a very short period of time. Everyone knew which country the Iranians would be aiming at first.

In 2008, when Obama first became president, the Rav commented in one of his public lectures that a modern-day Achashverosh had just been elected in the United States and that his government would be a terrible thing for the Jews, as he was one of the most evil people to have been elected to power for a very long time.

The Rav explained that Obama wasn't only the Jewish people's problem. He would also turn out to be the American people's problem, too, as he was only interested in how best to destroy the country he'd just been elected to lead.

When Obama had first been elected President, Rav Berland sent Rav Eliyahu Meirav, one of his senior students, on an emergency mission to the United States. He tasked Rav Meirav with the job of passing on an urgent message to new President Elect, urging him to travel to the grave of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov in the Ukraine, and to say the 10 verses of psalms that make up the *Tikkun Haklali* prayer.

Rav Berland promised the President Elect that if he would do this, he would be remembered as the best president in the history of the USA, and that he would make a number of instrumental, positive changes that would be engraved in the history books. But, if he didn't make the trip, then Rav Berland warned Barack Obama that he would go down as the worst president in the country's history. This message was passed on to the President Elect by his brother, but it seems it was ignored.

In subsequent years, President Obama had been posing as the concerned "friend" of Israel, warning them away from neutralizing the Iranian nuclear program themselves because he, Obama, was going to take care of the problem himself. He made a lot of promises to Israel and other concerned countries that he would ensure that Iran would never be in a position to develop a nuclear bomb.

The world took Obama at his word — until, in 2013, the point was reached where alarm bells started to ring throughout the international community that the Iranians had already passed the point of no return with their uranium enrichment program, and that it was no longer possible for Israel — or anyone else — to bomb their nuclear reactors. At this point, the American president revealed his true colors and convened an international meeting that appeared to have an agenda designed to ease the passage of the Iranian nuclear bomb into the world.

A MODERN-DAY HAMAN

When Rav Berland spoke at the gathering of 8,000 people in the Winter Stadium in Tel Aviv, at the peace rally he held in June 2012, he explained that the president of Iran was a modern-day Haman. The Rav said then: “The leaders of the world have been telling each other that it’s a shame that Hitler, may his name be blotted out, didn’t manage to finish off the Jewish people, but don’t worry — now we’ve got the president of Iran to complete the job! But,” the Rav reassured the crowd, “*Am Yisrael* will prevail in the end!”

The Rav explained that Obama, the American president, wasn’t at all bothered by the fact that the Iranians were developing a nuclear weapon. He was only making a big show about wanting “peace” with the Iranians in order to tie Israel’s hands and prevent them from making a pre-emptory strike. Now, in Geneva, the mask was finally off, and Obama was busy encouraging the world’s leaders to “make peace” with the genocidal leaders of Iran.

THE LAST CHANCE

But all this was foreseen by the Rav, and by many of the other holy leaders of *Am Yisrael*. Rabbi Yehuda Bracha, for example, published a Hebrew pamphlet around this time called “The Last

Chance,” which contained many *midrashim* that describe what would occur in the end of days, including references to what can be understood as referring to a nuclear bomb.

Whatever spiritual work had already been done by that point was still not enough to tip the scales in the favor of *Am Yisrael*. Obama and Ahmadinejad were coming ever closer to developing a nuclear bomb, and now a group of the world’s leaders were poised to sign on the Geneva Agreement, which would officially permit Iran to go nuclear.

“IN 2 MONTHS, THEY’LL HAVE A NUCLEAR WEAPON!”

Throughout his stay in Morocco, the Rav had returned to the theme of Iran’s nuclear bomb on many different occasions. Rumors had abounded in the media for months that despite all the international sanctions and pressure, Iran had nevertheless managed to produce enough fissile nuclear material to produce seven atomic bombs. Many weeks before the Rav left Morocco, he’d left his students in no doubt about where the Iranians were holding with their nuclear program:

“In two more months, the Iranians will have a nuclear weapon!” he’d declared to his shocked students. Once again, the Rav’s foresight was astounding.

The Chanukah when Rav Berland decided to leave Morocco, the king of Saudi Arabia had just flown out to the United States to urgently discuss the Iranian bomb, exactly as predicted in the *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*.

In a *midrash* from the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Yeshiya* 60) it says the following:

“Rabbi Yitzchak said: The year that Melech HaMoshiach will be revealed, all the kings of the nations of the world will provoke each other. The king of Persia will threaten the king of Arabia and because of this ***the king of Arabia will go to the king of Edom for advice.***

“Afterwards, the king of Persia will destroy [most of] the world. The remaining nations will be hysterical and frantic and fall on their faces and will be seized as if by birth pains.

“And the people of Israel will be frantic and hysterical and they will say, where will we come and go? Where will we come and go? And Hashem will say to them: Do not fear, My children, do not fear. All that I have done I did only for you. Why are you afraid? The time for your redemption has come!”

The Associated Press at this time reported that Obama’s administration had been conducting secret bilateral negotiations with the Iranians for months, without anyone else being any the wiser about what was really being discussed or agreed to.

Meanwhile, a French newspaper reported on November 20, 2013 that the French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius had privately complained of the discrepancy between official multilateral negotiations and “a detailed accord John Kerry had negotiated in parallel with Iran.” When it came to the Iranians and the nuclear bomb, Obama had pulled the wool over everyone’s eyes, exactly as the Rav had predicted many years earlier.

The Israeli government was in a panic, and the papers were full of headlines screaming that the Israeli prime minister was begging someone to intercede and stop the Geneva Agreement from being signed.

The last day of Chanukah found Rav Berland deep within Africa, where more trials, self-sacrifice and miraculous occurrences were awaiting him.

ZIMBABWE

The book Admorei Belz contains the history of the Admorim of Belz. In that book, there's a story that was passed down the line of each of the Admorim of Belz, starting with the first Rebbe, the Sar Shalom, Rebbe Shalom of Belz, through Rebbe Aaron of Rokatch, until the current Admor of Belz, Rebbe Yissachar Dov.

Both the story and its moral were given over by the first Rebbe, who recounted that in a particular country the people decided to rebel against the king, and the king's minister of war escaped to another country with his soldiers. At the end of the war, this minister returned. And the moral of the story is that before Moshiach comes, there will be one Jew who will escape to a different country with his faithful students, and who will conceal himself with them. The first Belzer Rebbe, the Sar Shalom, then explained: "Moshiach will come in their merit."

One of the unsung heroes of Rav Berland's time in exile was the Israeli diamond mine millionaire, Yaron Yamin. As Rav Berland started on the next leg of his exile, in deepest Africa, Yaron Yamin began to play an increasingly prominent role in the events surrounding the Rav.

Yamin, a self-described secular businessman, and Rav Berland, have known each other for 20 years, from the time they first met in Uman. Yamin recalls about their first meeting: "Suddenly, I found myself next to him [Rav Berland], and he was giving me a

brachah, and I didn't even know who he was. Someone told me afterwards that he's one of the biggest *Tzaddikim* there is, but as I'm not a religious man, I didn't think it was a particularly big deal."

Nevertheless, their relationship began to develop, and the Israeli businessman would occasionally go to the Rav for advice and encouragement. Yamin continues: "Ten years ago, I had a big business failure, and the Rav told me to go to Africa, to Zimbabwe, and to dig. There, I was going to find a fortune.

"I thought to myself, 'How can I begin anything?!' All I had in my pocket was \$10,000, and by the time I got to Zimbabwe it was \$4,000... So I got there, and I wondered what the Rav wanted from me, and why he'd sent me there. Why here? Why Zimbabwe? It seemed completely unrealistic."

To cut a long story short, Yamin miraculously managed to purchase a plot of land in Zimbabwe practically for free from an old Jew. Rav Berland advised Yamin to start digging — and he discovered an enormous diamond mine that instantly catapulted him into the ranks of the super-wealthy. Overnight, he went from being almost bankrupt to being one of the wealthiest people in the world.

To this day, Yamin becomes very emotional when he tells the story of how Rav Berland literally transformed his whole life. "I met with him at a very difficult point in my life," he says. "I have a letter that I wrote to the Rav that I keep in my *tefillin* from the time I got there [to Zimbabwe], and the whole letter is soaked with tears. In terms of my finances, I never even dreamed that I'd get to the level I ultimately reached. I keep the letter so I'll never forget where I was, so I'll remember everything that the Rav did for me."

As a result of his African diamond mine, Yamin became a multi-millionaire before the age of 30. Today, he's known as one of the most successful businessmen in Israel.

When Rav Berland had to leave Morocco, one of the first people he called was Yamin. "The community didn't want the Rav to stay with all of his followers," he explains. "It was very difficult for them to host everyone and provide what they needed, like kosher meat and so forth. So then it got to the papers, and then to the King of Morocco, and they decided to publicize what the King of Morocco said: 'Either you leave, or your followers leave.'"

Yamin continues: "The Rav would never prevent his students from coming to visit him — his *chassidim* mean everything to him. I had a conversation with him and he asked me to come and see him [in Morocco]. The Rav told me, 'By tomorrow, we won't be here already.' The Rav wanted to continue the institutions he'd established. The subject upset him, and sometimes he'd cry over what was happening to the institutions he'd founded."

Once the decision was made to leave Morocco, Rav Berland and the small group of people accompanying him moved fast. They first took a plane from Morocco to Cairo, on the same day that the leaders of the G6 nations in Geneva continued to discuss well into the night what to do with Iran.

Egypt at that time (November 8, 2013) was hardly a welcoming place for an obviously Jewish, elderly *chassidic* man. At the time of the Rav's flight from Morocco, Northern Africa was in turmoil, with civil war, political unrest and Muslim terrorist groups

sprouting up in practically every corner²⁵. A few short months before the Rav's detour via Egypt, the country had voted the radical Muslim Brotherhood into power and was now in the grip of what was threatening to become a nascent civil war, as the Egyptian army had overthrown the Muslim Brotherhood and seized control of the country.

As the Egyptian army continued its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt continued to be a hotbed of terrorism, intrigue and unrest. And into this chaotic, anti-Semitic and violent atmosphere flew... Rav Berland.

When the passport clerk at Cairo Airport asked the Rav who he was, the Rav jokingly told the clerk that he was part of Al-Qaida. The Rav repeated this statement twice, and the Egyptian clerk smiled broadly and welcomed him into the country to await his connecting flight.

The Rav and his traveling companions, including Yaron Yamin, safely caught their connecting flight from Egypt to South Africa. At the passport control in South Africa, when the clerks saw him wrapped in his customary *tallis* and *tefillin*, they came over to take a closer look. The Rav started singing a Jewish song — and the African clerks joined in.

The Rav arrived in Johannesburg in time for Shabbos, and as the Rav danced, prayed and sang throughout his first Shabbos in Johannesburg, the political leaders in Geneva continued trying to iron out their agreement with Iran.

²⁵ The so-called 'Arab Spring' had begun in neighboring Tunisia in December 2010, and subsequently spread to many parts of North Africa and the Middle East, including Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Egypt and Syria.

Just after that Shabbos, on November 9, 2013, the French President Francois Hollande stormed out of the meeting in Geneva and broke the injunction of silence that had been laid on all of the participants by revealing to the world what exactly had been going on behind closed doors. He disclosed that all the other countries, including the U.S., Russia, Britain, Germany and China, had already consented to sign the agreement that would give Iran unfettered access to developing a nuclear bomb.

If the agreement went through, Iran could have a nuclear weapon within two weeks.

At the last minute, the French president balked at the idea of giving Iran carte blanche to become a nuclear power and pulled out of the talks, refusing to sign the agreement. This alone was a shocking development, as France has traditionally not been aligned with Israel's best interests in the international arena.

As the talks disintegrated into bitter recriminations and a swift face-saving operation by the Obama administration, no one could understand why the French president had pulled out in such a dramatic fashion, at the very last minute.

A couple of weeks later, on November 24, 2013, a short-term pact was signed in Geneva with Iran which specified that the Iranians would freeze crucial parts of their nuclear program in exchange for a number of economic sanctions being lifted. In the meantime, all the parties involved committed themselves to ongoing talks to reach a longer-term agreement.

At least for the moment, the immediate danger seemed to have passed.



On December 13, 2013 (10 Teves 5774), the city of Jerusalem was hit by the heaviest snowstorm in more than 20 years. Much of the city, including the areas where many of the Rav's followers lived, was without electricity for three days and largely cut off from the outside world, as the country scrambled to deal with the severe weather.

From South Africa, the Rav gave a *shiur* to the Shuvu Banim Yeshiva via a live hookup where he began by saying: "Everything will become white, white, and all the sins will be erased, as though it was Yom Kippur²⁶." The Rav continued that every year, on the fast of the 10th of Teves, the difficulties that had been decreed on Jerusalem were renewed again.

Israel's worst winter storm for decades happened at exactly the same time that the Israeli government started imprisoning *yeshiva* students who refused to enlist in the army, as well as others for protesting against the new draft laws.

The Israeli radio station Kol Berama reported that after the snowstorm, one of the Knesset members had calculated how much the storm had cost the Israeli economy, and found that it came out to exactly the same amount that the government had cut from the Torah world's budget and family allowance.



When the Rav first arrived in Johannesburg, Yaron Yamin escorted him to his home with full honors, and also arranged for the Rav to be flown around South Africa in his private jet. But the Rav's first visit to South Africa was very short. Already by December 2, 2013, the sixth day of Chanukah, the Rav had contacted some of his students at Shuvu Banim back in Israel and

²⁶ Referring to a verse in *Yeshayah* 18.

asked them to increase their prayers for his success. He told them that there was another city in Africa that he needed to travel to, located near the southern part of the Sahara desert.

There, the Rav explained, there would be enough place for everyone, and all of his followers and students could start to visit him again.

Shortly afterwards, the Rav took up residence in the city of Bulawayo, in Zimbabwe, where Yamin took it upon himself to ensure that the Rav's needs were completely taken care of. He arranged and paid for the Rav's lodgings in a luxury hotel in Bulawayo, organized a *mikvah* for him to use, and even took it upon himself to travel out to Israel and bring the Rav all of his holy books, so he could maintain his learning schedule. Yamin went to the Rav's home in Jerusalem and ordered a shipment including two and half tons of books.

But perhaps the biggest kindness that Yamin tried to do for Rav Berland at this point was attempting to clear his name. The wealthy businessman went to the media in Zimbabwe and Israel and gave two emotional interviews where he described the Rav's daily schedule, his *avodas Hashem*, and also tried to explain a little of the greatness of the Rav:

“Do you know who the Rav really is?” Yamin asked the journalist from Israel. “I’m going to try and explain and define him to you,” Yaron tears up, “and not as a ‘dati’ person.”

“There are a lot of Tzaddikim in Am Yisrael, all of whom learn Torah and keep mitzvos, etc. But the Rav is above all of them for one reason. He believes himself to be absolutely nothing. And this is the trait that

these people [referring to the group of people who were libeling and persecuting the Rav] used for their own personal interests and gain.

It's known throughout all the generations — look at the seven shepherds²⁷ of Israel. All of them were in exile. All of them were imprisoned. All of them were at the center of controversy [machlokes]. There's no Tzaddik that didn't experience opposition, not even Rebbe Nachman.”

Yamin then started to describe a little of the Rav's daily schedule: “The Rav seems to be living in two realities at once. In some ways, it's the best time of his life. He himself says that he prayed for this for the last ten years, to go and do his bodedus alone in the fields; to use the mikvah as much as he wants; to pray as much as he wants...”

The interviewer interrupted at this point, to ask Yamin about reported plans to build the Rav a “dream house” in Zimbabwe.

“The Rav doesn't need a ‘dream house’ or anything like that!” replied Yamin. “He's the epitome of modesty, as anyone who knows him can testify. He's happy to wear the same pair of shoes for years. You give him a plate of food and he just picks at it and eats two spoonfuls at most. He barely sleeps; one to two hours a night, no more. I've witnessed this with my own eyes!

He dips in the mikvah 20 to 30 times a day. Prays for three to four hours. And when he's not praying, dunking

²⁷ Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Aaron, Moshe and King Dovid

or doing hisbodedus, he's in a Torah book — and not just one book, but many of them.”

The interviewer interjected that, nevertheless, people had made some serious claims about the Rav...

Yamin was visibly upset at this point in the interview, and close to tears. *“Look, I've been with the Rav for 20 years, and the Rav is never by himself with a woman,”* he replied. *“He's never even so much as touched a woman's hand, okay.”*

“The people who spread these stories and libels about the Rav, I want to ask the Israeli police one thing. Do you even have a single piece of real evidence? Do you have any recordings? Do you really have anything at all in your hands? Or do you just have someone who was trying to get out of being prosecuted for attempted murder, and who decided to bring his wife along in order to slander Rav Berland? Is that all you really have in your hands?”

Then a few other unhappy, destructive individuals joined in, people who are known to be emotionally disturbed, and that's all you have against him.”

An impassioned Yamin continued:

“The Rav is not a criminal, the Rav is not a fugitive, and he's not running from place to place, as they describe it in the media. The Rav despised the way [certain people in the community] treated him, the way they controlled him... and certainly there is no need to mention what the media did — you read it every day.

There is no warrant for his arrest, nothing on Interpol, no reason to detain him at any border. I myself crossed four borders with the Rav, and as a successful business man I wouldn't dream of helping a criminal or fugitive from justice. Everything they are saying against the Rav, all the people involved in this, it's a group, a handful of people who are working against the Rav. There is absolutely no evidence."

In a separate interview, Yamin reiterated that the Rav could return to Israel of his own free will whenever he chose. There was no warrant for his arrest, no case against him, and he'd left the country as a completely free man — all indisputable facts that the media and the Israeli government had been hiding from the general public, keen as they were to perpetuate the myth that the Rav was a "fugitive from justice."

For now, Yamin's efforts to set the record straight appeared to be enough to get the media to leave the Rav and his followers in peace.

While Yamin and the Rav's assistants continued with their plans to build a residential complex and study hall for the Rav and his followers, including a number of guesthouses for the Rav's followers and anyone else who wanted to fly out to Zimbabwe to see him, the Rav himself was being housed in an unusual luxury hotel that was known as a hunting resort, located in the middle of the African jungle.

"We want that the Rav should be available to all of *Am Yisrael*," concluded Yaron Yamin. "He doesn't belong to just his *chassidim*, or just his community, or to you or me. He's the Rabbi of all of *Am Yisrael*. Every person can go speak to the Rav, visit him, consult

with him — he's the Rav of *Am Yisrael*. He's the Tzaddik of the generation.”

Yamin had arranged for the Rav to stay in a private villa on the grounds of the hotel that was located in the middle of the African jungle. From the safety of the hotel grounds, which was surrounded by an electrified fence and had a security team on duty 24/7, the guests could see every type of wild animal and creature pass by them, including monkeys, giraffes, zebras and elephants. The more dangerous animals could also be seen, including lions, tigers, crocodiles and hyenas.

The hotel guests could also hear the sounds of the wild animals very clearly from the hotel grounds, particularly at night. It was a beautiful sight to behold, but it was also very dangerous to get too close. While guests could order a special jeep to take them deeper into the forest, accompanied by armed rangers, no one, not even the native Zimbabweans, dared to venture into the forest without their jeeps and their weapons.

When Rav Berland arrived, he started leaving the hotel grounds to go and do *hisbodedus*, alone and unarmed, in the African jungle. The hotel management was initially incredulous that someone would want to do something so apparently dangerous and didn't know what to say to him. Later on, they were even more amazed when the Rav repeatedly returned to the hotel after hours spent alone in the forest, completely unharmed.

On another occasion, the Rav was walking [in the jungle in Zimbabwe] amongst a pride of lions, when suddenly a jeep appeared with five soldiers in it, who started screaming at him: “Where did you go?! Where are you going?! These lions killed a buffalo here just two days ago — you can see how they preyed on it!”

When the Rav told them that heI was doing doing *hisbodedus*, personal prayer, in the forest they were stunned. “So, you’re not coming back with us?” they asked him. The Rav responded: “No! You can go on without me...”

Every day, the Rav would ask the guards by the hotel gates to open them, to enable him to go and pray alone in the jungle. And every day, they would spend quite a lot of time trying to dissuade him, sometimes even bringing his family members along to try to talk him out of it. “At least stay close to the hotel!” they tried to persuade him, but the Rav ignored them and headed out deep into the jungle until the guards couldn’t see him anymore.

Then, after three or four hours of *hisbodedus*, he’d return as though nothing unusual had happened. The Rav explained to the hotel staff that he’d waited 77 years for the opportunity to pray in a place like this, a forest like this, in the same way that King Dovid had done, many centuries earlier. Once the security guards saw this miracle for a few days in a row, they developed a profound respect for the Rav and where overheard telling each other, “This is not a human being, this is an angel!”

Once, the Rav invited one of his followers to join him in his “jungle *hisbodedus*,” but the man demurred. He’d been out into the jungle already in an armored jeep, and what he’d seen then had been frightening enough. He told the Rav that he was scared to join him, because he didn’t have the same Heavenly protection that the Rav was obviously enjoying. The Rav replied simply, “But you’re with me!”

So then the student agreed to come, but as they reached the gates and all the sounds of the jungle filled their ears, he had a change of heart and decided he just couldn’t accompany the Rav after all.



On a different morning, the Rav asked his student to come and dip with him in the stream that was near the hotel, which the Rav was using as a natural *mikvah*. Again, the student demurred, because he was scared of being attacked by crocodiles. The Rav told him: “You have nothing to fear.” The Rav went over to the stream, immersed, and then returned — while the amazed student looked on, because he’d just seen a hippo emerge from the stream a few seconds after the Rav had exited. In Africa, it’s well known that hippos kill more human beings than any other animals.

When Rav Dovid Chaim Stern heard from one of the *yeshiva* students how Rav Berland had been praying alone for hours in the African jungle, in places where no other person would come without an armored jeep and a gun, Rav Stern said, “It’s because of his incredible *kedushah!* The animals don’t have permission to harm him — not the animals, and also not the human beings!”

Throughout his stay in Zimbabwe, the Rav spoke a great deal about King David, and how he’d continued to sing to Hashem despite being chased and in danger of losing his life. “The more they chased King David, the more he sang,” he remarked. “A person

needs a lot of merit to see the song that's contained in everything, in all of creation. That was the strength of King David, who turned everything he experienced into the songs contained in the Book of *Tehillim*, and that will also be the strength of Moshiach ben Dovid, too.”



Very soon after the Rav moved to Zimbabwe, his followers from Israel, including Rav Moshe Tzanani, started flying out to visit him again. If Morocco was like a different world for an Israeli *chassid*, then Zimbabwe was a completely different planet.

One of the Rav's followers flew out to visit the Rav in Zimbabwe, but ran out of money halfway through the trip.. He didn't even have enough money to hail a taxi once he arrived at the airport in Zimbabwe to take him to where the Rav was staying. He also hadn't told anyone he was coming, so there was no one who knew about his visit and no one who could help him.

This follower decided to take a cab to the Rav's hotel anyway, hoping that someone at the hotel where the Rav was staying would help him pay for it once he got there. As the cab drove up to the gates, the Rav came out with a \$100 bill in his hand and gave it straight to the taxi driver, without saying a word – even though the follower hadn't been in touch with the Rav at all, beforehand.

Rav Berland then asked the taxi driver to take the newly-arrived follower, together with one of the Rav's grandsons, to a different, specific hotel, where they could check in and leave their suitcases, before immediately bringing them back to the hotel where the Rav was staying. In the meantime, the follower didn't have a suitcase with him — only an item of hand luggage — but he knew better

than to question the Rav's instructions, so he settled in for the drive.

This second hotel was located quite a few kilometers away, and throughout the drive they passed a number of other hotels that were much closer to where the Rav was staying. They simply couldn't understand why the Rav had told the taxi driver to take them to a place that was so far away, to drop off the luggage they didn't even really have. But as soon as they arrived, the mystery was solved — because they found two other students from the *yeshiva* in the hotel, who were as shocked to see them as they were.

None of these other students had told anyone else about their travel plans, yet the Rav had still known they were coming. One of the *yeshiva* students explained that they'd landed in Zimbabwe and headed straight over to the Rav's hotel. However, they been unable to find him, so they'd continued on to their own lodgings — the cheapest hotel they could find, which they'd booked ahead of their trip. It was only when they got there that they realized that instead of the hotel they thought they were coming to, they'd actually ended up at a seedy, bad-smelling B&B that was full of dangerous-looking locals.

The heat in Zimbabwe was unbelievable, and their "hotel" didn't even have a single air-conditioning unit. The *yeshiva* students were actually feeling a little down about their situation. They'd made such an effort to come see the Rav, but now they were staying in a dump miles away from him, and they didn't even know if they'd have the merit of actually meeting with the Rav. In addition, they had no idea what they were going to do on Shabbos.

As they sat in the hotel lobby feeling depressed about the way things had turned out, all of a sudden they spotted these two other followers of the Rav — who had apparently been sent expressly to

them, via taxi, by the Rav himself! Not in a million years did they think that other Jews would ever show up in that place, let alone people they actually knew from the *yeshiva*.

The Rav had once remarked when he was in Morocco: “At the very same instant that someone thinks about me, I’m also thinking of them” — which this experience clearly showed. The two new arrivals left their small bags at the B&B, as per the Rav’s instructions, which reassured the other students that they weren’t alone in Zimbabwe after all.

When the taxi brought the first two students back to the Rav, the taxi driver told the Rav that after everything he’d just witnessed, he didn’t want to take the Rav’s money, and he tried to give it back. “You’re a big saint!” he told the Rav. “I don’t want to take your money.” Then, he got out of the car, gave the Rav a big hug, asked the Rav to give him a blessing, and snapped a selfie of himself standing next to the Rav.



The Rav gave the taxi driver a blessing, then asked him to start keeping Shabbos. By this point, the students were truly shocked, as it hadn’t crossed their mind that their driver could be Jewish.

He certainly didn't look Jewish, and nothing in his conversation or behavior had suggested the possibility, yet the Rav seemed to know otherwise.

Before his exile, the Rav had once explained that the Ten Tribes had originally been dispersed and "lost" on the African continent, and that many of the locals in the places where he was staying in Africa had a "spark" of Jewishness in them, retained throughout all the years, because these people had continued to only marry each other.

(This idea is borne out by the famous story involving the Ohr Hachaim, who also took the decree of exile upon himself and ended up in the same area as the Rav was staying, where he also discovered remnants of the Ten Tribes.)

The Rav continued that you could see which of these people truly had a Jewish soul by the way they honored the Jews.

Having reassured his distant students that he knew about them, even in their dumpsy hotel that was miles away, he now told the other two students that they could stay with him in his hotel, and arranged lodgings for both of them.

On another occasion, a group of zebras came right up to the electrified fence where the Rav and one of his students were praying the morning service. The Rav jokingly commented that they'd come to make up the *minyan*, and were already wearing their *tallis* (the black and white stripes resembled a *tallis*). As soon as the prayers were over, the zebras disappeared back into the forest.

The student laughed, but the next day the same thing occurred again, and continued to happen each of the subsequent days that this student was with the Rav. The Rav would take him down to

the field to pray the morning prayers and each morning as they were beginning, eight zebras would appear and stay there for the duration of the prayers, before quickly dispersing. The student noticed that each time, exactly eight zebras appeared.

The Arizal explains in his writings that sometimes, souls are re-incarnated in animals, and that these animals then seek out a *tzaddik* to help them achieve their spiritual *tikkun*. This didn't just occur with evil people; sometimes, even *tzaddikim* themselves would petition for permission to return in animal form, in order to achieve some minute rectification that they hadn't managed to complete previously²⁸.



The Rav was thrilled with his new lodgings, and he told some of his followers: “What a miracle, that they threw us out of Morocco and that we came to a place like this!” He then quoted a saying from Rebbe Nachman, to the effect that while many people say that the old days were better, he believed that God was actually running the world in a better way each day.

Later, he explained that the saying in the *Gemara Kesubos* 110b, that “a person who lives outside of Israel, it's as though they don't have a God” only applied when someone chose not to live in Eretz Yisrael. But when they had to leave Eretz Yisrael against their will, then, the Rav explained, “The opposite is true. Every place he goes, it's Eretz Yisrael; every place he goes, it's Jerusalem. Here, it's Eretz Yisrael! It's Jerusalem!”

²⁸ There is a famous story from modern times about how the Klausenberger Rebbe in Boro Park told a cat who was sitting under the table during one of his lectures that he could leave, since he'd now received his rectification. Immediately, the cat left the room.

That's not to say that the Rav wasn't yearning to return to Eretz Yisrael proper. At around this time, Rav Berland asked his followers back in Jerusalem to start arranging a number of big public prayer rallies at the Kotel, with the first being held on the 12 Adar Alef 5774 (February 12, 2014).

The Rav hoped that these prayer gatherings would achieve a number of big spiritual aims, including saving Israel from its enemies and giving the Rav himself the spiritual merit he needed in order to return to the Holy Land. Rav Berland was still very concerned about the Iranian plans to drop a nuclear bomb on Israel, and he returned to this theme on many occasions during his stay in Zimbabwe, but particularly over Purim 2014.

On one occasion, he sent his students a recorded message that said:

“Just as Hashem enabled Mordechai to triumph over Haman, so He’s also going to help us to triumph over all our ‘Hamans’ too, and all the enemies of Israel, like Al-Qaida and Hamas. And with that help from Hashem, we’re going to be able to save Am Yisrael from all of the terrible harsh decrees, including their desire to drop a nuclear bomb on us next month [April 2014].”

He continued: “They already have everything they need to do that; all the necessary raw material and components. That’s why we’re holding a huge prayer gathering now, in order to cancel their plans to drop a nuclear bomb on Israel. In the merit of that gathering, even if they actually try to drop their bomb on Israel, it will all just turn into candies [i.e., be ‘sweetened,’ spiritually.]”

“Everyone should come to the prayer gathering at the Kotel, to cancel the terrible decrees that are being passed on yeshiva students. They want to put every yeshiva student in the army! They want to try to extinguish the fire of Torah and teshuvah! But it’s only going to continue to grow from moment to moment. They’re promoting the lowest types of people and behavior, and they want the lowest people to rule Am Yisrael... Instead of building more yeshivos, they want to build more prisons, so that there’ll be more work for the policemen, the judges, the lawyer, and the prison guards.

“But instead of spending a billion dollars on building more prisons, better to spend a million dollars building a new yeshiva [so that people’s characters will be refined, and they won’t be sent to prison in the first place]. The prayer gathering [on Taanis Esther] will nullify all the decrees hanging over the whole of Israel.”

As the day for the prayer gathering rolled around, on March 13, 2014, Israel was hit with a fierce rainstorm. One of the organizers recalls: “Despite the fact that there were a lot of students with the Rav in Zimbabwe for Purim and the weather was so awful, when I got down to the Kotel I was amazed to see it was still packed with people. People had come from Eilat, from Nahariya, and from all over the country to sing and dance together and to hear a *shiur* from the Rav.”

All told, between 300 to 500 people showed up, despite the very inclement weather, and prayed, sang and danced together, before reciting the *Tikkun Haklali* three times, and then reciting the special prayer that the Rav had written especially for the occasion.

THE PRAYER WRITTEN MANY YEARS BEFORE THE
PRAYER GATHERING ON PURIM 2014

Shortly before the Purim prayer rally, one of the Rav's students discovered a prayer that Rav Berland had written many years' earlier, at a time when the Rav rarely if ever left Eretz Yisrael. As soon as the student realized the prayer's relevance to the Rav's current circumstances, he printed out hundreds of copies of the prayer, and distributed it to be read at the prayer rally.

It seems Rav Berland knew many years in advance that he would be exiled from the land of Israel. Here is what the prayer said:

“Master of the World, who can do everything, from whom no evil design is hidden or concealed. Please rescue Eliezer ben Ettia [Rav Berland] from the terrible decree that is hovering over him, the terrible decree to be exiled from the Holy Land, from the foundation stone, from the holy Kotel, the root of all the salvations and all the healing. [And instead, he is fulfilling] the decree of, ‘And Hashem removed them from upon their soil, with anger, wrath and great fury and He cast them into another land’ (Parshat Netzavim, 29:27).

“And he has been cast off to a different country, to a foreign impure country and the verse of Lamentations has been fulfilled.Please bring him back in peace to our land, and cancel all of the terrible decrees, and let him not need to leave the holy land again, the foundation stone, mount Moriah, never again in his life, and let us never again be left alone and despised without anyone to support us and raise us up. And let this terrible wandering be the end of all our troubles, and let it be considered as a redemption for our soul. And by way of this exile and wandering around, we should merit that all our sins should be atoned for, and we should merit to receive the complete redemption, *amen*.”

The organizers were a little disappointed by the turnout, but when they contacted the Rav later on to tell him how it had gone, he reassured them that every single person who's come had been

equivalent to 10,000 people, because of the amount of self-sacrifice that had been required to brave the terrible weather.

“Afterwards, the Rav told us that the gathering had helped matters a great deal, and that if we would continue to do something similar every week, he believed he could be back with us in Israel before Pesach 2014,” recalls the organizer.

While that didn’t happen, some of the prayer rally’s effects were felt much sooner. That same night, the terrorists in Gaza fired four rockets at Israel — and every single one of them miraculously landed in an open area, where they detonated harmlessly.



Rav Berland and his followers spent Purim in the city of Bulawayo, one of only two cities in Zimbabwe that still has anything resembling a fixed Jewish community. In the whole of Zimbabwe, there are now less than 150 people officially registered as belonging to the Jewish community, and less than half of them live in Bulawayo.

Which is why it was so strange that when the Rav’s followers got to the city of Bulawayo, they discovered an enormous new synagogue and events hall that was filled with Jewish books, but virtually empty of Jews.

The Rav commented on the synagogue in Bulawayo: “This place has been waiting for Shuvu Banim to come and spend Purim here since the sixth day of creation!” And it really did seem that way, as the Rav’s followers found themselves staying in the synagogue hall connected to the enormous new synagogue that had recently been built by the remnants of Bulawayo’s tiny Jewish community.

The head of the Bulawayo community invited the Rav to come and stay with him at his house, which was less than a 10-minute walk from the synagogue, while the men bedded down in the adjacent hall on mattresses, and the women and children found rooms to rent in a hotel that was close by.

In one of his lesson given during Purim 5774, the Rav said the following:

“Why have we still not managed to rebuild the Temple? Because if we built it now, it would just immediately burn down again. At the very moment that a person came to the Temple thinking bad thoughts, it would burn down. People don’t know that their thoughts [particularly their lustful thoughts] are like the fire of Gehinnom. Every time you look at things that you shouldn’t — that’s the fire of Gehinnom. A person can burn down the Temple literally every second.

That’s why Rebbe Nachman taught that a person has to be very careful to avoid evil [lustful] thoughts... And he can only overcome these sorts of lustful thoughts by learning Gemara, as Rebbe Nachman taught in Likutey Moharan Lesson 101 ...

... In another month, they [the Iranians] want to drop a nuclear bomb on us. We’ll have exactly five minutes [from the time they press the button] because it will have to travel 1,500 kilometers to get to us, and their rockets cover a distance of five kilometers every second. Three hundred seconds is five minutes. So assuming the warning siren goes off immediately, there’ll be just enough time to say the Tikkun Haklali, or at least some of it.

Just reciting a single Tikkun Haklali has the power to explode every nuclear bomb in the world, and to change everything into candies. [Meaning, to ‘sweeten’ everything.]

At every moment, we are facing terrible decrees, like the decree to forcibly enlist yeshiva students. Every day, we hear of more problems, and all this is only happening because of evil thoughts and lustful fantasies. That’s the reason it’s happening! Rebbe Nachman taught that the first priority has to be tikkun habris, and that’s the main focus of Breslov and the main focus of Shuvu Banim — to have holy, pure thoughts.”

Over Purim, the Rav read the *megillah* and lead the *davening*. Afterwards, he remarked, “We haven’t seen a Purim like this for 50 years!” The festivities continued afterwards, as well, as two boys from Israel celebrated their bar mitzvahs in Bulawayo, and another two students celebrated their *aufrufs*, with one of the weddings being held right after Purim, with the Rav officiating.

One of the leaders of the Zimbabwe Jewish community in Bulawayo told the Rav at the wedding that there had probably never been such a big gathering of Jews in a Zimbabwe synagogue. “Now that you’ve come here with your *chassidim*, you’ve really livened the place up,” he said.

During his annual Purim *tisch* in 2014, Rav Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern, the noted kabbalist and Breslov leader, announced: “Oy, this generation has no *tzaddikim*... until we got a true *tzaddik*, but now he’s in Zimbabwe!” He then started to talk about the greatness of Rav Berland, and how he’d merited to nullify himself to Hashem so much, that everyone else was now obligated to follow whatever Rav Berland told them to do.

One of the drunk young men at the *tisch* started to make some derogatory comments about Rav Berland. Without batting an eyelash, Rav Morgenstern silenced him by throwing a cup of Arak over him, then commented, “People still have their free choice, but this is the main test of our generation — to nullify ourselves to Rav Berland.”

Rav Morgenstern’s *gabbai* came over to refill his cup with more schnapps, but the Rav stopped him and said, “I don’t want to drink from this cup anymore. It’s defiled.”

The Jews of Bulawayo weren’t the only locals who celebrated Purim with the Rav. Two Jews from Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, drove seven hours to visit the Rav, once they heard he was in their country. One of the Harare Jews brought his small, black-skinned child to greet the Rav. The Rav paid this child particular attention and bent down to speak to him. He told the father a few times that the child had the eyes of a *gaon*, a Torah genius. They were with the Rav for four days.

After Purim, these two Jews returned to their homes, taking along with them two students from the *yeshiva*, as they had a return flight to catch from the airport in Harare at 9:15 p.m.

By 7 p.m., they were still three hours from the airport, so the students called the airport officials and asked if they could hold the flight for them. They were told no, and that check-in was going to close at 8 p.m. The driver told them that there was no way they could make their flight, and then, just to cap things off, it also started to rain really, really hard.

But the two students reassured their driver that in the power of the Tzaddik, they would see miracles. They started to sing a *niggun* and to say the *Tikkun Haklali*, and they reassured the driver that in the merit of the Rav, they’d have a miracle.

While the driver was very impressed with the students' optimism and *emunah*, he still didn't think they had any chance of making the flight. In fact, he told them that if they managed to make their flight, he'd start keeping kosher. As the words left the driver's mouth, the rain cleared up, and somehow they managed to reach the airport in Harare at 9 p.m., a quarter of an hour before the plane took off.

The staff at check-in initially told them they'd have to leave their bags behind and just run to catch the plane, but in the end they were allowed to take their bags with them, too. As they were running through the gate, they heard the Jewish driver who'd brought them muttering to himself, "Why did I promise to keep kosher? You can't even find any kosher food in Zimbabwe!"

The *yeshiva* students exchanged phone numbers with the Zimbabwean Jews, promised to keep in touch, and the plane took off as soon as they boarded.



The day after Purim, the Rav spent many hours talking to and meeting with his followers. Anyone could come in and talk to the Rav for as long as they needed. One of the Rav's followers asked him, "What can I do to help the Rav?" and the Rav replied, "Pray for me each day that I'll come back to Israel!"

The Rav also said that anyone who took it upon himself to recite the *Tikkun Haklali* three times a day for the Rav's success, the Rav would be indebted to him.

In the meantime, Yaron Yamin announced that anyone who wanted to stay in Africa for Pesach was invited to remain in Zimbabwe, instead of having to fly back to Israel. Sixty people,

including a few families, decided to stay with the Rav. The Rav told the students that they could only stay if they sat and learned Torah full-time.

After Purim, the Rav returned to Yamin's home, close to his diamond mine, while all the students stayed in Bulawayo. There, they opened their own synagogue and *kollel*, in fulfillment of the Rav's prediction that Shuvu Banim would open a *yeshiva* in Southern Africa.

As word of the "*Gan Eden*" in Africa filtered back to Israel, more and more of the Rav's students and followers - including people who'd never met him before - started to make the trip out to Zimbabwe to visit him. But good as things were, the big question on everyone's mind in Zimbabwe was still: "When is the Rav returning to Eretz Yisrael?" One of his followers actually came out and asked the Rav himself this question. The Rav responded, "In the merit of the prayer gatherings that you're holding for me by the Kotel, *b'ezras Hashem* I'll be back by Pesach [2014]. Keep praying and keep holding the gatherings each week, and I'll be back before Pesach."



While Rav Berland was repeatedly exhorting his followers to pray for the well-being and safety of the nation of Israel, the signs that the redemption of the Jewish people appeared to be imminent continued to multiply during 5774.

One such clue was the statement made by Rav Moshe Sternbuch during his Purim *seudah*, when he said, "When you hear that the Russians are subduing the city of Krim [the Crimea], then you'll know that the *geulah* has begun. And here we see that last week, the Russians subdued the Crimea, and the whole world is now in

an uproar over this. But according to the tradition that we have from the Vilna Gaon, this is a sign of the time of Moshiach.”

Rav Sternbuch’s remarks were referring to the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine, which had begun on February 20, 2014, when pro-Russian separatists sparked a wave of violence in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, leading to the deaths of about 90 people.

The separatists were demanding autonomy for the eastern region of the Ukraine known as the Crimea, which they wanted to see returned to Russian rule. Russian President Vladimir Putin quickly threw thousands of Russian troops into the conflict, causing tensions in the area to shoot through the roof.

Around Purim time, the neighboring country of Turkey warned Russia that unless it scaled back its military activity in the region, Turkey would close the Bosphorus Strait to Russian ships and commercial activities, severely limiting Russia’s access to Middle Eastern oil, and the Middle East in general. The Ukrainian conflict finally petered out toward the end of 2015, temporarily easing tensions in the area²⁹.

Another “clue” occurred on March 2, 2014, when more than 600,000 Jews gathered just at the outskirts of the city in a place called Shaarei Yerushalayim, or the “Gates of Jerusalem,” to pray for the Torah world in Eretz Yisrael, and to protest the government’s plans to force *yeshiva* students to serve in the IDF.

There’s a special *brachah*, *Chacham Harazim*, that is said when a person sees more than 600,000 Jews gathered together in one place. It’s arguably one of the rarest *brachos* ever said, because getting that number of Jews together is a very unusual occurrence.

²⁹ As of November 2016, the situation in the Crimea was very unstable, and tensions in that region are rising once again.

But on March 2, 2014, the *brachah* was said for the first time in living memory.

A few months before this gathering took place, students of Rav Dov Kook in Teveria put together a booklet that contained more of what the Vilna Gaon wrote about the coming of Moshiach, as brought in the book *Kol Hator*, section 6. There, it's written as follows:

“Rabbi Binyamin of Shoklov asked our master the Vilna Gaon what he could do to try to hasten the coming of Moshiach ben Dovid and the redemption of Am Yisrael. The Vilna Gaon answered his student: “If you can gather together 600,000 Jews in a place called the ‘Gates of Jerusalem,’ whenever you’re able to do that, a gathering of 600,000 Jews can completely cancel out the power of the sitra achra that rules at the Gates of Jerusalem — and then, you’ll merit the complete redemption.”

When the Vilna Gaon first wrote those words more than 200 years ago, no such place called the “Gates of Jerusalem” even existed, and barely a handful of Jews lived in the holy city, as economic conditions in the Holy Land were very difficult under the Ottoman Turks.

Similarly, when the students of Rav Kook wrote this information in their booklet, before Rosh Hashanah 2013, no plans for a huge gathering had even been considered. It seemed to be another clear-cut sign that the redemption was imminent.

THE ZIMBABWEAN IDYLL ENDS

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Sanhedrin* 98 tells us that there is no clearer sign of Moshiach than when we see our true religious leaders and *talmidei chachamim* being persecuted and given no peace.

Shortly before Pesach, 2014, hundreds of Rav Berland's followers started arriving in Zimbabwe en masse, to start getting ready for the holiday. Once again, the Rav's enemies saw that their tremendous efforts to tear the Rav away from his followers hadn't worked, so they decided to change tack, and to bribe some corrupt bureaucrats to do their dirty work for them.

On April 7, 2014, these corrupt Zimbabwean government officials came to visit Rav Berland at Yaron Yamin's house, and told the Rav that he was being placed under arrest because his visa had expired (even though it hadn't). They then forced the Rav to wear a prisoner's uniform, and publicly handcuffed him.

When the Rav heard that the police had come to arrest him, he recited the *Shehechianu* blessing, thanking God for bringing him

to this new situation.³⁰ From the moment the Rav was arrested, he continuously held a bottle of water in his hands, even while wearing handcuffs. Many people wondered about this, as it's widely known that the Rav never asks for something to eat or drink, and that even when he's given food and drink he usually eats only a little, and takes very few sips of liquid.

So why was the Rav going to such great trouble to take a bottle of water with him? Afterwards, it became known that the Rav had been concerned about not being able to ritually wash his hands before every prayer, as is required by *halachah*. The Rav didn't know where he would be taken after his arrest, or for how long he would be there, so he wanted to make sure that he would have enough water available to wash his hands.

Rav Berland's persecutors had left no stone unturned to maximize his public humiliation. They arranged in advance that the Rav would be forced to dress in prisoner's clothing for 10 minutes, and that someone would remove the *kippah* from his head. The photographer would be on-site, ready to take the picture as soon as they'd stage-managed the 'special' image they were after.

In the past, many people had returned to religious observance just from seeing Rav Berland's picture, so his persecutors figured they'd give the world an image of the Rav they'd never forget. But instead of turning people off, the picture of the Rav being so profoundly humiliated actually had a boomerang effect. Suddenly, it became clear to many people what sort of people had been chasing the Rav all over the world, ceaselessly harassing and maligning

³⁰ The Midrash in Yalkut Yeshayahu (60:499) that expounds about the tzaddikim who suffer for Am Yisrael also teaches that some tzaddikim are required to spend time in prison, in order to atone for Am Yisrael's sins.

him, while the Rav accepted everything that happened to him with love.

More and more people starting to question why the Rav was being treated in such an unnecessarily extreme and disgraceful way.

As the press went all out to make the Rav a household name, both in Israel and abroad, for all the wrong reasons, a lot of people who'd never even heard of him before started trying to find out more about him. Who was this Rav Berland, who was at the heart of so much controversy? What was he doing in Africa in the first place? Why had he been arrested in such a public, shameful way, if the only complaint the Zimbabweans could come up with was that his visa had expired?

At this time, one of the Rav's students, Rav Chaim Ness, was spending a lot of time in Tel Aviv working with more secular people, trying to bring them closer to *Yiddishkeit*. He recounts that people started approaching him and asking for more details about what was happening with Rav Berland. To keep up with the demand, Rav Ness started organizing gatherings in Tel Aviv that attracted hundreds of participants.

As a result of these gatherings, many formerly secular Jews began keeping more *mitzvos* — and the people who get the credit for that are, ironically, the Rav's persecutors.

One man wrote into the Shuvu Banim *Yeshiva* to say: "I'm not a Breslover *chassid*, and until today I didn't even have an opinion about everything surrounding Rav Berland. But after I saw that picture [of the Rav handcuffed in Zimbabwe], I began to

understand that the Rav really is suffering for us. ‘He takes our sickness upon himself’³¹.”

At the same time, many of the Rabbis who had been staying silent about the matter started to comment on what was going on, and to publicly come out in support of the Rav. A number of religious leaders who’d been sitting on the fence, or who were even considered to be opposers of the Rav, completely changed track after they saw that picture. Some even went as far as to call the Rav up directly to offer their support, and to ask forgiveness for the earlier doubts they’d harbored against him.



On April 7, 2014, the world leaders again tried to come to some agreement about Iran, this time meeting in Vienna. On that same day, the Zimbabwean police came to arrest the Rav in Bulawayo. The Rav spent many hours being interrogated in prison, and then went to court on April 8, where he was given the choice of paying a fine and being expelled from the country, or going to prison.

On April 9, the Rav left Zimbabwe to fly to South Africa. When he landed at the airport in Johannesburg, the South African police detained him for a couple of long hours while they checked his legal status in Israel.

While all this was going on, another mass prayer rally for the Rav’s success was being held at the Kotel. Throughout the prayer rally, the Rav’s followers were in close contact with some of the people who were traveling with the Rav, and miraculously, the moment

³¹ A quote from *Isaiah* 53:4. (See the entire chapter as it describes how the tzaddik takes on himself the suffering of the Nation – according to Ramban’s commentary in *Kisvei HaRamban*).

they finished saying the last *Kaddish* at the Kotel, the Rav was given permission to stay in Johannesburg.

At exactly the same time that all this was going on, the meeting between the world leaders in Vienna ended without any agreement being reached about the Iranians.

Throughout his ordeal at the hands of the Zimbabwean authorities, Rav Berland maintained his composure and *emunah*, and the people who were accompanying him even reported that he seemed to almost be in a state of rapture, as though he was engaged in the biggest *mitzvah* of his life. His happiness was contagious, and when he was released from prison in Zimbabwe and allowed to fly out to South Africa, the Rav left the country like a king, wearing his *tallis* and *tefillin*.

The picture of the Rav in handcuffs appeared on news sites around the world on 10 Nissan 5774 (April 10, 2014), exactly 30 days after he'd first spoken about the Iranians' plan to drop a nuclear bomb on Israel the next month. Everyone with a Jewish heart was completely shocked when they saw that terrible picture. Some people literally tore *kriah*; others sat on the floor and just cried their eyes out. That image landed like a bombshell in the heart of the frum Jewish world — but the humiliating media blitz seemed to have taken the place of the Iranians' nuclear bomb.

One of the students who'd been with the Rav in Johannesburg related what the Rav had said to his daughter just after that picture was publicized. The Rav said to her, "When I was handcuffed and dressed in the prison clothes, I felt as though I was holding the nuclear bomb in my hands."

The Rav himself later commented about his two-day incarceration in Zimbabwe: "How good it was for me over there [in Zimbabwe]!"

I sat on the floor with the locals and the criminals, and the whole time I sang and thanked Hashem and I reached [spiritual] levels that I otherwise would never have reached in a million years!”

At around the same time that the shameful picture of Rav Berland in Zimbabwe hit the news, many Rabbis in Israel were sent a fake newsletter that had been deliberately designed as an exact copy of Shuvu Banim’s own Knishta Chada newsletter, with the exact same name, logo and design. This phony newsletter was filled with lies and slanderous stories about the Rav, and also included entirely falsified quotes from a number of leading Rabbis.

As the outrage mounted, more and more people who saw this forged newsletter began to seriously question the integrity of the people who had been persecuting the Rav within the Breslov community itself. Many of the Rabbis who’d been falsely quoted contacted Shuvu Banim to set the record straight, and once again, the trap these Breslov zealots had set for the Rav rebounded on themselves. A number of the rabbis who contacted Shuvu Banim explained that now, they were starting to understand the moral caliber of some of the people who’d been persecuting the Rav — and also the greatness of the Rav, who’d borne all the abuse and affliction in silence, for decades.

When Rav Eliyahu Ifargan, the founder of Mosdot Keter Shalom, was told that the Rav had been arrested, publicly handcuffed, put in prison and then expelled from Zimbabwe, he sat down on the floor in middle of his *shiur* to participate in the exile and sorrow of the *Shechinah*.

Rav Ifargan then told his students: “Rav Eliezer Berland took upon himself exile and humiliation before Pesach, just like Rebbe Eliezer Hagadol, who was put into *cherem* before Pesach [by his contemporaries at the time the *Gemara* was being codified,

around 2,000 years ago]. Everyone has to participate in his sorrow and in the sorrow of the *Shechinah*.”

Rav Ifergan continued that according to the esoteric sources, when the Tzaddik takes such harsh judgments upon himself, it's only because of the sins of *Am Yisrael*, and that not every *tzaddik* can stand up to such a harsh test.

He continued: “We shouldn't just sit here, each one under his vineyard and fig tree and not participate in his exile and sorrow! In the next world, when the Creator of the World asks all of the *tzaddikim* what they did for *Am Yisrael*, everyone will try to say what they did. But then God will ask them, ‘Which of you agreed to take upon yourself exile, in order to help them? Who agreed to suffer for them? Who agreed to take the bread out of his own mouth, to participate in the sorrow of the *Shechinah*?’

This big *tzaddik*, who is the soul of Rebbe Eliezer Hagadol and a spark of Moshiach himself, is rolling around in the dirt because he chose to do that [in order to save *Am Yisrael*].”

Rav Ifargan continued that he didn't know how the people who continued to be obsessed with materialistic pleasures and false publicity were going to be able to stand up to the Heavenly accusations they were creating against themselves “at a time when the *Shechinah* is in exile, and a true *tzaddik* is rolling in dirt. Woe to them that they don't try to participate in the sorrow of the *Shechinah*, and in the sorrow of the Tzaddik.”

Rav Ifargan concluded that he had a tradition passed down from his forefathers that “in these days” [i.e., the period of time before Moshiach], the evil side would continue to grow stronger, and would appear to get more powerful from one day to the next. “Therefore,” he said, “anyone who shares in the sorrow of the *Shechinah* and *Knesses Yisrael*, and who shares in the sorrow of the Tzaddik in this very hard time, will help to ease the Tzaddik's sorrow, and give him more power to bring the *geulah*.”

While the Zimbabwe authorities' main target was Rav Berland himself, they also revoked the visas of the students who'd been

staying with him in Zimbabwe since Purim. While his followers had been prepared for Pesach in Zimbabwe, they were singularly unprepared for a last-minute forced exile to a different country, literally a day or two before the festival was due to begin.

Although a few of the Rav's students and his main attendants flew out with him to Johannesburg by plane, many of the other students, together with their families, were forced to arrange buses to take them across the border into South Africa. The authorities in Zimbabwe threw them out of the country so quickly, they didn't even give them time to collect the 600 kilograms of matzos they'd arranged for the holiday, plus their other Pesach provisions.

In a scene reminiscent of the original Exodus, the Rav's students hurriedly rented four buses and left for the long journey to South Africa. One of the buses got stuck on the way, and its passengers were delayed in the hot African weather for around 24 hours, with almost no food or drinks to sustain them because they'd been given no time to prepare food or other provisions.

The whole time the bus was stalled by the side of the road in Zimbabwe, the Rav was also "stalled" at the airport in Johannesburg as the South African authorities interrogated him, deciding whether to send him back to Israel or let him into the country.

Some of the students on the bus managed to get through to the Rav on the phone and explained the severity of their situation, that they were stuck in the middle of nowhere, with no food or drink, and with women and small children on board. The Rav reassured his students and told them to dance for an hour, and then everything would turn out okay. After the students had danced for a few minutes, some locals arrived bearing bananas and drinks, and an

hour later, a replacement bus turned up to take them on the last leg of their journey.

Meanwhile, back in the Johannesburg airport, the Rav sat there serenely. As was his custom wherever his wanderings took him and whatever difficulties he encountered, he continued his routine of praying, learning Torah, dancing and singing while the South African officials checked and double-checked his legal status.

A short while later, Rav Berland was granted permission to enter South Africa.

When the Zimbabwe authorities came to arrest Rav Berland at Yaron Yamin's home in Bulawayo, the wealthy businessman had



told them, "Beware of this holy man! If he gets deported from here all the rain will stop! Just look at the months he was here, what tremendous blessing the country received.

Nearly every day, you had strong rainstorms which are much needed for the economy. Tell Mugabe³² that if the Rabbi gets deported there will be no more rain!"



The Zimbabweans ignored the warning and proceeded to publicly dress Rav Berland in prison clothes and handcuff him, before arranging for him to be photographed, and

³² The president of Zimbabwe.

then carted off to the local prison for two days. Then, they deported him and his followers to Johannesburg three days before the festival of Pesach began.

Very soon after that, the rain in Zimbabwe stopped. By the beginning of 2016, the *New York Times* was calling the El Nino drought in Zimbabwe “the worst drought in more than a generation.” As the rain dried up, so too did the crops and the exports which supported the entire Zimbabwean economy. The U.N. World Food Program announced that 1.5 million Zimbabweans needed urgent food aid, as a result of the famine.



Shortly after this on the 28th of January, 2016, the niece of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe traveled to South Africa to meet Rav Berland and ask his forgiveness, in the name of her uncle and all the Zimbabwean people.

SOUTH AFRICA: PART 1

In a *shiur* he gave in Zimbabwe, Rav Berland explained: “Every place where the *tzaddikim* come, they wrap everything up in holiness, and they return everything back to *Hashem Yisbarach*.” The Rav explained that by doing this, they speed up the *geulah*, because they are collecting together the final sparks and returning them to the side of holiness.”

The Israeli authorities never issued an arrest warrant, or even officially opened a case against Rav Berland until shortly before he returned to the country, on July 18, 2016. While the story being spun by the Rav’s persecutors — and eagerly embellished by the unethical media — was that Rav Berland was “escaping from justice,” the truth is that Rav Berland left Israel a free man, came to Morocco as a free man, and entered Zimbabwe, and then South Africa as a free man, travelling on his own Israeli passport.

If any of the journalists who were covering the story had taken a moment to dig even just a little bit deeper into the “facts” of the story they were telling about Rav Berland, they’d have noticed a number of things that simply didn’t add up.

Firstly, people “on the run” don’t tell hundreds of students where they can come and visit them within a few days of arriving in a new location. They don’t travel around with hundreds of people, including men, women and children. They don’t try to start

yeshivos, *kollelim* and even kindergartens in their international “hideouts.” Wherever the Rav went, there too went his followers — hundreds and sometimes even thousands of them.

While the media rushed to portray Rav Berland as a “fugitive from justice,” the truth is that the Israeli government never had a case against him, or any evidence other than the claims of some very suspect individuals.

As Yaron Yamin said in one of the interviews he gave to the media:

“There is no warrant for his arrest, nothing on Interpol, no reason to detain him at any border. I myself crossed four borders with the Rav, and as a successful businessman I wouldn’t dream of helping a criminal or fugitive from justice. Everything they are saying against the Rav, all the people involved in this, it’s a group, a handful of people who are working against the Rav. There is absolutely no evidence.”

Yet despite this, from the moment Rav Berland set foot in South Africa, the persecution against him intensified, and even spilled over into physical violence.

Who were the people chasing Rav Berland in South Africa, if the country’s authorities were willing to let him in not just once, but twice? In this chapter, we’ll try to answer that question, and we’ll also reveal a little more of how the Rav’s persecutors worked hand in hand with the media to portray an image of the Rav that was completely disconnected from the truth.

Long before he arrived there, the Rav’s persecutors had a strong suspicion that Rav Berland would cross the border into South Africa after being deported from Zimbabwe.

They decided to get a head start on making the Rav's life in South Africa as difficult as possible by unleashing the "character assassination by media" that had already worked so well in Israel and Morocco. Before he even set foot in the country, the persecutors had "primed" the Johannesburg Jewish community that the Rav was a "fugitive" and a "wanted criminal" — claims that were patently untrue, as no case had ever been filed against the Rav in Israel.

The Rav's persecutors also went to great pains to try to influence the local Rabbis to shun the Rav and his community, going as far as writing each Rabbi in the community a personal letter, and taking out advertisements in the local paper which contained a number of the false accusations they were making against the Rav. They encouraged the Jewish community to shun this "dangerous fugitive" and his followers, and not to even give them the time of day.

All this was taking place just a day or two before Pesach 5774 was due to begin on April 14, 2014.

Before any of Rav Berland's followers even arrived in South Africa, one of the country's leading Rabbis issued a letter on April 11, 2014 to all the local Rabbis, which they asked should be distributed among all the Jewish communities in South Africa.

In that letter, this Rabbi warned the Jews of South Africa that a group of *chassidim* were about to arrive in the country, and that it was forbidden to shelter them or help them in any way. The text read as followed:

"We wish to notify Rabbonim to be aware of the situation so that our community not be involved with sheltering or supporting Berland and his followers. Please notify any members of your

congregation who you feel may be drawn into supporting or sheltering Berland and his followers.”

Most of South African Jewry obediently followed the dictates of this letter, and brought enormous pressure to bear on anyone who opened their doors to the Rav's students. Even those students who had made arrangements to stay with friends and even family members in South Africa discovered that their invitations had been withdrawn, as a result of the communal pressure that had been brought to bear on their hosts.

Things got so intense, that protesters against the Rav and his community even took to the streets in South Africa - and all this occurred long before the Rav or his students had even entered the country.

But sadly, the pressure to boycott anyone from Shuvu Banim worked. When the buses bringing the Rav's followers from Zimbabwe arrived, they had no idea where to take the hundreds of men, women and children they were transporting, because all of the arrangements and plans that had been so carefully made had now been scuttled. So, the bus drivers decided to dump their passengers in one of Johannesburg's local parks.

The situation looked dire. These families were in the middle of a strange country, with Pesach just a couple of days away, and prominent figures in the South African Jewish community were warning everyone not to lift a finger to help them.

Most of the Jewish community in South Africa had no idea what was really going on. If the Rav was innocent, why were Israeli authorities going all out to blacken his name and cause him so much suffering? But if the Rav was guilty, then why had no arrest warrant been issued in Israel, and why were so many of the most

highly-respected religious leaders back in Israel publicly supporting him?

And when it came to the Rav's followers, it was even harder to figure out what to do. Even if the Rav was guilty of all he'd been accused of, God forbid, surely that didn't preclude the community from helping their fellow Jews to celebrate Pesach?! As the debate within the Johannesburg Jewish community raged on, Rabbi Yitzhak Vaknin, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg, contacted Rav Yitzchak Yosef, the current Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel and son of the late Rav Ovadia Yosef, to ask him whether the Jewish community in Johannesburg should be helping out the newcomers who'd arrived, despite the harsh decree that had been issued by this other senior Rabbi.

Rav Yosef replied that it was a *mitzvah* to help the Rav's followers with all of their needs. Next, the Rabbi asked Rav Yosef for his opinion of Rav Eliezer Berland, to which he replied, "If my father respected him, I trust my father's opinion³³." But, Rav Vaknin persisted, Rav Berland leads his community according to strange customs... To which Rav Yosef replied: "Every *tzaddik* has strange customs."

³³ Shortly before he passed away in October 2013, a few months after the accusations against Rav Berland had begun, Rav Ovadia Yosef's grandson came to ask about the rumors he'd heard about Rav Berland. Before he could speak, Rav Ovadia told him, to hold his tongue. "You are about to speak ill of an angelic man!" said Rav Ovadia. "Beware! Anyone who speaks ill of him is playing with fire!"



Important letter

By The Tzadik Rav Shalom Arush shlit”a

אדר ב' תשעו

Dear Friends and Brothers, citizens of Johannesburg and all South Africa,

Please hear the plea that ushers forth from the depths of my being. My blood churns within my heart over the persecution of my teacher and Rebbe, the Rav and Tsaddik, **Rav Eliezer Berland, Shlit”a**. For a number of years now my rav has been pursued and persecuted for having done no wrong, as the tsaddik accepts on himself the heavenly decree to go into exile for the sake of the entire Am Yisrael.

And now you have merited that my teacher and rav is with you. Fortunate is anyone who honors him, as befits honoring a tsaddik whose entire life is devoted to the holy Torah and service of Hashem. The level of my rav’s mesirat nefesh, his devotion and self sacrifice, would have been considered outstanding even in previous generations, and is way, way beyond anything we would expect of a person today. Anyone who takes part in aiding and hosting my teacher and Rebbe, **may he live and be will, will Biezrat Hashem merit long life, health, and financial blessing for himself and his family.**

I would also like to use this chance to warn in the name of our holy Torah, that no one dare insult or pain this tsaddik in any way, chas vishalom, either directly or indirectly. **This matter causes him and the members of his family great suffering, with no relief for their pain,** as we have unfortunately heard has happened, may Hashem have mercy.

I wish to end with a blessing that any person who merits to aid the tsaddik in any way will see nachat from his entire family.

May we all merit seeing the consolation of Zion, Amen.

 Shalom Arush

Once the Sephardic Rabbi in Johannesburg got this clear *psak* from the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, he tried to persuade his Ashkenazi peers to open their doors to the Rav’s students, and listen to Rav Yitzhak Yosef - but sadly, his words fell on mostly deaf ears.

This Sephardic Rabbi decided to do whatever he could to alleviate the suffering of the Rav’s followers, so he put out his own message

Yet amidst all the chaos, rumors and deceit, the small Sephardi Jewish community in Johannesburg, which accounts for just 5% of South African Jewry, together with some big-hearted members of the Ashkenazi community, decided to open up their homes to the Rav and his 150-plus followers. While some of the Rav's followers found themselves sleeping in living rooms and garages of these kindly Jews in Johannesburg, others weren't so lucky, and ended up sleeping on benches outside, or inside the main Sephardi synagogue, Keter Eliyahu, until the Sephardi community could figure out what to do with them.

In a true act of Jewish loving-kindness, the Sephardi Jewish community in Johannesburg arranged for a huge tent to be erected to accommodate all of the visitors, and organized hundreds of meals to be cooked for them over the Pesach holiday.

Later on, one of the Johannesburg Jews found the Rav's followers a permanent place where they could stay, eat, sleep and learn Torah. The Rav gave his blessing to start a fundraising drive in Israel to help pay the rent on the premises, and from that point on the situation started to improve a little. But South Africa was not an easy place to be, and relations with the local Ashkenazi Jewish community continued to be difficult.

Rav Berland said that the self-sacrifice of his students was sweetening many of the decrees hanging over *Am Yisrael*, but in the meantime, it had been a very chaotic, difficult introduction to South Africa for everyone involved.



Forty years ago, at the request of Rav Moshe Sternbuch, Rabbi Avihu Levy moved from Eretz Yisrael to Johannesburg to take up the position of Sephardic Chief Rabbi and establish a religious

framework for the city's Sephardic Jews. When Rabbi Levy first arrived in South Africa, there were barely enough Sephardi Jews to make a *minyán*. Some four decades later, there are now three large Sephardi synagogues in the city of Johannesburg.

Rabbi Levy knew Rav Berland from the time they spent together in the Volozhin *Yeshiva* as young men, and he was also very close to the late Rav Elazar Menachem Mann Shach, as well as the Baba Sali, the well-known Moroccan *tzaddik* who spent the last years of his life, and is buried, in the Israeli town of Netivot.

Rabbi Levy shared some of his previous experiences with Rav Berland, both in South Africa and back home in Eretz Yisrael:

“The last time the Rav came to the community, he was drawing people to come and hear him speak like a magnet,” he recalls. “I could see how people were literally drawn to him like a magnet from the moment he arrived, and they were trying to spend as much time as they could with him, praying and so on.

“People were also giving him notes, kvitlach and pidyon nefesh requests — one after another — until you could really see how he’d drawn them all closer, and then we started to pray the evening prayers. And what prayers they were! Mamash like the Yom Kippur davening, with the special melodies. For every prayer, the Rav was singing the niggunim that we only use for Yom Kippur — because every day for the Rav is like Yom Kippur.

“Everyone was looking at the Rav, and just waiting for the Rav. There was the feeling like we’d been visited by Moshe Rabbeinu or something, because people just couldn’t stop gazing at him.”

As well as visiting many of the Sephardi Jews in their homes, Rav Berland also occasionally prayed in the 'Keter Eliyahu' Sephardi synagogue. *"We had the merit of praying with the Rav on Pesach at the Keter Eliyahu synagogue," recalls Rabbi Levy. "After the services, the South African special forces showed up looking for the Rav, and started asking everyone if they'd seen him. So I went over to them and asked them what they wanted. They told me, 'This fellow is an illegal immigrant from Zimbabwe.'*

"So I told them, 'So what? What's the problem? You let him into the country with no problems, so now what do you want with this Rav?' I also told them, 'You better be very careful, because he's a tzaddik! If you manage to get even one small brachah from him, your life would completely change!"

The Rav and his followers also received a great deal of support and help from the smaller of the two local Chabad houses in Johannesburg, and especially from Rav Shlomie Kinn, a Chabadnik originally from London.

When the Rav's followers started to unexpectedly appear in Johannesburg just before Pesach, Rav Kinn moved heaven and earth to try to help them settle in, and to make sure they had everything they needed to properly celebrate the holiday. On the Shabbos after Pesach, he turned up in person with two huge containers of cholent, plus two huge platters of kugel, and started handing the food out to any of the Rav's followers who wanted it.

One of the Rav's students noticed how much unusual effort and self-sacrifice Rav Kinn was displaying to help the community, and was very impressed. After Shabbos, this student happened to meet

Rav Kinn again and he asked him why he was making such an effort to provide so much help and support to a group of strangers who weren't even from the same *Chassidic* group.

Rav Kinn told him:

“At the beginning of this year (5774), on the second night of Rosh Hashanah, I had a dream that subsequently returned many, many times. I dreamed exactly the same dream over and over again, and it only stopped a little while before Chanukah.

“In that dream, I saw that a group of chassidim, including men, women and children, suddenly landed in Johannesburg. In the dream, I didn't know which group of chassidim they belonged to, I just knew they weren't Chabad, because the men all had very long payos and were wearing the striped Jerusalem kaftans and shtreimels. In the dream, I saw that people weren't treating them nicely, and that they were surrounded by a lot of negativity and objections, particularly from the immigration officials in the government and the Rabbinic courts and so on, and there was a lot of confusion.

“But I saw that out of the middle of all this confusion, Moshiach would come!

“And I also saw that all these problems and issues had to happen as part of the birth pangs of Moshiach, and that these chassidim would have to come to Johannesburg, and all the other things would have to happen, before Moshiach came.

“Although all these things were only happening in a dream, each time I dreamt about what these strange chassidim would have to endure, it bothered me a lot, to the point that I didn’t want to have the dream anymore, and I didn’t want to think about it anymore. But the dream just kept on repeating itself, over and over again, until one day I promised that whenever those chassidim showed up, I would do everything in my power to help them, and also encourage other people to help them, too. From the day I said that, the dream didn’t return.”

Despite the very rocky start that the Rav experienced in South Africa, over time things appeared to quiet down, at least in some ways, as many of the Jewish residents of South Africa started to develop some appreciation and respect for the sage who’d temporarily joined their community. During this leg of his stay in South Africa, the Rav spent quite a bit of time with the Sephardi *kehillah*, teaching Torah and praying with the community.

Many people started to come to him for advice and to receive a blessing, including some non-Jews who were enamored with the Rav and wanted him to oversee their conversion to Judaism.

One of the Rav’s hosts in South Africa happened to have all of the halachic works of the late Rav Ovadia Yosef, and while the Rav was at his home, many members of the Sephardic community in Johannesburg started dropping in to ask the Rav halachic questions. Often, they were amazed when the Rav would start quoting whole sections of the *Yabia Omer* — the multi-volumed halachic work penned by Rav Ovadia — and also Rav Ovadia’s rulings, by heart.

The host recalled that on one occasion his son asked the Rav a halachic question, and just on that one topic alone the Rav gave his

questioner 165 sources to refer to. The Rav's host remarked, "I have an angel staying with me, and I'm not worthy of discussing him."

On another occasion, the Rav started to explain more of the spiritual reasons as to why he was in South Africa. According to the latitude and longitude measurements of the world, Jerusalem is found at 32 degrees of latitude, which is the heart of the world (the *gematria* for the Hebrew word for heart, לב, is 32). Meanwhile, the city of Uman — Rebbe Nachman's burial place in the Ukraine — is located at 48 degrees, because that is the place of the Tzaddik, which also represents the mind of the world (the *gematria* for mind, מח, is 48). And Johannesburg is located at 26 degrees latitude, which corresponds to the *gematria* of one of God's Names, the Name associated with *rachamim*, or mercy.

In the city of Johannesburg, the Rav continued, it was possible to cancel all of the judgments hanging over the whole world. The Rav stated that he wouldn't leave Johannesburg until the Iranians had been forced to give up their nuclear bomb. He told the local Chabad Rabbi there: "I promise you, the first place that Moshiach will come to is Johannesburg!"

Perhaps this explains why Rav Berland returned to South Africa again later on, despite the enormous dangers, difficulty and immense suffering he knew would be waiting for him there upon his return. Because while many people in Johannesburg were starting to appreciate the holiness and greatness of Rav Berland, others in Johannesburg continued to view him and his followers as a problem that needed to be "eliminated."



South Africa suffers from an alarming amount of violent crime, corruption is rife at all levels of public life and bribery is endemic.

In order to try to maintain some semblance of order in an increasingly violent and lawless country, the South African Police Service created a special division officially called the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, but commonly referred to as “the Hawks.”

The Hawks in South Africa operate above the law and answer to no one but themselves. Sadly, the organization is also rife with corruption, with the Hawks happy to sell themselves out as “hired guns” to whoever is willing to pay the price of their services.

Rav Berland’s enemies were very unhappy that despite their best efforts, the Rav would still be spending Pesach together with his students in Johannesburg. So, despite the fact that Rav Berland had been cleared to enter South Africa and that there was no arrest warrant against him, they decided to hire the Hawks to “take care” of the Rav in a different way.

The Rav arrived in South Africa on April 9, 2014, less than a week before Pesach began. A few days later, as the holiday of Pesach was in full swing, the Hawks started combing Johannesburg, searching for the Rav and generally harassing his students and followers.

The Rav himself was keenly aware of the danger the Hawks posed to him, and shortly after arriving in South Africa, he contacted a few of his more senior followers in Eretz Yisrael to tell them that he was being chased from place to place, and that the spiritual stakes were getting higher every day.

The Rav requested that his community should increase the number of *Tikkun Haklalis* they were saying on his behalf from seven repetitions a day, to 10 a day, to reflect the seriousness of the danger that both the Rav and *Am Yisrael* were facing.

In the meantime, the Rav, together with two of his closest students, took a room in a local hotel and tried to keep a very low profile. They didn't tell anyone else where they were staying, to try to stay under the Hawks' radar.

Rav Nachman Isaac was one of the people who stayed with the Rav in Johannesburg, and he takes up the story:

“The Rav’s stay in the hotel was kept very secret, but somehow, on the first day of Chol Hamoed Pesach, the secret was revealed, and the hotel was soon full of the Rav’s chassidim who wanted to come and pray Shacharis with him,” begins Rav Isaac.

As is the Rav’s way, he just went with the flow and accepted whatever Hashem wanted for him, even though logically it didn’t look like it was so good for him. He went out to the crowd and enthusiastically prayed Shacharis, Hallel and the Mussaf prayers with them.

The prayers continued unhurriedly until around 2 p.m. But before the Rav began the Mussaf prayers, he abruptly left the building together with me and one of the other gabbaim. We started walking in the direction of the fields and villages. Exactly 10 minutes after the Rav left the hotel, the Hawks arrived — but didn’t find him. Where they were until 2 p.m. in the afternoon — I have no idea! Throughout all the years they were chasing the Rav, they seemed to coordinate things perfectly with him — they’d always show up a few minutes after the Rav had already left.”

When one of the Shuvu Banim students started making preparations to go join the Rav, his host insisted that his guest take his Jaguar to drive over to the Rav, instead of hiring a taxi.

He told the student, “I want my car to have the merit of taking you to be with the Rav, and who knows? Maybe I’ll also have the merit that the Rav himself will travel in my car.” But driving an expensive Jaguar around an unfamiliar country like South Africa was the sort of big responsibility that the student just didn’t want.

He told his host that he wasn’t familiar with the roads or the city (they drive on the opposite side of the road in South Africa, the same as in the United Kingdom), and that he preferred to take a taxi — but his host insisted that he take the Jaguar, and wouldn’t take no for an answer. Just as the student was approaching the hotel, he discovered that the Rav was apparently waiting for him. The Rav came straight out of the foyer, got into the car, and told the student to start driving.

There are many famous stories about the Rav’s trips, but one thing that’s commonly known about the Rav is that he always seems to know the roads, wherever he happens to be in the world. On many occasions, he’s told his driver to take a left or right, or given him other directions, often without even raising his eyes from the *sefer* he happens to be reading from. So it was on this occasion too, as the Rav told his student exactly where to go.

After the Rav and his student had been driving for some time, the Rav suddenly told him to pull over. A second car appeared and the Rav got into it and drove off in it, again without any prior warning or planning. The whole time the Rav was tremendously happy and lively, telling jokes and singing joyous songs, as he switched from one car to the next.

In the meantime, once his followers realized that Rav Berland had left the hotel, word spread that he must have gone on to one of the local synagogues, where he’d been scheduled to give a *shiur* after

the morning services. So his followers hailed a number of taxis to take them to the synagogue where they thought he'd be. When they arrived, however, one of the members of the local Jewish community came out to warn them that the Hawks were already there, searching for the Rav.

The students responded that they were also searching for the Rav, so they went inside and were immediately accosted by a group of Hawks who were waiting for them.

The Hawks had a booklet with them that contained a number of different pictures of Rav Berland at different stages of his life, which they'd been given by the Rav's persecutors. Many of the Rav's more senior followers also have white hair, a beard and long side curls, so the Hawks checked each student against the book of pictures. When they saw Rav Eliyahu Succot, one of the senior Rabbis from the Shuvu Banim community, they thought he might be Rav Berland, and asked him for his passport.

Rav Succot wasn't carrying his passport with him, so the Hawks whisked him away and escorted him back to his lodgings to get it. While all this was going on, unbeknownst to the Hawks or anyone else in the hotel, the real Rav Berland was already far away.

Rav Isaac continues the story:

“We came to some village, and we managed to rent a room there, probably the shabbiest place the Rav stayed in, in all the years [of exile],” he says. “The room didn't even have a chair or a table; it just had two beds and that was it. Yet the Rav was full of spiritual illumination!

We hadn't eaten since the morning. The Rav said we should first pray Minchah — and he prayed with so much vitality! Then he asked us if we had a sefer. All we had was Likutey Moharan, which the Rav opened up and started learning with us so nicely — he'd translate and explain things to me, and I don't remember having any other study session quite like it with the Rav.

Suddenly, the Rav remembered that we hadn't eaten since the morning, and he said to me, 'You're probably feeling weak.' Then he continued, 'Today is the yahrtzeit of Haman. We'll fast in honor of Haman's yahrtzeit.' And then we continued learning. The Rav was enormously happy, and was so pleasant to be with, it's hard to even explain.

"A little later, the Rav went out to look for a pool, or something he could use as a mikvah, but he couldn't find anything. In the meantime, we decided to go for a walk in the fields, and the Rav started singing songs of praise and gratitude to Hashem — even though we hadn't eaten since the morning! When you're with the Rav, you feel so satisfied and pleasant that you don't need anything, you're just praying that the experience will continue for as long as possible.

That evening, we prayed Maariv, and because we were feeling a little stressed, my father-in-law, Rav Shlomo Chaim Reicher, started to dance, while I did a headstand and the Rav did a somersault (!). To cut a long story short, it was a very joyful atmosphere. Later on, we found something to eat, but I saw that the Rav himself still didn't eat. I realized he was fasting on purpose, to try and sweeten the judgments.

I could see that the Rav understood the seriousness of the situation, and he mentioned a couple of times that he was in galus. You could see he was greatly tormented by the situation — but that was still no excuse for sadness! Even if you're being tormented and tortured in exile in order to sweeten the judgments [over the Jewish people], that doesn't mean you can't still be happy.

This is exactly the opposite of how regular people react. When we get hit by some difficulty, our mood immediately becomes very black, but by the Rav we saw the opposite. Even when he hit a difficult patch and was going through Gehinnom, he stayed happy throughout his ordeal. In the morning, I saw that the Rav was weak from fasting, but we were still unable to get him to agree to eat something,” concludes Rav Isaac.

After this first attempt to capture the Rav failed, despite the huge amount of effort and manpower they'd put into the job, the Hawks gave an interview to a local journalist in South Africa where they were quoted as saying: “We're not sleeping at night, because all the time we're trying to work out how to catch Rabbi Berland.”



Despite the fact that this was one of the most difficult times of his exile, with the Rav having to move around every two days or so to avoid being captured by the Hawks, he didn't let it disrupt his learning schedule and other *avodas Hashem*.

On the penultimate day of Chol Hamoed Pesach, for example, the Rav learned Torah around the clock, only stopping at 10 p.m. because of a blackout. “I wanted to continue learning until

midnight,” the Rav lamented. “But I think God had other plans and wanted me to sing songs to Him instead.”

One of Rav Berland’s grandsons, Rav Dovid Rubinstein, recalls:

“When the Rav was in Johannesburg, most of the time he used the swimming pool that was next to the house as a mikvah. In the winter, the pools there are very cold, even a little frozen. The temperature of the water could be -3 degrees, even in the daytime, and at night even colder.

Some of us grandchildren used to try to go into the pool in the middle of the day, while there was some sun to warm us up, but we didn’t manage it. One of the grandsons went in once, but being in the frozen water weakened him for the rest of the week. But the Rav dipped in that pool regularly, as per his regular schedule — and not just once a day! He’d dip again and again.

And that’s not to say that the Rav didn’t feel the cold. Each time he came out of the mikvah he’d immediately get dressed to try to stop the cold from completely penetrating his bones. Sometimes, we’d have to wrap him in a couple of extra blankets to help him warm up again.

What we young people couldn’t manage to do in the middle of the day, the Rav was doing at his advanced age, even in the middle of the night.”

On another occasion while the Rav was staying in South Africa, his host once spotted him leaving the house in the middle of the night, so he rushed after him to ask him where he was going. The

Rav pointed to the forest that was close to where he was staying and indicated that he was going there to do some *hisbodedus*.

The host explained to the Rav that even in the daytime, people were scared to go to that forest, because it was full of poisonous snakes. The Rav reassured his host that nothing would happen, and that he didn't need to be afraid. He then invited his host to come with him.

The two of them entered the thick of the forest — and came face to face with an enormous, aggressive-looking elephant. Again, the Rav turned to his host and told him not to be afraid, because nothing would happen — and that's how it was.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that when a person is doing *hisbodedus*, he doesn't have to be scared of anything, because he's engaged in a *mitzvah*, and it's known that no harm comes to someone who is busy with a *mitzvah* — especially the *mitzvah* of talking to Hashem.

Another time, one of the huge thunderstorms that are common in South Africa erupted and enormous bolts of lightning started striking the ground all over the city. Usually when this happens, the locals huddle together in their homes and don't go out to any open areas while an electrical storm is raging.

As the lightning continued to strike, the Rav's host was shocked to see him getting ready to go outside to the local grove, where he'd speak to God for hours at a time. "The lightning in South Africa is dangerous," he told the Rav. "It can strike people who are walking around outside and kill them."

"Who made the lightning?" the Rav replied and told his host that the lightning and the spiritual work of the *tzaddikim* were directly

connected to each other. He also explained that Rebbe Nachman had written about thunder and lightning that they were sent to straighten out man's heart, which had become crooked from all of his sins. But if someone already had a straight, pure heart, they had nothing to fear from the lightning.

Around this time, a couple of students from Shuvu Banim went to visit the late Rav Eliezer Shlomo Schick, commonly known as the "Tzaddik of Yavniel," to ask him about Rav Berland. Rav Schick told them, "Rav Lazer is on a Heavenly mission. As soon as he's finished his mission, he'll return to Eretz Yisrael."



While his students and followers back in Israel were celebrating Lag BaOmer, Rav Berland was still trying to avoid being arrested by corrupt authorities in South Africa.

During this time, only very few of the Rav's followers succeeded in meeting with him. One of them recounts how the Rav arranged to meet with him in a parking lot, he got very upset and pained to see the Rav going through such difficulties and tribulations. The Rav could see how upset his student was, so he reminded him of the discussion in the *Gemara Shabbos* that recounted the story of when Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (Rashbi) left the cave where he'd been hiding out for 13 years to escape the Romans.

Rashbi was covered in terrible sores, as a result of sitting up to his neck in earth for 13 years. When one of his colleagues, Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair, saw the Torah sage in such a sorry state, he cried out: "Woe to me, that I should see you like this!" Rashbi replied, "I'm fortunate that you see me like this, because if you hadn't seen me like this, then I wouldn't be like 'this.'"

Rashbi was telling Rabbi Pinchas that he'd merited to achieve a huge spiritual level precisely because he'd spent so many years in solitary confinement, hiding out in a cave. He told Rabbi Pinchas that he should be happy to see him like "this," because now Rashbi was in a position to teach him much loftier spiritual ideas than he could have done beforehand.

Yes, he had suffered from some very difficult circumstances, physically. But spiritually, he was doing better than ever.

The first time the Rav went into hiding in South Africa, he spent a period of time in a place called Pecanwood, and even his closest followers didn't know where he'd gone. While he was spending this time in Pecanwood, the Rav willingly didn't eat or sleep for many days in a row, in a display of immense self-sacrifice.

The house where he was staying was filled with holy books from floor to ceiling. The Rav would dip in the *mikvah* at midnight, in water that was freezing cold, then go out to the most isolated places and fields to do hours upon hours of *hisbodedus*, in a sort of mini exile-within-exile. During this time, no one knew where he was.

But although the Rav was now out of touch and out of reach of his students, many of the men, women and children who'd traveled out to be with the Rav weren't about to give up so easily and simply return home.

They decided to wait for him to return. As the days passed, his students began to ask themselves what they'd done that their Rebbe had gone into hiding, and that they couldn't be in touch with him anymore. Their murmurings reached the ears of the Rav, and one night, he turned up unexpectedly at the Chabad House in Johannesburg, where many of his followers were staying.

From that time on, the Rav started praying with his followers again, learning with them, singing with them, and giving over a number of brilliant Torah lectures. At this time, many of the local Jewish residents of Johannesburg started to draw closer to this holy man from Israel who'd suddenly appeared in their community. Even the non-Jews in Johannesburg got wind of the fact that a "miracle-maker" from Israel was now staying locally, and before long they were lining up in large numbers to see the Rav. Many of them expressed an interest in converting to Judaism.

One of the people who'd accompanied the Rav in his exile was Rav Yosef Shor, an expert *mohel* from Jerusalem, who'd already performed tens of circumcisions over the past few months in all the different countries where the Rav had found himself. (The *mohel* was a much esteemed member of the Breslov community and was also the *baal tokei'ah*, the person who blew the *shofar* for the Rav's community, on Rosh Hashanah.)

As well as performing circumcisions for the residents of the different countries where the Rav stayed, many members of the Breslov community back in Israel would fly out specifically with their newborn babies, in order to have them circumcised by this *mohel* with the Rav acting as Sandek.

Unfortunately, not everyone was thrilled with the Rav's increasing local influence and some members of the Johannesburg community eyed these developments with growing concern. When word started getting around that a Rav from Israel was starting to perform circumcisions and weddings and prayer services outside the existing communal Jewish framework in Johannesburg, many people were disturbed by what was going on.

Panic set in that Rav Berland was going to somehow take over the Johannesburg Jewish community, and worse yet, turn everyone

into *chareidim*. Once again, the Hawks were asked to intervene to remove the “problem” of Rav Berland and his followers.

The Hawks’ second attempt at capturing Rav Berland occurred when one of the members of Shuvu Banim became engaged to the daughter of one of the more important families in South Africa. The couple booked a hall, hired the caterers, and asked Rav Berland if he would officiate at their wedding ceremony.

As the big day arrived, Tu B’Av 5774 (August 11, 2014), friends and family of the couple arrived from all four corners of the globe to come and celebrate the happy occasion with them. But then they hit a snag, Rav Berland had agreed to officiate, but on the very day of the wedding, he requested that the celebration be pushed off for a week. The groom and his family were more than happy to comply, as they had a lot of prior experience with the Rav, and they knew that he would never request such a thing without a good reason.

But the bride’s family, understandably, were very distressed about this turn of events. They’d invited friends and family from around the world to join them, and it was going to be very awkward for everyone, to say the least, should the ceremony be postponed for a week. The bride’s family conveyed their feelings to the Rav’s attendant, who told the Rav about the family’s concerns.

Rav Berland immediately nullified his request to postpone the ceremony, in view of the great distress it was causing the bride’s family. His attendant called the groom’s family and asked them to be ready at the wedding hall in half an hour’s time, because the Rav was on his way to officiate.

The hall quickly filled up with men, women and children from every corner of the world, representing every type of Jew imaginable.

A few minutes later, the Rav's attendant called back and requested that all the guests at the wedding should sing a particular Hebrew *niggun*, 'and all mouths shall praise You', until the Rav actually arrived.

The first time the Hawks had tried to catch the Rav had been during the Pesach holiday. On that occasion, the groom happened to be in the car that drove the Rav to safety out of Johannesburg, and the Rav had sung this same song at that time, too.

The Rav appeared, and after being joyfully greeted by the families of the bride and groom, the wedding guests started praying the evening prayers before the *chuppah* would take place. The Rav led the *davening* with his traditional beautiful *niggunim* and tunes, with the guests happily joining in.*

From the moment the Rav arrived, a distinguished-looking man stood right next to him. Everyone assumed that he must be one of the guests, even though no one actually knew who he was. Midway through the evening prayer service, this man suddenly grabbed the Rav's arms. At exactly the same moment 50 armed Hawks burst into the wedding hall, while an officer with a rifle took up a position on the roof.

The South African police were carrying assault rifles with lasers, all of which were pointed at the Rav and the other wedding guests. The police were pointing their guns and flashing their lasers across the whole hall as a feeling of mounting confusion and panic took hold of the wedding party.

People started shouting, women and children started crying hysterically, and some of the guests even fainted on the spot from the sheer terror of being dramatically confronted by 50 armed and

aggressive men. Still others were so scared, they ran straight out of the hall and didn't return.

The groom recounted afterwards:

“The whole place looked like a war zone, or something. I'd just returned from Israel, where the rockets were still falling [this story occurred during Operation Protective Edge], so I was still living with that reality. The first thing that I thought when I saw all these people with their drawn weapons was that Hamas was staging some sort of terrorist attack, God forbid. Without missing a beat, the Rav stared at the intruders, and it looked like they all just somehow froze in place.”

What happened next sounds like the script of an action movie, but this is how the situation actually played out. The yeshiva students and guests were sure that they were witnessing a terror attack, and that people were trying to harm or kill Rav Berland. Instinctively, they started fighting for their lives.

An eyewitness takes up the story:

“One of the Rav's students was standing near the infiltrator, and grabbed the man's hands so that he'd release Rav Berland. While this was happening, a commando officer came up from behind the Rav and grabbed him again. This time another student jumped on the commando's back, and miraculously pulled him to the floor.

A second commando then grabbed the Rav, so yet another student pushed his hand away. When the commando grabbed on to the Rav again, this student turned around and hit him so hard the commando flew

backwards onto two other commandos, knocking all three men to the ground.

Then another student came running towards the commandos, yelling at them and holding a boulder in his hand. The commandos pointed their guns at him, so another student kicked one of the commandos who again flew backwards, knocking down the two other commandments and some of the wedding guests.

Another commando put his gun against the head of a teenage student, so someone kicked the commando behind the knee, so he collapsed on to the floor. Another students also had a gun against his head, but he managed to kick the commando to the ground by himself. The head commando then yelled at the others to shoot, but for some reason no bullet was fired.”

One of the Rav Berland’s senior students was standing behind the Rav when the first commando was knocked to the ground, and he describes what happened next:

“I turned around to see what was happening, and I saw a group of armed commandos. One of the younger student came up to me and told me, ‘You are the Rav, ok?’, I said ‘ok’, and he grabbed me and we started running towards the exit. Immediately, one of the officers started pointing at me and yelled out, ‘that’s him! That’s him!’

Then a large number of officers jumped on me, two of them held on to me very tightly, and they dragged me to their car. All the women and children were yelling and crying hysterically, people were fainting and having

panick attacks. They took me and left the hall, convinced that they had the Rav in their hands.”

The Hawks only realized they had the wrong man much later, when they asked the student to bring them his passport. He was released, and a relative was called to pick him up from the police station and drive him back to the wedding.

Meanwhile, the Rav continued on with his evening prayers as though nothing was happening, still singing the same beautiful tune. One of his followers had been holding the Rav’s hand for comfort, and afterwards he reported that when the Hawks had suddenly burst into the room, the Rav’s pulse didn’t change in the slightest, despite the very dramatic, panic-stricken events that were unfolding around him. The Rav just took everything in stride and didn’t waver for a second.

Once things had calmed down a little, the Rav was escorted out through a back door to a waiting car, but he told the wedding party to continue dancing and singing, and that this evening would be considered as the formal engagement ceremony, while the wedding proper would take place on a different day.

As the reality sank in, the families began to realize the scope of the miracle they’d just been witness to.

As soon as Rav Berland got to his home, he was greeted by one of his followers, Y.N., who’d flown out from Miami to see him and request a *brachah*. This man asked the Rav if he’d be willing to give an impromptu *shiur* that he’d live-stream and record for the Miami Breslov Center.³⁴

³⁴ The Rav founded the Miami Breslov Center at the beginning of his exile, in 2013.

On the spot, despite the drama he'd just experienced, the Rav gave a beautiful *shiur* in English about Tu B'Av³⁵, and the importance of loving our fellow Jew. Rav Berland explained that Tu B'Av was the greatest day of the year in many ways, as on this day you could really see God face-to-face. He told everyone in Miami to dance until daybreak, and that if they did that, all the Jews in Miami would do *teshuvah* and come back to Hashem — together with the rest of *Am Yisrael*.



While the Rav was teaching his Torah, the Hawks back at the wedding hall were extremely irritated about their failed attempt at arresting the Rav, and started harassing the wedding guests to tell them where the Rav had disappeared to. One of them told Yaron Yamin: “Tell us where the Rav is staying, because in the end we are going to catch up with him, but next time we’re just going to shoot him and send him back to Israel in a coffin!” (God forbid!)

After this traumatic event, most of the Rav’s followers were sure that he would have to go into hiding again, while his attendants were trying to persuade the Rav that maybe South Africa had gotten too dangerous for him to stay any longer, and that he should move to a different country. But the Rav told them that they had nothing to be scared about, and that he was going to continue to carry on as usual.

He told them: “There are still some judgments here that need to be sweetened, and with Hashem’s help, we need to sweeten them.”

In the meantime, the wedding actually took place the following week in a private home in Johannesburg, exactly as the Rav had stated at the beginning of the story. The Hawks were badly stung

³⁵ The *shiur* can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/VWVCITPQRW>

by their second failed attempt to apprehend the Rav, so they resorted to fabricating some more stories and lies for the local press about how the “dangerous” criminal they were after had escaped “justice” once again, and circulated the Rav’s picture together with a false story of how there was an international arrest warrant out for the Rav.

They asked the local Jewish community to call them with any details of the Rav’s whereabouts, and also instructed all the hotels in the area to be on the lookout for a Jewish man with a white beard, who they described as being ‘armed and dangerous’. One hotel actually contacted them shortly afterwards, to report a suspicious character who appeared to fit the bill. The Hawks arrived soon afterwards, to find Moshe Levinson, another of the Rav’s senior students. But this time, they realized it was a case of mistaken identity, so they left him alone.

The Rav’s next brush with the Hawks came on the 14th of Elul 5774, (September 9th, 2014). Another member of the Johannesburg Jewish community who had drawn close to Rav Berland was getting married and the couple asked the Rav to officiate at their wedding on that date. The wedding itself was being held in one of the big homes in Johannesburg.

One of the Rav’s followers who attended the wedding explains what happened next:

“I got to the wedding a little beforehand, and from the moment the Rav stepped out of his car, he told me that I would be his chief bodyguard, because in a few more minutes some commandos were going to show up and were going to try to arrest him,” he explains. *“To be honest, I didn’t really pay a lot of attention to what the Rav was saying because I thought he was telling*

me 'milah deshtusa' and jokes, as is his way. I put the conversation completely out of my mind.

Everyone went inside and the Rav officiated at the wedding, and then one of the locals asked the Rav to lead the congregation in saying the Tikkun Haklali. After that, we said Kiddush Levanah, the blessing on the new moon, and the Rav began to sing wedding zemiros, and to dance. He also began singing some Uman songs, and the atmosphere was very joyous and happy.

The dancing continued for around half an hour, until the Rav suddenly stopped what he was doing and decided to leave. The Rav's car was parked on the sidewalk on the road outside, and he entered the car and waved good-bye to us. Just as the Rav's driver pulled away, a huge van arrived and pulled up, effectively blocking the Rav's car, with another small car behind it. Together, these two vehicles tried to block in the Rav's car, and then, all of a sudden, they switched on their sirens."

"I really felt like I was in a dream," continues the wedding guest. "I ran over to where the police vehicles were parked and stood in their way, to try to stop them from moving. Meanwhile, the Rav's driver was trying to reverse away from the roadblock. A soldier suddenly got out of the van and pointed a gun at me, while the small car bypassed the van and started chasing after the Rav's car. All the vehicles were still driving in reverse, because that particular road was very narrow.

Then the van also bypassed me and started reversing after the Rav. Somehow, the Rav's driver managed to turn the car around by driving up on the pavement,

and he escaped. The Hawks still tried to chase after him, but eventually they gave up. That's when it hit me what the Rav had said earlier, that I would end up being his chief bodyguard."

The chase didn't end there. The Hawks tried to track down the Rav using a helicopter, plus tens of vehicles, but in the end the Rav experienced a number of miracles that enabled him to return safely to where he was staying.

When one of the bystanders at the wedding heard the chief commando ask one of his junior commandos why he hadn't just shot Rav Berland in cold blood and finish things that way, he realized that the Rav's life was in serious danger as long as he stayed in South Africa.

It's worth remembering that all of this was going on despite the fact that the Hawks had no arrest warrant and no legal justification for detaining the Rav in the first place. So to cover their tracks, the Hawks started giving more interviews to South African journalists describing this elderly *tzaddik* as a very dangerous criminal who was endangering lives by driving on the sidewalk and so forth, and asking the public to help them catch this "menace to society."

The Rav's followers started to fear that the situation was becoming too dangerous, and that there was a serious risk that the Rav may not make it through in one piece. Yet the Rav himself continued to act with his characteristic self-composure, *emuna*, and unshakable trust in Hashem.

One morning shortly after the Hawks' third failed attempt to capture the Rav, a few of Rav Berland's followers were in the central *mikvah* in Johannesburg when a Satmar *chassid* entered the

building. He asked the other men there if Rav Berland came to this *mikvah*.

The Satmar *chassid* explained that he'd come to Johannesburg on business, and that he'd heard about the Rav and was interested in seeing him and asking him for a blessing. The Rav's followers explained that Rav Berland never came to that *mikvah*, and that even when he'd been going out regularly he'd been using a *mikvah* in a private house that was an hour's drive away.

As they were leaving the *mikvah*, they were shocked to see Rav Berland standing outside the building, about to enter it. One of the Rav's followers happened to have a *shofar* in his *tefillin* bag, as it was Elul, and the Rav motioned to him and asked him to blow his *shofar*.

The follower was a little confused by the request and didn't really know what to do. After all, the whole country was currently looking for the Rav, and if he blew the *shofar* in such a central place, and at such a busy time of the morning when everyone was out and about, it would certainly draw the attention of a lot of people.

The Rav said to him, "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid!"

So the follower took out his *shofar* and blew it loudly a few times, as he'd been asked to do. The Rav's attendants told the followers that after he went to the *mikvah*, the Rav was going to pray in the nearby Sephardi synagogue, Keter Eliyahu. His followers found this incredible, as Keter Eliyahu was the central shul of Johannesburg, and a very public place for the Rav to be praying in.

The Rav's followers went on ahead to the Keter Eliyahu synagogue, and as they feared would be the case, they saw a number

of the Hawks' police vehicles waiting outside. However, once the *Shacharis* service actually began, the Hawks left.

Suddenly, Rav Berland entered the shul wrapped in his customary *tallis* and *tefillin*, sitting down as though he was a regular participant in the service. When the synagogue's Rabbi saw Rav Berland come in, he was pretty shocked. He immediately got up and asked Rav Berland to sit in his place at the front of the *shul*, as a sign of respect.

At the reading of the Torah, the Rav was given an *aliyah*. Word quickly spread that the Rav was in the shul, and before long many of the Rav's students arrived to come and see him. After the *davening*, the Rav told his students before he left that he would be coming again tomorrow.

It was a miracle that the Rav had come and gone from the shul without any problems with the Hawks, and that the Hawks had left literally seconds before the Rav arrived. But how could the Rav come tomorrow, when the Hawks would certainly know that he'd been in the synagogue today, and would be sure to be waiting for him?

But the following day, Hashem made another miracle and the Rav again arrived for the morning prayers undisturbed by the Hawks.

At the same time that the Rav's persecutors were continuing their "war" against Rav Berland in South Africa, back in Israel the war against the Torah world and the yeshivos was also heating up, as the government started to implement its plans to forcibly draft *yeshiva* boys into the IDF.

But in the middle of all this, God interrupted the persecution of the Torah scholars inside and outside of Israel with a war of a different kind.

THE GENERATION THAT MOSHIACH COMES IN

The *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* 97 describes the way the generation will look at the time that Moshiach comes in the following words: “In the generation when ben Dovid [Moshiach] will come, *talmidei chachamim* will be few in number, and the rest — their eyes will be weak with worry and groaning. And much suffering and harsh decrees will be renewed [upon the generation]. Before the first [problem] has ended, the second one will be hurrying to come.”

The Maharsha explains that when it says that the *talmidei chachamim* will be few in number, it means that men of truth will go and hide in the wilderness, on account of the evil generation. He also explains that the *tzaddik* will be regarded as a fool and a wild man in the eyes of the people. The Maharsha explains that the reference to their eyes being weak with worry and groaning is referring to the people who are left behind, without a *tzaddik* and without a leader.

Rashi explains that the last part of the verse describing the troubles and problems means that before the last sorrow has passed, the next will already arrive. And really, the concealment of the *tzaddik* is directly connected to the burgeoning problems, because when the *tzaddikim* hide and flee from us, it's only to diminish the additional decrees and problems that would otherwise befall *Am Yisrael*.

THE THREE MARTYRS AND WAR: SUMMER 2014

In a conversation with his students in Johannesburg, the Rav said, “Everything that we’re doing here is only to sweeten the judgments hanging over *Am Yisrael*.” In the *Gemara Sukkah* 45, it’s written that the main reason why Rashbi fled and hid in the cave was to free the entire world from judgment. Rashbi himself said: “I’m able to save the entire world from judgment, from the day I was created until now. And if my son Eliezer was with me, then it would have been from the creation of the world until today.”

Strangely, the *Gemara* refers to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s son as “Eliezer,” when his name was “Elazar.” In *Sanhedrin* 98, the *Gemara* again writes “Eliezer” instead of Elazar when talking about the signs of the *geulah*, in the passage where it says: “Rabbi Eliezer says that there is no clearer sign of the *geulah* than the fact that before the *geulah* there will be no peace for the *tzaddikim*, even though the verse says about them: ‘Much peace to those who love Your Torah.’”

Why does there have to be so much suffering in the world that even the *tzaddikim* need to suffer in order to reduce the amount of suffering on the rest of the people? It’s because the *geulah* is likened to the birth process, and in a birth, the final moments are the most difficult and the woman giving birth cries out in great distress.

So too with the birth pangs of Moshiach, the final moments are the most painful, and this itself is a sign that the end is coming. Hashem is just waiting for us to cry out, and to accept upon ourselves to return to Him in complete *teshuvah*.

On the evening of June 12, 2014, three young men, Naftali Frankel, 16; Gilad Sha'ar, 16; and Eyal Yifrach, 19, were picked up and kidnapped by Arab terrorists from the hitchhiking post in Gush Etzion.

For weeks, the Jewish nation was gripped with a mounting sense of dread over the fate of these three young men — but also with a stronger sense of unity than had been evident for many long years. All the arguments over religion and politics took a back seat as Israel's citizens buried their differences and prayed together that the three young men would be found, alive, and returned to their families.

Different communities all over the country organized events in the merit of finding these three boys alive— so many books of *Tehillim* were recited, so many challahs were baked, so many special services were arranged in local synagogues, and many other things besides. But after weeks of searching, the teenagers' bodies were finally tracked down to a shallow grave in the Arab town of Halhul, close to Chevron, on June 30, 2014.

They'd been brutally murdered very shortly after being picked up from the side of the road in Gush Etzion. Less than 48 hours after they were found, on July 2, 2014, Israel found itself back at war, as Arab riots in Jerusalem and other locations were joined by hundreds of rockets which started to rain down on the country from the Gaza Strip.

Thousands of miles away in South Africa, Rav Berland appeared to have known the fate of the three missing teens long before their remains were discovered by the army. On Thursday, June 19, 2014, ten days before the boys' bodies were discovered and officially identified, he made a statement that sounded eerily like an eulogy, about the three missing teens:

“The three kidnapped boys were³⁶ sparks of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, *ibburim* of the Seven Shepherds and the four Holy Matriarchs. They came to save *Am Yisrael*, and to cancel the terrible decrees. *Am Yisrael* was deteriorating spiritually from moment to moment, and from second to second, and nobody could stop this from occurring.

These three young men took it upon themselves to be Hashem's representatives, to be the Nation of Israel's representatives, in front of the *Kisei Hakavod*, to cancel all of the terrible decrees that had been made against us, and particularly the spiritual holocaust that has been unleashed against us, particularly in Eretz Yisrael.

All they are asking from us now is to wake up. To wake up and go to the *mikvah* every day; to wake up and start keeping Shabbos; and to stop speaking *lashon hara*; and to uproot all the baseless hatred. The next Temple is only going to be built with baseless love... with *achdus*. Now is the moment for all of *Am Yisrael* to return to being like ‘a single man with a single heart,’ like it was at *Mattan Torah*... *Am Yisrael*, if there's even just one, single Jew at the end of the world who's suffering, then we all feel it. This people is one ‘body,’ with one heart.”

The Rav then requested that everyone without exception should fast the following day, Friday, June 20, 2014, between 4:20 a.m.

³⁶ By using the past tense “were” the Rav made it clear that they were no longer with us.

and 6:50 p.m., the hour before halachic sunset, and requested that everyone should take an additional *mitzvah* upon themselves, too, and in this merit the [bodies of the] boys would be found.

Despite the short notice and the difficult timing of fasting on Erev Shabbos, more than 8,000 people all over the world registered to fast with Shuvu Banim, including whole families who until that moment hadn't been keeping Torah and *mitzvos*.

The day of the fast, the Rav was sitting with one of his students when he asked him to bring him one of the holy books that had been written by the Arizal. He remarked that in the merit of the Arizal, he would be able to reveal where the three boys were. He then asked the student to bring him a map of the Chevron area, so that the Rav could show him exactly where they were — but in South Africa, they didn't have such a map on hand. But the Rav was still able to show them that they were somewhere in the Chevron region.

All this occurred around 10 days before the remains of the boys were ultimately found in the village of Chalhul, near Hevron.

From the moment the news of the kidnapping broke, the Rav had taken it upon himself to fast from sunrise to sunset — and sometimes even whole nights and days. He spent the whole time hidden away in his home in South Africa, devoting himself to learning Torah and performing his other *avodas Hashem*. He also encouraged any of his students who could manage it to fast with him, from sunrise to sunset, every day. And so it continued for 18 long, painful days.

The sister of one of the three boys contacted the Rav on Sunday June 23, 2014, a week before the army finally found the bodies, and asked for a *brachah* that they should find the boys. The Rav

told her that she should arrange for 1,000 people to fast for an entire week, until the following Monday, and then they would see miracles. Many people fasted, as requested, and as a result of their fasting and all the other prayers that were said, the bodies were indeed discovered on the following Monday, June 30, 2014. The boys were brought home to be given a Jewish burial, and to be properly mourned by their families.

Throughout this period of time, the Israeli army was out in full force, looking for clues as to where the boys were. The Rav remarked to a student that the boys would be found soon — but not because of all the army's efforts. This is what actually happened. The boys were ultimately found by a couple of locals who'd volunteered to help with the search effort.

After the bodies were recovered, the Rav said that the three kidnapped martyrs had been very high souls, of a type that hadn't been seen for many generations already, and that they'd only come down to the world in order to die *al kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify God's Name. They were *tzaddikim* who had fulfilled the whole Torah, except for the commandment to die sanctifying God's Name. Hence, they returned to the world just to complete this *mitzvah*.

The Rav told his followers that just before his bar mitzvah three years earlier, one of the boys, Gilad Sha'ar, had told his parents that he'd like to get a *brachah* from Rav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, the Rav of Migdal Ha'emek, as his bar mitzvah present. His parents took him to see the Rav, and young Gilad asked the Rav to bless him that he should fulfill the *mitzvah* of sanctifying God's Name.

Rav Grossman later said that you could see that even then, Gilad knew that his whole purpose in this world was to sanctify God's Name by dying *al kiddush Hashem*.

After the funeral, Rav Berland told his students: *“There haven’t been neshamos like this in the world since the beginning of time... It would take many hours to explain who these neshamos really were, who came down to protect us. On exactly the same day that these three boys were kidnapped, [our enemies] wanted to fire a nuclear bomb at us, and who knows how many people they would have killed? ... If not for those three boys, everyone would have been erased, turned into dust. See how Hashem was arranging everything! These three boys, from their bar mitzvah, were asking Hashem to show them how to sanctify His Name, how to die al kiddush Hashem... We’re here for a reason. We need to wake up.”*

Rav Chaim Kanievsky eulogized the three boys as follows: *“They had a very big merit; thousands of people strengthened themselves [spiritually] because of them.”* Rav Elazar Mordechai Menser added that the main reason for the Jewish people’s exile was rooted in the sin of *sinas chinam*, or baseless hatred. *The three boys had sacrificed themselves to try to fix this sin, and to bring the redemption closer. And they left a lasting legacy of renewed unity, love and spiritual yearning in their stead.”*



The kidnappings led to the start of an all-out war with Gaza, as the Arabs started bombarding the country with rockets. The Israeli government initially didn’t repond militarily, but on July 2, 2014, Operation Protective Edge began, to try to stop the rocket attacks.

Four days before the start of Operation Protective Edge, the Rav insisted on dipping in a natural *mikvah* outside, despite the fact that the outside temperature was -4 Celsius and the water was freezing cold. After reciting his customary *Tikkun Chatzos*, the Rav then spent four hours singing the same *niggun* “*Avinu Malkeinu - Our Father and King have mercy and us and save us*

for we have no good deeds.” When one of his followers asked him why he was deviating from his usual schedule, the Rav replied that there were many judgments hanging over the people of Israel, so he’d been busy asking God to have mercy on the nation of Israel.

Then, he told his follower: **“Publicize the following statement in my name: Any soldier who’s killed now, I guarantee that he’ll go straight to *Gan Eden*.”**

At the time, there’d been a debate raging in Israel over the spiritual fate of soldiers killed in combat. A film had recently come out in Israel called ‘A Place in Heaven’, which had tackled the subject, and a number of high-profile news stories were being written about a fallen soldier who had reportedly been contacted during a séance (which is completely forbidden according to Jewish law). The journalists reported that the spirit of this fallen soldier had stated that there were no guarantees that IDF soldiers who fell in combat would automatically get to *Gan Eden*.

At this crucial time, four days before thousands of Israeli soldiers would be risking their lives fighting in Gaza, Rav Berland made it crystal clear that he would stand as a guarantor that any soldier killed in combat would indeed go straight to *Gan Eden*. But in the meantime, there was still no public sign that the Israeli Government was going to move against the terrorists in Gaza.

Two days before Operation Protective Edge finally began, the Rav spoke out against the Israeli government and its weak leadership in the face of Israel’s enemies. “Every day, a hundred rockets are being fired at every part of the country, and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu isn’t doing anything about it,” he said³⁷. “He should resign!”

³⁷ <http://www.bhol.co.il/news/759136>

The Rav continued:

“Israel’s leaders have lost the plot. People are being killed, people are being murdered and no one is shocked. The kidnapped boys called the police, and no one took any notice at all. If they would have sent a few police cars there immediately, they would have apprehended the terrorists with their hostages that night. What kind of a police force is this? What kind of an army is this?!”

Why isn’t it possible to liquidate all the head terrorists in Gaza, and to capture all their stockpiles of weapons and rocket arsenals? Netanyahu chose to form a government with Yair Lapid³⁸, whose only real concern is that another chareidi baby with payos will be born, and who might get a subsidized cup of milk to drink. And the whole country is being thrown into an uproar solely because a chareidi baby might get a cup of milk. At the same time, they’re still paying social security payments to Arab terrorists, and paying compensation to the families of Arab terrorists who killed themselves in suicide bombing attacks³⁹.

They want to recruit the charedim to the army! Which army?! This army abandons its soldiers! That’s not how

³⁸ As Finance Minister, Yair Lapid was responsible for punitively cutting funding to the Torah-observant world and its institutions that same year.

³⁹ Israeli law states that the family of anyone dying in a terrorist attack gets compensated with a monthly stipend. The law does not differentiate between the families of victims and the families of the terrorists themselves. Terrorists take advantage of this law, and it’s become another incentive for suicide bombers to kill themselves, as they know that their families will be taken care of for the rest of their lives.

the IDF [is meant to behave.] This army is protecting the terrorists!”

The Rav continued that it was now common knowledge that the Hamas had used all the trucks and concrete mixers that they'd been given by Israel to develop the infrastructure in Gaza to build terrorist tunnels into Israel instead, and called for a change in Israel's leadership. A few days after the Rav publicly said this, a poll showed that 70 percent of Israelis agreed and were also disappointed with the Government's lack of leadership, when it came to dealing with the terrorists.

Shortly after the Rav's statement, even members of Netanyahu's own party started publicly heckling him in the Knesset and calling for him to resign, which promptly led to the start of Operation Protective Edge, as Netanyahu scrambled to keep his job. Rav Berland's statement was widely covered in the Israeli press and met with a lot of public approval.

As Operation Protective Edge raged on with no end in sight, on July 14, 2014, the Rav spoke on the phone with the kabbalist Rav Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern, back in Israel, to commemorate the *yahrtzeit* of Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin on 22 Tammuz 5774 (July 19, 2014).

The Rav told Rav Morgenstern:

“Now, we will see big miracles, and no Jew will be killed anymore. I believe in you, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir; the tzaddikim have the power to ensure that no Jew will be killed anymore, and that people will do teshuvah because of the war.

That's how it was in 1973, in the Yom Kippur War, that the Jews did teshuvah, and all the baalei teshuvah came from 1973. Now, in this war, all the Jews will also do real teshuvah. Once, wars meant that we would just kill some terrorists. Now, they are firing rockets at us, and they have mountains of rockets without number, and they are building tunnels underneath Israel.

Now it's time to go pray at the Kotel and Chevron and at Rashbi's kever, and to storm the heavens with our prayers, that no Jew will get killed. No Jew! No Jew! No Jew!

The most important thing is to stop the war, and the rockets that are falling every day. We have to stop it. More than 20 Jews were killed in this war... They sacrificed themselves for Am Yisrael, and even though they weren't mitzvah-observant, and they didn't keep Shabbos, and they eat on Yom Kippur and don't fast, the secular world really doesn't know any better.

The Jews that are walking into the fire now, they're sacrificing themselves al kiddush Hashem, they're walking into the fire. And we don't have any idea who is sacrificing themselves for Am Yisrael.

They could have dropped out of the army and done other things, but they are going with all of their enthusiasm, simply in order to save Jewish lives. And now we need to pray to stop the war.”

About a month after rockets started raining down on Eretz Yisrael, one of his followers contacted Rav Berland to ask him if he had any words of wisdom, or *chizuk*, to share about the rocket attacks.

The Rav said the following: “Tell everyone not to be afraid, and not to start running away from one city to the next. As soon as the siren sounds, take your *Tikkun Haklali* out of your pocket and start to read it slowly, word by word, and if you do this, you have nothing more to worry about, and there will be miracles, with God’s help, and the rocket won’t fall anywhere near you.”

Despite the rockets, the citizens of Israel attempted to continue on with life as usual. They didn’t cancel their weddings or other celebrations and *simchos*, and neither did the Rav’s immediate family. At one such *simchah*, Rav Berland’s elderly sister, a resident of the northern Israel city of Haifa, traveled to celebrate the happy occasion. She recounted what had happened to her during the Second Lebanon War, when Haifa and the North were under frequent rocket attack from the Hezbollah strongholds just over the Lebanese border for months.

Things got so bad that at one point the Rav’s sister, Leah, asked her brother whether she should leave the city and move somewhere a bit quieter, in the center of the country. The Rav replied that even though more rockets would fall on Haifa, none of them would fall anywhere near her, and she should stay home.

At that time, the Rav sent many of his students up North to help their fellow Jews maintain their faith and strengthen their connection to God, and he promised them that no harm would befall them. Indeed, one of the people who went up North at the Rav’s bidding recalls how he and his companions literally heard rockets pass right over their heads, but they never even got so much as a scratch when they exploded.

Whatever type of terror the Arabs were engaged in, the Rav’s message was always the same: *“Terrorists are created from our sins! God is simply dressing up our sins in the guise of a terrorist.*

The terrorists don't have permission to harm anyone who is doing teshuvah. It's only if we're not doing teshuvah that the terrorists are given permission to harm us. And when we recite the Tikkun Haklali that neutralizes the sins that created the terrorist."

The Rav continued that *Am Yisrael* was engaged in so many terrible sins, that the nation was creating these terrible terrorists, and that if things continued this way, the sins would transform into terrible fire and pillars of smoke — which exactly described the situation in Israel during the rocket attacks.

But the Rav reassured his students that the sins — and the terror they were dressed up in — could be destroyed at their roots by *Am Yisrael* doing *teshuvah*. That's why the Rav encouraged everyone to recite the *Tikkun Haklali*⁴⁰ as much as possible — at least once a day, and three times for the members of his community and even up to 10 times a day, for anyone who was able.

During Operation Protective Edge, the Rav told his students to publicize the *segulah* of reciting the *Tikkun Haklali* to as many people as possible and revealed that if 10,000 people would start to regularly recite the *Tikkun Haklali* every day, no more Jews would be killed in the current war.



As the rockets from Gaza continued to rain down on Eretz Yisrael, reaching further and further into the central, heavily populated parts of the country, the Rav wrote a prayer for *Am Yisrael* where he made it clear that the only option left was to rely on Hashem. With the rocket fire continuing unabated, and the international

⁴⁰ In Likutey Moharan II:73, Rebbe Nachman teaches that reciting *Tehillim* opens up the paths of true repentance for a person. The *Tikkun Haklali* consists of ten chapters of *Tehillim*.

community firmly against the Israeli government's attempts to subdue the Hamas terrorists in Gaza militarily, it was becoming clearer and clearer that there was no way the State of Israel could really "win."

Many years before this latest conflict with the Arabs, the Rav had stated that it was impossible to rely on the IDF to protect Israel from its enemies, because even when they started military operations, they were no longer capable of carrying them through to the end.

By the end of June 2014, the Rav's words, uttered many decades before, appeared to ring more true by the day: "There is no one to rely on, except Hashem! The government can't help anyone, even the army can't protect us anymore!" The only thing the politicians had managed to do, with their misguided attempts to achieve "peace" with the Palestinians, was to make things a whole lot worse for the Jewish citizens of Israel.

Who armed the Palestinians in the first place and gave them weapons? Who gave them Gush Katif, which they quickly turned into a launchpad for the most sophisticated missiles and rockets, all aimed at Israel's largest cities? Who was sending Jewish soldiers into immensely dangerous combat situations instead of bombing the enemy from the air, solely to appease the international community?

Without *daas Torah*, the wisdom of Torah, to guide their military and political decisions, the politicians were bumbling from one security disaster to another.

As more and more rockets were fired into the heart of Israel, reaching cities that hadn't heard a siren for decades, a new dilemma arose in many yeshivos. Should the students be encouraged

to run to the security room when the siren went off, or should they stay where they were and continuing learn Torah? Some *Roshei Yeshiva* decided that learning Torah was truly the best defense against the rockets and told their students to stay put and learn hard when the sirens went off.

Some concerned parents sought the advice of Rav Chaim Kanievsky about whether that was truly the best course of action, and Rav Kanievsky told them, “The Torah protects and leads to success. It’s not the rocket that kills people, it’s the sin that kills people.⁴¹”

On a separate occasion, Rav Kanievsky was asked how it was possible that dangerous debris from the rockets was falling into Bnei Brak, when the Chazon Ish had guaranteed that Bnei Brak would be safe and protected, because of the amount of Torah being learned there. Rav Kanievsky replied, “He wasn’t talking about a Bnei Brak where people have i-Phones and internet access.”

The *tzaddikim* were telling the Jews in Israel at this time that if they started doing what God wanted from them, God Himself would take care of our enemies. Thousands of rockets had fallen on Israel, yet there had been so many miracles that the number of people who had been killed and wounded was negligible. In contrast, one rocket from Gaza that was directed at Israel had fallen on Egypt by mistake — and it had killed seven people and wounded roughly a hundred more. By contrast, the rockets fired at Israel either seemed to disappear in mid-air or landed on an empty patch of ground.

Speaking in South Africa, Rav Berland said, “Israel is protected! Everything is protected! Even though we see rockets and so forth,

⁴¹ A play on words from a famous saying from the *Gemara* that it’s not the bite of a snake that kills, but the sin that kills.

it's all just sparks of the Third Temple, starting to come down from Heaven.” He also told Rav Tzanani in a phone call before Shabbos Chazon (Friday, August 1, 2014) that Israel is the safest place in the world, and that Rebbe Nachman was fighting on behalf of the soldiers in Gaza.

On August 25, 2014, the Hamas terrorists and the Israeli government finally agreed to a cease-fire that would last for 30 days. In its terms of acceptance, the terrorists stated that if the Israeli government didn't reopen the borders of the Gaza Strip in the interim, the war would resume in another 30 days, on September 25th.

In the meantime, the world rushed to help the Palestinians by pouring many millions of dollars into the terrorists' bank accounts. Official diplomatic accounts stated that the money was to ward off the Palestinians' self-inflicted humanitarian crisis, but the truth was far more sinister. The nations of the world wanted the Palestinians re-armed and the terrorists' supply of rockets restocked, and the 30-day truce gave them ample time to accomplish these aims. They wanted the terrorists' army, including hundreds of suicide bombers, to be ready to fight.

The 30-day truce would end precisely on Rosh Hashanah 5775 — the seventh year the *Gemara* had singled out for “war.”



One direct miracle that came about as a result of the terrible kidnapping of the three boys was the discovery of a new network of underground tunnels that the Hamas terrorists had built, encroaching well past the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael.

As a result of the kidnapping and the subsequent “mini-war” that followed, Hamas's secret plans to use the tunnels to launch a

number of surprise, murderous raids on Jewish towns around the Gaza periphery and to channel a large number of Arab terrorists into the Israeli heartland was discovered and foiled.

The Hamas leadership had planned to launch their murderous attacks on the first day of the Jewish new year, Rosh Hashanah 5775 (September 25, 2014) — the seventh year, the *Shemittah* year, as it's written in the *Gemara*, “In the seventh [year] there will be wars.” But the almost unprecedented unity, *teshuvah* and prayers that had been sparked by the boys' kidnapping turned everything around. As a result, the war with the Arabs started earlier than they'd planned, and the tunnels were discovered before they could be used.

But the miracles didn't stop there. It's recorded that more than 4,000 rockets fell on Eretz Yisrael throughout the duration of Operation Protective Edge, yet just eight Israelis were directly killed by the rocket fire, and just another 60 injured over the entire two-month course of the war.

While the government and military were quick to pat themselves on the back for deploying the Iron Dome missile defense system, the Hamas terrorists were much more realistic in their assessment of why so few of their rockets were hitting their targets in Israel, and landing in open fields. One senior Hamas operative complained in a newspaper interview entitled: “Their God changes the path of our rockets in mid-air⁴² that the terrorists were extremely careful to program the rockets correctly, and were using the latest technology, but that God was saving the Jews.

There's a *midrash* written about the final wars that will take place before Moshiach comes, where it says that even the non-Jews will

⁴² <https://www.wnd.com/2014/07/their-god-changes-path-of-rockets-in-mid-air/>

start to acknowledge that the reason they were unable to destroy the Jewish nation throughout history was only because God was protecting us. The *midrash* continues that once the enemies of Israel realize this, they will turn their attention to trying to fight God Himself — and as soon as they do that, God will deal with them personally.

Rav Berland gave an additional explanation for the miracles occurring with the rockets during Operation Protective Edge. He said, “*The strength of a simple Jew is such that when he lays tefillin, and he winds the strap around his hand, in that same second a miracle is performed and a rocket winds around in a different direction and ends up landing in an open space. The ‘strap’ of the tefillin is protecting us from the ‘Strip’ of Gaza.*”

IN THE SIXTH YEAR, VOICES; IN THE SEVENTH YEAR, WAR

In the Gemara (Sanhedrin 97a) it describes the pre-Messianic era as follows:

“It’s taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Yehuda says, ‘In the generation when ben Dovid [i.e., the Moshiach] comes, the meeting place will be used for debauchery; the Galilee will be laid to waste; and the Gavlan will be desolate. The border people will wander from city to city and not be shown favor. The wisdom of the scribes will become putrid, and those who fear sin will be despised. The generation will have the face of a dog, and the truth will be absent.

As it’s stated, ‘Truth will be missing, and the person who flees from evil will seem like a crazy person.’

There will be eating, drinking and rejoicing, and the knowledge of Torah will return to those who study it. In the sixth year there will be voices. In the seventh year there will be wars. And in Motzoei Sheviis [the year after the seventh, or Shemittah, year] ben Dovid will come.”

In *Maseches Sanhedrin* (98a) the Sages discuss the coming of Moshiach and refer to the things that will have to happen in the world before he arrives. In that passage, it states: “Rabbi Elazar says, “There is also no clearer indication of the End than this... and to him that leaves or enters there was no peace from the adversary.”” The *Gemara* then goes on to interpret this statement as

meaning: “Even Torah scholars, concerning whom it is written that they shall enjoy peace, as it is written, ‘There is abundant peace for the lovers of Your Torah,’ will have no peace from the adversary.”

At the time when the Rav went into exile, many Torah scholars and religious leaders were being persecuted in a number of different ways: Some were being falsely accused and put into prison, some were being physically attacked and abused, a large number of the Hebrew-speaking *kollelim* and *yeshivos* (that didn’t have wealthy backers from outside of Israel supporting them) effectively closed their doors as a result of the government’s swinging budget cuts which meant they had no money to pay their students’ stipends and some *yeshiva* students were also being forcibly taken from their *Gemaros* and conscripted into the IDF, or jailed for failing to enlist.

As has happened so many times before, what ultimately stopped this “war on Torah” was a war of a different kind — Operation Protective Edge, which was begun in response to hundreds of rockets being fired at Israel by Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip.

While Israel has been through many wars since its inception, Operation Protective Edge was in a different category right from the start. There was a spiritual battle for the nations’ soul raging as the rockets continued to fall, and even people who were very far away from observance and religion started to feel that the Jewish people were on the cusp of a monumental change.

Within the observant world, barely a day went by without another message or statement stating that Moshiach and the redemption were imminent. At this time, Rav Yehuda Bracha, *Rosh Kollel* of Yechaveh Daat, told his students that all the signs stated in

the *Gemara* regarding the coming of Moshiach had now been met, aside from the “voices in the sixth year, and the war in the seventh.”

Rav Bracha explained that Rashi had two comments on “voices in the sixth year.” Rashi explained that it meant “a voice would ring out that Moshiach ben Dovid was coming,” or alternatively, it was referring to the sound of the *shofar*, calling the Jews to repent.

The “sound of the *shofar*” had been ringing out in Israel’s cities and homes all summer, as the silence was repeatedly pierced by the wailing of the siren warning that another barrage of missiles was on its way from Gaza. At the same time, throughout 2014 there had also been a number of reports in the international press of people in all parts of the world hearing the strange sounds of a *shofar* playing a single, long note coming from the heavens⁴³.

The non-Jewish world was extremely puzzled about this strange “*shofar* noise” that they’d been hearing all year, and that they couldn’t locate the source of.

Rav Bracha told his students that he believed the temporary cease-fire between Hamas and the State of Israel was solely in order for the war to return in the seventh year, as the *Gemara* said, “In the seventh year, wars.” Rav Bracha explained that according to the Arizal, the year 5775 would be the main *birur*, or process of clarification and selection, in preparation for the Moshiach to come.

Towards the end of 5774 (2014), Rav Chaim Kanievsky also went on record to say:

*“The Moshiach is no longer waiting at the entrance,
he’s already been given permission to open the door!”*

⁴³ Other accounts stated that the noise was coming from the ground.

And when he was asked specifically what he meant, he replied, "It's possible that we've reached the end of the exile."

When Operation Protective Edge began in July 2014, the leading kabbalist known as "the Milkman", Rav Chaim Perachia Cohen, made the following statement:

"They informed me from Heaven that the redemption process started today. Am Yisrael is going to be redeemed. No one knows how long it will take, dear brothers, but know that the complete redemption process (geulah sheleimah) has begun, and because of this, the troubles are not going to cease in coming."

Meanwhile, the kabbalist Rav Dovid Chaim Stern from Bnei Brak told his students in the autumn of 2014 that the situation was only going to get worse from day to day, and that only Moshiach could solve the problem.

There were many, many other statements and predictions from many different sources all saying the same thing: If "voices" had indeed been heard in the sixth year, then that meant that in the seventh year, 5775, "war" was looming on the horizon, with the promise of Moshiach's coming in the eighth.

While the leaders of the Jewish people were calling for more unity and love, the Iranians were also calling for more unity among Israel's sworn enemies. In 2014, a senior Iranian Ayatollah, Mohammed Ali Movahedi-Kermani, said, "The issue of Palestine is an Islamic issue. The Islamic world must come together to destroy the false Israeli regime... If this happens, nothing will be left of Israel." This, and other similar statements, was the standard rhetoric coming out of Iran.

Many of the weapons being fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip were made in Iran, and it was no secret that the Iranian regime was also pulling the strings of the Hezbollah terrorist organization up in Lebanon too. At this time, the Israeli government was falling over itself, trying to prevent Hezbollah from re-opening the Lebanese front when the country was barely coping with the thousands of rockets raining down from Gaza.

Rav Berland once wrote: “From America to Russia, and from Europe to Africa, they all want to destroy us. There is no concept of unity between the nations of the world. It’s only their hatred of Israel that unifies them.”

And ‘Israel-bashing’ wasn’t just a problem for Israelis living in the holy land. As the fighting continued in the Gaza Strip, the world’s media happily whipped up as much anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish feeling as they could, particularly within Europe. This prompted Rav Moshe Sternbuch to say that there had never been such a deep hatred in the world toward Israel as there was nowadays.

And who knew what this hatred could lead to? As 5774 turned into 5775, it felt as though the spiritual stakes being played for had never been higher. On the table, there was the redemption of the Jewish people, or its destruction, or maybe — both.

Rav Berland commented at this time that every day that something terrible wasn’t happening to the Jews, it was a miracle.

During his first stay in South Africa, the Rav had commented on a number of occasions that the angel of the Yishmaelim (i.e., the Arabs) was prosecuting against *Am Yisrael*. It’s written in the *Zohar, Bereishis* 119, that in the future the *Bnei Yishmael* would create a big war against Eretz Yisrael, and the Ramak explains that all the nations of the world, even those that hate each other,

would make peace just in order to fight against Israel and try to destroy it, because the Jews made a country for themselves.

Even as the cease-fire with Hamas took hold, the papers continued to be full of headlines about the Iranian nuclear bomb, and the very fragile “peace” on Israel’s borders. Was a full-fledged war about to break out again, or was God planning something else for the seventh year?

HOLLAND

EXCERPT FROM A LESSON THE RAV GAVE OVER IN JOHANNESBURG ON TISHAH B'AV 5774 - (August 5, 2014)

“The reason that they threw us out from all these places, from Morocco to Zimbabwe, and from Zimbabwe to Johannesburg, was all because of a lack of ahavas chaverim, a lack of love between friends. And if we don’t fix this now, then soon you’ll also not see me here, either [referring to Johannesburg].”

After the last incident with the South African Hawks in August 2014, the Rav’s attendants were becoming increasingly worried that the lawless Hawks of South Africa would stop at nothing to put an end to the Rav’s activities in Johannesburg, even if it meant physically harming him.

The plan had always been for the Rav to leave South Africa to travel to Uman for Rosh Hashana 5775, but his attendants asked the Rav if he would be willing to move forward his departure for Uman, and if so, if he’d be willing to leave South Africa that day, September 11, 2014, if they could arrange a ticket. The Rav agreed and told his attendants that they should arrange for him to fly to Uman via Holland, with a stopover in Israel⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Remember that the Rav left Israel of his own accord, and not because there was any police record on file, or any criminal charges against him at this time, so there was no apparent problem with stopping in Israel.

When the Rav, his wife and his attendants got to the ORT airport in Johannesburg that Wednesday night, they saw that the newsstands were piled high with papers featuring a picture of the Rav on the front page. Thanks to the Hawks, he'd apparently now become the most wanted man in South Africa. But that didn't stop the Rav and his Rebbetzin from sailing through all the passport controls, as his name didn't appear on any Interpol checks. Rav Berland boarded the KLM flight to Holland in exactly the same way as the other regular passengers.

The news that Rav Berland had left South Africa and was on his way to Uman for Rosh Hashanah spread like wildfire among the Breslov communities around the world. Unfortunately, the news also reached the ears of some of the Rav's persecutors back in Israel, who immediately began notifying the South African authorities, including the Hawks, as well as the Dutch police, that a "very dangerous individual who'd been on the run from the police in Israel for two years" was about to land in Holland.

The Rav's persecutors advised the Hawks to contact the Dutch police, too, in order to lend credence to their story and to ensure that the Dutch officials would take it seriously. As soon as the Rav's plane landed in Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, two Dutch policemen boarded the flight to tell the Rav that he was under arrest, because he was wanted for crimes in Israel.

When the Rav heard this, he replied, "Great! Take me to Israel!" but the Dutch policemen told him that wasn't the way things worked, and that he'd first have to have a hearing in Holland, to decide what to do with him. They escorted the Rav off the plane and held him in custody in the airport for five hours.

As usual, the Rav didn't let the crazy circumstances pull him away from his *avodas Hashem*. He prayed his customary lengthy

evening prayers there in the airport, while the Dutch officials ran around trying to get a straight answer out of the Israeli police about whether the Rav truly was a wanted man, and if so, what crimes he was meant to have committed.

The Dutch officials were confused, because the Rav's name wasn't on any Interpol lists and hadn't been circulated anywhere among the international law enforcement agencies. The reason for this was simple. There was no arrest warrant out for the Rav in Israel, and there was no case to answer. The Rav was being persecuted by the Israeli government for political and religious reasons, but that was hardly something they wanted publicized in a Dutch court.

While the Dutch authorities were trying to clarify Rav Berland's legal situation, they freed him. However, they forbade him from leaving the country, which meant that, once again, the Rav would not be able to reach Uman for Rosh Hashanah 5775.

At this time, even casual observers began to marvel at the "war" that the Israeli government seemed to be waging against this elderly *tzaddik*, Rav Eliezer Berland. It was common knowledge within the international community that the State of Israel had never spent so much time, money and energy tracking anyone down before, not even the biggest war criminals from the Holocaust — so what was going on here?

But even while he was being persecuted, falsely accused and slandered on all fronts, the Rav evinced nothing but forgiveness and kindness toward his persecutors, to the point of regularly praying for them and forbidding his followers to take any steps to try to defend him or publicly clear his name.

By contrast, the people who were persecuting the Rav resorted to just about every dirty trick in the book to try to convince the

Dutch officials to bypass the official extradition procedures and put the Rav on the next flight out to Israel.

But things don't work that way in Europe. The Dutch police informed their Israeli counterparts that if they wanted the Rav released into their custody, they'd first have to travel out to Holland to formally present their case to a Dutch court. In the meantime, the Dutch arranged for the Rav to have two lawyers of his own to represent him in court — Sharon Nahari, from Israel, and Louis de Leon, of Dutch origin. De Leon told Yaron Yamin that there was no chance the Rav would be released in time to make it to Uman for Rosh Hashanah.

De Leon explained that there had almost never been an occasion where Holland had refused an extradition request from a country that it had an extradition treaty with. If, by some small chance, the Dutch judges would refuse to extradite the Rav back to Israel, that certainly wouldn't occur during his first appearance in a Dutch court. Whatever happened next, it looked as though the Rav was going to be staying in Holland for quite some time. The best outcome they could hope for would be if the judge agreed that the Rav should just stay under house arrest, instead of sending him to prison...

The first court hearing was arranged for the following Friday morning, September 12, 2014, with the representatives of the Israeli police force appearing in full force. The Rav appeared in court wrapped in his customary *tallis*, and spent the whole time engrossed in his holy books, as though what was happening around him didn't interest him in the slightest.

Yaron Yamin accompanied the Rav to court, and later described how the Rav told him during the proceedings: "We've reached the time of redemption."

THE RAV IN TORAH CODES

Rav Matityahu Glazerson is an expert in Bible codes, the author of many books on the subject — and also an old friend of Rav Berland's, from when they studied together 60 years ago at Kfar Chassidim.

Rav Glazerson has written about Rav Berland appearing in Torah codes on many different occasions. The first time was when the Rav came to Johannesburg; the second time was when the Rav moved to Holland; and the third time was when Rav Glazerson traveled to Holland to meet with Rav Berland.

On that occasion, they sat together for two hours, and after the meeting, Rav Glazerson published some additional hints that he'd found in the Torah codes connected to Rav Berland. Rav Glazerson also released a film clip during his trip to Holland called, "The appearance of Rav Eliezer Berland in Torah codes."

In the film clip, Rav Glazerson showed how the words "Eliezer Berland Tzaddik" appeared together with the words, "The arising of the *Erev Rav* against Judaism." Rav Glazerson also pointed out that this same Torah code revealed the words "Breslov" and "*Hatikkun Haklali*."

In a separate film clip, Rav Glazerson showed that if you continue a little further down the Torah Codes table, you'd find the word "Moshiach," as if to say that everything Rav Berland is going through is leading us up to the time of the coming of Moshiach.

The Dutch judge spent eight hours pouring through all of the 'evidence' that the Israeli police had cobbled together as part of their false allegations against the Rav, and then concluded: "There is nothing here!"

The Dutch judge stated clearly that there was no evidence that could justify bringing Rav Berland before an Israeli court. The judge then went on to tell the Rav: "I'm really sorry that this is how people in Israel act toward holy people like yourself." The Dutch

judge then freed Rav Berland completely, without any restrictive conditions whatsoever.

One of the lawyers commented afterwards that this was “an historical event which will be taught in law schools” — the first time ever that a European country with an extradition treaty with Israel turned down an extradition request after just one court hearing.

But the Israeli police weren't done yet, and immediately requested appeal proceedings to try to get the judge's decision overturned, which caused the Dutch judge to rebuke them sharply. “You should be ashamed of yourselves!” he told the Israeli officials.

At this time, the Rav's followers undertook a “thank you” prayer service at the Kotel and sang and danced until daybreak. Rav Berland also spoke in a live broadcast to the students at the Shuvu Banim *Yeshiva* to strengthen them and encourage them to still make the trip to Uman, even though he once again wouldn't be with them, as until the court proceedings in Holland were concluded, he couldn't leave the country.

Around this time, a TV crew from Israel's Channel 2, one of the station's that had broadcast the allegations about the Rav two years earlier, came to interview him in Holland.

The Rav told them:

“I'm disappointed that there are only very few claims being made against me, because the first thing the Torah says is that you should always be someone who is being pursued and harassed, if you want to succeed

in life. You should say 'welcome' to every bit of criticism and every allegation⁴⁵.

I've spent two years in Purim already, where everything and everyone is wearing a costume. Channel 2 says that an Israeli Rav is suspected of these types of things, so I understand that there is a war against the Torah, and against religious people. They're going against me, in order to stop people from doing teshuvah, and in order that people will say that even Rabbis are doing the same sort of filthy things that they themselves are doing.

But this is not appropriate at all! This one is as far from the other as the east is from the west. It's as far [from the truth] as Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto [are from the earth], ... more than 10 billion kilometers away!"

When they asked the Rav why he'd left the country, the Rav answered, *"I have a mission in the world, to stop Jewish assimilation. Jewish men are marrying non-Jewish women, and intermarriage is up to 70 percent in Scandinavia, and 50 percent here in Holland."*

Channel 2 then asked Rav Berland if he was aware that the Israeli police were looking for him. The Rav responded,

"Of course I know. Thirty armed men with their guns pointing everywhere showed up to two chuppas I officiated at, so of course I knew they were looking for me! And I say 'welcome' to them, that they're looking for me. Here I arrived in Holland, let the Israeli police come to Holland now.

⁴⁵ A clip of this interview would later be used as the basis of one of the forged video 'confessions'.

Let them send 10 police representatives here, together with the police chief. Let him tell the justice minister that he wants to extradite this man from Holland. I'll pay for his ticket! I'm prepared to pay for your television station to come here, and we'll sit at this table and I'll pay for this conference room here at the Sheraton. Bring the plaintiff and all the people that you say are complaining against me. Let them sit here and tell me what they have against me. I'll pay for their tickets, you will be here with your TV sets and let these people step forward and say to me what they have against me."

When Rav Berland's persecutors saw how many of the Rav's followers were flying out to Holland to be with him, and how many more were expected to come out to celebrate Yom Kippur, Sukkos and the rest of the High Holidays with him, they hit on a new plan. They lodged a formal protest with the Dutch court, and requested that even though the Rav had been freed unconditionally until the next hearing, he should still be prevented from celebrating the Jewish holidays with his followers.

They argued that as the Rav had been "on the run," as they termed it, for two years already, he could very easily escape the country before the next hearing. They asked for a new hearing, this time with three judges, and requested that the previous judge — who had gone through all the evidence and rebuked the Israeli police for wasting everyone's time — should be disqualified from participating.

The Dutch acceded to the Israelis' request, and the new hearing was scheduled just two days before Yom Kippur. Once again, Rav Berland came to court wrapped in his *tallis*, and carrying a stack of holy books with him, which he proceeded to study the whole time he was in court. Every time the judges asked him for his

opinion or view on what was happening, he replied, “If you want to arrest me, then please, go ahead and arrest me. It’s a shame to be wasting everyone’s time like this.”

The Israeli prosecutors falsely alleged that the Rav had been running away from Israeli justice for two years. They also falsely asserted that the Rav had deliberately been staying in countries that didn’t have an extradition treaty with Israel, in order to escape “justice.”

The Rav’s lawyers showed that both claims were patently untrue. They informed the Dutch court that the Rav had left Israel voluntarily on his own Israeli passport as a completely free man. No case was being prosecuted against him, and no arrest warrant had been issued. They also showed how the US, Switzerland and South Africa — and many of the other countries the Rav had passed through on his travels — did, indeed, have extradition treaties with Israel.

When the Dutch judges questioned the Rav about why he’d been traveling to all these different places the last two years, he replied that he was on a mission to try to end all the Jewish assimilation that had been occurring in these places, and explained to the court what the rate of assimilation was in each of these places.

(Of course, the deeper reason that the Rav had left Israel was the deal he’d made with *Shamayim*, to endure many years of exile and public humiliation in order to save *Am Yisrael* from a harsh fate, but that wasn’t a discussion the Dutch judges could hear, much less comprehend.)

In each of the countries he’d stayed — Morocco, Zimbabwe and South Africa — there were many stories of Jews who’d married

out of their faith, but who'd started to return to their Jewish roots again after meeting the Rav.

Ultimately, the Dutch court completely rejected the Israeli government's request to imprison the Rav until the next hearing, which meant that he was free to celebrate the High Holidays with his followers.

HANIYA WILL BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL

After this second hearing, the Rav made the following comments to some of his followers:

“The terrorists in Gaza are getting help from the Israeli government. The next prime minister of Israel will already be from Hamas, maybe [Ismail] Haniya himself. It's impossible to know exactly who. Because today, all the wars they make [referring to the Israeli government] are only against rabbinic scholars, and against people like Rav Berland. Instead of waging war against Hamas, they're just waging war against Rav Berland. It's a sign that in the next election, Haniya himself will be the next prime minister of Israel, or maybe it'll be Arafat's nephew?”

The only focus of the [Israeli] government seems to be to unite with the terrorists, and to persecute Rabbis, so there'll be less Jewish continuity. So that's why they're fighting their 'war' [against the Torah world], and all the world is laughing at this, and saying, 'We have no idea what's going on here, or why [the Israeli government is chasing after this Rabbi] so very much!' They have no idea what's going on, after six million Jews got killed, and yet they still see the Israeli government

supporting the terrorists [financially], and even giving them more weapons.

I explained in the court how the only ‘gangsters’ the Israeli government is interested in these days are Rabbis and Roshei Yeshiva, and that’s why the Israeli police are going out of their minds, asking themselves, ‘How are we going to blacken his name?’ [In Johannesburg,] they sent 50 armed men after me... I officiated at four weddings in Johannesburg, and at the last one the police arrived with their patrol cars and sent armed commandos after me.

We’re really seeing God face-to-face in all of this, and everything is going to be transformed into beautiful things. Every second, we’re seeing miracles and wonders. Now, this is really a big kiddush Hashem, and everyone is going to do teshuvah, because they’re all seeing on television how [the Israeli government] is chasing after the Rav day and night. It’s simply showing everyone that this is just a war against Shuvu Banim, and a war against Rav Berland, because we’re bringing people back to teshuvah.

Today, there are nearly a million baalei teshuvah [in Israel], and they just can’t stand the idea that people who were once gangsters are today Rabbis with side curls and beards.”



The Dutch judges had told the Israeli police that unless they had an arrest warrant prepared against the Rav in Israel, there were simply no legal grounds for them to extradite him back to Israel.

Instead of admitting the truth — that there was no case against Rav Berland, and there never had been — the Israeli authorities asked for a few more weeks to allowe them to “arrange” the evidence required to extradite the Rav. The Dutch court fixed the date of the next hearing for November 17, 2014 and informed the Rav that according to Dutch law he needed to stay in Holland until then.

In contrast to the relatively low cost of living in South Africa, Holland was very expensive, and the problem of where the Rav’s followers should stay loomed large, as hundreds of people began arriving in anticipation of the Jewish holidays. A holiday village on the Dutch Island of Texel, located close to Amsterdam, was suggested as a possible solution to the problem.

The holiday village owned by a righteous convert named Avraham ben Avraham. When the Rav’s followers came to see the location, Avraham ben Avraham welcomed them warmly and showed them the guesthouses that he owned, which included a number of different holiday cottages and even a shul.

He told the Rav’s followers that he’d been waiting for a group of Jews to come and pray in his shul for 10 years. His parents, before they died, left instructions in their will saying that they knew that the God of the Jews was the true God and had requested from their son that all of their money and property should be used to help the Jews in some way.

Avraham told the followers of the Rav that almost no Jews had ever come to the island before, despite the fact that he’d built a beautiful shul full of holy books that was currently standing unused — something that upset Avraham greatly.

So it was that Rav Berland spent his first Rosh Hashanah in Holland on the Island of Texel, together with those of his followers who hadn't traveled out to Uman. Before the holiday began, he told his community, "My heart is broken for all of us, that we won't merit to be together in Uman. But if the heart is broken, then it's possible to bring down all the light of Uman, even to Amsterdam. Uman is here, and we are in Uman. *Rabbeinu* Hakadosh is with us. We can't be separated from the gathering in Uman! We're all together still, like one man."

The Rav *davened* as the *shliach tzibbur* in Texel, praying with the original *niggunim* used on Rosh Hashanah in Uman. The services began at 6 a.m. and continued through until 3 p.m. with no break.

On Yom Kippur 5775 (October 4, 2014), 400 of the Rav's followers flew out from Israel to Amsterdam to spend Yom Kippur with him there. Some more students had flown in from Uman or Israel, while a third group of around 100 people had traveled on two buses overland from Uman to Amsterdam — a journey of some 54 hours — demonstrating extreme self-sacrifice in order to be with their Rav.

When the first bus arrived in Amsterdam it drove up outside the Rav's lodgings. The Rav immediately came out of his home, boarded the bus, and gave his followers a rousing *shiur* for half an hour, discussing the greatness of the Tzaddik, Rebbe Nachman, and about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

He continued that he wanted to build a *yeshiva* for his followers in Amsterdam, but only on condition that his followers would commit to learning Torah in Holland 24 hours a day. The Rav concluded:

“Next week, we’ll already start reading parashas Bereishis... Whatever curses a person has to deal with, ultimately they are all just blessings. The more curses and problems he has, the more he’ll ultimately merit to have blessings. There is no such thing as a curse that can’t become a blessing. All the curses in the world are going to be transformed into blessings... There’s no such thing as a curse! End of story!”

After the Rav’s talk, the coach continued its journey to the Island of Texel — where it was discovered that the first “blessing” had occurred, as more of the Rav’s followers had arrived in Holland than could be accommodated in Texel.

While the women and children in the group were given the cottages, many of the men found themselves literally sleeping on the sidewalk until the last minute, when someone managed to rent a couple of big halls where they could stay in the meantime.

This anonymous helper also arranged for the delivery of a number of mattresses for the Rav’s followers to sleep on and organized a pre-fast *seudah* for the Rav’s followers, many of whom hadn’t eaten the whole day, with the eve of Yom Kippur fast approaching.

That Yom Kippur, the Rav’s old friend Rav Yehoshua Dov Rubinstein, one of the leading Breslov rabbonim, decided to fly out to Holland to be with Rav Berland and his community. During the Yom Kippur service, the Rav prayed from the *amud*, while Rav Rubinstein led the *Ne’ilah* prayers. Despite the unusual and even difficult circumstances his followers found themselves in, everyone present described their Yom Kippur in the most superlative terms. Rav Berland arrived for the *Kol Nidrei* prayers before sundown and continued to pray straight until 12 midnight. The following morning, the prayers began at 7 a.m. and only ended at

7:45 p.m., without any breaks, while the Rav again spent the whole time on his feet.

It was one of the largest gatherings of the Rav's followers since he'd begun his exile from Israel two years earlier. The number of Breslovers in Texel surpassed even the numbers of Breslovers in the main Breslov shul in Meah Shearim. The more the Rav was being chased and persecuted, the more followers he seemed to be attracting.

One of the people praying with the Rav and his community happened to be an important member of the Belgian Jewish community who was a follower of Rav Dov Kook of Tiberius. This man had heard that Rav Berland was going to be leading the prayers at Texel on Yom Kippur, and he decided to join the service to come and see Rav Berland for himself. This was the first time that this Belgian Jew had ever laid eyes on the Rav, and as he described it afterwards: "The Rav is the Holy of Holies. There are no words to describe him!"

When this Jew returned to Belgium, he told the members of the Belgian Jewish community who the Rav and his followers really were and told them to stop listening to all the lies being spread by the media in Holland and elsewhere. As the situation continued to develop in Holland, this Belgian Jew was instrumental in ensuring that many of the Rav's followers who later ended up coming to Belgium were received with great respect and hospitality by the Jewish community there.



When it became obvious that things weren't going their way in Dutch courts, the Rav's persecutors fell back on their

tried-and-tested strategy of slandering the Rav to the local media, with the aim of turning public opinion against him and his followers.

This reprehensible strategy had been very successful in Morocco and South Africa, so now the Rav's persecutors started stirring things up against him in the Dutch press, too. The anti-Semitic European media doesn't need a lot of encouragement to write disparaging, negative lies about Jews, especially Israeli Jews who happen to be big Rabbis. But where the story gets even more repugnant than usual is that the Rav's persecutors decided to stir things up *davka* on Yom Kippur.

While the Rav and his followers were fervently engaged in getting ready for the Yom Kippur prayers, the Rav's persecutors in Israel called up as many news agencies, newspapers and journalists as they could, warning them about the "dangerous, wanted criminal" who was hiding out on the Island of Texel.

So it was that on the holiest day of the year, tens of journalists and photographers suddenly descended on the otherwise peaceful Island of Texel and began harassing all the Jews they could find, in the middle of the Yom Kippur services. The journalists asked the Rav's followers all sorts of loaded questions in the hopes that they'd say something explosive that they could then take out of context or twist into another headline-grabbing false story.

CLASSICALLY ANTI-SEMITIC JOURNALISM

While the Jewish communities in Europe were coming under increasing threat from radical Islam, the whereabouts of Rav Berland and his followers was continually and openly publicized by the Dutch media, which encouraged its readers to view Shuvu Banim as a type of "lethal sect" or the "Jewish ISIS."

The Rav and his followers tried to keep a low profile wherever they went in Holland, but they were constantly tracked down by the Dutch media, who made it a *holy duty* to force the community out of whichever holiday village or premises they'd managed to rent.

Remember, Rav Berland was being forcibly detained in Holland only at the request of the Israeli government, yet he and his community were never granted any security protection by the Dutch authorities, while the Dutch press continued to write about them in a manner reminiscent of the worst Nazi propaganda.

One article, written in the *Dutch Telegraph* on November 15, 2014, was headlined "The Lethal Sect", and was illustrated with a big picture of Rav Berland superimposed over the Al Aqsa Mosque. This article included the following quotes, guaranteed to get European anti-Semites a little hot under the collar:

"Someone from that group [Shuvu Banim] may just blow up the Al-Aqsa Mosque."

"His supporters are a mix of outcasts, criminals and fanatics."

Quoting an 18-year-old named Mohammed, discussing his opinion of the Shuvu Banim *Yeshiva* in Jerusalem: "They're just a bunch of weirdos."

Discussing the "many women" who apparently didn't come forward with complaints against Rav Berland because they were 'scared for their lives': "[These women] don't want to bring down on themselves the wrath of the fanatical members of Shuvu Banim. The supporters, who have links with Zionist leaders and the Israeli underworld, stop at nothing."

So there you have it: The anti-Semitic Dutch media was portraying Rav Berland and his followers as a bunch of weirdos, criminals and fanatics with links to the Israeli underworld, murderous tendencies, and a secret plot to blow up the Temple Mount... And if it appeared in the media, then of course it *must* be true.

mayor then told him that he needed to evict the whole congregation from his holiday village — effective immediately!

The mayor explained that Texel was a peaceful, quiet place, and that his Jewish guests were causing far too much commotion with the press to be able to stay. Avraham ben Avraham tried to explain to the mayor, and to the other officials who'd accompanied her, that it was currently Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, and it was completely impossible to accede to their request and throw everybody out onto the street. According to Dutch law, the government is obliged to respect other people's religious traditions, so the island officials reluctantly gave the Rav and his community a day's respite.

As soon as Yom Kippur ended, a fleet of buses drove up to the holiday village, under orders from the mayor and her colleagues, to get everyone — all the Jewish men, women and children — out of Texel ASAP. All this took place under the beady eyes of the Dutch media, who had television crews set up everywhere to publicize the “invasion” of Texel by a bunch of *chassidic* Jews from Israel.

Before long, the Dutch police also appeared on the scene, to enforce the evacuation order from Texel. Some of the police officers started acting in a very aggressive manner toward the visiting Jews, particularly the many mothers who were trying to get their belongings together, pack their things and gather their children, under very short notice and very stressful circumstances.

The Dutch police started yelling at the women and children who weren't moving fast enough for them, and literally started to push them onto the waiting buses, in a scene that was all-too-reminiscent of the horrors visited on European Jewry during World War II.

Avraham ben Avraham, the kind Dutch host, was moved to tears by what he was witnessing. For days afterwards, he was seen wandering around Texel looking disturbed and upset. While all the Jews in the holiday village were evicted immediately after Yom Kippur, another 40 followers who had rented apartments on the island were given permission to stay on in Texel for a little while longer.

Back on the buses, the Rav's followers had no idea where they were headed, or what they could expect when they got there. A small number of them decided to get off the buses in Amsterdam and try to make their own arrangements, but the majority decided to stay on the buses, which were now heading for Belgium, at Rav Berland's suggestion. They had no idea what was waiting for them in Belgium, but they were certain that if Rav Berland told them to go there, something or someone would surely turn up to assist them.

And that's exactly what happened. The Belgian Jew who'd spent Yom Kippur with the Rav on Texel came back to Belgium with such glowing reports of the Rav and his community, that the Belgian Jews welcomed the refugees from Texel with open arms. They rented a big vacation village for them with big, beautiful vacation cottages in the Belgium countryside where they could spend the entire Sukkos, and also arranged 5-star kosher catering for them for the duration of the festival.

Most of these people had already spent Rosh Hashanah in Uman and Yom Kippur in Texel, and now, God had arranged for them to spend Sukkos in the beautiful Belgian countryside, replete with lakes and rivers. Wherever their devotion to Rav Berland took them, in each place they clearly saw how Hashem's Divine providence was smoothing the path.

In the meantime, another 300 of Rav Berland's followers managed to spend the holidays with the Rav himself, back in Amsterdam. The mayor of Amsterdam had given permission for a local Jewish school to be opened to accommodate them, and mattresses were brought over to the school hall, so people could sleep and eat there.

On the first Motzoei Simchas Torah that the Rav and his followers spent in Holland, during the dancing to celebrate *hakafot shniyos*, one of his followers went outside to get some air and somehow stepped on a broken tile that caused him to fall flat on his face. He found that he couldn't move, and he just lay on the floor until other people came out and discovered him.

The people who found him didn't know what to do, and whether they should call an ambulance for him or not, as he didn't have health insurance. The man's son-in-law immediately ran over to the Rav, gave over his name, and explained that his father-in-law was immobilized. He asked Rav Berland whether they should call an ambulance for him.

The Rav replied that they should, because it was really a matter of *pikuach nefesh*. He began to explain to the son-in-law about all the bones in the pelvis, and how they all fit together. The Rav continued that there was one bone located between the pelvis and the leg, and if it was broken, it would require an emergency operation to prevent it from becoming a potentially life-threatening issue.

He explained all the different medical issues connected to the situation, including what medical examinations were required, what the results would show, and what treatment they needed. The Rav concluded that the father-in-law would have to stay a full week in the hospital after the operation, and that he'd then have to rest at home for a further three months until his pelvic bone was completely healed.

In the meantime, no one even knew what had actually happened to the man, or whether he'd even broken something, let alone what he might have broken. But they called the ambulance, as the Rav had told them. However, the man's daughter refused to let

him travel in the ambulance until the Rav came to give her father a blessing, and to guarantee him that everything would be okay.

As soon as Rav Berland heard this, he immediately came out to the scene of the accident and began to explain to the paramedics in English what had happened, what was broken, and how to fix it — and that it was an emergency situation that needed to be dealt with immediately, as the danger was growing with every passing moment.

The Dutch paramedics were very surprised that the Rav appeared to have the medical knowledge of a doctor, and that he seemed to know exactly what the problem was. The man was taken to the nearest emergency room where the doctor took a number of X-rays and then started explaining to the son-in-law what the problem was: The man had broken a specific bone between his pelvis and leg, and it was actually a very dangerous break and needed urgent treatment to prevent the fracture from widening...

Word for word, the doctor gave over exactly the same information that the son-in-law had heard previously from Rav Berland. Afterwards, the son-in-law asked the doctor how long his father-in-law would have to stay in hospital and then recuperate post-op — but really, he already knew the answer.

The doctor told him: “One week in the hospital, and three months resting at home.”

After Simchas Torah, it became clear that there weren't enough places for the Rav's followers to stay in Holland, so most of them returned to Israel. Some followers stayed in Amsterdam, while a full busload of people traveled to Uman.

Before the bus departed for Uman, the Rav told the travelers: “No one will remain at the border.” He then repeated this unusual phrase a number of times, but his followers had no idea why he was saying it, or what it all meant. When the bus finally pulled up to the Ukrainian border, they discovered that one of the

passengers had lost his passport, and it looked like he was going to be forced to stay at the border, unable to travel on.

Then they remembered what the Rav had said, so they stubbornly refused to continue their journey without him. In the end, the Russian border guards allowed him to continue on with the group, and “no one remained at the border” — just as the Rav had predicted.



On November 17, 2014, Rav Berland was back in court in Holland, as the Israeli authorities continued to twist the arm of the Dutch authorities to try to get him extradited back to Israel, despite their lack of evidence.

The Dutch announced that they would hand down their decision on the case on December 1, 2014.

While the Dutch courts were deliberating over whether to accede to the Israeli government’s request to extradite the Rav, Israel was rocked by an awful, shocking act of terrorism.

On November 18, 2014, two Palestinian terrorists — cousins living in an East Jerusalem suburb — drove over to the Har Nof neighborhood in Jerusalem, entered the Kehillas Bnei Torah synagogue, and started shooting and stabbing the worshippers, who were in the middle of the morning prayers.

Four men died of their wounds immediately, while a fifth person finally succumbed to his injuries almost a year later, after having spent 11 months in a coma. One of the policemen who engaged the terrorists in a gun battle, a young Druze policeman from northern Israel, was also killed in the attack, which left another seven people

injured. It was the deadliest attack in Jerusalem since the Mercaz Harav atrocity in March 2008, when a Palestinian terrorist entered the Mercaz Harav *Yeshiva* and gunned down a number of teenage boys in cold blood.

It's a tenet of Jewish faith, however uncomfortable, that the death of *tzaddikim* atones for the sins of the generation. As the Jews of Israel were mourning the Har Nof massacre, the Shuvu Banim community in Amsterdam sadly also had their own tragedy to deal with.

Two of the Rav's younger followers, Shmuel Meir Langlavan and Natan Druck, *zt"l*, were killed in a horrific accident on the Dutch highway as they were returning from spending a Shabbos with Rav Berland in Amsterdam at the beginning of December 2014.

They were flown back to Israel for burial, and during the service, the Rav eulogized them from Holland. He said:

“This week’s parashah is Vayeishev, which describes the sale of Yosef Hatzaddik. If his brothers hadn’t sold him, Yosef would have already brought the redemption and built the Beis Hamikdash.

“These two tzaddikim also could also have brought the redemption, if they hadn’t been taken from us. This year, the year 5775, is the ‘etia Hamoshiach’⁴⁶. The Chasam Sofer explains that ‘in every generation, you can find the soul of Moshiach ben Yosef’. But if the generation isn’t worthy, Hashem removes that person from the world before the age of 20. If these two had remained in the world, and had reached the age of 20,

⁴⁶ 5775 has the same *gematria* as this Aramaic phrase which means “the time of Moshiach.”

they could have brought the redemption and Moshiach ben Dovid.

But the generation wasn't ready, and lacked the vessels [to receive] such holy, pure souls...

And now, these two tzaddikim have canceled all the decrees hanging over Am Yisrael... It's impossible to be consoled over the departure over holy, pure people like these. There is no comfort about holy, pure people like this who haven't been seen since the creation of the world. People who never opened their eyes [to see impure sights], and who only spoke words of Torah 24 hours a day, and who barely ate, and who barely slept, and just gave their all for their fellow man.

If they had reached the age of 20, the geulah would have happened immediately, and they would have brought Moshiach ben Dovid and rebuilt the Temple... Now, we are at the most sublime, transcendent moments for Am Israel, we've reached the moment of redemption mamash. Davka now, Hashem wants to bring the geulah. Hashem wants to bring the biggest light of all."

With all these harsh judgments manifesting themselves in the "war against the Torah," the days continued to tick down to December 1, 2014, the day when the Dutch court was to hand down their decision about what to do with Rav Berland.

That same Monday, two students from Shuvu Banim visited the synagogue of one of the generation's biggest *tzaddikim* and *kabbalists*, the late Chacham Avraham Chai, *zt"l*. The students told Chacham Avraham that the State of Israel had taken Rav Berland

to court in Holland, and the Chacham immediately replied: “Lies! It’s all lies!”

The students explained that the Dutch court was due to give their judgment at 2 p.m. that day, and the Chacham then said to them, “There is still no judgment that has been made, because judgment has a smell.” The Chacham then lifted his hands up to Heaven, and he began to cry and pray on the Rav’s behalf.

Sure enough, later that day the judges in Holland announced that the decision on whether to extradite the Rav to Israel had been postponed once again.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

While Rav Berland was in exile, the author of the book *Sod Hachashmal*, Rav Yekusiel Fish, sent some of the students of Rav Berland a photocopy of a page⁴⁷ from the book “Admorei Belz” the history of the Admorim of Belz. This page recounted a story that was passed down the line of each of the *Admorim* of Belz, starting with the first Rebbe, the Sar Shalom, Rebbe Shalom of Belz, through Rebbe Aaron of Rokatch, until the current *Admor* of Belz, Rebbe Yissachar Dov.

Both the story and its moral was given over by the first Rebbe, who recounted that in a particular country, the people decided to rebel against the king, and the king’s minister of war escaped to another country with his soldiers. At the end of the war, this minister returned. And the moral of the story is that before Moshiach comes, there will be one Jew who will escape to a different country with his faithful students, and who will conceal himself with them. The first Belzer Rebbe, the Sar Shalom then explained: “Moshiach will come in their merit.”

Rav Fish commented: “Pay attention to the description in the book how all of the Rebbes of Belz spoke about this with such enthusiasm throughout all the generations, though Belz is not known for occupying themselves with teachings about Moshiach like other chassidic groups do. It seems that they understood that this is the main thing that needs to happen before Moshiach comes, to break the forces of evil.”

⁴⁷ Pages 281-282

Although Rav Berland has always defied the normal way of the world when it comes to matters of health — barely eating, barely sleeping, dipping in freezing cold *mikvaos*, standing on his feet and dancing for 18 hours a day, even in his later years — and even though the Rav happily accepted even his most difficult circumstances as being God’s will for him, the spiritual “war” against him still took an enormous toll on his physical health.

While the non-Jewish world was ushering in their new year of 2015, news reached Israel on 10 Teves 5775 (January 1, 2015) that the Rav had fainted twice, gone into sudden cardiac arrest, and had been admitted to the hospital in Amsterdam in an unconscious state. His situation was extremely precarious, and the call went out to his followers back in Israel to immediately drop everything they were doing and run to the Kotel to pour their hearts out in prayer that the Rav should pull through and recover fully.

The night before he was admitted to the hospital, the Rav gave a class over the phone to celebrate the *yahrtzeit* of Rav Noson Sternhartz, Rebbe Nachman’s principal student. As part of the class, the Rav had told over a story about Rav Hersh Leib Lippel, one of the leading Breslover *chassidim* from the previous generation. The Rav said that after two of Rav Lippel’s friends had died, he himself fell sick and was brought to the hospital, where it appeared that he, too, had passed away.

The *chevrah kaddisha* was called to come and attend to the dead Rav Lippel — which is when Rav Lippel shocked everyone by waking up. He told them that he’d just seen the Angel of Death, who’d come for him with a sharp, drawn sword and taken him to *Shamayim*. There, Rav Lippel had seen his two friends waiting for him at the entrance to *Gan Eden*, because they didn’t want to go in until Rav Hersh Leib had arrived.

But Rav Hersh Leib didn't want to go to *Gan Eden* just yet! So he'd fought with the Angel of Death and had beaten him, and then he'd been returned back to this world.

On the day that he'd gone into sudden cardiac arrest and had been admitted to the hospital, the Rav told one of his followers: "Just as I said it in the class yesterday, so it was with me today. I was already in *Shamayim*, and I fought with and succeeded against the Angel of Death."



At the time the Rav fainted, at 1:45 p.m. on Thursday, January 1, 2015, he was in a room on the fourth floor of the hotel in Amsterdam where he was staying. The ambulance that was dispatched to bring him to the hospital used a crane from the Fire Department to lower him down through the fourth-floor window of the hotel, as they needed to ensure that the Rav remained in a horizontal position and the stretcher was too long to fit into the hotel elevator.

From the eyewitness reports from the scene, it seems that at the same time that the Rav's body was being lowered to the ground, the Rav's soul was returning back down to this lowly world.

One of the students who was with the Rav at the time he was taken down through the fourth-floor window later described how the Rav had been covered with a *tallis*, and said that it was a fearful sight to see, just like when the Satan had showed *Am Yisrael* a mirage in the sky that Moshe had died in the desert.

Two weeks earlier, at the beginning of Chanukah 5775 (December 15, 2014), the Rav had given his followers a number of instructions. He'd told them to start reciting the *Tikkun Haklali* seven times a day, in order that he should live. He'd also announced that everyone should come to him on Shabbos Chanukah (December 19-20, 2014) and that no one should be missing.

On Sunday, 6 Tevet 5775 (December 28, 2014), the Rav had arrived at the morning prayer service with the Breslov community, and unusually, recited *Avinu Malkeinu* after the *Amidah* — even though it is usually only recited on fast days and during the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The prayer is a supplication for Divine mercy.

The Rav recited this prayer with great emotion, and afterwards told the congregation that everyone should fast for three days from dawn until nightfall — the men, women and even the children. The community had no idea what was going on, or why they'd been asked to fast in this way, but it was obvious that something very serious lay behind the Rav's request, so no one asked any questions and everyone accepted upon themselves to fast.

On the second day of the fast, the Rav again came to the morning prayers, and told the congregation that they could eat that day, because part of the decrees had already been canceled via the subsequent death of two other *tzaddikim*, Rav Ephraim Baruch Rackman and Rav Mordechai Reuven Rokeach, *zt"l*. But the Rav concluded that on the following day, everyone needed to fast again.

Shortly before this happened the Rav had also asked his followers in Israel to gather together every day at the Kotel to pray for him.

Once the news reached Israel that the Rav had been hospitalized due to a sudden cardiac arrest and was in serious condition, all the pieces started to fall into place that the Rav had foreseen what was about to happen. It later transpired that the Rav had been unconscious for a full hour. The people who were attending to the Rav in Holland at this time truly believed the worst was happening, and frantically called the community back in Israel to run to the Kotel to start praying. Rav Berland's life was on the line.

The Rav's attendant, Reb Natan Besanson, was by his side the whole time. Afterwards, he recounted exactly what had happened:

“On Thursday, which was the 10th of Teves (January 1, 2015), after the Rav prayed the morning prayers, which lasted for quite a number of hours, with the kehillah in the village, the Rav returned home, and on the way he eulogized Rav Rackman on the telephone for around 20 minutes.

When he arrived back at his lodgings, the Rav fainted, and he had to go and rest on his bed for half an hour. We already realized that the situation was not looking so good, so we called an ambulance. In the meantime, before the ambulance arrived, the Rav returned to his Torah learning as though nothing untoward had happened. The whole time we'd been with the Rav, we'd never once seen him with any weakness or sickness.

In the middle of his studies, the Rav fainted for a second time, and this time he fell unconscious on the floor. The ambulance arrived two minutes later, and the

paramedics figured out that the Rav had suffered a cardiac arrest, and that it would be dangerous to move the Rav and that he needed to be taken to the hospital on a stretcher.”

Reb Besanson continues:

“At some point while the Rav was lying on the floor, he regained consciousness long enough to tell me, ‘Bring the Ketzos Hachoshen⁴⁸, Part A.’ The next thing I knew, the paramedics had arranged for a crane to come from the fire department, and that’s how they brought the Rav down to the ambulance. In the hospital, they connected him to an external pacemaker, and I was by his side the whole night.

During the night, I saw a white line [on the monitor] a number of times, showing that the heart’s rate was very low and required external intervention in order to keep the heart beating. But at no time did I see any change in the Rav. The Rav simply continued to learn the Ketzos Hachoshen, Milu’ei Hachoshen, the Urim v’Turim and the Nesivos Hamishpat. The Rav didn’t appear changed at all by his experiences. He was the same Rav, doing the same learning, with the same determination, and displaying the same mesirus nefesh.

In the middle of the night, the doctors decided that there was no choice other than to operate on the Rav the next day and implant a pacemaker. In the morning, the Rav told me that everything that Am Yisrael was going through, and everything that was happening in Eretz Yisrael, had affected him greatly. The Rav had

⁴⁸ An in-depth halachic commentary on Choshen Mishpat.

taken it all very much to heart — all of the stabbings that had happened during the ‘Knife Intifada’, the various tragedies that had been occurring, all the people who weren’t keeping Torah and mitzvos — he’d been affected by it all.

The Tzaddik is the heart of the world, and he feels all the sorrows of Israel.”

Once it had been determined that Rav Berland had suffered a cardiac arrest, his heart was hooked up to an external pacemaker, while the doctors informed the Rav’s family and attendants that the Rav urgently needed surgery to fit him with an internal pacemaker. The Rav’s attendant double-checked this recommendation with other specialists to ensure it was correct, but then subsequent events decided the matter. On Friday, the Rav’s heart stopped responding, and was completely dependent on the external pacemaker.

Once that happened, the surgery was scheduled as quickly as possible. The surgery was carried out and the Rav was already back home by erev Shabbos, January 2, 2015. However, the doctors told him to stay in bed and not to go out for up to three months.

Rabbi Bensason continues:

“The doctors told the Rav that he should rest for a minimum of four days after the operation, but that same day the Rav left the hospital, because he’d arranged to officiate at a chuppah for a couple who’d flown out to Amsterdam especially to have him attend. On the following day, the Rav recited kiddush levanah on the moon with a minyan outside. The Rav immediately

returned to his way of studying in a very methodical way, without any deviations or weakness.”

Another of the Rav’s students, Rav Raphael Gwartz, kept a diary of all the events that occurred to the Shuvu Banim community in Holland. Under the entry for January 3, 2015, he wrote the following:

“On Motzoei Shabbos the Rav officiated at a chuppah for a family that came from Israel. The Rav was very weak and looked pale. During the next few days we were constantly praying for the Rav. In Israel there were daily prayer rallies and round-the-clock recitations of Tikkun Haklali. They asked that for now, no more people should come from Israel to visit the Rav. On the next Sunday, visitors started coming again. On Monday, the Rav was back to toiveling in the river.

The Rav requested that we pray for him, because he’s still very weak.”

The Rav’s attendant later found a note that the Rav had written at the beginning of the year (5775), but he didn’t understand what was written there until after the shocking episode with the Rav’s near-death experience.

That note said the following: “Tishrei = *Chessed* (kindness), Cheshvan = *Gevurah* (judgment), Kislev = *Tiferes* (splendor), Teves = *Netzach yivaleh hamaves hanetzach* (may death be abolished forever).”

When the attendant asked the Rav about this note when he was in the hospital, the Rav said, “That was the decree. And *b’ezras Hashem*, it has been completely canceled.”

After the operation to implant the pacemaker, when the Rav left the hospital, he asked everyone back in Israel to go to Kever Rochel, and to Me'aras Hamachpelah in Chevron, and to say the *Tikkun Haklali* for him seven times, with the intention that "May death be abolished forever."

After the Rav was hospitalized, many members of the Shuvu Banim community did some serious introspection about how much they were really listening to the Rav's requests. The day before Chanukah, back in Kislev, senior representatives from Shuvu Banim had spoken with the Rav over the phone, and they had asked him whether they should continue holding the weekly prayer gatherings at the Kotel for the Rav's success. The Rav had previously said to stop them for a couple of weeks, when a number of serious terrorist attacks were rocking the country.

Things had quietened down a little, so his followers wanted to know whether the weekly prayer gatherings should be restarted. The Rav told them: "Yes! And you should gather there every day now!" The representatives were a little shocked and replied, "Isn't it going to be too hard for people to come to the Kotel every day?" But the Rav simply repeated what he'd said, and again confirmed, "Every day! Every day!"

It was Chanukah, and many people in the community felt it was too difficult to organize a prayer gathering every day, so the matter was quietly dropped. Less than a month later, when the terrible news hit Shuvu Banim that the Rav's holy soul had already gone up to the World of Truth, and that he'd had to fight with the Angel of Death to return to this world, many of his followers were filled with enormous regret that they hadn't done as the Rav had requested a month earlier.

As an atonement, the students at the Shuvu Banim *Yeshiva* arranged a daily gathering to be held at the Kotel, where they would say seven *Tikkun Haklalis* for the Rav's success and good health, in addition to the weekly gathering being held for the Rav at the Kotel on Wednesday evening, which also continued.



On the January 7, 2015, less than a week after the Rav was hospitalized and fitted with a pacemaker, Muslim terrorism hit the French capital, Paris, in a dramatic way. First, armed Muslim gunmen forced their way into the offices of a French satirical periodical called *Charlie Hebdo* and started firing. They killed 12 people and injured another 11, before being tracked down by French police and killed in a gun battle.

At the same time the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre was occurring, another armed Muslim terrorist broke into a kosher supermarket called *Hypercacher* in the Île-de-France region, where five Jews were murdered in cold blood and another 11 were wounded.

The twin terror attacks on the French capital shocked the world, and signaled the beginning of a new, and increasingly violent, chapter in Muslim terrorism. A couple of weeks later, on Rosh Chodesh Shvat 5775 (January 21, 2015), the Rav delivered the following rousing call to his followers, and to the nation of Israel:

“Now, we’re in a war. This is a new intifada. In Paris, they murdered five Jews. In Holland, they also tried to kill a couple of Jews. They closed all the schools, and they closed all the offices. The children are scared to go

to school now, because of what happened in Toulouse⁴⁹. Am Yisrael, we're in more danger now than ever before. This is a terrible intifada that is spreading throughout the whole globe, the whole world."

"Yesterday, they stabbed 12 innocent, sinless Jews on a bus⁵⁰, and no one even paid any attention; no one was even shocked by it. No one is talking about this, but we need to publicize this. The whole world is applauding each Jew that is murdered and killed.

It's impossible to sweeten the harsh judgments over the people of Israel, except by jumping into the fire [i.e. acting with mesirus Nefesh]. Only if we jump into the fire will we be able to sweeten all the judgments, so that there won't be any more judgments against Am Yisrael.

Every man is obligated to guard his eyes! This is true mesirus Nefesh! If people would guard their eyes, it would sweeten all of the harsh decrees. All the bad decrees are due to a lack of guarding the eyes. Each time an eye is opened [to see forbidden things], a Jew is killed. Each time an eye is opened, a Jew is stabbed.

If someone would see how many demons and spirits [there are in every square meter of the world], even a little, then immediately his soul would leave him. Therefore, Hashem gave us the ability not to see. And now is the time when all of the demons and spirits are

⁴⁹ On March 19, 2012, four Jews, including a father and his three small children, were shot to death by a gunman at the Otzer HaTorah Jewish school in the French city of Toulouse.

⁵⁰ On January 21, 2015, 12 Israelis were stabbed by a Palestinian terrorist on a Tel Aviv commuter bus.

coming out of the bottle and are bursting forth. All of the terrorists are demons and spirits. All of Hamas and all of Al-Qaida and all of ISIS, they are demons and spirits.

[When a person is reciting the Shema,] he needs to have the proper intention, he needs to have proper attention when saying Hashem Aechad [God is one]. AecHaD also stand for: Al-Qaida, Hamas and Da-ash (the Arabic name for ISIS). A person needs to have the correct intention that Hashem Aechad, God is One. If a person has the intention that God is One, then he will excise all of Al-Qaida, all of Hamas, and all of Da-ash (ISIS), [those] who decapitate others, and kill children and babies.

“This whole intifada is being encouraged by the nations of the world. The whole world is egging on this intifada, all of the nations, and all of them are sorry that Hitler (may his name be erased) didn’t finish the job.

Now, they’re relying on the Arabs [to finish the job]... All the nations of the world long for Jewish blood... Now, there’s an intifada like there hasn’t been since the beginning of the world. Twelve innocent people got stabbed on a bus, and the [nations of the world] don’t flinch. The world didn’t shake, and the world didn’t even pay it any attention. They only pay attention if a shot is fired in Gaza [in self defense],, then the whole world is shaken up. ‘They fired a bullet in Gaza!? How could they do such a terrible thing!? Who did this terrible crime?! Judge him in The Hague, judge him in Brussels!’

So, we have arrived at the end of days. This is the prophecy of the end of days. This is why Yaakov was scared to reveal the prophecy of what would happen at the end of days.”

The attacks in Paris and elsewhere created a sense of fear and panic among the non-Jews that quickly spread to every Western country with a Muslim population. Islam’s war against the Jews had always been complacently viewed as the State of Israel’s problem. But in 5775, the *Charlie Hebdo* and Hypercacher massacres made it clear that the winds of war had now blown over to Europe too.



Chaim Biton is a student of Rav Berland and a relative of Zarie Sibony, one of the girls who was trapped in the Hypercacher supermarket in Paris when a terrorist went on a murderous rampage there. He told us about an open miracle that happened to his relative, in the merit of the Rav:

Zarie Sibony was working as a cashier in her brother’s supermarket, Hypercacher. On Friday, Erev Shabbos *parashas Shemos*, a terrorist broke into the store and immediately started firing at anyone who was standing near the entrance or near the checkout, before taking the rest of the people in the store as hostages.

Zarie was standing closest to the entrance, but miraculously didn’t get hurt by the initial burst of gunfire. She fell to the floor and thought she was going to die like the others who’d already been shot and killed, while the terrorist forced his way into the store.

When Chaim heard that his cousin was working at that time in the supermarket, he immediately called the Rav’s hotline, to request a *brachah* from the Rav. The message was passed on to the Rav and

he said, “tell them that they don’t have anything to worry about. She will come out on Shabbos, and by Motzoei Shabbos you will hear that she has been freed and that nothing happened to her.”

In the meantime, the family didn’t know what had happened to Zarie, and the news was already reporting that several people had been killed in the store. Despite the Rav’s *brachah* they were still very nervous, so they contacted the Rav again, this time through his driver. At this point, the terrorist was herding all the hostages together in the supermarket and the world was fearfully following the developments in Paris. The Rav again said, “Tell them that they have nothing to worry about, and that they can calm down. She will come out on Shabbos, and on Motzoei Shabbos they’ll hear that she came out healthy and whole.”

In the meantime, the terrorist was scanning the shop and saw Zarie’s foot moving. At that moment, he shot directly at her leg — and again a miracle happened, because the bullet didn’t hit her. The terrorist came over and shouted at her, “What’s going on?! It looks like you don’t want to die!” It seemed as though he understood that she was being protected from Above.

He told her to stand up and said, “Good, if you don’t want to die then you can help me. You’ll do what I tell you to do.” Then he told her to close the shop’s shutters before the police arrived. She began to close the shutters, and when she came to the last section an older man of around 60 peeped under the shutter and asked if he could come in. She told him, “No, no, no, we’re closing, don’t come in!”

He pleaded with her that he just wanted to buy challos for Shabbos, and that he didn’t have any challos for Shabbos. He bent down and tried to get in under the shutter — and the terrorist immediately shot him dead. Meanwhile, Zarie’s family still didn’t have any

information about what was happening, as there was no communication with anyone inside the supermarket.

Despite the Rav's double blessing, the family still couldn't relax. Rav Yaakov Biton, Chaim's father, contacted another of the Rav's attendants to ask the Rav, "What will be?" The Rav responded, "Tell them that they have nothing to worry about, they can calm down. She will leave on Shabbos and on Motzoei Shabbos they will know that she came out healthy and whole."

After they heard the Rav's *brachah* the third time, with exactly the same words, they were confident that the promise of the Tzaddik would be fulfilled, and that nothing bad would happen to their relative. They continued saying *Tehillim* with *emunah* and hope as they went into Shabbos.

As the saga unfolded, the terrorist ordered Zarie to bring all the hostages who had fled downstairs to the shop's basement up to him. Zarie went downstairs, and then came up with only one man, who claimed to be the only one down there⁵¹. The truth was that there were another 20 people hiding in the store's freezer.

The terrorist didn't believe him and started to get angry. He told Zarie to go down again and call to the other people down there and tell them to come up, and that if she didn't do it, he'd kill her. Immediately, some more people came up, including a three-year-old boy, whom the terrorist wanted to kill on the spot.

At that moment, one of the hostages jumped on the terrorist and took his weapon away. Unfortunately, though, the terrorist had another weapon, and he shot the person who'd tried to disarm him in the head and killed him. He also tried to shoot Zarie in the

⁵¹ This one man volunteered to sacrifice his life in order to save the others who were in hiding.

head, too, and she felt the bullet graze her cheek — but miracle of miracles, again nothing happened to her. This was the third bullet that miraculously missed her.

At the same time, another hostage tried to escape from the store and the terrorist shot him in the face. The wounded man struggled for another three hours, until he eventually succumbed to his wounds and died. Hashem should avenge their blood.

One of the people who was hiding in the freezer downstairs sent an sms message to journalists and told them where they were. The journalists didn't realize that the terrorist was checking the news channels on the TV screens in the supermarket the whole time throughout the siege, so they wrote a headline that people were hiding in the freezer downstairs at Hypercacher. That piece of information flashed up on the screen at precisely the same moment that the terrorist got distracted and turned away from the screen.

Zarie's brother was one of the shop's managers. Although he wasn't actually there, he still managed to access the shop's closed circuit cameras to show the police what was going on inside the store. At that point, the police believed that they were dealing with two terrorists, a man and a woman, but he told them that the woman "terrorist" was actually his sister, and that the terrorist was forcing her to help him against her will.

The terrorist said to Zarie, "If you don't do what I tell you one more time, I'm going to kill everyone." She pleaded with him, "I'll do whatever you want, but please, just don't kill the boy." He listened to her and didn't kill the three-year-old.

Then the terrorist went downstairs with her and told her that he was going to kill anyone he found down there on the spot, including her. Another open miracle happened. There were still a

number of people hiding downstairs, who went and crouched in a corner when they heard the terrorist coming. Miraculously, the terrorist simply didn't see them. He went back upstairs and told Zarie that she could live, after all.

A moment after this, the terrorist decided he needed to pray, and when he bowed down, the police saw what he was doing via the CCTV. They immediately burst into the shop and killed him. It was already Shabbos, and all the hostages left the store, including Zarie Sibony, who will never forget the miracles that Hashem did for her.

As Rav Berland repeatedly said, Zarie herself left the store on Shabbos, but the family only heard about her release on motzae Shabbos. The three separate blessings she'd received from the Rav had apparently saved her from the three bullets that the terrorist had aimed directly at her, but which all miraculously missed their target.

Shortly after the attack in Paris, the secret service in Belgium busted a large terrorist cell that was planning to launch a wave of attacks against the Jews living in Europe. Once the news became public, some of the leaders of the Jewish community in Belgium publicly thanked Hashem and said that they believed they'd been rescued from the terrible decree of destruction in the merit of hosting so many of Rav Berland's students after Yom Kippur, as 'charity saves from death'.



Meanwhile, harsh judgments of every type continued to follow hard on the heels of each other. Barely a month after the Rav had suffered his near-fatal cardiac arrest, news came that another Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Schick, had passed away at the age of 75. Rav Schick was a giant in the Breslov community,

building thriving communities of followers both in Boro Park, New York and also in the northern Israeli town of Yavni'el.

Rav Schick passed away in New York on February 6, 2015, after a stay in the hospital where he was being treated for complications related to leukemia. After his passing, Rav Daniel Stavsky, head of the Beit Baal Shem Tov outreach organization, commented that Heaven had taken “an Eliezer for an Eliezer.” Rav Eliezer Berland had recently had a very close call with the Angel of Death and had fought mightily to return to this lowly world and continue his holy work. But once the Heavenly decree had been issued to return the soul of a “Rabbi Eliezer” to its Maker, it appears that Rav Schick took the decree upon himself, and went in Rav Berland’s place.

Within weeks of Rav Schick’s passing, Rav Berland was back in court dealing with more judgments of a different kind. After their last failed attempt back in December 2015, the Israeli authorities had been redoubling their efforts to pressure the Dutch to agree to extradite Rav Berland back to Israel. Their efforts had been repeatedly hampered in the Dutch courts as they had no arrest warrant or credible evidence to present to the judges, so the Israeli government decided ‘to go to the top’ and turn the extradition of Rav Berland into a diplomatic affair.

On February 12, 2015, the Dutch Secretary for Justice, Klaas Dijkhoff, ordered the Dutch courts to agree to the extradition of Rav Berland, the lack of evidence against him notwithstanding.

While the Rav’s legal team in Holland immediately lodged an appeal against this decision, the Rav continued on with his regular schedule of learning Torah, praying and doing acts of kindness for the community, completely unfazed by all the commotion surrounding him in the Dutch courts.

The next casualty in that terrible year was the kabbalist Rav Dovid Chaim Stern. Rav Stern collapsed during a visit to the U.S.A. around Purim 5775, and was also found to have suffered a serious heart attack. One of the students who was traveling with Rav Stern happened to be a first responder for Magen Dovid Adom, and he immediately started to administer CPR to the Rav. For 40 minutes, this student fought for the Rav's life, even though the Rav had stopped breathing and no longer had a pulse.

Eventually, his pulse returned and the Rav was taken to the intensive care unit in Maimonides Medical Center in New York. When he was admitted, the hospital staff considered his condition to be somewhere between critical and non-recoverable. The doctors didn't really hold out any hope that the Rav would recover, and the word went out to his students and followers around the world to start urgently praying for Rav Stern's welfare and recovery.

On the advice of the *Gadol*, Rav Shmuel Wosner, Rav Stern was also given the additional name Alter. An information hotline was set up to inform the public about the Rav's condition, and to enable people to participate in round-the-clock prayers for Rav Stern's recovery. Yet despite all these efforts, Rav Stern's condition only continued to deteriorate.

After he was admitted to the hospital, he suffered a further two heart attacks, and a short while later it was discovered that both of his lungs had also completely collapsed, which meant he was now 100 percent dependent on life-support to breathe. If that wasn't bad enough, on the following day his kidneys also collapsed, and the attending physician told the Rav's son to call his other children to come to the hospital immediately, so they could be there when their father passed away.

One of Rav Stern's sons knew how much his father respected Rav Berland, whom he'd known for more than 45 years, ever since Rav Berland had been the Steipler Gaon's *chavrusa* back in Bnei Brak. In fact, he was still regularly in touch with him. He decided to phone Rav Berland, who was then in Holland, and tell him the whole situation.

Rav Berland's attendant, Natan Salamon, passed on the message to Rav Stern's son that Rav Berland recommended to immediately do a *pidyon nefesh*, and that if he did that, his father would get up and live.

Natan Salamon related that ten minutes after the *pidyon* had been arranged, a great miracle happened, and Rav Stern woke up. Even more miraculously, Rav Stern then proceeded to shock the doctors at Maimonides by very quickly regaining his health and strength.

A little while later, Rav Stern was healthy enough to fly back to Israel, to his home in Bnei Brak, and he marked the occasion by holding a gathering where he could properly express his gratitude to Hashem for the enormous miracles that had occurred. This gathering was the first time that Rav Stern publicly explained what had happened to him and he revealed how many open miracles had taken place.

One of Rav Stern's sons spoke at the gathering and said the following: "Anyone who wants to know and understand what the subject of *techiyas hameisim*, or the revival of the dead, is all about, only needs to see what Hashem, in His tremendous mercy and kindness, did in front of our eyes [referring to his father's miraculous return from the dead]. Even the doctors admitted wholeheartedly that what had happened here was nothing less than the revival of the dead."

It was also told over at the gathering that during the time when Rav Stern was clinically dead, his soul had been in *Shamayim* and he was being judged in the Heavenly Court. Suddenly, the proceedings were interrupted by a *bas kol*, a Heavenly voice that was heard throughout all the spiritual worlds, saying that Rav Stern had to be returned to life.

At the gathering, they also read a letter from the senior doctor at Maimonides who'd been responsible for arranging the medical aspects of Rav Stern's flight home, who wrote the following: "I'm here to set down in writing the size and magnitude of the miracle that we witnessed with our own eyes. What occurred here was truly a case of the revival of the dead. The Rav suffered a heart attack and spent 40 minutes without breathing and without a pulse. In the emergency room, he suffered another heart attack and had to be resuscitated again. The first three days he was in the hospital, he really wasn't 'there' at all, physically.

According to the attending physicians, his chances of coming back to life and regaining consciousness, and especially of regaining his mental faculties, were zero. But it appears that God healed [the Rav] by Himself. Even in our generation, I have had the merit of seeing miracles as big as those done at the time of the Exodus from Egypt." The letter was signed by Dr Kerstein, the head of the intensive care unit in Maimonides Hospital, New York.



The Rav and his followers continued to learn Torah, pray and participate in their regular *avodas Hashem* in Holland, although circumstances were frequently very trying. Yet despite all the court hearings, the near-death experiences, the terrible tragedies engulfing the Jewish community in all parts of the world and the more basic daily difficulties involved in trying to accommodate

hundreds of the Rav's followers in Holland, by the time Purim 5775 rolled around, more than 700 visitors made the trip to come and celebrate the festival with the Rav.

In an effort to avoid problems with the local authorities and to properly accommodate everyone who had arrived, the Rav's attendants managed to rent another holiday village on the Dutch-Belgian border, a half-hour journey away from the city of Antwerp. Despite the unusual circumstances, Purim 2015 by Rav Berland was a very joyful, holy affair.

The festival began on the night of March 4, 2015, when everyone gathered together in the big communal hall to hear the Rav read the *megillah*. In the morning, the *megillah* reading was held in the courtyard next to the Rav's holiday cottage, and it was accompanied by a lot of joyful singing and dancing.

Many of the people who gathered in Holland for Purim were seeing the Rav for the first time in their lives, and they had such a spiritually uplifting experience that they were already planning their next trip.

Indeed, so many visitors were expected for Pesach that the Rav's attendants sent out a message informing prospective guests that they had to tell them in advance if they were planning to be in Holland for Pesach, in order to avoid any problems with finding suitable accommodations that could provide the local media with more ammunition to use against the Rav and his followers.

Back in Israel, a few of Rav Berland's students spent Purim at the home of Rav Dov Kook of Tiberius and told him about all the things that had been happening to the Rav in Holland. For example, they mentioned how the Rav had been moving around the country from one holiday village to another together with his

students, and how some of the troublemakers in Holland kept stirring things up so the community had to keep moving from place to place.

Each time, the Rav and his students would find a new location, but after a few days, the trouble would start again, and everything would be heavily publicized in the Dutch papers, to the point that it almost seemed as though they were being paid to print negative stories about the Rav and his community. But each time the Rav and his community got kicked out of their latest location, God would send someone new to help them.

In Holland, an increasing number of Dutch non-Jews heard about Rav Berland — ironically, thanks to all the negative press coverage — and, impressed by his obvious holiness, they started donating money and resources to help keep him and his community together and afloat, financially. Some of these non-Jewish Dutch supporters were even talking about converting, just as had happened previously in Zimbabwe and South Africa, where many non-Jews had also been very strong supporters of the Rav, and keen to convert to Judaism.

When he heard all this, Rav Kook smiled and commented, “There’s some profound *siyatta d’Shmaya* going on. He’s going to come and redeem us, and when he comes, Moshiach will come too.”

The longer the Rav stayed in Holland, the more miracles stories started to circulate about him. Rav Chaim Elazar Bransdorfer (son of the late Rabbi Meir Bransdorfer) was visiting Rav Berland in Holland when someone delivered a note thanking the Rav for a *pidyon* he’d made for his terminally ill daughter, who was now coming back to life again.



Rav Bransdorfer remarked that he was no longer surprised to hear all of the miracle stories concerning the Rav, as he'd already heard about thousands of such wonders, and he knew that doing wonders came very easily to Rav Berland.

Rav Bransdorfer continued that what *had* astounded him was the way Rav Berland had managed to reach so many Jews who were so distant from Torah and bring them back to being true *baalei teshuvah*. He recounted that he'd heard from one such *baal teshuvah*, who'd been extremely distant from *Yiddishkeit*, how the Rav had brought him back to Judaism without even saying a word to him, and Rav Bransdorfer commented that he had no idea how that could be possible — until that week in Holland.

That Shabbos in Holland, he'd seen it with his own eyes, when he'd been eating the Friday night meal at the Rav's home, expecting the Rav to give over some wondrous words of Torah. Instead, the Rav didn't say a word, and just sang Shabbos songs for many hours on end.

Rav Bransdorfer continued,

"I truly saw with my own eyes how so many of the people who'd come from chutz la'aretz to spend Shabbos with the Rav just sat there, gazing at the tremendous

light that the Rav was generating simply by doing what he was doing, particularly when he was singing the zemiros. I saw with my own eyes the huge changes that were occurring [as a result], and that they were being brought closer to Hashem much more [that way] than anyone could possibly do with words.”



As 5775 continued, the feeling of impending doom that had enveloped the Jewish people (and the world more generally) continued to deepen. Many of the *Gedolei Hador* put out messages at this time, including the following one from Rav Chaim Kanievsky, which was publicized around Pesach 5775 (April 2015) by the famous *darshan* and *mashgiach*, Rav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky.

Rav Mishkovsky made the following comments while he was speaking at a conference organized by Lev L’Achim:

“Today, we find ourselves at one of the most critical moments for the Jewish people,” Rav Mishkovsky announced. “One of the close relatives of our teacher and Torah giant, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, recently came to visit him, and the ‘prince of Torah’ [i.e. Rav Chaim Kanievsky] told him: ‘Go and announce to Klal Yisrael that we are at the time of ‘the footsteps of Moshiach,’ and that Moshiach is at the threshold, and the only possibility of surviving this period is through Torah and gemilus chassidim.”

The grandson of Rav Kanievsky was also present, and wrote down the message as follows:

“To the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, including those who are called ‘chilonim’: I was requested by my teacher and Rabbi, the Rabbi of Israel, shlita, to inform you that the only way to survive this generation is by following the path of Torah and doing good deeds, and that there is no other way.”

Rav Kanievsky then confirmed the wording of this message.

The grandson asked Rav Kanievsky, “How should I publicize this? Should I announce it with a loudspeaker?” Rav Kanievsky replied, “Yes! Take a loudspeaker and go all over the country!”

As the tension was mounting across the world⁵², Rav Berland had his final court hearing at the Dutch Supreme Court on June 30, 2015. After months of being pressured by the Israeli government, and specifically the Israeli police’s *Yahbal*⁵³ unit, the Supreme Court in Holland finally ruled that the Rav could be extradited to Israel.

Less than a week later, the Rav failed to appear for his regular 6 p.m. appointment at the local police station in Amsterdam, despite being under close observation by the Dutch authorities, who had also confiscated his passport. Nevertheless, by July 6, 2015, the unbelievable news filtered out that Rav Berland had apparently left Holland for good, and no one had any idea where he’d gone.

⁵² The headlines at this time were full of stories about ISIS decapitating hundreds of people in Iraq and Syria, and threatening to do the same to Westerners, too.

⁵³ On July 5, 2015, very shortly after this ruling was handed down, the former head of the *Yahbal* unit who’d begun the formal persecution of the Rav by the Israeli police, Ephraim Bracha, was found dead in his car in his hometown of Modiin, after committing suicide.

While the Dutch Prosecutors Office were scratching their heads, wondering how on earth the Rav could have left the country undetected, his Dutch lawyer, Louis de Leon, said what many other people were thinking, namely, that if the Rav had really managed to leave Europe without a passport, this clearly showed that he was a holy person, with supernatural powers.

Following the news of his miraculous disappearance from Holland, the international media started publishing all sorts of wild rumors about where the Rav had gone, and how he'd gotten there. Some journalists told their audience that the Rav had gone to Guatemala; others claimed that he was hiding out on a Caribbean island. But the truth was that no one knew where Rav Berland really was.

On 22 Av 5775, precisely 40 days after the Rav miraculously disappeared from Holland, he finally made contact and told his students that he wanted them to prepare for “good tidings” in the coming month of Elul.

In that recorded *shiur*, the Rav spoke a great deal about Eliyahu Hanavi, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and about the forthcoming year of redemption, 5776 — but he still didn't tell them where he was. It was only on Rosh Hashanah that the news leaked out that the Rav had returned to South Africa.

On Rosh Chodesh Elul 5775, the Rav announced that Moshiach would come that year, 5776. He said:

“On Motzoei the first day of Sukkos, the King Moshiach will already be standing and reading from the Torah. We're already waiting for Jerusalem to be rebuilt, and to see the King Moshiach read from the Torah. This is now the 40 days that we're preparing ourselves beforehand

for the birth. The King Moshiach will already be born before Yom Kippur... Forty days before Yom Kippur, the King Moshiach will already be born!"

The Rav also gave his students a sign that would help them know that Moshiach's coming was imminent: "If you see that the whole world is warring, that is the moment that the Moshiach will be revealed," he said. The Rav repeated the by-now familiar refrain: *Motzoei Shevi'is, milchamos* — on the evening after the *Shemittah* year, wars. The moment that Moshiach comes, all the world would be aroused to war.

But what sort of "wars" was the Rav really referring to?

A few days after the Rav spoke on the 25th of Elul and explained that the whole world would be sending their warships to Eretz Yisrael, Russia surprised the international community by sending warships and aircraft carriers to the Middle East, and also a number of soldiers to Syria. The ships were anchored in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, practically on the border of Israel.

From one day to the next, the armed forces in the region grew bigger. As well as Russian armed forces, most of the Western nations of the world also sent soldiers to the Middle East, including America, France, Italy, Britain, Belgium, Spain, Canada, Portugal, Greece and Holland.

In addition, Iran, North Korea, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Croatia, Venezuela, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, the Iranian-backed Hezbollah and Algeria also started to participate in the war in Syria, either directly by sending soldiers, or more indirectly by sending weapons or money.

By Rosh Hashanah 5776 (2015), a huge number of soldiers and weapons, including tactical nukes, were located in and around Syria. The war was ostensibly being fought against ISIS (Islamic State), but it increasingly resembled an international war being fought by proxy. With so many countries squaring off against each other, concern was high that even minor security incidents could potentially escalate into a world war. A little later, Turkey blew up a Russian plane that they claimed had strayed across the Turkish border with Syria. Russia retaliated by threatening to wipe Turkey off the map and sent a large number of weapons to the area⁵⁴.

As Turkey and Russia faced off against each other, it became even clearer how volatile and explosive the situation in Syria actually was.

When this occurred, Rav Moshe Sternbuch immediately sent out the following declaration to his students:

“We have received a tradition from the Vilna Gaon, handed down from one generation to the next, that if Russia will enter and conquer Istanbul, the capital of Turkey, a person should hurry to get his Shabbos finery ready, and to wait for Moshiach. The Russians and the Turks have begun to quarrel with each other. We hear the sounds of war, and all of the nations are shocked: How can Turkey start up with Russia? But we see in this the fulfillment of Chazal’s saying that when Moshiach comes, Hashem will provoke the nations against each other, and against their will, they’ll go to war.”

⁵⁴ Russia deployed the guided missile cruiser Moskva armed with S-300F (SA-N-6 Grumble) long-range SAM missiles off the Syrian coast near Latakia[15] and S-400 (SA-21 Growler) mobile SAM systems to Khmeimim airbase.

We're in Motzoei Shevi'is. We see in these matters great chizuk, spiritual strengthening, and we need to wake ourselves up. We must wake ourselves up to do teshuvah, and if we don't, God forbid, then [the enemies] will 'strengthen' Am Yisrael [in the matter of doing teshuvah], and we will experience some very great suffering."

At the same time, a video of a secular teenage boy who'd had a clinical death, and who had apparently been shown some violent scenes in Heaven relating to the imminent coming of Moshiach, went viral across Israel and the world, with hundreds of thousands of viewers. Among the many things the teenage boy said was that the IDF would only be able to stand up against its enemies for two days, and that Israel was about to be conquered by literally hundreds of thousands of foreign soldiers.

The prophecy in *Zechariah* speaks of all the soldiers of the nations gathering around Israel, and as 5776 began, it seemed that prophecy was about to come true. At this time, Rav Berland was asked if the war of Gog and Magog had started, and he replied, "Yes."

But it still wasn't clear what that actually meant. Would it be a massively destructive conventional war? A nuclear war, God forbid? Or something else completely?

THE THIRD INTIFIDA BEGINS

Rav Berland once said: “People think that Moshiach can come without prayer. That a person can simply travel to Uman, press a button, and Moshiach will appear. He’ll be there at the *tziyun*, and just needs to press a certain secret button, and then Moshiach will appear. Moshiach can’t come until we do true *teshuvah* with a truly broken heart and have true *shmiras einayim!*”

“It’s time to cry out, ‘We are guilty!’ and then Moshiach will really come, and Moshiach will be revealed. Moshiach wants to be revealed at every moment. *Motzoei Shemittah* — this is the time that Moshiach needs to be revealed.”

The Rav concluded that all the wars, the intifada and the dangers that will accompany the coming of the Moshiach are only to get people to wake up and do *teshuvah*, so that we’ll cry out “We are guilty! That’s it,” he said. “That’s all we need to do.”

On Erev Sukkos 5776 (September 27, 2015), the Rav wrote an unusual prayer about the so-called “blood-red moon” that was seen in the skies above Jerusalem on the first night of Sukkos. The Rav wrote:

“About this [the blood moon] the Zohar wrote in parshas Shelach 162 that ‘the moon will turn to blood.’

The Prophet Yoel wrote about this, in Yoel 3, and said, ‘And I will place wonders in the skies and on the earth.

Blood and fire, and a pillar of smoke, and the sun will turn to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day. And all those who call out in My Name will rule, because the remnants will be on Mount Zion in Jerusalem... And I will gather together all of the nations, and bring them down to the valley of Yehoshaphat, and I will judge them there [in regard to what they've done to] My people. And I will give an inheritance to Israel, which is scattered amongst the nations, and My land they will share.”

Immediately after the blood-red moon appeared, the third intifada began, with the cold-blooded murder of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Henkin on October 1, 2015, who were shot to death by Palestinian terrorists in front of their four children as they were driving in the Shomron hills. Just a few days later, on October 3, 2015, the holy martyrs Aharon Bennett and Rav Nechemia Lavi were also murdered in cold blood in front of their children, in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem.

The murder of Aharon Bennett, the son-in-law of one of the Rabbis at Shuvu Banim, was particularly close to home. Little Naftali Bennett, aged two and a half, was also injured in the attack that killed his father and seriously wounded his mother, Adel.

Rav Yosef Gal, Adel's father, describes what happened that fateful day: “Aharon, Hashem should avenge his blood, was murdered in the last moments of Shabbos Chol Hamoed, on his way back to our home. The terrorist ambushed them, and first attacked Adel, stabbing her 13 times. Despite the fact that she was trying to fight him off, and that Aharon was also hitting him, the terrorist continued. He stabbed Aharon fatally, and even though he had the knife still

stuck in him, the last thing Aharon managed to do before he died was pull the terrorist to the floor.”

Rav Nechemia Lavi lived in Beit Wittenberg, a Jewish residence located in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, directly above where the attack was taking place. He heard the screams coming from outside, and heroically risked his life to help the victims. Rav Lavi quickly wheeled the two children away from the terrorist in their stroller, saving them from certain death, before he, too, was murdered.

When Rav Berland was informed about what had happened, he said,

“It’s difficult for us to hear the difficult, tragic news about the terrible murder that happened today, where a holy and pure avreich from our holy community was murdered by the hands of a depraved evildoer and cut down in the prime of his life. We need to know that the holy Rav Aharon Bennett, Hashem should avenge his blood, and also the father and mother that were murdered the week before with terrible cruelty in front of their children, were a kapparah for Am Yisrael. They sweetened the decree and prevented another Holocaust from happening to Am Yisrael.

Hashem Yisbarach woke us up, that we should do true teshuvah. We should begin to honestly love and care about one another.”

Aharon’s wife, Adel, was seriously injured in the attack, sustaining 13 deep stab wounds to her upper body. She was immediately taken for lengthy surgery to try to save her life. The family called Rav Berland and asked him what to do, and the Rav told them to

bring a *pidyon nefesh* for her, which they did. Adel's situation then improved miraculously, against all odds. The doctor came out of the operating room and announced that there had been a miraculous and completely unexpected improvement in her condition.

At this time, Rav Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern said that the intifada had begun specifically then because the Arabs were already feeling that very soon the Temple would be rebuilt, and that the redemption of the Jewish people was close, and at that time they would lose all of their power. So they were trying to prevent the redemption.

A little before Purim 5755, Rav Berland issued a call for every member of *Am Yisrael* to contribute a sum of money, however small, toward a communal "*pidyon hakollel*" that would sweeten the harsh decrees of the so-called Third Intifada that the Rav could see looming on the horizon. The goal was to raise \$600,000 — a dollar for each of the root souls of the nation of Israel — and to sweeten the judgments that way.

At that time, he sent out a message saying: "We are in a new intifada, and it's a terrible intifada that will spread around the globe. It's impossible to stop it [by natural means]."

Unfortunately, even though the request to participate in the "*pidyon hakollel*" was repeated many times, with announcements appearing in many of the Breslov yeshivos encouraging people to donate, and many people took the Rav's plea to heart, most of these people were not wealthy, and barely a sixth of the total required was raised.

Then the Festival of Sukkos 5776 arrived, and with it came the beginning of the prophesized upswing in Arab violence. When the shootings, stabbings and other attacks began in earnest in Eretz

Yisrael, everyone saw that the prophecy of the Rav had indeed materialized. The Third Intifada, foreseen by the Rav and which he'd hoped to avoid and sweeten, had begun.

At this time, the Rav publicized an important message that whoever would donate 98 shekels a month for a *pidyon* would be saved, in that merit, along with his whole family, from the terrorist attacks.

The Rav promised this himself, in the following words where he said:

“As long as the intifada continues, everyone is obligated to give, every Jew in every place of the world. Even non-Jews should give 98 shekels — which is \$26, or €25, every month, for as long as this continues.

In every place in the world there are terror attacks. Whoever wants to be saved from this new intifada that is spreading over the entire globe, needs to give. Everyone who gives the pidyon will be saved from all attacks, and from all stumbling blocks, and from all types of sin.”

The Shuvu Banim Rabbis joined together with the Rav in this important project and tried to organize a group that included all the Rabbanim across *Am Yisrael*.

WHY PIDYON NEFESH WORKS TO REMOVE HARSH JUDGMENTS

The language that *Chazal* use to describe “money” is *damim*, which literally means “blood” or “bloods” in Hebrew. When there are harsh decrees hanging over *Am Yisrael*, they can only

be sweetened by immense amounts of *mesirus nefesh*, or self-sacrifice from the Jewish people, which often entails the spilling of blood.

But there is another way of sweetening the decrees.

Instead of spilling real blood, God forbid, it's also possible to fulfill the requirement to "spill blood" by the self-sacrifice required in giving money, or *damim*. If you give whatever amount you're able to give, with *mesirus nefesh*, then you fulfill the verse that states, "Charity saves from death⁵⁵." A *pidyon nefesh* where each person gives a fixed amount is called *pidyon hakollel*, or "communal redemption," and this sweetens all of the judgments that are currently hanging over the nation of Israel, which means we won't see any more blood spilled in our country.

As the Third Intifada gathered steam, barely a week went by without reports of another terrible attack in Israel. Perhaps one of the most notably disturbing incidents happened in the Central Bus Station in Beer Sheva on October 18, 2015, when an IDF soldier was killed and 10 others injured 3 in bad condition. IDF soldier Daniel Harush was so badly injured in the attack, the attending paramedics actually initially believed he was dead. This is how Daniel himself remembers the attack and its aftermath.

"I was using the washroom when the attack first started," recalls Daniel. "I peeped outside in order to assess the severity of the situation, and I saw that a soldier had been wounded by the terrorist and was lying on the ground. I immediately turned to my friend and told him that we needed to try to help the wounded soldier. However, as soon as I came out of the washroom, I got hit by a number of bullets that completely immobilized me — I collapsed on the spot."

⁵⁵ *Mishlei* 11:4.

He continues:

“I took five bullets, and I can’t even begin to describe how scared I felt. I didn’t even have time to weigh the situation that I found myself in. I was wearing my army uniform and I still honestly have no idea how a policeman could end up confusing an Israeli soldier with a terrorist. [Daniel was injured by ‘friendly’ fire.] And then, the next thing I knew I was lying on the floor, covered in blood, and trying not to lose consciousness.

Afterwards, they discovered that I’d been critically wounded in the stomach and liver, and also seriously wounded in the elbow. They took me straight to the operating room, and when I got there, I didn’t have a pulse. I was fighting for my life,” he says. “I went through a series of long, complicated operations, and for all intents and purposes I was in a coma and on a respirator for more than three weeks.”



Throughout those long, hard weeks, Daniel's relatives were constantly by his side in the hospital, caring for him throughout the difficult time that he was in a coma. Daniel's good friend, Ziv Mamon, takes up the tale of what was happening to Daniel during those weeks that he was unconscious and fighting for his life.

“Daniel arrived in the hospital in a state that was described as critical. As soon as we could, we got in contact with Rav Berland and told him about the terrible situation,” Ziv explains. “The Rav already knew Daniel from the time that he came all the way up from Eilat to hear a shiur that the Rav was giving in Beitar Illit. The Rav asked us to immediately send his gabbai, Natan Solomon, a sum of money for a pidyon nefesh for Daniel, and told us: ‘He will have miracles and wonders, and he will merit to bring the redemption to Am Yisrael.’

The following day, the Rav sent a bottle of drops to Daniel's family. In the meantime, it seemed as though the whole of Eilat joined us in the *mitzvah* of pulling together the funds required to immediately arrange the *pidyon*; everyone gave whatever they could.”

And what about the drops? Was Daniel immediately given the drops that the Rav had sent him?

“Unfortunately not,” Ziv tells us. “For various reasons, the drops kind of fell off everyone's radar, and we forgot all about them for a few weeks. But once we remembered them, we had our first big miracle. Around two hours after we gave Daniel the Rav's drops, Daniel opened his eyes for the first time in more than three weeks,” says Ziv.

“I am 100 percent sure that it was the drops that helped me!” interjects Daniel.

“It clearly was,” replies Ziv. *“Until we gave him the drops, nothing was moving. It looks like Rav Berland wanted to create some sort of natural ‘cover’ for the enormous miracle that was going to heal Daniel.”*

Daniel’s family informed the Rav’s *gabbai*, Natan Solomon, about the great miracle that had occurred, and how Daniel had woken up right after they’d given him the drops, even though he’d been in a coma for three weeks. When the *gabbai* told Rav Berland what had happened, the Rav answered, “Wow! What amazing drops! We need to distribute them to the whole world!”



As the toll from the terrible stabbings, murders and other terrorist attacks in Israel continued to mount, shortly before the Fast of Esther 5776 (March 22, 2016), Rav Berland issued a call for at least 10,000 people to come together at Me’aras Hamachpelah in Chevron.

Rav Berland promised that if a minimum of 10,000 participants would go to Chevron on the forthcoming Fast of Esther to pray, the attacks would stop. A little over 10,000 people — including some of the nation’s leading Rabbis — heeded the call and went to Chevron for the prayer gathering.

After the crowd had finished reading through the entire book of *Tehillim*, Rav Berland was contacted to speak to the gathering on a phone that was attached to a number of loudspeakers. Over 10,000 people heard him say that night: “In the merit of this gathering, the Intifada will stop”.

Miraculously from that night on, the stabbings and attacks that had been occurring on an almost daily basis beforehand did indeed abruptly stop.

After the event, Rav Yekusiel Fish commented:

“Whoever can’t put two and two together is an idiot. Specifically, at the same time that we are under constant attack from the Iranian nuclear threat, Rav Berland is being persecuted and is suffering in exile.

Without question, Rav Berland has been fighting the [Iranian’s] spiritual source, as is hinted to in his name “Berland”, which means ‘land of the bear’ in Yiddish. It’s known from the Gemara, (Tractate Yoma 77a) that the spiritual source of the Persian nation is called “Dubiel” the heavenly bear.

*There is no question that Rav Berland is fighting them at their source, as well as all the other threats that Am Yisrael is facing. Whoever doesn’t put two and two together.... Here’s a Tzaddik who is halting the tragedies himself, who is stopping a nuclear attack. He said: “Go and make a prayer gather on the night of the fast of Esther and it will stop the Intifada.” They went and did this, and **immediately** the Intifada stopped after half a year that not one day passed without killings!”*



Speaking shortly before Pesach 5776, Rav Shalom Arush commented: *“After the last prayer gathering in Chevron on the Fast of Esther, we clearly saw with our own eyes the strength of our teacher, Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita. After the prayer gathering that the Rav called for in Chevron, the terrorist attacks halted altogether. We suffered so much from those terrorist attacks and now we see with our own eyes that it stopped.”*”

Rav Berland had requested that another prayer gathering should be organized in Chevron on April 27, 2016, and Rav Arush was encouraging people to attend.

Rav Arush continued:

“Pesach is the time of redemption, and there is no other place that can work salvations like Me’aras Hamachpelah... Everyone is obligated to make an effort and to participate. It’s really important. We clearly saw with our own eyes how the last prayer gathering truly worked miracles on behalf of Am Yisrael... We

need to [pray to] continue to bring the geulah the sweet way, and that the Rav should return [to Israel].”

But, before things could get better, and Rav Berland could return to the Holy Land, the Rav’s precarious position in exile was about to get a whole lot worse.

REBBE NACHMAN'S DREAM

In the month of Kislev 5770 (1809), Rebbe Nachman dreamt a dream that was shrouded in mystery for more than 203 years. Rebbe Nachman taught that dreams should only be written down if you want them to come true. This particular dream that he'd had was so awful, the Rebbe cried for a full day after he'd dreamt it, yet Rebbe Nachman still insisted that it should be written down and even publicized. None of his students or followers had any explanation as to why this should be the case.

There is a tradition within Breslov that the cryptic dreams and stories of Rebbe Nachman would only really be fully understood when the Jewish people approached the end of days. The following dream⁵⁶ of Rebbe Nachman bears that tradition out very powerfully:

I was sitting in my room, but not even a single person came to see me. I was very surprised by this, so I went to a different room, but there wasn't a single person there, either. I went to the large house, and the study hall, but there wasn't a single person in either of those places, either.

⁵⁶ You can read the full dream for yourself in the book *Chayei Moharan* (in Hebrew), or in English, in the book *Tzaddik*, published by the Breslov Research Institute in the section called New Stories.

So, I thought I would go outside. I went outside and saw there rows and rows of people standing around and whispering among themselves. One person would make a comment about me, and someone else would snicker, and then yet another person would make a face at me. Even my own followers were against me. Some of them looked at me in a very arrogant way, while others were telling each other secrets about me, and so forth.

I called one of my followers over and asked him, “What’s going on?”

He replied, “How could you do such a thing?! How could you do such a terrible sin?!”⁵⁷ I still had absolutely no idea why everyone was mocking me. So I asked this man to go and gather a few of my followers together. He left me — and I didn’t see him again. So I started thinking to myself what I should do next. I decided to leave, and to go to another country.

I arrived there — but things were exactly the same. Even there, people knew about the situation and were standing around and talking about it. So, I thought I would go and live in the wilderness somewhere. Five of my followers joined me, and we went together to live in the wilderness. Whenever we needed to eat something, or so forth, we’d send one of the men out to get us what we needed. I used to ask him if the uproar had died down yet, but he answered, “No. It’s still very fierce.”

⁵⁷ The line “how could you do such a terrible sin” was taken out of later printings of the book, but can still be found in the printing by the “Mesech Hanachal” publishers, which was copied from the original manuscript and published in Lublin 1920

While we were living there, an old man came and called me, and told me he had something to tell me. So I went with him, and he started saying, “How do you dare to do such a thing?! Can’t you see how you’ve put your ancestors to shame — your grandfather, Rabbi Nachman Horodenka, and your great-grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, zt”l? Think of the holy Torah! Think of the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitchak and Yaakov! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?! How can you even think about staying here? Can you stay here forever? Your money will run out; you’re physically weak. What are you going to do?

“And what’s with the idea of running away to a different country? However you look at it, it’s not going to help you, because if they don’t already know who you are they won’t give you any money. And if they do already know who you are, then you still won’t be able to stay there because they’ll already know all about this situation.”

I replied, “If that’s how things are, and I’m simply a fugitive, then at least I’ll still have the World to Come.”

“You really think you’re going to have the World to Come?!” he answered. “After sinning like this, you couldn’t even find a place to hide yourself in Gehinnom because you caused such a terrible chillul Hashem⁵⁸!”

“Go!” I said. “I hoped you would have comforted me and spoken kind words to me. Now you’re only just making things more painful. Get away from me!” So the old man went away.

⁵⁸ These words were also taken out in later printings.

While I was staying there [in the forest], I thought to myself: "If I'm staying here for such a long time, chances are I could completely forget my learning." So I asked the man who used to go into the city for us to try and find a [Torah] book there, and to bring it back to me. He went to the city, but he didn't end up bringing back a book. He said it had been impossible to do it, because he couldn't tell anyone who the book was for, but it was also impossible to find a [Torah] book secretly. I suffered a great deal, because not only was I a fugitive, I also didn't even have a [Torah] book. Because a person can end up completely forgetting all of their learning.

Later, the old man came back, carrying a book under his arm. I asked him, "What have you got there?" And he replied, "A book." I asked him to give it to me, and he did. I took the book, but found that I had no idea how to position it. I opened it, but I found I couldn't understand a word of it — it was as though it was written in a different language and a different alphabet. I couldn't understand it at all, and this was very painful to me. I was also afraid that the men who were with me would leave me if they found out about this.

The old man called me over to him again, to speak to me. I went, and he started berating me again, as he'd done before: "How could you do such a thing?! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?! Even in Gehinnom, you'll have nowhere to hide!"

I said to him, "If it was someone from the Upper World who was telling me this, I would believe him." He told me, "I'm from there!" and then he showed me a sign that he was from there. Then, I started thinking about

the famous story about the Baal Shem Tov, where the Baal Shem Tov thought that he wouldn't be given any share in the World to Come, but he said anyway, "I love God, even without the World to Come."

In great bitterness, I threw my head down and turned away. As soon as I did that, all the different people the old man said I had shamed appeared in front of me — my grandfather and great-grandfather, the Patriarchs, etc. — and quoted the verse, "And the fruit of the land for excellence and proud beauty" (Yeshayah 4:2). They said to me, "On the contrary, we will be proud of you."

They brought all of my followers and sons⁵⁹ to me (because even my sons had left me when all this had begun) and they spoke kind words to me — the opposite of what had happened beforehand.

As to my throwing my head down in bitterness... If someone who had transgressed the whole Torah 800 times had thrown his head down as bitterly as that, he would certainly have been forgiven.

Rebbe Nachman finished relating his dream with these words: **"I don't want to tell you the other great goodness contained in this [the dream], but it was most certainly good!"**

⁵⁹ At the time Rebbe Nachman told over this dream, both of his two sons had already died in early childhood.

SOUTH AFRICA: PART II

THE HIDDEN SCROLL OF REBBE NACHMAN

Breslov *chassidus* has in its possession a secret document called the *Megillas Sesorim* (the Hidden Scroll) that was written in code and contains Rebbe Nachman's detailed description of what would occur in the time leading up to Moshiach.

In the Hidden Scroll, Rebbe Nachman says: "At first, there will be a huge *machlokes* surrounding Moshiach, and people will say [in astonishment], 'That's Moshiach?!'"

Writing in the book *Paolos Hatzaddik*, Rav Eliezer Schick brought down the following: "*Rav Natan once spoke up about Rebbe Nachman's Hidden Scroll [Megillat Sesorim] and said, 'The war of Gog and Magog is not specifically described in the Megillas Sesorim, but what was indicated was that there would be a flood of heresy in the world, and that would be the huge test facing us, and the Moshiach.'*"

Rav Shick continues: "*So from this we can learn that every time, in every generation, that we see enormous accusations between the people of Israel, and we see that arrogance is increasing — know! The Moshiach is already ready to reveal himself! It's only the heresy and the arrogance that is covering him up and concealing him...*"

The war of Gog and Magog includes all the machlokes and accusations that there will be around these same true tzaddikim, who reveal the true will of Hashem Yisbarach, because they [i.e., the arrogant people and mockers] want to devour them alive, may God have mercy.

And they will say every forbidden thing about them [the true tzaddikim] and make fun of them a lot — and by so doing, they will distance the souls of Am Yisrael from them. And this is what lengthens the bitter exile, may God have mercy. And so I say, woe to them! And woe to the souls of those who have any part in the machlokes and the arguments concerning the true tzaddikim, who reveal the true will of Hashem Yisbarach.

For they are the brazen-faced of the generation, those with the face of a dog⁶⁰, the soldiers of Gog and Magog, who conceal the truth, and they are the wicked people of the generation... of whom it's said: "When you see that he is so brazen-faced it is a proof that he is wicked", and it's written in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:10): 'He who is brazen-faced, and he who is a baal machlokes — he is the most wicked of wicked people,' may God have mercy.

And if you would have known, my beloved brother, what is written in the Megillas Sesorim about these soldiers of Gog and Magog, who conceal and hide the truth, you would become faint and terribly frightened, and you would fall on your face from the terrible panic and fear, about by who, through what, and why this bitter exile has been lengthened."

Rav Shick concluded: "In all circumstances, beloved brother, run away from *machlokes* and disagreements, and don't get into arguments, and take no part in any *machlokes* ever, or arguments about or mockery being made of the true *tzaddikim*, because we don't know what each day will bring, and you have no idea who and what you may be challenging and making fun of.

And even though they will want to entice you [to join them], saying it's a *mitzvah* to persecute good people, you, my beloved brother, you must protect your soul! And run away from '*mitzvos*' like these, otherwise 'bitter will be your end' — and the opposite

⁶⁰ This term is taken from the Gemara, which states that the face of the generation in the time of Moshiach is the face of a dog. It is interpreted by many as referring to false leaders who try to prevent people from finding the true Tzaddik who can really get them out of the bitter exile. Also see Sipurei Ma'asios (Rebbe Nachman's Stories), number 8.

is also true. If you help the true *tzaddikim*, you will bring the *geulah* closer, and you will be worthy of all the good that has been prepared for the soldiers of Dovid HaMelech.”

Given the terrible threats to his life that he'd experienced previously, it perhaps seems a little odd that Rav Berland decided to return to South Africa after he left Holland. Logically, it would have made more sense for him to go somewhere else, where he knew he wouldn't be actively chased by a violent bunch of gangsters-cum-policemen like the South African Hawks. Or, to go to another country which didn't have an extradition treaty with Israel (according to the claims that he was simply 'on the run').

The simple fact of the matter is that Rav Berland returned to South Africa solely because there was still spiritual work for him to do there.

When Rav Berland re-entered South Africa, he immediately got on with the work of creating a viable Torah infrastructure so that his followers and students could come and visit him, without disrupting their Torah learning, prayers and other *avodas Hashem*.

In contrast to his first visit to South Africa, this time the Rav and the 80 Shuvu Banim families who joined him found a place to stay that was an hour out of Johannesburg, where they could keep a low profile and not tread on anyone's toes in the local Jewish community.

Despite the fact that the corrupt South African Hawks had been violently persecuting the Rav for months during his previous stay in South Africa, within a couple of months of his surprise return to the African peninsula, the Rav was granted diplomatic immunity and a South African passport by the government there.

His followers fervently hoped that this would mark the end of the terrible persecution and threats of imprisonment that had dogged the Rav throughout his three-year exile, as his persecutors from Israel tried to stir up one country after another against him. Being granted diplomatic immunity meant (in theory) that the Rav couldn't be arrested and could move around the country as a completely free man, without being subjected to any checks or governmental interference.

It sounded great — in theory. In practice, the Rav's persecutors continued to pour enormous amounts of time, money and energy into finagling his arrest and "deportation" back to Israel. But it would take a few more months before their efforts bore fruit.

On the Shabbos before Tu B'Shvat 5776 (January 22, 2016), more than 400 of the Rav's followers flew out to Johannesburg to spend the festival with the Rav.

The Rav was staying at a holiday village in South Africa, and the premises quickly filled to capacity. Whoever hadn't made prior reservations at the holiday village ended up sleeping on blankets on the grass outside.

Even though his students were flying out to spend Tu B'Shvat with Rav Berland, which was on the following Monday, January 25, 2016, the Rav had made a specific point of encouraging his followers to be with him for the Shabbos before, Shabbos Shira. In a recording that was put out on the community hotline, the Rav announced that over the following days, big things were meant to happen in relation to the forthcoming redemption of the Jewish people.

The whole week beforehand, the Rav had been speaking about his persecutors and their ongoing machinations against him, which

was very unusual, for the Rav. He said that because he'd organized another wedding in South Africa, the Hawks were going to try to arrest him again.

The wedding was originally scheduled to take place on Sunday night, January 24, 2016, but the Rav advised the couple to push the wedding forward to before Shabbos, because he clearly knew what was going to happen next.

That Friday night, the Rav and the community prayed a very long *Kabbalas Shabbos* service in the big marquee tent that had been left up from the wedding that had taken place earlier in the week. At 11 p.m., after the prayers had finished, the Rav went to his holiday cottage on the grounds of the hotel with his family, in order to eat the Friday night meal.

About half an hour later, around 60 commandos from the South African Hawks suddenly appeared at the hotel grounds. It was an extremely dangerous and threatening situation. The 60 Hawks policemen were dressed in black and had their weapons drawn and ready to fire as they circulated through the hotel grounds, trying to find the Rav.

One look at their faces told everyone there that they really meant business, and that this time they were determined to stop the Rav in his tracks, one way or another. The situation was so frightening that one of the children there developed breathing difficulties as a result of the fear he experienced and had to be taken to the hospital urgently by his family on Shabbos.

The Hawks had surrounded the entire hotel grounds, and according to the laws of nature there was very little chance that the Rav would be able to escape from the Hawks this time around. The

hotel complex consisted of many different holiday cottages, each with two rooms upstairs and another two rooms downstairs.

The South African police moved methodically from one cottage to the next, conducting a detailed search of all the rooms and all the guests as they went along. When they reached the Rav's cottage, they immediately started searching through the lower two rooms. Then, they got ready to climb the stairs to the room where the Rav was calmly sitting, with the door wide open. Everyone held their breath to see what was going to happen next.

The police were already climbing the stairs, just as they'd done in every other cottage that they'd already searched, when suddenly, and for no obvious reason, they decided to turn around and leave without searching the upper rooms.

A few minutes later, the Rav left his room and started to walk down the stairs. One of the policemen was standing directly opposite him and was looking straight at him — but the policeman didn't see a thing! Hashem had blinded his eyes, and the Rav walked past him without being seen, in what appears to have been a remarkable, open miracle. Rav Berland then proceeded to leave the hotel grounds undetected.



Over the next three months, the Rav continued to be persecuted by the authorities in South Africa. Sadly, the poisonous stories that continued to appear about the Rav and his followers in the local media also succeeded in causing tensions to rise between the Rav's followers and some members of the South African Jewish community.

Shortly after the media made the fantastic claim that Rav Berland was urging his followers to violently attack the South African Chief Rabbi, the Rav released the following statement:

“I’ve come to make it known to everyone that the Chief Rabbi is my most faithful friend. He is with me in heart and soul. He is, thank G-d, taking care of me and our kehillah here in Johannesburg, physically and spiritually. I have never had a friend like Rav Goldstein my whole life, a friend so faithful. The kehillah feels the best under his patronage. He takes care of all of the affairs of our kehillah. I only respect him and pray to G-d that He should prolong his days and years. G-d forbid that things which were never said and have no foundation or basis should be publicized in my name — to say that I want to, G-d forbid, take his life. I only pray for his well-being.

G-d should prolong his days and years and establish his kingdom forever and ever, him and his family and children for all generations until the coming of our righteous Moshiach.”

By Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5776, a little more than three years after he first left Israel, it seems that Rav Berland had finally been given permission from Heaven to start the process of ending his exile in *chutz la’aretz*, and returning to Eretz Yisrael.

In a statement he released a little later, on Lag BaOmer 5776 (May 26, 2016), the Rav wrote the following:

Bs”d

Lag BaOmer 5776, gematria “*biyas haMoshiach*”

(May 26, 2016)

To whom it may concern,

Today, Lag BaOmer, is a great day for sweetening judgments in the world and today I was told that I could return to Israel. From Rosh Chodesh Nissan I already decided to return to Israel. I myself called the Gaon Rav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, the head of Migdal Ohr, to take care of all my concerns and to prepare the ground for my return to Israel.

I am asking for everyone to unify, and to unify all of our organizations, and not to accept any lashon hara about anyone in the world that they persuaded me to return to Israel against my will. For it is my exclusive will, and the choice to return to Israel came only from myself alone.

On April 7, 2016, on the way to voluntarily handing himself in to the South African authorities, the Rav felt unwell, and was taken to the local hospital in Sunninghill, Johannesburg. While he was there, Interpol showed up and took the Rav into custody, at the urging of the Israeli government and the Rav's other persecutors.

Rav Berland was officially under lock and key.

PESACH IN JOHANNESBURG PRISON

Rav Berland was first arrested on April 7, 2016, when he went to the Morningside Clinic in Johannesburg for medical attention, on the way to voluntarily turning himself in to the South African police.

From that time until he had his first court hearing on April 14, 2016, he was kept in a cell at the Randburg police station in South Africa. The Hawks continued to persecute the Rav even when he was in police custody and pressed the South African judges to place the elderly *tzaddik* in a maximum security prison in South Africa while the court hearings were being held, prior to extraditing him to Israel.

Rav Berland's South African lawyer, Themba Langa, told the court that the Hawks were not acting in the interest of justice and had ulterior motives. Langa said, "*This 79-year-old Rabbi is not a threat to anyone. He's just a spiritual man who probably differs in his teachings from the Israeli government.*"

The hearing was adjourned to April 20, 2016, and Rav Berland was returned to his cell in the Randburg police station. When his lawyers again tried to get the Rav released on bail — because Rav Berland had been arrested while he was on the way to *voluntarily*

turning himself in to the police — the South African judge decided that the elderly *tzaddik* should be sent to the Johannesburg Correctional Centre, more commonly known as ‘Sun City’, together with some of the most dangerous criminals in the world.

Bad as African prisons generally are, Sun City Prison in Johannesburg was still renowned for being the worst of the worst. It was home to a number of violent, murderous and disturbed individuals, it had a large prison population of radical Muslims and prisoners in Sun City were frequently beaten up, abused and even murdered by their fellow inmates on a regular basis.

As Jews around the world sat down to their *Seder* on the first night of Pesach 5776 (April 22, 2016) to celebrate their emancipation from Egyptian slavery, the generation’s *Gadol Hador*, Rav Eliezer Berland, found himself spending Pesach alone, in a filthy, tiny South African prison cell.



As the news of the terrible conditions Rav Berland was being kept in filtered back to Eretz Yisrael, a number of prominent Rabbis decided to start speaking out. Rav Yekusiel Fish, author of the book *Sod Hachashmal*, made the following public statement about the terrible way Rav Berland was being treated:

“The heart is bleeding, that one of the tzaddikim of our generation, one of the famous Torah greats of Israel from the past 50 years, was thrown into jail in South Africa, and sent to a two-by-two-meter cell, without a bathroom, where he’s already been for a few days. We don’t

know when he'll leave there. He's suffering such terrible tribulations, at the advanced age of almost 80 years old.

This situation is one of mortal danger and pikuach nefesh and nobody is speaking about it. The heart aches...

I heard the gaon and mekubal, Harav Morgenstern, shlita, say that he researched the issue, and demanded details [from those speaking against the Rav] and that everything is false, deceit and a big story. Rav Dovid Abuchatzeira from Naharia also said that everything is a plot to frame the Rav, and we heard similar things from big tzaddikim like Rav Dovid Chaim Stern, Rav Arush, shlita, and more tzaddikim. Everything is based on one person who claims that he climbed up to the Rav's apartment and saw what he saw.

Rav Gumbal, shlita, is the learning partner of Rav Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern, shlita, who said that Rav Morgenstern researched all the people who came with complaints. Afterwards, he sat and reviewed the evidence one by one, and he saw that everything is falsehood and deceit, and according to Torah law there's no validity, and it's forbidden to believe any of it.

We have a clear halachah: It's forbidden to accept lashon hara about any Jew, and definitely about the Tzaddik of the generation. We have to know that this is the pain of the Shechinah and we have to share in the pain of the Tzaddik. Say Tehillim for the success of Rav Eliezer Berland ben Ettia, learn for his success, and at least think of joining in his pain... We have to protest.”

Rav Fish explained that in recent years, everyone could see how the Iranians had been threatening the Jewish State with an imminent nuclear attack, and how anyone who had eyes in their head could recognize the link between Rav Berland's terrible exile and humiliation and the way the Iranians had been stopped in their tracks.

Rav Fish continued:

“On the night of the Fast of Esther, Rav Berland said, ‘Go and make a prayer rally to stop the intifada.’ People went and made one, and immediately the intifada stopped! Half a year passed in which there were no killings. Is it possible to stand blind in front of all this? Is it possible to be quiet in front of everything they are saying? Woe to us from the day of judgment.”

“It’s known that well over 25 years ago, [Rav Berland] told his wife that he’s going to establish an institution for 25 years, and that afterwards he’s going to dismantle everything, and he asked her if she agreed to this. Several years ago, he said that a difficult expulsion had been decreed upon him, and asked people to pray for him. It’s known that he told those close to him [in South Africa], ‘I’ll be in jail for Passover.’ Heaven forbid, we can’t think anything negative about him.”

Rav Fish concluded:

“Rav Shalom Arush, shlita, testified that he started undertaking activities with the Rabbinical Court on behalf of the Rav, shlita, but that he got a message from the Rav himself to stop. And we remember that before he went into exile, the Rav told us that he would be

going into exile for three years, and then, thank G-d, there would be the complete redemption. We are anticipating the beginning of the redemption, to see Hagaon Rav Eliezer Berland here, healthy, alive and whole, happy with us in the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen.”

Immediately after Pesach, Rav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, the Chief Rabbi of Migdal Ha'emek and founder and dean of Migdal Ohr educational institutions, packed his bags and flew to Johannesburg to see what he could do to ease the suffering of Rav Berland. *“I left Eretz Yisrael immediately, the day after Pesach, together with the grandson of the Rav, Reb Chaim Reicher,” he said. “We already did a lot of work before the holiday, just to bring the Rav matzos. It was a major operation.”*

Rav Grossman continued:

“I arrived in Johannesburg on Sunday [May 1, 2016] from Eretz Yisrael because I decided that I just couldn't stay in my home — even though I do mitzvos, and even though I run Migdal Ohr which has thousands of children in schools, and even though I am Chief Rabbi in Migdal Ha'emek with many Jewish families — when Rav Berland, whom I've been so close to for 40 years, is in the pit, in jail. So I left right away to come and see what we can do to help the Rav.”

Rav Grossman was shocked to see how bad things were for Rav Berland in prison when he went to visit him.

“Rav Berland is so happy in learning, he was dancing and crying, I can't explain it. I took his hand and I told him, ‘Your hand is so cold!’ and then I discovered that

he hadn't eaten in two days, because they didn't let any [kosher l'mehadrin] food in.

I went and told the lawyer that we need to bring food to the Rabbi immediately, and he went to ask permission — but they said no. So then I said, 'I am not leaving this jail until I meet the chief warden of the jail!' I explained to him that this is a holy Rabbi, who only eats what is especially kosher. So [the chief warden] called over one of the non-Jews who was in charge of the food, and he told me, 'This man says that it is kosher.' For them, if it's not pork it's kosher!

So I explained to the chief warden of the jail that this is a holy Rabbi, but he replied, 'Only the court can give permission to bring him [kosher] food, only the court.' In the end, I told the chief warden that Rav Berland hadn't eaten in two days, and that his feet and hands were cold! I convinced him to make an exception for that day, and I went and got food and gave it to the Rav. But then the chief warden told the lawyer, 'No more!'"

Next, Rav Grossman tried to get the South African Jewish community mobilized to offer Rav Berland more help and support while he was behind bars in Johannesburg. He recounts: *"I spent the whole day with the Chief Rabbi [of South Africa] and his people to convince them to give Rav Berland [properly kosher] food, and they all said that we needed to wait for Monday for the court, and that we needed to pray that the court will allow them to bring him food. Anyone who understands what it means to be in jail in Africa, it's unbelievable."*

Rav Grossman then went to speak to the Jewish chaplain in Sun City Prison, Rav Michael Katz, to see if he could help. Rav

Grossman asked the chaplain, “Do they have to wait until Monday just to put in a request with the court that the Rav should have kosher food? Right now it’s Thursday!” Rav Katz replied that once a week, on Friday, during family visiting hours, Rebbetzin Berland would be allowed to come and give him food, but that it wouldn’t last for two days without a refrigerator.

On the following Sunday after Rav Grossman had already left to return to Israel, the South African prison guards stuck to their position of refusing to allow kosher food to be brought in to the Rav. When Nachman Sitrit, the Rav’s assistant, tried to bring him food, he was arrested and interrogated for a few hours before being told, “There is no difference between an 80-year-old prisoner and a young prisoner. Everyone will eat the same food. Make sure we never see you again here.”



Rav Grossman continued that the South African Jewish community was steering clear of helping Rav Berland because

“they think that if Israel wants the Rav to come back and he doesn’t, then that means that he ran away from court. It makes the whole situation look bad.”

Rav Grossman continued:

“I was with Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein for a few hours, explaining who Rabbi Berland really is, who his people really are, and what happened. I got all the people who are working with Rabbi Berland to meet the Chief Rabbi, and at the end he said, ‘Let’s make a cease-fire so that we can do everything to help the Rav.’ The Chief Rabbi himself said he will see what he can do.”

Before Rav Grossman left South Africa, he met with some of the biggest lawyers in Johannesburg to arrange another appeal for the Rav to be released on bail, until he was sent back to Israel. The appeal was ultimately unsuccessful, and Rav Berland ended up spending more than three months in prison in South Africa.

Rav Grossman also spoke in a Johannesburg shul to try to arouse the community:

“Rav Eliezer Berland is a holy man, and an incredible talmid chacham who knows the whole Torah. He’s devoted his whole life to helping people, and to making hundreds and thousands of baalei teshuvah. He is working for Hashem Yisbarach day and night. Everyone should learn more, daven more, and do more chessed in the merit of Reb Lazer Berland, which is the biggest thing, because when he hears that people are davening and learning, this gives him strength.”



Meanwhile, back in Israel, other students and followers of the Rav, most notably Rav Shalom Arush, were also desperately trying to raise public awareness about the terrible, life-threatening situation Rav Berland was now in, during his stay in Sun City Prison in Johannesburg.

In an interview he gave to the Kol Berama radio show, Rav Arush said the following:

“It’s terrible the way people believe the media today... if only they would believe the Torah as much as they believe the media!”

The man is not a man, he is an angel! He is a malach Hashem who can stand 16 hours without moving for Shemoneh Esrei. He knows what people are thinking. I always used to ask him questions in my mind and he’d turn around and answer me! And many more miracles which I promised the Rav I will never speak about. It would take 10 hours straight for me to relate all the stories that I saw with my own eyes.”

Rav Arush explained that people had paid money to women to speak against Rav Berland, and that the Rav had taken upon himself the disgrace of being libeled as an adulterer in order to cancel out the terrible Heavenly decrees against the Jewish nation.

“Gedolei tzaddikim, many of the people that I’m connected with, said that the Rav is atoning for the entire generation,” he said. “So what can we do, there are people who believe the media that an 80-year-old person... [Laughs]. It’s insane!”

Rav Arush continued by trying to urge the Israeli public to act to get the Rav out of prison. He said,

“He’s in a life-threatening situation right now! He’s in prison, and even the prisoners are saying that he is an angel of G-d. He only studies Torah and prays all day! He barely eats!

We must get up and demonstrate! We need to stand in front of the South African consulate and bring politicians and public figures who will stand up and declare, ‘What’s going on here!? What are you holding him for?! What are you doing to him?!’

Who knows what kind of Heavenly judgment is hanging over Am Yisrael due to the way we are dealing with the situation, that this great, awesome tzaddik is sitting in jail and no one is opening their mouths! This thing cannot go on! This is a huge Heavenly judgment on Am Yisrael!!!”

Rav Arush concluded:

“We call on people to help, whoever can help in any way possible, they should come and do whatever they can. Whoever does will be blessed, Hashem will guard him, will watch him, and will make him successful... We should be zocheh that the Rav should lead Am Yisrael, and merit to see his redemption together with the redemption of all Am Yisrael. Amen.”

Rav Michael Katz, the Rabbi of the Johannesburg Prison Service, related that the Rav made an enormous impression on his fellow prisoners while he was incarcerated Sun City Prison:

“As part of my duties as the Rabbi of the Prison Service, I met with the gaon and tzaddik, Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita, on many different occasions,” begins Rav Katz. “Rav Berland was imprisoned under really terrible conditions, but he was always happy.

The prison cell the Rav was kept in was very small, less than three square meters. It had an untiled, dirt floor, with an open toilet in the corner that was only partitioned off with the Rav’s blanket as a makeshift mechitzah⁶¹. The cell also contained a very small writing table, and a crate of the Rav’s holy books in one corner.”

Rav Katz continued: *“Every time someone came to visit the Rav, they would bring him more holy books.”*

The Rav was imprisoned during the winter months, and during the night the temperature would frequently fall below zero, and the cold would permeate the walls and the floor of the cells in the giant subterranean prison building.

The Rav was incarcerated there with literally thousands of other inmates, including the worst dregs of South African society. *“I didn’t know whether or not the Rav had his own heater, but when I went to see him I saw that he was keeping himself warm by moving around his cell a lot, and learning Torah,”* says Rav Katz.

“I have no idea what the Rav’s davening times were, because each time I visited him, he was happily wrapped in his tefillin and tallis, and always had a holy book in his hand. The wardens, prison guards, and even the other prisoners in the prison facility all called the Rav ‘the Holy Man,’ and would come at all hours to ask for his blessing, and to ask for his advice about how to deal with the many problems they had in their personal lives.

The other prisoners treated the Rav very respectfully and honorably and tried to look out for him, to make sure that he had what he

⁶¹ Halacha forbids a person from studying holy works in an unclean place, such as in a bathroom or next to a toilet. Rav Berland chose to forgo his blanket - in the middle of winter - in order to be able to continue studying his holy books.

needed, and would frequently ask him if they could do anything for him.”

Rav Katz said that what amazed him the most about the Rav's time in the Johannesburg prison, though, was the way he was always smiling and in good spirits, and didn't complain about his living conditions, unlike the vast majority of the other prisoners there. *“He told me repeatedly that everything was good, everything was okay, and that everyone was helping him. He also told me that finally, he had the opportunity to spend lengthy hours in his bode-dus, the way he'd always wanted to.*

The Rav asked me to give over a message in his name that he is always with us, both in our gashmiyus and our ruchniyus, and that we need to strengthen ourselves in emunah and bitachon that everything that's happening is all for the good.”

Many of the prisoners in Sun City started to revere Rav Berland and would regularly visit him for advice and blessings. But in such a large population of violent and psychotic individuals, there were inevitably some who still wished to harm the obviously Jewish, elderly prisoner.

In order to try to keep the Rav safe, his family and attendants arranged for one of the more physically imposing inmates to be paid to become the Rav's bodyguard, and to protect him from his fellow inmates in Sun City, many of whom were radicalized Muslims.

While this arrangement originally worked out well, by the end of the Rav's sojourn in Sun City this “bodyguard” had started to extort more and more money out of the Rav's attendants for his services and was also very unhappy about the prospect of losing his lucrative salary if the Rav should be extradited back to Israel.

As rumors started to circulate that the Rav was about to be released back to Israel, the erstwhile bodyguard became the biggest threat to the Rav's safety. He locked the Rav in his cell and started

threatening the Rav's life if the prison authorities dared to try and remove him.

When the Rav was ready to leave prison, his attendants had to trick this "bodyguard" into releasing the Rav from his cell without harming him.

As difficult as the situation was throughout his exile, nothing fazed the Rav or took him away from his Torah learning and other devotions. Even when the South African police first arrested him at the Morningside Clinic, the Rav remained engrossed in the *sefer* he had with him at that time, the *Ketzos Hachoshen*, and continued studying from it even while he was inside the police car.

In every court appearance he had to attend, wherever that happened to be in the world, his head was always in a holy book, and he continued to toil in Torah even in Sun City Prison. Just as Yosef Hatzaddik had spent his time singing and dancing in jail and clinging to Hashem, so too Rav Berland accepted all the suffering he was being sent with joy, peace and a calm spirit.

In one of Rav Berland's many court appearances before the South African judges, his lawyers were fighting to get the Rav moved out of Sun City Prison to somewhere with easier conditions, where his physical needs would be attended to and he would be able to receive suitably kosher food and drink.

At the end of all the arguments, the judge ruled that the Rav could be moved to a holding cell in the local police station. As soon as the Rav heard this decision, he took his head out from the holy book he was absorbed in and told the judge, "No, I want to stay where I am. I can learn better here, without any interruptions." The Rav knew that the police station he'd be sent to would be

crowded with people, and that there would be too many distractions and disturbances that would make it much harder to learn.

Once the judge heard the Rav's amazing comment, he responded, "If his studying is more important to him than food, then he will have his way," and the Rav stayed in Sun City Prison despite the horrible conditions, and the difficulty of meeting even his most basic needs there.

The Rav often went for many days without food or drink while he was in Sun City Prison — but he barely noticed, because he was able to learn day and night. At that time, he told one of his students in a phone conversation: *"I am in Gan Eden here! I haven't had the yishuv hadaas to learn without interruption, day and night without end, without having to deal with the needs of the community, for 50 years already. My mind has opened up like it never has before."*

Despite the awful conditions in the Sun City prison in Johannesburg, despite the fact that the Rav wasn't being given kosher food or drink, his main request from his visitors was that they should bring him more books and holy *sefarim*. Even though he'd barely eaten for days, his greatest hunger continued to be for the wisdom of the Torah.

When Rav Berland finally left Sun City Prison in the middle of July, it took the prison wardens a couple of hours to clear his tiny prison cell of the 600 or so holy books he'd amassed in the two months he'd spent there.



As word continued to spread about the terrible conditions that Rav Berland was being kept in, *tzaddikim* from across the world contacted the Rav's community to show their support.

The Admor of Berdichev, Rav Aharon Boymill was frequently in the middle of many of these communiques. He says:

“Don't think that only Breslover chassidim are praying for Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita. All of the big Admorim, Rabbanim and tzaddikim around the whole world are praying for the Rav, shlita!

From Rav Steinman to the Admor M'Belz, to the Gerrer Rebbe and Rav Kanievsky, everyone is praying for Rav Berland, shlita, and they're always interested in what's happening with him. The gabbai of Rav Dovid Abuchatzeira, shlita, called me personally last week and told me that the Rav wanted to know what's happening with Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita. The house of Rav Steinman called and wanted to know what's happening with the Rav. The son of the Belzer Rebbe himself called me to find out what's going on with the Rav and said that his father wants to know.”

Rav Boymill continued: “It's not that Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita, is alone in the world and that only his chassidim care about him. All the Gedolim of Klal Yisrael, across the whole world, care about the Rav and are praying for him.

A minyan of us chassidim went to the gravesite of Rebbe Yossi Hagalili [to pray] for the success of the Rav, shlita. On the way home, we stopped in Teveria by the tzaddik, Rav Dov Kook, shlita, but it was very hard to

reach him because of all the students surrounding him. I banged on the pulpit and said, 'Harav Kook, Harav Kook, Harav Eliezer Berland is in exile and is suffering so much. If you had been in this situation like the Rav, Rav Berland, shlita, would turn the world upside down for you. Why don't you overturn the world for him?'

The whole synagogue stood silent. Then, three members came up to me and told me to leave immediately," says Rav Boymill. "But then Harav Kook came up to me, hugged me, and told me, 'I need this kind of gabbai.' He said to me, 'Harav Berland, shlita, is an expert in performing miracles, and the same wonders and miracles will happen. Those miracles will accompany him and he will get out of everything, with G-d's help.' Then Rav Kook informed everyone in the synagogue that they would pray for ten minutes for the success of the gaon and tzaddik, Rav Eliezer Berland."

As the extradition hearings in the South African court dragged on and on, and as the judges repeatedly refused to allow the Rav out on bail or to be placed under house arrest, the Rav decided to make a deal directly with the Israeli police.

He would return to Israel voluntarily, on July 19, 2016.

Two South African police marshals accompanied the Rav on his flight home, but the rest of the plane was filled with his *chassidim*. The Rav was flying home to his family and thousands of students, and it seemed that the end of his three long years of exile was finally in sight.

RAV BERLAND RETURNS TO ISRAEL

“Sometimes, the controversy surrounding a tzaddik is the greatest proof that he is a tzaddik.” – *Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Sefer HaMiddot*

At the beginning of the Rav’s exile in February 2013, the great kabbalist from Tiberius, Rav Dov Kook, released the following statement via his nephew, who added: “I don’t remember Rav Kook ever saying something similar to this before.”

This is what Rav Dov Kook said:

“Shamayim is very angry about the people who are disgracing the gaon and tzaddik, Rav Eliezer Berland. I am very concerned about the situation. Who knows what will be with us?”

Hashem Yisbarach is very angry, like the time the Jews sinned by making the Golden Calf. If it wasn’t for the mercy of Hashem Yisbarach, who knows what would happen to us? The main claim is not against Am Yisrael, who don’t know the Rav and therefore believe the lies of the media, because when a Jew doesn’t keep Torah and mitzvos and sees words like this in the media, it’s unfortunately only natural that he’s going to believe them.

But what Hashem is really upset about is that not all of the Breslov chassidim believe, with all their hearts, that [Rav Berland] is a tzaddik. If all of the Breslov chassidim would believe that Rav Berland is a tzaddik, then Moshiach would come. But since the Samech Mem [the Evil One] knows this, he’s trying to torpedo it.

The fact that Rav Berland is unable to be in Eretz Yisrael is soul-destroying. The president of Iran has an atom bomb, and Hashem

could arrange for it to be dropped on us in a second. But He's not doing that, because He has mercy on us."

On a separate occasion, when some of his students were trying to question him about Rav Berland, Rav Kook responded: "How can you even have any thoughts against Rav Berland?! I myself am not even able to grasp him."

Three years later, when Rav Berland was being chased by the South African police prior to returning to Israel, Rav Kook made the following statement on Purim night, March 23, 2016: "There will be tremendous Divine Providence. He will return to Israel and redeem us! His return will usher in the redemption⁶²."

Hopes were high that all the terrible suffering the Rav, his followers, the Torah world generally and the nation of Israel had endured over the past three years would be replaced with great joy, miracles and happiness. But that's not exactly what happened.

On July 19, 2016, Rav Eliezer Berland finally returned to Eretz Yisrael from Johannesburg, after an absence of more than three years.



⁶² You can see the clip of Rav Kook saying this at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZyqRT4Fzgg>

Again, it should be stressed that the Rav was not formally extradited from South Africa, and that he returned to Israel of his own free will. During the flight, the Rav learned Torah, prayed with his followers, and then spent many hours joyfully singing and dancing with his students.

As soon as the Rav stepped back onto the holy soil of Eretz Yisrael at Ben Gurion Airport, he kneeled down and kissed it reverentially. Then, he was immediately surrounded by the Israeli police.

Given the fact that there was no case to answer, no credible evidence to dispute, no possible legal justification as to why the Rav could be prosecuted in Israel, his followers plus many of the nations' leading kabbalists and Rabbis were sure that after a day or two, the Rav would be completely exonerated of all charges, released — and then the redemption would begin in earnest, as Rav Dov Kook had predicted.

In addition, the Rav himself had given permission on July 11, 2016 for his assistants to file a libel suit against Israel TV's Channel 2, one of the first media outlets that had aired allegations against the Rav back in March 2013.

It seemed as though the tide had finally turned against the Rav's persecutors, and that after a few legal formalities, he'd finally be a free man. Rav Dovid Abuchatzzeira said at this time: "The *tikkun* is over. Everything is going to go quickly now." On another occasion, Rav Abuchatzzeira commented: "[Everything related to] Rav Eliezer Berland is secrets. It's above our understanding. He's fixing the whole world."

But was the process finished, or was there still more "fixing" required?



Immediately after he bent down to kiss the holy ground of Eretz Yisrael, Rav Berland was surrounded by group of police officers who led him to a room where five of his followers were waiting to see him. Thousands more of his followers were waiting in the Ben Gurion airport arrivals hall, where they were singing and dancing.

Before the Rav got to Israel, it had been agreed in advance that he would allowed to speak to five of his followers in a small room in Ben Gurion airport, to ensure that he was in good health and being treated appropriately. When the Rav entered the room, he was told that he had 20 minutes to speak to his followers before going on to the court.

The Rav started speaking words of Torah - but not to his five students. Instead, he directed his words to the eight police officers who were guarding him. One of the police officers said to him: “We brought you here to speak to your students who you haven’t seen in a long time. Sit down, and talk to them. You can talk to us later.”

The Rav replied:

“No, I only came to Israel to speak to the police and the judges! These people (pointing to his students) I already brought to teshuva. No, I’m here to bring all of you to teshuva. Lock me up as long as it takes, I will not leave until every police officer and every judge does teshuva”.

Rav Berland then continued to speak to his police guards about Torah topics, but also surprised them with his vast knowledge of Israel’s wars, and his insights into the intelligence and security layout of the country. By the time he’d finished, he’d clearly

demonstrated how Israel's security was actually very fragile, and how only the Torah could truly secure the Jewish nation in its homeland.

After this prelude, which lasted a half an hour, the Israeli police took him straight to court in nearby Rishon LeTzion.

While he was talking with his followers in the airport, the first thing the Rav told them was: "That's it, now we're already in the *geulah*," although this would be far from evident over the coming weeks and months. After hearing this statement, one of his followers asked the Rav if things were going to be somehow different, now that we'd entered the next stage of redemption. The Rav replied: "No! Moshiach is already with us." And that was that.

The first judge to hear the details of the case against the Rav decided that there was no evidence against him, and that he needed to be released immediately. But he gave the police prosecutors a day or two to appeal, as they claimed they needed more time (after three years of waiting...) to pull their evidence together.

The case went to the appeals court — and the Rav's unconditional release was overturned. This set the pattern for more than 10 hearings over the following weeks where the Rav would be released by one judge, but the decision would then be overturned by the appeals court. It later transpired that this is a common tactic used by the Israeli authorities to keep people in prison, and that the appeals court rarely if ever goes against the police prosecutors.

In the meantime, the Rav was kept in prison in Ramle, and ferried between the court in Rishon Letzion (which routinely freed him) and the appeals court in Ramle (which routinely overturned that decision).

The Israeli police were having enormous difficulties pulling even a semblance of a case together because the ‘evidence’ they claimed simply didn’t stand up and the police officers who had been responsible for bringing the claims in the first place were now all out of the picture.

One police officer who’d been involved in putting together the original claims about Rav Berland had killed himself back in July 2015, on the same day that the Rav had left Holland. Another police detective who’d been responsible for turning the claims into the court papers that had been sent to the Dutch court had also now ‘disappeared’.

And then, the Head of Investigations who’d been assigned Rav Berland’s case went abroad on “vacation” when he heard that Rav Berland was returning to Israel — and no-one knew when or if he was planning on returning.

Back in January 2016, another police chief (who wished to remain anonymous) had visited Rav Shalom Arush and told him that⁶³ his superiors had threatened him that if he didn’t forge a false case against Rabbi Berland, he would lose his position. The anonymous police chief acknowledged that in reality, the case against Rav Berland was completely devoid of any evidence, and that all of the things that were being said about Rabbi Berland were lies.

The police chief continued that from the moment he’d begun trying to create a case against the Rav, he’d been suffering. He’d had a major car accident, and he’d got divorced, etc.

While this police chief had formally been completely secular, he’d started to do *teshuvah* and return to his religious roots as a result

⁶³ As heard from Rav Arush’s attendant, R’ Chaim Barzilai.

of all the suffering he'd endured, and he felt terrible about his part in falsifying the case against Rav Berland.

Rav Arush told the anonymous policeman that he could only fix the situation if he came clean and publicly admitted what he'd done. But the policeman told Rav Arush that he simply couldn't do that. If he admitted that he'd been trying to fabricate a case, he'd be sent to prison for at least 13 years...

But having worked so hard to chase him all over the world, blacken his name and arm-twist the South African government into extraditing him, the Rav's persecutors weren't about to let him go so easily.

If they couldn't make a case against Rav Berland in court, then they would fall back on their tried-and-tested strategy of subjecting the Rav to more "trial by media."

From the minute the news reached Israel that the Rav was returning to the country, the Rav's persecutors started working on trying to blacken the Rav's name further, with the aim of giving the Israeli police more ammunition to press for the Rav to be kept in prison indefinitely.

One story after another appeared, quoting the same lies in identical words, but that didn't stop many news outlets from simply airing these scandalous lies as if they were true.

In the days leading up to the Rav's return on July 19th, 2016 the anti-Torah media continued to feed its audience a steady diet of deceit, libel, lies and fantastic tabloid headlines designed to make it look as though the Rav was guilty as charged.

But the worst was still to come. At the same time that the Rav's lawyers were successfully arguing that there was no case to answer and that the Rav should be freed — or at the very least, released to house arrest — some “Breslov” zealots from Meah Shearim began to unleash another barrage of awful, slanderous stories via the media.

On July 17, 2016, before the Rav had even left South Africa, the Breslov zealots falsified a statement from Rav Yaakov Meir Shecter, plus two other Breslov Rabbis from the Meah Shearim community, effectively stating that the Rav and his Shuvu Banim community should be ostracized.

Sadly, even the so-called *frum* media was more than happy to publish the most brutal and scurrilous lies about the Rav and his community, without first checking the veracity of what they were printing.

Rav Shecter immediately wrote a rebuttal, which was hastily pasted up all across all the walls in Meah Shearim.

Then on July 18, 2016, the zealots released another falsified statement, this time claiming to be from the Rav's son, R' Nachman Berland, to the effect that the Rav's own son had turned his back on his father, God forbid, and wanted nothing more to do with him.

Again, R' Nachman Berland immediately made a statement and recorded an interview rebutting this falsehood, where he clearly stated: **“The recording is forged. There is a war against us. My father is the *Gadol Hador*.”** But again, the media chose not to cover R' Nachman Berland's statement, nor to retract the false stories they'd printed.

The following day, July 19, 2016, the well-known Sephardi *posek* Rav Shimon Badani released the following widely-reported statement about all the false media reports circulating about Rav Berland and his community: “It’s defamation, malicious and strictly forbidden,” said Rav Badani.

He continued:

“To slander a talmid chacham such as this is showing complete contempt for Torah scholars. It’s not up to each individual to make a judgment about whether someone else is okay or not. This is malicious. Anyone who is doing something like this — let the beis din decide. It’s forbidden to tell it all over the place, it should be said only in court, and then the court will decide. This is a very grave [sin]. A person who does this will end up in Gehinnom, if they speak lashon hara against a talmid chacham.”

In the meantime, the Israeli authorities were only too grateful for all the fake news appearing in the media, which helped to paint a sordid and deceitful picture of Rav Berland.

But the most terrible deceit of all occurred a few days later, on July 26, 2016, when the zealots released two very poorly-doctored videos to the media that simply overlaid a false audio on the images being shown.



In one video, they had it appear as though the Rav was condoning murder, while in the other, infamous, video they had the Rav apparently confessing to committing a terrible crime. It was blindingly obvious that both videos had been falsified in a very amateurish way, with a fake audio track placed over old video footage⁶⁴, but once again the media eagerly lapped up this new “evidence” against the Rav, splashing their terrible headlines over their front pages.

These recordings appeared at a crucial juncture in the many court hearings the Rav was undergoing where his lawyers were trying to win his freedom, or at the very least, to have the Rav released to house arrest pending going to trial in order to clear his name.

Now, thanks to the falsified videos put out by the Breslov zealots, the Israeli government came up with a new strategy for keeping the elderly Rav behind bars. He was now, officially, a threat to national security. His court papers categorized him as belonging to the highest level of dangerous criminals, a status usually reserved for mafia leaders and senior terrorists.

⁶⁴ You can see the fake VS real video for yourself here: <https://youtu.be/u1W6XMdLzPI>

ISRAELI ‘ADMINISTRATIVE DETENTION’

Given the ongoing historical threat from Arab terrorism, the Israeli justice system has developed a peculiar set of laws that can be used to keep those who are designated as threats to the country’s national security in prison for large stretches of time, without any evidence or trial.

This system of Israeli “administrative detention” is meant to give the Israeli police force, IDF, Mossad, and any other Israeli agencies involved with national security a period of time where they can collect enough evidence against a suspected terrorist to bring them to court, while also keeping the suspected terrorist off the street, in the meantime.

Thanks to old laws that were kept on the books in Israel from the British Mandate period, the Israeli government can imprison someone for months, and even years, before they’re even obligated to bring charges.



It’s well known that the Israeli judiciary unfortunately continues to be an almost exclusive enclave of liberal, left-leaning Jews with pronounced anti-religious bias.

The Israeli judiciary appoints its own judges. Very few center, center-right or religiously-observant candidates ever make it through the selection process. So, while loudly proclaiming its commitment to the highest ideals of impartiality, independence and truth, the Israeli judiciary often views things through a narrow lens of left-wing, anti-religious and “liberal” values.

Judge Shelley Timan was formerly one of the senior judges in the Tel Aviv District Court, until he quit in 2016 citing corruption

within the Israel justice system. In an interview he gave to the Israeli TV Channel 2⁶⁵, Judge Timan said:

“I left my job absolutely convinced that I’m doing the right thing, because I felt I couldn’t serve the cause of justice anymore.

There are people who are rotting away in prison. Many of them still haven’t even been brought to trial yet or convicted [of any crime]. Others are completely innocent of doing any crime,” he explained.

Timan continued: *“In a democracy, a person’s case should be judged in a prompt fashion, but you see how many cases here (in Israel) have a huge delay before they come to trial. I tried, I really tried, but I can’t stand it anymore. The prosecutors have enormous egos, and they want to see a conviction at any cost.*

There’s also a lot of errors and omissions [in the evidence], because the Israeli police aren’t doing their job the way they’re supposed to, again because there are a lot of ambitious people who want to win a conviction at any cost. And so, people are rotting away [in prison] for the rest of their lives, or for very long stretches of time.

I’m very sorry to say it, but the Israeli police are stitching people up, and fabricating charges. Also, the pressure from the media is also very hard for the judges to bear, and its skewing their decisions. Lobbyists and the media are determining the fate of the accused.”

⁶⁵ Judge Timan’s interview, with English subtitles, can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/qLJUWDziGSA>

Writing in the Hamodia newspaper on March 8, 2018, columnist Joel Rebibo had this to say about the increasingly sorry state of the Israeli judicial system in the wake of the Bezeq corruption case⁶⁶:

“Many in Israel don’t believe the courts are impartial, or willing to give them a fair hearing, and for good reason. Judges and prosecutors tend to be cut from the same elitist left-wing secular Ashkenazi cloth, and don’t relate to or respect the values and priorities of most of the Israeli public....

“It is mind-boggling that the Israeli judicial system needed 70 years to understand that there’s a problem with judges meeting alone with government lawyers.... It isn’t just defendants who are hurt by this reckless disregard for fair play. The courts undermine their credibility with the general public.”

Despite the obvious lack of evidence against the Rav, despite his failing health (which already at that point had required him to have surgery to remove a tumor), and despite the spiritual toll remaining in prison would take on the elderly, 79-year-old *tzaddik*, both of the judges assigned to the case by the Jerusalem District Court repeatedly ruled that the Rav should continue to be kept in prison.

After the seventh hearing to try to get the Rav freed, one of the judges refused to consider him for house arrest, because she said that: “Rav Berland is focused on himself, has a big influence on his surroundings, and there’s a risk he may try to escape.”

⁶⁶ Two suspects in this case appeared before a judge in the belief they could convince her to release them to house arrest. It was subsequently discovered that the judge and a government prosecutor had arranged the outcome of the trial beforehand, which led to a huge public outcry.

Shortly after this occurred, these two judges were back in the press for all the wrong reasons. They happened to be the judges who had freed a convicted Arab terrorist and then lifted the restrictions on him entering Jerusalem shortly before he went on to murder two people and injure five more in a shooting attack in Jerusalem on October 9, 2016.

The Israeli public was outraged at the poor judgment shown by these two judges that then led to the murder of two Israelis, and there were many calls for the judges to be fired from their posts. But in the meantime, the damage had been done. While a known Arab terrorist had been freed to kill again, the elderly, increasingly unwell *Tzaddik*, Rav Berland, continued to sit in prison.



It's hard to describe the blow that the Rav's persecutors managed to deal at this time to the Rav, to his community, and to *Am Yisrael*, generally.

In the aftermath of their shocking activities, many of the Breslov leaders and other rabbis tried to repair the damage by issuing a number of statements in clear support of Rav Berland, which publicly explained for the first time how these persecutors had been chasing the Rav for many, many years.

A close family member of Rav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman had the following to say about the matter:

“How is it possible to believe all these stories about the Tzaddik that are being spread around by criminals and sinners? By people who have sold him out for money? They took the Rav from shiur to shiur, and then charged people thousands of dollars just to speak to him. And

these are the same people that we're now meant to believe, when they started to spread all these stories about the Rav?!

These people are thieves and liars, and they have no connection to holiness. They completely damaged the community, and they kept the Rav under lock and key and didn't let him speak to anyone — only what they themselves wanted. And these people are the ones you're going to believe?!

These wicked people paid tens of thousands of dollars to a false witness, in order for her to agree to lie on their behalf... These people are 'sinners of Israel B'gufam'⁶⁷ — and these people you want to turn into Tzaddikim?!

How can people believe these lies? [He is a holy Tzaddik] and they are criminals and sinners who are exploiting his complete nullification to God's will [i.e., by not taking steps to silence them or to defend himself publicly]. They are exploiting this, and they threatened him that if he doesn't agree to do what they want him to do, they will spread stories and lies about him.”

Which is exactly what happened.

Rav Shalom Arush also released the following statement:

“We are stunned and pained, to the depths of our heart, to witness the terrible rumors and the machlokes occurring in our community, which are describing things that

⁶⁷ This is a reference from the Gemara about one of the categories of sinners who are so bad, they spend eternity in Gehinnom

are just completely impossible, have no logical basis, and are completely disconnected from reality.

“[We are shocked that] spiritually unrefined, brazen, chutzpadik people with coarsened hearts are opening their proud, arrogant mouths against the holy honor of Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita, who is a true Torah scholar and one of the pillars of the generation, whose whole world consists of Torah, prayer, holiness, abstinence, judging others favorably and sacrificing himself for another Jew, whoever that other Jew might be.

People are saying falsehoods, and spreading evil rumours concocted by malicious, accursed baalei machlokes [troublemakers, people who create division and strife] who are trying to harm the Rav.

AND THE COMMUNITY SHOULD KNOW THAT THE THINGS BEING SPOKEN OF ARE ABSOLUTE LIES, AND WOE TO ANYONE WHO BELIEVES ANY FALSE STORIES OR FALSEHOODS ABOUT HIM, EVEN JUST IN THEIR HEARTS.”

Meanwhile, the terrible circumstances also prompted the normally reclusive Rav Yaakov Meir Salmanovitch, one of the leaders of the present generation of Breslov *chassidim* and the former Rebbe of two of the Breslov zealots, to make the following public statement, after he'd been approached by his former students and asked if he'd be willing to sign something condemning Rav Berland and his community:

“Gevald! Gevald! How can we continue to be silent, when there's already been so much suffering, and so much spiritual misery, and so much strife and

machlokes, and so much pain? How are you able to continue to conduct such a cruel war? You have claims to make? You have things to say? Only in a good way! Only act in a merciful way!

How are you willing to cause so much pain to the world? Stop now! Stop now! Woe to you, from the Day of Judgment. If you have cause for complaint, speak to the other person in a peaceful way. [This is] terrible hatred, something that hasn't been seen since the creation of the world. This is delaying the geulah!

You want to try to cause our tzaddikim to stumble even more, with another signature, and another signature? Woe to you, from the Day of Judgment! ... Aren't you scared to go after such big tzaddikim and cause them to stumble? To go after such big tzaddikim and cause them to hate?

... How can it be that in Breslov, something as painful as this could be happening? Something as evil as this? It's already been four years of this wickedness, four years of people crying, four years where thousands of people have had their souls trampled. If you want to rectify things, even the most profound things, everything can be done peacefully! Not with wickedness! There's so much hatred going on here, so much hatred, hatred without end. If each person had love [in their hearts instead], we could have rectified everything.

... What are these terrible things that are going on? All the people who made trouble for Rav Shecter and involved him in disputes in the past already regretted what they did, and Rav Shecter, who is the holy of

holies, stumbled into a machlokes in the past because of other people [who told him lies], for which he's already asked forgiveness. Now, you come again, with another set of signatures, and call in other people, and you want to involve him [in another machlokes] again. Shame on you!

... Who knows if the final redemption of our people hasn't been delayed solely because of this terrible machlokes, which has spread strife and the defamation of God's Name across the whole globe? I've heard so much chillul Hashem coming from every corner of the world as a result of this machlokes. People are saying, even if what happened actually happened (God forbid, as though that could actually have happened) — where is all this terrible, murderous hatred [lit., murder] coming from? They say only in Breslov do you find this sort of murderous hatred!

... There are literally thousands and thousands of people who are deeply connected to Rav Berland across the whole world, and they are crying out, and their cries have pierced the hearts of the Heavens. Shame on you!

... Regret what you did, do teshuvah, and you'll be accepted with love. There is no hatred here, even though you did what you did, there is still no hatred [toward you]. Thousands of people have already been torn and broken by this terrible affair.

Hashem should help us that Moshiach should come and he will conclude matters... This is the first time that I've ever done something like this, and you should know that this wasn't a simple decision at all. If you

stop now, with all your strength, there is still a chance that the geulah will still come.”

STATEMENT FROM RAV MOTA FRANK

Another of Breslov's leading lights, Rav Mota Frank, also released a statement at this time, where he said of the Breslov zealots:

“... They're not embarrassed to stoop to the very lowest of levels, and to raise their hands against the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu. And they're trying to make other people go to secular court, too, to testify against Rav Lazer, to participate in the investigation by the police, who are known to hate religion [i.e., Judaism], about issues that have nothing to do with the investigation, solely with the aim of trying to make more trouble for him.

And the most terrible thing of all was to go to such a low level to publicly cause the embarrassment and humiliation of Rav Lazer and all of his people in this way, to pass around a recording of a false video (as is evident to everyone who really knows Rav Lazer), which they brought out in a backhanded, deceitful way, made up of old footage of Rav Lazer.

And they passed this video recording to who??? Not to the Rabbanim who sit on the throne of justice, with level heads and with pure yiras Shamayim, and who make decisions with full cognizance that the 'gates of Gehinnom are open below them' should they make a mistake; and not to a beis din that's made up of at least three dayanim, who sit together and act in accordance with the halachic laws of investigations.

Not only did they pass this recording to the police investigators behind closed doors, but to our great regret and embarrassment, they also passed this recording to who??? The Israeli television stations!!! In order to persuade the haters of Israel to aim their poisonous arrows of hatred against chareidi Judaism, and to debase a Rabbi and his community in such an evil way, and to cause millions of people to speak profanities in the worst way, and to have thoughts that he [Rav Berland] committed a terrible sin.

Gevald! Gevald! Gevald! Hashem should have mercy.

Who are the people [who are guilty of] spreading around profanity and false accusations of sin, in a way that has never been seen before? Rav Berland, or [the Rav's persecutors]???

... Anyone who has even a little bit of understanding about everything that is happening around us knows with certainty that the Rav is being persecuted and is an innocent man. And more than this, that there is a lowly group that will not stop at anything, even the most degrading things, against this tzaddik, the foundation of the world."

But it wasn't only the Breslov leaders who were shocked into openly speaking out. The great kabbalist known as 'the Milkman', Rav Chaim Cohen Perachia, also released a statement on August 8, 2016, where he said:

"I'm issuing a warning about [one of the Breslov zealots]⁶⁸ that a dangerous spirit of insanity has possessed

⁶⁸ The Milkman specifically named the person, in his original statement.

him, and he is no longer in control of himself. Therefore, it's completely forbidden to speak to him about anything whatsoever in connection to Rav Berland, shlita, because he has the ability to convince and persuade people [that falsehoods are true], even including those people who don't engage in lashon hara. And this ability is coming from the dangerous spirit that's entered him, Hashem should have mercy."

Meanwhile, the *Rosh Yeshiva* and leading kabbalist from Bnei Brak, Rav Dovid Chaim Stern, had this to say publicly⁶⁹ while speaking in Bnei Brak on August 11, 2016:

"I know Rav Berland, we have a strong connection. He is an exalted Jew who stands above all others. There is no man who is completely kindness and mercy [as Rav Berland is]. Whenever he had money he immediately distributed everything to charity. It is clear to us that a person who distributes so much charity and kindness, Hashem imbues his Shechinah on him.

'He who has mercy on Hashem's creations, they have mercy on him from Heaven,' and therefore Hashem imbues his Shechinah on him. Hashem will guide him as He sees fit. And it is clear to all of us, we are hoping and praying, that Hashem will do miracles and wonders.

Others don't know Rav Berland, like I know him. And they didn't ask the Steipler what I asked about him.... He's holy and pure — that's it! We need to wake up the masses! A holy tzaddik is suffering in prison. I believe that every single action is the greatest mitzvah, to save

⁶⁹ You can see the video of Rav Stern speaking here: <https://youtu.be/Wtj6PWBOsjM>

this tzaddik as quickly as possible. He's not guilty — he didn't do anything!"

On another occasion, Rav Stern said: *"Woe to whoever speaks ill of Rav Berland, for they will be punished severely. All those who dare to speak ill of this tzaddik should fear for their lives, for they will all, without exception, receive severe punishments from Above. I've known him for more than 50 years, and the way he learned with the Steipler was unmatched by any other. He is entirely holy."*

The final test before Moshiach comes is Rav Berland. Anyone who talks against him, or who believes the rumors being circulated about him, won't merit to witness the imminent redemption of our people."

Rav Dovid Abuchatzaira had this to say:

"Rav Berland is all Torah, and he's in prison by unnatural means, and his salvation will also be by unnatural means. The suffering that he's enduring now is the hardest, but the salvation is close, because the Rav is now undergoing the harshest degradation, so the salvation has to come, and all of his accusers will fall."

As the statements of support for Rav Berland continued to pile up, more and more notable Rabbis came forward, warning people from believing any of the terrible lies being told about the Rav.

Rav Yehuda Sheinfeld, a leading kabbalist and *Rosh Kollel* of the Shimon Hatzaddik Kollel, added his voice to the fray. In an open letter to the Badatz, Rav Sheinfeld wrote:

“To all the honored Rabbanim of the Badatz, and all the other Rabbanim involved with judging matters in beis din.

It has come to my attention that certain people want to try to include the Badatz in a letter of cherem against the gaon and tzaddik, Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita, and his community.

I’m here to tell you that I know all the background [about this matter] from the inside out, and how the person responsible has devised a number of cowardly, negative rumors and intrigues.

I’m writing to warn you to not believe any libels or false claims, without first verifying the other side’s account, in accordance with halachah, and particularly when we’re dealing with an individual like this... who is delusional, and who is deluding other people along with him.

So, my fellow Rabbis, you should proceed extremely carefully. I have examined all the details of this case minutely, and spoken to both sides involved, and you can clarify any matters pertaining to it directly with me.”⁷⁰



⁷⁰ Some of Rav Berland’s supporters tried to rally the generation’s leading Rabbis to begin publishing letters of support for the Rav, to try and redress the balance and inform the public about what was really happening. One Rav who was asked responded, “If I come out against them, then tomorrow [his persecutors] will turn on me, and they will also start telling lies about me, too.” This same concern was heard many, many times from other leading Rabbis in Israel.

In what appeared to be a ruse to make it as difficult as possible for the Rav's followers to picket the prison where he was being held, the Israeli prison authorities regularly shunted the Rav from prison to prison, despite his advanced age and increasingly serious health issues.

He started off in the Ramle prison in the center of the country, but then he was moved to the prison in Beer Sheva — about as far south as you can get. Undaunted, hundreds of the Rav's followers followed him down south and set up a tent city on the prison's periphery, where they intended to stay and learn Torah until the Rav was released.



(For reasons of modesty, the Rav requested that only men should come and camp out in the tent city in Beer Sheva.)

Once the authorities realized that their attempts to sever the Rav from his community weren't working, the Rav was moved to a different prison, this time way up north, in Tzalmon.

Once again, his followers had to dismantle their tent city in Beer Sheva and take the time, trouble and expense to rebuild it

somewhere else, but they did so uncomplainingly. After following the Rav literally all the way around the world and back, moving up north was the least of the challenges they'd faced to stay close to their Rav throughout his three-year exile.

As the terrible miscarriage of justice against Rav Berland lengthened into weeks and even months, a palpable sense of despair fell on large swathes of the Breslov community. What else could be done to turn things around? What more was needed, to get the breakthrough that would force the Israeli government to finally release the Rav?

Around this time, the tzaddik Rav Yosef Palvani⁷¹, z"tl, author of the *Hemdass Yosef* and *Darchei Ayun* seforim, made the following statement:

“Who can dare to say something against this person, whom no one can even come close to! And the amazing people he brought close to Judaism, and the tens of thousands of people he inspired to do teshuvah, and the amazing synagogues that he built! Who can dare say something against him? He’s the Gadol Hador!”

Who knows, chas v’shalom, what could happen? The people who are talking against the Rav, if they don’t care about their own lives, they should care about their children and the families’ lives. Who knows what’s going to happen to them?! People got terrible diseases from speaking badly about other Jews!

⁷¹ Rav Palvani was a Sephardic Talmid Chacham, and posek. He was very close to Rabbi Abba Shaul, and Rav Ovadia Yosef. You can hear the whole interview with him at: <https://goo.gl/otm8b6>

Someone came into [the secular] court and was saying a lot of insults against the Rav. They asked the Rav to respond, and the Rav said, 'I just want to give him a kiss on his forehead.' Who else would say something like that?! When the Rav was being interrogated by the police a few weeks ago, they brought in someone who said the most terrible, disgusting things against the Rav in front of him. As he was leaving, the Rav thanked this person for coming - and he said it so sincerely, 'thank you for coming' - as if he came to do him a favor!

When we hear a story like this, how can we not cry?

How can anyone say anything bad against him? What can we say about him? This person put [the Rav] in the most terrible torture and pain, caused him to be in disgusting prisons in Africa, the worst places in the world, caused him so much suffering and pain — and after all this, to come and give him a kiss on his forehead?! This is not a person! This is an angel of God!

The Gemara (Yerushalmi) says that the degree of the tzaddik's suffering indicates the degree of his greatness afterwards. The more he suffers, the higher he'll go. It's like a bow being pulled back — the further it's pulled back, the higher the arrow will fly when it's released. The Rav is suffering for our sins. We should be zocheh this year to see the full redemption, amen."

Between July 19, 2016 and the end of October 2016, the Rav's lawyers had accompanied him through more than 10 different legal hearings, in many different courts and locations around the country.

The cost of mounting so many different appeals to get the Rav freed was enormous. At the beginning of the hearings in Israel, the presiding judge asked Rav Berland to post NIS 700,000 in bail. The Rav's followers managed to raise the money within the very tight deadline they'd been given — but the judge still refused to grant bail.

Another round of fundraising occurred at the beginning of November, to pay for the astronomical legal costs involved in getting the Israeli courts to re-evaluate the Rav's unwarranted detention, which involved hiring a new team of top lawyers to try to secure the Rav's release.

On November 9, 2016, after the Rav had already spent more than 220 days in prison, the Rav gave a recorded *shiur* from Tzalmon prison where he spoke about the great benefits of taking on suffering and disgrace for the sake of *Am Yisrael*. But he concluded the *shiur* with these words: “But now it is time to cancel the decree, I am now in a life-threatening situation. It is true that we merited great things, but now it is time to sweeten the judgments.”

As the authorities continued to use every legal procedure⁷² they could think of to keep the Rav in prison without a trial for as long as possible, other *Gedolei Hador* became increasingly concerned about the toll the situation was taking on the Rav's health.

Rav Berland's family and attendants had a strong suspicion that the Rav's cancer had returned, yet the Israeli Prison Service wasn't co-operating with allowing the Rav's attendants to have

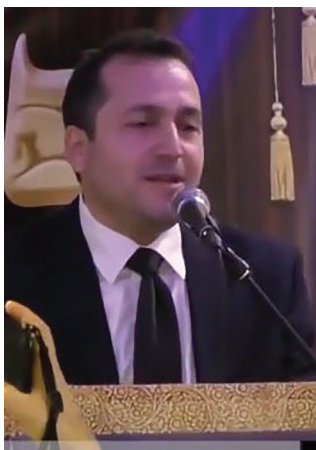
⁷² The judges in Rav Berland's hearings agreed to allow the State to use the “remand until the end of proceedings” rule in his case, which meant he'd be forced to stay in prison until the end of the proceedings, even if that process took many years, and even if the final verdict was “not guilty.”

his condition properly diagnosed or treated. The need to get the Rav out of prison was becoming a very serious race against time.

At the beginning of November 2016, this group of leading Rabbanim decided to intervene by sending a new legal team, which they hoped could find a way around all the legal arguments the State of Israel was using to keep the Rav imprisoned indefinitely without a trial.

This team of lawyers, headed by attorney Ephraim Dimri, suggested that the only way the Rav could avoid spending the next two years in prison, despite the lack of evidence against him, was if he agreed to a plea bargain.

Rav Berland's decision to make a plea bargain was not taken lightly. The Rav's lawyers and attendants consulted with many of the Jewish nation's most well-known Rabbis and Rebbes to ask for their agreement before proceeding. Attorney Dimri later explained why his team had pushed the Rav to make a plea bargain:



“The State of Israel spent 10 million shekels in order to bring him back, and from the moment that we’d try to leave the State of Israel with nothing to show for this, it was going to be very dangerous,” he explained. “The State was not going to give up on him, not the prosecutors and not the judges. That’s how it is with the State of Israel — what can you do?”

Dimri continued:

“Real justice only happens by Hashem, in His Heavenly Court. Here [in Israel], don’t go looking for justice. I told this to Rav Berland, and Rav Berland knows that it’s true. Because if there was justice, Rav Berland wouldn’t have needed to spend even a single day in prison. There is no justice!

So, this [i.e., the plea bargain] was the minimum that was possible. We were up against a large group of people, including police prosecutors and his enemies from within the [Breslov] community. The people who caused all this enormous damage to the Rav are people from within the community, and they haven’t ceased [their activities] for a second, and they won’t rest until, G-d forbid, they cause the biggest damage of all to the Rav. They want to take the Rav apart — and we weren’t going to let them do it!”

On November 22, 2016, the plea bargain was finalized. In return for falsely “confessing” to three very minor counts, the State of Israel would give Rav Berland a shorter sentence of 18 months, with a third of that time possibly being knocked off for ‘good behavior’.

As news of the Rav’s plea bargain leaked out, many of his supporters and followers were again shocked by the latest turn of events and couldn’t understand why the Rav would plead guilty to crimes he’d never committed.

It was only a little while later, when news of the Rav’s serious illness was made public, that they started to understand that if the

Rav had chosen to sit in prison to try and clear his name, it would probably literally have cost him his life.



Dudu Elkayam was part of Rav Berland's legal team for years, and initially, he was completely opposed to the Rav making a plea bargain. He later explained what the Rav had said to him to get him to change his mind.

“The Rav, shlita, is completely innocent,” explained Elkayam, “but he took something on himself that was really beyond our understanding. You could try to blame different people for what happened, all the lawyers, and say that they pushed him to make a plea bargain.

Attorney Rachel Toran, Attorney Feldman and I⁷³ were absolutely against making a plea bargain. We had the information in our hands, and it clearly showed that the Rav was completely innocent, beyond the shadow of a doubt. The Rav was up to date on all the details related to his case and the police investigation, and he understood that after the 22nd of November⁷⁴, from the moment the court would actually start examining the evidence, there would be a 180-degree turnaround in his case.

The day before he made the plea bargain, I spoke with the Rav, shlita, who explained the situation to me in

⁷³ This was Rav Berland's first team of lawyers, which was subsequently replaced by the team led by Ephraim Dimri.

⁷⁴ The proposed date of the first court hearing where the judges would start hearing the actual evidence against Rav BerLland.

the following words: ‘Dudu, I’m pleading with you [to understand] that I need to take this upon myself.’ From the moment the Rav told me this, I responded, ‘I’m standing behind you, and I’ll do whatever you decide. I’m with the Rav, and I always will be.’”

*“I didn’t say this because I’m a fanatic,” Elkayam continues. “I said this because I’m almost the only person who knows, definitively, the whole truth about the matter. I want to tell the community straight out — and I’m prepared to swear to this under oath and in front of witnesses — **Rav Berland has admitted to things that he never did, and he did this deliberately. But our understanding is too limited to grasp why he took this upon himself. If I believed in the Rav, shlita, before his plea bargain, my faith in him has only increased tremendously after the fact, because I know that he has taken things upon himself that are beyond my intelligence [to grasp], and beyond the understanding of all the nation of Israel. We simply can’t understand what’s going on.**”*

Elkayam continues:

“Anyone who searches their heart will understand that what I’m saying is the unvarnished truth. He’s innocent. They concocted a very terrible slander against him that we successfully unpicked. We effectively overturned the whole case against him.

[One of the things] they were claiming was that the complainants against the Rav were scared to testify in court [which is why they had no witnesses]. We showed that the only thing they were really scared of was the

witness stand. I asked Attorney Rachel Toran to ensure that every complainant would be obligated to come and testify. We had all the evidence required to show that the Rav was completely innocent, beyond even the shadow of a doubt.

The libels against the Rav, shlita, were very convoluted, and every action they took to smear and sully the Rav succeeded in blackening his name and increasing the time he was being detained in prison. However, we knew — and the Rav, shlita, also knew — that the week after his trial began, he'd already be acquitted. We weren't just working to get the Rav freed, we also wanted him to be completely exonerated from all the charges.

They were in a hurry to press charges and produce a bill of indictment because they knew that all the material they had was only good enough to blacken the Rav's name, but wouldn't stand up for a moment in court.

Indeed, we publicized one of the recordings we had where you could hear [one of the Breslov zealots] lamenting to [another Breslov zealot]⁷⁵ that they couldn't find a single complainant to come and testify [against the Rav]. Even the wife of [one of the persecutors], the main false witness against the Rav, shlita, told [one of the Breslov zealots] that she didn't want to come and testify.

She was the last complainant who they believed would be prepared to testify, and ultimately she also backed out. From our side, we really wanted her to take the

⁷⁵ The names have been omitted to protect their anonymity, as per Rav Berland's request.

stand, so that we could rebut the whole web of lies that she and her husband had told. The police prosecutors themselves knew that their witnesses weren't at all credible and had even tried to coordinate their testimony by coaching them about what to say, which is completely against the law.

Believe me, if this couple had got to the witness stand it would have been the biggest circus in town. But what can we do, we're dealing with a tzaddik who took things upon himself to sweeten the judgments upon Am Israel.

Legal counsel had nine secret files on people who didn't want to be exposed under any circumstances. I have no doubt that as soon as those files would have been opened, the whole web of false testimony would have been destroyed. But the Rav accepted on himself to be 'burnt.' Anyone who understands that the Rav is the true Tzaddik [of the generation] has to wholeheartedly go with his decision."

Another of the Rav's original legal team, Attorney Rachel Toran, gave over the following message when news of the plea bargain became public:

"My heart is broken, because the Rav would have been found innocent. Attorney Naama Elachdad went in to see the Rav and pleaded with him, with tears in her eyes, not to make a plea bargain, as he would certainly be going home the following week [after the trial began]. She said that the Rav lowered his face and told her that he knew that, but that he was obliged to take this upon himself."



In order for the Rav's plea bargain to be accepted and for him to be able to get out of prison within the next few months, the Israeli court required the Rav to make a public confession and full public apology. If it wasn't "convincing enough," then even with his plea bargain the court still wouldn't reduce the Rav's sentence.

This appalling and humiliating "show trial" occurred on Tuesday, November 22, 2016. When the time came for when the Rav was supposed to make his formal admission, the judge asked him what he had to say, and he then he quoted the verse from *Parashas Vayeishev*, 38:24: "[And Yehuda said to Tamar] take her out and burn her". The Rav continued, "In biblical times, people would be burnt for these kind of things"⁷⁶.

At precisely the time he said these words, the first fires were reported around Zichron Yaakov. It seems as though Rav Berland took it upon himself to get burned by shame, instead of *Am Yisrael* getting burned by fire. Despite the size, number and ferocity of the supernatural fires that occurred in Israel, miraculously, no one was killed.

These fires began as Rav Berland left the court in Jerusalem to be taken back to Tzalmon prison, located near Zichron Yaakov. Shortly after the fire in Zichron Yaakov became national news (and before any other major fires had occurred in Israel), the kabbalist Rav Dov Kook from Tiberius made the following statement:

⁷⁶ This was an idea that the Rav repeated when Channel 2 journalist Amnon Levy interviewed him. On that occasion, too, Rav Berland said: "I told the judge that **if** what they are saying is true and **if** I would have done what they accuse me of, then the punishment is too light, I would have deserved to have been burnt."

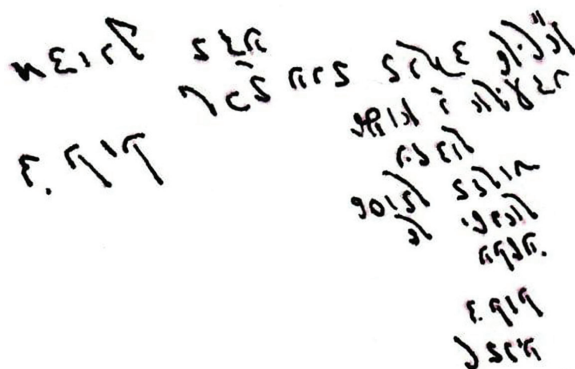
“All the terrible forest fires that are happening now around Zichron Yaakov are because of the persecution and suffering of the holy tzaddik, Rav Eliezer Berland. The measure of justice is being weighed out primarily against us in the north, and we need to know that the terrible fires that are burning there in a few different places are because Rav Berland is being held in the north, close to Teveria.

The Midrash says that when people persecute and shame tzaddikim, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings fires to the world! All the slanderers and people who are speaking libels and falsehoods about this awesome, holy tzaddik should be aware that soon, judgment will occur, and that there is a Judge mamash, who will reveal his [Rav Berland’s] honor and innocence to every eye.”

It was only after Rav Kook’s statement that the north was really hit particularly hard by raging fires. Fires were reported in and around a number of northern cities, including Hadera, Zichron Yaakov and the northern metropolis of Haifa, where more than 75,000 residents had to be evacuated.

More than 250 separate fires continued to rage for more than five days across every part of Israel. While the Israeli government was quick to blame the fires on Arab terrorists, Israel’s Home Front Command stated that no more than 5 percent of the fires appeared to be deliberate acts of arson⁷⁷. The rest had occurred spontaneously, with no obvious cause.

⁷⁷ Two weeks after the fires, the Israeli government admitted that they’d only been able to press charges against three Arab arsonists. All the other fires were “unexplained.”



Rav Kook once wrote out a statement, and signed on it, that Rav Berland is a spark of Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol. Despite the fact that Rav Eliezer Hagadol was the Tzaddik of the generation and on the highest spiritual level, the Sages of that time couldn't understand him and actually excommunicated him. They only rescinded their decree when he was on his deathbed.

As the fires continued to rage out of control, the *Daf Yomi* being learned that day recounted how every place where Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol gazed used to get burned up, as a result of his holiness.

Despite his tremendous suffering and his failing health, the one person who appeared to be managing the Rav's prolonged and unjust incarceration the best was... the Rav himself.

Rav Berland's grandson, Rav Chaim Reicher, paid him a visit in the Tzalmon prison in November 2016, when the Rav had already been incarcerated for around eight months, including his stay in Sun City Prison in South Africa. He reported back that something very peculiar was happening in Tzalmon.

"It's a very strange situation," he began. "Apparently, we who are coming to visit the Rav, shlita, are supposed to

be happy and uplifted, and we are meant to be giving strength to he who is inside, who is should be broken and torn. But in fact, the opposite is true. The Rav, shlita, is always in the best of moods. We come broken and depressed and he comes full of energy and good spirits and uplifts anyone who comes to visit. He always comes out wearing his tallis and tefillin and carrying piles of sefarim, until you forget you came to visit him in a prison at all...

“You sit in front of the Rav, shlita, who is already 80 years old, and you... see his holiness, the light that he projects, and you hear from him that everything is fine, there are no complaints, ‘I’m just learning here, nobody bothers me.’”

Rav Reicher continues:

“If there’s anything that strengthens the Rav it’s when he hears that people out here are praying for his success and continuing their avodas Hashem, their Torah study and their prayers, and that the community is growing and prospering more day by day. I spoke to the Rav about the status of the community and the students out there, thousands of people who just recently arrived and joined the veterans who stayed with the Rav.

Thousands more new people are drawing close, Litvish Rabbanim, Admorim that I talk to and I am in constant touch with. It’s like a new world of tremendous wisdom and singing melodies, of real Breslov, opened up for them. Not a Breslov that speaks badly about others, not a Breslov that says we are the best. Rebbe Nachman is prayer, is Torah, is niggunim and zemiros,

and to accept insults with love and joy, and so forth — and all this we see in the Rav...

The prison commander says he doesn't understand what's happening here, that whenever the Rav begins to pray, the entire prison is quiet. From 5:00 a.m. the Rav is singing and no one complains that he's bothering them. I heard that all the prisons are asking that the Rav should come to them and help their prisoners behave, too...

The Rav is entirely absorbed in avodas Hashem."

Rav Reicher continues:

"The righteous can never be locked up, like Yosef Hatzaddik, where all the awesome things he attained, he achieved them specifically in jail... Leading Rabbis speak to me privately and tell me that they have explicit instructions from the Rav not to support him openly, except for some things he permits because of the chillul Hashem. The Rav feels that he must take this disgrace upon himself in order to mitigate decrees and ignite the light of teshuvah in all of Am Yisrael.

I told the Rav that they are talking badly about him and asked him if we should act against it, but the Rav said we should do nothing, just pray, just learn, just dance and be happy. The Rav already told me some of those secrets that I must not tell, about why some things happened, and how the Rav filtered out the kind of people connected to him who were only looking for money, pride, status and dignity.

What other Rav or Admor has these kind of students, who after five years of persecution and torment are still sacrificing themselves? We see clearly that there are people here who learned the ways of the Rav. And anyone who isn't comfortable is welcome to leave. There are enough students already, there are thousands of new ones, there are hidden things happening that we do not understand.

Despite the fact that he studies Torah 24 hours a day, the Rav also has complete mastery of every subject: how to build airplanes, nuclear bombs, science, health, physics, history... He even sat with the Druze prisoners and told them about their holiday and the history of their religion, things that they didn't even know. Everything comes back to his holiness, his love of every Jew, and that he forgives everyone wholeheartedly."

"When I was a bit younger, many times I would find the Rav with his arms and legs sprawled out, crying to Hashem Yisbarach. I would stand next to him for four or five hours and hear him crying the Minchah prayers. We cannot talk about these things because it just detracts from his true greatness, which is beyond description.

After everyone else left, I was with the Rav in private, and I asked him if I could nevertheless do something to help him. The Rav answered me that I should invest in an additional hour of learning every day. With all my connections in politics, the Rav did not have any other request from me," Rav Reicher concludes.

TOWARDS FREEDOM

Rav Yehezkel Levenstein, ztl, the former *mashgiach ruchani* (spiritual guide) of the Mir yeshiva, wrote in his book *Or Yehezkel* (7) the following words about the importance of believing in, and hoping for, the coming of Moshiach.

“*Emuna* (belief) in the coming redemption is one of our fundamental obligations. And not just a grudging, low level of *emuna*. The Rambam writes that: “A person is obligated to anticipate and wait for the coming of Moshiach, and anyone who doesn’t wait [i.e. anticipate Moshiach’s coming] is a heretic.

And even though the whole of the nation of Israel believes in and recognizes the [idea of the] coming of the Moshiach, there is still an obligation to wait for it, and to anticipate it actually happening, and anyone who stops anticipating [the coming of Moshiach], even for just an hour, we see from this that they are not a believer.

Once a person really expects and yearns for the coming of the *Melech* Moshiach (King Moshiach), then any of the occurrences happening in the world appear to him to be a hint, or connected with the [imminent] redemption, and will cause him to think that maybe, the *Melech* Moshiach is truly on the threshold [of being revealed].

It should be underlined that people don’t see the signs of redemption because they don’t think about it all, or reflect on the matter [of Moshiach coming]. I remember how the Chofetz

Chaim, ztl, used to wait for it, and connect everything to the *geula* (redemption).”

Elsewhere, Rav Levenstein returns to the subject, and adds: “The Rambam already wrote that anyone who doesn’t wait for him [i.e. the Moshiach] to come every single day, is a heretic in regard to the whole Torah. And this is particularly true in our time, when we shouldn’t only wait and hope for the Melech Moshiach, but actually *know* that we are in the days when Moshiach *will* come.”

On Wednesday, November 16, 2016, Rav Berland took the advice of his new legal team to enter a plea bargain with the State of Israel prosecutors. The plea bargain was formally agreed by the court on November 22, 2016, and under the terms of this deal, Rav Berland was given an 18-month jail sentence, which his lawyers hoped meant he’d be free by Pesach 5777. Many people were stunned by this turn of events, but Ephraim Dimri, one of the Rav’s new attorneys, explained why they’d recommended this course of action.

Dimri explained:

“Rav Berland accepted this decision in order to end all of the legal circling that’s been going on around him. Because right now, until he gets a chance to prove his innocence, he could be sitting in prison for another one and a half or even two years. We needed to act according to the reality which we found ourselves in, and that reality was to free Rav Berland, ASAP.”

Dimri continued:

“The Rav, shlita, is completely innocent. But we needed to be realistic and intelligent, if not necessarily correct. The process of defending the Rav could have taken a very long time, and the Rav is unhealthy and not young

at all. Obviously, if the Rav, shlita, would have been out, even under house arrest, we would have managed the case to the end and we wouldn't have settled for a plea bargain. We would have definitely got the Rav, shlita, acquitted.

But we can't leave him suffering behind bars. The Rav has piles and piles of sefarim in his cell, shelves upon shelves, and all day and night he is sitting and learning. This is not a place for him."

Attorney Dimri continued:

"I was extremely impressed with him. Personally, I call him an angel. He simply has awesome spiritual powers. He's an amazing person. I have merited representing many big Rabbis and kabbalists in my career, but someone like Rav Eliezer Berland, I don't think there is anyone else like this. In my opinion, he is one in the generation."

Attorney Dimri then shared some of the miraculous occurrences he witnessed while visiting the Rav in prison.

"I'm going to tell you some stories that you're really not going to believe. The Israel Prison Service has now set up a commission of inquiry to find out how prison doors could open without any prison wardens pressing the button... But all these things happened to me, and they're true.

I was standing outside in the lawyers' room, and I was waiting for the prison wardens to open the door, a big iron door, [so I could get in to see the Rav]. Everything

there is connected by a closed circuit system, and it's impossible to open the next door along the passage until the first door is completely closed.

I said to the Rav [who was waiting for me behind the next door] that the door wasn't being buzzed open, and that I thought that the prison guard [who was meant to open the door] had gone somewhere. The Rav, shlita, told me: 'Push!' so I did, but it didn't open. So he told me again: 'Push!', so I tried again – and this time the door opened. This door literally weighed a ton, but it opened.

Then the prison warden showed up, and he said to me: 'How did you get in here?!?' So I told him that I'd pushed the door open. He went and checked the CCTV, then he called his superior, because he couldn't understand what had just happened. I said to the Rav: "They're confused!" He replied: "Let them be confused."

Attorney Dimri continues:

"Later on, one of the prison officers contacted me and asked me: 'Is the Rav normal?' (sane) I told her: "More than you are!" So then she asked me: 'Why then is he sitting on the floor every night and crying his eyes out?' I told her: 'He's reciting the Tikkun Hatzot, (midnight lament), and the Tikkun Rachel and the Tikkun Leah (deep kabbalistic prayers). He's praying on behalf of all Am Yisrael, and crying for us.'

This prison officer told me that she'd sent the Rav to be evaluated by a Russian psychologist. She told me: 'She examined him and told me that his intelligence is off

the charts – above what a human brain is meant to be capable of. He knows history, he knows mathematics etc...'

“One day, the prison commandant asked me to view some of the footage from the prison CCTV with him. He showed me how the Rav, shlita, is always surrounded by a hila, or aura or light. This is all true! The commandant thought that maybe the CCTV was malfunctioning, because it’s a very advanced piece of equipment, and he couldn’t understand what that aura of light surrounding the Rav really was.

The prison commandant told me: ‘Do you see that?’ I told him: ‘This is a holy Jew, a Tzaddik who learns Torah and prays all day long. What you’re looking at is his halo, or aura.’ After that, the prison commandant – who happens to be Druze – started coming to the Rav and kissing his hand.”

“Another time, I came to visit the Rav, shlita, together with another lawyer, and we decided to start singing with the Rav, because the Rav, shlita, really loves to sing. So we’re singing and dancing together, when the Rav suddenly tells us that we need to come and be his guests [in his prison cell].

Now, the distance from the lawyers’ room to the Rav’s cell was at least 100 meters, and there are prison wardens everywhere, and CCTV cameras, and everything else. I asked him very politely: ‘How are we meant to get there?’, but I had no doubt that it was completely impossible.

The Rav took his tallit, put it over our heads, and then took us with him to his cell. We entered his room, and it's full of holy books, literally piles upon piles of books. The Rav, shlita, looked through a couple of his books, poured us a couple of drinks that we made the bracha over and drank, and then told us: 'Now, I've performed the mitzvah of hachnassas orchim'. The Rav then told us: 'Now, you can return to the Attorney's Room.' And we returned."

Suddenly, we see the head of that prison section running towards us, and he's all stressed-out and shouting at us: 'Where were you?! I can't see you on the CCTV!' We told him that we'd been with the Rav, shlita, in his cell, but he insisted that this was impossible. "I didn't see you on the CCTV!" he tells us, as the Rav, shlita, is just standing there and smiling at him.

Attorney Dimri concluded his words by saying:

"There are other stories that can only be told once the Rav, shlita, has been freed, bezrat Hashem. If we breathe a word of these stories too soon, the whole of the Israel Prison Service will be up in arms, they'll have no explanation for how these things occurred. We saw some truly miraculous things there in prison."

Hot on the heels of the plea bargain, two of Rav Berland's main persecutors flew over to the US and scheduled meetings with a large number of well-known rabbis, to start peddling their slanders and lies wholesale on the other side of the Atlantic.

Thankfully, their trip met with very little success, and most of the American rabbis they met with saw straight through their lies

and refused to get involved in their deception. Meanwhile back in Israel, more and more leading Rabbis were putting out statements publicly supporting Rav Berland.

One such statement again came from the saintly Kabbalist Rav David Abuchatzera of Nahariya, who told one of his students: “It’s impossible to touch the Tzaddikim, even by as much as a hair’s breadth. It’s impossible [for them] to harm Rav Berland, shlita.”

Rav Meir Shmueli was even more blunt and warned of the terrible dangers involved in speaking badly about Rav Berland. He said:

“Throw away your own ideas (*seichel*) and tell yourself: ‘What do I know, anyway, about the actions of the Gedolei Israel? Why do I need to speak about these things?’

“But he admitted it!!! And it was written up all over the media!!!”

“It’s all nonsense and futility!... [In the case of Rav Berland], they told him: ‘if you don’t go along with us, you’re going to stay in prison for a long time, so it would be wise for you to say that you did these things, so you don’t end up in an even worse situation.’

“Today, there are many people who are busying themselves by commenting on affairs involving Rabbonim (rabbis). The late Rav Elyashiv, ztl, said that at least a third of the cancers affecting the Jewish community are being caused because people are disgracing Talmidei Chacham... Don’t speak! Do you really want to be playing with this type of fire?!”



In the meantime, the Rav's situation continued to be extremely serious, as his health steadily continued to worsen during his stay behind bars. His family, attendants and lawyers continued to hope that the Israeli courts would start acting with more clemency towards him and agree to release him after he'd served two thirds of his sentence, which would fall somewhere between Purim and Pesach 5777 (2017).

Now that the State had got its show trial and public confession of wrong-doing out of the Rav, it was hoped they'd see no further point in dragging out his incarceration. But yet again, the Rav's persecutors continued to argue in court that the Rav should stay locked up for as long as possible.

The Rav and his team of lawyers found themselves repeatedly getting called back to court for hearing after hearing, and still there was no end to the ordeal in sight. At the end of December 2016, during the festival of Chanukah, Shuvu Banim organized an emergency fundraising appeal to try to cover the astronomical legal costs involved in trying to get the Rav out of prison that had now surpassed the million shekel mark.

As the court proceedings continued to drag out, the Rav's lawyers finally managed to force the Israel Prison Service to release the information about the Rav's current state of health that had been withheld from his family and attendants.

As soon as they saw his health records, it was clear to the Rav's attendants that Rav Berland needed serious, immediate surgery to deal with a number of potentially life-threatening growths that had been left untreated for months. While the lawyers continued to argue for the Rav's early release in court, his attendants mobilized to find the best doctors in the country to operate on the Rav.

The first operation took place on February 13, 2017, where three separate growths and part of the Rav's prostate were removed. At the same time the surgery was taking place in Hadassah hospital on the outskirts of Jerusalem, thousands of his followers gathered at Kever Rachel to pray for the Rav's speedy recovery.

Despite the short notice and the lack of time to really organise the event, people arrived at Kever Rachel from all over the country, quickly filling it up to saturation point. The crush of people was so great the police were forced to close off the main corridor leading to the tomb, leaving a crowd of people standing outside.

Immediately after the prayer gathering ended, the good news arrived that the Rav's surgery had been successfully concluded, and that the Rav was in a good state and recovering.

Despite the fact that he'd just undergone a very complicated and serious procedure, immediately after the operation, the Rav asked to be brought three holy *seforim* so that he'd be able to continue to learn. Not even a serious operation could cloud his mind or pull him away from his Torah learning and *avodas Hashem*.

In typical overkill fashion, the State of Israel posted a large number of guards around the Rav's hospital bed, while his lawyers continued to argue that the Rav should be freed on grounds of ill-health. Just as it looked as though the courts were finally coming around to the idea, Rav Berland's persecutors struck again.

The incredible story begins on February 5th, 2017, when Rav Moshe Kramer, head of the Breslev yeshiva in Meah Shearim, was attacked in public and had his shtreimel knocked off. A police investigation later affirmed that Rav Kramer's attacker was a young individual who had a personal grudge against Rav Kramer.

But, ever on the look-out for new ways of slandering Rav Berland and his followers, the Breslov zealots immediately started spreading the story that Shuvu Banim was behind the attack on Rav Kramer.

The media again quickly fanned the flames of these latest baseless slanders and lies. Headlines from the *Yeshiva World News* website screamed out:

Headlines & Breaking News | YWN Videos Of Interest

SHOCKING VIDEO: Breslov Mashpia HaRav Moshe Kramer Attacked On Shabbos By Chasidim Of Rabbi Berland

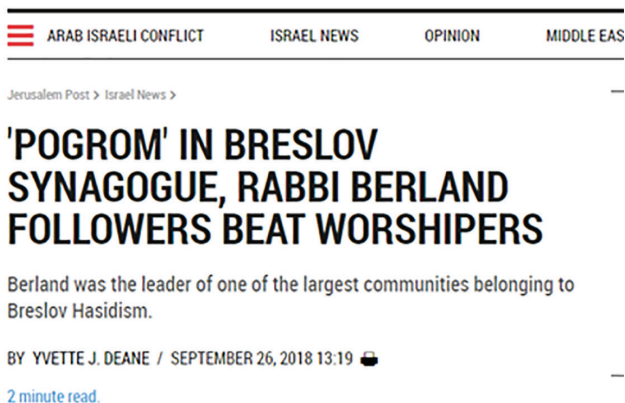
February 5, 2017 4:45 pm

The story then continued:

“The followers of Rabbi Eliezer Berland who was convicted of offenses have taken to attack [sic] his opponents. In the opening scene, a prominent Mashpia who dared to speak against Rabbi Berland was attacked violently. In the second you see followers of rabbi Berland covering their heads with Taleisim) as they destroy HaRav Kramer’s central air conditioner outside his home.”

All the videos actually showed is that Rav Kramer was attacked by someone wearing the traditional garb of a Meah Shearim chassid, and that three chareidi men with talessim over their heads were attacking an air-conditioning unit. There was nothing to link the attacks to Shuvu Banim, or Rav Berland – except the statements made by Rav Berland’s persecutors.

When news of the attack reached Rav Berland, he immediately put out a recording condemning it, and encouraged his students at Shuvu Banim to attend the gathering being organized by members of the Breslov shul in Meah Shearim, to protest the outrage done to Rav Kramer.



In the meantime, the zealots wasted no time pasting posters up in every Chareidi city in Israel, falsely blaming Shuvu Banim for the attack. Then, they printed up more than **100,000** pamphlets containing a slanderous account of a 'pogrom' that they falsely claimed followers of Shuvu Banim had perpetrated on the Breslov Shul in Meah Shearim and distributed them to every Chareidi city in Israel, as well as to every media outlet.

All this was occurring at the same time Rav Berland was being rushed into hospital for his serious, emergency operation. When he was told about the pamphlets, the Rav told his followers not to fight back, and not to respond to the ongoing provocations of the Breslov zealots, even though the police had already announced that the original assault on Rav Kramer had nothing to do with Shuvu Banim.

But amazingly, more was still to come. As the Rav was being wheeled in for surgery, huge billboards appeared in a large number of chareidi towns, from Bnei Brak to Elad and Beit Shemesh, bearing the headline (paraphrased from the Hebrew): “A protest about the attack against Rav Moshe Kramer carried out by low-lives from Shuvu Banim” - and which then segued into yet more horrible, slanderous lies about Rav Berland.

At the end of this horrible rant, came a long list of names of prominent Breslov rabbis, who’d apparently signed on this terrible statement.

Very quickly, many of these Rabbis put out public statements explaining how they’d been tricked by the Breslov zealots, who’d asked them to put their names to a protest against the attack on Rav Kramer, but never mentioned a word about Shuvu Banim or Rav Berland.

When news of this terrible *chillul Hashem* reached the ears of Rav Morgenstern, he immediately put out a statement decrying the terrible actions of the Breslov zealots, and also urged his followers to do everything they can to start publishing books - including in English - that would tell the true story of who the Rav Berland really was.

A number of other rabbis also publicly spoke out against this terrible *chillul Hashem*, including Rav Yehuda Yosefi, who said:

“Someone once told me, in the name of Jerusalem’s Tzaddikim of the past generation: ‘You should run away from every machloket, but when it comes to a machloket for the sake of Heaven - you should run away eight times faster.’ Even Korach believed he was arguing solely for the sake of Heaven.

Rabbi Yohonatan Eibshitz explained that a machloket for the sake of Heaven was the machloket between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. They argued when they were learning Torah, but there was still only love and unity between them. If the disagreement leads to hatred and to machloket - then that's not a machloket for the sake of Heaven! And it's so unfortunate, because people are going to pay a very big price for it.

Even if you want to take vengeance on someone else, do you really want to bring so much evil down upon yourself?!"



A few days' after his first, successful surgery to remove cancerous growths from his prostate the doctors discovered that the cancer had also spread to Rav Berland's kidneys, and another, even more serious, surgery was scheduled to remove the tumors.

Ultimately, the surgeons discovered that the disease had progressed so far in one kidney, they couldn't save it and had to be removed.

Within a few hours of the surgery, the Rav was sitting up in the chair next to his bed, poring over a number of holy books that were spread out on the small table in front of him. If that wasn't stunning enough, he continued to spend hours standing in prayer, as per his usual custom of serving Hashem with every ounce of his strength.

Despite his advanced age (the Rav was 79 years old, when all this was happening), and the severity of the two surgeries he'd just undergone, including having a kidney removed, when the courts



were informed that the Rav was standing up and praying next to his bed, they ruled he'd recovered enough to be sent back to prison within a week of having his surgery.

Given that most patients take between two and three months to recover from such serious procedures, the court's decision is very hard to understand. Back in prison, the Rav wasn't receiving even the basic medical care someone in his fragile situation really required, prompting his legal team and attendants to make a super-human effort to have the Rav released, at least to home arrest.

When Rav Berland's lawyers informed the courts they were preparing to sue the Israeli Prison Service for failing to treat Rav Berland's illness in a timely and humane fashion, finally things started to move.



On April 6, 2017, the Israeli court finally announced that they were freeing the elderly, ill Rav to house arrest - with a twist. The Rav would be freed to the Hadassah hospital hotel, and he would also be accompanied by a team of court appointed security guards 24/7, that he would have to pay for himself.

The news of the Rav's partial release was greeted with very mixed feelings. On the one hand, there was a palpable sense of relief that Rav Berland would finally get the care he needed to really recover from his illness, and that he was out of prison.

But under the initial terms of his release to the Hadassah hospital hotel, the only people who'd be able to see him were his immediate family and attendants. The Rav himself released a statement asking his followers to stay away from the Hadassah hospital, so that the court wouldn't try to use that as grounds for sending him back to prison.

Still, as the pictures started to circulate of the Rav spending his first Pesach with his family in Israel in more than four years, there was a feeling that maybe, the worst was finally behind the Rav and his followers. The Rav was joined by 12 of his family members for Seder night, and one of his grandson's shared the following:

“This Seder night was very similar to the one that I attended with the Rav, shlita, more than four years’ ago, [his last Seder] in Eretz Yisrael. I almost didn’t see any differences between them. Yes, we could see that the Rav was still suffering from pain throughout the Seder, but apart from that, Moranu Rav Berland, shlita, continued to serve Hashem as normal, with great strength and tenacity.”

Rav Berland's grandson continued: *“The doctors told the Rav, shlita, that it was absolutely forbidden for him to eat matzah, under any circumstances. But Rav Berland, shlita, still ate them with great mesirut Nefesh (self-sacrifice). I remember that in previous years, the Rav pretty much only used to eat matzah, and didn't really touch any other types of food. And this year, he*

also didn't cancel the mitzvah [of eating matzah at the Seder]. It seems that throughout the rest of the holiday, Rav Berland will be unable to eat more matzah, but for Seder night itself, he simply sacrificed himself to perform this important mitzvah."

As the Rav's health slowly started to improve, his lawyers continue to fight for the court to ease the conditions they'd placed on his house arrest at the Hadassah hotel. Fairly quickly after Seder night, they received court approval for the Rav to start receiving visitors of importance, other than his family.

A steady stream of rabbis, rebbes and Admorim started literally queuing up outside the hospital, often having to wait hours on end before being notified that the court had approved their visit, just to pay their respects to Rav Berland.

Breslov activist Aharon Boymil accompanied the Admor of Strapcov to visit the Rav at the Hadassah hotel, and he recalls:

"The Admor of Strapcov was waiting there with me for hours before they'd let us in, but I explained to him that there was nothing we could do [to speed things up], and that in the meantime you need a lot of official approvals to get through all the procedures set up by the State of Israel. But ultimately it was all worth it, in order to get the holy [Admor of Strapcov] inside."

R' Boymil continued:

"People wouldn't believe which [Torah] greats have been queuing up here simply in order to enter and see the Rav, shlita. Everyone wants to receive a bracha from Rav Berland, shlita."

I stood outside for 14 hours, and I saw something amazing: Even the guards, who aren't from a Torah background, were sharing divrei Torah with each other, and telling each other stories about the Tzaddikim. One of them told me that the Rav recited the Birkat HaShachar (morning blessings) with him, and also told me that the Rav was praying with him.

I asked him, 'Tell me something, are you religiously observant?' He replied: 'What does it mean, 'religious observant'? Every day, we're hearing divrei Torah, until we got to a stage where we got a new soul.'"



Most of the Rav's well-known visitors kept a very low profile, but as time went on, word started to leak out that a number of prominent figures in the chareidi world were beating a path to Rav Berland's door.

On April 18, 2017 two prominent Israeli politicians, the Health Minister Yaakov Litzman and Rabbi Meir Porush, came to visit Rav Eliezer Berland, in a highly-publicized visit. As word of their visit spread, some MKs from the radical 'Meretz' party to launch

yet another vicious verbal attack on the Rav and those who were visiting him.

The Health Minister, Rabbi Litzman, came under particular scathing attack from members of the ultra-left Meretz Party and other leftist MKs, after his visit to the Rav. The Rav's attendant, Natan Besanson picks up the story:

“The same people who have been behind the persecution of the Rav up until now are continuing to look for more ways to attack him,” he said. *“As we all know, Rav Berland, shlita, loves criticism, and looks for ways [that people] will shame and disgrace him. He even tried to calm me down, and he told me: ‘Natan, relax! After all, you know that I like being shamed and disgraced, and that I even encourage it!’ But while it’s permitted for the Rav to forgo the honor that’s due to him, we won’t give up on it.*

They are so obsessed with their persecution of Rav Berland, that they are taking it to the furthest extreme. Everyone who hears them, and then who afterwards really looks at who the Rav is, he can clearly see that everything is lies. We all see that they’re talking about a Tzaddik who simply learns Torah all day long and serves Hashem.

One great Tzaddik told me:

‘Rabbi Akiva had his flesh scraped with combs of iron, but this only happened once, right before he died. By Rav Berland, they’re scraping his body, his soul, his honor, his character - and not only for one second, or one single day, but for year after year. And we’re not

talking about Romans, here, like the people who [tortured] Rabbi Akiva, but about people who claim to be engaged in kiruv, who right now are scraping with their combs day and night.”

Rav Besanson continued:

“It’s insane, it’s like a bad dream, we’re talking about a level of wickedness that’s diabolical, and that doesn’t end. I’m waiting for the day when their web of lies will finally be exposed. [This injustice] is crying out up to the Heavens! They said they had hundreds of witnesses [against the Rav], but when it came down to it, they didn’t have anyone or anything. Their lies simply didn’t stand up [to any scrutiny].

Hashem will avenge the blood being spilled here. Usually, a man is only murdered once, but they haven’t calmed down, and they are still thirsting for the tzaddik’s blood. Rav Yaakov Litzman [and the other visitors] have known Rav Berland, shlita, for many years. They certainly don’t regret their visit. We know the truth, and we understand what is going on here.”

Given the unremitting attacks that were continuing in the press against Rav Berland and his followers at this time, other leading rabbis also came to publicly show their support. On May 3, 2017, the leading Sephardi Posek and head of the ‘Toherah Ve Chaim’ kollel in Bnei Brak, Rav Shimon Badani, arranged the first of what became many visits, firstly to the Shuvu Banim Yeshiva in the Old City, and later in the month, to Rav Berland himself.

Then in January 2019, Rav Badani made another trip to Jerusalem to pay his respects to Rav Berland and to ask the Rav for a blessing

for a shidduch for his grandson. Afterwards, he explained some of the tactics the Rav's persecutors had been using to try to smear his name, which included setting up their own false Beit Din. In an interview he gave at that time⁷⁸, Rav Badani explained to one of Rav Berland's attendants what they had told him:

בית דין צדק
משפטי אמת ושכום
 שני"י בית מדרש כלוראה דחסידי ברסלב ק"ק שובו בנים
 פנימי"ק ירושלים תוצב"ה

תאריך: אור ליום ה' ורבע שבט תשע"ד

כס"ד

במותב תלתא כהדא הוינא כד אתו קמו חשובי הרבנים בפרשת ה"בית דין", שהקימו לקבל שם עדות, נגד הרה"ה אליעזר ברלנד שליט"א, לברר דעת תורתנו הק'.

וכיון שהוברר לפנינו שלא נעשה כאן שום מעשה "בית-דין כלל", מפאת כמה וכמה דברים ואף עברו על סעיפים מפורשים בשולחן-ערוך, אי בעית אימא כזרון, ואי בעית אימא בשממון, הצד השווה שבהן שאין כאן לא דין ולא דיון, לא תורה ולא הלכה, (הכל כמבואר באריכות בנספח המצורף לזה הנמצא בב"ד).

על החתום:

אסף זקן נחמן ברוך יוסף מן

מקום החתום:

הרחוב הנביאים 26 פנימי"ק ירושלים תוצב"ה
 טלפון: 077-226-1035 בתרבות אימייל: 7226103@gmail.com

"I had three or four Breslovers by me who had beards longer than yours. [I said to them]: 'What are you saying [about the Rav]? We need to hold a Beit Din!' [They

⁷⁸ Which you can see: <https://youtu.be/Nq43nweDRbA>

told me] ‘You told us that there needs to be a Beit Din - here! We made ourselves a Beit Din!’ I said, ‘You made yourselves a Beit Din?! What did you decide?’ They said, ‘We brought the plaintiffs...’ I said ‘you brought the plaintiffs? Did you bring Rav Berland too?’ [They replied]: ‘No!’”

Rav Badani continued:

“How can this be?! How can you judge someone when he’s not even there [to defend himself]?! This is a sin. [They told me] He is gavra alma- ‘a dangerous person’⁷⁹. What sort of ‘dangerous person’ is this?! He’s a physically unwell man aged 80 years old. And this is a gavra alma?!”

[Rav Badani laughs, then continues:]

“What is this shtuyot, this nonsense?! There’s no such thing! I said to them ‘now he’s a free man, take him to the Beit Din of the Eida Chareidit that they will be the judges!’ They said, ‘we’re not going, we are going’. It’s all nonsense!”

“I told them, Who appointed you? Breslov Rabbis? Who appointed you? Ok, let’s suppose that’s true [that they were really appointed by Breslov rabbis]. Why didn’t you invite him [Rav Berland] to attend? [They told me] Gavra alma. “Who are you?! You are the judges and

⁷⁹ Gavra Alma is a halachic term that applies in rare cases when someone is a known murderer. Then, a Beit Din will be afraid to bring him to court as he might take people’s lives if he’s apprehended. So in those cases, they are allowed to judge and hold the court case without the defendant being there.

also the deciders? You are saying he is gavra alma. All of this is [coming from] you! Who gave you the right to do this? Gavra alma. What are you talking about, gavra alma?!”

Rav Badani concluded:

“I go according to the Shulchan Aruch, and according to the Torah. I don’t go according to my emotions. They said they went to this Rabbi and that Rabbi. I don’t care, this Rabbi that Rabbi - if there is no Beit Din, then there is nothing! It’s all nonsense. Even though the Gemara says that when there is a voice (rumor) that doesn’t stop so we suspect the person, but that’s on the condition that the person doesn’t have enemies. So what do you want! You are all his enemies! Hashem should help!”

Another early visitor to Hadassah hospital was Rav Shalom Tzadok, the head of the Ariel and Ayish yishuvim (settlements) in the Shomron.

Rav Tzadok recounted:

“I told Rav Berland, shlita, that we shouldn’t be surprised or impressed by all the slanderous lies that his enemies have spread about him.

I told him that he wasn’t the first person who’d been persecuted [in this way]. These things have been going on since the very beginning. Chazal tell us that dafka, in that area where a great person is the most excellent, that’s where they seek to turn things around, and make it appear that he’s the opposite of what he truly is.”

Rav Tzadok's connection with Rav Berland stretches back across 60 years, when they shared a room together at the Kfar Chassidim yeshiva for four years, until the Rav's marriage.

"I was at his engagement and also attended his chuppa (wedding)," explained Rav Tzadok. "I remember Rav Berland's, shlita, very unusual avodat Hashem back in the yeshiva. His diligence in learning was really only for its own sake. He used to rise early in the mornings and go to pray in holiness and purity. He would pray with dveikut, out loud, and then afterwards he'd be learning the whole rest of the day, until the end of the night. He was always the last one to return to our room, and then the next day he'd do it all over again."

Rav Tzadok concludes: "I couldn't see any trace of concern on the Rav, despite everything he's gone through. The happiness of learning Torah is still lighting up his face. His whole being is immersed in Torah, he's got a big table there, and it's full of holy books, and he's radiating [holiness and happiness] to everyone who's coming to visit him. It's really a delight to see him."

I told him that all the suffering that he endured, it was a kapparah (atonement) for Am Israel. All those people who saw how much success he was having with the non-Torah observant public, did everything they could to try to torpedo it."

Other voices within the wider chareidi world were also speaking out in support of the Rav and deriding the intimidating and slanderous tactics being employed against him, including the well-known kabbalist Rabbi Gamliel Rabinowitz.

In a conversation with Rav Yosef Frank in Meron, Rav Rabinowitz told him: “*Ashreich*, that you have such a Rebbe, Rav Berland. He’s a huge person, he’s a huge individual, and the fact that he has all of this opposition only serves to testify about his true greatness. There is no doubt about this.”

Still under house arrest, Rav Eliezer Berland returned to his home on Hachoma Hashlishit Road, in the Meah Shearim (Morasha) district of Jerusalem on May 24, 2017, after a five and a half year absence that saw him travelling from one continent to the next, jump from one country to another and move from one temporary dwelling to another, before spending well over a year in prison.

Immediately upon his return to his home in Jerusalem, the Rav issued the following statement:

“No-one is allowed to harm any of the complainants. No-one is allowed to turn their nose up at them. We need to help them financially and give them monetary assistance. [We need] to lift them up higher and higher, and to give them every honour and every form of help. If you meet them in the streets, only smile at them and shake their hand [cordially].”

Rav Berland continued: “Dance with them in the street and accord them all the honour they so richly deserve, because everything is in their merit. Everything that we managed to achieve, [like] giving three hour shiurim on the Ketzot HaHoshen, and all the prayers, and praying the mincha-maariv prayers for four hours every evening, everything is in their merit.

Just strengthen them, and encourage them, and give them all the honor and respect in the world. Also, help

them financially, if you see that they are lacking something, give them some money. Give them money for their gatherings⁸⁰, encourage them, motivate them to hold more gatherings, and more gatherings - because all of this is big vessels full of [spiritual] diamonds.

All of Shuvu Banim's success is in their merit. All of the success that we had in Holland, and in Johannesburg [here, the Rav also mentioned other cities outside of Israel] - everything is in their merit. Just encourage them, and strengthen them, and Shuvu Banim will completely transform the face of the country.”

And just like that, after five long, torturous years of exile, pain and imprisonment, Rav Berland returned to his community. The court stipulated that he was unable to leave his home in Morasha, and that he would still need to continue to pay to have a security team with him 24/7 - but suddenly, it was possible to pray with the Rav in the small courtyard next to his apartment building again, and to see him in the flesh.

Every day, hundreds and hundreds of people, including men, women and children, started flocking to the Rav's Jerusalem neighborhood. The makeshift *shul* where the Rav and his community prayed was full was always packed to capacity and beyond standing room only.

Shortly afterwards, on May 24th, 2017, the Rav was finally released to house arrest in his own home.



⁸⁰ The people within the Breslov community who were behind the slander and persecution of Rav Berland held a number of public gatherings against him.

YOU CAN TELL A LEADER BY HIS FOLLOWERS

It is impossible to understand the Tzaddik himself since his intrinsic essence is beyond our grasp. Only through the followers of the Tzaddik is it possible to understand the Tzaddik's greatness. People are nearer to the Tzaddik's followers than they are to the Tzaddik himself and so they can understand them, at least a little, when they see that they are mature, hard-working, God-fearing people. One who sees the truth can thus know the greatness of the Tzaddik from his followers.

This is similar to a seal. The writing on the seal is unreadable because the letters are back to front. Only when one takes the seal and stamps it on wax can one understand the letters and designs inscribed on the seal, and one then sees what is written on the seal. Similarly, through the Tzaddik's followers one can come to understand something of the Tzaddik himself.

Likutey Moharan I, 140

On Shabbat August 19, 2017, around 12pm, Shuvu Banim student Nachman Lerner was walking back to his home after visiting the Kotel, around 12pm.

Just as he was leaving *Shaar Shechem* (the Damascus Gate) on Shabbat, a female terrorist holding a knife suddenly ran directly at him and tried to stab him with all her might. Somehow, Nachman Lerner managed to evade the female terrorist, and then calmly continued home to where his family were waiting for him to begin their Shabbat meal.

Back at home, Lerner casually mentioned that he'd been involved in a minor altercation with an unbalanced woman. But when the police later reviewed the video footage of the area, they realized that an attempted murder had taken place, and they decided to track down the victim, to get more details about what had happened.

Early Sunday morning, the police contacted some of the students from the Shuvu Banim yeshiva to try and find the *avreich* who'd been involved in the attempted stabbing the day before. Lerner had already gone to learn in the yeshiva and was out of contact,

so one of the students went to go and tell him that he needed to head over to the police station to give a witness statement about the previous day's terror attack.

Lerner had no idea what he was talking about. It's only when he viewed the police footage that the penny dropped that he'd been attacked by a female terrorist intent on murder. "The police said that it's impossible to explain what happened to me, other than to say that I experienced an open miracle," he said. "There is simply no connection between what I experienced myself, and what I saw happening on the police footage, i.e. what was actually happening in reality."

"The police told me: 'Mister, this was some horrible woman, a 26 year old terrorist, who tried to stab you multiple times.' The police told me that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* Himself must have been giving me a hug."

As a student of the Rav, Nachman Lerner is extremely careful about trying to avoid forbidden sights. Rav Berland had recently told him that he could continue to enter and exit the old city via the Shaar Shechem gate without any fear, because 'angels were accompanying him, in the merit of his *shmirat eynayim*.'



At age 79, the Rav appeared to have more stamina, more strength, and more ability to stand on his feet non-stop for the very lengthy prayer service than many men less than half his age. Never complaining, always smiling at his community, often holding the hand of one of the teenage boys who thronged to be close to him, an outside observer wouldn't think for a moment that Rav Berland had any troubles or health problems.

But behind the scenes, the Rav was dealing with some enormously challenging circumstances on a number of fronts. Most of these difficulties continued to be hidden from the public, but on July 31,

2017, his health situation became so grave that he took the highly unusual step of publicizing his plight.

His community already knew that the Rav's health was in a precarious state, because he'd recently been forced to cancel his prayers with the community, which had never happened before.

Then, came the shocking report that two veins had burst in the Rav's leg as a result of a very serious infection, and that the doctors were advising the Rav to amputate it. The situation became so serious, the Rav himself recently wrote an unprecedented letter, asking the community, the nation, to help him in his hour need:

"To every Breslov chassid, to every chassid of Shuvu Banim, and to all of Am Yisrael," began the Rav's letter. "This is a fateful cry [for help], to all of Am Yisrael, before the amputation of [my] leg.

Today, the Rav was in Hadassah Ein Kerem, and the doctors observed that there was an extremely toxic infection. At the moment, there is a whole discussion about whether the Rav's leg should be amputated or not, so they need to bring in all the specialist doctors both from within Israel and from abroad.

They need to fly in doctors from Boston in order to try to heal the Rav's leg, shlita, without having to amputate it.

We are talking here about a huge expense... that's accumulating in order to pay for the security team over eight months. The security team was ordered by the State and by the Police.⁸¹"

⁸¹ Who also ordered that the Rav should be forced to bear the burden of paying for this astronomical expense out of his own pocket.

The letter concluded: “The Rav can’t pray and can’t do ‘melaveh malka’ with the community. He has to sit down, because of the terrible pain and suffering he feels throughout his whole leg.”

Barely a day after the Rav’s plea for help was publicized on Shuvu Banim’s English and Hebrew websites, both sites were maliciously hacked and went down within a few hours of each other – leaving the online fundraising campaign effectively dead in the water.

The hackers did such a professional job that it took Shuvu Banim almost three weeks to get their websites operational again, as they had to rebuild them from scratch. However, as frequently happened throughout the five years of persecution, the more his opponents tried to harm the Rav, the more it rebounded in their faces. After the malicious hacking, many people started to realize that Rav Berland *was* being persecuted in an extremely unusual manner and were moved to donate to help save his leg.

On August 7th, 2017, a number of American specialists flew out to Israel to try to save the Rav’s leg from amputation, and with God’s help, they were successful.

At the behest of the Rav’s persecutors, the Israeli court had decided that Rav Berland’s prison sentence would end two weeks’ after Rosh Hashana, on October 5th, 2017, which would prevent him from going to Uman.

So when the news first leaked out that on Monday, September 18, 2017 that the Israeli court had decided to give Rav Berland permission to travel to Uman for Rosh Hashana, 5778, the decision was very unexpected – not least by the Rav’s main persecutor, who quickly scrambled to try to overturn the court’s decision.

When the Rav got to Ben Gurion Airport on Tuesday September 19th, together with his wife and a large contingent of court-appointed security guards, he was told that he wouldn't be able to board the plane to Uman after all. The Breslov zealots had struck again. Newspaper accounts spoke of a 'former pupil' of Rav Berland, who had filed an appeal with the Central District Court to prevent the Rav from leaving the country.

But this time, the persecutors didn't get things all their own way. Rav Berland's legal team appealed, and by some miracle, the court decided the Rav could fly out to Uman after all – but only after posting a massive bail of almost a million shekels. Two of the Rav's followers were prepared to put up the money – and the Rav was on his way to Uman, for the first time in three years.

The Rav arrived on a flight to Uman with his wife, the Rabbanit Tehilla, his attendant, plus a large number of court-appointed security guards.

When news got out that the Rav was in Uman for Rosh Hashana after all, a strong feeling rippled through the crowd that Rosh Hashana 5778 marked some sort of turning point in the redemption of Am Yisrael. But no-one had any idea what was actually going to happen next.

UMAN, 5778

As the holiness of Rosh Hashana began to descend on the tens of thousands of Jews in Uman, rumors of the Rav's imminent appearance at the Kloiz (the main shul in Uman) electrified the town.

The fourth *Aliyah* to the Torah on Rosh Hashanah is traditionally known as Rebbe Nachman's *Aliyah*, as that is the one that would be reserved for him, during his lifetime. On Rosh Hashanah 5778, the fourth *Aliyah* had been reserved for Rav Elazar Mordechai Koenig, z"tl, leader of the Breslov community in Tzfat, but when the time came, he stepped aside and asked Rav Eliezer Berland to take the *Aliyah* in his place.

Crowds of people accompanied the Rav every place he went in Uman, and his attendants and court-appointed security guards had their hands full trying to protect the Rav, amidst all the pushing and shoving as hundreds of people tried to come close enough to see him, speak to him and try to hold his hand.

There was a distinct feeling in Uman and beyond that the winds of change were blowing through the world, and that something big was looming on the horizon. Meanwhile, over in America, the winds of change had started blowing in a much more literal sense.

Hurricane Harvey was a Category 4 storm that slammed into Texas on August 25th, 2017, causing \$125 billion worth of damage and causing ‘apocalyptic’ flooding in the Houston metropolitan area, displacing more than 30,000 people and killing 107.

The storm was hailed as a ‘once in a decade’ event, but the unsettled feeling that something unusual was occurring with the weather continued when barely two weeks later, the forecasters started urgently warning Florida, and particularly the city of Miami, to batten down the hatches as another massive storm, Hurricane Irma, started to approach the US.

As the hurricane drew closer and closer to Florida’s east coast on Friday, September 8th 2017, all the weather models were predicting a direct hit on the city of Miami – with devastating consequences.

Before Rav Berland went into exile, he’d set up a branch of the Shuvu Banim yeshiva in Miami which has now grown to encompass many hundreds of people and includes a kollel and synagogue. Students at the Miami yeshiva called the Rav up motzae Shabbat, September 9th, 2017, to ask the Rav to pray for them.

The Rav immediately asked his followers in Jerusalem to recite a Tikkun HaKlali specifically for Miami, and to especially have Miami in mind the verse in Chapter 32:6 which reads: “Just that the mighty, flooding waters shouldn’t reach to him.”

Next thing the forecasters knew, Hurricane Irma hung a sharp left, skipped past Miami and Florida’s East coast – and smashed straight into the state’s West coast instead, which hadn’t seen a hurricane of any real size since 1921. Irma completely destroyed twenty five percent of the houses in the area.

Meanwhile, back in Miami the winds were starting to pick up again and the authorities issued a warning for the residents to evacuate the area. Again, the worried students at the Shuvu Banim yeshiva in Miami called back the Rav for more *chizzuk* and advice.

The Rav told them that the winds – which were becoming increasingly wild and dangerous – wouldn't get stronger than 75 mph (120 km/h), and that the hurricane would pass over all the houses of Torah learning in Miami. Meanwhile, the official forecasts for Miami were estimating that the wind speed would reach a much higher velocity, and were also forecasting a tornado to hit the area, that would see winds of up to 185 mph.

In the end, the winds in Miami never topped 72 mph – exactly as the Rav had promised. While Florida still sustained enormous damage, especially on its West coast, Miami and the East coast missed the 'eye of the storm' and came through the ordeal in relatively good shape.

Throughout the two days of Rosh Hashana 5778, the Rav was in a very serious mood and, uncharacteristically, he didn't so much as smile at another human being throughout the whole holiday. There was speculation that perhaps the Rav was busy trying to sweeten the judgments he'd spoken about shortly before the new year began, when he'd said that North Korea would try to fire a nuclear weapon at the United States of America on Wednesday, the first day of Rosh Hashanah. By Shabbat morning, though, the Rav was in a completely different mood.

After the Shabbat morning prayers, Rav Berland spoke about the storms in Florida. The Rav explained that:

“All the storms and hurricanes are sent away from a place where Torah is being learned and from where

people travel from there to Uman.” The Rav then added: “Because the storm got to Miami on Shabbat, it broke windows and sent floodwater only into the upper stories, but by the Jews who were living on the lower levels, nothing happened to them, because it was Shabbat.

“We really, mamash, saw the hashgacha (Divine providence) that was happening. Houses were destroyed in Baton, whilst in Miami, nothing really happened.”

Rav Berland then stunned the audience by continuing:

“Now, we’ve arrived at the time of Gog and Magog, the time of geula, and the end of days. North Korea is going to launch a nuclear weapon, but it’s not going to reach to Miami, because there are synagogues there, and people who keep mitzvot. Perhaps it will fall into the sea. But North Korea has some very unique ideas. But despite all this, there’s no need to worry. Just sit in the succah, and don’t leave it. Anyone who sits in the succah will be protected and will survive.”

In the meantime, the confrontation between the United States and North Korea was coming to a head.

RAV LEVI SA’ADIA NACHMANI PREDICTS NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR PROBLEMS IN 1994

Rav Levi Sa’adia Nachmani was a well-known Israeli kabbalist.⁸² In 1994, while the State of Israel was neck-high in its failed ‘peace accord’ negotiations with Yasser Arafat and the PLO, Rav Nachmani was recorded as saying the following:

⁸² You can see a recording of Rav Nachmani speaking, with English subtitles at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOPtMsgUbRE>

“Do you think there will be peace? Do you think it will be peaceful one day? [You are] total fools! Parshat Ha’azinu is talking about us today. It says: ‘O, foolish and unwise people. A generation that’s crooked and perverse.’

“Do you know what will happen, God forbid? Korea. Do you know who Korea is? Not Syria, not Persia, not Babylon (Iraq) not Qadafi (Libya). Korea will arrive here, God forbid, may the Lord save us.

“And anyone who pays any attention to what’s going on in Korea today⁸³, it’s for us. The nukes. It will be very hard for us if we don’t do teshuvah. Understand this! Know that it’s worse than the holocaust! ‘For a fire is kindled in My nostrils, and will burn unto *sheoul*.’ Do you know what ‘sheoul’ is? It’s the capital of Korea.

“It will get to here, and ‘devour the earth with her produce and set ablaze the foundations of the mountain. I will heap evil upon them. I will spend My arrows upon them.’

“What does this mean? We have left Hashem, we think we belong to ourselves, and the PM⁸⁴ sits and does what he wants, as if Hashem doesn’t exist, if the land of Israel is his, and he does whatever he wants with it, as if the people are his.

“And the Torah says: ‘For the portion of God is his people.’ You don’t belong to yourselves, you’re His!... We have no dispute with the Arabs. We have a dispute with the God of Israel. If we won’t listen to Him, we will have more and more troubles, and the situation will get worse. Don’t believe these fools! You must beware of them, you must beware of the bad, foreign culture that they brought here.

⁸³ In December 1994, North Korea had just shot down a US Army helicopter, killing one pilot and taking the other captive for 13 days. Earlier in the year, the North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung had died, and been succeeded by his son, Kim Jong-Il, who was succeeded by his son, the present leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-Un in 2011. Kim Jong-Un has been notable for aggressively pursuing the development of nuclear weapons.

⁸⁴ Yitzhak Rabin was Israeli PM at this time.

“You are Jews, sons of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov, who received the Torah, your Torah. You must appreciate it and respect it and fight for it. Not with violence, but peacefully, by making teshuvah...

“If we make teshuvah, then we won’t need to go and fight in the army at 18 instead of getting married. Instead of letting you ‘rejoice in your home’ they take you off to fight. Instead of letting our girls find peace, they take them as soldiers...? I don’t understand this silence! Why don’t we make some teshuva?...

“Why do we keep quiet, and give the power to these fools who kill us? The yetzer hara is not you. It’s a separate force that enters through the ears. You are brainwashed by the media, brainwashed by the press, brainwashed everywhere...

“How long will we be fools. How long will we be naïve and indifferent? How long? We must do one thing, and nothing else. Not violence, and nothing else. Only teshuvah, that’s the answer for them...And then we’ll receive the very best thing, life and peace.”

More than two decades later, the world’s media was full of worrying headlines about Pyongyang’s growing nuclear capabilities and the threat their nuclear arms posed to the rest of the world.



In the meantime, daily life started to settle down into something of a routine. Every day, the Rav could be found *davening* with his community at the temporary shul that had been created as a makeshift addition at the back of the Rav’s building, when he was still under house arrest.

Every day, it was standing room only, and often barely that, as hundreds upon hundreds of people tried to cram themselves into the small hall to have the privilege of praying with the Rav. Even though the Rav continued to be under house arrest, a number of big rabbis and other names would come and publicly pray with

him on the Rav's small stage, or *bima*, while many, many more came to see him privately, away from the prying eyes of the media and the Rav's persecutors.

In October 2017, Rav Berland welcomed the Chassidic singer Mordechai Ben David on to his small stage, and also gave a blessing to the well-known kabbalist and head of the 'Kiryat Baal Shem Tov' institutions in Netivot, Rav Tzvi Hori. Other visitors around this time included Rav Reuven Elbaz, the Spinka Rebbe of Bnei Brak, and Rav Aharon Stern, the son of the famous kabbalist from Bnei Brak, Rav Chaim Dovid Stern, and head of the *Ziv Yehuda* Torah institution. At the request of his father, who was too poorly to travel at that time, he came to visit the Rav at the *Beit HaRav* at the beginning of October, very shortly before the Rav was formally released from house arrest. Rav Aharon made the following remarks to the community:

“Chazal teach that in the time to come (i.e the end of days) truth will be absent, it will be completely lacking and absent in all sorts of ways, and that every lie will be called ‘the truth’. I want to tell you something about my teacher, Rabbi Yehuda Zev Leibowitz⁸⁵, z”tl, who once decided to go to sleep when it was time for the Kol Nidrei prayer service on Yom Kippur, instead of going to pray in the synagogue.

Afterwards, he revealed to us that there had been a decree in Heaven on the Jews because so many of them were going to sleep on Kol Nidrei instead of going to synagogue. ‘So, I decided to also go to sleep,’ said Rav

⁸⁵ Rav Yehuda Zev Leibowitz, z”tl was a hidden Tzaddik who died just a few short years' ago and was rumored to be the head of the 'Lamed Vav' Tzaddikim in whose merit the world is sustained. He's buried in Bnei Brak.

Zev Leibowitz, 'so in shemayim they cancelled the decree.'[2]

We can see that the Tzaddik is doing something, but we don't really understand that whole picture of what's really going on with the Tzaddikim. We really have no idea about what their actions are doing. But, every act done by the Tzaddik is being done to sweeten the judgments on behalf of Am Yisrael."

Rav Stern continued:

"When I first came to Rav Leibowitz, z"tl, to care for him, I said to myself: 'What are all these weird actions and different types of behavior?!' Once, I was thinking to myself about why the Tzaddik was conducting himself in ways which meant that sometimes, it appeared as though he was doing things that were contrary to the halacha, but without saying anything about it.

Then, Rav Leibowitz raised his eyes from his Gemara and said to me: 'Aharon, did you know Rebbe Aharon of Belz?' I told him that no I didn't, because he died before I was even born. Rav Leibowitz continued: 'Do you know, that he used to show up five minutes before mincha (the afternoon prayers) and only then start praying shacharit (the morning prayers)? How can this be? But did anyone speak out against him? The Lelover Rebbe used to show up on motzae Shabbat, and begin shacharit then – did anyone speak out against him? Rav Shach didn't give in to anyone whose halacha he didn't agree with. So why didn't he come out against the Admor of Lelov?!'"

“Rav Berland is a Tzaddik who comes from the aspect of ‘law’, and no-one can touch him. Our Rabbi is holy and awesome, and all of his behavior – even if it seems to us to be strange, in truth, it’s all for our own sake. Because he’s taking our illnesses upon himself and he’s suffering for our sake.”

Rav Aharon continued:

“My saintly father arranged this evening, with the agreement of Moranu Rav Berland, shlita. He visited Rav Berland around two months’ ago, and Rav Berland asked him: ‘Esteemed Rav, I know that you’re taking pills for an urinary tract infection, but please stop now, as I’m taking that upon myself.’ And my father stopped [taking the pills]! Who told the Rav about my father’s illness? How did he know?!”

Rav Stern then struck a very somber note, saying: “We are currently in a period of time similar to that which occurred before the holocaust, but we have nothing to fear, inasmuch as we are sheltered under the *tallis* of Moranu, Rav Berland, shlita.”

Rav Stern continued:

“It gives me great sorrow that my father is so ill that he can’t come to this gathering himself, and that the Samech Mem (dark side forces) are preventing the Tzaddikim from meeting. But when I came here, I met Moranu Rav Berland, shlita, and he said to me: ‘Rav Stern, don’t worry! Everything is on my shoulders. From the 25th of Elul, motzae Shabbos (September 16, 2017), you’re going to see the beginning of the salvation

of Am Yisrael!’ I ask you, where else can you find a rebbe like this?”

Rav Aharon Stern concluded his remarks by saying:

“I’d like to request just one on thing, that we should have achdus and love between us, which will bring us the geula. Before his death, Rav Leibowitz ordered me to make the following announcement about America, so I repeat this every opportunity I get.

“He told me that the anti-Semitism in the United States is only going to continue to grow, until it gets to the point where the Jews will be forced to flee. We can also see how the forces of nature are going crazy there, and this is because we see how the people there are overturning everything, and no longer know who is their Abba and who is their Ima...The same is true in Tel Aviv, which is why Rav Leibowitz told me: ‘Tel Aviv will be destroyed.’

Moranu Rav Berland, shlita, is fighting against the head of the snake, in direct combat. Rav Berland is gouging out its eyes, and he’s taking upon himself all our troubles. I heard from my teacher and father, shlita, who told me: ‘I’m scared... I don’t know how Rav Berland is doing this! There is no other rabbi in Israel, there is no other rosh yeshiva in Israel, there is no other rebbe or admor in Israel who knows how Rav Berland is able to fight this war, and to fight against the head of the snake itself.”

Around the same time that Rav Stern came to visit the *Beit HaRav*, Rav Rachamim Bracha, the editor of *Shuvu Banim’s Knishta*

Chada newsletter happened to meet a young man there, who asked him when the Rav was expected to come out to join the community for the prayers that evening.

Rav Bracha continues:

“We carried on talking a while, and this young avreich told me that he came from Bnei Brak, and that this was his first time travelling to pray with Rav Berland in Jerusalem,” he recounts.

“So, I asked him what had brought him to the Rav, and he told me that he’d come because of a dream he’d had. ‘A dream?’ I asked him, a little surprised. ‘Yes, a dream!’ he told me, completely serious.



‘I had a dream about Rav Berland, and in the dream I saw that the Tzaddik was bigger than the whole of Eretz Israel, and that he was standing and looking over the whole of the country. I was still trying to figure out the

meaning of what I was seeing, when suddenly a total war exploded in my dream,' continued the avreich.

'Immediately, the Tzaddik spread his tallis over the whole of Eretz Israel, while continuing to hold onto it, but the whole of Eretz Yisrael was covered by it.'"

Rav Bracha continues:

"I was amazed, after all, I knew that the Rav has spoken on many occasions about his efforts to sweeten the decree of the rockets and missiles and, here, this avreich was telling me in all innocence about his dream, and he'd never even heard the words of the Rav.

So, I had to ask him, what happened at the end of the dream? He told me: 'All the missiles were caught by the tallit that the Tzaddik had spread out'⁸⁶. I went to my Rosh Kollel, and told him about my dream, and he told me: 'The tzaddik Rav Berland is protecting the whole of Eretz Israel.' So, I came to see for myself who this tzaddik really is,' concluded the avreich."



On October 8, 2017, on Rebbe Nachman of Breslov's yahtzeit, Rav Berland ordeal at the hands of Israel's 'justice' system was finally over. The Rav was formally released on the intermediate days of

⁸⁶ Painting by Yehoshua Wiseman: www.yehoshuawiseman.com, Tel: 054-844-1131.

Succot, and thousands of his followers flocked to Jerusalem, to celebrate his freedom in the biggest public Succah ever erected.⁸⁷

Given the Rav's poor health at this stage, his advanced age, the many years he'd spent wandering around the world and the tremendous stress and suffering he'd recently undergone at the hands of the Israeli Prison Service, you might think that after being formally released from his ordeal, the Rav would want to just put his feet up a little, and relax.

But 'relaxing' was the last thing Rav Berland had on his mind. Within a few short days of being formally released from house arrest, he'd already made plans to visit a number of the country's holiest sites to continue praying for the safety and welfare of the Nation of Israel. Despite all the suffering and persecution, Rav Berland was sending a very clear message that he was back, and that from now on, it would be business as usual, his age, ill-health and ongoing opposition notwithstanding.

The first grave the Rav went to was Kever Yosef in Shechem (Nablus), on the night of Hoshana Rabba, October 11, 2017. He was joined by a very large number of his followers, making it one of the biggest private visits to the tomb in modern times.

A few days' later, Rav Berland and a few hundred of his followers next visited the grave of Yehoshua bin Nun, located in the radicalized Arab town of Kifl Haris. And then, on October 31st, Rav Berland visited Kever Rochel, on the outskirts of Jerusalem - which coincided with the worst terrorist attack in New York since the Twin Towers, when an Islamic terrorist used his truck to mow down eight people in cold blood.

⁸⁷ You can see clips of the celebrations at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=NrOtJlvb2Aw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=28&v=3tKHYef0S5I

HOUSE VISITS FROM THE RAV

While few people were that surprised that Rav Berland would immediately return to visiting the holy kevarim upon his release, they were a little shocked by another of the projects that the Rav embarked on immediately after being freed: criss-crossing the country to renew his visits and appearances in homes and venues across Israel.

40 years ago, Rav Shalom Arush used to give Rav Berland a lift to Eilat on the back of his motorbike, where the Rav was headed in order to try to bring some of the Jews there back to Hashem and an observant lifestyle. Many tens of thousands of Jews returned to the path of their forefathers in the merit of Rav Berland's cross-country trips.

But that was back when the Rav was a much younger man. No-one expected an octogenarian who'd been through such severe health issues and other recent challenges to renew this type of outreach work. Not for the first time, the Rav surprised everyone – but why was he doing it?

Rav Yosef Assulin spent many years as the Rav's personal attendant. He recalls: *“Already back in 1989, the Rav said that the Iranians were investing billions in weapons that were going to be aimed at Eretz Yisrael, and that every square metre of Israel would have a rocket aimed at it.”* While the immediate threat from an Iranian nuke had started to noticeably recede, the Israeli security establishment was starting to publically voice concern over the growing Iranian presence in war-torn Syria.

So, Rav Berland took it upon himself to being an 'exile within an exile', and embarked on a grueling schedule of visits, to try to encourage more people in Israel to make teshuvah – this time at

the age of 79. Initially, the visits started small, and were kept low-key. But as word started to spread that the Tzaddik was coming to town, more and more people started clamoring for a chance to see Rav Berland for themselves.

As more and more communities started requesting the Rav to come and speak to them, and as the crowds of people attending these events quickly mushroomed from tens to hundreds and even a couple of thousand people, Rav Berland's persecutors couldn't believe what was happening.

After all the time, effort and money they'd put into blackening the Rav's name, hounding him all over the world and imprisoning him on trumped-up charges, the last thing they expected to see was the elderly Rav pulling in massive crowds all over the country as soon as he was released. The Rav's persecutors weren't prepared to let such a development occur without trying to put another spoke in the wheel, so a new campaign of intimidation and threats was begun against the Rav, this time spear-headed by another group of Facebook activists.

The group's tactics were very simple, any events hall who agreed to host the Rav would be bombarded with threats and intimidation until they would be forced to cancel the event. And if the events hall themselves continued to stand strong against these strong-arm tactics, then the local politicians would be called in to cancel the event 'from the top'.

At the same time, a very small group of protesters would come and demonstrate outside the Rav's events with loudspeakers and signs, and to make every effort to try to provoke the Rav's followers into some sort of confrontation with them would make some sensation headlines. To their credit, none of the Rav's followers and

students got drawn into a fight with the anti-Rav Berland activists, even when the protestors taunted and goaded them.

The Rav's persecutors started their latest round of bullying tactics at one of his first events in Bat Yam, where a very small group of protesters managed to generate some enormous headlines in the secular Israeli press. Buoyed by their success, they turned their sites on a big event that the Rav's followers had organized at the Mann Auditorium in Beer Sheva, to take place following the Fast of Esther (December 28, 2017).

After posting up a number of inflammatory and abusive Facebook posts, this group then organized a harassment campaign over the telephone, where they put enormous pressure on the hall's management to cancel the event. The Rav's followers managed to find another events hall in Beer Sheva last minute – but then the persecutors also intimidated that hall into pulling out of their agreement as well.

Finally, the event took place in the industrial area of Beer Sheva, in two enormous marquees that had been hastily erected on the premises of a tiling warehouse. Despite all the obstacles and last-minute changes of venue, hundreds of people still came to the event, while 10 'enlightened' protesters with bull-horns stood across the way yelling insults and abuse at them.

Other cities who saw their events cancelled thanks to the Rav's persecutors included Ma'alot Tarshiha in the North and Dimona in the South, with many other events either being moved 'in-house' to private residents and synagogues, or occurring only thanks to the incredible *emunah* and *yirat shemayim* of the hall owners who continued to host them.

In January 2018, Rav Berland was scheduled to speak at a synagogue in Rehovot. As soon as his opponents got word of the event, they quickly mobilized to get the Mayor of Rehovot involved in pressuring the synagogue to cancel the event. The synagogue bowed to the pressure tactics, and the event was moved to a hall in the industrial area of Rehovot instead.

But the demonstrators didn't stop there and continued to apply pressure tactics to try to force the hall owner to cancel the event there, too, including making all sorts of threats about getting his business closed down.

After all these threats had been made against him, the owner of the hall in Rehovot said that he'd been contacted by a number of journalists who were trying to get his reaction to the situation. The hall owner told the Breslov Information Line that he'd told the persecutors point blank that:

“I’m going to close the hall, and open up a kollel there, where the Torah of Rav Berland, shlita, will be studied instead. How is it possible for someone to be scared of people, but not to fear HaKadosh Baruch Hu?!” The owner of the hall continued: “I will open six kollels in Rehovot, and one of them will be for Rav Rerland, and I’m not going to bow to the pressure I’m coming under from his opponents.”

Despite the demonstrators' aggressive efforts to disrupt the Rav's shiurim, the Rav continued undeterred, holding back-to-back events up and down the country in Tel Aviv, Nahariya, Holon, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Eilat, amongst many other places.

“Rav Berland is a Jew who simply can't live without being disgraced,” explains Rav Yosef Assulin. “The Rav explained to me

once that if a person works hard to serve Hashem properly. Slowly, slowly, everyone in his environment is going to start challenging him, until ultimately, everyone is challenging him. When you get to the biggest of the big, like Moranu Rav Berland, shlita, it just has to be that the whole country is going to be against him.”



Throughout the next few months, stories of the Torah luminaries who were meeting with Rav Berland were interspersed with yet more lurid headlines, as the Rav’s persecutors continued their vendetta against him via the media.

On February 4th, 2018, media outlets started published more scandalous headlines announcing that a ‘shocking video’ of Rav Berland touching a woman’s throat had surfaced. Again, none of the journalists involved in peddling this latest scandal actually spoke to Klara Hammer, the woman in question, to get the real story of what was happening. After the video surfaced, Klara Hammer agreed to be interviewed by the Shuvu Banim website, where she explained that she’d been suffering with life-threatening throat cancer – and the tumor had shrunk after she’d seen the Rav.

“I’ve known Rav Eliezer Berland, shlita, since I was a little girl,” she began. “The Rav loves everyone. Anyone who knows the Rav, they see miracles. I’m the mother of 11 children, and I discovered that I was very sick with cancer around Rosh Hashana time, three years ago [in 2014].

Shortly before Rosh Hashana, the Rav had spoken to me on the telephone, and he’d told me that I was very ill - that I only had a month left to live, and that I needed

to come and see him, so he could help me. At that time, I had no idea what the Rav was talking about, because I still hadn't discovered that I was sick.

Two weeks after that, I went to Hadassah hospital, because I was really starting to feel unwell. There, they confirmed my worst fears, and they told me that I had a very serious illness, and that my chances of making it through were very small. The next day, I was already in the operating room. By this point I'd already lost 15 kilos in weight, and I decided that I just had to go and see the Rav.

I knew what this illness was, I'd already experienced it elsewhere in my family, both with my relatives and with my friends. The agreement I made with the hospital was that if I decided to go through with the operation, then afterwards I'd need to have a series of 40 radiation treatments.

The Rav contacted me and told me to come to him in Amsterdam. I came for two days, with my husband. When you see the Rav, it's truly like seeing an angel of Hashem. From the moment I saw him, I started to feel a bit more emuna and hope.

"The Rav gave me a soup to eat. Up until that point, I hadn't been able to swallow any food, but suddenly I found myself asking for another bowl. I told the Rav that I just had to have the operation. The Rav told me not to worry, and that he would send me the best experts."

Klara continued: "You could say that my recovery actually started there, in Holland, when I saw the Rav. Every day that I was in Holland, the Rav blessed me. I used to cry, and ask the Rav to pray for me - because who else can pray like the Tzaddik? By the time I got to the Rav, my tumor had already grown tremendously. When I returned home, it was already smaller. I also had two metastased tumors growing in the direction of my lungs, that had already bypassed the cartilage." But today, three years' later, Klara's cancer is a thing of the past.

On March 6th, 2018, there were headlines of a different kind when the grandson of the late Baba Sali, Rav David Abuchatzaira, met with Rav Berland for the first time at Rav Abuchatzaira's home in Nahariya.

Despite the very warm feelings these two tzaddikim had for each other, they had never actually met each other face-to-face before. Throughout the visit, Rav Abuchatzaira showed Rav Berland the greatest respect, including stopping his audiences with the general public at his home for 15 minutes, during which time he only spoke with the Rav.

After these two tzaddikim left the room where they'd been conversing and studying the deepest secrets of the Torah privately together, Rav Abuchatzaira then asked Rav Berland to step into the adjoining beit midrash, to learn something in the merit of Rav Abuchatzaira's holy forefathers, including the Baba Sali, z'tland the Baba Meir, z"tl.

Then, Rav David asked Rav Berland's *gabbay* to enter the room, while he continued to praise Rav Berland very highly. Rav

Abuchatzeira said: “He is entirely Torah! We have merited to have a completely pure person come to visit with us.”



At the beginning of the book, we explained how three of the nation’s biggest tzaddikim, the Baba Elazar, z’tl, Rav Dov Kook of Tiveria and Rav Berland agreed to forge a spiritual ‘pact’ that would see each of these holy man experience tremendous suffering and mesirus nefesh, in order to sweeten the harsh decrees that were gathering over the heads of the nation of Israel.

The Baba Elazar was brutally murdered shortly afterwards, and the rumors and exile of Rav Berland began a few months later. Throughout the more than four years of exile, Rav Dov Kook gave periodic messages of hope and chizzuk to the Rav and his followers, each one a beacon in a very dark night.

But it would only be on Motzae Shabbat, 8th Nisan 5778, (March 24th, 2018), many months after Rav Berland was finally released, that these two Torah luminaries would actually meet again face-to-face. The two tzaddikim met to share the melavah malka meal together, and then went outside together to recite the blessing over the new moon.

Just before reciting the blessing, Rav Berland started talking to the small group of people gathered around:

“Now that Rav Kook came, we’re going to bring the geulah by seder night. Rav Kook is going to bring the light of redemption, the light of Moshiach, and the light of the exodus from Egypt. Like the days when we left Egypt, Hashem is going to show us wonders. We’re

going to see wonders that have never been seen since the creation of the world, B'ezrat Hashem.

Rav Berland concluded:

“Now is the moment of the geulah, we should do kid-dush levanah.” Later, during the melavah malkah meal, Rav Berland again leaned over to Rav Kook, and said: “He’s bringing Moshiach, he’s opening the way for Moshiach now.”

After the meal ended, Rav Dov Kook said the following:

“I merited to understand a little bit of what he said, it’s the deepest of the deep. I’m amazed how the people who follow him and listen to him, how they understand what he’s saying. I understood only a little bit. He’s a genius, he’s a gaon, he’s a computer [of Torah], he’s an angel. He went through terrible, terrible suffering. Alavi (if only), I should understand everything he says.”

It sounded as though *geula* was imminent. But over the next few months, at least from the outside, the process of redemption looked like it had gotten stuck.

TUNNELS AND TRICKSTERS

The close relationship between Rav Eliezer Berland and Rav Chaim Kanievsky began many decades ago, when they were neighbors in Bnei Brak. Recently, a meeting was arranged between these two *Gedolei HaDor*, but when Rav Berland found about it, he promptly cancelled it. “If I meet with Rav Chaim it will be publicized around the world, and I’ll lose at least half the *machloket* against me, and then I won’t be able to work the miracles people need,” he explained.

Over the next few months, the Rav continued to criss-cross the country appearing at synagogues and private homes across the country, while his persecutors continued cranking up fresh allegations against him, most notably now in the in the English-language media.

The pattern was predictably the same each time: the Breslov zealot who was the main figure behind the persecution of Rav Berland would give another ‘exclusive’ interview, and the journalists would unquestioningly lap up every lie they were told.

In the meantime, on April 29th, 2018, the Rabbanit Tehillah Berland was awarded three million shekels in damages – the maximum sum permissible – against one of the persecutors. This astronomical sum was awarded to underline the terrible pain and humiliation this man had caused the Rabbanit, by secretly

recording conversations he'd had with the Rabbanit while he was posing as a 'mediator'.



And so, 5778 gave way to 5779, and the Rav returned to Uman, where he spoke of the great need for the Jewish community to have achdut and unity. Upon his return, the Rav continued his grueling routine of making house visits and attending speaking engagements the length and breadth of the country – sometimes, speaking in 5 or 6 different locations a night, before returning to Jerusalem to pray the morning prayers with his community.

Then, shortly before Chanukah 5779 (2018), the Rav started to give over a number of disturbing messages about the security situation in Israel, and urged his attendants to organize another big prayer gathering in Hevron, for the last day of Chanukah.

In a statement that he put out a few days beforehand, Rav Berland said:

“The whole of Am Yisrael is currently facing a terrible, threatening situation. Every part of Israel is now under threat of being deluged with rockets. After we saw 400 rockets falling on Ashkelon and the surrounding cities, including Beer Sheva, Netivot, Ofakim and Sderot, now they are preparing thousands and thousands of rockets, which will reach to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

And we have no possibility of stopping this from happening, because the whole world is against us. They can launch 10,000 missiles, and if we fire back even just one, they will say that we are the aggressors, and they are the victims.

They will say that we began [hostilities], and that they are simply defending themselves. We have no [military] might, we only have the power of tehillim. All of the State of Israel's efforts to stop the missiles of Hezbollah and Hamas ended in failure. Every day, we are threatened with thousands of new rockets. They can reach any target precisely...

Am Israel is in the greatest danger, mamash, and our only possibility of coming through this lies in our mouths: "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Esav."

We are now, mamash, at the final moments that we can stay in Eretz Yisrael, in the State of Israel, because the goal of the Arabs is to destroy everyone here. They don't care if its dati'im, chilonim, chareidim, Neturei Karta – they aren't interested.

They want to annihilate every single Jew, until the very last one of us – regardless of whether he's secular, or religious, or Mizrachi, or kipat srugah. It's written: "And I will divide them, into the light and into the dark."

They are not going to distinguish between the 'light' and the 'darkness'. Right now, we are all in the gravest danger, mamash. So, we need to really urge people to attend this Prayer Gathering, so that almost 50,000 thousand people will come. And everyone should read the whole of the Book of Tehillim.... and so, every single person is obliged to complete the book of Tehillim at the Prayer Gathering, and to make good use of this opportunity for 50,000 people to say tehillim together.

This will (be considered in heaven) as though a billion people are saying tehillim, and this will certainly stop the rockets. Only prayers can stop the rockets – not the IDF, not weapons, not tanks, not Patriot missiles, no Iron Dome – none of these things can stop the missiles. Only the tehillim that we will say at this Prayer Gathering can stop the missiles.”

Although many thousands of the Rav’s followers from across Israel made the effort to attend, the number fell far short of the 50,000 people the Rav had requested⁸⁸. And it wasn’t long before the Jews in Israel realized why the Rav had been so concerned.

The prayer gathering in Hevron was called for motzai Shabbos, Saturday night on December 8, 2018 – ‘zot Chanukah’. It continued well on into the small hours of the morning, until around 4.00 am, when the crowds started to disperse and the Rav returned to Jerusalem for the morning prayers.



At the same time that the Rav and his followers were lighting the Chanukah candles and beginning their recitation of the book of tehillim in Hevron, at a bus stop just outside the town of Ofra, North of Jerusalem, Hamas terrorist Salih Omar Barghouti was loading his weapons, and taking aim.

His target was a group of young Jews, including Shira Ish-Ran, a heavily-pregnant first-time mother, and her husband Amichai.

⁸⁸ Rav Berland privately commented at the end of the prayer gathering that while it had been big enough to defer the decree until Nissan, another prayer gathering would be needed on 1st of Nissan. Since Zot Chanuka 5779, the security situation on Israel’s Southern and Northern borders has continued to deteriorate.

Despite firing 15-20 bullets at a large group of Jews crowded together at the bus stop at close range, Barghouti injured only seven people, and most of them were lightly wounded.

Shira's husband Amichai had been shot three times in the legs – but one of the terrorist's bullets had entered Shira's lower abdomen, and her life, and the life of her unborn baby, were in serious danger as she was rushed to hospital.

Speaking to reporters afterwards, Shira's mother Liora Silberstein said: "The bullet went through her body. It's a complete miracle that it missed all her major organs." In another interview, she said: "We want to thank Hashem for all the miracles that took place. So many bullets were fired at a large group of people, crowded together."

Sadly, Shira and Amichai's newborn son, Amiad, died three days after he was born.

On December 12, Salih Barghouti was shot dead by the IDF while conducting a gun battle with the soldiers who'd been sent to arrest him. But the terror wasn't over yet. The next day, December 13, 2018, Barghouti's brother Asem carried out another terror shooting at the bus stop on Route 60 near the West Bank town of Bet El, where he murdered two soldiers in cold blood, and badly injured another soldier and a civilian young woman.

And this time, the murderer's bullet fell even closer to home, for the Shuvu Banim community.



That Thursday, December 13th, 2018, Yosef (Yossi) Cohen, 19, Yuval Mor Yosef, 20, and Nathaniel Felber, 20 were guarding the

Givat Assaf hitch-hiking point on Route 60 when the terrorist drove up and started firing at them. Yosef and Yuval died on the spot, while Nathaniel survived being shot in the head at close range but was critically injured.

Yossi and Yuval were serving in the 'Netzach Yehuda' brigade of the IDF, part of the Nahal Haredi Division that enables chareidi young men to serve in the army.

Very quickly after the terror attack, word spread that one of the victims was the step-son of Rav Eliyahu Meirav, a leading figure within the Shuvu Banim community and one of Rav Berland's oldest students.



Shortly after the murder, Rav Meirav was interviewed by the Israeli media, and he gave over an anguished plea for unity to finally take the place of division, and for Am Yisrael to come together in times of peace, instead of only in times of war.

“Yossi was a pure neshama. He was on shlichut (a spiritual mission). We sent him [on that mission] with very

great love. At every Shabbat meal, we sit together as a family, and everyone says 'thank you' for something that they're grateful for. Last Shabbat, Yossi said the following: 'I'm grateful to HaKadosh Baruch Hu that I have the zchut to use my body to protect the people of Israel.'

That's who this neshama was. He didn't really know what he was saying, but these were the last words that he said in our home. Now, all of us understand what he was really saying."

A clearly distraught Rav Meirav continued:

"Yossi was a pure soul. He was a child full of mesirut nefesh, a child who only wanted to help other people – right from the time he was small. And now, Hashem has taken him. We need so much strengthening..."

We were very proud of Yossi, and he was proud of us, too. We sent him [to the army] with love, from a very deep sense that he had a mission to do. We believe that Am Yisrael is one unit, indivisible. We believe that everyone is joined together. Everyone, in whatever place they find themselves, needs to help others, and to give to others."

"This is how I was raised," continued Rav Meirav. "I grew up on Kibbutz Beit Alfa, of the Shomer HaTzair, and these were the eternal values [we were taught] about loving another human being, loving humanity. No politics can sway these values, this feeling of eternal unity.

It's so unfortunate that bereavement is what bring us together. Perhaps, we'll actually start to win when we are joined together by love. Alavai. Why can't we come together on happy occasions?! It hurts me so much. It's hard to speak."

A journalist asked Rav Meirav about his own career with the army, and he responded:

"I served in the IDF, then made teshuva after the Yom Kippur War. I've been chareidi for 45 years already. But first and foremost, I am an Israeli. I am a product of the breakdown of secular Israeli society. It pains me tremendously that there are families who don't accept their children after they enlist [in the IDF]. I understand that everybody has to follow their own beliefs, and to walk in their own path. But we have to maintain our respect for the other person. We have to maintain the mutual respect between us!"

We have to put an end to the awful hatred between us. It's impossible to build a home, to build a state, in this way. Yossi was a young, Israeli, Chareidi man. He had a heart of gold, and he was the splendor of Am Yisrael, mamash. He wanted to finish the army, and then continue to give to Am Yisrael, by becoming a dentist. And now, he's above. He's watching over us."

Just that Thursday morning, another avreich in the Shuvu Banim community called David HaLevi had narrowly missed being injured in a terrorist attack in the Old City, when the assailant had tried to stab him, but somehow just managed to push him roughly to the ground, instead. A couple of seconds later, the terrorist ran over to two Israeli Border police standing close by, and stabbed

the policeman in the face, and the woman police officer in her leg, before he was shot dead.

Afterwards, HaLevi explained what had happened:

“In the early hours of the morning, I’d been in the yeshiva. I’d learnt some Torah, immersed in the mikvah, and when I came out of the mikvah, another student came over to me, and asked me for some tzedakah.

I have never, ever had such a difficult time persuading myself to take out a few coins to give for charity. But in the end, I got a hold of myself, and I gave him the last 10 shekels that I had in my wallet. It was only afterwards that I remembered the dictum of Chazal that” “Charity saves from death.” I really felt that i’d had such a hard struggle with myself to give that tzedakah, but that in the end, it had saved my life.”

Thursday evening after the deadly murder at Givat Assaf, another Palestinian was shot dead after trying to ram his car into a group of soldiers near Bet El. And then that Friday, another Palestinian terrorist broke into a military outpost near Bet El, where he managed to seriously injure an Israel soldier by clubbing him in the head with a large rock, and also stabbing him, before he was shot and wounded.

After months of relative calm, it suddenly felt as though the West Bank had been plunged into another cycle of awful, murderous violence – just as the Rav had foreseen. But there was still more revelations to come.

The Rav’s first call to gather people together for a prayer rally at Hevron was publicized on the Shuvu Banim English website on

December 2, 2018. That story explained that: “The stated aim of this gathering is to sweeten the wars that the Rav can see looming both in Israel’s south, but also in Israel’s north – which has been relatively quiet since the Lebanon II war, which occurred well over a decade ago.”

Two weeks’ earlier, Southern Israel had come under a barrage of over 400 rockets from Gaza, which had residents in the South scurrying into their security rooms and fearing that a full-blown war had begun. Twenty four hours later, a fragile peace had been renewed – which struck many observers as unusual, in and of itself, given the ongoing boiling tensions on the Gaza border.

So, no-one was surprised that the Rav had called for a prayer gathering to avoid war and rockets from the South. But Israel’s Northern border had been relatively quiet for years, so that part of the Rav’s statement raised a few eyebrows. But not for long.

Just two days’ later, on December 4, 2018, the IDF announced the start of Operation Northern Shield and revealed to the stunned Israeli public that Hezbollah had built a number of huge terror tunnels underground, crossing the Lebanese border into Israel, which the IDF was about to start locating and dismantling.

Two weeks and four tunnels later, Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu gave an English-language press conference at the Knesset where he said that the purpose of Hezbollah’s tunnels were to: “penetrate our territory, kidnap our people, including civilians, murder civilians, and conquer the northern piece of the Galilee. This is not merely an act of aggression. It’s an act of war. It’s part of a war plan.”

When Operation Northern Shield formally concluded in the middle of January 2019, six tunnels had been found. Netanyahu gave

another press conference where he said: “I think everyone understands that a very serious threat was averted here. Hezbollah’s operational plan was to use the tunnels weapon to infiltrate many fighters, between 1,000-2,000 terrorists, into the Galilee, to seize communities here. Everyone understands how the war would look if Hezbollah battalions were in the Galilee, and with the Iranian army opposite the Golan Heights.”

It’s amazing to remember that no-one was even really talking about the Lebanese border when the Rav first asked for the prayer gathering to be organized in Hevron. But that’s not all that was happening.

On December 19th, 2018, US President Donald Trump surprised the world – and by all accounts, most of his own administration, too – when he put out a message over social media that: “We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency.”

A few days’ later, in response to a question about how the American withdrawal from Syria would impact Israel, Trump reportedly said: “we give Israel \$4.5 billion a year. And they are doing very well at defending themselves.” At the end of March 2019, the Trump administration announced that they were recognizing Israel sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which was hailed as a major ‘breakthrough’ by many in Israel.

But others were not so optimistic about what the future might hold, when it came to preventing terror from Syria spilling over the border and drawing Israel into a serious confrontation with the Iranian forces stationed in the country. The Israeli airforce had been flying a number of missions over Syria for years, trying to disrupt, destroy and otherwise hamper the free supply of Iranian weapons and soldiers into the country, and Iran’s influence in

Lebanon, Syria and Gaza continued to keep Israeli officials up at night.

On January 13, 2019, PM Netanyahu made a highly unusual public admission that Israel had been behind hundreds of ‘ambiguous’ bombings of Iranian weapons’ depots in Syria, and other Syrian targets, over the last few years. This was the latest in a series of boastful statements the Israeli government was making about how strong, and efficient, and successful the Israeli army really was, in keeping all the enemies on its borders in check. But not everyone agreed with that assessment.

One vocal critic was Major-General (res.) Yitzhac Brick, the outgoing IDF Ombudsman, who had been making public statements for months that the IDF was nowhere near as strong, or as prepared for war, as the public was being told.

Brick’s concerns were repeatedly mocked and ignored by army and government officials alike, with an IDF panel headed by IDF comptroller Brigadier General (res.) Ilan Harari, and a Knesset committee both releasing reports which stated that the Israeli army was in the best shape it had been for years.

Harari’s report stated that: “the IDF’s ground forces are unequivocally prepared for war.” While the Knesset report said the level of war preparedness had “significantly improved since Operation Protective Edge,” with “a dramatic increase in readiness by almost every indicator — whether in the number of training drills, whether in munitions stocks, spare parts inventory and more.”

But Brick wasn’t convinced. In October 2018, he drew a lot of flack by publically claiming that the situation with the IDF was “worse than it was at the time of the Yom Kippur War”, when Israel was caught badly off guard by a surprise attack by its Arab

neighbors, which almost lead to an unmitigated disaster for the Jewish people.

As he was publically smeared as an ‘alarmist’ and fear-monger, Brick refused to back down from his warnings, and even continued to turn up the heat.

In a statement he put out on December 26, 2018, he had the following to say:

“Israeli citizens will pay a heavy price for the serious cover-up by the system and no one will be able to say I didn’t warn them. This is the first time in my ten years as ombudsman that I’ve met members of the IDF General Staff who are unable to accept criticism. I advise the senior command to stop playing games of ego and immediately get into the thick of things to correct the failures before it is too late.”

But as usual, this warning was also rebuffed.

Immediately after Chanuka’s prayer gathering in Hevron, Rav Berland told his attendants to begin preparing for the next prayer gathering, to be held on April 8th, 2019 – shortly after Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

The week after Chanuka, Israel’s governing coalition finally toppled over on December 24, 2018, when party heads announced new elections would be held on April 9th, 2019 – the day after the Rav had called for the next prayer gathering.

With a raft of allegations swirling around the PM, open hostilities on almost every border, the ongoing problem of a nuclear Iran and ongoing terror attacks within Israel’s border, within a few short

weeks of the prayer gathering it had become crystal clear that the Rav had been right, when he warned about the terrible dangers facing the Israeli people.

No-one knew if enough had been done to sweeten the judgments hanging over the Jewish people, or if more suffering was in store. What was clear, is that the fate of Am Yisrael was once again hanging in the balance – and that was being reflected in the Rav, himself.

After his majory surgery and leg problems, Rav Berland's health continued to be precarious throughout 2018. On December 30, 2018, during the celebrations for his 81st birthday, he took the unusual step of writing a very short, but very disturbing note, asking his congregants to pray for his continued good health. The handwritten note said the following: "Please pray for the Rav, that he shouldn't be taken before Pesach. Rather, his days should be lengthened until 210 years. Signed, Eliezer Berland."

The scene was eerily reminiscent of what had occurred four years' earlier, in Holland, just prior to when the Rav had suffered the cardiac arrest that had nearly claimed his life. Then, too, he'd asked the community to fast and pray for him. Then, too, the Rav's health had taken a very serious and sudden turn for the worse. At that time, too, other tzaddikim had suddenly passed away, and it's known that when these holy souls are taken, judgments are sweetened.

Was the same thing about to happen again?

On December 31st, 2018, the Breslov community was rocked by the news that the leader of the Breslov community in Tsfat, Rav Elazar Mordechai Koenig, z"tl, had passed away at the age of 73.

Rav Koenig was the son of the illustrious Rabbi Gedaliah Aaron Koenig, z”tl, who moved heaven and earth to build a strong foundation for the chareidi community in the resting place of the Arizal. After his father’s passing, Rav Elazar had picked up the mantle of leadership, and had guided the Tsfat Breslov community for almost 40 years, before he passed away following a long and difficult illness.

In his eulogy for Rav Koenig, Rav Berland crisply summed up the huge blow that had just befallen Am Yisrael: “Rav Koenig was the greatest in the generation. He was *boki* (well learned) in both the revealed and the hidden Torah. He was the Rebbe, *mamash*. The fact that there are chareidi Jews in Tsfat is all in his merit. He was the last of the tzaddikim.”

A day after Rav Koenig’s passing, the Shuvu Banim community were galvanized into action by reports that Rav Berland had been taken ill during one of his regular Torah classes in Tel Aviv. Very unusually for the Rav, he’d asked his attendants to take him back to his home as soon as the class was over, and to cancel his other shiurim and house visits that were planned for the rest of the night.

The Rav gave over a brief recorded message, where you could clearly hear how weak he was, and how every word required an enormous effort:

“Already, I can’t speak for two days,” he said. “I’m asking everyone to do 2,000 tikkun haklalis, and to reach saying 2,000 tikkun haklalis [altogether], so that the Rav can start to speak again today at the evening prayers, mincha and ma’ariv...”

Because if not, the Rav won't even be able to say the kaddish. Everyone is needed to save the Rav, and to return the power of speech to him, which was taken from him, as a result of [Am Yisrael's] many sins. Only reciting the Tikkun Haklali can rectify everything. So, we need to recite 2,000 Tikkun Haklalis – the entire community, and anyone else who wants to help the Rav.”

Thousands of people stepped up to pray for the Rav, and the organisers at Shuvu Banim estimated that at least 11,000 Tikkun HaKlalis were recited in the merit of the Rav's recovery, over the next 24 hours. Thankfully, the Rav's health took an immediate, and significant, turn for the better.

The next day found the Rav driving down to the Southern-most city of Eilat, where he jumped straight back into visiting communities, synagogues and private homes all over the region. But healthwise, things were still touch and go. After returning from Eilat, the Rav re-released an old, but very special prayer, and again asked his followers to recite a minimum of 1,000 Tikkun HaKlalis every day, in the merit of his full recovery.

The Rav's exile had begun more than six years' earlier, with a spiritual deal to suffer disgrace, humiliation and persecution, as a kapparah, or atonement for Am Yisrael's sins. As 2019 began, full of possible wars, freak weather and enormous political unrest across the planet, the question of whether all the self-sacrifice and prayers and teshuva to date would be enough to tip the balance in Israel's favor was the unspoken thought in so many people's minds.

And the coming months were about to answer that question, decisively.



The following weeks saw more and more Jewish blood being shed. On February 7th, 19 year old Ori Ansbacher was assaulted and brutally murdered by a Palestinian terrorist in broad daylight, in the Ein Yael forest on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The attack shook the country to its core.

Then, on March 15th, 2019, terrorists in the Gaza strip launched two rockets at Central Israel, which miraculously landed in empty spaces in the heavily-populated city of Holon, near Tel Aviv. Hamas claimed the launch had been an ‘accident’. Two days later, another terrorist stabbed Sgt. Gal Keidan, 19, at the Ariel Junction in the Shomron, then stole his gun and shot him, and other civilians, including Rabbi Ahiaad Ettinger, a 47 year old father of 12, who died of his wounds the next morning.

Just before the Fast of Esther, (March 20th, 2019), the Rav put out another hair-raising message asking his followers to spend the next three days praying that he would live to see Pesach 5779.

Emergency prayer meetings were swiftly organized at the Kotel, and despite the hustle and bustle of the busy Purim holiday, hundreds of people still turned up each night at *chatzot*, to read through the whole book of Psalms, in the merit of the Rav’s speedy recovery.

Three days later, there was another ‘accidental’ rocket attack from Gaza, which this time almost totally destroyed a house on Moshav Mishmeret, near Kfar Saba, while the family were sleeping in it. In another open miracle, the family of 7 only sustained very light injuries.

But as Rav Berland had warned at Chanuka time, the rockets were back, and this time, they were striking to the heart of the country.

The following day, March 26, 2019, another 60 rockets were launched at Israel, but most were intercepted by the Iron Dome, or fell harmlessly in empty areas. Even when a rocket crashed through the wall of a house in Sderot, it miraculously didn't explode. Hashem was still watching over the nation of Israel, He was still doing miracles for the Jewish people every moment, and every second.

As Rosh Chodesh Nissan approached, most of the world remained in a state of turmoil. There was a feeling in the air that so many things were hanging by a thread, and that the slightest nudge could tip the planet headlong into chaos.

In Israel, there were so many questions, so many concerns. The next few weeks could bring all-out war with the Arabs; a US-imposed 'peace' plan, a new government run by the same anti-chareidi politicians who did so much damage to the Torah world five years earlier. So many things were up in the air, there was so much to pray for.

Back in Jerusalem, Rav Berland re-iterated the importance of getting as many people as possible to Hevron, for the prayer gathering on April 8th, 2019. The stakes had never been higher.

EPILOGUE

Taken from a recording of a Lesson Rav Berland gave on Likutey Halachot, in Shvat 5775.

“The more falsehood there is, the more truth will be revealed in a clearer way. The truth will be revealed in the end. As much as the *sheker* (falsehood, lies) will be spread in the world, more *sheker*, more falsehood to fool everyone, that’s the degree that the truth will be revealed in the end. They didn’t tell all of the lies yet. It’s only the beginning.

There are still a lot of Tzaddikim in the world, in every generation, that aren’t listening to the *sheker*, they’re not letting themselves be fooled by the *sheker*. There’s not enough *sheker*. As long as we see that there’s still Tzaddikim in the world so it’s a sign that the *sheker* didn’t take over enough. Therefore, we need the *sheker* needs to be victorious. Until the *sheker* is victorious, there can’t be the redemption. When the *sheker* is victorious, then the people will go through a birur (clarification process), they’ll be sifted out, according to all of the strong truth that’s inside of them.

And that’s how Moshiach is going to be revealed. Moshiach needs to be revealed from the epitome of *sheker*, Moshiach and his people. They’re not going to be pulled by the *sheker*. The *sheker* wants to take everyone. The *sheker* says: “I didn’t say enough *sheker*. Maybe I’ll say a little bit more, maybe I’ll succeed in saying something else, a different way.

In every generation there are new lies. The *sheker* makes up things that never existed from the creation of the world. But specifically

through this spreading of the lies, the *sheker* will take over the whole world and there won't be even a drop of truth. Only a small number of people will hold strong to the truth, but the *sheker* will take over everyone, like Rav Noson says. And everyone will be taken over by the *sheker* and everyone will be fooled, and only then will the truth be revealed and Moshiach will come. Only through the increase of *sheker*.

Therefore, we need to strengthen the people saying the lies. Don't go against them, give them strength. This is the opposite of Likutey Halachot when we go against them. Likutey Halachot is always telling you the opposite way of what people think. We need to strengthen them even more, so they should make up more lies and do more articles.

Without this commentary from Rav Noson we wouldn't be able to understand what the verse says, that: 'the lips of truth will be established forever.' And then it says: 'the *sheker* come to be fulfilled'. What does it mean that the *sheker* will 'come to be fulfilled'? That only when the *sheker* reaches its end and is completely satisfied, only then will the truth be established.

We want the *sheker* to be satisfied and to get stronger and stronger without end, [in a way] that wasn't since the creation of the world, and then whoever is still holding onto the truth, will merit seeing Melech HaMoshiach. Moshiach will come when he sees there are some people who aren't being pulled and who know that it's *sheker* and nothing is able to fool them or confuse them.

Because as long as it's possible to change people's minds, to brainwash them to go for the *sheker*, and then brainwash them and convince them to go against the *sheker*, Moshiach won't have anywhere to go. Because then Moshiach will come and also convince people to come after him... No! We need that the people will be able to convince everyone until it's no longer possible for them to change their minds again.

When everyone's minds are turned around to the *sheker*, if there's even a minyan left, 10 people left, like it says 'Beit Knishta Hada', (a small group of people) whose minds haven't been turned by

the *sheker*, then the Moshiach can be revealed, and he'll reveal himself to this group of people. And from here, it will go on and spread throughout the whole world.

Like Rav Noson says, the main revelation of truth will be in the End of Days. The falsehood will be spread in the world until it reaches its satisfaction, until there are almost no more people left that it needs to conquer. There won't be any space for a point of truth. Then, specifically, will 'the lips of truth be established', through the *sheker* being increased very much. When there's more and more *sheker*, that's when the truth will be established.

Therefore, we shouldn't try to stop it, we shouldn't go against it. We shouldn't do articles against articles to prove that they're wrong. Why do we need more articles? We don't need more articles against articles

Like Rav Noson says, as it's known, the *sheker* has strength to fool the whole world. The strength that it has, it got from the kedusha, the holy side. It all comes from the kedusha, anyways.

So why did Hashem let it happen? Hashem let it happen so that the truth, a person's truth that he has within him, should be so strong, should be so burning strong, and should get stronger the more he sees that the *sheker* is winning. That real truth from within him, the pure truth from within him, should get so strong they can't brainwash him [anymore]. And then, they'll reach the level of Atik Yoman, a very high level, and then Moshiach will be revealed."

THE COMING OF MOSHIACH WON'T CHANGE ANYTHING

When Rav Berland was in South Africa during the summer of 2015, he gave a *shiur* where he explained that the revelation of the Moshiach wouldn't change anything at all in the world. Until everyone did *teshuvah*, there simply couldn't be a true redemption, and the real work of the Moshiach would be to bring everyone in the world back to God.

Around that same time, in a different shiur he said:

“These next six years, from 5775 to 5781 (2014-2021), are the years of redemption. These are the years when the whole of Am Yisrael will do teshuvah. Even the biggest criminals and thugs are going to do teshuvah. There are no criminals in Am Yisrael, there are no wicked people in Am Yisrael. It’s all just stages of the redemption process. It’s all just stages in the evolution of the neshamah, in receiving the different stages of the soul. The biggest criminal is going to end up being the biggest tzaddik...”

We also need to bring the 70 nations back in repentance. The King Moshiach is going to return all the nations back to God, because God forbid that even a single goy should die! We don’t want any non-Jews to die, except for [exceptionally evil] people like Hitler, yimach shmo, but even common murderers can do teshuvah.”

The Rav was sending a clear message that redemption is a process, and that the process that will culminate in true peace, and the coming of the Jewish redeemer, is already occurring right now, however it may look externally.

Moshiach, “the son of Yishai,” is likened to a sprout for a very good reason. For many long weeks, months and even years, the seed of Moshiach lays underground, hidden from public view, apparently decaying and rotting away. Until... that first sprout of redemption finally bursts forth.

May it be speedily in our days, amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you would like to learn more about Rav Eliezer Berland, (and you haven't done so already), you can read **One in a Generation Volume I**, which contains hundreds of hours of interviews, stories and first-hand sources about who he really is.

If you read Hebrew, there are many additional books available about the Rav, including collections of his Torah lessons, miraculous stories of the people he's helped and compendiums of his advice and prayers. A good place to start is the **www.ravberland.com** bookstore, which you can access here:

<https://ravberland.com/product-category/english-books/>

With God's help, we hope to be translating many more of Rav Berland's works into English in the near future.

LEARN MORE ABOUT RAV ELIEZER BERLAND AND SHUVU BANIM

For the latest news and updates about Rav Eliezer Berland and Shuvu Banim, please visit our website at:

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THE LAST WORD

Below, we bring a brief compilation of just some of the statements of praise that have been made about Rav Eliezer Berland, shlit”a. The statements have all been checked and verified.



Rabbi Dovid Abuchatzeira shlit”a from Naharia (grandson of the Baba Sali and known to be one of the greatest kabbalists of this generation):

“Rav Berland is a Holy *tzaddik*”.

(The following was said to Rabbi Aaron Farkash, a senior student of Rav Berland, when he came to pay a call and Rav Abuchatzeira stood up for him: **“Shalom K’vod Harav, Shalom K’vod Harav, Welcome honorable Rabbi! Welcome honorable Rabbi!”** (Rabbi Farkas was very surprised about this show of respect, and answered “I’m not an honorable Rabbi, I’m just a simple Jew.”) Rabbi Dovid answered: **“I’m not standing in respect for you, I’m standing in respect for Rav Eliezer Berland shlit”a who came in [in spirit] together with you”.**

(Said to another student of Rav Berland, during the years of exile):
“Every country that Rav Berland goes to he brings down new spiritual lights”.



Rabbi Dov Hakohen Kook from Tveria (well-known kabbalist, son-in-law of Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, and grandson-in-law of Rav Shlomo Elyashiv):

(The following was said by Rav Kook to his nephew, Eliyahu Leizerovitz, who repeated the words on Israeli radio:) **“There is tremendous anger in Heaven that people are speaking against Rav Berland... The President of Iran has a nuclear bomb in his arsenal and at any given time he can drop it on Israel....If all of the Breslover Chassidim would believe in Rav Berland, then Moshiach would have been here already a while ago.”**

Yisrael Amar is very close to the Kook family and is frequently in their house. He said that **Rav Kook told him that Rav Berland took upon himself the suffering of Moshiach ben Yosef.**

(The following was said to Dovid Levayov, who escorted Rav Kook one Purim night during Rav Berland’s exile: **“He will return to Israel and redeem us! His return will usher in the redemption.”**



Rav Dovid Chaim Stern from Bnei Brak (of the greatest kabbalists from Lithuanian tradition, known to have *Ruach Hakodesh*, was close to the Steipler and many Torah giants of the previous generation):

(As told to Nachman Mintz, a student of Rav Berland, who went to receive a blessing from Rav Dovid Chaim Stern at a time that Rav Berland was in exile in Zimbabwe.) Before he went into the room to speak to Rav Stern, Rav Stern's attendant asked him who he's a student of, and he answered "Rav Berland". Rav Stern said to him, **'You aren't a student of Rav Berland because you don't even know who Rav Berland is!'**

On another occasion, Rav Stern said publically: **"Anyone who speaks badly about the *tzaddik* Rav Berland, everyone without exception will receive tremendous punishments from Heaven."**

On another occasion, Rav Stern said that Rav Berland is: **"Holy of holies. No one is on his level of holiness,"** and said that he is **"one in a generation"**.



Rabbi Chaim Cohen a.k.a. The Milkman (known to the *tzaddikim* to be one of the leaders of the 36 hidden *tzaddikim* of the generation:)

One of Rav Cohen's senior students, the kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Sheinfeld, gave over the following account during a public *shiur* in Hadera. A big *talmid chacham* begged Rav Sheinfeld to take him to see The Milkman, as his wife had been diagnosed with a tumor in her head. When the two men came to the Milkman, he asked the *talmid chacham*: **"Did you speak against Rav Berland?"** The person tried to change the subject, so the Milkman repeated the question, in a stern voice: **"Did you speak or sign anything against Rav Berland?"** The *talmid chacham* admitted he had. The Milkman responded, **"She has no cure for her disease."** The *talmid chacham* was terrified when he this. The Milkman then told him: **"If you want to try to see if it can be fixed, then go**

and publicize exactly the opposite of what you signed; maybe it will help.”



Rav Elazar Mordechai Menser (known to be one of the 36 hidden *tzaddikim* in the generation:)

In 2016, Rav Menser wrote a letter, which publicized widely, where he stated: **“the entire persecution of Rav Berland comes from jealousy”**. The letter continued: **“I have no doubt that if these persecutors would have lived in the generation of Rebbe Nachman, they would have persecuted him as well (even though these persecutors consider themselves Breslover chassidim)”**.

He continued: **“From now on, anyone who opens his mouth against Rav Berland, he’s a willful sinner, and he should know that he’s playing with fire and the words of the Mishna in Avot will be fulfilled through him: ‘Their bite is the bite of a fox, and their sting is the sting of a scorpion, etc.’, and whoever just thinks bad thoughts against Rav Berland, he should know that the thought is considered idol worship, and a person needs to use all of his strength to fight against these thoughts. And whoever has already spoken against Rav Berland, has no remedy until he goes to him and asks forgiveness - until he hears that Rav Berland forgives him.”**



Rav Golan Mor Yosef (a big kabbalist from the town of Alma, one of the 36 hidden *tzaddikim*:)

Rav Golan has publically said many times publicly that Rav Berland is the *tzadik hador*, the greatest *tzaddik* of the generation,

and he once publicly swore to this and said, **“Whoever doesn’t believe this should leave.”**

One time, Rav Golan approached a man in the middle of prayers, took him out of the synagogue, and then explained that he did it because the person had experienced a passing negative thought against Rav Berland.



Rav Amos Gweta from Netanya (one of the tzaddikim of the generation, known for his *Ruach Hakodesh*.)

Rav Meir Knafo relates that when he recently went with others to Rav Amos Gweta, they spoke about Rav Berland. Rav Amos said words in praise of the Rav, including that he is: **“the gadol hador, the leader of the generation”**.



Rebbe Dovid Biderman, the Lelover Rebbe of America (leader of thousands, known as one of the greatest tzaddikim of our generation:)

The publishers of the Lelov torah sheets titled “Zichron Toras Moshe” contacted us to relate the following:

“The Rebbe admires Rav Berland with all the fibers of his being, and speaks about him with infinite admiration, and the Rebbe often asks his attendants to update him about what is happening with the Rav *shlit”a*.

“The Rebbe recently met the students of the Rav at the *Kosel* and told them passionately and enthusiastically, ‘Your Rav brought thousands to the path of *teshuva*, and he does so much for Am

Yisrael. Every single person is obligated to help him and to stand by him.”

“When the terrible rumors began spreading against the Rav, the Rebbe responded with unusual strictness, and he said the following, during a *drasha* to his chassidim:

“Rav Berland *Shlit*”a, always went through difficult times; he is a very honorable person, an awesome *talmid chacham*. I remember him from many years back, how he ran his yeshiva courageously and brought tens of thousands of people to *teshuva*. Therefore it is not a wonder that the *sitra achra*, the other side, is waging war against him, and spreading false libels.

“He raised up youngsters from the worst possible state of being; ‘from the dungheap He raises up the needy, To seat [him] with princes, with the princes of His people’ (*Tehilim* 113), and they are now exalted Jews, who are separated from the mundane world, full of Torah, fear of Heaven, and acts of kindness.

“I still remember from many years ago seeing Rav Berland *shlit*”a at the *Kosel*, how he approached the *Kosel* with *deviekus* and exaltedness and how he kissed the stones. The afternoon prayers of a regular day by him looked like holy fire of exaltedness that’s impossible to describe.

“It’s an act of the *satan* who is spreading far and wide to wage war against him; its forbidden for us to sit back and remain silent. We need to make noise and turn over worlds...”



The Belzer Rebbe *shlit*”a (leader of the Belz dynasty, which numbers tens of thousands of Jews around the world)

“I have now discovered a Jew who’s such a *tzaddik*, that I want to stay with him a little longer.”



Biala Rebbe of Bnei Brak (leader of the Biala chassidus of Bnei Brak and Beitar, known for his miracles, *Ruach Hakodesh* and devotion in Divine service:)

(When Rav Berland was in jail, the Biala Rebbe told Boruch Nimni: **“We need to overturn the world in order that the Rav will be released from jail, because each day he’s in jail we are losing thousands of new *baalei teshuva* who the Rav would return in *teshuva*.”** Then he said, **“The Rav is waging war directly with the *sitra achra* and all the *tzaddikim* are helping him, each one up to the place he can reach, but after a certain place only the Rav himself is standing there, waging war alone.”**



The Spinka Rebbes of Bnei Brak and Boro Park. (Both these Rebbes visit the Rav often and go to family *simchas* of the Rav whenever they can. Each are leaders of the Spinka Dynasty, which numbers thousands of chassidim:)

The Spinka Rebbe *shlit”a* (Donollo, Bnei Brak)

“Rav Eliezer Berland has brought tens of thousands closer to Hashem, so it is no wonder the Dark Side does battle with him, and false accusations are made against him”. He then added, **“Rebbe Aharon of Karlin died young, when he was only 36 years old, because he brought thousands closer to Hashem, so the *sitra achra* fought him. This happens in every generation; the**

***sitra achra* does battle with those *tzaddikim* who bring people closer to Hashem”.**

The Spinka Rebbe (Boro Park) *shlit”a*

The Spinka Rebbe had a daughter who was very sick with a brain tumor and couldn't walk. When Rav Berland was in America, many years ago, the Rebbe came to receive a *bracha* for his daughter, and the Rav miraculously cured her. Details of this story can be found in Volume 1 of **One in a Generation**.



GLOSSARY

<i>Achavas Chaverim</i>	To love our fellow Jew (literally, to love our friends).
<i>Achdus</i>	Unity.
<i>Admor</i>	A Rebbe in a Chassidic court.
<i>Al Kiddush Hashem</i>	In order to sanctify God's name.
<i>Aliyah</i>	Literally, 'going up' - both to the Torah, and to the land of Israel.
<i>Am Yisrael</i>	the nation, or people, of Israel.
<i>Am Ha'aretz</i>	An unlearned man; a boor.
<i>AN"SH</i>	Abbreviation of <i>Anshei Shelomeinu</i> , or 'our people', used in reference to other Breslov chassidim.
<i>Atik Yoman</i>	A kabbalistic term referring to higher worlds.
<i>Aufruf</i>	A celebration held by the groom on the Shabbos before his wedding.
<i>Aveira (pl: aveiros)</i>	Sin, wrong-doing.
<i>Avodah Zara</i>	Idol worship.
<i>Avodas Hashem</i>	Literally, 'Hashem's work' - refers to any holy endeavours, prayers or mitzvot, etc.
<i>Avodas HaTefillah</i>	Literally, 'the work of praying' - refers to praying.
<i>Avreich</i>	A married student who's serious about learning Torah, often full-time.
<i>B'Iyun</i>	In depth.

<i>Ba'al Teshuvah</i>	(plural: <i>ba'alei teshuva</i>) A person who returns to God (repents).
<i>Baal Toke'iah</i>	The one who blows the Shofar in synagogue on the High Holidays.
<i>Baalei Batim</i>	Householders who work instead of learning Torah full-time.
<i>Bachur</i> (pl: <i>bachorim</i>)	An unmarried student who's learning Torah in a Yeshiva.
<i>Baki</i>	Knowledgeable.
<i>Baraisa</i>	Tannaic statements that are found in the Gemara, but that have a lesser status than mishnayot.
<i>Baruch Hashem</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Bless God. <i>Colloquially:</i> Thank God.
<i>Bat Kol</i>	A voice from heaven.
<i>Bein Hazmanim</i>	Literally, 'between times' - refers to the period between the 9 th of Av and the first of Elul, when Torah institutions are closed for the Summer.
<i>Beis Din</i>	A religious, Jewish court of law.
<i>Beis HaMikdash</i>	The Temple in Jerusalem.
<i>Beis Midrash</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The house of learning. <i>Colloquially,</i> the yeshiva's main study hall.
<i>Bentch</i>	To bless - usually refers to reciting the grace after meals.
<i>B'ezras Hashem</i>	With God's help.
<i>Birkas HaMazon</i>	The blessing after meals.
<i>Birkas HaShachar</i>	The blessings recited in the morning, from the prayer book.
<i>Bitachon</i>	Trust (usually refers to trust in Hashem).
<i>Bitul</i>	Self-nullification.
<i>Biyas HaMoshiach</i>	Hebrew for: The coming of the Moshiach.
<i>Bnei Torah</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Sons of Torah. Refers to Torah observant Jews.
<i>Brachah</i>	A blessing.

<i>Bris Mila</i>	The circumcision ceremony typically held eight days after a Jewish boy is born.
<i>Chadar (pl: chadarim)</i>	Religious pre-school.
<i>Chaburah</i>	A Torah study group.
<i>Chai V'kayam</i>	A biblical expression usually used to refer to a dead Tzaddik, as being still 'alive' spiritually, and present and acting in the world.
<i>Chalakah</i>	A celebration where a three year old Jewish boy has his first haircut.
<i>Chalban</i>	The Milkman. Referring to the kabbalist, Rav Chaim Cohen.
<i>Chas v'shalom</i>	<i>Colloquially:</i> God forbid.
<i>Chassid (pl: chassidim)</i>	A group of religious, orthodox Jews who usually follow their own 'Rebbe'
<i>Chassidei Breslov</i>	(or 'Chassidim') Devout students or followers of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.
<i>Chassidus</i>	The spiritual path originated by the Ba'al Shem Tov, and followed by his students, including Rabbi Nachman. A sect of Judaism which emphasises joy in its practice and teaches that every Jew, no matter his level, can get close to Hashem.
<i>Chatzos</i>	The time of halachic midnight.
<i>Chavrusa</i>	A one-on-one study partner, when learning Torah.
<i>Chazal</i>	The initial letters of the following expression in Hebrew: Ch achmanu Z ichronam L 'vracha. <i>Literally:</i> "Our Sages, may their memory be for a blessing."
<i>Cheshbon Nefesh</i>	taking a self-reckoning or personal accounting of our own deeds.
<i>Chessed</i>	Kindness.
<i>Chevrah Kaddisha</i>	The organisation responsible for preparing a Jewish body according to halacha, before burial.

<i>Chizuk</i>	Strengthening, spiritual encouragement.
<i>Chol HaMoed</i>	Refers to the intermediate days between the first day (or days) of Yom Tov, and the last day (or days) of Yom Tov, of either Succos or Pesach.
<i>Chuppah</i>	The marriage canopy used in Jewish weddings.
<i>Chutz L'aretz</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Outside the land. Refers to anywhere outside of Israel.
<i>Chutzpadik</i>	Brazen, shameless, cheeky.
<i>D'Oraisa</i>	Refers to a commandment or mitzvah that's derived directly from the written Torah, as opposed to the Oral Torah.
<i>Daas</i>	Godly awareness, knowledge or wisdom.
<i>Daf Yomi</i>	The daily study of a specific, set page of the Gemara.
<i>Dam (pl: damim)</i>	<i>Literally:</i> blood, or bloods. Refers to 'blood money'.
<i>Darshan</i>	Someone who gives over a Torah class or lesson in public.
<i>Dati Leumi</i>	<i>Literally:</i> National-religious. Describes a group of more modern orthodox Jews in Israel.
<i>Davka</i>	On purpose, specifically.
<i>Derech Eretz</i>	Good manners. ' <i>Derech Eretz kadma le Torah</i> ' literally means that you have to put practical considerations before learning Torah.
<i>Dveikus</i>	Closeness or clinging to Hashem.
<i>Ein Od Milvado</i>	<i>Literally:</i> There is only Him (i.e. God).
<i>Eis Ratzon</i>	A favourable time.
<i>Emunas</i>	Trust, faith and belief in Hashem. <i>Emunas Tzaddikim:</i> believing in the words of our Tzaddikim.
<i>Erev</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The eve of. <i>Erev Shabbos</i> refers to the time before candle-lighting on Friday.

<i>Etia HaMoshiach</i>	The time of Moshiach.
<i>Gabbai</i>	Responsible for managing the services within synagogue, and / or attending a rabbi or Rebbe, in a capacity similar to a private secretary.
<i>Gadol HaDor</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Great one of the generation. Refers to the senior, leading figure in the Torah world.
<i>Galus</i>	Exile.
<i>Gaon</i>	Torah genius.
<i>Gashmiyus</i>	Materialism, materiality.
<i>Gedolim</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Great ones. Refers to the leading Torah personalities of a generation.
<i>Gehinnom</i>	Purgatory.
<i>Gemilus Chassadim</i>	Acts of kindness, good deeds.
<i>Gemach</i>	A free loan fund for money or other items.
<i>Geula</i>	Redemption.
<i>Gog and Magog</i>	The last war that's meant to occur at the end of days, ushering in the time of Moshiach.
<i>Hachnassas Orchim</i>	The mitvah of hosting guests.
<i>HaKadosh Baruch Hu</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The Holy One, blessed be He. Another term for God.
<i>Hakafot Shniyos</i>	Referring to the custom to dance with the Torah all night long on the night after Shemini Atzeres.
<i>Hakaras HaTov</i>	Gratitude.
<i>Halachah (pl: halachos)</i>	Jewish law.
<i>Hashem</i>	G-d.
<i>Hashem Yitbarach</i>	G-d, may He be blessed.
<i>Havdalah</i>	<i>Literally:</i> separation. The service performed at the conclusion of Shabbos, before returning to the mundane activities of the rest of the week.
<i>Hilulah</i>	Anniversary of a person (usually a Tzaddik's) passing.

<i>Hishtadlus</i>	One's own personal or physical effort.
<i>Hisbodedus</i>	Personal prayer to G-d in one's own words.
<i>Ibburim</i>	Refers to containing sparks of a particular soul, or souls.
<i>Kabbalas Shabbos</i>	Welcoming the Shabbos.
<i>Kapparah</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Atonement. Often refers to a financial or material loss that occurs instead of something worse happening.
<i>Kavanah</i>	Intention.
<i>Kedushah</i>	Holiness.
<i>Kehillah</i>	Community.
<i>Keitz</i>	The end, usually specifically referring to the end of days.
<i>Kesubah</i>	Marriage contract.
<i>Kiddush Hashem</i>	Something that sanctifies God's name.
<i>Kiddush Levanah</i>	The monthly blessing recited over the sighting of the new moon.
<i>Kibbutz</i>	Often secular agricultural settlement in Israel founded on socialist principles. <i>Kibbutznik:</i> Member of a kibbutz.
<i>Kippah</i>	Skull-cap.
<i>Kisei HaKavod</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The holy throne. Refers allegorically to God's throne in the Heavens.
<i>Kivrei Tzaddikim</i>	Plural of <i>kever Tzaddik</i> , or the grave of a holy, righteous person.
<i>Kloiz</i>	The main synagogue in Uman, originally built by Rabbi Natan.
<i>Korbanos</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The Temple sacrifices. Here, it means the recitation of the sacrificial service in the morning prayers, in lieu of actually performing the sacrifices in the Temple.
<i>Kotel</i>	The wailing or Western wall of the destroyed Temple, that still stands in Jerusalem.

<i>Kriyah</i>	The Jewish custom of tearing the clothing upon being told of the death of a close relative, as a sign of deep mourning.
<i>Kvitlach</i>	A note requesting a blessing that's sent to a Tzaddik.
<i>K'vod HaRav</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The honour of the Rav. A respectful greeting offered to rabbinic figures.
<i>Lashon Hara</i>	Evil speech, gossip.
<i>Likutei Moharan</i>	The main work of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov.
<i>Limud Torah</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Torah learning.
<i>Lishmah</i>	For its own sake, or for God's sake, without any other ulterior motives.
<i>Maariv</i>	The evening prayers.
<i>Machlokes</i>	Strife, trouble-making, discord.
<i>Malach</i>	Angel.
<i>Maseches</i>	Tractate - usually referring to the Gemara.
<i>Mashgiach (also, Mashgiach Ruchani)</i>	
<i>Masmid</i>	Someone who is constantly engaged in learning Torah.
<i>Masorti</i>	Traditionally religious.
<i>Mattan Torah</i>	The giving of the Torah.
<i>Mechitzah</i>	The barrier between the men and women's section of a hall or synagogue.
<i>Megillah</i>	Scroll.
<i>Melevah Malka</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The queen's meal. Refers to the meal that occurs after the end of Shabbos, to bid farewell to the Shabbos Queen.
<i>Menahel</i>	Headteacher.
<i>Meraglim</i>	Spies.
<i>Meshugga, Meshugganer</i>	Yiddish terms for craziness, a crazy person.
<i>Mesirus Nefesh</i>	Self-sacrifice.
<i>Midda Keneged Midda</i>	A measure for a measure.

<i>Middos</i>	Character traits.
<i>Midrash</i>	Stories and explanations from the Gemara and other holy books.
<i>Mikvah</i>	A pool of ritually pure water that cleanses a person from their spiritual impurity.
<i>Milah Deshtusa</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Foolish words.
<i>Milchama</i> (pl: <i>milchamos</i>)	War, wars.
<i>Minchah</i>	The afternoon prayers.
<i>Minyan</i>	A quorum of at least 10 men required for Jewish communal prayers.
<i>Mishnayos</i>	Plural of <i>Mishna</i> . Refers to the Tannaic statements that are part of the Oral Torah.
<i>Mitzvah</i>	(plural: <i>mitzvot</i>) Commandment(s), good deeds.
<i>Moranu</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Our teacher.
<i>Motzoei Shabbos</i>	The night after Shabbos has ended, Saturday night after nightfall.
<i>Navi</i>	Prophet.
<i>Ne'ilah</i>	The final prayer service on Yom Kippur.
<i>Neshamah</i>	The Divine soul.
<i>Netz</i>	Sunrise.
<i>Ovdei Hashem</i> (also 'ovdim)	<i>Literally:</i> Hashem's workers, people who are continually engaged in mitzvos, prayer and learning Torah.
<i>P'gam HaBris</i>	<i>Literally:</i> A blemish in the covenant. Refers to physical immorality.
<i>Parashah</i>	Refers to the Torah portion for each week.
<i>Parnassah</i>	Livelihood.
<i>Pashut</i>	Simple, in all simplicity.
<i>Pasul</i>	Halachically invalid / not kosher.
<i>Payos</i>	Side-curls.

<i>Pidyon HaKlali</i>	The general redemption payment which sweetens all the judgments over a person. <i>Pidyon HaKollel:</i>
<i>Pidyon Nefesh</i>	A redemption of the soul (a payment made to a Tzaddik that is used to redeem the person's soul from where it is trapped).
<i>Pirkei Avos</i>	Ethics of our Fathers - a collection of aphorisms from Chazal.
<i>Poskim</i>	Halachic decisors. A <i>psak</i> is a halachic decision or ruling.
<i>Protektzia</i>	Influence, nepotism (often a by-product of endemic corruption).
<i>Prutah</i>	A coin of very low value.
<i>Rabbenu</i>	Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (but also means 'our teacher' when used in reference to other Rabbis).
<i>Ratzon</i>	Will or desire.
<i>Refuah sheleimah</i>	<i>Literally:</i> A complete recovery, or healing.
<i>Ribbono Shel Olam</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Master of the World. Another term for God.
<i>Rosh Yeshiva</i>	The head Rabbi of a yeshiva.
<i>Ruach Hakodesh</i>	Divine intuition.
<i>Ruchniyus</i>	Spirituality, spiritual matters.
<i>Samech Mem</i>	Refers to the head of the forces of evil.
<i>Sandak</i>	An honourable position given at a bris, refers to the person who holds the baby.
<i>Seforim</i>	Holy Jewish books.
<i>Segulah</i>	A practice which results in a spiritual or material benefit, which is not logically derived.
<i>Seichel</i>	Wisdom, intellect, brains.
<i>Seudah shlishis</i>	The third Shabbos meal.
<i>Shacharis</i>	The morning prayers.
<i>Shalom Bayis</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Peace in the home. Marital peace.

<i>Shamash</i>	Attendant.
<i>Shamayim</i>	Heaven.
<i>Shechinah</i>	The Divine Presence in this world.
<i>Shefa</i>	Bounty.
<i>Sheker</i>	Lies, untruths.
<i>Shemittah</i>	The seventh year of a seven year cycle, in which the land is left unworked.
Shemoneh Esrei	The central prayer, consisting of 19 blessings, that is said three times a day.
<i>Sheva Brachos</i>	The seven blessings that are recited for a newly-married Jewish couple on each of the first seven days after their wedding.
<i>Shidduch</i> (pl: <i>shidduchim</i>)	Marital match, a date with a view to getting married.
<i>Shiur</i>	Torah class or lesson.
<i>Shliach Tzibbur</i>	The one leading the prayer service.
<i>Shlicus</i>	Going out to do outreach, some other mitzvah.
<i>Shlita</i>	An honorific term appended to the name of holy men during their lifetime.
<i>Shmiras Einayim</i>	<i>Literally:</i> Guarding the eyes. Refers to the mitzvah of not looking at immoral, spiritually damaging things.
<i>Shtreimel</i>	A round fur hat typically worn by chassidim on Shabbos, festivals and to other communal celebrations.
<i>Simchah</i> (pl: <i>simchas</i>)	Happiness. Also used to refer to a happy occasion like a wedding, for example.
<i>Sinas Chinam</i>	Baseless hatred.
<i>Sitra Achra</i>	<i>Literally:</i> 'The other side'. The dark side or source of negative spiritual forces, also an aspect of the yetzer hara.

<i>Siyatta dishmaya</i>	Heavenly help, Divine providence.
<i>Smicha</i>	The process of conferring rabbinic status on an individual.
<i>Sofer Stam</i>	The practice of writing mezuzahs, sefer Torahs and other holy texts. (Also called 'safrus'.)
<i>Sugya (pl: sugyos)</i>	The section of Torah being learnt, usually refers to Gemara.
<i>Tallis</i>	Four-cornered prayer shawl.
<i>Talmid Chacham</i>	A wise Torah student.
<i>Techiyas HaMeisim</i>	The revival of the dead, that will happen in the times of Moshiach.
<i>Tefach (pl: tefachim)</i>	A biblical unit of measurement, approximately 8-10 centimetres.
<i>Tefillin</i>	Black boxes containing holy texts that are worn on the arm and the forehead.
<i>Tehillim</i>	Psalms.
<i>Teshuva</i>	Repentance.
<i>Teshuvos</i>	Responses to halachic questions.
<i>Tikkun</i>	(plural: tikkunim) Spiritual rectification. <i>Tikkun Olam</i> - rectification of the world. <i>Tikkun Chatzos</i> - Midnight prayer, said to rectify / lament the destruction of the Temple.
<i>Tikkun HaKlali</i>	<i>Literally:</i> The General Rectification. The Ten Psalms (numbers: 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, 150) prescribed by Rebbe Nachman as a powerful spiritual remedy.
<i>Tisha b'av</i>	The ninth of Av, the date on which we remember the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.
<i>Toivel</i>	To immerse in a mikvah.
<i>Tosafos</i>	One of the more famous groups of commentators on the Gemara, dating from approximately the 12 th century.
<i>Tumah</i>	Spiritual impurity.

<i>Tzaddik</i>	(plural: <i>Tzaddikim</i>), The righteous one.
<i>Tzedakah</i>	Charity.
<i>Tzitzis</i>	A four cornered garment normally worn by Jewish men under their clothes, with fringes / strings at each corner.
<i>Tziyun</i>	The grave of a Tzaddik, e.g. Rebbe Nachman's grave.
<i>Vasikin</i>	Dawn minyan.
<i>Yeshiva</i>	Religious Jewish institution for learning Torah.
<i>Yetzer Hara</i>	The evil inclination.
<i>Yirah; Yiras Shemayim</i>	Fear of Heaven.
<i>Yishuv HaDaas</i>	A settled mind.
<i>Yom HaAtzmaut</i>	Israel's Independence Day.
<i>Zechus (also Zocheh)</i>	Merit, to merit.
<i>Zemiros</i>	Jewish songs, usually containing biblical verses, that are typically sung on Shabbos, and on other Jewish festivals and happy occasions.
<i>Zman</i>	Period of time.
<i>Zt"l</i>	Stands for: Zichron HaTzaddik Levracha: <i>Literally:</i> May the tzaddik's memory be for a blessing.

END NOTES

- ¹ *Isaiah* 2:2.
- ² Baal Shem Tov al Hatorah Parshas Korach and Komarno Rebbe in the name of the BESHT brought in Netiv Mitzvotcha Path of Unification, 6th path, 5th passage.
- ³ FOOTNOTE OF RAV ROMPLER: See what the Chofetz Chaim says (Hilchos Lashon Hara klal 8:4) and these are his words “[the status of] a Talmid Chacham is according to the generation. Even in our times, if he is only fit to instruct [halacha], and he toiled in Torah, he is considered a “Talmid Chacham”, and someone who disgraces him, even with simple words, even if it was said not in his presence, it is a serious crime, and he requires excommunication, as it says in the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah. And this is even more-so when he makes defamatory statements about him, whereby he holds back many people from serving Hashem, because of this... and much other damage, besides.
- ⁴ FOOTNOTE OF RAV ROMPLER: And due to the many sins in our generation, also, there is a huge deficiency brought about because of this, therefore nothing is progressing in relation to the spiritual destruction and the destruction of the Torah, and despite all the many tragedies that are happening in the world today, and despite the fact that redemption has been delayed redemption so much after the time for it has already passed (as is known, that from the year 5760 (2000) it is considered that the time of the redemption has already arrived).
- > However, as the Sages teach (in Tractate Sanhedrin) that even though all these times have passed, the Son of Dovid will not come until the people do teshuva. And this sin [of disgracing a Talmid Chacham] is certainly holding back his coming, because if this sin caused the

destruction of the Temple, then it is certainly preventing its rebuilding (as the Chofetz Chaim says on his notes on Rashi Rosh Hashana 17a).

> We must sound a great alarm about this matter, that any bully feels free to disgrace any Talmid Chacham who doesn't find favor in his eyes and who doesn't see things the same way the bully does. However, this in and of itself [i.e. the bullies who publically shame other people] would not be able to influence the public, if not for all the silence [among other influential individuals], who place a hand over their mouths and bury their head in the sand, because each one is concerned for their own stature, so that he himself shouldn't be publically disgraced as well, if he speaks out in protest against them [the bullies].

> Woe to us that this has happened in our days, that people care more about their own honor than the honor of Heaven. Who knows what kind of terrible disasters and even harsher decrees can happen [to the Jewish People] as a result of this sin! And no-one should say: "what will it help, if I protest alone?" -because at least he will save his own soul, and also maybe others will learn and gain courage to do the same. And through this, he will earn merit for himself and for the entire generation.

⁵ FOOTNOTE OF RAV ROMPLER: If someone can even begin to entertain a suspicion of this sort about a man like this, that is a sign that the person is on an extremely low level and very far from anything spiritual. He has absolutely no conception of the nature of spirituality, or how a spiritual person who is far from anything mundane [behaves], and he himself should be checked in regard to his own behavior in the matter of [adultery].

> For it is known what our Sages teach "kol haposel b'mumo posel – 'Each person who has an imperfection invalidates others" (i.e., he projects his own imperfections onto others). See what it says in the responses of the RaShDan (Yoreh Deah 215, and the Chofetz Chaim in Hilchos Lashon Hara, klal 6 in Be'er Mayim Chaim 31 mentions this RaShDan) about a story similar to ours. There, it says that whoever believes in the Torah of Moshe, it is forbidden for them to believe in the rumors, and anyone who is not sure (that is, he suspects that the rumors may be true) is someone who himself is infected with this disease (i.e. he does those things which he suspects the righteous of doing). These are the words of the RaShDan.

> It is known what the Tzaddikim said, that if those who go after physical pleasures and desires would know the pleasure that we feel when we say “Nishmas” on Shabbos kodesh - which is a thousand times more pleasurable than the physical pleasure that they feel when indulging in pleasures and sins - they would abandon all of their physical pleasures, and they would return in teshuva to become sincere servants of Hashem and the Tzaddikim. Behold, this pleasure is felt by anyone who is engrossed in the service of Hashem and the study of the Holy Torah, and therefore, whoever occupies himself with Torah and avodas Hashem, it will not even enter his heart to begin to believe any of these stories about another servant of Hashem, for he knows that it’s just not possible.

> And just like it is against all logic to say about someone who is enjoying the taste of sweet honey that maybe he would prefer to leave it, and desire the ‘sweetness’ of salt, instead, so we know what the Rambam says, that the evil inclination and sinful thoughts are only found in a heart that is empty of Torah. (And when someone studies Torah, but his heart is not yet fully engrossed in it, that is also considered as if his heart is ‘empty’, because the Torah has not yet engulfed his heart. Rather, his Torah learning is still only in his mind).

- ⁶ FOOTNOTE OF RAV ROMPLER: In our case, his intentions are clear to those who know his way of speaking and understand his nature, that his intention in purposely causing himself disgrace is to atone for the entire Nation. It’s written in Shaarei Teshuva by Rabeinu Yona that disgrace and insult are kinds of suffering that are considered to be more severe than death, and it is known from the holy books that the Tzaddikim would accept on themselves death in order to atone for the entire nation [and save them] from harsh decrees.

> And those idiots who spread these rumors [aren’t aware that] there are high tikkunim involved, that we have no idea about. This rumor was either invented by the [Rav’s] persecutors with the evil intention of making it sound as though his followers believe the stories, but have a strange way of explaining it away, i.e., by saying that a tzaddik is allowed to do these things, in order to make [the Rav] and his look bad, by saying that they believe these horrible things happened, and they even believe that its allowed etc.

> Or, these things were actually said by crazy people. But whatever the case is, let it be known that these ideas are complete heresy against the Torah of Moshe and those who reveal these false Torah ideas have no share in the World to Come. These sorts of ideas were spread by the Shabtai Tzvi cult, may their names be erased, and in the end they all converted [out of Judaism], as is known, and that was the end of them, but only after many people were fooled by them.

> Even though there is no need to write all this, nevertheless, I mentioned it because today there are so many crazy, insane ideas in the world, as we mentioned previously. This is because we are at the time of the final birur, or clarification process, before the complete redemption, therefore every evil and klipa that ever existed in the world is coming up again, in order for it to become reattached to the evil that still exists in the world, which is still mixed up with the good. In this way, it will be separated from its good, each will find its type, and the good will be left pure and clean, sifted from all evil, and that is the way that the evil can be abolished and destroyed completely, soon, together with the sitra achra and Amalek and all the other parts of evil. And then there will be room for the revelation of the Kingdom of Heaven and the complete redemption will be revealed very soon, in our days.

- ⁷ RAV ROMPLER'S FOOTNOTE: It's possible that Yosef also prayed for this disgrace in order to save the Jewish People from the yetzer hara. It's written that in the merit of Yosef's suffering, the Jewish People were saved from the klipa of the lewdness of Egypt.
- ⁸ RAV ROMPLER'S FOOTNOTE: Even those who don't at all agree with the Breslov way, aren't permitted him not to turn their backs on the honor of Heaven. As we mentioned above, [if someone does this], that proves that he is lacking in love for Hashem, the Torah and the Jewish people. Therefore, he makes crooked calculations, which are calculations of the yetzer hara, which contain no clear intelligence or justice, as is obvious.
- ⁹ RAV ROMPLER'S FOOTNOTE: Everyone knows (or at least, those who know [Rav Berland] well) that when he does things that sometimes seem a little strange to the public eye, in truth, everything he does is done for very deep reasons, for the sake of Heaven.

¹⁰ RAV ROMPLER'S FOOTNOTE: Especially when it's obvious to anyone who seeks out and investigates the matter, that all the rumors are completely false to their foundations.

¹¹ Isaiah 59:15.

¹² Psalms 119:165.

¹³ Devorim 32:22

¹⁴ Devorim 32:22

