

The Holy Brothers
Reb Elimelekh of Lizhensk and Reb Zusha of Anipoli



Simcha Raz

THE HOLY BROTHERS

**Reb Elimelekh of Lizhensk
and Reb Zusha of Anipoli**

The Lieberman Family Edition

Translated by
Dov Peretz Elkins

Menorah Books

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In memory of
Eliezer Lieberman, z"l
and his sons,
Aron Lieberman, z"l
Leibish Lieberman, z"l
Sam Lieberman, z"l

Born in Lizhensk, Poland, in the town of Reb Elimelekh,
our grandfather and fathers escaped the horrors of Europe through
Siberia and reached Montreal, Canada, where the family
settled and prospered.

They were dedicated in every way to their families, and their families
to them. They were renowned for their kindness, their commitment
to Torah and mitzvot, and their generosity to all who turned to them
for help and support.

In honor of my beloved mother – Sora Eisenberg Landes

And my cherished sisters – Rena Landes Rank, Rebecca
Landes, and Tamar Landes

GREAT Jewish women all!

With love and pride,

Joshua H. Landes

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Foreword

Rabbi Hanoch Teller

According to legend, the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hasidic Movement, was able to go to a specific spot in the forest, recite a particular formula, and an angel appeared.

One generation later, they knew the exact spot where the Baal Shem Tov was able to invoke the appearance of an angel, but they knew not what to say, and an angel did not appear.

And one generation later, they were no longer certain as to the precise spot that the Baal Shem would frequent.

And we, so many generations later and removed, we do not even know where the forest is, let alone the formula that he would recite. What do we have of the grandeur and majesty of the Baal Shem Tov?

We have a lot, for we have the story, and the story takes us back.

The stories of the holy brothers, Reb Elimelekh and Reb Zusha, bring us back, back to a time where there was no pretentiousness or personal agendas – just a simple life where serving the Lord with simplicity and sincerity was supreme, as was love of your fellow Jew – regardless of his or her station in life or observance.

At the time of the holy brothers in the mid-eighteenth century, the Jews in Poland worked for the unusually cruel feudal lords, each of whom they referred to as the *poritz*. Invariably, the *poritzes* were interested in squeezing and extorting whatever money they could out of the Jews, and mercilessly punished, with full government endorsement, any delinquency in tax or rent.

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One of the many Jews who had incurred the wrath of his *poritz* had an outstanding debt of three thousand golden coins. It was off to prison for him, and the *poritz* made it very clear that the inmate would never see the light of day again until his debt was fully repaid, and this was not a vain threat.

Kindhearted and benevolent, Reb Eliezer Lipman learned of this poor soul's plight and sought to redeem him from captivity. It would be an august challenge, for he had only a thousand golden coins. Still, he did not falter in his quest and went to speak with the *poritz*.

As he was making his way to the *poritz's* doorstep he heard torturous moans, which he gathered were from the Jewish prisoner held in the mansion's dungeon. Those awful moans only further strengthened Reb Eliezer's resolve.

The visitor was ushered into the home of the *poritz*, who was cordial until he learned the purpose of the call. Any trace of geniality evaporated at the very mention of the prisoner. "The stinking Jew owes me three thousand golden coins," the *poritz* fumed, "for all of the time that he hasn't paid his debts. He will rot in the cell to the last of his days until every coin is received!"

Reb Eliezer attempted to reason with the coldhearted land owner. "What have you to gain from a tenant who dies in jail? You are after your money, and this will not return it. Let me pay you all the money that I have, a thousand golden coins, for the freedom of the detainee, and surely the Lord will bless you so that you will not lose out from this deal."

But the *poritz* would not budge. However, Reb Eliezer also would not give up. Finally, the determined philanthropist prevailed, and the inmate was released.

The *poritz* was impressed both by Reb Eliezer's negotiations, and that a perfect stranger would spend a thousand coins of his own money to redeem a fellow Jew. "I see that you are an upright man," the *poritz* commented, "and I am therefore going to offer you a break. Since you are a flax merchant, I recommend that you travel to my brother-in-law, who is a flax distributor. I will write you a letter of recommendation encouraging him to give you a substantial discount."

"Thank you," Reb Eliezer responded softly, "but I parted with my last coin in order to redeem your captive."

“In that case,” reflected the *poritz*, “here is your money back; invest it wisely with my brother-in-law!”

Joyously, Reb Eliezer departed to the flax distributor armed with his letter of recommendation. The new *poritz* read the letter and was amenable to make a sale at a fair price. He had Reb Eliezer escorted to his warehouse where he could personally inspect the low-cost, quality material.

Just as they were leaving the warehouse, Reb Eliezer heard a tormented shriek from somewhere nearby. “What is that noise?” he wanted to know.

“Oh that,” the worker said with a flip of his hand. “It’s hard to believe that old Jewish farmhand is still alive. Ever since he was imprisoned he has made such a racket that we have denied him food and drink to quiet him down. Eventually, I guess, it will work...”

Upon hearing this, Reb Eliezer dropped the flax in his hands and rushed out of the warehouse to speak with the man he had just negotiated with. Using the money that he had brought for his purchase, Eliezer Lipman managed to redeem the prisoner.

The captive was released in a dreadful state and Reb Eliezer had a doctor summoned and food gingerly administered. He then invited the man to come to his house for the holiday of Passover that was approaching.

Grateful that he had managed to save a fellow Jew before it was too late, Eliezer and his guest were about to set off when the wholesaler called out, “Hey, what about our deal? Don’t you wish to purchase some flax?”

“How could I ever do business with a man as wicked as you?” Reb Eliezer declared. “Have you no compassion or human dignity?”

Most amazingly, this *poritz* was visibly moved by the reproof. Filled with contrition, he pledged that from that day forward he would never commit a shameful act, and to prove his intentions he reduced his price even more and put the money for the ransom toward the flax purchase.

Eliezer Lipman was amazed how things had developed. It was exactly as the Rabbis had taught: one mitzva brings in its train another mitzva! Both ransoms did not cost him, fulfilling the rabbinic teaching that no action or mitzva ever goes unrewarded.

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But what greater reward could Eliezer have received for his constant kindness and charity than a beautiful family, two of his sons being none other than Reb Elimelekh of Lizhensk and Reb Zusha of Anipoli?

The parents of the holy brothers, as they came to be known, Eliezer Lipman and his pious wife Mirish, were descended from families that could trace their lineage all the way back to Rashi, Rav Yochanan HaSandlar of talmudic fame, and even King David. They lived in the townlet of Lapachi, not far from Tiktin.

As Mirish was illiterate in the Holy Tongue, she would recite her blessings by heart. Reb Zusha testified that at the time that his mother prayed, the Divine Presence could be found in the home. Every Friday before Sabbath she would travel to Tiktin to dispense alms.

The day that the Baal Shem Tov visited Eliezer and Mirish's village marked a turning point in their lives. From then on, they faithfully provided candles to the synagogue, and were meticulous in prayer as they beseeched the Almighty to open the hearts of their four sons and one daughter to the Torah.

After the passing of Eliezer Lipman, his sons divided their father's inheritance in the following manner: Avraham received the cash and the house was given to Nosson. The jewelry and housewares went to Elimelekh and the outstanding debts were to be collected by Zusha.

The division had been contrived by Zusha, who was clever at disguising his intentions. He made it appear that he had time on his hands, and accordingly, was the most suited for this least desirous of portions: the collection of debts.

However, Zusha was in no way cut out for this mission, and without a penny from the inheritance was left destitute. Bereft of any means of support, he decided to travel to his uncle who was an assistant to the holy Maggid of Mezritch, the successor of the Baal Shem Tov.

Lodging with his uncle meant constant exposure to the Maggid, and in no time, Zusha became an ardent Hasid. In the meantime, Elimelekh had moved to his wife's hometown of Shineva.

After his stay with his uncle in Mezritch, Zusha departed for the home of his brother Elimelekh. The very long and arduous journey took

its toll on Zusha's attire. His worn-out tatters were far shabbier than those that clad the poorest beggars.

Ever vigilant of the honor of his in-laws, Elimelekh was ashamed to allow his dreadfully appearing brother into his home. He therefore arranged accommodations for him at the home of the local baker.

However, Zusha's nights were not earmarked for mundane sleep. Those precious hours were devoted to learning, prayer and the loud recitation of *tikkun hatzot*. Zusha's nocturnal agenda effectively brought an end to his tenancy at the baker's house, and Elimelekh had no recourse other than to invite his brother into his own home.

It was there that he was able to observe Zusha's ways firsthand, which awakened in him a desire to draw close to the Maggid of Mezritch. Reb Zusha also convinced his older brother to join him in a self-imposed exile which they would devote to elevating the people that they would encounter.

Attired in the clothes of exile, they would travel from village to village to persuade, direct, and inspire the people to desist from sin and return to their holy roots. The exile would also, as the Talmud teaches, purify their souls.

And indeed, across the length and breadth of the Polish landscape the brothers wandered, bringing the word of the Lord to those that were either unfamiliar or needed to be reminded. The holy brothers, in a manner all their own, made focusing upon God a central part of people's lives.

Wherever the two holy brothers went during their self-imposed exile they generated a spirit of repentance. Their standard routine was to admonish themselves out loud for their supposed crimes, when in fact their "sins" were precisely the ones that the villager within earshot needed to rectify.

"Melekh, Melekh," Reb Elimelekh would reprimand himself, "how will you ever be able to face your final judgment knowing that you took advantage of your customers' naiveté?"

"I am certainly no better," Reb Zusha would add. "How could I have avoided davening with a minyan?" he mourned.

The two of them used their clairvoyant abilities to determine exactly what it was that the locals had transgressed, and then elaborated

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as to how they would personally be punished for those very same sins. Invariably, this caused the true sinners to be filled with remorse and rectify their sinful deeds. Countless individuals improved their lives this way without having their dignity compromised or having been humiliated in the process.

Wandering from town to village, the holy brothers neglected their physical needs and were sustained solely by meager coins or scraps of food that were donated along the way. One Sunday night they found themselves in a new town on a cold, wintry night. The tavern keeper offered to lodge them behind the fireplace that heated the pub.

The two of them took their places on the floor, with Reb Zusha, as always, offering his older brother the preferred spot nearer the fire. No sooner had Reb Elimelekh and Reb Zusha settled down to rest their weary bones when the tavern began to fill up with locals who had come to celebrate nothing more than their inebriated state. Wobbling and singing as drunkards do, they made themselves merry until they stumbled across a *real* cause for celebration.

Right before their eyes, innocently sleeping on the floor, was a Jew who could serve as the evening's entertainment. As many of them were wagon drivers, they were equipped with whips and staffs that could readily enlist the sleeping Jew's cooperation.

"Up and dance!" they ordered, snapping their whips and beating their staffs to ensure immediate compliance. Reb Zusha sprang to his feet and danced energetically for the leering drunkards. The wagon drivers were not looking for a quick performance – they had all night – and they unsparingly utilized their appurtenances to assure protracted amusement.

Eventually, however, they grew tired and allowed Zusha to collapse on the floor. But it wasn't just *one* Jew that they had savagely beaten. Reb Elimelekh felt every blow on his *own* back and urgently pressed his brother to exchange places with him. "They'll be back and then it will be my turn to suffer their indignities."

But in no way did Reb Zusha feel that he was getting the worst of the deal. Being beaten simply because he was a defenseless Jew was good for the soul, he maintained. And he knew his brother did not dispute this point.

Still, Reb Elimelekh would have none of it. He was insistent that they switch places so that if the drunks decided again to be entertained, *he* would bear the brunt of their vile behavior.

And indeed the wagon drivers returned, eager for another dance performance. Not for naught had they entered the tavern.

But in a display of uncharacteristic egalitarianism, they announced that it would only be fair to wake the Jew lying nearer to the fireplace, for the outer one had already made his contribution to the night's festivities.

Reb Elimelekh stood up and explained, or at least *tried* to explain, that the *outer* Jew was previously the *inner* one, for they had switched places. But his entreaties fell upon drunken ears.

Reb Zusha sanguinely accepted his lot and commented, "Melekh, don't feel bad. You see that one who deserves to be beaten cannot avoid it. Your desire to switch places was willed from Heaven."

Eventually the wagon drivers tired of their entertainment and they crashed to the floor in a drunken stupor. The brothers arose to recite *tikkun hatzot* and to thank the Almighty for having separated them from inhumane derelicts. Blessed were they to be servants privileged to worship the Almighty.

The holy brothers never forgot those that extended themselves on their behalf in their period of exile. One such individual was Reb Aharon in the village of Ludmir, who served as their host whenever they visited the town. Reb Aharon lived in abject poverty, but this never stopped him from extending hospitality and sharing his meager crumbs.

Once Reb Elimelekh and Reb Zusha were revealed as famous tzaddikim, and their followers were everywhere to be found, they returned to Ludmir – this time in a horse-drawn carriage. Just as in the past, they turned to Reb Aharon for lodging, which he graciously offered, as always.

Overnight, Reb Aharon's modest hovel became the focus of the town, and masses formed outside the door to seek the tzaddikim's blessings and intervention in a host of matters.

One of the wealthy merchants in the town felt that *he* deserved the honor of hosting these famous guests, and he extended his invitation

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for them to come to his richly appointed house where they could dwell in perfect comfort. But the brothers flatly refused.

“What is the difference between our visit this time,” the brothers wanted to know, “and our earlier visits, when you did not extend us an invitation? We are the very same people; just this time we came with a horse and wagon.

“We therefore propose that you host the horse and wagon...”

In the court of the Maggid, Reb Elimelekh was considered one of the finest students. And when the great Maggid’s soul was summoned above, the disciples gathered to decide upon his successor. The consensus was that there was a need for a leader that was robust and energetic, articulate and charismatic, who would know how to watch over his flock and even, if necessary, engage in battle on behalf of the Hasidic Movement. Once these guidelines were established, the question of who would succeed became a moot one.

Unanimously the disciples elected to crown Reb Elimelekh with the mantle of leadership to direct and spread *Hasidut* in Poland and Galicia. Upon reaching their decision they chanted in unison, “*Yehi adonenu v’rabbenu* – Long live our master and teacher, Reb Elimelekh!”

From there the group of Hasidim departed to Lizhensk with Reb Elimelekh at the head of the procession. The group continued until evening descended and it was necessary to lodge for the night. They entered an inn along the way and requested a single room for their newly appointed master.

To the great astonishment of the Hasidim, Reb Elimelekh requested pillows and covers from the innkeeper – as if he were planning to retire for the *entire* night. Several hours later the Hasidim were, well, appalled that their new master was still sleeping like a commoner. The Maggid who had preceded him had never allowed himself more than a few hours of sleep. Without anyone saying a word, there was a profound sense of regret over their choice of leader. Still, no one had the temerity to arouse Reb Elimelekh.

But when several more hours passed and Reb Elimelekh remained sleeping, they knew they had to do something. They summoned Reb Zusha, who was with them at the inn, to awaken his brother.

“Waking Reb Elimelekh is the simplest thing in the world,” he commented, as if he was just asked by the trembling Hasidim to tie a shoe. And with that he entered the room where his brother was sleeping and placed his hand over the mezuzah in the room. At that instant Reb Elimelekh jumped out of bed.

The confounded Hasidim asked Reb Zusha to explain what they had just beheld. “As you know,” Reb Zusha began, “man must envision the name of God before his eyes at all times. But what is one to do when he slumbers? The answer is that he relies on the ineffable name inscribed in the mezuzah.

“Thus, when I covered over the mezuzah, my brother no longer had anything to rely on, and was therefore compelled to awake and envision the Almighty before his eyes.”

All of the Hasidim released a pent-up, collective sigh of relief. With Reb Elimelekh at the helm, Litzhensk became the Jerusalem of Hasidim.

One of the great hasidic masters, the Divrei Chaim, commented, “Anyone who believes all the hasidic stories is a fool, and anyone who thinks that any of the stories could not have happened is a heretic.”

Perhaps we can append this caveat to mean all hasidic stories are true, just not always religious about fact. They are imbued with multiple layers of meanings and implications in the subtle twists and turns of the telling. The stories of the holy brothers, just like the story about the Baal Shem Tov, will transport us back to the magical places of yore, to the peaks of the Galician Carpathians and to the depths of our hearts.

Hanoch Teller
Jerusalem

Preface by the Translator

I am delighted and honored to have a part in bringing this book to the English-reading world.

First because of my deep respect and admiration for my friend and teacher, Simcha Raz, a distinguished Israeli scholar and writer. This is the sixth book I have been privileged to have published in English which was written originally in Hebrew by Simcha Raz. All six books are the product of Simcha Raz's lifelong study of the sacred literature of the Jewish people.

Simcha Raz has the unique ability to gather profound teachings from many places and deposit the sweetness and beauty of Jewish wisdom into a series of outstanding collections on many themes.

I particularly enjoyed translating this collection of tales of the holy brothers Reb Zusha of Anipoli and Reb Elimelekh of Lizhensk. The stories reflect the powerful personalities of two of the best-known hasidic masters, and the deep moral and spiritual heritage which they have bequeathed to future generations. Reb Zusha's exemplary devotion to God and Reb Elimelekh's profound study of Torah and deep connection to the life of a Hasid make them models for the Jewish people of this century.

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I want to thank those who assisted in making this translation smooth and accurate: Yocheved Klausner and Sahar Tzur. Yocheved's amazing mastery of both Hebrew and English is a special gift that she shared with me. And Sahar's special knowledge of the art of translating is another amazing gift. Profound thanks to both of them.

I am extremely grateful to my cherished friend, Joshua Landes, a devoted Jew and lover of Hasidism, who encouraged and supported the translation of this special collection. Most appropriately, he has dedicated this book in honor of his beloved mother and sisters.

I am also truly grateful to the Lieberman family of Montreal, Canada, who supported the publication of this book. The Lieberman family are an outstanding example to all in their support for Torah institutions and scholarship, and it is especially meaningful that they have dedicated this book in memory of their grandfather and fathers, all born in Litzhensk.

I am also grateful to Ashirah Yosefah, of Koren Publishers Jerusalem, for guiding my book from manuscript to press, to Aryeh Grossman of Koren Publishers for his valued assistance in enabling this project to become a reality, and to Esther Cameron and Debbie Ismailoff, whose superb editing is deeply appreciated.

In closing I want to thank my devoted wife, Maxine (Miryam), who tolerated my obsession with the computer during our first years after making aliya. Working on editing and translating this amazing book has brought me great joy and renewed appreciation of the Jewish tradition to which we have together devoted our lives.

Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins
The Holy City of Jerusalem
Rosh Hodesh Shevat 5778

Introduction

REB ZUSHA OF ANIPOLI

Reb Zusha (1718–1800), son of Rabbi Eliezer Lipman of Lizhensk, was the essence of piety, simple faith, and pure, genuine love of Jews. He was the authentic symbol of the image of the tzaddik of former times, who had boundless love for his Creator, the Torah, and the Jewish people.

Reb Zusha's learning came second to his deep piety. "Being naive is a sign of great wisdom," said Rabbi Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz. Our father Yaakov was "a mild man who stayed in camp,"¹ but not out of naïveté. He met challenges with Lavan and with Esau. He was wise in his simplicity, and Reb Zusha, too, was simple out of choice.

In the city of Anipoli, the last city where Rabbi Dov Ber, the great Maggid of Mezritch, lived, Reb Zusha guided the Hasidim and merited to be buried next to the grave of this illustrious leader of the hasidic movement. He served him in life and served him in death.

When Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi published his famous work, the *Tanya*, the foundational book of hasidic philosophy, he did not seek approbations from the great scholars of Israel. The approbations of Reb Zusha and his colleague Rabbi Yehudah Leib HaKohen of Anipoli, author of *Or HaGanuz*, were all he sought.

1. Gen. 25:27.

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Rabbi Shneur Zalman testified to the godliness of Reb Zusha: “His prayers were filled with extreme awe, so that in the ‘Temple of Awe’ his awe was amazing.” When Reb Zusha lay ill in his last years and was confined to his sickbed, Rabbi Shneur Zalman made a special trip to Anipoli to serve him.

Reb Zusha entered the garden of *Hasidut* before his brother Reb Elimelekh. When Reb Elimelekh still opposed the new trend, Reb Zusha was already learning from the Maggid of Mezritch. Zusha worked on his brother, exposing him to all kinds of teachings, lessons, stories, and wise insights, until he brought his mind and heart into the new movement. And thus Elimelekh became a rabbi, rose to the level of master and guide to generations, and established his own *beit midrash*. He holds a place of honor even today as a spiritual guide to the Hasidism of Poland and Galicia, while the image of Zusha the wanderer persists to this day.

Zusha always remained Zusha – a simple, honest Jew, never touched by a drop of arrogance or egotism. Reb Zusha never created a congregation, never aspired to greatness or glory, to heroism or royalty. He had but one desire: to be Zusha. What benefit would it serve, he taught, were I to exchange places with our father Avraham? Avraham would be Zusha, and what benefit would come to the world?

Reb Zusha was completely wrapped in ecstasy. The kindling oil of enthusiasm never left him for even a moment. His soul longed endlessly for the greatness of God. He was totally at one with the essence of his Creator.

Reb Zusha had no special approach to Torah study, to Hasidism. He had no secret knowledge; he asked few questions. Nor was he a scholar or one who led followers to ways of faith. In his core he was a simple, honest Jew, a hidden *tzaddik*, who stands in the corner and prays quietly. One hardly notices him or pays him special attention. But by dint of the purity of his prayers, free of any cunning or biases, all the prayers in the *beit midrash* found their way to Heaven.

Reb Zusha was well known as a symbol of the movement of those who were pious, God-fearing, and pure, who sought nothing for themselves – neither lucre nor glory, not pleasure in this world or the next. He was simply pure. He fitted the definition of the upright delineated by Eliezer Steinman, the great scholar of Hasidism in this generation. Steinman writes:

One who is upright is always upright, totally honest. He is completely upright. No one is more upright than such a one. The upright person needs not a speck of guile. He is pure and innocent. His uprightness is limitless. Thus he is completely fit and honest. He is honest because there are no detours on the ladder toward heaven, and no slipperiness on the slope downwards.

You might say: An upright person has no depth. Not so! He is deeper than the deepest. A deep person must delve rigorously to reach the depths. But the upright one reaches the depths even on the surface. The upright one does not have to be a scholar. He recites “Blessed are You” and has already reached the depths. He takes a piece of chalk in his hand, or a flower, or a crumb of bread, and behold, he has already attained the whole world. The upright one is always able to transmute a little into a lot. The upright one is righteous. The upright one always stands on the edge of the abyss, but holiness protects him; “God protects the upright.”

Reb Zusha is that upright person. Others reached great heights, penned holy books, left behind important Torah interpretations, and he is just Reb Zusha. But when one pronounces the name of Reb Zusha, it has a powerfully strong and majestic sound. Reb Zusha’s name means something.

The upright person is not the opposite of the scholar. On the contrary, he is an absolute scholar. And he is not a close neighbor to the one “who doesn’t know how to ask.” With him, he doesn’t know how to get angry, or become embittered. In any case the upright one is not gratuitously contentious, he is not one who starts an argument about the order of the universe, or about the nature of creation, or who strives to solve problems and explain riddles. Since he has no arguments, he needs no answers.

The upright one is righteous, in other words, complete. He finds completeness everywhere. With an open heart he is assured in his heart, in his soul, in his blood, in all his limbs, that whatever the Creator made, He made it well and at the proper time. It is obvious that the upright one sees no evil. There is no such

thing as evil. Goodness means absolute simplicity, even though it brings nothing new. He is simply good from birth.

The world of the righteous one is an endless song, a thread of grace and harmony covers it completely. This is not a matter of special intelligence, in the realm of wisdom or at the edge of wisdom. The righteous one is complete in his soul, and since completeness and a greeting of peace² is in his very bones he shares greetings with everyone. Every morning he says, as does Zusha: “Good morning to you, O world!” Even to the morning itself he says: “Good morning to you, O morning.” The soul of the righteous does not break. It comes from the source of the souls which fled before the eating of the Tree of Knowledge, prior to *shevirat hakelim* (the “breaking of the vessels”).³

REB ELIMELEKH OF LIZHENSK

Reb Elimelekh (1717–1787), also the son of Eliezer Lipman of Lizhensk, was one of the most important leaders of the hasidic movement.

In his youth he took on the burden of exile and accepted great agony and suffering. Under the influence of his brother Reb Zusha, he embraced Hasidism. He visited the Maggid, Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch, and became one of his disciples.

Following the death of Rabbi Dov Ber, Reb Elimelekh traveled to Lizhensk and began to spread the light of Hasidism in Galicia and in Poland. As a leader he acquired for himself such a central position in Hasidism that he was compared to the revered Baal Shem Tov (the Besht).

Reb Elimelekh merited, appropriately, the appellation of “founder of practical Hasidism.”

In accordance with the needs of the time, Reb Elimelekh equated the practical form of Hasidism with the deep, theoretical philosophy of the Maggid of Mezritch on the subject of the tzaddik and his qualities. The tzaddik, in the view of Reb Elimelekh, is holy at birth, just as an

2. This is a play on words: “*shalem*,” meaning whole, complete, and “shalom,” the everyday greeting, which means “peace.”

3. *Sha'ar HaHasidut*, Hotzaat Neuman, Tel Aviv, 317.

oldest child is holy from his mother's womb, and he is considered a son of the Blessed Holy One.

Before aligning himself with the hasidic movement, Reb Elimelekh was a kabbalist who practiced asceticism in his life. Despite the fact that one of the characteristics of Hasidism is that it does not reject worldly matters, there are clear indications that Reb Elimelekh continued to cling to his former ideas.

The Baal Shem Tov was the architect of Hasidism. In his shelter Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye and Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch established their home and the home of their loyal students, but this meeting place for scholars and aspiring tzaddikim became a firm and faithful home only once Reb Elimelekh set in it a table for guests from the class of simple folk. He made Hasidism an inn for the masses, a house for the people. The Baal Shem Tov set up an "Ohel Moed,"⁴ his students turned it into a tabernacle, and Reb Elimelekh built a small sanctuary, since it was he who established the table, which was the foundation for the spread of Hasidism and the leadership of the community.

Since Reb Elimelekh gave Hasidism its final form, refined it, and emphasized the importance of the great tzaddik on whom the whole world relies, he made it a useful, sought-after tool for the masses. Some people revered him as much as they revered the Baal Shem Tov, as if the hasidic movement had two *hatanei Torah* or two *hatanei Bereshit* standing under one *huppa*. However, it is not appropriate to compare souls with weights and measures like things of this world. Every exceptional person is unique.

The Besht occupies a special place of honor. He is almost not in the category of flesh and blood. He is a spark from the world of legend. He is a messenger of divine providence who was sent to the people at a time of turmoil to extricate them from a mire of decadence and depression of the soul. He is a kind of heavenly voice from the soul of the nation, emerging to awaken and encourage. But Reb Elimelekh is not superhuman, nor is he a genius. He is a simple Jew who rose from the simple people to become a leader of the community, and this is the source of his great strength and special merit.

4. The Tent of Meeting in the Bible.

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Reb Elimelekh emphasized especially the spiritual exile, since he knew that the Shekhina (Divine Presence) is with us in exile. Thus “one must meditate alone before the sun rises, when it is a favorable hour to weep over the exile of the Shekhina until there are no more tears.” It is a clear sign that a person repents “when one weeps over the exile of the Shekhina,” since “in this way one will know if he is on the true path in his service of the Blessed One, when he says that he worries and is pained constantly about the exile of the Shekhina and the people of Israel.”

Like the rest of the leaders of Hasidism, Reb Elimelekh emphasized the importance of joy in divine service, and along with this he had an essential understanding of the need for a measure of seriousness, which, according to what is written about him, also existed in his life.



Reb Elimelekh's book, *Noam Elimelekh*, published in Lemberg in 1787, quickly became an important guidebook for Hasidim and was reprinted many times. Rabbi Mendel of Rimanov, the great *Admor*⁵ of Galicia, said, “Only after my immersion in the *mikve*, on Erev Shabbat, can I plumb the depths of *Noam Elimelekh*.”

Written as a commentary on the Torah, *Noam Elimelekh* contains much material detailing the ideology and way of life of Hasidism. Reb Elimelekh highlights the idea of the tzaddik. He stresses the role of the rebbe as the source of understanding, as a highly evolved human who lives on a lofty plane, and who is the bridge between God and man. In most editions there is a list of *hanhagot* (religious practices) which Hasidim of all streams try to apply.

Noam Elimelekh is one of the most important foundational books of Hasidism, and it became a sacred volume. Many considered this book as a remedy and placed it at the head of those who were ill or giving birth.

As we already mentioned, Reb Elimelekh came to Hasidism not on his own, but rather under the influence of his brother Reb Zusha. Nevertheless, he eventually reached very high levels of understanding of

5. This is the Hebrew acronym for *Adonenu, Morenu, VeRabbenu* (our lord, our teacher, and our master).

Hasidism and became a teacher of its precepts. Even the giants among the rebbes sang the praises of his book, which to this day is considered a major resource, similar to *Toldot Yaakov Yosef*. Since its publication there has not been another book written on the philosophy of Hasidism equal to it. It is filled with the light of redemption, freeing man from the vain pleasures, pain, and sickness of this world. Yet Reb Elimelekh himself, in contrast to the rest of the great scholars of Hasidism, and even in contrast to his brother Reb Zusha, was not redeemed.



Reb Elimelekh of Lizhensk was only seventeen years old at the beginning of the Baal Shem Tov's leadership and about forty when the Baal Shem Tov died. Had he wanted to, he could have established a connection with him lasting many years, until the latter's death. But Reb Elimelekh chose not to do so, because he did not approve of the appellation "Baal Shem (Master of the Name), as magic makers and those who dealt with oaths and holy names – methods that the holy Ari already considered to be dangerous and outdated – were referred to by this title. Only after Reb Elimelekh recognized the holiness and purity of the Baal Shem Tov and it was clear to him that the title Baal Shem had no connection to the Baal Shem Tov did he join his camp. Since at that point the Baal Shem was no longer alive, Reb Elimelekh accepted the authority of his student, Rabbi Dov Ber, and attained an important position among his followers.

Following Reb Elimelekh were his superb students: Rabbi Yisrael of Kozhnitz, who was dubbed "the second Baal Shem Tov"; Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin; Rabbi Mendel of Rimanov; and Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta. All of these individuals were considered by the Hasidim as the major followers and spiritual heirs of Reb Elimelekh of Lizhensk.



Compared to all the other great teachers of Hasidism, who were men of esoteric knowledge, Reb Elimelekh's teachings were the most open. It is easier for us to grasp his spirit, to identify with his struggles, to dwell

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in his proximity and hear from him both new insights into Torah and stories about life and its complications.

Just as the Maggid of Mezritch built his hasidic philosophy on the foundation of the ideas of the Besht, so too did Reb Elimelekh design his beit midrash with the concepts that he imbibed from the Baal Shem Tov's teachings. The Maggid was like a father and patron for his students, and so was Reb Elimelekh. They were similar in their ideas, but different in their actions, of one mind in thought, but different in goals and aspirations. The Maggid was a teacher to students, while Reb Elimelekh was a teacher to rebbes. The Maggid taught the philosophy of Hasidism, while Reb Elimelekh was a guide to the hasidic path.



Hasidic literature, whose existence spans two hundred years, is surprising in several ways, not only in its volume. It stands out in the multiplicity of its subject matter and its creativity. It includes volumes of philosophy and ideology, commentaries on the Torah, and expository essays on rabbinic literature. It also includes sermons, homilies, reprimands, discussions and parables, wills, and stories and legends.

Now *The Holy Brothers* joins this growing body of literature. Its objective is to create a window through which the reader can view the essence of his own life, and, in the words of the founder of the hasidic movement, Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, "to affix a mezuzah on the gates of the universe, to prevent evildoers from entering," and thus to enjoy the words of Torah taken from that treasured tome, *Noam Elimelekh*, and from the many collections of tales reflecting the way of life of these holy brothers, Reb Zusha and Reb Elimelekh, may their merit protect us and the entire nation of Israel forever.

Simcha Raz

Jerusalem, the tenth of Tevet, 5769

(the *yahrtzeit* of my mother, Hannah Malkah Rakover, of the Mandelbaum family, granddaughter of the great sage Rabbi Menahem-Nahum Epstein of Kobryn, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing)

Awe of Heaven

HIS TEACHING IS IN ORDER

Just as a father holds the hand of his young son to lead him on the way, so Reb Elimelekh grasps the hands of his Hasidim to show them the right path. His well-known “Tzetel Katan” (handbook for serving God) is the embodiment of a *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (abbreviated code of Jewish law) for proper behavior, a kind of menu of mitzvot and good deeds to achieve perfection in Hasidism and in piety. It is a scroll of testimony to the special method of teaching to which he was partial.

At the bottom of the “Tzetel Katan” it is written in simple fashion, “These are the things which if one does them he shall live by them.” In this small handbook there are no arguments regarding Jewish laws, no kabbalistic meditations on the unity of God, but rather proper advice, clear and brief, regarding one’s customs in thought, speech, and action that one should practice in order to keep away from sin and enter the gates of holiness.

First and most important of all is the acceptance of the yoke of the sovereignty of Heaven – to be at all times literally a servant of the Creator, to keep the mitzvot. And it is possible to keep the mitzvot at every single moment.

The Hasidism of Reb Elimelekh was focused completely on deeds. Even from this perspective there still remained with him some remnants of the ideology of the older Hasidism, which preceded the approach of the Baal Shem Tov (the Besht). Reb Elimelekh still did not remove from

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his heart the idea – more accurately the feeling – that one cannot attain perfection of the soul except through the destruction of the body, and that there is no way for the soul to rise other than through the flame that burns away materiality. However, the furnace of afflictions he directed toward himself alone. In “Tzetel Katan,” which is a path for others, there is no mention of an obligation to accept punishments and afflictions, but there is guidance about the use of language, purity of thought, study of Torah, and prayer with sincerity.

Also included are explanations about what one should do to acquire positive character traits: he should not be lazy or irresponsible; he should accustom himself to arise from his bed early, clean his body, and go quickly to the beit midrash; and he should “become habituated for forty consecutive days to pay attention to the words coming from his mouth, both secular words and spiritual words, and he should imagine that someone standing next to him is encouraging him in a loud voice to fulfill all these instructions regarding behavior. And when he accustoms himself thus, then in the course of time there will arise in him a great awakening of his soul, ‘sparks of fire in a mighty flame, a very flame of the Lord.’¹ This is because ‘every habit becomes a master.’”

Thus we see in all his simple counsels, some of which are very down-to-earth, the sensitive educator in him, along with the correct logic of a physician. Other tzaddikim were occupied with remedies, charms, and invocations, and would teach, caution, and arouse the people with shouts and crying, or with songs and dances. Reb Elimelekh sought to improve the people with medicines. All of his words were healing. But he was careful not to stuff them with sharp, bitter medicines such as those which he himself used. In his booklet of suggested behavior we do not find encouragement for fasting or self-flagellation.

In *Noam Elimelekh* he grants permission to others to serve the Blessed One with all types of service, to bring the material into holiness, and thereby “the Blessed One gives people permission to enjoy a bit of this world.” In his commentary on *Parashat Ki Tissa*, on the verse “Take for yourself choice spices ... solidified myrrh ...,”² he writes:

1. Song 8:6.

2. Ex. 30:23.

A sweet smell will accompany your deeds; namely, that even with regard to the most material things, from all of the materiality there should emit a pleasant smell. This is the meaning of “solidified myrrh,”³ which means “bitter” – even if there is something whose purpose is all bitter, a sweet smell should come from it. The word “solidified” (in Hebrew *dror*, literally “freedom”) means that you should see that there is freedom, that is, freedom from the angel of death, namely from the devil and oppression of Israel by the nations, all of this you should do with regard to all material matters.

Therefore let no one say that it is forbidden to enjoy things of this world, and that since everything is for the sake of God’s name, I will separate myself from all matters of the material world, and not eat or drink at all, and I will be an ascetic. One should not say that, but rather one must strengthen oneself little by little to break the strength of our cravings, and to turn the matter around, around and around, until one finds the point of the essential holiness and its root in all material things.

This holy person, this ascetic, was very strict with himself, fasting constantly. But when he came to teach people the paths of Hasidism and holiness and to set before them a table they could sit around, he educated them according to their nature and their path.

At the same time Reb Elimelekh urged caution in relying on one’s own perceptions. Heaven forbid that we should judge the divine providence of the all-knowing Creator with the criteria of human consciousness, which is activated involuntarily by the outside influence of the senses and is subject to the natural constraints of knowledge and experience, without taking into consideration whether the spiritual ear wants to absorb it or not. Since the essence of the Unattainable is exalted above all human concepts, we must hold that, faced with the apparent contradiction between knowledge and choice, one must assume free choice on the part of the Creator, and say by way of allegory that divine providence possesses unlimited freedom; its knowledge possesses

3. The Hebrew words *mor* (myrrh) and *mar* (bitter) are similar.

unlimited freedom to act or hide the matters from the field of its vision, as it is written: "I shall certainly keep My face hidden on that day."⁴ Let us not forget that it is forbidden to rely for even a short while on our defective and partial power of distinction when facing these contradictory visions. As the Rambam teaches, we resemble a wanderer in the dark of night, when the path is not lighted other than by the glow of lightning, which appears for a short while and is gone. We must not rely on our ideas, but rather on the facts that our Torah transmits to us, as the revelation of the will of the Blessed One.

YOU SHOULD TAKE LEAVE OF MY ZUSHA

Hasidism achieved a great victory when two brothers, Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke, the rabbi of Nikolsburg, and Rabbi Pinhas HaLevi Horowitz, the rabbi of Frankfurt, joined the fellowship of Mezritch. In the early days of the movement, at its sunrise, Hasidism was a kind of spiritual power, built on those things that are neither weighed nor measured: clinging to God, the lifting of the soul and the spirit, joy and longing, awe and reverence, love of God and the Jewish people, thrill and wonder.

When these brothers joined the students of the Maggid of Mezritch, they brought with them precious assets of Torah from the house of their father, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Horowitz of Chortkov, and from the beit midrash of Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (the Gra): mastery and sharpness, dignity and depth. The joy in the camp of the Hasidim was great. Even the Maggid himself, Rabbi Dov Ber, rejoiced in welcoming them. He turned his face toward the brothers and said, "I have found a house full of candles, candles flickering but not burning. One spark left my beit midrash, fiery sparks flew off from Hasidism, and the candles caught on fire and became a flame."

However, these sons of the pious Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Chortkov were not satisfied when they first came to Mezritch. They remembered the beit midrash of the Vilna Gaon, his room and the Gaon himself, his Torah, his study of the *Humash* (the five books of Moses) – and they missed him. "There," they would say, "we really scooped up Torah with our hands from buckets..." In their first days in Mezritch they were

4. Deut. 31:18.

living in an atmosphere of legends woven around a man who remained mysterious, whose hasidic students saw in him majesty, genius, holiness, blessing; and they, the brothers, felt almost nothing. Here was a special spiritual inspiration, a unique style which expressed itself in song, with an emphasis on the sigh, conveyed with enthusiasm – outward signs to which they had not yet adjusted – and they almost decided to return to Vilna. When they entered the Maggid's room in order to take leave of him, he blessed them in parting and said, "It would be worthwhile if you would also take leave of my Zusha."

Back to Zusha, whom they knew. A righteous man, but.... Yes, they remembered that after meeting them for the first time, he came to them and complained that he was ignorant, illiterate, and he wanted them to teach him a chapter of Mishna every day. They complied and began to teach him the first *mishna* of tractate Berakhot: "From what time may one recite the *Shema*?" They would translate and explain to him each word: "*May-ay-matai* (from what time)" "*korin* (may one recite)" "*Keriat Shema* (the recitation of the three paragraphs of the *Shema*)..." Suddenly Zusha lay down on the floor and began to shout in a loud voice, in dismay and dread: "Who said that '*may-ay-matai*' means 'from what time?' Maybe the interpretation of the mishna is not '*may-ay-matai*,' 'from what time' but rather '*may-ayma*,' 'from fear' – from fear of the Almighty one must recite 'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.'" When he said the word "*ehad*," "one," his soul almost departed....

A GENIUS IN AWE

Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk used to say: Just as there is a *gaon* (genius) in halakha, so there are *geonim* in character. One of them is Reb Zusha of Anipoli, who was a giant in the laws of love, awe, and modesty.

HIS AWE COMES BEFORE HIS WISDOM

It happened once that Reb Zusha prayed before the Blessed One, and this is what he said:

Alas! My love for You is greater than my fear of You.

Make it happen, Master of the Universe, that I will tremble and fear You
As the angels and seraphs (fiery angels)

When Your holy name comes clearly from their mouth.

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He heard the blessed name in his prayers, and great fear came upon him
Because of the fear of his Creator.

Reb Zusha jumped and spread his hands to Heaven in prayer:

Zusha does not want to be afraid like a dog,

he wants to love You like Zusha.

And the Blessed One listened in His great mercy to his voice.

THE POWER OF LOOKING

“He took him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven and count the stars’”
(Genesis 15:5).

The Blessed One said to Avraham:

Do not lower yourself to descend from your level to matters of this world,

Only “Look toward heaven,” namely, look at the majesty of God.

One can look at the majesty of God especially

When he looks heavenward and sees the stars in their courses.

They shine with their bright light.

And from this, awe will come to man

to understand the majesty of the Blessed One.

This is the meaning of “count the stars.”

– Reb Elimelekh of Lizhensk

LET THE INNER PERSON MATCH THE OUTER PERSON

“When you were famished and weary, and he was undeterred by fear of
God” (Deuteronomy 25:18).

There are some people who weary themselves much

with service of the Creator

Until they are very tired,

And nevertheless they have no fear of God.

– Reb Zusha of Anipoli