



# חסידים הראשונים

## Stories of the Early Chassidim

### A TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH GAN EDEN

This story is about a man who we will call Shlomo.

Shlomo was a rich man who was about 50 years old. He was born into a family of Lubavitcher Chassidim, but he had gone away from living a frum, Chassidshe life. He did not keep the Mitzvos anymore, and he hardly had anything to do with the Jewish community. However, since he came from a family of Chassidim, he had big pictures of the Alter Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek hanging in his living room.

One day, he had to go and visit a certain Chassid in his house to discuss an urgent business matter.

When he entered the house he saw tables set as if for a Yom Tov, and everyone was singing happily. Seeing his guest arriving, the host immediately rose to welcome him, brought him into his office, and they discussed their business matters.

When that was finished, the guest asked: "Excuse me, but what is the celebration in there? Is it a family Simcha that I could wish you Mazal Tov for?"

"Yes," replied the host, "it is indeed a family simchah. Right now we are talking by telephone with our fathers and grandfathers in Gan Eden. And we were so glad to hear regards from there that we decided to make a feast ..."

The guest, of course, had no idea what he was expected to say in answer to this kind of talk.

Seeing his embarrassment, the host continued: "Today is Yud-Tes Kislev. In Gan Eden, in the place of the Alter Rebbe, there is a great deal of rejoicing. All the tzaddikim have gathered there in order to wish him Mazel Tov on his liberation, and on the tens of thousands of people who have become Chassidim.

Our fathers and grandfathers who used to travel long distances to visit the Rebbeim of their generations are there too for the big celebration, and we, their children and grandchildren, are rejoicing together with them over this Yom Tov, which is both theirs and ours."

These words drove deep into the heart of Shlomo. He remembered his childhood, when Chassidishe farbrengens just like this one used to take place in his own father's house. He felt a violent urge to join in with those happy chassidim, if only for a moment.

But then again, he felt himself to be so strange and far from their lifestyle that he could not gather the strength to express his wish. He almost felt ashamed of

himself. How could he, who ate trefah food and who did not keep Shabbos, join in with this pious group of chassidim?

The host had the sensitivity to rise to the occasion unasked, and while inviting him to join the celebration for a moment, said: "By the way, my friend, while you're in there you'll get regards from your father and your grandfather too ..."

And he saw to it that his guest should feel as if - literally - at home.

An hour passed, two hours, three. Shlomo forgot altogether that he had booked theater tickets for himself and some important officials that he was friends with. He was drawn so deeply into the joy of that gathering that he imagined that he was back in his parents' home as in his childhood.

He recalled the festive meal which was prepared every Yud-Tes Kislev in his grandfather's little shul. He remembered too the seudah which his grandfather used to hold whenever he came home together with his friends after a visit to his Rebbe in far-off Lubavitch. His grandmother used to fuss happily over the preparations for that meal, and his mother and aunts all shared in helping for the joyous occasion.

After quite some hours had passed, he finally went home. The first thing he did was take a long, long look at the pictures in his library. Then he sat down and davened Maariv with sobs that came from somewhere deep within him.

Within a few days he had bought new dishes and had his whole kitchen koshered, and was himself well on the way to becoming a new man.

*[From Sippurei Chassidim]*