

## THE ACCUSATIONS BEGIN

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

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 witness<sup>1</sup>, 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 first written, back in March, 2013, it would have totally changed the whole picture.

We have translated this letter from the original Hebrew and made some very minor adaptations to include it in this book. (Note: The footnotes are part of the original letter, and were written by Rav Rompler):

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish religious law requires a minimum of two witnesses to bring a case to court.



**self-sacrifice; who is completely abstinent from all mundane worldly matters<sup>iii</sup>; 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*<sup>2</sup>, 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<sup>iv</sup>....

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<sup>v</sup>, 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]

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

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<sup>2</sup> Literally that an egg can be eaten with dairy. This is a Talmudic term for a very obvious conclusion that goes without saying.

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<sup>vi</sup> in other areas<sup>vii</sup> in the past have no reason not to protest against the *chillul Hashem* being caused by those who are spreading the rumors<sup>viii</sup> ...

[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 a Tzaddik, 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*

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<sup>i</sup> 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.

<sup>ii</sup> 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.

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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.

<sup>iii</sup> 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).

<sup>iv</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>v</sup> 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.

<sup>vi</sup> 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.

<sup>vii</sup> 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.

<sup>viii</sup> 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.