



## JAIL

Lately in the news we have been hearing about all kinds of people being arrested, for terrible crimes. People we might have thought would never go to jail, will probably be spending long sentences behind bars. In this week's portion we also encounter a number of people in jail - Yosef, who is unfairly accused by Potifar's wife, and two of Par'o's officials, the cupbearer, and the baker.

This week is also the 19th day of Kislev, when Lubavitch Chasidim commemorate the release of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi from prison in czarist Russia. In the fall of 1798, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was informed upon and arrested on trumped-up charges of supporting the Ottoman Empire. His informers said that he would urge his followers to send money to the Land of Israel, "evidence" of his alleged insurrectionist aspirations (in fact, the money was sent to support poor Jews). At the time, the Land of Israel was a part of the Ottoman Empire, which was at war with Russia. Rabbi Shneur Zalman was arrested and charged with treason on claims that his teachings and activities threatened the imper-

ial authority of the czar. He was imprisoned on an island fortress in the Neva River in Petersburg.

In his interrogations, he was compelled to present to the czar's ministers the basic tenets of Judaism and explain various points of chassidic philosophy and practice.

Chasidim tell the story that once the Czar himself came to interrogate the Rabbi Schneur Zalman, but the Czar didn't want anyone to know that he himself had come, so he disguised himself. But Rabbi Scnuer Zalman recognized the Czar immediately, and blessed him with the Jewish blessing for kings - SHENATAN MICHVODO L'VASR VADAM.

The Czar got very angry. "I am not the Czar", he said. "How do you dare think that the Czar himself would come and visit you in jail? Just because of this crazy idea of yours you deserve a very severe punishment."

Rabbi Scnuer Zalman answered, "But you know that even God, the King of the Kings, visited someone in prison."

The Czar shouted back, "that is some twisted Chasidik logic". (because he had heard the allegations of other Jews against the Chasidic way of learning)

Rabbi Scnuer Zalman answered politely, "Excuse me, your honor the king, this is not just a Chasidic interpretation, there is an explicit verse in the Bible (from this week's

portion) that says that Yosef was placed in prison ... and God was with Yosef when he was there - VAYHI HASHEM ET YOSEF (39:21).

The Czar liked this answer, and treated him nicer.

After 53 days, Rabbi Scner Zalman was exonerated of all charges and released. The 53 days of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's imprisonment are said to correspond to the 53 chapters of the first section of the Tanya that he wrote. For this work he is called the Baal Hatanya.

His release was more than a personal liberation. It has become a major event in the history of Chassidism. Following his release on the 19th of Kislev, he redoubled his efforts, disseminating his teachings on a far broader scale, and with more detailed and "down-to-earth" explanations, than before. He is considered the first Rebbe of Chabad (also known as the "Alter Rebbe" in Yiddish), as he founded the "Chabad" approach - a philosophy and system of study, meditation, and character refinement, that made these abstract concepts rationally comprehensible and practically applicable in daily life.

On Yud-Tet Kislev it is customary for Lubavitchers to greet each other with "May you be signed and sealed for a good year in the study and ways of Chassidus", to sing verses from Tehilim 55, "He has redeemed my soul in peace", a reference to the experiences of the Alter Rebbe

and to eat kasha to remember the food the Alter Rebbe ate in prison. So here is a simple kasha recipe. Add onions and bowtie noodles for kasha varnishkes, a favorite eastern European traditional Chanuka dish.

## KASHA

1½ cups Kasha

1 egg, beaten

2½ cups boiling water

1-2 tsp salt

Mix groats and egg in saucepan over low heat. When grains separate add water and salt to taste. Cover. Cook over low heat for about 15 minutes till all water is absorbed. Serve as a side dish or fry up some onions and add bowties. ♪