

By RABBI  
CHAYIM S. CHASAN

# RARE DISTINCTION

**W**hat's in a name? It all depends on where the name originated. A last name can say a lot about you — your family, their origin, even their professions. *Schneider*, for example, means "tailor," and *Schreiber* means "writer." Or perhaps your ancestor might have been a *shochet*. Or, of course, a *Levy* or a *Cohen*.

Many Ashkenazic Jews carry German-sounding names, some of which have been Anglicized. *Mendelssohn*, for example, means "son (*sohn* in German) of Mendel." As these Jews migrated eastward, the names became Slavic. For example, *wicz* or *witz* replaced *sohn*, giving us names such as *Berkowitz* ("son of Baruch"). Among the Sephardim, the Hebrew word for "son of," *Ben*, may be used, such as Ben Yosef.

You may have noticed a pattern among many of these names. They are *patrilineal* — that is, they descend from the background of the father. Rare were the people named after their mothers, so rare that anyone who was must have had a mother of rare distinction.

Such a person was Reb Aryeh Leib Sarahs. A student of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid of Mezhibezh, he became a saintly figure in his own right. His life remains shrouded in mystery: he never lived in one town; instead, he traveled frequently, leaving behind a trail of followers. Like his mentors, he was a reputed miracle-worker, said to heal the sick, feed the poor, revoke anti-Semitic decrees, and foresee certain events. If Reb Leib Sarahs displayed any of the traits of his father, also a holy man, it was the ability to help Jews at the right time and right place.

Though stories and legends are told about him, only a few are reliably documented; nevertheless, they are enough to instill awe in many a Jewish heart. Reb Leib Sarahs was born on the 17th of Tammuz in the year 5490 (1730); he passed away on the 4th of Adar II, in 5551 (1791).

How did he get his mother's name instead of his father's? The answer lies in the character of his mother.

**S**arah was an innkeeper's daughter. Like most Jewish girls of her era, she was modest and retiring, and generally kept herself away from public view. She was also very pretty, which was more the reason why she preferred to stay indoors. She did not wish to attract attention, especially from the people who came to her father's inn.

Jews and non-Jews alike stopped by for drink and conversation; sometimes there was more drink than conversation. At those times Sarah knew not to go anywhere near the inn.

The inn actually belonged to the local nobleman, whose son, a restless fellow, had a strange fascination with weddings. He enjoyed getting married — over and over. Apparently he had trouble finding the right girl: no sooner did he recite the nuptial vows than he'd tire of his bride and annul the marriage. At times, instead of releasing her to marry someone else, he kept her as a slave.

Needless to say, fathers everywhere worried for their daughters and did everything to keep them out of sight. But this was impossible, and eventually Sarah caught the eye of the nobleman's friend. The friend in turn informed the son, and a match was made.

Everyone knew about the upcoming marriage — everyone, that is, except for Sarah and her father. One night the innkeeper was serving an

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unusually large crowd when one of the non-Jews, well into his cups, hiccuped, "Drink up, lads. There's more than enough reason to celebrate. The lord's son is having another wedding tomorrow night."

"Who's the bride?"

"Sarah, the daughter of Moshe the innkeeper!"

Moshe, standing there, went into shock. Late at night, after he closed up the tavern, he ran to the neighboring *melamed* (teaching rabbi) to seek his advice. Though it was

not yet dawn and Moshe knew the man might still be asleep, he felt he had no choice.

This *melamed*, Reb Yosef, was an interesting and enigmatic character. Whether he had ever intended to be

a *melamed* was unclear; he had arrived in town many years earlier, a widower wishing to be left alone. However, he soon displayed a knack for teaching children and inspiring them with Torah. Because of him, these children, once they turned bar mitzvah, were learned enough to study further.

To Moshe's surprise, Reb Yosef was wide awake and sitting by a candle, studying. "Yes?" he asked.

Before Moshe could answer, Reb Yosef stared straight into his eyes. In that state he remained, silent and meditative, until he softly said, "Do not worry. Everything will happen for the best. Go home, and I shall come to you in the morning."

After dawn Reb Yosef arrived, calm and collected, at the inn. He told the innkeeper to prepare a wedding — a large wedding, one where the entire town would be invited.

"You must also invite the local

## THE MASTER SINGER

**N**ear the town of Serentch, in Hungary, a young Jewish boy of eight was tending to his geese. He spent his time singing lovely and moving Hungarian melodies.

His fine voice caught the attention of the itinerant Reb Leib Sarahs. The holy man jumped off his wagon and approached the boy.

"What is your name, child?"

"Yitzchak," the boy replied.

"Tell me, Yitzchak. Do you love G-d?"

"Very much," the boy replied. "But all I can offer Him is song. I have nothing else."

Sadly he told the man how he lived alone with his mother, a widow. He enjoyed making up words and tunes while out in the fields.

"Take me to your mother," Reb Leib commanded.

"But, sir," Yitzchak stammered, "the geese—"

"Don't worry. Take them with you. If any damage is done to them, I shall pay."

The boy brought him to his home. The mother, Reizel, plausibly welcomed the guest and offered him refreshment. The boy went off to the side, humming his tunes.

judge, who has the power to arrest even a landlord," he finished.

Moshe was amazed. "Who is getting married?"

"Why, your daughter Sarah, or course."

"To whom?"

The *melamed* smiled. "To me."

The innkeeper was stunned. Sarah, married to Reb Yosef? Why, the man was old enough to be Moshe's own father! Moshe himself had been one of Reb Yosef's pupils. The thought of his precious young daughter marrying this man was frightening. Nevertheless, marrying the lord's son was worse. Moshe realized that he had no choice. The match was one that had to be made.

Within hours the canopy was erected, food and drink were brought in, and guests were invited. As soon as darkness fell, the *chasan* and *kallah* recited the blessings, drank the wine, and broke the glass. The ceremony

was followed by feasting and rejoicing.

At midnight, the lord's son arrived with his friend and four armed guards. "There she is," the friend said, pointing.

The lord's son tried to seize her, but the innkeeper intervened. "She is a married woman now," he said. The judge, who was sitting behind Moshe, rose and asked the lord's son to leave. Sul- lenly he did; the feast- ing continued for an- other hour, and Sarah was saved.

Rather than go home with his bride, Reb Yosef escorted her back to her parents, bade them all good night, and prepared to leave. "I shall return tomorrow and tell you what is to be

*Rather than go home with his bride, Reb Yosef escorted her back to her parents, and prepared to leave.*

done now."

The parents, over- joyed, thanked him profusely. But Sarah stood there watching, a tear in her eye.

The next day Reb Yosef came back. "Your daughter and I must travel to the nearest big city," he said to Moshe. "There we should find a rabbinic court, where a proper get can be writ- ten up for your daugh- ter. Then she'll be free to remarry someone suitable."

When the instruc- tions were brought to Sarah, she firmly declared, "No!"

"No?" her father cried.

"Yosef saved my life and my soul. Someone willing to do that must bear a special soul himself. I am indebted to him — more than that, I feel that my soul is intertwined with his. I wish to remain his wife. To repay his kindness, I shall serve him faithfully and give him comfort in his old age."

So she did. Much to Reb Yosef's delight, she proved a doting wife.

A year later, a son was born. His father gave him the name Aryeh Leib; it was his mother, however, who gave his last name. Henceforth the boy was called Leib Sarahs, after this righteous woman.

Shortly later, the boy's father passed away — but not before telling his wife that the child she had borne carried a special, holy soul which would bring light into the world. Such a soul, the Ba'al Shem Tov himself later declared, was one of the world's thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim* in its generation. ■

"I would like to know," Reb Leib demanded, "if you are able to afford an education for your child."

"I can make a living," the woman replied, "but a proper teacher for Yitzchak I cannot find."

Reb Leib pondered the problem for a few minutes, then said, "Give me your son. Please. I shall take him to a yeshiva." When the woman hesitated, he added, "Your son has a holy soul. In yeshiva he will not only learn Torah, but will develop into a great leader."

The woman replied that she wished to consult with her son. Little Yitzchak, after hearing the proposition, declared that he wished very much to learn about G-d.

That day the two left for the famed yeshiva of Rabbi Shmelke of Nikelsberg. The boy was a good learner; he proved Reb Leib Sarahs correct by becoming a scholar and a holy soul.

In time the boy became a rebbe himself and a leader of a great dynasty. To us he is known as Rabbi Yitzchak'l Kalaver.

Not only was Reb Yitzchak'l Kalaver known for his saintliness and scholarship, but followers came from far and wide to listen to his singing, which melted their hearts and brought them closer to their Creator.

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## TO OUR READERS

*"Mishenichnas Adar marbin bestn'chah* — When Adar arrives, we increase our joy" reads the title of this issue's cover, which looks forward in appropriately lighthearted fashion to Purim.

"Torah Highlights" and "This Month" discuss various aspects of Purim. In addition, the conclusion of "Mendel" revolves around that holiday.

Rarely do we find a man called not by his father's name, but by his mother's. This is precisely the case with Rabbi Leib Sarahs, one of the early Chassidic rebbes.

In this month's biography, you will read how Reb Leib Sarahs' mother merited having her name memorialized.

One of the stories about Reb Leib Sarah's is told in "Passing Through."

"Unshaken As the Continent," "Our Story," and "Our Wonderful World" do not appear in the current issue, because of space limitations, but will return next month.

We wish all our readers a very happy Purim!

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# MAIL ROOM

## Golden Age Project

I really enjoy reading your magazines. I especially like the "Torah Highlights."

I am doing a project about the Golden Age in Spain. I was wondering if you have any pictures of things during that era. Do you have any pictures of Rabbi Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, Rabbi Yehuda

HaLevi, or the Rambam? If you do, I will be very happy if you please send them to me.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Ilana Cainer

Richmond Hill, Ontario

We are unable to provide pictures or other such materials, and recommend that you ask your librarian for assistance. Good luck!

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