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Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak of Blendov: Lovesick for the Redemption

Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak Shapira of Blendov was born to his father, Rebbe Chaim Meir Yecheil, the grandson of the Maggid of Kozhnitz, and his mother, who was the granddaughter of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizansk. His father named him after the "Holy Jew" and said that all his Torah teachings were for his son, Yaakov Yitzchak. Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak was known for his intense enthusiasm in service of God and his strong stance on matters brought before him, in which he favored no one, regardless of their station. He was extremely modest and avoided any type of honor. He passed away on the 24th of Sivan, 5642 (1882) and was laid to rest in Warsaw. Over twenty thousand people participated in his funeral. After his passing, all five of his sons became Chassidic Rebbes. Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak's Torah teachings were compiled in the book, "Emet L'Yaakov'.

Rebbe Zelig Elazar of Kozhnitz, the son of Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak of Blendov related that on the eve of Passover in the year 5600 (1840), his father heard comments from his grandfather, Rebbe Chaim Meir Yecheil, alluding to the coming of Mashiach very soon. This was further supported by teachings in the Zohar. Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak stated that he did not feel capable or ready to receive the Mashiach. He became so worried that he fell ill with high fever until the holiday of Shavuot, after which he returned to good health, with God's help.

There are 49 days between Passover and Shavuot, the numerical value of *choleh*, ill. A known teaching from Rebbe Abraham the Angel, the son of the Maggid of Mezeritch and from additional tzaddikim is that the days of the Counting of the Omer between Passover and Shavuot are days of potential for the coming of Mashiach. Feelings of not being worthy or prepared for the coming of Mashiach can make one vulnerable to fear (*chil*) and trembling and eventually to illness (*choleh*) during these days. The root and source of any illness is in the emotion described in the Song of Songs, "I am sick with love (for God)."

The main part of the Counting of the Omer takes place during the entire month of Iyar. 'Iyar' is an acronym for "*Ani Hashem Rofecha*" (I am God, your healer). Both the illness and the remedy come in tandem during the days that we count the omer. This is like the Mashiach, himself, who is called "*Bar naflah*" (a person who falls), who falls and rises every moment.

This story is particularly connected to the End of Days alluded to in the Zohar regarding the year 5600 (1840), as per the verse, "In the sixth hundredth year of the



life of Noah...all the fountains of the great deep burst open and the windows of heaven were opened (Genesis 7:11). This allusion to the End of Days pertains to the connection between the wisdom of the Torah (the upper waters) and the wisdom of nature and science (the lower waters), which began to flow with more intensity during this year. The feeling that we are not succeeding in properly unifying Torah and science – and that a gap between them, which delays the redemption, has been created (distancing Jews from Torah observance) – creates illness, existential worry. This should energize us to take proper action to unify these waters, until we are restored to our good, redemptive health, with God's help.