

“Suffering? I Never Experienced Suffering!”

Zman conducted an exclusive interview with the Rebbe of Sassov, shlit'a, about his wife, Rebbetzin Chana Mindel Teitelbaum, a'h, a heroic woman who always had a smile on her face despite living a tragically difficult and relatively short life.

One child with a serious illness is enough to completely disrupt a family. What happens to the family when three children aren't well?

The Sassover Rebbetzin suffered almost every conceivable trouble: she had three children with serious medical conditions and another two whom she buried. She never knew financial stability. Yet through it all she strengthened herself with incredible faith in Hashem and never lost her optimism.

She was even diagnosed with a terminal illness which she valiantly fought. Sadly, she succumbed to the disease early this past summer. Zman presents to our readers an exclusive interview with her noted husband, the Sassover Rebbe, shlit'a, and sheds light on the life of this incredible woman.



Shimon Rosenberg



A huge crowd gathered at the Sassover Beis Medrash in Monsey to pay their final respects to the Sassover Rebbetzin, a woman who served her Creator with honor, joy and pure faith despite the incredible difficulties she faced throughout her 57 years of life.

Her husband, the Sassover Rebbe, *shlit'a*, walked up to the microphone and began speaking with a broken heart. He spoke with the simplicity of a child communicating with his loving father:

Father in Heaven, I ask of you one thing: Don't test me. And if I am destined to be tested, don't bring me to embarrassment. Give us the strength to withstand our tests.

All our strength to withstand tests was due to my Rebbetzin. Now that I am alone I don't know what will be. I don't have the strength. Please don't embarrass me.

I know, Father, that from you comes only good. It is beyond our understanding. Father, I am only flesh and blood! It weighs on my heart. It is hard for me and I ask you to help me. That is my prayer.

I want to tell my Rebbetzin something: You are the one who used to say, "The One Above said so and it will be good." You were the one who taught me that the One Above wants it that way and it will be good. We should not question it.

How many other people came to you to draw strength? You spoke with such simplicity. "We have such and such children. That is what the One Above wants! It's all the same." You instilled in me such simple faith. Of course we believe that this is what the One Above wants, but when it comes to reality, it is still difficult....

Dear children, I have no words for you. I know I am not your Mommy. I cannot take over for Mommy. I ask your forgiveness in public. I will try to do what I can, but I am not Mommy.

I am not going to fool myself. I do not

have the strength she had, but I believe that the One Above will grant me each day the strength I need for that day and grant me the wisdom to know what to do that day.

I ask of you, my Rebbetzin Chana Mindel—you were the one who was strong! You were the one who taught me the meaning of simple faith. Go to your place in the next world, arrive there as a pure soul. You spent your whole life with emotional suffering and now, in the recent past, with physical suffering as well....

A Heartrending Story

We visited the Sassover Rebbe, *shlit'a*, the day after he got up from the *shivah* for his Rebbetzin, *a'h*. The home was still engulfed in mourning and the family walked around speaking in hushed tones. The Rebbe himself struggled with the enormous challenge of strengthening himself to face the world alone. Through all the many ordeals he has overcome in his life, losing his pillar of strength will be by far the most trying.

When we explained the purpose of our visit to the Rebbe, he displayed no interest in speaking about himself, although he undoubtedly has plenty to share. He spoke only of his Rebbetzin and her sterling character, and how thanks only to her the family endured the difficulties it constantly faced.

The Sassover Rebbe, Rabbi Henoch Teitelbaum, is a scion of some of the greatest Chassidic leaders, including the Yismach Moshe of Uhel, the Sar Shalom of Belz, the Rebbe of Ropshitz and Rabbi Henoch of Alesk, among many others. His father was the late Rabbi Chanania Yom Tov Lipa Teitelbaum of Semyhali, a man who endured much suffering.

The Semyhali Rav first married the daughter of Reb Yoel Teitelbaum, *zt'l*, the Rebbe of Satmar, but his wife succumbed to illness and passed away young without leaving any children. He later married his

second wife, Rebbetzin Blima, *a'h*, a widow who devoted her life to assisting Torah scholars in any way she could. Together they began to build a family, but the Semyhali Rav developed cancer and passed away young, leaving behind his widow and several young orphans. The Rebbetzin now devoted her life to raising her children in the path of Torah and that of their righteous progenitors, who had left them a glorious legacy.

When he came of age, her son, the Sassover Rebbe, married Rebbetzin Chana Mindel, the daughter of Rabbi Eliyahu Yehoshua Geldtzeher, who heads Yeshivas Ohr Yisroel. Rabbi Geldtzeher is himself a descendant of the Vilna Gaon and Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, and a son-in-law of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler. Rabbi Geldtzeher already suffered the loss of a child when his son, the Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Eliezer, *zt'l*, was involved in a tragic accident while traveling with his students in *Eretz Yisrael*, and after a long and difficult hospitalization eventually succumbed to his wounds.

The Sassover Rebbetzin was the proverbial "crown of her husband," doing all in her power to allow her husband to advance in the study of Torah without being disturbed. They spent several happy years together with no particular problems and pressures. They watched their family grow as two healthy children joined their home and the Rebbetzin showered them with love and care like any happy mother. There was no hint as yet that the entire direction of their lives was about to change forever.

A Newborn's Health Issues

When their third child, Reuven Ber, was born in 1983, the family rejoiced. He appeared to be happy and healthy, with a birth weight of 8 pounds 15 ounces, but on his second day he inexplicably lost a full pound of weight. When he came home from the hospital he cried incessantly and had a poor appetite. To everyone's utter surprise, he failed to cry at his *bris*.

The Rebbetzin's parents came to visit when young Reuven Ber was two weeks old and they were shocked by his scrawny appearance.

"You must take him to a doctor at once!" they admonished their daughter.

The baby was rushed to the hospital and it was discovered that he had already lost two pounds. For a baby to lose as much as 10% of his birth weight in the first few days is normal, but here the loss was already approaching 25%!

The doctors were unable to diagnose the problem and the baby was transferred to another hospital where a battery of tests was performed. All they showed was that the child had not suffered brain damage. Meanwhile, his condition did not improve. At four weeks the doctors still had no diagnosis and they began to worry that this baby would not survive.

Each time he was fed the baby would spit up whatever he had consumed, so the doctors were forced to put him on intravenous feeding. This solved the problem for a while, but after several weeks



The Sassover Rebbe visits the grave of his father, the Semyhali Rav, shortly after his wedding.