

# WRITING TO THE REBBE

*An overview*

”יש רבי בישראל, ואין הוא נכנס בהגבלות הטבע, והרוצה ללכת לבטח דרכו:  
במסחר, בהנהגת הבית, וכו’ - לא ירים את ידו מבלי לשאול את פי הרבי...”

(אגרות קודש ח”ג ע’ נד)



Throughout the generations, one of the primary methods that connected a Chossid to his Rebbe was written correspondence. It isn't only a means of requesting the Rebbe's Brocha or seeking his advice. Writing to the Rebbe goes far beyond that. Through his pen, the Chossid connects his soul with the Rebbe. A Chossid understands that when receiving his letter, the Rebbe will not only read what is written within the lines, but he will also see through into what lies "in between the lines"; what is really taking place in the heart and mind of the sender.

In a letter written in Elul of the year 5709 (before the Histalkus of the Frierdiker Rebbe), the Rebbe urges Chassidim to connect as many Yidden as they can, with the (Frierdiker) Rebbe. Here are the words he uses:

"ע...י התקשרות היחידה באמצעות יחידות (אפשר גם בכתב) אצל רבי יחיד, ביחידו של עולם..." (אג"ק ח"ג עמ' קעח).

Rough translation: "...By connecting the innermost part of their Neshoma (*Yechida*) to the Aibershter (*Yechidoi shel oilam*) through Yechidus with the Rebbe (which can also be done by writing to him)".

The Rebbe's words seem to emphasize that writing to the Rebbe is a manner of establishing a deep connection; almost like entering into Yechidus.

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As we approach Yud Shevat, the day of the Rebbe's Kabbolas Haneisus, a day on which the Rebbe calls upon every Chossid to strengthen his Hiskashrus, we found it appropriate to bring to our readers the following essay on writing to the Rebbe.

This composition is based on what originally appeared in Hebrew as an introduction to "*Haksiva Le'Rebbe*" by Vaad Talmidei Hatmimim, 5769, and is being published now in English for the benefit of our readership. It will take you through the many occasions when traditionally Chassidim write to the Rebbe, and the varying methods engaged in each of them.

## LETTERS TO THE REBBE

From the day the Rebbe assumed the leadership of Chabad, hundreds of thousands of letters were written to him on the most diverse of subjects; from extremely private issues, to matters of world concern.

In one rare instance, the Rebbe writes: "I read all the letters that are addressed to my name, and I answer them on my own... as has been the custom for quite a while now, and in past generations" (*Tu B'Shevat*, 5721).

Perhaps the most amazing characterization of these words, was in 5738 when the Rebbe suffered a heart-attack on Shmini Atzeres. Immediately after Yom Tov, the Rebbe insisted, that he be brought all the sacks of mail that had arrived for him over the past few days, so he may begin to read and answer them, disregarding the doctors' directives that he first take a few days' rest...

In many letters, the Rebbe requests, and at times even demands, that the Chassidim write to him. Often times, the Rebbe begins a letter saying, "After a rather long intermission, I received your letter..." (implying that he would have preferred hearing from the writer earlier).

This request was repeated by the Rebbe time and again, in letters, Yechiduyos, and at Farbrengens.

The Rebbe assured Chassidim that the many letters he receives are not at all considered a burden him. From the following letter, one can sense the pleasure the Rebbe derived from the Chassidim's correspondence with him:

"At all times, I am delighted to be notified of what is happening with Anash; for if the news is good, this brings me joy and delight. And even if the news is not so good, at leastus re-establishing a connection strengthens [the one in despair], and minimizes the feeling of loneliness and misery. As it is

brought in various Seforim, that even when one is unable to assist his fellow in deed, a mere good thought or good wish from a fellow Jew is also significant..." (28 Menachem-Av, 5710).

## NOT LOSING FOCUS OF WHAT MATTERS MOST

On the other hand, when people began to mistake writing to the Rebbe as the main objective and write things that were insignificant or even untrue – so long as they had what to write to the Rebbe, the Rebbe admonished this sort of behavior:

"There are those who believe that first and foremost, they must write letters to me – the more the merrier, without taking into account who is writing, what they have done, the subject about which they write, and so on. They are so desperate that at times they must tire themselves until they actually come up with something, and worse – they fabricate things which never really happened, as long as they have what to write..."

"Therefore, it is important that we be clear on this subject: before writing a letter (no difference to whom it is addressed), think twice if it is really necessary that it be written, or if it is merely a waste of time, both the time of the sender, as well as the time of the recipient..." (27 Mar-Chashvan, 5749).

## HOW TO WRITE

The first and most essential thing to recognize when writing to the Rebbe is that this is not just another letter to a friend or relative; it requires much preparation. On the day a Chossid writes to the Rebbe, he will immerse himself in the Mikvah to purify himself, and attain a higher level of Kedusha – and his whole day will follow in that spirit.

Right before beginning to write, it is the custom to wash your hands, and to wear a hat and jacket (those who are married – a Gartel).

The letter is to be written in the



nicest and clearest form possible. This is the reason for the custom to use a clear piece of paper that does not have any lines on it. The Rebbe explicitly instructed numerous times, that when writing to him, the letter should be clear and easy to read.

## READING IN "BETWEEN THE LINES"

On occasion, the Rebbe expressed his preference that the party personally interested in the query or topic of the letter, write himself, as opposed to having someone else write for him, or even ask the Rebbe in person.

In response to a question asked on behalf of a relative, the Rebbe said (in Yechidus):

"Let him think it over and then write to me, and then I'll be able to offer my opinion. Perhaps there are additional factors that he was reluctant to share with you. In general, when seeking advice through a third party, it's preferable for one to ask in writing than orally... For no matter how articulate they might be, there always stands the chance that some details might be

omitted. Whereas if the individual writes his thoughts down, he will write it all."

In addition, the Rebbe referred more than once to what he called "in between the lines". For example, in a letter dated 29 Tammuz 5713, the Rebbe writes: "I was pleased to recognize from in between the lines of your letter..." Or in a Yechidus (5736): "I received your letters. I read them, and I also read in between the lines..."

## COMPOSING A LETTER

As for the letter itself, there are several types of letters, written at various times and for different occasions. Some of these are:

### PA"n

A Pa"n is written rarely, on very special occasions **only** - like Erev Rosh Hashonah or the Yom Hahilula. The Pa"n, as opposed to a regular letter, has a specific Loshon with which it is written. In Reshimos (Choveres 156 pg. 484), the Rebbe brings a lengthy Loshon for the beginning of the Pa"n, but in a Sichah (Toras Menachem vol. 1 pg. 39) – the Rebbe explains that the Loshon should really be a bit shorter and slightly different.

In addition to the general request of the Pa"n, that the Rebbe should evoke Rachamim on the soul of the writer, Chassidim include specific requests as well – both for their material and spiritual needs.

In accordance with the Rebbe's instruction, one should write a Pa"n following Davening (in order to add in as many possible Zechuyos). Before beginning to write, one should envision the Rebbe's face.

In the widely known letter, the Rebbe issued ahead of the Frierdiker Rebbe's first Yortzeit, he solicits those who had had the merit of beholding the [Frierdiker] Rebbe's holy countenance, to dedicate time before they embark on the actual formulation of the words, to remember the times when they saw him,

and relive to the best of their ability those golden moments.

The Rebbe also instructed that one is to accept upon himself an extra Hachlota, which is to serve as a Keli to receive the Brochos.

[It is important to note:

The word Pa"n (Pidyon-Nefesh – redemption of the soul) refers essentially to the money which Chassidim would give to the Rebbe so that he would Daven on their behalf.

As years went on, the letter itself was referred to as the Pa"n, and the money that went along with it was called "D'mei Pa"n" (possibly because due to the circumstances, Chassidim were unable to send along money – e.g. behind the Iron Curtain).]

## LETTER

Aside from a Pa"n, Chassidim will often write letters to the Rebbe. These letters do not carry any specific form. They are written and addressed to the Rebbe (without the formal Loshon-header of a Pa"n), and contain whatever



the subject may be. Seeking the Rebbe's advice in worldly matters or concerning Avodas Hashem, asking Torah-related questions, or simply notifying the Rebbe of something the Chossid feels it important that the Rebbe should know

about.

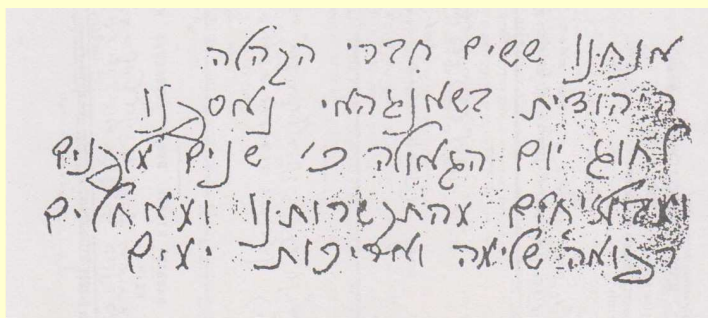
## DUCH

Another very important form of writing to the Rebbe is a *Duch* (*Dinve'Cheshbon*) – a report to the Rebbe. Throughout the years, the Rebbe demanded that Chassidim report back on the pe'ulos that they were involved with; whether individual Chassidim or administrators of institutions, Shluchim, Bochorim, and so on. The Rebbe always wanted to hear, requesting that they write in detail ("Kol ha'mefaret harei zeh me'shubach").

An interesting story:

In the summer of 5716, the Rebbe sent a group of Bochorim as Shluchim to Eretz Yisroel to enliven the peoples' spirits following a terrorist-attack in Kfar Chabad. On the first Shabbos after they returned from their Shlichus in Elul, the Rebbe spoke about them at the Farbrengen and admonished the Gabbai for failing to reserve Aliyos for the Shluchim that Shabbos morning. Then the Rebbe said:

Chassidim relate: In the year 5707, the Frierdiker Rebbe commemorated 20 years since his release from prison on Yud-Beis Tammuz, 5687. Being that he was not in the best of health at the time, our Rebbe conducted a campaign that Chassidim from all over the world send in good wishes along with B'suros Tovos to the Frierdiker Rebbe to strengthen his health. Many of the telegrams that arrived in English and French were rewritten by the Rebbe in Hebrew for the Frierdiker Rebbe to read and enjoy. (Some of these manuscripts can be found in "Tzaddik La'Melech" vol. 3 pg. 118).



A telegram the Rebbe transcribed for the Frierdiker Rebbe.

אנחנו ששים חברי הקהלה  
היהודית בשאנגהאי נאספנו  
לחוג יום הגאולה כ' שנים מלפנים  
ומבטיחים מהתקשרותינו ומאחלים  
רפואה שלימה ואריכות ימים

TRANSLATION: We, sixty members of the Jewish community in Shanghai, gathered to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Yom HaGeulah. We pledge to strengthen our hiskashrus and we wish you a Refua Sheleima and a long life.

“But the truth is, the Shluchim themselves are to blame. Upon returning from their Shlichus, they should have immediately brought back word as to how the Shlichus went. This we learn from Moshe Rabbeinu, who *rendez-vous* ‘d to Hashem after speaking with the Jewish people. In Rashi’s words: the Torah is teaching us Derech Eretz; Moshe did not reason that since my Sender knows already anyway, there’s no need for me to report back, and rather actively engaged Hashem in conversation.

“Instead, they each went to shower, to change their ties, and other *Ba’le-batishe* affairs!”

### B’SUROS TOVOS

Chassidim have always tried to write letters bearing good-news to the Rebbe to bring about Nachas to him. In countless letters, the Rebbe begs of the Chassidim that they write in B’suros Tovos, about their Avodas Hashem – learning and Davening, and about their good health, Parnosa, and so on.

In Yechidus with a Bochur in the winter of 5732, the Rebbe said:

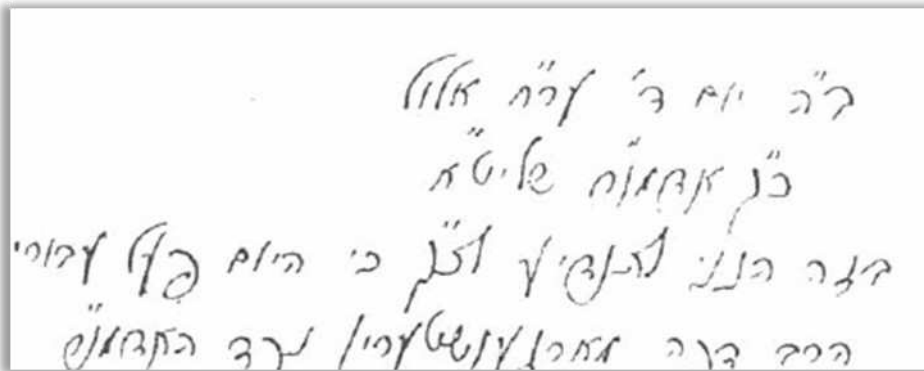
May Hashem help, that the next time you come to me, you’ll be able to tell about the good things you are doing as well, not only the not-good things... When I hear that a Bochur in Tomchei Tmimim is learning well, Davening as he should, and acting as befitting, it brings me the deepest, most sincere joy and delight (“*Simcha ve’taanug nafshi upnimi*”). Certainly you and your friends in Tomchei Tmimim will try to act accordingly – if only for the sake of Ahavas Yisroel!

### “TZOROS-CHASSIDIM”

In numerous letters and Sichos, the Rebbe gently reprimanded those referred

to as “*Tzoros-Chassidim*”; Chassidim who only write to the Rebbe when things go wrong, but when all is well they forget...

In addition to often expressing dissatisfaction with such conduct, the Rebbe once said: “My father-in-law spoke about ‘*Tzoros-Chassidim*’ - when things are good for them, they don’t come. When they are given a Shlichus,



An ordinary letter from a Chossid to the Rebbe. At the top, he simply writes “Cha”k Admu”r Shlit”a”.

they always evade it. Suddenly when they are in a difficult situation they come and demand that they need a miraculous salvation (“*A Moifes*”); but they are not a suitable vessel to receive the Brochos of Moshe Rabbeinu...”

### PERSONAL GUIDANCE

In 5748 shortly before the Rebbeztin’s passing, the Rebbe spoke publicly on a number of occasions that people should refrain from asking for specific advice. Instead, they should turn to the various resources available and seek counsel there. For example: with issues regarding Avodas Hashem, the Mishne says “*Asei L’cho Rav*”; medical concerns should be directed to a doctor (or more than one doctor), business advice should be discussed with close acquaintances, and so on. (See Sichas Shabbos Parshas B’shalach and Motzoei Shabbos Teruma, 5748).

The Rebbe also repeated time and again, that all the letters he receives are brought to the Ohel, the source of all

blessings, and there is therefore no need to wait for an individual response each time. (This was said publicly at Farbrengens, as well as to many individuals who came to the Rebbe for “Dollars”).

### “THE REBBE WILL FIND A WAY TO ANSWER...”

All of the above leads us towards the unambiguous conclusion, that today as forever hitherto, we can, and must continue writing to the Rebbe, whether for good news, or just corresponding with him as to our doings.

In a letter written to a Chossid after the Histalkus of the Frierdiker Rebbe, the Rebbe

says:

“With regards to your question, ‘What can I do when in doubt, as it is no longer possible to ask the Rebbe now?’ – If you will stand strong in your Hiskashrus to him without paying attention to the arguments of the Yetzer Hora, and you’ll send your question to the Ohel; the Rebbe will find a way to answer you...” (Igros Kodesh vol. 3 pg. 266).

We conclude with the powerful words said by the Rebbe at a Farbrengen:

“The Shepherds of Yisroel will not forsake their flock; they remain connected with them now exactly the way they were at the very moment, the very day following the Histalkus.

“Therefore, we must hold steadfast onto the Rebbe’s ‘Kliamke’ (doorknob); we must hold onto the open door. We go to the Ohel with our requests, we write ‘Pidyonos’, we ask for Brochos – and that the Rebbe should also give us the appropriate vessels to receive the Brochos with.” (Shabbos Parshas Yisro, 5740).