



BEHIND THE SCENES OF

ימי בראשית

In honor of the day of Kabbolas Hanesius – Yud Shevat, we present you with an exclusive interview with Rabbi Yosef Greenberg (Shliach in Alaska) and Rabbi Eliezer Zaklikovsky (Shliach in Monroe, NJ), authors of Yemei Bereishis, revealing fascinating facts and accounts from behind the scenes in the preparation of this remarkable work.



Please tell us about the time that the idea to compile this Sefer developed, and what prompted it to come to light?

One of the most intriguing Seforim published by Kehos over the years is a large, black 435-page Sefer called “Yemei Bereishis”; the first description of a very critical period in our history as Chabad-Chassidim. The subtitle reads: “*Yoman M’tkufas Kabbolas Hanesius – Tov-Shin-Yud – Tov-Shin-Yud-Aleph*” (A diary from the period of the Rebbe’s assuming leadership – 5710-5711).

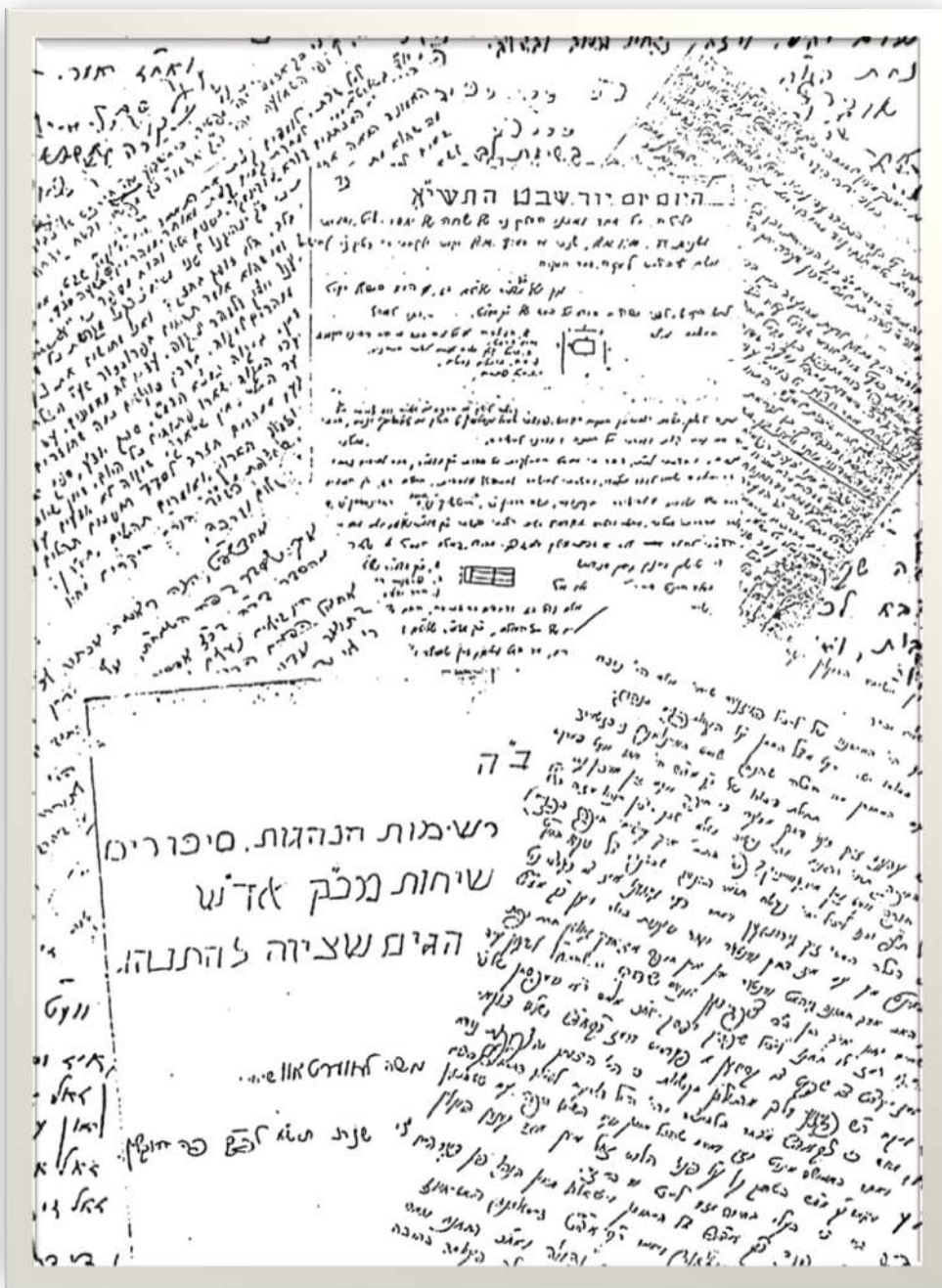
The many readers of this compilation will attest to the vivid account depicted through its many pages – so real, they lift the reader and carry him to the period of time at hand.

Where did the initiative to create this masterpiece come from? What challenges did the editors encounter? What was the Rebbe’s reaction to the idea?

RYG: The idea to publish this Sefer was born in 5746, when I was working on compiling the set of “Sichos Kodesh” along with Rabbi G. Eichorn. I was a young Bochur, trying hard as I could to gather new material in an attempt to fill in on the many Sichos that were missing at the time. In addition to finding many audio-recordings of the Rebbe’s Farbrengens and transcribing them, we also looked for old transcriptions that might be scattered in the private possessions of Anash.

At one point during my search, I was notified about Reb Eli Gross who held a personal diary in the years following 5710. As it turns out, this is the only actual diary known to us that was written during that period. (There were many letters describing the current events to relatives and acquaintances abroad that were written by locals, but this was the only full, daily documentation that we were able to come up with).

The style of writing portrays Reb Eli’s personality; simple and sincere. He was not one of those who knew about all the happenings behind the scenes in Beis Chayeinu. Just an ordinary Bochur learning in 770, recording in his diary that which he saw



A collage of handwritten diaries by Anash and Bochorim from the period of Kabbolas Hanesius.

Notice in the center a diagram by Reb Eli Gross illustrating the position of tables at the Farbrengen, Yud Shevat, 5711.

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and heard on a daily basis. In retrospect, this plays an important role in the significance of his diary - his ability to stay true to the facts - which was ultimately integral in putting together an all-inclusive and accurate depiction of the year as it was.

Having heard this important piece of information, I went to Reb Eli's home and spoke with him about our project, and how his memoirs would be of substantial assistance. After agreeing to my request he retrieved the collection of manuscripts he had written. The sight alone of three large binders, decades-old, including hundreds of pages written in Hebrew, English, and Yiddish, amazed me. I was stunned! In addition, attached to some of the pages were clippings of newspapers and pictures from that time period, and notes he had written to the Rebbe, along with the answers he received.

Although the folders were well-organized, the diary itself was quite hard to read. I realized that I had much work ahead of me. My original intent was merely to extract the portions of Sichos that he had transcribed in his diary, however, the more I delved into his writings, the more I appreciated what I was reading, until I decided that it would be best to publish this treasure in book-form.

Another motive pressing me to undertake this project was the lack of information available on the period of the Rebbe's Kabbolas Hanesius. The new light that I saw with the discovery of Reb Eli's diaries. When I was a young boy, I recall my own inquiry on the starting period of Dor-Hashvi'i, and being able to come up with very little information. There was a letter penned by Reb Mottel Dubinsky in which he describes the Histalkus of the Frieddiker Rebbe (printed in Sefer Hatoldos), but somehow the Rebbe is barely mentioned!

My curiosity only grew with time, and I found it very difficult to come up

with something substantial. (This was before the famous collection of letters by Reb Yoel Kahan was published). When I finally was exposed to Reb Eli's diaries, it was a real eye-opener for me, and I wanted to allow others to benefit from them as well.

Is the information he documented precise? Can his writings be considered reliable?

RYG: Absolutely. Reb Eli was very meticulous about the many details of the subjects discussed. He even went so far as to draw diagrams to better illustrate the scenes he attempts to describe. For example, when writing about the Rebbe's Farbrengen on Yud Shevat 5711, he draws a diagram depicting the exact arrangement of the tables in the Zal at the time; exactly where the Rebbe sat, and so on. Reading through his writings really gives you a good picture of what actually went on in those days...

Did you ever wonder why he would have written such a diary? What motivated him to compose such a well-documented journal?

RYG: In the beginning of his diary, he writes that the decision to write it was based on advice he had received from his Mashpia. He began writing during Tishrei of 5710, just a few months before the Frierdiker Rebbe's Histalkus.

Did Reb Eli's diaries contain sufficient material for the entire Sefer, or did you have to look elsewhere as well?

RYG: At first, we had in mind to publish Reb Eli's writings alone. However, when we began to collect pictures as well, the archive started growing. We came upon newspaper clippings that carried more stories, private letters written by Anash and Bochorim from 770 at the time, and much more. Our database suddenly doubled and tripled in size!

Additionally, there were many portions of Reb Eli's writings that were very difficult to understand and needed

to be "decoded". Even Reb Eli himself was not able to make out what they meant (it can be quite difficult to recall everything after a period of forty years!). I had no choice but to approach other members of Anash that were around in those days and fill in on the missing details. And so my rounds of interviews began...

Can you tell us more as to how you went about gathering all the material; finding the documents, conducting the interviews...?

RYG: Well, we also had letters that Reb Yoel Kahn sent home in those years which contained a lot of information. (However, Reb Yoel was not here at the time of the Histalkus, so they are missing a vital part of the story). There were also letters written by Reb Laibel Groner and Reb Moshe Levertov, but our foremost source was always Reb Eli's diaries.

Of all the interviews we conducted, I was most touched by Reb Zalman Gourarie. As someone who was very close with the Frierdiker Rebbe and already quite an efficient activist in 5710 (as opposed to most of the other individuals I was speaking with who were only young Bochorim at the time), he was able to provide the best story of what actually happened in those years, including many details from "behind the scenes". When speaking to Reb Zalman, I got a feeling as if I was reliving that period. This was no simple task. Getting someone to speak and reignite his memories after forty years took quite some time and turned out to be very tedious work. I had to sit with Reb Zalman Gourarie about five, maybe six times until I finally left with the information I needed to hear.

When I came to speak with him the first time, he told me "Do you know why I agreed to talk to you?" And he began to tell me that the Rebbe had instructed a few individuals in that period to compile a book on what was going on in Lubavitch then. They didn't fully understand what the Rebbe wanted and



so the book never actually came to be, but now, with the attempt to compile the Yemei Bereishis, it's possible that the Rebbe's wish is finally being fulfilled!

Reb Zalman was, by far, the most fascinating of all the interviews I held though I did speak with many others as well, like Reb Dovid Raskin, Reb Moshe Groner, Reb Laibel Dubov, and others.

In my quest for more material, I had to "turn-over peoples' homes". One of those homes was Reb Zev Katz's – where I found the archive of pictures that had belonged to Rabbi Mentlick. This was also a valuable source of material.

One of the most interesting documents I discovered in Reb Zev's possession:

Even before the Rebbe officially accepted the Nesius, he wrote a letter addressed to all the "Rebbes" in honor of Yud-Tes Kislev, asking them to utilize this auspicious day for spreading Chassidus. Needless to say, a letter of this kind has great meaning.

In the archive, I found a

handwritten copy of the letter as it appeared in the Israeli newspaper "Hatzofeh". I would never have known that this letter ever appeared in the newspaper if not for chancing upon this handwritten copy. I thereupon contacted the editorial staff of the newspaper in Israel and requested a copy of the original page, and was subsequently able to include it in the Sefer. What most amazed me was that at the top of the page the headline read "*Michtav Le'Admorim – Me'HaAdmur Mi'Lubavitch*"; something quite unusual considering the time it was published! It was still before the Rebbe officially accepted the Nesius and adamantly refused that the title "Rebbe of Lubavitch" be publicized along with his name...

When did you finally decide to send the Sefer to print?

RYG: The truth is that throughout the years we worked on the Sefer, we did so with the uneasy feeling as to whether or not the Rebbe would allow such a Sefer to go to print. I recall when

speaking with Reb Zalman Gourarie that he had instilled a sense of trepidation in me that made me feel uneasy with the whole idea. He explained that I have to be very careful about each and every word written, that all should be accurate and appropriate for print. After all, we were dealing with a very sensitive topic; the Rebbe himself...

When I approached Rabbi Krinsky and asked him whether Kehos would undertake the project and fund it, he told me that he cannot say for certain until the work was completed and the Rebbe would give his consent.

REZ: In the winter of 5751, Rabbi Greenberg left on Shlichus to Alaska and I remained in Crown Heights to complete the work. As Yud Aleph Nissan approached (when the Rebbe would begin "Shnas HaTzaddik" – his 90th year) we decided that the time was right for us to notify the Rebbe about the idea, hoping that it would bring Nachas in honor of this special day.

I prepared about twenty sample

ON A PERSONAL NOTE...

When speaking with Rabbi Greenberg a few weeks ago, I noted that from the time I was a young Bochor, whenever I picked up the Sefer and began reading, it was only a few hours later that I was able, with great difficulty, to bring myself to put it down again...

After expressing his appreciation for my compliment, Rabbi Greenberg related that he has heard similar remarks from many other individuals, even from those that are considerably older than he is.

After all, the subject of discussion in this Sefer is so close to the heart of every Chossid, yet only a select few were privileged to have been around at the time of these central moments, while so many of us Chassidim were simply not there. Even those of us who merited to spend many of the ensuing years in the Rebbe's presence, we still missed out on that

crucial year between the Histalkus of the Frierdiker Rebbe and the Rebbe's official acceptance of the Nesius, which served as a major turning-point and an entirely new era in the history of Lubavitch.

No wonder the Rebbe showed such affection to the proofs of the book presented to him, bringing them along with him to the Ohel (as recounted in the interview).

The exceptional capability of this Yoman allowing its reader to relive the times of which it speaks, is unparalleled in any other documentation available today.

I strongly urge my fellow Chaveirim to seize this unique opportunity and enjoy the pages of Yemei Bereishis, as I and so many others have.

M. J.



What touched me most was the fact that the Rebbe brought it along with him to the Ohel and read through its pages. I felt as if the Rebbe was examining to see if it was written correctly.

pages of text, along with some pictures and documents with which I tried to give an accurate picture of what the final book would look like, gathered them together in a folder, and handed them to Rabbi Krinsky. He, in turn, added a small note in the folder briefly describing the project, adding that Kehos was prepared to fund it, and asking the Rebbe for his consent, and gave it in to the Rebbe.

For a few days the folder sat on the Rebbe's desk without him giving any response.

Finally, on the night of Yud-Gimmel Nissan I received a phone-call from Rabbi Y. B. Friedman of Kehos with some good-news. That day the Rebbe brought the folder along with him to the Ohel and skimmed through the pages during the car-ride. While at the Ohel, the Rebbe wrote a response on Rabbi Krinsky's note giving his approval to go ahead with the project.

There are no words to describe the joy I felt at that moment. At last, we were able to go ahead and publish the Sefer!

For the next few months I worked on putting our final product together. Just before Chof-Ches Sivan (which would mark 50 years since the Rebbe's arrival to the United States), we prepared

a Pesach-Dovor for the Sefer and left an empty space at the bottom for the Rebbe to fill in the date. Attached to the Pesach-Dovor, I wrote a short note to the Rebbe dated "Chof-Ches Sivan" notifying that we were ready to go to print.

At the bottom of the Pesach-Dovor, the Rebbe first added the date "Sunday Parshas Chukas", and crossed a line through it, replacing it with "Erev Shabbos Parshas Shelach". It was then that I decided to quickly make copies of the final version and give it in to the Rebbe, to be ready before the next time he would go to the Ohel.

Did the Rebbe make any corrections in the Sefer itself?

RYG: No. But the Rebbe did contribute to the Sefer in various ways.

Firstly, the Rebbe edited two Sichos especially for the Sefer. (The Sichas said by the Frierdiker Rebbe when he received citizenship of the United States in 5709, and a Sichas said by the Rebbe at one of the Shabbos Mevorchim Farbrengens in 5708 about the lessons we learn from chess).

The Rebbe also added the date at the bottom of the Pesach-Dovor of the Sefer, as mentioned.

REZ: The real surprise, though, was

yet to come.

When I finally had one copy of the Sefer ready, I hurried back from the book-binder in Williamsburg hoping to make it back in time to hand it to the Rebbe before he leaves for the Ohel. (This was at the end of Sivan, 5751).

I arrived just minutes before the car pulled away and handed the Sefer to Rabbi Krinsky who was already in the car. I clipped a short note onto the inside cover page, saying that this is the Sefer as it is ready for print; we hope that it will bring Nachas-Ruach to the Rebbe, and concluded the note by signing Rabbi Greenberg's name and my name.

After returning from the Ohel, Rabbi Krinsky called me into his office and told me "Lazer; I don't know what it is, but you must have some real Z'chus to have privileged such attention from the Rebbe!"

He then related: Throughout the car-ride, the Rebbe read through the entire Sefer page by page, and even after arriving at the Ohel, he didn't leave the car for an additional ten or fifteen minutes until he finished to the last page. Before going into the Ohel, the Rebbe placed the bookmark at the page that discussed the Histalkus of the Frierdiker Rebbe to mark the place, and brought

the Sefer with him inside the Ohel.

"Before leaving the Ohel", concluded Rabbi Krinsky, "the Rebbe handed me the Sefer to return to you!"

When I gave a look at the Sefer, I noticed that there was a large beeswax stain on the cover (that had poured out from the Rebbe's candle while at the Ohel). I also noticed that my note was missing, but Rabbi Krinsky did not know as to what the Rebbe had done with it.

The next morning, I received a phone-call in my dormitory room from Rabbi Krinsky. He told me that the Rebbe sent out the note to him with his handwritten answer: The Rebbe responded the note with the words "Niskabel Vetac"h Vedavar Beitoy Vehazman Gromo" (I received it and derived pleasure; it is an opportune time) and made an arrow pointing to the date of our note "Chof-Ches Sivan". Where we had written that we hoped to give the Rebbe Nachas-Ruach, he added the word "Rav" (**much** Nachas; i.e. the Sefer brought the Rebbe more Nachas than we had originally thought).

While at the Ohel, the Rebbe had torn out our first-names and our mother's names from the note (mine and Rabbi Greenberg's) and left only our last names.

RYG: Another time when the Rebbe got involved in the details of the Sefer:

I had written a lengthy introduction to the Sefer in which I attempted to give an "inside-look" on the period around the Rebbe's acceptance of the Nesius. Being that I was doubtful as to how accurate my take on the matter was, I sent it in to the Rebbe along with a note. I told the Rebbe that although this introduction was already examined by the editorial staff of Kehos, I hoped that the Rebbe would look at it and ascertain its content. On my note, the Rebbe circled where I had written that it was shown to the staff at Kehos and wrote in his holy handwriting: "*Maspik Kaposhut*" (That is sufficient; obviously).

But above all, what touched me most of the Rebbe's involvement in this Sefer was the fact that he brought it along with him to the Ohel and read through its pages. I felt as if the Rebbe was examining to see if it was written correctly.

If there was one selection of the Sefer that you would consider the most moving, which would that be?

RYG: The most special portion of the Sefer is, undoubtedly, the detailed description of the day of Kabbolas Hanesius – Yud Shevat, 5711. Exactly

what the Rebbe did throughout the day, how the Farbrengen went about, which Seforim were printed in honor of the day; all in the greatest detail.

What did the Rebbe do just before the Farbrengen? He went to visit his mother! Imagine: watching the *Melech* as he went to and from his mother's home... There are layers and layers of insight in these stories. In the Sefer they appear a bit dry, at times, but when you think into what it says, we can Farbreng for hours about each line alone!

It's been a few years now since the Sefer has been out of print and unavailable. Is there any plan to reprint it in the near future?

RYG: The truth is, when we were preparing the material for the Sefer, many people who owned useful documents did not appreciate what a beautiful project was at hand, and therefore refused to share what they had with us. Only after the Sefer was printed did they realize the lost opportunity they had to participate and expressed their regret. If someone would undertake this project today and include the many accounts and documents that have since come to light, I believe the Sefer would be larger and even more beautiful than the first edition!



EXCERPT FROM THE SEFER YEMEI BEREISHIS:
THE GREAT AND HOLY DAY OF
YUD SHEVAT 5711

Arriving back from the Ohel in the afternoon, Mincha was quickly davened; after Ma'ariv, the Farbrengen was called for 8:00 p.m.

The Rebbe visited his mother that evening, not leaving to return to 770 until 8:45 p.m. Throughout the evening, many people arrived in 770 for the Farbrengen, till a crowd of over 800 people had gathered in the "Zal."

The Rebbe entered the Farbrengen at 9:45 p.m., together with Rabbi Kazarnovsky and Horav E. Yalles (of Philadelphia) and took his place. Between delivering Sichos, the Rebbe spoke to various people; among them was a Bochur whom, previously in Yechidus, the Rebbe had instructed to sell his car. The Rebbe now asked him if he had sold it yet – when the Bochur answered that he had not, the Rebbe gave him a look of astonishment.

Following the first Sicha, Leibel Groner whispered to R' Yitzchak Hendel to ask the Rebbe to say a Ma'amar. The Rebbe heard the request – and told Rabbi Hendel, "Tell him not to 'drei a kop'!" Rabbi Kramer was standing nearby and overheard the conversation. He said to the Rebbe, "He's right, we want to hear a Ma'amar!" – but the Rebbe waved his hand as if to dismiss the idea entirely.

About an hour into the Farbrengen, an elder Chossid named R' A. S. Nemtzov stood up and announced, "Everyone wants to hear a Ma'amar. The Sichos are good and fine, but we want to hear Chassidus!" The shul fell completely silent. The hearts of all those assembled trembled as they waited to see how the Rebbe would respond...

And so ... at 10:40 p.m., the Rebbe opened the Frierdiker Rebbe's Ma'amar and began, "In the Ma'amar that the Rebbe distributed on the day of his passing, he begins with Basi L'gani..." – then the Rebbe began to speak with the tune of a Ma'amar. Out of excitement, everyone began to push – but within a few moments, the room settled down and the Rebbe continued reciting the Ma'amar. As the Rebbe spoke about the Avodah of Dor Hashvi'i, he cried profusely.

Completing Se'if Gimmel, he said, "We will now take a break and say L'Chaim."

Rabbi Nemtzov jumped up onto the table and cried out, "We must say 'Shehecheyanu'! Hashem has helped us – we have a Rebbe!" He then recited the Brocho, "Shehecheyanu" with Hashem's name, and all present responded with a wholehearted "Amein!" The Rebbe smiled and asked Rabbi Nemtzov to come down from the table.

The Rebbe then requested that the Chassidim sing the "Benoni," saying that "the [Frierdiker] Rebbe cherished this Nigun"; and then the "Rostover Nigun" of the Rebbe Rashab.

After the Nigunim, the Rebbe continued the second part of the Ma'amar. Finishing Se'if Hei, the Rebbe stopped and asked everyone to sing a Nigun from the Rebbe Maharash and one from the Tzemach Tzedek. Following these Nigunim, the Rebbe continued the Ma'amar to the end; concluding with a short Sicha, the Rebbe pointed out that in Chabad generally, the Chassidim must take responsibility for the main Avodah themselves – not simply relying on the Rebbe'im to do it for them.

All through the recitation of the Ma'amar, the Rebbe held his hands under the table with his eyes open, looking straight ahead.

Following the Ma'amar, Rabbi Nemtzov blessed the Rebbe – in the name of all the Chassidim in honor of the Nesi'us – with "Bonei, Chayei U'mezonei," and everyone answered, "Amen!"

At 12:55 a.m., the Rebbe started the Chassidim singing the Nigun, "Ki V'Simcha," as he left the shul. Everyone continued to sing the Nigun as they danced with great joy for a long while. As the Rebbe walked out the door, Rabbi Kazarnovsky wished him, "Mazel Tov!" and the Rebbe smiled.

After the Farbrengen, the Chassidim sat until 3:00 a.m. reviewing the words the Rebbe had spoken that evening; but the Bochurim, despite their extreme exhaustion, stayed until 6:30 in the morning to review the new Ma'amar – over and over, and over again.