



The following is a meticulous description of Rosh Hashonoh 5660 in Lubavitch, seen through the eyes of a Bochur, who, new to the unique style of Tomchei Temimim, is ushered into a world, he never imagined even existed.

Editorial note: Throughout the article, the term 'The Rebbe' will be referring to the Rebbe Rashab.*

I was a young boy rather well educated, I had mastered the ability to comfortably learn through Gemoro with its fundamental commentaries, and perhaps quite different than my peers, I even had a healthy grasp in the deeper works of Jewish thought, like Rambam's Moreh Nevuchim and others.

My knowledge extended past the fron-

tiers of Jewish subjects, for as I was a studious young man, I had treaded the waters of secular topics, and gotten interested in philosophy and other major secular works.

I held this broad gamut of interests of mine very dearly, and greatly enjoyed the time I spent poring over all sorts of books. I had a deeply rooted faith that I would

retain my dual 'identity', and somehow manage to combine my familiarity in both the religious and laic worlds.

By the summer of 5659, the fame of the newly established Yeshiva in Lubavitch had reached my ears, and aroused my curiosity. Attracted by its outstanding reputation of rigorous study, I set my compass towards the little Belarussian town. I was

* Translator's note: This article is a translated excerpt of a longer, more detailed memoir originally written in Hebrew. In the process of translating this piece, we've had to adapt to English prose and grammar rule, at times at the expense of the poetry and particular style, that is the signature of the original writer.

For the full essay in its pristine language and lexicon, see Hatomim Vol. 1 pp. 223 and pp. 416

perfectly aware that secular education wasn't emphasized in Tomchei Temimim, let alone provided for, but I - I thought-will manage to keep my balance even there.

What a bittersweet mistake, which so many had fallen prey to in that era! As soon as I arrived there, I realized I was mistaken, I came to understand that the founder of this unique Yeshiva had a wholly different perspective, a perspective which didn't include, nor necessitate any outside influence.

I thus decided that Lubavitch wasn't the place for me, and I would return home at my earliest convenience.

I was conflicted on whether to nevertheless remain for a few weeks, considering how costly and difficult the journey there had been, or simply go right back. Time had made the decision for me, and after a few days of hesitation and debate I was still there, scrutinizing with a watchful eye, every nuance and every detail of the Yeshiva's curriculum and students.

One day, I walked into the main zal, and saw a large and broad study hall, hosting within its walls, young men sitting across tables and studying diligently. Every one of them was preoccupied with the material he was learning and was devoted to understanding it, reading it, and reading it again, not ever tiring nor stopping. There was a loud and conducive chatter, a cocktail of voices stemming from the four corners of the room, filling the air, and I could almost sense the pleasure and sweetness of these boys' assiduity.

I remained there, standing in a niche observing and pondering, trying to take it all in, when suddenly, as soon as the clock hit eight o' clock, the sounds came to an abrupt end, everyone closed the seforim they had delved in during the entire day, only to replace them with other seforim, themselves rather thick and large. Where Gemoros and Shulachn Oruch's rested till but a few moments earlier, now resided Tanya's, Likkutei Torah, and other volumes I had never seen before.

I couldn't quite define it, but it seemed like the new setting was identical yet entirely different; yes, there were the same bochurim studying, across the same tables, but their tunes were different, the air was new. Every here and there I could catch a soft sound, a subdued note flying in the wind, that was inspiring and drawing me near. I perceived a higher degree of seriousness and concentration than in the previous period, and an all-around somber setting.

I gathered my little self together, and asked one of the boys what was everybody learning, was it some cryptic mystical work, or perhaps the deepest secrets?



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“Chassidus!” He told me with a broad smile, “We're learning Chassidus!” I looked at him baffled and beguiled, and dared to ask him what this was all about.

“You see my friend” – he ensued, “Chassidus in general, and more specifically Chassidus Chabad, is a world onto itself, it explains to man the purpose of his life, and shows him the path to its fulfillment. Chassidus differs from most other books of ethics; it is first and foremost a most profound study on the root of man's Neshomo, elucidating Hashem's unity, and the lofty significance of Torah and Mitzvos. Only after all this, does it reach to its disciple, and with soft discipline teaches him, to refine himself and come closer to his creator.”

A cold shower. This was all new to me, ‘Entire books explaining how to be a better Jew!’ – I thought.

“Later on in your stay, you'll merit to see our holy Rebbe deliver a Maamor Chassidus, you will learn it again and again, until you're fluent in it, and then, and only then, will you begin to understand.

More days elapsed, and it was the eve of Rosh Hashonoh. That morning I arose early and got to Yeshiva at daybreak, to find the room filled with guests who had come from far and near, to spend Rosh Hashonoh in the presence of their leader and guide – the Rebbe.

People were pleasantly chatting and greeting one another, rejoicing in the mere being with one another in Lubavitch. I could identify in their midst many distinguished Rabbonim, and leaders of communities, all joined by the common denominator of being Lubavitcher Chassidim, who had undertaken a long trip to spend the most solemn days in the year with the Rebbe.

Behold! A piercing silence befell the room, the Rebbe was coming! A windy little path was formed, for the Rebbe to walk through to his seat at the front of the shul. I observed the Rebbe's tenure, his saintly look as he strode across the shul, and was immediately impressed.

Like mine, everyone's eyes were fixed on the Rebbe, all were standing in total annulment, and self abnegation, stemming from the awe of being in the presence of a man of a different league entirely.

My thoughts had caught on fire, yet my brain remained cold and removed. I couldn't tell you why or what, but seeing everyone standing with such reverence, I too fell numb and silent.

Selichos began, and the chazzan's initial song was immediately overpowered by the chants of the entire shul. From time to time everyone would slightly raise their eyes from their siddurim, and gaze towards the Rebbe, closely monitoring his moves, and taking keen heed of them.

At that moment, I decided that this flock had at its core point a raging fire, capable of melting even the hardest of hearts. Precisely what – however- was this fire burning on?

I would wait and see.

The sun has set, and the hundreds of bochurim, along with the myriads of guests gathered in the big room of the yeshiva, to usher in the New Year with Maariv.

A distinct seriousness, and sobriety is visible and everybody's face.

A few minutes transpire, and the Rebbe comes in. His holy face is like a blazing torch of fire, and his gaze is ever so serious; in a paradoxical mixture however, there's a loving warmth, emanating from his radiant smile. I clearly see how two opposing forces – bitterness and joy – are merged in one vessel, in a harmonious unity and beauty.

Maariv begins, everyone davens with fervor, and I try getting closer to the Rebbe's place to see, to hear, though I don't

know what. Bitter cries resound from his holy place, and ghostly sighs pierce the air.

In the Rebbe's davening, no word is uttered without first dipping in a generous bath of tears, and I stand beside him, in awe and shock.

Many people cry on these most solemn days, I thought to myself, what sets the Rebbe's cry apart from everybody else's? No sooner than I had thought that, I had found my answer. These weren't cries, nor tears, this was hishtapchus hanefesh, this is the Neshomo of a Tzadik pouring out, before her father's throne.

The general noise gradually subsides, and davening is over, but the Rebbe is standing still in his place, softly humming to himself an old Chabad tune, a tune of yearning and demand, challenging its cantor, and from the Rebbe's heart a deep cry breaks forth.

You see, there are many types of cries; cry of pain, of yearning, and even of joy. The Rebbe's cry is unlike any other, or perhaps it is like all of them together.

Maybe, just maybe – I thought to myself – the Rebbe's cry was there just to arouse the hearts of thousands of Jews to their father in heaven, and even if it were just for that, it would be enough and plentiful.

Here stood a man – I continued to my-

self – whose ambitions are so sublime and divine, whose humbleness and modesty aren't a product of hard toil, rather a result of his subservience and unity to an absolute truth. To stand in his glorious company is worth to squeeze in the multitudes who have come to bathe in the radiance of his holy presence.

An immaculate purity stems from the heart and propels tears like rain, and inside you feel hope and happiness, bitterness and longing, indeed this can only be found in the presence of a superior being.

The Rebbe, the messenger of the nation entire, stands before Hashem and offers an account of the year bygone, and beseeches Him to bestow His blessings for the upcoming one, he pleads and begs that this year be a plentiful one, both physically and spiritually.

When the Rebbe had finished davening, he turned to the awaiting crowds to wish them a good year; his face shone like that of an angel and his eyes streamed forth light, with a sweet fatherly love.

That night I could not sleep. The sights I had witnessed had made such a deep impact on me, that my thoughts were running incessantly, and gave me no rest.

In truth, I hadn't even understood so much, or intellectually processed the

events of earlier in the evening, but inside of me, something had changed irreversibly. My previous notions and imagined wisdoms had lost all value, and I was left dumbfounded and mute.

I had begun to understand – or better said, to feel – that there's a most sublime meaning and goal to mankind upon this earth.

I had come to the recognition, that not everything can be dissected on the cold operating table of intellect and knowledge. I had realized that there are things which the frigid and dry mind cannot grasp, yet you feel with all your being that they are real indeed.

Listening to the Rebbe's tefillos this evening, I could almost see the heavens open up above me, and the beis din shel ma'aloh deliberate over our future. My soul shook hearing the Rebbe's every word, and I perceived that all of the heavenly rulings and decrees, are accurately decided from below.

I then decided, that if there's any purpose to life, here was the place where I would discover it, and learn how to reach it.

At that precise moment I had made up my mind: I was going to stay in Lubavitch.

