



מקדש ישראל

Before his Nesius even began, the Rebbe graced the Chassidim by attending many of their personal simchas.

In honor of Yud Dalet Kislev, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's wedding anniversary, we present you with a chronological timeline of the Rebbe's special custom of being Mesader Kiddushin, and a review from several people who were honored with the Rebbe's presence at their wedding.

Sources: Mekadesh Yisroel, Kfar Chabad Magazine, and others.

“The great love that parents feel for children is nothing compared to the love a Rebbe feels for a Chossid.” From these precious words that the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote in his Likkutei Dibburim¹, we get perhaps a small grasp of just how precious and dear each chossid is to the Rebbe. Countless stories bear witness to the Rebbe's personal involvement in even the most trivial details of the Chassidim's life. Whether it was by inquiring into a child's performance in *cheder*, or simply showing concern like telling one to wear a coat in the freezing winter.

The Chassidim's personal anguish was the Rebbe's, and their joyous moments were his

too – just like a father with his children. It should come to no surprise then, that every bochur learning in 770 shared a common desire that the Rebbe should be Mesader Kiddushin by their chasuna, when the time would come.

The Rebbe held this practice for twenty years, adapting in the interim as his responsibilities grew and time availability diminished. This period can be categorized into four general stages:

5703-5710. Over these years, as the son-in-law of the Frierdiker Rebbe, the Rebbe was usually present for the kabbolas ponim and the chuppah, and occasionally even the subsequent festive meal.

5711-5714. After assuming the Nesius the Rebbe continued to be mesader kiddushin (under specific circumstances, as will be mentioned below), but ceased attending wedding meals.

5714-5720. As his activities and responsibilities intensified, the Rebbe no longer attended the kabbolas ponim, and would only officiate the siddur kiddushin when the chuppah was held in the courtyard outside 770.

5720-5723. Beginning on the Frierdiker Rebbe's tenth Yohrtzeit, Yud Shevat, 5720, the Rebbe officially ceased performing weddings entirely, to the exception of some couples who made a particular commitment to the Rebbe.

During the period before the Nesius, many would invite the Rebbe (or Ramash, as he was referred to then), to attend their wedding. In the majority of occasions the Rebbe would concede, but out of respect for his older brother-in-law, the Rashag, he would

refrain from being Mesader Kiddushin. At times when Rashag was not able to attend, the Rebbe agreed to perform the siddur kiddushin.

If the ceremony was to take place out of town, the Rebbe would politely decline the invitation, since his busy schedule as chairman of Lubavitch's central organizations, Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Kehos and Machane Yisroel, didn't allow for extended

leaves, instead sending a warm letter to the Chosson and Kallah, wishing them Mazal Tov and that they should merit to establish a *binyan adei ad*, an eternal Jewish home entrenched in the values of Torah and Mitzvos.

In the early stages of this tradition, the Rebbe would make a point and travel, often quite far (within greater New York), to wherever the wedding was taking place. Looking not to burden anybody, the Rebbe generally took a taxi at his own expense, and (at least) once he even used a public tram!

To avoid this important task from taking even a slight toll on his work, the Rebbe usually requested to be informed when the Chosson had begun walking towards the *bedeken* to cover the Kallah, which meant there was sufficient time for him to arrive at the venue of the wedding for the chuppah.

At that time the Rebbe didn't wear a *kapota* on weekdays, yet when he went to a wedding, he would specially don his silk sirtuk and gartel, and bring his siddur from which he read the brochos.

On one occasion, on the morning of his wedding, a chosson was approached by the Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Hodakov, who told him that the Rebbe requested for a siddur to be brought to the chuppah, in the event that somebody didn't know the brochos by heart. In his modesty, the Rebbe hid his insistence on reading out of a siddur under the guise that "there might be somebody who might not remember the brochos from memory."

When at the ceremony, the Rebbe, in his humility and sensitivity, stood away from the center until he was called upon, making every effort not to divert the attention away from the chosson and kallah.

At the end of the chuppah the Rebbe would remain behind and watch the chosson and kallah walk until they reached to the yichud room, at which point he would quickly return to 770 and resume his holy work. On only ten occasions, the Rebbe remained after the ceremony and participated in the celebration, even joining in the dancing, as he did, for instance, by the chasuna of Rabbi Zalman Posner on 6 Kislev, 5710.

During the years up until he took on the mantle of the Nesius, the Rebbetzin would often join the Rebbe, and he would always make a point to go over to the Chosson and Kallah, give his personal wishes, and present them with a check, the amount of which varied.

Though not so today, it was common practice then that a special ceremony be held for the *siddur tenoim* – some two weeks before the wedding itself. Families who enjoyed a special closeness with the Rebbe would often insist for him to attend and, when time allowed, the Rebbe made it his



business to be there. In some instances, the Rebbe even addressed the crowd with some words of inspiration, focusing on the theme of a Jewish marriage and its mystical implications, while at other occasions, he explained the meaning of the chosson and kallah's names according to kabbalah².

Eleven of those talks are recorded in the Rebbe's Reshimos where the Rebbe used to

posed to the common practice of using a kerchief or a foulard).

Other less strict requirements emerged from conversations the Rebbe held while at weddings. Among them were that the chosson receive smicha before his marriage and that the chuppah be held outdoors, like in the Rebbe's own instance.

It wouldn't be before 30 Shevat 5711, that

איז מען מכבד

כבוד קדושת אדונינו מורינו ורבינו...

jot down brief notes ahead of an occasion where he expected to talk. There were times when, although the Rebbe had an address prepared, he nonetheless did not end up speaking, and would later add, next to the title of a speech, the words לא נאמר, indicating that it was never delivered.

The same was true of an *aufruf*, held on the Shabbos before a chasuna, when, often upon insistence of one of the families, the Rebbe would agree to participate.

In an era when cameras were still rare, pictures of the Rebbe were hard to come by, yet by weddings, it was ordinary for the family to hire a professional photographer to document the event, turning any wedding where the Rebbe attended into a unique opportunity to capture him on camera.

The Rebbe in turn, when he noticed he was being photographed, would often turn away or cover his face in a dignified manner.

ואותנו קידשת

5711-5714

The above held true until 5711, when, upon his assumption of the Nesius, the Rebbe's responsibilities grew and his time availability thinned. The Rebbe thus raised the bar of expectation for him to agree to be mesader kiddushin.

During the year of aveilus after the Frierdiker Rebbe the Rebbe didn't participate in weddings, however, he gave his siddur and gartel to chassanim to daven with in the Frierdiker Rebbe's room, on 770's second floor, on their wedding day.

It was then that the Rebbe laid out specific conditions for his attendance at weddings:

The chosson had to agree to grow a beard – something extremely difficult and challenging in America at the time. And the kallah had to agree to wear a *shaitle* (as op-

posed to the common practice of using a kerchief or a foulard).

Despite the number of his responsibilities growing every passing day, the Rebbe reserved special concern and care for the bochurim, often being actively involved in their shidduchim and at times, dedicating a sicha to them at the Farbrengen before their wedding, discussing the topic of marriage in the light of chassidus and kabbalah.

When a wedding would take place far from 770, the Rebbe would come in a private car, often escorted by Rabbi Shmuel Levitin.

In 5714, the Rebbe's secretariat announced that the Rebbe would officiate only at chuppahs that would take place in the courtyard of 770. This was due to the Rebbe's own declaration that the trip to and from different wedding halls around New York were too time consuming.

Indeed, from then onward, every chossid saw to it that his chuppah be arranged outside 770 for the Rebbe to be able to participate. Still, the Rebbe would only emerge from his office immediately before siddur kiddushin and return shortly after.

Despite the Rebbe's firm stand on not being photographed, Chassidim were relentless about capturing if but one portrait of the Rebbe on camera. The former order, where the Rebbe would conceal himself, ended when the photographer Reb Reuven Trainer asked permission from the Rebbe, to photograph him, since that was his business. To the Chassidim's joy, the Rebbe agreed, and beautiful pictures began emerging from every Lubavitcher Chasuna³.

At the chuppah, after the kallah had finished circling around the Chosson, Rabbi Kazarnovsky would announce that the Rebbe was being honored with Siddur Kiddushin. The Rebbe would hold the cup of wine in



his right hand as it was being poured, and his siddur in his left. Rabbi Hodakov usually read the kesubah and the Rebbe paid careful attention to every detail of the procedure. After that, Rabbi Kazarnovsky would again announce that the Rebbe was being honored with reading the sheva brochos. Those who merited being there recall the Rebbe's temperament while reciting the Brochos as being outstandingly solemn and yet royal. But no sooner did the formal part of the chuppah conclude that the Rebbe's expression

became joyful.

Rabbi Avrohom Sassonkin, whose chasuna was the second to last to be performed by the Rebbe, recounts his feelings while standing under the chuppah, mere inches away from the Rebbe: "I stood there alone in front of the Rebbe's pure eyes, waiting for my kallah to arrive, and the Rebbe was looking at me attentively. My mind went blank, I froze – what could one think about when the Rebbe is right there looking at him? I felt as though I were on the threshold of entering in yechidus, except here you don't talk, you just stand."

איז מען מ'כיד...
5714-5720

The first wedding to take place in the courtyard of 770 was that of Rabbi Dovid Raskin. In the yechidus he and his wife had shortly before their wedding, Reb Dovid asked the Rebbe to be mesader kiddushin, saying he would have his chuppah outside the Rebbe's office as per the Rebbe's wish. The Rebbe answered that standard procedure was for

the kallah's family to decide who should get the various *kibbudim* by the wedding. The kallah immediately asked the Rebbe and he agreed.

After Reb Dovid, all the Chassidim followed suit and over the next six years the Rebbe officiated at forty-five weddings.

Reb Dovid can also be credited as the initiator of other traditions, which today are

Mrs. Faivish Vogel, made the commitment, and were among the last handful of fortunate ones to see the foundations of their married life being laid by the Rebbe.

Still, some very outstanding exceptions were made – outstanding because by some of them, it was the Rebbe who initiated the discussion of his will to be mesader kiddushin, rather than the Chassidim's insistence.

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צֶלֶם דְּמוּת תְּבִנִיתוֹ

Once the Rebbe permitted Reb Reuven Trainer to take pictures of him, Rabbi Moshe Groner began circulating the pictures among Chassidim.

At one point, Reb Moshe decided to make a special gift to the Rebbetzin Chana, consisting of some of the nicest prints of the Rebbe by weddings. He therefore asked Reb Reuven to give him the negatives of the pictures after he had developed them so he could use them for his own purposes. Although the photographer refused to be separated from his precious negatives he agreed to let Reb Moshe choose which pictures he would like for the Rebbetzin.

At the time, there were some thirty pictures available in total, and Reb Moshe fashioned a beautiful album out of them, and asked Rebbetzin Chana, if he could go over to her house to give her something.

When he presented the Rebbetzin with this precious gift, she was overwhelmed with joy. She sat and examined the album carefully and slowly, mentioning here and there the names of people she recognized in the background of the pictures.

The Rebbetzin, in her sheer elation, shared her excitement with her son, the Rebbe. Reb Moshe held a special privilege upon clear instruction of the Rebbe's secretariat, that if at any moment he needed to convey a message to the Rebbe, he was free to knock directly on the Rebbe's door and talk to him, a unique charter granted to select few.

On the first occasion he entered the Rebbe's room, following his gift to the Rebbetzin, the Rebbe thanked him profusely for his gesture, and said: "You cannot imagine the

almost a given by every Lubavitch chasuna: he was the first to have the Rebbe's letter to the chosson and kallah read under the chuppah and he also pioneered the idea of writing the invitation with the exact wording chosen by the Frierdiker Rebbe for the Rebbe's chasuna – he had asked the Rebbe in Yechidus how the invitation should be formulated, to which the Rebbe replied, "Keloshon Horav" – the way the [Frierdiker] Rebbe did.

Among the less known directives he received from the Rebbe before his wedding was that while standing under the chuppah, he should think and contemplate about the Frierdiker Rebbe.

קול שְׁשׁוֹן וְקול שְׂמֵחָה 5720-5723

In the weeks leading up to Yud Shevat, 5720, the Frierdiker Rebbe's tenth Yohrtzeit, it became increasingly clear that the Rebbe was gradually withdrawing from participating in Chassidim's wedding, let alone be mesader kiddushin. Only seven chuppahs were performed by the Rebbe over this period and, in most cases, it took great negotiation from the Chassidim's part.

The shlichus revolution that the Rebbe spearheaded – right from the dawn of his Nesius – was still walking its first steps and many parents were less than comfortable with sending off their children to places devoid of spirituality and lacking Jewish communal infrastructure. The Rebbe, in an attempt to encourage young couples to join the ranks of the already existing shluchim, announced that he would be mesader kiddushin by the weddings of couples who would undertake to go on shlichus.

Five couples, the last one being Rabbi and



After his chasuna, Rabbi Berel Junik, who was very close to the Rebbe's family, brought his wedding photo album to the Rebbetzin Chana; when she saw the picture of the Rebbe standing while the kesubah was being read, she asked him to make her a copy of it. Reb Berel made a copy, put it into a beautiful frame, and brought it to her. The Rebbetzin excitedly put it up on a shelf in her apartment, clearly visible to all. Once, she even said that when the maid comes to clean the house, she doesn't let her clean it, because she wants to do it herself!



nachas she derives from it!" The Rebbe offered to pay for the pictures, but Reb Moshe refused, saying he wanted it to be his present.

כי בו שבת

The very last chuppah where the Rebbe officiated was at the wedding of Rabbi Shmuel Lew; of the fascinating chain of events that led up to it, Rabbi Lew recounts:

"Towards the end of 5722 I became engaged to the daughter of Reb Zalman Jaffe, who enjoyed a special relationship with the Rebbe. Shortly after our engagement, my father-in-law-to-be wrote to the Rebbe, that if he conceded to being *mesader Kiddushin*, the wedding would take place in New York in the summer of 5723, otherwise it would be in England in the winter of the same year. Though the Rebbe was not fond of prolonged engagements, he wrote back, that he saw no reason why not to wait until the

summer, when I, the chosson, would conclude my studies in Yeshiva. In this unbecoming answer on the Rebbe's part, there seemed to be already a hint of his desire to be *mesader kiddushin*. Although make no mistake, for when my father-in-law suggested that the Rebbe officiate by the wedding, the Rebbe said that he'd already discontinued that tradition, and smiled.

As the wedding date was approaching, it didn't seem like the Rebbe would be present; the first clue that he might, arrived some ten

days before the wedding, when the Rebbe asked me if the chuppah was decisively to be at seven thirty in the evening, as posted on the invitation, or perhaps it could be moved. Reading between the lines, I was quick to reply that if the Rebbe wanted, we could move it to whatever time he pleased.

The same evening my father-in-law went into Yechidus, and the Rebbe mentioned again that perhaps the chuppah should be earlier, "Why must chosson and kallah fast so long?" he said. My father-in-law wittingly replied that if the Rebbe were to agree to be mesader kiddushin, the couple was prepared to fast for two weeks! They concluded agreeing to reschedule the chuppa for five o'clock in the afternoon.

We hastily printed and sent out new invitations, bearing the new scheduled time for the chuppah. The Rebbe edited the text of the invitation and gave specific instructions about it. He said the new invitations shouldn't be sent out before Yud Beis Tammuz, which was mere days away from the wedding (we got married on 15 Tammuz), and that his name should not appear on any part

of it. In the text, where it said 'the chuppah will be at five o'clock', the Rebbe underlined three times the words "five o'clock".

Sometime over the following days, Rabbi Hodakov, who hardly ever spoke not on the Rebbe's appointment, came over to me, and asked me who would be mesader kiddushin. He went on to ask me detailed questions about the preparations for our wedding, and when the kallah intended to start wearing a shaitel, clearly hinting that she already should by the chuppah!

On the wedding day, the Rebbe went to the Ohel. Around three thirty, my father-in-law wanted to begin the *kabbolas ponim*, so the chuppah could be precisely at five, faithful to the Rebbe's directive.

It was four forty five, and the Rebbe hadn't yet returned from the Ohel; five more minutes passed, and Rabbi Hodakov conveyed the message that the Rebbe was about to arrive, however, it was known that before doing anything else, the Rebbe would daven Mincha immediately upon his arrival at 770, and it would follow that the chuppah would certainly not begin at five, as anticipated. My

father-in-law didn't want to hear any of it; "The Rebbe said five o'clock, and so it will be!" he insisted.

Indeed five minutes before five, the Rebbe's car pulled up, and the Rebbe went straight to his office, informing Rabbi Hodakov, that he will be coming out for siddur kiddushin momentarily. Need I say more? The chuppah began at five o'clock exactly!

If this golden succession of events weren't enough, might I mention that throughout the duration of the chuppah, the sun was shining brightly, and no more than three minutes after its conclusion, a downpour began..." concludes Rabbi Lew, fondly.

Soon, we will see our Rebbe again, uniting in marriage the Aibershter and his majestic bride, Klal Yisroel, when it will be finally fulfilled what it says:

מהרה ישמע בערי יהודה ובחוצות ירושלים, קול ששון
וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה....

1. Vol. 1 p. 88.

2. See for instance, 'Reshimos' issue 7, p. 62.

3. The pictures were collected and published in 'Mekadesh Yisroel', Kehot 2000. The book was compiled by Rabbi Eliezer Zaklikofsky, along with a detailed description and Yomanim which were penned by those present.

Those who merited being there, recall the Rebbe's temperament while reciting the Brochos as being outstandingly solemn and yet royal.



SPECIAL ATTENTION

There were two special elements of attention chassanim and kallos received from the Rebbe throughout the years: The chassanim would receive the Rebbe's siddur from his holy hands, for Mincha before their Chasuna, and both chassanim and kallos were treated to a yechidus, just for them.

– A brief description

YECHIDUS

A special privilege young chassanim and kallos were treated to, was to have a Yechidus before their wedding. This practice began as early as 5710, even before the Rebbe openly accepted the Nesius. Generally the couple would enter this yechidus, accompanied by their parents, and at times, if they wanted to speak with the Rebbe privately, they would go in alone, or even each separately. During the Yechidus the Rebbe would bless them and answer their questions which they had written down beforehand, and handed into the Rebbe.

In 5738, following the incident of Shemini Atzeres, this practice was interrupted, due to the ever increasing volume of couples, and out of the impossibility for each to have their private time with the Rebbe.

Yechidus Klolis, thus began to take root, wherein the Rebbe would address larger groups of chassanim and kallos at once. Before the Yechidus, each one got to hand to the Rebbe his written letter, and the Rebbe would deliver a general brocho to all, at times addressing points which had been raised in their written petitions to him. The groups stood in front of the Rebbe, on different sides of the room, separated by tables which were arranged to form a temporary *mechitzah*. At the end, the Rebbe would hand each a Dollar for *tzedokah*.



THE REBBE'S SIDDUR

Every Lubavitcher chosson got to daven the last mincha before his chasuna, out of the Rebbe's very own siddur. In the early years, the Rebbe would hand it to them personally. This practice too, began in 5710, when some chassanim were debating whether to postpone their wedding until after the *shnas aveilus* for the Frierdiker Rebbe, a notion which the Rebbe wholly rejected, and to one of them he offered to give him the Frierdiker Rebbe's Siddur, for him to use in the Frierdiker Rebbe's room, upstairs in 770. From then on, this turned into a standard practice. Originally it was reserved only for alumni of Tomchei Temimim, and eventually it exploded beyond Yeshiva frontiers.

The Rebbe established that a chosson should daven this tefillah, wearing a *gartel*, though the Lubavitcher minhag is to start wearing one consistently only after the wedding.

It occurred once, that a chosson didn't have a gartel, the Rebbe noticed this, and took off his own and handed it to the Bochur to use.

Chassanim whose wedding would be overseas, and therefore would not be in New York for their final mincha, would come to the Rebbe before their departure; the Rebbe would instruct them to keep wearing a *gartel* over their shirt, for all the tefillos, until their wedding.

Upon handing over the siddur, the Rebbe would wish the Chosson: "May you ask Hashem for all good things, and may the wedding be in a good and auspicious time."

"MAZAL TOV!"

Towards the later years, when the Rebbe's already packed schedule, got even busier, it became the minhag, that newly married couples, would go straight from the chuppah, and stand next to the Rebbe's office, waiting for him to walk out for davening, or back from the Ohel, at which point he would bless them, and wish them 'Mazal Tov'.

Rabbi Binyomin Klein tells of the Rebbe's profound sensitivity towards the Chassidim:

"During a chuppah which was taking place right outside 770, the Rebbe always made sure not to exit his office, to go daven or the like, in order that the crowd gathered by the simcha, shouldn't abandon it, to see him. On the rare occasions when the Rebbe needed to leave his office nonetheless, he would leave the light in his office turned on, for people not to notice he had walked out."