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A Malach and a Chossid

Rabbi Aharon Blesofky relates how his father, Reb Schneur Zalman Blesofsky, came to Lubavitch.

My father descended from a long line of Karliner Chassidim, but his grandfather married a woman from a Chabad Chassidus—I'm not sure if it was Kopust or Lubavitch.

When my father was growing up in New York City (he was born in 5683*), the only *yeshivos* available were RJJ on the Lower East Side and Torah Vodaath in Williamsburg, which my father attended. In Torah Vodaath, my father got to know Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson, who would visit and speak with the *bochurim*, and give a Tanya *shiur* several times a week. While the *hanhala* was mostly Litvish, they allowed this—a Yid of the caliber of Rabbi Jacobson was inspiring to the *bochurim* and they appreciated that—so my father began to learn Chassidus.

The “Malach” also came to Torah Vodaath and he also learned Chassidus with the *bochurim*. They tolerated his Chassidus-learning because they had no choice, but this stopped as soon as the Litvishe *roshei yeshiva* started coming to America before the war. He passed away in 5698*, but a group of his followers—known as the Malachim—continued in his ways. They would wear their *tallis kotton* over their shirts, per the Alter Rebbe's opinion, and had long *peyos*. My father went along with them. As a Malach, my father

was meant to have no association with Lubavitch but my father wanted to see the Frierdiker Rebbe.

He came to the Frierdiker Rebbe's door—they didn't allow many people in on account of the Frierdiker Rebbe's health, so there was an individual controlling who would go in—and standing there at the door was the Rebbe, who let my father in. He entered the hallway, known as the salon, and saw the Frierdiker Rebbe for a few minutes.

That was the only time he saw the Frierdiker Rebbe.

Still, my father stayed a Malach.

The Malachim initially didn't have a yeshiva of their own, so they would learn in a *Poilishe shtibel* all day. Eventually, in 5696*, they bought a *shul* on Hewes Street, which everyone knew as the “*Malachim Shtibel*.” My father would study there each Thursday night.

One evening in 5712*, my father had been married 11 years, and was sitting in the *Malachim Shtibel*. That same night, the Rebbe came out of his room and walked into the *zal*. Moshe Gorkow, today of Boston, was in the *zal*, and he heard the Rebbe say, “There is a *shul* in Williamsburg called *Nesivos Olam*, and there are *yungerleit* sitting there whom it would

לזכות
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לרגל האפשרעניש' שלו
ח' אדר ה'תשפ"א
נדפס ע"י הוריו
הרה"ת ר' יוסף דוד וזוגתו מרת רבקה
ומשפחתם שיחיו
שטראקס

“There is a shul in Williamsburg called Nesivos Olam, and there are yungerleit sitting there, whom it would be proper to be mekarev to Chassidus Chabad.”

be good to be *mekarev* to Chassidus Chabad.” With those words, the Rebbe turned around, left the *zal*, and went home.

It was close to 11:00 p.m., and Moshe discussed with three others who were present whether they should go right away or perhaps put it off because of the lateness of the hour—would the *shul* even be open this late?

One of them concluded, “The Rebbe said to go, and that means we should go now.” So they got on a bus, without having any idea where this shul “*Nesivos Olam*” was located. A 15- or 20-minute bus ride brought them to Williamsburg, and by now it was approaching midnight. They got off the bus at a street corner and began asking people for directions to “*Nesivos Olam*.” “I never heard of it,” people replied.

They were almost ready to give up, but they asked one more person. “*Nesivos Olam*—you mean the *Malachim Shtibel*,” he replied. “It’s on Hewes Street between Lee and Marcy.” They were on Lee Avenue, having taken the bus up Nostrand Avenue to Williamsburg. “If the shul is open, you’ll see the lights on,” he continued.

They went there, and sure enough, the lights were on and several *yungerleit* were sitting there. One of

them was my father. My father saw the *bochurim* walk in and greeted them. My father was intrigued by this group of people who had visited so late at night. They sat down and had a discussion until the wee hours of the night—3:00 or 4:00 in the morning—and then my father went home.

In those years, Friday morning was a time that the *bochurim* would make an extra effort to come to *seder Chassidus* on time, as the Rebbe had spoken to *hanhalah* about the relatively poor attendance that had been taking place.

Moshe Gurkow, however, woke up a bit late. By the time he came to *zal*, it was 8:40, and sitting near the door was a young man, with the brim of his hat up. “Aren’t you the *yungerman* I saw last night in the *Nesivos Olam* shul?” Moshe asked. “What brings you here?”

“We had a conversation last night,” my father replied. “I would like to continue that conversation.”

The rest is history. ¹

1. Chaim Avraham Dov Ber Levine.