

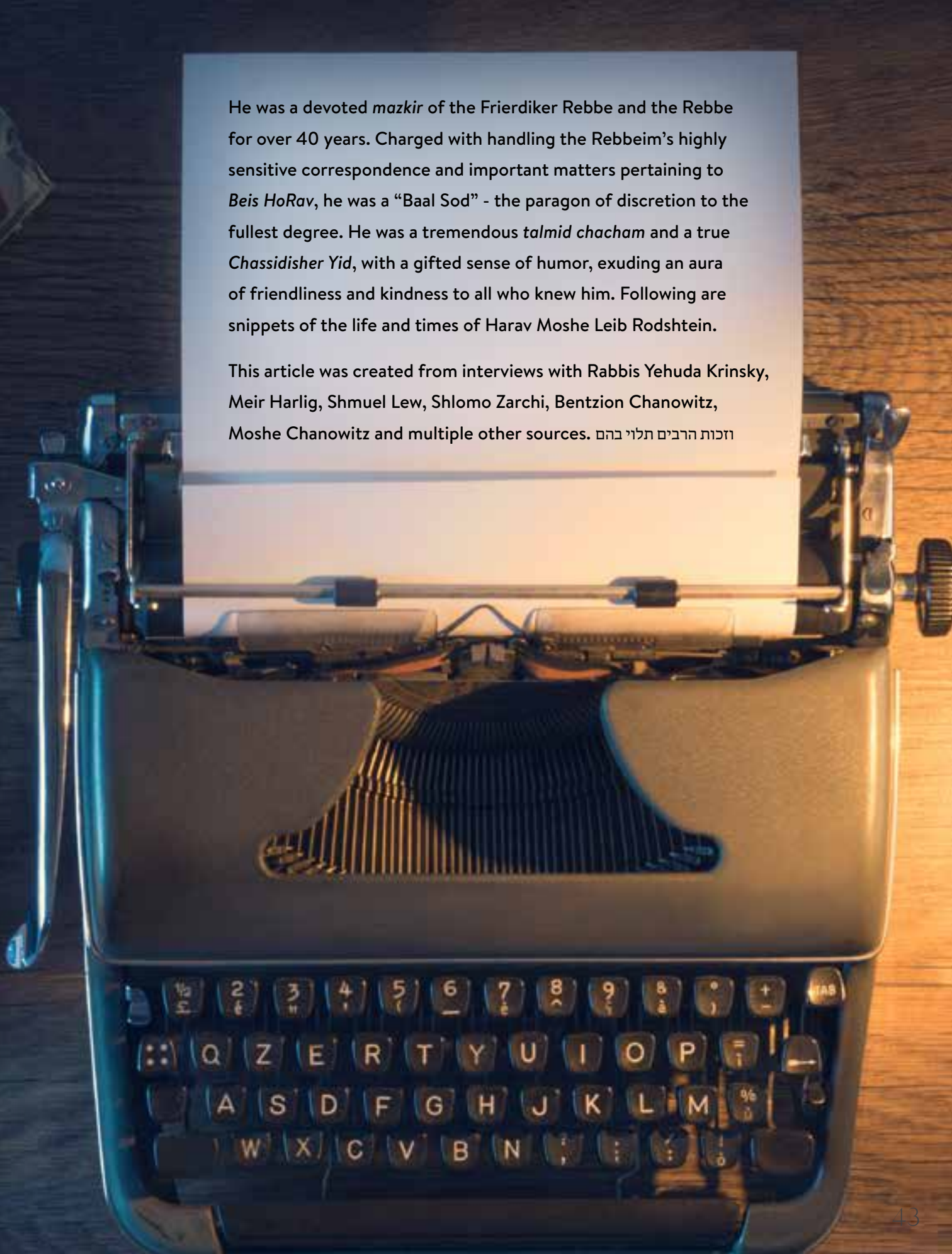
Service & Discretion

The life and times of
the legendary Mazkir,
Reb Moshe Leib Rodshtein

לזכות השלוחה
מרת פערל גאלדא שתחי'
לרגל יום הולדתה א' אייר,
השליח גבריאל נח שיחי',
לרגל יום הולדתו ט' אייר,
בבחור הת' השליח לוי שיחי'
לרגל יום הולדתו י"ב אייר
נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' דוד ומשפחתם שיחיו
טייכטל



JEM 112663

A vintage typewriter with a sheet of paper inserted, set against a dark background. The typewriter is a classic design with a keyboard and a carriage. The paper is white and contains text. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the mechanical parts of the typewriter.

He was a devoted *mazkir* of the Friediker Rebbe and the Rebbe for over 40 years. Charged with handling the Rebbeim's highly sensitive correspondence and important matters pertaining to *Beis HoRav*, he was a "Baal Sod" - the paragon of discretion to the fullest degree. He was a tremendous *talmid chacham* and a true *Chassidisher Yid*, with a gifted sense of humor, exuding an aura of friendliness and kindness to all who knew him. Following are snippets of the life and times of Harav Moshe Leib Rodshtein.

This article was created from interviews with Rabbis Yehuda Krinsky, Meir Harlig, Shmuel Lew, Shlomo Zarchi, Bentzion Chanowitz, Moshe Chanowitz and multiple other sources. זכות הרבים תלוי בהם.

“It’s impossible to describe what the Rebbe and his family experienced since the outbreak of war... The library in Otwock is still intact... Three crates of priceless ksavim, including the Baal Shem Tov’s Siddur, that were brought to Warsaw are also still intact... but the rest of their belongings, clothing, valuable gold and silver artifacts and even the Rebbe’s Tallis and Tefillin were all lost in fire! Some of the Rebbe’s invaluable writings were also burned, and there are no copies of them... I also merited that my belongings, which were together with the Rebbe’s belongings, were all lost as well in the fires...”¹

It was Cheshvan 5700* and Europe was burning. Germany had invaded Poland two months earlier, setting off the worst world war in history and the Jewish world would never be the same.

The above letter was written by the Frierdiker Rebbe’s devoted *mazkir* Reb Moshe Leib Rodshtein to Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel describing the horrors of war-torn Warsaw and how the headquarters of Lubavitch, which had so recently started thriving in the town of Otwock after so many years of exile and wandering, was once again on the run.

As Chassidim in America worked feverishly to save the Frierdiker Rebbe’s family from the inferno and to ensure their safe passage to the United States,² the Frierdiker Rebbe prepared a list of his staff and their families that were to accompany him on this journey. Reb Moshe Leib Rodshtein and his wife Kaila were on this list.

The alias that stuck

His birth name was Zushe ben Mordechai Shifrin.³ From his early teen years he learned in Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim in Lubavitch, and later on in Poltava in the late 5670s*. During those days of upheaval in Russia, men from age 17 were forced to go to army training and between the ages of 21 and 25 they were drafted into the army.

In the yeshiva, all *bochurim* who were 17 obtained false papers stating they were 14 years old, and those who were already 21 forged their ages to 25.

Zushe Shifrin was issued false documents and the ruse worked for a while but he was ultimately caught and drafted. It is unknown how he eventually got himself an exemption, but after leaving the army he traveled directly to Rostov to ask the Frierdiker Rebbe what his next step should be.

In *yechidus*, the Rebbe instructed him to leave Russia and then told him

to give him his hand. Chassidim never hold the Rebbe’s hand and Zushe declined to do so now as well, but the Frierdiker Rebbe insisted and told him a story of the Baal Shem Tov while holding his hand.⁴

In preparation for his escape from Russia he received forged documents with the name Moshe Leib Rodshtein, and from then on he was called by this name by all who knew him. In writing as well as in conversation he was also commonly referred to with the acronym of this alias - רמ"ל.

He managed to cross the border but was quickly caught and apprehended by the Polish border patrol and later released. In 5684* he married Kaila Chanowitz, the daughter of the Lubavitcher *shochet* of Gluboko, Reb Yisroel Chanowitz, and he was very active in the Lubavitcher community for several years. They eventually settled in Warsaw, where he was



THE WEDDING OF REB MOSHE LEIB AND KAILA, GLUBOKO 5684*.

appointed to be the secretary of Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim in 5687*.

In the summer of 5692*, while the Frierdiker Rebbe was living in Druzkenik, a resort area on the border of Poland and Lithuania, Reb Moshe Leib was appointed to be the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *mazkir*. Several days after his appointment he accompanied the Frierdiker Rebbe on a trip to visit the Lubavitcher Chassidim in Ludmir, Poland. He continued to serve as the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *mazkir* until the Nazis invaded Poland in Elul 5699*.

From the Rebbe’s Reshimos it emerges⁵ that even before his official appointment as *mazkir*, Reb Moshe Leib was together with the Frierdiker Rebbe in Postov, near Vilna, during the month of Adar 5692*. The Rebbe quotes Reb Moshe Leib about which *haftarah* the Frierdiker Rebbe said on Shabbos Parshas Pekudei.

When the war broke out, Reb Moshe Leib joined the Frierdiker



Rebbe and his family as they evacuated from Otwock and spent several harrowing weeks in Warsaw dodging the German bombs.

As mentioned earlier, the initial plan was for Reb Moshe Leib and his wife to join the Frierdiker Rebbe on the escape to America through Riga, but since he was a Polish citizen, there was no way for him to leave Poland to Latvia, so the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed him to travel to Gluboko and find a way to escape to Lithuania.

At the time, the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed all the *talmidim* of Tomchei Temimim to escape to Lithuania and after several weeks, dozens of *temimim* organized themselves in a yeshiva setting in Vilna. Reb Moshe Leib helped the *bochurim* in many ways and farbrenged with them.⁶

When the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in Riga during the month of Teves, Reb Moshe Leib and Reb Shmuel Zalmanov came to Riga to update the



THE FRIERDIKER REBBE IN RIGA, CIRCA 5690*.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASIDEI CHABAD/KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY



WITH THE BOCHURIM IN VILNA

17 ADAR I 5700. LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASIDEI CHABAD.

Frierdiker Rebbe in person about the new yeshiva in Vilna and the efforts to obtain exit visas for the *bochurim*.

At one point during this important operation Reb Moshe Leib provided names and personal information about over 120 *temimim*, Chassidim and their families - all from memory!

Although Reb Moshe Leib and his wife had been included in the Frierdiker Rebbe's list of essential staff to accompany him to the United States, their visas only arrived some time after the Frierdiker Rebbe already

left Europe, and they moved to Riga with the hope of reaching the US from there. Eventually, they were forced to escape eastward through Russia, and from the port city of Vladivostok set off to Kobe, Japan, from where they eventually set sail for America, arriving in New York City, through S. Francisco, in Cheshvan 5701*.

Six weeks later the Frierdiker Rebbe appointed Reb Moshe Leib to be the *menahel* of Agudas Chassidei Chabad in Chicago.⁷ At the time there were four Lubavitcher shuls in the city



and many descendants of Chassidim lived there. He served as the rav of the Agudas Chabad shul and was instrumental in arranging *shiurei Chassidus* throughout the city. He fundraised for the “Keren Hatzalah” to save Jews from the European inferno and was involved in many other projects throughout the Jewish community.

In 5703* he was involved in opening the Yeshivas Achei Temimim in Chicago, which continued to function until the summer of 5706*. At that time, Reb Moshe Leib was called back to New York to once again serve as a *mazkir* to the Frierdiker Rebbe. His responsibilities included handling the Frierdiker Rebbe’s correspondence, presiding over the collection of *maamed*, and handling certain financial aspects of Colel Chabad.

In his capacity as *mazkir*, Reb Moshe Leib became a permanent fixture of the 770 scene and many from that time period remember his kind, warm and gentle personality.

“When I came to 770 as a young *bochur* from Boston, Reb Moshe Leib took an immediate interest in my well



REB MOSHE LEIB (LEFT) ACCOMPANIES THE FRIERDIKER REBBE ON HIS VISIT TO GLUBOKO 5694*

KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

being,” recalls Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky. “He did not have any children of his own and he was focused on ensuring the wellbeing of a young *bochur* far away from home.”

“He would speak with me at length, always exuding a rich *Chassidishkeit* and dedication to the Rebbe. He was very proud of us young *bochurim* and once said to me, ‘You *bochurim* are the future of Lubavitch!’

“He was a true ‘*baal sod*’ who knew how to keep a secret and never revealed anything connected with his work in *mazkirus*.”

The First Recordings

Following the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *histalkus* on Yud Shvat, he became

instrumental in the Chassidim’s efforts throughout the year to ensure the Rebbe accepted the *nesius*. Rabbi Berel Shemtov relates⁸ that Reb Moshe Leib was so impressed by the tremendous *hiskashrus* the *yungeleit* and *bochurim* had for the Rebbe that he commented to Reb Yitzchok Dubov during that time period, “They cling to him [the Rebbe] like bees around honey, and they pressured me to speak to the Rebbe about the *nesius*.”

He began serving as a *mazkir* for the Rebbe while continuing to handle his previous responsibilities. At one of the many important meetings with Chassidim throughout that year he exhorted the Chassidim to continue giving *maamed*. He was also appointed



WITH THE BOCHURIM IN VILNA

to the committee charged with building the Frierdiker Rebbe's Ohel⁹.

Reb Moshe Leib had a great interest in gadgets and owned a recording device. On the historic day of Yud Shevat 5711*, unbeknownst to the crowd, he connected the Rebbe's microphone to his recording device and merited to record the historic farbrengen of *kabbalas hanesius* and the *maamar* Basi Legani. It seems that the recordings of all the farbrengens in those early years were recorded on devices belonging to him.

In those early years of the *nesius*, the Rebbe had not yet allowed for his Torah to be properly published. The *hanachos* of the *sichos* were transcribed by a team led by the *chozer* Reb Yoel

Kahn and typed with a typewriter on several copies of paper which were of terrible quality.

One day Reb Moshe Leib brought several copies of the *hanachos* to the Rebbe and said, "There is no point in producing better copies of these *hanachos* because very soon they will be published properly. These are just for temporary use." Reb Moshe Leib said this comment with the express intention of seeing how the Rebbe would react to the idea of proper publication of the *sichos*. The Rebbe smiled, and when Reb Moshe Leib reported this to the Chassidim they understood this to be the Rebbe's agreement for publication in better quality.

"I spoke to the Shver..."

"Reb Moshe Leib worked very closely with the Rebbe. He would go into the Rebbe's room every day to take dictation for the Rebbe's extensive correspondence at a schedule that varied from day to day," Rabbi Krinsky recalls. "He worked every day in the office now known as WLCC."

There were times when the Rebbe would return from the Ohel and Reb Moshe Leib would enter the room immediately to take dictation for letters. Rabbi Leibel Groner once related an interesting episode that occurred in connection with this.¹⁰

One time after the Rebbe returned from the Ohel he called for Reb Moshe Leib. After several moments he left the Rebbe's room and uncharacteristically shared with Rabbi Groner what had just happened:

Two weeks earlier, after working in the Rebbe's room, Reb Moshe Leib remained standing by the door silently. The Rebbe looked up and said with a smile, "You cannot go home tonight because your wife wrote me a letter last week and did not yet receive an answer; and she told you not to come home without an answer to her letter." Reb Moshe Leib nodded and smiled and the Rebbe continued, "I have not yet been by the Shver. So please tell her that I give you permission to go home because there is no answer yet."

On this evening (two weeks later), when Reb Moshe Leib walked into the room, the Rebbe said that in the interim he was by the Shver and had a chance to ask the question for Reb Moshe Leib's wife. The answer is that she should not do as she had planned.

Reb Moshe Leib handled the Yiddish and Hebrew correspondence and was understandably involved with the way the Rebbe handled his mail. As is well known, the Rebbe would open every envelope himself. Due to

Reb Moshe Leib's interest in the latest technology he once bought an electric envelope opener and brought it to the Rebbe in order to alleviate the burden of time that it took the Rebbe to open the enormous amount of mail that arrived daily.

The Rebbe looked at the machine for a few moments but refused to use it.

In general, Reb Moshe Leib always sought to create a joyous vibe and made a concerted effort to make the Rebbe happy. He would often do some

"*shtik*" only in order to elicit a smile from the Rebbe.

Rabbi Krinsky relates that once, as Reb Moshe Leib walked into the Rebbe's room to take dictations for letters, he was holding a very tiny pencil. The Rebbe asked him if he was not able to find a larger pencil to write with. The next day he walked into the Rebbe's room with a giant pencil in his hand and the Rebbe laughed in appreciation. It seems he would use this pencil on several occasions just so that the Rebbe would be amused.

Others recall that he would bring wind up gadgets and place them on the Rebbe's desk at times to lighten the mood.

A quiet and unassuming man, he rarely spoke in public, but when he participated in a farbrengen he would often do "*shtik*" to lighten the mood. For example, he had a very long handkerchief that he would slowly pull out of his breast pocket in a way that made a scene that entertained the crowd. There were also times that



AT THE SHEVA BROCHOS OF REB MORDECHAI MENTLIK, OTWOCK 5698*.
R - L REB MOSHE LEIB, REB YEHUDA EBER, REB SHRAGA FEIVISH ZALMANOV, REB CHATCHE FEIGIN, REB MORDECHAI MENTLICK.



LAG B'OMER PARADE 5717*. REB MOSHE LEIB IS STANDING IN THE DOORWAY OF 770.

JEM 286730

he engineered some type of ruckus during Mincha on weekdays just to elicit a smile from the Rebbe.

Far from being a vain clown, he was a *pnimius'diker Chassidisher Yid* who was genuinely friendly and pleasant to everyone and wanted them to be happy - especially the Rebbe.

Transcends all limitations!

There were some unique exceptions to his rule of silence and when he did speak in public he expressed his true devotion and love for the Rebbe. One of them was on Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai 5717*, the day before the major Lag B'omer Parade. After Shacharis he stood up on a bench and made the following announcement.

"All Chassidim must get involved in ensuring the parade is successful. The goal of the parade is so that *Yiddishe kinder* that are not yet *shomrei Torah u'Mitzvos* should see the Rebbe's holy face. The memory of this experience will be engraved in their minds and

will have a spiritual and physical healing effect on them. As the *possuk* states, "וראה את הכהן ונרפא הנגע"—and he will see the Kohen and the illness will be healed..."

Another time, on Shabbos Parshas Terumah 5714*, Reb Moshe Leib accompanied the Rebbe as he left the *zal* after Shacharis and soon afterwards returned to the remaining Chassidim. He stood up on a bench and said: "Today we read in the Torah about the mitzvah of building the *aron kodesh*. Chazal teach us that the place of the *aron* was *מינו מן המידה*—it transcended the limitations of space. You all think that this concept is distant history? You should know that in our times there is a Yid, the one who just walked into that room"—he said while gesturing towards the Rebbe's room—"who embodies this special quality. Every day he receives thousands of letters from around the world and I cannot comprehend how he manages to respond to all of them. This is the true embodiment of '*מינו מן המידה*'!"

On the same note he once commented to his great-nephew Reb Aharon Chitrik that whenever he thinks that he's starting to understand the Rebbe's behavior and develop some type of pattern, everything changes and the Rebbe remains as mysterious to him as before. Another time he saw a certain individual taking a photo of the Rebbe. In those years the Rebbe did not approve of Chassidim photographing him and Reb Moshe Leib confronted the man for doing so. The man said he wanted to have a photo of the Rebbe to remember the Rebbe's image and Reb Moshe Leib responded, "By the time you will develop the photograph, the Rebbe will be totally different."¹¹

The *bochurim* in 770 at the time appreciated his *Chassidisher* warmth and humor and he was friendly and approachable to them.

"One Friday during the month of Elul I was in the *zal* of 770 which was completely empty," recalls Rabbi Gershon Mendel Garelik. "Reb Moshe Leib walked into the *zal* and gestured to me to follow him into the *mazkirus* office. When I entered, he instructed me to stand under the air conditioning vent and to listen closely. After a few moments I heard sounds of the shofar. During those years the Rebbe davened Shacharis during the weekdays in his room. The Rebbe had just finished davening and was blowing shofar, as is customary. I cherish this unique memory very much."

A special experience he had only because of Reb Moshe Leib's unique sensitivity to the *bochurim*.

Another experience related by Rabbi Garelik: "Once a group of us *bochurim* followed the Rebbe as he walked home. The Rebbe would walk very quickly and never waited at the curb for the light to change. After the Rebbe crossed the street we followed immediately behind, and it was not a very safe situation... The next day Reb Moshe Leib walked up to our group as we were sitting in the *zal* and after making some small talk said to us, 'You guys need to wait for the green light.' And then with a twinkle in his eye added severely, 'because you could really get hurt!'"

Rabbi Shlomo Zarchi relates that Reb Moshe Leib would often speak with the *bochurim* - already in the 5710s* - about the need to bring the Rebbe to the world and even suggested that they needed to find a way to get the Rebbe on television.

"He was a very friendly man," recalls Rabbi Leibel Alevsky. "When I was working in Tzach, whenever I needed to have intelligent advice pertaining to complicated situations, things I would not necessarily want to bring to the Rebbe and consume his time, I would discuss it with Reb Moshe Leib. He was very close to the



Rebbe and yet so approachable and always tried to help.”

Lubavitch Expansion

The neighboring building to 770 on the western side, 766 Eastern Parkway, was owned by a Jewish dentist named Dr. Schapiro, and it served as his private residence and clinic. He was very friendly to Lubavitch and even treated the Rebbe and Rebbetzin on several occasions.

One day in 5723* Reb Moshe Leib approached Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky with some urgent news. He had just been speaking to Dr. Schapiro who had shared with him that he planned to retire, sell the house, and move away from the neighborhood.

“You must look into buying the building. This is crucial for Lubavitch expansion,” he insisted.

“At the time we were bursting at the seams,” says Rabbi Krinsky. “The Rebbe’s library was overflowing with *sefarim* and there was no room to store them, let alone to arrange them as a proper library. I agreed with Reb Moshe Leib and after consulting the Rebbe, I reached out to Dr. Schapiro about purchasing the house.

“He was very receptive to the idea and we agreed on a good price. To make a long story short, Merkos L’Inyonei Chinuch purchased the home several months later, eventually turning it into the Rebbe’s library.

“In those years, most people, especially non-Lubavitchers, could not imagine that Lubavitch would need to own another building on Eastern Parkway. Dr. Schapiro could have very possibly put the house up for sale, sold it and we would have completely missed this crucial opportunity. It was only due to Reb Moshe Leib’s diligence, attention and vision that we were able to purchase the house when we did.”

Reb Moshe Leib lived for many years in the same building as a shul



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THE REBBE LEAVES THE LIBRARY 7 CHESHVAN 5748*

on Rogers Avenue. Rabbi Mordechai Harlig was the rav of the shul and Reb Moshe Leib would daven there often. At the time, the *mikveh* in Crown Heights was not built in accordance with the opinion of the Rebbe Rashab as בור על גבי בור, and Reb Moshe Leib invested tremendous efforts to build such a *mikveh* in that shul. It was the only *mikveh* of its kind in Crown Heights for many years.

Towards the end of his life, he and his wife moved to an apartment in the building on the corner of Kingston Avenue and Union Street.

A Royal Visit

In 5727* Reb Moshe Leib became very ill and it was increasingly difficult for him to continue coming to 770 every day. In an extremely rare occurrence, the Rebbe visited him in

his apartment on Kingston Avenue during Rosh Hashanah 5728*, an event that indicates what a special person he truly was.

On Motzei Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecha, 9 Cheshvan 5728*, Reb Moshe Leib passed away and was buried near the Ohel the next day. The Rebbe participated in the *levaya*, and in another unique exception, traveled all the way to the cemetery and watched the proceedings of the *levaya* from outside the gate.

Reb Moshe Leib purchased his burial plot in the front row nearest the Ohel and once explained to Reb Aharon Chitrik that since he did not have any children, he wished that those who come to the Ohel and pass by his grave should say a kapitel Tehillim in his memory.¹²

The Rebbe instructed that a *minyán* should daven in his home every day of *shiva* and since Reb Moshe Leib was very instrumental in publishing the *maamarim* of the Frieddiker Rebbe from 5699*, they should learn several lines from the *maamar* connected to the *parsha* of that week after each *tefila*.

Reb Moshe Leib bequeathed all of his possessions to Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch, including his home on Kingston Avenue which served for many years as the Mivtza Neshek office.

His *matzeiva* reads:

Pleasant and beloved to all. He consecrated his entire life to *beis chayeinu* and served there for over 40 years. With utmost humility he fulfilled his mission to draw Yidden closer to the life of life.

Hemshech Samach Vov

On¹³ Beis Nissan 5725* Rabbi Mordechai Shusterman of the Balshan print shop received a phone call from Rabbi Chodokov with the following message. When the Rebbe returned



from the Ohel he instructed that we should start typesetting the *Hemshech Samach Vov* that very night in preparation for print.

This happened despite the fact that Beis Nissan was on a Sunday and not a regular work day at the shop.

Until then this foundational *hemshech* from the Rebbe Rashab was available only in mimeograph, and the time had come for it to be properly published. Over the next few weeks Rabbi Shusterman was encouraged to hasten the typesetting, but to his surprise was told to stop only a few weeks after Pesach.

During the Seudas Yom Tov of Sukkos 5726* in the Frieddiker Rebbe's sukkah, Rashag inquired why the publication of *Hemshech Samach Vov* had stopped. The Rebbe responded that a certain member of *anash* had produced many copies of the mimeograph version of the *Hemshech* and was selling it in Eretz Yisroel. When he heard that Kehos was about to publish the *sefer* he wrote a letter to the Rebbe complaining that he would lose his entire investment if the *hemshech* became imminently available in the format of a proper *Sefer*.

“He regretted writing this to me afterwards, but if I would receive a letter from a Chossid expressing

how important it is to him that the *hemshech* be printed properly I would consider it. In reality I received a letter with the opposite content...”

Despite all this Reb Moshe Leib instructed Rabbi Shusterman privately to continue typesetting the *hemshech*, which he continued doing on a volunteer basis and managed to prepare 50 more galleys¹⁴ of the *Sefer*.

Five years later, when Rabbi Shusterman was in *yechidus* for his birthday on Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul 5730* the Rebbe asked him “Where are we holding with the preparations for printing the *Hemshech Samach Vov*?”

Rabbi Schusterman told the Rebbe that after we were instructed to halt typesetting the *hemshech* Reb Moshe Leib Rodshtein (who had already passed away by then) instructed me to continue and we managed to prepare 50 more galleys.”

“When the Rebbe heard this he said in a loud voice: **‘ותבוא עליו ברכה!’** 📌

1. Derech Tomim vol 4, p. 41.
2. See *The Miraculous Rescue*, Derher Adar II 5779.
3. See Toldos Chabad Lita, Latvia & Poland p. 357.
4. As heard by Reb Avrohom Weingarten. Teshura Weingarten-Vorst 5761.
5. Reshimas Hayoman p. 253.
6. See *Shadar* p. 37.
7. Toldos Chabad B'artzos Habris page 334.
8. Yemei Breshis p. 85.
9. Chossid Ne'emon (by Shneur Zalman Berger), p. 184.
10. Heard by Reb Aharon Kurant at a farbrengen with Rabbi Groner - Sukkos 5742. Teshura Kurant 5768.
11. Teshura Bar Mitzvah-Nagel 5757. Page 114.
12. Recorded by his great nephew Rabbi Aharon Chitrik (Heoros U'biurim Oholei Torah 929).
13. Lmaan Yeidu Bonim Yivoleidu page 150. Kehos page 232.
14. Preliminary versions of publications meant for review by authors, editors, and proofreaders, often with extra-wide margins.