

True Devotion

*The Rebbe's Daily Visits
to his mother,
Rebbetzin Chana*

In 28 Sivan 5707, the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana, arrived in New York, where she lived in close proximity to her beloved son, the Rebbe. The next seventeen ("Tov") years gave her the *Nachas* and joy to combat the years of hardships she endured wandering in exile with her husband, Reb Levi Yitzchok, and the loneliness she suffered with his untimely passing.

Despite his crowded schedule the Rebbe took the time to visit his mother every day. Whether it was a balmy summer evening or a freezing winter night the Rebbe could be seen walking up Kingston Avenue to his mother's apartment.

The daily visits usually took place be-

tween six and seven o'clock in the evening and would last between five to fifteen minutes. On Friday afternoon, the Rebbe would visit for a short while close to candle-lighting time and return for a longer visit after *Kabbolas Shabbos*. At times, the Rebbe came for an additional visit on Shabbos day or *Motzoei Shabbos*.

Reb Laibel Paskez, who also lived at 1418 President Street, relates:

"Many times when the Rebbe arrived at the apartment building, one of my sons or myself had the privilege of opening the door for him. The Rebbe always responded with a smile and said, "thank you." In some instances, the Rebbe asked my children where they learned or what they had

been learning recently."

Reb Shmuel Lipskier and his family resided nearby. He recounts how the Rebbetzin once noticed one of his children holding the door open for the Rebbe and commented that the Rebbe does not necessarily appreciate it. [A possible explanation for her remarks is that the Rebbe didn't exercise and she wished his opening and closing of the heavy door would be of some benefit to his health.]

Before he would arrive, the Rebbe would telephone his mother to inform her that he was on his way, and he kept his own key so that his arrival shouldn't trouble her in any way. Nevertheless, the Rebbetzin often waited outside to greet



the Rebbe and nearby residents recall a most touching scene of the Rebbe and his mother conversing in front of the building.

The Friedman family lived next door at 1414 President Street, and sometimes their son, Avraham (today known as the singer Avraham Fried), would stand near the window and sing “*Uforatzta*,” “*Hoshia*,” and other *Niggunim* as the Rebbe arrived. In response, the Rebbe would look up at the boy and wave his hand along with the *Niggun*.

THE DETAILS

During his visit, the Rebbe and his mother would sit together in the living room and have cups of tea (often pre-

pared by the Rebbe himself). The Rebbe made sure to sit only after his mother was already seated and he would inquire about her wellbeing and daily activities. He even concerned himself with trivial matters like the cleaning lady’s work in the apartment and he often brought along a newspaper or other reading material to share with the Rebbetzin, and would make an effort to tell her news that would make her happy.

From her part, the Rebbetzin also sought to tell the Rebbe things that would make him happy, or at times request his advice on various issues. Her acquaintances often relayed their own issues to her as well so that she ask the Rebbe’s

advice on their behalf.

So as not cause each other pain, the Rebbe and his mother refrained from confiding their worries and sharing sad news. When the Rebbe’s brother Reb Yisroel Arye Leib passed away, the Rebbe hid the news from her and, although she later began to sense the truth (which she recorded in her diary), she didn’t divulge her concerns with the Rebbe either.

COME JOIN US!

Mrs. Chaya Sarah Weiner used to assist Rebbetzin Chana in her later years. Her son, Reb Bentzion relates:

“When the Rebbe arrived for his daily visit, my mother would prepare a glass of tea for each of them. Once, the Rebbe

asked my mother, “And how about for yourself? You’re not going to have a tea as well?” My mother responded that she had prepared one for herself in the kitchen. “Come drink with us,” the Rebbe insisted, but my mother replied, “No, thank you, I’ll let a mother and her son enjoy some private time together.”

While with his mother the Rebbe sat patiently and never rushed the visits, but once he left he would hurry back to 770. In leaving, he would wish his mother “*Kol tuv*” or “*Derlebben Moshiach*” (may you live to greet Moshiach), and when she was ill he would not wish her “*Refuah Sheleima*,” in order not to highlight that she wasn’t well.

“HE THINKS I DON’T KNOW!”

Reb Hirshel Chitrik, who often visited the home of the Rebbetzin, relates an interesting story about how the Rebbe would take leave of his mother.

“The first time I saw the Rebbe leaving his mother’s apartment I noticed something strange. On his way out, the Rebbe straightened some of the chairs and fiddled with the picture frames on the wall. At first I didn’t make much of it, but when this scene repeated itself over and over, I found it quite puzzling. Seeing my confusion, the Rebbetzin remarked, “I

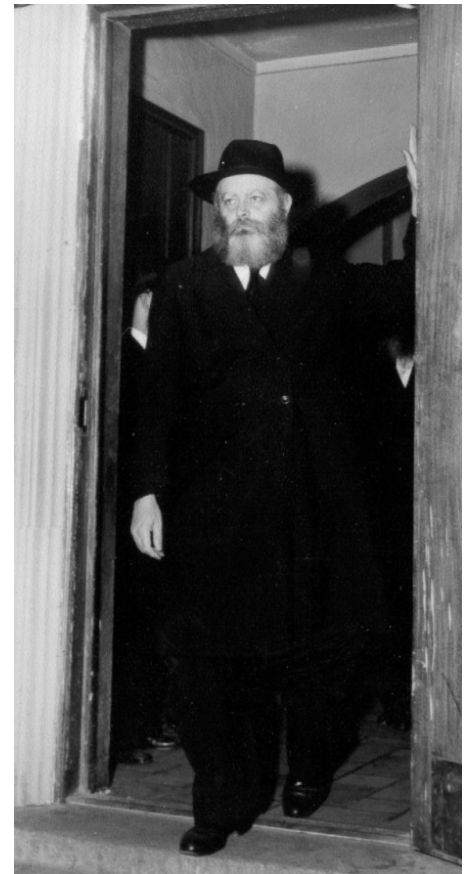
see you realized my son’s mysterious manner of leaving the house. Let me tell you something: from the day my son turned Bar Mitzvah I have never seen his back. And he still thinks I haven’t noticed.”

“It was then that I understood what had happened. The Rebbe didn’t want to merely walk out backwards, because then his mother would realize that he was avoiding turning his back on her. Thus, he would walk somewhat on his side and pretend to be straightening the chairs to complete the guise.”

THE REBBETZIN’S APPRECIATION

After suffering so much throughout her lifetime and living alone without her husband, the Rebbe’s daily visits served as a source of comfort for the Rebbetzin. In her diary, Rebbetzin Chana described the pleasure of the Rebbe’s visits in extraordinary terms. “These visits sustain me,” she once wrote. “They give me new life for the entire day. I live with the strength I get from them.”

“My apartment where I am now is not very large. It so happens that during the time he sits here with me, the room seems to be much bigger! During his visits, I don’t at all feel many things that I find unpleasant and under the inspira-



tion of his noble devotion and greatness, I manage to live with them until his next visit 24 hours later”. [This diary entry was written when the Rebbetzin was living on the corner of Lincoln and Kingston.]

In another instance she writes:

“Sometimes my mood gets dark and the clouds become dense enough to slice with a knife. But after I see my son, the clouds lose their gloom.”

Reb Berel Junik, long-time acquaintance and assistant of the Rebbetzin, related:

“The Rebbe’s daily visits were the most special hour of the day for her and as the appointed time of drew close, she would prepare herself by dressing in fine attire. During the rest of the day, she ‘lived’ with the moments she spent with the Rebbe.

“In the course of her conversations with the Rebbe she would try giving him *Nachas* as much as possible. She was well informed about the goings-on in the Chabad community, and she always sought news that she knew would please the Rebbe.”

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Reb Bentzion Weiner relates:

“My mother was deeply moved by the Rebbe’s daily visits. She once complimented the Rebbetzin: “Your son is so busy yet he finds the time to come each day for a visit. What a son you have; he never misses a day.” The Rebbetzin responded: “Indeed, he fulfills the *Mitzvah* of *Kibud Eim* above and beyond his obligation.””

ADDITIONAL VISITORS

There were quite a few individuals who frequented the Rebbetzin’s apartment and sometimes their visits coincided with the Rebbe’s. Reb Laibel Raskin, who used to visit the Rebbetzin almost every day while he was a bochur in 770, relates that if he saw the Rebbe was with his mother when he arrived, he would leave immediately. Reb Hirshel Chitrik adds that if the Rebbe saw him visiting the Rebbetzin he would thank him for spending time with her.

In another instance, Reb Berel Futerfas was visiting the Rebbetzin when the Rebbe arrived. He hurried into the kitchen to hide and heard the Rebbe ask his mother who was in the apartment. “Futerfas,” the Rebbetzin replied and the Rebbe said that he had regards for him from his father.

“When I left the kitchen,” Reb Berel recalls, “the Rebbe told me that Rabbi David Hollander had recently returned from Russia and brought regards from my father.”

“WE HAVE A GUEST!”

Reb Zalman Schmukler relates a story of his mother who was once invited to visit the Rebbetzin whilst the Rebbe was present.

“My mother knew Rebbetzin Chana from the time they spent together in the DP camp in Poking, Germany, where she had cared for the Rebbetzin. When my mother came to New York in 5713, the Rebbetzin invited her for a visit.

“When she told one of her friends about the planned visit, her friend was shocked. “That can’t be,” she said, “that’s the same time that the Rebbe usually visits with her.” Hearing this, my mother

called the Rebbetzin and asked if she had misunderstood the desired time. The Rebbetzin responded, “Not at all. That is exactly when I would like you to come.”

“During my mother’s visit, the Rebbe arrived. My mother was uncomfortable but the Rebbetzin told her, “Just wait here.” She then said to the Rebbe, “This is the woman I told you about.” It was then

When Rebbetzin Chana arrived in America in 5707 (after staying with the Rebbe and Rebbetzin for a short while) she lived in an apartment at 1304 Lincoln Place on the corner of Kingston Avenue (top right). Later (around the year 5713), she moved to an apartment on the first floor of 1418 President Street (bottom right) (which today is connected to the Yeshivah dormitory at 1414). Reb Meir Harlig notes that the Rebbetzin moved to make it easier for the Rebbe’s daily visits. This way, the Rebbe no longer had to cross the busy intersection at Eastern Parkway.

that my mother understood why she wanted her to visit at that specific time.”

Mrs. Sarah Raskin recounts a similar story about her husband, Reb Mendel Raskin.

“During one of my husband’s visits to New York the Rebbetzin invited him to her home, where they sat reminiscing the days they spent together in Alma Ata. Suddenly the Rebbe walked in. My husband was stunned and, not wanting to disturb their privacy, he began to make his way into the kitchen. The Rebbetzin saw his dilemma and smiled, telling the Rebbe, “We have an important guest with us now: Reb Mendel Raskin. During the toughest of times in Alma Ata he would always take care that we had *Lechem Mishne* on *Shabbos*.”

“Hearing this, the Rebbe smiled at my husband and gave him a brocha.”

“I’LL BE RIGHT OUT...”

Reb Yehoshafat Alpert, a *Mechanech* from Israel, was often invited to visit the Rebbetzin. He relates the following story about one of those visits:

“Towards the end of my visit, the Rebbetzin told me, “Soon the Rebbe will be here. Perhaps you should leave as you might not feel so comfortable to be here



when he comes.”

I agreed and left the house. Later on though, when I was in *Yechidus* with the Rebbe, he told me “*Yasher koach*.” Not knowing what I had done to deserve his thanks, I gave the Rebbe a puzzled look. “For visiting with my mother,” the Rebbe said.

Another Chassid who used to visit the Rebbetzin while he was a bochur in 770 once returned to New York with his wife and baby, and visited the Rebbetzin again. While they were there, the Rebbe arrived and told them to remain seated.

"I didn't mean to disturb," the Rebbe said, "I'll be outside."

In the meantime, the baby had been playing with a ball and it fell onto the floor. Before anyone moved, the Rebbe himself bent down and returned the ball to the child.

A MEETING IN THE STREET

Rabbi Asher Zeilengold recalls an interesting encounter from the time he studied at 770 in the *chofs* (1960's).

"One day, the Rebbe returned from the Ohel to daven *Mincha* in 770, and after which, he planned to visit his mother. A small group of *Bochurim*, myself included, decided to go there and watch as the Rebbe would come by. When the Rebbe's car arrived, the Rebbetzin was sitting on a bench outside her building and talking with a few children. The Rebbe walked over to his mother and they began conversing. From where we were standing we couldn't hear much of what was being said but we heard the Rebbetzin say something to the effect of, "I want you to go home." The Rebbe looked a bit startled, as if to ask why, and the Rebbetzin continued, "You were at the Ohel today; I know you haven't eaten yet." The Rebbe asked her how she knew he was at the Ohel. She pointed to the car and said, "Krinsky is here."



"In other words, the Rebbetzin sensed that because the Rebbe had come by car as opposed to walking over as he usually did, meant that he had only just returned from the Ohel.

"When their conversation ended, the Rebbe and his mother stood and smiled for a moment, and then the Rebbe returned to the car."

"WHO FARBRENGED?"

The Rebbe's 25th anniversary (Yud Dalit Kislev, 5714), occurred on Shabbos and, although he rarely farbrenged on Shabbos in those years, the Rebbe held a farbrengen on this particular Shabbos, during which he spoke about the *Chasunah* in 5689.

However, not expecting a farbrengen

to be held, many Chassidim left 770 before it began. Reb Shiya Korf was one of those who left and, while walking down Kingston Avenue; he met the Rebbetzin, who asked him what had been going on in 770. Reb Shiya answered that the Chassidim were farbrenging with Reb Bentche Shemtov.

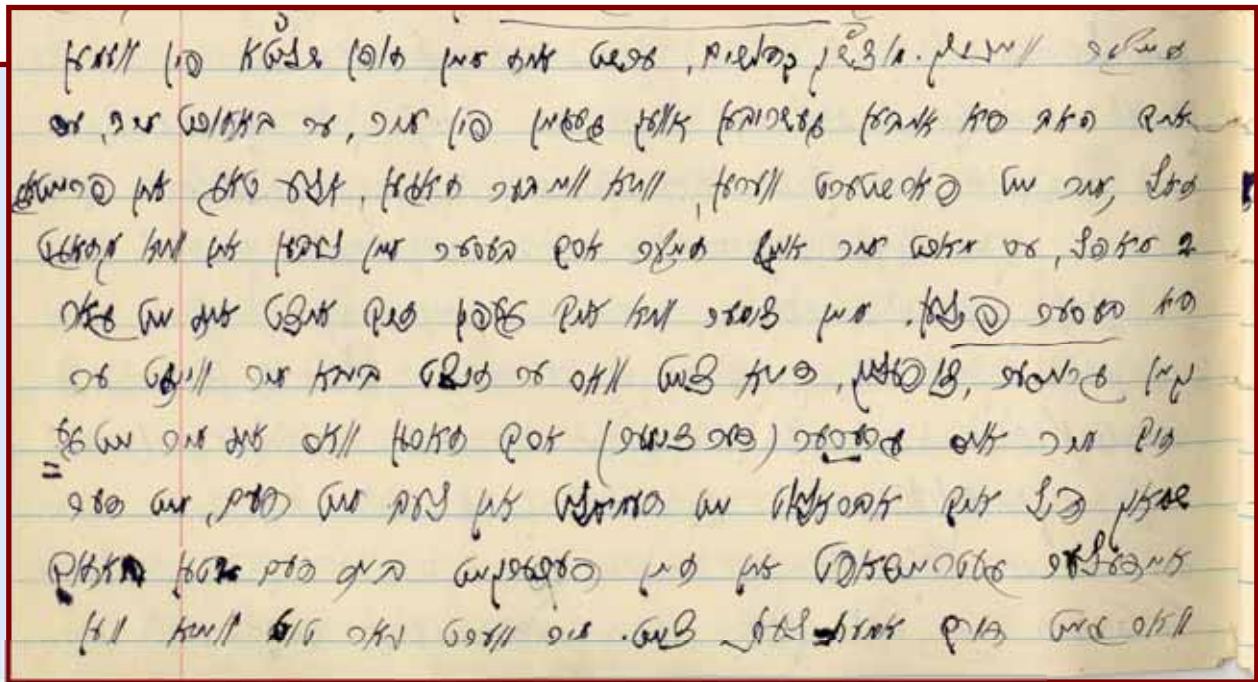
Later that day, when the Rebbe visited his mother, she told him that she had heard Reb Bentche farbrenged in 770. The Rebbe replied with a smile, "I had to farbreng, and Bentche takes the credit."

When sharing this story to one of the Chassidim, the Rebbetzin added that it was she who had requested of the Rebbe to farbreng in honor of the occasion.



In Paris

The Rebbe's custom of visiting his mother actually began during the three months that they were in Paris, when the Rebbe visited her in the mornings and evenings. On Pesach Sheini, the Rebbe conducted a farbrengen with *Anash* of Paris when he suddenly stopped and said, "We must stop here. I need to go visit my mother." The Chassidim begged the Rebbe to delay the visit and continue farbrenging but the Rebbe refused, recited a *Brocha Acharona*, and left to visit his mother.



“My Daily Expansion”

Excerpt from the Rebbetzin's personal diary

My son, long may he live, about whom I have written above, has just left my home. He visits me daily—may it do me no harm to mention it, as women are wont to say—and twice on Friday. He makes my life much better and, as they say here [in America], makes me feel better.

My apartment where I am now is not very large. It so happens that during the time he sits here with me, the room seems to be much bigger!

During his visits, I don't at all feel many things that I find unpleasant, and under the inspiration of his noble devotion and sublime greatness, I manage to live with them until his next visit 24 hours later.

מוצש"ק קדושים [תשי"א]. ערשט איז מיין זון שליט"א. פון וועמען איך האב דא אויבן געשריבן, אַוועק געגאַנגען פון מיר. ער באַזוכט מיר - עס זאל מיר ניט פאַרשטערט ווערן, ווי ווייבער זאָגן - אַלע טאָג, און פרייטאָג צוויי מאל. ער מאכט מיר אויף זייער אַסאך בעסער מיין לעבן, און ווי מען זאָגט דאָ: בעסער פילן. מיין צימער וואו איך געפין זיך איצט, איז ניט גאָר קיין גרויסער. צופעליק, די צייט וואָס ער זיצט ביי מיר, וויזט ער זיך מיר אויס גרעסער (דער צימער). אַסאך זאכן וואס איז מיר ניט געשמאַק, פיל איך אבסאָלויט ניט דעמאָלט, און לעב מיט דעם, מיט דער איידעלער געטרייטשאַפט און זיין העכערקייט, ביז דעם צווייטן באזוך וואָס גייט דורך אַ מעת-לעת צייט

“MAY HASHEM GRANT HIM STRENGTH!”

Reb Yaakov Katz, Rosh Yeshivah of Kfar Chabad relates a story of his visit to the Rebbetzin.

“On the Shabbos before Rosh Hashonah (5724), I attended the Rebbe's farbrengen with Reb Avraham Mayor and went afterwards to his home. As we

passed by President Street, Reb Avraham suggested that I go in to see the Rebbetzin and wish her a Gut Shabbos. The Rebbetzin knew me from the time we were in the DP camp in Poking, Germany, where we had lived in the same building.

“The Rebbetzin told us that the Rebbe had informed her that we had arrived in

New York, and that on the following Tuesday we would be received for *Yechidus*.

“Reb Avraham mentioned that we were coming from the farbrengen and the Rebbetzin remarked, ‘Hashem should give him [the Rebbe] strength. He works so hard.’” ■