



# Art Gallery in 770

An art gallery. The Rebbe was going to visit an art gallery.

Would you believe it?

It all started with a young man from Haifa, Israel. Boruch Nachshon was born to a religious family in Haifa. Like most Israeli men he was supposed to do his stint in the Army before moving on in life. Before his draft he decided to spend some time studying in Yeshivat Kerem Yavne.

While in Yeshiva, a friend of invited him to join the Yud Tes Kislev farbrengen in Kfar Chabad. In those days the Yud Tes Kislev farbrengen drew a large crowd of non-Chabad Chassidim who would join for the uplifting and inspiring evening. Famous guests included President of Israel Mr. Zalman Shazar, Gen. Ariel Sharon, many Army officers and political figures, and other dignitaries.

“It was in 5718”, recalls Reb Nachshon, “as a Haifa kid I had no idea what a farbrengen was, what Yud Tes Kislev was, what Chabad was, nothing. But I decided to join him. We got to the farbrengen and all of a sudden they began singing a beautiful niggun. That niggun captured me; I knew then that I would become a chossid.”

After his military service he entered the Yeshiva in Lod, but unfortunately did not enjoy the learning. He tried very hard but realized that he couldn’t keep up to such an intense schedule. Feeling depressed and under immense internal pressure, he wrote a letter to the Rebbe. The Rebbe’s response was quick in coming: Many others have gone through similar emotionally tumultuous situations, and came out of it.

For the young man these words were a lifeline. Many times throughout the following years he would grasp onto them and revive his spirits.





One of the rooms near the office of the yeshiva had a large writing table and soon Boruch, unable to focus in the Zal, was drawing all sorts of pictures. Anything he saw became the subject of his pen. This soon caused a crowd of onlookers to surround him interested in the artistic bochur. The hanhala didn't like this new attraction and wanted to send him away from yeshiva claiming that he was distracting other bochurim but the mashpia, Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, would not hear of it. "The bochur got a letter from the Rebbe and you want to throw him out?!" And so Boruch stayed.

After his chassunah his family stubbornly did not want him to dress like a Lubavitcher. When he asked the Rebbe for advice the Rebbe replied "Conflict is abhorred and great is peace." "Ever since then," says Reb Boruch "I am a soldier without uniform."

### VISITING NEW YORK

His first visit to the Rebbe was in 5723, after his marriage to his wife Sara. The Rebbe had told him not to travel to New York if that would put him in debt, so he and his wife worked overtime to scrape together the funds for a ticket. Due to their financial situation they could only afford to travel by ship, a trip that took three weeks. On the way, they hit a storm and Boruch got so seasick, he couldn't leave his bunk for three days. On top of that his wife was in her ninth month of pregnancy..... The trip was true *mesiras nefesh* for her.

Arriving in New York they drove straight to 770 with all of their suitcases. As they set them down, they saw the Rebbe walking from the corner (having just visited his mother). Boruch said to himself, this is the man from the pictures! As the Rebbe passed, Boruch smiled in joy and the Rebbe smiled back.

### RECTIFYING THE ART OF PAINTING

The next night he went in to the Rebbe for his first Yechidus. (His wife was still recovering from the journey, so he went himself.) He was in Yechidus for over three hours. The Rebbe asked him "What brought you to me?" He told the Rebbe his entire life story, and about the internal struggle he constantly had. When he mentioned the niggun that captured his imagination, the Rebbe wanted to know which niggun it was. And so



Boruch sang the niggun.

The Rebbe gave Boruch a bracha and said: many generations have passed and the art of painting has never been fixed – had a *tikkun* in kedusha, but with the help of Hashem you will rectify it.

The Rebbe then offered to fund Boruch's studies in New York on the condition that he would find a program of study acceptable to Jewish values. Despite the difficulty inherent in such a task, Boruch gladly received the Rebbe's offer and devoted himself fully to the celebration of the wisdom of the Creator through painting and visual art. When he asked "What is kosher art?" The Rebbe told him to speak to a Rav who could give him guidelines for what is and is not allowed.

Not knowing English, Boruch was unsure how to get around but the Rebbe gave him the name of Nissan Davis, an architect in Boro Park who would help him settle in and find a program of study. With his help, Boruch enrolled in the School of Visual Arts on 22<sup>nd</sup> St.

For two years the Nachshons lived in New York, receiving a stipend from the Rebbe each month.

#### **GAVE BIRTH YET?**

While Mrs. Sara Nachshon was due with their daughter, she had a short Yechidus. The Rebbe asked her if she was careful to give tzedaka before lighting Shabbos Candles and gave her a bracha to raise the child "לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים".

Mrs. Nachshon recalls: "I asked if we could name our child Devorah Leah if it would be a girl. The Rebbe replied that we would not be able to give the name Leah (my mother-in-law's name was Leah and she was still alive) but if my husband and I agreed on Devorah, we could add another name to imply the full name. As we came out of Yechidus I told my husband 'we are definitely having a girl!'"

Not long after, on a Shabbos afternoon, Mrs. Nachshon went into labor right after Reb Boruch came home from the Rebbe's Farbrengen, and they went to give birth at the Jewish hospital at the end of Eastern Parkway. Before she entered the delivery room, Reb Boruch walked back to 770 to tell the Rebbe that she was in labor, and to ask for a bracha. He got there as Mincha was about to start.

When the Rebbe came in, he told the Gabbai to give Boruch an *aliya*. When the Gabbai began to say the *Mi Sheberach* he asked Boruch if he should say האשה היולדת—the woman who gave birth. He didn't know what to answer, having left the hospital before his wife had entered the delivery room. The Rebbe looked at the clock and said "מ'קען שוין זאגן יולדת".

After Mincha, Shlomo Reinitz came running over "The Rebbe just said that your wife gave birth already! I want to see the miracle with my own eyes!" And he walked together with Boruch to the hospital. As they walked through the doors, the nurses informed them that Sara had already given birth. "Was it around five?" Boruch wanted to know. "Yes," they replied surprised, "how did you know?" "The Lubavitcher Rebbe said so." "Ah," they said, "if it's the Lubavitcher Rebbe then we have no questions."

Reb Boruch later returned to Eretz Yisroel, eventually settling in Kiryat Arba. (Not much later Mrs. Nachshon moved the family into Chevron proper, which is a story for itself.)

#### **AND NOW: HOW THE ART GALLERY CAME TO BE**

"It was 15 years since I had last been in New York to see the Rebbe due to financial constraints", says Reb Boruch, "but in 5739 I was able to travel. A year prior, Reb Faivish Vogel from London visited me (in Chevron) and promised to help arrange the funds to make an exhibit of my paintings in London. Unfortunately, the exhibit there was not so successful and it only covered its costs. I decided to go the next year to the Rebbe, in New York, and sent my exhibition there. I dropped the paintings off in one of the Crown Heights basements and wrote to the Rebbe, offering to show him a few of the originals. But the Rebbe suggested that I make a full display in the new offices of 788 Eastern Parkway."

#### **THE TOUR - WEDNESDAY, KISLEV 6, 5739**

After Mincha the Rebbe, accompanied by the Mazkirus - Rabbis Chodakov, Krinsky, Groner and Klein, toured the exhibit set up in 788 Eastern Parkway. Other Chassidim who either worked in Merkos or were otherwise involved also joined. (In the pictures Rabbi Kotlarksy and Rabbi H. Gansbourg are visible.) The



Rebbe was there for over 45 minutes, looking and commenting on the paintings. Speaking in Lashon Hako-desh, the Rebbe commented to Boruch Nachshon as he explained what each painting was about.

On the first floor there were a few paintings and the Rebbe stopped there first. Standing next to one painting, the Rebbe asked Boruch Nachshon why there are no cards explaining what each painting depicts. When he replied that this painting is a picture of Shechem, the Rebbe asked if this is indeed similar to the real Shechem...

The next painting had a picture of tefilin with the possuk “...ומי כעמך ישראל...”. The Rebbe said that he should add a “Chof” (ומי כעמך כִּישראל) because there are two pessukim and the Alter Rebbe writes the one with a “Chof”.

The painting also portrayed a finger of Hashem extending from His Tefilin and pointing towards the Tefilin of Yidden that had the finger of Yidden pointing towards Hashem.

BN: This is a problem, and there is also a halachic problem. I wanted to make it a finger facing a finger so I made a portrayal and that was my solution.

**The Rebbe:** What is the problem?

BN: I didn't want to be *m'gashem* Elokus like they [other painters] do. So I made a transparent finger.

**The Rebbe:** I don't understand, what is the problem?

BN: I wanted to depict how Am Yisrael points at Hashem and Hashem figuratively points back.

**The Rebbe:** Nu.

BN: So I couldn't make a physical hand, instead I made it transparent so it should be symbolic.

**The Rebbe:** But this is real fingers?

BN: They are pointing one to the other.

**The Rebbe:** [Yes,] But it is not a symbolic finger, it is a real finger. What is the difference between this finger (pointing to the Yidden's finger) and this finger (pointing to Hashem's finger)?

BN: But it's not real, there is no flesh and bones.

**The Rebbe:** But it is not a symbol.

[In other words, a symbolic finger is not a picture of a finger with less color, or transparent. It would need to be less finger-like, less defined and more figurative.]



He then showed another painting, and the Rebbe commented, 'From what I see you need to remove the sixth finger, it has six fingers.' and smiled.

The Rebbe pointed again to the hand: There are six fingers here, there are some creations with six fingers (and smiled) but Am Yisrael are like Hashem wants. And pointing to the "hand" of Hashem said here too there are five fingers.

One of the paintings was of the Kruvim that were on the Aron in the Beis Hamikdash. The Rebbe commented, "They need to look young, without beards, and the face should be a baby's face not adult. The wings need to be shading [spread out] as it says in the possuk, not above but lower down." [As will be explained later, the wings of the Kruvim were spread out and hovered right above the cover of the Aron, not held high over their heads.]

When they reached a painting of a harp the Rebbe said: [about the strings] there needs to be seven or ten, sometimes four, but never six. [See *Yalkut Tehillim Kapitul 34*]

One of the paintings had Tefillin and Tzitzis. The Tefillin Shel-Rosh had lines to separate the four battim

only on the side and not on the top. The Rebbe said that the lines should be on the top of the Tefillin as well.

BN: Evidently I made this in the middle of the war.

**The Rebbe:** The Yom Kippur War?

BN: Yes.

The next painting depicted a dark world in which the *klipos* are prevailing; a Muslim is standing on a tower and the Yid is standing on the side holding a candle. The Rebbe said: you should raise the Yid so that should be above.

BN replied: That it will be in the future while the painting shows the time of Golus.

The Rebbe said: It must start now, in the Golus. We don't need to wait as we are in Kislev [the month of Geula], maybe draw over here (pointing to the upper left side of the picture) so the Yid should be higher.

BN: I'll fix it this week.

**The Rebbe:** Either way, it should be higher also in space, *begashmiyus*.

One of the pictures had a red moon, the Rebbe said: I am not involved in astronomy but a moon like this is physically impossible.

BN: This could also be a setting sun.





**The Rebbe:** So then there needs to be clouds. It doesn't bother me if it is the moon or not, but [whatever it is] it needs to be physically possible.

The Rebbe then approached a small room on the side in which were lying a bunch of pictures. Boruch Nachshon said: here are the ugly pictures that I didn't want to show, and there [also] wasn't any place. The Rebbe entered the room and looked at the pictures.

Coming back into the main exhibit the Rebbe saw a painting in which people are working. One of the men faced the viewer and the other had his body facing the viewer but his head and feet were in profile to the side, in the old Egyptian style of art.

**The Rebbe said:** the Egyptian artists had a style of drawing the head here and the body there. I don't know the reason but this was their custom through the generations, to draw the chest facing the viewer like here (and pointed). The feet and the head are like here but just the chest is like this man (pointing out each item). If both are Egyptian the other body should also be facing forward, this is how you can see who they are.

BN: this [other] man represents Ashur.

Another picture also had Kruvim. The Rebbe commented: here too the faces are too old and their wings are held up.

One of the pictures had the Tzemach Tzedek with a candle.

Boruch Nachson: this is before the end of Golus.

**The Rebbe asked:** it looks like a candle made of melting ice.

BN: Yes, it's supposed to be. It is a moment before the Geula.

Returning to the topic of the Kruvim the Rebbe added: This is not as it is described in the Torah, probably because of a lack of knowledge in the psukim and maamarei chazal... the deficiency is emphasized because this is the way all the Christians depict it.

BN: How should it really be?

**The Rebbe:** טוכים על הכפורת (shading/hovering over the cover of the Aron) like it says clearly in the Torah. Shading close down, it says shading with their wings above the *kapores*, here they are overhead. And when it says above it means [close]... The other problem is that this is the way the Christians portray them. They should





not sit far, like it says in the Torah, not standing straight but lower down and, mainly, the wings should be lower, near the *kapores*. [סוככים implies hovering close, like a bird that hovers over its baby chicks.]

#### URGING TO MARKET THE PAINTINGS

They approached another few paintings and the Rebbe asked: What is here? Are there some which were bought?

BN: There were some recently.

**The Rebbe:** You need to publicize that they are for sale, at least the rest. Do you have a set price in dollars?

BN: People fainted because of the prices and I didn't want to ruin their health....

**The Rebbe** (smiling): You need to make a sign that this is only for healthy people..... Set the prices so that they don't bother you later...

The Rebbe then asked: this is everything? There is no picture of a Chossid dancing?

BN: There is.

**The Rebbe:** Where?

Boruch Nachshon showed a picture of a Chossid wearing a crown and dancing.

**The Rebbe:** this looks like someone is going to crown the king or a *malach* or himself, but there is no dancing.

BN: Joyful dancing.

**The Rebbe:** but it looks as if he is going on his way and bringing a crown to someone.

He showed the Rebbe a picture portraying Moshiach, and the face was that of the Rebbe. The Rebbe smiled and made a sign of *bitul* (dismissal) with his hand.

Then the Rebbe told him: at least you have some time, make a few lithographs.

Seeing another picture he asked: Is this Yerushalayim?

BN: It's not exact, more of a composition.

The Rebbe then told Rabbi Y. Krinsky: A catalogue should be made, with the prices of the paintings. And turning to Boruch Nachshon said that he should make a picture of Chassidim dancing.

BN: I wanted to travel from city to city, hoping to sell some of the paintings....

**The Rebbe:** By Yud Tes Kislev there will surely be many guests from around America and from other countries. If you can arrange here for it to be organized,

then the organizers can re-arrange everything, people can visit, and you should have lithographs and copies ready for sale. People should be able to take copies home. It would be particularly good to have an explanation on the back describing the picture, even better if there could be a practical application in tangible mitzvos. By the pictures of tefillin, tzitzis, Shabbos candles, and so on, an explanation of the painting and the mitzvah that is connected to it. Also make the prices clear, and with Hashem's help it will be with hatzlacha.

Afterwards the Rebbe asked why some of the pictures are dated "Chevron" while one says "Kiryas Arba", it should say "Chevron" as well.

The Rebbe finished off: Thank you for the Nachas Ruach, may it be Hashem's Will that it will be with growing Hatzlacha.

#### A PERSPECTIVE SHIFTING FEW MINUTES

At around 4:30 the Rebbe returned to his room. Boruch Nachshon was called to the Gan Eden HaTachton where he spoke to the Rebbe for another 15 minutes.

The Rebbe told him, "You were successful in presenting the neshama of a Yid, but you should know that a Yid also has a *Guf*, and that body is holy." Reb Boruch asked, "What does the Rebbe want?" "Draw the simple explanation of the psukim, the stories of the Avos and similar things."

[i.e. he should now focus more on *gashmiyus'dike* ideas, for when Moshiach will come everything will be physical, ואין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוט].

The Rebbe wanted to know if he had painted while in New York. He responded that he had not because he was in a dejected mood. The Rebbe said to make a picture of a dejected mood....

Reb Boruch Nachshon later said that until then he would paint ideas from Chassidus and try to capture the feeling of yearning for the Ein Sof, the feelings of escape from the pressures of this lowly world. After the Rebbe told him to come down to this world's level, it took him some time to figure out how to paint for someone who never had studied Chassidus before.

Indeed, the Nachshon paintings are famous all over the world known for the unique style and depth they impart. ■