

דעם רבי'נס א מענטש



RABBI BEREL BAUMGARTEN

דעם רבי'נס
א העלד
A Great Hero

AN ACCOUNT OF TRUE DEDICATION
AND REMARKABLE SACRIFICE

Reb Berel Baumgarten was born on 25 Menachem-Av 5682 in New York.

Prior to his coming to Lubavitch he studied in Yeshivas Chaim Berlin and Torah Vada'as. During that period, Reb Sholom Ber Gordon learned in Torah Vada'as as well, spending his breaks learning from a small sefer; this action piqued Reb Berel's curiosity, and he set out to discover what is this book, but his efforts were in vain, as Reb Sholom Ber always found a way of avoiding revealing to him the name of the sefer.

Eventually Reb Berel found out that it was a Tanya, and immediately approached Reb Sholom Ber telling him: "If

this sefer is good for you, then it's probably good for me too". Reb Sholom Ber consented to introduce him to Reb Yisroel Jacobson on condition that this remains a secret. At the time, Reb Yisroel Jacobson taught Tanya to a large group of Yeshiva students from various yeshivas and Reb Berel joined the shiur.

Later, Reb Berel described the courage and mesirus nefesh for them to keep their beards, an act frowned upon by American culture and even the Yeshiva culture; among the anecdotes he told of a time he walked in the street with fellow Tanya-students when a truck pulled up next to them and one of the workers

offered them a brush, a pail of water and a razor, saying "Apparently you don't have enough money to buy them yourselves."

When the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in America and established Tomechei Temimim, many of these Bochorim formed the first group of temimim in the yeshiva, among them was Reb Berel.

Starting in 5702, Reb Berel dedicated much time and effort to reach Bochorim from other Yeshivos, sharing with them what he discovered. Though at first he was unsure whether his actions were proper, the Frierdiker Rebbe repeatedly encouraged him, and he saw the fruits of

his labor, bringing many students to Lubavitch. At some point the Rebbe encouraged him to approach the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he managed to obtain permission to give a Tanya Shiur. These various shiurim continued for many years until he went on Shlichus to Argentina in 5715.

In 5703 he was appointed to serve as a Rosh Yeshiva in Achei Temimim. Eventually he left the position, as he became deeply involved in other matters, but still

Dovber Baumgarten related that he was recently offered to get involved in a very complicated business deal. Unsure whether he should accept the offer, he turned to the Rebbe who told him that he should go to the Ohel and ask the Frierdiker Rebbe what he should do. Reb Berel replied that not everyone is able to see the Frierdiker Rebbe and that he needs a 'lebediker Rebbe'...

"The Rebbe advised that he should go to the Ohel, present his doubts and then

birthday of the Rebbe Maharash, and Reb Berel was one of those who was privileged to join this group representing Anash and Temimim from all over the world.

LIKE A FATHER

Reb Berel had developed a very personal relationship with the Rebbe before the nesius. For instance, it was customary that on Sukkos the Rebbe would give out cake and coffee to everyone who bentched on the Frierdiker Rebbe's lulav. (For the custom is not to eat anything before bentching lulav.) Reb Berel, who was not from a Chassidshe home, was very scrupulous about not eating before davening, and didn't take any cake. When the Rebbe asked him why he wasn't eating, he explained that he never ate before davening. "Do you want to be a Chossid?" the Rebbe asked him. "Yes," Reb Berel replied. "Then you should eat, for a Chossid eats before davening."

His personal connection to the Rebbe continued after the Rebbe accepted the Nesius, with the Rebbe being involved in every detail of Reb Berel's life, both regarding his public activities as well as private matters.

When once he had a court case, he wrote to the Rebbe asking for a brocha, the Rebbe then told Rabbi Chodakov to call Reb Mordechai Harlig, Reb Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky and Reb Yisroel Jacobson and have them attend the proceedings; the judge was impressed by the presence of these distinguished Rabbis and the verdict was given in Reb Berel's favor. Afterwards, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Chodakov that he call each of the three Rabbis and convey a personal thank you from the Rebbe.

HAFATZAS HAYAHDUS

When Tzach was established in 5714, Reb Berel became heavily involved in all its activities and together with Reb Leibel Alevsky was very active in arranging various shiurim and programs. He was involved in college campus outreach and helped establish the "Pegisha" weekends which brought college students to crown heights for Shabbosim.



REB BEREL SHOWS THE REBBE THE NEW PIN WITH THE MESIBOS SHABBOS LOGO. THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN AT THE FRONT DOOR OF 770, IN THE YEAR 5702. LOOKING ON IS REB SHMUEL AIZIK POPACK.

continued to serve as a Mashpia for many bochurim, particularly those who struggled.

DOR HASHVIL

Immediately following the Histalkus of the Frierdiker Rebbe in 5710, Reb Berel turned to the Rebbe for guidance in all matters, both gashmi and ruchni. Already during the Shiva Reb Berel entered the Rebbes' room to discuss pressing matters concerning Hafotzas Hama'ayonos that couldn't be pushed off. But upon entering the Rebbes' room an unbelievable Bittul came over him and he couldn't utter a word from great emotion...

In Yemei Bereishis, the following story is chronicled:

"Thursday, 29 Shevat, 5710 – Reb

follow the first thought that comes to mind, but Reb Berel was persistent that he is incapable of attaining an answer, and requested the Rebbe give him an answer; the Rebbe then told him that he (the Rebbe) will go to the Ohel and ask for him. Immediately after Reb Berel left the room, the Rebbe called Rabbi Chodakov and told him to inform Reb Berel that he should not accept the deal at all costs."

Reb Berel was one of the most active Chassidim during the period of time after Yud Shvat, investing much effort to ensure that the Rebbe accept the nesius. After Pesach, 5710 it was decided by a meeting that a minyan of chassidim will go to the Ohel of the Frierdiker Rebbe and beseech that the Rebbe accept the nesius. The date chosen was Beis Iyar,

One of his friends from 770 possessed a myriad of talents which were instrumental in Hafotza and he used them for college campus outreach, bringing many groups to Yechidus. Eventually though, he veered off the path of Halacha but continued outreach work. This episode prompted Reb Berel to ask the Rebbe: "How can I ensure that I remain on the proper path and not veer aside?" The Rebbe replied 'Az Men Folgt, Farkricht Men Nisht' - When one obeys, one does not go astray."

His son, Reb Pinye, recalls a student who came from a family with no visible connection to Jewish practice, but he was very impressed by the lectures and evenings and came closer to his heritage, finally agreeing to undergo a Bris. The event took place in the Baumgarten residence, followed by a Pidyon Haben. Reb Berel sent the Rebbe some cake and mashke from the seuda and also informed the Rebbe that the student had chosen the name Shneur Zalman. The Rebbes' response was just one word: "Hecheyisani - you have revived me!"

At an occasion when the Rebbe saw Reb Berel and Rabbi Chodakov standing together on the steps outside 770 he remarked: "Tzvei Groiseh Held'n - two great heroes..."

TRUE SACRIFICE

Towards the end of 5715, he began his travels throughout South America as the Rebbe's Shliach eventually settling permanently in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This city had a sizeable Jewish community but was in dire need of a stronger sense of Yiddishkeit founded upon Torah and Chassidus. When he first arrived in Buenos Aires there was one esrog in the entire city and the concept of Matza Shmura was foreign to its residents, but with Reb Berel's tireless efforts all this changed. He established mikvaos, strengthened Kashrus observance, and raised the standard of Jewish education in the city, eventually becoming the Rosh Yeshiva of the local non-Chabad Yeshiva. He translated some of Kehos' publications in Spanish including "Talks and

Tales" as well as various other sifrei chasidus.

One can safely assume that most of the Anash and Shluchim today in Argentina are the fruits of the labor. The Rebbe acknowledged his remarkable efforts saying: "Berel is bringing me an entire country..."

During one of his many travels to spread Yiddishkeit Reb Berel headed to the western city of Mendoza to meet with a local Jew. While walking the streets of this city, home to a sparse Jewish population, a young boy approached him and asked that he come home with him. Upon his arrival, the child's parents lost no

time telling him of their son's commitment to Yiddishkeit, and of how he had conducted their Pesach Seder. "But how?" asked Reb Berel, incredulously. There were so few Jews in Mendoza it seemed unlikely anyone would know how to conduct a Seder. The boy pointed to a copy of Talks and Tales in Spanish. Somehow the magazine had made its way to Mendoza, and the boy had used it as his guide to celebrate Pesach with his family in this remote corner of Argentina.

In his letters to his friends and fellow Shluchim he expresses his strong desire, to be physically near the Rebbe. Being in





Argentina at such a distance from the Rebbe was too much for him to bear, and so before his first Rosh Hashana on Shlichus he wrote to the Rebbe requesting to come to New York for Rosh Hashana and be present at Tekios, as he was in the previous years. The Rebbe's response was: "Do you think that I only have in mind those who are present during tekios? On the contrary, if one must be on shlichus in Argentina, I think about him even more."

He wrote to the Rebbe lengthy letters multiple times each week, describing in detail all his activities in Hafatzas Hama'ayanos. He wrote very openly, often pouring out his heart about his own situation b'ruchniyus and the daily hardships he faced in his shlichus. He merited to receive from the Rebbe very specific answers and horaos in all areas of his shlichus. At times when he didn't have financial means to put bread on the table, it was the Rebbe's fatherly attention and encouragement, together with his total dedication and hiskashrus that fueled him to continue his shlichus with incredible mesiras nefesh.

Reb Berel's ahavas yisrael and ahavas Chassidim was boundless. For instance,

Eved Ne'emon

The following is an excerpt from the Shavuos Farbrengen of 5714:

During the Shavuos Farbrengen of 5704, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe appointed three Chassidim (in the form of a beis din) and charged each of them with the task of bringing talmidim from other yeshivos closer to Toras Hachassidus.

The first two Chassidim became involved in their own personal matters – physical or even spiritual – and completely abandoned their shlichus. The third Chassid on the other hand is not a tremendous lamdan in nigleh or the greatest maskil in Chassidus, nor does he have parnassah... and nevertheless he fulfilled the mission which the [Frierdiker] Rebbe has given him; he continues to do so to this very day, and will definitely carry on in the future.

Ten years have passed since this Farbrengen and we already

see the fruits of his labor. It is also four years since the histalkus of the [Frierdiker] Rebbe – although in truth the presence of a tzaddik in this world is stronger after his histalkus, as explained in Igeres Hakodesh, still, to our physical eyes the concept of histalkus exists – and yet he still continues to carry out the Rebbes' shlichus. Certainly the [Frierdiker] Rebbe is with him wherever he goes, as it says 'shlucho shel adam k'moso'.

Being that "Hashem does not withhold reward" and "tzadikim are similar to their Creator," certainly the Rebbe will reward him for carrying out his Shlichus. The Rebbe's work is an investment with guaranteed results, and therefore this Chassid's needs and desires will be fulfilled.

[The Chassid whom the Rebbe was referring to was Reb Berel Baumgarten.]

when he received the news that Reb Mendel Futerfas left the U.S.S.R., he donned his shabbos kapote and made a resounding 'Shehecheyanu.'

A YUD BEIS TAMMUZ SAGA

It is impossible to write about Reb Berel without relating the following episode:

Reb Berel often spent Yud Beis Tammuz in 770 by the Rebbe's farbrengen. One year, however, he realized that on Yud Beis Tammuz he would be travelling from Argentina to Brazil. Disturbed at the prospect of spending this auspicious date far from anyone with whom he could share his feelings, he sent the Rebbe a telegram before he left home, asking to be remembered on that date.

In order to reach Brazil, one had to cross the Iguacu River by ferry; this ferry had an open deck covered by an awning, with several heavy-duty rafts tied together to carry cars and cargo. Reb Berel followed instructions and drove his car onto the raft. As soon as his car was parked, he joined the other travelers enjoying the fresh air beneath the awning.

He was happy to find that two of his fellow passengers were Jews. But his joy was short-lived as he discovered that they had no desire to hear about anything to do with Yiddishkeit. One of them even brazenly flaunted a ham sandwich before him. Feeling that further conversation would be futile, and offended by their actions, Reb Berel returned to his car and opened one of the seforim he always had with him in the car as per the Rebbe's instructions.

Suddenly, there was a powerful jolt; a boat had slammed into the raft, sending the huge beams tumbling down from the raft, pushing cars into the Iguacu River. Suddenly Reb Berel's felt his car move, and with utter shock he realized his car began to move; he slammed his foot on the brake but was powerless to stop his car's motion, and he too fell with his car into the raging rivers!

Though he was a large and strong man, Reb Berel couldn't open the car door for the water pressure was simply too great.



...The Rebbe remarked, "Berel is bringing me an entire country!"...



His entire life flashed before him and he considered the thought of saying Viduy; at the same time another thought ran through his mind, it's Yud Beis Tammuz, no day for saying Tachnun or Viduy...

He never knew how it happened, but suddenly his car door opened, and he found himself out of the car and in the water, being pulled upward.

His troubles, however, were far from over, for Reb Berel had never learned to swim. Frantically flailing for what seemed like hours, he was at the end of his strength when his head suddenly broke through the water. Exhausted, he

could only bob helplessly up and down; he had no idea what was keeping him afloat. Between waves, he could see the raft close by, but was powerless to move towards it.

To make matters even worse, he could hear a rumbling thunder in the distance, and realized with horror that the river's powerful current was beginning to pull him away from the raft, and towards a waterfall! As the white water crashed over him, Reb Berel looked up to see a man heaving a life preserver toward him. It splashed into the river just within reach.

Reb Berel grabbed the life preserver and drew it close. Though his strength was giving out he held on to it for it was too small to fit over his body. While in the water, he pictured the Rebbe's face before him.

After he had been hauled out of the river and was able to regain his composure, the two Jews whom he had met previously approached him, overcome with remorse. They realized that it was because of them that Reb Berel had returned to his car, and apologized for their previous conduct. The man who had flaunted the sandwich even promised to begin keeping kosher.

After Reb Berel reached the far shore, he began to contemplate his situation. He had no explanation for the miracle that had occurred.

All these calculations, however, came later; at the moment he had more immediate concerns. His personal belongings had sunk with the car, and he was far from any Jewish community. Where would he find Tallis and Tefillin with which to daven?

Reb Berel found that there was a small airport nearby, but he would not be able to reach another city before sunset on the scheduled flights. He was unable to conceive of letting the day pass without putting on tefillin.

He inquired about hiring a private plane. Although the cost was exorbitant, he was able to find a pilot who could fly him to another city before sunset. He sent a telegram to the leaders of the Jew-

ish community there, asking them to meet him at the airport with tefillin.

There was a mix-up in communications and instead of bringing a pair of tefillin they showed up at the airport with a sefer torah. With less than an hour left before nightfall, Reb Berel grabbed a cab and told the driver to hurry to the nearest shul. Unfortunately, night fell before he could get there. Broken-hearted, he stopped the cab and sat down on a nearby park bench and cried.

At his next yechidus, he asked the Rebbe how he could atone for not putting on tefilin that day. Before answering his question, the Rebbe looked up at him and asked, "Nu, did I think about you?"

The Rebbe then instructed Reb Berel to study Hilchos Tefillin from Shulchan Aruch, as well as specific Maamorim that speak about shibud hamoach v'halev.

At the end of the yechidus, Reb Berel told the Rebbe that in the car he had a Siddur and Tanya which he had received from the Rebbe some time ago and had been lost together with the car. "Am I to blame?" said the Rebbe, "And am I to blame?" replied Reb Berel. To this the Rebbe smiled broadly, removed a Siddur and Tanya from the desk and handed them to Reb Berel.

Later he found out that during that year's Yud Beis Tammuz farbrengen the Rebbe had turned to his brother Reb Mendel Baumgarten and asked "Where is Berel?" and told him to say lechaim. When Reb Berel heard this he approached his brother to ask what time this occurred and it turned out that this had occurred at the precise moment he had been under water!

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS?

As part of his shlichus, Reb Berel would make an annual trip to various locations in Europe and Eretz Yisroel. During one of his travels across Europe in the early 5730's he happened to arrive in England for the dedication of the new Beis Lubavitch Center; from there he proceeded to Eretz Yisroel where he visited a new building that Reb Efraim Wolf had recently established. While rejoicing

at the success of hafotzas hayahadus in other countries, he could not help but feel dejected, for these luminous structures made his modest Beis Chabad in Buenos Aires look like a little shack.

The next time Reb Berel was in yechidus, he entered the Rebbe's room with a broken heart and this time he did not write a Pan. The Rebbe asked him "Where is your Pan?" He replied "I have nothing to report. I saw what they built in England and in Eretz Yisroel and I have practically nothing."

The Rebbe became very serious and said to him: "Success is not measured

with buildings but with talmidim." Then, the Rebbe opened one of the desk drawers and took out a recent report from the hanhala in 770; the report stated that the four bochurim Reb Berel had been mekarev and sent to learn in 770 were among the most outstanding. "This is success," said the Rebbe.

In 5738, while in England as part of his annual trip through Europe, Reb Berel suffered a stroke and on Tes Zayin Adar he passed away at the young age of 54. Upon his request, he was brought New York and was laid to rest just three rows behind the Ohel. ■

**...The Rebbe looked up at him and said
"Nu, did I think about you?"**

