



RESCUE — OF THE — LIBRARY

*Part 1: Recovering the Rebbeim's
treasured library from Poland*

לזכות החתן הרה"ת בן ציון שי' אלפרוביץ והכלה מרת חנה שיחיו גולדשמידט
לרגל חתונתם בשעתו"מ יום כ"א אד"ש ה'תשע"ד
מוקדש ע"י תלמידיו בוגרי מתיבתא אהלי יוסף יצחק ליובאוויטש - דעטריאט

Dark clouds descended upon Europe with the beginning of the First World War, and matters only turned worse with the onset of World War Two. In addition to the various atrocities being committed, the respective libraries of the Rebbe Rashab and the Frieddiker Rebbe were subject to terrible conditions and confiscation. Most were under the impression that there was no way of recovering these precious collections.

In an incredible sequence of events beginning in 5731, what had seemed an impossible feat – was indeed achieved. Guiding every step of the way, the Rebbe directed a number of individuals on how to retrieve one section of the library.

To prepare for this unprecedented article, *A Chassidisher Derher* uncovered many never-before-seen documents, and had the pleasure of interviewing many individuals who were heavily involved in bringing the Seforim home, including: Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, the Rebbe's Mazkir and chairman of Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch; Rabbi Simchah Zirkind, Shliach to Montreal, Canada; Family and friends of Rabbi Aharon Chitrik; and many others. Read along, as we offer you a review of this remarkable saga.

The Library of Agudas Chasidei Chabad has a rich and detailed history. As one of the largest Jewish collections, the library contains about a quarter of a million seforim, many of them old, rare and valuable.

This collection is part of the lifeblood of Lubavitch, with thousands of kesovim and artifacts of the Rebbeim.

The affection that was shown by the Rebbeim to these collections was extraordinary. The library was a central part in the Nesius of each and every one of our Rebbeim.

Since the Alter Rebbe's times, every one of our Rebbeim had a collection of seforim and kesovim that was passed down through the generations of Chabad. The seforim were guarded and preserved with great love and care.

THE REBBE RASHAB'S LIBRARY

The first time the library was subject to perilous conditions was during the turmoil of World War I, when the Rebbe Rashab relocated from Lubavitch to Rostov. In addition to transporting his household and belongings, the Rebbe Rashab put great thought into how his precious library would be moved. Due to the unsafe circumstances of the time, it was impossible to transport the library as a whole to Rostov.

The Rebbe Rashab therefore resolved to divide the vast library into two:

The first part contained the kesovim of the Rebbeim, as well as a limited number of seforim for immediate use. The kesovim collection consisted of thousands of handwritten pages of niglah and chassidus. This section of the library accompa-

nied the Rebbe Rashab to Rostov.

The second segment contained the bulk of the library's seforim – compiled through the immense effort of the Rebbeim and passed on from generation to generation. This enormous section of the library was sent off to a secure warehouse in Moscow to be stored, until it could be transported to Rostov.

In 5680, after the war ended, the Rebbe Rashab sought to obtain the library from Moscow, but the efforts encountered many setbacks. Due to the war, the warehouse had been seized by the government and the seforim were subsequently moved to the Lenin Library. The Rebbe Rashab put great energy into having it returned but the Russians refused to release it.

After the histalkus of the Rebbe Rashab that same year, the Frieddiker Rebbe continued to work toward their release. Realizing the extreme challenges he faced, the Frieddiker Rebbe built a new library that would be open to researchers and scholars. A great section of the new library came with the purchase of the library of Reb Shmuel Weiner, a well-known collector of seforim.

Under the ruthless Communist rule, the Frieddiker Rebbe was imprisoned for spreading Yiddishkeit. In 5687, after the Frieddiker Rebbe's liberation from prison, he prepared to leave Russia.

The Frieddiker Rebbe told the Russians that he would not leave without the new collection he compiled. After initial refusal, the Communists eventually allowed the invaluable library to leave the country.

Arriving in Riga, the Frieddiker Rebbe continued to expand the library by requesting Chasidim and publishers to send in seforim. From Riga, the library moved with the Frieddiker Rebbe to Otwock, Poland.

ON THE RUN

In 5699, with the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Frieddiker Rebbe escaped Otwock to the large city of Warsaw, with the intention of moving the Lubavitch



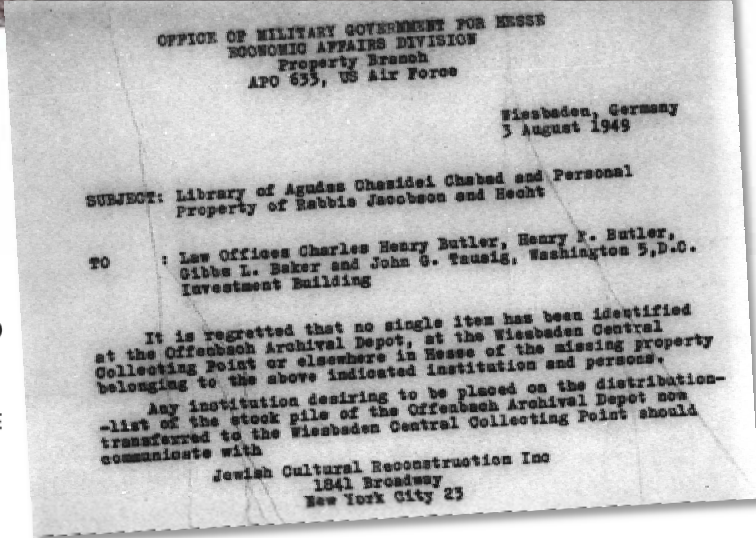
TOP: THE JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE IN POLAND WHERE THE KESOVIM WERE BEING HELD BY THE POLISH AUTHORITIES. RIGHT: A LETTER FROM THE YEAR 5709 FROM THE US FORCES STATIONED IN GERMANY, RESPONDING TO THE INQUIRIES OF THE FRIEDDIKER REBBE ABOUT THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE KESOVIM, SAYING "NO SINGLE ITEM HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED".

headquarters to the United States. The newly-compiled library was now at great risk of being plundered.

As the library was the property of Agudas Chasidei Chabad, the Frieddiker Rebbe instructed that the kesovim be deposited in the American Embassy in Warsaw and accordingly had it registered as belonging to Agudas Chasidei Chabad of America.

The new library was now forced to be divided into two parts. The seforim – which made up the bulk of the library – were unable to accompany the Frieddiker Rebbe to Warsaw because of their enormous amount, and thus remained in Otwock. The kesovim on the other hand, remained together with the Frieddiker Rebbe in Warsaw.

Plans were underway to ship the seforim from Otwock directly to the United



States while the invaluable kesovim would remain with the Frieddiker Rebbe on his route of escape.

Yet, before those plans were able to materialize, the battle between the Polish and Nazi forces climaxed. The Nazis overcame the Polish armies and invaded Warsaw. Overnight, the situation became gravely dangerous.

In the aftermath of the Polish defeat, the Nazis wreaked havoc over Poland, and the Frieddiker Rebbe had to flee Warsaw. Even traveling with the kesovim alone could prove dangerous, so the Frieddiker Rebbe divided the library once again.

The crates containing the bulk of the kesovim, was deposited at the American Embassy in Warsaw. A mere few suitcases of precious kesovim – many of which were passed down by each of the Rebbeim – remained at the Frieddiker Reb-

be's side as he ran from the bombs to safety.

In a miraculous turn of events, the Frierdiker Rebbe was evacuated from Warsaw to safety, and, on Tes Adar Sheini 5700, he arrived on the shores of the United States.

ON AMERICAN SHORES

Upon arrival in America, the Frierdiker Rebbe spared no effort to locate the library in order to bring it to America. The seforim of the library that were in Otwock arrived in America in Sivan of 5701 through the efforts of Horav Mendel Horestein HY"D (the Frierdiker Rebbe's third son-in-law).

Saving the kesovim that were in the American Embassy turned out to be far more difficult, especially when the United States entered the War, ending all diplomatic ties. The embassy was invaded and all clues to the kesovim's whereabouts went cold.

When the war ended, the efforts continued through the U.S. State Department until Yud Shevat 5710, but the

kesovim could not be located.

No further knowledge was gleaned pertaining to the whereabouts of the kesovim. In 5717 Professor Ber Mark, Director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, reached out to the Chabad askan, Reb Pinye Althaus, regarding manuscripts that were in the Institute. The kesovim of the Rebbeim were among these. The Rebbe instructed that this lead be pursued but all further attempts turned futile.

In the coming years, random pages of these kesovim appeared in different places; some of these were presented to the Rebbe. Several years later in 5723, Reb Pinye passed away and the story of the kesovim remained by and large quiet.

All this changed in 5731...



A LETTER FROM RABBI SIMCHA ZIRKIND TO THE REBBE DATED 23 TEVES 5733 THAT ACCOMPANIED THE DUPLICATED MICROFILMS AND THE SEFER HE PRESENTED TO THE REBBE TOGETHER WITH RABBI MENDEL ARONOV. THE REBBE'S RESPONSE CAN BE SEEN ON THE MARGINS OF THE PAGE.

Guarded Faithfully

During the Frierdiker Rebbe's incarceration in 5687, there was a strong suspicion that the communists would confiscate the kesovim. The Frierdiker Rebbe relates in the Reshimas Hamaaser:

"[I began to think] What is happening in my home right now... and what is happening with my future son-in-law [the Rebbe] who went to the house of my mazkir, was he chas vesholom caught... the vivid spectacle stirred me and a stream of tears burst from my eyes, warm tears rolled down my face. I was deeply distressed and my body shook: was it possible that the sacred kesovim were also taken, chas vesholom?"

At that time, the Rebbe went to the home of the mazkir to alert him of the arrest and destroy implicating evidence. The Rebbe also addressed the concern of the kesovim. Acting quickly, the Rebbe divided the kesovim between several Anash who hid them. After Yud Beis Tammuz, the kesovim were returned.

We know of this story from a letter in which the Rebbe wrote to Reb Zalman Duchman:

I seem [to remember] that at the time of the arrest of the Frierdiker Rebbe, you were one of those who I gave kesovim to hide?

Reb Zalman replied:

[The Rebbe] gave me one crate of kesovim, and by hashgocha protis, on 12 Tammuz at 1:30 I brought them back. [the Rebbe] was sitting in the back of the large zal and when I handed back the kesovim, the Rebbe told me, I will repay with the good news that the [Frierdiker Rebbe] will be coming for Shabbos.

When the contingent was sent to Russia in 5748 to work on the release of the seforim from the Lenin Library, Rabbi Berel Levin asked the Rebbe if it was possible that some kesovim were not returned then and if they should try to locate them. The Rebbe answered "They all were returned immediately!"



RABBI AHARON CHITRIK AT HIS WORK DESK.



RABBI SIMCHA ZIRKIND TOGETHER WITH TWO SUPPORTERS OF CHABAD, AT THE YECHIDUS FOR MACHNE YISROEL DEVELOPMENT FUND. CREDITS: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE

THE SEARCH BEGINS

An international turn of events which began in the year 5731, led to the beginning of a great breakthrough in this saga. The “Canadian Library and Archive”, Canada’s national library, sought to do a cultural exchange to enhance their respectable department of Judaic books.

A “cultural exchange” is one that allows prestigious libraries to obtain copies of rare books and manuscripts from other countries, through two respective

countries coming to a mutual agreement about lending out a valuable collection that their country possessed. In this way, each country would now have an expanded collection of books and artifacts that they couldn’t have had otherwise.

Having heard the interests of the Canadian government, the Polish authorities offered to “lend” them a Judaica collection they possessed. The deal was sealed, and a Polish agent was sent to the Canadian capital in Ottawa, accompanied with tens of thousands of microfilms of rare manuscripts of Jewish litera-

ture. Although the Canadian libraries didn’t have the originals, they now had access to all the material in microfilm.

Now that the images were in microfilm format, the Polish authorities sensed an opportunity to make a small fortune. The agent travelled to prominent Jewish libraries in America offering them the collection at a rate of one dollar per page.

One of the librarians approached was Rabbi Horowitz of the library at Yeshiva University. He identified the manuscripts as associated with Chassidus Chabad and told the agent to approach Lubavitch. He also alerted Rabbi Aaron Chitrik of what he had seen. Rabbi Chitrik, an expert in the field of publishing many kesovim of Chasidus, immediately took interest in pursuing this opportunity. Unfortunately, the agent had returned to Canada and was not able to be located.

SECRET DUPLICATION

In Teves 5732, news of this agent and the microfilms in his possession reached Rabbi Simcha Zirkind of Montreal. In the past, Rabbi Zirkind had facilitated the acquisition of many rare seforim and manuscripts for the Rebbe’s library. Naturally, he took interest, although he didn’t know the contents of these microfilms.

He approached the agent, offering to help facilitate a deal regarding the rare manuscripts. In order to do this, he managed to convince the agent to lend him the microfilms temporarily. He then showed them to Reb Volf Greenglass, who was known to be familiar with the ksav of the Rebbeim. When Reb Volf identified the ksav of the Tzemach Tzedek, their excitement knew no bounds: They had discovered kesovim of the Rebbeim!

Rabbi Zirkind spared no time in bringing his precious find to the Rebbe. Informing the agent that he would need to borrow the microfilms for a bit longer, he made the trip to New York. The Rebbe ruled out paying the price requested by the agents, but agreed that they can be paid a reasonable amount for their time

and effort.

In order to get a full grasp of what amount and which kesovim were at hand, an expert needed to be called. Rabbi Chitrik was sent to Montreal to examine the microfilms. He spent many hours examining the microfilms and created a list of all the kesovim it contained.

When Rabbi Chitrik returned to New York he gave-over to the Rebbe a synopsis of the matzav that had materialized, and subsequently submitted the list to the Rebbe.

Rabbi Zirkind now turned his efforts to obtaining images from the microfilms to be sent to the Rebbe. However the costs of this project were great, so he enlisted the financial support of the Parshan family to fund a great portion of the costs.

In Av of that year, Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky submitted a set of samples of kesovim from the microfilms that were being duplicated to the Rebbe. He wrote to the Rebbe about the idea of obtaining the actual kesovim from Poland where they were located. He asked the Rebbe whether it would be worthwhile to pursue this lead.

The Rebbe replied in the affirmative, confirming that search efforts should commence.

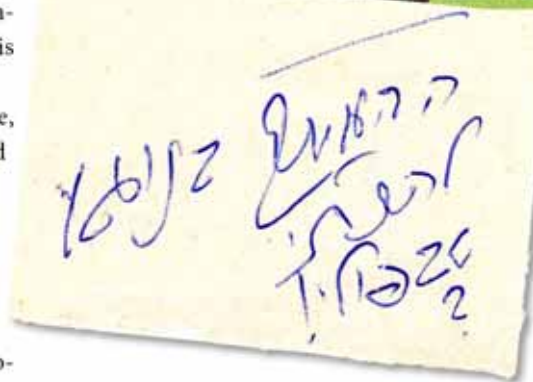
In the meantime, Rabbi Zirkind, was looking to find a way to bring all the microfilms to the Rebbe, which numbered close to 35,000 in total. He made contact with the Kodak Company in Toronto and found that they had the technology to duplicate the microfilms.

Seizing his chance, he immediately traveled to Toronto, and began setting in motion whatever was necessary to clandestinely copy these reels of microfilm. Here, he encountered even more costs than he had originally anticipated and enlisted the support of several Anash in this unique initiative.

Rabbi Mendel Aronov of Toronto stepped up and paid a large sum of money toward the copies. In return, he would later have the zechus of presenting one of the duplicated reels to the Rebbe.



TOP: THE BUILDING WHICH HOUSES THE LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD.



LEFT: "המשך בהנוגע להכת"י שבפולין"? WHILE RESPONDING TO AN UNRELATED QUESTION, THE REBBE ASKS RABBI KRINSKY WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING WITH THE KESOVIM IN POLAND.

CATALOGUING THE KESOVIM

Around Yud Shevat 5733, their combined efforts paid off, and Rabbis Zirkind and Aronov presented the Rebbe with the duplicated reels of microfilm. Each of them had the privilege of presenting one reel to the Rebbe. Additionally, several Maamorim of the Rebbe Maharash had been compiled from amongst the thousands of pages of kesovim. This select compilation of Maamorim was published and bound in a beautifully-bound volume and presented alongside the microfilms.

When Reb Mendel Aronov went in to present his reel (see image), the Rebbe reciprocated in return, by giving him special brochos, as well as mentioning that he had received the special zechus of Pidyon Shvuyim – redeeming the Rebbeim's possessions which were in captivity.

The Rebbe thanked him and instructed that the new microfilms be forwarded to Rabbi Krinsky who was overseeing this matter. Rabbi Krinsky purchased a microfilm reader for the Rebbe's library so they could properly process the new microfilms. Now the kisvei yad could be accessed and properly catalogued.

By the Rebbe's further instruction, the

microfilms and images were then submitted to Rabbi Chitrik who began to work at it, identifying and creating a list to prepare them for retrieval from Poland.

Immediately thereafter, Rabbi Krinsky wrote a Tzetzl to the Rebbe about the latest developments, on which the Rebbe replied with a brocho.

KESOVIM AT LAST

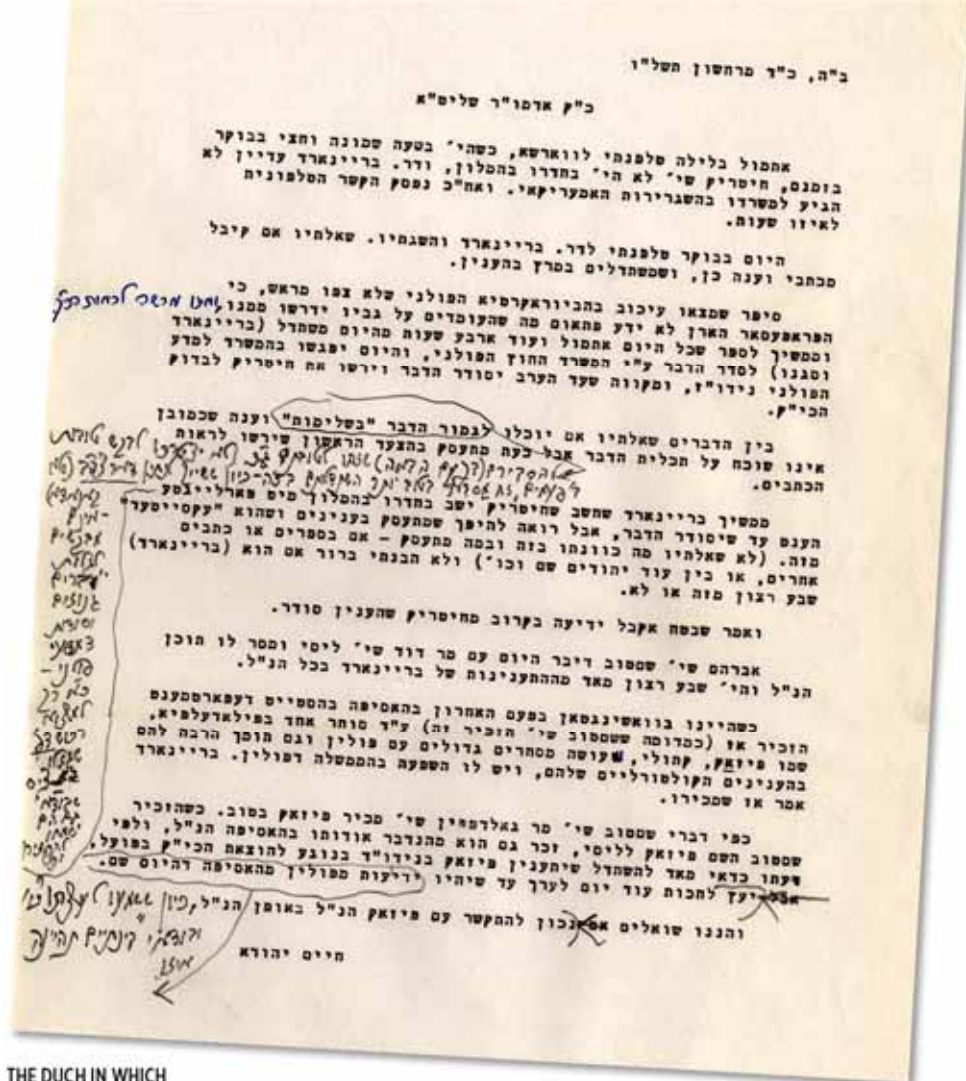
Two years later, in 5735, the entire effort got a major thrust through an exciting yet unexpected event. A Canadian student had traveled to Warsaw and visited the institute where the kesovim were held. Seeking a souvenir from his visit, he asked the librarian if he could perhaps take an artifact from the archive. To his surprise, the librarian offered him an entire volume of manuscripts!

Upon his return to Toronto, he proudly showed it to Rabbi Dovid Schochet. After a quick perusal of the book Rabbi Shochet identified it as Shaalos U'Teshuvos of the Frierdiker Rebbe in his own ksav yad kodesh!

Realizing the magnitude of what he was holding, he tried to explain to the student that this precious volume must immediately be sent to the Rebbe. The student, however, did not want to part with his rare find. After much pleading and cajoling Rabbi Schochet prevailed upon the young man to loan him the volume and brought it to the Rebbe...

The Rebbe immediately identified kesovim from the Frierdiker Rebbe in the volume. With visible excitement, the Rebbe requested to borrow the sefer and then took it to his room.

After close to an hour, the Rebbe returned the sefer with the kesovim of the Frierdiker sorted and separated from the teshuvos. Rabbi Schochet eventually prevailed on the student to give the Rebbe the sefer as a present. The student insisted, in fact, on giving it to the Rebbe in person and traveled to New York to give it to the Rebbe.



THE DUCH IN WHICH

RABBI KRINSKY INFORMS THE REBBE ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES RABBI CHITRIK WAS HAVING, AND THE EFFORTS THAT WERE TAKING PLACE TO SOLVE THAT ISSUE. THE REBBE REPLIES AT LENGTH.



THE REBBE RETURNS FROM A VISIT TO THE LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD.

CREDITS: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE

The Rebbe thanked him and gave him a set of Shaylos U'teshuvos from the Tzemach Tzedek that Kehos had published, as a present.

This unanticipated event brought new urgency to the efforts of obtaining the kesovim from Poland.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUE

Rabbi Krinsky relates:

"We began brainstorming how to best go about securing the seforim's release. At this point, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov entered the picture. In addition to his position of Shliach to Philadelphia, Rabbi Shemtov is the Rebbe's representative to Washington and is acquainted with many high-ranking officials there. Through diplomatic efforts and the right connections, the pressure paid off and we reached Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who, in turn, filed a request with the American Embassy in Poland for the release of the library."

Rabbi Shemtov spent several tireless months involved in negotiations, including many meetings in Washington with high-ranking diplomats. For some of these meetings, Rabbi Krinsky flew in from New York, and assisted the efforts. A short while later, the Jewish Historical Institute responded to the request in a letter addressed to Merkos with a carbon copy to the US Embassy:

9/24/1975

To Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch

770 Eastern Parkway

Brooklyn, NY, 11213

In response to the letter of 6/27/1975, the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland informs you that it does not have in its possession manuscripts of Chabad Lubavitch.

Additionally, we inform you that, in the case that a contingent of experts in this matter will visit, we will make every effort to allow research of all the archives including the manuscript archive.

Signed,

Director, Professor Doctor Maurycy Horn

POLAND-BOUND

In Cheshvan 5736, Rabbi Aaron Chitrik was suddenly summoned by Rabbi Hodakov and asked if his passport was current. When he replied in the affirmative, he was instructed to obtain a Polish visa and prepare for a trip to Warsaw. Rabbi Hodakov continued that he would be informed of a travel date soon, and, upon his arrival, he was to stay there for one week, in order to sufficiently locate and identify the kesovim.

With little time to waste, Rabbi Chitrik wrote to the Rebbe, inquiring as to which particular day he should best travel to Poland, as well a request to have a Yechidus before he departed. He received a fascinating response from the Rebbe, as follows:

ביום א' בלילה באם אא"פ מקודם (ובטח יהי בערב ש"ק על הציון)
ליחידות אין עתה, וא"צ כיון שיהי עה"צ.

In other words: He should depart on Sunday night and, if possible, even earlier. A Yechidus was not necessary, since he would certainly go to the Ohel of the Frierdiker Rebbe on Friday (two days before his departure).

On Motzoei Shabbos, 20 Cheshvan after Maariv, Rabbi Chitrik waited near the Rebbe's room to receive a *birchas preida*. The Rebbe gave him a copy of Mayim Rabim 5636 which was recently printed, with an instruction that he need not bring it with him to Poland. He also received ten dollars with instructions to exchange it to Polish currency in a legal way.

He then got several unique horaos from the Rebbe including a horaah to look for the seforim from the "Chersoner Geniza". Not knowing how to identify it, the Rebbe directed him to the "Hatomim" periodical where he could

find identifying signs. The Rebbe instructed him to look for the Baal Shem Tov's menorah and described it as a small menorah with the Ba'al Shem Tov's name engraved on it. The Rebbe concluded saying, "the Rebbeim are going with you".

The special shlichus was extremely discreet. Interestingly, Rabbi Chitrik's family relates, that prior to leaving, he had told his children, that, should their friends ask where he is, they should just



THE CAN WHICH CONTAINED THE REEL OF MICROFILMS. ON THE LABEL THE REBBE WROTE THE INITIALS OF RABBI MENDEL ARONOV, WHO PRESENTED THIS PARTICULAR REEL.

say he went to Honolulu...

On Sunday evening, Chof Cheshvan, Rabbi Chitrik flew to Poland. Upon arrival he immediately went to the Jewish Historical Institute. Once he had arrived there, he faced an unforeseen challenge. The librarian claimed that he had no prior knowledge of this visit and was not expecting him. He therefore denied him access to the archives. Rabbi Chitrik attempted to reach the mazkirus through the phone line in the US embassy, but he was told it would take 24 hours to secure a phone line.

As this was going on, Rabbi Krinsky wrote a Duch to the Rebbe informing that he had not been able to reach Rabbi Chitrik, however he had been informed by one of the people in the embassy that Rabbi Chitrik hadn't even been able to view the kesovim. Rabbi Krinsky continued that he was currently working on reaching out to the people that could help solve this issue.

Rabbi Krinsky also wrote, that – in the event that Rabbi Chitrik would indeed be successful in obtaining the seforim – he would try to arrange through the Embassy to have these transferred to the USA immediately.

Eventually, the efforts were successful and through the US embassy Rabbi Chitrik was able to gain access to the archive.

NOT SO SIMPLE

This was not the end of the challenges that Rabbi Chitrik encountered. At first, they only allowed him to view the library catalogue. The librarian finally agreed to allow him to see books, but only one at a time and under the supervision of two guards. As he was already familiar with the microfilms which had reached the

Rebbe's library, Rabbi Chitrik knew exactly what he was looking for and it was clear that this was not what they were showing him. They were deliberately bringing unrelated books!

Realizing that the archive was on the fifth floor without an elevator in the building, Rabbi Chitrik decided to give one of the Polish guards a “present” to energize him. After handing him a piece

Pidyon Shvuyim

By the Grace of G-d
16th of Iyar, 5739
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Joseph Shestack, Esq.
Philadelphia, Pa.

Greeting and Blessing:

This letter has been long overdue, especially considering its subject matter. But it is also the subject matter of this letter, more precisely the emotional aspect of it, that is the prime reason for the delay. For it is not easy to express in words, much less in writing, very deep personal feelings, and I kept on delaying it for a calmer disposition. However, since these feelings have not subsided, there is no point for further procrastination.

I refer, of course, to your truly Yidisher endeavor in the matter of restitution of the manuscripts and books that belong to the library of my predecessor, my father-in-law of saintly memory, which you initiated with the help of friends, and have already had considerable success in regards to a substantial part of them having them restored to their rightful place and “home.”

As you know, this Schneerson Library included not only a collection which my saintly father-in-law had acquired personally during his lifetime, but mainly manuscripts and books that were the legacy of his saintly forebears, some of them going back to the Alter Rebbe, Founder of Chabad.

There is surely no need to elaborate on what these manuscripts and books meant to him, as to all the Lubavitcher Rebbes before him. He had a very special, profound and soulful attachment to them, over and above his attachment to books and manuscripts of similar sacred content. And many of them represent the heart and soul of the sacred Chabad literature.

You can therefore well understand how deeply moved I was, and will always be, and the feelings of all the friends of Lubavitch about your great and noble endeavor in volunteer-

ing your time and effort and prestige to “bring home” these sacred manuscripts and books. It is truly a case of Pidyon Shvuim, since only by being at home can these spiritual treasures resume their full vitality, not only for the benefit of those who are directly associated with the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, but also for the benefit of all our Jewish people, through the dissemination of the teachings of Chabad Chassidus and Pnimius Hatorah.

If “the reward of a Mitzvah is the Mitzvah itself” and requires no human “thank you,” your noble endeavor clearly transcends any expression of gratitude. Nevertheless, I am impelled to express, however inadequately, in my own behalf and in behalf of the movement which I am privileged to head, as well as in behalf of all who have an actual or potential stake in this matter – our gratification and heartfelt appreciation...

...I am pleased about the timing of this letter on the eve of your departure on the second stage of your endeavor to return a further substantial part of this library that are still in “exile.” I trust and am confident that you will not encounter difficulties, since you will be dealing with fellow-Jews, children of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, especially those whom Divine Providence has privileged to be the custodians of this part, after it had been pillaged during the war and Holocaust, miraculously survived, until they finally came under that custody of the present guardians, in order to be restored to their rightful owners and rightful home in the true sense of ושבנו בנים לגבולם. Indeed the Zechus of having taken care of them in the interim will stand them in good stead, and make them even more responsive to their pleasant duty in the realization that they can now complete and bring to the culmination point their guardianship...

...The merit of your great mission will certainly stand you and all yours in good stead for additional generous blessings in all your personal affairs, materially and spiritually.

With esteem and blessing

of chocolate, the results were immediate. The guard returned with five books. Before leaving for the day, the guard mentioned that he enjoyed the chocolate.

Upon returning the next day, Rabbi Chitrik handed both of the guards a bar of chocolate and a tip of a few zloty. Looking through the volumes the guards brought down afterward, Rabbi Chitrik recognized numbers in the Frieddiker Rebbe's handwriting on two volumes. These numbers were the cataloguing code of the library in Lubavitch!

As soon as the director left, the uninterested guards allowed him into the room where the kesovim were kept.

He was delighted to find all the kesovim kept in one place in an organized manner. He began making a full list of every item that was there.

Upon opening a sefer of the Rebbe Maharash's kesovim, Rabbi Chitrik was stunned to find the tzavaa of the Tzemach Tzedek! Realizing that this would be of unique importance to the Rebbe, he secretly slipped it away and smuggled it out of the library.

Alas, Rabbi Chitrik was unable to convince the library to actually hand him the seforim, but at least he was able to compile a full list of what the library actually had within their possession. Rabbi Chitrik returned to New York and submitted the list and the tzavaa to the Rebbe. The Rebbe asked him if he had made a copy of it, to which he answered that he indeed had.

Now that it was able to be proven without doubt that the kesovim of the Rebbeim were being held in Poland, the efforts to pressure the Polish authorities into releasing them could begin in full capacity. The work of obtaining official permission for the transfer of the kesovim from Poland to America began in earnest. This process took about a year and a half of diplomatic effort.

Rabbi Shemtov enlisted the support of Mr. Edward Piszek, an influential Philadelphia businessman of Polish descent through a mutual friend and strong supporter of Rabbi Shemtov. Mr. Piszek had strong ties to the Polish government and

played an instrumental role in negotiating the release of the kesovim. The hard work paid off when, in the early summer days of 5737, yet another trip was scheduled to Poland.

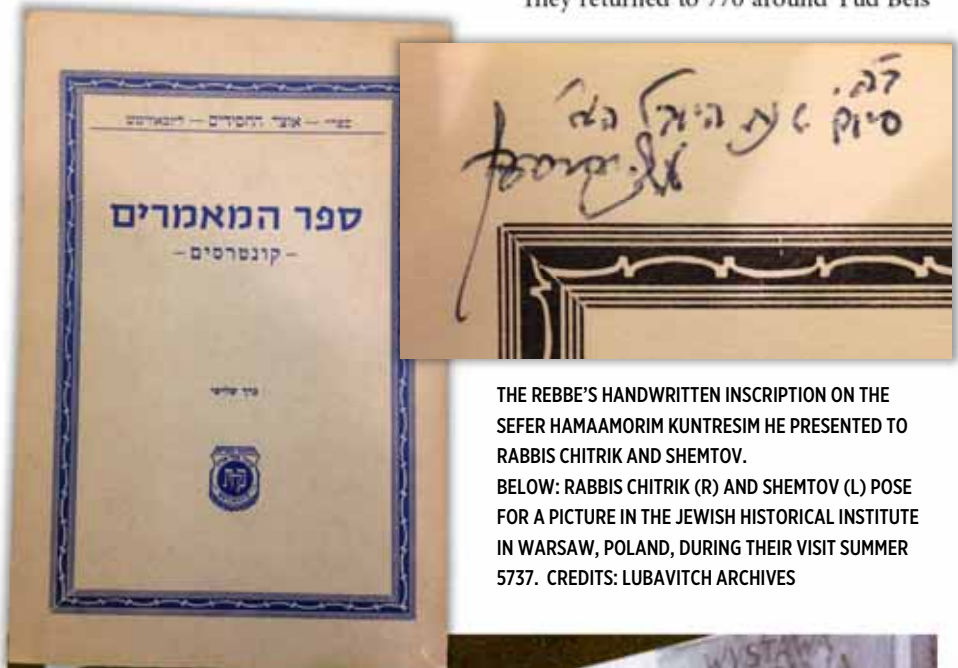
Lubavitch's lawyer, Mr. Jerry Shestack, Esq., played a vital role in the legal process of the release of a number of these kesovim which had already ended up in Eretz Yisroel. {Ed. Note: It is noteworthy to mention that Mr. Shestack was also quite instrumental in the Hei Teves seforim case, a decade later.}

In a letter addressed to Mr. Shestack,

the Rebbe describes, in glowing terms, appreciation for his assistance toward these efforts. The letter was sent as well to Rabbi Shemtov, with a message that he read it as if it was addressed to him (see sidebar).

This time, Rabbi Chitrik was accompanied by Rabbi Shemtov with the mission of ensuring that each and every item is ready for transport as soon as the official permission is given. After a tireless and stressful week of work, they returned to New York, and it seemed that their efforts would soon see fruition!

They returned to 770 around Yud Beis



THE REBBE'S HANDWRITTEN INSCRIPTION ON THE SEFER HAMAAMORIM KUNTRESIM HE PRESENTED TO RABBIS CHITRIK AND SHEMTOV.

BELOW: RABBIS CHITRIK (R) AND SHEMTOV (L) POSE FOR A PICTURE IN THE JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE IN WARSAW, POLAND, DURING THEIR VISIT SUMMER 5737. CREDITS: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

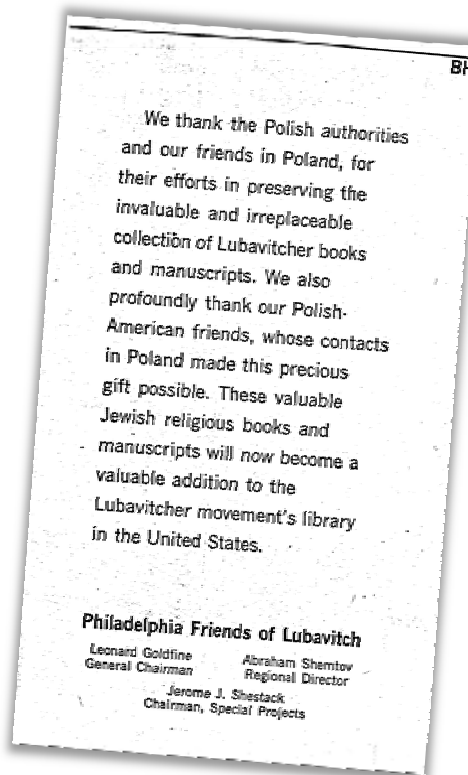


Tammuz. They immediately completed a detailed report describing their work in Poland and submitted it to the Rebbe, to their surprise, the Rebbe presented them with a reshima from the Frierdiker Rebbe and a copy of Maamorim Kuntreisim by the Frierdiker Rebbe inscribed and signed by the Rebbe (see images).

In the month of Av, Rabbi Shemtov returned to Warsaw to finalize the last details of the transfer to the United States. After his return, the Rebbe gave Rabbis Chitrik and Shemtov a copy of the Rebbe's own ksav yad – a *mayneh* to the maanichim on the maamer Vehaya Midei Chodesh of that year. At the Farbrengen of 22 Menachem Av, the Rebbe gave Lechaim to the two of them, as well as a bottle of Mashkeh for Rabbi Shemtov.

A TIMELY GIFT

In Cheshvan of 5738, the crates arrived in Philadelphia and were released to the possession of Mr. Pizsek. After smoothing out some last minute difficulties, the kesovim were ready to be sent to their rightful home in 770. A grand ceremony was held in the Independence Hall with Polish dignitaries and local friends of Lubavitch in attendance, including those who were involved with this special mission. After this high profile event, the crates were loaded into a van and



THE NOTICE PUBLISHED
IN FOUR MAJOR US NEWSPAPERS AT THE BEHEST OF
THE POLISH GOVERNMENT.

brought to 770.

The Polish government made a condition that an advertisement be placed in four major American newspapers thanking them for the release of the library.

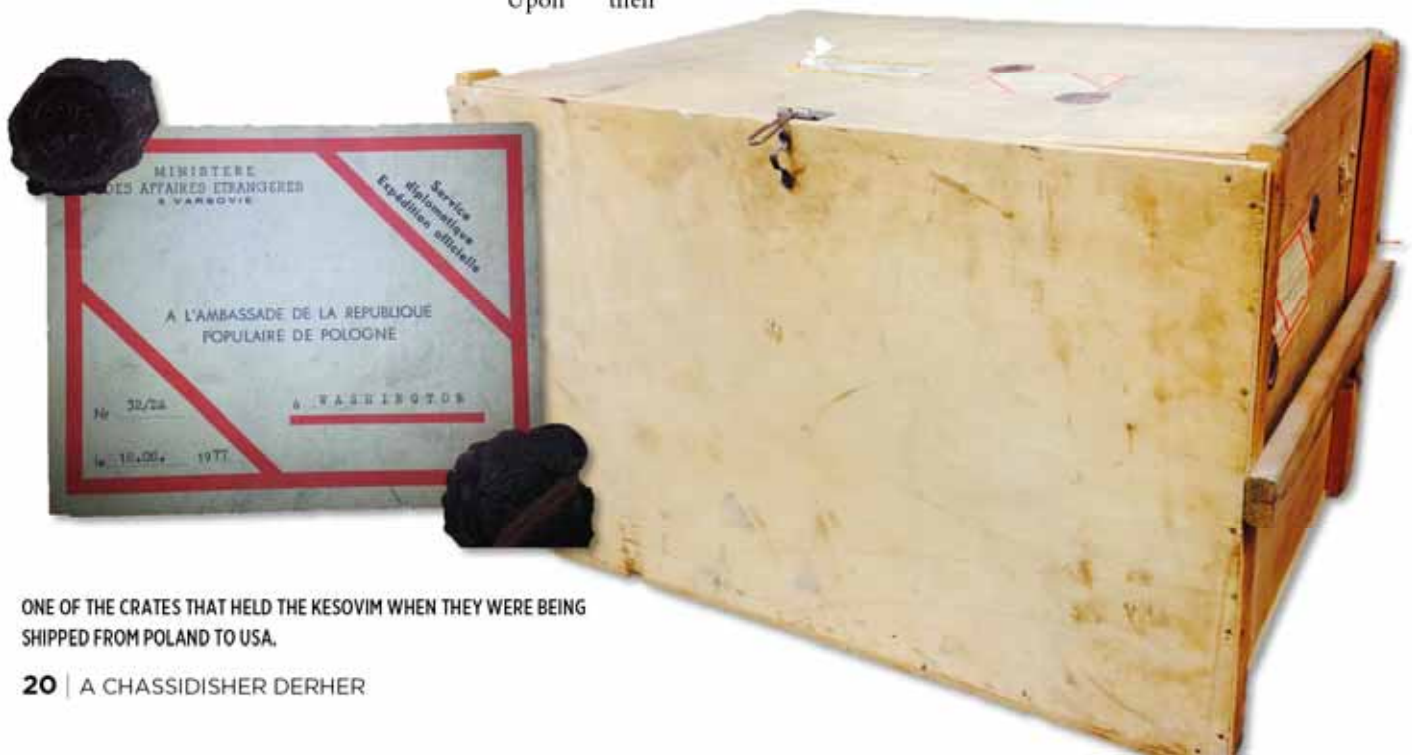
On 21 Cheshvan, in the midst of great joy, the kesovim arrived at 770. During this period the Rebbe was recovering from the heart attack of Shmini Atzeres. Upon their

arrival, Rabbi Krinsky informed the Rebbe and asked if he should bring the seforim in to the Rebbe for his perusal. The Rebbe informed him that he would personally go the library to look through all the seforim at a later time.

The next day, 22 Cheshvan, Rabbis Chitrik and Shemtov entered the Rebbe's room for a Yechidus and presented the Rebbe with two volumes of the kesovim. The Rebbe's face visibly lit up as he took the seforim and leafed through them.

The Rebbe then benched them with a special brocha: "Gratitude – you will receive from the Oibershter. Since this is an inyan of pidyon shvuyim, let there be a pidyon shvuyim by each and every one who learns these kesovim. This is also an inyan of kibutz goluyos. May this be the beginning of the kibutz goluyos of the neshomos as well as the gufim, until the kibutz goluyos through Moshiach in actuality. Fortunate are all of the people who had a connection to this, especially since it was connected with personal inconvenience, and it was nonetheless carried out happily. May you always share Besuros Tovos."

The Rebbe informed the Mazkirus and the doctors of his plan to visit the library to see the kesovim on 28 Cheshvan. The information got to several bochurim who were always following what was going on. Learning of the opportunity to see



ONE OF THE CRATES THAT HELD THE KESOVIM WHEN THEY WERE BEING
SHIPPED FROM POLAND TO USA.

the Rebbe for the first time in five weeks, they hurried early in the morning to find distant places from which they could see the Rebbe. Some hid under cars in the cold weather, but in their excitement they hardly even noticed the hard conditions.

On 28 Cheshvan 5738 after mincha, the front door to 770 opened and the Rebbe appeared in the doorway. The Rebbe began to go down the stairs and make his way to the library, with Dr. Resnick and the Mazkirus accompanying.

The librarian, Rabbi Berel Levine, recalls what took place then:

“Rosh Chodesh Kislev is the well-known day when Chasidim celebrate the full recovery of the Rebbe and the day when the Rebbe returned home for the first time since Shmini Atzeres. What is less known is that a day before that, the Rebbe left 770 for the first time to visit the library to view the kesovim of the Rebbeim which had recently been returned to Lubavitch by the Polish government.

“This collection had been left in Warsaw during World War II and for the past several years, efforts were being made to secure their release and in the summer of 5737, the final authorization had been given for their return.

“A few days earlier, five large crates had arrived with the kesovim in them and today, the Rebbe had come to the library to see them. The library was set up with a chair and table where the Rebbe would sit while looking at the kisvei yad.

“I stood in the library (where I had recently begun working). When the Rebbe entered, he noticed me and nodded his head and said “yasher koach” and sat down at the table. Rabbi Krinsky brought piles of volumes from the next room where the crates were, while Rabbi Groner handed them individually to the Rebbe. The Rebbe commented on the nature of certain volumes. When looking at a volume of Kisvei HaArizal, the Rebbe noted the beautiful design of the writing...

“The Rebbe looked through each volume and put it aside as the next one was passed up. This went on for about two hours during which the Rebbe examined about 150 volumes. Rabbi Binyomin Klein, Dr. Resnick and I stood watching after which the Rebbe stood up to return to 770.

“This was the Rebbe’s first visit to the library building which had been purchased several years before.”

The next evening, hundreds of Chasidim stood outside the entrance to 770 and waited. After a short while, the door of 770 opened and the Rebbe stood there in full glory. Chasidim burst into song— with the Rebbe encouraging strongly. The Rebbe had recovered and was well enough to go home.

In Sivan of that year, the Rebbe established a special department of “Maareches Otzar Hachasidim”, broadening the editorial staff with the intent of publishing the newly-released kesovim of our Rebbeim. ■

Welcoming the Kesovim

The kesovim arrive in Philadelphia en route to New York. A special reception was held at Independence Hall in their honor. Credits: Lubavitch Archives

