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# REBBETZIN CHAYA MUSHKA

## A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

**THIS ESSAY IS BASED PRIMARILY ON  
THREE WORKS OF JEWISH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA,  
“EARLY YEARS,” “THE REBBETZIN” DVD,  
AND “THE EARLY YEARS” DVDS.**



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THE REBBETZIN IN HER YOUTH.



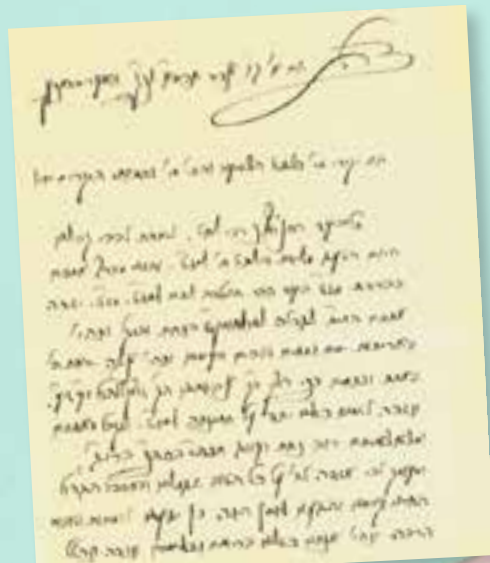
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## BIRTH

Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka was born in the town of Babinovitch, near Lubavitch, on Shabbos 25 Adar, 5661 (תרס"א).

At the time, the Rebbe Rashab was visiting Germany due to health reasons. He was notified via telegram about the birth, and he immediately dispatched a telegram back with a *mazal tov* and the suggestion that she be named Chaya Mushka, after her great-great-grandmother, the Rebbetzin of the Tzemach Tzedek. He also sent a letter in which he repeated the suggestion and included many *brachos* for the new baby and her parents.<sup>1</sup>

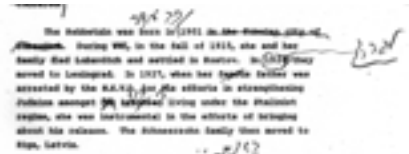
The news that a new granddaughter was born to the Rebbe spread to Chassidim all over. In letters over that next week, the Rebbe Rashab acknowledges the *mazal tov* he received from Reb Yeshaye Berlin,<sup>2</sup> and shares the happy news with Reb Avraham Abba Person.<sup>3</sup>



LETTER FROM THE REBBE RASHAB TO THE FRIERDIKER REBBE ONE DAY AFTER THE REBBETZIN WAS BORN, REQUESTING THAT SHE BE NAMED CHAYA MUSHKA.

“ Jewish education must begin with stories about *mesiras nefesh*; it is specifically those stories “*vos leigen zich*” by a Jewish child.

## WHERE WAS THE REBBETZIN BORN?



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It was always assumed, for lack of evidence otherwise, that the Rebbetzin was born in her hometown of Lubavitch.

After the *histalkus* on Chof-Beis Shevat, this was noted in a press release prepared by Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, but the Rebbe crossed out that line and it was removed. Later, the Rebbe informed him that she was born in a nearby town called Babinovitch. [See picture of *ksav yad*.]

(*Early Years*, p. 472.)

## NATURAL SELF SACRIFICE

Until she was fourteen years of age, the Rebbetzin and her sisters grew up in Lubavitch, where their father, the Frierdiker Rebbe, paid close attention to their education.

The *melamed* hired to tutor the Rebbetzin and her sisters thought to use a rationalist approach. He felt it would be unwise to inculcate them with stories of supernatural events or extreme self-sacrifice. However, the Frierdiker Rebbe disagreed. He told him that on the contrary, Jewish education must begin with stories about *mesiras nefesh*; it is specifically those stories “*vos leigen zich*,” that are naturally grasped and understood by a Jewish child.

When the Rebbe retold the story, he pointed out that this story shows that the *mesiras nefesh* that later so characterized her life was a focal point of her education as a child growing up in the Frierdiker Rebbe's home.<sup>4</sup>

Even in her adult years, we find this to be a recurring theme in letters from the Frierdiker Rebbe to the Rebbetzin. One such famous letter describes the suffering of the Yidden on Tisha B'av throughout the ages. Its main point is the fact that Yidden must always be ready to go

against the flow and reject all outside pressures, whether intellectual or physical.<sup>5</sup>

The trait of *mesiras nefesh* instilled in the Rebbetzin from such a young age is evident in many of the stories about the Rebbetzin from her young adult years in the Soviet Union, then under Nazi Germany, and in other situations. “Schneersons don’t fear anyone,” the Friediker Rebbe told his captors when he was arrested, and the Rebbetzin was a personification of that trait. In her quiet, regal manner, she never compromised on her beliefs and always did exactly what she felt was right, regardless of the consequences, even in circumstances of discomfort or outright danger.

Growing up in Lubavitch of those years meant that the Rebbetzin was always in close proximity to her grandfather, the Rebbe Rashab. She would often refer to things she had seen in her grandfather’s home, and once said that the memory of his beautiful and heartfelt davening was something that remained with her throughout her life.



THE REBBETZIN AS A YOUNG GIRL.

She once told Reb Berel Junik that with proper concentration, she can reconstruct the image of her grandfather’s *farbrengens*, and even recall what he had said.<sup>6</sup>

The Rebbetzin once commented that the famous picture of the Rebbe Rashab didn’t do justice to his true *hadras panim*. When Rabbi Nochum Kaplan drew a painting of the Rebbe Rashab wearing a *spodik*, he brought it to the Rebbetzin for her opinion, and she commented that his beard was a lighter color, and that his eyes were sharper than he had portrayed them. When he corrected the painting, the Rebbetzin was satisfied, and even kept the painting in her home for one night.<sup>7</sup>

### IS IT A SPECIAL YOM TOV?

During the Yom Tov meal of Acharon Shel Pesach 5666 (תרס"ו), when the Rebbetzin was five years old, the Rebbe Rashab related that he had overheard an exchange between the Rebbetzin and her sister. “I was in the *sefarim* room when I heard them arguing, and I was interested in hearing what they were discussing.”

The Rebbetzin and her sister were arguing about the significance of Acharon Shel Pesach. Her sister maintained that it was a Yom Tov like any other, while the Rebbetzin argued that it was special; it is the only Yom Tov when *Shehecheyanu* isn’t recited.

The Rebbe Rashab commented that their argument reminded him of a similar discussion he and his siblings had with their grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek. His sister had suggested that the observance of Acharon Shel Pesach was to celebrate the fact that the Yidden spent a full week successfully avoiding *chametz*. The Tzemach Tzedek didn’t reject her explanation, but added his own. He told them that the first days of Pesach celebrate our *geulah* from Mitzrayim, while Acharon Shel Pesach celebrates our future *geulah* from the current *galus*.<sup>8</sup>

In a *sicha* one Acharon Shel Pesach, the Rebbe spoke about the deeper meaning of both stories, and explained that the ideas were paralleled. The reason we don’t recite *Shehecheyanu* on Acharon Shel Pesach, which was the Rebbetzin’s point, is connected to the Tzemach Tzedek’s explanation. It’s because it commemorates the *upcoming* redemption. Being that this hasn’t yet occurred, and that is a cause of heartache to the Jewish people and the *Aibershter* himself, it is not possible to recite *Shehecheyanu* on that day.

(*Toras Menachem* vol. 43 (5725 vol. 3), pp. 201-203, 243-250.)



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## THE CLOUDS OF COMMUNISM

In 5676 (תרע"ו), World War I was in full swing, and the German army was making vast inroads into Russian territory. The Rebbe Rashab decided to leave Lubavitch with the entire *beis harav*, and made his way to Rostov.

At the time, the Rebbetzin was fourteen years old. In Rostov, the Frieddiker Rebbe and his family lived in very close proximity to the Rebbe Rashab; on two stories of the same small building.

During the Rebbe Rashab's illness preceding the *histalkus* on Beis Nissan 5680 (תר"פ), the Rebbetzin remained close to his side. Reb Moshe Dovber Rivkin, in his *sefer Ashkavta D'Rebbi*, writes the following words about one of those nights:

"The Frieddiker Rebbe and his family went to rest, aside from his daughter Mushka, *tichye*, who remained awake the entire night. I also went to sleep in one of the rooms.

"At around two in the morning, I heard some noise in the house, so I dressed and left my room. I saw Mushka, *tichye*, rushing through the home with a glass of milk in her hand. I asked her what was going on and who the milk was for, and she answered that it was for her grandfather, the Rebbe, who wasn't feeling well."

After the passing of the Rebbe Rashab, the battle to keep *Yiddishkeit* alive began in earnest, and the Frieddiker Rebbe was constantly



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THE REBBETZIN'S SOVIET PASSPORT.



THE FRIEDIKER REBBE'S APARTMENT IN LENINGRAD.

harassed by the Secret Police of Rostov for his activities. After about four years of leading the Chassidim in Rostov, he was forced out of the city. He then settled in Leningrad.

The persecution persisted in Leningrad as well, and the possibility of an arrest became apparent. It was during that time, in 5685 (תרפ"ה), when the Rebbetzin was 23 years old, that the Friediker Rebbe signed a document granting the Rebbetzin full power of attorney over his money and possessions for a period of three years (at the end of which they had already left Russia).<sup>9</sup> This document, which has survived in the original, is testimony to the amount of trust that the Friediker Rebbe had in his daughter.

## THE ARREST

The fear soon turned to reality, and at midnight of 15 Sivan 5687 (תרפ"ז), the Secret Police arrived to arrest the Friediker Rebbe. Reb Elya Chaim Althaus<sup>10</sup> describes how the Rebbetzin alerted the Rebbe of the new elements in their home:

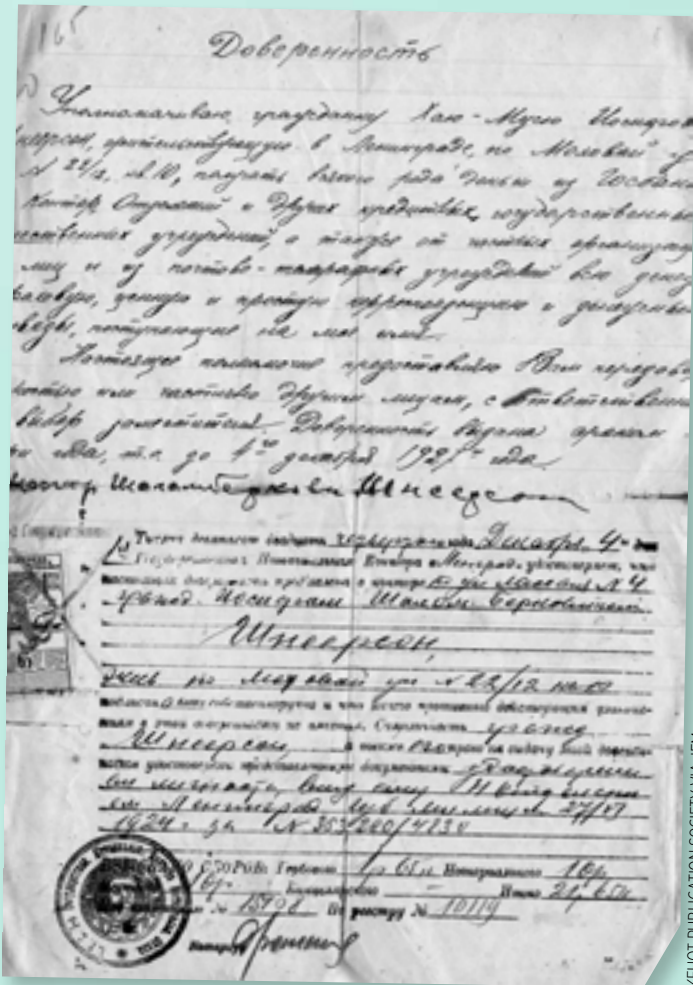
“Through the open window, she called to Reb M. M. Schneerson, who was approaching. ‘Schneerson, guests have come to visit us.’

“He understood, and immediately ran from the courtyard to inform the close Chassidim.”<sup>11</sup>

In *Reshimas Hama'asar*, the Friediker Rebbe records the conversation the Rebbetzin and her sister Rebbetzin Sheina had with the police when they entered their room to search it:

“They first went to search the room of my daughters Chaya Moussia and Shaina and asked them: ‘Which party do you belong to?’

“They answered that they were ‘members of our father’s party, apolitical Jewish women who



POWER OF ATTORNEY OF THE FRIEDIKER REBBE TO THE REBBETZIN.

hold dear Jewish traditions and despise the new trends.’

“Why?’ inquired Nachmanson, astonished.

“Why?’ replied Shaina, ‘this we are not obligated to answer you. You asked regarding our beliefs and I replied. As to the question why, this we are not obligated to explain, for you are not here investigating my letters and documents for discussion’s sake. What we were, we still are, and we declare this openly, regardless of whether you find it acceptable or offensive.’”<sup>12</sup>

That night, the Friediker Rebbe was arrested. After an international outcry, his sentence was mitigated to exile for three years to the city of Kostroma. The Rebbetzin was chosen to accompany him on his journey.

They traveled to Kostroma, and after a mere ten days, the Friediker Rebbe was notified that he would be set free. The Rebbetzin telephoned the Friediker Rebbe’s home in Leningrad



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and notified them, “We’re coming home for Shabbos! *Bli pirsum*, without publicity.”

The Rebbe once related in a *sicha* that the words *bli pirsum* became a slogan among the Chassidim at the time.

“When we wanted to notify other cities, we wanted to do so as quickly as possible, so we sent them telegrams signed *bli pirsum*. The recipients knew who was sending the telegram, and that it wasn’t a surname, but an instruction to celebrate without publicity.”<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in a letter, the Rebbe speaks of the “*bli pirsum farbrengen*” that took place in the hallway of the Frierdiker Rebbe’s home, and likewise, Reb Zalman Duchman writes that “we drank lots of *l’chaim* and the Chossid Rabbi Elkin danced in his socks, since we needed to celebrate *bli pirsum*.”<sup>14</sup>

The Frierdiker Rebbe, still not entirely safe from the persecution of the authorities, traveled to Malachovka, near Moscow, where he spent

several weeks away from prying eyes while awaiting exit visas.

While there, the Rebbetzin joined him for a Shabbos and they embarked together on a journey to Rostov, to the Ohel of the Rebbe Rashab, which they would visit this one last time before leaving the Soviet Union forever. Reb Folle Kahan wrote that Chassidim at the time surmised that the Rebbetzin was chosen to accompany the Frierdiker Rebbe on this journey because her wedding was approaching.<sup>15</sup>

### THE WEDDING

Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah recounted that when the Rebbe Rashab discussed potential *shidduchim* for their granddaughters, he said, “For Moussia, I am thinking of one of Levik’s children.”<sup>16</sup>

The formation of the *shidduch* took place in 5683 (תרפ”ג), when the Rebbe first visited the Frierdiker Rebbe. Within a short time, the Frierdiker Rebbe decided to take the Rebbe as a son-in-law, and he invited the Rebbe to join him in a *kuhr-art*, a vacation town, to spend some time together. He then wrote to the Rebbetzin about their meetings.<sup>17</sup>

The wedding itself was postponed for a number of years, ultimately taking place after they left Russia, on Yud-Daled Kislev 5689 (תרפ”ט), in a grand affair at Yeshivas Tomchei



THE INVITATION TO THE REBBE AND REBBETZIN'S CHASUNA.

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THE REBBETZIN ON HER WEDDING DAY, YUD DALED KISLEV 5689.

Temimim in Warsaw. The wedding has been described in many places; we will not repeat the entire story here.

One of the unique *hanhagos* of the Rebbetzin during the wedding related to her wedding gown. The Frierdiker Rebbe requested that she wear a gown that isn't white. (It's a non-Jewish custom, the Frierdiker Rebbe said.) Instead she wore a number of gowns over the course of

the wedding celebration, each with a different color.<sup>18</sup>

The significance of that day was discussed by the Rebbe on Yud-Daled Kislev 5714, when the Rebbe held a *farbrengen* marking the twenty-fifth anniversary. The Rebbe explained that although every wedding is a special occasion, his was unique. As the Rebbe famously said, "דאס איז דער טאג וואס מ'האט מיר פארבונדען מיט אייך" און אייך מיט מיר, און צוזאמען וועלן מיר אויסמאטערן



"We're coming home for Shabbos! Bli pirsum, without publicity."





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והחי יתנו אל לבו—די גאולה האמיתית והשלימה  
connected me to you, and you to me, and  
together we will achieve the true and ultimate  
redemption.”

### PARIS

The Rebbe and Rebbetzin remained in Riga near the Friediker Rebbe for eight weeks, and on Yud Shevat they departed for Berlin, where they would remain for close to three years.

After three years in Berlin, the Nazis rose to power, and Jews began to feel the effect of the government propaganda. The Rebbetzin related that once while walking down the street, they noticed a large group of uniformed Nazis approaching them. Their appearance was so fearful that the Rebbetzin asked the Rebbe to enter a nearby shop and wait until they passed, but the Rebbe kept on walking as if he didn't notice them at all.

This affair concluded peacefully, but within a short period of time, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin decided to relocate to Paris.

Kosher food was very hard to come by, and the Rebbetzin would go to great lengths to obtain food with unquestionable *kashrus*. For *chalav Yisrael*, the Rebbetzin would travel to a farm to watch a farmer milk his cow. For meat, the Rebbetzin went to a local kosher butcher shop to watch their process up close, and only when she felt it was adequate, did the Rebbe agree to buy from them. Reb Eliyahu Raichman once visited their home in Paris and saw the Rebbetzin choosing and grinding kernels of wheat for the Rebbe's matzah. The Rebbetzin explained to him that the Rebbe doesn't eat anything from outside his home.

They would buy bread from a local bakery that the Rebbe approved of, until once, while approaching the bakery, someone accosted the Rebbe and said, "You? A G-d fearing Jew like you eats from this bakery?"

They later discovered that the individual was merely attempting to boost the growth of a competing enterprise, but nevertheless, the Rebbe never bought from them again. "*Hot der Aibershter geholfen, un zint yemalt iz shoin kein broit oichet nisht geven*—The Aibershter helped, and from then, we didn't even have bread," the Rebbetzin related.

An incident that sheds light on the Rebbetzin's character took place with the Rebbe's brother, Reb Yisroel Aryeh Leib. Reb Leibel required certain documents from the German government, but was unable to obtain them on his own. The Rebbe offered to travel to Berlin in his place, but the Rebbetzin felt that she had a better chance at succeeding, so she traveled instead.

While in the "lion's den," they asked her to fill out a questionnaire with her personal details. When they saw that her family name, maiden name, and mother's maiden name were all Schneerson, they didn't believe her. The Rebbetzin held her ground. "When we conquer Paris," they said, seeing her insistence, "we'll check this out."

An interesting anecdote is in a letter of the Frierdiker Rebbe about a new book about the Alter Rebbe that had been published in German, called *Der Rav*. Wanting to hear about

its content, the Frierdiker Rebbe sent it to the Rebbetzin. "She said it is a pleasant read and written in the style of a dedicated Chossid. The author, she said (in the name of her husband), is Dr. Ehrman," the Frierdiker Rebbe writes.

The Rebbe and Rebbetzin traveled periodically to the Frierdiker Rebbe in Riga, and then Warsaw and Otvozk, usually for Tishrei and Pesach, and once spent almost an entire year in his presence in a convalescent town. Besides for these visits, they remained in contact via mail, and their correspondence fills the entire fifteenth volume of the Frierdiker Rebbe's *Igros Kodesh*. One special letter is known as the *lange briv*, a letter over one hundred printed pages long describing the early days of Chassidim, written in its entirety to the Rebbetzin.

## NAZI OCCUPATION

When the Nazis approached Paris, the Rebbetzin recounted, a general offered the Rebbe the option of hiding out in his summer home in the outskirts of Paris, but the Rebbe refused. Instead, they boarded one of the last trains leaving Paris, and fled south, first to Vichy, and then to Nice.

Although those cities were not under the direct occupation of the Nazis, they were present nonetheless, and the situation was far from simple. Jews tended to remain at home, and were only seen on the streets in extreme cases.

Regarding their stay in Nice, the Rebbetzin related the following story:

"I was once walking along the beach in Nice, when I noticed a Jewish woman walking towards me. She was the wife of a Belgian rabbi.

"I asked her why she was there, and she responded that she was waiting for her husband who had gone to *tovel* in the ocean. He was *toveling* at a spot some distance from the main swimming area, and his clothing lay on the beach.

"As we were standing there, we noticed a group of Nazis approaching. Nice wasn't under Nazi control, but we were afraid nonetheless. We were relatively inconspicuous, and the main issue was that her husband's appearance clearly showed that he was a Jew; we were at a loss of what to do.



*The Rebbetzin went to a local kosher butchershop to watch their process up close.*



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“I suddenly had an idea. I approached the lifeguard and said in French, ‘Isn’t that someone’s head I see there, far out in the water?’ I hinted to him that it could be unpleasant should the Nazis notice him...

“He got the point. He took his rescue boat and rowed out to ‘save’ the ‘drowning man.’

“He grabbed the rabbi and brought him to a safer location. Meanwhile, the Nazis noticed that he had a Jew on his boat, but since they were already quite a distance from them, they decided to let it go.

“Later that night, he sent a message with one of his daughters that all was well. I wasn’t home at the time, because I had just gone out to obtain *chalav Yisrael* milk.”

### IN THE UNITED STATES

After many months of wandering, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin arrived on the safe shores of the United States on Chof-Ches Sivan 5701 (ה'תש"א).<sup>19</sup> Within a few weeks after their arrival from Europe, after initially living in what would later become the Rebbe’s room at 770, they

moved into a small apartment on President Street and New York Avenue, where they lived for some fifteen years, until the house on President Street was acquired.

The Frierdiker Rebbe placed the Rebbe at the helm of the three new major institutions: Kehos, Machne Yisrael, and Merkos L’inyonei Chinuch. From that moment on, the Rebbe was no longer a private figure; he began *farbrenging* on a regular basis, and became openly involved in leading the activities of Lubavitch.

The Rebbetzin, however, retained the status she had kept before the war. She kept the same low profile, loath to receive the preferential treatment she deserved as the daughter of the Frierdiker Rebbe, and later, as the Rebbetzin. When she felt that storekeepers in Crown Heights were going out of their way to give her special treatment, she began shopping in other neighborhoods. When she would call people over the telephone, she would introduce herself as “Mrs. Schneerson from President Street,” and the people at the other end would often miss the fact that it was the Rebbetzin speaking.

### A NEW SELF-SACRIFICE

Much has been written about the idea that the Rebbe’s biggest Chossid was the Rebbetzin herself. The full extent of the Rebbetzin’s role in the Rebbe’s *nesius* is something that remains unknown to this very day, which is undoubtedly exactly what she preferred. However, it is easy to comprehend how the weight of the burden was shared by the Rebbetzin throughout the decades of the Rebbe’s *nesius*. Awaiting the Rebbe’s return on the late nights of *yechidus* and *farbrengens*, the endless workdays when the Rebbe would return home with yet another bag of letters, and the endless stream of letters and requests involved great sacrifice on the Rebbetzin’s part.

The Rebbetzin’s aides relate that whenever she experienced a medical issue, she went to extreme lengths to try to hide it from the Rebbe. Once, when the Rebbetzin was hospitalized, the nurses noticed that when the Rebbe came each day, she took great care to look better than her true physical state.

There were parts of the Rebbe’s physical work that the Rebbetzin was directly involved in as well. The Rebbetzin would read vast amounts



THE REBBETZIN'S CANDLESTICKS.



THE REBBETZIN'S CAR PARKED IN FRONT OF 770 IN THE DAYS AFTER THE REBBE HAD A HEART ATTACK ON SHMINI ATZERES 5738.

of information, passing on whatever would be of interest to the Rebbe, and many people, especially during emergencies, would pass their requests to the Rebbe through her.

### FINAL DECISION, FULL CONTROL

For the average Chassidim in 770, the Rebbetzin was very rarely, if ever, seen. However, there were watershed moments during the Rebbe's *nesius* when it was the Rebbetzin's input that changed the course of events. Although her involvement in the Rebbe's work is something that remains mostly unrevealed until this day, we do know a few—but extremely pivotal—stories that give us a glimpse into the Rebbetzin's input.

The first was at the very start of the Rebbe's *nesius*, following the *histalkus* of the Friediker Rebbe. Chassidim were left bereft, and asked the Rebbe to assume the *nesius* and lead the Chassidim. At first the Rebbe refused to acquiesce to their request. Chassidim related that the Rebbetzin played the pivotal role in the eventual shift of direction. She told the Rebbe that if he wouldn't continue the Friediker Rebbe's work, thirty years of his hard labor would go to waste.<sup>20</sup>

Another pivotal moment was after the Rebbe's heart attack on Shemini Atzeres 5738.

The story is told by the Rebbe's *mazkir*, Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky:<sup>21</sup>

"It was five thirty in the morning, and after suffering a heart attack during *hakafos* the night before, the Rebbe's heartbeat was faltering; it was an issue of *pikuach nefesh*.

"Earlier that night, the Rebbe had made it very clear that he wished to remain in 770, despite the requests of a number of doctors and Chassidim present that he be taken to a hospital for treatment. At this point, the doctors said that they have no choice; the Rebbe must go to the hospital. The situation was dire; we had no way of treating the Rebbe in his room. There was no medicine, no cardiologists, nothing at all, and the Rebbe was going through a second massive heart attack.

"As we were discussing the situation, the Rebbetzin came down from the second floor to see what was happening. The doctors told her that the situation was critical, and they wanted to take the Rebbe to the hospital even though he didn't want to go.

"The Rebbetzin asked, 'What does my husband say?'

"The doctors told her that the Rebbe doesn't want to go.

"Being the next of kin, the ultimate decision was in her hands; the doctors wouldn't be able to overrule her decision.

"Without hesitation, she said, 'Throughout all the years that I've known my husband, there was never a moment during which he was not in total control of himself. I cannot allow you to do that against his will.'

“

When she would call people over the telephone, she would introduce herself as “Mrs. Schneerson from President Street.”



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*The Rebbetzin replied, “The sefarim belong to the Chassidim, because my father belonged to the Chassidim.”*

“To have the courage and the *emunah* in the Rebbe to make such a decision, against everyone’s opinion, in a situation of total *pikuach nefesh*, can only be attributed to her strong recognition and extreme *bittul* to the Rebbe, way beyond what any of us can imagine.”

### CONVINCED

One more famous occasion when the Rebbetzin played a major role was in the *sefarim* case.

As the various parties were called upon to give testimony, Chassidim hoped that the Rebbetzin would not need to give a deposition, but the Rebbe told Rabbi Krinsky not to try avoiding it, because she would do very well.

The Rebbetzin sat at the table, regal and composed, surrounded by the lawyers of Agudas Chassidei Chabad, the opposing side’s lawyers, and a whole team of assistants. She was extremely precise; she did so well that the opposing attorneys were very frustrated. They had hoped to garner some information that would be beneficial for their case, but in the end, they threw down their pencils in frustration.

At the end, one of them asked bluntly, “Mrs. Schneerson, in your opinion, tell us, who did the books belong to?”

The Rebbetzin replied, “The *sefarim* belong to the Chassidim, because my father belonged to the Chassidim.”

### “MALADYETZN!”

The Rebbe left 770 for the first time after his heart attack on Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5738. The Rebbetzin was standing at the window of the Frierdiker Rebbe’s room, on the second floor, watching the proceedings below. Reb Mendel Notik, who was there with the Rebbetzin, describes the emotion in the air: “It was absolutely electrifying. I glanced at the Rebbetzin and it seemed to me that her eyes were teary.”

Observing the celebration and the outburst of love from Chassidim to the Rebbe, she commented, “*Ah-zelche maladyetz’n*” (roughly translated: Such great boys). Later, she told Reb Mendel that she hadn’t seen such a celebration since the release of her father from the Shpalerka prison in Leningrad on Gimmel Tammuz.

After the Rebbetzin’s *histalkus*, the Rebbe pointed out that these words had a profound impact on the judge, persuading him to make the right decision. The Rebbe said:

“Regarding the story of Yud-Tes Kislev, the Alter Rebbe emphasized in his letter that his release was great and wondrous in the eyes of the nations of the world... Similarly, the *niftes* [the Rebbetzin] responded in a manner that impressed even non-Jews, saying that her father, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe, along with all his *sefarim*, belong to the Chassidim. This brought about that the non-Jews included it in their verdict as well...”<sup>22</sup>

### ROYALTY

Although the Rebbetzin was rarely seen in public, some individuals merited to have a close relationship with her and had the honor of visiting her home.

All visitors describe how she held a regal and majestic presence, and yet she managed to make every single person in the room feel comfortable. Each individual present would receive due attention. She would speak to the young children on their level, often preparing toys and candies and personally entertaining them, while to *bochurim*, she would inquire in their learning and their activities in *hafatzas hamaayanos*. The setting was *malchusdik*, but each person felt important and valued.

The Rebbetzin always portrayed an attitude that completely hid her personal state. Dovid Junik relates that he spoke to the Rebbetzin on the phone just two days before her *histalkus*, when, unbeknownst to him, she wasn’t feeling well. She nevertheless carried on the conversation as usual. She asked him how *yeshiva* was, how their *mitzvoim* was going, and so on. He could have never imagined that the Rebbetzin wasn’t well at the time. At the same time, she was very perceptive regarding the thoughts of her visitors, and, as Dr. Ira Weiss describes, she often picked up his true mood over the phone.

The regal atmosphere was coupled with a genuine feeling that the Rebbetzin felt extremely humble. Every request from the Rebbetzin was accompanied by an apology for taking the person’s time, effort, and so on. When the shluchim sent the Rebbetzin a gift, she

expressed her appreciation to Mrs. Leah Kahan, adding, “They are so busy, and who am I?”

Indeed, one topic that the Rebbetzin often discussed with love and admiration was the topic of the shluchim, and Lubavitch activities worldwide. The Rebbetzin would speak about them with great pride. She would often extol the fact that a “*yunger por folk*,” a young couple, should travel to a distant place, far from the comforts of their families and friends, to spread *Yiddishkeit*. Numerous visitors describe how the Rebbetzin clearly derived personal *nachas* from the work of the shluchim.

The Rebbetzin’s *nachas* was so evident that after her passing, the first Sefer Hashluchim was dedicated in her memory with the Rebbe’s consent, and the *hakdasha* explains that her “concern for the wellbeing and success of the shluchim knew no bounds.”

The Rebbetzin showed a similar interest in all of the Rebbe’s campaigns and initiatives.

Mrs. Louise Hager describes how the Rebbetzin once showed her a video of mitzva tanks visiting dangerous outposts of Israeli soldiers. The Rebbetzin had been so impressed with the video, she wanted to share the pleasure with her. On some occasions, the Rebbetzin would encourage her to get more involved herself. “She did it very subtly,” Mrs. Hager relates. “I didn’t even realize it at the time, but looking back, I can see that she dropped these small hints. She would say, ‘I’m sure you can do it,’ or ‘go for it,’ ‘try it out.’”



The Rebbetzin once gave an interesting description of her hometown of Lubavitch to Mrs. Leah Kahan:

“Different winds blew in Lubavitch at different times. When the mood was light, happy, and joyful, it was a sign that a certain individual had come to town, and had brought with him all the joy and happiness. If the mood was somewhat serious, it was also a sign that Chassidim from a specific town had arrived in Lubavitch.”

“I understood at that time,” Mrs. Kahan relates, “that she wasn’t talking about the past. She wasn’t being nostalgic. She was actually in Lubavitch.” **T**



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1. *Igros Kodesh Admur HaRashab* vol. 3, p. 218-219.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
4. *Sefer Hasichos 5749*, vol. 1, p. 234.
5. *Igros Kodesh Admur HaRayatz* vol. 15, p. 17-28.
6. See *Derher Av 5777*, p. 47.
7. *Kovetz Harabanis*, p. 9-10.
8. *Sefer Hasichos Kayitz Tof Shin*, p. 71-72.
9. *Early Years*, p. 171.
10. See *Derher Cheshvan 5777*, p. 18, *Of Heart and Quill*, for more about Reb Elya Chaim.
11. *Early Years*, p. 199.
12. *Likkutei Diburim* vol. 4, p. 613.

Translation from *The Heroic Struggle*.

13. 12 Tammuz 5739. *Sichos Kodesh 5739* vol. 3, p. 300.
14. *Early Years*, p. 205-206
15. *Shmuos V’sippurim*, p. 134-135.
16. *LSheima Ozen*, p. 156.
17. *Igros Kodesh Admur HaRayatz* vol. 15, p. 30.
18. Heard from Mrs. Esther Sternberg.
19. See *Derher Sivan 5777*, p. 47.
20. Yemei Bereishis, p. 310.
21. *Derher Shevat 5777*, p. 47. For the complete story of Rosh Chodesh Kislev, see *Derher Kislev 5777, The complete story of Rosh Chodesh Kislev*.
22. 2 Adar 5748. From audio. For more details about the case, and the Rebbetzin’s testimony, see *Derher Supplement, Hei Teves 5777*.

## RABBI LEVI AZIMOV OF PARIS, FRANCE RELATES:

In honor of the month of Tishrei 5730, Chassidim arranged a charter plane from Eretz Yisrael to New York (as they had done in years past). After Tishrei, the plane took off for Eretz Yisrael. A little while later, the Rebbe asked the *mazkirus*, “*Vos tut zich mit dem charter? What is happening with the charter?*”



They didn't understand what the Rebbe was asking—they had just taken off! A few minutes later, however, the news came to 770 that one of the engines of the plane had caught fire mid-flight, and they had miraculously managed to return to the New York airport safely.

The Rebbe proceeded to give them several *hora'os* (including to *chazer a maamar* Chassidus in the airport), and they ended up leaving the following morning.

This is the famous story of the charter, but less known is more background to this story. My parents, Rabbi Shmuel and Basya Azimov, were part of the charter (it had picked them up in France). That day, before the plane was originally scheduled to leave, my parents had gone to visit the Rebbetzin together with my brother Mendel, who was a baby at the time, and my grandfather, Reb Bentzion Shemtov.

As they were talking, the Rebbetzin asked, “When are you traveling back?” My father replied, “Tonight.”

The conversation continued, and a few minutes later the Rebbetzin asked again, “When are you traveling back?”

“Tonight,” my father replied. A few minutes later, she asked yet a third time, “When are you traveling back?”

“Tonight.”

When they left, my father discussed this strange occurrence with his father-in-law, Reb Bentzion Shemtov, and they both understood that something was clearly wrong with the trip. Maybe they shouldn't even go... In the end they decided to take the flight, and that's when the engine failed.

There are different messages that one can take from this story. One is the clearly evident *ruach hakodesh* of the Rebbetzin. But on a different level, and perhaps deeper, this is a lesson in how to be a Chossid. Many people who would be present in such a situation might shrug it off—who knows why the Rebbetzin asked three times? Who says it has any significance? But Chassidim who were more involved knew that obviously there

was a deeper meaning here. As it turned out, the *ruach hakodesh* was revealed shortly afterwards. This is how my father would always tell us this story—to illustrate how one must view a word of the Rebbetzin.

Once, when my parents visited the Rebbetzin, they noticed a certain gift that someone had given. On their way out, as the Rebbetzin accompanied them to the door, my mother complimented her by saying that it was a beautiful gift. The Rebbetzin commented, “*Nisht dos iz matanos vos mir darf'n*—These are not the type of gifts that we need.” My mother grabbed the opportunity and asked, “What are the types of *matanos* that the Rebbe and Rebbetzin would be satisfied with?” The Rebbetzin answered, “*A shiur mit yunge—dos git nachas ruach*—Classes for youth—that is what gives *nachas ruach*.”

Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5748 was a time of great joy in Lubavitch. The *seforim* case was finally over and my family, along with many other Chassidim from all over the world, had come to celebrate this time with the Rebbe.

When the *seforim* actually came back on Monday, Beis Kislev, my mother immediately went to the payphone to call the Rebbetzin and wish her *mazal tov*.

The Rebbetzin immediately asked her, “*Ver iz duh?*” Who is here (from the family)? My mother said that the entire family was here, and that even my sister had flown in from Paris. The Rebbetzin said, “*Miken morgen araingein*”, you can come by tomorrow.

This was something special, as we had never visited the Rebbetzin as a family.

Being that the Rebbetzin had asked for “everyone” to come, my mother understood that the extended family was also invited, and Reb Nachman Sudak and his wife—my mother's sister and brother-in-law—came with us.

During the visit, my uncle Nachman and my father gave a report of their activities on *shlichus*, and the Rebbetzin didn't speak much, though she said a few words here and there. At one point she said, “*Ir zolt vissen mir zaynen tzufriden fun aich*.” You should know that we are happy with you. More than once throughout the conversation, the Rebbetzin remarked, “*Nu! Itzt vet zich unhoiben a naye tekufa*.” Now a new era is beginning.

A few months later was Chof Beis Shevat...