

Derher A Chassidisher

**עבודת
התפלה
in Dor
Hashvi'i**

THE CRADLE OF PNIMIYUS HATORAH



IYAR 5779
ISSUE 81 (158)
JUNE 2019



28 ELUL 5750, LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 166308



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On the Cover:

In this issue, we explore the Rebbe's approach to one of the founding principles of Chassidus: the proper way to daven.

A Chassidisher Derher is honored to feature unique and historic photos from Jewish Educational Media's Living Archive photo collection. The Living Archive is a project to preserve, and provide access to the video, audio, and photographic recordings of the Rebbe. These photos are copyright by JEM and are available at TheLivingArchive.org



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Special Thanks to

Kehot Publication Society • Rabbi Chaim Shaul Brook • Rabbi Zalman Goldstein • Rabbi Mendel Gourarie • Rabbi Sholom Ber Levin • Rabbi Shmuel Lubecki • Rabbi Menachem Posner • Rabbi Michael Seligson • Rabbi Motti Seligson • Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin • Schabse Soffer • Rabbi Avraham D. Vaisfiche

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A Chassidisher Derher (ISSN 26411059) (USPS 21880) is published monthly by A Chassidisher Derher Inc, 784 Eastern Pkwy, Brooklyn, NY 11213. Subscription price \$71 a year. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to A Chassidisher Derher, 784 Eastern Pkwy, Brooklyn, NY 11213.

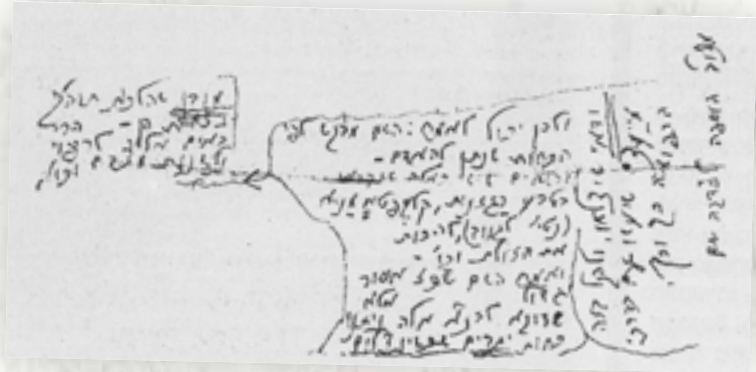


כתב יד קודש

לע"נ
אבינו הרה"ח הרה"ת
ר' יוסף מנחם מענדל
ב"ר יצחק ע"ה
ולע"נ אמנו מרת זיסל דבורה
בת ר' אלי הכהן ע"ה
טענענבוים
ת"צ'ב'ה'

Overcoming Urges

The following is a note
in the Rebbe's holy
handwriting written to a
practicing psychologist:



It is obvious that the laws of our holy Torah are eternal—the [patients] who come to you seek healing and wish to change their situation, etc.

Therefore [based on the above], you can tell them:

Hashem only demands of a person in accordance with the capabilities He gave that person. [On the one hand,] we see that there are those who were created with a natural instinct towards anger, kleptomania (the urge to steal), or to hit others, etc. [Yet at the same time,] Hashem tells us that all these are severely prohibited.

But these people [who possess these inclinations] were given **extraordinary** capabilities, which if they make use of, they will **certainly** be successful [in resisting and overcoming these urges]. In order to make their challenges easier, you [the doctor] also help them with medical advice, telling them to do such and such [remedies].

Enclosed is [money] to be given to tzedakah there.

מובן שהלכות תוה"ק נצחיות הן—הרי
באים אליו לריפוי ולשנות מצבם וכו',

ולכן יכול לומר: השם מבקש לפי
הכחות שנתן לאדם—ורואים
שיש כאלו שנבראו בטבע רגזנות,
קלעפטאמניא (נט' לגנוב), להכות
את הזולת וכו'—

ואמר השם שכ"ז איסור גדול

אלא שדוקא לבנ"א אלה ניתנו כחות
יתרים שכשינצלום ודאי שיצליחו,
ולהקל בזה מיעצם שגם בדרכי
הרפואה יעשו כך וכך.

מצו"ב לצדקה שם.



Avodas Hatefilah IN DOR HASHVT'I



*WHO ARE YOU
TALKING TO?*

When the Alter Rebbe was approaching his twentieth birthday, he decided to travel away from home in order to grow in Torah and *avoda*.

“I was debating where to go,” he said later, “and couldn’t decide. My brother, the Maharil, is a man of common sense, and he advised me to go to Mezrich.

“I knew that in Vilna I could learn how to learn, and in Mezrich I could learn to daven. I already knew how to learn a little, but about davening I knew very little, so I went to Mezrich.”¹

The foundation of Chassidus Chabad was to learn how to daven. Interestingly, the Alter Rebbe had already been learning the Chassidus of the Baal Shem Tov with his teacher Reb Yissachar Ber for a number of years before he went to Mezrich. In addition, he was fluent in the *siddur* Shaar Hashamayim of the Shal”a and knew all the *kavanos* of the *mekubalim*. Yet he still insisted that he knew almost nothing about davening. For that he had to go to Mezrich and study by the Maggid himself.²

From this we see that knowing how to daven is not necessarily a result of how much Chassidus one knows. A person can be *baki* in every *sefer Chassidus*, yet still be totally ignorant when it comes to davening.

To know how to daven, you have to go to the Rebbe.

With that in mind, let us delve into the Rebbe’s Torah to discover how a Chossid in *dor hashvi’i* should daven. Authentic *avodas hatefilah* is not something that belongs only in the olden days, while we must make due with a cheap imitation. Even today, in the year 5779, a Chossid can daven the way Chassidus Chabad truly demands.

Yes You Can

The idea that davening is “*avoda*”—work—is not unique to Chassidus. In fact, *tefilah* is introduced in the Torah as “*avoda*” right from its conception. The Torah says

I already knew how to learn a little, but about davening I knew very little, so I went to Mezrich.”

לעבדו בכל לבבכם, and Chazal explain that “service (work) of the heart” refers to davening.

When a Yid davens, he is doing “*avoda*,” even if he has never learned a *maamar* in his life.

The Rebbe once told³ the story of a Chossid of the Alter Rebbe who barely knew



pirush hamilos, yet he davened for many hours with intense concentration. When asked by Chassidim what he thinks about for so long, he said that he once heard a Torah from the Alter Rebbe on 'זכור ושמור' 'בדיבור אחד'.

Zachor, the Alter Rebbe said, means always remember. *Shamor*, keep (guard) in your mind. *B'dibur*, in every *davar*—thing. *Echad*, the oneness of Hashem. And with this *vort* he davened for 40 years.

The Rebbe concluded:

This is the response to those who claim that proper avodas hatefilah does not apply to them because they lack a deep background in

Chassidus, and maybe they don't even know the meaning of the words.

From this story we see that a full and comprehensive hisbonenus is to contemplate that everything comes from Hashem. The avoda of a Yid is to find the 'Echad' in everything.

This story is a perfect example that even someone with very little knowledge, if he thinks about the 'Echad' in everything, he can daven with this for 40 years.

One shouldn't postpone *avodas hatefilah* until they have the proper knowledge and background; to do so would be falling for another trick of the *yetzer hara*. As the Rebbe told a *bochur* in *yechidus*⁴:



Just like we listen to the Rema when it comes to the halachos of בשר וחלב, we have to listen to the Rema when it comes to this as well!"

To daven slowly and patiently is a proper thing, but the nefesh habehamis and the yetzer hara don't want and don't let. The nefesh habehamis says that since it's not completely genuine, you shouldn't daven ba'arichus. Yet the opposite is true, one must certainly daven, what's the other option? To sit and wait for the davening to be genuine?! To wait until you have the kavanos of the Ramak and the Arizal?! You have to simply do it!

The Rema says clearly, that before davening 'contemplate the greatness of Hashem.' It doesn't mean to think a whole maamar... even a few lines would suffice. Just like we listen to the Rema when it comes to the halachos of בשר וחלב, we have to listen to the Rema when it comes to this as well!

Avoda doesn't mean breaking mountains and turning over the world. If during davening it takes effort just to keep in mind 'לפני מי אתה עומד'—that you're standing before Hashem—and yet you manage to do so, you have successfully accomplished avodas hatefilah!⁵

Avodas hatefilah means to work; for some, it may be work just to pretend to daven. The Rebbe once suggested at a farbrengen⁶ that if a person absolutely cannot daven, he should at least sleep under the tallis so it looks like he's davening and that will inspire other people.

When asked if avodas hatefilah is for everyone, the Rebbe responded in a letter that indeed it is for everyone; the difference is only in quality and quantity.⁷

In this context, davening is quite different than learning. An ignorant person cannot be expected to jump right into a sugya. Even if he is well versed in other areas, that won't help him. Learning Torah is a step-by-step process.

With davening however, you can jump right into it. No prior knowledge is needed to start. As long as you are willing to work, you can start davening immediately.⁸

There is no such thing as someone who can't daven.

Before Davening

Tefilos were established in place of korbanos.⁹ Just as korbanos required a Beis Hamikdash, so too davening requires a structure, and that is the hachanos for davening.¹⁰

Everything has to be with an order, therefore davening must also be a process. The first step is to enter a spiritual mode through the hachanos before davening. Namely—mikvah, tzedakah, and learning Chassidus.¹¹

These days, there is an additional hachana: It is impossible to daven on an empty stomach, so one should also eat before davening.

As the famous adage of the Tzemach Tzedek says, "It's better to eat in order to daven then to daven in order to eat."

Eating before davening is not a compromise or something to feel bad about. It's a positive thing, we are infusing our davening with chayus!¹²

By eating before davening we demonstrate that for us, food is just another tool in serving Hashem. Like the famous story with the Rebbe Maharash, who asked Ivan the wagon driver why he eats, and he answered that it's in order to live another day and eat more. When Bentzion the meshares was asked the same question, he replied that he eats in order to have strength to serve Hashem.¹³

Mikvah

Before performing the *avoda* in the Beis Hamikdash, a *kohen* would *tovel* in the mikvah.

Likewise today, before our *avodas hatefilah*, which is in place of *korbanos*, a prerequisite is to go to the mikvah.¹⁴

Tzedakah

Another important *hachana* for davening is giving tzedakah. In the Hayom Yom of Beis Kislev, the Rebbe brings an explanation from the Frieddiker Rebbe for this:

My grandfather (the Rebbe Maharash) once explained in a maamar why "Rav Elazar would give a pruta to a pauper and then pray." He explained that davening must be

with chayus, and by giving tzedakah before davening and giving chayus to the pauper, we bring a lot of chayus into the davening. While saying this, he raised his hands to express that tremendous addition of chayus.

Many times before davening, my father would search for a poor person to give them food.

A Perek Tanya

On several occasions the Rebbe instructed people to learn a *perek Tanya* before davening.¹⁵

Who Are You Talking To

It's not always easy to daven, that's why it's called *avoda*, work. Some people

לזכות
החתן הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל שיחי'
שפאלטר
והכלה המהוללה מרת מרים ברכה תחי'
בכור
לרגל חתונתם בשעטומ"צ
ח"י אייר, ל"ג בעומר ה'תשע"ט
נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' צבי יוסף וזוגתו מרת חנה שיחיו
שפאלטר
הרה"ת ר' שלמה וזוגתו מרת גיטל בריינדל שיחיו
בכור



Meiron

The Cradle of
Primius Hatorah

HANS PINN / ISRAEL GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE

YIDDEN FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE VISIT KEVER RASHBI ON LAG BA'OMER, 5699.

Freilicher...

"At 4:15 a.m. we traveled to Kfar Meiron," writes the Friediker Rebbe in his diary. "Fifteen minutes later we arrived, and before davening, I prayed at the resting place of Rashbi a"l."

The Friediker Rebbe records how he lit candles in the merit of his family members (including "my daughter C.M., her husband Reb M.M., our daughter Sheina, *anash* and the *temimim*...") and then began to daven

with a minyan at a brisk pace. The Friediker Rebbe was honored with *pesicha* and received *shlishi*.¹

Of the many gravesites and holy spaces spanning the Holy Land, Meiron holds a special status among

Chassidim, being the resting place of Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai, the author of the Zohar, the foundation of *pnimius haTorah*.

In fact, Meiron was even proposed twice to host a community of Chabad Chassidim.

The first such instance was following the *aliya* of the Mitteler Rebbe's Chassidim. (It is unclear why it ultimately did not happen.)

The second time took place in our generation, proposed to the Rebbe by Israeli President Zalman Shazar. In his letter to Mr. Shazar, the Rebbe writes that, "In general, I am enthusiastic about the idea of a Chabad settlement in the area of Tzfas–Meiron, however, the idea still lacks details, especially regarding the types of people who would settle there..."²

In recounting the Frieddiker Rebbe's visit to Eretz Yisroel in 5689* (תרפ"ט), Rabbi Shimon Glitzenshtein writes in greater detail:

"The Rebbe *shlita* locked himself in Rashbi's cave, lit several candles and did *hishtatchus* on the *tziyun*. He broke into heartrending sobs that shook all the listeners to the core. He again read all the *pidyonos* and then instructed to daven Shacharis briskly."³

In later *sichos*, the Frieddiker Rebbe describes his pleasure in being close to Rashbi. "When I was in Eretz Yisroel, I visited all the *kevarim*. At Rashbi's resting place, I felt *heimisher* [more at home], meaning *freilicher* [more joyous]..."⁴

Fascinatingly, a letter was discovered revealing the Frieddiker Rebbe's plan to visit there once again, on Lag Ba'omer no less! In a letter written to Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka and the Rebbe, the Frieddiker Rebbe describes his plans and adds that he hoped the Rebbe would join him for the journey as well.⁵

In our generation as well, the Rebbe placed great value on visiting Kever Rashbi in Meiron.



THRONGS OF YIDDEN TRAVELING TO MEIRON FOR LAG B'OMER, CIRCA 5680S.

HE BROKE INTO HEARTRENDING SOBS THAT SHOOK ALL THE LISTENERS TO THE CORE.

In 5736*, when the Rebbe sent the group of shluchim to live in Eretz Yisroel, some of them were sent to settle in Tzfas, "Near the resting place of Rashbi in Meiron," the Rebbe pointed out.⁶

Likewise, the first group of shluchim to Eretz Yisroel in 5716* made a point to visit Rashbi's *tziyun*, and in a record of a *yechidus* to *bochurim* in 5735*, the Rebbe instructed them to specifically visit Meiron on Lag Ba'omer and gave them dollars to give to *tzedakah* there.⁷

Three Day Celebration

The tradition of visiting Meiron on Lag Ba'omer was founded by the Arizal. Each year, he would travel from his home in Tzfas to Meiron for a three day period, amid great celebration. (In 5740*, when the Rebbe held three farbrengens over the Lag Ba'omer period, he associated it with this tradition of the Arizal.)⁸

Over the ensuing centuries, it became an established custom among the Jews of Tzfas to carry on the Arizal's tradition.

"They would travel each year," the Rebbe once described, "to the resting place of Rashbi on Lag Ba'omer, beginning with the evening of Lag Ba'omer when it is customary to light bonfires (at a time when fire stands out—at night) in honor of Rashbi..."

"Moreover, whenever Lag Ba'omer fell out on Sunday ... they would go to Meiron on Erev Shabbos together with their wives and children ... and *shecht* a lamb for the Shabbos meals ... they would celebrate the entire Shabbos with extra joy, associated with the *hilula* of the Rashbi."⁹

The tradition of bonfires was also started by the Arizal. In later years, the custom spread to Yerushalayim, Chevron and other locations in Eretz Yisroel. The merit of dedicating the *hadlaka* was available for purchase, and there were several instances that the Rebbe Rashab bought the *hadlaka* in Chevron.¹⁰

The Tahalucha

"In times past, there weren't many *chofshim* [individuals who threw off the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos*] in Eretz Yisroel," the Frieddiker Rebbe



noted on Lag Ba'omer 5699* (תרצ"ט).¹¹ "However, later the *chofshim* grew in numbers, and the *yerei'im* would suffer from them when visiting the resting place of Rashbi on Lag Ba'omer. They would scoff at them and even threw stones at them. They would have to go in groups, [protecting themselves] until they would be able to reach and spend time at the *kever* of Rashbi.

"Someone once related to my father [the Rebbe Rashab] that *chofshim* spend time at the *kever* of Rashbi in Meiron, but do not put on tefillin. My father responded, that if the Berditchever Rav would be here today, he would have fashioned an entire chandelier from it. Besides for being *melamed zchus* on a person, [the Berditchever] would also influence him to do *teshuvah*..."

The presence of non-observant Jews in Meiron on Lag Ba'omer presented a unique opportunity. In 5712*, just one year after the Rebbe assumed the *nesius*, the newly established Tze'irei Chabad in Eretz Yisroel was looking for opportunities to fulfill the Rebbe's call for *hafatzas hamaayanos*, and they decided to utilize the pilgrimage to Meiron just for this purpose.

"On Erev Lag Ba'omer," the trip is described in Bitaon Chabad,¹² "a caravan of five automobiles left Tel Aviv to Meiron. When they arrived that evening, a microphone was set up on the roof of the *kever* and they broadcast a program of Tze'irei Chabad, including speeches about the Baal Shem Tov, Rashbi, as well as *niggunim* and *chazzaras dach*..."

"At daybreak, the caravan proceeded to Tzfas, and continued to stop in many locations. They sang and danced, and encouraged the bystanders to strengthen their Yiddishkeit."

In response to their *duch*, the Rebbe wrote how happy he was to receive news of the initiative, and encouraged them to make more stops in the future, comparing their trip to the Chassidim of the Mittlerer Rebbe who famously stopped in every village on their way back from Lubavitch to review the Chassidus they had heard from the Rebbe.¹³ In many letters over the following years, the Rebbe strongly pushed for the continuation of the tradition, and encouraged all those "*hashayachim lazeh*—those appropriate for the task" to make the journey.¹⁴

The Rebbe would also participate in the costs of these activities, and

encouraged Chassidim to keep up the relationships with those they met in Meiron.¹⁵ Detailed reports were expected from the participants.

The annual *tahalucha* to Meiron became an official tradition. Dozens of *anash* would board buses that would slowly make their way to Meiron, stopping off in many towns and cities along the way to speak about Yiddishkeit, and each year, the military would arrange a sound system and radio broadcast for the Chassidim from the roof of Rashbi's *kever*. In later years, mitzvah tanks also became part of the scene.

After receiving the report of the second year of activities in 5713*, the Rebbe noted that they weren't utilizing the opportunity presented by the *upshterinish minhag*—as many Jews in Eretz Yisroel customarily celebrate their children's *upshterinish*, known there as a "*chalakeh*," in Meiron. The Rebbe suggested that Alef-Beis cards be distributed to the children along with some additional information for the parents.¹⁶

In 5717*, Bitaon Chabad reported a special "Mivtza Hanachas Tefillin," where "pairs of *bochurim* made rounds among the endless streams of people and gave more than 1000 people the opportunity to put on tefillin. It was an amazing scene to watch; many of the people pledged to once again begin putting on tefillin every day."¹⁷ It is important to note that this was a full 10 years before the Rebbe officially launched *mivtza tefillin*.

The trip to Meiron in those days was a significant journey, especially with all the stops on the way, which meant that the yeshiva *bochurim* would miss a significant amount of *sefer hayeshiva*. There were times when the *hanhala* suggested in letters to the Rebbe that the trip be canceled that year, but the Rebbe always encouraged them to continue.



A Word From The Wise

Dovid¹ lived in the home of his brother-in-law, Avraham, in the city of Novo-Ratzevsk which was located in Pskov, outside the Pale of the Settlement.

Only Jews with a profession that was deemed necessary were given permits that allowed them to live in that area. Avraham was a glazier by trade which earned him the residence status that he needed. However, his actual work was as a merchant of silverware and ornaments, a well kept secret that could lead to trouble.

In the first floor of the same house lived a tailor. The tailor was very jealous of Avraham and of the double life he lived and to top it off he felt that his peace and quiet was disturbed because of him. The tailor, looking to settle the score, went and informed the government that indeed this man was

living in the city under a false pretense because he was not a practicing glazier but rather a merchant.

The government immediately acted on this information and evicted him from town and also confiscated all his possessions. The final blow was the command that he must relocate to the city of Polotzk.

Dovid was allowed to stay on and he continued doing the business. His brother-in-law, on the other hand, was not faring well in Polotzk.

On one occasion, Dovid travelled to visit the resting places of some members of his family who were buried in Vitebsk. He happened to meet his brother-in-law there, who bemoaned the miserable life he was having and all the challenges he was facing. Avraham then shared his idea to help him out of the dire situation

he found himself in. "I am therefore going to travel to Lubavitch to ask the advice of the Rebbe [Maharash]. Since you are already here, why don't you join me on my trip?"

Dovid agreed and off they went to Lubavitch.

When Avraham went into *yechidus*, Dovid stood on the side to observe what would happen.

After Avraham poured out his heart, the Rebbe asked him, "What skills do you have?"

"I am a glazier by trade," he replied.

"Are you well versed in this craft?" pressed the Rebbe.

"Yes!"

"In that case," advised the Rebbe Maharash, "Travel back to Novo-Ratzevsk and go into the town office building. On the second floor you will see a broken glass window. Offer to repair it and tell

the secretary to mark it in your name. When you have done this, go make an acquaintance with the minister of the city."

The Rebbe then made notice of the gentleman standing silently in the corner, "Who is this man?" He asked. "He is my brother-in-law," he replied.

"Where do you live and what is your occupation?" the Rebbe asked, turning his attention to Dovid. "I live in Novo-Ratzvesk." After hearing his response the Rebbe continued, "You should leave your current residence and resettle in Vitebsk!"

Without fully grasping who he was talking to, Dovid brazenly replied, "I lack nothing in Novo-Ratzevsk and besides I did not ask for advice about what I should do!"

"Don't you see that Novo-Ratzevsk is a dangerous place!" persisted

לע"נ
השלוחה מרת הינדא גיטל אלטע ח'י
בת ר' עזריאל ע"ה
שיימאן
נלב"ע כ"ז אייר ה'תשע"ג
תנ"צ ב'ה'
נדפס ע"י
משפחתה שיחיו



the Rebbe and with those words the *yechidus* ended.

After they had left the Rebbe's presence, Dovid berated his brother-in-law for schlepping him to Lubavitch and made it clear that he had no intentions of relocating.

In contrast to Dovid, Avraham had every intention of following the directives of the Rebbe. He travelled to Novo-Ratzevsk and carried out all the instructions he had been given.

He then went to the house of the minister but he was not home at the time.

Seeing the minister's wife there he went inside with some ornaments and tried to persuade her to buy something. "I will discuss it with my husband," she replied.

In an attempt to catch her attention and draw her into a conversation, he removed a fancy pocket watch from his jacket and pretended to be looking at the time.

His ploy worked and she was drawn to the watch. "How much can I buy that for?" she asked.

At that point he realized the Rebbe's advice was already materializing and he spilled out his whole story to her.

She replied, "Come back tomorrow morning, and in the interim I will speak to my husband about your situation."

The next day he woke up early and met up with the minister before he went to his office. The minister instructed him, "Come over to my office today and

present your case; I will react strongly and shout at you, however, don't back down and push back at me with conviction. In the end everything will work out well."

Sure enough, a short while later, as soon as he had entered the office and began presenting his case, the minister began to yell and shout at him. "I am a glazier! I am really a glazier! In fact I fixed a window in this very building yesterday."

The secretary, who was working nearby and overheard the conversation, chimed in, "Indeed it is true. I watched him do it with my own eyes and I even have it recorded in my ledger.

The minister then gave him the appropriate

documents and he was able to return home.

The tailor who had been the informant was not too happy that his plan had failed so he schemed again. This time he laid his eyes on Dovid. He informed the authorities that Dovid was in the city illegally and without anyone knowing him or having connections with higher ups in the government he was forced to move to—lo and behold—Vitebsk!

The Rebbe's words were true, each man made the choice of how to end up where he was supposed to. **T**


(*Otzar Sippurei Chabad*
vol. 18, p. 19)

1. The names do not appear in the original, they were added here for the sake of clarity.



In UNCHARTED Territory.

Exclusive Interview with Rabbi Laibl Wolf,
a pioneering shliach on campus.



Rabbi Laibl Wolf grew up in Melbourne, Australia. His father, a Radomsker Chossid, had settled there with his family after surviving the Holocaust. Together with the other impoverished immigrants, his father slowly restarted life in Melbourne, building a small hat business, operated out of his backyard into a thriving enterprise. Laibl was on a fairly typical track for a young Jewish boy: he attended the local Jewish day school, completed high school, and went on to the University of Melbourne to obtain a law degree.

While in college, however, he met Rabbi Zalman Serebryanski, who was one of a few Lubavitchers that had been instructed by the Friediker Rebbe to settle in Australia in the post-war years. Reb Zalman asked him if he would learn with him. Laibl had been familiar with Lubavitch as a child: This small group of Lubavitchers loomed large in the lives of all the Jews of Australia, because they were at the forefront of building the local Jewish infrastructure, including *mosdos chinuch*, *kashrus*, and so on.

“I was quite adventurous,” Rabbi Wolf relates. “I was looking into every corner, nook, and cranny—and so I agreed, and we began learning every week.” These classes, which would continue for many years, affected quite a change in Laibl’s outlook. “Rabbi Serebryanski got hold of me and never let me go. He allowed me to enter

into the depths of Chassidus, which brought much more meaning to my life, and brought me much closer to understanding the beauty and depth of the Torah. I had been a student leader, president of Jewish student societies and the like, and I always had a sense of personal responsibility to the Jewish community. But as the Rebbe entered my life in a profound way, my personal orientation as to where I was leading the students became much more acute.”

Towards the end of his legal studies he married his wife Leah, and following his wedding, while completing his degree, spent half the day in “*kolel*”—which essentially meant studying in the Lubavitch Yeshiva Gedola, because there was no actual *kolel* in Australia at the time.

About a year after his wedding, with his law degree complete, Laibl went on to study for a master’s degree in psychology. At a crossroads, unsure which route to take, law or psychology, he decided to write to the Rebbe asking for advice.

But instead of choosing one of the two options, the Rebbe replied that it would be best for him to continue his work with the academic youth.

After clarifying with *mazkirus* that the Rebbe was referring to university students, he asked the *mazkirus* how he should go about doing such a thing. They told him to speak to Hillel, which was then the primary Jewish

organization on campus and based mainly in America. Laibl immediately turned his focus to fulfilling the Rebbe’s directive. Without making too many calculations, he sat down and wrote letters to several Hillels in America asking if there were any posts available.

To his surprise, they answered that they were actually trying to expand internationally and were looking to bring Australians to America for training as Hillel directors. They suggested three campuses, and Laibl forwarded these options to the Rebbe. The Rebbe underlined “Madison, Wisconsin.”

Not long afterwards, in the winter of 5730*, the twenty-four year old Laibl, who had only recently begun having a strong connection with Lubavitch, and his young wife, who had grown up in a Litvishe family no less, were on the plane out of Australia with their three-month-old baby, leaving behind their families and everything they knew, for a strange new country and a job they knew very little about.

On their way to Wisconsin, they stopped for a few days at the Chabad House at UCLA, at the time one of the very few Chabad Houses on campus. It was quite a learning experience. Campus life in America in 1970 was wild and raw, and the shlichim were adept at channeling these energies themselves. “I remember one character

in particular in that *Beis Chabad*,” Rabbi Wolf relates. “Everyone called him Baruch Hashem. I asked why he was called Baruch Hashem, and they said he had a violent tendency, and if he didn’t hit you, you would say ‘Baruch Hashem.’ That’s why he was called Baruch Hashem...”

“Of course there were many straighter individuals as well, but the Chabad House became a real beehive of activity in terms of attracting students, because the shluchim were on the wavelength of the students—equally ‘way out there’ as the students were. Not that the shluchim were necessarily that way themselves, but they were able to tap into that energy and express it.

“Those several days already taught me what I would be needing to express and do when I got to Wisconsin...”

They arrived in Wisconsin soon after, where they were greeted with a Midwest winter at its finest.

Being that he was officially going for training, Rabbi Wolf had been given the role of assistant to the then Hillel director of Madison. When Rabbi Wolf asked the Rebbe about how to go about this position, the Rebbe didn’t answer the specific question but just gave a *bracha*. As fate would have it, soon after Rabbi Wolf arrived in Madison, the director unfortunately contracted a serious heart condition and passed away. Laibl was left with an entire Hillel House, a three-story building, with the responsibility for seven thousand Jewish students.

The University of Wisconsin was a particularly radical college at the time, and there were constant demonstrations against the Vietnam War and many other issues on the table. These often turned violent, and there were many clashes between police and students.

Rabbi Wolf quickly learned how to adapt to the climate. He relates:

“We created a first aid center in the Hillel House, because whenever there was an altercation—every other day, the police and students would throw canisters of tear gas at each other—the students would come to the Hillel to wash their eyes out. The police didn’t consider the Hillel House sacrosanct either, and every once in a while a few gas-canisters would be thrown into the Hillel as well. That was my first experience with tear gas, not a very pleasant experience... As a consequence, I became very good friends with many students, especially the activist ones, many of whom went on to become quite famous people throughout the United States.

“It was a very, very serious period of time, when people took the revolution they were part of very seriously, but there was also a childish naivete; the same students who would throw bombs would throw frisbees all afternoon, or sing songs and play guitar. The Rebbe recognized that there were wonderful energies there that needed to be tapped into and directed; that the youthful revolutionary zeal was something that could be utilized. The students were

prepared to be moved because there was an *emes*, there was a truth and there was an energy.

“The Rebbe saw this well ahead of time and directed the early Chabadniks on campus to tap into that and redirect it, and this became the *baal teshuva* movement. That’s why there was such a wonderful success in terms of Chabad on campus and moving students towards Yiddishkeit.”

In terms of activities on campus, Rabbi Wolf’s campus operations were quite similar to what one would see at a Chabad House today: he would give *shiurim* and lectures, he had a table on campus where he put tefillin on students, and so on. His background would often come in handy as well, as a lawyer who had studied psychology, and he was accepted in the fraternity of academia.

The First Yechidus

Soon after arriving in Madison, Rabbi Wolf and his wife—both of whom had moved across the world at the Rebbe’s behest, but had never met the Rebbe—flew to New York for their first *yechidus*. It was an utterly new experience for them, and they had no idea what to expect. They were



told that their time was scheduled for approximately 2:30 a.m., and to arrive at around midnight.

“We found ourselves in a rather long line,” Rabbi Wolf relates. “I could see so many different characters, individuals, and behaviors. Some were quite sedate and grounded, saying Tehillim; others were conversing with members of *mazkirus* seeking advice, and yet others were very nervous. It was a highly charged arena, and we waited there in *gan eden hatachton* for two hours. It was an absolutely wondrous experience.

“Finally, the last person in front of us went in. People’s time with the Rebbe varied from about two minutes to ten minutes, and now we were finally the next in line. It was almost three o’clock in the morning, and we waited and waited for a half hour, forty five minutes, an hour—finally the person ahead of us came out. I was later to learn that this young man was Adin Steinsaltz...”

Finally it was their turn to go in. “I remember preparing myself, and I said to myself, I’m going to remember every detail of this room, I’m going to have photographic memory. But I can tell you right now, I recall precious little of the room...”

They approached the Rebbe’s desk. The Rebbe was looking down at a letter he was holding—evidently Rabbi Wolf’s most recent letter, in which he had written about a dozen questions. Rabbi Wolf also noticed another pile of letters nearby: all (or many) of the letters he had written to the Rebbe over the years.

The Rebbe looked up and said, “Do you want me to respond to these questions now, or provide you with written answers?” In those days the Rebbe spoke to him in English, though later it would change to Yiddish. Rabbi Wolf wasn’t ready for the question, and he remained silent, weighing the merits of the two options. Finally, the

Rebbe said, “Let me therefore respond to you now.”

Seven on Seven

One of the challenges Rabbi Wolf was having on campus was that there were seven thousand Jewish students who were his responsibility—an overwhelming amount—and he wasn’t sure what the right approach was: Should he be working in a *makif* sort of way, macro, creating some greater impression of Yiddishkeit on the campus, or should he be working in a more micro setting, with individuals?

The Rebbe answered pointedly and deliberately, with a very serious demeanor. “Your job is not to work with seven thousand. Your job is to work with seven. Those seven will find their seven, and those seven will find their seven. But your work is to work annually with seven.”

Rabbi Wolf says, “I understood that to mean that I should make sure to work in a way that there would be success that could be measured in terms of individuals, moving them from point A to point B, and since, of course, every individual is an *olam katan*, every one of them would have a worldwide effect. Obviously one must work on both scales—micro and macro—but the Rebbe’s emphasis was on individuals. This was a very, very important message for me.”

The True Meaning of Geirus

Another question was about *geirus*. This was a time when students were very adventurous as far as their spiritual meanderings, and Rabbi Wolf wasn’t quite sure what his policy should be when approached by students to discuss conversion.

The Rebbe read the question and said: “You are a chaplain and you have other colleague chaplains; if a student should approach you for conversion, ask this student to first meet with their

respective chaplain, in the pathway in which they were raised (or that they might have had some connection to), so they can investigate better and know where they come from.

“If, after meeting with the other chaplain, the student comes back and still wants to be Jewish, then you should make sure that the student is placed in the hands of someone who can teach them in an authentic way. There should be a period of learning, each time pointing out the difficulties of changing the way they eat, the way they behave on a Shabbos—pointing out all the difficulties a change of lifestyle would entail, so that they’re fully conversant with what they are getting themselves into, and at that point many a student will decide that it’s not for them.”

Then the Rebbe added: “Once they go through with the *geirus*, you should recognize that what has taken place is not a conversion, because there is no such thing as conversion.”

The Rebbe elaborated (—“I must have raised an eyebrow,” Rabbi Wolf says): “In *Lashon Hakodesh*, you have words and their opposites, the Rebbe said. For example, a servant who becomes free is עבד שנשתחרר; a poor man who becomes rich is an עני שנתעשר. Notice that the *shorashim* of these words are very different: עבד and עשיר and עני and שחרור.

“But a person who who went through a *geirus* is called a גר שנתגייר—the identical *shoreish* in both instances. When a person goes through a *geirus*, we know retroactively that this *neshama* was always Jewish—nothing was converted, nothing was changed.

“For reasons best known to the *Aibershter*, this *neshama* was placed into this particular set of circumstances of a non-Jewish mother, and this is the *nisayon* of this *neshama*. The *pintele Yid* within that *neshama* is what caused it to seek to be Jewish, and after the *geirus* we come to the



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והכלה המהוללה מרת רחל שיחיו
שיזגאל
לרגל חתונתם כ"ח אדר שני ה'תשע"ט
נדפס ע"י הוריהם
ר' אפרים וזוגתו מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו
שיזגאל



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