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שפאלטר



Argentinian *Pioneer*

The first Argentinian bochur to learn in 770, and then return as the Rebbe's shliach and become a pillar of the Lubavitch community in Buenos Aires.

The story of **Rabbi Aharon Hakohen Tawil**.

Special thanks to Rabbi Aharon Tawil, Mrs. Sara Tawil, Rabbi Shlomo Tawil and Rabbi Mendy Reicher for their assistance in preparing this article.

I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 5698*. My parents both hailed from prominent families of the Chaleb Syrian community and immigrated to Argentina from Eretz Yisrael during World War I. We are a family of Kohanim and have a tradition that we are direct descendants of Eili Hakohen.

When I was a young *bochur*, there were no yeshivos in Argentina and after concluding my studies in the local Sefardi *cheder* I continued learning Torah on my own in various shuls. There were several other *bochurim* that did the same but there was nothing organized for us. At one point I started giving *shiurim* in a shul in the Flores neighborhood and was quite active in such programs.

Around Tishrei 5717* Rabbi Berel Baumgarten visited Buenos Aires as the Rebbe's shliach¹ and I met him in the Shuva Yisrael shul. Rabbi Baumgarten sensed my desire to learn Torah in a more proper setting and offered me to join him on his trip back to New York to learn in Tomchei Temimim. Although I knew nothing about the Rebbe and Lubavitch (except for the few things I had heard from Rabbi Baumgarten over those few weeks) I was very excited about the idea and after discussing it with my parents we started making arrangements for my trip. I was 18-years-old.

The Rebbe was involved in all the details of the trip and even sent a check to cover my travel expenses.

We did not take a direct route to New York. The Rebbe instructed Rabbi Baumgarten to visit the Jewish community in Belem, Brazil, where we spent several days including Shabbos. During our stay Rabbi Baumgarten spoke to the members of the *kehila* and inspired them to greater *shemiras hamitzvos* and I arranged some gatherings for the youth. It was a very uplifting visit and Rabbi Baumgarten



REB AARON (TOP RIGHT) AS A BOCHUR LOOKS ON AS THE REBBE IS MESADER KIDUSHIN AT A WEDDING, 10 ADAR I 5719.

told me to give my tefillin to one of the locals. The Rebbe was very satisfied upon learning of the details of the trip.

We arrived in New York on 6 Cheshvan, which is the day before my birthday, so I merited to enter *yechidus* by the Rebbe the very next night on 7 Cheshvan.

When I entered the Rebbe's room, he greeted me with a radiant smile, expressing a unique affection. I was immediately at ease and felt enveloped in the Rebbe's fatherly warmth and love.

I presented the Rebbe a gift on behalf of the Shuva Yisrael community—the *sefer* Ben Ish Chai.

"This is a very important *sefer*," the Rebbe said while skimming through the pages. It is an anthology of practical *halacha* organized by the weekly *parshiyos*. The Rebbe instructed me to learn the *sefer* on a weekly basis, to learn Kitzur Shulchan Aruch as well, and to thank the Shuva Yisrael community for the thoughtful gift on his behalf. (Igros Kodesh vol 14 page 282)

It was a short *yechidus*.

Settling down in the yeshiva in 770 was an experience. It was my first time

learning in a yeshiva setting and I was unable to speak Yiddish or English.

This was in addition to the fact that I came from a Sefardi home whereas all the other *bochurim* were Ashkenazim.

At first there was no room for me in the dormitory so I stayed at the home of the *mazkir* Rabbi Leibel Groner. He would often inquire how I was settling in yeshiva and other personal questions, and at times clearly said that these questions were coming from the Rebbe. I was humbled to know that the Rebbe was keeping close tabs on me throughout.

The *hanhala* and the *bochurim* were very welcoming and did everything they could to help me adjust to my new setting. Rabbi Mentlik, the *rosh yeshiva*, arranged *chavrusos* for me at all hours of the day. There was even a time that Reb Yoel Kahn learned *nigleh* with me for a half hour every day. Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson learned Chassidus with me in the mornings and Leibel Raskin, who was one of the older *bochurim* in 770 at the time, learned Chassidus with me in the evenings. He made a point to learn *maamarim* in Yiddish and patiently translated each word so that I would

Suddenly the Rebbe turned to me and requested that I sing a “Sefardishe niggun.”

have an easier time learning to speak in Yiddish.

I immediately threw myself into learning with much *geshmak*.

A year later, two more *bochurim* from Argentina joined me in 770, Chaim Sued and Yosef Srugo. Now that we were a group of three, Rabbi Mentlik arranged that Sholom Feldman should learn *nigleh* with us every day as a paid job. He enjoyed learning with us so much that a week later he approached Rabbi Mentlik and declined any payment.

“Sing a Sefardishe Niggun”

The first farbrengen I merited to be present at was Shabbos Mevarchim Kislev. Although I was unable to follow the *sichos*, I was captivated by the entire experience. Suddenly the Rebbe turned to me and requested that I sing a “Sefardishe niggun.” I wasn’t sure which song to sing and the Rebbe mentioned the melody “Ozreini Keil Chai.” Thankfully I knew the *niggun* and as I started singing solo in front of the hushed room the Rebbe sang along with me softly.

From then on, for the next five years that I was in 770 there were many occasions that the Rebbe requested I sing this *niggun* and every time the Rebbe joined with a special *dveikus*. The Rebbe looked like he was in a different world when singing this *niggun*. It is difficult to describe how special these moments were.²

Why Rashbi Made Lag B’Omer

Six months after my arrival I felt the need to go into *yechidus* another time. During these six months I had grown tremendously in so many areas,

especially in my understanding of the Rebbe and Chassidus and I felt the need to have another *yechidus* in order to ask the Rebbe some important questions regarding my conduct and learning in yeshiva. Despite all the headway I was making, I was still having a difficult time in my new environment.

Rabbi Hodakov allowed it despite the fact that it was not my birthday and I was scheduled to go into *yechidus* several days before Lag B’Omer.

This *yechidus* lasted close to half an hour and it changed my life. The Rebbe was very warm and welcoming and answered all of my questions patiently and gave me many *horaos* with regard to learning and proper behavior. It was from that day onward that I felt I was a full fledged Lubavitcher.

Growing up in Buenos Aires in the Sefardi community almost no one had a beard and when I arrived in 770 I

did not start growing my beard right away. However over the last few weeks from Pesach, my beard was growing because of *sefira* and by the time of this *yechidus*, right before Lag B’Omer, my new beard was quite noticeable.

Although I had not mentioned anything about my beard in my note, during the *yechidus* the Rebbe suddenly said, “Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai did not make Lag B’Omer so that Yidden should shave their beards.” Quoting several sources on the great spiritual value of having a beard and the greatness of the Yom Tov Shavuos, the Rebbe instructed me to keep my beard until Shavuos. “If you have any questions about your beard after Shavuos, you will ask me then.”

Needless to say, I never had any more questions about my beard and kept my *tzelem Elokim* from then on.

No one ever told me to change my *minhagim* or *nusach hatefila*, but over time I began adopting Lubavitch *minhagim* and when I mentioned these changes to the Rebbe, the Rebbe was always very sensitive about it.

Once, in *yechidus*, I mentioned that I would like to change my *nusach hatefila* to Nusach Ari. The Rebbe



REB AARON (L) AND ARYEH PRAGER ON THE STEPS OF 770 BEFORE LEAVING FOR MERKOS SHLICHUS, SUMMER 5720.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASIDEI CHABAD

When some time would pass without any correspondence from Argentina, the Rebbe would ask, “Why are you not writing me anything?”

approved of the idea and gave me a pocket-size siddur Tehillas Hashem with Tehillim. On the other hand when I asked the Rebbe about the fact that I wear a *tallis gadol* during Shacharis before my marriage—in accordance with the Sefardic tradition—the Rebbe indicated that I should continue doing so. The Rebbe once gave me a pocket-size Tanya as well.

During those years the Rebbe instructed me to learn Ein Yaakov and the Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch, but all of this needed to be done outside of the *sedarim*.

During one Tishrei, many of the *bochurim* in the dormitory were very ill and bedridden with high fevers. I was one of the last ones to get over the illness and on Simchas Torah I was still in bed running a high fever.

At the farbrengen before *hakafos* the Rebbe asked “Where is Aharon Hakohen Tawil?” Rabbi Mentlik sent a *bochur* to bring me from the dorm. When I heard the Rebbe was looking for me, I made the effort to get out of bed, come directly to the farbrengen and say *l’chaim* to the Rebbe. As *hakafos* began I was standing a little bit away from the crowd, but then the Rebbe scanned the crowd and said, “Where is Aharon Hakohen Tawil?” and called me closer to him, away from the crush of the crowd, so I was able to experience *hakafos* literally

within a few feet from the Rebbe. After *hakafos* I went back to bed, and the next morning I woke up feeling completely better...

Spanish Correspondence

Since I was the only Argentinian in 770 for a while, I served as a delivery boy or interpreter for many Argentinian Jews with their correspondence with the Rebbe. They would send me letters with messages for the Rebbe in Spanish and I would translate these letters into Hebrew and give them to *mazkirus*. The Rebbe usually responded immediately to the letters. I would write the responses

in Spanish and send them back to Argentina. There were times that the answers needed to reach them urgently, and I would send a telegram.

All this I would do in between the *sedarim*, and it kept me extremely busy. When some time would pass without any correspondence from Argentina, the Rebbe would ask, “Why are you not writing me anything?”

On the subject of interpreting, many years later, during one of my visits to the Rebbe, I was in *yechidus* three times in one night. The first two times I accompanied Spanish speaking Jews into *yechidus* to translate the Rebbe’s words for them and at the end

SHE WILL BE HEALTHY

I had an uncle who lived in Flatbush at the time. His name was Rabbi Yosef Tawil and he had previously been a *maggid shiur* in the Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Yerushalayim. I would visit him from time to time and he would always greet me with an open Zohar and we would discuss different *inyanim* in learning. The Rebbe once answered a question in learning that he asked me.³

Several weeks before Rosh Hashanah he told me that his twelve-year-old daughter Flora was in the hospital gravely ill and he asked me to write to the Rebbe asking for a *refuah shleimah*. I wrote the *pan* and the Rebbe responded אזכיר על הציון.

Her situation did not improve and as it became progressively worse my uncle asked me to write again several times.

On Erev Yom Kippur, as I approached the Rebbe to receive *lekach*, the Rebbe handed me a piece for myself, two pieces for my parents, two pieces for my uncle Yosef and his wife, and then handed another piece for Flora, mentioning her name and mother’s name and instructing me to make sure she eats this specific piece of *lekach* before Yom Kippur, “and she will be healthy.”

I rushed to my room to drop off the other pieces of *lekach* and immediately took the bus and subway to the hospital on Avenue T. When I arrived my uncle was not there, so I gave the three pieces of *lekach* to my aunt and told her to be sure that Flora eats this specific piece before Yom Kippur. My aunt was shocked, because Flora was unable to eat anything at the time, but I told her that this must happen and the Rebbe had given clear assurance that she will be healthy. Having accomplished my mission I rushed back to 770 in time for Yom Tov.

A few days later I called my uncle and he joyously shared the news with me that Flora had eaten the *lekach* before Yom Kippur and was making a miraculously rapid recovery.

of the night I went in for my personal *yechidus*.

"I am in the Mesader Kiddushin"

Rabbi Yehoshua Avrohom Sapir was a Gerrer Chossid living in Uruguay who served as a *shochet* for the local community. His daughters wanted to marry yeshiva *bochurim* but there were none in Uruguay and very few in all of South America at the time. Chaya Rochel Sapir came to New York in 5719* to find a *shidduch* and ended up marrying a Lubavitcher *bochur* from Cuba, Yona Slapochnik, who was learning in 770 at the time. They had the great *zechus* that the Rebbe was *mesader kiddushin* at their wedding.⁴

When Rabbi Sapir was in New York for his daughter's wedding he went into *yechidus* by the Rebbe

and mentioned that the *kalla* has a twin sister Sara Rivka who is still in Uruguay, and although she very much wants to marry a yeshiva *bochur* as well, she has a hard time traveling so far away from home. He asked the Rebbe for advice in how to go about finding her a *shidduch*.

The Rebbe said that Sara should come to New York as there were quite a few South American *bochurim* here at the time and this would be the best way for her to find a *shidduch*. A short time later she was in New York and her new brother-in-law Yona Slapochnik suggested to Reb Dovid Raskin that I would be a good *shidduch* for his sister-in-law.

A short while after we met, we received the Rebbe's *bracha* to marry and became engaged. The wedding date was set for Rosh Chodesh Adar 5721*.

Some time before the wedding we decided to personally deliver an invitation to the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana. She welcomed us graciously into her apartment and when she opened the envelope and read our names on the invitation she said with a big smile, "Ah, the Rebbe is very satisfied with this *shidduch*."

Although the Rebbe had recently stopped being *mesader kiddushin*, we decided to ask the Rebbe to be *mesader kiddushin* at our wedding, since he was *mesader kiddushin* for my wife's twin sister some time earlier. When we mentioned this in *yechidus*, the Rebbe declined and said, "I will always be with you. The distance and the walls do not separate us. I will be in the *rav* that is *mesader kiddushin* during your Chupah."

I repeated this to Rabbi Dvorkin who was our *mesader kiddushin* and



REB AARON RECEIVING DOLLARS AS A "TANKIST", EREV ROSH HASHANAH 5735.

YOSSI FREIDIN VIA JEM 140539

*📅 5719-1959, 5721-1961



THE REBBE GIVES REB AARON A BOTTLE OF MASHKE DURING KOS SHEL BROCHO, MOTZOEI SIMCHAS TORAH 5740.

...A short time later Rabbi Hodakov called me into his office and in a stern tone said, "The Rebbe wants to know how much money you need!"

although he was known not to be an emotional person, he was trembling throughout the duration of our *chupah*.

Shlichus

During the *yechidus* before our wedding we told the Rebbe that we are ready to go on shlichus wherever the Rebbe would send us, and after our wedding several offers started coming our way. We notified the Rebbe of everything and at one point the Rebbe sent back the following response:

לדעתי, מקומו ויצליח בבואנוס-אייריס
ובזמן הקרוב נכון לנסוע עם זוגתו תל' לב. א.
להחזיר המצורף

In my opinion, your place is, and you will be successful, in Buenos Aires, and it would be appropriate to travel soon with your wife to Buenos Aires.

We started looking into different opportunities to work with the Buenos Aires community and I was in *yechidus*

several times in connection with these discussions. The Rebbe was involved in every detail. For example, the Rebbe was very adamant that I not travel there until the community would pay for our travel expenses. When things started to seem doubtful, the Rebbe assured me that I would have a position "near me [the Rebbe]."

During this time period my wife was working as a kindergarten teacher in Oholei Torah and I continued learning in 770 like a regular *bochur*. We did not have much money but we were happy.

Once, in *yechidus*, the Rebbe asked me what I was doing about *parnasa*. I said we had what we needed between my wife's salary and the wedding gifts, and either way we were preparing to move on shlichus imminently.

Afterwards, Rabbi Hodakov called me and said that he was instructed by the Rebbe to give me money for

living expenses. I adamantly refused to accept any money, reiterating that we had what we needed.

Apparently the Rebbe was upset that I had not received money because a short time later Rabbi Hodakov called me into his office and in a stern tone said, "The Rebbe wants to know how much money you need!" I was unsure of what to do, and finally out of pity for Rabbi Hodakov, I said an amount, which I received promptly.

My parents invited us to visit them for Pesach in Argentina (I had not been home since Tishrei 5717*). We asked the Rebbe about this and the Rebbe said that if we can find a family to stay with over Pesach in Crown Heights—so that my wife would not need to work hard to prepare for Yom Tov—we should remain in Crown Heights for Pesach. We spent Yom Tov that year at the home of Rabbi Mendel Baumgarten, Rabbi Berel Baumgarten's brother.

After going through various options for how to develop our shlichus in Buenos Aires, the Rebbe told me to open a new *minyan* and gave me certain guidelines how to do this without causing any *machlokes* in the community.

On Isru Chag Shavuot we departed 770 as the Rebbe's shluchim to Buenos Aires. As we prepared to leave 770 to the airport, the *bochurim* started dancing outside and we all noticed the blinds of the Rebbe's room going up. We were shocked when minutes later the Rebbe himself came to the front door of 770 to see us off! We immediately entered the taxi and the Rebbe stayed at the doorway until we were out of sight.

Upon our arrival we started a *minyan* with young students which we eventually named, "Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov." The *nusach hatefila* and the *minhagim* were Sefardi but it was all in the spirit of Chabad. There were *shiurim* in Chassidus and

every Shabbos we had a *chassidisher farbrengen* and many of these students became Lubavitchers. Eventually I worked together with the local *baalei batim* to bring Rabbi Baumgarten to Buenos Aires on a permanent basis and I was involved in the development of Chabad activities throughout the years.

Since I am a trained *shochet*, being that the Rebbe had instructed me to learn *shechita*, I eventually started working in the local *shechita* one day a week. After I was in Buenos Aires for several years I also became a *mohel* and served in this capacity for many years as well.

There were many areas of shlichus that developed over time as the Lubavitch community in Buenos Aires started to grow. Groups would gather together to listen to the farbrengens via hookup and we were very active in all the *mitvzoim*. One of my greatest pleasures was helping many *bochurim* from Argentina travel to learn in the yeshivos near the Rebbe. Many of them later returned as shluchim to South America.

Our first three children were born through a cesarean section and the doctor said my wife can no longer have any children. The next time we were in *yechidus* we mentioned this to the Rebbe. The Rebbe smiled slightly, said, “I see no problem,” and instructed us to consult with a *rav*. Rabbi Dvorkin assured us that it was common for women to have multiple births via cesarean section and *baruch Hashem* we merited to have another child.

Pillar of the community

When we moved to Buenos Aires on shlichus, most of my wife's family was nearby in Uruguay and she was able to see her parents often. Over time, both of our families all moved away, and most of them settled in



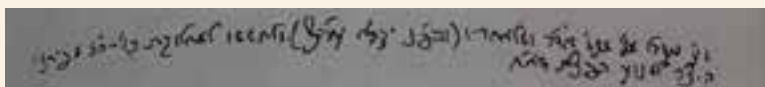
THE REBBE ADDS [שווארט ובודק] IN HIS HOLY HANDWRITING IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO REB AARON, DATED 21 SIVAN 5735.



BOCHURIM AND CHASSIDIM DANCE JOYOUSLY AT THE AIRPORT WITH REB AARON AS HE EMBARKS ON HIS SHLICHUS, 5721.

CAUTION WITH BALANCE

In *yeichidus* and in letters⁵ the Rebbe often cautioned me to ensure that my activities should be done in a pleasant and peaceful manner and to avoid any *machlokes*. However, once when I wrote to the Rebbe that I was not doing a certain activity in *hafatzas hamaayanos* since I feared it would cause *machlokes*, the Rebbe responded:



וחששו למחלוקת כו' - ה"ז מפתויי היצר למנוע הפצת דא"ח.

With regard to your fear of *machlokes* etc. This is one of the temptations of the *yetzer [hara]* to prevent *hafatzas haChassidus*.



THE BAR MITZVAH OF REB AARON'S SON SHLOMO, 5736.

Eretz Yisrael. At one point we started asking the Rebbe on several occasions if we should move to Eretz Yisroel as well, but the Rebbe always encouraged us to remain in Argentina where we were involved in the community.

In 5738*, the Chadera Religious Council offered me the position of *mohel* in the Chadera hospital and other educational responsibilities. When I traveled to the Rebbe that year I met Rabbi Yitzchok Lifshitz in 770. He was the *shochet* for *gasos* in Chadera and also served in other communal positions. Rabbi Lifshitz wanted to move to Yerushalayim and offered me to take over his position as

well. Accepting all these offers would mean an enormous amount of work but the salary would make it worth it.

Rabbi Lifshitz and I went into *yeichidus* on the same night and we both separately asked the Rebbe about our respective plans—I would move to Chadera from Buenos Aires and he would move to Yerushalayim. The Rebbe was opposed to the idea and said that each one must remain at their post—me in Buenos Aires and Rabbi Lifshitz in Chadera.

Unbeknown to me, the *rav* of Chadera, Rabbi Dovid Verner, also wrote to the Rebbe about the idea of me moving to Chadera to assume

the positions of *shochet*, *mohel* and educator, and before Shavuot he received a letter from the Rebbe with the following response.

והנה, הרה"ח הור"ח אי"א נר"מ וכו', הר"א ש', הכהן טאויל הוא מעמודי התווך בצ"ע בעירו (כולל בחינוך עטה"ק) ואיך זה יעתיק משם!?

Rabbi Aharon Hakohen Tawil is one of the foundational pillars of communal work in his city (including chinuch al taharas hakodesh). How can he move away from there?!

We have been here ever since and are blessed that our children and many of our grandchildren serve as the Rebbe's *shluchim* in South America.

The Rebbe's love and care for me throughout my life is tremendous. As a young *bochur* the Rebbe guided me into becoming a proper Chossid and was intimately involved in every aspect of my life throughout all the years. I am mostly grateful for the *zechus* to be the Rebbe's *shliach* in the final battle to bring Moshiach.

Although I experienced this in a revealed and practical way, I am certain that this is the case with everyone. The Rebbe's words to me before my wedding, "I will always be with you," resonate with me today more than ever and are relevant to every Chossid. May we merit very soon to be reunited with the Rebbe *b'gashmiyus* with the coming of Moshiach. **1**

1. See A Chassidisher Derher Magazine #13.
2. During the Simchas Beis Hashoeva farbrengen on Sukkos 5723 (after I had already been on shlichus in Argentina for over a year) the Rebbe called upon the *talmidim* from Argentina, and specifically called my name, to sing "their *niggun*." In the recording you can hear the Rebbe singing along. Listen to the recording on Ashreinu.app: ashreinu.page.link/XSWg
3. The letter is printed in Igros Kodesh vol. 15 page 220.
4. See Mekadesh Yisroel page 255.
5. See for example Igros Kodesh vol. 22, p. 283.

THE "EXTRA" LETTER ARRIVED 32 YEARS LATER

Rabbi Avrohom Yosef Polichenko was a Chossid who lived in Buenos Aires with whom I was friendly for many years. At one point his family moved to Canada, and in 5760, some time after he passed away, his family was preparing to move homes and they discovered two letters stashed away in a folder. Both letters were *michtavim klali'im-proti'im* dated "Yemei Hageulah 12-13 Tammuz 5728." One was addressed to Rabbi Polichenko and one was addressed to me.

This discovery was very strange for me because I had received this specific *michtav kloli proti* back in 5728 and it turns out it was sent twice, but with several changes. The letter I received in 5728 was signed by the Rebbe himself and this recently discovered letter was signed by the *mazkir*.

Most astonishing about this newly discovered letter was a postscript on the bottom which read as follows:

הפ"נ (הכתוב) עבוד אחיו שי יקרא עה"צ. ויש להתייעץ עם רופא מומחה איך להתנהג אתו וכו'.

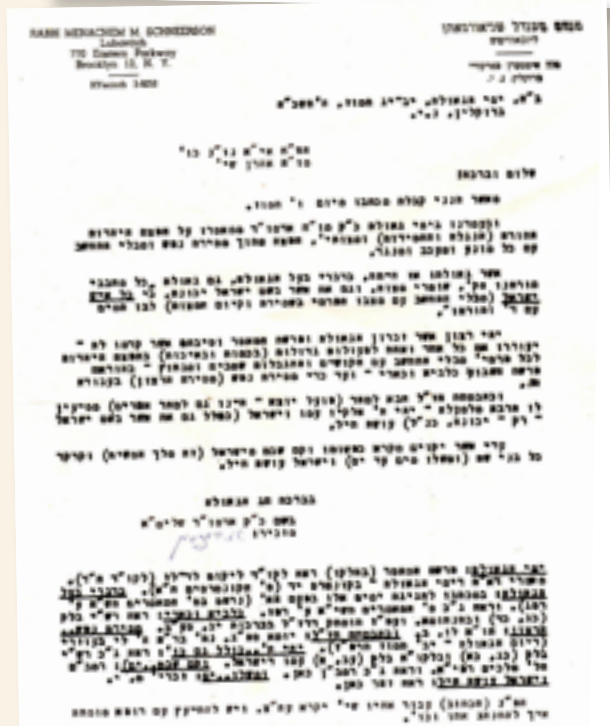
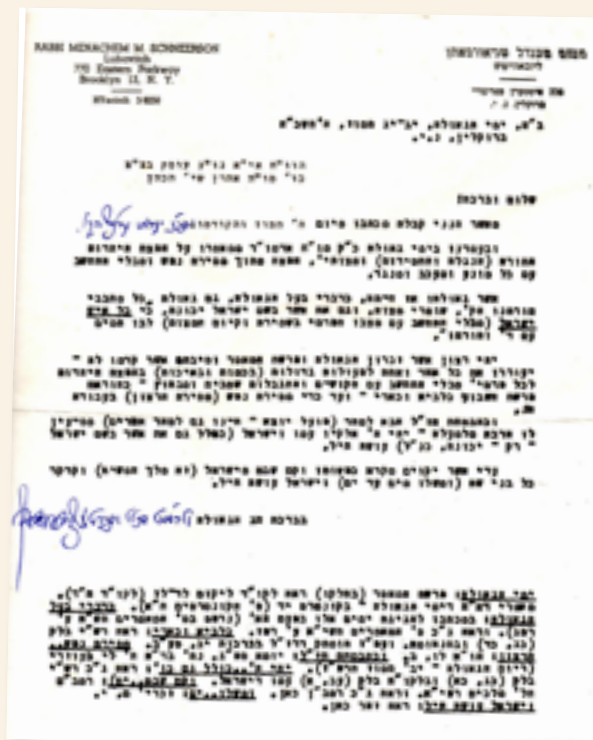
The pan (which you wrote) on behalf of your brother was received and will be read at the Tziyun. Consult with a competent doctor how to deal with him etc.

This postscript was astonishing because in 5728 my brother was in good health and I had not written to the Rebbe about him. But in the summer of 5760, when this letter was discovered, my brother Refoel was going through a medical crisis! This postscript was written 32 years earlier with such revealed *ruach hakodesh* and it was delivered to me at the perfect time in such a bizarre and mysterious way!

Another interesting point is that my brother was distrustful of doctors in general, and I saw this message from the Rebbe of specific importance for him.

When Mrs. Polichenko called my wife with the news of the discovery and the contents of the letter I asked her to fax the letter to me immediately. Rushing to his home with the faxed letter I was delighted to hear that he had just left the house to go on a walk, which indicated that he was already feeling better.

I was also going through a certain challenging issue at the time and after receiving the newly discovered letter I merited much *hatzlacha* in that area as well.



THE TWO VERSIONS OF THE MICTAV KLOLI-PROTI SENT FOR REB AARON.