

לזכות
החייל בצבאות ה'
רפאל יעקב זאב שיחי'
לרגל הולדתו ט"ז אייר ה'תש"פ
ולזכות אחרות מיא רייזל תחי'

ולזכות הוריהם
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל
וזוגתו מרת מושקא שיחי
קראסניאנסקי
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר למאוי, הוואי

נדפס ע"י זקניהם
הרה"ת ר' ראובן וזוגתו מרת אהובה
יהודית שיחי ניו
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר
לאיסט בוקה רטון, פלורידה



From Harvard to 770

PROFESSOR YITZCHOK BLOCK



DELIVERING A LECTURE AT MACHON CHANA, 5746

The fascinating journey of a Tennessee boy from public school to Harvard to famed Aristotelian scholar—but always first and foremost, the Rebbe's shliach.

This article is based primarily on Professor Block's interview with My Encounter by Jewish Education Media. Special thanks to Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin and Rabbi Yechiel Cagen. Quotes from other individuals are taken from "Dr. Yitzchok Block — Inspiring Stories and Anecdotes," published by his family after his passing. A short version of this article was published in Derher - Chabad on Campus special edition.



KOS SHEL BRACHA, MOTZOEI SIMCHAS TORAH 5749

5749 - 1988

LEVI FREDIN VIA JEM 25983

Finding the Real Thing

Yitzchok Leib Block was born in Nashville, Tennessee, to a traditional Jewish family who kept kosher and attended the local Conservative Synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. He received the standard education for an American Jewish child: public school in the morning and *talmud Torah* each evening, culminating with a bar mitzvah. After reaching Jewish adulthood, he would be free to leave the burden of *talmud Torah*, and much of Yiddishkeit for that matter, behind.

However, things changed for young Yitzchok, or Irving, as he was called then. Within a week of his bar mitzvah, his father passed away, and he began reciting *kaddish* twice each day. “That was one of the two cardinal rules of being Jewish in those days,” he later explained. “Number one, you married only a Jew, and number two, you said *kaddish* for your parents.”

Now a regular at the local Orthodox shul, Irving became friendly with the rabbi who convinced him to continue studying about Yiddishkeit. Over time, he slowly gravitated towards Torah and mitzvos.



DR. BLOCK AS A CHILD, CIRCA 1958*

“Everybody was talking about me. ‘What’s happened to Irving? He used to be such a nice little kid and he’s becoming a religious fanatic...”

“Throughout my teenage years, I read a lot about Judaism in English publications, but I never really had the opportunity to do concrete learning. Then, one bright day, a new person showed up in town. The whole town was talking about it. It was a young man *with a beard*. It was unheard of; it was like he just stepped off the boat.”

Rabbi Zalman Posner had been sent by the Frierdiker Rebbe to Nashville, where he assumed the post of rabbi in a local shul. Irving immediately felt connected. “I felt that he was the real McCoy. I said, ‘This is *emes*.’”

Throughout his university years, Irving would spend each morning studying Torah with Rabbi Posner.

“I began to learn for the first time in my life. Every morning after davening, after a cup of coffee, we would sit down and learn. We learned *Shnayim Ochazin B’Tallis*. It was an eye opener to me. For the first time in my life, I learned what it means to sit down and learn Torah. We grew very close.”

As he approached graduation from college, Yitzchok decided to study philosophy in graduate school and was accepted into Harvard.

“Towards the end of that year, I had to decide what to do with my summer. I was getting really involved in Gemara, so I suggested to Rabbi Posner that I spend my summer in Lubavitch. Rabbi Posner was hesitant but I insisted. I liked Rabbi Posner very much; if Lubavitch produced a guy like him, it couldn’t be too bad...”

So, one day in 1952*, Rabbi Posner took him to 770.

First Impressions

This wasn’t Yitzchok’s first time in 770. A year earlier, he had visited New

York for a family wedding and Rabbi Posner had suggested he visit the Rebbe. Yitzchok thought it sounded interesting so he called up 770 and made an appointment to see the Rebbe on a Thursday at ten o’clock.

“At exactly 10:00 a.m. I arrived at 770 and said that I was there to see the Rebbe. Rabbi Hodakov looked at me and said ‘What are you doing here now? Your appointment is for ten o’clock tonight...’

“I never imagined that I would have an appointment at such a strange hour. Rabbi Hodakov felt bad. He picked up the phone, spoke for a moment, and turned back to me. ‘I’m awfully sorry,’ he said, ‘but the Rebbe can’t see you now.’”

Yitzchok wasn’t prepared to brave the streets of New York late at night so he didn’t have his *yechidus*. But he did see the Rebbe.

“As I was sitting in the hallway, I noticed a young black-bearded gentleman come down the stairs, wearing a tallis, tefillin and a short jacket.¹ He looked at me and walked into his office.

“That was the Rebbe coming from davening. In 5711* he would daven in the Frierdiker Rebbe’s office on the second floor and I happened to be there as davening concluded.”

In 770

Now coming for his second visit, Yitzchok arrived in 770. The yeshiva was small in those days and the American *bochurim* immediately befriended him and set him up with a *chavrusa*.

When Rabbi Posner went into *yechidus*, Yitzchok was invited in as well.

“I can’t remember exactly what happened. We got into talking about philosophy, and he said, ‘The philosophy of Plato is very cruel.’ Plato’s social philosophy is that children should be trained like



RABBI ZALMAN POSNER, CIRCA 5727*

wards of the state. But I had never heard anybody say that it was cruel; after all, Plato was the ‘G-d’ of philosophy... Two years later, a book came out saying that Plato’s social philosophy was—using the exact same terminology—cruel. The book caused a furor in the philosophical world, but nobody ever refuted it...”

Interestingly, although Yitzchok would later have a storied career in philosophy, the Rebbe never again discussed philosophy with him.

“My first farbrengen was Yud-Beis Tammuz 5712* in the small *zal*,” Yitzchok recounted. “There were some 200 people present, on stacked tiers all the way to the ceiling and the whole place was steaming; you could literally see the sweat dripping from the ceiling.

“The thing that really affected me was the *niggunim* they sang. I found it overwhelming. I was greatly moved by that farbrengen although I didn’t understand a word.

“During one of the *niggunim*, the Rebbe noticed me, picked up a piece of cake and said, ‘Have you had cake yet?’ I’m a polite southern boy; I said

“Thank you very much, I had cake already.”

“The whole room went ‘Huh...’ The Rebbe smiled and put the cake back on the plate. At the end of the farbrengen, he called over Zalman Posner and gave him two pieces of cake. He came over to me and said, ‘The Rebbe wants you to have this piece of cake. I suggest that you make a *bracha* and eat it.’”

The story had an additional element, one which Yitzchok learned only many years later, when he was living in London, Ontario, father to eight children and a distinguished Chossid.

During a discussion, Rabbi Posner said to him,

“Do you remember your first farbrengen when the Rebbe gave me a piece of cake for you? The Rebbe told me to tell you something which I never told you.

“*Zolt ir em zogen, sof sof vet er veren a Chossid; er darf nit farshporen di tzeit*—Sooner or later, he’ll be a Chossid. He shouldn’t spend all this extra time [wastefully]...”

After an enjoyable summer in 770 Yitzchok was torn. On one hand, he

My Mother’s Connection

Dr. Block related:

My father passed away when I was very young, and the Rebbe always took interest in my mother’s well-being, although they had never met.

For example, one year after receiving *lekach* from the Rebbe on Hoshanah Rabbah, Rabbi Groner came running to call me back. The Rebbe asked me about my mother—although there was nothing out of the ordinary—and gave me a piece of cake for her, which I sent to her in Atlanta.

One time, my mother asked me to arrange a *yeichidus* for her, and when she came out, I asked about the conversation.

She said, “I told him that I live by myself, and on Friday night when I light Shabbos candles, I feel very lonely.”

I felt that it was something inappropriate to tell the Rebbe, but that’s what she said.

The Rebbe looked at her and said, “You don’t have to feel lonely; *der Aibershter iz ale mol mit*—Hashem is always with you.”

She came out a calmer person. “The Rebbe helped me,” she said.

That was the whole interaction; one sentence. You see, if I would have said it to my mother, she would have brushed me off, but when the Rebbe said it to her, it made an impact. Ever since the Rebbe said that to her, she didn’t feel lonely.



LECTURING, CIRCA 5720*

had been accepted into the post-graduate program at Harvard to continue his pursuit of a doctorate in philosophy, but on the other hand, he was immensely enjoying his time in 770. After consulting with the Rebbe in *yechidus*, he decided to go to Harvard.²

Harvard

He spent a semester in Harvard, and soon, exams were approaching. But there was something that bothered him terribly. Harvard policy was that students were graded on a curve, meaning that only the top third of the class would pass the difficult exam, notwithstanding one's personal grades. Yitzchok was not at the top of his class and he began to feel depressed. He missed the Torah learning and camaraderie of 770 and the Harvard curriculum proved much more difficult than expected. One morning, he got onto a bus and rode back to 770.

"When I arrived back, I announced that I decided to return and study in yeshiva. Everyone welcomed me warmly. But when I went into *yechidus*, the Rebbe told me, 'I think

you will regret that you gave up your profession.' He looked at me with a smile, 'You have to have *courage*. You know what *courage* is?'

"I walked out stunned. My friends all asked, 'What did the Rebbe say?' I said, 'He says go back to Harvard.'

"Huh?'

"That was everybody's reaction. Rabbi Mentlik, Rabbi Bukiet—they were all utterly chagrined. And I got back on the bus and went back to Harvard."

Yitzchok took the exams, and failed. He received his Master's degree, but was rejected from the continuation of the program. He thought it was time to come learn in yeshiva, but the Rebbe asked, "Can't you take the exams again?"

He did, and this time, he passed.

"During my second year, exams were set for the morning after Acharon Shel Pesach. These were exams that couldn't be taken a second time, so it was crucial that I passed.

"I spent Acharon Shel Pesach in 770, and during the *farbrengen*, the Rebbe announced that everyone should drink four cups of wine. That caught me totally unprepared. I had a

The Rebbe Saved Someone's Thesis

Dr. Block related the following story about his time in Harvard:

There was a chemistry student at Harvard working on his PhD, and the Rebbe wrote me a letter to get involved with him and draw him closer to Yiddishkeit. I started learning with him Tanya.

In his PhD, he had a problem that he couldn't solidify a certain element, and he was at his wits' end because unless he achieved this solidification, he wouldn't be able to continue with his thesis.

I said to him, "Come with me to the Rebbe. What have you got to lose?"

He had a *yechidus* for half an hour or 45 minutes, and he came out blinking his eyes. The Rebbe had suggested trying some form of radiation on this element, but he said, "There is no reason why this should solidify it."

Two days later, he called me, "Irving, I can't believe it, I put the radiation on it and it solidified."

bus to catch that night and exams were the next morning...

"Suddenly, the Rebbe looked at me and made his two handed motion which meant, 'Drink the whole cup.' Oh, my G-d, I'm supposed to take the bus at 12:00 a.m., and I was supposed to take my exam in the morning at 9:00.

“I drink the first cup of wine, and the Rebbe looks at me and says again... I said oh, my G-d... The Rebbe repeated the instruction four times. I was dizzy. I could hardly stand up. I managed to take the subway up to Port Authority. I stumbled onto the bus, and woke up in Boston. I made it at nine to take my exam, and I passed it. That was an open miracle.”

The next stage was to take an oral exam to propose a topic for a dissertation, and Yitzchok failed again. He wrote to the Rebbe in despair, and the answer was the same. Take it again. Once again, this time he passed.

He began writing his dissertation while studying in 770 part time. He also found a small “side job.” He taught Tanya to a large group of students in Brooklyn College and brought some 35 students to the Rebbe for a *yechidus* where they merited a question and answer session, and heard fascinating answers from the Rebbe. (The *yechidus* was later published.)³

The distractions in 770 didn't allow him to properly finish. The Rebbe kept on nudging him about finishing his dissertation, so he returned to the quiet of a Harvard library, where he finished writing his dissertation in three months, and finally received his PhD.

“At the next farbrengen I was at, the Rebbe looked at me and smiled and said, ‘*Yetzt kenst du hubben menuchas hanefesh*—now you can have peace of mind.’

“Now, I thought, I'm going to sit in yeshiva and learn; the Rebbe has no excuse. I wanted to learn for *semicha*. I wrote in to the Rebbe, and you know what the answer was?

“Four words: ‘*Lo mit an aleph*.’ Under no circumstances whatsoever.”

Instead of Yeshiva

“I spent a half a year teaching in Yeshiva University,” now Professor Block recounted. “When my students

Chassidic encounter

Prof. Yitzchak Block will lead a weekend Chassidic encounter sponsored by the Chabad House of Berkeley, 2340 Piedmont Ave., this weekend.

A professor of philosophy at the University of Western Ontario, Dr. Block will lead workshops, classes and “Farbrengens,” or Chassidic encounters.

The first session will be held Friday at 8 p.m., continues all day Saturday and Sunday morning. The weekend is free of charge.

FARBRENGEN ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE BERKELEY GAZETTE, 6 MAY 1975*



DR. BLOCK (IN THE TOP HAT) LEADS A FARBRENGEN AT THE PEGISHA, CIRCA 5728*

COURTESY OF THE BLOCK FAMILY

found out that I was a Lubavitcher, they would line up after class was over and ask me questions in *emunah*. Is there a G-d? What about the Torah? They couldn't get over the fact that I had a PhD in philosophy from Harvard.

“Then I understood why the Rebbe sent me to Harvard. I had a greater effect than a hundred rabbis just by existing; without saying a word.”

As he was looking for a permanent job, the Rebbe told him to take the main points of his dissertation and print them in scholarly journals. At first, he was apprehensive; his thesis on Aristotle contradicted some of the leading scholars of the day; who was he to argue with them?

With the Rebbe's encouragement, he reached out to a famous journal but they rejected his essay. The Rebbe pushed him to pull some Harvard connections and soon the essay was published and created a storm in the academic world. Professor Block was now sometimes being referred to as a leading scholar on Aristotle.

“The Rebbe always pushed me further and believed in my potential even more than I knew. Once, as I was sitting in *Gan Eden Hatachton*, the Rebbe told a couple in *yechidus* that I was a great professor. At the time, I didn't even have a job.

“The Rebbe also wanted me to write a book on Aristotle, which, to my regret, I never did. The Rebbe



STUDYING WITH STUDENTS, CIRCA 5733*



A CHASSIDISHER DANCE WITH DR. YAAKOV HANOKA

wanted me to become as important as possible in the world of philosophy so that I would have an influence on my Jewish students. And the truth is I have, I know I have. Hundreds of students have grown closer to Yiddishkeit by mere fact that I was a professor and a Lubavitcher.”

London, Ontario

After some time looking for a post, Dr. Block was offered a position in London, Ontario. But there was one problem: there was no Orthodox shul, no day school, and no Jewish infrastructure. He was now married with a child and London didn't seem to be the most appropriate place to raise a Jewish family.

“The Rebbe advised me to take the job, but I asked him, ‘What will I do there?’

“*Vest gefinen vos tzu ton*—you'll find what to do there,’ the Rebbe replied.

“When I first walked into the community, I was just like Rabbi Zalman Posner in Nashville, Tennessee. They had never seen it. ‘You're a Chossid?’ I said yes. ‘What

kind of Chossid?’ ‘A Lubavitcher Chassid.’ ‘Luba what?’ They never heard the name before.

“The first day, I got a call from the director of the local B’nai Brith. He said, ‘We have a serious problem. We have a few Jewish students here and we have no one to take care of the local Hillel; maybe you’ll undertake it?’ I couldn’t say no, so I said yes.”

As Pesach approached, they prepared to travel back to New York for Yom Tov.

Suddenly Rabbi Hodakov called him and asked, “Are you coming to New York?”

“Yes, *im yirtze Hashem*.”

“What will the students eat on Pesach?”

Dr. Block took the cue and said that he will arrange meals for the students in London.

He went to one of the old Jewish fraternities and made a deal with them: “I will give you guys a brand new oven; all I need you to do is put in these pre-cooked trays of kosher for Pesach food each night for students to eat.” They agreed to the arrangement.

He reported the plan to the Rebbe, and that *seder* night, he merited a special *kiruv*:

Before the *seder*, various close individuals would be invited into the Rebbe’s room to receive matzah. That year, the Rebbe called Dr. Block inside, and told him, “Take as many matzahs as you need.”

Not About Drinking

Students and community members alike were drawn to Dr. Block’s intellect, coupled with his genuine sincerity.

“Dr. Block knew how to attract and keep students interested,” related a former student, Mr. Reuven Stein, after Dr. Block’s passing. “His *farbrengens* kept them coming back. But it wasn’t a drinking party. There was great joy and intense Torah. Dr.

Block was a deep thinker and he was sharp. This is what attracted so many of us. We could get *mashke* anywhere but we could only get Dr. Block’s Chassidus from Dr. Block. Speaking of *mashke*, who could forget the well-meaning, unknowing guest who brought Dr. Block vodka. The only problem was... it was Pesach. This was the only time I know of that Dr. Block was speechless.”

“Just as the students who had met Dr. Block in his philosophy classes could not comprehend that he was primarily a Chossid of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” related another *mekurav*, Dan Marans, “it is hard for those of us who met him through Chabad to believe that this G-d fearing, caring, easy going, unpretentious, easily understood, fun loving sports fan had anything to do with Greek philosophy, not to mention being a Harvard educated, world renowned expert on Aristotle. Being able to sustain opposites is a G-dly trait that Dr. Block was able to achieve.”

All of Professor Block’s activities were done under the close guidance

of the Rebbe, through letters, *maanos*, and calls with Rabbi Hodakov. (In several letters, the Rebbe writes, “I will read all the *panim* at the Tziyun—which seems to mean that he was sending *panim* from many other individuals as well). Dr. Block also posed questions in Chassidus to the Rebbe, and received several answers. In Dr. Block’s archive, there are more than 30 letters (*kloli-proti*) from the Rebbe, with many additions in the Rebbe’s handwriting.

“Dr. Block told me,” says Dan Marans, “that he had a very deep relationship with the Rebbe.” After Gimmel Tammuz, when the Rebbe could no longer answer his questions in person, “he started meditating about what the Rebbe would want him to do and after a few minutes he always knew what the Rebbe would have answered.”

The Rebbe’s Miracle Conference

The Rebbe always wanted Dr. Block to speak at conferences and produce papers on philosophy. A request once

The Enigmatic Vechulu

Reb Mottel Chein related:

When Dr. Block got engaged, he received, like all *chasanim*, a letter from the Rebbe. He called his friends to a *farbrengen* at the yeshiva dormitory on Lincoln and Troy. Throughout the night, Yitzchok spoke about one thing, the greeting that opened the letter. It was a more or less standard opening: “To the G-d fearing, upright man, a Chossid etc. Yitzchok Sheyichye.” He was not perturbed or baffled by the Rebbe’s lofty descriptions of him, a newly minted Chossid.

“The Rebbe sees my soul as it exists in its supernal birthplace, in A”K, not as I appear in this world,” he said.

But he didn’t understand the “*Vechulu*.”

What could the Rebbe be alluding to? By night’s end, he arrived at a conclusion.

“With the etc. the Rebbe means to say, ‘Don’t be a *shvantz*.’”

Seeing this philosophy doctoral student grapple with the meaning of the Rebbe’s letter the entire night with a sincerity rarely found in more distinguished Chassidim, affected me deeply.

came from an international conference on Greek Philosophy being held in Brown University, and Dr. Block agreed to speak. Some time later, he discovered that he was scheduled to speak on Shabbos morning.

“I wrote to the Rebbe right away, asking what I should do, but I received no answer. Another month goes by. I write again. No answer.

“I get a call a week before the conference from Rabbi Hodakov. He says I should tell the chairman that an emergency has arisen and I need to be in New York for Shabbos—could he switch my talk to Friday morning?

“I said ‘You can’t do that a week before...’”

With fear and trepidation, Yitzchok called the chairman. “Is it possible to switch my talk to Friday morning?”

“I was just on the verge of calling you,” the chairman responded, “because the professor scheduled to speak Friday morning has come down with a terrible flu and can’t make it.”

Yitzchok delivered his talk on Friday morning, and rushed to a bus leaving for New York. A full three-hour trip, he was barely going to make it.

The weather was terrible. Dr. Block managed to ride the subway a bit before *shkiah* arrived and walked the rest of the way.

“I came to the farbrengen on Shabbos; the Rebbe looked at me and smiled, and said, ‘Block, say *l’chaim*.’”

“Oh, I thought to myself, the Rebbe did it again... Poor fellow there—a very famous philosopher—he had to get a flu so that I should be able to give the talk on Friday and be able to come to the farbrengen for Shabbos Mevarchim...”

Torah Institutions

The Blocks had moved into town with a one-year-old baby, their son Chaim. When time came for him to enroll in preschool, Mrs. Block

opened a Jewish preschool. When he graduated kindergarten, the Rebbe said that if they have five kids on board, they should start a Jewish day school. With time, the Jewish community had a full Jewish infrastructure, thanks to the Blocks; a preschool, day school, Orthodox *minyán*, a functioning Hillel, mikveh, and eventually, a successful Chabad House. This all took place alongside Professor Block’s “official” job at the university.

Not everyone took it easily.

“I was always being accused of being too religious; ‘Dr. Block is a fanatic, he’s a Chossid, he wears tzitzis and a beard...’ The university gave me no issue whatsoever, but many Jews in the community were incensed.

“There were many times I wanted to resign but the Rebbe always refused. I once told the Rebbe I wanted to resign because the community politics were so time consuming that it was taking away from my work at the university. The Rebbe responded, ‘If you can find someone with more *yiras Shamayim* than you have, you can give it to him...’”

A Midnight Farbrengen

In addition to his work in London, Dr. Block lectured on Yiddishkeit in many different venues, most notably at the yearly Pegisha, where he

would hold his famous “Midnight Farbrengen.”⁴

“Those first few years of the sixties and seventies,” Dr. Block related, “were the real good years. The hippies were the best *keilim* you could possibly imagine, and the Rebbe knew it and made sure we utilized the opportunity.

“I don’t remember when or how it actually started, but at some point we started having midnight farbrengens on Motzei Shabbos of the Pegisha. Now there was always an official program for *melave malka* with a speaker and all but this happened a couple hours after that had concluded. Rabbi Hanoka⁵ was not at all happy with this because it completely ruined the schedule. Let’s be honest, if you are up until five in the morning farbrenging there is no way you can be ready for eight o’clock when the Sunday program is supposed to start.

“Those farbrengens were very uplifting and inspiring. I remember how there were buses waiting for many people who would go directly from the farbrengen to Morristown in order to spend the day in yeshiva. A lot of people became frum through those late night and unofficial farbrengens.”

Rabbi Shmuel Lew, who was heavily involved in the Pegisha in those years, relates, “In one of the earliest Pegishos, the students were asking Dr. Block many questions, and he answered every one of them—he



DR. BLOCK WITH THE STUDENTS OF THE LONDON HEBREW DAY SCHOOL HE FOUNDED. CIRCA 5731*

Vodka Vs. Water

Rabbi Yossie Nemes relates:

When I was on shlichus in South Africa between 5745 and 5747, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks farbrenged with a group of about 100 people and related the following.

He had been to several Pegisha weekends in New York and his favorite part had always been the Motzei Shabbos farbrengen with Dr. Block. One year, he and some of his friends who were already veterans of these Pegishos, noticed that Dr. Block had set aside a bottle of vodka to use at the farbrengen after Shabbos. They played a prank on him by pouring out the vodka and filling the bottle with water. They waited with baited breath for their prank to play out.

The next day when the farbrengen began, Dr. Block asked for a *lchaim*. They all watched as he said a *bracha* and drank from the cup. He looked around and said, "This is the difference between a Chossid and a non-Chossid. They look the same... they both keep Shabbos and put on tefillin, but it is like water and vodka. One is just plain, the other fills you with warmth and inspiration."



COURTESY OF THE BLOCK FAMILY

PRESENTING THE CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER WITH A SIDDUR, CIRCA 5750* (SEE DERHER ISSUE 53, A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS FOR THE STORY BEHIND THIS GIFT).

PICTURED ARE RABBI ZALMAN AHARON GROSSBAM, RABBI BEREL MOCHKIN, DR. BLOCK, RABBI AVROHOM ALTEIN, PRIME MINISTER BRIAN MULRONEY

was brilliant. Then, they asked him how he had become religious. He said, 'I'm not on a psychiatrist's couch,' and he refused to answer the question.

"Somehow, the Rebbe got wind of this, and sent him a *tzettel* telling him

that he should tell his story. That day at brunch, he related the entire story."

What The Rebbe Wants

Without the official title of shliach, Professor Block transformed Jewish life on his campus and the local community. In fact, as mentioned,

despite the sometimes difficult circumstances, the Rebbe never allowed him to move away.

"I kept getting offers from other universities, UCLA, Claremont Graduate School in Los Angeles, and others, and I kept asking the Rebbe if I should accept them. But I never received an answer. I had an offer from Stony Brook in Long Island, which meant I could move to Crown Heights and practically live in 770... No answer.

"The Rebbe never told me to do something if he knew that I didn't want to do it. There were situations that I know of where the Rebbe gave people instructions which he knew they wouldn't want to do. But in my case, he never did it.

"Finally, I told my wife, 'Look, the Rebbe is not going to agree to our move. He wants us to stay here...'

"My entire life has been a series of miracles from the Rebbe. Step after step, I could never have succeeded in doing any of those things myself.

"I feel like the Rebbe said, 'I'm going to take this guy who thinks nothing of himself, and make him into a great philosopher, because it's important that he should have an influence on Jewish students. That's what he had in mind.

"And today, hundreds of people, if not more, have been affected. Without exaggeration." **1**

1. This story took place before the Rebbe publicly accepted the *nesius* on Yud Shevat 5711.
2. For more on the Rebbe's guidance about attending college, see *Derher* Sivan 5777, pg. 38, "How to Make a Living."
3. *Toras Menachem* vol. 20, p. 394. Chabad.org/392177.
4. For the full history of Pegisha, see *Derher* Adar II 5779 pg. 12, "Changing Lives Forever."
5. Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Hanoka was a prominent scientist and *baal teshuva* who was very involved in the Pegisha. For his own fascinating story, see *Derher* Elul 5776 pg. 38, "The First of Thousands."