

RELEASED EST. TIME 5788

**RESCUING JEWISH
AMERICAN YOUTH ONE HOUR A WEEK**



לעילוי נשמת
ר' בנימין בן ר' דוד ע"ה
גלב"ע ו' אלול ה'תשע"ט
תנ"צ'ב'ה'

נדפס ע"י בנו
הרה"ת ר' שמואל אהרן וזוגתו מרת חנה
ומשפחתם שיחיו
נובאק



VEVIEL SCHILDKRAUT VIA JEM 108597

THE REBBE DISTRIBUTES CHANUKAH
GELT TO CHILDREN OF RELEASED
TIME, 27 KISLEV 5737*.



NGFIE ARCHIVES

RELEASED TIME IN EAST
FLATBUSH, CIRCA 5711*.

Once, on a Wednesday afternoon, a *bochur* was sitting and learning in the upstairs *zal* of 770, across the hall of the Rebbe's room. The room was empty since all the other *bochurim* were out on "Released Time."

Suddenly the light went out. The startled *bochur* looked up and was astonished to see the Rebbe had entered the room and flipped the light switch. The message was clear: Now was not the time to be learning in *zal*, because on Wednesday afternoon everyone should be on "Released Time."

Providing proper chinuch for children is one of the primary missions of our generation. In 5702* the Friediker Rebbe initiated the earliest Lubavitch flagship educational program to bring Yiddishkeit to the furthest reaches of the Jewish community. Utilizing the opportunity granted by the government for public school children to be excused from school one hour per week to receive religious instruction - known as "Released Time" - Lubavitch embarked on an ambitious mission to ensure these children received the education they needed.

Over the next 80 years, Released Time unleashed a revolution on Jewish education in America, transforming the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and inspiring many to enroll in proper Jewish schools. Today the program includes periodic day camps, Shabbatons, home visits, holiday programming and more.

This article will explore the history, impact and importance of this legendary program.

The information contained in this article was culled from the fascinating album:
Shiurei Limmud Hados, Historical Review of the Released Time Program of the National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education.

AMERICA IZ NIT ANDERSH

Upon arriving on the shores of the United States on 9 Adar Sheni 5700*, the Friediker Rebbe declared that whereas many felt America was not a place for the authentic Yiddishkeit that flourished in Europe before the war, he would do everything to show that America was no different. Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim and affiliate schools were immediately established and hundreds of Jewish children started receiving an authentic yeshiva education. But the Friediker Rebbe wanted to elevate the quality of *chinuch* for every Jewish child in the greater New York area.

There were other Jewish day schools and many afternoon *talmud Torahs* in the city, and although some were authentic, many others were unfortunately staffed by teachers who were *mechalelei Shabbos* and who certainly did not personify *yiras Shamayim*, to say the least.

In the month of Cheshvan 5702* the Friediker Rebbe penned a letter¹ to an American *talmid* learning in Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim and an American *talmid* learning in Yeshivas Torah Vodaas, charging them with the task of creating a committee of yeshiva *bochurim* dedicated to providing authentic *chinuch* for all Jewish children in New York, in conjunction with the recently established Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch.

The Friediker Rebbe described the immediate tasks of the committee:

1. To conduct a census in all Jewish communities of the greater New York areas. Coordinate teams of yeshiva *bochurim* to go from door to door, meet the parents and inquire whether their children were learning in an institution that provided an authentic Jewish education. Create a questionnaire that would

On motion duly made and passed, it was decided to establish a division of the activities of MERKOS L'INYONEI CHINUCH, INC. under the name of the "COMMITTEE FOR FURTHERANCE OF JEWISH EDUCATION". This committee's functions would be at present primarily devoted to the development and spread of religious instruction of public school children during the "religion release hour", as well as other activities as will from time to time be assigned to the committee.

A motion was duly made that the person authorized to sign checks on the bank account on behalf of the corporation be the Chairman of the Executive Committee and the Treasurer. This motion was carried.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned. Dated the 7th day of October, 1943.

M. S. Schwartzman
Chairman

N. M. Friedman
Secretary

פרסום ראשון!

COURTESY OF MERKOS L'INYONEI CHINUCH

EXCERPTS FROM THE "MINUTES" OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF MERKOS L'INYONEI CHINUCH, HELD ON 26 TISHREI, 5703 IN 770 WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE FRIEDIKER REBBE.

1. To help obtain the names of the children, their addresses and the schools they attended. If their children were not yet enrolled in proper Jewish schools, encourage them to do so and recommend the closest one to them. If tuition was the challenge, find ways to subsidize it.
2. To visit every Jewish school and politely gather information on its size, the observance level of the principals and teachers, and what type of curriculum and books they used. Communicate with the faculties that a list would be compiled and publicized of all the Jewish schools that provided an authentic Jewish education, to raise their enrollment and arrange financial aid for them as well. At the same time this list

would expose those schools who called themselves *Talmud Torahs* but in truth were providing the exact opposite type of education—the "treifah *Talmud Torahs*."

"When you truly care for the proper chinuch of these children with a 'yiras Shamayim gefil' your work will inspire the schools currently lacking in areas of yiras Shamayim to make the necessary changes."

On several occasions, the Friediker Rebbe declared that the call of the hour for all *talmidei hayeshivos* in America was to dedicate themselves to rescuing as many children as possible from the *treifah Talmud Torahs* and enable them to have a proper chinuch.

A committee named "Vaad Maginei Chinuch Hakosher" was established and *talmidim* of several *yeshivos* spent their lunch breaks canvassing Jewish neighborhoods. Although they were successful in convincing the parents

of many children to attend the right schools, it was impossible to reach the tens of thousands of Jewish children throughout the city and bring them to the right schools. An alternative avenue was desperately needed to bring Yiddishkeit to these children.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION BECOMES LEGAL

A bedrock of the American governing system is the separation of Church and State, ensuring the government does not impose a specific religion on its citizens. As such, formal religious education is prohibited in American public schools.

During the school year of 1925-26 (5686), several non-Jewish religious organizations made an arrangement with the school district of White Plains, NY to allow the children to attend religious classes for one hour a week. The classes were taught by teachers not associated with the schools, off school grounds. A similar system had been legally approved in the state of Indiana in 1914 (5674), but there was no such law in New York State.

This new arrangement stirred controversy, and the next year, a lawsuit was brought before the New York State Court of Appeals. The court ruled that the weekly religious instruction off school grounds was not in violation of any laws, but the

controversy continued to play out in the court of public opinion.

Finally, in 1940 (5700), the New York State Legislature voted into law the provision for public school children to receive religious instruction for one hour each week, in accordance with guidelines set forth by the State Board of Regents, provided parents allowed their children to attend.

For a year after the law came into effect, mostly non-Jewish organizations took advantage of it. There were perhaps 25 Jewish classes in all of New York City, mostly because

almost all Jewish organizations opposed the idea from the outset.

Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Konikov was the *rav* of the Tzemach Tzedek shul in Williamsburg and the administrator of the local Beis Rivkah school for girls. In the winter of 5702* he learned about the Released Time program happening in his area for other faiths and reasoned it was a golden opportunity to reach the vast majority of local girls not currently enrolled in the Beis Rivkah.

He started his own program for Jewish children but it was very difficult for him. He sent a letter to



A RELEASED TIME CLASS IN EAST FLATBUSH, 5711*.

NCFJE ARCHIVES

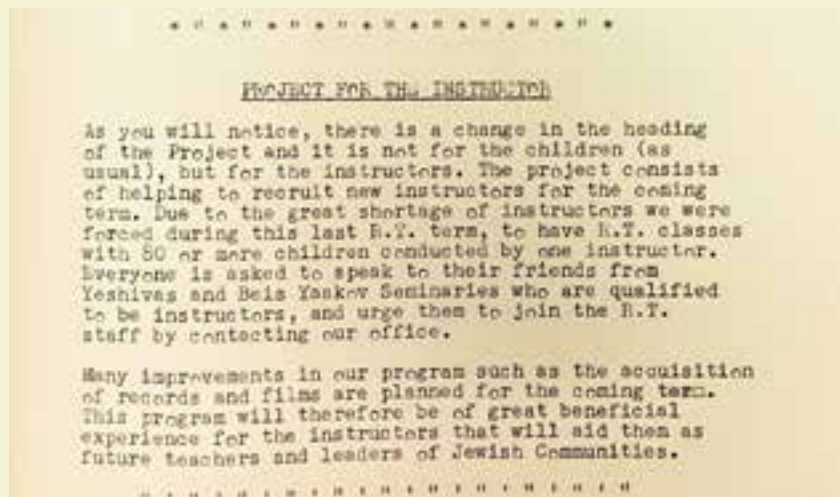


FIRST CFJE DINNER, 5709.

NCFJE ARCHIVES



ANNUAL CFJE CONVENTION, 6 SHEVAT 5711.



EXCERPT FROM THE TEACHER'S GUIDE OF 5720.

the Friediker Rebbe describing the program and its potential, and the letter was immediately forwarded to the Rebbe, the chairman of Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch.

On 7 Shevat 5703^{*2} the Rebbe notified Rabbi Konikov that his letter was received and that Merkos had undertaken the task of providing Released Time programming for all Jewish children in New York.

The above-mentioned committee was charged with coordinating Released Time, and within a year over 2,000 boys and girls were enrolled. *Talmidim* from several *yeshivos*

volunteered to teach every Wednesday, a teacher's guide was published with regularity and the program became known as "מיטוואך שעה – Wednesday Hour."

Although there were some boroughs that had designated a different day of the week for Released Time, this is the name the program became widely known as, and this is the term often used in the *sichos* and *igros* of the Rebbeim.

The program was wildly successful and committee members were happy to report on the weekly classes as well as the fact that so many children

had enrolled in proper schools as a result of their inspiration. The Friediker Rebbe responded³ that their accomplishments until then were entirely insufficient. While 2,000 students may be a nice number, it does not account for even a percentage of the amount of children who so desperately need a proper *chinuch*. There was much more work to be done!

In the same letter the Friediker Rebbe named the committee "Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education."

On 3 Nissan 5704^{*4} the Friediker Rebbe instructed Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch to establish an official organization to lead the Released Time efforts. It should be called שעה - של"ה לימוד הדת with an official mission statement, bylaws, budget, logo and a dedicated director. (The name later became שיעורי לימוד הדת.)

This organization would operate independently but under the supervision of Merkos. This made the *peulos* of Shaloh not a uniquely Lubavitch project and would therefore involve young men and women from all segments of the *frum* community.

Yeshivos from all across the spectrum—Reb Yitzchok Elchonon, Reb Chaim Berlin, Yavneh, Torah Vodaas and others—were involved in Released Time. In each yeshiva there was a liaison to the CFJE to recruit the *bochurim*, ensuring they received teacher's guides and had their expenses covered each week.

In addition to teaching the classes, scores of volunteers were needed to recruit students to participate in Released Time. One could not walk into a public school and announce that all Jewish children should follow them to the nearest shul. Every parent needed to sign a document requesting the school allow their children to join the Released Time program. Yeshiva *bochurim* would canvas entire

THIS IS THE MISSION OF YESHIVA BOCHURIM

There were those who found it odd that yeshiva bochurim were dedicating so much time to this activism, reasoning that they should be focusing all of their time and energy on their learning instead. But the Rebbeim clearly instructed differently.

In the winter of 5703* one of the bochurim involved with Released Time wrote a letter to the Frierdiker Rebbe expressing his inner turmoil at the fact that his activism is taking away time from his learning and distracts him while he's learning as well. In response,⁷ the Frierdiker Rebbe explained how essential chinuch work is, eclipsing everything else.

"Words are inadequate to express the great merit one has from doing this holy work. All the supernal angels and heavenly neshamos in Gan Eden are jealous of all those involved in the mission of saving Jewish children from the web of kefira spun by the apostate faculties of the treifah Talmud Torahs, and bringing these children under the wings of the Shechina in the proper Talmud Torahs.

"The Mittlerer Rebbe writes that spiritual death is worse than physical death. Imagine you saw Jewish children drowning or trapped in a burning home, and you and your friends had the ability to rescue them from death. Would you or your friends stand back and be concerned about your Torah learning?!

"All the more so when you witness so many Jewish children drowning in the sea of kefira and being burned by the poisonous kefira they are being exposed to. How can you and your friends be concerned about your Torah learning?! You must all 'cast your lives aside' and work with much mesiras nefesh and enthusiasm!

"The state of affairs of chinuch is the responsibility of the yeshiva bochurim. The rabbonim are doing their part but you must get the job done. Each one of you must realize your purpose and obligation."

Regarding his distractions during learning, the Frierdiker Rebbe dismissed the issue as his general problem with focus, and not the fault of the activism.

"Apparently it is your nature to be distracted and this happened before your activism. You must train yourself to control your thoughts so that when you are learning nothing else should distract you."

In the spring of 5715* a certain Chossid wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking whether it was appropriate for yeshiva bochurim to dedicate time to recruiting new students to the Reshet Oholei Yosef Yitzchok

schools in Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe replied in sharp and direct terms:⁸

"I was shocked to [read such doubts] from you, more than from other Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel. You were in America when the [Frierdiker] Rebbe—the nossi of klal Yisroel, not just anash—sent out the talmidei hatmimim to do chinuch work. He chose the 'cream of the crop' and dispatched them to arei hasadeh to establish yeshivos in order to teach alef beis, reading, siddur, Chumash, Mishnah and Gemara, despite the fact that these talmidim were capable of accomplishing much in learning Chassidus in addition to nigleh.

"You are also aware of the Mitvach Sha'ah program and its purpose to teach young children who do not even speak Yiddish and need to be told about reciting Modeh Ani, the basics of Shabbos observance, etc. For this the [Frierdiker] Rebbe also dispatched the yeshiva bochurim, even those already involved in learning Chassidus and davening b'avodah despite the fact that the number of talmidim in Tomchei Temimim at the time was very small..."

Rabbi Aharon Cousin, who learned in 770 in the 5710s*, relates:⁹

"One year my birthday occurred on a Wednesday and when I was in yechidus a few days earlier I asked whether I should go to Released Time or perhaps I should skip it in order to learn more Torah on that day. Putting a great deal of emotion into his words, the Rebbe rejected the idea outright saying "Avadeh zolstu gayn—of course you should go!" adding that I should teach the kids something extra special precisely because it was my birthday.

"A friend of mine wrote to the Rebbe that he wanted to be exempt from doing Released Time because he didn't think reciting brachos with the children and giving them prizes accomplished much. Furthermore, it took three to four hours out of his day, travelling to Coney Island and back, and he felt his time would be better spent sitting and learning. He also argued that the thought of knowing he would have to disrupt his studies preyed on his mind all week. So he asked the Rebbe's permission to be exempt.

"The Rebbe wrote back to him: 'I want you to know that all the neshamos in Gan Eden, even the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu, are envious of you because you have the opportunity to recite Shema with young Jewish children. The mitzvos you do with those precious children certainly will have an everlasting effect."



A RELEASED TIME CLASS AT HEBREW LANGUAGE ACADEMY (HLA) OF BROOKLYN, TEVES 5779.

neighborhoods, going door to door making parents aware of their local program and encouraging them to sign up.

Proper locations needed to be arranged, treats and supplies purchased and delivered in an orderly fashion, and money needed to be raised as well. All this was accomplished in those early years exclusively by yeshiva *bochurim*.

In addition to the weekly classes, much thought and energy was invested to ensure the children applied their lessons on a daily basis and the CFJE provided hundreds of pairs of tzitzis, mezuzos and other *tashmishei kedusha* to the children and their families free of charge.

On Chai Elul 5704*, the Frierdiker Rebbe spoke a *sicha*⁵ at the conference of Agudas Chasidei Chabad at the Park Manor Ballroom and summed up the Released Time program as follows:

"This past year 3,000 students were enrolled in the Mitvach Sha'ah program. They were taught about emunah in Hashem and recited brachos together. The children come from treif homes, without mezuzos or Shabbos,

yet the children are reciting brachos, pesukim and the like. This causes a big commotion in heaven and all the malachim come [to witness it]."

During Chanukah 5705* the CFJE organized their first annual convention for the many volunteers and activists involved with Released Time, featuring renowned educators and motivational speakers to inspire everyone to increase their dedication to Released Time. After the main speeches, there were smaller sessions where the activists would discuss issues with the program and devise solutions on how to enhance the weekly classes.

The Frierdiker Rebbe sent a special letter to the participants and this became a yearly tradition which the Rebbe continued after Yud Shevat.

In the letter to the first convention the Frierdiker Rebbe set a goal for them to recruit at least 5,000 students to Released Time for that year.

The *peulos* of Released Time were not limited to New York City. Shluchim, who had been recently sent to open *yeshivos* in many cities, started Released Time programs too, and by the summer of 5705* Merkos

reported in the *Pardes Bulletin* that Released Time was up and running in cities throughout New York State such as Buffalo, Rochester, Monticello and Ellenville, and all over North America—in Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, California, Rhode Island and even Canada.

In the summer of 5705*, Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht was appointed to lead the CFJE and the Released Time program.⁶ Under his leadership, the CFJE and the Released Time program grew exponentially and within a few years over 10,000 children were participating every week in New York City alone.

With this growth, the finances increased and an annual dinner was arranged featuring the "who's who" of the New York Jewish philanthropic community. The Frierdiker Rebbe and the Rebbe both sent special letters to the first dinner in Adar 5709*, a tradition the Rebbe continued after Yud Shevat.

PUBLICATIONS

As mentioned earlier, the CFJE published weekly teacher's guides to help the volunteers prepare for the Released Time classes. The Frierdiker Rebbe was very pleased with the idea, encouraging them to have the guides reviewed by professionals and to ensure that the volunteers had them several days in advance so that they could be properly prepared.

In addition, the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed them to publish a small, eight-page booklet to be distributed to the students free of charge that would contain some *tefillos* such as *Modeh Ani*, some of the *birchos hanehenin*, *Shema Yisroel*, *Baruch Sheim*, *Torah Tziva* and *Beyadcha*, as well as messages encouraging them to honor their parents, learn well and participate in *Mesibos Shabbos*. That

year 10,000 copies were published and distributed.

In 5705* Merkos began publishing a monthly booklet titled SHALOH with four sections: 1. A story focused on teaching a *halacha*. 2. A story in installments about Jewish history. 3. A story focused on teaching *middos* and *derech erez*. 4. A comic strip.

The comic strip was created by artist Mr. Michel Schwartz and the Rebbe was deeply involved in the concept as well as the details of the drawings.

Twenty-four booklets were published in 5705*-5706* and another twenty-four booklets were published in 5721*-5722*.

Although the target audience of the SHALOH booklets were the Released Time children and the Teachers Guides were created for the Released Time instructors, they served as an invaluable resource for Jewish schools around the world at a time when there was almost nothing available in the realm of professional Jewish curricula.

MISGUIDED OPPOSITION

Despite the fact that the weekly hour of religious instruction for public school children was the state law, there were many who continued to oppose the idea for different reasons, led by Jewish organizations from opposite ends of the spectrum.

One form of opposition, coming mainly from those seeking to weaken Jewish education in general, argued that any vestige of cooperation on the part of the public school system facilitating religious instruction was in violation of the constitutional premise of separation of Church and State. This laughable approach was championed by many secular Jewish organizations and movements who actively supported efforts to overturn the law in the courts and in local legislatures.

In 5708* a Jewish mother and a Protestant mother filed a lawsuit



FIRST ISSUE OF THE SHALOH PUBLICATION.

KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

SECOND EDITION OF THE RELEASED TIME TEACHER'S GUIDE, WITH LESSON PLANS FOR A FULL YEAR. PUBLISHED 5720*.



RELEASED TIME STUDENTS SING AT A CONCERT ARRANGED BY CFJE, 5705*.

NCJIE ARCHIVES



RELEASED TIME INSTRUCTORS BY THE CFJE CONVENTION OF 5709*.

NCJIE ARCHIVES

against the City Board of Education claiming that the religious instructions were unconstitutional. The struggle reached the United State Supreme Court and in the spring of 5712* the Released Time program was found to be constitutional.

The New York Times reported on the landmark decision:¹⁰

“The Supreme Court’s decision upholding the released time program for pupils in New York State ‘places the final stamp of approval’ on the plan, Andrew G. Clauson Jr., president of the City Board of Education, declared yesterday...

“The decision had been awaited with much interest since a 1948 Supreme Court decision found that the released time as practiced in Champaign, Ill. violated the Constitution. There the instruction was conducted within the schools by religious instructors of various faiths who came into the classrooms. In New York City, religious instruction is not given on public school property...

“Justice Douglas, writing for the majority, disposes of the constitutional question as follows: ‘We follow the McCollum Case [from Champaign]. But we cannot expand it to cover the present released time program [as practiced in New York City] unless separation of church and state means that public institutions can make no adjustments of their schedules to accommodate the religious needs of the people. We cannot read into the Bill of Rights such a philosophy of hostility to religion...

“We find the majority opinion persuasive...

“In this time of so much moral bankruptcy, with the demonstrated need for religious and ethical training, we feel that the door cannot be closed to a program—shared by 2 million or more young children over the nation each year—that offers promise

of strengthening the religious and moral fiber of our youth.”

Another form of opposition came from several *frum* enclaves in the Jewish community. They reasoned that a program providing a bare minimum of Jewish education would suffice for many parents, discouraging them from sending their children to Jewish schools.

Besides, how much can you teach these children in one hour a week, argued some.

Over time both of these arguments proved to be baseless. The fact was that the Released Time program encouraged thousands of children, who otherwise had no connection to any type of Jewish education previously, to enroll full time in Jewish schools.

Regarding the many thousands more who remained in public schools, the weekly hour provided them with an education they would have otherwise never received. And we should never underestimate the value of a Jewish child reciting “Shema Yisroel” or a *bracha* over a treat, even once in their lifetime. All the more so on a weekly basis.

In addition, since the weekly religious instruction was a fact of life, there were many Jewish children who were participating in the non-Jewish religious Released Time programs, *Rachmana litzlan*, because there was no Jewish programming available in their schools and they did not want to be different than their gentile friends. The CFJE Released Time program was helping avert this disaster as well.

Basic Constitutional Principle Upheld

The recent decision of the United States supreme court, in upholding the constitutionality of the released-time educational programs, was a basic decision affecting the future of the nation.

The case was based upon a practice in New York City and in many other places of providing for religious education for school pupils through released time from their school studies.

In 1948, in the McCollum case, the supreme court ruled against released time when the religious teaching was given on school property. This has had the unfortunate effect of discouraging the practice of releasing school pupils for religious instruction during school hours.

The recent decision in which the New York City public schools were primarily involved dealt with holding instruction during released time at designated places other than on school premises.

Such a decision indicates that the majority of the members of the supreme court realize the need of greater emphasis upon religious education and that provision for this does not conflict with the basic law of the nation.

Now that the principle of released time has been established, it will undoubtedly be more widely used throughout the nation and more public school pupils will gain the benefits from religious instruction.

The broad position taken by the majority of the highest court, as expressed by Justice William O. Douglas, was:

“We are a religious people whose institutions presume a with religious authorities by adjusting the schedule of public events to sectarian aids, it follows the best of our traditions.”

THE SUPREME COURT’S DECISION WAS REPORTED AROUND THE COUNTRY. GREENSBURG DAILY NEWS (GREENSBURG, INDIANA), 13 MAY 1952 (LAG B’OMER 5712).

The successes were so obvious that over time even the ardent opponents were forced to begrudgingly admit that given the circumstances, Released Time was the most powerful antidote to the tragic reality of Jewish education in America.

In a fascinating letter penned by Dr. Nissen Mindel in 5724* on the Rebbe’s behalf addressing the issue of school prayer, he refers to the Released Time program and its undeniable success:¹¹

“Anyone who knew the late Lubavitcher Rebbe of saintly memory, either personally or by reputation, knew of his self-dedication to Torah and to one hundred percent Yiddishkeit, and also knew of his vast experience in Chinuch. No one, therefore, could make the charge that by initiating and developing the Release Time program, consisting of one hour a week, he would undermine the religious character and the future of the children (though there was some bitter opposition due to ill advised or misguided reasons.)

THE CORPORATION

One week after Yud Shevat 5711* the Rebbe gave an interview to the Yiddish newspaper “פארווערטס—Forward” and amongst many topics highlighted the importance of Released Time.

“There is a law permitting school children to leave public school for one hour a week to receive religious instruction. The Catholics and Protestants utilized the opportunity, but not the Jews. The [Friediker] Rebbe came and said ‘Call upon the young boys and girls to teach these children Yiddishkeit. If they aren’t educated themselves, let them become educated. Take the children out of public school for one hour a week and bring them here.’ Thus started a major movement under the directorship of Rabbi Yaakov Hecht and Mr. Moshe Morgenstern, a movement with great success.”

Two months later, at a meeting held in 770 on 7 Adar II, the Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education was incorporated as an official corporation with the Rebbe signed on the Certificate of Incorporation as the first trustee (see photo). In addition, the Rebbe accepted the title of *nossi* of the CFJE.



CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION OF CFJE, 5 ADAR II 5711*.

“If when the program was initiated over twenty years ago, there could be room for a difference of opinions to whether it was a wise approach, everyone must now admit that the program has been highly successful in that it has been instrumental in producing Rabbis and Torah-observing laymen, through the stimulus which that single hour a week has given many children to pursue their religious education in the Talmud Torah Hebrew Day Schools and Yeshivot.”

LUBAVITCH AT THE WHITE HOUSE

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt convened the first White House Conference on Children and Youth. From then on, every 10 years the White House hosted thousands of delegates for a week of discussions devoted to improving the lives of children across the nation. Each conference focused on issues relevant to the decade in which the conference was held.



THE LUBAVITCHER DELEGATION TO THE WHITE HOUSE, 5720*.
LEFT TO RIGHT, RABBI ZALMAN POSNER, RABBI YAAKOV YEHUDA HECHT, RABBI URIEL TZIMMER, DR. NISSAN MINDELE, RABBI DAVID HOLLANDER.

EXTRA TEN MINUTES

The purpose of Released Time is to influence the children to apply the lessons they are learning during that hour at home. In a *duch* from the winter of 5723* it was reported to the Rebbe that “in most cases, the teacher stays 10 or more minutes longer past three o’clock in order to speak to the children on an informal basis about doing the mitzvos, going to Talmud Torah, etc.”

On this specific detail the Rebbe responded “ת”ח על—הבשורות טובות—thank you for the good tidings.”

In 5727*, when Rabbi Shlomo Cunin was seeking to bring another shliach to Los Angeles to lead the Released Time program there, he mentioned to the Rebbe in *yechidus* that he would like to offer the position to Rabbi Avrohom Levitansky. The Rebbe asked if Rabbi Levitansky was involved with Released Time as a *bochur* in New York, and when Rabbi Cunin answered in the affirmative the Rebbe asked if he remained after the classes to speak with the children.

Clearly, the Rebbe expected that the *bochurim* take an active interest in the children’s growth in Yiddishkeit and not run away from the class after delivering the obligatory one hour of instruction.



A RELEASED TIME CLASS IN ROCKWOOD PARK, 5751.*

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASIDEI CHABAD



BIKKUR BAYIS WITH RELEASED TIME CHILDREN, CHANUKAH 5710*.

NCJE ARCHIVES



BIKKUR BAYIS WITH RELEASED TIME CHILDREN, CHANUKAH 5779*.

YOSSI SPIERO



NCFJE ARCHIVES

A RELEASED TIME CLASS IN EAST FLATBUSH, CIRCA 5705*.



NCFJE ARCHIVES

A RELEASED TIME CLASS IN EAST FLATBUSH, 5711.

The conference of 1960 (5720) marked the 50th anniversary since its inception and Lubavitch was represented with a unique delegation: Rabbis Yaakov Yehuda Hecht, Dovid Hollander, Nissen Mindel, Zalman Posner and Uriel Tzimmer. The conference was held in Washington D.C. from 28 Adar through 5 Nissan 5720*.

This marked the first time Lubavitch participated in such a high profile national event, and they were instructed by the Rebbe on three specific agenda items they were to advocate for:

1. Federal financial aid for parochial schools.
2. Greater opportunities for religious instruction such as Released Time.
3. To separate the genders in school, thereby raising the moral standards of the schools and the students.

There were various forums at the conference but the Lubavitch delegation participated specifically in the forum dedicated to moral and ethical education. All three agenda items were controversial, with the

greatest challenge coming specifically from Jewish organizations misguidedly fixated on eradicating religion from the public sphere.

The Lubavitcher delegation waged a fierce battle in favor of Released Time. Ultimately the battle was won and the conference, with a majority of 206 over 147, adopted resolution #459:

“That children and youth be granted greater opportunities for specific religious education in many weekday activities, including released time or diminished time from public school for programs under the supervision of local religious bodies.”

The delegation's mission was considered a major success. During the farbrengen of Acharon Shel Pesach several weeks later, the Rebbe spoke in sharp terms about those who constantly seek to undermine the efforts to provide more children with proper *Yiddishe chinuch* and that their *yetzer hara* devises strange ways of convincing these naysayers that their arguments are rooted in concerns of *yiras Shamayim*.

On a practical note, the Rebbe called on everyone to redouble their efforts in ensuring the Released Time

program grow and to influence those not yet convinced of its importance to finally realize their mistake.

“When you will do so in a pleasant manner, especially through providing clear proofs, pointing out lebedikeh kinder, living children that were rescued through the weekly Released Time hour: Here is a child now learning in a Talmud Torah or a yeshiva; here is a girl now enrolled in a Beis Rivkah or a Beis Yaakov; here is a woman already married and building a proper Jewish home. This will certainly have the desired impact [on those currently opposed to it].”¹²

SUMMER CAMPS, RALLIES AND THE ISRAELI DIVISION

As the stated purpose of Released Time was to provide a wholesome Jewish education to children who otherwise would not have access to it, Rabbi Hecht felt the need to open a kosher summer overnight camp for girls. Camp Emunah was established in 5713* and the Rebbe visited the camp grounds in Greenfield Park, NY during the historic visits to Gan Yisroel.¹³

Over the years CFJE had established many summer day camps



LAG B'OMER 5726*.

NCFJE ARCHIVES

in the city as well, going back to the 5700s*.

During Chanukah 5731*, Released Time started a yearly tradition of inviting the students of Released Time to 770 to join the Rebbe for Mincha and menorah lighting. Students from local *chadarim* started joining as well. In 5738*, after the children said the 12 Pesukim the Rebbe spoke a *sicha* for them and Rabbi Hecht translated in English for the benefit of the Released Time children. Afterwards the Rebbe distributed *Chanukah gelt* to the children through their instructors.

After the disaster of the Yom Kippur War, many Israelis immigrated to the United States and a large number of them settled in Queens. Mostly for financial reasons, the

vast majority of these children were enrolled in public schools instead of Jewish schools and they received no Jewish education at all.

Bochurim in 770 initiated and developed a special Israeli division under the Released Time umbrella catering to these children who would not gain much from attending the regular English-language Released Time classes. In addition, the Machneh Yisrael Day Camp was established in Queens under the auspices of Released Time.

In honor of 15 Shevat 5736* they started publishing short pamphlets entitled *Daf Layeled* and *Daf Lahorim* in Hebrew with short instructions connected with Yomim Tovim, etc.

The following episode illustrates the great attention the Rebbe paid to these pamphlets. Early one Wednesday morning, Rabbi Shmuel Zalmanov, the coordinator of the Israeli Division, submitted the *Daf Layeled* for Purim to *mazkirus*. Barely an hour after the Rebbe arrived at 770, Rabbi Zalmanov was urgently called to *mazkirus* and notified that the Rebbe made a correction to the pamphlet.

In the pamphlet there was a short description of the Purim story and Mordechai was presented as the uncle of Esther. The Rebbe corrected the narrative by writing “בן, מג[ילת] — He was a cousin, see Megilas Esther, *Perek 2 Possuk 7* — correct it.” The Megillah clearly states that Esther was Mordechai’s cousin!

Of all the urgent mail waiting for the Rebbe's response, the pamphlets being distributed to the Israeli children educated by Released Time needed to have the most accurate information about Purim. All the instructors were told to add the word **בן** before the word **דוד** thereby changing the meaning from "uncle" to "cousin" before distributing the pamphlets to the children.

A year later, when Rabbi Zalmanov needed to return to Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe ensured that he found a substitute to run the program in his absence.

During the 5740s* the concept of Jewish children attending Jewish day schools and yeshivos became more popular, and the amount of Jewish children attending public school in New York City had diminished dramatically; so participation in Released Time had dwindled considerably. Rabbi Hecht suggested that the program be rescheduled to Sunday which would provide better flexibility as well as opportunity to attract more children.

The Rebbe advised against it saying that since the idea of Released Time happening on Wednesday, specifically during the school week, was initiated by the Friediker Rebbe, he does not want to make any changes to the program.

It is important to realize that an integral element of the impact Released Time had on the children was the fact that the classes occurred during school hours. This emphasized that religious instruction was as important as all other school subjects, just not permitted to be taught on school premises.

HISTORIC FARBRENGEN

On the morning of the second day of Sukkos 5737*, a short while after the Rebbe had given his *arba minim* for the Chassidim to *bentch* on in



CFJE DAY CAMP, SUMMER 5712.

NCFJE ARCHIVES



RELEASED TIME DAY CAMP, WINTER 5780.

NCFJE/MENUSH AMIT

the Sukkah, he called for Rabbi Meir Harlig and asked him if he had seen Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht yet. When the Rebbe asked again some time later, a family member walked to East Flatbush where Rabbi Hecht served as the rav in a shul and notified him that the Rebbe was asking for him.

After Shacharis, Rabbi Harlig notified the Rebbe that Rabbi Hecht had arrived. The Rebbe gestured for

Rabbi Hecht to enter his room and told him that he would like to have a farbrengen ending with *kos shel bracha* for the Released Time children on Wednesday, the third day of Chol Hamoed, in the large Sukkah adjacent to 770.

The next day the Rebbe sent a note to Rabbi Hecht with a detailed program for the farbrengen. (See sidebar)

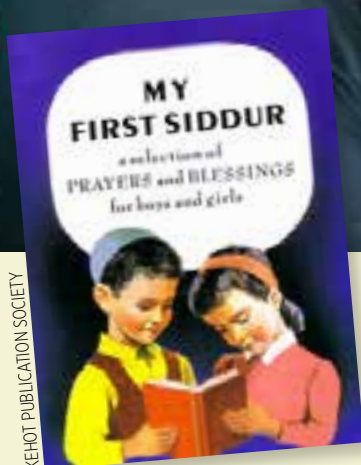


FARBRENGEN WITH THE CHILDREN OF RELEASED TIME IN THE SUKKA, 19 TISHREI 5737*.

VELVEL SCHILDKRAUT VIA JEM 108755



LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 235819



KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

IN HONOR OF YUD SHVAT, 5750*, RABBIS YAAKOV YEHUDA AND SHIMON HECHT PRESENT THE REBBE WITH COPIES OF THE NEWLY DESIGNED SIDDUR PRINTED FOR RELEASED TIME. RABBI YAAKOV YEHUDA SAID IT WAS FROM THE PRINTING OF THE "FIRST 40,000", WITH MANY MORE TO COME.

Hodakov that the farbrengen was very beautiful.¹⁴



Today, 80 years later, Released Time continues to be an essential duty of the *talmidim* learning in the Central Tomchei Temimim in 770. Close to 1,000 *Yiddishe kinderlach* from over 80 public schools are "released" at 2:00 p.m. every Wednesday to learn the basics of *Yiddishkeit* and *aleph beis*, recite *brachos*, and get a major boost of Jewish pride. As in the past, they continue to influence approximately ten percent of their students annually to transfer to yeshiva day schools, arrange special events for Yomim Tovim, Shabbatons, winter and summer day camps, and facilitate visits to the students' homes several times a year.

During the farbrengen of Shabbos Parshas Ki Seitzei 5750*, two days before the *shloshim* after the passing of Rabbi Hecht, the Rebbe spoke a *sicha* about the significance of *chinuch*, and especially the *chinuch* of public school

children, and how crucial it is to bringing the *geulah*.

*"Notwithstanding everything he [Rabbi Hecht] and others have accomplished in this area—the fact that the geulah has not yet arrived is proof that there is still much more to be done. This will certainly hasten the arrival of Moshiach."*¹⁵ **T**

1. Igros Kodesh Rayatz vol. 6 page 42.
2. Igros Kodesh vol. 1, p. 78.
3. Igros Kodesh Rayatz vol. 8, p. 204.
4. Ibid. p. 250.
5. Sefer Hasichos Admur HaRayatz 5704 p. 164.
6. See *A Staunch Soldier*, Derher Teves 5778.
7. Igros Kodesh Rayatz volume 7 page 126.
8. Igros Kodesh vol 11 page 93.
9. Here is My Story, JEM. chabad.org/3711266
10. SHALOH page 95.
11. Ibid. p. 169.
12. Toras Menachem vol. 28, p. 62.
13. See *In the Rebbe's Reshush*, Derher, Av 5775.
14. For more details and photos of this historic farbrengen, see *A Chassidisher Derher Issue 24* page 68: *Gathering in the Sukkah*. Video available at: chabad.org/3077584
15. Sefer Hasichos 5750 vol. 2, p. 666.

The announcement of this unique and historic farbrengen set 770 abuzz. In less than three days all the parents needed to be notified of this special opportunity and the logistics of transporting the children from their schools to 770 and then back home needed to be arranged.

Only the children, their instructors and those directly involved with Released Time were allowed to be present in the sukkah for the farbrengen. The *minyan* handpicked by the Rebbe to make "Hamotzi" at the farbrengen consisted of the Rebbe, the six members of *mazkirus*, Rabbi Hecht, Rabbi Mordechai Mentlik and Rabbi Berel Junik.

At 3:15 the children joined the Rebbe in shul for Mincha and by 4:15 everyone was ready for the Rebbe to enter the sukkah. The program went smoothly as planned and the Rebbe commented later to Rabbi