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קאלער



# A Greater Business

Reb Mayer Zeiler

Reb Mayer Zeiler is the proprietor of Flocktex, a textile business in Eretz Yisroel. He shared his fascinating story with the My Encounter team at Jewish Educational Media.

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# my story

Volume II

Some of Reb Mayer Zeiler's stories that are presented here are adapted from JEM's upcoming book, **My Story, Volume 2**.



## Beginnings

I was born in 5707\* in a DP camp in Germany. At the age of two, my parents moved to New York and settled in Crown Heights but I didn't have much of a connection to Lubavitch during my childhood. My father was associated with Bobov and I learned in Litvisher yeshivos. My real connection to Chabad and the Rebbe began upon my marriage to my wife Ella, daughter of the noted Chabad philanthropist, Reb Dovid Deitsch of New Haven.

Life was comfortable. After some time in kollel in 770, I began to settle down. I joined my father-in-law and started working at his business.

On one occasion in *yechidus*, the Rebbe looked at my *pan* and asked, “*Vos iz vegem parnasa? What about livelihood?*”

“Baruch Hashem,” I said. “We have *parnasa*.”

“*Uber a bracha darf men betten—* But you still need to ask for a blessing in this regard,” the Rebbe responded.

I immediately responded by asking for a *bracha*, which I received, and throughout my life I saw the Rebbe's *brachos* come to fruition in amazing ways.

In those days, the Rebbe encouraged and strongly requested that everyone buy a home in order to support the *shchunah*<sup>1</sup> so I searched for a suitable home in Crown Heights and soon wrote to the Rebbe asking for a *bracha* to close on the sale. To our surprise, the Rebbe told me to reject the offer. Instead, he said, I should continue with a rental. This was out of the ordinary, to say the least, but we followed the Rebbe's instructions and soon we understood what was behind them.

## Much More Than A Check

Shortly after the Yom Kippur War, my father-in-law asked the Rebbe how he could support Eretz Yisroel. He

assumed the Rebbe would tell him to write a check to “Tzach” (Lubavitch Youth Organization, headed by Rabbi Yisroel Leibov), but the Rebbe told him something else entirely: build a factory in the Holy Land. More specifically, the Rebbe instructed that it be situated in Nachlas Har Chabad in Kiryat Malachi which would soon be populated by a large number of Russian immigrants in need of jobs.

In those days, Eretz Yisroel was a backwater. Infrastructure was weak, taxes were high, and the bureaucracy was enormous. Starting a business there didn't seem to be a profitable endeavor. In fact, our financial advisors offered to meet with the Rebbe to “convince” him out of the

idea but we explained to them that we were building this factory at the Rebbe's behest to contribute to Eretz Yisroel and any potential profit was secondary.

We began working on a plan to erect a factory to produce our material—my father-in-law produced textiles—but the plans dragged on. There was a hurdle to overcome every step of the way and things weren't moving very fast. A year or two later, as my father-in-law and I passed by the Rebbe for *lekach* on Erev Yom Kippur, the Rebbe asked, “What's going on with the factory?”

There wasn't much to report but my father-in-law understood that the Rebbe wanted us to move on it. I had



RABBI YISROEL LEBBOV AT A TZACH KINUS, 5729.

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## Good News Too

After the *bris* of one of our sons, there was significant bleeding and I took the initiative to ask the Rebbe for a *bracha* at a farbrengen which happened to take place that night. Thankfully, the bleeding stopped soon thereafter. At a *yechidus* several months later the Rebbe asked about the incident and I explained that everything had worked out. The Rebbe responded,

“*Uber gute neiyes vil ich oichet gleich heren—but I would like to hear the good news right away too.*”

been involved in the business's sales department but now I was drafted to travel to Eretz Yisroel every few months to work on this new project.

There were mountains of stumbling blocks. The Israeli bureaucracy created obstacle after obstacle and every permit was a challenge. The industrial zone of Nachlas Har Chabad didn't even have normal infrastructure for sewage and electricity.

Every time I returned, I would go into *yechidus* and describe the difficulties to the Rebbe. Truth be told, I hoped the Rebbe would absolve me of the project which was turning out to be a total misery. But every time, the Rebbe would give me a *bracha* that everything would work out and encouraged us strongly to continue.

During one such *yechidus* in 5736\*, the Rebbe noted that a business could not be run from afar; someone needed to be on-site in Eretz Yisroel in a more steady fashion. My father-in-law decided to write to the Rebbe what everybody's position in the company was and asked for his advice regarding who should transfer to Eretz Yisroel.

I was only 27 years old, and officially only in sales but the Rebbe's answer was that since I was already familiar with some of the government people it made sense that I should be the one to make the move. It wasn't exactly news that I was waiting for but I didn't question his instructions. I went in for a *yechidus* and asked for how many weeks I should go.

The Rebbe replied that my children needed to enroll in school in a few weeks—it was the middle of summer. Changing schools in the middle of the year isn't a good idea, so it would be worthwhile, the Rebbe said, for us to remain the entire school year. It sounded like a jail sentence. I attempted to change his mind, but needless to say, the attempt wasn't very successful.

Well, at least it was only for a year.

### “Why Would You Leave?”

A few weeks later, on 15 Av 5736\*, we arrived in Eretz Yisroel. On the Shabbos before our move, I drove down from the summer bungalow colony to Crown Heights for the *farbrengen*. The Rebbe called me up,

gave me a bottle of *mashke*, and gave me a warm *bracha*, saying, “*S'zol zein mit grois hatzlacha, un asach, asach mishpachos velen hobin hana'a derfun*—It should be with great success and many families will benefit greatly from it.”

From our comfortable home in Crown Heights we moved into an apartment in “Nachla” that was perhaps a fifth of the size. In those days, Nachla had no roads or telephones, and the sewers only worked occasionally. To obtain fresh, clean milk or bread, you needed to get on line early in the morning to receive it.

There also was no infrastructure in the industrial zone. I was getting into more and more arguments with more and more bureaucrats and nothing seemed to be moving. We felt the government should be grateful we were contributing to the country by building a factory and creating jobs but the reality was the opposite. Everything was a fight, a negotiation, a problem. Every month or six weeks or so, when I would come to New York, I would report to the Rebbe on the latest issues that arose.

Soon, my year in Israel was drawing to a close. I recalled that before our departure, the Rebbe had commented, “I'm sure you will ask me before you return,” so I mentioned during my *yechidus* around Shavuos time that we planned to return.

“Why? Is your wife unhappy?” the Rebbe asked.

“No, she is happy.”

“Are your children unhappy?”

“They are happy as well.”

“So what's the problem with staying?”

I don't know what got into me but I blurted out, “I can't take it anymore...”

The Rebbe listened to my litany of complaints, and then responded with a wave of his hand,



REB MAYER AND OTHERS STUDY WITH PRIME MINISTER SHAMIR FROM THE TANYA JUST PRINTED AT THE KNESSET. 5752.

“The most difficult times have already passed. From now it will be easier.”

## A New Administration

In 1977, the Begin government came to power. During a *yechidus*, the Rebbe asked for my opinion on the new administration. It was a surprising question, to say the least. I was 29 years old but apparently the Rebbe wanted to know my opinion.

“Have you befriended the administration yet?” he asked.

I hadn’t reached out to very high levels of government but hearing that question, I decided to reach out to the new “Minister of Industry, Trade, and Labor,” Yigal Hurvitz.

I tried to arrange for an appointment but his aides repeatedly pushed me off. After attempting for several months, I decided to go another route. I identified which car he drove and began to follow him as he left the Knesset one night. I certainly spooked out his security men. I jumped out of my car as he parked in front of the Ministry of Industry but his security detail blocked me. Not giving up, I ran into the building and raced up a stairway, emerging right as he exited the elevator.

I introduced myself as a new industrialist in Israel and asked for an appointment. He was a gentleman. He asked his assistant to arrange a meeting and went into his office. Again, his assistant tried to push me off for three months or six months, so I declared that I would wait near his office that night as long as it would take until I had my meeting. They finally relented and gave me an appointment that week.

We had a very productive meeting. The next week, to my surprise, he actually drove over himself to our facility to see with his own eyes what the discussion was about. As the

Rebbe had promised, there was a marked turnaround. Suddenly, doors started opening up. I started making friends in the ministries and banks and officials began to look for ways to help.

Moshe Katzav, the former mayor of Kiryat Malachi, was elected to the Knesset and he invited me to lunch in the Knesset dining room. As we sat there, Prime Minister Begin walked in to grab a bite. Many people wanted his attention and he seemed a bit annoyed. Katzav insisted on introducing me anyway. At first, Begin expressed his annoyance to Katzav but after a moment he looked back and asked me,

“Are you the Lubavitcher with the factory in Kiryat Malachi? The Rebbe spoke to me about you when I was sitting with him in *yechidus*. I hope you don’t have any more headaches.”

Looking at Katzav, he said,

“Make sure he has everything he needs.”

## “You Are A Salesman...”

After several years, the building was ready and the machinery was installed. It was finally time to begin production. Our plan was to produce quality velvets but the process was difficult; our machines didn’t seem to produce anything better than second-grade goods.

During my next *yechidus*, I explained to the Rebbe that the machines were running but we couldn’t manage to produce quality material.

“*Uber di mashinen arbet?* The machines are working?” He was happy that things were moving and didn’t seem very perturbed about the second-grade material.

“Do you have samples?” The Rebbe asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“*Du bist duch a salesman*—you are a salesman, go out and sell,” the Rebbe said.

I understood from the Rebbe that I should begin sales even though we didn’t have the quality material that we wanted to produce. I asked for a *bracha* and traveled to Europe to peddle my second-grade material.

I was directed to various people who were supplying North African companies that might be interested in second-grade goods. To my surprise, when I sat down with their representative, he informed me that they wanted first-grade material and not second-grade materials.

I had no idea how to make the first-grade but remembering the Rebbe’s *bracha*, I agreed. He wanted a huge amount, and he wanted it in five weeks. There was no way we could achieve that goal but I agreed anyway and raced back to Israel. We worked around the clock and through many small miracles, we managed to produce our first order. The factory was finally a reality.

## “What Can I Do For You?”

From the very beginning, we understood that our purpose wasn’t only to turn a profit—although we did turn a great profit, *baruch Hashem*, as the years went on. Our factory’s goal, as the Rebbe set it out, was to create *parnasa* for many immigrant families in the area.

However, the Rebbe clearly had another shlichus in mind: we were to be an example for Yiddishkeit and a source of inspiration for others. Being in business, we had the opportunity to reach places and individuals who in those days classic shluchim would have had difficulty getting to.

These opportunities often arose during visits of dignitaries to our factory where I would offer them to put on tefillin and encourage them to strengthen their Yiddishkeit. Before



REB MAYER ZEILER PUTTING TEFILLIN ON LORD MARCUS SIEFF.

and after these visits, I would send reports to the Rebbe and often receive detailed guidance.

One early example was when Moshe Katzav brought us a very prominent visitor: Lord Marcus Sieff of England, the chairman of Marks & Spencer.

Lord Sieff was a strong supporter of Israel and the president of the Weizmann Institute, and he came to see the new industry we were developing in the country. His company sold clothing and furniture, so his visit had great business potential as well. We were warned ahead of time that no publicity was allowed while he was in Israel, to ensure that he remains safe from Arab repercussions. He was accompanied by Professor Sella of the Weizmann Institute.

After a light breakfast, we gave him a tour of our plant. We had just developed a new type of velvet which was inherently blackout; it had the ability to fully block out sunlight. He was very impressed. He said we

had a nice plant and that he thought we would be successful. At the time, we had yet to turn a profit, so his statement was encouraging.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

No doubt, he expected us to ask him to market our product. Velvet fabrics were very popular in England, and we had created the perfect new version. To his surprise, I asked him something else entirely.

“Lord Sieff, how about putting on tefillin?”

Moshe Katzav and Professor Sella started to laugh. Lord Sieff was surprised.

“Tefillin? It’s been 54 years since my bar mitzvah when I last put on Tefillin.”

After some hesitation, he agreed. He put on the tefillin, the photographer snapped a few photos, and we said Shema together. Always the perfect gentleman, he thanked me for the opportunity.

The visit went off without a hitch. But the next morning I was shocked

to discover the picture of me putting on tefillin with the Lord on the front-page news. I was mortified. We had been specifically asked not to publicize any pictures until Lord Sieff left the country.

The photographer wouldn’t answer my calls, so I called Professor Sella and began to apologize profusely. To my surprise, he said there was no need to apologize. The day before, the photographer had called him for permission to use the picture, and Lord Sieff, who happened to overhear the question, said that he wasn’t embarrassed about it and they were welcome to use it.

The following Hoshana Rabba, I passed by the Rebbe for *lekach* and the Rebbe suddenly asked me, “*Vos iz mit dem Lord*—What’s with the Lord?” I was momentarily confused. What does the Rebbe want from me? Suddenly, it hit me. He was asking about Lord Sieff! We hadn’t been in contact since our meeting at the factory, but the Rebbe gave me a piece of *lekach* to bring to him.

I wasn’t exactly sure how he would react to me bringing him a piece of cake but I put the cake in the freezer and called him up after Yom Tov. I asked to meet with him in person so I could relate a personal message from the Rebbe. He responded that he would be in Israel the following week and I could meet him there.

The following week I met with him at the Weizmann Institute. I told him about the custom of *lekach* and how the Rebbe had asked about him and sent him a piece with best wishes for a new year. He received me very graciously, put on a yarmulke to recite a *bracha* with me, and ate a piece. He also saved a piece for his wife.

Later, Rabbi Hodakov asked me how I had related the concept of *lekach* to him and when I told it over, he expressed that I had done well.

Soon, it became a custom. The Rebbe would give me *lekach* or a dollar for Lord Sieff, and he would receive it with great respect. I brought him other things as well, like matzah for Pesach each year.

During my trips to New York, Rabbi Hodakov would give me instructions for my interactions with people and receive my reports about previous encounters. During one such conversation before a trip to see Lord Sieff, Rabbi Hodakov said that I should encourage people to have Shabbos meals with their families.<sup>2</sup> With that in mind, I purchased a beautiful silver *kiddush* cup for Lord Seiff. Rabbi Hodakov said I should buy a gift for Lady Sieff as well, suggesting the new N'shei Chabad cookbook, which I did.

Several years later, they visited us in our home, and his wife commented,

“Mr. Zeiler, you should know that my husband is a traditional Jew. He recites *kiddush* every Friday night.”

### What's The Connection To Fabric?

Shimon Peres visited our offices twice, once as foreign minister and once as prime minister. During his first visit, I put on tefillin with him. It was a good atmosphere, someone snapped a picture, and it was later printed in the newspapers as a front page headline.

The second time he came, as prime minister, his security detail called me up a day before to discuss the meeting. Normally, they would come to see where exactly the Prime Minister would walk but this time they also wanted to speak to me. They asked me what I would be discussing with the Prime Minister; clearly, they wanted to know if I would offer to put on tefillin. “We would appreciate it if you don't put the Prime Minister in this position,” they said.

“The Prime Minister is very welcome at our factory,” I told



REB MAYER HELPS SHIMON PERES PUT ON TEFILLIN.

them, “but no one should tell me what to discuss with him. If he is uncomfortable, he's always welcome not to come.”

Before the visit, I asked the Rebbe whether I should talk to him about the significant issues of the day—I don't recall whether it was *Shleimus Haaretz* or *Mihu Yehudi*. I received a phone call very quickly from Rabbi Hodakov. “What does it have to do with fabric? Talk to him in business; these discussions are not your issue.”

Yitzchak Rabin also visited our factory. We have an unusual picture of him holding a large glass of whisky with a huge smile. I had offered him a small shot for a *l'chaim* but he said, “You're making a joke of me,” and took a large one instead.

When he visited as prime minister, I asked him to put on tefillin. He began to laugh.

“You know,” he said to me, “I visited the Rebbe when I was in Washington as an ambassador. His blue eyes went right through me.” He



REB MAYER GIVES MEMBERS OF THE SHINUI PARTY A TOUR OF HIS FACTORY. EHUD RASSABI IS SEEN ON THE FAR LEFT.

spoke about the Rebbe's wisdom with great respect.

"But he didn't ask me to put on tefillin!"

I later gave a report to Reb Binyomin Klein and he told the Rebbe about our exchange. The Rebbe smiled, Rabbi Klein told me later. "*Mistame given ba nacht*—[his *yechidus*] was probably at night..."

### A Shinui For Shinui

Years ago, there was a political party in the Knesset called Shinui, headed by Tommy Lapid, a known antagonist to the religious community. I was friendly with one of their Knesset members by the name of Ehud Rassabi.

One time he decided to bring a group of his associates to see our factory to show them an example of religious people who do honest work. We were happy to host them. I gave them a tour, had lunch, and we had a conversation about how I came to Israel.

I shared with them that I was sent by the Rebbe himself to help develop industry in Israel—this was a story I shared quite often with visitors. I explained that I had passed by with

my father-in-law at *lekach*, and so on. Suddenly, a woman in the group corrects me.

"*Leikech*, not *lekach*."

She was a self-declared anti-religious advocate, so I asked her where she got her clearly religious *Poilishe* accent.

"Do you know Moshe Klein, a *sofer* in New York?"

"Of course I do."

"He's my cousin. I'm the black sheep of my family. I was born in Meah Shearim..."

Before leaving, the woman came over to me. "I live in Ashkelon and I'm on the city council. If the Chabad schools ever need any help, let me know."

Towards the end of the visit there was a great atmosphere in the room and I saw that we had made a real connection. I turned to Ehud who was of traditional Yemenite origin and said, "Let's show them how to put on tefillin."

He rolled up his sleeve, put on tefillin, took a picture with us, and several others followed. I gave each of them a beautiful leather Tehillim.

The visit was considered a big accomplishment. They were a very anti-religious party but we had managed to make a real connection with them. They were clearly touched about the Rebbe's interest in the well-being of the Israeli economy and his concern for Israel's wellbeing. We brought real *shinui* to Shinui...

Afterward, I sent Ehud Rassabi the photo of him putting on tefillin. He placed it proudly on his Knesset desk. "All my associates wanted me to take it down," he told me later, "but I insisted that it remain."

### The Failed Test

In 5751\*, England passed a law that all fabrics in furniture had to pass a certain flame-retardancy test. Most companies added a coating to their fabric which ruined the soft touch, but we were able to develop a technique where we inserted the chemicals in the actual materials without changing the quality of the fabric.

We were excited to market this new product in England but we discovered that we would need an English institute to certify that our material passed the test. When we sent our material to their laboratories, they replied that our material failed to meet their standards. This was disastrous news since I had already marketed the fabric as FR fabric throughout England. I immediately called Rabbi Klein to ask for the Rebbe's *bracha*. We received a *bracha*, and I sent the fabric again. Once again, it failed.

After several more failures, I was becoming increasingly despondent. I didn't see how it would pull through, and I called Rabbi Klein and asked him to request a *bracha limaala mderech hateva*.

I happened to be in New York then, for Yud Shevat 5752. As I passed by dollars after Maariv, the Rebbe asked me, "*Shoin altz b'seder*—Did everything work out?"



I replied, “If the Rebbe says so...”

The Rebbe said, “*Ich farshtei nisht*—I don’t understand.” Clearly, he wanted a more positive answer.

The next morning, I called up the head of our technical department and asked her to fly to England with the material and visit the institute herself. She didn’t understand why that would be of use if we had failed the test a number of times but I insisted that we had the *bracha* of the Rebbe and therefore it was worthwhile to make the trip and make sure we pass the standard.

A day later, she called me.

“I have the certificate in my hand.

### What’s The Rush?

In the late 5740s\*, I received a phone call from one of our major customers named Pete Robinson.

“Mayer,” he says, “A guy in England copied your material and he’s offering me the same goods for 20 percent less. I know we’ve been doing business for a long time but I need you to give me a better price.”

I tried to fight him off but he was an excellent negotiator and I began to get worried. We couldn’t afford the price he was requesting and I feared that the competition would have greater repercussions. I called Rabbi Klein and asked him to approach the Rebbe for a *bracha* and advice.

The Rebbe answered, “*Vart*—wait.”

I stalled for several days but at some point I had to call him back. After some negotiations, I got them to drop to 18 percent, or perhaps 15 percent. He wasn’t willing to compromise more.

I called Rabbi Klein again, and again the Rebbe said the same thing. “You don’t need to answer right away.”

I continue to stall and to argue, and he slowly went down to 13 or 14 percent. But then he said that was it, I had to make my decision.



FLOCKTEX BOOTH AT THE LARGEST INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE TRADE FAIR, GERMANY 5779\*

I happened to be in New York at the time. Pete called me and asked me to come to England the next week to hammer out the final details. I wrote about it to the Rebbe, but didn’t receive an answer. My departure date arrived. Not knowing exactly what to do, I decided to get onto the plane.

We sat down for a full day meeting to hammer out the issue. As *shkiah* approached, I told Peter that I would have to take a break to pray. With great respect, he gathered all of his people and had them leave the room until I was done.

The end of our meeting was almost miraculous. I managed to negotiate them down to a 2% discount. I felt like a hero and immediately called *mazkirus* to give over the good news. During that phone call, I was informed that the Rebbe had given an answer just after I had taken off.

“What’s the rush?”

Needless to say, I was quite deflated. I berated myself for not having waited for the Rebbe’s answer.

However, there was one gratifying element that came out of the story. Reb Leibel Groner later told me that the Rebbe mentioned this meeting to him: That during my meeting with non-Jews, I wasn’t embarrassed to stop and say that I needed to daven. It

felt as if the Rebbe was still giving me some credit...

### Exhibiting Judaism

In the early 1980s, we started exhibiting at an international exhibition for the fabric industry held in Frankfurt, Germany. The Israeli Ministry of Commerce suggested that we put up a stand there under the Israeli flag because it was a place of international standing and a great place for business.

The exhibition took place from Wednesday through Shabbos and the official contract stated that we needed to remain open the entire time. Nonetheless, we obviously closed for Shabbos. We also brought along tefillin and kosher food and used the opportunity to do *mitvzoim*. I set up a small corner at our stand where people could put on tefillin in privacy, and I would call over Jewish customers and sell them some “Jewish merchandise.”

After the exhibition, I wrote a report to the Rebbe about both the business and the Jewish element. I reported that we had closed the stand on Shabbos and I also shared several stories of people who hadn’t put on tefillin for decades.

The following year, I told the Rebbe that I wasn’t interested in returning to

# קטיפה: בעזרת הרבי



מנכ"ל מלחטקס רב יצחק הודקוב, יחד עם הרבי, במועדון התיאטרון בברוקלין.

הרבי, יצחק הודקוב, חתם על חוזה עם מלחטקס לייצר תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור. החוזה כולל גם את ייצור תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור. החוזה כולל גם את ייצור תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור.

## לדן לבנין יצחק הרבי

במלאת 50 השנים להקמת מלחטקס, עמד יצחק הרבי בראש המפעל. הרבי, יצחק הודקוב, חתם על חוזה עם מלחטקס לייצר תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור. החוזה כולל גם את ייצור תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור.

**מנכ"ל מלחטקס בקיפת מלאכה**  
**הוקם לנו הודקוב הרבי**  
**מלחטקס על ידי ר' דוד דייטש,**  
**מחברו של הרבי, מאז יצא,**  
**הוקם קיבל הודקוב לעולם לארץ**  
**ובזמן למנוח המנכ"ל דייטש הוא**  
**אחד ממנהלים של רשת קטנטל**  
**במלחטקס. בארץ הוא מייצג**  
**קטיפה חסינה אש, המנסה מחד**  
**לציין שכל 50 שנותיו יהודים.**

## מאת שאול לילוב

היה זה לפני כשנתיים, כשהייתי בביקור בברוקלין. הרבי, יצחק הודקוב, חתם על חוזה עם מלחטקס לייצר תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור. החוזה כולל גם את ייצור תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור.

## יש חל אביב - מייזיק

במסגרת חגיגות יום הולדת 50 לרבי, יצחק הודקוב, חתם על חוזה עם מלחטקס לייצר תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור. החוזה כולל גם את ייצור תפילין לרשתות חנוכה ויום כיפור.

would take place on a Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in September. That Monday night was the first night of Rosh Hashanah.

Sunday wasn't the popular day at the exhibition, which meant we would only have a half a day of real profit from quite an expensive trip. On the other hand, giving up the place in the exhibition could have repercussions for coming years and might also send a message to my competitors that we are in trouble. That, coupled with the knowledge that the Rebbe always wanted me to participate in the expos, helped me make a decision to do it.

From the beginning of the expo, I had a sign hanging that we would be closed from Monday afternoon. That was a suggestion I had received years before from the Rebbe through Rabbi Hodakov for my Shabbos closings—to inform customers from the outset that the booth will be closed over Shabbos, so they could make sure to visit earlier.

At about midday on Monday, as we were getting ready to wrap up, I saw an older gentleman walk up and down past our stand, looking intently at our "closed" sign. He soon approached one of our salespeople and began to speak to him animatedly.

As I got closer, I heard the gentleman yelling at the representative, "What type of business is this to close for a holiday?"

Our salesperson began to explain that his boss was a religious Jew, and so on. I approached them and joined the conversation, and he seemed quite upset. I asked him where he came from, and he replied, "Chile."

He didn't sound South American. "Where were you from before Chile?" I asked.

"Ich bin a Poilisher—I am from Poland," he responded in Yiddish. Now I understood what was going on. I took him inside my private room, gave him some orange juice, and began a discussion.

### A MAARIV ARTICLE FROM 5748\* ABOUT REB MAYER AND FLOCKTEX, WITH SPECIAL MENTION OF THE SHIURIM GIVEN AT HIS FACTORY AND THE TEFILLIN BOOTH AT HIS EXHIBIT IN GERMANY.

Germany. Firstly, I wasn't comfortable in Germany in general (my parents were Holocaust survivors). It was also expensive, and I didn't see the financial value. But the Rebbe had other plans and he instructed me to return each year. This was the case with other exhibitions as well. Over time, we saw very positive financial results *baruch Hashem* and we established a large part of our market in Europe.

The Rebbe always wanted to hear a report. I once returned to Israel without giving a report and a few days later I got a phone call from Rabbi Hodakov.

"Why didn't you give a report about the exhibition?"

I gave over a verbal report, and at times he would tell me to pause and then return to the phone with more questions. Clearly, the Rebbe was interested in knowing all the details.

When I finished, Rabbi Hodakov told me, "*Zayer gut getun*—very well done."

## The Rosh Hashanah Exhibition

Another international fabric exhibition that we exhibited at took place at the World Fair Center in Brussels, Belgium. One year, we received word that the exhibition

“You believe in these religious things?” he asked me. “What business is this to close in the middle of an international expo?”

“Sir, would you like to put on tefillin?”

“Tefillin?! I don’t believe in G-d. I went through Hitler.”

“I fully understand that you would be angry,” I told him. “But what does that have to do with putting on tefillin? You never had the opportunity to do a bar mitzvah. Let’s do it right now!”

After a long conversation, he agreed. As he began to recite the words Shema Yisroel, he broke down in tears as did my son and I. When we were done, he hugged us, kissed us and thanked us profusely.

After he calmed down, I offered to show him some fabric that we were selling.

“Fabric? I’m in the fish business.”

“So what are you doing at the fabric expo?”

“I’m thinking of going into fabric...”

It was another powerful reminder about our true mission at the expos.

## A Dollar For Lyon

Whenever I went by dollars before leaving New York, the Rebbe would always give me a dollar for Eretz Yisroel and a dollar “*far di nesiah*.”

One time, I mentioned that I would be stopping in Lyon, France, on business, and the Rebbe gave me a dollar for Lyon.

At my meeting in Lyon, the non-Jewish gentleman asked me to join him for lunch.

“I eat only kosher, and I brought my own food,” I explained.

“No,” he said, “A Jewish woman here directed me to the kosher restaurant.”

I had a conversation with the woman and it seemed to me that the restaurant standards weren’t up to par.

Trying to explain to her why I couldn’t eat there, I said,

“Did you ever hear of Chabad Lubavitch?”

“Yes, I did,” she said. “I know of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in New York. I heard he gives out dollars, and how I wish I could have such a dollar from him.”

I suddenly realized the true *tachlis* of our conversation.

“Today is your lucky day,” I said.

“The Rebbe sent a dollar especially for Lyon...”

## From One Matzah

In the early 1980s, I had a meeting with a fellow named Oded Chetzroni, an officer in the Bank of Israel who

was responsible for the financial aspects of exports. Being before Pesach, I brought along a box of matzah and gave it to him as a gift. A year later, I sent him a box again.

Some time later, I was on a flight when I got a tap on my shoulder. It was Oded. As we were chatting, he introduced me to his wife as “the guy who gave me matzah.”

“You should know,” she said, “since you sent us matzah, we began holding a *seder* in our home, something we didn’t do previously.”

We became closer over the years, and he gradually climbed the ranks until he became the CEO of the Bank of Israel. When that happened, I called him up and asked him to arrange a



REB MAYER RECEIVES LEKACH, 21 TISHREI 5749\*.

big Chanukah party for his entire staff where we would light the menorah. I brought along some of my children, we put tefillin on all the men, and it was a great success.

One day, he says to me, “You know Mayer, you could eat in my home. We began to keep kosher.”

I expressed my delight, and he explained that my matzah had gone a long way, “My daughter became fully religious, and she is marrying a yeshiva student.”

### A Much Better Deal

After Gimmel Tammuz, based on the Rebbe’s instructions of “*Aseh lecha rav*—I began to bring my questions to Rav Mordechai Eliyahu. He was a true

Chossid of the Rebbe and he would constantly ply me with questions about the Rebbe’s stand on various matters. His advice to me, as well, always reflected the Rebbe’s instructions.

I was once invited to a horse racing event by our largest customer in South Africa. It was a very “un-Jewish” event and I didn’t want to go, but Rav Eliyahu knew that the Rebbe wanted me to always go “out there” and he encouraged me to participate.

At the event, I shared the story of how the Rebbe sent me to Israel to open an industry, when someone spoke up.

“I know of the Rebbe. I write to him before every significant business deal.”

Needless to say, I was all ears.

“I am a congregant in Rabbi Yossi Hecht’s shul,” he says. “As a young man, when I entered the furniture industry, I was offered a position as a manager in a certain furniture company which came with a significant raise. There was one caveat. I needed to be available seven days a week.

“I’m not a religious person. However, I decided to ask the Rebbe’s advice before taking the job.

“The Rebbe advised me not to take the position. I don’t think he even connected it to Shabbos. He simply advised against it, and I followed his advice.

“A short time later, the company went into hard times, and I bought the entire firm for a low price.”

By the time of this story, he controlled three-fourths of the industry in South Africa and was a phenomenally rich man. All because he listened to the Rebbe’s advice.

### In Conclusion

I have been extremely blessed to have received the Rebbe’s personal guidance on a regular basis from the moment I entered the orbit of Chabad. From our years in Crown Heights, to our move to Israel, whether in business matters or family matters, we merited the Rebbe’s close guidance at every step of the way.

And in return, I had the merit—and continue to have the merit—to serve as a conduit for the Rebbe’s activities in countless ways. Outwardly, I am a businessman. But the Rebbe made me and countless other businessmen his shluchim. ❶

1. See Derher Cheshvan 5777.

2. This concept was actually the predecessor to Mivtzah Neshek. In the period before the declaration of Mivtzah Neshek, the Rebbe spoke on several occasions about the importance of Shabbos meals with family.



LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEW 256867