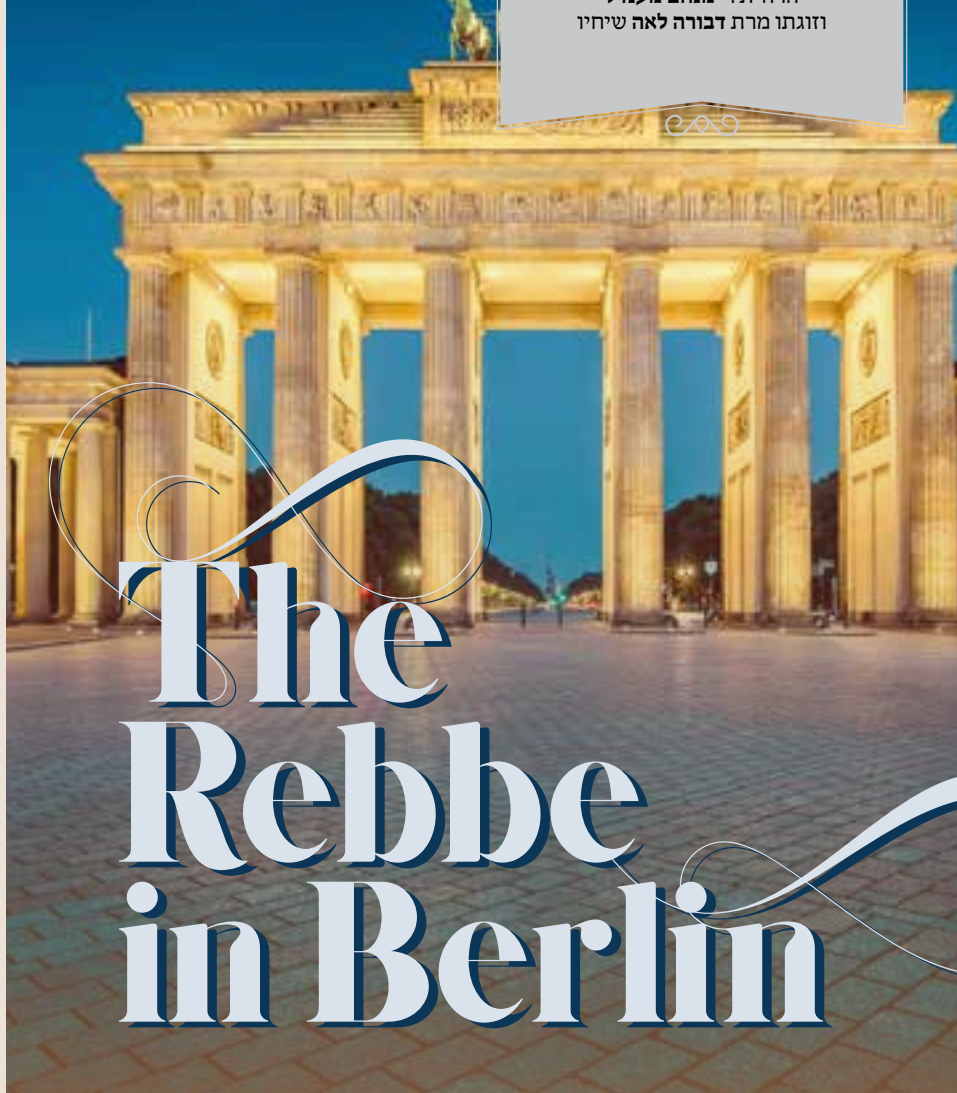


לזכות
החיילת בצבאות ה'
ח' מושקא תח"י
לרגל הולדתה י' תמוז ה'תש"פ
נדפס ע"י הור"ה
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל
וזוגתו מרת דבורה לאה שיחיו



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The Rebbe in Berlin

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In recent years, much information has been unearthed about the early life of the Rebbe, in the years before his bright light was seen illuminating the entire world. The Rebbe tried as much as possible to hide his true greatness from the public and was immersed in his own world of Torah and *kedusha*. At the same time, the Rebbe stood at the ready, fulfilling many important *shlichus'n* for the Frierdiker Rebbe in various ways. Below is a compilation of some of these stories from the time that the Rebbe lived in Berlin, Germany, from 5688* until 5693*.

Chronological context: When the Frierdiker Rebbe left the Soviet Union in 5688* and settled in Riga, Latvia, his immediate family, including his future son-in-law, our Rebbe, traveled along with him. From there, the Rebbe traveled to Berlin where he lived for about one year prior to the wedding, and then returned there together with the Rebbetzin shortly after their wedding for nearly four and a half more years.

Much of the information contained in this article is from the books *Admorei Chabad V'Yahadus Germania*, and *Early Years* by JEM.

On the Frierdiker Rebbe's Behalf

As the Rebbe arrived in Berlin on 3 Teves 5688*¹, the international conference of Agudas Yisroel was taking place. The very next day would be the first General Session. The Rebbe participated in the conference as the Frierdiker Rebbe's representative.

After the first day of the conference, the Rebbe wrote a detailed report to the Frierdiker Rebbe describing the sessions of the past day: "Baruch Hashem, I arrived safely yesterday evening... the chairman, Dr. Kohn [spoke]... He began by reading the bracha that was received from the Lubavitcher Rebbe..."

In the following days, the Rebbe wrote another report to the Frierdiker Rebbe about the continuation of the conference.

At the Rabbiner Seminar

At that time, Berlin had a well-known "Beis Midrash L'Rabbanim," or the "Rabbinerseminar zu Berlin," headed by Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg. (Rabbi Weinberg held this position from after World War I until the yeshiva was destroyed during the pogroms of Kristallnacht in 5698*.)

Many *talmidim* of Rabbi Weinberg later recalled and related their memories of the Rebbe from those years. The Rebbe would frequently come to the *beis midrash* to learn or to listen to *shiurim* delivered by Rabbi Weinberg and by Rabbi Chaim Heller, oftentimes remaining after the *shiur*, participating in lengthy Torah discussions.

One day, shortly after his arrival in Berlin, the Rebbe came to the Seminar, and asked Rabbi Weinberg to give him *semicha*, explaining that in order to be allowed entry to the Government Library at the Friedrich William University of Berlin, one needed to present a certificate.²



EXIT STAMP FROM LATVIA IN THE REBBE'S PASSPORT



RABBI WEINBERG



RABBI DR. YOSEF WOHLGEMUTH

One of Rabbi Weinberg's *talmidim*, Rabbi Chaim Nachman Kovalsky, related the exchange between the Rebbe and Rabbi Weinberg as he heard it from Rabbi Weinberg himself:

When the Rebbe requested to be tested for *semicha*, Rabbi Weinberg asked him in what area of Torah he can be tested. "Wherever Rabbi Weinberg would like," the Rebbe replied.

Rabbi Weinberg handed the Rebbe one of his own works. "I figured I would test him on something I wrote myself, so I gave him a *kuntres* I had published. The Rebbe took the *kuntres* home with him and studied it overnight, returning the next morning to be tested. He knew the whole *kuntres*, with every detail by heart!"

In the Rebbe's Reshimos,³ the first entry written in Berlin⁴ is dated, "Teves. 88. Berlin." and is titled "He'aros al [] shel Harav R. Y.Y. Weinberg," containing *he'aros* on issues Rabbi Weinberg raises in his *kuntres* titled 'Pinui Atzmos Meisim' on the topic of

relocating remains from one grave to another. Despite this being quite an obscure and difficult subject, the Rebbe mastered it successfully overnight, to Rabbi Weinberg's amazement. (It should be noted that, years later, when Rabbi Weinberg's *talmidim* reprinted his *sefer*, *Shailos u'Teshuvos Sridei Eish*, they included these notes from Reshimos.)

The dean of the Rabbiner Seminar at that time was Rabbi Dr. Yosef Wohlgemuth. In a letter⁵ to his son years later, the Rebbe said that he visited his father's home one Shabbos night, where he was giving a *shiur* in *Rambam*. The Rebbe also said to Rabbi Wohlgemuth's daughter, "His *talmidim* were devoted to him like Chassidim to a Rebbe!"

Encounter On a Simple Day

Rabbi Azriel Zelig Slonim related that while he was living in Yerushalayim, upon hearing the news that the Frierdiker Rebbe had left the USSR and settled in Riga, he decided to travel to Riga for Shavuos 5688*.



THE REBBE'S RESHIMA ON RABBI WEINBERG'S COMPILATION

However, at that point one was not able to receive an entry visa to Latvia without an invitation from a Latvian citizen. Nonetheless, he began his journey and traveled to Berlin, where he would seek the Rebbe's assistance. (He had already met the Rebbe a few years earlier while on a visit in Yekaterinoslav.)

Rabbi Slonim related:

"When I arrived at the home where the Rebbe was staying, on a regular afternoon during the month of Iyar, they told me 'he is fasting today,' implying that this was a typical occurrence.

"I knocked on the door, then as I entered, I saw the Rebbe sitting and learning Talmud Yerushalmi while wearing Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin. The Rebbe recognized me and motioned to me to have a seat and to wait until he finished a certain piece."

After the Rebbe took off his tefillin, he greeted Rabbi Slonim with a warm 'Shalom Aleichem.' Rabbi Slonim explained his problem, after which the Rebbe went out with him to the post office and sent a telegram to the Frierdiker Rebbe requesting that an invitation be sent, which arrived a short while later.



THE BERLIN RABBINER SEMINAR CIRCA 5660

On 29 Tammuz 5688*, the Rebbe wrote a letter in Yiddish, addressed to his future mother-in-law, in which he describes life then in Berlin:

...Here, too, it was raining the entire time until these past few days, when the weather reversed itself with an unusual heat wave. Only at night it cools off.

The Germans allow themselves to go about in the streets while their jacket is held over one arm, and in the other hand there is a handkerchief they use to wipe their sweat.

As the sun sets, all the home doors open. One who walks down the street, encounters at each house a family sitting together. They gaze at the moon, feeling pleased with the world—and especially with themselves, their wives and their children...

[Rabbi Meir] Hildsheimer⁶... informed me that when he passed through Berlin for two days he visited the Chortkover Rebbe... I thought it would be worthwhile to go see how they conduct themselves... I pushed my way inside and could see everything... Everyone gave him 'Shalom'... They brought out a barrel of beer... They sang and danced. 'Vu drei vochen, voss drei vochen, (what three weeks... i.e. it was of no concern to anyone for) der Rebbe iz gekumen!' (the Rebbe has arrived!)

"...I heard about the farbrengen of Yud-Beis Tammuz in Riga. While I was standing on Unter Den Linden⁷ waiting for the bus, a young man suddenly ran towards me saying, 'Shalom Aleichem! I am from Riga!' He was traveling through Berlin and must have recognized me from your house. So he told me about Yud-Beis Tammuz..."

In another letter, dated "Erev Tishah B'Av—the day Moshiach Tzidkeinu was born," the Rebbe wrote:

"I received your invitation. Heartfelt thanks for your kind offer... How is everything by you? You will receive this letter after Tisha B'Av, how was your fast?

"There is no special news with me. The heat has become a bit milder, so the fast will be easier. How will the German Jews manage [tomorrow], when it is forbidden to greet one another with 'Gutten Tag,' I cannot fathom. However, after all, Hashem is capable of everything!"

Acceptance to University

The archives of the Friedrich William University of Berlin, (known today as the Humboldt University of Berlin) show the Rebbe's first being listed as a visiting student at the university, dated April 27, 1928 (7 Iyar 5688).

In later registries at the university, the address the Rebbe gave is "Hansa-Ufer 7, at [the home of Dr.] Wilensky."

The Rebbe wrote in a letter regarding Dr. Wilensky's *Sefer Harikma*: "I knew the author; a man of remarkable talents, he was extremely meticulous. When I was in Berlin, he was researching this sefer. I have seen him fully immersed in it, turning night into day for this work."⁸

While at University

Living in Berlin at the same time as the Rebbe was Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, and they formed a relationship that would last for years to come. Rabbi Soloveitchik recalled that during his time in Berlin, often when he had a question or an issue he had to figure out, either in his academic studies at university or *lehavdil* in Torah study, he would frequently ask

the Rebbe for assistance. He noted that whenever he visited the Rebbe, he saw the Rebbe studying either *nigleh* or Chassidus.

Rabbi Soloveitchik related⁹:

"The Rebbe had an outstanding memory. In all my life, I never encountered someone with such a memory.



THE REBBE'S ACCEPTANCE LETTER TO THE BERLIN RABBINER-SEMINAR AS A VISITING STUDENT SIGNED BY RABBI DR. YOSEF WOHLGEMUTH



LETTER FROM THE RUSSIAN ACADEMIC UNION IN GERMANY CERTIFYING THAT THE REBBE GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL

The Professors

During his first two years in Berlin, the Rebbe attended classes on physics by Professor Walther Nernst who is credited as a founding father of modern physical chemistry and was also awarded a Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1920.

Dr. Yaakov Hanoka related something he heard from the Rebbe in *yechidus*: "[The Rebbe] said that at first he couldn't understand why Nernst, who was such a famous person, was teaching an introductory course. The Rebbe then explained to me with a chuckle, that it turned out that a teacher got paid according to the number of students he had, and there were far more students taking the introductory course than there were taking the advanced course..."

Another professor the Rebbe knew from Berlin was Professor Erwin Schrödinger. Once when Professor Paul Rosenbloom was in *yechidus*, he brought up a book written by Professor Schrödinger, to which the Rebbe commented, "He was a very good lecturer." (See *The Rebbe's Man in Mathematics* in this magazine.)

Mikveh

One day, the caretaker of the *mikveh* entered the *Beis Midrash L'Rabbanim* reporting a 'strange incident' that had occurred earlier that morning. He said a young man approached him requesting permission to use the *mikveh* (for *Yekkeshe Yidden* such a custom was unheard of, and therefore he found it necessary to report). After hearing who this young man was, the caretaker was instructed to give the Rebbe the key to the *mikveh*.

Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik (about whom we will read more below), once said to Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, one of his *talmidim*, "I can testify that he [the Rebbe] never missed a single day of going to the *mikveh*!"

"There were Yidden from other communities, studying at the university at the same time. Some of them are considered today to be famous *Gedolei Torah*. In the university they behaved the same as the other university students. But he [the Rebbe] behaved like a Yid from Warsaw or Russia. Berlin made absolutely no impression upon him at all!

"In university, the Rebbe always walked with a Gemara in his hand. Whenever a discussion in the class came up, the Rebbe would look into the Gemara.

"One time during a lecture, the professor was walking through the room and noticed the Rebbe was learning Gemara. The professor called out 'Young man, what kind of behavior is this?' and he challenged the Rebbe to repeat what he had just been teaching, which the Rebbe then flawlessly did."

Correspondence



While in Berlin, the Rebbe corresponded with the Rogatchover Gaon. Pictured is an envelope containing the Rogatchover's response to questions the Rebbe had asked, mailed to the Rebbe in Berlin.

Nusach Ari

Berlin in those years was a city full of Jewish life. On a single street there could have been over 10 *shtieblach*. Most of the time the Rebbe was in Berlin, he davened at the Dombrover Shtiebel, located over an hour walk from where the Rebbe and Rebbetzin lived. The reason for this, it seems, was because the vast majority of Yidden in Berlin davened *Nusach Ashkenaz*, and the Dombrover Shtiebel davened *Nusach Ari*.

Shlichus of the Frierdiker Rebbe

While the Frierdiker Rebbe was in Riga, he appointed the Rebbe who was in Berlin to oversee efforts into rescuing the Lubavitch Library being held captive by the USSR. In a letter to Mr. Hans Goslar of Berlin, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote:

"I would like to introduce you to my son in law Rabbi M. Schneerson, who I appointed to meet with you regarding my library, the inheritance of [my] holy ancestors, which unfortunately, remained behind in Russia..."¹⁰

That same day, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote a letter to the Rebbe, describing in detail the complex situation, tasking the Rebbe with meeting different people, along with clear directives as to what the key talking points should be.

The Frierdiker Rebbe also wrote to the Rebbe requesting that he, and on some occasions the Rebbe's brother Reb Yisroel Aryeh Leib¹¹, visit the library in Berlin in order to see which Jewish manuscripts were there, to search for a specific *sefer* or manuscript, and if possible, to copy their catalogs of handwritten Jewish manuscripts. The Rebbe and Frierdiker Rebbe kept an ongoing

correspondence regarding this matter.¹²

Visits of the Friediker Rebbe

In the summer of 5689*, the Friediker Rebbe made his historic visit to Eretz Yisroel and then to the United States of America. Before leaving Europe, the Friediker Rebbe

stopped over in Berlin, where he was greeted by the Rebbe and Rebbetzin.

The Friediker Rebbe describes in his *yoman* the events of that day:

“Wednesday, 23 Tammuz. Our daughter M. Chaya Mushka together with her husband, my son-in-law, met us at the stop in Berlin... The day passed in discussion... It seems as though

the negative situation of his father is suppressing him.

“At 10:50 in the evening we travel to Vienna via train... our children accompany us.”

When the Friediker Rebbe returned from America, he again spent some time in Berlin with Rebbe and Rebbetzin, as described in his *yoman*.

‘A Vareme Hant’

Reb Yitzchok Meir Ferstenberg, a Gerrer Chossid, who studied in Berlin at the same time, related the following story:

The Belzer Rebbe visited Berlin to see an eye doctor for an issue he had with his vision. While he was in Berlin, the Rebbe, accompanied by Reb Itche Meir, went to see the Belzer Rebbe.

The Belzer Rebbe, not being able to see easily, was standing with closed eyes, while people were in line giving him ‘shalom’ one after another. The Belzer Rebbe had his hand in a towel and that is how he would give *shalom*. When the Rebbe gave him a hand he looked up, took off the towel and gave him *shalom* with his hand, and asked “*Ver iz der yungerman—Who is this young man?*” commenting, “*A vareme hant—a ‘warm’ hand.*” Everyone present was astonished and they asked Reb Itche Meir, “Who is this?”



THE BUILDING WHICH HOUSED THE RABBINER SEMINAR AS IT LOOKS TODAY

In the Rebbe's Words

When the Rebbe was *menachem avel* Rashag after the passing of his mother, a discussion arose regarding the *minhag* that an *avel* should sit in a different place in shul, to which the Rebbe commented:

*"In Russia I had not seen these minhagim, only in Germany. In Germany there was also a minhag that after davening, first the rabbanim, followed by the whole congregation, would pass by the avel to wish 'Gut Shabbos' with a few words of nichum aveilim that are permitted on Shabbos."*¹³

Once, at a Yom Tov meal, there was a discussion regarding singing *Ein Kelokeinu* during davening. The Rebbe noted: *"In the presence of the [Frierdiker] Rebbe it was not sung. While I was in Berlin I heard it being sung for the first time."*¹⁴

On another occasion, at the meal of Motzei Yom Kippur 5727*, an individual mentioned that the greeting "Have an easy fast" is said only regarding Yom Kippur but not on Tishah B'Av, to which the Rebbe commented, *"When I lived in Germany, I heard this greeting used regarding Tishah B'Av as well."*¹⁵

To which he responded, "He is the Lubavitcher Rebbe's son-in-law."

The Nazis Rise to Power

During the winter of 5693*, the Frierdiker Rebbe traveled to Berlin to receive medical care entrusted to the Rebbe. While he was there, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote:

"The new custom of not receiving letters is a result of the weak state of my health... For more than two months I was alone in a sanitarium in Berlin, with only my middle son-in-law coming to see me every day at a set time..."

During this time, dark clouds began covering the skies of Germany. The Nazi party was rising to power, and on 3 Shevat 5693*, Adolf Hitler *yemach shemo* was appointed Chancellor of Germany. Immediately, a new wave of anti-Semitism swept through the cities and towns of Germany. For the Yidden living there,

the situation was becoming dire. Years later at a farbrengen, the Rebbe recounted what it was like at that point in Berlin:

"The Holocaust was not the result of one mentally unbalanced individual who coerced others into helping him. Everyone who was there, myself amongst them, saw how enthusiastically people accepted him, expressing the hope that he would bring to realization their heartfelt longing to see 'Deutschland über alles' (Germany above all)."

The Rebbe and Rebbetzin decided that it was time to leave, and in the winter of 5693* they left Germany for France, where they would spend the next few years, until finally emigrating to the United States. **T**

1. As marked in the Rebbe's Russian passport.
2. There are various versions of what exactly was the exchange. For the story as told by others, see JEM's *Early Years* film.
3. Many of which were written in Berlin.

To read about the *Reshimos* in detail, see the Derher Tammuz 5775.

4. Choveres 127.
5. Igros Kodesh vol. 5, p. 187.
6. Rabbi Hildsheimer was one of the leading rabbanim in Berlin at that time. He played a key role in securing the miraculous release of the Frierdiker Rebbe from prison, on Yud-Beis Tammuz the previous year. After the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia, he met with Rabbi Hildsheimer on a few occasions.
7. A main street in Berlin where the Friedrich William University is located.
8. Igros Kodesh vol. 14 page 369
9. The following was told over by Rabbi Shalom Ber Kowalsky, a close friend of Rabbi Soloveitchik, in JEM's *Early Years* film. Chabad.org/454547.
10. Igros Kodesh Admur HaRayyatz, vol. 15, page 116.
11. Reb Yisroel Aryeh Leib was also living in Berlin at that time.
12. These correspondences are mostly printed in Igros Kodesh of the Frierdiker Rebbe, vol. 15
13. Sichos Kodesh 5730 vol. 1, p. 714
14. Sichos Kodesh 5730 vol. 2, p. 542
15. Toras Menachem 5727 vol. 1, p. 77.