



“This Is Only the Beginning!”

Exclusive Interview with
Rabbi Yossi Groner

לזכות
מרת חיה מושקא תחי'
שוחאט
לרגל יום הולדתה - י"ט מנחם אב
ולזכות בעלה הרה"ת שלום דוב בער שיחי',
ובנותיהם ברכה ליפשא, עליזה ושיינדל
תחינה



Rabbi Yossi
Groner, head
shliach to the
Carolinas and son
of Rabbi Leibel Groner,
the Rebbe's longtime
mazkir, shares memories
of 770 and of the early
years of his shlichus.

Early Childhood

My earliest distinct memory of the Rebbe is from my upshernish in 5719*. My parents brought me and my twin brother Menachem Mendel to the Rebbe's room. It seemed to me that it was late at night, and I believe it was a night of *yechidus*. With a serious expression, the Rebbe pulled out a pair of scissors from his desk drawer, cut a little piece of my hair and then handed me a silver dollar. He then did the same for my brother.

The next special memory that stands out in my mind is from Simchas Torah 5724*. I was almost eight years old and at the beginning of *hakafos* I was standing on the top of the bleachers to the Rebbe's left. But after some time, I jumped down from my place and joined my father who was standing next to the Rebbe's *shtender* and I was able to see the Rebbe's face throughout *hakafos*.

It was a very special experience. Seeing the Rebbe's unbridled *simcha* as he pointed to all four directions while singing *Ufaratzta* and the extreme hand motions he made during Harav Levi Yitzchok's *niggun* is indescribable. Later that night, after the *seudas Yom Tov* in the Friediker Rebbe's apartment, the Rebbe came downstairs, distributed *l'chaim* to those who accepted upon themselves to learn more Chassidus during the coming year. He then taught two *niggunim*: *Hu Elokeinu* and the slow *Ki Anu Amecha*.

It was a little after 7:00 a.m. when the Rebbe left 770 to go home. It was cold outside and the Chassidim gathered outside in front of 770 were singing the final stanza of *Hu Elokeinu*. I positioned myself inside the front corridor right near the front door of 770 and was the only person near the door.

When the Rebbe came out of his room and walked towards the front

door of 770, he stopped right in front of me and started to wave his hands to the tune the Chassidim were singing outside the open door, while looking straight at me with a big smile. I started jumping up and down singing together with them. This is just one example of the special attention the Rebbe gave us children in those early years.

Crown Heights at the time was a very diverse Jewish neighborhood. We knew that the Rebbe is the essence of *kedusha* and the epicenter of our lives was 770. We spent as much time as possible there and loved hanging around the *bochurim*.

It was common in those days to see the Rebbe walking from his home to 770 and back. Although there was a rotation of *bochurim* who would walk several paces behind the Rebbe at night, during the day the Rebbe walked alone from his home to 770 and to visit his mother, Rebbetzin Chana. At times, non-Lubavitchers would approach the Rebbe and start conversations.

One afternoon the Rebbetzin called the *mazkirus* office with a message for the Rebbe and my father said that the Rebbe was not yet in 770. She expressed concern because the Rebbe had left the house a while back, so my father ran out of 770 and he saw the Rebbe speaking with a certain individual on Brooklyn Avenue. He politely but firmly told him that the Rebbe is very busy and he should

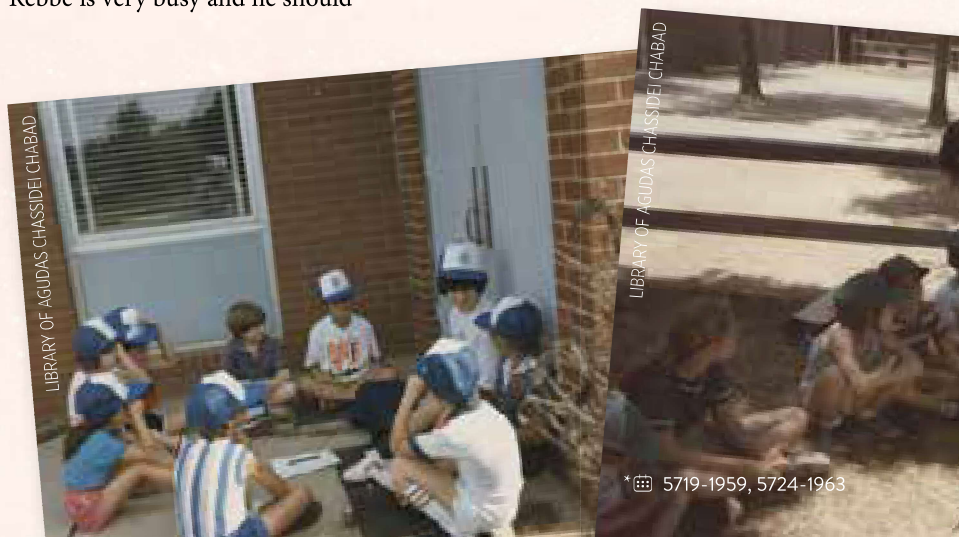
schedule an appointment for *yechidus* at the *mazkirus* office.

One peculiar story about the Rebbe walking in Crown Heights:

There was a small Belzer *shtiebel* on Eastern Parkway between Brooklyn Avenue and New York Avenue. One afternoon they were missing a tenth for a *minyan* and a fellow who was not from the neighborhood and had never seen the Rebbe before, offered to find a "*tzenter*" on the street. Standing on the corner of Brooklyn Avenue and Eastern Parkway he saw the Rebbe walking towards the corner and asked if he could help them with the *minyan* in the *shtiebel*...

When my father noticed that the Rebbe was delayed in returning to 770, he ran towards the corner and asked a child riding a bicycle if he had seen the Rebbe, and the child directed him to the Belzer *shtiebel*. Upon entering, he saw the Rebbe standing near the bookshelf looking into a *sefer* as the rest of the *minyan* davened. The Rebbe motioned to my father to remain and then left.

Learning in Oholei Torah, our bus driver was Reb Yankel Holzman. He would sing *niggunim* with us during the ride. One day, as he turned into the service lane of Eastern Parkway we all saw the Rebbe walking towards 770. We were singing a *freilicher Chassidisher niggun* with the bus windows wide open and the Rebbe



waved his hands in encouragement to the *niggun* with a big smile. Reb Yankel stopped the bus, jumped into the middle of the bus and we all started dancing.

From a very young age we were at farbrengens. As children we mainly participated in the *niggunim* and focused on the exciting things that happened at the farbrengen such as when the Rebbe stood up to dance and other special events like that.

When we were 10 years old my brother and I made a *hachlata* to remain for every farbrengen from beginning to end. It was not easy, and it was obviously difficult to follow the *sichos* and *maamarim*, but we encouraged each other. Every Sunday our *melamed* would start class by asking the students to repeat something we had heard at the Rebbe's farbrengen and everyone had a chance to stand up and share something. This trained us to listen as best as we could and try to learn directly from the Rebbe.

Mazkir's Children

We were well aware of the great merit our father had to serve the Rebbe as a *mazkir* and felt a responsibility as his children as well. We barely saw our father throughout the week. Some evenings he would come home briefly between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. and then rush back to 770, returning home very late at

night, often at 1:00 a.m. He then did much of his work associated with Otzar HaChassidim, preparing *sifrei Chassidus* for publication, since it was difficult to do this work during regular office hours. Early in the morning he would serve us breakfast and leave immediately.

We saw him most on Shabbos. During the *seudos* he would read and explain a letter of the Rebbe and he often shared a fresh story of the Rebbe, which were usually amazing miracles, while obviously omitting any identifying details.

Discretion was ingrained in us from very early on. Although my father never shared what he saw and heard by the Rebbe, it was inevitable that we would see or overhear something that was considered privileged information. For example, writing a letter to the Rebbe from Russia was extremely dangerous, so Chassidim would send their letters to relatives living in New York who then brought them to 770. Another option was to send the letters to our home, addressed to "Zeide." Whenever we saw the Russian envelopes addressed to Zeide we immediately put them in a designated spot in our home—without ever speaking about it to anyone—and my father would then bring them to the Rebbe.

The fact that our father was a *mazkir* did not mean we had extra privileges. We had to arrange our own places at farbrengens and all other occasions just like the rest of the kids and *bochurim*. My father never wanted

us to stand out as privileged children. Our classmates would have *yechidus* with their families at least once a year on their fathers' birthdays, but I did not have *yechidus* from my upshernish until bar mitzvah, after which I merited to the annual *yechidus* on my birthday like the rest of the *bochurim*.

Nevertheless, there were some special things we were able to observe that others were unable to. For example, on Chol Hamoed we davened in 770¹ and followed our father as he followed the Rebbe back to his room. Waiting on the steps in *Gan Eden Hatachton* we were able to catch a glimpse of what was happening inside as my father walked in and out. The Rebbe was sitting at the side of his desk learning—every single time. This made a very big impression on me.

The Rebbe always inquired about our family and wanted to know everything about each one of us. I know this from reading my father's diaries now, and we also knew about this at the time in several ways.

An interesting gesture the Rebbe once made to my parents was in 5735* when my brother and I were sent on shlichus to the yeshiva in Kfar Chabad.

Every Lubavitcher *bochur's* dream was to learn by the Rebbe and the *hanhalos* of the yeshivos in Eretz Yisroel, Brunoy and Montreal expressed to the Rebbe that if all the *bochurim* would all flock to New York they could shut down their yeshivos. In Elul of 5734* the Rebbe announced that in order to allow *bochurim* from out-of-town yeshivos to experience learning near the Rebbe's *daled amos*, groups of *bochurim* from New York would be sent as shlichim to out-of-town yeshivos to keep them going.²

The largest group was sent to Eretz Yisroel to Yeshivas Toras Emes in Yerushalayim and to the yeshiva in Kfar Chabad. When we arrived, a group photo was taken of us and sent to the Rebbe. Upon receiving



5735-1975, 5734-1974



LIBRARY OF ACHUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD



THE GROUP OF SHLUCHIM UPON THEIR ARRIVAL IN ERETZ YISROEL

the photo, the Rebbe handed it to my father to give it to my mother so that “she should have a photo of her children at home.”

An Energy Jolt

Although we saw the Rebbe often, we never took it for granted. Seeing the Rebbe was always an uplifting experience. Observing the Rebbe during a *tefilah*, hearing a *sicha* or *maamar*, getting a nod of *l’chaim* from the Rebbe at a *farbrengen*, and especially going into *yechidus*, were all life-changing experiences. It was noticeable when a *bochur* was preparing for *yechidus*. For months beforehand his entire behavior—his davening and learning and even just the way he spoke—was entirely different.

All those encounters were expected and one typically prepared for them. But when you had an unexpected interaction with the Rebbe, this caused a real shake-up to the system.

I’ll share with you three such experiences I merited to have.

After the terrifying events of Shemini Atzeres 5738* the Rebbe did not daven in the main shul downstairs for many months. Even after Rosh Chodesh Kislev, when the Rebbe returned somewhat to the regular routine, he davened in the upstairs *zal* for all Shabbos *tefillas* in addition to joining the *bochurim’s minyan* on Monday and Thursday for *krias haTorah*. On Friday night there was *seider Chassidus* until 8:30 p.m. and the Rebbe would daven with the *bochurim* then. On Shabbos morning the *minyan* for Shacharis was exclusively for *baalei batim* and there was a rotation system to determine who would attend.

On Erev Pesach the Rebbe gave my father many instructions regarding Pesach and one of them was that he would start davening with the main *minyan* downstairs on Yom Tov morning. My father was to notify the Rebbe when the *minyan* was up to *chazaras hashatz*, and the Rebbe would then join the *minyan* for Hallel.

That night as we were walking home for the *seider*, my father said he was very worried because for some

reason he was under the impression that the Rebbe was unsure if my father properly understood all the instructions regarding the next morning’s Shacharis.

“Why don’t you tell the Rebbe that you understood the instructions clearly?” I innocently asked.

My father looked at me in complete shock. “You never initiate a conversation with the Rebbe!” he said.

I found it amazing that despite the fact that he worked in such proximity to the Rebbe for close to 30 years, he still had a total *bittul* for the Rebbe and would never initiate a conversation on his own.

In general I observed that every time my father walked into the Rebbe’s room he would first pause, straighten his *kapota*, hat and beard and only then enter. There was always an aura of reverence, formality and awe whenever he was in the Rebbe’s presence. He often said that although he observed the Rebbe so frequently, he never felt at ease or felt that he grasped the Rebbe in any way. Serving the Rebbe is to serve true *malchus* - and one felt it all the time.

My father always told me that the closer one gets to the Rebbe the more they realize how little they know of the greatness of the Rebbe.

Now, back to the story of Pesach 5738*. The next morning, many members of *anash*, who usually davened in *minyanim* that took place in other parts of 770 and from many other shuls, joined the downstairs *minyan*, since it was the first time the Rebbe was davening downstairs since Shemini Atzeres. The shul was packed from wall to wall and no one was anywhere else in 770, even the *mazkirim*.

I was not davening with the *minyan* and when my *chavrusa* approached me to discuss something, I suggested we move our conversation upstairs. Speaking in the hallway near the *zal*,



we suddenly heard the door to *Gan Eden Hatachton* open and I saw the *bochur* standing in the front entrance of 770 become pale and run out the front door.

Instinctively I ran to the entrance and saw the Rebbe wearing a tallis, holding the door of *Gan Eden Hatachton* open with one hand. The Rebbe asked me if I knew where the *minyan* downstairs was up to. I said that when I was downstairs they were up to *Yishtabach*. The Rebbe thought for a moment and said, “Nu, be sure I am notified when they are up to *chazaras hashatz*.”

I answered “Yes.” (Whenever I observed my father receiving an instruction from the Rebbe he always simply answered “Yes,” so I did the same.)

The Rebbe said “Thank you” and walked back into his room. I ran downstairs as fast as I could and told my father what had just transpired and he said, “You see [why I was concerned]?”

That brief interaction with the Rebbe shook me to my core and I could not sleep for three nights

straight. It was completely unexpected and being alone with the Rebbe as the Rebbe gazed at me like that was just so overwhelming and gave me an unbelievable adrenaline boost.

Two years later, on Acharon Shel Pesach after Shacharis, I was in the front entranceway of 770 conversing with Reb Yoel Kahn and several others. Suddenly the Rebbe appeared in the doorway of *Gan Eden Hatachton*. An immediate hush fell over the room and everyone moved to the side. I approached the Rebbe and the Rebbe asked me if my father was in the area. I said I would find him immediately and the Rebbe said “Thank you,” and returned to his room. Although it was not as dramatic as the previous encounter, it was definitely unexpected and made a deep impression on me.

The next story happened many years later when I was already on shlichus in Charlotte for 12 years.

It was during Tishrei of 5752*. I was experiencing a very difficult financial crisis that needed to be resolved and felt I needed to be by

the Rebbe for Simchas Torah. I made arrangements for the other shlichim in town to fill in for me for Yom Tov and I drove to New York on the night of Hoshana Rabba with two of my children.

I received *lekach* (wrapped in a plastic bag with a dollar bill) from the Rebbe the next day and the Rebbe called me back and gave me another piece of *lekach* saying “דאס איז פאר” - this is [a *bracha*] that you should have financial abundance.

I was shocked to hear this because I had not written to the Rebbe about the problem and when I asked my father later if he mentioned anything to the Rebbe about it he said he had not. The Rebbe’s revealed *ruach hakodesh* and unsolicited *bracha* already gave me much encouragement.

For *hakafos*, my brother Aharon managed to arrange a spot for me right next to him which was very close to the Rebbe’s place. (I had lost my original spot when I went on shlichus.) Simchas Torah night the Rebbe pointed to me and said to my father

with a big smile, “I believe he is your relative. Make sure he says *l’chaim!*”

I approached the Rebbe with a cup of *l’chaim* and asked for a *bracha*, and as the *minhag* is on Simchas Torah, I gave a *bracha* to the Rebbe to which he answered a very loud “Amen!” By now I was sufficiently confident that everything would work out and sure enough the next day a friend of mine who was aware of my problem arranged a large donation from one of the Lubavitcher *gevirim* that would help avert the looming crisis.

The next morning I wrote a letter thanking the Rebbe for the *brachos* and described the significant donation that had been arranged for Chabad of Charlotte. Within a short while the Rebbe responded *אזכיר על הציין*.

I needed to drive for 10 hours that day back to Charlotte and I was exhausted, because no one ever slept during the three days of Hoshaana Rabba, Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah by the Rebbe. I planned on leaving early but Reb Meir Harlig encouraged me to wait a few more minutes because the Rebbe would be going to the Ohel and I would be able to see the Rebbe one more time before leaving.

I stood near my father’s office which was at the other end of *Gan Eden Hatachton* together with a few others and we were surprised when the Rebbe came out of his room several minutes earlier than expected. We pushed ourselves against the wall to give the Rebbe as much room as possible to reach the stairs towards the driveway and the Rebbe handed each one of us a coin to give to *tzedakah* in the *pushka* affixed outside the door to my father’s office.

The Rebbe turned to me and said, “I heard that you already received a donation.”

I was stunned and momentarily speechless but as the Rebbe turned

towards the stairs I managed to say, “The Rebbe’s *brachos* materialized.”

The Rebbe turned around to face me and with a penetrating but loving look said, “This is only the beginning!”

The tremendous *bracha* and complete unexpectedness of the interaction with the Rebbe gave me such an energy jolt, I could have driven to South America with that energy...

Shlichus

As I mentioned earlier, I was sent on shlichus as a *bochur* to the yeshiva in Kfar Chabad for the years 5735* and 5736*. In the summer of 5736* I needed to return to New York for a while and during that time I went on Merkos Shlichus to North Carolina. There was no shliach there at the time and we started making contacts with communities and individuals throughout the state.

On Purim 5736* we visited many Israeli army bases and did a lot of *mitvzoim*. I was awed at the tremendous respect the generals and officers had for the Rebbe and how the soldiers so appreciated our visits, and I wrote a seven page report about the experience to my father.

He gave the report to the Rebbe with a cover note that read: *אולי גרם נחת רוח*—perhaps this report will be a source of *nachas* to the Rebbe. The Rebbe edited my father’s note to read *גרם נחת רוח רב*—it is a source of much *nachas*.

For a *bochur* to receive such a reaction from the Rebbe on a *duch* of *mitvzoim* was like winning the lottery. Our greatest wish in life was to bring *nachas* to the Rebbe and this was the motivating factor in my decision to go on shlichus when the time would come: To bring the Rebbe *nachas*.

During the summer of 5737*, I returned to both Carolinas on Merkos Shlichus with a friend and we were very successful. After submitting a

detailed *duch* to the Rebbe about the shlichus, Rabbi Hodakov instructed me to keep up the connection since there was no shliach there, but all my activities needed to be done with the permission of the *hanhala*.

I visited those states for Chanukah and Purim; and for Simchas Torah 5739* I decided to go to North Carolina, because I was so traumatized by the events of Shemini Atzeres 5738* that I preferred to be on the Rebbe’s shlichus for Yom Tov than to be in 770. I asked the *hanhala* for permission and when I wrote to the Rebbe about my plan, the Rebbe underlined the words about the *hanhala*’s permission and wrote: *ויהא בהצלחה רבה*. Rabbi Dovid Raskin was very impressed since he rarely saw such an expression on a *bochur*’s note.

After my wedding, I suggested to Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky that perhaps it was time to open a branch of Chabad in North Carolina. He consulted with Rabbi Hodakov who agreed to write a note to the Rebbe about the idea.

The Rebbe responded that since there was no kosher *mikveh* in Charlotte they should find a couple whose wife no longer needed one, adding in parentheses that it is to avoid giving off the impression that one is permitted to live in a city without a *mikveh*.

Apparently the shlichus was not for us.

The next day Rabbi Kotlarsky came running to me and said that



20 KISLEV 5747, YOSSEI MELAMED VIA JEM 306778

the Rebbe just asked Rabbi Hodakov what is doing with Charlotte. When he responded that they were seeking an older couple to go there on shlichus, the Rebbe asked, "און וועגן בויען א מקוה?" (And about building a new *mikvah* you didn't think?") They were silent, and the Rebbe continued, "זאלסט טראכטן וועגן, דעם" ("You should think about it...")

In consultation with Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dvorkin it became clear that it would be very difficult to build a *mikveh* before arriving there so he determined that as long as we would make it our top priority and build a *mikveh* within a year or two, it was appropriate for us to move there on shlichus.

Rabbi Kolarsky solicited a generous contribution from Reb Yosef ("Usseh") Deitch, and our *mikveh* was ready within a year but North Carolina was experiencing a drought at the time. On Yud-Tes Kislev we received the permit from the city and miraculously there was such a rainstorm that the *mikveh* filled within hours.

Generally I sent a *duch* to the Rebbe at least once a month and at times even every two weeks. One of

the main motivators for me was the following story. On Shemini Atzeres 5738* a bed was brought into the Rebbe's room, and even after the Rebbe's health improved the doctors requested that the bed remain in the room so the Rebbe could rest for some time during the day. I asked my father what the Rebbe did during that time and he said that the Rebbe read the *duchos* from the shlichim. This was the Rebbe's "leisure" activity...

The Senator

One of the earliest supporters of Chabad in North Carolina was State Senator Marshall Rauch who was rated the second most powerful man in the state. I met him once while I was still a *bochur* together with Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky, and he told us that, while all of his business ventures were doing quite well, there was one venture he was having trouble with.

We advised him to write a letter to the Rebbe asking for a *bracha* and that he should commit to wearing tefillin every weekday. He followed our advice and within days his business problem was resolved.

In the early 5740s* the state legislature debated a certain law that if ratified in North Carolina would have national ramifications and negatively impact the Orthodox community in a very strong way. Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky notified me that representatives from Agudas Israel will contact me to encourage me to



RABBI GRONER AND RABBI MOSHE KOTLARSKY WITH FORMER STATE SENATOR MARSHALL RAUCH

send telegrams to my state legislators opposing the law, which they did.

I called *mazkirus* and asked to speak with Rabbi Hodakov to be sure that it was the right thing to do.

"How will you sign the telegram?" he asked. "You can sign in the name of Lubavitch?"

"I can sign the telegram with Lubavitch of North Carolina," I suggested.

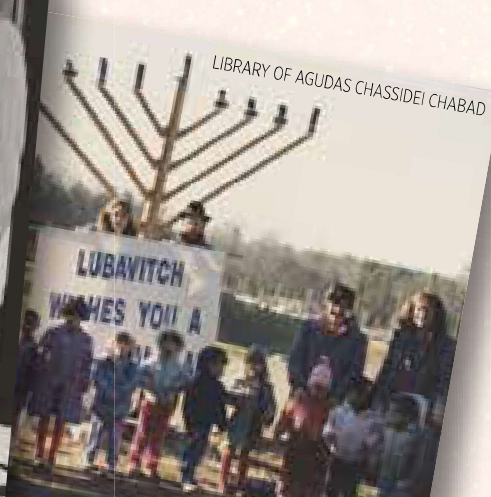
"The only one who speaks for Lubavitch is the Rebbe," Rabbi Hodakov said decisively, and then continued, "You have a good friend who is a senator. Why don't you speak with him?"

I reached Senator Rauch in his business office and he was completely unaware of the debate raging about this law. After I filled him in on what was going on, he expressed his opposition to the law and told me he will work things out.

This was on a Thursday and the law was scheduled for debate on Monday. Senator Rauch arranged several meetings to determine where things were holding, and on Friday one of the senators introduced a referendum that would not allow the legislature



5738-1977, 5740S-1980S



to even debate that law for another 25 years. There was a forced vote and a slim majority voted in support of the referendum, which was a very big victory. It became a national sensation and the media reported (mostly in a negative light) that Senator Rauch was responsible for destroying the law on a national level as a result of what he did in North Carolina.

On Motzei Shabbos he called me for a *d'var Torah* to include in a speech he was preparing for a Jewish function and I asked him how he felt about all the negative national attention he was getting. He said he knew he did the right thing and did not care about all the noise.

Rabbi Bogomilsky told me afterwards that all the *frum* lobbyists in New York heard what had happened behind the scenes and were awed at the fact that the crisis was averted due to the Rebbe's shliach's connection with a powerful state senator through influencing him to wear tefillin and Torah learning. They saw how the Rebbe's reach extended much further and deeper than all of their lobbying efforts.

Our Job as Shluchim

This guidance from Rabbi Hodakov, that only the Rebbe speaks on behalf of Lubavitch in all national or global matters, stood me in good stead several years later. A prominent member of the Charlotte Jewish community, who sat on the national board of a Jewish organization, reached out to me about the thorny issue of *Mihu Yehudi*.

I told him I am not a spokesman for Lubavitch and only the Rebbe can discuss this issue. He wrote a letter to the Rebbe and an interesting correspondence ensued. I was copied on every letter and was actually enjoying this entire back and forth.

Eventually he offered a suggestion that was not practical and not in the

spirit of *halacha* and I warned him it would never happen. Sure enough his idea was rejected and although the exchange had been very respectful until then, he wrote a very nasty letter to the Rebbe. I received the copy of the letter a day earlier than it would arrive in New York and when I read it I became sick from disgust but mainly terrified that the Rebbe would receive such a horrible letter.

I frantically called my father and started screaming that he should intercept the letter before the Rebbe opened it. My father reminded me that he cannot do that because the rule is that all the Rebbe's mail is opened by the Rebbe, and when I realized it was inevitable the Rebbe would see the letter I felt guilty for indirectly causing it and I started crying uncontrollably, fasting and saying Tehillim.

The next morning my father called to hear how I was doing and my wife told him what was going on. Some time later that morning he called again and said that when he was in the Rebbe's room, he saw the Rebbe read the letter from North Carolina. When the Rebbe finished reading it he put it down and asked my father how I was doing to which he responded that I am sitting on the floor, fasting and saying Tehillim. The Rebbe instructed him to go out of the room and call me immediately to tell me to stop what I was doing.

My wife and I decided that we would terminate all contact with this man because he had written such a

terrible letter to the Rebbe but the Rebbe instructed us to forget about the episode and to be *mekarev* him even more than before. If the topic of *Mihu Yehudi* came up we should confidently say that it's not our business and that our job is to encourage Yidden to learn Torah and do *mitzvos* and nothing else.

For some time afterwards the Rebbe asked my father about our continued connection with this fellow, and today his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are all involved with Chabad on various levels and several of them are even *frum*.

A few years later there was a more public struggle going on in the community about *Mihu Yehudi* and I was forced to participate in a public debate on the topic. I wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking for a *bracha*. An hour before the debate as I was nervously preparing my remarks for the debate I got a call from my father. He told me that he was in the Rebbe's room and the Rebbe was writing a response to Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht on a question he asked regarding *Mihu Yehudi*.

"Suddenly the Rebbe put down his pencil and told me that what he is writing now is relevant to my son, and proceeded to dictate for 10 minutes exactly what you should say during the debate. The Rebbe told me to call you immediately with this message."

I transcribed everything my father said to me in the Rebbe's name and





the debate turned out to be a major success.

A few years after Gimmel Tammuz I was faced with a new crisis. There were elements in the community pushing for certain reforms in our school and a prominent supporter arranged a meeting with other rabbis to apply pressure on us to make changes to our curriculum that were unacceptable to us.

The night before the meeting I was very frustrated and said to my wife that usually in these situations we would write to the Rebbe. But what can we do now?

Early the next morning, when I entered my office before the *Shacharis minyan*, I saw a fax from a friend who works in the Rebbe's library that had been sent in the middle of the night.

Here is some background to this fax. There was a non-Jewish man who was a descendant of a certain Lubavitcher family and he was interested to learn more about his ancestors.

Several weeks before receiving this fax I discussed this Lubavitcher family tree with one of the researchers in the Rebbe's library. He commented that he just read a beautiful letter from the Rebbe to Mr. Kaddish Luz, the Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, who was also a descendant of this specific Lubavitcher family, describing the failure of the Kibbutz movement. The letter was set to be printed in the new volume of the Rebbe's *Igros Kodesh*, volume 23, that was being prepared at the time and he

offered to fax me a copy of this letter, but apparently forgot to do so.

Out of the blue, this letter appeared in my fax machine, but the amazing thing is that the letter printed right before this one was a response to an educator who was under pressure to change things in his school. The Rebbe encouraged this educator to be strong and firmly resist these changes, providing a powerful explanation that applied to the very topic being discussed at the important meeting I was having that night!

Throughout the meeting I responded to all of their challenges by reciting the Rebbe's letter almost verbatim and everything worked out in the best possible way.

In awe of the open miracle I had just witnessed, I called the researcher and asked him what possessed him to send the letter we had spoken about weeks earlier in the middle of the night?

He said to me that in his sleep last night he felt someone coming to him and saying, "You told Yossi Groner you would send him a certain *igeres* and you didn't send it to him yet!" He woke up with a start and when he went back to sleep felt the same thing again, so he hurriedly ran to the library in the middle of the night and faxed the letter to me. The previous letter was on the same page so that letter came in the fax as well.

This was a miracle I experienced after Gimmel Tammuz, which illustrates that our connection to the Rebbe has not changed. The Rebbe continues to care for all of his Chassidim the same way he did before Gimmel Tammuz.

Going to the Ohel is our form of *yechidus* and the Rebbe finds a way to guide us in everything. It's important to realize that before Gimmel Tammuz when we wrote letters to the Rebbe we did not always merit to receive answers. One needed to have a special

zechus to receive an answer then and the same is true now. Sometimes the Rebbe's answers came in writing and at times the answer came in other forms.

We miss the Rebbe terribly but the Rebbe is not absent, *chas veshalom*. The Rebbe continues to be with us every step of the way, all the time.

To feel this one needs to work hard. Aside from learning *Chitas* and three *perakim* Rambam every day, it is crucial to have a *kvius* in learning the Rebbe's Torah every day. When I go on long distance drives I listen to a recording of the Rebbe's *farbrengen* and this gives me the feeling that the Rebbe is with me the entire time.

I'd like to conclude with the following thought. In the early years, people had the opportunity to have a private *yechidus* with the Rebbe, mainly for their *yom huledes*. In 5735* the Rebbe discontinued this and only visitors and special people were able to have *yechidus* and the Rebbe said that the *farbrengen* will serve as *yechidus* for the rest of us. Some time later *yechidus kholis* started, but then in 5746* the Rebbe started giving out dollars on Sundays and later on even more often during the week.

The Sunday dollars was an unprecedented phenomenon in Lubavitch history. For the first time ever, every man, woman and child was able to approach the Rebbe to receive a *shlichus mitzvah*, a *bracha* and even the opportunity to say a few words.

I think the Rebbe did this in order to empower every single Yid in our generation to be his shliach. He gave each and every one of us tremendous *kochos*, continues to guide us and care for us every step of the way and the more we are aware of this we will succeed in fulfilling our mission in preparing the world for Moshiach. T

1 In those years, the Rebbe didn't daven *Shacharis* with the *minyan* on most weekdays.

2 See *Simchas Torah* Day 5735, sicha 3.