


לזכות  
הרה"ת שלום דוב בער שיחי' שוחאט  
לרגל יום הולדתו י"ז מרחשון  
לשנת הצלחה בגו"ר

# Wini

Reb Shmuel Levitin



REB SHMUEL STANDS BEHIND THE REBBE AS  
THE REBBE DELIVERS A MAAMAR, PURIM 5725.

A photograph showing Reb Shmuel, an elderly man with a long white beard and glasses, wearing a black hat and a dark coat. He is seated at a table with several other men, also wearing hats and coats, who are identified as bochurim. They appear to be in a study or library, with bookshelves visible in the background. The photo is slightly faded and has a warm, aged tone.

REB SHMUEL IN HIS  
LATER YEARS IN  
DISCUSSION WITH  
BOCHURIM IN THE SMALL  
ZAL, UPSTAIRS 770.  
CIRCA EARLY 5730S.

JEM109323

# Even in Previous Generations

Special thanks to Rabbi Shlomo Zarchi, mashpia of Tomchei Temimim-770 and Rabbi Sholom Ber Levitin, shliach in Seattle, Washington, for their interviews. All other information in this article is culled from the comprehensive overview of Reb Shmuel's life published in the Rivkin-Farkash Teshurah, 21 Sivan 5775, unless indicated otherwise in the footnotes.

## THE PREEMINENT TZIYUR

“When I was a child and *bochur*,” relates Rabbi Shlomo Zarchi, “Reb Shmuel was the preeminent figure among the Chassidim in 770. There were a number of Temimim from Lubavitch that lived in New York, but Reb Shmuel was always considered something special. He was one of the earliest Temimim in Lubavitch and a famous *baal mesiras nefesh* in Russia. In America, he was the head *mashpia* of the yeshiva and the rav of *beis harav*. He had a tremendous *tziyur*.”

“In earlier years, he would teach Chassidus regularly, and even in his old age, he taught Tanya once a week. At some point, he stopped because the late evenings were too difficult for him, but it was important to the Rebbe that he continue; the Rebbe suggested that he give his class in the afternoon.

“He had a very special *yachas* with the Rebbe. In his capacity as rav, he would often *pasken shaalos* for the Rebbe. One time, he had a fever that wouldn’t go away and the doctors didn’t know what to do. When the Rebbe sent him a *ksav* of a *maamar* about healing, he got better.

“He loved to tell over a *geshmake* Chassidische story. He was a master teacher and storyteller, always ready with an insightful comment or story.

Even at his advanced age, he liked to stop at my table in yeshiva — to our delight — and share stories and sayings. Every *yoma d’pagra*, he would hold a *farbrengen*, which would also attract many non-Lubavitchers. As an aside, he would always instruct me to say *l’chaim* at these *farbrengens* because I am *Kohen* — so that afterwards he would be able to tell his grandson, Rabbi Sholom Ber Levitin, a *Levi*, to say *l’chaim* as well.

“He also had a very important role in 5710\*. Being that he was one of the most prominent Chassidim in America and had a special *yachas* with the Frieddiker Rebbe, many people looked to see what Reb Shmuel would do when the Frieddiker Rebbe was *nistalek*. To Reb Shmuel, it was clear that the Rebbe should become the new Rebbe immediately, and it was the force of his personality that helped make it happen sooner.”

## EVERYTHING WENT THROUGH REB SHMUEL

“His relationship as a Chossid to the Rebbe after Yud Shevat 5710\* began immediately,” says Reb Shmuel’s grandson, Rabbi Sholom Ber Levitin.

Rabbi Levitin drew our attention to an amazing story retold in *Yemei Bereishis* (page 71): Avrohom Weingarten, a close student of Reb



REB SHMUEL’S AMERICAN PASSPORT PICTURE, 5707.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASIDEI CHABAD

Shmuel, was supposed to celebrate his *tenaim* on Motzei Shabbos Yud Shevat 5710\*. He came to ask Reb Shmuel what to do, but Reb Shmuel didn’t give him advice. Instead, he sent him to ask the Rebbe.

“I find it amazing,” says Rabbi Levitin, “that this was his immediate response — only hours after the Frieddiker Rebbe’s *histalkus*. It is clear that there was no question in his mind about the future.

“In general, many *hora’os* of the Frieddiker Rebbe to *talmidim* and *anash* in those years went through my grandfather. He arrived in America almost a year-and-a-half before the Frieddiker Rebbe, as a *shadar*. The Frieddiker Rebbe chose three *shadarim*

### “REB SHMUEL’S AH VORT”

- Reb Shmuel would say that you have to remember every word that the Rebbe tells you in *yechidus*. If you don’t see what it means now, at some point down the line you will realize what it meant. It may take 10 or even 20 years, but at some point, you will understand everything the Rebbe told you.<sup>1</sup>
- “What’s the difference between a Rebbe and a *chochom*? A smart person says what will happen. A Rebbe — what he says, will happen.”
- “2” — ולא אבה ה' לשמוע אל בלעם — that is the level of Reb Zushe Anipoli, who didn’t see bad in anything. “ויהפך ה' את הקללה לברכה” — that is the level of Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, who saw the good in everything. But the Baal Shem Tov’s *darga* was “כי אהבך ה' אלקיך” — he saw the *Nefesh Elohis* in every person.
- Chassidus doesn’t like ignorance, he would often say. However, with a little less of our own *sechel*, we will be able to come closer to the *emes*.<sup>3</sup>



REB SHMUEL STANDS BEHIND THE REBBE ON THE BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE "SHALASH" COURTYARD DURING A CHILDREN'S GATHERING, CHOL HAMOED SUKKOS, 5718.

## A POWERFUL IMPACT

During one farbrengen with Chassidim in America during his period as a *shadar*, several individuals began pouring out their hearts to Reb Shmuel, telling him about their difficult material circumstances.

Hearing their distress, Reb Shmuel decided to do something out of the ordinary. He stood up and announced:

"I am a shliach of the Rebbe, and *shlucho shel adam kimoso*. With that power I bless you that Hashem should fulfill all your heart's desires."

Afterward, he quickly reported the incident to the Frierdiker Rebbe and asked if he had acted correctly.

The Frierdiker Rebbe responded:

"I agree with you — may Hashem fulfill the blessings very soon, and give each of them and their families whatever they need, physically and spiritually."<sup>4</sup>

in the 5690s\* to visit the United States: Reb Itche Masmid, Reb Mordechai Chefetz and my grandfather.

"Rabbi Zalman Gurary told me that when the Frierdiker Rebbe was shown the building of 770 for the first time, he designated the various rooms in the building, and when he reached the two rooms at the end of the hallway, he said: 'These are going to be for Reb Shmuel' [his family was stranded in Europe at the time].

"For the next 15 years, my grandfather literally lived in 770. The inner room was his private dwelling,

and in the outer room he taught Chassidus. Each Shabbos, he would dine at the Frierdiker Rebbe's table. The Frierdiker Rebbe himself would usually not join due to his health, but my grandfather would eat there together with the Rebbe. When my father, Reb Binyomin, was a *bochur*, he would be the server."

We asked Rabbi Levitin to describe his grandfather's personality. Instead of giving his own opinion, he directed us to a letter about Reb Shmuel written by Reb Chatche Feigin, introducing

Reb Shmuel to the Chassidim of America:

"He is from the earliest Temimim," Reb Chatche writes, "a *pnimi b'etzem mehuso*. He has a profound understanding of Chassidus, he is an *oved*, and a wise person..."

## WITH EVERY FIBER OF HIS BEING

Rabbi Tzvi Shusterman was a student in Torah Vodaas when, one day, he heard about a new *shadar* that had arrived. "They called him Reb Shmuel Rakshiker," he said. "When we saw him, we were tremendously impressed by his character. He was a true Chossid, who lived Chassidus with every fiber of his being. He began teaching us Chassidus in depth, showing us the richness of Chassidus."

Chassidus was an inseparable part of his life. Once, while holding a farbrengen for *bochurim* in New York, Reb Shmuel listed from memory every single *maamar* he heard from the Rebbe Rashab during his years in Tomchei Temimim. When the Rebbe compiled a list of the Rebbe Rashab's Chassidus, many of the missing *maamarim* were included based on Reb Shmuel's recollections.

Despite the Temimim being awake learning the entire *leil shishi*, Reb Shmuel recalled, the highlight of the week was hearing the new *maamar* from the Rebbe Rashab on Friday night. They would swallow every word. On one occasion in 770, he related that during a *maamar* in 5663\* (תרס"ג), the Rebbe Rashab said the words, "*Vesamcheinu bemitzvosecha*— give us joy in Your mitzvot," — "and the way the Rebbe said it still rings in my ears and gives me *chayus*..."

Even when he was imprisoned (see below), he could not fathom living without Chassidus. He was taken to Siberia on a Shabbos, but he nevertheless took along a Torah Or



(and his tallis and tefillin). Years later, he asked the Frierdiker Rebbe for a *tikkun* for carrying a *sefer* on Shabbos, and the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed him to learn Maseches Shabbos.

His *geshmak* in Chassidus earned him his *shidduch* and first *rabbanus* as well.

When Reb Shmuel was around 24 years old, he happened to pass through the *Chassidishe* town of Rakshik in Lithuania for Shabbos. He repeated a *maamar* in shul, and the *baalei batim* loved it. He spoke well, explaining deep concepts in simple terms, allowing everyone to understand.

After Shabbos, the *baalei batim* asked the rav, Reb Asher Margalios, to find a way to keep the young man around. Reb Asher had an idea — he had a daughter of marriageable age, and he thought it would be a perfect *shidduch*. With the Rebbe Rashab's *bracha*, the *shidduch* materialized.<sup>5</sup> Not long afterward, Reb Shmuel's father-in-law passed away, and he was appointed as his successor.

## THE REBBE'S RAV

"My grandfather," says Rabbi Levitin, "was considered the Rebbe's rav. The Rebbe would sell his *chometz* to him and direct his *shaalos* in *halacha* to him as well. He would often say, 'In the Rebbe's shul, the Rebbe is the Shulchan Aruch.' Although the Rebbe usually didn't *pasken* himself, my grandfather would always try to get a sense of the Rebbe's feeling about the matter before offering his own *psak*."

"I remember one occasion in particular. My grandfather would daven at the *amud* on the *yom hillula* of the Rebbe Rashab, Rebbe Maharash, and Tzemach Tzedek, upon instructions of the Frierdiker Rebbe. On Beis Nissan 5723\*, the Rebbe was at the Ohel, and Mincha was expected to be close to *shkiah*. The Rebbe would also be drawing *mayim shelanu* that

## ORIGINS

Reb Shmuel was born in the town of Pahar in the beginning of 5643\* (תרמ"ג). It was during the *shloshim* of the Rebbe Maharash, and he was therefore given the name Shmuel.

He was born into a family with deep Chabad roots. His maternal grandfather, Reb Gershon Ber of Pahar, was a famous Chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, and his father, Rev Zev Volf Levitin, would later be a *mashgiach* in Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim.

In his early childhood, his family was so desperately poor that his father would split matches into two to save money.<sup>8</sup> There were obviously no funds for tuition. A local *melamed* had pity on the young boy and allowed him to sit in his classes, but did not permit him to ask questions, so as not to steal time from the children whose parents were paying.

Despite the difficult circumstances, Reb Shmuel made strides in his learning. He later related that his grandfather, Reb Gershon Ber, once visited his home when he was eight or nine years old, and as they walked together to shul, Reb Shmuel proudly told his grandfather that he knew full pages of Gemara by heart, hoping he would test him. To his surprise, his grandfather said, "*M'darf kenen ineveinig*—you need to know the Gemara inside," teaching him a lesson in *bittul*.

As a 16-year-old, already very proficient in Gemara and *poskim*, he joined the yeshiva in Lubavitch. It was only two years after Tomchei Temimim had opened its doors, and the main group studied in the town of Zhembin, under the tutelage of Reb Shmuel Gronem Esterman. Nonetheless, the Rebbe Rashab determined that this new *bochur* would remain in Lubavitch, in his close proximity.

Being a talented and sharp *bochur*, the *mashpi'im* and elder Chassidim quickly took a liking to him. Rashbatz — who taught him Chassidus — liked to share his thoughts and *chiddushim* with Reb Shmuel. Reb Shmuel Gronem had a relationship with him as well. The senior Chossid Reb Chanoch Hendel taught him a lesson in *ahavas Yisroel*: He once noticed that Reb Shmuel's shoes were torn and promptly exchanged them with his own.

evening for the matzah sent to Eretz Yisroel. I noticed something unusual that day: My grandfather was sitting in the *zal* waiting for the Rebbe to arrive. He remained there for an hour and a half.

"The Rebbe finally arrived close to *shkiah* and walked very quickly into 770, with Rabbi Groner close behind him. I soon understood that my grandfather had been anticipating a question: Rabbi Groner made a beeline for him and said, 'The Rebbe asks:

Should we daven Mincha or do *mayim shelanu* first?'

"My grandfather said that before answering, he needed to speak to the Rebbe. He entered the Rebbe's room and emerged a very short time later saying '*Ashrei yoshvei veisecha...*' with the Rebbe close behind him. I don't know what he asked, but in those few seconds he had gotten a sense of the Rebbe's opinion."<sup>6</sup>

Reb Shmuel began his 'career' in *rabbanus* from a young age. At age 11 he already learned Yoreh Deah, and at

14 he learned Choshen Mishpat. But he didn't take the position lightly. "He often wanted to abandon his post in Rakshik," one *bochur* later transcribed hearing from Reb Shmuel. "When approached with *kashrus* questions about a chicken — if he said it was kosher, he wouldn't be able to sleep at night because it may have been *treif*. If he ruled that it was *treif*, he wouldn't be able to sleep because he had caused the butcher financial harm."

Despite his personal misgivings, he was very popular in his town for his wisdom and character. After he was forced to leave at the beginning of World War I (see next section), the townspeople didn't hire a new rav for a full 20 years. When Reb Shmuel finally returned in the late 5690s\*, they welcomed him back with open arms.

## HOW TO LOOK AT A YID

Reb Shmuel had a special *chush* in *ahavas Yisroel*, and always knew when to speak at the right moment. On numerous occasions, Reb Shmuel was *melamed zchus* to the Rabbeim in a way that only he could.

One year, he visited Rostov for Simchas Torah, and at the farbrengen, the Rebbe Rashab began a sharp *sicha* about the *chilul Shabbos* that had been commonplace during World War I. Hearing the Rebbe Rashab's words, Reb Shmuel gathered courage, said *l'chaim* and asked for permission to speak.

When the war broke out, the Jews of Rakshik — near the battlefield between Russia and Germany — were considered "untrustworthy" and were forced by the Czar to abandon their homes and travel deeper into Russia.

Reb Shmuel related to the Rebbe Rashab that a townsman had asked him whether he could transport his physical belongings out of the city on Shabbos to protect them from the invading armies. Reb Shmuel ruled that it was forbidden. The individual



REB SHMUEL (CENTER) STANDS NEXT TO THE REBBE AS RABBI HODAKOV READS THE KESUBA AT THE CHUPA OF REB TZVI AND MENUCHA LERMAN, 4 ELUL 5715.

followed his instructions despite the heavy loss he incurred. When they later met up in Dvinsk, he actually thanked Reb Shmuel for saving him from violating Shabbos.

When he finished his account, the Rebbe Rashab smiled at him and no longer pursued the topic. The Friediker Rebbe, who was standing nearby, enjoyed the exchange, and exclaimed, "Rakshiker rav, say *l'chaim!*"

## NEW FRONTIERS

Reb Shmuel was famously known as "Reb Shmuel Kutaiser," for his years spent strengthening Yiddishkeit in Kutais, Georgia (Gruzia) as one of the first "modern-day shluchim."

How did that unique shlichus come to be?

One day, as Mincha drew to a close in the Rebbe Rashab's home in Rostov, Chassidim noticed a suspicious group of cossacks approaching the front door. Worried, they rushed to lock all the windows and doors to the premises. However, the Rebbe Rashab said, "Why are you locking the doors? Those aren't cossacks, they are Yidden! Let them in!"

The door was opened, and the 'cossacks' approached and kissed the mezuzah. "*Hakol kol Yaakov, v'hayodayim yidei Eisav*," the Rebbe Rashab said to them in amusement.

They were a group of Jewish merchants from Georgia. They had heard about the famous tzaddik living in Rostov, and had come with a request: Send us a rabbi to strengthen Yiddishkeit in our area.<sup>9</sup>

KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

The Rebbe Rashab decided to send Reb Shmuel who had been displaced from his original *rabbanus* in Rakshik. Despite their reservations about traveling to a land with a different language and culture, Reb Shmuel and his family packed their bags and began the long journey eastward.

The Jews in Central Asia were warm and committed to Yiddishkeit. However, they were extremely uneducated. When writing about Reb Shmuel's influence, the Frierdiker Rebbe described their initial state:

"There is no land with such dire ignorance of Torah like Georgia. Even the devout can barely translate a verse in Chumash, and surely not a Mishnah or Gemara or *halacha* from a *posek*. Even the local *chachamim* have difficulty understanding Shulchan Aruch..."<sup>10</sup>

Reb Shmuel quickly got to work. Speaking in *Lashon Hakodesh*, he began teaching Torah to the local Jews. He gathered the *chachamim*, learned *halacha* and Tanya with them, and helped them prepare classes for the youth. Select *bochurim* who understood *Lashon Hakodesh* received personal classes from Reb Shmuel as well. Each Shabbos, he would speak from the pulpit with a translator, teaching the locals about Shabbos, *kashrus* and *taharah* and inspiring them to bolster their Yiddishkeit.

The project was a phenomenal success. Many hundreds of children joined the *talmud Torahs*, and Reb Shmuel brought down another 10 Temimim to help him. When Reb Shmerel Sasonkin arrived, he wrote to the Frierdiker Rebbe that "when he first walked into the shul of the older *bochurim*, he thought for a moment that he had entered the small *zal* in Lubavitch..."

The Rebbe himself used the story of Reb Shmuel to encourage a new shlucha to Australia, Mrs. Devorah

Groner, when she was experiencing hardship:

"When the father of my father-in-law," the Rebbe wrote to her in English, "sent two Jews to Gruzia (Caucasia), a remote and neglected region, the two emissaries so transformed Jewish life there that even now, 45 years later, we find the grandchildren of those native Jews in New York who are strictly religious and devoted Chassidim."<sup>11</sup>

Reb Shmuel was forced to flee after several years, but his influence was long lasting.

"I once met a Georgian Jew," says Rabbi Sholom Ber Levitin, "and when he heard that Reb Shmuel was my grandfather, he began hugging and kissing me! That was how much they loved him." Until today, a shul in Nachlas Har Chabad founded by Georgian Jews is called Beis Shmuel.

For Tishrei 5728\*, three newly immigrated Michalashvili brothers, the sons of one of Reb Shmuel's early students, came to the Rebbe for Tishrei, where they reunited with Reb Shmuel. Reb Shmuel told them that a year earlier, during a *farbrengen*, the Rebbe had turned around to him and declared, "Next year, Georgian Jews will be here!"

Not long afterwards, on Rosh Hashanah, the Rebbe said a *maamar* "*Vehaya bayom hahu*," and then, as the crowd sang, the Rebbe turned around to Reb Shmuel and said, "Nu, have they come from Gruzia?"

## THE LAST YESHIVA IN THE SOVIET UNION

After fleeing Georgia, Reb Shmuel came to Leningrad and asked the Frierdiker Rebbe how to proceed.

The Frierdiker Rebbe had just decided to open a Beis Midrash for rabbanim in Nevel, due to the severe shortage of competent rabbanim. The Frierdiker Rebbe appointed Reb Shmuel to lead the new institution, which drew Chassidim and *misnagdim* from all over the country. Several well-known families entered Chabad through this yeshiva. Despite the Yevsektzia cracking down all over the country, this *beis midrash* managed to escape scrutiny for a while; it was an island of calm during the wild times of the first decade of Communism in Russia.

One day, the Yiddish Communist newspaper (ironically called) *Emes* published a shocking "expose."

"In the corner of Nevel, a group of Lubavitchers has settled down. These

is for what can actually be accomplished, I mentioned to your husband the experience in a somewhat similar situation, when the father of my father-in-law sent two Jews to Gruzia (Caucasia), a remote and neglected region, the two emissaries so transformed Jewish life there that even now, 45 years later, we find grandchildren of those native Jews in New York who are strictly religious and devoted Chassidim. There is this difference,

Mrs. Devorah Groner

11th of Cheshvan, 5721

however, that those two Jews who revitalized Jewish life in that remote region, were the only pioneers and had no helpers. They had to start from scratch, whereas you and your husband came to Australia, finding there a group of Anash who have, to a considerable extent, already prepared the ground, except that many phases of the work have still to be accomplished and could best be done by people who have an English background, since, basically, the Australian society is similar to that of the American society.

THE REBBE'S LETTER TO THE AUSTRALIAN SHLUCHA MRS. DEVORAH GRONER, DATED 11 CHESHVAN 5721, DESCRIBING REB SHMUEL'S UNIQUE SHLICHUS TO GRUZIA.

are Chassids, hypocritical fanatics, who have opened a yeshiva.

“The yeshiva attracts followers of the ‘holy’ Rebbe of Lubavitch, *meshulachim*, G-d’s cossacks and other religious clerics from various places. They collect money for *mikvehs* and distribute propaganda against the local Jewish government school. They say, ‘It’s better to send your children to a non-Jewish school; at least they don’t indoctrinate your children against Judaism!’ There was even one occurrence where hysterical religious men accosted Jewish children and yelled at them, ‘Why are you going to school on Shabbos!?’

“Rumor has it that this yeshiva and the entire gang of religious people are supported financially by the Lubavitcher himself...”<sup>12</sup>

After such publicity, it was clear that their days were numbered. They began planning a move to a different location, but the Yevsektzia caught up with them before they had a chance. In Kislev of 5689\* (תרפ"ט), Reb Shmuel was arrested and the *beis midrash* was shuttered.

The Frieddiker Rebbe, living in Riga at the time, gave an interview to the Morgan Journal not long afterwards. “The shuttering of the yeshiva,” the journalist wrote, “is, in his eyes, the greatest tragedy to befall Orthodox Jewry in Russia in the past few years. Nevel was the only *makom Torah* and *emunah* in Soviet Russia in the past few years.”

## A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

One of Reb Shmuel’s many qualities was his *pikchus* and his way with people. In every situation, Reb Shmuel attracted friends from the most unlikely of places.

“When he was in jail awaiting trial, his situation was very difficult,” related his son, Reb Binyomin. “He was in a prison with the worst criminals. But among them was a Jewish thief, a

## MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

Rabbi Zarchi relates:

When President Zalman Shazar wanted to come for a *yechidus* with the Rebbe, the Israeli government pressured him against it (see *Leben Mitten Rebbe’n*, Derher Av 5781). People in 770 were saying that it was important to the Rebbe that he indeed come to 770. Reb Shmuel approached Rabbi Hodakov and asked him, “Is it true that the Rebbe wants Shazar to come here?” Rabbi Hodakov confirmed the rumor. Reb Shmuel said, “Let me speak to the Rebbe.”

He went into the Rebbe’s room and said, “I will bring him over.”

The Rebbe agreed, and Reb Shmuel led a delegation to Shazar’s hotel. Shazar welcomed them warmly. He was having difficulty overcoming the pressure from people in Israel not to go to 770, but with the visit of the delegation, he made the decision to go immediately, and came with them back to the Rebbe.



REB SHMUEL LEADS A DELEGATION TO MEET ISRAELI PRESIDENT ZALMAN SHAZAR AT HIS HOTEL ROOM AND ESCORT HIM TO HIS MEETING WITH THE REBBE, 13 AV 5726.





SHOLOM YISROEL HODAKOV



YUD SHEVAT 5721, YOSSI GOLDSTEIN VIA JEM 307946

THE REBBE SPEAKS WITH REB SHMUEL DURING A FARBRENGEN IN THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S APARTMENT, YUD-TES KISLEV 5724.

violent criminal who was considered the leader of the prisoners. My father developed a positive relationship with him, and he protected him. He etched a line on the floor with his stick and informed the prisoners that he would kill anyone who passed over the line and entered my father's private space."<sup>13</sup>

In Siberia, too, he found an opportunity to make a connection. Sentenced to three years in exile, he found himself totally alone, a solitary Jew among gentiles. But he met an old Jew named Avraham, who kept some semblance of Jewish practice; he cooked a cholent each Friday, for example, with non-kosher meat. Avraham became Reb Shmuel's devoted friend. Reb Shmuel would teach him the basics of Yiddishkeit, and he — being a free man — would help in whatever way he could.

One day, shortly before Rosh Hashanah, Reb Shmuel received word that a package had arrived for him. Suspecting that it contained a shofar, he asked Avraham to immediately make the arduous trip to pick it up for him. "There is a lot of good stuff," he said, "and I'll split it with you."

When Avraham returned with the package, he watched curiously as Reb Shmuel opened it. To Reb Shmuel's delight, there was a shofar inside, and his face lit up with joy.

Avraham saw that this was no "physical goody," but he wasn't disappointed. "I knew that when you said 'good stuff,' you had something more spiritual in mind, and that's actually why I went out of my way to get it for you."<sup>14</sup>

### THREE SPECIAL MENTIONS

There are countless stories and sayings to repeat about Reb Shmuel — far too many to be covered in one article. However, there are three stories that stand out: not many people had the merit to become a part of the Torah of three Rabbeim.

The first story is about the Rebbe Rashab.

In 5664\* (תרס"ד), Reb Shmuel was drafted to the army and had no choice but to serve. Only after much petitioning, he was given a reprieve due to "weak constitution."

Before entering the army, he took along several deep *sefarim* of

Chassidus, including Imrei Binah, with the hope that he would find time to delve into them. But when he was finally released from his army base, he told his father that learning had been almost impossible. "It was impossible even to think!"

His father repeated the comment to the Rebbe Rashab. That Shabbos, during the *maamar*, the Rebbe Rashab commented, "*A neshamah in galus, afilu di machshava, trachten lozt men oich nisht*—When a *neshamah* is in exile, it isn't even allowed to think (about *Elokus*)."

The second story is about the Frierdiker Rebbe.

After Reb Shmuel's return from Siberia, the Frierdiker Rebbe made great efforts to obtain his release from the Soviet Union, and in Shevat 5697\*, he succeeded in crossing the border. Twenty years had passed since he had left Rakshik (which was now part of independent Lithuania), but the community welcomed him back with open arms. However, the Frierdiker Rebbe soon appointed him to be a *shadar*.

"On his way to America," relates his grandson Rabbi Levitin, "he



REB SHMUEL STANDS TO  
THE REBBE'S RIGHT AT THE  
CONCLUSION OF A CHUPA,  
CIRCA EARLY 5720S.

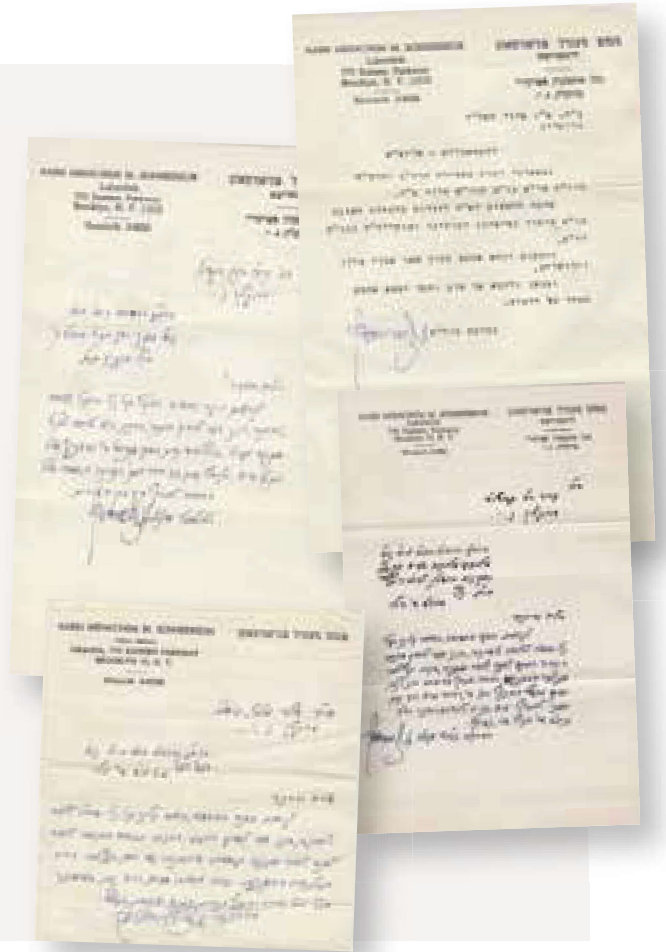
## “YOUR SHINING LIGHT”

Reb Shmuel had an immense zechus that each and every year before Rosh Hashanah, the Rebbe wrote to him a special note with brachos for the upcoming year. It is fascinating to read each one of these notes and recognize the specific nuances the Rebbe made each year in his *bracha*.

For example one year, in his titles addressing Reb Shmuel, the Rebbe added: “מלאכתו מלאכת שמים בהפצת תורה” —He does the work of heaven, spreading the wellsprings of Chassidus and kindling the illuminating lamps—the students of Tomchei Temimim...”

The Rebbe always added a special bracha, in addition to a good year in his own personal and family life, for success in his holy work as a *mashpia* in the yeshiva. One year, the Rebbe writes: “להצליח במיוחד במצוה דצ”ל זהיר בה טפי, בזהר ואור מוסיף והולך, השפעת דא”ח בתורה וסביבותי ומתוך שמחה וט”ל—May you be successful especially in the mitzvah about which you are the most meticulous (*‘zahir’*), the one that shines (*zohar*) with ever increasing light: your teaching Chassidus in Tomchei Temimim and its surroundings...”

(For photocopies of all the original notes, see Teshura Rivkin-Farkash 5775)



REB SHMUEL STANDS BEHIND THE REBBE AS THE REBBE DELIVERS A MAAMAR, PURIM 5723.



REB SHMUEL SITS TO THE LEFT OF THE CHOSSON AS THE REBBE SPEAKS AT THE KABOLAS PONIM OF REB MOTTEL AND SARA DUBINSKY, 2 ELUL 5713.

### A PERSONAL STORY:

Whenever Reb Shmuel would reprimand a *bochur*, he would do it with a smile and a sense of humor. “*Mimah nafshach*,” he would often say. “If I am right, you’ve just gained. If I’m wrong — that’s even better...”

To lighten the atmosphere, he would often retell a story about a failing of his own.

One such story was the following: During a farbrengen, the Frierdiker Rebbe explained that a Rebbe’s *bracha* can only work if the person makes his own *keili* and trusts in the Rebbe’s *bracha*. The Frierdiker Rebbe told a long story about Reb Zev Volf of Zhitomir, who promised a woman a blessing for a child if she would only trust him unquestioningly.

At the end of the story, Reb Shmuel commented to the Frierdiker Rebbe, “Nu, for that you need to be Reb Zev Volf.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe didn’t respond.

The next day, Reb Shmuel was called to the Frierdiker Rebbe.

“There was a Jew in the audience who needed to understand that my *bracha* is reliant on him just as much as me,” the Frierdiker Rebbe said, “and that’s why I told the story, but then you stuck in your, ‘Nu, for that you need to be Reb Zev Volf.’”<sup>15</sup>

got a special pass to travel through Poland to see the Frierdiker Rebbe, despite Lithuania and Poland’s lack of diplomatic relations. It had been 10 years since he had last been in *yechidus*. Before the *yechidus*, the Frierdiker Rebbe’s family asked him to focus on uplifting matters, because the difficult situation of the Jewish people

was weighing down on the Frierdiker Rebbe and affecting his health.

“In the *yechidus*, my grandfather cited the *possuk* about Moshiach’s times: ברגע קטן עזבתיך וברחמים גדלים אקבצך<sup>16</sup>—I left you for a short moment, and with great compassion I will gather you. He told the Frierdiker Rebbe, ‘When Moshiach comes, we

will look at all the suffering like it was just one short moment, *nor a rega...*’ The Frierdiker Rebbe turned and said, ‘Yuh, a rega, *uber a bitere rega*—yes, a moment, but a bitter moment.’

“A year and a half later, the Frierdiker Rebbe himself arrived in the United States after escaping the Nazi occupation of Poland. At the conclusion of the first *maamar*, ‘*Balayla Hahu*’ on Purim, the Frierdiker Rebbe said very similar words: ברגע קטן עזבתיך וברחמים גדלים אקבצך: How could the entire *galus* be called a short moment? But when Moshiach comes and Hashem’s ‘great compassion’ is revealed, we will realize that the entire *galus* was one short moment.”<sup>17</sup>

“My grandfather told me that at that moment, the Frierdiker Rebbe looked directly at him across the table. It was as if to say, now do you understand what I meant? Only then, when the entire Europe was on fire, did my grandfather finally understand just how bitter it would be.”

And the third story, from the Rebbe:

Reb Shmuel passed away on 11 Elul 5734\*, and at the Chai Elul farbrengen, the Rebbe said the following:

“I heard a story from Reb Shmuel Levitin. Today was the conclusion of the *shiva*, and now the *shver* is taking care of him with everything he needs — from the moment the soul departed the body and surely with the *shleimus* of the *shiva*.

“When I came to him once, he spoke about his imprisonment and exile in Siberia. What stood out in his memory? When he told me the story, nobody else was in that room in 770. What did he recall? That he couldn’t remember whether to recite in *birchos hashachar*, “*Hanosen laya’ef koach*” or, “*Hanosen la’ayef koach*.”

“What was the most disturbing element of the exile and the suffering and the lack of any basic necessities in



Siberia? What really mattered to him? The uncertainty whether to say *la'ayef* or *laya'ef*.

“This is a demonstration of the level that can be achieved by the Rabbeim in those who are *mekushar* to them.”<sup>18</sup>

## UNIQUE – EVEN IN EARLIER GENERATIONS

“When my grandfather was ill,” says Rabbi Levitin, “the Rebbe personally came to visit him in the hospital. I also remember that my grandfather once fell in a snowstorm and dislocated his arm, and the Rebbetzin called our home very often to see how he was doing.

“When he passed away, the Rebbe participated in the *levaya* all the way

to the cemetery, although he remained behind the gate. The Rebbetzin’s car followed the hearse all the way to the cemetery as well. Later, she told my father that ‘*Reb Shmuel iz geven unique*’ — using the English term. She said that, ‘He would have been considered unique even in previous generations.’” <sup>1</sup>

1. *Derher* Tammuz 5775 pg. 18.
2. *Devarim* 23:6
3. *Kfar Chabad Magazine*, issue 530 pg. 20
4. See story in *Kfar Chabad Magazine*, issue 530 pg. 20. Letter in *Igros Kodesh Admur Harayatz* vol. 4 pg. 515.
5. *Kfar Chabad Magazine* issue 530 pg. 14.
6. This is not to imply that Reb Shmuel gave halachic rulings simply based on the Rebbe’s inclination. Rather, as the Mishnah states (*Negaim* 9), חכם גדול אתה שקיימת דברים, חכמים. Reb Shmuel was able to see the Rebbe’s

inclination through a halachic lense, and rule accordingly — obviously with the proper halachic guidelines.

7. *Kfar Chabad Magazine* issue 870 pg. 26.
8. *Kfar Chabad Magazine* issue 870 pg. 25.
9. *Admorei Chabad V’Yahadut Gruzia* pg. 16
10. *Igros Kodesh Admur Harayatz* vol. 1 pg. 227
11. English letter dated 11 Cheshvan 5721. Telsner-Swerdlov Teshura, 29 Shevat 5757 pg. 20. The second shliach may be a reference to Reb Shmerel Sasonkin (the Rebbe identified the first as Reb Shmuel during a *yechidus* with Mrs. Groner).
12. *Kfar Chabad Magazine*, issue 530 pg. 16.
13. *Kfar Chabad Magazine*, issue 585, pg. 21.
14. *Kfar Chabad Magazine* issue 530 pg. 18
15. *Kfar Chabad Magazine* issue 530 pg. 20
16. *Yeshayahu* 54:7.
17. *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5700 pg. 10.
18. *Ashreinu* Audio, Chai Elul 5734, Sichah 3 min. 6:06-8:29, condensed for clarity.



THE REBBE ATTENDS THE LEVAYA OF REB SHMUEL, 12 ELUL 5734.