

לזכות  
החייל בצבאות ה',  
השליח מנחם מענדל שיחי'  
לרגל האפשרעניש' שלו ח' תשרי ה'תשפ"ב

נדפס ע"י הוריו  
הרה"ת ר' שמוליק זוגתו מרת ח' מושקא  
שיחיו גרינברג  
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר לוויציטה, קנסס

# A Visit With The New Lubavitcher Rebbe



*Presented here are selections of an interview with the Rebbe shortly after Yud Shevat 5711, by Dr. Gershon Kranzler, published in Orthodox Jewish Life (Sept./Oct. 1951), under the heading: "Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, having just accepted the position as leader of the Lubavitch movement, talked of his concerns and his approach to strengthening Judaism in the United States."*



I was standing in the hallway of the Rebbe's residence in Brooklyn. The Maariv service had just concluded and the Yeshiva Bachurim were streaming out of the *Beth Hamidrash* into the cold winter evening. Released from the strenuous routine of many hours of concentrated study, the young scholars, most of them with beard and *peyos*, were chatting freely and loudly, while they put on their coats to leave the building. Suddenly the loud talk ceased and a look of awed respect appeared on the lively faces as the new Rebbe walked through the hall towards the door. Deferentially, they pressed forward on both sides of the narrow doorway. One young man, flustered, moved from one side of the way to the other, to make more room and stumbled into the path of the Rebbe. Before he had a chance to recover his balance, the Rebbe had taken him by the shoulder and had gently helped him to the side, a smile lighting up his serious face.

Instantly, the embarrassment of the young scholar was gone. The Rebbe's smile reflected in his happy eyes, and

the entire atmosphere was suddenly changed. The awe was gone and a warm current of friendly understanding seemed to flow through the young scholars pressed closely into the hallway, brightening the frosty dark of the evening.

This experience of a few fleeting moments, the mute exchange of a smile and glance, answered many a question that had risen in my mind since the passing of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe a year before, and the election of his successor. I had the privilege of knowing Rabbi Menachem



M. Schneerson before he assumed his new office and I had come to appreciate the young scholar with the serious face and unassuming, almost shy manners. He then directed the educational aspects of the Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch. But now everything was different. This was no longer the "RaMaSh," the son-in-law of the Rebbe, respected as a scholar, a friendly advisor, and interpreter of the thoughts of Chabad Chassidism. His new burden of office, with its responsibility for the thousands of followers of Chabad the world over, and its exacting demands for attention to the hundreds of visitors seeking aid, advice and inspiration from the Lubavitcher Rebbe day in, day out, would seem to have removed Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson from any close personal relation. But the little incident in the hallway taught me better, and I began to appreciate the importance which a Chassidic leader of this type can assume for the future of the Jewish people, even in these days of twentieth century culture.

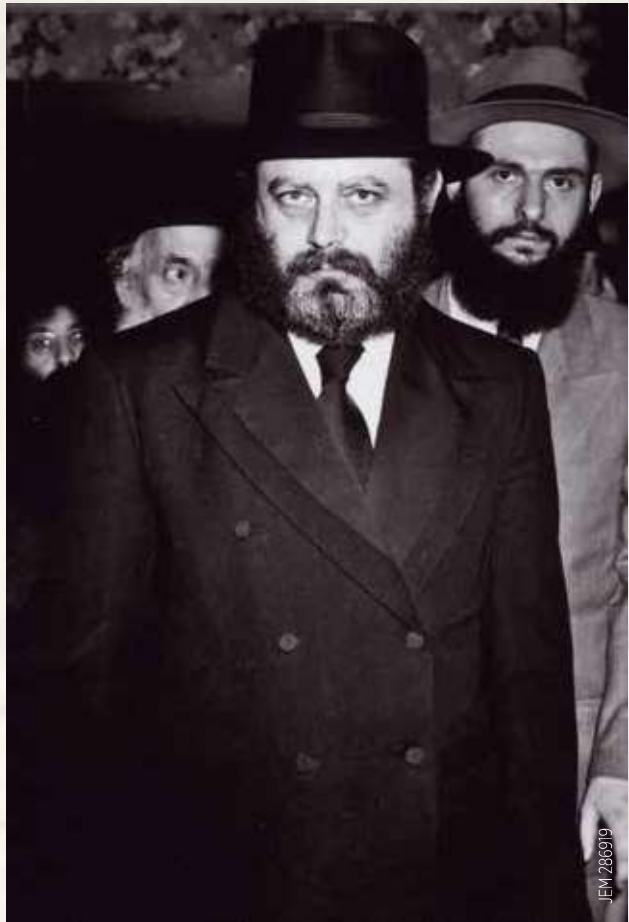
When the opportunity arose to visit the Rebbe and to transmit his views and perspective on the task ahead, I remembered something Rabbi Schneerson had once said when he addressed a gathering of young workers for the furtherance of Jewish education: "It is not we that count, we with our weaknesses and capabilities. It is our will to do a job that we realize is important. Success is not in our hands, it is in G-d's. But we have to will to do what He demands of us, and in that will all our weaknesses and insufficiencies wane and become insignificant."

I could not have searched for a better motto to characterize the message of courage and encouragement which I took with me when I had the privilege to spend some time with the new Lubavitcher Rebbe, and to question him on his views concerning the contemporary Jewish scene.

### IS DISPERSION A CATASTROPHE?

"It is a mistake," said Rabbi Schneerson, "if we conceive of the worldwide dispersion of the Jewish people in *golus* [exile] as a catastrophe. As a matter of fact, this very lack of concentration of the remnants of our nation was the source of our salvation throughout the centuries of persecution and pogroms. Hitler was the greatest threat to our national survival because the largest concentration of the masses of Eastern and Central European Jewry had come into his evil grasp. On the other hand, however, concentration of large groups of our people in one country has been the means of creating the spiritual centers from which the rest of the Jewish colonies could draw their inspiration, leadership and material replenishment.

"Our history in *golus* is an unbroken chain of the



emergence and disappearance of such centers in country after country, and from one corner of the earth to the next. As the Jewish sun set in one land, it had already begun to rise in another. Now that the great centers of Eastern Europe have been destroyed by Fascism and Communism, America has become the focus and fountainhead of Jewish survival. Providence has prepared a new home for Torah and Yiddishkeit in this country, while the flames devoured the bastions of the strongest and most impregnable Jewish fortresses on the other side of the ocean."

With earnest emphasis, the new Chabad leader continued: "American Jewry must recognize this sacred, historical mission which Divine Providence has entrusted to it at this critical moment of our struggle for survival. The largest concentration of our best elements are in America. We must lead the smaller Jewish communities in other countries and continents, even in *Eretz Yisrael*, which must lean heavily on American support for its economic and spiritual survival. The very shape which Jewry and Judaism of tomorrow will present, depends on the active leadership of each and every Jew in this country.

"Realization of this historical mission," Rabbi Schneerson said, "demands a complete about-face and





reevaluation of our spiritual position. America's great genius has been in the development of the individual, of the pioneering and self-made man type. Although this helped in developing our potentialities by demanding every last ounce of ingenuity and perseverance, it has on the other hand focused too much attention on egoistic aims and interests. Personal goals have dominated. Only in our spare and leisure time, after we have carved our groove in terms of economic or social success, have we dedicated some time and effort to philanthropic and communal affairs. We have been social workers on an amateur, after-working-hours basis. This pattern of life has been no less characteristic of American Jews than of other Americans.

"But it is at this point that there must be a change of basic outlook and concomitant redirection and reorganization of our existence as a community and as individuals. Primarily we must live the life of social beings, with the responsibility and dedication of our best efforts for the *clal*, the community. Only then can we afford to invest in our own individual aims and goals."

This, Rabbi Schneerson stressed, was his main message to American Jews: "The only way American Jewry can live up to its historic task is by self-sacrificing, self-effacing *mesirat nefesh* for the Jewish *clal*."

"The thing we have to fear most at this moment is the defeatism and the defection that has gripped some of our best elements in this country in the face of the

growing effects of so-called 'interfaith' movements, of the watering down of the very content of our religion to a point where our children will no longer know whether they are Jewish or not. Charity begins at home. We cannot talk of assuming responsibility for the rest of the Jewish world, of building new centers for Torah and Yiddishkeit elsewhere, even in *Eretz Yisrael*, when right here in our midst our brothers and sisters are being engulfed. More than that, we have no right to teach and lead others if at home we neglect the very thing we want to make others do.

"But," warned the Rebbe with a smile, "I don't want you to convey the impression that I am merely giving *mussar* - moral exhortations. It has never been the way of Lubavitch to give *mussar* only. *Mussar* serves us only as a means towards actions. Whatever we say or preach must be geared to some active goal. We ourselves can point to amazing results that draw in ever-widening circles of non-religious as well as religious elements of our people."

In response to the look of surprise in my eyes, the Rebbe continued: "Yes, I mean non-religious circles. You see, it has always been the belief of Chabad that there is not a single Jew, as far as he may seem or thought himself to have drifted from the center of Yiddishkeit, who does not have some good point, some particular mitzvah which by nature or by inclination he may promote. This spark of good in each soul can and must be utilized for the good of the Jewish community and



in turn, for the good of the person who does it. For this reason, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe called not only on Orthodox Jews for cooperation in this work after he settled in this country ten years ago, but he drew on all types of Jews who had the power and will to contribute some aspect, some particular skill or capacity towards the offensive for Jewish education and the Torah life.”

Rabbi Schneerson paused. For some minutes he remained sunk in reflection, then said: “Let’s realize this. The Jewish people has been so heavily decimated in the past decade or two that each of us must be made to count, and to count doubly. And it is for this reason that this call to take the offensive for Torah Judaism is not only directed at the observant. The accomplishment counts for what it achieves objectively and what it does to the one involved. In this respect, too, a mitzvah is its own reward.

“Many of those who may think they are lost as *‘Epikorsim’* are really not, and need only some stimulation, some bridge to find the way back. There was for example, the man who visited the late Lubavitcher Rebbe to ask for his counsel concerning some business matter. After he had answered the question, the Rebbe suggested that he put on Tefillin. The visitor protested, ‘What is the sense of talking to me about Tefillin if I do not believe in anything at all. I am an *Epikores*.’

“Not so easily does one become an *Epikores*,’ replied the Rebbe. ‘One has to know a great deal of

the questions and problems and know the answers, and then refuse to accept them, to deserve this title. You first put on Tefillin, and you will discover that you needed only such a bridge to find yourself.”

As I took leave, overwhelmed by the spiritual experience of the short hour I had been privileged to spend with the new Lubavitcher Rebbe, he stressed again an earlier warning. “The only purpose of our talk can be to speak about the work which the late Lubavitcher Rebbe has started in this country, and into which he has been able to draw so many varied groups of Jewish people. This work must and will go on, with the help of G-d. We must all contribute to this historic mission. This is what I want you to convey to your readers. And if it helps to make them realize what our task is, and put their shoulder to the wheel, then our time was well spent indeed.”

This is the new Lubavitcher Rebbe. The high office, the admiration of the people, the burden of directing innumerable activities of world-wide organizations, had not marred his modesty. Publicity is generally sought by leaders of such stature, but the new Rebbe is not that kind of leader. As he once told a gathering of his co-workers: “We, ourselves, don’t count. It is our task, our sacred mission, that matters. And if we but want to carry it on, our goal will not remain unachieved.” **T**