

How did the Rebbe react
upon seeing a bochur
who was wearing an
apron in the kitchen?

ליל שימורים

The Rebbe's Visits at the Sedorim of Mosdos in the Neighborhood

A very select group of Chassidim gathered in the Rebbe's room waiting for the moment when the 'tatte' of klal Yisroel would bless his children.

It was Erev Yom Kippur of 5712 and the Rebbe had indicated that he wanted to give birkas habonim to the bochurim. This closeness he showed to the tmimim became an annual highlight, one that no bochur wanted to ever miss. But it would be exhibited more than just once a year. On Pesach of that same year, 5712, the Rebbe again made it clear how dear the bochurim are to him, and began the practice of visiting them as they prepared to conduct their own Pesach seder. The care and concern of the Rebbe to each and every detail struck a deep chord within the hearts of all those who merited to be present at these visits. We have attempted, for the first time ever, to paint a picture of this annual event so that we can all appreciate the specialty of the occasion. Each year and every visit can fill an article for itself. However, for now we have focused on giving a general overview.

Why was there a red
carpet rolled out over
President Street?

As most people rushed home
to begin their sederim, the
Rebbe would purposely go in
the opposite direction to visit
some very special locations.

לע"נ
הרה"ח התמים המשפיע ר' אברהם בן ר' דובער ע"ה דריזין ('מאיר')
לרגל יום ה'ארציט' - י' ניסן
ולע"נ בתו מרת רחל בת ר' אברהם ע"ה
נדפס ע"י משפחתם שי'

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Special thanks to Rabbi Mendel Feller for his assistance.

Feverish activity took over the dining hall of Beis Rivkah at 723 Eastern parkway.

The night of the seder is a busy one and the *bochurim*, who then ate at this location, were getting ready to begin *Kadeish*. As the final preparations were being completed and the *ka'aros* were set up, the main door swung open and the Rebbe strode inside. Great joy swelled in their hearts as they realized that the Rebbe's visit to their seder last year, 5712, was not a once off event but rather they would have the *zechus* of receiving the Rebbe's *brocha* this year as well.

The *bochurim* gathered around the Rebbe to catch every word. The Rebbe gazed over at the *ka'aros* and noticed that the *maror* was placed in paper plates. After being asked the reason for this, the *bochurim* replied that this was done so that the *maror* doesn't make the matza wet. Hearing their answer, the Rebbe said, "This *minhag* was not seen by the Friediker Rebbe and we need not innovate things. To prevent wetting the matza, the Friediker Rebbe would shake it off. You can put it on two or three napkins instead."

Observing the room, the Rebbe noticed that a basic seder staple was missing; the wine had still not been brought out, and they could obviously not begin without it. Turning to the *bochurim* he said, "I am sure you will not be conducting the seder with milk... Nu, you should have a kosher and *freilichen* Pesach. You should be joyous and this should continue throughout the year."

The First Stop

Perhaps in the years 5712 and 5713 these special visits caught the *bochurim* by surprise, but this quickly turned into an annual highlight.

Following *maariv* on the first night of Pesach, when Jews all over rush home to begin their seder, the Rebbe began his rounds of visiting the *sedorim*. At first only the *bochurim* were visited, but as the years passed, other *mosdos* added,



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BOCHURIM PREPARE FOOD FOR YOM TOV IN THE YESHIVA KITCHEN

including, Hadar Hatorah, Machon Chana, FREE and more. For the Rebbe to begin his seder, he simply had to go up to the second floor of 770, and after 5730 it was a brief walk to President Street, yet he went well out of the way to express his deep care for those not celebrating with family.

It is beyond the scope of this article to highlight every incident, and no doubt every *bochur* or *chossid* that merited being at one of these visits has his own cherished memories, yet we will highlight several of those moments to try and describe the uniqueness of the occasion.

During every visit, the Rebbe inspected many of the rooms and areas of the yeshiva kitchen, including the washing area and pantry. He would also look at the tables and observe the way things were set up for the seder. When the visit came to an end, the Rebbe would give a beautiful *brocha*. The length and content of this *brocha* varied from year to year and sometimes the Rebbe would include a *possuk* from his new *kapitel* that was just started on Yud-Aleph Nissan. In the later years, the Rebbe would be *magia* these *brochos* after yom tov.

As the years went on, it became increasingly clear that although the Rebbe's visits to the different *mosdos* were centered around Pesach and the seder, he also paid close attention to many other

details throughout the building.

The Filter

In 5737, after inspecting the dining room and glancing at every plate, and at the bags in the kitchen, the Rebbe stopped at the sink and touched the rubber filter covering the faucet. Turning to Reb Dovid Raskin, he said, "There is an empty space in there, and undesirable things can get caught there, so it should be checked every once in a while."

Bochurim who were present then, fondly recall how Reb Dovid Raskin farbrengened late into the night with the words the Rebbe told him, translating them into practical guidance in *avodas Hashem*.

True Comfort

In 5712, after observing all that had been done to prepare for Pesach, and the seder, with great satisfaction, the Rebbe noticed something missing and brought this to the attention of the *bochurim*. "There should be additional pillows and blankets to make the leaning more comfortable."

That same year, the Rebbe noticed that the wine was not being stored in a good place and he commented that it shouldn't be left near the oven because there is the possibility of it becoming vinegary. The

Rebbe also pointed out that the *mezuza* on the door leading outside was not positioned at the correct angle.

In 5714 the Rebbe asked if everyone had taken *challah* from the matzos (the matzos were handbaked by the *bochurim*) and if the *marror* had been prepared with a *shinui* (a change from the normal way), as it may not be done on Yom Tov.¹

In 5741, after walking through the dining room and pantry, the Rebbe paused before giving the usual *brocha* and asked if the candles had been lit by a woman that had recited “*Shehechiyonu*.” The *bochurim* replied in the negative. The Rebbe then went into the kitchen, blessed the cook and asked her to ‘lend’ one of her candles to the *bochurim* so that they can look at it during *kiddush*. The Rebbe then instructed that the candle be placed on a tall chair so it can be seen by all.

“Next Year in...”

In 5734 Machon Chana was opened. It was named after the Rebbe’s mother and served as a seminary for young women that hadn’t received a frum education.

From that year on Machon Chana became a regular stop of the Rebbe as he visited the various *sedorim*. But in fact, that year, the night of Pesach was the second time the Rebbe would visit that location.

Earlier in the year, while the building was still being renovated, the Rebbe toured the site with Rabbi Yaakov Yehudah Hecht with the aid of a flashlight, as the electricity was still not up and running. The Rebbe went through each of its three floors and before leaving, he placed a Siddur, Tehillim, Tanya, Kesser Shem Tov, Magid Devorov L’yaakov, and a *tzedaka* pushka in the building.

One can just imagine how much these Pesach visits meant to the girls, and the Rebbe reserved a very special *brocha* for them; “Next year you should merit celebrating yourselves [in your own homes].”

Throughout the years, the Rebbe observed many of the finer details and brought it to the attention of those in charge. One more famous incident took place during the visit of 5737, when the Rebbe noticed and commented that the mirrors were not sufficient for the girls’ needs and this should be corrected.

A Shabbos’dike Exhibit

In 5738, after observing and going through each floor of the building, the Rebbe continued into the kitchen and then the dining room, glancing at the way each *ka’aroh* was set up.

When the Rebbe finished inside Machon Chana, he started walking towards the home of the dorm mother, the Ganzburgs.

Reb Itchke Ganzburg had established a museum of sorts in which he displayed various exhibits depicting different items and concepts of Yiddishkeit, such as a Beis Hamikdosh model. He would travel around with his displays, giving children

the opportunity to learn something about their heritage.

Before Pesach that year, Reb Itchke had asked the Rebbe in a letter if he can set up the exhibits in Machon Chana so that the Rebbe can view them when he comes to visit the seder. The Rebbe responded, “תערוכה בשבת?”—“An exhibit on Shabbos?!”

When the Rebbe arrived at the Ganzburg home, however, he expressed interest in seeing the exhibits. This request came to Reb Itchke as a complete surprise because of the response he had received, and as a result the exhibit was not setup. When he mentioned this, the Rebbe replied that nevertheless he would like to see it.

The visit to Machon Chana in 5739 was truly a lesson for everyone. As the Rebbe went from floor to floor and room to room he attempted to open one door which proved to be locked. Mrs. Ganzburg explained, “[It’s closed because] there is *chometz* inside.” The Rebbe immediately replied, “It is not appropriate to mention that word on Pesach.” He then gave the Ganzburgs a special *brocha*.



THE DORMITORY OF MACHON CHANA

F.R.E.E.

The Rebbe was no stranger to the F.R.E.E. building on 1383 President, which sits just a few short houses away from the corner of Kingston Avenue. He had been there many times before Yud Shevat 5710. The building had belonged to the Kozlover Rebbe, who owned a large library with many precious and rare *seforim*. From time to time the Rebbe would stop in there to look something up or to research a certain *inyan*. In 5732, the building was purchased by F.R.E.E., they very much wanted the Rebbe to visit their first seder in the new building.

In 5729 the Rebbe had established this *mosad* and named it Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe. Later, the staff began to use the name F.R.E.E. as an acronym. The goal of this organization was to care for the needs of the many Russian Jews

arriving on the shores of America with nothing more than the clothing on their backs. The staff working for F.R.E.E were determined to nourish these people in both body and soul.

As Pesach 5733 approached, Rabbi Abba Pliskin, who was the senior member in the Vaad of F.R.E.E., reported to the Rebbe that F.R.E.E. will conduct sederim for Russian Jews, and requested that the Rebbe visit the seder. A short while before Pesach the response came that the Rebbe would indeed attend.

The Rebbe's affection for Soviet Jewry is well known, and as the *possuk* says, כמים הפנים לפנים, they too felt a strong and close connection with the Rebbe.

When word came to F.R.E.E about the Rebbe's impending visit to their humble quarters, they went into a frenzy, and feverish preparations began for this momentous occasion.



FRIENDS OF REFUGES OF EASTERN EUROPE
HEADQUARTERS ON PRESIDENT STREET

The Royal Carpet

Rabbi Okunov described what went on during the days preceding Pesach and the visit itself:

Anyone who was able to help was quickly mobilized. A red carpet was laid along President Street from the corner of Kingston all the way into the building and across the staircase. Flanking the carpet on both sides were lights set up to illuminate the path.

Visiting Spots

A) 770. The Rebbe held his seder in the Friediker Rebbe's apartment on 770's second floor until 5730.

B) 723 Eastern Parkway, the original building of Beis Rivkah. The bochurim conducted their seder here from 5712 through the mid 5720s.

C) 676 Eastern Parkway; the Yeshiva kitchen was based at this location in the mid 5720s. This is where the seder took place after moving from Beis Rivkah.

D) 749 Eastern Parkway; the Yeshiva dormitory. The bochurim had their seder here beginning from 5727. That year, when the Rebbe visited the building on Pesach night, he commented "וקרא זה אל"ז - it is opposite 770!

E) The building on the corner of Union and Eastern Parkway which currently

houses the *Kolel*. The bochurim's seder later moved to this location. The building was known as "*U'foratzta*". In 5739, the Persian children had their seder here.

F) 1414 President Street. In 5738, the bochurim's seder moved to the new kitchen at this location. When the Rebbe passed by "*U'foratzta*" on his way to 1414, the Rebbe smiled and told Reb Yankel Katz "They've locked the doors (here) and now we need to go to a new location". When in the building the Rebbe commented a few times, stating that it is "ברהרחה" – wide and spacious, and blessed Rashag that from this הרחה they should reach גדולה יותר (roughly translated: even more prosperity).

G) The building that belongs to F.R.E.E. This is where the Russian refugees had their seder. Beginning with the mid-

5730s, the Rebbe would visit their seder.

H) Hadar Hatorah. The Rebbe visited the seder of the bochurim who studied there a number of times. In 5740, the Rebbe visited the seder of the Persian children, held here.

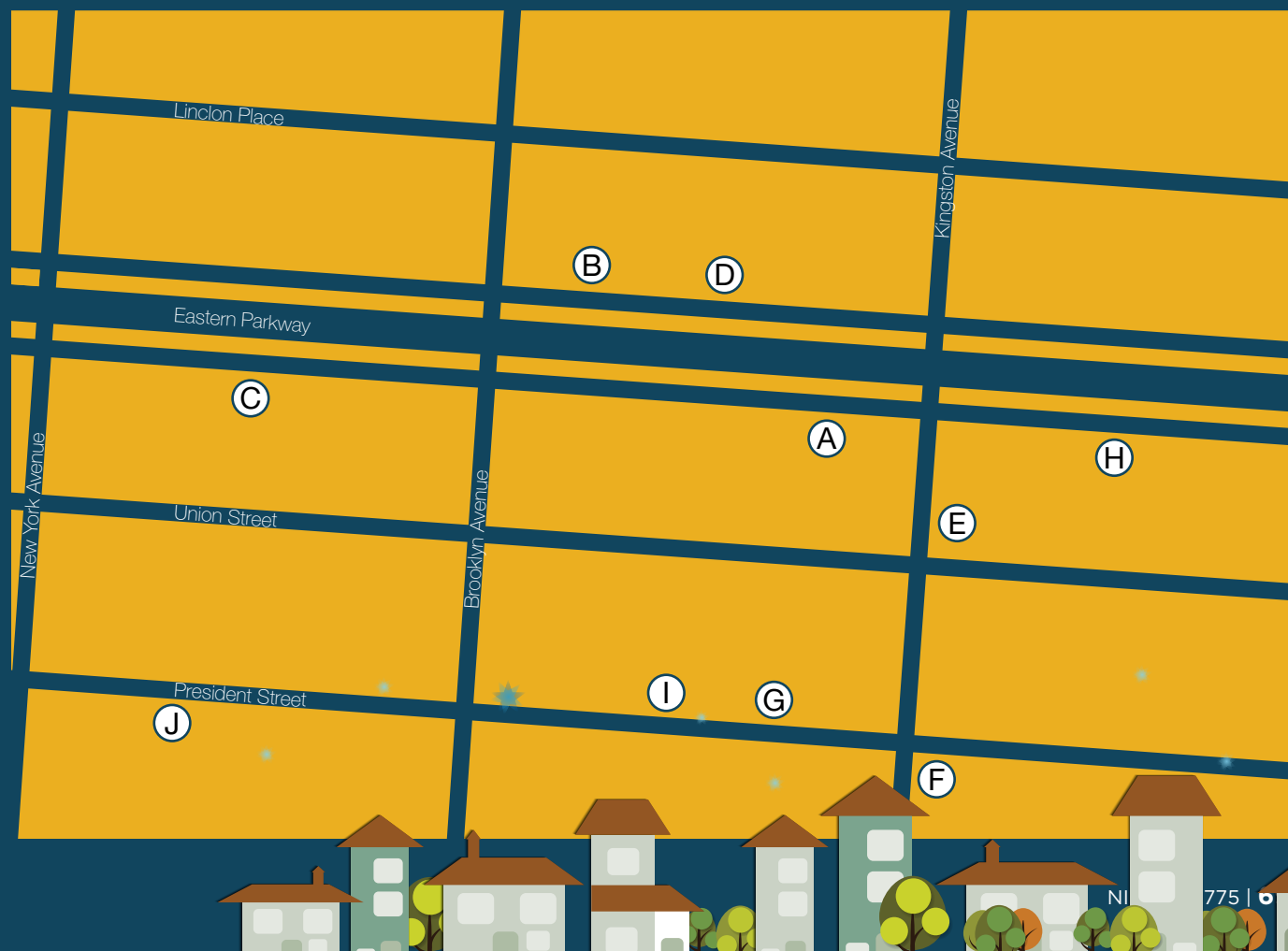
I) Machon Chana. This house was purchased in 5734. The Rebbe paid a visit to the newly purchased edifice on 15 Shevat that year (see inside the article), and again on Pesach for the girls' seder. In subsequent years, the Rebbe would visit here on Pesach night.

J) The Rebbe's house. In 5741 (the final year), as the Rebbe reached his house after visiting all the *sedorim*, he turned to the crowd and blessed them with a "*Pesach kosher v'someach*", and Reb Yankel Katz delivered *birkas kohanim*; see inside the article.

The Rebbe always began his visit by going through the crowd until the kitchen and giving a *brocha* to the kitchen staff in Russian, who then would take

There was such a rush and hubbub of activity during the preparations that first year that some things were just not done properly. After the Rebbe and those accompanying him had entered the building, the red carpet that had been laid out had moved a little bit and it was dangerous for anyone to climb the staircase like that. Quickly, a *yungerman* who had been working all day and was still wearing his weekday clothes, grabbed hold of the carpet and held it in place so that would be safe to climb. When the Rebbe was leaving, he turned to this *yungerman* and asked him in Russian, “And in your house they have already made Pesach?”

"Yes, now I am going home," he affirmed.

[illegible]

“Just remain here a little longer to ensure that everything is under control...”

During this conversation there was a chossid standing nearby, who then wanted to tell the Rebbe something in Yiddish. With a smile the Rebbe said to him, “He is speaking Russian and I also know Russian.”

The Rebbe concluded with asking the *yungerman* about his *parnassa* then gave him a *brocha*



The Rebbe would always give a special *brocha* to these refugees, blessing them to merit to one day be together with the rest of their families, many of whom were still behind the “Iron curtain.” In the years 5739-5741 the Rebbe edited these *brochos* in Russian.²

The effect those moments had on these Yidden, who literally gave up everything for Yiddishkeit, goes well beyond whatever we can imagine.

A Russian Brocha

Mr. Gegerman was a refugee from Russia who was also a writer, he merited to receive some very special attention from the Rebbe.

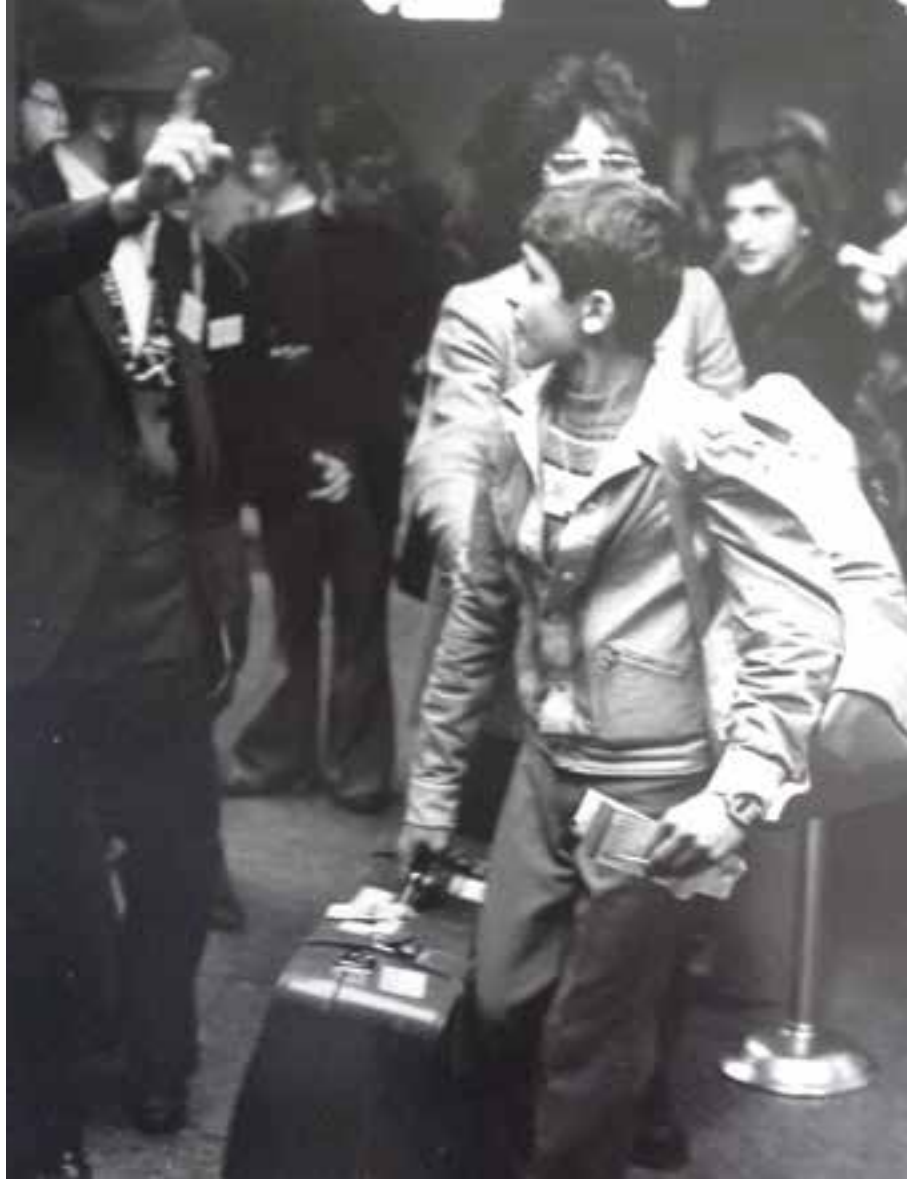
He was present at the visit to F.R.E.E. in 5738. When the Rebbe entered the building, he turned to Mr. Gegerman and said that he should compose a nice write-up about the Pesach seder. Before the Rebbe left Mr. Gegerman commented that the Rebbe has a shining countenance. The Rebbe replied, “You should see to it that the light here should reach all the way to Moscow.”

“Rebbe,” said Mr. Gegerman. “It all depends on you.”

The Rebbe replied that through Mr. Gegerman’s writing skills, he has all the avenues to reach there.

Once again he said, “This is up to you [Rebbe].”

To this the Rebbe answered, “Everything on my shoulders?! Everyone must do what is their responsibility!”



BOCHURIM DIRECT IRANIAN CHILDREN AS THEY ARRIVE ON US SOIL

When the Rebbe was ready to leave after visiting the Russian *sedorim* in 5741, the children announced “יחי אדוננו מוריננו” and began the *niggun* “We want Moshiach now.” The Rebbe clapped with his hands encouraging the singing vigorously.

That encouragement flowed through the blood of every Russian Jew, knowing that there was a Rebbe who cared and worried for each one of them personally.

In Search of a Translator

Another special group that merited to have the Rebbe visit them during the seder was the children who had managed

to leave Iran. Children began arriving in 5739, and from their first Pesach in America the Rebbe stopped by every year to give them a *brocha*.

In a previous article, the story of this miraculous escape is described in full detail, as well as the special attention they received from the Rebbe.³

Here we highlight the events surrounding their Pesach *sedorim*.

In 5739 the Rebbe began his visit with the kitchen. Standing there was a *bochur* wearing an apron. Upon catching sight of this, the Rebbe broke into a wide smile. When the Rebbe came into the dining room he looked at the *ka'aros* that the boys themselves had set up, and he then turned to give them a *brocha*.

The Rebbe asked if anyone knew Persian and would be able to translate. Rabbi Yaakov Yehudah Hecht pointed to the *bochur* Hertzel Illulian who was fluent in the language. The Rebbe asked if he also understood Yiddish, which he did. At the conclusion of the *brocha* and its translation the boys all responded loudly, “*Amen, kein yehi ratzon*,” in their Sefardic accents. Following their lead, the Rebbe repeated this, also in a Sefardi pronunciation, and then began the *niggun* “*V’somachta*.”

On the way out, Reb Yankel Katz, who was accompanying the Rebbe, asked if these were all the children from Iran. To this the Rebbe replied, “This is only the beginning.”

Reb Yankel then suggested that it be publicized that the Rebbe had visited them. The Rebbe pointed to Rabbi Hecht and said, “I am relying on him.”

In 5740, as the Rebbe was walking into Hadar Torah to visit the seder of the Iranian immigrants, there was a group of American children standing around outside with their fathers. With a big smile the Rebbe asked if they were also Iranian.

When the Rebbe finished giving his customary *brocha* he picked up a Persian Hagadah from the table, but when he saw that it had a name inside he set it down. Then he picked up a different Hagadah and asked Rabbi Hecht if he could take it, leaving with it in hand.

The Rebbe then continued on to Machon Chana, where the Iranian girls happened to be staying. There were some girls milling around and the Rebbe inquired who they were. After hearing that they were the girls from Iran, the Rebbe asked where they were having their seder. Rabbi Groner replied, “They are each going to different homes but they have gathered here to hear the Rebbe’s *brocha*.”

Once the *brocha* had been translated into Persian the Rebbe said that the girls should say *Amen* with their Persian accents. They did so and the Rebbe smiled broadly.



PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 126178



PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 126183

THE REBBE GIVES RABBI Y. Y. HECHT A BOTTLE OF MASHKE UPON BRINGING A GROUP OF IRANIAN CHILDREN FOR KOS SHEL BROCHA, MOTZOEI PESACH, 5739

In 5741 when the Rebbe was ready to give his *brocha* to the Persians, he asked if anyone could translate it. There was one *bochur* who knew Persian but not Yiddish, so he suggested that Rabbi Hecht would translate from Yiddish to English and then this *bochur* would translate into Persian. The Rebbe declined this and another *bochur* offered to translate. The Rebbe asked the *bochur* if he knew Hebrew, which he did, so the

brocha was given in Hebrew and then translated to Persian. The Rebbe broke it up into four allowing the *bochur* to explain it piece by piece. During the final part, in which the Rebbe spoke about Moshaiach, the Rebbe pointed out that the *bochur* had shortened it considerably. He then said, “The main thing is that Moshiach should come in all languages and in all countries.”

Hadar HaTorah

Some years the Rebbe also visited the Hadar HaTorah yeshiva for *baalei teshuva*. As with the other *mosdos* the Rebbe walked through all the rooms of the building, including the kitchen, where he gave the cook a *brocha*. The Rebbe paid careful attention to the way the seder was set up and whenever something was amiss he would point it out so it could be corrected.

In 5737, the Rebbe walked into the *zal* on the second floor alongside Rabbi Hecht. The Rebbe sat down, said something and then walked over to the bookshelves and mentioned to Rabbi Hecht that the *seforim* were in such good condition it seems that they aren't used. To this Rabbi Hecht replied, "They bind them regularly..."



RABBI MOSHE FELLER WITH A GROUP OF YOUNG STUDENTS

No Laughing Matter!

As mentioned earlier, the girls learning at Machon Chana held their own seder. This was led by Rabbi Moshe Feller, along with his wife, who were like parents to many of these girls. Although they were already on *shlichus* in Minnesota, from 5736 they came to New York for Pesach every year.

Rabbi Feller relates the following incident that took place during the visit to the seder in 5737:

The Rebbe came in and inspected the whole place. He looked at the classrooms, went upstairs to the dormitory, and he



PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 140618

even went to the kitchen. More than 100 women, including students, teachers and helpers, were watching his every move. As he was leaving, he turned to Rabbi Groner and said, "ווער פרעגט די פיר קשיות? –Who's asking the Four Questions here?"

"Feller's son," Rabbi Groner replied, referring to my son Mendel, who was almost nine-years-old at the time.

The Rebbe was on the stairs coming up from the basement dining room—where the seder was being held—he looked over the banister at Mendel and asked him in Yiddish, "דו ווייסט די פיר קשיות? דו ווייסט זיי, בעל פה? –Do you know the Four Questions? Do you know them by heart?"

My son, who was standing at the other end of the room near the kitchen didn't hear what the Rebbe said and came a bit closer.

So the Rebbe asked again in English: "Do you know the Four Questions? By heart?"

This time, Mendel nodded and said יא in yiddish. The Rebbe smiled and pointed at me, saying

"But does he know the answers?"

Everybody laughed. It was a nice moment.

We had a beautiful seder. It must have been 4:00 a.m. when I got to sleep, so the next morning I didn't make it to

the Rebbe's *minyan*. I came later. When I arrived at 770, I was called into the Rebbe's room.

The Rebbe was there still wearing his *tallis*. When he saw me, he sternly declared, "What I said last night in Machon Chana was not a joke. Everybody there took it as a joke, but I didn't mean it to be funny."

And then he went on: "A child doesn't understand rituals. A child is thinking, 'We went through this whole thing last year! Why are we going through it again?' That's what he is asking in his heart. So the father has to transmit to the child that it's not the same thing as last year; it's a new thing. It's a new reliving of what happened last year. Do you understand this?"

I didn't respond, so the Rebbe repeated himself.

And then I said, "I understand. The Rebbe is referring to the chassidic explanation of the teaching of the *Chazal*, that in every single generation and every single day, a person must see himself as having personally gone out of *Mitzrayim*. We are meant to be constantly reliving the *geulah* from *Mitzrayim* and to see it as if it's a new experience."

The Rebbe nodded, "Yes. That's what I mean." Then he told me, "When you go

back to Machon Chana, tell this to them and explain that I didn't mean to make a joke."

Of course I said I would, but also, because I am an opportunist and here I was talking to the Rebbe one-on-one, I said, "Today happens to be my birthday. I had my own 'personal exodus' at *chatzos* after the first Seder."

The Rebbe chuckled and said, "It's the same message. Every time you have another birthday it's the same idea. Every birthday must be a whole new experience."


And then he gave me blessings galore.



In the following years the Rebbe built up on this:

In 5738, the Rebbe said to Rabbi Feller that he should answer all the questions, just as he did last year. In 5739 the Rebbe told him, "Most probably your son will ask the questions and you will answer, as was in the previous years. It should be *b'hatzlacha rabba*."

Birkas Kohanim

The last year the Rebbe visited the mosdos on Pesach night was 5741. After concluding at the final location, Machon Chana, the crowd escorted the Rebbe to his home. When they reached the corner of President Street and Brooklyn Avenue, Reb Yankel Katz asked the Rebbe if he could bless the Rebbe and the whole crowd with *birkas kohanim*. The Rebbe replied, "This is a good thing at any time." When Reb Yankel concluded his rendition, the Rebbe responded with "*Amen, ken yehi ratzon*" and proceeded home. 

1. Usually we prepare the Marror on Erev Pesach, but when Erev Pesach falls out on Shabbos, this is not allowed, so we prepare the Marror on Yom Tov with a Shinui. In 5714, Erev Pesach fell out on Shabbos.
2. Likutei Sichos Vol. 17, pages, 461, 464. Vol. 22, pages 285-286.
3. A Chassidisher Derher, Nissan 5773



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