



BEHIND THE PICTURE

THE ENGLISH CHARTER

- SUMMER 5721 -

A whirlwind of emotions and special moments¹

It had all begun with deep disappointment. The first chartered flight from Great Britain to the Rebbe almost did not happen. In mid 5721, Reb Bentzion Shemtov together with Mr. Zalmon Jaffe tried arranging a chartered flight by sharing an aircraft with another organization that was flying to New York, but ill-tempered travel agents condemned the project to failure.

It was nevertheless an audacious undertaking; had it succeeded, nearly 120 people would have flown to New York for just £35, a price well below the common cost of hundreds of pounds. So when they tried their luck a second time, the project was met with some skepticism, along with a healthy dose of hope.

The second attempt aimed for that summer, 20 Tammuz 5721 to be precise. But it too faced some serious challenges.

The exasperating travel agents nearly managed to have the trip cancelled again, alleging that not all passengers were ‘members’ of Lubavitch, and thus not deserving to participate in a Lubavitch-organized flight. With only four days



until take-off, little time was available to talk the antagonizers into retracting their accusations, or to appeal to the airline to correct the issue. Local newspapers carried ghastly headlines about the “£35 FLIGHT” and all seemed doomed, once again.

However, having received the Rebbe’s *brochos*, this setback was swiftly overcome and preparations were underway.

118 jolly travellers boarded a full flight, with hot and exquisite kosher catered

food. There were *shiurim*, songs, and a marvellously contagious excitement. Reb Zalmon had commissioned *bentchers* for each passenger, customized in honor of the flight to New York. It even had a space for each passenger to fill with his or her name and seat number on the airplane.

Unlike today’s nonstop routes, the flight made two stops to refuel—one in Ireland and another in Newfoundland, Canada—before landing safe and sound at Idlewild



THE SHAS WITH REBBE'S SIGNATURE IN IT.

International Airport of New York City (later known as JFK).

At the terminal they received a hero's welcome. Chassidim showed up at the airport in droves, men and boys stood on the rooftop, and all greeted the transatlantic guests with singing and dancing, all after midnight!

A diary entry from Reb Zalmon's hand records that an airport staff member present at the scene even broke into tears from the moving reception.

SPECIAL WELCOME

About one month before the expected trip date, Reb Zalmon wrote to the Rebbe asking if it was possible that the Rebbe receive the group immediately upon arrival. At that point, a defined time of arrival was not yet known, let alone for when the group would arrive at 770; so

mazkirus requested that Reb Zalmon provide these details once they become available, and then a decision would be made. Once it was established that the plane would land so late at night, with the arrival to 770 being even later, the information was passed along to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe agreed to receive the crowd at that hour, provided that the passengers also agreed to this, lest they feel 'forced' to participate. Needless to say, everyone welcomed the idea with great enthusiasm.

Though the hour was late, 770 was abuzz with a festive spirit. People strode to and fro, welcoming the newcomers, with refreshments being served all the while.

At 3.30 a.m. the Rebbe entered the large *shul* in a solemn silence, until he reached his seat that is generally used for *fabrenge*s. Over the next hour, the

Rebbe delivered two *sichos*, welcoming the guests by dwelling on the meaning of the traditional greetings of "*sholom aleichem*," and addressing the time of year—the Three Weeks—and its lessons.

About the conclusion of this special *farbrenge*n, Reb Zalmon records in his diary:

"The Rebbe gave another talk; there was some further singing led by Rabbi Dubov (of Manchester) [see picture] and at 4:30 a.m., to the lively tune of '*kee v'simcha tei'tzeiu*,' the Rebbe stood up and left the hall. The *kabolas ponim* was over."

After this special event, the tired yet elated guests headed for bed.

AN EXCEPTIONAL STAY

Over the course of their visit to the capital of Lubavitch, the group was privy to many exceptional moments. Chief

among them was the farbrengen on Shabbos Parshas Balak.

In that period the Rebbe held farbrengens only on *Shabbos Mevorchim* and other special occasions. It wasn't until nearly four years later, after the passing of Rebbetzin Chana on 6 Tishrei 5725, that weekly Shabbos farbrengens became the norm.

The Rebbe had indeed farbrenged on Shabbos 24 Tammuz, the first Shabbos they were present. But the following week, 2 Av, Parshas Balak, it wasn't 'expected' for there to be a farbrengen. Nevertheless, the Rebbe surprised everyone and farbrenged that Shabbos as well.

If every farbrengen of the Rebbe is a time of '*Elokus bipshitus*'—G-dliness manifest in a tangible manner—this particular farbrengen will forever remain etched in the hearts of those fortunate to have attended as something all the more otherworldly.

Though standing in the Nine Days, a time of mourning and gloom, the Rebbe was in a very good mood and visibly cheerful.

In the *sichos*, the Rebbe expressed the need to perform mitzvos with joy, notwithstanding the sad period. Between *sichos* lively *niggunim* were sung.

Some two hours into the farbrengen, the Rebbe declared that all the *mashke* and food in the room must be consumed before the end of Shabbos.² The crowd went into a frenzy; people were saying *lchaim* and bottles were rapidly emptying. Reb Zalmon himself lent a 'helping hand' in finishing the *mashke*, to the extent that when he *davened mincha* for the amud at the farbrengen's conclusion, he did so with the *nusach* of Simchas Torah! The Rebbe looked on with discernible pleasure.

The atmosphere in the room reached a crescendo when the Rebbe started to sing the *niggun* of Uforatzta and then rose to his feet, dancing in place. The large room rose with the Rebbe, every person standing, dancing, and singing creating a



joy; a *simcha* that was almost palpable.

As Reb Zalmon recorded then, "No words can do justice or describe that scene!"

RETURN TO MANCHESTER 6 AV 5721

The time had finally come to return to England, to 'pack up' all the precious moments experienced in the Rebbe's court and bring them back home.

Just before the guests boarded the busses for the airport, a message arrived that each traveler could have a brief *yechidus* with the Rebbe before taking leave.³

First in line was Reb Zalmon, who brought in with him a gift he had just been presented with from the thankful travelers of the charter: a beautiful *shas*, which every passenger was to sign. Reb Zalmon showed it the Rebbe and asked the Rebbe to sign it as well.

The Rebbe retorted that he wasn't a passenger of the charter, but in his hallmark candor Reb Zalmon replied that wherever a *chossid* goes, the Rebbe travels with him. The Rebbe accepted this, and affixed his signature to the *sefer*.

After every person had a *yechidus*, the entourage set out for the airport. The Rebbe escorted them and stood on the threshold of 770 bidding the group

farewell, only returning to his office once the busses completely disappeared from sight.

When the aircraft finally touched down in Manchester, another memorable flight had concluded, just as the one to New York. Onboard, the passengers had studied together the *sicha* which the Rebbe had spoken in honor of their arrival some two weeks prior, and had since been printed mugah by the Rebbe. They sang and danced, they reminisced and rejoiced, but most of all they brought back a very precious cargo: they returned home with hearts filled with gladness for their privilege of delighting in the presence of *nessi hador umanhigo*, for the honor and gift that had been accorded them. They arrived with a stronger resolve to perform more mitzvos, and most of all, with a burning wish to repeat this trip very soon! **D**

1. What follows is a deliberately incomplete account of the charter flight of 5721 from Manchester. For a complete description please see *My Encounter With the Rebbe*, PCL Publishing, Brooklyn, NY.

2. The reason for this, the Rebbe explained, was because leaving any food over for Motzaei Shabbos would constitute the act of *meichin*, preparing for the weekday during shabbos, which is forbidden.

3. This was in addition to a *yechidus* many of them had during their stay.