

# FAIT TRANS MATI

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# FOR ON

מוקדש לזכות  
הרה"ת ר' יעקב בן חנה  
והרה"ת ר' יוסף יצחק בן שרה  
ומשפחתם שיחיו  
עמאר





# למעליותא - THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The times were difficult. Russia and France were at war, and everything in between was being crushed. The Alter Rebbe requested that the march with which Napoleon's soldiers had crossed into Russia be sung for him.<sup>1</sup> After hearing it, he declared "It is a *niggun* of victory!" and he then fell into a deep *dveikus*. Coming out of the *dveikus*, the Alter Rebbe announced that in the end there will be "*didan notzach*."<sup>2</sup>

Today, just over two hundred years later, France has indeed been transformed. Yiddishkeit thrives in a phenomenal way, with tens of thousands of *baalei teshuvah*, colossal educational institutions, and Chabad Houses on every corner. Truly, a *didan notzach*...







## Depths of Darkness

When Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Russia in 5572 (תקע"ב), a fierce argument broke out among the *talmidim* of the Maggid of Mezerich, as to whether the Jews in Russia should support and *daven* for the success of Napoleon, or for the success of Czar Alexander of Russia.

Many of the *talmidei haMaggid* felt that Napoleon's victory would bring a new era of freedom and economic growth upon the Yidden of Russia, who until then were subject to a life of persecution and destitution. Therefore, they maintained, it is incumbent upon the Yidden to *daven* to Hashem that the French should defeat the Russians.

The Alter Rebbe thought otherwise. While Napoleon would bring freedom and prosperity to the people of Russia, the Alter Rebbe reasoned that he would also bring along the spirit of freedom from religion that was so prevalent in French culture. If, however, Czar Alexander would be victorious, although Yidden will be downtrodden and destitution will become widespread "...their hearts will become attached and devoted to their father in heaven."<sup>3</sup>

**YIDDEN WILL BE DOWNTRODDEN,  
DESTITUTION WILL BECOME WIDESPREAD,  
BUT THEIR HEARTS WILL BECOME ATTACHED  
TO THEIR FATHER IN HEAVEN**

Twelve years earlier, France had undergone a revolution that changed the face of its society and of the world in general. The people had overthrown the monarchy, they established the rights of every individual, and brought about a feeling of liberty and lack of restrictions. Since this revolution was not based upon a foundation of belief and trust in the Aibershter, and instead invoked the power of man, it brought along an atmosphere of anti-religion which unfortunately had an adverse effect on many of the Jews living in France. It then began to spread throughout all the countries of Europe and the world.

In this light, the Alter Rebbe viewed Napoleon, the ruler of France, as the ultimate representation of *klipah* in this world, and he sought to fight it in every way possible, spiritual and physical. The efforts he put forth for Czar Alexander's victory were so extensive, that the Russian government took notice and bestowed the Alter Rebbe's family with the status of "Honored Citizen for Generations," which stayed in effect for over one hundred years.

Because of his fierce opposition to the French and all they represented, the Alter Rebbe refused to remain under its jurisdiction even for a short period of time. Instead he chose to wander deeper and deeper into Russian territory, in the heart of winter, where he ultimately fell ill and passed away in the midst of the journey, in the town of Piena, on Chof-Daled Teves 5573 (תקע"ג).



## Reworking the Klipah

Despite the above introduction about the spiritual status of France and its people, a visitor to the Jewish community of France today would be pleasantly surprised to discover that his preconceptions of what the country may look like had been completely unfounded. Paris, the 'city of lights,' itself has an astonishingly vibrant Jewish community, and especially the Lubavitch segment of it, that outshines many other cities in its size, strength, and *chassidishkeit*.

In fact, when the Rebbe spoke about the world changing and coming closer to and more befitting of the era of Moshiach, he used the transformation of France as an example.

The Rebbe explained that to combat a *klipah*, one begins by bringing *kedusha* into its own boundaries, according to its—the *klipah's*—own level. However, just doing that only makes the lower level a receptacle to the effects of *kedusha*, but it is not yet transformed into a force of holiness. True *birur*, the Rebbe said, is when the holiness brought into the boundaries of *klipah* is so effective that the lower realm itself continues—on its own,

## יין נסך איז מטמטם המוח והלב

A poignant story, which the Rebbe mentioned in the *maamar* Basi L'gani 5711, is of the Rebbe Maharash traveling a long distance from his health resort to Paris. He stayed there for only a short period of time, just in order to meet a young Jew who had strayed from Yiddishkeit and had been spending time in the casino of the hotel in which the Rebbe Maharash was staying. The Rebbe Maharash sat alongside him for a while, as the young man was sipping from his non-kosher wine and playing cards. After a while, the Rebbe tapped him on the shoulder and said, “*Yungerman*, יין נסך defiles the mind and heart,” and then left to his room. A short while later, the young man went to the Rebbe

Maharash's room and they had a long talk, which led to him doing *teshuvah* and eventually raising a nice Jewish family.<sup>5</sup>

In later years, the Rebbe Rashab also made several visits to France.

Interestingly—as the Frierdiker Rebbe told—it was there, in the resort town of Menton, that the Rebbe Rashab envisaged and deliberated the basic ideas of the *Hemshech Ayin Beis*.<sup>6</sup>



THE SHORELINE OF MENTON, FRANCE.

with its own unique character and capabilities—to be a place of Torah and mitzvos. And so with France; it flourishes through its own institutions of Torah, *tefillah* and *gemilus chassadim*, completely independent and without a need for *hashpaah* from the Yidden in other countries.<sup>4</sup>

### The Birur

“The primary and complete *birur* - in a permanent and internal way - was accomplished in our generation, by the Frierdiker Rebbe. In addition to visiting France a number of times, and saying *maamarim* and *sichos* there, he also sent some of his household members as *shluchim* there; they lived there for a number of years and learned *nigleh* and *Chassidus*. He also sent his letters and *kisvei Chassidus* there, and some of his work was prepared there for print....”<sup>7</sup>

This is a quote from the *farbrengen* of Shabbos Parshas Vayeshev 5752. In honor of a group of guests that had come from France to spend Shabbos with the Rebbe, the Rebbe devoted an entire *farbrengen* explaining the *birur* of France and how it demonstrates our closeness to the times of Moshiach.

Clearly, there is much significance to the fact that the Frierdiker Rebbe sent the Rebbe and Rebbetzin to live in France. For many years, most Chassidim were unaware of the extensive work the Rebbe did for the Frierdiker Rebbe while in France. But over the years, we have been offered a small glimpse into some of it, while most of it will likely remain unknown forever. Taking a closer look at what we know of the years the Rebbe and the Rebbetzin spent there, we see how it was truly another step in the *birur* of its *klipah*. In fact, the Rebbetzin herself once told one of the *shluchos* to France that “מיר האבן געאקערט און—געזיט, און איר דארפט שניידן—we plowed and sowed, and [now] you have to reap.”<sup>8</sup>

### Safer Shores

In 5693, Hitler ימ"ש rose to power in Nazi controlled Germany. The Rebbe and Rebbetzin were then living in Berlin, the capital of Germany, and with the new winds of anti-Semitism that began

flowing in Germany, they soon moved to Paris.

Upon their arrival, the Rebbe immersed himself in his *avodas hashem* while continuing the work on various tasks on behalf of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Meanwhile, the Frierdiker Rebbe, who was also visiting Paris at the time, asked Reb Meir Shochetman, a Jew living there, to help the Rebbe enroll in university.<sup>9</sup>



# THIS IS NOT A REGULAR PERSON; IF YOU PAY ATTENTION YOU WILL SEE THAT THE LIGHTS NEVER GO OUT IN HIS APARTMENT

The Rebbe first joined the ESTP School where he studied mechanical and electrical engineering and later enrolled for classes at the famed Sorbonne as well.

While in Paris, the Rebbe - who kept to himself very much and made sure to avoid the public eye and the extra *kavod* he would get as the Frierdiker Rebbe's son-in-law - spent

the vast majority of his day in his small apartment with his *sefarim*. The Rebbe's downstairs neighbor was a *frumer* Yid, who observed that the entire night he would hear footsteps going back and forth in the apartment above him. When he mentioned it to a friend, he was told that "this is not just a regular person; if you pay attention you will see that the lights never go out in his apartment."<sup>10</sup> For approximately two hours every day, the Rebbe would leave his home and go to the university to hear lectures from the professors, often taking along with him a small *sefer* to peruse during class.<sup>11</sup> Reb Moshe Reitzer, a young Hungarian Yid who was also studying at the Sorbonne, remembered being in awe of the Rebbe at that time: "The Rebbe would come directly to the lecture, and didn't speak to anyone. When he did speak, he was very brief. He would come in, and as soon as the lecture was over he would leave."<sup>12</sup> Often, the Rebbe would skip the classes altogether, missing more than half of the classes during the eight years that he spent in Paris.<sup>13</sup>

Over the years, the Rebbe would use the scientific knowledge to defend Yiddishkeit and uphold its truths in discussion with professors and perplexed Jews of all types, leading them to greater commitment to Torah and mitzvos. In Paris as well, the Rebbe would influence others about the truth of Yiddishkeit.<sup>14</sup>

## Life in Paris

Reb Meir Shochetman who occasionally learned with the Rebbe, later recounted: "The Rebbe and Rebbetzin lived very modestly, in a

small room-and-a-half apartment, where the Rebbe had set *shiurim* in all facets of the Torah, often while fasting and remaining in tallis and tefillin throughout the day."<sup>15</sup>

We are offered a glimpse into the Rebbe's extensive Torah learning while in France from many of the Reshimos that we have today, which were transcribed during that period. These Reshimos, in which the Rebbe recorded some of his *chiddushim*, deal with topics covering Tanach, Gemara, Rambam, *halacha*, Chassidus and *kabbalah*. During the Rebbe's first few years in France, there were also many lengthy Torah letters that were sent back and forth between the Rebbe and his father, HoRav Levi Yitzchak—who was living far away, behind the Iron Curtain—until HoRav Levi Yitzchak was arrested by the Soviet authorities. The Rebbe often shared his *chiddushei Torah* with his father, who would comment and take much pride in the Rebbe's writings, as we can see from the letters that were sent in return.

"He would daven in the *chassidische shtibel* of Reb Avraham Chein, where he would take part in the *chassidische farbrengens*. Always insisting on staying on the sidelines, he refused to take a leading role as the Rebbe's son-in-law." Reb Meir Shochehtman recalled.

Years later eyewitnesses would relate to what extent the Rebbe went for the sake of a *chumrah* and *hidur mitzvah*. For example, the Rebbe would at times walk long distances to obtain *pas Yisrael* bread.<sup>16</sup>

*Cholov Yisrael* was also a constant issue. The Rebbetzin would at times walk many kilometers in order to watch a cow being milked, and from the milk she would prepare all sorts of foods, which would constitute the main part of the Rebbe's diet—since he wouldn't eat anything that was not prepared directly by the Rebbetzin.<sup>17</sup>



THE REBBE'S FILE IN THE SCHOOL RECORDS OF THE ESTP, AN ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY IN PARIS WHERE THE REBBE STUDIED, DATED 1932-1933.

JEM/THE EARLY YEARS





# "I AM A SHLIACH OF MY FATHER-IN-LAW THE REBBE, 'THERE IS A CHAZAKA THAT A SHLIACH WILL FULFILL HIS SHLICHUS.' I AM NOT ABLE TO TAKE A VACATION..."

## Working for the Frierdiker Rebbe

During the years in France, the Frierdiker Rebbe entrusted the Rebbe with many sensitive responsibilities on his behalf.

The Rebbe did extensive work in the realm of publishing and was intimately involved in preparing and reviewing many of the Frierdiker Rebbe's *maamorim*, *sichos* and *igros* for print.<sup>18</sup> In particular, the Rebbe was the driving force behind the printing of "Hatomim," the periodical of Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim. Although the Rebbe kept his involvement a secret—on the cover of the magazine three other names were listed as editors - the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote in a letter to the Rebbetzin that "the entire work" was the Rebbe's.<sup>19</sup>

Reb Meir Schochetman remembered the Rebbe visiting Parisian libraries and *shuls*, leafing through old *sefarim* and *kisvei yad*. Years later Chassidim would discover that the Rebbe was doing this at the

request of the Frierdiker Rebbe who asked the Rebbe to search for *kisvei yad*, rare *seforim*, and other Jewish books and artifacts of interest, that may be available for purchase for the Lubavitch Library.<sup>20</sup>

The Rebbe also did extensive work in cataloguing and indexing the *Igros* of the Frierdiker Rebbe in an organized fashion so that they can later be published by topic.<sup>21</sup> At times the Rebbe also served as the Frierdiker Rebbe's personal secretary<sup>22</sup>, and at the Frierdiker Rebbe's request, the Rebbe took the responsibility of handling many major medical decisions relating to the Frierdiker Rebbe's health.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, the Frierdiker Rebbe entrusted the Rebbe to manage the complex and clandestine network of transatlantic finances of the Frierdiker Rebbe, dealing with money arriving from the United States, which could not be directly sent to the Frierdiker Rebbe.<sup>24</sup>

All of the above work done by the Rebbe on behalf of the Frierdiker Rebbe remained unknown to most

Chassidim for decades. Over the years, however, with the revelations and printing of volumes of the Frierdiker Rebbe's *Igros*, we have managed to get a small glimpse into the vast amount of sensitive work that the Rebbe quietly did for the Frierdiker Rebbe.

Reb Leibush Heber was acquainted with the Rebbe during his stay in France. Once, when he was driving the Rebbe in his car, he mentioned that the Rebbe must take a vacation from his hard work; the *possuk* commands "*v'nishmartem meod linafshoiseichem!*"

The Rebbe answered: "I am a shliach of my father-in-law the Rebbe, and the Gemara says that 'there is a *chazaka* that a shliach will fulfill his shlichus.' I am not able to take a vacation..."<sup>25</sup>

## Avodas Hakodesh

In addition to his own Torah learning, the Rebbe would also visit the local *shuls*, occasionally giving *shiurim* in either nigleh or chassidus. Many of these shiurim were given at the small Lubavitch shul in the famous Pletzel area known as *Zibbetzen* (the address of the shul is 17 Rue des Rosiers, hence the name "Zibbetzen", the yiddish for "seventeen"), where the Frierdiker Rebbe, Rebbe Rashab and Rebbe Maharash had all davened when they visited Paris. A number of these shiurim are documented in *Reshimos*, where we find the notes



TWO ENVELOPES ON WHICH THE REBBE WROTE HIS RESIDENCE IN PARIS IN HIS HOLY HANDWRITING.



TWO RESHIMOS WRITTEN IN PARIS, FRANCE.

the Rebbe wrote for some of them. (In addition to the eye-witness reports of these shiurim).<sup>26</sup>

Besides for giving his own shiurim to adults, the Rebbe also involved himself in organizing chinuch for Paris's Jewish children and young people. Efraim Steinmetz remembers the Rebbe visiting his father and convincing him to send his children to a local cheder. And Reb Moshe Zev Reitzer, a Hungarian talmid chochom who the Rebbe met at the Sorbonne, was encouraged by the Rebbe to utilize his Torah knowledge to educate youth in Paris about Yidishkeit. "There are many young Jews roaming the streets of Paris. They have nowhere to learn. We need to ensure that they remain Jewish." The Rebbe told him. After he agreed to teach, the Rebbe helped bring students to him.

On one occasion, the Rebbe was not able to spend Simchas Torah with the Frierdiker Rebbe as he usually did, and was forced to remain in Paris. That Yom Tov was etched deeply into the memories of all that were present. The Rebbe led *hakafos* for hours on end, at one point singing and dancing "Al haselah hoch, hoch" with the crowd for three hours straight. While the

people dancing kept stopping to rest, the Rebbe didn't take a single break!<sup>27</sup>

### *Avoiding the Spotlight*

Even while engaged in all of the above, the Rebbe always tried to hide his identity and whenever possible made sure to avoid bringing attention to himself so that people would not feel that they need to give him *kavod*. In fact, there are even a number of stories of people who met and interacted with the Rebbe while he was in Paris, and only realized years later that he was the Rebbe.

The Rebbe even begged people that did know who he was, not to tell anyone that he was the Frierdiker Rebbe's son-in-law.

At the same time, however, the Frierdiker Rebbe constantly tried to encourage the Rebbe to reveal himself and take on a more public role in influencing the Jews around him. For example, in a letter to the Rebbetzin, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote about the Rebbe that "concealing oneself from people doesn't achieve anything... he should allow people to acquaint themselves with him through interesting conversation, it would bring about much good benefit."<sup>28</sup> And in a letter to Reb Alexander Reinin,

a Lubavitcher chossid and *askan*, the Frierdiker Rebbe asks that he try to arrange that the Rebbe participate at a certain shiur because "they will surely then honor him to give a shiur, which I greatly desire, and surely after the shiur he will also be able to speak on topics relating to awakening people to Hashem, in which he is very talented."<sup>29</sup>

But despite the Rebbe's efforts, some of his greatness did manage to seep through, and as time went by more and more people became aware of who was in their midst. Eventually, a committee of Jews in a leadership position in Paris turned to the Rebbe to be the Rav of their Shul. They even sent messengers to the Frierdiker Rebbe, telling him how much they wanted the Rebbe to be their Rav, in the hope that the Frierdiker Rebbe could encourage the Rebbe to accept the position.<sup>30</sup>

### *Fleeing Again*

After a number of peaceful years in France, new threats arose. The German army, which had already seen significant victories on the battlefield, was approaching the country and it was imperative for the Yidden in Paris to look for a safer location to live. A few days before Shavuot 5700, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin managed



A LETTER FROM THE REBBE MENTIONING HIS VISIT TO FRANCE IN 5707, WRITTEN ON THE STATIONERY OF THE HOTEL HE WAS STAYING AT.



to obtain tickets on a train leaving the city, a very short time before the German invasion.

Before leaving Paris, the Rebbe gave a speech in the *shul*, emphasizing the importance of *bitachon* in Hashem and the importance of keeping Torah and mitzvos in whatever situation one may find himself.<sup>31</sup>

The Rebbe and the Rebbetzin arrived in the city of Vichy just before Shavuot, bringing with them and saving bundles of treasured manuscripts from the Rabbeim's *ma'amorim* which would be printed years later. The Rebbe and Rebbetzin spent the next few months in Vichy. The situation was difficult, with little food and money to go around, and many refugees not having a roof over their heads. In order to gain entry to a hotel in the city (even to sleep in the hallway or lobby) one needed to prove that he owns a one-hundred dollar bill—an enormous sum in those days—and most Yidden arriving in the city had no such means.

The Rebbe owned such a bill, so he would stroll the streets in search of new refugees who had arrived in the city and were in need of a place to stay. He would lend them the bill, and once they gained entry to a hotel he would take the bill back and look for another refugee to take care of.<sup>32</sup>

After the period in Vichy, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin traveled to Nice and then to Marseilles, in an effort to obtain visas and boat tickets to the United States. While in Marseilles, the Rebbe visited an orphanage, bringing bags of bread and basic foods to the many despondent children, many of whom had no idea what had happened to their parents and family members. The Rebbe sat with the children, whom he knew each by name, and cajoled them to eat. He took the time to speak to each of them and comfort them.<sup>33</sup>

After a period of waiting, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin finally received the much awaited visas for entry to the United States. The evening before departure, the Rebbe wrote a Reshima

speaking on the subject of Moshiach's arrival.

The next day the Rebbe and Rebbetzin boarded a ship headed to the United States, and arrived safely at its shores on 28 Sivan 5701.

## Chassidim in France

When World War II came to an end, many Polish citizens were left stranded throughout the Soviet Union, after arriving as refugees fleeing the Nazis. As a sign of goodwill, the Russian government allowed them to return to their homeland, provided that they are able to prove their status as Polish nationals. Lubavitcher Chassidim, desperate to leave that accursed land, organized an operation in which they forged hundreds of Polish passports and thus managed to escape to the other side of the Iron Curtain.

After an interim period spent in DP camps, many of the families arrived in Paris, as per the directives of the Frierdiker Rebbe, and were waiting there to move on to their final destinations, either Eretz Yisroel or the United States.<sup>34</sup>

In order to assist in the refugees' placement, the Frierdiker Rebbe founded the "*Lishkah*"—the European Office for Helping Refugees and their Placement—and appointed Rabbi Binyomin Gorodetzky as its director. This office became the center for all of the Frierdiker Rebbe's—and later the Rebbe's—activities in Europe and North Africa. In addition to working with the displaced persons, they printed *seforim* in French, they cared for the Yidden of North Africa, and were involved in all sorts of activities pertaining to the Yidden of the region.

It was during that same period that Beis Rivkah and Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim of Brunoy were established, initially for the children of the refugees located in the area. These institutions grew to become bastions



RABBI BINYOMIN GORODETZKY LEADS A GATHERING IN FRANCE.



EARLY YEARS OF THE YESHIVA IN BRUNOY, FRANCE.

of Yiddishkeit and Chassidishkeit spreading the *maayanos* throughout the entire region. In the *sicha* on Shabbos Vayeshev 5752 the Rebbe referred to the establishment of Tomchei Temimim as a manifestation of the *birur* accomplished by the Rabbeim over the years.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Rebbe's Visit**

Rebbetzin Chana, the Rebbe's mother, was also among the refugees that left Russia on forged Polish passports; she arrived in Paris during the winter of 5707. The Rebbe, who had not been able to see her for eighteen years, traveled to Paris to meet her and to accompany her back to New York.

The Rebbe spent a total of three months in the city, and his visit left an unforgettable impact on all those that came into contact with him. Chassidim later recounted<sup>36</sup> how even when the Rebbe was walking down the street, people would turn their head to stare at the remarkable looking individual whom they had never seen before.

The Rebbe would visit his mother twice daily at the house of Reb

Zalman Schneerson, and also spent a considerable amount of time together with the Chassidim in the city; farbrenging, speaking, and giving them advice.

While in Paris, the Rebbe exerted tremendous effort into laying ground and planting the seeds for the central Lubavitch infrastructure in France, and established branches of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Machne Yisroel, Beis Rivkah and Kehos.<sup>37</sup> A lot of effort was also put into printing *seforim* for the Yidden in France.

Years later, Chassidim still recall<sup>38</sup> the Rebbe's Beis Nissan farbrengen of that year—which lasted until seven o'clock in the morning—as an event that “elevated us beyond our physical surroundings.” A bit more than a week later on Yud Aleph Nissan, Rebbetzin Chana commented to one of the Chassidim that it was the Rebbe's birthday, and they should ask him to farbreng. The Rebbe agreed immediately, and once again sat down to inspire the Chassidim.<sup>39</sup>

On Lag B'omer the Rebbe again farbrenged in the *shul*.

All in all, the Rebbe farbrenged a total of eight times while in Paris. In a way, this visit was the initial *hisgalus* of the Rebbe to the Chassidim, especially to the five hundred of them located in the city at the time. During those farbrengens, the Rebbe often spoke about the Frierdiker Rebbe, encouraging the Chassidim to be *mekasher* themselves to him as well as to send *maamad*.<sup>40</sup> Although it was not possible for most of them to travel to the Frierdiker Rebbe at the time, the Rebbe nevertheless demanded that there should be at least a yearning and desire to be by the Rebbe.<sup>41</sup>

After the Rebbe's return to New York, he continued to be in contact with the Chassidim in France, continuously encouraging them to grow and to do more in *hafatzas hamaayanos*. In one particular letter to Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, the Rebbe reproves the Chassidim in Paris for not doing enough to be *mekarev* more people to the Rebbe, especially at a time when thousands of Yidden were wandering around looking for direction in their lives.<sup>42</sup>





## Early Steps of Hafatzas Hamaayanos

The urging of the Rebbe was not just regarding the Yidden of France. In 5714 the Rebbe wrote a letter<sup>43</sup> to Reb Nissan Nemanov about dealing with the Yidden of North Africa that were beginning to emigrate to France, saying that by being *mekarev* those immigrants, it will be possible to ultimately reach all of their friends and relatives, even those that remained in North Africa. The Rebbe reminded him that already in Russia, many years earlier, the Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe sent shluchim to help the Sefardic Jews of Gruzia (Georgia) and Bucharra (Uzbekistan), and within a short period of time hundreds of families were brought closer to *Toras haChassidus*. Surely much work can be done within the Jewish communities



RABBI MULEH AZIMOV TEACHES YOUNG CHILDREN IN CHEDER.

of Morocco and Tunisia, the Rebbe felt, especially due to the warm nature of Sefardic Jews. If the Chassidim would realize that they have the opportunity to bring three hundred thousand Yidden to

Chassidus, they would have the willpower to do so, and they would also come up with the techniques needed to succeed.

It was also during that period that Rabbi Chaim Hillel Azimov opened up the first Sunday Hebrew School for Jewish children studying in Paris's public schools. This endeavor brought the Rebbe much *nachas*, and he sent a number of encouraging letters to Reb Chaim Hillel, stressing the importance of the work and the great merit for all those that take part in it.

In 5722, the Rebbe sent a group of *bochurim* as shluchim to study in Brunoy, to strengthen the yeshiva, and to start activities of *hafatzas hamaayanos*.

The *bochurim* that arrived in France brought a whole new life to the yeshiva. They were full of vigor and were inspired by the Rebbe's call of 'uforatzta,' in turn they brought that excitement to the *bochurim* in the yeshiva. After half a year, the shluchim returned to 770, but their impact still remained.

In 5724, a group of *bochurim* from Brunoy came to the Rebbe for Tishrei. The Rebbe showed them many *kiruvim* and encouraged them to continue and



THE REBBE'S HANDWRITTEN HAGOHOS ON THE YECHIDUS TO THE TALMIDIM HASHLUCHIM TO FRANCE, 12 ADAR I 5722.

widen the activities that had already begun in France.

During that period, the Rebbe appointed three *bochurim* to oversee the *hafatzas hamaayanos* in Paris. One of those *bochurim* was Shmuel (Muleh) Azimov, who would later return to become the head of Tzach in the city and the surrounding area.

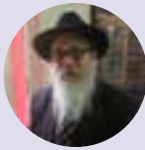
## Unimaginable Success

At the end of the month, the Rebbe blessed Rabbi Muleh Azimov that he will have "*hatzlacha rabah*, and the meaning of *hatzlacha rabah* is success —למעלה מן המשווער—more than imaginable." He returned to France with a new *chayus* and energy, and brought his efforts in *hafatza* to a new level, causing many individuals to become closer to Yiddishkeit through *shiurei Chassidus* and a wide range of activities.

After his wedding in 5728, the Rebbe sent Reb Muleh back to France permanently. In the years following Reb Muleh's arrival, *hafatzas hamaayanos* in Paris reached new horizons, unprecedented perhaps in any other part of the world. The sheer number of people that were touched

**"HATZLACHA RABAH, AND THE MEANING OF HATZLACHA RABAH IS SUCCESS למעלה מן המשווער - MORE THAN IMAGINABLE".**

## Reb Klafya Alush relates<sup>54</sup>:



"I traveled to the Rebbe for the first time on Chol Hamoed Sukkos 5730, and came straight to 770 by taxi. When I arrived, the Chassidim took care of me and brought me food in the sukkah.

"Then came the long awaited moment; I saw the Rebbe for the first time. It was a very emotional and special moment for me, and it left an indelible impression on my mind. I wrote home right away that "I have entered the tent of Moshe Rabbeinu..." For me, the Rebbe was something out of this world; I saw in the Rebbe a reincarnation of Moshe Rabbeinu, a true leader. Just that first encounter for me was already enough. The rest was all just a bonus."

and brought closer to Yiddishkeit is simply mind boggling.

In order to properly document this extraordinary growth, we bring excerpts from interviews of the initial *mekuravim* in those early years, who merited to take an active part in France's spiritual revolution.<sup>44</sup>

Reb Shalom Cohen, a world renowned professor, who travels to lecture throughout the world, tells the following:



"I began coming closer to Yiddishkeit after the famous student revolution, which took place in May 1968. With this revolution, the young



RABBI MULEH AZIMOV FARBRENGS WITH A GROUP OF MEKUROVIM DURING HIS EARLY YEARS IN PARIS.

people of France in essence tried to remove all boundaries, including religious and ethical. However, it actually brought about the opposite in the Jewish youth. Young Jews felt emptiness, and began searching for meaning and morals. It is noteworthy that Reb Muleh Azimov arrived in Paris on the same day that the revolution began. It was as if the Rebbe saw the yearning that would need to be filled, and was *makdim refuah l'makah*.

"I had approached the Lishkah with a request to participate in a *shiur* Gemara, and Reb Refael Wilschansky, who was then secretary of the Lishkah, gave me Reb Muleh's address.

"Reb Muleh invited us to 'an interesting *shiur*,' which he would deliver in his house on Shabbos afternoons. During those *shiurim* he would learn with us the first volumes of Lekutei Sichos, and afterwards we would ask him all sorts of questions on a wide range of topics. Everyone was able to ask whatever was on his mind, and Reb Muleh managed to connect every topic that was brought up with Yiddishkeit, showing us how to look at everything in the world with a Torah perspective.

"I remember Reb Muleh farbrenging with us at a later time. He emphasized that we need to remember that when one takes on upon himself to become a Chossid of the Rebbe, every *hiddur* and *minhag* becomes his; there is no difference between an elderly Chossid and a youngster who has just began keeping Torah and mitzvos. That farbrengen had a strong impact on us."<sup>45</sup>



A LETTER FROM ANASH OF FRANCE REQUESTING THAT THE REBBE COME VISIT THEM. THE REBBE WROTE ON THE BOTTOM OF THE LETTER "נתקבל יב"ת [= יב תמוז] ה'תשי"ג".





RABBI MULEH AZIMOV AND HIS CHILDREN RECEIVE DOLLARS FROM THE REBBE, 13 TISHREI 5738.



MITZVAH TANKS TAKE TO THE STREETS OF PARIS PROMOTING THE MITVZOIM.

**“THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW THE YIDDEN OF FRANCE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO STUDY IN UNIVERSITY AND REMAIN A SHOMER TORAH AND MITZVOS.”**

Reb Masoud Ben-Shushan, shliach in Orly, recounts:

“It was during those *shiurim* that Reb Muleh began telling us about the Rebbe, and it awakened within us a yearning to go see the Rebbe.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Groups to 770**

The extent of those early activities was so significant, that for the first Tishrei after Reb Muleh moved back to Paris, he came to the Rebbe together with a group of *mekuravim*. In the next few years larger groups came to spend Tishrei and other special days with the Rebbe. Although many of the people were still taking their first steps in Yiddishkeit, they all came for the full experience of Tishrei with the Rebbe. For many of them this was the *makeh b'patish* of their connection with the Rebbe.

Reb Shalom Ouaki relates:



“Throughout the entire month of Tishrei 5731, the Rebbe showed us many *kiruvim*. On Erev Sukkos the Rebbe requested that a representative of our group should come and receive a set of *daled minim*, in order to be *mezakeh* the rest of our group with *benching* on a lulav from the Rebbe.”<sup>47</sup>

Reb Binyomin Mergi, a shliach in France and the administrator of Beis Chana in Paris, also merited to spend that Tishrei by the Rebbe:

“That Tishrei I was sixteen-years-old. If I thought I had gone through a big change until then, a lot more was in store for me. The Rebbe welcomed us, the *bochurim* from France, with special attention. As long as we were in 770, we saw that the Rebbe was paying close attention to us—like someone paying attention to that which he had plowed and sowed, and is now awaiting the fruits.”<sup>48</sup>

Reb Shalom Ouaki:

“A short while after we returned from 770, Reb Muleh gathered all of

us together on a Sunday after the *shiur* and asked that each of us speak about his feelings from the trip. We all spoke excitedly about the effect it had on us. Then Reb Muleh revealed to us that it was actually the Rebbe who asked for this gathering, in order to hear about our feelings, because the Rebbe had *shepped* a lot of *nachas* from our visit. We were delighted to hear that, and we all began excitedly singing a *chassidisher niggun*.

“Then he told us that the Rebbe had requested to participate in the costs of our trip, and had given three options: eighteen dollars, half of the ticket, or the entire ticket.”

At the end of the gathering Reb Muleh told them that the Rebbe had sent a pocket size Tanya as a gift for each of them, and that really the Rebbe had wanted to call them all into a special group *yechidus* before they left, but he didn’t in the end, so as not to offend those who had already left.

Throughout the years to come, one of the main and most noticeable groups of guests coming to spend Tishrei, or any other *yoma d’pagra*, with the Rebbe was the group from France. The Rebbe showed them many special *kiruvim*, and indicated that he derived much pleasure from the group of Jews who had come so far to become real Chassidim.

### **Setting an Example in University**

The ‘group’ of university students that had become Chassidim were not given any time to rest. Once they themselves became closer, they were immediately recruited to become shlichim themselves within their respective venues and occupations. The Rebbe often didn’t allow them to learn in yeshiva, telling them instead to remain in their universities and spread Yiddishkeit to the other students there, and then to use



A SHIUR FOR A GROUP OF BAALEI TESHUVA FROM FRANCE.



STUDENTS AT “SEMINAR” LEARNING PROGRAM, 5737.

### **The Rebbe’s Torah in French**

The Rebbe spoke on a number of occasions about the reach of *hafotzas hamaayonos* that is accomplished through translating Chassidus to other languages, a project that was started by the Frierdiker Rebbe.

As of today, in what is a unique phenomenon and does not exist in any other county, almost all of the Rebbe’s *sichos*, *maamarim*, Reshimos, and letters have been translated to French by Rabbi Chaim Malul.

Reb Chaim Malul recalls how it all began<sup>55</sup>:

“When the Rebbe would farbreng during weekdays, we would listen by hookup, and I would translate the Rebbe’s words for those who didn’t understand Yiddish. People began to ask me to transcribe my translations so that they would be able to study them more in depth. I did so for three months, after which I sent the Rebbe the entire package of translations and asked for the Rebbe’s advice about the future.

“The Rebbe answered that it would be worthwhile to continue, and from then on every month we would put together a booklet of the Rebbe’s *sichos* of that month. Once, during *yechidus*, I asked the Rebbe what is the correct way to transcribe the Rebbe’s *sichos*. He replied: ‘Learn the *sicha*, forget my words, and write it down in your own terms.’”





## Complete Transformation

Tishrei 5734 was unique on many levels. It was a *shnas Hakhel*, the Yom Kippur war had broken out, something which had a deep affect on the Rebbe's conduct and content of *sichos* and *maamotrim*, and also, a large group of French Jews came to the Rebbe—many for their first time.

On the night of Simchas Torah, the Rebbe called the French group for a *hakafa*. This in itself was not unusual, for the Rebbe had given them a *hakafa* during the previous two years as well. What was about to happen, however, was a complete shock and surprise.

Reb Chaim Malul, shliach in Creteil recounts:

"At the *hakafa* we sang one *niggun* after another, but the Rebbe had not turned around towards the crowd to encourage the singing, so we understood that the Rebbe is waiting for something else. We quieted down, and then the Rebbe turned around, walked towards the end of his *bimah*, and began to sing.

"The hall was silent; everyone's eyes were on the Rebbe, trying to decipher the tune. None of us could have entertained in our wildest dreams what the Rebbe was about to do. Suddenly, one of the French guests whispered excitedly that the Rebbe is singing the La Marseillaise, the French national anthem! We shushed him, not believing that to be possible, but we very quickly realized that he was right...

"The group immediately began singing with out-of-this-world enthusiasm, as they knew how to do so well. Later that night throughout 770 it was possible to see groups of Chassidim, some of them with long white beards, listening to a youngster with a ponytail teach them the Rebbe's new *niggun*."

On Shabbos Bereishis the Rebbe explained that although 'converting' *niggunim* is not a task that is *shayach* to us in our generation, nevertheless, since the Alter Rebbe 'opened the faucet' and was *mevarer* Napoleon's march, it has become possible for us to do the same.

After the *sicha*, the Rebbe once again called the entire group to come up, and the Rebbe sang the new *niggun* again. He then said a short *sicha* entirely in French, telling the Jews of France to make a revolution against the *yetzer horah* "as soon as possible!"<sup>51</sup>

A few weeks later, a strange thing happened:

The prime minister of France announced that certain notes of the song were to be changed and modified. The Rebbe explained<sup>52</sup> that the *sar* of France in heaven felt that this *niggun* now belongs to *kedusha*, and therefore brought about its change.

their professions towards *hafotzas hamaayanos*.

Reb Daniel Uzan relates:

"When I was in *yechidus*, I asked the Rebbe if I should continue studying in the university, because I wanted very much to leave college and

enter a yeshiva. The Rebbe told me I should remain in college and then he said something that remained etched in my mind forever. He said, 'This is an opportunity to show the Yidden of France that it is possible to study in

university and remain a *shomer* Torah and mitzvos."<sup>49</sup>

Reb Shalom Cohen recalls a similar episode:

"My friend Chaim Malul and I desperately craved to learn in yeshiva, so we wrote to the Rebbe asking where we should go. We mentioned several universities, or, we asked, if we should go to yeshiva.

"The Rebbe answered 'בזו שקל יותר להיות שומר שבת ויו"ט—In the place where it will be the easiest to keep Shabbos and Yom Tov.' We were convinced that the Rebbe was telling us to go learn in yeshiva, but Reb Muleh cooled off our excitement and explained that it seems to be that the Rebbe wants us to go to university. Two years later we again received a similar answer, and we understood that the Rebbe wants us to learn a profession with which we can support ourselves.

"I always wondered why the Rebbe would want us to be in college instead of learning Torah in a yeshiva, but over time it became clear to me.

"It was all of those years that we were in college, many *baalei teshuvah* later told me, that brought about the change in their own lives. The fact that we were successful in our studies, and at the same time we were able to live as observant Jews, without any contradiction between the two, left a powerful impression on them.

Reb Binyomin Mergi speaks about his own 'non-yeshiva experience':

"When I entered *yechidus* before Yom Kippur 5731, I wrote to the Rebbe that I am currently studying in high school, but I want to enter a yeshiva. However, as soon as I entered the room, the Rebbe asked me, 'How many years do you have left until you graduate?'

"I answered that it would take the next two years. The Rebbe then told me that it is not worthwhile to quit my studies now, rather I should finish

them, and afterwards to start learning *limudei kodesh*.

“I obviously continued my studies in high school, and during the breaks I would put tefillin on all of my Jewish friends. When I graduated, I wrote to the Rebbe about my plans to go to yeshiva, and asked for a *bracha*. But to my surprise and dismay, the Rebbe crossed out the plans for yeshiva, and signaled that I should go to university. It was a difficult moment for me, but with the *kabolas ol* that I was educated with, I knew that the Rebbe is in essence giving me a special shlichus to spread Yiddishkeit among the students.”

### Continuing the Chain

Reb Yitzchak Izakovitch relates:

“When I was in *yechidus*, the Rebbe told me that I should put special focus on working with North African immigrants, specifying the Tunisians and Moroccans. The Rebbe explained that every person has an obligation to help his friends, especially since I am familiar with their style.

“In a *yechidus* two years later, the Rebbe told me: ‘Being involved in *uforatzta* is a *din mideoraisa*, for just as one must help a poor man physically, one must help him spiritually.’

“Then the Rebbe looked at me with his piercing eyes, and said: ‘We need to spread through the entire Paris, not just concentrating on one area. In every quarter there needs to be one person dealing with *mivtzoim* in that specific area. If you have an acquaintance in one area, he must become a *טופח על מנת להטפוח*—moist enough to get others wet,” to have an effect on his own area, and so on.”<sup>50</sup>

The atmosphere in France at the time was completely secular; throughout the entire country there were between fifty and one hundred observant Jewish families. Many of them would send their children to college without beards or yarmulkes,



THE REBBE WATCHES THE SCREEN AS THE MENORAH LIGHTING IN FRONT OF THE EIFFEL TOWER IS FEATURED DURING THE CHANUKAH LIVE PROGRAM, CHANUKAH 5752.

NONE OF US COULD HAVE ENTERTAINED IN OUR WILDEST DREAMS WHAT THE REBBE WAS ABOUT TO DO. SUDDENLY, ONE OF THE FRENCH GUESTS WHISPERED EXCITEDLY THAT THE REBBE IS SINGING THE LA MARSEILLAISE, THE FRENCH NATIONAL ANTHEM!



REB NISSAN NEMENOV ESCORTS YITZCHOK IZAKOVITCH, A FRENCH BAAL TESHUVA, TO HIS CHUPA.



and suddenly these students showed up on the scene, dressed full Chassidic garb, all while studying in the university!

These students did not stay very quiet either. During lunch breaks, they would fan out throughout the cafeterias and put on tefillin with students and invite them to shiurim Torah that would take place on campus. By 5731 over fifty (!) *shiurim* were taking place on the campuses of the various universities throughout the city.

On Fridays they would travel to the villages on the outskirts of Paris, to gather the Jews living there and make Shabbos meals together. But their primary goal was to set up classes with them that would continue throughout the year.

Slowly but surely, signs of Judaism—beards, yarmulkes, tzitzis—began to be seen on Paris streets, and a current of Yiddishkeit began to flow through the different universities.

Before Yud-Alef Nissan 5732, Reb Muleh presented the Rebbe with the key to the first Beis Lubavitch in Paris. The Rebbe *benched* him that it should grow larger and larger until they will say צר לי המקום – the space is too small, and they will need to open a new one.

True to the Rebbe's *bracha*, the Chabad House was never large enough. Throughout the week, and especially on Sundays, the center would be overflowing with men, women, and children from all walks

of life. They came to hear *shiurim* on all facets of the Torah, and for the chance to partake in the 'tree of life' of Chassidus.

### Spreading Further

Over the years following the *mahapeicha* of Paris, the Rebbe sent additional shluchim to Toulouse, Nice, Lyon, Marseille, Montpellier, and other areas of the country, to bring the revolution to those cities as well.

In each of these cities, the Rebbe was intimately involved in every detail, guiding the shluchim closely in the various ways they should go about their shlichus, encouraging them during hard times, and paying special attention to their families.

### Didan Notzach

From these grassroots *shiurim* and *mivtzoim*, an entire movement of Chassidim has begun. Hundreds of *baalei teshuvah*, who in turn impacted their own friends and families, many of them going on to becoming full-fledged shluchim of the Rebbe. They brought the Rebbe's words to the furthest corners of France, raising generations of children as Chassidim and shluchim around the world.

To date, there are thriving Chabad Houses in every neighborhood in Paris, just as the Rebbe anticipated in the *yechidus* with Reb Yitzchak Izakovitch. There are thousands of full fledged Chassidim, diligent on קלה כבחמורה, who have been dragged

out of the furthest spiritual depths to become the Rebbe's chassidim. They too have taken on the Rebbe's mission to go out to bring others back as well.

Two hundred years ago, the Alter Rebbe spoke of a threat called *klipas Tzorfaz*, which did not suffice with keeping to its own country, but rather felt the need to advance and threaten the purity of other nations as well.

Today, that same country has completely changed its face. The only aspect of the 'old France' that remains, is its attitude of advancement and conquest. Its name, which spell the word פרצת, and its *gematria*, which equals 770, accurately portray its essence.

The Rebbe explained<sup>53</sup> that the *birur* of France represents the *birur* of the entire world towards the *geulah*, in which we see two important components of a true *birur*. Firstly, that the *tachton*—the lower level which is being transformed—continues to exist in its unique form even after the *birur* is accomplished (instead of being completely obliterated and nullified). And secondly, its *birur* was implemented through *gilui ha'etzem*, which is expressed in the fact that the

### Visiting New York Universities

Reb Daniel Uzan tells over, that the Rebbe instructed them on several occasions to utilize their time in New York to visit local colleges, to tell the students about the 'French Revolution' and Jewish life in France. "Indeed, we would go around to shluchim and lecture about the amazing turnover that the Rebbe had been carrying out in France, and people would be very inspired when hearing about it"



GROUP PHOTO OF THE SHLUCHIM IN FRANCE.

work there was accomplished, both in a revealed sense and a hidden way, through our Rebbeim.

This is exactly what will happen when Moshiach comes. As the *possuk* states, ועלו מושיעים בהר ציון—They will go up to *Har Eisav*, and show over there, in that very situation, that לה' המלוכה, that Hashem runs the world.

This truly is ידידן נצח! **1**

1. This is the niggun Napoleon's March that we customarily sing following neilah on Yom Kippur. Those who were present in 770 remember it as one of the most uplifting and spiritual moments by the Rebbe, as he would stand upon his chair (or, in later years, climb up stairs) and encourage the singing with much vigor and intensity.
2. Sefer Hasichos Admur Rayatz 5703, p. 118.
3. Letter to R' Moshe Meizlish. Igros Kodesh Admur Hazaken, p. 396-397.
4. Sefer Hasichos 5752, p. 175-176.
5. To see the full story, see Sefer Hatoldos Admur Maharash p. 77.
6. See Likutei Dibburim, p. 301, 1.
7. Sefer Hasichos 5752, p. 181, footnote 43.
8. Ibid, p. 182, footnote 43.
9. Yemei Melech Vol 1, p. 380-381.
10. Ibid, p. 452.
11. Ibid, p. 453.
12. Interview with JEM My Encounter with the Rebbe project.
13. Based on the Rebbe's university

documents. The Rebbe's early years - JEM.

14. See interview with Mr. David Bezborodko on Chabad.org about the Rebbe's "lecture" at "Club du Faubourg" for scientists on the topic of the age of the world.
15. Yemei Melech Vol. 1 p. 373.
16. Ibid, p. 391. See also an episode recounted by R' Mendel Notik who heard from the Rebbetzin, Ibid. p. 390.
17. Recounted by R' Berel Junik who heard from the Rebbetzin. Yemei Melech Vol 1, p. 392.
18. See for example, Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz Vol. 15 p. 318 and 321 among many others.
19. Ibid, Vol 15, p. 208.
20. Ibid, Vol. 15 p. 150.
21. Introduction to Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz Vol 3 by Rabbi Sholom Ber Levin, p. 12.
22. See Igros Kodesh Admur rayatz Vol 4, p. 305 and p. 310, where the Rebbe signs letters of the Frierdiker Rebbe while the Frierdiker rebbe visited Paris.
23. See for example Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz Vol. 15 p. 184, 236-7.
24. Introduction to Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz Vol 15 by Rabbi Sholom Ber Levine, p. 3.
25. Recounted by R' Asher Heber. The Early Years Vol 2.
26. Ibid, p. 464.
27. Ibid, p. 463.
28. Igros Kodesh, Admur Rayatz Vol. 15 p. 172.
29. Ibid, p. 86.

30. Ibid, p. 211.
31. Yemei Melech, Vol 1. p. 517.
32. Recounted by R' Mendel Notik who heard from the Rebbetzin. The Early Years Vol 4.
33. Recounted by R' Aharon Dovid Newman. My Encounter Interview 05/11/15.
34. Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz, Vol 9, Letter 4922.
35. Sefer Hasichos 5752, p. 182.
36. Harrabi b'Pariz p. 257.
37. Igros Kodesh, Admur Rayatz Vol. 9 p. 333.
38. R' Nochum Avrohom Jacobowitz. Harabbi b'Pariz p. 240.
39. Ibid, P. 241.
40. Yemei Melech Vol 3, P. 965.
41. Later recounted by R' Schneur Zalman Butman and R' Aharon Zakon.
42. Igros Kodesh Vol 3, p. 52.
43. Igros Kodesh Vol 9, p. 3 p. 201.
44. In 5774 Kfar Chabad Magazine interviewed many of the first ba'alei teshuvah in connection with forty years since the Rebbe taught the niggun of Hoaderes V'hoemuna.
45. Kfar Chabad, issue 1514.
46. Ibid, 1508.
47. Ibid, 1504.
48. Ibid, 1515.
49. Ibid, 1503.
50. Ibid, 1505.
51. Sichos Kodesh 5734 Vol 1, p. 101.
52. Sefer Hasichos 5752, p. 184.
53. Ibid, P. 182-183.
54. Kfar Chabad, issue 1507.
55. Ibid, 1522.

