

לזכות
החתן הרה"ת ר' ניסן אייזיק שי' וואגעל
והכלה מרת הינדא רבקה תחי' סימאנדס
לדגל חתונתם בשעתומ' צ'ט' סיון ה'תשע"ו הבעל"ט
נדפס ע"י הוריהם ומשפחתם שיחיו

Rabbi Avrohom Korf, the Rebbe's shliach to Florida, was sent on Shlichus in 5721, meriting to be one of the Rebbe's earliest shluchim. In an exclusive interview with A Chassidisher Derher, Rabbi Korf tells us about the early years of his life; his childhood, his years near the Rebbe in 770, and his first activities in *hafatzas hamaayanos*, in New York and Miami.

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EARLY STEPS

A story of community activism
under the Rebbe's careful guidance

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH
RABBI AVROHOM KORF

Rabbi Korf, thank you for taking the time to speak to us. Before we discuss your years near the Rebbe and on shlichus, please share with us a little about your personal history.

I was born two days after Simchas Torah 5693, in the city of Kharkov, which is where I grew up until World War II reached our city.

Due to the hardships of life—we are talking about the height of the communist persecution—I received very little Jewish education, in comparison to today's children.

My mother taught us to *daven*, wash *negel vasser*, say *brachos*, etc. and each Shabbos my father would take us to shul. He also hired a *melamed* for us; I remember this *melamed* until today—he was looking to make some money, but he didn't actually know too much.

Every Friday night, my father would tell us stories, *chassidische mayses*, about Chassidim and *tzaddikim*; essentially, it was these stories that kept us *frum*. I always tell my children that they should tell their children *chassidische mayses*; it is the stories that they are told when they are young that will become etched in their minds and remain with them forever. My father was worried about us, and he wanted us to remain good Yidden, so he took care to tell us these stories every Friday night.

That was basically the extent of my *chinuch* in those days. Most of my time was spent playing outdoors.

Everything that had to do with Yiddishkeit was very hard to come by; I remember that there was only one set of *daled minim* in the entire city, and my father would take me each morning to *bentch* at the house of its owner.



LUBAVITCHER CHILDREN LEARN GEMARA IN THE POCKING DP CAMP; MUNICH, GERMANY.

The war came to Kharkov in 5702; what happened to your family?

The first effects of the war that reached us were the refugees. Kiev had been attacked, and hoards of people began streaming into Kharkov. It was then that we found out about what was going on.

Then we began to experience the bombings. German planes flew over the city dropping bombs that would wreak havoc and destruction. The Russians were so unprepared that they did not have proper anti-aircraft artillery, and they attempted to shoot down the planes with the most absurd methods.

We moved to a different location in the city. But on the second day of Sukkos 5702 my father came to the conclusion that nowhere in the city is safe, and he obtained train tickets for us to leave on what turned out to be the last train out of Kharkov.

We thus began traveling toward Samarkand. In calmer times it would have been a journey of a few days, but now, during wartime, it turned into a long and arduous journey. Our companions on the train did not make the journey any easier; at one point during the journey, a group of antisemites grabbed a machine that my father owned and used for

his livelihood, and threw it out the window.

When we arrived in Samarkand, there was a terrible hunger in the city; there was very little food to come by. My father rented a house, and along with us—in different rooms—lived other Chassidim. In one room lived Reb Abba Pliskin, and in another were Reb Moshe Katzman and his wife, who both fell ill with typhus (in those days we called it *yenne machleh*). When the illness would pass, the patient would be overcome with a massive appetite, and would need to eat a lot of food, "*azoy vi a leib*"—like a lion. But there was nothing for them to eat, and ultimately they both passed away, leaving two children, Zelig and Hillel. Zelig, who was a bit older, became like Hillel's father, and he would go to the market every day to try to make a few '*kopkes*' so they would have something to eat.

Then Reb Abba Pliskin also contracted the illness. When the ambulance arrived to collect him, my uncle Reb Mendel Futerfas ran to assist him. My father started to berate Reb Mendel; "Are you crazy, you have a family!" He couldn't believe that he would endanger his life by coming in contact with the highly contagious illness. But Reb Mendel didn't listen; "My *chaver* is sick, and I'm not going to help him?" He went with Reb Abba

BUT REB MENDEL DIDN'T LISTEN; "MY CHAVER IS SICK, AND I'M NOT GOING TO HELP HIM?"

to the hospital, took care of him, and with the *Aibershter's* help he actually remained healthy.

My father traveled to a different city, Friginah, and our family followed him there, and while there I once again began to learn a little. Initially I would listen in when my father would learn with his friends, and later I began to learn on my own as well.

By that time the hunger had abated a bit; seeing the easier conditions, Reb Mendel Futerfas and Reb Yonah Poltaver restarted the yeshiva in Samarkand which had withered away during the worst years of the war, and they wrote to my father telling him to send his children. My father allowed my older brothers to go, but I was still young and I was therefore kept at home. I was very jealous of my brothers, and over the next few months I nudged my father about it until he gave in and sent me as well.

The journey back to Samarkand took longer than expected. I arrived in the city as sunset began to fall on Friday night, and I was forced to walk all the way to the yeshiva, leaving all of my belongings behind. I came to the yeshiva with no belongings whatsoever.

When I arrived in yeshiva, I was reunited with my friends that I had gotten to know while previously living in Samarkand; although I was their age, their learning abilities were much more advanced than mine.

The yeshiva consisted of several grades. There were two classes that learned Gemara with my uncle, Reb Moshe Rubinson; one on a higher level and another lower. Most of my friends learned Gemara in the lower grade. When I arrived, Reb Moshe didn't want to allow me into their class, because I did not possess their knowledge, but my pride would not

allow me to be placed in a lower grade than my friends, so I insisted that I know how to learn Gemara just like my friends—although in reality the only Gemara I had learnt was what I had overheard from my father's learning.

Reb Moshe tested my knowledge, and I somehow managed to read the *amud* of Gemara well, and he allowed me into the lower Gemara class. However, my *ga'avah* was not yet satisfied; I worked very hard to excel in the lower class, and after three months I was allowed into the higher class. I worked hard there as well, and after my bar mitzvah I wanted to join yet the higher class, which learned by Reb Avraham Elya Plotkin. He was ready to accept me, but my uncle Reb Moshe didn't like my *ga'avah*, and he forced me to stay in his *shiur* for another half a year.

What are your memories from the escape from Russia in 5707?

A short time before the big escape took place, my uncle Reb Mendel Futerfas came with news that the authorities are about to arrest my father and Reb Nissan Nemanov. Upon hearing the news, they both escaped to Lvov, which is located on the Russian-Polish border. A day after they left left, I remember three KGB officers jumping into our yard and running directly to our house; they came to get our father, but *baruch Hashem* he had already gotten away.

In Lvov my father rented an apartment, and after a short while our entire family traveled there as well. While we were living there, my baby brother Bentzion passed away. When we were sitting *shiva*, our non-religious landlord came to visit us, and he asked my father a question.

Why is it, he wanted to know, that my father—who is religious—has endless *tzaros* and is constantly on the



LEM/THE EARLY YEARS BOOK

THE KORF FAMILY, CIRCA LATE 5700S. L-R: PINYE, GEDALYA, YEHOShUA (SHEA), AVREMEL.

run, but he looks like a young man and does not have any white hair, while he—a non-religious person—who lives well, and doesn't have any major worries in life, has a full head of white hair, even though he is the younger of the two.

I remember my father answering him, that when one is a *frumme Yid*, he has *bitachon* in the *Aibershter*. A non-religious person, on the other hand, constantly has second thoughts—why did I do this, why didn't I do that. But when we trust the *Aibershter*, we know that nothing is in our hands, and therefore we have no reason to worry.

After a short time in Lvov, we joined one of the *eshalon* trains that left Russia for Poland, and with us were two wagons full of Lubavitchers. We were all officially Polish citizens, and yet not a single one of us spoke Polish; we barely remembered our new Polish “names” that were written in our documents. Later we found out that Rebbetzin Chana was also on the train; at the time it was a complete secret, only one or two people knew about it.

When we arrived at the border, we were all literally shaking with fear. Our passports, and literally everything about our trip, was completely illegal, and there had already been a few arrests in the past; we had no way of knowing what was in store for us. What actually took place completely blew our minds.

A NON-RELIGIOUS PERSON CONSTANTLY HAS SECOND THOUGHTS - WHY DID I DO THIS, WHY DIDN'T I DO THAT; BUT WE TRUST IN THE AIBERSHTER AND THEREFORE WE HAVE NO REASON TO WORRY.

With us in our wagon were Reb Avrohom Mayorer and Reb Yisroel Neveler; Reb Avrohom had with him a two liter bottle of *mashke*. When the officer came on to the train, Reb Avrohom offered him a cup, but the officer declined. Reb Avrohom nevertheless insisted, and handed him a full glass of *mashke*, which the officer eventually drank in its entirety. His eyes began rolling, and he walked off the train.

The wagons didn't have a roof, so we were able to see what happened next. The officer got off and told his friend that there is good vodka in the wagon. Not wanting to miss out, the second officer came and drank a full cup as well.

They then ordered all of us to get off the wagon so they can check our documents. By the time we got off, they were both quite intoxicated, and one of them simply looked at his

watch and exclaimed that it is late and we should therefore continue on our way.

We couldn't believe what happened, but later we came to the conclusion that we merited such a miracle only because the Rebbe's mother was with us on the train.

Ultimately we arrived in the Pocking Displaced Persons Camp, where we spent over a year. While we were there, Reb Nissan Nemanov set up a serious yeshiva where we sat and learnt, together with eltere Chassidim such as Reb Yisroel Neveler and Reb Avrohom Elya Plotkin. From Pocking we moved on to Paris, and the yeshiva moved to Brunoy.

In 5710, a few *bochurim* merited to get *reshus* to travel to the Rebbe. Initially Reb Dovid Raskin went, and then four more *bochurim* followed, arriving a very short time before the *histalkus* of the Frierdiker Rebbe.

In addition to the fact that I was still young at the time, the Rebbe would often not allow Chassidim to come to America, instead directing them to Eretz Yisroel or other locations. As the years passed, I felt a growing desire to travel to America to learn near the Rebbe as well, but I couldn't convince my father to ask the Rebbe's permission. Being an *akshan*, after a while I was successful, and to our surprise and delight, the Rebbe agreed.



RABBI KORF ADDRESSES A GROUP OF CHILDREN IN LOD, ISRAEL WHILE ON SHLICHUS TO ERETZ YISROEL, SUMMER 5716.

I immediately began preparing for the trip, and I arrived in New York in Shevat 5713. I had never been to the Rebbe before, so before leaving Brunoy, I went to Reb Nissan to ask him how I should conduct myself when I come to the Rebbe.

Reb Nissan explained to me, that when a Chosid goes into *yechidus*, he needs to be completely transparent; the Rebbe must know everything about him and he must take care not to hide anything. The Chosid also must come in with complete *kabolas ol*—a commitment that he is giving himself over entirely to the Rebbe.

You probably went into yechidus when you arrived. Can you share with us what the Rebbe told you?

I will share with you a *hora'ah* that I received from the Rebbe during one of my birthday *yechidusen*. My birthday is two days after Simchas Torah; the Rebbe once asked me if I had an *aliyah* beforehand, and I said yes, on Yom Tov (when everyone gets an *aliyah* anyway). The Rebbe told me that I should get an *aliyah* specifically on the Shabbos before; not just on Yom Tov.

Please describe what life around the Rebbe was like. How often would you see the Rebbe in those years?

In those days, we would see the Rebbe only during *mincha* and *maariv*, and during *krias haTorah* on Mondays and Thursdays. At night, the Rebbe would walk home alone, without anyone accompanying him.

There were instances when the Rebbe would suddenly show up at the Karestirer mikveh (on Eastern Parkway and Brooklyn Avenue), and we would all run out into the boiler room to hide. The Karestirer Rebbetzin told us that sometimes at four in the morning she would see the Rebbe coming to use the mikveh.

In general, the *bochurim* in those days would try to stay out of the Rebbe's line of sight; we did not want the Rebbe to see us. Once, Reb Nissan came to New York and he farbrenged with the *bochurim* that were learning in 770. The next day the Rebbe asked Rabbi Groner what he had spoken about, and Rabbi Groner told him that Reb Nissan explained to the *bochurim* that it is inappropriate for them to stick themselves in the Rebbe's face. The Rebbe responded that he is right.

In those years, the yeshiva was quite small—as was Lubavitch in general—and the Rebbe took an interest in everything that was going on.

There were numerous instances that the Rebbe would walk into the *zal* during *seder Chassidus* in the morning, to see who had woken up on time. On the morning after Reb Yoel Kahn's wedding in 5714, the Rebbe did so, and the only *bochur* sitting there was my brother Pinyeh. The Rebbe looked at him and asked him, “*Du bist a ben yochid in yeshiva?*”—Are you an only child in yeshiva?

There were times that the Rebbe took it a step further. On Shabbos morning, he would walk into the *zal* at eight o'clock and invite everyone into his room to hear a *maamar*. Before starting, the Rebbe would instruct that the door be locked, and whoever showed up late would not be allowed to join.

In those years, the shul in 770 was very small, and when the crowds coming to farbrengens began to grow, the Rebbe began holding them in halls around Crown Heights. While there



NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE REBBE'S YUD-TE'S KISLEV FARBRENGEN AT FRANKLIN AVE. HALL IN BROOKLYN.

was a lot more space in the halls, they would not be set up properly, and the chaos and pushing would often get out of hand.

During one specific farbrengen people were climbing on tables and chairs, there was immense pushing, and the tumult was terrible. The Rebbe said that if this situation will continue, he will stop holding farbrengens. I had an idea how to arrange the hall and ‘make a *seder*’, but I didn’t have enough money to implement it; when I spoke to other people about it, they said that it won’t work and I should leave it up to the *Vaad Hamesader*.

I spoke to the *Vaad Hamesader*, and I told them that if they give me a hundred dollars, I can help the situation. They just brushed me off and said that *bochurim* should not be getting involved in the business of the *Vaad Hamesader*.

Later the *vaad* went into *yechidus* to discuss different options. One of the ideas that they suggested was that perhaps the women should not be invited. The Rebbe rejected it immediately, and said that under no circumstances can that happen, saying that he personally knows of homes and families that benefited considerably because the women came to farbrengens.

Then the Rebbe mentioned to them by the way, that they should speak to me, since I might have an idea.

I know this, because later, one of the members of the *Vaad Hamesader* called me over and began to berate me. It was entirely uncalled for, he said, and completely out of line for a *bochur* to write to the Rebbe about the tasks of the *Vaad Hamesader*. Then, after screaming at me for a while, he admitted that the Rebbe had told them to speak to me.

They asked me what I need, and I said one hundred dollars. Since I was inexperienced, and I didn't have help or tools, I did the entire job myself. I wasn't able to take care of the entire room; but I did manage to make a *seder* on one side, and during the *farbrenge*, the Rebbe said that "*mdarf geben a yashar koach*" to Korf.

Those were the early years of hafatzas hamaayanos. Can you share with us some of the activities that the bochurim used to do?

We used to go to different yeshivos to teach Chassidus. I would go to Torah Vodaas, to the Mirrer Yeshiva, and then later Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonon.

In Torah Vodaas, when one of the *roshei yeshiva* heard that I was giving a Chassidus *shiur*, he called me over and told me that under no circumstances may I use the lighting in yeshiva; if I do, it will be *gezeilah mamash*. I told my *talmidim* that we can't continue the *shiurim* in the yeshiva, but they didn't want to give it up, so they arranged for the *shiur* to continue in a nearby shul.

In Yitzchok Elchonon, I would teach every Thursday from five in the afternoon until three in the morning. I would conduct a whole range of *shiurim*, for *bochurim* of all ages. One of my *talmidim* there was Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, today the well known rav in Efrat. He later went on to have an extensive relationship with the Rebbe, and he once told me that what began his connection to Lubavitch were those *shiurim* that I would give.

One year, Yud Shvat was on Thursday night, and I told the *talmidim* that there would be no *shiur* that week, because the Rebbe would be davening at the *amud*. In middle of the day, Rabbi Hodakov called me and said, "*Mistamme* there will be a *shiur* tonight."

I responded that I had just cancelled because of Yud Sehvta. When he heard that, he responded sharply:

"You think that the Rebbe would be happy that because he is davening at the *amud* there won't be a *shiur*?"

I didn't have a choice, and I called the *bochurim* back to tell them that the *shiur* would take place as usual.

You were one of the twelve shluchim that the Rebbe sent to Eretz Yisrael after the terrorist attack in Kfar Chabad. What can you tell us about that unique shlichus?

When the Rebbe first spoke about the shlichus, he said that whoever wants to go should submit their names to *mazkirus*. Many people signed up, and I did as well. Some time later, those chosen were told that

they would be going, and the Rebbe mentioned that he had chosen those names while he was at the Ohel.

Before we left, we went into *yechidus*, where the Rebbe gave us a number of instructions pertaining to the trip. First of all, we should be ready the day before our scheduled trip, since we were departing on Shiva Asar B'tammuz, and one is not supposed to begin a journey during the three weeks.

Regarding the actual shlichus, the Rebbe told us that the way the Alter Rebbe conquered the world and brought people closer to *Toras Hachassidus* was initially through *nigleh*, and only afterwards through Chassidus. Therefore, when we are in Eretz Yisroel, we must speak both *nigleh* and Chassidus. Additionally, the Rebbe said that everything we do must be in a legal manner.¹

When we arrived in Eretz Yisroel, the Chassidim welcomed us in full glory; we spent Shabbos, 5 Av, in Kfar Chabad, and the feeling and excitement was indescribable. The village had just suffered a terrible tragic attack and our arrival brought a new life to everyone. In the newspapers they wrote that in Chabad,



A YOUNG RABBI KORF DURING HIS FIRST YEARS IN MIAMI.

THE REBBE LOOKED AT HIM AND ASKED HIM, "DU BIST A BEN YOCHID IN YESHIVAH?"



LAG BA'OMER PARADE, 5717

it's like Moshiach has already come. Throughout the entire trip, we were constantly farbrenging, speaking, and meeting with people; we brought a new life to the Chassidim there. It was after our trip that people began traveling to spend Tishrei with the Rebbe; before that, it was very uncommon.²

While we were in Eretz Yisrael, we went to visit Zalman Shazar (this was before he was the president of Israel). Officially, we had been invited to Eretz Yisroel by the government, and that was something that he had organized. During our meeting, he attempted to convince us to spend one day in the *ulpan*, where new *olim* study Hebrew. The issue was that the Rebbe specifically instructed that we do no such thing under any circumstances. I tried to tell Shazar that we don't have time; that we barely sleep three or four hours a night and we have so many meetings, it is simply impossible. But he had a very hard time accepting our explanation.

Every newspaper ran a different explanation as to why we had come; they were all wrong. One paper wrote that the Rebbe had sent us to be *metaken* the *chet hameraglim*—there

were twelve shluchim corresponding to the twelve *meraglim*. “*Chomoseinu*,” the newspaper of the *kana'im*, wrote that the Rebbe sent us to be *machzir b'tshuvah* the Israeli Chassidim that had become Zionists.

[We later heard from Reb Uriel Tzimmer—who had been a *kanoi* before becoming a Chosid of the Rebbe—that they had once written in their newspapers that they are the real Chabadniks, while the Lubavitchers had become Zionists. A short while later, they received a letter from Rabbi Hodakov. He wrote to them, that since he read that they are the real Chabadniks, he would like to know which Chassidus they learn, and who gives the *shiur*. He also wrote that the person who wrote the article should check his tefillin. The author did so, and he found them to be *possul*.]

Aside for visiting the Lubavitcher *mosdos* and farbrenging with anash, the Rebbe instructed us to visit various prominent rabbanim and rebbes. We visited the Belzer Rebbe, and the Gerrer Rebbe, and the Tchebiner Rov, and as per the Rebbe's instructions, we also went to the *kevarim* of Rashbi, the Arizal, and Reb Mendel Horodoker.

חורב אברהם שי יתאוו
ורח בדברי מלכות

We were also by chief rabbis, Rabbi Herzog and Rabbi Nissim. Those were the years that travel was mainly by ship, and the Rebbe campaigned strongly against traveling to Eretz Yisroel on the Israeli shipping lines, which were operated by Yidden and would travel on Shabbos.

The Rebbe maintained that it was blatant *chilul Shabbos*, but other rabbanim tried to argue that it is possible for a ship to run automatically for a period of time and therefore they should be permitted for travel. Rabbi Nissim told us that the Rebbe had explained to them why their opinion was wrong, and had requested that they remove the *heter* that they had published in support of the ships, and they did so.

Then we visited Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, who was one of the most elderly and respected rabbanim at the time. We spoke to him about the same subject, and he told us something very interesting: The specialty of the Rambam is in the fact that he was knowledgeable in all areas of wisdom; while most *gedolim* are known for their specific expertise in a certain area, the Rambam knew everything, and therefore his *piskei dinim* carry much more weight. He said that we see the same thing by the Rebbe.

Initially the Rebbe had written to him explaining why *al pi halacha* travel on those ships during Shabbos was forbidden. Then, when he wanted the rabbanim to put out an *issur*, the captains brought them on the ships, and showed them that everything works automatically and therefore there is no *chillul Shabbos*. They wrote to the Rebbe about it, and the Rebbe sent them back a detailed questionnaire for them to show the ship's engineers, filled with questions



about how each part of the ship works, proving that it could not really run automatically on Shabbos. When confronted with the questions, the captains had to admit that the Rebbe was right and it was impossible to run a ship entirely automatically on Shabbos (and yet they still did not publish an *issur*).

The shlichus to Eretz Yisroel was a major success in all areas, and when we arrived back the Rebbe himself said that it was a success ‘*Imàalah min hameshuar*’.

One of the main events of hafatzas hamaayanos during those years were the Lag Baomer parades, which you were very involved in. How did it all start?

When I was a bochur, we would all partake in the *mesibos Shabbos* programs, which were organized by Berel Shemtov and Moshe Gurkov. As part of *Mesibos Shabbos*, we organized rallies on Lag Baomer

The first parade that I participated in was really a rally conducted in the *shalash* in 5713 (unlike later years, when it was held on Eastern Parkway), and we thought, perhaps we should ask the Rebbe to come speak to the

kids. We proceeded to ask, and the Rebbe agreed.

When the Rebbe was walking back to his room after the *sicha* that he said from the porch, he said to Reb Shmuel Levitin that this is a “*nayer giluy or in hafatzas hayahadus* - a new light in the spreading of Yiddishkeit.” When we heard about the Rebbe’s reaction, we knew that this was something that had to continue.

The next time Lag Baomer was on Sunday was in 5716. I thought of the idea to make a parade, but when I told the heads of *Mesibos Shabbos* and others about my idea, they started laughing at me. They said that if we do it we will have a maximum of two hundred kids, and the event will be a failure. I didn’t agree with them, and I decided to write to the Rebbe about my idea. To my pleasant surprise, the Rebbe wrote back immediately that it is a “*davar nachon b’moad*” (very appropriate thing), on condition that it be run in an organized fashion, with a *seder mesudar*, and that it should be run by the same people running *mesibos Shabbos*; they should not be pushed to the side.

The parade was a tremendous success, beyond all of our expectations; people were amazed when they saw what was going on.

The next year, Lag Baomer was again on Sunday, and we began preparing another parade. This time, I didn’t want to put in too much work ahead of time, because the last children’s event that we had done, on Sukkos, had taken a large part of my day, and I wasn’t able to do anything else—daven with a minyan, etc.

Then the Rebbe had farbrenged, and he had spoken about the greatness of the event and the activities. Then he added that it should not take away from a person’s personal *avodah*. For that reason I didn’t want to put more than two weeks of work before into it.

I spoke to the others that were involved, Berel Shemtov and Berel Futerfas, and they insisted that I run the parade just like I had done the last time. After arguing back and forth, we decided to go to Rabbi Hodakov. When we spoke to him, he told me in no uncertain terms that I must be involved; he said that since the Rebbe’s answer had been to me, I must be involved and if not, there will be no parade.

I didn’t have a choice, and I worked on it for a long time. *Baruch hashem* we were very successful and it was even better organized than the previous parade.

I was ultimately involved in three parades. The third one was after my wedding, when I was teaching in Oholei Torah, and I wanted Binyomin Klein, who was a *chosson* at the time, to fill my place. But then again, Rabbi Hodakov insisted that without me, there will be no parade.

The morning of that parade, I was in the Tzach office. It was six o’clock in the morning, and Reb Meir Harlig came running and yelling that it is about to rain and that I must call Rabbi Hodakov. Despite the early hour, I phoned him and said that it seems that it will rain and the whole parade will be a disaster. I guess he then called the Rebbe.

Throughout the entire parade, when the thousands of children were present, it didn't rain one drop. During the parade my mother was standing next to the Karestirer Rebbetzin and my mother was telling her that she is worried that it will start raining and the whole parade will be a disaster. The Karestirer Rebbetzin told her that she has nothing to worry about. "As long as the Lubavitcher Rebbe is outside, it will not rain."

That is exactly what happened. As soon as the Rebbe went back inside, we began to bus all the children out of the area—which took a while, because we were not as organized as the years before. As soon as the last bus pulled away, the skies opened and a downpour drenched us all.

In those days, the Rebbe was deeply involved in the lives of the bochorim, which obviously included their shidduchim. What can you tell us about that period in your life?

One year, when I went into *yechidus* for my birthday, the Rebbe told me that he had heard that I had refused a teaching position in Oholei Torah, which had opened its doors a few years earlier, and the Rebbe wanted to know why I didn't want the position. I answered that I didn't want to get too involved in anything because I was hoping that the Rebbe would send me on shlichus. The Rebbe replied that since I am still a *bochur* and shlichus is not yet an option for me, I should begin looking into *shidduchim*. Meanwhile, I should take the teaching job and view it as a temporary shlichus.

I threw myself into my new position, and with Hashem's help we were blessed with huge success. I began with a class of seven students, and when they finished elementary school there were over thirty children in the grade, with more that wanted to join but we didn't have room.

I began looking into *shidduchim* and many offers came up, but none of them worked out. The next time I was

in *yechidus*, I wrote in my *tzetel* that I can't handle it anymore. The Rebbe said, "Nu, itzt vet zein shneller"—now it will be quicker. The next morning I received a suggestion, which ultimately worked out and we were married.

By the time I got married the Rebbe had stopped attending weddings and being *mesader kiddushin*. However, the Rebbe did make an exception for couples that were prepared to go out on shlichus. Thus, my wife and I merited that the Rebbe officiated at our wedding. During the same period, another couple asked the Rebbe to be *mesader kiddushin* for them, but the Rebbe told them that he had already stopped this practice and he could not do it. When the *chosson* said that he heard that the Rebbe would be attending the Korf wedding, the Rebbe replied that it was because they had committed to go on shlichus.

A short time later, during the year 5720, an offer came up for a shlichus. Moshe Feller had recently returned from Merkos Shlichus in Mexico,

THE REBBE IS MESADER KIDDUSHIN AT THE WEDDING OF RABBI AVRAHAM AND RIVKAH KORF, 13 SHEVAT 5720.





YESHIVA FOR BAALEI TESHUVA IN MIAMI. RABBI KORF ON THE FAR RIGHT.

BUT WHEN HE WAS WALKING UP THOSE STEPS, HE BEGAN TO REMEMBER THE SONGS THAT HE HAD LEARNED DURING HIS ONE SUMMER IN CAMP GAN YISRAEL

where he had visited the local Jewish communities, and he said that while the Sephardic community has a rabbi, the Ashkenazi shul does not. Rabbi Hodakov called me and asked if I would be willing to move to Mexico; I immediately replied in the affirmative.

Moshe Feller then put a call through to the community to tell them that I would be coming, but then they informed him that another rov—Rabbi Hershberg—had already committed to come. Hearing that, I was told that I would not be going.

The next time I was in *yechidus*, I told the Rebbe that I don't want to teach anymore, because I hope that the Rebbe will send me on shlichus. The Rebbe answered that since the plan of Mexico didn't work out, and there is nothing else as of yet, I should continue teaching, and when the time comes I will be sent on shlichus.

Just a few short months later, Rabbi Hodakov called me and asked me if I would be willing to move to Miami. I agreed on the spot, even though I couldn't even identify Miami on a map, and I had no idea what I would be doing there.

Before moving, we went into *yechidus*, where I asked the Rebbe what my shlichus is. The Rebbe told me that “*Vu s'felt in Yiddishkeit*”—

wherever something is missing in Yiddishkeit—it is my job to fill in the need. Before we left, the Rebbe gave me a Tanya and to my wife he gave a *siddur*.

The Rebbe instructed that N'shei Chabad organize a *tzeis'chem l'shalom* for us before we left, and Merkos sent three letters to Miami, to people who were friends of Lubavitch, asking them to assist us.

A few months after we arrived in Miami, I wanted to make a large Yud-Beis Tammuz farbrengen, which would be our first large event. I arranged to have it in a hotel owned by a local *baal habos*. I prepared advertising, and brought down four *bochurim* and *yungeleit* to farbreng with the crowd. I also wanted to invite the Jewish mayor of Miami Beach, but the Rebbe wrote to me that I shouldn't—it shouldn't look like I am trying to take over the city. In the end, the event was a great success, and over two hundred people came to participate.

Another thing that took place soon after we arrived was the birth of our son Yossi. My father flew to Miami for the *bris*, and when he returned to New York, the Rebbe questioned him in detail about everything that had happened. The Rebbe wanted to know

which rabbanim had attended, and was interested in every detail of what was going on.

In general, the Rebbe took care of us in the fullest sense of the word. I would often write *duchos* about what was going on, and the Rebbe would advise me on all types of issues.

In the beginning, the Rebbe did not allow me to open a school, because there already was an existing Hebrew Academy, and therefore I was not to create competition. Instead, I decided to open a summer camp. Luckily, I was ready for it because I had been previously involved in Camp Gan Yisrael and in the Oholei Torah day camp, which I had organized.

[A bit later, we did open a school, which my wife - may she have a *refuah sheleima* - put her life and soul into, and *boruch hashem* today it has grown to unbelievable proportions.]

In order to start the camp, I had a *mekurav* who agreed to give me the initial sum of money to buy a property, and I began looking into plots of land. At first we were searching for land in Central Florida,



RABBI KORF WITH HIS NEWBORN SON YOSSI.

but I was advised by my *baalei-batim* not to go there myself due to my Jewish appearance. (These were the days of racial segregation, and African Americans were not allowed to be in Miami Beach at night. However, the real racial segregation was in the center of the state, and the locals there hated all minorities, including Yidden.) One of them told me that he had a friend that lives in that area, and he will look for me instead.

I wrote to the Rebbe about it, and the Rebbe said no, because you look like a Yid, you should be the one to go. With such an answer, obviously I went without fear, and I began looking into properties. I remember that I came to a place where there were a few Jewish families, who kept a very low profile. When they saw me, they begged me to leave, saying that they live in peace with their neighbors, and my presence will awaken all the antisemites. But since the Rebbe had told me to come, I didn't pay attention.

The camp was very successful, with 40 or 50 children the first year. I will share with you an amazing story that happened because of our camp:

There was a group of students that joined our camp the year before they went to high school, where—this was the height of the hippy movement—some of the boys got involved in drugs. A number of them ended up in a commune in California, from where one of the kids called his father one

day and told him that he is getting married.

“With whom?” his father asked. He answered, “With a human being, with a girl.” The father wanted to know if she was Jewish, and he replied, “What difference does it make?”

The father tried to reason with his only son, but he realized he would be better off talking to a wall. In his distress, he turned to me for help.

Since the boy was thousands of miles away, I told the father that I cannot help much, but I will send a *tzetel* to the Rebbe asking for a *bracha*. A few weeks later the father happily told me that they had broken up.

What had happened?

The young couple had gone to the courthouse to arrange their marriage, and while walking up the many steps to the courthouse, the young man began having memories.

He had studied at the Hebrew Academy for seven or eight years, but that never affected him and this didn't bother his conscience. But as he was walking up those steps, he began to remember the songs that he had learned during his one summer in

Camp Gan Israel—‘Ain't Gonna Work on Saturday,’ and so on, started to ring in his ears—and as he walked through the doors of the courthouse he began to feel intensely sick and dizzy. He turned to his fiance, and told her that he won't be able to go through with the marriage that day; they should push it off for another time.

He went back to his apartment, and that night, he decided that he would not go forward with the marriage at all.

With the Rebbe's bracha, the seeds we planted at our camp were able to awaken this *Yiddishe neshama*.

Fascinating. We thank you, Rabbi Korf, for taking the time to share all of these memories with us. May you continue to see much success in your avodas hakodesh. 

1. See full article about the shlichus to Eretz Yisroel in “Transforming Tragedy,” *Derher Magazine*, Sivan 5774
2. The Rebbe mentioned this at the farbrengen of Shabbos parshas Nitzavim-Vayelech 5716



RABBI KORF WITH SUPPORTERS AT THE YECHIDUS FOR THE MEMBERS OF MACHNE ISRAEL DEVELOPMENT FUND, 7 TISHREI 5751.

CHAIM B. HALBERSTAM via JEM 55855