



Push, You'll Get In

SHAVUOS IN LUBAVITCH - 5662

Written by Reb Shaul Ber Zislin¹

I was a student in Zhembin at Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim, the only branch of the yeshiva besides the one in Lubavitch.

It was three days before Shavuos 5762 and our mashpia, Reb Shmuel Gronem Esterman, called for a farbrengen in honor of his imminent departure to spend Yom Tov in Lubavitch. His custom had always been to spend Rosh Hashana in Lubavitch with the Rebbe Rashab, and since his appointment as *mashpia* of the yeshiva in Zhembin, he would also travel to Lubavitch for Shavuos.

At the farbrengen he explained that he is traveling to Lubavitch, but that he forbade us from joining his trip. We were to go at the usual time, for Rosh Hashana. He focused on the idea of traveling to a Rebbe and how it leads one to the light of Chassidus. And he explained that his entire life he would only travel to the Rebbe for Rosh Hashana, but once he became the *mashpia*, the Rebbe instructed him to come to Lubavitch for Shavuos as well. However, he had not received permission to bring any of the *talmidim* of the yeshiva, because this would be a waste of our time, as we had not yet reached his level. (This is my understanding what he said.)

That afternoon, not long before *mincha*, Reb Shmuel Gronem departed for Borisov. He planned to spend the night there, and take the train from Borisov to Krasnia in the morning.

In the evening, I and two friends, Avrohom Nikolayever and Yaakov Boruch Lapitzer, were talking about how we want to go to Lubavitch for Shavuos even though Reb Shmuel Gronem forbade us from going.

Considering that we had almost no money, we decided to walk to Borisov (about 25 miles) and take the train from there. The little money we did have would allow us to buy tickets from Borisov.

We tried to convince some of our other friends to join us but no one else was willing to come. We packed a little food for the way, and took our tefillin and a change of underclothes. Each of us carried a small bag. At 1:00 AM we left for Borisov.

It was already near sunrise when we set out. The pre-dawn was hot and dry, not a sound in the stillness. We walked unhurriedly, taking our time, because we were not used to such long walks. The entire way we spoke words of Torah and Chassidus and *chassidische* stories.

As we passed one of the villages we met a shepherd taking his sheep out to pasture. This reminded Yaakov Boruch of an incident that took place the previous Rosh Hashana.

After the Rebbe Rashab had finished saying a *maamar* on Moztei Yom Tov and had left the hall, the crowd began to dance; within a half hour most of the Chassidim that were in the hall joined in the dance. The younger *bochurim* began to dance exuberantly, jumping, clapping and kicking their feet. One of the *baalei battim* of Lubavitch was standing there and began to shout at one of the *bochurim*, "Why are you making yourself crazy?! You have no *derech erez* of a human being! You see how the elders are dancing with *derech erez*!"

Standing on the side was Yerachmiel Sokistziner and he responded to this man, "Did you ever see a herd of animals

walking in the fields? The cows walk calmly while the calves run and jump. You think the cows have more *sechel*? Of course not! The calves happen to be lighter on their feet...” I added, “Even the Gemara says clearly, ‘A one-day-old ox is still called an ox.’”

The reason for this exuberant dance after the *maamar* was the great feelings of *bitul* and *hiskashrus* that was awakened in the Chassidim during the *maamar*. Based on Tanya perek 18—where it speaks of Hashem being greater than *sechel* and everyone is foolish compared to Him, and like the *possuk* says, בהמות הייתי עמך ואני תמיד עמך, “I am as an animal before You; yet I am continually with You”—we can understand what Yerachmiel Sokistziner was referring to.

We continued walking and soon came upon a hill covered in grass near a small stream of water. We decided to stop to wash our hands, daven, rest and eat something before continuing on the way. This way we would not be so tired and hungry when we get to Borisov. We rested there for about two hours. While resting we met some wagons traveling from Borisov to Zhembin. Amongst the passengers were some people to who recognized us and understood that we were traveling to Lubavitch. They called out to us and we responded, and they wished us a safe trip.

One person mentioned that he had seen Reb Shmuel Gronem alone the previous night in Borisov, and he realized that we are going without permission. He warned us that we will get a rebuke—“*nezifa*”—from Reb Shmuel Gronem, but we laughed him off.

As we continued on our way, one of us—I don’t remember who it was—decided that we need to sing a *niggun* that matches our pace while walking, like a military march, to help us walk faster. We sang and made good progress this way, but when we passed someone, we stopped singing, as it felt too childish.

In Borisov

We arrived in Borisov at about 8:00 in the morning and we discovered that the train leaves at 10:00. We were sure

that Reb Shmuel Gronem would be on that train so we decided to wait for the next train.

There was nothing for us to do at the train station, as the second train would only leave in the afternoon, so we went to the Lubavitcher *shteibel*. When we entered the shul we were immediately surrounded by many people who shook our hands and welcomed us. They recognized us as *talmidim* from Zhembin. We told them that we were going to Lubavitch for Shavuos. They were surprised and we could see that they were jealous.

The rov of the city, Reb Michael Rodlson, approached and greeted us. He knew me from my city, Krislave, from when he lived there before becoming rov, after his father,

the previous rov of Borisov, passed away. His family and mine had been very close and he inquired about my family and how they were doing.

We told him the purpose of our trip and he liked it a lot. He turned to the crowd that had gathered around and said, “*Bochurim* are traveling to Lubavitch! We need to be *mekarev* them!” And he instructed that we be brought some tea. He also invited us to eat at his house, but we were full from what we had eaten at our rest stop. He then asked about our financial situation, if we have money for the trip, and we told him the truth.

In the meantime, the second rov, the ‘Vietker’ as he was called, had also arrived in shul. The two rabbonim spoke between themselves and then to a few other people whom I

did not recognize. Rav Rodelson came over to us and said, “Wait here until after all the *minyanim* daven and we will get some money together for you.”

After the *minyanim* had finished he brought us some money. I don’t recall how much it was but it was enough to travel with if we used the ‘conductor’s discount,’ which was usually about half the price of a regular ticket. The ‘conductor’s discount’ was when the conductor snuck you onto the train and allowed you to ride in his compartment in exchange for a small bribe.

We went to the station and were relieved to see that Reb Shmuel Gronem was not there, that he had indeed

THE ‘CONDUCTOR’S DISCOUNT’ WAS WHEN THE CONDUCTOR SNUCK YOU ONTO THE TRAIN ALLOWED YOU TO RIDE IN HIS COMPARTMENT IN EXCHANGE FOR A SMALL BRIBE.

already taken the earlier train. When the second train arrived, we approached the conductor, who understood what we wanted and hinted to us, with a motion, to go to his compartment. We happily bundled in and a few minutes later he joined us.

“Where to?” He asked. “Krasnia,” we replied.

He said that until Orsha we could travel with him and he named his price. We asked if he could take us further to Krasnia and he said that when we would get to Orsha we should wait in the compartment until he finds out if we could continue with him. As it turned out we were able to ride with him all the way to Krasnia, the train station that serves Lubavitch.

They Are Outed

We arrived in Karsnia at around 7:00 in the evening. We entered an inn that was run by a tall, big man, but he was also soft spoken, and was known for skinning his customers on every penny. Knowing this, we did not plan on eating there, we just wanted to see who was hanging around there.

As we entered, we saw a group of Chassidim sitting and drinking tea around a table with a large boiling kettle at its center. Among the group were HoRav Yitzchak Yoel Rafalovitz, HoRav HaGaon Reb Moshe Madiyevski, and of course Reb Shmuel Gronem himself.

Upon seeing us, everyone welcomed us and Rav Yitzchak Yoel Rafalovitz asked us, in a jolly tone, “So who are you?”

We replied that we are from Zhembin. He laughed and said to Reb Shmuel Gronem, “These are yours; nu, why are you so quiet?” But Reb Shmuel Gronem did not reply. He also wouldn’t say a word to us. We saw on his face that he was very angry. We felt bad that we had sinned against him and we couldn’t work up the courage to approach the table.

Rav Rafalovitz told us not to worry about the fearsome inn-keeper, they had already ordered the tea and he invited us to sit down and drink some. We slid closer and pulled some chairs up and began to drink. Rav Rafalovitz urged us to drink as much as we liked and asked us about our trip. We told him about our walk and how we had ridden along with the conductor thanks to the help we got in Borisov. Reb Moshe also joined in the conversation along with another Chossid by the name of Epshtein. But Reb Shmuel

Gronem wouldn’t look in our direction; it was as if he didn’t know us or care for what we had to say. And this bothered us immensely.

A few minutes passed and the wagon driver came in announcing that he was ready to take them to Lubavitch. Rav Rafalovitz decided that because we had a *minyán* we would first daven *mincha* and then the group would travel.

Epshtein left ahead of the group in a special wagon prepared for him. Before he left we saw Rav Yitzchak Yoel and Rav Moshe speaking with him quietly. It seemed to me that they were discussing our situation and how much money we would need to get to Lubavitch.

Everyone went out to the wagon, and the innkeeper brought all their bags out. We stood to the side waiting to see what would happen. We didn’t plan on walking that evening to Lubavitch but to wait until morning.

Rav Yitzchak Yoel looked out the window of the wagon, “Nu? What do you think?” We told him our plan to spend the night in Krasnia and walk in the morning. He turned to Reb Shmuel Gronem and said, “Nu, Reb Shmuel? What do you think? I pay half and you pay half? And we will tell them to join us on the wagon?”

Sticking his head back out of the window he called out, “Jump on wagon, we are taking care of it for you!”

We jumped on and rode with. The whole way everyone spoke but Reb Shmuel Gronem wouldn’t talk to us.

“FOR THIS YOU HAVE TO ARRANGE PERMISSION FROM PINYE LEIB” THE REBBE ANSWERED WITH A SMILE.

We Arrive

It was 10:00 at night when we arrived in Lubavitch. We got off the wagon near the yeshiva and went into the big *zal*. Everyone surrounded us, welcoming us, wanting to know if others were coming; a commotion indeed. The news spread like wildfire—the Zhembiners came!

After a few conversations we called it a night and went to sleep on the newly made benches in the yeshiva with our coats as pillows.

We were pained that we had not seen any good feelings from Reb Shmuel Gronem, and, as a result of this, we would probably not have any welcome in Lubavitch, or a place to stay for Shavuot.

The next morning after davening Reb Shmuel Gronem approached us with a smile. “Go find a place to stay and you will be there for Yom Tov! I arranged that the yeshiva

will pay for your lodging and your meals. I will get a note for you to take to the family that you stay with. (There was no kitchen in the yeshiva yet, so the *bochurim* would live and eat at the houses of people who lived in Lubavitch, and the yeshiva would reimburse them.)

Our hearts jumped for joy, not only because we would have a place to stay and eat on Yom Tov, but primarily because Reb Shmuel Gronem wasn't upset anymore. We quickly went to find lodging and understandably the Yom Tov was wonderful.

We heard three *maamarim* from the Rebbe Rashab—*מי מדד*, *והר סיני*, and *וירד ה'*. The first two *maamarim* we understood well and chattered them over for the Chassidim.

After Yom Tov, Reb Shmuel Gronem prepared himself for *yechidus* with the Rebbe. We asked him if he would be able to speak before the Rebbe, to advocate for us to have a *yechidus* before we returned.

He answered us that he wouldn't be able to do that for us. It was enough that he was able to remove the *kpeida* on us for having come to Lubavitch without his permission, and even arranging for us a place to stay, but this much he wouldn't be able to do.

He also informed us that he received a stipend for us to return to Zhembin, which would come out of our account for the Tishrei trip, and by Tishrei the rest would be figured out. For now, however, he wouldn't be able to ask the Rebbe for a *yechidus* for us.

Reb Shmuel Gronem went into *yechidus*, and came out in a different spirit. He told us that he spoke to the Rebbe about us and saw that the Rebbe was happy that we had come for Shavuos. Therefore, he advised us not to leave Lubavitch just yet, but to go in and see the Rebbe while he ate (which was a more accessible time) and to ask him directly for a *yechidus*.

We did so and waited in the room near the Rebbe's *yechidus* room. When he walked by after eating, the Rebbe saw us and approached us. "These are the Zhembiner?" he asked. We answered in the affirmative. "Nu, what do you want?" We said that we stayed because we wanted to be able to have a *yechidus*. "For this you have to arrange permission from Pinye Leib," the Rebbe answered with a smile. Pinye Leib was the *shamesh* who would manage the door by *yechidus*. "I will try to see what I can do," the Rebbe said, and he went to his room.

Understandably we were overjoyed. The *meshares* Pinye Leib told us that while we wouldn't be able to go into *yechidus* that night, the Rebbe had told him to let us in. We

would have our turn the next afternoon before the Rebbe left Lubavitch for *datche*.

And so it was. The next day each of us had a chance to enter in *yechidus*.

This was my second *yechidus* ever. The details of what the Rebbe told me in *yechidus* is not to be written for the public (it's called *yechidus* after all), but generally the Rebbe spoke about my learning in *nigleh*, that I should work hard to understand the *halacha* of every *sugya*, and he mentioned the *sefer* Kesef Nivchar. I said that I had the *sefer* and he told me that it would be good to use it from time to time.

About Chassidus, he told me that just as we say about *nigleh*: *לא המדרש עיקר אלא המעשה*, the learning is not the main thing, rather it's the action that follows as a result, the same is true about Chassidus. Chassidus has its own desired outcome; this is the davening, which must change through learning Chassidus.

He also said that the same way an incorrect understanding of a Gemara will lead to an improper *halacha*—and this is very bad—similarly, a false interpretation in Chassidus will lead to a wrong understanding of *Elokus*, which is even worse.

The Rebbe continued: "You should find for yourself a friend, *וקנה לך חבר*. You should have a friend to whom you can reveal everything in the recesses of your heart. Through this it will be easier to fix yourself, and you will not need to wait for *yechidus*. But it must be a friend that you can rely on.

After I went out of *yechidus*, I decided that I can do this with my friend Avraham Nikoloyiver. For a long time after that, we were able to provide this friendship to each other. However, he eventually left Zhembin for Lubavitch for familial reasons and I was unable to find another friend of this caliber.

On our return to Zhembin, one of the Chassidim met us on the train and told us, in Lubavitch you *chattered* the *maamarim* that you heard from the Rebbe. I am demanding of you that you *chatter* them here as well. And so we *chattered* both *maamarim* for him in the train carriage, something that drew the attention of a few delighted Chassidim. One of the Chassidim brought out some *mashke* and cake and distributed it to everyone to make a *lchaim*.

We left them happily at the stop in Orsha and made our way home to Zhembin. And that was how we spent Shavuos in Lubavitch. **1**

1. Reb Shaul Dovber Zislin (5641-5724) studied in Tomchei Tmimim in its early years. Eventually, he was appointed as the *menahel* and *mashpia* of Tomchei Tmimim in Shzedrin. He later moved to Eretz Yisroel where he served as a rof and mashpia, and as one of the founders of Agudas Chassidei Chabad, until his passing at the age of 83.