

לזכות החתן
הרה"ת ר' אריה לייב שיחי' לבנר
והכלה המהוללה
מרת אריאלה ליבא שתחי' סיגלשטיין
לרגל חתונתם ביום ל' אדר ה'תשע"ז
נתרם ע"י הוריהם ר' מנחם שלום
וזוגתו מרת שושנה יפה
סיגלשטיין



Reb Mendel Futerfas

a living legend

"Accomplished and energetic, among the foremost mekusharim to our Rebbeim, who goes in their ways, in the holy path."

This is just one of the incredible things the Rebbe said about the renowned Chossid, Reb Mendel Futerfas.

Already early on in his lifetime, Reb Mendel became a legend. For his tireless work on behalf of the Chassidim in Russia, for his zestful personality, full of energy and life, and for his boundless dedication to the Rebbe and darkei hachassidus.

Vastly different than many other elder Chassidim, Reb Mendel didn't learn in the golden days of Tomchei Temimim; yet his colorful life story, as a bochur, businessman, mashpia or inmate, is an inspiration to anyone who comes its way.



3 TISHREI 5746, LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 216589

Early Years

Reb Mendel Futerfas was born in 5667, in Pleshentz, near Minsk, White Russia. His father passed away before his birth; at the *bris*, he was named after his own father.

The young orphan was brought up in the home of his grandmother Rochel Leah, who was a well-known Chassidische matriarch. Rochel Leah was also a childhood friend of Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah, the wife of the Rebbe Rashab, and whenever she visited Lubavitch, she stayed at the Rebbe Rashab's home. When she visited in 5675, she brought along eight year old Mendel, and the young child merited to be received for *yechidus*, where the Rebbe Rashab blessed him to be “*an ehrlicher Yid*, a pious Jew, with long life.” [Years later, as Reb Mendel languished in Siberian labor camps, his firm belief in the Rebbe Rashab's *bracha* gave him the strength to carry on.]

This visit became a yearly custom; the last time Reb Mendel merited to see the Rebbe Rashab was when he was thirteen years old, over Tishrei 5680, half a year before the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus*.

A few months later, Reb Mendel left home to learn in the underground yeshiva in Kremenchug; when the secret operation was exposed, his wanderings began, spending time in the yeshivos of Kharkov, Vitebsk, and Nevel. During his years in yeshiva, Reb Mendel studied with a number of legendary *mashpi'im*; Reb Yechezkel (“*Chatche*”) Feigin and Reb Itche *der Masmid* among others. However, his closest relationship was with the *mashpia* Reb Zalman Moshe Hayitzchaki. A deep bond developed between the two; Reb Mendel never missed a *shiur* or a *farbrengen*, and Reb Zalman Moshe took special notice and care for his *talmid*, raising him—in his unique manner—to live

Reb Mendel was known to ‘come down hard’ on people that would try to slip away from a farbrengen, even if they were going with good intentions.

up to the ideals of a *bochur* in Tomchei Temimim.

The distinct style of Reb Zalman Moshe was characteristic of Reb Mendel as well. Always lively and vivacious, Reb Mendel always had a passion for a Chassidisher *farbrengen*. Reb Mendel was known to ‘come down hard’ on people that would try to slip away from a *farbrengen*, even if they were going with the excuse of learning or davening.

Reb Mendel would often extol on the virtues of a Chassidische *farbrengen*. He would relate that once a Schneersohn relative attended a *farbrengen* of the Rebbe Rashab, and, in the height of his inspiration, asked the Rebbe Rashab for a *tikkun*.

The Rebbe Rashab told him, that whenever the Chassidim in his town gather for a *farbrengen*, he should make sure that he is present. That would be his *tikkun*.

The yeshiva in Nevel was discovered, and the wanderings

continued. Reb Mendel joined the yeshiva in Yekatrinoslav, but this time not as a student, but as a *mashpia*, at the age of twenty three. He spent a short while there, but once again the Communists caught up with them, and after a short period of time in Odessa, Reb Mendel returned home to Kharkov where he began to receive marriage offers.

Somehow, he managed to send a query to the Frieddiker Rebbe in Poland, and he received instructions to look into one specific offer, from the *shtetl* Karalevitz.

Reb Mendel traveled to that family's home, and on Shabbos afternoon a *kiddush* was held. Reb Mendel didn't restrain himself from *farbrenging* with the Chassidim gathered in the home, and late Motzei Shabbos, he found himself lying under the table. From his low perch, he overheard the prospective father-in-law tell his wife, “It is clear that this is a real Chassidisher *bochur*—look how he

In the Merit of a Farbrengen

Reb Berkeh Chein related that he once came to visit Reb Mendel when his young son Sholom Ber had fallen deathly ill. The parents were extremely anxious; a few of their children had already passed on, and they were desperately hoping for a miracle.

Arriving at Reb Mendel's home, the doctor turned to him and asked him to leave, saying that “the child has only a short time to live.” Reb Berkeh went outside, and walked behind a window, when he heard Reb Mendel davening to the *Aibershter*.

A shiver went down Reb Berkeh's spine. Reb Mendel was saying, “*Ribono Shel Olam*, have mercy on my child. Not in the merit of my Torah learning; it has not been adequate. Nor because of my davening; it hasn't been as it should have. Spare my son in the merit that I have never left in the midst of a Chassidische *farbrengen*...”



REB MENDEL JOINS THE MITZVAH MOBILE ON A MIVTZOIM RUN ON THE STREETS OF LONDON.

was ready to farbreng no matter the circumstance; we need to do whatever it takes to make sure he ‘closes’ the *shidduch* with us.”

In the summer of 5693, the wedding took place, and a new chapter in Reb Mendel’s life began.

With Heart, Soul, and Wallet

The state of the yeshivos was dire; the cost of upkeeping the clandestine operation along with supporting the families of those Chassidim who had been incarcerated was prohibitive, and the organizers saw in Reb Mendel the confidence, ingenuity, and perseverance that it would take to do the job. He was chosen to be one of those responsible to procure the much needed funds.

The yeshiva *bochur* now became a businessman. A perceptive person by nature, Reb Mendel was very successful in his business dealings, and brought in vast amounts of profit. Although very large sums of money passed through his hands, he did not

keep one ruble for himself, and every last penny was delivered to support Tomchei Temimim.

That night, Reb Mendel tossed and turned; “the bochurim are starving for bread, and I’m burying gold coins?”

Once, a partner convinced him to put away a few gold coins just in case circumstances would take a turn for the worse, and Reb Mendel acquiesced and buried a few coins in his yard.

That night, Reb Mendel tossed and turned. “The *bochurim* are starving for bread, and I’m burying gold coins?”

He dug up the money, passed it on to the appropriate individual, and only then returned to sleep for what was left of the night.

A Russian Thug and a Rod

“It was Yud-Tes Kislev 5702,” Reb Mendel related. “A thick snowfall covered the city. I was walking down the street when I suddenly noticed a gang of thugs armed with rods and bars, beating my good friend Yankel Gansberg, who had no means of protection and no path to escape.

“Being young and strong, I ran over and wrested a bar from one of the beasts. With my new weapon I knocked down one assailant, then another, and in the ensuing chaos Reb Yankel managed to escape, and I ran and hid in a large pile of snow.

“The gang searched for me high and low; they were intent on paying me back for my ‘insolence.’ But Boruch Hashem; I managed to save Reb Yankel’s life...”

Different colors

A few years passed and new dangers arose. In the beginning of 5700, the Nazis invaded Russia, and streams of refugees fled east, into the depths of Russia’s Asian territories. Thousands of Yidden reached Samarkand, among them many Lubavitcher Chassidim. When Reb Mendel arrived there, he once again saw a dire need; this time for *chadarim* for young children. Together with Reb Yonah Kahn (“Poltaver”), he set up a network of *chadarim* and yeshivos which withstood the strains of wartime and lasted until 5705, when a new project called to Reb Mendel.

The war had ended and the Soviet and Polish governments reached an

agreement; all of the refugees who had fled Poland into Russian territory would be permitted to return to their homeland, provided that they can present proof of their Polish citizenship.

Chassidim saw this as a golden opportunity to escape the accursed land. Immediately, a committee was set up to organize and direct a wide spread operation of forgery. False Polish passports were needed, and vast amounts of money were required in order to fund this undercover campaign. Here again, Reb Mendel was one of the leaders, and he

threw himself into the new project wholeheartedly.

The project was extremely risky; being caught meant facing accusations of counter-revolutionary activities—one of the worst offences in the Soviet Union, carrying a sentence of capital punishment.

Nevertheless, Reb Mendel didn't slow down; for a long time, he worked tirelessly in the border city of Lvov to facilitate the exit of thousands of Chassidim posing as Polish citizens.

When the operation began to drag on, some of the organizers used passports to save themselves, joining the 'eshalons' (trains) leaving Russia,

but Reb Mendel would not hear of it. He placed his wife and children on a train, but declared that he would not leave until the last Chossid would find his way out of the country.

Ultimately, the operation was brought to a close; the various passageways were blocked, passports were no longer procurable, and then the arrests began. One after another, Chassidim involved in the operation were picked up by the NKVD, and Reb Mendel understood that his days as a free man were numbered. Pulling together a few last passports, he boarded a train together with a few more Chassidim, and anticipated the move over the border.

Alas, it was not to be. Armed guards burst into the cabin, and dragged the Chassidim to a starkly different destination.

Hauled into prison cells, a bitter period of interrogations began. Reb Mendel's interrogations, accompanied by its fair share of torture, lasted for three full months. Throughout the entire period, Reb Mendel held his cool, and never revealed any incriminating evidence that would harm other Chassidim. In the spirit of his trademark *gaon Yaakov*, he refused to acknowledge the authority of his interrogators, and spoke only when he deemed appropriate. He held fast to his story: He told the interrogators that everything he did was so that he would be able to see the Rebbe; he cannot live without the Rebbe. Had the Rebbe been in Russia and he would be outside, he would have invested the same efforts to enter Russia as well.

This explanation didn't appeal to the NKVD. On Erev Lag Baomer 5707, Reb Mendel was sentenced to eight years of hard labor in Siberia; he was slated for 'reeducation.'

Reb Mendel related:

"During the three months of the interrogations, my mind was very

Lessons from the Czar's Soldiers

Years later, in his farbrengens with *bochurim*, Reb Mendel would expound on the different types of *mesiras nefesh* that a person could attain.

The highest level, he said, we can learn from a story of the Czar's soldiers.

The Czar once needed to cross a river and no bridge was in sight. Without thinking twice, the soldiers began to jump into the water, creating a human bridge upon which the Czar passed.

Reb Mendel noted that the real *mesiras nefesh* was from the first soldiers, those who reached the bottom of the river. They would not even merit that the Czar step on them; their names would not be remembered, and they would not be commended for their sacrifice. That is true *mesiras nefesh*.

Another lesson which Reb Mendel would learn from the Czar's soldiers, was about *ahavas Yisrael*.

Part of the troop of the famed and feared Cossacks, were their fearsome horses. For a horse to be accepted into the Cossacks' ranks, it would be taken for a swim through a raging river. Surviving the swim was not enough. The horses that would, upon reaching the shore, turn around and swim back to help other flailing horses, they would be taken into the Cossacks' ranks.

From among many lessons Reb Mendel would take from this story, one was a favorite. When a Jew reaches a certain level in *avodas Hashem*, his mission is then to turn around, search for someone who is flailing in the river, and assist him to reach that level as well.

Reb Mendel used to quip that the reason that the modern day *seder hayeshiva* is shorter than the *seder* customary in Lubavitch, is so that *bochurim* could spend the extra three hours to do *hafatzas hamaayanos* within the walls of the yeshiva.



DELIVERING A SHIUR FOR THE BOCHURIM IN KFAR CHABAD.

unsettled. On the day that I received my sentence, I was brought back to my cell, and I was finally able to evaluate my situation with a settled mind. I remembered that the Frierdiker Rebbe had once said that all those who are situated in Russia and in prison, when they will think about him, he will think about them.

“I stood in the corner of the cell, closed my eyes, and imagined that I was standing in *yechidus* before the Frierdiker Rebbe, or at least sending him a letter describing my plight.

“Years later I found out, that on that same day, the Frierdiker Rebbe sent a telegram to my family in London, which said that “the *pan* was received.”

Siberia

Arriving in Siberia, Reb Mendel was resolute; Shabbos would be held sacred, come what may. Once again, he didn't try excuses and tricks; he outspokenly declared to the camp commander that on Shabbos, he does not work. The response he received was resolute as well; the commander was not about to accept this threat to his authority, and made it very clear that there will be no such behavior in his domain. But Reb Mendel proved that he would be unyielding; he told the commander that he could kill him, but Shabbos he does not desecrate. Astonishingly, his demand was fulfilled, and he was not required to work on the holy day...

Kashrus was another aspect which demanded self-sacrifice, and unlike Shabbos, it tested Reb Mendel on a constant basis. There were moments when he felt that he would expire of hunger, but never did he allow *treifos* to enter his mouth.

Reb Mendel once related a conversation which he held with himself. A barrel of fish had arrived in the camp at a moment when his legs were bloated of hunger and he felt that he would not be able to hold out much longer. He inspected the barrel, and happily discovered that the fish were kosher. He was about to help himself to a portion, when he noticed that the lining of the barrel was shiny; it seemed that it may have been smeared with non-kosher oil...

Here began a *pilpul*: on one hand, the fish are kosher, so why should he worry about the oil. On the other hand, oil is a *davar hamaamid*, which affects the *kashrus* of all the contents of a pot, and the fish might

“I stood in the corner of the cell, closed my eyes, and imagined that I was standing in Yechidus before the Frierdiker Rebbe...”



THE REBBE'S LETTER TO REB MENDEL AND HIS WIFE UPON THE OCCASION OF THEIR SON'S MARRIAGE. HE IS ADDRESSED AS "FROM THE FOREMOST OF MEKUSHARIM TO OUR RABBEIM" AND A HOST OF OTHER TITLES.

therefore be *treif*. On the other hand, it was a question of *pikuach nefesh*—all other considerations should be rendered naught.

Then he remembered the *vort* of the Alter Rebbe (stated when he was incarcerated in Petersburg): it is better to remain clean of *treifos*, even at the price of one's *olam habah*. With that thought in mind, he decided that he would not touch the unclean fish.

“But then my *yetzer hara* came with a *taaneh*: you Mendel, are a *chitzon*, not a *pnimi*; to fulfill the ideals of the Alter Rebbe, one must be a *pnimi*...

“But that *taaneh* ruined the chances of the *yetzer hara*. I realized, that here I have a chance to use out even my *chitzon* side to fulfill the directive of the Alter Rebbe...”

Confined and oppressed, it was impossible to keep most of the mitzvos, let alone Chassidic customs. In fact, the nature of being in such a state can cause one to forget about

these ideals entirely. Not so Reb Mendel; whenever he noticed an opportunity, he did not allow it to pass by him.

For some time, Reb Mendel also managed to put on tefillin every day. He had smuggled in a small pair, and each day on the way to work, his gentile comrades would surround him and protect him from the guard's view. This custom came to an end when it was forty degrees below zero, and the strap of the tefillin froze and snapped.

A New Rebbe

From time to time, Reb Mendel would be interrogated by his jailers, often to check up on their reeducation project. One time, the interrogator had a new piece of information which knew would dampen the spirits of his determined prisoner. He told him that his Rebbe had passed on, and added that his son-in-law had become the Rebbe. [During his first *yechidus*

with the Rebbe, the Rebbe asked him when he had found out about the *histalkus*, and he related the story. The Rebbe then asked him what words the interrogator used to tell him the news; Reb Mendel replied that he is incapable of verbalizing such coarse language...]

A few years later, Reb Mendel received a beacon of light from his new Rebbe. The *maamar* “*Lo S’hiye Mishakela 5712*” was smuggled to him by Chassidim in Russia; the surprise of a *maamar Chassidus* brought him new life and hope for better days.

Chernovitz

After eight long years, Reb Mendel was released from prison and allowed to return home. With no family in the country, Reb Mendel settled in Chernovitz, where he lived close to his friend Reb Moshe Vishedsky. On his way to Chernovitz, he stopped off in Moscow for a few days. Reb Moshe



EREV ROSH HSHANAH 5749, LEVI FREIDIN via JEM 223477

Katzanelenboigen related that he met Reb Mendel in Moscow, and to his surprise, Reb Mendel had asked him to raise money for him. Reb Moshe was surprised to hear such a request from a person like Reb Mendel, but soon enough he understood. He raised a considerable sum, and when Reb Mendel received it, he said,

“Nu, Boruch Hashem now we will be able to open a Cheder in Chernovitz...”

A few days after he arrived in Chernovitz, he also began planning a *mehudardiker mikveh*, which was missing in the city at the time. Resting after a lengthy prison sentence was evidently not on his mind.

In his new setting, Reb Mendel settled into his new schedule. Each morning he would daven with the earliest *minyán* in town, not before he finished reciting the entire Tehillim.

Then, at eight o'clock in the morning, he would show up at the Vishedsky home, where he would learn Tanya with Reb Moshe for two hours. They would cover only a few lines each day, as they would constantly be referencing other *maamarim*.

Then Reb Mendel would continue to the house of Reb Chaim Zalman

Kozliner for a few hours of Gemara learning, and then he would head home together with Reb Moshe Vishedsky's son Michel, a young *bochur* at the time. They would eat lunch and learn together for two hours, and then Reb Mendel would spend a few hours focusing on his work for the community, after which he would return to his home and spend another two hours learning with Michel, and then a hour and a half with another Chossid, and then he would recite *krias shema* and gather strength for another day.

Reb Michel Vishedsky relates:

“I once found Reb Mendel in a spirited mood. I asked him what the occasion was, and he told me as follows.

“He had dreamt a dream from which he concluded that his end was near. Understandably, he had been feeling down with that in mind, when suddenly, somehow, a letter from the Rebbe had arrived.

“In the letter, the Rebbe asked how a Jew can despair, especially when he has a *bracha* from the Rebbe for long life, and especially when they will see each other very soon.

“Reb Mendel told me that he hadn't dared to write to the Rebbe, but the

Rebbe had read his thoughts and sent him an uplifting message in his hardest moments.”

Reb Mendel lived in Chernovitz for four years and he missed his family terribly. But more than anything else, he wanted to travel to the Rebbe. Since the day he had heard from his interrogators that there was a new Rebbe, he wanted to go see him, and when the Rebbe sent him his first Rosh Hashanah greeting, signed “*Dyedushka*” (Grandfather) in Russian, his wish grew into intense yearning.

He tried to obtain an exit permit to leave the country, but after a few failed attempts, he wrote to the Rebbe, and with the Rebbe's approval, he moved to Samarkand.

Samarkand

In this distant Asian city, one of the last underground yeshivos in the Soviet Union remained active. Reb Mendel arrived right after Reb Berkeh Chein had left Samarkand, and he took his place as the ‘senior *mashpia*’ of the Chassidim in the city.

Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman relates, that when they first experienced a *farbrengen* with Reb Mendel, they were very surprised.

“We were all accustomed to Reb Berkeh Chein's style, who would always urge us to improve in our commitment to Chassidus through *hisbonenus* in davening, and being meticulous in everything we see, hear and say. Every *farbrengen* with Reb Berkeh was intense and left us introspective, even embittered, reminded as we were how much we still had to work on ourselves.

“Reb Mendel's *farbrengen*, by contrast, was full of Chassidic sayings, tales and allegories, each with its own lesson. His *farbrengens* were full of joy and enthusiasm. It took us a while to get used to Reb Mendel's style and to learn that all of his witticisms and



LEVI FREIDIN via JEM 287938

REB MENDEL ADDRESSES THE ANNUAL YUD-TES KISLEV FARBRENGEN 5734 IN Kfar Chabad, WITH FORMER PRESIDENT ZALMAN SHAZAR IN ATTENDANCE.

He Doesn't Make Cheshbonos!

During the farbrengen of Yud Shevat 5722, the Rebbe said:

“There is a Jew sitting in Russia, and for a number of years, his family has been in the free world, but he is left there alone. He has a full beard, and if he wishes, he could sit a whole day by himself and learn.

“This would also be in accordance with Shulchan Aruch. Being active in spreading Yiddishkeit is fraught with danger...

“He can also decide to pray to Hashem that the good people win.

“But he didn't choose any of those choices. He decided to be active. In what is he active? In building *mikvaos*...

“His wife is not with him, and he will have no personal benefit from a woman's *mikveh*. He simply knows that if he is in a location without a *mikveh*, it is surely *b'hashgacha pratis*, and whether he will benefit or not, he must do his part in bringing Moshiach one step closer.

“Doing this work is at the risk of his life. It means collecting funds—something that brings publicity. Then he needs to publicize that there is a *mikveh*; otherwise of what use is it?

“Nevertheless he does not think about any *cheshbonos*. He knows one thing only; that he must move forward, and bring the world one step closer to Moshiach.”

stories were replete with Chassidus and *avodas Hashem*.”

Meanwhile, Reb Mendel returned to his efforts to obtain an exit visa, and this time, other activists, and even the Rebbe himself were involved.

An activist in England heard that the British Prime Minister was traveling to Russia to meet the Premier, Nikita Khrushchev. With the Rebbe's permission, the Prime Minister was requested to intervene on Reb Mendel's behalf, on the basis of family-reunification. The official policy of the Soviet Union was that they permitted family-reunification, so the Premier wasn't able to refuse, and in the beginning of Cheshvan 5724, Reb Mendel received his visa.

One month later, Reb Mendel's plane touched down in England, where he was reunited with his family after so many years of painful separation. But there was no time to rest. He immediately applied for a visa to the United States so that he would be able to come to the Rebbe.

With the help of a few activists in London, the right strings were pulled, and Reb Mendel arrived in New York for Yud-Tes Kislev. The wish of fifteen years had finally been fulfilled.

The sight of Reb Mendel standing in Gan Eden Hatachton awaiting his first *yechidus* with the Rebbe was itself a learning experience. Mothers pointed out to their children, saying, “Look how a Chossid prepares himself before going into the Rebbe.”

During that first *yechidus*, the Rebbe asked Reb Mendel in detail about his life in Russia. The Rebbe also instructed him regarding his new life, and focused specifically on arranging *brissin* for Russian Jews (this was something that remained close to Reb Mendel for the rest of his life).

Life in the free world

Settling in England, Reb Mendel went into the textile business. But this was secondary to his primary focus—spreading Yiddishkeit and Chassidus,

and helping Yidden wherever they may be.

He began traveling from shul to shul throughout London and the surrounding cities, organizing *shiurei Chassidus* for young and old. He also began fundraising for the Yidden whom he had left behind; before leaving, he promised them that he would do everything within his power to help them, and he didn't let them down. He traveled extensively, bringing with him the story of the plight of the Jews behind the Iron Curtain.

Reb Mendel would go about his travels in the manner of the *shadars* of the Rabbeim; arriving in a city, he would immediately look into what the city was missing, and would conduct *fabrengens* and *shiurim* with the locals. These *farbrengens* themselves were the magnet which drew potential donors to him, and encouraged them to help him in his cause.

Every time Reb Mendel would find himself in the company of Yidden who were not yet observant, he would use the opportunity to do *mitvzoim*. His English was practically non-existent, and his usual suggestion was, “I Jew, you Jew; I tefillin, you tefillin.” But the language barrier notwithstanding, the Jew would usually be cajoled into cooperating. “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.”

Even as an elderly man in Eretz Yisrael when he suffered from severe foot issues and walking was very difficult for him, Reb Mendel made herculean efforts to go on *mitvzoim*. When people would ask him why he went to such lengths, he would tell them that it is for two reasons:

“First of all, by doing the Rebbe's *mitvzoim*, one connects with the Rebbe himself; how can I forgo this opportunity? Second of all, in Siberia I missed many days of tefillin. Now I have to make them up.”

“It took us a while to get used to Reb Mendel’s style and to learn that all of his witticisms and stories were replete with Chassidus and avodas Hashem.”

Each year, Reb Mendel would travel to the Rebbe for Tishrei. This trip as well, was accompanied by trips before and after to fundraise for various causes, as well as *mitvzoim* throughout.

When he would be in 770, a natural place to find Reb Mendel was next to the *chozrim*, at the conclusion of every farbrengen. While the majority of the crowd would leave 770 after the farbrengen, Reb Mendel would always, without fail, take his place next to Reb Yoel Kahan, who, together with a group of *chozrim* would repeat the Rebbe’s entire farbrengen. He would remain there until he was sure that he understood every single *sicha* clearly.

One More Move

In 5731, the legendary *mashpia* of Tomchei Temimim in Kfar Chabad, Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman passed away. A short time later, Reb Efraim Wolf asked the Rebbe in *yechidus* who should be appointed in his place, and the Rebbe chose Reb Mendel Futerfas.

A short time later, Reb Mendel was by the Rebbe for Yud-Beis Tammuz, and in *yechidus* the Rebbe instructed him to go to Eretz Yisrael, visit the *mekomos hakedoshim*, and *oisbetin aleh gutteh zachen*, ask for all good things, and that in a year’s time, they will talk about settling down permanently. During that same *yechidus*, the Rebbe spoke to him at length about the value of the *bochurim* in Tomchei Temimim, extolling their virtues. Reb Mendel

began to suspect that the Rebbe planned on appointing him to be the *mashpia* in Kfar Chabad.

Meanwhile, Reb Mendel and his wife traveled to the Holy Land, visited the various sites, and at the end of Av, they returned to their home in England.

Sometime later, Reb Mendel’s family was struck by tragedy.

Reb Mendel’s daughter and son-in-law and their family were driving from a summer home when they were involved in a terrible car accident. The windows burst and all of the passengers flew out. With open miracles, almost everyone survived safely, with one exception; Reb Mendel’s daughter perished on impact.

Reb Mendel was no stranger to hardship or tragedy. Two of his children had died as infants, and another two daughters had passed on in the war years in Samarkand.

Another tragedy seemed to be too difficult to bear.

Reb Mendel often said that he then understood what the Rebbe had been referring to, when he said that he should *bet ois aleh gutteh zachen*, and perhaps that had helped his son-in-law and grandchildren survive, and that thought helped him carry on through such difficult times.

New Post

The next Yud-Beis Tammuz, Reb Mendel was by the Rebbe once again, and this time the Rebbe spoke to him clearly about his appointment. Reb Mendel protested; many years in business and fundraising had dulled his capacity as a *mashpia*, he claimed; how would he be able to counsel *bochurim*?

The Rebbe told him that the *Aibershter* will help him, and he will find the right words at the right moment.

The soldier that he was, Reb Mendel returned to London and immediately began preparing for his move to Eretz Yisrael, where he arrived for the first *zeman* on Rosh Chodesh Elul.

During his first farbrengens in Kfar Chabad, Reb Mendel drew large crowds, and he demanded from them, in his passionate and compelling fashion, that come Tishrei, a Chossid must be by the Rebbe. Hearing this theme again and again, his message had an immediate effect, and for that Tishrei, a large group of Chassidim made their way to New York together with their new *mashpia*.

From that year on, Reb Mendel’s schedule was as follows. After beginning the *zeman* of Elul with



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REB MENDEL IN CONVERSATION WITH REB ZALMAN GURARY IN 770, VOV TISHREI 5736.

the *bochurim*, he would travel to raise funds in Europe, and for Rosh Hashanah he would continue to New York. After the Yomim Tovim, he would travel around the United States together with Reb Shmuel Dovid Raichik, and after Yud-Tes Kislev in New York he would return to *Eretz Yisrael* for the remainder of the year.

The Mashpia

In his new position as *mashpia*, Reb Mendel energetically began to raise a generation of *bochurim* to be the Rebbe's soldiers. In his farbrengens, he demanded of the *bochurim* non-stop to be totally devoted to the Rebbe's activities, and to dedicate themselves entirely to the Rebbe.

His farbrengens were always packed; his engaging and exciting manner was an automatic magnet which drew *bochurim* and *yungeleit*, Chassidim and non-Chassidim. Everyone was sure that they would leave the farbrengen uplifted, excited, with new insight and depth in their *avodas Hashem*.

One of Reb Mendel's favorite themes was talking about the need to learn Chassidus and connect to the Rebbe. When *misnagdim* would complain that he is not deferential to their rabbanim, he was quick to retort that his ideals were actually quite factually based. He knew very well what happened to those who study Torah, but fail to 'hold on to the Rebbe's *kliamke*'—with the advent

Hearing this theme again and again, his message had an immediate effect.

of Communism there were many such individuals, and unfortunately, nothing has remained of them.

One of the most recurring themes of the farbrengens would be the need for *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe; first of all through traveling to the Rebbe and going on *mitvoim*, and just as importantly, through learning the Rebbe's Torah.

Reb Mendel would relate that when his own *mashpia*, Reb Zalman Moshe was a young man, the Rebbe Rashab asked him why he had ceased attending the *shiurim* of Reb Shmuel Gronem, the *mashpia* of his town.

Reb Zalman Moshe replied that "he doesn't teach the Rebbe's *maamarim*"—Reb Shmuel would teach the *maamarim* that he had heard from his Rebbe, the Rebbe Maharash. A short time later, a message came from Lubavitch; Reb Zalman Moshe's *sefer* in Chassidus should not be disturbed.

Reb Mendel's farbrengens were famous for his witty anecdotes and compelling stories about his life in Russia and in the Siberian gulag. Always taking a lesson in *avodas*

The Maggid's chevraya

Reb Mendel related what he had once heard from Reb Dovid Horodoker:

Reb Dovid had asked, "Who is part of the 'Maggid's chevraya'? Someone who wakes up early on Shabbos morning, learns Chassidus for hours, davens *barichus*, eats just a little bit and then goes back to learn Chassidus? No! he is not part of the 'Maggid's chevraya.'"

Reb Mendel said that for many years he wondered about the meaning of Reb Dovid's statement. If such a person is not from the 'Maggid's chevraya,' then who is?

But then, a fellow Chossid in London explained it to him, Reb Mendel said. A Chossid who wakes up early on Shabbos morning and walks a long way to *chazer* the Rebbe's *sicha* in a distant shul; then walks to the other end of the city to do the same in another shul—he is part of the 'Maggid's chevraya...'

Hashem, some of his tales are told over by Jews from all walks of life.

Warmth from the Czar

After Gimmel Tammuz, many Chassidim bemoaned the sorry state to Reb Mendel; “What will be, how can we go on?”

Reb Mendel would remind them of a story about a soldier in the Czar’s army; appointed to guard duty in the worst temperatures, the soldier nearly froze to death. After being nursed back to health, his comrades thought he would be commended for his faithful service. To their surprise, the commander ordered that he be flogged. The commander explained that the mere thought that he was representing the Czar should have warmed him.

Same here in our situation, Reb Mendel would tell them. The mere thought that the Rebbe didn’t leave his flock, and continues leading them just as before, should ‘warm their frozen bones’ and reinforce their faith that they will see the Rebbe very soon.

As Tishrei approached, Reb Mendel began preparing for his usual trip to the Rebbe for Yom Tov. He stopped off in London to visit his son Sholom Ber, and while there, he fell ill, and the doctors ordered him to remain. Over the following months his health deteriorated, and on 4 Tammuz 5755, Reb Mendel passed away.

The entry in *Hayom Yom* for 4 Tammuz reads:
“חסיד אחד או תלמיד אחד כאשר נותן לבו דעתו ונפשו על התורה וחיזוקה, פועל ישועות

בעיר גדולה בכל עניני העיר, והוא בדרך מלמעלה מדרך הטבע בזכות אבות העולם.”
“One single Chossid or *talmid* who devotes his heart, mind, and soul to strengthening Torah can accomplish wonders in a large city, in all that city’s affairs - in a manner that transcends the natural order, by the merit of the “Fathers of the World” [i.e. the Rabbeim].”

A worthy tribute to a true Chossid who sacrificed his life spreading Yiddishkeit and helping fellow Jews in the worst of times, continuing on in the free world as a staunch soldier of the Rebbe. 🕒

(Much of the information in this article is based on the sefer “Reb Mendel” published by Eshel—Kfar Chabad)



DEEP INTO A CHASSIDISHER FARBRENGEN IN THE SMALL ZAL OF 770, REB MENDEL AND REB DOVID RASKIN EMBRACE.