

תרט"ב - תרט"ט

EARLY YEARS

1902-1929

# EARLY YEARS

The formative years of the Rebbe,  
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, as told by  
documents and archival data

תרט"ט - תרט"ב • 1902-1929

BORUCH OBERLANDER | ELKANAH SHMOTKIN



מוקדש  
לחיזוק ההתקשרות לכ"ק אדמו"ר  
נדפס ע"י  
הרה"ת ר' זאב  
וזוגתו מרת ליבא ומשפחתם שיחיו  
גולדברג  
להצלחה רבה בכל אשר יפנו  
בגשמיות וברוחניות



# EARLY YEARS

*The Gemara relates that Rabbah was once sitting with two youngsters, Abaye and Rava. Impressed with the depth of their understanding, he said, "Butzin butzin mekatfey yediah—the quality of pumpkins is known by testing the sap from which they are formed." I.e. future scholars are recognizable at a young age.*

*Similarly, we learn about Moshe Rabbeinu, that when he was born, "the house was filled with light." From his first day in the world, his Divine calling was already evident.*

In the case of our Rebbe, his holiness—and his greatness—was apparent from the first day our world was blessed with his holy *neshamah*. This holiness was brought to the fore even more, as the Rebbe spent most of his childhood years, not in a *shtetl* atmosphere but in the big city life of Yekatrinoslav, where the Rebbe's father, Horav Levi Yitzchak Schneersohn, served as the rav. The Rebbe's childhood home was a bastion of Yiddishkeit in an ocean of movements and 'isms' that flooded Russia in the early twentieth century, threatening to drown all vestiges of Yiddishkeit and holiness.

In what people may think is only a recent phenomenon, the Rebbe actually grew up in a 'Chabad House.' As the oldest son of the rav, the Rebbe took an active part in different activities, and was a living example to everyone who crossed their threshold of how a Jewish child should conduct his life.

The story of the Rebbe's early years has been chronicled in the newly released book 'Early Years,' prepared by Jewish Educational Media and published by Kehos, in over five hundred and fifty pages. Over the past fifteen years, they have invested exhaustive efforts in researching the Rebbe's early years, and chronicling them in an organized format for everyone to read.

Over the next few short pages, we culled specific parts of the book, in an attempt to bring you a glimpse of the Rebbe's years prior to his bar mitzvah, growing up in Nikolayev and Yekatrinoslav. For the sake of flow and clarity, certain parts have been edited and rewritten, however, the stories in their entirety are all excerpted from the new release, and we are indebted to them for their invaluable work and for their graciousness in allowing us to use it in this article.

While preparing this article, Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin and Rabbi Levi Greisman of JEM graciously shared with us some tidbits and background information about the research that went into the book, and these have been incorporated into some of the sidebars.

While in this article we describe the Rebbe's childhood and early teenage years, the book covers much more than that; it spans all of the Rebbe's childhood, through the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's *chasunah* in Warsaw, 5689. With many previously unknown details and facts, the book is a must read.

Some of these stories are well known, some less so, but all are certainly worthy to hear again.

## Negel Vasser

From the very moment of the Rebbe's birth, the conduct surrounding him was on a level befitting a holy *neshamah*.

Rebbetzin Chana related to Reb Berel Junik that “from the day of his birth, my husband instructed me that whenever my newborn son awoke, I should wash *negel vasser* with him before nursing, which he didn't instruct me to do for the other children. Apparently this was a directive from the Rebbe Rashab.”

The involvement of the Rebbe Rashab, in truth, began even earlier. Reb Zalman Duchman related that the Rebbe was born following a *bracha* they received from the Rebbe Rashab (see Ksav Yad Kodesh column).

A short time later, the Rebbe fell ill with typhus, and the Rebbe Rashab sent telegrams with his blessings for good health. (Rebbetzin Chana related that they received six telegrams from the Rebbe Rashab when the Rebbe was born. It is not clear if these telegrams were included in those six, or not.)

Very quickly, the Rebbe's unique talent became apparent. Rebbetzin Chana recounts in her diary that on the Pesach just after his second birthday, the Rebbe asked *mah nishtana* at the *seder* table. Rebbetzin Chana writes that the manner of speech was that of a young child, but it was evident that he “understood them like a grown up.”

The Rebbe's family was living in Nikolayev, supported by the Rebbe's maternal grandparents, Rebbetzin Rochel and Horav Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, the *rav* of the city, while Horav Levi Yitzchak continued learning.

The political atmosphere of Russia in those days was one of protest and revolution against the Czar. When the Rebbe was nearing three years of age, his grandfather overheard him declaring, “*Daloi samaderzhavye*” (“end the dictatorship!”)—a mantra he had apparently overheard from the various groups that were protesting the Czar heavy handed dictatorship.

“I remember how my father of blessed memory feared that he might be overheard and instructed him to stop,” Rebbetzin Chana writes.

The Rebbe's upshernish took place a short time later, and Rebbetzin Chana relates that the Rebbe already had a beautiful appearance; when they would walk down the street, people would take notice, and stop to look at him.

As the revolution against the Czar gained momentum, it developed into a series of pogroms against the Jews in cities throughout Russia. At one point, the pogroms reached Nikolayev, and a number of Jews found refuge in the back of a pharmacy owned by a kind non-Jew.

Sensing the apprehension on the faces of the adults, the young children began wailing a great deal, and the noise they made could have revealed their location and endangered the entire group. The Rebbe was only three years old at the time. Yet he walked around the room quieting all the children. “It was too dangerous to talk, lest the voices be heard outside,” Rebbetzin Chana writes. “He gestured with his little hands to keep quiet, calming each child in a different manner. The pharmacist kept returning to watch how my son comported himself, and how, with such maturity, he affected those little souls.”

REBBETZIN CHANA WRITES THAT THE MANNER OF SPEECH WAS THAT OF A YOUNG CHILD, BUT IT WAS EVIDENT THAT HE “UNDERSTOOD THEM LIKE A GROWN UP.”



THE REBBE'S BIRTH RECORD IN NIKOLAYEV.

EARLY YEARS/EM



THE REBBE BEFORE HIS THIRD BIRTHDAY, TAKEN AT THE STUDIO OF M. KRAMER IN NIKOLAYEV.

## Cheder

Rebbetzin Chana writes:

“He began to study in *cheder*, which continued until we commissioned *melamdim* to teach him at home. What a pleasure it was! At every turn, there was some reason to take pride in him. Not that he desired this—on the contrary, he always tried to avoid it. But his personality just evoked respect.”

On a different occasion, Rebbetzin Chana wrote:

“From childhood on, he always spent his time in study. I don’t remember him ever wasting time.”

## From the Beginning

In a poignant letter to the president of Israel, Yitzchak Ben-Tzvi, the Rebbe writes:

“From the time I was a child attending *cheder* and even before, the vision of the future redemption began to take form in my imagination; the redemption of the Jewish people from their final exile. Redemption of such magnitude and grandeur, that through it the purpose of the sufferings, harsh degrees, and anguish of exile will be understood”.

In 5669, Horav Levi Yitzchak was appointed to be the rav of Yekatrinoslav<sup>1</sup>, and the family moved there. Some time later, Horav Levi Yitzchak asked a Chossid, Reb Shneur Zalman Vilenkin, to learn with his children.

## Discovering Rostov

Before being installed as rav of Yekatrinoslav, Horav Levi Yitzchak was encouraged by the Rebbe Rashab to find a rabbinical post, and the Rebbe Rashab was active in encouraging communities to hire him.

In 5666, Horav Levi Yitzchak seems to have been offered a position in a city, but with the condition of receiving *semicha* from Reb Chaim Brisker. The Rebbe Rashab encouraged Horav Levi Yitzchak to travel to Brisk, and interestingly, the Rebbe told over a story about his test with Reb Chaim Brisker, which indicates that the test took place on Sukkos of that year.

In the book, JEM reveals that the suggested position was in the city of Rostov, where the Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe themselves moved to, just ten years later.

This location was previously unknown. Aside for Rebbetzin Chana’s diaries and the letter from the Rebbe Rashab, there was just one more tip on the subject. A letter from the Rebbe Rashab to a Mr. Yaakov Halbreich, encouraging him to assist Horav Levi Yitzchak in his efforts to become rav. A search for that name in the Rebbe’s library revealed other letters of the Rebbe Rashab addressed to him and another individual, and they are described as pillars in the Jewish community of Rostov.

One more source helped confirm this conclusion:

A book called *Oholei Shem* chronicles the lives and histories of rabbonim throughout Russia, and it lists a certain rabbi as having become rav of Rostov in the year 5667, just after the efforts of the Rebbe Rashab and Horav Levi Yitzchak.

The book *Oholei Shem* assisted in many different ways; another example is:

In a letter, the Rebbe writes that he had relatives in the city of Dobrinka, and the rav himself was a relative of his. The book revealed that in fact, the Rebbe’s great-grandfather, Reb Yitzchak Pushnitz, served as the rav, and in 5664, when the Rebbe was only two years old, he passed away, and was succeeded by his son—the Rebbe’s great uncle—Reb Menachem Mendel Pushnitz.



Over the next four and a half years, the Rebbe, his brothers, and a select few other children would learn with Reb Zalman. There were two classes in the tiny *cheder*. The older class consisted of... the Rebbe, and the younger class held everyone else, and Reb Zalman would divide his time between the two “classes.”

Reb Nochum Goldshmidt, one of the students in the younger group, related that while all of Horav Levi Yitzchak’s children were brilliant and extremely studious, the oldest one stood out in his personality. The Rebbe’s youngest brother Leibel, for example, was brilliant as well, but he was a mischievous boy; he loved to engage others in conversation, jokes, and intellectual challenges. The Rebbe on the other hand, was serious by nature, and his earnestness was always noticeable on his face.

Reb Zalman’s son Sholom related that Rebbetzin Chana would walk the Rebbe to *cheder* each day; he was so engrossed in his own thoughts that she was afraid to let him walk alone, fearing that something would happen to him, *chas veshalom*.

THE REBBE ON THE OTHER  
HAND, WAS SERIOUS BY  
NATURE, AND HIS EARNESTNESS  
WAS ALWAYS NOTICEABLE ON  
HIS FACE.

After some four and a half years, Reb Zalman told Horav Levi Yitzchak that he could no longer teach the Rebbe; he had eclipsed all of the other children, and the Rebbe began learning at home, with his father.

While Reb Zalman was not the Rebbe’s only *melamed*, he seems to have been the primary one (aside for the Rebbe’s father himself, as we will soon see).

In 5738, Rabbi Nissan Mindel’s grandchild was named Shneur Zalman after his great-grandfather Reb Zalman Vilenkin (Rabbi Nissan Mindel was Reb Zalman’s *mehutan*), and when the Rebbe heard who he was named after, the Rebbe told him,

“He taught me and my brothers Chumash, Rashi and Gemara. *Er hot mir geshtelt oif di fis*, he put me on my feet; *er iz gevehn a gehoibener yid*, he was an illustrious Jew.”

Dovber Gurary grew up as a neighbor to the Rebbe. He described his experience as follows:

“The fact is ingrained deeply in my memory, and this amazed everyone who knew the Rebbe: he would never be seen sitting idle. Don’t forget, we’re talking about a child! He was a good friend of my older brother Shmuel Gershon, so we always spoke about him in my home, about this child that studies non-stop, as though he were a great rabbi. He never wasted a minute...”

“But even beyond his astonishing abilities, we were amazed by his earnestness. His face always reflected a certain seriousness, something that you don’t even see

with the grown-ups. Even we, the children, realized that he was special. I remember that my brother, who was the closest to him, would always tell us that he couldn't discuss anything with him superficially; everything they would discuss would probe the subject in depth.

"In our home, we would discuss how he studies into the night with his father. My brother would tell us that they studied together almost until morning, but it didn't interfere with his Cheder the next day. He'd study as though he had a good night sleep."

### "I was zoiche..."

Years later, on the night of the Rebbe's wedding in Warsaw, Reb Zalman participated in the celebration that took place in the home of Horav Levi Yitzchak in Yekatrinoslav. Very excited, he could not contain his pride over his celebrated *talmid*, and danced on the table declaring "I was zoiche..."

When Reb Zalman made it to the United States in 5713, the Rebbe was already Rebbe, and Reb Zalman came for a *yechidus*. When he entered, the Rebbe would not sit until his elderly childhood teacher would be seated. The latter, in turn, didn't want to sit in the presence of the Rebbe, so they both remained standing for the duration of the hour long *yechidus*.

The next time Reb Zalman came for *yechidus*, the Rebbe again offered him to be seated, but he again declined, until the Rebbe said, "Forty years ago we sat together around one volume of Gemara. Let us sit together now, as well." And then they sat down.

When Reb Zalman would enter the Rebbe's *farbrengens*, the Rebbe would rise in his honor and would not sit back down until his teacher would find his own seat.

Upon Reb Zalman's passing in 5723, the Rebbe escorted his *melamed's* casket to the cemetery and insisted on paying all of the expenses of the burial and the headstone, suggesting that Reb Zalman's children pay one dollar as a symbolic share in the mitzvah of burying their father. His *matzeivah* reads: He studied and taught Torah in public and with students, and merited that the Rebbe *shlit"a* studied under his tutelage.

## Summer Visits

Although they had moved to Yekatrinoslav, the Rebbe would visit his grandparents in Nikolayev for the last weeks of each summer. In a note written about a *sicha* on her *yahrtzeit*, the Rebbe wrote about his grandmother Rebbetzin Rochel, that "for several years, I spent the final weeks of the summer in Nikolayev. I stayed with her, *vetiplah bi*, she cared for me."

There were other occasions that the Rebbe returned to Nikolayev, such as for some *yomim tovim*. Batsheva Althaus, Reb Elya Chayim Althaus's daughter, reminisced about seeing the Rebbe as a child on Simchas Torah in Nikolayev:

"I remember that people would speak about the fact that her oldest was different from other children. For example, Simchas Torah, I remember that he would dance energetically, like the older Chassidim; in fact, even more than them. The Schneersons continued to visit Nikolayev even as they grew older, at least until I left Nikolayev when I was eleven years old, in 5681."<sup>2</sup>

On a different occasion, the Rebbe accompanied Rebbetzin Chana to a resort town in Crimea—Balaklavah—where a now-famous event occurred. Rebbetzin Chana writes:

"A cavern there was joined to the Black Sea by a narrow channel of water that flowed between two rock walls, creating a powerful current. Even experienced swimmers were cautious.

"One day, while spending time near the shore, I heard that a boy was drowning and I went to see what was happening. This is what I observed and heard from others:



APPOINTMENT OF THE REBBE AS RABBI OF THE OLD POBRITZNA SHUL IN YEKATRINOSLAV.

EARLY YEARS/JEM

“There were kayaks there, made for one person using a single oar. A boy in a kayak had neared the powerful vortex, and, caught in the strong current, began to sink.

“As I noted, it was quite dangerous. When my son saw this, he swam out to the kayak, climbed inside, and grabbed the oar from the exhausted boy, who was barely conscious by then. Taking control of the kayak, he steered it out of the current and brought it to shore.

“His passenger was saved. My son, however, after such a difficult and extraordinary feat, was strained both physically and emotionally. To escape the peril, he needed to employ an entire strategy to determine in which direction to steer. All this exertion exhausted him to the point that, as he neared the shore, he began to drown. When I saw him, he was terrifyingly exhausted and pale. His clothing were drenched.”

## Rescue Efforts

On 5 Av 5674, World War I broke out and thousands of Jewish refugees streamed into Yekatrinoslav, after the Czar forced them to “evacuate” from their homes near the border for fear that they may cooperate with the German enemy.

Rebbetzin Chana, along with Horav Levi Yitzchak, became very involved in the rescue efforts. In a *sicha* on 6 Tishrei 5745, the Rebbe described his mother’s dedication

FOR EXAMPLE, SIMCHAS TORAH, I REMEMBER THAT HE WOULD DANCE ENERGETICALLY, LIKE THE OLDER CHASSIDIM; IN FACT, EVEN MORE THAN THEM.

to the rescue efforts, saying that although his own main ‘occupation’ was learning in *cheder*, nevertheless, “it is etched in my memory for all the days of my life.”

However, it seems that the efforts were not relegated to Horav Levi Yitzchak and Rebbetzin Chana alone. In an article written by Rabbi Aharon Friedenthal, he describes his experience as a refugee child in the city of Yekatrinoslav during the war, and describes the efforts of the Rebbe’s family:

“The rabbi and rebbetzin, during those horrible days, knew nothing of their own lives. Everything was dedicated to the rescue effort.

“Even the three young boys, Mendel’e (who is now the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Brooklyn) Berel’e and Leibel’e, also felt the goings on. They gave up their places at the Shabbat table for the exiled children. The writer of these lines is one of those children to whom the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his brothers gave away their own meals, imploring us to feel at home. Such warm, precious, children!”



THE VARIOUS RESIDENCES OF THE REBBE’S FAMILY IN YEKATRINOSLAV,  
L-R: 31 BOLNICHNAYA STREET, 1908-1913; 2 MOSTOVAYA STREET, 1914-1921; 20 ZHELZHNYAYA STREET, 1921-1934.

## Refugee Melamed

Amongst the refugees was a Litvisher rav, Rabbi Issar Nissan Dribin, who previously served as a rav and *rosh yeshiva* in Kovno, Lithuania. Recognizing his Torah knowledge, Horav Levi Yitzchak asked him to move into their home and be his children's private tutor. For over one year, he lived in the Rebbe's home. In a *yechidus* in 5733, the Rebbe said, "When I was a child, I had two brothers. Our father hired a teacher who lived with us in our home, day and night, so that we could study Torah with him at every available opportunity."

There is a well-known story that the Rebbe related about his "*Litvisher melamed*," which seems to refer to Rabbi Dribin.

"I found my teacher studying Gemara on Tisha B'Av. I asked him, 'Doesn't Shulchan Aruch state that one may not learn Torah on Tisha B'Av?'"

"He replied, 'By my estimate, I will receive lashes in the next world anyway. Let it at least be for studying Torah on Tisha B'Av!'"

A longer version of what might be the same story which also occurred on Tisha B'Av was told over by the Rebbe on Yud Tes Kislev 5731, in a long *sicha* about educating children:

"I had a *melamed* who was from Lithuania. He was totally uninterested in secular studies. From time to time especially on the fast of Tisha B'Av, when there is no regular *cheder* and Torah study is prohibited, when no one was in the room, he used to sit and study Torah. When his students entered, he was embarrassed, so he would discuss some matter of secular knowledge.

"One of us told him that there are those who hold differently from Torah's view, that Hashem said 'let us make man in our form, according to our likeness,' and that 'Hashem blew into his nostrils the soul of life,' creating Adam and Chava and their descendants until the end of all time. They believe in the theory known as 'evolution:' first a cell came into being, from which a fish developed, followed by animals, which developed into a monkey, and eventually men came into being. They believe in this theory, bring proof for it, etc.

"After the entire theory was explained to him, the *melamed* said to me: 'Mendel, why must you debate this? Tell them it doesn't bother you—if they prefer that lineage, let them trace their roots to the monkey. And one who accepts that Hashem said 'Let us make man in our form according to our likeness,' can stay with that pedigree! Why must you argue with them?'"



EARLY YEARS/JEM



## Discovering the Litvisher Melamed

On many occasions, the Rebbe related the story of his *Litvisher melamed* on Tisha B'Av, as mentioned in the article, but no one ever had an inkling as to who this *melamed* was. Reb Zalman Vilenkin was clearly no Litvak, and the only other teacher that we knew the Rebbe had was his own father, Horav Levi Yitzchak himself.

There was a claim put forth by an individual that his grandfather served as the Lubavitcher Rebbe's teacher, but he did not provide any more evidence or facts that would back up his claim, nor was it clear if he was a teacher in Torah, or perhaps a tutor for secular knowledge.

The tip about Reb Nissan Dribin came a few years ago, with the commemoration of Gimmel Tammuz for the twentieth year, in 5774. The media was full of coverage about the Rebbe and one religious magazine in Eretz Yisrael, *Sha'ah Tovah*, printed a story by the magazine's editor (a Litvisher Yid), in which he described his grandfather as the *melamed* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Upon reaching out to him and an additional family member, they confirmed that their grandfather, Nissan Dribin, had been a refugee fleeing from the war, when Horav Levi Yitzchak had offered him the task of teaching the Rebbe and his two brothers.

One identifying factor that they related, was that their grandfather had heard that the youngest brother had moved to Eretz Yisrael, and he had wanted very much to meet him, for he had immensely enjoyed his company as a child. This fact seemed to corroborate what we already knew—that the Rebbe's youngest brother, Reb Yisrael Aryeh Leib, was an outgoing and lively child, who loved to talk and challenge others with riddles and the like.

With this name in hand, the JEM team went to the Rebbe's library to see if they can find any hint of a correspondence with the Rebbe. Searching for his name, a discovery was made, while there are no letters from Reb Nissan himself, there is a letter written by his son Pesach, in which he introduces himself as the son of the Rebbe's teacher.

Thus, his identity was proven beyond a doubt.



EARLIEST EXTANT LETTER OF THE REBBE'S FATHER HORAV LEVI YITZCHAK AS RAV OF YEKATRINOSLAV, DATED 19 SHEVAT 5669.

EARLY YEARS/JEM

“MENDEL, WHY MUST YOU DEBATE THIS? TELL THEM IT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU—IF THEY PREFER THAT LINEAGE, LET THEM TRACE THEIR ROOTS TO THE MONKEY..”

After about one year, Rabbi Dribin concluded that he can no longer teach the Rebbe, who was then around the age of bar mitzvah. From then on, the Rebbe studied on his own, under the tutelage of his father, Horav Levi Yitzchak.

In a *sicha* in 5739, the Rebbe professed that his father was his primary teacher, citing the Gemara's account of conversation between Rabi Yaakov and Rabi Yochanan. Rabi Yaakov told Rabi Yochanan, that when Yehoshua, Moshe's foremost pupil, taught, he did not preface each statement by saying, “So said Moshe.” In fact, Yehoshua sat and spoke without stating his source, yet everyone knew it was Moshe's Torah.

“So too, Reb Elazar your student; he holds forth without mentioning your name, but everyone knows that the teachings are yours!”

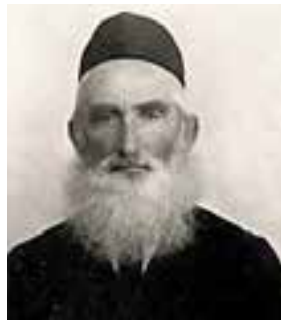
The Rebbe continued:

“Reb Elazar was a student of Reb Yochanan, but not his son. Nevertheless he didn't specify that all his knowledge was imparted by his master, as this was obvious. How



EARLY YEARS/JEM

REB SCHNEUR ZALMAN VILENKIN,  
THE REBBE'S MELAMED.



EARLY YEARS/JEM

RABBI ISSER NISSAN DRIBIN.

much more so in my case—a student who is also a son. Everyone knows the source of my knowledge.”

## The Bar Mitzvah

Horav Levi Yitzchak's father, Horav Boruch Shneur, would often visit Lubavitch and eat at the Rebbe Rashab's table, and then record their discussions in his diary, known as *Reshimos Harabash*. When the Rebbe approached bar mitzvah, he writes, he had a conversation with the Rebbe Rashab:

“After Shabbos I was in the Rebbe's room while he ate *melaveh malka*. I spoke with him about my grandson, Menachem Mendel, Levik's son, who will become bar mitzvah on the eleventh of Nissan, G-d willing...”

“The Rebbe told me,

“Go in health. May Hashem grant that it be a kosher Pesach. May we meet again in good health. Send regards to your father-in-law [Rabbi Zalman Chaikin] and to [your son] Levik. May Hashem grant that he [Mendel] be a good Jew, and Levik should have *nachas* from him and the other boys.”<sup>4</sup>

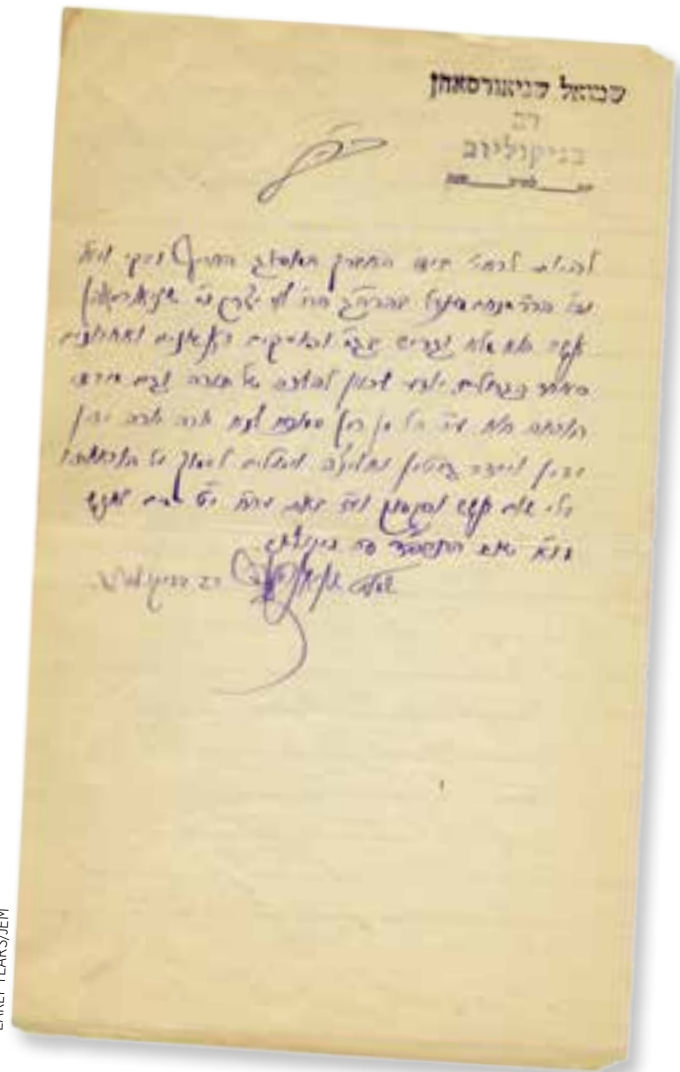
The Rebbe's *hanochas tefillin* took place on Yud-Aleph Adar 5675, just one month prior to his bar mitzvah, as the custom was at the time.

The bar mitzvah itself fell out on Friday, and the celebration was held on the following day, on Shabbos. Rebbetzin Chana describes the celebration at length:

It was our family's first personal celebration in the city. My husband, of blessed memory, was held in high regard following the initial birth pangs of his rabbinic position, due to the opposition of the non-Chassidim and Zionists. They had seen him as a personification of Lubavitch, so they hadn't previously come to terms with his appointment.

By now, however, we had already been living in the city for seven years, and our supporters were proud of my husband's accomplishments, while those who had

EARLY YEARS/JEM



THE REBBE'S SMICHA FROM HIS UNCLE, REB SHMUEL SCHNEERSON.

previously opposed him had expressed remorse many times over. Now both sides had an opportunity to express their feelings towards him.

The celebration took place on Shabbos and the *farbrengen* continued until after *havdalah*.

For our good friends it was a true celebration; a delightful, friendly, connection—a delectable feeling, as I remind myself now. Many guests attended.

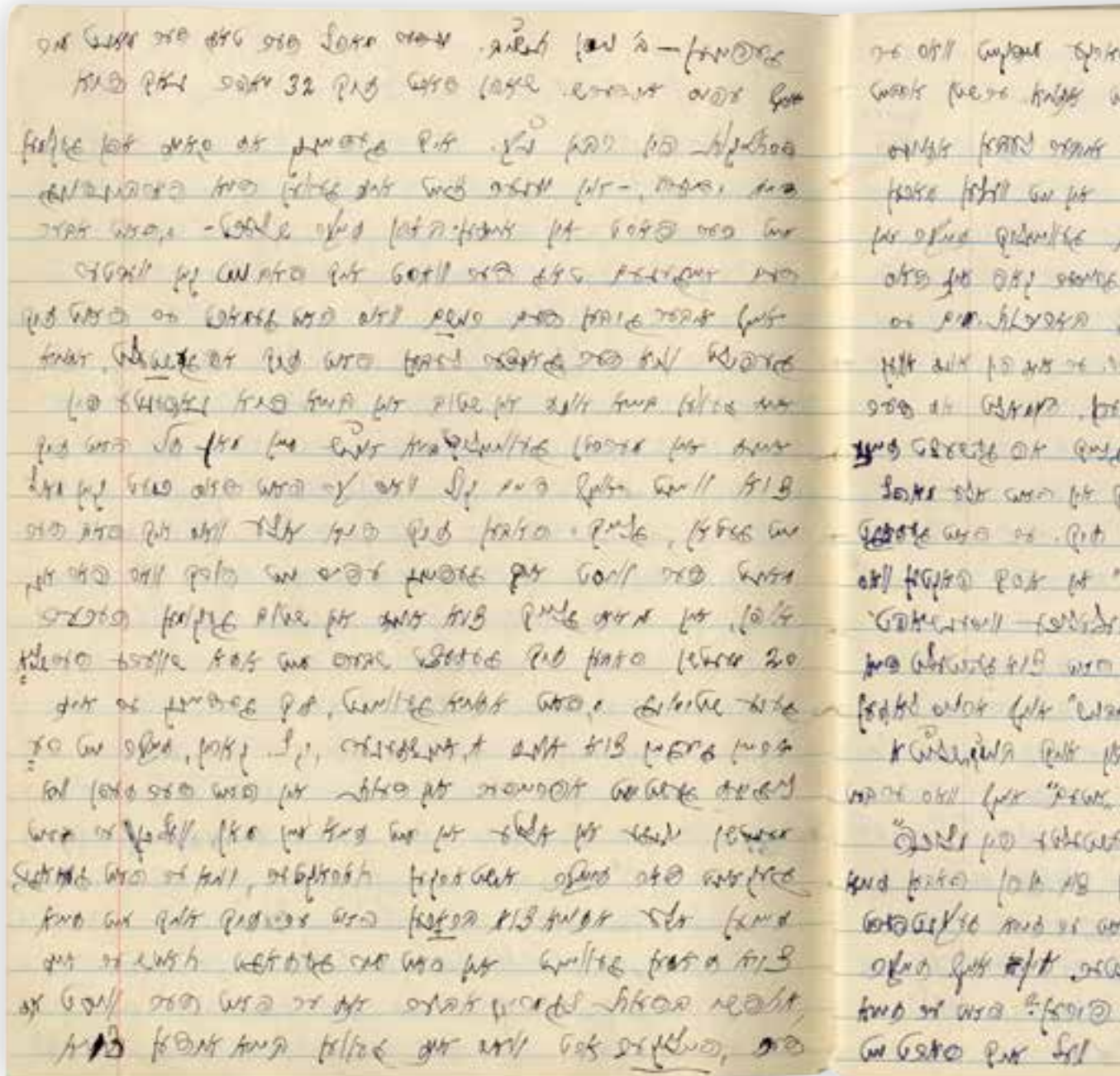
At the time we had a large home, and all its rooms were packed. Because it was so crowded, there was a constant exchange of guests, with some leaving while new ones entered, filling their places.

Many women came for me, as well, and there were also many young people. And amongst all these ages and genders, people from all types of backgrounds were included. I don't remember exactly what time it began, probably at around midday, after the conclusion of

davening in Shul. When they returned home, the men sat in the large room, while the woman were in the large dining room. Of course, it was prepared beautifully, with abundant food for men and women.

I believe my son remembers the talks he delivered at his bar mitzvah. He gave two speeches, I believe one in Talmudic scholarship, the other in Chassidic teachings. A large number of guests were present. We had many good

friends at the time, and it was a triumph for Chassidim that one of their own—my husband—had become rabbi of the city. Consequently, many uninvited guests attended as well. I wasn't present in the room when he delivered his talks. Everyone was indescribably overwhelmed by them. I recall how the engineer Sergei Paley came over to me—he possessed a sharp mind and was very learned in Torah.



He exclaimed, "This is the first time in my life that I heard such scholarship from a boy of his age!"

Around 3 or 4 p.m., men began to emerge with tear-soaked faces, old and young, not religious and Torah observant. I tried to look inside the main hall to discover the cause of their tears, but it was so packed that I couldn't see above all the heads.

When I inquired of those who have been inside, they told me that his father—my husband—had requested that our son, may he live long, promise him something. I wasn't inside, so I don't know the actual course of events. Our son's reply, apparently, was not immediate. Everyone was amazed by the great character of such a young boy, who is so guarded and cautious about giving his response.

Exactly what happened there I don't know, but around 6 or 7 p.m.—I remember it wasn't very light outside anymore—the faces I had previously seen weeping became very joyous. From inside, we heard the sound of such dancing and singing! The celebration became so intense that it affected those outside, as well. One sensed that this enthusiasm held some deep significance, and that both the request and the one who gave his reply would remain memorable for a long time. He was a slim boy with a refined face reflecting an inner spirit. One rarely encounters such a person.

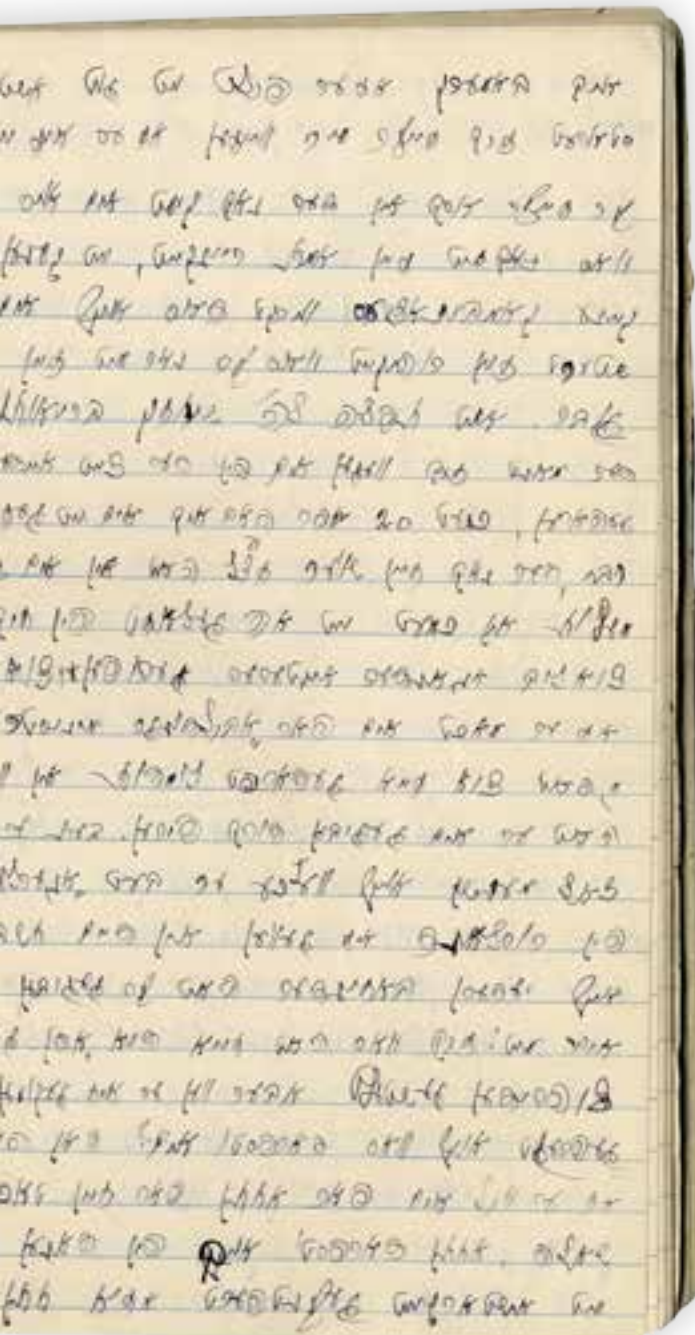
ONE SENSED THAT THIS ENTHUSIASM HELD SOME DEEP SIGNIFICANCE, AND THAT BOTH THE REQUEST AND THE ONE WHO GAVE HIS REPLY WOULD REMAIN MEMORABLE FOR A LONG TIME.

### ***His entire existence was Torah.***

Over the following years, the Rebbe was usually seen standing in his room, studying alone. Those who knew the Rebbe and his brothers, describe their intelligence and broad scope of knowledge in glowing terms.

The Rebbe's early years can perhaps be best summed up by the account of Yonah Kesse, a child whom the Rebbe brought home after he found him in shul starving, and who later became a member of the Israeli Knesset. He described how the Rebbe was always found standing and learning diligently; never sitting. "I remember that he was also well-versed in physics and mathematics," he said. But after an entire description of how the Rebbe was visited by university professors and students, etc., he concluded, "His entire existence, I recall, was Torah."

1. For a description of Horav Levi Yitzchak's leadership in Yekatrinoslav, see A Chassidisher Derher - Av 5776
2. Kfar Chabad issue 634
3. Yevamos 96b
4. Reshimos Harabash pg. 141-142



VAAD HANOCHOS B'LAFAK