

לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ח הרה"ת עוסק בצ"צ וכו'
ר' יהודא ליב"ז"ל
בן הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' יעקב יוסף שו"ב ז"ל
רסקין
גלב"ע י"ב אייר התשס"ד
נדפס על ידי ולזכות משפחתו
שיחיו לאורך ימים ושנים טובות



THE DESERT BLO

An exclusive interview with
RABBI SHIMON LAZAROFF



OMS



THE REBBE WISHES "MAZAL TOV, MAZAL TOV" TO ZALMAN LAZAROFF UPON HIS BAR MITZVAH, AS RABBI LAZAROFF STANDS BY HIS SIDE.

21730 ייזק

Rabbi Shimon Lazaroff — Shiminkeh, as he is fondly known — is a respected and beloved figure amongst the senior shluchim. Always lively, with a witty comment quick off his tongue, the head shliach to the state of Texas is unceasingly ready to delight young and old alike with simple yet keen messages about the life of a Chossid in general, and a shliach in particular.

Rabbi Lazaroff was born in Russia, and his childhood followed the path of many Lubavitcher Chassidim of his day; crossing the border, emigrating to Eretz Yisroel, and ultimately being a *bochur* near the Rebbe in the early years in 770. Later, he merited to be sent by the Rebbe—as one of the first shluchim—to the state of Texas.

The staff of A Chassidisher Derher was honored to sit down with Rabbi Lazaroff for a comprehensive interview about his early life, and most importantly, his years as a *bochur* near the Rebbe, and his shlichus to Detroit and Texas. Presented here is a selection of some of the *hor'os* he was privileged to receive from the Rebbe and some of those riveting stories and important lessons we heard.

As one who merited to receive guidance from the Rebbe at every step of the way, his life story is a source of inspiration and direction for all.

In preparation for this article, we were greatly assisted by Rabbi Chaim Lazaroff, who graciously provided us with many pertinent pictures and documents.



A YOUNG SHIMON LAZAROFF, APPROX. FIVE YEARS OLD.

KUTAISSI, PARIS

I was born in Kutaisi, Georgia, in the midst of World War II, where a large number of Lubavitcher Chassidim had gathered. A few months before I was born, my father, Reb Eliezer Gershon Lazaroff *hy"d*, was drafted into the Russian Army and sent to the German front, never to return.

After the war, the famous Lubavitcher escape from Russia took place, through the border city of Lvov. The Lubavitcher community of Kutaisi joined the great escape as well, so I, along with my mother and sister, made our way to Lvov, and we crossed the border into Poland. From there we traveled through Czechoslovakia, and then we reached France. The Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana, also left Russia together with our group.

After crossing the border we traveled until reaching Paris, where we attempted to settle down for the time being, until we would be able to continue to our final destinations. Shortly after that, our Rebbe—then the son-in-law of the Frieddiker Rebbe—arrived in France (from the United States) to arrange immigration papers for his mother, Rebbetzin Chana. My mother's brother, Yankel Lipsker, was tasked with arranging the food for the Rebbe during his stay, and he, in turn, asked my mother to cook the food;

so my mother merited to cook the Rebbe's food during those months.

The Rebbe would stay, especially on Shabbos, in Reb Zalman Schneerson's house, and I was one of the few children that would be present while the Rebbe was there.

Now, the Rebbe had known my father, as well as my grandfather, Harav Shimon Lazaroff, from Russia. In fact, in 5687 (תרפ"ז), the year of the Frierdiker Rebbe's arrest, the Frierdiker Rebbe had held two important meetings in Leningrad, and there had been a total of three participants: The Frierdiker Rebbe, our Rebbe, and my grandfather, who served as the *chassidische* rov of Leningrad.

So the Rebbe knew me, so to speak.

During his three month stay in Paris, the Rebbe held a number of *farbrengens*, and as customary by many *chassidische* *farbrengens*, at the conclusion, the participants would dance. I was a five year old child, so I would hold onto the Rebbe's jacket, and dance along. On one occasion, the Rebbe even held my hands and danced with me.

ERETZ YISRAEL

From France, the Chassidim began moving to different parts of the world, according to the instructions of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Many Lubavitchers traveled to Eretz Yisrael, while others went to Australia, England, Canada, and the United States. The largest group emigrated to Eretz Yisrael, and in 5708 my mother received instructions from the Frierdiker Rebbe to travel to Eretz Yisrael as well.

When we arrived there, I joined the Lubavitcher *cheder* in Tel Aviv led by Rabbi Fulle Kahan. My family then moved to Lod. The Lod yeshiva at the time had only five students: two Lipskers—Zalman and Eli, two Kaplans—Boruch and Nochum, and

me. That was the beginning of the yeshiva in Lod.

Being that we were the first *chassidische* yeshiva with a dormitory, the yeshiva began to grow. There actually were *bochurim* from *chassidische* (non-Chabad) backgrounds who joined us as well.

Then, the Yemenite Jews arrived in Eretz Yisrael, and no yeshivos wanted to accept them into their institutions. The Rebbe insisted that Chabad accept their children, even though the yeshiva was in dire financial straits. The Yemenite group was so significant in the Rebbe's eyes, that the sub-title of Tomchei Temimim in Lod became "*Olei Russya, Olei Teiman*—Russian Immigrants, Yemenite Immigrants."

Those were very special days. We were located in the depths of an orchard (the "*Pardes*"). The *mashpia* was Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, the *rosh yeshiva* was the *gaon* Reb

Boruch Shimon Schneerson, and there was a wonderful atmosphere. It was very spiritual; the *nigleh*, the Chassidus, it was all very special.

My class, over the next few years, was very blessed by this inclusiveness; my classmates were Reb Yossel Uminer, Reb Meilach Zweibel *a"h*, Reb Mottel Ashkenazi *a"h*, Reb Zushe Feldman and Reb Nochum Sternberg; besides for Rabbi Ashkenazi *a"h* and יבלח"ט Rabbi Feldman, none of them were from Lubavitch families.

As I grew older, many of my friends began traveling to the Rebbe. Nachman Sudak *a"h* and יבלח"ט Gershon Mendel Garelik, Yisroel Friedman, etc.—they were all going to New York, so I wanted to join as well. My mother said that I was too young; I was only fifteen years old, how could I travel to the Rebbe on my own? I, on the other hand, would tell her that if I

I WAS A FIVE YEAR OLD CHILD, SO I WOULD HOLD ONTO THE REBBE'S JACKET, AND DANCE ALONG. ON ONE OCCASION THE REBBE EVEN HELD MY HANDS AND DANCED WITH ME.



CLASS PICTURE OF THE YESHIVA IN LOD, 5715. SHIMON LAZAROFF STANDING ON FAR RIGHT.

was too young to go alone, she should travel along with me...

Sometime later, due to the economic situation in Eretz Yisrael, my mother sent a letter to the Rebbe saying that she would like to leave Eretz Yisrael and come to America (obviously together with her children). The Rebbe answered, that if she could manage to arrange the appropriate documents, it should be "in a *mazeldiker sha'ah*," in an auspicious hour.

My uncle Yankel Lipsker was living in America, and he arranged an affidavit for my mother. She bought tickets for the three of us to travel to Paris, and in addition, she bought herself a flight to the USA, where she proceeded to work on procuring affidavits for us as well.

We left Eretz Yisrael on 7 Cheshvan 5718. My sister Batsheva (Shemtov, now in Philadelphia) and I spent six months in France and when my mother obtained affidavits for us, we traveled to New York.

ARRIVING BY THE REBBE

My first Shabbos with the Rebbe was Shabbos Mevorchim Sivan 5718. That week, I heard my first *maamar* from the Rebbe, "*Lehavin Inyan Sefiras Ha'omer*."

It so happened that my birthday was approaching and I would be going into *yechidus*, so my mother and my sister used the opportunity to enter *yechidus* together with me.

I was coming from Tomchei Temimim in Lod, where I was under the tutelage of Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, so I understood that a *yechidus* was a very serious thing, to be prepared for by fasting and *Tanya bal peh*, and I was understandably very uptight before and during the *yechidus*.

We arranged that we would all enter *yechidus* together, and then my sister and I would leave and my mother would speak to the Rebbe privately for a few minutes. We did so, and later, as my mother exited the Rebbe's room, I noticed that she had an amused look on her face.

"I REMEMBER HIM AS A LEBEDIKER CHILD." THE REBBE SAID, SO WHY WAS I SO UPTIGHT?

I asked her what was so amusing, and she said, that as we left the room, the Rebbe had asked her what happened to her son.

"I remember him as a *lebediker* child," the Rebbe said, so why was I so uptight?

From then on, my relationship with the Rebbe was like that of a father. Whenever I needed guidance, I would quietly write a note, a *tzetl*, and when the Rebbe would return from home in the afternoon, I would hide in Gan Eden Hatachton, and hand the Rebbe my *tzetl*. The Rebbe would take it with him inside his room, shut the door lightly behind him, and a short while later the Rebbe would come out and answer my question. He would always end off the answer with, "*Gei lern*,



RABBI LAZAROFF (SECOND FROM BOTTOM-LEFT) AS A BOCHUR AT THE REBBE'S FARBRENGEN, 29 ELUL 5722.

un zei beshimcha—go learn, and be happy.”

This happened a number of times, when I was sixteen and seventeen. No one ever found out that I would do that. This was the sense of closeness that I felt from the Rebbe.

HORAOS IN AVODAS HASHEM.

Once, I told the Rebbe in *yechidus* that I was experiencing *machshavos zaros* during davening. Other *bochurim* with similar problems had been told by the Rebbe to study Tanya from the beginning of *perek mem alef* until “*hamelech*” by heart. To me, the Rebbe said that I should memorize beginning from the words “*Vehinei Hashem nitzav alav,*” until the word “*hamelech*” on the following page, and every time I have a stray thought, I should think about those words. Additionally, the Rebbe said that I should think about those words before *Hodu*, and before *Yotzer Or*, which I do religiously until today.

Another time, I wrote the Rebbe a depressing letter, about how I am failing in my *avodas Hashem* and so on. The Rebbe wrote back, that I should learn Kuntres Hatefillah, Kuntres Ha'avodah and Kuntres Eitz Hachaim, “then you will know how a *tomim* has to be.”

EVENINGS IN 770

When I arrived in New York in 5718, Lubavitch was very small. There were many *bochurim* in 770 that were from *frumme* homes, but not necessarily Lubavitcher ones.



RABBI LAZAROFF (L) WITH RABBI LEIBEL ALEVSKY (FAR RIGHT) AND A FRIEND DURING HIS SIX-MONTH STOPOVER IN FRANCE EN-ROUTE FROM ERETZ YISROEL TO THE US, WINTER 5718.

Most of them were from Boro Park, Bensonhurst, and Flatbush.

Being that I was still quite young, the *hanhalah* told me that I was too young to learn in 770, and my place was in Bedford and Dean. I went there, and I saw, on the first evening after *seder*, that all of the students went to play baseball and so on, and it was all totally foreign to me. So the next day after *seder*, I ran away; I went back to 770 where I was able to spend time with all of the older *bochurim*, and I slept there on a bench. The next morning I took the bus back to Bedford and Dean for *seder*, and I would do that again every single day.

Meanwhile I was really enjoying my days, because I was spending much time with the older *bochurim*. I remember how Leibel Raskin, Nachman Sudak, and יבולח"ט Boruch Shalom Kahan would *farbreng* every Thursday night, and I was able to participate and join them as well. The motto of their *farbrengens* was that the Rebbe is our commander, we are his soldiers, and we must be ready to go through fire and water for his sake. Those nights sleeping on the bench in 770 were the best days of my life...

Those were the early days of Lekutei Sichos; the Rebbe edited the first one for Shavuos 5718. In those days they were called *tochen inyanim* for *chazzering* Chassidus in shuls. The *bochurim* in 770 were the ones publicizing them, and I became their marketing man: before the Rebbe's big *farbrengens* on Yud-Tes Kislev and so on, I would go around and sell the booklets for five cents, and that is how they covered the cost of the printing.

SHLICHUS IN FRANCE

In 5722, the Rebbe sent *talmidim hashluchim* for the first time (for some reason, a common perception is that the first group was the *shluchim* to Australia in 5727, but in truth, we were sent five years earlier). Ten *bochurim* were sent to Eretz Yisrael and six were sent to Brunoy. I was one of the six that were sent to Brunoy. Before we left, we went into *yechidus*, and when we left 770 to the ship harbor to board the Queen Elizabeth, the Rebbe came out to see us off.

Two weeks after we arrived in France, we received a letter from *mazkirus* saying that we should send a report of our activities at least once every two weeks. Additionally, we

were instructed that every week, two of us should leave yeshiva and spend Shabbos strengthening Yiddishkeit in a different city, while switching off: one week in Paris, and one week in a different French city. I was the one responsible to organize the trips and procure the funds, and I would write the *duchos* as well.

In those days, with minimal travel and communication available, many of the youngsters in Brunoy did not know much about the Rebbe, and weren't aware of how Chassidim in *dor hashvi'i* should act—in regards to *hafatzas hamaayanos* and so on. Before we came to France, the Rebbe was a distant concept, but we made it real to them. That is what was so special about being there on shlichus.

One of the cities that I visited was Metz, where there was a large

population of Algerian Jews. I farbrenged with them an entire Shabbos, and after Shabbos, I got them all to write a *pan* to the Rebbe, that they would start keeping Shabbos and eating only kosher. Approximately thirty families signed.

About two weeks later in Brunoy, I received a letter from the Rebbe. I opened the envelope, and inside was a special letter from the Rebbe to those Jews in Metz. I was to go back and deliver it to them, and I did so.

The next year, Reb Bentzion Shemtov was in *yechidus*, and the Rebbe spoke about the activities of the Chassidim in France. The Rebbe told him that he sent a group of six *bochurim*, one of them was the son of Menucha Lazaroff, and he went to Metz and accomplished amazing things. Chassidim have been in France

for many years, and we needed to wait for youngsters, to come and do something...

During Elul of that year, having spent almost a whole year in France, we received a letter from *mazkirus*. In the letter we were told that our shlichus in Brunoy had concluded, and the time had come to return to New York. We were instructed to leave a copy of our reports with the Lishkah (Reb Binyomin Gorodetzky), so that our work should be able to continue on.

One of the main *bochurim* involved in continuing our work was Reb Mule Azimov *a"h* whom I was especially close with. He continued our work and took it to new heights, developing the infrastructure of Lubavitch and *hafatzas hamaayanos*, as it would later become well-known.



LETTER FROM MAZKIRUS TO THE TALMIDIM HASHLUCHIM DATED 14 ELUL 5722 NOTIFYING THEM TO RETURN TO NEW YORK.



THE REBBE ESCORTS THE GROUP OF SHLUCHIM TO FRANCE, 12 ADAR I 5722.



THE REBBE'S LETTER TO THE ALGERIAN COMMUNITY IN METZ, FRANCE. THE REBBE INSTRUCTED IN HANDWRITING THAT THE LETTER BE SENT IN AN ENVELOPE TO RABBI LAZAROFF:
 "להניח במעטפה ולשלוח להת' שמעון לרוב ש" (בריוגא)."

THEN THE REBBE ADDED THAT HE SHOULD SEE TO IT THAT I LEARN TO BECOME A DAYAN...

YADIN YADIN

We returned to New York, where I spent a few more years in the Rebbe's presence. Some two years later, I married my wife Chiena, the daughter of Reb Levi Itche Schapiro.

After our *chasuna*, I learned in *kollel* for two years. In those days we learned *hilchos treifos*, and we were tested by the *rosh yeshiva* of 770, Harav Yisrael Piekarski. He tested me very thoroughly; he asked me all sorts of complicated questions, and he was very impressed; I knew every single Taz and Shach and all the commentaries.

Every so often he would go into *yechidus*, and give over a report to the Rebbe from the various *bochurim* and *yungeleit*. In *yechidus* some time after my test, he excitedly told the Rebbe that he had tested me, and that he was very impressed with my knowledge.

The Rebbe told him that it was no wonder; I was a grandson of Harav Shimon Lazaroff, the rov in Leningrad. Then the Rebbe added that he should see to it that I learn to become a *dayan*.

The next day, I heard that Harav Piekarski was looking for me. I came over to him, and he told over the whole story, and ended off that the Rebbe had instructed him to tell me that I should learn Choshen Mishpat and become a *dayan*. So, over my second year in *kollel*, I studied for "*yadin yadin*."

MY FIRST SHLICHUS

Our first shlichus was in Detroit, Michigan, under the head shliach,



2 CHESHVAN 5751, LEVI FREIDIN via JEM, 179637



Rabbi Shalom Dovber Shemtov. In the first letter I received from the Rebbe while living there, the Rebbe wrote, “בטח גואם מזמן לזמן בבתי כנסיות שבעיר, Surely you lecture in the shuls throughout the city from time to time, and not only in Chassidus, but also in *nigleh*.”

From then on, I would very often go to shuls, go over to the rabbi, and ask if I could give a speech. That way, I spoke before many of the rabbonim and *frumme* Yidden in the city, in Young Israel, etc.

During those years, my main responsibility was to run Camp Gan Yisrael of Michigan. In my *duchos* at the time I would emphasize the existence of the camp as a *mosad* for itself, in addition to Lubavitch in Michigan in general.

In response to one of my letters to the Rebbe regarding camp, the Rebbe wrote, הרי הקעמפ אינו מלכות בפני עצמו, אלא חלק מהפעולות, ע"כ יתדבר עם הרשד"ב—The camp is not a kingdom of its own, rather it is part of the general activities [of the *mosdos*]. You should therefore [before taking any steps], discuss it with Rabbi Sholom Dovber Shemtov,

[the head shliach]. I will mention it at the *Tziyun*”.

LOOKING FOR A CITY

I had always dreamt of being sent on shlichus, to open *mosdos* of the Rebbe in a new city, where there had never been a shliach before; so while I lived in Detroit and I traveled around to enroll children in camp, I would look around in different cities for various options. One city I knew well was S. Louis; I had traveled there as a *bochur* on Merkos Shlichus, and I had seen much *hatzlacha* in my work there. I felt that it might be a place where we could move on shlichus.

On one of my trips, I was together with the *shadar* Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Raichik and he mentioned to me that he had heard from “inside sources,” that Merkos wanted to send a shliach to Texas. So he suggested that when I go into *yechidus* to ask the Rebbe about S. Louis, I should mention Texas as well. (In those days, the Rebbe didn’t tell us specifically where to go anymore. One would suggest different places, and the Rebbe would choose one of the options.)

Some time later I went into *yechidus*, and I included those options in my *tzetzl*.

The Rebbe read my *tzetzl*, and said to me that S. Louis was the only city in America that had a chief rabbi. If he admires the work of Lubavitch in *hafatzas hama’ayanos*, then why wasn’t he doing it until now. If he has not been doing *hafatzas hama’ayanos* and does not admire our work, then he won’t allow you to do it either. “Lubavitch is *sam saposchnik*,” the Rebbe ended off.¹

Therefore, the Rebbe said, S. Louis is not a good idea at the moment. Texas on the other hand is a good idea. “There are eleven rabbis there; you will be the twelfth one,” the Rebbe said. The Rebbe told me to go to Rabbi Hodakov and work out the details.

This occurred in the winter of 5732. A short time later, at the farbrengen of Yud-Aleph Nissan celebrating the Rebbe’s seventieth year, the Rebbe asked that seventy one new institutions be opened in honor of his birthday. Subsequently, the Rebbe agreed that my shlichus in Texas be counted among the seventy one *mosdos*.

TEXAS

The Rebbe had spoken to me about Texas, but he did not specify which city I should move to. So I did a tour through the state. I went to Dallas, S. Antonio, Houston, and then Austin. And when I arrived back, I wrote a report to the Rebbe. I wrote that Dallas seemed to be on the highest level, from a Yiddishkeit perspective, S. Antonio just built a new *mikveh*, Austin has a campus with many Jewish students, and Houston is lacking in *shomrei Torah u’mitzvah*. The Rebbe told me to move to Houston.

We were one of the first ten shluchim in the United States, but what was unique about our city was that, unlike the cities in which the shluchim had been moving to before then, in Houston there were almost no *frumme* Yidden at all.

THE REBBE CONTINUED, "YOU WRITE THAT IT IS BESIMCHA UVETUV LEVAV – WITH HAPPINESS AND GLADNESS, IS IT TRULY SO?"

BESIMCHA UVETUV LEVAV

Before moving to Houston we went into *yechidus*, and in my *tzetl*, I pledged to do the Rebbe's shlichus with my entire *kochos hanefesh*, with my whole heart and soul. My wife signed the letter as well.

When the Rebbe read it, he smiled, and he turned to my wife and said, "I see that you signed too; do you know what you are signing for?"

The Rebbe continued, "You write that it is *besimcha uvetuv levav*—with happiness and gladness; is it truly so?"

My wife answered, "Yes, of course."

Hearing that, the Rebbe smiled broadly, and put the letter into his drawer.

I was very friendly with the head of the Conservative school in the city, and when he heard that my wife was a teacher, he gave her a job interview and offered her a job. (The Rebbe told me that my wife should teach only if it would not disturb her work in educating our own children.) But

the job came with one condition; he said that she could teach about Torah coming from heaven, or things like that; which he personally didn't mind, but if parents would begin to complain, he will not be able to stand up for her.

We asked the Rebbe what to do. The Rebbe circled the line saying that the principal wouldn't stand up for those teachings, and wrote:

"אם כן מה השאלה?—If that is the case, then what is the question?"

(In other words, she should not accept the offer.)

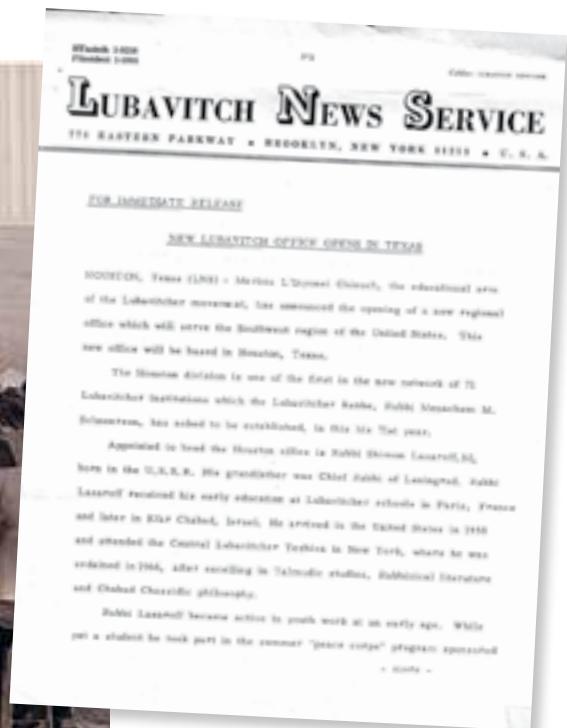
CHINUCH

When we moved to Houston, the Rebbe had given us two conditions; that we should be able to provide our children with a proper education (חינוך), and that the city should have a kosher *mikveh*.

Now, our children were studying in the modern orthodox, Torah Umesorah school. Since the school's *limudei kodesh* was on a very low level, we worked out with the school that my wife and I would teach our children *limudei kodesh*, and then we would bring them to school for *limudei chol*. (One of my fellow shlichim received a directive from the Rebbe that children must have friends and social



FIRST MAJOR EVENT OF CHABAD IN TEXAS IN HONOR OF YUD-TESS KISLEV.



LUBAVITCH NEWS SERVICE REPORT ON THE FOUNDING OF CHABAD IN TEXAS. THE REPORT WAS MUGAH BY THE REBBE.



THE CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF TEXAS REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS, HOUSING A WIDE-RANGE OF ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES.

opportunities, therefore I didn't keep them home all day.)

At some point, the school hired a new principal. This new principal didn't like our arrangement, so he told us that either my children remain in the school the entire day, or they don't come at all.

For some time we agreed, but the arrangement didn't work out for my children. They were on a much higher level than their classmates, and as a result they were bored during class and they weren't happy. After a few other incidents of compromising on the level of Torah and mitzvos in the school, I felt this could not go on.

I wrote a letter to the Rebbe describing the problems that the new principal was making, and the Rebbe answered pointedly:

“ישאל רב מורה הוראה בפועל אם חינוך—You should ask a practicing rov, whether proper *chinuch* is in the category of mitzvos one must fulfill at all costs...”

I called the rov of Crown Heights, Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dvorkin, and he said, “Look at what the Rebbe told you; the answer speaks for itself.”

Armed with this ruling, I held a meeting with the president of the

school. I told him what the Rebbe had said about חינוך הכשר. I gave him an ultimatum. They have ten days to decide, I told him; either they allow me to keep my children at home for *limudei kodesh*, or I will open my own school.

He began to laugh out loud. He never believed that I would open my own school.

Ten days later, I called the president and I reminded him about my ultimatum, but he just brushed me off.

I had gotten my answer.

The next day, a Thursday, I placed an ad in the Jewish Herald (a local Jewish newspaper), announcing that Lubavitch opened a new day school in Houston. My wife, who was teaching in the Torah Umesorah school, picked up our children, collected their books, and opened our own school in our house.

Right away, people started to call me to try to make peace and work things out, but I told them categorically that Chabad doesn't shut down schools. The Chabad school is open, so that is the way it will remain.

Meanwhile, with the Rebbe's *brachos*, the school went from five children to seven children; today there

THE REBBE ANSWERED,
“YOU SHOULD ASK
A PRACTICING RAV,
WHETHER PROPER
CHINUCH IS IN THE
CATEGORY OF
MITZVOS ONE MUST
FULFILL AT ALL COSTS...”

are over one hundred and sixty *kein yirbu*, and *baruch Hashem* it has a very good name.

BIG HATS AND BIG HEADS

During my early years in Texas, I used to visit the university in Austin on a weekly basis, and be *mekarev* the students there. One year, I managed to convince ten students (among them was Rabbi Moshe Traxler, who is today a shliach here in Houston) to go learn in Morristown over the summer, and during their stay, I brought them along to the Yud-Beis Tammuz farbrengen.

Many of the students were interesting characters, and some even had long hair so the *yarmulkahs* weren't exactly sticking to their heads.



I had an idea; I got them all to buy big cowboy hats to wear to the farbrengen. When the Rebbe walked in, he was greeted by quite an amusing sight, all ten were standing together with their massive hats. When the Rebbe saw them, he smiled broadly, and during the farbrengen, he instructed them all to say *l'chaim*.

About a half a year later, just before Chanukah, I received a call from Rabbi Shlomo Cunin, my colleague from California; “How many menorahs do you need?”

I was quite confused as to his question, so he explained:

He was in New York, and when the Rebbe saw him standing in the lobby of 770, the Rebbe asked him how *mitvza* Chanukah was going. (That year, 5734, was when the Rebbe announced *mitvza* Chanukah). After he told the Rebbe about his plans, the Rebbe asked him, “And what are you doing about your neighbor in Texas; *dorten hubben di chevre groyse hitlech, un unter di groyse hitlech hubben zei groyse kep, hubben zei groyse hasagos*—Over there they have the people with big hats, and under the big hats they have big heads, so they must have broad perceptions...²



GIMMEL TAMMUZ WITH SHAZAR

A short time after we arrived in Houston, the president of the Federation told me that Zalman Shazar, the former president of Israel, would be stopping over the next day in the Houston airport for a few hours on his way to Mexico. The community leaders would be meeting him in an airport lounge, and he invited me to join.

As a shliach, I didn't do anything on my own; I immediately called Rabbi Hodakov and asked him if I should join the reception.

As I was talking to him, I heard that Rabbi Hodakov paused for a moment; soon enough I picked up from his tone of voice that the Rebbe had joined the call.

I asked Rabbi Hodakov my question again, and he began to question me: "Do you know what tomorrow is?"

I said that I do; it was going to be Gimmel Tammuz. "Do you know the significance of the day?"

I said yes. I remembered that at a farbrengen on Shabbos Korach, Gimmel Tammuz 5718, the Rebbe had explained that for Chassidim, Gimmel Tammuz is in essence a bigger *simcha* than Yud-Beis Tammuz. The Frierdiker Rebbe himself was sent into exile and was unable to effect Chassidim directly as he would be able to if he was home. He was therefore still not free and the ultimate *yom tov* was on Yud-Beis Tammuz, when he could be with Chassidim once more. However for Chassidim who are *mekushar* to the Rebbe, the fact that the Frierdiker Rebbe **himself** was freed from such a dangerous decree (despite the fact that they were unable to see the Frierdiker Rebbe at the time, as he was sent to Kostrama), this itself is a cause of a bigger joy than the joy of Yud-Beis Tammuz.³

"Go there," Rabbi Hodakov said to me, "and tell him what you just told me. And don't forget to take some *mashke* and say *l'chaim* with him."

The next day I went to the airport with my *l'chaim*, and when I arrived, I saw that the place was packed; all the who's who of Houston were there...

However, as soon as he noticed me, President Shazar ushered me over and began a conversation with me. "Surely you are a Lubavitcher," he said. How is the Rebbe, what is going on, he wanted to know everything.

While all the community leaders of Houston were looking on, I told him the Rebbe's message about the day and said *l'chaim* with him, and at the end, he asked me for a favor.

He said that on his way back from Mexico, he would be stopping off in New York. Would he be able to see the Rebbe?

I immediately ran to a pay phone to call *mazkirus* to arrange a *yechidus* for him.

A few days later, I got a call from Rabbi Hodakov, telling me that a *yechidus* had been arranged for Yud-Beis Tammuz, and he asked me if I would be coming to town. I said of course I would. Indeed I came to New York for Yud-Beis Tammuz, and in the first part of the *yechidus*, when all of the dignitaries were present, I was told to join as well and the Rebbe actually introduced me to him.

The Rebbe said: "This is the *yungerman* who told us that you were coming; his name is Shimon Lazaroff. His grandfather and namesake was the rov of Leningrad."

Then the Rebbe continued:

"He lives in Houston, which is the place from where they fly to the moon; *iz duch Houston Shaar hashomayim*, it's the gateway to heaven..."



FORMER PRESIDENT SHAZAR VISITS THE REBBE, YUD-BEIS TAMMUZ 5733.
RABBI LAZAROFF IS SEEN IN FRONT OF THE REBBE'S DESK.



RABBI LAZAROFF GREETES
MR. SHAZAR IN HOUSTON.



RABBI LAZAROFF, STUART NELKIN & JAY NELKIN PRESENT THE REBBE WITH THE KEY TO THE RECENTLY PURCHASED AUSTIN CHABAD HOUSE, 12 TAMMUZ 5735.

BUILDING A BUILDING

When I began plans to build a building a few years after we moved to Houston, I wrote to the Rebbe about a property I was looking into, and I received an answer that I had not expected. The Rebbe asked me why I was jumping so far, where would I get the money from, etc.

I was very distraught when I received the answer, and I decided that I would scrap the entire plan. But then the *mazkir*, Reb Binyomin Klein calmed me down, and told me that the Rebbe wasn't telling me not to build. It simply had to be done with caution. He told me to go home, make proper lists, collect pledges, and to be responsible about it, and then the Rebbe will allow it to be built.

I followed his advice, and it proved to be the right thing. I then received a letter from the Rebbe, with many blessings, and he even enclosed ten fifty-dollar bills (five hundred dollars)—no small sum in those days—as his personal contribution. We built our building, and then we outgrew it, and we did renovations,

and *baruch Hashem* we were very successful.

This initial answer was part of a general instruction that I received from the Rebbe—that I should run my shlichus like a business; I shouldn't do anything that would put me into debt. In fact, I once asked the Rebbe about hiring another shliach, and the Rebbe said that I shouldn't, because I wasn't sure that I could afford it. (This was at the same time that Rabbi Shlomo Cunin was being told to do everything “*lechatchila ariber*.”)

Right after we finished a phase of the building, I came with a prominent *baal habos* to the Rebbe, and during the farbrengen (on Yud-Tes Kislev 5740), we came up to the Rebbe and the *baal habos* said that he donated a specific amount of money towards the building. The Rebbe told him he didn't give enough, and he must add to his previous pledge. Then, after he said *lchaim*, the Rebbe gave him a *bracha*, that we should see each other once more in ten years.

Another similar episode took place years earlier, in 5734, regarding a different building which I had bought, in Austin:

During a farbrengen, the Rebbe told a *baal habos* who had just sponsored the building that soon we will outgrow those buildings, and we will need to expand...

Chabad in Texas began in 5732 with nothing, and with the Rebbe's *brachos*, today it has expanded to seventeen cities, twenty seven institutions, forty shluchim and hundreds of *ba'alei teshuvah*, many of them shluchim themselves, teachers and rabbis across the globe. With Hashem's help and the Rebbe's continuous *brachos*, it will surely grow much more in the future, and give the Rebbe much *nachas*. **T**

1. “Sam saposhnick” means “I myself am a shoemaker.” The story goes that a Yid found his stolen tefillin in the possession of a gentile. When the Yid identified the Tefillin, the non-Jew called out “I myself am a shoemaker,” claiming to have found animal skin and created the “shoes” himself. The Rebbe used this term to bring out that Chabad is independent and maintains a unique style and approach. Our activities cannot be confined to merely following in the ways of others.

2. See Derher Kislev 5776 “Illumination” for the rest of the Rebbe's conversation with Rabbi Cunin, and a full overview of Chanukah 5734.

3. Toras Menachem vol 23, p. 103-106.