

By: Rabbi Bentzion Schtroks

If I Had Twenty

Yankefacs

REB YAAKOV MASKALIK (ZURAVITCHER)

Even in the most difficult times and circumstances, Reb Yaakov Maskalik exhibited an inner joy; it overflowed in his words, his actions, and his mere presence. It remained steadfast even through the bitter exile in Kazakhstan. Ahavas Yisroel and genuine concern for others were integral to his character, so much so that during his studies in Tomchei Temimim, the Rebbe Rashab drew parallels between him and Reb Levi Yitzchok m'Berditchev. His profound sense of compassion and willingness to assist at any cost persisted throughout his endeavors to fortify Yiddishkeit in Russia.



לע"נ
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' משה בן הרב נפתלי ע"ה
גרינברג
נלב"ע י' תמוז ה'תשע"ג
ת"נ צ"ב'ה'

נדפס ע"י בנו
הרה"ת ר' ישראל מרדכי חוגתו מרת
חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו גרינברג
על פסא, טקסט

Reb Yaakov Zecharya Maskalik

(also known as Reb Yankel Zuravitcher) was born in Schedrin. His parents, Reb Zev Volf and Yehudis Maskalik were Koidinover Chassidim and raised their children with a pure, chassidishe education.

Throughout his childhood, Reb Yaakov and his family lived in Schedrin, a town established by the Tzemach Tzedek and inhabited primarily by Lubavitcher Chassidim. Reb Yaakov absorbed much from the Chabad atmosphere surrounding him and was intrigued by the ways of the Lubavitcher Chassidim.

At age fifteen, Reb Yaakov decided to travel to Lubavitch to study in Tomchei Temimim. At first, his parents were reluctant. However, as they saw the development of his character and his sincere *avodas Hashem*, they gave him their full support.

Reb Yankel was among forty bochorim aspiring to join the esteemed yeshiva. Following a rigorous assessment process, which included evaluations of his Torah knowledge, conduct, and character traits, Reb Yaakov received high praise from both of the two assessing committees and, in Cheshvan 5661, he was admitted to Tomchei Temimim.

Reb Yaakov excelled in the learning of *nigleh* and Chassidus, but what made him truly unique was his Ahavas Yisroel. The Rebbe Rashab commented: “There is a *bochur* in the yeshiva who is an example of Reb Levi Yitzchok m’Berditchev¹.”

For eight years, Reb Yaakov learned at Tomchei Temimim. During his last few years there, he looked after the material needs of the younger *bochorim*,

earning the title “mother of the *temimim*.”²

Reb Folleh Kahn recounts:

“When Reb Yaakov Maskalik was still in the yeshiva of Lubavitch, he was already known for his generous heart, and would often be referred to as: ‘*Der mame*.’

“Some *bochorim* could not afford to pay for lodging and would sleep in the study hall. Most would bring blankets from home, but they needed to obtain mattresses. Reb Yaakov took it upon himself to ensure that these *bochorim* had mattresses. He would procure sacks and straw, and sew them into mattresses.

“Whenever a *bochur* was hurt, he would turn to Reb Yaakov, who would take care of the treatments.”³

Rising to the Occasion

In the year 5668, a shidduch was suggested with Miriam Rochel Margolin, daughter of Reb Tuvia Margolin from Zhlobin, and they got married after Shavuos. The young couple remained in Zhlobin for three years and were blessed with two daughters.

Shortly before his wedding—as per the instruction of the Rebbe Rashab—Reb Yaakov had begun to study Shulchan Aruch in order to receive *semicha*. He was tested and did *shimush* with Reb Menachem Mendel Chein, the Rov in Niezhin, one of the only Rabbonim to whom the Rebbe Rashab sent alumni of Tomchei Temimim to for *semicha* and *shimush*.⁴



REB YAAKOV LEIB PARETZKY (JACOBSON) WITH HIS FAMILY, ZURAVITZ, 5673.

Referring to Reb Yaakov, the Rebbe Rashab commented: “There is a bochur in the yeshiva who is an example of Reb Levi Yitzchok m’Berdichev.”

In the winter of 5671, Reb Lipman Dov Cohen, the former Lubavitcher Rov of Zuravitch, passed away. Some congregants of the local Nusach Ashkenaz Shul wanted to appoint the Rov of their Shul, Reb Boruch Rabinovitz, as the Rov of the city. The Chassidim, who comprised the majority of the community, did not accept the proposal.

Some sources suggest that the Rebbe Rashab sent Reb Yaakov to Zuravitch to fill the position of Reb Lipman Cohen. What we know for certain is that after Pesach of that year, Reb Yaakov visited Zuravitch and stayed in the home of Reb Yaakov Leib Jacobson, father of Reb Yisroel Jacobson⁵.

Reb Yisroel Jacobson related:

“In the summer of 5671, Reb Yaakov Maskalik visited our town. Since my father was the only shochet in the city, and we were the only ones with space to accommodate guests, he stayed at our home.

“He gave speeches that were greatly enjoyed by the community, radiating warmth and friendliness, enhanced by his distinguished and handsome appearance.”

Three months later, in Menachem Av 5671, Reb Yaakov was appointed to serve as Rov of Zuravitch.

The people who had campaigned for Reb Boruch Rabinowitz couldn’t refute Reb Yaakov’s appointment, but they weren’t pleased. When they realized how pure and good-hearted Reb Yaakov was, they decided to use this to their benefit.

They commissioned a delegation who successfully convinced Reb Yaakov that his appointment had left Reb Boruch without a livelihood and that he should commit to finding Reb Boruch a monthly income of four hundred rubles per month. Since Reb Yaakov avoided the slightest possibility of causing harm to another person, he agreed there and then to sign a prepared document assuming the responsibility.

The actions of this group deeply pained the Chassidim, especially as they took advantage of Reb Yaakov’s

pure, kind-hearted nature and his extraordinary Ahavas Yisroel. It was obvious that they relied on these characteristics to do away with practically all of his earnings.

Seeing how disturbed the Chassidim were by this, Reb Yaakov firmly refused to allow any actions that would reignite the flames of *machlokes* and insisted that the matter be settled peacefully.

Upon hearing of the issue, the Rebbe Rashab sent Reb Zalman Havlin to help resolve it. Reb Zalman was suitable for the sensitive and delicate task as he was well-liked and exceptionally talented; his reliability and directness earned the trust even of those who opposed him.

Reb Zalman, with his calm and meticulous approach, gradually guided the group to acknowledge their error and void the contract they had coerced Reb Yaakov into signing⁶.

As the ordeal came to an end and Reb Yaakov was unanimously accepted as the Rov by all of the residents of Zuravitch, the spirit of Lubavitch gradually began to influence all aspects of community life. The classes in Chassidus grew larger and more frequent. Reb Yaakov’s farbrengens drew crowds from all walks of life, and his positive energy attracted the entire community—including former opponents—to unite around him.

Reb Yaakov motivated parents to send their children to Tomchei Temimim, and his inspiration also increased the number of people who traveled to Lubavitch for *yomei depagra*, especially during the month of Tishrei.

Reb Yaakov instituted many chassidishe customs, which were accepted lovingly and respectfully; a result of his sincerity and mirroring his love and respect for his flock. Among many other things, Reb Yaakov saw to it that the Mikvah be heated for Shabbos so that more people would use it on Shabbos morning before davening.⁷

A Beacon of Hope

As time went on, Reb Yaakov's family grew. While his family lived in Zuravitch, his wife gave birth to three children.

After World War I and the Communist takeover, the regime began to impose its views onto the people. The Jews were the first to suffer, and Zuravitch was not spared.

The local government started to oppress all of the religious institutions and those who worked in them. This is when Reb Yaakov's stubborn side revealed itself. He fought fiercely against government restrictions. Even when the persecution intensified and accusations and charges against Rabbonim, Shochtim, Mohalim, and others increased, Reb Yaakov diligently carried on his responsibility as Rav and did whatever he could to protect observance of Yiddishkeit while being careful not to endanger anyone.

Despite the immense pressure he faced leading the community through the most challenging times, he maintained a calm demeanor, radiating positivity and never displaying the weight of his burdens. Those who were there at the time later related that Reb Yaakov continuously kept uplifted spirits, and his face glowed with a contagious joy.

On the *Kol Mevasser* radio show that would air in Kfar Chabad in the late 1980s, Reb Abba Levin said:

“Reb Yaakov was an individual who was filled with emotion, as the Yiddish expression goes: ‘*A hartzigehr Yid*’. He was always joyful, and whenever you saw him, he had a bright smile on his face. In short, he was a Jew who had an extraordinary feeling for others. He was completely devoted to helping Jews both physically and spiritually. When he would begin to speak with you, he would routinely open up with an affectionate phrase like “*Tzadikel*, how are you?” or, “*Chossidel*, how is it going?” He never started a conversation with merely: “How are you?” or “How is it going?” Anyone who was broken—and there was no shortage of broken people at the time—would find comfort when they encountered Reb Yaakov. His smile never disappeared, even when he faced personal challenges.”

Balancing Act

Although Reb Yaakov was very successful in his communal work in Zuravitch, he faced significant challenges in his personal life.

In 5680, Reb Yaakov's daughter Riva passed away at the tender age of three. Three years later, his wife Miriam Rochel became infected with pneumonia. Unfortunately, all of the cures that her doctors tried proved unsuccessful, and on the 7th of Adar 5683, she passed away. Reb Yaakov was left with four orphaned children, the oldest being fourteen years old and the youngest being two.

For two years following his wife's passing, Reb Yaakov single-handedly raised his four children. Despite this responsibility, he remained deeply engaged in serving his community, which by then had largely become an underground operation.

After two years, Reb Yaakov felt that his community work demanded an ever-increasing amount of his time, which came at the expense of caring for his four children. Not only was Reb Yaakov responsible for leading his local community in Zuravitch under the communist regime's watch, but he also embarked on travels to cities across Russia to fulfill the shlichus of the Friediker Rebbe, causing him to be away from home often.

This prompted him to choose between continuing his vital community work and looking after his four children. With a heavy heart, Reb Yaakov entrusted his friend Reb Chaim Eliezer Gorelick, who lived in Rogatchov, with the care of his children.⁸

Unwavering Resolve

Reb Yaakov's efforts to fortify Yiddishkeit in Russia—establishing schools, recruiting and funding teachers, organizing *shiurei Torah*, constructing mikvaos, and more, began primarily after the *histalkus* of the Rebbe Rashab, under the leadership of the Friediker Rebbe.

At first, Reb Yaakov was part of the group tasked by the Friediker Rebbe with carrying out clandestine operations to preserve Yiddishkeit amidst the ongoing persecution, and to report to the Friediker Rebbe regarding the spiritual and physical needs and welfare of Chassidim living in towns throughout Russia.⁹ Over time, however, as many of the group's members were arrested and others were expelled from Russia, Reb Yaakov was the only one

remaining to direct the operations.¹⁰

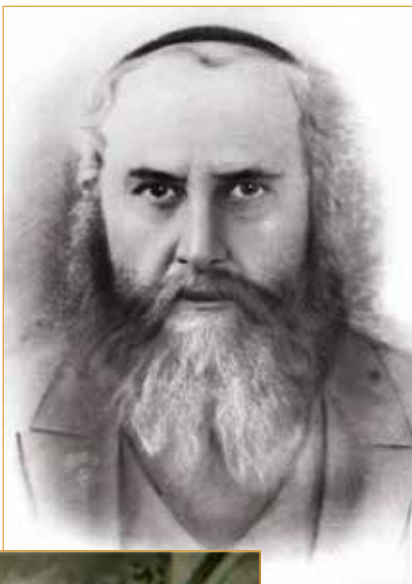
Reb Yaakov plunged ahead with his efforts, carrying out his work with dedication, day in and day out, never complaining. The Friediker Rebbe said, “If I had twenty Yankelach I would turn over Russia.”¹¹”

During this period, the Friediker Rebbe was arrested and exiled to Kostroma. After being freed, he returned to Leningrad, but since he was not able to stay there, he soon moved to a suburb of Moscow called Malachovka.

Since it was known that the government had undercover agents watching the Friediker Rebbe and everyone who he met, strict instructions were issued to the Chassidim that no one should come there.

The only ones the Friediker Rebbe allowed to stay near

A PORTRAIT CIRCULATED AMONG THE CHASSIDIM REMAINING IN RUSSIA, MADE FROM A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE FRIEDIKER REBBE TAKEN IN LENINGRAD, SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE TO RIGA IN 5688.



REB MENDEL MASKALIK, ELDEST SON OF REB YANKEL.

“If I had twenty Yankelach, I would turn over Russia.”

THE BRACHOS THAT REACH THE MALOCHIM

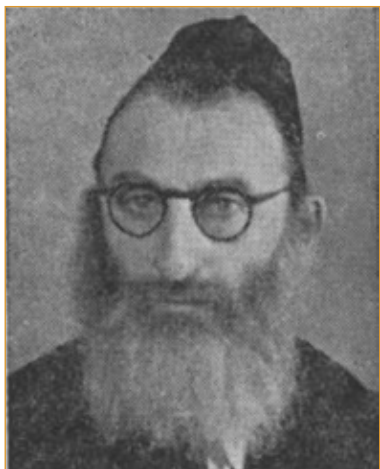
Reb Simcha Gorodetsky related the following story:

On Shemini Atzeres 5682 or 5683, I merited to sit at the Yom Tov table in the Friediker Rebbe’s sukkah in Rostov. Also present were Reb Itche Der Masmid and Reb Yaakov Zuravitcher, although Reb Yaakov was busy dancing with the children in the courtyard. Their dancing and singing were lively and we heard it in the sukkah. Reb Itche commented several times: “Ah, ah, it is disturbing.” but the Friediker Rebbe did not respond. Finally, upon repeating this again, the Friediker Rebbe told him: “When one reaches *emes*—truth, even to the tip of the first *Yud* of the letter *Aleph* in *emes*, this too is *emes*.”

Later in the conversation, Reb Itche said something that I couldn’t hear properly, and the Friediker Rebbe told him: “You are asking for something which is associated with [high] levels. On high, there are several groups of *malochim* (the Friediker Rebbe enumerated several groups by name), and they wait all night; the office is closed until Reb Yaakov wakes up in the morning, washes his hands, and recites *Birchas Hashachar*, then all of the offices open up and the *malochim* sing *shira*: “*B’ron yachad kochvei boker...*”²⁹

him were relatives and a few others, including Reb Yaakov, whom the Friediker Rebbe appointed his personal secretary during his time in Malachovka.

During that time, Chassidim in other countries coordinated a massive effort to enable the Friediker Rebbe to leave Russia. Every step was reported back to the Friediker Rebbe for approval and guidance. To avoid government censorship, the letters would arrive through



REB YEHOShUA
ZELIG DISKIN.

TORN SLIPPERS

Reb Avrohom Drizin once related:

“The Friediker Rebbe once expressed: ‘Since the creation of the world there was never a *klipah* as heavy as Trotzky (a prominent figure in the Communist party and the Russian government). [As the possuk says:] ‘And this against that’, there is also an equivalent on the side of *kedusha*. It is not necessary to enumerate who this is, but suffice to say that he wears torn slippers.’

“The [Friediker] Rebbe was staying in a hotel at the time, and nobody was allowed to be there aside from Reb Yankelel who saw that the Friediker Rebbe’s slippers were torn.”³⁰

third parties; they would deliver them to Reb Yaakov, who would bring them to the Friediker Rebbe. Many of the Friediker Rebbe’s responses were also signed by Reb Yaakov.

The Painful Departure

In Elul 5687, the Friediker Rebbe traveled from Malachovka to visit the Ohel of the Rebbe Rashab in Rostov. On Erev Rosh Hashanah, he arrived in Leningrad, where he stayed until leaving Russia on Isru Chag Sukkos.

During the entire time until the Friediker Rebbe left Russia, Reb Yaakov remained with him¹². On that last Simchas Torah, a bitterness that could be felt in the hearts of the Chassidim. Times were challenging, the persecutions were increasing, and now that the Friediker Rebbe’s departure was imminent, many Chassidim were left with a feeling of uncertainty.

Reb Folleh Kahn related memories from that Simchas Torah:

“On Simchas Torah 5688, before the Friediker Rebbe left Russia, Chassidim came from far and wide, knowing that this was the last opportunity for the Chassidim in Russia to be together with the Friediker Rebbe.

“While everyone was gathered in the shul waiting for the Friediker Rebbe to come from his room for *hakafos*, Reb Yaakov had a brilliant idea. He gathered all the children and told them to hold hands as they danced around the *bima*. Since the Friediker Rebbe had not yet entered the shul, Reb Yaakov told them not to sing out loud, but to repetitively say the words: “*Kinder halt zich, halt zich—children hold on, hold on.*”

“Reb Yaakov continued to dance with them for a while, and it strongly impacted everyone present. Everyone who remembers that time in general, especially the Friediker Rebbe leaving Russia, knows how great the need was to strengthen each other, and everyone who was there understood what Reb Yaakov’s intentions were with this dance.”¹³

Undercover Efforts

On his visits to cities across the country, Reb Yaakov would dress in tattered clothing and appear in the local shuls saying that he was a Maggid coming to deliver

“He asked them about their shopping, and asked as an aside if they have young children, and where they go to school...”

drashos and collect money for his livelihood.

In this disguise, people would not know that he was on the Friediker Rebbe's shlichus, which could lead to discovery by the authorities, especially since there were spies in every community.

Only to a select few he knew he could trust did Reb Yaakov reveal his true identity and ask for help in fulfilling the shlichus. In many cases, even the Rabbonim in the city were unaware of the true purpose of his visit.

Upon arriving in a city where establishing a cheder seemed unfeasible, Reb Yaakov would engage Torah-observant parents, assuring them that he was not an undercover Communist agent, and convincing them to send their children to an underground cheder located in a neighboring town. He would send the older children and yeshiva-aged students to underground yeshivas further away.¹⁴

Reb Yehoshua Zelig Diskin compiled an elaborate account of Reb Yaakov's visit to the region of Vohlin:

“In 5688 I visited the town of Horitzov in the region of Vohlin. I arrived at the train stop in Shepetivka in the evening, from where I traveled by wagon to Horitzov. I stayed overnight in a hotel, and the next day I went to find a Shul to daven. I found four shuls, but they had all finished davening already. There was one shul that had a Minyan starting at noon. I arrived there and found about ten Yidden preparing to daven. Before davening, I heard people saying that a very pleasant Maggid had come to visit, his words as sweet as honey. I asked who the Maggid was and was told that he was a Litvak dressed in torn clothing, uninterested in the money people gave him.

“After davening I visited the home of the local Rov. There, I encountered a man of dignified countenance, a noble and soft look, a joyful individual who enjoys engaging with others, despite wearing tattered clothing. I realized that this was the revered “Maggid” to whom the townsmen had been referring.

“The fellow inquired as to who I was, and upon learning of my lineage, he revealed a connection to my father. With a hint of nostalgia, he said: ‘I learned in Babruysk, and I listened to your father speak. I wrote down his speech, and that is the speech that I used when I became the Rov of Zuravitch. Perhaps you have heard my name? I am Yankel Zuravitcher,’ he confessed humbly. ‘I don't have a livelihood, so I travel as a Maggid delivering lectures.’

“When I left the Rov's home, Reb Yaakov accompanied me. We entered the empty Shul, where he revealed to me that he was a Shliach of the [Friediker] Rebbe. He also showed me pictures of the [Friediker] Rebbe, and told me that he travels around the country organizing classes on Ein Yaakov and Mishnayos between Mincha and Maariv. In the Vohlin tradition, they don't have a break between Mincha and Maariv, so he was having a hard time with that.

“He finds people who he can trust and recruits them to join underground efforts to save the youth. For example, he sent one child from this city to Kremenchuk, in which there is an underground cheder. He also delivers speeches to inspire Yidden to come closer to their Father in Heaven. He isn't interested in donations; they only serve as a cover-up of his identity for the Soviet authorities.

“I stayed in that town for about a week, and on my way home, I stopped at the train station in Shepetivka. Waiting for the train, I wanted to find a home where I could find shelter for a bit. I saw a slaughterhouse, so I went inside, and here again, I encountered Reb Yaakov. This time he was wearing clean clothing that were not torn. He told me that it was the forty-second city he was visiting upon the [Friediker] Rebbe's instructions. We went for a walk together, and he spoke to a few women that we met on the way. He asked them about their shopping, and asked as an aside if they had young children, and where they go to school.

“In Shepetivka he encountered two children in my

“He told me that it was the forty-second city he was visiting upon the Friediker Rebbe’s instructions...”

A SPECIAL PROMISE

During a *yechidus*, the Friediker Rebbe asked Reb Yaakov about the welfare and situation of his son Menachem Mendel. Reb Yaakov, who was fully occupied with his communal work in the shlichus of the Friediker Rebbe, responded that he did not know exactly what his son’s situation was. (His son was staying with Reb Chaim Eliezer Gorelick at the time.)

The Friediker Rebbe said to him: “Because you are dedicated to my children, I am responsible for looking after your son.” The Friediker Rebbe then gave specific instructions about where his son should learn.

presence who he directed to Nevel to join the underground Lubavitcher cheder, and he provided them with funds to cover the travel costs. During that time he went to visit the gravesite of Reb Pinchos Koritzer. Before doing so, he went to the Mikvah. Though I wished to join him, he discouraged me because there were government detectives nearby. Reb Yaakov was already questioned by them, but since I was new there, the risk wasn’t worth it.

“In the afternoon, I went to the train station. I met Reb Yaakov surrounded by a large crowd since Shepetivka is a major junction near the Polish border. In the third section of the station, between the vast crowd of Ukrainian peasants, I see a Jew in his forties together with his son. I engaged him in conversation, and it turned out that his name was Rav Bonfeld from Mezhibuzh. He was heading to Novograd-Volynsky, which has a Lubavitcher underground yeshiva and cheder led by Reb Shaul Brook.

“Rav Bonfeld shared that his son recently turned ten years old. In Mezhibuzh, there was no one for him to study with, and the dire financial situation left them with no food at home, as there are two Rabbonim in Mezhibuzh and no source of income. With his wife about to give birth, Rav Bonfeld managed to save four kilograms of white flour and a ten-ruble coin. However, the government’s demand for their son’s enrollment in a Soviet school prompted him to hurry and take his son from Mezhibuzh to Novograd-Volynsky. To pay for the trip, Rav Bonfeld used the ten-ruble coin, and his wife utilized the saved flour to bake bread for their son’s voyage.

“Reb Yaakov told Rav Bonfeld that he too was traveling to Novograd-Volynsky to visit Reb Shaul Brook and the yeshiva there. They traveled together, and I traveled in the other direction towards Kiev.

“In Kiev, I stayed at the home of Rabbi Gorodetsky, and again met Reb Yaakov. He told me that when he arrived in Novograd-Volynsky he went to the Shul in which Reb Shaul Brook teaches. During his conversation with Reb Shaul, a sudden commotion arose as several officers approached the building. In a swift maneuver, Reb Shaul concealed himself within the bookshelf. When the officers questioned the children about who was teaching them, they said that they didn’t have a teacher and they learn on their own. The officers suspected Reb Yaakov of teaching them and arrested him. When he came to the police station, he showed the officers his train tickets proving that he had only arrived that day, and the officers released him. Shaken by the ordeal, Reb Yaakov rushed to make his way to Kiev.

“Reb Yaakov told Rabbi Gorodetsky that while he was in the towns in the Vohlin region, he organized tens of *shiurei Torah*, and sent about fifteen children to learn in *chadorim* in Nevel, Vitebsk, and Kremenchuk.¹⁵”

One of Reb Yaakov’s relatives related:

“With huge miracles, Reb Yaakov managed to dodge the Soviet authorities time after time. When asked if he was Yaakov Maskalik, he said no, my name is Yankel Zuravitcher, and vice versa. On multiple occasions, he went into hiding until he knew that enough time had passed for them to quit looking for him. Sometimes he had to flee from one city to another in the middle of the night, but nothing could stop him from being committed to his mission. He would not leave a city before he understood the community’s spiritual welfare and what was needed there.¹⁶”

In the Heart of Moscow

At the end of 5689, Reb Yaakov took his children, who had been in Rogatchov with Reb Chaim Eliezer Gorelick, and settled in Moscow.

Although he resided in Moscow and tended to his children, Reb Yaakov diligently pursued the mission entrusted to him by the Friediker Rebbe, safeguarding the flame of Yiddishkeit in Soviet Russia. Despite being continuously updated via mail about the goings on in many communities, including the status of *chadorim* and *mikvaos*, he willingly endangered himself by visiting these locales in person. He displayed a remarkable dedication, even going so far as to use his own resources to compensate teachers, ensuring uninterrupted Torah study.

Reb Avrohom Drizin Related:

“In Moscow, to make ends meet, I ran a business that depended on the black market. I partnered with Reb Yaakov because he was honest and had good judgment. Once, we earned a big profit of a few thousand rubles. I split the money equally with Reb Yaakov, thinking it would last us each a few months. By the end of the week, Reb Yaakov asked me if he could borrow three rubles for his Shabbos needs.

“I was surprised and asked him what happened to the several thousand rubles I had given him at the beginning of the week. He answered sincerely that three teachers had not been paid for three months, and there was a possibility

that the *chadorim* would shut down. In another city, the construction of the mikvah was postponed due to lack of funds. So, he used the money to pay the teachers, sent the necessary funds to complete the mikvah and found himself with nothing remaining for Shabbos.¹⁷”

In his genuine, caring manner, Reb Yaakov attended not only to the community’s collective needs but also to the individual concerns of each person. This was especially crucial during a time when many faced dire financial straits. With conventional employment requiring the desecration of Shabbos, and working any job that the government did not officially recognize meant risking imprisonment or worse, numerous Chassidim found themselves in desperate situations. Families were left without means of support, as many individuals were incarcerated, leaving entire households with no source of income.

PART OF A LETTER SENT BY REB YANKEL TO A FELLOW CHOSSID WHO WAS WITH THE FRIEDIKER REBBE. REB YANKEL ENTREATS HIS FRIEND TO MENTION HIM TO THE FRIEDIKER REBBE FOR A BRACHA.



TESHURA ZIBERSTROM - KATAN 5777

KOL BAYAAR

At the farbrengen on Purim 5711, the Rebbe shared the following story:

“On Purim 5687, after the [Friediker] Rebbe concluded the farbrengen and went into his room, a few people remained, one of them being the chossid Reb Yaakov Zuravitcher. He sat on the floor and sang the niggun *Kol Bazaar*.” The Rebbe then instructed that this niggun be sung³¹.

* 5689-1929, 5711-1951, 5687-1927

The Friediker Rebbe said to him: “Because you are dedicated to my children, I am responsible for looking after your son.”

Reb Yaakov gave everything he could to help families survive and continuously raised funds to help those in need. He would send letters to his friends who had made it to America and plead with them to send financial aid to the Chassidim remaining in Russia.

Cracks of Light

In each of the many letters that Reb Yaakov sent to the Friediker Rebbe reporting after each trip—which he signed with the disguised name of Riza—he expresses profound anguish over the Soviet persecution that was determined to completely eradicate the learning of Torah and practice of Yiddishkeit from within Russia. In these letters, Reb Yaakov also asks for any support possible to help pay teachers, mikvah attendants, etc. The letters were written in code to prevent his ‘illegal’ activities from being uncovered by government censors.

In one such letter, Reb Yaakov expresses painfully: “The store of the children was destroyed, and there is no one to take care of this.” In another letter, he writes: “The mikvah was destroyed, and the building sold to an uncircumcised [man] who sealed it up.” In another letter, he writes: “There is no order for the holy sheep of Hashem’s flock [i.e. the Jewish children], who get captured like birds in the traps of the latest fads and various platforms.” Regarding another city, he writes: “There is a big commotion since they want to steal the large Shul. I spoke to the Rov and I told him that they should make a meeting and they should gather signatures to send to Moscow.” In another report, he writes: “The poverty here is great since there is no livelihood, and now there is a worry that the mikvah might fall into the hands of foreigners Heaven forbid, since 300 rubel is needed to finish the repairs.”

Although these letters are filled with painful occurrences, they also showcase his trust in Hashem, optimistic solutions, and positive accomplishments. The cracks of light within the darkness expressed in Reb Yaakov’s letters received frequent attention in the Friediker Rebbe’s responses to him.¹⁸

Towering Ahavas Yisroel

Throughout his life, wherever he went and in every situation, Reb Yaakov carried with him deep and genuine concern for the physical and spiritual needs of the people around him, identifying what people needed and going to great lengths to fill it. He would never let anything stand in his way of helping another Jew. Presented here are a few of the stories and anecdotes illustrating this special trait:

His grandson, Reb Shlomo Galperin relates:

“My mother once told how she often found my grandfather sitting late into the night near candlelight, jotting down notes on small scraps of paper. Intrigued by his behavior, she couldn’t help but wonder what was bothering him at this hour so much as to disturb his sleep. One night, her curiosity got the better of her, and she peered over his shoulder to see what he was busy doing.

“To her surprise, she observed him meticulously recording various short notes. One note had the address and information of a mikvah; another detailed where to locate a children’s teacher; a third listed sources for kosher meat, tzitzis, mezuzos, or a chuppah.

“It turned out that whenever he walked through the streets and overheard a conversation of one woman telling another how their daughter gave birth to a boy but they did not have a mohel to do the bris or other such predicaments, Reb Yaakov would discreetly pass one of these notes to them. He made it his daily mission to assist in any way he could.”¹⁹

When Reb Yaakov was newly married and living in Schedrin, he would go every night to the local weddings, and try convincing the *chossan* and *kallah* to have a wedding in accordance with Halacha. First, he would find the grandmother and speak to her about the importance of a Jewish wedding. Then he said *l’chaim* with the guests, and by the time he finished the grandmother hopefully agreed to have

him officiate a proper Jewish wedding.²⁰

Reb Berke Chein once told a fascinating story that he witnessed of Reb Yaakov:

“I was once in Moscow for Shabbos, and on my way to shul, I saw Reb Yaakov standing in a grocery store near the checkout counter alongside a woman dressed in ripped clothing.

“At first I was utterly surprised at the sight, but as I observed further I understood what was happening. The store owner was slicing bread for his customers, adding a little extra to each bag in order to reach the full measurement. Reb Yaakov seized the opportunity to request these extra pieces from each shopper to give to the needy woman. By the time the line dwindled, Reb Yaakov had gathered enough bread to fill two bags. He handed them to the woman and continued on his way to shul.

“Later, I learned that Reb Yankel had encountered this woman on his way to shul, where she stood sobbing with tears. Upon investigation, he discovered she was a Jewish widow, and she and her children had been fasting for days.”²¹

Reb Mendel Futeras shared that when Reb Yaakov would encounter a *bochur* who was down during the month of Elul because they did not have sufficient funds to travel to the Friediker Rebbe, he would go and raise the amount of money that they needed to cover the trip.

Reb Folley Kahn spoke of the uniquely caring persona of Reb Yaakov, sharing the following stories:

“During one of my business trips away from home, I returned to Moscow at five in the morning and was taken aback to find Reb Yaakov strolling through Kalanchyovskaya Square, a neighborhood known to be unsafe for Jews. ‘Reb Yaakov,’ I asked, ‘where are you headed at this hour?’

“At first, he avoided my question, but eventually he confided that during a train ride a few weeks earlier, he struck up a conversation with a young man hailing from a small village in White Russia. This man, now working at a local factory and staying with a non-Jewish family, lamented that he couldn’t observe Shabbos due to his work, and that he didn’t even have enough time to daven because of his early shift. He also shared how he really wanted to mark his father’s upcoming *yahrtzeit* by davening, possibly even with a minyan, but wasn’t sure if he would manage. Reb Yaakov made a note of the *yahrtzeit* date, and now that date had arrived and he was heading out to wake the young man in time for davening.

“During the winter of 5691, I was sent into exile, leaving my wife and our four children behind in Moscow. As Pesach approached, my wife found herself grappling with how she

would make the Seder without having me there to lead it. The evening of the Seder arrived and she sat at home feeling down. Suddenly a knock was heard at the door. With trepidation, she opened the door to find Reb Yaakov standing there, his face radiant with joy as he warmly greeted the family with a resounding ‘*gut yom tov*.’

“Reb Yaakov wasted no time and sprang into action, swiftly setting the table and leading a beautiful seder for my family. His presence brought a sense of comfort and joy, alleviating some of the pain of my absence.

“After finishing the entire Seder, Reb Yaakov bid farewell and returned to his own family, who had eagerly awaited his return all night. He then started the Seder with his family, little did they know that it was actually his second round of conducting it that night.”

Reb Avrohom Drizin shared another incident that he witnessed with Reb Yaakov:

“Once, I was walking with Reb Zalman Kurnitzer and Reb Yaakov when we came upon a young couple. Reb Yaakov sensed they were Jewish and struck up a conversation. As they talked, he learned that they were living together without having had a proper Jewish wedding. So, Reb Yaakov gave them his address and invited them over.

“The next day, I needed Reb Yaakov urgently, but he was nowhere to be found. I finally saw him the next day, and he told me what had happened. The couple that we met had taken him up on his invitation and visited him. When they

HE IS NOT MISSING ANYTHING

When Reb Simcha Gorodetsky, a close friend of Reb Yaakov’s, traveled to the Rebbe for the first time, Reb Yaakov’s family requested that he ask the Rebbe when to commemorate their father’s *yahrtzeit* since there wasn’t any information about when he had passed away.

Reb Simcha conveyed the message in his first *yechidus*, and the Rebbe responded: “He is not missing anything, he is already long in the high realms. If the family would like, they can set [the date of the *yahrtzeit* to be] Chof-Daled Teves.”³²

arrived, he quickly sorted out all the wedding details, officiated their wedding, and even convinced the woman to keep *taharas hamishpacha*. He covered all the expenses, including purchasing mezuzos for their home.

“Another time, Reb Yaakov heard about a very poor person who couldn’t afford a bris for his son. Without hesitation, Reb Yaakov arranged for a mohel and prepared a beautiful meal, covering all the costs as usual.”²²

Much of Reb Yaakov’s behavior described in these stories and many more resemble practices that only became common in our generation. Reb Nissan Nemanov once expressed about Reb Yaakov that he fulfilled the Rebbe’s mitzvot before they were instituted similar to the *avos* who fulfilled the mitzvos before they were commanded.²³

Even in Exile

On 12 Elul 5695, close to midnight, following a tip-off to the government about their activities, a group of Chassidim in Moscow and Malachovka, including Reb Yaakov, were arrested and sent to Kazakhstan²⁴.

One of the proofs of this is in a letter sent to the United States from Moscow six days later:

“Please tell our father (referring to the Friediker Rebbe) and Anash, that they have started to engage in the things which are referred to in Parshas Vayeshev, *aliyah six, possuk chof* (which says: “And they took him to the prison...”) and included in our brothers is also the ‘father of the orphans’ Reb Yaakov ben Yehudis M’Zuravitch, and this is sufficient for the one who understands.”²⁵

Reb Abba Levin related his memories from his time



THESE PHOTOS OF REB YANKEL WERE TAKEN DURING HIS TIME IN SOVIET PRISON.

in Kazakhstan with Reb Yaakov:

“I lived in Moscow and worked independently in the heart of the city near the K.G.B.’s office.

“For strange reasons which I will not enumerate here, I was accused of being a counter-revolutionist against the government. For committing this crime, one would be exiled to Siberia for ten years or more. At the same time, Reb Yaakov Zuravitcher and Reb Shlomo Matusof were also accused, with no connection between us three. With Hashem’s kindness, we were given an ‘easy’ sentence of three years in Kazakhstan, and Boruch Hashem they did not separate the three of us.

“We were taken to a far-off place in the south of Kazakhstan, far from any civilization, about thirty-five kilometers from Shymkent.

“The town where they brought us to had only non-Jewish families, and there were no Jews other than us three. Our personal situations were quite distressing. I had been married for just a year, with a newborn daughter; Reb Shlomo Matusof was seventeen years old, and Reb Yaakov’s health condition was fragile. Yet astonishingly, Reb Yaakov kept a smile on his face the entire time. He always had words of encouragement and hope to share. Truthfully, throughout his time with us, he uplifted our spirits with his words, stories, and just with his presence.

IN THE MERIT OF CARING

During a Simchas Torah farbrengen in the year 5681 the Friediker Rebbe remarked:

“In Lubavitch there were students who weren’t dedicated [as much] to learning, but were dedicated to assisting other students with all of their needs, and eventually they excelled not only in *avodah* but also in understanding the revealed parts of Torah, and they served as teachers of the Jewish people, for example Reb Yaakov Maskalik from Zuravitch³³.”

“When Reb Yaakov Maskalik was still in the yeshiva of Lubavitch, he was already known for his generous heart, and would often be referred to as: “Der mame.”

He made our time there much more bearable.”²⁶

During his exile, Reb Yaakov not only uplifted his friends who were with him but also provided comfort and instilled hope in his relatives from afar. Reading the few letters he managed to send to them before he perished, we encounter the same unwavering optimism that defined him.

Presented here are excerpts from two such letters:

“Also when I sleep at night, I imagine as if am standing in front of the *baal hashmua* who is showing us smiling faces, and shining faces, and promises us that soon we will merit to be in the place about which it is written ‘the life of *neshamos*, the atmosphere of your land.’

“Life teaches the person, and a person learns by extracting a lesson from everything that he witnesses in the world. From everything that was created, there is a lesson to learn from. The nature of a deer is to turn his head back while he runs, surveying the lengthy trail he has covered in his desperate escape. This is because he is extremely tired from all of the running, escaping his predator, while ahead he sees tall mountains and deciduous forests which he still has yet to cross through. Therefore

Hashem gave him the nature to turn his head back. Seeing how many tall mountains he has already passed gives him the strength and courage to continue running to safety, where he can rest from his difficulties and tiredness...”²⁷


Unfortunately, Reb Yaakov did not finish the three years in Kazakhstan.

Reb Abba Levin recounts when Reb Yaakov was taken away, and almost certainly executed:

“More than two years after we were taken to Kazakhstan, the ‘angels of destruction’ came on a Shabbos morning and took Reb Yaakov from us.

“We knew that we could not ask any questions. After a few days, I saw how he was taken in an open vehicle to Shymkent. This was the last time that I saw Reb Yaakov.

“A few days later, a non-Jew told us that she has an acquaintance who works in the K.G.B. in Shymkent, and he told her that Reb Yaakov was shot to death. At first, we did not want to believe it, but after a few days and years went by and we had not heard from him, we started to believe that the story this lady told us might be true.

ד”ה.”²⁸ 

1. Otzar Hachassidim - USSR & Poland (Ashkenazi) p. 253.

2. Bitoon Chabad 1-10 p. 320.

3. Bitoon Chabad 1-10 p. 320.

4. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 160.

5. Zikaron L'Bnei Yisroel p. 30.

6. Zikaron L'Bnei Yisroel p. 30.

7. Beis Chayeinu #115 (5-12 Kislev 5752) p. 41.

8. Kfar Chabad issue 602.

9. Otzar Hachassidim p. 253.

10. Toldos Chabad B'Rusia HaSovietis p. 154.

11. Otzar Hachassidim p. 253.

12. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 160.

13. Bitoon Chabad 1-10 p. 321.

14. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 161.

15. Toldos Chabad B'Rusia HaSovietis p. 154.

16. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 161.

17. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 161.

18. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 162.

19. Teshurah Chein-Greenberg p. 19.

20. Otzar Hachassidim p. 256.

21. Otzar Hachassidim p. 254.

22. Kfar Chabad issue 602.

23. Otzar Hachassidim p. 265.

24. Anoshim Chassidim Hoyu p. 111.

25. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 163.

26. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 164.

27. Beis Chayeinu issue 115 p. 44 (Kislev 5752).

28. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 164

29. Kfar Chabad issue 603.

30. Otzar Hachassidim p. 265.

31. Toras Menachem vol. 2. p. 325.

32. B'ohr Hachassidus - year 3 p. 163.

33. Sefer Hasichos 5681 p. 10.