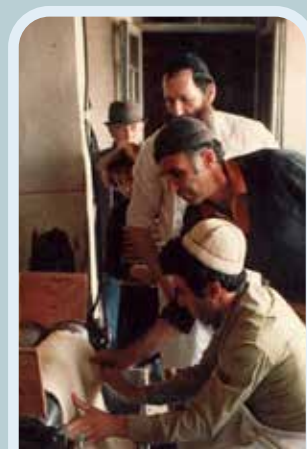


BY: RABBI MENDY GREENBERG (TWINSBURG, OH)

# A FLAME<sup>✦</sup> BEHIND THE FROST

THE CHABAD HOUSE BEHIND  
THE IRON CURTAIN



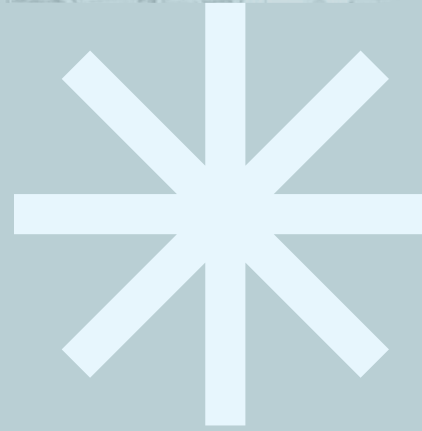
לזכות ברכה ליפשא תחי'  
לרגל יום הולדתה י"ז אלול

ולזכות מנחם מענדל שי'  
לרגל יום הולדתו ט' אלול

נדפס ע"י הוריהם הרה"ג הרה"ח ר' שלום דוב  
בער וזוגתו מרת ח' מושקא שיחיו שוחאט



**RABBI YITZCHOK KOGAN**  
**SERVES AS ONE OF THE**  
**ELDER SHLUCHIM OF**  
**MOSCOW AND RABBI**  
**OF THE BOLSHAYA**  
**BRONNAYA JEWISH**  
**CENTER. THIS IS THE**  
**INCREDIBLE STORY OF**  
**HIS LIFE AND WORK**  
**UNDER SOVIET RULE.**



## The Special Visit

“Let me share some memories from the past few days.”

With these words, a *kevutza bochur* begins a fascinating description of a special visitor at 770 one morning in Kislev, 5747.

“On the morning of Tes or Yud Kislev, I arrived at 770 from Seder Chassidus in Chovevei Torah for the 9:30 a.m. *minyan*, and a quiet buzz was going around—Reb Yitzchok Kogan—the *tzaddik from Leningrad*—had arrived.

“One by one, people slipped into the *cheder sheni* to see the ‘*tzaddik*’ for himself.

“Before davening, they made sure to stand him to the left of the *aron kodesh*, facing the entrance, so that he would be able to see the Rebbe when he arrived at 10:00.

“When the Rebbe entered for *krias haTorah*, Reb Yitzchok said *Shehecheyanu* aloud, and the Rebbe answered ‘Amen!’ The entire time, there was no overt reaction from the Rebbe, but when Reb Yitzchok performed *hagbah*, the Rebbe looked at him intently and wiped his holy eyes with his handkerchief again and again.

“Immediately after davening, a *farbrengen* began in the small *zal*. The crowd piled up into a human pyramid stretching to the ceiling. They brought out *mashke*, and a *lebedike farbrengen* went on for around two hours. People looked at him as if a rare celestial being had descended. Every word he uttered during his stay was considered holy.

“Before Maariv, Rabbi Groner approached him and whispered something in his ear. After Maariv, he and his wife went into *yechidus* with the Rebbe. They remained inside *Gan Eden Hatachton* for two hours and ten minutes!

“We waited the entire time outside the door. As soon as they emerged, we sang *Mimitzrayim Ge’altanu*, and Reb Mendel Futerfas, who was visibly moved by the *yechidus*, took hold of him and led him into the big shul, where a crowd had already gathered. Somehow, they managed to get him seated, and another exciting *farbrengen* began. He shared stories of the Rebbe, the Rebbe’s miracles, stories about *baalei teshuvah*, and the Rebbe’s *brachos*.

“On Friday night, after davening, many people approached him to wish him ‘*Gut Shabbos*’ and he greeted everyone warmly. Everyone saw in him a real *tziyur* of a Chossid.

“The night before his departure, he and his wife went in again for a half-hour *yechidus*. The next morning, they left for the airport.

“*Thus ends the story of the Tzaddik from Leningrad in Lubavitch.*”<sup>1</sup>

This remarkable description was not about an elder chossid from a previous generation. This Reb Yitzchok didn’t have a long white beard, and he wasn’t a *Tomim* from Lubavitch who had seen the Rebbe Rashab.

His was a very different pedigree. For the previous ten years, he had been responsible for a spiritual revolution in the most unlikely of places—his hometown, the city of Leningrad. His ‘Chabad House’ had been operating right under the nose of the Soviet regime.

## The Center in Leningrad

Yiddishkeit in the Soviet Union was almost non-existent in the 5730s. The legendary Chabad underground had largely petered out after the Great Escape of 5706, and even the small Chabad community that remained behind mostly left the Soviet Union in the years after the Six-Day War. Only a tiny handful of Chassidim remained.

At the same time, interest in Jewish life was on the rise. Inspired by the miracles of the Six-Day War, an entire generation of young Jews desperately wanted to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel and reconnect with their people. Many indeed submitted requests to leave, only to be rejected and branded as refuseniks, immediately losing their jobs and livelihoods. Suddenly, thousands of young Jewish men and women wanted to reconnect—but had no sense of



RABBI YITZCHOK KOGAN AND HIS WIFE AT JFK AIRPORT AFTER ARRIVING IN THE U.S.A. FOR THE FIRST TIME.



REB YITZCHOK WITH RUSSIAN REFUSNIKS IN LENINGRAD, 5740S.

direction. There was no one to guide them.

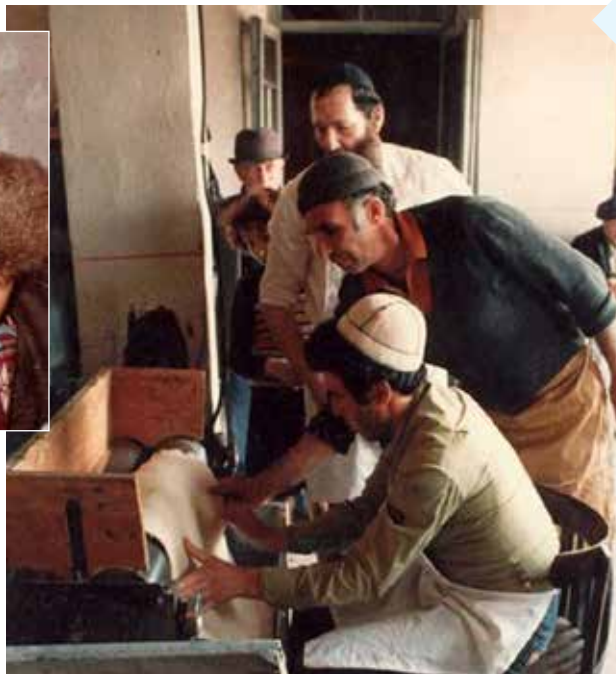
Then, in Leningrad, news began to spread among the Jewish community: Yiddishkeit could be found in the home of Izya and Sofia Kogan, a young, dynamic couple whose home was open 24 hours a day. Yomim Tovim, weddings, *brissin*, Torah classes, kosher food, or even just a kind heart and a listening ear—it was all possible at the Kogan home, on the fourth floor of a nondescript Leningrad apartment building.

Moshe Shapir was a young Jew studying at Leningrad University. Somehow, he received Reb Yitzchok's address and soon became a regular guest in his home.

"Life in his home was incredibly interesting. There were never fewer than ten people in the house at any given time. There was always a pile of shechted chickens ready, and each time, his wife would prepare large amounts of food for the guests.

"His home served as a shul and the central hub of Jewish life in Leningrad. His close circle would often conduct secret weddings and *brissin*. At times, close to a hundred people would squeeze into the small room.

"Every Shabbos, dozens of guests would join him. When everyone sat down to eat together, it naturally turned into a farbrengen. They would sing together, say *l'chaim*, and Reb Yitzchok would share words of Torah. There were always new people there, experiencing Shabbos or a Pesach Seder for the very first time. His home was open 24 hours a day, and I have no doubt that among the many unfamiliar faces were also undercover KGB agents."<sup>2</sup>



DIRECTING THE SECRET MATZA BAKING.

Alexander Sheinin was another young man searching for Yiddishkeit who found his way to Reb Yitzchok's home, and was immediately hooked. "Rabbi Kogan would give lessons in his kitchen. I was completely drawn in. I felt like I had finally found the path, the direction I had been searching for."

Alexander's parents weren't particularly thrilled about his new direction in life, so he moved out of his parents' home and rented a small room of his own; "a few crates served as a table, and a few more as a closet." As soon as he settled into his new 'apartment,' he asked Rabbi Kogan to begin teaching Hebrew lessons in his living room.

"Rabbi Kogan taught the word *shalom*—not just as a greeting used when meeting or parting, but also as one of the names of Hashem. So, while learning Hebrew, we were also learning about Yiddishkeit. During one of the first lessons, he pulled candles from his pocket, arranged them on a chair, said the *brachos*, and lit them. That was the first time in our lives we celebrated Chanukah."<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Zalman Aharon Grossbaum, shlich to Toronto, went on a shlichus to Russia in the 5740s together with Rabbi Aryeh Leib Kaplan *a"h* of Tzfas where they visited Moscow, Kiev, and Leningrad. When they arrived in Leningrad, a key place on their itinerary was the Kogan home.

\* 5740s-1980s

“We came there on a Friday night,” he related in his interview with *A Chassidisher Derher*. “Despite the fact that he lived on the fourth floor of a building without an elevator, there was no problem with a *minyan*; the home was overflowing with people, all trickling in quietly, one by one.

“Generally, the young Jews didn’t speak a word of Yiddish, so all our conversations were in *lashon hako-desh*, which many of them had painstakingly learned from Mishnayos or Rashi. I saw immediately that there were no shortcuts in Russia; whatever they knew was because someone had sat and taught them a Mishnah in Pe’ah or Megillah or Bava Basra—whatever *bletel* they had become the resource through which they learned Aleph-Beis and everything else they knew.

“There was a stark difference between the *ruchnius* and the *gashmius*. The apartment was old, the wallpaper was peeling, but there was always room for another person. This was true wherever we went in Russia—there was always another chair or milk carton for another guest, and no one counted place settings. Somehow, another fork or spoon would materialize for the latest arrival.

“At the Shabbos meal in the Kogan home, Mrs. Kogan introduced her children and noted that her teenage daughter was walking home from the other side of Leningrad.

“Mrs. Kogan explained to me that her school had a recital that day, which she was forced to attend. Since Shabbos came in very early—it was the month of

Teves—she had gone straight from school to a friend’s house nearby to *bentch licht*, and then she would walk for several hours across the whole city to get home without being *mechalel Shabbos*.

“I was astounded at what I heard. It was unbelievable.”

## Full Circle

Reb Yitzchok Kogan himself had roots in Chabad. His mother’s father, Reb Yosef Tamarin, had been a chosid of the Frierdiker Rebbe and pillar of Yiddishkeit in Leningrad. When the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia, he told Reb Yosef that *ayere kinder bleiben mit*, your children will remain connected to Yiddishkeit. But when Yitzchok was only three years old, his grandfather was caught baking matzah for the Jews of the city. The NKVD called him in for interrogation after interrogation; upon leaving one such encounter, tragedy struck. His heart gave out and he passed away.

Growing up, ‘Izya’ would always bring a kosher lunch to school and look for excuses to avoid attending on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Old chassidim would come to tutor him in the afternoons, teaching him basics like *davening*. But as he reached his teenage years, he followed the route of most Jewish youth through high school and university, and was later employed in a technological department of the Red Army. For several years, Yiddishkeit wasn’t a central factor in his life.<sup>4</sup>



But then, in the years following the Six-Day War, Reb Yitzchok and his wife felt the pull of Eretz Yisroel along with so many of their brethren and applied to leave. After a long two year wait, their application was denied. They were summarily fired from their jobs and placed under strict surveillance of the KGB. They were no longer honored citizens of the Soviet paradise; now they were criminal suspects.

A small group of refuseniks in Leningrad banded together to support one another. They attempted to learn Hebrew and hoped for an eventual release from Russia, doing what they could in the meantime to survive. With no background in Jewish education, the group had very little involvement in Yiddishkeit.<sup>5</sup>

A turning point came just before Pesach.

Reb Yitzchok had been invited to a Passover celebration on the night of the Seder. When he asked where it would be held, he was shocked to hear it was scheduled to take place in a restaurant.

“That was just too much,” he later shared. “I asked them, ‘How can it be that on the night of the Seder—when the entire Jewish people around the world are sitting and conducting a Seder—we’ll be sitting in a non-Jewish restaurant having a party?!’ I managed to convince them to move the event to a different night.”

Afterward, he realized that they were not to blame. They simply didn’t know anything about Yiddishkeit! The thought bothered him so much that he decided to invite everyone to his home for the Seder. At the time, the Kogan family lived in a two-room apartment—but Reb Yitzchok invited no fewer than 46 friends!

“That Seder night was one I will never forget. We even had a guest from Eretz Yisroel who led the Seder. My friends and I had never before experienced such pure joy and spiritual elevation.”<sup>6</sup>

He began attending shul every Shabbos, and his connection to Yiddishkeit steadily grew. He reconnected with the elder Chassidim he had known in his youth, becoming a close *talmid* of Reb Refoel Neymotin, an elderly *Tomim* from Lubavitch still living in Leningrad, and other Chassidim like Reb Avraham Medalia. Soon, he was a full-fledged Lubavitcher chossid.<sup>7</sup>

He never forgot about his fellow refuseniks.



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

TWO PICTURES SMUGGLED TO THE REBBE OF REB YITZCHOK WITH MEKURAVIM AND CHASSIDIM VISITING FROM AMERICA.



REB YITZCHOK AS A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY (CENTER) WITH HIS PARENTS.



REB YOSEF TAMARIN, MATERNAL GRANDFATHER OF REB YITZCHOK KOGAN.



ONE OF THE ANNUAL PURIM SHPIELS THAT TOOK PLACE AT THE KOGAN HOME.

“We were still a young couple, and many of them would come to our home, simply because they sensed a real Yiddishe atmosphere there. On Shabbos and Yom Tov, there was a special warmth that left a deep impression on them.

“When I saw how moved they were, I realized I had to start teaching. I began learning with a few young refusniks, and the more I taught and the more they asked, the more I realized how much I still needed to learn myself.”

The shul in Leningrad was crawling with listening devices and informers, so he opened a private *minyán* in his home and began giving *shiurim* regularly. Soon, the Kogan home became a spiritual hub for an entire community—dozens of young families who turned to him for everything from kosher food to *seforim* to halachic guidance.

Though the Kogan apartment was no more than two small rooms, every Shabbos, it was packed with people. Dozens would join for davening and the *seudos*, and many would stay well into the night.<sup>8</sup>

It wasn't only Russian Jews who were finding their way there. One frum visitor from the United States recalled how comical it seemed when Reb Yitzchok tried to plot with him how to be *mekarev* the secular Israeli who had been sent to Russia on behalf of the Israeli government. The Israeli had ostensibly come to help the Russian, but that's not how the Russian saw it.

Rabbi Zalman Aharon Grossbaum had a similar experience during his Friday night visit to the Kogan home:

“While waiting for the *minyán* to come, I noticed a young man there, and approached him to open a conversation. I opened in Hebrew, but he didn't understand. He didn't understand my Yiddish either. To my shock, he began speaking to me in perfect English! As it turned out, he was a South African who was studying in Philadelphia, and he had arrived in the Soviet Union as an exchange student majoring in languages.

“So you found Yiddishkeit through Chabad in South Africa?” I asked.

“No,” he replied.

“So it must have been in Philadelphia,” I said.

“Not there either,” he answered. “In Leningrad, I met Rabbi Kogan, and he brought me to Yiddishkeit.”

“I was floored. He had lived all his life in locations with a strong Chabad presence, and yet no one had reached him there. Where did he find his connection? In a lonely fourth floor apartment behind the Iron Curtain, in a secret *minyán*, where the participants had to quietly enter one by one to ensure nobody noticed...”

## Under the Nose of the KGB

One of Reb Yitzchok's *mekuravim* was Reb Dovid Aldin. His first meeting with his future *mashpia* was also his first meeting with the KGB—a very close call:

“Despite the tremendous obstacles we faced,” Reb Dovid related, “we always tried to stay joyful. One special



REB YITZCHOK KOGAN IN LENINGRAD SOON AFTER HE BEGAN HIS FULL RETURN TO YIDDISHKEIT.

tradition we had each year was a *Purim Shpiel*, where we would retell the story of the Megillah, adding ‘contemporary’ commentary to the story.

“One year, on Purim night, dozens of us gathered in a private apartment for the Purim celebration, and I met Reb Yitzchok Kogan there for the first time.

“Most of the guests had already arrived, but before the program even began, KGB agents burst into the apartment. They blocked the doors and windows and ordered everyone to stay in place. We were terrified—we thought it was the end. But instead, we experienced a Purim miracle; the agents recorded everyone’s names and details, then expelled us from the apartment. And that was it.

“The next day, I was summoned by the principal of the school where I worked. She rebuked me harshly and said: ‘I know you participate in these gatherings, and that you encourage others to learn about Judaism. My advice to you: stop immediately.’”

Throughout those years, Reb Dovid was ‘invited’ to many ‘discussions’ with the KGB. (He was lucky—others from Reb Yitzchok’s circle spent time in prison as well). Every time, they warned him: stay away from Kogan and his friends! Don’t exchange even one word with them!

Despite the lessening intensity of the KGB persecution in those years, the danger was still

real and acute, and one needed to carefully weed out informants from joining the *peulos*. But as the years passed, Reb Yitzchok made a firm decision: no more fear of the KGB. He carried himself with unwavering resolve, despite knowing full well that “they” were monitoring his every move. He moved to a much larger apartment, making his presence far more conspicuous, but refused to be afraid.

“One time,” Reb Yitzchok recalled, “my wife told me that a coworker of hers had asked if she and her family could come to our home for the Seder. My wife was very nervous and said to me, ‘They don’t even look Jewish. Who knows? Maybe they’re KGB agents sent to spy on us and see what we’re doing.’

“I told her, ‘How can we make such calculations? In other areas of halacha, we are meticulous to the finest detail. If there’s even the slightest question in shechita, we go *lechumra*. And here, when it comes to a Yiddishe *neshama*, are we going to be *meikel* and turn them away?’

“In the end, the entire family came to the Seder—and they ended up staying for the rest of Yom Tov. They became full *baalei teshuvah*, and eventually became some of the most dedicated activists we left behind. All from that one Seder night.”

## The Test

From his early childhood, Reb Yitzchok’s mother would tell him: “You should know: there is a Rebbe who cares for every Jew in the world.” As a youngster, it sounded like a fairy tale; how could one person be in tune with the entire world? But her words made an impact.

When he reconnected with the Lubavitcher Chassidim in Leningrad, he finally had the opportunity to forge his own connection with the Rebbe. Rabbi Dovber Levy came to Russia armed with a video camera, and every person at the farbrengen had the opportunity to talk directly to the Rebbe through the screen.

After hearing so much about the Rebbe, Reb Yitzchok decided that he needed to ‘test’ this phenomenon. At the time, Yosef Mendelevitch was a very well-known refusenik languishing in a Siberian gulag with a sentence of many years ahead of him. Reb Yitzchok used the opportunity to ask

REB MOTTEL “DER SHOCHET” LIFSHITZ PERFORMING SIDUR KIDDUSHIN IN THE JEWISH UNDERGROUND.



for a *bracha* for his release.

“A few months passed with no news of him,” Reb Yitzchok related. “Then, I decided to take a few days off to visit his prison camp and try my luck at getting some information about him. I came home from work, davened Mincha and Maariv, and turned on the radio to hear the world news on the BBC broadcast. When I heard the news, I almost fainted. I couldn’t contain myself. They reported, ‘Right now, Yosef Mendelevitch is on an airplane headed for Vienna, and will continue directly to Israel.’

“I never tested the Rebbe again.”

## The Shechita Message

One major challenge in the Soviet Union was kosher food. At one point, no kosher meat could be obtained in Leningrad for a full two years. The city’s aging shochet had become too frail to continue, and there was simply no one to take his place.

One day, Reb Mottel “*der shochet*” Lifshitz arrived from Moscow to perform a *bris milah* for a close friend of Reb Yitzchok Kogan. After the bris, as they sat together at the table, Reb Yitzchok asked him to do some shechita before he left. “Reb Mottel, my children haven’t seen meat in two years. Shecht something! A chicken, an ox, anything!”

But Reb Mottel refused. “Izya,” he said, “I can’t. If the authorities find out I shechted here, they’ll revoke my permit in Moscow. But you—you’re young. You should study shechita. Come to my home for a month and I’ll teach you how to shecht chickens.”

When Reb Yitzchok’s mother heard that he was about

to travel away for an extended period of time, she found an elderly chossid in Leningrad to teach him locally. He soon became an expert shochet for chickens, but there was no competent Rav to give him a *kabbalah*, which meant that the elder *shochtim*, like Reb Refoel Neymotin, would need to accompany him each time to be *omed al gabav*. The chossid who taught him warned him not to go to any official government-sanctioned rabbis for certification, because they were under constant surveillance and his own safety would be compromised.

Shlepping elder Jews around wasn’t something he enjoyed, and after several months, Reb Yitzchok decided that *kapparos* on Erev Yom Kippur would be his final shechita. Then he would wait for a visiting *rav* from abroad to give him a proper *kabbalah*. The Rebbe had already sent several *rabbanim*, but Soviet authorities had caught wind of them and turned them all back at the border.

In the middle of *kapparos*, he was approached by the old chossid Reb Avraham Medalia. Reb Yitzchok only knew him as a math professor, but now Reb Avraham leaned in and said quietly, “Reb Refoel told me you need a *kabbalah*. I am a *rav*, but I can’t say so publicly. I’ve already spent seventeen years in prison. Let me watch you shecht, and if it’s good, I’ll give you a *kabbalah*.”

He watched, approved, and gave his *kabbalah*—but not in writing. “I’ve sat in prison long enough,” he said. “If anyone questions your certification, send them to me. I’ll explain why I couldn’t write it down.”

Moments later, someone called his name: “Izya! Izya!” A young man known as Yehudah Hakatan had just arrived



REB REFOEL  
NEYMOTIN  
INSPECTING REB  
YITZCHOK'S SHECHITA  
KNIVES, 5740.

from Moscow. “I don’t really understand what this means,” Yehuda told him, “but the Rebbe sent a message for you: *‘Tikach misras shechita b’yadecha—Take upon yourself the role of shechita.’*” The Rebbe’s message had arrived just seconds after he had become a shochet.

A few months later, Rabbi Levy visited Leningrad. He tested Reb Yitzchok and issued his first official *kabbalah*.

At the time, he was only shechting chickens, and he didn’t think it qualified as fully “taking on shechita,” as the Rebbe had said. But within a few short months, he had become a teacher to a full yeshivah of students from across the Soviet Union—young men who came to learn shechita from him.

When one of those students left Russia, he asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* that Reb Yitzchok should merit to leave as well. By then, Reb Yitzchok had been waiting seven years for an exit visa.

The Rebbe responded that “I give him a *bracha* in everything that he does.”

“In those years,” Reb Yitzchok related, “we accomplished things that by any natural measure were simply impossible.”<sup>11</sup>

## Taking Leave

For twelve long years, the long-awaited exit visas failed to appear. Then, on Yud-Beis Tammuz 5746, he received the call: his exit visa had been

approved.

It was incredible news, but they were unsure whether they should use the opportunity to leave. By then they were central figures in Yiddishkeit in Leningrad, and they knew that the Rebbe didn’t approve of leaving Russia if one was active in *hafatzas hamaayanos*.

They sent a message with the question to the Rebbe, and soon, the response came back: move to Eretz Yisroel.

In the weeks leading up to their departure, Reb Yitzchok divided his responsibilities. One *mekurav* would take over the *minyán*, another would oversee the Torah classes, another the *shechita*, and so on. On the Shabbos before their departure, sixty Jews traveled from across the Soviet Union to spend those final hours with him. It was a very difficult moment; at that time, no one imagined the Iron Curtain would fall just a few years later. For all they knew, this goodbye was forever.

Under the watchful eyes of the KGB, a large crowd accompanied the Kogans to the airport. As the time came to board, the crowd broke out in a chassidishe dance. Even the KGB could not stop them.

When they arrived at the Ben Gurion Airport, crowds of people were waiting. The accounts of the Jewish resurgence in Leningrad had already made its way to Eretz Yisroel, and the newspapers all came to catch the moment. Cameras flashed as the person who had become known as “the Tzaddik

of Leningrad” appeared—a young Jew, straight out of the Soviet Union, but looking like the full chossid he was, with a hat, *kapote*, and long black beard.<sup>12</sup>

Reb Yitzchok himself would quip that he was specifically called the Tzaddik of Leningrad, a city with very little Yiddishkeit, “because to be the Tzaddik of Yerushalayim would be a much more difficult task...”

## The Yechidus

Three weeks after arriving in Eretz Yisroel, the Kogans boarded a plane to New York and merited the *yechidus* described above.

The *yechidus* was at a table in *Gan Eden Hatachton*, and as they entered, they realized that three chairs had been set up. When the Rebbe asked them to sit, they initially remained standing, but then the Rebbe said, “I know you were told not to sit, but it will be more comfortable for me

if you sit, because our conversation will be a long one.”

Reb Yitzchok gave the Rebbe a detailed *duch* about their activities, and the Rebbe began asking questions—about their exit visas, about Jewish life in Leningrad, and about the general state of Yiddishkeit in the Soviet Union.

The Rebbe gave detailed *horaos* for the broader Russian public. The Rebbe explained that Soviet Jews needed to know that their mission was not to protest. The priority was living a Jewish life—learning Torah, observing *mitzvos*, and especially giving children a Jewish education. Yidden who had already emigrated needed to understand that reaching Eretz Yisroel or the West was only the beginning—their journey toward Torah and *mitzvos* was just starting.

The Rebbe spoke against the public demonstrations, telling Reb Yitzchok that “The government wants to change—it must not be disturbed.”<sup>13</sup> Soon, the Rebbe said, the gates of Russia would open wide. Jews would

## ONE HALACHA OF RAMBAM

When the Rebbe launched the *takana* of learning Rambam daily, it was no small challenge for a Jew living in Soviet Leningrad. *Seforim* were scarce, and a full set of Rambam was nowhere to be found.

Still, Reb Yitzchok was determined to participate. He traveled to a friend who happened to own a few worn pamphlets—just the *halachos* of Shabbos. That’s where he began learning Rambam.

As he learned, one concept stood out to him. The Rambam writes that we honor Shabbos by ‘accompanying’ it like one would escort an important guest. The image lodged itself in his mind.

Some time later, a Jewish couple from Phoenix, Arizona, arrived in Leningrad. Unprepared for the brutal Russian winter, they braved the frigid weather and walked six kilometers on Shabbos to join Reb Yitzchok for a meal. By the time they arrived, the *seuda* was already over, but they were welcomed warmly, given food and drink, and stayed until the end of Shabbos.

With the memory of the Rambam’s “accompanying,” Reb Yitzchok decided to accompany them back

to their hotel. He wanted to drive them, but his car’s engine was frozen solid. Instead, he ordered a taxi and paid the driver out of his own pocket to take them.

Several years later, in 5748, Reb Yitzchok and his wife were visiting the United States and were invited to speak in Phoenix. The community—including some members of the Reform congregation—greeted them warmly.

After his lecture, he asked where he could find kosher food in the city. They told him, “There are only two homes in Phoenix where the kashrus is truly *mehudar*: the shliach’s house, and another family that became fully observant because of you.”

He was taken aback. “Because of me?” he asked.

They explained: “Years ago, they visited Leningrad and spent Shabbos at your home. They were touched by your warmth, but what made the deepest impression was what happened after Shabbos: that you personally walked them to the taxi and even paid the driver yourself. They had come to help Russian Jews—but in the end, it was a Russian Jew who helped them. That moment stayed with them. They began keeping Shabbos and kashrus, and have become fully observant.”<sup>10</sup>



REB YITZCHOK RECEIVES A DOLLAR FROM THE REBBE, 5750.

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soon be allowed to leave the Soviet Union freely, and it was time to begin preparing to receive them, particularly in Eretz Yisroel.

The Rebbe also said that they should make sure to preserve their Russian—they would still need it.

Indeed, just a few years later, they would return to Russia to help the *yaldei Chernobyl* and to assist in attempts to recover the Rebbe's library. Ultimately, they would remain there to stay; today Reb Yitzchok serves as the *shliach* in the Bolshaya district of Moscow and *rav* of the beautiful Bolshaya Bronnaya shul and Jewish center.

After over two hours in *yechidus*, they rose to leave, and Mrs. Kogan—who was usually quiet and reserved—suddenly burst out in Russian: “Rebbe, we will do everything in our power!”

The Rebbe smiled and responded in Yiddish: “*Ah Chossid tut merer vi er hot kochos*—A Chossid does more than he has the strength for.”<sup>14</sup> **T**

1. *Otzros Lubavitch* 5782 p. 14.
2. *Toldos Chabad B'Peterburg* p. 293.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
5. “Profile in Courage: The Tzadik of Leningrad,” [lubavitch.com/profile-in-courage-the-tzadik-of-leningrad/](http://lubavitch.com/profile-in-courage-the-tzadik-of-leningrad/).
6. *Sichat Hashavua*, Vayigash 5747.
7. “The Tzaddik of Leningrad Looks Back 30 Years After the Fall of the USSR,” [chabad.org/5387559](http://chabad.org/5387559).
8. *Toldos Chabad B'Peterburg* p. 289.
9. “My Encounter,” *Living Torah* Program 677.
10. *Yomim Tovim Im HaRebbi*, pg. 126.
11. “My Encounter,” *Living Torah* 746.
12. *Toldos Chabad B'Peterburg* p. 265.
13. See “Quiet Diplomacy,” *Derher Sivan* 5778.
14. “The Tzaddik of Leningrad Looks Back 30 Years After the Fall of the USSR,” [chabad.org/5387559](http://chabad.org/5387559).