

City *of Our* Forefathers

The CHABAD
COMMUNITY *of*
CHEVRON

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לזכות הגה"ח
הרב אברהם ליב זוגתו
שיחיו שוחאט
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר
למדינת ונצואלה,

לרגל מלאות ארבעים
שנה לשליחותם
(תשמ"ה-תשפ"ה)

ers

The Pre-History

When Reb Mendel Horodoker arrived in Eretz Yisroel with over 300 Chassidim, they quickly found a suitable place to live. The city of Tzfas lay desolate after suffering a terrible earthquake several years earlier. They settled in the empty homes, davened in the Beis Yosef Shul, *toiveled* in the Arizal's mikvah, and davened at the many holy *kevarim* in the area. It seemed like a spiritual paradise.

But things quickly turned sour. The local Pasha demanded heavy taxes, and the Sephardi community leaders demanded money for the city's upkeep. The Chassidim couldn't keep up. Huge sums had been spent to feed and clothe the many impoverished families who had joined the Aliyah, and there was nothing left. Soon, the Pasha threatened to arrest the community members, and Reb Mendel fell ill in distress.

A minor salvation occurred when tzedakah money sent by the Alter Rebbe finally arrived, but everyone realized that Tzfas had no future. Soon, Reb Mendel and most of the Chassidim relocated to Tveria.

At first, the Sephardi community leaders seemed to be more welcoming, but things soon soured there as well.

When the Chassidim wanted to open their own shul, the local community leader refused to give his approval, claiming that it was forbidden by the Ottomans; he gave

the Chassidim a *cheder-sheni* of the local shul instead.

Soon, however, the loud and enthusiastic davening of the Chassidim disturbed the locals, and the community leader 'remembered' that opening a new shul was permitted. Relieved, the Chassidim began davening in Reb Mendel's home and in his courtyard, but the problem wasn't resolved. In the description of one Chossid, "Reb Mendel's *beis midrash* was right under the open windows of the Rosh Hakahal's home; the thundering sounds of davening would arise as the Rosh Hakahal sat over his pot of meat, long after his davening had concluded. He could hardly stand it; it made his life unbearable."¹

Problems continued to arise after the passing of Reb Mendel Horodoker. He was succeeded by Reb Avraham Kalisker, who became a vocal opponent of the Alter Rebbe. Soon, the Chassidim were splintered into two groups—supporters of Reb Avraham Kalisker, and Chassidim of the Alter Rebbe. Tensions were high. Reb Avraham Kalisker set up his own tzedakah system for his Chassidim, and the Alter Rebbe's *chaluka* was the main source of funding for his Chassidim.

Feeling unwanted and persecuted, Chabad Chassidim began to migrate back to Tzfas. But living conditions there hadn't improved, and a new solution was needed. In the early years of the Mittlerer Rebbe's *nesius*, he sent them a message: the Chabad Chassidim should move to Chevron.²

Why Chevron?

The Rebbe once related that when the Mittlerer Rebbe established the Chabad *yishuv* in Chevron, he chose several Chassidim to travel from Russia to Eretz Yisroel to be its founders. The Chassidim protested, "What will be with Chassidus?" (i.e., their visits to hear Chassidus from the Rebbe). In response, the Mittlerer Rebbe promised to personally send them *ksavim*. The Rebbe noted that, in fact, numerous *kisvei yad* were discovered in the possession of grandchildren of the Chevron Chassidim.³

Who were those Chassidim who traveled from Russia directly to Chevron? The above story is told about Reb Yisrael Yaffe, "the printer from Kopust" who had been very active in publishing Sifrei Chassidus for the Mittlerer Rebbe.

Another instance of a Chossid moving to Eretz



THE HOME OF REB MENDEL HORODOKER AND HIS SHUL ON THE UPPER FLOOR OF HIS HOME.

Yisroel was preserved in the Shmerling family history. According to this account, Reb Shimon Shmerling was a wealthy Chossid of the Mittler Rebbe living in Shklov. One day, when he arrived for Tishrei to the Mittler Rebbe, he received a surprise Shlichus—the Mittler Rebbe asked him to travel to Eretz Yisroel and find a suitable living space for *anash* there. He spent over a year on the road, and after a long and difficult journey, returned to Lubavitch with his findings. Soon the Chabad community in Chevron was born.⁴

The small Sephardi community was exceptionally welcoming. Unlike Tzfas and Tveria, where conflict was far too common, the Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Chevron worked together with remarkable harmony. Over the next century, the community would remain united.

As Chassidim began moving into the Jewish quarter, resources were needed to help establish the new community, and two *shadarim* were dispatched to Russia to raise funds—Reb Shimon Shmerling and Reb Leib “Baal Yisurim” (the sainted Chossid of the Alter Rebbe who was famously asked to become a rebbe himself).

Reb Shimon came up with a unique strategy. He began to sell “*daled amos* of Chevron” to all major donors; instead of simply giving *tzedakah*, they now had the opportunity to symbolically own a piece of land in Eretz Yisroel, and in the holy city of Chevron, no less. His campaign reached a pinnacle of success when the Mittler Rebbe wrote a letter supporting the effort, and personally purchased a piece of land, the “Avraham Avinu shul,” for the Chassidim.

The letter did not survive, but the *rav* of Chevron, Reb Shimon Menashe Chaikin, shared what he had seen in his youth: “I testify to what I saw with my own eyes—a handwritten letter by the Mittler Rebbe... In the letter, he wrote as follows: ‘I found a statement attributed to the Radbaz, that anyone

THE STORY OF THE AVRAHAM AVINU SHUL

The Mittler Rebbe’s property in Chevron was a portion of the Avraham Avinu shul; the central hall hosted a Sephardi minyan, and the Mittler Rebbe purchased the small adjacent shul for the Chassidim. The following story is told about how the Shul got its name:

Hundreds of years ago, the Jewish community of Chevron numbered only nine Jewish residents. There was no *minyan* during the week, and they depended on Jews from nearby villages for Shabbos and Yom Tov.

One Erev Yom Kippur, the nine Jews waited for visitors from the surrounding villages to arrive, but no one came. They later learned that everyone had gone to Yerushalayim instead. They prepared to begin Yom Kippur, saddened by the prospect of davening without a *minyan*.

Suddenly, an elderly man appeared. They invited him to join them for the *seudah hamafsekes*, but he explained he had already eaten. Overjoyed, they began the Yom Kippur *tefillos*.

After the fast, the group drew lots to decide who would host the guest for the break-fast meal, and the *chazzan*, who was also the *shamash*, was selected. However, as he escorted the man to his home, the guest suddenly disappeared. The entire community joined forces to find him, to no avail. He was gone.

That night, the elderly man appeared to the *chazan* in a dream. “I am Avraham Avinu,” he said. “I saw your distress over not having a *minyan*, so I came to join you.”⁶



THE ORIGINAL AVRAHAM AVINU SHUL, 5685.

who owns land in Chevron will be spared from *chibut hakever* (painful refinement of the body after death).”

The Mittlerer Rebbe also sent a letter to all the Chassidim in Russia, extolling the spiritual virtues of the Chevron. He explained that all the *tefillos* we daven in the diaspora rise to Hashem through Chevron, the resting place of our three forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who represent the three *tefillos* of Shacharis, Mincha, and Maariv. Therefore, the Mittlerer Rebbe concluded, anyone who holds Chevron dear should do everything in their power to support the Jewish community of that holy city.⁵

The Black Rabbi

In those days, Chevron was a backwater. To reach the city from Russia, one would travel first to Kushta (Istanbul), take a ship to the port city of Yaffo, from there ride by camel to Gaza, and then across the desert to Chevron. Often the journey was done riding in boxes hanging off both sides of a camel. It was quite literally a life-threatening journey.

Politically, the situation was even worse. Unlike Tzfas or Tveria, which were close to the port city of Acco and were semi-civilized, Chevron had no formal government in place and was controlled by local Bedouin tribes. For protection, the Jewish community would pay “protection

money” to the most powerful sheikh in the area, Sheikh Abdul Rachman.

The man tyrannized the entire city. He would walk down the streets and help himself to anything that struck his fancy, and with the Jews as his “subjects,” they were obviously no exception.

One day, the sheikh visited the home of Reb Levi Yitzchak Slonim, who was responsible for distributing funds for Colel Chabad. Seeing the money and ledgers, he told Reb Levi Yitzchak, “You know that I could take all of this by force. But I am a fair man, and I would not deprive the poor of their livelihood. However, in exchange for my protection, I feel entitled to be listed among your respected rabbis.”

With little choice, Reb Levi Yitzchak included him in the list of prominent recipients and referred to him in the Colel Chabad records as “the Black Rabbi.” He would receive bi-annual contributions before each Yom Tov, and in turn, promised the Jews protection.

The situation was obviously far from perfect. The sheikh himself was always involved in wars with neighboring tribes, and on one occasion, when the battle didn’t go his way, the city was overrun, and a terrible pogrom was perpetrated against the Jewish community. The sheikh himself abused the Jewish community at every opportunity, seeing how helpless they were. The difficult situation continued for many years, until the Ottomans finally deposed him.⁷

Despite the difficulties, the Chassidim were steadfast in their commitment to remain in Chevron. The reason? The Rebbe’s *ratzon*.

This sentiment was beautifully expressed in a letter written by Reb Shimon Menashe Chaikin, the *rav* of the Chassidim in Chevron, towards the end of his life:

“I am ninety years old, thank G-d... Here in Chevron we have four hundred souls in our community... and I can testify what I saw with my own eyes from the time of the Mittlerer Rebbe, when *anash* were living together with the *poilisher* Chassidim in Tzfas. In those days, the Rebbe commanded us to establish our community in Chevron, and we fulfilled his directive.

“Despite the persecutions we suffered at the hands of the Chevron strongmen, his directive preserved our spirit to fulfill the will of the Tzaddik who placed immense effort to establish a community in Chevron.



REB MORDECHAI DOVBER SLONIM, SON OF REBBETZIN MENUCHA ROCHEL, ARRIVED IN CHEVRON WITH HIS PARENTS AT THE AGE OF FIVE. IN THIS PHOTO, TAKEN IN CHEVRON SHORTLY BEFORE HIS PASSING, REB MORDECHAI DOVBER IS SEEN SURROUNDED BY HIS DESCENDANTS. IT WAS SAID THAT HIS APPEARANCE WAS VERY SIMILAR TO THAT OF HIS GRANDFATHER, THE MITTELER REBBE.

HIS GRANDSON REB YAAKOV YOSEF SLONIM, THE LAST RAV OF CHEVRON, IS ON THE FAR RIGHT.

I saw many *kisvei yad kodesh* with requests and *brachos* both physical and spiritual for those who remain committed to Chevron. In one letter, he wrote that it was Chevron specifically that he wanted as a dwelling place for *anash*. The Tzemach Tzedek after him, as well, when he sent the *tzedakah* money each year, would specifically extoll the importance of Chevron.”

A New Infusion of Life

After twenty years in Chevron, the Chassidim received a new delegation: the Tzemach Tzedek sent a large group of families to Eretz Yisroel, led by Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel, the Mittlerer Rebbe’s daughter, and her husband, Reb Yaakov Kuli Slonim.

Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel had always longed to reach Eretz Yisroel. As a young woman, she had fallen ill, and the doctors had lost all hope, but the Mittlerer Rebbe sent a messenger to tell her that she would soon recover and would have the merit to travel to Eretz Yisroel. Miraculously, she opened her eyes and made a full recovery.

Before leaving, she visited the Tzemach Tzedek and shared her fear of the journey—that she might fall sick from the rain on the long and arduous trip. “Nu,” the Tzemach Tzedek replied, “So you’ll go between the drops.”

She got onto the wagon to Shklov for the first leg of the trip, and the wagon driver soon returned with an astounding story—the way to Shklov had been dry and beautiful, but the return trip had turned into a nightmare. No rain had fallen as long as Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel was in his wagon.

Many of the Jews in Chevron would later testify to an amazing feat—Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel would walk through the rain and come home totally dry, while everyone else would be wet. The miracle continued until her final day.

Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel became a central figure in Chevron. For the next 55 years, until she was almost ninety years old, people flocked to her for *brachos* and advice; every *kallah* visited “the Bubbe Rochel” for her blessing before the

THE BONFIRE

The Arizal began a tradition of lighting bonfires each Lag B’omer in Miron, and over the ensuing centuries, the custom spread to Yerushalayim, Chevron, Tzfas, and other locations in Eretz Yisroel. The merit of dedicating the *hadlaka* was available for purchase, and the Frierdiker Rebbe related that one year, either 5653 or 5654, the Rebbe Rashab bought the rights to the first *hadlaka* in Chevron.

Another purchase is recorded in a letter from several years earlier, in 5648, in a letter from the Rebbe Rashab to Reb Shneur Zalman Slonim of Chevron, the Rebbe Rashab asks him to specifically buy the *hadlaka* of Chevron, but not that of Miron: “I would like to acquire the *hadlaka* in Chevron, but do not buy the *hadlaka* on the *kever* of Rashbi for me.”

chuppah, and great *rabbanim* would stop in her house during their visits to Chevron to hear her stories about her father and grandfather. Non-Jews in the area told stories of her greatness. One story, in particular, had an impact on the entire Jewish community:

Chevron’s water was controlled by an Arab named Abu Zurayik, who was viciously antisemitic. When distributing water, he would make the Jews wait until everyone else had taken their fill, and only then ‘graciously’ share some drops with them. The Jews were helpless.

One day, his only daughter Fatmah fell terribly ill, and the doctors could offer no cure. Seeing Abu Zurayik’s desperation, someone suggested that he ask Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel’s blessing. Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel conditioned her

blessing on one thing—that he stop mistreating the Jews. Abu Zurayik put his hand on his heart and took a solemn oath that he would do so—and his daughter soon recovered. From that day onward, the Jews had a steady supply of fresh water.⁸

The Chevron Palace

As the community of Chevron grew, Jews began to build homes in new areas outside the walls of the tiny Jewish ghetto. One of the first to do so was Chaim Yisrael Romano, a wealthy Jew from Kushta (Istanbul) who had come to spend his final years in Eretz Yisroel. He built a large building and courtyard, which became known as Beit Romano, and was—at the time—one of the most beautiful buildings in the city.

Containing homes, shuls, and stores, it became a central part of the Chevron community. One of its inhabitants was none other than the Sdei Chemed, who served as the Sephardi Rav. Community members would note that the Sdei Chemed actually passed away while learning Torah in the shul of Beit Romano.

Several years later, Mr. Romano passed away, and his children put the building up for sale. The Jews were concerned; the Arabs might want to make it a mosque, and the secular Jews might want to open a school there, in the heart of the Jewish community. Until then, Chevron had been spared the winds of secularization that had begun blowing through Eretz Yisroel. But who could afford such a large purchase?

In desperation, they turned to Lubavitch. A local businessman convinced the owners to hold off on selling

the complex until an offer was made to the Rebbe Rashab. After long negotiations, the Rebbe Rashab agreed to the purchase. Now, the Rebbe Rashab had a personal possession in the city of Chevron, just like the Mittlerer Rebbe in his time.

The Rebbe Rashab sent specific instructions for the building, asking that it be used mainly for davening and Torah learning; its real use would become clear later, with the establishment of Yeshivas Toras Emes.

Just Like in Lubavitch

In Cheshvan, 5572, a beautiful event took place in Lubavitch. A few wagons stood in front of the *chatzer* of the Rebbe Rashab carrying seven *bochurim* and one family. Around them crowded hundreds of *bochurim* and townsfolk, headed by the *hanhala* of the yeshiva, elder Chassidim, the *menahel*—the Frierdiker Rebbe—and the Rebbe Rashab himself. They were bidding farewell to the seven *bochurim* being sent to Chevron to establish Yeshivas Toras Emes.

For decades, the Chevron community had been falling into decline. People were leaving to seek livelihoods elsewhere, and others were leaving to learn Torah in Yeshivos in Yerushalayim. Chevron was struggling both physically and spiritually.

In many letters, the Rebbe Rashab encouraged the Chassidim to strengthen the community's *ruchniyus* with a renewed commitment to learning Chassidus. A Yeshiva called Magen Avos was established with the hope of improving the situation for *bochurim* and *yungeleit*, but despite everyone's best efforts, the trajectory did



BEIT ROMANO.



not change.

The Rebbe Rashab made a dramatic decision. He would dispatch seven of the best *bochurim* in Tomchei Temimim, along with a *mashpia*, to establish Yeshivas Toras Emes—a yeshiva that would resemble Tomchei Temimim to the fullest degree.

The arrival of the Shluchim made waves in Eretz Yisroel. Most Torah learning in Eretz Yisroel still took place the old-fashioned way—young people came to shul, learned on their own, and had occasional help from a teacher. Toras Emes was the first European-style Yeshiva, with a dormitory, fully provided needs, and a comprehensive educational outlook. It was also far more Chassidus-oriented than the Jews of Eretz Yisroel had ever seen; the *bochurim* learned Chassidus for hours each day and spent many more hours davening. It was a totally new phenomenon, and was incredibly successful.

The Yeshiva attracted *bochurim* and *yungeleit* from all over Eretz Yisroel. Reb Mordechai Dovber Slonim described the effect in a letter to a close friend:

“The *mashpia* and the *bochurim* have made an incredibly positive impact on the entire community; they have lit up the entire city. I had lost all hope—and had I not seen this with my own eyes, I would never have believed it. How great is the Rebbe’s power to turn darkness into light. The impact of the *bochurim* and *yungeleit* is obvious to all. Even we, the elderly—our sparks have been rekindled. I can’t describe the spiritual pleasure of a perek Tanya every day, and Chassidus being learned constantly. Not only myself and the elders—even the *leitzanei hador* agree that the city has hope again...”

For three years, the Yeshiva and community thrived. Then, tragedy struck. World War I broke out, and the Ottomans were at war with the Russians. All Russian citizens were banished from the country, including the seven *bochurim* who were the beating heart of Toras Emes. After just a few short years, the Yeshiva was forced to close.¹¹

Twilight

The years following World War I marked a low point in the history of Chevron. Most of the Chabad Chassidim had moved away, a secular school opened for the local youth, and Beit Romano was taken by the British government to be used as a police station, jail and courthouse. When the Frierdiker Rebbe reopened Yeshivas Toras Emes, he chose to situate it in Yerushalayim.

But one major event during the interwar period left an indelible impression: the Frierdiker Rebbe’s visit in 5689.

That year, the Frierdiker Rebbe embarked on a historic voyage to Eretz Yisroel, the only one among all of the Rabbeim to do so. For ten days, he traversed the land, visiting the *mekomos hakedoshim* as well as many towns and cities along the way.¹²

One of those days was dedicated to Chevron. Despite the fact that most Lubavitcher Chassidim



THE ENTRANCE TO THE ME'ARAS HAMACHEPELAH AS IT APPEARED AT THE TIME OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S VISIT.



THE SIGHT OF DESTRUCTION IN THE AVRAHAM AVINU SHUL IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE RIOT. THE ORIGINAL EDIFICE WAS SOON DESTROYED BY THE ARABS AND LATER RECONSTRUCTED BY THE RETURNING JEWS.

now lived elsewhere, Chevron remained prominent as the capital of Chabad in Eretz Yisroel; it was home to several properties personally owned by the Rabbeim, and, of course, it was home to Me'aras Hamachpeila, which was to be the centerpiece of the Frierdiker Rebbe's visit.

On Tuesday, 7 Av, the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived from Yerushalayim along with a large convoy of Chassidim. The whole community came out to greet him at the outskirts of the city, the crowd jostling to shake the Frierdiker Rebbe's hand as he sat in the home of the rav, Reb Yaakov Yosef Slonim. A short time later, the entire crowd joined the Frierdiker Rebbe on a walk toward Me'aras Hamachpeila.

In those days, Jews were not allowed entry into the building. Access was permitted only up to the notorious "seventh step." Many prominent Jews had tried to gain permission to enter, but to no avail; even Moses Montefiore, the famed philanthropist, had been refused entry. That day, Jewish dignitaries were trying to gain permission for the Frierdiker Rebbe, but, at the outset, it didn't seem possible.

The Frierdiker Rebbe arrived at the seventh step and davened Mincha with the hundreds of Jews gathered there. It took almost two hours. Those nearby could hear the Frierdiker Rebbe davening with the most heartfelt tunes of the Rosh Hashanah *nusach*. It was a very special moment.

After Mincha, news arrived that in a historic gesture from the Arab leadership, the Frierdiker Rebbe and a small entourage would be allowed into the building. When the Frierdiker Rebbe entered, they respectfully gave him and his delegation leather slippers to wear over their shoes instead of asking them to remove their shoes altogether.

From Me'aras Hamachpeila, the Frierdiker Rebbe visited the Avraham Avinu Shul and Beit Romano. Later, he delivered a *maamar* in the central shul and paid a short visit to the Chevron Yeshiva. Late that night, the Frierdiker Rebbe returned to Yerushalayim.

The uplifting emotions felt after the Frierdiker Rebbe's visit didn't last long. Just eleven days later, on 18 Av 5689, Arab rioters perpetrated a horrific pogrom on the Jewish community. Known as the 1929 riot, 67 Jews were brutally murdered, and many more were injured. The British government, which had utterly failed to protect

the Jewish community, decided to evacuate the remaining Jews to Yerushalayim.

In one fell swoop, the centuries-long Jewish presence in Chevron came to an end.

Rebirth

Some six months after the Six Day War, the Arab manager of the Park Hotel in central Chevron noticed a group of Jews approaching his property. His heart dropped. "This is it," he thought, "the Jews are coming to take revenge for the 1929 riot."

To his relief, the Jews just wanted to rent his hotel for Pesach. Led by Rabbi Moshe Levinger, a group of families had decided to reestablish the ancient Jewish community of Chevron. After spending Pesach at the hotel, they ended up in a building owned by the military, where they lived with their families for over two years, refusing to leave.

Knowing of the Rebbe's support for Eretz Yisroel and the longstanding connection of Chabad to Chevron, Rabbi Levinger wrote to the Rebbe asking for his support in the reestablishment of the Chevron Jewish community. If the Rebbe would only give the command, he assumed, thousands would take up the call.

The Rebbe didn't agree. While very supportive of his desire to resettle Chevron, the Rebbe would not issue an official directive to move there. The reason: *ein somchin al hanes* (one should not rely on a miracle). The government was already involved in talks to return those territories to the Arabs; it was, therefore, irresponsible to encourage families to make the move.¹³



RABBI MOSHE LEVINGER (FAR LEFT) WITH GENERAL MOSHE DAYAN AND SOME OF THE SETTLERS AFTER BEING RELOCATED TO KIRYAT ARBA.

When General Ariel Sharon asked the Rebbe to make an endorsement, the Rebbe's response was similar. The Rebbe wrote that he agreed with the need to settle all of the territories, but the government couldn't be trusted to support those settlements in the long term. At that very moment, the Rebbe wrote to him, there were Lubavitchers ("some revealed ones and some secret ones") among the families living in Chevron—and the conditions were abominable.¹⁴ There were several occasions where the Rebbe looked into the possibility of re-establishing a Chabad community or Yeshiva in Chevron, but each time, the plan was shelved because of the lack of government support.

Still, the Rebbe was very supportive of those who chose to move there on their own accord, and when, a few short years later, the government decided to evacuate the nascent Jewish community to the nearby, newly-established settlement called Kiryat Arba, the Rebbe spoke out sharply against the move. The new Kiryat Arba was not Chevron, the Rebbe pointed out, but *outside* Chevron.

"It's shameful," the Rebbe said, "that Eretz Yisroel passed a law implying that Jews will not be allowed to live in Chevron and near Me'aras Hamachpeila—and the law was joyously handed to the mayor of Chevron, whose own family members murdered Jews in 5689! *Harotzachta v'gam yorashta* (Have you murdered and also inherited your victims)!?"¹⁵ The Rebbe was very pained by the withdrawal. It would take another ten years for the community to be born again.

Beit Hadassah

Reb Boruch Nachshon was among the first group of settlers on that Pesach after the Six Day War. A Lubavitcher Chossid, he and his wife had fallen in love with Chevron and dreamed of rebuilding the Jewish community there.

In 5739, he and his colleagues in Kiryat Arba decided to take the plunge. They would secretly enter Chevron, reoccupy one of the Jewish buildings in the city, and refuse to leave, come what may. After careful deliberation, they settled on Beit



BEIT HADASSAH.

Hadassah, the former hospital that had served the Chevron community. The building stood vacant and seemed to be the most fit for the operation.

To make it politically difficult for the government to remove them, they decided that the plan would be executed only by their wives and children. After Pesach that year, a group of ten women and 40 children climbed into the vacant structure through a small window, and began to settle down. The next morning, soldiers patrolling the area were shocked to find the building's new Jewish occupants.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin was very upset, but he was disturbed by the thought of forcibly removing women and children from the building. Instead, he put the building under siege. No one was allowed inside, and anyone who left was not allowed to return.

They remained there for a long time. They refused to leave, and the government refused to let others in. Husbands and fathers would come to visit every Shabbos through the windows—but nothing more was possible. As the months dragged on, with no light at the end of the tunnel, some of the women questioned whether it was correct

to remain. Mrs. Nachshon wrote to the Rebbe asking what to do.

At first, no answer was forthcoming. But suddenly, a tape recorder arrived in Chevron. At the farbrengen on Vov Tishrei 5740, while delivering a *sicha* on the topic of Shleimus Haaretz, the Rebbe said that he had received a letter from the women, asking what they should do. “What could I answer her?” the Rebbe said. “Who is blocking access to the building? Jews themselves—the same soldiers who have been tasked with protecting Jewish lives!”

The Rebbe’s support continued throughout their stay. On the Shabbos before Lag B’omer 5740, a terrible terrorist attack took place outside Beit Hadassah; six Jews were killed, and many more injured. That year, the Rebbe had asked for Lag B’omer parades to take place in cities throughout Eretz Yisroel, and a parade had been planned for Chevron as well. But now, Chevron on Lag B’omer was going to be the site of six funerals. Reb Boruch Nachshon wasn’t sure if the Lag B’omer parade should proceed as planned.

He phoned the Rebbe’s *Mazkirus*, and soon received the Rebbe’s response —the parade should go on as planned.

The Rebbe’s *hora’ah* was perplexing to many of the Jews as well. Most people were in no mood to celebrate. But the effect only became evident later. Privately, local Arabs admitted to the Jews that the sight of Jews celebrating right after a terrible terrorist attack made them realize that expelling the Jews from Chevron wouldn’t be an easy endeavor. They began to come to terms with their presence.

The government began to come to terms with it as well. With each attack, it would allow a few more homes and buildings to be added to the Jewish community, and the Chevron Jewish community experienced a slow and steady rebirth.

Reclaiming the Lands

In one of his earliest attempts to reclaim Jewish land in Chevron, Rabbi Moshe Levinger located the home of Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel. He wanted to reclaim the property for the Jewish community, so he reached out to Colel Chabad. They turned to the Rebbe for permission, and the Rebbe instructed that a *rav* from *anash*



REB BARUCH NACHSHON WITH HIS FAMILY SOON AFTER THEIR SETTLING IN CHEVRON.

determine what should be done.

Reb Yaakov Landa, the *rav* of Bnei Brak was consulted, and—being acquainted with Rabbi Levinger—he determined that Rabbi Levinger could be given power of attorney.

Rabbi Levinger quickly got to work. Instead of trying to force out the current occupants through the courts, he simply offered them a large sum of money to vacate the premises. At first, they seemed to be open to the suggestion, but then they suddenly changed their minds. It turned out that Jewish activists from *Shalom Achshav* had offered them even more money to remain! In the end, however, Rabbi Levinger prevailed and succeeded in receiving the home.

Following this success, Rabbi Levinger decided to go for a bigger prize: Beit Romano, the large building that had been the personal property of the Rebbe Rashab. Perhaps, he thought, he could establish a Yeshiva in the building once more. Again, he would need the Rebbe’s approval; this time, he decided to travel to New York.

He arrived in Nissan 5741. When he entered the office of *Mazkirus*, they made it very clear that the Rebbe wasn’t receiving anyone for *yechidus*, but soon he received a call from the office; the Rebbe had heard of his arrival, and wanted to see him after Mincha that very day.

For long hours, the Rebbe questioned him in great



A PLAQUE IN FRONT OF THE HOME OF REBBETZIN MENUCHA ROCHEL SCHNEERSON IN CHEVRON.

detail about the situation in Chevron and in Yehudah and Shomron in general. He told the Rebbe about the state of the settlements, the government's policy, the situation among the local Arabs, and so on. At the close of the *yechidus*, the Rebbe agreed to give him power of attorney to redeem the estate and to establish a Yeshiva there as well.

Chevron Today

After much long and hard work, the efforts bore fruit, and Beit Romano was returned to Jewish

hands. Many other areas of Chevron were restored as well. Today, Beit Romano is home to hundreds of *Yeshiva bochurim*, the Avraham Avinu shul is used regularly, and Beit Schneerson—home of Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel — houses Jewish families and institutions. Led by Rabbi Daniel Cohen, seven Shluchim families are active in the area, and a Kollel Chassidus gathers every day.

Once again, Jewish life thrives in the city of our forefathers. **1**

1. Toldos Chabad B'Eretz Hakodesh chapter 2. Much of this article is based on *Chevron Ir Hakodesh* chapter 4.
3. Toras Menachem vol. 49 pg. 111.
4. Oholei Lubavitch vol. 3 pg. 156.
5. Igros Kodesh Admur Ha'emtzai pg. 168.
6. A visitor to Chevron described an amusing debate that existed regarding the story: "A lively debate surrounded these two shuls: in which one did Avraham Avinu appear to complete the minyan? The Sephardim were certain that he would naturally appear in the big shul that bore his name. The Ashkenazim, however, claimed otherwise. Their reasoning? The big shul always had a minyan, but in their smaller shul, the tenth man was often missing, and therefore Avraham Avinu had come to complete their *minyan*. The question remained with a *teiku*." (Chassidus Chabad B'Chevron p. 165)
7. From the account of Reb Menachem Shmuel Slonim.

8. See *Chevron Ir Hakodesh* Chapter 2.
9. Lag Ba'omer 5699. Sefer Hasichos 5699 pg. 330.
10. 22 Adar 5648. Igros Kodesh Admur Harashab vol. 3 pg. 14.
11. Sefer Pilpulim Toras mes vol. 2 p. 509.
12. See "A Royal Visit," Derher Av 5774.
13. Igros Kodesh vol. 26 pg. 51.
14. Igros Kodesh vol. 25 pg. 170.
15. Shabbos Parshas Ekev 5730.

