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P I N P O I N T S

STORIES OF THE RABBEIM'S
REACH AND IMPACT AROUND THE GLOBE

CHINA



For well over a century, the Rabbeim have cared for the Yidden in China — whether they lived there, traveled for business, or were transported there in wartime.

MATZAH FOR THE CZAR’S SOLDIERS

In the mid 5660s, hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers — many of them Jewish conscripts — were transported east on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Their destination was Manchuria (which today is mostly part of China) and the front lines of the Russo-Japanese War on the Pacific coast, thousands of miles from home.

But as far as they were in body, they were never distant from the *nossi’s* thoughts.

In 5664, as the crisis escalated and soldiers were sent east, the Rebbe Rashab initiated the first campaign to have the government distribute matzah to the soldiers. It was met with some success, but not at the necessary scales.

In 5665, as the war raged, the Rebbe Rashab launched a massive campaign to galvanize the Jewish world with the goal of obtaining matzah for the Jewish soldiers at the front, spending almost a month in S. Petersburg convincing the government to allow the project—which they ultimately did, reaching out to other Jewish leaders to lend

their influence to the campaign, and asking every Jew in the Russian Empire to contribute.

In a letter to Reb Yeshayahu Berlin on the sixth day of Chanukah, 5665, the very beginning of the campaign, the Rebbe Rashab wrote:

“We must concern ourselves with [the provision of] matzah for our brothers on the war front while there is still time. As there are now many of our brothers there—perhaps up to forty thousand—it is impossible to achieve this through the donations of individuals alone; rather we must gather funds from all the townlets, so that even small contributions will add up and amount to a fitting sum...”¹

In a highly impactful letter circulated throughout Russia, the Rebbe Rashab wrote:

“Brothers! We must feel the hearts of our brethren at the war front, who are placed in a difficult [situation] and great danger, *Rachmana l’tzlan*. They are forfeiting their lives and jeopardizing their lives to die on behalf of our king and the land of our birth. It is as though they have been separated from life (may Hashem in His great kindness guard them from all sorrow and hardship, and bring them peacefully to their homes), especially those of the reserves, who have left their homes, their children and their possessions, and only to Hashem do they lift their eyes. We know how precious and how beloved the mitzvah of eating matzah is to each one of our brethren, and conversely *chas v’shalom*, if one of our brothers is forced—even under the greatest duress—to eat chametz



JEWISH SOLDIERS WITH THEIR MATZOS ON PESACH 5665.

on Pesach, *Rachmana l'tzlan*, how much his heart will be pained within him, and it will touch him to the very depths of his soul. (There are indeed many of our soldierly brethren who will not eat chametz on Pesach so long as their soul is yet within [their body], but one cannot survive eight days without eating).

“... The fulfillment of the mitzvah of eating matzah on Pesach will strengthen the hearts of our brethren, and give them strength and fortitude to stand firm in war and to overcome the enemy with might ...”

“Certainly, each of us has relatives who are soldiers in the war zone. We are obligated to save them and give them the strength and ability—with Hashem’s help—to stand in battle, and bestow upon them this lofty and exalted mitzvah, which will guard them and strengthen them ...”²

On Yud-Aleph Nissan, the Rebbe Rashab received a telegram from Harbin notifying him that the freight cars had arrived with the matzah. On the following day he received a telegram from the committee in S. Petersburg, confirming that all the arrangements had been brought to timely fruition. On 13 Nissan, a telegram from Harbin notified the Rebbe Rashab that not all the wagons had arrived as planned. Consequently, there was a shortage of matzah, not at the front, but in Harbin itself. At the last minute, 10,000 rubles were wired to Harbin, so that additional matzos could be baked regardless of expense.

All in all, the mission was a success, and the Rebbe Rashab’s holy wish was fulfilled to his satisfaction.³

THE YIDDEN IN SHANGHAI

In the 5680-90s, Shanghai, China was a major international hub, including British, American, and French enclaves. An established Sephardic community consisted of many Jewish businessmen and others. Later, it became the home of many Yidden fleeing the Nazis, including many *bochurim* of Tomchei Temimim.⁴ The Frierdiker Rebbe showed special concern for the Yidden in Shanghai.

On 16 Cheshvan, 5689, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin’s *chasuna* date was set for 14 Kislev, and invitations to the *chasuna* were sent out. For the next month, the Frierdiker Rebbe was very busy with the wedding and wrote very few letters: for the remainder of that month, only two letters were written. In Kislev, only 28 letters. (In contrast, the first half of Cheshvan that year saw 113 letters, and 165 were sent in Teves). And yet, during this incredibly busy period, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote seven letters⁵ to the Jewish communities in Shanghai and Harbin, China, and to Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi, who served as the *rav* of the *Ashkenazi kehilla* in Shanghai, and later the Rosh Yeshiva of Tomchei Temimim in the city.

KEHOS IN CHINA

In 5706, following the end of World War II, a sizable contingent of Lubavitchers were still in Shanghai. With the reopening of commercial shipping between Asia and the United States, it became financially viable to print





A COLLECTION OF SIFREI CHASSIDUS PRINTED BY THE TEMIMIM IN SHANGHAI BEFORE THE COLLABORATION WITH KEHOS.



seforim in Asia, where prices were much lower than in the United States. The Rebbe directed that Kehos print seforim in Shanghai.

The Temimim, in fact, had printed a number of essential seforim in Shanghai during the war years, but this was not done in coordination with Kehos. After the war, the Rebbe wrote to Reb Volf Greenglass expressing surprise that the Temimim hadn't sent any of these seforim to the Frieddiker Rebbe,⁶ and requesting the printing of a large number of seforim. "If they will agree to our proposal, we can hope for the revelation of much good light," the Rebbe wrote.⁷

The Temimim agreed to take on the work of printing seforim as an official branch of Kehos, printing maamarim, kuntreisim, and seforim. In a letter dated 27 Nissan, 5706, the Rebbe wrote to "the Temimim, Shanghai," describing the seforim that had been received and writing,

"You spoke well when you wrote that setting up a branch of Kehos in your place of residence is the will of my father-in-law, the Rebbe ..."

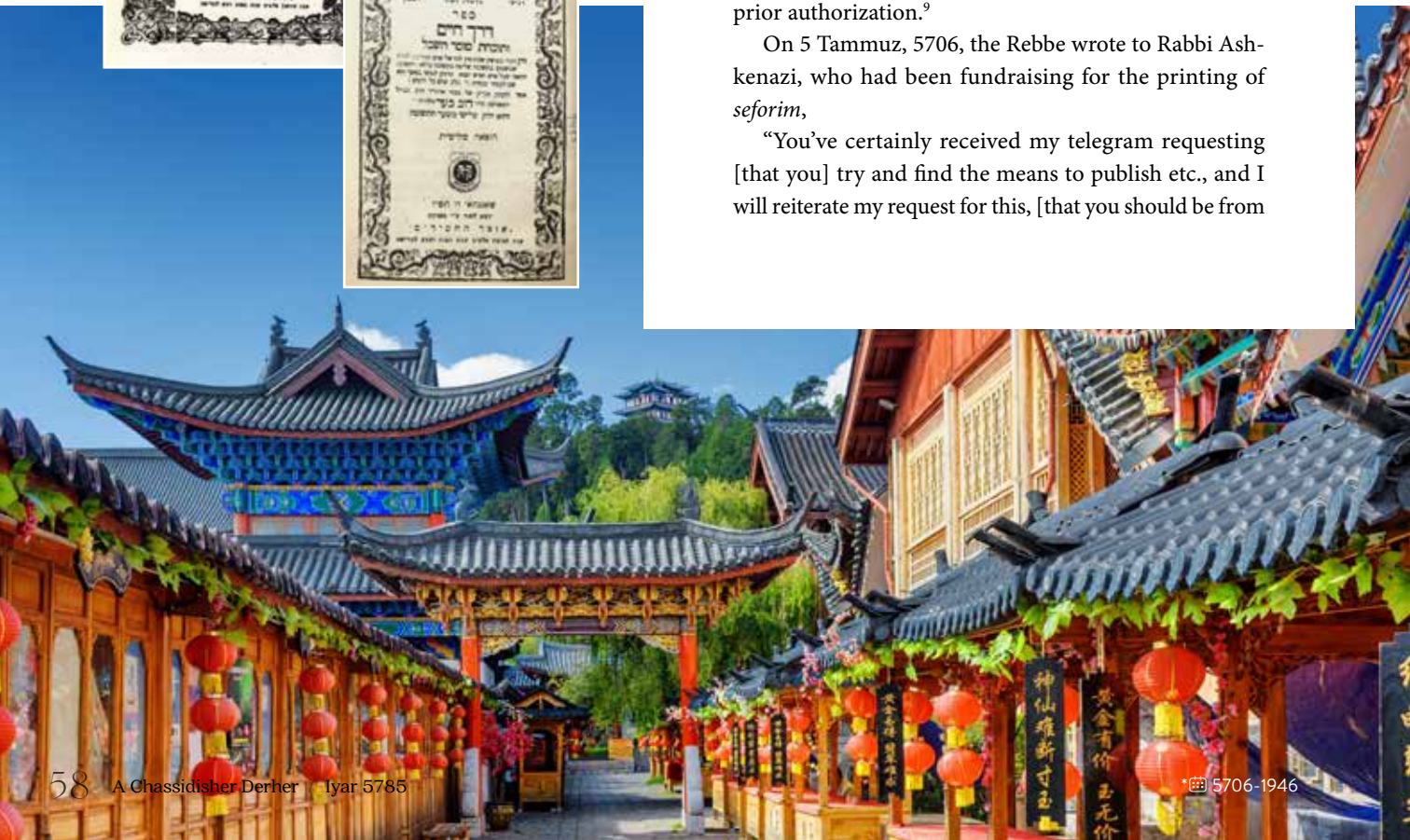
The Rebbe asked about inventory and requested additional printings, specifying:

"The paper and the binding must be from the best ..."

In another letter, the Rebbe reiterated the Frieddiker Rebbe's directive that nothing published by any of his mosdos should be printed—in any language—without prior authorization.⁹

On 5 Tammuz, 5706, the Rebbe wrote to Rabbi Ashkenazi, who had been fundraising for the printing of seforim,

"You've certainly received my telegram requesting [that you] try and find the means to publish etc., and I will reiterate my request for this, [that you should be from



those who] bring merit to many, a merit that never ceases for all time. I spoke to my father-in-law, the Rebbe, about this, and the matter is fitting in his eyes. May Hashem bring you success.”¹⁰

Towards the end of that year, the Frierdiker Rebbe’s ongoing efforts to secure the needed paperwork were successful, and the *Temimim* finally traveled to America. Rabbi Ashkenazi, *rav* of Shanghai, remained behind, and continued the work of printing *seforim*. The Rebbe wrote to Rabbi Ashkenazi and Reb Chaim Plotkin,

“...The greatness of the *zechus* involved needs no explanation... I only want to emphasize that your reward is great, to protect and to illuminate in the World to Come and in this world, in soul and in body.”¹¹

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Mr. Freddy Ezekiel was born in Shanghai, China, where he lived until 5708, when he moved to Hong Kong, before eventually moving to the U.S. In 5722, while visiting a friend in Brooklyn, he received a message that the Rebbe wished to meet with him.

“During most of our conversation, I was answering his questions, relating the history of the various Jewish communities in the Far East—in India, Singapore, China, etc. He was very interested in the history of the Sephardim who came from Baghdad and established various communities in Asia. He also wished to know the history of the Ashkenazim who fled there from the Nazis.

“He wanted to know all the details. He asked me many questions about how the various communities got along, about their traditions, about the existing infrastructures—the shuls, the schools, the *mikvaos* etc.

“I recall telling him how Shanghai changed with the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. Up to then, Shanghai was in Japanese hands, and it was a thriving city, with a prosperous Jewish community which looked after the thousands of refugees who fled from Nazi-occupied Europe. But the Pacific War disturbed everything. When it ended, and the Chinese Communists came to Shanghai, all the Jews left so that, by the time I was speaking with the Rebbe, the Jewish community there was nearly extinct.

“And yet he still asked so many questions about Shanghai. He also asked about Tokyo and Kobe and Manila. I recall thinking: Why is he so interested in the fifty families living in Hong Kong? Why is he so interested in the few Jews left over in Japan? Why do the ones in the Philippines matter so much to him?

“Obviously, he had a far-reaching vision of how things

would change in the coming decades, and he was thinking ahead. I have to say that it never occurred to me to wonder what the future would hold for Yiddishkeit in the Far East. The thought didn’t cross my mind. Clearly, though, it had been on the Rebbe’s mind. He was already anticipating how the world would change, and he must have been thinking not just how to preserve some of the dwindling Jewish communities in Asia but how to develop them.”¹²

Indeed, in the coming decades, the Rebbe sent *shluchim* to Asia, fortifying the Jewish community across the continent.

CHABAD IN HONG KONG

In 5745, Rabbi Mordechai Avtzon began serving as a *shliach* in Hong Kong. The 100-year-old community had sent letters asking for a rabbi, and Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky traveled to the city to assess the situation. As the community was reluctant to hire a full-time rabbi, it was agreed that two *bochurim* would come for a short while. Rabbi Avtzon was one of them, and the community asked him to stay on.

Rabbi Avtzon, still a *bochur*, was instructed by the Rebbe to follow the advice of the *rabbanim*, who told him to take the position. When a *shidduch* subsequently came up, the Rebbe instructed,

“It is not worthwhile to interrupt the *shlichus* at this point.”

“This was a turning point as it had not been clear to me whether my employment was deemed as a full-fledged *shlichus*,” Rabbi Avtzon later related. “Here, the Rebbe clearly referred to this position as a *shlichus*!”

A month later, the *shidduch* came up again, and this time the Rebbe responded in the affirmative, and Rabbi Avtzon got engaged to Goldie Shemtov, daughter of Rabbi



MR. FREDDY EZEKIEL

Avrohom and Bat Sheva Shemtov from Philadelphia. They traveled back to Hong Kong three weeks after their wedding.

After the community reneged on its offer to Rabbi Avtzon to continue on as rabbi the following year, Rabbi Kotlarsky was instructed to travel to Hong Kong and work things out with the community, but they did not budge. On a phone call with Rabbi Hodakov, the Rebbe came on the line and said:

“We will not allow those who are sent from here to be sent away.”

The Rebbe’s position was clear; Chabad would open independently. “At that point, I asked Rabbi Hodakov if this meant that we should be the *shluchim*, or perhaps in light of the embroiled community environment, a fresh couple should be selected for this position,” Rabbi Avtzon related. “Again, the Rebbe made it clear by saying that it is “*nogea b’nefesh*” (absolutely essential) that we be the *shluchim!*”

On Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5746, the Avtzons launched Chabad of Hong Kong, and soon afterwards they founded “L.I.F.E.”—Lubavitch in the Far East. As the only *shliach* in the area at the time, Rabbi Avtzon made many trips to Thailand, Japan, Singapore, Korea, Vietnam, and China, to work with individuals and communities in these places. Today, each of these countries has its own *shluchim*.


When the Avtzons were concerned about *chinuch* for their young children, and Mrs. Avtzon asked if they could relocate, the Rebbe replied,

“You have succeeded until now, and beyond expectations. I will mention at the *Tziyun* that going forward you should succeed even more than you did until now, and with joy and good hearts; may you share good news.”

The Avtzons opened a school which has become home to close to 400 children.¹³

SEFORIM IN CHINESE

Rabbi Fishel Katz, a traveling gemstone dealer, fulfilled many missions for the Rebbe during his travels, printing Tanyas in Africa and Asia (including several in China) and organizing Jewish events in far-flung communities. After a professor wrote to the Rebbe, describing how he’d met with descendants of Yidden in China who wanted to learn more about Yiddishkeit, the Rebbe instructed Rabbi Katz to come up with a list of *seforim* to be translated to Chinese.

This he did, and the Rebbe approved his choices, *The Divine Commandments* and *My Prayer*, both by Nissan Mindel. In 5749, *The Divine Commandments* was published in Chinese, but as of the early 5750s, only 86 pages of *My Prayer* had been translated and sent to the Rebbe. Decades later, in 5785, the complete book was translated and published by Kehos. Today it is also available online at Chabad.org.¹⁴ 



THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED ‘MY PRAYER’ IN CHINESE

1. Igros Kodesh of the Rebbe Rashab vol. 4, p. 75. Translation from chabad.org/2174130.
2. Ibid. vol. 1, p. 321. Translation (with slight variations) from chabad.org/2174130.
3. For a detailed account of this story, see the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *reshimos* published in Sefer Hama’amarim 5665 p. 354-60, and in Sefer Hasichos 5696 p. 130-3, as well as “Pesach with the Rabbeim” - Derher Nissan 5784. Additional sources consulted were Admorei Chabad V’yahadus Tzorfas, and an article by Eli Rubin on chabad.org cited above.
4. See “Escape to Shanghai” in this issue.
5. Most can be found in Igros Kodesh of the Frierdiker Rebbe, vols. 2 and 16.
6. Igros Kodesh vol. 2 p. 89.
7. Ibid. p. 100.
8. Ibid. p. 126.
9. Ibid. p. 134.
10. Ibid. p. 214.
11. Ibid. no. 276.
12. Published by JEM — Here’s My Story issue 393.
13. Excerpted from “Mitzvas Hador,” Derher Nissan 5779.
14. See chabad.org/6794782.