

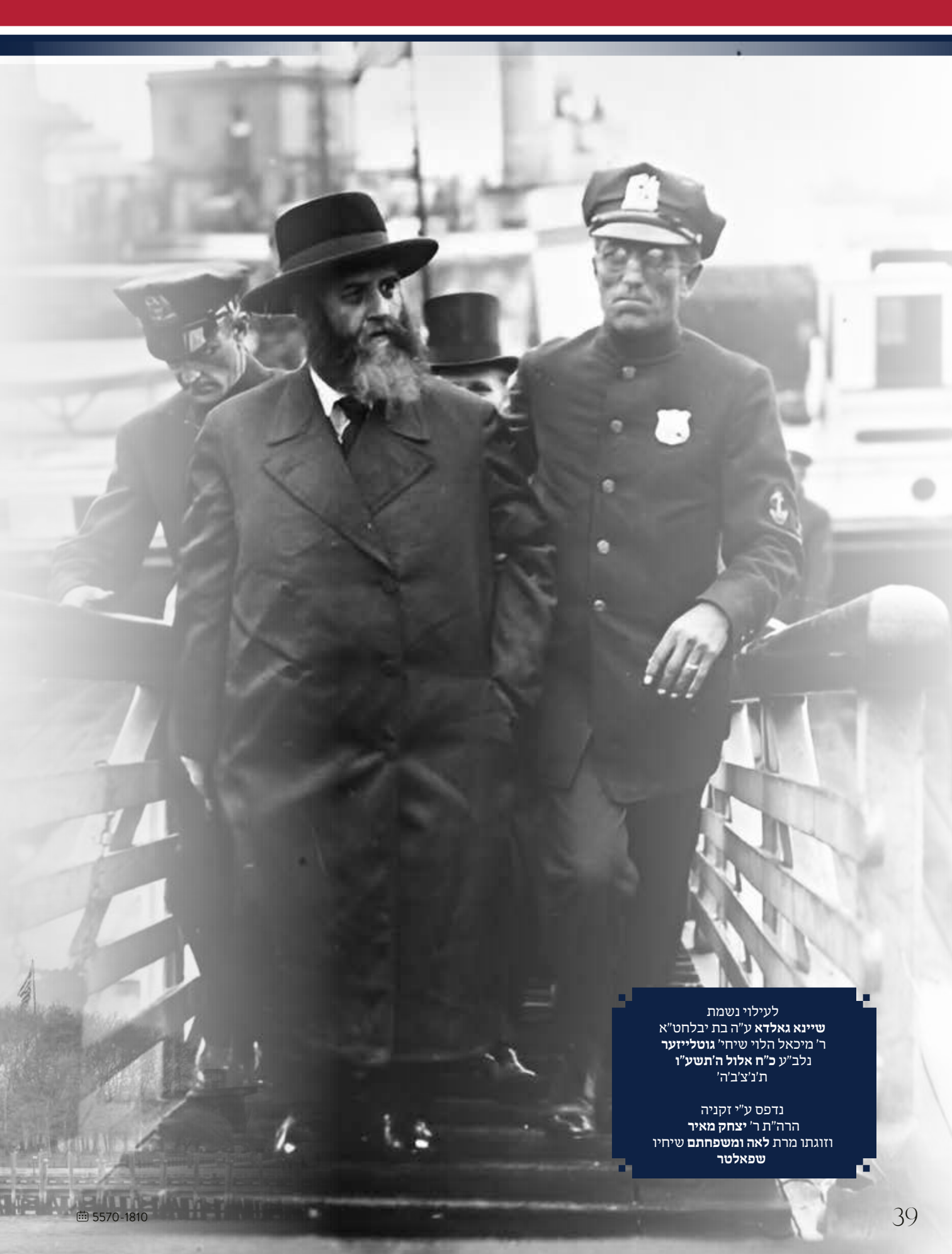
A black and white photograph of the Statue of Liberty on the left side of the page. The statue is shown from the waist up, holding a torch in its right hand and a tablet in its left. It stands on a large, multi-tiered stone pedestal. In the background, there are trees and a body of water. The sky is overcast. The text 'AMERICA AWAKENED' is written vertically in a serif font along the right side of the statue's pedestal.

AMERICA  
AWAKENED

THE  
**FRIERDIKER**  
**REBBE'S**  
VISIT  
TO THE  
**UNITED**  
**STATES**

*By:* Rabbi Mendy Greenberg (Twinsburg, OH)

Special thanks to Rabbi Shmuel Super and Mendel Wolf (Chicago) for their assistance in the preparation of this article.



לעילוי נשמת  
שיינא גאלדא ע"ה בת יבלחט"א  
ר' מיכאל הלוי שיח'י גוטלייזער  
נלב"ע כ"ח אלול ה'תשע"ו  
תנ"צ'ב'ה

נדפס ע"י זקניה  
הרה"ת ר' יצחק מאיר  
וזוגתו מרת לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו  
שפאלטר

# A Sea of Curiosity

The Friediker Rebbe was accustomed to traveling. He often spent time in spaces where he was one of the only—if not *the* only—visibly Jewish individuals. Curious stares were common.

So it was aboard the ship to America in Elul, 5689. The Friediker Rebbe would sit quietly on the deck or in the writing room, immersed in a booklet of *kesavim* or composing letters. A few passengers would glance his way—curious about the dignified figure with the beard and *yarmulke*—but nothing out of the ordinary.

Suddenly, that changed.

One day, as the Friediker Rebbe stepped out to one of the deck's cushioned benches, something was different. The glances became stares. Whispered conversations followed him. The air was thick with curiosity.

News had spread on the ship that they would not be docking immediately in New York Harbor. The captain had just received a radio transmission informing him that a private vessel would be meeting them at sea to escort a distinguished guest ashore, bypassing the typical customs procedures.

The captain and his passengers now realized that they had been sharing their voyage with someone far more important than they had imagined.<sup>1</sup>

# The Unlikely Lifeline: America

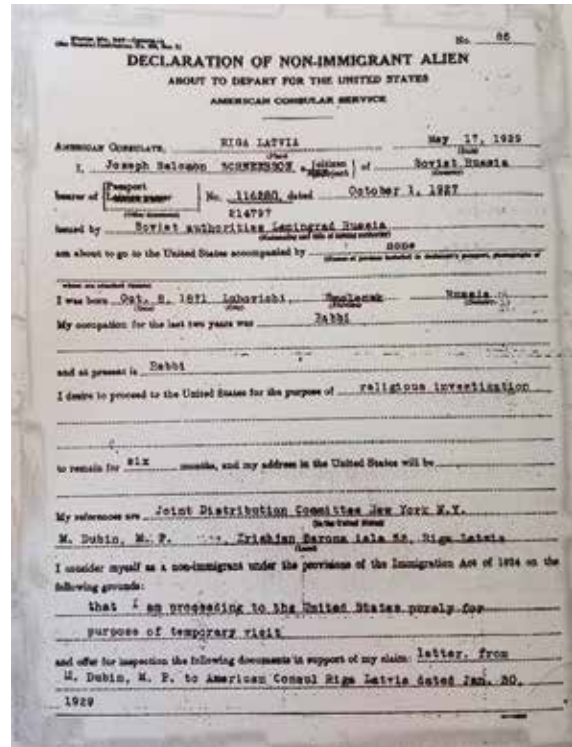
For nearly a decade, the Friediker Rebbe had stood at the forefront of the battle to preserve Yiddishkeit in Soviet Russia. He had personally led the effort, organizing, inspiring, and funding the underground network keeping Jewish life alive under impossible conditions.

But nearly two years before his voyage to America, everything had changed. After the arrest and liberation of Yud-Beis Tammuz, the Friediker Rebbe was forced to leave the country.

As he sat on the train leaving Russia, the Friediker Rebbe penned a departing message to his Chassidim: “תקותי תאמצני והיא נחמתי אשר ריחוק המקום לא יפריד ח”ו” —It is my hope and my solace that geographic distance will never, G-d forbid, separate us.” Wherever he was, his bond with the Yidden of Russia would remain unbroken.

That’s why he decided to visit America.

THE FRIEDIKER REBBE'S REGISTRATION PAPERS FOR HIS VISIT TO THE U.S.



KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY



KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

THE FRIERDIKER REBBE STEPS OFF THE BOAT, 12 ELUL 5689, FLANKED BY A POLICE HONOR GUARD.



KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

While temporarily settled in Riga, the Frierdiker Rebbe worked tirelessly to support the Jewish underground in Soviet Russia and to uplift the material and spiritual condition of Russian Jewry.

One of the greatest challenges was funding. Across Europe, Jewish communities had limited awareness of the dire situation facing their brethren in Russia. More importantly, they were themselves impoverished, ill-equipped to provide substantial support.

But America was different.

At the time, everyone knew America as the *treifene medina*. Jewish education was almost non-existent, and observance of Torah and *mitzvos* was in freefall. People said that Judaism in America had no future.

However, the United States excelled in the mitzvah of tzedakah. It had become the largest, wealthiest, and most philanthropic Jewish community in the world. More significantly, American Jewry had deep personal ties to Russia. Unlike other European Jewish communities, the majority of American Jews were Russian immigrants or the children of immigrants, many of whom had arrived just a generation earlier.

A sizable number came from Chabad backgrounds. Shuls bearing the names *Nusach Ari* and *Tzemach Tzedek* dotted the country. In Brownsville—then the heart of Jewish Brooklyn—there were no fewer than eleven *Nusach Ari* shuls.

When American Chassidim petitioned the U.S. government to help secure the Frierdiker Rebbe's release from Soviet imprisonment, they introduced him as the spiritual leader of "two hundred synagogues and 150,000 members."<sup>2</sup>

America was ripe for a visit.

## Echoes of Excitement

When the visit was announced, the Chassidim were ecstatic.

It was Shevat of 5689 when the letter arrived from Reb Chatche Feigin, the Frierdiker Rebbe's secretary, bringing the news. The letter was addressed to Reb Yisroel Jacobson—one of the first *Temimim* in America—informing him that the Frierdiker Rebbe would be coming to raise awareness about the plight of Russian Jewry and to assess the state of Yiddishkeit in America.

For the small group of *Temimim* in the United States, it was earth-shattering. They had never dared dream that the Frierdiker Rebbe would actually come. They had never even asked. In their eyes, America was simply unworthy of such a visit.

A committee was swiftly assembled to coordinate the visit. The Kramer family, Reb Mendel Lokshin, Rabbi Jacobson, and a handful of devoted *anash* sprang into action—strategizing, spreading the word, and laying the

groundwork for the royal visit.<sup>3</sup>

The broader Jewish community, especially those in the *Nusach Ari* shuls, responded with great anticipation. By this time, the Frierdiker Rebbe was internationally known for his courageous defiance of Soviet tyranny and his relentless fight to keep Judaism alive under communism.

Although some were skeptical—“*What business does the Rebbe have in America? Does he think he can open a yeshiva here?*”—the overall mood was one of excitement. Across the country, communities formed committees, prepared accommodations, and planned dignified receptions.<sup>4</sup>

The *goldene medina* had never before welcomed a guest of such spiritual stature.

## A New Chapter Begins

12 Elul 5689 was the day the Frierdiker Rebbe stepped onto American soil for the very first time.

Cameras flashed and excitement buzzed through the

crowd. Despite the downpour, hundreds had waited for hours just for a glimpse of the Frierdiker Rebbe. A police honor guard stood ready to escort him through the crowd.

As the Frierdiker Rebbe walked off the boat surrounded by policemen, it evoked memories of a different kind: when two years earlier, police had surrounded the Frierdiker Rebbe to take him to prison.

“Here, just like in Russia, I’m greeted by many policemen,” the Frierdiker Rebbe later remarked to a group of journalists. “But what a difference! There, they came to arrest me for spreading Torah to Jewish children. Here, they’re protecting me.”

A motorcade soon swept the Frierdiker Rebbe and his entourage to Boro Park, to the shul of Reb Eliyahu Simpson, where a newly constructed apartment on the second floor would serve as the Frierdiker Rebbe’s first American residence. Outside, the street was crowded with men, women, and children waiting to catch a glimpse of the Frierdiker Rebbe.

Soon, the Frierdiker Rebbe’s face appeared on the

### TIMELINE

Over his ten months in the United States, the Frierdiker Rebbe visited countless shuls and communities. Accompanying him were his son-in-law, Rashag, his secretaries Reb Chatche Feigin and Chaim Lieberman, his uncle Reb Moshe Horenshtein and the famed Latvian chossid and diplomat, Reb Mordechai Dubin.

Here is a broad outline of the Frierdiker Rebbe’s travels.

On 12 Elul 5689, the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in New York, remaining there until 13 Kislev. The first location was in Boro Park, above the shul of Reb Elyahu Simpson, and after Rosh Hashanah (in Brownsville, see sidebar), the Frierdiker Rebbe moved to a large home in Crown Heights, where he spent Sukkos and Simchas Torah.

On 13 Kislev, the Frierdiker Rebbe traveled to Philadelphia, where he stayed for one month, until 12 Teves. Upon arrival, he visited the Liberty Bell and sat in George Washington’s chair. The Frierdiker Rebbe held a large Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen in the hall of Yeshiva Mishkan Yisrael.

From there, the Frierdiker Rebbe continued to Baltimore, staying until 4 Shevat. During the final days of that visit, he made a brief trip to Washington, D.C.

Following a short return to New York (5–11 Shevat), the Frierdiker Rebbe traveled to Chicago for an extended stay from 11 Shevat through 29 Nissan. During this time, he also visited Milwaukee. Pesach was marked in Chicago, with *sedorim* attended by large crowds, particularly on the second night of Pesach, with *sichos* that continued late into the night.

At the end of the Chicago visit, the Frierdiker Rebbe made several shorter visits to nearby cities. On 29 Nissan, he traveled to Detroit, on 6 Iyar, he traveled to S. Louis, and on 15 Iyar, he returned to New York.

After Shavuos, the Frierdiker Rebbe journeyed to Boston and its surrounding areas, staying from 19 Sivan until 3 Tammuz, when he returned once again to New York.

On 14 Tammuz, the Frierdiker Rebbe made his final trip to Washington, D.C., where he met with President Herbert Hoover. One week later, on 21 Tammuz, he departed the United States aboard the S.S. *Bremen*, arriving in Berlin on 27 Tammuz.



second-floor balcony, and he delivered a short *sicha*.

“Tremendous applause,” reported the *Morgen Journal*, “broke out from the crowd—men, women, and children—when he finished. Many began to head home, satisfied that they had seen the Lubavitcher Rebbe with their own eyes and received a blessing from him.

“But a large crowd remained, lingering outside the shul. They stood there the entire day, huddled under umbrellas in the rain, waiting for a chance to enter the building. Well into the night, the line outside the shul still hadn’t thinned, as committee members, hundreds of local residents, and others who had traveled from far and wide came to see the Rebbe.”<sup>25</sup>

The Rebbe was in America!

## The “Chabadization” of America

A journalist reported that a complaint was being lodged against the Frierdiker Rebbe during his visit:

“A chossid from one of the Ukrainian courts has been overheard lamenting: *There’s real danger here—the Lubavitcher Rebbe with his visit might just succeed in the ‘Chabadization’ of all the last remaining Chassidim in America!*”<sup>26</sup>

For ten months—from 12 Elul until 21 Tammuz of the following year—the Frierdiker Rebbe traveled across the East Coast and the Midwest. Jewish newspapers were

filled with dramatic reports: somehow, *‘treife’* America had transformed into a vibrant Chassidic court.

Because of the spiritual climate of American Jewry at the time, we have very few transcripts of the *sichos* the Frierdiker Rebbe delivered throughout the visit, and a number of *maamarim* are missing as well. However, we have dozens of vivid newspaper descriptions that capture the remarkable atmosphere surrounding the Frierdiker Rebbe wherever he went.

The Frierdiker Rebbe left a profound impression on all who encountered him.

“He has an unforgettable countenance,” a reporter wrote in New York. “A *hadras panim*, a bright reddish beard, graying in the middle. But the most striking features are his eyes and his high, white forehead. The eyes are penetrating, deep—it feels as though they could look straight into the soul.”<sup>27</sup>

Thousands came out to the train stations to greet him. People came and went from his accommodations at all hours of the day and night. *Minyanim* would gather spontaneously, and impromptu *farbrengens* formed regularly. City after city reported the same phenomenon, journalists expressing astonishment at how American Jewry was seemingly being “taken over.”

## Scenes from the Stations

In every city, the ‘celebration’ of the Frierdiker Rebbe’s arrival began at the train station.

HEBREW SCHOOL CHILDREN AND THEIR TEACHERS GREET THE FRIEDIKER REBBE AT THE TRAIN STATION IN S. LOUIS.



DR. HILTON PRICE

“At a quarter to one,” a reporter describes the Frierdiker Rebbe’s arrival in Philadelphia, “the train finally appeared—and from the wagon, a radiant, *Shechina*-like face appeared. It was the Rebbe himself, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn. The crowd surged forward toward the train car.”<sup>8</sup>

In Detroit, a similar scene played out:

“The crowd that beleaguered Michigan Central Depot was many many times the estimate of the police department.... When the crowd got the first glimpse of the Rebbe... a sudden, spontaneous ‘*Baruch Haba*’ erupted from everyone’s mouth. This frightened the police somewhat, for they momentarily thought that trouble was brewing.”<sup>9</sup>

Soon after arriving at the train station, the Rebbe

would be driven with a celebratory motorcade to his accommodations.

“Thousands of people had gathered around the house,” it was reported in Philadelphia. “American youth stood at a distance, watching with reverence. Some tried to find their way into the house just to catch a glimpse of the Frierdiker Rebbe.

“The Chassidim sparkled with joy, their faces radiating with light. The excitement of seeing the Rebbe practically poured out of them—it was visible on their faces. The entire scene strongly evoked memories of the *alte heim*. ‘It’s been so long—so very long—since we’ve seen anything like this,’ could be heard among the crowd.”<sup>10</sup>

In Chicago, an enterprising journalist tried to gain entry into the home by asking the host, Mr. Gilman, if he could grant him access. Mr. Gilman smiled:

“Let you in? Will they even let *me* in? Right now, I’m no longer the owner of this house—the Rebbe and the crowd are. But come, let’s try getting in through the alley. Maybe we’ll manage to sneak in somehow. And if not—don’t hold it against me...”

In every city, Reb Chatche Feigin would immediately begin organizing a list for *yechidus*, and a steady march of people would make their way through their home.

It wasn’t just Chabad Chassidim or old-world Jews, a reporter in Baltimore noted.

“Among the many visitors who came daily to the Rebbe, one could often spot a surprising number of young, Americanized Jewish women—women who were as distant from Yiddish and Yiddishkeit as the North Pole is from the South. They were dressed in the latest

## HOW TO RECEIVE KAVOD

During the Frierdiker Rebbe’s visit, Reb Yisroel Jacobson began to notice that the Frierdiker Rebbe was losing weight. Concerned for the Frierdiker Rebbe’s health, he spoke with Reb Nissan Telushkin, who revealed that the Frierdiker Rebbe had a custom: whenever he arrived in a new city, he would fast. The Frierdiker Rebbe had once explained to Reb Nissan, “*Kavod darf men oisdaren*—honor needs to be ‘starved out.’”<sup>12</sup>

fashions, arriving in the most expensive cars, chauffeured by polished Black drivers in uniform.

“And yet, the Rebbe would speak to them about their Jewish identity. And from what I hear, more than a few of these women promised him that from that day forward, they would begin living as proud, committed *Yiddische techter*.”

This was not what people expected from a Rebbe who had ostensibly come to America for fundraising. After all, many *gute yidden* had visited before, and they were typically content to raise money for their institutions back home. But watching the scenes unfold, the reporter had a realization: this Rebbe was different.

“It seems that the Lubavitcher Rebbe came to America with the deliberate intention of launching two simultaneous campaigns—one spiritual, and one material...”<sup>11</sup>

## Standing Room Only

In every city the Frieddiker Rebbe visited, the central event was the official community reception—often combined with a fundraiser for Russian Jewry. Large shuls filled with thousands of people, all eager to see the Frieddiker Rebbe.

The evening typically began with a series of speeches before the Frieddiker Rebbe’s address.

In Detroit:

“Chairing the event was Mr. Glist... In a brief opening address, he introduced Rabbi Elkin of Chicago... Next to speak was Rabbi Fischer... His remarks were marked by tact and sound logic, and the audience listened with great interest.

“Rabbi Stollman then took the podium. In moving words, he described the plight of *lomdei Torah* in the Soviet Union, and he appealed to the assembled crowd to respond generously with their support. His words made a strong impression. The crowd began giving eagerly—hands stretched out from every direction, ready to offer their donations. In a very short time, nearly \$800 was collected.

“Rabbi Fein then addressed the crowd. In heartfelt words, he introduced the honored guest—the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Rabbi Fein had known the Rebbe from his days in Russia and had interesting things to say about the matter.

“When the figure of the Lubavitcher Rebbe appeared, it was as if the whole Shul was electrified. Everyone rose from their seats as one. And when he began to speak, there reigned an absolute silence, so that one could hear a pin drop.”<sup>13</sup>



די ווערטער האָט דער הייליגער ליבאוויטשער  
 רבי נעזאָנט איבערגעבענדיג די סטבע  
 ווען ער איז געווען אין סט. לואיס.  
 "איך גיב אייך די סטבע, און האָר אַז  
 כּוּכּוּת אַבוּתֵי הַקְּרוּשִׁים, וועט יעדערער וואָס  
 וועט האַפּען די סטבע וועט בעהיט ווערען פֿון  
 צעה און גיבענשט ווערן מיט בני, חיי, ומזוני"

WHILE IN S. LOUIS, THE FRIEDDIKER REBBE SET UP A COMMITTEE TO BUILD A MIKVAH AND GAVE A COLLECTION OF PENNIES TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE DONORS. THEY WERE DISTRIBUTED ALONGSIDE THIS POCKET-SIZE IMAGE AND THE TEXT OF THE FRIEDDIKER REBBE’S SPECIAL BRACHA.

In Philadelphia:

“A particularly moving scene unfolded when the Lubavitcher Rebbe himself rose to speak. Out of respect, the entire audience stood up—and remained standing for the entire duration of his speech. Among other things, the Rebbe remarked that in general, we need less talk and more action—and that this is especially true when speaking about the Jews in Russia.”<sup>14</sup>

In S. Louis:

“The Rebbe himself was the final speaker, and he surprised everyone with his beautiful, almost literary Yiddish. He spoke about the state of Yiddishkeit in America, explaining that despite all the challenges and obstacles, it could—and must—flourish.”<sup>15</sup>

After the reception in S. Louis, the community leaders told the Frieddiker Rebbe that this type of attentiveness was unheard of.

## AMERICA OF FAITH

Throughout his visit, the Frierdiker Rebbe spoke with deep admiration for the United States—its freedoms, its values, and the kindness shown by its government. The Frierdiker Rebbe was always careful to respect the customs and the laws of the land.

One example from the visit to Milwaukee:

When Chassidim wanted to bring *mashke* to a *farbrengen*, the Frierdiker Rebbe firmly prohibited it. At the time, America was in the midst of Prohibition, when alcohol was strictly outlawed. There would be no *mashke* at his *farbrengen*.<sup>17</sup>

A unique event took place the day he arrived in Philadelphia. The first stop was Independence Hall—birthplace of American liberty, where the newspapers described an unusual scene:

“Mr. Thatcher escorted the Rebbe into Independence Hall and invited him to sit in the very chair where George Washington had once sat.

“Seated in that chair, the Rebbe offered a blessing for the American government and expressed strong praise for the U.S. Constitution. ‘This was my very first wish upon arriving in America—to see the cradle of American freedom,’ the Rebbe said.

“Afterward, the Rebbe was escorted with great ceremony to the Liberty Bell, where he laid a beautiful

laurel wreath and remarked: ‘Freedom that is founded on religion is the strongest kind of freedom.’”<sup>18</sup>

The image of the Frierdiker Rebbe laying a wreath seems surprising and quite unusual. Interestingly, the Frierdiker Rebbe himself described this moment in a letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina—and the press report, including the Frierdiker Rebbe’s words, turned out to be remarkably accurate.

The Frierdiker Rebbe writes that they handed him a wreath of flowers to place near the bell, and he noticed that at that moment, everyone became very solemn. In the eyes of the crowd, it was a very serious moment. He laid the wreath, and said (as recorded in the letter), “החירות המיוסדת על האמונה היא הנכונה והחזקה ביותר, Freedom that is founded on faith is the truest and strongest form of freedom.”<sup>19</sup>

At the close of his visit to America, the Frierdiker Rebbe even traveled to Washington D.C., where he visited President Herbert Hoover at the White House for the express purpose of thanking him.

“The visit,” one reporter quoted Rashag, “was to thank the president for the freedom America gives its Jewish citizens, and for the interest shown by the government in Jewish affairs overseas. The president’s friendly reception was another demonstration, says Rabbi Gurary, that Yidden and Yiddishkeit have a great future here.”



GEORGE WASHINGTON'S CHAIR AND THE LIBERTY BELL IN INDEPENDENCE HALL, AROUND THE TIME OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S VISIT.



THE FRIERDIKER REBBE WITH RASHAG IN FRONT OF THE WHITE HOUSE.

There had been several visitors over the previous years; when Rav Kook visited, only half the hall was filled. When Chaim Weizmann came, it was better, but there were still plenty of empty seats. But when the Frierdiker Rebbe's visit was publicized, one thousand tickets were sold on the very first day. An estimated 3,200 people attended, inside and outside the shul.

In private letters, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote about the enthusiasm, but noted that "In America, they warm up quickly and they cool off quickly as well. One must quickly seize the moment."<sup>16</sup>

## A Voice of Comfort

Despite the thousands who thronged to see the Frierdiker Rebbe, the financial response was disappointing. Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson later wrote that the leaders of the Joint Distribution Committee feared the Frierdiker Rebbe's tremendous influence and actively worked to limit his contact with America's wealthy Jews.<sup>20</sup>

But the real problem was America's economic situation. Just a few months after the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived, the stock market crashed, plunging the country into the Great Depression. Businesses collapsed, people lost their livelihoods, and many Jews were left unemployed. Now, it was the Frierdiker Rebbe who was offering them encouragement.

Mr. Isador Starr, who was a young man at the time, recalled a beautiful moment during the Frierdiker Rebbe's visit to Detroit:

One morning, the Frierdiker Rebbe made a surprise visit to the *Nusach Ari* shul. During his visit, he spoke about the economic crisis and urged the people not to lose hope—the downturn was only temporary, and America would return to prosperity.

"Then," writes Mr. Starr, "the Rebbe started to speak again slowly in his characteristic low voice. 'I am glad to see you in Shul. Stick to the Shul (*"halt zich"*). Stick to the Torah and stick to each other.'"

The Frierdiker Rebbe elaborated:

"In Shul, you will feel close to G-d... if a man can study a Blatt Gemara, very good; if he can study a Perek Mishnayos, very good; if he can only study a Parsha Chumash with Rashi, still very good. And if nothing else, certainly you can say a Kapitel Tehillim, and that, too, is very important."

Then he added:

"Even if you just sit together and eat a piece of hering with a baked potato or 'make a Schnapps' and wish



A NOTICE ANNOUNCING THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S DELIVERY OF A MAAMAR AT THE NUSACH ARI SHUL IN S. LOUIS.

each other 'LChayim,' ...that, too, is worshipping G-d. The Mitzvah of *V'Ahavta L'rei'acha Kamocha* is an *ikar*, a cardinal principle, in Torah, and its observance is of extreme importance."

"It was spoken in his low voice, but with overwhelming conviction," writes Mr. Starr, "and one would have to see the faces of the people to realize and appreciate the deep impression it made upon them."<sup>21</sup>

## A Rebbe Says Chassidus

On Shabbosim and special days, the Frierdiker Rebbe delivered *maamarim* and held *farbrengens*. Sometimes these were held in large public spaces, directed at the broader public, and some were quieter occasions, held in the Frierdiker Rebbe's accommodations.

"One weekday," writes Rabbi Jacobson, "at Reb Mendel Lokshin's Tzemach Tzedek shul, the Rebbe said Chassidus. The shul was filled to capacity; several hundred people were unable to enter and stood outside in the street. Estimates suggested a crowd of close to 5,000 people.

"It was assumed that the Rebbe would first go to the

## TISHREI IN AMERICA

Tishrei was just a few weeks away when the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived. A delegation arrived from Congregation Agudas Achim Anshei Lubavitch, a Nusach Ari shul in Brownsville with 1200 members, asking for the honor of hosting the Frierdiker Rebbe for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Frierdiker Rebbe agreed.

When the Frierdiker Rebbe approached the shul, bedecked in his *kapote* and *spodik*, the streets were packed. Every window and balcony had onlookers. The shul itself was packed to the rafters.

It was a true Rosh Hashanah in Lubavitch. The Frierdiker Rebbe davened that evening for three hours, and one thousand people remained there until the very end, waiting to wish the Frierdiker Rebbe *l'shana tovah*. During *tekios* (the Frierdiker Rebbe said the *pesukim* and the *brachos*) and during the *maamarim* of the second night and *motzei yom tov*, the crowd spilled out onto the street.<sup>22</sup>

Twenty years later, one of the *mispalelim* reminded Rabbi Jacobson of that Rosh Hashanah. "I'll never forget that davening on the night of Rosh Hashanah," he said. "The heartrending cries—it felt as if the walls of the shul were crying with him."<sup>23</sup>

Yom Kippur was spent in a similar manner; the Frierdiker Rebbe actually remained in the shul for the full 24 hours.

Sukkos and Simchas Torah were celebrated at the Frierdiker Rebbe's accommodations, a large home in Crown Heights on the corner of Brooklyn Avenue and Prospect Place. People thronged to the home throughout Yom Tov and Chol Hamoed, and the Frierdiker Rebbe held several farbrengens.

On the night of Simchas Torah, the Frierdiker Rebbe recounts in a letter, he sat at his place facing the front wall as the *Ata Horeisas* were sold, and made a firm decision that these *Hakafos* would be no different than those in Lubavitch.

"We did the first *hakafa* and the seventh in the usual way. The crowd sang with such energy, with very good *niggunim* and great enthusiasm—it lifted the entire street. Despite the late hour, a massive crowd filled the street. They say there were children brought by their parents—older ones standing and watching, and younger ones lifted in their arms. Passersby and people from nearby buildings stopped to see what was going on."<sup>24</sup> After *Hakafos*, the Frierdiker Rebbe washed for the *seudah* and farbrenged for the rest of the night. The farbrengen ended at 7:30 a.m.

America, everyone agreed, had never seen anything like it.



THE SHUL IN BROWNSVILLE WHERE THE FRIERDIKER REBBE DAVENED FOR THE YOMIM NORAIM, 5690.



THE HOME IN CROWN HEIGHTS WHERE THE FRIERDIKER REBBE SPENT SUKKOS AND SIMCHAS TORAH.

*mizrach* to greet the *rabbanim* and community leaders waiting there. But instead, police had to forcefully carve a path through the crowd just to get him to the *bima*. The Rebbe ascended the platform, sat in the chair, and began the *maamar* in a thunderous voice that rang out through the entire shul—and even beyond.”

After a *maamar* in Milwaukee, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote in his letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, Reb Chatche Feigin and Reb Moshe Horenshtein reported that the *maamar* really ‘took’ the crowd.

“Those who attended reported that everyone understood something, and even during those parts they didn’t understand, they felt a sweetness and *geshmak*. In the *maamar*, I explained two *pesukim*, illustrating them with real-life examples in spoken Yiddish. People kept repeating it afterward.

“There are a number of Jews here, in their forties and fifties, originally from our region—Vitebsk province—who, in their youth, had visited Lubavitch with their fathers...

“This visit awakened something deep inside them. It shook them. At the first talk I gave (so they say), they were completely *farloren*, overwhelmed. They wept hysterically, and said *Shehecheyanu* through tears of both joy and pain...”<sup>25</sup>

Everyone agreed that the visits had a deep and profound impact on the communities.

“The Boston visit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” said the *Morgen Journal*, “was a tremendous moral and spiritual success. Every one of his appearances was *b’rov am hadras melech’dig*. His headquarters at 104 Crawford Street became, from the moment he arrived until the moment he departed, a true *tel talpiyos*. Young and old, rich and poor, Chassidim and *misnagd’im* alike came to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe and to hear *chassidus*.”<sup>26</sup>

## The Rebbe They’d Never Seen

When the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in Chicago, a reporter for the *Courier* magazine noticed an elderly, grey-bearded Jew standing at the edge of the train tracks. He looked to be in his nineties. At his side stood a young boy—his great-grandson—and several middle-aged men, his sons.

“The elderly man stretched his eyes toward the direction of the train. His worn, weathered face was lit up with joy. It was as if he had become young again.”



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A RECENTLY RELEASED PHOTOGRAPH OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE ADDRESSING THE CROWD AT A SHUL IN PHILADELPHIA, DURING A LARGE FAREWELL EVENT HELD FOR HIM WITH 1000 PEOPLE. THE NEXT DAY, THE FRIERDIKER REBBE SENT THE PHOTO TO REBBETZIN NECHAMA DINA, NOTING THAT AS THE PICTURE WAS TAKEN AS HE WAS SAYING THE FOLLOWING WORDS:

“האלט שטארק גאט'ס ב"ה מתנה, די הייליגע תורה”  
 “HOLD ON STRONG TO THE GIFT THAT HASHEM HAS GIVEN YOU—THE HOLY TORAH.”

Excitedly, the old man leaned over to the reporter and explained his emotions:

“I want to see the Rebbe—a grandson of *my* Rebbe. I still remember the radiant face of my Rebbe, the Rebbe Maharash. Oy, what a face he had! One glance from him gave me newfound strength. You want to know why I’ve lived so long? Every time I saw him, I felt as though I had gained ten more years of life. I also knew his son, the Rebbe Rashab. And now... now I’ll be able to make a *Shehecheyanu*...”

“The old grey-bearded chossid broke down in tears like a small child, and then, with youthful passion, he began

to dance like a young chossid. He had received new life.”<sup>27</sup>

Many Chassidim, or descendants of Chassidim, found new life in this visit. In one letter, the Frierdiker Rebbe describes a farbrengen in Milwaukee which had 25 or 30 attendees who had personally visited Lubavitch, Kapust, or Liady, the ‘courts’ that had splintered off Lubavitch after the *histalkus* of the Tzemach Tzedek (the Rebbe of Babroisk, the last surviving branch of Kapust, had passed away just seven years earlier).<sup>28</sup>

“The Chabad Chassidim,” writes one reporter, “who had always spoken with reverence and love about the Lubavitch dynasty, the Lubavitch court, and the Lubavitcher Rebbeim, were now meeting, for the first time, the Rebbe they had never seen in person.

“Not only were they completely convinced that everything they had imagined about the Rebbe was true—they now realized that all they had remembered didn’t even scratch the surface. The impression the Rebbe made on them was extraordinary. Very few could even find words to express what they were feeling. They were entirely under the influence of the Rebbe’s powerful spiritual presence.”<sup>29</sup>

Naturally, as the unforgettable visit drew to a close, the Chassidim began to hope that the Rebbe might stay in America. A committee was formed, and they approached the Rebbe with their request. If only they would be *zoche*...

What they didn’t know was that the Frierdiker Rebbe was already giving the idea serious thought. The goal of raising awareness about Russia was accompanied by the goal of scouting out America as a possible place to live. In a letter written by his father-in-law, Reb Avraham Schneerson, it is spoken of almost as a certainty—it was going to happen; only a few practical matters still needed to be resolved.

Ultimately, however, the Frierdiker Rebbe decided to return to Europe—at least for the time being. In an interview with a reporter, he explained that he could not bring himself to settle so far from the Jews of Russia. He could not abandon them.

Later, the Frierdiker Rebbe shared another reason with Rabbi Jacobson: he had come to America in the capacity of an *askan tziburi*—a communal activist—but, as he put it, “*mein inyan iz Chassidim un Chassidus*, my [true] mission is Chassidim and Chassidus.”

Years later, having returned to America, the Frierdiker Rebbe offered yet another explanation. “I saw the *minhag hamedina*,” he said, “a culture in which even the pure of heart feel the need to conform to society’s norms, where



THE FRIEDIKER REBBE ARRIVES AT THE TRAIN STATION IN CHICAGO.

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even *rabbanim* follow the idolatry of ‘that’s just how things are done here.’ It’s not hard to imagine what kind of influence a rabbi can have when he himself is clean-shaven...”<sup>30</sup>

The time was yet to come.

## The Departure

“Last night, the Newton Hotel on the bustling Broadway street near 96th Street was transformed into a true Chassidic court. Hundreds of Chassidim gathered, singing soulful Chassidic *niggunim*, a festive meal was held, and one of the most prominent Chassidic leaders of our time—the Lubavitcher Rebbe—delivered words of Torah. The crowd of Chassidim listened intently, hanging on to every word.”<sup>31</sup>

It was the final days of the Frierdiker Rebbe’s visit, and New York’s Jews were utilizing every moment.

“For a while, the Rebbe sat deep in thought. The entire crowd—men and even several women who had somehow managed to slip into the hall—stood in total silence, ears sharply attuned. Some climbed onto benches for a better view, straining to hear what the Rebbe would say. He spoke quietly, yet everyone could hear.

“‘Until I came to America,’ the Rebbe began, ‘I always had an excuse for American Chassidim. I figured there was a difference between the ‘*alte heim*’ and the ‘new home.’

“But over these few months that I’ve spent here in America, I’ve become convinced that there is no difference. The new home is just like the old one when it comes to Torah and *mitzvos*. Anyone who truly wants to be a frum Jew—to daven three times a day and observe all the *mitzvos* properly—can absolutely do so here, just as they could back in the old country.

“The problem doesn’t lie with America. The problem lies with us. We’ve grown too used to *heteirim*; day by day, we give up more and more from learning Torah and Chassidus, and from observing *mitzvos*.”

As he prepared to leave the United States, the Friediker Rebbe made it clear that America had immense potential. A journalist who interviewed the Friediker Rebbe noted that in contrast to other *rabbanim*, who spoke negatively about the state of American Jewry, the Friediker Rebbe was optimistic.

“The young here absorb and thirst for Yiddishkeit,’ says the Rebbe. ‘The youth is turning back to its Jewish roots. All they lack is knowledge, education.’

“The Rebbe adds, ‘Those who wish to, can make their new life in America resemble their old life overseas.’ The Rebbe is fully confident that it will happen. ‘The American Jews will not only support the yeshivas and Torah centers across the ocean; they will also establish and maintain their own yeshivas and Torah centers here.’”<sup>32</sup>



A NEWSPAPER CLIPPING (FROM THE COURIER MAGAZINE) SHOWS THE FRIEDIKER REBBE DURING HIS TIME IN CHICAGO.

Although the Friediker Rebbe was returning to Europe for the time being, he left a clear message with the Chassidim: Strengthen Yiddishkeit. Spread Chassidus. Uplift the spiritual state of American Jewry—and the day will come.

The center of Chabad-Lubavitch would one day be transplanted to American soil. **T**

1. Letter of the Friediker Rebbe to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, 21 Elul 5689.

2. For more on the state of Yiddishkeit and Chassidus in the early days of America, see “Sacks-Full of Mesiras Nefesh,” *Derher Iyar* 5784.

3. *Zikaron Livnei Yisrael* p. 165.

4. Account of Mr. Issador Starr, published in *Bikur Ch”k Admu”r Haraya”tz L’Ir Detroit* p. 10.

5. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 45–46.

6. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 65.

7. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 85.

8. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 61.

9. Account of Mr. Issador Starr, published in *Bikur Ch”k Admu”r Haraya”tz L’Ir Detroit* p. 11.

10. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 62.

11. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 64.

12. *Zikaron Livnei Yisrael* p. 181.

13. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 74. *Bikur K”k Admu”r Haraya”tz L’Ir Detroit*.

14. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 63.

15. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 71.

16. Friediker Rebbe’s letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, 6 Iyar 5690.

17. Friediker Rebbe’s letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, 11 Adar 5690.

18. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* pg. 61.

19. Friediker Rebbe’s letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, 15 Kislev 5690.

20. *Zikaron Livnei Yisrael* 184.

21. Account of Mr. Issador Starr, published in *Bikur K”k Admu”r Haraya”tz L’Ir Detroit* p. 14.

22. Friediker Rebbe’s letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, Motzaei Rosh Hashanah 5690.

23. *Zikaron Livnei Yisrael* p. 173.

24. Friediker Rebbe’s letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, Isru Chag Simchas Torah 5690.

25. Friediker Rebbe’s letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, 11 Adar 5690.

26. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 83.

27. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 68.

28. Friediker Rebbe’s letter to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, 11 Adar 5690.

29. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 99.

30. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* pp. 92–94.

31. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 85.

32. *Toldos Chabad B’Artzos Habris* p. 87.