

IN THE **FOOTSTEPS**
OF **CHASSIDIM**

The Chossid Who Spoke Up

Reb Avraham Sender Nemtsov

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לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ת ר' יעקב בן הרב שמואל יוסף ע"ה
גרינבוים
גלב"ע מוצאי שבת קודש פרשת
ויחי יעקב ט"ו טבת תש"פ
תנ"צ'ב"ה
נדפס ע"י אשתו ביילא רישא תחי' ובנו
מנחם מענדל ומשפחתו שיחי'
גרינבוים



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A Rebbe Without A Maamar

Two months before Yud Shevat 5711 (when the Rebbe officially assumed the *nesius*), a *bochur* named Mordechai Dubinsky described the state of affairs at 770 in a letter.

“There is an ideological debate going on,” he writes. “Should we pressure the Rebbe to ‘officially’ accept the *nesius*? Unofficially, he is leading us in the fullest sense of the word. Three days a week are formally scheduled for *yechidus*, and he answers everyone. We have been witness to open miracles from his *brachos*. Things are proceeding from day to day. He is called up to the Torah as ‘*Adoneinu Moreinu v’Rabbeinu*,’ and in his presence, his personal name is never mentioned.

“The only thing missing is *maamarim*—and the rumor is that this will change after Yud Shevat.”¹

Maamarim.

While the Rebbe was receiving people for *yechidus*, accepting *panim*, *farbrenging*, and so on, it was all presented as if there was no *nesius* attached to it. Most importantly, the Rebbe still refused to do the one thing that was the sole purview of the Rabbeim—deliver a *maamar* Chassidus, “*divrei Elokim chayim*.” In fact, the Rebbe wouldn’t even review *maamarim* of the previous Rabbeim; nobody had ever heard the Rebbe speak in the tune of a *maamar* at all!²

But change was in the air when the *farbrengen* of Yud



REB AVROHOM SENDER SITTING RIGHT BEHIND THE REBBE AT A FARBRENGEN IN THE EARLY YEARS.

Shevat arrived. The Rebbe publicly accepted a *pan klali*, and the notices about the Rebbe's *minyanim* and farbrengen in the Jewish media already conferred the title of Rebbe. The setting of the farbrengen—for the first time—put the Rebbe at the head of the table on a small stage. There was a strong sense of anticipation.

The Rebbe began the farbrengen with several *sichos*, speaking about the *yahrtzeit* and about the shlichus'n of the Frierdiker Rebbe. One *sicha* followed another, and several *niggunim* were sung. Meanwhile, everybody was waiting in expectation. Would the Rebbe say a *maamar*?

Finally, someone decided to speak up.

“Nimtza Chein...”

Three separate letters and *yomanim* record the moment.

One version is recorded in a letter from the *bochur* Moshe Levertov to his friend Berel Shemtov who was learning in Yeshivah in England.

“After the [*sichos*], there was a [*niggun*] break, and they began requesting Chassidus. The Rebbe said, ‘Who is requesting,’ and they responded, ‘Chassidim!’ Afterwards, the Rebbe began, ‘*in dem maamar... Basi Lgani...*’”³

Reb Yitzchak Pevsner describes it a bit differently: “During the farbrengen, someone said ‘*nimtza chein*’—that [the Rebbe] should say a *maamar* Chassidus. He waited a bit, and was *b'dveikus*, and then began the *maamar*, in the tune of a *maamar*.”⁴

The most extensive description is found in the diary of

Reb Elye Gross (which later formed the basis for the volume *Yemei Bereishis*):

“One of the elder Chassidim said in a loud voice: *Di reid iz gut, uber der olam bet chassidus*, the *sichos* are good, but the crowd requests a *maamar*! Everyone fell silent and looked towards the Rebbe. At 10:40, the Rebbe began: ‘In the *maamar... Basi Lgani...*’”

None of these descriptions record the name of the person who spoke up. Still, everyone knows who it was: Reb Avraham Sender Nemtsov, an elder chossid from Lubavitch—and possibly the oldest chossid at the farbrengen.

Reb Avraham Sender had been one of the earliest proponents of the Rebbe's *nesius*. At the time of the Frierdiker Rebbe's *histalkus* a year earlier, Reb Sender had been living in Manchester. When the news arrived, he had immediately wanted to send a *ksav hiskashrus* to the Rebbe, but the deliberations of some other elder Chassidim had delayed the sending of the letter for several weeks. Either way, the Rebbe had responded with a categorical refusal.⁵

Now, a year later, the Rebbe had finally acquiesced. Reb Sender was euphoric. Rabbi Leibel Groner would later recall that after the Rebbe paused following the first section of the *maamar* to say *l'chaim*, Rabbi Nemtsov jumped onto the table and announced, “Chassidim, we have a Rebbe!” and recited the full *bracha* of *Shehecheyanu*, with the entire crowd responding with a thundering “Amen!” With a broad smile, the Rebbe turned to Rabbi Nemtsov and asked him to quiet down and get off the table.⁶

Although he was a very distinguished character at that farbrengen, Reb Avraham Sender was unusual among the elder Chassidim of his day.

He didn't come from a Lubavitcher family and he hadn't spent much time in Lubavitch circles. When he moved from Manchester to New York in 5710, the only chossid he knew was Reb Shmuel Levitin, whom he had last met as an eighteen-year-old *bochur* in the town of Lubavitch.

The Tomim Who Didn't Know the Temimim

Reb Sender grew up in the town of Kamin, near Vitebsk, in a G-d-fearing home. He was born around 5630, just a few years after the passing of the Tzemach Tzedek.

He was a bright child, so he was sent to the Litvishe yeshiva in Minsk after his bar mitzvah where he learned for several years. He had no particular association with Lubavitch or any other streams of Chabad; as a child, he had received a *bracha* from one of the Tzemach Tzedek's sons for a terrible speech impediment that plagued him in his



REB AVROHOM SENDER.



LEFT TO RIGHT: RABBI SHMUEL GROSSMAN, RABBI YITZCHOK DUBOV, CHIEF RABBI HERZOG, RABBI BENTZION SHEMTOV, RABBI SHMUEL REIN, RABBI SENDER NEMTZOV.

childhood. When he was twenty years old, he happened to spend Rosh Hashanah in Kopust—but that was it.

At twenty, he was drafted into the Russian army. Military service for the Czar was a nightmare for any Jew, especially one who refused to eat non-kosher food. Still, somehow, Reb Sender persevered and emerged five years later without his *yiras shamayim* being compromised. After his army service, he married Sarah Mindel (the aunt of Rabbi Nissen Mindel, the Rebbe's secretary—who would later become their son-in-law as well), and made his living from a grocery store in Kamin.

But he wanted more.

Reb Sender wanted to continue his learning, which had been so rudely interrupted by the army service. He reached out to the kollel that existed in Kovno at the time, and they agreed to accept him with the stipend of ten rubles per week.

However, Reb Sender had started to gravitate towards Lubavitch. Reb Sender's uncle was Reb Shaul Raksin, a student of a chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek and an enthusiastic Lubavitcher chossid. Reb Shaul had heard about the new yeshiva the Rebbe Rashab had opened in Lubavitch—and convinced Reb Sender to try it out.

When they arrived, Reb Sender's application was categorically rejected. The yeshiva was in its infancy. Young, promising *bochurim*, in their late teenage years, were being handpicked to be part of this new 'experiment.' Reb Sender was already a twenty-seven-year-old married man; he was no longer an impressionable youngster who could receive true *hashpaa* from the *mashpi'im* at the yeshiva. This was not the right place for him.

But Reb Sender and his uncle were not willing to give up. In a *yechidus*, his uncle argued to the Rebbe Rashab that Reb Sender had been willing to give up a significant amount of funds from the Kovno kollel to come to Lubavitch instead. He deserved to be accepted.

The Rebbe Rashab gave his approval, and Reb Sender became the first *yungerman* in Tomchei Temimim.

The town of Lubavitch became his own. He learned Chassidus from the famed *mashpia*, Rashbatz. Reb Sender would relate how, when a *shiur* once ended, he had assumed that one hour had passed since it had begun, but he looked at the clock and discovered that it was three in the morning; they had spent six hours with Rashbatz ensconced in the *maamar*.

Being already advanced in his learning, he was asked to take over a Gemara *shiur* for the townspeople in a local *shteibel* that had previously been delivered by Reb Chonye Marosov.

One day, an older chossid from the days of the Tzemach Tzedek gave him some criticism; "Your *shiur* is good, but not as good as Chonye's!"

“Why?” Reb Sender asked.

“Chonye gave an excellent shiur, but he didn’t *feel* like he was giving an excellent shiur. He had *bitul*. But you, your shiur is excellent, *but you know that it’s excellent.*”

Lubavitch Yeshivah Old Boys Club

After a period of learning in Lubavitch, Reb Sender returned home. He was a changed person; now a fiery chossid, he immediately began teaching *shiurim* in Chassidus to the locals. Within a few short years, however, he accepted a job to become a *shochet* in faraway Manchester. So, the veteran *lamdan* but newly-minted Lubavitcher chossid soon found himself as the only chossid in an entire city, and perhaps even a whole country.

People quickly learned to trust the *shechita* of this special individual. When Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook was in England, he was careful to eat only from Reb Sender’s *shechita* and quickly befriended him.

One day, Rav Kook asked him for a *haskama* for a publication, but Reb Sender demurred. “In Halacha, we have the same opinions, but in *hashkafa*, it’s different.”

Reb Sender was actually known for opposing Zionism, even before becoming a chossid.

At his own engagement party many years earlier, the local *rav* had offered a *l’chaim* for the success of the Zionist Congress, which had just gathered for the first time in Basil, Switzerland. When Reb Sender refused to participate, the Rav pointed out that 77 *rabbanim* had signed a proclamation supporting the endeavor.

Always one with a witty retort, Reb Sender responded by quoting the *possuk* regarding the *meraglim*, “אִפְסֵי כִי עַז הָעָם” (The people who inhabit the land are mighty). The word עַז, he pointed out, had the *gematria* of 77...

Over the decades in Manchester, several other *Temimim* joined him—Reb Menachem Tzvi Rivkin, Reb Yitzchok Dubov, and Reb Shmuel Rein. Reb Zalmon Jaffe was a youngster during those years; “these four personalities,” he would later write, “made up the *Lubavitch Yeshivah Old Boys Club*—a very select and exclusive group.”⁷

The Minyan to Hold Up the City

In his later years, Reb Avraham Sender settled in Long Beach, NY, near his son-in-law, Rabbi Nissen Mindel. They both davened in the local Young Israel shul, where Reb Sender gave a regular Tanya *shiur*.



TESHURA NEMTZOV 5779

RABBI NEMTZOV IN HIS
LATER YEARS IN AMERICA.

One day, the Rebbe asked Reb Sender if there were any Friday night *minyanim* in the entire Long Beach that davened *bizmana*, at sundown. Long Beach was home to many elderly, *balebatish* Jews, and the Friday night *minyanim* in the summertime were held long before *tzeis*, so Reb Sender told the Rebbe that there were not.

Hearing that, the Rebbe made a request: Reb Sender should arrange such a *minyan* each week.

Reb Sender didn’t ask any questions, and throughout that summer, he arranged a weekly *minyan* late Friday night. It proved to be very challenging. Most people were very comfortable with the early *minyan*. So, when the next summer came around, Reb Sender asked the Rebbe whether it was necessary to continue. What was the point of the *minyan* if nobody expressed any interest in it?

That’s when the Rebbe explained that the *minyan* served a very important purpose.

According to halacha, the Rebbe reminded him, if all the city shuls accept Shabbos early, Shabbos automatically begins for the entire locale. Long Beach was full of Jews who were not yet observant of Torah and *mitzvos*; if Shabbos begins early, it adds a significant portion of time to the potential *chilul Shabbos*. By maintaining one single *minyan* at *tzeis*, that entire problem was averted. “Why should they be *mechalel shabbos* for 27 hours, when it could be only 26?”⁸

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Reb Avraham Sender passed away at the ripe old age of 93 on Shavuot 5722, and was buried near the Ohel. **T**

This article is based on Kfar Chabad magazine issue 2096, and the Nemitzov Teshurah—Shevat 5779, unless otherwise noted.

1. 10 Kislev 5711.
2. Yemei Bereishis p. 383.
3. Kfar Chabad issue 1863, p. 110.
4. Yamim Mikedem p. 37.
5. Igros Kodesh vol. 21, p. 99.
6. Yemei Bereishis p. 383.
7. Zalmon Jaffe Encounters 5753.
8. As heard from Reb Berel Rosenberg, grandson of Reb Avraham Sender.