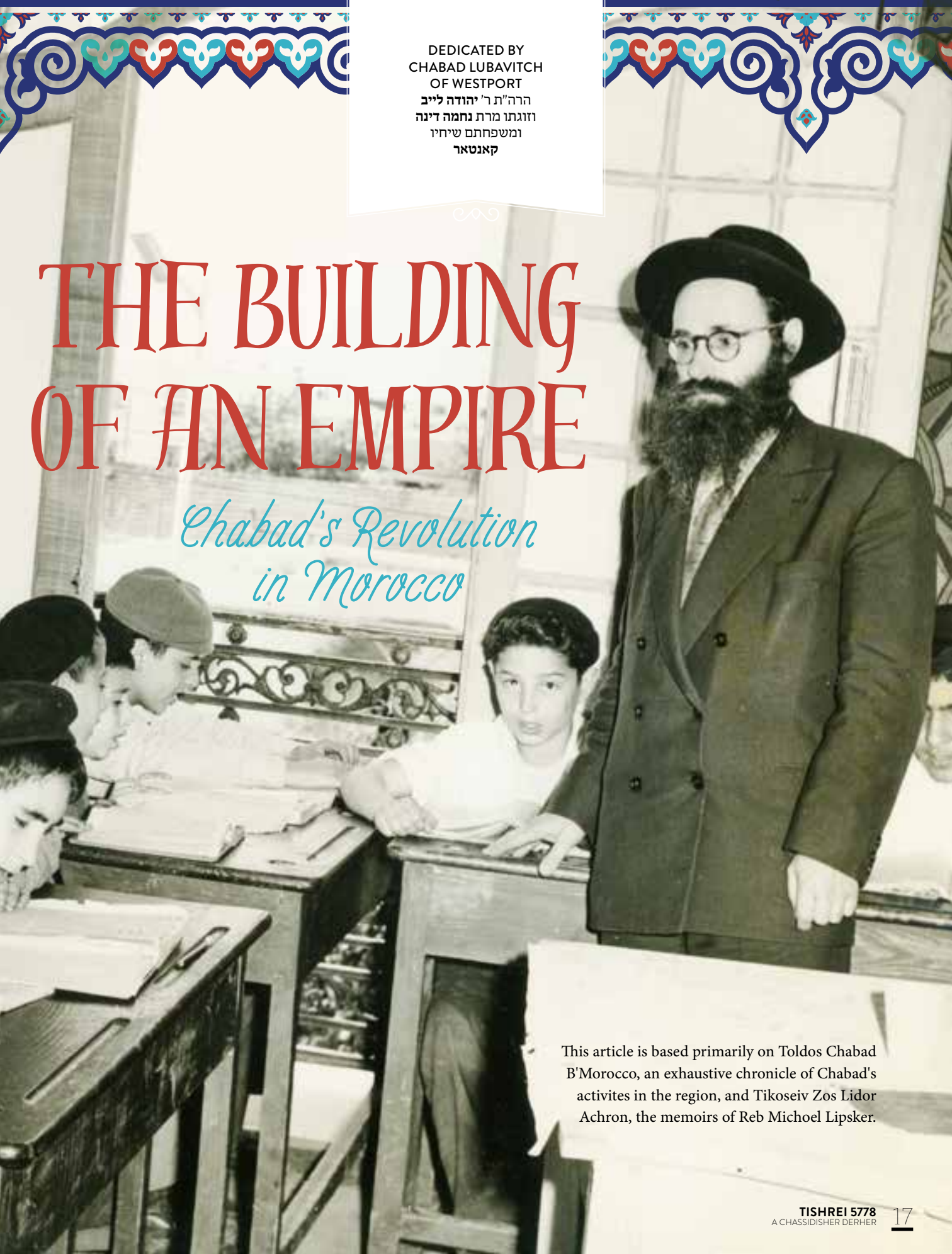




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# THE BUILDING OF AN EMPIRE

*Chabad's Revolution  
in Morocco*



This article is based primarily on Toldos Chabad B'Morocco, an exhaustive chronicle of Chabad's activities in the region, and Tikoseiv Zos Lidor Achron, the memoirs of Reb Michael Lipsker.

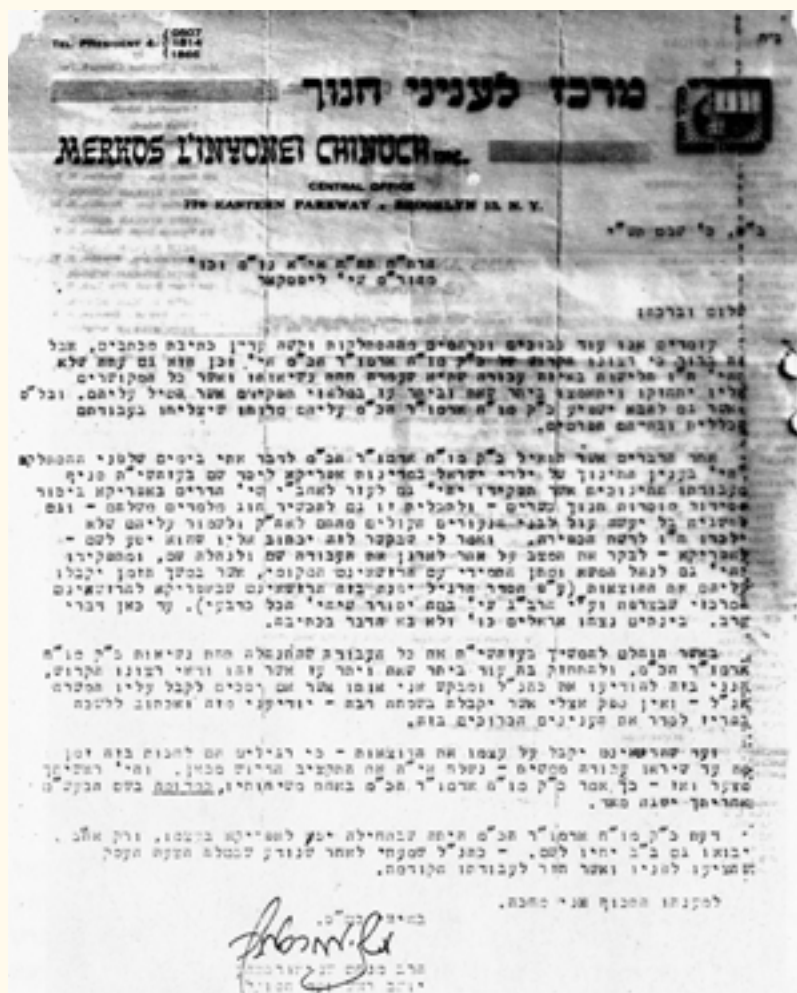


It was during Shevat 5710. The Jewish world was reeling from the news of the unexpected *histalkus* of the Frierdiker Rebbe. At the time, many Lubavitcher Chassidim worldwide were still in a state of transition following the Holocaust and the mass escape from communist Russia; a sizable number resided in France where they had been awaiting further instructions from the Frierdiker Rebbe as to where and when they could finally set down roots. Now, after the *histalkus*, everything seemed up in the air.

Reb Michoel Lipsker was one of the Chassidim residing in France. One day, he came home to a letter from the Rebbe, dated 20 Shevat—a mere ten days after the *histalkus*.

“We stand bewildered and shocked from the *histalkus*,” the Rebbe began, “and writing letters is still difficult. However, it is clear that the holy wish of the my father-in-law the Rebbe was—and is—that there be no diminishment *chas veshalom* in any of the work that was under his leadership, and that all those connected to him should strengthen themselves and exert themselves above and beyond, *b’yeser se’is v’yeser oz*, in fulfilling the mission that he placed upon them. There is no doubt that my father-in-law the Rebbe will continue to be *mashpia* from his *ruach* that they be successful in their public work and their personal lives.

“One of the things that my father-in-law the Rebbe chose to speak with me about a few days before the *histalkus* was regarding the education of the Jewish children in Africa; to establish a branch of our educational work there, with Hashem’s help.”



LETTER FROM THE REBBE TO REB MICHOEL LIPSKER, SETTING IN MOTION THE SHLICHUS IN MOROCCO, DATED 20 SHEVAT 5710, A MERE TEN DAYS AFTER THE FRIEDIKER REBBE'S HISTALKUS.

The Rebbe continues, in very concise words, how the Frierdiker Rebbe had defined the role of Lubavitch on the continent:

- Establish a branch of the Lubavitch educational network.
- Assist the local Yidden in establishing and organizing *mosdos chinuch*.
- Train local teachers.
- Ensure that the youth emigrating to Eretz Yisroel do not fall into the trap of *kefir*.

“[The Frierdiker Rebbe] told me,” the Rebbe continues, “that I should write to you that you should travel there—to Africa—to oversee the situation on the ground, organize and manage the activities... Until this [point in the letter] is *divrei harav* [the words of the Frierdiker Rebbe]. Meanwhile, “the angels prevailed” [the *histalkus* occurred] and there was no time to write.

“Being that it has been decided that, with Hashem’s help, all the work under my father-in-law the Rebbe’s leadership will continue and be strengthened *b’yeser se’is v’yeser*

"...WRITING LETTERS IS STILL DIFFICULT. HOWEVER, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE HOLY WISH OF MY FATHER-IN-LAW THE REBBE WAS—AND IS—THAT THERE BE NO DIMINISHMENT CHAS VESHALOM IN ANY OF THE WORK THAT WAS UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP..."

oz, and certainly this is his holy will, I am hereby notifying you about the above. If you do agree to accept upon yourself this assignment—and I have no doubt that you will, with great joy—I request that you notify me, and I will correspond with the office [*Lishka*] in France about the arrangements...Your beginning will be small, and then—so said the [Friediker] Rebbe in one of his *sichos*, in the name of the Baal Shem Tov (I believe)—your end shall increase exceedingly...I await your immediate response.”<sup>1</sup>

Reb Michoel immediately sent back a letter with his agreement. The Rebbe hadn’t indicated which specific country in Africa he should go to, but after some research Reb Michoel saw that Morocco was the right place. Within a few months, by the beginning of Sivan 5710, Reb Michoel was in Meknes, Morocco.

The Rebbe sent him a letter upon his arrival:

“...I sent a telegram yesterday saying: Begin working immediately, with *hatzlachah*. With blessing, Menachem Schneerson. [Now the Rebbe continues the letter:]... When Reb Binyomin Gorodetzky comes back [to New York]...I will discuss with him your proposals. Be that as it may, do not delay. Begin immediately, and may it be in a good and auspicious time, to fulfill the will of my father-in-law the Rebbe regarding spreading Torah and strengthening Yiddishkeit...”<sup>2</sup>

## A CRISIS IN NORTHERN AFRICA

Although Morocco counted itself among the oldest Jewish communities in the world (some maintain that Yidden have resided there since the times of Shlomo Hamelech), their religious observance had declined terribly over the last generation. The *Alliance Universelle* (or כל ישראל חברים), a French organization dedicated to “modernizing” and “educating” the Jewish people, had taken advantage of the naïveté of the Jewish communities in Morocco, Tunisia, and other countries, and established a huge network of schools there. Though they ostensibly spent a few hours a week learning Jewish subjects, the main focus was on educating the children to be enlightened members of society, unconstrained “by the backwards customs of old.”

“Growing up in Casablanca,” former Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Shlomo Amar writes, “I remember that there were several Jewish schools...in addition to the children who studied in the shuls as was the ancient custom. This continued until the people of Alliance came and established several schools of their own, where the study of Torah was trivialized, and worst of all, they studied on Shabbos as in the weekday...”

“The devastation caused by these schools was very great, and grew day to day. The masses were fooled into sending their children there, as they did not comprehend how terrible it was. They thought that their children would learn a profession and become educated, that they would be successful and also good, wholesome Jews; they did not imagine where it would lead to. Many people were led astray due to these schools, and there were even rabbonim who erred after them...”

“...At that time Hashem sent his messengers, through the holy man who carried the generation on his shoulders ‘as the nurse carries the suckling’—namely, the Rebbe of Chabad zy”a. The spirit of Hashem guided his steps...and he called his shluchim into action, sending them to places they and their fathers did not know, where they did not understand the language or the customs.”<sup>3</sup>

## “BEGIN IMMEDIATELY!”

The Rebbe told Reb Michoel to hit the ground running [“Begin immediately”, the Rebbe had written], and that’s exactly what he did. As soon as he arrived, he went about establishing a yeshiva, with the help of Harav Baruch Toledano (who had also helped him arrange his visa). Everything was different in this new country, and as an Ashkenazi outsider, he had to navigate a delicate balance between

assisting the local Yidden and teaching them, while also ensuring that they should not feel like he was trampling on their local, Sephardic customs.

There were already a few students studying informally in Harav Baruch's shul under their teacher Rabbi Yitzchok Sabag, and this would serve as the basis for the new yeshiva. But the style was different from anything Reb Michoel had ever seen. They sat on wide benches with their feet tucked under them; one would read the Gemara and the teacher would explain. Reb Michoel immediately organized a dining room in a side-room of the shul, but he was afraid to start bringing in desks and chairs, lest he offend the local custom. But after the teacher confirmed that he would be happy with the new furniture, Reb Michoel immediately ordered new desks and chairs from a carpenter. It was already beginning to look like a school. Within a few weeks, the student-body had grown to forty children, and a new location was rented. The farbrengen of Yud-Beis Tammuz was celebrated with great fanfare.

As the summer vacation approached, Reb Michoel arranged a summer school for all the children of the city, including those in the other schools. It was blessed with unbelievable success, with about fifteen classes spanning all grades. In previous years, the youngsters had largely remained in the city during the summer, and were a source of frustration and grief for the parents. The people in the community were deeply appreciative to Reb Michoel for resolving this issue, and the success of the summer



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school—where many learned more Yiddishkeit than the entire year—made a deep impression on them, paving the way for future activities.

As the years passed, the yeshiva quickly outgrew its early facilities and became a huge organization with hundreds of students.

To appreciate what Reb Michoel accomplished, and what Lubavitch would continue doing throughout Morocco, it is important to realize

that these weren't regular students from middle class backgrounds, and the yeshivos weren't just there in order to teach them for a few hours a day. Many of the Yidden lived in utter squalor—the Jewish community of Morocco was perhaps the most impoverished in the world—and when the children came to the yeshiva, many of them were very sick from various illnesses. In addition to providing them with



"...AT THAT TIME HASHEM SENT HIS MESSENGERS, THROUGH THE HOLY MAN WHO CARRIED THE GENERATION ON HIS SHOULDERS, THE REBBE OF CHABAD. THE SPIRIT OF HASHEM GUIDED HIS STEPS...AND HE CALLED HIS SHLUCHIM INTO ACTION..."

a high-level Jewish education, the Lubavitcher schools took care of them on a physical level, with clean dormitories and food.

Reb Michoel wrote: "I will try to describe how it was without exaggeration, for there is plenty to tell about the situation as it was. The children from the small villages came dressed in their clothing, a cloak—*zelabia*—which was white/black; when they first put it on it was white, but it had become black... It seems that bathing and laundry did not exist in those deserts. The first thing we needed to do was shower them and provide them with new clothing. One time, when the children returned from the shower, one of them was crying and crying and no-one could calm him. Finally they figured out that he had come with his older brother, but he couldn't find him now. They showed him that 'he's right next to you!' but he did not recognize him, and continued crying. Finally, one of the teachers came up with an idea: he brought the older brother's old rags and told him to put them on, and the child calmed down upon seeing his brother..."

Reb Michoel took care of the *talmidim*'s health as well, both physical and mental—in some

cases saving children from lifelong disabilities.

### SPREADING THE WINGS

As Lubavitch's educational initiatives in Meknes grew increasingly successful, it quickly spread elsewhere. Midlat, a small town near Meknes, had little in the way of schools and educational institutions; even the Alliance had only two classes. The community sent a message through Harav Toledano asking for Lubavitch's help in educating the hundreds of unattended to children.

"One day, I traveled there with Harav Baruch," Reb Michoel later wrote, "and as we entered the city, we met hundreds of children. We went to the home of the Chacham Harav Meir Abuchatzera, where the leaders of the community gathered, and after a short conversation, we arrived at the subject at hand. I asked them, 'How many children are there over the age of five, besides for those learning in the Alliance school?' Over the next few hours, they gathered hundreds of children in to Harav Meir Abuchatzera's shul—children with no spiritual sustenance whatsoever.

"After davening *mincha*, we returned to the home of the Chacham, where, in our honor, they had prepared tables filled with delicacies—meat, wine, and other foods, as is their custom.

"In the evening, we sat down for a practical discussion about opening a *talmud Torah*, where we discussed locations, teachers, and financial



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sources. I stood firm that they, too, help carry the financial burden, and it was agreed that they would pay 50% and we would provide the other 50%.

“We sat together until late at night; we drank *l'chaim* and wished *brachos* in honor of establishing the *talmud Torah*. The next day, they began signing up students, and they also decided to make an evening-yeshiva for the older youth. *Baruch Hashem*, there was great success.

“Once in a while, I would visit and see the results...It made a big impression on everyone when a ten-year-old child said *maftir* in the big shul, and the entire city was talking about it with great *nachas*. When I would come, they would literally kiss me with thanks and joy.”

## BUILDING JEWISH INFRASTRUCTURE

Within a few months of landing in Morocco for the first time in his life, Reb Michoel had managed to

establish two schools and multiple afternoon programs. But there was no time to rest, as he went about strengthening every area of Jewish life.

One key program he began was Tiferes Bachurim, an afternoon program for *bochurim* and *yungelait* who worked for a living. They would gather in the evenings (and other times) to learn Shulchan Aruch and Chassidus, and they would also get together on Shabbos for a *seder niggunim*, followed by a *melave malka* and stories of *tzadikim*. This group formed the core of the Lubavitch activities in Morocco, including the *mitvzoim*, matzah baking, and so on, and many would become educators themselves.

Reb Michoel also began creating a Jewish infrastructure, by training *shochtim* and *sofrim*, establishing an institute for teachers, and so on. Believe it or not, some of these projects were controversial: People couldn't believe that these

poor, lower class children from small villages were permitted to do such important jobs—doesn't a *shochet* need to be from a family of *shochtim*?!—but as time went on, they began appreciating the value of what Lubavitch was accomplishing: re-establishing Jewish life on sturdy ground.

Reb Michoel focused on training his students in the ways and study of Chassidus, beginning every day with the Hayom Yom; setting up morning and evening classes in Chassidus in the yeshiva (though, as per the Rebbe's directive in a letter, they were shorter than in regular Lubavitcher yeshivos); getting them involved in *hafatzas haTorah*; and so on. He also focused on spreading Chassidus throughout the city, holding major farbrengens, giving out the new *kuntreisim* of the Frierdiker Rebbe's *maamarim* as they came out, and such. He received special encouragement from the Rebbe in this regard. “It is very, very good that you utilize every opportunity to explain an *inyan* in Chassidus at all possible opportunities, and I await further updates on this. Without question, the *brachos* of the Rebbe my father-in-law are accompanying you in this work that it be with great success.”<sup>4</sup>

One of Reb Michoel's most innovative projects was to address a severe shortage in *tashmishei kedusha*—tefillin, tzitzis, and so on. “The yeshiva grew and developed in quality and quantity,” he writes, “and we moved to a more spacious location...Day by day, visitors came to see it, and they all were stunned by the yeshiva and praised it. It continued growing and becoming ever more famous and admirable.



THE BEIS SEFER L'SAFRUS IN ACTION. THE ENTIRE PROCESS OF MAKING AND WRITING STA"TM HAPPENED HERE.



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REB MICHOEL LIPSKER LEADS A LAG B'OMER OUTING IN THE FIELD.

But I personally, saw a serious, fundamental lack in the education of the *talmidim*: There was a severe shortage of *tashmishei kedusha* in the city, and the entire country—and this was even more severe by the students. The vast majority of their tzitzis and tefillin were not only possibly *possul*...”

Reb Michoel did not suffice with diagnosing the issue. After consulting with the Rebbe,<sup>5</sup> and with the assistance of Rabbi Binyomin Gorodetzky, he flew down a *sofer* from Eretz Yisrael to begin a training program in *stam*. The Rebbe directed that they study every aspect of the job, from writing to fixing the *klaf* and the *batim*, and that’s what they did. Dozens of students became

full-fledged *sofrim*, providing tefillin, mezuzos, and tzitzis for Morocco and far beyond. (They even completed a few *sifrei Torah*!) The institute lasted many years, and later on, these *sofrim* went on to become some of the best in Eretz Yisrael.

(Incidentally, Reb Michoel had managed to catch on to *safrus* himself, so when the *sofer* needed to return to Eretz Yisrael, he became the trainer until the job was passed on to Rabbi Sholom Eidelman.)

### MIKVAOS OUT OF FAUCETS

Perhaps the best illustration for the situation of Yiddishkeit in Morocco at the time—a sincerity and dedication to Yiddishkeit but an utter lack of knowledge—was

the situation with the *mikvaos*. Reb Michoel quickly realized that most *mikvaos* were filled from a faucet! When he spoke about it with the chief *chacham*, he was nonplussed. The faucets come from the ground... The pipes are not considered real vessels... There are opinions to rely on, he said.

When he wrote about it to the Rebbe, the Rebbe wrote. “It seems from your letter that you mean literally, that they use water from a water fountain!” Then the Rebbe instructed him on how to deal with it. “Without making a big deal out of it, you should change it slowly but surely—either by changing it into a *mikveh* of rain water, or if there is no



rain in your area, perhaps you can arrange artificial ice.”<sup>6</sup>

Reb Michoel related: “I said to the chief *chacham* that the Beis Yosef says that in laws of the Torah (*d’oraisa*) one must be stringent! All we are discussing is building another cistern of rain water next to the first one!...I wasn’t asking for any money from them...for fifty dollars at the most a new cistern of rain-water could be dug.”

It took a long time and protracted arguments for the local leaders to finally relent and allow him to build a *mehudar’dike mikveh*, something that would have been self-understood in a regular Jewish community.

## HOW TO BUILD A MOSAD

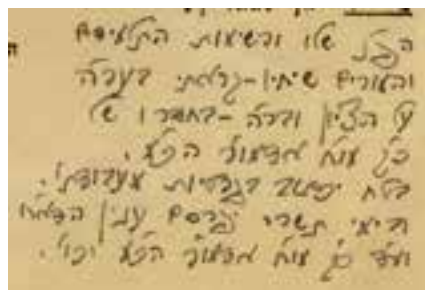
The Rebbe encouraged Reb Michoel to write often and in detail, and was intimately involved in guiding all minor and major decisions. “Surely you will continue writing in detail about all issues, as our sages have said, one should not be concise when elaboration is important.”<sup>7</sup> Reading the Rebbe’s letters and directives to him, one receives a fascinating crash course in so many areas of shlichus, as Reb Michoel was confronted with challenges ranging from intense local politics; opposition from existing schools; the limits of community leadership; deference to local custom coupled with firmness on principles; financial independence; and so on. The Rebbe trained him on setting expectations; where to draw the line on any number of issues; and protocol for dealing financially with Merkos and the Lishka. Considering that he was the first shliach the Rebbe sent out



THE FIRST GROUP OF STUDENTS FROM MOROCCO WHO JOINED TOMCHEI TEMIMIM IN BRUNOY, FRANCE.

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A handwritten postnote to Reb Michoel Lipsker on a letter dated Erev Shabbos Shuvah 5711.



Your pan and the list of students and teachers sheyichyu - I read on Erev Rosh Hashanah at the Tziyun, and on Rosh Hashanah in the room of the [Friediker] Rebbe.

You will surely write in detail of your work.

In the days of Tishrei you should publicize about Chassidus and about the [Friediker] Rebbe etc.

הפ"נ שלו ורשימות התלמידים והמורים שיחיו - קראתי בער"ה על הציון ובר"ה - בחדרו של כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר הכ"מ.

בטח יכתוב בפרטיות מעבודתו.

ובימי תשרי יפרסם ענין הדא"ח וע"ד כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר הכ"מ וכו'.

after 5710, it is not far-off to imagine that the Rebbe was creating a sort of blueprint for the thousands of shluchim to come.

In one of the Rebbe’s early letters, he set down the tone for how the *mosdos* would operate. “I already gave the message that the name must be ‘Oholei Yosef Yitzchak Lubavitch,’ and under it (in parentheses?)

‘Named for and under the leadership of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.’ Besides for this general name, each specific *mosad* will have its name on its stationary, such as *Education Center for Teachers*, *Yeshiva*, *Tiferes Bachurim*, and the like. I hope that there will be no difficulties in having everyone agree on this, but whatever it is, the stationaries must have the

## THE CHACHAMIM OF MOROCCO

The Rebbe had long-standing relationships with many *chachamim* and rabbonim in Morocco, including Harav Baruch Toledano, the Abuchatzera family (most famously Rabbi Yisroel Abuchatzera, later known as the “Baba Sali”), Rabbi Sholom Mashash and many others. The Rebbe became their go-to authority for all types of questions in Kabbalah, *halacha*, and personal matters, and their friendship assisted Lubavitch’s work greatly.



HARAV YITZCHOK SABAG, MOROCCO

LIPSKER FAMILY

name ‘Lubavitch.’  
“Regarding what you write that a committee of five people was made, and from now on all questions will be sent to them, it is self understood that this must be done in a fashion that the spirit of the *mosdos* will be kept the same, and no foreign airs will mix in.”<sup>8</sup>

One significant saga was the establishment of a girls school. Reb Michael asked the Rebbe about it soon after he arrived, and the Rebbe gave him a framework for how to approach such a project. “It is difficult to give a detailed opinion from here, but the general point is this: there are many areas of *tznius* that the Sephardim have taken upon themselves for many generations, pertaining to women, teenage girls, and even little girls. So when it comes to the education of their daughters, you must be extremely cautious that they shouldn’t end up saying that ‘from when Lubavitch came to their country, we went from a higher *kedusha* to a lesser one.’ Thus, you must first investigate by the *charedim* and elders in the community as to what the *minhag* of their ancestors was. Even if certain changes are necessary, it must be done in a way that it won’t cause

gossip that this brought them to a lesser holiness.”<sup>9</sup>

Later on, the Rebbe gave him further instructions. After encouraging him to go ahead with establishing girls schools in Meknes and elsewhere, the Rebbe added: “It must not be together with the boys—not only shouldn’t they learn together in one room, but they shouldn’t even use the same entrance to the building. It would be even better if they were on separate buildings and separate streets, for the more careful you are in these matters, the better...”<sup>10</sup> When the question arose whether they should teach secular subjects in the girls school, the Rebbe told them that there was no trial period for such things—if they began doing it, they would be forced to continue. “In such matters, it will be difficult to cease doing it—even if you want to.”<sup>11</sup> The Rebbe therefore advised them to do further research before coming to a final decision.

The school started with Reb Michael’s daughters, and it quickly blossomed. After a few years, it was a fully functioning school, with classes going all the way through high school. As it was the only Jewish high school in the area, even the children who went to other

elementary schools attended the Lubavitch high school, and the results were such that it grew and grew in popularity.

The Rebbe’s involvement wasn’t limited to the big picture, however. The Rebbe showed interest in individual students and families as well. In one letter: “The *pan* about [...] will be read at the *tziyun hakadosh*. Please ask, in an appropriate manner, whether she follows *tahara* as she should, and whether, in the period of their marriage, another girl was offended by him...Please let me know. Please let me know about the health of the student Moshe ben Pricha...”

## ESTABLISHING AN EMPIRE

As the *mosdos* grew, the Rebbe sent more shlichim to assist in the work and develop it further, including Rabbis Shlomo Matusof, Nissan Pinson, Leibel Raskin, Sholom Eidelman, and others.

The first one was Rabbi Matusof, who arrived in the beginning of 5711. In addition to building the central organizations in Casablanca—arranging classes for the youth, establishing schools, and so on, essentially creating a second Lubavitch capitol in Morocco—he was the pioneer in spreading it out

further, to the small, primitive towns and villages throughout the country.

He later wrote: "With the situation of Yiddishkeit as it was, we didn't think about bringing just one family closer to Yiddishkeit, or to learn Torah with only one child. It

was clear that our job was to work in a broader arena."

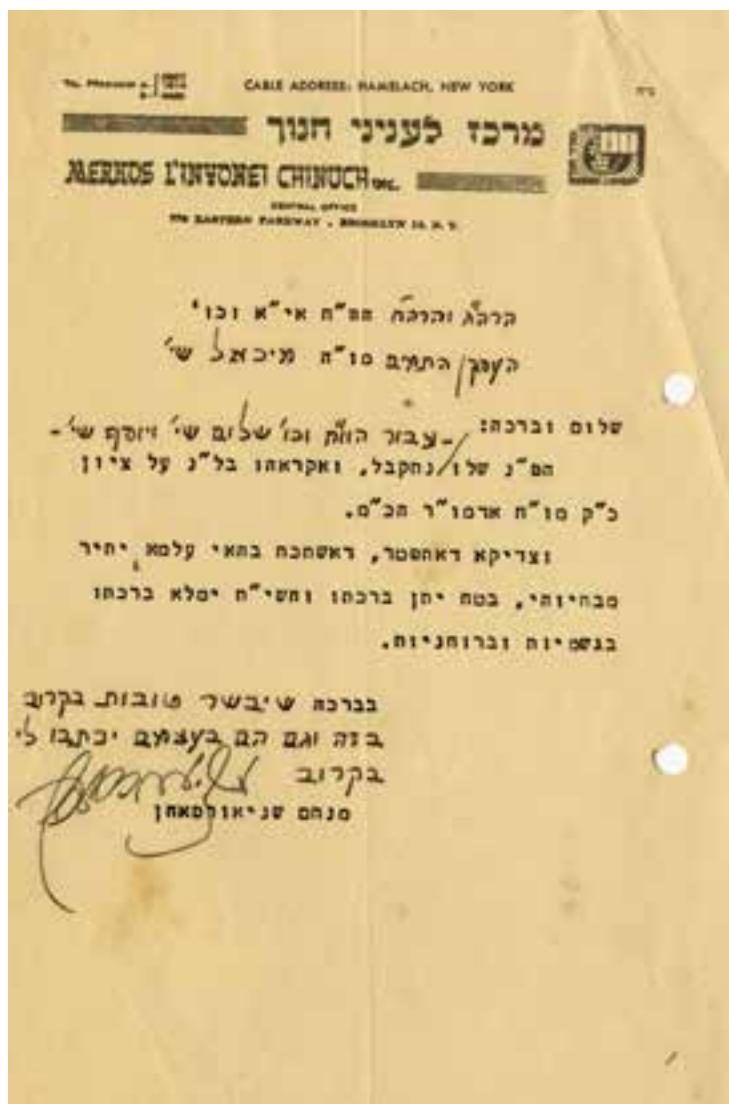
Today, when a shliach goes out to a city, he usually thinks in terms of building a *mosad* from the bottom up, starting off small and growing from there. Chabad Houses and especially schools take years to

establish. But Morocco was different, both because the need was so great, and because the Yidden were so eager to take anything they could get.

So Rabbi Matusof didn't focus on building one school or two schools, or even ten schools. He traveled from village to village setting up one school after another. When he arrived in a village, he would gather the children to ascertain how many there were, find teachers for them, and within literally hours or days a new school was up and running! Then, it was on to the next village.

Some of these villages were so far-flung and primitive that they were not accessible by standard vehicles, and Rabbi Matusof found himself travelling by donkey to reach

In this letter, the Rebbe responds to a *pan* from a student in Morocco; being that they weren't able to read the typical cursive, the Rebbe writes his handwritten additions in block letters.



"SEE THE  
SICHA OF 13  
TAMMUZ FROM  
WHICH YOU CAN  
DRAW CHAYUS,  
INSPIRATION,  
AND STRENGTH  
IN YOUR WORK  
IN YOUR PLACE  
NOW. FROM  
THERE YOU WILL  
SEE, THAT IT  
IS UNDERSTOOD  
EVEN IN THE  
HUMAN MIND  
THAT THERE IS  
NO PLACE FOR  
THOUGHTS OF  
LONELINESS  
CHAS  
VESHALOM..."



them. The following is his report about one of these tiny villages:

## TINDZAD

*A small and piteous community, very few people; 9 families, 53 people in total. Twenty of them are children who need a teacher, and, sadly, some of the adults do not even know what a Hebrew letter looks like. There are only some who learn in the Muslim school. They also lack a shochet*

*and a shliach tzibur, and until we arrived, for many weeks they hadn't davened in their shul whatsoever. We arranged someone to daven for them. If there is a talmid in the yeshiva [in Casablanca]...who is learning shechita as well, maybe it would be good to arrange to bring him.*

"It was tremendous work," he would later write. "We needed to find a proper place for them to learn and teachers among the local people.

We also needed to choose a director in each location to be directly responsible for the *talmud Torah*, and to arrange monthly salaries for them all. When that was taken care of, we immediately advertised the new school. Later on, I would return to test the students, resolve various issues, and ensure that everything was okay. It was a lot of work, but this is how we established the great chain of education 'Oholei Yosef Yitzchak Lubavitch of Morocco."

In other towns and villages, where another Jewish school already existed and he could not open one of his own for one reason or another, he convinced the existing schools to cease their *chillul Shabbos*, sometimes applying pressure to ensure it happened. In addition, Reb Shlomo established summer-schools in many villages, with hundreds of students.

Reb Shlomo was forced to spend the entire week traveling in order to establish and manage the chain of schools, but the success was staggering. In the first year, fifty schools were opened throughout Morocco! They ranged greatly in style and size—some schools, located in bigger towns, had hundreds of students; others were in tiny villages and the small schools were located in the side-rooms of the shuls. The numbers he was dealing with were mind-boggling; thousands of students learning in a chain of schools that had been established *in the course of a single year!* And this wasn't done with an army of Lubavitchers from New York—everyone, including the teachers, principals and directors, were locals, and they were all managed by a single shliach, Rabbi Matusof.

## NEVER ALONE

The Rebbe showed Reb Michoel tremendous *kiruvim* on a personal level: encouraging him in his work, asking about his family, and the like. In one particularly powerful letter, the Rebbe responded to a letter where Reb Michoel had written that he felt lonely, and that "a great weakness was falling on his work."

The Rebbe replied: "This is the advice of the *yetzer*, who attempts to weaken every person in fulfilling his shlichus by using the appropriate language for this particular shliach. The *pisgam* of the Rebbe my father-in-law is known, that Chassidus accomplished that *m'iz nit elent*—a person is not lonely. Wherever we are, the Rabbeim are there. This is especially true regarding the Rebbe my father-in-law, who himself wrote regarding the *histalkus* of his own father that the shepherds of the Yidden will not abandon their flock...Now that the physical boundaries have been removed, they [the Rabbeim] are together with every man and woman who has a connection to them, in whichever place they may be—especially in places that they were sent to in order to fulfill a shlichus—and even more so in places where they were sent on shlichus to spread the wellsprings of the Baal Shem Tov to the outside—which is a preparation for the coming of Moshiach and *tehiyas hameisim*, when *yakitzu viyranenu shochnei afar vehu besocham*.

"See the *sicha* of 13 Tammuz 5709, published in *kuntres* 12 Tammuz 5710, from which you can draw *chayus*, inspiration, and strength in your work in your place now. From there you will see, that it is understood even in the human mind that there is no place for thoughts of loneliness *chas veshalom*, and there is surely no reason for weakness in your work. *Halevai* that *anash*, and especially the *temimim*, would carefully study the words of my father-in-law the Rebbe, even in the *sichos*, and especially from 5710 and the previous year..."



JEM / MATUSOF-FAMILY

REB SHLOMO MATUSOF LEADS A CLASS FOR SCHOOL-BOYS.



LIPSKER FAMILY

A GROUP OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE JOINT POSE WITH REB MICHAEL LIPSKER ON AN INSPECTION VISIT TO MOROCCO.

As time went on, many of these students were sent to the yeshivos in Casablanca or Meknes, and when they returned they became leaders in their communities. Later on, when the Rebbe began working to establish the Lubavitch chain of schools in Eretz Yisroel (known as the *Reshet*), it was as a continuation to this chain of schools in Morocco.

## THE JOINT

All of these projects costed tremendous amounts of money—something that was in low supply in Morocco and Lubavitch at large. The “American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee,” commonly known as the Joint were the main benefactors. In fact, from the Rebbe’s first letter to Reb Michael, we see that this was the Friediker Rebbe’s plan

from the very beginning. Quoting the Frierdiker Rebbe, the Rebbe writes that, over time, the Joint would “shoulder the expenses,” and adds in parentheses “(according to typical protocol, the Joint of Africa will ask the central Joint in France, and with the help of Reb Binyonim Gorodetzky, it will surely be set up satisfactorily).”

As the premier Jewish relief organization, the relationship between the Joint and Lubavitch had begun many years earlier, during the *nesius* of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Recognizing that the Frierdiker Rebbe was the leader of Soviet Jewry, the Joint had distributed huge monies through the Frierdiker Rebbe to the Jews behind the Iron Curtain, and they continued supporting Chabad's efforts in Europe and elsewhere following World War II. Now that Lubavitch was opening schools for children in Morocco, the Joint was a natural partner in the endeavor.

Getting the Joint to finance so many huge projects took time and effort, however, and it is the subject of many letters between the Rebbe, Rabbi Gorodetzky, and the shluchim in Morocco. Although it didn't happen overnight, within a few months the Joint agreed to start their financial support, and they essentially became the underwriters for Lubavitch's work in Morocco. In fact, this became one of the Joint's largest projects worldwide.

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of this unique partnership is where it grew complicated, where it wasn't so smooth, because it touches at the heart of Lubavitch's mission in Morocco and perhaps throughout the world.



A JTA PRESS RELEASE ABOUT THE WORK OF LUBAVITCH IN MOROCCO.



AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE ARCHIVES

JEM 286804



*"THEY WEREN'T READY TO TAKE THIS TYPE OF PEOPLE, FOR THEIR GOAL WAS TO CREATE GEDOLIM, EDUCATED PEOPLE, AND ALSO IN SECULAR SUBJECTS. RABBI...ONCE TOLD ME THAT IF HE DOESN'T MANAGE TO BRING THE BEST PROFESSORS AND CREATE TRULY EDUCATED STUDENTS AND SO ON— HE ACHIEVED NOTHING..."*

## DEALING WITH THE LOWER CLASS

As seen above, the work of Lubavitch could be divided in two categories: the central yeshivos

and schools in the big cities, like Casablanca and Meknes; and the string of dozens of schools throughout the small villages in Morocco. While the Joint was happy to invest their money in the

big cities, where the students had a chance at becoming rabbonim and prominent community leaders, they were adamantly opposed to Lubavitch's involvement in the primitive villages. One of the Joint's officials was once arguing with Reb Shlomo, saying, "We are giving you a million. Why must you spread yourselves throughout the entire Morocco, to more than fifty places? Use this money for ten locations, and there you will be able to do it well. The way you're operating in the village of Sidi Rahcal is a complete waste."

The Joint was loathe to sponsor schools where the students sat on the ground in cloaks, or where the food wasn't prepared in a modern kitchen. Although the shluchim



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tried to slowly develop the schools into more modern institutions, it was a delicate matter for the locals; as seen above, they were protective of local custom.

A similar type of issue came up in the bigger cities as well. As time went on, other organizations followed Lubavitch to Morocco—but they weren't ready to deal with the lower class people. "They weren't ready to take this type of people", Reb Michoel writes, "for their goal was to create *gedolim*, educated people, and also in secular subjects. Rabbi...once told me that if he doesn't manage to bring the best professors and create truly educated students and so on—he achieved nothing."



But for the goal of what Lubavitch was trying to do—reinvigorate Yiddishkeit—these concerns were not relevant at all. The shluchim had no interest in "modernizing the primitives" nor in changing local custom. They created many institutions dedicated to practical Yiddishkeit, and put a strong emphasis on teaching Shulchan Aruch and practical *dinim* to the students and community members.

If the focus in the big cities wasn't on creating the next big professor but on teaching Yiddishkeit, this was equally important in the villages, if not more so. But although the officials from the Joint were very satisfied with the work in the major cities, they were upset at Lubavitch's use of their resources in primitive villages, and the shluchim—with the Rebbe's guidance of course—refused to cease their activities saving Yiddishkeit. The issue remained.

Finally, after a long periods of circling discussions, it seemed that the Joint would finally cut off their funding to the villages. And so, the Rebbe wrote a long letter to the chairman of the religious board of the Joint, Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu (Leo) Jung, a great *askan* and *talmid chacham* who, among other things, was instrumental in assisting the Frieddiker Rebbe escape Russia. "Knowing your esteem for my father-in-law...I am certain that you will continue your support for his work and his institutions." The Rebbe relayed to him the problem, and how the Joint was near to ceasing their support for this work.

After a considerable back and forth, Rabbi Jung promised Rabbi Gorodetzky that he would take a trip

to Morocco to see the situation with his own eyes. Shortly afterwards, the Joint representative in Morocco was replaced by a *frum* person, Rabbi Yisroel Shif, and from then on everything was smoothed over.

Over the following decades, the work of Lubavitch in Morocco grew by leaps and bounds, under the leadership of the shluchim, most notably Rabbis Michael Lipsker, Shlomo Matusof, Leibel Raskin, and Sholom Eidelman. Although the majority of the community later emigrated to other parts of the world, there are hundreds of thousands of Yidden throughout the world today who grew up in the Lubavitch schools in Morocco, and kept their Yiddishkeit due to the *hatzalas nefashos* the Rebbe undertook through the shluchim.

"We had tremendous success and *hashgacha pratis* at every step of the way," Reb Michoel later wrote. "This was unmistakable, and evident to the eye. It was only with the strength of the *meshaleiach*, with all the explanations that the Rebbe gives, to the extent that the *meshaleiach* himself creates wonders at every turn." T

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 3 p. 237.
2. Letter on 2 Sivan 5710.
3. Rabbi Amar's letter in *Toldos Chabad B'Morocco*.
4. 5 Cheshvan 5711, Igros Kodesh vol. 4 p. 23.
5. See letter 23 Teves 5711, Igros Kodesh *ibid.*, p. 132.
6. 3 Sivan 5712, Igros Kodesh vol. 6 p. 95.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Letter 11 Kislev 5711, Igros Kodesh vol. 4 p. 67.
9. *Ibid.*
10. 10 Iyar 5712, Igros Kodesh vol. 6 p. 32.
11. 3 Sivan 5712, Igros Kodesh vol. 6 p. 95.