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נלב"ע כ"א אדר-שני, ה'תשע"ו

נדפס ע"י בתה וחתנה  
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר  
לבל הרבור, פלורידה  
הרה"ת ר' שלום דובער  
וזוגתו מרת חנה שיחיו  
ליפטקאר



MADE IN T



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Additional details were culled from Reb Avraham's autobiography, "My Spiritual Journey."

8 TISHREI 5748, LEVI FREDIN VIA JEM13629

# HE USA

*אברהם דוב העיט*  
RABBI AVROHOM  
DOV HECHT



A RABBINIC PERSONALITY SECOND-TO-NONE; THE CHARISMATIC LEADER OF ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CONGREGATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES. RABBI AVRAHAM DOV HECHT WAS A TOWERING FIGURE COMMANDING THE RESPECT AND ADMIRATION OF MANY. YET HE NEVER LOST SIGHT OF HIS ULTIMATE POSITION: A FOOT-SOLDIER IN THE REBBE'S ARMY.

14 TEVES 5737, LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 210233

## MIKVAH ORIGINS

When the Frierdiker Rebbe visited New York in 5689 (תרפ"ט), he once made use of a *mikvah* located in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn.

Before his visit, the rav who founded and managed the *mikvah* toiled for many hours to prepare it for the honored guest. Fiercely guarding the privilege for himself, he didn't allow anyone to assist him. He cleaned, scrubbed, and even prepared two separate *boros*, one hot and one cold, to suit whatever preferences the Frierdiker Rebbe may have.

Taking note of his effort, the Frierdiker Rebbe handed him ten dollars on his way out—no small sum. But the rav refused the money. He would accept no remuneration for the immense privilege.

Instead, the Frierdiker Rebbe offered him a *bracha*. "I bless you that your grandchildren will one day be my Chassidim."

Such a blessing was a big deal in America of the 1920s. Young Jews were leaving the fold in unprecedented numbers. Religion seemed to be a thing of the past, to be discarded on the boat entering New York Harbor from the "Old World" across the ocean. That Reb Hersh Meilach Hecht's grandchildren would be G-d-fearing, and Chassidim no less? That would truly be a dream come true.

## BROWNSVILLE

Avraham Dov Hecht was born in 5682 (תרפ"ב) in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn to his parents, Reb Shea and Sarah Hecht. As a young child, he was enrolled in Yeshivas Chaim Berlin. The school was run by a few poor immigrants who spoke almost no English, and they employed a number of teachers whose dedication to Judaism was questionable. Avraham came from a G-d-fearing home, but the atmosphere on the street, and even in school, was very lacking.

Some time after his bar mitzvah, Avraham joined his older brothers, Shlomo Zalman and Moshe Yitzchok, in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. The brothers became acquainted with Reb Yisroel Jacobson, who would hold weekly study sessions for *bochurim*, where they would study Chassidus and discuss the depths of Yiddishkeit in a warm and inviting atmosphere. The *bochurim* developed a close relationship with Reb Yisrael; he shared with them his experiences in the town of Lubavitch, and regaled them with stories of the Frierdiker Rebbe.

With time, the Hecht brothers became full-fledged Chassidim. When the oldest Hecht brother, Shlomo Zalman, became engaged in 5698 (תרצ"ח) to Rabbi Jacobson's oldest daughter, he decided to grow a beard, and his neighbors thought he had lost his mind. Then, a short time after he married, he and his wife decided to

## AVRAHAM CAME FROM A G-D-FEARING HOME, BUT THE ATMOSPHERE ON THE STREET, AND EVEN IN SCHOOL, WAS VERY LACKING.

take an even more drastic step. After hearing so much about the Frierdiker Rebbe, they decided to move from New York to Otwock, Poland, to live in close proximity to him.

Avraham and a group of friends, also yearning to meet the Frierdiker Rebbe and enroll in Tomchei Temimim, decided—with the Frierdiker Rebbe’s encouragement—to follow a few months later. The winds of war were already brewing in Europe and his parents were adamant that their son not make the trip, so Avraham secretly took fifteen dollars from his private savings, obtained a passport and voyage ticket, and broke the news to his parents two days before he was set to embark.

Although they were apprehensive, Avraham’s parents were proud that their son so longed to see the Frierdiker Rebbe, and they hesitantly agreed.

### IN OTWOCK

On a bright morning at the end of Av 5699 (תרצ"ט), the entire New York Lubavitcher community accompanied the six young *bochurim* who boarded a ship for the long voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, accompanied by their *mashpia*, Reb Yisroel Jacobson. After five days at sea, they arrived in France and continued via train.

While waiting in the Paris train station, they were treated to a surprise. The Rebbe, who was living in Paris at the time, came to greet them. The Rebbe told them that the Frierdiker Rebbe accorded great significance to the fact that they were making the trip notwithstanding the political climate, and spoke to them about the holiness of a Rebbe, impressing upon them the magnitude of their trip.

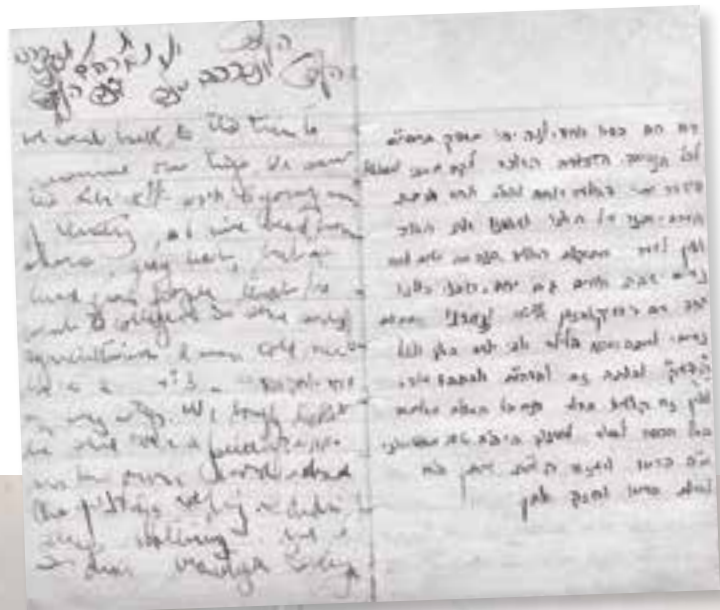
Avraham would later relate that with this brief encounter he was completely taken by the Rebbe’s immense stature; his piety, purity, and *kedusha*. It was the beginning of his love for the Rebbe that would later become legendary, and manifest in total devotion and *hiskashrus*.

The small group arrived in Otwock on Rosh Chodesh Elul, one week after departing from American shores. They were welcomed warmly by the yeshiva administration, and were

provided with “high class” lodgings in consideration for their “spoiled” American backgrounds. Nevertheless, it was a far cry from home.

Their first encounter with the Frierdiker Rebbe was that Friday night, when they were part of a select group ushered into the Frierdiker Rebbe’s room to hear a *maamar*.<sup>1</sup> Reb Avraham Dov related:

“The impressions of the short half-hour we spent in his room remain engraved in my mind. It is difficult to describe the experience. His words were hard for me to understand, but his shining face, filled with love and holiness, require no explanations. I remember feeling the presence of



REB AVROHOM DOV'S PERSONAL DIARY OF HIS TRIP TO POLAND. HERE HE DESCRIBES MEETING THE REBBE AT THE TRAIN STATION.



ON THE BOAT TO POLAND, ABOUT TO EMBARK. REB AVROHOM DOV IS POSING WITH THE OTHER THREE BOCHURIM, SECOND FROM RIGHT.

IN THE FOREGROUND, HIS FATHER, REB YEHOSHUA HECHT, IS IN DISCUSSION WITH REB SHMUEL LEVITIN AND REB YISROEL JACOBSON.

something far beyond my own limited understanding, and I was awed by its obvious truth and purity. When it was over, I was reluctant to exit the room.”

The days passed, and the *bochurim* immersed themselves in learning. “Day after day passed as my friends and I thirstily absorbed the Torah study and Chassidishe life in Otwock. America seemed more distant than the moon. A full week passed with the speed of light as I immersed myself in the classes with vigor and enthusiasm. When we were informed that we would once again be admitted into the Rebbe’s study on our second Friday night, a full-blown thunderstorm couldn’t have obliterated the boundless sunshine.”

That week, the *dibbur hamaschil* was “*Teshuvah utefillah utzedaka maavirin es ro’a hagezeirah*,”<sup>2</sup> on the topic of *teshuva* when facing hard times, possibly a reference to the uncertainties brewing; this *maamar* was a bit more basic and Avraham found it easier to follow. After Shabbos they were also allowed to enter into *yechidus*.

The Polish *bochurim* had a difficult time understanding the culture of the Americans. When the Americans pulled out their bats, balls, and gloves for an impromptu game of baseball during one recess, the Polish *bochurim* looked on in wonder. When the Americans pulled out boxing gloves and began pounding at each other, the wonder turned to shock and consternation. Nevertheless, the *bochurim* settled down well in yeshiva and immersed themselves in learning. The intensity of the learning compared to their American yeshiva, and the

privilege of living near the Frierdiker Rebbe was something they couldn’t take for granted, and they utilized every moment of it.

The dire warnings sent out by the American consul in Warsaw were entirely ignored.

## BLITZKRIEG AND FLIGHT

On Friday, Erev Shabbos Selichos, the peace and tranquility came to an abrupt halt. German warplanes flew overhead and dropped their lethal cargo throughout the city, wreaking havoc and destruction.

Seeking guidance in the midst of the mayhem, Avraham Dov raced to the Frierdiker Rebbe’s home, where he joined a multitude of people seeking reassurance. When the Frierdiker Rebbe noticed him and a fellow American *bochur*, he sent a message asking them to run over to Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah’s home to assure her there was nothing to fear.

Returning to their lodgings, the *bochurim* heard the frightening news: Germany had declared war, and it was only a matter of time before they would reach Otwock. The American consul strongly advised them to travel immediately to Warsaw, where the consulate would arrange for their safe passage out of Poland.

They immediately packed their bags, arranged taxis, and ran to obtain a *yechidus* with the Frierdiker Rebbe. They entered the Frierdiker Rebbe’s room at 12:30 p.m.; he was already wearing his Shabbos clothes and adorned with his *shtreimel*, adding to his already regal demeanor.

The Rebbe blessed them, and told them the entire state of affairs was only

a test from Hashem. He directed them to contact the Lubavitcher Chassidim in Riga—Reb Mordechai Chafetz and others—and to grow in their diligent Torah study and fulfillment of mitzvos. The Frierdiker Rebbe’s calm disposition calmed their tense nerves; they now felt equipped to embark on the perilous journey back home.

Before exiting the room, one of the *bochurim* asked the Frierdiker Rebbe, “What will be if we are forced to violate Shabbos?”

The Frierdiker Rebbe answered them, “The *zechus* of the two great *tzaddikim* whose birthdays are on Chai Elul—the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe—is sufficient that you will not need to transgress this Shabbos.”

With this comforting message, the *bochurim* boarded the taxis and headed for Warsaw.

Arriving in the big city, the *bochurim* wandered from place to place, seeking help for their predicament. When the anti-Semitic consul turned his back on them, they were forced to wander for hours, late into Shabbos night, seeking lodging and assistance.

At one point, a hotel was ready to admit them with one requirement—that they sign the registration. The *bochurim* began to debate whether *chillul Shabbos* was permitted in their situation, but Reb Shlomo Zalman stopped them. “The Rebbe said we won’t desecrate Shabbos; obviously this isn’t the place for us.” They continued their search, and ultimately found lodging at a Jewish hostel.

On Sunday, they managed to board a train for Latvia, and a few hours later, they finally reached relative safety.

## TISHREI IN RIGA

Tishrei was spent with the Chassidim in Riga, in the presence of famous Chassidim such as Reb Itche der Masmid and Reb Mordechai

WHEN THE AMERICANS PULLED OUT BOXING GLOVES AND BEGAN POUNDING AT EACH OTHER, THE WONDER TURNED TO SHOCK AND CONSTERNATION.



THE FRIEDIKER REBBE'S LETTER TO THE BOCHURIM ASKING THEM WHY THEY DID NOT REPORT OF THEIR WELLBEING AND SAFETY, DATED 14 TEVES 5700.

Chafetz, the latter of whom was appointed by the Frierdiker Rebbe to guide the *bochurim* in their learning of *nigleh* and Chassidus.

Avraham related that he watched Reb Itche davening devoutly throughout the entire Yom Kippur. When the fast was finally over, Avraham breathed a sigh of relief; now the Chossid would finally be able to eat a warm, nourishing meal after his rigorous fast and *avoda*. Imagine his shock and consternation when he observed Reb Itche sit down to a “meal” of some bread and stewed fruit...

After the *Yomim Tovim*, the *bochurim*'s parents, frantic with

worry, managed to secure their safe passage across the Atlantic, and in the beginning of Cheshvan they finally arrived back in the United States.

Avraham settled back down in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, and awaited news from Europe. The Frierdiker Rebbe remained trapped in the inferno, and the American Chassidim worked tirelessly to obtain his passage to a safe haven. On Hei Teves, they celebrated with the news that the Frierdiker Rebbe had reached Riga, from where he would proceed on his journey to America.

A few weeks later, the *bochurim* received a letter from the Frierdiker Rebbe:

“To my dear students, Achei Temimim in New York: “...While under siege, I worried about you, and several times I asked the American consulate in Warsaw if they had any news from you. I hoped that you would surely attempt to notify me via the consulate regarding your safety, to calm me and give encouragement to my broken heart... but you did not do so. This results from lack of feeling—the love and affection that is expected according to the teachings of Chassidus.”<sup>3</sup>

### NO DIFFERENT

When the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in America on Tes Adar II 5700 (ה'תש"ו), he immediately announced the founding of Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim on American shores. Many close supporters attempted to dissuade the Frierdiker Rebbe; they felt that a yeshiva for *bochurim* who grow beards and learn Chassidus was an exercise in futility. In fact, Reb Avraham Dov recalled, when the Frierdiker Rebbe spoke after his arrival and made his intentions known, a very prominent supporter of the Frierdiker Rebbe had a very hard time digesting the idea.

Within 24 hours, Avraham Dov was called in along with the rest of the Otwock group, and the Frierdiker Rebbe told them they were to be the nucleus for the new yeshiva.

The beginning was difficult on a material level, but on the spiritual level they thrived. Avraham Dov merited to be constantly in close proximity to the Frierdiker Rebbe, and he took part in all of the early steps in *hafatzas hamaayanos* (Avraham related that the Frierdiker Rebbe once said that the American *rabbonim* are fast asleep; he was here to wake them up, and he didn't think they would give him credit for it).

He merited to be present at *fabrengens*, *tefillos*, and the like; he described the Frierdiker Rebbe's cries

during the opening *Maariv* of Rosh Hashanah his first year in America—which took four and a half hours—as something that remained with him throughout his life.

In those years, the Frierdiker Rebbe would *farbreng* in the dining room of his apartment, and only a small group of Chassidim were permitted entry. The young *bochurim* would often stand outside and knock, hoping to be allowed inside. Once, Reb Avraham knocked for so long, the Frierdiker Rebbe said to let him in, commenting “*Es is nikker az er klapt mit an emes, he is clearly knocking earnestly.*”

As the years passed, more and more European *bochurim* arrived in the United States and joined the ranks

of Tomchei Temimim. Although all the *bochurim* were joined in common goals and ideals, there were sometimes clashes and heated arguments between the American Yankees and the grizzled Russians, who came from cultures that couldn’t have been more different.

One day, out of the blue, Avraham Dov was called out of the *zal*. Without any prior warning, he was ushered into the Frierdiker Rebbe’s holy *yechidus* room.

The Frierdiker Rebbe looked at him and said:

“Avraham, *ich vil dir epes zogen*, I want to tell you something. *Vos iz di nafka mina*, what is the difference between an American Chossid and a Russian Chossid?”

“A Russian is like a coal; once you ignite it, it holds the heat for a long time. An American is like a piece of wood; it catches fire quickly, but it is also quickly extinguished.”

“When I came downstairs,” Reb Avraham related, “and told over what the Frierdiker Rebbe had said, oh, what an *iberkerenish* there was...”

There was another time when Avraham was called suddenly into the Frierdiker Rebbe’s room, and, upon entering, he asked “*Vos—what?*”

The Frierdiker Rebbe replied, “*Az m’fregt vos, heist nisht gefolgt*, when someone says ‘what,’ it’s a sign he hasn’t followed instructions.”

## HAFATZAS HAMAAYANOS

The *bochurim* in 770 were intensely involved in all the new initiatives to bring Yiddishkeit and Chassidus to other Jews. One of the main opportunities for *hafatzas hamaayanos* was on Shabbos, when *bochurim* would go to *shuls* and speak to the congregants. Reb Avraham Dov would relate how, to ensure that they were adequately prepared, they would practice their sermons facing the empty benches of 770. Often, in typical Hecht style, when approaching these *shuls*, Avraham Dov’s younger brother Shalom would act as a “*gabai*” who would introduce the “rabbi,” thus adding to his prominence in the eyes of the listeners.

In 5702, Avraham Dov began traveling around to various cities to establish branches of Tomchei Temimim. (The Frierdiker Rebbe said of Reb Avraham and his brother, Reb Yankel,<sup>4</sup> “Avraham and Yankel can turn over the whole America.”) He was instrumental in establishing yeshivos in New Haven, Worcester, and Buffalo, working tirelessly day and night to establish a proper place for Torah learning in the city, and he was also

THE FRIERDIKER REBBE SAID OF REB AVRAHAM AND HIS BROTHER, REB YANKEL, “AVRAHAM AND YANKEL CAN TURN OVER THE WHOLE AMERICA.”





REB AVROHOM DOV ACCOMPANIES RABBI YITZCHAK KADURI ON HIS VISIT TO THE REBBE, 24 SIVAN 5750.

the *menahel* of Tomchei Temimim of Newark for a period of time.

The work wasn't easy; parents had to be persuaded to pay tuition, and to send their children to a school that had no reputation at all, but the *bochurim* persevered and each yeshiva ultimately got off the ground.

In 5704 (תש"ד), he married Liba Grunhut, and the young couple settled in Dorchester, Massachusetts, where Reb Avraham Dov planned on opening yet another branch of Tomchei Temimim.

He related what occurred:

"On our first Shabbos in Dorchester, I gave a fiery sermon in shul, announcing that we would be opening a new Jewish day school and inviting everyone to participate.

"The next morning, I dressed and primed myself to begin making the rounds throughout the neighborhood, inviting Jewish parents to register their children. As I approached the first house, I noticed that they had a few young boys, perfect for my yeshiva.

"I knocked on the door, and soon found myself facing the mother of

my future students, a woman in a pajama robe. She took one look at me, and said 'We don't give donations on Sunday,' and slammed the door.

"The enthusiastic speech I had so carefully rehearsed remained unsaid and I dejectedly returned to the security of my own home. Feeling crushed and humiliated, I wrote a letter to the Frierdiker Rebbe, recounting my failed attempts. I outlined my feelings of depression and humiliation and I waited anxiously for an encouraging reply.

"The answer I received changed my entire outlook on a difficult situation. The Rebbe wrote, 'בושה שלא במקומה, יסודה בגסות הרוח—misplaced shame is rooted in haughtiness and pride.'

"My attitude immediately transformed. Why did I think that establishing a yeshiva would be such an easy task? With renewed enthusiasm, I continued working on the project, unconcerned with the public's reactions."

Twelve months of hard work produced the desired results. Approximately one hundred and

twenty students enrolled, a building was purchased in a fine residential area, and a staff of dedicated teachers was employed. Aside from his busy schedule tending to the material and spiritual needs of the school, Reb Avraham Dov served as rabbi of a *Nusach Ari* shul in Dorchester as well.

Family reasons didn't allow Reb Avraham Dov and his wife to remain in Dorchester for long, so as soon as the yeshiva was running smoothly, they moved back to New York, where Reb Avraham Dov began searching for a new job. The job wasn't far off, coming from a quite an unexpected direction.

## THE ASHKENAZI/ SEFARDI RABBI

The summer of 5705 found Reb Avraham in his in-laws' bungalow colony in Fleischmanns, NY. The colony was populated by Ashkenazim and Sephardim who, for the most part, kept their separate ways. Separate *minyanim*, *sifrei Torah*, and *chazanim* were the norm, not out of animosity, but out of the clear differences in their way of life.

One day, a few members of the Sephardic community asked Reb Avraham Dov to deliver a sermon to their community on Shabbos afternoon. He couldn't have been more flabbergasted by the request. That Shabbos, he delivered a fiery *drasha*, with his natural zest and life, to a crowd of fifty Syrian Jews. After the compliments were finished, a few prominent members of the community came over and offered him a job. He thought they were joking.

One *drasha* led to the next, and before long, the community leaders made it clear they wanted to hire him. Isaac Shalom, the president of the Syrian community, visited the Frierdiker Rebbe, who gave his clear approval and *bracha*, and Reb Avraham Dov was hired as the junior



NO LONGER BEING ABLE TO GIVE IT TO THE FRIERDIKER REBBE, HE BROUGHT THE NOTE TO THE LEVAYA AND HANDED IT TO THE REBBE INSTEAD.



SEVERAL LETTERS REB AVROHOM DOV RECEIVED FROM THE REBBE.



REB AVROHOM DOV WITH MR. RUDY GIULIANI.

rabbi of the congregation and director of the *Talmud Torah*.

Reb Avraham threw himself into his work with his natural enthusiasm and gusto. Full of confidence and good nature, he engaged the youth of the community to levels of commitment that hadn't been seen in years. He arranged classes and events to fit the style of the youth of those days, and many who were on their way out, *r"l*, did an about face and returned to Yiddishkeit.

Reb Avraham was innovative and creative in his work. When he noticed that bar mitzvahs were only celebrated on Shabbos, which meant that the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* was totally ignored, he instituted a new custom in his shul:

Each bar mitzvah boy would come on a weekday close to his bar mitzvah, together with family and close friends, and they would hold a "*tefillin*

ceremony." The grandfathers and other honored guests would have the opportunity to wrap one circle of the bar mitzvah boy's *tefillin*, and an entire ritual was created around it. This way, the bar mitzvah boy, and by extension, his entire family, would fulfill this important mitzvah.<sup>5</sup>

## THE REBBE

Reb Avraham Dov merited a relationship with our Rebbe from his earliest days in America. The Rebbe was very close with the *bochurim*, and especially with those active in spreading Yiddishkeit, as the Hecht brothers were.

In 5704, when Reb Avraham received *semicha*, he approached the Rebbe at *Mincha* time saying that he deserves a *mazal tov*, and shared the good news with him. The Rebbe congratulated him, and then began

quizzing him on how the test went; what was he tested on, what questions were asked, and so on, for a full hour. (The Rebbe often corresponded with Reb Avraham on matters of Torah; Reb Avraham would pose his questions on *nigleh* and Chassidus, and the Rebbe would answer at length).

The Rebbe participated in his wedding as well, and remained for the wedding meal (which he didn't regularly do), and even addressed the crowd, something that seems to have happened only three times. A page of preparatory notes that the Rebbe wrote was later discovered.<sup>6</sup>

That relationship came to a head after the passing of the Frierdiker Rebbe, when Reb Avraham immediately dedicated himself as a Chossid of the Rebbe. In fact, on the day of the *levaya*, Mrs. Hecht was overdue, and before Shabbos, Reb Avraham had prepared a *tzettel* to bring to the Frierdiker Rebbe asking for a *bracha* for a healthy and easy birth. After Shabbos, no longer being able to give it to the Frierdiker Rebbe, he brought the note to the *levaya* and handed it to the Rebbe instead.

His love for the Rebbe only grew with the ensuing years, and the Rebbe reciprocated, showing Reb Avraham extraordinary *kiruvim*.

REB AVROHOM DOV WITH THE REBBE DURING THE YECHIDUS FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE MACHNE ISRAEL DEVELOPMENT FUND, 26 ADAR 5751.

S SHLAGBAUM VIA JEM 306690



7 TISHREI 5751, S SHLAGBAUM VIA JEM 145200

## “HE IS A GOOD RABBI!”

*Reb Avraham’s special relationship with the Rebbe was evident throughout the years, including the very warm conversations he had and the kiruvim he merited during “dollars.”*

*Below are a few excerpts:*

**Rabbi Leibel Groner:** Rabbi Hecht is leaving today for Eretz Yisrael.

**The Rebbe:** *Hatzlacha Rabba.* Have a safe and successful trip. Give this [dollar] to *tzedaka* in Eretz Yisrael. Accomplish even more than you think is possible.

**Rabbi Hecht:** [The Rebbe should bless me that] I should be healthy.

**The Rebbe:** *Amein!* Be healthy on the way there and on the way back. You’re surely coming back to *chutz la’aretz*. Don’t leave us here [without you]!

**Rabbi Hecht:** *Chas v’shalom!*

*After Reb Avraham walked away, the Rebbe called him back and said:*

**The Rebbe:** I don’t know if it’s appropriate, but may I suggest that when you meet with your chief rabbi, [Rabbi Mordechai] Eliyahu, he himself should put this [dollar] in a *tzedaka pushka*. I don’t know if he’ll accept it from me.

**Rabbi Hecht:** He surely will accept it!

**The Rebbe:** He is probably already accustomed to hearing from me...



*Reb Avraham often brought major supporters to the yechidus for members of the Machne Yisroel Development Fund, and they too merited special kiruvim:*

**The Rebbe** (to Rabbi Hecht’s congregant): Thank you very much for bringing your rabbi! He was not well. Now he is healthy?

**Congregant:** We want you to take care of him; to help him.

**The Rebbe:** That I’m doing on my own. Especially if the *balebatim* are asking for their rabbi—not only complaints to the rabbi, but also asking a *bracha* for him, that’s a good thing! He is certainly a good rabbi!

One of his grandsons recalls how at one *farbrengen*, the Rebbe was encouraging the singing very heartily and Reb Avraham was moved to clap so hard, his watch broke!

On another occasion, seeing the Rebbe encourage the singing so strongly, Reb Avraham couldn’t contain his emotion and burst into tears.

## CHIEF RABBI

With time, Reb Avraham Dov became the senior rabbi of his congregation. This was the central community of Syrian Jews in the United States, so a very bizarre state came to be: the most prominent Sephardic rabbi, the spiritual leader of the Syrian Jewish community in the United States, was an Ashkenazi, and a Lubavitcher Chossid, no less.

Later, Reb Avraham took on additional roles. He began working for the Union of Orthodox congregations, and he joined the Igud Harabbonim, ultimately being appointed as its president in 5737, a position he held until his passing. He was now in one of the most prominent rabbinic positions in the United States, with a major position of authority on all Jewish matters. The Rebbe encouraged





MOTZOEI PESACH 5741, YOSSI MELAMED VIA JEM 127172

him to use it out to the fullest. In one *ma'aneh*, the Rebbe tells him to speak about the issue of *Mihu Yehudi* on the radio “with decisiveness, like a king—‘Who is a king? The *rabbonim*.’”

In his position of influence, he often utilized his connections to various people and organizations, also serving as a semi-liaison between the Sephardic community and the Rebbe. He was, for example, instrumental in arranging the *yechidusen* of the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu.

Reb Avraham merited long and detailed *yechidusen* with the Rebbe over the years, and in public too, the Rebbe would often give him a special *yachas*, always acknowledging his presence and greeting him with a wide smile. During *farbrengens* in the early years, the Rebbe would often tell him to say *l'chaim* (on Simchas Torah 5711, the Rebbe instructed him to say *l'chaim* seven(!) times); and once, in 5727, the Rebbe declared him the “Chief Rabbi of the Sephardim.”

On another occasion, during *kos shel bracha*, the Rebbe told him “The Rambam writes that Avraham is called *eisan*, strong.<sup>7</sup> Be strong, and get rid of all unwanted influences.” After Pesach 5745, when the first *Siyumei Harambam* were underway, the Rebbe told him during *kos shel bracha*, “Don’t forget to speak tomorrow about Moshe Hasepharadi.”<sup>8</sup>

## AT THE FOREFRONT

Over the years, Reb Avraham became a major force of influence in the Jewish world. As the rabbi of a distinguished congregation, he rubbed shoulders with the greatest Jewish philanthropists, politicians, and world

leaders. He exuded a positive energy that commanded the respect and admiration of all he came in contact with, and he had a powerful way with people.

But his personal charisma and talents were only a tool in his work. He remained a steadfast soldier of the Rebbe, carrying out scores of *shlichus’n* and bringing the Rebbe’s message everywhere.

When the Rebbe began to campaign about *Mihu Yehudi* in Eretz Yisrael, Reb Avraham immediately jumped to the forefront of the efforts, and—as per the Rebbe’s instructions—utilized his prominence and connections to promote the halachic viewpoint.

As the president of Igud Harabbonim, he would make the rounds in the United States and in Eretz Yisrael, speaking to crowds and to politicians about the terrible wrong that was being perpetrated. He became one of the most vocal opponents of the law, and was often featured in the Jewish newspapers at the time.

The Rebbe also sent him to Eretz Yisrael to convey to Menachem Begin the Rebbe’s immense pleasure about his efforts on this issue. In a phone conversation with Reb Efraim Wolf, Rabbi Hodakov instructed him to arrange press conferences, radio interviews, and the like, where Rabbi Hecht could speak about the issue. Rabbi Hodakov explained that Rabbi Hecht doesn’t come as a Lubavitcher; he is the representative of a large Sephardic community, and therefore can be influential with Sephardic Chief Rabbi Nissim. He described Reb Avraham Dov as someone who “is

HE BECAME ONE OF THE MOST VOCAL OPPONENTS OF THE LAW, AND WAS OFTEN FEATURED IN THE JEWISH NEWSPAPERS AT THE TIME.

## IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE

Alongside his work with Yidden, there are a few notable stories about his work amongst the nations of the world as well, and with their governing bodies.

One encounter with the government was when he was invited to recite an opening prayer at a Senate session. He prepared a draft of the prayer he would recite and submitted it for the Rebbe's *hagaha*.

The Rebbe's edits are utterly fascinating, and teach a great deal about the proper attitude to government, democracy, and other religions.

The following are some of them:

- The Rebbe insisted that the prayer include elements that would make it clear they were being said by an orthodox rabbi, not by a member of a different religion or by a Reform or Conservative rabbi. The Rebbe suggested that he write that G-d "Watcheth and guideth" us at every moment, in order to express the uniquely Jewish concept of *hashgacha pratis*.
- The term "Father in Heaven" was removed, so that it shouldn't be mistaken as a reference to the Trinity.
- Part of the prayer-request was to help us "advance the cause of democracy." The Rebbe wrote, "We cannot idolize democracy either. Replace it with, or add the words, 'justice and peace.'"
- Instead of "Bless this assembly, their wives, their sons and daughters," the Rebbe inserted "their families," explaining, "wives אינו לשון נקי' כ"א—isn't exactly appropriate language."
- Instead of a reference to people "of all faiths," the Rebbe wrote "of all colors and races," explaining, "this way you will properly acknowledge civil rights, and at the same time, no one will complain that you mentioned Jews and other faiths in one phrase, without separating them with a *Thavdil*."

## IN THE UNITED NATIONS

During the Vov Tishrei *farbrengen* in 5748,<sup>10</sup> the Rebbe spoke out against certain Jewish individuals who had met with the Pope. The Rebbe decried their actions in the strongest possible terms, and said that since some Jewish people are misrepresenting Yiddishkeit to the non-Jews, it is incumbent upon us to promote and represent true Yiddishkeit. On that note, the Rebbe suggested that a rav speak before the United Nations about the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*.

A few days later, while distributing *lekach*, the Rebbe told Reb Avraham Dov that he had him in mind during that *sicha*; he should be the one to speak.

Reb Avraham immediately got to work, looking for a way to speak from the UN rostrum. Being that you must represent a certain country, the Rebbe advised him not to ask the Israeli delegation for this special favor, but to try and speak in the name of the United States. A speech was prepared and edited by the Rebbe. As it turned out, the speech was not delivered due to technical reasons.

acquainted with the issues, knows how to speak strongly, isn't afraid, and his words make a real impact."

On the Shabbos after Purim 5745, Reb Avraham even merited a portion of a *sicha* directed to him:<sup>9</sup>

The Rebbe had spoken strongly about the fact that some Sephardic *rabbonim* had been opposing the *Mihu Yehudi* campaign. At the end of the *sicha*, the Rebbe mentioned that the rav of the Sephardic community is present, and being that he didn't yet fulfill his obligation for *ad d'lo yada*, he should do so now, and he should also correct the above mentioned situation. After speaking about him for a few minutes, the Rebbe told him to say *l'chaim* twice on a large cup, and then began singing a Sephardic *niggun*: *Mipi Keil*, and encouraged it strongly.

## A TRUE CHOSSID

In addition to his *rabbanus* activism and community work, Reb Avraham Dov was a fiery and devoted Chossid of the Rebbe. Whenever in the company of other Chassidim, a lively *chassidisher farbrengen* would develop around him, and he would regale the crowd with his stories and experiences near the Frieddiker Rebbe and the Rebbe. When the Rebbe announced *takanas haRambam*, Reb Avraham Dov enthusiastically joined and never missed a day.

One time, the Rebbe asked Reb Avraham why he doesn't sit on the Rebbe's dais during *farbrengens* together with the other prominent *rabbonim*. Reb Avraham answered by quoting the *possuk*, "והיו עיניך רואות את", מוריק, and your eyes shall behold your master." Hearing that, the Rebbe gave him a wide smile.

Before Rosh Hashana 5752, certain individuals suggested to Reb Avraham that he shouldn't go for *kos shel bracha*, so as not to burden the Rebbe too much. During the Machne

Yisroel *yechidus* several days later, the Rebbe told him, “I was looking for you during *kos shel bracha*...”

When he explained that he didn’t want to burden the Rebbe, the Rebbe answered, “Instead of coming up with explanations, just come.”

One time Reb Avraham wrote to the Rebbe that several of his family members were ill, and asked if it could be the result of an *ayin hara*. The Rebbe answered by quoting a Gemara: “אנן מזרעא דיוסף קאחינא דלא שלטא בי” עינא בישא—we are from the offspring of Yosef [in this case referring to the Friediker Rebbe] upon which *ayin haras* have no jurisdiction.”

Reb Avraham passed away on 24 Teves 5773. A life lived to its fullest; a Chossid who proudly spread the Rebbe’s message to the furthest reaches possible; a true *zara d’Yosef*—a true soldier of the Rebbe’s army. **T**

## “YOU ARE LIKE REISH LAKISH?”

Once, after a *farbrengen*, Reb Avraham was so inspired by the Rebbe’s Torah that he wrote the Rebbe a letter praising and extolling the Rebbe’s learning. The Rebbe responded with a *mareh makom*: “עיינן ב”מ פד, א.”

The Gemara there describes Reb Yochanan’s sadness after the passing of his colleague Reish Lakish. His students brought Reb Elazar ben Pedas to replace Reish Lakish. During the *shiur*, Reb Elazar began supporting Reb Yochanan’s teachings and bringing proof to his words, and Reb Yochanan wasn’t pleased.

“You are like Reish Lakish?” Reb Yochanan said, “Reish Lakish would ask 24 questions on every teaching of mine... You say, ‘A *braisa* supports your words.’ *Atu lo yadana d’shapir kaamina*—do you think I don’t know that I’m correct?”

1. *Dibbur Hamaschil “Shoftim V’shotrim,” Sefer Hamaamarim 5699, p. 242.*

2. *Sefer Hamaamarim 5699, p. 248.*

3. *Igros Kodesh Admur HaRayatz* vol. 5, p. 11-12.

4. For more about Reb Yankel (JJ) Hecht, see *A Staunch Soldier, Derher Teves 5778.*

5. *Hapardes* year 42 number 8, p. 32.

6. *Mekadesh Yisrael*, p. 6-7.

7. See Rambam *Hilchos Avodas Kochavim* 1:9.

8. In his introduction to *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam refers to himself as Moshe Ben Maimon Hasepharadi.

9. *Toras Menachem* 5745 vol. 3, p. 1486.

10. *Toras Menachem* 5748 vol. 1, p. 111.



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