

לע"נ  
ר' שמואל נתן ע"ה בן ר' אברהם אבא  
ע"ה  
פערלמוטער  
גלב"ע ו' אייר ה'תשנ"ב  
ת"צ'ב'ה'  
גדפס ע"י בנו  
הרה"ת ר' אברהם אבא  
וזוגתו מרת חנה פרומא ומשפחתם  
שיחיו  
פערלמוטער



*Exclusive Interview with*  
**RABBI LEIBEL ALEVSKY**

# MY YEARS *in* 770



Rabbi Leibel Alevsky has served as the Rebbe's shliach to Northeast Ohio for over forty years.

Before moving to Cleveland, he merited to spend many years by the Rebbe, first as a *bochur* learning in 770, and then as the *menahel* of Tzach throughout the 5720s.

In this exclusive interview with *A Chassidisher Derher*, he shares stories, recollections, and lessons from his years as a *bochur* and his involvement in the early years of *hafatzas hamaayanos*.



REB LEIBEL BRINGS MR. SID DAVIDOFF, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO NEW YORK MAYOR JOHN V. LINDSAY, TO THE REBBE, MOTZOEI SIMCHAS TORAH 5728.





A GROUP OF CHASSIDIM IN THE DP CAMP IN WEGSCHEID, GERMANY. REB LEIBEL IS SITTING BOTTOM ROW FIFTH FROM RIGHT, CIRCA 1950.

## BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

I was born in Chernigov, Ukraine, in 5699 (תרצ"ט). When I was two years old, my father was drafted into the Russian army to fight the Nazis, and never returned. I was raised by my mother and my maternal grandfather, Reb Gavriel Kagan, a *tomim* from Lubavitch.

After the war, we joined the famous escape from Russia under false Polish passports, and after some time in a DP camp and in France, the Frieddiker Rebbe instructed my family to move to Eretz Yisrael.

When we arrived, I enrolled in Tomchei Temimim in Lod, and when I was fifteen, I joined the *zal*, under the tutelage of Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman.

## YESHIVAH IN ERETZ YISROEL

Many prominent Chassidim lived in Eretz Yisrael at the time, and we often availed ourselves of opportunities to *farbreng* with them. I spent time with Chassidim such as Reb Zalman Moshe Hayitzchaki (as a child), Reb Shmerel Sasonkin, and others.

Every *yoma d'pagra* we would *farbreng* with Reb Chaim Shaul Brook. For us young *bochurim*, he was engaging and down to earth; unlike most older Chassidim, he was very street-smart, and he really understood us and spoke our language. "Reb Sheyel" (as he was affectionately called) truly captured our imagination.

I don't recall studying *maamarim* of the Rebbe in those days. The only *maamar* of the Rebbe I recall studying before I left in 5718 was Mayim Rabim 5717. I don't remember many *sichos* either; I remember once, Reb Shlomo Chaim received a *hanacha* of a *sicha*, so he gathered the whole yeshiva and taught it to us. That was the general atmosphere in Eretz Yisroel in those days; we knew that there was a "*yunge Rebbe*" in America, but we only had one picture of him. Aside for *panim* on Erev Rosh Hashanah, I almost never corresponded with the Rebbe.

This was the state of affairs in Eretz Yisroel until the Rebbe sent the *shluchim*.

After the terrorist attack in Kfar Chabad in 5716, the local Chassidim were very dejected, and the Rebbe sent twelve *bochurim* *shluchim* to

*I remember Reb Shmuel Fogelman—who was one of the shluchim—crying out to us, "Ir farbhteit nisht! Der Rebbe iz a melech! You don't understand, the Rebbe is a king!"*

strengthen them. It was they who totally changed our perception of how to have a relationship with the Rebbe.<sup>1</sup>

The *shluchim* were based in yeshiva with us; from there they would go to visit rabbonim, yeshivos, and communities, and we tagged along wherever they went. These were *bochurim* from 770, so we hung onto their every word, and they showered us with attention.

One night, we *farbrenged* with the *shluchim* in Kfar Chabad. After many hours and many *l'chaims*, I remember Reb Shmuel Fogelman—who was one of the *shluchim*—crying out to us, "*Ir farshteit nisht! Der Rebbe iz a melech! You don't understand, the Rebbe is a king!*"

Their visit left such an impression on us that many of us decided that our future was in 770. We were determined to go to the Rebbe.

Some time after their trip, I, wrote to the Rebbe asking for permission to come to New York, and received the following answer: "ישיבת כרכים קשה, אם לדעתי ישמע יעסוק בלימוד ויתעסק בעבודת התפילה וישפיע על חבריו. City life isn't conducive [for a *bochur*]; if you ask my opinion, you should study Torah, engage in *avodas hatefillah*, and influence your surroundings."

In other words, there is nothing to talk about.

I was despondent.

I was approaching draft-age. Within a short while, I wouldn't be able to leave Israel at all without first serving in the army, so I was desperate to leave. After my grandfather wrote a long letter to the Rebbe explaining the situation, the Rebbe sent him the following instructions:

“יסע לשנה לצרפת תחת הר”ן נעמאנאוו, וואו יוחלט המשרד דרכו. You should travel to spend a year in France under the tutelage of Reb Nissan Nemenov, and then your future path will be decided.”

I spent a half a year in France until my passport was about to expire. I was in a bind. The Rebbe told me to spend a year in France, but now I couldn't remain there. I wrote the whole story to the Rebbe, and concluded my letter saying, “*v'atah lo eda ma la'asos*, I don't know what to do.” A week later, I received an affidavit from Rashag, enabling me to enter the yeshiva in 770 (something which he only sent per the Rebbe's instructions).

My excitement was out of this world. That night, my friends and I held a grand farbrengen that lasted until morning. I was ecstatic. I couldn't believe my good luck. A year and a half after I first wrote to the Rebbe, I would finally be able to learn in 770.

## NEW YORK

I arrived in New York on my nineteenth birthday, Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5718. Reb Itche Springer picked me up from the ship and brought me to the Kerestirer *mikveh* before *maariv*, where I prepared to see the Rebbe for the first time.

A year earlier, my friend, Reb Meir Friedman, had spent Tishrei in New York and had described his experiences to me. He had related that he once walked into 770 and proceeded down the hallway, when suddenly the Rebbe appeared in front of him, coming from the sink. The hallway was very narrow, and he didn't

know what to do. He told us that he was so frightened, he wished a pit would open under him so he could jump in.

That was the impression of *yiras haromemus* in my mind before I saw the Rebbe for the first time. Before *maariv*, I made my way to the southwest corner of the small *zal*, as far as

possible from the Rebbe's place, and I stood there shaking from fright.

Suddenly, I hear “ssshhhhh.” I raised my eyes and saw the hats split, and another hat walking in between them. I immediately lowered my eyes and didn't pick them up until the Rebbe left.

That Shabbos was Erev Shavuos, and the Rebbe farbrenged. In

*“Vou iz Alewsky? M'darf mechanech zein di naye. Where is Alewsky? We need to educate the new ones.”*



REB LEBEL (TOP LEFT) IN KFAR CHABAD.



THE SHLICHIM SENT BY THE REBBE TO ERETZ YISROEL, SUMMER 5716, VISITING THE CHEDER CHILDREN IN LUD.



those years, the Shabbos and Yom Tov farbrengens took place in the “shalash” (a tent-like structure built in the courtyard outside), and the big weekday farbrengens were held in halls outside Crown Heights.

I was still afraid, so during the *niggunim* when the Rebbe would look around, I made sure to hide behind the *bochurim*. Suddenly, the *bochurim* pulled me in; the Rebbe was looking for me. They gave me a *kelishke* and said, “Say *l’chaim*.” I said *l’chaim* and the Rebbe responded.

After the farbrengen, the *bochurim* told me that the Rebbe had said, “*Vu iz Alevsky? Zol er zogen l’chaim. M’darf mechanech zain di naye. Where is Alevsky? He should say l’chaim. We need to educate the new ones.*”

Two weeks after I arrived, I went in for *yechidus*. I wrote a long *tzetel*, writing everything about myself, and I asked a few questions as well. The Rebbe answered point by point. After the *yechidus*, I wrote down the *hora’os*, and merited that the Rebbe edited it.

One *hora’a* was regarding *avodas hatefillah*. The Rebbe said:

איידער מען שטעלט זיך דאווענען, טראכט מען איבער דעם ענין אדער דעם אות אדער די נקודה אין דער מאמר וואס מ'האט געלערנט אין דער פרי, און מיט דעם שטעלט מען זיך דאווענען.

ווען מ'זעט אז די התעוררות ווערט שוואכער, קען מען איבערטראכטן די נקודה פון דעם מאמר אבער ניט אין אן ארט וואס

*Right before the Rebbe reached the corner, he turned to me, made sure that I noticed him, lifted the collar of his coat, and opened his hands in a surprised expression.*



REB LEIBEL (RIGHT) IN BRUNOY.

מ'טאר ניט מפסיק זיין, ווי אין ברכות קריאת שמע.

“Before davening, contemplate on the concept, or the *ois* or point in the *maamar* that you studied that morning, and with that, you can begin davening. When you notice that your inspiration is fading, contemplate on it once again, but not in a place where it is forbidden to make an interruption, such as in *Birchos Krias Shema*.”

Another question I asked the Rebbe was, when I daven *barichus*, I sometimes feel good about it. How can I ensure that it won't cause *gaavah*?

The Rebbe answered:

“אז ס'גייט אדורך א צייט, און מ'זעט אז מ'לאכטשעט ניט, און מ'פאטש'ט ניט אויפ'ן פלייצע, און מ'גייט נישט קיין מעדאל פאר דעם, גייט עס אוועק פון זיך.

“When time passes, and you see that no one compliments you, no one is patting your back, and no one is

giving you a medal, it will go away on its own.”

That was the only time I asked the Rebbe *avoda'dike* questions. After spending time in 770, I understood that it's not my place at all, and I would stick to asking for a *bracha* (besides for *askanus*, as I'll describe later.)

## LIFE IN 770

In those days, the Rebbe would only farbreng on Shabbos Mevorchim, Yom Tov, and special weekdays.

The farbrengens in the *shalash* were often held in freezing weather. The Rebbe would walk in wearing a coat over his shoulders, say a *sicha*, and right before beginning the *maamar*, the Rebbe would shrug the coat off. After the *maamar*, Reb Shmuel Levitin and Reb Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky would gently put it back on the Rebbe's shoulders. If the Rebbe would



see a *bochur* without a coat, the Rebbe would motion to him to get one.

Likewise, the Rebbe would also comment to *bochurim* who didn't wear coats outdoors during the winter.

One Israeli fellow once walked out of 770 without a coat, and turned left onto Eastern Parkway. Suddenly, he noticed that the Rebbe was approaching from the far end of the block. Not wanting the Rebbe to see him, he moved between two of the houses, and before the Rebbe passed, he ran all the way to the back of the driveway to hide.

It didn't help him. As he stood there shivering in the cold, the Rebbe came down the driveway, turned to find him, and said, "*Frier trugt men nit kein mantel, un dernach kumt men bet'n brachos*. First you don't wear a coat, and then you come and ask for *brachos*."

I had a similar experience:

One Shabbos morning when the Rebbe arrived in 770 at eight o'clock, he made his way through the hallway and looked into the *zal* and *cheder sheini* to see who was on time for *seder Chassidus*. Many *bochurim*, myself among them, were missing. The next Shabbos, we all knew that we had to make it to 770 on time. Imagine my consternation when I awoke at five minutes to eight!

Our dormitory was on Eastern Parkway, across from Oholei Torah. I threw on my clothing and my hat and jacket and started dashing down Eastern Parkway. When I approached Brooklyn Avenue, I stopped abruptly; I saw the Rebbe approaching, his hands in his coat pockets, reciting something.

I immediately backtracked a few steps, and waited for the Rebbe to pass.

Right before the Rebbe reached the corner, he turned to me, made sure that I noticed him, lifted the collar of his coat, and opened his hands in



REB LEIBEL (TOP LEFT) AT THE REBBE'S FARBRENGEN, PURIM 5732.



a surprised expression. I understood exactly what the Rebbe wanted. I ran back to my dorm, grabbed my coat, and raced back to 770, reaching the building just as the Rebbe walked through the door.

I turned out to be extremely lucky. Just one minute later, the Rebbe walked out of his room, came towards the first door of the *zal*, and motioned for us to come in. Only about twelve people were present. We filed into the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe told us

to lock the door, and started saying a *maamar*...<sup>2</sup>

The next week, the *zal* was packed.

## WATCHING THE REBBE

In those days, *bochurim* didn't run after the Rebbe at every opportunity. On the contrary, we were ashamed to be in the Rebbe's presence. Whenever the Rebbe would arrive at 770, we made sure to be nowhere to be seen. Only one person would remain to open the door for the Rebbe, and very

often he too would hide behind the door so the Rebbe wouldn't see him.

The only time we would remain in the area was during *seder*; we would be sitting in *zal* with the door wide open, so when the Rebbe would appear at the door of 770 we would all stand up and wait respectfully for the Rebbe to enter his room. Sometimes the Rebbe would gaze through the door at us on his way. One time, I remember a few children were playing *dreidel* near the elevator, and the Rebbe bent over near them and spun the *dreidel*.

Every night, the Rebbe would walk home from 770 at eleven or twelve at night, and sometimes later, accompanied by Rabbi Hodakov. Because of safety concerns, a custom began that two *bochurim* would escort the Rebbe from some distance behind. We acted as if we didn't exist. If, for whatever reason, we saw the Rebbe turn his head towards us, we would immediately duck behind a tree or car.

One time, we had an amusing experience:

One Friday night, the Rebbe was approaching his house on President Street from across the street when we noticed a big dog barking on the sidewalk. Being that it was sitting right in front of a large puddle, we figured that the Rebbe would probably just cross the street to avoid them both.

That's not what happened. As the Rebbe came closer, the dog quieted down and backed away with its tail between its legs. Then the Rebbe took one step back, jumped over the puddle, and continued on.

When we tried doing the same thing, we landed smack in the middle of it with a loud splash, and then the dog heard the noise and began barking at us loudly. I looked up towards the Rebbe, who was already walking up the steps to his house; he looked back at the noise, smiled at us, and walked inside.

## KANIM

About a half a year after I arrived, in Parshas Ufaratzta 5719, The Rebbe instructed the *hanhalah* to appoint seven *bochurim* for *nigleh* and seven for Chassidus. They were called *kanim*—branches, as in the seven *k'nei hamenorah*. These *kanim* would study their respective subject for an extra hour and a half each night, and the idea was for them to bring *chayus* into the Torah learning of the *yeshiva*.

I was privileged to be one of the *knei hamenorah* in Chassidus. The night that we were all chosen, we went into *yechidus* together and the Rebbe said a *sicha* for us.<sup>3</sup>

A few weeks later, the Rebbe added a *hora'a*: once a week, one of the *knei hamenorah* should deliver an *inyan* to the whole *yeshiva*. Regarding Chassidus, the Rebbe said that we should teach a concept, “בהסבר ממה” שמובא עד”ז ממקומות אחרים בדא”ח



REB LEIBEL SPEAKS AT A TZACH KINUS, 20 TISHREI 5738.

LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 22385

## REB SHLOMO HORENSHTEIN

One of the Rebbe's secretaries in those years was named Reb Eliyahu Quint. He was a very learned Jew who served as the Rebbe's bookkeeper, and he enjoyed speaking to the *bochurim* in his free time.

One evening, I was sitting with him in the *mazkirus* office, when a buzz came from the Rebbe's room. Rabbi Quint picked up the phone and said, "Haaallo?" (Not being a Lubavitcher Chassid, he took the liberty to speak to the Rebbe in ways the other *mazkirim* never would. They, for example, would pick up the phone and quietly await the Rebbe's instructions. He would answer with a grand "Hello").

He listened for a moment, and said, "Alevsky is here." I started getting nervous. A moment later, he said, "Good, I'll tell him."

He put down the receiver and said, "The Rebbe wants you to enter his room."

I was petrified; I began berating him, "What did you do to me?" Normally, the only time I entered the Rebbe's room myself was for *yechidus*, and only after days and weeks of mental and spiritual preparation. Here I was expected to walk straight into the Rebbe's room!

I had no choice. He told me what to do: "Knock twice quietly on the door, and the Rebbe will buzz the door open."

I knocked and the Rebbe buzzed me in. I saw the Rebbe was sitting with a visitor; he was Reb Shlomo Horenshtein, a first cousin of the Frierdiker Rebbe<sup>5</sup> who would visit the Rebbe from time to time. The Rebbe was sitting with him in an informal fashion; they were both on the Rebbe's side of the desk.

When the Rebbe noticed me, he motioned to me to step inside, and said, "*Zei darfen bald forren in de Bronx. Hostu a car?* He needs to go to the Bronx; do you have a car?"

I answered, "I can get a hold of one."

Reb Shlomo asked the Rebbe if I know the way to the Bronx, and the Rebbe replied, "*er vet shoin oisgefinen*, he'll figure it out."

To me, the Rebbe said, "*In arum fuftzen minute*—in fifteen minutes."

Exactly fifteen minutes later, the Rebbe walked out supporting Reb Shlomo's right arm. The Rebbe brought him over to the doorway and gave me a look. I slipped my hand under his other arm, and the Rebbe said *yasher koach*.

As we approached the car, I remember thinking to myself, "I have an hour with this guy; I'll be able to ask him about everything he heard from the Rebbe." Unfortunately, that is the last memory I have of that occasion; I remember absolutely nothing that happened after that. Nothing similar ever happened to me; I guess the Rebbe deleted my memory disk.

explanations based on other sources in Chassidus."

That was an entirely new concept to us. Until then, we only reviewed Chassidus in *lashon harav*. Now the Rebbe wanted us to give over *pilpulim* in Chassidus, just as in *nigleh*.

Shortly thereafter, another *hora'a* came. Whenever we speak, the *bochurim* should be able to ask questions. A little while later, the Rebbe instructed that our *drashos* be published as well.

Three quarters of a year later, on Erev Rosh Hashanah, the Rebbe called us in for a *yechidus* again with the *hanhalah*.<sup>4</sup> He began a *sicha*, saying that there are *hamshachos* from heaven that are sometimes obstructed on their way down into the world. Through our efforts, we can be "*mavrich es hagefen*," we can create a bridge that allows them to come down.

As the Rebbe continued speaking, he began to cry, and as he went on, the crying became stronger, until the Rebbe was sobbing like a child and could no longer speak. I had never seen the Rebbe in that state. He was shifting back and forth in his chair weeping intensely, while we were standing in a half circle around the Rebbe's desk, not knowing what to do.

At some point, Rabbi Hodakov motioned for us to leave. He opened the door, and we all filed out. As I left, I looked back at the Rebbe, and I saw the Rebbe lift his face from his hands. His face was very red and full of tears, and the Rebbe said, "*Lshana tova umesukah*." The Rebbe then put his head back down and began crying again.

## DRIVING THE REBBE TO THE OHEL

One time, the Rebbe needed to go to the Ohel and no one in *mazkirus* was available to drive, so Rabbi Groner asked me to drive the Rebbe. Frightened by the prospect, I argued





that I wasn't the man for the job, but he explained that there was no one else to do it and there was no choice.

I asked him what I needed to know, and he told me the *seder*:

The Rebbe would walk out of 770 holding a bag of *panim*, sit down in the front seat and place the *panim* next to him (on the way to the Ohel, the Rebbe always sat in the front). Rabbi Groner would hand me a second bag, and I was to put it in the car right next to the Rebbe's bag.

I also asked Rabbi Groner, "When do I know the Rebbe wants to go back?" He answered, "The Rebbe will tell you."

That's what happened; I opened the door for the Rebbe, we put in the bags, and on the way the Rebbe began

to work quietly. Rabbi Groner had told me that when arriving at the Ohel, the Rebbe would take the first bag and I should take the second bag and bring it into the Ohel. That's what I did.

The Rebbe approached the Ohel, knocked on both doors, put the bag of letters down and began organizing the papers on the ledge.

I didn't know what to do, so I stood in the corner with my bag. When he finished organizing the letters, the Rebbe looked at me quizzically, as if to say, "What are you still doing here?" and put out both hands to take the second bag.

After the Rebbe began organizing those letters as well, I remained standing there, as I needed to know when to return. The Rebbe

finished organizing and looked at me quizzically again, and said "*Arum fir azeiger*, at about four o'clock."

I sat in the car, busying myself with my work, and at a quarter to four I came back into the hallway of the Ohel. It was then that I suddenly realized that Rabbi Groner hadn't told me whether I should inform the Rebbe when it's time to leave, or just wait for the Rebbe to come out. I didn't know what to do.

I walked to the end of the hallway, and dared open the door just a crack. The Rebbe was working quickly. Making notes on some letters, dropping some letters in, and putting others back into the bag. Meanwhile, four o'clock came and went, and my *kishkes* were turning.

I slowly kept opening the door until it was fully open, hoping the Rebbe would notice me. I had a Tehillim in one hand, one eye on the Rebbe, and I was getting more and more nervous.

*The Rebbe was working quickly. Making notes on some letters, dropping some letters in, and putting others back into the bag.*

Should I interrupt the Rebbe, at the Ohel no less?

It was already a quarter to five, then five o'clock, and suddenly the Rebbe looked up at me with the same quizzical look; "*Shoin fir azeiger*, is it already four o'clock?"

I answered, "It's already five."

The Rebbe said "Ah," and began immediately packing away the remaining *panim* and got ready to leave. The Rebbe moved one bag over for me to take, took the other bag himself, and we left back to Crown Heights. On the way back, the Rebbe finished *Maaneh Lashon* and said *korbanos* for *mincha*.

Back at 770, the Rebbe davened *mincha* and then returned to the car to go home. When the Rebbe entered the car, he sat down in the back seat, behind the passenger seat.

Now, that put me in another dilemma. In those days, whenever the Rebbe would go home, he would sit behind the driver's seat, and when he would go to Rebbetzin Chana, he would sit behind the passenger seat. I

thought I would be taking the Rebbe home to break his fast, but here he sat down in the 'Rebbetzin Chana seat.' I turned and asked the Rebbe, "*Tzu der mame'n?* To Rebbetzin Chana?"

The Rebbe answered, "*Nein, tzu der heim*—no, to the house," and slid over to the other seat.

Because of my experience before leaving the Ohel, and realizing that there was no way to ask something, I felt that there should be a way to contact 770 from the Ohel, and I therefore asked a friend to donate a car-phone for the Rebbe's car. It cost nine-hundred dollars. (As soon as it was installed, the Rebbe began sending many *horaos* directly from the Ohel.)

I also arranged a no-parking sign in front of 770; beforehand, *bochurim* would "hold" the spot in front of the walkway until the Rebbe would come, but often the space would be taken and the Rebbe would have to walk around a car or two. When I began working with government officials as part of my job in Tzach, I arranged that sign.

## TZACH

For ten years, until we moved on shlichus to Cleveland, I ran Tze'irei Agudas Chabad, or in short, Tzach. I was its first official employee.

This is how it all began:

Tzach essentially began as a volunteer organization run by Reb Dovid Raskin. A lot of the *hafatzas hamaayanos* in the New York area, such as *tahalucha*, was under the official auspices of this organization.

Tzach would make a *kinus* each year on Chol Hamoed Sukkos. In 5722, the topic discussed was disseminating the Rebbe's *sichos*. In one speech, Reb Bentzion Shemtov declared with his inimitable lisp, "*M'darf nemen a mensch, cholen gelt, un svet zein shichos*." Tzach, he said, needed a permanent employee whose job would be to publicize the Rebbe's *sichos*. With volunteer work, nothing would ever be properly done.

After the Rebbe received the *duch* of the *kinus*, Rabbi Hodakov told Reb Dovid Raskin that he would pay a beginner's salary for an employee to work for three hours a day, and Reb Dovid offered me the job.

I was a 22-year-old yeshiva *bochur*, and also one of the *knei hamenorah* so I initially refused, but Reb Dovid reasoned with me that I should at least write to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe answered, "אם מסוגל הוא, לזה, אפילו בהשערה עכ"פ, יקבלו בשעה טובה ומוצלחת, אם ברשות ההנהלה. If you are qualified for it, at least assumably so, you should take the job in a good and auspicious hour, with the permission of the *hanhalah*."

I went to the *hanhalah*. Reb Yisrael Jacobson began asking questions, but Reb Shmuel Levitin cut him off. "The Rebbe said to ask permission from the *hanhalah*? You can go."

The day I began working, Reb Dovid Raskin took me to meet the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana.



PINNY LEW

A NO PARKING SIGN IN FRONT OF 770, ALLOWING THE REBBE'S CAR CONSTANT ACCESS. CIRCA 5725.



REB LEIBEL BECAME A LIASON OF TZACH TO CITY OFFICIALS AND DIGNITARIES.

Thus began a unique relationship with the Rebbetzin which I enjoyed for the next few years. I merited to assist her in numerous ways and spend hours in her presence. (The many stories and experiences in this regard are beyond the scope of this interview and will be covered at a later point, נ"ח).

My job in Tzach was to take responsibility for everything that had previously been organized on a volunteer basis. *Hakhalas kehillos, tahalucha*, Shabbosim in outlying cities, *shiurim*, printing *sichos*—they were all my responsibility.

One thing I organized was the early publication of Likkutei Sichos.<sup>6</sup> Tzach printed the first 4 chalokim and I was heavily involved in all of the work.

The Rebbe was involved in everything that happened in Tzach. He would see every piece of mail that arrived or went out. Whenever I wrote a letter, I would send it in to the Rebbe with a carbon-copy, and the Rebbe

would often write comments on the carbon-copy and return them to me. In his comments, the Rebbe basically taught me how to write letters. Sometimes the Rebbe would circle a paragraph and ask, “*Mah zeh mosif*, what does this add?”

In 5727, I suddenly got a *tzetz* from the Rebbe; “Does Tzach have anything more important to do than to deal with the *shechunah*?” This was during the time when many of the Jewish residents began moving out of Crown Heights and it was becoming dangerous.<sup>7</sup>

That came as a total surprise, because until then we were involved solely in *hafatzas hamaaynos*, but I immediately threw myself into the new mission. I built all sorts of connections with city officials and prominent Jewish organizations, and got them involved in helping the *shechunah*. On a number of occasions, I brought groups of Jewish

officials and dignitaries to the Rebbe’s farbrengens, and the Rebbe said *sichos* directed specifically to them.

Thanks to those connections, Tzach purchased a number of buildings and obtained numerous grants to help other Jewish people buy property.

## YUD-ALEF NISSAN, SHNAS HASHISHIM

Some time before Yud-Aleph Nissan 5722, we had a discussion about the Rebbe’s upcoming sixtieth birthday. We felt it was an important milestone, and although we had never marked the Rebbe’s birthday before, we felt it would be appropriate to do so now. The idea we came up with was that every Chossid should make a contribution in the number of sixty; whether in Torah learning, money, or whatever.

This discussion took place during a Shabbos Mevorchim *melaveh malka* that was held in 770 by Reb Dovid



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Raskin. A *duch* of the *melaveh malka* was sent to the Rebbe, and I also sent in a proposed letter that would be sent from Tzach to all of *anash* about the campaign. (We would never dare do something like that without showing it to the Rebbe first.) The Rebbe returned the letter without comment, so we took it as an approval and began sending the letter to the entire world.

Letters began streaming in from all over, with donations and *hachlatos*, and the campaign generated a lot of excitement. It was a very special time; this was the first time in history that Chassidim banded together from across the globe to collectively bring the Rebbe a *nachas ruach*, and it gave us all a very special feeling.

Many people overseas didn't differentiate between the Rebbe and Tzach, so they sent their donations directly to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe sent it to us. After a few times, the Rebbe wrote "*Likeren Hashishim*" on the envelopes intended for us. I was very excited; the Rebbe had formally agreed to our project and even gave it a name!

On that Yud-Aleph Nissan, when the Rebbe returned from the Ohel, I gave Rabbi Hodakov two bags—one full of *duchos* and the other full of money and checks totalling twenty-two thousand dollars, which was a very large sum in those days.

Five minutes later, Rabbi Hodakov walked out and said that the Rebbe would farbreng. That was the first time the Rebbe farbrenged on Yud-Aleph Nissan and it was a very unique farbrengen.

## MARRIAGE

Around Purim 5722, my mother-in-law was in *yechidus* and gave the Rebbe a list of *bochurim* whom Reb Dovid Raskin had suggested for her daughter. The Rebbe chose my name, but added, "*M'zol nit dertzeilen di kinder biz noch Pesach*—don't tell the children about the idea until after Pesach."

After Pesach, the *shidduch* was suggested to me, so I wrote to the Rebbe and received a *bracha* to go forward with it. Every time I met with my wife, I wrote to the Rebbe again and received a *bracha* to continue.

Then, once we made a decision to marry, we each entered *yechidus* separately. (Later, we would go into *yechidus* together as *chosson* and *kallah*, and another time shortly before our wedding.) Because we entered separately, when my wife came out of her *yechidus*, she was a *kallah*, but interestingly, I wasn't yet a *chosson*.

Two weeks before my wedding, we asked the Rebbe in *yechidus* about going on *shlichus*, and the Rebbe answered, "*Du bist duch matzliach in Tzach, vos darfstu avekfaren*—you are, after all, successful in Tzach, why should you move out?"

Something special happened at my wedding:

Our wedding took place in Cleveland on Chai Elul 5722. We suggested that date to the Rebbe because it was an auspicious day, a *yoma d'pagra*, when the Rebbe didn't normally hold a farbrengen (in those years).

We received the Rebbe's *bracha* and *haskamah*, and on Chai Elul many of the *bochurim* in 770 drove

to Cleveland to participate in our wedding.

Little did we know that a major event did take place. At the same time as the wedding, the Rebbe held a surprise farbrengen where he announced the upcoming "*Shnas Hakan*," 150 years since the *histalkus* of the Alter Rebbe. That was a major theme of the Rebbe's *sichos* and activities throughout the following year, and it all started during that farbrengen on Chai Elul.

Although we missed out on the farbrengen, the Rebbe instructed Rabbi Hodakov to phone the *chosson* at the wedding hall to give over the *nekudah* of the farbrengen, and to have the *chosson* repeat it to all the *misnagdishe* rabbonim and *baalei batim* who were present.

## LIGHT UP THE WORLD!

In our *Yechidus* before our wedding, the Rebbe told us, "*Az ir vet machen lichtig arum eich, vet der Aibershter machen lichtig bai eich*—When you will spread light around you, the *Aibershter* will illuminate your own space as well."

This directive and *bracha*, throughout our years in Tzach, and then on the Rebbe's *shlichus* to Cleveland beginning in 5732, has been a guiding light for us. ❶

1. See *Transforming Tragedy*, Derher issue 20 (97), Sivan 5774.

2. Presumably, this was the *maamar* "*Vayedaber Hashem*," Shabbos Parshas Tzav 5719—ed.

3. Toras Menachem vol. 24, p. 218.

4. Toras Menachem vol. 24, p. 239

5. He was to married Devorah Leah, daughter of Rebbetzin Sheina Bracha Dulitzka, a sister of Rebbetzin Shтерна Sarah. See Igros Kodesh vol. 20, p. 571.

6. See *The Written Torah*, Derher Tammuz 5777.

7. See *Crown Heights*, Derher issue 50 (127), Cheshvan 5776. The Rebbe began addressing the issue publicly only three years later, in 5729.