

לזכות החתן
הרה"ת ר' אברהם יונה שיחי' קאראליין
והכלה המהוללה
מרת זעלדא תחי' נעמאנאוו
לרגל חתונתם בשעטומ"צ
כ"ד סיון ה'תשע"ח

נדפס ע"י הוריהם
הרה"ת ר' יואל גרשון וזוגתו מרת רבקה
ומשפחתם שיחיו קאראליין
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חנה
ומשפחתם שיחיו נעמאנאוו



A Loving Father


EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH
RABBI YISRAEL DEREN

Rabbi Yisrael and Vivi Deren have served as the Rebbe's shlichim for over forty years. Their remarkable life story has been an inspiration to many.

In this interview, Rabbi Deren and his wife share the stories and the hadracha they received from the Rebbe in their youth, in marriage, and on shlichus.



MARKO DASHEV PHOTOGRAPHY



THE SPRINGFIELD
MENORAH,
ERECTED BY RABBI
DEREN NEAR THE
SPRINGFIELD
CITY HALL AND
COURTHOUSE.



G SCHUSTERMAN VIA JEM 303075

THE REBBE STANDS UNDER THE CHUPPA OF AVROHOM AND SARAH RIVKAH SASSONKIN, 10 TAMMUZ 5722. AN ELEVEN YEAR-OLD YISRAEL DEREN STANDS WITH HIS FATHER REB YECHESKEL ON THE RIGHT.

Background

My family has had the merit of being in the United States from the Rebbe's earliest days in America. My father, Rabbi Yechezkel Deren, grew up in Poland in a Lubavitcher family, and was enrolled in Tomchei Temimim after his bar mitzvah. Shortly after the war broke out, he escaped with the Lubavitcher yeshiva to Shanghai, and arrived in America after the war.

My maternal grandfather was Reb Sholom Posner, who was sent by the Friediker Rebbe to America in 5689 (תרפ"ט). When they arrived, they saw the dismal spiritual state and my grandmother was very concerned for her children's future. When the Friediker Rebbe came to America in 5690 (תר"צ), she asked him in *yechidus*, "How will I ever raise Jewish children here?"

The Friediker Rebbe laughed and said, "*Du vest ois'hodeven feine,*

frumme, chassidische kinder—you will raise fine, *frum, chassidische* children."

Later, the Friediker Rebbe instructed them to move to Pittsburgh and open a Jewish day school. After my parents married in Kislev of 5710, they joined my grandparents in Pittsburgh. That's where I grew up.

By The Rebbe

My earliest memory of seeing the Rebbe is when I was seven years old. Although Pittsburgh is not so distant from New York, travel wasn't as easy and cheap as today, and we didn't—especially as children—go to New York very often. When I was seven years old, my father sent me along with a group of bar mitzvah students for the Purim farbrengen of 5718. The farbrengen was on Thursday night, and on Shabbos the Rebbe farbrenged again. The following day, on Sunday, we went into *yechidus*.

I remember another few short visits like that. When I was eleven years old I came to the Rebbe for Simchas

Torah for the first time, and merited to be present when the Rebbe taught a *niggun*.

One special childhood memory is coming to New York for the *chupah* of my aunt, Sarah Rivkah Sasonkin. The Rebbe was *mesader kiddushin*, and then the entire wedding party flew to Pittsburgh. While in New York before the *chupah*, my family was granted a *yechidus*, and prior to that we went to visit the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana.

In Rebbetzin Chana's home, a few of the children were misbehaving and taken out, but I remained quiet and well-behaved and was allowed to remain. When Rebbetzin Chana noticed that, she rewarded me with a story. She told me how a professor in Yekaterinoslav had brought a question to her husband, Harav Levi Yitzchok in mathematics which they had been toiling on for a long time, and when the Rebbe saw the question he answered it on the spot.

I learned in the school in Pittsburg until I was twelve years old, and then I came to New York to study at the yeshiva on Bedford and Dean, where I remained for four years. Each Shabbos, I would stay by Reb Zalman Shimon Dvorkin in Crown Heights, and I merited to be in the Rebbe's presence, and join the Shabbos Mevorchim farbrengens. (Soon afterwards, the Rebbe began to farbreng every week, after the *histalkus* of Rebbetzin Chana.)

In Yechidus

From my bar mitzvah onward, I merited to be in *yechidus* with the Rebbe before each birthday. The first *yechidus* was in honor of my bar mitzvah, when I went in with my parents. The Rebbe tested me on my *pilpul* on the topic of carrying tefillin on Shabbos.

The Rebbe asked, how can the *chachamim* permit tefillin to be worn on Shabbos, if that constitutes carrying which is an *issur d'oraysa*. I was puzzled, not understanding how it could be an *issur d'oraysa* if the Alter

Rebbe permits it. I remained silent, and the Rebbe explained, "Because it's *derech levush*, it's like wearing a garment."

The Rebbe also asked when we would celebrate the bar mitzvah, and my father answered that they were discussing different dates, so the Rebbe commented that the Zohar says "*miyom yom holadito*," it should be celebrated on the *yom huledes* itself.

In yeshiva, I, of course, wanted to be (or at least be thought of as) a *chassidische bochur*. There was a particular thing many *chassidische bochurim* were doing (the particulars are not relevant to the story) and I wanted to do so as well. My parents did not think it was a good idea. I wrote to the Rebbe and asked if I could do the same. The Rebbe answered, "אם בתוקף יחליט - If you will make a firm decision to"—and then gave me quite a difficult condition to fulfill—"יעשה יעשה - כן והשם יצליחו - you should do so and Hashem will grant you success."

I called my parents and they felt that I couldn't fulfill the condition as the Rebbe had given me. In my

fourteenth birthday *yechidus*, I asked the Rebbe what to do.

The Rebbe read my *tzettel* to the end and then without looking up said to me "*Ich hob dir shoin genfert*, I already answered you, *vest dos tohn tzu nisht?* Will you do it or not?"

The Rebbe continued looking down at my *tzettel* waiting for my response.

I stood frozen for what felt like hours, although it was probably not more than a few seconds, and finally, with tremendous effort, I very hesitatingly gave the Rebbe a barely perceptible nod. The Rebbe looked up with a smile, and said, "*Nu, az du vest gedeinken az du host mir tzugezogt, vest du zicher kenen*—if you will remember that you promised me, you will surely be able to accomplish it." Those words carry me till today, every time I run into a difficulty in my shlichus; "*Az du vest gedeinken az du host mir tzugezogt, vest du zicher kenen*."

At another *yechidus*, when I asked about concentration in *davening*, the Rebbe instructed me to always look in a *siddur*. "*Osiyos me'iros*," the letters in the *siddur* will help me concentrate on the meaning of what I was reciting.

The Rebbe's Farbrengens

When I was seventeen years old, the yeshiva bought the dormitory at 749 Eastern Parkway; I moved in there and I was right across the street from 770 and the Rebbe. In those days, 770 had a small crowd, where everyone knew everyone. Nevertheless, Lubavitch was rapidly growing, and the farbrengens attracted a large crowd, which filled the entire shul (downstairs 770 in its initial form, before the expansion into the adjacent buildings).

I vividly remember the first time I understood a *sicha* from the beginning until the end. I was thirteen years old, and the Rebbe spoke about the mitzvah of *Hachodesh hazeh lachem*, of setting a calendar according to the



A LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER FROM THE SPRINGFIELD UNION CAPTURES A MITZVAH MOBILE WITH BOCHURIM VISITS THE STREETS OF DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD, SUMMER 5734. RABBI DEREN (CENTER) HELPS A MAN LAY TEFILLIN.



RABBI DEREN (RIGHT) WITH SENATOR TED (EDWARD) KENNEDY AT A CHABAD DINNER IN AMHERST MASSACHUSETTS. RABBI SHOLOM POSNER IS IN THE CENTER.

moon. The Rebbe noted the difference between the sun and the moon: the sun always remains the same, while the moon constantly changes, growing and shrinking, again and again. The *hora'a*, the Rebbe said, was that when a Jew is climbing in his *avodas Hashem*, he might fall and think that it's the end of it; he'll never be able to recover. But Jews are compared to the moon, and the moon teaches us that there is always another round.

Now, at that fabrengen, I had been a bit down. Something was happening in my life; I don't remember exactly what, perhaps a difficult test or the like, which caused me to feel, in my thirteen year old mind, that my life was already a total failure. Being able to understand and fully grasp that *sicha* was an amazing inspiration. I felt that the Rebbe was talking directly to me. After *mincha* and *maariv*, I remember walking home and looking up at the bright moon, and thinking how my life had just been given back to me by the Rebbe.

When I was 17, I went to learn in Newark for two years (that was the *seder* in those years). The Mashpia was Reb Meilach Zweibel *a"h*.

Our Shidduch

When I was nineteen years old, my parents were in *yechidus*, and the Rebbe brought up the matter of a *shidduch* for me. A year later, when my parents were in *yechidus*, the Rebbe suggested that my parents speak to me about a *shidduch* “*eider a tzveiter vet tzu ehm tzugein*—before someone else approaches him. *Ich mein nisht davka heint bay nacht, men ken varten biz morgen in der fri*—I don't necessarily mean tonight, you can wait until tomorrow morning.”

I was not even twenty years old at the time and my mother said, “*Er vil noch lernen*—he wants to continue learning.” The Rebbe smiled and with a wave of his hand said, “*Er vet lernen noch di chasuna*—he will learn after the wedding.”

In general, when people would write to the Rebbe about *shidduchim*, the Rebbe would answer, “*Nachon hashidduch*” (it is a proper *shidduch*) or “*Tov hashidduch*” (it is a good *shidduch*) or “*Azkir al hatziyun*” (I will mention it at the Ohel). In our case, when my wife and I wrote to the Rebbe that we agreed to get married, we merited a special *bracha*. The

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COMING IN!”

Rebbe wrote, “*Nachon hashidduch, vetov, v'yehi bshaa tovah u'mutzlachas, azkir al hatziyun*” (it is a proper and good *shidduch*, may it be in a good and auspicious hour. I will mention it at the Ohel).

Usually the Rebbe encouraged very short engagements, but in our case, because I was still very young, the Rebbe allowed us to stretch our engagement for eight months, during which I could obtain *semicha*.

Before our wedding, we went into *yechidus*, and the Rebbe told us something very powerful, which continues to guide us until today. The Rebbe said, “*Ir vet machen lichtig un varem ba andere, un der Aibershter vet machen lichtig un varem ba eich*—you should bring light and warmth to others, and the *Aibershter* will bring light and warmth to you.” That *bracha* and *havtacha* is what keeps us going until today.

Kollel and Shlichus

After our wedding, I joined the *kollel* behind 770 for two years.

Once, while I was there, the Rebbe surprised us with a visit. It was in middle of a random day, when suddenly someone rushed in breathlessly, “The Rebbe is coming in!”

Luckily, most of the *yungeleit* were there, and a few *bochurim* present jumped out of the window before the Rebbe saw them. The Rebbe walked in, looked around the room, and also went upstairs to see the apartment that was there (apparently that was the main reason the Rebbe came to see the *kollel*).

Although the attendance was alright, the Rebbe was very unhappy about the *bilti seder*. Every *sefer* he saw opened was a different one; no one was learning the same thing. The Rebbe wrote to Reb Zalman Shimon that the whole concept of a *kollel* was a *chiddush* in Lubavitch, and without a proper *sefer*, the Rebbe said he would shut it down.

Shlichus in those years was already becoming a norm. Everyone knew that the Rebbe wanted Chassidim to move on shlichus, and the apprehension of the earlier years had already dissipated.

During the two years I spent in *kollel*, I received many offers for shlichus opportunities. In those years, the Rebbe didn't generally send out shluchim to new locations; new shluchim were usually hired to join existing *mosdos*. Many *mosdos* at the time were looking for extra hands, and many shluchim called us with offers.

When my wife and I were in *yechidus*, we told the Rebbe that we wanted to go on shlichus. The Rebbe told us to go into Merkos and speak to Rabbi Hodakov to hear suggestions. Rabbi Hodakov told me that there was a suggestion for a shliach to move to Amherst, Massachusetts, so I immediately said, "We'll take it." He smiled and explained that the recent norm was to come with a list of suggestions and choose the best one.

Being that I had received many proposals, I wrote up all nineteen of them, and we asked the Rebbe to choose. The Rebbe replied, "The *sefer* now is that we don't send out shluchim anymore; you should choose a place yourself, *b'makom shelibo chafetz*, according to your heart's desire, *v'al yeshaneh adam mibno mitoich banav*, a person shouldn't differentiate among his children."

I remember being disappointed; I wanted the Rebbe to choose our place. Reb Binyomin Klein saw my

disappointment, and said, "The Rebbe just called you his own child!"

Mrs. Deren: I wrote a letter to the Rebbe, explaining that our *libo chafetz*, our heart's desire, was to go where the Rebbe himself would send us. This time, the Rebbe circled three of the nineteen options, and said to look into those places and get more details. After we did so, the Rebbe chose Amherst.

During that same *yechidus* regarding our shlichus, the Rebbe said, "*Bichlal zolt ir zehn az s'zohl zein gut b'gashmius. Hagam az ruchnius iz der ikar, az s'iz gut b'gashmius, ken men hob'n koach oif ruchnius*—In general, you should ensure that you have are physically comfortable; although spirituality is the main thing, when you will be comfortable physically, you will have strength for spirituality."

Amherst

Mrs. Deren relates: Our shlichus was unique in those days in the fact that we weren't based in an established Jewish community. Although most

shluchim dealt with students, they were usually based in a large Jewish community, where they would be able to find financial support. Nevertheless, we moved there with the Rebbe's *brachos*, and began working with students.

At first, we found a tiny house, almost a bungalow, where one room served as our shul, kitchen, dining room, office, and more. We began holding Shabbos meals, *minyanim*, and classes, and many students made real progress in their Yiddishkeit. As our crowds grew, we moved into a larger space, and within a few months, with the Rebbe's *brachos*, we were fortunate to be able to buy a beautiful facility, large enough for all of our activities.

Rabbi Deren: We decided to celebrate the *chanukas habayis* for our Chabad House with a grand concert. We obtained a hall and organized everything, but to our consternation, as the date approached almost no one bought tickets. We thought the event would be a colossal failure.



THE CHABAD HOUSE IN AMHERST.

The Shabbos before the concert was probably the worst Shabbos of my life.

I went up to the second floor of the Chabad House from where you could actually see the concert hall, and as I looked at it, I was thinking to myself, “Yisrael, you see that building over there? Tomorrow that’s going to be the scene of your downfall.” I don’t recall if I was literally crying, but inside, I was sobbing.

As I was standing there, I was reminded of a story that I had heard about Reb Mendel Futerfas. One time, when at a low point in jail, he had the idea of sending a letter to the Rebbe in his mind. He imagined making all the preparations, writing the letter, and posting it. A week later, his family in England received a letter from the Rebbe addressed to Reb Mendel. It began with the words, “In response to your telegram...” I thought to myself, “If only I was on the level of Reb Mendel, if only I could do something like that, I would send a letter to the Rebbe in my mind. I would write, ‘Dear Rebbe, You sent me here to make a *kiddush Hashem*, and I am about to do the opposite. Rebbe, please save me!’”

The next day, I braced myself for the worst. But then, to our shock (and delight), as we approached the hall, we saw huge lines of people. The concert was an unbelievable success.

Right after the event, my grandmother went to New York, where she was scheduled to enter in for *yechidus*. She had been at the concert in Amherst, so the Rebbe sat back, and he started asking questions about every detail of the concert. Did politicians attend? Was it covered by the press? Did I make an appeal? Were my parents there?

Finally, the Rebbe asked, “Nu, and how many people were there?” My *bubbe* replied, “Over one thousand.”

To which, the Rebbe responded, “Over a thousand?! And yesterday Yisrael was so worried...”

Other Shlichus’n

Mrs. Deren: As our activities grew, we brought down more shlichim to help with the work.

A few years after moving on shlichus, I was asked to come join the faculty of Achei Temimim in Springfield which was going through a difficult period. Springfield was

the closest Jewish community to Amherst, and my husband was there fundraising almost on a daily basis, so we considered the move.

We asked the Rebbe what to do, and he answered, “*Kfi sheyisdaber b’Malach*—as you will discuss with Merkos.” After a consultation with Rabbi Hodakov, we received the green light, and began spending the week in Springfield and Shabbos we would move into the Chabad House in Amherst.

Rabbi Deren: In 5748, having already placed shlichim in Hartford, and having been given responsibility for other areas in Connecticut, I realized that Stamford needed a shliach. I wrote to the Rebbe asking if I should open a center in Stamford and if the answer was yes, should I do it myself and hire a shliach to take my place in Amherst, or should I stay in Amherst and hire a new shliach for Stamford. The Rebbe answered that a Chabad center should be opened, but I should be the one to decide whether to do it myself or to bring a new shliach. We moved to Stamford, and *baruch Hashem*, with the Rebbe’s *brachos*, our work has met with great success.

The Rebbe’s Guidance

Throughout our years in Amherst, Springfield, and Stamford, we were always *zoche* to the Rebbe’s guidance. Although, in those years, the Rebbe didn’t always answer letters, and the *maanos* were often very short and concise, we always felt that the Rebbe was with us, guiding us through the good times, and through the not-such-good times.

One particular moment stands out in my memory:

One year, while living in Springfield, my wife gave birth shortly before Pesach. We would usually spend Pesach living in the Chabad House in Amherst, but that wasn’t possible with a new baby, so



HEBREW SCHOOL IN SPRINGFIELD.



RABBI DEREN (LEFT) IS JOINED BY THE THEN MAYOR OF SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS TED DIMAURO AND RABBI URI POSNER AT THE OPENING OF THE SUKKAH ERECTED IN DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD, CIRCA 5742.

“OH, YISROEL, IT’S GOOD THAT YOU CALLED. THE REBBE JUST TOLD ME TO SEND YOU A CHECK FOR YOUR PESACH EXPENSES...”

we arranged for others to run the *sedarim* in two locations in Amherst. In addition, we also organized a large public seder for the Russian immigrants in Springfield, and the costs were astronomical.

I was in a real bind. We didn’t own a single Pesach dish. I had no way of having Pesach in our home; our finances were very tight, and I didn’t have the means to now buy everything necessary for Pesach for ourselves, on top of our regular expenses.

I sat in my office very dejected; I remember feeling very sorry for myself. Here I was, worrying about the seder for so many Jews, people were coming to me with their *shaalos* and requests and I was caring for so many

people, yet no one seemed to be caring for me.

As I was sitting there, a woman called my office. Her daughter was sick, and she wanted me to pray for her. I immediately noted their Hebrew names, and called *mazkirus* to pass it on to the Rebbe.

As Rabbi Krinsky picked up the phone, he said “Oh, Yisrael, it’s good that you called. The Rebbe just told me to send you a check for your Pesach expenses...”

I remember another time we received a special *kiruv*:

There was a couple who began to come to our Chabad House. The husband was making strides in his Yiddishkeit, but unfortunately his wife

was very antagonistic about it. When matters really started getting serious, she gave her husband an ultimatum. She would come to ten Torah classes with Mrs. Deren. If Mrs. Deren managed to convince her, good. If not, she wanted a divorce.

She began attending, but by the fourth class my wife saw that her efforts didn’t seem to be successful. She wrote to the Rebbe, asking what to do, and the Rebbe replied, “*B’signon v’kaasiyasa ad achshav*—continue doing as you have been doing until now.”

Ultimately, we weren’t successful and the marriage ended. Naturally, my wife was very broken about it.

A short time later, we joined a *pegisha* weekend in Crown Heights, where my wife and I spoke at various workshops. During the Shabbos farbrengen, the organizers of the *pegisha* went up to receive a bottle of *mashke* from the Rebbe and the Rebbe told them, “*Deren iz oichet doh*, Deren is also here.”

I came up to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe gave me *l’chaim*, and then gave me a piece of cake, “*Un dos iz far di missus deineh*, this is for your ‘missus.’” I felt that the Rebbe was encouraging us after that story.

Mrs. Deren: Shulamit Aloni, an anti-religious Knesset member at the time, spoke in a college in Amherst, and we called *mazkirus* to ask if we should go to the speech. Rabbi Klein told me that we should go, and that I should introduce myself and say that we are from Chabad.

When I told her that I was from Chabad, her eyes opened wide. “Chabad? Here?”

She said, “*Kol hakavod l’Chabad*. I like Chabad. They don’t force; rather, they try to persuade.”

Rabbi Klein later told me that when he passed on the report to the Rebbe, he couldn’t remember where we lived. He began saying to the Rebbe, “Deren

THE REBBE WROTE, “ויקויים בו זה הקטן גדול יהיה, IT WILL BE FULFILLED IN HIM THE PRAYER ‘THIS SMALL ONE WILL GROW TO BE GREAT.’”

from...” The Rebbe asked, “Pittsburg?” He said, “No, Yisrael Deren,” and the Rebbe finished off, “Amherst.”

Rabbi Deren: One time, when we went for dollars in 5751, the Rebbe gave me a second dollar, “*Doz iz far di rabbonus deineh*—this is for your rabbonus.” Then the Rebbe gave my wife a second dollar, “*Doz iz far ayer hilf tzu ayer man in di rabbonus zeineh*—this is for helping your husband in his rabbonus.” Then the Rebbe gave me a third dollar with a smile and said, “*Doz iz far dir aftzu helfen ir helfen dir*—this is for your helping her helping you.”

Personal Guidance

Mrs. Deren: The Rebbe’s encouragement was always felt, also on a personal level. We went through some very challenging times, and we merited some very beautiful answers from the Rebbe.

I once wrote to the Rebbe asking for general direction for our situation. The Rebbe wrote: “ע”פ שו”ע כולל בטחון” בה’ ושמחה בעבודתו (Live) according to Shulchan Aruch, including *bitachon* in Hashem and joy in serving Him.”

Another encouraging answer we received was when our son Mendel was a baby. I wrote to the Rebbe that he wasn’t growing at a normal pace; he was still very small. The Rebbe wrote, “ויקויים בו זה הקטן גדול יהיה—may it be fulfilled in him [the prayer] ‘This small one will grow to be great.’” That was



RABBI DEREN TEACHES A CLASS IN STAMFORD.



RABBI DEREN BRINGS THE KEY TO THE CHABAD HOUSE IN AMHERST TO THE REBBE, YUD SHEVAT 5735.

fulfilled (in a spiritual sense) in an unbelievable way.

Before Tishrei 5752, I pressured my children to come home for the first days of Sukkos. I understood that for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah there was nothing to talk about, as they wanted to be by the Rebbe, but I wanted them to join us for at least one Yom Tov. I felt that my children were an integral part of

our shlichus, and that they could have a strong impact on the people that would be joining us in our home for Yom Tov.

My son Yossi was eighteen, and he wasn’t very excited about the prospect, but because I insisted, they remained home. After Yom Tov, we phoned Crown Heights and heard about all the amazing things that had occurred. The Rebbe had watched each person *bentch*



MENDEL DEREN STANDS BY SHORTLY AFTER RECEIVING HIS FIRST ALIYA AT 770, 5 TISHREI 5748.



THE GROUNDBREAKING OF THE CHABAD CENTER IN STAMFORD, YUD-ALEPH NISSAN 5763. THEN MAYOR DANIEL MALLOY (CENTER) JOINS IN THE CEREMONY.

lulav, over a duration of six hours, and my children had missed out on the opportunity. Needless to say, they were extremely disappointed.

After Yom Tov, we received a letter from one of our guests, where they thanked us for hosting them and wrote about the impact that we had on them. One thing jumped out at me: They wrote that the biggest impression was from our teenage children.

My son Yossi wrote the story in a *duch* to the Rebbe. Some time later, Rabbi Groner called him and showed him the Rebbe's answer. The Rebbe wrote: "נת' ות'ח ת"ח. 2. אזכיר עה"צ. 1, I received your letter, thank you very much, I will mention it at the Ohel."

Shlichus Haklolis

When the Rebbe first said to hold a Kinus Hashluchim in the USA, I was

one of the people involved in the early organization. After the first Kinus, in 5744, the Rebbe said that we should create a *vaad l'milui hachlatos*, to bring the discussions into reality. The *vaad* consisted of myself, Rabbi Yossi Groner, and *ybch"lch* Rabbi Daniel Moscovitz *a"h*.

Throughout the years that I dealt with general shlichus matters, I felt that the Rebbe was very happy about our work. In those days, I often did not receive answers from the Rebbe when writing a report pertaining to my own shlichus, but in the case of the *vaad*, or a situation that benefited all the shluchim in general, I almost always received an answer.

Hiskashrus

Sometimes, when I speak to *bochurim* about my experiences by the Rebbe and the like, I hear the same complaint repeated. *Hiskashrus* today isn't possible anymore. You lived with the Rebbe on a daily basis, and you therefore had an easy route to *hiskashrus*; but a young *bochur* today doesn't have the ability to be a real *mekushar*.

I answer that they are suggesting that the Chassidim in Soviet Russia, who showed exemplary *mesiras nefesh* and raised generations of Chassidim, weren't true *mekusharim*. After all, they too had no contact with the Rebbe.

The reason this question is raised is because of a misconception. The *hiskashrus* that they are thinking of isn't real *hiskashrus*. What they are thinking of is a facade that the *yetzer hara* pulls over true *hiskashrus*.

Genuine *hiskashrus* is achieved in ways that the Rabbeim made clear time and time again. Through learning the Rebbe's *sichos* and *maamarim*, fulfilling the Rebbe's directives—that's the way to be a *mekushar*, and that hasn't changed one iota since Gimmel

Tammuz. If anything, it has become easier to accomplish.

The real difference in this aspect of a Chossid's *avodah* today and a Chossid's *avodah* before Gimmel Tammuz, is regarding a superficial *hiskashrus*:

In those days, it was easy to *feel* like a *mekushar*. You could attend *farbrengens*, watch the Rebbe by davening, “hang around” 770, and you felt like the biggest *mekushar*. But that *hiskashrus* was superficial; it didn't necessarily become part of you.

My uncle, Reb Zushe Posner, often pokes fun of the concept that some individuals are derisive of *tzugekumene* Chassidim. He says, if you're not *tzugekumene*, you are not a true Chossid! Your father may be a Chossid, but that is not an insurance policy for you. To be a Chossid, something has to change in *your pnimius*, it doesn't come from hanging out and just being around Lubavitch.

It is true; we no longer see the Rebbe *b'gashmiyus*, we cannot go to *fabrengens* and we don't merit dollars and davenings. But the essence of *hiskashrus* hasn't changed at all.

Today, it's not harder to be *mekushar*; it's just harder to convince yourself that you're a *mekusher*—when in fact all you have is *chitzoniusdike hiskashrus*. It's harder to convince yourself that a superficial *hiskashrus* is enough. The difficulty is on the part of the *yetzer hara*: at one point in time, he could easily fool you into thinking that you are a *mekushar*, while today his job has become many times more difficult.

Guidance

The complaint about *hiskashrus* is often accompanied with another issue: Today, many feel that we can no longer receive clear guidance from the Rebbe. After all, that is an important part of *hiskashrus*—following the Rebbe's directives. At one time, the



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Rebbe guided us on every step; in every situation and at every fork in the road, the Rebbe gave you direction. Suddenly, we are at a point in time where we sometimes feel lost; we no longer have whom to turn to.

The truth of the matter is like we said regarding *hiskashrus*: The change is only on the part of the *yetzer hora*.

What does this mean?

Before Gimmel Tammuz, the Rebbe made his *ratzon* very clear on many issues. Everyone knew that the Rebbe wanted Chassidim to move on *shlichus*, for example; there was no doubting that. We all knew the Rebbe's opinions on *chinuch*, *shlichus*, *Eretz Yisroel*, and so on.

However, throughout the generations, Chassidim knew that “*Vi men fregt, azoi entfert men*—the Rebbe

will answer you in the manner that you asked.” When push came to shove, sometimes those concepts weren't so comfortable for some individuals, and they chose not to go in that direction. Moreover, some people would write to the Rebbe about their decisions, even if deep down they knew the Rebbe doesn't approve. They would ask for the Rebbe's *haskamah ubracha*, and often they received it.

In other words, the foundations of the Rebbe's guidance are clear. We know exactly how to be *mekushar*, and through learning the Rebbe's Torah, we know exactly how to conduct ourselves. The answers that we are missing are the answers the *yetzer hora* wants to hear. Our *Nefesh Elohis* has no doubts; the Rebbe gave us instructions that are as clear as day.

TRUE HISKASHRUS GROWS OUT OF THAT DEDICATION.

As Chassidim, we can be sure that the Rebbe provided us with everything we need to cope with in our current situation. In the *sicha* of Beis Adar 5748, the Rebbe gave clear guidelines in how to go about a case of doubt. Whether through a *mashpia*, *yedidim mevinim*, or *chassidische rabbonim*, the Rebbe's *horaos* are as clear as day.

I'm very comfortable stating that when I walk into a yeshiva today, I see the *chassidische bochurim* are on a higher level than the *chassidische bochurim* of our day. Not necessarily because they know more, or because they have a more *chassidische tziyur*; it is because the superficiality is not there. Today, a *chassidische bochur* is an honest, *pnimusdiker* one; he won't be swayed by *chitzonius* as we were.

The Gemara says, "*Mah zar'o bachayim af hu bachayim*" (just as his children are alive, he too is alive). We see that the Rebbe lives in the fact that a *bochur* in Chicago, Toronto or Kfar Chabad truly lives with the *chayus* that he takes from the Rebbe. That is the Rebbe's life, that is *hu bachayim*. That hasn't changed, that was the Rebbe's life before Gimmel Tammuz and that is the Rebbe's life today.

Work At It

In our day, the *yetzer hora* has convinced many people that *hiskashrus* is a hard task, it's too difficult for regular people.

The truth is that *adam lamal yulad*. Doing the Rebbe's work was never meant to be easy, the Rebbe made that very clear in the first *sicha* that he said after the *maamar Basi Legani*. The Rebbe said that each person must still fulfill his *avodah*; the fact that we have a Rebbe doesn't remove any responsibility from us.

This morning I happened to see the *maamar V'zeh Hamishpatim* from Kuntres Chof-Beis Shevat 5752. One *nekudah* that the Rebbe speaks about is carrying *olah shel Torah*, the yoke of Yiddishkeit with joy and pleasure.

The fact that something is difficult to obtain doesn't mean that it is beyond our reach altogether. And it also doesn't mean that it wasn't meant for us. There is no room for a negative attitude.

On the contrary; Chassidim sometimes viewed a *kiruv* from the Rebbe as a *richuk*. The reasoning was simple: if you would be a true Chossid, the Rebbe wouldn't have to go out of his way to encourage you to do something. Obviously your *avoda* is lacking.

In other words, a Chossid's task is to dedicate himself to the Rebbe entirely, without being asked and without being patted on the back. No matter how difficult the task, a Chossid tackles it head on.

True *hiskashrus* grows out of that dedication. If you want to be a *mekushar*, do it when you *don't* feel like it. Go to the Ohel, learn the Rebbe's *sichos* and *maamarim*, learn Rambam,

go on *mitvzoim*—and suddenly you will discover that you are connected to the Rebbe.

When I was in yeshiva, we would complain to the *hanhalah* that we don't have a *chayus* in learning. They would respond, "Obviously not, because you're not learning!" A *chayus* in anything in your life will always come as an outgrowth of dedication to that ideal, whether learning *nigleh* or Chassidus, or the concept of *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe.

My grandfather once asked a Jew to put on tefillin. The Jew responded, "Rabbi, how can I put on tefillin if I don't believe in G-d?" My grandfather answered him, "How can you believe in G-d if you don't put on tefillin?" A real connection will only grow once you actually do it.

It may always be difficult, but as the Rebbe once wrote to us, your life must be centered around "Shulchan Aruch, including *bitachon* in Hashem and joy in serving Him." Doing the Rebbe's work is the biggest merit one could ever ask for. Being the Rebbe's shliach means that every part of your day, everything you do, is an expression of the *meshaleach*, the Rebbe. Although at times it might be difficult, if you are mindful of the fact that you are the Rebbe's shliach, that thought will carry you through. **T**



RABBI DEREN LAYS TEFILLIN WITH A STUDENT.