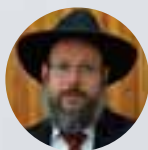


וזהחלי לתן
אל לבו

BOCHURIM REMEMBER
CHOF BEIS SHEVAT





Chof-Beis Shevat 5748* was the *histalkus* of the Rebbetzin. Most people didn't meet the Rebbetzin or see her regularly, yet her *histalkus* changed the lives of Chassidim forever.

Although the memories of those days are seared in the minds of all who were there, those who were there at all hours of the day and night and truly lived each and every moment with the Rebbe were the *bochurim*.

With the approach of Chof-Beis Shevat, the Derher has collected diaries and memoirs and conducted interviews with *bochurim* at the time. These include Rabbi **Asher Farkash** of Buenos Aires, Argentina; Rabbi **Sholom Gottlieb** of Nikolaev, Ukraine; Rabbi **Mordechai Mishulovin** of Beitar, Eretz Yisroel; and Rabbi **Eliezer Zaklikovsky** of Monroe Township, NJ. זכות הרבים תלוי בהם. for sharing their precious memories with our readership.¹

LET'S BEGIN WITH THE WEEKS AND MONTHS PRIOR TO CHOF-BEIS SHEVAT.

Rabbi Gottlieb: 5748* was my *kevutza* year in 770. As young *bochurim*, we didn't realize it at the time but it was a pivotal year in the history of Lubavitch and *dor hashvi'i*, completely changing the way Chassidim relate to the Rebbe.

Already in Elul of 5747*, the Rebbe announced that the coming year of תשמ"ח would be called "*shnas tismach u'tisamach*," a year of abundant joy.

That year was also a *shnas hakhel*. In every *sicha* and at every *farbrengen* of Tishrei the Rebbe went deeper and deeper into the theme of *hakhel*. At every opportunity, the Rebbe would demand that more be done in the realm of *hakhel*. No Chossid could remain indifferent about *hakhel*. Our every thought that Tishrei and throughout the following months was focused on how we could fulfill the Rebbe's wish in making *hakhel* gatherings. I think it's possible to say that for those of us who were *bochurim* then, *hakhel* is in our DNA.

Rabbi Zaklikovsky: It was clear from the beginning that this would be an unusual and special year in many ways. For starters, Tishrei stuck out as very unique, especially Simchas Torah which was extremely joyous even compared to a regular Simchas Torah. Then, after Tishrei, the Rebbe began holding a *farbrengen* almost every Shabbos.

On Rosh Chodesh Kislev the first International Kinus Hashluchim took place. It was also 10 years since Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5738, when the Rebbe went out to the Chassidim for the first time since the heart attack on Shemini Atzeres. The Kinus that year was filled with incredible joy.

If this was not enough, on Beis Kislev, during the Kinus Hashluchim, the *seforim* were returned to 770. The court case, which had caused the Rebbe so much pain, was finally behind us.

Then came Hei Teves, the first anniversary of the court victory, and the Rebbe made a *shturem* about the day and it became an official *yom tov*. It felt like it couldn't get better than this. Everything was perfect and Lubavitch was at the peak. We were all on a high.

Then suddenly, like a thunderstorm out of the blue, came Chof-Beis Shevat.

We knew that the Rebbetzin was a bit weak but nobody imagined that such a thing could happen.

“For those who were *bochurim* then, *hakhel* is in our DNA.

THE HISTALKUS

Rabbi Zaklikovsky: Chof-Beis Shevat was Tuesday night. It was a late hour and we were getting ready for bed in the Hadar Hatorah dormitory on Eastern Parkway when a *bochur* came in and said that everyone is running in the street, there must have been an accident. I ran outside to see what happened, when suddenly I heard someone shouting that the Rebbetzin was *nistalek*.

I immediately got dressed and ran to 770. It was shockingly quiet there, none of the usual commotion. People were whispering to each other, where is the Rebbe, where is the Rebbetzin, nobody knew any details. In the upstairs *zal* there were *bochurim* saying Tehillim quietly. The whole atmosphere was somber and silent.

We said Tehillim for a few minutes and then went outside. Someone whispered to me that the Rebbetzin was *nistalek* in the hospital and the Rebbe was at his home. Together with a friend, we walked over to the Rebbe's house. When we got there, we saw Reb Berel Junik and Reb Meir Harlig standing outside and they told us to leave. We moved away and stayed on the sidewalk.

Rabbi Mishulovin: At 2:00 a.m. Rabbi Leibel Groner came to 770 and told the *bochurim* to make a raffle for a rotation that would do *shmira* in the Rebbe's house. Every hour 10 *bochurim* would go into the house to say Tehillim. The raffle was done in the upstairs *zal* which was packed.

Meanwhile everyone started streaming to the Rebbe's house on President Street. It was freezing cold, in the height of winter, but no one was paying attention to the weather. We stood and waited outside the house.

THE CAR ARRIVES

Rabbi Zaklikovsky: Around 5:00 a.m. the car with the Rebbetzin arrived at the house. The atmosphere was frightening and tense. Nobody moved, we were all standing silently on the sidewalk waiting.

Suddenly the door to the Rebbe's house opened and the Rebbe walked out wearing his coat, with his head bent.

The street was dark, the only light was coming from the light on the Rebbe's porch. The Rebbe went down the stairs slowly, holding onto the railing. Meanwhile the *chevra kadisha* took the stretcher out of the car. The Rebbe walked over to the car and turning to the *chevra kadisha*, he said, "Ah *groisen yashar koach*."

The Rebbe then followed the stretcher up the stairs to the house. His face was so serious, so broken, it's hard to describe; it was like nothing we had ever seen before.

At the top of the stairs were double doors, like there are on many houses. Usually only one door is used, but they needed to open the second one as well. Apparently it hadn't been used for a while, and it took them a couple minutes to get it open. All the while the Rebbe was standing there and watching.

Once the doors were finally opened, it almost felt as if we were invading. The Rebbe's personal life was suddenly on display. It was a terrible feeling for us.

TEHILLIM NEAR THE REBBETZIN

Rabbi Mishulovin: The first *minyan* in the *shmira* rotation ended up staying only 20 minutes. After that, every few minutes a new *minyan* would be allowed in and the previous one would leave out the back door.

At close to 6:00 a.m. more people started waking up and learning about the *histalkus*. The crowd outside the Rebbe's house grew as everyone wanted the *zechus* to go inside and say Tehillim.

A line formed and they started letting people in to say Tehillim for shorter periods of time. As more *anash* woke up and heard the news, the line got longer until it stretched all the way to New York Avenue.

It was hard to digest what was happening. Until then the Rebbe's house had been symbolic of his and the Rebbetzin's personal life. Only the handful of people who worked there and an occasional guest ever went inside. We were even afraid to walk on the side of the street where the Rebbe's house was and would cross the street even if the Rebbe wasn't home. Now, we were actually going into the house

At 7:00 a.m. the Shabbos siren went off, informing the last few people who didn't know.

“The Rebbe came to the car and said to the *chevra kadisha* “a *groisen yashar koach*.”

From 7:00 a.m. the police were already closing off President Street from Kingston Avenue until New York Avenue.

At 9:30 a.m. the Rebbe came down to the bottom floor of the house where a *minyan* was waiting and the Rebbe said *kaddish*. None of the *bochurim* were present.

At 10:30 a.m. a large meeting was held in 770 where we were told how the *levaya* would proceed.

THE LEVAYA

Rabbi Zaklikovsky: At a quarter to twelve, the Rebbe came downstairs to the dining room of the house. The room was full of people with the *aron* in middle. The Rebbe said that whoever is not part of *chevra kadisha* should leave.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Fuchs of the *chevra kadisha* started the *kria* as is customary, after which the Rebbe said the *bracha* of *dayan ha'emes* and finished the tear. At this point, the *chevra kadisha* left, leaving the Rebbe alone with the Rebbetzin's *aron*.

After a few minutes the Rebbe left the house for the *levaya*.

Every inch of the street and sidewalk was packed, even the rooftops were full with people.

As the Rebbe began walking toward 770, it looked like a royal procession. First was an escort of police motorcycles, followed by the *aron*, followed by the Rebbe. Behind the Rebbe walked the *mazkirim* and distinguished *rabbanim*. Behind them was the Rebbe's car driven by Rabbi Krinsky, and behind the car was the rest of the crowd. Above the *levaya* were police and news helicopters.

The Rebbe looked extremely serious, walking slowly, and looking down. It was so frightening, yet regal.

When the *levaya* reached Eastern Parkway the Rebbe got into the car and followed the *chevra kadisha* car to the *beis hachayim*.

I got into one of the many waiting buses that followed the Rebbe's car. By the time we arrived at the *beis hachayim*, the gate was already closed. Only the first few cars after the Rebbe had been allowed in but some *bochurim* found a way to hop over the



fence and we were able to sneak in all the way to the *kevura*. Peeking from the sides of the *matzeivos* we were hiding behind, we were able to see the Rebbe perfectly.

The Rebbe was standing near the *kever* and his holy face was filled with grief as he watched the *aron* being lowered into the ground. One of the *mazkirim* then handed the Rebbe a paper with *tziduk hadin* and the Rebbe read it slowly with

a broken voice. Everyone who stood there was crying.

Rabbi Mishulovin: During the entire *kevura* the Rebbe was looking at the *kever*. During *kaddish*, before the word “*veyis’hadar*,” the Rebbe paused and you could hear him crying. The whole *kaddish* the Rebbe said with his voice shaking and tears in his eyes.

The Rebbe then changed from his regular shoes to *shiva* shoes.



CHASSIDIM ARRIVE AT THE BEIS HACHAYIM.



Rabbi Farkash: I was learning in Montreal at the time. We were asleep when our *mashpia*, Rabbi Itche Meir Gurary, ran through our rooms, crying that the Rebbetzin was *nistalek*. Upon hearing the news we immediately went to mikvah and started saying Tehillim, while a bus was arranged. At 2:30 a.m. the bus left Montreal with the whole yeshiva and many of *anash*.

By the time we pulled in to New York, the Rebbe was already at the *beis hachayim*. We jumped the

fence but the *kevura* was already over and we only managed to catch a glimpse of the Rebbe entering the car.

We arrived back in Crown Heights in time for Mincha at the Rebbe's house. Of course most people were not able to go in for Mincha and we davened nearby on the street.

Rabbi Gottlieb: After Mincha the Rebbe said a *sicha*. When it came to the *hora'a bavodas Hashem* the Rebbe used the expression from Koheles, "*Vehachai yitein el libo*—and the living will take to heart."

From that moment on, this phrase took on a life of its own. At every farbrengen and *sicha* of that year, the Rebbe spoke in terms of "*vehachai yitein el libo*."



THE REBBE COMES DOWNSTAIRS FOR DAVENING IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING THE REBBETZIN'S HISTALKUS.

For me, this phrase became synonymous with the memory of the Rebbetzin. Until today I cannot hear these words without thinking about the Rebbetzin and her connection with *maase bipoel*.

"*Vehachai yitein el libo*" carried with it a sense of urgency; it became a motto that demanded that you do something to get the job done. An untold number of *hachlatos* were taken, *mosdos* were opened, and *mitvzoim* were done, under the banner of "*vehachai yitein el libo*."

THE SHIVA

Rabbi Farkash: After the *sicha*, the Rebbe's house was opened to the public and we were able to pass by the Rebbe and say *hamakom yenachem*.

At that point the Rebbe's house still somewhat looked as it had the day before. I felt like it wasn't respectful to look around, but I did notice some odds and ends like you would find in any private home. Later on everything was moved out.

The hardest part was the actual *nichum aveilim*. The Rebbe was sitting there with tears in his eyes, looking at each person as we said "*Hamakom yenachem*." It was very difficult to see.

Rabbi Zaklikovsky: Usually when you passed by the Rebbe there was some kind of activity. Either the Rebbe was pouring *kos shel bracha*, taking *panim*, giving dollars, etc. Here the Rebbe was

“On Thursday, the second day of *shiva*, four people named their baby daughters Chaya Mushka by *krias haTorah*.”

sitting and looking at you, waiting for you to say "*Hamakom yenachem*.”

Every few seconds, the Rebbe responded "*Amen*" to the passersby. Besides for the sound of people shuffling by and whispering "*Hamakom yenachem*" and the Rebbe's quiet "*amen*," the room was totally silent.

On Thursday, the second day of *shiva*, four people named their baby daughters Chaya Mushka at *krias haTorah*. The Rebbe looked pleased by this.

After Shacharis and Mincha the Rebbe again sat for *nichum aveilim*. Among the visitors was Rabbi Aaron Soleveichik from Chicago, who sat down and spoke with the Rebbe. After Maariv, Mr. David Chase came and the Rebbe spoke with him in English. The Stoliner Rebbe also came that night.

Rabbi Mishulovin: Life in Crown Heights resumed, but with the Rebbe not there, 770 felt empty. Although *seder* in yeshiva restarted, we felt like we couldn't just sit and learn Gemara like nothing happened. Instead we started learning the



THE REBBE LEADS THE MINYAN FOR TEFILLOS IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING THE REBBETZIN'S HISTALKUS.

mesechtos for the *chalukas haShas* in memory of the Rebbetzin.

Until Friday afternoon the Rebbe looked serious and pained. Whenever he began speaking to someone the Rebbe started crying. On Friday after Mincha we saw the Rebbe smile for the first time to the Israeli ambassador to the U.N. Mr. Benyamin Netanyahu.

THAT SHABBOS

Rabbi Zaklikovsky: The question on everyone's mind as Shabbos was approaching was, "Will there be a farbrengen?" This coming Shabbos was Shabbos Mevorchim, and for over 40 years the Rebbe had not missed a single Shabbos Mevorchim farbrengen. We were all anxious to know what would happen. Will the Rebbe spend Shabbos in 770?

Rabbi Farkash: One of my strongest memories from those days was the transition from Friday to Shabbos.

By Mincha the Rebbe appeared clearly in *aveilus*, with his eyes still red from crying, but when it came to Maariv, the Rebbe entered 770 full of *simcha*. By *Lecha Dodi* the Rebbe encouraged the singing perhaps even more than on a regular Shabbos.

The changes in the style of the Rebbe's farbrengens started right away that Shabbos.

Usually every farbrengen followed a similar pattern: Two or three *sichos*, followed by a *maamar* and then a *sicha* on Rashi, Rambam, and Likutei Levi Yitzchok. But already that Shabbos, the Rebbe changed the *seder*. For example, the farbrengen started right away with a *maamar*, as well as many other differences. At the time we thought it was a one time thing, but later we saw that this was the beginning of a permanent change in the style of the Rebbe's farbrengens.

Although there is no *aveilus* on Shabbos, the Rebbe did not ignore the *histalkus*.

In the *maamar*, which was about Parshas Mishpatim and Parshas Shekalim, the Rebbe talked about how the scales that were used to weigh the *shekalim* go up and down on either side, like a *neshama* that comes down and goes back up. The Rebbe also cited the Zohar on Parshas Mishpatim that discusses *gilgulim*.

The Rebbe then spoke about opening new *mosdos* in the Rebbetzin's memory. During that very farbrengen a number of people went up to the Rebbe and upon receiving a bottle of *mashke* announced the establishing of new *mosdos*.

Similar to the change from Friday to Shabbos was the change on Motzei Shabbos. The Rebbe immediately returned to a mode of *aveilus*, and his face looked as it did on Friday.

Rabbi Zaklikovsky: The *seder* of *nichum aveilim* after every *tefillah* continued until Monday, with many public figures, *rabbanim*, and politicians coming to pay their respects.

On Tuesday, when the the Rebbe got up from *shiva*, it was a very emotional scene. Reb Zalman Gurary gave the Rebbe a *bracha* in the name of the Chassidim and Rabbi Chaim Gutnik said *birchas kohanim*.

After Mincha the Rebbe distributed dollars for about five hours. President Street looked like 770 on a Sunday. There were thousands of people, babies, strollers, separate lines for men and women, etc.

After dollars, before Maariv, the Rebbe turned to the *gabbaim* of 770, Reb Yehoshua Pinson and Reb Zev Katz. Handing them a hundred dollar bill, the Rebbe said, "As is customary, there should be a farbrengen in her memory. It should be a grand farbrengen, with many people, the more the better. We should merit *hakitzu viranenu shochnei afar*. The farbrengen could be at a more convenient time, but it should at least begin today."

After Maariv, Rabbi Pinson announced that the farbrengen would take place in 770. The Rebbe stopped him and said that it should not be in 770, rather in the house. Rabbi Pinson then said that

the farbrengen would start in the house and finish in 770. Later, Rabbi Groner came and said that the Rebbe wanted the entire farbrengen to be in the house.

The farbrengen was very uncomfortable. It felt strange to be sitting in the Rebbe's house and farbrenging, especially considering that the Rebbe was right upstairs.

THE FOLLOWING WEEKS

Rabbi Farkash:

The whole next *tekufa* was full of confusion. We didn't know if the Rebbe would be home or in 770; everything was announced at the last minute and was often inaccurate.

For Purim that year we all came in not knowing if there would be a farbrengen or not. In the end there was no farbrengen and we were allowed in to the Rebbe's house for just one *tefillah*.

At the usual farbrengen time, 770 was packed as if the Rebbe would come in. We sat and sang *niggunim* for a long time and it was a very depressing atmosphere. What was Purim without a farbrengen?

Rabbi Gottlieb: Right after Chof-Beis Shevat, the "nerve center" of Lubavitch moved from 770 to the Rebbe's house. Our daily lives revolved around



the Rebbe's house. The *tefillos*, dollars, *sichos*, answers from the Rebbe, new *hora'os*—everything came from the house.

On a practical level, the *bochurim* began spending more time with the Rebbe than ever before. This was not just seeing the Rebbe pass by; every *tefillah* was davened in the Rebbe's presence.

Even while sitting in 770, our thoughts were always, "What's happening in the Rebbe's house?" The upstairs *zal* of 770 turned into a kind of extension of the house with a live hookup to all of the *tefillos* and *sichos*.

To hear the Rebbe daven at the *amud* three times a day was something indescribable. Obviously we couldn't all go in the house for every *tefillah* and there were raffles and rotations for who can enter, but even those not in the house were able to hear via the hookup.

That year, the Rebbe's *tefillos* became the center point in the life of a *bochur*. We would strain to hear every word, push near the windows, and endlessly debate nuances in the Rebbe's tone.

We learned how to daven like the Rebbe. Wherever you went that year, in the *zal*, the dining room, or walking down the street, you heard *bochurim* repeating the Rebbe's unique tune, trying to learn every inflection and daven exactly like the Rebbe.

For us *kevutza bochurim*, there was a special *seder* allowing us in to one *tefillah* a day, with a raffle determining who would be *zoche* to join which *tefillah*. This presented me with a unique opportunity, because the *vaad hamesader* was not familiar with the names of the Israeli *bochurim*. I was therefore *zoche* to be at almost every *tefillah* that year, under many assumed identities...

Another unintended consequence of Chof-Beis Shevat, was the *achdus* between different groups of *bochurim* that did not usually interact with each other.

In 770, the American and Israeli *bochurim* usually kept to their respective groups. Yet the shared experience of fighting to get into the Rebbe's house, the excitement of sneaking past the *vaad hamesader*, the time spent in such close proximity in the house, all this brought a new sense of cooperation between the groups. Until today I have friends that I made during the countless hours spent on the steps of the Rebbe's house.

Rabbi Farkash: Looking back at that time, starting from a short while before the *histalkus*



SHACHARIS IN THE REBBE'S HOUSE IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING THE REBBETZIN'S HISTALKUS.

and continuing on afterwards, we can see how the Rebbe was preparing us for a new period.

For example, at the 15 Shevat farbrengen and at the *yechidus klotis* two days earlier the Rebbe spoke about *asei lecha rav*, asking a *rofeh yedid* medical questions, and the like. It seemed clear that the Rebbe wanted to minimize the reliance on the Rebbe's direct responses that Chassidim were accustomed to having. The Rebbe also reiterated that all letters with requests for *brachos* were brought directly to the Ohel of the Friediker Rebbe, and so there was no need to wait for a written response from the Rebbe.

A week after the *histalkus*, on 2 Adar, the Rebbe said a lengthy *sicha* in his home again detailing all these steps about what to do when in doubt and in need of counsel.

Let us hope that we will be *zoche* to the fulfillment of עפר שוכני עפר with the coming of Moshiach now! **T**

1. The account from Rabbi Zaklikovsky was originally printed in the Shevat edition of *Techeyeinu* magazine by Vaad Talmidei Hatmimim. The account from Rabbi Gottlieb was originally printed (among other accounts of Chof Beis Shevat) in Kfar Chabad magazine in connection with 30 years from the *histalkus*, 5748-5778. We thank these publications for sharing their material with us.