



Every Step of the Way

INTERVIEW WITH
RABBI PINCHUS FELDMAN
Sydney, Australia



MY EARLIEST MEMORIES

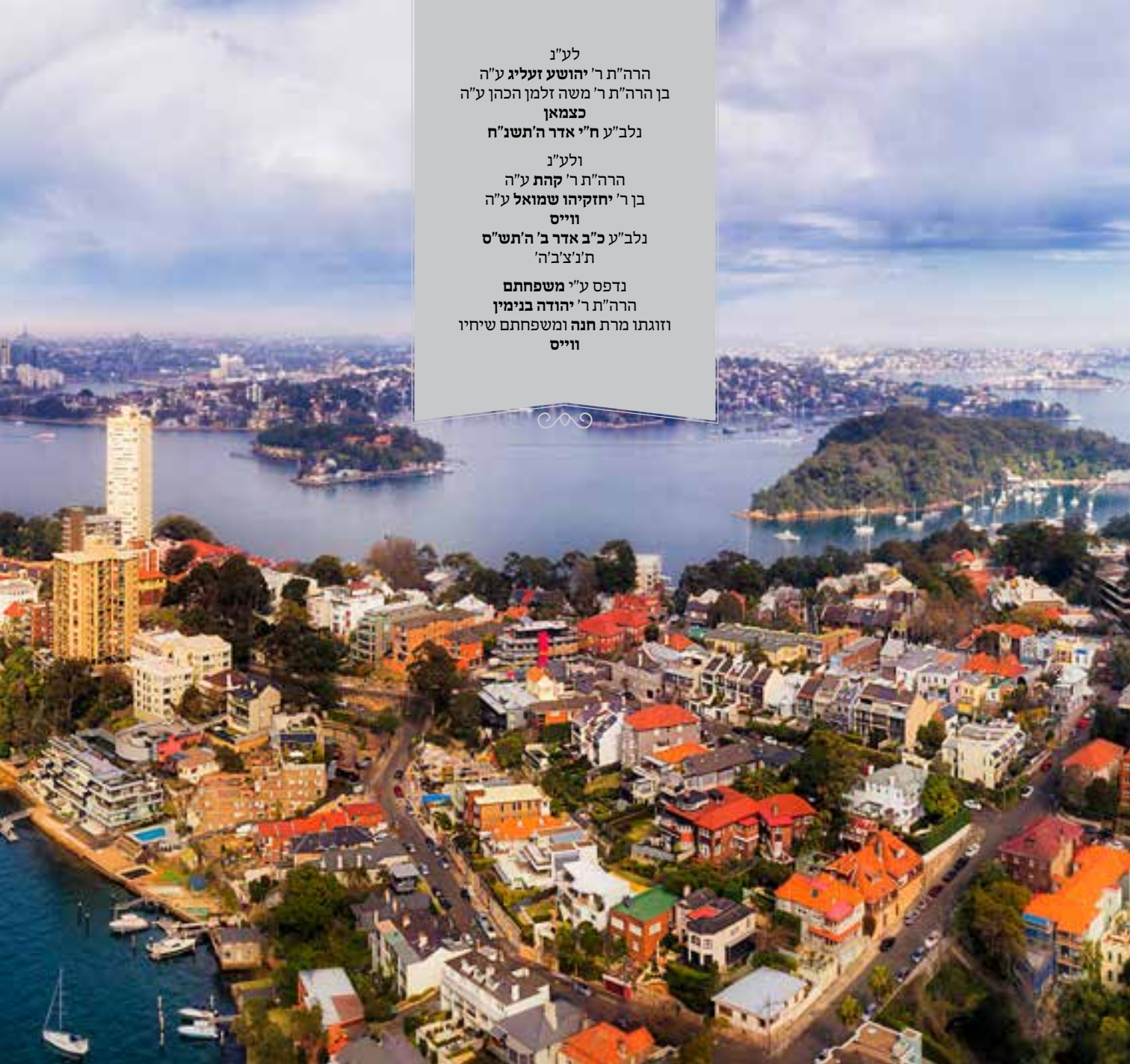
I was born in New York in 5705 (תש"ה). My father, Rabbi Mendel Feldman, was a *talmid chacham* and *gaon* who was *niskarev* to Lubavitch as a *bochur* in the late 5690s and was from the nucleus of Tomchei Tmimim in America. He was sent on a number of *shlichusen* and received many *kiruvim*. My mother, Rebbetzin Rochel Feldman (who was also a *shlucha* to

Pittsburgh as a single girl to help the newly established school there) was the daughter of Reb Elye Simpson, the *mazkir* and *shadar* of the Frierdiker Rebbe. I received an education about *shlichus* from a very early age. After their wedding, my parents were sent on *shlichus* by the Frierdiker Rebbe to Jacksonville, Florida and all I heard from them from my earliest childhood was the great *zechus* that they had to

be *shluchim* and to be *mekarev* Yidden to Yiddishkeit and to Lubavitch.

Together with my parents, I merited to be in *yechidus* by the Frierdiker Rebbe a number of times.

On one occasion, the Frierdiker Rebbe blessed me to be “a *gezunte Yid un a shtarkeh Chossid*, a healthy Jew and a strong Chossid.” (It is worthy to note that throughout my life, I’ve had numerous health issues but nothing



לע"נ
הרה"ת ר' יהושע זעליג ע"ה
בן הרה"ת ר' משה זלמן הכהן ע"ה
כצמאן
נלב"ע ח"י אדר ה'תשנ"ח
ולע"נ
הרה"ת ר' קהת ע"ה
בן ר' יחזקיהו שמואל ע"ה
ווייס
נלב"ע כ"ב אדר ב' ה'תש"ס
ת"נ צ"ב ה'
נדפס ע"י משפחתם
הרה"ת ר' יהודה בנימין
וזוגתו מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו
ווייס

that ever developed into anything significant, *baruch Hashem*.)

Another time, the Frierdiker Rebbe told me, "*Zolst lernen asach un shtifen asach*." Loosely translated, that means, "You should learn a lot and be 'mischievous' a lot."

One time, the Frierdiker Rebbe asked me, "*Vos machst du*." My parents had just taught me to respond to someone's "*Vos machst du*," with,

"Baruch Hashem, vos machst du?"

So sure enough, I duly responded, "*Baruch Hashem, vos machst du?*"

My parents were mortified, but the Frierdiker Rebbe clearly enjoyed my response and gave me a broad smile.

In one of these *yechidusen*, the Frierdiker Rebbe placed his holy hands on my head and blessed me with *birkas kohanim*. My parents treasured and held onto the *yarmulke*

I wore that day, and when I grew older I also cherished it and carried it in my pocket until it totally fell apart.

UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES

I vividly remember the Motzei Shabbos we received the call about the Frierdiker Rebbe's *histalkus*. Although I was only five years old, I'll never forget the sight of my parent's devastation.

There was a severe fog that night and planes weren't taking off, so we took a train from Jacksonville all the way to Washington, D.C., and from there we flew off to New York for the *levaya*.

During that time period, I remained in my grandparents' home in New York to attend school and my parents joined me in New York shortly afterwards. We lived on Kingston Avenue, and for the next eight years, I merited to grow up in the Rebbe's presence.

The Rebbe paid special attention to us, the Crown Heights children in those years, often singling us out to say *l'chaim* at farbrengens. On quite a number of occasions, the Rebbe called out to me, "Pinchus Hakohen Feldman, *zog l'chaim!*"

THREE ALIYOS FOR MY BAR MITZVAH

My *bar mitzvah* took place on Friday, Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5718*. Beforehand, the Rebbe instructed me to receive three *aliyos*: one on Friday morning, a second on Shabbos morning, and a third on Shabbos afternoon. I received the first and third *aliyos* in the Rebbe's presence, and the middle one in the shul where my father was the *rav* (in Brownsville, where Eastern Parkway meets Lincoln Place), where we celebrated the *bar mitzvah*.

The Rebbe informed me that he wanted to give me the *brachos* for my *bar mitzvah* in public, *berabim*, during the closest farbrengen to the occasion—the grand Simchas Torah farbrengen. I was obviously very excited and I came to the farbrengen anxiously waiting for the Rebbe to call me.

In those years, the Simchas Torah farbrengens lasted many, many hours. Hour after hour passed and still the Rebbe hadn't called me. I was young and it was difficult for me to remain

inside the entire time, so after hours of waiting I decided to step outside for a few short moments.

To my *mazal*, just as I stepped out the Rebbe called out, "Pinchus Hakohen Feldman, *vu iz er*, where is he?"

Needless to say, I was quite embarrassed, but I was rushed back into the room and the Rebbe graciously gave me challah and *bentched* me in honor of the *bar mitzvah*.

In the years that followed, I would send in questions to the Rebbe and I often received answers, *brachos* and guidance. In general, the Rebbe was very involved in everything in our lives; he really looked after "the boys."

On one occasion I was invited to a family *bar mitzvah* outside New York City, which was scheduled for a Shabbos Mevorchim. I was conflicted as to whether I should go; on one hand, the family would be hurt if I didn't attend, but on the other, I didn't want to miss the farbrengen. I asked the Rebbe what to do, and he responded that I should remain in 770. It was very important to the Rebbe that the *bochurim* be present at the farbrengen.

During my years in 770, my uncle fell ill with *yene machala*. I consulted with the Rebbe and I also arranged a *yechidus* for my aunt. During the *yechidus*, the Rebbe spent a long time counseling her regarding her husband's treatment.

Several days later, during *sefer Chassidus* on Friday night, Rabbi Hodakov called me and informed me that the Rebbe would like to see me. I was shocked; I went to *Gan Eden Hatachton* and nervously knocked on the Rebbe's door.

The Rebbe called me in and asked about my uncle and his treatments. He wanted to know every detail.

That was the type of relationship we had with the Rebbe.



RABBI FELDMAN AS A BOCHUR.

TOMCHEI TEMIMIM

Before I entered *zal* in Montreal, I was in *yechidus* for my birthday (as I had every year after my *bar mitzvah*), and I asked the Rebbe how to use my free time. The Rebbe directed me to divide any extra time I had between Chassidus and Shulchan Aruch. So, each evening, I would add an hour of Chassidus and then an hour of Shulchan Aruch. (The Rebbe's instruction to learn *halacha*, in retrospect, was the beginning of a series of instructions that guided me to where I am today, but at the time I was totally unsuspecting.)

After one year in Montreal, I "graduated" to 770, and I was *zoche* to learn near the Rebbe for several years, through Pesach 5725*.

After that Pesach, I went to learn in Kfar Chabad.

Before my journey, I had quite a long *yechidus* and the Rebbe gave me many directives. The Rebbe told me that I was to be a *shliach*—not as a *bracha* but as a statement—(I understood that to mean that I would be a *shliach* throughout my life). The Rebbe said I should review *maamarim* publicly at least once a month, and

also that I should continue studying *halacha*. (I indeed learned *halacha* with Rabbi Schneur Zalman Gorelik, the *rav* of Kfar Chabad at the time, and received *semicha* from him.)

The Rebbe also encouraged me to write to him often and added that he would do his best to respond. If there was an urgent need for an answer, the Rebbe said, he would even send me a telegram.

In Kfar Chabad, I was considered one of the *eltere bochurim*, and I would spend a lot of time learning and farbrenging with the younger students. The *mashpia* Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman would arrange groups of *talmidim*, and I would spend time with them. *Baruch Hashem*, I was quite successful, and many struggling *bochurim* and newcomers to Lubavitch found their way through my “tutorship.”

It was a very spiritual time for me. I learned for many hours, I was involved in *avodas hatefillah*, for which I received a special *bracha* from the Rebbe, and Reb Shlomo Chaim helped me to deflect *shidduch* requests so that I would be able to continue learning. I hoped it would last “forever.”

NEW PLANS

For Tishrei 5727*, I traveled to the Rebbe.

Several days before Rosh Hashanah, the Rebbe held the customary *sicha* for women. In those days, the women were given the opportunity to pass by and have a mini-*yechidus* with the Rebbe following the *sicha*. On that occasion, as my mother approached the Rebbe, the Rebbe told her, “*M’darf zeh trachten veges a shidduch*, you need to begin thinking about a *shidduch*.”

To be honest, I was quite disappointed. I was thoroughly enjoying my time in Kfar Chabad, and the prospect of marriage didn’t excite me in the slightest; there was so much that I wanted to learn before marriage. I was only 21 at the time. Nonetheless, my return to Kfar Chabad was canceled, and we began looking into various *shidduchim*.

In the beginning of Cheshvan I had my birthday-*yechidus*, and I included a list of *shidduch* prospects in my *tzettel*, hoping the Rebbe would guide me on how to proceed. The Rebbe read the names but, in the spirit of Parshas

Chayei Sarah, he said, “*Kulan shavin litovah*,¹ they are all equally good.” The Rebbe wasn’t going to choose a specific name.

A short time later, I received a suggestion from Reb Binyomin Klein and my uncle Reb Sholom Mendel Simpson regarding a young lady named Pnina Gutnick, the daughter of Rabbi Chaim Gutnick of Australia. She was visiting New York at the time. Her father was well-known to have a special connection to the Rebbe. I later discovered that during her three years of study in the Gateshead seminary, the Rebbe had carried on significant written correspondence with her as well.

I wrote to the Rebbe about the suggestion, and to my surprise, the Rebbe replied that I should grab the opportunity, “*Shema yikadmenu acher*, lest someone else come before you.” (I later discovered that the very suggestion had originated from the Rebbe.)

We met several times, and then I wrote to the Rebbe asking if I should proceed. The response I received was that I should follow my *hergesh halev*, my emotions. Seeing that answer, I wrote to the Rebbe again. I explained that *hergesh halev* wasn’t applicable in my case since the only reason I looked into *shidduchim* was because the Rebbe had instructed me to do so. Personally, I would have preferred to continue learning, so I asked the Rebbe to tell me exactly what the next step was. If he would say to proceed with the *shidduch*, I would; but if he wouldn’t, then I would not.

Shortly afterwards, I received the Rebbe’s response.

“*Veyehei beshaa tovah u’mutzlachas*, may it be in a good and auspicious hour.”

My father approached the Rebbe at his next opportunity to speak about the *shidduch* and the Rebbe wished him “*mazal tov*.” The Rebbe added,



12 KISLEV 5750, CB HALBERSTAM VIA JEM 35591

“*Zei zolen zein in Australia*, they should live in Australia.”

Interestingly, the Rebbe instructed us to hold a *tena'im* ceremony right after our engagement, although the usual custom among *anash* is to do *tena'im* immediately before the wedding.

KICKOFF

My future father-in-law, Rabbi Chaim Gutnick, was one of the most prominent rabbis in Australia, and the Rebbe viewed him as the chief rabbi of Australia. He had a very close relationship with the Rebbe; he would have *yechidusen* for hours upon hours where he would speak with the Rebbe about anything and everything under the sun.

We thought to hold the wedding in New York and hoped that the Rebbe might make an exception to the rule at the time and be *mesader kiddushin*, but the Rebbe instructed us to hold the wedding in Melbourne.

Why did the Rebbe instruct us to do so?

Obviously, it is impossible to know exactly the Rebbe's reason. However, as events played themselves out, it was clear that this was crucial for the Rebbe's vision for Melbourne and Sydney. *Anash* in Melbourne had just opened the Yeshiva Gedolah there, and not long after our engagement the Rebbe decided to send six *talmidim hashluchim* from 770 to Australia for a two year period. The establishment of the yeshiva was a very big deal and the Rebbe wanted it to open publicly with the greatest possible *shturem*.

Now, my father-in-law was extremely popular and the Rebbe encouraged him to make a big wedding. Our *chuppah* had 5000 people in attendance and the wedding meal had 1400 guests. It was extremely high profile and widely reported in the media.



TENOIM OF RABBI FELDMAN.

FOR A LEARNED AUDIENCE I SHOULD DELIVER A MAAMAR “SO THAT THEY WILL BE NISBATEL.”

The Rebbe chose our wedding to be the “kickoff” for the yeshiva. The six shluchim arrived shortly before the wedding accompanied by my grandfather, Reb Elye Simpson, who the Rebbe sent as his personal shliach to help set up the yeshiva, and at the wedding they were all guests of honor. The Rebbe sent *mashke* with them and they distributed a little bit to all the men. Their presence made a powerful impression on the entire Jewish community.

A SPECIAL SHEVA BRACHOS

Sometime before our wedding, the Rebbe instructed me to receive as many *semichos* as possible. In addition to my *semicha* from Rabbi Gorelik of Kfar Chabad, I subsequently received *semicha* from Rabbi Piekarsky, the *rosh yeshiva* of 770, Rabbi Berel Rivkin, the *rosh yeshivah* and *masmich* of Torah Vodaas, Rabbi Pinchas Hirschsprung from Montreal, and from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

It is interesting to note, that the Rebbe wrote me at that time (when I told him what I was learning for *semicha*) that he is surprised that

semicha—*yoreh yoreh* is given without learning relevant practical *halochos* in *gittin* and *kiddushin*.

In *yechidus* before I traveled to Australia for the wedding, the Rebbe gave me many instructions.

First of all, I was to deliver at least three *pilpulim* over the wedding days. Secondly, I was to review a *maamar Chassidus* at every event related to the wedding. I asked the Rebbe what sort of *maamarim* to review, and the Rebbe said that for a simpler crowd I should choose simple *maamarim*, but for a learned audience, I should choose a more difficult *maamar*, “so they will be *nisbatel*.”

The Rebbe also gave another instruction:

Although the wedding would be in Melbourne, one of our *sheva brachos* (as a *melava malka*) should take place in Sydney. The official reason, the Rebbe explained, was that the *kallah's* grandmother lived in Sydney and her husband (of *zivug sheni*), Rabbi Asher Abramson, was the chief *dayan* of the city (who the Rebbe also wanted me to receive *semicha* from). The *taam pnimi*,



A GROUP OF THE EARLY SHLUCHIM AND ASKANIM AT A COMMUNITY EVENT IN PHILADELPHIA, MID 5730S. IN ATTENDANCE: RABBI AVRAHAM SHEMTOV; RABBI PINCHUS FELDMAN; RABBI NACHMAN SUDAK; RABBI ZUSHE WILMOVSKY; RABBI LEIBEL RASKIN; RABBI SHLOMO MAIDANCHIK.

LEFT: RABBI FELDMAN ADDRESSES THE EVENT.

RIGHT: THE SHLUCHIM POSE WITH A GLOBE, EACH POINTING TO THEIR RESPECTIVE MAKOM HASHLICHUS. RABBI FELDMAN IS ON THE RIGHT.



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASIDET CHABAD

however, was about where the *sheva brachos* should be held.

The Rebbe instructed that the *sheva brachos* be held in a specific shul called “Yeshiva.”

Yeshiva was a community founded by a Gerrer Chossid named Rabbi Gedalia Hertz, who had moved away from Sydney several years earlier. (Reb Gedalia was closely associated with Lubavitch, and today his children and grandchildren are Chabad Chassidim.) This shul had a number of very scholarly congregants, Holocaust survivors who had been educated in Europe’s finest *yeshivos*. It also had a semi-yeshiva for children, and it was the center for Yiddishkeit in Sydney. When Rabbi Hertz moved away in the early 5720s, the *baalei batim* had asked the Rebbe to suggest a replacement, but ultimately hired a different rabbi, named Rabbi Barzel, a renowned *rosh yeshiva* from Eretz Yisroel.

The Rebbe told me to hold a *sheva brachos* in their shul on Motzei Shabbos and gave very specific instructions: I was to deliver a *pilpul*, review a *maamar*, and also sing the *niggun hachana* and the Alter Rebbe’s *niggun*.

The Rebbe instructed me that subsequent to the wedding we should go to Kfar Chabad and that I should learn *dayanus* in *kolel* (for which I then received *yadin yadin*). He also gave me a *seder avoda* but emphasized that I should remember that it is *shana rishona* and that it is a *chiyuv min haTorah* for there to be “*vesimach es ishto*, to make one’s wife happy.”

I left New York after Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 5727. During the *farbrengen*, the Rebbe spoke a *sicha* about the *mann*, the “*lechem min hashamayim*,” and afterwards called me up, gave me a bottle of *mashke*, and *bentched* me that I should always have *lechem min hashamayim*.

AN OFFER

I arrived in Australia a month before my wedding for my engagement party. I spent most of the month in Sydney where I first encountered the *baalei batim* of the Yeshiva.

The *rav* would deliver a *shiur* in *Gemara l’iyun* every week and seeing a *yungerman* from America, honored me to deliver the *shiur* in his stead. *Baruch Hashem*, I made a good impression on them, and almost immediately, I was approached with a proposal. Rabbi

Barzel was going to Eretz Yisroel for several months and they were looking for a replacement rabbi. They offered me the job.

I wrote to the Rebbe and received a response as a postscript to the “wedding letter.” The Rebbe wrote that we had already made up that I will spend some time in *kolel* in Kfar Chabad and he didn’t understand the reason to change those plans.

I rejected their offer.

A few weeks later, they hosted our *sheva brachos*. As the Rebbe instructed, I delivered a *pilpul*, and all the learned Jews listened and enjoyed it. Then, I reviewed a *maamar*. Following the Rebbe’s instructions here as well, I chose a difficult *maamar* of the Rebbe Maharash (Mi Kamocho 5629), with many references to Kabbalistic concepts that were totally unfamiliar to the audience. Here, they sat with great respect, awed at the Kabbalah “flying over their heads.” Soon afterwards, we sang the solemn and soul-stirring *niggunim*.

The audience was very impressed. To them, in faraway Sydney, this was a very uplifting experience.



RABBI JJ HECHT VISITS THE US CONSULATE DURING A TRIP TO AUSTRALIA. RABBI CHAIM GUTNICK AND RABBI FELDMAN ARE ALSO IN ATTENDANCE. 5728.

But very soon afterwards, we said our goodbyes and headed off to Eretz Yisroel.

RABBI HODAKOV'S PHONE CALL

After a year in *kolel*, my sister-in-law, Rabbi Gutnick's second daughter, became engaged to Rabbi Sholom Ber Hecht. We didn't plan to attend the wedding; we were literally a world away and it was unheard of to make regular trips to Australia. About a week before the wedding, I received a phone call from Rabbi Hodakov. He told me that I must pack my bags and travel to Australia immediately.

Why the rush?

The reason would be to attend the wedding; additionally, the Rebbe wanted me to become the *rav* of Yeshiva in Sydney. A short time earlier, Rabbi Barzel had decided to move to Eretz Yisroel permanently.

My wife had given birth just over a month earlier to our oldest son, Yosef Yitzchok. The Rebbe gave detailed instructions and asked that specific people to look after her in my absence, and I took a suitcase and set off for Australia.

At the outset, my father-in-law was incredulous about the Rebbe's

instructions. He was actually one of the founders of the Yeshiva when Rabbi Hertz came and he couldn't fathom that a respectable community of many middle aged *talmidei chachamim* would hire a twenty-three-year-old rabbi, especially after being host to two very venerable *rabbanim*. However, the Rebbe said that this is what he wants and that was that.

My father-in-law invited several of the community leaders to his daughter's wedding and suggested that they bring me to Sydney for a "*probeh*," for a trial period of two weeks.

Particularly, the point of contact was Reb Shmuel Greenbaum, a big *talmid chacham* in his own right who had visited the Rebbe for *yechidus* in previous years.

At a subsequent *yechidus*, the Rebbe said to him that he (the Rebbe) owes him commission on facilitating the *rabbanus*.

(A few years later Reb Shmuel was having difficulties in *parnassa* and he then asked the Rebbe for his commission! The Rebbe responded that his commission is *yiddesher nachas* from his children, which has actually been fulfilled in very great measure.)

From the time of the wedding, we had weekly phone calls with 770.

My father-in-law would call Rabbi Hodakov but we understood that the Rebbe was on the line as well.

My trial period finished successfully and it was now time to negotiate a deal. My father-in-law came to Sydney along with the *mechutan* Reb Yankel Hecht. (The Rebbe told me that Reb Yankel should be my mentor in matters concerning *rabbanishe breitheit*. It was his suggestion that I start wearing a *rabbanishe* hat, which I do until this day.)

The community came with an offer: They were willing to employ me to run the school, deliver classes, and fulfill all rabbinic obligations but they reserved the right to hire a senior rabbi if they should so desire at a later date. After all, I was only twenty-three years old!

My father-in-law called 770, and the Rebbe gave us the following instructions:

We should tell the community that I am a *rav*. A *rav* is a *mara d'asra* and must have full control over everything in the community. If they are willing to hire me as the *rav* unconditionally, with the final say on all matters, good. If not, "*mir velen bleiben gutte freint*, we will remain good friends," in the Rebbe's words, but we will not accept the offer.

We gave them the ultimatum and after some deliberation, they accepted.

The Rebbe sent a telegram to the *hachtara*, and also a beautiful letter to the congregation praising them for their choice and writing the most amazing compliments (the letter was addressed to Reb Shmuel Greenbaum):

ואשרי חלקם שברחו בהרב פנחס שליט"א
הכהן לרב דקהלתם ולראש הישיבה, שהרי הוא
מטובי תלמידי הישיבה הק' "תומכי תמימים"
ליובאוויטש.

"You are fortunate to have chosen Rabbi Pinchus *shlita* Hakohen to serve as the *rav* and *rosh yeshiva* of your community, for he is from among the

MY TASK WAS “IBER-TZU-NEMEN DI GANTZE MEDINEH,”

finest students of Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch,” the Rebbe wrote (*Igros Kodesh* vol. 25 pg. 236).

Thus, through the Rebbe’s deliberate planning, I became the rabbi of Yeshiva. After I received the post, the Rebbe told my *shver* that my task was “*iber-tzu-nemen di gantze medineh*, to ‘transform’ the entire state [New South Wales].” That was to be my *shlichus*.

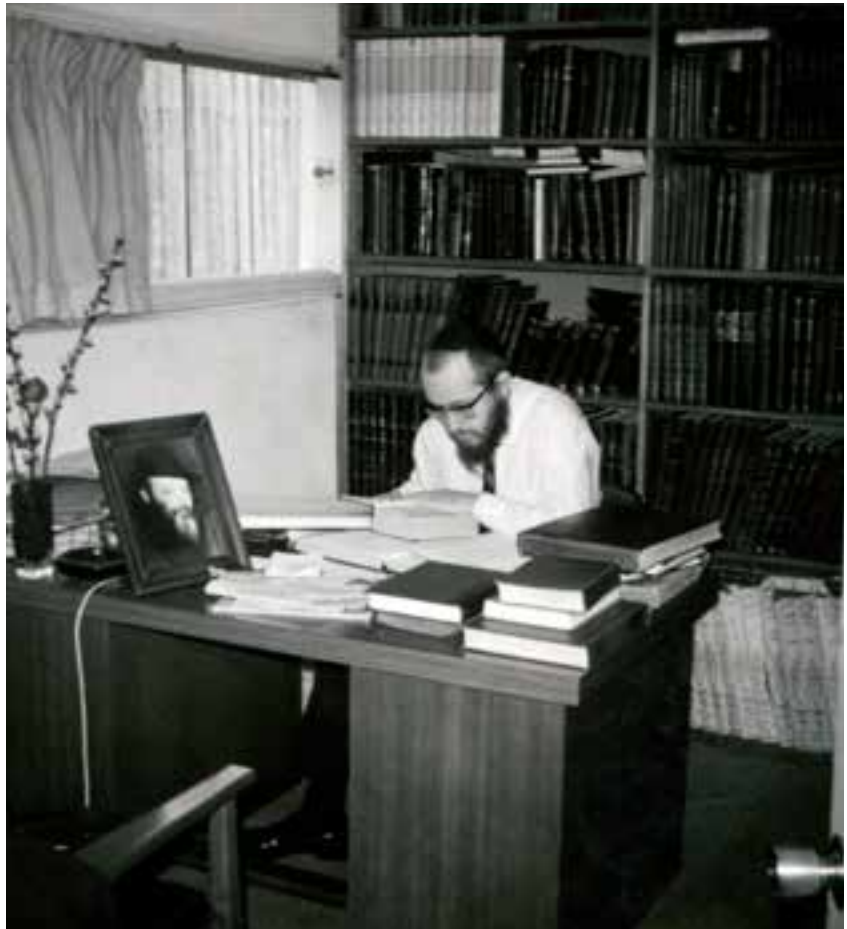
Over the years, we received a constant stream of advice and encouragement from the Rebbe. Rabbi Hodakov spent significant amounts of time with me on the phone and guided me on every aspect of our *shlichus*. When we first moved out, I told Rabbi Hodakov that I didn’t know how I would manage to accomplish everything the Rebbe wants, and Rabbi Hodakov wrote to me that I should always remember that “אם קטן אתה בעיניך ראש שבטי ישראל אתה, you might be small in your own eyes, but you are a leader in Israel.”

One interesting directive I received about my position was that I should receive the highest salary in the organization. This is because *baalei batim* associate importance with the level of salary. Therefore, it was imperative that I be paid the highest salary.

WITHOUT THE SHAAR BLATT

Naturally, I wanted to do all of the Rebbe’s activities and *mitvzoim*, and I wanted it to be in the name of the Rebbe and Chabad. However, the Rebbe maintained that I would best achieve all of these goals in my position as the rabbi of Yeshiva.

Slowly but surely we brought the Rebbe into every aspect of the *mosdos*.



RABBI FELDMAN IN HIS OFFICE.

More Lubavitchers were brought into the schools and the community started to gravitate to the Rebbe. Ultimately, we began opening Chabad Houses in the late 5730s*, and those were officially under the name Chabad.

However, as long as the community wasn’t ripe for that change, the Rebbe didn’t allow it. Even in seemingly petty matters, the Rebbe always told me to respect the sensitivities of the congregants. For example, my Hungarian *baalei batim* insisted that a *rav* may only speak Yiddish in shul (this had been a strong *takana* in Hungary meant to battle the influence of Reform). It was very difficult for me to bring *mekuravim* into a shul where I spoke in Yiddish and I needed to appoint interpreters to translate my words into English. Nevertheless, the

Rebbe didn’t allow me to change the custom.

In 5732*, I came to 770 for Yud-Alef Nissan, and the Rebbe announced the campaign to open 70 new institutions that year. I hoped that the Rebbe would allow me to open an official Tzach in Sydney, but in *yechidus* the Rebbe categorically rejected the idea.

In the current situation, the Rebbe told me, my *shlichus* was to do all the Rebbe’s activities in Sydney but “without the *shaar blatt*.” The Rebbe explained that the Frierdiker Rebbe once instructed that if people are afraid or embarrassed to study Chassidus, the *shaar blatt* should be removed and they should be given the content without knowing the source. My situation was similar, the Rebbe

said. I should continue doing the Rebbe's work, but without any drastic changes in the official name.

WOMEN'S ACTIVITIES

When we came to Sydney, much before we established our own *yeshiva gedola* and seminary, the Rebbe told us that our task is to see to send as many *bochurim* to the Melbourne *yeshiva gedola* and for my wife to send girls to Ohel Chana in Melbourne. The Rebbe said that we have to act like Avraham and Sarah where “*Avraham megayer ha'anashim*” and “*Sarah megayeres hanashim*.”

The Rebbe gave my wife the responsibility to deal with all women's

issues, both with the religious women by teaching *taharas hamishpacha* as well as the general community in finding ways and means of bringing them closer to Yiddishkeit.

She ended up creating a major women's organization called “Women of Valour” whose highlight was a yearly function of up to 800 people. She created a network of classes and seminars which ultimately made many *baalei teshuva*.

At every *yechidus*, the Rebbe would ask my wife about developments with the women. However, every time we reported our successes the Rebbe used to respond “מי שיש לו מנה רוצה מאתיים”, i.e. never to be satisfied.

THE REBBE SAID THAT WE HAVE TO ACT LIKE AVRAHAM AND SARAH WHERE “AVRAHAM MEGAYER HA'ANASHIM” AND “SARAH MEGAYERES HANASHIM.”



RABBI FELDMAN LIGHTS A PUBLIC MENORAH IN SYDNEY.

TIGHTROPE

Serving as a rabbi in a non-Chabad shul but as a shliach of the Rebbe, brought about an interesting situation:

I would often receive directives from the Rebbe, but I wasn't permitted to relay it to my lay-leaders as the Rebbe's instructions. The Rebbe didn't want the *baalei batim* to feel as if everything I did was dictated from afar. So I had to find ways to fulfill the Rebbe's instructions without letting on where it came from.

For example:

A year before my arrival in Sydney, a full-on day school had been opened to replace the after-hours *talmud Torah* that had functioned until then. We were looking for a headmaster for the secular studies and a certain person was suggested. He had all the secular qualifications, and he was also a Chossid, so it seemed a perfect fit. However, he wasn't willing to take instructions from me. He wanted to be answerable only to the top board of executives.

The Rebbe told me to reject his candidacy because, as he had said earlier, the *rav* must have full control over everything in the community. However, I couldn't say so publicly; I needed to find excuses to reject him.

There was another instance which was similar, and this one I will never forget:

The day school at the time consisted only of an elementary school. I arrived full of enthusiasm, and immediately declared that we need a high school as well.

The lay-leaders felt it was too early; there weren't enough funds and the elementary school was just getting off the ground, but I nevertheless insisted. I organized meetings, gave speeches, and cajoled and nudged people. I told them that one must have *mesiras nefesh* for *chinuch*, and I began to gather

support. It seemed that it might get off the ground.

I hadn't asked the Rebbe before doing so. I innocently assumed that the Rebbe would obviously agree, and in one of my reports to the Rebbe, I simply informed the Rebbe about the plan.

I received a call from Rabbi Hodakov, instructing me to pull back my campaign and cancel the plans. It was too early for a high school, the Rebbe said, and I should proceed with these plans only when I have a viable financial base and a concrete plan for success.

The situation was almost comical. I had to come up with various excuses to kill the idea. The *baalei batim* were incredulous. I had been full of excitement and had declared this to be of utmost importance and suddenly I had made a complete turnaround. They all understood that something had occurred but they couldn't figure out what it was. I was very careful not to let on what had happened.

KASHRUS IN SYDNEY

A few years into my shlichus, I was approached by the leaders of the Hungarian community of Sydney with a request. Sydney had two kashrus agencies; one was administered by the *beis din* of my wife's step-grandfather, Reb Asher Abramson, and the other by the Hungarian community. Their community had been lacking a rabbi for some time, so they asked me to take responsibility for their *kashrus* organization.

My *baalei batim* opposed the idea because we already had enough on our hands. I thought it would also be disrespectful for me to be somewhat of a competition to Rabbi Abramson (the Rebbe had even directed me to consult with him on all matters pertaining to *rabbanus*). Additionally, I assumed that the Rebbe would reject the idea because I knew that the



MORDECHAI BARON VIA JEM 147962

RABBI FELDMAN ADDRESSES THE KINUS HASHLUCHIM HAOLAMI, ROSH CHODESH KISLEV 5748.

Rebbe generally opposed Lubavitchers getting involved in *kashrus*. The Rebbe had once told someone, "*Unzer inyan is tzu marbeh zein oichlei kashrus, we should focus on increasing people who eat kosher.*"

I explained all the considerations in a letter to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe responded that despite all my misgivings, I should accept the offer because it was essential that a city have a high standard of *kashrus*. It was a hard sell to my lay leaders (again, I couldn't say it in the Rebbe's name), but I managed to convince them that it was our Torah duty to get involved. Ultimately, our entry into *kashrus* gave us the keys to the *kashrus* of the entire city.

OPEN MIRACLES

I would normally come to the Rebbe every Yud Shvat, and if that

wasn't possible, I would come for Yud-Beis Tammuz.

Obviously, we only came with the Rebbe's explicit permission. It was unheard of in those years for a shliach to come to New York without first writing to the Rebbe and receiving his approval, and there were times that the Rebbe refused to grant permission. (The usual conditions were that I had permission from my wife, and that my absence wouldn't have a negative impact on our activities.)

One time, I got off the plane in New York for Yud Shevat, and the transition from the Australian summer to the New York winter hit me so hard that I fell ill with a terrible fever. I was bedridden and too sick to move and Yud Shevat was only a day away!

My grandfather, Reb Elye Simpson, was scheduled to go into *yechidus* that night so he asked the Rebbe what I

should do. The Rebbe said that I must come to the farbrengen, no matter what.

The weather was terrible and some family members tried to discourage me. I recalled the story of the Alter Rebbe on Simchas Torah with the sick Chassidim² and I made the effort to come to 770. I was feeling awful, so I laid down under a bench behind the Rebbe, emerging only to say *l'chaim*.

Unbelievably, by the time the Rebbe left the farbrengen I was as good as new; there was no trace of the fever left. It was a pure miracle.

Another story:

My wife and I were in *yechidus* together. There was a certain issue bothering my wife but she didn't want to put it in writing and hoped to bring it up during the *yechidus*.

After discussing the different issues in our *tzettel*, the Rebbe turned to her and asked, "And what does the power behind the throne say?"

This was her moment to ask; however, she became tongue-tied, and said nothing.

Not getting any response, the Rebbe proceeded to give us *brachos*, which signaled the conclusion of the *yechidus*. I thought that my wife had lost her chance.

Suddenly, in the course of his *brachos*, the Rebbe said, "In regard to [the particular issue bothering my wife], being that you are involved in good work, I don't think you should be bothered by it. Ignore it and everything will turn out well."

We had never mentioned this issue to the Rebbe; it was a clear demonstration of *ruach hakodesh*.

(On a separate occasion, the Rebbe asked my wife what someone was doing regarding a certain issue, and she responded, "She's doing her best." The Rebbe smiled broadly and said, "*Ba unz in America, az m'tut gornisht, zogt men*, 'I'm trying my best'—Here in America, when we do nothing, we say 'I'm trying my best.'")

MARAH LEVANAH

Sydney is not a religious city and fundraising for a religious day-school was something that proved to be very

MORE STUDENTS

In the 5740s*, our institutions were in significant financial difficulties. One of our *mekuravim* was a member of Machne Israel Development Fund, and during his *yechidus*, he asked the Rebbe for a special *bracha* for me, in regard to the financial situation.

The Rebbe said, "Please tell Rabbi Feldman that the solution to financial problems is to increase in students."

We immediately made a campaign to bring in more students. We sent out flyers and put advertisements in the papers, and pulled in several new students.

At the next *yechidus*, he told the Rebbe that we had brought in new students, but the situation was still dire.

The Rebbe responded, "Please explain to Rabbi Feldman that the only solution is to add in *talmidim*..."

At that time I asked the Rebbe whether I should borrow money to pay the teachers even though I didn't know how I was going to pay back. The Rebbe answered in the affirmative.



difficult. Once, when I had a *yechidus*, I expressed my dismay to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe responded that he doesn't understand my attitude. It was clear, the Rebbe said, that everything in Sydney is *limaalah miderech hatevah*, beyond nature. So why was I complaining? If I needed evidence, I could just compare myself to many of my peers who haven't had the same measures of success.

The Rebbe commented to me on several occasions that I demonstrated too much *mara shechora* (seriousness and lack of joy). Once, my wife went for dollars and the Rebbe told her that since I was too *mara shechora*, it was her responsibility to reveal the *marah levenah* within me.

I once wrote to the Rebbe that I believe all of his *brachos* will be fulfilled, and in my mind, I have *bitachon* but I have a *meitzar hagaron*, a term used in Chassidus for when the mind understands something but the heart refuses to be affected.

The Rebbe's response was that he doesn't understand the issue. The way to correct a *meitzar hagaron* is to learn

more Chassidus, which will help your intellect influence your emotions.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

Our institutions began to grow; we had a school, yeshiva, seminary, mikvah, and more, and I was always looking for a new angle of fundraising opportunities.

At some point, I visited Los Angeles and saw the Holocaust center that was associated with a school called Yeshiva University. They explained to me that it was an amazing source of funds (especially in those days, when many philanthropists were Holocaust survivors) and it was a primary source of support for their school.

I thought that it was a wonderful idea; Sydney was a community of Holocaust survivors and people would be very enthusiastic about something like that.

We had the land on our campus and there was a person who promised a million dollars for the project. We prepared all of the campaign material, and right before we launched the campaign, I wrote to the Rebbe and asked for a *bracha*.

To my surprise, the Rebbe said that under no circumstances should we proceed. Firstly, this isn't our *inyan*, and secondly, it is wrong to collect money in the memory of the *kedoshim* even for the benefit of memorializing them!

TRANSFORMATION

The Rebbe blessed us a number of times with *nachas* from our children.

Baruch Hashem, all of our children and now some grandchildren are on shlichus and we are very grateful to Hashem and the Rebbe for the *brachos*, both personally and communally.

As I mentioned earlier, after I received my post in 5728*, the Rebbe told my *shver* that my task was "*Iber-tzu-nemen di gantze medineh*, to 'transform' the entire state." During a *yechidus* at a later point, the Rebbe told my *shver* that since I was appointed *rav*, Sydney belongs to the Rebbe.

In retrospect, what has happened with the Rebbe's vision and *brochos* was amazing (taking into account that, unlike Melbourne, Sydney was a spiritual desert). Many thousands of children were educated in our different kindergartens, primary schools, high schools for boys and girls, Gan Yisrael summer camps and winter camps. We established a *yeshiva gedola* (there are about 500 *musmachim* from our yeshiva, many who are serving all over the world as shlichim), a seminary, and many other *mosdos*. Most of the spiritual leadership in Sydney today are either our *talmidim* or people that we have brought out on shlichus. Indeed, this applies to a large proportion of the spiritual leadership in all of Australia.

That was the Rebbe's instructions:

"Iber-tzu-nemen di gantze medineh." ❶

1. Rashi on Chayei Sarah 23:1.
2. See "Simchas Torah of Fire," *Derher Tishrei* 5775 pg. 24.

“HERE IN AMERICA, WHEN WE DO NOTHING, WE SAY ‘I’M TRYING MY BEST.’”

OVER SEVENTY

Rabbi Asher Abramson, the *dayan* of Sydney, was mistreated by the *baalei batim* of his shul and he needed to leave his shul; obviously, he was sad and unhappy.

During a *yechidus*, the Rebbe spoke to me about various ways to keep him active in the community, but at one point I told the Rebbe, "He's already an old man, he's over 70 and no longer healthy."

As soon as those words left my mouth, I froze. I had just said that to the Rebbe, who was in his mid-seventies as well!

The Rebbe smiled broadly, and said, "*Ich bin oichet iber zibetzig, un ich hob plener far noch tzen yor, un noch dem hob ich plener far noch tzen yahr*—I'm also over 70, and I still have plans for the next 10 years, and afterwards for the next 10 years as well."