



# In UNCHARTED Territory.

Exclusive Interview with Rabbi Laibl Wolf,  
a pioneering shliach on campus.

לזכות השלוחה הצעירה  
ברכה פעסל שתחי'  
לרגל הגיעה לגיל י"ב שנה  
היא עונת בת מצוה  
ביום ט"ו אייר ה'תשע"ט  
יה"ר שתגדל להיות ראוי'  
לשם בת חב"ד כברכתו ורצונו של  
כ"ק אדמו"ר זי"ע ולנחת רוחו  
נדפס ע"י הוריה  
הרה"ת ר' אברהם יהודה הלוי  
וזוגתו מרת דבורה לאה שיחיו  
סאסקינד  
נוביי, מישיגין



For many decades, Rabbi Laibl Wolf has been a world-renowned lecturer, famous for his books explaining Chassidus and his profound speeches. He is one of a very small group of early Lubavitcher speakers that pioneered the art of articulating Chassidus to a modern crowd, and his travels have taken him to hundreds of Chabad Houses around the globe.

As a young Australian newly-wed, only recently introduced to Lubavitch, the Rebbe sent him on a mission to work with college students in the United States. It was during the height of the hippy-era. The Rebbe guided him on issues large and small through fascinating letters and *yechidusen*, and he continued his work with students for many years.

As a shliach who was sent by the Rebbe to head a Hillel House, quite a unique and extraordinary position, we are certain that our readership will enjoy this interview.

*This article is based on an extensive interview with Rabbi Wolf conducted by A Chassidisher Derher. We were also greatly assisted by Rabbi Wolf's interview with JEM's My Encounter with the Rebbe project. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Rabbi Yechiel Cagen and the My Encounter team for making it available to us.* זכות הרבים תלוי' בהם.

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Rabbi Laibl Wolf grew up in Melbourne, Australia. His father, a Radomsker Chossid, had settled there with his family after surviving the Holocaust. Together with the other impoverished immigrants, his father slowly restarted life in Melbourne, building a small hat business, operated out of his backyard into a thriving enterprise. Laibl was on a fairly typical track for a young Jewish boy: he attended the local Jewish day school, completed high school, and went on to the University of Melbourne to obtain a law degree.

While in college, however, he met Rabbi Zalman Serebryanski, who was one of a few Lubavitchers that had been instructed by the Friediker Rebbe to settle in Australia in the post-war years. Reb Zalman asked him if he would learn with him. Laibl had been familiar with Lubavitch as a child: This small group of Lubavitchers loomed large in the lives of all the Jews of Australia, because they were at the forefront of building the local Jewish infrastructure, including *mosdos chinuch*, *kashrus*, and so on.

“I was quite adventurous,” Rabbi Wolf relates. “I was looking into every corner, nook, and cranny—and so I agreed, and we began learning every week.” These classes, which would continue for many years, affected quite a change in Laibl’s outlook. “Rabbi Serebryanski got hold of me and never let me go. He allowed me to enter

into the depths of Chassidus, which brought much more meaning to my life, and brought me much closer to understanding the beauty and depth of the Torah. I had been a student leader, president of Jewish student societies and the like, and I always had a sense of personal responsibility to the Jewish community. But as the Rebbe entered my life in a profound way, my personal orientation as to where I was leading the students became much more acute.”

Towards the end of his legal studies he married his wife Leah, and following his wedding, while completing his degree, spent half the day in “*kolel*”—which essentially meant studying in the Lubavitch Yeshiva Gedola, because there was no actual *kolel* in Australia at the time.

About a year after his wedding, with his law degree complete, Laibl went on to study for a master’s degree in psychology. At a crossroads, unsure which route to take, law or psychology, he decided to write to the Rebbe asking for advice.

But instead of choosing one of the two options, the Rebbe replied that it would be best for him to continue his work with the academic youth.

After clarifying with *mazkirus* that the Rebbe was referring to university students, he asked the *mazkirus* how he should go about doing such a thing. They told him to speak to Hillel, which was then the primary Jewish

organization on campus and based mainly in America. Laibl immediately turned his focus to fulfilling the Rebbe’s directive. Without making too many calculations, he sat down and wrote letters to several Hillels in America asking if there were any posts available.

To his surprise, they answered that they were actually trying to expand internationally and were looking to bring Australians to America for training as Hillel directors. They suggested three campuses, and Laibl forwarded these options to the Rebbe. The Rebbe underlined “Madison, Wisconsin.”

Not long afterwards, in the winter of 5730\*, the twenty-four year old Laibl, who had only recently begun having a strong connection with Lubavitch, and his young wife, who had grown up in a Litvishe family no less, were on the plane out of Australia with their three-month-old baby, leaving behind their families and everything they knew, for a strange new country and a job they knew very little about.

On their way to Wisconsin, they stopped for a few days at the Chabad House at UCLA, at the time one of the very few Chabad Houses on campus. It was quite a learning experience. Campus life in America in 1970 was wild and raw, and the shlichim were adept at channeling these energies themselves. “I remember one character

in particular in that *Beis Chabad*,” Rabbi Wolf relates. “Everyone called him Baruch Hashem. I asked why he was called Baruch Hashem, and they said he had a violent tendency, and if he didn’t hit you, you would say ‘Baruch Hashem.’ That’s why he was called Baruch Hashem...”

“Of course there were many straighter individuals as well, but the Chabad House became a real beehive of activity in terms of attracting students, because the shluchim were on the wavelength of the students—equally ‘way out there’ as the students were. Not that the shluchim were necessarily that way themselves, but they were able to tap into that energy and express it.

“Those several days already taught me what I would be needing to express and do when I got to Wisconsin...”

They arrived in Wisconsin soon after, where they were greeted with a Midwest winter at its finest.

Being that he was officially going for training, Rabbi Wolf had been given the role of assistant to the then Hillel director of Madison. When Rabbi Wolf asked the Rebbe about how to go about this position, the Rebbe didn’t answer the specific question but just gave a *bracha*. As fate would have it, soon after Rabbi Wolf arrived in Madison, the director unfortunately contracted a serious heart condition and passed away. Laibl was left with an entire Hillel House, a three-story building, with the responsibility for seven thousand Jewish students.

The University of Wisconsin was a particularly radical college at the time, and there were constant demonstrations against the Vietnam War and many other issues on the table. These often turned violent, and there were many clashes between police and students.

Rabbi Wolf quickly learned how to adapt to the climate. He relates:

“We created a first aid center in the Hillel House, because whenever there was an altercation—every other day, the police and students would throw canisters of tear gas at each other—the students would come to the Hillel to wash their eyes out. The police didn’t consider the Hillel House sacrosanct either, and every once in a while a few gas-canisters would be thrown into the Hillel as well. That was my first experience with tear gas, not a very pleasant experience... As a consequence, I became very good friends with many students, especially the activist ones, many of whom went on to become quite famous people throughout the United States.

“It was a very, very serious period of time, when people took the revolution they were part of very seriously, but there was also a childish naivete; the same students who would throw bombs would throw frisbees all afternoon, or sing songs and play guitar. The Rebbe recognized that there were wonderful energies there that needed to be tapped into and directed; that the youthful revolutionary zeal was something that could be utilized. The students were

prepared to be moved because there was an *emes*, there was a truth and there was an energy.

“The Rebbe saw this well ahead of time and directed the early Chabadniks on campus to tap into that and redirect it, and this became the *baal teshuva* movement. That’s why there was such a wonderful success in terms of Chabad on campus and moving students towards Yiddishkeit.”

In terms of activities on campus, Rabbi Wolf’s campus operations were quite similar to what one would see at a Chabad House today: he would give *shiurim* and lectures, he had a table on campus where he put tefillin on students, and so on. His background would often come in handy as well, as a lawyer who had studied psychology, and he was accepted in the fraternity of academia.

## The First Yechidus

Soon after arriving in Madison, Rabbi Wolf and his wife—both of whom had moved across the world at the Rebbe’s behest, but had never met the Rebbe—flew to New York for their first *yechidus*. It was an utterly new experience for them, and they had no idea what to expect. They were



told that their time was scheduled for approximately 2:30 a.m., and to arrive at around midnight.

“We found ourselves in a rather long line,” Rabbi Wolf relates. “I could see so many different characters, individuals, and behaviors. Some were quite sedate and grounded, saying Tehillim; others were conversing with members of *mazkirus* seeking advice, and yet others were very nervous. It was a highly charged arena, and we waited there in *gan eden hatachton* for two hours. It was an absolutely wondrous experience.

“Finally, the last person in front of us went in. People’s time with the Rebbe varied from about two minutes to ten minutes, and now we were finally the next in line. It was almost three o’clock in the morning, and we waited and waited for a half hour, forty five minutes, an hour—finally the person ahead of us came out. I was later to learn that this young man was Adin Steinsaltz...”

Finally it was their turn to go in. “I remember preparing myself, and I said to myself, I’m going to remember every detail of this room, I’m going to have photographic memory. But I can tell you right now, I recall precious little of the room...”

They approached the Rebbe’s desk. The Rebbe was looking down at a letter he was holding—evidently Rabbi Wolf’s most recent letter, in which he had written about a dozen questions. Rabbi Wolf also noticed another pile of letters nearby: all (or many) of the letters he had written to the Rebbe over the years.

The Rebbe looked up and said, “Do you want me to respond to these questions now, or provide you with written answers?” In those days the Rebbe spoke to him in English, though later it would change to Yiddish. Rabbi Wolf wasn’t ready for the question, and he remained silent, weighing the merits of the two options. Finally, the

Rebbe said, “Let me therefore respond to you now.”

## Seven on Seven

One of the challenges Rabbi Wolf was having on campus was that there were seven thousand Jewish students who were his responsibility—an overwhelming amount—and he wasn’t sure what the right approach was: Should he be working in a *makif* sort of way, macro, creating some greater impression of Yiddishkeit on the campus, or should he be working in a more micro setting, with individuals?

The Rebbe answered pointedly and deliberately, with a very serious demeanor. “Your job is not to work with seven thousand. Your job is to work with seven. Those seven will find their seven, and those seven will find their seven. But your work is to work annually with seven.”

Rabbi Wolf says, “I understood that to mean that I should make sure to work in a way that there would be success that could be measured in terms of individuals, moving them from point A to point B, and since, of course, every individual is an *olam katan*, every one of them would have a worldwide effect. Obviously one must work on both scales—micro and macro—but the Rebbe’s emphasis was on individuals. This was a very, very important message for me.”

## The True Meaning of Geirus

Another question was about *geirus*. This was a time when students were very adventurous as far as their spiritual meanderings, and Rabbi Wolf wasn’t quite sure what his policy should be when approached by students to discuss conversion.

The Rebbe read the question and said: “You are a chaplain and you have other colleague chaplains; if a student should approach you for conversion, ask this student to first meet with their

respective chaplain, in the pathway in which they were raised (or that they might have had some connection to), so they can investigate better and know where they come from.

“If, after meeting with the other chaplain, the student comes back and still wants to be Jewish, then you should make sure that the student is placed in the hands of someone who can teach them in an authentic way. There should be a period of learning, each time pointing out the difficulties of changing the way they eat, the way they behave on a Shabbos—pointing out all the difficulties a change of lifestyle would entail, so that they’re fully conversant with what they are getting themselves into, and at that point many a student will decide that it’s not for them.”

Then the Rebbe added: “Once they go through with the *geirus*, you should recognize that what has taken place is not a conversion, because there is no such thing as conversion.”

The Rebbe elaborated (—“I must have raised an eyebrow,” Rabbi Wolf says): “In *Lashon Hakodesh*, you have words and their opposites, the Rebbe said. For example, a servant who becomes free is עבד שנשתחרר; a poor man who becomes rich is עני שנתעשר. Notice that the *shorashim* of these words are very different: עבד and שחרור; עני and עשיר.

“But a person who who went through a *geirus* is called a גר שנתגייר—the identical *shoresh* in both instances. When a person goes through a *geirus*, we know retroactively that this *neshama* was always Jewish—nothing was converted, nothing was changed.

“For reasons best known to the *Aibershter*, this *neshama* was placed into this particular set of circumstances of a non-Jewish mother, and this is the *nisayon* of this *neshama*. The *pintele Yid* within that *neshama* is what caused it to seek to be Jewish, and after the *geirus* we come to the

recognition that this always was a *Yiddishe neshama*. The Rebbe went on and said that this is why the Shulchan Aruch exhorts us to give *kavod* to a *ger* and a *giyores*, even more so than a naturally born Jew, because this is a *neshama* that has gone through a much more difficult test—and passed it.”

Here the Rebbe emphasized that the *geirus* must be according to *halacha*, with a properly constituted *beis din*, and if not, we will never know whether this was a Jewish *neshama* or not.

## Politics

Another question Rabbi Wolf asked was regarding his responsibility as a Hillel director as far as the political activities on campus: Should he get involved in the anti-Vietnam demonstrations and so on? The reason he had this question was because the Jewish students in Madison felt a

responsibility to society at large, and they expected the Jewish leadership on campus to take a stand on the anti-war issue. The question was: What public relations stance should they take vis-a-vis this issue, and to what extent should he be involved?

The Rebbe answered: “If you see two people drowning, G-d forbid, and one of them is your brother while the other is a stranger, and you have the capacity to save only one of them, no one will have any complaints, morally or ethically, if you choose to save your brother.

The Rebbe said: Your Jewish brothers and sisters are drowning. If you have the time to cover everybody, then you have the responsibility to do so.

“Then,” Rabbi Wolf relates, “the Rebbe looked up at me, looked me directly in the eye, and asked, ‘Have you used all available time to save your brothers and sisters?’”

## Campus or Community

There was another question about priorities: There was a fairly small Jewish community in Madison, about five hundred families, in addition to the Jewish student-body. Rabbi Wolf had very limited contact with them, because his work with the students was all absorbing, day and night. He asked the Rebbe what his responsibility to the community was.

The Rebbe gave a very direct response: “The older people have had their chance. It is now the turn of the younger people.”

Rabbi Wolf says, “Keep in mind that many of these answers were for that particular moment and that particular time; i.e. this was *my* mission at the time. I’m not sure how much you can generalize from that... But the Rebbe recognized that the fertile ground was with the younger people; that’s my own sense of it.”

## Public Speaking

“I was giving a good number of lectures on campus at the time,” Rabbi Wolf says, “and I asked the Rebbe if he had any advice as to how I should present myself publicly in terms of public speaking. The Rebbe gave me two pieces of advice that have held me in good stead.

“Number one,’ the Rebbe said, ‘you should speak one level above the audience.’ This in itself was surprising, because generally we say that we should bring it down to the level of the audience, so they should understand. But the Rebbe said to keep it one level above the audience.

“Then the Rebbe said a second thing, which might be related to the first: ‘Make sure that when you finish, you leave them wanting to learn more.’

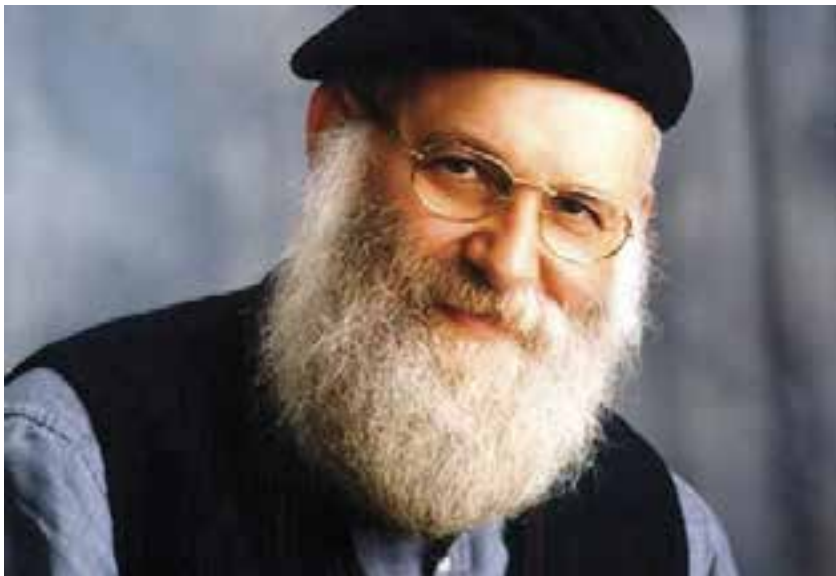
“These two guidelines have guided me in all my presentations (and for the past twenty six years, my work has been primarily public speaking in many *Battei Chabad* around the



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RABBI WOLF SPEAKS AT A FUNCTION IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.





world)—to arouse the curiosity of the audience, to help them realize that if they are interested in other Eastern religions because they’re spiritual and mystical and wonderful, Yiddishkeit has plenty to offer in this arena.

“Putting in all these different snippets provides many different pathways, so that each person in the audience can find something that hits the mark of their *neshama*, an opening that they will be able to further pursue. Most of the young people who are college-educated find themselves in a sophisticated academic arena and study sophisticated books, but they dump their Yiddishkeit because it seems so simplistic and childish compared to what they see in the wider world. So it’s very important to be able to present the depth, meaning, and spiritual relevance of Yiddishkeit, and to couch it in language that is equally sophisticated. Chassidus affords the opportunity to do so.”

The *yechidus* went on for fifty-five minutes, certainly longer than they had expected. Rabbi Wolf says: “My wife and I came out of the *yechidus* with a sense of confidence and reassurance that we were involved in something purposeful that was

important for *klal Yisrael*, and we had a clarity in our marching orders.”

During the *yechidus*, the Rebbe also advised him to maintain contact with Rabbi Yisroel Shmotkin, who had moved on shlichus three years earlier to Milwaukee, about seventy or eighty miles away. Rabbi Wolf had been in touch with him before: Before Rabbi Wolf came to Madison, Rabbi Shmotkin would drive in every week to give a class to students. “Although he couldn’t speak English,” Rabbi Wolf says, “he did not allow that to be an impediment to having heart-to-heart conversations and having *hashpa’a* on students. When I came, he delegated that role to me.

“Rabbi Shmotkin helped me in many, many different ways. At one point, he advised me that we should have a Shabbaton similar to the *pegisha* for students that would take place in Crown Heights. So we invited a couple of other young shlichim, in addition to Rabbi Shmotkin, to come for Shabbos to lecture and *farbrenge* with the students: Rabbi Manis Friedman, who had just started out in Minnesota, and Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Kagan, *a”h*, from Detroit. It was a wonderful Shabbos.”

## Writing to the Rebbe

“I didn’t lift a finger without reporting to the Rebbe,” Rabbi Wolf says. “Throughout the years, I always sent a detailed monthly report, which went to five or six pages, and very often the Rebbe commented, usually with short confirmations and acknowledgements.

“My sense over various *yechidusen* was that the Rebbe admired initiative. And I was not slow in taking initiative—I enjoyed it (hopefully most of the time it was wisely). When I was asking whether I should do this or that—and it was often a little bit off the beaten track—the Rebbe always wrote “ת”ת” (“Thanks”), acknowledging my letter and giving confirmation. The Rebbe encouraged me to express things that I could do that someone else might not be able to do. I’ve learned from other shlichim as well that the Rebbe encouraged them to take initiative. By creating that new *keili*, you allow the *brachos* to flow in a new way into your success and *hatzlacha*.

“One time, I sent in an advertisement for Pesach that I was putting in the student paper. I was very proud of the way it was worded, using the terminology of campus to ‘call Jewish students to arms,’ to be radical and adopt Pesach in the way of the Jewish radicals of old.

“Within twenty-four hours I received a phone call from Rabbi Hodakov: ‘The Rebbe asks you, why didn’t you put any of the *mitzvos* of Pesach in the ad?’ I learned a very significant lesson: you can be as radical and contemporary and flowery in your language as you want, but if you leave out the *mitzvos* themselves—what’s the point of it all?”

## Finding Joy in Your Shlichus

“Although we were seeing tremendous success in our work in Madison, my wife felt lonely there,”

Rabbi Wolf relates. “She had been raised in a large Jewish community, and in Madison there was no Orthodox community whatsoever. We wrote to the Rebbe about it, and he indicated that it was very important for my wife to feel comfortable and happy in her circumstances, and only then would there be success.”

Rabbi Wolf asked Hillel if there were any other positions available closer to a Jewish community, and they offered him a post in Hofstra University, in Long Island, NY. After two years in Madison [5730\*-5731\*] they moved to Hofstra, where they continued working with Jewish students.

It was a commuter campus, and they found a home twenty-five minutes away, in Long Beach. Considering that they were located relatively close to Crown Heights, Rabbi Wolf thought about moving there. “I thought to myself, if I’m commuting anyway, wouldn’t this be

a wonderful opportunity to live in Crown Heights?

“The Rebbe sent us a very strong letter, though it was couched in rather friendly terms. The Rebbe said, why would you want to move to Crown Heights? You have seen that living where you are now has given you so much success, more than other people. Stay where you are in order to be able to continue the success in your work.”

Rabbi Wolf was very much enjoying the work on campus, but again it wasn’t so comfortable in a sense that they had left all their friends and family in Australia. They asked the Rebbe whether they might continue their work back in Australia, where they had been invited to open a Hillel. “I didn’t realize how *chutzpadik* it was to keep asking the Rebbe to move,” Rabbi Wolf says, “but I must tell you that the Rebbe was very patient with us and very forbearing.”

The Rebbe replied, in a letter: “In answer to your basic question as to whether to return to Australia, or to

continue your work in the the U.S.A., I must point out the obvious, namely, that the fullest success in one’s efforts can be attained only if your work is done with joy and enthusiasm.

“Judging by the information that was conveyed to me... and as I also see from your letter, both you and your wife seem to have strong longing for Australia... In the light of this, I withdraw my previous opinion, and leave the decision to you as to where you think you will have the greatest inspiration and most conducive atmosphere to have Hatzlocho in your work. Accordingly, you should decide whether you should return to Australia, or continue here in the U.S.A.”

“The Rebbe, however, did point out,” says Rabbi Wolf, “that for me there was a far greater scope for success in the United States than Australia, which was much more constricted and limited.”

They had several options for what to do in Australia itself; one option



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RABBI WOLF RECEIVES A DOLLAR FROM THE REBBE, YUD-ALEPH SHEVAT 5750.



was to open a Hillel in Melbourne, another was to take a certain position in Sydney.

Rabbi Wolf relates: “My wife felt that I was not learned enough to take that position. When I asked the Rebbe about this position during a *yechidus*, my wife said—right in front of me—‘But he’s not capable of this position!’

“The Rebbe smiled, and without batting an eyelid said: ‘The position will make the person.’

“I think this point is true of the vast majority of shluchim,” Rabbi Wolf adds. “I don’t think I’m in any way undermining the qualities of shluchim when I say that there are some—including myself—whose personal typology does not initially seem suitable to the role. We feel that we’re not always fully up to the task. Yet we see how shluchim are so successful in ways that can only be described as miraculous, and the *kochos* that each one of us possesses somehow come out when the responsibility is thrust upon our shoulders. Almost all shluchim go out with no professional or organizational training whatsoever, yet because the Rebbe has confidence in us, we have the confidence, and this allows the position to make the person.

“After telling this to my wife, the Rebbe turned to me and said, ‘Do you know *Alef*?’ I wasn’t quite sure what the Rebbe meant, but I said ‘yes.’ The Rebbe said, ‘If all you know is *Alef*, then that’s what you will teach people—*Alef*.’”

### **A Soldier Does Not Leave the Front Lines**

Rabbi Wolf felt that he hadn’t really had the opportunity to sit and learn on his own, and he wanted to delay his work for a year and go to *kolel*. The Rebbe sent him a very strong letter emphasizing that going to *kolel* would not be the right thing at this point.

In the letter, the Rebbe wrote that there are different fields; some people’s main task is Torah study, while others are supposed to focus more on communal work or *chinuch*. “In your case, however,” the Rebbe writes, “since you have already been active in youth work for a number of years and have seen that you have had Hatzlocho in your work, and Hatzlocho in an area where it is very doubtful that anyone else could have had such Hatzlocho, namely the area of academic youth, and, moreover, in an area where the time element is very important, since the sooner a Jewish boy or girl begins to observe the Mitzvoth, the more certain it is that

they will be saved—your option has already been decided by Hashgocho Protis. Consequently, I can see no justification for you to abandon this sacred work, G-D forbid.”

The Rebbe went on to say: “If you have a strong desire to learn Torah and increase your knowledge, etc., you can do so by taking time off matters of *reshus*, but not at the expense of the time which you have to devote to the Chinuch of G-D’s children, so to speak.”

The Rebbe added: “If you may still be apprehensive as to how much you can accomplish in your Torah studies under such limited conditions, I would like to remind you that the beginning of the...Torah Or, i.e. the first drush and on the first page, contains the quotation...שע"י" נתנית צדקה נעשה מוחו וכלבו זכים אלף פעמים ככה [—through giving tzedakah his mind and heart become refined a thousand times more so]... In other words, the great zechus of your continuing in this area [of *chinuch* activities] will bring extraordinary Hatzlocho in your own Torah studies in your spare time—“a thousandfold.” According to the Tzemach Tzedek... the said phrase is not just a manner of speaking, but actually means what it says, without exaggeration.”



## Kosher Meditation

Rabbi Wolf relates: “In 5739, the Rebbe spoke publicly in an unusually explicit *sicha* about meditation, and the hurts and dangers of a Jewish person being involved in some of these Eastern practices. The Rebbe said that he would like to see therapists and professionals use the methodologies of what we might call today relaxation response—the Rebbe spoke Yiddish in the *sicha*, but that term was in English—to calm people’s nerves, and to remove the theological, *avoda zara* overtones that usually accompanied these practices.<sup>1</sup>

“In my own limited way, I began to evolve programs of meditation. I sent the outlines to the Rebbe, and each time the Rebbe acknowledged my letters and ideas. At one point I asked the Rebbe if I could introduce concepts of Chassidus into the meditation, which would allow me to bring Chassidus to people in a more profound way. I asked for permission because the Rebbe had asked that the meditation be stripped of its religious connotations, and be only a therapeutic tool. To my surprise, the Rebbe again answered with ‘*Tach*,’ giving his confirmation.

“For the past fifteen years-plus, I’ve been very involved in this endeavor, and the current *mosad* that I run in Melbourne with my son, SpiritGrow, is a place where meditation plays a central role. In my own small way, I hope I’m conforming to the Rebbe’s request of many years ago even in the present tense.”

When it came to choosing a final position in Australia, the Rebbe told them to ask two *yedidim* for advice. After a short time in one position on a campus, Rabbi Wolf opened a campus operation under the auspices of Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Groner in Melbourne, where he eventually directed seven campuses throughout Australia. [Interestingly, in his first *yechidus* with the Rebbe, Rabbi Wolf was told that he should work with seven students, and those seven will find their seven, and those seven will find their seven.]

After spending seven years on campus in the mid 5740s\*, Rabbi Wolf decided—with the Rebbe’s agreement—to take up traveling and speaking as his full time occupation.

“Before every lecture tour,” Rabbi Wolf says, “I would send the Rebbe a list of all the Chabad Houses and institutions I would be visiting. Whenever I would go by ‘dollars,’ the Rebbe would inevitably say the same

thing: ‘A dollar for you, and a dollar for your *mekuravim*.’

“Throughout the years, in the Rebbe’s letters to me, there would always be a separate little letter directly to my wife. Essentially, whenever I asked the Rebbe something that deserved a response, the Rebbe took the opportunity to write to my wife, always encouraging her to continue her work.”

## Continued Effect

“The Rebbe once told Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Groner, *a”h*, that the marching order is *kibbush Australia*, to overtake and transform Australia with Yiddishkeit. If we just live within our *mosdos* and try maintaining them, then we’re stepping backwards; we must always have an expansionist strategy.

“I saw this growing up in Australia: The Frierdiker Rebbe sent several families, survivors of the Holocaust,

to Australia, and they went on to establish the Chabad *mosdos* there. In fact, they were the founders of the Jewish community in general, because when they showed the courage of building Jewish learning—in a community that was made up of Jews who were essentially destroyed by the Holocaust—many other groups followed suit. What distinguished them was that they were not only in survival mode—how to make a living and so on—but they felt a communal responsibility. They divided the tasks in terms of what they were to achieve as a community, and it was the initial thrust of Chabad wanting to introduce *chinuch* that sparked the awareness in others to develop a Jewish educational system. And since Chabad always maintained a strong standard, in terms of personal practice and public posture of Yiddishkeit, it also had a very profound influence on other institutions, because there was always a standard to measure against.

“There was also a lot of daring, which is so true of Chabad everywhere; you would buy a property for a *mosad* without a penny in your pocket because there was a *brocha* and you needed to build the *keili*. It was that kind of pioneering adventurous spirit that Melbourne’s early Chabad pioneers demonstrated that made Melbourne into what it is today.”

“The Rebbe’s position is that if we’re not out there building, creating, growing—if we’re not moving upwards—then we’re moving backwards. Even within Chabad communities, we must always make sure that the ‘*Ufaratzta*’ continues with the original zest. As the Rebbe once said, Yidden are simply gold coins in the street; all we have to do is go there and pick them up.” **T**

1. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5739 vol. 3, p. 314.