

# LOVE FROM AFAR

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הרה"ת ר' אהרן יעקב  
וזוגתו מרת אסתר פראדל שיחיו  
גאלדשטיין  
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר, אן ארבער, מישיגן



נדפס ע"י בנם  
הרה"ת ר' חיים אפרים  
וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא  
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MOSCOW 5740S / NATHAN BRUSOVANI



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*“The Chassidim behind the Iron Curtain were separated from their leaders for over 30 years, and the younger generation has never even seen their leaders, and certainly could not have relied on the latter’s leadership and decisions to shape their lives. Yet these Chassidim turned out to be the strongest element of Jewish life behind the Iron Curtain.”*

When we read these words today, written by the Rebbe in 5720\*, almost 60 years ago, we can’t help but see the parallels to our situation today (for full quote see sidebar).

It has been so many years since we saw the Rebbe. Yet Lubavitch is bigger than ever and is thriving. The Rebbe has more shluchim today than ever before, and more people, from all backgrounds, are connected to the Rebbe than ever before.

The secret behind the success of Chabad behind the Iron Curtain was the connection between the Chassidim there and the Rebbe. For many long decades, the Rebbe worked tirelessly to encourage and help the Chassidim there. Whenever the Rebbe mentioned them by farbrengens his usual stoic voice would choke with tears.

When Chassidim were finally allowed to leave Russia, they merited unprecedented *kiruvim* from the Rebbe, even the children.

The love that the Rebbe showed for his Russian Chassidim, most of whom he had never seen, is surely something that we are experiencing today as well, a time when the younger generation of Chassidim has never seen the Rebbe.

As we approach Gimmel Tammuz, when this is at the forefront of our minds, we can draw some inspiration from stories that demonstrate the

Rebbe’s deep connection with his Chassidim stuck behind the Iron Curtain.

### A REBBE’S THOUGHT

“*Machshava moeles*”—thought helps—these are the first words of Likkutei Dibburim, the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *sichos* edited by the Rebbe.

### NEVER SEEN THEIR LEADERS

Incidentally, you mention in a previous paragraph that one of the aspects of Chassidic life is that the Chassidim are relieved from the responsibility of making decisions. You infer that the reason is that they are incapable of making their own decisions, and are entirely dependant on others. However, the truth is not so, as experience had demonstrated. A case in point are the Chassidim behind the Iron Curtain, who were separated from their leaders for over 30 years, and the younger generation has never even seen their leaders, and certainly could not have relied on the latter’s leadership and decisions to shape their lives. Yet these Chassidim turned out to be the strongest element of Jewish life behind the Iron Curtain, an element which retained its independence and way of life, in the face of the most terrible persecution, under circumstances constantly demanding decisions of an extraordinarily vital character, frequently decisions in matters of life and death, while others were indeed unable to make their own decisions and drifted with the stream, taking the line of least resistance. This extraordinary inner strength of the Chassidim came to light, for all to see, when the Iron Curtain was temporarily pierced soon after the last war, and numerous Chassidic families with their children and grandchildren escaped from behind the Iron Curtain.

*The Letter and the Spirit volume two page 220*

\*📅 5720-1960

The discussion by that farbrengen in the sukkah, on the night of Shemini Atzeres 5693\*, was about the Jews in Russia. “Thought has no boundaries,” the Friediker Rebbe continued, “and there is nothing that can hold it back, and at every moment it reaches its destination.”

“But what does the other person [the one being thought about] gain?” asked one of the Chassidim.

“A lot.”

Later at the farbrengen, the Friediker Rebbe said to him, “Where were you last Sukkos?” In other words, last Sukkos you were trapped in Russia, and this Sukkos you are free. So you see how my thinking about you had an affect.

The same idea was expressed by the Rebbe, in a letter to Reb Nissan Nemenov in 5712\*:

“I had the special pleasure of receiving the names of *anash* in Russia, which demonstrates two important points.

“1) The *ahavas Yisroel* and the unbreakable bond between you and

our brethren in Russia. 2) It is most certain that by keeping a connection with them, at least in our thoughts, it strengthens the idea that כל ישראל כולו. Consequently, just as that country has no power on those outside its borders, a connection with those still stuck there will give them added energy to stand up and strengthen their situation and will weaken the power over them from the enemy... But for this we must be as one body, and this is the idea of the power of thought, and especially the power of imagination (כח הציור).

“Surely you will maintain this connection going forward, and doubtlessly it will greatly help those who are there and also those who are here.”

## DIEDUSHKA

Reb Bentzion Vishedsky merited to see firsthand the Rebbe’s care for Russian Jews. He related:

“In 5718\*, my father’s uncle, Reb Yaakov Yosef Raskin, left

Russia. My father sent with him a letter to the Rebbe, asking if he should submit a request for exit visas. He did not receive a reply.

“A few years later, in 5725\*, our friend Reb Zalman Viniarsky was preparing to leave Russia. Seeing his friend about to leave, my father once again decided to ask the Rebbe if he should submit a request. Zalman was hesitant to take the letter, because if it was seen by the border guards it might put his whole trip in jeopardy. But my father insisted that he wanted to send the Rebbe an actual letter in his handwriting, not just a message.

“In the end Reb Zalman agreed, and my father wrote a letter on cigarette paper, which is very thin and easy to hide. Zalman sewed the cigarette paper into the lining of his coat, and that’s how my father’s letter got to the Rebbe.

“A while later we received a letter from my uncle Reb Yaakov Yosef Raskin. Between the pages of the letter was a slip of paper with the Rebbe’s handwriting on it. It’s an absolute miracle that this message was not taken by the censors who looked at every piece of mail.

“The message said to submit requests for the family, and at the end the Rebbe wrote in his handwriting, “Do svidanya, Diedushka”—We will see each other, Zeide.

“We knew then that we would be seeing the Rebbe shortly, and indeed our visas were approved and soon we were out of Russia.<sup>2</sup>

“Our joy was incomplete however, because my older sister Dvonia, who was married to Mottel, the son of Reb Simcha Gorodetzky, had been in Tashkent and was still stuck there.

“Reb Simcha had left Russia even before us, in 5724\*, and he thought that he would finally be able to relax a little after so many hard decades. Yet he immediately fell very ill, and was in the hospital. His children were all



11.SHEVAT 5724, JEM 104272

נ.ב. ז"ע נחקבל סכתבו סיום ד' חסודוג' אמתויו- (על אגרוו כחם אגרוו לוי. (ח)  
 זא טענה וט' - והרי זא ודלי נלו התך יריב עם וט' והצטרף אענה אוד יואב זעה ז'!

still in Russia, and his wife had already passed away. He was all alone in Eretz Yisroel.

“My brother and I used to visit him every day to bring him food and try to cheer him up. But he was very depressed and down, always slouching in his chair silently, a shell of his former self.

“One Friday, my father came with me to visit him, and before we even got to his bed, he started shouting from across the hall *“Di kinder kumen!”*—the children are coming!

“Shocked, we asked him to explain. He said that a while ago he wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking for a *bracha* for health, and did not receive a response.

“When one is deathly ill, and the Rebbe doesn’t respond to your letter, it is not a good sign... So shortly after he wrote another letter, telling the Rebbe that it seems he will not be *zoche* to a response and a cure.

“Today a letter came from the Rebbe. It was a *michtav klali-prati*, and at the end there were a few lines in the Rebbe’s handwriting:

“Your letter from 4 Tammuz and the later *pan* were just received. It is surprising that you write that you are not worthy ו”ח and was not answered. Your children just got an exit visa from there, etc. Can there be a better answer than this?”

“We were shocked. Our sister was coming! A few months later, Mottel Gorodetzky and his family arrived in Eretz Yisroel. When he saw the Rebbe’s letter to his father, he looked at the date his visa was issued, and it was 10 days after the Rebbe’s letter was sent. Who knew that a visa was going



RABBI BEREL LEVY IN LENINGRAD, 5741\*.

LEVY FAMILY

to be issued? The KGB officials in Tashkent, and the Rebbe...<sup>3</sup>”

### DOES ANYBODY CARE?

Shavuot 5724\*. The Rebbe had just said *l’chaim* on a full *becher* following a *sicha* addressing the plight of the Russian Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain. 770 was silent. Suddenly the quiet was pierced by the Rebbe’s call; “Nu, Nu...!” The Rebbe paused for a moment and then, making a hand motion which seemed to express immense dissatisfaction, he said: “When dealing with a brother or a relative there would be no need to wait for my directive (to say *l’chaim*), but now, when speaking of a broader group of Yidden, nobody is moved!”

Immediately a few Chassidim raised their cups to say *l’chaim* but the Rebbe didn’t even glance in their direction. Instead he said, “You make kiddush on a full cup of mashke, but when it comes to saying *l’chaim* for the

*Russian Jews, a small cup suffices...?”* Needless to say, the Chassidim were speechless. Someone began to sing “*Hoshia es amecha*,” but the Rebbe made a hand motion similar to before and began singing alone the *niggun* “*Essen est zich*.” When the Chassidim tried joining in, the Rebbe motioned with his hand once more and said: “Tomorrow they will come with requests about sending visas to their relatives. But they should know that earlier, it was an auspicious time where a heartfelt *l’chaim* was to be said sincerely, with ‘an emmes,’ and a good word spoken while it’s still Yom Tov. Great things can be accomplished through this for all the Jews of Russia and they can be redeemed in the blink of an eye. Yet nobody is moved to take action! The fact that there are millions of Jews suffering does not bother them in the least! They think that they will accomplish something with their money...” Afterwards, the Rebbe

requested for a child under the age of bar mitzvah to begin the *niggun* of “*Hoshia es amecha*,” saying “The children cannot be blamed for this.”

Indeed, it is not a stretch to say that only one person truly cared, to the depths of his heart, about Russian Jews. In a letter from the Frierdiker Rebbe, we find the same frustration with this apathetic attitude.

*To my future son-in-law,*

*The purpose and content of this letter is to send you regards of many blessings.*

*Regarding my travels, it will be lengthy to write so I will leave them to be spoken about when we meet soon.*

*The Russian issue is very popular by people to talk about, yet I have not found someone whom this issue touches their heart and inspires them to action. But I hope that my trip now will be beneficial with G-d's help, and with complete clarity I must say, that our brothers who find themselves in the cauldron of misfortune and the kettle of troubles, are orphans.<sup>4</sup>*

At every opportunity the Rebbe talked about the plight of the Yidden in Russia. On Simchas Torah 5724\*, at the farbrengen before *hakafos*, the Rebbe said: “We are standing before *hakafos* and we have to remember those who are stuck in captivity. The [Frierdiker] Rebbe said when he was leaving there in 5687\*, that by learning Torah in our countries, it will help them over there.”

Later, the Rebbe established the custom of saying the *possuk* “הנני מבריא אותם” before *hakafos*, as a way of davening for the Russian Jews.

## A MATTER OF TIME

We know how precious the Rebbe's time was; every moment was carefully allocated. Yet when it came to the Russian Jews, the Rebbe spent an enormous amount of time caring for them.

Mr. Liova Eliav was the First Secretary of the Israeli Embassy in

Moscow in the late 1950s and was very involved with Chabad there. He would bring them *siddurim*, *sefarim*, *tefillin*, and anything else they needed.

After his posting there concluded, he came to New York and had a *yechidus* with the Rebbe.

The Rebbe spent an unprecedented **seven** hours talking to him, discussing every single detail about Jewish life in Russia. He related that by the time he left 770 it was already light outside.

Rabbi Berel Levy traveled to Russia many times as the Rebbe's shliach. Wherever he went he would take a small handheld video camera, and take videos of Chassidim.

In every city he visited, the local Chassidim would all gather at a house, and one by one they would present themselves for the camera. The men would not appear on camera unless they had gone to *mikveh* that day, and the women were all dressed in their Shabbos best.

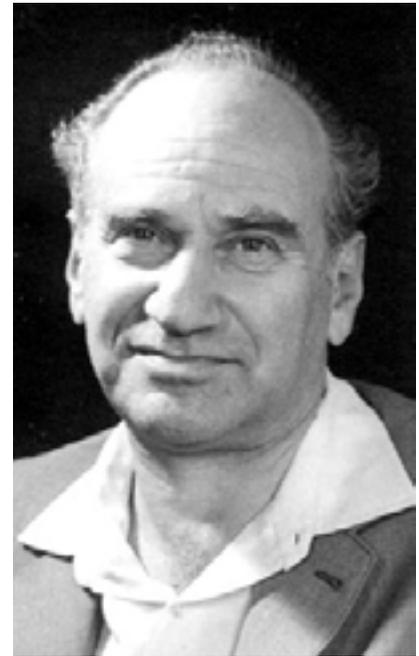
They would introduce themselves to the video, and then ask for a *bracha* for anything they needed, be it *parnassa*, *shidduchim*, questions about which job to take, whether to apply for a visa, etc. Incredibly, these films were never confiscated at the border.

In the earlier years, Rabbi Levy used to bring the video reels to the Rebbe's house, and the Rebbetzin would watch the videos. One time she asked him why doesn't he also show them to the Rebbe.

He replied that he didn't think the Rebbe had time to watch them. The Rebbetzin responded that she thinks the Rebbe would be very interested to see them. Reb Berel said, if so, he would like to be the one to bring it up with the Rebbe.

The next time he was in *yechidus*, the Rebbe had already spoken to the Rebbetzin about it and said that he wanted to see the videos.

From then on, upon returning from Russia, he would take a projector into



MR. LIOVA ELIAV, SECRETARY OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY IN MOSCOW IN THE 1950S.

the Rebbe's room, set it on the Rebbe's desk, and the Rebbe would watch the videos. Sometimes they were over two hours long.

On one trip he was accompanied by his son Reb Don Yoel, and he joined him in the *yechidus* as well.

He recalls how his father would stand with a notepad, and the Rebbe would answer the questions as they were asked, while his father would write down the answers to send back to Russia.

## TRULY ALONE

The majority of Russian Chassidim left in the great exodus of 5706-7\*. Most remaining Chassidim had left by the early 5730s\*. Those who were there after that, were truly alone. Yet in every major city, there were pockets of Chassidim who kept the flame of Yiddishkeit alive.

Visitors to Russia in those years were always shocked by the great devotion these stranded Chassidim had for the Rebbe. Most of them had never seen the Rebbe in their life, yet the Rebbe was all they cared about.



RABBI BINYOMIN KATZ

Mr. Dovid Rivlin worked for the Israeli foreign ministry and was the Israeli consul general in New York.

While working at the consulate he met with the Rebbe many times and developed a close relationship. Sometime after that he arranged a visit to the Soviet Union. One of the places he visited was the Marina Roscha shul in Moscow.

For a Russian Jew to go to shul was dangerous enough, and to talk with a representative of the Israeli government was out of the question. He later recalled:

“To my shock, when the people in shul heard that I knew the Rebbe, and that I was even in the Rebbe’s presence for Simchas Torah, their eyes popped out. They surrounded me and bombarded me with questions, and didn’t let me rest for hours as they begged me to tell them more and more; nothing else interested them, only the Rebbe.”<sup>5</sup>

## SHAMAATI

In the mid 5720s\*, Reb Binyomin Katz was sent by the Rebbe to Russia. While there he had the chance to

meet the Chossid Reb Mottel Lifshitz, known as “Mottel der Shochet.”

They couldn’t talk openly because informants were everywhere, yet when Reb Mottel passed him he whispered, “*Anash?*” Binyomin nodded. The only thing that he asked was “How is the Rebbe?” More than that, they simply did not exchange a word...

One morning while visiting Tashkent, Reb Binyomin was brought to the Bukharian shul which was jammed with Chassidim, young and old, and for two hours he sang all the Rebbe’s *niggunim* while the crowd listened rapturously.

One of the *sefarim* he brought along was a small book containing the Rebbe’s *maamarim* from the year 5715\*. Seeing how thirsty these Chassidim were for something from the Rebbe, he decided to leave it with them in Tashkent. Years later, when these families managed to leave Russia and some of the *bochurim* came to New York, he found that they were so well versed in these *maamarim*; they could repeat them almost word for word.

While walking in the street, he was accosted by a couple on the street. The husband’s name was Reb Yankel Lepkivker (known in Tashkent as “Yankele der Shvartzer”). After searching with great difficulty to find employment that would not require him to work on Shabbos, he finally found a job in a laundromat. After a while the exposure to the chemicals that were used in the cleaning process had a serious effect on Reb Yaakov’s health and he became critically ill. Having no other choice, they took the risk of sending a telegram directly to the Rebbe and they received a one word answer: “*Shamaati!*” (I heard). Shortly thereafter, Reb Yaakov miraculously began to heal until his health was completely restored. Now, as a way of saying thank you, they wished to send a large sum of money

with Reb Binyomin to the Rebbe as a *pidyon nefesh*.

This was a time when the main work of Russian activists in America was to send money to Russia, and this Chossid wanted to give the little money that he had to the Rebbe.

## TO SEE THE REBBE

Rabbi Shmuel Lew visited Russia many times in the 5740s\*. While there, he met the above mentioned Mottel der Shochet, who for many years was the only *shochet* in Moscow. He had been able to leave Russia, but the Rebbe told him to stay because he couldn’t leave Moscow bereft of a *shochet*.

He expressed to Rabbi Lew that his only desire is *צו זען דעם רבי'נס הייליגע אויגן* (to see the Rebbe’s holy eyes) and then he’ll go back to Russia. This is indeed what he did a few years later.

Rabbi Lew also told of visiting the shul in Leningrad on Hoshana Rabbah. There was an old Chossid named Rabbi Chidekel who had been by the Rebbe Rashab as a young *bochur*, and by then was already very sick and bedridden.

Although he almost never left his bed, when he heard the Rebbe’s shlichim were coming, with great difficulty he dragged himself out of bed and came to the community sukkah just to see them.

The deep love that the Rebbe had for his Russian Chassidim, who had never seen him, kept them going through the long *galus*. Indeed many of them were more ardent Chassidim in Russia than after they left.

The same is surely true about today’s Chassidim.

1. Igros Kodesh #1564
2. Diedushka page 437.
3. JEM Living Torah, My Encounter With The Rebbe, Bentzion Vishedsky, disc 121 program 484.
4. Diedushka page 350
5. Diedushka page 373.