



דין קדימה לצרפת



Rabbi Yosef Matusof
Toulouse, France

”נשיא דורנו האמ
אויפגעטאן און
אנגעזאגט צו כל
אנשי ונשי הדור
אז מצוות הדור
איז אין דעם ענין
השליחות...”

“The Rebbe *nesi doreinu* established and mandated each and every man and woman in this generation that the ‘mitzvah of our generation’ is *shlichus...*”
(ש”פ וישלח תשמ”ז)

I merited to grow up on shlichus in Morocco. My father, Rabbi Shlomo Matusof, was one of the first shluchim sent by the Rebbe after the Friediker Rebbe’s *histalkus*.

As a *bochur*, I studied in Brunoy. During my time there, I merited to be very involved in the work of *hafatzas hamaayanos* in Paris and the surrounding cities. After spending a few years in Brunoy as teenagers, Reb Nissan Nemanov allowed me and my friends to move on to the yeshiva in 770; but when we arrived in New York, the Rebbe sent us back to Brunoy as shluchim because he wanted us to remain in France to increase the work of *hafatza* there.

After spending a year in 770, in the summer of 5733*, I married my wife Esther, the daughter of Reb Chaim Hillel Azimov and sister of Rabbi Shmuel Azimov, the Rebbe’s shliach to Paris.

During his first years in Paris, Rabbi Azimov built up the work of Chabad with much success, and based on the

Rebbe’s *horaos* many of his *baalei teshuva* became shluchim themselves.

We spent the first year after our *chasuna* in Crown Heights where I attended *kolel*. At the time, we heard a rumor that the Rebbe wants to send more shluchim to other cities in France and establish the work of Chabad there.

As my time in *kolel* was coming to an end (in the summer of 5734*), I wrote to the Rebbe that I very much want to be the Rebbe’s shliach. Based on my capabilities and the work I had done in the past, I mentioned that France would be a possibility. I included the offers that I had received for shlichus in other countries as well, and asked the Rebbe if I should look at one of the cities in France.

The Rebbe responded:

”דין קדימה לצרפת וידבר עד”ז עם הרבא”ג.”

“France is first priority. Discuss this with Rabbi Binyomin Eliyahu Gorodetzky.”

Rabbi Binyomin Gorodetzky was appointed by the Friediker Rebbe to head the *lishka*, overseeing Chabad’s activities in Europe, Asia and North Africa.

At first, Rabbi Gorodetzky told me that he is not yet ready to send shluchim to other cities in France. The Rebbe continued to direct me to him a number of times over the next few months, but Rabbi Gorodetzky kept on pushing me off.

I wrote this to the Rebbe and I suggested that I could go as a shliach “לאחת הערים בצרפת” and I will try to arrange that the Consistoire will employ me. The Consistoire is like the Jewish community council recognized by the government. It was originally set up by Napoleon and has branches in the various cities in France. The Consistoire in the city where I would live might consider paying my salary as I will contribute through my activities with the youth.

The Rebbe circled בצרפת and wrote again: “ידבר בכ”ז עם הרבא”ג שיח”.

“Speak about this with Rabbi Gorodetzky”.

The Rebbe then circled my suggestion, and wrote:

”?לקבל משרה מהקאנסיטואר מהו האויפטו?”

“What is the accomplishment in accepting a position from the Consistoire?”

Later the Rebbe gave me clear *horaos* regarding how to work with the *kehila*, but here the Rebbe was telling me that it doesn’t make sense to move there officially as their employee, if there was the possibility to go as a shliach.

At one point, Rabbi Gorodetzky offered to arrange a shlichus for me in Tehran. Tehran was then a peaceful place for Yidden before the Islamic revolution broke out in 1979.



I wrote this option into the Rebbe and the Rebbe answered me:

להתעניין ע"ד טהרן או צרפת.

“Pursue the options in Tehran or France.”

Rabbi Gorodetzky gave me a letter from the community in Tehran asking me for lots of information about myself. I would need to fill out all the information, send it to the Joint in Paris and they would forward it to the community Tehran. The Rebbe had told me not to take a job as an employee of the community and here it seemed that I was being offered a similar position in Tehran.

Rabbi Binyomin Klein suggested that I send the letter into the Rebbe and include a draft of what I plan to respond to them. I did as he said and asked the Rebbe's *bracha*. I never received an answer to this letter, and it became clear that the Rebbe was not fond of this idea. When I wrote to the Rebbe that Rabbi Gorodetzky had informed me that the Tehran plan is off, the Rebbe wrote back to me:

“בכל אופן צריך לענות מכתב הצטדקות.”

“In any event, you need to reply [to the community in Tehran] with a letter explaining [why you turned down their offer].”

During that time, Rabbi Hodakov offered me a shlichus in Panama. I wrote to the Rebbe but I didn't receive an answer to this letter either.

At the end of Shevat 5735*, in a long conversation with Rabbi Gorodetzky, the Rebbe told him in no uncertain terms that the time had come to expand the work of Lubavitch and bring shluchim to the other cities in France as well. After that, I spoke with Rabbi Gorodetzky about five cities (Toulouse, Lyon, Marseille, Nice and Grenoble) and he suggested that since we are set to go in to *yechidus*, we should list the various cities and ask the Rebbe to choose.

Our *yechidus*, which took place in Adar, shortly before we traveled to

France, was over 20 minutes long(!), something extremely unique then, especially for a young couple. I handed the Rebbe a five page letter that I had written with questions about the cities, *parnasa* and more. Among other things, I wrote that I had discussed everything with Rabbi Gorodetzky. The Rebbe spent a long while reading my letter, looking back and forth at the various pages, and marking things with his pencil.

Finally, the Rebbe looked up and with a big smile said, “Since you write that you consulted with Rabbi Gorodetzky, you should certainly continue doing this in the future.”

Regarding *parnasa*, the Rebbe said: “When you will be in Paris by the *mishpacha*, you will find out how much you need to live, write to me and to Harav Gorodetzky, and we will answer you.”

The Rebbe then started going through the cities that I had asked about. First the Rebbe told me that I shouldn't move to Marseille.

However, he added: “In Marseille there is a Jew called Moshe Lechiani, a special Yid, a warm Yid (א טייערער) (“איד און א ווארעמער איד ווארעמע”) and I receive from him warm letters (בריוו). Travel to Marseille bring him regards from me.” When the Rebbe said his name, I nodded my head. “You know him?” the Rebbe asked. “Where do you know him from?” I said that I knew him as a child in Morocco and later from when I was on Merkos Shlichus in Marseille. The Rebbe smiled broadly, “If you know him, then it's a very good idea to go see him, bring him warm regards and encourage him about the *peulos* of Purim and Pesach.”

The Rebbe said that Lyon is not a good idea for me. Interestingly, the Rebbe skipped Nice.

“What is left,” said the Rebbe, “is Grenoble and Toulouse. From Toulouse I receive letters and it

seems that it's a place where work can and should be done. Grenoble is also a possibility but you should check what is going on there. Go to both places, write your impressions from both places to me and to Harav Gorodetzky.” The Rebbe pointed his hand in my direction, “You should also write your opinion.”

The Rebbe blessed us with many *brachos* for *hatzlacha* in the shlichus, stressing a number of times that our work should be *בדרכי נועם ובדרכי שלום*.

We traveled to France, visited Moshe Lechiani, bringing him tremendous encouragement, and then continued on to Grenoble and Toulouse. As per the Rebbe's *hora'a*, after much contemplation, I wrote my impressions to the Rebbe with our conclusion that Toulouse needs a shliach sooner.

Just before Pesach, we received the Rebbe's answer:

“ויהא נסיעתם לטולוז בשעה טובה

ומוצלחת.”

“May your travels to Toulouse be in a good and auspicious time.”

A few months after we arrived, the Rebbe sent a special letter in response to the leaders of the Jewish community in Toulouse, thanking them for their support for me and my wife. (Printed in *Igros Kodesh* vol. 31, p. 31).

We were very fortunate to receive many letters and *maanos* at the beginning of our shlichus, and a number of *horaos* over the years to come. With the Rebbe's *brachos*, the *mosdos* of Chabad in Toulouse continue to impact thousands of Yidden, and are לשם ולתפארת, with a day school, preschool, camps, Chabad Houses and over 10 shluchim! T