



# THE MAKING OF A CHOSSID

לזכות  
ילדינו היקרים  
יצחק צבי, מנחם מענדל, אברהם מאיר,  
יהודית, וישראל ארי' לייב  
שיגדלו להיות חסידים  
יראי שמים ולמדנים  
נדפס ע"י  
הרה"ת ר' אליעזר  
וזוגתו מרת חנה שיחיו  
וואלף

Rabbi Yaakov Immanuel Schochet was a unique figure in *dor hashvi'i*; handpicked by the Rebbe to work on some of the deepest works of Chassidus and also instructed by the Rebbe to attend college and become a professor at a university. Even without the archetype characteristics of a “typical” Chossid, he was a staunch and ardent Chossid of the Rebbe.

When the Rebbe wanted the Tanya to be translated to English, Rabbi Schochet was the one he chose to translate *Iggeres Hakodesh* (which is arguably the most difficult part); when the Rebbe wanted *mafteichos* to be made of various works—Rabbi Schochet is the one he appointed; when the fate of everything was on the line during the *sefarim* case, Rabbi Schochet was on the witness stand to convey the meaning of a Rebbe. When the Rebbe was fighting for *mihu yehudi*, the purity of the Jewish nation, Rabbi Schochet was at the forefront. As a pioneering lecturer and writer, he traveled the world to speak on Chassidus, Moshiach, and the authenticity of Yiddishkeit.

Rabbi Schochet was a strong Chossid and *mekusher* (and, at one point, he was even a member of the Rebbe's secretariat), but if you met him as a teenager you wouldn't necessarily believe he would end up that way.

In Part I of this article we begin with Rabbi Schochet's early years: when he came to Lubavitch at the age of fourteen with a mind of his own, how the Rebbe was *mekarev* him tremendously, dealing with him patiently and lovingly through his teenage years and all that it entailed. In Part II we will discover how he became involved in the Rebbe's work, as a powerful advocate for Torah and Yiddishkeit.

## COMING TO LUBAVITCH

Rabbi Yaakov Immanuel Schochet was born in Switzerland in 5695\*. His father, Rabbi Dov Yehuda Shochet, was of German descent, a *yekke*, and studied in the Telz Yeshiva. For many years, Rabbi Schochet (the father) was a *rav* in Switzerland and Holland.

The Schochet family was related to Rabbi Hodakov, who was married to Rabbi Dov Yehuda's sister. Their direct connection to the Rebbe began in 5712\*, after they emigrated to Canada, when their youngest daughter suffered severe burns to her body, and it was the Rebbe's miraculous intervention that saved her life.<sup>1</sup>

That year, Rabbi Hodakov advised the elder Rabbi Schochet to send his children to a Lubavitcher yeshiva. Rabbi Immanuel Schochet related: "My father was told by my uncle [Rabbi Hodakov] that if you're sending your children to a yeshiva in America, you need someone to keep a good eye on them. Send them to Lubavitch and I'll take care of them." Immanuel was enrolled in Tomchei Temimim at Bedford and Dean, the Lubavitcher yeshiva high school that included secular studies.

Immanuel and his brother Dovid arrived by train from Toronto on 26 Nissan, a Monday. Rabbi Hodakov picked them up from Grand Central Station and drove them directly to 770 for davening. "It wasn't like the later years when people would sit literally right in front of the Rebbe. In those days, when the Rebbe would come into the room, everybody disappeared. Before davening, the *bochurim* would line up to reserve a place around the *bima*, and then they would later come in to hear the Rebbe's *maftir*. The moment *maftir* was over—they were gone again. There's an expression in *Nach* והנערים נחבאים, 'the boys were hiding.' Does the Rebbe have to see my face...?"



RABBI DOV YEHUDA SCHOCHET, IMMANUEL'S FATHER.

"(When I originally came, this concept of hiding from the Rebbe didn't make any sense to me, and I was the only *bochur* who davened with the Rebbe's *minyán* on Shabbos. I sat quite close to the Rebbe during Shabbos davening.)

"When the Rebbe came in on that Monday morning, all the *bochurim* disappeared, and the entire front half of the shul was empty. I didn't understand why, and I remained standing behind Rabbi Hodakov.

"The Rebbe stared at me... and I stared right back. To me, it felt like the eye contact was for a long time, though it was probably just a second. Inside me, things were turning. Don't ask me why: I didn't understand what a Rebbe is, even though this was after the miracle had occurred with my sister. In my mind a Rebbe was like a chief rabbi..."

## THE FIRST YECHIDUS

The following day was Tuesday, and Immanuel and his brother Dovid were scheduled to have a *yechidus* with the Rebbe. Reb Dovid Raskin approached Dovid and told him that before *yechidus* one immerses in the mikveh. There was no men's *mikveh* in Crown Heights at the time, and Immanuel did not understand the necessity of immersing in *mikveh*, so he decided to ask Rabbi Hodakov if it was required. Rabbi Hodakov replied that it was



IMMANUEL SCHOCHET AS A YOUNG BOY.

SCHOCHET FAMILY

not—it depends on a person's *hergesh*, and so Immanuel decided not to go to *mivkeh*.

As a result, he entered *yechidus* early in the evening, while his brother, who traveled a half hour to Brownsville to go to *mikveh*, entered much later."

## THE FIRST YECHIDUS

"I came into the room," he later related. "To this day I don't understand it, but it looked like the whole room was dark. The only light was coming from two small Shabbos lamps behind the Rebbe. All I could see was the Rebbe's face, nothing else. I began trembling from head to toe. Don't ask me why, it doesn't make sense to me.

"The Rebbe was very friendly, asking 'Shalom Aleichem, how are you? How are things? How are you settling in yeshiva?' Then he began asking about my family: how my parents were doing, how my sister was doing. But I was very nervous and felt like I had to leave.

"Before the *yechidus*, I had been told to write my name and my mother's name on a piece of paper. When I gave it to the Rebbe, he stared at it for a long, long time. I didn't understand, what there was to see. It's three or four words...! The Rebbe went on to ask me a few more questions, and the *yechidus* lasted 5-7 minutes.



A LETTER FROM THE REBBE TO IMMANUEL, DATED 28 MENACHEM-AV 5713.

## THE REBBE'S FARBRENGENS ARE WHAT KEPT ME IN LUBAVITCH. MOST OF WHAT I LEARNED IN YESHIVA WAS AT THE FARBRENGENS.

The moment I closed the door behind me, I felt as if a magnet was pulling me back in again. I had to really control myself not to go back in.

“I went to Rabbi Hodakov’s office and he asked me, ‘Nu how was it?’ I described it with a German word (I barely spoke Yiddish at the time)—*unheimlich*, spooky. He was surprised: most people who go into the Rebbe feel so comfortable, the Rebbe makes you feel so at home... But that was the first *yechidus*.”

### THE FARBRENGEN

“A few weeks later there was a farbrengen for Shabbos Mevorchim Sivan. I didn’t understand three-quarters of what the Rebbe said. Although I understood most of the Yiddish, the Rebbe speaks with a mix of Yiddish, and Hebrew words,

and technical terms. Yet, there was something about the farbrengens that was a magnet for me, I could not miss a farbrengen. Don’t ask me how. The farbrengens are what kept me in Lubavitch. Most of what I learned in yeshiva was at the farbrengens.

“I stood there and watched what was going on, and towards the end of the farbrengen the Rebbe looked at me and told me to say *lchaim*. I said, ‘א דאנק, איך גלייך דאס נישט’—Thank you, but I don’t like it.”

“Everyone’s looking at me... such a *chutzpah!* The Rebbe tells you to say *lchaim* and you say no?! The Rebbe is smiling; Rabbi Hodakov is exploding in laughter because he knows who we’re dealing with... Rabbi Mentlik’s face turned redder than his beard, like Yom Kippur. If looks could have killed

me, I would have died so many times. The Rebbe got a good laugh out of it...

“The Rebbe said, ‘פארט, זאג לחיים—Still, say *lchaim*.’ Again I said that I don’t like it. So, with a smile, he let me go. I didn’t understand what was happening, I had been polite. I felt bad, so I took a drop Slivovitz, and said *lchaim*.”

“The Rebbe said *lchaim*, and said, ‘ער וועט זיך שוין צוגעוואוינען צו דעם’—he will eventually get used to it.”

From then on, at almost every farbrengen, the Rebbe would tell Immanuel to say *lchaim*.

## THE SECOND YECHIDUS

The second *yechidus* took place only two months after Immanuel joined the yeshiva. He had been involved with Agudah from his childhood—“I was a fanatic Agudist,” he would later say—and he was in touch with their central New York office from the day he arrived. As the summer approached, they offered him to be a counselor at Camp Agudah, which, at the time, was the only religious summer camp.

“The *rosh yeshiva* Rabbi Mentlik asked me what I’m doing for the summer, and I told him that I’m going to be a counselor at Camp Agudah. ‘How long are you going for?’ I said that the job was for nine weeks. ‘You only have permission from the yeshiva to leave for three weeks,’ he said. ‘And you can’t leave before Yud-Beis Tammuz.’ He told me that the only one who could give me permission was the Rebbe.

“Well, I considered myself as having a close relationship with the Rebbe! So I went to Rabbi Hodakov and told him that I needed a *yechidus*. ‘Is it necessary?’ he asked me. I told him that it was, and he gave me a *yechidus* for the following week, no questions asked.

“I didn’t understand it at the time, but people would wait three or four months for a *yechidus*, and here I



wanted a *yechidus*—no problem! There were only a few books available in Yiddish from Merkos that I could read from cover to cover—and I was given whatever I wanted. It took me years and years to understand that there must have been special instructions from the Rebbe himself to ‘cut this guy some slack.’

“This time I also didn’t go to *mikveh*. The moment I opened the door, I saw that there was a big smile on the Rebbe’s face, and I had to smile back. It was the exact opposite experience of the first *yechidus*.

“‘Reb Immanuel!’ the Rebbe greeted me. ‘How are you?’ We talked for a little bit, *chapt a shmues*. Then

the Rebbe asked, ‘Nu, what brings you here?’ Thinking back now, it’s unbelievable...

“I said that I had gotten a job at Camp Agudah, which was for nine weeks, but the yeshiva only wanted to give me three weeks off. They said that I would need the Rebbe’s permission for more time off. So, I said to the Rebbe, I came to get your permission.

“Now, what would someone else have done in the Rebbe’s position? Three weeks and that’s it!

“But the Rebbe started reasoning with me... You just came to yeshiva, the Rebbe said, you were barely there, and you’re going to leave now? It doesn’t make sense.

“I started arguing, and it was going back and forth. For example, the Rebbe quoted the Mishnah that says that *Shema* precedes *Vehaya im shamoa* because a person must accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven before accepting the yoke of mitzvos. The Rebbe didn’t simply dismiss what I said—he kept reasoning with me!

“The Midrash says that Shlomo Hamelech, who was the wisest person on earth, was even wiser than the fools. What does that mean? Obviously he was smarter than the fools. The explanation is that a fool believes that he’s the smartest person in the world; Shlomo Hamelech was so

# L'CHAIM WITH THE REBBE

“The Rebbe would often ask me to say *l'chaim*. On one occasion, something unusual happened:

“It was Shabbos Mevorchim Nissan 5713 or 5714. In the middle of the farbrengen, an elderly Chossid from Eretz Yisroel showed up, and people called him over to take a seat at the table with the *baalei batim*. For whatever reason, another one of the elder Chassidim felt that this person didn't belong taking a prominent place at the Rebbe's farbrengen, and he made a sharp remark—even trying to physically pull the guest away from his place.

“The Rebbe's face turned white; I've never seen the Rebbe like that. Everything got quiet, but the Rebbe didn't say anything directly about the incident. The subject of the next *sicha* was on the *possuk* לא תתעב כי גר היית בארצו—*מצרי*—you shall not hate an Egyptian for you sojourned in his land. Regardless of what happened you don't embarrass a person like that, especially someone who has esteemed heritage. The Rebbe continued speaking sharply about *yetzias Mitzrayim* and how it is important for every person. It is *noigea* to me, the Rebbe said, pointing to himself; it's *noigea* to my brother-in-law, pointing to Rashag; to Reb Shmuel, to Reb Shmuel Zalmanov, to Rabbi Zalman Gurary. דארטן שטייט שוחט'ס זון, וואס מיינט אז ס'איז נישט נוגע צו עם, ס'איז נוגע צו עם אויכעט—There stands Shochet's son who thinks that it doesn't apply to him, but it applies to him as well!

“The Rebbe was putting me together with a group with whom I had no connection. After that, he turned to me and said אפשר וועסטו שוין אפער וועסטו שוין?—Maybe you will finally say *l'chaim*?! with a pretty stern tone (as opposed to the very friendly tone I was accustomed to).

“In the later years, the Rebbe wouldn't tell me to say *l'chaim* as frequently; I would generally say *l'chaim* on my own. But sometimes out of the blue the Rebbe would still remind me.

“Usually, I didn't have anything in mind when I said *l'chaim*—I just said *l'chaim*. But there was one time around 5748-5749 when I did have a *bracha* in mind. I had a good seat, right in front of the Rebbe, but when I raised my cup to say *l'chaim*, the Rebbe answered to my right, he answered to my left, behind me, in front of me, all over—but he seemed to skip my place. I didn't understand what was happening. I felt that the Rebbe was intentionally skipping me.

“They were singing *Zol Shoin Zein Di Geula*, and suddenly the Rebbe stood up and started encouraging the singing with his hands very strongly, with a serious expression on his face. Everyone else stood up as well, and looking at the Rebbe's face I felt rotten inside. Here it's bothering the Rebbe so much that '*zol shoin zein di geula, Moshiach zol shoin kummen*,' and I have in mind some personal thing. I really felt embarrassed.

“At that moment, the Rebbe sat down, looked at me, and said *l'chaim*.”

wise that he was even able to make a fool realize that he was a fool.

“The Rebbe dealt with me similarly. He kept reasoning with me, and the *yechidus* lasted for about a half hour (!) going back and forth. Eventually, I realized that he wouldn't budge. I knew a few Yiddish words, and I said, 'Nu! *Farfalen*—it's a lost case.' The Rebbe started laughing and said, נישט פארפאלן, ס'איז געפונען—it's not lost, it's found.”

In the end, Immanuel went to Camp Agudah after Yud-Beis Tammuz, but he stayed for six weeks instead of three. Being that he hadn't come at the beginning of the summer, he was a rotating counselor without a



THE SCHOCHET FAMILY IN TORONTO. IMMANUEL IS SECOND FROM LEFT.

designated bunk. As a result, and also because the mentality of the American kids was alien to him, he didn't have a good time.

As soon as he got back from camp in the month of Av, he went into *yechidus* for his birthday. "This was the third *yechidus* in a few months! By this time I was more into things, and I went to *mikveh*. As soon as I came in, the Rebbe said, 'אה שלום עליכם! נו ס'האט, זיך געלוינט צו האנדלען זיך נאך א וואך און זיך געלוינט צו האנדלען זיך נאך א וואך—Shalom Aleichem! So, was it worth negotiating for another week and another week...?'

"It was as if he was saying, you had a miserable time, so what were you arguing about? It wasn't worth it..."

"If only I would have had the *sechel* to appreciate everything... It was unheard of for *bochurim* to receive letters from the Rebbe, especially signed by hand. If I would have had the *sechel*, I would have been able to take advantage... On the other hand, if I would have had the *sechel* I wouldn't have had the *kiruvim*, so... But the relationship with the Rebbe is what kept me in Lubavitch; if not,

I would have run away from there. Throughout the years, the Rebbe took a direct personal interest in me. In the summer, when I was home, the Rebbe would sometimes send me letters enjoining me to study even when it was voluntary, and other *mussardike* messages like that."

## A TIKKUN

In Adar 5714\*, Immanuel got into some trouble with the yeshiva, together with a few other *bochurim*. They were kicked out of the secular part of the yeshiva, and one of the *bochurim* was so upset that he transferred to Torah Vodaas. Immanuel wanted to do so as well, and he wrote a letter to the Rebbe detailing how he felt that the yeshiva wasn't right for someone with his outlook and background, and that he was going to leave, as his friend already had.

A week later, there was a letter waiting for him in *mazkirus*. Most of the letter was responding to his general complaints about the yeshiva; the Rebbe wrote that the *yetzer hara*



RABBI CHAIM MORDECHAI AIZIK HODAKOV, IMMANUEL'S UNCLE.

didn't want him to be in Chassidische yeshiva which was why it was fighting against it. It also addressed the incident that had occurred.

Immanuel sent another letter to the Rebbe, reiterating his version of the story, and within a few days he received a response. The Rebbe responded to his letter and again emphasized the importance of being in a Chassidische yeshiva. The Rebbe also gave him a *tikkun* for what he had done, especially now that he had more time in the afternoons having been expelled from secular studies: to learn masechta Taanis; to learn the first 11 *prakim* of Derech Chayim and know the content well; and to observe the fast days of *Bahab* following Pesach, by fasting half days. This was suggested for all four of the *bochurim* who were involved.

Immanuel passed on the message to his friends.

"The previous year I had returned home for Pesach," Rabbi Schochet related. "This year I decided to see how Pesach was like with the Rebbe. My parents were very upset, so I made up a whole excuse that my papers were being held up in the consulate... My brother decided to stay as well, with the same excuse.

"Erev Pesach arrived, and I went by the Rebbe to receive matzos. The Rebbe smiled, wished me a 'kosher

and *freilichen* Pesach,' and asked me if I had begun studying Derech Chayim yet. I said that I hadn't, but I would begin after Pesach. The Rebbe shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He let it go.

"I spent the *seder* with Rabbi Hodakov; we finished the *seder* early and went to the Rebbe's *seder*. The meal had just ended, and the second half of the *seder* was beginning. The Rebbe saw me, and made eye contact. After the *seder* ended, the Rebbe walked down the steps [from the *seder*, which was upstairs in 770], and everyone was singing *Keili Ata* from the pouring back of *kos shel Eliyahu*. The Rebbe was encouraging the singing with his hands, and went into his room. Normally, he would go into his room and that's it. This time he put down his siddur, came out again, and kept going with his hands, as we were all standing around there.

"The Rebbe looked around, I saw eye contact, and by the way he looked at me I felt that something was coming. The Rebbe started saying a *sicha*: first about Pesach in general, then about the significance of a Chassidish yeshiva. Looking at me

with a smile, the Rebbe went on to say that there are some people who think that they are a *yekke*, and aren't *shayach* to Chassidus, but they should know it's *shayach* to them as well, and so on. The Rebbe also mentioned the incident. The Rebbe said that he had already given a *tikkun teshuva*, part of which was to study Derech Chayim. Now Derech Chayim, the Rebbe said, isn't *yom-tov'dik*, so I don't have the heart to tell them to start right away, yet it would be a *glaiचे zach*, the correct thing to do.

They started singing again. The Rebbe kept looking in my direction, but I'm not one to start singing and dancing and jumping up and down. The Rebbe kept looking at me, very sharply.

Suddenly the Rebbe came over to me, and pulled me by my jacket into the circle, with him.

After the dancing, I sat down together with the father of one of the *bochurim*, and we began studying Derech Chayim.

## COLLEGE

In 5715\*, Immanuel was getting ready to graduate from Bedford and

Dean, and the topic of college came on the table. It was very important to his parents that he get a degree, so although it wasn't particularly important to him, he decided to enroll in Yeshiva University, where he could pursue a degree while studying Torah as well.

Towards the end of the year, he was involved in another incident of troublemaking that caused him to be expelled from the secular part of Bedford and Dean, and he didn't have all the necessary credits for college.

The next farbrengen was a week or two later. Yud-Beis/Yud-Gimmel Tammuz were on Shabbos and Sunday, so there was a farbrengen on Shabbos and then a big farbrengen on Sunday night. During the Shabbos farbrengen the Rebbe dedicated an entire *sicha* to the topic of secular studies. Although the Friediker Rebbe was against going to college, the Rebbe said, he still took care of the people who did go to college, arranging for them to receive matzos for Pesach, kosher food, and their other religious needs. Still, the Rebbe emphasized, the principle was not to go to college.

The Rebbe continued and said that there is mercy from above, and they made going to college ever more difficult: One needs to pass exams and get a diploma; and if that wasn't enough, they recently added an entrance test to be accepted to college, in addition to the requirement to pass high school.

For some people, the Rebbe said, even that is not enough, and obstacles were placed in their path from above. "Without spelling it out," Rabbi Schochet said, "the Rebbe was alluding to my story. Those who knew what happened understood what the Rebbe meant. It was quite a strong *sicha*."

"Now, most of the students in my class in Bedford and Dean were not from Lubavitcher families. It was a good yeshiva—there weren't even so



IMMANUEL GIVES A SPEECH AT THE KEVER OF REBBI SHIMON BEN YOCHAI ON LAG B'OMER 5718.



**"IMMANUEL," THE REBBE SAYS TO ME. "YOU ARE ALSO WALKING AROUND WITH THOUGHTS OF HOW TO SET YOURSELF UP AFTER LABOR DAY. SAY L'CHAIM AND FORGET ABOUT IT."**

many yeshivos in New York those days—and more than half of the class was planning to go to college. After that farbrengen, Rabbi Mentlik gathered all the boys except for me, and told them that he wanted to report to the Rebbe before the farbrengen on Sunday night that they had decided not to go to college. He was afraid to tackle me after what had happened...

"Most of the class decided not to go.

"After Yud-Beis Tammuz I wrote to the Rebbe that I had heard the *sicha*, but I had not made up my mind yet about what to do, because the school had acted unfairly with me. Meanwhile I was going to attend public school in the evenings to make up for my missing course in Geometry, and afterwards I would take an entrance exam to have in the bank, since I was still planning on attending YU. I wrote that I hoped that there was no *kepeida* on me.



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“The Rebbe wrote back: ‘אין מצדי ח”ו: ענין של קפידה, אלא שמחוייב אני וכל אחד מישראל, שכשרואה מישהו עושה דבר שאינו מתאים בשבילו לעשות כל מה שביכולתי כן למנוע אותו מלעשות כן—There is no *kepeida* on my part, *chas veshalom*. But when I see that someone is doing something that is not good for him, I have the obligation, like every Jew, to do everything in my ability to stop him.”

Immanuel went ahead with the evening classes, passed the exam, and



he was scheduled to take the entrance exam for college at the end of the month of Av. During the farbrengen on Chof Av, out of the blue the Rebbe began speaking about the Rambam in Hilchos Deos that it is better for a person to live in the forests and deserts than to expose himself to an environment that is harmful for him... “From the way the Rebbe spoke, the way I heard it, it was addressed directly to me, ברחל בתך הקטנה (in unmistakable terms).

“I realized that I couldn’t do it. After the farbrengen I wrote to the Rebbe that I had decided to stay. I had already paid the \$50 fee for the entrance exam, a good chunk of money at the time, but I didn’t take it. To my parents I had to make up a whole story that something was delayed, and so on... But that was it. I stayed in yeshiva.”

## READING INTO THOUGHTS

“Afterwards I started thinking to myself: Why was the Rebbe so passionate about it? Yud-Beis Tammuz, Chof Av, letters... Probably it’s because of the direct *kiruv* that the Rebbe had shown me, such an open personal relationship—something that didn’t exist in general, and everyone knew about it. If I went to college, it would kind of be a *patch in ponim*—the Rebbe put so many *kochos* into me, and I’m going to college. I was also Rabbi Hodakov’s nephew...”

“So I decided that the problem was that it had been too public. I would have to do it quietly: I would go home for the summer the following year, and then I simply would not come back. No one would even notice it. The Yeshiva Ner Yisrael in Baltimore has a deal with the University that you can get credit for studying in the yeshiva, and I would go there, especially since my brother Ezra was in Baltimore at the time.

I didn’t breathe a word about my decision in yeshiva nor at home; not a soul on earth knew about it.

“Comes Shavuot. The Rebbe speaks a whole *sicha* about people going to the country, and how it’s another world: people aren’t careful about *tefilla betzibur*, people aren’t careful about *tznius*; it’s kind of *helker shmelker*—until Labor Day, and he made fun of Labor Day as this magical date when suddenly everything goes back to normal. It was a very strong *mussar sicha* about what goes on in the summer.

“The *sicha* finishes, the *olam* starts singing a *niggun*, and suddenly I notice that he’s looking at me with a big smile on his face. I thought, *oy vey, what now? I haven’t been in trouble for quite some time!*

“People begin noticing that the Rebbe keeps staring at me, and I keep staring back, and the singing stops. “Immanuel,” the Rebbe says to me. דו טראגסט זיך אויך ארום מיט מחשבות ווי אזוי צו מתקן זיין נאך לייבאר דיי, זאג לחיים און פארגעס וועגען דעם.—You are also walking around with thoughts of how to set yourself up after Labor Day. Say *lchaim* and forget about it’.

“I really didn’t understand what the Rebbe was saying. I wasn’t *thinking* about it: I had made up my decision at the beginning of the year—and that was it, finished! I looked towards the Rebbe with a puzzled look on my face. The Rebbe kept looking at me, and smiling. Then he said, ‘ס’וועט דאך סיי ווי, נישט ווערן, איז וואס דארפסטו זיך ארומטראגן מיט די מחשבות.—It’s not going to happen anyway, so why do you have to walk around with these thoughts?’

I’m looking at the Rebbe, and then it suddenly hits me; kind of like he put the thought in my head. I just had to burst out laughing. The Rebbe told me to say *lchaim*, and that was that. **T**

*To be continued in Part II.*

1. See JEM’s *Through the Veil*, vol. 1.