לעילוי נשמת מרת **חנה לאה** בת הרה"ת ר' **שמעון** ע"ה ברוק נלב"ע ז' טבת ה'תשע"א 'ת'נ'צ'ב'ה

נדפס על ידי ולזכות משפחתה שיחיו משפחות **ברוק, באנון, ודייטש.** ניו יארק. פלארידא. מאנטאנא. מאנטרעאל.

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Throughout the rich history of Chassidus Chabad, our way of life has produced new terms such as *oved*, *maskil*, *tomim* and shliach—all developed before *dor hashvi'i*. In our generation, the title "*tankist*" became a badge of honor and an indication of a sacred duty.

We are all familiar with the concept of *mivtzoim* and take for granted that mobile homes decorated with colorful signs and equipped with loudspeakers blaring *chassidishe* music is the best way to bring Yiddishkeit on the spot to people on the go. Even more obvious is that these vehicles are called Mitzvah Tanks.

But this was not always the case. Here is how Mitzvah Tanks became the spearhead of the Rebbe's war against assimilation and how the *tankistim* became the proud foot soldiers on the front lines in the campaign to bring Moshiach.<sup>1</sup>

KISL

שאו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה נהרא עליך

## Response to Inconceivable Tragedy

It was a tense time for the global Jewish community, months after the Yom Kippur War and days after the terrorist attack in a high school in Ma'alot, Eretz Yisrael, on 23 Iyar  $5734^*$  which left 22 teenagers dead r"l. The Jewish world was reeling in shock from the tragedy and during the farbrengen of Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar the Rebbe spoke a *sicha* about the need to strengthen the protection of Yidden throughout the world especially in Eretz Yisroel—through five specific *mivtzoim*.

**Tefillin:** As the *navi* states, when the nations of the world will see that the name of Hashem is upon the Yidden (the *tefillin shel rosh*) they will fear you.

**Torah:** Encourage every Yid to learn Torah every day, as the Gemara states that Torah is a protection and salvation.

**Mezuzah:** Kosher mezuzos on the doorposts of the home serve as a protection for all of the inhabitants of the home wherever they may be.

**Tzedakah:** Encourage Yidden to give tzedakah every day and to have a tzedakah *pushka* at home. Chazal declare that when you take care of the poor, Hashem takes care of you. **Bayis Malei Sefarim:** Having *sifrei kodesh* in the home strengthens the spiritual security of the home.

The next day, Erev Shavuos, the Rebbe unexpectedly went to the Ohel—something that had never happened before. This came as a surprise to everyone including the Rebbe's secretaries, especially since the Rebbe had been to the Ohel three days earlier.

On the way to the Ohel the Rebbe started editing the *sicha* about the five *mivtzoim* so that those going on *tahalucha* on Shavuos should speak in all the shuls about the *mivtzoim*. Upon reaching the Ohel the Rebbe asked Rabbi Krinsky to call the Vaad Lehafatzas Sichos from the public payphone to notify them of his edits.

While in the Ohel the Rebbe finished editing the *sicha* and gave Rabbi Krinsky the final draft with instructions to relay all the changes to the Vaad immediately. Thus, the *sicha* was edited by the Rebbe and then published less than a day after it was said, in time for Yom Tov.<sup>2</sup>

On the day after Shavuos, Rabbi Shneur Zalman Garelik (the rav of Kfar Chabad), Rabbi Yechiel Meir Yehuda Goldberg, Rabbi Yeshaya Weiss, and Ms. Nechama Rosenberg (Rabbi Garelik's great niece and a *kalla* at the time) were



killed in a terrible car accident while traveling to Kfar Chabad from a wedding in Yerushalayim. News of the horrible tragedy reached 770 on Motzei Shavuos and everyone was terribly shaken.

During the farbrengen the next Shabbos the Rebbe cried bitterly about the recent tragedies and said there is no logical explanation for them.

"Since these episodes defy comprehension, we must respond by doing mivtzoim in a way that also transcends all logic. Although a Yid naturally wants to learn Torah and daven at great length, nevertheless he goes out into the street to encourage another Yid to place a tzedakah pushka and mezuzah in his home, and this will bring Moshiach quicker."<sup>3</sup>

#### Lubavitch Hits the Streets

For many years, especially since the onset of Mivtza Tefillin before the Six Day War in 5727, it was routine for *bochurim* to venture out on *mivtzoim* when there was no *seder hayeshiva*. These activities were coordinated and supported by Tzach, which was responsible for all outreach work in the New York area.<sup>4</sup>

After the tremendous *sichos* from the Rebbe during the recent farbrengens about *mivtzoim*, Reb Dovid Raskin—the *menahel* of Tzach as well as a member of the *hanhala* of the yeshiva in 770—suggested that this was not enough. A rotation of groups of *bochurim* needed to be on the streets doing *mivtzoim* every day.

On Wednesday, 15 Sivan, the Rebbe returned from the Ohel and held a surprise farbrengen. The purpose of the farbrengen was so that the Rebbe can directly communicate the importance of strengthening the *mivtzoim* to those listening from afar via live hookup. Everyone that would get more involved in *mivtzoim*, wherever they were in the world, would receive one bill of the local currency from the Rebbe.

Many *anash* joined the *mivtzoim* activities and Tzach's main office was busy 24 hours a day. Brochures were distributed about the importance of checking mezuzos and installing kosher ones. Dozens of people would call Tzach's phone number (which was printed on the brochure) requesting home visits to check their mezuzos and a team of *bochurim* was tasked with doing the house calls.

*Mivtzoim* was reaching a fevered pitch, but there was much more to come.

One day that week, as the *bochurim* were out on the streets doing *mivtzoim*, their activities were interrupted by a heavy rain. Several *bochurim* came up with the idea to rent moving trucks and outfit them with a table and two benches. This way people can be invited onto



the trucks to wrap tefillin, undisturbed by the elements.

On Erev Shabbos, 17 Sivan, two yellow trucks blaring *chassidishe* music from loudspeakers left 770, manned by groups of *bochurim* to do *mivtzoim* in Manhattan and Queens. The trucks were such a success that by Sunday, 19 Sivan, four trucks were parked in front of 770. When the Rebbe arrived that morning, the loudspeakers started playing Harav Levi Yitzchok's *hakafos niggun* and rolled away. Reb Dovid Raskin

ONE OF MANY REPORTS SENT TO THE REBBE RECOUNTING OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE MITZVAH TANKS.

reported to the Rebbe that on that day, 10,000 brochures were distributed...

In response the Rebbe wrote: נת' ות"ח ת"ח. ואשרי חלקם. ויה"ר שיקוים בכל המשתתפים במבצעים אלה - האנשים והנשים והטף -שליט"א: מי שיש לו מנה רוצה כו' ארבע מאות וכו'. אזכיר עה"צ.

I recieved [the report] and many thanks, many thanks. Fortunate is their lot. May it be Hashem's will that it be fulfilled by all those involved in these mivtzoim—men, women and children—shlita: He who has one hundred wants [two hundred] etc. four hundred etc. I will mention it at the tziyun.

In addition the Rebbe notified the relevant parties that 90% of the budget for the *mivtzoim* will be covered by the special *mivtzoim* account under the auspices of the *mazkirus*.

## **Tanks Against Assimilation**

On Sunday evening, 26 Sivan, upon exiting 770 the Rebbe looked intently at the five yellow trucks parked outside in preparation for the next



RASKIN FAMILY ARCHIVES

### Why "Tank"?

On numerous occasions the Rebbe explained the significance of the term "tank" in connection with *mivtzoim* mobiles.

> A tank is designed to protect its occupants from the enemy and also enables them to conquer the enemy. So too the Mitzvah Tank is meant to protect from assimilation as well as conquer assimilation; to reach those that have already assimilated and bring them back to Yiddishkeit.<sup>5</sup>

> The purpose of a tank is to enable soldiers to reach all types of frontiers. To conquer desert terrain one needs a tank with tracks because regular tires sink in the sand. If there is a ditch, the tank can ride over it. If there is a barrier of any type, the tank is heavy enough to destroy it.

So too the Mitzvah Tank is able to reach Yidden in all types of places and stages.<sup>6</sup>



day's *mivtzoim*, decorated with banners depicting tefillin and a mezuzah.

Minutes later, Rabbi Krinsky, who had just driven the Rebbe home, returned to 770 with the following instruction from the Rebbe:

In the Rebbe's library there was a painting by the artist Baruch Nachshon depicting an army tank with tefillin straps as tracks and the box of the *shel rosh* as the turret, followed by many more army tanks. Above it read, "הי נקרא עליך ויראו ממך "ה' (see photo).

The Rebbe instructed that this painting be copied onto large banners and attached to the *mivtzoim* trucks. The *bochurim* leading the project were elated. The Rebbe had officially addressed this new endeavour and even given instructions for it!

A few days later, Rabbi Krinsky invited Mr. Irving Spiegel of the New York Times to 770 to witness the *mivtzoim* trucks parade away in the morning. The Rebbe told Rabbi Krinsky to tell Mr. Spiegel, "These are the tanks against assimilation." The *mivtzoim* trucks became "Mitzvah Tanks" and the *bochurim* working from them became "*tankistim*"—titles handpicked by the Rebbe.

Several days later there was a beautiful article in the New York Times about the Mitzvah Tanks and many other media outlets picked up the story. It was discussed on the radio and the new phenomenon was making a big splash in the entire city.

#### **Conquer New York!**

On Tuesday, 28 Sivan, Reb Dovid Raskin reported to the Rebbe that on Motzei Shabbos there will be a community meeting about *mivtzoim* to encourage *anash* to participate in *mivtzoim* and to donate money as well.

Almost immediately the Rebbe responded: הרי עד אז יכולת ואפשר המבצעים שליט"א לכבוש נ.י. וסביבותי' ובדרכי נועם ושלום.

Until then, those on mivtzoim can conquer New York and its surroundings, in a pleasant and peaceful manner.

The unique expression in this note infused the bochurim with unprecedented enthusiasm.

On Shabbos Parshas Korach, 2 Tammuz, the Rebbe gazed at the tanks parked outside 770 for a long while as he arrived that morning. Then there was a surprise farbrengen in the afternoon.8

"The reason for this farbrengen is in connection with the fact that there is a tremendous involvement and 'koch' in the mivtzoim, and the more I will speak about it, the more it will increase and strengthen this enthusiasm. It has already worked and there are those that have worked on *mivtzoim* with great energy and they merited to have an extra farbrengen. A farbrengen on such a Shabbos is uncommon, and it is, in addition to a thanks for

## **Big City vs. Small City**

There are *tankistim* that operate in big cities where there are many people and the mivtzoim cause a big shturem; and there are those that operate in faraway remote areas where there are fewer people to work with and even less people that appreciate what they are doing.

Notwithstanding the incredible merits of the big city tankistim, there are several advantages to the small city tankistim.

Firstly, the tremendous *shturem* of the big city allows the yetzer hara to entice the tankist to take personal pride in his work, be satisfied with his accomplishments thus far and fuel his gaava. This doesn't happen in the small city.

In addition, since there are fewer people working with the remote Yidden, this type of work illustrates how every single Yid is an entire world. This needs to be the זהיר טפי-where we focus extra care and concern.

(Sichos Kodesh 5734 vol. 2, p. 280)



their work, an encouragement for the future that they should increase in *mivtzoim* more than has been done until now.

"Everyone must commit themselves to get more involved in *mivtzoim*, and if one has not made the commitment yet, do it now. If even one

#### **Out of the Ordinary**

When *mivtzoim* is done from a "tank" it creates an unusual public scene and has greater impact. Similar to זכר ליציאת מצרים, at the Pesach seder we do unusual things to quip the interest of the children. So too when dealing with "spiritual children," their protective shell can be so thick that the only way to reach them is by doing something unusual.

When he or she sees a vehicle, decorated in signs with Jewish themes and messages, with music blaring from loudspeakers and announcements inviting them to step up and do a mitzvah (itself a novelty to this Yid), they start to ask "Ma nishtana? What is this?" or at least they stand back in wonderment, but their facial expression indicates that they want to engage.

Sichos Kodesh 5736 vol. 2 page 533.

#### טנק – טהרות נזיקין קדשים

The English word "tank" when spelled in Hebrew letters is tes, nun, kuf. These are the acronym of the three *sedorim* in Shas: Taharos, Nezikin and Kadshim.

These represent an important lesson for those going on *mivtzoim*.

First, one must be "tahor"—have pure intentions when going on a mission to influence other Yidden. Then it is possible to influence a Yid in "Nezikin"-to avoid sins; and then to influence the Yid in "Kadshim"-to become more involved in kedusha—Torah and mitzvos.

However, one should not wait until their intentions are entirely pure before being involved in mivtzoim. Get involved right away and the purest of intentions will come eventually.7

### "He is a Tankist!"

On Shiva Asar B'Tammuz, one of the *bochurim* that was supposed to go on a Mitzvah Tank was not feeling well and his father wrote to the Rebbe that he suggests his son should not go on the tank that day. The Rebbe responded, "He is a *tankist*!"

The *tankistim* worked long hours. The tanks would drive away from 770 at 10:00 a.m. and return only after *shkia*, which in the summer meant 9 to 10 hours on the streets. Aside for the tank leaders, the groups of *bochurim* manning the tanks were determined by a rotation.

"During that time period we barely slept," recalls Rabbi Yosef Gopin. "Yossi and Eli Friedman were in charge of the banners. Some of the *bochurim* in charge of the tanks were Yosef Weingarten, Yosef Gurevitch, Yossi Hecht, Shmuel Greisman, Sholom Duchman and Shmuel Lipsker. Shmuel Greisman's job was to determine where *bochurim* would go in the city. He knew the city very well. Some of the permanent tank leaders were Yossi Hecht and Yossi Gerlitzky.

"In the beginning it wasn't easy to have all the arrangements in place. But all the *bochurim* were very inspired and wanted to go on the tanks. The *zal* was packed for *seder Chassidus* in the morning and then those manning the tanks that day davened Shacharis and left. *Seder Chassidus* at night was also a full house.

"Even *bochurim* who were challenged in certain areas of *yiras Shamayim* got a big boost from being *tankistim*."

"Every day we submitted a detailed report of everything that happened on the tank," says Rabbi Yosef Gerlitzky. "Reb Dovid would prepare a proper *duch* of all the tanks for the Rebbe.

"One day, our tank was stationed near Stony Brook University and a student who had previously been in yeshiva with us helped us with *mivtzoim*. Next to the report of our tank, which included this detail the Rebbe wrote 'ראיתי ות"ח. להחזיר - Return [the note to them]: I have seen it. Thanks.' Reb Dovid was elated and farbrenged the entire night explaining that when the Rebbe writes 'ראיתי' it is something very special."

more Yid will commit to doing *mivtzoim*, the entire farbrengen was worthwhile."

The next day, seven tanks rolled away from 770 to go to battle.

#### The General and his Troops

Monday, 4 Tammuz, as the Rebbe's car pulled up to 770, music started playing from the loudspeakers and groups of *bochurim* stood next to their respective tanks singing along. The Rebbe smiled broadly at the *bochurim* and waved his hand in encouragement. Reaching the doorway of 770 the Rebbe turned around and continued encouraging the singing, and waited as the tanks began driving down Eastern Parkway, gazing at them until they were several blocks away.

Seeing the Rebbe standing in front of 770 seeing off his troops as they rolled into battle in the tanks against assimilation was so special, that by Thursday a large crowd had gathered to witness it. At the Yud-Beis Tammuz farbrengen the Rebbe announced that all those involved in *mivtzoim* will receive a five dollar bill in connection with the five *mivtzoim*, and at the farbrengen on Shabbos Parshas Balak the Rebbe instructed all the *tankistim* to say a special *l'chaim*.

"They should say *lchaim* on behalf of the *tankistim* that are far away, their relatives and friends, and it should be לרחיים לברכה ולהמשכה"

## **Tankistim Even Off the Tanks**

By summer 5734\* it had become routine that, in addition to daily *mivtzoim*, the tanks would leave 770 in a parade every Monday and Thursday. This continued throughout the summer until Tishrei. At times tanks would travel to outlying towns and cities in lieu of Merkos Shlichus. In fact the Rebbe said that going on the tanks during the summer would be considered as Merkos Shlichus.

During the month of Elul the Rebbe continued emphasizing in *sichos* and letters the need

# **Riding Side by Side**

Rabbi Yosef Shmuel Gerlitzky recalls a unique episode that occurred during the summer of 5734\*:

Our tank had been stationed in the Bronx and we were driving back to 770 approaching Atlantic Avenue, with music blaring from the tank, when one *bochur* suddenly realized that the Rebbe's car was driving adjacent to the tank, and the Rebbe was inside returning from the Ohel!

"The Rebbe is right next to us," he exclaimed. We all clamored to the opening of the truck and the Rebbe looked at us with a broad smile and started waving his hands in encouragement to the music. We all started dancing and singing and the Rebbe continued waving his hand until Rabbi Krinsky turned onto Linden Boulevard and we continued on to Atlantic Avenue.

It was a really special moment.

#### I Am Going With You!

True to form, as the Mitzvah Tanks were taking the Jewish world by storm there were naysayers from various communities. Days before Yud Shevat 5735\* an individual published a scathing article against Lubavitch and called the *tankistim* a "terror brigade."

During the Yud Shevat farbrengen the Rebbe spoke a very strong sicha of encouragement to the tankistim and declared, "I am going with every one of the tankistim! When people mock you, they are mocking me. Just as I am not intimidated by their mockery-though I can't say I enjoy it-you should not be intimidated by it!"

The following Shabbos the Rebbe addressed the issue in a much sharper tone and said, "I [the Rebbe said his own full name] am the one who instructed them to go on the tanks." The Rebbe said this twice and then continued. "I ask no one what to do, and if I need to ask someone I have whom to ask. B'hashgacha pratis I am the 'baal habayis' of Lubavitch, and in Lubavitch there is no terror brigade!"



THE REBBE ENCOURAGES THE FLEET OF MITZVAH TANKS AS THEY EMBARK ON MIVTZOIM TO THE STREETS OF NEW YORK, 7 TAMMUZ 5734\*.



to increase in *mivtzoim*, and the tanks were operating to full capacity.

On Chai Elul, at the conclusion of the farbrengen the Rebbe announced that he would distribute dollars for tzedakah to all the participants... through the *tankistim*!

Lest one should think that the title *tankist* is reserved for one who is currently manning a tank, the Rebbe clarified that it was much more than that.

"Those fortunate to be *tankistim* and over the past few days were involved in influencing Yidden with regard to the five *mivtzoim*, should come up now and receive packs of dollars to distribute to everyone here... Where are the *tankistim*?"<sup>9</sup>

From then on, the *tankistim* (which came to include all those who were involved in *mivtzoim* 

on a consistent basis) were regularly privileged to receive and distribute the Rebbe's dollars during the weekday farbrengens. In the 5740s\*, this became the custom at every single weekday farbrengen and at times after weekday *sichos*.

Frequently during the distribution, when an elderly Chossid or a child—who did not fit the profile of a typical tankist—would come by, the Rebbe would ask, "Are you a *tankist*?" These distributions were a consistent and public display of the Rebbe's great affection for the *tankistim*.

During *hakafos* on Simchas Torah 5735\*, the Rebbe dedicated a *hakafa* to the tankistim.

Throughout the year of 5735\*, although bochurim and anash continued investing much energy in *mivtzoim*, the official Mitzvah Tank parades only occurred in the weeks leading up



THE REBBE DISTRIBUTES DOLLARS TO THE TANKISTIM FOR THE FIRST TIME, CHAI ELUL 5734.

# **Financial Support is not Enough**

Although the Rebbe had informed Tzach that the Mivtzoim Fund under the auspices of *mazkirus* would provide 90% of the budget for the Mitzvah Tanks, Reb Dovid Raskin worked tirelessly to procure the necessary funding from donors.

"Reb Dovid was the life behind the entire project," recalls Rabbi Sholom Duchman. "He was responsible for the finances of this epic *mivtzoim* campaign—renting the trucks and buying fuel and printing literature—and he never told us that there wasn't enough money.

"I remember sitting in his office a few hours before the Yud-Beis Tammuz farbrengen and Reb Dovid was in such an uplifted mood as he continued calling one potential donor after another."

A member of *anash* wrote a letter to the Rebbe requesting a *bracha* for *hatzlacha* in a new business venture, and he was instructed by the Rebbe to invest in purchasing a Mitzvah Tank. Likewise, the Rebbe told someone that if he has an opportunity to sponsor an entire tank he should not forgo the opportunity.

During that time period the Rebbe asked a certain Chossid if he was involved in *mivtzoim* and he responded that he donated money for it. The Rebbe said, "It's not enough to be Zevulun (a supporter), you need to also be a Yissachar (active participant)."

### Seder Hayeshiva

A *bochur* from Eretz Yisroel wrote a letter to the Rebbe inquiring how to balance consistent *mivtzoim* and the *sidrei hayeshiva*. The Rebbe responded on Lag Baomer 5735\*:

תלמידי הישיבה שבאו מאה"ק והיתר הרמב"ם בזה, המפורסם בס' יד החזקה, מובן <u>ופשוט</u>, אשר לשבת וללמוד בשקידה בשמירת <u>כל</u> סדרי הישיבה בדיוק. ובנוגע לבחורים המקומיים, לגביהם יש לזה מקום, אבל צריכים לברר דעת ההנהלה בזה.

Regarding the *talmidim* from the Holy Land, which the famous *heter* of the Rambam in Sefer Yad Hachazaka for [them leaving Eretz Yisrael is known], it is understood and <u>obvious</u> that they must sit and learn diligently, perfectly keeping <u>all</u> the *sedarim* of the yeshiva. Regarding the local *bochurim*, there is place for it [for them to be more involved in the *mivtzoim* -Ed] but it is necessary to clarify the opinion of the *hanhala* in this matter.



A MITZVAH TANK PARADE PREPARES TO LEAVE FROM 770.

to special occasions such as Yud-Tes Kisley, Yud Shevat and Purim, and a grand parade of 18 Mitzvah Tanks rolled away from 770 on Lag Baomer.

It was during the winter that everyone realized it was impossible to convince Yidden to enter the freezing yellow trucks for anything, so it was decided to rent mobile homes with proper heating. And from then on the mobile home became the stereotypical vehicle associated with the Mitzvah Tanks against assimilation.

### Transforming the Tumult of Rome

Many wonder why it is important to bring Yidden closer to Yiddishkeit through public and noisy methods. Granted, in our generation it is



not proper to isolate oneself in the comfort of the immediate atmosphere of Torah and one must reach out to Yidden and bring them closer. But why must we go out into the streets and make loud announcements about wrapping tefillin, mounting *mezuzos* or giving tzedakah?

The fact that there were bells on the bottom of the Kohen Gadol's *me'il* teaches us a powerful lesson pertinent to our generation. According to all indications we are in the times of עקבתא —at the very bottom of the "*me'il*." When the Kohen Gadol entered the *Beis Hamikdash* to do the *avoda*, the bells at the bottom made a lot of noise, reminiscent of the style of *avodas hateshuva*. In order to bring the people closer to the *Shechina* it must be done in a noisy way.

Additionally, when the secular world around us is doing everything in a loud and tumultuous way, the way to neutralize it is by utilizing noise and tumult for *avodas Hashem*. When we ensure that Yiddishkeit is expressed loudly and proudly, in the very same place where the tumult of secularism thrives, we will merit to hear the loud shofar blast heralding in the *geula*.<sup>10</sup> **1** 

- 2. Likutei Sichos vol. 13, p. 211.
- 3. Sichos Kodesh 5734 vol. 2, p. 182.
- 4. See Derher Menachem Av 5779 "Uforatzto!"
- 5. Ibid. 5734 p. 268.
- 6. Ibid. p. 279.
- 7. See fn. 2.
- 8. Ibid. p. 231.
- 9. Ibid. p. 424.
- 10. Likkutei Sichos vol. 16 page 341.



THE SUMMER OF 5734\*, "NEWSWEEK," "TIME" AND THREE ARTICLES IN "THE NEW YORK TIMES" COVERED THE TANKS, AS DID "THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE."

Much of the information in this article was gleaned from the panel discussion The Mivtzoim Era (5733-5735) organized by the Vaad Talmidei Hatmimim with Rabbis Yosef Gopin, Yosef Gerlizky, Sholom Duchman and Kasriel Kastel. Additional information comes from the Reb Dovid Raskin Archives, soon to be released in the forthcoming book, ועבדי דוד, Special thanks to Bentzion Pearson and the Raskin family.