

לע"נ
אבינו היקר ר' **בנציון** בן ר' יעקב ע"ה
נלב"ע כ"ח שבט ה'תשפ"א
ת"נ צ"ב ה' *

ולזכות בתנו
הדסה אסתר תחי'
לרגל הגיעה לגיל ששים עשרה היא עונת בת מצוה
כ"ט שבט ה'תשפ"ב

נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' **מנחם ארי'** וזוגתו מרת **עדינה רחל ומשפחתם**
שיחיו לנדא
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THE REBBE'S STAUNCH SOLDIER

REB BENTZION SHEMTOV

For the publication of this article, we were greatly assisted by Rabbi Yossie Shemtov of Tucson, Arizona, who shared his compilation about his grandfather Reb Bentzion with us. All of the information in this feature was culled from his collection, unless noted otherwise.

“Rabbi Shemtov was an extraordinary person, an outstanding example of a true Lubavitcher Chossid.”

These words were written¹ by Mr. Zalmon Jaffe, a close friend of Reb Bentzion “Bentche” Shemtov, shortly after Reb Bentche passed away in 5735*.

“He was a devoted and loyal soldier who carried out the Rebbe’s orders unhesitatingly and without question, with courage, gladness and self-sacrifice. He was the Rebbe’s ‘roving’ ambassador abroad and represented Lubavitch with enormous and good effect. His exemplary conduct, determination and *mesiras nefesh* (self sacrifice) for Jews everywhere enhanced his reputation but, even more so, enhanced the entire Lubavitch movement, too.

“Shemmy, as we affectionately called him, referred to my office as his ‘Manchester HQ.’ He always found plenty of work for me to do. He drove me crazy with wild and preposterous schemes which somehow, in retrospect, always turned out to be such wonderful and inspired notions.

“One perfect example is the time in 1961 when he arrived at my office with an idea that ended up with my phoning a company to charter a flight to New York. This flight ultimately enabled 118 passengers to visit the Rebbe for a ridiculously low price.

“The Rebbe has lost a staunch soldier.”

THE WHITE LINEN SHEET

Reb Bentzion Shemtov was born in Cheshvan of 5662* in the town of Droya, near Minsk, to his parents, Reb Kasriel and Basya. His mother was a descendant of Reb Shalom Shachne, the father of the Tzemach Tzedek.²

During the first years of her marriage, Basya miscarried several times. Hoping for children, she went for a *yechidus* with the Rebbe Rashab who blessed her to have healthy children. He gave two special instructions: The baby should be called Bentzion, and he should be wrapped in a white linen sheet.³

During his childhood, he learned in *cheder* with two close friends, Zalman Droyer and Avrohom Mayorer (Drizin), who lived in the next town over.

When they approached bar mitzvah age, they began to look for a yeshiva. Avrohom’s older brother, Yehudah Leib, was acquainted with graduates of several Lithuanian *yeshivos*, and was unimpressed with their *yiras Shamayim*. Therefore, he suggested that Avrohom go to Lubavitch. The young Bentzion asked his friend to write back about his experience.

Within several months, a letter arrived back in Droya with enthusiastic descriptions of the yeshiva. “You need to come here!”



RABBI PINNY LEW

REB BENTZION SHEMTOV WITH MR. ZALMON JAFFE ON THE MORNING OF THE SECOND CHARTERED FLIGHT TO THE REBBE, 29 SIVAN 5722*.

Reb Avrohom concluded.

He didn’t need more convincing. Bentzion immediately left for Lubavitch, where he was accepted as a student in the year 5675*.

However, his peaceful years in Lubavitch were short lived. The next year, due to the chaos of World War I, the Rebbe Rashab left Lubavitch and the yeshiva left some time later. Over the next few years, as the war turned into a brutal revolution, the yeshiva wandered from place to place.

During those turbulent times, already as a young *bochur*, his unique talents in *askanus* came to light. Under the circumstances, it was occasionally necessary to deal with the authorities. Reb Chatche Feigin, the *menahel* of the yeshiva, chose Reb Bentzion, seeing him as most fitting for the job.⁴

STREET SCENE IN THE TOWN OF DROYA, WHERE RABBI BENTZION GREW UP.

UNTIL THE LAST DROP OF BLOOD

Soon, the Bolsheviks took over the country and began a concentrated campaign to abolish all practice of religion. In response, the Frierdiker Rebbe fought like a lion to preserve *yeshivos*, shuls, *mikvaos* and Jewish institutions all over the Soviet Union.

During a visit to Moscow, the Frierdiker Rebbe called nine Temimim for a fateful meeting. “We swore,” the Frierdiker Rebbe later related about that day, “to be *moser nefesh* for Torah until the last drop of blood. We divided up the work of the entire country, each one taking a region.”⁵

Reb Bentzion was one of those select ten. In a letter from the Frierdiker Rebbe to Reb Menachem

“FOR ANIMALS, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE”

Reb Mendel Futerfas related the following story:

“Chassidus explains that at 20 years old, a person reaches a higher spiritual level, based on the Gemara, *בן עשרים שנה למכור בנכסי אביו*.

“When I was 17 years old, I asked my twenty-year-old friend Reb Bentzion [who later became his brother-in-law] if he felt the difference in being 20. He answered, ‘For a *beheimah* there is no difference between 20 and 30...’

“Many years later, when he reached 70 years of age, I asked if he began to feel it, and he responded, ‘I still haven’t become a *mentch*...’

(*Reb Mendel*, page 251)

Zemba about the *mesiras nefesh* of the Chassidim in Russia, the Frierdiker Rebbe describes Reb Bentche and his work in beautiful words:

“Bentzion is a *bochur*, a *lamdan* and *yarei Shamayim*, with significant talents in learning *nigleh* and Chassidus. He is *boki* in Gemara and many *halachos* of Yoreh Deah and Choshen Mishpat. A great future in learning was predicted for him.

“...When I suggested to a small group of our *talmidim* to take part in the work [of strengthening Yiddishkeit], he was the first to indicate that he wanted to take part. He was assigned to the region of Vohlin [an important Jewish region, today divided between Poland, Belarus and Ukraine] to travel throughout the region and raise awareness with regard to *chadarim*, public Torah classes, kosher *mikvaos* and more.

“For two-and-a-half years, he worked with diligence, establishing many tens of *chadarim*. He gave fiery speeches about Torah learning and about *taharas hamishpacha*, and a new spirit enveloped the entire Vohlin...”⁶

An amazingly detailed description of his work is found in a letter written by Reb Shlomo Yosef Zevin.⁷ This letter was written to Jewish supporters outside the Soviet Union, and describes the work of the Frierdiker Rebbe’s shlichim in great detail. As an example, he cites verbatim a letter the Frierdiker Rebbe had received from Reb Bentche:

“I arrived [in Zhitomir] on 4 Shevat... So far, we organized three small *chadarim* with 36 students. After Shabbos, another three will be established... Several *balebatim* were inspired; they divided up the city and went door to door to ask for monthly donations to support the *chadorim*. At the moment, there is enough money to support teachers for 250 students. I also plan to establish a yeshiva... I have a list of 200 cities in the region



JEM, 102214

THE FRIERDIKER REBBE, CIRCA 5689*.

in which to establish *chadarim*.”

Rabbi Zevin continues to report: “We should note that this messenger also established a yeshiva in Cherkas, and small groups for learning Gemara in Sdeh-Lavan, Tarashtze, Chevnah, and more...”⁸

MAFTIR — A YOUNG BOCHUR?

An account of one fascinating shlichus for the Frierdiker Rebbe was written by Reb Bentche himself.

In 5687*, a large rabbinic conference was planned to be held in Leningrad. “The government supported it,” Reb Bentche explains, “with the intention of creating a wedge between the *chareidi* rabbonim and the liberal rabbonim, as they successfully did amongst the non-Jewish religious clergy.”

Seeing the danger in allowing the government to interfere with the affairs of rabbonim, the Frierdiker Rebbe opposed it. “The Rebbe’s holy opinion was that having a rabbinic conference [in general] was a good thing, but not a public conference.”

However, a number of non-Chabad

“MY SECOND MAZKIR”

In a letter that year, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote:

“May Hashem help me to soon bring over my secretary and confidant Reb Elchonon Marosov, who has been sent to Siberia for the past year-and-a-half (all by my fault) and also my second secretary, Mr. Bentzion Shemtov who was in prison for a year and recently sent to Siberia for three years for the sin of establishing tens of *chadarim* and several *yeshivos*...”

(Igros Kodesh Admur Harayatz vol. 2 pg. 68).

rabbonim, who were wary of the vast support the Frierdiker Rebbe enjoyed from Jews in Russia and from supporters in other countries, saw an opportunity to gain power.⁹ Many unsuspecting rabbonim went along with their plan. A pre-conference was held in Karasten, and Reb Bentche was dispatched by the Frierdiker Rebbe to counter their efforts.

The Jews of Leningrad were asked to send two representatives to the pre-conference. The Frierdiker Rebbe and the *kahal* of the *misnagdim* reached an agreement that they would each send one representative, but the *misnagdim* reneged on the deal and unscrupulously managed to “steal” both places. “Don’t allow the Leningrad representatives to speak at all; let them receive their *schar b’hai alma*, their reward in this world,” was one of the instructions Reb Bentche received from the Frierdiker Rebbe.

“I arrived in Karasten before Shabbos,” he writes. “Many distinguished rabbonim attended, some of whom had served as

rabbonim for over 60 years. I arranged to receive *maftir*; the fact that a young *bochur* received *maftir* only because of his *mishleach* already broke the opposition. The rabbonim Zevin, Zamsky and Gershon Chein [also sent by the Frierdiker Rebbe] arrived on Sunday, and made it clear that ‘the Rebbe and his entourage’ would be controlling the proceedings.”

Through the efforts of Reb Bentche and the others, they managed to scuttle the endeavors of the opposition. Whenever the Leningrad delegates attempted to speak, Reb Bentche and the other Lubavitchers immediately raised a ruckus. They worked hard to explain to all the rabbonim the danger in the large conference, and in the end, the government dropped the entire plan.¹⁰

THE ARREST

In his letter to Reb Menachem Zemba, the Frierdiker Rebbe continues his account about Reb Bentche:

“The Yevseksiya smelled that a hidden hand was creating a massive commotion for Torah... for three months, he felt a shadow following him and counting his footsteps. Nonetheless, being dedicated to his work, he could not bring himself to leave his work.”

Finally, the Yevseksiya caught up with him. In 5687*, as he visited Ovruch to establish a *cheder*, he was caught and arrested. But he was no easy prisoner to deal with.

“While in prison,” writes a friend of his, “he drove the jailers so crazy to allow him to put on tefillin at the right times and so on, that the heads of the secret police called in Chief Rabbi Milikovsky with the hope that he would be able to ‘calm him down.’”¹¹

Somehow, Reb Bentche made a good impression on his jailers and they granted him a temporary release. Despite the restrictions placed on him, he continued his work and was even involved in the efforts to obtain the Frierdiker Rebbe’s release later that year. Before the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia, Reb Bentche made a — totally illegal — trip to see him one last time.

Soon, his actions caught up with him. He was rearrested and sentenced to three years in a distant exile.

By this time, he was engaged to be married to Esther Golda Futerfas, the sister of Reb Mendel. Not willing to wait three years, she traveled to his forsaken place of exile to hold the wedding. A Jewish welder formed a ring out of a metal spoon, the ice in the river was broken for the *mikveh*, and Reb Shmuel Levitin —



REB BENTZION (LEFT) IN HIS YOUTH WITH HIS FRIEND REB DOVID BRAVMAN



REB BENTZION STANDS BEHIND THE REBBE AND REBBETZIN CHANA, DURING THE REBBE'S VISIT TO PARIS, FRANCE IN 5707*.

who was exiled to the same village — was the *mesader kiddushin*.

Despite the suffering, Reb Bentche never complained.

“His toes were frostbitten because of the severe Siberian cold,” writes Zalmon Jaffe, “and he had to wear specially made boots. This did not stop him from walking thousands of miles on the Rebbe’s business and he was, nevertheless, always cheerful and constantly saw the bright side of things. For example, his daughter Frieda (Sudak) was once criticizing his Siberian exile, denouncing the Soviet authorities for their cruelty. Rabbi Shemtov rebuked her. He pointed out that the cold weather was good for his asthma! In any case, he continued,

Siberia was preferable to being called up to serve in the Russian Army.”

In a letter to Reb Bentzion’s father, the Frierdiker Rebbe lauds Reb Bentzion’s efforts, and blesses his father that soon his son will be released, and be able to resume his activities in an ever stronger effort!¹²

TRUE AHAVAS YISROEL

Upon returning from exile, Reb Bentche continued to use his talents for holy work. In those days, many Chassidim suffered from terrible poverty for their refusal to work on Shabbos. Thinking big, Reb Bentche arranged agreements

with sewing factories allowing Chassidim to work from home, giving them control of their own work hours. Hundreds of people owed their livelihood to his efforts.

During a *sicha* in America, the Frierdiker Rebbe spoke about Reb Bentche as an example of the special *ahavas Yisroel* and *hanachas atzmuso* that was part and parcel of the character of Temimim in Russia.

“Bentzion Shemtov was literally *moser nefesh* to do a physical act of kindness for another Jew, and moreover, he traveled around with literal *mesiras nefesh* to do a favor for another Jew...”¹³

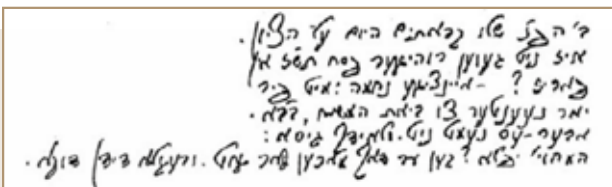
Reb Bentche once saw a young Chossid being led away by a Russian policeman. Thinking quickly, he ran over to the policeman shouting, “Hello Ivan! How are you? I haven’t seen you for so long! What’s doing? How are you managing?”

He started hugging and kissing the policeman, while nudging the young Chossid to run away.

“But who are you? I don’t recognize you!” said the policeman.

“Don’t you remember we were in the army together?” Reb Bentche carried on until the other Chossid was well out of sight.

Realizing that his prisoner had escaped, he began yelling at Reb Bentche, “You made me lose my



Four years after the Rebbe’s visit to Paris, after the Rebbe had already accepted the *nesius*, he wrote this postscript in a letter to Reb Bentzion, reminding him of the peaceful days in France, before the *histalkus* of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Noting the pleasant times in Paris, the Rebbe concluded that our only true comfort will be with the coming of Moshiach.

ב' הפ"נ שלו קראתים היום על הציון. איז ניט געווען רוהיגער פסח תש"ז אין פאריז? - איינציגע נחמה: מיט פיר יאר נעענטער צו ביאת המשיח בב"א. אבער - עס נעמט ניט. ולאידך גיסא: המהו"י יפלא? קען ער דאך מאכען גאר גוט. ובעגלא דידן דוקא.

I read both of your panim at the Ohel today. Wasn’t it calmer Pesach 5707* in Paris? The only comfort is [that] we are four years closer to the coming of Moshiach, [may it be] speedily in our days. [Such a comfort though], is not particularly convincing. Yet on the other hand: is there anything too difficult for Hashem? He can certainly improve the situation immensely. And may He do so quickly.

prisoner, you idiot! You're really going to get it now! I'm going to take you to court and I'm going to make sure you go to prison."

"Listen," Reb Bentche reasoned with the officer. "If you report this incident, it will be you who will end up in jail, for you have released a wanted prisoner. I, on the other hand, can only be charged for mistakenly hugging an old friend." Reb Bentche took out a bottle of vodka and gave it to the policeman, who then dropped the whole case.¹⁴

The authorities were always looking for Reb Bentche, and the family was forced to move several times. Soon, World War II broke out and Reb Bentche and his family fled to Samarkand, along with many others.

The situation was dire. Thousands of refugees swarmed the city; there was not enough food or shelter to go around. There were times when the family was forced to suffice with animal food. Still, Reb Bentche taught his children the true meaning of *ahavas Yisroel*.

One night, as the children slept on their "bed" (a large table), Reb Bentche came home and woke them up with exciting news; he had procured a full loaf of bread. As they excitedly drew around the table for their first taste of food in a while, Reb Bentche cut the bread in half.

"Take this to the house of Shlomo Chaim [Kesselman]," he



REB BENTZION SHEMTOV SPEAKS PASSIONATELY AT A SIMCHA.

instructed his oldest son, Mendel.

"But they have less people," he protested. "Why should they have an equal amount?"

"Because they haven't eaten for longer," his father replied.¹⁵

LEAVING RUSSIA

In 5707*, Reb Bentche and his family had the good fortune to leave Russia on the Polish "*eshalons*" (trains). As his family settled in the Pocking DP camp, Reb Bentche didn't rest and immediately got involved in all sorts of *askanus*. He soon found himself in Paris, where a very special guest had arrived — the Rebbe himself had flown to Paris to greet his mother and accompany her to America.

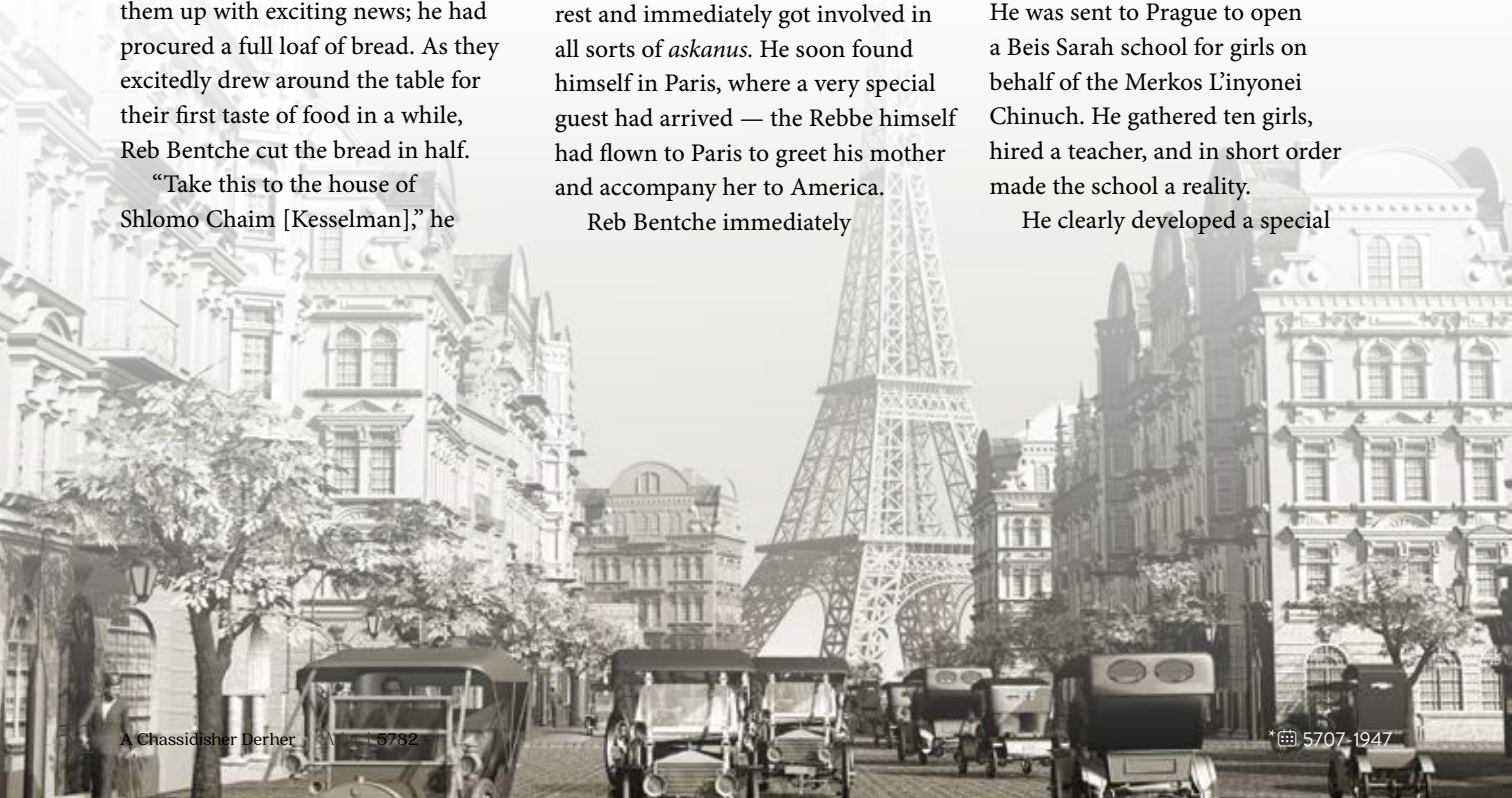
Reb Bentche immediately

"connected" himself to the Rebbe, attempting to remain in his close proximity at every possible moment. At one point, the Rebbe actually asked Reb Bentche to leave his hotel room so that he would be able to learn in peace.¹⁶

Reb Bentche shared his excitement about the Rebbe with the other Chassidim. "I noticed," he told them, "that the bed has been filled with *sefarim* for several days in a row. The Ramash literally doesn't go to sleep!"¹⁷

During that visit, he also carried out his first shlichus for the Rebbe: He was sent to Prague to open a Beis Sarah school for girls on behalf of the Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch. He gathered ten girls, hired a teacher, and in short order made the school a reality.

He clearly developed a special



connection with the Rebbe during that visit. When the Rebbe returned to America and published *Sefer Hasichos Kayitz Tof Shin*, he sent a box to Europe with the following instructions:

“Please give two copies to ‘Kibutz Lubavitch,’ two to Pocking, one to Kalmenson in Prague, and one for Reb Bentzion Shemtov...”¹⁸

THE REBBE'S NESIUS

On 10 Shevat 5710*, Chassidim worldwide were hit with the unthinkable news. The Friediker Rebbe had been *nistalek*. At the time, one of the English Chassidim — Reb Yitzchok Dubov of Manchester¹⁹ — was visiting New York. During the *Shiva*, he came to the conclusion that the Rebbe, then known as the Ramash, should immediately be appointed as Rebbe.

Upon his return to England, he proceeded to the home of Reb Bentzion Shemtov. After a long conversation, they both gathered the *anash* of London and wrote the first *ksav hiskashrus* to the Rebbe, addressing him with the title “*Kvod Kedushas Admur Shlit”a*.”

Reb Bentzion began to encourage others to do the same. In a letter to his brother-in-law in Australia, Reb Shneur Zalman Serebransky, Reb Bentche encouraged him to be *miskasher* to the Rebbe, even indicating that it was known to be the Friediker Rebbe’s express will.

“At the moment, he refuses to accept the *nesius*,” Reb Bentche writes. “However, based on my conversation with one of *anash* in England who spoke with him, it seems that he also received a *hora’a*, and with Hashem’s help, we will have a Rebbe very soon.”

During a visit to Eretz Yisroel, he farbrenged with the *anash* of Tel

Aviv, encouraging them to accept the Rebbe’s *nesius* as well. He also began to direct Jews in England to request the Rebbe’s *brachos*. Reb Bentche’s house became an in-between point between the Rebbe and English Jewry, and many letters and telegrams were sent his way.²⁰ (Later, in 5712*, Reb Benche was tasked with the burial of the Rebbe’s brother, Reb Yisroel Aryeh Leib, when he passed away in England, and he also became the Rebbe’s primary contact with his wife.)

However, it was a long time before the Rebbe indicated that he would accept the *nesius*. The Rebbe responded to Reb Bentche’s *ksav hiskashrus* with a *michtav klali-proti* that ignored the matter entirely. In handwriting, at the bottom of the letter, the Rebbe simply added, “I received your letter... Surely Reb Yitzchok Dubov shared our conversation with you...”²¹

But Reb Bentche wasn’t one to give up. He printed new stationery for Tomchei Temimim in England declaring it to be under the *nesius* of the Rebbe, and sent a letter to Rebbetzin Chana. Soon after, a telegram was rushed to his house; the Rebbe demanded that all the papers be immediately destroyed and that no such endeavors be initiated without his express *reshus*.²²

A CHOSSID THROUGH AND THROUGH

For the next 25 years, Reb Bentche dedicated every waking moment to the Rebbe’s *inyanim*. His entire life was dedicated to strengthening the *hiskashrus* of Chassidim, growing the Rebbe’s *mosdos*, and bringing the Rebbe *nachas*. Many Chassidim throughout the world received their first “taste” of *dor hashvi’i* from Reb Bentche, who tirelessly traveled and wrote letters to promote the Rebbe’s *inyanim* — always doing so with his characteristic splash.

In the invitation to his son Yisroel’s bar mitzvah, Reb Bentche included his wish that the bar mitzvah “be a Chossid, *yarei Shamayim* and *lamdan*, according to the will of our *nossi*, the Rebbe.” Needless to say, it caused a commotion among the Yidden of London (where Reb Bentche settled — see next section). One well-known *iluy*, Rav Moshe Shternbuch (today the *av beis din* of the Edah Hacharedis in Yerushalayim), wrote to the Rebbe about it.

In a fascinating response, the Rebbe defended Reb Bentche’s language.



REB BENTZION RECEIVES LEKACH FROM THE REBBE, HOSHAANA RABBA 5721*.

KIRUVIM

During the historic Yom Tov of Sukkos 5731*, the Rebbe established a “United Nations,” speaking at length about its spiritual significance [see *Derher*, Tishrei 5779, “Transforming the Nations”]. During *hakafos*, the Rebbe appointed various individuals as delegates of their countries. “Being that everything must be done according to Torah,” the Rebbe said, “these will be individuals who have *smicha* or are *roshei yeshivos*.”

When the Rebbe announced Reb Bentzion Shemtov as England’s envoy, someone remarked that he’s not a *rav*. Hearing that, the Rebbe responded that it was “under my *achrayus*.”

Another special *kiruv* the Rebbe showed Reb Bentche was also on Sukkos: Until 5730*, the Rebbe would give *daled minim* to a very select group of some seven people (later, the group became much larger). One of those annual recipients was Reb Bentche.

Another special gesture was during the Hachnasas Sefer Torah Shel Moshiach.³⁷ Reb Bentche was one of the 15 individuals personally honored by the Rebbe to read a *possuk* of *Atah Horeisa*.³⁸

“Regarding your question — what connection is there between the wish of a Jewish heart and the desires of a *basar vadam* (a mortal).

“...The *yetzer hara* is a master at his profession... The greater the wish and *bracha*, the greater it will try to get involved... Therefore, the only option is to place the *tefillah al daas* (at the discretion of) another person, who is objective in the matter...”²³

“When I visited London shortly after leaving the Soviet Union,” related Professor Herman Branover, “I met Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov. I knew nothing about him and his special work in the Soviet Union and Europe, but a few words that he told me in our short conversation made a deep impression on me.

“‘I think,’ he said, ‘our biggest problem is that we don’t appreciate how good it is and how much we should rejoice at every moment over the fact that we have such an amazing Rebbe!’”²⁴

When Mrs. Bassie (Posner) Garelik was around 12 years old, her parents enrolled her in Beis Yaakov, being that Beis Rivkah did not have a class for her age. Reb Bentche once visited her home; hearing that she was too old for Beis Rivkah, he suggested a perfect solution: “Why don’t you act as if you don’t know much and then they’ll let you into the younger classes — of Beis Rivkah!”²⁵

Traveling to the Rebbe was, to



REB BENTZION STANDS BEHIND THE REBBE AT THE FARBRENEGN OF YUD SHEVAT 5730*.

Reb Bentche, the most important part of a Chossid’s life. When Reb Yitzchak Dubov made a special trip to the Rebbe in 5716*, he attributed the *zechus* to Reb Bentche. “I never pulled together so much money, but Reb Bentzion reminded me of the saying of Radatz Chein, that it is worth begging from door to door in order to be able to go to the Rebbe.”

Reb Leibel Raskin recounted that he once heard from Reb Bentche that “to travel to the Rebbe, one need not receive permission, because in these matters we ask the opinion of the *choleh*, not the doctor...”²⁶ (On one occasion, Zalmon Jaffe records that Reb Benche traveled to the Rebbe without express permission, and the Rebbe didn’t accept his decision; he was treated by the Rebbe as if he was still in England).²⁷

In front of the Rebbe, Reb Bentche always displayed the ultimate *bittul*. He never sat in the Rebbe's presence, even in his old age when his contemporaries occupied the seats behind the Rebbe at the farbrengens. During one surprise farbrengen on Shavuos 5711*, the Rebbe told him to "be seated, without *kuntzen*," taking him by the hand and seating him on the bench. The Rebbe held his hand for the duration of the farbrengen!²⁸

Zalmon Jaffe notes that Reb Bentche refused to attend the *seudos* in the Frierdiker Rebbe's apartment, because the Rebbe was not seated at the head of the table. "He could not bear to see the Rebbe take a back seat."²⁹

"In 5718*," Reb Leibel Raskin related, "Reb Bentche picked me up from the airport [in London]; on the way to his home, we passed the palace, where we saw the soldiers standing at attention. Reb Bentzion told me, 'Do you see how they stand? We should learn a lesson in *bittul* from them...'"

This was not a type of behavior that was generally expected of Chassidim. Once, during Sukkos 5714*, the Rebbe happened to walk into the public sukkah. Surprised by the Rebbe's sudden appearance, Reb Bentche immediately backed away, and the Rebbe commented, "*Iz dos ahavas Yisroel — zich dershreken far a Yidden? Is it ahavas Yisroel to be frightened by a Yid?*"³⁰

During that same Tishrei, the bochur Elya Gross recorded Reb Bentche's farbrengen. "Don't assume," Reb Bentche told the *bochurim*, "that when you fulfill a shlichus you are doing the Rebbe a favor. We see clearly that everyone who fulfilled the Rebbe's instructions without asking 'why' had *hatzlacha* in everything." Elya notes further: "Reb Bentzion told me that this was told to him by the Rebbe himself, in a letter."³¹



REB BENTZION TOGETHER WITH THE BOYS OF THE LUBAVITCH SCHOOL IN THE 5710S*.

TURNING OVER ENGLAND

In 5708*, the Frierdiker Rebbe appointed Reb Bentche to be his *shadar* to London, responsible for spreading Yiddishkeit and strengthening the Chassidim of England.

One of his first activities was declaring a "*cheder*" — his own three sons and nephew, Reb Shalom Ber Futerfas. A Beis Rivkah was also quickly opened. Both institutions started out small, but soon began to experience significant growth. When he wanted to send his sons to New York, the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed that they remain in London. "It would be better to establish a Tomchei Temimim in London itself."³² Two months later, Reb Bentche duly reported back to New York: Tomchei Temimim had become a reality.

Reb Bentche's presence in a city was one that could not be ignored. Everyone quickly got to know the fiery and energetic Lubavitcher Chossid who was afraid of nothing and no one. With his characteristic *ahavas Yisroel*, countless people benefited from his quiet acts of aid,

but when it came to matters of the Rebbe, "quiet" wasn't in the lexicon.

In one *yoman* about a Yom Tov *seudah* in the Frierdiker Rebbe's apartment, a *bochur* records that Zalmon Jaffe told the Rebbe: "From the day Bentzion Shemtov came [to England,] and from the day the Rebbe became Rebbe, Manchester has become a different place!" The Rebbe smiled and said, "He still has more work to do."³³

Reb Bentche himself related that the yeshiva of Manchester — where his sons learned before coming to 770 — wasn't officially a Chabad yeshiva, but the Rebbe told him that it was "*unzere yeshiva*, our yeshiva," despite not having the name "Tomchei Temimim." This was because Reb Yitzchok Dubov served as the *mashgiach* there, implemented many *minhagei Chabad*, and was *mekarev* many *bochurim* to the Rebbe.³⁴

Professor Velvel Greene, during his stay in London, had an encounter with Reb Bentche:

"I was in the midst of my work in the hospital, when I received a message: 'There is an emergency meeting at the Chabad House, drop everything and come immediately. We received a message from the Rebbe, it is important that you come.'"



REB BENTZION AND HIS FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHED ON EREV YOM KIPPUR 5710*, AT THE BEHEST OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE, WHO HAD REQUESTED PHOTOS OF HIS CHASSIDIM AND THEIR FAMILIES "ווי זיי שטייען" (STANDING).

"I ran onto the subway and made my way to Stamford Hill. When I arrived at the shul, I saw the following scene: Rabbi Shemtov was sitting at the head of the table, surrounded by many people, but he wasn't saying a word. *Anash* were gathering from all over, and he wouldn't say anything.

"Rabbi Sudak told me that his father-in-law had just arrived that morning, and refused to eat or drink anything until he gave over the Rebbe's message.

"Suddenly, he stood up and declared: '*Der Rebbe hot gezogt az davenen muz zein shein!* The Rebbe said that davening must be nice!'

"That was it. The meeting was over.

"It was only nine words, but they had an amazing impact. From that day onward, all *anash* davened in one single *minyan*, and nobody spoke during davening. It was really a revolution; the davening indeed became '*shein*.'"³⁵

Reb Bentche wasn't content with England.

"Among my earliest Chassidish memories," related Mrs. Risha Slavaticki from Antwerp, "are the Chassidim that used to visit the city. Reb Bentche Shemtov, for example, would go to shuls to *chazzer*

Chassidus. He once went to the shul of Reb Itzik'l of Pshevorsk and began repeating a *sicha*. Some *yungeleit* asked him to stop, but Reb Bentche wasn't exactly one to be *nispoel* from a few young men. When their words fell on deaf ears, they physically removed him from the building, only for him to return. They removed him again and locked the door, but the window suddenly opened, and he was back inside. When Reb Itzik'l heard the commotion, he instructed that Reb Bentche be permitted to continue."³⁶

"SHICHOS!"

One of Reb Bentche's greatest passions was the dissemination of the Rebbe's *sichos*.

In the early years, the Rebbe's *sichos* were not published in an organized fashion. Only in 5718*, under the initiative of three or four bochurim, the Rebbe began editing a *sicha* each week for the *tahalucha*.³⁹ When Reb Bentche would visit New York, he would often enter the office, watch the typing, and rub together his hands in delight. In the summer of 5719*, he arranged for Tzach in London to republish the *sichos* for wide dissemination, ensuring that it

was printed in a high quality fashion.

Reb Bentzion wasn't satisfied with the one year's worth of *sichos* that were released.

In 5722*, at the Tzach convention on Sukkos, Reb Bentzion Shemtov declared with his inimitable lisp, "*Mdarf nemen a mensch, cholen gelt, un s'vet zein shichos*." Tzach, he said, needed a permanent employee whose job would be to publicize the Rebbe's *sichos*. With volunteer work, nothing would ever be properly done.

After the Rebbe received the *duch* of the *kinus*, Rabbi Hodakov told Reb Dovid Raskin that he would pay a beginner's salary for a permanent employee, and Rabbi Leibel Alevsky was hired.

"One of the first things I organized was Likkutei Sichos. That year, the Rebbe began editing the second round of *sichos* (volumes 3-4), and I was heavily involved in all of the work."⁴⁰

This produced another year of *mugadike sichos*.

A few years later, towards the end of 5727*, Reb Bentche once again took action. He asked Reb Zalman Chananin and a group of *bochurim* and *yungeleit* to form Vaad L'hafotzas Sichos. Every week, they would take a *sicha* that had been previously edited by the Rebbe (in 5718* or 5723*) and print thousands of copies, sending them around the world. Reb Bentche was very involved, constantly *koching* in and helping fundraise for the "*shichos*."

Before Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz 5729*, after two years of reprinting old *sichos*, they realized that they had run out of *sichos* for that week. Reb Bentche asked Reb Yoel Kahan to prepare a new *sicha*, and the Rebbe agreed to edit it. Within a short time, Likkutei Sichos again became a reality.

But printing wasn't enough. Each week, between Mincha and Maariv on Friday night, Reb Bentche would announce "*Shichos!*" encouraging everyone to sit down and learn

the Rebbe's *sichos*. He would do so in 770, in any Lubavitcher shul, and in non-Lubavitch shuls he visited as well. Wherever he went, the *sichos* went along with him.

In 5733*, Likkutei Sichos began to be published in Lashon Hakodesh. Reb Bentche, whose wife had already passed away, sold his home in London, went to Eretz Yisroel, and paid for the establishment of a printing press in Kfar Chabad ("Machon Levi Yitzchok") to disseminate the *sichos* in Eretz Yisroel.

THE REBBE'S "ARMIYA"

On a summer day in 5735*, Reb Bentche was walking across the street at the entrance to Kfar Chabad when, in a terrible accident, he was struck by a passing truck. Several days later, on 5 Tammuz, he returned his soul to his maker.

On Yud-Beis Tammuz, at the farbrengen, the Rebbe made mention of this special Chossid.

"Since the arrest and imprisonment is connected to Russia and especially to the army which the *baal hasimcha*

THROUGH AND THROUGH

A *mashpia* shared the following recollections of Reb Bentche:

"Reb Bentzion Shemtov was a fascinating blend between the different generations of the Rabbeim. On one hand, he was a *talmid* of the yeshiva in Lubavitch, and that was evident in everything he did. On the other hand, there was nobody more excited about *mivtzoim*, *sichos* and all of the Rebbe's *inyanim* than Reb Bentche, placing him squarely in *dor Hashvi'i*.

"It was expressed in interesting ways. I recall, for example, how he sat with us *bochurim* one Shabbos in 770 and farbrenged about the importance of dedicating ourselves to the Rebbe's *mivtzoim*, even if it needs to come at the expense of *avodah pnimis*.


"Had you thought that he was simply *mezalzel* in *avodah pnimis* (*chas veshalom*), you just needed to stay a few minutes longer. After he finished his speech, I saw him sit down in a corner of the *ezras nashim* with a *Samach Vov* and proceed to daven at great length. With all his restlessness and globe-trotting, you saw who he really was — a Chossid with no greater *taavah* than a *Samach Vov* and a few hours to daven."

v'hageulah established... it is an appropriate time to sing a Russian *niggun*, and specifically a *niggun* that speaks about 'Mi Armia Admura,' the army of the Rebbe."

This was a Russian military song which Reb Bentche had repurposed into a *niggun* about the dedication of Chassidim to the Rebbe.

Hinting to Reb Bentche, the Rebbe continued: "This is associated with

the fact that the Kovetz Michtavim of Tehillim was just published in English, in memory of a person who had the merit to be exiled for spreading Torah.

"*Yehi ratzon* that this army, which continues to exist today, should be an appropriate continuation; the young should look at those soldiers, in that army, and likewise raise their children and grandchildren..." 

1. *My Encounter with the Rebbe - Volume 2*, Shavuot (and Tanya) 5735 (1975), "A Tribute to Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov." Chabad.org/2593583.

2. As told by Reb Avrohom Mayorer. Some details are from *Kiddush Hashem* by Reb Aharon Gershuni.

3. As told by Rabbi Avremel Shemtov.

4. *Kiddush Hashem* pg. 92.

5. 12 Tammuz 5702. *Sefer Hasichos* 5702 pg. 154.

6. Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz vol. 2 pg. 149.

7. See Derher Sivan 5779, "Gaon and Chossid."

8. Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz vol. 1 pg. 579.

9. See Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz vol. 1 pg. 619.

10. Toldos Chabad B'Rusia Hasovietis pg. 92

11. *Kiddush Hashem* pg. 91.

12. Igros Kodesh Admur Harayatz vol. 16 pg. 171.

13. Shavuot 5705. *Sefer Hasichos* 5705 pg. 106.

14. Teshura, Shemtov Bar Mitzvah 5767.

15. As heard from Rabbi Berel Shemtov.

16. As told by Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Laufer, who was in Paris at the time.

17. Harabi Bipariz pg. 441.

18. Igros Kodesh vol. 21 pg. 85.

19. For the article about this special Chossid, see Shevat 5779, "The Lamplighter from Lubavitch."

20. See Igros Kodesh vol. 4 pg. 151.

21. I.e. about the Rebbe's refusal to accept the nesius. See Yemei Bereishis p. 105.

22. Yimei Bireishis pg. 147.

23. Igros Kodesh vol. 7 pg. 213.

24. *Peleh Hadorot* pg. 35.

25. *Sippur Ishi* pg. 407.

26. Raskin-Minkowitz Teshurah 5774 pg. 18.

27. *My Encounter* issue 26, pg. 44.

28. Derher Sivan 5777 pg. 8

29. *My Encounter with the Rebbe - Volume 1*. Shavuot 5728 (1968), "Royal Dining." Chabad.org/260028.

30. *Chodesh Tishrei Bibeis Chayenu* pg. 31.

31. Yoman Gross Tishrei 5714.

32. Letter, 6 Cheshvan 5710.

33. Teshura Cohen-Sossover 5757 pg. 18.

34. Teshurah Vogel-Huss 5773 pg. 23, Derher Shevat 5779 pg. 38.

35. Professor Greene, Shalom Uvracha pg. 152.

36. *Koach Nashi*, pg. 220.

37. See Derher Shevat 5776, "Sefer Torah Shel Moshiach."

38. Toras Menachem vol. 59 pg. 62.

39. See Derher Tammuz 5777, "The Written Torah."

40. Derher Iyar 5778 pg. 51.