

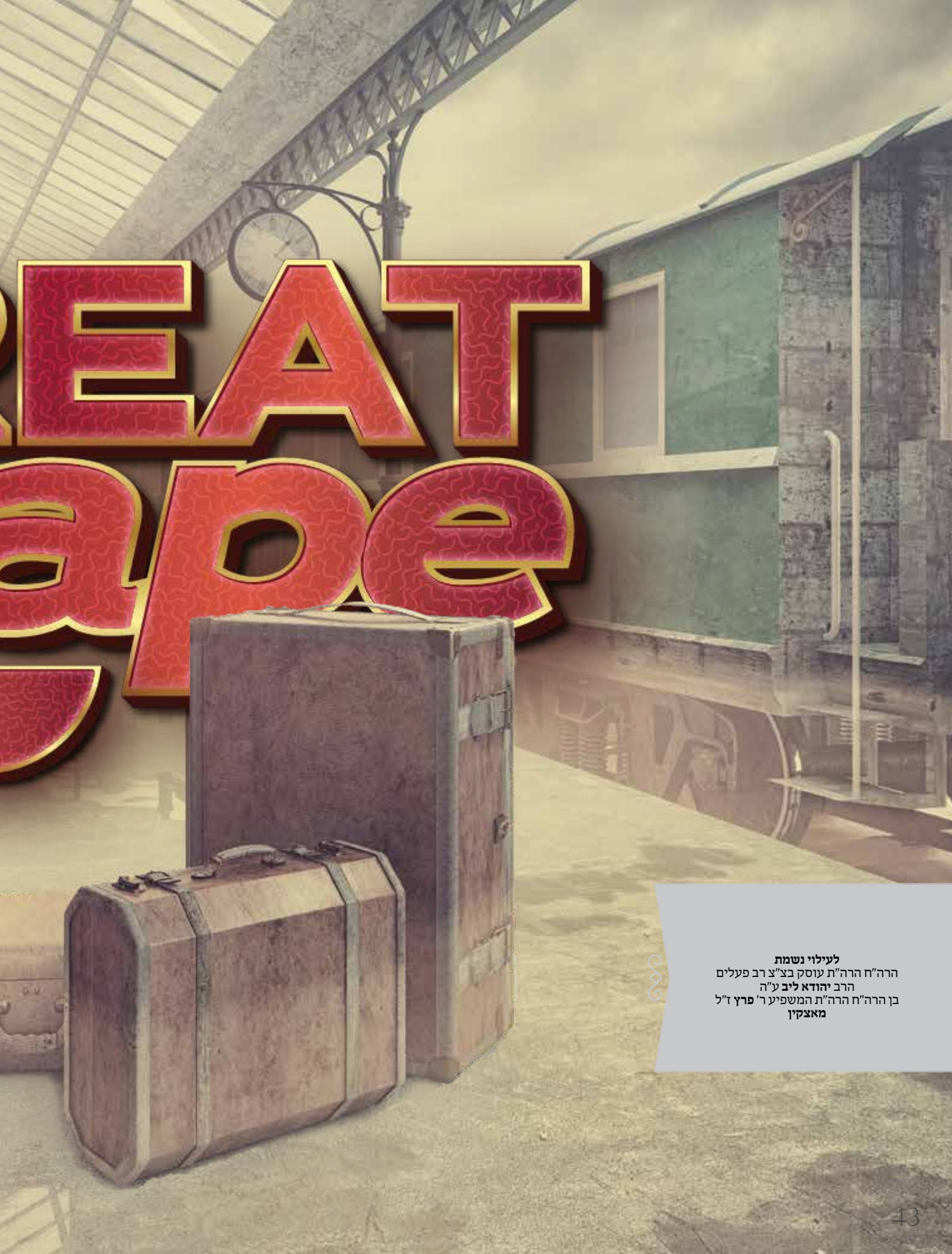


The GR ESCALADE

THE STORY OF THE “ESHALONS”

THIS AMAZING STORY HAS BEEN CHRONICLED IN MANY (HEBREW) PUBLICATIONS FROM COUNTLESS PERSPECTIVES. THIS ARTICLE IS BASED PRIMARILY ON THE ACCOUNTS CITED IN PE'ILUT CHOTZAH GVULOT, THE MEMOIRS OF REB BINYAMIN GORODETZKY, THE MEMOIRS OF MRS. YOCHAVED ZALMANOV, AND SEVERAL DERHER INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED OVER THE YEARS. WE MADE EVERY ATTEMPT TO PORTRAY THE EVENTS ACCURATELY;

COMMENTS AND CORRECTIONS ARE WELCOMED,
AND CAN BE SENT TO FEEDBACK@DERHER.ORG.



לעילוי נשמת

הרה"ח הרה"ת עוסק בצ"צ רב פעלים
הרב **יהודא ליב** ע"ה
בן הרה"ח הרה"ת המשפיע ר' **פרץ ז"ל**
מאצקין

To Stay or to Go?

At the close of World War II, many Chassidim in Russia were at a crossroads.

The invasion of the Germans had sent them fleeing from their homes and towns into the far recesses of the Russian interior, many of them reaching all the way to Samarkand and Tashkent in faraway Uzbekistan. They were left bereft of their homes and belongings.

Life in the Soviet Union before the war had been unbearable. Just a year before the outbreak of the war (in the year known as *Tirtzach*—תרט"ח) Stalin had cracked down on the masses, killing millions in the cellars of the KGB. Untold numbers of Chassidim were among them. The situation had been dire.

However, the years of war brought some respite to the persecuted Chassidim. The KGB was no longer as active, and Yidden were able to maintain a semblance of Jewish life.

But now the war was over. What to do? Where should they settle? What would the future hold?

The Big Three

Meanwhile, the three most powerful men in the world had convened to decide the new world order: President Harry Truman of the United States, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom, and Joseph Stalin *ym's* of the USSR. One decision issued at the conference was that Polish citizens who had fled into Russia during the war would be permitted to return to their homes.

For the Yidden of Russia, this seemed to be a golden opportunity. Documents could be forged or swapped with a Polish citizen, and one suddenly had a ticket to freedom. This gave rise to a



massive black-market operation; if a Polish citizen died or chose to remain in Russia, his documents could be sold for a hefty price.

Many Chassidim were unsure. Cheating one's way through the border was a major crime and many Chassidim were already 'repeat-offenders' for their work in spreading Yiddishkeit. There was no doubt that heavy punishments would be meted out on anyone caught. On the other hand, the freedom of the outside world beckoned. It was too good of an opportunity to miss.

The question was posed to the Frierdiker Rebbe. However, that was difficult in itself. The Frierdiker Rebbe's answers were sent from America to Europe, and then translated into vague codes and sent to Russia. It was often difficult for the Chassidim in Russia to decipher the Frierdiker Rebbe's true intent.

The first answer was sent to Reb Binyomin Gorodetzky on 8 Teves 5706*. "Whether the question pertains to him or to everyone, due to the current situation they should wait until matters clear up. And Hashem will help them, physically and spiritually." By the time the message reached Russia, it read, "Grandfather says to remain in place."

Sometime later, another answer arrived: "It is not good to live in a place which lacks *shalom bayis*. It would be better to remain in a place with *shalom bayis*, and to wait for another opportunity."

This was a reference to the rampant antisemitism in Poland at the time. Despite the persecution at the hand of the Communist government, the Jews in Russia lived in peace with their Russian neighbors. If the alternative was settling in Poland, the Frierdiker Rebbe opposed the idea.

Sometime later, it became clear that it would be possible to leave Poland and continue into other countries.



REB BINYOMIN GORODETZKY

The question was posed once again, and this time, the Frierdiker Rebbe seemed to approve. Some were instructed to look into the option, while families with young children were to wait until matters cleared up.

Reb Binyomin Gorodetzky was one of the first Chassidim to make the trip. Somehow, he procured documents for his family and joined one of the trains filled with Polish citizens. One bright day after Shavuot he found himself — unbelievably — standing on the other side of the Russian border.

Immediately, he dispatched a letter to the Frierdiker Rebbe describing his experience and the various options available to Chassidim. Three days later, an urgent telegram arrived from New York: the Frierdiker Rebbe approved of the plan.

Reb Binyomin immediately wrote letters back to Russia informing them of the Frierdiker Rebbe's decision. The news began to spread far and wide, and Chassidim began packing their bags. There was no time to waste; it became apparent that the KGB was once again paying attention to the movements of Chassidim. The slight relief of the war years was clearly over, and it was time to hit the road.

Lvov

In order to leave the country, every Chossid needed to follow the same process: Polish documents were to be procured or forged, they were to be submitted to the OVIR — the Russian immigration office — for an exit-visa, and tickets were to be obtained for the train ride over the border. Trains left from all over Russia, including from Samarkand, but most Chassidim preferred to travel to the border on their own, to avoid spending too much time among Polish citizens who might uncover their ruse.

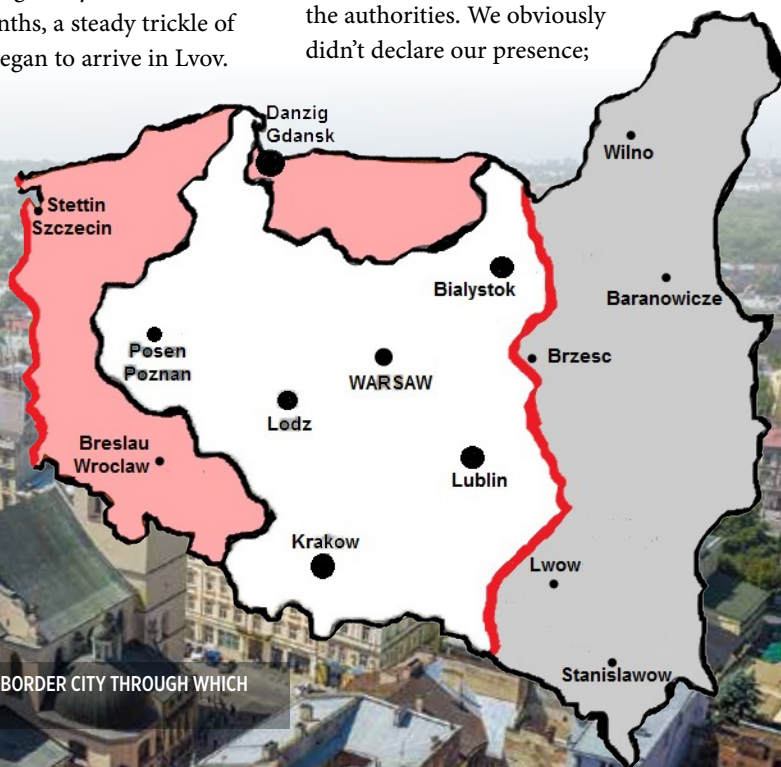
Lvov, a city right at the border of Poland, became a central gathering place — and for good reason. The city had formerly been a part of Poland, but Stalin decided to keep it as part of the USSR. In his magnanimity, the residents — all Polish citizens — were given the right to leave the city and immigrate to Poland proper. This gave way to a massive black market of Polish passports; every citizen could easily obtain documentation to leave and then sell it on to eager buyers. Over the summer months, a steady trickle of Chassidim began to arrive in Lvov.



REB LEBEL ALEVSKY AS A CHILD

“We knew nothing about the whole escape,” relates Rabbi Leibel Alevsky, a child at the time, “until my aunt in Moscow got wind of the operation. She wrote that she would be getting married in Lvov and invited us to the wedding. My family got the hint and we made our way to Lvov.

“At the time, the law stipulated that one was forbidden to remain in a city for more than twenty-four hours without reporting his presence to the authorities. We obviously didn't declare our presence;



LVOV (WHICH WAS PART OF POLAND BEFORE THE WAR), BECAME THE BORDER CITY THROUGH WHICH MANY CHASSIDIM ESCAPED FROM THE SOVIET UNION INTO POLAND.



but that meant that we couldn't remain in one house for more than twenty-hours; otherwise the host would be liable if he didn't turn us in. Therefore, I vividly remember being constantly on the move; dragging our suitcases from one house to the next."

It was a very tense time. The increasing numbers of bearded Jews

began to attract attention and all the men made a conscious effort not to be seen in public. Prohibitive sums were paid to homeowners for providing living spaces to the illegal aliens. Chassidim lived in constant fear, always expecting a knock on the door from the KGB.

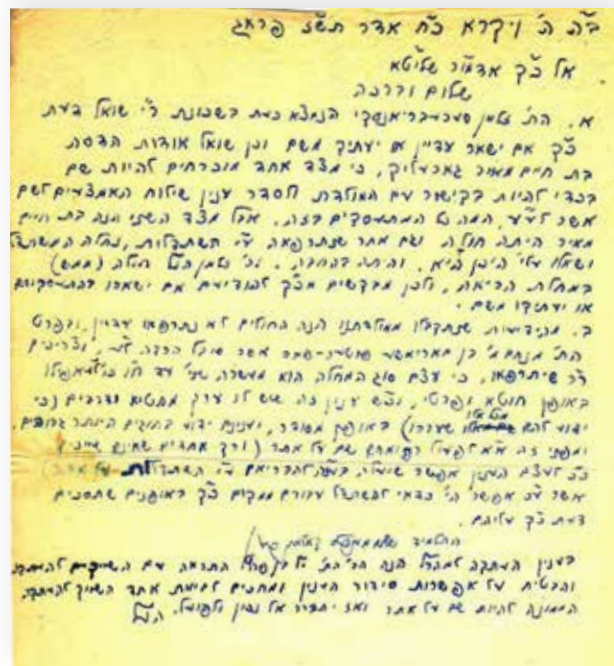
In the beginning, people arranged everything for themselves. But as more and more Chassidim arrived, a *vaad* was created, led by Reb Mendel Futerfas, Reb Shmerel Sasonkin, Reb Yonah Kagan and others. The lead activist was Leibel Motchkin; still a *bochur*, he was a shrewd activist with a knack for creating friendships in the right places. He led the effort, exploring the various options for obtaining passports, making sure to bribe all the pertinent individuals, and keeping track of the arriving families and train schedules.

Many others were involved. Reb Moshe Chaim Dubravsky assisted Leibel Motchkin and was also responsible for distributing money to *anash*

families for basic needs. Reb Mendel Futerfas and Reb Yonah Kagan were responsible for obtaining funds and taking care of the *yeshivos* and *chadarim*. Reb Shmerel Sasonkin was the 'senior advisor' of the operation. Reb Mendel Gorelik was a professional forger. Reb Dovid Kok and Reb Zalman Serebryansky obtained additional passports. Reb Yisroel Noach Belinitzky was the accountant. Mrs. Sarah Katzenelenboigen, famously remembered as "Mume Sarah," was a key activist, obtaining documents, transferring money, and solving the various problems that arose. Mrs. Tzipa Kozliner was the contact with the government, obtaining the necessary OVIR approvals. The list goes on and on.

At immense risk to their lives, these heroic individuals spared no effort to help their fellow Chassidim escape the border. Many of them sent their own families ahead, pushing off their own exits until the end of the operation.

Outside Russia, a similar network of Chassidim was established. Reb Yitzchak Goldin was stationed in



A LETTER TO THE FRIEDLIKER REBBE WITH UPDATES ON THE ONGOING RESCUE EFFORTS WRITTEN BY REB LEBEL MOCHKIN.

PELIOS CHOTZE GEVULOS

Krakow to welcome the immigrants and help them plan the continuation of their journey. Reb Sholom Mendel Kalmenson was stationed in Prague, which was uniquely situated to be easily contacted from Russia, Poland, Germany, and the United States. He was the central office for the efforts. Reb Binyomin Gorodetzky was stationed in Paris, where the Frierdiker Rebbe soon appointed him to be responsible for all Chabad activities in Europe and North Africa. Reb Yisrael Jacobson was a contact in New York, bringing questions to the Frierdiker Rebbe and doing various activities on their behalf.

The Royal Escape

Over the summer months of 5706*, a steady stream of passports were obtained and families began to cross the border. Some traveled as individuals, hoping to blend in among the Polish passengers without attracting too much attention, and some traveled as groups, relying on their ability to bribe guards who noticed something was amiss. After all, these “Polish citizens” could not speak a word of Polish.

Mrs. Yocheved (nee Garelik) Zalmanov was a teenager at the time, and she had the privilege to accompany Rebbetzin Chana on the second organized group. In her memoirs, she described the events.

“One day in Lvov, we received word that the next train would

leave within a few hours. The train was already at the station...

“We rushed to the station, but then Leibke [Motchkín] approached my sister and me and asked us to go bring a certain woman from a specific address; the train was being held up for her. When we entered, we saw a refined, middle-aged woman sitting on a chair, while a tall woman stood next to her.”

Rebbetzin Chana was unsure whether to take the train. She hoped to obtain a legitimate release via family reunification policies. The woman next to her — Mume Sarah — was encouraging her to take the risk.

“When she saw us, she asked us in a very refined manner, ‘Who are you?’ We responded: ‘We are the daughters of Reb Chaim Meir Garelik, the Rebbe’s shliach to Crimea.’ Her face immediately lit up; she stood up and said, ‘With these children, I will go!’

“We all jumped into a taxi and rushed back to the train station. Later, I discovered that the refined-looking woman was none other than Rebbetzin Chana. As soon as we arrived, Leibke and his helpers made sure that she found a place to sit.

“The day turned to night, as if to give some rest to the worried passengers, sitting on the floor of a freight train like sardines. Families, with packages and bundles, children



REB LEIBKE MOTCHKIN

young and old, freezing from the cold and terrified by the possession of fake passports, with nobody remembering their names and exactly which family they belonged to — it was all fake. At the same time, we felt joy: with Hashem’s help, we would be exiting the cursed borders of Stalin’s paradise.

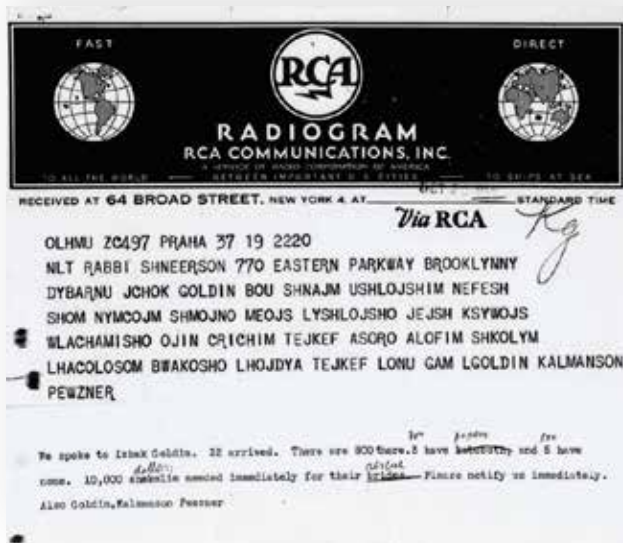
“As the chaos and crying of the children began to quiet down, my father asked me to bring the blanket that we owned to the woman I had accompanied to the train. I climbed over heads and feet until I got to her seat. ‘My child,’ she looked at me, glowing with an unusual radiance. ‘You’ve enlivened me... May this merit remain with you in everything you do!’”¹

Rabbi Avremel Korf was on the train as well:



THE JOURNEY OF HUNDREDS OF CHASSIDIC FAMILIES FROM LVOV THROUGH POCKING.

* 5706-1946



A TELEGRAM SENT TO THE FRIERDIKER REBBE FROM THE CHASSIDIM LEADING THE RESCUE EFFORTS, REQUESTING ADDITIONAL FUNDS. THE TELEGRAM IS WORDED IN CODES.



A LETTER SENT BY THE FRIERDIKER REBBE TO THE "JOINT" (AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE) URGENTLY REQUESTING FUNDS FOR THE REFUGEES.

"When we came to the border, we were all literally shaking with fear. There had already been a few arrests in the past, and we had no way of knowing what was in store for us. With us in our wagon were Reb Avrohom Mayorer and Reb Yisroel Neveler. Reb Avrohom had a two-liter bottle of *marshke*. When the officer came on to the train, Reb Avrohom offered him a cup, but the officer initially refused. However, Reb Avrohom insisted, and handed a full glass of *marshke*, which the officer ultimately drank in its entirety. His eyes began rolling, and he walked off the train.

"The wagons didn't have a roof, so we were able to see how the officer got off and told his friend that there is good vodka in the wagon; not wanting to miss out, the second officer came and drank a full cup as well.

"They then ordered all of us to get off the wagon so they could check our documents. By the time we got off, they were both drunk, and one of them simply stated that it's late and we should

therefore continue on our way...

"We later came to the conclusion that we merited such a miracle only because the Rebbe's mother was with us on the train..."

Impasse

By Elul time, some 500 souls had quietly made their way to freedom. Meanwhile, the news continued to spread: passports were available in the "City of the *Taz*," as it was referred to in code (Reb Dovid Segal, author of *Turei Zahav* on Shulchan Aruch, had been the Av Beis Din in Lvov). Chassidim from all over the Soviet Union began streaming to the border city, hoping to begin their lives anew in a free land. The trickle soon became an avalanche, and soon, there were 700 Chassidim waiting for salvation in Lvov.

But there was a problem.

The repatriation agreement had been signed in the summer of 5705*, over a year earlier. By now, most legitimate Polish citizens had left the country. The trains didn't travel

as regularly, and it was no longer possible to 'disappear' among a large group of Polish speaking passengers. The cost of passports had tripled. The Chassidim had arrived with a general *gemach* fund of over \$34,000 for those who couldn't afford to purchase their own way out, but the money was quickly running out. They seemed to arrive at an impasse.

During Elul, there seemed to be a breakthrough. Leibel Motchkin succeeded in arranging passports for 33 families — over three hundred people — and they planned to take the next train. But suddenly, Leibel's contact informed him that the government knew of their plans and intended to arrest them all. It seemed that the 'fun' was over.

In a letter, Reb Shmerel Sasonkin described the impact of the information:

"Leibke was shocked by the information and spread the news late at night. Everybody was terrified and remained home. For four days, the train stood and waited for us, while the contact continued to warn

us... that whoever traveled would suffer a bitter end. He told us that the government had a list of all the *anash*; he warned that if we were seen on the streets we would be arrested.

“Everybody remained closeted at home until Rosh Hashanah, feeling terrible about the circumstances. All their money had been lost [with the purchase of the now-useless passports]; with no sources of employment, they would all die of hunger. We cried and recited Tehillim. Such an Elul we never experienced; everyone davened alone, and most people didn’t even recite Selichos, instead reciting Tehillim. A message went out that we were to daven at home even on Rosh Hashanah.

“Erev Rosh Hashanah arrived, and we were extremely disheartened. How could Rosh Hashanah come without *mikveh*? Without any coordination, all *anash* decided that come what may, they would go to *mikveh*... At dawn, the *mikveh* was packed. Meeting each other once again, our spirits were somewhat lifted. We decided to arrange *minyanim* in the homes and hoped that our prayers would be answered.”

On Erev Sukkos, matters hadn’t improved. Leibel Motchkin smuggled a note/*pan* to Reb Sholom

“AL KIDDUSH HASHEM”

In the course of the operation, three Chassidim were arrested: Reb Berke Chein was arrested right before he got onto a train, Mrs. Tzipa Kozliner was arrested with the documents (as described in the article), and Reb Berel Gurevitch was arrested at the border for lack of proper documentation.

Through many open miracles, they were all released within the next two years. Reb Berel Gurevitch was even lucky enough to be allowed over the border into Poland. Reb Berke and Mrs. Kozliner needed to wait many more years until being allowed to leave Russia.

These three arrests were made by the local authorities, who could easily be bribed. However, much larger problems awaited. At the close of the operation, the higher-ups in Moscow got involved, beginning a five-year chase of any activists who remained behind. Other arrests were made when a small group of *bochurim* attempted to make an escape on their own. Those Chassidim weren’t as lucky.

Reb Mendel Futerfas, Mume Sarah, Reb Yonah Kagan and many others were slowly but surely arrested and put through terrible tortures and interrogations. Reb Mendel languished in prison for eight years. A number of Chassidim remained imprisoned until the death of Stalin, in 5713*.

And several, among them Reb Yonah and Mume Sarah, perished under the terrible circumstances of their imprisonment. They didn’t even receive the dignity of *kever Yisrael*; they have no known burial place. But the people they saved — 1000 souls and their countless descendants — is in and of itself the greatest monument to their memory.

Hashem yinkom damam.

Mendel Kalmenson in Prague:

“The situation cannot continue. All *anash* have gathered here, and there are no options of traveling to you, because they [the Russians] know everything. We need Heavenly

mercy. We are all left penniless...

May Hashem, who hears the cry of orphans, widows, and children, have mercy on all of us very soon.”

EXCERPT OF A LIST WITH DETAILS OF THE FAMILIES OF CHASSIDIM DEPARTING ON THE TRAINS.

№	Имя	Фамилия	Возраст	Пол	Страна	Дата отъезда
1	Израиль	Беркевич	45	М	Польша	1945
2	Тейтл	Козлинер	38	Ж	Польша	1945
3	Берел	Гуревич	42	М	Польша	1945
4	Мендел	Футерфас	55	М	Польша	1945
5	Сара	Муме	35	Ж	Польша	1945
6	Йона	Каган	40	М	Польша	1945
7	Шолом	Мотчкин	30	М	Польша	1945
8	Берке	Чейн	48	М	Польша	1945
9	Тейтл	Козлинер	38	Ж	Польша	1945
10	Берел	Гуревич	42	М	Польша	1945
11	Мендел	Футерфас	55	М	Польша	1945
12	Сара	Муме	35	Ж	Польша	1945
13	Йона	Каган	40	М	Польша	1945
14	Шолом	Мотчкин	30	М	Польша	1945
15	Берке	Чейн	48	М	Польша	1945
16	Тейтл	Козлинер	38	Ж	Польша	1945
17	Берел	Гуревич	42	М	Польша	1945
18	Мендел	Футерфас	55	М	Польша	1945
19	Сара	Муме	35	Ж	Польша	1945
20	Йона	Каган	40	М	Польша	1945
21	Шолом	Мотчкин	30	М	Польша	1945
22	Берке	Чейн	48	М	Польша	1945
23	Тейтл	Козлинер	38	Ж	Польша	1945
24	Берел	Гуревич	42	М	Польша	1945
25	Мендел	Футерфас	55	М	Польша	1945
26	Сара	Муме	35	Ж	Польша	1945
27	Йона	Каган	40	М	Польша	1945
28	Шолом	Мотчкин	30	М	Польша	1945
29	Берке	Чейн	48	М	Польша	1945
30	Тейтл	Козлинер	38	Ж	Польша	1945
31	Берел	Гуревич	42	М	Польша	1945
32	Мендел	Футерфас	55	М	Польша	1945
33	Сара	Муме	35	Ж	Польша	1945
34	Йона	Каган	40	М	Польша	1945
35	Шолом	Мотчкин	30	М	Польша	1945
36	Берке	Чейн	48	М	Польша	1945
37	Тейтл	Козлинер	38	Ж	Польша	1945
38	Берел	Гуревич	42	М	Польша	1945
39	Мендел	Футерфас	55	М	Польша	1945
40	Сара	Муме	35	Ж	Польша	1945
41	Йона	Каган	40	М	Польша	1945
42	Шолом	Мотчкин	30	М	Польша	1945
43	Берке	Чейн	48	М	Польша	1945
44	Тейтл	Козлинер	38	Ж	Польша	1945
45	Берел	Гуревич	42	М	Польша	1945
46	Мендел	Футерфас	55	М	Польша	1945
47	Сара	Муме	35	Ж	Польша	1945
48	Йона	Каган	40	М	Польша	1945
49	Шолом	Мотчкин	30	М	Польша	1945
50	Берке	Чейн	48	М	Польша	1945





16 ADAR 5709, JEM 2886

Another 'Try

With everyone sitting on their suitcases, a group of thirty-two people decided to use their passports and try their luck. They had almost nothing to lose. When a train was scheduled for the first days of Sukkos, they decided to join. Obviously, it was a situation of *pikuach nefesh*.

Reb Shmerel described the scene: "When they departed, it felt as if we were bidding goodbye to people who were going to their death. There was intense sobbing and wailing... But Hashem heard their prayers and they were successful. When we heard that they had crossed the border, our spirits lifted."

The *vaad* reconvened after Simchas Torah. The Chassidim made a pact to do everything in their power to save all the *anash* and help them get over the border; the pact would be in effect until Yud-Tes Kislev, and then they

would be free of their obligation.

In light of the dire financial situation, it was decided that all money must be given into a central account to fund the entire operation. This decision was made by a "Beis Din of 23 Rabbanim," and all the Chassidim were expected to comply, under threat of *cherem*.

"My father, Reb Uziel Chazanov," related Mrs. Basya Kalmanson, "had already purchased the necessary documents for our family. He emptied his pockets and gave whatever money he had — including all the proceeds from the home we had just sold. My brother-in-law Reb Avraham Aharon Rubashkin was a talented businessman who had amassed quite a fortune in Samarkand, but he handed everything over to Reb Mendel Futerfas.

"My mother tried to keep a few pennies to buy a winter coat for my brother, but Reb Mendel argued that he could wear *shmattes* — and

meanwhile another Jew would be able to leave. Outside Russia — he told us his assumption — there's plenty of money, and you will have as much clothing as you need. My mother even gave over her jewelry, keeping only her wedding ring."

In Cheshvan, there was more encouraging news. A group of 57 people took the next train and crossed the border successfully. It didn't resolve all the issues; some 600 people were still waiting in Lvov, but it seemed that a *yeshuah* might be at hand. However, they waited. A large transport needed to be arranged to bring out as many Chassidim as possible in one shot, but that was a major and dangerous endeavor. They had asked for the Frierdiker Rebbe's *bracha*, but a response had not been forthcoming. The proposal was sent to 770 during Tishrei, but, as Rabbi Yisrael Jacobson reported, "the entire month, the Rebbe has been *b'hisbodedus*, more *upgetragen* [to himself]. The question was relayed in writing, but he hasn't yet answered."

During a *yechidus*, Reb Yisrael raised the question again, and the Frierdiker Rebbe didn't answer. "I gave over all the letters to the Rebbe *shlita*," he writes, "...but nudging the Rebbe [for an answer] is obviously out of the question." Chassidim were puzzled but proceeding with such a dangerous endeavor was out of the question without a *bracha*.

There was another issue at hand. The project would cost many thousands of dollars — money that the Chassidim simply didn't have. Loans were being taken on by Reb Yitzchak Goldin who was sneaking the money into Russia, but a better resolution was necessary. Furthermore: where would the Chassidim go after leaving Russia? Who would pay for their basic needs?

In the middle of Cheshvan, the Frierdiker Rebbe's *bracha* finally arrived. Around the same time,

the Joint Distribution Committee agreed to support the Chassidim as refugees upon their arrival. With those assurances in hand, the wheels began to move on a final resolution.

They Know Everything

Reb Shmerel Sasonkin describes what followed:

“After Tishrei, the government officials suddenly seemed kinder; they agreed to approve the documents, obviously for a hefty sum of money. The sum was collected, and on Friday, 28 Cheshvan, Mrs. Tzipa Kozliner was scheduled to visit the OVIR offices with the documents to receive their approval.”

Expecting an easy transaction, a transport was arranged for that very day. Three hundred people were expected to join, and a message was sent to Reb Sholom Mendel Kalmenson to expect them. Everyone waited anxiously for the approval.

“At exactly 1:00 p.m., Tzipa approached the offices with 60 family passports... Reb Chaim Ber Wilschansky followed her from behind. As she entered the building, Chaim Ber noticed armed soldiers standing next to a car and paying close attention to them. A moment later, Tzipa emerged from the building looking disturbed. Something was amiss; they had refused to touch the passports. Moments later, Chaim Ber saw the soldiers approach Tzipa and order her into the car — with all the passports still in her possession...”

All the *anash* in Lvov were gripped with fright. The authorities clearly had a list of the Chassidim and even knew their locations — within a few hours, her brother Mendel Gorelick and her son Mottel Kozliner were arrested as well. Everyone expected swift retaliation; the entire effort



PE'ILOS CHOTZE GEVULOS

A GROUP OF CHASSIDIM WHO ESCAPED ON TES KISLEV 5707*.

had gone to waste, mass arrests were sure to follow, and the families were destined to a dark future in the Soviet Union. All seemed lost.

But none of that occurred. Strangely, no further arrests were made. Mendel Gorelick and Mottel Kozliner were released shortly after Shabbos. Tzipa remained in prison (where she spent a year-and-a-half) but it seemed that a major crisis had been averted.

Confused, the *vaad* decided to try their luck again. Heavy bribes were once again submitted to the OVIR officials and, to their shock and delight, the approvals were delivered. It seemed that there was hope after all. (One possible explanation is that the local authorities orchestrated the arrests to squeeze more money out of the Chassidim; either way, it seemed to be an open miracle.)

The preparations went into high gear. Reb Sholom Mendel was informed, and he in turn wrote to Reb Yisrael Jacobson in New York. “I was told that in these days, some 3-400 will come, and it is hoped that the entire affair will conclude this month, with Hashem’s help.”

The train was arranged. Tes Kislev was zero hour.

Meanwhile, in New York...

On the morning of Tes Kislev, the nurse tending to the Frierdiker Rebbe’s medical needs knocked on the door of the *yechidus* room to administer a vaccine but heard no response. She opened the door and approached the Frierdiker Rebbe, but the Frierdiker Rebbe did not respond to her at all.

Frightened that something was wrong, she ran to call Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, who rushed into the room and was met with the same result. She immediately called several *bochurim* from the yeshiva; her son-in-law [the Rebbe] was not far away, she told them: “Call him immediately.”

The Rebbe rushed into the room and noticed that the Frierdiker Rebbe’s mouth was moving silently. The Rebbe leaned over, listened closely, and told everyone that they could calm down. The Frierdiker Rebbe was reciting the words of *Az yashir*. It wasn’t a medical emergency — it was clearly a spiritual matter.

Meanwhile, half-a-world away, dramatic events were playing out.

In Russia of those days, nothing was on-time or planned in advance. Trains could be arranged on a moment’s notice. When, on Tes Kislev, the train was ready to move,

it was necessary to rush the news to all the Chassidim, giving them only a few short hours to grab all their belongings and make their way to the train station. The stream of hundreds of people to the train station, many of them bearded Chassidim, attracted attention. The fact that none of them spoke Polish — the language of their “homeland” — didn’t help the situation. For the most part, the families did their best to remain silent throughout the trip to the train and the processing.

Fifty *anash* families — 240 souls — gathered on the train, creating the largest such group by far. The tension was palpable. Every single passenger was committing a serious crime which could bring on the worst possible punishment. Freedom — if achieved — would end some 25 years of terrible suffering and persecution. Their very lives hung in the balance.

The train began to move and soon reached the border. All the men were asked to step outside into the freezing cold, where their documents were checked one by one. The women’s documents were inspected on the train.

One Chossid, Reb Berel Gurevitch, didn’t have proper documentation and



SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE SASONKIN FAMILY WHO SUCCEEDED IN CROSSING THE BORDER, PHOTOGRAPHED SOON AFTER THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE SOVIET UNION.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

was placed under arrest. Reb Zalman Sudakevitch, whose papers weren’t in order either, hid under a massive pile of luggage for several hours; for good measure, several people sat down on the pile. It took him several days to recover from the ordeal.

After several hours and plenty of bribes, the guards at the border came to the conclusion that all was in order and allowed the train to continue. Everyone remained absolutely silent as the train inched forward.

Then, the long-awaited moment: the train crossed the border. The

relief was palpable. Spontaneously, the Chassidim on the train began to sing, “*Padah beshalom...*”

Back in New York, the Rebbe listened as the Frierdiker Rebbe recited *Az Yashir*. After concluding, he began reciting it again from the beginning. Suddenly, he stopped and said, “*Baruch Hashem, m’iz durchgegangen, durchgegangen genug*— they have passed through, they have passed through enough.”

Several hours later, a telegram arrived in 770; the Chassidim had crossed the border safely.



[This story about the Frierdiker Rebbe in New York was told over by the Rebbe during his visit to Paris in 5707*. The story is told in various versions and presented here according to the account of Reb Zalman Sudakevitch.]

Freedom!

This group was the largest and most significant. While small groups left earlier and several more followed, this train contained the largest by far — 240 Lubavitcher Chassidim, saved from under the noses of the Soviets. The Frierdiker Rebbe sent an emotional letter to the Chassidim:

“To those who are dear and beloved to me and close to my heart, the students of my holy father; may his merit, alongside the merit of all our holy Rabbeim, hover over you and your families...”

“*Baruch Hashem Elokeinu v'Elokei avoseinu v'raboseinu*, who has saved you and your families, and has brought us to this day... We all hope that we will be able to, very soon,

meet with each other, and we will all do everything in our power to help you settle down with good *parnassah* and schools for the children.

“May Hashem see our broken and mourning hearts over our beloved brothers and sisters, Temimim, Chassidim *v'yesharim*, who were killed, slaughtered, and burned in sanctification of His name. May He avenge their revenge, and take us with our righteous Moshiach to our Holy Land...”²

In a second letter, the Frierdiker Rebbe expressed his wish to receive photographs of all the newly arrived Chassidim, with lists of their names.

“My next memory from those years,” says Rabbi Alevsky, “is from right after we crossed the border. We were all gathered in a big hall in Krakow on Friday night, a short time after we arrived. Everyone was in very high spirits; a grand *farbrengen* took place, and lots of *l'chaim* was passed around.

“After two weeks in Poland, the Bricha smuggled us over the border into Czechoslovakia and then to the American Zone in Austria, where we were set up in a Displaced Persons Camp in Wegscheid. Other Chassidim were in Poking.

“We were part of a large Lubavitch group in Wegscheid; Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, Reb Saadia Liberow and other prominent Chassidim were with us, and they set up a *cheder* and *yeshiva* where we were able to finally begin learning Torah without fear.”

For the Chassidim it was without exaggeration a modern-day *yetzias Mitzrayim*. They would finally have the ability to live normal lives. They would be able to raise their children as Yidden without fear. And, most importantly, they would be able to reunite with the Rebbe. **1**

1. Teshura Veisfish-Zalmanov — Iyar 18, 5769
2. Igros Kodesh vol. 9, p. 187.

A PARTIAL LIST OF CHASSIDIM RESIDING IN POKING. NOTE REBBETZIN CHANA'S NAME AT THE VERY TOP OF THE LIST.

1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100	2101	2102	2103	2104	2105	2106	2107	2108	2109	2110	2111	2112	2113	2114	2115	2116	2117	2118	2119	2120	2121	2122	2123	2124	2125	2126	2127	2128	2129	2130	2131	2132	2133	2134	2135	2136	2137	2138	2139	2140	2141	2142	2143	2144	2145	2146	2147	2148	2149	2150	2151	2152	2153	2154	2155	2156	2157	2158	2159	2160	2161	2162	2163	2164	2165	2166	2167	2168	2169	2170	2171	2172	2173	2174	2175	2176	2177	2178	2179	2180	2181	2182	2183	2184	2185	2186	2187	2188	2189	2190	2191	2192	2193	2194	2195	2196	2197	2198	2199	2200	2201	2202	2203	2204	2205	2206	2207	2208	2209	2210	2211	2212	2213	2214	2215	2216	2217	2218	2219	2220	2221	2222	2223	2224	2225	2226	2227	2228	2229	2230	2231	2232	2233	2234	2235	2236	2237	2238	2239	2240	2241	2242	2243	2244	2245	2246	2247	2248	2249	2250	2251	2252	2253	2254	2255	2256	2257	2258	2259	2260	2261	2262	2263	2264	2265	2266	2267	2268	2269	2270	2271	2272	2273	2274	2275	2276	2277	2278	2279	2280	2281	2282	2283	2284	2285	2286	2287	2288	2289	2290	2291	2292	2293	2294	2295	2296	2297	2298	2299	2300	2301	2302	2303	2304	2305	2306	2307	2308	2309	2310	2311	2312	2313	2314	2315	2316	2317	2318	2319	2320	2321	2322	2323	2324	2325	2326	2327	2328	2329	2330	2331	2332	2333	2334	2335	2336	2337	2338	2339	2340	2341	2342	2343	2344	2345	2346	2347	2348	2349	2350	2351	2352	2353	2354	2355	2356	2357	2358	2359	2360	2361	2362	2363	2364	2365	2366	2367	2368	2369	2370	2371	2372	2373	2374	2375	2376	2377	2378	2379	2380	2381	2382	2383	2384	2385	2386	2387	2388	2389	2390	2391	2392	2393	2394	2395	2396	2397	2398	2399	2400
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