



לע"נ מרת רבקה ח' הינדא ע"ה  
בת הרה"ת ר' אשר הלוי ע"ה  
ברבר  
נלב"ע י"ט אדר שני ה'תשע"ד  
ת"נצ"ב"ה

נדפס ע"י בתה וחתנה  
הרה"ת ר' לוי יצחק  
וזוגתו מרת שפרינצא פערל  
ומשפחתם שיחיו  
שמוטקין

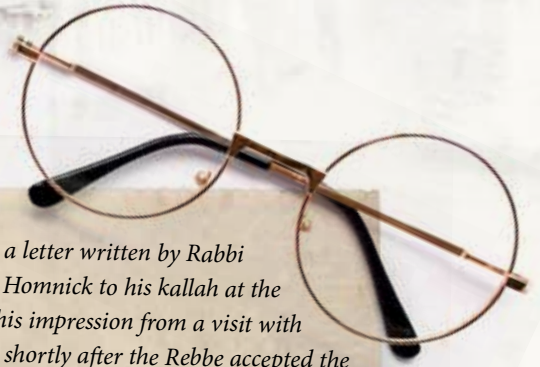
# Shabbos Mevarchim In Lubavitch With the New Rebbe



RABBI YAAKOV YITZCHOK HOMNICK

*Presented here is a letter written by Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Homnick to his kallah at the time, describing his impression from a visit with Lubavitch at 770 shortly after the Rebbe accepted the nesius. Rabbi Homnick was a student of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan. As he describes in his letter, his family had Chassidishe roots, and he therefore always took an interest in Chassidus.<sup>1</sup>*

*The letter is a real treasure, offering an authentic and very vivid description of what life around the Rebbe was like in those early years.*



## Tuesday Parshas Pekudei, 28 Adar I, 5711\*

I would like to describe to you what I did this past Shabbos.

Every Shabbos Mevarchim, the Lubavitcher Rebbe recites a "maamar."

Amongst Lubavitcher Chassidim, Shabbos Mevarchim, when the new month is blessed, is considered a joyous time, because then the Rebbe comes out to the crowd of hundreds of Chassidim gathered to hear his words of Torah and blessing. So on this past Shabbos, Shabbos Mevarchim Adar II, I went to Lubavitch to hear the words of the "Rebbe."

How do I end up in Lubavitch?

Firstly, when I lived on the East Side, my father attended the Chabad (Lubavitch) shul for many years, where they

davened Nusach Ari. While there, I heard much about the Lubavitcher Rebbe and about the philosophy of Chabad. They told me all about the wondrous deeds of the Lubavitcher Chassidim in Russia, who, despite the [persecution of the] Russian government, were able to save thousands of Jews from assimilation. With real *mesiras nefesh*, they taught Torah and kept mitzvos in hiding.

I also heard about their successful operation to evacuate thousands of Jews from Russia to America and Eretz Yisroel; Jews who had lived for 25 years under the Bolsheviks, yet they remained Torah-true. I had also read about these stories in the papers.

And in America too, I heard how they go around to small towns and build Jewish schools with *mesiras nefesh*, bringing the youth closer to Hashem. I heard about the

“Merkos L’Inyonei Chinuch” and the organization they have to fight assimilation.

Learning about all of the above really piqued my interest, and I decided to go and see for myself, who and what exactly are these people. I also heard about their beards and *peios*.

Most importantly, a few years ago I attended the summer camp of Mesivta Torah Vodaath. Every summer, the Lubavitcher yeshiva sends students to this camp, and while there I met some of them. There was one *bochur* in particular<sup>2</sup> who paid close attention to me. I heard that he is an exceptional student, both in his regular Torah studies, as well as in the teachings of Chabad.

Chabad Chassidus consists of a very well-built philosophy. Their first Rebbe, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi, was a student of the Baal Shem Tov. He was able to blend the teachings of Chassidus from the Baal Shem Tov with the teachings of the “*misnagdim*” and the Vilna Gaon. He wrote a *sefer* called “Tanya,” based on the school of thought of Chabad—*chochmah, binah, daas*.

Like the other Chassidim, he extolled the importance of emotional feelings and the role they play in the life [of a Jew]. But like the *misnagdim*, he also stressed the importance of studying Torah.

The Tanya lays out a whole philosophy for life. They say that Rabbi Soloveichik has said that the Tanya contains the deepest philosophy in the world.

The *bochur* that I met wanted to learn Tanya with me. In the Lubavitcher yeshiva they learn it every day. Because it contains many terms and concepts from Kabbalah, you need a teacher to introduce them to you.

This *bochur* was thin with his back hunched over. His eyes shined brightly, almost with a spiritual bearing; he looked to me like a *tzaddik*. He learned some Tanya with me and I enjoyed it immensely. Unfortunately, soon thereafter I had to leave back to the city.

When I was learning in Spring Valley, Rabbi Mendlowitz started teaching classes in Tanya. His classes were amazing. Rabbi Mendlowitz was well versed in the teachings of Chassidus in general, and the teachings of Chabad in particular. He was able to bring down the concepts of the Tanya into a clear, modern language.



REB PERETZ HECHT, WHO STUDIED TANYA WITH RABBI HOMNICK

But unfortunately, we only heard about five classes from him, and then he got sick and passed away.

After his passing, I kept reading Tanya on my own. I always felt that there are very vital concepts to be found in the Tanya, things we all need to know.

In general, I always had a deep interest in Chassidus. My family stems from Chassidim and we inherited that Chassidishe spirit. But as far as the teachings of Chassidus, even though Chassidus is such a well-written philosophy, with thousands of *sefarim* discussing it, I was never able to learn it thoroughly, because I never had a teacher to learn it with me.

Taking all of the above into account, I was extremely interested to go and see what is happening at 770 Eastern Parkway. Lubavitch is the only Chassidus which is strong and active even in America, so I decided to go to Lubavitch.

This is what their Shabbos Mevarchim looks like: At 8:00 in the morning, they all come to shul. First they go to the *mikveh*, then they recite the entire Tehillim. By 10:00, they’re ready to start davening.

Anyone who walks into that shul is immediately awestruck by what he sees. When you walk into the impressive building, you will suddenly see more beards than you’ve ever seen in your life: Long beards, short beards, white beards, red beards, full beards, and “goatees.” Elderly Chassidim with covered faces and younger ones with a few “grass hairs” on their chins.

The atmosphere is completely different than the one out in the street. Everyone converses in Yiddish. They all understand Yiddish.

There are people who were in Shanghai, people who escaped from Russia, *bochurim* who arrived from Eretz Yisroel to learn there, *bochurim* who came from South America, and from every corner of the world. You can tell from their faces where they come from. Most of them however, are Americans. Some are also *baalei teshuvah*.

They daven with great intensity. Others stand about in the halls and talk, but even their idle talk is made of a “different kind.” Like Chazal say about the “idle talk” of *talmidei chachamim*; their mundane conversations have the “Chabad spirit” to them.

The room that they daven in is fairly small; not more than



RABBI SHRAGA FEIVEL MENDLOWITZ, THE ROSH YESHIVA WHO ALSO GAVE SHIURIM IN TANYA AT THE YESHIVA OF SPRING VALLEY, NY, IN THE 5700S\*.



CHOL-HAMOED PESACH 5722, JEM 103439

40 ft. x 20 ft. At the center of the room is a *bimah*.

Immediately upon entering the room, I observed a very strange thing: On one side of the room there are some 150 people crammed together, while on the other side there are only ten people.

Then I looked closer and I understood: On one side of the room, the Rebbe is there. Because they want him to be able to see the *amud* and hear the *chazzan* well, they leave a huge empty space for only the Rebbe and some elder Chassidim, so he won't be disturbed by the large crowd.

There was no place to sit; everyone davened while standing. Amongst them are some very distinguished individuals: one person is a writer in the Yiddish newspapers, another is a doctor. The doctor also stands in the middle of the crowd of Chassidim and davens like all the rest of them.

The chief rabbi of Shanghai from before the war is also present amongst the Chassidim who are here for Shabbos Mevarchim. Everyone stood and davened together.

I tried getting closer to the Rebbe to look at his face. The Rebbe is tall with a round black beard. They say he learned in Berlin and completed his studies as an engineer.

I can immediately see that he is a calm, orderly person. He never picked his eyes up from out of the *siddur*; he was completely focused on his prayers.

Some of the students here daven with immense concentration; you can see their full hearts go out with every word of prayer. Someone explains to me that they are still mourning. They are mourning the passing of the [previous] Rebbe, the father-in-law of the current Rebbe.

The late Rebbe who passed away about a year ago was a great activist. He built the Lubavitcher yeshiva in America and had a great influence on the other *yeshivos*. In addition to that, he was a wise man and a Torah scholar. (I am currently reading some of his *maamarim* and I see how he was a person who literally fought for the ideals he believed in.) Standing here in the shul, I thought to myself what a pity it is that I never saw the elder Rebbe.

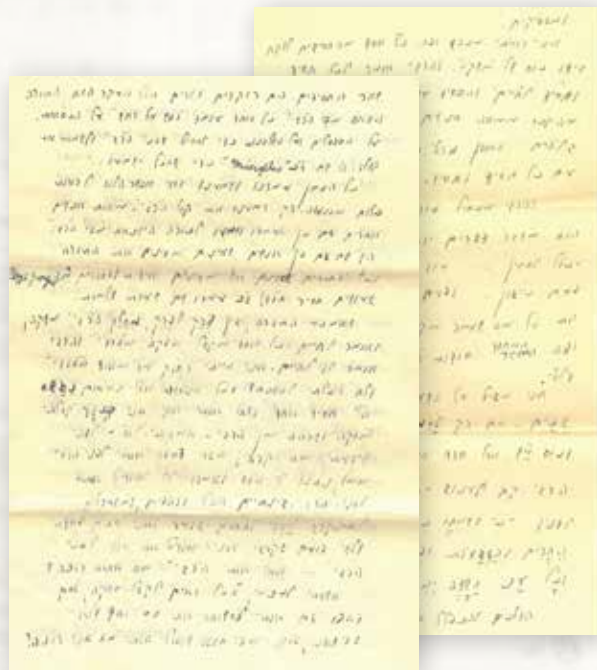
When the davening was over—their *nusach* is a little different than Ashkenaz or Sefard (their first Rebbe established to daven with the *nusach* of the Arizal, the great Kabbalist Reb Yitzchak Luria. It's a very meticulous *nusach* based on the secrets of the Kabbalah)—all the Chassidim started running towards the other half of the room where the Rebbe was, because he was going to speak and everyone wanted to be closer to him.

Everyone wanted to hear his holy words, without missing even one word.

A few minutes later, the Rebbe started talking. The Rebbe speaks in a low voice. His words flow like a forceful spring of water; he never stops to find the right word.

He speaks with a distinct accent. The Chabad Chassidim speak with a very distinct Yiddish. They speak like the Lithuanian Jews, but their "*reish*" is like that of the Hungarians. Also the words are a little different. While they speak, some words of Hebrew will get mixed in, as well as some concepts from Chabad teachings.

The Rebbe speaks quickly and with a sing-song. The Chassidim stand around the table with closed eyes, trying to concentrate and hear every



EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTER



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word. He speaks of the secrets of the Torah.

I felt like I was in a new world; a world where the only interest is in living a wholesome Jewish life. A world that is still interested in *avodas Hashem* and the secrets of the Torah.

The Rebbe speaks for a while and then takes a break, and the Chassidim sing a *niggun*. Even the *niggunim* of Chabad Chassidim are different from those of other Chassidim. They are very deep and heartrending *niggunim*.

In the teachings of Chabad there is a full section about *niggunim*—how to listen to *niggunim* and how to really be impacted by them.

They sing the *niggun* higher and higher, and then they stop. Then I observed a beautiful thing: Each one of the Chassidim raises a cup of *mashke*, and the Rebbe wishes each and every Chossid “*l’chaim!*” and they respond “*l’chaim.*”

Each and every one of the more than 100 people is blessed with a personal *l’chaim* from the Rebbe, thereby fostering a personal connection with each Chossid.

Then the Rebbe starts speaking again, this time talking about simpler concepts that everyone can understand. Then he takes another break, and there’s another *niggun*. Then this repeats itself a third time. The Rebbe connects everything with what he spoke about earlier, and a beautiful tapestry emerges, bringing together the secrets of the Torah with the revealed parts of Torah.

I glance at the clock. It’s already after 2:00, and most of them only tasted a little *kiddush*, some cake,

and a little *mashke*. But the day is not yet over.

The Rebbe gets up to leave. Everyone stands up and sings “*Ki V’simcha...*” and they all go to daven Mincha.

After Mincha, some people finally go home. But the real Chassidim stay longer and review the Rebbe’s words. One person tries to repeat everything the Rebbe said exactly; if he errs, the others will correct him. In this manner, they maintain exactly what the Rebbe said.

On Motzei Shabbos, the Rebbe’s *maamar* will be written down and printed. There’s no word that comes out of the Rebbe’s mouth that will not eventually be printed.

After this *chazzara*, they daven Maariv, and then they go to one Chossid’s house for *melaveh malka*. They spent their entire day immersed in Torah and *avodas Hashem*. This is how they prepare themselves for the new month.

When I left the Lubavticher court, I felt so elated. I felt like over there you can find the true spirit of Shabbos and the true spirit of *kedushah*.

I don’t know what the future holds for Lubavitch, but I know that they have a very rich past, and an interesting present.

Lubavitch and Chabad hold a special place in the story of our people. **1**

1. This letter was published, along with one more about Purim 5711, by his nephew Rabbi Shraga Dovid Homnick and the author of Yememi Bereshis Rabbi Yosef Greenberg, in a Teshura from the Hertzels-Greenberg wedding, 5781.

2. Reb Peretz Hecht.