

“I HAVE PLANTED A CEDAR IN ERETZ YISROEL”

REB EPHRAIM WOLFF

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PRINTING

לזכות החיילים בצבאות ה'
מנחם מענדל בן חי' מושקא שי'
לרגל יום הולדתו בז' מר-חשון
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מתוך שמחה, בריאות והרחבה

Celebrating his Bar Mitzvah alone in Heide, Belgium in 1933, the young man whose father forbade him from going to Tomchei Temimim would never have dreamed that one day he would head its central yeshiva in Kfar Chabad, a town he would help found in a country he would fight to defend.

The 13-year-old orphan would make his way from Nuremberg, Germany, to Heide, Belgium, where he would celebrate his Bar Mitzvah alone. He would eventually reach the Frierdiker Rebbe's holy court in Otwock, Poland. Escaping the inferno that consumed his home, he would become a pioneer, founding mosdos with dozens of branches that educate thousands of Chassidim each year, and becoming known simply as the Menahel – the Director.

FROM NUREMBERG TO OTWOCK

Rabbi Ephraim Wolff was born in Nuremberg, Germany, on 21 Av 5680. His parents, Reb Benyomin and Breindel Wolff, were well-to-do pillars of the community and famous for their generosity. In a city largely dominated by the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) movement, their home was an oasis of Torah-true Yiddishkeit.

Reb Benyomin was one of the most respected members of Nuremberg's Orthodox community, supporting the Adas Yisroel shul, and assiduously studying Torah. An example of *Torah u'gedulah bemakom echad* — Torah and prosperity in one person, he was fluent in all of *Shas* and was quite wealthy, owning a metalworking factory whose towering structures in central Nuremberg created goods of silver and steel that were famous throughout Germany.

From a young age, Ephraim's parents showed him that physical comfort and wealth paled in importance next to living as a G-d-fearing Jew. As a child, Ephraim would travel every day to attend the nearest Cheder that taught authentic Yiddishkeit, a trip of an hour and a half in each direction. At age 10, he left home to learn in Mannheim, 150 miles away. At age 12, he journeyed to Heide, Belgium, a small village outside Antwerp with a renowned yeshiva.

In Heide, young Ephraim first met Chabad Chassidim and developed an interest in Chassidus. Some of them served as *rabbonim* and educators in the area, and, most notably, he met Reb Itche Der Masmid, (Reb Yitzchok Hurwitz) — who left a deep impression on Ephraim during these



REB EPHRAIM AS A YOUNG BOY WITH HIS PARENTS AND AUNT

formative years.

The influence of the Chassidim he met in Heide gave him a thirst for Chassidus. He wanted to go to Poland, where Tomchei Temimim had relocated following the Frierdiker Rebbe's liberation from Russia, but his father opposed the plan, pleading with him to not be so hasty in abandoning the *Litvishe* way of life and learning. So instead Ephraim went to the yeshiva in Telshe, Lithuania.

There too, however, his thirst for Chassidus continued. He soon met another legendary Chossid, the rav of nearby Rakshik (Rokisis), Reb Shmuel Levitin. Rakshik boasted a sizable Chassidish community and was known as the most Chassidish town in Lithuania. Reb Shmuel took it upon himself to share the light of Chassidus in nearby *yeshivos* and Ephraim soon became a regular at Reb Shmuel's *shiurim*.

Inter-war Germany was not always a comfortable place for Jews, and antisemitism in Nuremberg became increasingly worrisome and unbearable. With the rise of the Nazis to power in 1933, gangs began boycotting and terrorizing Jewish businesses. *B. Wolff & Co, Metallwarenfabrik* was no exception. The Wolff family quickly

realized that there was no future in Nuremberg, and Reb Benyomin began to liquidate his assets, selling what he could for whatever price he could get. In 1935, Reb Benyomin and his family escaped Germany, a harrowing journey that involved sneaking into a cafe on the border between Germany and Belgium: they entered the front door in Germany and exited into Belgium through the backyard, evading customs officials by claiming they were planning to return.

From there they continued to the Netherlands, settling in a suburb of The Hague. But, following the loss of their home and business, they now suffered a much greater loss: Breindel, the matriarch of the family who was always doing *chessed* passed away suddenly from a hemorrhage. Upon receiving news of his mother's passing, a grief-stricken Ephraim hastened to Holland, but could not make it in time for the *levaya*. He soon returned to Telshe and continued his studies.

In the course of learning with Reb Shmuel Levitin, the *meshpia* realized that it was time for his young protege to take the next step in *hiskashrus*. He suggested that Ephraim travel to the Frierdiker Rebbe, then in Otwock, Poland, for the month of Tishrei 5699.



THE FRIERDIKER REBBE AT A HEALTH RESORT IN THE LATE 5690s



A LETTER FROM THE FRIERDIKER REBBE TO REB EPHRAIM IN THE SUMMER OF 5699 INQUIRING ABOUT THE WELLBEING OF HIS FATHER AND UNCLE.

Though he was new to the Frierdiker Rebbe's *chatzer*, the Wolff name was familiar to the Rebbeim of Chabad. In 5667, the Rebbe Rashab had stayed at the home of Reb Elyakim Wolff, Ephraim's uncle, in Wurzburg, Germany. This launched a connection that continued with the Frierdiker Rebbe, with whom Reb Elyakim corresponded a number of times. When Ephraim Wolff arrived in Otwock, the Frierdiker Rebbe asked his secretary, Reb Yechezkel "Chatche" Feigin, whether this *bochur* was related to Reb Elyakim. Hearing that he was his nephew, the Frierdiker Rebbe immediately approved Ephraim's entry into Tomchei Temimim.

THE REBBE ASKED HIM TO COME IN

Reb Ephraim once related that on Beis Nissan 5699, the Rebbe Rashab's *yahrtzeit*, *bochurim* were asked to come make a minyan at the health resort where the Frierdiker Rebbe was staying, so that the Rebbe could daven at the *amud* and say *kaddish*. The Frierdiker Rebbe davened in a seated position, and after davening, he told a number of stories about the Rebbe Rashab and said *l'chaim* with the *bochurim*.

At the time, Reb Yechezkel Himmelstein's wife found out that the Frierdiker Rebbe was in town, and wanted to go into *yechidus* to ask a *bracha* for children, something they had not been blessed with. Her husband protested that the Rebbe was there to relax, not to listen to *tzaros*, but she insisted. Since the road was dangerous, Reb Yechezkel asked young Ephraim to accompany her to the Rebbe.

After her *yechidus*, the *mazkir* approached Ephraim and asked him whether he'd like to go into *yechidus*. Ephraim realized that this was not the *mazkir's* idea, but that it had come from the Rebbe. Indeed, he later found out that the Rebbe had asked Mrs. Himmelstein how she had gotten there, and when she replied that a *bochur* had accompanied her, the Rebbe called the *mazkir* and asked him to bring the *bochur* into *yechidus*.

But Ephraim felt that he could not accept the invitation. For one thing, the Frierdiker Rebbe was there to relax and recover; the *yechidus* could be a strain on his health. In addition, Ephraim was in winter clothing — not dressed the way he would feel comfortable entering *yechidus* — and had not gone to the *mikvah*, since they had left long before dawn to begin their journey. So Ephraim asked the *mazkir* to tell the Frierdiker Rebbe that he was still traveling, and had just stopped in Riga for a short time to get his papers in order.

Having recently been in *yechidus* in Otwock and receiving a *bracha* for his journey, Ephraim was very taken by the attention that the Frierdiker Rebbe was giving him by inviting him for another *yechidus*. Indeed, the Frierdiker Rebbe's *bracha* accompanied Ephraim throughout the perilous train ride from Riga to Odessa, and the sea voyage from Odessa to Haifa.

Ephraim was so taken by the experience of the *tefillos*, *farbrengens* and other happenings during Tishrei that he decided he wasn't going back to Telshe, remaining in Otwock until Kislev. Joining Tomchei Temimim was quite an adjustment for this scion of German Jews. The yeshiva could barely afford to feed the *bochurim*, and hiring cleaning help was out of the question so the *zal* would be quite messy by the time the day was done. Coming from a *Yekkische* background, a dirty *beis medrash* was simply unconscionable. So Ephraim would wait until the others were asleep and then secretly clean the *zal* himself.

In Kislev, Ephraim was *zoche* to go into *yechidus* for the first time, beginning a deep connection with the Frierdiker Rebbe. In that *yechidus*, the Frierdiker Rebbe told young Ephraim, whose davening would often be far louder than his peers, that one must daven out loud from the Siddur, but in such a way that others don't hear you.

In that *yechidus*, Ephraim also asked a bracha for the next chapter in his family's journey. The Wolff's had realized that nowhere in Europe would be safe from the Nazis, and despite Ephraim's deep desire to stay near the Rebbe, Reb Benyomin had decided that the family would make the difficult journey to Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe gave his bracha and Ephraim began his voyage.

His first stop was Vilna (Vilnius), capital of Lithuania, where he began the arduous process of obtaining an exit visa from Lithuania, an entry visa into the British Mandate of Palestine, and transit visas for the countries in between. His father, still in Holland, sent money and paperwork to smooth the process, but the bureaucracy would move only so fast. From Vilna, young Ephraim traveled to Riga in nearby Latvia, where he spent about a year waiting for his entry visa to the British Mandate of Palestine.

In Riga, Ephraim joined the local Tomchei Temimim, where he again encountered crushing poverty and need among the other *bochurim*. As a scion of a well-to-do family, Ephraim had arrived with 15 suits of high-quality fabric. But seeing his fellow *temimim* lacking basic items of clothing, within days he had distributed 14 of them, keeping only one for himself.

During his time in Riga, Ephraim met notable Chassidische personalities like Reb Chatche Feigin and Reb Yechezkel Himmelstein, as well as Reb Mordechai Dubin, who served at the time as a member of the Latvian Parliament, the Saeima. Ephraim also met Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Aizik Hoda-kov, later the Rebbe's *mazkir*. In Riga, Rabbi Hodakov served as representative of the Agudas Yisroel party to the City Council and was responsible for Jewish education in the area. But the highlight of Ephraim's stay were the months that the Frierdiker Rebbe spent at a health resort in Riga during the winter of 5699.

When he finally received his entry visa to Eretz Yisroel, Ephraim boarded a train to the Ukrainian port town of Odessa, where he embarked on a ship bound for Eretz Yisroel. By the time

he arrived, Germany had invaded Poland and the war had begun. Ephraim's father and sister also successfully escaped Europe and settled in Yerushalayim.

There Ephraim joined the Chabad Yeshiva, Toras Emes. He developed a friendship with the longtime *rav* of the Tel Aviv's Chabad community, Harav Moshe Ashkenazi. Ephraim informed the Frierdiker Rebbe of his arrival, and received *brachos* in return. His correspondence with the Frierdiker Rebbe would continue when the Rebbe settled in the United States and wrote letters providing Ephraim with guidance, encouraging him to study *nigleh* and Chassidus, and a letter advising him to look into *shidduchim*.

I HAVE PLANTED A CEDAR IN ERETZ YISROEL

Reb Ephraim soon met Pessia Pariz, whose father, the famed *chossid* Reb Avrohom Pariz, was in New York near the Frierdiker Rebbe at the time. Upon hearing about the prospective *shidduch*, Reb Avrohom immediately





REB EPHRAIM WOLFF IN HIS OFFICE AT THE YESHIVA

asked the Frierdiker Rebbe about it. The Frierdiker Rebbe approved the *shidduch* and went on to praise Reb Ephraim, saying in Yiddish, “איך האב, “איינגעפלאנצט א ארז אין ארץ הקודש — “I have planted a cedar tree (*erez*) in *Eretz Hakodesh*.” After such a warm approval, Reb Avrohom rushed to telegram his wife, who was in Petach Tikva, to go ahead with the *shidduch*.

The couple was engaged in the winter of 5702, and married that spring in the Gestetner Banquet Hall in Yerushalayim. Their first son, Nosson, was born soon after and six more followed. Following each birth, the Frierdiker Rebbe sent letters of bracha and advice, as he did when Pessia was unwell and briefly hospitalized.

As a *yungerman*, Reb Ephraim ran a courier service, but soon found himself pulled into communal activism, in which he would find his life’s calling. The Frierdiker Rebbe was calling for *l’alter l’teshuva*, *l’alter l’geula*, encouraging everyone to do *teshuvah* and help alleviate the birth pangs of Moshiach that the world was experiencing. Reb Ephraim’s father-in-law, the devoted *chossid* Reb Avraham Pariz, recruited him to reach out to news outlets and spread the Rebbe’s message.

Following World War II, as Eretz

Yisroel became embroiled in conflict leading to its declaration of independence, and then when war broke out in 1948, Reb Ephraim served in the Hagana. His unit helped defend the Jerusalem Corridor, the road between Yerushalayim and the Shephelah, a lifeline for the city that was otherwise cut off by Jordanian forces.

The Frierdiker Rebbe sent a bracha for the family’s safety, and indeed, despite a number of close calls, they emerged from the war unscathed. On one occasion, the Wolffs were hiding in a shelter during a bombardment and a shell scored a direct hit on the structure, blasting open the sandbags that had been placed over it. Miraculously, no-one was hurt. Another time, Reb Ephrayim ventured out to get food for four-month-old Elyakim, and was fired upon by Jordanian Legionnaires. The bullets whizzed past his shoulders but did not strike him.

THE YESHIVA IN LOD

The new State of Israel saw an influx of Jewish immigrants, and in 1949, after many Chabad families

escaped the Soviet Union using false Polish passports, a number of them made their way to Eretz Yisroel. Yerushalayim’s Chabad community could not absorb all the refugees and soon a number of families settled together in an area outside Lod, some 15 kilometers from Tel Aviv.

The legendary Reb Zushe Wilmsky secured a building that had served as a guesthouse near the Lod train station. In fact, when the Frierdiker Rebbe traveled through Lod on his way from Alexandria, Egypt to Yerushalayim in 5689, he stopped at the train station, pointed to that very building, and said that it would be a yeshiva. Twenty years later, the *nevuah* was fulfilled as Tomchei Temimim found a home there. In that small guesthouse grew a yeshiva that today has thousands enrolled in its various branches.

As it quickly grew, the yeshiva’s need for a full-time *menahel* — director — became apparent, and Reb Ephraim was asked to temporarily fill the position for a designated trial period. Every Sunday he would set out from Yerushalayim and stay in Lod through the week, going home only for Shabbos, while his wife cared for their four young children. At the end of the trial period, Reb Ephraim wrote to the Frierdiker Rebbe about his work in the yeshiva: “For me, the main challenge is leaving my wife and children behind all week, which is very difficult for my wife, and a proper home is very difficult to find in Lod.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe replied with what turned out to be his last letter to Reb Ephraim, instructing him to continue his work in Lod and blessing him and his family. After receiving this letter, Reb Ephraim formally accepted the position of *Menahel* — Director of the Yeshiva, a position he would fill for over five decades.

A YESHIVA FOR IMMIGRANTS

From the start, the yeshiva placed emphasis on the absorption of Jewish immigrants, particularly those emigrating from Yemen and Russia. In fact, the yeshiva's legal name was "Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim, Kollel Olei Rusya, Olei Teiman."

When the State of Israel was founded, there was a wave of immigration from Yemen, Morocco and Tunis. Rabbi Yisroel Grossman, who was Rosh Yeshiva in Lod for many years, would travel from village to village and persuade the new immigrants to send their children to yeshiva. His son, Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, Chief Rabbi of Migdal Haemek, related that when his father had gathered a sizable group of immigrant children and sought to find them a yeshiva, he was rebuffed by a number of *yeshivos*. "You want us to create a *Sephardishe yeshiva*?" the *roshei yeshiva* would ask.

But when he asked Reb Ephraim, the response was very different.

From the earliest years of his *nesius*, the Rebbe had encouraged the *hanhalah* of Tomchei Temimim to include the Yemenite children in their activities and ensure that they would receive a proper Jewish education.¹

So when Reb Ephraim was approached about this issue, not only did he immediately welcome all the *talmidim* to the yeshiva, but he accompanied Reb Yisroel's fundraising from *shul* to *shul*, so that the new students — who of course could not pay tuition — should have beds and mattresses and everything else they'd need to feel welcome and comfortable in the yeshiva.

The Rebbe encouraged the yeshiva to pay heed to the education of these

young men, with the aim that they would soon become educators themselves. "It's obvious how necessary this is and how great are the benefits that can be expected from them," the Rebbe wote.

Indeed, many of these students soon went on to serve as mentors to their younger peers, creating a culture of growth that allowed immigrants from backgrounds both physically and spiritually disadvantaged, to see their potential as teachers and *mashpi'im*.

BUILDING UP Kfar CHABAD: THE YESHIVA AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

In 5723, the central yeshiva in Kfar Chabad was inaugurated. Its cornerstone had been laid five years previously, at the Rebbe's behest. Every step of the process was overseen by Reb Ephraim, who reported constantly to the Rebbe. Upon completion of the new building, the *bochurim* in *yeshiva gedolah* moved from Lod to Kfar Chabad, enabling Lod to welcome additional students to the *yeshiva ketana*.

But as both *yeshivos* flourished, it was just a few months before the brand-new building was bursting at the seams. And so, in 5723, the cornerstone was laid for a second building, which would be named "Beit Pinchas" after the legendary Chossid and member of the yeshiva's administration, Reb Pinchas Althaus, who passed away a month after the cornerstone was laid. In the early 5730s, the Lod yeshiva added new buildings as well, to house the kitchen and dining room, as well

as dormitories, classrooms, and offices. It continued to expand year after year as the student body grew.

From the start, the yeshiva did not limit its scope to traditional *bochurim* seeking to learn only Torah all day. In the winter of 5712, the Rebbe wrote to the *hanhalah* about a proposal that had been raised to open vocational schools. The Rebbe wrote, "It is out of the question to change the *seder* of Tomchei Temimim from the way that it was set up by its founders and principals the Rebbe [Rashab] and my father-in-law the [Frierdiker] Rebbe, and therefore the yeshiva itself cannot have vocational classes. On the other hand, as there are a number of married men and *bochurim* who, for whatever reason, can't learn in yeshiva all day, but would be willing to learn *nigleh* and Chassidus for a number of hours each day, provided they are also taught a trade, it's a very good idea to work on this ..."²

Thus *Beit Sefer L'Melacha*, the Vocational School, was born. It was a separate *mosad*, but under the close supervision of the yeshiva. The school grew to include courses in carpentry, agriculture, and printing.

On Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5716, *Beit Sefer L'Melacha* was the site of a horrific terrorist attack when five students and a teacher were murdered in cold blood. The Rebbe's response to this tragedy was to encourage rebuilding. A print shop was built, and named for the five slain students.³

THE REBBE'S DEPUTY

During the first decade at the yeshiva, Reb Ephraim worked with Reb Avrohom Drizin (Mayorer), and they poured heart and soul into building up the *mosad*. The Chabad network in Eretz Yisroel quickly grew



ORIGINAL BUILDINGS OF THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IN KFAR CHABAD



REB EPHRAIM STANDS (SECOND TO RIGHT) IN FRONT OF THE "YAD HACHAMISHA PRINTING SCHOOL", BUILT IN MEMORY OF THE FIVE SLAIN STUDENTS.

to include boys' and girls' schools, *yeshivos*, Colel Chabad, Tzeirei Agudas Chabad, and the Reshet schools. While Reb Ephraim focused on the yeshiva and its branches in Kfar Chabad, Nachlas Har Chabad and Migdal Ha'emek, he was soon acting as liaison between the Rebbe and all the Chabad *mosdos*, earning him the unofficial title "the Rebbe's deputy in the Holy Land."

The Rebbe would ask to hear in detail about everything taking place in the yeshiva, as Rabbi Hodakov wrote to Reb Ephraim in 5729: "The Rebbe has pointed out to me a number of times that they don't tell him about everything that's happening in Kfar Chabad and in Eretz Yisroel in general. You need to write about everything, down to the last detail."

Reb Zushe Posner, who worked in Reb Ephraim's office for a number of years, related that Reb Ephraim told him that the Rebbe had asked to be informed of everything taking place "as if I'm in the yeshiva office."

Harkening back to that first *yechidus* with the Frieddiker Rebbe, when Reb Ephraim was told that one should be loud but that others should not hear you, Reb Ephraim served in a position of immense responsibility, but did so with the utmost discretion. He knew everything about everyone, but told not a soul — besides the Rebbe.

He directed, counseled, and advised dozens of *mosdos* and hundreds of people, but always in an unassuming way and under unbreakable secrecy.

This reliability and discretion was brought to bear during the painful *sefarim* incident leading up to Didan Notzach. As the individual who stole *sefarim* from the Library of Agudas Chasidei Chabad began making them available for sale around the world, the Rebbe spoke with anguish about the *sefarim*, warning that to take such a *sefer* into one's possession was like picking up a live bomb.

A number of these *sefarim* made their way to Eretz Yisroel, where they were acquired by local collectors and dealers. Local Lubavitcher Chassidim tried to persuade these collectors to return the *sefarim* — if not of their own goodwill, then in exchange for payment. The payments were made by Reb Ephraim, from funds he administered on the Rebbe's behalf.

Rabbi Sholom DovBer Levine, librarian of the Agudas Chasidei Chabad library, related that some time after the court ruling on Hei Teves 5747, the court requested a detailed list of all monies paid by Chabad to recover the stolen *sefarim*. Rabbi Levine received information from various Chassidim who were active in the United States and in Europe

in recovering the *sefarim*, but when he reached out to Reb Ephraim, he did not receive a response. He asked other Chassidim who were involved, but they said that they didn't have the information. Under pressure to send in the list as quickly as possible, Rabbi Levine again reached out to Reb Ephraim, expressing the urgency of the matter, and informing Reb Ephraim that a copy of the letter was sent to the Rebbe as well.

In response, Reb Ephraim wrote that the information about the sums he spent was something he would only report to the Rebbe, and not to anyone else. He added that he, too, was sending a copy of *his* letter to the Rebbe.

In the end, Rabbi Levine was able to get the list, but was left with a deep appreciation for the extent to which Reb Ephraim safeguarded the Rebbe's confidence, unwilling to share potentially sensitive information with anyone whatsoever.

Upon the passing of Reb Eliezer Karasik and Reb Pinchas Althaus in the early 5720s, Reb Ephraim was asked to head Agudas Chasidei Chabad in Eretz Yisroel. For decades, he reported to the Rebbe on public and private matters, and passed on the Rebbe's responses to the appropriate individuals. He did all this while maintaining a grueling schedule as the

THE ONE UPON WHOM I CAN RELY

Scores of the Rebbe's letters to Reb Ephraim are published in *Igros Kodesh*, but they drop in frequency in the 5720s. This is not because Reb Ephraim was corresponding *less* with the Rebbe, but rather the reverse: he had begun sending detailed reports to the Rebbe, every morning, encompassing all Chabad activities in Eretz Yisroel in which he had a part. In the evenings, he would talk by phone with Rabbi Hodakov, who would verbally relay the Rebbe's responses to, and questions about items in the report.

Despite his efforts to keep a low profile and avoid publicity, Reb Ephraim's devotion and almost superhuman efforts did not go unnoticed or unrecognized. Speaking with a Chossid from Tel Aviv, the Rebbe said, "The one on whom I can rely in Eretz Yisroel is Reb Ephraim Wolff." On another occasion, a couple who had emigrated from Russia to Eretz Yisroel came to New York to visit the Rebbe, leaving their daughter behind in Eretz Yisroel. They told the Rebbe that they couldn't afford the airfare to bring her along.

"I have a friend in Eretz Yisroel," the Rebbe replied. "His name is Reb Ephraim Wolff. Go to him, and he will see to it that all your needs are met."

yeshiva's director, involved in administrative and fundraising duties.

BUILDING CHABAD NEIGHBORHOODS

In 5724, foreseeing the need for more housing when Russia's Jews would be allowed to go free, the Rebbe instructed Rabbi Binyamin Gorodetzky to develop a Chabad project in Lod. Reb Ephraim told *Kfar Chabad* magazine that Rabbi Gorodetzky was given \$20,000 by the Rebbe for this project, and Reb Ephraim and Rabbi Gorodetzky raised the rest with great effort. As financial challenges threatened to halt the project, and later, as construction progressed on what would be called "Shikun Chabad," Reb Ephraim corresponded with the Rebbe, keeping him informed at every step in the process.

Reb Ephraim sent the Rebbe the blueprints as soon as they were approved. When construction finally commenced, the Rebbe sent a telegram blessing Reb Ephraim and Reb Avraham Parshan, who was also heavily involved, with much success and with far greater additions over what had already begun.

The Rebbe's prophetic vision saw Shikun Chabad become home to hundreds of Russian immigrants in the years to follow.

Following the Six Day War in 5727, immigration from the Soviet Union picked up, particularly from the republic of Georgia, and the need for additional homes for these new *olim* was acute. So, in addition to Shikun Chabad and the expansion of Kfar Chabad, a neighborhood was established in Kiryat Malachi in 5729 named Nachlas Har Chabad.

At this point, the Chabad effort to resettle Soviet refugees ran into opposition from high-ranking members



TRANSCRIPT OF A PHONE CONVERSATION REB EPHRAIM HAD WITH THE REBBE'S MAZKIRUS ON THE TOPIC OF ENROLLING ADDITIONAL CHILDREN IN CHABAD MOSDOS

ON A LETTER SENT BY REB EPHRAIM TO THE REBBE REGARDING BOCHURIM GOING ON MIVTZOIM DURING SEDER, THE REBBE REPLIES SHARPLY HOW ALL MATTERS OF THE BOCHURIM MUST ACCORD WITH THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE HANHALA.



of the Israeli government, who were determined to scatter these immigrants across the country rather than allowing Chabad to settle them in the new neighborhoods being built for this purpose.

The Rebbe realized the serious spiritual harm this could cause, and prevailed upon the government, through his representatives in Eretz Yisroel, to approve the creation of the new development in Kiryat Malachi. Nachlas Har Chabad consisted of a number of apartment buildings which would host some 600 Soviet immigrant families. They would be mentored by ten Chabad families who moved to the neighborhood for this purpose.

Of course Reb Ephraim was in the thick of these discussions and debates. In one letter, he wrote to the Rebbe how in a meeting with an Israeli official, the official asked what they would do if the expected hundreds of families showed up before the buildings were ready. “Then every family in Lod and in Kfar Chabad will take in an immigrant family,” was Reb Shlomo Madanchik’s immediate response.

Reb Ephraim asked the Rebbe if this was as far as they were expected to go: did the Rebbe expect every family of *anash* to take in an immigrant family? Should they maintain their ambitious goal of absorbing so many families? As the meetings and negotiations continued, and the plan began to take shape, Reb Ephraim continued to write to the Rebbe for guidance. Following the final meeting, when it was decided to go ahead with the building project and the relocation of Chabad families to serve in mentorship roles, the Rebbe telegraphed his approval and blessing for success.

On Erev Shabbos Zachor 5729, the Rebbe instructed that a *farbrengen* be held in the new neighborhood, and since then, Shabbos Zachor is considered the official date of Nachlas Har



REB EPHRAIM HELPS A VISITOR AT THE YESHIVA IN KFAR CHABAD PUT ON TEFILLIN

Chabad’s founding.⁴

Reb Ephraim was also deeply involved in the establishment of Kiryat Chabad in Tzfas. In 5733, when Rabbi Leibel Kaplan arrived in Tzfas as the Rebbe’s *shliach*, Reb Ephraim reported on the tasks and challenges Rabbi Kaplan faced, and the Rebbe responded, making clear that the *Kirya* should be built as its own neighborhood, blessing the families moving in, and pledging financial support.

These are a few examples of the hundreds of letters and *hora’os* Reb Ephraim merited to receive from the Rebbe as he put heart and soul into the growth of Chabad in the Holy Land.

EXPANDING CHABAD IN ERETZ YISROEL

Reb Ephraim stood at the helm of Chabad in Eretz Yisroel as it

experienced exponential growth, and was directly involved in the opening of dozens of *mosdos*, programs, and initiatives. His accomplishments include the *yeshivos* in Lod, Kfar Chabad, Nachlas Har Chabad and Migdal Ha’emek; the *Beit Sefer Lmelacha*; the absorption of immigrants from Georgia, Bukharia, Russia and Yemen; opening a Kollel for married men; renovating the Tzemach Tzedek Shul in Yerushalayim after the Old City was liberated during the Six Day War; establishing and expanding Chabad neighborhoods in Lod, Kiryat Malachi and Tzfat; spearheading initiatives following the Rebbe’s calls for the *mivtzoim*, Who is a Jew, the Sefer Torah for Unity, Rambam, and much more.

Under the Rebbe’s guidance, Reb Ephraim was involved in sending shlichim throughout Eretz Yisroel. He collected *maamad* donations from the Chassidim in the country, and supervised outreach initiatives to soldiers in military bases. He also oversaw the publication and distribution of *sifrei Chassidus* throughout Eretz Yisroel.

* 5729-1969, 5733-1973



REB EPHRAIM IN HIS LATER YEARS, LEARNING ALONE FROM A SEFER AND KUNTRES OF THE REBBE

THE LEGENDARY MENAHEL — DIRECTOR

Despite his enormous workload, Reb Ephraim's primary responsibility was always Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim and its many branches across Eretz Yisroel. He would work late into the night, the light in his office almost always on. Regardless of how busy he was, he would always make time to speak to any *bochur* who needed something.

In the yeshiva's early years, during times of hardship in Eretz Yisroel, it was a struggle to provide just one meal a day to the students. When Reb Ephraim would be brought food from the dining room, he would refuse it, asking to be brought the leftovers only after all the *bochurim* had eaten. Throughout his life, despite being the one who fundraised to buy the supplies for the yeshiva, he refused to use them, insisting they be used only by the *bochurim* and *hanhalah*.

His *Yekkishe* roots would sometimes surface when the *zal* was especially messy. As had happened

so many years before in Otwock, *bochurim* would wake up to find the *zal* mysteriously cleaned, the tables and chairs placed in neat rows. They soon discovered that it was the *menahel* himself who, after a grueling day's work that left him almost no time for himself or his family, spent yet more time sweeping and organizing the *zal*.

Despite all this, Reb Ephraim found time to learn Torah, *nigleh* and Chassidus, each day, as per the Frieddiker Rebbe's blessing all those years earlier. He completed Shas several times with his *chavrusas*, one of whom was Mr. Tzvi Itzkowitz, the Mayor of Lod, with whom he would learn Gemara for an hour a day.

Reb Ephraim once wrote to the Rebbe that he was concerned that due to his huge workload and communal responsibilities, he might forget the Torah he had learned. The Rebbe responded that he should take on an additional *chavrusa*, so Reb Ephraim added another *kvius* from 1:00 to 2:00 every afternoon.

Despite being responsible for hundreds of salaries and thousands of students, Reb Ephraim did not hold himself above the work of every Chossid — *hafatzas hamaayanos*. Every Friday for more than 30 years, he and

his wife Pessia would visit the Shmuel Harofe Hospital where Reb Ephraim would put on tefillin with the men and Pessia would distribute *neshek* to the women.

GENERATIONS OF CHASSIDIM

Reb Ephraim and his wife Pessia were blessed with six children and a multitude of grandchildren *ka"h*, many of whom moved on shlichus to distant countries. Reb Ephraim took a keen interest in every family member, calling each grandchild on their birthday, and would recite the *kapitel Tehillim* corresponding to the age of each child and grandchild every day.

In 5760, Reb Ephraim fell ill, just two months after the tragic passing of his son and right-hand man, Reb Berke.

On Wednesday, 26 Shevat 5763, Reb Ephraim passed away at the age of 84. He is survived by a large family around the world, and by thousands of spiritual descendants who owe their Chassidishkeit to the *mosdos* he built and maintained through decades of selfless and unwavering service to the Chabad community in Eretz Yisroel.

The young *bochur* from Nuremberg found the light of Chassidus and grew into a legend, with thousands of students, *mushpa'im*, and family members carrying on his legacy of learning, giving, and above all, being a staunch and loyal *chossid* of the Rebbe⁵. **1**

1. See Igros Kodesh vol. 3, p. 310; vol. 4, p. 486; et. al.

2. Igros Kodesh vol. 5, pg. 84.

3. See *Transforming Tragedy* — Derher Iyar 5775; *The Rebbe's Capital City* — Derher Tishrei 5779.

4. See "A Mountain of Pride," Derher, Tishrei 5780.

5. Much of the material in this article is based on the book *Hamenahel*, Kfar Chabad 5782.