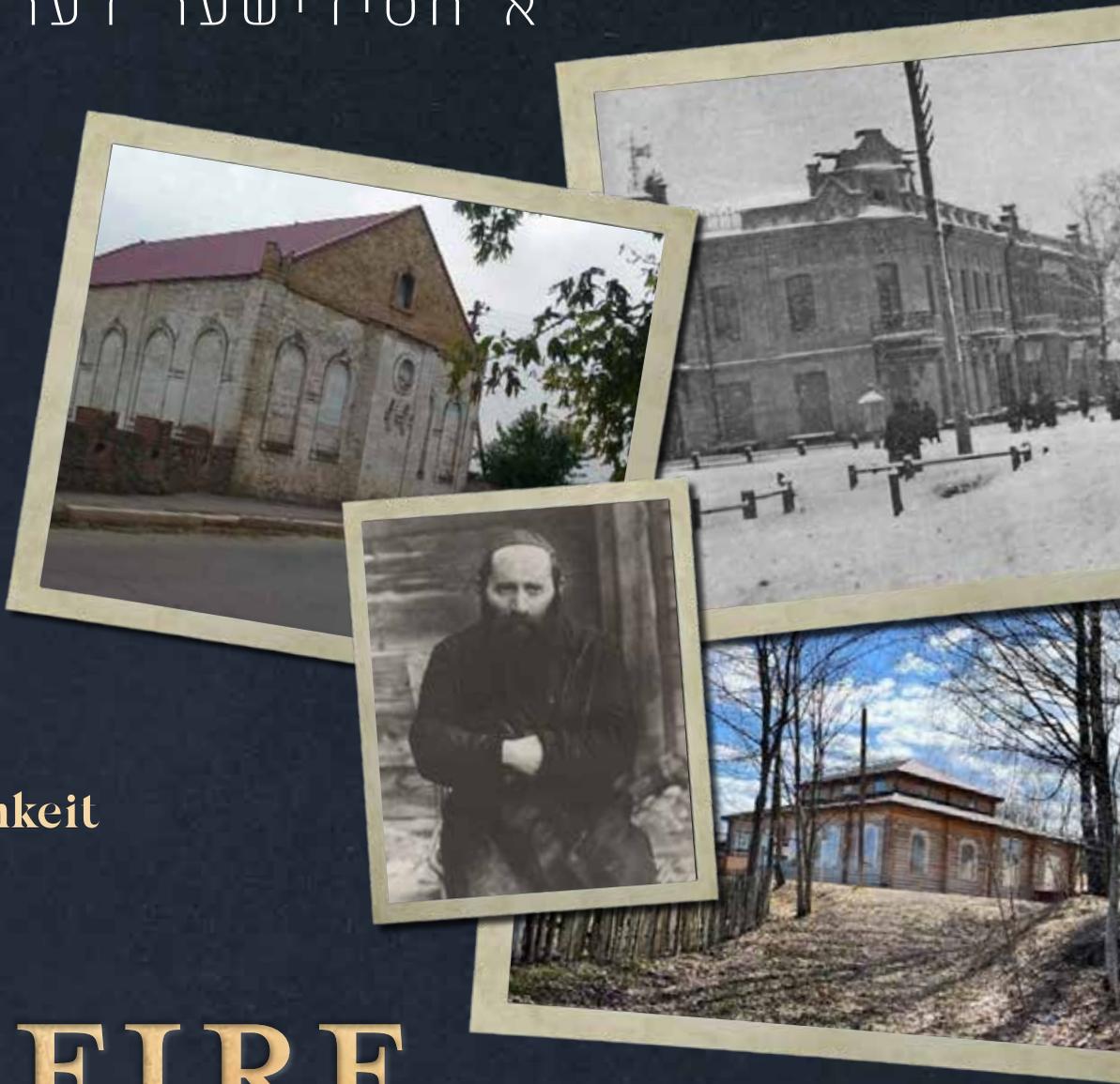


A Chassidisher **Derher**

א חסידישער דערהער



A Diploma for Yiddishkeit

AN INTERVIEW WITH
RABBI ZEV SIROTA

A FIRE UNDIMMED

THE LEGENDARY CHOSSID AND SHADAR,
REB ITCHE MASMID



TEVES 5786
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RISING TO THE OCCASION

When one finds themselves in a challenging situation, it's essential to recognize that this is actually a *shlichus* from Hashem, calling upon the person to view this situation as an opportunity to bring Hashem's presence to every place.

This is how the Rebbe explained the challenge of the court case over the *seforim* and the victory of Hei Teves: The episode was to be seen and used as an opportunity to double and redouble our efforts in spreading Yiddishkeit and Chassidus to every corner of the globe. To establish more Chabad houses. To give more tzedakah and encourage others to do the same. And to reach out beyond the Jewish community, to all non-Jews of the world, influencing them to keep the Sheva Mitzvos B'nei Noach.

An overview of this fascinating *sicha* and its many lessons can be found later in this issue.

You will also read the incredible story of Reb Zev Sirota—a Chossid who was encouraged by the Rebbe to seize every opportunity throughout his life's journey to spread Yiddishkeit and Chassidus with *ahavas Yisroel*.

In the army bases of the Sinai Desert, in the heart of Jewish Brooklyn, or in the spiritually barren cities of pre-war America, a Chossid always finds opportunities to inspire, uplift, and spread *Elokus*. In our generation, just as in previous times, as you'll read in the story of the legendary "*Shadar*"—Reb Itche Der Masmid.

Methods may have changed. Times may be different. However, the message remains the same. As the Rebbe says in the *sicha* of Hei Teves: "*Lshaken shmo sham*"—to bring Hashem's name to every single place, and to transform that place into a dwelling for His holy presence.

All of this inspiring content is featured alongside: The story of a special month in the Rebbe's presence during a "Year of Wonders"; an overview of the precious stories and history preserved by Reb Zalman Duchman; a call to action about the Rebbe's "Mivtza Torah"; and much more.

The reading and learning are sure to spark action, as we see the opportunities in each of our own lives to increase our efforts in spreading Yiddishkeit and *hafatzas hamaayanos*, to bring the Geulah Shleima now!

The Editors

יום הבהיר י"ד כסלו ה'תשפ"ו

Editorial

DERHER HONOR WALL

EXTENDING THANKS TO KEY DONORS, ON BEHALF OF THOUSANDS
OF BENEFICIARIES OF A CHASSIDISHER DERHER.

A Chassidisher Derher Visionary

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“נוספת על התודה ברוך מוזל טוב, על שזכה בענין חשוב כזה, להיות מן המזכים את הרבים, להאיר בע"ה את נפשם באור דברי כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר שליט"א, ולהתעורר עי"ז לתורה, לעבודה ולגמילות חסדים...”
(ממכתב יום ד' י' לחדש מנ"א תשנ"ה)

“In addition to thanks, I would like to add the blessing of ‘mazal tov’ for your merit in taking part in such an important project, bringing merit to the masses, illuminating their souls with the light of the words of my father-in-law, the Rebbe Shlita, inspiring them to Torah, Avoda, & Gemilus Chasadim...”

(THE REBBE'S LETTER, 10 MENACHEM-AV 5703)

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ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'
נדבת משפחתו שיחיו

ה שבת Crisis Becomes Clarity

The Torah is translated into Greek

COMPILED BY: RABBI MENDEL VOGEL

In a second attempt to translate the Torah into Greek (after an unsuccessful attempt 61 years earlier), the Egyptian-Greek Emperor Ptolemy (Talmi) gathered 72 chachomim, isolating them in 72 separate rooms, and ordered them to each produce a translation. On the 8th of Teves of the year 3515 (ג'תקט"ו) they produced 72 identical translations, including identical changes in thirteen places (where they each felt that a literal translation could distort the Torah's true meaning). As a result of this translation, Greek became a significant second language among Yidden. In Talmudic times, 8 Teves was observed by some as a fast day, expressing the fear of the translation's detrimental effect.

Regarding the day on which the Torah was translated into Greek, it states in *Maseches Sefer Torah* (1:8): "...that day was as difficult for the Yidden as the day on which the *eigel ha'zahav* was made, since the Torah could not be translated adequately."

This statement requires explanation: Firstly, we know that Moshe translated the Torah into all 70 languages (*Devarim* 1:5; *Rashi*)—including Greek. Clearly, then, translating the Torah into other languages is a *positive* thing; otherwise, Moshe would not have done so. Why, then, was 8 Teves labeled a "difficult" day for the Yidden? Furthermore, how can we say that "the Torah could not be adequately translated" if Moshe Rabbeinu had already done so many years earlier?

The biggest question, however, is this: Even if we could understand why "the Torah could not be adequately translated" and therefore 8 Teves was a "difficult" day, how can it be compared to the day the *eigel ha'zahav* was made, a catastrophe of cosmic proportions? Were the events of 8 Teves really that disastrous?!

This phraseology is also found in *Maseches Shabbos* (17a)

regarding an incident in which, following a halachic dispute between Hillel and Shammai, the *halacha* was decided according to the opinion of Shammai: "That day Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the students. And [that day] was as difficult for the Yidden as the day the *eigel [ha'zahav]* was made."

Here, too, we need to understand why this situation was considered as grave as the incident of the *eigel ha'zahav*?

The explanation lies in the precise wording of *Chazal*: "That day was as difficult for the Yidden as the *day* on which the *eigel ha'zahav* was made" (rather than "...as difficult...as the **sin** of the *eigel ha'zahav*").

To clarify: The act of making the *eigel ha'zahav* in and of itself was not a catastrophe; there still could have been a happy ending, as Aharon (in an effort to delay the *worship* of the *eigel* until Moshe returned) subsequently announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to Hashem!" (*Ki Sisa* 32:5). It was only on the *next* day that the Yidden performed the *cheit ha'eigel* by worshipping the calf.

Accordingly, the expression "as the *day* on which the *eigel*



ha'zahav was made” takes on new meaning: It is not referring to the disaster *itself*, but rather to an event with a *potentially* disastrous outcome.

Based on this new understanding, we can answer our previous questions: When we say that “the Torah could not be adequately translated,” we mean that a literal and precise word-for-word translation of the Torah into Greek could have enabled someone like Talmi to misinterpret and distort the Torah.

Similarly, when the *halacha* was decided following the opinion of Beis Shammai, there was a concern that the *halacha* might follow Beis Shammai forever—contrary to a foundational principle in *halacha* that wherever Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel disagree, the opinion of Beis Shammai is completely disregarded.



Meforshim on Chumash explain that the Yidden made the *eigel ha'zahav* because they desired to have a tangible representation of Hashem's presence in their midst. In fact, they thought that if they could fashion a tangible representation of Hashem's presence out of a physical material like gold, that would be even better than what they had until then—Moshe Rabbeinu. *Elokus* would permeate even deeper into physical reality and demonstrate how *everything* is one with Hashem (similar to what we find later on in Torah, when Hashem commanded the Yidden to fashion a dwelling place—the Mishkan and specifically the *aron* and *keruvim*—out of gold).

However, since their actions were not based on Hashem's command but rather on their own reasoning, the results were the complete opposite—the Yidden fell through with the *cheit ha'egel*, thereby erecting a *barrier* between them and Hashem.

This is why “the day on which the *eigel ha'zahav* was made” (even before they worshipped it) is referred to as “difficult,” because the *eigel* represented the idea of creating “separateness,” so to speak, from Hashem.

When Moshe was instructed by Hashem to translate the Torah into all 70 languages, there was no room for a negative outcome (i.e. misinterpretations), since it was based on Hashem's command.

But when the translation was carried out at the behest of Talmi, a human being, there was a potential for grave error (such as misinterpreting the first *possuk* in Torah, “בראשית

ברא אלוקים”, which, if translated literally, could be understood to mean that there is another authority besides for Hashem (“שתי רשויות”), *chas v'shalom*).

Likewise, if the *halacha* had been decided according to Shammai in every dispute from then on, it would have been a tragic error: Beis Shammai is more stringent in their rulings due to their *neshamos* being rooted in the realm of severity and judgement (מדת הדין). Since they have a more prohibitive worldview and do not see the potential for holiness in the physical world, therefore, when there is a choice to reject or embrace, they reject. In a very, very subtle way, saying that there is an entity which cannot be imbued with *kedusha* is ascribing to the concept of “שתי רשויות”; saying that there is an entity outside of Hashem.

But unlike the day on which the *eigel* was made, in these two instances, the potential calamity did not materialize. On the contrary, both of these instances led to positive results: The Greek language was refined to such an extent that, according to *halacha*, it is the only language other than *lashon hakodesh* in which one may write a *Sefer Torah*. And due to Hillel's humility by deferring to Shammai, he influenced him to be more embracing, resulting in some leniencies in the rulings of Beis Shammai.

Takeaway:

In our generation, Torah, and specifically Chassidus, has been made available in numerous languages, allowing people from diverse backgrounds to tap into these profound teachings. By translating the deep and lofty ideas discussed in Chassidus about *achdus Hashem*, we refine the “70 languages” spoken by humanity, which in turn elevates the “70 nations” that they represent. This process draws us nearer to the era of Moshiach, about which it says: “For then [in the era of Moshiach], I will convert all the peoples to a pure [and accurate] language, for all of them to call in the name of Hashem, to serve Him with a common effort” (Tzefania 3:9).

(Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 24, p. 1)



Compiled By: Rabbi Levi Greenberg (OH)

Written By: Rabbi Mendel Jacobs

לע"נ
ר' אברהם שמואל בן ר' משה ע"ה
גלב"ע כ"ד ניסן ה'תשפ"ה
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הרה"ת ר' יצחק מאיר וזוגתו מרת
לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו
שפאלטר

What Was Yaakov Doing?

In the *sicha* on Asara B'Teves 5742, the Rebbe explained the story of Yaakov's blessing to his grandsons, Efraim and Menasheh, as well as the lesson we can learn from it:

The Rebbe quoted the Kli Yakar: Yosef felt that as the firstborn, Menasheh deserved to get a greater blessing, as the Torah mandates that a firstborn inherits a double portion of his father's estate. However, Yaakov taught him that the younger one has a special quality. Hashem chooses the "smaller"—those who are humble and modest.

The lesson the Rebbe derived from this:

The Mishna says that before davening, a person must contemplate their own smallness, submitting themselves entirely before Hashem. When a person does so, they succeed in receiving all the *brachos* from Hashem, in an unlimited manner. As Chassidus explains, there is a difference between a *bracha* and a *tefilla*: a *bracha* draws down provisions for a person only from as high as his own spiritual source. A *tefilla*, however, can accomplish "*yehi ratzon*"—revealing a new will of Hashem from a much higher level than one's source. This is why *tefilla* can be fulfilled even in a case when, based on merit alone, the person wasn't necessarily deserving of it.¹

One of the *manichim* who transcribed this *sicha* asked the Rebbe the following question:

How can we say that Yaakov's *bracha* to his grandsons accomplished the same thing as a *tefilla* (revealing a new will from Hashem), when numerous *maamarim* in Chassidus explain that his blessing in this instance was only a *bracha*, with a *bracha's* limitations?

The Rebbe replied:²

לכן הדגשתי שהוא ע"ד ולא אותו הענין,

כי (כמובן בלאה"כ מכו"כ מקומות) כמה דרגות בברכה, וכן [כמה דרגות] בתפלה.

ברכת הדיוט, ברכה סתם, בר"כ [ברכת כהנים]. סוג בר' [ברכות] יצחק (גבורה) יעקב ומשה.

עשר ל' [לשוונת] נק' תפלה. עושה מחצה, כולה, מהפכת [ד]עתו וכו'.

That's why I emphasized that [the comparison of Yaakov's blessing to *tefilla*] is only similar, but not exactly the same thing.

Because (as is already understood from many sources), there are many levels of *bracha*, and there are also many levels of *tefilla*.

[Some examples of the different levels of *bracha* are:]

The *bracha* of an ordinary person, a regular *bracha*, *Birkas Kohanim*. The type of *bracha* that Yitzchok gave ([which stems from a place of] *Gevura*), [the type of *brachos* that] Yaakov and Moshe [gave, which stem from other places].

[Similarly, there are many levels in *tefilla*. Some examples are:]

The ten expressions by which *tefilla* is called [each one representing another level of *tefilla*. Then there is the dispute recorded in the Midrash, whether *tefilla* has the power to] accomplish half [of what the person requests, or] all [of what a person requests. There is also the level of *tefilla* of *tzaddikim*, which the Gemara says has the power to] change [Hashem's] mind, and so on.³



טור 'לעבן מיטן רבי'ן הוקדש לזכרון
ולעילוי נשמת
ר' שמואל ב"ר יהושע אליהו ז"ל
ואשתו מרת שרה ע"ה
בת ר' יקותיאל ומרת לאה הי"ד
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'

~
ע"י בנם
ר' יקותיאל יהודה
וזוגתו מרת פעסל לאה ומשפחתם
שיחיו
רוהר



The Apple of Hashem's Eye

TEVES—5751

The month of Teves in the Year of Wonders began with the final days of Chanukah—a time of miracles for our people—while we awaited miraculous salvation again under new circumstances. As coalition forces built up in the Middle East, many people were terrified of the repercussions for the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel, fearing the worst. The Rebbe's unrelenting reassurance was the only calming voice in an ever-growing sea of panic, strengthening the faith of the Jewish people that Hashem is always watching over them and that no harm would come our way.

COMPILED BY: RABBI YANKY BELL

WRITTEN BY: RABBI MENDEL JACOBS

Chanukah

On Wednesday, 2 Teves—the final day of Chanukah—the Rebbe went to the Ohel. The Rebbe joined the *minyan* for Mincha and Maariv upon his return, then told Rabbi Leibel Groner, “As a continuation to Zos Chanukah, whoever did not yet give Chanukah Gelt, or did not give enough Chanukah Gelt, can still do so now...”

The Rebbe proceeded to distribute dollars to all present. When Rabbi Avraham Shemtov passed by, the Rebbe smiled and said, “For *liros v’leiraos*” (“to see and be seen”—a reference to the Chanukah Live program the day before that Rabbi Shemtov coordinated).

Shabbos Hei Teves

The first Shabbos of the month, Parshas Vayigash, occurred on Hei Teves—Didan Notzach—marking four years since the victory in the trial over the *seforim* of the Chabad library. It was a joyous Shabbos indeed.

A large sign hung proudly in the shul in honor of the

“Hisvaadus Chassidim” in connection with the luminous day of “Hei Teves—Didan Notzach.” Many guests arrived to spend this Shabbos with the Rebbe, including numerous shluchim from out of town, as well as more than 250 guests of the “Pegisha” (“Encounter with Chabad”) program.

The *niggun* “Didan Notzach” was sung very enthusiastically many times throughout Shabbos, and the Rebbe encouraged the singing with great joy.

An especially joyous farbrengen took place on Shabbos afternoon. The Rebbe spoke a lot about the importance of having holy *seforim* in one’s home, and also mentioned the ongoing effort to redeem the *seforim* of the Rabbeim still in Russian exile.

At the end of the farbrengen, the Rebbe distributed bottles of mashke for events during the upcoming week, beginning with tonight’s Hei Teves farbrengen by the members of Agudas Chassidei Chabad. The Rebbe concluded the distribution by singing his father’s *niggun*, as usual, and then he began singing “*Al nisecha...*,” encouraging the crowd to sing faster and louder.



CHASSIDIM FARBRENG AT 770 ON MOTZEI SHABBOS, 5 TEVES.



Good for the Jews

On Thursday, Asara B'Teves, after Mincha, the Rebbe said a *sicha*—as he always does on fast days. But this time, something was different.

The Rebbe spoke passionately for close to an hour, taking a stand on current events with a theme that he would repeat several times throughout the remainder of the month.

Due to the tense situation in the Middle East, when it seemed like an attack could be imminent on the Jewish community in Eretz Yisroel, many people were afraid. To make matters worse, an influential individual in Eretz Yisroel had stated publicly that the Jewish nation was in a spiritually bad state, and that therefore, terrible things were about to *chas v'shalom* befall them.

The Rebbe addressed this issue head-on. “Every single Yid is the apple of Hashem’s eye!” the Rebbe declared. “No matter their outward conduct, every one of them is a child of Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. *Rachmana l'tzlan* to try and fool around with that!!”

As to the predictions of doom, the Rebbe assured that there could be no new “tab” starting for Hashem’s retribution, as some had suggested, because the final *geulah* is at hand.

Interestingly, even after such a sharp *sicha*, the Rebbe distributed dollars and smiled broadly at many of the passersby.

On the following Shabbos, Parshas Vayechi, the Rebbe continued on this theme.

In a long, animated *sicha*, the Rebbe spoke passionately about how special each and every Yid is. Those who suggested that the Yidden who perished in the Holocaust were recipients of Divine retribution were gravely mistaken, the Rebbe said. “*Rachmana l'tzlan* to think such a thing! Certainly not to say such a thing! All the more so not to publicize such a thing!!”

The Rebbe spoke about the *novi* Yeshayahu, who spoke negatively of the Jewish people, only to be fiercely reprimanded by Hashem in return. All throughout the generations, the leaders of the Jewish people went to the greatest lengths to find *zechusim* for the Jewish people and to bring out their best qualities, not *chas v'shalom* to give the Satan what to lean on!

At the conclusion of this *sicha*, the crowd sang Napoleon’s March, and the Rebbe’s encouragement was something other-worldly. The Rebbe waved both hands in circular motions again and again, bringing the singing to an amazing crescendo. It almost seemed as if the walls of the shul were



AFTER A PASSIONATE SICHA ON 10 TEVES, THE REBBE WASHES HIS HANDS FOR MAARIV.

shaking! One of the participants records in his diary that it seemed clear that the Rebbe was orchestrating spiritual affairs, drawing blessings down for the Jewish people at this difficult time, and indeed for the whole world.

Later in the farbrengen the Rebbe again addressed this issue, saying that an individual, a mere human being of flesh and blood, seems to have found himself fit to make calculations for Hashem. He thinks it’s appropriate to speak ill of the Jewish people. “He says these things to his students,” the Rebbe exclaimed, “and he leads them off the well-trodden path. He is leading himself off the path. His students don’t know what they’re talking about, and he himself doesn’t know what he’s talking about!”

The Rebbe called on this individual to learn from Hashem. What does Hashem do in His “spare time”? The Gemara says that He sits and makes *shidduchim*, building Jewish homes and bringing *simchos* to Jewish families.

With that, the Rebbe asked if there was a *chosson* in the room, and two *chassanim* were pointed out. The Rebbe told one of them to stand on the table, and told them both to say *l'chaim* and sing a joyous *niggun* on the theme of a wedding. The crowd sang “*M'heira Yishama...*”

The Silver Coating

The next week, the Rebbe again elaborated on this theme. In the week's Parsha of Shemos, the Torah tells the story of Moshe Rabbeinu speaking ill of the Jewish people by speculating that they wouldn't believe in his mission from Hashem ("V'heim lo yaaminu lee..."). As a result, he was punished with a snake and with tzaraas.

The Rebbe again asserted how careful one must be when speaking about Hashem's precious children. Even if words of rebuke are warranted, they must come from a place of love.

If one only sees negative traits in another individual, the Rebbe explained, it's because they're actually seeing a mirror of themselves. A mirror is just a piece of glass, but there's silver on one side of it that blocks the view to the other side and instead displays one's reflection. The silver represents a person's own self-love and natural biases. In order to properly see the other, one must rid oneself of these negative qualities.

Expansion

On the following Shabbos, Parshas Va'era—Mevorchim Shevat, the Rebbe dedicated much of his farbrengen to the recently marked yom hilula of the Alter Rebbe on Chof-Daled Teves.

Addressing the new wave of Jewish immigration to Eretz Yisroel from the Soviet Union, the Rebbe encouraged that they be assisted in growing in their Yiddishkeit. Even after seventy years of near-total religious suppression, the impact of the activity of all our Rabbeim in Russia is still recognizable on these Yidden. We need only to develop it further and bring it out into the open.

Likewise, this new influx in Eretz Yisroel highlights the need for more physical space for absorption. There are sections of the land that Hashem has already placed in the hands of the Jewish people, and these places should be settled by the new immigrants.

Towards the end of the farbrengen the Rebbe again spoke passionately about the need to show only love to our fellow Jews, and not to try and justify Hashem's actions in the Holocaust.

"The victims of the Holocaust went up in flames like holy korbanos, in sublimity and purity. There's no place to try and justify what happened to them. From now on, only open and revealed goodness will come upon the Jewish people!!!"

Do it Here!

Inspired by the Rebbe's address each week of strength and encouragement for the Yidden in Eretz Yisroel, one of the local mashpi'im in Crown Heights wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking if it would be appropriate to send groups of anash to Eretz Yisroel to help uplift the Jewish spirit there.

The Rebbe responded:

"The effort should entail what is **stated in the Torah**, by the local Jewish people here, the people of **your city, headed by you**, through increasing Torah and mitzvos in a **straight-forward manner**. I would appreciate it if you notify me how much they increased [in Torah and mitzvos as a result of this effort] **in actuality**. I will mention this at the Ohel."

This response from the Rebbe was a clear indication that the Diaspora Jewish community must assist their brethren spiritually. Indeed, on Thursday, 24 Teves, a special gathering was held at 770 with elder Chassidim and mashpi'im to discuss how to implement this effort.

That same week, the Rebbe wrote a note in response to Reb Leibel Raskin, who articulated the apprehension felt in the Jewish community of Morocco:



THE REBBE'S EDITS ON THE SICHA FROM 10 TEVES. ON THE TOP LEFT, THE REBBE ADDED 'MAHIR', INDICATING THAT IT BE PUBLISHED IMMEDIATELY. THE REBBE REPEATED THIS PRACTICE AS HE SPOKE ON THE SUBJECT AGAIN THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING WEEKS, ADDING 'MAHIR' TO EACH SICHA.

“Every single Yid is part of Hashem (and the Alter Rebbe explains in the beginning of Tanya that this is to be understood **literally** [“*mamash*”], which means it manifests **tangibly** in the physical sense [“*mishush*”]. This is apropos to the current time, [when we read] Parshiyos Vaera—Beshalach, and [at a time when we are] extremely close to the [fulfilment of the words from Parshas Beshalach] ‘You will bring them up and plant them in the mountain of your heritage’ (which was said in song—with joy), [indicating] the true redemption through *Moshiach tzidkeinu*...”

“Chazal say that already at the beginning of Parshas Vaera—the slave work of the Jewish people in Mitzrayim ceased.”

The Spiritual Battle

As the political situation in the Middle East continued to unravel, the Rebbe was asked if there had been any change in his stance regarding Eretz Yisroel being safe. The Rebbe responded that his original stance was based on the words of the Torah that Hashem’s eyes are upon the Land from the beginning till the end of the year, and obviously, there was no change in that sentiment.

In the Rebbe’s presence, the effort to help our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land is present throughout the month, with a spiritual battle being waged on their behalf.

Each time the Rebbe enters or exits the shul, Chassidim sing “*Utzu Eitza*” enthusiastically, in prayerful hope to foil the schemes of our enemies.

On Thursday, 27 Teves, a notice is issued that the Rebbe has approved the call by Agudas HaRabbanim of America to declare this Erev Rosh Chodesh a half-day fast and a day to increase in davening.

On 28 Teves, the Rebbe came into shul for Mincha and Maariv and vigorously encouraged the singing of “*Utzu Eitza*” with both hands.

After Maariv, the *gabbai* reminded everyone that the following day, Erev Rosh Chodesh, was declared a half-day fast, and that after Shacharis they would all recite the selected *kapitelach* of Tehillim.

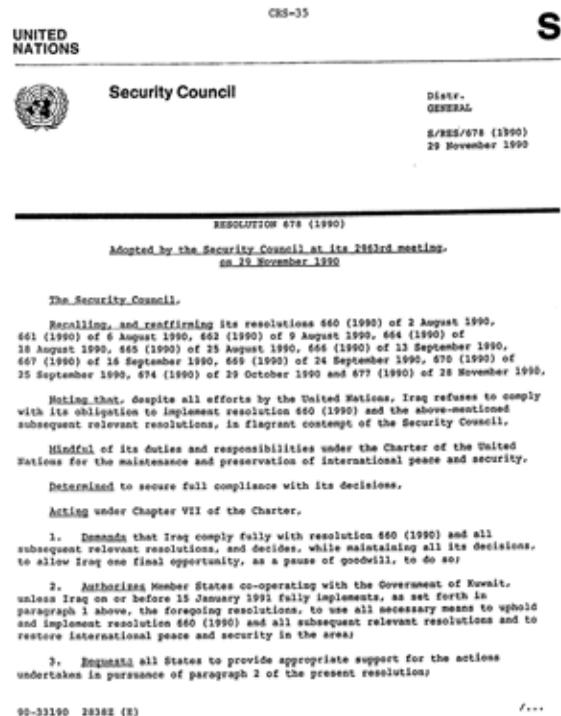
As the Rebbe left the shul, he wished well to people who would soon be traveling (as he always does). When people told the Rebbe that they were traveling to Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe said, “This is a very good thing!”

The next morning, the Rebbe arrived to Shacharis at exactly 10:00, with a copy of the notice from Agudas HaRabbanim protruding from his siddur.

After *Tachanun* was recited, the Rebbe turned his siddur to the long *Avinu Malkeinu* and then turned towards the



THE REBBE ENCOURAGES THE NIGGUN ‘UTZU EITZA’, 10 TEVES.



U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION #678, ISSUING AN ULTIMATUM TO IRAQ, INSISTING IT PULL OUT OF KUWAIT BY JANUARY 15, 1991, OR FACE WAR. AGUDAS HARABBANIM ISSUED A CALL TO FAST ON THE DAY THE ULTIMATUM WAS SET TO EXPIRE (EREV ROSH CHODESH SHEVAT).

aron kodesh, which was immediately opened. The Rebbe gave the indication, and Chassidim sang the Alter Rebbe's *Avinu Malkeinu*.

At the end of davening, the Rebbe recited each *kapitel* of Tehillim as listed on the notice he had brought in his siddur. At the end, the Rebbe recited *kapitel* 150, which was not on the list, and the *gabbai* announced that everyone should say that *kapitel* as well.

Later that evening, Rabbi Leibel Groner reported that the Rebbe had told him that the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel had nothing to be afraid of. The Torah clearly states that Hashem's eyes are upon the Land from the beginning till the end of the year.

The next day, when asked about sealing homes or sleeping in shelters due to fear of incoming missiles, the Rebbe said that this could be done for two reasons: 1) It helps people have a calmer sleep; 2) If the enemy sees that we're prepared, they will be deterred from attacking.

The Reassuring Voice

Each Sunday throughout the month, the Rebbe was visited by thousands of people for dollars and *brachos*. A recurring theme this month was whether people should travel to Eretz Yisroel or bring their relatives who were already there home. The Rebbe reassured them that there was no reason to worry; everyone in Eretz Yisroel would be safe and sound.

On Sunday, 6 Teves, the El-Al administration came to see the Rebbe. The CEO told the Rebbe that their airline was responsible for bringing thousands of Russian Jewish immigrants to Eretz Yisroel. Just in the past week, they brought six thousand people in one day! He asked the Rebbe to encourage the Jewish community in the United States to fly to Eretz Yisroel and not to abandon their brethren at this trying time.

The Rebbe reassured him that he continuously tells people to go there.

"On the contrary," said the Rebbe, "it is safer to be in the Holy Land than in the United States, since the Torah says that Hashem watches over the Land. Moshe Rabbeinu said this more than three thousand years ago, and it was inscribed in the Torah for posterity. We only hope that Eretz Yisroel will display its true nature, by bolstering Torah and *mitzvos* in the land, thereby revealing Hashem's protection even more."

The Rebbe concluded that the company must live up to its name, "El-Al," which indicates an ever-growing quest to strive and reach higher.

In this vein, the Rebbe asked them to place a *tzedakah* box on each airplane, giving the first three dollars for the first three pushkas. "If you send me an exact list of how many airplanes you have, I will send you a dollar for each and every one!" the Rebbe said.

Later, a US army chaplain told the Rebbe that he was traveling to Saudi Arabia to participate in the war effort,



RABBI CHAIM ZEV BOMZER INTRODUCES
A GER TO THE REBBE, 13 TEVES.



MR. YITZCHAK DAVID, THE ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER'S ADVISOR ON
DIASPORA AFFAIRS, CONVERSING WITH THE REBBE, 27 TEVES.

and that he was bringing his Megillah in case he would still be there for Purim. The Rebbe told him that he would certainly be back home before Purim and that he could leave his Megillah there.

Rabbi Gershon Rosenstein passed by with his son, and Rabbi Leibel Groner told the Rebbe that the boy is asking if he should go to Russia to help spread Yiddishkeit on behalf of the Ezras Achim organization.

“What’s the question?” asked the Rebbe.

They explained that the political situation there was unsettling, and the Rebbe said, “Why do the politics concern him at all? Is he going there for politics?” and the Rebbe wished him success.

An individual asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* for children, and asked if they should see a doctor. The Rebbe asked how long they had been married, and when the man specified a number of years, the Rebbe agreed. “There have been new discoveries in this field in the intervening years,” the Rebbe explained.

On Sunday, 20 Teves, the Rebbe was visited by Rabbi Chaim Zev Bomzer, who introduced a newly converted *ger* to the Rebbe.

“Tell him,” the Rebbe said, “that he is more precious to Hashem than you [pointing at Rabbi Bomzer] and me [pointing at himself]. The Torah says, ‘You shall love the *ger*.’”

Mr. Don Ronan told the Rebbe that his father was born on the exact same date as the Rebbe [11 Nissan 5662], in the exact same city of Nikolayev, and in the exact same hospital. Today, he lives happily in Eretz Yisroel.

Mr. Ronan had used “*Beit Cholim*” (house of the sick) as the Hebrew term for hospital, and the Rebbe said, “Why must you call it a *beit cholim*? He was born in a ‘*beit rofim*’ (house of doctors).”

The Rebbe then gave him a dollar for his father to have many long years and to have good news from the whole family.

A delegation from the Jewish Federation came to the Rebbe, saying that they were soon leaving on a trip to Eretz Yisroel.

The Rebbe gave one of them a dollar and said, “This is for *tzedakah* in Eretz Yisroel. My dollar is only symbolic. You will certainly give half a million dollars!”

“Of course! At least half a million!” he said. The Rebbe responded that it should be only the first installment.

To another individual in the group, the Rebbe said, “You must publicize that you’re going to Eretz Yisroel. Not like those who are afraid to go and are causing others to be afraid.”

A representative of Israel’s Ministry of Tourism came to the Rebbe, saying, “Rebbe, there are no tourists now in Israel!”

The Rebbe reassured him that he constantly publicizes the importance of traveling to Eretz Yisroel, and that it’s the safest place to be. It has the Har Habayis, the place of the Beis Hamikdash, and most importantly, it has a community of two or three million Jews, *kein yirbu*.

Don’t Even Think About It!

On Sunday, 27 Teves, an individual told the Rebbe that his son is not being admitted to yeshiva.

The Rebbe responded: “You need to speak to a *rav*. They’re not letting him into yeshiva? I’ve never heard of such a thing. You should ask a *rav* for help. Something seems not right.”

The Rebbe was approached by Rabbi Moshe Cohen, who told the Rebbe that his daughter was studying in a seminary in Eretz Yisroel and he was asking if he should bring her home due to the war.

The Rebbe said: “She’s in Yerushalayim, the safest place! She’s together with Hashem in His capital.”

“So I shouldn’t bring her home?” asked Rabbi Cohen.

“*Chas v’shalom!*” said the Rebbe. “How can you even think such a thing?”

Mrs. Cohen told the Rebbe that their daughter is on break from her studies anyway, so perhaps she should come home for a bit.

“Let her stay there,” the Rebbe replied. “There are plenty of good things for her to learn there, in the holy city.”

The Rebbe turned to Rabbi Cohen and said, “You must not tell anyone that you even entertained the thought of bringing your daughter home. Not just about your daughter, but no Jew should publicize when they have a thought about leaving Yerushalayim. Very soon we will all go there, together with Moshiach! Why would you think about leaving there?”

The Rebbe was approached by Mr. Yitzchak David, the Israeli Prime Minister’s advisor on Diaspora Affairs, who asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* for success in bringing all the Russian Jews to Eretz Yisroel.

The Rebbe told him: “You should let everyone know in my name that trading the *galus* of Russia for the *galus* of America makes no sense. It’s time to start trading *galus* for *geulah* by going to the land of *geulah*. Hashem’s eyes are upon the land from the beginning till the end of the year, especially this year!” 🇮

BY: RABBI MENDY GREENBERG
(TWINSBURG, OH)



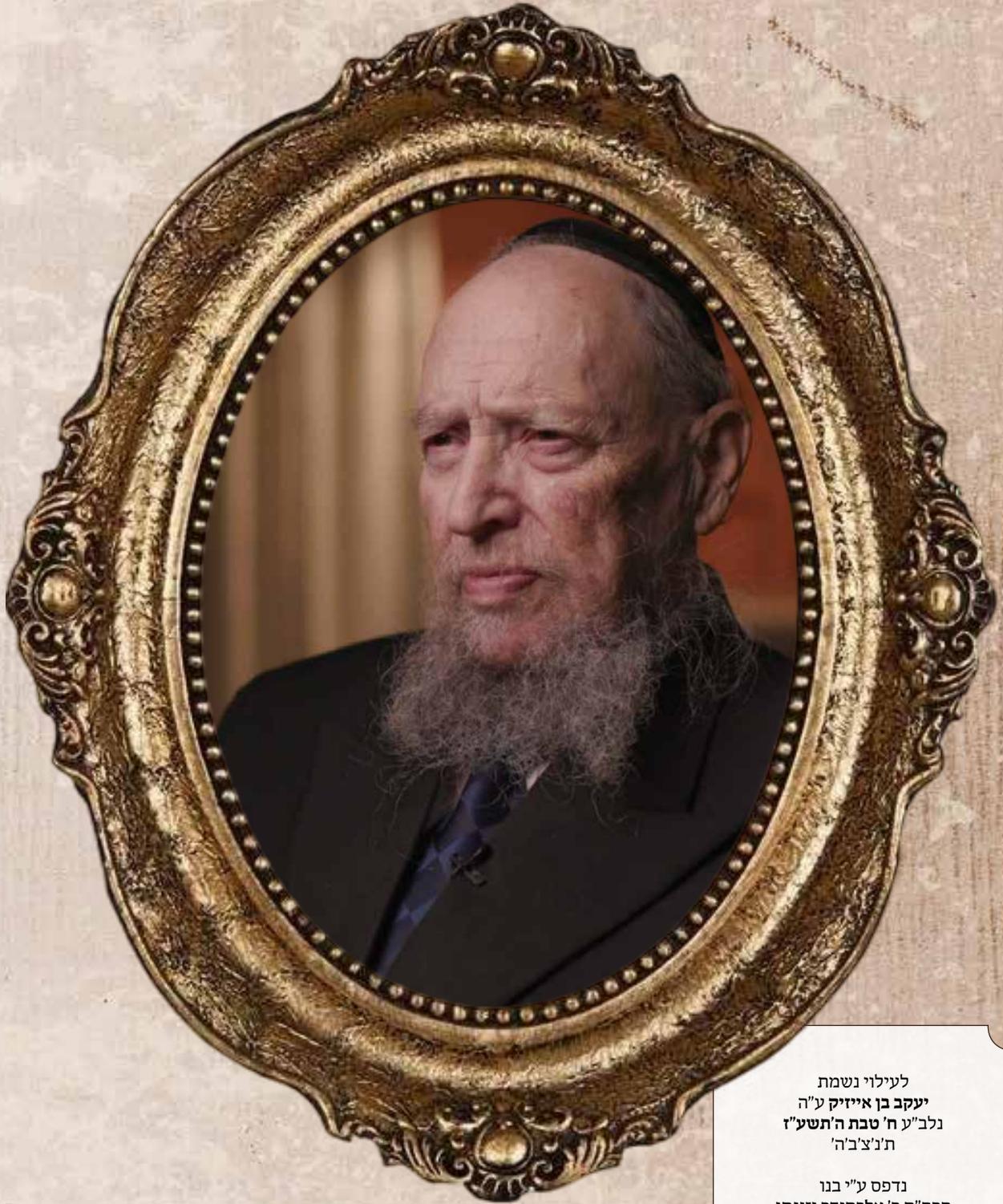
A DIPLOMA *FOR* YIDDISHKEIT

AN INTERVIEW WITH
RABBI ZEV SIROTA



Rabbi Zev Sirota of Flatbush has a fascinating life story. He was *niskarev* to the Rebbe from Yeshiva University, he learned in 770 during the early years, and went on the Rebbe's shlichus in the most unusual of places.

The following is his interview with A Chassidisher Derher.



לעילוי נשמת
יעקב בן אייזיק ע"ה
נלב"ע ח' טבת ה'תשע"ז
תנ"צ'בה'

נדפס ע"י בנו
הרה"ת ר' אלכסנדר וזוגתו
מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו
קאלער

A BEARDED BOCHUR WALKS INTO YU

I grew up in a *frum* home in Washington Heights, Upper Manhattan, in the years just after the Holocaust, as part of Rabbi Breuer's *kehilla*. The Jewish community was still rebuilding, and the local *frum* schools were in their infancy. Both neighborhood schools—"Soloveitchik" (the more modern one) and "Breuer's," which I attended—ended at eighth grade. My class pushed to continue, so we remained for ninth, but afterward, we had to find new places to learn.

The class scattered: some went to Telz in Cleveland, one to Chasam Sofer. My parents, however, insisted I attend a sophisticated high school that could lead to a solid college education, and so we settled on Yeshiva University.

I was unhappy.

The *limudei kodesh* program at the school was top-notch; they had serious *talmidei chachamim*, like Reb Mendel Zaks (son-in-law of the Chofetz Chaim) and, of course, Reb Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik himself, but the boys at Yeshiva University weren't really *frum*. Many came from Conservative homes in the Bronx or out-of-town and had never experienced high-level Yiddishkeit. They knew about *kashrus* and Shabbos—to their standards—but they were just American boys attending a top-notch Jewish high school. The school didn't have the *rei'ach* of a yeshiva.

One evening, as we were hanging out in the Beis Midrash, someone new walked in. He was a *bochur*—maybe twenty years old—with a beard (!) holding a stack of *seforim*. He introduced himself as Berel Shemtov and said that he wanted to start a *shiur Tanya*.

My interest was immediately piqued. This *bochur* was unlike anyone we had ever seen. He didn't speak a word of English, he wore a full beard without the slightest embarrassment, and in his hands he carried a stack of freshly printed Tanyas—just published in 5714, for the first time in America. We had heard of Tanya, but none of us had ever actually seen one, let alone learned it. It was all a bit exotic and exciting. Together with a small group of four or five friends, we established a weekly *shiur*.

PERMISSION GRANTED

Reb Berel was a young *bochur* at the time, but he never really changed. If he wanted to accomplish something of the Rebbe's *inyonim*, nothing would stop him. There was nothing that could possibly shame or embarrass him, and

nowhere he wouldn't go. I was very taken by him. He didn't speak English, and we didn't speak Yiddish, but our hearts understood each other.

After a few weeks, the *roshei yeshiva* began hearing the word *Tanya* over and over again, and they caught wind of the *shiur*. They were all Litvaks, and they were not enthusiastic about Chassidus, to say the least; they said, "It's not for us," and categorically forbade the *shiur's* continuation.

Seeing that I was excited, my parents offered to host the *shiur* in our home, but after a few weeks, Rabbi Shemtov got restless. He wanted the *shiur* to grow and spread, and to have a *hashpa'a* on the entire environment, and that wasn't going to happen at our house. He wrote to the Rebbe about the issue, and the Rebbe instructed him to reach out to the head of Yeshiva University himself, Reb Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik.

I don't know whether he personally approached Rav Soloveitchik, but the end of the story was that Rabbi Soloveitchik was an enthusiastic supporter. He said that the *Tanya shiur* could continue—in any classroom, and in any *beis midrash*, at any time of day.

In general, we knew that Rabbi Soloveitchik had very



REB BEREL SHEMTOV AS A BOCHUR, 5716.



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, 5715.



RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK GIVING A CLASS TO STUDENTS AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY.

warm feelings for the Rebbe. It was well known that they had been together at university. One of his close students told me that Reb Yoshe Ber would relate how the Rebbe would sit with a *sefer* hidden under the desk, yet still be able to repeat the entire lecture back to the professor. I also recall hearing that whenever he visited the Rebbe's apartment, he always found the Rebbe standing and learning. Reb Yoshe Ber himself also had some background in learning Chassidus.

In any case, his support was unequivocal, and the *shiur* was reinstated at the yeshiva.

A NEW WORLD OPENED

Tanya changed my life.

Anyone who starts learning Chassidus knows this experience—an entirely new world opens to you. We were youngsters, but I—and the others—felt that this was something special. We immediately understood that we needed the *limud* in order to function as true Yidden.

There was also the *varemkeit* and the joy of *darkei haChassidus*, which we had never experienced in Washington Heights or Yeshiva University, with their *litvishe kaltkeit* (today, the Litvishe world has learned—in some circles—to adopt the *simcha* of Chassidus and has been *niskarev* to Chassidus to some degree, but they still have plenty to go).

WHEN THE GATES WERE CLOSED

Every year on Rosh Hashanah, a special parade would take place for Tashlich. We would march in rows of two, singing loudly all the way to the Botanical Gardens, with the Rebbe himself leading the way.

Famously, the Rebbe once climbed over the fence; I was right there when it happened.

There was a terrible downpour that day, but that, of course, didn't faze the Rebbe in the slightest, and the parade went out as usual. We marched through the storm until we reached the Botanical Gardens... only to find the gate shut. No one had imagined that visitors would arrive on such a day.

Without a moment's pause—I was standing right behind him—the Rebbe climbed over the fence and made his way to the water to recite Tashlich.

A few *yungeleit* and *bochurim* scrambled over to follow, but most of us held back. We knew that the Rebbe recites Tashlich very fast; it would be only moments before he came back and began the return to 770. If we were to start climbing over, we would likely miss the return. So we just waited; in short order, the Rebbe came back, climbed back over the gate, and we returned to 770.

It wasn't just a *shiur*. Rabbi Shemtov would farbreng with us and introduce us to *darkei haChassidus*. Each week, he would share a story, and before Yud-Tes Kislev, he taught us *Pada Veshalom*. He also began inviting us to the Rebbe's farbrengens on major occasions, such as Yud-Tes Kislev and Purim. He would let us know when and where to come, wait for us, guide us to a spot, and make sure we were taken care of. He was like an older brother, and I began to feel comfortable in Lubavitch.

I was very taken by the Rebbe.

One aspect that I quickly noticed was that *rabbanim* and *roshei yeshiva*, of whom I had seen plenty, all carried



A COLLAGE OF PICTURES OF YESHIVA LIFE AT 770 TAKEN IN THE YEAR THAT RABBI ZEV SIROTA CAME TO LEARN THERE.

1. RABBI MENTLICK TAKING ATTENDANCE.
2. BOCHURIM EATING IN THE ‘SHALASH’ (COURTYARD) OF 770. REB BEREL SHEMTOV IS SEEN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PHOTO, SECOND TO THE LEFT. IN THE BOTTOM LEFT CORNER IS HIS BROTHER REB AVREMEL.
3. YESHIVA BOCHURIM IN THE ZAL AT 770.

themselves with a certain weight. You always felt their presence, the prestige they projected. With the Rebbe, it was the opposite. He never spoke about himself. When he said Torah, it wasn’t, “*Un ich zog azoi*, I say this...” There was no “I” in it at all.

And yet, what came out was breathtaking. The Rebbe would sit calmly at a farbrengen and quote from every corner of Torah—Shas, Rishonim, Acharonim, *seforim* I knew and *seforim* I had never even heard of. My *roshei yeshiva* sat at a table with ten gemaras open. With the Rebbe, you realized you were looking at something entirely different. Over time, we became full-fledged Chassidim.

Then, I had the question of college.

THE REBBE’S SURPRISING ANSWER

I had spent two years in college at Yeshiva University, where I earned my associate degree, but for my parents, that wasn’t enough. They wanted me to finish a full college degree and ‘become a mensch.’

This was totally normal at the time. Yiddishkeit was just building up in those years. In 770, there were only seventy *bochurim* when I finally enrolled in 5718—compare that to today, when you can enter 770 and find five hundred *bochurim* learning Chassidus on any given day. In those days, everyone was going to college. Everything was about ‘*tachlis*.’

But my heart was already in Lubavitch. I was learning Tanya and other *sifrei Chassidus*, I was attending the Rebbe’s farbrengens regularly, and I wanted to take the leap. I wanted to learn in 770.

My parents were not pleased—to put it mildly. After an intense argument, they reached out to the Rebbe’s office, reporting my desire and sharing their opposition. “What is going to become of him? How will he ever make a living?”

To my surprise, an answer came back very quickly. I remember hearing Rabbi Hodakov’s voice coming through the telephone: The Rebbe said that I should not quit college under any circumstances. I must finish college, “get the diploma, and use the diploma to spread Yiddishkeit.”

To be honest, I was a little disappointed, but there was no doubt in my mind that I would fulfill the Rebbe’s directive unquestioningly. So, I spent another two years at Yeshiva University—and many years later, as I will soon share, I finally understood the Rebbe’s directive.

ALL THE HEAVY HITTERS

I received my diploma in 5718 and made my way to 770.

At my birthday *yechidus* in early Teves, the Rebbe approved of my joining 770, and said that I should speak to *hanhala* to set me up with a *chavrusa* “*vos past far dir*, who is appropriate for you.” The next day, I met with Rabbi Mentlick and conveyed to him the Rebbe’s instructions.

At the time, with no new *bochurim* my age entering 770, there was no “appropriate *chavrusa*.” Instead, Rabbi Mentlick set me up with a temporary *chavrusa*—Avremel Korf, who would later become the Rebbe’s shliach to Florida.

For me, this was a real catch. Reb Avremel was one of the special chassidische *bochurim* from the ‘previous generation’; he was a good five years older than me, and he had a very good head—he really knew how to learn. I had the pleasure of learning with him for several months, until a new *bochur* appeared in 770 who came from a similar background. Reb Moshe Feller had just transferred over

from Torah Vodaas. He became my *chavrusa*, and we hit it off right away.

Where were we going to sit? I wanted to see the Rebbe coming in and out of 770.

The Rebbe would arrive at 770 on Mondays and Thursdays shortly before *krias haTorah*; on other days, he would come a bit later. In the early evening, the Rebbe would leave 770 for exactly one hour—I would time it—to visit Rebbetzin Chana and to go home for a short while. The only place in the *zal* which allowed sight of the Rebbe’s entrance and exit in the foyer of 770 was the table at the north wall, along the closed double doors that lead to *Mazkirus*, so that’s where we ‘settled.’

Whenever the Rebbe would arrive, we would stand up, and that was the entire *zal*’s cue to stand up as well. We would wait for the Rebbe to pass through, then we would sit down—and the entire *zal* would sit down too.

At the same table sat Arele Chitrik, learning with Mottel Kalmenson, followed by Moshe Bogomilsky and Yosef Abrams. At the far end were Yisroel Friedman and Itche Mayer Hertz. These were all ‘heavy-hitters’; all sharp minds who knew how to learn well, and very chassidische *bochurim*.

A LETTER FROM NORTH CAROLINA

One year, I went on *Merkos Shlichus* to North Carolina with my friend Avremel Sasonkin.

In those days, we didn’t stay in hotels; we would usually find a frum Yid and stay at his home. But in North Carolina, there wasn’t even a single Orthodox shul! I wasn’t sure what to do, so I opened the phone book, flipped through the Yellow Pages under “clergy,” and spotted a Jewish name.

I called, introduced myself, and he welcomed us warmly.

Our host was an educated man—the rabbi of a large Reform Temple and a professor of Jewish studies at the local college. But he firmly believed that Torah was not *min hashamayim*—and he even taught that in his classes.

We spent hours talking during that visit, and one of our conversations lasted the entire night.

I presented him with several questions. One was about the Torah’s list of animals with only one kosher sign. The Torah names five such animals—and in thousands of years since, no one has ever found a sixth. Isn’t that remarkable? How could Moshe Rabbeinu—or any supposed author—have known that?

He admitted he was aware of the issue but had never studied it properly. “I’ll need to look into it,” he told me.

A few months later, a letter arrived at 770 for me. It was from that rabbi in North Carolina. He wrote that as a result of our discussions, he had come to the conclusion that the Torah is indeed *min hashamayim*. He had kashered his kitchen and was striving to live according to Torah’s dictates. Although he remained the rabbi of his Reform temple and a professor at the college, his outlook—and his life—had undergone a complete transformation.

STANDING BEFORE THE REBBE

My first *yechidus* was probably for my birthday in 5716, and then every year afterward, I went in again for my birthday. I also had *yechidus* with my wife before our wedding, and later, before we were sent to Nachlas Har Chabad in 5730.

Yechidus was always very serious. There was a certain sense of tension before entering the Rebbe's room. I would ask questions and receive answers, but the atmosphere was always reverential—even from the very first time I went in. The Rebbe always treated me like a *chossid*.

Before going into *yechidus* with my *kallah*—who did not come from a Lubavitch family—I prepared her a bit. I told her, “The Rebbe will likely invite you to sit down, but you should remain standing.”

At that *yechidus*, the Rebbe addressed her formally, using “*ir*,” while to me he spoke with the more personal “*du*.” It was very gratifying; to me, it meant that the Rebbe was treating me as someone he was comfortable with, as if I were his child.



RABBI SIROTA (TOP RIGHT CORNER) LOOKS ON AS THE REBBE IS MESADER KIDDUSHIN.

But the real role models were the *eltere bochurim*, characters like Reb Itche Shpringer, Reb Berel Shemtov, Reb Avremel Korf, and Reb Gershon Mendel Garelik. In my eyes, they were giants in *darkei haChassidus*. There was also Reb Avremel Shemtov, who was a bit younger. He had a very sharp mind; during the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Piekarski's *shiur klali*, Reb Avremel would really give him a hard time. On one occasion, he stumped him so well that Rabbi Piekarski—who had studied at Chachmei Lublin—didn't have what to answer, and he simply closed the Gemara and walked away.

The *sedorim* in 770 were very serious. At eleven o'clock, Rabbi Mentlick would begin taking attendance for *Seder Nigleh*, and it was rumored that the list was submitted to the Rebbe. We didn't need any more encouragement; we were always there on time.

Rabbi Mentlick would attend the two *nigleh sedorim*, and would give a *shiur* in *nigleh* (in the *cheder sheni*) to the youngest class in 770. The *mashgiach* was Reb Dovid Raskin. The official rosh yeshiva was Reb Yaakov Yisrael Piekarski, but he wasn't so involved. He had his own *shul* and other involvements, and would mainly give a *pilpul shiur* once a week. Sometimes he wouldn't prepare well enough, and he would suffer for it. As I mentioned earlier, we had some *bochurim* with very good heads, such as Avremel Shemtov and Zushe Feldman from Kfar Chabad, and they would give him a very hard time.

In Chassidus, the youngest class was taught by Reb Shalom Marosov. Reb Yisrael Jacobson taught the next class, and the highest *shiur* was by Reb Shmuel Levitin. He would also teach a weekly *shiur Tanya* for the last half hour of Chassidus on Thursday night to the entire yeshiva.

I didn't have much of a connection with Reb Shmuel; he had a very heavy accent, and it was difficult to understand him. The main *mashpia* in those days was Rabbi Jacobson. He *farbrenge*d with us countless times, and I was *mekabel* a lot from him. He was a very warm person—he would even travel personally to the pier or the airport to greet new *bochurim* coming from Eretz Yisroel.

THE PRICE OF EIGHTEEN DOLLARS

In 5721, the Rebbe spoke about the importance of continuing to learn Torah after marriage. At the time,

CHILDREN PLAYING AGAINST
THE BACKDROP OF THE
NEWLY ESTABLISHED
COMMUNITY OF NACHLAS
HAR CHABAD. EARLY 5730S.



YIMEITMIM

there was no kollel in Crown Heights (in fact, there weren't many *kollelim* anywhere in the world).

Several of us were *chassanim*, and we wrote to the Rebbe asking to be the founding members of a kollel. The Rebbe gave us his approval and *bracha*, and so we established the kollel in the small *vaibershul* of 770, which later became Rabbi Groner's office.

A few weeks later, Rabbi Hodakov called us in. "Listen," he said, "we are paying you eighteen dollars a week. For that money, it's only right that you produce something!"

"Alright," we asked, "what should we do?"

He told us he would speak to the Rebbe and get back to us. A couple of days later, he called us again and said: "The Rebbe wants *mareh mekomos* for Likkutei Torah. However," he added, "these *mareh mekomos* cannot come at the expense of your kollel time. During kollel hours, you must be fully immersed in *nigleh* and Chassidus. The *mareh mekomos* should be prepared in your free time."

So, in effect, we were being paid for the *mareh mekomos*, while the kollel learning itself was, I suppose, for free.

There were no computers then. Every lunch break and every evening at home, we sat with *seforim*, tracking down the sources for whatever the Alter Rebbe cited in Likkutei Torah. In the mornings, we would compare notes.

Every Motzei Shabbos, right after Maariv, one of us would present that week's work to the Rebbe. By rotation,

one of us would knock on the Rebbe's door and hand him the folder. The Rebbe would flip through it quickly, and sometimes stop at a certain point on the page and look up at us—it always felt like the Rebbe's eyes were piercing you—and ask for more details about one *mareh makom* or another. The Rebbe would catch these details incredibly fast.

"WE NEED PEOPLE LIKE YOU"

In 5731, the Rebbe sent our family to Eretz Yisroel.

Shortly before that time, the Rebbe had founded the neighborhood of Nachlas Har Chabad. As the gates of Russia began to open and emigration became possible, the neighborhood started filling with Russian families, each with different levels of knowledge and *frumkeit*. The Rebbe encouraged families of *anash* to settle there as well, to help strengthen and establish the community.

By the time we arrived, several families were already in place; altogether, about twenty families like ours lived there.

My first position was as administrator of the girls' school. One of my first accomplishments was arranging for the school to be officially recognized by the Department of Education. Until then, they had been running from office



CHIEF RABBI OF THE IDF, RABBI MORDECHAI PIRON, AWARDING RABBI SIROTA.



WITH FELLOW SOLDIERS IN FRONT OF HIS BASE OFFICE.

to office, trying to scrape together small sums of money. With the new status, we were able to streamline the government funding. Because of that success, the boys' school in Nachalah became a branch of the girls' school, which allowed them to receive funding as well.

After some time working at the school in Nachalas Har Chabad, there was a bit of a *machlokes*, and I began looking for other opportunities. I was offered chinuch positions to lead schools in Bat Yam or Holon, but I also started exploring the possibility of enlisting in the army—for a very practical reason.

At the time, I was living in Eretz Yisroel as a non-permanent resident, and I wanted to regularize my legal status and become a citizen. When I inquired at the relevant offices, I was told that to do so, I would need to enlist in the IDF. Given my age, the enlistment would be for six months and would be considered *miluim*—reserve duty.

In those days in Eretz Yisroel (and perhaps even today), this was quite normal. *Bochurim* in yeshiva did not enlist, of course, but it was common to do so later, once they were married. Many men in Kfar Chabad were doing regular reserve duty at the time.

I went through the initial intake process for the army, including psychological testing and a review of my background. They were very impressed. I scored high on the psychological evaluation, and with my college diploma, *semicha* for *rabbanus*, and career in education, I seemed to be a strong candidate.

“We need people like you,” they told me. “Instead of six

months of unpaid reserve duty, we can put you through one month of basic training, and then you can sign up for a year of service as an officer—with full salary. In time, you'll be sent to an officer's course.”

When I heard that, a memory came rushing back. Years earlier, when I wanted to enroll in 770, the Rebbe had instructed me first to obtain a diploma—and to use it to spread Yiddishkeit. The army, I thought, was an incredibly fertile place to spread Yiddishkeit. Perhaps this was the very reason the Rebbe had wanted me to earn that diploma in the first place!

The truth is, my diploma had already come to good use. It was the diploma that helped me enroll in the Nachalas Har Chabad school in the *zerem* of “Mamlachti-Dati” (recognized by Israel's Department of Education). But here, the opportunity was even greater.

I wrote to the Rebbe detailing all the options before me—the chinuch positions in Bat Yam and Holon, as well as the army offer—and the Rebbe circled the army. And so, I became an IDF officer.

AN OFFICER OF THE SOUL

I began with basic training. For a whole month, I shlepped around—running, jumping, climbing, and of course learning how to shoot an Uzi—all on very little sleep. Everyone else was eighteen; I was already in my early



OFFICIATING AT A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR IDF FALLEN.



PREPARING A KESUBA.

thirties. It wasn't easy, but I managed to pull through.

At the end of the month, they had me sign on for a year. They told me I would serve as a *rav tzvai*, a military chaplain over a large unit. That was precisely what I had been hoping for. Now I could fulfill the Rebbe's words.

My unit was stationed in the Sinai Desert. It was a renowned unit—the one that had encircled the Egyptian army in the Sinai, paving the way for victory in the Yom Kippur War.

My responsibilities included overseeing kashrus and ensuring Shabbos observance to the extent possible. But most importantly, I held weekly gatherings with each *plughah*. Many of the soldiers were kibbutznikim and others who had grown up knowing nothing about Yiddishkeit. For many, the first time they ever saw tefillin was when they entered the army. Now, every week, I was able to give them a serious talk on the parsha and on Yiddishkeit in general.

I also had countless personal conversations with the soldiers. There were specific times each day when I made myself available for that purpose, and they all knew they could turn to me with their problems. As a result, I developed many close friendships. I even had several conversations about Yiddishkeit with Shimon Peres and Yitzchak Rabin during their visits to the base.

Like other officers, I would return home to my family once a week, alternating between a Shabbos-weekend or a Monday *chufsha*; that's how it went for three years.

AN AUTHENTIC SHABBOS

One story from my days in the army stands out.

It was Rosh Hashanah and I was stationed at the base in Sharm al-Sheikh. The base was enormous—stretching for miles.

I approached the *ketzin dat* of the navy, the officer in charge of religious affairs (though he himself wasn't very religious), and told him, "The Lubavitcher Rebbe often speaks about *mitvza shofar*—blowing shofar for those who haven't had the chance to hear it in shul. This base is filled with such soldiers, many of whom are on guard duty or other assignments. Let's go do *mitvzoim* together."

He agreed. After we made kiddush and ate following davening that Rosh Hashanah morning, we took a shofar and set out across the base.

During our tour of the base, we came to the holding cells where soldiers were kept after committing violations, awaiting transfer north to be judged by military tribunals. At the time, some forty or fifty soldiers were being held there.

I noticed that the regular officer in charge wasn't present. Instead, there was a replacement officer. I introduced myself and asked if I could speak to the prisoners and blow shofar for them. He was enthusiastic that I had come, and immediately brought all the prisoners out. I spoke with them, blew shofar, and we had an uplifting visit.



RABBI SIROTA PRESENTS THE REBBE WITH A SEFER WRITTEN BY A FAMILY MEMBER.

I couldn't help but notice that the replacement officer himself seemed very engaged in what I was saying. After the prisoners were sent back to their cells, I continued talking with him.

He was a sharp, intelligent fellow. He had recently trained in psychology and was soon to be transferred from the military police to the medical units. We had a fascinating conversation about Yiddishkeit, but time was running short, so I returned on Motzei Yom Tov, and we ended up speaking the entire night. When I finally left his office, it was already daybreak, so I went straight to the Yam Suf and immersed myself in the water for *mikvah*.

He told me that he wanted to experience an "authentic Shabbos." At the time, I was living in Bnei Brak, so I invited him, together with his wife and daughter, to spend Shabbos with us.

I remember feeling uneasy about bringing him to the

Chabad shul on Rechov Avraham where I davened. It was a decrepit shtiebel—wooden benches, broken tables, and lit by kerosene lamps because of a *cheshash chilul Shabbos* with electricity. In a city like Bnei Brak, with so many respectable shuls, I thought it wasn't a fitting place to bring guests. So on Friday night, I took him to a different shul.

But he quickly sensed something was off. After davening, he turned to me and asked, "Is this the *shul* you daven at each week?"

"To tell you the truth," I admitted, "it's not. I daven in a shtiebel with wooden benches and broken tables, where they don't use electricity and they light the room with kerosene lamps. I just wanted you to feel more comfortable."

"No," he said firmly. "I want to experience *your* Shabbos."

So the next morning I brought him to the Chabad *shul*, and he was very moved by the atmosphere—the simplicity, the chassidische davening, the atmosphere—it touched him

profoundly. When we left, his face was glowing.

That Shabbos afternoon, I took him on a walk through Bnei Brak. He was astonished to see an entire city at rest—silent streets without a single car. We stepped into a yeshiva, where he witnessed a sea of *bochurim* in white shirts immersed in learning during the afternoon *seder*. It was a sight unlike anything he had ever seen.

Little by little, he drew closer to Yiddishkeit. I kashered his kitchen, the family began keeping Shabbos, he transferred his daughter to a religious school, and in time, they underwent a complete transformation.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN TEL MEGIDDO

In the army, the rule was that you had to periodically move up to a new position.

After three years in the army, I heard about an opening in the military police—they needed a chaplain for the toughest prison in their system, the facility for soldiers incarcerated for serious crimes, serving sentences of six months or more.

I thought it would be an excellent fit. There were so many young men there who desperately needed *hashpa'a*, and I felt it was the perfect place for me to have an impact. I completed the required course and became the chaplain at Tel Megiddo.

My work there involved a great deal of speaking and counseling—not only with the prisoners, but also with the officers who worked in the prison. With the prisoners, my main focus was on preparing them for life after release. Whenever someone was nearing the end of his sentence, I would try to convince him to enroll in a baal teshuva yeshiva. Instead of wandering the streets, smoking hashish, and again falling into crime, a yeshiva could provide the stability they needed.

Some agreed—and when they did, I would personally escort them there the moment they were released. I knew that if I just said, “We’ll meet tomorrow,” I would likely never see them again.

We saw very good results.

Once, while riding a bus in Yerushalayim, a young man approached me. “Do you recognize me?” he asked. I didn’t.

So he explained: “I was in the Megiddo prison. You

spoke to me and convinced me to go to yeshiva. Look at me now!”

Two years of learning in yeshiva had so transformed his appearance—his very features—that I hadn’t even recognized him.

RETIRING FROM SERVICE

Throughout my years in the IDF and in the military police, I wrote to the Rebbe at every significant juncture. Each time I signed on for another two years, it was only with the Rebbe’s approval. I would also share stories of special *hashpa'a*—like the ones I’ve told here—and the Rebbe would respond with *n“n n“n*.

The work in the military and military police was very intense. After fourteen years, I wrote to the Rebbe that I was tired and wished to retire. I hoped to enroll in a kollel to learn, and to continue influencing people from a calmer, more relaxed place. To be honest, I was nervous—I suspected the Rebbe would not agree. But to my surprise, the Rebbe approved of the plan, and I finally retired from service.

Even after retiring, I maintained many of my connections. Due to my background and experience—as a major in rank with a unique story—I was frequently invited to speak to communities all over the country. From time to time, the army itself would also call me back to perform different functions, and I would happily assist, until our family ultimately moved back to the United States.

IN CONCLUSION

As I said earlier, I had been quite shocked and surprised when—as a youngster in Yeshiva University—the Rebbe had categorically rejected my plan to join 770. I can still hear Rabbi Hodakov’s voice coming through the telephone receiver to my home—“*beshum ponim v’ofen* he should not leave Yeshiva University.”

At the time, I couldn’t possibly appreciate why, but over the years I came to realize that a *vort* of the Rebbe *vert nisht farfalen*.

“Get the diploma, and use the diploma to spread Yiddishkeit.”

With Hashem’s help, that’s exactly what I did. **T**

By: Rabbi Shneur Itzinger

Step Inside

Farbrengen with the Rebbe
— A Companion

A guide to the Sicha of
Hei Teves 5747



Hisvaaduyos 5747 vol.
2, pp. 170–180.



Sources

This guide is designed to assist in experiencing the farbrengen on video or audio. Timestamps correspond to the video, linked above.

לע"נ
האישה החשובה מרת
חסיא בת ר' איסר ע"ה
ניו
נלב"ע כ"ה טבת ה'תשפ"ג
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'

נדפס ע"י נכדה
הרה"ת ר' יואל זווגתו מרת
ריקל ומשפחתם שיחיו
ניו





The Rebbe teaches us to look at the Rabbeim’s initial response to any event as a guide for how to properly celebrate the occasion.¹ On **Hei Teves 5747**, just hours after receiving the joyous news of **Didan Notzach**, the Rebbe came into shul for Mincha and delivered a *sicha*, in which he explained how to respond to the accusations raised in court against the Rebbe and Lubavitch, and more importantly, how to understand the lessons of the victory.

Asking for a Chumash in the middle of Mincha, the Rebbe based the *sicha* on the first and last *pesukim* in the *shiur* Chumash of the day, as well as on the reaction of the Alter Rebbe to his *geulah* on Yud Tes Kislev.

A Timely Lesson

[0:00]

The first lesson of the day: Finding purpose in concealment.

So now (you can understand) **that it was not you who sent me here, but G-d. He has made me Pharaoh’s counselor, lord over all his household, and ruler over all Egypt.**

ועתה לא אתם שלחתם אתי הנה כי
האלקים וישימני לאב לפרעה ולֵאדון
לכל ביתו ומשל בכל ארץ מצרים:

The Alter Rebbe’s directive,

- as interpreted by the Mittlerer Rebbe,
- tells us to *live* with the daily portion of Chumash.²
- Today is the **third** portion.
 - On the third day of creation, Tuesday, Hashem said twice “*ki tov*—it is good,”⁴ also connected to being “good for heaven and good for earth,”⁵ (acting properly towards Hashem as well as toward His creations).
 - Every moment of today, and each lesson, combines these two elements.

Looking to today’s Chumash for the lesson:

- The very first *posuk*⁷ tells us:
 - an eternal instruction.

LIVING WITH THE TIMES

The Rebbe often brings the *vort* from the Alter Rebbe: “we must live with the times,” which was interpreted (by his brother the Maharil, and later by the Mittlerer Rebbe) to mean that we need to find a lesson in the daily *shiur* of Chumash.

Similarly, the Shaloh (quoted often in other places by the Rebbe) also teaches that the weekly Parsha is connected to the Yomim Tovim that occur during the days it is read.³

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DOUBLED GOOD

On the second day of creation, Hashem separated the upper and lower waters. On the third day, He created dry land. Since the work of the waters wasn't complete until Tuesday, Hashem held back from saying "*Ki tov*—it is good" on Monday, and said it twice on Tuesday—once for the completion of Monday's work and once for the new creations of Tuesday. Tuesday therefore has the unique quality of "doubled good."

The Gemara introduces two types of *tzaddikim*: those who are good only toward Hashem, and those who are also good toward their fellow.

The Tzemach Tzedek connects these ideas: the "doubled good" of Tuesday reflects the twofold good of the *tzaddik* who acts properly both "*lashamayim*" and "*labriyos*"—toward Heaven and toward others.

The Rebbe often notes that the entire Tuesday carries this quality of doubled good—"lashamayim v'labriyos." It is not divided, with part of the day for Heaven and part for others; the entire day is inherently both.⁶

ETERNAL LESSONS

An important part of learning Torah is understanding that it is not merely a story, *chas v'shalom*. Every word in Torah carries a lesson for the future.

If Yosef, before Matan Torah, realized that what happened to him had a purpose, we must especially do so now. At Matan Torah, we became one with Torah: *ישראל, אורייתא וקוב"ה כולא חד*. As we are one with Torah, its lessons must shape us.

THE COURTROOM ABOVE

In Torah, a *Dayan* is called Elokim.⁸ The name Elokim, when referring to Hashem, is associated with judgment and concealment, unlike the name Havayah, which is linked to revelation and kindness.

The Rebbe connects the judgment over the *seforim* in the earthly courtroom to Hashem's judgment—Elokim.

- When facing a challenge—and once it is resolved—we must discover the lesson it holds and share it with ourselves and others.
 - It was certainly not by chance, nor simply to inflict pain.
 - This idea of learning a lesson, as Yosef did, is even more applicable after Matan Torah.

Breaking it down within the *possuk*:

- **Shelachani**: Wherever we are is a *shlichus*, a mission—
- **Lo atem... Elokim**: —from Hashem.
 - The mission may not be immediately apparent, as it originates from "Elokim," associated with severity and judgment.
- [Knowing this is the *shlichus* itself:] recognizing that you are on a mission from Hashem—and acting accordingly—[reveals *Elokus* wherever you are].
 - The lesson could have been from a "Havayah" occurrence—open and revealed. Hashem wanted it to come through judgment, leading to a greater *aliya*.
- To reiterate: wherever you are, and in whatever situation you find yourself, you must know that you have a mission—
 - Torah helps reveal the concealed mission,
 - which comes from a higher, concealed aspect of Hashem.
- —to make a *dira b'tachtonim*.
- As the Baal Shem Tov taught: wherever we are, we have a mission from Hashem to reveal Elokus—"leshaken shmoi shom," to make Hashem's name rest in the world.⁹
- It begins within, and spreads outward.
- Like the Menorah, at the door facing outwards.
 - Today, Tuesday following Chanukah, is influenced by its lessons.
- until the outside is nullified and transformed.

The first lesson of the day is in today's Chumash: Just as Yosef recognized he was on a mission from Hashem and that his enslavement was not the

result of human action, we too must realize at every moment that we are always on a divine mission—to reveal Elokus wherever we are.

“What My Enemies Teach Me”

[8:25]

The next lesson of the day: increase in hafatzas hamaayanos.

- Chanukah is also connected with oil, compared to Chassidus, which—like oil—spreads out and reaches everything around it.
- Similarly, Chassidus must be disseminated everywhere.

On the topic of *hafatzas hamaayanos*, the Rebbe introduces the second lesson of today:

- When the Alter Rebbe was imprisoned, his response came from analyzing the slander against him.
- The conclusion he reached—agreed upon also by the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid—was to intensify *hafatzas hamaayanos*.
- This explains what happened today:
- So much has happened in *hafatzas hamaayanos*,
 - also affecting *hafatzas hayahadus*—even basic Yiddishkeit is infused with Chassidus—
- So how could such a “*shelachani*”—negative event happen?
 - After accomplishing so much, leaving only “polishing the buttons”¹¹ (see below).
- The only explanation: it was intended to encourage even stronger activities of *hafatzas hamaayanos*.
- Accusations were made that Chabad is not “active,” that we have no use for *seforim* and manuscripts if we don’t spread Chassidus—only to encourage us to spread Chassidus even further.
 - What does “even polish the buttons” signify?
 - A garment is intended to provide protection. The button does not provide

A HEAVENLY VISIT

When the Alter Rebbe was in jail, he was visited by his teachers, the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid. “Why was I imprisoned?” he asked. “It was a heavenly decree on account of your spreading Chassidus,” they replied. “Should I stop?” he asked. “On the contrary, when you are released, you should say *even more* Chassidus!” came the unambiguous answer.

The Alter Rebbe had already realized that the accusations against him were baseless and could only be a result of a heavenly *kitrug*. Hearing it from his teachers provided additional affirmation.

A year prior to Hei Teves, during the trial itself on Chanukah 5746, the Rebbe mentioned this story, teaching that we should be happy that the accusation that Lubavitch is inactive is entirely baseless. The Rebbe urged learning from such accusations to increase all our activities.

Here, the Rebbe completes the circle, affirming again that this court case could only have been a result of a heavenly decree intended to spur further action.¹⁰

POLISHING THE BUTTONS

This expression, used by the Friediker Rebbe, illustrates that we are completing the final *avoda of galus* and are ready to greet Moshiach. When one is polishing their buttons, everything else is already in place.¹²

From Hei Teves onward, the Rebbe mentioned several times that even this *avoda* is also complete—“געפוצט און איבערגעפוצט: polished and overpolished again and again!”¹³



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additional protection, which is already provided by the garment. It merely connects the two sides, bringing the right to the left.

- This signifies the “right”—*kedusha*, transforming the “left”—*kelipa*. The left side remains useful, but it is influenced and transformed into good by the right side,
- and then the left too plays a role

and assists the right side.

- As we celebrate the victory, practical action must follow.

The second lesson: just as the Alter Rebbe saw his imprisonment as a catalyst for greater hafatzas hamaayanos, the baseless accusation that Lubavitch is not “active” can only mean that we must do even more.

The Wagons' Message

[14:40]

The next lesson of the day comes from the **final** possuk of the day's Chumash: The wagons Yosef sent, hinting to the *egla arufah*, which brought life to Yaakov—vatechi ruach Yaakov.

... Yaakov saw the wagons Yosef had sent to transport him, and the spirit of their father Yaakov was enlivened.

וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף
לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם:

- Yaakov was enlivened when he saw Yosef's spiritual standing:¹⁴
- Despite Yosef's involvement in governing Mitzrayim—
 - This was a novel concept: the Avos were shepherds, remaining above worldly involvement, while Yosef was very involved in the world, running Potiphar's household.
- —he was not distracted from serving Hashem properly.
 - This was deliberate: the Avos initially were above worldly involvement only as a preparation for the time when Yosef would introduce a new *avoda*—bringing Elokus into Mitzrayim and the world.
 - Yosef's *avoda* represents the pinnacle of the *avoda* of the Avos.
- His devotion was displayed by sending *agalos*—wagons—representing the laws of *egla arufa* that Yosef studied with his father before they departed.¹⁵

When an unidentified corpse is found, the Sanhedrin identifies the city closest to the body. That city's Beis Din then performs the *egla arufa* ceremony, absolving themselves of responsibility for the death.

- The *egla arufa* raises awareness of the fact that a corpse was found.
- Learning about this prevents the possibility of a future *chahal ba'sadeh*.
- A Jew in the “*sadeh*” is in Esav's domain, distanced from Elokus—the source of life—and thus susceptible to death.
- A Jew, however, naturally wants to remain connected to Elokus,
 - as the Rambam teaches regarding one who gives a *get* under pressure, that it is considered willing.
- This is our *shlichus* from the Rebbe:
 - [Fulfilling] the *shlichus* brings about *va'techi ruach Yaakov*.
 - Although the question is asked: did he not pass away etc.?
 - When “*zaroi ba'chaim*”—alive with Torah and Mitzvos which bring life, “living” with the Torah we study—he too is alive.
 - When we are alive, we can do our mission:
- Firstly, as above, to always know we have a *shlichus* from Hashem.
 - Even before making a *dira b'tachtonim*,

we have the knowledge that we are on a mission to do so.

- And, to prevent any possibility of a “*chahal ba’sadeh*”—a Jew who is disconnected from Elokus, the source of life.
- Even in the “field”, outside the realm of *kedusha*, we should create a home for Hashem.

The Action Plan

[24:58]

What we can do to practically implement all the above.

- Even with all we have accomplished, we must do even more,
- transforming our own homes into a “Beis Chabad”—a place of Torah, *avoda*, and *gemilus chassadim*,
- and spread the light outside—
 - Back to the lesson of the *agalos*:
 - One might have thought that it was Pharaoh who sent the wagons, [meaning the influence of Yiddishkeit is not apparent],
 - Torah therefore emphasizes that they were sent by Yosef,
 - meaning that everyone—even non-Jews—recognizes Yosef’s influence, that he has the only say in everything connected with Yiddishkeit and our *shlichus*.

EVERY HOME A BEIS CHABAD

Throughout the year 5747, the Rebbe repeatedly urged the building of more and more Batei Chabad. This call extended to every individual to turn their own home into a Beis Chabad: a place from which Torah, *avoda*, and *gemilus chassadim* are practiced and shared with others.

- From this, we see the power we have—
- —to influence even non-Jews in their *mitzvos*.
- This brings about *vatechi ruach Yaakov* literally.
- We will go to the expanded Eretz Yisroel,
- with the *kahal “gadol”* of all the Jewish people.
- We also experience “*gadlus*” on a personal level,
 - including in Torah and *mitzvos*, which each have an advantage over the other.
- Simply put: an increase in all matters of Torah, *avoda*, and *gemilus chassadim* **today**.
- Place money in the Pushka, spread these words to others, and share Torah and Yiddishkeit with all.
- We will then uncover how all the pain we went through was only temporary, by using it for the right purposes.
- We have the strength to increase in all the above, relative to the pain we went through,
- and will see and “find” great results, especially the coming of Moshiach.

1. See *Step Inside* - Yud Tes Kislev 5742, *sicha* 2, Derher Kislev 5786.

2. Sefer Hasichos 5702, p. 29. Hayom Yom 2 Cheshvan. See sourcesheet, sources 1–4.

3. See fn. 2.

4. Rashi Bereishis 1:7.

5. Kiddushin 40a.

6. See sourcesheet, sources 5–7.

7. Vayigash 45:8.

8. See Rashi on Mishpatim 21:6.

9. Hayom Yom 18 Elul. Also mentioned here is מוֹה' מַצְעָדִי מוֹה' כוֹנוֹנֵי גַבֵּר, seemingly referencing a similar Torah of the Alter Rebbe, Hayom Yom 10 Tammuz. See sourcesheet, sources 8–9.

10. See sourcesheet, sources 11–12.

11. Sefer Hasichos 5689, p. 42.

12. Ibid.

13. See for example Hisvaaduyos 5747 vol. 2, p. 301.

14. Vayigash 45:27.

15. See Rashi on Vayigash 45:27.



IN THE **FOOTSTEPS**
OF **CHASSIDIM**

Three Degrees Removed

By: Rabbi Mendy Greenberg (Twinsburg, OH)

לזכות
החיילת בצבאות ה'
שיינא שתחיל'
לרגל יום הולדתה ג' טבת
נדפס ע"י הוריה
הרה"ת ר' חיים אפרים וזוגתו
מרת חיל' מושקא שיחיו
גאלדשטיין

Streams of Stories

This Chof-Daled Teves, we will mark the Alter Rebbe's 213th *yom hilula* (5573-5786). *Farbrengens* will be held to mark the day, and stories of the *baal hahilula* will be shared.

This raises an interesting historical question.

How many times was that specific story repeated before reaching us? How many “links in the chain” separate us from the original moment it occurred?

In earlier generations, until the Frierdiker Rebbe encouraged Chassidim to transcribe their memoirs, a *written*

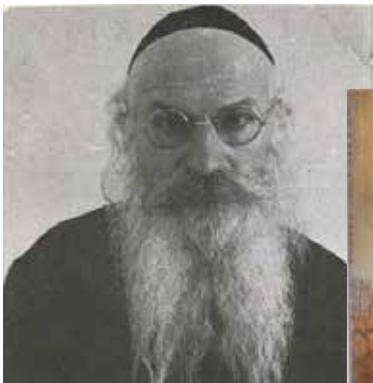
chassidische *maiseh* was an anomaly. With some exceptions, stories were generally conveyed orally—told and re-retold—until they reached us, or until they were finally committed to writing.

Over time, groups of stories came to form distinct “streams”—narrative traditions that could be traced back to a particular transmitter. One central stream, for example, centers on the stories of Reb Gronem, the famed *mashpia* in Lubavitch. He had heard countless stories from his own *mashpia*, Reb Avraham Zhembiner, who had in turn received them from his teachers. These were later transcribed by his students, such as Reb Chaim Mordechai Perlov in Likkutei Sipurim, Reb Folleh Kahan in Shmuos v'Sippurim, and Reb Yudel Chitrik in Reshimos Devarim.

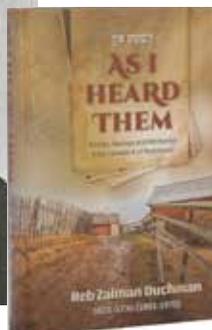
Another important stream is stories preserved by Chassidim who emigrated to Eretz Yisroel from the time of the Alter Rebbe, especially those transmitted within the Slonim family, descendants of Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel.

The common denominator of most of these streams is the long oral journey—story after story, link after link—spanning decades and generations until they reached us.

But there is one line of transmission that stands unique. It is a kabbalah that surfaced only in more recent generations, yet still retains remarkable closeness to the distant past: the stories recorded in *Lisheima Oizen*, by Reb Zalman Duchman.



REB ZALMAN DUCHMAN.



Here is one:

My grandfather would relate that as a child, he stood near Reb Eizel [Homel'er]'s sukka and watched as they covered it with a thick layer of *s'chach*. My grandfather asked Reb Eizel: "Don't you need to see the stars?"

Reb Eizel answered: "Listen, Yoel'ke, I was by the [Alter] Rebbe in Liozna when they were covering the sukka. The Rebbe stood there and motioned with his holy hand, "*Noch gedichter*, thicker, thicker."

Reb Eizel finished with a cry: "*Andersh ken ich nit ton!* I cannot do otherwise!"¹

This story, recorded in the not-too-distant past, is written by an author only three degrees removed from the Alter Rebbe. He heard the story from his grandfather, Reb Mordechai Yoel Duchman, who had heard it from his *mashpia*, Reb Eizik Homel'er, who himself was a chossid of the Alter Rebbe.

Third Degree

Reb Zalman Duchman was one of the *eltere chassidim* in 770 throughout the early years of the Rebbe's *nesius* until his passing in 5730, and was the subject of a comprehensive profile in *A Chassidisher Derher* of Kislev 5783, titled, "A Link in the Golden Chain."

He was born in the city of Gomel (also known as Homel), an important city for Chabad Chassidim. As he describes it:

The Frierdiker Rebbe writes in a *sicha* that my hometown, Homel, was one of the first chassidishe cities.

Even in my times, until the Bolshevik era, the Lubavitcher shul had a *cheder sheni* (a *chabad'nitze*) where the *minyán* davened for almost two hours, as the Alter Rebbe instructs in *Iggeres Hakodesh*.²

Reb Zalman learned in Tomchei Temimim by the Rebbe Rashab, but a formative influence in his life was his grandfather, Reb Mordechai Yoel Duchman of Homel. His grandfather gave him a real *chassidisher chinuch*—and a voluminous amount of stories.

Second Degree

The stories weren't easily earned. Reb Mordechai Yoel would say Chassidus every Shabbos and Yoma D'Pagra, but stories didn't come as easily. As Reb Zalman related:

The storytelling happened when I was able to discern the 'good moments' with my grandfather. [This wasn't common,] because my grandfather would say, "In *kelipa*, it's all laughter and fun, but in *kedusha* what I've seen is *kepeida* (or, in the words of the Frierdiker Rebbe, 'seriousness')."³

Reb Mordechai Yoel was from an exalted generation of



REB ZALMAN AS A YOUNG MAN IN RUSSIA.

Chassidim. As a young man, he had the merit to study in the Yeshiva of the Tzemach Tzedek in Lubavitch and received many *kiruvim* from the Rebbe. He arrived in Lubavitch at the unusually young age of fourteen, which makes his uniqueness quite evident.

Reb Zalman describes his grandfather's childhood as follows:

From early childhood, he was a *masmid* in learning and very frum; he would tie a headcovering to his head at night so it wouldn't fall off. He would spend full nights learning in the Homel'er shul; in his old age, he would give us *musar* and say that when he was 14 years old, he knew the entire Shas, Gemara with Rashi... His retention was so good that he didn't need to hear *chazara* after the *maamar* [of the Tzemach Tzedek].⁴

Aside from being one of the *yoshevim* near the Tzemach Tzedek, Reb Mordechai Yoel had the opportunity to learn in the presence of one of the legendary Chassidim of the older generation, Reb Eizik Homel'er, who served as the *rav* of the city.

Reb Eizel was already advanced in years; he passed away when Reb Mordechai Yoel was only about twenty years old. From a very young age, Reb Mordechai Yoel tried to use every opportunity to speak with Reb Eizik:

Reb Eizel didn't sit in *Dinei Torah*, because those

involved conflict, but he would answer *shailos*. Everyone knew that after *shemoneh esreh*, it was possible to approach him and ask questions.

My zeide Reb Mordechai Yoel told me that as a child, he would invent questions to have an excuse to talk to Reb Eizel. He would also ask the women who were his neighbors to send their questions with him.⁵

YUD TES KISLEV ON SITE

During his days learning in the Yeshiva of the Tzemach Tzedek, Reb Mordechai Yoel had the opportunity to spend Yud-Tes Kislev in Liozna, in the presence of individuals who had experienced the events firsthand. Here is the story, as told by his grandson:

When the zeide Reb Mordechai Yoel was one of the *yoshevim* by the Tzemach Tzedek, ‘Nikolai was looking for them’ (in other words, they were being called to the draft). The Tzemach Tzedek sent them away from Lubavitch, some to Kalisk and some to Liozna. My zeide was sent to Liozna, and it turned out that he was there for Yud-Tes Kislev.

This was the *seider* in Liozna:

They brought large bottles with *mashke* and sacks of liver. There was an elder named Reb Yossele, who had been present when they had arrested the Alter Rebbe. He sat at the head of the table and repeated the story from beginning to end. When he described how they had slapped the Rebbetzin and she lost two teeth, he broke into tears.

Reb Yosef also related that the next Yud-Tes Kislev, i.e., the first celebration in Liozna, a large crowd arrived. It was a very warm Yud-Tes Kislev. They covered the courtyard with tarp and the Alter Rebbe himself went around and asked to eat, drink, and be *freilech*, “because my Yom Tov is higher...” It was about both *ruchnius* and *gashmius*—and the Aibershter helped; therefore, he requested that they should be *freilech*.¹³

First Degree

Reb Eizik had been one of the early Chassidim of the Alter Rebbe.

Even before meeting the Alter Rebbe, he had been famous as a *lamdan* throughout the area, and the Alter Rebbe had specifically sent a *shadar* to Homel to engage with him and bring him for a visit to Liozna. Reb Eizel came, and his life was changed forever.

In Liozna, as Reb Mordechai Yoel told his grandson, there was no place for arrogance—even in one’s accomplishments in Torah learning.

Reb Eizel would relate that when he arrived in Liozna, he had already learned Shas seven times with all the *nosei kelim*. He was nicknamed *Der Zibele* (the seventh)—and he felt shamed like a thief.⁶

Reb Eizik was immediately taken by the personality of the Alter Rebbe, and became a lifelong chossid. Even many years later, when speaking of his Rebbe, he would be overcome with emotion:

When my zeide [Reb Mordechai Yoel] would start to describe Reb Eizel’s fervor when speaking of the Alter Rebbe, it was *moiredik*. “He’s on a higher level than all others—even Adam Harishon before the *cheit*.”

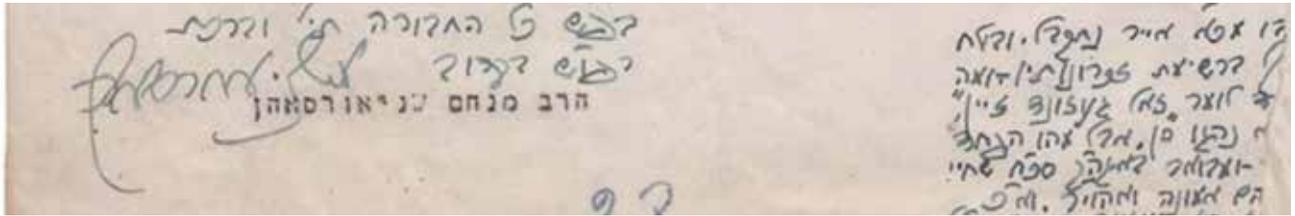
Reb Eizel would say, “If Moshe Rabbeinu and the Rebbe would arrive, and the Rebbe would give one directive and Moshe Rabbeinu would say otherwise, I would say: You do what you want; I can’t do different than my Rebbe—*ich ken andersh fun mein Rebbe’n nit tohn!*”⁷

At one farbrengen, Reb Eizel described the level of devotion the Chassidim felt toward the Alter Rebbe:

If the Rebbe would tell us to walk through fire, we would do it. Do you think we would go with the intention of being saved? No! With the intention of being burned!⁸



‘CHONA ARIEL’
AUTHORED BY REB
EIZIK HOMEL’ER.



THE REBBE'S RESPONSE TO REB ZALMAN, REGARDING WHAT HE WROTE ABOUT THE REBBE 'ZOL GEZUNT ZEIN'.

As a close student of Reb Eizik, Reb Mordechai Yoel received incredible stories and traditions from his teacher, passing them down to his grandson with the same vivid descriptions he had heard. In Reb Zalman's stories, the characters jump off the page in an incredible way.

Here's another story Reb Zalman's grandfather heard from Reb Eizik:

Once, the Alter Rebbe came out and gave out *mashke*. The 'feter Leibele' [the Alter Rebbe's brother Reb Yehuda Leib of Yanovitch] asked, "What's the occasion of the *simcha*?"

The Alter Rebbe responded: "I have today fulfilled what I wrote in my Tanya, 'Vehevei shfal ruach ... *afilu bifnei kal shebikalim*, be lowly ... even before the most irreverent person,' where I added the word *mamash*."⁹

"Today, I was visited by someone who has transgressed the entire Torah. I thought to myself, 'Nu...' I contemplated the matter for three minutes, and discovered that in seven matters, I am worse than him."

When Reb Eizel would repeat this story, he would bang on the table and say, "Such a thing—only the Rebbe could have done. *Dos hot mer az der Rebbe nit gekent*."¹⁰

Reb Eizik would sometimes express his disappointment with the *yeridas hadoros* he saw in the youth of his day. In his times, he would tell them, the *yungeleit* would learn all night, and then go out into the cold—without fur coats—and break the ice to go to *mikvah*. "This cannot be demanded from today's *yungeleit*," he would say, "but even today, you can daven and learn."¹¹

In his old age, Reb Eizik would bemoan his own lowly state of *avoda*. He once remarked that he had nothing to bring along to the World of Truth except for one thing—*shimush talmidei chachamim*:

One summer, he related, he was walking down the street in Liozna as the Alter Rebbe was sitting at his window. A wind came and blew away a page of *Kesovim*; he picked it up and brought it back to the Alter Rebbe.

[As Reb Eizik told the story,] one of the listeners smiled, and Reb Eizel said, "Why are you laughing? This is real *shimush chachamim* according to halacha!"¹²

Very Gezunt!

In honor of Chof-Daled Teves, the Alter Rebbe's *yom hilula*, we conclude with the following story:

Reb Zalman began writing his memories at the Rebbe's request shortly after he left Russia. These stories were written as letters to the Rebbe, who would comment on them and always encourage him to write more. The Rebbe would also occasionally share their contents with the Frierdiker Rebbe—who always expressed his enjoyment.

When the Frierdiker Rebbe was *nistalek*, Reb Zalman included the following story in his next letter:

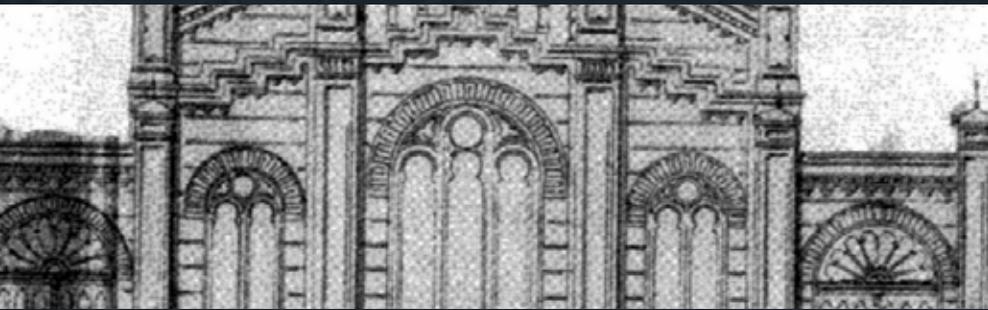
When my zeide Reb Mordechai Yoel would speak about his Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, even fifty years after the *histalkus*, he would say, "Der Rebbe zol gezunt zein," and then he would catch himself and add, "in Gan Eden."

In his response, the Rebbe wrote:

And regarding your fear of saying "zol gezunt zein"—that it was not customary—but what is the fear? The Alter Rebbe explains in *Iggeres Hakodesh Siman 28* that the life of a tzaddik is his Emuna, Ahava and Yir'a.

If so, he is very *gezunt* indeed.¹⁴ ❶

1. The Alter Rebbe, story #4.
2. Reb Mordechai Yoel Duchman, story #1.
3. Reb Mordechai Yoel Duchman, story #22.
4. The Tzemach Tzedek, stories #1–2.
5. Reb Eizik Homel'er, story #22.
6. Reb Eizik Homel'er, story #36.
7. The Alter Rebbe, story #3. The Rebbe commented on this story that it is similar to the story about Rabbeinu Tam and Moshe Rabbeinu, recorded in *Seder Hadoros* 1:4930.
8. The Alter Rebbe, story #5.
9. Perek 30.
10. The Alter Rebbe, story #16.
11. Reb Eizik Homel'er, story #50.
12. The Alter Rebbe, story #37.
13. This seems to mean that the imprisonment was both a physical threat and also a threat to *ruchniusdiker* matters.
14. Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5710. Lisheima Ozen (new edition) p. 34.



A FIR UND II



BY:
RABBI
SHOLOM
POSNER

לזכות
עליזה תחי' שוחאט
לרגל יום הולדתה - כ"ב טבת

ולזכות הוריה
הרה"ת ר' שלום דוב בער
וזוגתו מרת חיה מושקא
ולזכות אחיותיה ברכה ליפשא,
שיינדל, ואחיה מנחם מענדל שיחיו

The name Reb Itche Masmid conjures images of holiness, solemnity, and otherworldly asceticism.

Yet Reb Itche der Masmid was very much a real person who lived in this world in an era not too distant from our own. His dedication to *avoda* in its fullest sense, whilst serving as a mentor for the common folk, serves as a symbol of uncompromising values of Chassidus in the modern world.

Books have been written about him but still have not succeeded in properly portraying his greatness. We shall not attempt to limit him in this brief article. We will try to provide just a glimpse into the biography, persona, and character of this enormous figure.¹

REB ITCHE MASMID



THE LEGENDARY CHOSSID
AND SHADAR,
REB ITCHE
MASMID

YITZCHOK'S MERIT

Our story begins with another Itche, a *yungerman* from the Chabad settlements of the Cherson region in Ukraine. Reb Itche was a physical laborer, earning his living from a tannery, but was a deep soul. His spiritual development was, to a large extent, a result of the uplifting annual visits of Reb Hillel Paritcher.

Reb Hillel—a renowned Talmid Chacham, *mehader b'mitzvos*, and an exceptionally holy individual—served as a “*shadar*” (emissary) for the Mitteler Rebbe and, later, the Tzemach Tzedek. Several months a year, he would make his rounds in the various villages and settlements of Cherson, teaching Chassidus, raising funds, and bringing a boost of holiness wherever he went.

On 11 Av 5624, Reb Hillel passed away while in the middle of his yearly travels. His passing not only plunged his students into mourning but also left them in discomfort. Before his passing, Reb Hillel had taken out enormous loans for his purposes of *pidyon shivuyim* and—his fundraising trip cut short—did not leave the necessary funds to repay them.

Reb Itche was part of a group of Reb Hillel's students who took this matter personally. Taking responsibility for their *mashpia's* honor, they publicized that they would personally reimburse Reb Hillel's creditors.

To produce more income, Reb Itche exerted himself beyond his body's ability, and his health deteriorated rapidly. Within a short time, he passed away, leaving behind his wife, Elka, who was expecting their first child.

Tragedy mounted when Elka passed away in childbirth. The baby girl was adopted by Elka's brother, Harav Avraham Dovid Lavut, whom he named Ita Elka. Elka after the baby's mother, and Ita as a remembrance for her father (Itche - Ita).

However, the story has a happy ending after all. For, as Chassidim later pointed out, Reb Itche's sacrifice for his *mashpia's* honor was ultimately rewarded. Ita Elka would have a son, bearing the name of her father, whose greatness was reminiscent of Reb Hillel himself.²

THE MASMID

Reb Itche was born to Reb Shlomo Mendel and Elka Horowitz in 5644 [according to his official documents]. His family was one of the first who came to the Chabad settlement “Nahar-Tov” in the city Brezhnagavato (Berezhnevate), where Reb Itche was born.

It's not clear when he received his nickname “Masmid,” but it could have applied to him at virtually every point of his life. Already at seven years old, he took to learning Gemara with great enthusiasm, often late into the night.

Itche burned with the desire to study in a yeshiva beyond his small village, but his parents would not hear of it. His father—a *melamed* in the village—was delighted by his son's enthusiasm for learning, but could not bring himself to allow Itche to travel far from home. After becoming Bar Mitzvah, Itche took his future into his own hands. Without consulting his family, he braved the long journey to the city of Kremenchuk by himself.

After his risky flight to Kremenchuk—sneaking onto trains and hiding under the seats—he set out to find a worthy yeshiva. At first, he was deemed too young to be accepted into the yeshiva and was left to fend for himself. Selling his only possessions (his tefillin!), he sustained himself and studied diligently in the *beis midrash*. Upon seeing Itche's remarkable dedication and capability, the yeshiva agreed to register him.

Four years were spent in that Kremenchuker yeshiva until Itche moved elsewhere. He learned in various *yeshivos*, including a chassidische yeshiva in Putchep. Throughout this time, Itche succeeded exceptionally in his learning. *Frumkeit* as well was never an issue. Itche avoided negative influences and refused to engage with *bochurim* of questionable *yiras Shamayim*.

Yet, something was missing. In that era, before the founding of Tomchei Temimim, the prevalent attitude among *bochurim* was one of haughtiness and competition. Itche himself was absorbed in a culture where academics reigned supreme.

An episode that captures Itche's life before learning in Lubavitch—both his amazing qualities and the culture of which he was a part—is the story of his *semicha*. Itche was in fierce competition to receive *semicha* before a friend of his. With his strong physical stamina, Itche was able



ELKA HOROWITZ,
MOTHER OF REB
ITCHE DER MASMID.
SHE PASSED
AWAY IN 5713.



THE SHUL IN THE SETTLEMENT OF NAHAR TOV.

to study intensely without resting. He was rewarded when, at just 17 years old, he received his certificate. His friend, however, was of weaker build, and could not keep up with the intensity of their competition. The strain he exerted on himself made him ill, and he ultimately passed away.³

TRANSFORMATION

The revolution that was Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim appeared at the end of 5657, and the number of students it attracted gradually grew each year. Reb Itche began receiving regular recommendations to join the yeshiva, which provided an intense regimen of studying *nigleh* within an atmosphere of Chassidus and heightened *yiras shamayaim*.

Reb Itche heeded their advice, and at the end of 5661⁴ became a student of Tomchei Temimim. There, he found what he was looking for; his fellow students, in turn, were impressed by his *hasmada*.

The daylight hours did not contain enough time for Reb Itche to complete his desired 20 hours of Torah study. While the *zal* was transformed into a dormitory—beds pulled out from the wall to replace the benches and tables—Reb Itche would continue studying by the light of a small lamp (so as not to disturb the sleep of his friends). Hovering over a *shtender*, he would immerse his feet in cold water to force his exhausted body awake. (He continued this practice throughout his life.)

Even Reb Itche had his limits. One night, he fell into a deep sleep while still standing at his *shtender*. Reb Itche

toppled over together with his *shtender*, *sefer*, and lamp, onto the nearest sleeping *bochur*. In general, his friends, worried for his health, would look for an opportunity when he was dozing off. They would quietly extinguish his lamp and ease him into bed.

It seems, however, that Reb Itche was not fully informed about the nature of his new yeshiva. He spent the hours allocated to study Chassidus to continue studying Gemara, and saw *farbrengens* as a convenience—allowing him to study at a table in the corner of the well-lit *zal*. Apparently, this behavior was tolerated in those early years of the yeshiva.

Seeing that he had no intention of following the yeshiva's schedule, his friends would try to persuade him to at least learn a little Chassidus. Reb Itche's ready response was, "If there will be a 25th hour in the day, I will spend that hour learning Chassidus."

One night he broke. While learning, he picked up some words being said at the nearby *farbrengen*. Intrigued, he picked up his head to listen more. Being emotionally inclined by nature, he was deeply moved by the words of Chassidus shared by the elder Chassidim.

Wanting to "drown" himself for having "wasted" all his time for no reason, Reb Itche threw himself entirely into the study and practice of Chassidus. Now, when his friends would try to persuade him to learn some *nigleh* his ready response was, "If there will be a 25th hour in the day, I will spend that hour learning *nigleh*." Eventually, Reb Itche found his way to "the middle path," studying both *nigleh* and Chassidus.

With his newfound depth, he began to stand out not only



RECONSTRUCTED ZAL OF
TOMCHEI TMIMIM IN LUBAVITCH.

in his *hasmada*, but also in his *avoda*; his *chumros* and *hiddurim* in halacha, his abstention of all bodily pleasures, regular fasting, and—most notably—lengthy and emotional davening. Significantly, Reb Itche was devoted to the value of *bittul* and humility. He now held his hard-earned *semicha* in contempt, and tore it to shreds.

Tomchei Temimim's effect on him was so powerful that the Rebbe Rashab saw the yeshiva as worthwhile if only for Reb Itche and Reb Dovid Horodoker. When the Rebbe Rashab would go to "Datche," Reb Itche was among the ten *bochurim* chosen to be the *minyán*. The Rebbe Rashab also did not advise him against wearing a *gartel* before marriage; hence, Reb Itche was the only *bochur* in Tomchei Temimim who wore a *gartel*.⁵

A WORTHY PARTNER

On one of Reb Asher Nikolayever's trips to Lubavitch, he took notice of Reb Itche. Seeing that he was an unusually impressive *bochur*, Reb Asher took care to arrange a *shidduch* for him with someone who would value his spiritual and slightly ascetic way of life.



REB ITCHE IN HIS YOUNGER YEARS.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

In the town of Dobrinka, near Nikolayev, lived a Chernobeler chossid named Reb Shmuel Litutchi. Reb Asher thought that his daughter Fruma would be an appropriate match.

After looking into Reb Itche's character, the Litutchis were divided on the proposal. Although they knew that no better prospect could be found regarding *yiras shamayim*, some expressed concern about his ability to support his family. The matter was left for Fruma herself

to determine. She responded confidently: “I prefer a life of holiness rather than a life of modernity and comfort.”

They were married around the year 5665 and, for a short time, were supported by the Litutchis in Dobrinka. Upon the Rebbe Rashab’s instruction, Reb Itche opened a branch of Tomchei Temimim in Dobrinka, which he oversaw. Every day, after a long Shacharis, he would proceed to give a *shiur* in Gemara to the older *bochurim*. He also served as an unofficial *mashpia* for the *balle-batim*, and would teach Chassidus to them every Shabbos.⁶

RAMMENN

At this time, another yeshiva was being established in a Ukrainian town called Rammenn (Romny). Its wealthy Rosh Hakohol—a pious Lubliner chossid—set out to create a yeshiva to serve the town’s boys, all at his own expense.

At this point, the name Tomchei Temimim was already synonymous with Torah and *avoda*, removed from external influences. Rammenn also had a sizable Chabad population, and even the Rosh Hakohol maintained a relationship with the Rebbe Rashab. It seems that for these reasons, the community wished for their yeshiva to be run in the spirit of Lubavitch.

Thus, at the beginning of the year 5667, the Rebbe Rashab transferred Reb Itche to head this new yeshiva, teaching *nigleh* and Chassidus.

Apparently, the Rosh Hakohol was not too excited about the Lubavitch influence in his yeshiva after all. As a result, he hardly paid Reb Itche a salary. Into this utter poverty, all of Reb Itche’s children were born.

Undeterred, Reb Itche carried out his mission with tremendous dedication. His schedule was strikingly similar to the one he led in Dobrinka. After his lengthy davening, he would give a *shiur* in Gemara to the *bochurim*, and at night, a *shiur* in Chassidus.

The remarkable clarity with which he explained Chassidus attracted many ‘guests’ to those *shiurim*. Under his tutelage, many *bochurim* received their *chassidische chinuch* and later graduated to the yeshiva in Lubavitch. In addition, *bochurim* who wished to be accepted to Tomchei Temimim were regularly referred to Rammenn to study under Reb Itche. Some *bochurim* already learning in Lubavitch were transferred to Rammenn as well.

Eventually, some *balle-batim*, who could no longer bear to see Reb Itche’s destitution, established a small fund to supplement his meager salary. Reb Itche described this development in a letter to his father-in-law: “They provide



THE TOWN OF RAMMENN.



REB TZEMACH
GUREVITCH,
ELDEST SON
OF REB ITCHE.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD

me with all my needs, and the situation has improved...” In reality, their contribution still left Reb Itche a poor man, but he saw himself undeserving of even this slight betterment.⁷

A SHINING LIGHT

When the yeshiva in Rammenn closed at the very end of 5677, Reb Itche moved his family to Cherson. Soon after moving, Reb Itche took his oldest son, Tzemach, and traveled to Rostov to be with the Rebbe Rashab for Rosh Hashanah.

They were of the relatively few who were present for Tishrei. Since the outbreak of World War I, life in Russia grew increasingly difficult, and travel was a luxury that few could afford, both monetarily and due to the practical risks involved.

In *yechidus*, the Rebbe Rashab gave Reb Itche a task that would solve this issue. If Chassidim could not travel to the Rebbe to hear Chassidus, an agent of the Rebbe

would bring Chassidus to them. From this point on, Reb Itche served as a “*shadar*” and his salary was covered by the Rebbe Rashab.

To succeed as a *shadar* in disseminating Chassidus, Reb Itche was the most natural fit. His enthusiasm and deep understanding in Chassidus paired with his warm, kind, and prestigious demeanor, attracted the masses. However, the other responsibility associated with a *shadar*—raising money—was not within Reb Itche’s realm. He would focus on *chazzering* Chassidus, and accompanying Chassidim would collect *maamad* (donations to the Rebbe’s personal fund).

Reb Itche had always been a master at explaining deep concepts. Now that he was tasked with making Chassidus relatable to everyone—requiring the use of simple Yiddish vernacular—Reb Itche carefully studied the few *maamarim* that were written in such terminology. He quickly trained himself to accurately translate Chassidus in this manner. He also would come up with new *meshalim* to bring Chassidus to their level, and confirmed their accuracy with the Rebbe Rashab.

Despite his care in maintaining accuracy, his *chazara* was far from monotonous. Reb Itche would choose a *maamar* which he had thought through and absorbed in his davening. The result was that he would speak loudly and with deep enthusiasm. His talent was enhanced by a *bracha* from the Rebbe Rashab to teach Chassidus in a smooth and lucid manner.

Ultimately, it was not what Reb Itche said that made him so impressive; it was who he was. When this frail chossid with a shining face, seemingly from a bygone time, showed up in a city, his presence was felt by all inhabitants. He could be found every day passionately davening. When he sat down each night to *chazzer* Chassidus, often leading to a *farbrenge*n, souls were drawn.

The Frierdiker Rebbe advised him, “*Itche, m’darf keinem nit arainemen. M’darfleichten bei zich dem or ha’emes oif azoy fil az yenner zol oich tzugetzoygen veren*” (Itche, we don’t need to lure anyone in. We must shine the light of *emes* within ourselves to the extent that others should be attracted as well).⁸

THE HARD TIMES

The quality of life in Russia was in precipitous decline. The war coincided with and was followed by disease, starvation, and violent power struggles—accompanied by deadly pogroms. Reb Itche’s own wife succumbed to the typhus epidemic on 14 Sivan 5679. Regulations

surrounding the contagious disease required complete quarantine. Reb Itche could not even bury his wife.⁹

Despite the ongoing violence against Jews, Reb Itche attempted a trip to Rostov to see the Rebbe Rashab in the winter of 5680. Perhaps due to the danger of being a noticeable Jew on the speeding train, Reb Itche opted out of standing in the packed car, instead standing between the cars. When the train made its first stop, Reb Itche lost his balance and fell. He was injured and unable to travel for several months.

News came from Rostov that the Rebbe Rashab was not well; this only increased Reb Itche’s desire to travel there, but it was impossible. When news reached Reb Itche in the middle of Iyar that the Rebbe Rashab had recovered, he was at first elated, “*Azoy azoy, der Rebbe is gezunt gevoren!*” But for some reason, he was not at rest with this information. He decided to make the 80-kilometer journey to Nikolayev, to consult with Reb Elya Chaim Althoiz—a dear friend of *Beis Harav* who surely had further information.

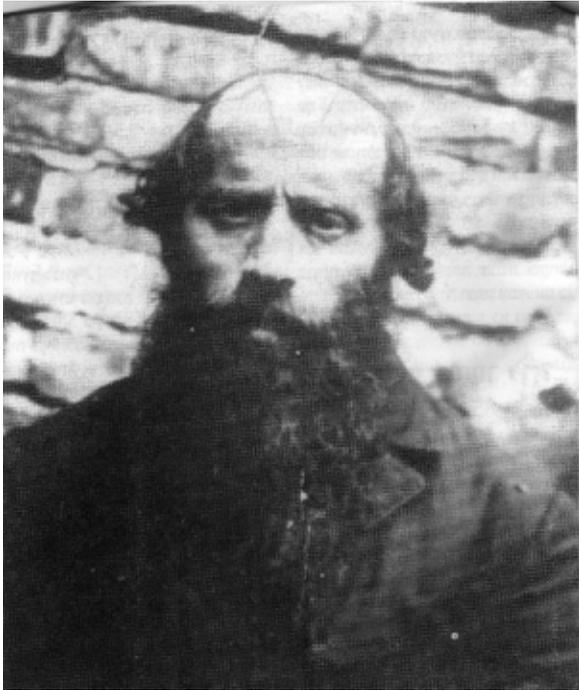
When he arrived at Reb Elya Chaim’s house and began pressing for more information, he was met with silence. Reb Elya Chaim could not bring himself to tell his friend the truth—the Rebbe Rashab had been *nistalek* over a month prior. When his question was repeatedly ignored, Reb Itche understood what had happened and collapsed in a faint.

This all transpired on Lag B’omer. A mere three days later, on 21 Iyar, the Chassidim of Nikolayev and its environs delivered a *ksav hiskashrus*, declaring themselves connected to the Frierdiker Rebbe. Reb Itche’s signature is displayed prominently on this document, second only to that of Harav Meir Shlomo Yanovsky.

The Frierdiker Rebbe’s acceptance of the *nesius* breathed hope and comfort into that volatile era of war, pogroms, and the beginning of Bolshevik oppression. But that stability was shattered when, in Cheshvan 5681, the deadly typhus epidemic struck *Beis Harav*. This tragedy coincided with the Bolshevik confiscation of property, depleting *Beis Harav* of its ability to pay the enormous medical fees.

The entire family was affected by the disease, the Frierdiker Rebbe most of all; the doctors proclaimed that the worst would soon happen. Chassidim were broken and desperate. They increased in reciting Tehilim, reading *panim* by the Rebbe Rashab’s Ohel, and even fasting.

Seeing that the situation was dire, Reb Itche announced the opportunity for those who desired to gift the Rebbe



REB ITCHE. CIRCA 5690.

years of life. This gift, however, was to be drawn from their own remaining years. With emotion and trepidation, the Chassidim gathered in the Rebbe Rashab's room, and the *aron kodesh* was opened.

Reb Itche proclaimed the seriousness of this undertaking, "Think hard and well how precious life is, how precious is each day of your lives. Yet, consider also the value of the Rebbe's life." Through heartwrenching sobs, the Chassidim lined up to "give their donation." Each person made a "*kinyan*" and declared the number of years they were giving up. Reb Itche recorded each "donation" on a note.

Reb Itche remained in Rostov throughout that time, doing his utmost to assist the Rebbe. He was also the one who recited *kaddish* during the period when the Frierdiker Rebbe was unable.

Their prayers were answered, and slowly the Frierdiker Rebbe's health grew stronger until he fully recovered. Reb Itche remained in Rostov until Yud-Tes Kislev, when the Frierdiker Rebbe's health had significantly improved. That winter, he set out again on his mission as *shadar*, this time on behalf of the new Rebbe.¹⁰

MASHPIA

For the next seven years, Reb Itche faithfully served as the Frierdiker's Rebbe's agent—traveling throughout

the Soviet Union. He now needed not only to *chazzer* Chassidus, but to assist in the various activities to keep Yiddishkeit alive under Communist rule.¹¹

When the Frierdiker Rebbe decided to leave Russia, Reb Itche was one of the first to be informed. He was completely devastated by the news. The last Simchas Torah spent together in Leningrad, Reb Itche had a lot of *mashke*. At the *seuda*, he lay at the Frierdiker Rebbe's feet and cried bitterly, "Rebbe! Rebbe!" The Frierdiker Rebbe handed his plate of food to Reb Itche to "make an Eiruv" with the Russian Yidden—they should always be connected.¹²

Upon arriving in Riga, the Frierdiker Rebbe set out to arrange for Reb Itche's passage to the free world so that he could continue his work as a *shadar*. Within the borders of the USSR, Reb Itche worked for his freedom as well, following the directives he received from the Frierdiker Rebbe.¹³

Throughout this long and complicated process, Reb Itche was mostly stationed in Charkov (as the Communist oppression intensified, it became increasingly impractical to travel often). There, he served as *mashpia*. Living on the same property as the shul, he poured his soul into invigorating the Chassidim with authentic Chassidus despite the hard times they were experiencing. Through his efforts, there was a regular *seder Chassidus* of *balle-batim* as well as frequent *farbrengens*.¹⁴

Eventually, the "troublesome" efforts paid off and Reb Itche was granted freedom to leave the USSR. His arrival in Riga after Tishrei 5693 was met with much excitement. Even Riga's extremely secular Yiddish daily newspaper—often a platform for rhetoric against Lubavitch—featured a beautiful piece about him.¹⁵

Riga served as Reb Itche's base, but he wasted no time in resuming his travels as a *shadar* throughout Latvia and the entire Europe. However, the location where Reb Itche's services were truly needed was the United States.

The Frierdiker Rebbe's visit to America—three years prior—had stoked the fire of Chassidus on those shores, but over time that warmth was dissipating. The decline in Chassidic sentiment was felt in the reduction of *maamad* contributions. The Frierdiker Rebbe's ailing health required the consultation of specialists and costly treatments, coming at a strained time in the finances of *Beis Harav*.

The solution to both of these problems—the weakening of Chassidus in America and the financial crisis—could be found in a *shadar*. Now with Reb Itche on free

soil, efforts were doubled to enable his mission to the U.S. The urgency of this undertaking was emphasized by the Frierdiker Rebbe himself. However, the logistical arrangements were undermined by the U.S.'s immigration paranoia and proceeded at a sluggish pace.

The decision that Reb Itche should serve as the U.S.'s first *shadar* was, in fact, determined three-and-a-half years before Reb Itche's freedom from the USSR! Despite the urgency of this mission, it seems that the delay was worth it so that Reb Itche would be the one to go.¹⁶

AVODA

A representative of the Rebbe must be an exemplary chossid, and in this regard, Reb Itche was a shining example.

His daily routine remained virtually unchanged, kept up even through the years of adult life. He would arise early in the morning to prepare for davening by going to the *mikvah* and learning Chassidus for many hours. Before Shacharis, Reb Itche would not so much as drink tea, let alone taste a morsel of food, yet he was in no rush to finish davening. Even on Erev Rosh Hashanah, his davening would continue until well after midday.

His davening itself was in the manner of the great Lubavitcher Chassidim—involving deep concentration and contemplation into the greatness of Hashem as expounded on in Chassidus.

After his lengthy Shacharis, he often had to immediately begin davening Mincha, after which he would move directly to Maariv. Only late in the afternoon (or night) would Reb Itche sit down to eat his only meal of the day. His *netilas yadayim* was more substantial than his meal. Whereas he meticulously fulfilled the mitzvah of washing his hands—a process that took him twenty minutes to complete—his meal usually consisted of just enough bread to allow him to make a *bracha Al netilas yadayim*. Reb Itche despised partaking in the pleasures of this world any more than absolutely necessary.

After his humble meal, Reb Itche would spend the rest of the night learning *b'hasmada*. Although he would doze off periodically, he would quickly wash his hands and resume his study.

Often, especially on *yomim tovim* and *yomei d'pagra*, Reb Itche would *farbreng*. Naturally, the Chassidim looked to him to do most of the talking. Reb Itche was prone to speak of the importance of personal *avoda*, which was the focus of all the stories, thoughts, and demands he would share. All this time, he would say *l'chaim*, and, given his

frail composition, he was well under the influence early on—yet he never dozed off or lost his bearings.

Only toward dawn would he begin “preparing for davening” by resting. He would either rest his head on the table, or at most lie down fully on the bench—but after twenty minutes, he would jump up with renewed vigor, and the routine would begin anew.¹⁷

A HUMBLE SERVANT

If Reb Itche's body suffered malnutrition or neglect, it showed no signs of it. Although he seldom ate—due to his numerous *kashrus* conditions and intense *iskafya*—his face radiated color. Despite his infrequent moments of rest during his intense *avoda*, study, and travel, he was always full of energy and joy. He never bathed—unless we count his many *tevilos* in the *mikvah*—but he and his clothing were consistently immaculate.

It was clear to most, if not all, that Reb Itche's sustenance was not that of an ordinary man. His physical vitality certainly did not come from tangible nourishment. The only explanation that remains is that his *chayus* came from the spiritual nourishment of his Torah and *avoda*.

The opinion his peers had of him is astounding. Lubavitchers are not prone to exaggerating an individual's qualities, yet Reb Itche received unmasked reverence even in his lifetime. This astonishment was expressed by Reb Avraham Elya Axelrod of Baltimore:

“[Reb Avraham Boruch Pevzner, who lives in Russia] wrote to me matter-of-factly, ‘Reb Itche the Masmid is now in your country,’ while praising him very much. He writes that he has a reputation similar to that of Reb Hillel Paritcher in regards to mofsim etc. Now, being that anash, especially Temimim, and most especially Reb Avraham Boruch sheyichye, are very distant from Polisher excitement and exaggerations, I was amazed by [his description]...”

One of the outstanding figures around Reb Itche was Reb Chatche Feigin, secretary of the Frierdiker Rebbe and organizer of this shlichus to America. Among his instructions to the Chassidim in America to make the best use of Reb Itche's time there, he writes, *“You can have him serve in various functions. B'shaas hadchak, he can even give brachos.”*

This additional revelation, that Reb Itche could give powerful *brachos*, is perhaps the most astonishing. However, Reb Itche insisted that this was a mistake. When a time-sensitive need arose, he did not have time to physically bring the *pan* to the Rebbe, so he sent it “in



A LETTER FROM REB ITCHE DURING HIS TIME IN ENGLAND IN 5697. UNDER HIS NAME AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE, IT SAYS “REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE.”

his mind” instead.

At the same time that he was lauded, Reb Itche was also perceived as a peer—a fellow chossid, albeit a few steps above and beyond everyone else. This is certainly as was preferred by Reb Itche, given his humble spirit.

His approachable nature made him easy to connect with, and indeed his students included young *bochurim* along with elder *talmidei chachamim*. In the various stories in which he is recalled, as well as the few surviving letters he penned, the picture emerges of a genuine friend to the great and the small. His genuine concern over another’s pain, his vibrant joy in their celebration, and his characteristic sense of humor endeared him to his friends, students, and the many communities and individuals who came under his influence.¹⁸

DEDICATED ENTIRELY

In truth, examining Reb Itche’s attributes is unnecessary in determining why he was so fitting as a *shadar*, because the Frierdiker Rebbe clearly stated which quality made him the first choice; “For a *shadar* we need *hanochas atzmuso*”—dedication of his entire essence.

It’s not too difficult to decipher this value found in Reb Itche. Being devoted is special but not rare. However, *hanochas atzmuso* implies that one is not tied to any particular *tziyur*. Rather, one does whatever Hashem wants of him at that moment. The result is that such a person will pursue actions that are different and at times opposing, modifying themselves to the situation with complete dedication.

A few vignettes illustrate this point in the biography of Reb Itche:

At one point, the Horowitzes hosted an orphaned boy named Avrohom Dovid Yanovsky in their home. Noticing that Avrohom Dovid loved to eat chalah, Reb Itche would begin his day, before davening and its preparations, by ensuring that there was chalah in the house. At times, he needed to search the early-morning market to find the treat, but Reb Itche made sure that this *yasom* would feel cared for. Despite him being removed from materiality, he knew and cared for the needs of a child.¹⁹

Given his tender nature, one can only imagine the pain Reb Itche endured during his tenure in Rammenn, when he could not afford to provide his own children with their essential needs. Despite this, he displayed his trademark consistency in all things holy throughout his tumultuous life.

AMERICA

As important as it was that Reb Itche would embark on this shlichus, they would need to overcome the bureaucracy of American immigration. The Frierdiker Rebbe said that it would be more feasible to obtain a tourist visa for one year.

The Chassidim in America began sending requests to the U.S. consul in Latvia, “to grant Rabbi Itzhoc Gourewitch permission for a short visit to the U.S.” for the primary purpose of answering their difficulties in Chabad-Jewish philosophy.

The process dragged on, ironically, because of the American government’s wariness of tourists “overstaying” their visit. Of all people, Reb Itche was least interested in

the glamor of America and would much prefer staying close to the Rebbe.

Finally, in Elul 5693, the consulate issued his visa, and Reb Itche set off for America. This stay would bring out another powerful aspect of Reb Itche's character—his dedication to the Rabbeim. If his role as *shadar* typically focused on teaching Chassidus, with fundraising taking a secondary role, on this trip, his primary focus was alleviating the financial burden of *Beis Harav*.

No more than a month after arriving in New York, he sent a sum of \$5,000 to the Frierdiker Rebbe—a tremendous amount during the Depression era. Most of this money was secured not as donations, but rather loans from various *gemachs*. Reb Itche gladly accepted the

responsibility of raising the funds to repay these loans, and hoped to raise more beyond that.

In a letter to Reb Yisroel Jacobson, we can see Reb Itche's deep devotion to the Rebbe, "*The apathy of anash is inconceivable. How can we sit with folded arms when the 'crown of our head' is in frightful suffering!? Where is the effect of Chassidus!? Where is the love for our holy Rabbeim!? What are we [worth], what is our life, if we do not work for the good of Beis Chayenu!? In a troubling time like this, a holy obligation rests on us to arouse all of our abilities to establish Beis Chayenu!*"

These heated emotions did not remain in the realm of theory; Reb Itche was possessed by the need to provide money for the Rebbe. Almost entirely alone, he navigated the unfamiliar territory of the U.S. and trekked out to every major Jewish community he could. All for the Rebbe's well-being.

Reb Itche's passion clashed at times with American *balebatishkeit*. While he made efforts to adhere to the protocols of 1930s American philanthropy, he forcefully pursued his purpose, revealing a side of himself seldom seen in other situations. Despite opposing voices, Reb Itche insisted on prioritizing *maamad* over other funds, publicly exposed the desperate times the Rebbe was experiencing, and demanded that others dedicate themselves at least a fraction of how much he did.

Ultimately, his work was quite successful. His presence and guidance not only rekindled the passion for Chassidus, but he also initiated practical changes in the organization of Agudas Chabad in America. In the realm of *maamad* as well, he succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. However, much was left to be accomplished (notwithstanding the extension of his visa). As Reb Itche was returning to Europe, requests poured in from America for him to be sent to them again. The Frierdiker Rebbe had considered this idea, as nobody could fill the role like Reb Itche. Unfortunately, the plan never came to fruition because of issues with legal documents.²⁰

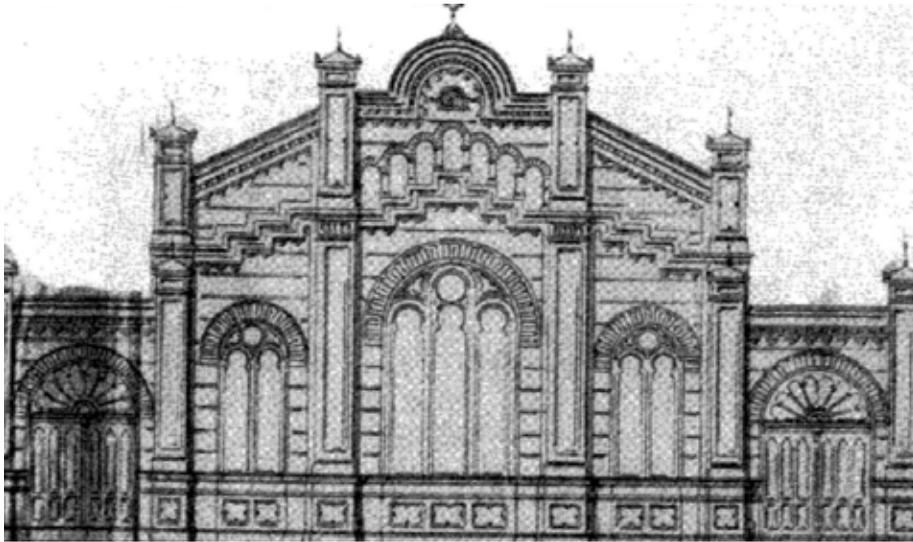


REB ITCHE'S
PASSPORT FROM
EARLY 5697.



A HEAVENLY FIRE

Although Riga was Reb Itche's home at the end of his life, he spent much of his time traveling the continent on missions of the Frierdiker Rebbe. His trips took him to an assortment of *kehilos*, including Belz, Ponevetch, Manchester, and Antwerp. In each city, he was welcomed with appropriate honor—in one instance, a *choshuve rav* insisted that Reb Itche sit in his own seat. Reb Itche utilized his standing to carry out missions of the Frierdiker



THE CHABAD SHUL IN RIGA.

Rebbe as well as spreading Chassidus in places where its light was never appreciated previously.²¹

With the outbreak of WWII, Latvia was conquered by the Axis and occupied by Russia. Once again, Reb Itche found himself under Communist rule. Their safety further deteriorated when the Nazis שׂמ׳ר betrayed Russia and prepared to take Latvia. However, the Jews were not yet aware of the extent of the danger which was approaching. Was it worth avoiding German occupation by escaping deeper into Russia? Or could nothing be worse than the Communists? Reb Itche decided to wait it out, and advised his two sons who lived in Riga to do the same.

The Nazis approached Riga in Sivan 5701, and at this point, Reb Itche changed his mind. Alas, only his son Shmuel escaped, on the last train to leave. Reb Itche himself refused to join as it would entail traveling on Shabbos.

From this point on, we have no reports of Reb Itche—aside from his log in the ghetto census. Practically every Jew who remained in Riga was murdered by the Nazis and their eager collaborators, leaving few witnesses.

However, a compelling legend persists about Reb Itche’s last moments on earth:

Locked up in a shul, the Jews waited helplessly as the foundations were doused in oil; any moment now they would be set ablaze. Suddenly, Reb Itche stood erect in front of the aron kodesh, “Tayere yidden,” he declared, “we are now fulfilling the tremendous mitzvah of kiddush Hashem, and we ought to do so joyfully!”

He opened the aron kodesh and removed a sefer Torah. With one arm clutching the Torah, and the other on the

shoulder of another chossid, he led everyone in dancing. Beneath the flames, a Hakofos Niggun was heard in the place of crying.

The story is difficult to corroborate, but knowing how Reb Itche led his life with such purity, it can only be expected that he would meet his death with such dignity.²² **T**

1. All sources refer to the book “Yiras Hashem Otzaro” unless otherwise specified.

2. p. 18.

3. pp. 23–25

4. Bitáon Chabad vol. 25.

5. pp. 26–30, 51. Eile Toldos Peretz pp. 51–52.

6. pp. 32–33.

7. pp. 34–36. Eile Toldos Peretz pp. 49–51.

8. pp. 36–37, 97, 114, 156–159, 278.

9. pp. 36–39.

10. pp. 116–122, 158.

11. p. 38.

12. pp. 42, 124.

13. p. 162.

14. pp. 39–42.

15. pp. 43, 259.

16. pp. 160–162, 168.

17. pp. 54–55, 57–62, 72, 75, 78.

18. pp. 49–50, 52, 63, 67, 80, 88–91, 104, 141, 171, 177.

19. p. 52. B’darkei Hachassidim vol. 1, p. 281.

20. pp. 160–234.

21. pp. 238–246.

22. pp. 272–281.

לזכות
החיילת בצבאות ה'
זעלדא רחל שתחיל
לרגל יום הולדתה י"ט חשוון

נדפס ע"י הוריה
הרה"ת ר' חיים אפרים וזוגתו
מרת חיל' מושקא שיחיו
גאלדשטיין

LET HASHEM DO THE “PLANNING”

THE MISTAKENLY TERMED
“FAMILY PLANNING” IS A
RECIPE FOR CHAOS

Compiled By: Rabbi Levi Greenberg (OH)

Written By: Rabbi Shneur Itzinger

THE WEEK THE WORLD WAITED FOR A WOMAN¹

Sunday passes under the desert sun. Monday goes by, and the people remain encamped amid the endless sand and heat. All Tuesday and Wednesday, the vast nation waits: millions of souls, tents pitched neatly around the Mishkan, flags of the Shevatim fluttering overhead. Thursday comes, Friday and Shabbos pass. Still, the cloud rests. Still, they wait.

And then, finally, after a full week of stillness, the trumpets sound, the cloud lifts, and the signal is given: it's time to move on, to continue toward the Promised Land.

Why the delay?

Far beyond the encampment, apart from her family and her people, a woman sat alone. A *metzora's*, afflicted with leprosy for speaking negatively about another. In her merit, the nation waited. For seven days, the entire camp of Israel, including the holy *Aron* and the *Shechina* itself, paused its march through destiny, all because of her.

What was so extraordinary about this woman that she merited such honor?

The woman in question was Miriam

HaNeviah, and the subject of her misjudged words was her youngest brother, Moshe Rabbeinu, leader of the Jewish people.

How could she make this mistake, speaking ill of another Jew, any Jew, let alone her revered brother?

It had been just a week earlier when Miriam had a conversation with her brother, Aharon HaKohen. She had observed something Moshe did that seemed to her to be a poor choice, as it would prevent future children from being born to him.

Miriam's complaint about her brother was, on some level, justified. She reasoned—and rightfully so—that the Jewish people are sustained by having sons and daughters who observe Torah and *mitzvos*, thereby fortifying and enlivening *Am Yisroel* and hastening the coming of Moshiach.

Knowing especially the unique virtue of her holy brother, the leader of the Jewish people, and of his wife Tziporah, also known for her exceptional *tzidkus*, Miriam wanted to ensure that they would continue to bear children; who, with such special parents, would bring great benefit to all of *Klal Yisroel*.

Her complaint was righteous enough to merit that the entire nation delay its travels

נשי
ובנות
חב"ד
N'SHEI
U'BNOS
CHABAD

for a week. Under different circumstances, she would have been entirely correct. Only in this specific case and due to her exalted level was there an element of misjudgment, as she didn't entirely appreciate the loftiness of Moshe Rabbeinu's qualities.



In telling this story to girls graduating high school, the Rebbe points out that only Moshe Rabbeinu himself could have a reason to act differently. For the rest of us, our mission is to fulfill the very first mitzvah in the Torah: to bring more Jewish boys and girls into the world and pave the way for the *geulah*.

This is no peripheral matter, no side aspect of

Yiddishkeit. It is the mitzvah that will bring the *geulah* to the entire Jewish people, the redemption from this bitter *galus*. As the Gemara² teaches, Moshiach will not come until all *neshamos* have been brought down into bodies.

This most essential mitzvah was entrusted to Jewish women and girls: to literally bring new Jewish lives into the world, and to "rebirth" them by teaching and raising them. In doing so, we build homes worthy for Hashem to dwell in and raise soldiers of Hashem in large numbers, echoing the *passuk*, "And the people multiplied and became very strong."³ Along with this sacred mission, Hashem surely grants the energy and resources needed to fulfill it.⁴

THE MESSAGE OF TRUE MOTHERHOOD

The translation of this sicha, evidently intended for a wider audience, was edited by the Rebbe and published as a standalone booklet. We have reproduced it here exactly as the Rebbe approved and edited it for publication. Although some of the English may feel dated, the message, of course, remains as relevant as ever. We hope it will be enlightening for the Derher readership and will encourage, as the Rebbe requested, "to take the initiative...to bring the message of true motherhood into every home."

THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE שליט"א ON "FAMILY PLANNING"

(Excerpts - abbreviated and freely translated - from his address to the Nshei uBnos Chabad Convention, 17 Sivan, 5740)

Children are the most cherished Divine blessing known to mankind. "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28) is the first precept and blessing in the Torah. It teaches us that the world was created for the sake of mankind, and that it is a Divine obligation to marry and raise a family, and bring up the children in accordance with the will of the Creator, so that the world will be populated by a human race worthy and capable of "subduing it" — not only physically and materially, but also spiritually; a humanity committed to the Divine laws of justice and morality and mutual concern, under the tutelage of our Heavenly Father.

A truly blessed home is one that is filled with the joy of children, boys and girls, who are reared in the ways of our first ancestors, Abraham and Sarah, "to follow in the way of G-d, practising righteousness and justice" (Gen. 18:19).

Marriage, is a sacred, Divinely ordained, institution founded on purity and sanctity of family life (*Taharas*

Hamishpocho), the observance of which is a precondition of true and lasting happiness, highlighted by the blessing of healthy offspring—healthy both physically and spiritually. Each child that is born into the home represents an additional Divine blessing to the parents and grandparents; there are no unwanted children, and no child is a burden, G-d forbid.

Knowing that children are a blessing from G-d, parents have no reason to be apprehensive about being able to provide for the child. Surely the Giver of the blessing will provide. And "He who feeds and sustains the whole world" is able to take care of the children as well as of the parents.

If economic considerations cannot justify the limitation of a family, what about a home where the relationship between husband and wife is in need of improvement; should they hesitate about increasing the family? We must, again, turn to the Torah for guidance. The Torah teaches us that where a wife, by reason of immodest behavior, arouses the husband's suspicion and jealousy, thus creating a serious disruption of *Sholom Bayis* (harmonious relationship), but

ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

- » Every Jew must do all they can to fulfill the mitzvah of *pru u'rvu* and not interfere with Hashem's plans for us. This includes making the necessary preparations, even before marriage, both physically and spiritually.⁵
- » When Hashem wished for Noach to delay having children until a later age, He Himself took away Noach's ability to do so. Likewise, if a person truly no longer has the strength to have children, Hashem will intervene.⁶
- » How many children are enough? Some say that since they already have as many children as Yaakov Avinu, who had twelve *Shevatim* and a daughter, it is already enough. Or they seek justification by saying that Shulchan Aruch states they have already fulfilled their obligation of *pru u'rvu*. But even with the strongest *heterim*, and even after having many children, as long as "*mil'u es ha'aretz v'kivshuha*" has not yet been fulfilled in the literal sense, don't mix into Hashem's *cheshbonos*.⁷
- » What about someone who, for whatever reason, is unable to fulfill the mitzvah of *pru u'rvu*? The Friediker Rebbe already addressed this, explaining that "making a Chossid" is also a form of *pru u'rvu* on a spiritual level. By helping another Jew become a Chossid and spreading *Yiddishkeit* throughout the world, one fulfills "*mil'u es ha'aretz v'kivshuha*"—"fill the earth and conquer it."⁸
- » The ultimate fulfillment of *pru u'rvu* will be when Moshiach comes, when birth will take place much more quickly. The Gemara⁹ teaches that a woman will give birth every day, and the Tzemach Tzedek¹⁰ explains that the process will take nine hours instead of nine months.¹¹

is found innocent of unfaithfulness, she will be rewarded by bearing offspring (Num. 5:29) — as a clear sign of G-d's favor and greatest blessing. For, children, more than anything else, cement the mutual relationship between husband and wife and the peace and harmony in their home.

In reality, any such argument for limiting the size of one's family on grounds of economic, or social considerations, or postponing having children until the relationship attains the highest level, and the like, is contrary to the spirit and letter of the Torah. Only in *most exceptional* cases is the use of certain contraceptives permitted by Jewish Law — and only a very competent Rabbinic authority is qualified to rule on whether such an exceptional situation does in fact exist.

The truth of the matter is, that in the overwhelming majority of cases, all the arguments to justify birth control stem from the same source — the *Yetzer Hora* (evil inclination), that inner tempter, whose function is to distract a man or a woman, from the way of the Torah and test his/her faith in G-d. This wily Yetzer works cleverly. He will not attempt to persuade someone to recklessly disregard the Divine laws, but will clothe vice in a garment of virtue, saying that whatever reprehension there may be in denying oneself another child, it will be more than offset by being able to devote more time and attention to worthy good causes, communal causes, and the like.

Aside from the religious aspect, experience has shown that couples who take the path of so-called "family planning" — a catching phrase that appeals to the sense of orderliness and forethought, and purporting to give parents the right to decide if, and when, and how many children they should have, sooner or later discover to their great dismay, that it has been counter-productive in the very areas of its supposed advantages. The actual effects of family planning have been, and are, emotional upsets, frustrations, strained relationship between husband and wife, all of which inevitably taking a toll of ill health. It has caused such couples to seek psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, marriage counselling in an effort, often futile, to straighten matters out. Thus, far from bringing orderliness into family life, family planning has caused disturbances and complications in the normal family affairs, with added financial burdens in doctors' bills, reduced mental and physical efficiency, not to mention the fact that family planning has often proved irreversible, and would-be parents eventually discovered that the blessing of children, or more children, has, alas, eluded them.

It does not require special perception or insight to realize that when the normal physical and spiritual process of married life, as decreed by the Creator and Giver of life, is tampered with, distorted, or altered, the peace of the household is bound to be disturbed. It is folly to attempt to take over G-d's book-keeping and accounting to figure out how many children He is able to care for.



THE PUBLISHED Sicha OF THE REBBE ON "FAMILY PLANNING."

Addressing the 12th Annual Convention of the Lubavitch Women's Organization, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe Shlita, called for a campaign to educate the Jewish public about the practice of Taharas Hamishpocha (the Torah's law of marital relations). He noted that his topic had discussed by Rabbis in their sermons, in the schools, at women's groups, synagogues, etc. Noting the openness in recent years with which such matters are being discussed, the Rebbe Shlita noted that in a modest, but far-reaching manner, programs are arranged to present the Torah approach to marital relations. The Rebbe Shlita also spoke out against the practice of family planning. He emphasized that having children is the greatest blessing God has given; a couple. He explained that the public's efforts to control the birth of children directly correspond to the rise of divorce and marital friction present in today's society. Raising children is a source of great pleasure for the family and the limitation of that pleasure brings about undesirable consequences on many levels.

ON THE REPORT OF THE 'RESOLUTIONS' TAKEN BY THE WOMEN, WRITTEN THE DAY AFTER THE CONVENTION, IT STATES THAT "THE REBBE SHLITA ALSO SPOKE OUT AGAINST THE PRACTICE OF FAMILY PLANNING."

ON THE WORD 'ALSO', THE REBBE WROTE ?!

ON THE WORDS 'SPOKE OUT', THE REBBE WROTE הרבה יותר מזה [MUCH MORE THAN THAT].

Proponents of family planning have concentrated their main propaganda on the female partner in marriage, since she has the task of childbearing and rearing the infants. I therefore urge every woman not to be swayed by it, but rather reflect on the great, very great Divine blessing and privilege of motherhood, with complete trust in G-d, that following the Divinely ordained way of life brings with it the three-fold blessing of children, life, and sustenance. Children — healthy children, happy children, and as many as G-d will grant; life — a life free of all those complications that unfortunately afflict the homes where family planning is practised; sustenance — in a generous measure in all needs, and more.

No wife and mother needs to feel chagrined at being dubbed "old fashioned," or at odds with modern times and modern culture. What "modern culture"? That which produced the Holocaust? The Holocaust of a million Jewish children? Indeed, the answer is: Every Jewish woman should realize, and do all she can to impress upon others, that it is a sacred duty and eternal merit of every Jewish mother to help replenish this horrible void.

Jewish women have a proud tradition and heritage of being the "Builders of the House of Israel". Even under the most abject conditions of slavery under the Pharaohs, with the horrendous decree of having their boy babies snatched from them and thrown into the Nile, they continued to bear children, and prolifically, even if it meant delivering them in the fields. It is this determination that produced the redeemer Moses, and the Divine hosts, whom he led to freedom: freedom not only from physical slavery, but also spiritual freedom with the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. Moreover, it is the children of that generation, and of all subsequent generations, that G-d accepted as guarantors that the Torah would be kept and cherished.

I further urge you, all the participants of this convention and all Jewish women everywhere, to take the initiative for a world-wide campaign to promote *Taharas Hamishpocha* and to bring the message of true motherhood into every home. Jewish women have historically played a crucial part in the preservation of our people, and they must do the same in the present critical times.

And in the merit of adhering to *G-d's Plan*, all human planning and designs against our people, and against humanity in general, will come to naught, and we can confidently look forward to the fulfillment of the Divine promise, through the mouth of our Prophet Micha (7:15): "As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show you wonders." **T**

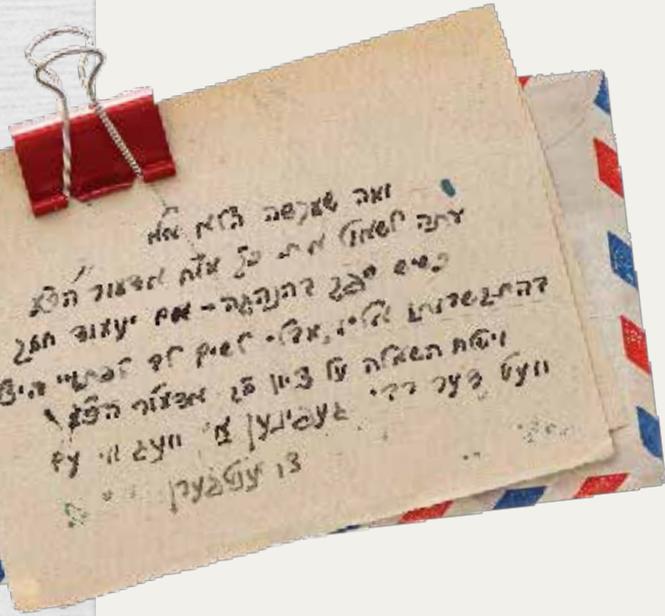
1. Adapted from the Sicha to *talmidos hamesaymos*, 5 Tammuz 5740. *Sichos Kodesh* 5740 vol 3., pp. 494–495.
2. *Yevamos* 62a. *Avoda Zara* 5a.
3. *Shemos* 1:20.
4. Adapted from *Motzei Shabbos*, 10 Shevat 5730. *Toras Menachem* vol. 59, pp. 134–135.
5. *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25, p. 35, and fn. 63.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 36, and fn. 77.
7. *Yud Gimmel Tishrei* 5744; *Hisvaaduyos* 5744 vol. 1, p. 157.
8. *Yud Gimmel Tishrei* 5744; *Ibid.*, p. 161.
9. *Shabbos* 30b.
10. *Or Hatorah - Yahel Or* p. 619.
11. *Shabbos Beshalach* 5745; *Hisvaaduyos* 5745 vol. 3, p. 1128.

WATCH:
THE GREATEST
BLESSING

READ:
HOW TO PLAN A
FAMILY



Story



לע"נ
הילדה התמימה אלטא מינא ע"ה
בת יבלחט"א הרה"ח הרה"ת
ר' ישכר שלמה ומרת שיינא שיחיו
טייכטל

תלמידת בית רבקה חברה בצבאות ה' זכתה
לקירוב מיוחד מכ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו
נקטפה בדמי ימיה ביום ש"ק, פרשת ואלה שמות כ"ג טבת ה'תש"נ
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

נדפס ע"י
משפחתה שיחיו

דער רבי זעט
געפינען א זעג...

WRITTEN BY: RABBI LEVI GREENBERG (TX)

It Was a Good Idea



AS TOLD BY
RABBI LEVI GOLDSTEIN
(Des Moines, Iowa)

For a long time, I wanted to produce an album of Chabad Niggunim, and in Kislev of 5780, I sent a Facebook message to the famous pianist and music producer Yaron Gershovsky, asking if he would be interested in the project. He graciously provided his contact information, and we had an initial conversation about the project. In the meantime, COVID shut down society, and many other things were happening in my life, so this project was postponed indefinitely.

Finally, in Adar of 5785, I decided to go ahead with the

project and reconnected with Yaron. After some conversations, we launched the project and got to work.

A few days before Yud-Aleph Nissan, I browsed the web to find flights to New York, and I was surprised to find a very cheap round-trip flight from Chicago (a five-hour drive from my home) arriving late Yud-Aleph Nissan in the evening and returning the next afternoon.

After booking the flight, I decided on a whim to ask Yaron if he would like to meet me at the Ohel on Yud-Aleph Nissan. He responded that he would be happy to do



THE UPCOMING ALBUM PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH YARON GERSHOVSKY.

so, but needed directions to get there since he had never visited the Ohel before. When I provided him with the address and described the general area, he realized that it was just a half-hour drive from his home.

When we met at the Ohel on Yud-Aleph Nissan morning, he told me that he had once seen the Rebbe in 770, but he could not recall the setting or the circumstances that brought him there. I explained to him the significance of coming to the Rebbe at the Ohel, how he should conduct himself there, and he was very moved by the experience. After we spoke for a while, he left to go home, and I found a ride to Crown Heights. During the ride, I shared with my fellow passengers that I had just met Yaron Gershovsky at the Ohel and was working with him on a new Chabad Niggunim album.

One of the passengers, Yisroel Levin from Palo Alto, CA, opened up a Kindle Reader and said to me, “If you’re working on a Chabad Niggunim album, I’m sure you would like to see this letter.”

The Kindle Reader was open to Likkutei Sichos vol. 16, p. 515. It is a letter from the Rebbe dated 24 Teves 5719.

I was pleased to receive your letter and to see in it your interest in Jewish melodies in general, and specifically Chassidic melodies and, more specifically, Chabad melodies...

In principle, your idea to produce these melodies to be played by orchestras is proper. However... there is a real concern that the “production” may change the style and content of the songs, to the point that instead of being beneficial, it could be harmful...

My intention is not to discourage the project; on the contrary. I am only requesting that you pay attention to this concern.

The message of this letter resonated strongly with me, as one of my main motivations for producing an album was to be very specific about remaining true to the authentic ways the niggunim were sung by Chassidim for generations, rather than changing them for musical purposes. Also, the way this letter was shown to me right after inviting Yaron Gershovsky to come to the Ohel for the first time, gave me the feeling this was the Rebbe’s way of sending me a message that I was on the right track. **T**

YOUR STORY

Share your story with A Chassidisher Derher by emailing stories@derher.org.

BY: RABBI MENDEL JACOBS

נדפס ע"י ולזכות
הרה"ת ר' שרגא פייוול
וזוגתו מרת דבורה לאה
ומשפחתם שיחיו
מאן

MIVTZA TORAH



TAKING ACTION

THE TEN
MIVTZOIM
REVISITED

Spread the Words

Mivtza Torah: To ensure that each and every Jew learns Torah as much as possible, at the very least, a few minutes each day. "Torah protects and saves..."

...Best would be to try and influence each one to learn sections of Torah by heart, which will always remain in their memory, thereby ensuring that words of Torah are always etched in their minds...¹

With these words, the Rebbe formulated what "Mivtza Torah" actually means.

As was the case with several of the Rebbe's *mitzvot*, the initiative was connected to the security situation in Eretz Yisroel. In the months following the Yom Kippur War, the Rebbe had noted that the Israeli soldiers themselves were asking for substantive ways to boost their morale.² In response, the Rebbe urged Chassidim to assist them with Torah and *mitzvos*, especially those connected with Torah, Tefilla, and Tzedaka.

We Want Your Soul!

Eleven years later, in a series of impassioned *sichos*, the Rebbe again urged everyone to renew their commitment to this *mivtza*. The Rebbe said:

When you meet a Jew in the street, you must ask him whether he already has a set time to study Torah. If he already does, then you must influence him to increase the amount he studies. Best would be to encourage him to give his own Torah class to others as well. If, for whatever reason, *chas v'shalom*, he does not yet have a set time to study Torah, you must try, in a heartfelt manner, to get him to start learning Torah.

...On that note, it's important to make clear:

When you approach a Yid to speak with him about setting a time to study, you shouldn't connect it with anything else. Don't ask him about his conduct in other areas of Torah and *mitzvos*, whether he fulfills *mitzvos* scrupulously (*b'hiddur*), in the best manner (*l'chatchila*), or merely getting by (*b'dieved*). The only thing you should tell him is that as a son of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and as a daughter of Sara, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah... he should go study Hashem's Torah!

Don't ask him about his background, don't ask him for his passport... and certainly don't ask him for money (unless he offers it on his own). You are asking one thing of him: "*Ten li hanefesh!*" Give me your soul! Sit and learn



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MIVTZA TORAH

TAKING
ACTION

THE TEN
MIVTZOIM
REVISITED



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Torah! The Torah is our life and the length of our days. Hashem says, “If only the Jewish people would... as long as they keep my Torah!”³ No matter where a person is holding, Hashem wants him to study Torah!

This is also the answer to all those who argue that Torah must be studied in purity and so on: Hashem himself says, “If only... they would keep my Torah.” The study of Torah itself will bring him closer to all areas of Yiddishkeit!⁴

Teach Aleph!

Another element of Mivtza Torah that the Rebbe insisted is applicable to each and every person is to strengthen public *shiurim* in Torah.

“Not everyone has the talent to address a full crowd and teach Torah in public,” the Rebbe explained. “However, if you engage in Mivtza Torah, you can persuade another person to come and join an already existing Torah class.⁵

Furthermore, the Rebbe said, since we are in the final days before Moshiach, every person must share whatever knowledge they have.

There are those who argue: How can you tell me to get involved in Mivtza Torah, when I myself only know a single chapter, or a single letter? It’s not my fault—I am a *tinok shenishba bein ha’akum*, but the bottom line is that I don’t have any knowledge, so how can you expect me to get involved in Mivtza Torah?!

[We say to him:] Listen! There is no time! Moshiach is coming soon! Run out to the street and study Torah with someone! If you only know ‘one chapter,’ then learn ‘one chapter’ with him!

Even if you only know ‘one teaching, or even one letter’—you were taught how to read the Aleph-Beis, and all you know is the shape of an Aleph—then go out and shout ‘Aleph!’ You will surely meet someone who doesn’t know what an Aleph is, and you will be able to explain it to him!

“But,”—this person argues—“What will the other person gain from knowing what an Aleph is?!”

No! You will begin with Aleph, and it’s possible that this will be all; but because you gave him ‘one letter’ of Torah, it will blossom into ‘one chapter,’ and before long into a tremendous amount of Torah.”⁶

Mivtza Torah and Moshiach

When enumerating the qualities of Moshiach, the Rambam lists that he will be “*hoge'h b'Torah*”—one who diligently contemplates Torah. It would seem that Moshiach’s main quality would be as a ruler and king; why is his proficiency in Torah so important?

The reason is that Melech HaMoshiach will have the ability to redeem the Jewish people and take them out of *galus*, stemming from his toiling in Torah, making his very “being” one of Torah. As such, he will have the power to override the limitations of this world, since the “Torah was created before the world,” and it transcends the world. He will therefore “compel all of the Jewish people to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance,” followed by the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and gathering in the exiles of the Jewish people, may it be *teikef umiyad mamash*.⁷

REB NACHUM MARKOWITZ RECEIVES
KOS SHEL BRACHA FROM THE REBBE.



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FIVE MINUTES

On the importance of studying Torah every day, even if only a small amount, Reb Nachum Markowitz relates:

As a *bochur*, Nachum wasn’t excited about learning. Instead, he worked for the Shmira-patrol, driving around and ensuring the safety of the Crown Heights neighborhood. As is known, the safety of Crown Heights was very important to the Rebbe, and he felt that this would be a good way for him to spend his time.

Once, in *yechidus* with the Rebbe, he wrote about his occupation and that he does not feel inclined to learn so much. He wrote clearly that although he knows he should be learning, he lacks interest and avoids it, adding that this lack of interest bothers him.

The Rebbe told him as follows (in *Lashon Hakodesh*): “You should continue to work in the patrol in this neighborhood, and you should set times for learning, in *Torah Shebiksav* and in *Torah Shebaal Peh*. In *Torah Shebiksav*—learn the parsha of the week, and in *Torah Shebaal Peh* [at this point the Rebbe picked up his head]—learn whatever you want. The main thing is that these set times shouldn’t be more than five minutes! And from time to time, add a fifth [twenty percent, i.e., one extra minute].

Reb Nachum relates how this *hora’a* was life-changing for him; he would often finish the five minutes in the middle of an interesting question or topic, but as per the Rebbe’s instructions, he would not continue. This made him think about the learning all day until he could finally learn the answer or continue the next day.



MIVTZA TORAH

TAKING
ACTION
THE TEN
MIVTZOIM
REVISITED

Conquering the World—One World at a Time



Interview with Rabbi Shloime Wolvovsky

By: Rabbi Bentzion Pearson

Please share a little bit about yourself and how you began this journey of sharing Torah with others.

I grew up in Crown Heights, and I've lived there almost all of my life. Although my *parnassa* came primarily from business, as a chossid, I always sought opportunities to be involved in *mitzvoim* and help fellow Yidden with Torah and *mitzvos*.

Naturally, the first place I turned was to my immediate contacts, whether from my business or local people I knew from the Crown Heights community. This evolved into setting up times to learn Torah with people, some regularly, others less so. Slowly but surely, my weekly schedule became filled with study sessions.

About two years ago, I decided that the time had come to turn this from a passion project into a more structured program. I launched a project called “Karnei Ohr (karneiohr.org),” making myself available to those who wish to learn and would appreciate more Torah in their life.

I firmly believe, both from what we know and learn in the Rebbe's *sichos*, as well as what I've learned from my experience, that *limud haTorah* cannot be approached as a top-down obligation; something that we *must* do. It's very difficult to bring a fellow Yid to commit to Torah learning with that approach.

Torah needs to be a transformative experience.

The Yid needs to see how the Torah is a vitalizing force in his life, both personal and professional. When they appreciate the wisdom of Torah and how it applies in their life, how it fosters their own growth and illuminates their life-journey, it's altogether different. A person will be much more receptive to it and will stay committed over the long haul.

This is what I try to do with the people I learn with. I started with a core group of regulars; some are in-town, others are out-of-town, and I learn with them over Zoom. They are at varying levels of *frumkeit*; some more, some less. Some are even friends I've known for many years, who were educated in *yeshivos* just like me.

Currently, I'm learning and spending time with some twenty individuals each week.

I say “spending time” because sometimes it's a formal learning session over a *sefer*, and sometimes we're having a conversation. We'll discuss what's on their mind, what's been happening in their lives, and we'll try to find the Torah perspective.

That's really beautiful! Can you share some examples of the impact that Torah learning has had on some of the people you're in touch with?

It's very encouraging when I hear meaningful feedback from the people I'm learning with.

Some time ago, I approached a fellow community member in Crown Heights and offered to learn with him. He readily agreed. When I asked him what he wanted to learn, he told me that he'd like to learn Chassidus. This is someone who went through the regular Chabad yeshiva system, so his choice came as no surprise to me.

When we sat down to learn for the first time, he explained to me that as his children are growing up, he really wants them to appreciate what we have as Chabad Chassidim. There's no way he could convey that without learning Chassidus.

So, learn we did.

We started learning a *maamar* together each week, and after six or eight sessions, we completed a full *maamar*. At that moment, I looked up at his face and noticed a special excitement. He was beaming! I asked him, "What's this all about?" and he confided in me: "What do you mean? This is the first time in my life that I completed a full *maamar* from beginning to end..."

That moment was incredibly eye-opening for me. I realized that one need not look very far to have an impact with Torah learning. Your friend, your next-door neighbor, the person you daven with in shul; any of them might be waiting for a boost in their Torah learning, and so it's truly special to be able to serve them in such a meaningful way.

I've seen time and again: when you learn Torah with another person, whether a *sicha*, *Tanya*, or anything else, it could become like life-giving oxygen for them. It could help them see their life in a whole new light and address the exact issues and challenges they're dealing with at the moment.

Not long ago, I was introduced to an individual who comes from a frum background but has drifted away over the years. I realized soon after we met that the Yiddishkeit he grew up with was presented to him in a dry way,

and perhaps that had soured his experience.

We started to learn, but we kept the setting casual. We would have many informal discussions, as opposed to a strict, text-based study. Very often, we would talk about *mitzvos*, and I tried to give a Chassidus-based perspective on their meaning.

At one session, he asked me, "Next time we get together, can we talk about the meaning behind tefillin?" Of course, I agreed, and we indeed had an interesting discussion about tefillin at our next Zoom session.

As we begin our session the following week, he tells me excitedly, "I want to let you know that since we spoke last time about tefillin, I've been putting them on every day!"

Imagine that! What learning Torah can accomplish in a Yid's life; it can be absolutely transformative!

Wow! Those are indeed incredible stories. What is it specifically about Torah learning that makes such a deep impact on our lives?

We all know the Rebbe's famous words about Mivtza Torah, that the goal is: "*Einmemmen di velt durch limud haTorah*"—to conquer the world with Torah study. I believe that the Rebbe was also referring to the "*olam katan zeh ha'adam*"—every person is like a miniature world. The Rebbe wants us to transform the perspective and worldview of each and every person through a meaningful Torah-learning experience. And we see it happening every day.

The Rebbe said countless times that our Torah is "*Toras Chaim—hora'ah bachaim*"—a Torah of life, which provides guidance for life. When the Torah is a living Torah, presented as something truly part of our lives and giving us life, the effect is unparalleled.

Torah needs to be seen in this light. We may have gone through yeshiva; we may have even received *semicha*. We might even



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be learning Torah regularly. However, the question ought to be asked: Are we benefiting and being vitalized by the Torah to the degree available to us?

The Rebbe records in *Hayom Yom*⁸ that the Baal Shem Tov used to travel for three reasons, one of them being to spread *pnimiyus haTorah*. The Mittlerer Rebbe explained:

The revealed part of Torah is compared to water, while the hidden part of Torah is compared to fire. Water attracts; everyone comes to it on their own. But fire is scary; people don't gravitate to it naturally. With his travels, the Baal Shem Tov showed that Chassidus is not something to be afraid of. If we want to spread Chassidus, the Mittlerer Rebbe concludes, we need to go directly to our potential students and show them that it's not scary. It's fire, but it's a G-dly fire. It's not a fire of destruction, *chas v'shalom*. It's a fire of warmth and love.

I believe that in this *Hayom Yom*, the Rebbe is teaching us to be proactive in showing our fellow Yidden how meaningful Torah, especially Chassidus, can be for them. It can be transformative, in a very positive way.

Can you share with us how exactly this project started and how it has grown over the years?

My project started organically, and it was a smaller part of my weekly schedule. However, as time progressed, the project grew BH beyond its original boundaries. Through reach-out, invitations, and referrals, I was delivering several shiurim and quite a few chavrusas every week.

While my primary focus has been working with men, throughout this time I've encouraged my wife—who teaches Chassidus at BRHS—to develop her own initiative for women. Baruch Hashem, for over five years now, she has been hosting a weekly “Lunch & Learn” for women. Each year, the class explores a different theme—such as *Bitachon*, *Tanya*, or *Tefillah*. The shiur is consistently well attended, and participants often share how it serves as a source of spiritual oxygen—empowering them in their roles as Chassidische women, wives, mothers, and community members.

At a certain point, I realized it was time to formalize this. So, I set up a non-profit (501c3) organization, which presented the opportunity for

friends and acquaintances to partner with me in this project.

Some of the people I study with opt in for a financial commitment. It's not simply about compensation—it reflects a deeper level of dedication and shared investment in their own growth. This commitment helps ensure that our learning is consistent, focused, and truly impactful. It also allows me to devote the time and attention needed to build and nurture meaningful learning relationships with more individuals.

It's been two years since I jumped in and took on this project full-time. It's been a truly special journey, *baruch Hashem*, and I'm grateful for every step along the way.

Can you share with us more about your own journey through this project and the effect that it had on you personally?

A significant impetus and inspiration for getting involved in all of this has been my listening to the Rebbe's farbrengens. The Rebbe always brings each idea home with such clarity, never leaving anything in the air. One constant in the Rebbe's words is how we must truly live Torah and allow it to guide us every single day. This is what I try to convey to the people I learn with. And I hope my words resonate with them as well.

The ideas that I've learned over the years have been transformative in my own life: whether it was learning how to have true *bitachon* in Hashem even during difficult times,

or how to see and recognize *hashgacha pratis* in our everyday lives, and so on. I realized that when Torah is approached properly, especially Chassidus, it empowers us to live on a much higher level.

I've learned to appreciate that it's a process; it takes time. But eventually, the shift happens, and a person realizes the tremendous opportunity to live and be enlivened by Torah learning.

This is especially true of the Rebbe's Torah, which is tailor-made for our generation, and which addresses so many of the challenges that we face today in such a clear and lucid fashion. There's nothing quite like it.

There's a *sicha*⁹ where the Rebbe draws a lesson from *Arei Miklat*; that every Yid needs to be like a sign pointing and guiding others in the right direction. But as a human being, you need to be a "living sign"; you can't just remain dormant. You can't wait until people come to you looking for guidance. You need to step out of your comfort zone, reach out to others *where they are*, and offer them the guidance and direction they may not even know they need.

It's up to us to be that guiding light for our fellow Jews. The Torah is their inheritance—"Morasha kehillas Yaakov." All we need to do is present it to them in a relatable and relevant way, and their hearts will be open to learn and absorb.

The Rebbe says we must "conquer the world" with Torah. Let's start by influencing one "small" world at a time.

1 Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar 5734; Likkutei Sichos vol. 13, p. 212.

2 See *Bayis Malei Seforim* entry of this column, Derher Kislev 5786.

3 In the *sicha*, the Rebbe said that he doesn't want to mention the actual quote from the Midrash, as it has negative connotations.

4 Shabbos Bereishis 5745; Hisvaaduyos 5745 vol. 1, p. 461.

5 Shabbos Parshas Beshalach 5742; Hisvaaduyos 5742 vol. 2, p. 823.

6 Motzei Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar 5739; Sichos Kodesh 5739 vol. 2, p. 720.

7 Likkutei Sichos vol. 35, p. 205.

8 16 Av.

9 Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, p. 363.

