

לעילוי נשמת
מרת לאה בת הרה"ח ר' אליהו נחום ע"ה בלאק
נלב"ע שבת קודש כ"ה אלול ה'תשע"ג
ת"נ צ"ב ה'

נדפס ע"י
משפחתה שיחיו

עילוי נשמת אליהו נחום אהבה

The Rebbe's Pride & Joy

Compiled by:
Rabbi Yossi Katz

Written By:
Rabbi Boruch Altein

N'shei Chabad

Special thanks to Rabbi Yossi Alperowitz, Mrs. Sasha Alperowitz, Mrs. Sima Ashkenazi, Mrs. Riva Ceitlin, Mrs. Vivi Deren, Mrs. Rivie Feldman, Mrs. Leah Gniwisch, Mrs. Esty Grossbaum, Mrs. Sarah Kahanov, Mrs. Sarah Katzman, Mrs. Leah Kahan, Mrs. Shiffy Landa, Mrs. Cherna Light, Mrs. Reba Sharfstein, Mrs. Chani Shmukler, Mrs. Shterna Shpritzer, Mrs. Ester Sternberg, Mrs. Fradel Sudak and Mrs. Bluma Weinberg for their assistance in preparation of this article.

With the early history of N'shei Chabad we were assisted by "History of N'shei U'bnos Chabad, the Rebbe's Pride and Joy," printed by N'shei Chabad of Kansas City in conjunction with N'shei Chabad.

A very special thank you goes to the staff of JEM for sharing their interviews with Mrs. Feldman and Mr. and Mrs. Rader. זכות הרבים תלוי בהם.

he shul is packed with people, hundreds, even thousands of them. The cities they have traveled here from read like a global geography lesson, spanning the vast expanses of the United States and Canada — New York, Detroit, Cincinnati, Miami, Minnesota, Los Angeles, Montreal, Vancouver, and more — to locations across oceans and continents. They have come to hear the words of the *nossi hador* and garner guidance and inspiration for their holy work at home, each one in their own area.

Is it possible? Thousands of people fill every bench and bleacher in the grand downstairs *zal* of 770, yet there is not even a *minyán* present — for these devoted Chassidim are women and girls, every single one of them.

When was such a sight ever seen before — the *nossi hador* dedicating his time and focus in such a marvelous manner to the women of אנושי שלומנו, and not as an isolated incident, but multiple times every year?

Travel to every city with a frum community — you will find nothing which can compare. Our Rebbe, the *nossi hador*, launched a metaphorical revolution in the setting of women and girls within Yiddishkeit and Chassidus Chabad.

As the Rebbe explained in the *kuntres* "On the greatness of Jewish women" (Shabbos Parshas Bo & Beshalach 5752*)¹, the emphasis the Frierdiker Rebbe [and by extension, our

Rebbe] placed on the role of women in *avodas Hashem* is not as an also-had, but unique and fundamental. The qualities of women are essential to the fulfillment of our core mandate as Yidden: to create a *dira betachtonim* and bring the coming of Moshiach.

The vehicle through which the Rebbe launched this revolution is the renowned and storied organization of Agudas N'shei U'bnos Chabad (shorthand: N'shei). The riveting account of the Rebbe's launch of this organization is the subject of this article.

A Simchas Torah Farbrengen

Simchas Torah day 5713*, a mere year-and-a-half after the *kabbalas hanesius* on Yud Shevat 5711*. The crowd of Chassidim filling the small (and as of yet, only) *zal* of 770 to the roof joyously participated in the Rebbe's farbrengen. Suddenly, as the Rebbe began the third *sicha*, an entirely new organization, one neither planned nor initiated by the Chassidim, saw its debut.

"The [Frierdiker] Rebbe would publish his *sichos* and letters in Yiddish," the Rebbe said, [unlike the previous Rabbeim, who did so exclusively in *Lashon Hakodesh*]. "One reason he gave was to allow women and girls the ability to access the content, thereby inspiring them in their service of Hashem. To strengthen this, the need has arisen to establish an association of Chabad women and girls, Agudas N'shei U'bnos Chabad..."

The Rebbe went on to ask that the new organization be



up and running by Shabbos Bereishis, just a few days hence — and of course, that is what indeed took place.

The Israeli Connection

As it happens, the genesis of N'shei U'bnos Chabad began even earlier. In a letter dated 24 Sivan 5711*, the Rebbe wrote to the *vaad hapoel* of Agudas Chassidei Chabad of Eretz Hakodesh (“Aguch”):

“In my view it is necessary to organize a special women’s division of Aguch... to organize both women who are Chassidim and all those who hold the spirit of Chabad dear to their heart and soul, to arrange activities for women generally. As is self-understood, this requires a unique approach and goals.”

In its own twist of events, the well-known Chossid, Reb Zushe Wilmowsky became heavily involved in launching this Israeli N'shei organization, predating the central *mosad*, with tremendous *hatzlacha*. Things moved quickly and on Sukkos 5713*, just over a year later, the very first women’s conference of the Israeli N'shei U'bnos Chabad took place. As mentioned above, a few days later, on Simchas Torah 5713*, the Rebbe launched the central Agudas N'shei U'bnos Chabad in America.²

Auxiliary To No One

Successful organizations for frum women already existed at this point. In the early 5710s*, most Jewish communities and organizations had a ladies’ auxiliary. This was an association of women who typically raised needed funds for the community or organization or assisted in some other way.

N'shei was different. As the Rebbe set out the new organization’s goals, N'shei existed to support women in their service of Hashem, both internally and reaching out to others. It did not serve to assist other, mainstream organizations.

In fact, one thing that was absolutely off the table during the early years of N'shei was active fundraising. In numerous letters and instructions, the Rebbe explained that raising its own funds would give the new organization an uncomfortable character and make it seem akin to the numerous ladies’ auxiliaries that already existed. Rather, the budget of central N'shei U'bnos Chabad in those years was covered entirely by the Rebbe!

This went on for many years. Eventually, the Rebbe wanted the organization to stand on its own feet and raise the funds

needed for their programs.

As can be expected, this new type of women’s organization required a fundamental shift of perspective. In a letter dated the first day of Rosh Chodesh Elul 5714*, the Rebbe writes to Reb Betzalel Wilschansky: “May it be Hashem’s will that a fundamental shift take place in the attitude of women of *anash* toward the entire idea [of N'shei U'bnos Chabad], for which purpose a fundamental shift must take place in the attitude of the men of *anash*. Apparently, it is not yet clear [to everyone] how essential the matter is....”

Rapid Growth

In 5713*, after the Rebbe launched the new *mosad*, the Rebbe directed Rabbi Yosef Weinberg (who was involved in the ladies auxiliary of the Lubavitch Yeshivos) to get the organization off the ground.

The Rebbe quoted from Kisvei Ha'Arizal that the generation of Jewish women who wandered through the desert with Moshe Rabbeinu was outstanding in many respects. One of the women’s greatest merits was that they refused to bow down to the Eigel HaZahav, the Golden Calf. “Amongst the rewards promised to these righteous women was that their souls would come down into this world in the generation preceding the coming of Moshiach.” Based on this declaration by the AriZal, the Rebbe felt that it was the perfect time to establish N'shei u'Bnos Chabad, an organization that would inspire its members to bring more Chassidishkeit into their own homes and bring closer other women to Yiddishkeit and Chassidus.

The Rebbe continued quoting the writings of the AriZal further, saying, “In this generation, and as part of [the Jewish women’s] reward, the husbands will follow the wives - *Talmidei chachamim nishmaim linishoseihem*.’ If you want to accomplish anything with the men, accomplish first with the ladies!”

The executive board of N'shei Chabad was made up of Rebbetzin Tema Gurary, Mrs. Miriam Popack, and Mrs. Sarah Kahanov. The first official meeting of N'shei Chabad took place at the Gross home in Crown Heights and mailings were done from their basement.

Initially, only a few women participated — in fact, the Rebbe acknowledged this reality in his *sicha* on Simchas Torah, encouraging the initial entrants to not be intimidated by small numbers and to trust that growth will indeed come.

Mrs. Reba Sharfstein, who started N'shei of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 5715*, relates:

“My husband and I moved to Cincinnati in the fall of 1954, to teach. In a farbrengen during Shevat, the Rebbe spoke about women getting together to learn in general and especially about their mitzvos. Shortly afterward Reb Avrohom

Drizin, who would come regularly to Cincinnati to fundraise, visited and stayed at our house. He asked if we heard what the Rebbe said. When I said yes, he asked, ‘So what are you doing about it?’ I looked at him in shock and explained that there were only one or two other women who were even possibly interested. He simply said, ‘Okay, call them,’ and handed me the phone. So I did. I called one woman, she thought

of another woman, who then thought of another — so we started with five women. From that, it grew to hundreds.”

Throughout those formative years, the Rebbe regularly encouraged different women to launch or participate in N’shei chapters in their respective cities.

For example, on Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5713*, just days after the *sicha* launching the new *mosad*, the Rebbe wrote to Mrs. Rochel Cunin from the Bronx. He shared with her about the start of a new group for women to get together, learn *halachos* that are relevant to them, discuss matters relating to their children’s education, and learn about the weekly *sedra* and talks from the Frieddiker Rebbe. The Rebbe asks her if she can get together with other local women to launch a branch in her area.

A few days later, on 23 Cheshvan, the Rebbe wrote to Reb Shlomo Zalman Hecht in Chicago, following up on a conversation the Rebbe had with his wife, to see whether she had already started N’shei activities.

Numerous other such examples exist.

Multiple times, the Rebbe stressed that N’Shei is not limited to “certified Lubavitchers, nor dependent on which *nusach* the women daven, nor whether their husbands put on Rabbeinu Tam tefillin.” Rather, all those who agree that Hashem must be served not only emotionally, but also using one’s intellectual powers, are already included within the term “Chabad.” Indeed, on a number of occasions the Rebbe asked women from “outside” the Lubavitch community to get involved.³

On 26 Kislev 5713* the Rebbe wrote to *anash* of Dublin, Ireland, expressing appreciation for their report regarding the launch of N’shei there, and pointing out that not every participant needs to be from a Chabad background — the core requirement is simply that they desire to become closer to Chabad. Additionally, the Rebbe noted that generally the speakers and lecturers for the chapter should be sourced from the participating women themselves, though it is of course alright if, when appropriate, a man would offer a class or the like.

On a similar note, on 25 Cheshvan 5713*, the Rebbe wrote to Rabbi Sholom Rivkin of S. Louis, Missouri, asking him to find ways to launch a N’shei chapter in his city, stressing that the official leaders must be women, though he and others can help keep the momentum going. Similarly, in a letter to N’shei of Tel Aviv on Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5715*, the Rebbe noted that many of the participating women can lecture as well.

In 5713*, the Rebbe asked Rabbi and Mrs. Bentzion Shemtov, then the pioneers of Chabad in London, along with other local Lubavitchers, to start a local N’shei chapter. Mrs. Fradel Sudak (daughter of the Shemtovs) was then a young girl. As she relates:

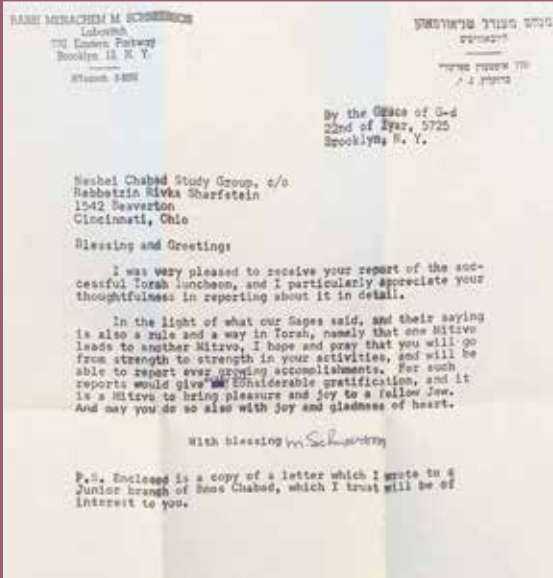
“At first, only about six to eight Lubavitch women would attend the regular meetings in each others’ homes, three



THE FIRST N’SHEI CHABAD CONVENTION WITH BNOS CHABAD PARTICIPANTS, HELD IN CINцинATI, OHIO.

A SPECIAL MITZVAH

Presented here for the first time is a beautiful letter from the Rebbe to members of N’shei Chabad in Cincinnati, Ohio, demonstrating how much the Rebbe appreciates the activities of N’shei Chabad, and the reports thereof.



of whom were older and the rest were new mothers. Yet, each woman invited her neighbors, and the group saw rapid growth. Whenever someone prominent traveled through London from New York, such as Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht or Rabbi Yosef Wineberg, who often served as the Rebbe's liaison for women's matters, the Rebbe instructed them to address the local N'shei."

Mrs. Sudak would originally babysit for those mothers who wanted to attend a meeting. Yet, after some time passed, she became the one to give the *shiur* in a Rebbe's *sicha*, despite her relative youth!

She recalls that the Rebbe instructed London N'shei to learn three items at each meeting: 1. Something from the weekly *parsha*; 2. *Halachos* that are relevant to women, and 3. Chassidus, achieved by recounting a *chassidische maaseh*.

London was one of the original branches — alongside Crown Heights, Brownsville, Montreal, Toronto, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Worcester and Pittsburgh, who laid the groundwork for the hundreds of branches and tens of thousands of participants in the years ahead.

Opposition

The novelty of N'shei's groundbreaking work did give rise to some opposition.

In 5714*, Mrs. Shula Kazen, living in Cleveland, Ohio, had just given birth to her son, when she received a letter from the Rebbe asking her to launch a local branch of the LWO (Lubavitch Women's Organization, i.e., N'shei). As she related, she was then contending with ill health and motherhood and did not feel up to stewarding the project forward. Yet, a surprising set of circumstances led to her connecting with a local Jewish woman who was active in the Cleveland Jewish scene and who dearly wished for a local branch of N'shei to be established; and indeed, that is what happened.

"At that time," Mrs. Kazen relates, "We had been publicizing N'shei activities in the local Jewish newspaper. Some criticized us for it. They felt that women's issues did not belong in a mainstream publication (due to *tznius* concerns). The Rebbe, of course, encouraged me to continue. 'In previous generations, Jews gave *matan beseiser* [charity inconspicuously]. But today, it's different,' he said. 'When it's published in a newspaper that Moshe has given a contribution, then Chaim, too, wants to give. If it's published that Bracha has given, then Sarah, too, wants to give.' Publishing good activities publicly encourages more to participate."

When Mrs. Kazen first started the organization, participating women began donating funds toward the activities. She took no pay for her work, but some community members suspected her of using the funds for personal needs.

Understandably, this deeply upset her.

She raised the issue with the Rebbe, and the Rebbe replied: "People always talk. You cannot stop others from talking, but you will succeed." The Rebbe advised her to encourage participants to put money into a large tzedakah box at each meeting.⁴

Demographic Differences

N'shei U'bnos Chabad, the name the Rebbe gave the organization in his very first *sicha* on the topic, mentions two distinct demographics: women and girls.

N'shei of Montreal asked the Rebbe how to handle different demographics when the issues confronting them are not all the same. On 22 Cheshvan 5715* the Rebbe responded: "Some issues and questions have a broad appeal and some are relevant to specific ages. Thus, some gatherings should be arranged for all members [of the branch] where broader matters are discussed... and additionally, individual groups can be formed for specific groups and ages — though the general meetings for all participants should occur often."

In a letter to Rabbi Zalman Kazen dated Yud-Gimmel Tammuz 5714*, the Rebbe advised him to launch a separate branch for younger women (as sitting with older women might be unappealing for the younger aged women), but to ensure that this is done diplomatically.

From the above it is clear that N'shei U'bnos Chabad exists to serve girls and women of every age, each in their own way and working as one whole.

Learning, Conventions, Publications And More

So, what was this new *mosad*, spearheaded by the Rebbe, going to do? What would be its primary activities?

On 28 Tammuz 5712*, the Rebbe wrote to the earlier, Israeli branch of N'shei U'bnos Chabad and laid out the main tasks he saw the new association performing. The Rebbe divided these tasks into two sections:

1. On behalf of the participants themselves. These included:
 - a. Getting together regularly to learn about topics such as *parshas hashavua*, topics of each Yom Tov as it

approaches, relevant *halachos* and so on.

- b. Learning appropriate *maamarei Chassidus*, *sichos* or the like, that cover the fundamentals of Toras HaChassidus, its *minhagim* and *hadrachos* — thus strengthening the spirit and light of Chassidus in participants' homes.
2. On behalf of others. These included:
- a. To exert themselves, with great energy, for the good of others who are “closest” — i.e., on behalf of the *chinuch* of their own sons and daughters, and Jewish boys and girls in their neighborhood.
 - b. To lead a powerful campaign to strengthen Yiddishkeit in general, especially in the areas of *taharas hamishpacha*, *kashrus*, and an upstanding, kosher education.
 - c. To strengthen *mosdos* that provide an upstanding, kosher education. This is especially so by actively participating in all Chabad educational institutions in Eretz Yisroel, in particular by assisting with arrangements for food and accommodation, ensuring proper cleanliness and appropriate attire, and the like.

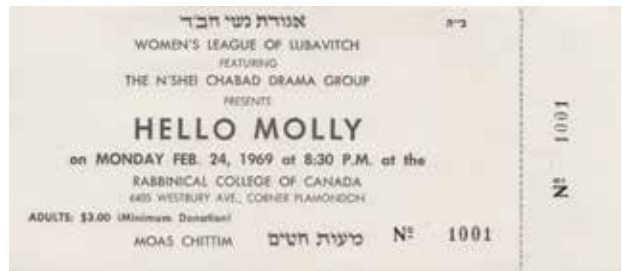
These same ideas, permuted perhaps into an appropriate form for every time and place, have been the bread-and-butter of N'shei branches the world over.

Most importantly, the purpose of N'shei is to do all the above *as a group*. In the *sicha* of Simchas Torah 5713* the Rebbe emphasized the public influence a group of women working together has, above and beyond that of individuals. Firstly, new people will hear about the activities when done in a group, and secondly, they will be able to participate as well. Thus, N'shei U'bnos Chabad became a vehicle, not simply to strengthen the *avodas Hashem* of women themselves, but to become a key part of impacting the world and bringing Moshiach.

Home-Life Balance

The Rebbe spoke often about a woman's role as “*akeres habayis*,” the mainstay of the home. How can a mother of growing children also become a prominent community activist? The Rebbe writes to a woman, “The housewife is, of course, limited as far as outside activities are concerned. Nevertheless, within the available possibilities, a great deal can be accomplished with good will and determination.”⁵

Mrs. Sima Ashkenazi of Kfar Chabad, Israel, relates how the Rebbe encouraged her to become more involved in the communal life of Kfar Chabad and its N'shei, even before her husband was appointed as its rav. In 5729*, she was in *yechidus* and the Rebbe asked her about the *yiras Shamayim* of the women of Kfar Chabad. She wasn't sure what to answer,



AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR A MUSICAL PERFORMANCE BY N'SHEI CHABAD IN MONTREAL, 5729*.

and the Rebbe told her that *yiras Shamayim* is evident in two things: *tznius* and *taharah*.

The Rebbe instructed her to strengthen these two areas, and upon her return to Kfar Chabad, she should divide the town into sections, with regular classes on these two subjects in each area. The classes should be for all ages, for the old may have forgotten and the young may not have learned them properly.

Another area she got involved with was teaching in the girls' seminary.

As time went on, however, Mrs. Ashkenazi found it exceedingly difficult to balance both aspects of her life, her work in the community and seminary and serving as mother and wife. In a *yechidus* together with her husband, she asked the Rebbe about it. The Rebbe replied:

“The primary function of an *akeres habayis*, who is the ‘magnificent crown of the Jewish edifice’ (עטרת תפארת בית) (ישראל), lies in educating her children and matters of the home. Yet, if time allows, she should prioritize her seminary teaching, as it involves teaching students who will in turn teach others [i.e., continuing the cycle].”

At the end of the *yechidus* the Rebbe wished her *hatzlachah* in *hafatzas hamaayanos*. When she returned home, she arranged matters as such that she would be able to balance both roles.

On that note, Mrs. Leah Gniwisch of Montreal, Canada, tells how each year from 5723* to 5734* she led N'shei of Montreal in putting on a kosher musical performance for Jewish women and girls.

The performance was prepared with the highest quality in mind, necessitating months of hard work and many late evening practices by the women in the performance. The slack for all these late evenings was invariably picked up by their husbands, who would take care of the home and the children while their wives went to N'shei for the rehearsals. Despite the time and energy devoted toward the project, they felt that the impact was worthwhile and continued doing it, year after year.

One year, however, it was just too difficult. Most women



IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CONVENTION, EACH WOMAN FROM OUT-OF-TOWN WOULD STEP FORWARD TO SPEAK WITH THE REBBE AND HAND OVER THEIR LETTER. AS DURING A YECHIDUS, THE REBBE WOULD READ THEIR LETTER, OFTEN JOTTING DOWN NOTES AS HE REPLIED.

couldn't make the time to participate, and their husbands were not prepared to take up the slack.

The performance took place each year around Purim time, four weeks before Pesach (with the proceeds going toward helping with *maos chitim* needs). That year, about ten weeks before Pesach, Mrs. Gniwisch had a *yechidus*.

In the *yechidus* the Rebbe asked her if they would be having a play that year. She responded that unfortunately they would not be, as she couldn't get any women involved and their husbands were too worn out. The Rebbe looked at her and told her to go back and tell the husbands that they should do what they need to do, and she should put together the play. Indeed, that is exactly what happened.

Conventions, Events, Initiatives

One of the major activities of N'shei U'bnos Chabad is the annual convention.

In 5716* the Rebbe instructed N'shei to host a convention of the various different branches of N'shei U'bnos Chabad. It took place on Sunday, 26 Iyar, at the Riverside Hotel in

Manhattan. It was a very special affair — even Rebbetzin Chana, the Rebbe's mother, participated, along with over 300 other women.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Karzanovsky read the Rebbe's letter written for the convention, followed by various speeches and reports from delegates of the different branches across North America. Finally, the delegates took on various resolutions that N'shei would perform over the coming year.

The highlight of the convention was the special *sicha* the Rebbe addressed to the delegates and women that evening in 770, and a special *yechidus* the women had with the Rebbe.

The Rebbe instructed that a journal be compiled with a detailed account of the convention and transcripts of the speeches, instructing that it be made as beautiful as possible.

In a *maaneh* from 14 Kislev 5744*, the Rebbe gave a number of important directives for N'shei events. (This specific *maaneh* was in connection with the "Week of the Jewish Woman" — a special project of N'shei that year.) First, the Rebbe wrote that at all such events, the initial meeting should take place at the center of Chabad, in Crown Heights. Later events during the convention can take place elsewhere. As such, the best time to host such an event is when people are in Crown Heights anyway, such as during Yom Tov times.

As well, the Rebbe wrote, the primary and important



LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEL CHABAD

THE FIRST ANNUAL CONVENTION OF N'SHEI CHABAD IN MANHATTAN, IN 5716*. THE WOMEN STAND AS RABBI KAZARNOVSKY (FAR LEFT) READS THE REBBE'S LETTER TO THE CONVENTION. REBBETZIN CHANA IS STANDING FIRST TO THE LEFT OF THE PODIUM.



A JOURNAL IN ENGLISH AND YIDDISH PUT TOGETHER AT THE REBBE'S REQUEST WITH AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONVENTION.

events should be accompanied by a special journal. It should include *divrei Torah* — especially ones that are timely — candle-lighting times (and times for *havdalah*), and sections describing N'shei U'bnos Chabad and its activities.

Finally, it would be extremely good — “נכון במאד” — for the journal to be made as beautiful as can be. This is so that women will desire to bring it home, use it to adorn the home bookshelf, and even gift it to friends.

These directives were reiterated multiple times at various N'shei initiatives. In general, the Rebbe always instructed that activities and events should be done in as beautiful a manner as possible.

The Rebbe would also emphasize the importance of producing sophisticated publications and PR, and hosting elegant events. For example, in a letter dated Rosh Chodesh Shevat 5712*, the Rebbe wrote to Reb Zushe Wilmsowsky reminding him to ensure that when promoting N'shei U'bnos Chabad in Israeli media, to be mindful that it be done in a

refined and elegant manner.

In general, the Rebbe was extremely involved in every aspect of the convention and N'shei. For years, the Rebbe would review and edit every item of writing used in N'shei activities, checking them not only for content, but even for simple grammatical errors. Everything had to be presentable and accurate.

The convention became an annual affair, occurring every Shabbos Mevarchim Sivan, growing larger and more elaborate each year. Eventually it extended to an entire weekend, with multiple events and activities, while Bnos Chabad would put on a grand production for the women.

The Rebbe instructed N'shei that each year's convention should have a unique theme. That first year they could not decide which theme to choose, so the Rebbe instructed them to submit a few options and the Rebbe himself chose the year's theme. In fact, this continued annually — the Rebbe would choose the theme the convention would feature — up until a certain point, when the Rebbe told the organizers to choose a theme on their own.

The convention *sicha* was one of the select times during the year when the Rebbe would specifically address the women in person in 770.

The *sicha* would take place after the convention participants made their way back to 770 from Manhattan. Mrs. Sternberg recalls the Rebbe instructing the women not to worry and rush back for the *sicha*, as he would deliver it whenever they arrive.

At first, the *sicha* took place in the Rebbe's room, as only delegates from the initial cities were in attendance. The crowd grew each year, until 5721* when the location of the *sicha* moved to the small *zal*, and eventually to the downstairs shul of 770. After the *sicha* the women would have a chance to go up to the podium and speak privately with the Rebbe.

Mrs. Sternberg recalls how one year the Rebbe shared tremendous *brachos* with the women in attendance, and one woman was so overcome with emotion that she couldn't help but begin to sob. The Rebbe noticed and gave her one of his handkerchiefs, neatly folded and ironed, to dry her eyes.

Mid-Winter Warmth Across The Nation

At one point during the early 5720s*, a few women from the N'shei U'bnos Chabad central committee were brainstorming for ways to expand their activities and reach more Jewish women, to spread the teachings of Chabad and of

Torah and Yiddishkeit to ever wider circles.

As Mrs. Rivie Feldman recalls, the members of the committee decided that just like the yearly convention takes place in New York, perhaps they can spread out and bring the same idea to different cities where there are women who wouldn't necessarily come to Crown Heights. They'd put on a great program with quality entertainment and food and it would bring in women from all ages, affiliations, and walks of life.

They wrote to the Rebbe and asked for approval and *bracha*, which the Rebbe swiftly gave. Mrs. Miriam Popack was the prime coordinator of these conventions which took place in midwinter, unlike the central convention which was held Shavuos time.

The first midwinter convention took place in Boston in 5723*.

As Mrs. Popack recounted, they took a school bus to Boston — in a snowstorm — one Sunday afternoon and hosted a small convention. But that small beginning led to years and years of successful conventions the world over, with women from every walk of life.

The Rebbe instructed that hosting the convention should be a community-wide effort, and that they should take place in a central location close to many other communities, to maximize its impact. Typically, Mrs. Popack would travel to the city to meet with the local community, many of whom were not necessarily part of the Chabad community, and convince them of how much the community stands to gain from hosting a convention. This project was enormously successful.

As mentioned, in addition to writing a special letter and often speaking about the convention during a *farbrengen*, the Rebbe would review the theme and make notes on the program and the speakers.

In later years, the Rebbe began giving Mrs. Popack a stack of dollars to distribute to the women who were traveling with her to the midwinter convention. At the convention in 5744* in Columbus, Ohio, Mrs. Popack began distributing the dollars to the women who had traveled to the convention. It was a large delegation (perhaps 50 or so women), and as she was distributing them, other local women gathered to see what was happening. When they heard about the dollars from the Rebbe, they also requested a dollar.

Mrs. Popack explained that, unfortunately, she doesn't have any more dollars from the Rebbe to give. The other women got upset and asked her to please tell the Rebbe that they also want dollars, as they're also part of the convention. Mrs. Popack immediately called the *mazkirus* and explained the situation. The Rebbe's response⁶ was that there was no intention at all of discrimination, *chas veshalom*. Due to the deep desire of these women to receive dollars from the Rebbe, she would be sent an additional \$200 to distribute, and if more was needed she should let the Rebbe know.

Publications

In addition to the convention journals, the Rebbe encouraged N'shei Chabad to publish numerous works. These included *Di Yiddishe Heim*, published half in English and half in Yiddish; and the N'shei Chabad Newsletter. Both names were chosen by the Rebbe, and *Di Yiddishe Heim's* English section was even edited by the Rebbe for many years, until 5751* when the Rebbe told Mrs. Rachel Altein — its English editor — that he doesn't have time and that he'll rely on them. Both publications featured a variety of articles and discussion pieces on Torah and the role of a Jewish woman.

Other noteworthy publications included: *Aura*, which was a beautiful coffee-table-like book about the role of Jewish women; *The Gift*, a beautiful book about Shabbos; a book collecting photographs of girls named Chaya Mushka; and *Outreach Challenge*, an anthology of how-to articles for *shluchim*, culled from the N'shei Chabad Newsletter. Mrs. Chana Piekarski and Mrs. Fruma Junik actually presented the book to the Rebbe on Rosh Chodesh Shevat 5749*, in the Rebbe's home. When the Rebbe came to 770 to speak by the *Kinus Hashluchos*, the Rebbe carried it with him. When the Rebbe gave dollars, it was there on the table, and the Rebbe gave two dollars to Mrs. Piekarski and Mrs. Junik for writing the book and "for the book they are going to write."

In 5730*, the young women's division, "Junior N'shei," had an idea to print a kosher cookbook — the first one in existence. The Rebbe encouraged the idea very much, and the *Spice and Spirit* cookbook was a great success.

In the 5720s* and 5730s* (and onward), N'shei of London, UK, was very active. In the mid-5730s* they began hosting the main European N'shei convention, with hundreds of attendees and prominent speakers. The second convention's theme was *Roots*, all about our collective roots as a people and as individuals in Yiddishkeit, and the need to return to them and assist others in their journey. The theme was of course chosen by the Rebbe. It took place in 5739* with over 500 attendees.

The Rebbe wrote a long, beautiful letter explaining the theme and the unique role of the Jewish woman, and on the Shabbos before the convention the Rebbe spoke on this theme at the *farbrengen*.

Mr. and Mrs. Bentzion Rader were dedicated Chassidim and activists in Lubavitch of London, and Mrs. Rader was one of the main organizers of N'shei London. Some time after the convention, the Rebbe wrote to her, asking her to help put together a book that would be called *Roots*, to present — in a most elegant manner — the work and activities of N'shei Chabad in Europe, through the conventions and various other activities.



Thus, “Roots” was another beautiful publication of N’shei U’bnos Chabad, based in Europe.

Around that time period, the Raders had been involved in publishing a book called Challenge, highlighting the work of Chabad and the Rebbe in general. In a *yechidus* some time afterward, the Rebbe asked the Raders to create an anthology for Jewish women.

Mr. Rader recalls how the Rebbe said, “If it’s a question of money, I would be prepared to participate in the venture.’ My wife, who is a very English lady, said to the Rebbe that that would be quite unnecessary, as she still has money left over from the European Convention which she had just organized. The Rebbe started to laugh and he said that this is the first time in the history of his organization that anybody ever had a surplus.”

This anthology became known as “Woman of Valor.”

At first, Mr. Rader sent the Rebbe the articles that were written for the book, as had been done with the previous books. The Rebbe wrote back and said it’s not necessary, as he can rely on his judgment.

Mr. Rader recalls, “Before the book was finalized, my wife and I were in *yechidus* when the Rebbe asked us, ‘What is happening with “Woman of Valor”?’ when will it be printed?’ I replied that it’s already at the printer, but they are only prepared to do it — at the price we want it for — if we order 10,000 copies, and they want to be paid in advance.

“The books were published by Lubavitch in England. I told the Rebbe that we can only do it if Rabbi Hodakov will agree to take 7,000 of those 10,000 copies and pay up front for them, and that we have an appointment with Rabbi Hodakov later on that day to discuss it with him. The Rebbe started laughing and said, ‘If you can persuade Rabbi Hodakov to take 7,000 copies and pay you in advance, you’re a better businessman than I even give you credit for being.’

“Anyway, we went to see Rabbi Hodakov later that day. I told him what we wanted, and — to my surprise — he said ‘Yes, we’ll take 7,000 copies.’ I told him that they needed to be paid for in advance, and he said to just ask Rabbi Krinsky for a draft or a check. So I wrote to the Rebbe that Rabbi Hodakov agreed to take the 7,000 copies and pay in advance, but I don’t think it had anything to do with my business acumen; I was sure that someone had spoken to him beforehand.”

Mr. Rader and his wife were in New York for Shabbos and the final proofs of the book had to be at the printer early the next week. The Rebbe hadn’t yet seen the articles, and Mrs. Rader said to her husband that she doesn’t feel like she can take the responsibility of publishing it without the Rebbe having seen what’s in it. So that Friday — which was a short, winter Erev Shabbos — she got the proofs together and gave them into the Rebbe.

About an hour or two later, Rabbi Klein phoned and said

that he had a message from the Rebbe. The Rebbe said he read it and wanted the details of who had written certain articles. Because Mr. Rader had written most of the articles, they had just put a list of contributors in the back.

Additionally, there was a drawing in the book of women of different age groups, and one of the women was wearing a mortarboard (a university cap and cape). The Rebbe said to have the mortarboard removed because people might think that a woman must go to university in order to be a woman of valor.

Apparently the Rebbe had read the book in an hour — something that would seem to be physically impossible.

Dial-a-Friend

In 5737* the Rebbe began to speak about the importance of *mashpi'im*. In that light, Mrs. Junik, who headed N'shei Chabad at the time, had the idea to appoint women in Crown Heights who would be block connectors. They would be in charge of organizing events on each block, such as *shiurim*, get togethers, and so on.

After the Rebbe spoke at the convention about having more children, women spoke of the difficulties involved. Mrs. Junik thought of putting together a list of women who were comfortable being called about specific topics related to raising a family. This idea would be called Dial-a-Friend.

Mrs. Junik wrote in the idea to the Rebbe but received no response. She decided to leave it.

Some time later, Rabbi Hodakov told her that the Rebbe wants to know what is happening with it. She explained that she received no response, to which she received the following *maaneh*: “כבר עניתי בהתוועדות עת רצון—I already answered during the propitious time of the farbrengen.” Mrs. Junik then realized that the idea to launch the initiative came after hearing the Rebbe talk about the importance of expanding our *peulos*, during the farbrengen on Shabbos. Needless to say, Dial-a-Friend was launched.

Sifrei Torah for the Rebbetzin and Rebbe

In 5741*, N'shei Chabad of Eretz Yisroel wrote a *sefer Torah l'zchus* the Rebbe and the Rebbetzin. This was received by the Rebbe with much attention and appreciation.

After 22 Shevat 5748*, N'shei in America wanted to do something in honor of the Rebbetzin. Mrs. Junik suggested



ONE OF THE ORGANIZERS OF THE CONVENTION, MRS. SARA KAHANOV, PRESENTS THE REBBE WITH A PROGRAM.

writing a *sefer Torah*, and the Rebbe agreed. They asked the Rebbe if they should wait to finish it after the year or for Rosh Chodesh Kislev. The Rebbe responded, “ווי שניעל מעגלעך”—As soon as possible.” The Rebbe also told them to start the *sefer Torah* in his home on President Street.

Nine months later, on Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5749*, the *Sefer Torah* was ready for completion. Rabbi Groner told the women involved — a committee of four — that the Rebbe would give them dollars for the *sefer Torah*. The Rebbe was in his house, so they quickly rushed over. As they were standing in the kitchen, the Rebbe walked in through the back door and gave them a packet of hundred dollar bills with a huge smile, and wished them זאל זיין הצלחה רבה.

The Rebbe then went to daven Mincha. After Mincha the Rebbe said a *sicha* and asked that they be present — the



JEM101758



JEM101763

THE WOMEN LOOK ON AS THE WRITING OF THE SEFER TORAH COMMENCES IN THE REBBE'S HOME DURING THE SHIVA OF THE REBBETZIN.



ROSH CHODESH KISLEV 5749*, THE REBBE HANDS MRS. GOLDIE GANSBOURG, ONE OF THE ORGANIZERS, A PACKET OF DOLLARS IN THE KITCHEN OF HIS HOME.

bochurim had to squeeze to one side to make space. The Rebbe spoke about the great *zechus* of anyone who has any part in the *sefer Torah*, all the way to the one who made the “mantel.”

Kabbalas Pnei Moshiach Tzidkeinu

In 5751*-2*, the Rebbe spoke very strongly about Moshiach. N'shei Chabad formed a special committee to think of activities they could do to help bring Moshiach. One item they came up with was a grand *melaveh malka l'kabbalas pnei Moshaiach Tzidkeinu*. The *melaveh malka* took place on the night of 28 Teves 5752*, and it was a massive event, broadcast live around the world. Thousands of people participated, including many from outside the Lubavitch community, and the organizers merited to receive multiple special *maanos* from the Rebbe. Additionally, there were many responses to branches that participated via hookup, or made their own *melaveh malka* following their example.

During that period, the Rebbe responded warmly to several gestures of N'shei Chabad, expressing the anticipation in the imminent arrival of Moshiach. Around Kislev that year, they collected \$5000, commissioned a silversmith to fashion a beautiful silver tzedakah *pushka* in the shape of 770, and brought the money and *pushka* to the Rebbe by dollars as a participation in the 770 building campaign. The Rebbe was very encouraging. He answered *amen* to all of their *brachos* and gave each one of the organizers two dollars, wishing them “איר זאלט צוהיילן די גאולה—you should hasten the *geulah*.”

The Fundamental Role Of The Jewish Woman

The Rebbe wrote a letter to the European N'shei Convention that took place in London on the theme of “Roots,” dated 15 Teves 5739*:⁷

“In this life-saving work, the role of the Jewish woman is of crucial importance, since she is the Akeres Habayis, the foundation of the home... It is a dual process: actively pursuing one's own growth and development, and at the

same time working for the preservation and growth of our people, through spreading and strengthening Yiddishkeit...

“Finally, to pursue the analogy from roots... one does not look for flashing color and external beauty in roots, nor are the latter concerned with what some people might say about their external looks; roots do their work humbly and modestly, indeed for the most part hidden from view altogether. Such is also the work of true Jewish mothers and daughters....”

In multiple *sichos* and letters throughout the years, the Rebbe emphasized the fundamental and essential role women play in Yiddishkeit and in our mission on this world.

In a *yechidus* in 5713* with N’shei Chabad of Worcester, Massachusetts, the Rebbe explained that women are naturally more compassionate, which is the way of Torah — דרכי דרכי — and is the best way to influence others to learn to love Torah, our mission in life.

On the note of Worcester, Mrs. Feldman shared a story where the impact of N’shei U’bnos Chabad shines for all to see:

“In 5727* a midwinter convention took place in Worcester. On Motzei Shabbos they had a special speaker. They invited the mayor of the city to come and give greetings for the convention.

“The mayor came, and from all outward appearances one wouldn’t think he was Jewish. At the end of the speech he said, ‘I want to present the key to my city to the Lubavitcher Rebbe’ — he had a key prepared in a box with a dome of glass on it — ‘and I want you to tell the Lubavitcher Rebbe that I am one of his own, as my father studied in the town of Lubavitch.’ You could have heard a pin drop — what an impact!”

Over 6-13 Shevat 5752*, the Rebbe spoke at length about women’s unique and essential characteristics. These *sichos* were edited by the Rebbe and published as a special talk on the qualities of women.

In it, the Rebbe explains that the Frieddiker Rebbe began working directly with women, unlike previous Rabbeim (who worked primarily with men and allowed the women to be impacted indirectly), due to the unique qualities of women, as they are the *akeres habayis* and can influence both their children and husband.

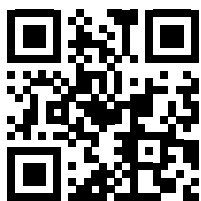
The Rebbe went on to explain that women take precedence, both in time and quality, from the very beginning. For example, at *Matan Torah*, women were spoken to first. They also did not sin with the golden calf, unlike the men. By the making of the *Mishkan*, once again women were the primary gifters (the men came alongside the women), and they performed the most complex task — weaving the goat hairs while still attached to the goats.

However, said the Rebbe, as we draw closer to the time of Moshiach, women become all the more essential. It was in

the merit of the righteous women of Mitzrayim that the Jews merited to leave Mitzrayim. The same applies to us leaving *galus* (especially since our souls are reincarnations of those who left *Mitzrayim*). Women truly feel the bitterness of *galus*, and so they will truly experience the joy of Moshiach, just as they did when leaving *Mitzrayim*, when they not only sang but played instruments and danced.

The Rebbe pointed out that not only are women essential in the leadup to Moshiach, but when Moshiach actually comes, the value and quality of women will far surpass men — as it says, נקבה תסובב גבר (Females will encompass males) and אשת חיל עטרת בעלה (Women will be the crown above their husband).

On Motzei Shabbos Bereishis 5713*, the Rebbe addressed the first gathering of N’shei U’bnos Chabad and said: They [the women] have the mission of bringing warmth, light, and joy — true warmth, light and joy — into their homes. This is hinted to by the unique mitzvos of women: *neiros Shabbos Kodesh*, challah and kosher food, and *taharas hamishpachah*. (Interestingly, the *mitvzoim* for all these mitzvos were launched by addresses to N’shei U’bnos Chabad as well.) The Rebbe finished off: “You have the ability to make your home a Jewish home, a warm home, and a home filled with light...” **T**



SCAN THIS QR CODE TO ACCESS FURTHER
READING, INCLUDING FASCINATING
LETTERS AND RESPONSES FROM THE
REBBE ABOUT NSHEI U’BNOS CHABAD.

WWW.DERHER.ORG/018546

1. Sefer Hasichos 5752 pg. 299
2. See “Hapartizan” – biography of Reb Zushe Wilmowsky, p. 107
3. Igros Kodesh, 28 Marcheshvan 5713, 20 Cheshvan 5714, et. al.
4. See The Queen of Cleveland, Hasidic Archives 2023.
5. Teshura, Mintz - Tiefenbrun, 5781
6. Scan the QR code at the end of this article to see the full response.
7. Printed in “Return to Roots.”