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נדפס ע"י בנו
הרה"ת ר' אברהם צמח הלוי וזוגתו מרת
דבורה לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו
רוזנפלד

Sheitel

*The foundation of a Yiddishe
home, a wellspring of blessing*

MUCH OF THE TRANSLATED CONTENT
IN THIS ARTICLE WAS PREVIOUSLY
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“Kimchis had seven sons, all of whom merited to serve as kohanim gedolim. The chachamim asked her, ‘What have you done to merit this?’ She answered: ‘The rafters of my house have never seen the braids of my hair.’”

(Masechta Yoma, 47a)

“[Kimchis’s] profound conduct of tznius—to the extent that even when she was alone in the house ‘the rafters of her house never saw the braids of her hair’—affected her sons so much that they all merited to become kohanim gedolim.

“Her behavior thus had an effect many, many years after she conducted herself in this manner—after her children had already become bar mitzvah and after they had reached the age of twenty, when they became fit to become kohanim gedolim.

“Moreover, her conduct also had an influence on her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, for the son of a kohen gadol inherits his father’s position.

“Since this tale is related to us by Torah She’beal Peh, it follows that this is not just a story of something that transpired in the past, for ‘that which has passed is past.’ Rather, it comes to teach every Jewish daughter how much she is to scrupulously observe tznius, even when there is no one else in the house, etc.

“... By behaving in this ultimate manner of tznius, one affects for the good one’s children and grandchildren, as we glean from the above tale of the Gemara.”

(Chai Elul 5742¹)

No Compromise

Over the years, the Rebbe underlined the great *zechus* that a woman has in maintaining *tznius* and covering her hair, particularly with a *sheitel*, and pointed to it as a major source of blessing for her and her family.

The tremendous benefit of wearing a *sheitel* is actually spelled out in the Zohar²: “If she does so [= properly covers her hair], her children will be superior to other children of the nation; her husband will be blessed with spiritual and material blessings, with wealth, children and children’s children.”

The Rebbe also spelled out in letters the many *brachos* that are drawn down through a woman covering her hair properly with a *sheitel*, mostly based on the above Zohar.

At the basis however, as in all matters of life, the Rebbe grounded his stance on the importance of women wearing sheitels on the fact that women covering their hair is mandated by *halacha*.

In reply to a woman inquiring about the basis of the obligation to wear a *sheitel*, the Rebbe replied unequivocally: “[Regarding] the issue of covering a woman’s head—on what the custom is based, etc.

“This is a full-on law in Torah, *Toras Chaim*, and not

WEARING A HAT

During a *yechidus* around the year 5732*, a Chossid asked the Rebbe several questions regarding the Rebbe’s push to wear a *sheitel*.

The Chossid asked: “Is there any significance of wearing a hat on top of the *sheitel*?”

The Rebbe responded: “When a woman wears a hat on top of her *sheitel*, other women will assume that she is not wearing a *sheitel*. The proof is: why would she be wearing a double covering, a *sheitel* and a hat? They will therefore think that the hair under the hat is not a *sheitel*. Thus, they will assume that such behavior is appropriate, and it is enough to wear a hat on top of the hair.”¹⁸

It is important to note, that in a place where it is customary to cover the *sheitel*, the Rebbe wrote that one should take into consideration if wearing the *sheitel* uncovered would breach the standard (a “*pirtzah*”).¹⁹

“Wearing a sheitel is of primary importance to the foundation of the entire home.”

merely a custom (although much importance is attributed to Jewish customs too).³ All the more so, that there is special emphasis placed on practicing this law—of covering a (married, obviously) woman’s hair, as is understood from the quality of the reward received for adhering to this law.”

The Rebbe’s insistence on the matter actually had precedence in previous generations. The Friediker Rebbe wrote about the necessity for a *chassidishe* woman to cover her hair with a *sheitel*. In fact, as the Friediker Rebbe continued, this special regard for *halacha* is where the uniqueness of a *bochur* who studied in Tomchei Temimim is expressed:

“The difference between a student of Tomchei Temimim and a student of other yeshivos, is not only in matters of *yiras Shamayim*, but is mainly in matters of *mesiras nefesh* for Torah and behavior [according to Torah]... The behavior must be that the wife of a student in Tomchei Temimim should wear a *sheitel*, notwithstanding how hard it may be, because doing otherwise is not possible and not

permissible.”⁴

Indeed, to many who inquired regarding a *shidduch* proposal, the Rebbe responded by emphasizing the necessity that the *kallah* take upon herself to wear a *sheitel*. In some instances, the Rebbe wrote in strong terms, that “it is obvious and self-understood that a non-negotiable condition [that has to first be made] is that of [the *kallah*’s taking upon herself to wear] a *sheitel*.”⁵

Aside for noting the basic halachic reason, the Rebbe would regularly stress that wearing a *sheitel* “is not merely a private matter, but something of a general matter and brings about merit to many (*zechus ha’rabim*).”⁶ In reality, the Rebbe wrote, wearing a *sheitel* is the foundation of a *chassidishe* home.

In a telling letter, the Rebbe writes relatively at length and in clear terms, about the tremendous importance and benefit connected with wearing a *sheitel*:

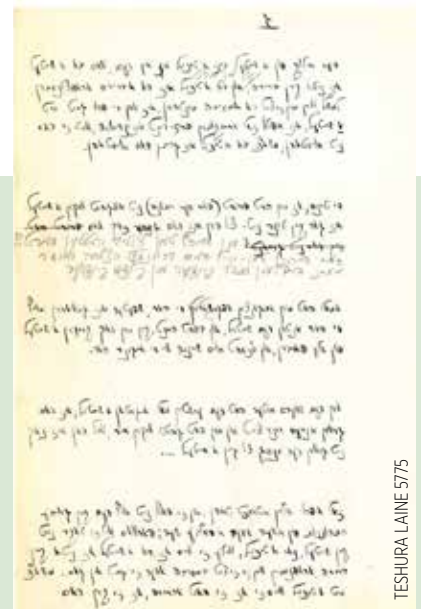
“Regarding what you wrote at the end of your *pan* about



THE FRIEDIKER REBBE’S LETTER TO A BOCHUR IN TOMCHEI TEMIMIM WITH GUIDANCE PERTAINING TO HIS UPCOMING WEDDING. AT THE END OF THE LETTER HE STRESSES THE REQUIREMENT THAT HIS WIFE WEAR A SHAITEL.



SOME OF THE REBBE’S HAGAHOS ON A CONVERSATION IN YECHIDUS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF A SHEITEL, FROM ROSH CHODESH ELUL 5714.



TESHURA LAINE 5775

“From today onwards, everyone, without exception, should unite with the anash women who wear sheitels, give their children a true chassidishe education, and lead a truly chassidishe home in all details.”

your *kallah*, [a *bracha*] that you should have a *chassidishe* home (“a *chassidishe hoiz*”).

“... Wearing a *sheitel* is of primary importance to the foundation of the entire home, as it is something seen by all. This is especially pertinent in your area, since I have heard that there is currently some laxity in this matter, regarding wearing a *sheitel*. Thus there must be unwavering firmness in this [matter], and she should specifically wear a *sheitel*.

“Surely, your desire will help you find the right words to bring this about practically and successfully.”⁷

Yiddishe Pride

In a fascinating letter, the Rebbe writes to a woman who was worried that she may be laughed at if she starts wearing a *sheitel*:

“In response to your letter in which you write about a *sheitel*, and how in your *frum* community this isn’t the tradition [i.e. they don’t wear *sheitels*], and you are ashamed, for perhaps they will laugh at you if you wear a *sheitel*...

“Recently even American youth have begun to especially honor and respect those who stand firm in their faith. They do not feel embarrassed by those who scoff at them and their outlook on the world. To the contrary, they respond with scorn and derision to those who simply follow the majority without having any principles of their own. Surely you know that the entire four-part Shulchan Aruch opens with the statement that one should not be embarrassed by those who scoff at one’s service of Hashem.”

The Rebbe concludes with a most powerful message:

“Moreover, and this too is quite simple and very understandable: ‘Hashem fills heaven and earth,’ and finds Himself with man in all places and at all times. This is not so with regard to people; even those who live extremely close are not always close at hand. Thus, how can it possibly be

that one is not embarrassed, *chas veshalom*, before Hashem, and rather is embarrassed by people who are flesh and blood?!”⁸

Sheitel Specifically

Much of the Rebbe’s correspondence on the topic discusses the necessity for a woman to wear a *sheitel* specifically, and more precisely, a *sheitel* that entirely covers her hair.

An advantage of wearing a *sheitel* rather than a *tichel*, the Rebbe explained, is that a *tichel* can easily slide down, unlike a *sheitel*. Thus, wearing a *sheitel* is very much needed in times when *frum* Yidden can be subject to intimidation.

In the Rebbe’s words,⁹ “The difference between a *sheitel* and a *tichel* is the following: It is easy to take off a *tichel*; this is not the case with a *sheitel*. Also, when one is

INFLUENCE OTHERS!

“... In such a way must the *neshei u’bnos Chabad* impact their surroundings, beginning with their families, including their mothers and mothers-in-law. That the mother and the mother-in-law should learn holy things from their daughter or daughter-in-law, for example in regards to wearing a *sheitel*.”²⁰

“You should also make an effort to encourage other women to wear a *sheitel* as well, explaining to them that by doing so they open the channel for Hashem’s blessings of good health, ample sustenance, and true *nachas* from their children.”²¹



at a gathering and wears a *sheitel*, then even if President Eisenhower were to enter the room she would not take off the *sheitel*. This is not so with a *tichel*, which can be easily removed.

“... It is possible that she will say that she will wear a *tichel* properly. If she does so, then surely all is well. But experience has shown that this is not the case.

“Why place yourself in the path of temptation? We ask every day prior to *davening*, ‘*V'al tevi'einu lo ledai nisayon*—do not bring us to a [challenging] test.’ So how can we take upon ourselves such a test? Who is greater than Dovid

Hamelech, concerning whom the Gemara says that he completely vanquished his *yetzer hara*, and nevertheless he did not withstand the test.”

An interesting episode is recounted by Rabbi Zev Litenatsky:

Upon his engagement with his wife, Devorah, in 5719*, he merited to have a *yechidus* with the Rebbe. Present at this *yechidus* were the *chosson*, the *kallah*, and their fathers.

During the *yechidus*, the question came up how Devorah would cover her hair after their marriage. Her sisters lived in Israel at the time, and they all covered their hair with

A PARTIAL SHEITEL

Rabbi Mendel Nemes related:

“When my mother was pregnant with me in 5718,* she and my father came to see the Rebbe to ask for a *bracha*. At the time, it was the custom among some *frumme* women to wear a partial *sheitel* covered with a kerchief. At the time the Rebbe had been encouraging married women to cover their hair with a *sheitel*. When the Rebbe saw my mother he said to her, ‘A half a *sheitel* is a half a *bracha*, a whole *sheitel* is a whole *bracha*.’

“After giving them a *bracha*, the Rebbe asked to see my father privately and when my mother left the room, he opened a drawer and took out some

money. It was a pretty large sum for those days. The Rebbe then instructed my father to go to Manhattan and find out where the Broadway actors buy their wigs and to buy my mother the nicest *sheitel* he could find.”

In a letter, the Rebbe expressed similar sentiments to a partial *sheitel*. In reply to someone who wrote about wearing a *sheitel* that will cover all the hair except for “two fingers’ in front,” the Rebbe responded:

“I’m not sure whom you are trying to fool. One cannot fool Hashem and one cannot even fool the entire world — one can only fool oneself. What possible benefit can be derived from this?”²²

* 5719-1959, 5718-1958

UNITE TOGETHER

In a landmark letter dated 6 Tishrei 5715*, addressed to many individual women and women's organizations, the Rebbe emphasizes the necessity of wearing a *sheitel*, and the importance that *anash* women unite together to influence their colleagues in this regard:

"Without going into the reasons why certain ideals were not upheld in the homes of *anash*, in dress and in the education of their children, I would like to make you all aware, that from today onwards, everyone, without exception, should unite with the *anash* women who wear sheitels, give their children a true *chassidishe* education, and lead a truly *chassidishe* home in all details.

"May Hashem help you all, that you should see the truth, that it is not such a hard thing, and it is not something to be embarrassed of, *chas veshalom*. On the contrary, you should be proud of this, that you have the strength to not be ashamed of the fact that when walking in the street friends and acquaintances will recognize that here goes a Yiddishe woman who upholds *das Moshe v'Yisroel*—so much so, that she does not want to hide it."²³

tichels, which is what she wanted to do, even though it is the custom for Lubavitcher women to cover their hair with a *sheitel*.

The Rebbe asked Devorah if there was something on her mind, and she brought this up. It led to a long discussion between the Rebbe and Devorah—lasting about 45 minutes—in which she explained her position, and the Rebbe explained to her why *tichels* are problematic. The Rebbe said, "Imagine yourself coming to a wedding, where everybody is all dressed up in their nicest clothes and all the women are wearing *sheitels*, but you are wearing a *tichel*. You will feel uncomfortable, because you won't look as nice as them."

The Rebbe added that when something feels uncomfortable, then people tend to discard it after a time, which is why it is better to prevent any such problem ever coming up.

After the *yechidus*, Devorah agreed to cover her hair with a *sheitel*, and immediately went to purchase one.¹⁰



Constant Demand

The Rebbe's great push for women to wear a *sheitel* expressed itself in many ways throughout the early years of the Rebbe's *nesius*. From letters to individuals, personal conversations in *yechidus*, or just a remark during a *sicha*, the Rebbe demanded this very much.

As Reb Moshe Levertov wrote in his diary: "In general, everything that the Rebbe speaks about with a passion, the Rebbe demands very much. For example, the Rebbe expressed regarding women covering their hair with a *sheitel* that he will carry through with *mesiras nefesh* ('*er vet durchfieren mit mesiras nefesh*')."¹¹

In the earlier years of the Rebbe's *nesius* (and even earlier, during the Friediker Rebbe's *nesius*) the Rebbe would participate in the weddings of Chassidim as the *mesader kiddushin*.¹² In the years following Yud Shevat 5711*, the Rebbe laid down several conditions to his participation at weddings, including that the *chosson* should grow a beard and that the *kallah* should wear a *sheitel*.

Similarly, before the wedding of Reb Shmuel and Mirel Spalter, the *chosson* had a *yechidus* with the Rebbe. During the *yechidus* the Rebbe told him that if he cannot afford a *sheitel*, he should go to the *mazkirus* office to receive funds to purchase a nice *sheitel* ("a *sheine sheitel*") for his *kallah*.¹³

By 5723*, the Rebbe had stopped physically participating in Chassidim's weddings. Before the wedding of Rabbi Shmuel Lew, the father of the *kallah*, Mr. Zalmon Jaffe,

requested that the Rebbe participate in the wedding as *mesader kiddushin*. A few days before the wedding Rabbi Hodakov asked the *chosson*, Rabbi Lew, if the *kallah* had two *sheitels*, so that when one is being washed the other one can be worn.

Ultimately, as a rare exception, the Rebbe was *mesader kiddushin* at their wedding, the last time he did so.

Head Held High

Shortly after her engagement, Mrs. Chana Sharfstein had a *yechidus* with the Rebbe. To her surprise, the Rebbe asked if she was planning on wearing a *sheitel*. She answered honestly: “No, I’m not planning on wearing a *sheitel*.”

The Rebbe looked at her with a smile and said: “*Un farvos nit* - and why not?”

“I’m living in Boston,” Mrs. Sharfstein replied. “All my friends are nice observant girls who come from observant homes, and none of my friends are planning on wearing a *sheitel*. Only old people wear *sheitels*.”

“Are you going to keep your hair covered?” the Rebbe asked.

“Yes,” Mrs. Sharfstein confirmed. “Everyone in Boston wears hats; I’m planning on wearing a hat as well.”

And that was the end of that.

Over a year passed, and gradually Mrs. Sharfstein began to realize that many of her neighbors and friends were wearing *sheitels* and they didn’t look too bad in one. Slowly, she began to reconsider, although practically she had no

BE GENTLE

“You write that you tried to speak to the person about covering her hair with a *tichel* [but you were not successful] and you did not want to apply force or make a commotion.

“[You were correct in doing so,] for *chas veshalom vechas veshalom* [to act in too forceful a manner], for the path to success is not through anger but through gentleness. Merely explain that *kissui harosh* brings with it success from Hashem’s hand for herself, her husband and her children *sheyichyu*.”²⁴

plans to purchase one.

One day, in the beginning of *chodesh Elul*, a letter from the Rebbe arrived in the mail addressed to “Mrs. Chana Sharfstein.” The letter’s arrival was a bit unexpected; Mrs. Sharfstein hadn’t corresponded with the Rebbe recently.

She opened the envelope to the sight of a typed letter taking up a full page, with the Rebbe’s signature on the bottom.

The letter, which began with discussing the significance of the new year in regards to *teshuvah*, contained some surprising content.

The Rebbe wrote that he wants to institute amongst the women of Chabad something that hasn’t been instituted



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before: the idea of wearing a *sheitel*. And he wants every single woman in the Chabad community to wear a *sheitel*, “without an exception” - the Rebbe underlined.

The Rebbe continued that Mrs. Sharfstein could be a leader amongst the women to influence people.

But the mind blowing part came at the end: the Rebbe brought up every argument that Chana had posed in her *yeichidus* as to why she would not wear a *sheitel* and

discussed them.

Mrs. Sharfstein recounted the Rebbe's words: “The fact that your friends are not planning to wear a *sheitel*, that should not make you feel that you shouldn't wear one; you can be the one to be the leader, and show them the way.

“As to what you say that you would be uncomfortable with wearing a *sheitel* - when you wear a *sheitel* and you walk down the street, carry yourself high and feel proud to

A YOUNG SHEITEL MACHER AND THE REBBETZIN

Mrs. Freeda Kugel, the owner of a flourishing *sheitel* business, had the *zechus* of taking care of the Rebbetzin's *sheitels* for almost 20 years. In an interview, she shared her story of success, which she attributes solely to the Rebbe's *brachos*.

In 5722*, the Rebbe instructed her to move from Eretz Yisroel to America with her family. Freeda had a job as a beautician in Eretz Yisroel and continued in the field when she came to America, dealing with hair and wig styling as well.

When she began to work in *sheitels*, the Rebbe strongly encouraged her work and *bentched* her business generously. The Rebbe said (paraphrased): “*Sheitels* are a good business... you will be very successful... other *sheitel machers* will buy *sheitels* from you... every woman needs at least two *sheitels*, a week-day one and a ‘*Shabbosdik*’ one.”

Freeda related: “At the time the Rebbe said all this to me, it was as if he was telling me I would one day be an astronaut and fly to the moon! I couldn't see why other *sheitel machers* would want to buy *sheitels* from me, and I was dealing with cheap synthetic *sheitels* that certainly couldn't be called ‘*Shabbosdik*.’”

The Rebbe's encouragement continued throughout the years. When Freeda moved into her one-family home on Union Street, the Rebbe gave \$500 of his own money to participate in the purchase. “We didn't know that this home would eventually become part of the business!” Freeda related.

One day in 5727*, the telephone in Freeda's Montgomery Street office rang. “This is Mrs. Schneerson from President Street,” the voice said. The Rebbetzin continued; “I would like to buy a *sheitel*.”

“I suspect that it was the Rebbe who sent the

Rebbetzin to an inexperienced young woman in a basement on Montgomery Street,” Freeda related. “The Rebbetzin could have easily gotten a much better wig from some fancy salon somewhere. Instead, she came to me. She always ordered the same *sheitel*: A short, small one with graceful lines in a color called ‘platinum silver.’

“The Rebbetzin became my most loyal customer, and my most important one. I would drop everything, cancel all appointments, whenever she was ready for me. If the Rebbetzin wanted me Tuesday at 4:00, that is when I went to her. I put my heart and soul into taking care of her old *sheitels* and making new ones for her.

“The Rebbetzin dressed beautifully, impeccably, and modestly. She wore a full *sheitel* - not a half *sheitel* with a hat, not a hat with a little hair showing, but a full *sheitel*, and she wore it every day. This I know from the frequency with which she required my services, and the obvious wear and tear on the *sheitels* themselves.”

Regarding the quality of the *sheitels*, Freeda received much guidance and encouragement from the Rebbe as well. For many years, she would import cheap synthetic *sheitels* from Korea.

They were affordable, but didn't last longer than a few months and they definitely could not be called ‘*Shabbosdik*’ by any means. But as the years went by, the Rebbe's *brachos* became fulfilled and Freeda began manufacturing her own *sheitels*, on the highest level of quality.

“Both the Rebbe and the Rebbetzin clearly conveyed to me that although women have to wear wigs, it doesn't mean they have to look ugly,” Freeda recalled. “I think that is one reason why the Rebbe encouraged me in my work: He wanted women to be able to wear *sheitels* covering all their hair and to look nice at the same time.”²⁵

let the world know that you're a proud Jewish woman, and therefore you are wearing a sheitel with happiness..."

Mrs. Sharfstein immediately decided to write a note to the Rebbe informing the Rebbe of her decision to wear a sheitel.

Just a few days after Mrs. Sharfstein sent her note, she received a phone call from Rabbi Krinsky that there was something important waiting for her at the Rebbe's office.

"Of course, my husband immediately went to 770, and I impatiently awaited his return," Mrs. Sharfstein related. "My husband returned from 770 and told me 'you won't believe what happened.' He takes out a check and says: 'Look! This is what I received in 770, this is from the Rebbe.'

"In a small white envelope was a personal check from the Rebbe, written in his personal handwriting, and with it came a special message that I should buy the most beautiful sheitel I could find; he said I should wear it in great happiness and joy."¹⁴

Added Benefit

As mentioned, the Rebbe pointed to wearing a sheitel as a source of great blessing.

In response to an individual who asked the Rebbe's advice "regarding your brother having male children, and healthy children," the Rebbe responded unequivocally:

"You should also find out from your brother whether his wife is careful to observe *kissui harosh*. For the Zohar's statement is known that a woman's observance of *tznius* and especially *kissui harosh* brings about 'blessings of above and blessings of below, with wealth, with children and grandchildren, etc.'"¹⁵

In a telling letter to a Chossid in Australia, the Rebbe writes that the financial problems that were prevalent amongst the community were less because of the declining financial state of the country, and more because of the sheitel issue amongst *anash* women:

"In regards to what you wrote regarding your financial situation, as well as [the financial situation] by several *anash*: I cannot withhold my opinion on the matter, for it is important to other people, and it is [regarding] very important things. My opinion is, that of the main reasons for the lack of success until now, is not so much the natural reason—the financial situation of the country now, for many have overcome this—rather it is the issue of *sheitels* by the *anash* women.


"And although the *limmud zechus* (not only a *limmud zechus*, but the truth of the matter is) that [the sheitel issue] is because they became used to this in the old country [i.e. Russia], and there this [i.e. the issue of wearing a sheitel]

was fraught with much difficulty, and once one becomes accustomed to something it becomes permitted to him, *chas veshalom*. It is known, however, that a *limmud zechus*—although it is of great value—does not change the situation, that ultimately, the issue of *sheitel* is not okay at all."¹⁶

Rabbi Yitzchok Arnold related:

Five years passed after my wife and I were married, but to our dismay, we still had no children. My wife remembered a letter she wrote to the Rebbe long before, when she was a *kallah*, about covering her hair as a married woman. At that time, the Rebbe had answered her, "If you cover your hair with a *sheitel*, as a married woman should, you will have children."

At her next *yechidus* with the Rebbe, she took that letter with her. And when she asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* for children, she put the letter on the table and said, "I have a promise." And then she burst into tears.

The Rebbe recommended a particular fertility clinic, where he suggested she see a doctor whose name he provided. We went there, and fourteen months later our first son, Shlomo, was born.¹⁷ 

* Special thanks to Mrs. Sara Morozow for reviewing this article.

1. Toras Menachem Hisvaaduyos 5742, pg. 2190-2191.

2. Vol. 3 pg. 126a.

3. Shulchan Aruch Even Ha'ezer 21:2.

4. Igros Kodesh Admur Harayat"z vol. 6 pg. 411.

5. Igros Kodesh vol. 15 pg. 198.

6. Ibid.

7. Igros Kodesh vol. 5 pg. 232.

8. Igros Kodesh vol. 19 pg. 428.

9. Rosh Chodesh Elul 5714 (Toras Menachem vol. 12 pg. 188).

10. Here's My Story, Shabbos Tazria-Metzora 5777.

11. Mekadesh Yisrael pg. 134.

12. See "Mekadesh Yisroel" - A Chassidisher Derher Issue 66. "לבנין עדי עדי" - A Chassidisher Derher Issue 189.

13. Mekadesh Yisrael pg. 213.

14. Head Held High, Living Torah program 156.

15. Igros Kodesh vol. 7 pg. 259.

16. Translated from the original letter.

17. Here's My Story, Shabbos Parshas Bereishis 5777.

18. Teshura Blum Slavin 5755 pg. 21.

19. Igros Kodesh vol. 16 pg. 330.

20. Toras Menachem vol. 11 pg. 65.

21. Igros Kodesh vol. 8 pg. 217.

22. Igros Kodesh vol. 9 pg. 325.

23. Igros Kodesh vol. 10 pg. 6.

24. Igros Kodesh vol. 6 pg. 117.

25. This story has been culled from an interview conducted by the N'shei Chabad Newsletter, February 2002.