



“WE WERE ALL AWESTRUCK”

*Description of life with
the Rebbe—5713*

Presented here is a translation of a beautiful letter written 70 years ago, in Teves 5713*, by Reb Sholom Feldman. Sholom was a bochur from Kfar Chabad, one of the first who managed the daunting task of crossing the Atlantic Ocean, coming to study in 770 in the Rebbe's presence. In this letter to his friend, Reb Leibel Raskin, Sholom describes in vivid detail his arrival, his first impressions of seeing the Rebbe, attending farbrengens, and entering yechidus.



B”H. Tuesday, 7 Teves, 5713*.

My esteemed and dear friend, Leib,
Sholom U’bracha.

Some three weeks ago I arrived in the Holy of Holies, the home of the [Friediker] Rebbe נ”ע and the home of the Rebbe שליט”א.

I arrived in New York early in the morning and a delegation of *bochurim* came to greet me, including: Yosef Blizinsky, Tzvi Lerman, Yoel Kahn, Bentzion [Friedman] of Poland from Tashkent, Menachem Shemtov, and another American *bochur* who drove their rental car.

The trip [to 770] was a bit long. You can imagine how I felt realizing that in just a few moments I would be standing in the Rebbe's *daled amos*. The boys, especially Tzvi Lerman, kept telling me about the place I was about to go to: “The Rebbe routinely walks on this exact street!” they said. “It’s possible that we’ll step out of this car and see the Rebbe!” I

was awestruck.

As it was the morning, we stopped off on the way to use the *mikveh*. The feeling I got when using this *mikveh* wasn’t exactly the same as when I used the pool in Lod.

We arrived at the yeshiva in the middle of *seder Chassidus*. I didn’t overthink it; I just sat down and began learning like all the other *bochurim*. But my heart was falling out of my chest...

We davened and ate, but then I had to go out for a few hours with Yosef Blizinsky to take care of my [visa] papers which were still not in order.

By the time we got back, everyone was standing and waiting for the Rebbe to arrive for Mincha. Suddenly I noticed everyone’s eyes turn towards the door, and behold—the Rebbe walked into the room. The Rebbe stands in a section of the room where no one else stands. Everyone’s gaze is centralized to one place: on the Rebbe. It was quite a moving experience

to see how when the Rebbe is in the room, everyone else is *botul*, almost nonexistent.

This Mincha was the first time I saw the Rebbe.

On Thursday night, at about 2:30 a.m., I went into *yechidus*.

At first, I was completely numb. All I saw was a hand, white like snow, giving the Rebbe the note that I had written beforehand. But then I came back to myself, paid attention and retained what the Rebbe said.

At the end, the Rebbe *bentched* me: “You should learn Torah with *yiras Shamayim*, you should become a Chossid, *yarei Shamayim*, and *lamdan*, and we should derive great pleasure from you, materially and spiritually.”

It is impossible to describe the feeling just before being admitted into the Rebbe’s room, and then being called in, the door opening up... It’s just something you have to experience on your own.

I was privileged to have already been at three farbrengens. At the first one, I had a good place near the Rebbe where I was able to see and hear everything in detail.

When we hear a *sicha* or *maamar* from the Rebbe, we pay attention not just to what is being said, but more importantly to what is being conveyed “between the lines.” This is of course something I cannot explain in a letter—it’s something you need to experience for yourself.

About the farbrengen of Yud-Tes Kislev, Yosef Blizinsky already wrote in a letter to Tzvi Lipsh.

On the first Shabbos of Chanukah, the Rebbe recited a deep *maamar* about the fact that the Chanukah lights are kindled specifically after sunset. He explained the contraction that happens to the Divine light through the partition in between the world of *Atzilus* and the subsequent three worlds, and how the purpose of everything is for the creation of our physical world, as explained in Tanya *perek* 38. The Rebbe offered three distinct reasons and explanations for this. Then he discussed the difference between the lamps in the *Beis Hamikdash* that were kindled during the day, and those of Shabbos and Yom Tov that illuminate the night. There were also a few short *sichos* continuing the theme of the *maamar*.

On the second Shabbos of Chanukah there was another farbrengen, this time extending throughout the day literally until sunset. The Rebbe made *kiddush* and said *l’chaim* a few times on full glasses.

At the beginning of the farbrengen the Rebbe said, “I will now repeat a selection of a *maamar* from the Tzemach Tzedek. You don’t have to stand up and I won’t have to strain myself [because it won’t be delivered like a traditional *maamar*]. So it will be easier for you and easier for me.”

Then there was a long *sicha* explaining the *possuk*, “היתה לי דמעותי לחם יומם ולילה באמור אלי כל היום איה אלקיך—My tears were my sustenance day and night, when they said to me all day ‘where is your G-d.’”

The Rebbe cried while saying his words. He said: “Why are my tears my sustenance day and night? It’s because they ask me ‘Where is your G-d’ *all day*. Of course, while davening and learning, or while sitting at a farbrengen, we always feel that elevation. But what about the rest of the day? Where do we see upon you that Hashem is your G-d?”

When speaking these words, the Rebbe started crying loudly. He placed his hand over his forehead and cried so profusely that everyone in the room was awestruck.

While the Rebbe was still crying, with a covered face, he continued in a soft, still voice: “He might even daven with a *geshmak*, yet when he comes home he chooses the best portion of food, and if it’s missing salt he adds salt. So how can he try to connect himself with Hashem? He sends Hashem up to the highest heavens while he himself remains in the lowest realms. Then he complains that he doesn’t have a *geshmak* in davening, that he can’t seem to really connect with his learning, that he can’t have a positive influence on his students...”

The Rebbe continued: “If he would only know who he truly was [i.e. what level he is really on], all these questions would go away.”

When saying these words, the Rebbe’s cries were extremely deep and painful.

Then the Rebbe concluded: “The Gemara relates that there were two jesters who brought happiness to other Yidden, and as a reward they were given a good life in this world, in the next world, and a connection with *Atzmus U’mehus*. So why am I making you all sad?”

The Rebbe then continued with a *sicha* on a happier topic, and asked that we sing a joyous *niggun*, saying, “We need to make a move [spiritually]!”

I must conclude my letter now, however I will add this: At one point in the farbrengen the Rebbe told an individual to say *l’chaim* on a full cup and said to him, “The Rebbe is still the same; he is only garbed now in different clothes, more refined clothes...”

The Rebbe also related that the Mezricher Maggid once told the Alter Rebbe a story that included an episode of Eliyahu Hanavi revealing himself, and the Alter Rebbe said, “I want to see him...” The Rebbe explained that all the Rabbeim had this revelation, it’s only that it never came down to the lowest realms of our reality (“למטה מעשרה טפחים”).

I witnessed and heard all of the above in great detail. As stated, when we hear a *maamar* or a *sicha*, the main thing we hear is what’s conveyed “between the lines,” which of course is something [that I cannot share in this letter].

Please write to me what the Rebbe’s answer to you was.

In your letter, please write to me about the progress of your [visa] papers [to be able to come here].

Sholom Feldman 