



לזכות הגה"ח הרב אברהם ליב וזוגתו שיחיו שוחאט
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר למדינת ונצואלה מאז שנת תשמ"ה
להצלחה רבה בכל המצטרך

נדפס ע"י בנם הרה"ת שלום דובער שי' שוחאט ומשפחתו



Upholding the House of Lubavitch

Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka

For many Chassidim, the Rebbetzin remained somewhat unknown throughout her lifetime. As someone who avoided the public eye, it was primarily after her *histalkus* that Chassidim began sharing their encounters and personal experiences publicly. As we learn more about the Rebbetzin, we see her towering personality, her *tzidkus*, and her devotion to the Rebbe and Lubavitch.

In this article we will attempt, aided by a collection of insightful stories, to share a glimpse into the Rebbetzin's life, and her key role in *dor hashvi'i*.

In a fascinating conversation during the *shiva*, the Rebbe mentions that the Rebbetzin, like all *tzaddikim*, is considered “alive” even after her passing, and moreover—she is even more alive than during her lifetime.¹ We can therefore be certain that she bestows her blessings upon us, as we continue fulfilling the Rebbe's work to bring the final and complete *geulah*, speedily.²

Our Rebbetzin

In order to better understand the role that the Rebbetzin plays in the *nesius*, let us take a look at a *sicha* spoken by the Rebbe during the year following her *histalkus*.³ The Rebbe references a lengthy discussion in Chassidus about the *Avos* and the *Imahos* of our people: The role of the *Imahos* is to channel the spiritual energy and lofty levels of the *Avos* into this physical world.

For this reason we find that the *Imahos* were a step ahead of the *Avos* when it came to matters that were more practical: Avraham wanted Yishmael to stay with him, because he saw Yishmael at his spiritual source where he was indeed in a good state. But Sarah knew that in the physical world, Yishmael was far from perfect and needed to be sent away. Similarly, Yitzchok wanted to give the *brachos* to Esav, because at his spiritual source there was immense energy. But Rivka knew that in the physical world it was Yaakov who would properly utilize the *brachos* instead.

The same is true about the Rabbeim of Chabad, the Rebbe explained. The work of the Rabbeim in the physical world is accomplished through their Rebbetzins.

Despite the privacy and deep humility with which the Rebbetzin lived her life, staying as far away as possible from the public eye, those who had the privilege of knowing and serving the Rebbetzin share countless stories which display the incredible role the Rebbetzin served at the Rebbe's side, caring for the welfare of Chassidim, giving *brachos*, preserving and strengthening the Rebbe's initiatives, and protecting the house of Lubavitch

at its most critical moments.

Below we will explore a few of those cherished accounts.

The Baby Should Hear The *Farbrengen*

The following story teaches us about the Rebbetzin's great interest in educating young children in the ways of Chassidus, even from the moment of birth.

Mrs. Esther Sternberg relates:

Her father, Reb Zalman Gurary, was sent by the Rebbe to Eretz Yisroel as his *shliach* to bring the crown for the first children's *sefer Torah*, which was to be completed on Chof Av 5741*. Mrs. Sternberg was about to give birth at the time, and due to some complications her father was quite concerned about her wellbeing. It seems that Reb Zalman mentioned his concern to the Rebbetzin, and when Mrs. Sternberg gave birth on 17 Av, the Rebbetzin called her at the hospital twice a day to inquire how she and the baby were doing. The Rebbetzin also called the Sternberg household every evening during this time period to speak with the oldest daughter and check on the other children.

On Chof Av the Rebbetzin called Mrs. Sternberg and during the conversation she asked: "Do you have a way to hear tonight's *farbrengen*?" Mrs. Sternberg said that she does.

The Rebbetzin said: "If so, it would be a good thing



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for you to take your *meidele* (baby girl) with you into bed, and you should put the receiver between your ear and hers so that she can listen to the *farbrengen*, because it is very important for a child to hear Chassidus.”

Mrs. Sternberg was amazed by what she heard. In all her years as a wife, mother, daughter and granddaughter of prominent Chassidim, she had never heard of something like this, that even such a newborn baby should hear the Rebbe’s voice. She readily promised the Rebbetzin that she would do so. She later said that to her surprise the baby was calm the entire time the Rebbe was speaking.

A Caring Mother

The Rebbetzin is known to have cared deeply about the wellbeing of the *shluchim* and their families.

Mrs. Bassie Azimov related that she once visited the Rebbetzin during the 5730s*, at a time when several American families had moved on *shlichus* to France. This was quite a novelty then, as the number of *shluchim* around the world was still fairly small. The Rebbetzin spoke to Mrs. Azimov about the difficulty that is involved in moving to a new country, not speaking the local language, and so on. The Rebbetzin appeared to be very concerned. In an attempt to “calm” the Rebbetzin, Mrs. Azimov began to explain that it was not so strenuous since these are Lubavitcher couples who had been educated to go out on *mesiras nefesh*. The Rebbetzin said, “This is indeed the *chinuch* that you received, though not everyone received that *chinuch*, and we need to sympathize with their hardship.”

Another story is related by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok

Greenberg:

“In 5743*, I traveled on *shlichus* to the yeshiva in Seattle. It was shortly before we were set to leave, we already knew exactly who was in our group, when we found out that another *bochur* was joining us.

“Many years later, that *bochur*, Rabbi Dov Hillel Klein, told us how he came to join our group.

“One day, he was walking up the stairs at 770 on the way to the office of the *hanhala* of the yeshiva to try and receive a *shlichus*. After passing the doorway leading to the second floor, he saw an elderly woman in the stairwell. He immediately realized that it was the Rebbetzin.

“The Rebbetzin asked him, ‘Why do you look so down?’ He explained that he really wanted to go on *shlichus*, but since he learned in Tiferes Bachurim he was officially not eligible. The Rebbetzin said that she will see what she can do. Within a few days he was added to the list of *bochurim* going to Seattle. At that time, not even all *bochurim* from Tomchei Temimim in Morristown would go on *shlichus*, but the Rebbetzin as a mother stepped in and took care of him!”

Rabbi Shlomo Bistritzky relates:

“I was learning in yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel on the 25th of Cheshvan 5748* when the verdict was announced that Chabad had won the appeal on the *sefarim* case. Two days later it was announced that the *sefarim* would finally be returned to their rightful home in 770 on Beis Kislev.

“In true fashion of ‘better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission,’ a friend and I decided to travel to New York to celebrate the final return of the *sefarim*. As is well known, the Rebbe was not pleased when the *bochurim* left *sefer hayeshiva* to witness the return of the *sefarim*. My father, being a staunch Chossid, was disappointed in my choice as well, and for the entire

*📅 5730s-1970s, 5743-1983, 5748-1987

“...At least you know that Lubavitcher Bochurim, including your son Shloimy, their gashmius is their Rebbe! Go easy on him.”

week to follow he reminded and reprimanded me for the bad choice I made.

“On Friday night, my father (as the head of Hatzalah) had a tradition of visiting the Rebbetzin to check in and see how she was feeling, how the Rebbe was feeling, and then go home before the Rebbe arrived. That Friday night, my father came home and gave me a very warm

HUMILITY

The Rebbetzin once related that she received a tray as a wedding gift – a tray which belonged to the Tzemach Tzedek – from her uncle and aunt, the Horenstein family. “I never use it,” she said, “for who am I, a simple woman, to use these holy objects. I only look at it, and then I feel connected to the family.”

This story parallels the episode recorded in Reshimas HaYoman, when the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed the Rebbe that he should begin wearing Tefillin of Shimusha Rabba and Raavad. The Frierdiker Rebbe told the Rebbe that he does not have an extra pair in his possession, so he said that he would order new Tefillin for him. He added, that although he did have in his possession the Tefillin of Shimusha Rabba and Raavad used by the Rebbe Rashab, “I know that you will not be willing to wear them. I also fear using them; only once in a while do I put them on.”

shalom aleichem! I asked my father, ‘In what honor did I receive such a warm *shalom aleichem?*’ He said: ‘I was by the Rebbetzin and she asked how all of the children were doing. I said that you came from Eretz Yisroel and that I am very disappointed.’ I became very anxious, my father had told the Rebbetzin! My father continued: ‘The Rebbetzin looked at me and said, “Leibel, other *bochurim* in other communities, when they want to make trouble, they go to a movie, they find other things to do. At least you know that Lubavitcher *bochurim*, including your son Shloimy, their *gashmius* is their Rebbe! Go easy on him.”’

“I share this story because it illustrates the very personal, deeply rooted love the Rebbetzin had—as a partner with the Rebbe—for each and every one of us. Many of us perhaps did not merit to see it personally, but we have a Rebbetzin that only saw our goodness and our potential. She loves each and every one of us unconditionally.”

Another incredible story that brings out the deep care the Rebbetzin shared with the Rebbe for the Chassidim is the following:

Someone once knocked on the door of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin’s house in the middle of the night and apologized for knocking so late. The Rebbetzin said: “Don’t you know that my husband and I are all about being here for others?”⁴

The Power of Brachos

On more than one occasion, the Rebbe referenced the potency of the Rebbetzin’s *brachos* and their ability to affect positive outcomes.

Once, the Lubavitch Women’s Organization sent the Rebbetzin a bouquet of flowers, together with a list of

individuals for whom *brachos* were requested. Setting aside the flowers for the Rebbetzin, the secretary passed on the letter to the Rebbe who, observing that it was addressed to his wife, asked his secretary to give it to her, saying, “She is also capable of giving blessings.”⁵

Dr. Moshe Feldman once asked the Rebbe about the difference between the Rebbe’s *brachos* and the Rebbetzin’s *brachos*. The Rebbe explained: “For my *brachos* one ought to prepare a proper *keili* (receptacle), for the *brachos* of the Rebbetzin one does not need a *keili*.”⁶

A Bracha For Long Life

Mr. Isaac Milstein related: “My family emigrated from Russia to Israel and in 5738* we moved to New York. My mother found work as a stylist at Freeda Wigs in Crown Heights. Once, the Rebbetzin called the store asking to speak to the manager, Mrs. Kugel. My mother, who answered the phone, said “Mrs. Kugel is out, would you like to leave a message?” and asked who was calling. The Rebbetzin replied asking her to convey that Mrs. Schneerson called and asked if Mrs. Kugel could call back at a good time.

My mother then realized that it was the Rebbetzin on the line and said: “Rebbetzin! It is a great honor to speak with you, and I will relay the message.”

The Rebbetzin then said to my mother: “I can hear in your voice that something is bothering you, is everything okay?” My mother burst out crying. She explained that

our family recently immigrated to America, and that my grandmother had suddenly fallen ill, and the doctors say that she has only a few months or maximum a year to live.

The Rebbetzin then switched to speaking in Russian and gave a *bracha* that my grandmother will be alright and that she will emerge from the whole ordeal in peace. And so it was. Against all of the doctors’ bleak predictions, my grandmother survived and lived another 23 years, from 5738* until 5761*.

Another story is told by Rabbi Hershel Kesselman, shliach in Southgate, England:

“In the first years after our marriage, we lived on the second floor of the building which housed the Albany Bakery, on the corner of Eastern Parkway and Albany Ave. At the time, my wife would give private art lessons to women.

“Every once in a while, the Rebbetzin would travel somewhere by car, and on her way back the driver would stop at Albany Bakery to pick up an order. On one occasion in Elul 5747*, my wife went out to the balcony with another woman who she was teaching. This woman had been married for 10 years and was still childless.

“As they were conversing, the Rebbetzin’s car suddenly pulled up in front of the store, and the driver entered the store to pick up the Rebbetzin’s order. Meanwhile, the Rebbetzin opened the car window and looked up at the two women chatting on the balcony.

My wife, being a daughter of the Sudak household, had the privilege of visiting the Rebbetzin a few times, and immediately recognized her. She told the women with whom she was speaking, “Let’s go inside! We don’t



want to just stand here and look at the Rebbetzin, invading her privacy.” But the woman would not budge, and instead remained standing on the balcony, where she and the Rebbetzin gazed at each other for a while, until the driver returned and they left.

Exactly nine months after this episode, on Lag Baomer 5748*, which was already three months after the Rebbetzin passed away, she gave birth to a baby girl, and named her Chaya Mushka after the Rebbetzin, in whose merit she finally gave birth after ten painful years. This was a *bracha* from the Rebbetzin by just looking in the eyes of a childless woman without a word being exchanged.”

At The Rebbe's Side

There are many stories demonstrating how the Rebbetzin gave advice and offered suggestions of her own volition, which Chassidim later realized were identical to what the Rebbe said:

Rabbi Levi Azimov of Paris relates:

“During their first years of shlichus, my parents, Rabbi Shmuel and Bassie Azimov, once traveled to the Rebbe on the chartered flight that started off in Israel and passed through Europe. Before leaving back home, they visited the Rebbetzin and she asked them, ‘When are you going?’ to which they replied, ‘This evening, with the charter.’

“About a half an hour later, the Rebbetzin again asked them, ‘When will you be going?’ and they answered, ‘This evening.’ When the Rebbetzin repeated the question a third time a bit later, the Azimovs were puzzled. Was this the Rebbetzin’s way of hinting to them that they should stay and not travel? In the end however, they left with everyone else that very evening.

“Sometime after take off, the pilot announced that one of the engines caught fire and they would have to make an emergency landing. At that very moment, the Rebbe who was at the time in 770 walked out of his office and asked the secretaries if there was any news about the charter.

“Miraculously they landed safely, and immediately called the Rebbe’s secretariat to notify the Rebbe of what had occurred. The Rebbe gave them a few instructions, among them that they should recite one of the Rebbe’s *maamarim*. The next day they all left again homeward bound, only this time landing safely at their destination.”

In retrospect, it is fascinating that the Rebbe and the

IS THERE NO MAAMAR FROM OUR REBBE?!

When Reb Chanina Sperlin was preparing for his wedding which took place in Elul 5747*, the Rebbetzin asked him which *maamar* he planned on reciting. Upon replying that he planned on reciting the *maamar* of the Frierdiker Rebbe from Yud-Daled Kislev 5689*, the day of the Rebbe’s *chasunah*, the Rebbetzin asked “*Un fun'em man iz nita*—Is there no *maamar* from my husband?” After further discussing the matter with the Rebbetzin, Reb Chanina recited both the *maamar* of the Frierdiker Rebbe as well as the Rebbe’s *maamar*.

The Frierdiker Rebbe explained that the reason we say a *maamar* at the wedding is in order to invite the Rabbeim to the wedding. Here the Rebbetzin was intimating that it would be most proper for a Chossid to invite his own Rebbe to his wedding.

Rebbetzin both sensed the issue with the charter before it occurred.

In a similar vein, Reb Meir Harlig relates that he would go every day to the Rebbe’s house to pick up a thermos of tea for the Rebbe. Once, the Rebbetzin opened the door and upon asking him how he was doing, Reb Meir told the Rebbetzin that his son had an infection in his throat and the doctor said that his son should have his tonsils removed. The Rebbetzin objected, saying that the tonsils is something that Hashem placed inside the body and it should not be removed. The next day, when Reb Meir again came to the Rebbe’s house to bring the thermos to 770, the Rebbetzin told him that she had spoken with the Rebbe about the matter and the Rebbe agreed with her that the tonsils need not be removed. Indeed, the child healed completely without his tonsils being removed.

These stories give us just a glimpse of the Rebbetzin’s holiness and heavenly insight, like our *Imahos* and *tzidkaniyos* of days bygone.

The Rebbe explained: “For my brachos one ought to prepare a proper keili, for the brachos of the Rebbetzin one does not need a keili.”

At A Critical Moment

A week and a half after the *histalkus*, on Motzei Shabbos Parshas Teruma 5748*, the Rebbe came back down after Maariv in his house and spoke a *sicha*. The Rebbe spoke about the Rebbetzin and related that during her testimony in the court case of the *sefarim*, when she was asked, “To whom do you think belong the *sefarim*; to your father, or to the Chassidim?” she responded, “They belong to the Chassidim because my father belonged to the Chassidim.” The Rebbe explained that with her answer, the Rebbetzin brought about that this sentiment should manifest in the verdict of an earthly, non-Jewish court, bringing it further into this physical world.

This was reminiscent of what the Alter Rebbe stressed with regards to the victory of Yud-Tes Kislev, that even the nations of the world agreed to the study of Chassidus and they all admitted that it was a miraculous episode.

The Rebbetzin, like Sarah Imenu about whom the Torah says the expression “*hinei ba’ohel*,” was always modest and unassuming, keeping away from the public eye. Although she was at the center of the world’s attention as the Rebbe’s wife, she amazingly succeeded to continue her work privately, without the honor and glory she could have received on the merit of being the Rebbetzin.

Yet, although she wished to remain in the background, whenever Lubavitch stood at a crossroads or a critical juncture, when the future of Chassidus was challenged, she had no problem standing at the helm for all to see.

The Rebbetzin knew in advance the difficulties involved in a deposition. She knew that she would be

videotaped and that the video would be shown to the judge and its transcript would be read aloud in a courtroom, which would be packed with people including many Chassidim. This spotlight is precisely what she always tried to avoid. Nevertheless, she went on *mesiras nefesh* to protect Lubavitch, and like the Rebbe said she would, she succeeded in her testimony beyond all expectations.

It is interesting to note, that many years earlier when the Friediker Rebbe was imprisoned and subsequently exiled to Kostroma, it was the Rebbetzin whom the Friediker Rebbe selected to travel with him. Here too,



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Lubavitch and the future of Chassidus were in great danger, and again, the Rebbetzin was the one in exile together with her father the Frierdiker Rebbe.

Interestingly, in this very same testimony in court, the Rebbetzin mentioned that when the Frierdiker Rebbe was informed of his release, it was she who phoned to tell the family and Chassidim about his miraculous release.

This episode is similar to two other stories, where the Rebbetzin is known to have stood at the helm in a critical moment, ensuring that the future of Lubavitch was safeguarded.

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky relates:

“On the night of Shemini Atzeres 5738*, after having a major heart attack, the Rebbe’s life was in danger and the doctors wanted to take him to the hospital against his will. The rabbonim and *mazkirim*, frightened as we were, concluded that the doctors’ orders must be followed, when suddenly the Rebbetzin appeared on the scene. In her greatness and her steadfast *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe, she did not allow the doctors to take the Rebbe to the hospital. She said that ever since she knew the Rebbe, there was never a single moment that he was not in complete control over his life, and therefore she could not possibly agree that something be done against the Rebbe’s will. She assured the frightened Chassidim that all will surely be well.

“To have the courage and the *emunah* in the Rebbe to make such a decision, against the overwhelming opinion of all the doctors, in a situation of critical *pikuach nefesh*, can only be attributed to her strong recognition and extreme *bittul* to the Rebbe, way beyond what any of us can imagine.”

At another crossroad in the history of Lubavitch we yet again find the Rebbetzin playing a pivotal role. In 5710*, her involvement turned the tide as well. Rabbi Yosef Wineberg related that when the Rebbe refused to take upon himself the *nesius*, it was the Rebbetzin who told the Rebbe that if he would not take upon himself the *nesius*, all that the Frierdiker Rebbe built would go to waste.

Here again we see her intense *hiskashrus* to her father and to all the Rabbeim. Although she knew the personal price that would be involved in such a step, nevertheless she went on *mesiras nefesh*, paving the way for Lubavitch to carry on so the *dor hashvi’i* could finish the task started by the Alter Rebbe to bring the final *geulah*.

In the above-mentioned *sicha* from 5749*, the Rebbe says that Chassidus Chabad is all about transforming this physical world and revealing G-dliness within it. This task of the Rabbeim is achieved through their Rebbetzins, who relate to the world in a more tangible way. This

is just like the *Avos*, who were *neshamos* from *Atzilus* but they relied on the *Imahos* to channel their energy in the world, through *sefiras hamalchus*.

Hours Before The Histalkus

Rabbi Levi Shemtov of Riverdale, NY, relates:

“On 21 Shevat 5748*, en route to the hospital, the Rebbetzin conversed with my father-in-law, Dr. Feldman, regarding the upcoming wedding of his daughter (my wife), inquiring in detail about all of the preparations and how the *chossan* and *kallah* were doing. Despite being in tremendous pain, all the Rebbetzin expressed concern for was the welfare of a young couple.”

In the Final Moments of Galus

In a *sicha* delivered at the end of the *shiva*, the Rebbe explained that the Rebbetzin, as the daughter of the *nessi hador*, certainly shares her *zechusim* with everyone else, manifesting in *brachos* for each and every person in everything that they need, culminating in the greatest blessing for the *geulah ha’amitis v’hashleima*.⁷

The Rebbetzin continues to help us from on high through her *brachos* and *tefillos*. It remains up to us to learn from her ways, and as the Rebbe said, to emulate and perpetuate them,⁸ and to learn from her *mesiras nefesh*, to fight this last battle before the coming of Moshiach. May it be very soon, when we will finally merit to see the Rebbe and Rebbetzin, *teikef umiyad mamash*. **T**

1. 27 Shevat 5748; see chabad.org/2823586.
2. Much of this article is based on an essay by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Greenberg, shliach to Anchorage, Alaska.
3. Rosh Chodesh Kislev and Shabbos Parshas Toldos 5749; Sefer Hasichos 5749 vol. 1, pp. 84-85.
4. Chabad.org/5382765, 159:25.
5. Chabad.org/110745.
6. Chabad.org/5382765, 155:00.
7. Sefer Hasichos 5748 vol. 1, p. 273.
8. 24 Shevat 5748; chabad.org/1418737.