



לע"נ  
ר' משה בן ר' זלמן צבי ע"ה  
נלב"ע אסרו חג השבועות  
ה'תשע"ח  
תנ"צ'ב'ה'

נתרם ע"י נכדו  
הרה"ת ר' שלום דובער וזוגתו  
מרת ח' מושקא ומשפחתם שיחיו  
שוחאט

# THE REBBE'S FIRST CAMP

**CAMP EMUNAH —  
BNOS YAAKOV YEHUDAH**



## PRESENTED IN HONOR OF THE 70TH YEAR OF CAMP EMUNAH

Special thanks to Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht, Rabbi Levi Hecht, Rabbi Chanoch Hecht, Rabbi Shimon Sabol, Mrs. Malkie Katz, Mrs. Miryam Swerdlov, Mrs. Baila Rochel Kievman and Mrs. Chana Simpson, for their time and assistance in the preparation of this article. Special thanks to N'shei Chabad Newsletter for permission to include their interview with Rebbetzin Hecht.

# THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY YOUTH

“My years at Camp Emunah,” says Mrs. Miryam Swerdlov, “were among the best of my life, and definitely the most formative. The Rebbe’s visit to camp was literally the highlight of our youth; it’s something that we will never forget.”

“In those days, camp lasted nine weeks, divided into three three-week sessions. In every session there were children who learned in public school and came to camp through the Released Time program. That was the real purpose of the camp—to be *mekarev* those children. Those were incredible years.

“Rabbi Hecht himself was almost larger than life; he was really the heart and soul of the camp, and he paid special attention to the public school children. He treated each one like his personal child.

“Rabbi and Rebbetzin Hecht were the most dedicated shlichim ever. In general, Rabbi Hecht didn’t know how to do things ‘halfway’; if he did something, he did it *all* the way—and that’s exactly how he treated the public school kids.



RABBI AND MRS HECHT

“His favorite story was one I like to tell all over the world. His father-in-law, Reb Elimelech Lasker, came to the United States at the turn of the century and worked in the needle trade on the Lower East Side. Every Monday he would lose his job because he refused to work on Shabbos. But he would come home and say, ‘*Kinderlach*, this week I had another chance to make a *kiddush Hashem*.’

“Rabbi Hecht liked to say that in the homes where the father would come home and say, ‘I made a *kiddush Hashem*,’ the kids would remain frum. In those families where the father would come home and say, ‘I’m so upset, I lost my job again because of Shabbos’—those kids left Yiddishkeit. It’s all about how we choose to paint the picture. If we paint a happy picture, our kids will see and take note, and if we paint a picture of difficulty, the kids will internalize that as well.”

## THE FIRST CAMP

Camp Emunah is unique in its distinction as the first Chabad summer camp, being established several years before Camp Gan Yisroel.

How did it all begin?

Rebbetzin Chave Hecht, who founded the camp with her husband,<sup>1</sup> shared the following in an interview:<sup>2</sup>

“In the summer of 1952, my husband and I were in the country, staying near Camp Agudah. We decided to visit the camp on Shabbos afternoon. The camp spirit during *shalosh seudos* was so inspiring that after Shabbos we resolved to ask the Rebbe if we could open a Lubavitcher camp. We put in a *tzetel* several times, each time asking for *haskamah* to start a camp, until the Rebbe finally agreed.

“Once we had organized all the basic requirements to start the camp, we sent in a *tzetel* with two



RABBI HECHT AT AN EVENT FOR CAMP EMUNAH IN ITS EARLY YEARS.

requests: To be able to acquire a suitable property, and to name it Camp Emunah. *Baruch Hashem*, the Rebbe gave his blessing to both of these proposals. We decided to open a girls’ camp because we thought girls would be easier to manage than boys. (We would later learn, however, that running a girls camp is actually more difficult in almost every way.) In the summer of 1953, with the Rebbe’s *brachah* and *haskamah*, we started the first ever Lubavitcher overnight camp.”

The property was an old summer hotel named Windsor Lake Hotel & Resort. Rabbi Hecht partnered with Rabbi Avraham Mintz and Sydney Samson, and they purchased the property together to serve as both a camp and a kosher hotel. This form of hybrid was common in those days, and it made it easier to obtain the necessary permits.

The camp gained immediate popularity; the first year saw an enrollment of 60 children in each session. As the camp grew over the next few years, Rabbi Hecht bought out Rabbi Mintz and Mr. Samson and the entire property became camp alone.

“In the late 5710s\*,” says Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht, “my father told

the Rebbe in *yechidus* that, *baruch Hashem*, the camp was expanding and he planned on building two new bunkhouses. The Rebbe responded, ‘Why only two?’ In the spirit of *ufaratzta*, the Rebbe said, he should build six. Over the next few years he ended up building 10 new bunkhouses to keep up with the demand. By 5725\*, there were 300 campers in each session.”

When the Rebbe came out with his call for 71 new institutions for *shnas hashivim*, Rabbi Hecht decided to open a brand new section called “Tiny Tots” for younger children ages 5-8, building a brand-new site with new buildings and new infrastructure. It was the most significant project the camp had undertaken. He wrote about his idea to the Rebbe and asked that it be included in the 71 institutions (the Rebbe’s *maaneh* is being published here for the very first time).

The Rebbe responded that they could proceed, on the condition: “באם יבטיחו ההשגחה על קטנות בגיל רך—כזה..לפועל—if proper supervision could be ensured for such a young age, it should be done.”

Regarding the 71 institutions, the Rebbe wrote, “באם עכ”פ בנין אחד יוגמר”—לפני י”א ניסן תשל”ג - שנת השבע[ים] - יוכלל אם ע”א מוסדות—if at least one building will be completed before Yud-Aleph Nissan 5733\*—*shnas hashivim*—it

will be included in the 71 mosdos.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Rebbe included it in the 71 institutions despite the fact that the camp sessions would take place after the year had concluded.

“The Tiny Tots program went on for approximately 20 years,” said Rebbetzin Hecht. “By that time there were fewer and fewer parents sending their children to Tiny Tots. There were many more day camp programs available in the city, and most parents would wait until their children were older to send them to overnight camp. We decided that it was more important to provide a program for teens, so we opened B.J.J. Teen Camp on the grounds of Tiny Tots.”

## A CAMP FOR EVERYONE

“In the early years,” explained Rebbetzin Hecht, “most of our campers were kids from the Released Time program, who learned in public schools during the day but were taken out for religious instruction. We would try to get the kids from Released Time to enroll in yeshiva.

“In the 1960s we had many children whose parents were Holocaust survivors. We took many of these children free of charge, as their parents had no way to pay for camp. We did not set a price, we just let parents pay whatever they could. In the 1980s we welcomed into camp many children from Iran, who were rescued from there after the fall of the Shah.”

Mrs. Perel Schulkind recalled:

“When my daughters were 13 and 10 years old, we wanted them to escape the hot city and go to the country, to overnight camp, so we sent them to Camp Gilah. The following year, when we went to register them again, Camp Gilah informed us that they had installed a new pool and so the price had gone up. We could not afford the new price. In fact, we could not even afford half the new price. We did not know what to do.

“Someone suggested, ‘Call Rabbi J.J. Hecht. He has a camp, Camp Emunah, and will take your girls at whatever price you can afford.’

“So we did. And that is how our daughter Chaya Sara made friends with Lubavitcher girls and eventually married a Lubavitcher Chossid,



CAMP AGUDAH IN THE MID 5710S\*

\* 5710s-1950s, 5725-1965, 5733-1973



CAMP EMUNAH GROUP PHOTO IN ITS SECOND YEAR (5714\*).

Rabbi Elimelech Silberberg. They are shluchim in West Bloomfield, Michigan, and their children are shluchim as well. All because of Rabbi J.J. and Rebbetzin Chave Hecht! Their policy was: Rich or poor, always an open door. Or as we say in Yiddish, *'Ohrem oder reich, doh zeinen alleh gleich.'*"

Throughout all our interviews, we heard the same theme, over and over: Rabbi Hecht never turned a child away. Children whose parents could not afford tuition, children from troubled homes, and even children who were troubled themselves—every Jewish child was warmly welcomed. Long before attention was given by organizations for special needs children, Camp Emunah accepted children with special needs and physical disabilities, such as polio and cerebral palsy; and while they received the care they needed, they were made to feel a part of the regular camp as well.

## THE BEST PLACE TO BE

"I was a head counselor in Camp Emunah from 5720\*-5725\*," relates Mrs. Malkie Katz (nee Hecht). "The

schedule was such that I went straight from teaching in school to being the head counselor of camp and right back to teaching. So, in 5726\*, I decided I needed a vacation.

"I wrote to the Rebbe for permission to go to Eretz Yisroel for the summer, and the Rebbe responded (I am paraphrasing), 'What can you do in Eretz Yisroel that you can't do in Camp Emunah?'"

"Needless to say, I went for another year. By the end of the summer, I felt that I had gained more than any other summer at camp. When I wrote about the summer to the Rebbe as I always did, I mentioned this point, and the Rebbe's response was (paraphrasing), 'Aren't you glad you listened to me?'"

"Every year the Rebbe would 'begin' and 'conclude' the summer:

"Before camp, the Rebbe would deliver a *sicha* for the graduating students of Beis Rivkah and for the camp counselors. In the early years, we actually gathered as counselors in the Rebbe's room—just us, the counselors of Camp Emunah. And, when camp ended, there would be a special rally in 770 where the Rebbe would address the children. Those were always highlights of the summer."

The Rebbe often encouraged girls to participate in the

camp and become staff.

"There was a time," said Rebbetzin Hecht, "when it was difficult for us to get enough counselors. Girls wanted to go on shlichus in the summer, to day camps all around the world. So I asked the Rebbe if working in Camp Emunah is also considered a shlichus. The Rebbe responded, 'Camp Emunah is a shlichus of the Eibershter *mammosh*.'"

One *maaneh* that remains in the Camp Emunah archives seems to deal with a similar issue. We don't know the question posed by Rabbi Hecht, but in this answer, the Rebbe writes: "נראה הסיבה - שיעורים כדבעי - למדריכות תחייה (אולי ואצל קצתן - משכורת)—the reason seems to be proper classes for the counselors (and **perhaps**, for **some** of them, a salary."

In one answer to a girl debating how to spend her summer, the Rebbe writes as follows: "Since Hashem didn't create anything in vain—and you have been given a talent in guiding and educating—you should spend your summer utilizing this talent. In other words, to be in camp (Emunah, or Pardes Chana, or Sternberg or the like) in a manner that the **entire** summer will **utilize** your talents, for communal benefit, and obviously this will benefit you personally too — both physically and spiritually. Hashem will no doubt help you..."<sup>4</sup>

## EVERY DETAIL

The camp was very special to the Rebbe, and he paid great attention to every detail. Whenever a problem would arise, Rabbi Hecht would immediately write to the Rebbe and receive detailed answers. Often, the Rebbe would comment on brochures and reports he would receive, even when no questions were asked.

"We once sent the Rebbe a brochure for Camp Emunah," said Rebbetzin Hecht, "which included

the camp's full daily schedule. The Rebbe asked us why we had a learning session in the morning but not in the afternoon. Because of this we added a small learning session called 'A Din a Day' before Mincha. We reported this to the Rebbe and he was very happy."

In another response, the Rebbe added two directives regarding the learning: First of all, the Din a Day "surely refers to *halachos* which are relevant [to the girls] in their daily lives." Secondly, the weekly Dvar Torah said on Friday night in the dining room should be "each time, [delivered] by someone new."<sup>5</sup>

A similar response was sent to Rabbi Shmuel Heber, regarding Pardes Chana in Montreal. The Rebbe discouraged his plan to teach Koheles; "It is difficult to explain, and more importantly, what is the *bechein* [i.e., the practical application from the study]?" Regarding teaching *halacha*, the Rebbe wrote to teach "matters that are relevant to them," and that the main focus in camp should be "*Hamaaseh hu haikar*."<sup>6</sup>



THE REBBE ADDRESSES THE COUNSELORS OF CAMP EMUNAH BEFORE THE START OF CAMP ON ROSH CHODESH TAMMUZ 5751\*.

"One year," relates Rabbi Levi Hecht, "the brochure camp sent to parents included the menu of the foods they would be serving the campers. The Shabbos meals went into great detail; it listed kiddush and challah, and then, for the Friday night meal, it listed fish, soup, meat, dessert, and so on, and the same for the Shabbos day meal. The Shabbos day meal also had an important addition: The first course included

chopped liver, which was considered a delicacy in the upstate hotels of the time. Because of that addition, fish was obviously left out of the menu, since you can't serve fish and meat together.

"When the Rebbe received the brochure, my father was reminded of how the Rebbe noticed every detail. Noting that fish had been omitted from the Shabbos day meal, the Rebbe reminded him that a Shabbos meal—even one with



## RALLY AFTER CAMP

1. A GIRL FROM CAMP EMUNAH RECITES A POSSUK ALONGSIDE RABBI HECHT.

2. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE RALLY, THE REBBE HANDS PACKETS WITH COINS TO THE MADRICHOS OF CAMP EMUNAH TO DISTRIBUTE AMONG THE CAMPERS.

3. AT THE RALLY IN 5740\*, THE REBBE REQUESTED RABBI HECHT TO CALL UP THE DIRECTORS OF THE CAMPS TO RECEIVE THE COINS FOR THE CHILDREN. WHEN NO ONE FROM CAMP EMUNAH CAME FORWARD, RABBI HECHT WENT OVER TO THE REBBE HIMSELF AND THE REBBE SMILED BROADLY AT HIM.

chopped liver—needs to have fish.”

## THE REBBE'S VISITS

According to the accounts in Bin'os Deshe, the chronicle of the Rebbe's visits to camp, the Rebbe visited Camp Emunah three times, after each visit to Gan Yisroel—in 5716\*, 5717\*, and 5720\*. The Rebbe always spoke a short *sicha* to the campers and staff, and during the first visit, the Rebbe toured the entire facility as well. Unlike Gan Yisroel, which was not in session during the Rebbe's first visit, the campers of Camp Emunah merited to be present on all three occasions.

“I was the head counselor during one of the years the Rebbe visited,” relates Mrs. Chana Simpson. “I recall that the Rebbe benched us all with a successful summer, but I wasn't paying close attention because I was too busy ensuring that the children behave respectfully. I do recall that the Rebbe was very impressed; he had been to Gan Yisroel, and it hadn't been nearly as nice or as organized. He also gave dollar bills for all the camp staff, including the non-Jewish workers.”

“When the Rebbe came to visit camp,” says Mrs. Swerdlov, who was present during the Rebbe's visit in 5720\*, “we cleaned and worked diligently to prepare for his arrival. I think we even vacuumed the front lawn. The place was spotless.

“Before the visit, Malkie Katz and I ran to a place near Ellenville to get flowers, and we decorated everything beautifully. This was our *hachanah*—cleaning and decorating to make sure that camp looked as beautiful as possible. It felt like *Maamad Har Sinai*.

“I remember one amusing moment: During the Rebbe's visit, he walked by our bunk and saw that we had a sign that said ‘*chazershtal*.’ Unfortunately, it was painted onto the



A GROUP OF CAMPERS POSE UNDERNEATH THE NEWLY PLACED SIGN AT THE ENTRANCE OF CAMP BEARING THE REVISED NAME: “CAMP EMUNAH - BNOS YAAKOV YEHUDAH”.

wall, so we couldn't simply remove it before the Rebbe's arrival. When the Rebbe saw it, he didn't say anything, but he smiled from ear to ear.”

Mrs. Katz has another recollection:

“When I was a counselor in 5716\*, the Rebbe walked into my bunk and noticed a sign on the door with the bunk name and all the names of the campers. When he proceeded to the next bunk, he asked why they didn't have a similar sign.”

Rabbi Levi Hecht shared the following story he heard from his father:

“When the Rebbe came [presumably for the first time], he walked around the entire camp, looking at the dining room, the kitchen, the bunks, and the entire campus. There was a separate section of camp, across a street, with two buildings; one of which served as the shul and gathering room for all the main activities (it's not the current shul).

“As he was crossing the street, he looked up and noticed the *eruv* running across the street. He asked my father, ‘*Doh meg men me'arev zein*—it is permitted to construct an *eruv* here?’

“My father replied that Rabbi Elkana Zoberman, known as the

Yardanover Rov, was spending the summer on campus and had permitted its construction.

“The Rebbe responded that if he permitted it, ‘*m'ken zich farlozen of em*—he can be relied on.’ According to some versions, the Rebbe said, ‘*M'zagt az er iz a talmid chochom*—they say he is a *talmid chochom*.’ As an interesting sidenote, I think they erected the *eruv* by purchasing that portion of the road from the municipality.”

## BNOS YAAKOV YEHUDAH

“After my husband passed away,” related Rebbetzin Hecht, “the Rebbe wrote to us asking, ‘How do you want the organization to run?’ My children submitted two different proposals for how my husband's duties would be divided among his children, but did not mention Camp Emunah. The Rebbe chose one of the two proposals and in his answer added, ‘*Un di mame blaiht in camp*—Your mother should remain in camp.’ Therefore, I am still involved with Camp Emunah to this day.”

Rabbi Levi Hecht relates that the Rebbe instructed a name change as well:

“The Rebbe sent Rabbi Klein to my parents’ home after my father’s passing, where he spoke with my mother and brother Sholem Ber. Among other things, he said that the Rebbe wanted them to add my father’s name to one of the institutions. They weren’t sure which one, so they asked the Rebbe if they should add his name to Camp Emunah and Yeshivah Hadar Hatorah—one institution for boys and one for girls—and the Rebbe approved.”

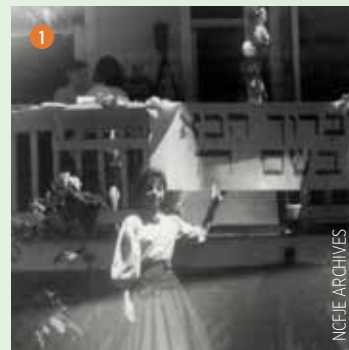
In the *sicha* following Rabbi Hecht’s passing, the Rebbe spoke about the name of the camp, “Emunah”:

“*Emes* represents the masculine side (*z”a* and *tiferes*, with its source in *daas*), while *emunah* represents the feminine side (*malchus*). In *avodah*, this represents the fact that one begins his *avodah* with plain *emunah*, in the simple belief of its truth, later achieving *emes* as well... Nonetheless, the foundation and beginning of one’s *avodah* is with *emunah*; as Chazal say, “Chavakuk established [all of *avodah*] on one [attribute]: ‘*V’tzaddik be’emunaso yichye*—the *tzaddik* lives with his *emunah*.”<sup>7</sup>

While preparing this article for publication, we were saddened by the passing of Rebbetzin Chava Hecht *a”h*, on 7 Adar I, 5782. תנצב”ה.

1. See “A Staunch Soldier,” Derher Teves 5778.
2. N’shei Chabad Newsletter, April 2013. All segments from Rebbetzin Hecht are from the same article.
3. As transcribed by Rabbi Hecht, probably during a phone conversation.
4. Petakim, pg. 172.
5. Igros 11154.
6. Teshura Heber, 8 Shevat 5768 pg. 17
7. Sefer Hasichos 5750 pf. 629 fn. 141.

# THE REBBE’S VISIT



1. IN ANTICIPATION OF THE REBBE’S VISIT, THE GIRLS SPENT THE AFTERNOON DECORATING THE CAMPGROUNDS, ESPECIALLY THE PORCH WHERE THE REBBE WAS TO STAND, WITH FLOWERS AND STREAMERS. IN THIS PICTURE A CAMPER POINTS TO THE SIGN THAT WAS PREPARED TO WELCOME THE REBBE IN 5717\*.

2. AS NIGHT FELL THE REBBE ARRIVED AND WENT UP ON THE PORCH OF THE MAIN OFFICE TO OVERSEE THE CAMPERS AND STAFF WHO STOOD WAITING TO GREET HIM IN THE ORDER OF THEIR BUNKS.

RABBI HECHT CAN BE SEEN CONVERSING WITH THE REBBE, WHILE RABBIS JACOBSON, KAZARNOVSKY, CHODAKOV AND MINTZ STAND TO THE SIDE. THE YOUNG BOY NEAR RABBI HECHT IS HIS SON RABBI SHEA HECHT.

3. THIS CAMP PHOTO WAS TAKEN SEVERAL YEARS AFTER THE REBBE’S VISIT IN 5717\* IN THE SAME LOCATION AS THE ABOVE PICTURES.

4. A NEWLY RELEASED PICTURE FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE NCFJE SHOWS A DIFFERENT ANGLE OF THE REBBE BEING WELCOMED BY THE CAMPERS AND STAFF.

THE REBBE SPOKE A SHORT *SICHA* TO THE CAMPERS AND AFTER HAVING SOMETHING TO EAT IN THE DINING ROOM HE SPOKE A SECOND *SICHA* FOR THE STAFF MEMBERS.