



SACRIFICE REB DOVID BRAVMAN & DEVOTION

BY: RABBI BENTZION SCHTROKS

לזכות ילדינו היקרים
יצחק צבי, מנחם מענדל, אברהם
מאיר, יהודית, וישראל ארי' לייב
שיחיו
שיגדלו להיות חסידים יראי
שמים ולמדנים
נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' אליעזר וזוגתו מרת חנה שיחיו
וואלף

One evening in the winter of 5683*, a young Dovid was strolling the streets of Rostov when he suddenly heard the captivating melodies of a profoundly exquisite chassidisher niggun. The soul-stirring tune intrigued him to find the source of the heartfelt singing, which turned out to be a farbrengen of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Dovid entered the room where the farbrengen was held and a Chossid sat him down under the table. At one point during the evening someone accidentally stepped on him, causing him to jump up and cry out in pain. Reb Yonah Eidelkopf started escorting the young boy out of the house so that he wouldn't disturb the farbrengen. When the Frierdiker Rebbe noticed this, he remarked: "An eideler kind—A refined child." He looked intently at Dovid for a few moments and said: "Ich hodeveh em mit di oigen—I am raising him with my eyes."¹

The story of Reb Dovid Bravman, a prominent Chossid, paragon of mesiras nefesh and absolute bittul to the Rebbeim and their directives.²

Youth

Reb Dovid Bravman was born in Kherson, Ukraine, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5670* to his parents, Chaim and Golda Bravman. With the onset of the Bolshevik pogroms, the family moved to Yekaterinoslav and from there to Rostov, where the Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe lived at the time.

After his first encounter with the Frierdiker Rebbe (see above), Chassidim gave Dovid much attention and slowly educated him in the ways of Chassidus and *hiskashrus*. Several months later, instead of having the Bar Mitzvah celebration his parents had planned for him, he opted to spend the day in the Frierdiker Rebbe's shul.

During summer vacation of that year, Dovid's parents agreed to send him to Tomchei Temimim in Nevel for several weeks. When vacation was over and Dovid's parents sent him telegrams to return home, he refused to leave the yeshiva.

A few months later, Dovid traveled to the Frierdiker Rebbe in Rostov where the Frierdiker Rebbe told him he could return home and continue studying at the "gymnasium" (a secular school that prepares students for university) where he had been until then. Dovid chose instead to continue learning in Tomchei Temimim where he remained for another ten years until 5694*.

Tomchei Temimim

Reb Dovid excelled in Tomchei Temimim and received special attention and mentorship from Reb Yisroel Neveler and Reb Chatche Feigin. He was an exceptional *oved* who would often be seen davening for many hours deep in thought and *dveikus*.

Reb Leibel Mochkin related:

"I once visited Reb Dovid in his home in Malachovka, to

bring him a letter from Reb Nissan Nemanov. Reb Dovid's mother told me her son was davening Maariv. I waited roughly 45 minutes, and Reb Dovid did not even realize I was standing there."

Reb Dovid once shared that the Frierdiker Rebbe gave him specific instructions regarding his *avodah*. For example, he could minimize the amount of time he slept at night but should not cut back on his eating.

He became very friendly with the older *bochurim* in the yeshiva, sharing an exceptional friendship with Reb Mendel Futerfas, Reb Avrohom Drizin, and Reb Bentzion Shemtov.

When the Soviet authorities shut down the Tomchei Temimim branch in Nevel, Reb Dovid traveled together with the other *bochurim* to learn in Kharkov. The yeshiva did not last very long there before the Yevsektzia caught up with them, and the students were forced to scatter amongst the other branches of the yeshiva in various cities.

At All Costs

When most of these underground branches of Tomchei Temimim eventually shut down, Reb Dovid traveled home to Malachovka, a suburb of Moscow.

At the time, having a letter from the Frierdiker Rebbe in one's possession was considered a serious crime so we unfortunately do not have many of the Frierdiker Rebbe's letters from that time period.

In the only extant letter to Reb Dovid from then, the Frierdiker Rebbe instructs him to register as a resident of Moscow for three months so he can be eligible to receive a passport to immigrate to Eretz Yisroel.

Shortly after arriving home in Malachovka, he became the director of a government-operated textile factory network. In this position he merited to employ many members of *anash*, enabling them to earn a living stress-free without working on Shabbos.

Many Jews came to Moscow to arrange for passports in order to leave Russia. As mentioned, one needed to be a registered resident of Moscow to apply for one, and to be a resident one needed to be locally employed. The most popular solution was to turn to Reb Dovid who graciously, and with much *mesiras nefesh*, granted documents stating they were employees of the textile factory. This ruse was extremely dangerous as it jeopardized his own livelihood and was a crime punishable by death.

Reb Dovid established an underground cheder in Malachovka for thirty young children. Eventually, he also became active in the broader operation of underground yeshivas, maintaining them financially and coordinating their relocation when necessary.



REB DOVID BRAVMAN (SEATED ON THE FAR RIGHT) WITH HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER SHORTLY AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL IN POCKING. HIS PARENTS IN LAW, REB YAAKOV YOSEF RASKIN AND HIS WIFE, ARE TO THEIR LEFT. BEHIND THEM ARE MEMBERS OF THE RASKIN FAMILY.

Marriage

In 5706*, Reb Dovid became engaged to Tzivya, the daughter of Reb Yaakov Yosef Raskin. The couple wrote a letter to the Frierdiker Rebbe asking for a bracha for the shidduch, even though it was impossible for the Frierdiker Rebbe to respond to them by mail or telegram. After leaving Russia the following year, the couple received the response the Frierdiker Rebbe had written for them with his approval and blessings for the shidduch.

The wedding took place on 8 Teves 5706* at the Bravman residence in Malachovka. "It was a very *chassidishe* wedding, with lively dancing that lasted late into the night," shared the kallah, Mrs. Tzivya Bravman.

Immediately following their wedding Reb Dovid became intensely involved in the famous escape of Chassidim from Russia known as the "Eshalonen." He was from the leaders of the effort and risked his life on many occasions.³

First Encounter

Reb Dovid and his family left Russia in 5706* together with hundreds of other Lubavitcher families. They arrived at a DP camp in Pocking, Germany, the same location where



When the Frierdiker Rebbe asked the Chassidim in Russia to send him pictures of themselves, Reb Bentzion Shemtov sent a picture of himself together with Reb Dovid. When the Frierdiker Rebbe received the photo, he wrote on the back of it: "תרין ריעין דלא מתפרשין" ("Two friends who do not separate").

Although they had different temperaments, Reb Dovid and Reb Bentzion shared a strong friendship.

the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana, resided at the time.

In 5707*, the Rebbe traveled to Paris, France to greet his mother and spent several months there arranging for her travel to the United States. During that time Reb Dovid traveled to Paris and merited to spend precious time with the Rebbe. This was the first time Reb Dovid met the Rebbe.

Reb Elchonon Yehuda Leib (Chonye) Raitzes related:

"When Reb Dovid returned to Pocking after his visit in Paris, several Chassidim asked him to share what he saw and heard from the Ramash. One of the things he mentioned was that it is known that each of the Rabbeim had one Chossid who was completely aligned with the Rebbe's will. He always wondered who this Chossid was in relation to the Rebbe. When he saw the Ramash, he immediately realized that this was the true and complete Chossid of the Rebbe."

Printing Sefarim

After their defeat in WWII, Germany's economy was in shambles. Since their currency was very low and the demand for employment was exceptionally high, the cost of production there was very cheap and, with their advanced technology, it was the ideal place to publish books at the time.

The Rebbe decided to seize this opportunity to print many *sefarim* of the Rabbeim and during Reb Dovid's visit to Paris, he was appointed to oversee the printing of Kehos *sefarim* in Germany.

The Rebbe would prepare the *sefarim* and then send them to Reb Dovid with detailed instructions on how to print and distribute them. Many of the *sefarim* were published via offset from older prints and the Rebbe would provide instructions for the Shaar Blatt (the title page) in accordance with the new standards set by the Frierdiker Rebbe for the publication of the Rebbeim's *sefarim*.

Amongst the *sefarim* Reb Dovid printed were Tanya, Shulchan Aruch, Torah Ohr, Likkutei Torah, the *sifrei Chassidus* of the Mitteler Rebbe, Piskei Dinim of the Tzemach Tzedek, Sefer Hamaamarim Yiddish of the Frierdiker Rebbe, and others.

Reb Dovid would send these *sefarim* to Germany, France, Belgium, England, the United States and other countries.

The Rebbe corresponded with Reb Dovid frequently regarding the printing operations. In almost every letter, the Rebbe encouraged speeding the printing process and coordinated an intricate system involving Chassidim throughout Europe to ensure the printings could happen in a timely manner.

Reb Dovid was also one of those to whom the Rebbe would send the new *sichos* and *maamarim* of the Frierdiker Rebbe to be shared with the Chassidim in Pocking.



REB DOVID IN POKING, 5709*.

Rescuing The Sefarim

At one point, the newly printed *sefarim* failed to arrive in New York, and the Rebbe's letters to Reb Dovid assumed an urgent tone and started to investigate the cause for the delays.

Two of the factors that caused the delays were: The German economy stabilized fairly quickly and their currency was rising in value. As a result, the American currency Kehos was using to pay for the publication did not have the same value in Germany as it did right after the war.

Secondly, the printer mixed the outstanding bills of several Jewish entities with the bills of Kehos. He considered all of the Jews in Pocking as one unit, and refused to release the *sefarim* of Kehos until the others paid their dues.

In the beginning of 5711*, after extensive efforts and after Reb Dovid gave the printer all of his own money, the newly published *sefarim* were finally released.

Reb Dovid and his family had been waiting to move to Eretz Yisroel, and as per the Rebbe's request, remained in Germany until the efforts to retrieve the *sefarim* were successful.

Now that the task was finally complete, Reb Dovid asked the Rebbe if it was appropriate for his family to move to Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe responded that he should ask the opinion

“When he saw the Ramash, he immediately realized that this was the true and complete Chossid of the Frieddiker Rebbe.”

of his family in Eretz Yisroel, and then let the Rebbe know. The Rebbe added that Reb Dovid should notify the Rebbe of how much money he was owed for rescuing the *sefarim*.

“From what I heard,” the Rebbe wrote to Reb Dovid, “you invested your own money [into this project] and much effort. I doubt you actually included the payment for your time in the [previous] account you sent...”⁴

Kfar Chabad

After over five years in Germany, Reb Dovid and his family received the Rebbe's *bracha* to relocate to Eretz Yisroel, arriving in Kfar Chabad several days before Shavuos 5711*. They moved into the house of Mrs. Bravman's parents Reb Yaakov Yosef Raskin and his wife, who moved there in 5709* as early pioneers of the new town.

After settling in Kfar Chabad, Reb Dovid was asked to fill the position of *mazkir* for Agudas Chassidei Chabad of Eretz Yisroel. Reb Dovid asked the Rebbe whether to accept the position. The Rebbe advised him to earn a livelihood through another capacity, and to find an opportunity for a position connected to *hafatzas hamaayanos* as a secondary income.

His good friend Reb Nochum Goldshmid helped him find employment at the Bank Hamelacha in Tel Aviv.

Every morning, Reb Dovid took the 6:00 bus to Tel Aviv from Kfar Chabad and returned in the late afternoon to participate in *shiurei Torah*.

Reb Dovid himself did not feel fulfilled with his work at the bank. He viewed it as temporary since he preferred to be involved in *hafatzas hamaayanos*. Reb Dovid was happy to

be offered the opportunity to teach *shiurei Chassidus* in the yeshiva in Lod but the Rebbe instructed him that his primary occupation should be at the bank and his involvement in *hafatzas hamaayanos* should be in his spare time.

"I don't know for certain why the Rebbe gave my husband this directive," said Mrs. Tzivya Bravman. "I speculate though, that the Rebbe foresaw what was to come in a few years. When my husband passed away at an early age, I was left to care for five children. The financial benefits I received from the bank helped our family tremendously through the years."

During the early years of Kfar Chabad, a new housing project was developing but although Reb Dovid wanted to purchase a home there, he did not have the 500 *lira* for the down payment. Someone recommended he purchase a home in Rishon Letzion with a financial plan that he could manage. This home also had the advantage of being near a Beis Yaakov school where his daughters could be educated.

When Reb Dovid asked the Rebbe whether to pursue this, the Rebbe sent him a letter and asked that it be publicized. In the letter, the Rebbe explained that the channel to receive the *brachos* that the Frieddiker Rebbe arouses on high for his Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel is specifically through living in Kfar Chabad. Even those who need to work for the time being outside of Kfar Chabad, should make every effort to eventually find work in Kfar Chabad, especially as the city continues to grow and more opportunities open up. The only reason to live outside of Kfar Chabad is if one is tied to another area by their communal position.

The Rebbe expounded on the great value of living in Kfar Chabad and foretold that it is only a matter of time until people come to this appreciation themselves.

The Rebbe concluded that this message should be publicized amongst *anash* and since the Torah values the money of Yidden, they should not waste it on writing these questions [to the Rebbe] to which the response is self-understood.

After receiving this letter, Reb Dovid and his family continued living in Kfar Chabad.

Communal Activist

When Reb Dovid arrived in Kfar Chabad in 5711*, he quickly became an essential part of the town's heartbeat. Reb Dovid was from the lead voices during *chassidishe farbrengens*, and he delivered a *shiur* in Chassidus every Shabbos morning with dozens of attendees. *Yungerleit* and *bochurim* clung to Reb Dovid and gleaned much inspiration from him.

Reb Dovid took the initiative in pursuing the establishment of a Lubavitch girls' school in Kfar Chabad, which opened under the name Beis Rivka, as well as the establishment of a preschool. Reb Dovid invested much effort into

TWO LETTERS FROM THE REBBE TO REB DOVID, WINTER 5711, ADDRESSING THE RETRIEVAL OF THE SEFARIM AND REB DOVID'S SETTLING IN Kfar CHABAD.



TESHURA, MONDSHINE, 5782



these projects and received much encouragement from the Rebbe.

Aside from the abovementioned efforts, Reb Dovid was also the first to arrange and deliver a *shiur Chassidus* for women in Kfar Chabad. Many of the letters the Rebbe sent to Reb Dovid address the manner in which this should be conducted.

His wife helped him arrange the *shiurim* for women. In a letter dated 18 Shevat 5712*, the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana, wrote to Mrs. Bravman informing her that a special package was sent from New York with *sefarim* for the women's *shiurim*.

In addition to a *shiur* for women, Reb Dovid also delivered a *shiur* to the girls. The Rebbe wrote to Reb Dovid several times about this *shiur* with specific interest in the effect it was having on the girls. The Rebbe also sent two letters to the girls

* 5711-1951, 5712-1952

in the *shiur* for Reb Dovid to learn with them.⁵

In 5715*, Vaad Kfar Chabad - the leadership committee or board of the town - was established. Naturally, Reb Dovid was appointed to be involved in the spiritual matters pertaining to the Vaad. In 5717*, Reb Dovid was appointed chairman of the board and he became responsible for and involved in the spiritual well-being of Kfar Chabad as well as its physical well-being.

Reb Dovid Chein once described Reb Dovid's dedication to the Rebbe's village:

"In 5717*, the Rebbe instructed that new housing should be built for the newly arrived Moroccan immigrants who were moving into the old Arab houses near Kfar Chabad. This directive seemed to be impossible for us to carry out. How would we manage to build new apartments when each of us were busy with the debts we had accumulated building our own houses, and the accounts of Vaad Kfar Chabad were completely empty?

"I can still hear the words of Reb Dovid ringing in my ears, as he told me: 'If you want to be included in "those that bear the title of a Jew," you ought to build! I am not referring to being a Chossid, but if you want to be a Jew! We need to build. Plow the ground with your nose. There are no excuses; if the Rebbe says that we should build, then we can build and we must build.'

"A meeting was held concerning this project. A prominent Chabad activist who was the Chabad connection to the government stood up and explained that there was no chance of gaining government support for building additional housing as the government had just recently supported the building of houses in Kfar Chabad. Furthermore, the fellow argued that it would be brazen to even request such support.

"Hearing these remarks triggered a soft spot for Reb Dovid. Reb Dovid jumped up and said: 'How can you think, let alone utter, such words?! If the Rebbe said that we should build, we will build! We are to put all logic aside, since our entire existence must be set aside when it comes to the view and the will of the Rebbe. Our entire being is not relevant in relation to the Rebbe.'

"Reb Dovid sat down completely shaken and started delegating jobs. I was given the duty of contacting the government offices that would be instrumental in making the project happen. For three months, I was sent from office to office, with my requests consistently falling on deaf ears. Every official sincerely advised me to give up on my 'unrealistic' project.

"Each time I returned to Reb Dovid and reported that we had pursued all possible avenues, but Reb Dovid would not hear of it and said if the Rebbe said we should build, we will build. In the end, Reb Dovid's determination paid off, and the houses were built. I learned from the experience that when the Rebbe's will is important to someone, one can accomplish

even that which is unrealistic in the natural order of things.

"This was Reb Dovid's attitude to all of the Rebbe's matters. Much like a business person is concerned with their business, Reb Dovid was completely dedicated to fulfilling the Rebbe's will."

Traveling to the Rebbe

In the month of Tishrei 5717*, Reb Dovid merited to fulfill his life's dream—to travel to the Rebbe. Not many guests traveled from Eretz Yisroel to the Rebbe for Tishrei in those years, and Reb Dovid was one of the few who came that year. During the festive month, Reb Dovid merited to receive special attention from the Rebbe.

Reb Dovid Chein related:

"I remember when Reb Dovid traveled to the Rebbe. Before his trip, Reb Dovid became a different person. He walked and talked differently. Everything changed; it seemed like he was in another world. It was clear that his mind was in another place. He was fully engrossed in one thing, traveling to the Rebbe."

Reb Yitzchok Dovid Groner related: "At the first Shabbos farbrengen after he arrived, Reb Dovid stood behind me. Being that I am tall, he could not see the Rebbe well and he asked me, 'Can you be so kind and allow me to see the Rebbe? I have been waiting for this moment for thirty years already!' (It was then thirty years since the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia)."

Several times throughout the month, the Rebbe instructed the guests from Eretz Yisroel to say *l'chaim* and start an *Eretz Yisroel'dike niggun*.

On Shabbos Bereishis, which came directly after Simchas Torah, the Rebbe farbrenged for eleven hours. During the farbrengen, the Rebbe said that the guests from Eretz Yisroel needed to be *niskarev*, and the Rebbe distributed mashke and challah to them. The Rebbe called upon Reb Foleh Kahn, Reb Avrohom Drizin, Reb Dovid Bravman, and others.

Mrs. Tzivya Bravman related:

"During his stay near the Rebbe, my husband wrote to me: 'I can't tell you when I will return to Eretz Yisroel, as for now I am in the hands of the Rebbe.'"

Towards the end of the month of Tishrei, the guests who came entered into *yechidus* with the Rebbe. In the notes that Reb Dovid recorded from his *yechidus* it is apparent that most of the *yechidus* revolved around Kfar Chabad and maintaining it spiritually and physically.

The Rebbe gave Reb Dovid two specific directives in the

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yechidus. Firstly, he should learn two chapters of Tanya by heart each week. Secondly, when thinking Chassidus, he should connect it with the written words of the *maamar* by keeping the *sefer* open. This way, the mind does not wander and can absorb the written words.

When Reb Dovid returned from the Rebbe to Kfar Chabad, he exuded an extraordinary joy from his time near the Rebbe, repeating the instructions that the Rebbe gave him for Kfar Chabad.

Upon his return, Reb Dovid decided that if the Rebbe allowed his leadership to be officially incorporated into Kfar Chabad, the town would receive a whole new breath of life, both physically and spiritually. As a preparation for this, Reb Dovid initiated several meetings where the locals took upon themselves serious *hachlatos* to give the Rebbe much *nachas*.

After the meetings, Reb Dovid wrote a letter on a new letterhead for Kfar Chabad which had the words “Under the leadership of the Lubavitcher Rebbe” and conveyed the *hachlatos* the villagers made. Reb Dovid was saddened and disappointed when the Rebbe instructed him to destroy the new letterheads.

Reb Dovid Chein related: “I will never forget the pain that Reb Dovid expressed. He cried bitterly as he related to us the Rebbe’s answer. I do not know if Reb Dovid ever recovered from this difficult incident.”



REB DOVID SPEAKING AT A PUBLIC EVENT IN KFAR CHABAD.



REB DOVID SPEAKING AT THE FIRST KINUS OF TZEIREI AGUDAS CHABAD DURING HIS VISIT TO THE REBBE, TISHREI 5717*.

End of Life

In the winter of 5719*, Reb Dovid became ill. After undergoing a medical operation to examine his condition, the doctors determined that Reb Dovid had a severe brain tumor that had gone unnoticed for a long time. It soon became apparent that the growth had spread significantly and Reb Dovid needed a miracle.

During the early stages of his illness, when Reb Dovid was still capable of writing, he wrote a letter to the Rebbe explaining his dire situation. Reb Dovid asked for a *bracha* that he should have a complete recovery so that there should be no holdback to the Rebbe’s work.

Throughout the few months that Reb Dovid was unwell, *anash* in Kfar Chabad and in New York davened for him. Reb Dovid’s brothers-in-law, Reb Dovid Raskin and Reb Leibel

* 5719-1958, 5717-1956

“I will never forget the pain that Reb Dovid expressed. He cried bitterly as he related to us the Rebbe’s answer.”

Raskin, as well as others, mentioned Reb Dovid’s name to the Rebbe frequently in letters, during farbrengens and even in *yechidus*.

On 4 Teves 5719* the Rebbe turned to Reb Dovid Raskin—who was the *baal koreh* for the Rebbe on weekdays—after Krias HaTorah, instructing him to make a *mi shebeirach* for Reb Dovid. The Rebbe remarked: “They have added a name to him—Boruch.” When Reb Dovid Raskin forgot Reb Dovid’s mother’s name, the Rebbe interjected: “Ben Golda.”

In a heartfelt letter to Reb Dovid and Reb Leibel Raskin, their father, Reb Yaakov Yosef (Reb Dovid’s father-in-law) pleaded with them to beg the Rebbe to guarantee that Reb Dovid will have a complete recovery.

Reb Dovid and Reb Leibel entered *yechidus* on 17 Teves 5719*, asking the Rebbe to guarantee their brother-in-law Reb Dovid’s complete recovery. The Rebbe told them that only the Aibershter could guarantee and that he would read their letter at the Ohel of the Friediker Rebbe.

When it seemed that the Rebbe finished the *yechidus*, Reb Dovid repeated: “The Rebbe should guarantee.” The Rebbe responded in a more serious tone: “This is a *poilisher* way. To guarantee only the Aibershter himself can. You should share good news.”

On the evening of 24 Sivan 5719*, at age 50, Reb Dovid passed away. Many residents of Kfar Chabad and other Chasidim participated in his funeral from Kfar Chabad to Tzfas where he was laid to rest.

Before Reb Dovid’s tombstone was erected, the Rebbe gave an instruction that included in the words being inscribed on it should be written: “from the prominent students of Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch.” **7**



NICHUM AVEILIM LETTER SENT BY THE REBBE TO THE BRAVMAN FAMILY DURING SHIVA FOR REB DOVID.



THE INSCRIPTION ON HIS TOMBSTONE REQUESTED BY THE REBBE, “מחשובי תלמידי תומכי תמימים ליובאוויטש”

1. This version of the story was shared by Reb Yitzchok Axelrod in the name of Reb Shmuel Taichman.
2. Much of the information in this article is culled from *Teshura—Bar Mitzvah, Mondshine* 5782.
3. See *The Great Escape*, Derher Adar II, 5782.
4. Letter dated 22 Sivan 5711.
5. 22 Elul 5714, Igros Kodesh vol. 9, #2942.