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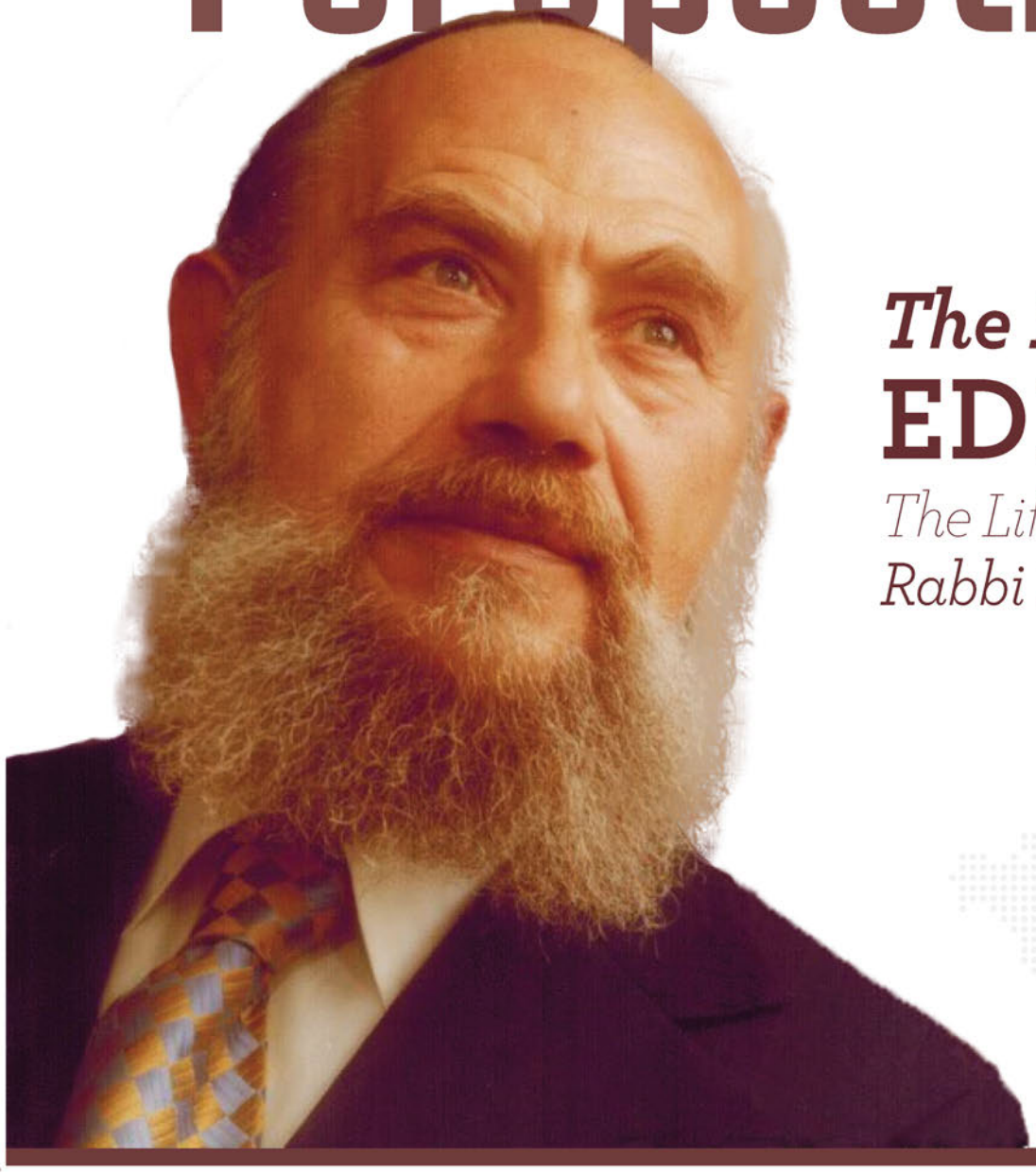
Perspectives

FIFTEEN



The Rebbe's EDITOR

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Perspectives

FIFTEEN

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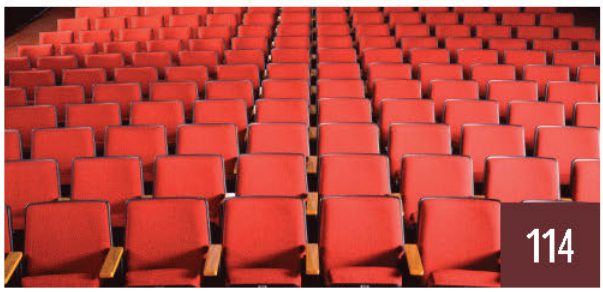

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MY JOURNEY TO THE YESHIVAH IN LUBAVITCH
Memoirs of Reb Shmaryohu Sassonkin III

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FOREWORD

An Inner Resolve

IN ONE SECTION OF HIS MEMOIRS of Lubavitch, after writing at length about the importance of regular *tevilah* for purity, the eminent *tomim* and senior Lubavitcher *rov* Reb Shmaryahu Sassonkin concludes:

"Despite the fact that *tevilah* was very much valued, still people in Lubavitch never told anyone to *toivel,* for it was something that depended on one's personal feeling. Some felt the need for daily *tevilah* – and since the *mikvah* was not far from the *zal* and was always open, it didn't take much time; some *toiveled* on Mondays and Thursdays when the Torah is read. But everyone *toiveled* on Erev Shabbos and on Shabbos for the holiness of Shabbos."

WHAT WAS INDEED THE PROBLEM with speaking about *tevilah*? If they didn't want to burden the students, couldn't they make it voluntary? But why not encourage it at least to some extent?

In Tomchei Temimim of Lubavitch, the leading quality around which all *farbrengens* revolved was *pnimiyus,* inner resolve, and the ridding of *chitzoniyus,* external motivation. They didn't only disdain doing *mitzvos* for ulterior motives or displaying a *hiddur* for others to admire – for such a person is simply serving himself – but even worthy conduct aimed towards becoming a "good chossid" was considered *chitzoniyus,* since it didn't rise from a genuine appreciation for that practice.

In Tomchei Temimim of Lubavitch, the leading quality around which all farbrengens revolved was pnimiyus, inner resolve, and the ridding of chitzoniyus, external motivation.

In our generation, many such practices have been standardized. And justifiably so: The *bochurim* in Lubavitch who were continuously engaged in thorough *avoda* knew where they stood and they climbed steadily. We, however, can't wait until we're ready to grow into a new level, and we often need a direct order to drive us forward.

Yet, if every *hora'a* is canonized and every good practice is recorded and regulated, we risk losing the potential for any measure of *pnimiyus*. Even meaningful *chassidishe* practices can turn flat when they become a "to-do"; a *niggun* becomes a ritual and a *farbrengen* becomes a ceremony.

It is important to draw a distinction between *halacha* or sanctioned *minhagim* and other worthy practices. *Mitzvos* (and Torah mandated community customs) are the essential will of Hashem and their practical fulfillment is what matters most. However, *darkei hachassidus* are transformational tools, and when done without meaning they will obviously not change anyone.

THERE IS ANOTHER BENEFIT to *pnimiyus'dike* education which is especially relevant today:

Many young people are desperately trying to stand out and be different – sometimes in a way that conflicts with Torah. Feeling quashed by a monotonous system, they feel compelled to assert themselves in some way.

One solution has been to provide youth with extra-curricular activities in which they can excel and find their place. Besides being limited in time, the extra-curricular activity is also defined, and it may or may not fulfill the needs of expression of each child's unique personality.

Perhaps if youths' lives would be less standardized, they wouldn't need to look for creative outlets. An adolescent who thinks for himself and makes real choices feels alive all of the time and doesn't need unusual activities to express independence. Instead of applying an educational patch, we can avoid the problem from the outset.

School systems are indeed necessary to manage the many students, but it need not result in systemized personalities. In home and in school, we can impart our underlying values through teachings and stories without imposing rites and observances.

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger

General Editor

An adolescent who thinks for himself and makes real choices feels alive all of the time and doesn't need unusual activities to express independence.

References

Igros Kodesh, Vol. 10, p. 100 – The job of educator is to release the student from external and internal coercions and to allow him to function freely and healthily without cognitive dissonance.

Reshimas HaRavash [diary of the Rebbe's grandfather R. Boruch Schneur Schneerson of his conversations with the Rebbe Rashab], p. 18 – The Rebbe Rashab related how the Mitteler Rebbe would not pay attention to his children's conduct and study, and R. Boruch Schneur comments in his diary, "This is very profound according to my understanding." [No doubt we aren't great enough to influence our children without any intervention, but there is a lesson to be learned.]

Story heard from the family – The Rebbe wanted a certain person to begin wearing a beard, but he did not want to ask him directly since "then it would be my beard and not his."

Sefer HaSichos 5689, p. 30 – A Rebbe must do everything exactly as it ought to be, a chossid must do what helps him in serving Hashem [in explaining why R. Hillel Paritcher washed for *shaleshudos* although the Rebbeim did not].

Sichos Kodesh 5729, Vol. 1, p. 214 – When trying to influence a person to change it doesn't help to grab them by their conduct, their "garments," since they may leave the "garment" with you and run off.

The HOLINESS *of* MOTHERHOOD

THE REBBE'S PERSPECTIVE

Vav Tishrei 5734

Sichos Kodesh 5734, Vol. 1, pp. 25-29

Motherhood inevitably demands forgoing personal pursuits; important causes and noble ideals are temporarily suspended. Looking to achieve more, a mother may solicit dedicated caregivers or other fixes that will tend to her children in her place. Can a mother be substituted? How does a mother avoid becoming worn-out from childrearing?

TO FORGO A G-DLY REVELATION

The story of Chana begins with Elkana who traveled each year to the *Mishkan* in Shilo, taking with him his immediate and extended family. Each year he took a different route, and camped in open fields along the way, causing a great tumult among the local residents. When people would ask where he was headed, he would tell them how he is taking his family to the *Mishkan.* Many were inspired to join him, and he was later rewarded.

Now, if the Torah says that one person who visits the *Mishkan* merits the revelation of the *Shechina,* surely Elkana's entourage merited an exceptionally great revelation. And since Chana was a prophetess, she saw the *Shechina* in Shilo like no other Jew, with intense feelings of pleasure, appreciation and emotion.

Yet, when Chana bore a son and it was time for their yearly trip, Chana declined to join them. Instead, she decided to stay with her son at home until he was old enough to join the trek. Chana could have taken Shmuel along, since her husband was wealthy and could afford enough maidservants to care for him during their travels. But she still declined, since the care and the attention he would receive at home would inevitably surpass what he would receive while traveling, despite having all the necessary help and amenities at their fingertips. She also refused to leave Shmuel at home with a "babysitter" for the weeks that she would be away, sparing him the difficulty of traveling at such a tender age.

What's more, going to Shilo would have benefited Shmuel as well, as the G-dliness and prophecy Chana would have gained there ultimately would have extended to him. Yet, Chana decided – and Elkana didn't disagree – that remaining at home until Shmuel would be weaned at two years of age would be worth it to increase the quality of his upbringing even in the slightest.

The fact that Chana was able to bring her son to the *Mishkan* at two-years-old to stay there forever came about through the power of her *mesiras nefesh* of not visiting Shiloh for two years. On that occasion, she merited a special prophecy, demonstrating Hashem's agreement with her actions.

FAMILY FOUNDATION

These details were included in Torah, among the few *pesukim* about Elkana and Chana, serving as a lesson for future generations. A Jewish mother or future mother may be occupied with all kinds of good things, yet, she learns how Chana who was a prophetess who wanted to go to such a holy place as Shilo, though did not go for Shmuel's sake, so he could be at home with his mother...

Pilgrimage to Shilo cannot compare to what a mother can accomplish through staying at home and seeing to it that her home runs according to the Torah, particularly with regards to educating her children.

Hashem charged a woman with a mission that is greater than pilgrimage to Shilo, and even that of encouraging others to go. That objective cannot compare to what a mother can accomplish through staying at home and seeing to it that her home runs according to the Torah, particularly with regards to educating her children.

When the Torah counts the Jewish people, it mentions straight away that it was "*l'mishpchoseihem* – to their families." The foundation, survival, and structure of the Jewish people, Yiddishkeit, and Torah depends on the family being built as Hashem established it: that the man does his part and the woman does hers. A woman's task is no less important; in fact, hers may be even more crucial to the children's upbringing.

As women began to take jobs outside their home – due to financial pressure – a divide developed between the mother, the father, and the children. Not only don't they know each other, they can't even *understand* each other!

It pains the heart to see what is happening...

A UNIQUE MISSION

When Hashem blesses one with children, then all other things should be set aside, and the main purpose of the wife is to be the "mainstay of the home." That is her greatness, her role, and her mission. No one else can do it. Instead of trying to imitate and chase others who don't know what they want and who just confuse others for some believed benefit, a woman should realize that her primary mission is to serve as the "mainstay of the home."

Specifically, through such conduct will she be able to bring her children to Shilo and present them to the *Kohen Gadol*, and they will grow up to be like Shmuel, who equaled Moshe and Aharon, and who anointed Dovid Hamelech from whom Moshiach descends, (Shmuel thus began the process of Moshiach's coming).

Women were given the wherewithal to carry-out their mission in the loftiest manner possible, with joy and a glad heart. When they do so, they will establish blessed offspring with whom we will soon go to greet our righteous Moshiach.

IN SUMMARY

• Instead of traveling with her family to the Mishkan and meriting the revelation of the Shechina, Chana remained at home with Shmuel and give him the best possible care. She did not entrust him with anyone else, but rather cared for him personally.

• Family is the foundation and strength of Yiddishe life. When a mother is unavailable, family members lose the family bond and may become emotionally distant from each other.

• The gift of children and the mission to raise them was given to the mother, and she should not be distracted by other holy causes. Doing so loyally will grant her outstanding children. P

The Rebbe's
EDITOR

—

Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel was a talented, worldly intellectual who, over several decades, went from a hired secretary to a full-fledged chossid. The Rebbe's editor and the author of tens of Chassidus books, he was entrusted with the task of conveying the Rebbe's teachings and Chassidus to the world.

RABBI NISSAN MINDEL

autobiographical sketches

The following article was compiled from conversations and writings with the Rebbe's editor and scribe Rabbi Nissan Mindel. He tells of his introduction to Chassidus Chabad and the Rebbeim, his position of editor and personal secretary, and what he observed and learned in that capacity.

Rabbi Dr. Mindel serves as an example of an eloquent thinker who chose to become a chossid and preferred the spreading of Torah and Chassidus over other intellectual pursuits. A talented, worldly person who could have successful in many other fields, he nevertheless dedicated his life for Yiddishkeit and Lubavitch out of conviction and dedication to the Rebbe.

CONNECTION WITH LUBAVITCH

I was born on Beis Nissan 5672-1912 in Riga, Latvia to Yaakov Yitzchak and Bunia Mindel. I grew up attending *Torah Im Derech Eretz* schools which followed the teachings of Rabbi Shamshon Rafael Hirsch.

My connection with Chabad started in 5688-1928, not long after the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia and moved to Riga; this was after his release from prison on Yud-Beis Tammuz in 5687-1927, an event that impressed me deeply. I began to participate in the Rebbe's *farbrengens* (gatherings) on Yud-Tes Kislev and on other occasions. I vividly remember hanging from the doorpost in a very big crowd and glancing at the holy face and eyes of the Rebbe. This glance remains seared in my mind and heart.

That year, my brother Asher was to travel to Argentina, and my uncle (and future father-in-law), the *chasid* Reb Avraham Sender Nemtzov, urged him to seek a private audience with the Frierdiker Rebbe before his trip. My brother agreed, and I pushed myself to accompany him. I was quite awestruck but nevertheless entered with my brother and stood behind him in the holy presence of the Rebbe. The Rebbe spoke with Asher, then 17 years old, telling him that as he went from one country and one environment to another, he should always remember

On a mission to Anash in Europe, at the center.of table

where he had come from and should never forget his essential upbringing and way of life.

In 5690-1930, I traveled to England to attend the University of Manchester, and in 5697-1937, I married my cousin Necha Nemtzov who lived in Manchester. My focus was now on providing for my family, and I therefore entered into some business arrangements with an uncle who dealt in lumber from Russia. The job entailed transactions by telephone, which I found a pleasant way to do business.

Around that time, the Frierdiker Rebbe contacted Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Aizik Chodakov, the principal of Torah Im Derech Eretz and the government appointed director of Jewish education in Latvia. The Frierdiker Rebbe, who was in Latvia at the time, asked Rabbi Chodakov to suggest one of his students who knew multiple languages to serve as his secretary. When my name came up, the Rebbe inquired about my background and qualifications and showed an interest. When my wife and I visited Riga that year, Rabbi Chodakov promptly got in touch with me to arrange a meeting and offered me the position.

When I found out that the Rebbe lived in Otwock, Poland, I replied that I had no interest in living in Poland and refused the offer. Rabbi Chodakov persisted and asked for a second meeting, at which time I replied that I couldn't accept the offer without consulting with my wife. Rabbi Hodakov suggested that I discuss it with her and then offered me attractive conditions, giving me the option to set my own terms. I was not in the least interested in going to Poland, but I did not wish to offend or show disrespect to my teacher and *menahel*, so I stipulated extreme conditions that I was certain would not be accepted—but they were!

When I discussed the matter with my wife, her answer was that she considered Poland a "death trap" and did not wish to live there. Rabbi Hodakov contacted me yet a third time, this time by phone, and suggested that I come to Poland for a month or two on a trial basis. My wife agreed but said that she would return to England and wait for me there. After Tishrei, I joined the Frierdiker Rebbe in Otwock with the intention of staying but a few months, which eventually lasted much longer. I had planned

Rabbi Nissan Mindel, standing near the Rebbe at the Freiderke Rebbe's accepetance of US citizenship

on rejoining my wife in England for Pesach. During these few months, I was invited to join the Rebbe's family for Purim. The Rebbe himself, however, was not home; he was at a sanatorium.

After a while, the Rebbe's son-in-law, the Rashag, asked that I extend my stay another six months. He promised to advance my salary and offered to meet whatever conditions I asked for. When I asked my wife for her advice, she said that she couldn't prevent me from staying but would remain in England and wait for me there. And so I stayed in Otwock.

During this time I very much wanted to learn *Chassidus*, but at first I did not have particular success. I studied *Tanya* with Reb Yechezkel (Chatche) Feigin, *Hy"d*. Whenever we came to a topic that I didn't understand and I asked questions, Rav Chatche would say that for the meantime we would skip it and go on to another topic. I was not used to this way of learning. I stayed in Otwock until Rosh Chodesh Elul 5699-1939, learning and dorming at Tomchei Temimim. Most of my work revolved around the *yeshivah*, which included public relations.

ESCAPING THE WAR

One day, I was talking to the Hecht brothers, Reb Shlomo Zalman and Reb Avraham, who were then studying in the *yeshivah,* when they told me that they had been ordered by the American Embassy to return immediately to the US due to the precarious prewar situation. Since only two weeks remained on my

visitor's visa, I immediately had a *yechidus* with the Frierdiker Rebbe, during which I explained the situation and asked permission to leave Otwock. The Rebbe consented and even asked some detailed questions about my passport and citizenship papers, and he gave me his blessings.

When I got to the British consulate in Riga, I heard about the bombing of Otwock. Yet here I was, stuck in Latvia! This was in Elul 5699-1939, at the outbreak of World War II. When Rabbi Chodakov heard that I was stuck there and could not reach England, he asked that I use the time to take charge of the twelfth grade high school class of Yeshivah Torah Im Derech Eretz for the next few months. Many of the students knew English, and Rabbi Chodakov mentioned that the Rebbe wanted chasidic stories to be translated into English for them. He sent me a collection of stories to work on. The first one I translated was the well-known story of the *chasid* and the Alter Rebbe, "Gavriel Nosei-Chein."

In Adar I 5700-1940 a plane was arranged to transport the Rebbe and his family out of Europe, and I was selected to come with. There were 11 people in the group that finally left Riga for America by way of Sweden—the Frierdiker Rebbe and Rebbetzin Nechama Dina; the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah, and her nurse, Manya (Rosen); the Rashag and his wife and son; Rabbi Chodakov and his wife, Etel Cherna; Rabbi Chaim Lieberman; and myself. We traveled by plane to Sweden since boats were no longer permitted out of Riga. The plane was small, with a seating capacity of 18. We left practically empty-handed, except for a package of manuscripts the Rebbe held in his holy hand the entire time. Because there were still some available seats on the plane, the Rebbe insisted that they be filled with another seven Jews whose lives we could save. And so we did.

We landed in Stockholm and took a boat to the port of Gothenburg. There we boarded the ship *Drottningholm,* which would sail to America. My official papers identified me as a "travel assistant to the family of the Rebbe" and were valid for six months. Needless to say, due to the unforeseen developments of the war, my six month stay extended until the end of the war. Our voyage across the Atlantic was not very comfortable, to say the least, with many stormy days.

On one occasion, the forceful waves caused quite an upheaval inside the ship, and as a result the Rebbe was thrown off his bed. I was summoned to help him back to bed as he was wheelchair-bound at the time, and I found the Rebbe smiling as he lay on the floor. We picked him up, and he reassured us that he was fine, *baruch Hashem*. He wanted to know if anyone else had fallen, and when we told him that no one was hurt, he burst into the genuine laughter of relief.

Because there were still some available seats on the plane, the Rebbe insisted that they be filled with another seven Jews whose lives we could save.

The "travel assistant to the family of the Rebbe"

Although I was beginning to understand and appreciate Chabad chasidus, I did not yet consider myself, nor was I planning to become, a Chabad chasid. But the translation had a tremendous influence on my work in general.

CHASSIDUS IN ENGLISH

Not long after arriving in America, the Frierdiker Rebbe suggested that I translate the *Tanya* into English, an effort that had been attempted numerous times in the past without success. In truth, I was somewhat taken aback that the Rebbe was choosing this *sefer* at a time when it seemed more urgent to publish educational material for Jewish American youth. Not only the Frierdiker Rebbe but his son-in-law, the Rebbe, impressed upon me the need to translate the *Tanya*.

In 5702-1942, the Frierdiker Rebbe asked me to take the manuscripts that he had managed to bring with him to New York and have them transferred to microfilm. The Rebbe handed me his precious bundle of manuscripts that very night. When I realized what a treasure was in my possession, I couldn't sleep. Among the manuscripts were the Rebbe's *mafteichos* (indexes) on numerous *sifrei chasidus* which would be published in the coming years. I found these indexes to be invaluable as they opened a new world for me; with their help I was able to study various topics in *chasidus*. After I made these microfilms, I was able to study them during my free time at night and thus advanced in my study of *chasidus*.

After studying the Rebbe's indexes at great length, I felt somewhat more confident and empowered to translate the *Tanya*. I asked the Rebbe if he would help me in this endeavor, and he gladly agreed. Still and all, I did not want to take too much advantage of his kindness. The work of translating the *Tanya*, which was finally completed in 1961, naturally took away time from my other responsibilities. Translating the *Tanya* had a profound effect on me and drew me into the inner world of *chasidus*. Although I was beginning to understand and appreciate Chabad *chasidus*, I did not yet consider myself, nor was I planning to become, a Chabad *chasid*. But the translation had a tremendous influence on my work in general. From 5700-1940 through 5704-1944, I served in dual roles, working for Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim under the direction of the Rashag and also working for Merkos, Machne Israel and Aguch under the direction of the Rebbe.

By 5704-1944, I was working exclusively for Merkos. I worked closely with the Rebbe in his office, which would later become the *yechidus* room. The Frierdiker Rebbe requested that I write a monthly magazine for children, something he felt was very much needed. When I asked Rabbi Hodakov where I would find the time for this, he answered, "You will only be the editor." The bottom line was that I ended up doing the entire thing, writing and editing. The first issue of the children's magazine in Yiddish, *Shmuessen Mit Kinder*, was published for Chanukah 1942. Shortly afterward we added a second monthly, *Talks and Tales*, in English. These two magazines would be published every month for the next 47 years.

I very much wanted to venture into writing on more profound topics, but Rabbi Hodakov encouraged me to continue with my successful and vital writing for the young. There was no point in changing course, he said, especially as the magazines were critical to the children's spiritual well-being. At the Frierdiker Rebbe's instruction, the Rebbe checked every single issue of *Talks and Tales* before it went to print, continuing to do so when he became Rebbe, and Rabbi Hodakov checked the *Shmuessen Mit Kinder*.

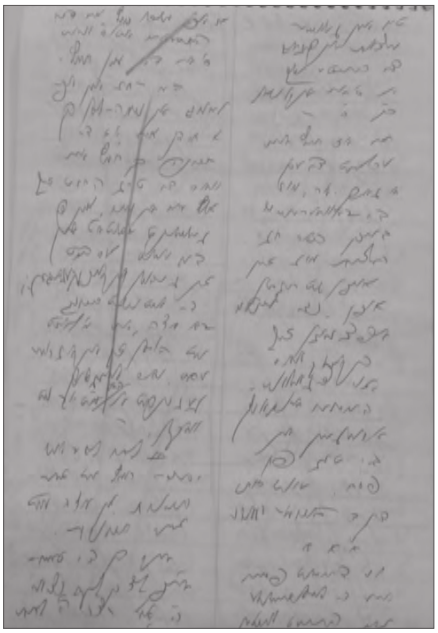
With the Rebbe's shluchim to Eretz Yisroel, 5716 (1956), second from left

In the "Nature's Wonderland" column that appeared every month in both issues, I saw a special opportunity to inspire and strengthen the young in their faith and understanding of Divine Providence. In light of the science that was being taught then—subjects such as evolution, which still assault young people today—the importance of laying a solid foundation of faith in the Creator cannot be overemphasized. Ultimately, in the words of the Rambam in his Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, when one contemplates the creation—"How numerous are Your works, Hashem" and "How great are Your works, Hashem"—it brings one to love and awe of G-d. In connection with this, the Frierdiker Rebbe once commented to me that he very much enjoyed reading the *Shmuessen Mit Kinder*. He said, "When I read the 'Wonders of Nature' column, I gain *yiras Shamayim* from it (*s'kumt mir tzu in yiras Shamayim*)."

THE REBBE'S SECRETARY

After the Rebbe accepted the position of Rebbe on Yud Shevat 5711-1951, I continued serving as his personal secretary, in addition to working on the two monthlies and other projects, as well as traveling on various missions.

My role as personal secretary entailed going three times a week (sometimes more) to the Rebbe's room to take down in shorthand responses to the personal letters people wrote him. The dictation was always in Yiddish, and the Rebbe would explain whatever points were necessary in order to write a response. The Rebbe would then specify the language in which the letter was to be written—English, Hebrew, Yiddish or Russian. I would take these points home



Rabbi Mindel notes in shorthand

My role as personal secretary entailed going three times a week (sometimes more) to the Rebbe's room to take down in shorthand responses to the personal letters people wrote him.

and compose the letter, which the Rebbe would read and edit, if need be, before signing and having it mailed.

Traditionally, chassidim presented their dilemmas to the Rebbe in person at *yechidus*. However, as the number of requests for *yechidus* grew, and it became physically impossible for the Rebbe to accommodate them all, he found it necessary to cut back on the number of personal *yechidus*. First, it was limited to two nights a week, and later to one, until it proved necessary, under medical advice, to discontinue the personal *yechidus* altogether. Of course, this led to a rather sizable increase in the number of personal letters that the Rebbe was now receiving.

Yet, for the Rebbe the task of dealing with an increasingly heavy load of correspondence never turned into something routine or tedious. He always displayed a keen sensitivity to the correspondent, man, woman or child, regardless of the subject matter of the letter received. The reply was usually couched in affectionate terms that made the recipient feel as if he, or she, was involved in a personal audience with the Rebbe.

Not surprisingly, given these conditions, a substantial backlog of 'unfinished' mail would build up as the volume of incoming mail steadily grew. The situation was aggravated by two 'bottlenecks': One at the highest level – at the Rebbe, and the second at the secretarial level.

The Rebbe always attended to his mail personally. He never authorized any of his aides to reply in his name. Because of the intimate and confidential nature of many of the letters addressed to him, the Rebbe would open all incoming mail himself, or have it opened in his presence. The replies, whether signed, mostly, by the Rebbe himself, or by his secretary, would likewise be dictated by himself and none other. Every outgoing letter, not omitting those on Secretariat stationery, would return to the Rebbe's' desk for a final perusal before mailing.

For all the rigorousness of the process, a great many letters succeeded in passing through the various stages in order to be mailed to their destinations. The amazing thing about it is that the Rebbe was able to dispose of this immense volume of correspondence in what was, comparatively speaking, a minimal amount of time. The process of reading and answering his personal mail took the Rebbe probably not more than five to six hours a week, about half the time of which was spent in two, sometimes three, sessions a week, dictating to his private secretary–although this managed to keep the secretary busy for a goodly part of his working day!

How did the Rebbe manage to dispose of so many letters in such a short time? Well, for one thing, he was an exceptionally fast reader. He would sweep through a one or two-page letter with extraordinary speed, missing nothing on, or between, the lines. Then, putting that letter down and taking another one up, the Rebbe simultaneously dictated his response to the first letter point by point *seriatim*, or in order of importance, as he determined. Thus, while the secretary was racing against time, taking notes in his own original steno "code," (in Hebrew characters and words–because they can more easily be abbreviated and/or cast into acronyms

Yet, for the Rebbe the task of dealing with an increasingly heavy load of correspondence never turned into something routine or tedious. He always displayed a keen sensitivity to the correspondent, man, woman or child, regardless of the subject matter of the letter received.

Greeting Israeli President Zalman Shazar

and other time-and-space saving expedients), the Rebbe was already poised to reply to the next letter.

Occasionally, the Rebbe would ask me to read a letter aloud to him–not so much, I surmised, because of the difficult script, as in order to be able to read another letter or two while I got on with the reading, to which he scarcely seemed to pay attention. When I concluded my reading, the Rebbe would dash off his replies in his inimitable manner, quickly and unhesitatingly, both to the letter I had read aloud, as well as to the next one or two that he had, concurrently, read well ahead of me.

However, with all the Rebbe's extraordinary ability to deal with his mail so expeditiously, it became increasingly clear–even in the early years of the Rebbe's reign–that it would not be humanly possible to deal with the swelling tide of mail within the relatively short amount of time that he allotted to correspondence. Consequently, I made so bold as to suggest that, in the case of certain outgoing mail, there might be a way to economize on the time spent at this task. I referred, by way of example, to such standard, or form letters, as Rosh Hashanah greetings, responses to requests for the Rebbe's blessing on

Receiving arba minim from the Rebbe

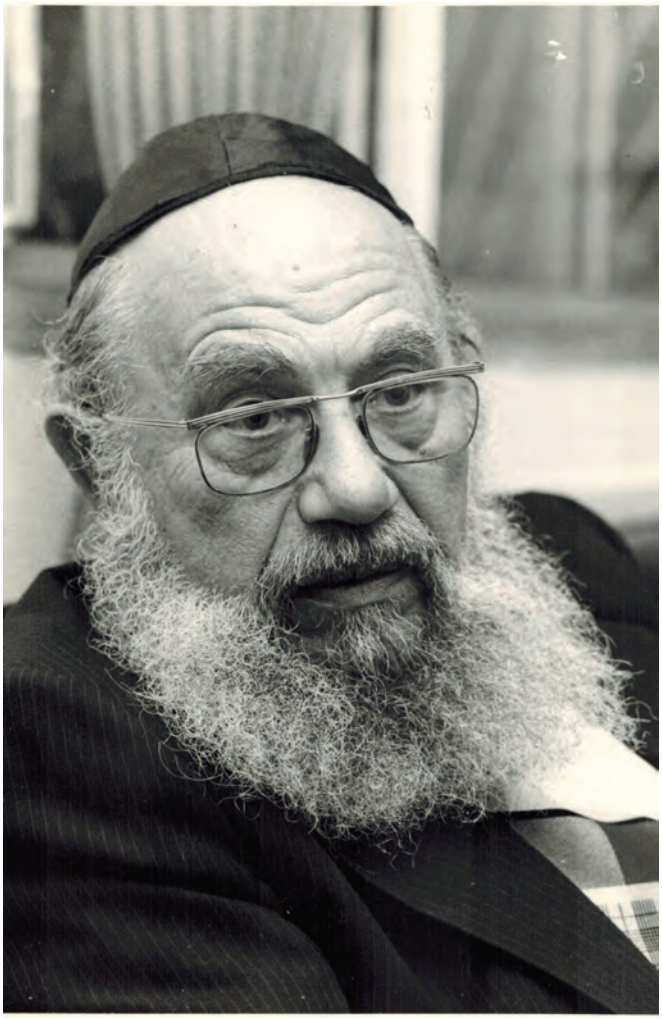
happy family events, such as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a marriage, birthdays, and so on, which when taken all together, though this was not one of my tasks, could easily number several thousand over the course of a year. Now, if the Rebbe would authorize the 'signing' of such letters by means of a rubber stamp–a universally accepted practice–it would certainly save a good deal of his precious time.

With polite acknowledgment of his secretary's thoughtfulness, the Rebbe nonetheless rejected the idea out of hand, adding a reason which, presumably, should have occurred to me in the first place. Indeed, I should have known that anything that smacked of 'subterfuge' would be repugnant to the Rebbe. That went without saying. The Rebbe's reason was simple: "How can I send prayerful wishes to a person in such an artificial manner, and how would that person feel if he or she received good wishes from his Rebbe in a letter that was signed, mechanically, with a rubber stamp?" So that was the end of that.

The second 'bottleneck' developed at the secretarial level, it being my task to put onto paper the Rebbe's response to the ever-growing volume of multilingual correspondence pouring in from all parts of the world. The Rebbe's answers, however, could only be conveyed in one of the no more than four languages that his office was equipped to work with.

In this situation, least problematic was the English correspondence, because here secretarial assistance was available to type the letters. However, before coming to that stage of the process, I had to cope with the fact that his replies were often "dissertations," communicated in Hebrew and Yiddish, as has already been pointed out. The typewritten English reply was then submitted to the Rebbe for his approval and signature. Occasionally the Rebbe made marginal annotations by hand, or underlined a word for emphasis.

Letters that went out in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian, to speakers of those languages, were less time-consuming on the one hand, more so on the other. Although they did not require translation into English, the advantage so gained was offset by the unavailability of typists competent in these



In a 5746 (1986) interview with Kfar Chabad initiated by the Rebbe

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languages. Thus, I was obliged to type these letters myself–an expedient vitiated by the fact that typing (in any language) has never been among my strongest accomplishments.

Faced as we were with inevitable delays, the principle of "first come, first served" could not, of course, be strictly adhered to. For one thing, there were certain letters that had to be dealt with on a priority basis, although even to these the replies often had to begin with an apology for the unavoidable delay involved in their dispatch.

Characteristically, in acknowledging a letter, the Rebbe usually gave precedence to a non-Lubavitcher over a devoted follower and, for the same reason, to a Gentile over a non-Lubavitcher. "My Chassidim will understand the delay; others might feel slighted," the Rebbe would explain.

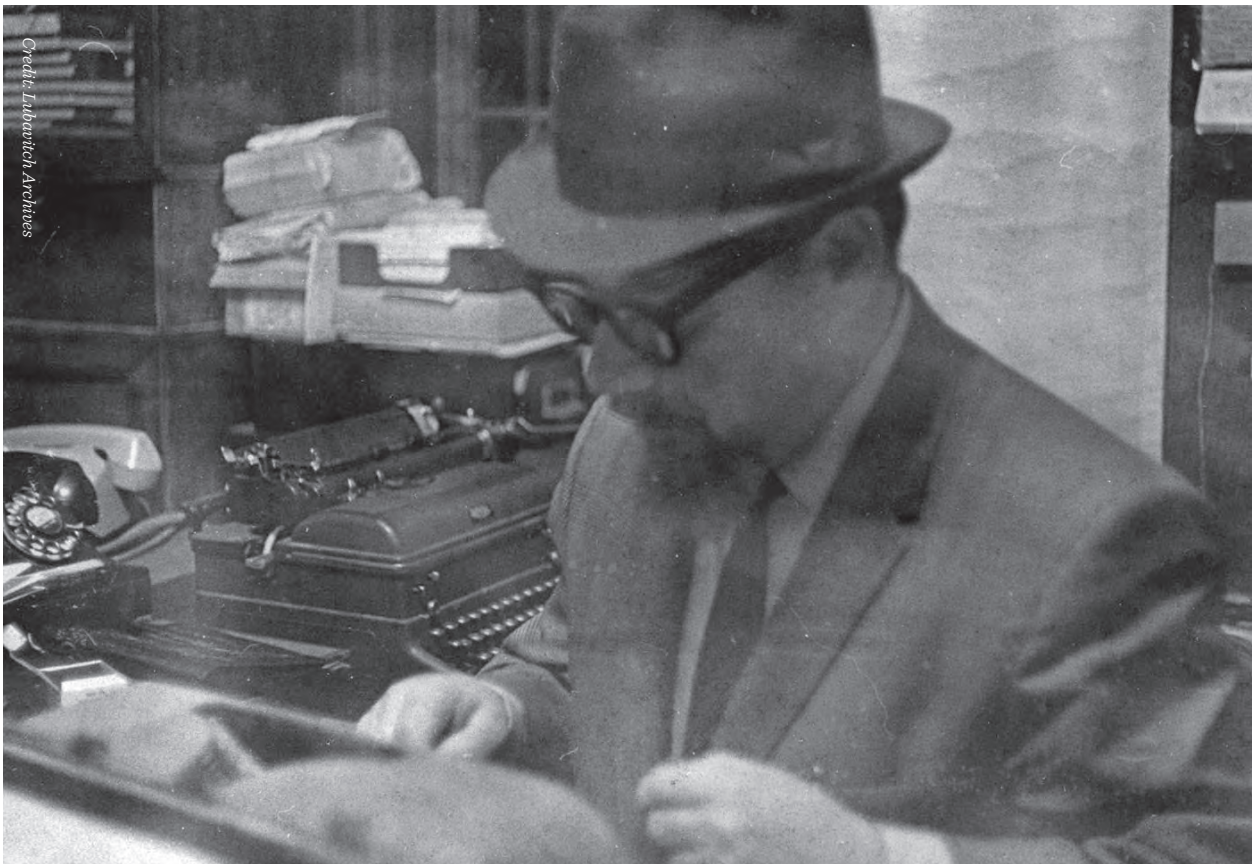
Letters were typed with two copies, one that was filed in the Merkos office in 770 on the Rebbe's instruction, and the second for me to keep in my own files. On occasion, as the need arose, the Rebbe would contact me by phone regarding certain letters. It was years later, after I had given it much thought and had received the Rebbe's approval, that I decided to compile some of the English letters in book form so that people would benefit from their valuable universal lessons, insights and advice. Of course, any name or other clue that might identify the letter writer was omitted to maintain privacy. Thankfully, the first volume of these letters is published under the title *The Letter and the Spirit*, with more volumes to follow, with Hashem's help. P

MANAGING *the* REBBE'S CORRESPONDENCE

Rabbi Nissan Mindel

Date unknown

Translated from Lashon Hakodesh
by Perspectives Staff



At work in his office, circa mid-1970s

I have been asked to share some details about one particular field of the Rebbe's activities, and that is the field of correspondence: the many letters which the Rebbe received and how he deals with them. This topic falls under my domain being that one of my occupations in the Rebbe's secretariat is to serve as the Lubavitcher Rebbe's personal secretary, though the Rebbe naturally has other secretaries as well.

WHO CORRESPONDS WITH THE REBBE?

It is worth noting as an introduction, that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is not only the Rebbe or leader of Chabad chassidim who are spread around the world, but he is also the leader of all Jewry. This was also the case with the previous Lubavitcher Rebbes, beginning with the Alter Rebbe, author of the Tanya and the *Shulchan Aruch*, who established the Chabad philosophy and movement and was the patriarch of the line of Chabad leaders of the last two hundred years. It is therefore understood that those who turn and write to him are not only his chassidim and devotees, but also people from all types of backgrounds, famous and influential people, heads of communities, *rabbonim*, community activists, politicians, and so on and so forth.

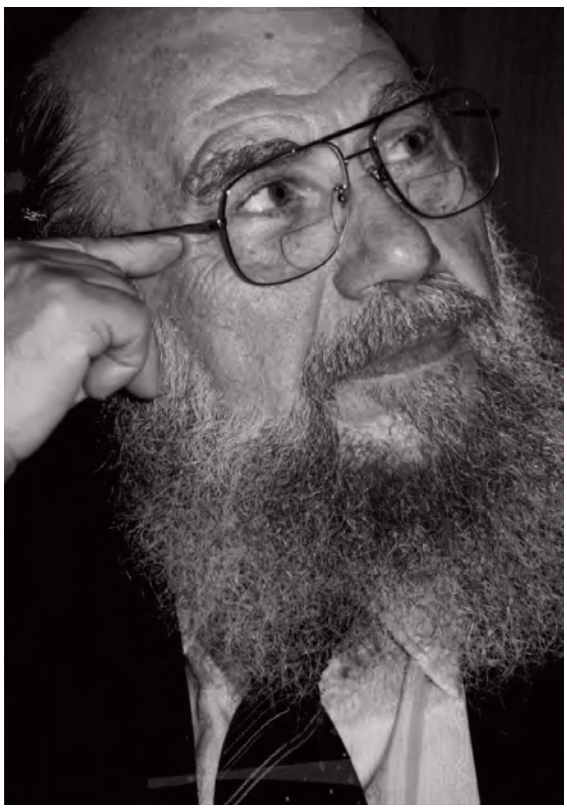
I estimate that on **average**, the Rebbe receives about two hundred letters a week, perhaps more. The content of the letters can be divided in to several categories:

As the leader of Chabad, by whose word all Chabad matters are set, he receives regular reports on Chabad institutions in *Eretz Yisroel* and the diaspora and their activities, and also requests for advice and directives. This includes the various organizations run by Chabad, such as *"Agudas Chabad," "Tze'irei Agudas Chabad,"* and *"Nshei U'Bnos Chabad,"* including all their subdivisions, as well as charitable organizations, schools, and so on.

Many personal letters are for advice and blessing: not only from chassidim but from all Jews, men and women, and even young boys and girls.

As a Jewish leader, he receives letters from various religious and social groups/organizations, from leaders and activists, coming with inquiries on issues

Firstly, it must be noted that the Rebbe personally opens and reads each letter and telegram that he receives, and he personally replies to each one. There are no exceptions to this rule. This increases the wonder, how does he find the time to read and reply to all the many and varied letters that he receives?



regarding events in the lives of Jews and Judaism in *Eretz Yisroel* and the diaspora.

Also corresponding with the Rebbe are thinkers and scientists, professors and university students, who are involved in religion, science and the like.

Despite all the many and diverse letters, the Rebbe endeavors to answer each one, great or small. However, it happens at times, and perhaps not so rarely, that a reply is delayed, sometimes for weeks or months, due to the many burdens and the shortage of time. But generally speaking all letters are answered eventually.

HOW DOES THE REBBE DO IT?

How does the Rebbe deal with the flood of letters and questions that are rushed to him from around the world?

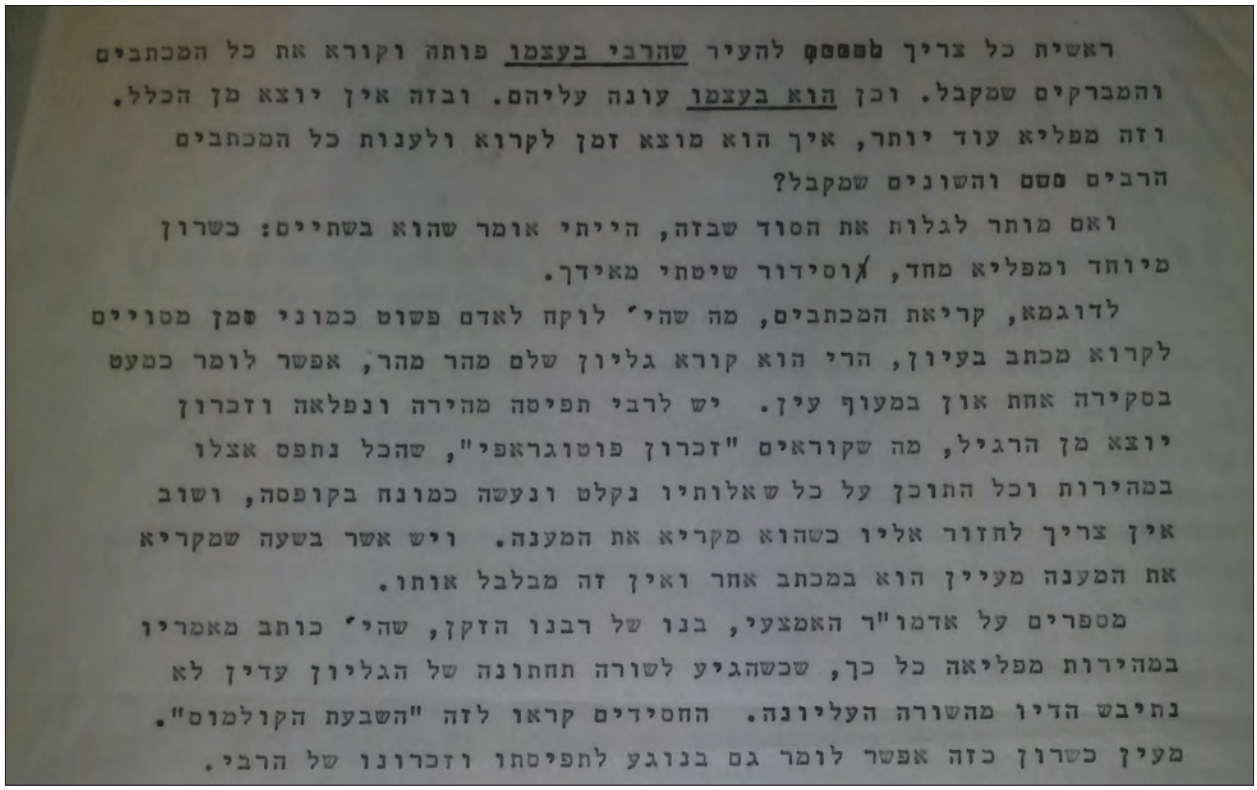
Firstly, it must be noted that the Rebbe **personally** opens and reads each letter and telegram that he receives, and he **personally** replies to each one. There are no exceptions to this rule. This increases the wonder, how does he find the time to read and reply to all the many and varied letters that he receives?

If I am allowed to reveal the secret, I would say that the answer is twofold: a unique and amazing talent, together with an organized system.

Let's take for example the reading of the letters:

While it would take an ordinary person like me some time to read a letter with concentration, the Rebbe reads an entire sheet very quickly, you could even say with one swift glance. The Rebbe has a quick and amazing comprehension and an outstanding memory – what people call a "photographic memory" – and all the contents of the letter and its questions are grasped and retained. He has no need to look at it again when he dictates the response. Sometimes, as he dictates the response, he reads another letter, and it doesn't distract him.

They say about the Mitteler Rebbe, son of the Alter Rebbe, that he would write his *maamorim* so quickly that when he reached the final line of the page, the ink on the top line had still not dried. Chassidim referred to it as the "beswearing of the quill" (*hashba'as hakulmus*). A comparable talent could be said about the Rebbe's comprehension and memory.



ראשית כל צריך להעיר שהרבי בעצמו פותח וקורא את כל המכתבים
והמברקים שמקבל. וכן הוא בעצמו עונה עליהם. ובזה אין יוצא מן הכלל.
וזה מפליא עוד יותר, איך הוא מוצא זמן לקרוא ולענות כל המכתבים
הרבים ושונים שמקבל?

ואם מותר לגלות את הסוד שבזה, הייתי אומר שהוא בשתיים: כשרון
מיוחד ומפליא מחד, וסידור שיטתי מאידך.

לדוגמא, קריאת המכתבים, מה שהי' לוקח לאדם פשוט כמוני המן מסויים
לקרוא מכתב בעיון, הרי הוא קורא גליון שלם מהר מהר, אפשר לומר כמעט
בסקירה אחת און במעוף עין. יש לרבי תפיסה מהירה ונפלאה וזכרון
יוצא מן הרגיל, מה שקוראים "זכרון פוטוגראפי", שהכל נתפס אצלו
במהירות וכל התוכן על כל שאלותיו נקלט ונעשה כמונח בקופסה, ושוב
אין צריך לחזור אליו כשהוא מקריא את המענה. ויש אשר בשעה שמקריא
את המענה מעיין הוא במכתב אחר ואין זה מבלבל אותו.

מספרים על אדמו"ר האמצעי, בנו של רבנו הזקן, שהי' כותב מאמריו
במהירות מפליאה כל כך, שכשהגיע לשורה תחתונה של הגליון עדין לא
נתיבש הדיו מהשורה העליונה. החסידים קראו לזה "השבעת הקולמוס".
מעין כשרון כזה אפשר לומר גם בנוגע לתפיסתו וזכרונו של הרבי.

The original Hebrew article

THE REBBE'S RESPONSE

As far as the manner of response, (for as mentioned the Rebbe personally answers all letters and queries), the system is as follows:

Regarding standard requests for a blessing, the response is usually short and exact, *"azkir al hatziyun,"* which he writes on the margin of the original letter or on the envelope. That means that he will mention the petitioner for the particular request at the resting place of his holy father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe. Twice a month, on *erev Rosh Chodesh* and on the fifteenth of the month, the Rebbe takes the many requests which have accumulated, and he reads them at his father-in-law's *ohel*. It is interesting that the Rebbe attributes the blessing and merit to his father-in-law, the *tzadik* of the generation. Sometimes, the Rebbe will add to his response, "May it be His will that your heart's requests be fulfilled for good."

If the content of the letter asks for advice, and the questioner specifies the various options, the Rebbe will underline one of the options with his pencil. That choice is the answer which is then transmitted by one of the secretaries in person or over the phone.

Sometimes multiple letters arrive whose subject belong to the same category. The Rebbe will group them together and give one response for all the letters, but then note on the side of the page an added detail which is relevant to that questioner.

A great portion – the vast majority – of the regular letters are answered in this manner. However, there still remain some unique personal letters which the Rebbe answers in long or short, as each letter requires.

As far as the languages of the letters: Most of the letters that the Rebbe receives are in English, Yiddish and *Lashon Hakodesh,* however some are in Russian, French, Spanish, Italian, and German. The Rebbe is fluent in all of these languages and he can read them. The response though is generally in one of these four languages: *Lashon Hakodesh,* Yiddish, English, and Russian. The Rebbe dictates the response in the respective language, except for English in which case the Rebbe dictates the response in *Lashon Hakodesh* or *Yiddish,* and only articulates in English those special expressions which he wants to be written in an exact way.

After the Rebbe dictates these unique individual letters to his personal secretary (which is in the realm of my responsibility and merit), the letters are typed up and then they return to the Rebbe who reviews them with a perceptive eye to check whether they are accurate and exact. Only then does he sign them or instruct his secretary to sign in his name. P

Rabbi Mindel in the mazkirus office with Rabbi Chodakov

A FAITHFUL SCRIBE

personal recollections

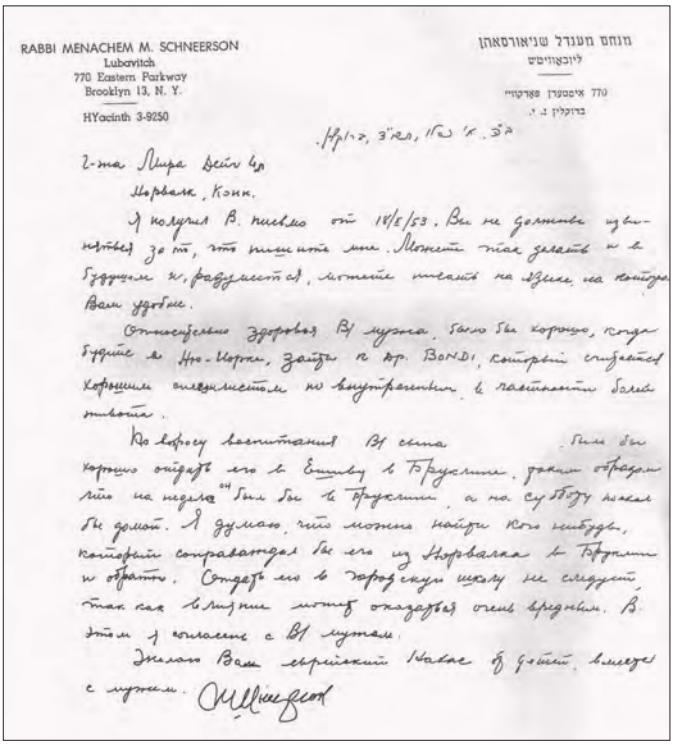
By Mrs. Frida Schapiro

My father, Rabbi Nissan Mindel, wasn't a secretary in the conventional sense of the word; he didn't file documents or make phone calls. He was hired to formulate the Rebbe's correspondence because he was a writer who could express Torah ideas in a clear and simple style and not only that, perhaps more importantly, because of his humble character, in whom the Rebbe could confide and whom he could trust.

My father describes taking dictation from the Rebbe as listening to miniature *sichos kodesh*. At the end of each dictation, the Rebbe would specify in which of the four languages the letter was to be written. The Rebbe dictated the points – concepts of Torah and Chassidus which he formulated and crystallized into a brief letter – and my father wrote them down in shorthand and later composed into a letter. He himself typed the Hebrew and Yiddish ones on his Hebrew typewriter and the English ones were typed by his secretary, Mrs. Belle Koenigsburg. My father didn't have a Russian typewriter so he wrote those by hand.

Mrs. Koenigsburg would commute to Long Beach, NY, and work in my father's office at our home. He would dictate to her word for word in English from his shorthand notes and she in turn would write

Before the Rebbe signed his name to anything – regardless of the four languages in which the letter was written –he would go over every comma. On occasion he would cross out a word and substitute another one. "This word conveys the meaning of what I want to say better than that one."


RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON
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מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש
770 איסטערן פארקוויי
ברוקלין 13, נ. י.

Letter written in Russian by Rabbi Mindel and signed in Russian by the Rebbe

them down in her English shorthand and then type up the letter. After the letters were typed, my father would check them for accuracy and then bring them to the Rebbe on his next day to the Rebbe's room. This was before computers, when corrections were a time consuming and tedious job and the entire letter or parts of the letter had to be re-typed with the corrections and additions. Since the Rebbe's changes were sometimes complex and often written in Hebrew, father would dictate these changes as well to his secretary, who would re-type the letter.

All letters were typed with an additional two carbon copies, on onion skin paper, which were inserted into the typewriter along with the regular paper that was sent to the addressee.

Before the Rebbe signed his name to anything – regardless of the four languages in which the letter was written –he would go over every comma. On occasion he would cross out a word and substitute another one. "This word conveys the meaning of what I want to say better than that one." My father understood that the Rebbe's grasp of English was better than his, even though my father was a linguist with a forte in English.

Father personally prepared *The Letter and the Spirit* series, a project I assisted him with years back, as I had been doing over the years with other projects. Of the many thousands of letters, he selected some of the English letters and arranged them according to topic – enough letters to fill ten volumes. He then wrote a comprehensive and detailed introduction in which he describes the process by which the Rebbe's correspondence was carried out. The introduction is a fascinating study in and of itself. He *B"H* managed to see the publication of Volume One of *The Letter and the Spirit* in his lifetime and we are continuing his work according to his instructions.

Interestingly, some of the letters which my father selected were "confidential." When I asked him why he was including them in his series, he told me that when the Rebbe had given him his approval to print the letters and he had asked the Rebbe about those specific letters, the Rebbe told him to

Standing behind the Rebbe at the distribution of the English Tanya, 1971

use his discretion. It goes without saying that the Rebbe trusted my father implicitly.

In addition to the Rebbe's correspondence, my father's other duties included the writing of *Talks and Tales* (English) and *Shmuessen Mit Kinder* (Yiddish) – the two well-known monthly children's magazines which the Frierdiker Rebbe had asked him to write when they first arrived in America in 1940. As instructed by the Frierdiker Rebbe, the Rebbe was to review the *Talks and Tales* before going to print each month and Rabbi Chodakov was to review the *Shmuessen*. This continued for the entire 47 years.

My father's writings total about 90 books, in many languages. Among his many works of Chassidus for young and old is his six-volume history of the Jews, *Our People*, which he wrote under the pen name of his martyred father, Jacob Isaac (Yaakov Yitzchak). To my knowledge, the only two books for which the Rebbe wrote a foreword are two books of my father: The Tanya in English and *Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi* – the two volume set of the Biography of Rabbi Schneur Zalman and the philosophy of Chabad.

My father understood that the Rebbe's grasp of English was better than his, even though my father was a linguist with a forte in English.

a collection of Rabbi Mindel's work for the Rebbe

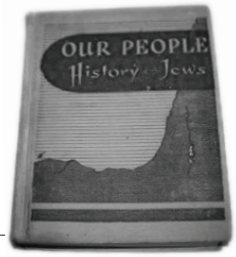
A selection of written works including "The Commandments" transalated into Chinese

My father also served the Chief Secretary of Merkos (as is listed in the back of the *siddur*) and was sent by the Rebbe on many missions locally and abroad. He was exceptionally regimented, and was very meticulous with his time.

As I understand it, there are four categories of the Rebbe's involvement in my father's writings:

1. The Rebbe's letters are like other works which the Rebbe himself authored. Like the *sichos*, they were transcribed and then edited carefully by the Rebbe and they carried the Rebbe's name. The Rebbe dictated every letter point by point to my father (albeit he used some code words to save time). Similarly, *From Day to Day* (a *Hayom Yom* for children) was dictated by the Rebbe to my father who wrote them in English.
2. The works of my father which the Rebbe reviewed word by word and made detailed corrections, additions and suggestions, at the behest of the Frierdiker Rebbe. This refers to the *Talks and Tales* throughout its 47 years. By extension this includes the five volumes of *The Storyteller* and the two volumes of *My Prayer* which are collections of the original stories and articles as they appeared in the *Tales and Tales*. The only addition that was later made was the introduction which my father wrote for the books, and this too was reviewed by the Rebbe. The discerning reader can well appreciate the fact that every word of the *Talk and Tales* was carefully reviewed and approved by the Rebbe, and the Rebbe's extensive notations on preliminary drafts of articles in the *Talks and Tales* attest to this.

3. All the other works of Rabbi Mindel which he wrote at the request of the Rebbes in his capacity of editor of Chabad publications. This includes dozens of books and pamphlets, among them: English Tanya, *Our People, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi* (biography and philosophy), *The Commandments, The Frierdiker Rebbe's Memoirs*. These also were reviewed by the Rebbe, although perhaps not to the same extent.
4. My father's own articles, letters and lectures which he wrote and gave as a private citizen and not as the Rebbe's representative. Besides the fact that his talks and writings were no doubt shaped by his education from the Rebbeim and the yoke of his holy work, he also merited that the Rebbe took the time and interest to review and comment on many of these writings as well. Naturally, these are quite different than the other categories, as they are his own works, with the Rebbe's input more limited and not official.



Rabbi Mindel's works included various childrens publications

a bottle of Mashke during Kos Shel Brochoh

BECOMING A CHOSSID

My father would say that he did not start out as a Chabad *chossid* - but he grew into one. It took him much time and effort to truly get to know and appreciate Chabad. He literally expended tremendous mental and physical effort in learning the Chassidus which the Rebbe had given him and guided him through. An effort we can see reflected in the blessed fruits of his work. P

Giving the Rebbe a Pan on Erev Rosh Hashana

LETTERS IN THE MAKING

A collection of the Rebbe's notes to and regarding Rabbi Mindel's work

פרסום ראשון

Special thanks to

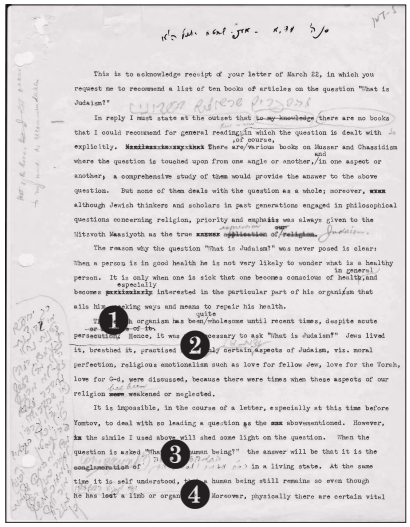
Rabbi Sholom Ber Schapiro - director of **Nissan Mindel Publications**

for providing us with these precious documents.

WHAT IS JUDAISM?

A response to the question "What is Judaism?" and why that question is only being asked today.

Note how the lines are double spaced to leave room for editing.



This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of March 22, in which you request me to recommend a list of ten books of articles on the question "What is Judaism?"

In reply I must state at the outset that ~~to my knowledge~~ there are no books that I could recommend for general reading, in which the question is dealt with explicitly. ~~Nevertheless~~ There are, of course, various books on Hassar and Chassidism where the question is touched upon from one angle or another, and in one aspect or another, a comprehensive study of them would provide the answer to the above question. But none of them deals with the question as a whole; moreover, although Jewish thinkers and scholars in past generations engaged in philosophical questions concerning religion, priority and emphasis was always given to the Mitzvoth Masiyoth as the true ~~application of religion.~~

The reason why the question "What is Judaism?" was never posed is clear: When a person is in good health he is not very likely to wonder what is a healthy person. It is only when one is sick that one becomes conscious of health, and especially becomes interested in the particular part of his organism that ails him, seeking ways and means to repair his health.

The Jewish organism has been quite wholesome until recent times, despite acute persecution. Hence, it was not necessary to ask "What is Judaism?" Jews lived it, breathed it, practiced it, only certain aspects of Judaism, viz. moral perfection, religious emotionalism such as love for fellow Jew, love for the Torah, love for G-d, were discussed, because there were times when these aspects of our religion were weakened or neglected.

It is impossible, in the course of a letter, especially at this time before Yomtov, to deal with so leading a question as the above-mentioned. However, the simile I used above will shed some light on the question. When the question is asked "What is a human being?" the answer will be that it is the conglomeration of [illegible] in a living state. At the same time it is self understood, that a human being still remains so even though he has lost a limb or organ. Moreover, physically there are certain vital

comments and edits to a letter
see full size letter for more detail ▶

❶ The Rebbe deletes the suggestion that the wholesomeness of Yiddishkeit resulted from persecution. While it may be true, it would not draw a person to want a wholesome Yiddishkeit.

❷ Here the Rebbe adds:

Only individuals or small groups sometimes became ill in this respect, but after a short time their condition became clear (either they returned to good health, or G-d forbid they became totally cut off, like the Karraites or the Frankists, and the like), but there was never a possibility to remain within the community and to "call darkness 'light' and bitterness 'sweet.'

❸ Instead of "conglomeration" which implies a random collection of items, the Rebbe suggests "compendium?" and adds in *Lashon Hakodesh* that he is looking for a word that conveys a התאחדות שלימה - complete unity.

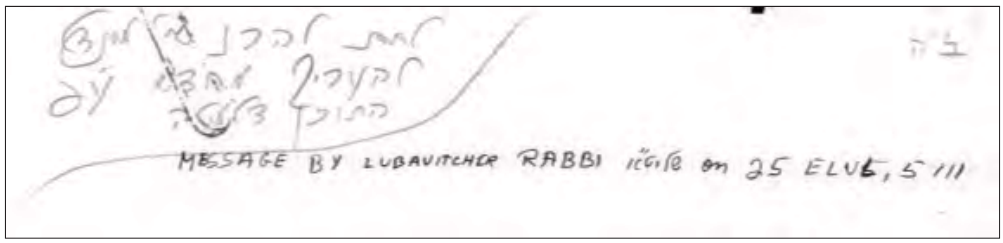
❹ The Rebbe adds, "even many of them [limbs]."

internal memos

REWORKING SICHOS

The Rebbe entrusted Rabbi Mindel to rework sichos and incorporate the Rebbe's comments and additions, as in this Elul message:

"Give this to Rabbi Nissan Mindel to reedit completely based on the content below."



This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of March 22, in which you request me to recommend a list of ten books of articles on the question "What is Judaism?"

In reply I must state at the outset that ~~to my knowledge~~ there are no books that I could recommend for general reading, in which the question is dealt with explicitly. ~~Nevertheless~~ There are, of course, various books on Mussar and Chassidism where the question is touched upon from one angle or another, and in one aspect or another; a comprehensive study of them would provide the answer to the above question. But none of them deals with the question as a whole; moreover, ~~xxxx~~ although Jewish thinkers and scholars in past generations engaged in philosophical questions concerning religion, priority and emphasis was always given to the Mitzvoth Maasiyoth as the true ~~answer~~ expression ~~application~~ of ~~our religion~~ Judaism.

The reason why the question "What is Judaism?" was never posed is clear: When a person is in good health he is not very likely to wonder what is a healthy person. It is only when one is sick that one becomes conscious of health in general, and becomes ~~particularly~~ especially interested in the particular part of his organism that ails him, seeking ways and means to repair his health.

1 The Jewish organism has been quite wholesome until recent times, despite acute persecution ~~or because of it.~~ Hence, it was not necessary to ask "What is Judaism?" Jews lived it, breathed it, practised it. 2 Only certain aspects of Judaism, viz. moral perfection, religious emotionalism such as love for fellow Jew, love for the Torah, love for G-d, were discussed, because there were times when these aspects of our religion ~~were~~ had been weakened or neglected.

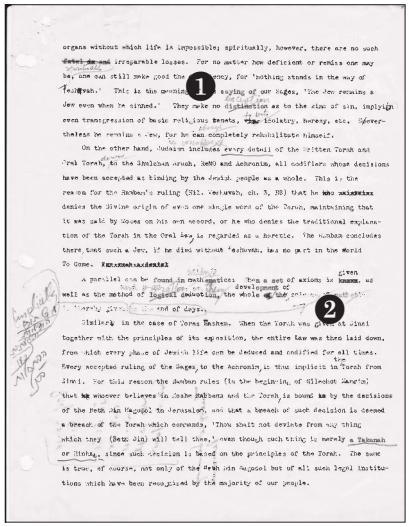
It is impossible, in the course of a letter, especially at this time before Yomtov, to deal with so leading a question as the ~~xxx~~ abovementioned. However, ~~in~~ the simile I used above will shed some light on the question. When the question is asked "What is a human being?" the answer will be that it is the ~~conglomeration~~ 3 of in a living state. At the same time it is self understood, that a human being still remains so even though he has lost a limb or organ 4. Moreover, physically there are certain vital

organs without which life is impossible; spiritually, however, there are no such ~~fatal da and~~ irreparable losses. For no matter how deficient or remiss one may be, one can still make good the deficiency, for 'nothing stands in the way of Teshuvah.' This is the meaning of the saying of our Sages, 'The Jew remains a Jew even when he sinned.' They make no distinction as to the kind of sin, implying even transgression of basic religious tenets, ~~the~~ idolatry, heresy, etc. Nevertheless he remains a Jew, for he can completely rehabilitate himself.

On the other hand, Judaism includes every detail of the Written Torah and Oral Torah, to the Shulchan Aruch, ReMO and Achronim, all codifiers whose decisions have been accepted as binding by the Jewish people as a whole. This is the reason for the Rambam's ruling (Hil. Teshuvah, ch. 3, H8) that he ~~who maintains~~ denies the Divine origin of even one single word of the Torah, maintaining that it was said by Moses on his own accord, or he who denies the traditional explanation of the Torah in the Oral Law, is regarded as a heretic. The Rambam concludes there that such a Jew, if he died without Teshuvah, has no part in the World To Come. ~~Emxxmmkxxdexxxk~~

A parallel can be found in mathematics: When a set of axioms is ~~known~~ given, as well as the method of logical deduction, the whole ~~of~~ development of the science of mathematics is thereby given to the end of days.

Similarly in the case of Toras Hashem. When the Torah was given at Sinai together with the principles of its exposition, the entire Law was then laid down, from which every phase of Jewish life can be deduced and codified for all times. Every accepted ruling of the Sages, to the Achronim, is thus implicit in the Torah from Sinai. For this reason the Rambam rules (in the beginning of Hilechot Mamrim) that ~~ix~~ whoever believes in Moshe Rabbenu and the Torah, is bound ~~in~~ by the decisions of the Beth Din Hagodol in Jerusalem, and that a breach of such decision is deemed a breach of the Torah which commands, 'Thou shalt not deviate from any thing which they (Beth Din) will tell thee,' even though such thing is merely a Takanah or Minhag, since such decision is based on the principles of the Torah. The same is true, of course, not only of the Beth Din Hagodol but of all such legal institutions which have been recognized by the majority of our people.



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A parallel can be found in mathematics: from a set of axioms is given, as well as the method of logical deduction, the whole [illegible] development of [illegible] end of days.

Similarly, in the case of Torah Shebeal Peh. When the Torah was given at Sinai together with the principles of its exposition, the entire law was then laid down, from which every phase of Jewish life can be deduced and codified for all times. Every accepted ruling of the Sages, to the Acharonim, is thus implicit in Torah from Sinai. For this reason the Rambam rules (in the beginning of Hilchot Mamrim) that whoever believes in Torah Shebeal Peh and the Torah is bound by the decisions of the Beth Din Hagadol in Jerusalem, and that a breach of such decision is deemed a breach of the Torah which commands, 'Thou shalt not deviate from any thing which they (Beth Din) will tell thee,' even though such thing is merely a Takanah or Minhag, since such decision is based on the principles of the Torah. The same is true, of course, not only of the Beth Din Hagadol but of all such legal institutions which have been recognized by the majority of our people.

continued from previous page
◀ *see full size letter for more detail*

WHAT IS JUDAISM? (CONTINUED)

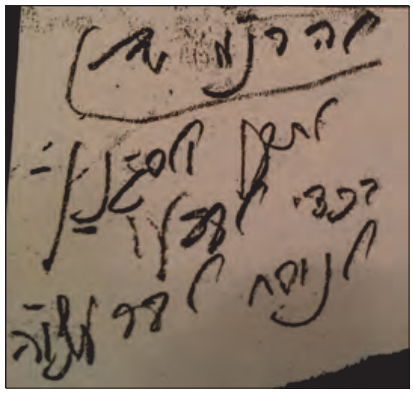
❶ The Rebbe replaces "distinction" with "exception," since there is a distinction between sins regarding *teshuvah*, it is only that there is no exception and everyone can return.

❷ The Rebbe notes here that when axioms are given with rules of application, then all future development has essentially been given "(implicitly) and with the full strength of certainty and truth as the original axioms."

internal memos

TO PREPARE STANDARD LETTERS

Here the Rebbe instructs Rabbi Mindel, "to correct and stylize [the attached Bar Mitzvah letter] to set it as a standard text for Bar Mitzvah letters."



THE PURPOSE OF VACATION

This is a draft of a message on summer vacation that the Rebbe wished to publicize.

❶ The Rebbe crosses out the mention of working people and chooses to focus on children who study Torah, since the theme is specifically about continuing the study of Torah during vacation.

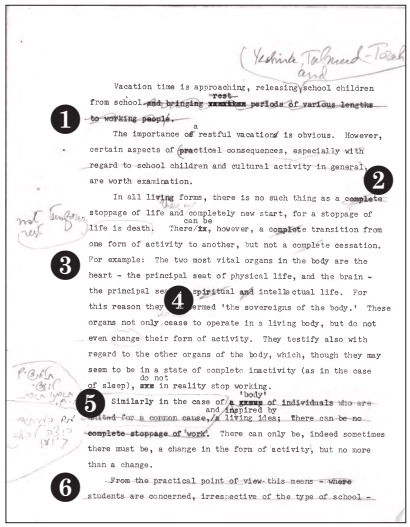
❷ The Rebbe deletes the superfluous "complete" several times.

❸ The Rebbe added, "not temporary rest," which Rabbi Mindel edited to read, "and cannot serve as a temporary rest period."

❹ This is an edit by Rabbi Mindel made assumingly before he handed it in to the Rebbe.

❺ In this paragraph (and the next), one can see clearly how Rabbi Mindel restructured the sentences based on the Rebbe's corrections.

❻ Here the Rebbe writes that stopping the function of a group of people is not possible, "if the group wants to continue to exist." Then the Rebbe decided to omit the original sentence, and that note wasn't incorporated into the final version.



Vacation time is approaching, releasing school children from school ~~and bringing xxxxthem periods of various lengths to working people.~~

The importance of a restful vacation is obvious. However, certain aspects of practical consequences, especially with regard to school children and cultural activity in general, are worth examination.

In all living forms, there is no such thing as a complete stoppage of life and completely new start, for a stoppage of life is death. There can be, however, a complete transition from one form of activity to another, but not a complete cessation. For example: The two most vital organs in the body are the heart - the principal seat of physical life, and the brain - the principal seat of spiritual and intellectual life. For this reason they are termed 'the sovereigns of the body.' These organs not only cease to operate in a living body, but do not even change their form of activity. They testify also with regard to the other organs of the body, which, though they may seem to be in a state of complete inactivity (as in the case of sleep), xxx do not in reality stop working.

Similarly in the case of ~~a xxxxx of individuals who are united for a common cause,~~ a living 'body' and inspired by a living idea; ~~There can be no complete stoppage of work.~~ There can only be, indeed sometimes there must be, a change in the form of activity, but no more than a change.

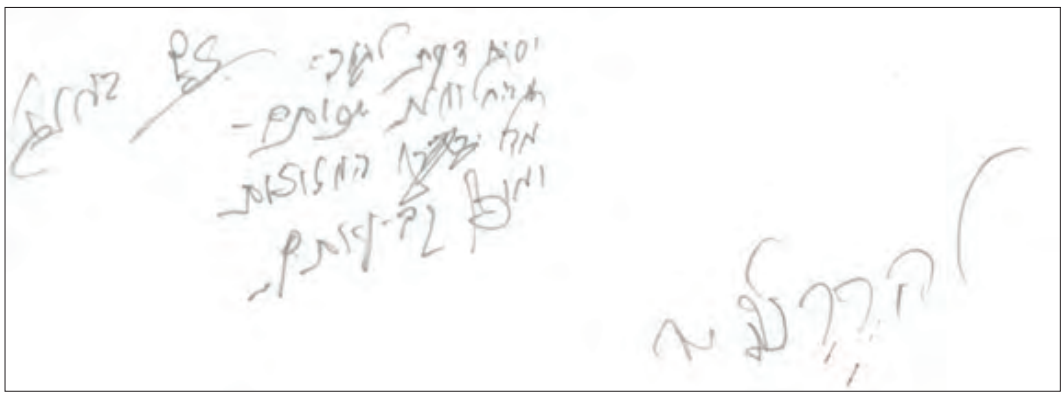
~~From the practical point of view this means - where~~ students are concerned, irrespective of the type of school -

comments and edits to a letter
see full size letter for more detail ▶

internal memos

RENDER IN ENGLISH

As noted, the Rebbe would often comment on English letters in Lashon Hakodesh and leave it to Rabbi Mindel to write it out in English. The Rebbe writes on the paper, "PS באנגלית" that it should be written as a PS and in English, and on the side, "להרנ"מ שי" instructing the acting secretary to give it to Rabbi Mindel.



(Yeshivot, Talmud-Torah and

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The importance of a restful vacations is obvious. However, certain aspects of practical consequences, especially with regard to school children and cultural activity in general, are worth examination.

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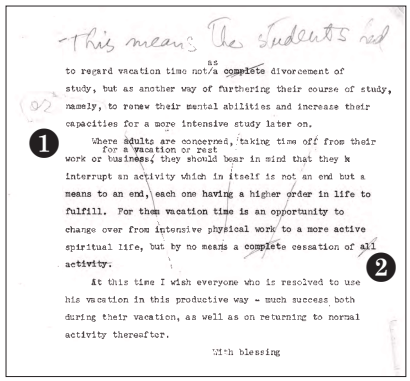
~~From the practical point of view this means - where students are concerned, irrespective of the type of school -~~

THE PURPOSE OF VACATION (CONTINUED)

❶ The Rebbe adds the word "or" which implies that one can use vacation properly either by additional study or by refreshing oneself for the future. Interestingly that change did not remain in the final version.

❷ The Rebbe deleted the words "complete" and "all activity", before he decided to omit the discussion of adult vacation.



This means the students had

to regard vacation time not as a complete divorcement of study, but as another way of furthering their course of study, namely, to renew their mental abilities and increase their capacities for a more intensive study later on.

Where adults are concerned, taking time off from their work or business for a vacation or rest, they should bear in mind that they interrupt an activity which in itself is not an end but a means to an end, each one having a higher order in life to fulfill. For them vacation time is an opportunity to change over from intensive physical work to a more active spiritual life, but by no means a complete cessation of all activity.

At this time I wish everyone who is resolved to use his vacation in this productive way - much success both during their vacation, as well as on returning to normal activity thereafter.

With blessing

continued from previous page
▼ *see full size letter for more detail*

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At this time I wish everyone who is resolved to use his vacation in this productive way - much success both during their vacation, as well as on returning to normal activity thereafter.

With blessing

THE PURPOSE OF VACATION (THE FINAL VERSION)

VACATION MESSAGE FROM THE
LUBAVITCHER RABBI, RABBI M. SCHNEERSON

To Jewish students and School Children Everywhere,

G-d bless you all!

Sholom u'Brocho:

Vacation time is approaching, to release youths and children from Yeshivoth, Talmud Torahs, Day Schools, etc., for a long summer recess.

The importance of a restful vacation is obvious. However, certain aspects of vacation time should be examined carefully. Is vacation time a complete stoppage of study, or is it merely a transition from one form of activity to another?

In all living forms, there is no such thing as a stoppage of life, followed by a completely new start, for a stoppage of life is death, and cannot serve as a temporary rest period. There can be, however, a transition from one form of activity to another, but not a cessation ~~xxxxx~~ or stoppage.

For example: The two most vital organs in our body are the heart and the brain. The heart is the principal seat of physical life; the brain is the principal seat of intellectual life. ~~Xxx~~ Because the heart and the brain have the supreme control of the body, they are termed 'the sovereigns of the body.' Now, these organs not only do not cease to operate in a livign body, but they do not even undergo a radical change in their form of activity. They testify to the fact that ~~xxx~~ the other organs of the body also, though they may seem to be in a state of inactivity, as in the case of sleep, do not in reality stop working.

To pursue the example of sleep further, we find that during ~~th~~ sleep breathing is slowed down considerably which pnables the body to have its necessary rest and invigoration. But breathing is not stopped, for the 'breath of life' must always be there.

Similarly in the case of students, boys and girls, studying our Torah, Torath-Chayyim - 'the Law of Life,' restful vacation does not mean complete interruption and stoppage of Torah and Mitzvoth, G-d forbid. It means only just another way of furthering their course of study, a period during which they renew their mental abilities and increase their capacities for a more intensive study later on.

Therefore, let not a day pass without the 'breath of life' provided by the 'Torah of Life.' Let every one have appointed times for the study of Chumash, Mishnah, Gemoro, and so on, each one according to his or her standard of Torah education.

At this time, I wish everyone who is resolved to use his or her vacation in this productive 'living' way - much success, both during their vacation, as well as on returning to normal activity thereafter.

With blessing

By the Grace of G-d
6th of Adar Rishon,
5744. Brooklyn, N.Y.

[illegible]
[illegible] Vice
[illegible]

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter of Jan. 29th. As requested, I will remember you in prayer for the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good.

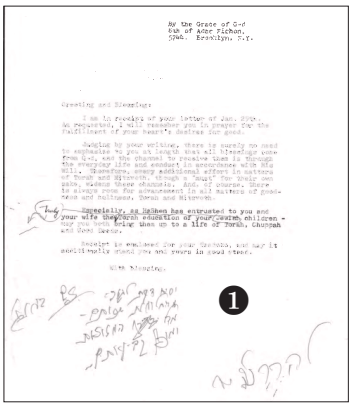
Judging by your writing, there is surely no need to emphasize to you at length that all blessings come from G-d, and the channel to receive them is through the everyday life and conduct in accordance with His Will. Therefore, every additional effort in matters of Torah and Mitzvoth, though a "must" for their own sake, widens these channels. And, of course, there is always room for advancement in all matters of goodness and holiness, Torah and Mitzvoth.

Especially, as HaShem has entrusted to you and your wife the Torah education of your Jewish children - may you both bring them up to a life of Torah, Chuppah and Good Deeds.

Receipt is enclosed for your Tzedaka, and may it additionally stand you and yours in good stead.

With blessing.

DREAMS



comments and edits to a letter
◀ *see full size letter for more detail*

❶ In the letter, the writer complains of having bad dreams. The Rebbe replies, "P.S. in English

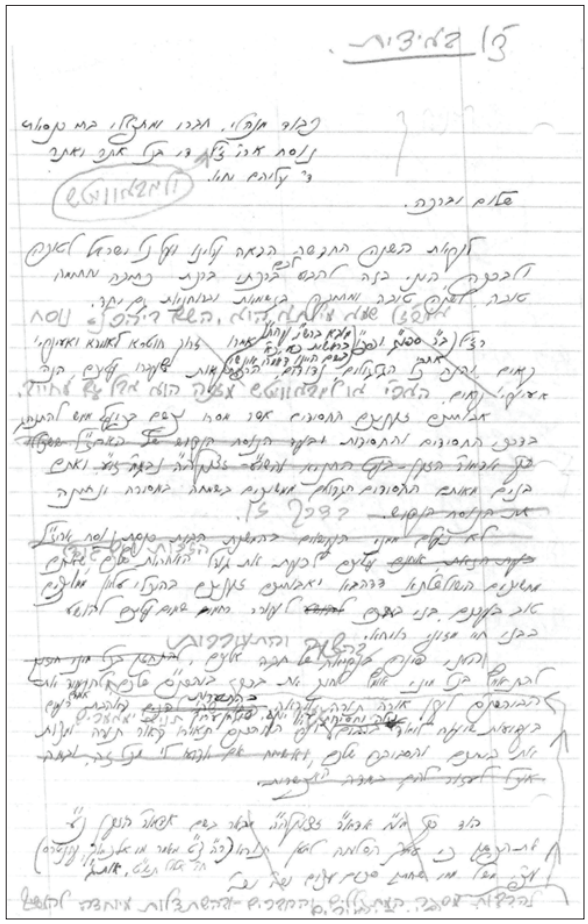
You should completely take your mind away from thinking about the dreams, but you should check your mezuzos and the manner in which they are placed."

internal memos

LASHON HAKODESH AND YIDDISH

Although Rabbi Mindel is associated mostly with the English letters, he actually wrote a significant portion of the Lashon Hakodesh and Yiddish letter as well. Until 5729 (1969) the other secretaries R. Moshe Leib Rodshtein and R. Eliyahu Kwint wrote the technical Hebrew and Yiddish letters, but the michtavim klaliyim and other literary letters were prepared by Rabbi Mindel.

The following letter to "the leaders, members and attendees of Nusach Ari and Lubavitch shuls" was prepared by Rabbi Mindel in Lashon Hakodesh. The Rebbe edited it, but noted that it should be reworded in Yiddish.



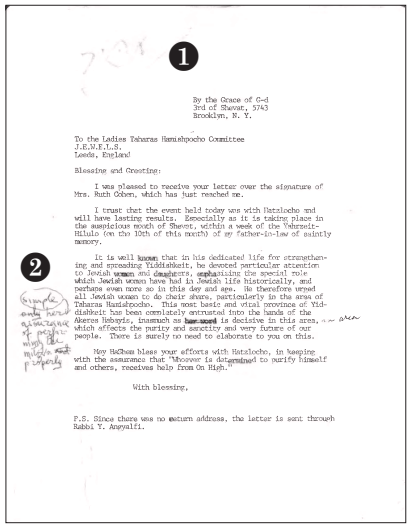
THE SPECIAL ROLE OF WOMEN

This letter carries one short comment which the Rebbe with a blue ink pen, and not the usual pencil he used for correcting. Presumably the Rebbe made the correction as he held a pen to sign it.

❶ On the top the Rebbe wrote, מהיר, "rushed" that it should be expedited so that it arrives in time for the event..

❷ Instead of "her word," the Rebbe writes:

"her assurance of performing the mitzva properly." It would seem that the Rebbe is emphasizing the role of the woman in actually performing the *mitzvah,* and not just of relaying the information that it was done.



❶

By the Grace of G-d
3rd of Shevat, 5743
Brooklyn, N. Y.

To the Ladies Taharas Hamishpocho Committee
J.E.W.E.L.S.
Leeds, England

Blessing and Greeting:

I was pleased to receive your letter over the signature of Mrs. Ruth Cohen, which has just reached me.

I trust that the event held today was with Hatzlocho and will have lasting results. Especially as it is taking place in the auspicious month of Shevat, within a week of the Yahrzeit-Hilulo (on the 10th of this month) of my father-in-law of saintly memory.

❷ It is well known that in his dedicated life for strengthening and spreading Yiddishkeit, he devoted particular attention to Jewish women and daughters, emphasizing the special role which Jewish women have had in Jewish life historically, and perhaps even more so in this day and age. He therefore urged all Jewish women to do their share, particularly in the area of Taharas Hamishpocho. This most basic and vital province of Yiddishkeit has been completely entrusted into the hands of the Akeres Habayis, inasmuch as her word is decisive in this area, which affects the purity and sanctity and very future of our people. There is surely no need to elaborate to you on this.

May HaShem bless your efforts with Hatzlocho, in keeping with the assurance that "Whoever is determined to purify himself and others, receives help from On High."

With blessing,

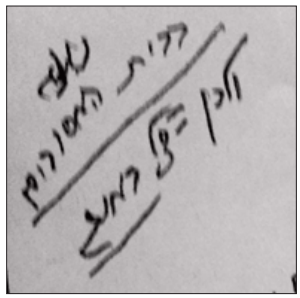
P.S. Since there was no return address, the letter is sent through Rabbi Y. Angyalfi.

comments and edits to a letter
see full size letter for more detail ▶

internal memos

A LETTER TO PRISON

Here the Rebbe instructs Rabbi Mindel to prepare the letter in English since the recipient is in prison.



1

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בס"ד

MESSAGE BY LUBAVITCHER RABBI שליט"א on 25 ELUL, 5711

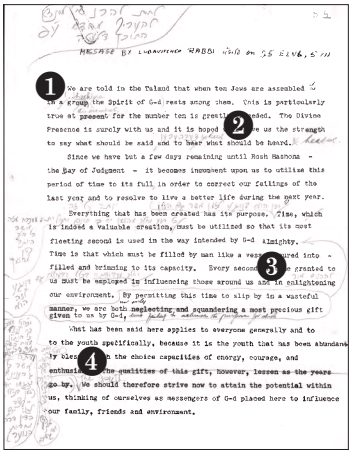
❶ We are told in the Talmud that when ten Jews are assembled in a group the Spirit of G-d rests among them. This is particularly true at present for the number ten is greatly exceeded. The Divine Presence is surely with us and it is hoped will give us the strength to say what should be said and to hear what should be heard. ❷

Since we have but a few days remaining until Rosh Hashona - the Day of Judgment - it becomes incumbent upon us to utilize this period of time to its full in order to correct our failings of the last year and to resolve to live a better life during the next year.

Everything that has been created has its purpose. Time, which is indeed a valuable creation, must be utilized so that its most fleeting second is used in the way intended by G-d Almighty. Time is that which must be filled by man like a vessel poured into filled and brimming to its capacity. Every second of time granted to us must be employed in influencing those around us and in enlightening our environment. ❸ By permitting this time to slip by in a wasteful manner, we are both neglecting and squandering a most precious gift given to us by G-d,

What has been said here applies to everyone generally and to to the youth specifically, because it is the youth that has been abundantly blessed with the choice capacities of energy, courage, and enthusiasm. ❹ The qualities of this gift, however, lessen as the years go by. We should therefore strive now to attain the potential within us, thinking of ourselves as messengers of G-d placed here to influence our family, friends and environment.

ELUL



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comments and edits to a letter
◀ *see full size letter for more detail*

In this Elul message geared towards students, the Rebbe challenges them to use their energy and prudence to make the most of their time.

❶ The original read that when ten Jews are assembled in a group the Shechina rests among them. The Rebbe crossed out the words "in a group" to imply that anytime ten Jews are together even not as a group, the Shechina rests with them.

❷ The Rebbe changes hear to דערהערן which Rabbi Mindel translated to "heed."

❸ Instead of "enlightening" the Rebbe writes "להכניס אור" - to introduce light (enlightening has the connotation of opening minds which is not necessarily the case).

❹ The Rebbe crosses out a sentence about the lack of enthusiasm at advanced age, and focuses on the advantage of youth.

internal memos

LETTER POINTS

Often the Rebbe would jot a short response on the margin of the sender's letter:

"For Rabbi Nissan Mindel

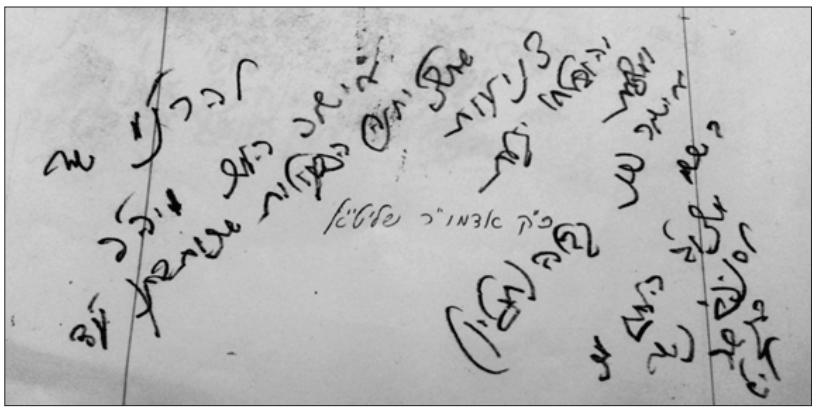
Confirm receipt of letter from ...

That her activities that she reports about *tznius* should succeed, and we have been assured if you toil you will find.

Confirm Pan Send receipt (Tefillin)

[Sign] "in the name of" [the Rebbe]

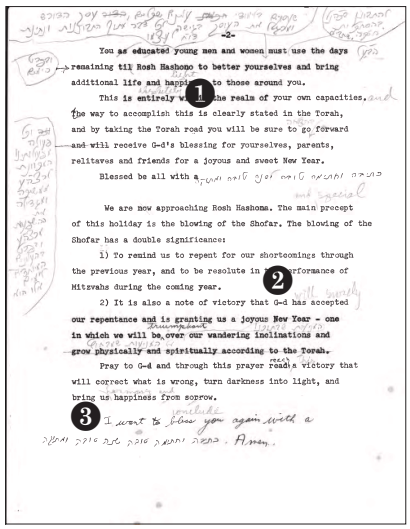
Enclosed is the copy of a letter to the branches of Nshei Chabad in connection with ..."



❶ Instead of writing that the task is "entirely" within their capacity, the Rebbe suggests replacing it with the word "absolutely" (perhaps since entirely can be misunderstood to mean that they already have all the necessary strength without the need to improve).

❷ The original states that the blowing of the shofar is a sign that Hashem "has accepted our repentance." The Rebbe writes "will surely," since that acceptance has yet to take place at the time of shofar blowing.

❸ The Rebbe changes "happiness and sorrow" to "harmony and happiness" and concludes with positive words.



-2-

You as educated young men and women must use the days remaining til Rosh Hashono to better yourselves and bring additional life and happiness to those around you.

This is entirely within the reals of your own capacities. The way to accomplish this is clearly stated in the Torah, and by taking the Torah read you will be sure to go forward and will receive G-d's blessing for yourselves, parents, relitaves and friends for a joyous and sweet New Year.

Blessed be all with a

We are now approaching Rosh Hashona. The main precept of this holiday is the blowing of the Shofar. The blowing of the Shofar has a double significance:

1) To remind us to repent for our shortcomings through the previous year, and to be resolute in the performance of Mitzvahs during the coming year.

2) It is also a note of victory that G-d has accepted our repentance and is granting us a joyous New Year - one in which we will be over our wandering inclinations and grow physically and spiritually according to the Torah.

Pray to G-d and through this prayer reach a victory that will correct what is wrong, turn darkness into light, and bring us happiness from sorrow.

I want to bless you again with a

Amen.

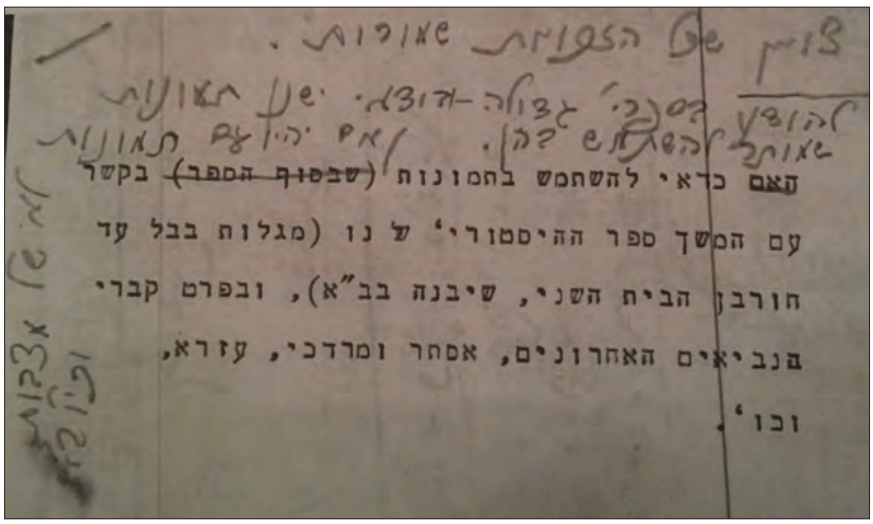
continued from previous page
see full size letter for more detail ▶

internal memos

OUR PEOPLE, COPYRIGHTED IMAGES

When preparing the Our People series on Jewish history, Rabbi Mindel wanted to include relevant images. He asked the Rebbe if he should use certain images which he found in another book on the topic.

The Rebbe approves the idea of including images, but notes that the images in that book are copyright and cannot be used. He advises him instead to visit the central New York Library where he will surely find suitable images which are not copyright.



בסניף גדולה-הדומה. ישנן תמונות
אותן להשתמש בהן. אם יהיו עם תמונות

האם כדאי להשתמש בתמונות (~~שבסוף הספר~~) בקשר
עם המשך ספר ההיסטורי' ש נו (מגלות בבל עד
חורבן הבית השני, שיבנה בב"א), ובפרט קברי
הנביאים האחרונים, אסתר ומרדכי, עזרא,
וכו'.

You as educated young men and women must use the days remaining til Rosh Hashono to better yourselves and bring additional life and happiness to those around you.

This is entirely within the realm of your own capacities. The way to accomplish this is clearly stated in the Torah, and by taking the Torah road you will be sure to go forward and will receive G-d's blessing for yourselves, parents, relitaves and friends for a joyous and sweet New Year.

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I want to bless you again with a

Amen.

(ה) 1950 (ב) 3 copies

INT-1

Thank you for your letter ~~of March 31st.~~ I regret that owing to pressure of work my ~~reply~~ acknowledgment was delayed until today.

I was pleased to read in your letter that you "would like to ~~do~~ do some of the things we both want to see accomplished." I have underlined your expression 'we both.'

1 In your letter you refer to your problems and my problems. Of course, every human being has some problems, if he wishes to make continuous progress in life. However, may I point out that when you

2 refer to my problems, ~~they~~ a certain part of them are really your, also ~~problems~~ - according ~~to~~ to my late father-in-law, our revered Rabbi of sainted memory, ~~since~~ he has ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ indicated and explicit told you ~~t~~what you soul's mission in life is, and ~~the Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch~~ indicated the channels is the medium through which to ~~fulx~~ ~~fillxikx~~ accomplish it.

3

It is superfluous on my part to elaborate on it, inasmuch as you have been privileged to hear it direct from the Rabbi of saintly memory, on more than one occasion. Your last inteview with him, more-

4

over, so soon before his leaving this world, should be considered

5

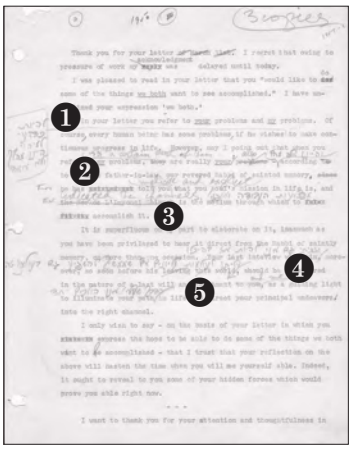
in the nature of a last will and testament ~~to you~~ and me, as a guiding light to illuminate your path in life and direct your principal endeavors into the right channel.

I only wish to say - on the basis of your letter in which you ~~xxxxxxxx~~ express the hope to be able to do some of the things we both want to be accomplished - that I trust that your reflection on the above will hasten the time when you will see yourself able. Indeed, it ought to reveal to you some of your hidden forces which would prove you able right now.

- - -

I want to thank you for your attention and thoughtfulness in

THE CONFINES OF INTELLECT



comments and edits to a letter
◀ *see full size letter for more detail*

A letter to Mr. Yehuda (Julius) Stulman who was very active in supporting the Frierdiker Rebbe's activities in America. This is a letter that our Rebbe sent him in 1950.

❶ The letter states, "every human being has some problems if he wishes to make continuous progress in life." The Rebbe adds that this is not just dependant on personal preference but is necessary if he wishes "to be as he should, that is moving (*mehalech*) and not stationary (*omed*)."

❷ The Rebbe writes to Mr. Stulman that those issues which he considers the Rebbe's problems are in fact is own problems since the Frierdiker Rebbe had charged Mr. Stulman with these missions. In his corrections, the Rebbe tones it down by writing "a certain part of them" (not all issues are his responsibility) and "yours also" (not on his shoulders alone).

❸ In discussing what that mission is the Rebbe crosses out the explicit mention of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch and writes simply that the Frierdiker Rebbe "indicated the channels."

❹ The Rebbe adds that he was also present at Mr. Stulman's last yechidus with the Frierdiker Rebbe."וזכיתי גם אני להיות אז בהיכלו"

❺ Instead of "leaving this world" in reference to the Frierdiker Rebbe's *histalkus*, the Rebbe writes: His ascent to higher worlds though he continues to provide in our world as well.

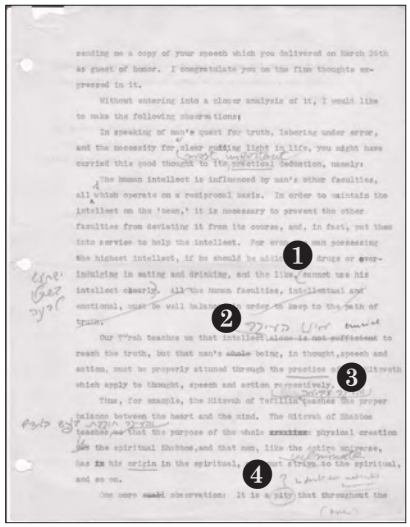
THE CONFINES OF INTELLECT (CONTINUED)

❶ Instead of writing that one who is addicted to drugs or overindulgent in eating "cannot use his intellect clearly," the Rebbe writes that "he will use his intellect for evil."

❷ The original stated that intellect alone is not enough to reach the truth (but it may well be the main tool). The Rebbe crosses that out and writes that it isn't the main way.

❸ The Rebbe emphasizes how practical *mitzvos* are not only a symbol which remind us of something, but they themselves change us.
For example: Tefillin teaches "and primarily brings" the proper balance between the heart and mind. Shabbos teaches " and primarily engraves in the soul of man" that the purpose of the physical creation is the spiritual.

❷ In noting the fact that Hashem was not mentioned in Mr. Stulman's speech, the Rebbe circles the word "pity" indicating that it requires a less antagonistic word. Above it one can see Rabbi Mindel's note to change it to "no doubt an unintended omission."
Also, the Rebbe crosses out the world "small," not to belittle the matter.



sending me a copy of your speech which you delivered on March 26th as guest of honor. I congratulate you on the fine thoughts expressed in it.

Without entering into a closer analysis of it, I would like to make the following observations:

In speaking of man's quest for truth, laboring under arrow, and the necessity for clear guiding light in life, you might have carried this good thought to its practical deduction, namely:

The human intellect is influenced by man's other faculties, all which operate on a reciprocal basis. In order to maintain the intellect on the 'beam,' it is necessary to prevent the other faculties from deviating it from its course, and, in fact, put them into service to help the intellect. For example, a man possessing the highest intellect, if he should be addicted to drugs or over-indulging in eating and drinking, and the like, cannot use his intellect clearly. All the human faculties, intellectual and emotional, must be well balanced in order to keep to the path of truth.

Our T"rah teaches us that intellect ~~alone is not sufficient~~ to reach the truth, but that man's ~~whole~~ being, in thought, speech and action, must be properly attuned through the practice of Mitzvoth which apply to thought, speech and action respectively.

Thus, for example, the Mitzvah of Tefillin teaches the proper balance between the heart and the mind. The Mitzvah of Shabbos teaches us that the purpose of the whole ~~creation~~ physical creation is the spiritual Shabbos, and that man, like the entire universe, has ~~in~~ his origin in the spiritual, and strives to the spiritual, and so on.

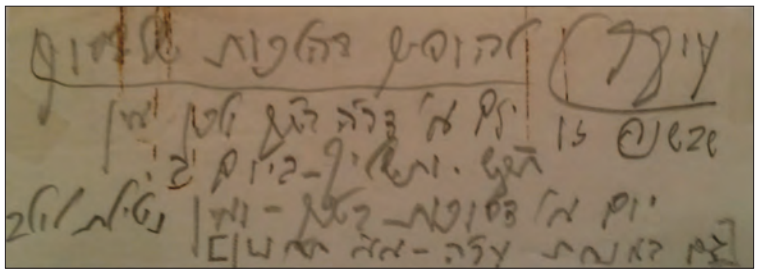
One more ~~small~~ observation: It is a pity that throughout the

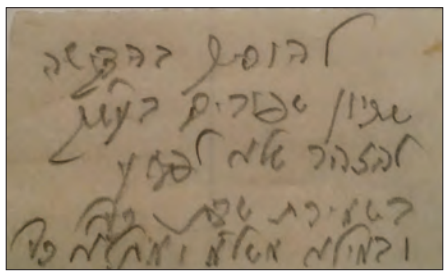
continued from previous page
see full size letter for more detail ▶

internal memos

TALKS AND TALES

The Rebbe would ensure that the halachos in the Talks and Tales were accurate and up to date. In these notes, the Rebbe points out the unique halachos for that year's kvius (calendric schedule).





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The human intellect is influenced by man's other faculties, all which operate on a reciprocal basis. In order to maintain the intellect on the 'beam,' it is necessary to prevent the other faculties from deviating it from its course, and, in fact, put them into service to help the intellect. For even the man possessing the highest intellect, if he should be addicted to drugs or over-indulging in eating and drinking, and the like, cannot use his intellect clearly. All the human faculties, intellectual and emotional, must be well balanced in order to keep to the path of truth.

Our Torah teaches us that intellect alone is not sufficient to reach the truth, but that man's whole being, in thought, speech and action, must be properly attuned through the practice of the Mitzvoth which apply to thought, speech and action respectively.

Thus, for example, the Mitzvah of Tefillin teaches the proper balance between the heart and the mind. The Mitzvah of Shabbos teaches us that the purpose of the whole physical creation was the spiritual Shabbos, and that man, like the entire universe, has his origin in the spiritual, and must strive to the spiritual, and so on.

One more small observation: It is a pity that throughout the

whole speech the name of G-d was not mentioned explicitly even once, although, to be sure, it implicitly permeates the whole speech.

* * *

I conclude with the hope that your desire to find an early opportunity to do some of the things which we both want to see accomplished would soon materialize, with G-d's help.

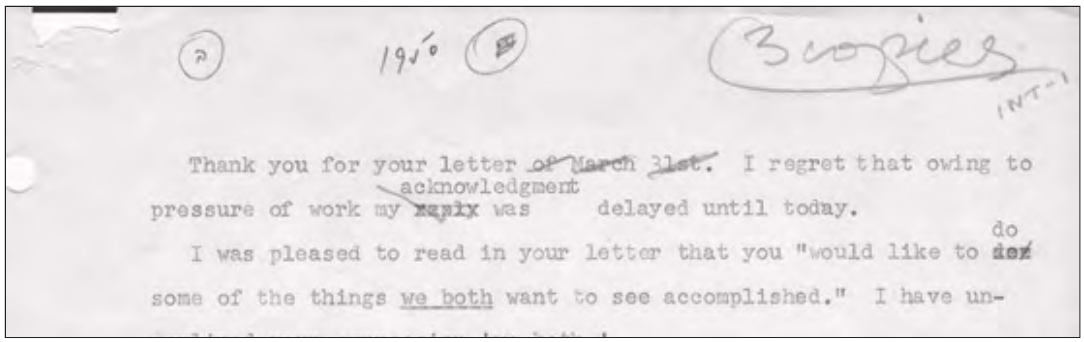
With all good wishes to you and your family,

Very sincerely yours,

25

TYPING INSTRUCTIONS

Here the Rebbe requests Rabbi Mindel to have three copies made of the letter, instead of the standard two. The reason for this is not known.



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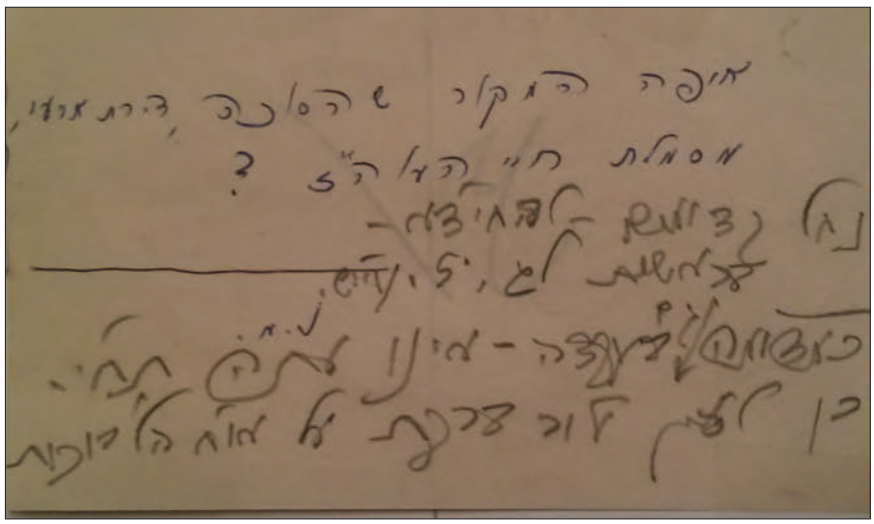
SOURCES

Rabbi Mindel would sometimes turn to the Rebbe with various questions relevant to his work. Here the Rebbe provides sources for the sukkah symbolizing life in This World:

Nachal Kedumim of the Chida Bereishis 33:17. See there. I believe it is also in the Akeida – but I don't have it at the moment. Also see Tur Barekes, Orach Chaim, Hilchos Sukkos.



NOT JUST A PEEK

RABBI SHOLOM BER AVTZON

After Reb Zushe heard about the greatness of the Maggid and became a talmid and chossid of his, he tried to influence his brother Reb Elimelech to also learn under the Maggid. Initially, Reb Elimelech didn't want to hear of it, "What is wrong with what I am learning now, that I need to learn something else?" However, after a while Reb Elimelech discerned a certain new level of holiness in his younger brother Reb Zushe, and there was no denying it; there was something of tremendous substance in the teachings of the Maggid. He was receptive to learn Chassidus.

Nevertheless, he was still of the opinion that he didn't have to travel to the Maggid and learn directly from him, rather he would ask his brother to repeat the teachings that he heard and learned from the Maggid and learn in that way. Quoting various sayings of our sages that express the concept that a disciple can convey the teachings and inspiration of his teacher, Reb Elimelech would say, "Brother, I am ready to learn from you."

While admitting that a student can exude his teacher's greatness to a certain extent, Reb Zushe argued that it was not the same, as we see in the case of our first teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu, and his student, Yehoshua ben Nun. The Gemara expresses it with the following parable: Moshe's radiance is compared to the light of the sun, while Yehoshua's radiance is compared to the light of the moon.

But knowing that he wouldn't convince his illustrious brother through debating the virtue of learning directly from a teacher versus from a student of his, Reb Zushe decided to bring out the point with a parable.

Rabbi Sholom Ber Avtzon is a veteran teacher in Tomchei Tmimim – United Lubavitch Yeshiva, Ocean Parkway. He has authored many books, including the acclaimed Rebbeim Biography series and Early Chassidic Personalities series, and is a sought-after lecturer and farbrenger. He can be contacted at avtzonbooks@gmail.com

A king once sent a minister of his to a distant city in his kingdom. The minister was greeted by the people of the city and he explained the guidelines of the king to them and thereafter implemented them.

Now, in that city lived an extremely wealthy individual who recognized the noble character of the minister and treated him with the respect one gives a king. The minister noticed this and reprimanded him, "I am just a servant or officer of our great and illustrious king. The king is so much greater, and comparing him to me – his lowly servant – is in fact slighting the king."

When he heard that the king himself is so much greater, the man decided that he must see and serve the king. If the servant is so kind, wise and of a noble spirit, how much more so will the king himself be. So he sold all of his properties and everything that he couldn't take along and moved to the capital city.

Arriving there, he immediately went to the palace and asked if there was any job opening in the palace. He didn't care what it was, as long as he would have the merit and opportunity to serve His Majesty the King. However, to his disappointment, the manager of the palace operations informed him that all positions were filled and at the moment there was no need for another worker.

The next morning, he was there again, asking if there was perhaps some work that he could do for His Majesty the King, but once again the response was, "Every position is filled."

Thus began a daily routine, that continued for weeks, months and indeed years. Every day, he asked if there was something he could do for the king and as usual the answer was, "Thank you for the offer/desire, but sorry you are not needed."

One morning he arrived, and to his great delight the manager told him, "The one who used to put wood in the furnace can no longer do that job. If you wish to do that job, it is yours." The man was ecstatic, "What do you mean, if I would want to do it? Of course I want to

Knowing that he wouldn't convince his illustrious brother through debating the virtue of learning directly from a teacher versus from a student of his, Reb Zushe decided to bring out the point with a parable.

do it! I want to begin immediately. Just show me what has to be done and I will do it."

The manager took him to the basement of the palace and opened the wood shed. There they kept the pieces of wood that were delivered weekly to the palace. "Your responsibility is to take this wood and place it in the furnace to keep the palace and His Majesty warm."

"I accept," replied the wealthy person and immediately took some wood to the furnace.

Watching the wood burning, he observed that the wood came from various trees, some thicker some thinner. Some bigger than others, some from wood that burned fast and others from wood that burns slowly. Sometimes the fire was raging, and other times it ebbed down. He immediately realized that there were moments that the palace was very warm, while other times it may have been cool.

So he bought a saw and a scale and began cutting each piece of wood to ensure they were the same size. There were the bigger pieces that maintained the fire and smaller pieces that would be used to maintain a consistent warmth.

A week later, the king called in the manager and asked what changes he had implemented lately in the maintenance of the palace. The manager was afraid that something was going amiss and replied, "The only change we made is that I hired a new person to warm up the palace. He is an interesting fellow – he came here daily for three years asking if there was an open position, as his only desire is to serve his majesty, the King. So when the person in charge of the furnace informed me that he couldn't come any more, I gave the job to him."

"Exactly as I thought," replied the king. "Until now the temperature in the palace fluctuated. There were moments in the morning that it was too hot, then it became comfortable and then it started becoming cool, only to become unbearably hot again. But now there is a constant state of comfort. I believe it is only proper that I personally thank him. Please bring him into my throne room."

The manager immediately went down to the furnace room and informed the worker that the king wished to meet him later in the afternoon. The worker was elated; his dreams and hopes were finally being fulfilled, and he would actually be allowed to gaze upon the king.

Entering the room with the greatest respect and awe, he thanked the king for his graciousness for allowing him to serve him. The king then thanked him for his dedicated work, ensuring that the temperature in the palace remained constantly comfortable, not too hot or too chilly. "However," the king continued, "I heard that you refuse to take a payment for your work. While I appreciate your loyalty and dedication, it is not befitting for a king to be indebted to anyone, even the most loyal subject. Therefore, either you accept some kind of payment or reward or otherwise I will have no choice but to relieve you from your responsibility."

Hearing this, the man paled – his only longing was to serve the king out of loyalty, not for any remuneration,

and now His Majesty the King was saying this was unacceptable and he must accept some payment. Quickly thinking over his options he replied, "His Majesty's wish is my command. The payment I desire is that every day, I be allowed to gaze at the graciousness of His Majesty the King."

The king smiled and replied, "While it is not in the protocol that a laborer be allowed to enter the throne room on a constant basis, because of your loyalty and dedication I will make the following allowance: above the throne room is a storage room, and a workroom will be set-up for you there, so no one will be surprised that you are going there daily. After the room is set-up, you will be allowed to make a slit in the wall from where you can look for two minutes a day into the throne room and you will see what you desire."

The man was overjoyed and he thanked the king profusely for his kindness and understanding. This arrangement continued for a few years, until one day the prince did something that displeased his father the king, to the extent that the king banished him from his table. The prince was distraught that he could no longer see his father, and then suddenly he remembered hearing about the little slit in the workroom. So the prince approached the worker and pleaded with him to allow him to join him in the workroom for just a few seconds that he too be able to gaze upon his father the king.

Facing the prince, the worker replied, "Honorable prince, peeking through a slit in the wall suffices for a lowly individual as myself. I am undeserving and unworthy of even being a laborer of His Majesty the King. But only because of His Majesty's graciousness has he allowed me to work and gaze upon his graciousness, thereby becoming somewhat connected to him.

"But you are his son, you are the crown prince. It is not befitting you to only see His Majesty for a short moment through a small crack in the wall. You are entitled and deserve much more. My prince, if you will take the advice of a humble person, go and beg your father, His Majesty, for his forgiveness and then you will be allowed to see him at all times in all of his grandeur."

—

Reb Zushe concluded his parable and said to his brother, "You are great, you are entitled to learn the complete wisdom and teachings from the Maggid.

We are entitled and expected to "see the Rebbe" completely, by learning his sichos in their original and complete form, and giving the Rebbe's teachings a prominent place in our lives.

Why are saying it is sufficient to gaze upon the eyes who saw him, when you can gaze upon the holy Maggid himself!"

Hearing these words, Reb Elimelech decided that his brother Reb Zushe was correct and he made the journey to the Maggid, becoming one of his outstanding students.

We have in recent years witnessed an incredible dissemination of Chassidus and the Rebbe's teachings. People from all walks of life are taking interest and studying the insights taught to us by the Rebbe. However, what may be enough for someone who never had a relationship with the Rebbe and Chassidus, should not be enough for us who have had such a connection. We, the Rebbe's chassidim, cannot be complacent or comforted with "seeing the Rebbe" through a sliver of a vort, a short clip, or a secondhand message. We are entitled and expected to "see the Rebbe" completely, by learning his sichos in their original and complete form, and giving the Rebbe's teachings a prominent place in our lives. Then we will merit the fulfillment of our fervent wish, ritzoneinu lirois malkeinu, to actually see the Rebbe, soon with the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu. P

CHINUCH *in our* TIME

Part Two

RABBI NACHMAN YOSEF TWERSKY

THE FOUNDATION OF CHINUCH

FUNDAMENTAL FAITH

Shlomo HaMelech famously wrote, "Educate a child according to his way so that when he grows old he won't veer from it." The Rebbe once asked: Why do we want him to stay the same as he grows older? Do we want him to keep his childish perception?

The Rebbe explains that this statement is not discussing the child's understanding, but the fundamental principles. That foundation doesn't change even as his appreciation and understanding grow.

A child is told that when Hashem says, "I am Hashem your G-d" in the singular, He speaks to the child, and He is the child's "strength and life-force." Or when Hashem says, "You will be to Me a holy nation," the child is told that Hashem wants *him*, the Jewish child, to be holy. The child is further taught that by studying Torah he becomes one with Hashem, and as he grows older he intensifies his connection to Hashem through Torah and *mitzvos*. These core beliefs sustain the child at every stage of his life.

ESSENTIAL BOND

The Baal Shem Tov once lost his *ruach hakodesh* and all of his Torah intellect, and so he recited the letters of the Alef-Beis, the essence of the Torah. He reviewed the letters again and again, until he returned to his usual elevated state.

A direct descendent of the Rebbes of Chernobyl and son of the late Rachmastrivka Rebbe of Yerushalayim, as a bochur, Rabbi Twersky joined the yeshivah in Kfar Chabad and in 770.

Today, Rabbi Twersky serves as a rov of the Beis Menachem Mendel shul in Crown Heights and a Maggid Shiur in Mesivta Oholei Torah. He is a leading community mashpia and counsels dozens of families on a regular basis, particularly regarding topics of chinuch.

Every person, even a *tzadik*, goes through ups and downs. During those falls, he remains connected to Hashem through his essential connection.

In other words: If I am a Jew just because of what I do, then when *ch"v* I lose that standing, I am bound to lose everything. But if I am connected to Hashem with my essence, I remain connected to Him no matter what happens.

Whatever part of Torah we learn – Chumash with Rashi or Gemara with Rashi and *mefarshim* – we must feel that it is connecting us to Hashem. Of course, we must learn as much as we can, but the foundation of our learning is our recognition that through any Torah learned or *mitzva* done, we bond with Hashem.

THE ONE MISHNA THAT HE KNEW

A young couple of Holocaust survivors who married after the war moved to the United States and settled on the Lower East Side. They had a son and they chose to send him to learn in Lubavitch. The child had severe behavioral problems, but in those days *yeshivos* didn't throw children out; they were happy that the child was among *frum* friends. The boy was sensitive toward his parents, and he kept all of his trouble a secret from them.

In 5720 (1960), shortly before the boy's *bar mitzva*, the father told his son that following the custom, they would visit a *tzadik* for a *bracha*, and since the boy learned in Lubavitch they would go to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. On the day before his *yechidus*, he excitedly told his friends at school that he would be seeing the Rebbe. To his dismay, his friends warned him that the Rebbe asked *bar mitzva* boys questions on what they were learning. The boy became nervous; he didn't want to aggravate his parents, but it was too late to prepare anything.

When they entered the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe blessed them for the *bar mitzva* and spoke to the father about various things that pertained to him. Then the Rebbe turned to the boy and asked him whether he could speak to him in learning. Not being able to refuse the Rebbe, the boy said yes, though he had no idea what he would respond. Instead of asking which Gemara his class was learning, the Rebbe started asking him questions about one particular *mishna*. As it happened, that exact *mishna* he knew very well, since he had written it out many times as a punishment...

The father looked on with such *nachas*. Here was the Rebbe talking with his son in learning, and his son knew all the answers. After a few questions the Rebbe gave him a *bracha* to continue to grow in learning and bade them farewell. The father left the Rebbe's room elated, and when they arrived home he proudly told his wife about how well their son had done. The boy became inspired to pursue learning more seriously and develop his talent.

Perhaps it can be said that the Rebbe saw how the *mishna* connected the boy to Hashem – no matter how he had come to know it – and through it he illuminated the boy's *neshama*.

THE ESSENTIAL CONNECTION

I once had a student who was extremely challenging and made all kinds of mischief to disrupt the class. I knew that punishment or rebuke would only cause damage, so I dealt with him in a kind manner.

I once met his father and we spoke about his son's struggles, and the father then told me an insightful and fundamental *vort*:

The Gemara relates how when Dovid HaMelech entered the bathhouse he was saddened that he was without *mitzvos* since he had removed his garments

(*tzitzis, tefillin*). He was comforted only when he remembered his *bris mila*. What is the Gemara telling us with this story?

"Garments" are a person's qualities which define his conduct. A child is pure and sincere; he can be sold into almost anything. An adult is mature and understanding, and can discern between good and bad. But there is a transition period when the child's "garments" (his innocence) are shed, but he does not yet have the maturity of an adult. He is not responsible; he can reach the lowest of places and he doesn't care. It is a dangerous phase. Everyone passes through it, however some are in and out, while others roost for a while.

This was Dovid HaMelech's satisfaction with the *bris mila*. We have an essential connection to Hashem which supersedes the *mitzvos* that we do. When an adolescent feels lost, and temporarily loses his interest in *davening* and learning, it is that essential connection that gives him strength to continue.

SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH

The *posuk* at the end of *Parshas Acharei-Mos* says, "I am Hashem your G-d, you must not do as they do in Mitzrayim, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices, I am Hashem your G-d."

The *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh* asks there: What is the significance of the repeated statement "I am Hashem your G-d"? And why the emphasis on the lands of Mitzrayim and "Canaan, where I am bringing you"?

Hashem therefore tells a Jew, "*I am Hashem your G-d* – Indeed, under ordinary circumstances, you could never overcome your natural instincts. Only I, Hashem, give you the supernatural strength to withstand them.

When we learn Chassidus and become excited about Hashem, we transmit that to our children. It's the *chayus* that is paramount.

The *Ohr HaChaim* explains that a person might say to Hashem, "If You want me to be holy, then bring me to a clean land. If You bring me to the land of Egypt or Canaan where I am exposed to extreme immorality, how can I act holy?"

Hashem therefore tells a Jew, "*I am Hashem your G-d* – Indeed, under ordinary circumstances, you could never overcome your natural instincts. Only I, Hashem, give you the supernatural strength to withstand them. Even challenges that come from living in a decadent land can be overcome with help from Above. I placed you in those situations, and I give you the power to rise above them."

Children need to realize that their challenges are normal, and Hashem gives them strength to endure. Though it won't solve all their problems, it will lift a weight off their heart and they won't come to despair.

INNER CONNECTION

R. Pinchas of Koretz, one of the great disciples of the Baal Shem Tov, taught that one should not send his child to a *melamed* who doesn't learn *pnimiyus haTorah*. Why is this so important for a *melamed* who teaches reading, *Siddur*, Chumash, *Mishnayos* or Gemara?

The purpose of education is to impact the child's *neshama* for life. How can we be sure that a boy who learns Alef-Beis or Gemara will have it shape his essence? Many people are knowledgeable, yet do as they please. How do we ensure that our child will be positively affected? The solution is *pnimiyus haTorah,* the section of Torah that penetrates his own *pnimiyus*. When a teacher learns Alef-Beis with a child or Chumash or *Mishnayos*, he puts his essence, his *pnimiyus,* into the child. Although he is teaching him the revealed part of Torah, he invests his soul into the child's soul.

The same is true for us parents. When we learn Chassidus and become excited about Hashem, we transmit that to our children. It's the *chayus* that is paramount. When we share a *sicha* at the Shabbos table, we should say it with feeling; the length of the *vort* isn't important. When a father comes home after Shabbos, and excitedly shares some point from the Rebbe video, the Rebbe comes to life in his home.

WHY ARE WE LEARNING?

One of the problems of adolescents with *Yiddishkeit* is that they view it as constricting when they want freedom. They don't feel proud to be a Jew, and they lack the basic appreciation of being Hashem's child.

A *yungerman* told me about a *bochur* from a *frum* community who went far off, leaving his home, yet, every Shabbos he would visit a nearby Chabad House for *chulent*. The *yungerman* offered to study Tanya with him, but the youngster refused, saying that he didn't believe in anything. The *yungerman* countered that it was only fair to maintain such a stance after seriously learning Tanya, so the youngster conceded.

They began to study together, and the *bochur* continued to insist that he didn't believe. During one session, as they studied the fourth chapter, he broke down crying. When he calmed down, he explained himself, "When I was a boy in school, they taught me about 'an ox that gores a cow' and I wondered, 'I don't have an ox or a cow and it is unlikely that I ever will. Why do I need to learn this? How will this help me?' But my teacher forced me just to put my finger on the place. I didn't have the head for it, and was punished for lack of interest until I just dropped out of school. Had I known that when by learning Torah I become one with Hashem, what difference does it make if I have an ox or not? I cry that my teachers didn't teach

me this." From that point on, he began a slow journey back to *Yiddishkeit.*

When these roots are planted early on, they motivate the *neshama* for years to come.

THE VALUE OF PHYSICALITY

R. Hillel Paritcher related the following story:

About 600 years earlier, a duke in Germany incarcerated the leading sage of that generation, the Maharam of Rottenburg. They demanded an exorbitant ransom for his release, and the Maharam thus declared that it was forbidden to redeem him, since it would encourage them to capture others. Indeed, he lived the rest of his life in prison and passed away on 19 Iyar 5053 (1293).

Even after his passing, the authorities refused to release his body for burial. Fourteen years passed until a wealthy Jew by the name of Alexander Wimpfen offered his entire estate in exchange for the Maharam's body. He then purchased two cemetery plots and said that when his time would come, he should be buried next to the Maharam.

A few months later, during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*, the Maharam came to Alexander in a dream. He thanked him for giving him a proper burial, and told him that as a reward from Heaven he could either be extremely wealthy and be blessed with a long life, or he can choose to die the following day and join the Maharam in *Gan Eden*.

Alexander didn't hesitate and immediately chose the second option. He quickly got out of bed and woke up his family, told them what he had dreamt, and wrote a will in which he described what had happened. The following morning he passed away.

R. Hillel Paritcher then posed a question to his listeners: What do you think of Alexander's choice? To his listeners' surprise, R. Hillel explained that his choice was valid before the revelation of Chassidus, but according to the Baal Shem Tov's teachings, the advantage of physical *mitzvos* outweighs all of the spiritual delights from sharing a chamber in *Gan Eden* with the Maharam of Rottenburg until the coming of Moshiach!

Chazal say in *Pirkei Avos*, "One hour of *teshuva* and good deeds in this world is greater that all of *Olam HaBa*." According to Chassidus, this does not just mean that in this world one can rectify his wrongdoings so that he can better enjoy *Olam HaBa*, but that *mitzvos* themselves are superior to the spiritual light of *Gan Eden*. The Alter Rebbe explains the reason in Tanya (Ch. 4) that through practical *mitzvos* a Jew "grasps" Hashem Himself, whereas

The burial place of the Maharam in Rottenburg

When a child is taught the full meaning of practical *mitzvos* and how they connect us to Hashem, he will find hope to bond with Hashem even when he isn't spiritually inspired.

> When a child does something good at school or at home, regardless of whether he received a "certificate" for it or not, we need to make a big deal about it.

in *Gan Eden* the *neshama* merely basks in the ray of the *Shechina*.

Without Chassidus, one may choose to forego a *mitzva* in order to receive a greater share in *Olam HaBa*. With Chassidus, it is worth losing *Olam HaBa* completely just to be able to do another *mitzva*. From this perspective, preferring *Olam HaBa* is simply indulging into a personal – albeit lofty – desire.

When a child is taught the full meaning of practical *mitzvos* and how they connect us to Hashem, he will find hope to bond with Hashem even when he isn't spiritually inspired.

EXHILARATING EXPERIENCE

TO CHOOSE LIFE

The Torah says in *parshas Nitzavim*, "Choose life for yourself and your children." Why does the Torah have to tell us to choose life? And why are we told to choose for our children if they too are being told to choose life?

R. Dov Berish Veidenfeld, the Tchebiner Rov, explained that the instruction here is to choose a living and vibrant *Yiddishkeit*. Every Shabbos, *Yom Tov* and *chassidishe yoma d'pagra* should be celebrated with energy and excitement. When we perform *mitzvos* with life, our children will automatically become alive with *Yiddishkeit*.

CELEBRATING MITZVOS

In transmitting values to our children, the knowledge of right and wrong alone is insufficient. The Torah must be received *"besimcha u'bipnimiyus"*—with joy and in a way that affects one's essence. Surely then, our children, the guarantors for the Torah, must learn the Torah in a jubilant manner.

The Gemara says that every *mitzva* that the Jewish people accepted with joy endured. Joy during a *mitzva* shows how important that *mitzva* is to us.

Every holy accomplishment or milestone should be marked with a special celebration. Just as a Siddur Party and Chumash Party make the Siddur and Chumash important to the child, we need to make every holy endeavor something to remember. When a child finishes learning a *masechta* of *Mishnayos,* a festive meal should be held for him, to show how valuable it is to us. He will remember it and it will spur him on further.

I recall how the Rebbe encouraged the *siyumim* on Rambam to be made with great pomp and celebration. This underscored its importance and excited many people to join the study cycle.

Many people laugh at the *minhag* to add additional *kugels* on a special Shabbos, such as Shabbos

Rosh Chodesh or the like. Such mockery is often inappropriate and sometimes dangerous. True, the spirit Shabbos is best honored by the study of Chassidus and *davening*; but if an added *kugel*, or any other food, generates good feelings towards Shabbos, what's wrong?

WHAT THE CHILD WILL REMEMBER?

R. Nochum of Chernobyl once visited a town and was asked to be the *sandak* at a *bris*. After the *bris* the poor family put out only a few cubes of sugar and a small bottle of *mashke*. R. Nochum was shocked and asked for everyone to participate in arranging a grand *seuda* with *challa*, fish and meat, and guaranteeing that he would cover the cost.

Later that day, they held a large meal, and R' Nachum explained why he insisted on making a feast for the *bris*. "Before Rosh HaShana there were terrible accusations against the Jewish people. *Malach* Michoel maintained that although there were many sins, the many *mitzvos* of the Jews would outweigh

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Just as a Siddur Party and Chumash Party make the Siddur and Chumash important to the child, we need to make every holy endeavor something to remember.

Throughout the week I eat without pleasure, but on Shabbos it's a *mitzva* to eat and the *neshama* and body work together. It is a joint pleasure for the *neshama* and the body."

them. When they put the *mitzva* of *bris* on the scale, *Malach* Michoel insisted that the *seuda* and all the work that goes into preparing it must be placed on the scale as well. I don't want to forgo this great *zechus*."

The Satan is also called *Malach Sama-el. Sama-el* is an acronym for *Seudas Mitzva Ein Laasos* (don't make a feast for a *mitzva*), *Siyum Masechta Ein Laasos* (don't make a *siyum* when completing a *masechta*), and *Seudas Mila Ein Laasos* (don't make a festive meal for a *bris*). The Satan says, "If you want to learn, so learn; but don't make a big deal out of it. Don't make a celebration."

This principle is especially true at home. When a child does something good at school or at home, regardless of whether he received a "certificate" for it or not, we need to make a big deal about it. Whatever is done with excitement becomes engraved in their minds and hearts.

PLEASURABLE YIDDISHKEIT

A wealthy man once came to Berditchev to spend Shabbos with R. Levi Yitzchok. That Shabbos, the *tzadik* changed his habit, and with every bite of food at the Shabbos meal he said *"l'chavod Shabbos kodesh"* with obvious delight. The guest thought to himself, *The Rebbe eats one tiny fish with such delight, while I eat three kinds of fish and have lots of property and I don't experience as much pleasure.*

One *bochur* told me that he had learned more during the summer than he had learned throughout the entire school year!

After Shabbos, the man presented his dilemma to the *tzadik*. R. Levi Yitzchok replied:

"A Jew has a problem. He has a G-dly soul and an animal soul who oppose each other. When he learns, the animal soul tries to distract him with all sorts of worldly pleasures. But when he tries to enjoy life, his G-dly soul whispers in his ear, 'Is this why you came into the world?'

"What's the solution? To get both souls to work together. Throughout the week I eat without pleasure, but on Shabbos it's a *mitzva* to eat and the *neshama* and body work together. It is a joint pleasure for the *neshama* and the body."

Every Jew, especially one who studies Chassidus, will feel uneasy if their *neshama* is malnourished. We need to convey to the youth how observing *mitzvos* will also bring them satisfaction and pleasure.

A PLEASANT ENVIRONMENT

Many wonder what the secrets to success are of the *yeshivos kayitz*. How is it that boys who don't learn year-round become *masmidim* during the summer?

Chazal tell us, "A person should always learn where his heart desires." When a person is in an enjoyable environment, he is inspired to learn and behave properly.

I recall one summer when around fifteen young *bochurim* stayed in the city. During that time, I had arranged to learn Chassidus every morning with R' Yosef Goldstein *a"h*, and so I invited the *bochurim* to join. Every morning at eight o'clock they came for Chassidus and *davening* without any *mashgiach* forcing them to come. They experienced the joy of learning in a relaxed setting without force. At the end of that summer, one *bochur* told me that he had learned more during the summer than he had learned throughout the entire school year!

THE CHILD'S INTEREST

The saying goes: That children should be *yerei Shomayim* depends on the mother, that they should be *talmidei chachomim* depends on the father.

It's normal for a boy not to be excited about reviewing what he learned in *yeshiva*. But if the father chooses something different and interesting, the child will be excited to learn with his father and the study matter will leave a lasting impression on the child.

A *yungerman* called me about a child he tutors who was not at all interested in learning. I inquired what they were studying. It turns out that the boy's mother asked for them to learn a certain *mesechta* of Gemara so the boy could make a *siyum* at his *bar mitzva*, but the boy himself had no such aspiration. I suggested instead that he learn something lighter and more interesting with the boy such as Chassidus or *halacha*.

Two weeks later he called to tell me that the boy loves their *halacha* study so much that on his own he bought a book of *Hilchos Shabbos* with pictures and asked his father to learn it with him.

PROPER PROTECTION

RESPONSIBLE PARENTING

Although every Jewish child has a *neshama* which naturally draws him in the right direction, parents must still take care that he isn't misguided. We must be vigilant about what comes into our homes. Today, there are thankfully many more *frum* magazines than there were years earlier. Though it is of course preferable to study Torah, these kosher publications offer an alternative to secular ones.

When a child is taken on a trip, parents must know where their child is going. We can't just assume that "it will be all right." The spiritual damage a child can sustain from unsuitable places could affect them for the rest of their lives.

At the same time, it must be done in a sensible manner. One should not tell a child, "We don't go there," or "that's not good." In homes where many things are forbidden there is an even greater desire for them.

They key is for the child to feel that it's for his own good. But, that can only be achieved if parents have a close connection with their child. The child then learns to trust his parents even when he doesn't fully understand their decisions. If, however, that relationship doesn't exist, all their reasons won't convince him.

WITHOUT COMPROMISE

The Rebbe often stressed that young people are turned off by compromises, and it causes them to lose faith in the educator and everything he says. Even small compromises can cause significant harm to the long term development of the child. (See for example, *Igros Kodesh,* Vol. 13, letter #4604.)

Even when a child is lax in observing certain *mitzvos*, he knows what's right and what's wrong, and he isn't looking to turn his weakness into an ideology. If we tell him the truth in a loving manner, it will resonate with him, and eventually he will find the strength to put it into practice.

Once, a student of mine wanted to watch something inappropriate. I asked him whether he would want his own child to watch that same thing, and he immediately replied that he would not. With the proper encouragement, the child will overcome his struggle.

From a Young Age R. Leizer Silver *a"h* was the president of the *Agudas HaRabbanim* of America and worked together with the Frierdiker Rebbe in aiding the Jews behind the Iron Curtain and battling the Reform. He once shared the following insight:

Chazal tell us that the *Yevanim* forced the Jews to write that they don't have a portion in the G-d of Israel on the horn of an ox. Why was this so important to them? Who cares what is written on the ox's horn? This question bothered him for some time.

One day, he was invited to cut the ribbon at the opening of a new museum in Cincinnati where he was the rabbi. After the ceremony, he was given a tour of the museum, and was shown a collection of ox horns. The tour guide explained that in earlier times ox horns were used as a baby bottles.

This, R. Silver said, was the Greeks' intention: to corrupt with heresy from the most tender age.

We need to establish our home as an oasis in the nonstop rush of life. One important ingredient is our own commitment to Torah living

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A LIVING EXAMPLE

HEARING VOICES

We need to establish our home as an oasis in the nonstop rush of life. One important ingredient is our own commitment to Torah living. When children see their father opening a *sefer* to learn, they pick up that Torah is an important part of life. When they see their mother whispering a *tefila*, they know that they can turn to Hashem with their problems.

The Torah discusses a *ben sorer u'moreh,* a rebellious child, "who did not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother." In a non-literal interpretation of the *possuk*, the Kotzker Rebbe said that the "voice of his father" refers to the father's Torah study at home, and the "voice of the mother" is the mother's *davening* and telling stories of *tzadikim*. A child who did not hear these voices is prone to rebel.

PERSONAL EXAMPLE

One day a *chassidishe* businessman received a bundle of bills and to his dismay he discovered that one $100 bill was counterfeit. He could have easily passed it on together with the other bills, but that would be stealing, and so he took the loss himself.

That day, when his children came home from school, he welcomed them with a festive meal. When the children sat around the table, he told them he was going to do a big *mitzva*. He took out the counterfeit bill and told them how he refused to steal, and how happy he was at his opportunity for a *mitzva*. Together, they all held on to the bill and destroyed it.

Twenty years later, one of his children bought a house from heirs of an old woman who had died. The heirs told the son, "Our elderly mother left the home in disarray. We tried to clean it up and take the valuables, but we couldn't go through everything. If you find anything, please let us know."

A few years later, the son renovated the house, and in one of the walls he found three gold bars and bundles of bills. He was inclined to keep it, but then he remembered how his father burned the counterfeit bill and celebrated it with a feast. He decided to do the same. He gathered his family together and showed them the three gold bars and bundles of bills, and then in front of them he called the heirs and returned it all.

THE SOUND OF TORAH STUDY

When a father comes home and opens a *sefer* (even if not for in-depth study), the child comes to appreciate Torah study. An older boy can be brought to a *beis midrash* to see and hear people learning. Watching others excited by learning can give the child a lasting *chayus* in learning.

The Tzemach Tzedek would travel to distant cities to visit the chassidim who were unable to make the trip to Lubavitch, but the cities near Lubavitch he wouldn't visit. On one trip, accompanied by his older sons, they passed the nearby town of Dubrovna and the Tzemach Tzedek strangely instructed the wagon driver to stop there.

The Tzemach Tzedek headed to the home of R. Nechemia of Dubrovna. R. Nechemia had been the Tzemach Tzedek's *chavrusa* when they studied under the Alter Rebbe, and he went on to become a prominent *gaon* and a successful businessman. R. Nechemia's son opened the door and told them that his father was in his *beis midrash*.

The Tzemach Tzedek turned around and headed for the *beis midrash*. He knocked on the door, but R. Nechemia was immersed in learning and didn't hear the knocking. Finally, the son came and broke down the door. The Tzemach Tzedek went inside with his sons and they beheld R. Nechemia deeply engrossed in learning. They watched him for a while and turned to leave. R. Nechemia's son offered to interrupt his father, but the Tzemach Tzedek told him that it wasn't necessary, "I only wanted to show my children what it means to be totally immersed in Torah."

The Rebbe mentioned many times how R. Yehoshua ben Chananya's mother would take him to the *beis midrash* as a baby to hear the sweet sound of Torah study. This had a lifelong impact on him.

"The parents' role is to cultivate the *neshama* that Hashem gave the child and to make it shine. Hashem's role is providing us and our families with good health and material needs in abundance. When we do our part and raise our child to Torah and *mitzvos*, then Hashem does His part."

DOING OUR PART

One of the biggest challenges to ensure a proper *chinuch* is the lack of time. We are overworked to pay our bills and to manage our home. Where do we find the time and peace of mind to give children all the attention that they need?

At a talk to Nshei Chabad in 5743 (1983), the Rebbe set forth a revolutionary approach to childcare which takes a large burden off our shoulders (printed in *Toras Menachem* 5743, Vol. 3, p. 1482):

"Chazal say that there are three partners in the creation of a child: the father, the mother, and Hashem who provides the soul. Now, since this is a joint venture, we must each work to grow the business. What does Hashem do and what do we do?

"The parents' role is to cultivate the *neshama* that Hashem gave the child and to make it shine. Hashem's role is providing us and our families with good health and material needs in abundance.

"When we do our part and raise our child to Torah and *mitzvos*, then Hashem does His part." P

Toras Emes yeshiva, 1980s

The Cold FIREBRAND

The Life of R. Chaim Ber Wilensky

A MIGHTY MASKIL | THE CHRONICLES OF CHASSIDIM | A QUESTIONNAIRE

Amongst the intellectual giants of Chassidus Chabad, R. Chaim Ber Wilensky of Kremenchug, stands out as an independent thinker, pragmatic intellectual, and a silent leader.

Despite spending hours at a time contemplating Chassidus, he was keenly aware of the realities of life and the artificial steps they demand – though he sometimes willingly ignored them. Single-mindedly focused on the objectives of Chassidus, he had no interest in promoting himself or his ideas and emotions, and he kept silent, unless he deemed it necessary to speak up. He was nevertheless the leader in his town and active in all community and private matters.

Most accounts of chassidim are limited to select anecdotes by an outsider about the chossid's "shul life" – his davening, learning, farbrenging or his visit to Lubavitch – but little on his private life and day-to-day conduct. In this case we have a detailed account by R. Chaim Ber's son about his private world – his daily conduct, his lifestyle, and his unique personality.

A MIGHTY MASKIL

One of the greatest intellectual giants of Chassidus Chabad was the chossid R. Chaim Ber Wilensky of Kremenchug. Reb Chaim Ber belonged to a group of outstanding Chabad chassidim in Kremenchug known as the "Kremenchuger Beralach" (since they were all named DovBer after the Mitteler Rebbe.

As can be seen from the relatively few mentions of him, R. Chaim Ber was held in high esteem by the Rebbeim, who discussed Chassidus with him and sent chassidim to learn from him.[1]

"RAIBN-ZICH ARUM CHASSIDIM"

The Frierdiker Rebbe related:

"I have been told, that when I was six or seven, R. Chaim Ber visited Lubavitch, and both my father and uncle RaZa requested that he speak to them on topics of Chassidus. R. Shmuel Ber Barisover was also there at that time. R. Chaim Ber spoke at great length on the difference between *Ohr-Ein-Sof* and *Ohr-HaEin-Sof,* and employed twenty-one parables. My father then said that he found a source in Chassidus for sixteen, and had assumed that the other five were from R. Aizik Homiler's writings. He later discovered that they were R. Chaim Ber's original thoughts.[2]

"In 5649 (1889), after Shavuos, my father told me, 'One must spend time (*raibn-zich*) in the close company of elder chassidim. Look here, I'm older than you. Yet, when R. Shmuel Ber [Barisover] and R. Chaim Ber spent a few weeks in Lubavitch, I then spent three-quarters of a year applying what they had spoken about.'"[3]

INTELLECTUAL STUDY

In 5649 (1889), R. Chaim Ber visited Lubavitch, and since his legs suffered and could not stand, he *davened* in the *cheder sheini* next to the small *zal*. He sat there on a bench, covered with his *talis,* and *davened*.

The Rebbe Rashab recalled:

"I had davened in the main *shul* and I passed by the door of the *cheder sheini*. I stood there for some time and listened to R. Chaim Ber *davening*. When I came home I said, 'Now I have found justification for intellectual study of Chassidus.' Until then, intellectual study was totally objectionable in my eyes."[4]

"THE REBBE WILL MANAGE JUST FINE WITHOUT ME."

In the year 5647 (1887), the Rebbe Rashab was exceedingly occupied with studying *Imrei Bina* of the Mitteler Rebbe, in *Shaar HaKrias Shema,* chapters 12-13. He learned so intensely that hair fell from his head. He then sent a question to R. Chaim Ber, but R. Chaim Ber did not reply.

When R. Yitzchok Yoel Rafalovitch, the *rov* of Kremenchug, visited Lubavitch, the Rebbe complained that he did not receive a response from R. Chaim Ber. When R. Yitzchok Yoel returned to

Kremenchug he scolded R. Chaim Ber, "How is it that the Rebbe writes you a letter and you don't bother to reply?"

R. Chaim Ber disclosed what the topic of the letter had been, "He asked me a question in *Imrei Bina*."

"So, why didn't you answer him?" R. Yitzchok Yoel pressed.

"He'll manage just fine without me," R. Chaim Ber explained.

The following year when R. Yitzchok Yoel visited Lubavitch, he told the Rebbe Rashab what R. Chaim Ber had answered. The Rebbe heard him and said, "My intention wasn't to gain an explanation in *Imrei Bina*, but to know how one could possibly work it out with human logic."[5]

RASHAB TOPICS OF CHASSIDUS

During the years of 5648-5653 (1888-1893), the Rebbe Rashab corresponded with various chassidim on topics Chassidus, which later developed into *maamorim*. The letters sent to R. Chaim Ber are assumed to have included "rich ideas."[6]

In one letter to R. Chaim Ber in the winter of 5653 (1893), the Rebbe Rashab writes, "Last Chol Hamoed Pesach you asked me about what you heard repeated in my name that *Matan Torah* took place only on this hemisphere and not in America. At that time, I showed it to you in a *maamar* of the Alter Rebbe from 5562 (1802), and I have it handwritten by the Mitteler Rebbe and in two *maamorim* from the Tzemach Tzedek..."[7]

It seems that there was another letter in which the Rebbe Rashab explained the topic at length. The Frierdiker Rebbe expounds that in the Western Hemisphere where the *Matan Torah* wasn't openly revealed, *avoda* requires hard work and *mesiras nefesh*.[8]

ECSTATIC FROM CHASSIDUS

At one *farbrengen* in Lubavitch, the Rebbe Rashab delivered profound chassidic insights in the presence of the *maskilim* R. Yehoshua Chersoner and R. Asher Nikolaiyever. On his way home, R. Asher stopped in Kremenchug and repeated those teachings for R. Chaim Ber, who said with excitement, "Had I been present, I would have kissed the Rebbe's hands and feet!"

When R. Yitzchok Yoel returned to Kremenchug he scolded R. Chaim Ber, "How is it that the Rebbe writes you a letter and you don't bother to reply?

R. Yitzchok Yoel Rafalovitch

R. Asher would later say how he wished upon himself to be as brokenhearted on Yom Kippur as R. Chaim Ber was brokenhearted from disappointment from missing that Shabbos.[9]

NOT FOR PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

The Frierdiker Rebbe related:

"From the age of nine and onwards, during the time when R. Zalman Zlatapolsky and R. Chaim Ber were in Lubavitch, I began listening to Chassidus and huddling at the feet of the chassidim.[10]

"At that time, the Rebbe Rashab recited the famous *maamar* of Acharei Mos 5649 for R. Chaim Ber privately. The *maamar* discusses the advantage of *tikkun* over *tohu*, and of Rabbi Akiva over his fellow sages who entered *Pardes*, in that he entered in peace and therefore left in peace.

"At the Shabbos table together with those said chassidim, as well as other elders and two or three youngsters, my father spoke about how although Chassidus gives a person the ability to raise himself up, he must first rid himself of his bodily habits. Aharon's sons sinned by wanting only to connect, without thinking of the action that it must bring to. This is achieved through *bittul atzmi*, to do as Chassidus instructs, and not as logic dictates.

"The Rebbe concluded, 'Chassidus reveals the truth that every intellectual understanding, no matter how deep, must lead to a deeper practice in a *mida tova* and make the body shine.'"[11]

This *maamar* is highlighted numerous times by the Frierdiker Rebbe, and each time in connection with R. Chaim Ber.[12] It would seem that the *maamar* was addressing the debate in Kremenchug over the correct attitude for living a life guided by Chassidus

(see further in the questionnaire). The Rebbe Rashab supported R. Chaim Ber's position that Chassidus must always be applied with mature balance, *tikkun*, through *bittul* to a higher calling.

TO THINK FOR FIVE HOURS?!

About that stay in Lubavitch the Frierdiker Rebbe related:

"One day I was walking home from *cheder*, which was then in the *cheder sheini*, to eat lunch, and as I ran through the courtyard I met R. Chaim Ber. He asked me if I could show him the path leading to the garden which stood behind father's house. I showed him the entrance which was near the well, and I followed him to see what he would do there.

"Around our garden, there were several benches which were sunk into the ground. R. Chaim Ber sat down on one of the benches, removed his hat and remained seated in his *yarmulka*. I left him and headed home.

"During that time I was learning by the secondary level *melamed*, R. Shimshon. The day began at eight in the morning with *davening*, then a quarter-after-nine we had to be in *cheder* to study until two in the afternoon. Two to four was a break for lunch and writing, and then four to seven we learned some more. At seven, I would usually go with a group of friends to the garden where we would converse.

"How surprised was I when I found R. Chaim Ber sitting in the same position as I had left him five hours earlier! My childish mind could not comprehend how a man could sit for five hours and think. I had seen people learn all day, but just to think?!

"I was so amazed that I could not contain myself and I ran to tell my father."[13]

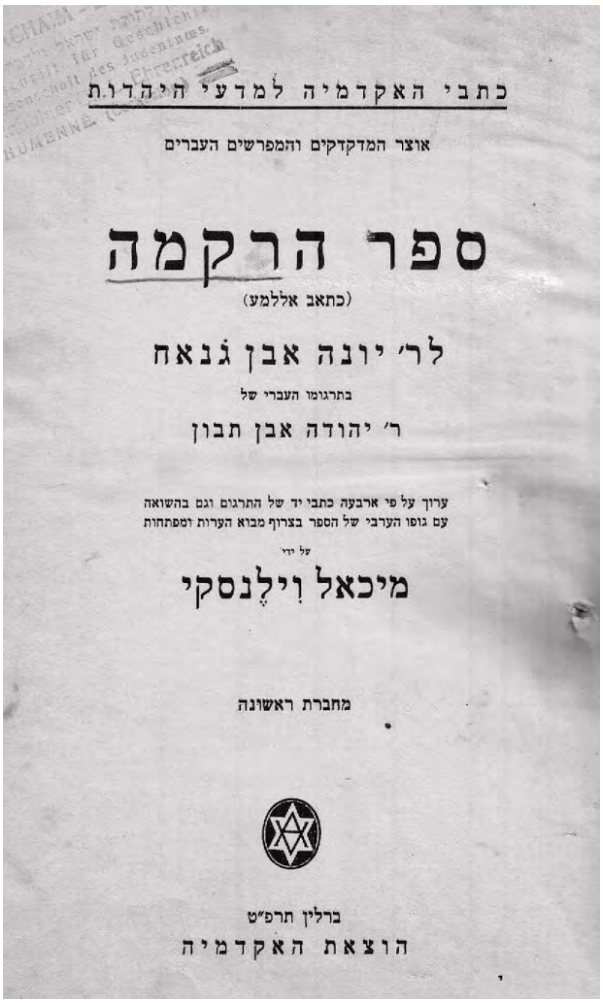
WHERE AM I?

R. Chaim Ber's intense concentration was not restricted to a quiet bench in a Lubavitch garden, but rather it was ever-present with him.

R. Chaim Ber would travel to Kishinev once or twice a year to buy his supply of wine. In Kishinev he would stay in the home of his supplier who treated him with fitting respect. Once, he arrived in Kishinev but the man had stepped out, so R. Chaim Ber waited in a corner and began to contemplate on Chassidus.

When the supplier came home, he welcomed R. Chaim Ber, but no response came forth. The man could not understand why R. Chaim Ber ignored him. A few hours later, R. Chaim Ber began walking around as if he were looking for something. The supplier offered his help and R. Chaim Ber said that he wished to wash his hands. Upon showing him the sink, R. Chaim Ber expressed surprise that it was not where it usually stood. He then greeted the supplier warmly and asked him what brought him to town. The man was dumbfounded by the question, until he realized that R. Chaim Ber had forgotten where he was.[14]

The Rebbe later relayed: "I was in Berlin at the time when he researched the Sefer HaRikmah, and I saw him totally involved in it, working on it day and night."


כתבי האקדמיה למדעי היהדות

אוצר המדקדקים והמפרשים העברים

ספר הרקמה

(כתאב אללמע)

לר׳ יונה אבן גנאח

בתרגומו העברי של

ר׳ יהודה אבן תבון

ערוך על פי ארבעה כתבי יד של התרגום וגם בהשואה
עם גופו הערבי של הספר בצרוף מבוא הערות ומפתחות

על ידי

מיכאל וילנסקי

מחברת ראשונה

ברלין תרפ״ט

הוצאת האקדמיה

The Sefer HaRikma annotated by Reb Michoel

BRAINPOWER FROM KINDNESS

Intellectual greatness is not only a product of natural talent or hard work. Sometimes it can be merited through physical efforts.

The chossid R. Zalman Zlatapolsky would often merit that the Rebbe Maharash said private *maamorim* for him. In the year 5638 (1878), the Rebbe said a special *maamar* for him and in it he quoted the passage that R. Eliezer would give a coin to a pauper before *davening*. The Rebbe explained, "*Davening* should be with liveliness; by enlivening the pauper with the gift, the giver gains an incredible increase of life and enthusiasm," – and he threw his hands upwards to demonstrate the incredible understanding.

When R. Zalman passed though Kremenchug, he repeated the *maamar* before R. Chaim Ber. From then on, each morning before he *davened*, R. Chaim Ber would set up a table with drinks and cakes for the poor to eat something after *davening*.

The Rebbe Maharash later said to someone, "You think that R. Chaim Ber's intellectual prowess resulted from his study of the Mitteler Rebbe's *Shaarei Orah* and *Ateres Rosh*? No! His *haskala* came from the cakes that he distributed before *davening*."[15]

REB MICHOEL WILENSKY

Reb Michoel Wilensky was born to R. Chaim Ber in 5637 (1877) in Kremenchug and learned in Lubavitch in the year 5654 (1894). Although the *yeshivah* of Tomchei Temimim had not yet been established, there was nevertheless a group of about fifteen *"yoshvim"* – young men who sat and learned in the Rebbe's *beis medrash*. During that time, he merited special attention from the Rebbe Rashab.

Looking to gain a secular education, he attended university in Berne and Kazan. In 5681 (1921) he left Russia for Berlin, where he used his expertise as a philologist to prepare works on Hebrew grammar. He edited the Ibn Ezra's *Safa Brura* and *Moznayim* (unpublished), and he annotated and published R. Yonah Ibn Janach's *Sefer HaRikmah*.

While living in Berlin, the Rebbe rented an apartment from Reb Michoel. The Rebbe later relayed (to the editor of the updated edition of *Sefer HaRikmah*), "I knew the deceased as an exceptionally talented person with unique precision. I was in Berlin at the time when he researched the *sefer*, and I saw him totally involved in it, working on it day and night."[16]

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE FRIERDIKER REBBE

Despite the fact that Reb Michoel had become distant from the *chassidishe* lifestyle, he nonetheless felt strongly for it and had great esteem for the Rebbeim. The Frierdiker Rebbe corresponded with him numerous times, and tried to solicit his help for various projects – a bibliography of *sifrei Chassidus*, translation of Chassidus, and biography of R. Chaim Ber. It would seem that the Frierdiker Rebbe's efforts were also intended to draw Reb Michoel back to the way of Chassidus.

In Teves 5691 (1931), the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote to him for the first time and discussed the idea of preparing a bibliography of *sifrei Chassidus* from all chassidic sects. The Frierdiker Rebbe concludes, "As I was reading your letter, the sentiment of comradery that existed between us 35-36 years ago was aroused within me. I would be very interested to know of your life now, and if you are satisfied from having materialized some of your aspirations which you had hoped would better your life." The Frierdiker Rebbe also asks about his father's writings.[17]

In a follow-up letter from 18 Shvat, the Frierdiker Rebbe describes at great length his library of handwritten *maamorim* that hadn't been printed. He lists eight categories from the Alter Rebbe (four stages) through the Rebbe Rashab. At the end, the Rebbe mentions Reb Michoel's stay in Lubavitch and asks again about his father's writings.[18]

COLLOQUIAL CHASSIDUS

On 5 Nissan the Frierdiker Rebbe addresses him regarding the translation of Chassidus:

"I would like to ask you if you learned Chassidus from the time you left Lubavitch (I do not mean those parts of *avoda* and *mussar*, but that of *haskala*). Forgive me for asking this as it may not be appropriate to pry, however I ask for only one reason, which is the possibility of translating various concepts of Chassidus and some chapters of Tanya into European languages (German, French and English) and into colloquial Yiddish. Perhaps you can take such a thing upon yourself, or you know someone who could, and then I can tell you exactly what I have in mind.

"Throughout my travels, particularly in America, I have had the opportunity to meet with various intellectuals and youth, and have seen that for many of them the ideas in Chassidus would be close to their heart if not for their difficulty with *Lashon Hakodesh* and the unique terminology of Chassidus. I have met with young men, sons and grandsons of Chassidim, some of whom have studied Chassidus themselves in their youth, and others who have only seen others study Chassidus, and I have spent several hours with them, making a big impression. I saw that they have a strong feeling...

"I think that if select passages from Chassidus and some chapters of Tanya were translated into everyday language so that this group of people could understand them, it would shine a ray of light serving to promote ethical living."[19]

THE PREREQUISITE TO UNDERSTAND CHASSIDUS

As I was reading your letter, the sentiment of comradery that existed between us 35-36 years ago was aroused within me. I would be very interested to know of your life now, and if you are satisfied from having materialized some of your aspirations which you had hoped would better your life.

In the next letter, the Frierdiker Rebbe writes, "About what you wrote that you proved to your friend the advantage of the path of Chassidus not only over other paths in *Yiddishkeit*, but also over the path of European culture – I cannot comment on that since I am unfamiliar with the European culture.

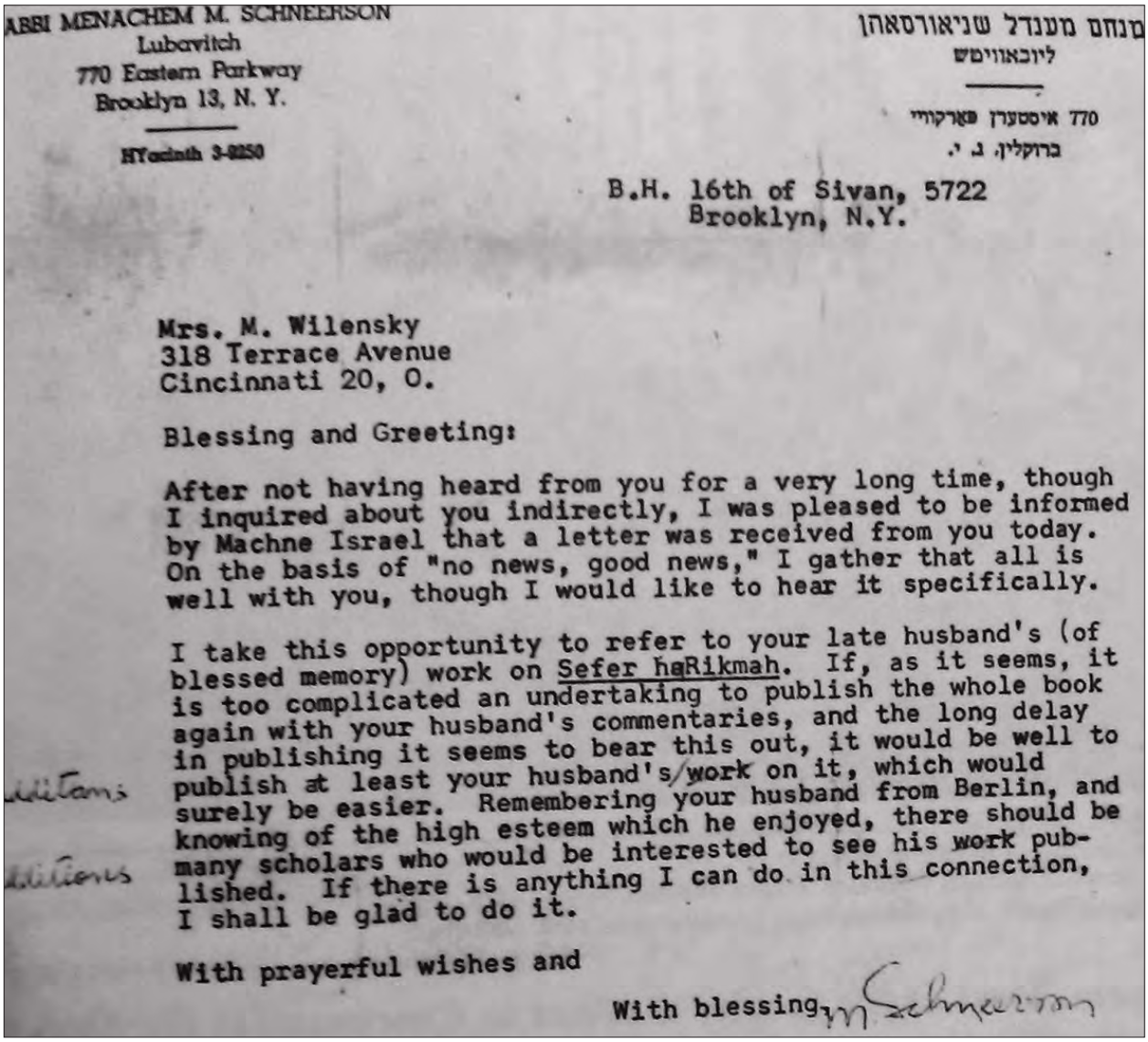
"However, [I can say that] I have always viewed the bringing of proofs for Torah and *mitzvos* from other disciplines, or proofs for Chassidus from practical subjects, like a promissory note of one hundred coins from a great and famous magnate, for which one asks the doorman to be a guarantor...

"You write that your friend advised you to prepare yourself with general scholarship so that you can present your ideas in public. I think that all the past years have given you enough preparation. But moreover, Chassidus is not acquired through working the mind alone; Chassidus requires an essential preparation through observing Torah and *mitzvos*. They say of R. Hillel Paritcher that he was exceptionally careful with the particularities of *mitzvos* (for example, he didn't sit on a padded chair out of concern for *shaatnez*, and other such precautions). When questioned, he replied that he did this so that he could understand Chassidus better."

The Frierdiker Rebbe goes on to observe how traditionally the *ovdim* who were constrained and tense in *avoda*, a state of mind which doesn't allow for broad thinking, reached a deeper understanding than the *maskilim*, the deep thinkers of Chassidus. This demonstrates that G-dly intellect is unlike other disciplines, and it is observance that enable a person to climb the ladder of G-dly understanding.

The Frierdiker Rebbe concludes, "I will not contain that it was with a pained heart that I read that from the time that you left Russia you haven't learned Chassidus at all. I consider this a great loss, not only for itself, but for its broader effect. I am certain that the cause for the deficiency in observing *mitzvos b'hiddur* by young men who were educated thirty years ago in a fresh atmosphere and who descend from esteemed lineage does not compare to the cause for the lack of observance of those raised in this generation who only know what they see."[20]

In other words: While you can't blame the new generation for lack of observance, more is expected of those who should and do know better.



RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON
Lubavitch
770 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn 13, N. Y.

HYacinth 3-0250

מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

770 איסטערן פארקוויי
ברוקלין, נ. י.

B.H. 16th of Sivan, 5722
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mrs. M. Wilensky
318 Terrace Avenue
Cincinnati 20, O.

Blessing and Greeting:

After not having heard from you for a very long time, though I inquired about you indirectly, I was pleased to be informed by Machne Israel that a letter was received from you today. On the basis of "no news, good news," I gather that all is well with you, though I would like to hear it specifically.

I take this opportunity to refer to your late husband's (of blessed memory) work on Sefer haRikmah. If, as it seems, it is too complicated an undertaking to publish the whole book again with your husband's commentaries, and the long delay in publishing it seems to bear this out, it would be well to publish at least your husband's work on it, which would surely be easier. Remembering your husband from Berlin, and knowing of the high esteem which he enjoyed, there should be many scholars who would be interested to see his work published. If there is anything I can do in this connection, I shall be glad to do it.

With prayerful wishes and

With blessing, M. M. Schneerson

A letter from the Rebbe to Mrs. Wilensky

IN AMERICA

In 5695 (1935), Reb Michoel came to America and settled in Cincinnati where he worked as librarian in a local Jewish Library and was friendly with Rabbi Leizer Silver, chief rabbi of Cincinnati and head of Agudas Horabbonim.

During *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* 5707 (1946), the Frierdiker Rebbe requested of him to write his memories and feelings of the time he spent in Lubavitch, adding "My father, the Rebbe, drew you very near, in a meaningful way, more than R. Zalman Betzalel and the other 13-14 *yoshvim*."[12]

In his last letter to Reb Michoel, five days before his passing, the Frierdiker Rebbe asks him to prepare an in-depth article regarding what is written in *Pardes* of the Ramak about one who doesn't believe in *Kabala*. Reb Michoel agreed, and in a letter from 11 Shvat he writes (he hadn't yet found out about the *histalkus*):

"My wife and I are very grateful to the Rebbe for taking interest in our well-being and for his exceptional blessings."

"My wife and I are very grateful to the Rebbe for taking interest in our well-being and for his exceptional blessings.

"The Rebbe's offer to write an article... Surely it is intended for publication in some journal or newspaper, and I consider it an honor and thank the Rebbe for this. I will IY"H look into the matter and as soon as I have something I will notify the Rebbe.

"Michoel Zalman, son of my father and master Rabbi Yitzchok Chaim Dov Halevi *nishmaso eden*."[22]

During the following years, the Rebbe corresponded several times with Reb Michoel. At one point he offered the Rebbe three books of handwritten *maamorim* of the Tzemach Tzedek that he had.[23] The Rebbe sent R. Yosef Goldstein (Chmelnik), who served as a shochet in Cincinnati, to collect them from him.[24]

Notes

1. [diary of the Rebbe's grandfather R. Boruch Schneur Schneerson of his conversations with the Rebbe Rashab], p. 44,

2. Sefer HaSichos 5699, p. 300.

3. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Vol. 2, p. 331; Reshimas Hayoman, p. 461.

4. Sefer HaSichos 5684, p. 52.

5. Sefer HaSichos 5684, p. 52. In Likutei Sipurim (Perlov), section on the Rebbe Rashab §8, it was a *shochet* named R. Noach who delivered the message, and R. Chaim Ber scolded him, "Fool! The Rebbe sends me questions and I should answer?! You think he doesn't know something that I do know?" and he sent him away. The *shochet* later berated himself for not having understood on his own what the message was about. (R. Perlov concludes, "Such were chassidim of the past who appreciated the Rebbe's great intellect in addition to his *kedusha*, even when the Rebbe was very young.")

6. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Vol. 2, p. 331.

7. Igros Kodesh, Vol. 1, p. 161.

8. Igros Kodesh, Vol. 2, p. 330.

9. *Sefer HaSichos* 5703, p. 139. (Regarding the date, see the questionnaire which records that R. Chaim Ber passed away on Chanukah 5653).

10. See *Sefer HaSichos* 5700, p. 72 that R. Dov Ze'ev [Kozevnikov], the rav of Yekaterinoslav, was also in Lubavitch at that time.

11. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Vol. 2, p. 406. *Reshimas Hayoman*, p. 227. The bulk of the *sicha* is quoted in *HaYom Yom* for 27 Adar II and 26 Nissan.

Reb Michoel passed away on 30 Sivan 5715 (1955), and the Rebbe sent R. Yisroel Jacobson to attend the *levaya* in Cincinnati. R. Michoel left a part of his personal library and his writings to the Rebbe.

After his passing, the Rebbe encouraged his wife, Mary, to reprint the *Sefer Harikma* along with additional notes her husband had written since the first printing.[25] After some back and forth, Dr. Shimon Bernstein from Eretz Yisroel was hired to prepare the second edition, which was printed seven years later in 5724 (1964). P

Credit: Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati

12. Sefer HaSichos 5681, p. 14 among the highlights of the Rebbe Rashab's life and the impact it had on R. Chaim Ber [and R. Avraham Ber Yirmiya's of Babroisk.]

13. Likutei Diburim, Vol. 1, p. 395.

14. Sefer HaSichos 5684, p. 81; *Igros Kodesh Rayatz,* Vol. 6, p. 333; *Sefer HaSichos* 5700, p. 94; *Sefer HaZichronos – Divrei Hayomim (Gurkov),* p. 19.

15. Sefer HaToldos Admur Maharash (5707), p. 66. See also *Sefer HaSichos* 5700, p. 163 that it was a result of his dedication to the Rebbe Maharash.

16. Igros Kodesh, Volume 14, Letter #5142, from 20 Shvat 5717.

17. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Volume 14, Letter #5228.

18. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Volume 2, Letter #520.

19. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Volume 2, Letter #512.

20. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Volume 2, Letter #533.

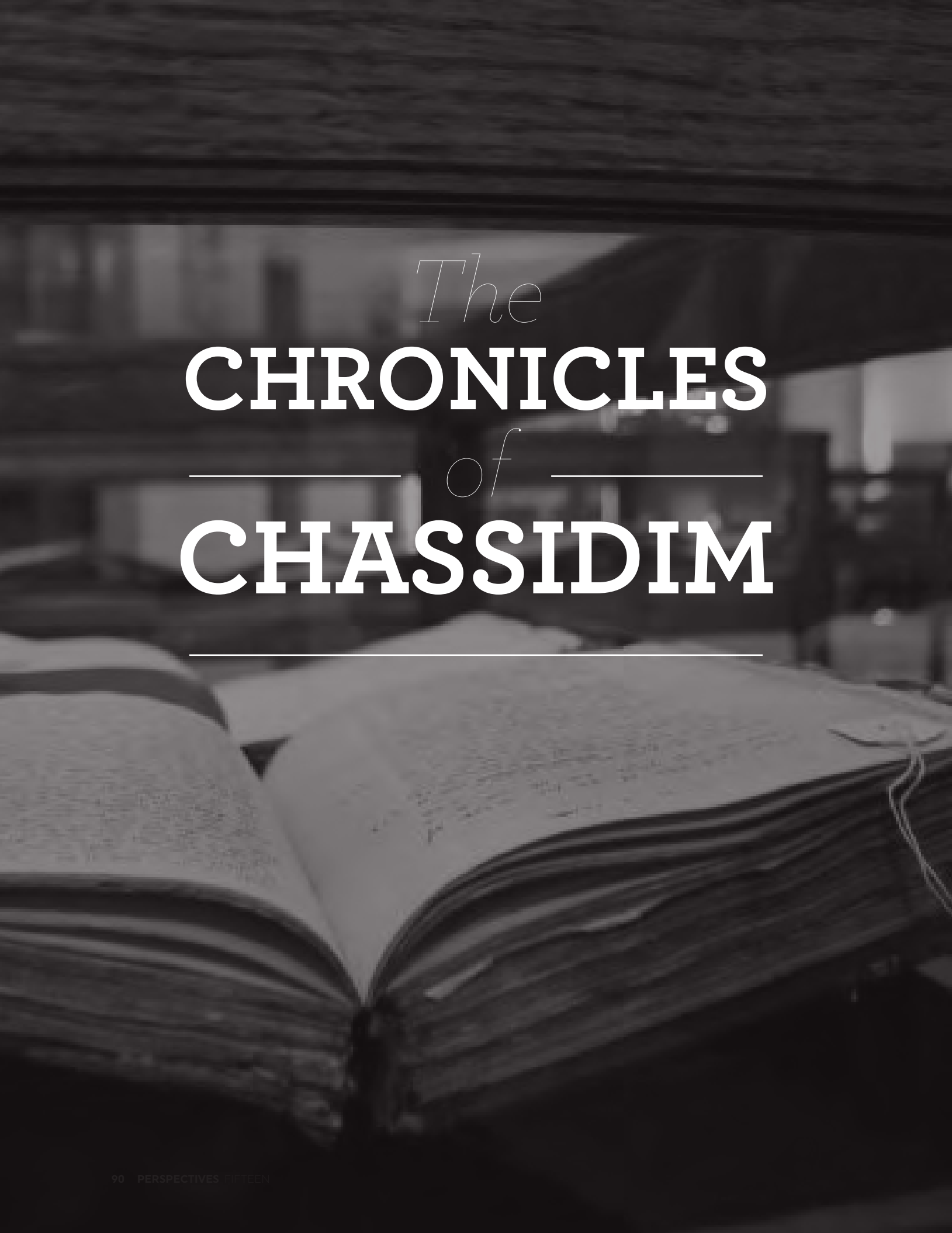
21. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Volume 9, Letter #2943.

22. Igros Kodesh Rayatz, Volume 10, Letter #3694.

23. Igros Kodesh, Volume 9, Letter #2880.

24. Igros Kodesh, Volume 9, Letter #2953. *Igros Kodesh,* Volume 11, Letter #3583 thanks him for the Frierdiker Rebbe's letters which he sent.

25. Igros Kodesh, Volume 12, Letter #4081, #4193, #4344, #4697, #5211.



The CHRONICLES *of* CHASSIDIM

BY RABBI SHALOM BER LEVINE

Chief librarian at the Rebbe's library and author of numerous volumes on halacha and Chabad history

Throughout the years, the Frierdiker Rebbe persistently urged his chassidim to record their personal recollections and memories, as well as any knowledge they may have had about the elder chassidim of the preceding generations.

The first attempt to collect these diaries occurred with the compilation of the journal *HaTamim,* which featured a special column on this subject and was entitled "*Toldos Yemei HaChassidim* – The Chronicles of Chassidim."

In the first issue of *HaTamim* the editor writes, "The editorial board of *HaTamim* will vigorously pursue and with much interest, the collection of information about 'men of stature' in order to compile a column on this subject, and we hope to get help from the chassidim and *temimim,* to record the history of chassidm on a level that is fitting for their prestige and illustriousness." Some of these articles were written by the Frierdiker Rebbe himself or collected from his letters, while others were written by chassidim.

In a letter from Cheshvan 5696 (1935) the Frierdiker Rebbe writes to R. Elye Chaim Althaus, "It would be a positive thing if you would dedicate time to write down what you heard from your father and from your uncle Reb Asher Grossman about the time they spent in Lubavitch, as well as some of your own memories from the time you spent in Kremenchug where you saw the great and renowned chassidim the 'Berelach' [a group of chassidim in Kremenchug who all carried the name Ber]."

In a letter written two years later (Shevat 5698-1938) to the same chossid, the Frierdiker Rebbe elaborates, "As I have already written to you, it would be most appropriate for you to record your memories of the elder chassidim you encountered in your younger years, or at least short notes about them, such as their names, monikers, their appearances and occupations, if they sat and learned or if they worked etc., and I would also appreciate if you can write about the 'Berelach'.

"Presently, I am interested in Reb Chaim Dov Ber [Wilensky], whom I saw in Lubavitch two or three times, with the last time being in the summer of 5653 (1893). It would be most appropriate for you to contact his son Reb Michoel, who would definitely be able to give you a general outline, as well as information about when he was born, his education, teachers and spiritual guides, and he may have a picture of him as well."

On 3 Tammuz 5699 (1939) the Frierdiker Rebbe writes directly to Reb Michoel Wilensky, "I have a strong desire to create an everlasting tribute to your father, the renowned *maskil* and chossid Reb Chaim DovBer of Krementchug, which will be published in the periodical journal *HaTamim,* printed by the *temimim* of Lubavitch.

"I therefore turn to you with a request that you compile an article about the life of your father the chossid, his lifestyle and anything else that is fit for print, in his memory and for the benefit of the public who wish to appreciate the personalities of great chassidim."

With regards to the biography, it would certainly be better for you to write it yourself, however the main thing is the content.

At that time, preparation was underway for the publication of the 9th booklet of *HaTamim*. However, a short while after the writing of that letter the Second World War broke out, so the journal never appeared, and Reb Michoel's response was never received.

In the end of the following winter (9 Adar II 5700/1940), the Frierdiker Rebbe was miraculously rescued from war-torn Europe and arrived in the United States. Just two weeks after his arrival, he writes to Reb Michoel, "I wanted to write a letter to you for a while now, but I was unable to find your address. I then received your address through the board of 'Kiryas Sefer' [a publishing house for which he worked] and I wrote to you but received no response.

"Surely you have read the booklets of *HaTamim* which is published by the *yeshiva* students and has a column dedicated to the life stories of chassidim. It would be most appropriate for you to write the history of your esteemed father the chossid, to be printed in *HaTamim* as an everlasting tribute to him."

In the Frierdiker Rebbe's archives is Reb Michoel's response from 7 Nissan, in which he writes amongst other things, "I was pained to learn from reading the Rebbe's letter that my response never reached Otvotzk...

"In my letter I had asked if the Rebbe's intention is that I supply the facts and someone else will write it up, or that I write it myself, which understandably is uncomfortable for a son to do. Currently, due to the condition of my health I am unqualified for this task, however I can still supply the content."

In a letter from 13 Nissan, the Frierdiker Rebbe responds, "With regards to the biography, it would certainly be better for you to write it yourself, however the main thing is the content."

On *Motzaei* Pesach Reb Michoel replied, "Regarding the biography, it goes without saying that I regard it as a holy matter, and the Rebbe's efforts touched me to the depth of my heart, however I am still unable to do the writing myself because I have never written stories or descriptions, and it is difficult for a son to write praises about his father.

"For now I am writing any information regarding his life that comes up in my mind, (which include things I heard about him from the Rebbe Rashab of righteous memory), and when they come together more or less as a complete composition, I will send them to whomever the Rebbe instructs me to.

"The content I have is limited, since he passed away when I was 15, and he hardly ever spoke about himself. I also don't really have whom to hear from, because for many years already I have lost touch with my relatives in Russia.

"About my father's *haskalah* (scholarship) of Chassidus, I have obviously no concept.

"It would seem to me, that his greatest attribute was his silence; not only did he hardly ever interject into the words of the one who repeated the Rebbe's Chassidus in Lubavitch, he didn't even get involved in the discussions about the Chassidus he himself had repeated, and to someone watching on the sidelines it would seem that he had no comprehension of the conversation.

"He excelled not only in not speaking; he was in general a private person who rarely stepped out of himself, and this he did only when necessary. Describing such an individual is of great difficulty."

A week later, the Frierdiker Rebbe writes back, "I take pleasure in knowing that you began recording the memories of your father the esteemed chossid, some of which you merited to hear from my holy father the Rebbe Rashab of blessed memory. May Hashem help you in all that you need both physically and spiritually."

In actuality, he didn't manage to finish his task at the time and it dragged on for many more years. It seems that throughout that time the Frierdiker Rebbe continued to encourage him to write it.

In the library archives there is a copy of a question sheet which was prepared to help Reb Michoel record the biography. Its headline reads: "The Chronicles of Chassidim – A questionnaire, for the life story of R. Yitzchok Chaim Dov Ber Wilensky."

In a letter dated the 17th of Elul 5707 (1947), Reb Michoel tells Reb Chaim Lieberman, "The questionnaire is filling up, and I have already written two pages. It is going slowly since it is necessary for me to record things that occurred or were told to me over 60 years ago. I don't have any notes to remind me of the things that happened, and any [person, place or thing] that could have helped me remember remained in Kremenchug. I'm therefore relying solely on memory which is taking a while. Obviously as soon as I complete the work I will send it to you."

Almost three months later, on the 6th of Kislev 5708, he writes, "I hope to send the response to the questionnaire in the next few days IYH. It is very difficult for me because I'm relying solely on my weakened memory, and none of what I am writing is written in my personal notes.

"I would like to request that you do me a favor and see if the Rebbe has copies of correspondences from my father, and with the Rebbe's permission, please copy one of them on my behalf and send it to me, since I don't have even one memento from him since everything was left behind in Kremenchug."

I am now asking of you to compile a list of the chassidim that you knew and heard about from your father or from any of the elder chassidim."

The Chabad Library in New York.

"I have designated someone to organize all the letters and information that we will receive regarding this matter."

A little over a week later the questionnaire is finally complete. In the letter which he sent along with the questionnaire he writes, "Along with this letter I am sending the completed sheet for the article, with answers to the Rebbe's questions.

"My answers contain more quantity and less quality. I have attempted to write at length the details that I remember, and I did not concern myself that some of them may not be in order, since the purpose is only to gather content for the writer of the article. I hope that the one who will rework the information will be able to paint an accurate image of my father, even if it will be missing some details. Obviously the main subject of this article, which is the great *haskalah* in Chassidus of my father, has remained untouched, and really I have no way of expounding on it, because I have no knowledge of it at all.

"When the article is ready for print, please send it to me so that I can edit it, and ensure that I have not made any mistakes or led you to err."

Three weeks later the Frierdiker Rebbe specially thanks him in a letter, "I am extending my gratitude to you on the fulfilment of my request that you write up the details of your father's life. I am now asking of you to compile a list of the chassidim that you knew and heard about from your father or from any of the elder chassidim."

A few days later Reb Michoel responds, "I thank the Rebbe from the depth of my heart, for if not for the Rebbe's request, I surely would not have compiled this information about my father, even though now it is in a convoluted manner.

"With regards to other illustrious chassidim, I have no perception of them at all, except for the odd story that I heard, and the very little that I have seen. So as not to return this paper empty, I will write the story about Reb Boruch Tamarress who was my father's Chassidus teacher,

> "I hope that the one who will rework the information will be able to paint an accurate image of my father, even if it will be missing some details."

which will attest to the characteristics of his soul." He then tells two details of his life (see later on in this article).

Two years later, on the 5th of Shevat 5710 (1950), just a few days before his *histalkus*, the Frierdiker Rebbe writes to Reb Michoel, "I am aware of the great love that my father the Rebbe had for your father the chossid, and I remember the special interest in you that my father expressed when you were a young student in Lubavitch. I also know of the long letters my father wrote to your father with regards to my uncles' customs and about matters of Chassidus, so I ask of you my dear friend to please send those letters here for a few weeks so that I can copy them, and then I will send them back."

Reb Michoel's response contains no mention of the letters, but in this questionnaire he tells how out of all the Rebbe Rashab's letters, the only one that remained was the wedding invitation of Rebbetzin Mushka [Horenshtein, sister of the Rebbe Rashab, in 5652 (1892)].

In a similar manner, the Frierdiker Rebbe urged for the history of many other famous chassidim to be recorded. In a letter on this subject to R. Bentzion Shemtov from 5708 (1948), the Frierdiker Rebbe concludes, "I have designated someone to organize all the letters and information that we will receive regarding this matter."

The previous letter leaves the individual unnamed, but in a letter written a year later to R. Schneur Zalman Duchman the Frierdiker Rebbe reveals, "My son-in-law the chossid and *gaon* RaMa"SH will G-d willing take care that all the stories that come his way will be properly organized." This article was also given to the Rebbe.

After the Frierdiker Rebbe's *histalkus* on 10 Shevat 5710 (1950), Reb Michoel inquired about the fate of the planned article, as we find in a letter addressed to Reb Chaim Lieberman on Lag BaOmer of that year:

"A number of years ago I received an inquiry sheet you sent on behalf of the Rebbe, with a list of questions about the life of my father, and when I sent the sheet back I requested that it be returned to me. I don't know what happened to it, but I presume that that it wasn't used and it won't be used. Regardless, I ask that you return the sheet to me as soon as possible, or if you want to put it to use you can make a copy or picture of it, since I don't have a good quality personal copy, only one with scant information. I am sure that you will fulfill my request and I thank you in advance."

Soon after, Reb Chaim Lieberman responds, "In accordance with your letter on Lag BaOmer, I am attaching a copy of your answers to the question sheet. Since the original was sent to the Rebbe himself, I don't think it is proper for me to send it back. The director of our *seforim* publications, Reb Menachem Shneerson, has told me that the notes will be put to use, he just doesn't know yet when."

This entire collection remained with the Rebbe throughout the years.

In 5748 (1988), when I was instructed to prepare the series of "Toldos Chabad" on Chabad history in various locales, I asked Rabbi Chodakov if I could use the notes that were written by chassidim. He replied that he doesn't know where they are, but he gave me permission to look for them in the archives of the secretariat's office. Over the next few weeks I searched through all the files and found many useful things, but not the actual notes of the chassidim. Apparently the Rebbe himself had them. I didn't have the nerve to ask the Rebbe for them, so I compiled the series of "Toldos Chabad" without those notes.

Today, those notes were discovered among the Rebbe's files, and is being published here, as the Rebbe told Reb Chaim Lieberman in Sivan of 5710 that "the notes will be put to use, [he] just doesn't know yet when." P

A QUESTIONNAIRE

The life of the chossid R. Yitzchok Chaim Dovber Wilensky

Completed by his son Reb Michoel Wilensky

His name?

His full name is, as mentioned, Reb Yitzchok Chaim Dovber with the addition of HaLevi, (one of the first two names was added when he was ill as a child or as a young man), he was called to the Torah by the name Yitzchok Chaim Dov, he was normally called Chaim Ber, and he signed by the name Yitzchok Chaim Duber.

What was his father's name?

Meir.

What was his mother's name?

Bracha.

What did his parents do for a living?

I believe they had a small store, but they definitely sold paltry items.

When was he born?

Between the years 5596-98 [1836-38], (the birthday written in his travel documents was inaccurate).

Where was he born?

Kremenchug.

Who were his teachers as a small child? In his youth? As a bochur?

I don't know who his teachers were, however my grandmother would proudly say (my grandfather passed away before I was born) that although they were not wealthy people, they still made sure my father had the best teachers of the town, and from very early on he excelled in his studies.

When did he get married? And any other information about his wife's family.

My father was married three times and widowed twice.

He first married at eighteen or nineteen years old. A few months after his wedding he traveled to Lubavitch only to return during the shiva of his wife who died in childbirth.

One of her sisters was married to Reb Noach Sheinis from Verchni-Dnipropetrovsk (their son learned in Lubavitch in the years 5654-5 [1894-5]), and the other was married to Mr. Dikansky (whose first name I cannot remember) from the city of Yaketrinislav. (The latter was a board member of his city, and was responsible for selling merchant certifications, etc. He had an office in the city building in which he always had a *Mishnayos* or another *sefer* to learn from in his spare time. Incidentally, this Mr. Dikansky had a son Reb Yisroel who was a learned man and a thinker, and

The center in Vitebsk

later became the father-in-law of one of my younger sisters, who married after my father's passing.)

My father's second wife was a widow, and together they had three daughters.

A few years after she passed away, around the year 5637 (1877), my father married my mother, and from what I heard, the suggestion was made by the Rebbe Maharash. (My mother was divorced from her first husband (who was incidentally quite a wealthy man) because they had been married for ten years but had not had children.) The Rebbe [Maharash] himself was *mesader kiddushin* in Lubavitch.

My mother had *yechidus* with the Rebbe Maharash, and was accompanied inside by his Rebbetzin. The Rebbe then instructed her to not wear a wig made of hair but rather one made of silk strands. She was very particular about this all her life.

Prior to my birth, my mother traveled to her hometown, a small town in the Vitebsk region. She was compelled to stay there for a while even after I was born, so that my older brother (born from my father's first marriage) who was being drafted to the army, could remain registered as an only son (which exempted him from duty). Apparently my father joined her in Vitebsk for some time where he worked as a wine merchant (just as he did in Kremenchug).

At the first opportunity during my first year [of life], my parents traveled back to Kremenchug, and on the way they stopped in Lubavitch. In their special merit the Rebbe [Maharash] blessed me while placing his hands on my head, something he did not ordinarily do. In addition, my father received a strip of white silk from a garment of the Tzemach Tzedek to create a *yarmulka* for me.

My mother and the mother of Reb Michoel Dvorkin (whose whereabouts are unfortunately unknown to me) were sisters, and our grandfather Reb Michoel Drisser after whom we are both named, was said to be an exceptional individual.

In their special merit the Rebbe Maharash blessed me while placing his hands on my head, something he did not ordinarily do.

How did he support himself?

To the best of my knowledge he initially sold *seforim*. I believe his partner was Reb Moredechai Dov Lifshitz, who was a grandson of Reb Nochum Schneerson, and the son-in-law of Reb Yosef Tumarkin of Kremenchug. He remained one of my father's closest friends. Later, he was a wine merchant in Kremenchug, and also in Vitebsk where he had someone manage the business.

When did your father begin to learn Chassidus? And with whom?

I don't know exactly when, but it was before he went to learn in Lubavitch. His primary teacher was Reb Boruch Tamarress, for whom my father had the greatest respect, and considered it a great merit to have been his student.

My father also heard Chassidus from Reb Hillel Paritcher when he would stop in Kremenchug on his way to the colonies. I believe my father even once accompanied him on one of these travels.

[I will allow myself to share two tidbits about my father's primary Chassidus teacher Reb Boruch, which are testament to his character:

Firstly, even the people closest to him had no idea that he was even remotely interested in *dikduk* until after he passed away and they discovered an entire *sefer* that he had written on the subject.

Secondly, I heard that he had an ongoing debate with Reb Hillel Paritcher (who would stay in Kremenchug on his way to the colonies), about the status of wine of someone who did not pay the sales tax. Reb Hillel would say "It is permissible, yet I wouldn't partake from it," while Reb Boruch would say "It is forbidden, yet I would partake from it should it be served to me." It seems that the debate concerned the Halachic status of the wine.]

Did he daven at length on Shabbos and Yom Tov? During the week? What was his behavior like on the Sholosh Regalim?

During the week he would *daven* for about an hour, and on Shabbos and Yom Tov for about two hours. Both were without any movement. His *davening* on *Yomim Nora'im* left an impression on anyone who saw it. (Parenthetically, he was the only one of the respected members of the *mizrach* wall who didn't

Reb Berel Maiseiyov's conduct did not find favor in my father's eyes. One who wanted to join his group had to "divorce" himself completely from worldly matters - even their wives had to feel as though their husbands had traveled overseas.

wear a *kittel* during the *Yomim Nora'im*, and only in his final years did he put one on).

I heard from the Rebbe Rashab about my father's Yom Kippur *davening* in Lubavitch, (my father then had an illness in his legs and was forced to daven *Shemone Esrei* sitting down), that "the taste of his *davening* sits with me in my intestines until this very day; he *davened* richly, a rich *davening*."

On the nights of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah my father would step out of his nature completely. It once happened that a guest from Minsk saw his intense dancing on the street on the way to *hakafos* in *shul*, and became so concerned that he begged of my father's entourage that they stop him so that nothing bad should befall him.

On another occasion, I saw how he left those who were dancing and went to a room in our house and danced alone.

My father would *daven* at length on the night of Shemini Atzeres.

Did he deal with public affairs? Was he a member of any group that did? Which one?

He was a member of the *tzedaka* group and of the *chevra kadisha*, as well as the group that finished *Shas* yearly, but I am unsure how involved he was in each of these.

In general, he distanced himself from public affairs, (though he was very involved in helping private individuals, and not only financially), unless it was very much needed, in which case he devoted himself completely.

One of his proactive accomplishments was the founding of the new *shul* named the "New Chabad *Shul*." It was more than just a building – it was a revolution of sorts.

The background to that story is:

Reb Boruch Tamarress had three primary students: my father – who was the youngest of them, Reb Dov Dabruskin [also known as Berel Moshe's] and Reb Dov Maiseiyov who was the son of the *rav* in Kremenchug (the three of them were grouped together as "the Berelach").

After the passing of Reb Boruch, all of the students decided that the leadership would remain in the hands of these three primary students. They also established a rotation for delivering Chassidus on Shabbos, however, the two others evaded the public speaking. (When my father asked them to explain their behavior, they replied that my father should start and then they would follow suit. My father heatedly retorted, "When I start to talk, you will both be silenced.") Reb Dov Dabruskin passed away a short while later.

Reb Berel Maiseiyov's conduct did not find favor in my father's eyes. He went by the premise that his students were to rely on others to sustain them, and one who wanted to join his group had to "divorce" himself completely from worldly matters (even their wives had to feel as though their husbands had traveled overseas). In order to ensure that they would not "remarry," they had to behave in a peculiar manner that would deem them unfit to rejoin society.

The most effective option was the consumption of alcohol. Some of the group who began drinking for this ulterior motive eventually began drinking "*lishma*." There were stories told of fine, talented


KLEIMAN

young men who became total drunks and were forced to leave their jobs. On the other hand, there were those who became completely turned off because they had no desire to behave in that manner.

My father also didn't approve of Reb Berel Maiseiyov's conduct towards his pupils, which was based on rejecting and distancing them.

Things got so bad that the Rebbe Maharash got involved, and the next time Reb Berel Maiseiyov came to Lubavitch the Rebbe strongly reprimanded him, but that too was to no avail.

My father agreed with the notion that a life of total dedication to Chassidus is reserved for exceptional individuals. Yet, he felt that those individuals should not challenge the world, but rather behave in accordance with society.

Apparently the debate between my father and Reb Berel Maiseiyov went on for a while, until my father realized that he was not changing his mind, so he went off and founded his own group. This was very difficult for him, because they had been such close friends. However, I never heard my father speak ill of Reb Berel, and I even remember seeing him in our house.

The appointment of Reb Yitzchok Yoel Rafalovitch as the *rov* of Kremenchug [in 5640] was also against Reb Berel Maiseiyov's will.

Later, when Reb Berel became ill and had fallen out of favor in the eyes of the public due to his conduct, it was my father who supported him. All those who could help were encouraged by my father to do so, and when he would meet them in the street, the first question would be "What have you done to help Reb Berel?" It was well known that there was no better way to touch my father's heart than by bringing him money to help Reb Berel. When Reb Berel heard of my father's passing, he cried and said, "If only I could have taken his place. He would accomplish so much good were he to remain alive."

My father was also involved in some communal matters that involved conflict. I recall these two cases:

Once the community leaders in Kremenchug instituted that the dead be placed in a coffin which would then be carried to the cemetery on a wagon [instead of carrying it by hand as it was done traditionally]. My father did not allow them to implement this.

Kremenchug

And one year, there was a shortage of food, and a certain Torah leader (I believe it was Reb Yitzchok Elchonon Spector) had permitted the consumption of *kitniyos* on Pesach. My father made sure that it was announced in all *anash shuls* that it was forbidden.[1] I do not recall any more details about this.

Did he have set times to travel to Lubavitch or was it only when he had the opportunity?

I have no knowledge of the matter; however, I assume that due to the distance he was unable to travel often.

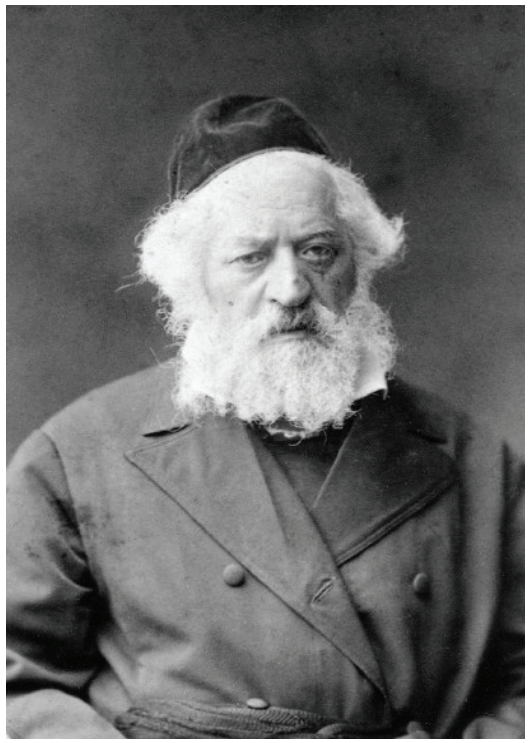
During the lifetime of the Tzemach Tzedek he traveled to Lubavitch at least twice, and on both occasions he stayed for an extended amount of time. During the Rebbe Maharash's lifetime he traveled many times. After the Rebbe Maharash's *histalkus* he traveled once for sure, and perhaps twice. He had made plans to travel for the wedding of Rebbetzin Mushka [Horenshtein, sister of the Rebbe Rashab, Summer 5652 (1892)], but his health condition did not allow him.

Did he organize gatherings of anash in his home? On what occasions? Was he amongst the leading speakers? Describe the nature of these gatherings, etc.

To my knowledge, Kremenchug was famous for the gatherings of *anash*, and our home was the gathering place.

Gatherings took place every *Motzaei* Shabbos, *yoma d'pagra*, and whenever someone from a town to the north of Kremenchug would travel to Lubavitch and pass through Kremenchug (they generally stayed in our home), repeating the Chassidus they had heard on their return. It goes without saying that we gathered on Yomim Tovim.

My father rarely spoke—in general, he was very reserved—yet, he was the life of these gatherings, and all the speakers directed their words to my father. The gatherings did not have a specific program, (programs were not to the liking of my father), rather they spoke about all sorts of matters, sang a lot and debated topics in Chassidus. My



Reb Yitzchok Elchonon Spector

All those who could help were encouraged by my father to do so, and when he would meet them in the street, the first question would be "What have you done to help Reb Berel?"

I don't write since I am afraid that I will misplace my notes and a goy will find them and claim them as his own

The RaZa

father never got involved in their debates even if it was about the Chassidus that he had delivered earlier that day; he just listened in. The purpose of the gatherings was the *dibuk chaveirim,* for the Chassidim to connect with each other. It is told that when the Mitteler Rebbe was in Kremenchug (around the time of the Alter Rebbe's *histalkus),* he had said "the mud of Little Russia [Ukraine] is sticky."

Just how much the chassidim cherished these gatherings is evident from the following example:

Reb Nochum Noach the *shochet*, one of the few people with whom my father discussed Chassidus on the way to *shul* on Shabbos morning after his recital of Chassidus, would work on *Motzaei* Shabbos in the slaughterhouse until midnight, which obviously left him exhausted. Yet, he would hurry home just long enough to change his dirty clothes before coming to our home even if only for the last hour of the gathering, (though quite often it would continue until three in the morning or later).

Did he write any chidushei Torah?

He said that he didn't. I was once in Lubavitch and the Rebbe Rashab related to me that he had asked my father if he had ever written *chidushei* Torah, to which my father answered that he did not. When he asked my father why not, my father replied, "Because I don't want to." The Rebbe Rashab concluded this story by saying, "And his 'not wanting' was a considerable reason."

(The Rebbe seemed to be referring to an episode with my father that I had heard about in Kremenchug, and then again in Lubavitch from the RaZa with whom the story had happened:

The RaZa wanted to assess the true depth of the *maskilim* [intellectual giants of Chassidus]. He did this by requesting each one of them to recite Chassidus for him, and then repeat it afterwards in front of the Rebbe Maharash. When my father's turn arrived, he already knew the nature of this exercise, and so he refused. Finally, the Rebbe commanded him to recite Chassidus before the RaZa and he agreed, but on condition that he would not have to speak in front of the Rebbe himself. The Rebbe apparently wanted to hear my father's style of delivering Chassidus, and so

My father rarely spoke—in general, he was very reserved—yet, he was the life of these gatherings, and all the speakers directed their words to my father.

they positioned my father in a room near an open window, while the Rebbe sat outside in the garden and listened in. When my father realized what was happening, he closed the window.)

My father once told me that someone in Kremenchug had asked him why he doesn't write *chidushei* Torah, to which he responded "I don't write since I am afraid that I will misplace my notes and a *goy* will find them and claim them as his own." He was really saying that he doesn't want to, but in a humorous manner.

After his passing, only two unfinished documents were found: One titled "*L'havin Yachid Echad v'Kadmon* – To Understand [the titles for Hashem] Singular, One and Primordial," about two pages long, and another titled "*L'havin Inyan A"K* – To Understand the Level of Primordial Man," one page long.

It is also worth adding that my father had a box where he would store all his documents, such as important letters that he received, and so on. The box was always locked and my father kept the key with him.

Shortly before his passing, he spent each evening sorting through the contents of the box, and he burned anything he deemed fit. One would have assumed that he kept all the important documents and burned the ones that had no use. The reality is in fact the opposite, since out of all his correspondences with the Rebbe Rashab only the invitation to Rebbetzin Mushka's [Horenshtein] wedding remained. It therefore seems plausible that he burned all of his writings in Chassidus, and left just those pages that were incomplete.

(There were also two wedding invitations from the Rebbe Maharash for two of his children's weddings. These invitations were actually addressed to all of *anash* in Kremenchug, but they had been mailed to our home. It is interesting to note that at the end of one of them the Rebbe Maharash adds, "Surely I do not need to request and remind everyone that they should not travel without their passports, as is proper procedure.")

What were his qualities and characteristics?

It is very difficult to answer that question, since his primary quality was containing his emotions and evading public recognition to an extreme degree. It is particularly difficult for me since I only knew him for a short while after my *bar mitzvah* before he passed away. (About a year-and-a-half before his passing he became terminally ill, though he kept it a secret from us.)

Everything about him gave the opposite impression of who he really was. Starting from his outward appearance—which mostly had nothing to do with him—he didn't look like a "chossid": He was a tall man with hardened facial features, a beard as neat as if it were trimmed, and he was extremely particular about the cleanliness of his clothes.

He looked as though he were a cold and calculated man who is impressed by nothing, someone who knows his value and is confident in himself. So much so that people would joke that he was a man whom death could not reach, due to his healthy body and nerves of steel. The truth, however, was quite the opposite, and those who were close to him, dubbed him, "the cold firebrand."

I will provide a few examples to illustrate:

My eldest brother died during my father's lifetime, and he left behind a large family without much of an inheritance (he had been a bookkeeper). Shortly afterwards, my father traveled to my brother's town, and when he returned, he recounted everything to us with such little emotion it was surprising. Yet, throughout that winter my father grew old and his hair turned white.

When I became *bar mitzvah* my father was not at home. He was traveling to buy the wine for the year, which was done seasonally, and could not return in time, (perhaps he was also not interested in the publicity around the *bar mitzvah*). His letter of blessing concluded with the words, "The blessing of a layman should not be insignificant in your eyes," despite the fact that he should have been concerned that I revere him so that I accept his guidance.[2]

When he got remarried in Lubavitch, he made sure that no more than the necessary ten men be present at the *siddur kidushin* [which was officiated by the Rebbe Maharash], (when I came to Lubavitch [around 17 years later] people still spoke about this).

My father's fear of publicity was like that of something dangerous. After his passing, my teacher, who would come to our home each day for several hours, told me that when he had discussed my study curriculum with my father, he told my father that he thought it was time that I learn *poskim* as well. My father agreed, but said that it was unfit for a thirteen-year-old child to know how to *pasken* on his own. He therefore suggested the following curriculum (at that time we were studying *mesechta* Chulin): We should first study the Gemara with Rashi, Tosfos, and Maharsha, etc. followed by Rif with Ran and the Rosh belonging to that *sugya*. Only then should we study the Tur, Beis Yosef, Bach, Drisha and Prisha, and finally the Shulchan Aruch, Taz, Shach and Pri Megadim. In this manner, I would learn the *poskim,* but not know how to *pasken* much. He told me expressly that he did not want me to become a *rav*.

Our home atmosphere also gave off a misleading impression. The truth was that my father's life was not at all paradisiacal, and he had many troubles in life. In business he also escaped from publicity, though such conduct does not reward well, something he was well aware of but chose to accept. Despite all this, he was noticeably happy. People would flock to our home to be uplifted, and for many, our home was their home; there were even those who preferred our home over their own. As our business manager told a relative of ours from another city many years later, "Their home was certainly a 'kingdom.'"

He looked as though he were a cold and calculated man who is impressed by nothing, someone who knows his value and is confident in himself. The truth, however, was quite the opposite.

Reb Yehoshua Dabruskin, whose mother lived in Kremenchug, would stay in our home, though she was not pleased about this. Reb Yaakov Mordechai Bezpalov would also stay with us although his sister lived in town.

The one thing my father saw no reason to hide was his love for song and music. He sang well and would frequently sing at our Shabbos table, although he wouldn't recite the *zemiros*. His love for song was boundless; someone who knew how to sing was guaranteed acceptance into my father's circle, and my father would show the singer warmth and affection.

I recall how there was once a pauper who was collecting money in our town, and he *davened* in the same *shul* as my father. It happened that my father passed the fellow during *davening* and gathered that the man was an outstanding singer. From then on, my father no longer allowed him to go collecting, and he saw to it that this man's needs—which honestly weren't that many—were well taken care

The one thing my father saw no reason to hide was his love for song and music. His love for song was boundless; someone who knew how to sing was guaranteed acceptance into my father's circle.

My father could not always contain his emotions, and they would occasionally burst out at random times.

of. Since then, this Reb Henich rose in greatness and was invited to sing at all sorts of celebrations and gatherings.

My father could not always contain his emotions, and they would occasionally burst out at random times. It happened once on a secular new year (I don't remember the year but it was around 1887), that his eldest son-in-law Reb Zalman Rotinsky invited him for breakfast, since all the shops were closed. Generally, my father kept the instruction [in Mishlei] not to visit often,[3] and he only visited his children on Yom Tov. However, this time he accepted the invitation, and for some reason he stayed there for some time.

While he was there, some of my brother-in-law's relatives also came to his home—they weren't part of my father's small circle—and during the conversation one of them said something to the effect of needing to do *teshuvah*. My father began suddenly to cry uncontrollably for several hours, and spoke about various things between his tears. Eventually, he organized *Tikkun Chatzos* and then came home.

I had arrived there late, but I remember my father speaking about the Rebbe Rashab, "What do you know about the kind of person that this *yungerman* is?! I am like dust before him."

(Regarding the Rebbe Maharash he once said that when the Gemara's rule that "a student should not query his teacher in a subject in which the teacher is not currently involved," did not apply to the Rebbe Maharash, since "he was always involved in all topics.")

I want to relate the words of the Rebbe Rashab at a gathering of *Simchas Beis Hashoeiva* in the year 5654 (1894), which I personally merited to hear:

First he spoke about the previous chassidim of Kremenchug, and then he said "*Olam HaTikkun* [the realm of correction and stability] began with Chaim Ber."

He continued to speak of how wary my father was of behaving in a manner that might make him look pretentious: how much he deliberated until he decided to wear a *gartel* for *davening* (unfortunately I don't recall his exact wording, but I do recall how in his final years my father made sure that his *gartel* could stretch[4]).

Then the Rebbe said, "When a tear was found in his *siddur* in Yelisavet [today Kirovohrad in Ukraine] they carried it around like a *korbon*" (I never heard about this in Kremenchug).

He then added, "He was here for several years. I had then repeated my father's *maamar* for him with my own 'introduction' (or something to that effect). My father's words are good, so he had what to work with, but he didn't take anything from my additions (those last words he said with a smile). The skill of listening, I (the Rebbe first said 'learned' but then changed to) saw in him. He listened without making a single move, yet all of his limbs heard. He listened with his entire being, until he became red behind his ears."

Along those lines, Reb Aharon *Chozer* told me that my father always made sure to be at *chazara,* but he would only listen. In over thirty years that Reb Aharon knew him, he only remembers one occasion when my father contributed.

From others I have heard that whenever my father brought a *yungerman* to Lubavitch who had a good memory—my father had drove several *yungeleit*—the *yungerman* would have to repeat Chassidus exclusively for him. Then too, my father would only listen.

I believe my father's interpersonal relationships can be summed up in the words of Reb Elozor Moshe Madayevsky, "When he was close with someone, that person was his closest friend."

I would add that my father wouldn't necessarily smile to a person who spoke to him, even when he exhausted tremendous efforts for that person. Whoever spoke to him didn't feel entirely at ease.

He behaved the same way towards his children. He concerned himself with the smallest of details, but did so in a discreet way, and while he wouldn't show them an angry face, he also wouldn't them show a cheerful one.

I remember on several occasions how I wanted to speak with him but was too afraid to do so, even though he never showed anger at home. He never played with the babies, except for my brother Shmuel, by whose crib he would pause for a few seconds while he dressed himself in the morning before shul. I believe he earned that attention because of his name [after the Rebbe Maharash].

One can say about him that he was a friend, but not friendly.

I will bring a few examples of this:

Reb Yaakov Alter Zlatopolsky was the son of a wealthy man and for a while he was wealthy himself, but the wheel of fortune turned and he lost everything he owned. He could not repay his debts and he temporarily disappeared from Kremenchug. This was all we knew about the story.

A few years later, Reb Yaakov Alter's situation had already stabilized to a degree, and he was sitting at a gathering in our home. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, he jumped up and began shouting to the people sitting there, referring to my father, "Do you know what this man did for me?"

He then shared with us what had happened:

When my father found out—since everyone confided their secrets to my father—that Reb Yaakov Alter wouldn't be able to repay his debtors, my father was concerned that the negotiations with the debtors would harm his health (the man had already sold all of his jewelry and furniture of value). My father thus sent him off to Odessa, and he personally handled the negotiations with the debtors (Reb Yaakov Asher had an older son, though he needed to be supervised). Reb Yaakov Asher concluded, "I will never forget those letters of encouragement that he sent me."

The entire time my father sat and listened cold facedly, as though the story was about someone else entirely.

My father was concerned with even the smallest needs of those close to him. When *HaRav* Shmuel Gurary was going to become *dayan* in the city of Charol (the official *rav* there was the above-mentioned Reb Elozor Moshe Madayevsky), and had to travel there for the first time, there was concern that the town's residents would have a negative impression of him,

The entire time my father sat and listened cold facedly, as though the story was about someone else entirely.

since dress was not Reb Shmuel's specialty. On his way to Charol he stopped over in Kremenchug, and my father personally arranged his clothing and shoes, and advised on how to conduct himself in this regard.

Another thing about my father that at the time shocked people was his extreme care about the *halachos* related to *Even Haezer*. For example, he wouldn't walk even a few steps in the street together with my mother.

My eldest brother-in-law Reb Zalman Rotinsky who was originally from Kremenchug had learned in Lubavitch and would come listen to my father deliver Chassidus. When he got engaged to my sister, my father forbade him from entering our home even for the sake of hearing Chassidus.

One of the conditions I know that he made with my third sister's future father-in-law before they got engaged was that the couple wouldn't stroll together after their wedding, as well as other such things.

[However, when the situation required it, he would forgo his standard:]

It once happened that the wife of one of those close to my father lost her mind, and her husband had to take her to a hospital for the mentally ill in Poltava. My father happened to be there, or perhaps he had gone there specifically to visit them, and was staying in the same inn as this couple. Suddenly, the ill woman expressed interest in riding a carriage with my father. When my father heard of this, he immediately consented. The wagon driver was called to come and my father put on his coat, but then the woman abruptly changed her mind and decided she wasn't interested.

My father was not a man of compromise. I once heard from him regarding something he was trying to help a person with, "I see that this issue cannot be resolved without a compromise, so I asked him to pass this on to someone else."

One more story that they tell about my father:

HaRav Yechezkel Arlazerov of Charkov approached him about making a shidduch (his daughter with my eldest brother), but my father told him, "He's not for you." Indeed, my brother ended up marrying the daughter of Reb Alter Umonsky from Cherson, a balebatishe Lubavitcher chossid.

I don't know my father's learning style. I do know that he had a steady shiur every morning to learn a few chapters of Tanach. He would laugh at those chassidim who didn't know Tanach, so that when the Rebbe Maharash said a maamar beginning "Veyikon'u Ami,"[5] they had no idea

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Reb Elozor Moshe Madayevsky

"I see that this issue cannot be resolved without a compromise, so I asked him to pass this on to someone else."

whether it was perhaps an agadah, from Gemara or a midrash.

On Shabbos mornings he would rise at dawn, go to the *mikvah*, and be *maivir sedrah*. He would then learn the *maamorim* of *Likutei Torah* or *Torah Ohr* relating to that *parsha* until the time came for him to deliver Chassidus. He would repeat *maamorim* of the Mitteler Rebbe from *Ateres Rosh* or *Shaarei Orah* and perhaps another sefer as well. Generally speaking though, my father was one of those who stayed up late, and it sometimes happened that he retired to bed after the family had already risen for the day.

His style of speaking Chassidus was fantastic. He would enter the room with a canister of tobacco which he used specifically for this purpose. He would sit down and sniff the tobacco silently, while signs of discomfort began to show on his face.

Even as he began speaking, he would stutter, and he would repeat the same words several times (fear of public speaking was not an issue). After a few seconds his speech began to flow smoothly, and he spoke with closed eyes while swaying forcefully.

My father never recited Chassidus in the shul. Only on Yom Tov did he speak in shul between *mincha* and *maariv* on lighter topics. Those speeches were open to public (unlike the Shabbos *maamorim*), and they attracted a large crowd.

HaRav Yaakov Mordechai Bezpalov once spent six months in Kremenchug to hear my father's recitation of Chassidus. According to Reb Dovid Gurary, this was at the instruction of the Rebbe Maharash.

Those who knew my father would say that Chassidus was not just a subject of study, but something upon which his entire life was dependent.

Other details of his personal, family or public life.

The little that I know, I have already noted in the previous sections.

The date of his passing and where is he buried.

The second day of Chanukah 5653 (1893), and he still managed to kindle the *menorah* on the first night. He is buried in Kremenchug.

The names of his sons and daughters and their addresses.

I will list his children in age order:

Avraham – deceased; Sara Rotinsky – deceased; Rivka Dunyuvisky – Kremenchug; Rissel Slavin – Leningrad; myself; Golda Dikansky – Kiev; Chana Shik – Rostov; and Shmuel – deceased.

I don't know their current addresses since we have lost contact with each other since the decree (one who wrote to relatives outside of Russia would be forced to request money which would then be confiscated by the government). Apparently, they were afraid to write to me. P

Notes

1. See *Shailos U'Teshuvos Tzemach Tzedek, Orach Chaim,* §56.
2. See *Yalkut Ohev Yisroel* p. 108 that a father should project greatness before his family so that they learn from him.
3. *Mishlei* 25:17, "Visit your neighbor sparingly, lest he become sated with you and hate you."
4. Apparently that was more of an ordinary girdle.
5. *Divrei Hayomim* 7:14. We don't have a maamar of the Rebbe Maharash beginning with this *possuk*. We do have such a *maamar* from the Rebbe Rashab from 5651 (1891), which was originally written in correspondence with various *chassidim,* amongst them R. Chaim Ber.

Let THEM *decide*

Rabbi Binyomin Cohen

A few months after our arrival in Australia some forty two years ago, my wife and I were invited to participate in a Shabbaton taking place in Kew – a suburb of Melbourne. The entire Shabbos program was conducted in the Kew shul, which, despite being somewhat past its heyday, still managed to attract a substantial congregation. The concluding event of the Shabbaton was a special *Shalosh Seudos* which was held in the shul hall.

I sat at the head of the table next to the Rabbi of the shul, Rabbi Yaakov Schreiber z"l who was a direct descendant of Rabbi Moshe Schreiber z"l (1766 – 1839), better known as the Chasam Sofer, the world-renowned Rav of Pressburg and spiritual leader of Hungarian orthodoxy.

The chairman said a few words of introduction and called upon me to address the gathering. Before I had a chance to stand up, Rabbi Schreiber leaned over to me and whispered into my ear. "The Chasam Sofer pointed out," he said in Yiddish, "that we have to be very happy when Jews keep the Shabbos which Hashem gave them. Once that is over, we should not make the Shabbos any longer for them than it needs to be. So please don't speak for too long."

Needless to say, I complied with the Rabbi's request. My address did not last for more than ten minutes, the *Shalosh Seudos* concluded promptly, and the worthy congregants of Kew were able to go home without being delayed or inconvenienced by any Rabbinic over-enthusiasm.

Despite having dutifully toed the line, I was, in retrospect, more than a little surprised by the Chasam Sofer's words. He was, after all, famous for being a demanding and uncompromising religious leader who tolerated no interference when it came to setting standards of Torah observance. Surely it was rather out of character that a man who had dedicated his whole life to the raising of the spiritual bar should have voiced his concern that nobody be kept unduly long in shul at the end of Shabbos? Still, if the Chasam Sofer's direct descendant had received such a teaching in the name of his illustrious ancestor, there seemed to be little reason to doubt its accuracy. Surely the Rabbi of Pressburg had his reasons, even if they seemed somewhat at odds with his general approach.

The whole matter was not of any urgency, or even of much practical importance. I promptly forgot about it for several decades until I recently happened to hear about something rather similar which took place in Eretz Yisroel quite a while ago.

The year was 5725 (1965) and the place was the town of Bnei Brak, a citadel of piety and devotion by any standards. The Chabad shul in Rechov Avraham was, like shuls the world over, in the habit of hosting a *Shalosh Seudos* after *mincha* every Shabbos afternoon. Challah was available for those who wanted it, but many of those present made do with other foods. The reason for this was based on that which is explained in Chassidus that at this particular time the most exalted spiritual level of the Shabbos day is reached. It is, in fact, a level akin to that of Yom Kippur, and therefore, quite understandably, a

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The Chasam Sofer

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time when spiritual food is more appropriate than a normal, physical meal.

The requirements of Shulchan Aruch are, however, not to be trifled with, and a third meal must therefore be eaten. Nevertheless, given that the Shulchan Aruch itself permits a certain degree of flexibility (in comparison to the first two Shabbos meals) with regard to what one needs to eat, the Chabad custom has generally been not to eat bread at this time. One has to eat something, but the main focus has always been on the spiritual fare. A typical Chabad *Shalosh Seudos* will, therefore, start with Chasidic *nigunim* (melodies) which serve as an introduction to the *maamar* – a Chasidic discourse of one of the Chabad Rebbeim, often based on the Parsha of that particular Shabbos, and normally repeated by heart. The *Shalosh Seudos* itself will conclude about the time of nightfall and, hopefully, as a climax to the Shabbos day, leave its participants better equipped to deal with the challenges of the coming week.

Naturally, no *Shalosh Seudos* ever prepared itself. If there is to be food on the table, someone is going to have to take the trouble to arrange it. While it will probably not be beyond the capabilities of most people to cut up a plate of herring, finding someone who will be able to repeat a *maamar* by heart is a rather different matter. In addition, since the purpose of the whole exercise is to inspire and elevate the listeners, the *manner* of the repetition is of crucial importance. Only someone who lives in, and has a feeling for, the ideas expressed in the *maamar* will be able to communicate his passion to others. Where does one find such people? Divine Providence was certainly looking after the Chabad Chassidim of Bnei Brak when it brought into their midst Rabbi G.

In addition to spending the whole day in study of Torah, Rabbi G. devoted much of his time to the *maamorim* of the Rebbeim of Chabad. He was (and still is) a person who does not view the study of Chassidus as an intellectual exercise, but rather as a discovery of that part of Torah which will satisfy the hunger and quench the thirst of a Jewish soul. His total commitment to all that is explicit, and even more

so, implicit, in every *maamar*, gave the words themselves deeper meaning and focus, as well as stimulating the spiritual appetite of those listening. Clearly, Rabbi G. was the most obvious choice when someone was needed to repeat a *maamar*. He became an almost permanent fixture at the *Shalosh Seudos* every Shabbos, and the Chassidim of Bnei Brak rejoiced in their good fortune.

Unfortunately, there was a slight problem. The *maamorim* which Rabbi G. chose to repeat were not short. Most of them lasted for at least fifty minutes, and sometimes more than an hour. When the *maamar* and the *Shalosh Seudos* finished, the night sky of Bnei Brak was already filled with stars. The time printed in the calendar for the end of Shabbos had come and gone long ago. Even the Jews who were in the habit of not ending Shabbos until the nightfall of Rabbeinu Tam (a grandson of Rashi, who held that night is not until about half an hour after the accepted time) had already davened *maariv* and gone home to make *havdalah*. Only in the Chabad shul did the *Shalosh Seudos* last so long (courtesy of Rabbi

Rabbi G., the cause of the problem, found it difficult to understand why people were so upset. He was utilizing this most sacred of times for a purpose hallowed by tradition – the repetition of Chasidic *maamorim*.

The Rebbe's answer to his question about the maamar was brief and to the point: "אזוי לאנג ווי דער עולם האט געדולט צו הערן" – for as long as those present have patience to listen.

G.) thus enabling its congregants to enjoy an extra dose of Sabbatical sanctity and Chasidic inspiration.

Needless to say, not everyone appreciated arriving home long after their neighbours. In most cases, their wives didn't appreciate it either. Shabbos itself is a day of rest, but that only ensures that after the day of rest has ended there is that much more to do. The tranquillity and peacefulness are often followed by a far more hectic atmosphere as the members of the household try to cope with the seemingly endless number of tasks demanding their attention. This is especially true in Eretz Yisroel where many Jews do not work on Friday but resume the daily rush first thing Sunday morning. Thus the pressure already starts the night before, when people have what to do and would like to get on with it as soon as possible. Under the circumstances, many of the Chassidim felt that something had to be done to rectify the situation.

Rabbi G., the cause of the problem, found it difficult to understand why people were so upset. After all, he wasn't asking them to listen to some long-winded presentation of his own ideas. He was, rather, utilizing this most sacred of times for a purpose hallowed by tradition – the repetition of Chasidic *maamorim*. Every single word of a *maamar* was indescribably holy, and had provided spiritual sustenance for generations of Chassidim. How could those who saw themselves as faithful and devoted followers of those very same Rebbeim who had said the *maamorim*, be so insensitive to their sanctity? How could they cast away such a priceless opportunity to unite themselves with true spiritual

inspiration as they rushed back home, eager to start the new week? Didn't they realize how much they could gain from the *maamar* which would help them cope successfully with the challenges of the coming week? Why the rush and scramble to conclude the Shabbos and relegate the *maamar* to a position of, at best, secondary importance? Rabbi G. felt very strongly that a compromise in this matter was an affront to the Rebbeim and to the Chassidus which they taught. The *maamorim* thus continued unabated as the Chassidim of Bnei Brak resigned themselves to a situation which was, for many of them, not to their liking.

Some months later, Rabbi G. travelled to New York for his first visit to the Rebbe. He decided to take advantage of his *yechidus* with the Rebbe to seek the Rebbe's guidance concerning the length of the *maamorim* which he chose for public repetition. He would not present the matter as a subject of dispute between himself and his somewhat – less enthusiastic listeners. After all, he had nothing against any of the Chassidim, and they certainly had nothing against him. On the contrary, they held him in the highest regard. The question here was purely one of principle, and who was better qualified to express an opinion and provide guidance in this matter than the Rebbe himself? He who passionately urged his Chassidim to be involved in the study and dissemination of Chassidus would surely encourage him to utilise every opportunity to repeat more and more *maamorim* of the Rebbeim. He would therefore just phrase his inquiry in the completely impersonal form of "How long should a *maamar* which is repeated in public last for?" and the Rebbe would probably tell him that it wouldn't harm anybody if the *maamar* would be even longer than he was presently saying. After all, the Rebbe's expectations and demands often exceeded those of his most devoted Chassidim, and maybe here also he would be encouraged to do even more.

Like many of those who had experienced a Yechidus before him, or who were to receive one after him, Rabbi G. was in for something of a surprise. The Yechidus was conducted in Yiddish, and the Rebbe's answer to his question about the *maamar* was brief and to the point: "אזוי לאנג ווי דער עולם האט געדולט צו הערן" – for as long as those present have patience to listen.

In other words, there is no such thing as an "ideal" length for a *maamar* (or for any other words of Torah). Over and above all other considerations has to be the question of what the listeners want, not what the speaker would like. If, therefore you are repeating Chassidus in public, your main concern should be that those present should listen to and absorb your words. This they will only do for as long as you have their attention. Once you lose them, as a result of their impatience or whatever, you have also lost the reason for your continuing to speak. The purpose of repeating Chassidus is for *their* benefit, not for your spiritual self-gratification. Work out what is the attention span of most of the listeners, and choose an appropriate *maamar* accordingly.

No one could possibly question the Rebbe's total and absolute commitment to the spreading of Chassidus through the repetition of *maamorim*. Similarly, no one in his right mind would suspect that the Rebbe would be prepared to compromise on a matter of principle just in order to keep his Chassidim (or anyone else) happy. There are so many examples to

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the contrary that there is no need to refute such a misguided suggestion. The directive, however, to take people's patience into account does not represent an abandonment of principle. Rather, it indicates what is, in some areas at least, the principle itself. When the aim of the exercise is to reach the person's intellect and emotions, all other considerations have to be modified and adjusted to ensure that they assist, rather than detract from, the core intention. The *maamar* is indeed sacred, but the ultimate purpose is that it affects and influences the person listening to it. To lose him in order to preserve the *maamar* is missing the point.

To put it in other words: It is always unacceptable to compromise on principles. All that will be achieved through such a compromise is an invariable weakening, and sometimes a complete destruction, of the principle itself. To compromise however, on a peripheral issue could often be quite advisable, especially if doing so may serve to strengthen the matter of main concern. A *maamar*, like any other part of Torah, was given for the sake of the Jew who hears it or studies it, and, as such, is a means to an end. The means should never be allowed to become our major focus. Granted, great care needs to be exercised in determining what is, in fact, an issue of principle and what is merely secondary. Once, however, that has been decided, it will be clear on which matters one should stand firm as a rock and on which ones far greater flexibility would be a more suitable approach.

Returning to the question of Shabbos itself, the same holds true. There is no way known in which any change can be made to the Shabbos day itself or to any of its *halachos*. Even if the majority of *Klal Yisroel* were to vote to move Shabbos to a different day of the week, their wishes would achieve absolutely nothing as no type of accommodation or compromise could be arranged on such a matter. The Shabbos day is when Hashem decreed it to be and no one in the world can change that. Once, however, three stars have appeared in the sky at the end of Shabbos, the day and its sanctity have finished. True, there is a *mitzvah* to add to Shabbos, but there is no fixed length for such an addition. One can fulfil this *mitzvah* by prolonging the Shabbos for one second, and, halachically speaking, there is no need to do more than that.

Obviously, it is possible to argue both ways. But it would seem that the Chasam Sofer and the Rebbe favored the approach which prefers to leave all voluntary matters to the feelings and choice of the individual.

Even if the majority of *Klal Yisroel* were to vote to move Shabbos to a different day of the week, their wishes would achieve absolutely nothing as no type of accommodation or compromise could be arranged on such a matter.

Of course, we would not encourage anyone to conclude his Shabbos at the earliest possible opportunity. There are indeed Jews who prolong their Shabbos for many hours, thereby demonstrating how precious this day is in their eyes and how reluctant they are to leave it. This is praiseworthy and highly commendable but in no sense a Halachic obligation. It is, rather, the expression of positive feelings by an individual or group of people and cannot be imposed upon the community at large.

The Chasam Sofer was of the opinion that to blur the demarcation line between the voluntary and the obligatory will not serve to enhance either of them. The voluntary should not become obligatory any more than the obligatory can become voluntary. The Shabbos itself has to be insisted upon, regardless of individual, or even communal, preferences. The *tosefes Shabbos* (addition to Shabbos), however, can and should be left to the individual.

Nothing should be done to force a person to meet someone else's standards in a matter which the Torah itself has given over to his personal choice.

Some would take a very different approach and endeavour to present even the voluntary as obligatory in order to protect the truly obligatory. They fear that any flexibility allowed on the periphery of a *mitzvah* will gradually penetrate inwards and will lead to an unacceptable laxity in the observance of basic halachic obligations. This school of thought would recommend not finishing Shabbos until long after nightfall, thus making the possibility, or the probability, of finishing Shabbos before nightfall, far less likely.

Obviously, it is possible to argue both ways, but it would seem that the Chasam Sofer and the Rebbe favored the approach which prefers to leave all voluntary matters to the feelings and choice of the individual.

May Hashem grant that, in addition to our total devotion to His Torah and Mitzvos, we should also be blessed with much wisdom and sensitivity when helping others. The truly successful Mashpia or Mechanech is the one who knows the precise needs and capabilities of those with whom he is attempting to communicate. In the ultimate analysis he will carefully measure whatever he gives over to them, in accordance with that which they have decided, and are ready, to receive. P

REB SHMARYOHU SASSONKIN

THE STYLE OF LEARNING IN LUBAVITCH

In Lubavitch, the *bochurim* learned with great depth and truly penetrated the *sugya* they learned, with the intent of reaching the final Halachic conclusion. Since they learned for the purpose of recognizing the Halacha, they stayed away from any *pilpul* that was not directly related to the Halacha, and they only debated matters that led to a true clarification of the *sugya*.

The method they followed was to learn from the first Rishonim to the last Acharonim. First they learned the *sugya* with Rashi and Tosfos, and only once their opinions and the differences between them were clear to them would they learn the Rif with the Ran or Nemukei Yosef, followed by the Rosh. Since they learned them so thoroughly it was easy for them to learn the Tur, the Beis Yosef, and the Shulchan Aruch, and it was like a helpful review for them.

The Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, both Orach Chaim and Yoreh Dei'ah (those sections that are extant – i.e., the *halachos* of Shechita and Niddah), was a guiding light for those who studied Halacha. They would learn other Acharonim as well: the Pri Megadim on Orach Chaim and Yore Dei'ah, the Sidrei Taharah on Niddah, the Ktzos Hachoshen and Nesivois on Choshen Mishpat, and so on.

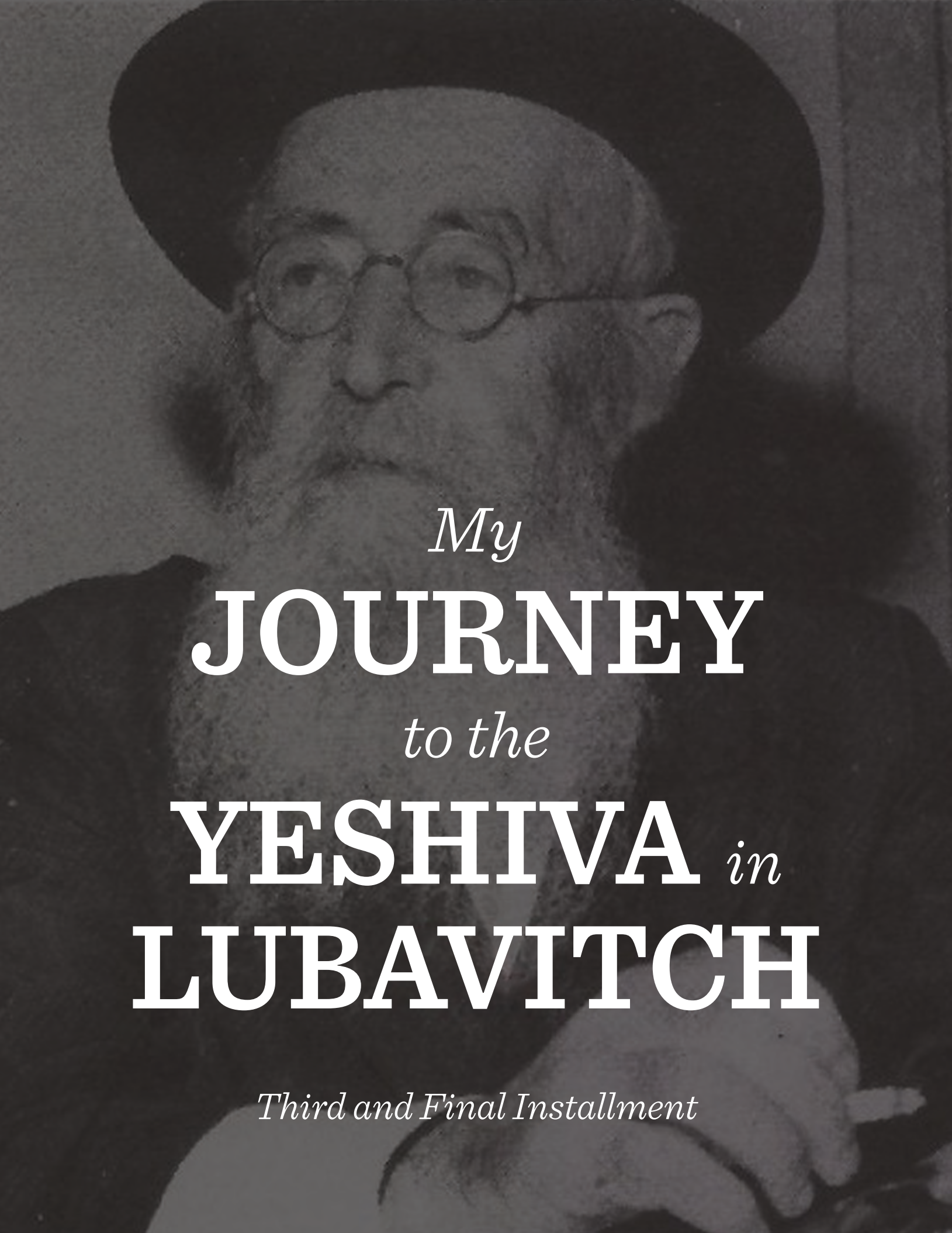
In my days in Lubavitch there were a number of students with incredible skills. As such, there was no difficult *sugya* or complex Halacha that was learned that wasn't thoroughly clarified.

It is worth noting that in my times the *groiseh zal* was just developing, so that when the Rebbe established smaller yeshivos in other towns, they had to select

Reb Shmaryohu Sassonkin, also known as Reb Shmerel Batumer (in reference to the town of Batumi, Georgia, where he served as rov), was the rov of the Chabad community in Yerushalayim from his arrival in Eretz Yisroel in 5710 (1950) until his passing on 19 Menachem Av 5736 (1976).

In his memoirs titled "Zichronosai," he writes in descriptive style about his youth, the Tomchei Temimim yeshivah in Lubavitch, his rabbonus in Batumi and the state of Georgian Jewry, and about the challenges of living Jewishly in communist Russia.

The following chapters convey his further impressions of the yeshivah in Lubavitch: the study of Nigleh and Chassidus, the mashpi'im R. Michoel and R. Groinem, the farbrengens, and the internalization of chassidishe values.



My JOURNEY *to the* YESHIVA *in* LUBAVITCH

Third and Final Installment

The courtyard of Tomchei Temimim in Otvotzk

Roshei Yeshiva and Maggidei Shiurim from outside of Lubavitch. The candidates for Rosh Yeshiva would say a *shiur* in front of the most gifted students, and the decision of who was appropriate for the job was based on their opinion.

However, it was soon realized that our yeshiva itself had "grown great produce," and they stopped looking for Roshei Yeshiva from outside. The *groiseh zal* produced high quality students, so that we had excellent Roshei Yeshiva who came from among us. (I have elsewhere described the talent and genius of some of them and the success they had with their students.)

The previously-mentioned method of study suited the style of the students. Most of the students in Tomchei Temimim came from Yeshivos with Roshei Yeshiva who were exceptional geniuses and aimed to teach their students how to grasp the depth of a *sugya*.

Most of the students were Chabad chassidim who enjoyed a style of learning that focused on the text at hand rather than *pilpul*. This was true even regarding students who came from the Yeshivos of Kremenchug and Amtchislav whose Roshei Yeshiva were not Lubavitch.

The Rosh Yeshiva in Kremenchug was HaRav HaGaon Reb Yitzchok Zev Tzukerman, known as "The Gadol," and the Rosh Yeshiva in Amtchislav was the extraordinary genius HaRav Elchonon Wasserman. Truth be told, both of them avoided *pilpul* and taught their students in a brilliant and straightforward fashion to understand the *sugya* with tremendous clarity. Here is not the place to focus on their incredible manner of learning; both were phenomenal geniuses before whom the entire Shas and Rambam, both with their commentaries, were brightly illuminated.

Some students came from Yeshivos where the focus was on creating one's own *chidushim* and developing *pilpulim*. However, as soon as these foreign ideas arrived in Lubavitch, the Yeshiva's founder – the Rebbe – immediately sensed it. He expressed sharp words against it and warned that one needs to distance himself from this strange concept completely. Since the focus of their in-depth learning was for the purpose of creating *chidushim*, they were not paying attention to the Halacha that is derived from the *sugya*. Someone who studies in such a manner generally doesn't know the actual Halacha, because his desire to be *mechadesh* overrides his ability to understand the actual matter at hand in depth.

In Chassidus, not only are the concepts themselves incomprehensible to the senses, but even the examples and parables it uses are beyond the senses, and one must use great effort for his intellect to understand them.

The Rebbe quoted the Zohar which states that one who learns in such a style is adding strength to Sitra Achra, and anyone who issues a *psak* based on such study is "destroying souls," Rachmana Litzlan. One who truly fears Hashem should therefore distance himself from people whose learning creates false *chidushim* and *pilpulim* full of air. A true *pilpul* can only be created when the Halacha has been properly understood from the start, but when one creates a *pilpul* before he fully comprehends the *sugya* it is impossible for it to be true, and he is wasting his time with falsehood. The Rebbe thus ordered the students to destroy this evil practice from their midst and only learn the Torah *lishmah*. (The above is based on *Kuntres Eitz HaChaim* from the Rebbe Rashab, written in the year 5664 [1904]).

In my days, this concept had already been uprooted from the students because the Rebbe's sharp words had permeated their souls, and anyone who had taken that foreign path had since dropped that style of learning. By the time I arrived in Lubavitch, all the students studied in a manner that was in accordance with the Rebbe's will.

The *mashgiach* over the learning was R. Zev Volf Levitin from the city of Pahar. He wasn't just in charge of the students' *seder* but of testing them as well. He was fluent in all of *Shas*, and he would get to the depth of the *sugya* and see if the students were learning in the desirable manner.

After the students understood the subject properly from its source, they would study the Teshuvos of some renowned Geonim as a condiment to their knowledge, such as those of the Noda BiYehudah, the Chasam Sofer, R. Akiva Eiger, the Tzemach Tzedek, and others.

THE STRUCTURE OF CHASSIDUS

Chassidus is not *Mussar* – Jewish ethics, *Chakirah* – Jewish philosophy, *Drush* – homiletics, or Kabbalah. It is also not an explanation of Kabbalah; rather it is a subject of its own.

Chassidus is a unique G-dly discipline, a deep and lofty examination of spiritual matters. There are many names given to Chassidus: *"Divrei Elokim Chaim," "Pnimiyus HaTorah"* and *"Heichal Chabad"* (the chamber of Chabad). The founder of this chamber, from the foundation up to its rafters, was the Alter Rebbe – the Rebbe R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi. The Alter Rebbe based it on the teachings of his Rebbe – the Mezritcher Maggid, and on the teachings of his Rebbe's Rebbe – the Baal Shem Tov, upon whom a G-dly spirit rested, and to whom Torah was revealed from Heaven through Eliyahu Hanavi's teacher, Achiya Hashiloni.

The study of Chassidus is vast in breadth and depth.

The revealed part of Torah also includes deep intellectual concepts, but they generally concern matters that can be grasped with one of the physical senses. Sometimes they can be seen with the eyes, such as the lungs of a *treifah* (an unhealthy animal), or they can be heard, like two sides of an argument about a loan or deposit. Even when it comes to abstract reasoning that cannot be seen or heard, there are always similar concepts that can be grasped, helping a person understand.

In Chassidus, however, not only are the concepts themselves incomprehensible to the senses, but even the examples and parables it uses are beyond the senses, and one must use great effort for his intellect to understand them. (This statement is based on

the words of the Rebbe Rashab.) However, with toil, one can understand Chassidus properly in a logical manner, in a way that is appropriate to the depth of the wisdom of Chassidus.

It is known that the Gemara is divided into many sections, some easier, some more difficult, and some extremely difficult. When a child is introduced to the study of Gemara he is raised up level by level, step by step, starting from easier subjects and then harder ones. He begins by studying easy *sugyos,* and even then only the Gemara with Rashi; then he is taught harder sections with some of the Tosfos that are relevant to *pshat*; then he reaches the third level where he learns even the hardest *sugyos* with every Tosfos; until he reaches a stage where he can learn on his own without the help of a teacher and he can understand the subject properly.

In Chassidus it works the same way; there are subjects, some easier and some harder. Sample topics include: *Memalei Kol Almin* and *Sovev Kol Almin* (the light that fills the world and the light that transcends it); the creation *yesh mei'ayin* (ex nihilo); the topic of *ohr, chayus,* and *koach* (light, life, and energy); *koach* and *yecholes* (power vs. ability); and so on. Just as when one studies Gemara he gains knowledge with the assistance of teachers, some greater than others, so too in Chassidus one can only gain knowledge with the help of teachers.

THE THREE MASHPIIM

For this purpose the Rebbe Rashab, the founder of the Yeshiva, appointed three *mashpi'im* to teach Chassidus to the students. (Teachers of Nigleh are known as Roshei Yeshiva, whereas teachers of Chassidus are known as *mashpi'im*.)

In my days in Lubavitch the *mashpi'im* were the chossid R. Moshe of Zhebin, popularly known as Moshe Zhebiner; the chossid R. Michoel Beliner of Nevel, called "Michoel Neveler" or "Michoel Der Alter"; and the chossid R. Shmuel Groinem Esterman, known simply as "Groinem."

The *mashpia* R. Moshe of Zhebin would learn with the beginners. He would begin with the Vayikra *maamorim* in Likutei Torah of the Alter Rebbe, such as *"Adam Ki Yakriv Mikem," "Lo Sashbis Melach," "Vnikdashti Besoch Bnei Yisroel,"* and others.

R' Groinem's children

From the moment you begin to learn Chassidus – although you are merely standing at the threshold – a new world opens before you, and new secrets are revealed.

To bring an example: The first secret that is revealed is that of the *korbanos.* The Ramban writes that Kayin and Hevel understood the great secret of sacrifices, as did Noach and Adam Harishon. But you would never dream that this secret would be revealed to you in the *maamar "Adam Ki Yakriv."*

We already know from Rashi's commentary that every Jew has two drives, a Yetzer Tov and a Yetzer Hara. In Chassidus they are referred to as "souls": an Animalistic Soul and a G-dly Soul. You thus discover that you have an animal within you.

There are three types of animals: the cattle, the sheep, and the goat. They each have a different nature: the ox gores, the sheep is gentle, and the goat (עז) is brazen (עזות).

So too regarding your own animal there are three types: the animal soul of someone who is naturally quick to anger (an "ox"); someone who is a *ba'al ta'avah* (a "sheep"); and one who is brazen (a "goat"). These negative animalistic traits lower you down and distance you from Hashem, and therefore you should force yourself to refrain from fulfilling your *ta'avah* and that will bring you closer to Hashem.

This is alluded to in the *possuk, "Adam Ki Yakriv Mikem"* – "when a man will bring forth [a sacrifice] from [among] you," meaning that we must bring forth a sacrifice from within ourselves, from our very soul.

We reviewed each maamar multiple times until it was well ingrained in us.

The *maamar* of *"Lo Sashbis Melach"* is a continuation of *"Adam Ki Yakriv Mikem."* This maamar explains that just as a *korbon* must be sacrificed with salt, so too our spiritual sacrifices that come from within us must be accompanied by spiritual "salt."

Salt has many great qualities:

1. It removes unwanted parts of food, such as blood from meat.

2. Although salt does not have flavor on its own, nonetheless it is used to spice food.

3. It is used as a preservative.

So too regarding the spiritual sacrifice of our soul we must use spiritual "salt." This salt is Chassidus, *Pinimiyus HaTorah,* and this spiritual salt has all the qualities of physical salt, namely:

1. Learning Chassidus does not have as much flavor as learning Halacha, because one can only *know* the facts but cannot *understand* the essence of the matter, which remains hidden and unattainable until Moshiach will come and reveal it. Nevertheless,

Do not think that the little I have described above exposes all the secrets of Chassidus, for at that time we only stood on the threshold of Chassidus. However, the little that was revealed to us ignited our souls.

Chassidus gives flavor to the "bread and meat" which is Gemara and Halacha.

2. This spiritual salt "preserves" and brings the fulfillment of Torah and Mitzvos.

3. Chassidus helps us separate the evil from the good within our animalistic soul.

4. The *possuk* refers to salt as "the *bris* of Hashem." The purpose of a *bris* is to connect; similarly, the purpose of Chassidus is to connect us with Hashem.

5. Just as salty foods make one thirsty, so too Chassidus causes one to become thirsty for Hashem.

This *maamar* also explains the twelve-hour learning schedule of bochurim in Tomchei Temimim: eight

hours for learning Nigleh and four hours (one third of the day) for learning Chassidus. This is based on the teaching of Chazal (*Kidushin* 30a) that "one should always split his days into thirds, one third for Mikrah, one third for Mishnah, and one third for Talmud."

All the great commentators struggled with this Gemara: why should someone learn Mikrah for a third of the time even when he gets older (as implied by the word "always")? However, based on this *maamar* it can be understood: when one gets older he should learn Chassidus, which is also included in the category of Mikrah, for a third of the time (as the schedule indeed was in Tomchei Temimim).

SECRETS OF CHASSIDUS

With the approach of Pesach, our *mashpia* R. Moshe Zhebiner started teaching the *maamorim* of Parshas Tzav that discuss eating Matzah on Pesach, revealing to us more great secrets:

(1) Matzah is a food that strengthens our *emunah*, as the Zohar teaches (2:183b) that "Matzah is the food of faith." This is difficult to comprehend: how can physical food assist us in spiritual matters?

This can be understood with the teaching of Chazal (*Brachos* 40a) that "a child does not know how to call out 'Father' until he tastes grain." Just as a child cannot understand mundane matters until he tastes bread, so too when the Yidden left Mitzraim they could not understand holy matters until they tasted the Mann.

Also, just like bread, which grows from the physical earth, contains within it the "word of Hashem," thereby sustaining his *Nefesh HaSichlis,* so too Matzah, which grows from the spiritual "earth," brings sustenance to the *Nefesh Ha'Elokis.*

Additionally, although a child does not know how this person is his father or why he should love him, yet he calls to him "Father" anyway, because his relationship with his father is not built on intellect. Similarly, by eating Matzah, one will reach a level of G-dliness that will allow him to call out to his Father in Heaven with a deep and powerful connection that transcends intellect.

(2) After midnight the Yidden felt a great fear of Hashem, the level of *"Yirah Ila'ah"* (higher fear). This is why Hashem told the Yidden to eat Matzah on the night of Pesach, so that they too would be able to connect to *"Yirah Ila'ah."* By fulfilling the Mitzvah of eating Matzah with *bittul,* which is the level of *"Yirah Tata'ah"* (lower fear), they became capable of reaching the level of *"Yirah Ila'ah."*

(3) When the Yidden left Mitzrayim they ate two types of Matzah. The first type was the Matzah they were commanded to eat before Chatzos, as the *possuk* says, "You shall eat Matzos in the evening." However, that command only applied the first day; afterwards, they were allowed to eat *chometz.*

However, the Yidden continued to eat Matzah on the other days as well, as the Haggadah explains that "the dough of our fathers did not have time to become *chometz.*" This means that the dough was *unable* to become *chometz* due to the great revelation of Hashem that they experienced at that time. This was the second type of Matzah, the one that came after Hashem's revelation.

(4) Even today, when we sit at home during the Seder and eat the Matzah, we are meriting great G-dly revelations. However, one can only appreciate this if they have fulfilled Hashem's commands throughout the year, thus reaching the level of *"Yirah Tata'ah";* then, when the night of Pesach comes, he can merit to reach *"Yirah Ila'ah."*

SPIRITUAL ELEVATION

Do not think that the little I have described above exposes all the secrets of Chassidus, for at that time we only stood on the threshold of Chassidus. However, the little that was revealed to us ignited our souls.

Even the students who were beginners and were only crossing the threshold of Chabad and Chassidus were so influenced by what they learned that it caused them to feel spiritually uplifted, as though they were transported to another world, to a place where there was only good, illuminated with a great, powerful *oir*. This, of course, was caused by the little bit of spiritual "salt" that was already giving flavor to Halacha, so that they truly felt they were studying Hashem's Torah.

Similarly, their davening was affected positively; they started wearing *tzitizis* and *tefillin* that were nicer and more *mehudar;* and they transformed into new people, to the extent that they did not even recognize themselves.

Every student considered himself lucky that he merited, with *hashgacha pratis,* to come to this place of light, and I, who experienced many challenges to get there (as I discussed in the previous chapters), particularly felt this *hashgacha pratis*.

Afterwards we studied under the *mashpia* R. Michoel Beliner, who was loved immensely by his students. One received pleasure just by seeing his face, radiant from his wisdom and knowledge of Chassidus. He was very sensitive of others and had tremendous *ahavas yisroel*. Those who remembered him from when he lived in Nevel would share that on the cold winter nights he would not rest, because he was busy finding all sorts of ways to procure firewood. He would carry the wood on his shoulders and bring it to the homes of the poor who were shivering from cold, and especially to homes with small children, and if there was no one there to set up the furnace he would do so himself.

He loved all the students, even those who were not in his class. He was like a compassionate father and mother to them, caring for all their needs. He was so incredibly connected to his students that he sensed their needs even before they sensed them themselves. It was not for naught that his students loved him, for if a friend's love is reflected on the other, surely it is that way with a teacher and his pupil.

R. Michoel Beliner

R. Michoel was like a compassionate father and mother to all the students, caring for all their needs. He was so incredibly connected to them that he sensed their needs even before they sensed them themselves.

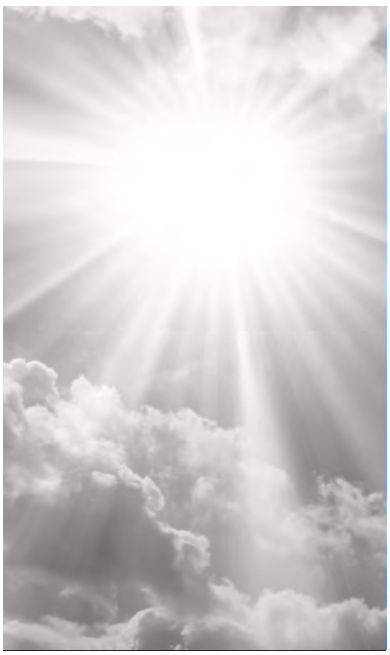
It was a pleasure to hear him explain the words of Likutei Torah, and it happened more than once that it would lead him to share words of inspiration and *avodah,* while tears would stream down his face.

I will never forget the tremendous impression it made on us when he taught the *maamar* "*Ani Ledodi*" during the month of Elul. We were especially inspired and moved when he reached the end of the second paragraph, which reads as follows:

Pious individuals try to refrain from such speech, and it is said about one amora that 'he never spoke empty speech in his life.

"The nature of a person is that even when only his toenail gets hurt, he feels the pain in his brain. But that is only if the limb is still attached. If the limb is amputated from the body, the brain will not feel the limb's wound, since it isn't connected. Similarly, Yidden are attached to Hashem, and one should feel the pain he causes to the G-dly spark within him when he brings it down into *galus*. The only reason a person may not feel this pain is because he has weakened his spark so much that it has been separated and severed from its source."

When our *mashpia* R. Michoel read the last words, "separated and severed from his source," he broke down and cried bitterly.



His words had a tremendous influence on us, since they were passionate and truly came from his heart, and "words that come from the heart, enter the heart." R. Michoel also introduced us to some difficult sections of Chassidus and explained it to us very well.

After that we moved on to the *mashpia* R. Shmuel Groinem Esterman. It was from him that we received most of our knowledge of Chassidus. R. Groinem had every topic of Chassidus organized and structured, and there was no topic, no matter how small, that he did not thoroughly figure out.

He knew a tremendous amount, and he would spend days and nights toiling in Chassidus. All this exertion made him fall ill, until he could no longer see and had to undergo surgery. However, his toiling brought him much success, and he was particularly talented in elucidating the concepts to his students.

He stood out in his fantastic explanations of Tanya. He was very precise about every letter and would make sure that each and every one was explained. Since he knew all of Chassidus in an orderly fashion, he was able to find explanations for everything.

His words were exact, so when he repeated something he would use the same exact words, which made it easier for his students to comprehend. Truth to be told, without his explanations, Tanya would be like a closed book to us. He truly enlightened us.

THE MEANING OF A FARBRENGEN

On Rosh Chodesh and *Yomei Depagra* [special dates] the *mashpi'im* would *farbreng* with us. This was aside from *Yud Tes Kislev*, *Shemini Atzeres, Simchas Torah,* and *Purim,* when the Rebbe himself would *farbreng* with the students and chassidim.

Farbrengens is the fourth category, about beloved speech that uplifts the soul and inspires one to adopt positive qualities and distance himself from negatives ones, and this is accomplished through story and song.

Many people wonder: What is a *farbrengen*? What purpose does it serve?

My introduction to the concept of *farbrengen* before my arrival in Lubavitch came in two ways:

First, from the Rambam's explanation to *Avos*, where he divides all types of speech into five categories: (1) speech that is a *mitzvah;* (2) forbidden speech; (3) repulsive speech; (4) beloved speech; (5) permissible speech. And he explains there as follows:

"Speech that is a *mitzvah* includes reading and learning words of Torah, which is a positive *mitzvah* and is equal to the entire Torah. Forbidden speech refers to false testimony, lies, talebearing, cursing, foul language, and *lashon hara*.

"Repulsive speech serves no purpose but does not involve sin, such as tales that people share about incidents that transpired, the king's conduct, how one person died and how another became wealthy. This is what our Sages call *devarim beteilim.* Pious individuals try to refrain from such speech, and it is said about one *amora* that 'he never spoke empty speech in his life.'

"Beloved speech includes speaking about the value of intellect and of good character traits, and how lacking them is undesirable. This can be accomplished through stories and songs which inspire the soul to adopt these traits and withhold it from lowly ones. Similarly, it includes praising great people so that others are encouraged to follow in their ways, and to disdain those who perform evil so that people will look down at their conduct and stay away from them. This category of speech, to highlight positive qualities and put down negative ones, is called *derech eretz*."

What is relevant to our discussion about *farbrengens* is the fourth category, about beloved speech that uplifts the soul and inspires one to adopt positive qualities and distance himself from negatives ones, and this is accomplished through story and song.

My second introduction to *farbrengens* came about in the summer of 5665 (1905) when I stayed in Kishinev. There, I participated in a *farbrengen* of Polish chassidim and enjoyed it immensely. At the *farbrengens* they would say *l'chaim*, sing *niggunim*, and tell stories of their Rebbes, the righteous men of the generation. They would describe their service of Hashem, their manner of *davening*, their righteousness, and the miracles they performed. All this would warm their hearts to follow the path of Chassidus.

THE NATURE OF A NIGGUN

The *farbrengens* that captured my heart more than any others were those in Lubavitch. Besides the overall inspiration, they were like a spiritual bath which cleansed and purified the soul from any grime and coarseness, so that it could climb to a holier place and serve Hashem through *davening*, learning, and doing *mitzvos*.

The purification process occurred either through tears of *teshuvah* or through a joyous heart, depending on the subject of the farbrengen. Some called for introspection, leading to sorrow and tears, while others led to happiness and rejoicing. The choice of subject depended on the *mashpia* who spoke.

In Lubavitch they also told stories and sang *niggunim*, but the *niggunim* were in line with the style of the *farbrengen*. If the discussion revolved around introspection, we would sing sorrowful melodies (*merirus*); if it was about a yearning and longing to live up to the ways of chassidim and Chassidus, we would sing songs of yearning (*gaagu'im*); and if the subject matter was something that brought joy, we would sing joy songs of joy (*simcha*).

R. Michoel's farbrengens consisted primarily of words of inspiration: He encouraged us to learn and daven properly, and not to learn Chassidus superficially. He told us to strive to understand new things, but not like the reading of a newspaper in which yesterday's news is no longer relevant.

While singing, we would not jump from one *niggun* to the next; rather we would repeat each *niggun* several times. If we paused during the singing, it served as a time to reflect and contemplate on the *mashpia's* words and internalize them.

You may be wondering: How was it possible for there to be spiritual grime and coarseness in Lubavitch?

The truth is that the grime and coarseness did not originate in Lubavitch, rather each person brought it from home. Beforehand it went unnoticed, and even the most superficial flaws were ignored before arriving in Lubavitch. Examples include to be particular that *tefillin* and *tzitzis* should be *mehudar*, and to *daven* slowly and with liveliness – both of which came in the wake of the study of Chassidus.

However, internal flaws such as coarseness and negative habits within the person can be covered up by his external improvement, and furthermore, people naturally think the best about themselves. The *farbrengens* in Lubavitch revealed the coarseness and inspired a person to purify and cleanse himself. This revelation did not occur by simply pointing out the unwanted traits and destroying them, rather the *mashpi'im* would describe goodness and illuminate it, causing the negativity to fall away on its own.

FARBRENGENS WITH R. MICHOEL AND R. GROINEM

In my days, the *farbrengens* of R. Michoel of Nevel and R. Shmuel Groinem were very different.

R. Michoel's *farbrengens* consisted primarily of words of inspiration: He encouraged us to learn and *daven* properly, and not to learn Chassidus superficially. He told us to strive to understand new things, but not like the reading of a newspaper in which yesterday's news is no longer relevant, since such learning will never affect a person. Chazal teach us that the purpose of learning is to lead to action, and the action demanded by Chassidus is the service of the heart and davening. The purpose of Chassidus is to come to an understanding of Hashem's greatness, which is only attainable through deep study.

Chassidus should be studied with no less depth then the study of Nigleh and Poskim. The objective is to delve deeper into what one has studied, particularly during the time of *davening,* which is an opportune time to inspire one's soul to love Hashem and fear Him, and to correct the negative traits that hold him back from doing so. If one studies properly but does not deliberate during *davening*, these negative traits will remain uncorrected.

The *mashpia* R. Michoel was a heartfelt person whose words came from the heart. He practiced what he preached, and his words therefore entered the hearts of his students and made a great impression. Although he revealed the students' flaws, he did it with sensitivity and with deep love, and sensing this, they in turn accepted it with love.

Our Sages teach us that one should instigate his *Yetzer Tov* against his *Yetzer Hara*, as the Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya that one should "shout in his mind at the animal soul and say to it, 'You are evil, wicked, abominable, loathsome, and disgraceful,' and all the other names our Sages have called it." However, when arousing another's *Yetzer Tov* against his *Yetzer Hara,* one may not do so with angry words. The Alter Rebbe writes so clearly in *Likutei Torah* (*Shlach*, 41b): "One should pour anger on the evil that is within him, and become upset over the state in which he is in, but one should not view others with a negative eye or with jealousy, neither in worldly matters nor in their service of Hashem. Blessing only rests on that which is hidden from the eye, and Hashem's blessing only comes where there is a good eye."

When the *mashpia* uncovered our flaws, he never did so in a loud, angry, or hateful voice, or in a way

that offends the listener. He spoke softly and pleasantly, and his words were never disregarded. His students would sit crowded together at his *farbrengens* with friendship, and they would bend their ears like a funnel to hear his pleasant words.

The students who learned in Lubavitch will never forget the impression the *farbrengens* ingrained upon them, nor the holy atmosphere that was felt. Sometimes, a *farbrengen* would continue until the morning, but we didn't feel that the night had passed; it was as though we were above time. The *possuk* "How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together" naturally came to mind, for the sweetness and warmth of *kedusha* would envelope us all. We never felt tired at the *farbrengens*. The high point of holiness was when it was almost morning, when we sang the sweet and heartfelt *niggun, "Kol dodi dofek pischi li"* (My beloved is knocking, open up for me).

R. Groinem's *farbrengens* were entirely different; he never shared words of inspiration. It was as if he and R. Michoel divided the jobs: R. Michoel would uncover our inner flaws, while R. Groinem would teach us the ways of chassidim and Chassidus. R. Groinem never had to reveal our imperfections, rather the imperfections became apparent on their own.

R. Groinem had a talent for describing the lives of the previous Rebbeim and chassidim to us, using vivid descriptions as though they were standing before us. He would describe for us their greatness in Nigleh and Chassidus, their expressions and mannerisms, their deep connection to their Rebbe, and their deep understanding of Chassidus.

For each *farbrengen* R. Groinem would choose a topic upon which he would focus for the entire *farbrengen*. He was proficient in the history of the Rebbeim and their students, the outstanding chassidim in each generation. The ways of our Rebbeim, of chassidim, and of Chassidus were staggeringly organized in his mind. He repeated each *vort* or story exactly as he had heard it with incredible precision. His stories were full of rich content, and he would explain them as well. Usually the explanation of the story came from chassidim of previous generations, but he would sometimes add his own explanations as well; whatever the type of explanation, it was shared clearly and tastefully.

When R. Groinem chose to focus on the qualities of *bittul* and *temimus*, nullification to Hashem and sincerity, which are the foundations of Chassidus, he would describe to us the great chassidim that excelled in these areas. He would explain that although there were great men who reached these levels without learning Chassidus, that was because they were naturally ingrained with these characteristics, and the Torah they learned only enhanced them. However, most people don't have these traits by nature and they may even have negative traits such as coarseness or shrewdness. Such individuals must work on improving themselves, and Torah study alone will not fix his character traits. This is evident from Yeravam Ben Nevat, who surpassed all the sages of his generation with his wisdom, yet his Torah knowledge did not uproot his arrogance. On the contrary, it intensified until it destroyed him (as the Gemara describes [*Sanhedrin* 101b]).

This, then, is the true quality of Chassidus: the ability to chase away, uproot, and destroy negative characters traits and become more humble and sincere through studying Chassidus.

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

Once, when R. Groinem was describing the depth in which chassidim delved into Chassidus, he shared the following story:

An elder chossid once went to buy glasses in a large and busy store. The merchants handed him a pair of glasses to try on and then moved on to deal with other customers. As the chossid waited to be assisted, he pulled out a *maamar* from his pocket, moved to the side, and started learning. He became so engrossed in the *maamar* that he completely forgot where he was and the noise around him didn't disturb him. He stood in that manner until it was time for the store to close, at which point he jolted out of his reverie as if he had awoken from sleep.

R. Groinem then noted that although such conduct was commonplace with *Gedolei Yisroel* who didn't learn Chassidus, they were by nature of a melancholy type which leads to being alone and delving deeply into one's thoughts (as the Alter Rebbe explains in Torah Ohr [19c] regarding Rabbi Chanina Ben Tradyon). The power of Chassidus, though, is that even one who is naturally upbeat and finds it difficult to concentrate on an idea (despite his intellectual capabilities) can also transform himself.

Although these chassidim were great Torah scholars and toiled enormously on improving themselves, their devotion and dedication to the Rebbe was truly remarkable, to the extent that they were prepared to sacrifice their bodies, money, and souls. The *bittul* the chassidim had to their Rebbe was so great that they didn't dare say "Shalom Aleichem" to the Rebbe, as the *possuk* quotes Elisha, "Youngsters saw me and hid" (see *Shulchan Aruch YD* 242:16). They would stand before their Rebbe like a servant before his master, and this enabled them to become fitting recipients.

All the *bochurim* studied Chassidus with depth and diligence and enjoyed it immensely. The Rebbe Rashab organized and explained Chassidus in an incredible manner, as the Rashbatz aptly described him as the "Rambam of Chassidus."

Nonetheless, only a few merited to achieve true "service of the heart" at *davening*. As the Midrash states (*Vayikra Raba* 2:1), "A thousand students enter to study *Mikrah;* only a hundred of them continue on to study Mishna; ten of them go on to study Gemara; and only one of those students is able to decide Halachic rulings." Similarly, if a hundred came to study Chassidus, only ten reached the level of true davening. However, all of the students acquired the path of chassidim and Chassidus, and they were all attached to the Rebbe with their hearts and souls. They all considered the study of Chassidus to be essential, and they truly felt and recognized that only Chassidus can infuse them with a passion for Torah and *mitzvos*.

This recognition accompanied us throughout our lives, and brought us to love each other like brothers for the rest of our lives. P

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