

THE “WAR” ON THE KIBBUTZIM

BY SHNEUR ZALMAN BERGER

*It was 45 years ago that a new offensive war began in Eretz Yisroel. Chassidim descended upon kibbutzim to share authentic Judaism. * R' Shmuel Blizinsky opened his archives and related his yechidus, reports, and letters from the Rebbe about the grand mitvza which got the ball rolling.*

(Continued for last issue.)

R' Shmuel went on to describe all the obstacles he encountered. The Rebbe responded (13 Teives) that he was disappointed that they hadn't taken advantage of the special days of Kislev and the general spiritual arousal following the Sinai Campaign. The Rebbe went on to respond to the fundraising difficulties, and said he would give a third of the money “but as is my way, the final third.”

This letter from the Rebbe galvanized Tzach and Anash to action. R' Shmuel writes this in another report he sent to the Rebbe on 11 Adar I 5717 (1957). “I showed the letter to R' Leib Zalmanov, and I showed it at a gathering of the administration two weeks ago. It really excited all of them.” He went on to say he had raised about 500 liras.

Before Shabbos, Shmuel went to the secretaries of the *kibbutzim* to get

their agreement to host the Lubavitchers. He went armed with the letter from Damiel to the secretaries of the *kibbutzim*, in which he asked them to welcome the Lubavitchers graciously. Damiel also called the *kibbutzim* ahead of time in order “to lay the groundwork.” He was famous at the time, and he opened many doors.

This was a war, and being an officer, Shmuel sent draft notices to various *chassidim*. Two letters were sent to potential candidates, and these two letters were edited by the Rebbe, illustrating how highly he regarded their visiting the *kibbutzim*.

Dear _____

Shalom u'vracha!

On behalf of Tzeirei Chabad, we'd like you to visit Moshav _____ on Shabbos Parshas _____. Your partner will be _____. Details about the place you'll be visiting, etc., will be sent to you in another letter after we receive your response to this letter.

If it absolutely impossible to be available on this Shabbos, you will



Shmuel Blizinsky (center) in army training exercises

surely inform us as to which Shabbos will be possible.

Please let us know your answer to this letter by return mail. *B'chol ha'kavod*.

After the person responded and agreed, R' Shmuel would send him the following:

Dear _____

Shalom u'vracha!

Pursuant of our letter of (date) _____
— and your consent of (date) _____
-, you are asked to appear on Friday
_____ at _____ o'clock, at _____
_____ for the trip to _____.

Transportation will be provided for you both ways. If you do not require our transportation, and will travel on your own, please let us know. You must take along food for Shabbos.

B'chol ha'kavod

Rabbi Avrohom Chanoch Glitzenstein, a member of the administration of Tzach, sent these letters to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe replied:

"In response to your express letter of 12 Shvat with the enclosures. In general, when it comes to technical letters, you need to consult with those over there, and with many people. The wording of the letters is a technical matter, but since you sent them here already and await a response, I am responding out of turn, even before my urgent letters.

In the first letter you have to change it from an "order" to a "suggestion," i.e. that the following place is being suggested to you, and add that if it's impossible to be available that Shabbos, they will surely let you know which Shabbos they will be available.

"It will surely be difficult for the invitees to agree without knowing

ahead of time where they're going, etc. Not only that, but you can assume that agreeing to go will depend on who the partner is. Human nature is such that one doesn't necessarily want to go with just anyone. And sometimes, knowing who the partner is, one will agree wholeheartedly. So too with transportation, it would seem you should add that if he doesn't need it and will travel on his own, he should let you know in advance."

"At first, I wrote the letters as an order, requiring everyone to show up for Shabbos," says R' Shmuel, "but the Rebbe did not agree to that."

Shabbos Parshas P'kudei was the



Shmuel Blizinsky doing his army service

first attempt. The first *kibbutzim* were Kevutzat Schiller, Palmachim and the Agricultural School Ayanot. Three teams of *chassidim* went off on this adventure.

"*Baruch Hashem*, we went out in three groups," wrote R' Shmuel to the Rebbe after Shabbos Parshas P'kudei 29 Adar I 5717. "Two from Ramat Gan, the Shochet, R' Mordechai Gruzman and Shmuel Blizinsky to Kevutzas Schiller; R' Yitzchok Gansburg and R' Binyamin Levin from Kfar Chabad to Ayanot; R' Zalman Abelski and R' Elazor Gorelick to Kibbutz Palmachim. I took a taxi and

he took the people from Ramat Gan and Tel Aviv and then from Kfar Chabad, and delivered each to his place. On Motzaei Shabbos he took them all back home."

R' Shmuel had arranged everything meticulously. He prepared a form that those visiting a *kibbutz* had to fill out with their impressions of the *kibbutz*, what level of *Yiddishkeit* there was, what they had done, and what could be done in the future. These reports were sent to the Rebbe, too.

R' Shmuel describes that first Shabbos: "The type of activities included: a lecture on the approach and teachings of Chabad, and learning two chapters of *Tanya* with 90 people of the *kibbutz*.

"9:00 Friday night, all the members of the *kibbutz* convened in the cultural room. A man by the name of Meir introduced us and gave us the floor. I explained the first three chapters of *Shaar HaYichud V'HaEmuna* orally. We told them chassidic stories. R' Mordechai Gruzman learned chapter 32 of *Tanya* with them in the text, and explained it well. They ate it up.

"We discussed Chabad with them in general, and about Kfar Chabad in particular. R' Mordechai told them about Chabad in Russia. Yona Kesseh was there too, and they asked him to tell what he knew of Chabad because they call him a Chabadnik. He told them about the Rebbe's family, whom he knew personally. He told them he was getting ready to go to America and would see the Rebbe *shlita*. We sat there until midnight.

"The organizers told us it made such an impression that the next day they met people in the dining room who began searching for the G-dly spark within the physical, and they weren't joking.

"At the *seuda shlishit*, seven people joined us in our room and we sang

Chabad *niggunim* and said some Chassidus they could understand, and then left that night. Our leaving was difficult for them.”

Shmuel reads the report and smiles. He remembers how nervous he had been. “It’s hard to describe how skeptical and terrified we were that Friday. When we’d get to the *kibbutz*, what would we talk about? How do you explain Yiddishkeit to *kibbutznikim* who are strangers to anything religious?”

“I arrived on Friday, together with R’ Mordechai Gruzman, *a”h*, and the

kibbutz secretary warmly welcomed us. He told us that the cultural committee had decided to have an Evening with Chabad on Friday night.”

He said that there was a lecture every Friday night. If the lecturer was a singer, a lot of young people attended, and if some public figure showed up, a small group of older people attended. “I hung a sign in the entrance to the dining room which says that this week there will be an Evening with Chabad. I have no idea how many will show up, if any at all.”

“At eight in the evening, the secretary came to us looking very surprised. He told us in amazement that all the members of the *kibbutz*, young and old, were sitting in the hall and waiting for us. On the way to the hall, my mind raced with the questions of what to talk about, how to begin, and how they would react.

“The secretary began with a few kind words and invited me to speak. In the meantime I noticed that the tablecloth on the table near me was upside-down. I decided to begin my talk with that. I told everyone that I had heard in the name of some

“WE ARE MERELY SOLDIERS, ASK THE REBBE”

On Shabbos Parshas P’kudei, Parshas Sh’kalim, the Shabbos the project began, Binyamin Levin, *a”h*, and Itche Gansburg visited the Agricultural School Ayanot. Moshe Ben Nachum, on the staff at the school, wrote about their visit in the publication *HaOved HaDati* (Adar II, issue 42) under the headline, “Shabbos Chabad in Ayanot.”

“On Shabbos Parshas Sh’kalim, two Chabad emissaries, Binyamin Levin and Yitzchok Gansburg, came to Ayanot. The emissaries spent most of their time with the youth group HaOved HaDati, they participated in *t’fillos*, leading the prayers and sang Chabad *niggunim*.

“At *Kiddush*, they sang the tune the Rebbe composed, and sang before thousands of his *chassidim* who had gathered from all over the world for the Yomim Noraim and Sukkos, on the words “*darkecha Elokeinu l’haarich apecha*.”

“During Shabbos there were a number of talks about the chassidic movement in general, and Chabad in particular. These made an indelible impression on the youth, and included Chasidic stories. The Sephardic youth, who were hearing of the challenges faced by the chassidic movement for the first time, were particularly impressed. They listened particularly closely when the *shluchim* segued from telling stories of the Baal Shem Tov and his students to recent Chabad stories. Among other things, they related how Chabad hung on in Soviet Russia during the reign of Lenin and Stalin, how they educated children in Torah and *mitzvos* in cellars not far from Red Square, and were unafraid of imprisonment and exile to remote

Siberia or the North Pole.

“A debate ensued, mostly in the form of questions and answers, regarding Chassidus in general and about what motivated these men to leave their homes and families for Shabbos and to wander from village to village and *kibbutz* to *kibbutz*, and sometimes to places they could not eat in and without being able to *daven b’tzibbur*.

“Is it worth it? Isn’t the reward offset by the loss? The answer to this was: They themselves did not exactly know the reason for their being there. They were merely “soldiers of the Rebbe.” The Rebbe gave the command, and they had to obey. The Rebbe is their spiritual “general” and they are confident that the Rebbe sees in this campaign some supernal command which has to descend to the people, and to the entire nation: whether to religious people or to people who do not call themselves religious, those who do not yet fulfill *mitzvos*.

“This approach of going to the rank and file was done back in Russia, and the Chabad movement continues to use it in the U.S. Now the order was given to begin this campaign in Eretz Yisroel, too.

“The Rebbe is confident in the Israeli youth, who fight with self-sacrifice for the glory of Israel and Eretz Yisroel, confident that this precious youth deserves to be counted in the ranks of Chabad youth.

“The emissaries were endeared by the religious youth of Ayanot. They also came in contact with the youth in general there, some of whom had not had the privilege of seeing the fulfillment of *mitzvos* in their

tzaddik that at a *seudas mitzva* or a gathering for the sake of a *mitzva*, the tablecloth is upside-down, and look - this tablecloth is upside-down!

“Everybody began examining the tablecloth near them, and they discovered that they were all upside-down. People began laughing and this broke the ice. I began explaining the first chapters of *Shaar HaYichud V’HaEmuna* which talks about faith, which was so lacking among the members of the *kibbutzim*.”

Word of the success these “Nachshons” had enjoyed got around

Kfar Chabad and among Anash, and it reassured them. From then on, each Shabbos, a number of pairs went to various *kibbutzim* to teach Chassidus. On Purim, only two weeks after this project began, all the members of the Palmachim *kibbutz* visited Kfar Chabad.

The Rebbe of course, told them to keep the ball rolling. The Rebbe instructed them to send handmade *shmura matzos* to all the *kibbutzim* they had visited.

Says Shmuel, “After Pesach, we heard a surprising reaction from

Kibbutz Kevutzat Schiller. The secretary of the *kibbutz* wrote, “When I received the *matzos*, I convened all the members of the *kibbutz* and explained to them that this year we couldn’t do as we did every other year, i.e. eat chametz and matza together. This year we had *shmura matza*, and you can’t eat that with *chametz*. Therefore, whoever decided to eat only matza the night of the *seider*, would get a piece of *shmura matza*. Then and there, everyone decided that on the night of the *seider*, the *kibbutz* would not have chametz.”

Shmuel maintained his connection

homes.

“For the first time, they were meeting religious Jews face to face, *chassidim*. They were even more impressed when they learned that one of the emissaries was a member of a *moshav* which was founded by order of the Rebbe by the people who had been educated in Russia and made *aliya* after the War of Independence. They founded the agricultural *moshav* Shafrir, and established a professional agricultural school.

“On Motzaei Shabbos, all the youth and residents gathered and one of the *shluchim* made a goodbye speech. He was enthusiastically received and when he was done, they all agreed that every year, Shabbos Parshas Sh’kalim in Ayanot would be a Shabbos Chabad. The *shluchim* didn’t want to commit to anything because they said: We are merely soldiers. Ask the Rebbe and if we get his consent to the suggestion, we will do so willingly.

“The meeting ended when a taxi came to pick up the Chabad soldiers from the *kibbutzim* and surrounding villages. The emissaries had done their task in Ayanot faithfully. The taxi left late at night, echoing the prayer accompanied by the Rebbe’s tune: “*darkecha Elokeinu l’haarich apecha*.”

Mr. Ben Nachum sent the Rebbe a description of the Shabbos and the request that Shabbos Parshas Sh’kalim be a Shabbos Chabad every year, but the Rebbe did not agree. In a letter of 10 Nissan 5717, the

Rebbe explained why:

**“To Mr. Moshe Ben Nachum
Shalom u’vracha!**

I was pleased to receive your letter and many thanks for sending a report regarding the *shluchim’s* visit to Ayanot. I was happy that the mutual impression was positive and good, to the extent that you asked that Shabbos Parshas Sh’kalim be a Shabbos Chabad in Ayanot.

However, according to Chabad’s approach, you don’t postpone a good thing for an entire year, especially in such a time in which twelve months in our day are worth many times that much relative to normal times. If this is so in general, it is all the more the case when speaking about the benefit of the youth at a development age, for then there is no comparison between what is done a year before they have matured to work done some years later.

In any case, I hope it was a good beginning of drawing concern towards the foundation of Torah, a great principle of which is “love your fellow as yourself,” and as it is emphasized at the beginning of the *Pesach seider* with the gathering of the four sons with extremely different worldviews, sitting at their father’s table, being informed about what the Torah says.

B’kavod and with blessings for a kosher and happy Pesach



Yitzchok Gansburg



A Chabad lecturer at a gathering in a *kibbutz*

with the *kibbutz* members, and not too long afterwards, a kosher kitchen was opened for all those who were interested.

This was the beginning of the offensive battle which the Rebbe had announced for the purpose of conquering the world. At the time this war effort was not appreciated by many religious groups, the same groups that warmly embrace the very same approach today.

The Rebbe derived great *nachas ruach*, and that is what's important. The Rebbe wrote the following to Shmuel:

B"H 5 Nissan 5717
Brooklyn

...Shmuel Gedalya *sh'yichyeh*

Shalom U'vracha!

I received your letter of Motzaei Shabbos with the enclosure as well as your earlier letters, and that I take great pleasure in the work you write about certainly does not have to be elaborated on. Certainly, our *Nesim*, our holy Rebbeim, who sacrificed themselves for the love of every single Jew, and spoke a great deal about the greatness of this matter, will increase



R' Shmuel Blizinsky

in the arousal of Divine mercy in the current place of their holy service. In order to add great success in these projects and outstanding success. And blessings and success in the personal matters too, of all those who participate in this. Certainly, through this they will continue in these projects, and "one *mitzva* leads to another."

Just as you merited to bring up the idea of the visitations, and you merited to actually see it happen and the good fruits that resulted, you will also merit to relate good news in the

future in this, that the work continues and intensifies both in quantity and quality, until the fulfillment of the promise "and they will no longer teach one another, etc., for they will all know Me, from little to big."

With blessings for a Chag Pesach kosher v'sameiach and for good news in your personal affairs, too.

A year passed, and Shmuel and his family emigrated to the United States. The work he began continued for many long years and in many different ways, which inspired many members of *kibbutzim*.

Word of this work reached the U.S., where it became a model for others to copy. Anash in the U.S. began working within universities, which were the "*kibbutzim* of America" - a symbol of denial of faith. Since then, thousands have changed their way of life, in this country or others, to one of *Torah* and *mitzvos b'darkei ha'chassidus*. Many of them established beautiful chassidic families, and have merited to see children and grandchildren steeped in *Torah* and *Chassidus*.