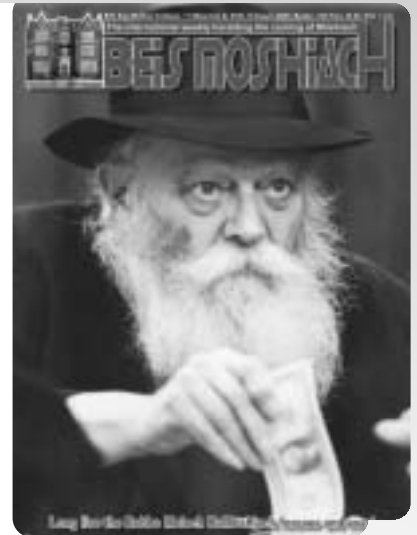


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### **U.S.A**

744 Eastern Parkway  
Brooklyn, NY 11213-3409  
Tel: (718) 778-8000  
Fax: (718) 778-0800  
admin@beismoshiach.org  
www.beismoshiach.org

### **ERETZ HA'KODESH**

ת.ד. 102 כפר תב ד 72915  
טלפון: (03) 9607-290  
פקס: (03) 9607-289

### **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:**

M.M. Hendel

### **ENGLISH EDITOR:**

Boruch Merkur  
editor@beismoshiach.org

### **ASSISTANT EDITOR:**

Alexander Zushe Kohn

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# WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO WICKED PEOPLE?

SICHA OF THE REBBE MH" M\* FROM BIURIM B'IGERES HA'T'SHUVA  
TRANSLATED BY BORUCH MERKUR



[Towards the end of Chapter 6 of *Igeres HaT'shuva*, it is written: "One draws down its [spiritual] influence [i.e., "from the aspect of the Lower Letter Hei (of G-d's name Yud-Kei-Vav-Kei)"] through one's wicked deeds and thoughts, until it [is channeled] into the palaces of the Other Side [i.e., the side of evil], as it were, because it is from there that he received his thoughts and deeds. And since it is he who channeled to them the influence, therefore he takes a portion at the head, and that will suffice to understand.] **And that is [the meaning of] what the Sages said, 'We don't have in our hands, not the tranquility of the wicked and etc.' – 'in our hands' specifically, meaning in the time of Exile, after the destruction [of the Holy Temple]'**":

1. We must understand: How is it that the saying of the Sages [i.e., "We don't have in our hands, not the tranquility of the wicked and etc."] is elucidated according to that which is explained here in *Igeres HaT'shuva*? For at first glance, on the contrary: this Mishna appears to be in complete contradiction to what is explained here in *Igeres HaT'shuva*!

2. On the Mishna (Avos; Chapter 4, Mishna 15), "We don't have in our hands, not the tranquility of the wicked," Rabbeinu Ovadya Bart'nura brings two explanations: 1) "We don't have in our hands" means [like the Talmudic expression], "It was not in his hand" [i.e., it was not in his possession]. That is, we are not privy to the reason for the tranquility of the wicked. 2) In the time of Exile we do not have the tranquility which G-d commonly bestows upon the wicked in order to expel them from the World to Come [by having paid them back already in this world for any claim of reward].

(The possible reason for this [distinction mentioned in the second explanation] is as follows: Presently there are not such horribly wicked people, people who ought to be expelled from the World to Come. Specifically in the time of the Holy Temple, when there was illuminated a revelation of G-dliness, is it possible to say, "And He pays back [each of] those who hate Him to his face in order to vanquish him" (VaEschanan 7:10). Whereas in the time of Exile, the wickedness comes from the hiding and concealment [of G-dliness]. Thus, they are not [considered] "those who hate Him." (The latter exemplifies the saying of the Sages (Bava Metzia 32b, quoted above in the first section of *Tanya* [i.e., *Likkutei Amarim*], the end of Chapter 30) regarding the ignorant – that their deliberate sins are considered for them like inadvertent sins.))

According to both meanings, the saying of the Sages (not only is not elucidated in light of the concept explained here in *Igeres HaT'shuva*, but on the contrary, it) contradicts what is explained here in *Igeres HaT'shuva*.

According to what is explained in *Igeres HaT'shuva* here, we do in fact know the reason for the tranquility of the wicked: "Since it is he who channeled to them the influence, therefore he takes a portion at the head." Why then does the Mishna say, "We don't have in our hands," which means (according to the first approach), "we are not privy to" [or "we do not know"].

Likewise with regard to the second approach, the saying of the Sages does not sit well with what is explained in *Igeres HaT'shuva*. For in *Igeres HaT'shuva* it states that in the time of Exile, after the fact that, "On account of your iniquities your mother [i.e., the Sh'china] was cast away," a wicked person takes a

\*The first section of the original sicha, until mentioned otherwise, is muga.

portion at the head. Evidently, in the times of Exile **there is indeed** the tranquility of the wicked, yet the Mishna states, “We don’t have in our hands, etc., the tranquility of the wicked.”

3. One cannot answer that the Mishna speaks specifically about the tranquility that G-d commonly bestows upon the wicked **in order to expel them from the World to Come**. Namely, that **this** kind of tranquility does not exist in the time of Exile (for presently the wicked are not considered “those who hate Him,” as mentioned above). Whereas the tranquility that a wicked person “takes at the head” from the influence that derives from the palaces of the Other Side, “since it is he who channeled to them the influence,” does in fact exist in the times of Exile. One cannot answer this way, because – in addition to the fact that from the terminology of the Mishna, “We don’t have in our hands...the tranquility of the wicked,” it follows that in the time of Exile the wicked have no tranquility whatsoever – this approach only uproots the contraction between the Mishna and *Igeres HaT’shuva*; it still remains a quandary, however, that the Alter Rebbe says, “And that is [the meaning of] what the Sages said, etc.” – that through the explanation of the concept here in *Igeres HaT’shuva*, what the Sages said will be understood. For the Sages speak about the tranquility of the wicked that is 1) for the sake of expelling them, etc., and 2) that was apparent before the Exile. Whereas, in *Igeres HaT’shuva* it speaks about the generous portion which the wicked receive from the palaces of the Other Side, on account of the fact that “it is he who channeled to them the influence,” and 2) specifically after the fact that we had caused the principle of the Exile of the Divine presence. Now, how is it that the saying of the Sages is elucidated in light of the concept explained in *Igeres HaT’shuva* when over there it is speaking about something entirely different?

4. We must, therefore, say that the Alter Rebbe learns the Mishna in such a way that it does indeed speak about the tranquility of the wicked that comes in the time of Exile on account of the fact that “it is he who channeled to them the influence.” Namely, the fact that the Mishna states in a manner of presenting a **novel thought**, “We don’t have in our hands, etc.,” this implies that really it should be “in our hands”; in the time of

Exile **there really ought to be** the tranquility of the wicked. It is on this [reading of the Mishna] that he [i.e., the Alter Rebbe] says, “And that is [the meaning of] what the Sages said, etc.” – that the saying of the Sages which proves that in the time of Exile there must be the tranquility of the wicked is understood according to that which was just explained in the text: “therefore he takes a portion **at the head**.”

It is still, however, not understood:

1) The fact that he states beforehand that a sinner receives vitality with greater strength and greater might, and that he takes a portion at the head, with this he means (not only that thus circumstances will unfold according to the dictates of logic [i.e., in theory alone], but also) that so it is **in actuality**. However, in the Mishna it states that “**We don’t have** in our hands, not the tranquility of the wicked.”

2) From the phrase, “And that is what the Sages said,” the implication is that **specifically** in light of the preceding explanation is the saying of the Sages understood. And at first glance, what is difficult in the Mishna according to the explanation of Rabbeinu Ovadya Bart’nura is that the words, “the tranquility of the wicked,” refer to the tranquility which G-d commonly bestows upon the wicked in order to expel them from the World to Come.

The difficulty in Rabbeinu Ovadya Bart’nura’s first explanation is self-understood. The question, “Why do the ways of the wicked prosper?” was asked by Yermiyahu (Yermiyahu 12:1). In fact, according

to the Sages (Brachos 7a), Moshe Rabbeinu had already asked the question of G-d, “Why is there, etc., a wicked man who has it good [in this world]?” Now, why is it that Rebbi Yanai [the author of this Mishna] said that, “We don’t have **in our hands**, not the tranquility of the wicked,” that **we** don’t know the reason for the tranquility of the wicked? – even Yirmiyahu and Moshe [who preceded him by centuries, etc.] did not know!

It is not clear, however, what the difficulty is in the Mishna according to the **second** explanation of Rabbeinu Ovadya Bart’nura.

5. In addition to the quandary in perceiving how the saying of the Sages is elucidated in light of what is explained here in *Igeres HaT’shuva*, it is also not understood:

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*The fact that the Mishna states this in a manner of presenting a novel thought, it implies that in the time of Exile there really ought to be the tranquility of the wicked!*

---

We have already spoken many times about the fact that every instance where the Alter Rebbe explains in *Tanya* a saying of the Sages it is because the saying comes to shed additional light on the concept explained in *Tanya*. Explanations of **sayings of the Sages** would otherwise have no place in *Tanya* (other than the fact that the saying of the Sages are explained according to the concepts discussed in *Tanya*).

Thus it is not understood: In what respect is additional light shed on the concept discussed in *Igeres HaT'shuva* here through the explanation of the saying of the Sages, "We don't have in our hands, etc."?

6. In addition to all the above it is also not understood the **terminology** of the *Igeres HaT'shuva* here:

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**Why is it that Rebbi Yanai said that we don't know the reason for the tranquility of the wicked? – even Yirmiyahu and Moshe did not know!**

---

1) From the words, "**meaning** in the time of Exile, etc.," it proves that the Alter Rebbe is proposing the **novel thought** that "in our hands" means in the time of Exile. For at first glance, the Alter Rebbe is only explaining the **reason** for the fact that "in our hands" should be the tranquility of the wicked, and not innovating a proposed meaning of "in our hands."

2) Why does he say, "in the time of Exile, after the destruction [of the Holy Temple]"? At first glance, it would have been enough to say only **a single** phrase – either "in the time of Exile," or "after the destruction." Why does he use both expressions?

(To be continued.)

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# BASELESS HATRED – AN OXYMORON

BY RABBI CHAIM ASHKENAZI  
TRANSLATED BY MICHOEL LEIB DOBRY

*How is it possible to have hatred for someone or something for no reason whatsoever? To have love for a certain thing without reason is understandable, but not hatred. We hate someone or something that bothers us, however, when we use the word “baseless,” this indicates that the person or thing doesn’t bother us at all. If so, where does this hatred come from? Excerpts from a chassidic farbrengen.*

## CAN IT REALLY BE BASELESS?

There are two words that have turned into a concept that accompanies us during these days of anticipation for the joy and happiness at the celebration of the imminent Redemption. As we approach our long-awaited goal, two words stand in our path and block the way: *Sinas Chinam* (baseless hatred).

“Why was Yerushalayim destroyed? Because of **baseless hatred**.” At first glance, this two-word phrase is an oxymoron. How is it possible to have **hatred** for

someone or something **for no reason** whatsoever? To have **love** for a certain thing without reason is understandable, but not hatred. We hate someone or something that bothers us, however, when we use the word “baseless,” this indicates that the person or thing doesn’t bother us at all. If so, where does this hatred come from?

The world tries to explain that hatred is always for a reason, but the reason is wrong or without any factual basis. Another interpretation is that there really is some reason, however it fails to justify the hatred. If this were actually the case, it is really quite simple to dispel the

baseless hatred: The moment that it can be proven to the one who hates that he erred in establishing the reason for the hatred, the reason will no longer exist, and subsequently, the hatred is nullified.

In addition to the fact that there is an easy method to remove this hatred, there appears to be yet another advantage: Hatred that comes due to a certain reason is not necessarily based on some longstanding or firmly rooted argument. Nevertheless, this virtue seems to prove that this is not the type of hatred that led to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, as it is not enough of a cause for such destruction. If so, why do we say that this is what caused the destruction of Yerushalayim? Apparently, this is not the true meaning of baseless hatred.

We are even more perplexed by the saying of our Sages, “During the first [destruction], their transgression was revealed, their end was revealed.” In other words, the sin of the generation at the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash was revealed: idol worship, lewdness, and bloodshed. Thus, because “their transgression was revealed, their end was revealed.” This means that after seventy years, they went out of exile. However, “During the last

[destruction], their transgression was not revealed, their end was not revealed.” What does this mean that it was not revealed? Don’t we already know that the sin of that generation was baseless hatred? Why is it not yet considered to be revealed?

Practically speaking, if we understand what baseless hatred truly is, all these difficulties would be resolved.

### LITERALLY AS A LITTLE CHILD

Baseless hatred means when we hate someone who has caused us no harm and has no intention of doing so. Sometimes, the hater and the hated don’t even know one another. If so, then why the hatred? The hatred comes from the mere fact that the hated person exists and thus detracts from the hater’s own image and existence.

There is an example of this phenomenon that we all know: A baby is born in a good and auspicious hour, and the happy mother holds the child in her arms. The child’s older sibling sees this sight and immediately approaches the mother and pulls at the baby, causing the baby to fall and get hurt *ch”v*. The baby did nothing to him or anyone else for that matter, as he still can’t do much of anything. Nevertheless, his brother simply can’t stand him. What happened?

According to the perceptions of the older child, the whole world is his. Even his mother belongs only to him and no one else. Suddenly, someone else enters his world and takes away the exclusivity of his “kingdom.” As he grows older, his level of understanding and comprehension also grows. Accordingly, so does his world, taking on greater detail: **his** toys, **his** bed, **his** stroller, etc. Thus, if someone touches them, even if he

doesn’t use them, the child begins to scream.

Here we have a classic example of what baseless hatred means: hatred that comes not because someone did something against him, rather simply because the other person exists in his world, reducing his own *metzius*. Such hatred runs very deep, since according to his distorted way of thinking, the other person causes harm to his **entire** existence. This is even worse than harming someone else’s property, honor, or physical body – all of which are just specific details with specific value. In a case of baseless hatred, however, the perceived damage affects a person’s very essence, his sense of self, his ego, thus arousing deep animosity.

### EXCUSES, EXCUSES...

All the excuses that a person gives, even if they might be partially or completely true, are not a **reason** for hatred. They merely serve as **excuses** to protect his honor in order that people won’t look upon him in a negative light. Thus, he points to a variety of factors to explain his hatred. Nevertheless, there is no connection between these factors and the hatred.

How do we prove this to be the case? From the sequence. The reason comes **beforehand**, while the excuse comes **afterwards**. As the chassidic saying goes, “*A tirutz iz a ganav*” (an excuse is a thief), as is written, “If you see a thief and consort (*taratz*, similar to *tirutz* – make an excuse) with him.” A thief has plenty of excuses to justify his acts of thievery, and therefore, he stays a thief.

(Regarding all such cases, the correct and most important thing to do is to distinguish the true reason that exists beforehand and the excuse that comes after the fact to justify the conduct. For example,

someone comes to a certain rabbi, claiming that he has all types of questions about and complaints against G-d, and wants to hear some answers. The rabbi listens to all his questions and replies, “I don’t hear any questions. All I hear from you are excuses for the fulfillment of your wants and desires. How can I possibly answer one excuse with another excuse?”)

Therefore, we understand why regarding the sin of baseless hatred it is written, “their sin was not revealed,” and thus, “their end was not revealed.” When a person *ch”v* violates the prohibition of bloodshed or some other grievous sin, after the passage of time and the calming of his desires, he makes a reassessment and comes to the conclusion that the transgression he committed was not a worthwhile action. At the time that his passion overcomes him, he loses his senses, but after he sobers up and regains his senses, he looks at what he did with sheer embarrassment.

However, in a case of baseless hatred, the hater constantly finds more and more reasons to justify his feelings. It requires the attribute of basic truth to admit that the other person essentially did him no harm and there is no reason for the hatred other than his own feeling of *metzius* that takes up all the space. This brings to mind what the Tzemach Tzedek said to a chassid who complained that people trampled on him wherever he was in shul, i.e., they gave him no consideration and did the opposite of what he wanted. The Rebbe’s reply: Don’t spread yourself out over the entire shul and then people won’t step all over you...

### WORSE THAN “BE KILLED AND DON’T TRANSGRESS”

Thus, we find that the exile caused by baseless hatred has lasted for nearly two thousand

years. While this sin does not appear to be as serious as idol worship, lewdness, and bloodshed, nevertheless, people are simply not prepared to deal with the problem by admitting that I am at fault, and the other person is not to blame. On the contrary, they take the attitude that I have to take up all the room, and anyone who enters the space that I consider to be mine is detracting from my existence.

This mode of conduct is exactly what happens among animals. Animals are territorial by nature. Each marks off an area where no other animal can enter, establishing that this is its world, and it is forbidden for others to trespass. Similarly, we find in our discussion: Someone who engages in baseless hatred decides to mark off his world by fulfilling his own desires. Thus, according to his distorted perception, if someone enters his domain, this places limitations on his sovereignty. In such a case, how can we possibly expect him to admit that only he is at fault, if he is spread out in every direction?

Therefore, “their transgression was not revealed, their end was not revealed.” As a result, we see that this is essentially worse than the three sins that caused the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash, regarding which we say, “Be killed and don’t transgress.” All of these sins occur when our desire overpowers us. Even regarding those Jews who *r”l* convert to a different religion, the Rebbe shlita writes that they do so for money, prestige, etc., and not because they *ch”v* believe in what they’re doing, since no Jew actually wants to deny G-d.

However, in a case of baseless hatred, they lack the most important thing: the belief that there is nothing else besides Him.

Instead, the one engaging in baseless hatred holds that there is nothing else besides *himself*. He has no desire whatsoever that the other person should improve his conduct, etc.; all he wants is for that person not to exist in his world. This is comparable to the aforementioned case of the newborn baby and his older brother, who wants him *ch”v* to disappear off the face of the earth. This represents klipa in its worst possible form.

***The rabbi listens to all his questions and replies, “I don’t hear any questions. All I hear from you are excuses for the fulfillment of your wants and desires. How can I possibly answer one excuse with another excuse?”***

#### **FOR NO REASON? YES!**

Therefore, a person must first decide to make “*ahavas chinam*” (baseless love) an inseparable part of his order of conduct. This means that he must act towards his fellow Jew with true affection, regardless of whether there is a reason. First and foremost, he must only think, speak, and act for the other person’s benefit (and only afterwards, he can start looking for reasons why, if he still wants explanations).

The Rebbe MH”M emphasizes

that this is the only way to repair this type of klipa. When a person sees or hears about another metzius, arousing within him a desire to conduct himself in an unloving manner, he must immediately apply weight in the other direction. The moment he hears about someone, he should automatically begin to think and speak positively about him, and subsequently, he will do good things for him as well.

Let’s go back for a moment to the example of the child who is trying to push away his baby brother’s existence because it limits his own. What should we do here? We take the child by the hand, pat the baby’s cheek together with him, and say, “See how sweet the baby is.” As we can see in actual practice, our feelings and emotions change according to actions. Even when a person has poor character traits, if he associates with a proper group of people and accustoms himself to act, speak, and think in an appropriate manner, he eventually develops a new and positive mode of conduct. This applies no less in the opposite direction *ch”v*, as we have been warned to “stay far away from an evil neighbor and don’t join the wicked,” etc.

We have seen how the Rebbe shlita stood for hours and hours, giving both materially and spiritually to all who came throughout the year – Erev Yom Kippur, Hoshana Rabba, *kos shel bracha*, Sunday dollars, etc. If we put them all together, we will come to hundreds and thousands of hours where the Rebbe gave and gave. This teaches us to conduct ourselves according to the words of the Alter Rebbe in *Tanya*, “And on the contrary, to render good unto the liable,” i.e., we should even bestow good upon someone who is on the level of “liable,” thus showing us how we should give to

others.

Naturally, this must go hand-in-hand with the study of Chassidus and delving into the concept of lessening our *yeshus* and haughtiness. Each of us must say to ourselves, “What is the purpose? Who am I to say that the world is mine alone?” particularly when we know exactly where we are holding in a spiritual sense.

### THINK, SPEAK, AND DO ONLY GOODNESS AND KINDNESS

If so, what exactly should be the order of our avoda? First, a person must decide that from this day forward, he will not speak, think, or do anything that is the opposite of good. In addition, we are required to engage only in thoughts, speech, and action in a good and proper direction, garments of the souls which are within the reach of each and every one of us. When we turn our outlook, our thoughts, our speech, and our action in a more positive direction, this not only corrects the sin of baseless hatred, it also produces other important results. As the Rebbe Maharash says, “Chassidim think that only the Rebbe can make miracles. The truth of the matter is that any Jew who speaks positively about his fellow – can bring great salvation upon himself!”

Here’s a story about one of the Baal Shem Tov’s students, which emphasizes how much damage *ch*”v can be caused by negative thoughts, and the great benefit that comes from finding merits in one’s fellow Jew, even when it’s so difficult that you virtually have to “invent” them:

Once during the evening prayers of Rosh HaShana, one of the Baal Shem Tov’s students noticed his fellow chassid bending over to pick up his snuff box that had fallen on

the floor. He complained to him that it was wrong to stop in the middle of davening to enjoy a smell from his snuff box. Due to this complaint, a Heavenly accusation was registered against the student’s friend, carrying a most serious punishment. The Baal Shem Tov, who wanted to sweeten the judgment against this chassid, succeeded in convincing the Heavenly court to agree to a condition: If the complaining student himself would find

*As the Rebbe Maharash says, “Chassidim think that only the Rebbe can make miracles. The truth of the matter is that any Jew who speaks positively about his fellow – can bring great salvation upon himself!”*

something positive to say about his fellow chassid, the punishment would be nullified.

What did the Baal Shem Tov do? He entered the beis midrash on the night of Hoshana Rabba, and caused the accusing student’s thoughts to be distracted, thus depriving him of the ability to continue saying Tikkun with proper intention.

He wandered in the beis midrash for a while, when suddenly, a question arose in his mind: Why specifically in this generation has the custom of

smoking tobacco and smelling snuff become so widespread? Then he realized that there must be some very lofty souls in these substances, and in order to attain their proper correction, they must pass through something as refined and delicate as snuff. He immediately remembered what his friend did on the night of Rosh HaShana, and deeply regretted his negative thoughts. He now understood that his righteous friend’s smelling of snuff may have elevated a very special soul.

The next morning, the student approached the Baal Shem Tov with his question about snuff, telling him what he had thought. “You should know,” the Baal Shem Tov replied, “that there was a serious Heavenly decree against your friend because of your complaint – but now it has been nullified. I am warning you – from now on, you must always judge your fellow favorably and don’t arouse any accusations against them!”

### G-DLY BASELESS LOVE

The main desired result stemming from our positive change of direction (even when we find it impossible without coming up with some “baseless” ideas of our own) is that when we act with baseless love, we will arouse upon ourselves G-d’s true and essential love for the Jewish people – *ahavas chinam*. There is a well-known chassidic explanation of the concept of free choice: G-d chose the Jewish people without any reason; this was what He wanted and this is what He decided. As a result, “their end will be revealed,” the end of all exiles, including this longest and bitterest exile, and we will soon experience the beginning of the Redemption through the revelation of the Rebbe shlita, our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days, mamash!



# “ADDING A SHIUR, ADDING LIFE”

BY RIVKY KAMINKER

*Chanie’s husband was very serious as he walked over to the bookcase and took a Gemara Taanis off the shelf. He turned some pages and then began to read, “From here on in, from the 15th of Av and on, whoever adds the nights unto the days to engage in Torah study, adds life unto his life.” \* A Chamisha-Asar B’Av story.*

SUMMER 5740. It was late at night and the small car raced recklessly on the roads of the Yizre’el Valley. The speed was beyond belief. At one of the junctions, close to their destination, there was a sudden, heart-stopping screech of the brakes. Two cars miraculously stopped, centimeters apart. Apart from the terrible fright, nothing had happened. *Baruch Hashem.*

“Those on mitzva missions are not harmed,” “Return us in peace,” “We are Chassidei Chabad – talmidei ha’Rebbe, ashreinu,” “Tz’daka saves from death.” These were only a few of the phrases that Chanie repeated to herself as the car took her home from the shiur she gave at moshav Midrach Oz.

On her right was a picture of the Rebbe and on her left, a pushka to

protect her from harm, and her lips whispered the prayer, “may we reach our destination alive and in joy and in peace.” This was the only way she could maintain her calm.

They were saved once again, certainly in the merit of the shiur, but how could she continue to travel like this each week?

*“I tremble in terror every time,” she said, “but this time it went beyond anything I’ve ever experienced before.”*

Her peace of mind was not restored even after the dangerous trip was over. With trembling knees, she went up to her apartment, her fear making it difficult to climb the steps. This time the danger was far too palpable and close for comfort.

Her husband simply did not understand the insane driving. “Where’s he rushing?” Chanie explained that up until recently two female soldiers had driven her home, but they had left the moshav. The driving was taken over by two drivers from the moshav, who drove at breakneck speeds, so that they could drop her off and head back to their home.

“I tremble in terror every time,” she said, “but this time it went beyond anything I’ve ever experienced before.”

“I have been giving a shiur for a long time,” Chanie continued, “but it requires advance preparation and being very familiar with the material, especially the quotes from the p’sukim, because the women are very knowledgeable. And the trips there and back take up a chunk of time. All that doesn’t bother me. I am actually happy to get there and see how every week there are more and more women in attendance and the auditorium is full.

“I feel that I’ve connected with the women and they have connected

with me and through me to the Rebbe, but this nightmare of a trip is beyond what I can take anymore. The straw that broke the camel's back was this trip today with our narrow miss."

Chanie's husband declared that (literal) mesirus nefesh wasn't required here. We are supposed to spread the wellsprings, but not at the expense of our lives.

"You are the mother of young children and they still need you. Call up and explain what is going on. If they can change the transportation arrangements, fine, but if not, then cancel the class."

The next Monday, Chamisha-Asar B'Av, Chanie found herself in the midst of an uncomfortable conversation. She spoke with a lovely woman and told her what was going on and shared her feelings and fears over the traumatic car ride each week with irresponsible drivers. She said that her husband did not allow her to continue under these circumstances. If a change would be made, she would gladly continue giving the class.

The woman was truly sorry. She knew how much the women on the moshav looked forward to the class and how it benefited them, but she didn't see a resolution to the problem. He was the designated driver of the moshav and there was no one else.

"If I have something new to tell you, I'll give you a call."

They wished each other well and the conversation was over.

Chanie and her family went on a brief vacation and returned after Shabbos. There in the mailbox a surprise awaited them. It was a letter from the Rebbe! The family raced up the stairs, each one wanting to be the first to open the letter. Then someone noticed that the letter was addressed to **the participants of the**

**shiur in Midrach Oz.**

How astonishing this was! Why did the Rebbe send the letter now, when the shiur was canceled?

Chanie felt that something was going on. She had recently sent a report to the Rebbe about the shiur but that wasn't unusual as she always reported about her activities yet she had never received a written answer. Of all times to get an answer, when she had finished with this group – sorry though she was – *now* she received an answer from the Rebbe!

She nervously read the letter which was a general-personal letter (i.e., a letter the Rebbe would send to numerous individuals with a

***"Why did the Rebbe gave me the siddur that was turned over? What's not right here?"***

general message), at the end of which were two lines which the Rebbe had added to the usual wording of general letters. The two short lines said a lot.

Chanie read and reread the letter. She read it aloud and gave it to her husband for him to read too. It was open ruach ha'kodesh!

The date of the letter was the exact day Chanie called to cancel the shiurim, the 15<sup>th</sup> of Av. The Rebbe wrote that he is certifying receipt of the letter. He went on with the usual wording, "and in an auspicious time it will be read at the gravesite..." and continued with the special quality of Chamisha-Asar B'Av. It ended with, **"with blessings fitting for this day –**

**Yom Tov – may you increase even more in your good activities and influence in this way throughout your surroundings."**

Here the Rebbe added – and you could see that the lines were written especially for this letter and not to be copied in all the letters: **"continuously increasing, and Chazal say and promise that one who adds is added to, etc."** And it had the Rebbe's signature.

Chanie's husband was very serious. The Rebbe's quote sounded familiar and he went over to the bookcase. He removed a Gemara Taanis, leafed through until the end of the tractate and began to read:

"From here on in, from the 15<sup>th</sup> of Av and on, whoever adds the nights unto the days to engage in Torah study, adds life unto his life."

All seemed to stand still. Apparently, their way of thinking about the shiur and the trip was mistaken. They tried to excuse themselves, thinking how they were only human, and since they had felt in danger, they had acted accordingly. Now what? Obviously, the shiur had to go on, and the travel plans made no difference. The learning would be protective.

On Monday, Chanie met with the women again and prepared a farbrengen in honor of the great merit of receiving a letter from the Rebbe. She conveyed the Rebbe's message and relayed the background information to the women.

At the end of the class, she spoke with Batya, the woman who was the driving force behind the shiur, about arranging **another evening** for learning because the Rebbe spoke about **adding**.

Batya wanted to help but she couldn't find any available evening. Chanie was very disappointed. It was most important to her to fulfill



the instructions the Rebbe had written. After all, **her life** depended on this addition; it was life insurance.

She was so sorry afterwards that she didn't think of an easier solution, to add five or ten minutes to the existing shiur. This idea came too late...

\* \* \*

Chanie's husband went to the Rebbe for Tishrei 5748. One day of Chol HaMoed, he called and despite the international connection, Chanie could tell that he was very concerned. During their conversation, he asked if everything was all right a number of times.

"Why are you asking and what caused you to be so nervous all of a

sudden?"

"Today something very strange happened after davening. I was standing at a table near where the Rebbe passes by and on the end of the table was a siddur that someone had placed upside down by mistake. Instead of turning it back in its place, the Rebbe placed the siddur right near me, right between my hands."

Chanie was excited. Her secret request that they have a siddur that the Rebbe touched had come true! But then it turned out that her husband hadn't taken the siddur. He was simply afraid.

"Why did the Rebbe gave me the siddur that was turned over? What's not right here?" he asked again and

again. "The Chassidim standing near me begged me to take the siddur, for the Rebbe had given it to me, but I had a bad feeling about it. It worries me."

This is why he was calling to verify that nothing was "upside down" at home. The Rebbe did things for a reason. First, there was the letter that spoke of "adding life etc." and now the siddur.

A short while later they heard the bad news that Batya, the spirit and organizer of the shiur had been killed in a car accident along with some family members. Yes, the Rebbe had done what he could to add chaim-life to her life. Chanie hadn't understood that the Rebbe was not only worried about her but about every member of the shiur.

# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF RABBI LEVI YITZCHOK

BY MENACHEM ZIEGELBOIM

*He was a young man when he first wondered who the Rebbe's father was. When he asked Lubavitchers, they didn't know. He began doing research on the life of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn and discovered many amazing things. Even after he published his two-volume work about R' Levi Yitzchok, he continued to do research and after the Iron Curtain fell, he took a long trip to explore the cities where R' Levi Yitzchok served as rav and went into exile. \* In honor of R' Levi Yitzchok's yahrtzait on 20 Av, we spoke with author Rabbi Naftali Gottlieb, who told us about the Rebbe's involvement in his biography of the Rebbe's father and stories about his travels in the footsteps of R' Levi Yitzchok.*

Noted Chassidic author, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Gottlieb has written over sixty books. They were and still are quite popular, even nowadays when so many new books are being published. However, one of his books stands out in importance, at least to Lubavitcher Chassidim, and that is his *Toldos Levi Yitzchok*. Rabbi Gottlieb considers it his best literary effort.

The goal of the *Toldos Levi Yitzchok* is to describe the life and character of the gaon and mekubal, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn, father of the Rebbe, and this, Rabbi Gottlieb does quite well. Today, there is hardly a Chassid who does not know the story of his life to some extent or another, but when Rabbi Gottlieb first set out to write the biography, very few people knew much about this outstanding personality.

Most amazingly, the Rebbe closely followed the writing of this book and even personally helped Rabbi Gottlieb in writing it.

**“YOU PROMISED A BOOK  
ABOUT MY FATHER –  
WHERE IS IT?”**

The idea for writing this book

was conceived at the end of the sixties. Rabbi Gottlieb was pondering the fact that hardly anyone knew the Rebbe's yichus. "It was clear to me that the Rebbe's father wasn't just another rav in a city in the Soviet Union," explains Rabbi Gottlieb.

He decided to write, but he wanted the Rebbe's approval first. When he didn't get an answer, he dropped the idea. But several years

later, "in Tishrei of 5735 (1974), I went to the Rebbe for the first time in my life," relates Rabbi Gottlieb. "And when I passed by for kos shel bracha the Rebbe said to me, 'You promised me a book about my father, where is the book?'

"I didn't know what the Rebbe was referring to, as years had passed since I had had that idea, but then I suddenly remembered. I said that

since I hadn't received the Rebbe's approval, I didn't get involved.

"The Rebbe smiled and said, 'What do you mean, do you need approval for such a thing? The Ribbono shel olam has to give His haskama.' The Rebbe added, 'Now that you are here, gather material for your book.'

"I was shocked. First of all, how did the Rebbe know me when this was the first time the Rebbe was seeing me, as we had only corresponded by mail. Second of all, I was very intrigued by this topic that had suddenly resurfaced.

"When I had calmed down a bit I began searching for people who knew the Rebbe's father, but quickly discovered that only a few Chassidim had known him personally. One of the Chassidim, who heard about my project, gave me Rebbetzin Chana's journal. She had been with her husband in exile and in her journal there are many stories about her illustrious husband.

"Based on the journal and some information that I heard from Lubavitchers who knew Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, I began gathering data from which I started writing the book. I received much help from R' Tuvia Blau.



Rabbi Gottlieb at the entrance to Chili. Next to him are Rabbi Kubalkin and Rabbi Moshe Dovid Cohen

“The Rebbe’s involvement with the book was unusual though obviously understandable. The Rebbe constantly inquired about where I was up to. When I finished writing a chapter, I immediately sent it to the Rebbe for editing. A few times, I got a phone call from Rabbi Chadakov a”h, the Rebbe’s secretary, who would dictate corrections on the chapter. I had no doubt that these were the Rebbe’s correction. This was recently confirmed when I saw a photocopy of the Rebbe’s handwritten corrections which Rabbi Chadakov read to me.”

It wasn’t easy for Rabbi Gottlieb to prepare the book. The main job was in gathering material, and since there were few sources of information, the work dragged on.

One day, Rabbi Gottlieb received a letter from the Rebbe at the end of which the Rebbe added a handwritten note: **A great pity that the outline is taking so long about my father. Ad masai? It doesn’t look as though it will be published for Yud-Alef Nissan!**

Rabbi Gottlieb realized more than ever how important this book was to the Rebbe, and in 5737 the biography of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok was published.

The book is unique in that it is almost entirely comprised of firsthand testimony from Rebbetzin Chana’s journal, from Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Raskin and his sons, who were with R’ Levi Yitzchok in Alma Ata, and from the memoirs of Rabbi Boruch Shifrin a”h and others.

The Rebbe was extremely satisfied, and when R’ Gottlieb next visited the Rebbe, he was called to Rabbi Chadakov, who said to him, “You should know that you have a great z’chus. The Rebbe told me to ask you, in his name, to visit some Chassidim who knew his father, including Rabbi Yosef Nimotin and Rabbi Moshe Binyanim Kaplan, in

order to hear what they have to say about his father, since they knew him personally.”

R’ Gottlieb fulfilled this request, wrote up their stories, and submitted them to the Rebbe. The Rebbe checked the material and made some corrections. Then the Rebbe said the originals should be returned to R’ Gottlieb.

### ESPECIALLY BELOVED

The Rebbe said that the book gave him much nachas. This special

***“I was shocked. First of all, how did the Rebbe know me when this was the first time the Rebbe was seeing me, as we had only corresponded by mail. Second of all, I was very intrigued by this topic that had suddenly resurfaced.”***

attention was expressed not only in the preparatory stages but also thereafter. For example, the Rebbe’s secretary Rabbi Binyamin Klein said that when the book was published it remained on the Rebbe’s desk for many months.

It is known that R’ Yosef Nimotin had had in his possession something handwritten by Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, which he had received from him as a gift. After R’ Yosef was arrested, the K.G.B. discovered the manuscript and in their anger at the name

“Schneersohn” they burned it.

Many years later, when R’ Yosef saw the Rebbe, he asked the Rebbe for another handwritten page of his father’s in exchange for the one that had been burnt. The Rebbe gave him a copy of *Toldos Levi Yitzchok*, which has photocopies of R’ Levi Yitzchok’s writing on the Zohar and *Tanya*.

The Rebbe pointed at the manuscripts and said, “I am giving you this book as a gift. It has some photocopies of my father’s writings and you should consider it as though I actually gave you his writings.”

### IN RABBI LEVI YITZCHOK’S CELL

Another three editions of the book were published, with the best of them all being the last edition, which was published in three volumes. It is unique in that it was written after the fall of communism.

Rabbi Gottlieb decided to travel to the places where Rabbi Levi Yitzchok had been and left his imprint, especially the city of his rabbinat Yekaterinislav (today Dnipropetrovs’k) and the cities of his exile, Chili and Alma Ata, where R’ Levi Yitzchok is buried. Thanks to his efforts, R’ Gottlieb even got part of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok’s interrogation files from the K.G.B. in Dnipropetrovs’k. These files shed new light on his arrest.

“There are places that I went to, that thrilled me when I thought: this is where the great tzaddik walked, where he was arrested,” relates R’ Gottlieb. “These were very moving visits and although the books had already been published, I went to Dnipropetrovs’k together with the local shliach, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzki, and he arranged for us to visit the cell where Rabbi Levi Yitzchok sat, the places where he was interrogated and tortured, r”l.

“With his help, we were able to obtain Rabbi Levi Yitzchok’s file from

the K.G.B. The original file was sent to his son, the Rebbe.

“I also had the z’chus of traveling to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok’s place of exile, to distant Chili where, I imagined, no Chassid had since visited. The visit was made possible after the arrival of the Rebbe’s shluchim to Kazakhstan, Rabbi Yeshaya Cohen and Rabbi Yehuda Kubalkin.

“By marvelous hashgacha pratis we made the visit the day after the yahrtzait on 20 Av. At first, we didn’t know where the forsaken village was

**mosquitoes that come from the mud swarm in the air and accompany you wherever you go: in the street, in the house, in the kitchen, in the closets, in the kitchen utensils, in the food and drink, when you go to sleep and when you get up. Wherever you go, a mosquito precedes you.**

**Its homes are made of mortar and cement, its walls are made constantly damp by the torrential rain and hail, and the floor of the house is also made of mortar and cement. Unlike in other cities, the house barely serves as a refuge from the sun and hail, snow and vapor, and stormy**

heat was intolerable. We waited impatiently for the break of dawn so we could leave the place.

“When the sun rose, we finally left the hotel and began to visit the town in order to achieve the goals we had set for ourselves. The first thing we wanted to do was to find the town elders so we could try to elicit details from them about the giant who had dwelled in their midst for four years. However, nobody knew anything about the Jewish rabbi who had lived there. We were told that we were wasting our time since the people there were mostly relatively young and knew nothing about him.

“Being that this was the case, we visited those places Rabbi Levi Yitzchok had been, such as the local police station where he had to present himself every ten days. We went to the building of the local bakery, near which Rabbi Levi Yitzchok had to stand and wait for hours. He stood there along with a motley crowd of prisoners, criminals, murderers, robbers, and exiles from many countries. There were screams and curses as well as fistfights. They all stood there in order to receive a loaf of bread that was supposed to last them for three whole days! We also went to other places.

“It is probably because of these experiences that Rebbetzin Chana told R’ Berel Junik that the Rebbe wrote them that ‘he would never forgive himself for leaving Russia and leaving them there.’”

**What made you exert yourself to follow up on every bit of information about Rabbi Levi Yitzchok?**

“When you are writing a biography about a Jewish hero, especially when it’s the Rebbe’s father, during the course of the writing about a certain topic and a certain place, your curiosity is instinctively aroused. You want to know as many details as possible about the place. I won’t be



**Rabbi Gottlieb at the train station in Chili**

and how to get there, and whether the place is still called Chili.

“In the end we managed to get to that awful place where Rabbi Levi Yitzchok was sent, sixty-five years ago, on 11 Shevat 5700 (1940) all alone, weak and broken. Rebbetzin Chana describes Chili as follows:

**For many people this name, Chili, arouses feelings of dread and horror. Why?**

**Its dust is damp dust, mud of dust and water, which does not absorb and never dries up. The**

**winds that wail at all hours of the day.**

**In the summer, the burning sun raises up a stench and rot from the dust which cause dangerous diseases and shorten man’s life.**

“When we stayed in a hotel for the night, we experienced the mosquitoes Rebbetzin Chana referred to. Armies of angry mosquitoes attacked us nonstop. We began to feel, just a bit, the terrible suffering that Rabbi Levi Yitzchok endured throughout his years of exile. The

exaggerating if I say that while writing the book about Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, many thoughts went through my head along the lines of: If only I could visit those places once in my life and see what the tzaddik experienced there with my own eyes.

“While I wrote the book, one of the Chassidim visited me and said that he had just had a yechidus with the Rebbe and he came with a message from the Rebbe, to tell me in the Rebbe’s name not to reject any detail; I was to regard even the smallest things with the proper seriousness. So it’s no wonder then that every thing, big and small, interested me and I wanted to see, and know, and hear it in order to get it down for my readers.”

**Did you discover anything new on your visits to Dnipropetrovs’k, Nikolaiev, and Chili?**

“It’s difficult to express the feelings one has in writing when writing about a particular thing and the strong desire to personally see these places. After the Iron Curtain came down and it became possible to visit places that were previously inaccessible for seventy years, you can well imagine how powerfully you long to visit the places you are writing about.

“This answers your question. What I discovered on my travels to Dnipropetrovs’k for example, where



**T’filla at the gravesite of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok**

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok served as rav and the Rebbe spent his childhood years, is that a personal visit leaves powerful impressions in every sense. Similarly, I got a first hand glimpse on my trip to Nikolaiev, where the gaon and Chassid Rabbi Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, the Rebbe’s grandfather, served as rav. There you can see the house where the Rebbe’s bris took place.

**How do you think we, in our generation, can relate to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok’s work, which was done with mesirus nefesh, blood and tears?**

“We can see for ourselves that of

all the activities that were done by our holy Rebbeim in ‘that country,’ especially by the Rebbe Rayatz and Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, nothing went to waste. Every act of mesirus nefesh for the sake of Yiddishkait and spreading Torah and Chassidus that was done throughout the former Soviet Union, rises forth now from the very earth of that country.

“This applies particularly to those who are on the Rebbe’s shlichus there. They can testify how true this is, when they personally witness those coals which were smothered for years and are suddenly bursting into flame. It is with these lofty powers that the current shluchim are able to accomplish greatness far beyond their efforts and above any natural means.

“There is no question that what Rabbi Levi Yitzchok planted with blood and tears is being reaped today by the shluchim, as emissaries of his son, the Rebbe.”

When Rabbi Gottlieb speaks of the shluchim reaping the fruit in the place where Rabbi Levi Yitzchok sowed, he is also referring to Nikolaiev, where the Rebbe was born. Today, the rav of the city and head shliach is his son, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Gottlieb. He has established a Jewish community with an empire of mosdos chinuch named for the former rav of the city, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok.

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# IN THE SHADOW OF FOUR NESIIM

BY RABBI SCHNEUR ZALMAN CHANIN

*He was born with the blessing of the Tzemach Tzedek, was ShaDaR of the Rebbe Maharash, received ordination from the Rogatchover Gaon, and served as rav by instruction of the Rebbe Rashab and the Rebbe Rayatz. \* A chapter about the Gaon and Chassid, Rabbi Yehoshua Nimotin, who would become the father-in-law of R' Chaikel Chanin.*

## CHAPTER 4: SHIDDUCH BEFORE THE BRIS

My great-grandfather (on my mother's side) was the Gaon and Chassid, Rabbi Yehoshua Nimotin. He was born in 5608 (1858) and his father was Rabbi Yosef Dovid from the city of Kublitz, a Chassid of the Tzemach Tzedek.

I recently heard an interesting story from an elder Chassid, who heard it from my grandfather when he learned in yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Vitebsk. Rabbi Yehoshua Nimotin's father would travel to Lubavitch once a year. Since he was a melamed and was poor, he didn't have the money to travel by horse and wagon; instead, he walked.

A number of years after his

wedding, when he still did not have children, he took his rucksack and walked to Lubavitch an additional time that year in order to ask for a bracha from the Tzemach Tzedek.

The custom in Lubavitch was that when a Chassid left the Rebbe's room, he would join a dance called the yechidus dance. All those who had merited a yechidus would dance and the rest of the Chassidim would stand around and clap. This dance was beloved to the Chassidim.

After my great-grandfather left the yechidus in which he received the Rebbe's bracha for children, he joyously joined the circle of dancers. Within the circle, he noticed a classmate that he hadn't seen in many years. My great-grandfather asked him what he was doing there in Lubavitch in the middle of the year, when it

wasn't Shabbos or Yom Tov. His friend said he had been married for a number of years without having children and had come for the Rebbe's bracha, which he received.

My great-grandfather told him that he had come for the same reason and baruch Hashem, he had also gotten the Rebbe's bracha. He said to his friend, everything is b'hashgacha pratis. The Rebbe gave me a bracha for children at the same time that he gave you a bracha for children. Certainly, his brachos will be fulfilled soon, so let us make a deal: If you have a son and I have a daughter, or vice versa, let us make a shidduch between them right now.

They shook hands in agreement and made a *kinyan* as is customary. Before the year was up both had children, and the shidduch between Yehoshua Nimotin and Rebbetzin Rochel was firm and established.

## A MAN OF SPIRIT

R' Yehoshua Nimotin was involved in Torah study from his youth. He was tremendously diligent in his studies and had a good head. By the age of 18, he had already received smicha for rabbanus. Years later, he also received smicha from the Rogatchover Gaon.

I heard from some elder Chassidim who learned in yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Vitebsk that they saw that he also had smicha from the S'dei Chemed.

R' Yehoshua served as rav in a number of towns in Russia, including Ushatz, Danilowitz, Beshenkowitz, Veliz, and Vitebsk. He was a man of many talents as well as a Gaon and a lamdan. He had a vast knowledge of Nigleh and Chassidus. He was a true Chassidishe rav who spoke pearls of wisdom and was wise in matters of heaven as well as worldly matters. Many consulted with him and he graciously helped them.

R' Yehoshua was mekushar to the "tree of life" for three generations — i.e., he was mekushar to the Rebbe Maharash, the Rebbe Rashab, and the Rebbe Rayatz. He merited wondrous displays of affection from our Rebbeim, who esteemed him highly. The Rebbe Rashab and the Rebbe Rayatz encouraged him, and became personally involved in ensuring that he accept the mantle of rabbanus.

When the Rashab of Ratzitza (the son of the Admur Maharil of Kopust) passed away in 5669 (1909), my great-grandfather was offered the position of rav in that city. As a faithful Chassid, he consulted with the Rebbe Rashab. The Rebbe gave his approval.

In 5682 (1922), when the leaders of the community in Vitebsk considered him for the position of rav in that city, the Rebbe Rayatz put in efforts on his behalf and sent a

***Certainly, his brachos will be fulfilled soon, so let us make a deal: If you have a son and I have a daughter, or vice versa, let us make a shidduch between them right now.***

telegram to the askanim of the city, in which he highly recommended R' Yehoshua for the position.

Indeed, the following year R' Yehoshua was appointed rav in Vitebsk.

#### OPEN RUACH HA'KODESH

R' Yehoshua served as the Rebbe Rashab's ShaDaR (*shlucho d'rabbanan*, i.e., fundraiser and emissary). He would travel twice a year to Lubavitch, once as rav, for Chag HaMatzos, and as Shadar, on Shavuos. He would often mention that he had had yechidus with the Rebbe Maharash 28 times!

On one of my great-grandfather's trips as Shadar he was witness to the

Rebbe's ruach ha'kodesh:

One of the cities he would visit as Shadar was Riga, where a number of Lubavitcher families lived. From time to time, he would review Chassidus for them and he would raise maamud money for the Rebbe's household expenses.

Among these Lubavitcher families was the famous Berlin family (apparently the family of R' Yeshaya Berlin, who is mentioned in a number of sichos of the Rebbe Rayatz). The head of the family contributed generously to maamud, but for reasons known only to him, he did not reveal how much money he gave to anyone. He would divide the amount in half, give half the money at work (where he wrote it down in his books), and then give the other half out of his pocket without anybody knowing about it.

The head of the family died. The next time R' Yehoshua went to Riga, he went to the family, as he always did, to raise money for maamud. He hoped that the man's heirs would continue to donate as generously as the deceased had done, but they did not. After speaking to them at length and explaining that it would be good for their father's neshama, he managed to prevail upon them not to give less than before but to give what their father gave.

The heirs opened the books and saw that the amount their father had written there was only half what R' Yehoshua had told them their father gave. None of his explanations helped and the family refused to give him more.

When R' Yehoshua returned to Lubavitch, he went to the Rebbe Maharash — whose appearance, R' Yehoshua said, was like an angel of G-d — to give a report of his travels. As soon as he opened the door, before he even said anything, the Rebbe said with a smile:

**If he had given you all the money**



**from the business and had written that into the books, you would have more now.**

The Rebbe explained: The neshama in Gan Eden cannot fulfill mitzvos and does not get a reward for mitzvos. However, if he had written down the entire amount in his accounting books while the neshama down below was clothed in a physical body, the neshama would still receive reward up above from the money that is given to tz'daka in this world.

### **HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ROGOTCHOVER GAON**

We can understand a bit of my great-grandfather's greatness in Torah from his close relationship with the Rogatchover Gaon. In 5661 (1901), he received smicha from the Gaon and they corresponded regularly. The Gaon wrote very flattering descriptions of him (relative to the descriptions he usually used). It's interesting to note that the more they corresponded, and the better the Gaon got to know R' Yehoshua, the more flattering descriptions he added.

In later letters, the Gaon called him his "friend," or "close friend." (The letters we have refer to earlier letters, which we do not possess. We also have two letters that he sent the Gaon, but we don't have the responses).

When R' Yehoshua stayed in Leningrad for health reasons, he would often meet the Gaon and they would speak at length — whether "mundane talk of talmidei chachamim" or deep Torah topics.

R' Yehoshua suffered greatly from pains in his feet and he went to consult with famous doctors in Leningrad. The Gaon once said to him jokingly, "I see how you daven Shmoneh Esrei at great length. Because you stand so long, you suffer from pain in your legs. Learn from me: I daven Shmoneh Esrei one-two-three, and therefore, I don't have pain in my legs."

The Rogatchover Gaon, aside from being an expert in the entire Torah, was also involved in matters of this world. His head wasn't confined to the heavens; when necessary, he was capable of speaking wit and humor. He didn't care who asked him something, a young boy or a learned man; he answered all of them graciously and explained matters to them until they understood them.

When he wrote, his words were extremely concise, but when he spoke, he elaborated and explained so that anybody could understand him.

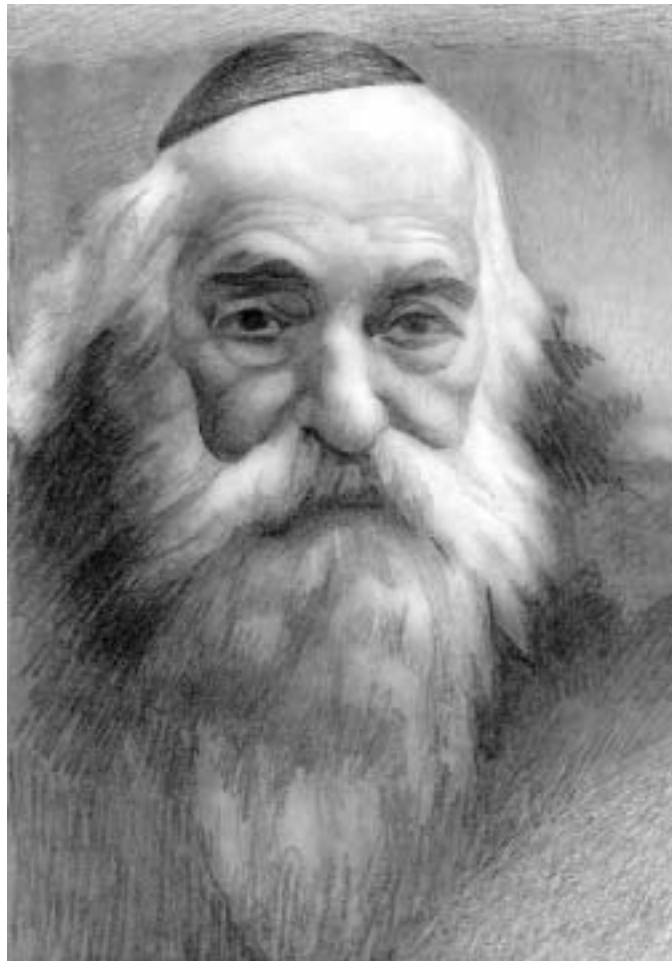
### **STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT RAMBAM**

In one of the conversations they had, the Rogatchover Gaon told R' Yehoshua an interesting story that

happened in his youth. When he was a boy, before the age of bar mitzva, his father could not find a suitable melamed for him in the city. Having no choice, he sent him off to the big city, where he studied in the large yeshiva in Brisk headed by Rabbi Yoshe Ber (Rabbi Yosef Dov (Halevi) Soloveitchik (1820-1892), known as the *Beis HaLevi*), who served as rav of Brisk for most of his life.

When he arrived in Brisk, Reb Yoshe Ber tested him. Despite being far younger than the others in the yeshiva, he displayed outstanding abilities and was accepted as a talmid.

The Gaon loved learning Rambam even as a child, and would do so at every opportunity. One time, the Brisker Rav entered the beis midrash



**Rabbi Yehoshua Nimotin**

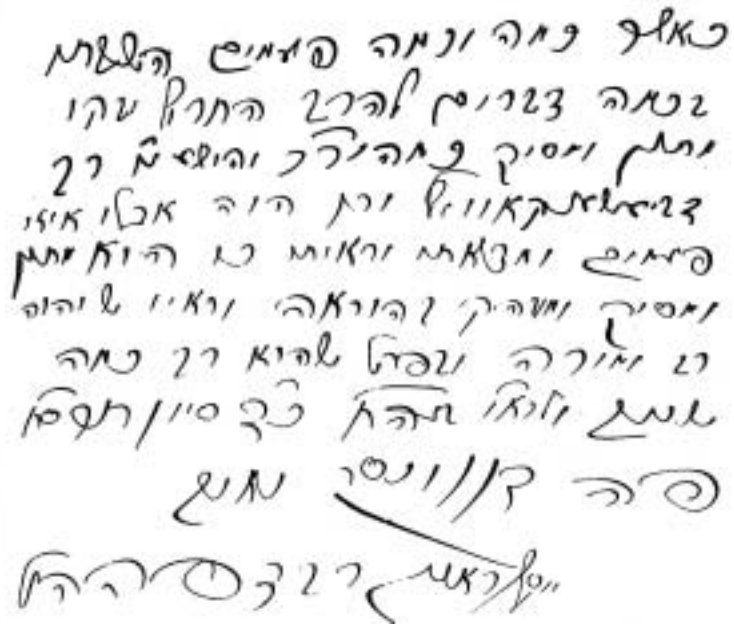


The Rogatchover Gaon. The Gaon gave this picture to R' Shmuel Nimotin before he left Russia

and saw the child studying Rambam. Reb Yoshe Ber became angry and yelled at him, "Did you learn the entire Shas with the commentaries that you are already learning Rambam?"

The Rogatchover Gaon said he had, but the Rav ignored his reply and said firmly, "Go and learn Gemara, and after you know the Gemara well you will learn Rambam. Did you hear what I said, boy?"

The Rav then told the shamash of the beis midrash to take all the volumes of the Rambam's *Yad HaChazaka* and put them up on a high shelf so the "boy" wouldn't be able



The Smicha that Rabbi Yehoshua Nimotin received from the Rogatchover Gaon

reach them. Then he turned to the Rogatchover again and said, "I'm warning you – don't touch those Rambams!"

But the Rogatchover didn't give in. He snuck into the beis midrash at night, put one table on top of another, and then another on top of that one, but he still couldn't reach the Rambam. Finally, he placed a chair on top of the third table and managed to reach the *Yad HaChazaka*. He now had his treasure, and he learned Rambam every day in secret, so the Rav wouldn't catch him.

When the Rogatchover told this story, he added that it was a miracle he didn't fall down off his structure.

One time, the Rogatchover was so immersed in his learning he didn't realize that the Rav had entered the beis midrash. Suddenly, Reb Yoshe Ber noticed the young talmid learning Rambam! He yelled, "Sheigitz! How many times must you be told that first you have to learn Shas and the commentaries, and only then can you learn Rambam? Even after a number of warnings you don't listen, and with such chutzpa, you learn Rambam!"

The Rogatchover replied, "Rebbi, if by learning Rambam occasionally one becomes a sheigitz, then those who learn Rambam day and night are absolute goyim!"

(Chapter 4 to continue, iy"H, next issue.)

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# OPEN MIRACLES!

*Shliach, Rabbi Yigal Kirshnzaft of Gush Katif, was wounded two weeks ago by a Kassam missile. He sent a letter to his brother and friends in Gush Katif in which he excitedly relates the miracle that happened to him.*

A typical Sunday afternoon in Neve Dekalim: Zev, my guest from the U.S., and I were getting out of the car near the Lilienthal home. Suddenly there was an explosion and I found myself flying and landed on the pavement with my entire body covered in hot, sticky blood. My friend Zev sat on the pavement with his legs in a puddle of blood that grew by the minute.

As an old timer in this area, I immediately realized that we had been hit by no small amount of the enemy's contaminated metal. I applied pressure to the concussion in my head and tried to dial the council.

Neighbors and emergency personnel came immediately and evacuated us under fire. "Don't slip away from us," yelled the medic at me. "We need you! Remain conscious!"

I felt dizzy and sensed that I was losing consciousness. I was drifting...

I turned to our Father in heaven and simply requested: Please, let me remain in this world. We have so much more to do.

I also said a chapter of T'hilim that remained in my mind. In addition to my head wound, I felt a strong pain in my lower back. The gurney was drenched in blood.

"Okay, we closed the wound in the hip," said the medic.

"No," I answered. "In the middle of my back there's another bleeding wound." The medics turned me over on my side and bandaged that wound too. We went with two ambulances and a helicopter, apparently to provide merit to many Jews in our rescue.

In the middle of the flight, I called to the officer who flew the helicopter and said to him, "Now you've fulfilled your 'obligation' in evacuating Gush Katif. This is your last evacuation from the Gush..."

Many X-rays were taken of me at the hospital. Amongst all the shrapnel, two pieces could be seen in my back, one big one, about two centimeters

***Neighbors and emergency personnel came immediately and evacuated us under fire. "Don't slip away from us," yelled the medic at me. "We need you! Remain conscious!"***

from the spine, and the other one in the hip. This piece put pressure on my lower back and prevented me from sitting and walking.

On Sunday, both wounds were bandaged.

People around the world prayed for our recovery. In Brazil, America, Antwerp, in the talmudei Torah, kindergartens, and yeshivos. They stopped learning to say T'hilim. Even in line at the dentist in Kiryat Arba they said T'hilim for our recovery.

And then wonder of wonders! On Monday, when they changed the bandages, they only bandaged the wound in my hip, but the wound in my back had disappeared! I felt my back and it was as smooth as ever. I called my family and they were shocked. The doctors arrived and looked for the shrapnel in my stomach and everywhere else but it was gone! It simply disappeared. How is that possible? It's there in the X-ray! It was a wound that bled. It prevented me from moving around. From that point on I was able to sit, to get off the bed, and to walk. Baruch Hashem!

Yes, this is the power of t'filla. If a piece of metal and an ugly wound could suddenly disappear, then evil decrees can disappear in the blink of an eye.

To those who worry, "what will we eat tomorrow," they should look into the bentcher where it says that Hashem, "sustains the entire world in His goodness, with chein, chesed, and rachamim..." Why worry? Does Hashem sleep at night? Does he take off time to build up His strength or for vacation?

It has been proven that whoever



**Yigal holding part of a Kassam missile that was shot at the Gush**



**Yigal's X-ray**

places his trust in man is disappointed. "As in the days of your going out of Egypt, I will show you wonders." Then too, the Egyptians were at our backs, the desert was on our sides, and the sea was in front of us. Today there are terrorists, the government, the expulsion administration, the corrupt media and the police.

mitzvos of our Creator: to plant, to build, to educate, to smile, and to develop.

Let's stop poisoning ourselves with the messages of a hostile media, and let us not, chalila, turn towards the enticements of people of flesh and blood – even if they are wrapped in paper money.

The answer is, "Tell the Jewish people to travel!" Move on!

Keep going! What will be? What will we eat tomorrow? Move on! Don't worry. We have a devoted Father Who takes care of all our needs. Let us continue to fulfill the

As the Rebbe says, "Think good and it will be good!"

Whoever holds on Above, does not fall down below! Even before the water reaches our nose, the sea will split and we will merit the Geula shleima b'karov mamash. Let us strengthen ourselves with ahavas Yisroel and rely on our Father in heaven.

"T'shuva, T'filla, and Tz'daka remove the evil decree."

It's proven! Whoever does not believe is invited to come and see!

Again, many thanks for all the t'fillos and help.

"We will surely go up and inherit it because we have the ability to overcome!"

--Yigal Kirshnzaft, Neve Dekalim

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# ZERO HOUR

BY CHANA KATZ

NORTHERN SHOMRON – The other night, a group of avreichim from Tzfas came to the northern Shomron and had a very important talk with Shliach Uriel Gorfinkle. Most of them decided to return with their wives and infants this Shabbos, and still others are looking to stay here for the next few months. It is a story in itself how Divine providence has been leading us to find one apartment after another around here. Thank G-d, the new mikveh built at the Beis Moshiach at our settlement was recently completed!

This is very important because the darkness pretends to be so overwhelming and powerful when in reality it is nothing but nothing. A little light is the proof.

\* \* \*

The reports, part of a psychological warfare that has been waged on an increasing basis, are that the roads to the entire Shomron will be imminently closed to non-residents, which means not just the roads to the Jewish enclaves fighting against liquidation. The other day, the main road was closed to Ganim and Kadim in the northern Shomron – not to keep out terrorists, but to keep Jews from occupying the houses which were already abandoned!

One couple from Sa-Nur who left that settlement to visit relatives was refused reentry into the Shomron and arrested at their relatives home, while their six children, aged one to nine, remained alone at Sa-Nur!!!

Another couple from our settlement recently took their infant to a doctor in Netanya and was stopped by soldiers and interrogated, despite

the need for the obviously ill infant to proceed quickly to the doctor. One member of Anash returning from mivtzaim was ordered by Israeli soldiers to go out of his car and, under gunpoint, was told to drop his papers on the ground. He was detained for a half hour. It is getting to the point where bringing a fellow Jew a mattress or food boxes is considered as smuggling contraband.

It was shocking to learn that for awhile now it has been prohibited to bring a new caravan anywhere into the Shomron – and not just the four settlements under fire now. One needn't be hit with a two-by-four to understand exactly where this suicidal plan is heading, r"l.

Reports of police harassment and extraordinarily abusive treatment have been surfacing in alarming numbers in recent months, as was the tragedy of three young, pure, teenage girls who were imprisoned under severe conditions for 40-days merely because they went out to protest the deadly disengagement plan. Just two days ago, the Israeli army had to call a temporary halt to a disengagement training exercise because the Israeli police officers were being overly abusive to the Israeli soldiers who were pretending to be resisting settlers.

The Arab terrorists themselves are publicly warning us that increased terror – not peace – will follow the withdrawal yet American President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Sharon are telling the world that we are heading toward peace. Meanwhile, even the “Palestinian” president is public announcing to his people that

the disengagement is a victory that will only be completed when “Jerusalem and all of occupied Palestine is liberated.”

The message for us is that we must reach out to as many Jews as we can with the truth, and non-Jews as well, with the Sheva Noachide laws. It is forbidden to be discouraged by the darkness, rather to shed a little more light wherever we can.

\* \* \*

The other night, a group of Anash stayed out until 6:30 in the morning driving to various cities to pick up food packages that were sent for those in the Shomron, whom, G-d forbid, will not be allowed to enter or leave their settlements in a matter of hours or days. The foodstuffs, generously and sacrificially offered by so many, were sorted and then re-boxed for distribution to Sa-Nur and Chomesh. Bachurim, having finished with their yeshiva seider, have been streaming into the northern Shomron all hours of the day and night to go to the summer yeshivos that have already been established here. They are working so hard in every sense, with a motivation and spirit that is shattering boundaries.

\* \* \*

The past week, a group of 20 Americans arrived on a “Achdut” flight to Eretz Yisroel led by Leib Schaeffer, a member of Anash from Wooster, Mass. After going to the mikveh at the old city of Jerusalem they came to the northern Shomron and spent the night at Sa-Nur. The next day, most of the group continued to Gush Katif, wearing their yellow shirts which said, “Americans Oppose Jewish Expulsion.”



Organizer Schaeffer said he it was a disappointment that of the 200 seats he reserved on the flight, only 20 were taken. On the other hand, those who did come, managed to do what many others could not. They didn't accept "no-entry" as an answer from the soldiers and police manning the various checkpoints, and ultimately, they succeeded in overcoming the last and most difficult checkpoint and jubilantly posed for pictures near the beautiful beaches of Gush Katif community Neve Dekalim.

While that group, consisting of both Jews and non-Jews who became connected through seven Noachide laws organizations, prepared to camp out in the Gush as long as was needed, one member of Anash who came on the trip with his 78-year-old father, broke away from the group in order to help out in the northern Shomron.

Rabbi Yacov Dovid Cohen, of Crown Heights, organizer of the website [www.noahide.org](http://www.noahide.org), immediately thrust himself into activities on its behalf, often wiping perspiration from his face as he worked on behalf of the northern Shomron while adapted to the summertime sun.

"When a dog is going for your leg and your neck at the same time, which do you fend off first?" said Rabbi Cohen. "The one attacking your neck. The strategic center of Israel, both from a military and halachic point, is no doubt the northern Shomron, asked Cohen. His 78-year-old father, Reb Chaim Elezar Cohen, also spent a couple of days here in the northern Shomron, hardly ceasing from learning Torah and saying T'hillim the entire time. The elderly Reb Cohen shared with us the interesting hashgacha pratis which brought him on this mission.

Several months ago, Reb Chaim's wife had booked a flight to come to Eretz Yisroel to participate in their grandson's putting on t'fillin for the first time, at the Kotel. Reb Chaim was hesitant to participate on the

exhausting trip and it was to be during the nine days. But when he heard about the Achdus flight, he wanted to participate and within two weeks before the flight left, booked a ticket with the group. It turned out it was the same flight his wife was on!

\* \* \*

Before the rest of the group had left for Gush Katif, we heard yet another interesting Hashgacha Pratis story about how the entire trip came about. The story was told by Achdus flight participant Jonathan Silverman, a 23-year from Bensonhurst, Brooklyn who became involved with Chabad in recent years while he was a student at Stonybrook University and a member of the powerful Chabad house run by

*It is forbidden to be discouraged by the darkness, rather to shed a little more light wherever we can.*

shliach Adam Stein.

According to Silverman, Stein was headed to Brooklyn for a wedding of one of the members of the campus Chabad group. Around the same time, there was a meeting at 770 called by Gush Katif residents who had visited America seeking support: "Rabbi Adam wasn't going to go to that meeting because his car was stolen, but he was given another car and so he finally went. He was moved by what he heard and he called his friend Leib Schaeffer in Wooster and the two immediately decided upon a course of action: arranging a special flight to Eretz Yisroel to help fight the evacuation and offer support to the Gush Katif and Northern Shomron residents. The

meeting at 770 was still underway when Rabbi Adam asked for permission to announce the mission.

"This whole chain of events showed the sanction of Hashem," concluded Silverman. "Wellsprings....Divine Providence.....Let's Do It! Total Chabad. This is Chabad at its best!"

\* \* \*

When the group came to our settlement at Avnei Chefetz, they were taken by shliach Gorfinkle to the mountaintop yeshiva where the bachurim have been based these past few weeks. Schaeffer looked out at the breathtakingly beautiful view of Eretz Yisroel and those living in simple, worn caravans on the hilltop and just started to cry.

"I got a haskama from Rav Schwei when I asked if we could go during the nine days," said Schaeffer, "and he answered me by saying that the question is 'How can one NOT go!'"

Schaeffer said the mixed group on his trip left their jobs and families and came to bodily put themselves on the frontlines of this battle.

"People only have one or two chances in their entire life to break out of the robotic existence of day to day life," said Schaeffer. "The Frierdike Rebbe said in 'Basi L'Gani' that netzach – victory, strength – is the only midda our generation can achieve that is higher than the middos of our ancestors. Why, because we're more comfortable. Those who sacrifice their lives to save other lives is the mesirus nefesh the Rebbe was talking about."

\* \* \*

Our friend from Anash, who has been working literally without much sleep in order to help, out stressed the importance of staying calm and having a bird's-eye view of the entire situation.

"I've spoken with a couple of leading Chabad rabbeim to confirm what seems to be the process that we're all going through now," said Chana Devorah Schwartz of Yerushalayim. "There are three things

that Am Yisroel needs to do to bring the Geula, and it's our responsibility to make the efforts to do these things and we can't pass them off to anyone, even the tzaddikim. We have to do the job ourselves.

"We have to appoint a king, destroy Amalek, and build the Beis HaMikdash. Hashem already revealed the king, the Rebbe is King Moshiach, and it's our job to accept his kingship, and, in the ways of pleasantness and peace and ofen ha'miskabel (in a way people can understand and accept) to help others accept his kingship as well.

"Regarding Amalek, the real battle is to destroy the Amalek within ourselves. This is the way to destroy the external Amalek as well. The gematria of Amalek and the word 'suffek' in Hebrew, which means doubt, is the same, which teaches us that we have to destroy all our doubts about the current situation in at least three main ways. One of them is we have to be firm and confident in declaring to the nations of the world that Hashem gave Eretz Yisroel to the Jewish people, who are not allowed to give one inch of it away. If we only had followed more of what the Rebbe said in remaining firm, strong, and outspoken about the territorial integrity of Eretz Yisroel, we probably would have not ended up in the situation we're in now. But it's still not too late and we must double and triple our efforts to protest as the Rebbe told us to do to make up for lost time.

"The second aspect of destroying Amalek within is not giving in to any form of doubts about Hashem's ability and desire to change the situation in our favor. We need to learn the lesson of the Three Weeks and how the spies lacked the faith of their ability to acquire the land with Hashem's help. We don't need to make that mistake again. This is our big tikkun now – we can fix the mistake of the spies by not being scared of the "giants" in the land. We need simple faith that Hashem can and wants to turn the tide in our favor, which we merit by our mesirus nefesh

and what we practically do – in all the areas of action, t'shuva, Torah, t'filla and tz'daka – to help the situation, accompanied by our firm faith that Hashem will respond by bringing us yeshua and geula.

"The third way is not allowing Amalek to cool off our avodas Hashem, as the Rebbe said. We have to have a fiery liveliness in our avodas Hashem and strengthen our achdus by warming up our ahavas Yisroel with real mesirus nefesh to help one another.

"On the last inyan of rebuilding the Beis HaMikdash, the Rebbe said that the main way we can participate in rebuilding the Beis HaMikdash is by learning about it in Hilchos Beis

***Schaeffer looked out at the breathtakingly beautiful view of Eretz Yisroel and those living in simple, worn caravans on the hilltop and just started to cry.***

B'chira of the Rambam and in the sichos and maamarim of the Rebbe."

Mrs. Schwartz opened *Letters from the Rebbe* in English, volume three, page 102, where the Rebbe confirms exactly our present job. She recommends for everyone to read the whole letter, number 79.

"The first thing my eyes fell on was: 'How can one allow himself to be so confused by the yetzer ha'ra, as to be overcome by anxiety or worry? Of course there are times when things do not seem to go as expected or as desired. But the Torah has already forewarned us to regard such times as temporary trials and tests of one's faith in G-d. As a matter of fact, the stronger

remains one's faith in G-d, even under adverse circumstances, the sooner it will become clear it was all a matter of a test. But this faith should not merely be a matter of lip service, but must have the full force of conviction. And this is not hard to achieve, if one reflects on what has been said above and frequently, calmly and objectively. I trust that the above lines will suffice, and you, on your part, will also be a source of encouragement and confidence to your husband.'"\*

Added Mrs. Schwartz: "Women! Remember how in Egypt we encouraged our husband's with faith in the Geula? We need to do that too now."

And the Rebbe concluded, "May G-d grant that you should have good news to report in the spirit of Purim, on which we celebrate the reversal of the Jewish position from sadness to gladness and, in the words of the Megilla, 'for the Jews there was Light, Joy, Gladness and Honor.'

"With blessing..."

\* \* \*

(As this story was being filed, we have just received word that the shliach's wife has asked some to say T'hilim for two bachurim who apparently were arrested or detained (it is not clear now) trying to enter Sa-Nur this morning (Erev Shabbat). It's also not clear at this writing where the other eight bachurim accompanying them ended up, but it doesn't appear that they also were taken by the Israeli army into custody.

(We've known it, but yet it is still hard to believe. Although Eretz Yisroel was given as the eternal heritage of the Jewish people by Hashem, Who can give the land to whomever He wants, settling parts of the land of Eretz Yisroel and defending the settling of the Land of Israel is not only considered a "crime" by the entire world – but has been determined to be a severely punishable crime by the very "leaders" of Eretz Yisroel)

MESIVTA

# CHABAD AT THE SDEROT-OF AKIM RALLY

BY NOSSON AVROHOM

*For three days, hundreds of Lubavitchers demonstrated at the huge rally in Sderot and Ofakim and loudly proclaimed the Rebbe's opposition to withdrawing from any part of Eretz Yisroel. In addition, shiurim and farbrengens were held and Mivtza T'fillin was done with the soldiers. \* An on the scene report.*

The sun beat strongly on the heads of tens of thousands of demonstrators in the makeshift tent city erected in the Sderot park. The heat and humidity was especially trying for those who came from the center and north of the country. Demonstrators were exhausted.

The following scene that I beheld was not a staged photo shoot: two policemen in blue uniforms were standing on guard facing a child in orange with a large Bucharian kippa on his head and curly peios. He recited by heart, "B'Reishis bara Elokim eis ha'shamayim v'eis ha'Aretz. V'ha'aretz..." It seemed that if they wouldn't stop him, he would fly through the entire book of B'Reishis. A little while later the child continued, "Noach ish tzaddik

*tamim haya b'dorosav..."*

The policemen looked bemused. "If only my kids will be like that," said Officer Chaim Rebibo from Merchav Negey to his friend. "What a smart kid!"

"Do you love me," he suddenly asked the child.

"Of course! I love every Jew."

"You aren't afraid to live where you live?" asked the policeman.

"No, Hashem watches over us."

"You see these chevra," said Rebibo to his fellow officer who was listening to the conversation. "You are the real Am Yisroel."

This sums up the long battle over shleimus ha'Aretz; a battle for emuna without compromises; a course which

will lead, with Hashem's help, to a great victory and the speedy revelation of the Rebbe MH"M.

The time has come. It's the moment of truth. These were the feelings that tens of thousands of Jews felt, observant and non-observant, young and old, yeshiva bachurim and college students, women and children, of all backgrounds; what they had in common was their fear for the future of millions of Jews.

They came on Tuesday (Aug. 2) for a second march that began with a huge rally in Sderot. The goal: to cry out against the expulsion plan that threatens to remove thousands of Jews from their homes. Many Lubavitchers were present at the rally from all over the country, knowing that as Chassidim of the Rebbe we have a powerful voice.

At the entrance to Sderot, we were stuck in a long jam with thousands of cars and busses bringing people to the rally. Dozens of yellow Moshiach flags waved among the national flags, with the knowledge of where our salvation will really come from. One of the mobile mitzva tanks had a screen on it where you were able to watch the Rebbe screaming about the shocking situation, which we were gathering to protest that very day.

Doron Oron of the Moshiach

Center at the Midrachov in Yerushalayim said:

“When we came with the tank that had the projector and screen the police refused us entry. Rabbi Moshe Pizem, shliach in Sderot, showed us a side road but that was blocked too. We wrote to the Rebbe and the answer was in volume 15, p. 125 of the *Igros Kodesh*:

May it be G-d's will that you succeed in your trip in a way that is good for you and your family both b'gashmius and b'ruchnius. You should take on another shlichus mitzva, i.e., use the days you will be there to strengthen Yiddishkait and spread the wellsprings, including saying divrei Torah and Chassidus and arousing to fear of Heaven in public, whether in a speech or by learning inside the text, etc., according to the conditions of the place.

“Encouraged by this answer, we

*“A moment before  
you add another page  
to Megillas Eicha and  
Jews remembering  
you each year, stop!  
The Jewish people are  
telling you to stop!”*

returned to the original road and suddenly, a miracle! The police officer who, just minutes before, had blocked entry to us, allowed us to enter!”

When we got there, dozens of Jews were glued to the video screen. “The Lubavitcher [Rebbe] was the only one who envisioned everything precisely,” said a Poilische Chassid to me. He held a sign that said, ‘Antiyochus destroyed Yerushalayim, Titus destroyed

Yerushalayim, and Sharon plans on destroying Gush Katif.”

When I asked him whether that wasn't a bit harsh, he firmly said, “It's time to stop fooling around when it comes to pikuach nefesh.”

Hundreds of Jews entered the tank to hear more about the Rebbe's battle for shleimus ha'Aretz, and they heard plenty about the only thing that can truly stop the racist transfer: Moshiach. A stand for writing to the Rebbe was set up outside the tank, from which thousands of brochures on shleimus ha'Aretz and Moshiach were given out.

“At a critical time like this, everybody wants to know what the Lubavitcher Rebbe has to say,” said a tall, young guy with a ponytail who said he was from Kibbutz Be'eiri in the western Negev.

In the background, I could hear that the speeches had begun. A message of emuna was the common thread woven through all the speeches. From one of the demonstrators near me I learned the new concept that is making its way among the religious Zionists: **hitbagrut** (time to grow up). No more following the Knesset with eyes closed, but full faith in Hashem!

Knesset member Rabbi Meir Porush gave a special speech in which he wondered how it was possible to be quiet in the face of this decree. After him, Moshe Leshem, a colonel in the Reserves spoke, “Nobody should say we didn't warn them. Whoever takes part in the expulsion will have to stand judgment afterwards!”

The father of Hilla Abuksis of Sderot who was killed by a Kassam missile, gave a moving speech in a choked voice, “Mr. Prime Minister, where was the helicopter that is hovering over us and the thousands of soldiers and policemen who surround us now when my daughter was killed?”

On the screens, a video of Kfar Maimon was shown which opened with Rabbi Sholom Dovber Volpe holding the Torah scroll written in the z'chus of the Jews of Gush Katif.





Two policemen in blue face a child in orange

Singer Ariel Silber's song "A Jew does not expel a Jew," was highly acclaimed. He has been volunteering his time by driving around for days and singing for soldiers, singing and asking them to refuse to expel their fellow Jews.

Rabbi Menachem Porush, a man over 80, delivered a moving speech. Despite his frailty, he came to tell the crowd, "You are not alone."

Knesset member Effi Eitam delivered a passionate speech of faith, "How can you fight the Lubavitcher Rebbe and the other gaonim and tzaddikim who pray each day that the expulsion be stopped? A moment before you add another page to Megillas Eicha and Jews remembering you each year, stop! The Jewish people are telling you to stop!"

The atmosphere was tense. You could feel the pain and sadness, but there was also a feeling of emuna that the expulsion would not happen.

Towards the end of the rally, I was surprised and excited to meet Rabbi

Leibel Mochkin from Crown Heights. He asked where he could stash his luggage, because he wanted to smuggle into Gush Katif.

I couldn't help but remember the stories I read about this man who had heroically smuggled more than 1000 Chassidim out of Russia, under the noses of the Russian authorities. I realized that the man who had bravely faced the communists in Russia, would not be intimidated by the Yassam (Special Patrol Units, a small corps of highly

trained anti-terror professionals within the police force, known for their cruelty) in Israel.

There were tears in Rabbi Mochkin's eyes as we watched videos that showed police brutality. "Here? In Eretz Yisroel?" He was shaken up.

The rally ended at midnight. It was heartwarming to see how hundreds of Lubavitchers gathered near the tank for Maariv. Slowly the crowd built up. I stood at one of the junctions of Sderot, a city that went all out to welcome the

crowds that came to demonstrate. Near me stood a traffic policeman from Kiryat Gat, Aryeh Metamiger, who exclaimed, "Your strength is in your emuna and your achdus. It's heartwarming. Am Yisroel chai!"

A farbrengen took place at the Chabad house in Sderot. We got directions from an older woman who directed us there. Her name is Pila Yehudis and she told us sadly, "I have been here since 1963 and it looks as though I will have to leave in tears and pain. My three sons have already left the city."

Yossi Ben Yaakov, a resident of Sderot, informed us, "If there is a Disengagement, I'm outta here. Period. This city is already a ghost town."

Now I understand even more why we must stand strong against the expulsion crime. We are literally seeing what the halacha describes, "the land will be easy for them to conquer."

We arrived at the Chabad house. The atmosphere was electric. It looked as though the shliach, Moshe Pizem

prepared for our coming for a week. There were plenty of drinks and goodies on the tables and slowly, dozens of Lubavitchers and mekuravim gathered to farbreng. Leading the farbrengen were Rabbis Leibel Mochkin, Motti Anati, Zimroni Tzik, Boaz Kali, and Dovid Nachshon. Rabbi Mochkin spoke about the mesirus nefesh needed in Russia and compared it to our times.

One niggun followed another. Rabbi Anati of Florida told of the protest activities in his city. Rabbi Kali asked for help in explaining things to Arabs. Mr. Meir Gabbai, a local lawyer, spoke in praise of the Chabad house and about the miracles that happened at every stage of its construction.

During the farbrengen, we heard that some Kassam missiles had been shot at the demonstrators but had fallen on Arabs and killed one and injured four. Chasdei Hashem.

I met Rabbi Pizem at this farbrengen. He was over his head in

work with a cell phone in one hand while he did everything else with his other hand. He ran from place to place and every few minutes he came back to the farbrengen with more drinks, cookies, or fruit.

He told me about the expansion of his Chabad house in Sderot.

“Next year we are opening a daycare center. This how we at Chabad respond to the difficult situation we are in. Our motto is, ‘as they tortured them, so they increased and became stronger.’”

Rabbi Pizem came to Sderot in 5747. His father-in-law, Rabbi Avrohom Dunin, who was the menahel of the Chabad school at the Brosh moshav nearby, introduced him to the place. Rabbi Dunin’s first son-in-law, Rabbi Yisroel Hershkowitz, went on shlichus to Ofakim and his second son-in-law was invited to work in Sderot. The answer from the Rebbe said:

**“P’sak din from a rav in writing**

**that there is no fear of encroaching on someone else’s territory, and then they should look into the aforementioned suggestion. I will mention it at the gravesite.”**

\* \* \*

**Tell us a bit about your large building that we are in now.**

“We got the building on 3 Tammuz last year. As time went by, we became quite friendly with the mayor. He had gotten a bracha from the Rebbe to be elected mayor. After he was elected, as a sign of his appreciation, he gave us the building that used to serve as part of a school that had closed.

“The building is spacious and now we are working on renovating it. One of the already renovated rooms has become our beautiful shul, and now we are renovating a room that will serve as the daycare center. On the second floor there will be a hall for events, brissin, kiddushim, etc., with Hashem’s help.”

When Rabbi Pizem talked about the daycare center plans he pointed out that even before it has opened, people have come to register their children.

The general work of the Chabad house is expanding too. During the week, davening takes place in the building that serves as the Chabad house near the municipal market. About thirty greengrocers take a break from their work to daven there and they study *Tanya* after the davening. During the day, many people come in to watch a video of the Rebbe.

**When you arrived in Sderot did you dream it would become a border town?**

“Absolutely not! It was a quiet, unknown town. In recent years, before the Kassams, the population doubled with people who sought peace and quiet. Today, that has all changed. People are on edge. You walk around the city and hardly see anyone. People are leaving town and that will only increase if the expulsion happens. I believe that if people could sell their



homes, most of them would be long gone.”

### **What are people feeling?**

“The general mood is negative. You just never know when and where the next attack will happen. There are open miracles, but it’s still terrifying. Every little thing makes people jump.

“I’ll tell you what happened last week. Peddlers were selling watermelon and yelling, as they do, ‘Red watermelon, red watermelon!’ Somebody walking by thought they were yelling ‘Red alert’ (a signal that Kassams are coming) and he ran and broke his leg.”

\* \* \*

At the end of the farbrengen, Rabbi Kutli Rapp of the Matteh for Shleimus HaAm V’HaAretz came on the phone and encouraged those farbrenging to achieve victory.

The crowds headed for Ofakim and we went with the mitvzaim tank and tankist Chaim Nevo. A group of young people were dancing opposite us and singing, “*Anachnu maaminim b’nei maaminim.*” How right they are.

We arrived in Ofakim and saw a huge tent city in the park. Among the cypress and eucalyptus trees, thousands of tents were erected, and there were stands for water and information and food booths. Photographers and the media from Eretz Yisroel and around the world seemed to converge where there was the slightest action.

At the entrance was a table set up by the local Chabad house run by Rabbi Yisroel Hershkowitz and his helpers. They gave out food and drink. Later on, I joined a shiur on chapter 32 of *Tanya* given by Rabbi Dovid Meir Drukman, rav of Kiryat Mochkin, from a copy that was printed that day in Sa-Nur in northern Shomron. Around Rabbi Drukman sat many Chassidim and other Jews.

Rabbi Drukman enthralled his audience with lessons and parables and connected it all to our times:

“The Blau family had two sons. Rabbi Amram Blau belonged to the Niturei Karta and his brother was just the opposite in his views. One time, they demonstrated against each other, and one brought the other a cup of water. What do we see – that you can argue but you cannot hate.

“When Rabbi Aryeh Levine heard that there is a chapter in *Tanya* about ahavas Yisroel, chapter 32, he didn’t rest until he obtained the chapter and learned it backwards and forward.”

\* \* \*

Wednesday morning (Aug. 3), after sleeping for two hours, I woke up to the sounds of t’filla. We went to the

***“We must win this fight. Through your magazine, tell all Chabad Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel and the world to drop everything and take an active part in this battle.”***

mikva and a Litvishe Jew without a beard looked at the group of Lubavitchers and said with a smile, “Do it all but don’t miss the morning mikva...”

On our way back from the mikva, we went to put on t’fillin with many soldiers and policemen and explained to them some ideas of the Rebbe’s.

After Shacharis, I went to some shiurim on topical matters that took place in the “A Jew does not expel a Jew” tent. More than once, the Rebbe came up in the shiur. Rabbi Yisroel Ariel, director of Machon HaMikdash, told of the Friedman family who were thrown out of their home in Yamit,

and moved into a tent in Gush Katif. Now their grandson is in jail for having the nerve to refuse to expel his grandparents.

Rabbi Gad Ben Zimra, director of Ulpana in Maale Levona, explained how to talk to the soldiers. “Psychologists are telling them that if they refuse orders, the army will fall apart, and the mutual support in their units will collapse. We have to explain to the soldiers that they belong to a broader family than the army, the family of Am Yisroel.”

Yesha Council Chairman, Bentzi Lieberman, announced that that evening there would be a huge protest gathering and then we would try to get to Gush Katif. At the same time, young people were signing up at a special booth to try to break through to the Gush in groups.

After Mincha, groups of young and old were organized to go out to the soldiers and talk to them to refuse to expel Jews. On our way, we met hundreds of border police and we put t’fillin on with them. Many agreed to do it but were confused.

“What can I tell you?” said one of the officers as I removed the t’fillin straps. “I don’t know what is happening to me. Before the military briefing I didn’t know what I was going to do and now, the military briefings accomplished the opposite. I don’t know how I’m going to do this...” He looked at me with his head lowered and tears in his eyes.

I saw why the officers were so afraid of contact between the soldiers and the demonstrators. A row of soldiers separated us from the police. A young man from the Gush spoke to the soldiers and three of them burst into tears. Not just tears but bitter crying. Their commander hugged them, yelled, and hugged them again.

Chabad was at work in the tent city. T’fillin and Igros Kodesh stands abounded. I watched a group of children reciting the 12 P’sukim with the bachurim and getting candy. Other





**Rabbi Zimroni Tzik, Rabbi Leibel Mochkin, and Rabbi Motti Anati, farbrenging with demonstrators**

bachurim distributed, *Ha'Geula, M'anyen V'Achshavi*. Many go in and out of the tank.

The atmosphere in the park was extra special, as all Jews, from all walks of life, gathered in unity. All are determined and believe we have the ability to change history and establish, once and for all, that Jews do not want to expel Jews.

Towards six in the evening, thousands made their way to the large city square at the entrance to the city. Residents came out and gave us cold bottles of water and food.

The second gathering began with a speech from Knesset member Ahud Yatom. He was followed by a boy, named Eren Shimchon, who led us in the recitation of T'hilim. Knesset member Rabbi Yitzchok Levy said that the south had become a place of chesed.

Mr. Avner Shimoni, director of the Gaza Strip Council blessed the crowd who support the residents of the Gush. Knesset member Gila Finkelstein described her visit to the girls arrested for protesting who are strong in spirit. One by one, rabbanim and public figures got up and encouraged the crowd.

Knesset member Yechiel Chazal was cheered when he told about thousands outside the city and when he asked the police commander in

charge, "Why are you blocking them?" he was told that he cannot control so many people.

A moving speech was delivered by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner:

"When we evacuated the safari they gave the animals five years to get used to a new habitat. When we evacuated Chavat HaDagim in Eilat, they gave the fish three years. I say to the Prime Minister: If you don't want to give us five years like animals, give us at least three years like fish..."

The closing speech was given by Rabbi Yisroel Hershkowitz, the shliach in Ofakim, who explained the Rebbe's view and spoke about the danger in giving away land.

When the rally was over, thousands walked to the entrance of the city, where thousands of police and soldiers, horses and other tools of destruction were waiting. The soldiers and police faced off with the demonstrators and there was tension in the air.

In the meantime, hundreds of young people organized themselves to march on the Gush in small groups. I joined one of the groups and we walked a roundabout route to the Gush. However, we were caught and sent back to the city. Later at night, sheer exhaustion forced us to go to sleep on the sidewalks facing the soldiers and police.

The next day we were told about delicious meals being served by the Chabad house. At the soup kitchen, after the needy finished eating, the place was open to hundreds of demonstrators. Everybody discussed mesirus nefesh and the past two days. Some of the Chassidim praised Rabbi Hershkowitz for providing an apartment for the demonstrators to sleep in and wash up.

We heard that hundreds managed to slip into Gush Katif.

Thursday afternoon, thousands had gone home to refresh themselves for the next march to take place the following week. Before we left, I stayed for another speech by Colonel Meir Indor who explained the danger of the expulsion. He gave an overview of the history since the Arabs began throwing stones and then graduated to missiles, thanks to the Israelis.

At the end of his lecture, he praised the Rebbe's position on shleimus ha'Aretz. "I tell writers and pundits about his predictions, and they are amazed by how the Rebbe foresaw it all."

Before leaving the park, Effie Eitam said to me, "We must win this fight. Through your magazine, tell all Chabad Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel and the world to drop everything and take an active part in this battle."

On my way home, thoughts of the previous three days swirled in my head. There's no denying that things are tough but there are also rays of light. There is enormous optimism from the fact that thousands of families and individuals forego their comfort, take off from work, and join together to protest the expulsion.

Here and there, you can see policemen and soldiers who have broken down. The reality is such that the more demonstrators there are the slower the expulsion machine can work until, with Hashem's help, it will stop. They have the power. We have the emuna.

# ‘IN THE DARK OF NIGHT WE ERECTED THE OHEL’

BY AVROHOM RAYNITZ

*At the end of the 80's, when the communists ruled the Soviet Union with an iron hand, the Rebbe sent Rabbi Dovid Nachshon and Avi Taub on a secret mission to put up Ohalim on the Rebbeim's gravesites in Russia. \* Here is the full story of how the ohel on the grave of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn was miraculously constructed in a day and a half.*

Back in the 80's the Iron Curtain was as strong as ever and whoever was behind it, wanted to get out. Those outside the Soviet Union did not want to enter the lion's den, aside from Lubavitcher Chassidim sent there by the Rebbe. These Chassidim were sent on secret missions to strengthen Yiddishkait in a place where it was forbidden and they endangered their lives to spread the wellsprings.

Rabbi Dovid Nachshon, director of the Chabad Mobile Mitzva Tanks in Eretz Yisroel and his close friend, Avi Taub, were sent by the Rebbe to erect Ohalim on the gravesites of the holy Rebbeim throughout Russia and the Ukraine. They were also sent to erect an ohel at the gravesite of the Rebbe's

father in Alma Ata.

The two men spent months in Russia on this special mission, while pretending to be businessmen who had come to Russia to purchase diamonds, since Avi Taub has a diamond business. The full story of all their travels cannot yet be publicized, but in honor of the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn on 20 Av, Rabbi Nachshon described one of his secret missions.

## SHOCKED AT THE CEMETERY

This was our fourth trip to Russia. On Shabbos Chazon, 2 Av 5748, we were in Leningrad where I celebrated

my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday with a special farbrengen. For about seven hours, we sat with Jews of the community and there was a tremendous spiritual arousal.

At that time of the year, the nights in Leningrad are very short and when Shabbos was over, we rushed to have Melaveh Malka and then left for the airport from where we flew to Alma Ata.

Typical of Russia, the plane was delayed and we arrived in Alma Ata in the late afternoon. We immediately began looking for a place where we could immerse before going to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok's grave.

After immersing, we went in the direction of the cemetery together with our friend, Nachum Tamrin, who served as our interpreter. When we got to the entrance of the cemetery, I was sure there was some kind of mistake. It is a very large gentile cemetery with crosses and other religious symbols everywhere. Trees were planted among the graves and on the graves were pictures of the deceased or their idols. Naturally, we felt terrible seeing this.

It was late and the sun was setting, and the nightlife at the cemetery was beginning. Yes, there was life there at the cemetery. Dozens of drunks and



*The Rebbe spoke about his father and said, “My father went to exile and is still in exile.” This short sentence fully expressed what we felt there, that Rabbi Levi Yitzchok was still in exile, a terrible feeling.*

members of the underworld made the cemetery their home and we walked among them as we searched for the grave of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok.

We walked for a long time until we found the grave we were looking for. A few other Jews were buried nearby, but it was a tiny section in a sea of gentile graves. Afterwards, they told us that when Rabbi Levi Yitzchok was buried,

they bought a few other plots around his, and that is how the tiny Jewish section came to be.

We stood at the grave and felt just horrible. Only a few feet separated Rabbi Levi Yitzchok from hundreds of gentile graves.

Meanwhile, it was growing darker and we quickly measured the area so we could get an ohel built around the grave. We realized that it would be very difficult to set the grave off from the others because the other graves were very close by.

We left the cemetery feeling very dispirited. That week we arrived back in New York and saw the Rebbe. I wrote my sad feelings about the gravesite in a report I submitted about the entire trip.

On Shabbos 16 Av, Shabbos Nachamu, the Rebbe spoke about his father and said, "My father went to exile and is still in exile." This short sentence fully expressed what we felt there, that Rabbi Levi Yitzchok was still in exile, a terrible feeling.

At that farbrengen, the Rebbe said some unusual things about his father. He said, "After the Rebbe, my father-in-law, left that country [Russia] he [Rabbi Levi Yitzchok] remained the only grandchild of the Alter Rebbe, the Mittlerer Rebbe, and the Tzemach Tzedek leading that country, and therefore he was also consulted for guidance, etc."

As with all the farbrengens during the period of our missions to Russia, the Rebbe instructed us to say l'chaim on a full cup.

### THE WORDING ON THE MONUMENT

In the following months, we sent Nachum Tamrin to take more precise measurements, and after we got the information, we prepared a design for the ohel. In accordance with the general guidelines we received from the Rebbe at the beginning of our shlichus, we presented the design to



Rabbi Dovid Nachshon reading a pidyon nefesh on his first visit. Near him is Avi Taub



Working by the light of candles

*Yes, there was nightlife there at the cemetery. Dozens of drunks and members of the underworld made the cemetery their home and we walked among them as we searched for the grave of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok.*

rabbanim and sent it in to the Rebbe too.

Although the Rebbe did not get involved with the details of building the Ohalim, we thought that perhaps this time the Rebbe would make an exception and we would receive instructions from the Rebbe about his father's grave. However, the Rebbe did not say anything.

Following the Rebbe's sicha about his father's special position once the Rebbe Rayatz left Russia, we decided that the wording on the monument should be like the wording on the monuments of the Rebbeim except for the word "Admur."

In Av 5749, we submitted the final wording to the Rebbe and the design for the ohel, but as I said, we did not receive any special instructions.

On our seventh trip to Russia, we went to Alma Ata again. Since we were ostensibly diamond merchants doing business in Moscow, we had to come up with explanations for our trips out of Moscow. We said we were going to visit family gravesites.

One Shabbos in Elul 5749, we were in Leningrad. The plan was to leave right after Shabbos on a flight for Alma Ata in distant Kazakhstan in order to build the new ohel and erect the new gravestone. For various reasons we were limited in time and had until Tuesday night, which would leave us with only two and a half days to do the work. We knew it would be difficult to complete all the work in so short a time but it was possible.

We arrived at the airport in Leningrad on Motzaei Shabbos and were informed that the flight was delayed for a few hours. As we waited, we were told of further postponements and it was only the next day, Sunday afternoon, that the flight finally left. We landed in Alma Ata Sunday night. Forget about our plans! We had less than two days to do the work.

Throughout our stay all sort of problems arose, as I will go on to tell you. We saw how the Satan was trying to prevent us from fulfilling the Rebbe's shlichus.

We looked for the director of the cemetery. A few days earlier, we had sent one of our people there to meet with him and he had agreed, in exchange for a lot of money, to take care of the permits we would need to erect the ohel and monument. Well, it

turned out that he wasn't home and would first show up the next afternoon.

The short amount of time we had to work in did not enable us to wait for him and we had to obtain the permits ourselves, for without them, the authorities would tear down what we put up. In our despair, we thought we would put the ohel up another time, after the time allotted to us was wasted with bribes and permits.

That night, I went to sleep exhausted and depressed. In my dream, I saw myself standing in the Rebbe's beis midrash in New York. After the davening, when the Rebbe went to his room, he turned around to me and strongly encouraged me with his hand three times, while looking at me in a special way. Then he continued on his way.

We saw this as a sign from Heaven. We should not despair, and that if we wanted to, we could build the ohel. The night was almost over and we went to try to get the permits.

Early in the morning, we met with the person in charge of all the cemeteries in Kazakhstan, a senior official. We told him that we had come to build an ohel on "Grandfather's" grave and we gave him a nice sum of



Lighting a candle on the first visit

money. He agreed to our plan but said there was a problem in obtaining cement, blocks, and other building materials. He hoped to get them within ten days to two weeks.

We told him that the ohel had to be built by the next evening at the latest. He began to laugh and said it was impossible. In the end we made up with him that if everything was ready by the following night, we would double the money. He agreed.

We began writing the wording for the monument in Hebrew letters on a paper and he went to get dozens of workers. We left for the grave. The cemetery was large and neglected. Ruffians wandered around and desecrated the graves. Once again, I had this terrible feeling that even in death the tzaddik had no rest. It only strengthened our resolve to get the ohel up as soon as possible.

As I mentioned before, there was barely any space between Rabbi Levi Yitzchok's grave and the others, but after repeated measurements, we managed to fit in a wall that would not touch the nearby graves. It was an open miracle because there really wasn't a natural way to build a wall there.

## BUILDING



Rabbi Dovid Nachshon supervising the work on the gravestone



Supervising every stage of the construction



The workers dug up the old iron fence and began digging a foundation. While they worked, and due to the lack of time, we went to the nearby monument factory to have the gravestone prepared. It is a large and impressive headstone, fitting for a tzaddik.

The necessary measurements were quickly taken and the work on the stone began. The worker sat with a sharp chisel and banged on it with a special mallet, forming letter after letter. In the meantime, I sat on the side and said the Slichos for the end of Elul. Since the goy was unfamiliar with Hebrew letters, he made a mistake and

had to get new marble and start all over again. We felt squeezed by the time pressure. The clock was racing and we felt that the 24 hours that remained were slipping away from us.

We went back to the cemetery to supervise the work. We saw that the workers had made nice progress and had already finished building some rows of bricks. Night fell, but nobody considered stopping working. We tried drawing an electric cable from the

nearby factory but the cemetery was so big we were unable to draw it until the grave. We had no choice, so one worker brought twigs and lit a large bonfire that illuminated the area and the workers continued working.

It was cold and the workers (and we) were tired and hungry because they hadn't eaten all day, but nobody considered stopping because there was no time.

The person in charge of cemeteries

showed up every few hours to check on the progress. After all, he didn't want to lose the huge amount of money we had promised him. In the middle of the work, I went to the hotel and called the Mobile Mitzva Tank office in Eretz Yisroel so they could call the Rebbe and report on our progress. (For obvious reasons we didn't want to call directly from Russia to the U.S.) In general, we saw open miracles throughout.

When the ohel was almost complete, a tractor came and brought the finished monument. After a long night of work, the workers toiled mightily to erect the huge slab of marble and to attach it to the new walls. On the new monument, we made sure to include Rabbi Levi Yitzchok's last name, Schneersohn, despite the fact that for 44 years it was dangerous to mention that name. The government had waged a bitter war with members of the family who were considered traitors to the country.

Even after we erected the new stone, we left the old one standing because of its importance. The new monument was in the wall, behind the old monument. Today, they are both there in the new ohel.

The workers worked for 24 hours in a row until Tuesday afternoon. The ohel was up. A metalworker came to make the fence and we put up a new lock to protect the sanctity of the site. Then something interesting happened. Dozens of Jews from Alma Ata and the villages around it came. News of the ohel had gotten around and they had come to see it.

We began talking with them and many of them said that they visited the grave at least once a week or once a month. Many told of the sanctity of the site and about open miracles that had happened to them and their families over the years, after they had asked the tzaddik to plead for mercy on their behalf.



The tractor bringing the gravestone

## GIVING THE KEY TO THE REBBE

We kept the first key to the gravesite for the Rebbe. After Rosh HaShana, which we spent in Moscow, we flew to New York to the Rebbe. On 6 Tishrei, the yahrtzait of Rebbetzin Chana, wife of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, before the davening, we gave Rabbi Leibel Groner a report and the key. We also gave him some s'farim and manuscripts we had taken from Russia, as well as a bottle of mashke from the farbrengens there, with which the Jews of Russia wished the Rebbe brachos.

That day the Rebbe came down to daven very late, nearly 10:40. Since we had an afternoon flight, we rushed, and as soon as davening was over we stood near the elevator to receive the Rebbe's bracha for our trip to Eretz Yisroel.

After receiving the Rebbe's bracha, we ran to our rooms in order to pack so we could make our plane. Suddenly, the phone rang. It was Chanina Sperlin, who said Rabbi Groner was looking for us and it was urgent. We told him we were on our way to catch a flight but he said we had to come to the office.

We went to 770 and met R' Groner in the Lower Gan Eden. He had given the Rebbe what we had submitted, but the Rebbe refused to take it from him and said, "If they are still here, they should come and give it to me themselves."

As we stood there in the Lower Gan Eden, we heard the buzzer of the Rebbe's door. It was a signal to the

*Suddenly, the phone rang. It was Chanina Sperlin, who said Rabbi Groner was looking for us and it was urgent. We told him we were on our way to catch a flight but he said we had to come to the office.*

secretary. He opened the door and told the Rebbe they would bring what the Rebbe had asked for. After a few seconds, someone came with lekach (honey cake) and the secretary brought the lekach into the room.

Then the secretary told us to enter the Rebbe's room. This was completely unexpected, since the practice of personal audiences had been discontinued. We tremblingly entered Upper Gan Eden. The Rebbe stood behind the bed that was in the middle of the room, which had a pile of s'farim on it. The Rebbe was wearing a tallis without t'fillin.

The Rebbe waited until the secretary left and then I placed the report, manuscripts, and mashke on the bed. Then Avi gave me the key and I gave it to the Rebbe and said this is

the key to the holy gravesite in Alma Ata.

The Rebbe examined the key chain where I had written a note that said it was the key to the ohel in Alma Ata and asked, "What's this?"

I said, "This is the key to the ohel in Alma Ata."

Then the Rebbe looked upwards and said with great emotion, "This is the key to the ohel."

Then the Rebbe blessed us and said:

**Fortunate is your lot, great is your reward, great is your merit, for arousing the Jews of Russia and working with them and working on the ohalim of the Rebbeim, tzaddikim, k'doshim. May we not need to come to such things; may there be, rather, "arise and sing those who dwell in the dust."**

*Throughout the years, since the passing of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, the Rebbe took a great interest in his father's grave and was concerned about its care. The Rebbe sent money over the years towards protecting the area and precise instructions for its care.*

*This article deals only with the final stage of the building of the ohel at the gravesite, which was done by Rabbi Dovid Nachshon and Avi Taub, in the course of their work in building ohalim for all the Rebbeim's graves in Russia.*



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