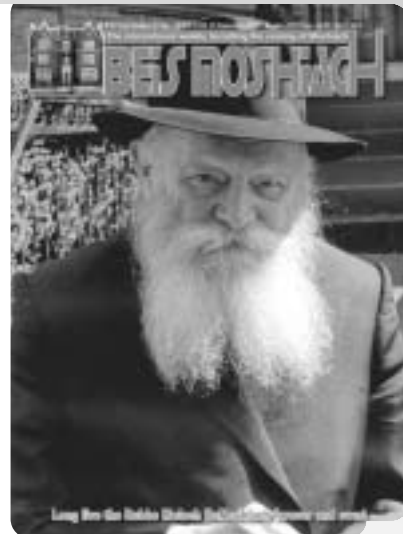


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IF EXILE IS NO GOOD, WHO NEEDS IT?

LIKKUTEI SICHOS VOL. 24, PG. 167-176
TRANSLATED BY BORUCH MERKUR



1. The commentaries on the Torah explain that the matters of the opposite of blessing in the “Rebuke” in our portion [i.e., this week’s Torah reading, Parshas Savo] are not only rebukes and warnings, which would come “if you do not listen to the voice of G-d your L-rd,” rather, they are prophetic statements which have been fulfilled. As the Abarbanel puts it: “It is appropriate to know that the curses mentioned in this portion are not intended to be threatening and to overwhelm, to frighten the hearts of men; they come, rather, in a spirit of G-dly holiness, relating what will be in their end. Indeed, they have all been fulfilled, etc.”

The verses of the portion of the Rebuke speak in general about the punishment of exile: “G-d will disperse you among the nations, etc.” The commentaries explain in detail how all matters of the opposite of blessing have been fulfilled after the destruction of the Second Temple (the Forth Exile), or even after the destruction of the First Temple (the Exile of Bavel and etc.).

It is understood that the intent and purpose of the afflictions of exile and etc. of the Rebuke is not for the sake, G-d forbid, of vengeance against Jews or simply for the sake of punishing them, rather, it is for their good. As Rashi puts it: “The curses and the afflictions sustain you and stand you up before Him.”

[However] we must understand: The Gemara says that “There are four things which the Holy One Blessed Be He regrets having created. These are they: The Exile, Kasdim [i.e., the Exile of Bavel – see Footnote 13 in the original], Yishmaelim [i.e., the Forth Exile – see Footnote 13], and the Evil Inclination.” From this it is implied that the Exile is not good for the Jews. For if the Exile would bring with it a benefit, which were it not for the Exile we would miss out on this benefit, why would it be “regretted”?

In the [Gemara] Yerushalmi we actually find that only

“three things” are cited; “Exile” is not mentioned.

However, it is very difficult to say that on account of the latter quandary the Yerushalmi omits reference to Exile – and this comprises a dispute of the [Talmud] Bavli against the Yerushalmi: whether or not the concept of exile contains a benefit – for the latter question applies not only to Exile, but also to the other three items: “Kasdim, Yishmaelim, and the Evil Inclination.”

Moreover, “**All** that which the Holy One Blessed Be He created in His world He created solely for His honor.” **All** that G-d created – including, “Kasdim, Yishmaelim, and the Evil Inclination” – is “for His honor,” and consequently, [it was all created] for a good purpose. Now, how is it possible to say also with respect to the three items (in the Yerushalmi) that the Holy One Blessed Be He regrets them (and in the terms of the Yerushalmi, “He regrets (*taha* [a stronger term, connoting being astonished]) that He created them”)?

2. An explanation of the above, prefaced by the principle that “We do not give credence to a possible [explanation that proposes a (Talmudic)] dispute” so long as there remains the possibility to explain [the subject at hand] in a manner that precludes the dispute (even if it is a stretch). Accordingly it is logical to say in our case that there is no dispute between the Bavli and Yerushalmi regarding whether the Holy One Blessed Be He also regrets the Exile.

Exile is not something that is manifest unto itself; it is, rather, a result of the Evil Inclination. That is, when one is seduced by the Evil Inclination and he succumbs to sins, this brings about Exile: “On account of our sins we were exiled.”

Thus, even according to the opinion of the Yerushalmi, since the Holy One Blessed Be He “regrets (*taha*)” [the creation of] the Evil Inclination, this includes within it the concept of Exile, which comes as a result of the Evil

Inclination.

And since [the approach and style of] the Yerushalmi is to discuss matters in a more **general** way than the Bavli, so it is in the case at hand: it does not enumerate the result (Exile); it mentions only the cause (the Evil Inclination).

Whereas the Bavli, which speaks in detail, enumerates the Evil Inclination unto itself and the Exile unto itself.

This is connected to the general distinction between the exegetical approach of the Talmud Bavli and the Talmud Yerushalmi:

With regard to numerous topics, the discussion of the Talmud Yerushalmi is concise and general. These topics are elaborated on in greater detail and length in the Talmud Bavli.

Simply speaking, the reason for this difference is that the study of Gemara in Bavel continued for an extended duration after the sealing of the Talmud Yerushalmi; the compilation and sealing of the Talmud Bavli occurred “approximately one hundred years after R. Yochanan had compiled the Gemara Yerushalmis.” [Footnote 20 in the original: Rambam in his preface to the seifer *HaYad*.]

*If the Exile were to
bring with it a
benefit, why would it
be “regretted”?*

Thus, the Talmud Bavli is considered to be a later text than the Talmud Yerushalmi, which is one of the reasons why legal rulings follow the Bavli not the Yerushalmi. That is, since the sages of the Talmud Bavli, knew what is stated in the Yerushalmi – whose sealing was prior, as mentioned above – being that they appear later chronologically, the

principle is that legal rulings follow the later authorities.

And the distinction between the prior and later authorities is expressed also in the fact that the later texts are more detailed and elucidated than the earlier texts. Just as we find regarding the distinction between the literary style of the Mishna (which is to “speak concisely and include many things.” [Footnote 23: Rambam in his preface to his elucidation of the Mishnayos...]) and the style of the Gemara of a later period, so too is the distinction in the Gemara itself between the (earlier) Talmud Yerushalmi and the (later) Talmud Bavli. It is for this reason that the Yerushalmi mentions only three items (citing them in general), whereas the Bavli enumerates 4 items (in detail).

(To be continued.)

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ניתן להשיג מחזורים בעברית-אנגלית

THE REBBE IS THE BOSS

BY RABBI LEVI YITZCHAK GINSBERG, MASHPIA, YESHIVAS TOMCHEI T'MIMIM - LUBAVITCH, KFAR CHABAD
TRANSLATED BY MICHOEL LEIB DOBRY

The truth is that if the tzaddikim of the generation would decide to bring the Redemption, particularly the leader of our generation who proclaimed “Immediately to the Redemption,” they surely could do so, as “the tzaddik decrees and G-d fulfills”! So why has this not happened? As long as it is G-d’s will that the Jewish people remain in exile, they listen to His voice. This is the greatest form of self-sacrifice, as we are talking about the most principal, inner, and spiritual need. Nevertheless, they refrain from decreeing due to the will of G-d! But after all is said and done, the question is asked: Ad masai?

The mashpia, R. Mendel Futerfas tells the following story:

The holy Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin conducted himself outwardly as a wealthy and grandiose man of nobility. Even the shoes he wore on his feet were plated with gold. However, very few people knew that underneath the covering of his royal footwear, he didn’t have any soles. The tzaddik literally walked on the ground, and every step caused him much pain and discomfort!

The tzaddik from Ruzhin also suffered much in his public life. The

Austrian government constantly pursued him, and their soldiers eventually incarcerated him in a prison together with hardened criminals, murderers, and thieves. He was tried as a rebel, until through G-d’s great kindnesses, he succeeded in escaping to another country, where the laws of extradition to Austria did not apply.

At one particular stage, Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin was imprisoned in a menacing fortress somewhere in Austria. The local governor received direct orders from the Austrian central government to imprison the tzaddik,

using the military and police forces at his disposal to carry out the command.

One day, the governor was out riding on his horse around the city, accompanied by several of his army commanders and soldiers. They passed by the river that encircled the city, when suddenly they saw Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin immersing in the river. This should have absolutely impossible, as according to all information available to the governor, the tzaddik should have been under lock and key in the local fortress prison...

The governor was furious. Apparently, he thought to himself, the chassidim bribed the prison guards, who then let the tzaddik go free and even let him immerse in the river. “Unbelievable! This is the level of military discipline in the army under my command? This is how the guards and police carry out my orders? I’ll show them a thing or two!”

Without a moment’s hesitation, he quickly turned his stallion galloping in the direction of the fortress prison to catch the guards in their act of misconduct, as their prisoner is roaming free as a bird, not locked up in his cell where he belongs.

With restrained anger, the governor burst into the fortress commander’s office. “This is how you carry out my orders? How dare you let the Jewish rabbi out to roam free throughout the town!”

The prison commander was shocked by the governor’s outburst. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.

The rabbi has been here in prison the whole time, under heavy guard without even the slightest possibility of escape. If His Excellency so wishes, he can go in and see for himself.”

“Indeed, I want to see him – right now!” roared the governor.

The prison commander got up and went with the governor and his entourage to the prison ward. They opened one iron gate after another, entering one room within the next, until they finally reached the cell where Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin was supposed to be. The prison commander swung the cell door open, and sure enough, there was the tzaddik, standing and drying himself off from the water where he had just immersed himself...

The governor’s eyes bulged in utter astonishment. “What’s going on here?” he blurted in undisguised bewilderment. “It’s absolutely impossible to enter or leave this place. Everything is closed off with high walls, iron gates, heavy locks, surrounded by guards at every corner. Yet, this rabbi leaves when he pleases and how he pleases, goes to immerse in the river, and then comes back here to dry off!”

This was a kiddush Hashem of immeasurable proportion. The non-Jewish governor saw with own eyes that Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin was truly a holy man of G-d. High walls and iron gates posed no barrier to him, and he is the *baal ha’bayis* over all that happens to him. The governor’s relationship with the tzaddik of Ruzhin changed completely. Though he didn’t release him from his imprisonment, the chassidim eventually succeeded in bribing the guards and smuggling over the Austrian border, as mentioned earlier.

Afterwards, the chassidim asked the tzaddik: Since we saw with our own eyes how the Rebbe is the *baal ha’bayis* over all that happens to him, as he left prison when he wanted and came back when he wanted, then why

did the Rebbe have to endure so much suffering?

“This is what we learn from the pasuk, ‘Although I walk through the valley in the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me,’ Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhin replied.

“For my part, ‘I fear no evil,’ I am not afraid ‘although I walk through the valley in the shadow of death,’ since all these things have no relevance to me. The only thing that does bother me and truly causes me pain and suffering is ‘for **You** are with me.’ In other words, G-d is together with me in the same ‘valley in the shadow of death,’ as this situation hides and conceals G-dliness, causing the opposite of G-d’s revelation in the world. This is what I fear, this is what pains me, and this is what bothers me, since my entire life and desire is with but one purpose in mind – to reveal G-d’s glory in the world.”

* * *

Chassidim recall that the great wedding celebration for the Alter Rebbe’s grandson and HaRav R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev’s granddaughter was extremely crowded because of the huge number of chassidim who came to see these two great tzaddikim. It even reached the point that the Alter Rebbe and R. Levi Yitzchak couldn’t get out of the room where they were waiting.

R. Levi Yitzchak turned to his *mechutan*, the Alter Rebbe, and said, “*Mechutan*, let’s pass through the wall and get out of here [and he didn’t mean, chassidim added, that they should **break through**, rather to pass through and leave the wall intact...].”

The Alter Rebbe’s response: “I have no desire to use *kuntzim* (tricks).”

* * *

In a sicha from Chaf Menachem Av 5710, the Rebbe MH”M shlita said, “**If anyone has doubts regarding the Rebbe [Rayatz] whether he is the *baal ha’bayis* over everything and can do anything and thus, no one can hide from him – this means that he is**

lacking in ‘Anochi’ and ‘Lo Yihye Lecha,’ i.e., the essential point of *emunah*!” In any event, the Rebbe says, he still must learn the Rebbe’s teachings (particularly, the D’var Malchus 5751-5752) and as a result, the Rebbe will “drag” even him out of the mire and filth of his current spiritual state.

The Rebbe states clearly (Shabbos Parshas Pinchas 5744): “The truth is that if the tzaddikim of the generation would decide to bring the Redemption, particularly the leader of our generation who proclaimed ‘Immediately to the Redemption,’ they surely could do so, as ‘the tzaddik decrees and G-d fulfills!’ So why has this not happened? As long as it is G-d’s will that the Jewish people remain in exile, they listen to His voice. This is the greatest form of self-sacrifice, as we are talking about the most principal, inner, and spiritual need. Nevertheless, they refrain from decreeing due to the will of G-d! But after all is said and done, the question is asked: Ad masai?”

In his sicha from the 15th of Iyar, 5751, the Rebbe says, “You have no greater self-sacrifice than when a Jew ‘lets’ G-d leave him in Galus! A Jew has the ability to **mix up the whole seider hishtalshlus** in order to prevent the only son of G-d Alm-ghty Himself, i.e., each and every Jew, from remaining in exile!

“Is it possible – the Jew can claim – that G-d would leave him in exile, particularly such a long exile – one thousand years, close to two thousand years, and a **very harsh exile**... This is the greatest possible virtue for Jews to have, even the greatest self-sacrifice – that they don’t interfere with G-d’s authority, even though as a result, they **lose out** *r”l* on all they could have attained during more than one thousand nine hundred years in Galus!”

We see from the previous story how the tzaddik is handed over completely (or so it seems) to evil

people, tormented and afflicted behind prison walls, and forced (or so it seems) to bribe the guards in order to escape with his life. Yet, whenever he so desired, he could pass through all the high walls, and all the steel and iron barriers were to no avail. The tzaddik can do – and he does – what he wants and how he wants. However, due to some deep and inner G-dly purpose, he acts with total self-sacrifice, doesn't use "kuntzim," and doesn't mix up the whole *seider hishtalshlus*.

The Rebbe said in a sicha from Shabbos Parshas Shmini 5710 (edited): **"Thus, it is really irrelevant to raise questions in connection with my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, on the spiritual order of below to above and above to below. It is known that the whole concept of the Rebbeim is a preparation for the coming of Moshiach, when the glory of G-d will be revealed and all flesh will see, i.e., G-dliness will be seen with the naked eye. The preparation for this is when the all-powerful and inexplicable Atzmus is expressed, as it were, through a physical body and appears for all flesh to see, answering each person face-to-face. He speaks in 'jargon' familiar to most, and even sometimes mixes in a word of English or Russian and the like.**

If so, why does the Rebbe "descend" and get into all these natural confrontations, including pain and suffering and other things that are against the revealed will of G-d, such as the terrible *chillul Hashem* of expelling thousands of Jews from their homes in Eretz Yisroel, etc.?

The Rebbe says (*Sichos Kodesh* 5710, new edition, pg. 45): **The Rebbe [Rayatz] was even accustomed to make a mark in his siddur each night after counting *S'firas HaOmer*, even though there was obviously no need to look for a mnemonic, something relevant in connection with simple people, not the Rebbe.**

Then why did the Rebbe do this?

The Rebbe explains (*ibid.*, p. 58) that this is surely not a case of descent, rather an aspect of spiritual *avoda*. From his standpoint, the Rebbe is higher than all else, as he is totally connected to G-dliness, to the point that his entire *metzius* is G-dliness. However, due to some inner G-dly purpose, he also wishes to act within the worldly limitations of natural order, instilling this inner and essential G-dly matter into them. As a result, he sacrifices everything, acting as if he is just a simple Jew, in order for things to be absorbed into the lowest levels of the world's natural order.

Therefore, it is quite clear and

*As a result, he
sacrifices everything,
acting as if he is just a
simple Jew, in order
for things to be
absorbed into the
lowest levels of the
world's natural order.*

obvious that eventually "*der Rebbe vet zicher oisfirn*" – the Rebbe will surely complete and fulfill all that he desires in the best and most revealed manner possible for all to see.

By the same token, everyone understands that is totally irrelevant to suggest that G-d cannot *ch"v ch"v* carry out His will and desire due to various reasons, despite the fact that it says in numerous sources that "in all their troubles, He has troubles," and that the Sh'china is pained and tormented in Exile, saying, "Heavy is My head, heavy is My arm," etc. In any event, it is clear to any simple Jew who believes in G-d that He is the *baal ha'bayis* over what happens at all times. If He so

wishes, He can change and even reverse the whole situation at any moment, and the fact that He does not do so is not because He is *ch"v* unable, rather due to some deep G-dly purpose. Similarly, we find with tzaddikim – even though the tzaddik himself says, "Am I in place of G-d?"

If this applies in the case of a regular tzaddik, it applies all the more when we're talking about a Rebbe and a nasi, and especially Melech HaMoshiach himself, where physical and bodily limitations have no relevance, rather the will and desire that even the physical body and the material world should specifically play a part in all this.

Therefore, as the Rebbe says in his sicha from Shabbos Parshas Chayei Sara 5752, Melech HaMoshiach specifically must be flesh and blood in a physical body, in a world that opposes him and fights against him. At the beginning, it even appears that things are going completely against his will and desire. No one pays any attention – and they even *r"l* give away parts of Eretz Yisroel to our worst enemies, in direct contradiction to the teachings and instructions of Melech HaMoshiach.

Nevertheless, it is clear beyond even the slightest doubt that everything is being conducted only with the permission and consent of the "all-powerful *baal bayis* over everything," and only because of some inner G-dly purpose, there is a temporary state of hiding, concealment, and delays.

We believe this with complete faith, living with it in every aspect of our daily lives, and this further brings and reveals the fact that we will see very soon with our own eyes the absolute victory of the Rebbe MH"M, in the Third Beis HaMikdash in the Holy of Holies, with the true and complete Redemption, immediately, *mamash*, NOW!

Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu v'Rabbeinu melech HaMoshiach l'olam va'ed!

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Boruch Hashem, Elul 5765

Mivtza: HELPING THE NEEDY

To every member of the Lubavitcher community:

During this month of preparation for Rosh Hashonoh, the "head" of the New Year, we fondly recall our Rebbe's words that this is an especially auspicious time for strengthening our deep bond of Hiskashrus with the "Rosh Bnei Yisroel," the "head" of the Jewish people and leader of the generation.

Our Rebbeim explain that **an important way to strengthen Hiskashrus is by participating in the Rebbe's activities and concerns, consequently, by supporting an organization that brings together a number of these activities, the Hiskashrus is greater and stronger.** Such an organization is Kupas Rabbeinu, which seeks to continue many of the Rebbe's activities and concerns without change from the way he would conduct them himself.

Every year at this time, the Rebbe would call upon us to contribute generously to help needy families with their extra expenses for the coming month's many Yomim Tovim. This also coincides with the special emphasis during this month of giving extra Tzedokah, (indicated in the Hebrew letters of the word "Elul," as explained in many Sichos etc.), as a vital way of preparing ourselves for the new year and arousing Divine mercy upon us.

We therefore appeal to every individual man and woman to contribute generously to Kupas Rabbeinu, enabling us to fulfill the Rebbe's desire to help all those who anxiously await our help. The greater your contribution, the more we can accomplish.

Your generous contribution to Kupas Rabbeinu will be the appropriate vessel for receiving the abundant blessings of the Rebbe, who is its Nasi, that you may be blessed with a Ksiva Vachasima Tova for a good and sweet year, materially and spiritually. May it help to bring the full revelation of Moshiach - our Rebbe - immediately now!

Wishing a Ksiva Vachasima Tova for a good and sweet year,

In the name of Vaad Kupas Rabbeinu

Rabbi Sholom Mendel Simpson

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Groner

P.S. Of course, you may send to Kupas Rabbeinu all contributions that you would send to the Rebbe; all will be devoted to the activities to which the Rebbe would devote them.

You may also send Maimad, **Keren-Hashono** (this coming year 5766 - 354 days), Vov Tishrei, Yud Gimmel Tishrei Magbis etc. to Kupas Rabbeinu.

P.S. Please send all correspondence only to the following address.

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MY FIRST DAY IN TOMCHEI T'MIMIM

BY SHNEUR ZALMAN BERGER

*T'mimim describe their first day in Tomchei T'mimim in Lubavitch, Morocco, and Kfar Chabad. * Presented for 15 Elul, 108 years since the founding of Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim. * Part 2 of 2*

"SHEDDING TEARS AND PLEADING, AND SOME OF THEM WERE ACCEPTED INTO THE YESHIVA"

The Chassid Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson, a"h, vividly describes the tension felt by fathers and sons who came to Lubavitch and wanted to be accepted into Tomchei T'mimim:

On Wednesday afternoon, the second day of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5668 (1907), my father and I arrived in Lubavitch. We stayed with our relative, the shochet R' Shlomo Chaim Kutin.

On Thursday, we went to the office. It was evening time, when the Rebbe Rashab held his yechidus'n. My father and I went in to the holy chamber of the Rebbe Rashab. This was the first time in my life that I was seeing the Lubavitcher Rebbe; it was the second day of the month of Marcheshvan. Regarding my application, the Rebbe said to speak to the hanhala.

That Shabbos, Parshas Noach – I think it was after Kabbalas Shabbos – the Rebbe Rayatz came to the beis midrash in his Shabbos clothes and a shtraimel. The bachurim were singing niggunim. Among those singing, I remember Rabbi Shaul Dov Zislin, who was a bachur at the time. Among the niggunim that I remember, they sang Yedid Nefesh, as it is known in Lubavitch.

Suddenly there was silence. The chassidim melted to the sides, creating a broad path, and the Rebbe Rashab entered and said a maamer. I don't remember the beginning of the maamer, or what it was about. It was the first time in my life that I witnessed such a wondrous sight and I am left with only an impression of the sight. I wasn't capable of listening to and following the maamer. When the Rebbe finished the maamer, he went to another room to rest.

On Friday we went to the mashgiach, R' Yechezkel Himmelstein, and he sent me to Rabbi Yechiel

Komisar to be tested. The test took place on Motzaei Shabbos. They gave me an *amud* of Gemara to learn by myself, and on Monday, or Tuesday, they said I was accepted into the yeshiva. I was assigned to R' Leib Babin's class.

That period of time (a week or two) in which talmidim were accepted made a strong impression on me. Many talmidim came with their fathers and many came alone. The fathers spoke to one another and each one was nervous about whether his son would be accepted. The yeshiva's reputation was excellent and many talmidim applied, but only top students were accepted, and those who were not accepted did not readily leave Lubavitch. They knocked on the office door, sought those who could help them, went to the Rebbe Rayatz, who was the menahel of the yeshiva, ran to Rebbetzin Rivka, cried and pleaded, and some of them were successful in having their requests heard, and they were accepted into the yeshiva.

* * *

Rabbi Jacobson grew up to be a prominent figure in Chabad. He ran yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Homil, and, after emigrating to the U.S., was one of the founders of Agudas HaT'mimim. He ran Agudas Chassidei Chabad, and founded Achei T'mimim



and Achos T'mimim. He also founded and ran Bais Rivka, and served as mashpia in yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in New York.

“I TRAVELED 780 KILOMETERS UNTIL I GOT TO YESHIVAS OHOLEI YOSEF YITZCHOK IN MAKNES”

Rabbi Dovid Asyag describes his first day in the Chabad yeshiva in Morocco, where he learned despite the difficult material conditions:

As a child, I learned, as did all my Jewish friends, in the Jewish school in Beni-Melal in Morocco. Although only Jews attended this school, the Jewish



Rabbi Dovid Assaig

lessons consisted solely of a few hours a week of Tanach. In order to fill in what was lacking, we learned Midrash, Halacha, and Ivrit in the evenings with local rabbis. No wonder that most boys my age finished the Jewish school without even a basic knowledge of Judaism.

With Hashem's kindness, I ended up in the Chabad yeshiva. I was ten years old at the time. At the end of the school year, I came home with my report card. My marks weren't bad, but they weren't particularly good either. My father looked at my report card and was upset.

“These marks are not fitting for one of your abilities. You are a bright student and this is an embarrassment. Even your younger brother got better marks than these.”

I took this to heart and during the summer vacation decided to try and learn somewhere else in the hopes that I would be successful in my studies.

“Father,” I said, “you see that I didn't do well at the school in Beni-Melal. I heard from friends that in Maknes there is a Chabad yeshiva where younger and older students study. I would like you to send me there during this vacation time. If I do well, fine; if not, I will return home.”

Our parting was very emotional. I parted in tears from my brothers and

sisters, my parents and my friends. I traveled a long distance, 780 kilometers, until I arrived at the Oholei Yosef Yitzchok yeshiva in Maknes, which was run by the shliach, Rabbi Michoel Lipsker a”h. The rosh yeshiva at that time was R' Yitzchok Sebbag.

When Rav Lipsker came to Maknes, the local Jews did not know how to relate to him. He had different customs, a different nusach ha'tfilla, a different sort of knot in his t'fillin, etc. Since Rav Lipsker wanted to start a yeshiva, the leaders of the community agreed on condition that the rosh yeshiva would be a local Torah scholar who would ensure that Torah was being studied properly there.

After some time, the community came to appreciate Rabbi Lipsker, of course, and everyone loved and admired him.

The meals and sleeping conditions weren't good. Being far away and feeling homesick were also a big challenge, and so, at the end of the summer vacation, when I went home, my father was surprised to hear that I wanted to go back to yeshiva and learn.

My father tried to dissuade me from going so far away, but when he saw how I truly wanted to learn there, he agreed to send me. I went back to yeshiva, and, this time, I became a regular talmid of yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim Chabad.

As I said, food was a problem. There were about 180 talmidim learning in six or seven classes. The food was cheap and simple and there weren't enough places for sleeping. I slept with seventy bachurim in a large, crowded room. We all slept on straw mattresses. At first, getting up in the morning with a backache was a very difficult thing to do. During the cold winter nights, we suffered from the freezing cold that penetrated the hall, since the heating system didn't work properly.

Being so far away from home was also a challenge, but my parents had a lot of nachas and were proud of their son who learned in the Chabad yeshiva in Maknes at such a young age.

* * *

Like hundreds of other boys who learned in Chabad yeshivos in Morocco – later to become men who would disseminated Torah – Rabbi Asyag eventually returned to his hometown of Beni-Melal where he directed and taught talmidim. Today he serves as rav of a neighborhood in Migdal HaEmek.

“THE REBBE PERSONALLY SAW TO IT THAT I GO TO TOMCHEI T’MIMIM”

It was Elul 5727 (1967), the beginning of the new school year. Three outstanding talmidim left yeshivas Kol Torah in Yerushalayim to learn in the yeshiva in Kfar Chabad. This wasn't just an ordinary switching from one yeshiva to another, but a move into a new world, ideologically and behaviorally – from the Litvish world into the Chassidic world.

The three of them now hold important positions in Chabad as shluchim and mashpiim. One of them is Rabbi Menachem Wolpo, a rav and shliach in Netanya.

* * *

Although I am descended from Chassidim – the Chassid, Rabbi Eziel Zelig Slonim, was my grandfather – and descended from the Mittlerer Rebbe, I was sent to an excellent Litvishe yeshiva, Kol Torah, where I learned with great diligence. The rosh yeshiva was Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z”l. In Kol Torah, I absorbed the Litvishe, Musar atmosphere.

At the end of Tishrei 5723, my father, Rabbi Yitzchok Wolpo, had a yechidus with the Rebbe, and the Rebbe spoke to him about educating his children in the ways of Chassidus.

This topic came up time and again on subsequent visits to 770.

Since I had a prior connection to Chabad, when I heard that there was a secret Tanya shiur taking place with Rabbi Yosef Segal, I joined, even though it did not have the approval of the hanhala.

Other talmidim joined the shiur and the hanhala found out about it. The mashgiach began trying to convince us to drop Chassidus, arguing that it interfered with our learning. When the pressure intensified, my grandfather, Rabbi Slonim, decided to get involved. He made a special trip to the yeshiva and spoke with the rosh yeshiva. In the end, Rabbi Auerbach was convinced

The mashgiach began trying to convince us to drop Chassidus, arguing that it interfered with our learning.

that there was nothing wrong with the talmidim learning Tanya. In those years, I was considered an outstanding talmid and won prizes for excellence in learning, so they couldn't claim that the Tanya shiur was interfering with my learning.

In 5726, my brother, R' Sholom Ber, had a yechidus with the Rebbe. The Rebbe inquired about me, and my brother said I was learning in Kol Torah. The Rebbe asked him whether he wrote me about the farbrengens. When he said he didn't, the Rebbe told him to start writing me highlights of the farbrengens. The Rebbe added that with Hashem's help I would end up in Chabad.

With time, I made many other small steps towards Chabad. When I began wearing my tzitzis out, this was an important step for me in my drawing closer to Chabad. I secretly began attending the farbrengens of Rabbi Moshe Weber a”h and Rabbi Shmuel Elozor Halperin. At some point, I even dared to stand at the Chabad t'fillin stand at the Kosel and put t'fillin on people.

As time went on, the Chassidic influence closed in on me from all sides. At some point, I realized that I had to learn Chassidus and begin living as a Chassid. That's when I thought of transferring to learn in Chabad.

My parents weren't happy with this at first. I was an outstanding talmid in Kol Torah and they were afraid that if I transferred to a Chassidic yeshiva I would lose a lot of Torah prestige. But in Elul of 5727 three of us left Kol Torah for Kfar Chabad.

I wrote to the Rebbe about this, and, soon thereafter, received this reply from the Rebbe:

The Avreich, Menachem Mendel Chaim, sh'yichyeh,

Shalom u'v'racha,

I received your letter in which you request a bracha – i.e., the pidyon nefesh dated 25 Cheshvan. It will be read at the gravesite of the Rebbe, my father-in-law, at an auspicious time.

Since we are guaranteed that if one toils one will find, you should learn Nigleh and Chassidus diligently, i.e., in a way that the Torah refers to as yegia. Learning leads to action – that is, to the punctilious fulfillment of mitzvos – so that the guarantee of “and you will find” will be fulfilled.

With blessings for success,

The changes were drastic. I remember how the atmosphere attracted my attention. Hundreds of bachurim learned in Kol Torah and so you always heard a tremendous noise



Rabbi Menachem Volpe by the Rebbe

of people learning. The same was true for the davening. The bachurim shuckled in concentration and they all shouted the Shma Yisroel.

But in Tomchei T'mimim I felt a different atmosphere during the davening – an atmosphere of holiness, somber silence. It was without a lot of noise, but with a lot of inner avoda – avoda from the essence of the soul. I was very pleased with this.

When I arrived at Tomchei T'mimim directly from Kol Torah, I sported a small *chup* [longish hair in front]. I soon encountered a group of bachurim who made sure to explain to me that I needed to get a Chassidische haircut. Here's what happened:

One morning I woke up and saw

some locks of hair on my pillow. I didn't pay much attention to it, but the same thing happened the next morning. That's when I realized that a bit of my hair had been cut by someone in the middle of the night.

I soon decided to get a proper haircut. I went to one of the T'mimim who did haircutting, and he found it hard to believe that I had just entered the yeshiva and already agreed to cut my chup.

I slowly digested the significance of my switch to Tomchei T'mimim. As time went on, I began seeing the difference between myself and my friends from my former world, not only in how we learned, davened, and our inner avodas Hashem, but also in

our influencing the outside world. The latter point was especially underscored on Fridays when I put t'fillin on people on the streets of Tel Aviv while my former friends went to the beach.

It was with a special feeling, some months later, that I began giving an underground Chassidus class of my own to talmidim in a Litvishe yeshiva. This time I was on the other side of the desk.

* * *

Rabbi Menachem Wolpo is a shliach in Netanya, rav of the Kiryat Nordau neighborhood, and a prominent Lubavitcher in Eretz Yisroel.

(The stories were compiled from Zichron LBnei Yisroel, Zichronosai, Anashim Chassidim Hayu, and issues of Beis Moshiaich)

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‘WE WOULD HAVE DIED OF HUNGER BECAUSE OF HIS PIETY’

BY RABBI SCHNEUR ZALMAN CHANIN

*It's hard to believe that so many adventures, materially and spiritually, happened to one Chassid, R' Shmuel Nimotin, R' Chaikel's father-in-law. * the following installment tells us of his rich life until the Communist Revolution.*

CHAPTER 7

A SHIDDUCH FROM ON HIGH

My grandfather, R' Shmuel (may Hashem avenge his blood) was born in 5643 (1883) and was named for the Rebbe Maharash. Indeed, his own life, like that of the Rebbe Maharash, was replete with majesty and mesirus nefesh. He was one of the first talmidim in Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim, where he learned until 5663 (1903), when he became engaged.

When R' Shmuel became of age for a shidduch, his father, the Chassid R' Yehoshua went to Lubavitch and had a yechidus, and the Rebbe Rashab

suggested Ita Mera Feitel, a family descended from Rashi, for R' Shmuel.

R' Yehoshua was a famous rav in Beshenkowitz. His salary, however, for his services as rav, consisted of only three kopeks a week. He also had a fur coat and hat that the townspeople had given him as a gift when he became their rav. He used that coat his entire life. My father told me that in his ninetieth year he was still wearing that coat.

With a salary like that, my mother's grandfather could not afford to pay for a wedding for his son or to help set him up in life. Therefore, he wanted for his son a fine girl who came from a wealthy family.

When R' Yehoshua heard the Rebbe's suggestion of a girl from a poor family which did not have the wherewithal to pay for the wedding and to set up the young couple, he rejected the idea out of hand.

After some months, my great-grandfather went back to Lubavitch and had another yechidus. In the middle of the yechidus the Rebbe called for the gabbai and asked him to call for R' Shmuel. In R' Shmuel's presence the Rebbe repeated his suggestion of the shidduch.

Even then, R' Yehoshua did not agree, and he began to haggle with the Rebbe. My grandfather, R' Shmuel, was shocked by his father's reaction and discreetly began pulling on his father's sleeve in order to hint to him to stop haggling and refusing the Rebbe. Finally, having no choice, his father agreed to the shidduch and the couple married.

Years later at a farbrengen, when my grandfather had taken a lot of mashke, he complained to his father, "How could you argue with the Rebbe?! How did you have the courage to refuse a suggestion the Rebbe made?"

I consulted with the Rebbe about every shidduch idea that came up and I sought his bracha and haskama, and you merited that the Rebbe himself made the shidduch – how did you dare refuse him?”

His father, R' Yehoshua answered, “I played with the Rebbe when he was a child. I held the Rebbe in my hands when he was a baby.” R' Yehoshua was a shadar of the Rebbe Maharash and was fifteen years older than the Rebbe Rashab, which apparently was the reason for his lack of bittul to the Rebbe.

STORY ABOUT A BOOK

My father told me that R' Yehoshua had a handwritten book from the Tzemach Tzedek that he received as a gift from one of the sons of the Tzemach Tzedek. When the Rebbe Rashab heard about this, he asked R' Yehoshua for the book. This book was very precious to R' Yehoshua and he did not want to part with it and so he avoided fulfilling this request. However, whenever he went to Lubavitch the Rebbe would ask him for the book.

At one of these yechiduyos, when R' Yehoshua spoke with the Rebbe in matters of Chassidus, the Rebbe learned that he had **two** handwritten

“That’s what your father-in-law was like. He was a real yerei Shamayim. He was ready to lose everything because of some feeling that maybe the knife wasn’t perfectly smooth. If not for me, we would have died of hunger because of his piety.”

books, and not just one as he had thought until then. The Rebbe began to ask, even plead with him, “Please R' Yehoshua, give me grandfather’s [the Tzemach Tzedek’s] Chassidus books.

R' Yehoshua finally acceded to the Rebbe’s request and the next time he went to Lubavitch, he told the Rebbe he had brought one book. Hearing

this, the Rebbe got up and went to the other room. He put on his sirtuk and Shabbos shtraimel and then went back to the yechidus room to take the Chassidus book written by the Tzemach Tzedek.

R' Yehoshua described the Rebbe Rashab as a handsome man but on this occasion, he said the Rebbe looked like an angel of G-d. His holy countenance lit up and expressed his satisfaction, joy, and pleasure, which R' Yehoshua had never seen before.

At the time, R' Yehoshua decided to go back home in order to get the other book he had. He said it was worthwhile losing the book in order to see the glow of the Divine presence, which seemed to be drawn from the light of the Six Days of Creation that was hidden away for tzaddikim.

R' Yehoshua knew the contents of all the books of Chassidus that he owned and he would review two maamarim every Shabbos, one before Kabbalas Shabbos and one after Mincha during the third Shabbos meal. (R' Shlomo Matusof, who was born in Vitebsk, told me that he still remembers how his father would take him as a child to hear the maamer that R' Yehoshua would review at the third Shabbos meal.)

After the passing of the Tzemach Tzedek, R' Yehoshua joined the delegation of Chassidim that went from son to son to see what each of them was like, and finally chose the youngest of the Tzemach Tzedek’s sons, the Rebbe Maharash, as the leader of Chabad Chassidim.

(There is another version that R' Yehoshua’s father was involved in selecting the Rebbe Maharash as Nasi after the passing of his father, the Tzemach Tzedek. But the version we heard from him was like the first version.)

THE CHASSIDIC RESTAURANT

After his wedding my grandfather,



R' Shmuel settled in Dvinsk, where his wife's parents lived and the city where the Rogatchover Gaon was a rav. After a number of years, roughly at the end of the 1900's, the Rebbe Rashab asked him to move to Petersburg, and said:

"Shmuel, you should move to Petersburg to serve there as shochet for the Jews of the city. You should also open a restaurant for the Jews who come to the capitol city, and especially for the Chassidim, so they have kosher food that they don't have to worry about. Your home should be open to all and the main thing is not to forget Torah study and establishing fixed times to learn Torah."

In those days, Petersburg was a city where Jews could not reside, certainly not a religious Jew, not to mention a religious Jew who wanted to be a shochet. As was expected, he was not given permission to live there. So the Rebbe advised him to present a request to live in Petersburg as a merchant who dealt in manufacturing sacks.

R' Shmuel immediately got permission to live in Petersburg, where he lived until his arrest in 5697 (1937).

And this is how my grandfather was sent by the Rebbe Rashab on holy shlichus to Petersburg (which was called Leningrad under the communists). He spent most of his day on learning and avoda, and only stopped learning when he had to shecht chickens. His wife ran the restaurant and the "business" was run in a manner that "whoever is in need should come and eat..."

R' Shmuel refused to distinguish between those who could afford to pay for a meal and those who could not. Every Jew who came in washed his hands and sat down to eat. Whoever could pay, paid. Whoever could not pay was given credit "until things got better."

R' Shmuel and his wife had the great privilege, which entailed mesirus

nefesh, that when the Rebbe Rashab and his son (later the Rebbe Rayatz) came to Petersburg, although they stayed at an expensive hotel frequented by ministers and wealthy men, they ate only what was brought to them from R' Shmuel's wife's restaurant.

My maternal grandfather's home was open to all, not only for supplying the hungry with food but also as a place to stay. The Chassid, R' Shmuel Michel Treinen lived with them in the final years of his life.

R' Yehoshua described the Rebbe Rashab as a handsome man but on this occasion, he said the Rebbe looked like an angel of G-d. His holy countenance lit up and expressed his satisfaction, joy, and pleasure, which R' Yehoshua had never seen before.

CHILDREN, CONTINUE MAKING NOISE

The Chassid R' Shmuel Michel Treinen was very wealthy under the czar and his children fled in the middle of the communist revolution for France. After the revolution, when the communists nationalized everybody's property, they took his factories and businesses away from him and he was left poverty-stricken. It was only thanks to R' Shmuel Nimotin that he managed to save a large quantity of gold, which he hid in

my grandparents' house.

He was old, broken, and alone, and he asked my grandfather for a corner of the house for him to rest his head. Thus, he lived with them until the end of his life.

When the Rebbe Rayatz would travel to Petersburg for matters relevant to the Jewish community at large, at first as his father's emissary and then as the acting menahel of Tomchei T'mimim and as Nasi, he would go to my grandparents to visit R' Shmuel Michel. He would say, "I came to visit my grandfather's Chassid."

My mother said that one time, when the Rebbe Rayatz visited R' Shmuel Michel, the children took all the chairs in the house and lined them up and played "train." Some children took pots and banged on them to indicate that the train was leaving. The children had a wonderful time and the noise increased by the minute.

R' Shmuel Michel was an old man and he couldn't bear the racket. He yelled at the children to stop the noise, but the children, being typical children, continued to play noisily. When the Rebbe visited him, R' Shmuel Michel couldn't concentrate and he got up, went over to the children, and said angrily, "You *shkatzim!* Calm down! The Rebbe is here, have some respect!"

When the Rebbe heard this, he said to R' Shmuel Michel, "You are my grandfather's Chassid and it is not befitting for you to call Jewish children, "*shkatzim.*" The Rebbe took candies out of his pocket for each child and said in Yiddish mixed with Russian, "Children, don't pay any mind. Continue to make noise, continue to bang, and continue to play."

"I REMEMBER THE KINDNESS OF YOUR YOUTH"

The restaurant became famous. The Rebbeim and famous Chassidim

enjoyed it when they visited Leningrad. Aside from the Rebbe Rashab and the Rebbe Rayatz, the Rebbe MH" M also ate there (and slept there for half a year) when he stayed in Leningrad in the years 5685-7 (1925-1927).

The Chassid, R' Boruch Shneur, the Rebbe's grandfather, lived and ate with them throughout his stay in Leningrad. Likewise, his son, the gaon and mekubal, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn, the Rebbe's father, lived in their house when he visited Leningrad.

Among the Chassidim who benefited from the restaurant were mostly well-to-do people, like the

Chassid R' Monye Monesohn who had been a Chassid of the Tzemach Tzedek, the Chassid R' Shmuel Gurary, and the Chassid R' Shmuel Michel Treiten. When they had appointments with ministers and distinguished people such as those who ran banks and the like, they met them at a meal at my grandparents' restaurant.

The Chassid R' Michael Dvorkin, the Chassid and Mekubal Rabbi Zalman Schneersohn of Lodz, and the Chassid R' Falik Gurary were also people who frequented their home. Whenever the Chassid Rabbi Mordechai Dubin went to the capitol for lobbying purposes, for personal reasons, or to visit the Rebbe, he would stay at my grandparents' home.

They all knew that the restaurant was run by a genuine Chassid, a G-d-fearing person who was particular about his mitzva observance. They also knew that the Rebbeim ate there and certainly all the food was of high standards of kashrus. The only person who lived in my grandfather's house but did not eat there was the Chassid, R' Yitzchok Horowitz, known as R' Itche der Masmid.

When the Rebbe Rayatz arrived in Leningrad to live, he would be brought food from my grandmother every day. Since my mother was the oldest of the daughters, she had the z'chus of bringing the food to the Rebbe's house. My mother told me that the Rebbe's household was run like royalty, and when she brought the food, the Rebbe's daughters would open the door but they never took the food themselves. They would tell her, "The man will soon come to take the package from you."

When we arrived in the U.S. after many years of not seeing them, my mother met Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, and the Rebbetzin reminded her how she still remembered how my mother would bring them food in Leningrad.

On another occasion, the Rebbe told her in yechidus that he remembered her from the time he stayed in their house in Leningrad as one of three little girls in her father's house.

KOSHER WITH THE ROGATCHOVER'S HASHGACHA

Around the year 5674 or 5675 (1914 or 15) there was a meeting of financiers, directors of banks and government ministers, in Petersburg, the capitol of Russia. Apparently R' Shmuel Gurary was one of the organizers of the event because he had to make a large feast. Naturally, he wanted it to be kosher.

R' Shmuel arranged for the meal to be made by my grandmother and he



asked for pigeons for the main course. After much effort, they obtained enough birds, and my grandfather carefully shechted them with his usual kavanos.

Preparations for the event were underway when my grandfather suddenly entered the kitchen, took the pot with the birds, and ran out. My grandmother chased after him, demanding an explanation. My grandfather answered that there was a shaila because he had just checked his knife and he felt that perhaps it wasn't quite perfect. If it wasn't perfect that would mean the birds were not kosher and had to be thrown out.

My grandmother exclaimed, "Since when did you become a posek? Because of your apprehensions and hiddurei hiddurim it all becomes treif?! As far as I know, there are laws when a great loss is involved, and we will have such a tremendous loss that we will never be able to pay back.

"Do you know what it means that the meal won't be ready on time? They'll stone us! Think about what we will cause our friend, R' Shmuel Gurary when he finds out that he cannot host the meal for all those important people! I don't think there's a shaila regarding the kashrus of these birds, rather, Shmuel Nimotin has some sort of hergesh and is nervous. I demand that you return the pot of birds and bring it to the rav. Whatever the rav decides is what we will do!"

When my grandfather heard all this, he agreed to go with her to the rav, to the Rogatchover Gaon. The Rogatchover heard both sides and asked to see the sh'chita knife. He checked a number of times and then asked my grandfather, "What's the problem with the knife?"

My grandfather answered that he had a feeling that the knife wasn't halachically acceptable, that it wasn't sharp and smooth enough.

The Rogatchover said that the

WHEN NECESSARY, I CAN ALSO SPEAK

My grandfather related that he heard from his father, R' Yehoshua, that the Rebbe Rashab did not speak Russian on purpose. My grandfather was once in a yechidus with the Rebbe Rashab and they spoke about their brethren in Russia, whose lives were difficult, and about all the suffering they were undergoing; about how the government treated the Jews and about the Rebbe's trips to Petersburg.

The Rebbe said, "When necessary, I can also speak, 'the language of your dogs.'"

sh'chita was perfectly kosher with all the hiddurim and the knife was sharp and smooth. He added that he himself would eat from the food if they agreed to give him some of it. And that put my grandfather's mind at ease.

When my grandmother told the story to my father she said, "That's what your father-in-law was like. He

was a real yerei Shamayim. He was ready to lose everything because of some feeling that maybe the knife wasn't perfectly smooth. If not for me, we would have died of hunger because of his piety."

THE RESTAURANT EXPANDS AND THEN CLOSES

The Rebbe Rashab's instruction to my grandfather to live in Petersburg and to run a restaurant was considered holy to him. Everybody knew that this home hosted all the great Chassidim, askanim, those who ran Lubavitch yeshivos, and the connection with Beis HaRav was as close as could be. The house was a meeting place for chachamim and farbrengens took place there night and day.

During the civil war, when the communists began taking over the government and the property of the people, many well-to-do people, not necessarily Jews, fled, especially those who conducted business or had other ties abroad. They left Russia, leaving behind their homes and property, focusing primarily on saving their lives.

One banker, a friend of my

BECAUSE I THINK ABOUT YOU ON ROSH HA'SHANA

My grandfather, R' Shmuel Nimotin related:

The Chassid, R' Shmuel Michel Treinen was a Chassid of the Rebbe Maharash and then the Rebbe Rashab, and was very wealthy. He had a huge steel factory in which he manufactured railroad tracks. He had thousands of employees and he received government licenses to make these railroad tracks not far from Leningrad.

One time, on one of the Rebbe Rashab's visits to Petersburg, R' Shmuel Michel asked the Rebbe to visit his factory. The Rebbe agreed and went with R' Shmuel Michel to tour the factory with all its branches and departments, taking an interest in every detail. Naturally, the Rebbe got the royal treatment.

When the Rebbe finished his visit and was ready to get into the buggy to travel back to his hotel, R' Shmuel Michel asked him, "Rebbe, what do you think of the factory and all the machinery?"

The Rebbe answered, "How do you think you got all this? It's because I think about you on Rosh HaShana at the davening in Lubavitch!"



grandfather from Leningrad, prepared to flee the country. His leaving had to be kept secret but he trusted my grandfather completely. He even suggested that my grandfather live in the building of the bank, at least until after he crossed the border so that people wouldn't notice that the building was empty and suspect something was amiss.

My grandfather went to look at the place. It was a spacious building that

would be perfect for the restaurant and hosting guests. There were many large rooms, which could hold many Chassidim and serve as a comfortable place to farbreng. Who dreamed that the Yevsektzia would lock it all up? He also found nice furniture there, and so my grandfather was thrilled with this gift from G-d. He soon moved his household and all he owned into their new house. But their joy was not long-lasting.

I heard from my uncle Reb Refael, and my mother told me as well, that the new house that had previously served as a bank had a safe. When the Rebbe came to Leningrad in 5684 until he left for Riga in 5688, the Rebbe used this safe and hid in it the manuscripts he had from the Rebbeim: the Baal Shem Tov, the Alter Rebbe, the Mittlerer Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe Maharash, and writings of his father the Rebbe Rashab, as well as other precious manuscripts. It is possible there were other manuscripts that my uncle did not know about.

The Rebbe had the key and only occasionally were the members of the

household allowed to look at the manuscripts, but not, Heaven forbid, to touch them.

When the Rebbe was arrested in Sivan 5687, someone came from the Rebbe's household to my grandfather in order to look through the contents of the safe. After a few hours of checking, the person left. The man who was sent was definitely one of Anash but who he was and what he was looking for, we do not know.

The restaurant remained open until after the Rebbe Rayatz left Russia. Then my grandfather had to close it because the NKVD spied on the place and the situation worsened day by day. People became more and more afraid to enter the house. It was a known secret that whoever entered the house automatically went on the Yevsektzia's black list.

After my grandfather closed the restaurant, he worked for a living in weaving, as did many other Chassidim of that time.

(R' Shmuel Nimotin's story continues, G-d willing, in the next installment)

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SEEKING THE TRUTH

BY OFRA TAMARKIN

She was a young Hungarian girl who took classes at the Jewish school in Budapest and suddenly felt she belonged to the Jewish people, without quite knowing why. From there it was a long and winding road until she became a Geras Tzedek, Liora Rus Barnea.

I have to start by saying that stories of converts always fascinated me. Their discovery of the Truth inspires me tremendously, and the acts of Divine Providence that lead them towards Klal Yisroel are in the category of open miracles.

I met Liora Rus at her home in Tzfas and I sat and listened, enthralled and moved, to her story.

Liora Rus was originally from a Christian family in Budapest, Hungary. Her family celebrated holidays traditionally, and, on rare occasion, went to church, but these token gestures meant very little to Liora Rus. She had a difficult childhood, but even during the hardest moments she believed there had to be something beyond her own existence; that there was something higher that ran the world in a more moral, more correct, manner.

Liora Rus: "From a young age, I would speak to G-d about my problems or about things in my life that I wanted changed. I had a strong, inner belief in His strength and goodness. There were many

complicated situations from which I was miraculously saved. I knew that these were gifts from above, and thanks to them I continued to draw closer to the truth."

MAKING THE FIRST CONTACTS

Liora Rus was very different than the other members of her household. She was much more spiritually inclined and was sent for religious studies at the church. The feeling of emptiness she had while studying there was enormous. She felt the huge distance between what they told her and the truth she felt within herself.

She encountered Torah for the first time in elementary school. One of her teachers told Bible stories to the class, and they made a deep impression on her. Music was her way of connecting to spirituality and rising above the mundane.

Liora Rus' first step towards Judaism took place when she went to a high school in which most of the teachers and students were Jewish.

Liora Rus: It was very important to my father that I attend the best school in Budapest. So, although he did not like Jews, he registered me in a high school where most of the students and teachers were Jewish. The walls of the school had the symbols of the twelve tribes and a Magen Dovid, which aroused my curiosity.

I learned that this had been a religious Jewish school before the Holocaust and, back then, was considered one of the best schools in Hungary. After the war, the religious component diminished, even though there was still a strong Jewish consciousness.

How did your father deal with the fact that his daughter was associating with Jews?

When I began studying there, he had a talk with me in which he explained that I had no connection with Jews and I should keep my distance from them. I didn't understand what was so bad about them, and I felt that he was afraid because he knew that Jews had the truth.

This was a tough period in my life. School was intensive and my parents divorced. I lived with my father. At the age of 12, I was running his house. I had become friends with Jewish students, but we didn't discuss religion because they weren't observant.

Two years later, a new student joined us who wore a kippa and was



The Jewish school in Hungary which Liora Rus attended

relatively more religious than the others. He was a novelty at the school. I became friends with him and I told him about my connection with G-d. I tried to understand his way of serving G-d. He was the first one to tell me about mitzvahs and I felt that a new and magical world had opened before me.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Liora's tremendous fascination with the mystical led her to think that perhaps her family had some connection with Jews. When she asked her father about this, he reacted in anger and screamed that they had no connection with Jews and she should forget about it.

Her mother, on the other hand, told her that she had a connection with Jews, but in order to get more accurate information, she sent Liora to her grandmother. The grandmother told her that her parents fled from Poland to Hungary during the Holocaust but since they burned their documents, there was no evidence as to their ancestry.

Liora Rus: My questions led my grandmother to tell me about her childhood and about how each year,

in the springtime, her mother would bring matzos to the entire family. From these stories, I realized there was a possible connection here with the Jewish people, but there was no clear proof. I was very confused by everything that I heard.

My birthday is in April and my grandmother bought me the Chabad Hagada shel Pesach. This was a tremendous surprise and I felt that she was accepting and supporting me in the steps I was taking.

She was the only one in the family who did something to encourage and support me. I decided I would make a seider with my family. I told my grandmother, my mother, and my brother. We went shopping, and cooked special holiday food. When the holiday arrived, I had them sit down and I began to tell them the Hagada. It was a surrealistic experience. They cooperated with me but didn't quite understand what was going on.

When we got to the part where you pour out drops of wine, they followed me, but instead of pouring it into a plate, they poured it on the floor. The whole situation moved me. If my grandmother was really Jewish,

then the last mitzva she did was to eat matza, and at the age of 75 the first thing she did was celebrate Pesach.

ENCOUNTER WITH CHABAD

Liora Rus' life continued, more or less, unchanged. She had an interest in Judaism and felt a strong attraction to it, but things didn't change much. That summer she went with a friend to a festival that took place on a small island near Budapest. It was a place where many young people came to hear concerts and attend workshops. She and her friend found a spot they liked and pitched a tent. Around them, preparations for the festival were underway, with tents and attractions being set up, as well as stages for musical performances. After a full day of activities, they lay down to sleep.

Liora Rus: When I got up the next morning, the first thing I heard was Klezmer music. I went outside and saw, near our tent, men dressed in black with beards, tzitzis, and kippot, building a huge tent from which I could hear the Klezmer music.

What amazing Divine Providence! I was interested in Judaism for two years and wanted to find out more



The Hagada shel Pesach in Hungarian which Liora Rus' grandmother gave her

about it, and here were practicing Jews, right near me. For a few days, I hung around them and checked out what was going on in their tent, until I gathered the courage to enter.

One of the bachurim welcomed me and we began to talk. I asked him many questions and debated with him. From my knowledge and enthusiasm, he was sure I was Jewish. At the end of the conversation, I gave him my phone number.

From then on, I continued to attend shiurim from time to time and evening programs that took place there, but I was still nervous about getting too involved. When I returned home from the festival, it took me a few good months to digest the fact that I had met religious Jews. I felt that they were the first “real” Jews I had met. The outstanding thing about them was that their Judaism was out in the open. They were proud of it. It became clearer to me that this was what I wanted.

What about the bachur who took your phone number – did he call you?

No. He didn’t call. On Chanuka, I heard that a big menorah lighting event was going to take place in the central plaza of the city (I learned that this too was a Chabad event). When I got there, there were a few hundred people there and a giant menorah in the center. Nearby sat a group of young neo-Nazis, who didn’t dare get closer to the event. After the menorah lighting, divrei Torah was said, doughnuts were given out, and dancing took place.

I was standing and watching the dancing when I suddenly saw the bachur I had spoken with at the festival. He recognized me and came over to me. He apologized for having lost my phone number, wrote it down again, and promised to call me soon. A few days later, he called to invite me to Kabbalas Shabbos at the

Chabad house. I felt I had to tell him my story and that I wasn’t Jewish.

After he recovered from the shock, he began to tell me that even someone with a drop of Jewish blood can return to his roots, and that I had to think about whether I was truly interested in doing this.

This conversation with him made me sit down to think about whether I could stop and go back to what I was before I became acquainted with the world of Judaism. I felt that this was impossible. Judaism was the truth for me and everything else seemed empty. There was no going back for there was nothing to return to.

When I got back to him and told

She was overcome by the dream and saw it as another sign that she was on the right track.

him that I was ready to do whatever was necessary, he coolly said he could not help me and that I had to do it myself.

How did you feel when he said that?

I was kind of shocked by the way he said that. Throughout the period that followed, as I delved further into Judaism, in Budapest, none of the people I knew at the Chabad house encouraged me because it was halachically forbidden according to do so. They maintained a superficial relationship with me. Now I know that this was the only way to arouse my true, inner desire. This was something I had to undergo completely on my own.

FIRST T’FILLA IN SHUL

One Friday, Liora Rus went to shul for the first time. She went over to the bookcase, took a Hebrew-Hungarian Siddur, and tried to follow along. As she stood there silently, she strongly felt the fear and awe of the place. When she began davening the Shmoneh Esrei she stood with everybody else and read the words in Hungarian.

Liora Rus: When I read the line, “G-d of Avrohom, G-d of Yitzchok, and G-d of Yaakov,” I began to cry. In my heart, I knew that I had come to the right place. I saw the women davening, and in their movements there was an expression of something very deep, an expression of man’s submission to G-d.

This experience made a deep impression on me and I continued to go to shul every Friday. I would come home from school on Fridays, change into a skirt, go to a shiur, light Shabbos candles, and daven. Then I would go to the Chabad house for the Shabbos meal. The meals were delightful but I soon felt that I did not belong there.

Most of the guests were Israelis from the university who wanted a homey atmosphere. I needed something deeper. I started having Shabbos meals at home. My father didn’t understand what was going on with me. As I took on more practices, his opposition grew. We fought a lot at this time and he was sure I wasn’t normal. He didn’t understand me. Fortunately, this whole process didn’t affect my studies; otherwise he would have fought what I was doing even more.

* * *

Oftentimes, a process so deep and meaningful can be accompanied by many obstacles and pitfalls. In Liora Rus’ case, her journey constantly led upward. Her discovery of t’filla and Shabbos were tremendously inspiring



Reaching out to Hungarian Jewish youth

to her. One night, when she returned home from a shiur, she thought how holy and pure the Jewish nation is. She felt, with all her heart and soul, what a tremendous privilege she had in being close to them.

That night she dreamt of Rabbi Boruch Oberlander, the shliach in Budapest. He was announcing her name at an aliya l'Torah. He added that they were waiting for her in the tents of G-d, where she truly belonged. She was overcome by the dream and saw it as another sign that she was on the right track.

Liora Rus: At this time, I learned mostly on my own. I bought a *Shulchan Aruch* and was fascinated by how Hashem put all His wisdom into the details of life. I also began studying Chassidus with a chavrusa and, for the first time, felt the chayus in it. I was still going to school in the mornings, but my real joy was going to shul, and learning Torah.

My plans were to finish high school and get accepted to the best universities in order to show my father that I had what it took, and then to put it all aside and go to Eretz Yisroel to begin the conversion process. I didn't tell my father about my plans and my mother didn't

believe I would do it.

When the Chabad community saw that you continued to come to shul, week after week, and were learning and davening, they didn't help you out?

Only after a year and a half of regularly attending shul and shiurim did Rabbi Oberlander invite me to his house for a talk. At first, he listened to my story. I saw a look in his eyes that indicated to me that he was still testing me. Suddenly, he asked me why I wasn't satisfied with keeping the Seven Noachide Laws.

I told him I wanted to connect to Hashem with all 613 mitzvahs. From that point on the conversation changed direction and I felt that he believed me. In the end, he encouraged me to continue what I was doing and said that he would refer me to a rav who dealt with conversions, who he thought would help me.

OBSTACLES ON THE ROAD TO ERETZ YISROEL

Liora Rus met the rabbi, and he arranged a place for her in a midrasha in Yerushalayim. The only thing she had to do was buy a plane ticket. She didn't have the money

and couldn't work. By Divine Providence, however, her father opened a bank account for her on her birthday, with enough money in it for a plane ticket to Eretz Yisroel. This happened at a point when she was ready to close the chapter on her life in Budapest and begin a new life.

Liora Rus: A week before the flight, I contacted that rabbi in order to hear the final details. He apologized to me and said the midrasha would not accept girls who hadn't converted yet. He wished me luck and the conversation was over.

I was flabbergasted. Here I was, a week before my flight to Eretz Yisroel, with nowhere to go upon arrival, and with no one whom I knew! I went to Rabbi Oberlander in the hopes that he could help me. He couldn't help me, but talking to him strengthened me. I realized that Hashem was testing me to see if I really wanted to convert. He wanted to see if I would continue to trust in Him when the situation seemed impossible.

Did you have any regrets or any thoughts about canceling the trip? This was a big test for an 18 year old!

I knew that, no matter what, I would make the trip to Israel. Then Hashem gave me the strength to withstand the test. A few days before the flight, an Israeli that I knew from the Chabad house called me. He had heard about my situation and suggested that I spend my first night in Eretz Yisroel with his family. To me, this was a sign that Hashem was beginning to arrange things for me.

EMUNA, BITACHON, AND HASHGACHA PRATIS IN ERETZ YISROEL

Liora Rus' flight was scheduled for September 11th, 2001, the day the Twin Towers fell. Hers was the last flight leaving Budapest. The family who hosted her welcomed her

graciously, but on Thursday, she began looking for a religious family with whom to spend Shabbos.

Liora Rus: I had no idea where to begin looking. I simply went out on the street and began asking people if they knew of a place associated with Chabad. This was the only thing I could think of. I finally found someone who agreed to help me. He took me to the Chabad preschool.

I went in and the first thing I saw was a picture of the Rebbe, the same picture I had seen at the Chabad house in Budapest. Although I hadn't learned a lot of Chassidus yet, I felt a connection to the Rebbe. It was a feeling of calm faith that everything would be all right. The preschool teacher was sweet and said she would try to find a family.

* * *

Prior to her arrival in Israel, Liora would eat her Shabbos meals alone. She always tried to imagine what Shabbos with a "real" family would be like. When she spent Shabbos with the Zakheims, she saw that what she had imagined wasn't that far from reality. That Shabbos was special and full of warmth and sanctity. She didn't speak much, but observed and took in what was going on around her.

Liora Rus: When Shabbos was over, I sat with Mrs. Zakheim in the kitchen and we began talking. I told her the story of my life and she listened closely to all the details. She said that they felt like I was a member of the family even though I wasn't Jewish. She told me, "I usually do not host people I don't know. When I was called and asked to host you, I just said yes. When I put down the phone, my daughters looked at me incredulously. You invited her? You never do anything like that? Especially with somebody that none of us knows?!"

We felt close after this

conversation, and Mrs. Zakheim wanted to help me. This was the first family that opened its doors to me and treated me like their daughter.

PREPARING FOR CONVERSION

Mrs. Zakheim found a place in Yerushalayim that had a study program for conversion. This was the first place that enabled Liora to begin the process she so yearned for. However, she soon realized that this wasn't the place she sought. She found the classes not serious enough and most of the girls were planning on converting for personal reasons, not in order to get close to Hashem.

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It was there that Liora Rus realized how connected she felt to Chabad and the Rebbe. She yearned for Yiddishkeit. Concepts she learned in this school contradicted what she knew from Chabad. They explained that the State of Israel was the beginning of the Geula. She didn't understand how this State could converted people who weren't sincerely interested in becoming part of the Jewish people. It just didn't make sense to her, but she had no other option.

After a few months, she felt that she was ready. She asked the administration to speed up her

conversion. One of the rabbis who saw her sincerity worked on her behalf, and, before long, she found herself at the Rabbanut, a letter of recommendation from the rabbi in her hand.

Liora Rus: I was very disappointed by the meeting at the Rabbanut. The rav I met with didn't ask me deep questions in halacha or emuna. I felt it was impossible that I had taken such a long time just to convert like this. In the days that followed, I simply sat at the school and waited for something to happen, for someone to help me.

A few days later, Chaya Engel called me. I had spent a few Shabbasos with her. She asked how I was doing and suggested that I meet her brother, a dayan at the Beis Din Tzedek in B'nei Brak. Perhaps he could help me. I joined his family for Shabbos so he could meet me. That Shabbos was very strange. We had no way of communicating because he did not speak English and I did not speak Hebrew.

On Motzaei Shabbos I left, disappointed, for Yerushalayim. From the bus station, I went straight to Chaya. She opened the door and happily informed me that the Beis Din was ready to meet with me.

* * *

This was the sign Liora Rus was waiting for. She felt that her dream was about to become true. She had two weeks to prepare for the meeting. Her excitement and anticipation for this meeting is impossible to describe. She had worked for this for so many years, and now it was about to happen.

Liora Rus: On that greatly anticipated day, I went to the Kosel early in the morning. On the one hand, I felt it was going to happen that day; on the other hand, I wasn't sure that I knew enough. I realized that what I was going to experience



Rabbi Oberlander at the public menorah lighting in Budapest

that day was of far greater significance than getting a good mark on a test. I knew that if Hashem wanted me to be a Jewish neshama, observing Torah and mitzvos, He would make it come to pass.

I went to the Beis Din in B'nei Brak. In the room, five rabbis were sitting around a table. In the center sat Rabbi Karelitz and he was looking at me. I was very emotional. I looked at him and thought about how, in reality, it was Hashem Who was testing me. They asked me various questions and I felt that Hashem was putting the answers in my mouth. For an hour and a half, I answered questions on topics in halacha and emuna, and I told them my story.

From their questions, and from the way they dealt with me, I sensed how serious they were. I spoke a lot and they hardly responded. They just asked more and more questions.

When they were done, they told me that I could go. I was there only an hour and a half, but it seemed like an eternity given the fact that it was a cheshbon nefesh about what I was all about. Chaya came in after me in order to verify the facts that they had been told about me. When she came out of the room, she had

tears in her eyes and she said that the conversion would take place in four days. I began to cry.

THE IMMERSION

Liora Rus prepared herself for the great day. She felt like an empty vessel, different from what she had been until then, but not yet what she was wanted to be. Each day she distanced herself further from her old self and prepared herself to receive her new identity. Her hiskashrus to the Rebbe deepened at this time too. She wrote to the Rebbe for the first time and told him about her upcoming conversion and immersion, and about her desire to study. She asked for a bracha.

In the answer she opened up to, the Rebbe wrote about the deep significance of immersion in a mikva, and how the person immersing becomes a completely new entity. At the end of the letter, the Rebbe advised the person to learn in a Chabad school.

Liora Rus: I felt that the Rebbe was close to me. This feeling grew stronger when I dreamt of the Rebbe one night. In my dream, I was in 770, and they brought me to his room. The Rebbe sat opposite me

and spoke to me. I don't remember what he said but we spoke for a long time. Then the Rebbe gave me lekach (honey cake). When I woke up, I concluded that the Rebbe was taking care of me, materially and spiritually.

* * *

The day of Liora Rus' immersion was 14 Kislev, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's anniversary. Liora Rus woke up early and went to the Kosel, and from there she went to B'nei Brak. She said T'hillim all day and cried. Before she immersed, the three rabbis told her that she could still change her mind.

Liora Rus: I told them that I wasn't interested in changing my mind. They began asking me halachic questions, which helped bring me back down to reality. To tell you the truth, I don't know what they suddenly wanted. I was already at a point that was beyond words and questions. I was ready to immerse and to receive a Jewish neshama. Once again, they explained the significance of, and the responsibility inherent in my decision, which I would be making with my free choice. I began to cry. I said that I knew all this and still hadn't changed my mind.

They blessed me and said I was doing a great act of Kiddush Hashem. I felt surrounded by warmth. I burst into tears. I felt like I was reborn; like an uncomprehending, newborn baby. When I looked in the mirror afterwards, I felt like I was looking at something new. The light that I had seen for years in the eyes of Jews I suddenly saw in my own eyes.

* * *

When they asked her why she chose the name Liora Rus, she explained that only in Judaism is there true light (Liora meaning "light for me"). In addition, significant milestones in her journey towards

Yiddishkait had to do with Chanukah, the holiday of light.

One of the rabbis brought a cake and they all drank and said l'chaim.

BRINGING THE LIGHT DOWN INTO VESSELS

Until that moment, I thought that the immersion was the goal, what I had waited for all those years. It was only afterwards that I realized that the work first began after the immersion.

I went outside feeling lightheaded. Everything looked new. On the trip to Yerushalayim I looked at the scenery and felt that I had access to the G-dliness that enlivened everything. I looked at creation with different eyes. I knew that my first step as a newborn was to learn Torah and Chassidus in a serious way in the Rebbe's school.

Following my conversion, I went to Sarit, a friend of mine from Kiryat Malachi. I inquired about schools and she suggested that I meet Mrs. Wechter. Mrs. Wechter was herself a Hungarian, and she would be happy to meet with me and help me out. So I met Mrs. Wechter, and from the very start a warm and strong connection formed between the Wechter's and myself. They accepted me like their daughter/sister. Mrs. Wechter was so warm that I felt I could open up to her without fear. I told her that I was looking for a place to learn and she recommended Machon Alte in Tzfas.

I went to Tzfas and when I got to Machon Alte I knew this was the place for me. I loved the girls, the shiurim, and the atmosphere. I had time to assimilate everything I had experienced. I had spent years on this goal without really knowing the reason why. I felt drawn to it, like I had no choice in the matter. Then, suddenly, it was really happening and absorbing it all was not an easy task.

* * *

At Machon Alte, Liora Rus began to understand more deeply what a Jew is, and what a Chassid is, as well as what a Jewish woman is. That which had been super-rational until then, came down into rational thought. She had long conversations with Rabbi Rosenfeld, the menahel of the school, who explained to her that there are Jewish souls that are drawn into klipa and in the conversion process these souls elevate the three impure klipos to k'dusha.

THE WECHTER FAMILY

Throughout the conversion process, there were families who helped and supported Liora Rus. Until today, the Wechter family is like her own family. Even when she studied at Machon Alte she continued to visit the Wechters for Shabbos and Yom Tov. Through them, she learned how to live what she was learning.

Liora Rus: With Rebbetzin Wechter, I saw the meaning of real, unlimited receiving and giving. Rabbi

Wechter helped me with various halachic matters and, more than anything else, with understanding the true meaning of *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe.

At first, I had some difficulties with the Moshiach topic. I saw it as extremism. Through Rabbi Wechter, however, I got the answers I needed, along with an understanding of the subject and an ability to internalize it. I always had a strong connection to the Rebbe, but I didn't know how to live with the fact that the Rebbe is Moshiach. I saw Chassidim consult with the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh* and receive amazing answers, and this had a significant impact on me.

When I met my husband-to-be, Ilan, I realized that all my experiences had prepared me to be his wife and to build a Jewish home with him. At a certain point, I realized the depth of my decision to convert: I wanted to be a link in the chain of the Jewish people. This understanding made me look at life in a very meaningful way.

Ilan and I got married this past Teives. Rabbi and Rebbetzin Wechter were written on the invitation as my parents, and they led me to the chuppa. My family did not come to the wedding, although all the dear people who opened their hearts and homes to me, including Rabbi Boruch Oberlander, the Rebbe's shliach in Hungary, who came especially for my wedding, surrounded me.

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IS SOMETHING MISSING?

Thanksgiving is mentioned in several Torah passages. Eliezer prostrates himself and gives thanks (Rashi *ibid*) to G-d for having led his steps to Rivka. The mitzva of offering the first-ripened fruits of bikkurim to the Kohen is likewise an expression of thanksgiving for the good land (of Israel) and its fruits.

Oddly enough, though, certain items for which the presenter of the bikkurim ought to have offered thanks are not mentioned at all! Why not mention the Exodus from Egypt and the 40-year miraculous trek in the desert as two primary items to offer thanks for? Jews had to obviously leave Egypt and complete their journeys in the desert before being able to enter the Land and benefit from its produce! The presenter backtracks to Yaakov during his stay with Lavan and gives thanks for Yaakov having been spared from Lavan's nefarious plans. Why not backtrack to Avrohom having been spared from the fiery furnace and from the four kings he battled against? The further wonder is that Rashi doesn't even address this obvious question, implying by omission that the solution is just as obvious and does not even deserve mention!

IT'S CONTEXTUAL

The answer to all this will emerge if we look at the general theme of this parsha: the presenter of bikkurim is thanking G-d for the quality of life he is finally enjoying after having settled in the Holy Land in a permanent manner. The first step of thanksgiving is, of course, the acknowledgment of the great contrast between the

previous state of galus and the redemptive state he is presently enjoying, not burdened anymore by the yoke of oppressors. The presenter, however, goes a step further: he is acknowledging that the present settled state is deserving of special thanks, as opposed to previous settled states in the course of Jewish history, during which the "settled" state was really not settled at all.

Yaakov Avinu stayed with Lavan for 20 years. He settled down, married and raised a fine family, eventually attaining riches. With all that, however, he still felt very unsettled, an unwanted and unwelcome guest. And so it has been throughout the whole length of Jewish history, even throughout the golden eras in Spain and other lands. Jews never felt really settled.

The settled feeling that many American Jews harbor is deceptive. The Jews of New Orleans will attest to this. The blessed feeling of true tranquility and of being truly settled was felt only in the Holy Land, and it was for that elusive element that special thanksgiving was offered by the presenter of bikkurim.

At the seider, singing "Dayeinu" loudly (just as he is raising his voice during the bikkurim presentation) he will offer thanksgiving for Yetzias Mitzrayim and for the forty-year trek in the desert. But, right now, for the produce obtained within a tranquil and settled state, for that he reserves the thanksgiving time at the bikkurim offering. In this specific context, he contrasts his current state with previous seemingly settled states in the course of history, which, in fact, have never been as settled and tranquil as

they first appeared to be.

OF SETTLERS, SETTLED, AND SETTLING

Are Jews today, whether in Eretz Yisroel or elsewhere, in a tranquil and settled state? Or are we still at the whims of various world powers' agendas? If an Israeli would have offered bikkurim 35 years ago, thanking G-d for the wonderful produce he had just grown on his newly acquired piece of land in Biblical Gaza, part and parcel of the Holy Land, could he in good conscience have fully articulated this prayer of thanksgiving? Or would he have realized that, in truth, nothing is yet settled? – even though he is called a settler and nothing is really tranquil.

Yes, the realistic settler even then would have realized that, as long as Israel is led by jellyfish-wishy-washy-self-serving-ignorers-of-Jewish-ultimate-destiny politicians, nothing is settled and nothing is tranquil. Jews everywhere are still in a state of agitation.

It seems that G-d is compelling us towards the realization that what is needed more than ever now is leadership founded on Torah values and Divine dictates, which override world opinion. Only then will the Holy Land finally reach its desired state of tranquility and its inhabitants will realize that its truest citizens are its so-called "settlers," who are personally contributing to this Divine process, leading up to the speedy Geula shleima through Moshiach Tzidkeinu, b'karov mamash, settling once and for all the Divine plan of Creation!

(Based on Likkutei Sichos vol 14, pp 91-98)

THE REBBE WARNED IT WOULD HAPPEN

INTERVIEW BY SHAI GEFEN

*On Motzaei Shabbos Parshas Shoftim, on the “Melaveh Malka” program on the Moreshet network of Kol Yisroel Israeli Radio, former Knesset member Geula Cohen was interviewed by journalist Uri Revach. In this fascinating interview, Geula Cohen told what the Rebbe had written her 24 years ago about why he wasn’t telling his Chassidim to settle in Yehuda and Shomron. She also related what the Rebbe told her in yechidus right after the Six Day War and why they would have to re-conquer Yerushalayim. * A transcript of the radio program.*

Uri Revach: We would like to say shavua tov to Mrs. Geula Cohen. A letter of the Rebbe has been publicized recently in Chabad publications and many people are talking about what the Rebbe wrote to you. Tell us, what did you write to the Rebbe?

Geula Cohen: It was 1981 and I was suggesting that the Rebbe tell the many, many talmidim and Chassidim who listen to him, to not only make aliya but to settle Yehuda and Shomron and Chevron.

In Chevron, there was a large settlement of Chabad Chassidim in Beit Romano. After visiting the Rebbe and hearing his opinion regarding settling, I wanted to ask him to renew the settlement in Chevron. We spoke mostly about settling the land.

Uri Revach: First off, it’s important to note that the Rebbe asked you not to publicize the letter and said it depended on your judgment...

Geula Cohen: The Rebbe explained in the letter why he couldn’t ask his

Chassidim to go to Yehuda and Shomron, because the settling of Yesha was only a political demonstration with political aims and benefits, namely to arouse public opinion. The Rebbe said, “My inyan is halacha, not politics.”

Why did the Rebbe think it was only a political agenda? The Rebbe went on to explain to me that he was very apprehensive that after a long time the settlers were likely to be removed from there by the government.

I will read what the Rebbe wrote me: “I must emphasize that my call and the like [to go and settle Yesha] is possible when it can be based on the strong hope that the settlements will be lasting, and not as a political ploy and for the benefit of arousing public opinion, even if after not much time elapses they will remove the settlers, for my inyan is not politics but halacha.”

The Rebbe writes me explicitly that it is definitely possible that after not much time elapses the settlers will be removed. The Rebbe said he could only send people to settle there when it is not political and not temporary, but real, and he said it is definitely possible that they will remove settlers.

Furthermore, the Rebbe writes – it was extremely interesting to read what he wrote – that he is basing this on the fact that the same people who wield influence in the government, will



return all of Sinai with its oil fields. It was so interesting how the Rebbe spoke about conceding Sinai, how he explained that it caused enormous financial damage to the State of Israel.

I will read a line of this: **“According to the approach of those who had influence in this regard throughout the 32 years, I have seen that their influence is in one direction – that of concessions and withdrawals. And most recently to a far greater extent, returning sources of oil that would have supplied more than half, and some say three-quarters, of the country’s industrial and defense needs. And they have actually returned them without a proper reaction from the citizens of our land, despite the fact that everyone knows that this [oil] is the most effective and vital weapon for the security of the land and for its economy.”**

Uri Revach: The Rebbe knew they would return it 30 years ago?

Geula Cohen: He was very apprehensive. He said that he was afraid that all the settling was only a demonstration on the part of the government and the time would come when they would not hesitate to expel settlers. He did not say that it was a demonstration on the part of the settlers, and he did not want me to publicize the letter to my friends because he did not want to weaken the settlements.

I did not publicize the letter until recently, when portions of it were publicized in the Chabad magazine. From this, we see the Rebbe’s great sensitivity. I didn’t publicize the letter until someone from Chabad came to me and asked to see the letters.

The Rebbe wrote that this was the first time he was revealing the reason

“The Rebbe went on to explain to me that he was very apprehensive that after a long time the settlers were likely to be removed from there by the government.”



The Rebbe in yechidus

why he wasn’t sending people to settle, but he added that he did not want me to reveal what he wrote, and his reason was in order not to weaken those who had emuna that there would be a major change.

Uri Revach: What do you think about what is going on?

Geula Cohen: The Rebbe told me very, very difficult things to hear, in connection to Yerushalayim too. I don’t want to get into that because we have just experienced enough traumatic events.

It’s a fact that there have been evacuations and the removal of Jewish settlers from Eretz Yisroel, and we’re not talking yet about controversial areas like in Yehuda and Shomron, but about settlements that were supported by every Israeli government.

The first settlements in Gaza were initiated by the Labor government and only afterwards did the Likud government add to it. So there was a consensus of opinion on this by all the governments, Right and Left.

But I still believe there will be a change, and that if there is a g'zeira, Hashem will change it. The Rebbe also believed and was afraid, but he asked me not to publicize it.

It's very hard for me to talk about what the Rebbe said to me about Yerushalayim, and I hope it won't happen.

Uri Revach: I understand that the Rebbe wasn't optimistic about Yerushalayim.

Geula Cohen: He said that the conquering of Yerushalayim was not done wholeheartedly to begin with, in order to liberate all our holy places in Yerushalayim, and it was because of outside pressure. This is apparent from the way the IDF was asked not to damage anything. The Rebbe also spoke about all the doubts in that war – that they hadn't intended on conquering the holy places from the outset because they identified with them. Therefore, he was very, very afraid that we would have to re-conquer Yerushalayim.

Uri Revach: Did the Rebbe actually say they would have to re-conquer Yerushalayim?

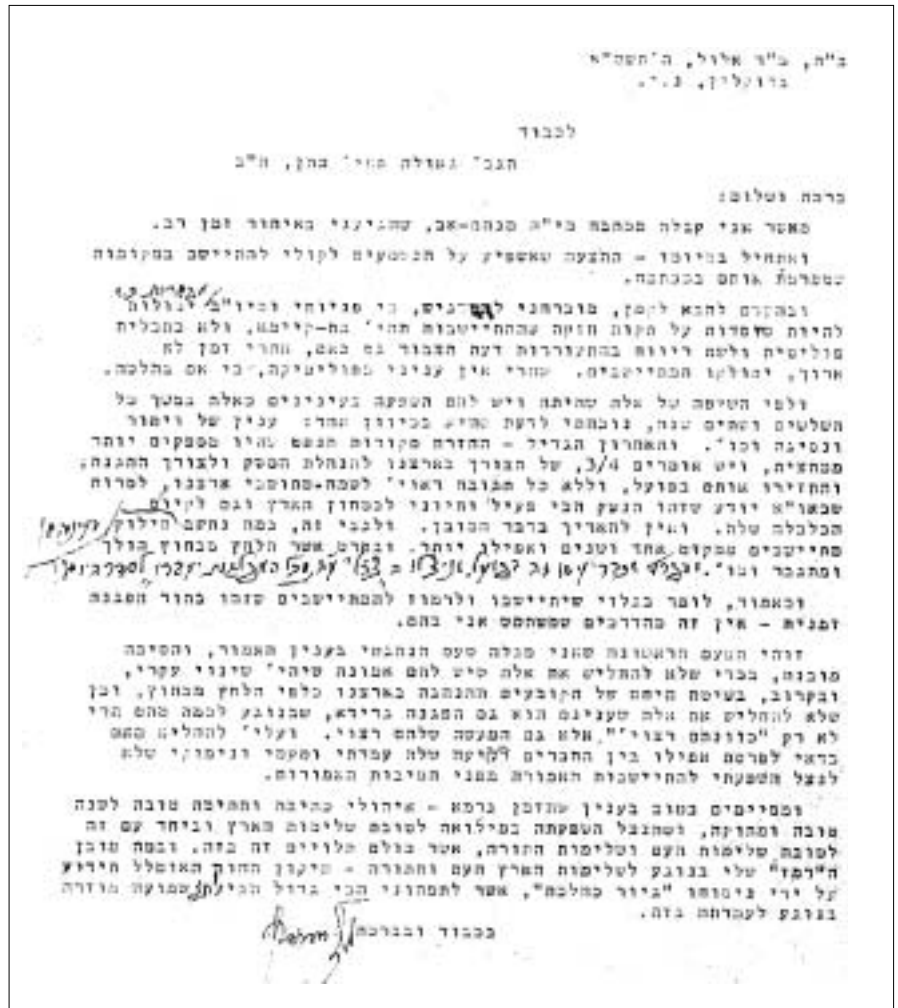
Geula Cohen: He said the conquering wouldn't last.

It's very hard for me to talk about this. I don't want to talk about it. It hurts me. I was so horrified when he told me that. When the Rebbe saw that I was horrified he said that of course everything could change – but this is what he felt.

I didn't publicize this at first either. I was afraid to publicize it. It was only after a few people knew and word had spread that I told what he said. Let us pray that it does not happen.

Uri Revach: If you ran the country, what would you do?

Geula Cohen: I would certainly not decide to evacuate Jewish settlements. Obviously, this doesn't just begin in one area. We govern and make decisions under pressure and we treat the dictates of the U.S. as though they are a decree from heaven.



The Rebbe's letter, dated 1981, to Geula Cohen. First publicized in *Yechi HaMelech* and then in *Beis Moshiah*.

I would also do an educational campaign. The Rebbe spoke to me personally, even though I am not a Lubavitcher Chassid, and the Rebbe wanted me to use my power of influence to speak to the youth and explain what Eretz Yisroel is.

Unfortunately, not enough was done in this regard. It was with the fight over Gush Katif that, for the first time, the idea of Eretz Yisroel [as opposed to just a secular state in the Middle East – Ed.] really came up on the national radar. It was one long lesson. What a pity that we didn't do it in a positive way, through classes and lectures in schools. We did not raise Eretz Yisroel on the agenda, nor the bond of the religious public and its mesirus nefesh for Eretz Yisroel. Sadly,

the price we paid was terrible.

I think that the secular public is somewhat fearful of the power of the spiritual, which is why they try to react cynically and mockingly and treat the whole thing as though they won.

Uri Revach: Many people were strengthened by what they saw on the TV screens.

Geula Cohen: A mighty feeling of emuna was revealed, as well as an enormous spiritual force of mesirus nefesh. It entered every home and it will reverberate and continue to reverberate. I was happy to see Chabad among those fighting in Gush Katif.

Uri Revach: May we have besurot tovo with the true and complete Geula, thank you Geula Cohen.

THE FINAL PRAYER – BEFORE WE RETURN

BY SHAI GEFEN

Two weeks ago Thursday, a group of Rabbis arrived at the central Shul in Neve Dekalim for a “N’ila” prayer. Shai Gefen joined the group in touring the desolation and destruction of Gush Katif. The following are some of the painful impressions and musings.

Thursday, 4 Elul 5765, is a day that will remain engraved in my heart forever. What a difficult, painful day. The wound bled anew as I saw the horrifying sights around us in Neve Dekalim, the former capitol city of Gush Katif. The heart refuses to believe and even the mind can't absorb the fact that Jews destroyed and uprooted Jewish life here in Gush Katif. Thousands of



Rabbi Chanan Porat addressing the assembled in the deserted shul: “We are not saying goodbye.”

Jews were exiled from here.

We were back in Neve Dekalim for a final prayer in the destroyed shul. A little less than a month ago I stood here Tisha B'Av night with thousands of Jews and we sang, "Sh'Yibaneh Beis HaMikdash." Today, it looks completely different. Aside from the walls and the bare aron kodesh in the eastern wall, it's all silent and bare.

The purpose of the delegation of rabbanim was to pray a final prayer, a N'ila of sorts, in the main shul of Neve Dekalim. To express a prayer that Am Yisroel be able to return to the Gaza Strip, along with a heartfelt request that the government not destroy the shuls of Gush Katif (this was before the final decision not to destroy them).

We were about one hundred men crowded into two buses that brought us directly to Neve Dekalim. Kisufim Junction. It no longer blocks entry into Gush Katif but is a symbol of submission and destruction. The bridge that served the Jews was being dismantled by the army. Signs of destruction were everywhere. Who believed that Gush Katif would be totally destroyed?

We rubbed our eyes in disbelief. Was it really all razed to the ground? And there it was, before our very eyes. We went to the former cemetery. 48 graves were desecrated. An uneasy quiet was felt, mute testimony to what was and is no longer.

We entered what used to be Neve Dekalim and began to walk towards the main shul. Around us were the remains of the bulldozed buildings. The shul, which remained standing, stood out immediately. A miniature sanctuary that for dozens of years was a place of Torah and t'filla was now an empty shell.

We entered the Sefardi shul and it was hard to look. One of the people with us burst into tears.

Rabbanim explained to the media who were present how wrong it would be for Jews to destroy the shuls. "Don't touch the shuls of Gush Katif," said Rabbi Yehuda Dery, rav of Beer Sheva.

Rabbi Sholom Dovber Wolpo explained that the severity of the problem lay in the expulsion the prime minister perpetrated, while the problem of the shuls was merely a consequence of that bitter expulsion. Rabbi Wolpo strongly

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attacked the rabbanim who said that halacha had no opinion regarding the Disengagement and who suddenly remembered the shuls of Gush Katif.

"We are here today to cry out about this terrible situation. However, even during this time of churban we are sure that Hashem hears our cries and will have mercy on His people." Chairman of the Shas party, Eli Yishai, Knesset member Rabbi Yitzchok Levy and

Knesset member Nissim Zeev also spoke.

From there we went to the main sanctuary in the Ashkenazi shul. The fresh churban was there before us. The media from around the world recorded this historic prayer. Rabbi Chanan Porat emphasized that this N'ila prayer was not a finale for we are sure that Hashem will bring us back to the Gaza Strip. These miniature sanctuaries, which will remain here will testify to the fact that Jewish life once existed here.

"The government's goal is to destroy the shuls so there shouldn't be anything to remind us of what once was and is no longer. There's no security issue here at all, though they present it that way to the public," said Porat.

The shliach tzibbur for Mincha was the regular chazan of Gush Katif, Rabbi Ackerman. He wore tallis and t'fillin. After Shmoneh Esrei he led the Avinu Malkeinu prayer and we responded line by line. This time they did not open the paroches on the aron kodesh because there was no paroches and no sifrei Torah.

It is hard to describe the feelings of those moments. Each line of the Avinu Malkeinu took on an urgency. "May this moment be a moment of mercy and a desirable time before You," was said with heartfelt emotion. "Avinu Malkeinu, have mercy on us, our babies and children," and we thought of the innocent children expelled from their homes just a few weeks before. "Avinu Malkeinu, act on behalf of those who were killed for Your holy name." Gush Katif was sanctified by Jews who were moser nefesh al kiddush Hashem and now all is desecrated by evil ones. "Avinu Malkeinu, avenge the spilt blood of Your servants."

Like at the N'ila t'filla of Yom Kippur we said Slichos and kabbalas



The destruction of Gush Katif (inset: the shul in Netzarim set on fire)

of malchus Shamayim with an arousal of t'shuva and t'filla to Hashem that He have mercy on His people. "Guardian of Israel, watch over the remnant of Israel and let not Israel be destroyed, who recite the Shma Yisroel."

The t'filla was reminiscent more of the Mincha on Erev Tisha B'Av when you say, "Nachem" – console the city that is in mourning and in ruins, despised and desolate, mourning because she is bereft of her children ... and she sits with her head covered in shame ... legions have devoured her, worshipers of alien gods have possessed her..."

The t'filla ended but the terrible pain is relentless. There are questions: Why did Hashem allow this? How could Jews do this to themselves?

As a final parting from Neve Dekalim, we walk around amidst the destruction. You can see signs of a Jewish presence everywhere,

moments before the bloodthirsty, rampaging mobs of Arabs will destroy it all.

As we walk towards the former home of the shliach, Rabbi Yigal Kirshnzaft, we saw a mezuzah holder like garbage on the ground. We can't grasp the reality of it all even as we see it in front of us. What irony there is in the sign still hanging from an electric pole, which says, "Model Home."

Homes were destroyed down to the foundation, in some cases burying thirty plus years of Jewish life. Some houses were burned. Yeshaya's prophecy is seen before our very eyes, "Your land will be destroyed, your cities burned in fire, your land before you – strangers consuming it..." Oy, what we once had.

The shliach's home and Chabad house was a landmark to all those who came to Gush Katif. It was a place of chesed, Torah, and t'filla. It was bursting with life. What remains is rubble. Near the destroyed house, we saw an abandoned baby carriage. We saw sifrei Chassidus and parsha pamphlets, which is what remained after the destruction.

Rabbi Wolpo and I stood there, choked up. Rabbi Wolpo, who had been with Rabbi Kirshnzaft during the expulsion, couldn't take it any more. He pictured the house full of simcha and light, the happy children, the non-stop activity, and now...

Right next to Yigal's house we saw what Jewish degradation is as we watched soldiers brought to Gush Katif to clean up the mess so

our murderers will get a nice clean place.

“How are you not embarrassed to clean up for Abu Mazen?” he yelled out to the soldiers. The soldiers looked down.

We entered the Yemenite shul. Even though they are destroyed, they are still holy. This is where we davened on Shabbos Chazon with the Torah that was written especially for the Jews of Gush Katif. It is hard to describe the joy during that t’filla. Now, the shul was empty and the aron kodesh that had, “serve Hashem with joy” written on it was no longer there. Testimony to what was here was scrawled on the wall of the shul by somebody before he was evicted, “The sound of Torah and T’filla has been stilled. G-d is a G-d of vengeance.”

We walked through the destruction to Rabbi Tal’s Yeshivas Toras HaChayim. The yeshiva’s equipment was strewn about. There was even a full bottle of wine for kiddush, memory of the spiritual life that was once here. We entered Rabbi Tal’s room where thousands of s’farim adorned the walls, from where he disseminated Torah. Just a few months ago, we had sat here for a lively Torah discussion. Aside from a table and chair, all is gone. “Remember Hashem, what we had, look and see our shame. Our portion was turned over to strangers, our homes to alien people.”

On our way, we saw Bezek phone workers destroying the infrastructure so the Arabs won’t be left with any of it. Their faces reflect their horror at the sights around them.

These were our final moments in Gush Katif. We walked towards the gate of the yishuv. Rabbi Wolpo blew the shofar for the soldiers at the gate, Mivtza Shofar. I tore kria and recited the blessing of Baruch



Final prayer in Gush Katif

Dayan HaEmes, which is what you do when you “see Jewish cities in their destruction.”

And amidst the churban I thought of the story that took place after the churban of the second Beis HaMikdash. Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elozor ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking to Yerushalayim. When they reached Mt. Scopus they tore their clothing. When they arrived at the Temple Mt. and saw a fox exit the Holy of Holies, they began to cry and Rabbi Akiva laughed.

They said to R’ Akiva: Why are you laughing?

He answered: Why are you crying?

They said: The Holy of Holies is a place about which it says, “A stranger who approaches will die,” and now foxes are walking there, shouldn’t we cry?

He said: That is why I am laughing, for it says, “I have as loyal witnesses Uriah the Kohen and

Zecharya ben Yivorchehu.” What does Uriah have to do with Zecharya? Uriah lived in the time of the first Mikdash and Zecharya during the second?

The verse is connecting Zecharia’s prophecy with Uriah’s prophecy. Uriah said, “Because of you, Tziyon will be plowed.” Zecharya said, “Old men and women will yet sit in the streets of Yerushalayim.” Until Uriah’s prophecy was fulfilled, I feared that Zecharia’s prophecy would not be fulfilled. Now that Uriah’s prophecy was fulfilled, we know that Zecharia’s prophecy will be fulfilled.”

They said to R’ Akiva: Akiva, you have consoled us! Akiva, you have consoled us!

In the midst of our sorrow we know that the prophecy of the Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach, “behold Moshiach comes” will be fulfilled, just as everything the Rebbe said was fulfilled. From out of this tzara the light of Geula will shine forth.

EVERYTHING WE CAN DO TO PUT OUT THE FIRE

BY CHANA KATZ

There was a terrible chilul Hashem last week when some 70 Jews tried to reenter the evacuated northern Shomron settlement of Sa-Nur. The Yehudim, some of whom were pried away from their homes just several weeks earlier, were again evicted by brutal force by the Yassamniks, a tough, highly trained special police force known for its brute strength and fierceness.

There were no hugs and tears and embraces here, as some mistakenly thought was the predominant tone of the initial Gush Katif/Shomron evacuations following Tisha B'Av. (Ask some of the bachurim who returned from Chomesh with nasty bruises, black eyes, and severe head wounds.)

The Yassamniks were reported to have rough-handled, beat, and arrested many of the 70 Yehudim (not connected with Chabad) who had returned to Sa-Nur and barricaded themselves in one of the few remaining structures there: the British fortress. In addition, hundreds of other Jews who also intended to reenter Sa-Nur were held back as large numbers of army troops and police were sent to the area to put up roadblocks.

It must be understood that this land was given by Hashem to the entire Jewish people as an eternal

heritage, yet not only are the Arabs living upon a vast majority of this land, but they are claiming that it was never ours, that it only belongs to them, and that they have every right to murder and destroy us as long as we are here.

Just a few days after the Jews

The quiet itself should be alarming to anyone who things the government is for one second not working feverishly behind the scenes to prepare the next devastating blows to Eretz Yisroel.

fought with mesirus nefesh to regain their inheritance at Sa-Nur, hundreds of Arabs from local villages were reported to have rampaged through Sa-Nur as well as Chomesh, where they looted the remains of Jewish communities.

But in contrast to the Jews, who were beaten and arrested and taken from Sa-Nur, the Israel Defense Force neither arrested the Arabs who penetrated those areas, and in fact let them cart away as much of the leftover electrical and building goods as their donkey carts and tractors could accommodate.

Further, the Israel Defense Force was officially quoted in the Israeli media as saying that the Arabs were permitted to be in Chomesh and Sa-Nur as long as they did not build permanent structures there.

* * *

While many Jews – although unfortunately not enough – mobilized in the final months before the Gush Katif/northern Shomron expulsion of Jews from their land, there seems now to be a lull, as once again many wait to see which direction the winds will take.

But there is just as much reason to literally lose sleep now as there was in the weeks preceding the evacuations.

The quiet itself should be alarming to anyone who things the government is for one second not working feverishly behind the scenes to prepare the next devastating blows to Eretz Yisroel.

Even the lies are not concealed anymore but are brazenly put in public view. For example, right after the disengagement, when some American and world powers were telling Israel there needed to be more churbans – that what took place was only a “beginning” – some decided it wise to tone things down.

So there were reports that the President of the United States tried to persuade world powers to hold off on their demands on Israel – at least until Prime Minister Arik Sharon could gain solid footing after his acts which stabbed the Torah, Hashem, the Jewish people and the Jewish nation, through the heart.

So what exactly does that tell us? That the lull is only temporary, and like the eye of a storm, is in actuality dangerously deceptive, for as we all know, when the winds pick up after the eye of a storm passes over, they seem to come out of nowhere with an even greater punch and destruction.

It is very frightening to think how much of life in Eretz Yisroel has returned to routine.

Shortly after the evacuations, the oceanfront cafes and restaurants in Netanya – even the Mehadrin ones – were filled with diners casually chatting, eating large portions of food, and enjoying the last days of summer vacation.

* * *

Meanwhile, the house continues to burn.

As much as the Rebbe screamed

about the Camp David Accords, now the Israeli government even undid that damage and created a worse situation: they have literally given the keys to the henhouse to the foxes (on a silver platter no less). Some 750 Egyptian troops (armed with automatic machine guns, assault rifles, etc) will be the “guardians” of our borders. Not only are we not going out to fight the enemy in order to protect our people and our land, we are going out to greet

While most of the nation now moves on with this obsession, those really plotting the destruction of Eretz Yisroel are not being sucked into this false distraction.

the enemy with a red carpet and a complimentary key to our land, as well as complimentary maps and details of our infrastructures, water, and electrical installations.

Moshiach himself gave us explicit directions: Do everything you can do to bring Moshiach.

If our house was truly burning, we would not continue with our routine. We would make a tumult and do everything we could to put it out.

There wouldn't be a question. So how can there be such a lack of consensus as to whether our house is burning?

Until the last traces of the Galus are erased, the reality is that Jewish lives are in danger. According to the Rebbe MH”M, millions of lives. Just hours after Israel left Aza and the northern Shomron, a yeshiva student/chassan was murdered in Yerushalayim and a suicide bomber injured scores and left two Jewish security guards fighting for their lives in Beersheva.

* * *

The politicians are tripping over each other in their haste to line up support for the next election. And the truth is that while most of the nation now moves on with this obsession, those really plotting the destruction of Eretz Yisroel are not being sucked into this false distraction. Every day they are signing new “orders,” like the one Defense Minister Shaul Mofez signed the other day saying 11 Jewish families have to vacate a portion of Chevron.

We all know that Moshiach will be completely revealed any minute. But what if for some reason, he tarries and it takes another few seconds? And what if, during those extra seconds, G-d forbid, the enemy makes its way to our very doorstep? Then, G-d forbid, there wouldn't be any more leisurely dining, mivtzaim, or life as we know it. We would also be waiting for Hashem in his mercy to awaken those who sleep in the dust...and hope that those still alive would do everything they could to put out the fire.

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RABBI MOSHE LEVERTOV A”H

On Erev Shabbos Parshas Shoftim we heard the sad news of the passing of the distinguished Chassid Rabbi Moshe Levertov of Crown Heights. R’ Moshe was born Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul 5689. His father, Dovber Levertov was a great-grandchild and grandchild of descendants of the Alter Rebbe and was considered one of the great Chassidim of his generation. He was one of the nine Chassidim who took part in the “covenant” with the Rebbe Rayatz in 5684, about standing strong with mesirus nefesh until the last drop of blood, to teach Torah.

In his youth, R’ Moshe and his family lived in Moscow, near the Chabad shul Marina Roscha. His father was the main person who ran and supported the shul. At that time, a melamed secretly came to their house to teach him and his older brother, R’ Sholom. This was under communist rule, when the government forced all children to attend public school, which indoctrinated them with heresy and forced them to desecrate the Shabbos.

Not attending public school entailed mesirus nefesh, but the Levertov family withstood the test and their children were not contaminated with secular studies and ideas.

R’ Moshe and his brother Sholom went to shul every Shabbos and Yom Tov despite the great danger for them and their family if caught by the communist authorities.

Since his father was responsible for the building they lived in, he was able to hide Chassidim who showed up in Moscow, even though he could have been arrested for harboring unofficial guests who were counter-revolutionaries. Among the Chassidim hosted in their home were R’ Yona Cohen, R’ Chonye Morosov (who later became R’ Moshe’s mechutan), R’ Yitzchok Goldin, R’ Shmuel Notik, R’ Zalman Teibel, and R’ Nissan Nemenov.

Many farbrengens took place in the Levertov home, though naturally, these took place secretly. So R’ Moshe and his brother grew up in a warm Chassidische atmosphere.

When R’ Moshe turned ten, his older brother was sent to yeshiva in another city. Because of the danger involved, they didn’t even tell relatives, and even R’ Moshe did not know where his brother went (so he wouldn’t inadvertently blurt it out). He was left alone without his brother or any friend, and he wasn’t even allowed to go outdoors on weekdays so he wouldn’t



Rabbi Moshe Levertov

get caught. He remained the entire day in the tent of Torah.

R’ Moshe once said that his bar mitzva was held secretly with only three people present: himself, his father, and R’ Berel Gurewitz. Lchaims were said over cups of milk.

After the war began, the family left Moscow for distant parts. R’ Moshe’s father was very sick and so R’ Moshe had to learn on his own. Part of the day, he worked in the field in order to earn a bit of flour for the family.

At the war’s end when they returned to Moscow, his father was still sick, and

so, despite his youth, the burden of running the shul fell upon him. He managed to have a minyan every day and was the baal korei.

In 1944, when R’ Moshe was 15, he went to learn in Tomchei T’mimim in Samarkand. After a year and a half of learning, he was sent to Kutais in Georgia. Not even two weeks had passed from when he arrived in Kutais when he heard about Anash escaping from Russia. The communist government was allowing Polish refugees who fled to Russia during the war to return to Poland, and Anash took advantage of this opportunity and left Russia, feigning to be Polish citizens.

With many miracles R’ Moshe and his brother arrived in Lvov [Lemberg], a border town, and after a half a year in Lvov were able to board a train that crossed the border. From there they went to Austria, where the yeshiva was established once again. After a while, R’ Moshe and the entire yeshiva went to Brunoy, France where, the yeshiva exists until today. He was one of the first talmidim there.

For a number of years R’ Moshe studied in yeshiva, and then, in 1950 he was one of the bachurim picked by the Rebbe Rayatz to come and learn in Tomchei T’mimim in the U.S.

Before they left Brunoy the Rebbe Rayatz passed away and they were told by the Rebbe MH”M to come. The Rebbe said, “Since the Rebbe told you to come, you should certainly come.”

At the farbrengen on Shmini Atzeres 5711, the Rebbe asked the T’mimim whether Moshe Levertov (who was on a ship on his way from Paris) had arrived yet.

In those early days, R’ Moshe was one of the outstanding T’mimim in 770. He was also the first to immortalize some events and statements (in yechidus and farbrengens) of those

years. Part of his diary was publicized in the *Yemei B'Reishis*, (most of the diary was not yet publicized).

R' Moshe was also one of the chozrim, and it happened occasionally that when the chozer R' Yoel Kahn was not present at a sicha, the Rebbe used R' Moshe's notes to edit and make corrections, etc.

In those days R' Moshe enjoyed attention from the Rebbe, and he was called by Rabbi Chadakov to the Rebbe for special yechiduyos. On a few occasions, the Rebbe gave him a directive during a farbrengen, as recorded in the diaries he wrote.

After learning in Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Brooklyn for a few years, in which he excelled in his learning and avodas Hashem, he was sent by the Rebbe to Pittsburgh to serve as mashgiach ruchni in the mesivta there. He married Bracha nee Moskal and the Rebbe was their mesader kiddushin.

In 1959 the yeshiva closed and R' Moshe returned to New York, where he was a maggid shiur and mashpia in the branch of Tomchei T'mimim in the Bronx. His talmidim and mushpaim loved him and over the years R' Moshe continued giving shiurim and keeping in touch with all his talmidim.

In 1964, he founded and ran Lishkas Ezras Achim, an organization that helped Jews in communist Russia. The primary way it helped them was by sending them undercover shluchim and by sending packages of food and ritual objects (t'fillin, mezuzos, matzos for Pesach, etc.). Over the years, R' Moshe and his colleagues expanded the mosad into a giant operation based in his home.

The work of this organization was shrouded in secrecy because of the danger to our fellow Jews in the Soviet Union. The Rebbe was constantly involved in all details of the operation and with everything going on with the Jews there. Because of the secrecy the askanim and Jews in the Soviet Union could not call the Rebbe's secretaries directly and many things went through R' Moshe.

For this purpose, on a number of



R' Moshe Levertov receiving kos shel bracha



The Levertov brothers, R' Sholom & R' Moshe



R' Moshe (left) in the offices of Ezras Achim

occasion some secret meetings between the Rebbe and R' Moshe were held in the doorway of the Rebbe's home. This was because the Rebbe did not want certain details and instructions to be discussed openly in his room in 770, and only very few people knew the details.

R' Moshe was also an expert sofer and he devoted his final years to writing parshiyos for t'fillin and mezuzos, especially for the shluchim around the U.S.

In his final years, R' Moshe wrote about the mesirus nefesh and askanus of his father which was translated into English as, *The Man Who Mocked the KGB*.

Aside from being well known as an outstanding talmid chacham with tremendous knowledge in Nigleh and Chassidus, he was also involved in organizing various tz'daka and chesed

matters. He was also the chazan a number of times on Yomim Noraim in 770 in the Rebbe's minyan. For some years he was the baal korei (together with R' Dovid Raskin) in the Rebbe's minyan.

In recent years, he was a maggid shiur in the Kollel Tiferes Z'keinim in 770.

After a protracted illness, R' Moshe passed away at Mt. Sinai hospital on 6 Elul. May his memory be a blessing. He is survived by his wife Bracha, his son R' Yosef Yitzchok – shliach in Houston, Texas; his daughter and son-in-law R' Eliyahu Matusof, publisher of s'farim of the Rebbeim and member of the editorial board of Otzar HaChassidim; his daughter and son-in-law R' Levi Morosov – shliach in Melbourne; his son R' Berel -shliach in S. Fe, New Mexico; his son R' Notte – shliach in Auberville, France.

WHEN SILENCE IS A SIN

PUBLISHED BY: SICHOS IN ENGLISH
 ENGLISH EDITION BY: MORDECHAI E. SONES AND YANKEL KONCEPOLSKI
 EDITED BY: SHIMON NEUBORT
 REVIEW BY: ALIZA KARP

The past year and a half has been a constant race over hurdles to try to save Gush Katif and the Northern Shomron... with rallies, symposiums, meetings, lobbying, solidarity trips and millions of emails. Along with the activities came the pain and anxiety of having to deal with such an evil decree. We sacrificed and we resisted, but still, we never imagined it would actually come to pass. Our minds just could not conceive that such staggeringly deep and hideous evil would actually materialize from within the Jewish nation.

In the aftermath of the Disengagement, it would be a luxury to be able to give in to feelings of despair and defeat. But such luxury we do not have. As the powerful forces in Eretz Yisroel talk of which towns they will not remove, we know that the ones they do not mention are in danger of extinction by unnatural means and we also know that with the retreat from each location brings increased terror to the rest of the country.

We have no time to dress our wounds; we have to forge ahead.

Throughout our struggle, many groups are overlooking their differences and coming together to work towards a common goal. Working in these coalition settings, I have come to see the various philosophies and tenets that guide people in their search for social justice and self fulfillment. I also see a need for a clear, clean perspective to break through the misguided conceptions and hidden agendas.

At this time, when we have to dig deeply to regain our strength, the Eshet Chayil Foundation has made it possible for Sichos In English to release a publication that brings guidance and encouragement to the battle weary ranks and the new recruits who are coming to realize that they are also needed on the battlefield.

‘When Silence is a Sin,’ presents the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s uncompromising stance on the Halachic obligation to protest when lives are at stake and the obligation to settle the entire Land of Israel. The book includes original quotes as well as letters of significance, including the Rebbe’s answer to a letter from General Ariel Sharon in 1968, a letter as relevant today as it was when it was written, in the year following the Six Day War.

‘When Silence is a Sin’ presents the Rebbe’s sources for the mandatory public declarations by Rabbis that lives cannot be put in danger through land concessions. The Rebbe addresses the excuses that

Rabbis give to defend their silence. “In his public address of Purim 5730 [1970], the Rebbe added that even Rabbis who are not accustomed to protest, must protest in this case and not remain silent, lest their silence be taken as tacit approval. ‘Whether one is accustomed or not, if there is a chance that his silence will be misinterpreted, then he has no choice, whether he likes it or not, he must articulate his position.’”

Upon hearing the Rebbe’s call for Rabbis to state their opinions according to Halacha, Rabbis in the Diaspora were quick to say that they do not want to meddle in the affairs of those who live in Eretz Yisroel. “The Rebbe responded that this argument has no basis in the

Torah, because all Jews are one people. Every Jew , regardless of where he finds himself, is united with every Jew in the world (even with one who says he has no business meddling in their affairs...) The Rebbe cited Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi’s statement that a body can only be considered healthy when all its constituent organs are healthy.”

Included is a chapter of the Rebbe’s unique and multi-faceted approach to fighting adversity through spiritual means: gathering children, especially at holy places to recite phrases of Torah and T’filla and to give Tz’daka; increasing in Torah and Mitzvos;



strengthening Torah and aiding Yeshivos; increasing in prayer; increasing in the spreading of Mitzvos, specifically, T'fillin; buying a letter in a Seifer Torah; increasing in Tz'daka; increasing in love and unity and increasing in joy. Each of the above is linked to the source in the Torah and how it will effect the safety of Jews in Eretz Yisroel.

An example of the connection between the Rebbe's plans of action and the Torah is as follows... Increasing in Torah and Mitzvos: "Since every Jew, including small children, received the entire Torah as an inheritance, then certainly the verse (D'varim, 33:25) "Iron and copper are your doorbolts" also pertains to them... This means that when all Jews, including small children, learn Torah and do Mitzvos, this triggers the state of "iron and copper are your doorbolts" for the entire Jewish people. The Land of Israel then becomes sealed with locks and bolts of iron and copper, such that "the enemies are unable to enter."

Regarding the need to settle the entire Land of Israel for the sake of security, the Rebbe says in a letter dated Cheshvan 22, 5738 (1977): "In my opinion, it is clear that this is the only way to cause the enemies of

Israel to give up their evil plans, when they see that we really mean it."

Examining a letter from the Rebbe to, then General, Ariel Sharon, dated September 5, 1968, one wonders how Sharon could have fallen so low. "... the enemies who surround the land, see the government in our land exhibit more and more weakness – a government who believes that they must deal with the Arabs with silk gloves and great care – and should there be a quarrel between an Arab and an Israeli, the first thing to do is to check what the reaction will be in the capital of one country or another, and only then decide what to do. So the Arabs constantly allow themselves the luxury of creating more and more disruptions, and all the more so, disturbances and eventually terror.

"And as we approach the New Year... may the blessings begin, including the crucial change in the government's posture, without having to wait for unwished-for incidents which would force the change. After all, we have seen miracles from the All-powerful G-d in the recent past, and He is able to affect miracles in any fashion..."

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RIBIS D'RABBANAN? RIBIS D'RABBANAN!

BY CHANA KATZ

Money is dear. But this is a story about a Yid of whom it can be said that the Rebbe's words were even dearer.

It's not that the Yid was a revealed Chassid or even shomer mitzvos.

In fact, he barely understood what the Rebbe was talking about during a farbrengen he once attended at 770. But one thing he did know – even if he didn't understand it: The Rebbe said that Ribis D'Rabbanan (rabbinically forbidden interest) was a serious thing.

After his one brief experience in 770, the Yid, originally from S. Africa, returned to his home in Eretz Yisroel and life went on...

* * *

The following story was told by Rabbi Yehoshua Appell, a lecturer in the holy city of Yerushalayim. Rabbi Appell originally heard the story from R. Moshe Naftolin, a Lubavitcher accountant who had the following most unusual experience with a client of his: Reb Yid.

* * *

R. Yid was a very talented worker who had developed a breakthrough product while he was employed by a major hi-tech firm. Yet one day, R. Yid was fired from his job. He was quite taken aback; his patented work for the company resulted in an extremely valuable product – although none of the profit was to be his.

A lengthy lawsuit pursued, and when the legal proceedings finally ground to a halt, R. Yid found himself the victor. He received almost a one million shekel judgment in his favor. In addition to that large sum, there were also a certain amount of interest and penalties involved to the sum of 150,000 shekel.

It occurred to the accountant, R. Naftolin, that there may be a question of Ribis D'Rabbanan.

“If it has to do with Ribis D'Rabbanan or anything that smacks of Ribis D'Rabbanan, I don't want to have anything to do with,” he insisted.

Having raised this question, R. Yid answered that if it was Ribis D'Rabbanan, he didn't want to take it! R. Naftolin felt uncomfortable paskening himself and depriving a man of 150,000 shekel. He said he'd ask a rav, and went to the renowned posek in B'nei Brak, Rav Shmuel Vozner.

R. Vozner declared that there were certain leniencies in this case that

would permit Naftolin's client to accept the money, and he asked the accountant why he had mentioned the term Ribis D'Rabbanan.

R. Naftolin returned to R. Yid with the good news that a highly respected rav had ruled that the money was not considered Ribis D'Rabbanan and he could receive it.

But R. Yid still refused.

“If it has to do with Ribis D'Rabbanan or anything that smacks of Ribis D'Rabbanan, I don't want to have anything to do with,” he insisted.

R. Naftolin was quite taken aback and said in all straightforwardness to R. Yid: “I don't understand. You don't seem to be an observant Jew, so where does this sensitivity come from for not taking Ribis D'Rabbanan?”

The client answered: “I have to admit that I once attended a farbrengen at 770 at the invitation of some friends in America. During a large part of the farbrengen I kept hearing Ribis D'Rabbanan. So I asked people around me, what is this Ribis D'Rabbanan that the Rebbe keeps talking about?”

No one – not during or after the farbrengen – was able to give him an understandable explanation. So he concluded that Ribis D'Rabbanan is something you don't touch – even it meant giving up the substantial sum of 150,000 shekel!