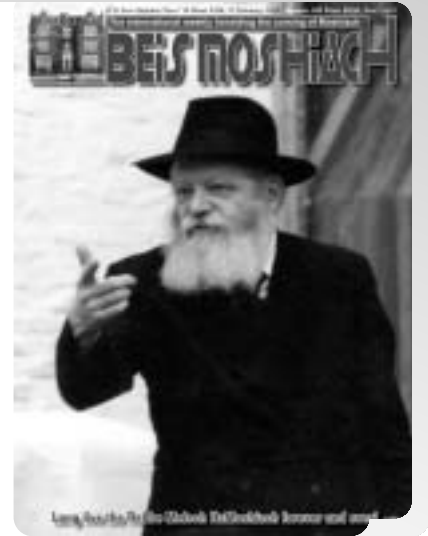


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TO KNOW G-D: IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO BELIEVE

LIKKUTEI SICHOS, VOL. 26, PG. 114-123
TRANSLATED BY BORUCH MERKUR



1. In the beginning of the book *Mishneh Torah*, in the [prefatory section entitled] “The Enumeration of the Mitzvos,” the Rambam says: “The first Mitzva of the Positive Commandments is to know that there is a Deity (*sh’yesh sham Eloka*), as it is said, ‘I am the L-rd, your G-d.’” With this Mitzva, the Rambam also begins the laws of his book *Mishneh Torah* [Laws of the Foundations of the Torah]: “The foundation of the foundations and the pillar of wisdoms is to know that there is a primordial Being (*sh’yesh sham Matzui rishon*) and etc.”

However, in the first law, the Rambam does not say that this knowledge (“that there is a primordial Being”) constitutes a **Positive Commandment**. Rather, he first discusses at length (throughout the course of five laws) **several** details regarding the “primordial Being” before he concludes (in Law 6): “The knowledge of this matter is a Positive Commandment, as it is said, ‘I am the L-rd, Your G-d.’”

It is thus understood that according to the opinion of the Rambam, the Positive Commandment of, “I am the L-rd, Your G-d,” is not only [the imperative to acquire] the general knowledge “that there is a Deity,” “that there is a primordial Being,” but it also includes [knowledge of] details pertaining to G-d (which he enumerates in the laws).

The Abarbanel explains (in his book *Rosh Amana*) – quoted in *Seifer HaMitzvos* of the Tzemach Tzedek [“The Mitzva of Belief in the Divine,” Ch. 1] – that according to the opinion of the Rambam, the Positive Commandment of Belief in the Divine is not simply [to believe] that the Deity exists, “that there is a Divine Being,” but that “the Deity, blessed be He, of Whom we **already** know that He exists – His existence is more

primordial and more complete than that of all the [created] existents and etc.” (as he elaborates on the topic).

([Of course, were the Positive Commandment of Belief in G-d no more than to believe in the notion that He exists] this would beg the question: How is it possible to count Belief in G-d as a **Mitzva** (a Commandment)? The entire concept of a Mitzva is only possible if there is a Being Who commands the fulfillment of the Mitzva. Thus, it doesn’t make sense to say that it is Mitzva to believe that there is a Being Who commands the fulfillment of Mitzvos.)

Thus, the Rambam prefaces the five laws concerning the existence of G-d [to his mentioning in Law 6 that “The knowledge of this matter is a Positive Commandment”], because the Mitzva of Belief in ([or] Knowledge of) the Divine requires that we know (at least) **these** details concerning [the nature of] G-d’s existence, [describing] how it is that He, may He be blessed, [exists in a way that] is “more complete than that of all the [created] existents and etc.”

2. Furthermore, the precise wording of the Rambam has been noted [see *Rosh Amana*, Ch. 17; *Seifer HaMitzvos* of the Tzemach Tzedek *ibid*, Ch. 2, end; and more – see FN 12], “**to know** that there is a Deity,” “**to know** that there is a primordial Being,” indicating that the Mitzva is **to know** with an intellectual knowledge, etc. (Similarly, the Rambam concludes – both in the Mitzva of the Knowledge of G-d [Foundations of the Torah 1:6] and the Mitzva of the Unity of G-d [*ibid* 1:7, end] – “The **knowledge** of this matter is a Positive Commandment” (not “the belief in this matter”).)

And on this basis, the Abarbanel addresses the question: How can we be **commanded** regarding a matter of **beliefs**, “which are not acquired through will and choice”? He answers that the Rambam “did not count the nature of the belief and its truth as a Positive Commandment, but the **knowledge** of these matters and the **study** of them, which brings to the acquisition of beliefs.” Indeed, “this pursuit of knowledge, philosophical analysis, and the application of scrutiny, and this study...which give rise to beliefs...they formulate the will and the choice.”

Accordingly we can understand why the Rambam did not suffice with mention of the details concerning the existence of G-d (in Laws 1-7), which a Jew must know in order to fulfill the

Specifically when we know the terms of the dialectics regarding these laws, then the knowledge of G-d is in a manner of “to know” – not simply having faith, but an intellectual knowledge.

Mitzvos of Knowledge of G-d and the Unity of G-d, but he goes on to elucidate (in the later laws, until the end of the chapter) several matters concerning the Knowledge of G-d.

(Namely, the Scriptural proofs that “the Holy One Blessed Be He is not corporeal”; that the physical descriptions regarding G-d “written in the Torah” are “in accordance with the minds of mortals...it is all metaphor”; regarding the request of Moshe, “Please show me Your glory” [Sisa 33:18] and the manner by which his comprehension was “of the truth of existence,” **and etc.**)

For at first glance, how is it relevant to bring this **dialectic** in his book *HaYad* [i.e., *Mishneh Torah*], a book of “**halachos halachos**” [FN 18:

the expression Rambam uses in the conclusion of his preface to his work *HaYad* [to strictly define its objective of encoding laws] – see the lengthy discussion in *Rosh Amana*, Ch. 19]?

According to the aforementioned we may assert that this is relevant to the obligation “to know,” for specifically when we know the terms of the dialectics regarding these laws, then the knowledge of G-d is in a manner of “**to know**” – not simply having faith, but an intellectual knowledge, etc.

Put differently: In order to fulfill the Mitzva of **Knowing** G-d, we must at least know the **foundational** “pursuit of knowledge, philosophical analysis, and the application of scrutiny” concerning the existence of G-d, which Rambam elucidates in this chapter.

[To be continued]

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A BLESSING FOR CHILDREN THROUGH JOY

BY RABBI NAFTALI ESTULIN, SHLIACH, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
TRANSLATED BY MICHOEL LEIB DOBRY

It is difficult to bring a bracha for children into a home of depression and sadness. Therefore, you should adopt a child, who will uplift the atmosphere in the home, and in that merit, you will be privileged to have children of your own.

I'll begin with a thrilling story that I heard a few weeks ago. I was sitting and learning *Torah Ohr* with my friend, HaRav HaChassid R. Yosef Yitzchak Brod, when suddenly a Poilisher chassid came into shul and sat near us. We asked if he would like to join us in our studies, and he gladly agreed.

After concluding the learning session, he told us an amazing story that he had heard from his friend, a Jew named R. Shaya, a descendant of the Baal HaChiddushei HaRim, who had been married for decades and had yet to have children. Naturally, this caused him and his wife to be in a particularly unhappy mood.

During one of their discussions, R. Shaya told him about a special meeting that he had with the Rebbe

Rayatz and the Rebbe MH" M. R. Shaya, who was then a young man, was staying in Vienna and heard that the Rebbe Rayatz had come to the city for health reasons, and was accepting people in yechidus.

At the time, the Rebbe Rayatz had difficulty speaking, and the order of things was that when someone went in for a private audience, the Rebbe Rayatz would say a brief d'var Torah, and this marked the end of the yechidus.

When R. Shaya went in, the Rebbe Rayatz gave over a d'var Torah, but he couldn't manage to understand everything that was said (as one of the elder chassidim used to say, the world has become so coarse that no one is capable of understanding the Rebbe's words).

When the Rebbe finished

speaking, R. Shaya left. On the one hand, his heart was overjoyed at the privilege of seeing the Rebbe Rayatz, but on the other hand, he was deeply disappointed that he did not merit to understand what the Rebbe had said.

As he was still making his way out, someone called for him to stop. He turned around, and found himself facing the Rebbe's son-in-law, the Rebbe MH" M. The Rebbe approached and asked, "Did you understand what the Rebbe said?" R. Shaya replied that he didn't, and the Rebbe MH" M proceeded to give over what the Rebbe Rayatz had told him.

This was his first opportunity to be acquainted with the Rebbe. He was not in contact with the Rebbe after this meeting.

Years passed. R. Shaya endured the horrors of the Holocaust and survived, emigrated to Eretz Yisroel, found a wife, and as mentioned earlier, was married for years and had no children.

After all the doctors had given up trying to help the couple, and even all the rabbanim and rebbes that they had consulted had long

since despaired, R. Shaya decided to ask for a bracha from the Rebbe MH" M.

He wrote a pain-filled letter, relating at length his great anguish and his wife's, and concluded the correspondence by reminding the Rebbe of their meeting in Vienna.

A few weeks later, he received a letter from the Rebbe in response. To his surprise, the Rebbe wrote that he remembers him well, and even the details of what he had been privileged to hear from the Rebbe Rayatz. The Rebbe then proceeded to write again what the Rebbe Rayatz had told him – word for word!

The Rebbe continued in the letter to relate to R. Shaya's request for a bracha, as follows: It is difficult to bring a bracha for children into a home of depression and sadness. Therefore, you should adopt a child, who will uplift the atmosphere in the home, and in that merit, you will be privileged to have children of your own.

R. Shaya and his wife rushed to fulfill the Rebbe's words. They adopted a child, who naturally uplifted the atmosphere in the home, and shortly thereafter, they saw the fulfillment of the Rebbe's bracha.

Today, besides the adopted child, R. Shaya and his

wife have another nine (!) children of their own.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS STORY?

Every one of us wants to bring another Jew and another Jew closer to the Rebbe, connected in heart and soul, until he feels that he is a son of the Rebbe, and the Rebbe is his father.

We must know that a bracha for children comes specifically to a home with simcha. Specifically in the avoda of shlichus through joy, we will succeed in bringing more and more Jews closer.

However, the situation in the world seems sometimes to be so difficult, it's simply gets too hard to be happy. What are we supposed to do?

Anyone who wants to be happy, despite the world situation – or perhaps even due to it – simply has to live with Moshiach, literally not figuratively. In every event that occurs in the world, we must see the connection to Moshiach.

Thus, even the most distressing events, with all their pain and anguish, do not succeed in removing us from an atmosphere of true joy as with every passing day, we get closer and closer to the moment when we will greet Moshiach.



Rabbi Naftali Estulin

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THE WIFE OF OUR KING

BY S. NAHARI

We never saw the Rebbetzin stand in line because the Rebbetzin made her purchases by phone. She would call the storeowner and he would write down her order and send it over.
* Presented for the yahrtzait of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka on 22 Shvat.

Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka a”h, wife of royalty, the legendary, majestic figure – so distant from us, yet the lessons we learn from her life are so close to each of us.

Much has been said about the Rebbetzin’s interest in the little details. Before a guest came to her house, she inquired about the person’s interests so that the conversation would be pleasant and comfortable. Only someone with a lofty, refined soul could enter the shoes of another so fully.

The following story will strengthen our esteem for the Rebbetzin and perhaps it will also strengthen this midda of caring for another.

* * *

The king’s neighborhood, Kingston Avenue. By Divine providence, the name of the community is **Crown Heights** and the name of the main street and shopping center is **Kingston**

(King’s Town). Chassidim buy and sell here. There are stores up and down the avenue. There are pictures of the Rebbe everywhere, reminding us whose neighborhood this is.

Decades ago, the non-Lubavitcher merchants were more numerous. They were residents of the Crown Heights community even before the Rebbe Rayatz bought 770. Slowly, as the demographics changed and non-Lubavitchers moved out, the stores changed. And by the time this story took place, most storeowners were Lubavitchers.

Years passed. The Lubavitcher storeowners aged and some retired. Stores changed hands and new faces began to be seen behind the counters. For most residents of Crown Heights as well as the guests and shluchim who visited Lubavitch headquarters, the changes didn’t matter very much. At first, people may have missed the former owners but they quickly got

used to the new ones.

However, there was someone who found the changes difficult. This was Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka. It doesn’t seem to be a big deal that one storeowner leaves and another takes over; the main thing is that the shelves are stocked with the desired products. But no – this was very important to the Rebbetzin.

Only when the Rebbetzin determined that the storeowner would keep her business in confidence would she agree to be his customer. She was not willing to allow her private affairs to be the talk of the town.

At the beginning of the 80’s one of the stores on Kingston Avenue changed hands. The owner, a Chassid known for his hiskashrus and loyalty to Beis Rebbe, for his mesirus nefesh in Russia, etc., felt that it was time for him to sell his store. The young Chassid he sold it to had no experience, so the former owner stayed on for some time to train him.

During the negotiation period, the older Chassid told the younger man about his clientele. Each customer had his demands, with his special needs. He taught him which customers would need a price cut, done without them knowing; which ones were irritable and difficult, requiring greater patience and tolerance; which ones should be given extra special attention, and so

on.

The most surprising and significant piece of news was about the Customer (with a capital C), Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka. The Rebbetzin made purchases from this store. They never saw the Rebbetzin standing in line because she phoned in her orders. She called K. (for the purpose of this story) and he wrote down her order and sent it over to her house.

None of the Chassidim knew what the Rebbetzin bought, or what type of food she wanted. It was all private and kept confidential. The Rebbetzin relied on him as someone who could keep a secret and who was a devoted Chassid.

The new storeowner was somewhat taken aback by the new responsibility. It entailed a closer connection with someone from whom we were always warned to keep a distance of respect and awe. However, the store was his now and he had to get up the courage and do what needed to be done.

At first, while K was still in the store and helping Z. adjust, the Rebbetzin spoke with K. and continued to give him her order. But as time went on, K. began to leave Z. on his own in the store and he did fine. The customers got used to the change and continued to shop as they had done previously. The Rebbetzin also began to get used to the change and when K. wasn't there, she felt confident enough to speak with Z.

Young Mrs. Z. worked in the store too. She helped her husband with the books and in taking down phone orders. However, there was one

customer, "Mrs. Schneersohn from President Street," who specifically asked to speak with Z.

Then one day in Elul, Mrs. Z. had a baby. Shortly after giving birth, she was back in the store doing her work but she brought her infant along with her. Her "boss" didn't mind and actually encouraged her to bring him along.

The new storeowner was somewhat taken aback by the new responsibility. It entailed a closer connection with someone from whom we were always warned to keep a distance of respect and awe.

But now that Mrs. Z. had to get up in the middle of the night for the baby, she didn't go to the store as early as she used to. Her husband opened the store and she came later on after straightening up the house and getting herself and the baby ready to leave.

Elul in Crown Heights means unpredictable weather. It can be balmy

one day and cloudy with rain another day, not to mention crisp autumn breezes. Mrs. Z. listened to the weather forecast and looked out the window to see whether it was right or not.

On her way out the door one day, the phone rang. Who could it be? Mrs. Z. called her mother and grandmother faithfully every morning and she had done that already. She had also spoken to some close friends. So who was it now? Everybody who knew her knew that she was on her way to the store at this time. Those who wanted to reach her would catch her there.

It was her husband calling from the store and sounding very excited. His smile beamed across the wires. This is what he said:

A few minutes ago, the Rebbetzin called. I thought she wanted to make an order, so I took a pad and pen to write it down, but that wasn't it. The Rebbetzin said good morning and said that she knew that you came to the store every day to help me. She also knew that you brought the baby along with you. And so the Rebbetzin wanted to point out that now that it was Elul and the weather kept changing, you should please see to it that the baby is wrapped warmly so the Elul winds won't affect him adversely on the walk to the store!

* * *

May we follow in the Rebbetzin's ways and as the Rebbe said, when we go in her ways "her children are alive," and then "she is alive."

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THE RIGHT APPROACH TO WRITING TO THE REBBE

*Avrohom Raynitz interviewed four mashpiim and asked them: What should we write to the Rebbe? What shouldn't we write? When should a person go to a doctor and when should he ask the Rebbe for a bracha? * Part 1 of 2*

Why do we need to write duchos (reports) to the Rebbe and how often should we write them?

Rabbi Majeski: In the Rebbe's letters, we see that the Rebbe wanted *duchos* [a *duch*, an acronym for "*din v'cheshbon*," is a report accounting for one's activities and one's personal spiritual standing] to be written to him frequently. In hundreds of letters to Chassidim the Rebbe complained that he doesn't receive reports frequently enough. The Rebbe wants Chassidim to write to him about every good thing they did and not just to write him when there is a tzara, G-d forbid.

There is a shocking statement from the Rebbe, which shows how important it is to write to the Rebbe frequently:

I have already written to some of Anash that if they made the effort and with time, grew accustomed to writing letters with good news,

surely, from time to time it would absolve them from a number of [undesirable] matters which necessitate writing a letter. Being that we don't know to what end (is the Divine orchestration of events) perhaps the [undesirable thing happened] in order that two Jews could re-connect and in a way of drawing hearts together, something which causes nachas up Above.

(Igros Kodesh, vol. 12, p. 175)

Frightening isn't it? The Rebbe is saying that from Heaven there exists a desire that a Chassid write to the Rebbe periodically and when a Chassid *doesn't* write to the Rebbe, painful events may occur so that he is forced to sit down and write!

It's important to say that when the Rebbe asks us to write him good news he doesn't only mean in the personal-familiar context, as the Rebbe goes on to say in that same letter:

How surprising that in this letter you do not mention anything about public matters, when you merit to be within the walls of Tomchei T'mimim, and every one of them [i.e. every Tamim] is supposed to be an "illuminating candle."

So every Chassid must make sure that he sits down from time to time and writes the Rebbe a duch about himself.

As far as how often to do so, logic dictates it should be once a month. A month is a time-period and each period of time ought to be summed up in a duch to the Rebbe. In one of the Rebbe's letters to R' Nissan Nemenov, the Rebbe writes that once a month the names of the talmidim will be read at the gravesite [of the Rebbe Rayatz]. From this, we see that it is appropriate to report to the Rebbe once a month.

Rabbi Lipsker: In 5722 (1962), while I was on shlichus in Eretz Yisroel, we would write a detailed report to the Rebbe about our activities monthly. This was a given, as we were shluchim of the Rebbe and had to report to him, and it was understood that you wrote once a month.

In recent years, after the Rebbe

announced several times that the Rebbe appointed every Jew to be his shliach to spread the wellsprings and prepare the world to greet Moshiach, everybody ought to write to the Rebbe once a month and report to the Rebbe about their activities regarding their shlichus.

Rabbi Shapiro: Writing to the Rebbe is also a cheshbon ha'nefesh (spiritual accounting). When you sit down in a serious frame of mind, you review everything you did the previous month and you choose those things that are truly important, for better or for worse. This gives you a perspective about your spiritual state and enables you to make an honest spiritual accounting.

It says in Chassidus that although we should make a cheshbon ha'nefesh every night when saying Krias Shma al HaMitta, there are other times to make a deep spiritual accounting. It's not something you do every day. The Rebbe compares it to a businessman who has to balance the books periodically. He doesn't do this every day but once a month. And he takes an ever closer look at the

PANELISTS:

RABBI CHAIM SHOLOM DOVBER (BEREL) LIPSKER – Mashpia, Tomchei T'mimim

RABBI SHLOMA MAJESKI – Mashpia, Machon Chana

RABBI PINCHAS (PINYE) KORF – Mashpia, Oholei Torah

RABBI NACHMAN SHAPIRO – Mashpia, Oholei Torah

business once a year.

So too, writing to the Rebbe every month should be a genuine cheshbon ha'nefesh, getting it down in writing as a duch for the Rebbe. Once a year, for one's birthday, a deeper accounting should be made, and this too should be written for the Rebbe.

It's important to mention another advantage in writing to the Rebbe every month. The Rebbe himself noted it one time when he asked that letters be written to him for a specific date: When a Chassid knows that Rosh Chodesh is approaching, and he will need to write a duch to the Rebbe about his activities, this spurs him on to do more so he will have something to

write in the duch!

DETAILED REPORTS OR SUMMARIES?

How detailed should the duch be? Should every activity be described including the details or would a general summary suffice?

Rabbi Shapiro: From the Rebbe's letters, we see the Rebbe wants not only letters written on a regular basis, but detailed letters. To someone who sent him a short letter the Rebbe wrote:

[Your letter] was received. Thank you in brief for the very brief duch, and may the results not be brief at all.

You have to write in detail, and it's important to know that even if it's a long letter, the Rebbe knows every word of it. I once heard about a shliach who wrote to the Rebbe very often and each letter was at least ten pages! On several occasions, he got an answer from the Rebbe that referred to a little something that he mentioned on one of the last pages!

The Rebbe himself once said that even if there was no time to read all



From left to right: Rabbi Majeski, Rabbi Lipsker, Rabbi Shapiro, Rabbi Korf

the letters, it ought to be clear that the Rebbe knows all the details in the letter. The Rebbe compared it to a computer, that “as soon as you put some important details into the computer, you instantly know all the conclusions and actual judgment.”

Knowing this, namely that the Rebbe sees every detail in your letter, should ensure that we take letter writing seriously, as well as the activities themselves, including the smallest ones, for at the end of the month we’ll be writing to the Rebbe and the Rebbe knows just what we did and did not do.

Rabbi Lipsker: We must differentiate between when it’s proper to write in detail and when it’s unnecessary. Since we know the Rebbe is reading every detail in the letter, we must think before we write whether a certain detail is important enough to report to the Rebbe or whether we’re writing just to fill space.

Another important thing: about what was said previously about the need to write a duch once a month, what was meant was a literal din v’cheshbon. These duchos written to the Rebbe are not written in order to get an answer but to report to him.

As far as the letters written with requests for guidance or other questions, obviously these should not be written on a regular basis. On the contrary, in a sharp letter written in 5747, the Rebbe said that:

Lubavitch has existed for 200 years and in many areas things have been firmly established...talmidei ha’yeshivos – their responsibility is solely to the hanhala (and spiritually – to the mashpiim)... To tell a student of Tomchei T’mimim (and Bais Rivka, etc.) to send a duch of what they’ve done to me monthly or



As far as the letters written with requests for guidance or other questions, obviously these should not be written on a regular basis. On the contrary.

--Rabbi Berel Lipsker

every half a year or the like – cancels the responsibility of the hanhala and the others (as we see in actual fact), which is the opposite of the instructions of our N’siim. It is not possible for me to reply to even half of them, and therefore it leads to “breaking the vessels” (despair).

Therefore, it is very important to separate between a routine duch and asking the Rebbe to handle all the decision-making. The Rebbe wants the mosdos to run based on the decisions of the members of the hanhala, and for the talmidim to behave according to the decisions of the menahalim of the yeshiva and

the mashpiim. Therefore, it is up to the mosad alone to decide how to run things and the talmidim of the mosad must speak with members of the hanhala and get guidance from them as to how to behave.

When the hanhala decides that a certain matter must be decided by the Rebbe, only then may a talmid write to the Rebbe and ask for his decision. And when it comes to matters that necessitate speaking to a mashpia, it is possible that sometimes the mashpia himself will say that the Rebbe should be asked.

FIRST CONNECTION WITH THE REBBE – THROUGH WRITING OR LEARNING HIS TEACHINGS?

In the past, when someone would tell a Lubavitcher Chassid about a certain problem, the Chassid would suggest that he write to the Rebbe. In recent years, Lubavitchers are telling people who have no prior connection with the Rebbe and Chassidus Chabad to write to the Rebbe – just like that. They set up stands and invite people to write to the Rebbe and receive answers through the *Igros Kodesh*. Is it right that the first connection a person has with the Rebbe is through writing to him, or would it better if they learn the Rebbe’s teachings and his horaos and only then should it be suggested that they write to him?

Rabbi Korf: That Chassidim invite non-Chassidim to write to the Rebbe about their problems is firmly founded on a famous letter that the Rebbe wrote to the mashpia, R’ Shlomo Chaim Kesselman. The Rebbe wrote in high praise of someone who went to a country where people hadn’t heard of the Lubavitcher Rebbe [the Rebbe Rayatz] and he began telling his acquaintances that: **There is a Rebbe in Israel and he is not limited by**

nature and those who want to proceed with security: in business, in running the house, etc. – shouldn't make a move without asking the Rebbe. (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 3, p. 54 and on)

The Rebbe goes on to say that these Jews who wrote to the Rebbe because the man suggested that they do so, became close to the way of Torah and Chassidus over time. That means that the *Igros Kodesh* phenomenon is a positive one.

However, in this letter it refers to Jews who have problems in their business, health, shidduchim, and other important matters. The issue is clarified further on in the letter where the Rebbe writes that every Chassid who knows of the Rebbe's abilities –

And he knows of a friend who needs to make an important decision regarding health, parnasa, etc., or even in a matter of danger, G-d forbid, then out of humanity and Ahavas Yisroel, pikuach nefesh, etc., if there is hope and the slightest chance that he will listen, he should chase this friend and say to him the following: "Have pity on yourself, your household and all that you have. And do not rely on your understanding; learn Chassidus, connect with so-and-so [the Rebbe] and do as he says, and you will be successful."

That means: 1) when a Jew needs a bracha, it is very important to suggest that he write to the Rebbe. But seemingly, there is no inyan in just telling everyone you meet to write to the Rebbe. 2) Even when it's a Jew who needs a bracha, the Rebbe did not say to just write a letter but also that he should learn Chassidus. Therefore, in addition to writing, he should be persuaded to learn the Rebbe's teachings and to fulfill his horaos, for his material good.



When a Chassid knows that Rosh Chodesh is approaching, and he will need to write a duch to the Rebbe about his activities, this spurs him on to do more so he will have something to write in the duch!

--Rabbi Nachman Shapiro

What order should it be? Should you first talk about writing or first talk about learning or fulfilling his horaos? In general, the Rebbe didn't set any rules about this. Each person must do as he sees fit. In my opinion, when you start off by talking about the Rebbe's teachings and his horaos and only then talk about writing to him, it accomplishes everything in a more pnimiyusdike way.

Rabbi Lipsker: Rabbi Korf is right that there is no set order or recipe for success. It depends on the Chassid and the person he wants to be mekarev. After all, when you meet a Jew you don't know, it's not so easy to suggest that he put on t'fillin, and similarly there is a measure of difficulty in mixing in to someone's private life and suggesting that he write to the Rebbe.

There are Chassidim who have no problem stopping a Jew on the street and suggesting that they put on t'fillin but they don't have the courage to suggest that they write about their personal problems to the Rebbe. Then there are more sociable types. People, who by nature, find it easier to connect with strangers on a personal level and to suggest that they write to the Rebbe.

It also depends on the person you want to be mekarev. If he's closed, then it's better to start with a shiur, but if he's open it might be better to start with suggesting that he write to the Rebbe about his problems.

Rabbi Shapiro: Shluchim had a similar question years ago when they wanted to bring mekuravim to the Rebbe. Should they bring them immediately or is it better to wait and have them undertake more mitzva observance and horaos of the Rebbe before bringing them to the Rebbe? Many shluchim can tell you about baalei battim whom they brought immediately and just meeting the Rebbe accomplished more than ten years of talking to them.

Rabbi Korf: As I said earlier – that the suggestion to write to the Rebbe should only be about problems that necessitate writing to the Rebbe and not writing just for the sake of writing – I'd like to quote what the Rebbe said at the opening of the Kinus HaShluchim in 5749:

Some think that first and foremost they should try and write me letters and the more the better, disregarding who is writing, what his position is, what he is writing about, etc. ... Therefore, it is necessary to clarify that before writing a letter ... think again whether it is necessary to write this letter or perhaps it is a waste of time, the time of the writer as well as the time of the recipient.

(Hisvaadyos 5749, vol. 1, p. 362)

Rabbi Majeski: At first glance, since we regard writing to the Rebbe today just as we did before 3 Tamuz, we must always compare the two times. Before 3 Tamuz, would we have told everybody to write to the Rebbe? For most of us, the answer is no. As was mentioned here already, based on the Rebbe's sichos, it was only on certain occasions that we suggested that non-Lubavitchers write to the Rebbe. You need a serious reason to justify a new practice.

The only reason that I see, which justifies it, is the fact that after 3 Tamuz, when we don't see the Rebbe, writing to the Rebbe, even for no special reason, and the amazing answers one opens to in the *Igros Kodesh*, demonstrate that the Rebbe is *chai v'kayam*. Therefore, one ought to become *mekushar* to him and fulfill his *horaos*.

When a non-Lubavitcher sees that the Rebbe is *chai v'kayam* despite 3 Tamuz, he naturally feels that the Rebbe's *inyanim* pertain to him, the proof being: the Rebbe answered his letter!

Of course, you can be *mekasher Yidden* to the Rebbe through his teachings and *horaos* too, but the connection through the writing of a letter and receiving an answer has an advantage because of the personal element. Before 3 Tamuz, when we wanted to be *mekarev*



We need to constantly remind ourselves and live with the idea that writing to the Rebbe today is just like writing to the Rebbe before 3 Tamuz, and then the writing will be done in a pnimiyusdike way.

--Rabbi Shloma Majeski

someone to the Rebbe, we brought him to a *farbrengen* of the Rebbe or to "dollars."

When he got a dollar from the Rebbe or the Rebbe looked at him and wished him "*l'chaim v'livracha*," he felt a personal connection to the Rebbe. This made him feel like he wanted to fulfill the Rebbe's *horaos* and learn the Rebbe's teachings.

Today, when due to the double and redoubled darkness, we don't have dollars from the Rebbe or *farbrengens* with him, the way to

forge a personal connection with the Rebbe is through writing to the Rebbe.

However, along with all the advantages of writing to the Rebbe, we need to ensure that the writers take it very seriously by explaining to them that before writing to the Rebbe you need to prepare. They should make a good resolution and picture themselves facing the Rebbe and asking their question. We need to constantly remind ourselves and live with the idea that writing to the Rebbe today is just like writing to the Rebbe before 3 Tamuz, and then the writing will be done in a *pnimiyusdike* way.

WHAT YOU DO NOT ASK ABOUT

You said earlier that when there is a problem or indecision you can ask the Rebbe. Should you write to the Rebbe about any problem or are there questions that shouldn't be asked?

Rabbi Korf: Countless times, the Rebbe made it clear that we shouldn't ask him halachic questions. When Chassidim didn't know about this and asked, the Rebbe did not answer them. He referred them to practicing rabbis. The Rebbe told us repeatedly that since "this Torah will not be exchanged," one could not circumvent rabbanim, who are the sole authority for all halachic matters.

If this was said in years when we could receive direct answers from the Rebbe, all the more so when the Rebbe's answers are being received through the *Igros Kodesh*, regarding which the Rebbe said a number of times that asking by opening a holy book is only when:

You want to clarify how to handle an optional matter (about which there is no clear direction in Torah about what to do)

(BaMidbar 5749).

An important point must be clarified, namely, that looking for signs in Torah regarding what to do is only for those issues about which there is some doubt, and generally speaking, about *inyanei r'shus* (optional matters)... However, in a matter when he knows with certainty that the Torah says to do such and such, there is no need to look for signs.

(Noach 5749).

Rabbi Lipsker: There is a very sharp line from the Rebbe in a letter to one of the Chabad rabbanim in Eretz Yisroel who issued a certain p'sak halacha and then there were people who complained to him that there were letters from the Rebbe about similar situations where the Rebbe said differently than the rav. The rav asked the Rebbe about this and received a long letter that begins with the following:

It is well-known throughout the dispersions of the Jewish people that the rav needs to make his halachic decisions based only on *Shulchan Aruch* (and not on allusions in letters and the like, and not even based on letters, because a letter that is the opposite of *Shulchan Aruch* is nothing).

(M'Otzar HaMelech 209)

The Rebbe goes on to say in this letter how it isn't possible to pasken according to a horaa in a letter:

“Obviously, a horaa to an individual and the like, especially in a personal letter to him, is not a horaa for all, since most of the time it depends on the circumstances of the individual, his character, the opportunities that he wrote about in his letter, etc. etc.

This was said at a time when we received letters from the Rebbe, all the more so nowadays when we open to answers in the *Igros Kodesh*. Besides the fact that the Rebbe's



*The Rebbe writes:
“Have pity on
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successful.”*

--Rabbi Pinye Korf

answer back then depended on the circumstances of the person receiving the letter, understanding an answer from the Rebbe's letters depends, to a great extent, on the character of the person receiving the letter now, and on his understanding.

Since this is the case, now more than ever we must be extremely

careful that anything of a halachic nature be decided only by practicing rabbis. If in the past, the Rebbe refused to answer halachic questions, all the more so nowadays would asking the Rebbe a halachic question via the *Igros Kodesh* be the opposite of what the Rebbe wants.

As for those who think they are great Chassidim and make halachic decisions based on what they understand of answers from the Rebbe in the *Igros Kodesh*, even when it opposes halachic p'sak by rabbanim, the Rebbe said:

It's foolish to say that I said, Heaven forbid, to do the opposite of a p'sak din in *Shulchan Aruch*. Only a fool would believe that.

MEDICAL PROBLEMS – GO TO THE DOCTOR OR WRITE TO THE REBBE?

What should people do regarding medical problems? Write to the Rebbe first or go to the doctor first? If the doctor says to do something, is there a point in asking the Rebbe whether to do it or not, or should one only ask for a bracha that the treatment go well?

Rabbi Korf: Nowadays, when confusion reigns, sometimes, the best answer to questions like these is simply to review what was done before 3 Tamuz. What did we do then? Did we run to the Rebbe immediately or did we run to the doctor first? I don't know of anyone who had a medical problem who didn't go to a doctor first before writing to the Rebbe. It was obvious to all that when you have a medical problem, you go to a doctor. As the Torah says, “guard your souls.”

After going to the doctor and if the doctor said the situation is complicated and there are a number of ways of treating it or if the doctor recommended something serious, like an operation, then they would

write to the Rebbe.

Rabbi Majeski: In recent years, there were clear horaos from the Rebbe about what to do regarding medical questions:

When in need, do as an expert doctor says – even better, a doctor who is a friend. In special circumstances, two expert doctors, and if there is a difference of opinion then do as the majority says.

Sometimes people say to me: I wrote to the Rebbe and didn't get an answer in the *Igros Kodesh*. When I tell them that the Rebbe referred such questions to a doctor-friend, they don't like it. They want an answer from the Rebbe. This is a serious problem, because the Rebbe said explicitly that the suggestions of a doctor-friend is the Rebbe's answer coming through the doctor-friend.

When the Rebbe told us to consult with a doctor-friend, he did not abandon us. He simply decided to convey his answers through that doctor. Our desire to get an answer from the Rebbe is understandable, but a Chassid must know that he has to fulfill the Rebbe's horaos, even when he prefers otherwise.

So too nowadays, after the Rebbe said to consult with a doctor-friend about medical questions, we must do so. If we are Chassidim and if we fulfill the Rebbe's horaos, then we need to consult with a doctor-friend

and feel confident that the Rebbe's answer is coming through him.

This was the case before 3 Tamuz and is all the more pertinent after 3 Tamuz. When we compare the two possibilities – going to a doctor-friend and getting the Rebbe's answer through him or writing to the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh* – in the first case one is following a clear **horaa** from the Rebbe whereas the latter case is based primarily on a Chassidische **hergesh** (feeling).

The Rebbe *did* say that one could ask via sifrei kodesh but he didn't give a general horaa that when you have a medical question you should open a holy book. Therefore, you have to put it in perspective: when it comes to asking through the *Igros Kodesh* we have the Rebbe's **haskama and approval**, but when it comes to consulting with a doctor-friend, we have a **clear instruction** from the Rebbe.

This inyan definitely needs strengthening nowadays. I once saw a letter in which the Rebbe complains about those called “shpitz Chabad” who learn out allusions from various movements that the Rebbe makes, and based on their understanding of these hints they do the opposite of what the Rebbe said explicitly!

There are people today, who consider themselves “shpitz Chabad,” who denigrate clear horaos

from the Rebbe. For example, the horaos of the sicha of 2 Adar 5748 in which the Rebbe said that when in doubt consult with Chassidische rabbanim, regarding medical matters speak to a doctor-friend, regarding business speak to friends in the know, and instead they rely on answers that they deduce from the *Igros Kodesh*.

This means that when we have a clear law in *Shulchan Aruch* or a clear instruction from the Rebbe, the Rebbe himself does not want us to ask him through the *Igros Kodesh*. As was quoted earlier from Noach 5749 regarding receiving answers in sifrei kodesh, “regarding a matter that he knows for sure must be done al pi Torah, there is no need to search for signs.”

Rabbi Lipsker: I once heard from R' Shneur Zalman Gurary a”h that he asked the Rebbe about something and the Rebbe referred him to friends who knew about such things. He told the Rebbe that he wanted an answer directly from the Rebbe and the Rebbe responded: What do you care if my answer comes through them?

It's important to add that even after the Rebbe said to ask a doctor-friend, etc., the Rebbe emphasized that we can continue asking for brachos. That means that after going to a doctor-friend you need to write to the Rebbe and ask for a bracha.

[To be continued]

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CHICAGO

LIVING ON THE REBBE'S BRACHA

BY NOSSON AVROHOM

*The doctors said the operation was critical and that I had to be positive about it for depression would jeopardize the outcome. Yet, weakness overcame me and I despaired. I felt myself suspended between life and death. And then Rabbi Shmuel Katan came to visit me... * A personal miracle story.*

"I've lived fifteen years now thanks to the Rebbe's bracha." That is how Meir Sekaat, a middle-aged man who has been the gabbai in the Yemenite Mishkan Tzadok Shul in Rishon LTziyon for years, begins his story.

Although Meir is not a Lubavitcher, he has a warm spot in his heart for Chassidus, and especially for the Rebbe. He chokes up as he tells me his incredible story. His reminiscences makes it hard for him to speak and he stops every now and then, sighs, takes a deep breath, and goes on.

* * *

I was born less than fifty years ago in the Gordon section of Rishon LTziyon. As a kid, I looked for a high school that included Judaism in its curriculum and I picked the Vocational School in Kfar Chabad. After four years of school, in which I got a "full portion" of unmitigated belief in the Rebbe, I was drafted into Nachal. After

finishing my compulsory service, I signed up as a career soldier and joined the Army's Logistics and Procurement division. Up until that point, I had lived a good life, never felt ill and was in excellent health.

I was 33 years old when I suddenly began to feel strong pains in my lower back and stomach. At first, I tried to ignore the pain thinking it would pass. I figured I may have lifted something and strained some muscles, but not only did the pain not subside, it increased significantly. My wife urged me to go to the doctor and I did so.

For four months, I ran from doctor to doctor, from one clinic to another private one, and they all said the same thing: they don't see anything wrong and they don't know the reason for my pain.

After a long period of examinations, fear, and nerve-wracking waiting, one of the doctors discovered

a tumor. I was stunned. Was I sick with cancer at such a young age?! I was devastated. The doctors who treated me told me I would have to undergo chemotherapy treatment and then two complicated operations in order to remove the tumor.

"You are about to undertake a long and arduous course. You will only make it through if you are determined."

I don't want to remember those days for they were the worst in my life. Hardest of all was that my wife was pregnant and the atmosphere was tense and gloomy. I thought that the baby would be born and I would barely have a chance to see him or raise him.

I decided to write to the Rebbe, whom I had heard so much about when I had attended school in Kfar Chabad. I remembered that ten years earlier I had written to him about my father and had received wonderful answers from him that had made parting from him a bit easier.

I wrote a letter and sent it by fax to the secretaries in New York. I was disheartened when days passed with no response. I sent another letter and a third one, but did not receive a response. My friends, who saw me running to the mailbox every day to see if I got a response, said, "Maybe the Rebbe doesn't have time to answer you." However, I was sure I would get

an answer.

I underwent the first operation successfully. My doctors, Dr. Ben Chaim and Dr. Yona, did a great job. I was supposed to rest for a few weeks in order to gain my strength for the second operation.

From Erev Shabbos, I hardly ate anything since I was supposed to be on a strict diet. The following Tuesday, I was taken to the hospital and began tests in preparation for the operation scheduled for the new day. However, due to my great weakness, my body couldn't take it. The various systems weren't working properly and the doctors said I should eat and regain my strength. They released me and told me to return for the operation the following week.

R' Elimelech Firer, director of Ezra L'Marpei, was the one who connected me to the right doctors and helped me tremendously. Starting from Shabbos I began the strict diet again so that I would be able to have the operation on Wednesday.

I went back to the hospital but once again, my body wasn't up to having an operation. The doctors couldn't begin preparing for the operation until my condition stabilized. The director of the department grasped my hand and said, "Apparently you haven't said enough T'hillim."

I went to various mekubalim but did not receive a comforting response from any of them. My fear grew when I had still not received a response from the Rebbe.

Wednesday morning the doctors hooked me up to an IV. The danger of leaving me without an operation was great and so they decided to operate while having me connected to various machines. At seven o'clock that evening, I felt a tremendous weakness and was very depressed.

In a weak voice, I asked my wife to bring me a glass of tea so I could

revive myself. The doctors constantly warned me that this operation was critical and that I shouldn't fall into despair for that would jeopardize the results of the operation.

My weakness threatened to break my spirit. There were times that I felt that I was suspended between life and death.

My bleak thoughts were

I went back to the hospital but once again, my body wasn't up to having an operation. The doctors couldn't begin preparing for the operation until my condition stabilized. The director of the department grasped my hand and said, "Apparently you haven't said enough T'hillim."

interrupted by Rabbi Shmuel Katan. He is a Lubavitcher Chassid who was my teacher in Kfar Chabad and later became an employee of the army. It was after Chanuka and he told me that he had just been to the Rebbe and when he passed the Rebbe, the Rebbe had given him a bottle of mashke for the soldiers on the base. When he returned to Eretz Yisroel, he had heard about me, and he had rushed to visit

me with the bottle and a Chitas.

While we were talking, a Vizhnitzer Chassid stopped by. He worked for an organization that distributes food to sick people. R' Katan said divrei Torah and poured me some mashke, saying confidently that my condition would improve since the Rebbe had designated this mashke for me too.

I took a bit of mashke and maybe you'll think I was imagining it, but I immediately felt so much better. Previously, my stomach felt like it couldn't hold down whatever I consumed, but after the mashke, I felt calm. I asked him to stay on longer and we continued to talk into the night. That night I felt much stronger.

The next day they did the operation with far more success than they had anticipated. My recovery was also fast and amazed even the doctors.

My wife gave birth to a healthy boy. Before the bris, we sent a letter to the Rebbe to inform him of the birth. This time we got a response a few days later, a letter that stunned me. The Rebbe said the child would grow up to be a nachas ruach to his father and mother. The word "father" was underlined.

I was beyond thrilled. I told my wife and friends, "You see how the Rebbe was thinking about me the entire time. There's no question that the Rebbe sees everything."

Among the participants at the bris was Rabbi Moshe Edery of Kfar Chabad, who announced a farbrengen to take place every Rosh Chodesh, which we do until this day.

* * *

Fifteen years have passed since then and Meir doesn't stop telling his story so that people know there is someone In Charge. Whenever he relates his story, he is moved all over again. "An amazing miracle like this doesn't grow stale," he says.

A HECHSHER FROM THE CHIEF OF POLICE

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN CHANIN

*After fleeing from Leningrad, the “Tashkent era” of R’ Chaikel’s life began. * He went from being an “escaped criminal” to a “legal citizen,” and quickly regained his place as one of the main Chabad askanim in the city.*

SETTLING IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan is in the Asiatic part of the former Soviet Union. As compared to other areas under communist rule, the local Jews (and l’havdil, the Moslems) retained a certain measure of autonomy when it came to their economy and religion and the Yevsektzia did not reign with full power here. Over a million Jewish refugees are estimated to have traveled from European Russia to Asiatic Russia during World War II.

The capitol city, Tashkent, was a refuge for many Chabad Chassidim who began fleeing there as the Nazis approached. My father, mother, and two sisters arrived in Tashkent on Rosh Chodesh Elul 5702 (1942).

Upon their arrival in Tashkent, a new era in my father’s life began and his community involvement took on greater impetus, albeit in a different form. My father took an honorable place among the g’dolei

ha’chassidim and became one of the main askanim. They called him to every meeting concerning Tomchei T’mimim, concerning *pidyon shvuyim* (redeeming captives) and later, concerning smuggling Jews out of Russia.

My father was a clever and straight-thinking man. He knew how to analyze a situation and find a way to resolve complications. He was a strong principled man yet also well liked. My father had a way about him that enabled him to relate to government and other people in authority. In addition, he had a lot of money that he used when bribes were necessary.

My father tried to remain behind the scenes and his work wasn’t always of public knowledge. He gave large sums of money to his fellow Jews, beyond what would be considered generous even by today’s standards.

My father tried to help each and every person with whatever they

needed, whether it was getting a sewing machine, find employment at a factory, helping the numerous widows and orphans, giving advice, founding a cheider, etc. Anybody in trouble knew to go to R’ Chaikel who would certainly help.

Lubavitchers have told me that when they went to Tashkent and were bereft of everything and literally starved for bread, they knew that R’ Chaikel would find them food, a place to sleep, and would help them until they could help themselves, and even at that point, they were sure my father would help them.

AT THE RIGHT TIME

My father told a humorous story about the time when he was still in Moscow and homeless, after having fled Leningrad:

I walked the streets and wondered where I would sleep that night. The skies darkened and it began to rain. Rain? It wasn’t rain but a flood! I wasn’t rushing anywhere and so I took shelter under an awning on one of the streets, along with some other people.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder and I turned around. It was R’ Mendel Futerfas. He was happy to see me and said: Chaikel? I don’t believe it ... I’ve been

looking for you for days ... how did you manage to come here just at the right time when I needed money?

Do you understand the irony of the situation, my father asked me. R' Mendel lived in Moscow at the time and had a house and employment. I had no place to live and no address for I was a refugee running for my life.

Of course, R' Mendel got a nice sum of money from my father as a loan as many others had received from him.

MEETING WITH THE CHIEF OF POLICE

R' Yosef Mochkin, a good friend of my father who had also fled from Leningrad, preceded my parents and arrived in Tashkent a few weeks ahead of them. R' Yosef was the first Lubavitcher to arrive there, and as Yosef said to his brothers in Chumash, "Hashem sent me ahead of you to provide food." He paved the way for the Jews who arrived after him.

He was known as an ish chesed and an askan who cared deeply about his fellow Jew. At a later point, he even sat in jail because of this. Within a short time, he managed to forge connections with people in the government and police in Tashkent. When my father arrived, he did his best to help him register as a local resident and arrange all the paperwork, without which the Soviet system would spit you out.

My father, who had lived in fear for so long, was afraid to go to the police station to register his real name. R' Yosef reassured him and promised him he had nothing to fear because he befriended the chief of police who would arrange all the papers. However, my father was still afraid.

R' Yosef suggested that he

arrange an interview for him with the chief of police. My father said that he liked the idea but he asked that the chief of police come to him. My father explained that if the goy would come to him and would be willing to take money from him, then he would see he was a person he could trust. However, if he had to go to the police station, he could never be sure that a trap wasn't waiting for him.

R' Yosef succeeded in arranging a meeting with the chief of police, who agreed to come to my father. The police chief was an Uzbeki goy and not a sworn communist. On the contrary, he was a man who



believed in G-d, who admired people with religious principles. He also trusted Jews not to repay his good with evil and inform on him.

He had to pinch pennies, as every government employee had to do, and when he sniffed out the possibility of extra cash, he agreed to do whatever my father wanted. My father asked him to find out why they wanted to arrest him in Leningrad and it was through this police chief that he discovered that it was based on a mistake (as mentioned in an earlier installment). This information enabled my father to relax somewhat.

A HOUSE, FOOD FOR THE WINTER, AND KIDDUSHIM FOR THE CHASSIDIM

When my father arrived in Tashkent with his family, he couldn't register as a legal resident without having an address. Since he had money, he bought a house, gave \$500 rubles as a deposit, and brought my mother and the rest of the family there. My mother was thrilled to settle down after their traveling, but when she walked into the house she was disappointed for it had an earthen floor, or to put it more accurately, it didn't have a floor at all.

As soon as she saw this, she retreated and said to my father that she would not live in a peasant house. My mother was born and raised in Leningrad, a modern and cultured city, and was an intelligent woman, clean and organized, who loathed dust. Despite the living conditions they had endured the previous years, she was particular about standards of hygiene. She would not agree to live under such uncivilized conditions.

My father smiled as he told of how he forfeited the deposit and went to find a different house that would satisfy his wife. He soon found another house for which he paid \$3000 rubles. The house had a floor and was relatively spacious with a small garden in which they grew grapes and vegetables. They had two milk cows in the yard, which the seller gave them.

Another advantage to the house was the cellar, which served, in those days before refrigeration, as a place to store food so it wouldn't spoil. After moving his family into the new house and buying some necessary furniture, he went to the market to buy food.

In his wisdom, my father planned for the future. He saw the

abundance of food in Tashkent and figured that it was next to certain that famine would hit sooner or later and that he had better prepare storehouses of food. My father said that he bought 200 sacks, 80 kilograms each, of dried food that doesn't spoil quickly, such as rice, millet, flour and sugar, and he brought them to his cellar. He bought the food at the end of Elul but he also bought some sacks of wheat and put them in a separate place so they could use it months later for shmura matza.

Slowly, the family got into a routine. My father got three hand-weaving machines, which my mother worked on simultaneously. Aside from the weaving – i.e., moving the threads from right to left and from left to right monotonously but quickly – she had to change the spools of yarn in order to change the design, to invent a new design, etc. Although this was very hard work, it was a good source of income. My father took her finished products and with his business sense sold them on the black market for a nice price.

My parents hosted Kiddushim once again. Every Shabbos, my father managed to obtain food, through his connections and money. Whoever participated in those Kiddushim went out full, both spiritually and physically.

Many Chassidim who didn't have food to eat were too embarrassed to ask for help and nearly starved to death. When they came to the Kiddush, said l'chaim and ate the food the balabusta had prepared, they had an honorable way of feeding themselves.

My sister said that they used huge pots because they always prepared large quantities of food. She innocently thought that small pots weren't kosher!

IN RUSSIA YOU DON'T "BUY" – YOU "OBTAIN"

There is a reason why I say "my father got" and "my father obtained" rather than "my father bought," even when talking about food, clothing, or other essential items. This is a translation of the Russian word "zakazen," a familiar term to all those who know what life in Soviet Russia was like.

At this time and until the fall of communism, it wasn't possible to buy food in a store. Everything had to be "obtained" on the black market.

My mother was thrilled to settle down after their traveling, but when she walked into the house she was disappointed for it had an earthen floor, or to put it more accurately, it didn't have a floor at all.

You had to find out, secretly from others, where to get a piece of soap (smuggled in); who had a pot to sell; who got two pairs of shoes from abroad and agreed, for a nice price, to sell you a pair. An American child wouldn't understand how you could go to the grocery store to buy bread or milk and have the storeowner tell you he doesn't have any. Yesterday there was no bread, today there is no bread, and tomorrow there won't be any either. Or the day after tomorrow.

Parenthetically, even I, who knew

all the stories about Russia almost by heart, couldn't understand it until I experienced it myself. When I went on the Rebbe's shlichus in Kislev 5752 to the Soviet Union to print a *Tanya* together with my dear friend, R' Leibel Zajac, I began to understand.

On that trip, I saw how people stood in a long line for hours in order to buy bread. Before the trip I had taken along everything that I thought we'd need: food, disposable utensils, soap, a printing machine, a generator, printing paper, ink, etc. However, when we got to Moscow they told us that we had to buy water too because the local water wasn't safe for us. They showed us the store, meant for tourists, where you could use dollars, but when we went in, we didn't find water or soda. This store in Moscow, capitol of the second greatest superpower of the world (at the time), was full of – empty shelves.

One day, when I left the hotel we were staying in, I saw dozens of people walking down the street licking ice cream. It was winter and the temperature was dozens of degrees below zero, so I couldn't get over the sight of people bundled up in coats, scarves, gloves, and boots, eating ice cream! I was also wondering about the fact that people who didn't have bread to eat stood in line to buy ice cream.

One of the passersby pointed to where we could get this bargain. When I expressed my surprise he whispered, as though imparting a secret, that a shipment of ice cream had come from Finland and since there wasn't any bread, they were trying to obtain any nutritious food. The sugar in the ice cream, he told us, was a source of energy.

On our way to the town of Lubavitch, we passed a restaurant which had a big sign over it that said: No Bread. When I wanted to



My uncle Chaim Minkowitz



R' Naftali Hertz Minkowitz

take a picture of this sign, the owner asked me not to.

That is when I got an inkling of how the Jews in Russia had lived in those days, especially during the war.

THE FAMILY ARRIVED

As soon as they could flee Leningrad, my uncle R' Chaim Minkowitz, my father's brother-in-law and husband of his sister, Esther Rochel (who was also my father's cousin since their mothers were sisters), arrived. He went to my parents' house after spending the war years in besieged Leningrad and suffering from hunger.

As I already wrote, his wife, my aunt Esther Rochel and her daughters had joined my mother at the orphanage that was evacuated from Leningrad before the siege.

They had traveled with my parents all the way to Tashkent and had lived with them until my uncle arrived. My uncle arrived broken and sick with typhus.

Typhus was common during the war and felled many. It was practically synonymous with poverty, dirt, and lack of proper hygiene. When you added hunger and crowding, it was an ideal environment for the fatal illness to strike many people at once and to spread rapidly.

A person with typhus has fever, a bad headache, weakness, and muscle pain. The sick person gets a rash that starts on his back and spreads to the limbs until it covers the entire body. Without medication and the proper treatment, typhus is usually fatal.

The person treating those with

typhus was exposed to the danger of catching it, yet my mother took care of my uncle devotedly, constantly, and with endless loyalty. She washed him, brought doctors and got medication. Although she was careful that my uncle remain in isolation, my sister Golda caught typhus from him and my mother had to care for two patients.

My mother was up day and night until she saw the beginnings of recovery and she kept on top of their care until they both fully recovered.

After a while, Rebbetzin Mussia Nimotin, my mother's sister, also arrived in Tashkent. She came from Leningrad, broken in body and spirit after she saw her husband, R' Naftali Hertz (who was also the brother of my uncle, Chaim Minkowitz) and her little son Shimon, die of starvation. Her husband was one of the distinguished talmidim in his time in Tomchei T'mimim, a genuine Chassid and a G-d-fearing Jew. May their memory be for a blessing.

My parents welcomed her with open arms and did all they could to lighten her burden and suffering. Of course, she joined their household and lived with my parents all the years they lived in Tashkent. She also worked on the weaving machines and soon became an expert in this work.

G-d willing, I will dedicate a chapter to my aunt Mussia who has an honored place in our family history.

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FROM BEAT THE JEW AND SAVE GERMANY TO BEAT THE SETTLER AND SAVE KADIMA

BY SHAI GEFEN

AT THE BRINK OF THE ABYSS

The terrible scenes from Amona looked like something from another world. Thousands of police and Yassamniks brutally attacked the residents and youth who came to defend the dismantling of Jewish homes. Nobody doubts that someone wanted to see blood. Lots of blood. It's good to show it before the elections in order to extricate Olmert from his security woes. This approach is taken from Europe in the 1930's, "beat the Jew and save Germany."

*Terrorists' missiles are landing in strategic areas of Ashkelon and nearby yishuvim.

*On February 8th a Kassam rocket hit the Rotenberg Power Station outside Ashkelon, the first time the enemy succeeded in hitting the power station.

*Babies in their cribs are injured by Kassams like the 7-month-old baby who sustained brain and skull wounds. He and other family members lightly injured in the attack

are refugees from Gush Katif.

*Yishuvim near Gaza are not protected and residents are exposed to missile attacks. Leaders of yishuvim in the Sharon area met with the Defense Minister to discuss reinforcing public places in their cities.

*The head of Shabak said there are fifty attempted terrorist attacks a week!

*An Arab knifed six people in Petach Tikva, killing one woman.

The moral state of the country is declining at an alarming rate. Youth stab and are stabbed, and there is widespread violence, theft, and crime. The economy is not doing well either. In order to make the public forget all this, they use the "beat the settler and save Kadima" approach.

It's working well. Only the naïve





think that the pogrom in Amona was “an innocent act to preserve the law in the State of Israel.” According to reports, there were clear instructions to break heads. Those who saw what happened up close saw the murder in the policemen’s eyes.

If you thought that the government didn’t benefit thereby, you are mistaken. Instead of the public discussion focusing on the real problem – i.e., the fact that those who implemented the Disengagement crime established an Al Qaeda and Hezbollah state near our cities (just this week it was discovered that the largest factory for manufacturing Kassams was moved to Yehuda-Shomron) – they are busy with hundreds of wounded in Amona. Of the course the guilty ones are the settlers, the law-breakers who refuse to accept the law of Sodom and Amora.

The hatred implanted over many years is rising to the fore. Israeli society is falling apart, due to a lack of any moral vision. An entire nation saw how corrupt leaders are leading us as sheep to the slaughter and doing as they please.

It is only in the final moments of Galus, when darkness prevails in the world, that we can reach such a state of absurdity.

THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

The youth and thousands of opponents who faced off against the police with their horses and clubs, and fought like lions against the destruction of homes in Amona, deserve our admiration. The battle was definitely not for nothing. In the end, we will wake up and understand where our leaders are leading us.

Since the fight over Gush Katif, the Jewish nation has woken up to a new reality, a reality in which we see

who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, what is Galus and darkness and what is Geula and light. The confusion of holy and profane and between light and dark is waning. Daily, we see that things are becoming clearer.

The leaders of the Ichud Leumi, who during the expulsion from Gush Katif were proud of having collected weapons from the residents and helping ensure that the expulsion went smoothly, got a rude awakening in Amona when kicked by horses. Suddenly, the stories of the nobleman and pogroms in the shtetl became real.

The concept of Geula, which they had assigned to the Zionist police, was seen as taken from some fantasy world. The youth, who have sobered up from these abstractions, fought, while their fathers stood there stunned. Were those Jewish riders beating people? Was there no more brotherhood between the Zionist regime and religious-Zionism? The questions are perturbing.

Even those who saw the Medina as the beginning of Geula and considered it holy, are slowly coming to realize that the State of Israel in its wickedness is using everything in its power to oppose Eretz Yisroel and Toras Yisroel. At this time of crisis when enemies abound within and without, let us remember what Dovid HaMelech said, “These are with chariots and these with horses, but we invoke the name of Hashem our G-d.”

Unfortunately, this wasn’t the final act the government has planned. In the midst of the expulsion plan, Ami Eilon, former Shabak chief and today a Labor Knesset candidate, said that a country the size of Israel wouldn’t be harmed by a second Altalena [a reference to the cold blood murder of Jews against Jews ordered by Ben Gurion, in 1948, for political

Since the fight over Gush Katif, the Jewish nation has woken up to a new reality, a reality in which we see who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, what is Galus and darkness and what is Geula and light. The confusion of holy and profane and between light and dark is waning. Daily, we see that things are becoming clearer.

reasons] in order to stabilize the government.

Eilon and his fellow ideologues see every religious Jew and lover of Eretz Yisroel as an enemy of the state. This is the only supposedly democratic country in the world that has arranged pogroms and expulsions of Jews because they are Jews, a country in which Jewish blood is allowed to run in the streets and missiles are permitted to land on

Jewish homes with impunity.

This is the only country in the world in which the government injures hundreds of its youth while simultaneously sending rewards to those who murder its citizens, sending a quarter of a billion shekels to them to finance their attempts at exterminating us.

“THEY WILL MAKE POGROMS AGAINST JEWS”

The Rebbe Rayatz, whose yom hilula we marked this month, saw what would happen and prophetically told us what to expect. He said this 61 years ago on 26 Adar 1945 while celebrating fifty years since the founding of Yeshivos Tomchei T'mimim Lubavitch:

Men, women, listen!

In Eretz Yisroel, they are slowly, forcibly, converting Jewish children. Some of the anti-religious from among the group of leaders handling the orphans, refugee children, in Eretz Yisroel, have created a “shmad corner” for those children given into their charge.

In areas conquered by the Germans, Hitler set up extermination camps to torture and then burn Jewish bodies. In Eretz Yisroel, a certain group set up houses of shmad to torture and burn Jewish souls.

“The shmad corner” which forcibly converts orphan children, Jewish refugees, is educating the children with Hamans, devoted to the same educational approach as the wicked Yevsektzia.

These Hamans are teaching the children to desecrate the Shabbos, to eat treifos, to eat on Yom Kippur, to eat chametz on Pesach, and they don't allow the children to say Kaddish for their parents who died al kiddush Hashem. They teach the children to mock Hashem and Judaism.



The orphans educated by these Hamans, will rip Torah scrolls, will burn Jewish shuls, will destroy Jewish cemeteries, will arrange pogroms, will stab, burn, and shoot Jewish bodies, and rob property.

To our sorrow and shame, all these things, even those that were hard to understand at the time, have been fulfilled: the destruction of cemeteries, pogroms, stabbing. One reads this and shudders. However, like Rabbi Akiva and the Sages, we know that just as we saw the fulfillment of the prophecy of churban, we know that we will soon see the fulfillment of the Rebbe's prophecy, *“hinei zeh HaMelech HaMoshiach ba,”* and that the evil government will be uprooted as Moshiach restores the Malchus Beis Dovid and all the mitzvos of the Torah.

THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL

I got a phone call from a fellow in B'nei Brak who is not a Lubavitcher. He is a teacher in a Litvishe elementary school. He is very worried about the situation, he told me, and since he reads *Beis Moshiach* occasionally he sees how the Rebbe has it all analyzed, in contrast to the

rest of the rabbanim who are confused. He asked me why we don't publicize what the Rebbe said to others.

No one, aside from Chabad, says it clearly, he said. They're all perplexed. Only someone who reads what the Rebbe had to say gets a true perspective on what is going on. So why don't you publicize it?

It was difficult to answer his question, but shluchim and really anybody who considers themselves Lubavitch, need to know he and she have a job to do, to publicize what the Rebbe said. Why were those shocking sichos said if not for our situation? “Chabad is active,” says the Rebbe. Chabad isn't a movement that sits on the sidelines. We have clear instructions from the Rebbe and we must publicize them.

I suggested that this man from B'nei Brak distribute the CD *Eretz Yisroel HaShleima*, which clearly presents the Rebbe's view, and he agreed and ordered a bunch.

We are all the Rebbe's shluchim for inyanei Eretz HaKodesh. Shluchim around the world must arouse public opinion and spread the Rebbe's message. Halevai that before we do so, Moshiach comes!

CHEVRON, AMONA, AND HASHGACHA KLALLIT!

BY CHANA KATZ

In last week's *Beis Moshiach* we reported about an agreement that had been reached between Chevron residents and Israeli army officials. The agreement, resulting in the voluntary evacuation of nine Jewish families from clearly-owned Jewish land, was brought before the entire Chevron Jewish community and approved. It wasn't clear at that time how narrowly the agreement had passed and how some of the women who are the backbone of Chevron opposed it – even though they respected the outcome and now must, “*Tract gut vet zain gut.*”

Last week, during a Machon Alte/Chaya Mushka Shabbaton in Chevron, some Machon staff, on their own, probed deeper into the painful Chevron and Amona dilemmas, and came away with some very interesting and alarming insights. They learned that soon after the hand-shake on the Chevron deal, the IDF representatives themselves acknowledged that it wasn't a formal deal and could be subject, *ch"v*, to political interference.

One resident of Chevron told members of the Shabbaton group that right after the Jewish residents of Chevron agreed to temporarily evacuate the homes that “the army leader smiled in their face and said the agreement wasn't binding.” On the other hand, the Chevron leaders feel they did their part to uphold the agreement, which was much-publicized, and now the army/government will be under great pressure to uphold its word. There is the fear that if the agreement is not upheld, G-d forbid, there could be another Amona, *r"l*. But the official word is that they upheld their part of the agreement and await the imminent notice to return.

Chanania Mordechai, who teaches a class at Machon Alte, has been following events in Eretz Yisroel very closely. He shared some highlights of the conversation he had with one of the founding mothers of modern Chevron, a woman whose fiery and valiant efforts joined with others to give Jews all over the world a presence in the holy city of our forefathers – a presence which they fought for – and are still fighting for – with all their might, with Hashem's help.

* * *

“It really came down to the issue of whether to go to war or not,” said Mordechai. “It was obvious that the government was intending to go to war. Everything that happened in Amona would have happened in Chevron. They asked themselves if it was worth it to go to war over nine homes. Those opposed to the deal, felt that it was. They felt that nothing was ever gained in Chevron without fighting for it, and this was no exception. Sooner or later they'd have to fight, so why not start now?”

While all this is quite chilling to hear, Mordechai said the strong women of Chevron also maintain a positive attitude based on years of experience in living there. They've seen situations that appeared hopeless, turn positive in a seeming instant. It's a concept this brave woman leader referred to as “hashgacha klalit”: there are setbacks, but in the big picture they are moving forward. So too, she felt this recent agreement was a mistake, but that G-d willing, it will be corrected and she is respectful toward the people who decided upon it.

“Things are always changing,” Mordechai quoted her as saying, “and we don't know how things will be in a few years, even months. People talk

about manpower – soldiers vs. settlers – that's the worldly view. But (especially as we get closer to the Geula), the world is running on miracles nowadays.”

* * *

Discussing the tragedy in Amona, Mordechai felt that the extreme police brutality was not spontaneous, but latent in the hearts of those who wanted to bash anything to do with the Torah. The Chevron leader had a different perspective.

“Her exact words: ‘There's nobody home!’ There's no ideological opposition, rather self-seeking individuals trying to advance their personal careers. I'd be inclined to call the police Kapos!” said Mordechai. “She sees them as mercenaries not fighting for patriotism or ideology – just one interest: self, salary, position.

Amona, she felt, was just the beginning. The world has changed and people who respected and cooperated with the government are no longer going to blindly follow.

The older people got used to a certain way of thinking but the younger generation has no preconceptions from decades past. This is an advantage for they look at the situation in the here and now.

“She feels the government has a long, long fight ahead of them, that Amona was just the beginning. And while there could be losses here and there, hashgacha klalit, in the end the Jews will win.

“And her response to former Israeli secret service head Ami Ayalon, who told the press that the residents of Chevron better get used to the idea of evacuating – all of Chevron – she said with both fire and a chuckle, ‘I've got news for you. We're staying!’”

TURNING POINT AMIDST THE KLIPOS

BY NOSSON AVROHOM

*He was a Yerushalmi boy who went from door to door warning people about the chareidim's takeover of Yerushalayim. After the army he went to India where he spent a long time with people who brainwashed him until one day... * The story of Tomer Mizrachi, a Lubavitcher who took a long and winding road to the world of Judaism and Chassidus.*

I met Tomer Mizrachi for the first time when I visited the yeshiva g'dola in Tzfas. We got into a conversation and I couldn't help but marvel over the long road he had to travel before arriving in yeshiva and to a life of Torah and mitzvos. Unlike many other young people, his perspective on Judaism and religion went far beyond the usual negative view. His life story is about a lost and confused soul mired deep in captivity.

Tomer was born in the predominantly religious Bayit V'Gan neighborhood of Yerushalayim and he went to public school there. From a young age, he felt an intense hatred towards religious Jews, though he had nothing to do with chareidim. To illustrate his antipathy, elections were held in Yerushalayim and one candidate promised to open clubs and shops on Shabbos while the other candidate wore a kippa. Tomer didn't

suffice with simply voting, but volunteered and did all he could "so that Yerushalayim wouldn't be painted black" (as the chareidim are called because of their typically black clothing).

When he came of age, Tomer was drafted into the Intelligence sector. He served for three years at the IDF Central Command. His job was to develop and interpret Intelligence satellite photos. Those were exciting years in his life.

Along with his general satisfaction and happiness, he was feeling the need to search. Although he had everything he wanted he felt that it wasn't fully satisfying and wasn't true happiness. He wanted to be true to himself and he sought eternal truth that would transform his life into something real. This inner urge to seek truth grew day by day: "In those days I didn't

understand what was happening to me. I had no idea where this need to search came from. I tried to keep myself busy but these thoughts came back to bother me.

"For a few months I worked at various jobs and then I packed my bags and went to Thailand. I went by myself, as it was important to me to be alone without being dependent on any of my friends. From Bangkok, I went to the island resorts, where I wasted time on the beaches.

"I quickly realized that I would not find the answers to my questions in these places that were established tourist attractions. I looked for something liberating and less official. I took a flight to New Delhi and went from there to Goa.

"I met an Italian doctor who was an expert in holistic medicine. I took an interest in his work and he taught me alternative medicine that deals with the health of the soul by the proper balance of soul powers and energies. These teachings quenched my thirst for a while. I spent some time with this doctor but I came to realize, sadly, that this was only about fleeting happiness. After my initial enthusiasm, I began to feel an even greater sense of emptiness.

"I left the doctor and began to walk from beach to beach in the city. For hours, I would sit and think. Past, present, and future swirled about my head in confusion. The sand dunes, the quiet, and the date palms that



Now



On the way



Back then

swayed in the breeze didn't calm me. They only intensified the loneliness. I felt that my soul was crying out for something but I didn't know what. The lack of clarity that suddenly plagued me in the prime of my life threatened to break me.

"After a few months I packed and flew home to Eretz Yisroel."

For a while, Tomer tried to get into the Bach flower remedies but it didn't work out for him. He found that it was the world of energies, which attracted him. He eagerly read any book or booklet that he could find on spiritual energy. It was a momentary peaceful time before the next wave of distress. He didn't stay long in Eretz Yisroel. After two months he decided to return to India but this time he took along a pair of t'fillin, which he hadn't touched since his bar mitzva.

"This time I headed north, to the Parbati Valley. On either side are two villages, Naktan and Kiriganga. After exerting myself by mountain climbing, I reached the first village and I lived with an Indian family. Life was primitive and poor but it was because of this that I felt great.

"Every morning I got up with the

"I knew that Chanuka was coming up but didn't know precisely when. I was afraid to ask my parents lest they think I had lost my mind."

dawn and after eating we went to the fields where we worked until evening. Then we went back to the house and enjoyed the smell of incense. Sometimes, when there was no work in the fields, I would join the family on exciting trips in the spectacular mountains or in the pastoral valley.

"After a few months I left the family and went to the other village, which is one big ashram. And there are attractions there that bring in hordes of visitors.

"I experienced the visit there from a whole new perspective. For hours at a time I sat with one of the Indian 'Babus' and heard them talk about their

beliefs. It finally clicked for me that what I had been seeking all this time was spirituality. Not surprisingly, I enjoyed the explanations about their gods. Today, in hindsight, I find it hard to believe that I could have been interested in such stupidity for so long.

"In the meantime winter was beginning. I didn't know the exact date, having lost all sense of the days and months from the moment I landed in India!

"The village is in the Himalayan Mountains and accessing it was dangerous. Remaining in the village during the winter was reckless. I didn't own the normal means of protection from the elements, so I had no choice but to leave.

"Before leaving, the skies clouded over and snow, the likes of which I had never seen before, began to blanket the valley. Within a few hours, the area was covered with a prodigious amount of snow. I was stuck and beside myself. It would be insane to attempt to descend the mountain. I had heard of many people who had tried it and froze to death.

"A week went by and the awaited for break in the weather arrived. And

then, a moment before heading downward, as I stood on a rock, my pintele Yid awakened. I have no idea how and why but suddenly I found myself crying out Shma Yisroel. I repeated this pasuk a number of times and only then dared to descend.

“I experienced open miracles in that descent. I called them coincidences at the time but now I know they were Hashem’s Divine providence. Under good conditions, the descent takes five hours but it took me over twelve hours. On the way, there were countless instances when I nearly slid into raging icy rivers.

“I remained in the mountains another few months and worked in the fields of local Indians. The pay was paltry but that was my life at that time. I allowed my heart to lead me wherever it pleased. One day I decided it was time to rest. I went back to Delhi, where I rented an apartment. My plan was to travel to Goa and rest a bit from the experiences I had had the previous months.

“A day before I left I was sitting on the roof and enjoying the sunset when an Australian tourist entered my room and asked whether I was Israeli. When I said that I was, he told me he was Jewish and asked me to teach him Hebrew. I was a bit taken aback. He took two volumes of the Zohar out of his bag and asked me to teach him to read it!

“I asked him about these books and he told me that it was Jewish mysticism, the father of all mysticism. When I began reading, I realized that it was really something astounding. This was the first time that I realized that Judaism is also spiritual.

“I wanted to buy these books but didn’t know where to get them. I figured that the Chabad house in Delhi would have them but I refused to go there. I still remembered how when I was in Goa and sitting on the beach, a Lubavitcher disturbed my peace and asked me to put on t’fillin. I was still

angry at his nerve. Yet I really wanted those books.

“After much deliberation I decided to go to the Chabad house and ask for the books and immediately leave. When I got there, I saw two guys at the entrance. Later I learned that these were the brothers Arele and Avremele Kupchik, sons of Rabbi Klonimus Kupchik from Chadera.

“I asked if I could get a book on kabbala and Arele smiled and handed me a *Tanya*. I took the book and immediately escaped. Back at my

apartment, I tried to read the first pages, but it scared me. I realized this was something on the essence-level and there was no way I was going to change my essence. At most, I was willing to consider improving my character but not to change it.

“I was confused and ill at ease. I left the city and went to Almora, one of the prettiest villages in India. From the balcony of my room, I could see a chain of mountain peaks that were stunning in their beauty, at the end of which you can see the Himalayas. I



Purim at the Chabad house in Pushkar



Learning in Pushkar



"From my balcony I could see the magnificent mountains"

especially loved to look at the view at sunrise and sunset.

"One day, as I was walking down the street, I saw a local Indian pushing a wagon that contained books for sale. I was amazed to see books in Hebrew among his books. I bought two of them and these were less intimidating than the *Tanya*. It's interesting how it was these two books that motivated me to continue reading the *Tanya*, and so, without realizing it, I was being drawn in. Little by little, as I progressed, I realized I had come to a dead end. There was no choice. I had to make a choice, a change.

"I sat in that Indian's house and slowly made changes that strengthened my observance of Torah and mitzvos. At each stage, I felt that it wasn't me at all but something guiding me.

"I knew that Chanuka was coming up but didn't know precisely when. I was afraid to ask my parents lest they think I had lost my mind. In a

"I was stuck and beside myself. It would be insane to attempt to descend the mountain. I had heard of many people who had tried it and froze to death."

conversation with my mother, I wondered the entire time how to ask her when Chanuka was. At the end of the conversation I casually asked her and she told me that the first night was that night. I thought what a pity it was since I couldn't light, not having prepared for it.

"I looked into a grocery store that I was walking near and to my surprise

saw a box of large candles. I was very excited. On all my visits to villages in India, I had never seen these candles. I bought them and lit them.

"In the meantime I had begun putting on t'fillin. I remember a cute incident in which I was standing on the roof at sunrise with my t'fillin when I noticed hundreds of Indians, known for their lack of tact, standing and watching in amazement."

Tomer continued to progress in his observance. He started saying T'hillim regularly in addition to the t'fillin he put on every day and doing some other mitzvos.

One day, when he got to chapter five of *Tanya*, where it says how great Torah study is, he decided that he must learn Torah by leaving the village and going to Goa. On the way, he stopped off at the Chabad house in Delhi that he had run away from the last time he was there, in order to thank the bachur for the *Tanya* and the changes he had made.

"When I entered the Chabad house I met a chareidi Jew in his twenties. He greeted me and immediately asked me whether I wanted to study Torah in Pushkar. I couldn't believe it! This was what I was looking for! When I said yes, he sent me and two other bachurim, Nadav Cohen and Yaniv Cohen, to Pushkar. At the Chabad house in Pushkar, I delved into Torah study and began to get into the atmosphere of learning.

"As time went on I felt uncomfortable with the fiery and uncompromising belief that the Rebbe is the ultimate man. It was hard for me to accept this, for every Jew is a son of Hashem and nobody is more or less important. At a certain point, I had made a decision to learn the Jewish basics at the Chabad house and then move on to another group.

"I felt conflicted and one day felt I was experiencing a crisis. I realized I couldn't sit on the fence. On the one hand, the Lubavitchers were terrific



Taking the first steps



Outreach to children

people who helped every Jew all over the world. On the other hand, they had bizarre beliefs. I thought they had really lost it when they suggested that I write to the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh* and tell the Rebbe about my doubts.

“I had a *Likkutei Moharan* (writing of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov) and I took it with me one evening as I walked towards the mountains. I sat on a rock and simply spoke to Hashem. I said that I couldn’t go on this way anymore, that I had taken the first step towards Judaism and now it was Hashem’s turn to direct me to the right path. I opened the book and after reading a little bit was flabbergasted. Even now, as I recount this, I feel a chill.

“I had opened to the chapter that explains how important it is to follow the tzaddik of the generation who is the Nasi HaDor, because our neshamos are weak and only by connecting to him will our prayers be answered...

“I didn’t need to hear anything else. I saw this as a sign from Heaven. I went back to the others at the Chabad house and decided to firmly mekasher myself to the Rebbe.

“The thing that gave me the final push is connected with the following incident: It was between Purim and Pesach and after five weeks at the Chabad house I was debating whether

to return to Eretz Yisroel for Pesach. I wrote to the Rebbe and opened a volume of *Igros Kodesh*. I stood there for a long time in amazement at his answer. The page had two letters, one about Purim and one about Pesach. In the letter about Pesach, the Rebbe was writing to someone who was unsure about whether to remain where he was or to leave. The Rebbe told him to stay and quoted the Alter Rebbe in *Tanya* as saying that Torah study in impure countries, where idol worshippers live, is more precious...”

Tomer stayed at the Chabad house and helped prepare for Pesach. After a short time, he returned to Eretz Yisroel. His friends and family saw him

in his chareidi clothes and his beard and thought he was crazy. Some family members cried and tried to talk him out of it. They couldn’t believe that anti-religious Tomer had come back from India a “*dos*” (religious person). Some friends truly thought he had lost his mind and that the solitude in India had caused it.

As a genuine Chassid, rather than keeping his newfound knowledge to himself, Tomer reaches out to others and explains why he chose this way of life. He is married and lives in Tzfas, where he is continuing his studies in kollel.

THE FIRST PRAYER IN HIS LIFE

Tomer experienced a tremendous miracle when he went climbing in the Himalayas with his Indian friends. While climbing they heard gunshots. The group and Tomer found themselves in the midst of a battle between Indian police and foreign workers who came from Nepal.

“Right there in front of us, two Nepalese workers were killed when they fell from a rock and the entire area was closed to traffic. While we dove for cover, night fell, but the shooting didn’t stop. The police asked us not to move because the danger hadn’t passed. So we slept in a cave that we found.

“During the shooting I felt true fear for the first time in my life. I prayed and asked a Higher Power to save me. My prayer came from the depths of my heart even though I didn’t know exactly to Whom I was praying.”

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ב"ה

יחי אדונינו מורנו ורבנו מלך המשיח לעולם ועד

BLOOD: THE ONLY REASON FOR WHAT WE SAW

INTERVIEW BY SHAI GEFEN
TRANSLATED BY MICHOEL LEIB DOBRY

“Particularly due to the wickedness and cruelty of the special police forces, the power of our youth’s self-sacrifice was revealed in Amona. The struggle to save Eretz HaKodesh is not easy, but G-d willing, we will be victorious.” A special interview with the rav of Amona, HaRav Yair Frank, one of the leaders in the battle for Eretz Yisroel.

A fortnight ago, Amona turned into a symbol of steadfast and determined struggle, while on the other hand, there was revealed the ugly face of the police units that used all available means of force, as they broke open people’s heads “on orders from above.” Many in the general public feel that Amona is the breaking point in relations with the ruling powers, while on the other hand, it opens a true and uncompromising battle to continue our hold on Eretz HaKodesh.

As a result of the Amona Affair and its ramifications, we turned to the rav of the Amona settlement, HaRav **Yair Frank**, in order to hear about Amona, both what it was and what it will be, and the difficult events that took place two weeks ago.

HaRav Frank, when did you begin to serve as rav of the Amona settlement?

In my youth, I studied in the hesder yeshiva in Otniel. Afterwards, I continued my studies for another five years in the kollel for rabbinical judges in Ofra. Today, I serve as the rosh mesivta in the hesder yeshiva in Shilo.

This past year, I have also served as the rav of Amona. The Amona settlement, located near Ofra, has existed for over nine years, where approximately forty families now live. We’re talking about a most diverse settlement – farmers side-by-side with professionals. In the past two years, we have built nine permanent houses, which were destroyed two weeks ago by the authorities after a tenacious battle.

What about the claim that you invaded private Arab lands?

Anyone involved in this matter knows full well that we’re not talking about such a problem. This

is more a procedural problem than an ethical one. In the tens of thousands of homes throughout Yehuda and Shomron, no orders to destroy them are being enforced and people are waiting for matters to be worked out from a legal standpoint. Here, suddenly someone remembered that there is something illegal. The true reason for the ruin and destruction is their desire to destroy the settlements. The most amazing thing is that the day before the confrontation, the Yesha Council agreed to uproot the homes and have them moved to another location, provided there were given the time to so, but Olmert rejected this solution. This means that they wanted a confrontation and blood. This is the only reason for what we saw.

Why did the Yesha Council agree to this?

We opposed the Yesha Council’s approach and we did not agree to give in down to the last minute. The Yesha Council thought that at this point in time, it would be appropriate to show Olmert that here, similar to Chevron, he would not succeed in carrying out his scheme. We knew that this was a surrender agreement, and therefore, we opposed it.

However, as it turned out, G-d altered the situation, demonstrating the degree of insensitivity and

wickedness of the regime and the state, whose entire objective was to destroy the settlement and to show blood and violence among Jews.

Where does this bring us?

I hope that it will generate a thorough cheshbon nefesh among the general public over the situation and the formation of a national commission of inquiry to investigate the who, why, and how regarding this decision and what the true motivation was. To our great regret, we know that this entire process was conducted with political considerations.

You spoke about a cheshbon nefesh. What do you have to say about the young people who fought so uncompromisingly?

One message: Thanks and yasher ko'ach to the young people who came to us and revealed such amazing internal strength. Such soul power has not been seen in Israel for many years. I did not anticipate such evil and violence on the part of the state, and we were surprised by the degree of cruelty. However, it was specifically this violence and wickedness that revealed the strength of their self-sacrifice. This was expressed when the young people saw their friends receiving murderous blows and they knew that they were next in line, yet they steadfastly refused to move. While they took powerful blows to the head, they continued to sit on the floor, not moving an inch.

When people discuss Amona, people talk more about the confrontation, the blood, the brutality, and the expulsion, and less about the once flowering settlement. Here are a few important facts on the Amona settlement:

The yishuv was established in Elul 5756, about a kilometer east of

Ofra, and was one of the first in the new wave of settlement outposts. The name "Amona" is taken from the pasuk in Seifer Yehoshua (18:24) that lists his conquests, "And Ofra and Kfar HaAmona."

The settlement is located 901 meters about sea level and represents a special observation post eastward towards the Dead Sea and the mountains of Moav. Looking westward, one can see Ofra as if it is placed on the palm of the

The most amazing thing is that the day before the confrontation, the Yesha Council agreed to uproot the homes and have them moved to another location, provided there were given the time to do so, but Olmert rejected this solution. This means that they wanted a confrontation and blood. This is the only reason for what we saw.

hand. For this very reason, even back in the days of Ehud Barak's government, this settlement was classified as indispensable for security needs.

About two kilometers north of Amona is Mt. Chatzor, the location of the highest plateau between Meron and Chalchul. According to various traditional interpretations, Mt. Chatzor is where G-d showed all of Eretz Yisroel to Avrohom

Avinu, and promised him that he will inherit it.

On the yishuv itself, there are many archeological remains of the extensive Jewish settlement from the days of the Second Beis HaMikdash – wells, winepresses, and terraces – all of which bear testimony to intensive agricultural work in vineyards, particularly in this strip of land.

In 5762, the fields on the yishuv began to undergo the necessary preparations for home construction, funded by the government of Israel. The aspiration to establish the settlement and to provide a solution for large families living in caravans led to the building of permanent homes. During the last two years, Amona's permanent neighborhood was built with nine houses in its initial stages. Some of these homes were purchased by resident families on the Amona settlement.

The home construction was completed this past summer, and the Amona residents immediately began to live in these houses. The joy on the yishuv was great. In fact, it was doubly great for the residents of the new homes, who had finally left the stifling caravans into more spacious conditions. An amazing view of Yerushalayim spread out on the palm of your hand, the brilliant Dead Sea, the ancient Jewish agricultural relics beneath the window – all restore the heart and provide a deep feeling of connection to one's roots.

Until the expulsion, about forty families were living in Amona. The population in Amona was most divergent – farmers together with computer professionals, teachers with laborers, self-employed with salaried workers. The settlement also ran a kindergarten and a day care center.

The joy of the residents of

Amona did not last long. The High Court of Justice was petitioned, and the evil plan quickly began to snowball, when the state committed itself to destroying the houses.

A few hours after the police and soldiers left, the settlers placed the cornerstone for Amona's permanent synagogue. Amona and Ofra residents took rocks from the destroyed houses and used them for the foundation of the new shul.

There is no disputing the fact that something major happened in Amona in connection with continuing the battle for Eretz Yisroel. Do you also feel that way?

Absolutely. Amona is a landmark with great meaning. On the one hand, amazing strength was revealed, and G-d willing, this strength will continue to grow. On the other hand, people saw in Amona how Israeli society has deteriorated with a wickedness and insensitivity of incredible proportions.

Regarding the tremendous emotional strength that was revealed, we can look to what our Sages said on the pasuk in T'hilim (30:1) "A Psalm, a Song of the Dedication of the House by Dovid." Dovid HaMelech did not build the Beis HaMikdash; Shlomo did. If so, then why does it say "the house by Dovid"? The answer is that since Dovid sacrificed everything for the Beis HaMikdash, it is called in his name.

Jews in Amona acted with self-sacrifice. Children who have never tasted sin, young people comparable to gold, understood and felt that the struggle here is not just over a piece of land, but on the continuation of the Jewish presence in Eretz Yisroel, and therefore, the struggle was in their name. Just as the gates of the Beis HaMikdash were opened in the merit of Dovid

HaMelech, as our Sages say, similarly, in the merit of the self-sacrifice of these young people, we will see the Redemption of Am Yisroel, the True Redemption, the redemption of the Sh'china.

To a certain extent, the battle in Amona removed the shame of Gush Katif, where practically speaking, they used the approach of "I have love and it will win."

Indeed, this has been the feeling of most people. What happened in Amona made it abundantly clear that the struggle in Yehuda and Shomron will be waged in an entirely different manner. A struggle

*When there is unity,
victory is possible!
We must forego the
use of empty words
and proceed towards
actual unity. This is
the great call to
everyone: S.O.S.!*

without compromise. I don't want to start leveling criticism on what happened in Gush Katif, but we will absolutely not cry on the shoulders of our evictors. They will have to drag us out by force with iron chains. We will not turn the other cheek.

As the rav of the settlement, have you already digested what has happened to you?

I haven't digested it yet. How can you possibly digest such evil? Who would have ever imagined that Jews would act in such a fashion towards their fellow Jews?

In any event, have you drawn some conclusions?

The first interim conclusion is that disengagement from Eretz Yisroel means disengagement from the Torah. Eretz Yisroel is not just the concept of settling the land, but the actual realization of a life of Torah and mitzvos, a life in accordance with the holy Torah. This is a clear conclusion that we have drawn from the present struggle. They're not carrying out a disengagement from Eretz Yisroel for nothing; they want to cut us off from all that is Jewish.

Has Amona left its mark in the annals of the battles for Eretz HaKodesh?

It depends on how our people internalize it, including those in the non-religious community.

There is an atmosphere of encouragement and the gathering of greater strength in our ranks. We have restored color to people's cheeks. We have restored the self-respect after the disgrace of Gush Katif. The question is whether the Israeli public understands this as well. Do they now realize that the path they are taking will lead to a crushing destruction?

Are you concerned that we've ch"v come to a situation of two nations?

I don't think that we're talking about two nations. However, the fact that thousands of Jews were expelled from their homes and the nation was quiet demands interpretation. This shows clearly that we are currently in a most unhealthy situation. If they would have fought in Gush Katif the way they did in Amona, there would have been no expulsion – in both places. If our youth had been on the rooftops in Gush Katif the way they were in Amona, they wouldn't have been so quick to think about a

second disengagement. We also have a lesson to learn: I believe that since the disengagement, the Jews of Gush Katif have gone through a major cleansing process.

Why wasn't there a real struggle in Gush Katif as there should have been?

We are a gentle and ethical people. The struggle came hard for me as well; I have no connection to such things. However, we have to realize that when there is no alternative – we must also do things against our nature. Our community has to be less influenced by foreign culture and more in the direction of Torah.

Some are talking about cutting themselves from the state. Is this how people feel?

During the recent struggle, young people went around wearing

shirts with the words "I am a Jew from Eretz Yisroel," and this says it all. We are Jews who are connected to Eretz Yisroel and not the fat of the regime. We have to think about how to accept responsibility, how to influence others out of love. As we know, Chabad has no love without fear, and no fear without love. Fear of the Alm-ghty. When you're in an intense and uncompromising battle against the regime, you send a message that you have values and Torah, and you will not let anyone trample them.

I understand that the rav has a connection with Chabad.

I learn chassidus, *Likkutei Torah*, and *Tanya*. What connects me to chassidus is the Mitteler Rebbe's *Kuntres HaHispaalus*, and of course, the Rebbe's maamarim and sichos.

The impression nowadays is that there are no political solutions.

I sincerely hope not. I hope that the political leaders will understand that it's impossible to lead to a war among Jews, otherwise, who knows how seriously things will deteriorate. It is my earnest hope that the leaders will realize that we are in Amona to stay – forever.

Another important point: The communities of Yehuda and Shomron must be united with other religious communities throughout the country. When there is unity, victory is possible! We must forego the use of empty words and proceed towards actual unity. This is the great call to everyone: S.O.S.! The Rebbe also cried out for unity with all his strength, and with

G-d's help, especially at this time of distress, we will merit G-d's redemption and the salvation of the world.

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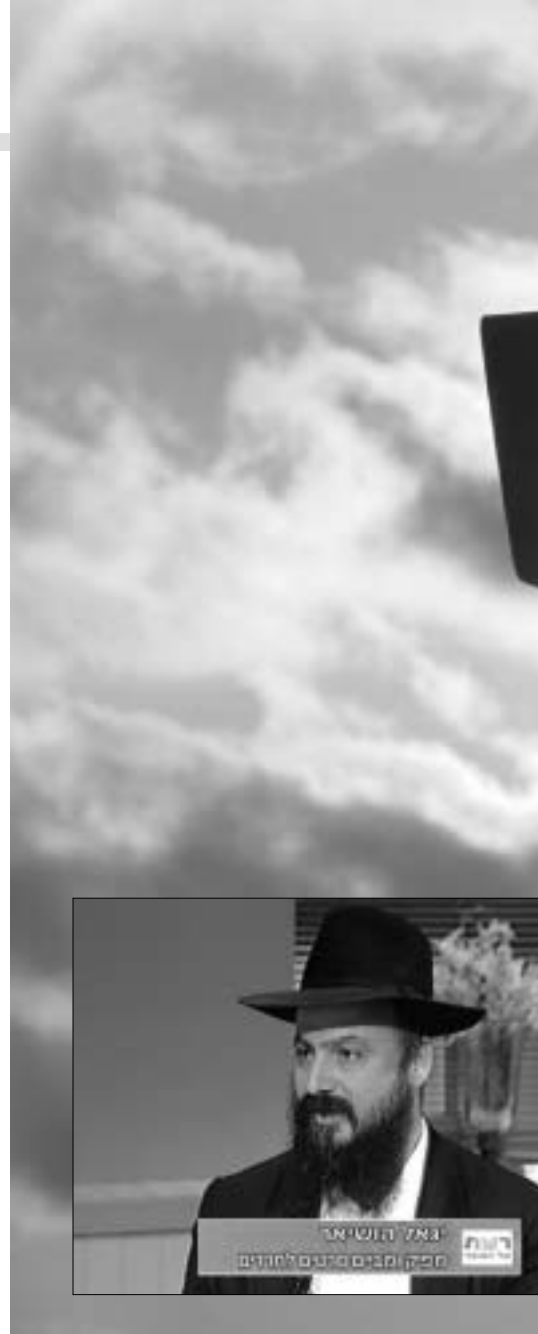
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SPREADING THE WELLSPRINGS THROUGH VISUAL MEDIA

BY MENDEL TZFASMAN

What happens when a Lubavitcher Chassid wants to produce a video and he hasn't the vaguest idea of how to go about it? Can a video that depicts a Chassidic story have action and bad guys? What is the connection between the Cantonist decree and the Maharal of Prague, between the stones of the Choshen and a mysterious partisan whose home is the forest? These and other questions are answered by Yigal Hoshiar, producer of Chabad videos (in Hebrew), who decided to use this medium to spread the light of Chassidus and the Besuras HaGeula. He has produced over fifty videos thus far.



If you want to write an article about a Chassidic video producer you want to know: how can you produce a video that will be suitable for all sorts of chareidim? What connects the “lights” – i.e. the Chassidic messages with which the producer lives – and the consumers, including those who are very far from the personal hashkafa of the producer?

I was also curious to know how a Chassid plans a day of filming with non-observant actors. And how do you prepare the world to greet Moshiach, not only with a finished product – i.e.,



an educational video al taharas ha'kodesh with the highest professional standards – but at every stage of production?

To find out the answers to these questions we traveled to Natzeret Ilit, where Yigal Hoshiar and his wife live. They are the directors of the Nitzotzot shel K'dusha company, whose main message is printed clearly under their logo: “educational films al taharas ha'kodesh.”

When I got to the yard of their house I was surprised to see Yigal's car

decorated with pictures of the Rebbe and stickers that say “Yechi” and “HaRebbe MH”M Chai V'Kayam.”

So Yigal, you put your cards on the table ... You are immediately identifiable as not only a Lubavitcher but as a Meshichist. This doesn't adversely affect the spreading of the wellsprings?

Yigal smiled and answered with a story: “Recently, Tzvika Schwartzberg, an actor from Ramat Aviv, who is about 50 years old, came to us. You can say that the Rebbe got him to act for

Nitzotzot shel K'dusha. His first appearance was on a filming day that took place at the Ruth Rimonim Hotel in Tzfas. The production crew consisted of Chassidim, Litvishe, knitted kippa wearers and those who don't yet cover their head.

“When it came time to daven Mincha we had a break and Tzvika went off to drink coffee. We were missing a tenth man and we asked Tzvika to complete the minyan. Although davening is not part of his routine, certainly not in the middle of a workday, he agreed to join the

minyan.

“Throughout the davening an older couple stared at us. At the end of the davening, they came over excitedly and told about serious problems they had with their daughter and son-in-law because of their different ways of thinking.

“It’s amazing how you Lubavitchers manage to unite everyone, without barriers and labels, and without compromising on your principles.”

“It’s interesting that the problems we experienced were ‘inside’ ones. I remember that when we were starting out and I was marketing the *Living with the Times* videos, there were certain Lubavitch-run stores that refused to sell these videos because the children in them were wearing Yechi yarmulkes. Now, after having sold many videos and having acquired a good reputation, despite the Yechi yarmulkes on the actors the wellsprings are being spread not only to the outside...”

Yigal Hoshiar is familiar to the public because of the videos he produces, which combine high professional standards with educational messages. Many people do not know that Yigal is a shliach of the Rebbe who is preparing the world to greet Moshiach in places that are often inaccessible.

For Yigal it all began when he passed by the Rebbe for dollars shortly before he got married and long before he got involved in videos. The Rebbe looked at him, handed him a dollar, and said, “bracha v’hatzlacha.” This was a high point for Yigal. He turned to leave but then the Rebbe took another dollar and blessed him a second time with “bracha v’hatzlacha.”

“In hindsight,” says Yigal, “I feel that the Rebbe gave me the ability then, to produce these videos.”

Yigal’s first project had nothing to do with producing videos but with printing. This was in 5751-5752 and in light of the Rebbe’s announcement that the only remaining avoda is kabbalas p’nei Moshiach Tzidkeinu by

the people, Yigal and tankist Elozor Kenig of Natzeret Ilit decided to print hundreds of thousands of Kabbalas HaMalchus forms.

Yigal paid for it with money he earned at various jobs when he was in Australia. He also borrowed a lot more money, and together they distributed the forms wherever they could. Tens of thousands of people from all walks of life signed the forms that accepted the Malchus of the Lubavitcher Rebbe as Moshiach. The forms were sent to the Rebbe through R’ Kenig and R’ Hoshiar. Two years later the pair were still paying off debts from this project.

Later on, in 5755, Yigal decided to produce a video that would visually publicize the fact that “there is a Moshiach in Israel.” The video included clips of the Rebbe as well as scenes from Chabad’s work around the world, and *Hisgalus Melech HaMoshiach* was ready to go.

The positive response to this video surprised even Yigal. The compliments, as well as the requests that he also produce something for children, were non-stop. Yigal was convinced and from that point on, the rest is history.

There are now **fifty** quality videos produced by Nitzotzot shel K’dusha including, *The Cantonist Decree*, *Every Jew is Gold*, *The Mysterious Partisan*, *The Mystery of the Stones of the Choshen*, *The Scar*, and many more. It’s hard to believe but the editing studio is a small room in the Hoshiar home and the “production crew” responsible for writing the scripts, the filming, the production, and editing is Yigal and his wife. Breakfast, lunch, and supper for the actors and other workers are prepared in the Hoshiar kitchen!

When I expressed my amazement at their output, Yigal modestly says, “I remember that when we went to the editing studio they laughed at our ignorance. We knew nothing about editing videos, photography, and digital production.”

Some will call Nitzotzot

WHEN THE ANIMALS DECIDE TO IMPROVE

Nitzotzot shel K’dusha is also preparing kindergarten children for Moshiach. There’s a series of videos that tells us about a group of (kosher!) animals, each one representing a different midda.

Since Moshiach is coming, the animals decide to improve and fix their middos and build Moshiach a strong house with a foundation of peace, serenity, diligence, and humility.

BECAUSE OF MESIRUS NEFESH

The video *The Mystery of the Stones of the Choshen* is about the Maharal of Prague, who forced a thief to return what he stole, has been widely acclaimed. It has professional actors, fantastic locations, a fine script, educational messages, really everything a good video requires.

When they had to pick an actor to play the Maharal of Prague, they ran into difficulties. It couldn’t be just any actor, but someone who looked the part wouldn’t agree to act in a video!

Yigal decided to go l’chat’chilla aribber and he asked Rabbi Shmuel Frumer to play the Maharal. Rabbi Frumer is known for his hadras panim (distinguished appearance).

Rabbi Frumer’s answer surprised Yigal. He said, “Because of your mesirus nefesh for the mitvza of signatures for kabbalas ha’malchus, I’ll agree.”



Yigal Hoshier filming one of the videos

miraculous, while others will say that it's about optimism. If you ask me, both approaches are right. Yigal takes many things in stride. So for example, if an actor shows up two hours late, Yigal doesn't blow his top. Despite the pressure and tight timeframe they must work in, he knows that everything is b'hashgacha pratis. If someone is late, the time is used to film something else. In retrospect, it turns out that it was good that the piece wasn't filmed on time and in that place and the rest was done later. It always seems that in hindsight, the video comes out much better.

The Hoshiars have wonderful stories about brachos from the Rebbe. "One of the hardest parts of producing a video is finding a location to film it in. A student at the University in Tel Aviv told me that it took him months to find a simple house, which he needed to complete his film course requirement.

"We once went looking in old Acco for a location to film, *Living with the Times*, in connection with Purim. We figured that old Acco would be good because of the ancient walls and atmosphere, which made one think of

Shushan. Just so that you know, one day of filming costs \$1500!

"We went there hoping that we would get a significant break that would convince us to close the deal and sign a contract. The man from the office looked at us, a Chassidische couple, and began to ask us questions about ourselves and about our goals. We told him that we are shluchim of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to spread Yiddishkai through educational films.

"He asked us to go take a look around and then come back. When we got back, we found out that this man is the director of the tourist bureau for Ancient Acco. 'I'm usually not here,' he said, 'but fate brought me here today in order to meet you. You are welcome to film on location, for free!' We have become close friends and this has led to an increase in his observance.

"Another time, when we were looking for a location to film, *The Mystery of the Stones of the Choshen*, we went to the Israel Museum. We had a hard time getting permission to film on location because this entailed stopping normal museum activity for two days. They wouldn't agree to that.

"B'hashgacha pratis we got in touch with Avi Taub, owner of the NDC diamond business. Every afternoon they empty the display room of jewelry and so the display cases remain empty until the next day. This made it into a museum ... The place had another advantage in that it's unfamiliar to most people. We couldn't find a better place."

On Shabbos and Yom Tov, or at supper on a weekday, you can see an interesting crowd at the Hoshier table: actors, photographers, and other people who work with them.

"We feel at home," they say. "You don't have to come on Pesach night to farbreng with Yigal because it happens at the end of every exhausting day of filming."

Tzvika Schwartzberg, one of the actors, had this to say about the results of one of the farbrengs:

"At the end of a day of filming, we sat down to farbreng. Yigal began telling miracle stories about writing to the Lubavitcher Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh*. I was excited about this and said that I also wanted to write to the Rebbe. At that time, I was directing a play that was a contender in a competition and I wanted the Rebbe's bracha. When we opened the *Igros*, I was shocked. The Rebbe wrote that I should not be upset about the person who did not vote for me and that I should use my talents for projects al taharas ha'kodesh ...

"Yigal didn't understand what amazed me so much but when I told him about the type of play it was, he understood."

"I like acting in Hoshier's videos," said the famous actor, Yehuda Barkan in an interview he gave the newspaper, *Kol HaEmek V'HaGalil*:

"The videos, considering the small budget and their being made in underground conditions, remind me of the pioneering days of filmmaking in Israel, when there was no money but lots of vision. Hoshier has managed, with his powers of persuasion, to



Yigal Hoshier on a shoot

convince actors like Gili Shoshan and Michael Veigel to act in his videos. They are produced with a small budget, but with one common denominator: love for Torah and Yahadus and the attempt to spread it.”

Michael Veigel spoke similarly. He is a Lubavitcher from Arad who used

to perform for the HaBima theater. He is a featured actor for Nitztozot shel K'dusha:

“Acting in Hoshier’s videos is a great experience. There’s the atmosphere of pioneering and vision. In middle of filming, we take a break for Mincha, wash our hands, and eat.

This Chassidic atmosphere is unique. It’s an amazing experience to be a part of it.”

An idea for a video can be sparked by anything, but ideas for Hoshier’s videos come from learning the Rebbe’s sichos and maamarim.

“I don’t watch videos, not even those produced by chareidim,” says Yigal. “It’s a pity to waste the time. In order to succeed at being a shliach in preparing the world to greet Moshiach, you have to constantly learn!”

For example, after learning the sicha in which the Rebbe speaks about the ‘tikkun needed in the U.S., where every good thing must get publicized and the way to decide whether to do something or not is whether the publicity will be worthwhile,’ Hoshier had the idea for a story. It is about a child named Mutti who wants to be a movie star in order to be famous. In order to appear on the screen he is willing to do anything. Then there’s Mendy who doesn’t look for publicity but thanks to his good deeds he gets in the headlines.

What about the more violent aspects of your scripts, the fighting, shooting, threatening?

“Listen, these things appear in stories of tzaddikim and nobody thinks of censoring them out of the story. In addition, in Chassidic stories the negative stuff always come from the ‘other side,’ from the rasha or the goy. Another point, often it is only through action that you can convey the mesirus nefesh needed to save a Jew.”

You’re not worried that the violence is what the child will get from the video?

“It’s a very important point that many people look at negatively. Chassidus explains ‘external influence’ and ‘internal influence.’ That means that it’s possible for a parent to think that a child only absorbed the least important parts but the real impact is the inner influence which is sometimes seen later on.

“Someone in education for a long



Scenes from Nitzotzot shel K'dusha

time told me about a boy who was more positively impacted by our videos than by endless Musar talks.”

You got lots of praise for your *Ayin Tova* video because of the educational messages it conveys. Wouldn't it be better to produce more videos like that?

“The truth is we also thought so, but one of the principals of a Chabad elementary school said that the video is highly educational but the children find it boring. ‘Children want action,’ he said.

“We realized that will all due respect to educational plots, we have to provide the children with educational videos that also have suspense and intricate plots. The trick is to plant the messages within the action.”

R' Hoshier gets many suggestions

for the production of other types of new videos. “The investment is small and the income is high,” they are often told, but the Hoshiars have no time for videos. They're busy with their shlichus. What guides them is the question, “What will the viewer be left with by the end of the video?” and “Would I allow my children to watch a video like this?” If the answer isn't positive, the suggestion is turned down.

The Hoshiars are not scared off by criticism. Furthermore, the first viewing of some of the videos was at a graduation ceremony where they were viewed by hundreds of parents and educators. Feedback was plentiful and the critiques helped improve the video that hadn't been marketed yet and also gave encouragement to continue.

Do you have a message for our

readers?

We know that the Rebbe's view is that everybody must use the talents with which Hashem blessed them to spread the wellsprings and bring Moshiach. Baruch Hashem, there are many talented Chassidim within Lubavitch who use their gifts for shlichus, but when it comes to scriptwriting for educational videos, those people are hard to find. Many people write books, brochures, and articles, but not scripts. The visual medium is still (despite the large number of videos) in its infancy and there's much to add, improve, and innovate.

We'd like Chabad Chassidim, who live with the concepts and messages of Chassidus, to be the ones to write scripts. We Lubavitchers have what it takes and must bring it to the world!