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Moshiach & Geula | Rabbi Zalman Hertzfel



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HOW COULD G-D DEFILE HIMSELF TO SAVE US?

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 7, pg. 153-157
Translated by Boruch Merkur

1. There is a well known Midrash¹ that states that all the Mitzvos that G-d commanded the Jewish people to fulfill, He Himself fulfills. Therefore, concerning the prohibition directed to the Kohanim (the priestly class) that they should not become ritually defiled, it is understood that G-d – of Whom it is said, “Your L-rd is a Kohen”² – also withholds Himself from becoming defiled, as it were. To that extent, Tosafos³ offers that it is no quandary that G-d was “permitted” to defile Himself to bury Moshe Rabbeinu, because “The Jewish people are called children of the Omnipresent,” and for the sake of one’s own child, a Kohen may become defiled.

Similarly, it says in Zohar⁴ regarding the future redemption that G-d will then defile Himself, so to speak, by taking the Jewish people out of the Exile of Edom [i.e., the exile imposed upon the Jewish people by the Romans; the current exile] (as the verse says, “Who is this coming from Edom, with soiled garments...and all My clothing I soiled”⁵). For the Jewish people are, as it were, “his (i.e., G-d’s) unmarried sister who is close to him, who had not been with a man.”⁶ Thus, [the Torah instructs us in the continuation of the latter verse], “for her, he [the Kohen] shall defile himself.”

However, the above must be understood in light of the fact that G-d is (not just a regular Kohen but) a Kohen **Gadol** (a **High Priest**),⁷ and a Kohen Gadol

may not defile himself for “any dead bodies,”⁸ not even for his own child or for his unmarried sister. Thus, it is still not clear: How could G-d have defiled Himself for Moshe and how will He defile Himself for the sake of [redeeming] the Jewish people?⁹

2. The Maharsha¹⁰ explains that, in truth, the concept of defilement is entirely inapplicable to the Supernal Realm, “for a spiritual entity is not susceptible to defilement.” The fact that the Gemara says that (following the burial of Moshe Rabbeinu) G-d immersed Himself in fire [to cleanse Himself, as it were], is nothing more than a response **appropriate** to the question and the false mindset of a heretic (*min*) who had presumed that G-d is a being with a physical form [and is, therefore, subject to the laws of ritual defilement].

The explanation of the Maharsha resolves the above difficulty in connection with the answer of the Tosafos, for, **in truth**, the concept of defilement is, for the most part, not applicable Above.

Tosafos’ commentary is only intended to explain how **this heretic**, according to his understanding,¹¹ is not bothered with the problem, “How could He have defiled Himself?” That is, **he** suffices with the answer, “The Jewish people are called children of the Omnipresent,” for he only knows that “Your L-rd is a **Kohen**,” not that He is a Kohen **Gadol**.

But, in addition to the fact that it is difficult to say that the entire discussion of the Gemara is only in accordance with the understanding of a heretic, it is proved from the aforementioned Zohar¹² that also Above the concept of defilement exists.

Thus, the quandary resurfaces: how could G-d, a Kohen Gadol, defile Himself, as it were, for “his child” or for “his unmarried sister”?

3. The explanation of the matter:

The fact that below [in the physical dimension] all aspects of Creation are established in a given, specific manner is because that is the way they exist Above in their source from which they derive. Their Supernal origin is, of course, incompatibly higher than their [physical] counterparts below, creations that are limited and possess [defining physical] forms. Nevertheless, also (their source) the Supernal

Attributes (not being at the level of utter [abstract] simplicity, as is the case with regard to G-d's Infinite Light, which is absolute simplicity [i.e., abstract, non-composite], rather, they) possess a particular limitation and form, be it **Benevolence (Chesed)**, **Severity (G'vura)**, and so on. Thus, they share a particular resemblance to the particular creations below that are created from them¹³ and in which the aspect of the source is manifest in a pronounced and defined manner. For example, water, which possesses the characteristic of descending from **above to below**,¹⁴ is a manifestation of the Attribute of Benevolence (the source for the aspect of water¹⁵), whose concept is expressed in drawing from **above to below**.¹⁶ The same principle applies to the other creations.

Thus, the creations compared to their source of origin are at the level of an "analogy," because through them we can have a certain conception of the "analogue," their Supernal Source.¹⁷

Since it is the Supernal Will that we should have knowledge and comprehension of the levels that exist Above, including G-d's Infinite Light (as in the

them¹⁹; they **descended** from the Supernal Qualities, as discussed above in Section 3.)

It is understood, however, that since they are **creations**, they **must** have several boundaries and limitations. Therefore, when we apply the "simple" elements as an analogy for the simplicity of G-d, the boundaries and limitations (that they **necessarily** possess, being **creations**) must not be mixed in to the equation, for **those** aspects are **not** analogous to the Infinite Light of G-d, may He be blessed.

Take, for example, the sun, which is undiminished by its [unceasing] emissions of light and rays. The sun derives this quality in virtue of its being an analogy for [G-d's immutability, as described in the verse], "I, G-d, have not changed."²⁰ (And as discussed above, the sun's being analogous for, "I, G-d, have not changed," is on account of its being²¹ a **manifestation** of "a sun...is G-d."²²) However, the various limitations and etc. associated with the sun (being that it is a creation) are **not**²³ analogous to the Infinite Light of G-d.

5. This preface sheds light on the topic of our discussion, namely, the difference between a regular Kohen and a Kohen Gadol as these concepts are expressed Above.

It is indeed true that the Kohen Gadol that exists below is an analogy for and an example of the Kohen Gadol Above, but only insofar as the specific concept of **additional priesthood and holiness** is present in the Kohen

Gadol below. Those matters pertaining to the Kohen Gadol below that exist in him simply on account of his being a creation, a soul in a **body**, are **not** analogous to the aspect of Kohen Gadol Above.

Thus, it is understood that since the human manifestation of the Kohen Gadol, with respect to the concept of **high priesthood** that he embodies, is beyond (or separated from) the concept of defilement,²⁴ to the extent that even "for his father or mother he shall not become defiled," it comes out that the concept of defilement is not applicable to the aspect of "Kohen Gadol" that exists Above.

(The fact that it is indeed possible for the Kohen Gadol to become defiled does not pertain to the concept of **high** priesthood that he embodies. Rather, it is on account of his being inherently restricted by the limitations of a body.)

However, the aspect of a regular Kohen that exists Above (the source from which is derived a regular Kohen Hedyot (a common priest) below),

Thus, the quandary resurfaces: how could G-d, a Kohen Gadol, defile Himself, as it were, for "his child" or for "his unmarried sister"?

phrase, "[that] they should recognize His greatness,"¹⁸ and so on – **His** greatness) which is absolute simplicity, He, therefore, also created things that express simplicity (within the context of Creation) in order that we could thereby have a concept, as it were – as one would apply an analogy [to understand what it represents] – of the simplicity of G-d.

4. The creations that express simplicity, being analogous to the sublime simplicity of G-d (are **not** mere analogies [or symbols, with no inherent resemblance or direct connection to that which they represent], rather they), do so on account of their **deriving** from **those** aspects that surpass the natural order of Creation (*hishtalshlus*). [Thus, they are veritable (physical) manifestations of their Supernal source, albeit in limited form.]

(Likewise, the **limitations** and **forms** [of certain things] are analogous to the Supernal **Qualities (Middos)** insofar as they are manifestations of

since the concept of defilement applies to a Kohen Hedyot that exists below – even with regard to the aspect of **priesthood** that he embodies, for which reason he **may** and must²⁵ defile himself, “for his close relatives and etc.” – therefore, it also exists in the Kohen Hedyot Above.

In light of the above we will understand how G-d could, as it were, be involved with the burial of Moshe, as well as the concept of “and all My clothing I soiled.” The concept of high priesthood rules out the possibility of defilement from the outset. The question is only relevant to the concept of common priesthood that exists Above, and in that regard is the aforementioned response, “The Jewish people are called children of the Omnipresent,” and, “for his unmarried sister, etc., for her, he shall defile himself.”

6. Another related issue:

The Baal HaTurim²⁶ comments on the verse, “You shall be for Me a nation of *kohanim*,”²⁷ that this means “Kohanim G’dolim (high priests).” That is, at the time of the Giving of the Torah, **every** Jew was at the level of Kohen Gadol.

Thus, it is understood that just as the concept of defilement does not apply to the aspect of high priesthood as it exists Above (as discussed in Section 5), likewise this is so with regard to Jews in virtue of the aspect of high priesthood they possess. (From this concept is derived the well known principle that no impurity can defile a Jew’s Yechida (the highest dimension of the soul).)

From this explanation we see the great love G-d has for the Jewish people, expressed in “all My clothing I soiled,” as follows. With regard to the essence of the soul, from the outset the concept of sin (and defilement) does not apply. Of consequence, also the concepts of exile and becoming “soiled” do not apply. That is, the concept of defilement and exile are only applicable to the revealed soul-powers. Nevertheless, G-d defiles Himself, as it were, in order to take the revealed soul-powers of the Jewish people out of exile. Even those [which are not the soul itself, but mere expressions of it] He cannot leave behind in exile²⁸; He redeems all the Jewish people, along with all their possessions and concerns (*inyanim*) with the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen.

(From the discourse and address of Shabbos Parshas Emor 5724)

Even the soul-powers [which are not the soul itself, but mere expressions of it] He cannot leave behind in exile; He redeems all the Jewish people, along with all their possessions and concerns with the true and complete Redemption.

NOTES:

1 Shmos Rabba 30:9; Yerushalmi Rosh HaShana 1:3

2 Sanhedrin 39a, end

3 Ibid

4 Parshas Emor 89a, explained in the discourse entitled, “*U’L’Achose HaB’sula*” 5627 and 5629

5 Yeshayahu 63:1-3

6 VaYikra 21:3

7 See Zohar III 17b

8 VaYikra 21:11

9 See Footnote 7 in the original for two alternative resolutions to the one the Rebbe presents in the text proper.

10 Sanhedrin ibid. See Footnote 8 for a similar line of reasoning in *Yad Rama*.

11 As the Baalei Tosafos put it, “This is no difficulty **for him**, etc.”

12 as well as other places in Shmos Rabba 15:5. See *Y’fas Toar* there.

13 to the extent that the Supernal Attributes are called by the same names as those things that are created from them (*Derech Mitzvosecha* 115a, end, as well as other places. See *Sh’la* 13b, end ff.)

14 Taanis 7a, end

15 See also *Shaar HaYichud V’HaEmuna* Ch. 11 (88b). See the lengthy discussion in Footnote 13 of the original text about how light is also created through the Attribute of Benevolence.

16 *Igeres HaKodesh* Section 8, as well as other places. Also, see *Tanya* Book 1, Ch. 4

17 See at length the discourse entitled, “*Mi Kamocha*,” 5629; *Hemshech V’Hachrim* 5631 pg. 25, end ff.

18 *Eitz Chaim*, Shaar HaKlalim, beg.: “When He, may His Name be blessed, had willed to create the world in order that...they should recognize His greatness, etc.” See also

Hemshech 5666, beg.

¹⁹ See *Tanya* Ch. 3, beg.

²⁰ Malachi 3:6. See *Likkutei Torah Shir HaShirim* 14c, as well as several other places.

In *Hemshech* 5666, pg. 477-8 it explains that (not only the lack of change in the **sun** is analogous of, "I, G-d, have not changed," but)

²¹ For which reason many of its particulars, including its aspect of greatness, exemplify concepts that emerge in the discussion of "a sun...is G-d." (See *Likkutei Levi Yitzchok*, Notes on *Tanya*, pg. 27, beg.)

²² From the verse, "For a sun and a shield is G-d, the L-

rd" (T'hilim 84:12). Also, see Footnote 20 in the original.

²³ See Footnote 21 in original.

²⁴ To note that the Kohen Gadol does not desecrate his service when he offers a sacrifice as an *onen* (one who had just learned that day that a close relative had perished) (Rashi on Parshas Emor 21:12; Sanhedrin 84a, beg.)

²⁵ *Tur Shulchan Aruch Yora Deia* 373:3

²⁶ Unlike the *Mechilta* on Yisro 19:8

²⁷ Yisro 19:6

²⁸ See *Shmos Rabba* 15:5, "It is **impossible** to leave behind My *truma*."



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THE MIF'I TRIBE OF CHASSIDIM

By Mendel Tzfasman

*Rabbanit Tova Mif'i of Bareket passed away a little over a month ago. A visit to the home of the mourners gave us a peek into the beautiful world of the extended Mif'i family. * A portrait of the Rabbi Ovadia Mif'i, whose wife got up in the middle of the night to listen to his Tikkun Chatzos and to cry together to merit to raise their children to Torah, chuppa, and Chassidus.*

Tishrei 5711/1950 was the early days of the State of Israel. Many new immigrants from Iraq, Kurdistan and mainly

Yemen were living in the Zarnoga transit camp near Rechovot. Every morning, the men left their tents for hard physical labor but their hearts



sang with joy over the privilege of being able to build up the land.

Late one morning, a Yemenite Jew with a beard and peios could be seen walking on the winding pathways of the camp. He had returned earlier than usual from his work as a woodchopper. On his shoulder was an ax and he sang a Yemenite song as he walked. Suddenly, he noticed a suspicious movement at the edge of the camp.

As he approached he saw a bus from the Jewish Agency with immigrant children boarding. One of the old-timers, a Yemenite who had abandoned Jewish tradition, was overseeing the activity. "Hey, where

are you taking those children?" he shouted. The old-timer responded with rude Israeli slang, telling him to shut up and mind his own business.

He had a feeling that something evil was going on. He didn't know precisely where the children were going to be taken, but he was sure it wasn't good. He mustered his courage and faced the counselor with typical Yemenite courage, saying, "Get off that bus now or I'll take you off with my ax."

The counselor knew not to mess with Yemenites, certainly not when they were angry, and he quickly disappeared.

That is how the children were

saved from spiritual annihilation. Later, these children grew up on Moshav Bareket, thanks to this man's mesirus nefesh.

Not long afterwards, Rabbanit Chaviva Mizrachi a"h and Rabbanit Bar-Shaul, who will forever be fondly remembered by the settlers, established contact between the Yemenite families and Rabbi Yisroel Leibov a"h, later to become the director of Tzach. R' Leibov got involved with the chinuch of the Yemenite children and that is how the nucleus of T'mimim Yotz'ei Teiman came to be.

Till this day, the elders of the Moshav are nostalgic about how the



Rabbi Ovadia Mif'i at "kos shel bracha"

residents of Kfar Chabad went all out for their children, how they raised them like sons, despite their own constrained circumstances, providing food, clothing, and a proper education for them.

During their yeshiva years, the Yemenite T'mimim brought chayus and a Chassidic outlook, which influenced the children to want to grow up as T'mimim.

TORAH STUDY FROM CHILDHOOD

A little over a month ago, Moshav Bareket, which is in the vicinity of the airport, suffered a tremendous loss with the passing of Rabbanit Tova Mif'i, the wife of Rabbi Ovadia Mif'i. She is survived by twelve children and more than a hundred grandchildren and great-children, all Chassidim and mekusharim to the Rebbe MH"M.

During the Shiva I went to Bareket for *nichum aveilim*. I found her sons, Efraim, Ezriel, Dovid, and Yisroel, sitting on a low couch at the end of a huge tent in the yard that usually serves as the venue for family simchos and Yomim Tovim. Near them sat their uncles, R' Ovadia and her brother, R' Menachem Sameiach. In the center sat the patriarch, Rav Ovadia, a role model of a traditional Yemenite Jew who did not change a whit despite the fifty years he has been living in Eretz Yisroel.

His wise gaze fits perfectly with his t'mimus and devoutness. His hands clutch his "childhood friend," which has accompanied him throughout his life — a book of halacha. According to halacha though, he is forbidden from studying Torah while a mourner, but R' Mif'i cannot be without it. He finds his consolation by learning the laws in *Shulchan Aruch* that pertain to mourning.

His children say that he was orphaned of his father when he was



Rabbi Ovadia Mif'i receiving lekach from the Rebbe

only seven, back in Habbaniya, Yemen. His father, who did not have children in his first marriage, married his mother when he was eighty and full of vim and vigor (he died at the age of 110), and she was in her teens.

His mother's financial state as a young widow with five children did not enable Ovadia to learn Torah from a "mori." He grew up without friends his age; his friends were ancient s'farim which he caressed lovingly, and the elders whose learning he listened in to, as he yearned for the day when he would be able to learn like them.

"Abba watched the elders for hours. The privilege to serve them was considered by him comparable to finding something valuable. When he could bring them a book or a cup of something to drink, he ran so as to minimize the amount of time he would spend away from the sound of their Torah," related Yisroel, the youngest of the brothers.

On the table were cups of tea with mint. Childhood memories of life on the moshav and stories about their parents' lives in Habbaniya in Yemen were recounted. The Mif'i family, as well as other families, are thus known as the "Habbanim."

The Mif'i family told about their parents' special approach which protected them and nurtured them as observant Jews and mekusharim to the Rebbe MH"M.

"Our parents were open to all technological advances. Despite Abba's advanced age, he uses a cell phone and he is looking to buy a computer to be able to record his chiddushei Torah in an organized way."

If you visit Bareket, you will surely be surprised to see R' Mif'i driving his car along the pathways as he reviews Torah by heart.

Their father is very devout regarding matters of halacha and doesn't budge one iota from the most minute detail. "To our father,

the question is always: What is the halacha? He says halacha has something to say about every dilemma, every issue. His s'farim are full of notations and that, along with his sharp memory, enable him to quickly find any source he needs."

One day, years ago, collectors from the Israeli Broadcasting Company came to the Mif'i home to collect a fee and to oversee television usage in the home. When they asked R' Ovadia where his television is, he said, "Come into my living room and I will show you my television." When they came in, he pointed at his library, packed with s'farim. "Here, that's our television. You are welcome to sit down and watch whatever program you like...."

The Mif'i children, like their parents, are gifted with a sense of humor, and when they tell this story, they laugh heartily and testify about their father that there is no "television program" that he hasn't viewed in depth, Rishonim and Acharonim, Shas and Poskim, *Shulchan Aruch* and Responsa, stories of Chassidim and sichos of the Rebbe, everything.

His childhood learning was acquired on his own, when he decided to learn to read Alef-Beis and to study sacred books. Despite the fact that he had no teacher, as well as having other difficulties, he began to acquire a prodigious knowledge of all Torah topics and was extremely diligent in his learning.

As a child, he began learning the commentary of the holy *Ohr HaChayim* and *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim*. He always said that before getting married one must learn at least the entire *Orach Chayim* of *Shulchan Aruch* one time.

Over the years he has studied Shas seven times and the Mishna nearly 200 times. Every day, since the passing of his mother in 5747, he learns 18 chapters of Mishnayos il'ui nishmasa. Since the Rebbe's takana of learning Rambam daily, he hasn't missed a day. Every day, after sunset, he learns the shiur of the next day.

He has never rested on his laurels and always seeks to advance. For years he worked hard in his learning so he could be tested with Heichal Shlomo's difficult tests. "After the test, he was hard on himself, thinking he hadn't studied enough, but when he saw his mark, he was relieved."

When the rav of Moshav Bareket passed away, the residents asked R' Ovadia to take his position. After a period of uncertainty, he decided to forego the offer and to personally see to the education of his children and grandchildren. "Others can be the rav of the moshav too, but only I can be the father and grandfather to my children and grandchildren."

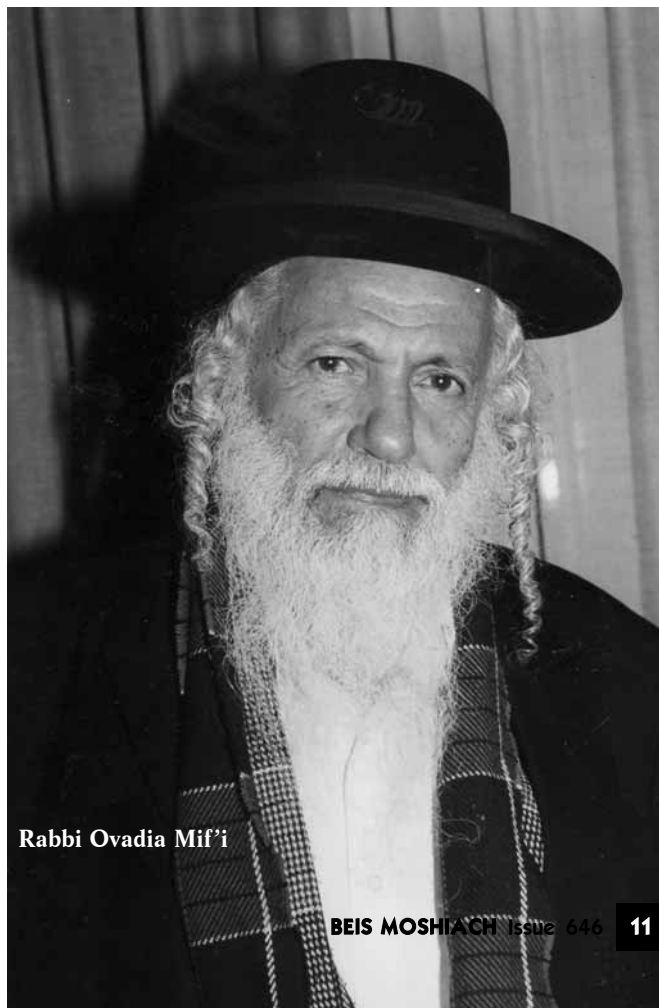
When Rav Saadia Maatuf, a Lubavitcher Chassid, was appointed rav of the moshav, R' Ovadia rejoiced. He

often went to Rav Maatuf to consult with him in halachic matters, especially to clarify Yemenite customs.

From when he was a child, he forwent all pleasures of this world for the sake of Torah study. This was the case even when his mother was forced to collect charity in order to provide for her children and would distribute the food in measured quantities. It was hard for him to leave his s'farim and it happened more than once, that despite his mother's warnings, "There will be no food left for you," he continued to learn. When he went to the kitchen and saw that nothing remained, he went back to learn.

SHE ROSE WHILE IT WAS STILL NIGHT

Rabbanit Tova a"h always stood by her husband's side, supporting him and taking care of the details so he would be able to devote his time to Torah study and be a role model for the children. Upon hearing the stories about her, that were publicized only after she passed away, it became apparent that she did not merely help him. She would rise in the middle of the night in order to listen to R' Ovadia's Tikkun Chatzos. When he would fast on Mondays and Thursdays, she did too, as well as joining him in his *taaniyos dibbur* (fasts refraining from



Rabbi Ovadia Mif'i

extraneous speech) and special t'fillos that he said in which he beseeched Hashem for G-d-fearing children who went in the ways of Torah and mitzvos. While listening to her husband's learning, she learned Chumash, Midrash, and Agada herself. She studied Chitas and daily Rambam, even though in Yemen women did not study.

R' Efraim and his wife Ruth Mif'i relate:

"One day, Abba was surprised to see Ima return home crying. When he asked her what had happened, she said that the neighbors had mocked her and nicknamed her the 'wife of the religious one.' R' Mif'i burst out laughing and was very happy about this, saying, 'Baruch Hashem that we merited that nickname.' She looked at it differently and it became a precious

***One of the
shochtim present
at the testing said
in amazement,
"He shechts as
though he is
playing the
violin."***

epithet to her, even though their mockery did not cease."

The children and grandchildren of the Mif'i family attribute their incredible upbringing to their mother who would say, "The most important thing to me in life is your chinuch." For many months over the years when her husband was abroad in his work as a shochet, she was the one who oversaw their chinuch,

which was uncompromising. She would surprise her children with her wide-ranging knowledge of halacha which she acquired from her husband.

"Starting from sunset, my mother forbade us to leave the house because she was afraid we would fraternize with kids who would be a bad influence on us. If we wanted to visit friends in the moshav for homework or anything else she would always say, 'If they would like, they are invited here.' She knew that many homes had televisions and the kashrus and tznius were not always as they should be for *b'nei talmidei chachamim*."

During the Shiva, many women who were not relatives came to talk about their relationship with Rabbanit Tova. The family members found out that in addition to building up the spiritual structure of her own family, she was also credited with improving shalom bayis, the observance of family purity, kashrus and Shabbos, and the strengthening of Torah and mitzvos among many families.

Women told about her wisdom, which was apparent in her counsel on shalom bayis, chinuch, and even parnasa difficulties. They benefited from her sage advice, though not before she told them to write to the Rebbe. Girls candidly told about the comments she made to them about their immodest dress. They accepted it from her because they felt it came from her love for them. One woman couldn't stop marveling about how the couple would visit patients in the hospital, even in very distant places. The common denominator in all the descriptions was the feeling that "I am with you – in good times and bad."

The Mif'i shidduch is a typical Yemenite story. R' Ovadia was twenty years old. The girl was only ten, but ready for marriage, according to her parents and the

standards of their culture. R' Ovadia's parents pointed out the girl to him from a distance and wished him "mazel tov" on his engagement to her.

If this surprises you and you wonder how such a marriage could be successful, the facts are, this marriage of 61 years was one of mutual respect and love that was, in turn, instilled in the children, some of whom are involved in shalom bayis and in guiding couples in how to have a happy marriage.

In honor of their golden wedding anniversary, R' Mif'i prepared a surprise for his wife. The children made sure she was out of the house and when she returned, the house looked festive and all the children, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law were sitting around set tables, singing chuppa songs. It was like their wedding back in Yemen, with dancing, rejoicing, gold jewelry, and other gifts.

THE ARABS RESPECT THE MIGHTY

In order to understand the story of their marriage, with the kalla only ten years of age, and the atmosphere at that time, we have to go back 100 years to the town of Habban in Yemen, where time stopped.

Habban, which is in the Azan territory in the southern half of the Arabian Peninsula was first settled by Jews in the 1600's. They assisted the Wahidi Sultan and in exchange, he gave the head of the community, Salimon Al-Chakim, a plot of land to build a Jewish community, a neighborhood called the Jewish Quarter.

Most of the Jewish men were craftsmen, as were Ovadia and his brother, Tzadok. They went around to the Arab homes when asked to do so, and fixed jewelry or created new pieces. In the course of their work, they took out time to learn Torah and to recite Torah by heart.



The women sewed and tanned hides for parchment for sifrei Torah. The only educational institution was the Talmud Torah that was located in the shul where the legendary “Mori” taught the little children. The Beis Din also operated out of the shul. When serious questions arose that the local Beis Din could not resolve, they referred them to the greater Beis Din in the capitol, Sana’a.

At this time in Yemen there were anti-Semitic laws, such as Jews not being allowed to ride animals, which forced Jews to walk the roads. There was also the orphan law, according to which young orphans were taken from the community and raised as Moslems.

The Jews of Habban were considered immune to these laws. Children did not have to be married off at an early age but people were nervous nonetheless. At that time, even those in Eretz Yisroel married off their children very young.

The relationship between the

Jews and the rest of the local population in Habban was fine, though occasionally, the Arabs stirred up trouble. On rare occasions there were instances of forced conversions or the kidnapping of children for the purpose of raising them as Moslems.

The Mif’i brothers related an example of one of the Jewish-Arab quarrels of that time:

“The Habbanim, despite their leanness, were, and still are, very strong in body and spirit. One of our grandfather’s brothers was a mighty man. Seven Arabs once started up with him and he beat them all up. The end of the story was that the parents of the Arab boys came to his house and gave him sheep, sacks of dates, and skins filled with oil as a sign of their admiration and respect.

“The elders of the moshav tell of a line in Arabic that the Arabs would say to a Jew who was still working in his field a few hours before Shabbos. *Sabit ya Yahudi* – go and get ready for Shabbos, Jew.”

UNITY SAVED THEM

The idea of making aliya was considered arrogant by Yemenites. “Who are we that we should make aliya to Eretz Yisroel?” they asked in true humility and with feelings of awe for the Holy Land. They imagined that if they went to Eretz Yisroel, they would be on the lowest spiritual level compared to the giants of spirit who lived there. Fortunately, this myth was debunked while they were still in Yemen, enabling them to construct their spiritual defenses, which proved effective to a great degree.

While they were in the Hashad immigrant camp near Aden, where they spent months before flying to Eretz Yisroel, R’ Mif’i did not feel well. He was taken to the hospital maintained by the English. At the hospital, Shoshana Demari circulated among the rooms visiting the patients. She was an Israeli singer and actress who came from Yemen and she returned to Yemen as an employee of the Jewish Agency.

Shoshana told R' Ovadia the truth about what was going on in Eretz Yisroel, where Shabbos wasn't Shabbos, tznius wasn't observed, and the education was heretical. Thanks to this information, the Habbanim were aware of what awaited them and were prepared to avoid the treachery of the Israeli government officials.

When they were brought a calf for slaughter, R' Moshe, the father of Rabbanit Tova, went over to slaughter it. The knife was smooth but not sharp enough. Seeing this, he put the knife down and said the meat could not be eaten. Jewish Agency officials, who didn't want it to go to waste, slaughtered the calf and distributed the meat, however the Habbanim threw it away and kashered their pots, despite the protests and threats of the Agency officials.

In other areas of Yemen, children were sent to Eretz Yisroel before their parents. This enabled the Israeli government to immediately send them to irreligious kibbutzim and rip Judaism away from them. The Habbanim decided that families would travel together, in order to avoid this.

They arrived on a Friday. The new immigrants were not accustomed to, nor did they expect, luxuries and they planned to spend Shabbos in the airport. They took out candles, lit them and welcomed the Shabbos.

The Jewish Agency officials arrived in trucks, extinguished the candles, and ordered the immigrants to board the trucks. This was the welcome the innocent immigrants received, they who had kissed the ground of the Holy Land only hours before.

The Habbanim didn't agree to settle in cities like Tel Aviv or to be scattered to different locations as they were asked to do, but insisted that they would live together. They

knew that their strength lay in their unity. Later on, when they settled in Moshav Bareket (named for the stone in the high priest's breastplate), they built the houses next to one another with the fields behind the houses. In other moshavim, the fields were between the houses.

The horrific kidnapping of Yemenite children (in which the parents were told their children had died but the children were very much alive and given away in adoption) almost entirely skipped over the immigrants of Habbani, whose unity had saved them, physically and spiritually.

A P'NIMI – IN EVERY PLACE AND IN ALL SINCERITY

One of R' Ovadia's characteristics is that he does what needs to be done as it ought to be done. There is no "just getting by" or "doing it to get it over with" with him. Whatever he learns, he immediately puts into action. This was true with the Chassidic stories he would tell his children, the lessons he imparted with the story were longer than the story, say his children.

This approach to life affects all aspects of his life, not just matters of k'dusha. His son R' Dovid illustrates this with an incident about the door to the storage area of their house. The ancient and unique key to this room was lost and it was impossible to replace it. The children brought tools with which to break the lock.

"Abba stopped us and asked why we were going to destroy it. His motto was, 'there is nothing that stands in the way of one's will.' If a person is unsuccessful, it's a sign that he thinks he can't succeed.

"We asked, 'But Abba, how can we open the door without breaking the lock.' Abba surprised us and

with a mischievous grin he said, 'I will make a key.' And he did, and by doing so, he opened not only the creaking door but a window to the correct view of life.

"One year, when nearly all the residents planted cabbage, it was a rainy, blessed winter. Many residents took shortcuts and only did the plowing properly, but my father did just as he did every year. He plowed the earth twice, fertilized it, etc. I remember my father returning home soaked to the bone from the rain that poured as he worked in the field, but with a big smile on his face.

"The end result was that everybody had nice but ordinary cabbages, but my father had grown cabbages nearly three times as big as usual, and their taste was exceptional."

R' Efraim Mif'i nostalgically describes the times he, as a child, accompanied his father to the work in the field. "My father operated the plow and I walked beside him. Wasting time was anathema to him and he spent the time with me reviewing the T'fillas Arvis and the Birkas HaMazon by heart. We walked in the field, in midday, and together we said the words of Maariv to the Yemenite tune."

At two in the morning, R' Ovadia would go out to recite "bakashot" before davening, despite the freezing cold and the darkness that prevailed. He did so even when living near bloodthirsty Arab neighbors. On the way he would recite Mishnayos and chapters of T'hilim and he was never afraid.

It is interesting to note that until this day, he gets up early for davening and bakashot at the sunrise minyan that was started at the moshav. This is what his children call his *zahir t'fei* (his area of particular observance). Up until the end, his extraordinary wife joined him in this, day after day, 365 days a year.



(From right to left) Efraim, Ezriel, Dovid and Yisroel Mif'i

SHOCHET-MEKUSHAR

R' Ovadia Mif'i worked as a shochet for many years. He started his career back in Yemen where the title of shochet was synonymous with *yerei Shamayim*, something that he always strove towards.

Like most of the Torah that he learned, he was self-taught with sh'chita too. Even preparing and testing the sharpness/smoothness of the knife for sh'chita, which requires a lot of concentration and experience, is something he learned on his own with persistent nonstop attempts, and he succeeded in passing the stringent tests. One of the shohtim present at the testing said in amazement, "He shechts as though he is playing the violin."

The tests for shohtim in Yemen were not at all easy. The ceremony, where the certificate was given by senior rabbanim and shohtim, was actually a public test. Everybody in the village went to the large tent that was set up in the yard of the shul, dressed in festive clothes. The new shochet was given a knife that was not smooth and was asked to fix it. When he successfully passed this

first stage, he was given an animal and after shechting it, he had to specify every body part and its function. Then he had to devein and salt the meat.

The dayanim were not satisfied with this. It was only when the candidate was able to review all the laws by heart, according to the order as they appear in *Shulchan Aruch*, that he was awarded the certificate, to the acclaim of the crowd. Since then, R' Ovadia has helped train many shohtim.

Many years later, when he was living in Eretz Yisroel, he began flying with his brother Tzadok to places around the world in order to shecht. One year, they flew to Chile. Their contract was until after Pesach and the brothers decided to fly to New York in order to celebrate Pesach together with their sons who were on K'vutza that year.

One day of Yom Tov, a farbrengen was announced. The Mif'i brothers naively decided to grab a place up front and early on, they sat down on the benches facing the farbrengen table which was always reserved for senior Chassidim. When the Rebbe

entered the room and began the farbrengen, the senior Chassidim arrived and were taken aback to see people sitting in their place.

The Rebbe noticed this and asked R' Leibel Groner to bring two chairs to the dais and to seat the brothers there. At the distribution of "kos shel bracha" at the end of the farbrengen on Acharon shel Pesach 5739, the Rebbe asked the brothers, "Are you from Bareket?" They said that they were and the Rebbe gave them two bottles of mashke, "in order to distribute it to those present at the farbrengen at the moshav."

On that same visit, the brothers were given aliyos to the Torah in the Rebbe's minyan on one day of Chol HaMoed. Later on, they discovered to their amazement, that this was an order from the Rebbe.

From then on, every time they flew abroad, they arranged a stopover in NY, and each time, the Chassidim in 770 made sure they had a place to sit on the dais, behind the Rebbe.

* * *

With the passing of Rabbanit Tova Mif'i, the town of Bareket and the Chabad-Yemenite community lost a living example of a righteous woman, who sacrificed everything for her family in order to raise them to a life of Torah, Mitzvos and the ways of Chassidus.

She is survived by a large family of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren all over the country. Many of them serve as shluchim, mashpiim, in chinuch, askanim, counselors of brides and grooms, and marriage counselors. She and her husband merited that their close to 150 descendents perpetuate their legacy of Torah observance and hiskashrus to the Rebbe MH"M. May her memory be a blessing.

‘A CHASSIDISHE RAV’ – THE REBBE’S CHIDDUSH

Interview by Avrohom Reinitz

*Twenty years ago, on 2 Adar 5748, the Rebbe spoke about the special role of Chassidishe rabbanim in running a Chabad community. We spoke with Rabbi Yosef Yeshaya Braun about the Rebbe’s chiddush in defining the role of Chassidishe rabbanim. * Is the rav of a k’hilla also the mashpia? Should he just focus on spiritual matters or also on material matters? Are the piskei dinim of a Chassidishe rav different in any way? * When a question arises, should you consult with Chassidishe rabbanim or ask the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh? * Why should every Chassidishe rav sign a p’sak din about Geula and how does a Chassidishe rav prepare his community to greet Moshiach?*

Twenty years ago, on 2 Adar 5748, the Rebbe said a sicha on “bo’u v’nachshov cheshbono shel olam” (come, let us make the reckoning of the world), and he said that when a Chassid is unsure about whether to do something, he should consult with Chassidishe rabbanim and do as they say. The Rebbe repeated this several times during that period and stressed the special quality of Chassidishe rabbanim. Was this a change, a step-up, regarding the traditional standing of rabbanim in Chabad?

There’s no question that in that sicha, the Rebbe added another angle to the role of rabbanim and the responsibilities they have. If you examine the Rebbe’s sichos and letters, you will find that raising the status of rabbanim began many years earlier, and this is actually one of the new policies of the Rebbe, which progressed over the years.

If you look at Chassidic history you will see that the concept of a “Chassidishe rav” is the Rebbe’s exclusive idea. In stories of Chassidim you will find hardly any stories about Chassidishe rabbanim. There certainly were Chassidishe rabbanim, but they did

not have the standing that the Rebbe attributed to them in our generation.

Furthermore, there were towns where Chassidim and Misnagdim lived together and when there was a dispute, the accepted compromise from our Rebbeim was that the rav of the community could be a Misnaged, whereas the shochet should be a Chassid (*Shmuos V'Sippurim* vol. 1, p 31).

To Chassidim of earlier generations, the role of a rav was technical. He had to answer halachic questions and that was it. Even when the rav was a Chassid, he did not have a big influence on the larger tapestry of Chassidic life. The shochet, on the other hand, was a role model. The Rebbe Rayatz writes (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 8, p. 132), "I have already written in many letters that the position of shochet-bodek in Jewish communal life is the highest position of all spiritual leadership roles. The rav is the head of the flock and the shochet-bodek is the heart of the flock. For the position of shochet-bodek is not just a man with a knife in his hand who supplies kosher meat to his flock, as he also must see to the moral state of the flock and establish shiurim for the public."

In other words, the rav has to supply the Torah knowledge and the shochet has to supply the heart and Chassidishe hergesh.

In Lubavitch they would tell the T'mimim who became rabbanim, in order to put them in their place, that they took a neshama and abandoned it (i.e., their Chassidishkait) for the good of the Klal.

The Rebbe Rashab, in one of his letters, bemoans the situation that rabbanim have to be so involved in matters of *issur* and *heter* (not permissible and permissible) instead of being

involved in Chassidus, as when they learned, as bachurim, in Tomchei T'mimim Lubavitch.

However, regarding our generation, the Rebbe said (in a recording of the sicha of 2 Adar), "In the past they had to worry that along with the rav there would be a mashpia, because the rav teaches Nigleh of Torah with practical halacha, and the mashpia teaches p'nimius ha'Torah with its practical ramifications. But when speaking of Lubavitcher rabbanim, they have both qualities as one."

The Rebbe innovated the fusing of rabbanus and Chassidishkait, and coined the phrase, "Chassidishe rav." Obviously, when the Rebbe demands this of rabbanim, he also bestows them with the kochos, the ability, and the opportunity to combine halachic ruling with hashpaa, providing guidance regarding that which is forbidden and permitted along with Chassidishe conduct.

The attitude towards the rav has changed in our generation so that when one of the senior Chassidim wanted to publish a compilation from all the writings of the Rebbeim about rabbanim and rabbanus, the Rebbe's response was: "If you find the appropriate and reliable material and take responsibility that even though the letters were written to various locales and in times completely different than now, it would still be valuable to publicize it – or at least it won't hurt – then print it. If there's a doubt, then don't do anything. (A warning about this in the introduction is useless because people don't pay attention to these introductions)."

That means that according to the Rebbe, the difference between the generations is so extreme that compiling this information could even be harmful. From the Rebbe's answer it is clear that he was not

The Rebbe said that the essential role of every Chassid is to disseminate the wellsprings of Chassidus. Even those to whom the Rebbe gave a different assignment, that is only an external role while the essential role remains to spread Chassidus.

in favor of printing this compilation and the idea was shelved.

This answer illustrates how differently the Rebbe related to rabbanim and their role, as compared to how this position used to be viewed.

Today it seems natural that rabbanim are the ones who lead the way in Lubavitcher communities when it comes to Chassidishe behavior. What is the Rebbe's chiddush?

If you want to know the Rebbe's chiddush about rabbanim, you have to learn the Rebbe's *Kuntres HaRabbanus*, and I am referring to those sichos in which the Rebbe defines the role of rabbanim, especially the sicha of 28 Sivan 5746, which was said in connection to the elections for



rabbanim in Crown Heights, as well as the sicha of Shavuot 5750. These two sichos were edited by the Rebbe.

In these sichos and others, the Rebbe emphasizes the responsibility of the rav for the spiritual state of his community. The aphorism of the Alter Rebbe is quoted that the rav is called the “mara d’asra.” That means that he is responsible for his k’hilla being a place of G-dliness or the opposite, G-d forbid.

That is why Chassidishe rabbanim are called “Moreh Tzedek,” since it is their responsibility to bring G-dly righteousness into practice – that the place be a vessel for G-dliness.

From the Rebbe’s sichos we see that the role of the rav is to raise the level of Jewish observance in his community. Not only from the aspect of dry halacha – that they should keep Torah and mitzvos – but also from the aspect of Chassidishkait – that there should be a Chassidishe environment and that the Rebbe’s horaos should be fulfilled. To a certain extent, the rav also has to be the mashpia of the community.

In many letters, the Rebbe refers sadly to those rabbanim and askanim who did important things

outside of Chabad but they neglected Lubavitcher matters – the Rebbe’s horaos and hiskashrus to the Rebbe. Regarding this, the Rebbe quotes the verse, “They made me the protector of the vineyards [but] my vineyard was not protected.”

When a Chassidishe rav works to strengthen observance in his community, he is “the protector of the vineyards.” He has to deal with kashrus, kiddushin, etc., like any rav, but he must always ask himself, “What about ‘my vineyard’?”

The first priority of a Lubavitcher rav is to bring the wellsprings of Chassidus to the Lubavitcher community and to the non-Lubavitcher community.

In one of the sichos that was said at the farbrengen when the Rebbe accepted the Chabad leadership (10 Shvat 5711), the Rebbe said that the essential role of every Chassid is to disseminate the wellsprings of Chassidus. Even those to whom the Rebbe gave a different assignment, that is only an external role while the essential role remains to spread Chassidus.

This was said to every Chassid; all the more so to one whose job it is to be mashpia. The primary goal of a Chassidishe rav is to spread Chassidus.

If the rav is a mashpia, then what is the role of the mashpia?

There is a big difference between a rav and a mashpia. The mashpia’s job is to directly influence the community, whether through shiurim or Chassidishe farbrengens, or personal conversations with members of the community. The rav’s influence is indirect.

Furthermore, sometimes there are Chassidishe behaviors that enter into gray areas of halacha, like farbrengens on Shabbos that go on till very late. The rav, who stands for halacha, has to consider shalom bayis, while the mashpia will sometimes keep the farbrengen going on a long time because he finds it necessary. A mashpia feels more comfortable “*faifing* at the world,” as opposed to the rav who is more constrained by his position.

When the rav gives a drasha he has to make sure his words are suitable for a drasha. He can’t speak farbrengen-style. Even at a farbrengen, the rav’s style is unlike that of the mashpia. There are many expressions that are acceptable when said by a mashpia but are inappropriate when said by the rav of a k’hilla.

Rabbi Buksbaum a”h of Machon Yerushalayim visited the Rebbe and afterwards he said to the Chassidim: Your Rebbe serves in both capacities, as Rebbe and Rosh Yeshiva. He explained this as follows. A Rosh Yeshiva works throughout the week and can rest on Shabbos. The typical Admur works hard on

Shabbos, leading the *tish* but he can relax the rest of the week. But your Rebbe works on weekdays and on Shabbos!

The Rebbe assigned Chassidishe rabbanim with a double role: during the week, when people come with halachic queries, and on Shabbos, when they attend farbrengens. The rav is supposed to speak at farbrengens to influence his congregants with Chassidishkait.

Should the rav of a community be involved in the material matters of the community or only focus on spiritual issues?

In one of the Rebbe's letters to the Igud HaRabbanim (vol. 11, p. 228), the Rebbe sharply criticizes the situation in the United States where a rav turns into a social worker whose main job is to give a nice sermon in shul and of course, deal with community matters. Along with the sharp criticism, the Rebbe writes in another letter (vol. 13, p. 218) that we cannot wait for the situation to change, and nowadays rabbanim have to deal with these matters too, even if they

are not directly related to rabbanus or Torah and mitzvos. The Rebbe emphasizes that it's not enough for the rav to talk to people on the telephone but he should visit his congregants at home and inquire as to their wellbeing.

In addition, due to the spiritual descent of the generations, the rav also has to tend to the personal problems of his congregants, which include shalom bayis, something that takes up a large portion of a rav's time. In our generation, a rav has many added responsibilities, to the point that the halachic realm takes up only a small part of his busy day.

I'll tell you an interesting anecdote. When *Beis Moshiach* was first published, for a short time there was a halacha column called *Lechem Abirim* which had piskei dinim of Rabbi Yehuda Kalman Marlow a"h. I was asked to edit this column and add sources, so I got to speak to Rabbi Marlow and discuss halachic issues with him (like sending a fax Erev Shabbos to a place where it is already Shabbos, or what is the halacha of *borer* when you have to

select from a pile of coats).

On one occasion, Rabbi Marlow said to me contentedly, "Ah, this is what I call rabbanus!"

I was surprised. I naively thought that most of a rav's time is spent on halachic matters. I asked, "Isn't this what the rav does all the time?"

"Halevai (if only)!" he said. "Being so busy with community matters, there is almost no time for the give and take of pure halacha." This was a revelation to me about how a rav spends his time nowadays.

It used to be that the rav of a k'hilla could sit back and wait for halachic queries to come to him. I once spoke to my grandfather, a famous rav about whom the Rebbe said he looked into his s'farim, about how to relate to the Rashash, who was a great gaon but there were those who shied away from him (mainly because he spoke negatively about reincarnation). My grandfather told me that the Rashash had a large library and a special chair on wheels that enabled him to move it towards the s'farim without having to get up. In his time, some people spoke negatively about this, saying he lacked *yegias ha'Torah* (toil in Torah, because he didn't get up).

The Rebbe Rashab once told a Poilishe Chassid who wanted to take *shirayim* (leftover food) from him: By you (by the Poilishe) it's a privilege; by us, it obligates.

Similarly, the work in rabbanus in our generation is definitely one that entails a great deal of responsibility and obligation. Rabbanus used to be a privilege, a good position, but today, the person who fills the position stands on a thin line between bringing merit to the many and causing the many to sin. No wonder then that in the Rebbe's letter to the shluchim in Eretz Yisroel, he





guides them to give priority to rabbanus, because today, being the rav of a k'hilla amounts to saving lives.

Perhaps that is the reason for the Rebbe's unprecedented involvement in the elections for rabbanim in Crown Heights, as the Rebbe himself put it, "I turn aside from all my other involvements." The Rebbe usually did not mix in to community matters. That wasn't his role. It was only because rabbanus is so important in our generation that the Rebbe found it necessary to drop everything else and get involved in it.

When it comes to pure halachic matters, is there anything special about a Chassidishe rav?

At first glance, there is seemingly a perpetual conflict between rav and Chassid, because the rav deals with technicalities as stated in *Shulchan Aruch* while a Chassid goes beyond the letter of the law, to the middas Chassidus.

For example, when someone goes to a rav with a question about family planning, the rav has to tell him the halacha, and according to halacha you have to take many

things into consideration, such as the weakness of the particular woman, etc. The fact that a person goes to a rav with this question means that he is dealing with a particular situation and the rav has to try and help the couple within the guidelines of halacha.

However, a Chassidishe rav has a Chassidishe hergesh and he knows the Rebbe's sharp sichos opposing family planning, which the Rebbe calls "the destruction of the family." He also remembers the many letters of the Rebbe in which the Rebbe says that when Hashem demands that a Jew fulfill a certain mitzva, He certainly provides the ability to do so and even if sometimes these abilities are hidden, they need to be revealed.

If the rav answers as a rav, he will check in the poskim and decide whether it is permissible or forbidden. But if he answers as a Chassid, knowing the individual asking the question, he may deem it appropriate to say: How is it that you are not embarrassed to ask?

A Chassidishe rav has to have an influence on his community so that certain questions are not posed from the outset. (Though of course, there are exceptions, but in many cases if the Chassidishe hergesh of the community is aroused, these questions won't arise.)

But if these questions arise anyway, how should the rav respond, as a rav or as a Chassid?

In the sicha of 2 Adar 5748, when the Rebbe defined the qualities of a Chassidishe rav, he said: "Their determination of halachos is based on Nigleh of Torah along with p'nimius ha'Torah ... with an understanding and grasp with chochma, bina, daas (of the G-dly soul, the intellectual soul, and up to and including the animal soul), through

Toras Chassidus Chabad."

That means:

Obviously, when a rav is asked a *shaila*, he has to pasken according to *Shulchan Aruch*. As the Rebbe wrote to a rav in Eretz Yisroel, "It is well-known throughout all the dispersions of the Jewish people that a rav has to pasken solely based on *Shulchan Aruch* (and not according to allusions in letters [i.e., from the Rebbe] and the like, and not even according to explicit letters, because letters that oppose *Shulchan Aruch* are null and void.)"

At the same time, there are situations in which the dry halacha says it's permissible, but the rav has to tell the person that that is what *Shulchan Aruch* says but there is also going beyond the letter of the law or doing what a "baal nefesh" (a more spiritual person) does. The Rebbe said several times that when something that is beyond the letter of the law becomes common practice, it becomes part of *Shulchan Aruch*. Also, in those places where the *Shulchan Aruch* says that a baal nefesh will be stringent, Chassidim are stringent, which means that the stringencies become part of the basic halachic ruling.

The story is told about a woman who asked a rav about chametz on Pesach. The rav delved into the topic, studying whether the chametz had been nullified before Pesach, whether it was something dry that became nullified in something dry, and other halachic issues. At a certain point, his rebbetzin said cynically to the woman: My husband, with his *Shulchan Aruch*, can feed you chametz on Pesach!

Speaking of Pesach, this is also an example of the conflict between Chassid and rav. If the rav rules strictly according to *Shulchan*

Aruch, there are many places in the house that do not need to be cleaned. On the other hand, Jews have always acted stringently regarding chametz.

The Chasam Sofer writes in one of his responsa, “Righteous women chased me out of the library...” According to halacha, if the room with s’farim had no chametz brought there throughout the year, it is not necessary to check there for chametz. But the Chasam Sofer, although he wasn’t a Chassidishe rav, esteemed the women who sent him out of that room so they could clean it, and he called them “righteous women.”

Therefore, when you go to a rav

When you want to ask a question and receive an answer, in that same sicha of 2 Adar 5748, the Rebbe says quite clearly to refer all questions, whether pertaining to the public or to personal matters, to three Chassidishe rabbanim.

with a question about Pesach cleaning, on the one hand, he has to tell you the halacha, taking into account shalom bayis and simchas Yom Tov (which are also halachic

considerations). On the other hand, he needs to tell the person asking the question how a Lubavitcher home should look on Pesach.

A rav nowadays is asked questions on many topics that do not appear in *Shulchan Aruch* and the commentaries. How do rabbanim pasken those kinds of questions?

Most rabbanim are not expert in all areas. If every person ought not to be embarrassed to say, “I don’t know,” certainly a rav who is asked about something he doesn’t know should say, “I don’t know”!

I was once in training with a posek and we spoke about certain questions. He told me in the name of one of the g’dolim of the previous generation (the Pupa Rav z”l) that a rav doesn’t always have to answer “tahor” or “tamei.” To some questions he can answer, “I don’t know.”

My grandfather wrote *Klalei Toras HaHoraa*. He printed it in a special booklet that was published in honor of the Rebbe’s 90th year. He quotes a lot of sources from the Gemara that show that in their time, each rav had his area of expertise.

My grandfather was once asked to oversee the chalitza ceremony. He declined, saying that he had never learned the laws of chalitza in depth. When the family insisted that he oversee it, he agreed on condition that they wait until he finished learning the tractate of Yevamos with the early and later commentaries.

For several months he learned the topic in depth and only then did he oversee the chalitza. Today, it is possible for someone to study an abridged form of the laws of chalitza, in English no less, and then to pasken ...

The Pri Megadim in his time complained about those who

mocked the rav, saying that the rav should be able to answer on the spot. Unfortunately, it’s even harder when people call on the phone and you have to answer immediately.

The rav also needs to try to learn all the time and be updated. On Shabbos Naso 5745, the Rebbe asked the rabbanim to constantly do shimush with other rabbanim as well as arrange seminars for rabbanim. The Rebbe quoted the Gemara about Rav who went to raise livestock with a shepherd for 18 months in order to be expert on blemishes in animals. He said if Rav could allow himself to devote 18 months to learn this field, then certainly rabbanim nowadays ought to devote time in order to learn and become updated in new fields.

As the rav of a k’hilla, what are the most difficult questions you get?

You might be surprised but the hardest questions have to do with the *Igros Kodesh*. When people get an answer to their question in the *Igros Kodesh* and ask me to explain it, that is the hardest because I was never trained in that capacity. I did shimush with my grandfather and other rabbanim in various halachic fields, but there are no rules for *Igros Kodesh* answers, and to a certain extent it depends on hergesh.

People latch on to signs like the date of the letter or to whom it was written. On the one hand, they have what to rely on since the whole inyan of receiving answers that way is based on the ancient practice (a custom praised by the Rebbe) of opening a Chumash or other holy book and looking for signs.

On the other hand, we don’t view an answer in the *Igros Kodesh* as merely a sign but as an answer from the Rebbe. People write a letter to the Rebbe and expect a



response. So when they come with questions in the *Igros Kodesh*, I have to see whether there is a clear answer, and if there isn't, then I have to say that (even though undoubtedly the Rebbe always answers) one does not always merit to receive a reply.

In a number of sichos in 5748, the Rebbe said that if questions arise regarding health, to speak to a doctor-friend; in parnasa – to knowledgeable friends. In addition, in the sicha of 2 Adar 5748, the Rebbe said that when a major question arises it should be referred to three Chassidishe rabbanim. What about asking the Rebbe questions through the *Igros Kodesh*?

When writing to the Rebbe you have to differentiate between requests for a bracha and questions. When it's a request for a bracha, the Rebbe said to continue asking him. Today, when we cannot ask the Rebbe directly, we should continue writing and asking for a bracha. And reports about our activities should also continue to be written to the Rebbe.

Asking for a bracha through the Rebbe's s'farim is a Chabad custom from way back. Chassidim would put a pidyon nefesh between the pages of a *Tanya* and as it says explicitly in the Rebbe's letter for Yud Shvat 5711, after reading the pidyon nefesh it should "be placed between the pages of a maamer, kuntres, etc., of the teachings of the Rebbe, my father-in-law, and sent to him (if possible on that same day) to be read at his gravesite."

That is what Chassidim used to do when they needed the Rebbe's bracha immediately, and they were unable to contact the Rebbe (in the years before faxes and e-mails, and long distance phone service was very expensive and not always available). They would write to the Rebbe, asking for a bracha and put it in one of the Rebbe's s'farim, knowing that the moment they placed the letter in the book, the Rebbe received the letter and gave his bracha.

But when you want to **ask a question** and receive an answer, in that same sicha of 2 Adar 5748, the Rebbe says quite clearly to

refer all questions, whether pertaining to the public or to personal matters, to three Chassidishe rabbanim.

I was there at the time and I heard this sicha. The *hanacha* of the sicha wasn't written as clearly as the sicha was said. The Rebbe repeated these instructions several times and there is no other way of understanding what the Rebbe said.

At the time, when the Rebbe said to refer certain questions to mashpiim, doctor-friends, or knowledgeable friends, some Chassidim refused to accept this distancing and they wrote to the Rebbe, saying that they wanted to continue asking the Rebbe directly. The Rebbe said that when you follow his instructions, then he conveys his answer through those people. In later years, the Rebbe said that after forty years, the senses of the talmid become like the senses of the rav.

Yet people ask the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh* and receive amazing answers.

Once this practice spread and we see the Rebbe's amazing answers to numerous people who ask him questions, this is (as the Chasam Sofer puts it in his response) "a living miracle" – indeed "experience is proof" – that the Rebbe answers when you ask him questions. However, we can't ignore the Rebbe's clear instructions, which he repeated several times. And as I said, they cannot be understood any other way. I don't understand how people ignore this. So a Chassid who wants to fulfill the Rebbe's horaos, should do as the Rebbe says to do in that sicha.

It's possible that the mashpia or friends he speaks to will say they cannot answer the question and will tell him to write to the Rebbe. In the Rebbe's letters we find that

Rabbi Dworkin was asked about something and he said it was a spiritual question and should be asked of the Rebbe. Although the Rebbe usually refrained from answering halachic questions and referred the questioner to rabbanim, in this instance, the Rebbe responded.

There are still many Chassidim who ask the Rebbe questions through the *Igros Kodesh*, either because they don't know what the Rebbe said to do or for some other reason. Sometimes the answer they open to isn't clear, and then they go to a rav for him to explain it to

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them. The rav has to try and explain the answer, since they already wrote their letter, but he should tell them that if they want to fulfill the Rebbe's horaos, they should ask their questions to Chassidishe rabbanim.

I would sum it up like this: If you ask the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh*, you're doing it on your own cognizance. If you ask Chassidishe rabbanim, you are fulfilling the Rebbe's horaa.

I'll stress it again – this is only regarding questions. When it comes to brachos, the Rebbe said

we could continue asking him directly, and based on the practice of putting a pidyon nefesh in the Rebbe's s'farim, surely people can ask the Rebbe for a bracha through the *Igros Kodesh*.

The Rebbe asked rabbanim to produce a p'sak din about Geula and the hisgalus of Moshiach. What power do rabbanim have to influence matters such as the Geula?

First, the Rebbe said several times that piskei dinim of rabbanim are effective even in Heavenly matters such as these. There are stories about the power of piskei din even regarding Heavenly decisions. Even in our generation there is the story about the debts that Yeshivas Kiryat Gat had and the Rebbe told the Rosh Yeshiva to get a p'sak din that the yeshiva has to get out of debt. After he convened a beis din and they paskened, they saw miraculous success.

Second, as Chassidim, we have to fulfill the Rebbe's horaos even if we don't understand them. If the Rebbe says that rabbanim should pasken about Geula and the hisgalus of Moshiach, every Chassidishe rav ought to think about it and write a p'sak din.

When the Rebbe began speaking about piskei din of rabbanim regarding Geula, there was a bachur who got many rabbanim of various backgrounds to sign the p'sak din that the Geula has to come in our generation. I went with him to my grandfather and he was enthusiastic about the idea. He was a close talmid of the Minchas Elazar, who was known for his constant anticipation of Moshiach's coming.

When I asked him to sign the p'sak, he was afraid to sign. He realized the great responsibility entailed in signing the p'sak din and he didn't have the *breitkait* to

do it. But he asked me to convey to the Rebbe that he agreed to the p'sak.

The Rebbe gave this *breitkait* to the rabbanim, with his horaa, for we know that along with giving a horaa, the kochos to carry it out are given along with it.

In the sicha at the Kinus HaShluchim 5752 the Rebbe said that the avodas ha'shlichus has to be permeated with one point – how it leads to greeting Moshiach. How is this done when one is a rav?

As I mentioned, a rav should sign the piskei dinim about Geula (whether the p'sak din that the Geula has to come now or the p'sak din that the Rebbe is b'chezkas Moshiach). When a rav signs the p'sak, his signature obligates him to get ready and to prepare his city. In that sicha the Rebbe talks about the need to prepare oneself, one's household, and his environment. This is incumbent on every Jew, all the more so a rav of a k'hilla.

A rav should include Geula in his drashos and not suffice with a mention at the end, but rather the entire drasha should be permeated with the anticipation of Geula and with the atmosphere of Moshiach. Since the rav of a k'hilla has to take care of shiurim in his k'hilla, he should make sure that there is a shiur on inyanei Moshiach and Geula.

When the rav instills a chayus for inyanei Geula in his community, the questions that he is asked will reflect that. Like we discussed earlier, there are halachic questions that someone who lives a galus life will ask, and someone who is living with Moshiach will not consider asking.

The main thing is to actually bring the Geula and march towards the Rebbe MH"M now!

THE JOURNEY OF A CHASSIDIC CHEF

By Nosson Avrohom

*There are four generations of professional chefs in Yochanan's family. They are renowned throughout the elite society circles of Italy and Britain. Yochanan followed in their footsteps, training in ten exclusive European restaurants, mainly in France. All predicted a great future for him but then, to his parents' deep disappointment, he changed direction and became a Chassid. * The fascinating life story of Yochanan Lambiasi of Beitar Ilit.*

After a two-hour interview with Chassidic chef, Yochanan Lambiasi, I left in absolute amazement. When you talk about a cook or chef (and Yochanan taught me the difference between the two), you immediately think of someone who is totally immersed in worldly matters. After meeting with Yochanan though, I had to reject that stereotype. Along with the know-how and talent to produce gourmet meals, Yochanan is someone who can be described as a Chassid and a p'nimi who sees

his work as a shlichus and not as a means to aggrandize his name or make big bucks.

There are four generations of professional chefs in Yochanan's family. They are renowned throughout the elite society circles of Italy and Britain. Yochanan followed in their footsteps, training in ten exclusive European restaurants, mainly in France. All predicted a great future for him but then, to his parents' deep disappointment, he changed direction and became a Chassid.

Although Yochanan's parents are Jewish, there was nothing Jewish about his upbringing. The depth in Chassidus, the creation of the world, our role in the world – along with Shabbos in the company of a Lubavitcher family, all won him over and the rest is history.

Today, after nearly twenty years and many brachos from the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh*, Yochanan opened a professional cooking school in Mesilat Tziyon, a yishuv near Yerushalayim. Nearly sixty young men are in the fourth cycle, most of them coming from various religious backgrounds. This month, a course in Hebrew will be offered, since until now, the classes have been geared to English speakers only.

"I feel that this is a shlichus," says Yochanan. "The Rebbe taught us that every Jew must use his talents in the service of Hashem. The world of chareidi and mehadrin kosher restaurants has grown tremendously in recent years and there's no reason why we shouldn't have religious chefs working there instead of using non-Jews or those who don't sufficiently appreciate the importance of kosher food."

Yochanan was born in the Islington neighborhood of London. His family, originating in southern Italy, settled in London in the sixties because of his father's profession as a chef, fourth

generation as such.

Aside from knowing that they were Jewish, the family did not observe any traditions. They lived in a non-Jewish neighborhood, went to non-Jewish schools, and lived a completely secular life. They didn't even have Jewish symbols in their home.

"I knew that some relatives on my mother's side did not work on

Shabbos. When I became bar mitzva, I heard that Jews mark this day and I asked my parents about it. They laughed.

"Today, four years after my father a" passed away, my mother made aliya and began taking an interest in Judaism, mitzvos, and Jewish values. Bit by bit, she is beginning to return to her roots, many years after her two sons did

so - that's my brother, a cardiologist, and myself. But back then, the atmosphere at home was secular."

Yochanan's father worked in an upper class restaurant in London and was renowned for his work. He had golden hands and an unusual talent, not only in preparing the dishes on the menu but in coming up with his own

Yochanan Lambiasi
guiding young chefs



creations. This endeared him to gourmands who enjoyed patronizing the restaurant because of him.

“When I turned 16, I was at a crossroads as far as my future. Each of my friends decided where he was heading. Some went on to college or university, some studied medicine, and some studied other professions. Others traveled the world. Knowing that I had a talent for cooking since I was little, I decided to study cooking and continue the family tradition. I loved the field.

“When I finished my compulsory education, I registered and was accepted to Westminster, an exclusive school for chefs in London. Many people in the field believe that it has the best faculty in the world for professional chefs. I studied there for three years. When I graduated, I was accepted at the exclusive Browns Hotel in London, where I worked for several months. Then I decided I needed to gain additional expertise.

“During the many years I devoted to studying gourmet cooking, I immersed myself in that world. I more or less knew what

the ten best restaurants in Europe were, which is where the top-ranking chefs worked. I got together enough money and clothing and decided to spend the next two years working at those ten restaurants.”

After two years spent as an assistant to renowned chefs throughout Europe, Yochanan felt he had achieved the level of skill that he had set out to acquire and decided that instead of trying to find employment in those famous restaurants, he would drop everything and return to London. He spent a few months at home and didn’t find a job that suited his level of expertise garnered by the experience he had gained in the previous five years.

Then a friend suggested that since he was Jewish, maybe he would be a good candidate for the kosher and exclusive King David catering company, which was looking for a professional chef to run its kitchen.

“I checked it out and presented myself and after a period of acclimation and probation, I was accepted as an employee. This was a unique period that built up my professional future for the first time, after working as an assistant to famous chefs. Now I was the one who had to take charge of the kitchen and delegate work to my assistants. In addition, this catering outfit was taken for evenings in big and famous hotels for events that were attended by Jews who wanted kosher food prepared at the highest culinary standards. Our catering service was the only one in London that met these criteria.

“Among the people who ate the food I prepared was Queen Elizabeth, ministers, and other famous people. I felt that I was sitting on top of the world. Along with the joy I felt, I began to get acquainted with my roots. For the

Even when they served the simple food, like gefilte fish and chicken soup, it didn’t require anything more than that for a wonderful atmosphere at the table.

first time, I was confronted with the fact that in a Jewish kitchen you can’t eat everything and that not all flavorings on the shelf could be mixed into my dishes. I remember being shocked when I discovered that you cannot mix milk and meat products.

“More than aggravate me - because these rules greatly limited me and caused me to look for creative solutions – it intrigued me. I quickly realized that these weren’t arbitrary rules but there was something profound behind them.

“The mashgiach in our catering hall was a Lubavitcher Chassid by the name of Rabbi Dovid Marlow. He saw that I was interested and he asked me straight out whether I was Jewish. The way I looked back then, he wasn’t sure... I told him I was and he asked me whether my mother was Jewish. I told him, ‘Not only is my mother Jewish but my father is too, and all my relatives, near and far, are Jewish.’

“My Jewish knowledge was minimal so I didn’t know what a religious Jew was. I grew up among goyim and I was never taught the significance of being





Yochanan Lambiasi

Jewish. All this was at the beginning of 5749/1989. We became good friends. I had many questions regarding cooking and he had unusual patience. He answered my questions one by one. One day, I remember, he explained the concept of *timtum ha'mo'ach v'ha'lev* (desensitization of the mind and heart). I really related to these ideas and was very taken by them.

"He explained many concepts in Chassidus to me and it won me over. If someone else had just explained the dry halacha to me and sufficed with 'permitted' and 'forbidden,' it's unlikely that that would have spoken to me. His exposing me to the world of

Chassidus, the depth of Judaism, was what aroused my curiosity.

"As Shavuot approached, he explained the reason for the holiday and why we eat dairy foods, and he suggested that I stay with a Lubavitcher family in his area for the holiday. He gave me the telephone number and address of Akiva and Miriam Sela and I was happy to follow up on it. I arranged to stay with them, but I had no idea what to expect.

"I was so curious. I felt I was discovering a world that I was already connected with. The feeling I had was that someone was leading me.

The Sela family lived in Hampstead Garden Suburb, which



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is near the large Jewish neighborhood of Golders Green. Akiva was in shul davening Maariv and his wife opened the door. There were many children, something I wasn't used to. I didn't stop marveling at what I experienced. I felt that the life I had lived until then was superficial and that this was a world full of depth and true joy. There was no end to the happiness that began to fill my heart."

When Akiva walked in, Yochanan became even more impressed as the children, large and small, went to their places at the table and all listened closely to their father and treated one another with respect. He was mesmerized by the Chabad niggunim that were sung and the divrei Torah that were said.

He was won over by the Jewish warmth and the wisdom that was imparted at the table, even by the little children.

"That night I slept at their home, and the next day I

accompanied Akiva to shul. That was the first time in my life that I went to shul. It's very hard to explain but the feeling I had was like a son returning home after many years. I felt that I was connecting to my neshama, to my p'nimius.

Even when they served the simple food, like gefilte fish and chicken soup, it didn't require anything more than that for a wonderful atmosphere at the table. Until then, I had been used to the atmosphere at the table being dependent on the quality of the food being served. I decided that this was the life I wanted to live!"

Yochanan received an enticing job offer from an exclusive restaurant in London called Colton Garden. "It wasn't a Jewish restaurant, so I reverted to cooking with whatever ingredients I pleased. I continued to visit the Chabad community on Shabbos and stayed with the wonderful Sela family.

"One Friday night I finished work and went by train to the Lubavitchers with whom I had become close. This was my first crisis. On the one hand, I felt a strong connection to Judaism. On the other hand, my animal soul did everything it could to draw me back to where I had been, like getting the job at that restaurant which was the ambition of every chef. The more I learned about Judaism - and I did so with the help of the T'mimim in the Chabad yeshiva in London - the more I realized the contradictions in my actions.

"At first I would walk for two hours from my place of work to the Jewish neighborhood. In the next stage, I stopped working at that restaurant and as time went on, I began putting on t'fillin and getting more involved in a Jewish way of life.

"When my mother realized that I had quit my job at that exclusive restaurant and that my interest in Judaism wasn't a passing phase, she was beside herself, really panic-stricken over it. As far as she was concerned, at least if I had become interested in joining up with modern Judaism, or even Reform and Conservative, that would be one thing, but Chassidim?! She was frantic and she tried every means possible to explain to me that I was making a mistake. 'They're primitive,' she kept reiterating. 'It's only in history that Jews acted that way.'

"My younger brother, who was studying medicine at Oxford, was sure I had gone crazy. He tried to understand what was motivating me. 'You built up a career in the world of gourmet cooking and now you're destroying it, for no reason?' He didn't understand me. One day, he asked to join me on my Shabbos visit to the Chabad community so he could see what I was so enthusiastic about. When Shabbos was over he said, 'That was interesting.' He began to show signs of interest but he forced himself to act with restraint. He is an intellectual and he wanted to get answers to his questions. The wonderful atmosphere wasn't enough for him.

"He had many questions, like what is Divine providence, how does G-d run His world, what is reward and punishment about, how is our role as Jews in the world different than that of non-Jews, etc.? I wasn't the type who wanted specific answers. I heard things and connected to them in a general way, but he wanted detailed and rational answers.

"We went to Rabbi Tzvi Telsner who hosted us. For two hours and more, my brother asked questions and the rabbi gave solid answers. This exchange further strengthened

my resolve, for I saw that Judaism has answers to all the questions. At the same time, he explained to us that the connection between a Jew and Hashem has to be with simple faith and *kabbalas ol*.”

Yochanan’s brother left the session greatly enthused. If at first Yochanan’s parents pinned their hopes on their younger son, to their horror, they saw that their other son’s interest in Judaism was growing. He joined Yochanan and they went to the Chabad neighborhood for Shabbos together. They became regular participants in t’fillos and farbrengens. Then they took some concrete steps, like starting to wear a yarmulke, then tzitzis, and finally they undertook to live a religious-Chassidic life.

“As soon as I began learning and internalizing, I felt a strong soul-connection, as though I had been raised with these things. Every evening I learned in the yeshiva g’dola, headed by Rabbi Hertz.

“I opened a kosher catering hall with Lubavitcher sh’chita and was invited to do events throughout the area. Along with the N’shei Chabad there, I gave courses in cooking.

“I was greatly interested in Chassidus but did not understand the concept of a Rebbe, the Rosh B’nei Yisroel, the Nasi HaDor. I understood that only when I went to 770.

“One day, I went to learn Chassidus in yeshiva and one of the bachurim came over to me and suggested that I go to the Rebbe for Tishrei, since in any case, no bachurim would be in yeshiva because they all went to the Rebbe. Two bachurim described the atmosphere and how exciting the experience would be, and I agreed to go.

“That was my first trip to New York and I went alone. At the airport, the only thing I knew to tell the cab driver was that I wanted 770 Eastern Parkway. I knew nothing beyond that. I unloaded my suitcases in front of

the familiar red building. The Butman brothers (shluchim in Ramat HaSharon and Chadera) were passing by and they noticed my bewilderment. They told me that Mincha with the Rebbe was taking place and I should hurry in. I entered the building and saw thousands of Chassidim and I understood why it had been deserted outside.

“I found my friends from London and they told me that after Mincha the Rebbe would say a brief sicha and then he would give out dollars for tz’daka along with brachos. One of the bachurim promised to accompany and help me. When the davening was over and the benches were moved aside in order to give us room, I found myself trampled with at least ten people on top of me. The friend who was with me had momentarily disappeared along with my briefcase.

“There were moments when I could not breathe. I gave a yelp and used the last of my strength. I



Yochanan Lambiasi with a graduating class

“When I think about my first encounter with the Rebbe, I imagine that this is what the Geula will be like, with a great darkness preceding it as I felt when I was trampled and crushed, and then, in a flash, there was the great light.”

somehow managed to extricate myself. During these moments I thought, ‘Who needs this? How did I get myself into such a bizarre situation?’

“A second later there I was, in front of the Rebbe. When you stand before the Rebbe and he smiles at you, you feel yourself melt. That is how I felt. The Rebbe’s radiant face, his penetrating eyes, made me feel I was standing before an angel.

“When I think about my first encounter with the Rebbe, I imagine that this is what the Geula will be like, with a great darkness preceding it as I felt when I was trampled and crushed, and then, in a flash, there was the great light.

“I spent a month with the Rebbe and it was the final straw in my long and winding journey. The

next time I went to the Rebbe, I went as a Chassid and mekushar.

“In 5751 I had an incredible miracle. When I think of it, I get excited all over again. It was Sivan 5751, a little less than a year from the first time I had been to the Rebbe, and I went to Crown Heights for the wedding of one of the talmidim in yeshiva. I spent most of the time in 770. On Sunday, 20 Sivan, I passed by the Rebbe for dollars. I planned on asking for two brachos. One was for the cooking classes I was giving for N’shei and B’nos Chabad in London, that they should be successful and achieve their aim. And I wanted another bracha for the catering establishment I owned. Like the first time, I was utterly thrilled by the experience. I felt that the Rebbe read me like an X-ray. He gave two dollars for the two requests and I turned to go.

“When I reached the door, R’ Groner the secretary motioned to me to come back. I went back to the Rebbe with my knees shaking and overcome with emotion. The Rebbe gave me another dollar and said, ‘b’suros tovos.’ He said nothing else. I didn’t understand what this was about. When I told my friends who were waiting outside, one of them guessed the Rebbe was referring to a shidduch.

“I didn’t see the connection and as the months passed, I forgot about it. When I got married I understood, because my anniversary is the date I received the dollar, the 20th of Sivan, 5753.”

Yochanan knew that the Rebbe wants people to use their talents, not ignore them and that is why he developed his catering business.

“In 5754 we made aliya and I went to work at the Plaza Hotel in Yerushalayim. Later on, I opened an Italian restaurant but had to close it because it required too

much of my time.

“I worked in various places until I came up with the idea of sharing my knowledge with other Jews. Remember that fifteen years ago there weren’t many exclusive kosher restaurants, whereas today there are plenty.

“I thought, ‘Why not teach Jews so they can make an honorable living out of this?’ With lots of encouragement and brachos from the Rebbe in the *Igros Kodesh*, I decided to open a cooking school for kosher cooking, the first in the world! We opened in 5763 with fifteen students. A year later we moved from Yerushalayim to a villa in Moshav Mesilat Tziyon, which is near Yerushalayim.

“We now have more than thirty students learning on three levels: one – a course on pastries and baking; two – cooking; three – wine.

“Besides the high level vocational courses, we have shiurim in halacha. The goal, aside from acquiring expertise in cooking, is for the students to learn halachos related to food preparation and consumption. Last Pesach, we sent one of our students to assist a chef in a hotel. At some point, the chef needed something and he sent the student to the chametz pantry to get a product from there. The student went to the mashgiach and reported this. Even though not all our students come from stringently observant homes, they learn and internalize the importance of kashrus.”

Throughout the interview, Yochanan emphasized that his work is part of the Rebbe’s shlichus in preparing the world to greet Moshiach. He uses his position to convey the Rebbe’s teachings about Geula. He sees his shlichus as having two main motifs:

“One is that people from the outside, like students, should see that it’s possible to keep kosher stringently without it affecting the quality of the food. Second, as Chassidim we are taught that gashmius and ruchnius are interdependent and a Jew’s parnasa is ruchnius. We give religious Jews the tools to support themselves honorably and this is the greatest tz’daka.

“Hashem gave me a talent for cooking and the knowledge I acquired over many years is what I transmit to my students so they can get a job and support themselves without their work being in conflict with their faith. Until this year, the courses were given in English but we plan on expanding and offering courses in Ivrit, in cooperation with the organization Lemida, which offers various courses to the chareidi sector to enable them to enter the job market. Many of our graduates have taken jobs in restaurants and hotels in Eretz Yisroel and other

countries.”

I have often heard from baalei t’shuva how the strict kashrus requirements limit chefs in their food preparations. When I brought this point up to Yochanan, he negated it. He said he had also heard this myth before, many times, “but it’s really incorrect.

“All non-kosher flavors can be mimicked with kosher products, as it says in Chazal that whatever exists on earth also exists under the water, i.e., the concealed realms. The difference between a chef and a cook is that a cook doesn’t have enough experience; he takes a recipe and prepares a dish. A chef is someone who writes the recipe. If you are a creative chef who understands flavors, you can derive a certain flavor using other ingredients, thus circumventing the need for the original ingredient.”

Can you give an example?

“In order to give chicken soup a dairy aroma, you don’t need to put in butter. I have found that you get the same taste by putting in

margarine with butter flavor, olive oil and walnut oil. You have to be creative.”

* * *

“We know that in order to be ready for Geula we have to refine ourselves. I often saw how the Rebbe made his brachos conditional on people eating kosher food, l’mehadrin. Non-kosher foods cause *timtum ha’lev* v’*ha’mo’ach* as Chassidus explains. “Kosher” (spelled with the letter chef) is related to the word “kesher” (meaning “connection,” which is spelled with a Kuf), since kosher food connects body and soul. The opposite of kosher is “treif” from the root meaning to “tear,” for it tears the soul from the body, as Chassidus explains.

“A healthy soul is not something associated with how much we exercise and develop the physical body, but in the kashrus of the food we eat, which refines the body. When we are refined, we are ready for Geula.”



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LIVING A LIFE OF FAITH ON SHLICHUS

By Chani Nussbaum

The shlucha to Ibiza, Spain, Mrs. Shlomtziyon Krauss, a descendent of Spanish Jewry, tells us how she is now reaching out to Jews in the country of her origin.

Spanish Jewry was nearly obliterated during the period of the Inquisition. Hundreds of thousands of Jews went off into exile and those who remained, did so as converts to Christianity, r"l, though many practiced Judaism secretly. If they were caught, they were burned at the stake by the Church. As the generations passed, more of the traditions were forgotten and Jews assimilated and intermarried with the local population.

CHILDHOOD

I was born in Spain to a Christian family, says Shlomtziyon. I was raised as a Christian until I was 15-16 and then my Jewish spark suddenly rose up. I began to read and realized that the Church was all lies. I also discovered books on Judaism and my parents and I figured out that we were descendents of Jews.

Our family name was Meraro, from the name Merari, who was

one of the sons of Levi. We were Levites.

Along with our reading, my parents began to remember things they had seen in their childhood. My mother remembered her mother lighting Shabbos candles. My father remembered Bible stories that he had heard as a child. They remembered that when bread fell on the floor, they picked it up and kissed it. These were remnants of a Judaism that my parents recalled.

The rest of the family, aunts and uncles, were not thrilled with the direction we were taking. They were Christians through and through. They considered veering off in another direction as heresy, and they cut off ties with us.

I ended up as an only child. My brother died at age 18. He had a special neshama and he undoubtedly helped push us towards discovering our Jewish roots. Nine months later, my grandfather died. They were the pillars who kept the family

strong. After their passing, my family began to disintegrate.

I'll never forget the feeling I had in high school when my only friends were my parents. We had no extended family for they had cut off ties with us. We were practically isolated.

We began keeping Shabbos and learning about Judaism. On Sukkos, my father built a sukka. We contacted Rabbi Moshe ben Dahan who was the rabbi in our area at that time. With his help, we continued studying and learning about our Judaism. We met an Israeli woman who lived in our area and through her we began learning Hebrew and Judaism. She opened our eyes. We discovered that the truth is to be found only in Judaism.

I graduated high school and wanted to do something Jewish. I studied philology (the study of languages). I studied Hebrew and Arabic and I was able to apply for a scholarship to study in Eretz Yisroel. I was in fourth place, but due to the tensions in Israel, the two in the first two places dropped out and I was in second place to receive a scholarship.

While in the Eretz Yisroel, I contacted the woman who had taught me and who had in the meantime returned to Israel. I spent Shabbos with her and her family in Chaifa. Our story touched their hearts and thus, my

parents and I met with a rabbi from the Israeli Rabbanut who agreed to convert us after we underwent their conversion process.

We prepared for conversion and my father dedicated all his money towards visiting Eretz Yisroel and our progress towards this goal. I felt very connected to Eretz Yisroel. After a few months, five years ago on 5 Elul, we converted.

SEARCHING

I was happy to belong to the Jewish people but I felt confused because I discovered many types of Jews. I felt a great spiritual thirst and didn't know where I truly belonged. I was attracted to Breslov. I read many books about purity of thought but it got me nowhere. I felt a great spiritual drop. I met some men but didn't find my shidduch. I felt even

more lost.

I also felt that I didn't have the physical stamina to make it through the day. I figured that if I volunteered and did something for someone else, I'd feel better. So I volunteered at Shaarei Tzedek hospital under the aegis of National Service. After a year, I felt that my batteries were drained. I didn't know how to strengthen my body because my spiritual confusion had weakened me. Then Hashem saw my suffering and came to my rescue.

THE REBBE AS SHADCHAN

Ten days before I finished my volunteer service, I joined an outing that left Bat Ayin in Gush Etzyon for the north. I loved Eretz Yisroel and although I was older than the oldest participants, that didn't stop me from joining the trip. That was a miracle in

itself.

My husband-to-be was the security guard on the trip and that was also a miracle. His story is worth an article of its own. He also spent a long time searching for meaning in life. At a certain point, he wrote to the Rebbe for a bracha for a shidduch and the answer he opened to in the *Igros Kodesh* was he had "to strengthen himself."

In one of the answers, the Rebbe wrote that if he was offered work with youth, he should accept it and that he would find his match there. Not more than a day or two went by and he was asked to join the trip as a security guard. He accepted, because of the Rebbe's answer, and we met. We married on 8 Nissan. I was no longer alone.

We spent Shabbasos in Kfar Chabad at the warm home of Avi and Yehudit Piamenta. Thanks to them, we are committed to



Within 24 hours of the dream, someone called my husband and said, “The Rebbe told me to give you two million dollars...”

Chabad. I’d like to take this opportunity to thank them with all our hearts.

We began to study *Tanya* together and amazingly, my confusion subsided. I had been missing a connection to the Rebbe.

SHLICHUS

We lived in Bat Ayin for a few months. We asked the Rebbe

about shlichus but did not see a response. We decided to help out the shluchim in the Golan Heights. We spent a year there and that is where our oldest child was born.

Then we moved to Ramat Gan in order to help the shluchim there, but after a short time, we felt our job there had ended. We asked the Rebbe where we should go and the answer was, “Why sit here when our brothers are suffering?”

This was when the Jews were expelled from Gush Katif. We picked up and moved to Avnei Cheifetz in the northern Shomron. We did some work there, but once again, after a short time, we had to leave.

We presented some shlichus options to the Rebbe but they were not approved. Then I remembered that in my childhood I had heard about the island of Ibiza in Spain, a tourist spot

where many young people go. These days, fewer Israelis go there since it became extremely expensive, yet you can still find Israelis who have been living there for 15 years.

It’s a very special place. People are willing to listen to you; the atmosphere is quiet and peaceful, unlike the tension that prevails in Eretz Yisroel.

When we asked the Rebbe about shlichus there, we got a positive response. In our minds, we were already there, but practically speaking, we had lots of debts with no money and so moving there was not possible.

One day, my husband’s brother wrote to the Rebbe for a bracha for something. In the answer he opened to, the Rebbe wrote, “I am surprised that Rabbi _____, who received a bracha to go there, has still not gone...” That was enough for us. We sold everything we had, paid off our debts, bought tickets and flew to Ibiza.

The money was used up in three days at a hotel. We paid 200 Euros a day. Nevertheless, we worked l’chat’chilla aribber because we knew that this is what the Rebbe wants of us, so for example, we davened outside and Jews who passed by saw us.

During that incredible summer, two and a half years ago, I gave birth to my daughter. She was born in a summer of mesirus nefesh. Her birth was really miraculous. The Rebbe does not remain in debt.

In one of the answers we opened to in the *Igros Kodesh* about our shlichus, the Rebbe wrote that we were going to collect diamonds. That’s exactly how we feel here. Each neshama is a diamond and we remove diamond after diamond from the mud.



R' Yoel Krauss with mekuravim



R' Yoel Krauss in Ibiza

One day, we were walking down the street with our son, who was wearing a kippa. An older Jew stopped us and he wished us a “shana tova u’mesuka.” It was before Shavuot but he explained that he hadn’t met Jews in such a long time that he had decided that he would wish a good year to the first Jew he met.

THE HOUSE THAT WAITED FOR US

On our short stay at Ibiza, we moved several times because of finances. One day, when we went to watch the milking so we would have chalav Yisroel, we encountered a large group of tourists including an Israeli couple who were excited to see us. They had responded to an invitation from a friend to meet in

Barcelona, but were unable to contact him when they arrived, and they were stuck in Ibiza.

Then a fire broke out near their tent and they stayed with us for three days. At first, they opposed everything we said, but to our surprise, they slowly softened up and the husband agreed to put on t’fillin. Later on, they moved to a small, nearby island. When they went to the café there, the owner offered

them a deal: You teach me Hebrew and I'll let you stay here for free. Apparently, his neshama was also a neshama of one of the early Spanish Jews.

We were in touch with them all summer. They used the phrases, "with Hashem's help," and "baruch Hashem," often, and we saw the power of the Rebbe. The husband told us that his wife had begun lighting Shabbos candles.

It was Rosh HaShana 5767. We tried organizing for the Yomim Tovim but were stuck financially and had a hard time doing anything. We wrote to the Rebbe and received his approval to return to Eretz Yisroel. We also went to 770, where we raised money for the shlichus.

One time, when we had written to the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh*, there was a letter addressed to Beis Chana about a building they should buy. I had seen a house for sale in Ibiza on the Internet, which had a mikva underneath it! I immediately told



The Picture of the Day in a local paper.

my husband that this was our Chabad house. He told me about the letter he had opened to and we felt there was a connection. We remained in the US for five months until two weeks before Purim, where we raised the money we needed to return to Ibiza and buy the building.

Someone, like an angel from

heaven, gave us a check for \$170,000, as a first payment for the house.

We returned to Ibiza a week before Pesach and began the process of buying the house. Two days before Pesach, we opened to a letter in which the Rebbe said we should make the seider at home. The house wasn't even connected to electricity but we got all the permits quickly and were able to host forty people for an unforgettable Pesach experience.

We continued working despite all the hardships we encountered. We held farbrengens and events for Jewish tourists and Israelis who came to the island.

TWO MILLION DOLLARS – A MIRACLE AND A TEST

Before last Shavuot my husband dreamt that he was passing by the Rebbe and the Rebbe pointed at someone standing behind him and motioned to him to speak. The person turned to my husband and said, "The Rebbe told me to give you two million dollars."

Within 24 hours of the dream,



R' Yoel Krauss (right) on the streets of Ibiza



The house designated as the Chabad house

In the meantime, we had to leave the house we had placed a down payment on and temporarily moved into a house that an Israeli couple set aside for us. He is the owner of a restaurant and we are planning on starting a kosher catering service there. They helped us and are in the process of being inspired to t'shuva.

Now we are back in Eretz Yisroel, as I wait to give birth. Then we plan on returning to Ibiza. We are sure that the Rebbe's brachos will be fulfilled and we will get the money we need to buy the house to be used as a center for our outreach work.

I thank the Rebbe for opening my eyes and saving my life, because before connecting to the Rebbe, it was like I wasn't in this world. The Rebbe revived me. The Rebbe is my father and he made me happy; despite the many challenges, I am happy. I am sure we will conquer the world with simcha and the Geula.

Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu V'Rabbeinu Melech HaMoshiach L'olam Va'ed!

someone called my husband and said, "The Rebbe told me to give you two million dollars." My husband had not told anyone about his dream!

We received the check three weeks later. We thanked the Rebbe for the miracle and put the money in the bank so we could finish paying for the building. In Tamuz the bank told us that the check was not covered.

It was a very big test for us. My husband and I were in shock

for days after having seen the fulfillment of his dream in such an amazing way. We were encouraged by the fact that we are shluchim and the Rebbe promised that the miracle would come from someplace we didn't expect, and surely this will take place.

We constantly receive chizuk regarding buying the house and we have faith, even though the situation is not at all simple. It's only with the kochos of the Rebbe that we are able to carry on.

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THE REBBE ZAHL GEZUND ZAIN!

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

Beis Moshiach Magazine is pleased to present the next installment from the seifer Shlita by Rabbi Zalman Hertz, discussing the faith of Lubavitcher chassidim in the seventh generation.

WHY A CHASSID WRITES THE TITLE “SHLITA”

In this chapter, we will begin to explain the basis for the conduct among chassidim to use the term “Shlita” even today, while totally refraining from the use of terms such as “of righteous and holy memory,” “his soul rests in the hidden treasures of Heaven,” “may his merit protect us,” etc.

What are the reasons that bring a chassid to write the term “Shlita” – “may he live long and good years, Amen,” or “*der Rebbe zahl gesund zain*” (may the Rebbe have good health) about a person who **before the eyes of the world** (“*olam*” – derived from “*helem v’hester*,” hiding and concealment) is in a state of departure of the soul from the body?

There are a few reasons:

1. The Rebbe used this title in reference to the previous Rebbe. Even if the Rebbe would have used this expression on only one occasion, this mode of conduct represents the utmost holiness. We

must be precise in its usage and derive practical instruction from it.

Furthermore, the Rebbe said “Shlita” regarding the Rebbe Rayatz after his histalkus on numerous occasions (there are those who say, at least eleven times), which strengthens this conduct with even greater emphasis among chassidim.

2. The Rebbe responded positively to the fact **that a chassid wrote this title** in reference to the previous Rebbe, **and the Rebbe even encouraged it.**

At the farbrengen of Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5710 (*Hisvaaduyos B’Lashon HaKodesh* 5710, Vol. 1, pg. 83), the Rebbe said:

I received a letter from one of the chassidim, where one writes regarding my revered teacher and father-in-law, the Rebbe (after his passing) “*der Rebbe zahl gesund zain*” (may the Rebbe have good health). I was truly pleased by this expression, and the truth is that his health was not from physical matters but from spiritual matters.

The Rebbe shlita expressed his

satisfaction to that chassid in writing (see *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 3, pg. 307):

His letter from the 25th of Iyar has now been received. I enjoyed very, very much that he writes *zahl gesund zain*. In mentioning my revered teacher and father-in-law, the Rebbe *hk”m*. It is understood according to what is written in *Igeres HaKodesh* 27, that the life of the tzaddik is spiritual – faith, love, and fear – and it is known that the tzaddik constantly goes from strength to strength. (NOTE: Two interesting details in the Rebbe’s reply: a) Twice using the word “very”: “I enjoyed **very very** much”; b) Despite the fact **that the Rebbe himself wrote in this letter the acronym hk”m** (hareini kaparas mishkavo – I am an atonement for his laying to rest) – a term written regarding someone who no longer lives as we do, nevertheless, he encourages the chassid in this different mode of conduct.)

It is thereby understood that we cannot say that this is a mode of conduct pertaining only to the Rebbe – “*Rebbe’she zachn*” (that the previous Rebbe lives specifically for the Rebbe shlita, etc.), for in addition to what was mentioned in the last chapter about the need to copy the Rebbe’s conduct (as long as the Rebbe doesn’t explicitly rule it out), **here, the Rebbe explicitly encourages the chassid in this conduct!**

3. Quite often, we hear the claim

that since the reality of the situation has changed, therefore, there is simply no place for using this title today. Yet, the conduct of the chassidim is established according to the guidelines set by their leader. When the Rebbe not only doesn't reject such terms, but even expresses his pleasure upon seeing them, it further encourages its usage.

To put it simply, the Rebbe is well aware of what happened on Yud Shvat 5710, yet he deemed it appropriate to encourage a chassid to relate to the previous Rebbe in a manner that expresses that nothing has changed. This is clear proof that **however one explains what happened on Yud Shvat 5710, it is still fitting and appropriate to use the title "Shlita."** (NOTE: In addition, the Rebbe stated explicitly that "there is no change" after the histalkus of the previous Rebbe.)

4. Anyone who is afraid of this "extremist" custom, out of the belief that this is not befitting "the spirit of Yisroel Saba," asking, Where have we found anywhere among the worldwide Jewish community throughout the generations that people refer to someone, even the biggest tzaddik, with the term "Shlita" or the expression "zahl gezund zain" after 120 years? - we direct him to the aforementioned letter in *Igros Kodesh*, where the Rebbe writes:

Why the fear of saying "zahl gezund zain"? [...]. Indeed, it is explained in Igeres HaKodesh 28 that the life of the tzaddik is faith, love, and fear. Thus, [...] he is more gezund. Sufficient for the wise.

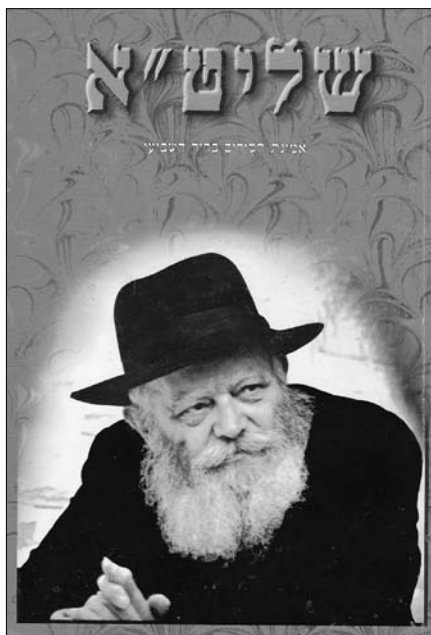
REJECTING THE WRITING OF TERMS OF "HISTALKUS"

We thereby find that the use of the term "Shlita" or "zahl gezund zain," in speech or in writing, is not only legitimate, it's even desirable, in

the holy opinion of the Rebbe shlita. (NOTE: For the Rebbe not only spoke in this style, he even encouraged a chassid to write this way.)

Nevertheless, there still remains for us to understand:

We learn from the sichos brought in the previous chapter, about the quality of hiskashrus expressed in copying the Rebbe's conduct - that as long as the Rebbe doesn't reject a certain mode of conduct among his students, the student should act according to his Rebbe's custom, and even be stringent about it. In regard to our discussion, inasmuch as



despite the Rebbe's encouragement of the use of the title "Shlita," the Rebbe himself customarily wrote "terms of histalkus," therefore, it would be appropriate for a true disciple to emulate his Rebbe's conduct in this respect as well, and when he writes "K'vod K'dushas Admur," shouldn't he immediately add "of righteous and holy memory," "his soul rests in the hidden treasures of Heaven," "may his merit protect us," etc.?

This question becomes stronger in light of what is written in the

previous chapter (on the importance of copying the Rebbe's conduct): If the Rebbe actually expects chassidim to follow his customs in precise terms, why don't they try to conduct themselves as the Rebbe does in this matter? In a manner of "*palginan dibbura*" (picking and choosing elements of a statement) we are liable to suspect *ch"v* that the chassidim do what the Rebbe wants only when it suits them (and the whole concept of writing "Shlita" derives merely from emotion). We can prove this by the fact that when there comes a time to act in an opposite fashion, according to the Rebbe's custom of writing - they deliberately ignore the custom...

However, we find that the Rebbe (not only encourages the use of the title "Shlita," as mentioned above, he also) categorically rejects the writings of terms of histalkus customarily written in reference to a tzaddik after his passing. Furthermore, as discussed at length in the previous chapter regarding the custom of copying the Rebbe - this is something very positive, except when the Rebbe explicitly rejects it. (NOTE: We brought another proof from the Gemara (Sukka 32b) in a manner of "a mere practice in Yehuda in order to reinforce an explicit statement in Torah." We see in this Gemara that the conduct of a student to be stringent in following that which "**came out from the mouth** of Rabbi Kahana" was also regarding something that the rabbi actually did in a totally different way, even though the rabbi didn't reject conduct such as his own among his students (rather, the student voluntarily chose to be stringent in matters expressing his connection to his teacher). Therefore, we find that in a case such as ours, there is no need to wait for the Rebbe to reject a certain mode of conduct. The very fact that he encourages the student to act in this specific manner is more than enough to prevent the student

from acting any other way, i.e., even as his Rebbe does personally.)

In numerous farbrengens, the Rebbe demanded with great fervor that Chassidim refrain from writing these expressions:

“IN THE HIDDEN TREASURES OF HEAVEN”

At the conclusion of the farbrengen on Acharon Shel Pesach 5710, the Rebbe spoke with great emotion and sobbing (see Toras Menachem, Vol. 1, pg. 27), saying that no one should apply the term “his soul rests in the hidden

The Rebbe categorically rejects the writings of terms of histalkus customarily written in reference to a tzaddik after his passing.

treasures of Heaven” to the Rebbe Rayatz:

What *hidden treasures of Heaven*? “Hidden treasures of Heaven” is a concept that relates to illuminations and revelations, whereas the Rebbe - whose avoda was not for the purpose of receiving a “*pras*” (reward), derived from “*prusa*” (portion), signifying a mere illumination and revelation – is connected with the essence, higher than illuminations and revelations. And since the essence is here below (in the place where the overall avoda was done),

we find that also the Rebbe is here below!”

The Rebbe then concluded:

My revered teacher and father-in-law, the Rebbe shlita, will lead us to the True and Complete Redemption.

“HIS SOUL RESTS IN EDEN”

At the farbrengen of Shabbos Parshas Shlach 5710 (ibid., pg. 106), the Rebbe said:

When talking about my revered teacher and father-in-law, the Rebbe, we don’t say “of righteous memory” (as is taught in Gemara Yoma) or “his soul rests in Eden”...because: a) who can give an “address” and limit his place to “Gan Eden” – the lower Gan Eden or the upper Gan Eden, or incomparably higher than that?; b) why should we send him away from us?! He surely does not want to part from us and is indeed here with us!

“OF RIGHTEOUS MEMORY”

Later in that same farbrengen, the Rebbe continued:

And for the very reason that we don’t say “*nishmaso Eden*” (his soul rests in Eden), we also don’t say “*zeicher tzaddik livracha*” (of righteous memory). For the concept of “memory” pertains only to something distant where there can be a concept of forgetfulness, whereas in our discussion, where there is no relevance to the concept of forgetfulness *ch”v*, there is no need for memory, as there is no need for memory in relation to a living person.

“MAY HIS MERIT PROTECT US”

The Rebbe once wrote a letter (see *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 17, pg.

513) in response to someone who asked why the Rebbe didn’t write the expression “*z’chus yagein aleinu*” (may his merit protect us), when he mentioned Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in his general letter from Lag B’Omer 5735:

It can be said according to the explanation of the Rogatchover (B’Chukosai 26:42) that there is no relevance to remembering regarding Yitzchak, and specifically Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, regarding whom it is explicitly stated that he protects more than during his lifetime, and he said that he exempts, etc., until etc.

When a chassid hears such amazing words from his Rebbe, negating the writing of these terms, he naturally is careful not to do so.

In other words, specifically because he has a connection to his Rebbe with every fiber of his being and tries to emulate his Rebbe’s conduct in every detail, when there emits from the Rebbe’s mouth a rejection of a certain mode of conduct, the chassid immediately implements it in practical terms, as the words of his Rebbe are most precious to him.

Furthermore, even if these words were said without adding reason and explanation, but in a manner of “I have decreed it,” and therefore, “you have no right to challenge it,” the chassid obeys immediately. This applies with even greater force when the words are explained, “*milsa b’taama*” – that we should not conduct ourselves in this fashion, because these titles are in contradiction to the reality: The previous Rebbe is not “in the hidden treasures of Heaven,” he is not limited to “Gan Eden,” and there is no relevance to arousing a remembrance of something that is not forgotten, as there are surely no grounds for using these titles.