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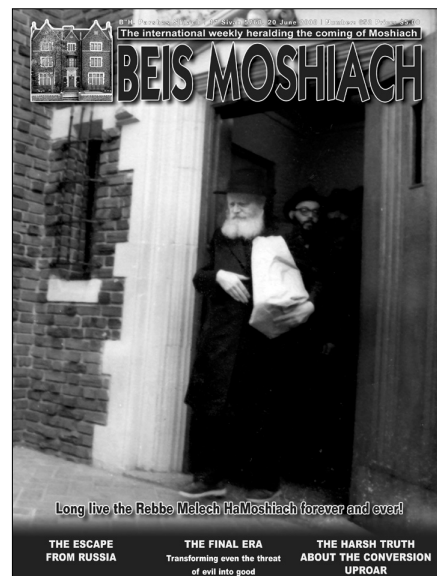
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USA

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

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:

M.M. Hendel

ENGLISH EDITOR:

Boruch Merkur
ed@beismoshiach.org

HEBREW EDITOR:

Rabbi Sholom Yaakov Chazan
editorH@beismoshiach.org

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THE LAND IS VERY, VERY GOOD

Translated and adapted by Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Ten spies said the Jewish people could not conquer the land of Israel. Joshua and Caleb said that “If G-d desires us, He will bring us into the land.” Since we derive the law of a minyan from the ten spies, obviously there is a positive element in their claim. They wished to remain in the desert, without the distractions of sowing and planting, to study and pursue a deeper relationship with G-d isolated from the mundane world. Joshua and Caleb argued that the deepest relationship comes from performing mitzvos with kabbalas ol – through submission to G-d’s Will rather than reason. This transforms the world into a dwelling place for G-dliness.

This week’s Torah reading begins with the story of the spies. After the Jewish people received the Torah, they proceeded towards the land of Israel. Before entering, Moses sent twelve spies – one from each tribe – to determine the terrain and the type of people that lived there. This was done to prepare for the coming war, for at that time Moses and the Jewish people anticipated an

immediate entrance to and conquest of the land. However, ten of the spies came back with a discouraging report, claiming the land of Israel was unconquerable. Only Joshua and Caleb insisted that if G-d told them to go, they would surely succeed. But the Jewish people were persuaded by the account of the ten spies. They became afraid of the coming battles and did not want to enter the land. They complained about Moses and threatened to rebel, to return to Egypt. As a result, G-d decreed that the generation that left Egypt would wander the wilderness for forty years and die there. Their children would conquer the land.

From this negative incident we derive an important principle in Jewish law. The ten spies who spoke disparagingly about the land and its conquest were called a “wicked congregation.” From this identification we derive the concept of a minyan – a quorum of ten men that constitutes a congregation. At first glance, this doesn’t make sense. Our sages tell us that every matter of holiness requires a minyan. Why do we learn this principle – matters of holiness require a minyan – from the ten spies, who actually rebelled

against G-d and are called a “wicked congregation”?

To understand the apparent contradiction requires the insight of Chassidus, the inner teachings of the Torah. For the sin of the ten spies actually teaches us how to approach Redemption and the days of Moshiach.

From one perspective, it’s clear why they did not want

to enter the land of Israel. In the wilderness, they did not have to worry about their material needs. They had food from heaven – the manna; they had water whenever they wanted, from the well of Miriam; the Clouds of Glory protected them, killing the snakes and scorpions and ironing their clothes. Freed from the worries of everyday life, they could concentrate on learning Torah. In their minds, this was the true way to learn Torah and be attached to G-d.

Their mistake was not realizing that there is a higher level of service, namely, fulfilling the mitzvos of the land of Israel. One's Torah study and attachment to G-d is then much greater. They mistook the secondary path – life in the wilderness – for the essential one – living in the land of Israel. Their only mistake was thinking the forty years in the wilderness was their final goal, when in fact it was only a preparation for the final stage, fulfilling the mitzvos and studying Torah in the land of Israel.

Accordingly, since their concern was to remain in a state of holiness and attachment to G-d, we derive from them the law of a minyan – ten men constitute a congregation for matters of holiness.

What was the difference between the reasoning of the ten spies and that of Joshua and Caleb, who were convinced that the generation of the Exodus could enter and conquer the land? The ten spies felt unprepared to enter the land. Having to sow, plow, reap and harvest – having to spend most of their time earning a living – would detract from their ability to fully and properly study Torah. They desired to be isolated from life's struggles and hardships; they did not want to interact with the other nations. This would interfere with their spiritual progress. Out of their great love for G-d, they wished to focus solely on increasing in wisdom, going ever higher in their understanding of and attachment to G-dliness.

As a result of the mistaken reasoning of the spies, it would be the **next** generation, the one that followed them, that entered the land. Although the generation of the wilderness had reached the pinnacle of wisdom, had been thoroughly immersed in learning Torah, the next generation was the one that actually entered the land of Israel and fulfilled the practical mitzvos.

On the other hand, Joshua and Caleb argued that the people should enter the land immediately. They said that the land would not interfere with their attachment to G-d. Just the opposite. Living in the land of Israel, fulfilling the mitzvos and studying the Torah there, the people would reach the highest possible level. Their connection to, and the revelation of, G-dliness, would be unimaginable. On what did they base this argument? "If G-d desires us, He will bring us into the land." That is, the entry to and conquest of the land of Israel is connected with G-d's desire and G-d's Will. G-d wants the Jewish people to be in the land of Israel, learning

Torah and performing mitzvos **there**. When the Jewish people do enter the land, they fulfill G-d's innermost Will. This automatically reveals the truth that G-d desires the Jewish people; it also reveals that the Jewish people's attachment to G-d is at the deepest, most essential level possible.

Attachment to G-d in the wilderness depended on a lack of distractions. Unburdened by the concerns of daily life, the Jewish people focused on gaining wisdom. Attachment to G-d in the land of Israel depends on involvement with the mitzvos. It requires a submission to and fulfillment of G-d's Will. The difference between these two types of attachment is highlighted by the appeal of Joshua and Caleb that "the land is very, very good." The doubling of the word "very" indicates that the highest level of attachment, higher than exercising reason, higher than the bonds of wisdom, is a nullification of the self, a connection to the Will of G-d.

Obviously, there is an eternal lesson in the argument of the spies, and in the counter-argument of Joshua and Caleb. According to the spies, we are not able to enter the land of Israel; we need more preparation, more education. We need forty years in the wilderness. Our generation must isolate itself, perfect itself, study Torah undisturbed. This generation must prepare the way, and perhaps the next generation will be able to enter the land. But first we must reach the highest extent of wisdom.

This, of course, is the argument of those who say this generation is not ready, or this generation is not worthy, to be the generation of Redemption, the one to greet Moshiach. The argument is, we need more time, we need more preparation, we need to isolate ourselves and concentrate on Torah study, on becoming attached to G-d through wisdom, reason or understanding.

The counter-argument is that of Joshua and Caleb. Every Jew, regardless of his or her level of understanding or accomplishments, is capable of entering the land of Israel immediately – right now. Entrance into the land – that is, bringing Moshiach – depends on conducting ourselves according to the prayer of Joshua and Caleb – "the land is very, very good." It requires us to act in a manner of **kabbalas ol** – accepting the yoke of heaven. Our mitzvos, even our Torah study, must be in a manner that demonstrates that "G-d desires us." True, the coming of Moshiach depends on each and every one of us. But it does not depend on our wisdom, our level of preparation, our progress through "forty years in the wilderness." Rather, every Jew is capable of performing the mitzvos with **kabbalas ol** – to fulfill G-d's Will simply because it is G-d's Will, because "He desires us." Acting in this manner, automatically and immediately we can enter the land that is "very, very good," with the coming of Moshiach.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 33, pp. 85-94)

A COMPLETE CHANGE AT 30,000 FEET

By Mendel Tzfasman

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

While traveling on the same flight from New York to Eretz Yisroel, Limor Shani, resident of Moshav Tamrat, discovered the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, the teachings of Chassidus, and the light of Yiddishkait that had been flickering within her, wanting to be revealed, in the merit of the traveler seated near her, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Groner, the Rebbe's secretary.

In the eyes of a Lubavitcher chassid, an airline journey home, for a visit, a vacation, or business matters – and especially a flight to the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach – is immediately connected with “mivtzaim” – putting on t’fillin, telling a miracle story from the Rebbe to the person sitting next to you, arousing a sense of excitement over the activities of the Rebbe’s shluchim throughout the world, and more. You can frequently hear a chassid giving over a deep and scholarly sicha to

the person next to him in flight, thus opening a path to plant the seeds of faith and reach the depths of his heart. In many instances, however, we have no way of knowing how the story turns out. Quite often, the chassid and his “traveling partner” warmly part company, as the latter returns to his day-to-day life that washes away, blurs, and dims the brightness of the exciting encounter. Even if something comes out of this chance meeting, in most cases, the chassid knows

nothing about it.

The following story is about such an experience on a flight, and the powerful impression it left upon the “person in the next seat.”

“It was about two years ago,” relates Mrs. **Limor Shani**, resident of the northern Israeli settlement of Tamrat, located near Nehalel Junction, as she begins her story. “I had just completed a visit to my son, Moran, who lives in New York, and I boarded a plane for my return flight back to Israel. I got to the business section and settled into my seat, when I suddenly noticed who was taking the place next to mine. I didn’t have much time to think as a chareidi Jew with a white beard, dressed in chassidic garb, sat down in the adjacent seat.

“‘Oy,’ I thought to myself, ‘now he’s going to start rattling me to move forward or backward, to the left or to the right.’ However, to my great surprise, he removed his hat and coat, placed them in the overhead compartment, and calmly sat down.

“The man turned to me in English and asked me what language I spoke. I replied, ‘Yiddish’... Apparently, he didn’t understand that I was joking, and he began to speak to me in Yiddish. When I pointed out ‘my mistake’ to him, he then proceeded to converse with me in Hebrew.

“When he learned that I lived on Moshav Tamrat, he asked me to send his warmest regards to Dovid and Dalia Tal, the local emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. While my acquaintance with Dalia at the time was limited at best, I still found it appropriate to say some warm words of praise about Mrs. Tal to this gentleman with whom I had yet to become acquainted.

“When I asked him, ‘From whom are the regards?’ he replied quite simply, ‘Tell them – From Leibel.’

“As the flight continued, he told me that he was the secretary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe for forty years. ‘Nu, the secretary of the Rebbe,’ I thought to myself, ‘his job obviously was to answer phones and send letters...’

“Rabbi Groner asked me if I would be interested in reading a diary he had written on the Rebbe. When I replied in the affirmative, I soon become engrossed in reading the diary and with Rabbi Groner’s accompanying responses to my questions, I got a clear picture of the Rebbe and his tremendous work. While I had heard much about the Rebbe, I had never gone to the trouble to find out additional and detailed information about him. The diary aroused my curiosity, and I posed dozens of questions before Rabbi Groner, beginning with what is happening in the Rebbe’s court today when the chassidim are unable to see him? Who leads them? I asked questions about the Rebbe’s illness, how his chassidim reacted during that time period – I even asked questions about the meaning of life and why we came into this world.

“Suddenly, I realized that this wasn’t just some ‘ordinary secretary who answers the phone.’ This was a man of great prominence and stature. Yet, his very appearance was paradoxical – a simple man with a winning and personable cordiality. I must point out that in my work, I have met a wide range of learned, scholarly, and talented people, but never in my life had I met such a unique personality.

“Slowly and without even noticing, layers of hatred and alienation peeled away, along with my problems and doubts about G-d and observant Jews. I was so absorbed by what he had told and explained to me that nothing else interested me. The captain, a

colleague of my husband, who is also a pilot with El Al, and other members of the crew approached me on more than one occasion and asked, ‘Need anything, Limor?’ But I didn’t need a thing – I had it all...

A GOOD RESOLUTION IN THE SKIES

“When the plane began to level off, my travel companion turned to me and asked if he could make a request. ‘That’s all I need,’ I thought to myself. ‘Now he’s surely going to ask me not to travel on Shabbos or something like that.’ I left my thoughts to myself, and I asked him what he would like me to do.

“Light candles each Erev Shabbos and Erev Yom Tov,” came the reply.

I was in no rush to make a commitment.

“Why should I be willing to do such a thing for someone who, with all due respect, I don’t even know?” I asked.

Rabbi Groner gave me a powerful answer. “You have to be particularly stringent about the time you light the Shabbos candles, as the time changes according to the season and the location. However, when you light at the proper time, the gates of blessing are opened, and you can ask for whatever you wish and for whomever you wish. When you are lighting, think about all the women who are lighting all over the world at that same moment – together with you.”

“I was in total shock. Rabbi Groner didn’t answer me with a quote from the Tanach, the Talmud, or the *Tanya*; he cleverly broadcast on the right frequency, penetrating my heart. The truth is,



though, that I wasn't convinced so quickly, and I proceeded to ask how so many good women who lit candles with tremendous self-sacrifice in Maidank and Buchenwald, and who surely davened and pleaded, nevertheless did not remain alive? Instead of an answer, I got a wave of the hand: 'That is a lengthy and complicated matter and there is no need to get into this now,' he said.

"It was simply amazing to discover that after all the various answers that I had received on the subject, this 'answer' seemed to satisfy me and I made the resolution. Two years have passed since then, and I light candles each Erev Shabbos and Erev Yom Tov!

"When we landed in Eretz Yisroel, we found a state of total disorder at the luggage collection area due to a nationwide general strike that was taking place that day. My travel companion showed himself to be a person with a unique level of Ahavas Yisroel. As soon as he found out where our flight's luggage was located, he noticed that I was standing in the wrong place, and he went over to explain to me where our suitcases were.

RELATIVES OF THE REBBE'S SECRETARY

"When I reached my car, I immediately placed a call to my mother. Before even mentioning about the family visit, which was the whole purpose of my trip to New York, I began by saying with great enthusiasm, 'Ima, you'll never guess who I was sitting with on this flight!' My mother expected to hear the name of an actor, a vocalist, or some other celebrity. 'With Rabbi Groner, the secretary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,' I said, knowing that my mother had a connection with Chabad and Lubavitch far more than I did...

"My mother shrieked with excitement, and then said that she had to get off the line and she would call me back in a few minutes. Later, she told me that she hung up to call the rabbi of a Chabad House in Toronto, with whom she had been acquainted for some time, in order to get a few more details on Rabbi Groner.

"When she finally did call back, she gave me a shock, "Did you know that we are related to Rabbi Chadakov, the head secretary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe?"

"You never told me that," I replied. My mother proceeded to tell me that my great-great grandmother's family name was Chadakovskia, and the family lived in Riga, Latvia. Rabbi Chadakov, her nephew, came together with the Rebbe Rayatz to the United States, where he served as one of his aides.

"My next telephone call was to Mrs. Dalia Tal. When I told her (no longer without emotion), 'You have warm regards from Rabbi Leibel Groner, the Rebbe's secretary,' she broke out into emotional sobs. When she managed to compose herself, she asked me to tell her about the flight, blessed me for my courageous decision, and explained the details in fulfilling the mitzva of Shabbos and Yom Tov candle lighting. From that day forward, my connection with the Tal family, and with her friend, Mrs. Assur, another Tamrat resident who had become a Lubavitcher, strengthened and we became close friends.

"My first Shabbos candle lighting was an experience that I will never forget. In the days of my childhood and youth living on a Shomer HaTzair kibbutz, we had 'Kabbalas Shabbos,' but now that I have been introduced to the inner content of Shabbos and its

holiness, to its magic moments more precious than gold, I thank G-d that He sent me His wondrous messenger.

"I started attending classes on *Tanya* and on chassidus, taught by Rabbi Dubroskin from Migdal HaEmek, together with my friends at the Migdal HaEmek chapter of N'shei Chabad, including the shlucha in Kfar Baruch, Mrs. Leah Weg, and gradually I began fulfilling more and more mitzvos, as often as possible – and all this is thanks to that flight, which proved to be one of the loftiest, if not the greatest experience of my life..."

A BAR-MITZVA IN 770

During the time that passed, the connection to Rabbi Groner strengthened and grew. The next time she traveled to the States to visit her son, Moran, together with her younger son, Yinon, she came to 770 to see for herself the World Lubavitch Headquarters, and to meet with Rabbi Groner.

When I mentioned to Limor that the name "Yinon" is one of the names of Melech HaMoshiach, she replied by relating a most traumatic episode:

"Yinon was born after the passing of his father, of blessed memory, an air force pilot. In the midst of a military operation, his plane collided with another aircraft. This was just before Rosh HaShana 5744. My husband was killed instantly, while the two other pilots who were involved in the accident survived and are alive to this day (may they live long). I was pregnant at the time, and when the child was born, I named him Yinon, the name that I had chosen together with his father prior to his passing. Afterwards, when they told me that Yinon is one of the names of Moshiach, I felt that the name Yinon was given by Divine illumination in order to provide

supreme strengths for this extremely difficult period of galus that we were going through after the tragedy.”

If it appeared that Rabbi Groner had some influence on the Shani family before, the next get-together came and proved the validity of the chassidic saying, “When two Jews meet, this is two G-dly souls against one animal soul.”

“This took place last winter, when I made another trip to visit my son, Moran, coming this time with his brother, Yinon. We arrived

“When you light Shabbos candles at the proper time, the gates of blessing are opened, and you can ask for whatever you wish and for whomever you wish.”

in New York on Friday, and the first thing I did was to let Rabbi Groner know that I was in New York. He invited us to come to 770 on Sunday.

“I had never been to 770 before and like all the other structures in Crown Heights, the building looked like something known to me only in storybooks. We started out on our way early on Sunday morning for our meeting with Rabbi Groner. When we arrived in Crown Heights, we looked around us in bewilderment. The amazing

appearance of hundreds of chassidim coming and going, in and out, the energetic vitality flowing from the rows of buildings engaged in constant activity captivated us.

“Some nice people politely approached us and offered their assistance. When we said that we had a meeting with Rabbi Groner, they directed us to his office, located behind a staircase in a space between two buildings that the chassidim call ‘770.’

“We were in his office for two and a half hours, during which Rabbi Groner excused himself to go outside for the funeral of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s head emissary in Morocco. One of the things that moved us the most was Rabbi Groner’s answer to the question, ‘Why are you hidden in a small room when you can move into a larger and more spacious office?’ The reply was quite simple: ‘This office served the Rebbe as a sukkah, and I wouldn’t trade this place for a larger and roomier office anywhere in the world!’

“During the meeting, Rabbi Groner asked my sons if they had put on t’fillin today. I didn’t know where to hide myself. ‘Now he’ll find out that you didn’t have a bar-mitzva,’ I whispered to my sons. Moran said that he didn’t put on t’fillin, nor was he interested in doing so.

“Rabbi Groner smiled and began to tell an amazing story. Out of all the thrill and excitement, I don’t remember all the details, apart from the fact that it left such an impression that Moran gave in and rolled up his sleeve, and Yinon followed shortly thereafter...

“Thus, the visit to Rabbi Groner’s office turned into a special and emotional bar-mitzva for my two dear sons in the holiest and most exalted place in the world – the court of the Lubavitcher

Rebbe! Rabbi Groner didn’t settle for just a ‘bar-mitzva,’ and he proclaimed that he was giving a ‘bar-mitzva gift’ – a mehudar pair of t’fillin, which was presented later to my sons by a special messenger!

“Towards the end of the meeting, Rabbi Groner told me that he had heard that I was active in N’shei Chabad, and he turned to my sons and declared, ‘Just know that your mother is a Chabadnikit.’

“I am not really religious yet, but his definition truly flattered me. I really try to help Chabad, and while I was once very far from myself and my Judaism, since my meeting with Rabbi Groner, my sense of Jewish pride has returned. I hope to prove worthy of the title ‘chassid of the Rebbe’...

“When we left the office, I suggested to Moran and Yinon that we travel to Manhattan. However, they were still under the effect of the bar-mitzva, and they said that they preferred to walk through the streets of Crown Heights. Moran, who lived primarily among Gentiles, really enjoyed spending time in the chassidic environment and couldn’t contain the joy that he felt. We went into the stores, ate ‘glatt kosher’ food, and looked with great pleasure upon the happy and smiling faces of the people around us. Such a feeling is literally reminiscent of how I felt at home – “like on the kibbutz”...

“Later, I understood that over the years, the ‘chassid’ within me was crying out and yearning for a little of the living waters. I thank G-d that He sent me Rabbi Groner, who woke me up from my galus hibernation, and I hope that I can play a part in bringing the Redemption and then be able to see the Rebbe, who I feel is with us, giving us encouragement and greater strength...”

MOSHIACH IN CASTELLO SFORZESCO

By Nosson Avrohom

Rabbi Sholom Elmaleh's Chabad house is opposite the huge Castello Sforzesco fortress, which is visited by millions of tourists a year. From there, he disseminates the light of Torah and the B'suras HaGeula to the Jews who live in the area as well as those who visit. He does his work in a way of l'chat'chilla aribber and he shares some of his amazing stories with us.

Millions of tourists visit Milan every year, including many Israelis and Jews from all over. They want to see the sights and one of the outstanding ones is located in the northwestern part of the city and is called Castello Sforzesco. This huge structure contains a number of the most important museums of Italy (some say, of all Europe) and it also has magnificent gardens.

The 500-year-old castle-fortress faithfully served those who ruled the city and each generation left its mark on it. Leonardo Da Vinci

himself had a part in designing it. The museums include the Museum of Ancient and Antique Art with an impressive collection of statues and frescoes as well as a fantastic collection of Renaissance art and art of other periods hanging in the world renowned art gallery, the Pinacoteca Milano. The castle is also known for its Museum of Musical Instruments. In the center is a spacious park with ponds and flowers, a veritable gem in the midst of an industrial city with a million and a half citizens.

On Chanuka and Sukkos, many tourists are surprised to see a spacious, decorated sukka or a large menorah in the main square at one of the entrances to the castle. This is overseen by the Chabad house "Naar Yisroel," which is located opposite the castle and many tourists stop by to connect with something Jewish.

Rabbi Sholom Elmaleh realized ten years ago, when he opened the place, that it would turn into a popular attraction. "It brought the work of Chabad to a much higher level since we no longer need to





contain ourselves within the Jewish areas. We are 'out there,' as 'outside' as you can be, because we are located in the most exclusive tourist area of the city." It is called "Naar Yisroel" because it is a continuation of the work with youth that the Elmaleh family began back in their early days in Milan.

Back then, they worked out of their home, work which enjoyed the brachos and encouragement of the Rebbe. Young people would come on Shabbos and Yom Tov and other times in order to strengthen their

Jewish identity and to try and fight the assimilation prevalent in Europe and in Italy in particular. Their focus today is not only on young people but also on their parents who were themselves involved when they were young.

In addition to shiurim and the programs at the Chabad house, R' Elmaleh gives his attention to Italian Jews who have assimilated. He visits them at home throughout the year. Before Pesach, for example, 1500 of them receive shmura matza. Before Chanuka they receive a menorah and

candles, along with a brochure that explains the significance of the holiday from a Chassidic perspective.

The Elmalehs have seen a lot of success from their efforts. Many Jews, who were completely ignorant of their religion have begun taking more of an interest, even people with non-Jewish spouses buy t'fillin and are interested in keeping Shabbos. Many Jewish women have begun lighting Shabbos candles.

In order to reach 1500 people you have to be organized and you

“I left that yechidus astounded and touched to the core of my neshama. The Rebbe, Nasi HaDor, occupied with the most important matters, dedicated his time to little me in order to find out how I felt and how I was handling being far from my parents, etc.”

have to have manpower. Before Chanuka and Pesach ten bachurim come from Eretz Yisroel to help out and they join the six talmidim in the smicha program who learn locally and also go on mitvzaim and make house calls year round.

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

When we visited Naar Yisroel we did a tour of the Chabad house. First we went to the office located in the entrance to the lot, which was full of packages of matza and brochures. On the table were maps that the T'mimim use as they ride their bikes on their way to the families they visit.

Then we looked at the shul and beis midrash, where the davening

and the learning for smicha take place.

We concluded the tour with an interview about the past, present, and future with the founder of the Chabad house, R' Sholom Elmaleh, and his son, R' Michoel Elmaleh.

“I was born in Marrakesh, Morocco, when Jewish life was bustling. We didn't know that it was an option for Jews to live a secular life ch”v. Even during the French occupation, which brought a licentious culture to Morocco, somehow the winds of modernity did not penetrate our Jewish community. I remember that the rav and mekubal, Rabbi Machlouf Abuchatzsera, who was a revered figure even by the gentiles, vigorously fought any signs of slacking in religiosity in the community.

“A strong childhood memory that I have is how he would fearlessly chase away the Arab ice merchants who would try to enter Jewish neighborhoods every few months on Shabbos in order to peddle their wares.”

R' Sholom was drawn towards learning p'nimius ha'Torah from a

very young age. The shliach, Rabbi Shlomo Matusof started a Talmud Torah and R' Sholom and another four boys joined it.

“As a boy I was interested in continuing to learn in Chassidishe mosdos. When I reached high school age, I attended the Chabad yeshiva in Meknes, which was run by the shliach, Rabbi Michoel Lipsker. I learned there for a year. I went to the Chabad yeshiva in Casablanca for my second year, which was run by R' Matusof. From the Rebbe's shluchim, who each had his own style and were role models of devotion to Judaism and hafatzas ha'maayanos, I learned the concepts of 'Rebbe' and 'Chassidus.' It was the obvious choice to my friends and me to go to Brunoy in France for our third year.

“The yeshiva in Brunoy shaped our Chassidic world. There were many other talmidim there from Morocco, so we did not experience difficulties in acclimating. We quickly got into the swing of things and studied Yiddish so we could understand the Rebbe's sichos. The one who made the biggest impression on me was the mashpia



The public sukka near the Castle



Rabbi Sholom Elmaleh

Rabbi Nissan Nemenov, from whom I learned Chassidus.

“It was enough to watch him daven, at length and with devotion, to be inspired to t’shuva. He said every word slowly and with a soulful tune. I would listen, transfixed, to his davening.

“The one who was especially mekarev me among the talmidim of the yeshiva was Shneur Zalman Labkowski, who today is the rosh yeshiva in 770. He was considered one of the Chassidishe bachurim in the yeshiva, with outstanding Chassidishe middos. His t’mimus and d’veikus in learning won me over and I considered him my role model.”

In 1968, R’ Sholom went to

Milan for the first time in order to help the shliach there, Rabbi Moshe Lazar, with a day camp he organized. The camp ended before Pesach and from there he flew to 770 in order to spend a year with the Rebbe.

THE FIRST YECHIDUS

In those days, the K’vutza year was from Nissan to Nissan.

“The first time I saw the Rebbe I was tremendously excited and fearful. All at once, everything I had heard and learned about the Rebbe and his being the Nasi HaDor, back in Morocco and in yeshiva in Brunoy, became tangible, real.”

R’ Elmaleh had yechidus twice

that year. These two private meetings, he says, accompany him till this day in all his work, even though he had other yechiduyos after he got married.

“My first yechidus was on a summer night at two in the morning. R’ Labkowski, who waited for me, took note that my yechidus was 22 minutes long, ‘The king and I, alone.’ In that yechidus, the Rebbe took an unusual fatherly interest in me. He asked me personal questions, like how I managed in the various places I had been in, getting into the details, even those that seemed trivial. He asked about my family who had made aliya, and he also asked whether anyone was looking for a shidduch for me. It was like a father-son relationship.

“I left that yechidus astounded and touched to the core of my neshama. The Rebbe, Nasi HaDor, occupied with the most important matters, dedicated his time to little me in order to find out how I felt and how I was handling being far from my parents, etc. The way I understood the Rebbe’s attention to me was that I was young and very introverted. I loved learning on my own and if a bachur in my class did not initiate a conversation with me, I wouldn’t do so on my own. So nobody had inquired about me and asked whether I needed anything. My relationship with my parents was not that open either. The Rebbe, who knew me, took an interest in me.

“The second time I had yechidus was before I left 770. In answer to my question, the Rebbe said I should begin looking into shidduchim with vigor and added, ‘if you toil and find, believe it.’

“From America I went via France to Eretz Yisroel. In France there were some shidduch ideas but nothing came of them and the same happened in Eretz Yisroel. A year went by before I became engaged. It

“It made waves, especially within the Litvishe community, but people came to me and said, ‘Rabbi Elmaleh, we have no complaints about you. You believe in this and are moser nefesh for it. We may not agree with you, but we respect you. The complaints we have are against Lubavitchers who believe that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is actually chai v’kayam but they hide their belief.’”

was amazing to see how precise the Rebbe’s words had been. I had left Crown Heights with a friend who was also in yechidus. In response to his question, the same as mine about shidduchim, the Rebbe said he should look into it and ‘bracha and success.’ Indeed, a few weeks after he landed in Milan, he became engaged. To me, the Rebbe had said, ‘toil and find,’ and I had to do much more work than my friend.”

REACHING OUT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

The wedding of the Elmalehs took place in B’nei Brak. They planned on returning to Milan on shlichus, which he had begun in 1968. He felt connected to the place and saw his future there. A year later, they moved to Milan.

His first shlichus was in chinuch. In those days, Rabbi Levi Chizkiya was the rav of the Persian community and he opened a Talmud Torah. R’ Elmaleh was the teacher. Since he also knew sh’chita, he served as shochet for small Jewish communities in Italy, such as one small town where there was a Jewish community, mostly Jews of Greek origin.

“I would go to the towns and I would be the only Orthodox Jew they would see from time to time. I didn’t just shecht and leave but stayed to talk to them about Judaism, put t’fillin on with them, and get them involved in other mitzvos.”

He had great satisfaction from his work in the Talmud Torah, educating the children to Torah and mitzvos with the goal of strengthening their Judaism and preventing assimilation. Nevertheless, he felt that he could do more.

“I looked for something where I could contribute more.”

These days, you can find kosher stores and restaurants in Milan with plenty of products, some with local hechsherim and some imported from Israel or Europe. Back in 1970 though, there were hardly any kosher products to buy. R’ Elmaleh decided to do something about this.

“The first thing I did was I decided to make kosher cheese. I wrote to the Rebbe about it and received an encouraging answer.”

It wasn’t easy. The dairies and companies that manufactured non-

kosher cheese did not understand what he wanted. They looked at him like he was crazy. It took a long time until he managed to convince one of the companies. The next step was to convince stores to sell the kosher cheese.

“With Hashem’s help, more stores agreed to sell kosher cheese. Later on we began giving a hechsher to a wider variety of hard cheeses, something which was out of the question entirely for Europe 35 years ago. Even today, there are many Jews, including observant ones, who are ignorant about the kashrus requirements when it comes to gentile milk products.”

R’ Elmaleh continues to give a hechsher on cheese and today there are many types of kosher cheese available.

R’ Elmaleh saw the shocking rate of assimilation around him. Even Jewish youth who came from traditional homes assimilated at a shocking rate. He felt he had to do something about it.

“My wife and I decided to start working with Jewish boys and girls in order to strengthen their Jewish identity, so they would experience what a genuine Jewish experience is like. We wanted them to meet one another so they wouldn’t look at non-Jews for marriage. Nearly every Shabbos we hosted dozens of young people. The meals took hours. On Yom Tov and special days we had Yom Tov meals or large gatherings.

“We were happiest when we were invited to the wedding of a Jewish boy and girl who met at these events. It was outreach to literally save souls, especially in the Jewish-Italian community where the intermarriage rate was sky high. Just recently, a new rav was appointed in Milan whose wife was a regular guest on Shabbos and Yom Tov in our home.”



Rabbi Michoel Elmaleh in the sukkah



Tourists and shlichim davening Maariv in the sukkah

AN UNEXPECTED BRACHA

Ten years later, at the beginning of the 80's, R' Elmaleh again had the feeling that he could do more and that whatever he was doing wasn't enough.

"For many months I went around with this feeling which I had for several reasons. I didn't always see the results of the work that I did, and people did not always give me feedback.

"I had the opportunity for yechidus with the Rebbe before returning to Milan and I decided not to write to the Rebbe about these feelings. On the note that I submitted before I went in to the Rebbe's room, I asked about various things, personal and general. The Rebbe answered me in detail and before I left, he blessed me, to my surprise, that I should be successful in spreading the wellsprings.

"I left the yechidus in a turmoil

of emotion. The Rebbe knew what was bothering me and had given me a bracha! This bracha gave me an enormous shot in the arm to continue my work. When I returned to Milan I decided to take the l'chat'chilla aribber approach and do things on a grand scale, not just small things here and there."

It wasn't easy. One of the big problems R' Elmaleh and his wife faced was a building. For nearly fifteen years, they looked for a building that could contain all their programs. They looked for a place that would enable them to expand their work beyond the community. But whenever they said what they wanted the building for, the owners refused to rent to them. So and he and his wife continued their work with young men and women.

It turned out that after being refused by landlords of upscale buildings, they ended up renting the most exclusive building in the city. R' Elmaleh never dreamed that this would be his base.

"One day we went to a building opposite the Castello, the beautiful castle in the center of town that attracts millions of tourists a year.

T'FILLIN THAT OPENED HIS HEART

As mentioned in the article, Rabbi Sholom Elmaleh traveled to cities and towns in order to shecht. Wherever he went, he took along a pair of t'fillin which he used on thousands of people.

"I saw how when a Jew puts on t'fillin, he changes and becomes more open and ready to hear about Torah and mitzvos. I stopped counting how many *karkaftos* (those who never put t'fillin on before) I got.

"Whenever I went to a certain town for sh'chita, I would put t'fillin on with the local Jews. They were all willing except for the president of the community who pushed me off time after time. Nevertheless, I didn't give up asking him. One time, he agreed to put on t'fillin and that is when he told me that it was the first time in his life that he was doing so. Since then, he puts t'fillin on regularly and he is open to hearing about Torah and mitzvos."

We didn't think they would be willing to rent us the place after they heard our plan to turn it into a shul and Chabad house, but the unbelievable did happen. The landlord was happy to rent to us. He didn't care what we did with it.

"In 5756 we held a big event and we announced the opening of another place in Milan, with the Rebbe's blessing, that would disseminate Judaism and prepare the world to greet Moshiach."

The opening of the Chabad house opposite the Castello thrilled the Jewish community.

"The first year we wanted to erect a sukka in the courtyard of the castle. People told me that I was being unrealistic but our motto in life is l'chat'chilla aribber and we go with the Rebbe's kochos. As expected, our request was turned down by all the official people until one day, we met with the Deputy Prime Minister of the region, who loved the idea of a sukka and worked to get us the permit to do so. He later told us that he has a feeling for things Jewish because his father was a Jew. Of course, we explained to him that he is not Jewish.

"Members of the Jewish community as well as the many tourists who saw the sukka, were taken aback at seeing it in such a public place. The deputy prime minister even donated a large menorah to us later on and got us a permit so we could put it up in one of the biggest plazas near the castle. This strengthened our belief that when you go with the Rebbe's kochos, nature is no obstacle."

A FORTUITOUS ENCOUNTER IN A PARKING LOT

Rabbi Michael Elmaleh, Sholom's son, had finished his learning in 770 the year before, and

after he married, he and his wife went to help his father at the Chabad house.

"Intermarriage among local Italian Jews did not begin recently; it is a plague that has been ongoing for two hundred years. Only recently, I met someone with a Jewish name who claimed he was Jewish. He told me that his mother, who was over eighty, was also Jewish. When we visited her, we discovered that she was not Jewish, since her grandfather had married a non-Jew.

"There are numerous stories like this one. You can find warnings against mixed marriages in the responsa of Italian rabbanim of four hundred years ago. Sometimes you find people who are actually Jewish, and every Jew like this that you can return to his roots is a treasure.

"When our son Levi Yitzchok was born, I went back and forth to the hospital several times. One time, as I parked my car in the parking lot, a person passed by and said 'shalom' to me. I responded with a warm 'shalom,' and went on my way, for many gentiles also know the word. Then I thought, but maybe he is Jewish, and I went back to him and asked him.

"He smiled and said, 'No, I'm Catholic, but my grandmother on my mother's side was Jewish.' It took time to explain to him that he is 100% Jewish according to halacha.

"I knew this was an opportunity to save a Jewish soul. It was a few weeks before Yom Kippur and I told him that the most important day in the Jewish calendar was coming up. I gave him a quick explanation about the significance of this holy day. He just stood there in shock.

"I was very moved to see him at the Chabad house on Yom Kippur. At first, he said he only wanted to see what Jews are about, but he soon got drawn into the Jewish atmosphere. At a certain point I checked into his Jewish past and

found out that his grandmother's name was Goldstein.

"I bought him t'fillin, which he puts on regularly. On Purim I visited him at his house. He had a friend over, a gentile who is an architect by profession, who asked him, in my presence, where his mezuzos are. On the spot, he ordered mezuzos. Even his gentile friends are encouraging him and it's all because of a greeting in a parking lot.

"Emanuel is making great strides in his Jewish observance. While I am thrilled about his return to his people, I am also sad about the thousands of other Jews who are lost."

What is the most significant program that the Chabad house has?

"If you mean outreach to the public, then it definitely has to be the work we do before Pesach and before Rosh HaShana, when we reach 1500 Jewish families. We send them three shmura matzos with an explanation about Pesach or an apple and honey with an explanation about the Yomim Noraim.

"However, the thing that makes real changes is the *Tanya* class that we have every week at the Chabad house. Sometimes we bring guest lecturers from Eretz Yisroel or from the US. One of the mekuravim came

RUACH HA'KODESH

Rabbi Sholom Elmaleh relates:

I once wrote to the Rebbe about personal matters. How surprised I was to see, in addition to the answer to my questions, a line about checking t'fillin to make sure they are kosher. I had recently checked my t'fillin but I gave them in again and a problem was found with the parshiyos. This demonstrates the Rebbe's ruach ha'kodesh.



over to me and said, 'I went around the supermarket with my wife and I couldn't buy anything. I'm afraid to buy non-kosher products!' Someone else who began coming to the class wanted to leave after a few shiurim. When I asked him why, he said, 'I feel that it is changing me deep inside.'"

R' Elmaleh has numerous stories about the success of the shiurim.

"We have a student who hangs around the Chabad house, Dovid Liebowitz from America. I met him for the first time nine years ago when I had recently arrived to help my father. He was and still is a translator from English to Italian and he does big projects in this field. He comes from a Reform home and we first got to know him well on Pesach. I saw that he was a serious fellow and I began nudging him to come to shiurim. The problem was that he worked outside the city and it was difficult for him to leave work and travel so far.

"One time, when we met, I decided that if he doesn't join the shiurim, at least he should read what we are learning in the shiurim. I bought him *Lessons in Tanya* and gave it to him. He learned it all and

the next time we met he had questions for me and displayed a growing interest in it.

"Shortly after, he started observing some mitzvos, and now he puts t'fillin on every day and is shomer Shabbos. I saw how learning *Tanya* changed him completely.

"In general, I feel that we will go and greet Moshiach with *Tanya*. It's amazing to see how people change their lives after learning it, showing an openness and strong desire to get more involved in Judaism.

"We had a student here who became a Lubavitcher thanks to learning *Tanya*. She got married on Lag B'Omer. Last year, she worked on translating *Igeres HaT'shuva* into Italian. She recently asked me to write to the Rebbe about the translation she did. The amazing answer was to someone who asked the Rebbe about a program of study of *Tanya*. The Rebbe told him to begin with *Igeres HaT'shuva* and then to learn *Shaar HaYichud V'HaEmuna*."

PEOPLE ARE WAITING TO HEAR ABOUT MOSHIACH

We could see that publicizing

about Moshiach is not just another aspect of this shlichus but its focus. On the Chabad house business cards, in addition to the name of R' Elmaleh and the address, it says the Rebbe's prophecy about Geula. In all the seasonal brochures they publish, the main point is the B'suras HaGeula and the identity of Moshiach. I saw how a shliach can proudly present this idea.

"We speak openly about our belief that the Rebbe is Moshiach and chai v'kayam. It's not that people don't have questions. Naturally, the first time someone hears this they are skeptical and have questions, but just as I don't hesitate to answer other questions about the Rebbe's leadership or Chassidishe ways, so too I do not hesitate about this. There is no question without an answer in the Rebbe's sichos, especially in the sichos of 5751-2.

"Just as we knew to keep our heads high and publicize earlier prophecies of the Rebbe, whether about the Six Day War, the fall of Communism, or the Gulf War, I see no difference with this prophecy. When you prove that the Rebbe is a true prophet and all his prophecies came true one by one, not only do they not mock, they accept what you say.

"When you say things confidently and are straightforward about it, we know that words that come from the heart enter the heart. People understand that this is serious. We recently published a brochure with the prophecy of Geula and we distributed it in all the Jewish communities of Milan. It made waves, especially within the Litvishe community, but people came to me and said, 'Rabbi Elmaleh, we have no complaints about you. You believe in this and are moser nefesh for it. We may not agree with you, but we respect you. The complaints we have are against Lubavitchers who believe that the Lubavitcher

Rebbe is actually chai v'kayam but they hide their belief.'

"This is the shlichus that we got and the one we have to do, otherwise – how are we shluchim of the Rebbe? That we spread Judaism and take care of Jews spiritually and materially is nice, but there are other Jewish and religious organizations that do that. What makes us different is that we are shluchim of the Rebbe, of the Nasi HaDor, who defines our mission.

"People are waiting for us to tell them, to explain it to them. People are thirsty to know. Unfortunately, we often prefer to avoid talking about it.

"A few years ago, I davened in another shul here and I met a student who was looking into a siddur but wasn't saying anything. I went over to him and gently showed him what to do and from then on, he began attending *Tanya* classes and ended up a full-fledged baal t'shuva. Today he is a Chassid and he married and lives in Crown Heights, where he is involved in hafatza.

"He had been lacking someone to show him the ropes, to explain things, to tell him what to do, rather



The children on shlichus involved in outreach.

than just smile at him. The same is true for Moshiach and Geula, when you explain the topic clearly, you get through."

* * *

When I asked R' Elmaleh about his plans, he said:

"Our plans and those of the entire Jewish people, so I believe, is to see the Rebbe MH" M who will

redeem us from the suffering of galus. Until then, we plan on working on preventing assimilation. My heart breaks every time I find out about another lost soul. We are losing so many to assimilation.

"We put out a brochure on the topic but we have to do much more in order to stop this growing, tragic phenomenon."

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THE HARSH TRUTH ABOUT THE CONVERSION UPROAR

Interview by Nosson Avrohom

*In recent weeks there has been a great uproar following the invalidation of conversions from the government's Machon HaGiyur. Beis Moshiach spoke with Rabbi Gedalia Akselrod, formerly Av Beis Din in Chaifa, who has dealt extensively with the topic of conversions and who has fought against these fraudulent conversions. His opposition nearly lost him his job. He was questioned twice by the police for the crime of opposing these conversions and merited blessings from the Rebbe over the years. * Part 1 of 2.*

For months now the official rabbinic circles in Eretz Yisroel and the world over have been in an uproar about a group of dayanim who are encouraging gentiles to convert and making it as easy as possible to do so. The one responsible for this is the former Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, who established the Machon HaGiyur (Conversion Institute) for this purpose.

Since Sharon wanted to further his personal agenda, "to provide a response to the demographic problem of Jews in the Jewish nation," as he put it, he made sure to have the Machon HaGiyur near the Prime Minister's office and he supervised it directly. This was for the purpose of circumventing the battei din that were too strict, for his liking, regarding those who sought to convert. The dayanim in the Machon HaGiyur received orders that reflected Sharon's wishes.

Lately, rabbanim and dayanim have sought to halt the scandal of fraudulent conversions that have become the norm for some rabbis, more or less well-known, who head the Machon HaGiyur. The latter have been converting gentiles wholesale without checking whether the converts did in fact sincerely accept the observance of Torah and mitzvos.

The most recent scandal exploded two months ago because of the revocation of the conversion of a woman who converted at the Machon Giyur, founded by Rabbi Chaim Meir Drukman, the head of the Hesder Yeshiva Ohr Etzyon located in Merkaz Shapira. The beis din, realizing that the woman who wanted a divorce had not kept Torah and mitzvos since her conversion, and was therefore, not a Jew, ruled that she did not need a *get* in order to be divorced from her husband.

This p'sak was issued by Rabbi Ettia of Yerushalayim, who heard the

case together with the Beis Din in Ashdod. The dayanim asked the woman if she kept Shabbos or the laws of family purity. When she responded that she did not, they determined that she was not a Jew. Not only did she not need a get, but she and her three children could not legally marry Jews under Israeli law.

The woman created a lobby of supporters who championed Rabbi Drukman's conversions and sought to appeal Rabbi Ettia's *p'sak din* at the Beis Din HaGadol (Supreme

Rabbinical Court) in Yerushalayim. The Beis Din HaGadol, comprised of three rabbanim headed by Rabbi Sherman, heard what she had to say and dealt with it seriously.

After a thorough investigation, they acknowledged what Rabbi Ettia had realized, and they paskened that he was right and she was not a Jew. In the fifty page *p'sak din* (verdict), Rabbi Sherman wrote that he based the *p'sak din* on two main reasons. First, she admitted that she did not keep Shabbos and other basic Jewish

laws, and therefore the conversion was not valid. Second, Rabbi Rosen, who headed Rabbi Drukman's Conversion Directorate, accused him of not being present at the conversions of numerous converts and the staff members were using his seal of approval without his being present. The Beis Din HaGadol ruled all the conversions both Rabbi Drukman and Rabbi Chaim Avior presided over since 1999 must be declared null and void.

The chareidi newspapers as well as the general media made a huge commotion, each on a different side, of course. Journalists and troublemakers attacked the chareidi dayanim for daring to scoff at Rabbi Drukman's conversions, thus casting doubt on thousands of people who converted with him.

The chareidi papers attacked the unacceptable leniencies that have become standard in the wholesale conversion business, characteristic of the conversions done under Rabbi Chaim Drukman, as well as at other conversion institutes all over the country.

In the meantime, Rabbi Drukman's tenure came to an end and his contract was not extended. (Whether there is a connection to the tumult depends on whom you ask.) However, those involved know that the approach is not going to change and their goal is to convert as many gentiles as possible, as quickly as possible, G-d forbid.

We Chabad Chassidim remember the Rebbe's war, with tears, regarding the necessity to amend the Law of Return and annulling the scandalous conversions taking place in Vienna. Today, everybody can see what the Rebbe was fighting for as tens of thousands of gentiles all over Israel and the world, think they are Jews. Now, everyone – including those chareidi groups who strongly opposed the Rebbe on this – has to admit that the Rebbe was right.



In a discussion on this topic that took place two weeks ago at a full assembly of the Knesset, Knesset member Shmuel Halpert said, “I want to take this opportunity to mention the difficult battle waged by the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He saw the great danger in the aliya of hundreds of thousands of gentiles and the attempt to join them to the Jewish nation through fictitious, fraudulent conversions.”

Many dealt with this issue over the years, establishing committees, holding demonstrations, signing petitions, but it did not help. Till this day we have this cursed breach in the law of MiHu Yehudi that has brought tens of thousands of gentiles to Eretz Yisroel and is a cause of assimilation. Despite the situation,

Today, everybody can see what the Rebbe was fighting for as tens of thousands of gentiles all over Israel and the world, think they are Jews. Now, everyone – including those chareidi groups who strongly opposed the Rebbe on this – has to admit that the Rebbe was right.

nobody bothers to amend the corrupt law. On the contrary, things are only deteriorating.

Because of the recent uproar, *Beis Moshiach* spoke with Rabbi Gedalia Akselrod, former Av Beis Din in Chaifa, who dealt extensively with the issue of conversions during his tenure, a battle which nearly cost him his job. He was questioned twice by the police for the crime of opposing these phony conversions and merited many brachos from the Rebbe over the years.

THE CONVERSION DIRECTORATE – CONVERSION WITHOUT REAL SUPERVISION

When did you begin getting involved in opposing these conversions?

I was elected to serve as dayan on the beis din of Chaifa on 16 Iyar 1981. I still merited to sit alongside dayanim of the previous generation, men of stature and great knowledge. In Elul, a few months later, there was a meeting of dayanim in Teveria that was organized by the administration of the battei din. I was a new dayan and the kinus interested me. The guest of honor was the chief rabbi of Israel at the time, Rabbi Shlomo Goren (d. 1994), who delivered the main address and focused on the topic of conversions.

Rabbi Goren was the first to take the issue of conversions out of the battei din and started a special conversion department that dealt with it. Until then, if someone lived on an irreligious kibbutz and wanted to convert, he could not open a conversion file with the battei din of the Israeli Rabbinat for the simple reason that he would be unable to keep Torah and mitzvos, an incontrovertible condition in the conversion process.

The new policy that Rabbi Goren

implemented made it possible for those goyim living on kibbutzim to present a request to convert. I didn't dream that the topic of his talk would be conversions, and when he began to speak I was very surprised. I couldn't listen and remain quiet and so I got up and challenged him.

I asked him what convinced him that the conversions he did met the requisite halachic standards. How did he know that these people would keep mitzvos? The conversion department under his authority had converted 400 people in one year. Today – using the same approach in various conversion centers – they convert about 4000 people a year!

He explained that the people assure him that they will keep mitzvos and so he believes them. Those involved in this issue know that many of these so-called converts not only do not keep Torah and mitzvos, they don't even bother trying to pretend.

When the session ended, Rabbi Goren came over to me and said angrily: What did you do to me? Just a short while ago, I elected you as dayan and that's what you do – embarrass me?!

Following that lecture, I was really upset. I realized that there was a serious problem here and all these conversions were fraudulent. That was the first time that I decided to do something, to take the initiative.

When I returned home to Chaifa, I thought that I had to write what took place at the kinus and send it to the Rebbe. That's when I got into the thick of things and for many years a few of us rabbanim fought to amend this sorry situation.

A DIRECT APPEAL TO THE RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE REGISTRARS

What have you done to fight it?

In the winter of 5744 we sent a booklet to five hundred rabbanim in



Chabad Chassidim demonstrating on behalf of amending the Law of Return and establishing that a Jew is someone born of a Jewish mother or converted according to halacha

Eretz Yisroel that we printed under the name, “Halachic Standards of the Conversion Certificate.” We had a copying machine at home and I worked on typing it up and arranging it all manually. I rolled together all the pages in order to bind them as a booklet. The goal was to bring to the attention of these dayanim and rabbanim that a gentile who converts and does not keep Torah and mitzvos, has not been converted.

After preparing the booklet, I collected signatures from various rabbanim who represented a wide array of views and Jewish communities, so they would give their approval to the booklet.

The booklet compiled sources from the Gemara, Rambam, *Shulchan Aruch*, the Rishonim, and Acharonim, with the common denominator being that there is no legitimate view that holds that there can be a conversion without the convert keeping Torah and mitzvos.

In order to forestall those who would say there are people who are lenient today, I brought quotes from Rav Kook and Rav Herzog, who were opposed to leniencies in conversions. The booklets were sent to rabbanim, dayanim and marriage registrars at county offices, etc. We thought that this would halt meaningless conversions.

You appealed directly to those who record marriages?

Yes, definitely. We saw that all our efforts to speak to rabbanim had fallen on deaf ears. They may have had the desire to fix things, but the pressure on them was great. So we decided to work on those authorized to grant marriage licenses in the hopes that they would stop registering as married those who had been converted in those Machonei Giyur. We knew that this would create an uproar and stop the conversion machine.

A few days went by and we were called by one of the chief rabbis. The

three of us – the members of the committee who had printed the booklet: Rabbi Chaim Pardes of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Avrohom Atlas, a member of the beis din in Chaifa, and myself – were asked who gave us permission to print the booklet and send it to rabbanim.

One of us said: I remember that the year before you were appointed to serve as chief rabbi, you stood at the lectern at the rabbinic conference at the Plaza Hotel and cried out in a choked voice against these conversions. What suddenly happened to change your mind?

He didn’t have a good answer and he asked: Do you want Reform conversions in Israel? I told him that that would be better than Reform conversions masquerading as Orthodox, since then everybody would know the truth.

I said it made a joke of conversions when conversions had been something that the Jewish people had been extremely careful

He didn't have a good answer and he asked: Do you want Reform conversions in Israel? I told him that that would be better than Reform conversions masquerading as Orthodox, since then everybody would know the truth.

about throughout the exile. All Jewish communities in the world look at how the rabbinate in Eretz Yisroel operates and this crosses a red line that can have the Jewish communities in the US and Europe following in their wake.

In 5746, I was in 770 and I met Rabbi Simcha Elberg, who told me that he had met a distinguished rav who deals with conversions in America and he asked him how

many conversions he had done thus far. The rabbi estimated about three hundred conversions. Rabbi Elberg asked him how many of them were observant of Torah and mitzvos and the rabbi said: Maybe three.

What other activities did you do following that?

When I saw that the booklet had made a commotion in the media but the Conversion Institutes were continuing to operate, we decided that we had to issue a p'sak din which would be signed by many rabbanim. The p'sak stated that those conversions which were done without anyone keeping tabs on the converts were not halachic conversions!

600 SOLDIERS "CONVERTING" A YEAR

Why would a gentile want to convert if he or she is not interested in keeping mitzvos? Who is making them convert?

That's a good question. Why would a gentile want the yoke of mitzvos? After all, when Hashem asked the nations whether they want the Torah, they didn't want it!

Every dayan knows that most of the conversions are done to make a marriage "kosher," because Jewish parents don't want their children marrying non-Jews. So the non-Jews go through a conversion process even though they have no intentions of keeping mitzvos.

In 5746 we formed another committee of which I was a member. There were another two members, Rabbi Yakobovitz, the rav of Hertzliya and Rabbi Dovid Katz, Rosh Yeshivas Mishkan Yaakov in Chaifa and now the rav of the Carmel neighborhood in Chaifa. The three of us worked on getting signatures from rabbanim of cities, and we got a nice response.

Our request was that the chief rabbinate should appoint a committee that would check and see whether converts were keeping mitzvos after they received their conversion certificate. We got fifty signatures (out of eighty), including avos beis din and many important dayananim. This request of ours aroused a commotion in the world of dayananim as well as in the media.

Awareness of the issue forced the rabbanut to do something and they formed a committee, whose conclusions were known: 80% do not light Shabbos candles and only 20% kept a few mitzvos. As a result of these findings, the chief rabbinate decided to make the conversion process tougher, but this decision has not been implemented. On the contrary, today there are twenty dayananim who receive a salary from the Prime Minister's office and their goal is to convert people. In the army, about 650 soldiers are converted a year. That is an impossibly high number.

[To be continued be"H]



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THE RIGHTEOUS PENITENT

By Boruch Merkur

LOVE OF A FELLOW JEW TO NULLIFY THE EXILE

The first mention the Rebbe makes regarding the especial quality of the final era, said on the day of the passing of his wife, the Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka,⁶ is that “Love of a Fellow Jew is especially required...in order to nullify the concept of Exile, which was a result of baseless hatred.”⁷ This includes nullifying the concept of death, which is connected with baseless hatred and Exile and so on. The latter is understood from the fact that at the time of the Redemption there will be, ‘He has concealed death forever, and G-d, the L-rd, shall wipe the tears off every face, etc.’”⁸ The commandment to Love a Fellow Jew is the key to nullifying the Exile. Indeed, the Exile came about as a result of baseless hatred, a (severe) lack in the fulfillment of this mitzva.

The natural outcome of nullifying the Exile is that death will be eliminated. So, in response to the passing of the Rebbetzin, the Rebbe reinforces the campaign of Love of a Fellow Jew, which has the power to bring about the Redemption and eradicate death itself.

That is the consolation that the Rebbe awaits, a consolation delivered by G-d Himself. However, it is within the power of a Jew to bring about this Divine consolation, as the Rebbe says: “One of the manners (whereby the cause of Exile and death is eradicated) is through Consoling Mourners,” an expression of Love of a Fellow Jew.

TRANSFORMING THE THREAT OF EVIL

That Shabbos,⁹ following the Rebbetzin’s passing, the Shabbos that blesses the month of Adar, the Rebbe spoke¹⁰ about the transformative quality of the month of Adar, “the month that was **transformed for them** from grief to joy and from mourning to a festive day,”¹¹ specifying that there are two ways for this transformation to take place:

“There can be an order of events whereby first there is something undesirable that precipitates mourning and grief, **following which** it is transformed (and possessing the virtue of joy that comes about from grief). The transformation of

the month of Adar (‘the month that was transformed’), however, was in a manner whereby the decree (the decree of Haman) from the onset was **not actually fulfilled**.” Rather, once the Jews got wind of the evil decree, they reaffirmed their connection to G-d and returned to Him wholeheartedly, to the point of self-sacrifice. The decree was subsequently reversed, ‘and the city of Shushan reveled and rejoiced.’”¹²

Sometimes joy can only be achieved through grief. The month of Adar, however, teaches that it doesn’t have to be that way. The advantage of “joy that comes about from grief” can be gained without suffering actual grief; it is enough that the very threat of grief can result in this profound, transformative joy, without any actual experience of grief or suffering.

The same concept finds expression in terms of the service of G-d. In general, there are two types of Divine service – the service of the righteous and that of the penitent – each having an advantage over the other.

The penitent, although having succumbed to actual sin, overpowers the negativity through his repentance, and succeeds in not only eradicating the evil associated with sin, but actually transforming it to good. Indeed, even “the sins that he did on purpose are considered for him as meritorious actions.”¹³ Specifically through his experience of sin, succumbing to such lowliness and darkness, the penitent reaches the greatest heights, transforming the darkness itself into light: “Since all that is higher descends lower,¹⁴ therefore, at the moment when the lowest levels (mourning and grief) are transformed, the highest levels are reached.” Thus, the service of the penitent surpasses even that of the wholly righteous, being that he serves G-d “with more fortitude and vigor.”¹⁵

On the other hand, there is an advantage to the righteous person, one who never sinned. The righteous person never compromises his connection and devotion to the Alm-ghty; he always remains steadfast to the will of G-d, keeping His Commandments with unwavering discipline, whereas the penitent experienced – at the time of committing the sin, prior to his repentance – that

which is contrary to the will of G-d. The penitent, to attain his heights, first had to descend, “with all the suffering and the like connected therewith.”

But these two paradigms are not mutually exclusive. The month of Adar gives a Jew the capacity to attain both virtues simultaneously, the power that “Even as he stands at the level of the wholly righteous (who never succumbed to any sin), he should have the virtue of the transformation of a penitent.” The Rebbe clarifies how this paradoxical state is achieved, as follows.

The ultimate purpose of Creation is for a pure and holy soul to descend from its heavenly abode to invest itself within a physical body, in a world (“*olam*,” meaning “*helem v’hester*,” obscured and concealed,¹⁶ insofar as the world serves to conceal the Creator) that is filled with evil and temptation, the potential for “mourning and grief,” and from there it must overcome this darkness, transforming the darkness to light:

“...in order that the light of G-d, the Infinite, may He be blessed, should illuminate in the place of the darkness and evil of the entire world with greater strength and greater fortitude, achieving the added benefit of light that comes from darkness, etc.,’ as it will be openly revealed in a permanent manner in the Future Era.”¹⁷

Immersed within a material world which conceals G-dliness, the Jew must confront the threat of “mourning and grief” and overcome the temptation of evil. In so doing, he contributes towards the dazzling effect of bringing G-dly light into the depths of darkness, a revelation that will be revealed and fully appreciated in the Messianic Era.

But to achieve this lofty goal, fulfilling the very purpose of Creation, one need not be harmed and sullied by the evil, by the “mourning and grief.” Rather, in order to attain the advantage of light that comes from darkness, it is enough to confront the threat of evil without actually succumbing to its grasp:

“The power that the month of Adar provides is that the darkness which is required in order to attain the virtue of ‘transforming darkness to light’ should be no more than a threat. That is, the fact that one is present in such a world where it is **possible** to do something contrary [to G-d’s will] – this itself expresses the ‘greater strength’¹⁸ of repentance (notwithstanding the fact that he never sinned). And he stands with such fortitude that not only does the darkness of the world not detract from his service of Torah study and the performance of G-d’s Commandments, on the contrary, he transforms the darkness of the world to holiness in such a manner whereby from the onset¹⁹ he possesses the virtue of the added benefit of light that comes from darkness.”

Here we see how it is possible for one to reap the benefits of repentance without actually having succumbed to sin. Namely, the threat of sin itself, the potential for sin, is

enough to serve as a catalyst to bring out the unique advantage of light that comes from darkness. Thus, one can remain wholly righteous and at the same time possess the sublime virtues of a penitent.

This whole process can even take place when the person has no knowledge of the threat, the temptations that he actually faces, being steeped in the pursuit of holiness,

“nevertheless, since his service of Torah study and the performance of G-d’s Commandments is with greater fortitude (in light of the knowledge, in general, that the material world is a place that is predominantly evil,²⁰ although he is ignorant of the details of the matter, as mentioned above), all matters of the world (including the particular veils and concealments) are thereby transformed to holiness, in accordance with the ruling of the Rambam²¹ – that through a single Mitzva, performed by a single Jew, he tilts his own scale and that of the entire world to the side of favor, bringing to himself and to them redemption and salvation.”

Thus, one can maintain purity and holiness – remaining completely aloof, ignorant of any details of the evil that prevails in the world, having only the general knowledge that evil does exist – and still transform the existence of the evil in the world, accomplishing the same transformative effect as the penitent yet remaining wholly righteous. And in so doing he tips the scales of Divine judgment to the side of favor and brings Moshiach now!

NOTES:

⁶ 22 Shvat 5748; *Seifer HaSichos* 5748 Vol. 1, pg. 254-255.

⁷ Yoma 9b.

⁸ Yeshayahu 25:8.

⁹ Shabbos Parshas Mishpatim, Parshas Sh’kalim.

¹⁰ *Seifer HaSichos* 5748 Vol. 1, pg. 256-267.

¹¹ Ester 9:22.

¹² Ibid 8:15.

¹³ Yoma 86b.

¹⁴ See Footnote 16 of the Rebbe’s address.

¹⁵ Rambam Laws of Repentance 7:4. *Seifer HaMaamarim* 5569 pg. 214.

¹⁶ See *Likkutei Torah* Shlach 37d; *Biurei HaZohar* of the Tzemach Tzedek, pg. 355.

¹⁷ *Tanya* Ch. 36

¹⁸ Zohar I 129b. See *Igeres HaT’shuva* Ch. 8.

¹⁹ See Footnote 27 in the original.

²⁰ See *Tanya* Ch. 6, end.

²¹ Laws of Repentance 3:4.

THE ESCAPE FROM RUSSIA

Prepared for publication by Avrohom Reinitz

*R' Hillel Zaltzman tells of his personal "Exodus" from Soviet Russia. * Part 2*

[Continued from last issue]

In the middle of the 60's, the Soviets began issuing exit visas. Some members of Anash in Moscow, Tashkent, and Samarkand received them. It seemed that a new era had begun. But then the Six Day War broke out. Diplomatic relations between Israel and the Soviet Union were broken off and the Russians stopped issuing exit visas.

In the meantime, because of the war, there was a great spiritual arousal among Russian Jewry. Many Jews, who for many years had been members of the communist party and whose Judaism had been in an unconscious state, woke up with longing for Eretz Yisroel.

Two years went by and there was another crack in the iron curtain. The OVIR offices once again began issuing visas. At the same time, the Jewish Agency started a campaign to send visas to Jews in Russia. They would locate families in Israel with the same family name as a family in Russia and would send the Russian family an invitation so the families could unite.

Many Jews asked permission to emigrate. Here and there were demonstrations in which Jews called on the authorities to allow them to leave for Israel. The demonstrators

were often arrested, but unlike in the thirties and fifties, when arrests ended with sentences of twenty-five years in Siberia, the arrests of the sixties lasted only days. Then the people were released with a warning. Only a few were held for months or even years.

We listened to the "Voice of Zion to the Exile" on the radio, which was broadcast from Israel and we heard reports about families who had received visas and who left for Israel. At first it was one from this city and one from that city, but then we began to hear reports about dozens who left in one week, then about dozens in a day. There were times that an entire planeload of emigrants from Russia landed in Eretz Yisroel.

In 1968-9, people in Samarkand and Tashkent once again began receiving exit visas. For example, my father and brother-in-law, Eli Mishulovin left in Shvat 5729. The Mishulovin family left in Shvat. The family of R' Dovid Gurewitz, the Levkivkers, and others left Tashkent.

We didn't understand how OVIR made its decisions. There were people, seemingly simply people, who were not under suspicion, who were turned down for years. Then there were people who, as soon as they submitted their first request,

got permission to leave. Those who did not get permission were sure that the KGB had something against them.

We went to OVIR and dared to ask for exit visas. "How come in other places they are giving dozens of exit visas and you are refusing us?" we asked. We didn't dare say, "How come you gave so-and-so but you didn't give me?" Rather, we asked in a general way. The officials in Samarkand said they did not know of any changes in the emigration laws.

In 1970 there was going to be an international convention in Moscow of communist parties. This convention took place every five years and was attended by communist leaders from all over the world. We figured that since the Russians did not want guests to see demonstrations of Jews in Moscow, they would approve requests for exit visas made at this time. Some people planned on demonstrating during the convention in hope that the government would give them exit visas to get rid of them.

R' Moshe Katzenellenbogen, who lived in Moscow, called my brother Berel and said that he should come to Moscow, and although he couldn't guarantee it, there was a good chance that he would get an exit visa. My brother, together with his neighbor, R' Aharon Makovitzky, decided to go to Moscow. The day after they arrived there, my brother called and said that spirits were high in Moscow and I should come there too.

In the evening, I walked with R' Moshe Nisselevitz and told him what my brother had said and suggested that we travel together to Moscow. R' Moshe stood still and thought and then said: Oy, how can we leave all our communal work?

In the meantime, his wife heard our conversation and she, upon whom lay the burden of educating

their children (since the wife was home most of the day and if someone came to inquire about the children she would have to deal with the questions), was unwilling to forgo this opportunity to leave Russia. She urged R' Moshe to go along with me to Moscow.

R' Moshe listened to his wife and asked me when I planned on going. I said there was a plane to Moscow that night. He immediately packed his suitcase and we left for the airport.

When we arrived at the airport, we found out that due to the poor weather conditions, no planes had left Samarkand in the last 24 hours and hordes of people were waiting for a flight. We also saw a large group of thirty pilots who had to get to Moscow but were stuck in Samarkand and waiting for an improvement in the weather.

At one of the counters I saw a gentle woman by the name of Tamara, whom I knew from school. I went over to her and asked whether she could use her connections and get us on a flight that night. She said that that wasn't possible but they said that the next morning the weather would improve and then she could help me.

We decided that R' Moshe would not return home and he slept at my house. We woke up early and rushed to the airport. We wanted to get on the first flight so we could daven in Moscow because it was two hours earlier in Moscow than in Samarkand. If we left at eight in the morning, after a three and a half hour flight it would be nine-thirty in Moscow.

I went straight to Tamara but she said there was no room on the first flight because the thirty pilots had to be in Moscow that day and the first flight would take them, but there might be another flight that day. I told her we had to get to Moscow urgently. She pointed at someone



sitting at the next counter and said, "Go over to him. Maybe he can help you."

I went over to him and told him that I had to get to Moscow. He told me to wait and he would try and help me. I was happy about this and immediately gave him a ten ruble bribe. In those days, when a monthly salary was between 80 and 100 rubles, this was a decent bribe. To my surprise, he refused to accept the money. I tried to convince him but nothing helped. I finally said that when I returned, I would bring him a nice gift from Moscow.

He examined my passport, wrote something in his ledger and after a few minutes of effort on his part, I received a boarding pass. I didn't suffice with that, of course, and I asked for another pass for R' Moshe, who was sitting at a distance waiting to see if I'd be successful. He didn't want to come over to me since his long beard made him rather conspicuous.

I pointed at R' Moshe and said I needed another pass. The clerk looked at him and asked for his passport. Then I saw him go over to an old woman and convince her to

give up her ticket and baruch Hashem he succeeded, and he wrote R' Moshe' name on her ticket. I ran over to R' Moshe and told him that Hashem had sent us an angel...

I was so overjoyed that I offered the clerk a bribe again, this time, twenty rubles. He continued to refuse. I asked Tamara what the man's name was. At first she didn't want to respond, but when I asked again she said that his name was Vassily Vachidovitz. I asked what his job was and what he was doing at the last counter and she evaded me again. She finally winked and hinted in a way that only someone living in Soviet Union would understand. He was a KGB agent who worked at the airport.

Oy gevald! I was certain that the KGB agent knew that Jews were going to Moscow in order to demonstrate during the communist convention.

When I told R' Moshe, he turned pale. In the meantime, we saw a group of tourists from abroad who had come to the airport and the man at the last counter immediately joined them. It was clear that he was a plainclothes agent whose job it was to keep an eye on foreigners at the airport.

We boarded the plane and breathed a bit easier since we hadn't been arrested. We didn't know what awaited us in Moscow. Would they arrest us? We strengthened our bitachon in Hashem and hoped for the best.

Three and a half hours later we landed in Moscow and to our great surprise, nobody came over to us. We traveled to Malachovka and were hosted by R' Yehuda Kulasher (Butrashvili).

When we met my brother Berel, he asked us if we had seen the man in the airport in Samarkand who had checked the passports of my brother and his friend, Aharon Makovitzky. They suspected he was

a KGB agent. We told them he was definitely an agent and related what had happened with us. We found it all amazing.

A RIDICULOUS CONVERSATION IN THE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE

Berel told us about how things were in Moscow and suggested that we go to the main OVIR office that was located in the main KGB headquarters on Lubyanka Street. This was a place that, for years, people were afraid to go near. He himself, said Berel, had been there the day before and there were two high officials there, one from the Interior Ministry, General Shubov, and one from the KGB office, General Verein.

My brother said that he had told them that he wanted to go to Israel because he was religious. They asked him whether he had tzitzis and he showed it to them. They asked him whether he had a yarmulke and he took off his cap and showed them his yarmulke.

They said that since he lived in Samarkand, they were not authorized to issue an exit visa to him and he had to present his request over there. When he tried to insist, they frightened him, saying: Over here nobody insists. It's only because you are a father of young children that we don't arrest you now.

We decided to try our luck. We did not have to make an appointment. There were set hours and you stood in line. When we got to Lubyanka Street and saw the KGB building, we recalled the thousands who had been shot in the cellars of that building and the terrible fear that people felt ten years ago when they passed this building. Now here we were, willingly going in there and asking for permission to leave the Paradise of the Soviet

I was certain that the KGB agent knew that Jews were going to Moscow in order to demonstrate during the communist convention. When I told R' Moshe, he turned pale...

Union for the despised Zionist state. A few years earlier, this would be considered a crime of treason. To a certain extent, it seemed like the "End of Days" to us...

This was shortly after the completion of the Torah scroll for Moshiach in 770 and we received a letter from R' Naftali Estulin that the Rebbe had said in a farbrengen, "When the ox falls, sharpen the knife," meaning that the fortune of Russia was on the decline. These thoughts gave us courage to enter the lions' den.

R' Moshe asked me to go in first and tell him what happened. As I mentioned earlier, his beard drew much attention. As I entered the room, I immediately recognized the generals sitting there by the precise description my brother had given me. They sat there in uniform with their epaulets and instilled fear in all those present.

In the secular world, it is considered a sign of respect to remove one's hat, but I did not take off my hat on purpose, to show that I am religious and that it's hard for me to live in the Soviet Union.



Hillel Zaltzman with his nephew Yosef Yitzchok Mishulovin

When they asked why I didn't doff my hat as is customary, I said that for us, it is not respectful to be bareheaded.

One of them asked: What do you mean by "us"? I said that I was referring to religious Jews. He asked: Are you religious? I said that I was.

One of them asked: Did you study Torah? I said that I had.

Who taught you and what does it say there? I said that my uncle Boruch, who had died in Israel, had taught me when I was little. It says there that G-d created the heavens and earth.

Did you also study Talmud? I said that I had and I added: I didn't come here to be tested on my Torah knowledge. In a little while, the time allotted to us will be over and I will have to leave. Please deal with my request.

They asked to see my passport and when they saw the name "Zaltzman," they asked: Was the Zaltzman who was here yesterday your brother? I said that he was and they said: He was impudent and we wanted to arrest him but we had

mercy on his children. As for your request, the decision has to be made where you live. Go to Samarkand and we hope they will give you permission to leave.

Then R' Moshe came in. When they saw his long beard they were taken aback and they asked: How long did it take to grow it? Then they said: We don't understand why all of you want to go to Israel when it's a blazing inferno there.

R' Moshe said that we trust in Hashem that everything will be okay and there will be peace. They told R' Moshe the same thing, that he had to go to OVIR in Samarkand and they would decide.

When we returned to Samarkand, we went to OVIR and said that we had been in the main office in Moscow and they promised us that in Samarkand they would give us exit visas. The officials said there was nothing to discuss. They had not received orders from Moscow about this and the emigration laws hadn't changed, so it wasn't likely that we would receive exist visas.

After a short time, I received an

invitation to a meeting at the Soviet national employment ministry. This was a central department which oversaw all the factories and workshops. The head of the department, a Moslem Uzbeki, welcomed me with great honor. He asked me to sit down and said: I heard that you want to emigrate to Israel. Why?

I explained that my aunt lived there and gave some other silly reasons (I knew that the KGB had given him the job to talk to me). He said: Imagine what happens if they will draft you into the Israeli army and they will send me to Egypt as a volunteer, will you shoot at me and kill me?

What could I say in response to this stupid question? I said: Heaven forbid. I know you and I wouldn't shoot you.

That is how our ridiculous conversation ended and I left. When I told my friends about it they were excited and we realized that something was afoot.

GOOD NEWS EREV PESACH

Erev Pesach 5731/1971 a government official appeared in the Benishmael quarter, in the courtyard where many Lubavitcher families lived, such as the family of R' Refael Chudaitov, R' Yaakov Boroshansky, R' Moshe Nisselevitz, R' Binyamin Malachovsky, and others.

The official went to R' Moshe, who had already submitted documents to OVIR with the request to leave. He met Mrs. Sonia Boroshansky and asked: Where does R' Moshe Friedman live? (That was the name R' Moshe Nisselevitz used after his failed attempt to leave Russian in 1946.) I have good news for him. He was given an exit visa from Russia.

Mrs. Boroshansky blurted out: We also want to leave!

Other people who were there and

had heard the official's question gathered around him and they all said they wanted to emigrate to Israel. The official stood there in the middle and apologized: Soon, all of you will be able to go. Believe me, you will all get your visas, but it can't be all at once. It has to be orderly, one by one.

The news spread quickly among all of Anash in Samarkand and Tashkent, and gave renewed hope to all. Within a short time, R' Moshe was called to the OVIR office and he received his exit visa.

His brother-in-law, R' Binyamin Malachovsky wanted to accompany them until the Russian border so that if they would not approve certain items that they were taking from Russia, he could take them back to Samarkand.

He also had another reason for going along. Every passenger to Israel had to go to the Israeli embassy in Moscow to take care of paperwork. It was known that when you entered the embassy, you were immediately given a paper which said, "The walls have ears." Then they pointed at the bookshelves and motioned that they could take whatever s'farim they wanted.

These were Jewish books that Russian Jews needed and there were also Chabad s'farim, like a *Tanya*, Siddurim, and sichos of the Rebbe. The person going to Israel would take some s'farim and when he left the embassy nobody checked him because he was considered as someone on his way out. The s'farim were left, of course, with those who remained in Russia.

At that time, the Israeli embassy did not operate in Moscow since Russia had cut off diplomatic ties with the outbreak of the Six Day War. However, the Dutch Embassy, which represented Israel and took care of all the required paperwork, also knew about the s'farim and had the same system.

This is why R' Binyamin joined the trip to Moscow in order to bring the s'farim back to Samarkand. However, when they arrived at the airport in Samarkand, they saw, to their horror, the head of the Jewish department of the KGB in Samarkand, a Tatar gentile by the name of Aktchurin, may his name be erased.

He looked angrily at R' Moshe and his family and gnashed his teeth. He had always tried to catch R' Moshe in his activities and now he had to adjust to the political changes and let them leave Russia unharmed.

When they got to the ticket counter, Aktchurin came over and began examining them, one by one. When R' Binyamin presented his ticket, he asked: Who are you? Why are you leaving all of a sudden?

R' Binyamin said that he was the brother of Mrs. Friedman (Nisselevitz) and he wanted to help them in Moscow. Aktchurin ground his teeth and said in a fury, "They will manage on their own. You don't need to go!" He forced him to remain in Samarkand.

FINALLY LEAVING!

During the next two years, hundreds more families received exit visas and most of Anash left the Soviet Union between the years 1970-1972. In Av 5730/1970 I also got my long-awaited exit visa. Like everyone else, I didn't tarry in Samarkand but hurried to Moscow. We had to spend a few days in Moscow in order to arrange the final papers before the trip.

In the meantime, I heard that the government was allowing every adult who left Russia to take a Torah scroll with him. Since we had heard that in the big shul in Moscow they had thousands of Torah scrolls from all the shuls throughout Russia that had been closed by the government, we tried to rescue them and take them to Eretz Yisroel. It was pidyon shvuyim in the full sense of the words.

I went to the main shul and spoke with the gabbai. He was afraid of me and I of him, but since we were both interested in the deal, we had a common language. He took me up to the second floor to a room



R' Elozor Garelik, R' Yosef Volovik, and R' Hillel Zaltzman in a picture taken many years after they left Russia, in Crown Heights

that was about 15 meters by 30 meters. All over the floor, to a height of a meter and a half, were Torah parchments without wooden handles. There were thousands of Sifrei Torah and I didn't know what to take, how to check them, or how to even reach them. The gabbai urged me: Nu, hurry, take off your shoes, go up and pick what you want. On the spot I learned how to tell the quality of sifrei Torah. I quickly rolled it and handled every parchment section to see if the letters were there. Due to time and moisture, letters separated from the parchment and many Sifrei Torah were pasul.

I took four Sifrei Torah with me and paid the gabbai a sizable sum. Since they allowed every adult one scroll, we sewed two scrolls together and rolled it up as though it was one scroll. When we crossed the border, they asked me to unroll it so they could be sure I hadn't hidden anything in it, but they did not catch on that it was two Sifrei Torah. After all, they were gentiles and unfamiliar with the normal thickness of a Torah.

I cannot describe how thrilled I was when we finally left Russia. The tremendous burden that was a constant presence in our hearts made way for great joy. I yearned to meet Jews and I was sure that when I met Jews in the West, they would welcome us with love. I was disappointed when, in the airport, the Agency official greeted us coldly and unceremoniously told us to board the bus that would take us to the Shinau absorption camp.

At first I thought they were guarding us for security reasons, but then we found out that the Agency officials made sure that nobody spoke to us so as not to convince us to go to the United States or another country.

In Shinau, we met some other Lubavitcher families who had left at



Yitzchok Mishulovin and his brother Michoel before leaving Russia

that time, the Kozliner, Boroshansky, and Volovik families, and others.

One of the officials asked us where we wanted to go and we said, Kiryat Malachi. He asked whether I knew where Kiryat Malachi is and I said that I didn't know but the Lubavitcher Rebbe told us to go there. He responded with a sharp Yiddish aphorism and expressed his surprise that we would follow the Rebbe's order with our eyes closed. I realized he was a Leftist and that he hated religion, so I didn't argue with him.

While I was in the camp, I saw that someone with a knitted kippa asked everybody to come to him and tell him his name, his father's name, his mother's name, grandparents, etc. He wrote it all down. I went over to him too and asked him what he was writing and offered to give him my information.

He said: You don't need this. I asked him again: Why don't you

take my information? He finally told me: I am here because this is what your Rebbe wants.

At first I didn't know what he meant and why he didn't want to write me down. Afterwards, he explained that he was from the Ministry of Religions. He had been sent in response to the Rebbe's demands regarding Shleimus HaAm and the problem of Mihu Yehudi.

The Agency representatives provided basic monetary support of \$70 per person and they offered it to me too, but I refused to take it. I said that I had money because when I had left Moscow I had changed my rubles for dollars. Since they allowed us to take out \$100 per person, I was able to take out \$300. They said this was the first time that someone refused to take money from them.

(Regarding other incidents that took place in the absorption camp, and the trip to Eretz Yisroel, I wrote at length in the chapters about Chamah.)

N'SHEI CHABAD CONVENTION IN NY FEATURES THE WORLD'S BEST

By Aliza Karp

The 53rd International Convention of N'shei U'Bnos Chabad was held on Parshas BaMidbar, Shabbos Mevarchim Iyar, the last weekend in May 2008, in Crown Heights. The theme was a Pasuk that is repeated in the Rebbe's Kapital, T'hillim 107:8, 15, 21, 31. The Pasuk says "Let them give thanks to Hashem for his kindness, and his wonders to the children of man." When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Jacobson spoke on Shabbos afternoon he suggested that the Pasuk can mean both, the wonders that Hashem performs for people, B'nei Adam, and it can also mean the wonder that Hashem performs through people, through individuals who are themselves wonders.

The program for the Convention began Thursday evening and continued through to Sunday night at 9 p.m. when the last of the women left the Rebbe's room. In fact, I was one of the last to leave the Rebbe's room. And I saw something very touching.

Mrs. Chana Popack, Mrs. Shterna Spritzer and Mrs. Cherna Light are the producers and directors of N'shei Chabad events in Crown Heights all year. This convention is their biggest accomplishment. Kol HaKavod to them – and thanks. All three of you are wonders!

Mrs. Popack takes on the difficult task of monitoring the women coming and going in the Rebbe's room. I do not know how many people fit into the Rebbe's

room at one time when it is, let's say, semi-squished. But I do know that to keep the line of five hundred women moving smoothly so everyone gets a fair turn is not an easy task. After running around since early Thursday, and no doubt for weeks before, Mrs. Popack stood by the door easing new women into the room while gracefully convincing others to finish promptly and leave. Everything Mrs. Popack does is with dignity.

Like I said, I was there at the end. I noticed a few women who were wearing scarves around their pants to make a wrap around skirt. Obviously, these were not women who had been initiated into Chabad, but they are Jewish women and we welcome them. As they were leaving I saw one speak to Mrs. Popack privately. I cannot even imagine how tired Mrs. Popack was at that time, and yet she totally focused on the woman. She encouraged the woman that her prayers would be answered and told her it was important to take on a Mitzvah at this time, a Hachlata. The woman thought for a few moments and then confided in Mrs. Popack the Mitzvah she would take upon herself.

I think Mrs. Popack's kind act is the revelation of the wonders of B'nos Adam. After all the hard work of the convention, one more Jewish woman was elevated because of the convention as a whole and because of the personal attention she received.

I attended the two most heavily attended events at the convention, the Shabbos afternoon session in Oholei Menachem and the event in downstairs 770. I am sure the smaller events were equally as interesting.

Shabbos afternoon N'shei Chabad is privileged to hear the two best speakers in the world. They really are the best – Miryam Swerdlov and Rabbi Jacobson. The program began with the Rebbe's Kapital and T'hillim for those in need of a Refua Shleima. Sharing her pain, Edith Block got up to say a special Kapital for her daughter who is sick. She asked that every day people should say Kapital Mem and Kapital Chaf for Devorah Nechama bas Yehudis. Throughout the convention prayers were being said for Chana bas Rasha Zelda who is in need of a Refua Shleima. We thank Hashem for wonders and we beg him for more. May Hashem answer our prayers with revealed good.

(One more point. I knew about Chana but did not have her mother's name or the age. Instead of making calls, leaving messages, you know how it goes, I decided to mention her without using the details. A few paragraphs later the phone rang. A woman was calling me to speak to me about Chana, she gave me the name and the age. It might not have been the creator Himself who called me, but I consider the call to be Min HaShamayim. I urge everyone to

say a Kapital Chaf Daled for Chana bas Rasha Zelda.)

Included in the program were a delightful singing performance and two additional speakers: a representative of the Russian community and a girl from Machon Chana, both telling their personal stories of their journey into Chabad. I thought it would be hard for them to share the stage with such magnificent speakers and Miryam and Rabbi Jacobson, but both of these young women won the audience over with their stories, their sincerity and their charm.

The Russian woman, Sima Vernick, spoke about her move from Tashkent to Eretz Yisroel and how her parents became more observant when she was in her teens. She spoke about the love and patience her parents showed her and her brother who would finish the Shabbos meal and head off to popular clubs. The patience paid off, as their daughter has now embraced Yiddishkait. Love and patience – interesting

concepts – and they worked!

Aliza Geiger, from Brazil, spoke about her struggles with her choice of whether to continue her life plan or change direction and go learn in Yeshiva. Intertwined in her story were three different times she wrote to the Rebbe and three different times she got the same answer. “Go to Yeshiva!” She is now in Machon Chana.

Miryam Swerdlov hosted the afternoon skillfully, even without a microphone. She shared her experiences, her lessons on life and of course, told us plenty of stories. One stands out in my mind. In her typical style, Miryam began by making fun of herself – only this time since she lost so much weight she could not make fun of food – so she described her lack of technological know how.

She was going to her daughter’s Chabad House in Mill Basin, Brooklyn with a group of girls who would perform a dance. Miriam was given a disc to put into the machine. This is where her technological training came

into play. She followed instructions and the music began and so did the dance performance. All went well until midway through the performance, the music stopped. Miryam was not prepared for that eventuality. But to her amazement, the dancing did not stop. The girls kept on going, not missing a beat, not missing a step. Miryam spoke to the girls after the performance. What they showed that day was how it is an accomplishment to dance when the music is playing; and it is a much higher level of performance when you continue to dance – even after the music has stopped.

Shortly after the Mill Basin dance program Miryam was invited to a class reunion. Back in ancient times, when Miryam was in school, there was no Beis Rivka in New York. In her school Miryam was known as Di Lubavitcher. She was different. At the reunion they asked her to speak. She told the above story. “Where do you get your Ko’ach from?” asked one friend. The answer came not from Miryam herself, but from a few of the classmates at once. They said, “She is Di Lubavitcher – that’s where she gets her Ko’ach!”

Again Miryam used her sense of humor when she introduced Rabbi Jacobson. She was saying how she hoped one day to be as good a speaker as he is, even if it takes her twenty more years. Rabbi Jacobson thanked her for the kind words and said that someone had just told him that he could be as good a speaker as she, if he keeps at it another twenty years. It was a very cute comeback born of mutual respect.

As mentioned above, Rabbi Jacobson interpreted the Pasuk from the Rebbe’s Kapital as referring to the wonder inside of us all. He told a story of a Chassid



Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson

***The Chassid told
the Rebbe, “The
Rebbe should be
revealed.”
The Rebbe
answered,
“There is much
inside you that
needs to be
revealed.”***

who pleaded with the Baal Shem Tov to see Eliyahu HaNavi. The Baal Shem instructed him to load his wagon with food, Matza and wine and go on Erev Pesach to the edge of a small town and spend Yom Tov with a poor family there. The Chassid followed his Rebbe's instructions and knocked on the door of the shack Erev Pesach saying he was stranded, could he please stay, he brought enough provisions for himself and for his hosts. The parents of nine hungry children were thrilled to have such abundance at their Yom Tov table. After Yom Tov the Chassid went back to the Baal Shem and complained that he did not see Eliyahu HaNavi. So the Baal Shem sent him back. Only this time he did not go inside, he listened from under the window as the husband and wife were speaking. The husband was telling his wife how they must thank Hashem for the visitor. The wife said she was sure the visitor was Eliyahu HaNavi. The Chassid understood. To see him – we have to bring out the Eliyahu HaNavi in ourselves.

This story was backed up with

a story about an encounter with the Rebbe. The Nekuda of the story was what the Rebbe answered a Chassid when the Chassid told him, “The Rebbe should be revealed.” The Rebbe answered, “There is much inside you that needs to be revealed.”

On one hand I want to share with readers what Rabbi Jacobson said, but on the other hand, summing up his stories strips them of their beauty. You really have to be there to absorb their depth. Everyone who can, should really go to that Shabbos session of the convention, there is no recording, no second chance. To follow is a list of topics Rabbi Jacobson spoke about.

He told an amazing multi-level story about an email and a dream and a man who visited the Rebbe in 1959 who just now put on T'fillin for the first time.

He said that in his preparation to speak at convention he always listens to the Rebbe's address to convention when the days correspond. This time he listened to the Sichah of 1968 – the flower power era. The Rebbe's message was related to social freedom breaking down boundaries and the effects on Tznius and relationships.

Rabbi Jacobson related a story when Reb Chaim Soloveitchik zt”l said that the Lubavitcher Rebbe represents the Har HaMoria of the generation.

Rabbi Jacobson spoke about Ahavas Yisroel and he told a very cute story about a hole in a Kop.

And more. Thanks Rabbi Jacobson! You're the best – even without the extra 20 years!

The Sunday session downstairs in 770 was scheduled to start at 4 p.m. I did not get there until much later and I had to leave early. I was fortunate to hear the presentation by R. Shimon

Waronker. I had seen video clips of Waronker on the internet when he rose to fame because of his achievements in a public school in the Bronx. Even after seeing his composure in front of the television cameras I was still taken aback with his fine communication skills and his engaging character. I arrived a few minutes before he was asked to speak. He was sitting on the front bench not far from me waiting for his turn. He was saying T'hilim the entire time.

Waronker said he follows the Rebbe's example of sensitivity to people as he learned first hand from Rabbi Bomzer. One winter night Bomzer drove a friend of his to Yechidus with the Rebbe. The friend was a high ranking official in the IDF. Bomzer decided to wait outside while his friend met with the Rebbe. But the friend came out right away and told him the Rebbe asked for him to join them. The Rebbe had asked his visitor how he got to 770, and then said, its winter, we have to invite your driver inside. It was one in the morning, the Rebbe was busy, the visitor was important and the Rebbe was concerned about the driver! “This is what it means to be a leader,” said Waronker, who cares about each of his students and takes responsibility for them.

Waronker spoke about our mission in this world – to build a Dira B'Tachtonim – to bring Moshiach. He stressed the power of speech. Hashem continues to create the world through speech and we have the power to change the world through speech. Jewish men are identified by their clothing whereas the appearance of Jewish women blends in more with the general population. Jewish women can be identified by their speech. We learn from the Rebbe's example to be sensitive to



Shimon Waronker

others as illustrated in the story about Rabbi Bomzer. The way to express this sensitivity is through speech.

Waronker urged his audience to love one another, to show sensitivity, to speak with respect. If you treat others with respect, they will treat you with respect. He applied this sensitivity to Jews and non-Jews. Waronker reasoned that since the Rebbe instructed us to reach out and teach the Sheva Mitzvos, that he considered non-Jews worthy of our time and sensitivity.

Waronker told of his being rejected to a leadership program. The second time he applied he was

accepted. The woman who called to give him the good news, called on Pesach Sheini. He explained to her what Pesach Sheini was about and how her phone call was giving him a second chance. "I am so happy to be part of a cosmic plan!" answered the woman... I think Waronker is a good ambassador to the world.

I had to leave early so I only heard the beginning of the presentation by B'nos Chabad representative Miss Fruma Wilshansky. But I did hear that she accompanied the Beis Rivkah High School – Achos HaT'mimim trip to Eretz Yisroel. And I was happy to hear the highlight of the trip was in Kiryat Arba at the home of Sara and Boruch Nachshon. To me the 770 of Eretz Yisroel is M'aras HaMachpela, and it is Boruch and Sara's Mesirus Nefesh that opened the way for us to be able to visit M'aras HaMachpella today. Avraham Avinu bought the Maara with 400 silver shekels. The Nachshons liberated it with Mesirus Nefesh (from those who wanted it to remain under Arab domain even after 1967.)

Being that I had to leave early I was disappointed I was giving up a chance to go to the Rebbe's room. It was painful. But then, later in the evening, my meeting for 9 p.m. was re-scheduled and I ran back to 770. As mentioned

above, I got there in time to go into the Rebbe's room a few moments before the room was closed to visitors.

On my way home I walked down Kingston with exhausted and satisfied Chana Popack and Shterna Spritzer. They have reason to feel satisfied and I know they do not feel complacent. Until we hear from the Rebbe that our job is done, Lubavitchers know they have not fully accomplished their tasks.

Shterna mentioned that so many people came to the session at 770 that they ran out of the specially designed tote bags they had handed out. She was happy so many people came but would have liked to have had a bag to show her husband. I got there too late to get a bag, so I was no help.

The next morning I went to Daven in 770. Went to my usual place. And there was a convention bag – on my seat. I looked around to see if they were strewn all over the place. Nope. Only one. On my seat. On my way home I dropped it off at Shterna's house. But then I realized that on that same walk home Mrs. Popack had mentioned the increased expenditures for the convention. It was nice to find the bag for Shterna at my place... maybe tomorrow I will find the many thousands of dollars N'shei Chabad needs to balance their convention budget.



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SHLEIMUS HA'ARETZ TODAY: INFORMING THE UN-INFORMED

By Aliza Karp

Moshiach can come this moment! We know it for a fact. We live according to nature and continue to face our challenges even when we know Moshiach's arrival is imminent. Not for a moment are we going to forget that we are ready for – and yearn for – Moshiach Now!

Recently there was a meeting in Crown Heights to discuss security issues. The main speaker was a religious Jew from another part of Brooklyn. The meeting was very orderly and productive. There was only one time when everyone spoke out of turn.

The speaker said, "Look, Moshiach is not coming tomorrow." With that, everyone in the room – actually it was about a hundred people in the dining room, living room and hallway – responded all at once. The collective response was friendly not hostile. Since all hundred voices were being heard simultaneously, the actual words were not clear, but the message was clear: Moshiach can come this moment! We know it for a fact. We live according to nature and continue to face our challenges even when we know Moshiach's arrival is imminent. That's why we are here at this meeting. But not for a moment are we going to forget that we are ready for – and yearn for –

Moshiach Now!

It was a beautiful moment, a moment of Achdus – the highlight of a successful evening.

I apologize, but I am now going to take you from the height of a Moshiachdik moment to a much lower level. My friend Helen Freedman of AFSI (Americans For a Safe Israel) has been a Shleimus HaAretz activist for more than thirty years. She lives in Manhattan. Occasionally she attends events that teach the opposite of what she believes. She thinks it is important to know what the others are up to and sometimes she manages to spread a little wisdom in a place where there is none.

She told me recently she went to such an event. It sounded like the event was bland, but she said, there was one thing that made the audience break into a spontaneous loud applause. That was when the speaker said that the greatest mistake of all was to allow the establishment of settlements in the

disputed territories.

My dear readers, this attitude is not an isolated attitude. Ignorance and lack of logic plagues American Jewish views on Shleimus HaAretz. Superstitions are more logical and easier to dislodge than the American Jewish loyalty to the idea of giving up our Biblical homeland so the so-called Palestinians can have a state.

Ashreinu Ma Tov Chelkeinu – we are so lucky that was brings out our enthusiasm is loyalty to Moshiach. What a contrast to our misled brethren.

I mention the reaction against the settlements to inform you that despite the apparent calm on the Shleimus HaAretz front – the war against the settlers continues. The object of the war is to rid Yehuda and Shomron of Jews – to make it like Gush Katif - Judenrein. The Rebbe said that settling the land is the only way to keep it. The enemies of the settlers are now saying the same thing. In order for them to give the land to our enemies they have to rid the land of the settlers – the obstacles to peace. And in order not to upset the Jewish population that the settlers are being cruelly uprooted – the public first has to be brain washed to hate the settlers.

Many American Jews, observant and not observant, have fallen subject to the propaganda war against the settlers. They have never been exposed to the views of the Rebbe on Shleimus HaAretz.

One of the first myths that uninformed Jews believe is that Jewish soldiers are risking their lives

so settlers can live where they want. This is totally false and now it is easy to prove. The Jewish army has had to go back into Gaza numerous times since the Disengagement. Some have lost their lives. There are no settlers in Gaza! The reason they go into Gaza is because of the terrorists – not because of settlers. And the reason they are in Yehuda and Shomron is because of terrorists – not because of settlers!

In fact, the settlers help the soldiers. As proven at Kever Yosef, defending a site without people living around it is very difficult. The soldiers have to be in places because of terrorists who breed there and terrorize the rest of the country. The settlers make the job of the soldiers much easier. It is easier to defend people than places. It has more meaning. And the interaction with the people is stimulating. It keeps

the soldiers alert and gives them more conviction. In many places the settlers pamper their soldiers with Shabbos gifts. I know in Chevron the Shliach sends a guitar playing singer to entertain the soldiers at night. It helps keep them alert and happy. By day, in Chevron, Bachurim bring the soldiers ices... and T'fillin.

These two concepts that the soldiers are there because of terrorists and that settlers help the soldiers are very foreign to most Jews... but they are very basic.

Another misconception is that the settlers are living illegally on the land. Along with this is the misconception that the land belongs to the Arabs. The land does not belong to the Arabs! There were almost no Arabs around before the Jews started migrating back to Eretz Yisroel, a hundred and some odd

years ago.

The war on the settlers is part of the suicidal policies of the government in Eretz Yisroel. The war on the settlers depends on ignorance of the Jewish population both in Eretz Yisroel and abroad.

Times are tough. Shleimus HaAretz has taken the turn that the Rebbe feared it would. Against all odds the Rebbe fought against it and we have to follow his lead. And we have a secret weapon... we know that Moshiach is with us, even now in this double Galus, and his light can begin to shine in the same amount of time it takes to turn on a light switch. We Want Moshiach Now!

If you would like more information about the issues and how to answer them, I would be happy to mail you a copy, or copies, of my booklet called "The Complex Relationship of American Jews to the Land of Israel." Contact me at alsteinkopf@yahoo.com.

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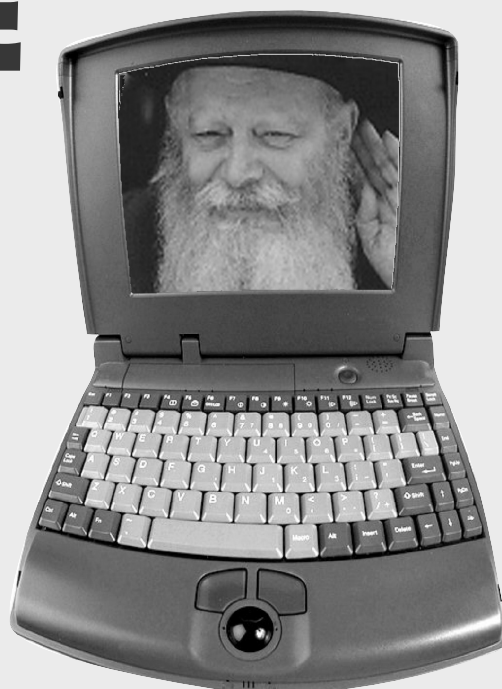
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