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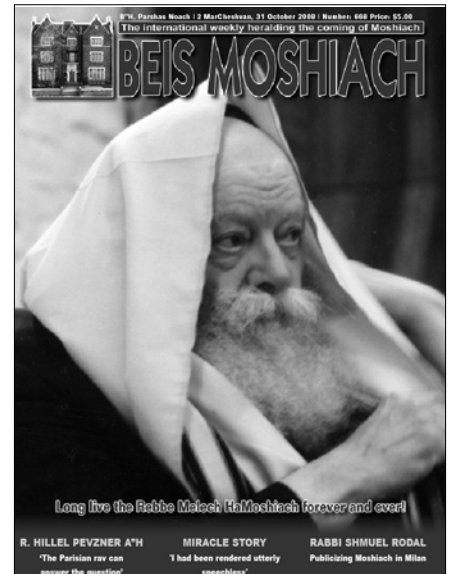
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# SCIENCE & TORAH

Translated and adapted by Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

***The Zohar predicted that a revolution in scientific and mystical knowledge would occur around the year 5600 (1840). The publication of Torah Or and Likkutei Torah was a milestone on the way to Redemption. Mystical knowledge is the source of scientific knowledge, and science illuminates the path to Moshiach.***

In this week's Torah reading it states: "In the six hundredth year of Noach's life . . . all the wellsprings of the great deep burst forth and the windows of heaven opened." The *Zohar*, the fundamental work of Jewish mysticism, explains the esoteric meaning of the verse as follows: In the six hundredth year of the sixth millennium the gates of wisdom above and the wellsprings of wisdom below will be opened; the world will then be prepared to enter the seventh millennium.

The two phrases in the Torah – "the wellsprings of the great deep" and "the windows of heaven" – allude to two types of wisdom. "The wellsprings of the great deep" refers to the wisdom below, meaning science or the wisdom of the world, while "the windows of heaven" refers to the wisdom above, meaning Torah. The *Zohar*, written nearly two thousand years ago by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a disciple of Rabbi Akiva, predicted that an explosion in wisdom, understanding and knowledge would occur around the Hebrew year 5600 – corresponding to the secular year 1840.

Indeed, in that time period, a hundred years after the Baal Shem Tov officially began teaching Chassidus to the general public – which also corresponded with the beginnings of modern industrialization – just such an intellectual explosion occurred. During this time – in the years 5607 and 5608, or 1847 and 1848 in the secular calendar – *Torah Or and Likkutei Torah*, two important works of the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad Chassidus,

were finally published. To understand the significance of this event, we must remember that the Baal Shem Tov had described a spiritual ascent he had experienced on Rosh Hashanah. As the Baal Shem Tov's soul reached higher and higher spiritual levels, it encountered the soul of Moshiach. The Baal Shem Tov asked, when will the master – meaning Moshiach – come? The answer was, when your wellsprings spread forth.

The publication of these two works of the Alter Rebbe represented not just another intellectual milestone. Traditionally, the spread of mystical knowledge is

both a pre-requisite to, and a result of, the coming of Moshiach. The prophet Isaiah declares that, in the era of Redemption, "the whole world will be filled with knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the ocean." Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was assured from Above that with and through the *Zohar* the Jewish people would leave their exile and usher in the Redemption. Still, mystical knowledge remained beyond the education and capacity of most people for over a thousand years. Not until the Arizal, who systematized Kabbala, did the inner teachings of the Torah truly become available to the public.

Even so, the mystical truths were inaccessible because their form was too intellectual and academic. The task of the Baal Shem Tov – and after him, the Alter Rebbe and Chabad Chassidus – was to "translate," so to speak, the esoteric into a form within the understanding of the average person, even one with little formal training in Hebrew or Jewish subjects – even someone with no background at all! The publication of the Alter Rebbe's works indicated that a tremendous opposition, on both the physical and spiritual planes, had been removed. The wellsprings – the windows of heavenly knowledge – had been opened wider and the spiritual wisdom – the inner teachings and secrets of the Torah – began to pour forth.

Since the Torah of Moshiach will be such that "the

whole world will be filled with knowledge of the Lord,” it’s obvious why the dissemination and proliferation of Chassidus – the inner teachings of the Torah – is a necessary preparation for the coming of Moshiach. After all, Chassidus is a manifestation and revelation of the Torah of Moshiach – a sample and foretaste of the “knowledge of the Lord” that will permeate the world in the era of Redemption.

But what is the connection of worldly knowledge with Moshiach? Since the *Zohar* links the “windows of heaven” – the mystical secrets of Torah – with the “wellsprings of the deep” – the discoveries and inventions of modern science – clearly one is the source and cause of the other. Still we may ask, why does the revelation of a new dimension of Torah – the inner teachings as expressed in Chassidus – result in a scientific revolution, an alteration of principles that reveals more and more of the inner truths of nature?

The answer lies in the fact that nature itself is part of creation. The laws of nature, the axioms, theorems and principles of science are simply observations and deductions about the world which G-d created. Scientific discoveries about how gravity bends light, cells reproduce or the inner structure of a quark are themselves preparations for the coming of Moshiach. The increase in scientific knowledge serves a deeper purpose than satisfying idle curiosity or enabling us to spend more hours on increasingly trivial pursuits.

Rather, like everything else that exists, science was created “for the sake of Torah and the sake of Israel.” Or, as it is expressed in the Talmud, “All that G-d created in His world He created solely for His glory.” This means that every aspect of creation can be utilized in the Divine service of a Jew. Just as the Jewish people, through the mitzvos of the Torah, reveal the G-dliness within the world, so, too, the natural sciences – scientific knowledge – and our understanding of the world exists to be used in the service of G-d, to deepen our understanding of the true spiritual reality, the Divine nature of existence.

For example, we are told by the prophets that in the times of Moshiach, the “whole world will be filled with knowledge of the Lord” and that “all flesh will see,”

meaning that with our physical eyes we will see G-dliness. Our sight will not be simply an “insight,” an intellectual comprehension, but a physical seeing. G-dliness will be truly visible.

Of course, such a condition is difficult to conceive. Even if we can grasp a little of this concept theoretically, it’s hard to imagine what the world will be like – what we will be like. We can readily admit that there is a spiritual life-force within every object, sustaining its physical existence at every moment. But how can the spiritual be perceived by the physical?

Modern science provides us with an analogy. One of the most powerful forces of nature is electricity. It has existed since the beginning of creation, obviously, but it was discovered only a few hundred years ago; application of its power is even more recent. By utilizing electricity to transmit sound, a voice at one end of the earth can instantaneously be transmitted to someone at the other end of the earth. The speaker may not even know who the recipient is – or that his words are being heard thousands of miles away. This parallels and makes comprehensible the concept that there is an “Eye that sees and an Ear that hears.” The physically fantastic makes it easier to understand the spiritually fantastic. Further, if we know that someone else is listening to our conversation, we become very careful with what we say. How much more so when we recognize that every word, indeed, every thought is “overheard” Above.

There is a practical lesson, one relevant to our current situation just prior to the revelation of Moshiach. As mentioned earlier, the coming of Moshiach depends on the spreading of the wellsprings of Chassidus. When modern scientific inventions, such as the radio (or now, even computers and the internet) are used to teach Torah to millions of people, we surely are in the era of Redemption. Indeed, such an electronic “flooding” of the airwaves and cyberspace with Torah and Chassidus, spreading everywhere without limitation, and available to everyone, actually begins to fulfill the prophecy that the “earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.”

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 15, pp. 42-48)

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# THERE ARE JEWS IN TIJUANA?

By Esther Chin

***“Tijuana is not safe, but we have taken the necessary precautions so that our community center is safe and our members are actively involved in this issue.” \* The community that lives on the miracles and the brachos of the Rebbe.***

It was Erev Yom Kippur 1993 and newly ordained Rabbi Mendel Polichenco wrote in to the Lubavitcher Rebbe about going on shlichus to Tijuana, Mexico.

Forty minutes later came the response: A bracha from the Rebbe for the young rabbi to establish the first Chabad community in Mexico.

“People came from all over for a farbrengen in celebration of the bracha,” explains Rabbi Polichenco.

The job was not easy. “The center hadn’t had a rabbi in over a year and the place was not kosher, people used to bring in chicken from the local supermarket. One of the kitchens was kashered but had to be rekashered about 20 times the first year alone,” said the rabbi.

With time the rabbi with the help of his wife, Dini Polichenco, people became more open and educated about the basics of Judaism, but that didn’t put a stop to the battles also taken on by the rabbi, such as the establishing of a proper shul within the community center and the

putting up of a mechitza.

The rabbi also had all the nonkosher “Reform” siddurim replaced with T’hillas Hashem and Chabad Machzorim and made the necessary arrangements so that the already existing mikva would be

fitting according to halacha.

The *Centro Social Israelita*, which is the name of Tijuana’s only Jewish community center and synagogue estimates that at present there are around 100 Jewish families living in Tijuana.

The rabbi caters to them as well as to the many visiting Jews that pass through the city of Tijuana, which is known as one of the most visited in the world and has a population of two million.

With regard to the needs of the Jewish community the rabbi explains what his shlichus is: “There are three major groups of people here - the Jews living in Tijuana, the businessmen that work in Tijuana



but live in S Diego, and the visitors that either come for Shabbos or travel through the city.”

Jews often come to privately run ‘hospitals’ that offer alternative ‘treatment’ for the terminally ill. There are around 40 hospitals that charge up to \$10,000 a week for juices and enemas.

“As much as I tell people that I do not believe there are any miracle treatments in Tijuana, they still come. Unfortunately I’ve taken numerous corpses from almost all of those hospitals.”

The rabbi has overseen and arranged for many bodies to be sent from Tijuana to their places of origin, as well as arranging proper Jewish burials in S Diego for the Tijuana community that doesn’t have a Jewish cemetery. The bodies have to be taken across the border.

Tijuana also offers a wide range of clinics for the treatment against addictions. The rabbi considers that unlike the alternative hospitals some centers have helped many Jews that have unfortunately had to seek help. The rabbi makes weekly rounds to scout them out.

Being that Tijuana is a mayor gateway to and from the United States, many people come to the city with the hopes of following the American dream. An estimated 50,000 cross the border every day.

The demographics of those going over the border are mostly shoppers and people who are either American citizens or US permanent residents who live in Tijuana and work in S Diego.

Ninety percent are estimated to be legal. But many still do it illegally. The rabbi explains how almost every week there is a Jew that ends up in jail for attempting an illegal cross. “It’s a very sad situation; I visit Jews from all over the world that have ended up in jail for this reason.”

Others also end up in Tijuana because they were deported from the United States and travel to Mexico

hoping to re-enter the country.

With all this, Rabbi Polichenco’s main mission is to provide the Jews of Tijuana with a truly Torah observant community where they can have all their Jewish needs met.

The community offers the celebration of every Jewish holiday and has daily prayer and weekly Shabbat services. People come Friday night to pray and for the meal as do they Shabbos day where they stay until Havdala.

Rabbi Polichenco offers classes in Tanya, Parsha and introduction to



**Rabbi Mendel Polichenco**

Judaism. The rabbi tells OF the many non-Jews coming to center, often married to Jews. “People had little knowledge of what a kosher conversion was,” so he set up classes and encouraged those already living with Jews to convert properly.

“The ones who were serious about Judaism converted and the others eventually left; As a result, we have a growing community of Jews baruch Hashem.”

**But how did Jews end up in Tijuana in the first place?**

As early as the 1940’s, Jews from Mexico City started coming to Tijuana for business. The city has had a booming economy and population since it’s foundation in 1919.

Both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews came looking for opportunities and set themselves up in various areas of business.

Nicolas Doron was born in China in 1946 to Russian immigrant parents who ran away from the communists and established a successful business in China where they lived until 1948.

Doron explains that his parents then moved to the States to evade the communists: “My mother had a high standard of living in China and life for her in the United States was hard so they decided to go to Mexico City, where my father invested his money in Cuba.”

When Fidel Castro came to power in 1949 the Doron family lost everything. They eventually moved to Tijuana in 1955.

Like the Doron family, many others came to Tijuana and with time the community grew and became very prosperous. So much so, that an estimated 80% has moved to S Diego.

Rabbi Polichenco explains how that factor put an obvious strain on the community, especially because the major financial supporters left: “The community lives on the miracles and the brachos of the Rebbe.”

Asked how he would define the community the rabbi said that it’s a very dynamic one, where people come and go, and that his goal is not to establish an orthodox community in Tijuana since he understands that it’s just not feasible.

“When people become religious I encourage them to leave to more established communities, we have former members of our community living in Los Angeles, in Israel and



in New York.”

Ezra Torres approached Rabbi Polichenco over two years ago with the desire to convert. He was referred to an orthodox Beit Din in Los Angeles and has since become Jewish.

Torres was encouraged to attend Sea Gate men’s yeshiva in Brooklyn by the rabbi. Upon finishing a summer program, Torres is happy to be back in Tijuana where he feels that life as a Jew, although not like in New York, is good.

The rabbi calculates that 40% of the community is composed of those living permanently in the city and the rest fluctuates: “Although a lot have left, more keep coming so we concentrate on raising their awareness and knowledge of Judaism.”

At 17, Olga Soshnikova made aliya with her sister from Russia so that they could live a safer life as Jews. Although not Torah observant, Soshnikova decided to go to yeshiva in Jerusalem: “I had no idea what kosher or Shabbat was.”

Soshnikova attended a mixed yeshiva. “There were boys and girls but separate seating,” she explains.

There she met Moises Serrano, a Jewish boy from Mexico who she married in May of 1998. “We had our first child in Israel and liked living there very much but we felt lonely, I was orphaned at age 13 and my husband’s entire family was in Mexico, so we decided to move.”

That’s how Soshnikova and her new family came to Tijuana. Living

in this city has been a good experience for her: “I love Tijuana, it’s not an ideal place for a Jew but we are able to get everything kosher and have a very warm community.”

The now mother of four says that what she liked best in the community in Tijuana was that she found a lot of mothers who supported her in her every need. They have celebrated brissin, upshernishes and lots of other simchas.

Like Soshnikova, Leah Hamori considers the community in Tijuana to be everything for her and her family, who are shomer Shabbat and have a 14 years old daughter. Orel, who studies in S Diego’s only Jewish orthodox high school, Torah High.

Hamori’s journey to Tijuana started in Veracruz, Mexico where she lived with her family but left to go to Israel where she met and married Shmuel, the son of Hungarian survivors of the holocaust.

They left Israel to try life out in Hungary only to decide to leave three years later to live in Mexico. That’s how they came to Tijuana.

For her “living life as a Jew in





***Rabbi Polichenco has worked on convincing parents to give their children Jewish education. He has a van packed full of kids that travel for almost two hours daily to get to school.***

Tijuana is not problem, socially and religiously I have a lot of support, through Rabbi Polichenco my daughter was enrolled at the Chabad Hebrew Academy of S Diego even though we lacked the funds, she was quickly able to adapt despite the fact that she didn't speak English."

Like Orel, other children travel from Tijuana to attend the Chabad day school. Rabbi Polichenco has worked on convincing parents to give their children Jewish education. He has a van packed full of kids that travel for almost two hours daily to get to school.

Soshnikova sends her nine year old son Daniel to Chabad, she says "it's physically very hard for him, he has to catch the van a 6:15 in the morning and doesn't come back until 5:00 o'clock but he loves it, when he misbehaves he tells me to punish him with anything other than not sending him to Chabad."

Much has been said about the violence in Mexico. Tijuana has been hard hit by crime. Asked about this issue the rabbi said that "Tijuana is not safe, but we have taken the necessary precautions so that our

community center is safe and our members are actively involved in this issue."

For Rabbi Polichenco, his job in Tijuana is the shlichus of the *Rebbe* and all that is needed for success is great emuna in Hashem.

Doron, who blesses the community every Shabbos with Birkas Kohanim, considers life in

Tijuana as fast paced. "Sure it's corrupt and dangerous, but it's for sure never boring and I raised three children here, two of whom now live in Israel and one lives in a strong Jewish community in Mexico City. Thanks to Rabbi Polichenco, Jews and Judaism are thriving in Tijuana."



# SPEECHLESS

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michael Leib Dobry

***“Imagine someone waking up in the morning, drinking a cup of coffee, saying goodbye to his wife, and traveling to work as on any other day. Suddenly, he is unable to open his mouth... not even to stammer or utter a sound – the words simply do not come.”***

***\* This is the story of Yosef Menachem, former Tzfas police commander and high-ranking official with the Northern Regional Command of Israel Police.***

In the living room of the Menachem family, residents of Moshav Dalton, a pastoral settlement in northern Eretz Yisroel, a large picture of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach hangs prominently. After conducting a lengthy and pleasant discussion with the heads of the household, Mr. Yosef Menachem and his wife Ester, I quickly understood that the Rebbe didn't simply remain on the wall for them. Ester told me proudly that she started lighting Shabbos candles as a result of her connection to the Rebbe. Her husband Yosef, who has held several senior positions with the northern regional command of Israel Police, among them commander of the Tzfas police station, speaks about two of his children, his son and his daughter, who have reached

their thirties, and how he longs for them to get married already.

The first connection that Mr. Yosef Menachem developed with the Rebbe was through the rav of the Chabad community of Tzfas, Rabbi Levi Bistritzky, of blessed memory. Rabbi Bistritzky would make weekly visits to the city jail each Friday, making certain that the prisoners' material and spiritual needs were being met, and requesting Shabbos prison furloughs where the circumstances allowed it. He put on t'fillin with the male prisoners and gave out Shabbos candles to the women detainees. The devotion and empathy towards these depressed souls and those whose fortunes had not improved established a warm and affectionate bond between the rav and the police chief, through

which he also heard about the Rebbe and his activities. Several years later, he was privileged to experience two heart-stopping miracles with the Rebbe's bracha.

“I was twice privileged to experience the G-dly power of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” he began his narrative. “The first story took place during the winter of 5749. As I did every weekday morning, I got into my car and began my daily journey to work at police headquarters in Natzrat Illit, where my offices were located at the time, in my position as northern administrative commander of Israel Police. There were many important issues at hand, and I had scheduled a meeting that morning with my deputy and others under my command, for the purpose of bringing about improvements in those areas related to the northern regional command of Israel Police. As on any normal workday, I said goodbye to my wife and set out on my customary route.

“About thirty yards from my house, I stopped for a soldier asking for a lift, whom I knew served at an IDF base on my way to work and had regularly traveled with me in the past. As soon as he got into my car, he asked me a question. I wanted to reply, but I discovered that I couldn't! The words had simply left me. I garbled the words, but I couldn't manage to say anything. I tried again and again, but to no avail! I had instantly turned into a mute. Just a few moments earlier, I had said ‘Good morning’ to my wife, and now I had been rendered literally speechless. The soldier in my car thought that I was making a joke out of him, but I was gripped by an intense fear.

“I was beside myself with shock and bewilderment. I wrote a note to the soldier stating I wanted to speak with him, but I simply couldn't talk! He reacted with puzzlement similar to mine, and we continued on our



way. I hadn't yet absorbed the fact that I was faced with a serious problem. I naively thought that maybe I had just lost my voice temporarily for some reason, and that after a few hours, I'll have something hot to drink and my voice will come back.

"After letting the soldier off at his base, I proceeded as planned to the police station and entered my office. When my deputy came in and started to talk to me about work-related matters, I again tried unsuccessfully to reply. I understood that we weren't dealing with an 'ordinary' occurrence. I wrote to my deputy on a piece of paper about what was happening to me, and asked him to take command.

"I quickly got into my car and made my way back home. My wife was shocked beyond belief when she saw that I couldn't respond to her verbally. I wrote to her about all that had transpired, and she was as bewildered as I was. These were moments of weakness, uncertainty, and most of all, an inability to have any control over what was happening to me. After a few moments, we decided that we

couldn't waste any more time, and we immediately set out for the Rebecca Sieff Hospital in Tzfas.

"In my previous role as Tzfas police chief, I knew many members of the medical staff, and they quickly brought me in for a series of tests. Several doctors specializing in a variety of fields checked me according to their area of expertise. The one who accompanied me throughout the entire process was Dr. Kozakov, who decided to send me for a further series of tests at Rambam Hospital in Haifa.

"After completing all the various tests, one of the doctors, a surgeon, suggested that I undergo a CT scan during my visit to Rambam. This all sounded like a bad movie. I was truly frightened. At such a moment, you actually feel how small we really are in the face of Divine Providence. Imagine someone waking up in the morning, drinking a cup of coffee, saying goodbye to his wife, and traveling to work as on any other day. Suddenly, he is unable to open his mouth... not even to stammer or utter a sound – the words simply do not come.

"At the Rambam Hospital, they

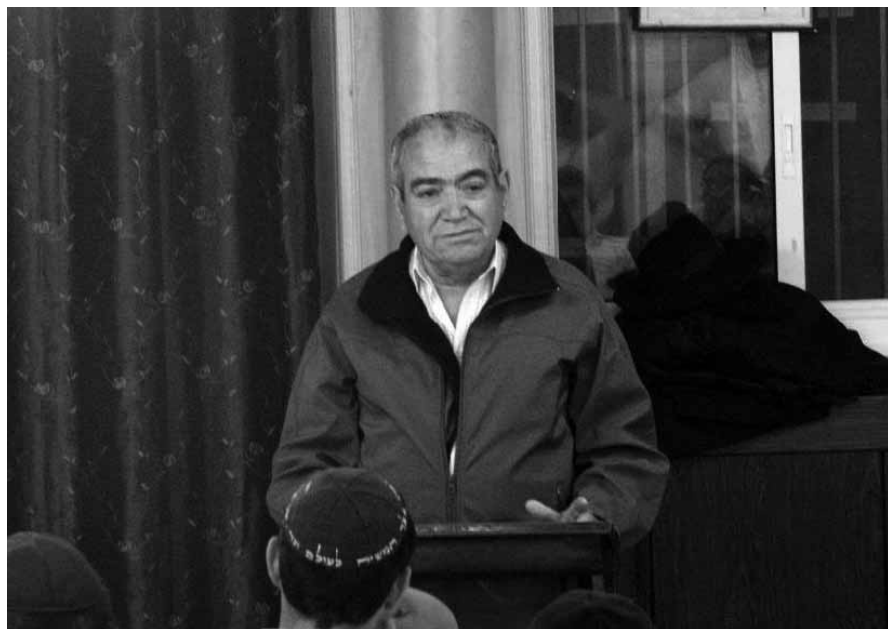
conducted a CT scan, after which the examining physician gave me an envelope and asked me to bring it as soon as possible to the doctor who had sent me.

"His face was very somber and severe, and I understood that something was definitely wrong. I quickly made my way to Sieff Hospital, and met Dr. Kozakov coming out of the elevator as soon as I entered the building. When he asked me if I had already done the CT scan, I nodded my head and handed him the envelope. He studied the pictures and the accompanying medical evaluations. He sighed and stated, 'You need to be hospitalized here immediately – it's most urgent.'

"I realized that the situation was quite serious, and returned the very next morning to continue the examinations. I was checked throughout that day by numerous doctors, including an oncologist, an ENT specialist, and even the hospital's administrator, Dr. Gabi Canaan, of blessed memory.

"After each doctor finished examining me, they jointly determined that there was a

***This all sounded like a bad movie. I was truly frightened. At such a moment, you actually feel how small we really are in the face of Divine Providence.***



Mr. Yosef Menachem telling his miracle story

***“Just a few moments earlier, I had said ‘Good morning’ to my wife, and now I had been rendered literally speechless... I was gripped by an intense fear.”***

dangerous tumor on my esophagus which must be immediately removed before it spreads and causes further damage. A series of pre-op tests would take place at the beginning of the following week. The operation had been scheduled for Friday – less than a week later – due to the urgency of the matter. The doctors were going out of their way to help me, saying that despite the fact that Friday is their day off and they have no obligation to work, they were prepared to come in especially for me, to do the operation. While I was deeply moved by their efforts, my heart was filled with much fear and concern. I had never been tested in such a fashion. This tumor had come upon me like a clap of thunder on a clear day.

“Since I had been deprived of the power of speech, I inwardly offered a silent heartfelt prayer that I should come out of all this.

“The following day, I was lying in my hospital bed in rather low spirits. Suddenly, Rabbi Levi Bistritzky came in. When I saw this man of great stature in my room, I could feel the color coming back to my cheeks. It turned out that he had a longstanding custom to visit the sick in the hospital, in addition to visiting those incarcerated at the

local police station. He looked at me warmly and then asked what I was doing there. Since I couldn’t speak, my wife, who was seated next to me, told him the entire chain of events in great detail. The very fact that Rabbi Bistritzky was in my room was a source of tremendous encouragement.

“I now understood why the prisoners at the city jail always waited impatiently for his arrival. He spoke to me with warm words of support, asked my wife to give him my full given name and my mother’s name, and promised that he would send it that very night to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, in request of a bracha. I had already heard a great deal about the Rebbe, and I was very happy for the opportunity to receive his blessing.

“Two days later, Rabbi Bistritzky returned to my room. It was late at night, just a day prior to the scheduled operation. The doctors had already gone home, and I was half asleep while my wife dozed on a nearby chair. He surprised us by saying that he had just received an answer from the Rebbe.

“The message was that if I would not have the operation on Friday, but a few days later - on Tuesday - it would be the proper thing to do. The Rebbe added that he was blessing me with a complete and speedy recovery. Rabbi Bistritzky had just received the answer and rushed to the hospital to inform me.

“We were both anxious to know what would happen next. Personally, I said nothing to the doctors. I waited with much anticipation for Friday to see if the operation would take place or not. I must admit - with some embarrassment - that I didn’t have the courage to ask the doctors to postpone the operation in accordance with what the Rebbe had said...

“On Thursday, when they asked me to begin fasting as a preparation

for the operation scheduled the following day, I didn’t refuse. A deep inner conflict was being waged within me. The Rebbe had told me to postpone the operation, but I simply didn’t have enough courage to tell this to the doctors - particularly since they had said that they were coming in especially for me due to the extreme urgency of this procedure. Words such as ‘stunned’ and ‘surprised’ are totally inadequate to describe my feelings when the hospital administrator entered my room on Friday to regretfully inform me that due to several emergency operations, my operation would have to be *postponed until Tuesday*. He asked me if I was upset; I was overjoyed...

“In the face of this postponement, I could already see that the Rebbe’s bracha was starting to materialize. The hospital administrator didn’t understand how my facial expression, which had seemed so tense in recent days, suddenly appeared quite optimistic.

“I will never forget the day of the operation, and not because it took place on the last day of the calendar year (December 31). The operation was successful, and the recovery period was far less than expected. I was simply delighted, especially when I discovered that my speech had been restored. I thanked the Rebbe from the depths of my heart for his blessing, but it had apparently not finished its work. A day into my recuperation, the entire surgical team and other senior members of the medical staff came into my room and said, ‘Menachem, you won’t believe what we found inside of you. There was actually a plastic bag filled with blood in your throat.’

“The looks on their faces testified to their utter amazement. They said that they had absolutely no idea how a bag with blood would have entered my body. They had never studied the

possibility of such an occurrence.

"On the day that I was discharged from the hospital, the administrator approached me and said warmly, 'Menachem, you should just know that our findings have been passed on to our investigative machinery in order to determine exactly what it was.'

"Needless to say, my appreciation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe had grown sevenfold. Though I had heard and known before that

the Rebbe was a prominent individual, an outstanding Jewish leader, and a great tzaddik, I had now experienced this for myself."

\* \* \*

Two years ago, a branch of Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim, under the administration of Rabbi Chaim Eliezer Wilschanski, opened near the home of the Menachem family. When I asked Mr. Menachem about the yeshiva, he gave an enthusiastic

reply:

"I derive much pleasure and satisfaction from these fine, well-educated, and delightful young men. The yeshiva has a staff that any learning institution would be proud to have – people who show much patience and who care deeply. They have become an integral part of the local landscape. We like the fact that they're here, and hope that they will stay."



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# CHABAD IN THE DESERT

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz, Shliach, Beit Shaan

*R' Blau is the “address” for every Jew and everything Jewish... After listening to his stories I expressed my amazement. R' Blau modestly said, “I just ‘harvest the fruits...’*

Guess where the following story took place: a shliach of the Rebbe, the Rav in a yishuv, goes to shul for Kabbalas Shabbos and he meets three men. They are drenched and confused. When they see the rabbi they ask him whether they can be his guests for Shabbos.

Indeed, somewhere in the desert, on the way to Eilat, is the yishuv called Merkaz Sapir, which serves as a center for six other yishuvim in the area. The rav of the yishuv and the area is R' Moshe Blau, who combines rabbanus with shlichus, raising children with mesirus nefesh.

Back to our story: The three men were returning home to Ashkelon from vacationing in Eilat. They were only somewhat surprised to see that instead of a road there was a mighty river. In that area there are sudden mighty flashfloods that sweep away whatever is in their path: be it trees, roads, or people.

The three men tried to continue through the water but the motor flooded, then stopped altogether.

Fortunately for them, a few hours later, about half an hour before Shabbos, a large agricultural vehicle drove by (an acquaintance of R' Blau), and with the help of a thick rope he dragged their car to the shul in Merkaz Sapir.

“I’d be happy to host you for Shabbos,” said the driver, “but I think you’d feel more comfortable with the rabbi.”

The rabbi provided them with

## CLARIFICATION RE LAST ISSUE’S INSTALLMENT

The article “The Painful Concessions of the Shluchim” mentions circumstances where “Shluchim would prefer not to carry on Shabbos...but have to carry nosh...because making the children happy is more important than a personal stringency.” Obviously, this is in an area where there is a **kosher eiruv**.

Shabbos clothes, shared his food, and gave them comfortable beds to sleep in. The spiritual end of things wasn’t lacking either, with uplifting t’fillos and shiurim. When Shabbos was over they said that they would never forget the chulent at the Chabad house of Merkaz Sapir.

“Sudden guests have become routine lately,” says R’ Blau. “A famous tourist road passes near us. Some tourists just ask for food or to wash up, and some even agree to stay for Shabbos. If it’s possible, we are happy to have them – which is, of course, thanks to the shlucha.

## FROM COSTA RICA TO MERKAZ SAPIR

One day, R’ Blau went to Shacharis at the shul and found a guest waiting there for him, a man of about 40 with a full beard, a large pair of tzitzis over his clothes, and a ten year old child with him.

“Are you the rabbi?” he asked. “Is there is a mikva here where I can immerse before davening?”

The man immersed, davened with the minyan, and then took out a D’var Malchus booklet from his bag and asked R’ Blau whether he could learn the daily Chitas with him. It turned out that the guest, an Israeli who lived in Costa Rica, had become religious through the shliach there, R’ Wilhelm, and was particular about all the Chabad customs.

His son wanted to see the Reed Sea, which meant they had to travel to Eilat. They set out, planning on davening Shacharis on one of the tall cliffs in the desert, but someone told him there was a rabbi and a Chabad house in the area.

After listening to these stories I expressed my amazement. R’ Blau modestly said, “I just ‘harvest the fruits.’ Before we came here, R’ Yosef Karasik and his family lived

***Children who at age five get up at 5:30 in the morning because at 6:00 their ride leaves for Eilat, a two hour drive each way. Every day! Children with mesirus nefesh!***

here and they 'plowed deeply' and had a major impact on the spiritual atmosphere here. R' Karasik is the 'Father of the Chabad yishuv in the Arava desert,' and we are just continuing where he left off."

I asked for more details about the "fruits" and R' Blau told me:

"On Lag B'Omer we have a bonfire near the house, and all the children of the yishuv come, most of them with their parents. It's the atmosphere ... the songs, the Chassidische stories that are told around the bonfire ..."

That's the way it is on Lag B'Omer, on every holiday, and even on ordinary days. R' Blau is the "address" for every Jew and everything Jewish.

## **THERE IS A TORAH BUT NO SHUL**

One of the seven yishuvim under R' Blau's jurisdiction is Tzofer. Recently, one of the families there said they wanted to donate a Torah scroll to the yishuv, but there was no shul. R' Blau suggested that they speak to the members of the committee of the yishuv and ask that a shul be built -

or a building designated for a shul - there.

The family said that it was a waste of time "because they are all secular." Two days later they came back to the rav all excited. They told him that the members of the committee loved the idea, and had gotten fully involved in obtaining permits and money for a shul in their yishuv.

Up until a few years ago, the situation in the area was completely different. The perpetually arid desert only reflected the spiritual aridity. R' Blau relates that due to their distance from the center of the country there are people in his area who had never visited a shul. There are people who had never heard of a mezuzah.

"We recently put up mezuzos in the home of one of the old-time families here. You had to see the tears of the woman when she picked up her granddaughter to kiss the new mezuzah. The grandmother remembered that she had a Siddur in the house, and she taught her three year old granddaughter how to hold the Siddur and daven.

"When we began having day camps, the district council leader vehemently opposed us. 'We can agree to programs with the adults, maybe, but absolutely not with the children,' he declared. In the end, a group of people who had already gotten a taste of Judaism told the leader that they wanted a Chabad camp. Boruch Hashem, the day camps have not only become a tradition, but they are the main attraction during the long summer vacation every year."

"Today there is another council leader and a different atmosphere. In all the yishuvim there is a demand on the part of the residents for shuls. There are rough farmers who, in the past, did not know what t'filla with a minyan is, who

today say, 'The agricultural settlement in the Arava is incomplete without a shul in every yishuv.'"

As opposed to what existed previously, today the district council leader goes with R' Blau to Yerushalayim for every meeting, in order to demand whatever possible for the religious advancement of the entire area.

## **CHILDREN OF THE DESERT – THE REAL STORY**

About 250 kilometers separate R' Blau's house and the center of the country. When I asked him how he deals with the loneliness and being so far from any Chassidic community he said, "That's not the question. Ask how the children manage; children who at age five get up at 5:30 in the morning because at 6:00 their ride leaves for Eilat, a two hour drive each way. Every day! Children with mesirus nefesh!"

"My nine year old son learns away from home in Kiryat Malachi. He lives with his grandparents and visits us occasionally. *That's* the real story. It's the children who can't eat at the neighbors' because it's not Badatz. These are children who, when they walk out the door, see desert hills on every side with sand everywhere. Their only friends are their brothers and a few children who come over to play. This is because we don't really want them to go to other children's homes. If they go anyway and the television is on, they are supposed to leave the room and close the door.

"A neighbor told us what she saw at the playground. A girl brought candy and gave it out to her friends. She offered some to our daughter, who is three years old, and she asked to see the bag.

When she did not find the familiar Badatz symbol, she politely gave the candy back, to the astonishment of the neighbor.”

## SHLUCHIM WORKING TOGETHER

“One day I got a call from the shliach in Gadera, R’ Benny Karniel. He told me about someone in Gadera who found work in my area and would need to stay for Shabbos, and he asked me to invite him. You cannot imagine how surprised and thrilled the man was to receive my invitation. It strengthened his connection to the Rebbe and Chabad.

“We had the opposite situation too. Someone from here was sitting Shiva for his mother in Kiryat

Tivon and he remained there for Pesach. I called the shliach, R’ Menashe Altheus, and the matzos from Merkaz Sapir arrived at the Shiva house in Tivon.

“Like every Chabad house here, we also have the military sector. There are military posts the length of the Jordan, with sometimes only two or three soldiers manning the post. When the bachurim and I show up with doughnuts on Chanuka or mishloach manos on Purim, they simply can’t believe that Chabad came to such far-off places. Go and tell them that Chabad lives a hundred meters away from their post...”

I can’t complete this chapter without mentioning the shlucha, Mrs. Chanie Blau. In addition to being the personal ganenet of the

children of shluchim in the area, she is also the official consultant of the area school. Thanks to her, they all hear about Judaism and learn what Chassidus is. More and more people from the community of teachers and parents hear from her about the Rebbe MH”M, connect with the Rebbe, and receive his guidance and brachos.

One year, towards the beginning of the school year, they discovered that some mezuzos were lacking at the school. The principal told the council secretary that she would not begin the school year until all the mezuzos were put up. Those who know the people working in the Arava area know that this is simply amazing.

Chabad outreach in the desert



# 'TO LIFE AND NOT TO DEATH'

By Sholom Ber Crombie

*In recent years, those who fight smoking have focused on young people who start smoking and then have a hard time stopping. \* 66 years ago, the Rebbe Rayatz declared war against young smokers and forbade “with an absolute and utter prohibition, smoking for talmidim under twenty years of age.” As for older talmidim, the Rebbe asked that they stop smoking \* A few years earlier, the Rebbe Rayatz asked b’nei Torah not to smoke during Rosh HaShana \* An overview of smoking from the perspective of the Rebbeim. \* Part 2 of 2*

[Continued from last issue]

## NOT HAPPY TO PLACE A BAN

Despite the clear order to talmidim under 20, the Rebbe was not in favor of a ban against smoking. In a letter from 5739, the Rebbe responded to the question as to why rabbinic authorities had not banned smoking: “This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter

... in which you write about the problem of smoking and ask why no *issur* (prohibition) has been issued against it, etc.

I note from your letter that you are aware of the halachic problems in issuing an *issur*. Rabbinic authorities have traditionally been reluctant to proclaim *issurim*, even in non-controversial situations, when it involved a “*G’zeira sh’ein rov*

*ha’tzibur yecholim laamod bah*, a “Decree that most of the congregation cannot abide by,” in which case an *issur* would force many into a position of being *meizidim*, sinning deliberately, rather than *shogagim*, sinning unintentionally.

Certainly there would be no case for issuing an *issur* in a matter on which authorities differ.

As you know, there are those, albeit in the minority, who claim that the health hazard of cigarette smoking has not been proven conclusively. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the manufacture and sale of cigarettes has not been outlawed by the health authorities.”

Aside from referring to the health problems in smoking and the various ways to counteract this problem, the Rebbe also referred to smoking itself. Being a genuine shepherd in Israel and understanding the young people who start to smoke, the Rebbe spoke about the source of the problem, that which leads young people to start smoking:

“In recent years there has been a further consideration, namely, that the prohibition of cigarette smoking, and placing it on a par with smoking marijuana, would increase the incidence of drug abuse and drug addition, since it is believed that cigarette smoking, especially among young people,

**provides a certain “escape,” and to some degree is a substitute for the drug abuse so prevalent among their peers.”**

By now, research has proven that in most cases, smoking is not an addiction that causes real changes in the chemical makeup of the body. From this aspect, there is no comparison between smoking and using drugs. It's just a habit which is sometimes so ingrained that it borders on addiction. Psychologists define smoking as an acquired addiction which can be overcome.

Other research shows that far more than the chemical influence tobacco exerts on the body, a person is attracted to smoking itself. Lighting up, handling the cigarette, holding it in one's mouth, blowing smoke, tapping out the ash etc. provides psychological pleasure akin to an older child's pacifier.

An Israeli researcher says, “Most smokers started smoking in adolescence, in high school or when they began army duty. Smoking is a ‘challenge’ of sorts to young people, who use it to demonstrate their maturity and

independence. There is strong social pressure exerted on kids to try the forbidden smoking experience.”

**“IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL DIN IN SHULCHAN ARUCH”**

At the end of the letter cited above, the Rebbe writes:

Needless to say, these and other considerations do not justify the use of something that has already been prohibited by the imperative of *V'nishmartem meod l'nafshoseichem*, “Be careful to scrupulously guard your health.” But I have mentioned the above by way of answering your letter as to some of the reasons why no *issur* has been proclaimed against cigarette smoking.

In addition to [the proposed *issur*] being counterproductive, there is also the possibility of a harmless cigarette being introduced in the future. ...

In connection with the “cigarette which is not harmful that will be introduced soon” we have another letter from that year (5739) in which the Rebbe writes:

**“Even according to those**

***“You ask why no issur has been issued against smoking... An issur would force many into a position of being meizidim, sinning deliberately, rather than shogagim, sinning unintentionally.”***

medical authorities who hold the opinion that cigarette smoking is harmful to the health, this opinion is based on the quality of cigarettes as they are now manufactured, containing harmful substances.

“A great deal of research is being conducted to find a way to eliminate those harmful substances in cigarettes and produce a harmless cigarette, in which case there would be no room at all for issuing a prohibition on cigarette smoking. Furthermore, any prohibition according to Torah is eternal and cannot be changed, just as the Torah itself is eternal and cannot be changed.”

The Rebbe also wrote sharply regarding smoking today, that according to most researchers, smoking is bad for one's health:

“As for the general mitzva of “be very heedful of your souls,” there is no need for rabbanim to take any special action since it's a fundamental din in Shulchan Aruch.”





## “WHY DOES THE REBBE SMOKE?”

In Chassidic history we find a number of references to the Rebbeim and smoking. One of them is in the story in *Shmuos V'Sippurim* that took place one of the times the Rebbe Rashab visited Moscow and was hosted by one of the wealthy men of that city. The rich man's son was sick and the doctors forbade him to smoke, but he did not obey them. His father yelled at him to stop smoking and fought him over this, but to no avail.

When the Rebbe Rashab was in their house, the rich man asked him to influence his son to stop smoking. The Rebbe said to his son, “Why do you smoke when you are sick?” The son said, “The Rebbe is not well either, why does the Rebbe smoke?” The Rebbe said, “I smoke because my father smoked.”

\*\*\*

The Rebbe MH”M told a story about the Rebbe Rayatz and the Rebbe Rashab, that after a telephone was set up between their rooms, it often happened that the Rebbe Rashab would call the Rebbe Rayatz and say: “You can come in, I want to smoke.” The Rebbe would go in, light a match and the cigarette, and the Rebbe Rashab would smoke and talk to him regarding the topic he was involved in.

Likewise it is told that some time before Pesach some yeshiva bachurim would travel to check the wheat for the baking of shmura matza, and they would also check the tobacco for Pesach for the Rebbe.

In general, the Rebbe Rayatz smoked very frequently, and this is mentioned many times in his sichos and memoirs. However, in 1940, due to

his poor health, the Rebbe Rayatz stopped smoking. In a letter of 13 Iyar, 1940, the Rebbe Rayatz told Professor Fishel Schneersohn that he completely ceased smoking. “Regarding my state of health there haven't been any happy developments yet,” wrote the Rebbe. “As to the diet prescribed by Gerson, I only keep it about halfway or a third of the way, as there are things that I am very careful about like smoking, which I stopped completely ... may Hashem send me a refua.”

In an interesting story told in *Migdal Oz*, the Chassidim R' Shmuel Michel Treinen and R' Simcha Gorodetzky visited the Rogatchover Gaon. During the visit, which took place on Shavuot, R' Shmuel Michel took out a cigarette and it was obvious that he wanted to smoke. The Rogatchover called for his wife to bring fire, and when there was no response he wanted to get up himself to bring fire for his guest. However, R' Shmuel Michel stopped him and said he had no intentions of smoking and had only wanted to know the gaon's opinion about smoking on Yom Tov.

The Rogatchover said he had never smoked and so he couldn't offer an opinion on the matter, since it was possible that for one habituated to smoking it could be considered *l'tzorech ochel nefesh*. When R' Shmuel Michel said that the Rebbe Rashab smoked on Yom Tov the gaon said, “You compare yourself to the Rebbe?! He is a lofty tzaddik and their smoking is another inyan altogether!”

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## Keren Hashono

### Ato Horeiso

#### שיחי' To All Of Anash And Tmimim

The Rebbe was accustomed to request after the selling of the Pesukim of "Ato Hereiso" that the following should be announced "Your word to Hashem is equal to physically giving to a person."

In many of his Sichos the Rebbe recalled words of the Alter Rebbe concerning the greatness of the quality of alacrity in all matters pertaining to Torah and Mitzvohs, especially regarding the Mitzvah of Tzedaka, he stressed, that one should act as quickly as possible.

In keeping with this dictum we wish to remind all those who had the merit of buying a Posuk of Ato Hereiso this Simchas Torah for the Merkos (which is under the leadership of Rabbi S.M. Simpson in accordance with the Rebbe's instructions) to bring their pledge in as expeditiously as possible to the offices of either Rabbi Simpson or Rabbi Groner or to send in their pledge to the address below.

**Keren Hashono:** A special tzedoko fund which the Rebbe established in 5714, from which tzedoko is given twice a day (except Shabbos and Yomtov), before Shacharis and before Mincha> This assures that all participants in this fund, fulfill the mitzvo of tzedoko twice a day. One is to contribute sums in the amount of days of the coming year. This year, 5769 has 354 days. The sums can be in pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, dollars etc., for each member of the family.

May giving of this Tzedaka speed the coming of the full Geulah through the revelation of Melech Hamoshiach.

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# PUBLICIZING MOSHIACH IN MILAN

By Nosson Avrohom

*Rabbi Shmuel Rodal is an old-time shliach in Milan. In addition to, together with his wife, raising seventeen children, he is also a melamed, a rav of a shul, overseer of projects and for twenty years, the editor of a Jewish publication written in Italian. Jews from all over the world visit his shul. \* Nosson Avrohom visited and heard stories about a shliach who went to Milan after the Rebbe picked it out of eight suggestions, while he had no interest in the place...*

I saw the Chabad shul Beis Shmuel run by Rabbi Shmuel Rodal, on my first day in Milan. In the afternoon I decided to go out and tour a bit. I ended up at Milan's most visited tourist center, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, a large building with amazing architecture. Millions of tourists from all over the world choose to visit this place as soon as they arrive.

There I was, feeling alone and conspicuous among the groups of hundreds of tourists from Japan, Germany and across Italy. I tried to

ignore the looks I was getting, which were partly curious stares and partly glares of hatred and racism.

As I looked upwards at the upper stories of the mall, which is built in the most incredible historic fashion, I was surprised to see a sign for a shul. A few young Americans, who saw my astonished face, pointed upward and seemed to want me to confirm that it was indeed a shul up there. We got into a conversation. They were shabbily dressed Jews from New Jersey who

had graduated high school and were touring in Europe for a few months.

Their knowledge of Judaism was limited to what they had acquired as a result of membership in their parent's Reform temple. We spoke for half an hour about Judaism and Chassidus. In the evening they were continuing to Venice, and I made sure to inform them about the Chabad house there.

When we sat down for the interview, I told Rabbi Rodal about my encounter. He wasn't surprised. Stories like this have happened to him dozens, if not hundreds, of times in the past year alone.

"People can't believe that here, in this tourist spot, near the famous Christian sites, is an Orthodox shul - with minyanim and shiurim no less."

Even before the interview with R' Rodal, we had heard from the shluchim in Milan that many of the baalei t'shuva began their journey, or became more serious about it, after meeting with R' Rodal. When I repeated this to him, he modestly said, "I am a simple person" - a statement he repeated several times in our conversation. One can see that he says it sincerely.

R' Rodal came to Milan thirty-five years ago to be a melamed in the Chabad school, a position he holds to this day. He and his wife have raised seventeen children and yet he has found the time to run a



shul, give many popular shiurim, and publish a Jewish publication for twenty years, which has been a tool

to be mekarev many Jews .

As a bachur, R' Rodal planned on going on shlichus. He worked at

camp Gan Yisroel in New York where he was in charge of activities. He always loved being active and was not the type to relax or be satisfied with the status quo. Today too, after marrying off twelve children, some of whom are on shlichus, he is still not interested in taking it easy. On the contrary, he is always coming up with new ideas, and looking for topics for shiurim and ways to reach out to even more Jews.

“He is a shliach around the clock,” is how another shliach in Milan described him, and believe me, it’s no exaggeration.

“We got married in Tamuz 5728/1968 and lived in Crown Heights. After six months, when my wife was pregnant and had to stop working, I had to support us. We asked the Rebbe for permission for me to continue learning in Kollel but to look for an afternoon job.



**Rabbi Rodal at a Hachnasas Seifer Torah for the Chabad house in the center of the tourist district.**

***“He is a shliach  
around the clock,”  
is how another  
shliach in Milan  
described him, and  
believe me, it’s no  
exaggeration.***

The Rebbe’s answer was positive.

“I was close with Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dvorkin, from the time he was in Pittsburgh, before he became a rav in Crown Heights. I was fortunate that he was fond of me and was very much mekarev me. When I told him that my wife was expecting and I was looking for a job, he promised to find something suitable, and he kept his word.

“He was a friend of a man named Mr. Rottenberg who ran a famous high school, UCQ, the Yeshiva of Central Queens. Many children from Boro Park and other Jewish neighborhoods sent their children to this school, which teaches both Limudei Kodesh and Limudei Chol. Many graduates went on to the Mirrer yeshiva in Yerushalayim and to Yeshiva University. He called me one day and said he wanted me to be a teacher in that school. I figured that a school of this caliber would require the teachers to have advanced degrees. Why would they want me? But Rabbi Dvorkin assured me, ‘You have nothing to worry about. I’ll get you in,’ and so he did.

“They hired me as the teacher of one of the fourth grade classes, which had all the troublemakers. Not only didn’t these kids want to learn; they had serious disciplinary problems. Not a single teacher had been able to control them. Their previous teacher had quit and I was

coming in the middle of the year. I was very young, and all the staff members were watching to see if I would rise to the challenge.

“I had plenty of *siyata d’Shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) and my experience in camp was a big help. I ran competitions and had prizes, and it worked! They enjoyed themselves and began learning.

“When the year was over, I was assigned a higher class, in addition to evening classes with the older grades. I stayed with them in the afternoon and learned various topics with them, in an experiential way. I would tell stories of tzaddikim and about the ways of Chassidim. We mainly reviewed what they had learned earlier in the day, to ensure that they knew it.

“A few months ago, an American now living in Eretz Yisroel came into my shul. He is an expert on eye treatments and was in Milan on business. When he saw me, he exclaimed, ‘Are you Rabbi Rodal?’ I said that I was, and his face lit up. He told me that he was a former student of mine and that he remembers when he had a question and I was the only one who could answer it.

“So I learned in Kollel and taught until our daughter was born, at which point we decided it was time to go on shlichus. When I saw that I was successful in chinuch, the children liked me, and I was endearing Torah learning to them, I decided that my shlichus would be in chinuch. The fact that with chinuch I would be able to see the results of my work, as well as the fact that it demanded my full involvement, attracted me very much to it. I received a number of offers for shlichus outside of New York.

I wrote to the Rebbe that I wanted to go on shlichus in the field of chinuch, and the answer was positive. The Rebbe referred



me to Merkos L’Inyonei Chinuch.

“I was very happy. Firstly, that the Rebbe agreed that I should go on shlichus, and secondly, that it would be in the field of chinuch, a field that I loved. I planned on being a melamed and using the afternoon hours for hafatza. Within a short time I had eight possible shlichus places in the United States and Europe.

“I planned on writing to the Rebbe about all the offers and presenting them in yechidus, but before I did so, I met Rabbi Gershon Mendel Garelik, shliach in Milan, who had come to Crown Heights. That same day, he came over to me and said that he had heard from R’ Chadakov, the Rebbe’s secretary, that I was looking for a shlichus as a melamed and he was looking for just that kind of person.

“I told R’ Garelik that Milan was not for me. I wanted a place relatively close to New York and I didn’t know Italian. If I was going to consider Europe, I had a more reasonable offer in London where the language was no problem and there was a Jewish community.

“You have to remember that shlichus wasn’t as developed as it is now. Italy was the end of the world to me. There were plenty of reasons to pick other places that were closer, and more lucrative. R’ Garelik offered me \$600 a month. After I checked with the Italian

consulate in New York about the cost of living in Italy, I realized it was similar to New York and that \$600 would barely suffice for rent. And of course we would want to fly to New York at least once a year to visit family.

"I had all the reasons in the world not to accept his offer, but R' Garelik pressured me to include Milan when I wrote to the Rebbe. He said, 'Listen, R' Chadakov recommended you - maybe that came from the Rebbe? Who knows?'

"Since he was nudging me, I agreed to write Milan as the last place on my list. With each offer I wrote the pros and cons, the terms and the distances. As far as Milan, I wrote that I was including it because R' Garelik asked me to but we were not thinking along those lines at all, and I gave the reasons why it was unsuitable.

"On Sunday we had yechidus. We knew that this yechidus would determine our future, where we would live, what we would do, and

where we would raise our children. I gave the Rebbe the letter.

"When he finished reading it, he looked up and said, 'As far as all your doubts about Milan, the eitzza is to write a contract - not only the rav should sign it, but at least two important balabatim from the community - and write everything out in detail.'

"The Rebbe looked at my wife and said, 'There are many young couples there so you can make friends.'

"The yechidus was over. We left in a daze. The suggestion that we regarded as least desirable was the one the Rebbe had picked. What moved us the most was the wording of the Rebbe's bracha. In those years, the beginning of the 70's, the Rebbe did not respond with specifics to every request to go on shlichus. He would suffice with a bracha that they do as they saw fit. We had the privilege of the Rebbe giving us specific guidance. In general, we always got very clear answers from the Rebbe and had a

close relationship with him.

"The next day we told R' Garelik that the Rebbe had chosen Milan but instructed that we should have a detailed contract, signed by at least two balabatim. Before we signed the contract, we wrote to the Rebbe and we were asked by the secretaries to submit the contract for the Rebbe to look at, which was considered surprising.

"The Rebbe reviewed the contract and, like a concerned father, he looked out for our interests. He said the contract should include a clause stating that if either of the sides was not satisfied by the other, the mosad had to pay for us to move all our things back to New York. The Rebbe also directed that the contract should say that the mosad should pay for occasional trips to visit our family. We felt very touched by this kiruv of the Rebbe, who was helping us in our preparations for shlichus.

"We left at the beginning of the year. It took time until we learned the language and mentality, but we managed. Back then, the school had only twenty-five pupils. I taught throughout the day, five or six students in the morning and another class in the evening. Some of my students are presently rabbanim and shluchim, including Rabbi Levi Garelik of Crown Heights and Rabbi Berel Lazar, chief rabbi of Russia.

"At a certain point, I asked the Rebbe for permission to return to New York. I wrote that I was wasting my time teaching four or five students when I could be teaching dozens. As always, I received clear directions from the Rebbe and we remained in Milan. The Rebbe wrote that generally, an important person is involved in important things and a simpler person is involved in more simple things. But when there are neither



**Rabbi Rodal handing his son a certificate for completing smicha at the Machon HaSmicha in Milan. Rabbi Gershon Mendel Garelik is on the right and Rabbi Yehuda Dery is on the left.**

***They were divided  
into two groups:  
those who were  
religious and  
wanted to daven  
despite their  
wartime  
experiences, and  
those – of whom  
there were many –  
who went to shul  
to socialize and  
eat herring.***

more important nor simpler people, then even the most important person can find himself teaching a little boy the Alef-Beis.

“Nearly two years passed and we asked permission to visit my family in Crown Heights. The Rebbe gave us four conditions: 1) if two years had gone by, 2) if it wouldn’t interfere with our shlichus, 3) if we did not go into debt, and 4) we had to be careful that people didn’t start talking about the Lubavitchers who flew because they had money.

“The Rebbe’s responses to my desire to leave and to my wanting to visit Crown Heights guide me in my shlichus until today. Sometimes, a shliach can think: I can do big things – what am I doing here? A shliach has to remember, and constantly remind himself, that if the Rebbe sent him to a particular place, that is his place of shlichus, whether or not he understands why he was sent there and what he is accomplishing. Another lesson is that we must be sensitive to the

people around us.

“I did not fly much over the years on shlichus. My position limited me due to lack of a suitable replacement. One of the times that I went to the Rebbe, I passed through the hall near R’ Chadakov’s office. He looked at me and asked, ‘You have nothing to do in Italy?’ When I said that the children were on vacation, he looked at me uncomprehendingly and said, ‘So what? They don’t go to the beach?’ By that he meant, so what if they are on vacation, does that mean they no longer exist? You need to work with them even when they are on vacation. R’ Chadakov’s ‘Ani Maamin’ of chinuch was never to rest.

“After a long period of time in which I learned Italian and got settled into my teaching position, I decided it was time to be involved in hafatzas ha’maayanos too. I found out that there was not a single Jewish newspaper or publication in Italy, and planned on filling that gap with a weekly publication in Italian that would bring Judaism to Italian Jewry.

“After three years in Milan, we felt the great lack of Jewish material in the country, especially for those living in the towns and villages where there are no Jewish communities. Every week I collected material, translated it, and published it. I put it into envelopes and mailed it to people all over Italy.

“Over the years I translated all of the Rebbe Rayatz’s Memoirs and kuntres ‘U’Maayan Mi’Beis Hashem.’ It started with four pages on a weekly basis and reached sixteen pages. I received much encouragement and many brachos from the Rebbe for the material I sent him every week. The Rebbe instructed us to bind each year’s worth of issues in order to preserve them.

“Jews from distant villages all over Italy wanted to subscribe. Quite a few people were mekurav to Judaism, thanks to it. A Jewish girl came across one of the publications and enjoyed it very much. At that time, she had taken a great interest in a certain Mexican cult. That was her entire world. She even went to the temple of this cult, where she sought to study the religion with the shamans. How surprised she was when one of the shamans told her, ‘You are Jewish and you have the truth. Why don’t you learn it?’

“When she returned to Italy and saw my publication, she contacted us through the address on it. By then I was giving shiurim which were attended by dozens of young people. She joined and enjoyed it. Her t’shuva process was very quick, and for a long time she helped me with folding, typing and printing the publication. Today, she lives in Eretz Yisroel and has a frum family. She herself writes and edits Jewish books.

“One week I printed a letter written by the Rebbe to a Jew who had a store. He had written to the Rebbe that even though it was open on Shabbos he did not ‘finish the month,’ and if he made most of his profits on Saturday how could he close the store on Shabbos? The Rebbe answered that he could not benefit from the money he earned on Shabbos, since it was money that wasn’t coming to him, as a Jew. The money could not be used for good purposes and would be wasted on unimportant things.

“A few months later I got a letter from a Jew in southern Italy. He also had a store that was open on Shabbos because he made more on this day than any other day. When he read the letter he decided to try it out. He would close his store on Shabbos and see what happened with his parnasa.

“He hung a ‘Closed’ sign on his

store on Shabbos and was amazed that at the end of the month, and the month afterwards, his profit was greater. Because of this, he began attending shul every Shabbos. People who saw his commitment to mitzvos considered him their spiritual role model and asked him to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShana. He wrote me asking whether I could help him with the halachos and whatever he needed to know about the t'kios.

"I was touched by his letter. Of course I contacted him and taught him, in several long phone conversations, what the shofar blowing signifies according to Chassidus, as well as the pertinent laws. I asked his permission to publicize his letter in an upcoming publication and he happily agreed. His letter made a great kiddush Hashem.

"You really can see the fulfillment of the statement, *"chazaka al taamula sh'eina chozeres reikam"* (no outreach effort goes to waste). Many Jews, especially young ones, began attending the shiurim and making changes in their lives.

"There was a girl who was not religious who lived with a gentile. She read the publication and came to shiurim that I gave in Chassidus. At the end of one of the shiurim, she told me about her life. She had some questions. As the minutes passed I saw that she was choking up with tears. She was serious and the shiurim lit up her neshama. I invited her to our home, where she would feel more comfortable talking about what was on her mind without other shiur participants around.

"That same day one of my daughters brought her skirts and modest clothing. A few days later they went shopping with her and she bought proper clothing. She quickly cut off ties with the goy and

today is happily married to a Chassidishe man and lives in a large Chabad community.

"The publication was published for twenty years, starting with 127 copies and building up to tens of thousands. For various reasons we no longer publish it."

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R' Rodal became involved with the shul in the prime tourist area of Milan years later. When I asked him how it came about, the answer was similar to what I had heard previously - that he can't relax. When he saw that his Shabbos had become relatively quiet in connection with hafatza, he looked for something to do and ended up



**Rabbi Rodal giving a shiur  
in the Sefardic shul in Milan**

at the shul.

"I had nothing to do on Shabbasos, so I looked for something. R' Gershon Mendel Garelik hooked me up with the shul in the tourist center, where one of the older worshippers served as the rabbi. At first, I was the Baal Korei and I occasionally gave sermons, to the satisfaction of the rabbi and the other worshippers. When he passed away, I was appointed as the rabbi.

"It's an interesting shul, which was founded by Holocaust survivors. This explains the name of the shul, 'Beis Shmuel Sh'eiris HaPleita.' When I first joined the shul, there were over one hundred

people davening there. All were men in their eighties. They were divided into two groups: those who were religious and wanted to daven despite their wartime experiences, and those - of whom there were many - who went to shul to socialize and eat herring. (One of them explained to me that this is the reason it's called a Beis Knesses and not a Beis T'filla - because 'knesses' is from the root that means to convene).

"Nearly 150 people came to shul on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. Most of them have since died and we have built a new minyan. Many of the children of those Jews either assimilated or moved to other countries, especially England, Eretz Yisroel and the United States.

"In recent years, making a living in Italy has become more difficult. Many Jews are leaving the country and the Jewish community is shrinking every year. If you don't have a successful business it's hard to exist in a dignified manner. A decent salary is 1500 Euro and renting an apartment costs 1000 Euro! This explains why the number of people at the shul is drastically smaller. Many of the men are mekuravim who began with shiurim and changed their lives.

"The shul, which used to be closed all week, is now open three times a week for the shiurim that I give, and boruch Hashem, there is a nice crowd."

Another factor in the shul's favor is that it is located in a prime tourist area which is visited by millions of tourists a year, including tens of thousands of Jews. Many of them see the shul and walk in to look around. It definitely makes an impression on them. Many others are exposed to the influence of the shul even before they enter, as was related at the beginning of this article.



R' Rodal has many stories about the impact the shul makes:

"We had an interesting story five years ago during a rainy winter. An

Israeli who worked in computers came to Milan on business. On Shabbos he decided to tour. How surprised he was to see a shul! He

came in and I welcomed him. He was impressed and stayed until the end of the davening. He was not at all observant and even despised the religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel, but when I suggested that he join us for the Shabbos meal, he accepted.

"By the time the meal was over it was pouring outside. I offered him my coat and he was surprised by my generosity. Later on he told me that he had never met a Jew so willing to help him just because he was a Jew. He could have counted on the fingers of one hand the number of conversations he had had in his life with a religious Jew. I said to him with a smile that he didn't have the face of a thief and he could leave the coat in the shul. We ended up becoming good friends.

"When we were in Israel last year, he invited us to his house and we visited him, to the amazement of his friends who knew his views. We often speak on the phone and his views have changed from one extreme to another regarding religious Jews."

R' Rodal is one of those Chassidim about whom it can be said that he "lives Moshiach." He is proud of the fact that his sons serve as shlichim and "all are meshichistin who publicize about Moshiach and are not ashamed to do so." When I asked what his approach on this subject is, and what his response is to those Chassidim who are afraid of openly speaking about Moshiach, he said:

"There is something basic we have to understand. If your mekuravim see that you speak logically, and you are not someone they consider a nut, they will accept the entire message. Are the laws of borer on Shabbos any more rational? All of Judaism is based on emuna. In all my shiurim I speak about Moshiach and I teach the Rambam's Hilchos Melachim, as

## THE REBBE TOOK RESPONSIBILITY

R' Rodal told of the great miracle he saw with his father, R' Yosef, in 5731. His father had been a shliach of the Rebbe Rayatz in Montreal and was a rosh yeshiva there. He set the tone among the shluchim and enjoyed rare kiruvim from the Rebbe Rayatz. He even received a large sum of money from the Rebbe in order to buy a summer home in the mountains, so the children could spend time there while he worked.

"After the passing of the Rebbe Rayatz, my father asked the Rebbe permission to sell Siddurim, Tallisos and Chumashim and some Judaica items. My father had a small bookcase where he kept these items and sold them to those who ordered them. He did this as a side job because his salary from the mosdos was not enough to support his household.

"The small bookcase became a bigger bookcase and then it became a room, which turned into a Judaica store. My mother ran the store and my father would help her in the evenings when he finished his other jobs. More people moved into the neighborhood and the store grew. Eventually he had two stores.

"In 5731 my father had a severe heart attack and the doctors told us how critically ill he was. They had to do a bypass, which required them to take arteries from his leg and transplant them in his heart, a medical procedure which is done for heart disease. My father also suffered from diabetes. The doctors told him that if he didn't stay away from the store, his days were numbered because the pressure from the stores was too much for him.

"I was already in Milan for half a year on shlichus and my brother and I decided to write to the Rebbe and ask for his advice and bracha. My father was not that old and he still had to marry off my younger sister.

"In our letter, we described the situation and the doctors' opinion, and asked what to do. In the past, I had helped my father a lot in the store and I asked whether I should leave shlichus in Italy in order to run the store. I thought this was also a form of shlichus, since my father didn't sell vegetables; he sold t'fillin and mezuzos, and checked them too.

"My second question was whether my father should take a partner to reduce the burden of dealing with the bookkeeping, whether the business should be sold, or whether he should continue to run the store.

"As far as returning from Italy, the Rebbe said that was not at all a consideration. As for taking a partner, the Rebbe crossed that off and made a line under the last suggestion that my father should continue to run the store and added a bracha. We were stunned by this answer but you don't argue with the Rebbe.

"Despite the doctors' grim predictions, my father lived another 18 years, until 5749. Two years before he died he was still working in the store. All the doctors who knew him were utterly shocked."

well as the Rebbe's sichos on inyanei Moshiach and Geula.

"Of course we speak about who Moshiach is, too, and when you tell them about the amazing miracles in your personal experience which came about through the Rebbe's brachos, people realize and accept that if our generation is the generation of Geula, then the person most qualified to be Moshiach is the Rebbe. I am very close to my students, and when I explain this to them, they are receptive.

"People see that the world is undergoing dramatic upheavals and look forward to the Geula. You also have to understand the most significant aspect of publicizing the Besuras Ha'Geula: you have to teach and learn and not suffice with slogans. The Rebbe said that learning is the easiest and most direct path; we Chassidim know that this is the only path. Otherwise, why would a Jew who makes a good salary, who owns a yacht and other luxuries, or someone who is frum, who lives in a nice Jewish community, want Moshiach? The only way to get people to want it is if they learn the Rebbe's sichos about Geula.

"The Rebbe says that the Geula will come with kindness and mercy, and we Chassidim are sure about this. We see how the nations of the world are *tummeling* about Iran's nuclear capabilities and some frum

Jews are warning about another disaster that will come upon us. We know that this is merely another way that Hashem has of waking us up from our sleep. We have to learn, internalize what we learn, and put it into action.

"The most amazing thing in this redoubled darkness we are in - the ray of light within this last, difficult test - is the ability to write to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh and see miracles.

"One night last winter, I had to go to Venice to give a shiur at the Chabad house. It's a few hours away and I wasn't sure how to go. If I went by train, I would be unable to return after the shiur in time to be in class in the morning. However, driving home after the shiur wasn't safe, because in the winter there is heavy fog that greatly reduces visibility. I wrote about this to the Rebbe and put it in a volume of Igros Kodesh. How surprised I was to open to a letter about the development of the car. I didn't need more than that. I drove there and the shiur went well, and when I drove home there was no fog - which was odd considering the weather that night."

Before I concluded the interview I asked R' Rodal to tell me his guidelines on shlichus. He said, "You have to really love every Jew! It's not enough that they attend shiurim. You have to ask them how they're doing, how they feel, and try

***She even went to the temple of this cult, where she sought to study the religion with the shamans. How surprised she was when one of the shamans told her, 'You are Jewish and you have the truth. Why don't you learn it?'***

and help them even with material things. Every Jew is G-d's child. We have to instill this idea within ourselves and live with this reality, because it's possible to fool someone only once or twice. If we view the person we are talking to with importance and respect, they will feel it, and our goal is to be mekarev **every** Jew. At the source, we are all equal; the rest is just the superficiality of Olam HaZeh. All of us, especially the shluchim, constantly see siyata d'Shmaya and live with a heavy responsibility on our shoulders.

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# A CHABAD ENCLAVE IN WARTIME

By Shneur Zalman Berger

[Continued from Issue #666]

## RICH CHASSIDIC LIFE

While the war was raging, the government's attention was focused on the burning front, and they paid less attention to civilians. Thus, the persecution of religious Jews and institutions diminished somewhat. There were hardly any mass arrests. It is possible that the presence of the Jews who had arrived as refugees from Poland helped somewhat.

Whatever the reason, Anash were able to arrange minyanim and have chadarim, although they didn't publicize it. There were Chabad minyanim in various places and a Chabad shul opened on Czekar Street, where many of the famous Chassidic figures davened.

Rabbi Aharon Zakon<sup>a</sup> described Chassidic life in this shul:

"Rabbi Shneur Zalman Garelik was the rav of the Czekarker shul. The shamash was Rabbi Chaim Binyamin Brod, and the one responsible for the mikva that was near the shul was Rabbi Mordechai Dovber Lokshin. Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman was the mashpia, and in this position he gave a shiur in Likkutei Torah to balabatim and farbrenged with them."

Every Shabbos, a number of distinguished Chassidim would daven in the shul "with avoda" as in days gone by.

Rabbi Zakon related:

"On Shabbasos, after the regular

minyan ended, I saw the well-known Chassidim, Rabbi Yona Poltaver, Rabbi Yisroel Neveler, Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, Rabbi Itche Leima's (Minkowitz), Rabbi Zalman Duchman, and other Chassidim, davening at length. One stood near the window, another with his face to the wall; one davened enthusiastically and another meditated, while yet another sang a niggun d'veikus. This powerful sight remains engraved in my heart until this very day."

R' Shlomo Galperin added in his memoirs:

"All of us Anash, young and old, enjoyed watching and listening to the sweetness of his davening Kabbalas Shabbos with the traditional Chassidic tune from generations past ... and when R' Shlomo Chaim sat on Shabbos on the bench in shul and davened, with the tallis covering his head as he *shuckled*, sometimes with tremendous d'veikus, he seemed like an angel of G-d."

R' Yisroel Neveler's lengthy davening is also described in R' Shlomo Galperin's memoirs:

"It was possible to see how he poured his soul out before G-d. He would daven in a way of 'her lips moved and her voice could not be heard.' Then he would meditate upon matters of Chassidus with great effort, until he understood them."

The Chassidishe farbrengens

were the glue that gave them the strength to carry on despite the terrible situation. The Chassidim of Tashkent did not forget those farbrengens.

R' Aharon Zakon:

"It once happened that the mashke was finished in the middle of a farbrengen. It was about two in the morning and R' Yona and I left the shul in search of mashke. We walked through the city, knocked on the doors of Anash, woke them up and asked them to donate some mashke. When we had enough mashke we returned to the farbrengen.

"One Shabbos, while R' Yona was farbrenging with us, R' Nachum Labkowski came – on Shabbos he would finish davening late and sometimes would daven until sunset – and R' Yona, who had drunk a bit of mashke already, said to him, 'When we come to Olam HaBa, they will seat R' Nachum in Gan Eden and make a little window for him, through which he will look at us being roasted in Gehinom ...'"

Every Shabbos there was a Chassidishe farbrengen in R' Chaikel Chanin's house, as his son, R' Shneur Zalman relates:

"Every Shabbos my father managed, through his connections and money, to obtain food, and whoever participated in those farbrengens left sated both physically and spiritually. There were many Chassidim who had no

***While most Chabad communities in Eastern Europe were uprooted because of World War II, the Chabad k'hilla in Tashkent was actually founded because of the war. Hundreds of Chabad Chassidim from all over Russia arrived there as refugees. Despite the difficult financial hardships, they united in brotherly love and formed a beautiful k'hilla with chinuch and chesed. \* The story of the Chabad k'hilla in Tashkent. \* Part 2 of 2***

food but were ashamed to ask for help, even though they were nearly dying of starvation. When they came to this kiddush, they sat together with everybody else, said l'chaim, and revived themselves."

At the many farbrengens held in the home of R' Mordechai Sirota the great mashpiim of the day farbrengend: R' Yona Poltaver, R' Yisroel Neveler, R' Peretz Mochkin, R' Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, and others. "Those nights the mashke poured like water," recalled one of those attendees, "and they would dance on the table until light of day."

When R' Mordechai left the Soviet Union, he went to the Rebbe for Yud Shevat 1972. During his yechidus, the Rebbe asked him with a broad smile, "Why didn't you bring the table that you farbrenged on so much?"

### **THE TALMUD TORAH**

The children could not wander about idly without a Jewish, Chassidishe chinuch. Some of the Chassidim hired melamdim to teach their sons privately. R' Peretz Mochkin hired R' Yisroel Neveler as a melamed, while



***The Uzbeki policeman asked the children angrily, “Where is the priest?” One of the talmidim burst out laughing at this question and the other children joined in. Their childish laughter saved the melamed.***

Mrs. Chaya Perla Galperin had R' Dovid Labkowski teach her son Shlomo (R' Dovid was a famous oved and proficient in Toras HaChassidus. He was later arrested, and he died in the cellars of the secret police in Tashkent).

R' Shlomo Galperin wrote about their learning:

“R' Dovid Labkowski was an impressive Chassid; he was always well groomed, with a sparkling white shirt and a sirtuk that looked new. His shoes were always polished. He was very particular and well-organized. This was a time when people lived in poverty, and yet he acted as a talmid chacham - ‘at all times your clothing should be clean.’ He would come to our house to teach us Chumash. He was punctual and precise. He did not spend a lot of time on explanations, but properly explained every verse in an orderly fashion.”

After a period of time, small classes began to form for the study of Gemara. R' Shlomo Chaim

Kesselman taught two classes, each with a few students. Then R' Yona Poltaver established chadarim and yeshivos in Tashkent. He took care of hiring teachers and finding homes where the learning could take place. He also made sure the talmidim had a hot meal, which cost a fortune in those days.

The melamdim and maggidei shiur during this time were the cream of Chabad in Tashkent: Rabbi Chaim Meir Garelik, Rabbi Hirschel Lieberman, R' Shneur Zalman Buber (Pevsner), Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, Rabbi Yisroel Neveler, and Rabbi Moshe Rubinstein. Rabbi Nachum Trebnik, who came to Tashkent in the middle of the war, was appointed the *bochen* (the oral tester) of the chadarim and yeshivos.

Rabbi Avrohom Maiyor (Drizin), who was one of the menahalim of Yeshivos Tomchei T'mimim in the Soviet Union, arrived in Tashkent in 1944. He too tested the talmidim. Occasionally, he would farbreng with the older talmidim and Anash.

One class was located in the home of Mrs. Chaya Perla Galperin, where Rabbi Yisroel Neveler taught.

Despite the diminishment in persecution, every so often the police and secret agents tried to catch the talmidim. This happened to the class in the Galperin house. One day, a policeman approached the house. Before he entered, R' Yisroel Neveler jumped out a window. The Uzbeki policeman, whose knowledge of religious matters was minimal, asked the children angrily, “Where is the priest?” One of the talmidim burst out laughing at this question and the other children joined in.

The policeman tried to get the children to talk and repeated his question over and over. The children just laughed more. The policeman did not understand why they were laughing and he finally

gave up and left. Thus, their childish laughter saved the melamed from interrogation and harsh punishment.

Because of incidents like these, the chadarim and yeshivos regularly moved from place to place. R' Yisroel Neveler and his talmidim wandered from one house to another. His educational views are engraved in his students' hearts. Many of them remember the stories he told on fast day afternoons.

“R' Yisroel was a terrific storyteller. We could visualize everything he told us as though we were seeing it,” said one of his talmidim.

Another class was held in the home of R' Zalman Leib Estulin. He was drafted in the Red Army, so it made sense to assume that the government wouldn't try to make life difficult for his wife, Raizel, while her husband was fighting for the Motherland. The students would gather in their house every day, arriving early in the morning so nobody would notice. They did not leave in the evening until people stopped walking in the streets. Mrs. Estulin took care of the talmidim, and prepared nutritious meals for them.

Her sister Mrs. Sarah Levkivker adds:

“Their house was comprised of one room where they ate and slept. It also served as a branch of Tomchei T'mimim for young bachurim. When necessary, they hung a piece of material as a curtain around the baby's bed, so that he could sleep.”

R' Aharon Zakon tells about learning in the Estulin house:

“We would go to R' Zalman Leib's house to learn after Shacharis. For a while, R' Zalman Leib would also supervise us. At a certain point, R' Yisroel Neveler taught us Gemara and Tanya.

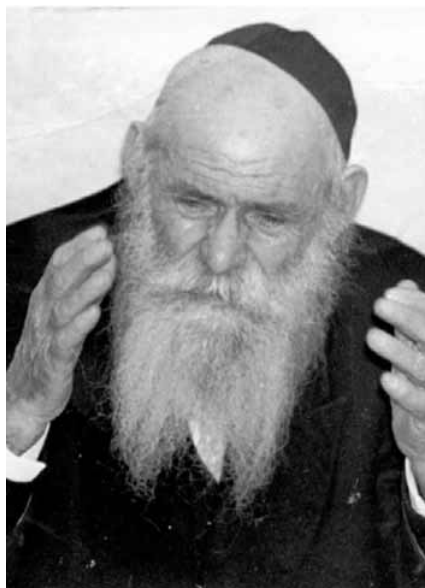
“The yeshiva consisted of two classes, one of older bachurim and

one of younger bachurim. When R' Yisroel gave a shiur to the older boys, the younger ones sat at the other end of the room and learned on their own, and then they switched. In the older class were Ben-Tziyon Friedman, Sholom Dovber Shemtov, Sholom Feldman, Chaim Yisroel Sperlin, Shlomo Galperin, Velvel Sirota, Chaim Ratovsky, me and another few bachurim. In the younger class were Berel Shaikowitz, Yisroel Duchman, Shmarya Pruss, Boruch Brikman, Yosef Greenberg, Chaim Rivkin, Berel Ratovsky and others.”

About a month later, R' Zalman Leib returned home on crutches, due to a serious war injury. He was happy that his house was hosting the talmidim of the yeshiva, and he took care of their needs. R' Berel Shaikowitz described R' Zalman's return:

“About a month after the yeshiva was established, R' Zalman Leib returned home. He was an impressive figure, with a reputation as an outstanding lamdan. He joined the yeshiva's staff. During the day he would supervise our learning and help any bachur who encountered a difficulty in his learning.

“Even during the difficult periods of hunger and privation, when R' Zalman Leib was forced to



**Mashpia, R' Shlomo  
Chaim Kesselman**

go out looking for empty bottles in order to earn a few coins for returning them to the store, after he sold a few bottles, which enabled him to buy bread for the next day, he stopped. He didn't worry about what would be two days hence, but went back to learning Torah.”

One day, the police approached the Estulin house. On the spur of the moment, the talmidim came up with an idea which saved them, as R' Berel Shaikowitz relates:

“In the middle of the room was a large barrel, and all the s'farim were

thrown in there. I took a piece of paper from the floor, cut it up, and stuck the pieces on R' Zalman Leib's beard. When the NKVD agent came in, he discovered, to his amazement, a man jumping around on crutches with pieces of paper in his beard, and a group of children laughing at him.

“He assumed it was a group of mischievous children who had found some lunatic to mock, and he left. It was an open miracle that the visit ended in this way.”

## **CHADARIM FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

Aside from the chadarim for the children of Chabad Chassidim, there were also chadarim for those who were not Lubavitch. These were also taken care of by the Chabad Chassidim. In 1944, Rabbi Eli Lipsker asked Rabbi Aharon Chazan to take on this holy task. R' Chazan agreed, and within a few months there were four chadarim in Tashkent, with eighty students of different ages who studied everything from reading from a Siddur to Gemara.

R' Chazan visited the homes of Jews and explained that their children ought to know about Judaism. He promised that the education would be free. After the



**R' Aharon Chazan**



**R' Zalman Leib Estulin**



**R' Peretz Mochkin**



**R' Dovid Labkovski**

parents gave their consent, he began teaching their children in his home. He wrote the letters of the Alef-Beis in a notebook, and within a few days the children knew the letters. Then he explained to the parents that in order to expand their knowledge, they had to learn in school.

The budget for these mosdos had to be very large:

“The financial expenses were enormous. Just the salaries for the melamdim were 20,000 rubles a month,” said R’ Chazan. “Aside from that, the talmidim were given a meal every day, which cost us tens of thousands of rubles. On top of that we had to pay to rent the rooms for the chadarim.

“The ones who primarily took on

this burden were wealthy Chabad Chassidim who made their money illegally. In the Soviet Union this entailed danger to their lives. In addition, the Lubavitcher businessmen had business acquaintances, irreligious Jews, whom they influenced to donate generously to these mosdos Torah.”

R’ Chazan supervised the learning, and was also responsible for the material end of things. He provided a meal every day for the talmidim, and the melamdim were paid by him without their knowing that Chabad Chassidim had donated the money.

R’ Chazan described the secretiveness of the operation:

“We were extremely careful, and everything was done secretly. The

Soviets looked away from religious activities as long as Polish Jewish refugees were in the Soviet Union.”

The Chabad community in Tashkent was a large and prominent Lubavitcher community during World War II, along with its sister-city in Samarkand. Unlike other communities, the Chabad community was formed because of the war, when numerous Lubavitcher refugees fled there. Despite the hardships, Chassidic life thrived there throughout the war years.

In 1946-7, most of the Lubavitcher Chassidim left the Soviet Union in the famous smuggling operation out of Lvov. Most of the Chassidim in Tashkent left in this way, and only a few dozen remained. The community continued to exist for another twenty-five years until the early 1970’s, when most of the Lubavitchers there left for Eretz Yisroel.

Even before the fall of communism in the Soviet Union, when the first seeds of perestroika were planted, one of Tashkent’s former sons, Rabbi Abba Dovid Gurewitz, returned there on shlichus. He eventually became the chief rabbi of Central Asia. Today, in Tashkent, Chabad’s accomplishments include a shul, a yeshiva, and a school with hundreds of students.

Over the years other shluchim went to Tashkent to help R’ Gurewitz, including grandchildren of askanei Chabad who lived there during the war years and had to operate secretly. Now they and their grandchildren can work openly and proudly.

*Sources: Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz, Toldos Chabad b’Russia HaSovietis, Lubavitch v’Chayoleha, Neced HaZerem, Seifer HaZichronos Divrei HaYamim (Gurkov), Gaon V’Chassid (Estulin), Ok-yol – Masa b’Mecaz Asia, Yehudis v’Yahadus b’Bris HaMoatzos, Anashim Chassidim Hayu, Toldos HaYehudim b’Asia HaTichona, So’aros b’Dmama, Beer Mayim Chaim, Beis Moshiaach, Kfar Chabad, T’shura Mochkin Sivan ’67, and personal interviews*

### “KOL NIDREI AFTER A LONG FARBRENGEN”

The many hardships in the lives of the refugees in Tashkent did not dim the character of Chassidic life. Though at times they seemed to contradict one another, they managed to unite them. Along with hunger, worries, and sadness, there were Chassidishe simcha, chayus and *lebedikait*, in no small part thanks to Chassidishe farbrengens.

The summer of 1941 is remembered by Chassidim as a very hard summer. They dreaded what the morrow would bring, and starvation and disease were rampant. Then, along came Yom Kippur. There were mixed feelings. The Chassidim in Tashkent prepared for Yom Kippur in a way that was fitting for those insane times. Rabbi Zushe Gross relates:

Erev Yom Kippur 5702 in Tashkent was unique. After davening Shacharis, R’ Nissan Nemenov asked my father, R’ Mulle, if there was mashke in the house. My father said there was, and R’ Nissan came to our house to farbreng. Word got around and many Chassidim began trickling in to attend the farbrengen on the eve of the holy day. The mashke poured like water.

“The sun was setting and they all ran to a nearby pond, immersed quickly, and ran to the minyan, which was in one of the homes. There was no time for a Seuda Mafsekes. The chazan for Kol Nidrei was supposed to be R’ Peretz Mochkin, but he had drunk a lot. He suggested that he go and immerse again to refresh himself. Some pointed out that it was minutes to sunset, but he ran to the pond, immersed and returned to shul.

“I remember how R’ Peretz poured out his heart with that Kol Nidrei. It was frightening to hear and it swept up all the people there, who melted in tears. It was a Kol Nidrei after a long preparation in the form of a Chassidishe farbrengen.”

# RABBI HILLEL PEVZNER A”H

By Shneur Zalman Berger

*A great feeling of mourning descended upon Anash with the passing of Rabbi Hillel Pevzner, founder and director of the Sinai educational empire in Paris and one of the roshei yeshiva in Tomchei T’mimim in Brunoy.*

Chabad Chassidim around the world, and especially in France, were saddened to hear of the passing of Rabbi Hillel Pevzner, one of the distinguished senior Chabad rabbanim, director of Sinai Institutions and longtime shliach in France. As soon as word of his passing on Friday, Erev Shabbos Shuva, became known, his students, friends and numerous Chabad Chassidim in Paris began streaming towards the Pevzner home.

Many of them related for the first time how he had helped them, materially and spiritually. Some spoke about “the Rav,” while others spoke about “the Menahel,” and yet others remembered him as a Maggid shiur who taught them how to learn.

R’ Pevzner’s personal friend, former French president, Jacques Chirac, did not wait to be informed by the family. As soon as he heard the news, he called the son, R’

Yosef Yitzchok, and began the conversation with three words

which he said in Hebrew: “Boruch Dayan HaEmes.” In their conversation, Chirac expressed his sorrow at the passing of a longtime friend and said he would be coming to console the family.

A large crowd gathered on Sunday morning for the funeral, which left from a shul in one of the magnificent Sinai buildings. Eulogies were given by Rabbi Gilles Bernheim, chief rabbi of France, Rabbi Dovid Mashash, chief rabbi of Paris, Rabbi Yosef Sitruk, former chief rabbi of France, Rabbi Dovid Moshe Lieberman, rav from the Shomrei HaDas k’hilla in Antwerp, Rabbi Yirmiyahu Menachem Cohen, Av Beis Din in Paris, Rabbi Yosef Dovid Frankfurter, rav and Av Beis Din of Adas Yereim in Paris, and Rabbi Yichye Tuboul, rav and Av Beis Din in Lyons.

One of the sons, Rabbi Avrohom Boruch Pevzner, and Menachem Mendel Slonim, a grandson, spoke movingly on behalf of the family. The oldest son, R’ Avrohom Boruch Pevzner, who until recently served



Rabbi Avrohom Boruch Pevzner eulogizing his father





**Rabbi Pevzner with the Rebbe**

as a shliach to Eretz Yisroel and mashpia in Toras Emes, was announced as the successor to the rabbinic position. Another son, R' Yosef Yitzchok, will take over the shlichus and running of the Sinai educational empire in Paris.

## **WANDERING AMONG UNDERGROUND YESHIVOS**

Rabbi Hillel Pevzner was born on 29 Teives 5681/1921, in Minsk. At this time, the communists were beginning to come down hard on Judaism, but his parents, R' Avrohom Boruch and Alte (nee

Hilvitz), raised him in the ways of Torah and Chassidus. From them he learned Torah and to preserve the ways of Chassidus with mesirus nefesh.

In his youth, he studied in underground yeshivos. At first he learned in Berditchev, together with his brother, Sholom Ber. Sholom Ber was arrested in this yeshiva, along with a group of children, who were sent to an orphanage. It took a miracle to release the children from there. From Berditchev, R' Hillel went to Zhitomir, and from there to Voronezh.

His father, may Hashem avenge his blood, who was rav and mashpia

in the Lubavitcher community in Minsk and a distinguished Chabad Chassid in Charkov, was exiled twice by the communists. The second time his strength did not hold out and he died in exile (see box).

During World War II, R' Hillel fled to Samarkand, where he learned with another three bachurim his age who later all served as directors of important mosdos chinuch: Rabbi Shlomo Matusof – shliach in Morocco; Rabbi Nissan Pinson – shliach in Tunis; and Rabbi Mordechai Levin – one of the directors of Beis Rifka in Kfar Chabad *beit*.

At the end of the war, R' Hillel left the Soviet Union when the Chassidim escaped via Lvov. He went first to the city of Bensheim and from there to Poking, Germany, where he learned in Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim. At this point he began his communal work when he, together with some other Chassidim, was sent to Prague to do rescue work with Chassidim who had left Russia and were in anti-Semitic Poland. The Rebbe Rayatz told them to work on moving the people over to the Western-occupied zones as soon as possible.

Chabad Chassidim in Poking decided that R' Pevzner and some other Chassidim should go to Prague. There they would help those who wanted to move from Poland to Germany and Austria, via Prague. They had another mission, which was to establish a link between the Chassidim in the camps and the Rebbe Rayatz and askanei Anash in Poland and France. Prague was the only place that had a phone connection and regular travel to the aforementioned places.

After a brief period in Prague he returned to learn in Poking, and from there he went to Paris.



**R' Hillel with talmidim of the yeshiva in Brunoy (center, wearing a tie)**

## MASTER TEACHER

R' Hillel married Asya Eidelman on the third night of Chanuka 5709. His wife stood by his side as his helpmate for nearly sixty years.

With the Rebbe's guidance, R' Hillel and his brother-in-law, Sholom Eidelman (shliach in Morocco), located old manuscripts, including Chassidic ones. They searched in the library of the Beis Midrash L'Rabbanim in Paris. When possible, they sent the Rebbe a manuscript or the book itself; otherwise, they sent photocopies. They received the Rebbe's encouragement and thanks.

R' Hillel was the Mashgiach in Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Brunoy. After some time, he became a Maggid shiur in the yeshiva, a position he filled until 1979. His students say he was extremely

knowledgeable in Shas and Poskim, which was apparent in his shiurim. He enjoyed sharing halachic riddles and telling jokes to lighten his shiurim.

His style of teaching was such that every student had to use his head and not rely on his explanations. His son, R' Avrohom Boruch, who learned with him, says that after a year of learning with his father, talmidim were able to learn Gemara and mefarshim on their own. This is because in addition to deep explanations, his father made sure that every student used his abilities to understand things on his own.

## AV BEIS DIN VAAD RABBANEI LUBAVITCH IN FRANCE

R' Hillel served for 55 years as

the rav of Lubavitcher Chassidim in France. He took on this position when Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dvorkin, who held this position before him, emigrated from France to the United States. The Chassidim who remained in France were aware of R' Pevzner's vast halachic knowledge, and began to ask him their halachic questions. Thus, without elections or a formal decision of any kind, the Chassidim chose him as the Chabad rav in France.

When Chabad communities began to proliferate in France and rabbanim were appointed over each k'hilla, a Vaad Rabbanei Lubavitch in France was formed, and R' Pevzner was chosen as the Av Beis Din. In this position, he guided all the rabbanim in France.



Rabbi Pevzner  
receiving minim  
from the Rebbe

In later years, he was one of the founders of “Merkaz Rabbanei Europe”, and until the day of his passing he served as a member of the presidium of the council of Merkaz Rabbanei Europe.

R’ Pevzner did much to raise the standard of religious observance, particularly in Paris, but in the entire country as well. He founded a large scale kashrus organization and issued rulings in all parts of Shulchan Aruch. Many

people went to him for adjudication in monetary disputes. Lubavitcher Chassidim constantly consulted with him regarding halachic queries. His rulings were known to be wise and deep. He never compromised when it came to halacha, yet he tried to make both sides happy and to find creative, halachic solutions wherever possible.

For example, his son Avrohom Boruch related, some people are

adversely affected by moisture in their ears and immersing in a mikva is problematic for them. “My father came up with the idea of using fish oil from a certain species, which blocks the ear from moisture and is not considered a *chatzitza* because anything that comes from the sea is not a barrier.” It was a brilliant solution, which made life easier for many people.

He forged good ties with an

## HIS FATHER DIED IN EXILE

His father, R’ Avrohom Boruch, endured much suffering before dying in exile. In his youth, he learned in Lubavitch and was one of the chozrim of the Rebbe Rashab. He married Alte Hilvitz, daughter of R’ Menachem Mendel, rav of the town Zembin. The Rebbe Rayatz appointed him as rav and mashpia of the Chabad k’hilla in Minsk. In 1930 he was arrested by the communists and sent to exile.

Why was he arrested?

R’ Hillel related:

“My father, A”H, was the rav of the Chabad shul in Minsk. The communists, who wanted to close it, tried persuading the balabatim to leave. My father went up to the bima holding a large wooden stick and announced: ‘The first one to leave the beis midrash and give it over to the wicked ones, will get his head split open with this stick.’ Police agents who saw this arrested him on the spot.”

The communists sent him to a labor camp in Siberia. After two miserable years there he was released, and he moved to Charkov.

After Purim 1939, there was a wave of arrests of Chabad Chassidim in Ukrainian cities. The first arrests were carried out on the eve of 17 Adar in Chernigov and Charkov. In Chernigov, a number of Chassidim were arrested, including Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (the uncle of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn, the Rebbe’s father) and his nephew, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn (cousin of Rabbi Levi

Yitzchok Schneersohn, the Rebbe’s father).

In Charkov, Rabbi Avrohom Boruch Pevzner, Rabbi Meir Gurkov, Rabbi Tzemach Gurewitz, and Rabbi Nachum Yitzchok Pinson were arrested. A few days later a wave of arrests took place among Chassidim living in Kiev, and on 9 Nissan, the Rebbe’s father was arrested.

This time, R’ Avrohom Boruch was sent to Kazakhstan. After a few months there, his wife joined him. The arrest brought on persecutions for the rest of the family, as R’ Pevzner related: “When my father was in jail, I was called to the police station, where I was asked, ‘Why aren’t you registered as a member of the party?’ I answered, ‘Did anyone ask me to register until now?’ The policeman hissed, ‘This apple did not fall far from the tree.’”

R’ Avrohom Boruch became very ill, and on the night of Erev Pesach, 1940, he passed away. Before he died, he wrote the following chilling lines to his children, “I know that my days are numbered. I am mortally sick and

about to die. I am doubtful as to whether I will receive Jewish burial, but I am serene and concede on that. I go to my death wholeheartedly, for I can be certain that my children and descendants will go in the path of Hashem.”

R’ Hillel kept this postcard until the day he died.



**R’ Hillel’s father, Rabbi Avrohom Boruch Pevzner (may Hashem avenge his blood)**

array of French rabbanim from all groups. He had connections with rabbanim in Paris, France, and elsewhere. Even when differences of opinion cropped up among them, the French rabbanim always respected him and conceded that he was a man of Torah genius and a man of truth.

His scholarship was renowned, and his piskei halacha were occasionally publicized in various periodicals, including the Lubavitch periodical published in New York, "Yagdil Torah". His particular expertise was in mikvaos. On several occasions, the Rebbe referred halachic questions regarding mikvaos to him, and even instructed him to travel to various places in order to supervise and fix the mikvaos there.

About fifteen years ago, R' Pevzner traveled to the CIS in order to supervise mikvaos that were being built. He said that building mikvaos in the former Soviet Union was his revenge against the communists. Even in recent years he was asked to lecture at the convention of European rabbanim on the topic of mikvaos.

On more than one occasion, the Rebbe referred to him as "the Parisian rav." At a Tishrei farbrengen in 5725, when the Rebbe wanted to clarify a halachic point during the farbrengen, he stated publicly, "The Parisian rav is here, so he can answer the question."

About twenty years ago, the Rebbe said a sicha in which he referred to the rabbanim of the community as "*abir sh'b'abirim*" (the most powerful of the powerful ones). The next day, a Sunday, the Rebbe said to R' Pevzner (apparently at "dollars"), "When I said "*abir sh'b'abirim*" I meant you too."

In 5730, when R' Pevzner came to the Rebbe, the Rebbe told him



**R' Hillel and his son, R' Yosef Yitzchok with models of the Sinai schools**

that he and several other rabbanim should test the talmidim on K'vutza.

For over fifty years he served as Rav, and even in his later years he continued to answer halachic questions at all hours of the day.

His son R' Avrohom Boruch relates:

"Four years ago I was at my parents' house late at night when the phone rang. My mother answered the phone. It was someone with a halachic question. Despite the late hour, she woke my father and he answered the question. My father did not have set times for answering questions, nor did he have set times for people to call him. His house was always open and he always responded to questions."

## **FATHER TO THOUSANDS OF TALMIDIM**

R' Pevzner's most notable accomplishment was founding the Sinai educational system, in which thousands of students are educated. He served as its menahel for decades.

It all began in 5725 when R' Pevzner took over the running of a Talmud Torah which was about to fall apart, located in a small apartment in the Pletzel. He also opened a Chabad school for children who were not Lubavitch. At first he had only eight students. He worked very hard to recruit more students to the Chabad mosdos, which he had founded with the Rebbe's encouragement and bracha.

He put all his energy into developing the mosdos, which quickly expanded until thousands of children were in attendance. In 5741, he brought his son, Yosef Yitzchok, into the administration. Yosef Yitzchok was later appointed as the menahel while R' Hillel served as president. Together they developed the mosdos by buying spacious buildings, with the encouragement of the Rebbe.

As R' Yosef Yitzchok told *Beis Moshiach*:

"In 5749 – Shnas HaBinyan – the Rebbe encouraged the building of Chabad houses and private homes. That is when we decided to build a huge complex which would

include all our mosdos. We quickly began working on the plans, and a small model was given to the Rebbe.

“The Rebbe’s response to the building of a complex was amazing. We received instructions and brachos throughout the process, and the Rebbe contributed a large amount of money towards the building expenses. In Shnas HaBinyan, the Rebbe said that whoever built a private or public building would get \$100 from the Machne Israel fund. I was in New York in Tammuz, 5749, and we were told by the secretary, R’ Groner, that the Rebbe would give \$100 to whoever contributed towards the building in Paris!

“The Rebbe said that the offer stood to those who would contribute by Erev Rosh HaShana. We established a base line amount of \$5000, and the donations poured in. On Erev Rosh HaShana, the final day for donations, there was a long line at my father’s door. He

gave out checks for \$100 which the Rebbe had sent.

“The Rebbe’s unique donation enabled us to raise enough money to cover 80% of the costs of the building. We borrowed the rest from the bank.

“Tishrei, 5752, marked the opening of the magnificent educational complex, which educates children from two months of age until marriage. The complex also includes a community center, mikvaos, a Chabad house, etc.

“The media coverage was extensive. This was the first time in the history of France that a Jewish school was built. All the existing schools had gotten old buildings, while this was a seven story structure with 8500 sq. meters. The size, too, was dictated by the Rebbe. He said to use the area we bought to its maximum capacity.

“The Rebbe considered it highly important to build a magnificent building in France, and he wanted it to be a model for other mosdos.

The Rebbe instructed us to arrange visits to the school complex so that people could see how much was being invested into Jewish education.

“A group of about a hundred people, including donors and those involved in planning and building the complex, went to the Rebbe for Shabbos, Parshas VaYakhel, 5752. Heading the group was my father, along with other members of the hanhala. On Sunday, 26 Adar I, when the Rebbe gave out dollars for tz’daka, my father gave the Rebbe the key to the building. The Rebbe took the key, blessed us, and said with a broad smile, ‘Start immediately to build a new building.’

“I was flabbergasted. We had just completed this huge complex which would include all the mosdos, and had caravans nearby available to us. Why did we need to build another building?

“After some time, the caravans were burned and my question was answered. If G-d forbid there had been students in those caravans ...

“A few days later we returned to France, shaken and terribly upset by news of the Rebbe’s stroke on 27 Adar, but the Rebbe’s instruction superseded our feelings. I immediately invited a senior official of the municipality to come visit the mosdos. My goal was to get him interested in helping us obtain another lot, where we could build yet another building.

“After he heard about our mosdos and the Rebbe’s instruction to build another building, he said to me, ‘Your Rebbe is a prophet.’ It turned out that the street where the Chabad daycare center was located was scheduled for demolition by the municipality, though it had not yet been publicly announced. Those who lived on that street would have to move, and the city was going to sell the lots for private initiatives.

## WHEN WILL HE COME AND REDEEM US?

As for R’ Hillel Pevzner’s longing for Geula, we will quote from an interview that he gave three years ago for the publication of *Merkas Rabbanei Europe*:

“Even as his many commitments which surrounded him are diminishing in his old age, one concern still weighs on him: M-O-S-H-I-A-C-H ... When is he coming? This question comes from his heart, every few minutes during the course of our conversation. ‘When he is coming already to redeem us?’ he asks, as tears come from his eyes and his voice chokes up.”

“... As we spoke about the success of the educational empire he founded and the beautiful fruits that grow in its orchard, a silent cry bursts forth from his lips, ‘When is Moshiach coming? Moshiach has so much work to do. Every Jew yearns for the coming of Moshiach. He should just come already!’”

\*What can be done, specifically, to bring the Geula?

“We try to be mekarev more and more Jewish to Hashem.”

\*What area do we need to work on amongst European Jews?

“To hasten the coming of Moshiach. The rabbanim in their communities need to strengthen this inyan of looking forward to Moshiach’s coming, and they need to do all they can so that Jews anticipate and daven for Moshiach’s coming.”

"I immediately submitted a request to build another complex there. After we obtained the permits, the city decided not to destroy the street. As the permits had already been given, they were not retracted.

"On 12 Nissan, 5753, the Rebbe gave, through the secretaries, three packets of dollars for the building. In one packet were one hundred \$5 bills; in the second were one hundred \$10 bills; and in the third were one hundred \$20 bills. The Rebbe's participation gave us a big push forward. We eagerly worked on preparing the plans for the next building.

"Shortly after Gimmel Tamuz, 5754, we celebrated the groundbreaking of Heichal Menachem. A little over a year later, the building was completed.

"As time went by, we realized it was a lot to ask of children to travel from one end of Paris to the other in order to attend a Chabad school. We decided to build another complex in the 17th *arrondissement*, an exclusive section of Paris.

"The groundbreaking took place on 6 Tishrei, 5761, and two years later the third complex, called "Ki Tov," was already in operation. It included many mosdos: a daycare

center, preschool, elementary school, vocational school, Kollel, a Machon L'Smicha, etc. Mr. Chirac's wife attended the Chanukas Ha'bayis."

### PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FRENCH PRESIDENT

How did it come to pass that the wife of the French President attended a Chabad event? This was the result of the work of the Pevzner family to build relationships with the political leadership in France, including heads of state. The following episode illustrates their special connection:

Four years ago, the previous president, Mr. Chirac, received a Jewish delegation in his palace. In the course of the visit, he sat on the side with R' Hillel Pevzner and his son R' Yosef Yitzchok, speaking with them about their work and about the increase of anti-Semitism in France. This picture, which was publicized in all the media, made a tremendous impression.

R' Yosef Yitzchok related more about their connection with Chirac:

"Chirac was a big 'chassid' of

***At a Tishrei farbrengen in 5725, when the Rebbe wanted to clarify a halachic point during the farbrengen, he stated publicly, "The Parisian rav is here, so he can answer the question."***

my father. He always told his friends that when Rabbi Pevzner told him to do something, he did not dare refuse."

No wonder,, then that in Chirac's autobiography, he emphasizes his ties with the Pevznars.

### SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REBBE

The treatment that R' Pevzner received from the Rebbe was amazing. He had many kiruvim over the years. His family relates that each time he went to the Rebbe, when the Rebbe came out for the first t'filla at which R' Hillel was present, the Rebbe would look at him and nod a greeting. R' Pevzner was mekushar heart and soul to the Rebbe. Any instruction he received from the Rebbe regarding rabbanus and the mosdos, he followed, even when at first glance things weren't always clear. He accepted what the Rebbe said with bittul.

When I asked his son and successor, R' Avrohom Boruch,



Giving a shiur in the yeshiva

about his father, he said, "My father was a real Chassid. As a young bachur he already knew all of Tanya by heart, word for word. His Krias Shma at night took half an hour or more. For many years he would get up early on Shabbos, learn Chassidus for a few hours, and then daven at length until the afternoon.

"Much can be written about his working on his middos. By nature he was tough, and he worked on himself to treat everybody in a very friendly way, and he always gave in.

"As for his being a baal chesed, that goes without saying; the same holds true for his being a Chassid who ran mosdos that help thousands of people materially and

spiritually; and his being a baki and gaon in Gemara, Halacha, and Chassidus."

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In the final days of 5768 people were asked to daven for R' Pevzner. He passed away on Motzaei Tzom Gedalya, leaving thousands of spiritual descendents in addition to his actual descendents: His sons, R' Avrohom Boruch, R' Yosef Yitzchok, R' Menachem Mendel – shliach in Geneva; Mrs. Shterna Sarah Kalmanson – wife of R' Yechiel Menachem Mendel, rosh Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Brunoy, Mrs. Rivka Naparstek – wife of R' Yechezkel of Paris, Mrs. Chana Slonim – wife of R' Chaim, shliach in Dijon.



President Chirac speaking to the Pevznars

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