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# WHY THE EMPHASIS ON G-D'S CHARIOT? G-D HIMSELF WAS REVEALED!

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 23, pg. 18-25

Translated by Boruch Merkur

1. The Rambam writes<sup>1</sup>: “It is a widespread custom that on the first day of the holiday (of Atzeres [i.e., Shavuot]) we read [the Torah portion beginning with the words], ‘In the third month,’<sup>2</sup> and we conclude with ‘The Chariot.’”<sup>3</sup> (The source for this custom is a Braisa in Megilla,<sup>4</sup> as cited in *Kesef Mishna*.) So is it ruled in *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*.<sup>5</sup>

Rashi writes<sup>6</sup> (quoted in the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>7</sup>) that the reason why we conclude with the Chariot of Yechezkel [which describes the angels bearing the Heavenly Throne] “is because He<sup>8</sup> was revealed on Sinai with a myriad of myriads of thousands of angels.”<sup>9</sup> The reason is explained at greater length in *Lvush*<sup>10</sup>: “We conclude with the Chariot of Yechezkel, for on that day [when the Jewish people received the Torah], in that choice circumstance, they all attained the heights of prophecy. All of them – both the small and great among them – heard ‘I am’ and ‘You shall not have’ from the mouth of the Alm-ghty.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, there is no doubt that they all grasped, at that event, the account of the Chariot to the full extent grasped by Yechezkel, as the matter is described,<sup>12</sup> ‘All the nation saw the sounds,’ which alludes entirely to the account of the Chariot. Thus, we likewise conclude the Torah reading with the account of the Chariot, which resembles the event [that occurred at Mount Sinai].” It is explained in the Radak on Yechezkel<sup>13</sup> in the name of our Sages,<sup>14</sup> “On the day of the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish people saw the Chariot as it was seen by Yechezkel – to the extent that they said that [at the Giving of the Torah] the least significant among [even] the women was as great as Yechezkel ben Buzi.”<sup>15</sup>

At first glance, this reason (for concluding with the Chariot of Yechezkel) requires elaboration. The simple interpretation of the fact that the Haftora needs to discuss a topic that “resembles the event”<sup>16</sup> is that the Haftora speaks (not about something peripheral to the event but) about the main point of the event. In the case at hand, however, the vision of the **Chariot** that took place at the Giving of the Torah, at first glance, is not expressive of the very essence of the concept of the Giving of the Torah. For

the essential point of the Giving of the Torah is, rather, the revelation of G-d [Himself and not His angels] to all the Jewish people, as well as the giving of the Torah to the Jews.

In light of the above, it is seemingly more appropriate that on the first day [of Shavuot<sup>17</sup>] the reading of the Torah portion describing the Giving of the Torah (“which expresses the theme of the day when the Torah was given”<sup>18</sup>) should be concluded with Chabakuk,<sup>19</sup> “which speaks about the Giving of the Torah<sup>20</sup>: ‘The L-rd comes from Teiman’<sup>21</sup> at (i.e., refers to<sup>22</sup>) the Giving of the Torah.”<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, even if one would maintain that also this was one of the main themes of the Giving of the Torah – that the revelation of the Divine Presence took place together with the Chariot, as the *Lvush* writes (ibid), “for on that day, in that choice circumstance, etc., they all attained the heights of prophecy ... the account of the Chariot, etc.” – still, at first glance, the main emphasis is not the vision of the Chariot but the revelation of (the glory of) G-d, and the fact that they all heard “I am” and “You shall not have” from the mouth of the Alm-ghty. Especially considering that it says in the name of our Sages<sup>24</sup> that the vision of the Chariot resulted in the later affair of the [Golden] Calf, may G-d have mercy on us.

Even if one would say that the Haftora must be about the Chariot, it would apparently be more appropriate to conclude with Yeshayahu,<sup>25</sup> the Chariot that Yeshayahu saw, which emphasizes the vision of the glory of G-d – “I saw the L-rd sitting on a high and exalted throne, and His lower extremity filled the Temple. [Angels called] S’rafim stood, etc.” – and which speaks about the Chariot only in brief. (Indeed, when the Parsha of Yisro is read [which describes the Giving of the Torah], we conclude with the Chariot of Yeshayahu.) Whereas, Yechezkel elaborates at length and in detail about the Chariot but speaks concisely about G-d.

In addition, the revelation of the glory of G-d [seen prophetically by all the Jewish people] at the Giving of the Torah was not like the revelation of the glory of G-d described in the

Chariot of Yechezkel<sup>26</sup>; it more closely resembles the prophecy of Yeshayahu. In fact, it surpassed the prophecy of Yeshayahu. It **resembles** the level of the prophecy of Moshe, the Greatest of the Prophets, as it is said [regarding the Giving of the Torah], “Face to face G-d spoke with **you** [the Jewish people] **at the mountain**” (a point which is further supported by what was discussed above: “I am” and “You shall not have” was heard from the mouth of the Alm-ghty).<sup>27</sup>

In light of the above, the words of the Radak – that the Chariot of Yechezkel was revealed at the Giving of the Torah – also require explanation. Since the revelation of (the glory) of G-d [Himself] is far greater [than the revelation of His Chariot, why is the focus specifically on the revelation of the Chariot, which is dramatically inferior?] Indeed, what good is the light of a candle in broad daylight?

Another matter that requires elaboration is the very law that “we conclude with ‘**The Chariot**,’ for “We don’t expound...about the Chariot (even) for an individual, unless he is a wise person with an understanding mind.”<sup>28</sup> For this reason, “It is customary in some places that a great and wise person reads this Haftora.<sup>29</sup> The support for this practice is [the Mishna], ‘and not about the Chariot unless he is a wise person with an understanding mind.’”<sup>30</sup> In fact, [in contrast with the opinion of Rebbi Yehuda] the other position stated in the Mishna<sup>31</sup> is that we don’t conclude with the Chariot “lest one come to inquire and probe deeply into it.”<sup>32</sup>

The Tosafos Yom Tov<sup>33</sup> explains, “It appears to me that the reason why we don’t worry (about whether one comes to probe) is that in either of the two possible scenarios the concern is dismissed. Namely, if the person is wise, he is aware that these matters are not [readily] comprehended by [even] intelligent people, and that silence is [therefore] preferable to speech. If, however, he is not [a wise person], then ‘he who silences a fool is considered a wise man’<sup>34</sup> – that is, he will surely silence his foolishness, knowing that he is not capable of answering any question [posed to him on the matter].”

However, even according to this explanation, clarification is required. What is the benefit in reading about this matter to the congregation? The intent of reading [from the Tanach in public] is not only for the sake of elite individuals whom G-d has graced with understanding, [in our case] those who understand the Chariot, but for every single individual present in synagogue who hears the [Torah] reading and the Haftora, the majority of whom are not at the level of “a wise person with an understanding mind, etc.,” not at the level of understanding the Account of the Chariot.

Therefore, we must say that the Chariot of Yechezkel possesses a unique quality that underscores the innovation of the Giving of the Torah (for which reason the Chariot was revealed at the time of the Giving of the Torah). To that extent, this Haftora “resembles the event” insofar as it expresses the general innovation of the Giving of the Torah (even more so than the prophecy of the Chariot of Yeshayahu). And the Chariot

of Yechezkel’s unique quality (being that it “resembles the event” of the Giving of the Torah) is comprehensible to every single Jew.<sup>35</sup> (However, the **details** of the matters related in the Chariot of Yechezkel are so esoteric that they are incomprehensible to regular people, for “the profundity of the Account of the Chariot... is well beyond the reach of the intellect of the masses.”<sup>36</sup>)

2. We may assert the following explanation for the matter:

The Gemara<sup>37</sup> distinguishes the vision of the Chariot as seen by Yeshayahu from that of Yechezkel as follows: “All that Yechezkel saw, Yeshayahu saw [i.e., Yeshayahu simply refrained from enumerating the details of his vision. The reason for this omission is illustrated with the following analogy]. Yechezkel is like a village person who saw the king; Yeshayahu is like a city person who saw the king.”

According to a simple reading of this Gemara, the difference between them is not in what they **saw** per se, but in what they **related**. That is, [in contrast to Yechezkel] Yeshayahu “did not bother to elaborate on everything, for he was a prince who grew up in a palace, and a city person who sees the king is not overwhelmed and bewildered, and he does not bother to relate [all the details].”<sup>38</sup> But from the very fact that Yeshayahu is described as a “city person” – for he was a prince who grew up in a palace – and Yechezkel is described as a “village person” – whose place is not the king’s palace<sup>39</sup> – it is understood that the prophecy of Yeshayahu is superior and more complete,<sup>40</sup> as our Sages said, Yeshayahu is called, “the greatest of the prophets,”<sup>41</sup> and the level of his prophecy and comprehension [of Supernal matters] exceeded that of Yechezkel.

This distinction [stating the preeminence of Yeshayahu in prophecy] is underscored by the very fact that Yechezkel enumerates all details regarding the Chariot whereas Yeshayahu mainly emphasizes seeing the King Himself (and not the details of the Chariot), paralleling the simple difference between the way a city person and a village person relate to seeing the king, as follows: Upon seeing the king, a city person, since he was raised in the royal palace, has some grasp of the king’s greatness. Therefore, to him, the sight of (all the details related to) the king’s chariot and the like does not add to the king’s mystique and his reverence for the king. Rather, just seeing the king himself has this affect on him. The village person, on the other hand, who has no knowledge and comprehension of the greatness of the king, when he beholds the spectacle of his greatness and his royal grandeur, he is inspired to a heightened appreciation of the king’s greatness (notwithstanding the fact that even then he has no comprehension of the essential quality of the king’s greatness).<sup>42</sup>

The same is true when this distinction is applied to Yeshayahu and Yechezkel. The prophecy of Yeshayahu, “the greatest of the prophets,” is akin to the city person’s appreciation of the greatness of the king. Thus, the greatness of the King’s **Chariot** bears no significance to Yeshayahu. Whereas Yechezkel, although his main vision was of the **Chariot** [and not the King], this vision brought him to attain some knowledge of

and reverence for the greatness of the King Himself.

The above runs parallel with what is explained in the book *Avodas HaKodesh*<sup>43</sup> regarding the Chariot of Yechezkel, which reads as follows: “From his vision and grasp of the Chariot of the Lower Realm, he knew of the Supernal...for there is a Throne above a Throne and a Chariot above a Chariot and a Rider above a Rider and Glory above Glory. From his vision of four [angels known as] Chayos [as they appeared to him] Below, he knew and recognized that there is a primordial representation of them Above in the true Unity, for so is the tradition. From his vision Below of Energy surrounding the Throne, which is called the External Energy, he knew that there is a primordial representation of it Above, Inner Energy, etc. Similarly with regard to all that he saw Below, he knew that there is a representation of it Above.” The author of this work (*Avodas HaKodesh*<sup>44</sup>) proceeds to expound how all the [relevant] verses in Scripture “speak about the Lower Realm but allude to the Supernal Realm.”

That is to say that the meaning and significance of the Chariot of Yechezkel is that matters of the **Lower Realm** are “likenesses of their Supernal counterparts,”<sup>45</sup> for which reason (Yechezkel) enumerates at length about all the details of the Chariot and its manner, emphasizing, “From its midst was the likeness, etc., the likeness of a man ... the likeness of their faces, etc. And the likeness of the Chayos, etc.”<sup>46</sup>

We may assert that this explains the precise usage of the term “likeness,” which [paradoxically] signifies something and its opposite. In one sense, seeing a likeness indicates that one does not see the thing [itself], just its “likeness.” For example, one who looks in a mirror sees just a reflection [i.e., a representation or likeness, not the thing itself]. In another sense, though, the term “likeness” indicates that it does not possess [or express] anything apart from the likeness of the thing. That is, not only through seeing the likeness is it possible to know exactly how the thing itself appears, but the entire existence of the likeness is nothing more than its portrayal of the thing.

Indeed, that which Yechezkel saw, with all the details of the matters of the **Lower Realm**, their entire significance is nothing other than the fact that they are “likenesses of their Supernal counterparts.”<sup>47</sup>

Whereas Yeshayahu, being a city person, did not comment on and enumerate all the details of the Chariot, for from the outset he did not behold a “likeness” as it exists Below but the essence of the matter **Above**. Being that he was a “city person” who “grew up in a palace,” all matters except the King [Himself] bore no significance to him, to the extent that they were not even perceived by him as existing. Thus, he says, “I saw the L-rd sitting on a high and exalted throne,” and mentions only the [angles known as] S’rafim, which “stood above for Him,” insofar as this was a detail of the vision of “the L-rd sitting on a...throne.”

3. Accordingly, the connection is understood between the Haftora of the Chariot of Yechezkel and the reading from the Torah of the section that speaks about the Giving of the Torah

on [Shavuot] the day when the Torah was given:

The revelation of the Divine Presence at the Giving of the Torah was not only a passing moment in history but [an event that is eternally relevant]. Namely, it permits the Jewish people, through their service of G-d,<sup>48</sup> to ascend and cleave to the Holy One Blessed Be He. Indeed, the power to do so was granted to them in virtue of the revelation of G-d at the Giving of the Torah, implanting in our hearts permanently “the assembly at Mount Sinai – that our eyes saw and not [the eyes of] a stranger, etc.”<sup>49</sup>

This is also the meaning of the Midrash<sup>50</sup> which says that the descent of G-d upon Mount Sinai was not only a temporary revelation but the **advent** of a totally new state of the world, insofar as the permanence of the decree that the Supernal Realms should not descend to the Lower Realms and the Lower Realms should not ascend to the Supernal realm was rescinded. The results of the nullification of this decree and its overt manifestation depends upon and comes about through the Divine service of the Jewish people.

The explanation of the matter.

It is understood from the very fact that the terms used in this discussion are “Supernal Realms” and “Lower Realms” that in essence there is a connection and even a bond between them, especially in light of what is explained in several places – that regarding the existence of every creation Below, its root and source is Above and from there it is derived (*nishtalshel*). The source of an ox, for example, that exists Below [in our world] is from the face of the ox in the Chariot, and so on, to the extent that its [ultimate] root and source is the word of G-d and the breath of His mouth, may He be blessed, which bring it into being and enlivens it every single instant.<sup>51</sup> Even its growth [and development] thereafter comes about from its [spiritual source known as] mazal **Above**, as our Sages say, “There is no blade of grass, etc., that does not have a mazal above it telling it, ‘grow!’”<sup>52</sup>

However, since before the Giving of the Torah there was a “decree” (*g’zeira*) – a term meaning “cut” (*gazar, chatach*) – [separating] the creation Below from its Supernal source, and (at the Giving of the Torah) when the decree was rescinded, the capacity was given for every single Jew, through his service of G-d,<sup>53</sup> to draw down and “see” in every creation Below its root and source Above, to the extent that in so doing he reveals the truth of its being – that it only exists in virtue of the true Existence<sup>54</sup> [i.e., G-d].

Since all beginnings are difficult, etc.,<sup>55</sup> therefore, at the Giving of the Torah (when “I am the One Who begins”<sup>50</sup>) there was an extremely lofty revelation [in order to provide the power required to overcome the challenge of beginning an entirely new era].

(As it is written in the Zohar,<sup>56</sup> “At that moment all the secrets of the Torah and all the Supernal mysteries, as well as the mysteries of the Lower Realms, were not withheld from them. Indeed, on that day, they saw the radiance of their Master’s glory eye to eye, a vision the likes of which was not revealed



since the day the world was created, for the Holy One Blessed Be He was revealed in His glory on Mount Sinai. If one were to say that since we learned that **a maidservant at the [splitting of the] Sea [of Reeds] beheld that which [even] Yechezkel the Prophet did not see [in his vision of the Chariot]**, perhaps that vision was on par with the vision of the day the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai – **not so**, for on the day the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai the [spiritual] pollution [that prevailed over humanity since the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge] departed from them [and therefore, their vision was pure and clear, an extremely powerful level of prophecy].” From this passage in the Zohar it is apparent that notwithstanding the fact that “a maidservant at the Sea beheld that which Yechezkel the Prophet did not see,” the vision of the Jewish people at the Giving of the Torah surpassed that.)

However, [although at the Giving of the Torah the vision was of the highest possible level, the vision of a “city person,” a level at which one takes no notice of the King’s Chariot, just the King Himself] the primary, permanent intent is the “Chariot of Yechezkel.” That is, to reveal within the world how the entire existence of all its minutiae is only a “likeness” of its existence Above (for which reason the Chariot was revealed then [i.e., to teach us this lesson and give us the ability to do so]). Thus, specifically this topic was established as the Haftora for the day of the Giving of the Torah.

This explanation also answers the question posed above: why was the Account of the Chariot established as the Haftora [for the first day of Shavuot], a topic that is not within the capacity of the majority of people to understand? For, although the details of the description of the Chariot enumerated in the Haftora are not understandable and cannot be grasped [by the average person], as discussed above, it is within the capacity of every single person to understand and relate to the **general** content of the Haftora. Namely, that the details of the Chariot Yechezkel beheld are “likenesses” from which Yechezkel knew and recognized “likenesses of their Supernal counterparts.”

4. Accordingly we can also explain the reason for the custom “to conclude (this Haftora) with the verse,<sup>57</sup> ‘A wind lifted me up, etc.’” (skipping one and a half chapters), “even though this is not at all written in [the Account of] the Chariot.”<sup>58</sup> In fact, according to the simple reading of the Scripture,<sup>59</sup> this passage describes the withdrawal of G-d’s glory after the Divine statement [Yechezkel had received through prophecy had ceased]. The explanation is that this verse (“A wind lifted me up and I heard behind me the sound of a great uproar: ‘Blessed is the glory of the L-rd from His place.’”) underscores the primary innovation and meaning of Yechezkel’s Chariot, as above.

To elaborate:

One of the differences between the Chariot of Yeshayahu and the Chariot of Yechezkel is that the Chariot of Yechezkel speaks about the [angels called] Chayos and Ofanim, whereas the Chariot of Yeshayahu speaks about S’rafin. The service of the Ofanim and Chayos are with an uproar. Indeed, it is known that “the sound of a great uproar” is from the Ofanim, as in the

blessings said prior to the recital of Shma: “The Ofanim and the Chayos HaKodesh, with a great uproar, rise towards the S’rafin. Facing them, they offer praise and say, ‘Blessed is the glory of the L-rd from His place.’” The service of the S’rafin, on the other hand, is without a tumult.

Upon considering the reason for the matter<sup>60</sup> [i.e., the varying reactions of the two groups of angels in beholding G-d’s glory] it becomes apparent that the difference between the S’rafin and the Ofanim runs parallel to the difference between the city person’s response to seeing the king and that of the village person. That is, the tumultuousness comes on account of the profound novelty, a quality that is descriptive of the village person upon seeing the king. The novelty of seeing the king and his exaltedness causes in him an uproar, whereas the city person, who does not perceive it to be (such) a novel experience, is not overwhelmed by it. The distinction between the S’rafin and the Ofanim is along the same lines.

In greater detail<sup>61</sup>:

The S’rafin fathom how the Holy One Blessed Be He is holy, how He transcends the worlds, and how the worlds bear absolutely no significance to Him, whereas the Ofanim grasp how G-d creates everything ex nihilo and how the existence of the world is created by the True Existence [i.e., G-d]. For this reason, the excitement of the Ofanim is with a great uproar, being that they comprehend how the truth is the opposite of what appears to the eyes – that the world appears to be real, existing, but in fact it is utterly nullified [being totally and constantly dependent on the True Existence]. For this reason there is an uproar, like a person who conceives a new concept that runs contrary to what appears to his eyes, creating in him overwhelming excitement.

Thus, the novelty, mentioned above, regarding the Giving of the Torah, is that even while perceiving the existence of the world, the Lower Realms, its true existence should be recognized [namely, that its existence is utterly nullified to the True Existence, G-d].

5. The foregoing discussion sheds light on the fact that at the Giving of the Torah there were, “Thunderclaps and bolts of lightning...and a very powerful sound of a shofar. The entire nation that was in the camp trembled.”<sup>62</sup>

If this verse is only given a simple read – that the intent and purpose of the thunderclaps and the lightning bolts were to bring fear and trembling to the world, among the Jewish people – at first glance, the revelation of G-d’s glory itself – “You have **seen** that from the heavens I have spoken with you”<sup>63</sup> – should have sufficed to affect in them this fear and trembling. In fact, the trembling on account of the thunder and lightning, etc., is a fear that is connected primarily with the body, whereas the fear and trembling on account of beholding the revelation of G-d’s glory face to face, has a great and profound impact, affecting (also) the spirit, reaching even the innermost depths of the soul. Yet, notwithstanding all this, the thunder and lightning, etc., was

[Continued on pg. 41]

# THE WONDROUS TORAH SCROLL

By Menachem Ziegelboim

***“Although you built a new beis midrash in its place, the old beis midrash, where people have davened for nearly 300 years, complained to the heavenly beis din that it was capable of receiving prayers for many more years to come.” \* Presented for Shavuos, the Yom Hilula of the Baal Shem Tov.***

## PART I

Mezhibuzh was one of many stops along the way.

This wasn't no simple pleasure trip; the Rebbe Rashab was traveling to various cities to pray at the holy gravesites and to attend secret meetings to discuss issues facing the Jewish people throughout Russia and the surrounding regions. He was accompanied by his loyal Chassid, R' Binyamin Berlin, who served as his assistant.

He had already visited the holy sites in Pastov (where R' Avrohom the “Malach” is interred), Anipoli (the Maggid of Mezritch), Berditchev (R' Levi Yitzchok), Niezhin (the Mittlerer Rebbe), and Haditch (the Alter Rebbe). Now, at noon on Sunday, 28 Cheshvan, 5658 (1887), he arrived in the town of Mezhibuzh, the home and final resting place of the saintly Baal

Shem Tov, founder of Chassidus.

The Rebbe Rashab headed straight for the beis midrash of the Baal Shem Tov, where the tzaddik himself learned and prayed together with his *chavraya kadisha*, each of whom illuminated the world with his Rebbe's light of Torah and holiness as well as his own.

The shul was nearly empty. In the back sat a few worshippers who remained after Shacharis. They weren't in a hurry; either their time was their own or they were *batlanim* who were supported by the community to sit and learn. They were gathered around the venerable chassid, R' Tuvia Leib the shamash, listening intently as he spoke to them while still bedecked in tallis and t'fillin.

The shamash was telling a story about the Baal Shem Tov as his listeners stood riveted. Their

attentiveness was no wonder since R' Tuvia Leib was considered a reliable source. His father's father, R' Yosef Tzvi, served in the Baal Shem Tov's house during his final ten years and had merited the bracha that he and his children, till the third generation, would live to a ripe old age.

R' Tuvia Leib bore the distinguished title of “shamash of the beis midrash,” or “shamash” for short. He was quite old and could not do much for the beis midrash, but since he constantly sat in the shul, davening and learning, the title was his.

When the Rebbe Rashab walked in, R' Tuvia Leib was discussing the “wondrous Torah scroll,” the one that reposed in the Aron Kodesh of the beis midrash but was hardly used. Every so often the shamash's voice choked up. This wasn't because of his prodigious age but due to the pain he felt on account of this Torah scroll.

## PART II

The Baal Shem Tov's beis midrash was located not far from the big shul (the Bach's shul). The wooden structure was somewhat concealed in the Jewish quarter and was separated from the main street by a picket fence.

The beis midrash was known as a shul with special segulos, and had a most interesting history.

Many years earlier, Prince

Augustus Alexander Czarturaysky, the ruler of Mezhibuzh, decided to sell the rabbanus of the town to the highest bidder. The wife of the wealthy local R' Berish Bielayaus, bought the position for her husband.

Shortly thereafter, R' Berish fell ill, and his condition quickly deteriorated. His wife rushed to ask the Baal Shem Tov for a bracha, for the Baal Shem Tov's fame as a wonder-worker had begun to spread even before he lived in Mezhibuzh.

The Baal Shem Tov visited the sick man and informed him that he was being punished by Heaven for accusations that were being brought against him. One complaint was that he had neglected the old beis midrash. "Although you built a new beis midrash in its place, the old beis midrash, where people have davened for nearly 300 years, complained to the heavenly beis din that it was capable of receiving prayers for many more years to come.

"This beis midrash parallels the heavenly Beis HaMikdash and it is

fitting and proper that more prayers be offered there. The only way that I would be able to counter this accusation is if I move to your town of Mezhibuzh." R' Berish accepted this suggestion and he soon regained his health.

The Baal Shem Tov moved to Mezhibuzh and davened in the old shul. To this day, the beis midrash is called, "the Baal Shem Tov's beis midrash." According to an old tradition, the Baal Shem Tov said the beis midrash should not be whitewashed, even after the wooden walls inside were blackened in a fire. Miraculously, it caused no damage except for blackening the walls, which remained as a testimony to that peculiar fire.

Over the years, the beis midrash had become dilapidated. The wooden foundation and supporting beams rotted and weakened from decades of exposure to the elements. The beis midrash needed urgent repairs but the worshippers, who for the most part were elderly and poor, could not take care of it. Those in the town who had the means were not

interested.

The elders and their shamash were understandably upset. Their tradition was that as long as the shul stood, there would be peace in the town. If it would fall, heaven forbid, then all of Mezhibuzh would be destroyed. They held an urgent meeting to come up with a way of raising the money they needed to fix the legendary beis midrash.

After discussing the matter, they concluded that the only motivation they had to offer would be to take the wondrous Torah scroll out of the Aron and auction aliya. With the donations they received, they would be able to repair the shul.

This Torah was famous. Many tzaddikim of the previous generations would visit Mezhibuzh for the purpose of having an aliya with this Torah and kissing the Baal Shem Tov's covering that was on the bima. For years the Torah was not removed from the Aron except on Hoshana Raba and Simchas Torah for the hakafos.

Not surprisingly then, R' Tuvia Leib burst into tears as he related the plan to occasionally take out the

Torah and give men of means the opportunity to have an aliya in exchange for a donation.

**The shul of the Baal Shem Tov after it was recently renovated.**





Although the goal was a worthy one, it still hurt.

“What is the uniqueness of this Torah scroll?” the Rebbe Rashab interjected suddenly. He was standing off to the side among the listeners and looked like a businessman who had walked into the shul by chance.

R’ Tuvia Leib was astonished by the question. Who didn’t know the story of the wondrous Torah? Well, if a Jew was asking, a Jew who looked like a businessman but had an aristocratic face, why should he refuse to answer? He wouldn’t miss an opportunity to relate another amazing story about the Baal Shem Tov.

### PART III

5512 (1742) was a year the residents of Mezhibuzh would not soon forget. Many men, women and children suddenly fell ill. Their conditions worsened and some were breathing their last. Not a house was spared. The townsfolk were at wit’s end.

They hurried to their local wonder-worker, the Baal Shem Tov, and asked him to pray that the epidemic cease. The Baal Shem Tov was reputed to possess supernatural powers and some even whispered that he could resurrect the dead. Surely, as a resident of the town, he would arouse mercy for them and have the evil decree annulled. If he prayed on behalf of Jews who came from far away, surely he would pray for his fellow townsmen.

To their surprise, the Baal Shem Tov did not immediately agree to their request. After several moments of meditation, he said there was a big accusation against Mezhibuzh, which is why many were falling sick, but sad to say, he could not help them.

The town leaders could not believe their ears. The Baal Shem Tov, the man who could defy the

laws of nature, could not pray for them?!

“Rebbe, help us! You see for yourself what is going on here. There is no home without an ill person. The situation is growing worse from day to day. Please do something!”

The Baal Shem Tov thought once again and then repeated what he had said earlier, that he could not help them and that it depended on the townspeople themselves.

“On us?” they wondered.

The tzaddik nodded and said, “You have the ability to save the sick, to weaken or to even annul the

***The town leaders  
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evil decree.

“In the Shmoneh Esrei we daven, ‘*usehi l’ratzon tamid avodas Yisroel amecha*,’ which means the avoda of the Jewish people always stands before Hashem to generate a positive Ratzon/Will from him, to weaken the decrees and annul them. The avoda is the letters of Torah and this can be expressed in two ways: by reciting the letters of the Torah and T’hillim and by writing a Torah scroll which everybody will participate in.”

Then and there, the town leaders agreed to have a Torah written with

the participation of all the members of the town. The tzaddik called for the scribe, R’ Tzvi, and told him to begin.

That very day, the sick miraculously began to recover. It still took days until the healing process was complete, but the improvement was apparent immediately. Once complete, the Seifer Torah was brought with much joy and honor to the Baal Shem Tov’s shul. It was thereafter referred to as “the wondrous Torah scroll,” for innumerable miracles were associated with it.

\*\*\*

This is the story that R’ Tuvia Leib recounted to the Rebbe Rashab. The Rebbe knew that the teller of the story was eminently reliable.

R’ Binyamin Berlin, the Rebbe Rashab’s shamash came and told him that the mikva was ready for him, as well as a wagon to take him to the cemetery. The Rebbe Rashab davened Mincha, immersed, and then went to pray at the gravesite of the Baal Shem Tov. He spent hours there, until late in the evening.

### PART IV

The Rebbe’s face was afire as he left the holy gravesite. He returned to the beis midrash and while still fasting, he davened Maariv. Then he sent R’ Binyamin to find out from R’ Tuvia Leib how much was needed to renovate the shul.

There were two options: they could make basic repairs for 300 rubles or they could do a complete renovation for 450 rubles. The better job would include not only that which was necessary but would also beautify the shul.

Presenting himself as a businessman from Arsha in the Mohilev district, the Rebbe Rashab offered to pay the entire amount, but with certain conditions. First, the next morning, Monday, they would give him an aliya and glila with the



wondrous Seifer Torah. Second, the davening would take place at dawn together with the minyan of regulars. Third, among those given an aliya there should also be a Kohen and a Levi. Fourth, for the next three days nobody should know about this, aside from those who davened in the minyan, of course.

The elders rejoiced at the offer. They would not have to keep removing the Torah from the Aron every time one of the wealthy people deigned to give them a donation. This guest was willing to pay all the money they needed.

The Rebbe Rashab sent 200

rubles on account and R' Binyamin Berlin wrote up an informal contract and signed for the Rebbe Rashab.

Only then did the Rebbe go to the inn and break his long fast with a hot tea and a little bit of bread. When he finished his paltry meal, he returned to the shul where R' Tuvia Leib still sat with some of the other older men. The Rebbe Rashab honored them with food and drink and they sat until late at night, relating stories of that unparalleled tzaddik who lived in their town so many years ago.

\*\*\*

Despite the late hour at which

he'd gone to sleep, the Rebbe woke up while it was still night and went to immerse. From there he went to the shul, where he and the elderly men prepared for davening. This was no ordinary Shacharis, for shortly they would be taking out the wondrous Torah scroll and reading from it, a very rare occurrence.

The Rebbe Rashab got an aliya, hagba and glila. When the davening was over, he went to the gravesite of the Baal Shem Tov and from there he went to the train station to continue his mysterious journey...

Source: Igros Kodesh Admur Rayatz vol. 6, p. 280-283

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# LOST SOULS AND FOUND OBJECTS

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz, Shliach, Beit Shaan

You may have heard about the “lost and found department” of Chabad houses around the world. People turn to the Chabad house not only to learn Chassidus or to get an aliya but also to locate lost children or an expensive camera.

At the Chabad house of Beit Shaan, there is an entire drawer of lost objects. One person put on t’fillin and forgot an expensive watch. After saying the bracha on the lulav, someone neglected to take his glasses. Sometimes the lost article is retrieved and other times it just has to stay there until Eliyahu HaNavi comes.

The mitzva of returning lost objects is the impetus for this column of stories about Chabad houses and how they handle this mitzva.

## RETURNING LOST OBJECTS VIA CELL PHONE

Someone called me on my cell phone Friday afternoon. “This is Yoel Babay from Beit Shaan,” he introduced himself. “I came by bus from Yerushalayim and when I got off in Beit Shaan I mistakenly took someone else’s bag, apparently a Chabadnik, because the bag has some sifrei Chabad. It says the bachur’s name. He continued with that bus and is probably on his way to Teveria or Kiryat Shmoneh. Can you please find out ...”

I called the Chabad house in

Kiryat Shmoneh but they didn’t recognize the name. No luck in Teveria, either. I knew there were a dozen other possibilities as to where the bachur could have gone and I had to try a different route.

I went back to Yoel Babay and asked him whether there were any other identifying signs. He said that on the s’farim there were unfamiliar acronyms. I realized they stood for yeshivas Tomchei T’mimim and Toras Emes Yerushalayim. Fortunately, our son-in-law was

present and he knew bachurim from Toras Emes. Within a few minutes he found out the bachur’s phone number. He was surprised by my call. He couldn’t understand how the Chabad house in Beit Shaan knew about his missing bag so quickly.

And what does a bus driver, from the company in Beit Shaan, do when he finds a wallet containing hundreds of shekels and a mikva card from someone in Kfar Chabad, on Har HaGilboa? Well, if it says “Kfar Chabad” then of course he gives it to the Chabad house in Beit Shaan. On my next trip to Kfar Chabad two days later, the wallet was returned to its owner.

## THE MISSING SUITCASE

Rabbi Binyamin Niazov worked for years in running the mosdos and being mekarev people in Netanya. He once traveled to the Rebbe and took with him many letters that his mekuravim had written to the Rebbe.

He was quite upset when the suitcase containing these letters was lost by the airline. He wasn’t as upset about his missing belongings as he was about the letters. He wrote to the Rebbe and told him what happened and asked the Rebbe what he should say to the people whose letters were lost. The Rebbe told him to tell them the truth.

The suitcase eventually turned up.

## RETURNING A DAUGHTER TO HER MOTHER

A bachur who finished his year on K’vutza decided to go on shlichus for a few weeks to a city faraway in South America. Having heard that Chabad needed extra manpower to increase their outreach activities, he headed out to make his difference in the world.

To prepare for his shlichus, he began asking for donations. He spoke to his uncle, the director of a Chabad house in Israel, who said he would think about it.

A few hours later, his uncle received a call from a lady from a neighboring city. She had lost contact with her daughter who was

in that very same city in South America. The uncle called his nephew and gave him the phone number of the worried mother.

The bachur spoke to his friends who were already in that city and within two hours the daughter was located. She called home and the mother called the uncle to thank him for his effort.

## RETURNING A LOST OBJECT THANKS TO A DONATION

Two friends, one who runs a Chabad house in the north and the other a rosh yeshiva in the center of the country, flew to New York for the Kinus HaShluchim. The shliach had a Megillas Esther with him that he planned on selling in New York.

In the taxi to 770, he realized that the Megilla was gone. He nearly fainted from despair. His friend the rosh yeshiva said, "If you give a donation to the yeshiva that I run, I promise that you will find the Megilla." The shliach handed the rosh yeshiva a nice donation and they told the driver to return to the airport.

The first person they met at the airport was a porter who was pushing a huge chain of empty luggage carts. They asked him whether he had found a Megilla. It was hard to explain to him what it was, but he finally understood. He opened a box on his wagon and took out the missing Megilla.

The shliach happily headed to 770. Just a few hours later, he discovered that another expensive possession was nowhere to be found. This time, he knew what to do. He rushed to look for his friend and gave him another donation. Wonder of wonders, within minutes the lost item was found and returned.

## TERRIFIED ARAB RETURNS STOLEN ITEM

A shliach's car was broken into and his cell phone and laptop were taken. The shliach called his stolen cell phone and the thief answered it with an Arabic accent. The shliach told him, "You should know that I am a rabbi and the computer is for the shul and to help the needy. If you return the computer to this address, nothing bad will happen to you, but

if you don't – I will go to the shul every day and pray that a 'black curse' will come upon you until you die.

The Arab got the message. Within a day, the computer was waiting for the shliach on the stairs near his house.

## RETURNING A DIAMOND

A few years ago, some renovations were done on one of the floors of the Diamond Exchange in Ramat Gan. The contractor, a Lubavitcher by the name of Yosef Levy, found a nice box in the garbage. He took the box home and when he opened it, he was astonished to find a huge diamond that, according to his unprofessional assessment, was worth tens of thousands of dollars.

He called Rabbi Chagai Halevy at 11 at night and asked to meet him that very night. Rabbi Halevy calmed him down and arranged to meet him the next day at the Exchange. Rabbi Halevy made inquiries at all the offices on the floor where the renovations were being made until it seemed likely that he had identified the company that had lost the diamond. He waited throughout the checking process until it was certain that the diamond was returned to its rightful owners.

That evening, the owner of the company called Rabbi Halevy and thanked him profusely. "And thanks to Chabad ... Only in Chabad – even when a 'diamond' is in the garbage, Chabad takes him out and returns him to his rightful place." The owner of the company met with Rabbi Halevy and heard about the distribution of food to the needy that he organized and immediately made a large donation that was given to each of the needy families. He was so touched, he put on t'fillin for the first time since his bar mitzva and told all his friends about his amazing encounter with Chabad Chassidim.

## RETURNING THE REBBE'S SIRTUK

Rabbi Boruch Wilhelm, shliach in Nahariya, relates:

When I was eight years old, I had yechidus. The Rebbe blessed me and then asked me what I was learning in school. I said I was studying Bava Metzia, perek Eilu Metzios. The Rebbe asked me what the din is if someone finds a strand of fish, and a few more questions.

Towards the end, the Rebbe pointed at himself, or to be more precise, at his sirtuk, and asked, "What would you do if you found my sirtuk?" Of course I said I would announce that I had found it because a sirtuk varies in size from person to person.

At the end of the yechidus the Rebbe gave me a dollar and said, "This is because I gave you such a hard time ..."

Years later, I got a (possible) explanation from one of my mekuravim regarding the Rebbe's question about the sirtuk, especially when this was my first yechidus and it is known that your first yechidus contains horaos for life. The mekurav explained that the Rebbe was hinting to me that in the world there are many "sirtuks" of the Rebbe that need to be found and returned to him (meaning, Jews who need to be brought close and "dressed" in a Chabad sirtuk) and the Rebbe gave me the instruction and the ability to do this!

# THE UNDERGROUND YESHIVA

By Hillel Zaltzman

Prepared for publication by Avrohom Reinitz

*Another fascinating chapter in the memoirs of R' Hillel Zaltzman \* The story of the underground yeshiva in Samarkand in the early 60's, the mesirus nefesh of the students and their parents, and the askanim and baalei battim who ran the yeshiva and hosted it in their homes.*

During World War II, most of Anash in Russia fled the front lines to Central Asia, mainly to the cities of Tashkent and Samarkand in Uzbekistan. The underground Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim went into exile with them. Ironically, the war years were when the yeshiva flourished. The communist police were preoccupied with the war against the Nazis and put little effort into the internal war against the 'enemies of the state.'

As opposed to the 1930's, when Anash were consistently and cruelly persecuted, the war years were relatively quiet. Taking advantage of this lull, they founded yeshivos and Talmudei Torah in Samarkand and Tashkent, along with Chassidishe minyanim. They were officially "underground" and secret but

actually operated almost openly.

From 1945-1946, with the cessation of the war, the persecution of Anash resumed. Thankfully, most Lubavitcher Chassidim were able to escape the Soviet Union by pretending to be Polish citizens who had been given permission to return to their homeland after the war. The yeshiva and the refugees moved to the DP camp in Poking, Germany and then to Brunoy, France.

The Lubavitchers who remained in the Soviet Union were unable to contend with the secret police and there were hardly any children of high school age left. The few bachurim who remained were older teens who were afraid to even think about learning in yeshiva.

We were one of the few

Lubavitcher families who remained in Samarkand. After my older brother Berel became bar mitzva, my father sent him to learn in Tashkent with R' Lipa Klein by R' Zalman Buber (Pevzner). The other Lubavitcher children during those years in Samarkand included: Michael Mishulovin, Mottel Goldschmidt, Yaakov Lerner, Zalman Friedman, and me. Until the age of ten we learned with R' Ben-Tzion (Benche) Maroz.

In the beginning of the 1950's an anti-Semitic atmosphere prevailed in the street. Stalin ran a propaganda campaign against the Jews in general and religious ones in particular, which climaxed in the infamous Doctors' Plot.

At this ominous time, all programs for learning Torah at the homes of Lubavitcher families in Samarkand collapsed. Only a few families endangered themselves and brought a melamed for their children for an hour a day.

The miraculous Purim rescue of 1953, with the sudden death of Stalin and the release of the doctors, eased the situation somewhat, though they still did not dare to organize regular classes. At that time, Michael Mishulovin and Mottel Goldschmidt learned for about two years with R' Eliyahu Paritcher (Levin) in his house.



## YOUNG PEOPLE WANTED TO LEARN TORAH

As I related in earlier chapters, I started in communal work at the age of 16 and a couple years later was sent on missions throughout Russia.

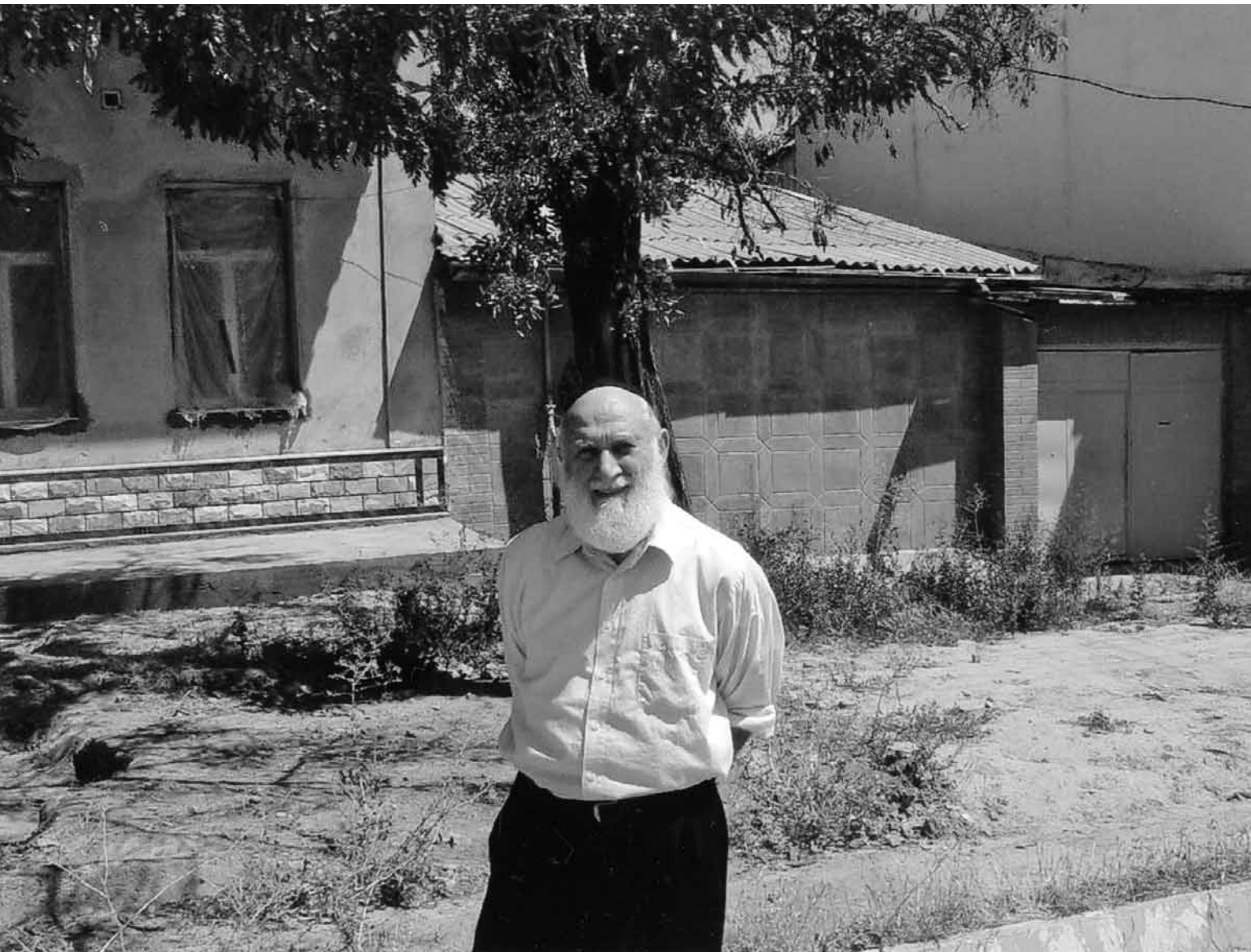
Returning from one such trip, I saw a boy who was unfamiliar to me mingling with Anash. In Russia we learned to be wary of strangers and so I immediately went to R' Moshe Nisselevitz and asked about this boy. R' Moshe told me that the

boy was Naftali Estulin and he was the son of the Chassid, R' Zalman Leib, from Tashkent. Since he could neither hide his son at home nor could he send him to public school, he decided to send Naftali to Samarkand in the hopes that he would find some sort of learning program.

Naftali said that his father knew he couldn't just send his son to look for a yeshiva in Samarkand when even Lubavitcher families would be afraid to include a stranger. His opportunity arose when some members of Anash in

Tashkent traveled to Samarkand for the wedding of Eli Kuperman. R' Zalman Leib sent Naftali with them and hoped he would remain in Samarkand.

The wedding took place on 12 Tammuz and Anash took the opportunity to rejoice and farbreng on the Chag Ha'Geula. At the wedding Naftali noticed a bearded man dancing and rejoicing more than the others and assumed he must be a close relative, maybe the father of the chassan or kalla. However, upon inquiring he was astounded to hear that the man was



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Rayatz!***

not related at all.

Naftali wondered why the man was so merry until they explained to him that he was dancing for another reason entirely – it was the Chag HaGeula of the Rebbe Rayatz! The Chassid was R' Berke Chein, who in Samarkand was called "R' Chaim."

After the wedding, Naftali was accepted by the Anash k'hilla of Samarkand and he stayed in the home of R' Feivish Genkin in the old city. R' Feivish was a simple man who had been a soldier in World War I. He and his wife Chasa were childless. They had joined the Lubavitcher k'hilla in Samarkand and were known to be able to keep a secret.

Naftali stayed with them for a month. In the absence of any friends or acquaintances, he felt almost like a prisoner in jail. The only one who came by was R' Berke Chein, who visited R' Feivish often.

One time, Naftali told me, R' Berke returned from the mikva early in the morning and began reciting the Shma. He would read

it from a mezuzah parchment with great chayus and tremendous kavana. While R' Berke was thus involved, Naftali woke up and realized he had forgotten to leave negel vasser next to his bed. Not wanting to bother R' Berke in the middle of reciting Shma, he went to the sink to wash his hands.

After finishing Shma, R' Berke said to Naftali, "You walked four cubits without washing?! You should have told me! I would have stopped in the middle of Shma in order to bring you water."

Naftali was amazed by R' Berke's Chassidishkeit and Ahavas Yisroel.

One time, R' Berke took him to immerse in the river and on their way back he invited Naftali to his house for Shabbos. Naftali happily accepted, glad to escape the loneliness at R' Feivish's house.

Naftali spent an uplifting Shabbos with R' Berke. His spirits were dashed upon his return, when R' Feivish chastised him, "Why did you go to eat by R' Berke when he doesn't have enough food for his family?"

After several weeks at R' Feivish's house, he received a visit from Eli Mishulovin. He spoke with Naftali several times and checked him out to see whether he was able to keep a secret and what level of learning he was on. After he successfully passed this scrutiny, they decided to include him amongst Anash and began to plan a proper learning environment for him.

In the meantime, some of Anash in Tashkent noticed Naftali's absence. One of them, R' Yisroel Frankel, figured out that Naftali must be learning somewhere in Samarkand and sent his son, Shmuel Chaim, there as well. A short while later, R' Gershon Gertzman sent his son Shaika to Samarkand too. They were all

about the same age and needed a place to learn.

## **THIS IS A YESHIVA?**

If I remember correctly, it was Yud-Tes Kislev 5721/December 1960 when the group formed. R' Michoel Mishulovin was the Maggid Shiur and Mashgiach. The learning took place in the home of my brother Berel. We were joined by Itche Mishulovin, followed by the brothers Eliyahu and Yosef Volovik from Tchernovitz.

Although the learning was according to the schedule in Tomchei T'mimim, we never thought of calling this learning by the holy name of "Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim." We were just a few bachurim learning together in someone's home – a far cry from the yeshiva atmosphere, where dozens of bachurim learn with all the s'darim.

When R' Mendel first asked me, "What's happening with the yeshiva?" I thought he was mocking me and I was annoyed that he was making fun of the learning we had arranged. R' Mendel said he was entirely serious and it wasn't the number of bachurim who made the place into a yeshiva. If we learned Nigleh and four hours of Chassidus a day, it was a yeshiva.

Even so, it is still hard for me to describe the learning that we had in Samarkand as a yeshiva.

## **RELEASING THE BACHURIM FROM THE ARMY**

Since the bachurim who learned with us were of draft age, we had to make sure they were released from the army. This was predominantly the responsibility of R' Binyamin Malachovsky and R' Moshiach Chudaitov.

The process of obtaining an





**R' Naftali Estulin in Samarkand**



**R' Shlomo Raskin in Samarkand**



**R' Moshe Lerner in Samarkand**

exemption began about a year or more before they had to stand before the draft board. The bachur would go to the local doctor and complain about some pain. For a year he would go to the doctor several times, each time complaining about the same “malady” that he supposedly suffered from. We usually chose illnesses that a doctor would have a hard time verifying, like stomach pains or mental illnesses.

When it was time to stand before the draft board and the bachur would complain to the military doctor that he suffered from a certain ailment, he would be asked to present his medical history. He would show that he had been to the doctor several times in the previous year regarding this complaint.

Of course, the draft office did not always rely on the medical history and often told the bachur to undergo tests and X-rays with doctors that the military trusted. In Samarkand there were a few Jewish doctors who worked with the army, among them Dr. Yosef Levin, Dr. Yitzchok (Izhye) Aharonson, and Dr. Abayev. We were on good terms with them and would direct

bachurim who needed confirmation of their illnesses to them. It should be noted that to their credit they never asked for money for the service they provided us. We would express our appreciation with a gift, nonetheless.

It was mesirus nefesh on the part of these doctors, for they held high positions (one was head of a department, another was a chief doctor) and if they were caught, not only would they lose their job but they could be sent to jail.

It happened more than once that after confirming that the bachur suffered from an illness, the military decided to send him for further tests with another doctor or for X-rays. In these cases, the doctors who cooperated with us had to ask the doctor whom the bachur was sent to, to do them a favor and confirm their diagnosis. These other doctors knew that at some future occasion they would need a favor from the Jewish doctor and they covered for one another.

The worst was when the army decided to send the bachur for more tests at the hospital. Sometimes they would hospitalize him for a few days. This was difficult because 1) we had to make

connections with doctors at the hospital, and 2) we had to ensure that the bachur had kosher food and could put on t'fillin. The Jewish doctors at the hospital usually helped us. They recognized that these bachurim were more refined than boys off the street, and were willing to accommodate them.

Nearly all of the bachurim in Samarkand went through this process until they were exempted. For the talmidim who came from other cities and did not receive exemptions from there, it was much more complicated. First they needed a permit to reside in Samarkand – they had to register as residents and prove that they had employment or were attending university. It was only after they completed this process that they could start working on being exempted from the army.

It was often necessary to go to the draft office and wait in the yard for the doctor in order to remind him that a bachur was coming that day so he should know to treat him accordingly. One time, during Shacharis on Shabbos morning, R' Binyamin heard there was a suspicion that someone had informed on them for trying to get

***Shaken and sobbing, she cried, "What do I need this for? I can lose my entire career and even be sent to jail!"***

Emanuel Ladaiov released from the army. The Jewish doctor who worked on his file was very afraid and was considering reporting what happened so that blame would not fall on her.

R' Binyamin immediately removed his tallis and ran to the doctor's office in order to calm her down. Shaken and sobbing, she cried, "What do I need this for? I can lose my entire career and even be sent to jail!" It took much effort on Binyamin's part to pacify her.

After we left Russia, Binyamin once delivered a speech about the mesirus nefesh in Russia. One of the people in the audience, who did not believe that everything that he related really happened, began to shout, "Stop lying and exaggerating!"

In a corner of the auditorium sat a young man who had recently left Russia. The heckler was silenced when this young man proclaimed, "Do you know who saved me from the Russian army? It was the speaker, Binyamin Malachovsky. "In my youth," he continued, "I wasn't considered one of the learning bachurim and did not hang out with the best crowd. My father sent me to Samarkand – perhaps it would be a good influence on me.

"When it was my turn to stand before the draft office, I asked for your help in getting exempt. You held a meeting to deliberate

whether to help me get out of the army or whether I should go to the army where they would make a mentch out of me. You, Binyamin, maintained that you had to save me from the army, since if I would be drafted I would go completely off the derech. The others accepted what you said and you helped me get exempted. I will never forget your great chesed."

## **YESHIVA IN A TWO ROOM APARTMENT**

I mentioned in earlier installments that in Samarkand there were various degrees when it came to caution. Some of the people who davened with us in the secret minyan were still not privy to other confidential information. The biggest secret in Samarkand was the underground learning that took place in a few homes.

The danger in having talmidim learning Torah in a house was threefold. First, it was an illegal gathering. Second, the fact that the boys came from other cities was illegal. In Russia of those days, staying in a city without a permit was a criminal act. Obviously, if they were caught in the home of a Lubavitcher, he would also be accused of collaborating with these illegal residents. The main danger, though, was that the householder could be accused of organizing secret learning of Torah and religious practice. This is why we kept it a secret, as much as possible.

I hosted talmidim in my house for a long time after I married. We lived in a two room apartment, with one room serving as a kitchen and pantry and the other was the dining room, living room and bedroom, all in one. After my daughter was born, we divided the room into two small rooms - a bedroom for the parents and a tiny room that served as the dining room where we had a

small crib for the baby. The bachurim learned in this room.

After we moved, the learning continued in our house. It had two advantages: 1) the house was bigger and 2) the landlord worked in Alma Ata and during the summer his wife would travel to him with the family. She let me use their big sun porch while she was away, and there the bachurim learned in comfort. Yosef Volovik was the Maggid Shiur and he remembers that when he taught five boys, it was considered a large class.

A short while before we left Russia we moved again, and it was "gan eden." The house had three rooms and a completely separate courtyard. In addition, there was an inner yard with a room which we also rented. The bachurim could learn there without fear of the neighbors.

Despite our precautions, the locals realized that their Jewish neighbors were different and when they saw the Jewish boys going into the yard, they would throw stones against the iron gate.

In order to keep a low profile, the bachurim had to remain all day in the house and the lady of the house that they learned in had to cook their meals. They could not be allowed to leave the house during the day because neighbors would notice the illegal gathering.

The bachurim found it hard to remain quiet all day and they would often go outside to let off some steam. Eventually, the neighbors noticed the noise and we had no choice but to move the bachurim to a different hiding place.

The three bachurim who came from out of town learned and slept in the home of a certain Lubavitcher. One night, when they finished learning, they went out for some air in the yard and began playing soccer. Apparently, they



forgot to be careful and the noise of their game could be heard on the street. Their host was returning home just then and when he heard the noise from the street, he was terrified. "The neighbors know that we don't have boys your age and your shouting will cause me problems!"

He ordered them to take their things and leave. Out on the street, with nowhere else to turn, the bachurim trekked three kilometers to R' Moshe Nisselevitz. They weren't disappointed. R' Moshe had pity on them and took them in. They had learned their lesson.

In the first years of the underground yeshiva only three families were in on the secret: Nisselevitz, Mishulovin, and Zaltzman. Only after a number of years had passed and we saw that the police were not persecuting Judaism as they did under Stalin, did we relax somewhat and expand to the homes of other Lubavitchers. This enabled us to accept more bachurim and we opened additional classes, with 3-5 boys learning in each one.

Over the years we had dozens of bachurim from all over the Soviet Union: Tashkent, Moscow, Riga,

Tchernovitz, Gorky, Odessa, the Carpathians, Russia, Ozhgorod, and Chust.

We paid the money to support the yeshiva and were also helped by packages we received from Ezras Achim in New York (as I wrote about earlier).

## CAN THEY KEEP A SECRET?

In addition to the studies for Lubavitcher bachurim, we also started classes for the children and bachurim in the Bucharian community. They were taught reading, t'filla and basic Jewish knowledge and values.

Many of these students and their families, after making aliya, became the nucleus of the Yeshivas HaBucharim in Kfar Chabad. Some of them went on to learn in yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Lud and Achei T'mimim in Rishon L'Tzion. These talmidim established hundreds of Chassidishe families and many of them are shluchim in various countries.

The Bucharian outreach program in Samarkand began with some T'mimim, among them the

grandchildren of Bucharian Lubavitchers who had learned in Yeshivos Tomchei T'mimim in various cities where they had been sent by R' Simcha Gorodetzky. The number of talmidim grew and similar learning programs were started in other towns and villages. According to our figuring, more than 1500 talmidim passed through over the years.

We did not have enough manpower to learn with all the talmidim ourselves, so we selected the best of the group, intelligent older boys who we ascertained could keep a secret, and we taught them.

Discretion was a non-negotiable condition for someone who wanted to be accepted. In those years, all it took was for one boy to chatter too much for the entire underground network to be in grave danger.

After the best of the group had learned themselves, they became mashpiim to others. We told them to speak to their Jewish friends in public school and see how serious they were and how good they were at keeping a secret, and to include those who measured up into the group. Thus, each of them had a class and transmitted what we



R' Eliyahu Volovik (second from the right in the second row)  
at a simcha in Samarkand



R' Shmuel Chaim Frankel

***Discretion was a non-negotiable condition for someone who wanted to be accepted. In those years, all it took was for one boy to chatter too much for the entire underground network to be in grave danger.***

taught them to other talmidim.

They once recommended a certain boy, not yet bar mitzva, who sensed that his friends were learning Torah and he wanted to join them. They were afraid to tell him about the group because even though he understood that it had to be a secret and he promised to keep it all to himself, his was a name that caused Anash, and especially those involved in such activities, to tremble.

His grandfather was a cruel policeman who was infamous in Samarkand. During the war he would catch Jews and threaten to libel them to the police unless they would pay him a hefty sum. The refugee Jews had no choice but to give him the bribe so he would leave them alone.

His son, the boy's father, was not a policeman but he was even more wicked than his grandfather. He had several wives, Jews and non-Jews and they all suffered from him. This boy was the son of a Jewish mother, a refined woman

who suffered terribly from her husband until they divorced.

Of course, our initial response was "no way," but after our talmidim told us time and again that he was a good boy and could keep a secret, we agreed to include him. He was truly a good boy and was successful in his learning. After a few years he made aliya, married and established a fine, large Chassidishe family. He is a rav, a mashpia and a darshan in a Bucharian community. His children are Chassidim and yerei Shamayim. Baruch Hashem.

On one of my visits to Eretz Yisroel I passed by a shul of Bucharians and was gratified to see him speaking for a large and attentive audience.

### **SIDDURIM WITH A HECHSHER FROM THE KGB**

As the number of students grew, we had a serious lack of Siddurim. Davening aside, these were essential to teach Alef-Beis and reading. There were Chumashim, Mishnayos and Gemaras in the shuls, but Siddurim were used so much that they got worn out. There was an urgent need for Siddurim for hundreds of children who learned in our network in various towns.

We found out that Rabbi Yehuda Leib Levin, chief rabbi of Russia at that time, printed nusach Sfard Siddurim for the main shul of Moscow. This printing was done by order of the government – not for religious reasons, of course, but in order to show the world that Russia is a free and democratic country where Siddurim could be printed. It was obvious to all that only a small number of the Siddurim would reach other shuls and that most of them would remain in storage in the Moscow

shul.

Mordechai Goldschmidt was traveling to his in-laws in Moscow and he was given the job of buying those Siddurim. The Siddurim were stored by the gabbai of the shul, and in order to buy them, he had to convince the gabbai that he wasn't a KGB agent. He also had to be careful that the gabbai did not tattle on him, for it was known that those who held official positions in shuls were appointed by the government. We hoped that in exchange for a nice sum, he would agree to the deal.

Mordechai gained the gabbai's trust and he consented to sell the Siddurim to him. How could he remove so many Siddurim without drawing any attention? Every time Mordechai went to shul, he took a few dozen Siddurim until he had removed 850. We paid 15 rubles for each Siddur, which was a lot of money in those days. Over time we were able to send all the Siddurim to Samarkand and from there, we distributed them to cities and towns where the learning took place.

These Siddurim revived us all. Although many of us were disinclined to daven from Siddurim printed by the KGB, for the hundreds of children it was wonderful. And if this Siddur was discovered in someone's home, it wouldn't be so terrible since the Siddur was "kosher" and had been printed in Moscow, not in Israel or America.

### **FOUR VOLUMES OF LIKUTEI SICHOS**

Anash in Russia, who somehow heard about the yeshiva in Samarkand, tried to help us. Those in Moscow did what they could, without ever asking about what exactly was going on. One of the unwritten rules among Anash at that time was that even if you knew about something, you didn't talk

about it or ask about it.

On one of my visits to Moscow, I got the HaYom Yom. Our joy in Samarkand was boundless. We excitedly read each line of the calendar, including the history of the Rebbeim that it included. We even avidly read the conditions for being accepted as members of Machne Israel as detailed at the end of the book. We made photocopies of the book and sent some to Tashkent.

One of the special people who helped our yeshiva a lot was R' Yisroel Pevzner, whom I remembered from my childhood. He came to Samarkand during the war and remained there. Outwardly, he looked like any intelligent businessman, but inside he was full of Chassidishe chayus. Because of his big business dealings, the government suspected and pursued him. For a long time he would move from city to city, until he finally settled in Riga.

R' Yisroel had a well-developed Chassidic sense of smell and somehow found out about our yeshiva. He was in constant touch with me, though of course, without unnecessary talk and questions. When I visited him one time, he

told me about a member of Anash who had been sent to ten years of jail while his only son, who had become bar mitzva, barely knew how to read.

He told the mother that he knew of a yeshiva somewhere in Russia, obviously without disclosing its whereabouts, and convinced her to send her son there when the opportunity arose. He told her that a man would take her son to yeshiva on condition that she wouldn't ask where they were going or where her son would learn and sleep.

She agreed with the provision that she be permitted at least to see the person who would take her son to yeshiva. The morning before I left the city, R' Yisroel brought me to their home. The mother asked nothing. She just wanted me to watch over her only son. I was amazed by the heroism of this Chassidishe mother whose husband was in jail and who was ready to send her son to a distant place without knowing where he was, just so that he learned Torah.

On that visit, R' Yisroel told me that he had recently been visited by the Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Nissan Mindel. Since R' Nissan had

***I was amazed by the heroism of this Chassidishe mother whose husband was in jail and who was ready to send her son to a distant place without knowing where he was, just so that he learned Torah.***

special t'fillin that were unavailable in Russia, fashioned out of one piece of leather, R' Yisroel wanted to exchange t'fillin with him. R' Nissan agreed and left his pair of t'fillin with R' Yisroel. I had the z'chus of putting on those t'fillin and reciting Shma in them.

R' Yisroel also told me that R' Nissan said that the Rebbe asked that pictures be sent to him of all the Lubavitcher bachurim in



From right to left: R' Hillel Zaltzman, the refusenik Yosef Mendelevitch, R' Binyamin Malachovsky



R' Shaikhe Gertzman



Russia. At first I refused to be photographed out of embarrassment and fear, but R' Yisroel insisted and took me, against my will, to the photographer. While my picture was being taken, I reviewed chapter 12 of Tanya in my mind.

In those years, we were cut off from all Chabad literature and only rarely were given maamarim from visiting tourists. We hardly saw any up-to-date sichos and maamarim and we didn't know what the Rebbe was demanding of us at this time. R' Yisroel, who wanted so badly to help our yeshiva in Samarkand, told me that R' Mindel had left a two volume set of Likkutei Dibburim. He was not willing to give me the s'farim since Anash who were close to him had not yet seen them, but he suggested that I photograph the pages and then develop the pictures.

I was thrilled and rushed to buy ten rolls of film. R' Yisroel sent me to his bedroom, where I photographed the two s'farim. Before we entered the bedroom, he asked his wife not to go in so she wouldn't see what I was doing there. She did not ask questions. That is the way it was in Russia; people preferred to know as little as possible so that if they would be questioned, they would truly not know.

R' Yisroel also told me that the Chabad rabbi in Leningrad, known as "der Liepler rav," had the first four volumes of Likkutei Sichos and that he had convinced him to give them to me. I headed straight for Leningrad and the rav's tiny apartment under the weekday shul where most of Anash davened before the war. Of course he was very afraid of me and did not want to admit to having the s'farim. However, after I told him that I had been sent by R' Yisroel Pevzner, he gave me the set of

Likkutei Sichos.

You can't imagine our joy when I brought the Likkutei Sichos to Samarkand. We gave two volumes to the Chassidim in Tashkent while we learned the other two. After two weeks we switched with them. That was sufficient time to review the two volumes from cover to cover. We learned it avidly day and night.

In the meantime, I developed the film with the pictures from Likkutei Dibburim. Since it was dangerous to have these pictures, to the point that we dared not show them to the



**R' Hillel Zaltzman – the picture sent from Russia to the Rebbe**

bachurim in yeshiva, we would sit on Thursday night and copy the Rebbe Rayatz's sichos into notebooks. I would compete with R' Itche Mishulovin as to who wrote faster and nicer. I must admit that he won. It was from these copies that the T'mimim learned.

## **WELL KEPT SECRETS**

We once heard a rumor that during the Yud-Tes Kislev

farbrengen in Leningrad, they spoke about the yeshiva in Samarkand and said that they could not remain on the sidelines but had to take part in it and raise money for us. There was adequate cause for concern about the yeshiva's being known and we were quite unhappy and even scared by the fact that they knew about the yeshiva.

I had to make a trip deep into Russia for communal matters, traveling through towns where Lubavitchers lived. Before my departure we had a meeting, where it was decided that if anyone asked me about the yeshiva, I had to deny its existence. Even if it was one of Anash who was knew about the yeshiva, I should say that the yeshiva was no longer active.

This decision caused me tremendous discomfort. During the course of my travels I went to Moscow to attend the wedding of my friend, Mordechai Goldschmidt. I met his uncle, Yisroel Pevzner, who had come from Riga for the wedding. R' Yisroel knew about the yeshiva and had even arranged copies of Likkutei Dibburim and Likkutei Sichos for the talmidim.

We spoke about various things and then he motioned that we should move to a private corner. There he gave me an envelope containing 1000 rubles for the yeshiva. It was an enormous amount of money, something like tens of thousands of dollars today. I knew that if I accepted the money it would clearly indicate that the yeshiva existed. Since we had decided to lay low, I refused to take the money. He pleaded with me to take it until his eyes reddened with tears. I felt terrible. He was an older Chassid and I was a young man. I was so ill at ease that I wished the earth would swallow me up. We finally parted with a certain degree of mutual understanding.



Afterwards, the chassan told me that R' Yisroel had gone over to him as well, and he had also refused to take the money. When I returned to Samarkand we held a meeting to review my trip. I told them about the uncomfortable situation when R' Yisroel pleaded with me to take the money and I refused to accept it. My friends understood what I felt but were very pleased that I had kept the secret even from him. And this was even though we did not doubt our friend R' Yisroel for a moment.

Over the years other bachurim joined the underground yeshiva from all over Russia. Among them were: from Tashkent – R' Velya Geisinsky, Boruch Levkivker, Dovid Itche Marinovsky, Avrohom Pressman and our nephew Avrohom Goldberg; from

Tchernovitz – Yosef Volovik; from the Carpathians – Moshe Miller; from Riga – Moshe Chaim Levin and Zalman Friedman; from Odessa – Moshe Bronfman; from Moscow – Mordechai Chazan and Dovber Junik; from Ozhgorod – Moshe and Meilich Rotner.

*NOTE: I am sure that each of these bachurim (and the others whose names I forget) has a treasury of memories of those years, of hard times but also precious memories of warm farbrengens, of various adventures, of moving from house to house, from yard to yard, from family to family; about the learning in my workshop outside the city, etc. The Rebbe asked that these memoirs be written and so I ask all the talmidim to write their memoirs so people will know what took place back then.*



R' Yisroel Pevzner

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# A LIVING FLAME

By R. M. Deroyan

*Ruth Ben Chaim, an architect and artist from Tzfas, shares her unusual life story for the first time, and her passionate quest for a life with Hashem.*

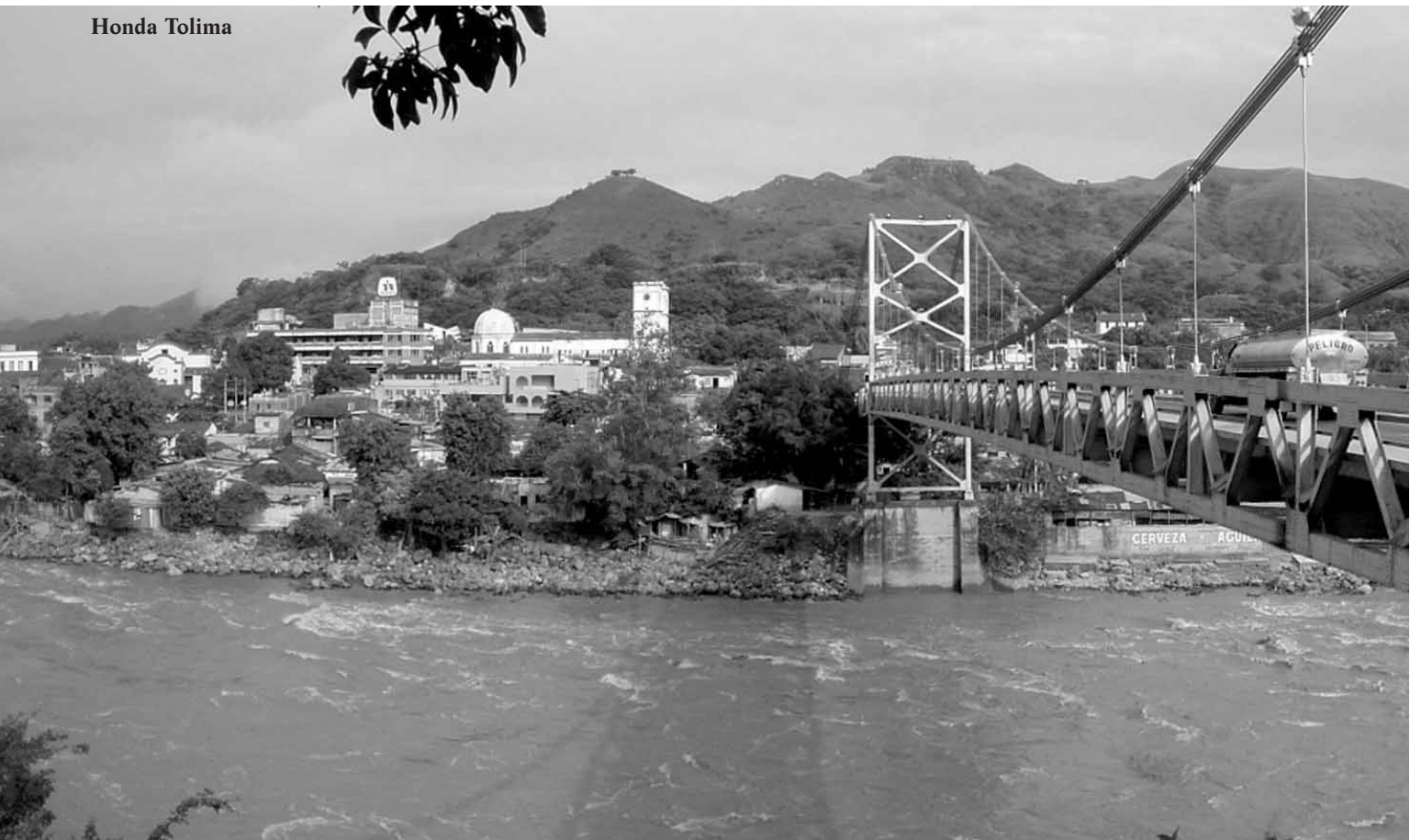
I never dared to tell anyone what I had experienced. I didn't even know how to express it in words because it was so powerful. Five years after I underwent conversion, I was still overwhelmed

by emotion, but even my husband did not know what I was going through as my soul sought to "become Jewish."

Like many Chassidim, I write to the Rebbe through the Igros

Kodesh occasionally. I did not want to forgo my privacy but the Rebbe said: "Divine providence saved them from destruction during the decrees ... for a certain purpose ... since Hashem took them from captivity and rescued ... with signs and wonders that are unnatural ... there is no doubt that they should forgo their own 'metzius' and their egos for the sake of the truth. Since Hashem saved her too ... her obligation is ... to implant simple faith among b'nei u'b'nos Yisroel" (vol. 9, p. 308-309).

Honda Tolima



I understood that I must tell the world what happened to me. I felt it was not my personal story but something that will be enlightening to many women and girls. I had written to the Rebbe about something else entirely and to my great surprise, he answered that I have to write my life's story.

## **"FROM THE DEPTHS I CALL YOU, HASHEM"**

I was born in Colombia in South America by a miracle. After my mother gave birth to two children, she underwent an operation on her uterus that left her unable to have any more children. She was very upset about this and she yearned and prayed for another child. Hashem answered her prayers, and on 11 Nissan I was born.

I lived in the "City of Bridges," which is in Honda Tolima, Colombia. "Honda" means deep, because it is a fisherman's town that lies deep within a chain of mountains. The town was formed as a result of an earthquake 500 years ago, which sank all the houses of idol worship of the Spanish conquerors into the water. The Spaniards had come to Honda, the first port in Colombia, and brought their culture, making it a cultured city.

The pristine nature of the area imbued me with the sense of connecting to something lofty. The beauty and power of nature revealed G-d to me and helped me connect to the Creator.

My father was a professor of medicine and was extremely kind. He did not charge most of his patients. To grow up with a man like this, who taught me so much about giving, medicine and life, was special. Thanks to his kindness, we received a Bible from an old woman in our village whom my father had treated. That was her way of repaying him.

My father exemplified the difference between the unrefined residents of the area and us. My father had an unusual interest in the Jewish people. He listened closely when they spoke about Israel in the media.

My parents had a few Jewish customs. My mother always sifted the flour because that was what she had seen her mother do. She always wore long, modest dresses and was very careful with her speech. She was kind to all, even animals, and often helped the poor.

Twenty-two years ago there was

a volcanic eruption which covered the entire city Armanu, near Honda. People climbed trees in an attempt to escape the lava. The area was declared a disaster area and the hospital was full of refugees who had lost everything and needed material and moral support. My parents' door was open to all those people who sought help. They worked tirelessly and devotedly to supply their needs at this difficult time. Since my parents were distinguished people in town, they were offered aid to leave Honda, but they refused to go because they





***To my surprise, he had a hard time answering my questions. “You’re a Jew! You have to know!” I exclaimed.***

wanted to help the people of Armaru.

I went to Bogota to study architecture, interior design and agronomy. When I finished my studies I left the big city and all my connections there. My soul cried out to be rescued. “I want to search for You,” I said to G-d. A fire burned within me and I knew that I had to find the wick for it to catch on to.

I returned to my parents in Honda. That was the preparation “to receive the Torah” from my father, who gave me that amazing Bible. I read it with great interest. Through the stories that describe the eternality of the Jewish people, the hope that never ends and the waiting for the Geula, I felt connected to Judaism.

The house was situated in an area where nature ran wild and I raised organic food which connected me even more to Hashem I would go on long hikes, searching within myself. All those feelings that I had felt throughout my youth, overcame me in such a way that I couldn’t contain them within me any longer. I felt estranged from the culture I was raised and educated in, and a thirst for all those values that I read about. The Bible stories were part of me now and my heart was breaking.

I didn’t have the tools to deal

with these feelings. At the same time, I felt that I was going up to a new path that would take me to a completely different world from the one I grew up in. Today, in hindsight, after learning Chassidus, I know that I went through a stage like the seed that rots in preparation for the growth that follows.

## **REVEALED G-DLINESS**

One day, I went outside to check on the plants and saw that the melon I had planted had ripened and separated from its root. Happily, I thanked Hashem for His kindness. I knew that I had Whom to thank and I always spoke to Him and asked for His closeness. That day, friends came and we hiked in the mountains. At a certain point, I felt the need to be alone. Something pulled me and I refused to continue with them.

I asked Hashem to bring me close to Him. I wanted to live a Torah life, to do mitzvos, to raise a

family. I told Hashem that I am prepared to abandon everything for Him. After this something inside me submitted and was drawn to accept the yoke of Heaven, I experienced a kind of revelation; a luminosity.

I got up and walked in the direction of a river that was down in the wadi. The path downwards was full of rocks under which snakes and other creatures often were hiding. You have to be extremely careful before you put your foot down. I walked as though I was floating. I felt weightless and I didn’t look down at all. I felt a strong need to immerse in the river. It was my first mikva.

As I immersed in the river, my entire life passed before my eyes. I felt as though a voice was speaking to me and answering all my questions about all the pain that had overcome me, about all the years I had felt alone and different than my gentile friends.

I saw in my mind’s eye the

## **MY LIFE AS A LESSON IN CHASSIDUS**

My life in darkness compelled me to seek the light.

I received “Chesed” and love from my parents.

The “G’vura” in the book of Mishlei taught me to how to direct the Chesed and protected me. I highly recommend Mishlei, especially for youth, because it has short, pointed aphorisms that helped me fix my middos.

My birthday, 11 Nissan, connected me to the Rebbe M”HM. My birth was a gift of “Tiferes.”

I got “Netzach” from the Tanach, the power to choose Hashem and diligence in following Him until I reached Eretz Yisroel.

“Hod” – my feeling of thanks to Hashem for saving me from living among goyim and to reach the Holy Nation, and for the artistic talent that I have.

“Yesod” – after much contemplation I broke my heart in prayer from the depths of my heart and asked to be able to raise a family in the way of Torah, and this is what I got.

“Malchus” – from birth until now it has been the Rebbe who is with me and who guides me in the way of Chassidus. With his guidance I searched for my roots and found them within the Jewish people.

“Kesser Malchus” is the work of daily life, to grow in faith and the desire to connect to and reveal Hashem.



innocent girl I had been who had thrown all her mother's jewelry out the window because she believed material goods were unnecessary, who had been pained by the cruelty of people who came to be cured by my father and took advantage of his good heart. I saw myself in Catholic school, rebelling against the establishment, and seeing all the corruption of the priests and monks and how it was so unsuited to my soul... I felt all the suffering of my life being exchanged with the holiness of Hashem.

It's hard to believe but I asked Hashem that if the experience I had while under the water was true, that I wanted to see it in a dream. And I dreamed the very same thing that I saw. I wanted to run and cry out to the world, to report what had happened to me, but I felt that the time wasn't yet right.

## THE WAY TO TORAH

I returned to Bogota where I worked as an interior designer and an architect for nine years. I occasionally studied kabbala with my brother, who also took an interest in spirituality, particularly Judaism.

When I returned to university to finish my degree, I had my own office. I kept a planner on my desk in which I would write verses from the book of Mishlei. All the employees would read the verses till it reached the point where, if I didn't write one in, they would ask me about it.

One of the things that helped me a lot in connecting to Hashem was the book of Mishlei. It also helped me a lot in converting and my meetings with rabbanim, because the deep feelings it aroused in me impressed the rabbanim who helped me in the conversion process.

My interest focused on spirituality, in searching for the

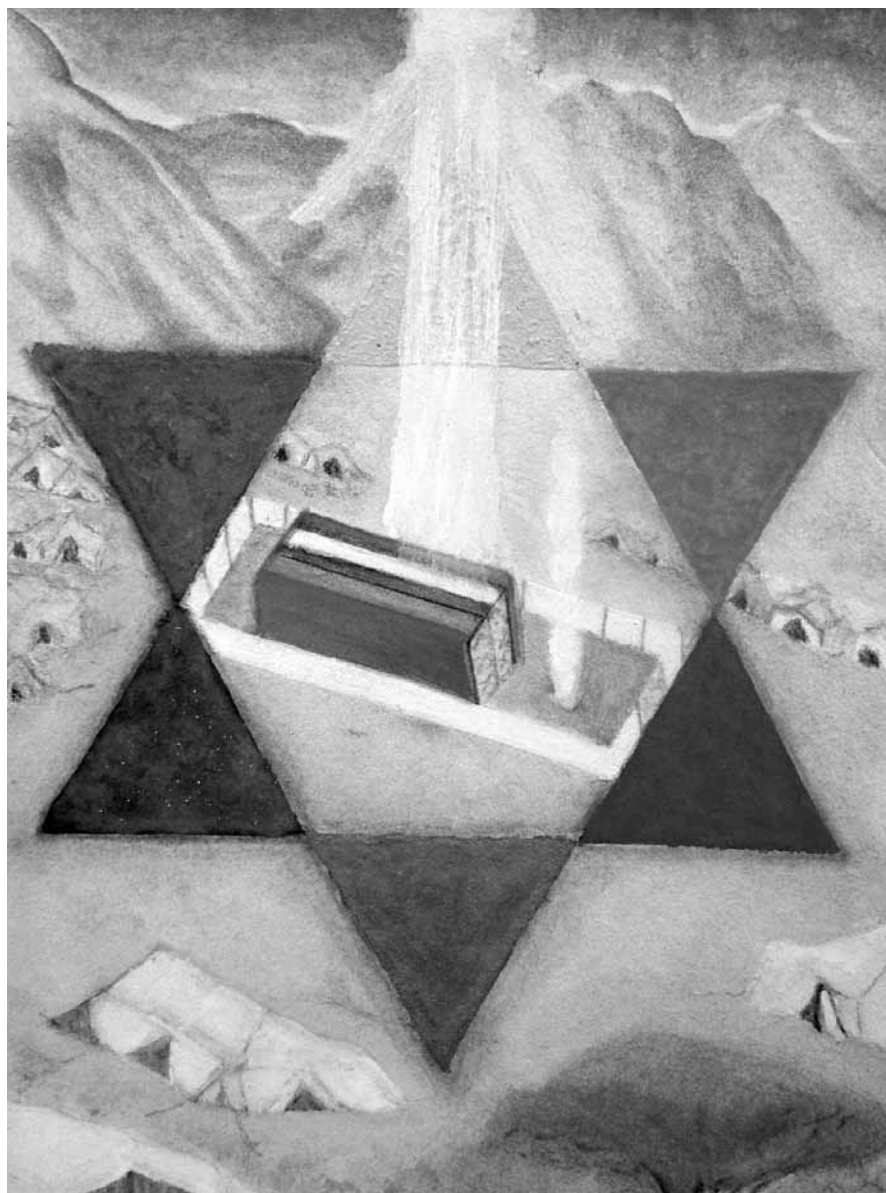
truth. Since the event in the river in Honda, my social life consisted of my work and going to whatever religion classes were available to me.

Then one day, I abandoned routine and went with a friend to a show. There I met the group's singer-guitarist who became my husband, Nissim Ben Chaim. I was attracted by the fact that he was Jewish.

I asked him questions about Judaism that came up as I read the Bible. To my surprise, my future husband had a hard time answering

my questions. "You're a Jew! You have to know!" I exclaimed. This line was the match that lit his neshama.

Our life together without k'dusha was our downfall. I was constantly dragging him to anything that seemed spiritual to me. I was trying to find myself, to find Hashem, and as I did so, we parted ways. My husband had to travel to Israel and afterwards he ended up seeing the Rebbe. I remained in Colombia because I wanted to care for my father who was ill and could not fly. We stayed in touch with



letters and postcards.

After three years, my father died. I felt the time had come to return to my husband in Israel. There I met with Rabbi Gedalia Akselrod, who quizzed me about my intentions about being a Jew – were they material or spiritual motivations. I told him what I knew and that it was mainly from the prophets I had read when I had attended Christian classes which, of course, distorted the Torah. I knew that they lied and that they made changes. I asked the rabbi my questions.

He referred me to Rabbi Avrohom Levy of Tzfas. I began the conversion process with him and became acquainted with Tanya. When I first opened it, I cried tears of joy and emotion. I had found the answers and the path and my goal in life. I understood all the hidden thoughts I had had. I realized that Chassidus was something that had been deep inside me all along, and described my life as it had played out.

The Rebbe always writes, “darkei ha’Chassidus.” Chassidus is man’s inner path which he must reveal, and in Tanya every person can find his inner path in life. I felt that everything I had gone through in life took form in the holy letters that the Alter Rebbe wrote.

I converted on 21 Av, the day after the yahrtzait of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, the Rebbe’s father. We got married on 3 Elul 5754 in a shul in Chaifa. My husband and I began to come close to Chabad Chassidus. Our mashpia was Rabbi Dunin.

## **BURYING MY PARENTS**

After my father died, they buried him, but five years later, the priests removed his bones and put them in a box in a family ceremony. My mother was shaken by this and decided that when she died, she

wanted to be cremated so she wouldn’t have to go through the same thing. I was living in Israel and didn’t know about this.

Eight years after my father died, my mother died on Erev Yom Kippur. I was very sad that I could not be with her and bury her because it was a Yom Kippur close to Shabbos.

Following her death, I opened to letters from the Rebbe in which the Rebbe wrote, “I’karev” my family, and I did not understand this. I wrote to the Rebbe again and opened to a letter which said that I must be mekarev the family and that he was sending me money.

***When I first  
opened the Tanya,  
I cried tears of joy  
and emotion. I  
had found the  
answers and the  
path and my goal  
in life.***

Because of this answer, I decided to call my brother. I went over to the phone and just then, he called me! He said they had found a bank account belonging to my mother and he was sending me my share. I understood that this was the money the Rebbe was sending me to be mekarev my family. I told my brother that I wanted to use the money to fly to Colombia and visit my mother’s grave and that’s when he said, “She doesn’t have a grave!”

My first night in Colombia, I slept in Bogota. I dreamt that I was in Honda, walking in the mountains and arriving at my parents’ house,

where I met my mother. I wanted to hug her, in my dream, for I was so happy to see her, but she looked serious and sadly asked why I had taken so long to come; her soul had suffered till that day.

This dream fueled my efforts on her behalf. I started explaining to my brothers how important it is for the souls of the dead that they be buried in the ground. After I got their consent, I went to the priest who was responsible for the desecration of the dead and said I wanted to buy a joint plot for my parents. I tried to convince him that this is important according to Jewish sources, but the truth is he was only interested in money. So, with the money I had inherited from my mother, I bought her and my father a plot.

The Rebbe’s instruction to be mekarev my family became clear – karev is the same letters as kever, grave. I buried my parents on 18 Cheshvan, on the day that Avrohom Avinu bought the M’aras HaMachpella to bury his wife. I am grateful to the Rebbe for if not for him, my parents would not be buried at all.

## **THE ASTONISHING REVELATION**

I left the main surprise for last. I often opened to answers from the Rebbe which said that I should look into my family’s roots. My mother told me that her grandmother came from Spain. The only place that has research covering family trees of Jewish families who were expelled from Spain is the Diaspora Museum. I sent them all the names that I had and discovered, to my surprise, that the names of my both of my grandmothers are there and they are Jewish! This was true of both my mother’s mother and my father’s mother, the Navaro and Guererro families.



# THE BESHARIS BELONG IN BIRIYA

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

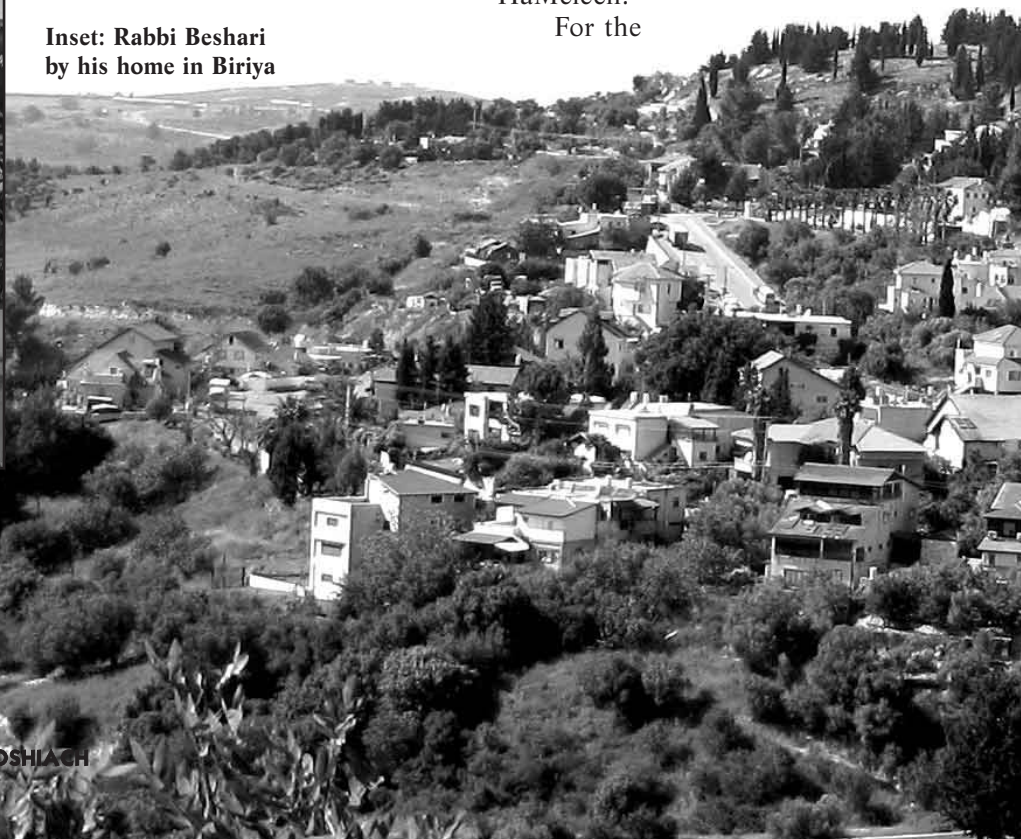
*In the small and magical village of Biriya, hundreds of Jewish souls have found their way to the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, often in the merit of the amazing answers they have received from him over the years, answers that have revolutionized their lives.*

known as “the eyes of the country,” is the calm and pastoral village of Biriya. A magical and breathtaking view appears from the windows of the houses of the village residents, most of who emigrated to Eretz Yisroel from North Africa and live a traditional lifestyle. The village is named after a vibrant settlement that existed on the premises during the era of the Talmud. The ancient village of Biriya was home to Rabbi Yosef Caro, compiler of the Shulchan Aruch, and is also the site of the grave of Benayahu ben Yehoyada, chief counsel to Dovid HaMelech.

For the

On a mountainside near Tzfas, positioned beneath the IDF Northern Command headquarters

Inset: Rabbi Beshari by his home in Biriya





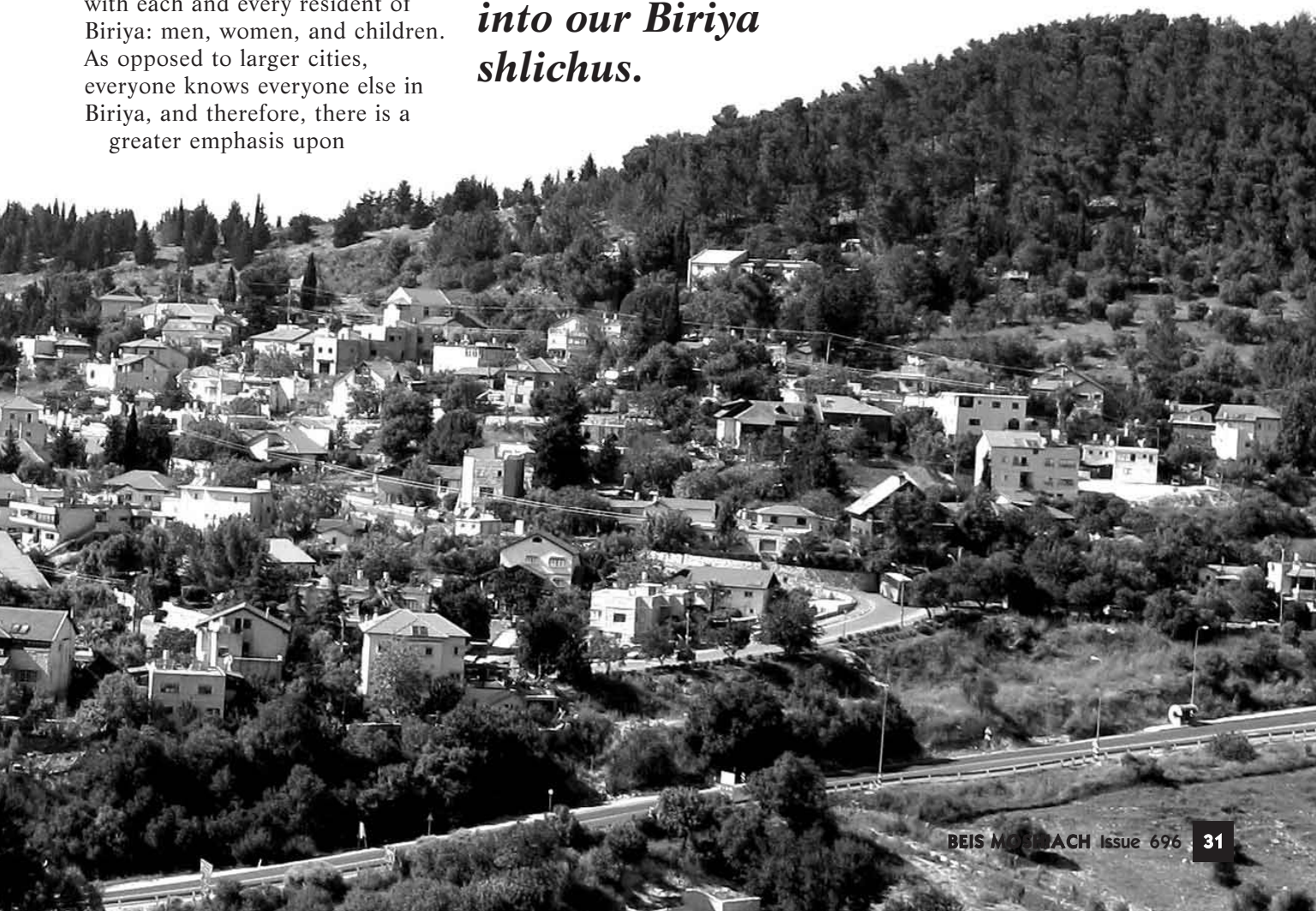
past twenty-five years, Rabbi Ehud Beshari and his wife, Devora, have been involved in outreach activities in Biriya. Until two years ago, they were living in the Kiryat Chabad community of Tzfas and commuted for shlichus. However, after the tragic accident near Eilat that took the lives of three yeshiva students on their way to mivtzaim during Chanuka, the couple resolved that they would give up the comforts of their warm community and move to the place of their shlichus. Thus, with the Rebbe's bracha, the Beshari family moved into the center of Biriya. On their first day there, they hung a large Moshiach flag on the house, a proud testimony to their purpose and objective there.

The central motto of the Besharis' activities is consistent, personal, and individual contact with each and every resident of Biriya: men, women, and children. As opposed to larger cities, everyone knows everyone else in Biriya, and therefore, there is a greater emphasis upon

***On the day we learned of the tragic death of the three T'mimim on their way to IDF army bases in the south to do 'mivtzaim' we decided we had to do something radical to hasten the Redemption, so we chose to throw ourselves into our Biriya shlichus.***

relating to each person as an individual. Their very presence and the direct contact with people in the street can bring revolutionary results. There is, for example, the local grocer who no longer makes a move without consulting the Rebbe, advising all her friends and acquaintances to do so as well, and a neighborhood woman in whose home a class for women has been established, making a deep and serious change in the host's way of life.

"Many women have told me that they began getting better acquainted with their close neighbors only in the merit of their participation in these activities," says the shlucha, Mrs. Devora Beshari. "This is a place where people work hard all day and come home only in the evening." Even if the Besharis won't admit it, the



participation of thirty women in a weekly Torah class on a settlement with one hundred and twenty families is a very respectable turnout. However, these shluchim do not measure success in statistical terms – until the Rebbe comes into every home in Biriya, they refuse to sit on their laurels.

## QUESTIONS IN FAITH THAT LED HIM TO “TOMCHEI T’MIMIM”

Rabbi Beshari’s parents emigrated from Yemen to Netanya, where he was born and raised. Even at an early age, he felt his soul yearning and searching for the true essence in its deepest and most inner sense. At a time when most of his friends were going out to seek greener pastures elsewhere, he chose to look for real Yiddishkait at home, seeking the true peace and tranquility to be found there.

He began playing various musical instruments as a hobby, and he chose to do his high school studies specifically at a religious institution in his hometown.

“When I completed my required high school studies, Divine Providence led me to the hesder yeshiva in Kedumim. During this time, I was already in the midst of an intensive search for my true self, looking for my true self, my soul. These were the days of the great battles of Gush Emunim, for the cause of settling Yehuda and Shomron, and I happily found myself joining young and old who went up to Sebastia time after time, and were evicted by the military authorities.

“Around this time, I came to know Rabbi Nachum Reichel, who in later years served as the rav of the Atzmona settlement in Gush Katif. We had many deep heartfelt talks, and I posed some difficult

questions in matters of faith. *Was there really a Revelation on Mount Sinai? Who says that all the stories in the Torah and Jewish history aren’t merely tales? By what right can the rabbanim interpret or be strict in matters of Torah?* Calmly and gently, he answered all my questions, including those I wouldn’t dare ask out of concern that I would be called a heretic.

“One day, I was heading towards Sebastia together with

***She had been  
living on the street  
for many years but  
had always  
thought that the  
place had been  
dark. However,  
with our arrival,  
she feels that the  
darkness has been  
replaced with the  
light of  
Redemption.***

Benny Katzover for another incursion and to supply our insurgents with food and water. Rabbi Reichel suddenly turned, asking me to accompany him to Tel Aviv because he was planning to stop in Kfar Chabad on the way and he wanted me to look into the yeshiva there. He knew what I felt in my heart and how I was searching for the truth, and he believed that I could only find the real answers in Chabad.

“We set out on our journey and soon found ourselves at Yeshiva Tomchei T’mimim in Kfar Chabad. He spoke with the rosh yeshiva, Rabbi Yaakov HaKohen Katz, and it was decided that I would stay there for a couple of days, and then I would decide if I wanted to remain. Rabbi Menashe Althaus, today serving as the Rebbe MH”M’s shliach in Kiryat Tivon, helped me a great deal in adapting to my new environment. He took care of all my needs and explained everything, with exemplary hospitality. Two days became four, and one week became two. I quickly understood that chassidus was what my soul desired.

“I was particularly enraptured by the Chabad niggunim. As a musician, I couldn’t help but be impressed by the intensity of these melodies. They were like cold water on a hot day for a tired and thirsting soul. They succeeded in restoring my connection to Torah and mitzvos.

“I found chavrusas with whom to learn nigleh and chassidus, and I invested much strength and energy to acquire and internalize greater wisdom in Torah. With each passing day, I felt a renewed sense of fulfillment, a welcome change from the feeling of inner emptiness and lack of faith in my Creator that I had in the past.

“Several months later, I returned to Kedumim to see Rabbi Reichel and express my thanks and appreciation. I was already going around with my tzitzis out, proud of my Judaism, the same Judaism regarding which I used to have such serious doubts. As I entered his home, I found him teaching the seifer ‘Nefesh HaChaim.’ When he saw me, his face lit up and he greeted me with undisguised joy. ‘Beshari has arrived,’ he said, ‘and now that he



has been learning chassidus in Kfar Chabad, he will explain to us the meaning of ‘*oros b’keilim*’ (lights in vessels).”

When Rabbi Reichel heard me explain the subject, he became most excited. He felt that I was no longer the same wayward and confused young man that he had known. Later, I discovered that I was not the only one that he had sent to learn in Chabad. There had been many others, among them Rabbi Amitai Yemini, who serves today as a shliach in Los Angeles.

“In 5740, I wrote to the Rebbe that I have resolved that I must go and learn in Yeshivas Tomchei T’mimim.

“Despite the fact that my progress in yeshiva was quick and straightforward, internalizing and manifesting such Chassidic values as what a Rebbe is, the power of a farbrengen, and bittul to the Rebbe and mashpiim took a little longer. The yeshiva folk put no pressure upon me, and the atmosphere was very pleasant. It took about a year and a half for me to become a full-fledged

chassid!

“At the start of 5741, I wrote to the Rebbe, asking whether I should continue learning in yeshiva or if I should start looking for a shidduch. In his reply, the Rebbe instructed me to consult with a mashpia. I went to R’ Mendel Futerfas, who told me with a smile, ‘Nu, get married.’ However, I had a slight problem: I had yet to have the privilege of going on ‘k’vutza.’ For R’ Mendel, this carried considerable weight, and he said, ‘Then go now.’ It was the month of Shvat, and after much pleading, my father consented to pay for my ticket. I experienced a most unique year with the Rebbe, which included the historic ceremony for the blessing of the sun. The moment that is most etched in my memory from that year was the maamer ‘B’chol Dor VaDor’ that the Rebbe gave over on Yud-Alef Nissan.

“In 5744, when I was still a young avreich, I met Rabbi Eliyahu Aryeh Friedman, of blessed memory, in shul. He was holding a list of locations for potential shlichus, and then



**Rabbi Beshari with his accordion at the Lag B’Omer parade**

proceeded to tell me what the Rebbe had spoken about on the previous Shabbos. ‘You must go out on shlichus – where do you choose to go?’ There was no room for argument. He had already established this as fact; the only question was where I wanted to do my outreach activities. ‘As nearby as possible,’ I replied, and he wrote me and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Bronstein down for shlichus in the nearby village of Biriya.

“We immediately began our activities there through home visits, checking mezuzos, Tzivos Hashem club for children, and a variety of many other programs in operation to this very day. Mrs. Shulamit Asulin gives a Tanya class for women every Sunday. On Tuesdays, there is a kollel for chassidus study, started by Rabbi Malkiel Machputz, and run today by R’ Dror Ben-Kish. We have a Tzivos Hashem club every Wednesday, run by students of the Beis Chana Seminar, and a shiur on Shabbos afternoons at the home of the Tritto family, taught



**Biriya residents participating in a Tanya class**



by Mrs. Michal Almalem and Mrs. Sara Chaya Wilschanski. In addition, we help many local residents write letters to the Rebbe and host them for Shabbos meals.”

## A VILLAGE OF A THOUSAND YEARS

Biriya is not just another yishuv, but an ancient site mentioned in the Talmud from the era after the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdash. In a letter from Tzfas sent in 1607, Biriya is listed among the Jewish villages that had been abandoned: “And there are destroyed synagogues there...countless Torah scrolls, and the Gentiles treat them with great respect – and the keys are in their hands...”

As a Jewish settlement, Biriya has gone through numerous changes from ancient times to our days. Rabbi Yosef Caro, compiler of the “Shulchan Aruch,” lived there. In 5668, Baron Rothschild purchased four thousand dunam north of Biriya. In 5682, a group of workers emigrated to Biriya, although they were unable to settle there.

In 5709, following the establishment of the modern Jewish state, a moshav of emigrants from Libya was established nearby, which was later abandoned and re-established in 5731. Later, a group of Italian converts, unable to be accepted for emigration elsewhere, managed to come here.

Today, the village of Biriya is a communal settlement with one hundred and twenty families and a total population of four hundred and fifty residents, both secular and religious.

Mrs. Beshari tells openly and candidly that in the early years of the shlichus, she didn’t see eye to eye with her husband about the

great investment he had made in the activities with the residents of Biriya. “It can be safely said that I didn’t take a serious part in the activities until five years ago, when I started walking to Biriya every Shabbos with guest speakers from Kiryat Chabad in Tzfas, who would teach Pirkei Avos during the summer and chassidus during

***“Then there were inner voices calling me to suppress and reject these feelings. But for days and nights on end, I kept wondering over the idea that although I had been searching for the meaning in the Far East – where will I find it? In Torah and mitzvos!”***

the winter. This class continues to this very day at the home of Mrs. Shosh Tritto, whose soul is filled with the teachings of Chabad chassidus in every sense of the word.

“She opens her home to us, as well as her heart to everything that symbolizes chassidus and to

all matters that bring satisfaction to the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach. Coming to Biriya every Shabbos catalyzed my personal connection with the local women, each one unique unto herself. We made our decision to move to Biriya, leaving the warm and united community of Kiryat Chabad in Tzfas, on the day we learned of the tragic death of the three T’mimim on their way to IDF army bases in the south to do ‘mivtzaim.’ We decided we had to do something radical to hasten the Redemption, so we chose to throw ourselves into our Biriya shlichus, quite literally.

“My husband consulted with Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Wilschanski and several other rabbanim and mashpiim in Tzfas, all of whom gave their approval. Naturally, I sat down and wrote a letter to the Rebbe via ‘Igros Kodesh,’ and the answer I received was quite clear: “Change your place and you change your luck for good and for a blessing. May they spread the teachings of chassidus in their new place.” There was no turning back. That same day, we began the process of looking for a home in Biriya.

“The house search had been going on for at least six months, but to no avail. We hadn’t been able to find a place that would fit our needs at a reasonable price. It was very frustrating, as we became reconciled to the fact that our plans apparently would not take hold, and we would have to continue operating through our home in Kiryat Chabad of Tzfas. Then we received another answer from the Rebbe, in response to a letter that I had written on another matter entirely. The Rebbe wrote that he was worried why we still hadn’t moved to our new place. This answer was addressed to a Cohen family. At



**Rabbi Beshari putting on t'fillin with one of the local youths**

my place of work, there is an employee named Aliza Cohen, who lives in Biriya. I called her into the office and asked if she knew about a house in Biriya that would be suitable for us. She was shocked by our desire to leave Tzfas and move to Biriya, but she immediately replied, 'Of course, I know about a house. There's a closed up house right across the road from us, totally empty, and the owners want to rent it out very much.' We went out that afternoon to see the house, were very impressed by it, and sat down with the owners that evening. After we explained to them the purpose of the house, they made a very sizable reduction in the asking price. The wife told us that she had been to the Rebbe in the past and was privileged to receive his blessing.

"Two years ago on Gimmel Tammuz, we moved with all our belongings to the new house. We hung a Moshiach flag on the house, and the settlement's Chabad activities received a double dose of fortitude and an immeasurable boost for greater

expansion. Two days later, a neighbor knocked at our door, telling us that she had been living on the street for many years but had always thought that the place had been dark. However, with our arrival, she feels that the darkness has been replaced with the light of Redemption. This was unquestionably a warm and heartfelt greeting of the highest order."

## **A PERSONAL STORY**

One of the Besharis' baalei t'shuva is **Sigal Rosenthal**. A certified cosmetician and alternative healer, Sigal began her return to Yiddishkait a little more than ten years ago on a tour of the East. Upon returning to Eretz Yisroel, she met her future husband, a jewelry designer by trade, and together they started a deep and meaningful journey along the path of Torah and mitzvos.

"Times were good for me as I started on the road back to Torah. I was lacking nothing, I enjoyed my material life, and similar to

many young people after completing their compulsory military service, I traveled to India and Thailand. My first insight regarding the existence of the Creator and my drive to explore my roots arose while in the southern Indian city of Poona, where I would meditate three times a day. Suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, I was struck by the thought that Jews, too, pray three times a day. I was overcome with the feeling that if I want to find the truth, I would have to go back home.

"Then there were inner voices calling me to suppress and reject these feelings. But for days and nights on end, I kept wondering over the idea that although I had been searching for the meaning in the Far East – where will I find it? In Torah and mitzvos! That's how I came to realize that there really is a G-d in Heaven, and this spurred me onto the path of our forefathers."

Over a period of several years, Sigal explored many paths within the Torah world. She studied at the Neve Yam Institute in Yerushalayim, and then with Breslov chassidism. After marrying, she established her home in Biriya. "My first serious connection with Chabad chassidus and the Rebbe was while I was hospitalized in the Sieff Hospital in Tzfas. One day, some Chabad women came for a visit and I told them of my health issues. Their reply: 'What's the problem? Write to the Rebbe!,' and they proceeded to explain how it is possible to write to the Rebbe and receive his bracha via 'Igros Kodesh.'

I followed their advice, and I received an answer from the Rebbe regarding the importance of making 'Mesibos Shabbos.' The problem was that I didn't have the

## NO GAME

Mrs. Sigal Rosenthal relates, “On the Shabbos before Pesach, I was privileged to stay with our shlucha, Mrs. Devorah Beshari at the Nir Etzion Hotel near Tirat HaCarmel, together with other Chabad women, friends and supporters, who had come there from all over the country. During this kinus, it crossed my mind that I felt myself a full-fledged ‘Chabadnikit.’ I observe nearly all the Chabad customs, and I am totally connected to the Rebbe and chassidus.

Thinking this over, I realized how incongruous it was that I wasn’t yet wearing a sheitel. Knowing how important it is to the Rebbe, I started working myself up to ‘go for it.’ After another few days of internalizing the whole concept, I made the final decision on that Erev Shabbos. I lit Shabbos candles, and after making the bracha, I asked the Rebbe that he should hear my request now as he had in the past, and give me encouragement towards this in the simplest possible words.

“However, I still had a big problem. My husband had not gone through the great kiruv process towards chassidus and the Rebbe that I had, and he was still opposed to the idea of my wearing a sheitel. The next day, after davening Shacharis with a lot of kavana, I went to the bookshelf and asked the Rebbe that he should give me a clear answer regarding what I should do – whether I should yield to the wishes of my husband, who doesn’t yet fully understand about the obligation to wear a sheitel, or should I start wearing the sheitel and afterwards refer him to the halachic sources and the people who can explain the matter to him.

“The Rebbe’s answer appears in a letter from the 7th of Elul, 5712 (Igros Kodesh, Vol. 6, pg. 327):

...I was sorry about what he writes in his letter that the opportunity has not yet come to travel and order a sheitel, and it’s a wonder that he would delay in this matter, and particularly when it is known to him what is explained in numerous places in chassidus and also understood according to human logic that at any moment, a person can acquire a whole world or *ch”v* the opposite, and thus with every moment that passes [and] he doesn’t do anything on the aforementioned matter, he could have built a world, i.e., to draw down

thereby additional holiness into all the worlds, as is understood from the Alter Rebbe’s Igeres HaT’shuva, Ch. 12, and because of negligence, this was not done. But we don’t bemoan the past, and he at least should hurry up in this matter as much as possible, and this is also the reason that I am sending my letter ‘special delivery.’

He certainly knows that Machne Israel has a special loan fund for such matters, and the payments are at reasonable terms, and if this is why there has been a delay until now, it’s a pity that he didn’t discover this, for the matter already would have been arranged. At least now he will move things along as is fitting, as in the saying of our Rabbis, of blessed memory, ‘swiftness brings, etc.,’ and the order of things concludes (Avoda Zara 20b) that eventually it leads to *ruach ha’kodesh*.

“As an Israeli who did not grow up in the religious world, when I read the letter the first time, I didn’t understand the meaning of the Yiddish word ‘*sheitel*.’

Mrs. Beshari explained to me that this was the Yiddish translation of ‘wig’...

“I was flabbergasted. The Rebbe writes in the clearest possible terms with a complaint why I still haven’t bought a sheitel. I immediately went out and bought a sheitel, which I now wear every day.

“My husband still wasn’t completely reconciled to this, and things didn’t go so easily. I wrote another letter to the Rebbe, and I read his answer again and again in a state of utter disbelief (ibid., p. 28): **I was pleased to receive his letter (no indication when it was written) that his wife has agreed to wear a sheitel. May it be the will of G-d Alm-ghty that she should do this with a joyous heart, and she should see with her own eyes the increased bracha and success in her endeavors, both general and particular, in proper health and parnasa for him and all the members of his household.**

“When I read the answer, I ran to my husband and said to him, ‘Look at what the Rebbe writes about how if I do this with a joyous heart, I will see with my own eyes an increased bracha and success in all that we require. This is for sure not just a game.’ Since that moment, a day does not go by without my wearing a sheitel.”

***‘Look at what the Rebbe writes! This is for sure not just a game.’***



slightest idea how to organize such a thing. I tried to gather children together and daven with them, but the project didn't last very long and I stopped doing it. Not long afterwards, I had another opportunity to spend time with some Chabadnikim, and I asked them to help me to write a letter to the Rebbe. When I opened the volume of 'Igros', I was amazed to see that the Rebbe again writes about organizing Shabbos groups. That same day, I asked how to go about doing this properly, and I have been involved in this activity now for eight years. Shortly after I began organizing the 'Mesibos Shabbos', I wrote to the Rebbe on a different matter, and I received a reply in which the Rebbe complained why I didn't mention in my letter about the 'Mesibos Shabbos' that I organize... Until then, I was part of the Breslov community in every respect, but after the clear guidance that I was privileged to receive from the Rebbe, I understood that there is only one leader, and I began the process of coming closer to Chabad.

"My greatest step along the marvelous path of Chabad chassidus was when I started taking part in the Shabbos classes organized by Mrs. Beshari at the home of the Tritto family. At one of these classes, I spoke to one of my Chabad friends about a serious personal dilemma. After seven years of marriage we still had not been blessed with children. We did not know whether to try various fertility methods or to leave things as they were. My husband was in favor of doing the treatments, and since we were both longing to become parents, I asked one of my friends to buy me a volume of 'Igros Kodesh.' I knew that if there was anyone in the world who could help, it could only be



Biriya's mitzva tank

the Rebbe.

"One day, when I was tormented by feelings of anguish, distress, and sheer hopelessness, I took a T'hilim and began to pour out my soul to Hashem. I put a few coins in a pushka and then wrote a letter to the Rebbe about the entire predicament, asking for guidance on what I should do. The answer I received appears in Vol. 6, pg. 91:

**In response to his letter in which he asks my opinion whether to continue turning to doctors or to have trust in G-d: It is quite clear that we must be strong in our faith in G-d, who heals all flesh and performs wonders, while also making a vessel in a natural way by following the doctor's instructions, and G-d Alm-ghty will fulfill their hearts' wishes for good to bless him and his wife with zera chaya v'kayama. I will read the PaN at the Tzion.**

"There was no need for a clearer answer than that. All the fears and concerns disappeared as if they never existed. I felt that the

Rebbe was accompanying me throughout the series of treatments, and this was a tremendous relief. The treatment proved successful from the very outset.

"Towards the end of pregnancy, I decided that I would give the baby an authentic Chabad name, whether it was a boy or a girl. Accordingly we named our daughter Chana Dina. A few years later, I wanted to have more children and so I wrote to the Rebbe again. The Rebbe replied that I should give tz'daka before lighting Shabbos candles, and my husband should form a picture of the Rebbe Rayatz in his mind. This time as well, the first treatment worked, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Teives, the yahrtzeit of the Alter Rebbe, I gave birth to twins."

## ANSWERS ABOUND

When I ask the Besharis whether they find truth to the claim that publicizing the announcement of the Redemption and the identity of the Redeemer

on their shlichus drives people away, they raise their eyebrows in surprise and reject the whole argument. “Maybe this was so in the past, when not everyone was a proper vessel to accept such concepts. Today, however, according to what we see and feel in our daily activities, people are yearning and longing for it. Here in Biriya, there isn’t a single resident who hasn’t heard about the possibility to write to the Rebbe via ‘Igros Kodesh’ and receive his advice and guidance. There have been stories upon stories of amazing answers, and there are many people here who simply don’t make a move without asking the Rebbe for his blessing.

“Our local grocer, an interesting woman who seems on the surface to be quite far from Chabad and from Rebbe, openly publicizes the subject of ‘Igros Kodesh’ to virtually every person who walks into her store. Many of them end up revealing to her their deepest secrets and the difficult problems they have encountered in life, and she heartily suggests to all of them that they should write to the Rebbe.

“One local resident came into her grocery one day looking very gloomy, and when she asked her customer what was troubling her, the woman replied that she is in the early stages of pregnancy, and after undergoing an examination, the doctors told her that she would have to give birth via an operation. ‘Nu, what’s the problem?’ the grocer replied. ‘You’re neighbors of Beshari, right? Haven’t you heard that you can write to the Rebbe via *Igros Kodesh*?’ The woman was most receptive to the suggestion, and that very day, she sat down and wrote a letter to the Rebbe.

The answer was amazing: The Rebbe wrote to a Jew who was

about to have an operation, and told him of his obligation to believe that everything happens by Divine Providence, and things will work out in a manner beyond logic and reason. She found the answer difficult to believe, yet when she went in for another examination prior to giving birth, the doctors decided that she could give birth naturally. This woman has since joined our growing circle of close friends and supporters who don’t make any

***With a heart  
engulfed by deep  
anguish and  
yearning for help,  
she asked the  
Rebbe for a  
bracha that this  
problem that was  
disturbing her  
peace of mind  
should simply  
disappear.***

major decisions in life without asking for the Rebbe’s bracha...

“Only recently there was another yet another incredible story here: One day, a Biriya resident came to me and asked for a bracha and advice from the Rebbe regarding a certain problem in connection with her children. It was sad to see her in such a state. This is a woman who is generally very optimistic, filled with the joy of life, yet on this particular day, I

noticed that the problem clouded her mood and put her into a deep state of dejection. Naturally, I convinced her to compose a letter to the Rebbe. She put all her feelings of distress in writing and she placed the letter in one of the volumes of ‘Igros Kodesh.’ The Rebbe replied with a letter stating that he is upset that she is going to a fortune teller, and spelling out in detail how seriously he views this from a halachic standpoint. At first, I didn’t understand the answer; after all, this was a religious woman. What did the Rebbe mean?

“After I finished reading the letter, I asked her if someone in her family was consulting a fortune teller. It never dawned on me that it was her. I suddenly saw her blush and then turn pale, as she initially couldn’t find the words to express her reaction. ‘How does the Rebbe know?’ she muttered excitedly, as she broke down and admitted that she has been seeing a fortune teller. She promised that she would not go to this person again, as in the merit of the Rebbe’s answer, she understood the seriousness of the matter...”

During the day, Mrs. Beshari works as the kitchen supervisor at the Beis Chana high school in Tzfas, and the staff includes several employees who are also residents of Biriya. A few years ago, she decided to give each of them a gift to show her appreciation for their work and dedication – a volume of “Igros Kodesh”.

“One of these women recently told me an amazing story that had happened to her. Not long ago, she had resolved to say T’hillim every Shabbos morning, and on one particular Shabbos, there was something troubling her that she didn’t want to discuss.

“She went over to the bookshelf in her home, and with a heart engulfed by deep anguish and yearning for help, she asked the Rebbe for a bracha that this problem that was disturbing her peace of mind should simply disappear. When she randomly opened a volume of ‘Igros Kodesh,’ she was stunned to see that the Rebbe had written how happy he was to hear that she says T’hillim on Shabbos, as he mentioned in great detail about the great value attributed to saying T’hillim. She told me that she was so overwhelmed by this answer that it left her absolutely speechless. She was even more moved when she got to the part in the letter where he offers “condolences to her on the passing of her mother-in-law.” The fact was that her husband was then sitting ‘Shiva’ after the passing of his mother...

“There are dozens of such stories all over Biriya. People see miracles in their daily lives, and as a result, they believe with simple truth.”

**Mrs. Beshari, based on your experience, what suggestions do you have for new shluchim to the moshavim?**

“They must always remember that our task is to utilize every meeting and every conversation, even by chance, to add some content in spreading the wellsprings of chassidus. A few months ago, we were checking out a house that we were thinking of renting and met with the young

couple who owned it. The house was neither suitable nor large enough for our needs, but the owners still wanted to sit down and chat with us. We happily consented, and naturally started talking about chassidus. We eventually learned that their thoughts of t’shuva started as a result of the strong Jewish feelings that were aroused during the recent IDF military operation ‘Cast Lead’ in the Gaza Strip. As we were leaving, the woman told us, ‘You came here not to see the house, but in order to strengthen us.’

“Every meeting and every conversation with another Jew is a valuable opportunity, as everything happens by Divine Providence. It is impossible to know the effect even one word could have on someone’s soul. One should never forget that it’s Hashem who brought you together, for a reason.

“Another tip is that if you want to develop a close connection with these people, show genuine concern and care for them. We make a point of visiting every woman in our community after birth, and we bring each of them a gift. My husband makes certain to visit all those who have taken ill, and plays his accordion as part of his *bikkur cholim* activities. People always remember this and appreciate it very much. The most important thing on shlichus is to be consistent and continue moving forward.”

**Chassidim always look ahead.**

## **What are your future plans?**

“As a general rule, we don’t make grandiose projects. We work in a small village, not in a large city. I recall times when I felt a bit depressed as I saw shluchim building and developing where they were, while due to the nature of the Biriya village, we had to settle for dealing with private individuals and we don’t always see the fruits of our labors. By Divine Providence, I met Mrs. Devora Vaknin, the shlucha in Menachemia, near Teverya, and I told what I was thinking. She told me, ‘You should know that the Rebbe isn’t looking for big projects. He has enough of those. The Rebbe is looking for the ‘little jars,’ and they are what will bring Moshiach.’

“Her words were very encouraging. I understood that the very fact that we were in Biriya, even without the big activities, has had an effect upon the local residents. I hear from many women how by simply coming here, we have aroused them to become much stronger in a variety of aspects of Torah and mitzvos.

“We plan to establish of a chassidic library for children with religious, educational, and of course, chassidic literature. I have seen an intense thirst for this among children and youth, and we must quench it through Jewish ideas, something that will help mold them in both the short and the long term.”





[Continued from pg. 7]

pivotal to the revelation of the Giving of the Torah. How could this be?

So the correct [and deeper] reading of these words is that the significance of the “uproar” at the Giving of the Torah (the thunder and the tumult, etc.; “The entire nation that was in the camp trembled”; the expression in the verse, “The earth quaked”<sup>64</sup>) is not only insofar as the tumult was heard by the physical ear – serving as an additional detail contributing to the preparation for and as a preface to the Giving of the Torah – but insofar as the uproar bears spiritual significance. The overwhelming excitement at the Giving of the Torah was on account of its profound innovation, recognizing in every detail of the Creation and in the entirety of Creation as a whole that the truth of the world’s existence is not what appears and is revealed to the eyes of flesh – that it exists and is real unto itself – rather, the truth is the Source which creates it, the Truth of the Existence of the Creator.

6. The word “Torah” is etymologically linked to the word “*haraa*,”<sup>65</sup> meaning “instruction,” “teaching.” How much more so is this the case when we reach the day of the year when the Torah was given to the Jewish people, for “these days are recalled and done”<sup>66</sup> [i.e., when you mark a particular day, the special qualities of that day are re-experienced]. Every single Jew must derive a lesson from the Torah reading as well as the Haftora of the day of the Festival of Shavuot. According to the explanation above, we may assert that there is an instruction with regard to the two areas – in one’s personal service of G-d and in the service of influencing others.

Although with regard to the Account of the Chariot it is said, “We don’t expound...about the Chariot...unless he is a wise person with an understanding mind,”<sup>28</sup> this is so with regard to the Account of the Chariot, as it is discussed in the Written and Oral Torah, only insofar as it is written in the Torah’s **mystical lexicon**<sup>67</sup> (the details about Yechezkel’s Chariot, books that were deliberately concealed from the public, and etc.). However, regarding the study of the inner dimension of the Torah as has been **revealed** and explained by the Arizal, who said that the time has come whereby “it is a mitzva to reveal this wisdom”<sup>68</sup> – this study is incumbent upon every single person.<sup>69</sup> In particular, after more time has passed since then, wherein we have had the advent of the explanation of the teachings of Chassidus, and especially after it has been explained in the wording of the Sages of the Torah in terms of understanding and comprehension, in a manner of “*visparnasun*”<sup>70</sup> [literally, “providing a livelihood”; meaning internalized and relevant to the person, as one’s livelihood is something tangible and real]. Indeed, this is “a lofty and exalted mitzva ... ‘Know the L-rd of your fathers, etc.’”<sup>71</sup> and it brings a person to have a ‘whole heart.’”<sup>72</sup>

In this manner we come to see and recognize in every single thing the truth of its existence – that it is created from the True Existence.

In a similar sense it is understood also regarding service with others – that the dissemination of Torah and Judaism among the

Jewish people at large must be done with “the sound of a great uproar.”<sup>73</sup>

When the service of the person is still within, inside the four cubits of Torah and holiness, it is enough for the manner of service to sometimes be as it is, in “a still and soft voice.”<sup>74</sup>

However, when we go out of these four cubits, amidst “the multitudinous voice of Rome,”<sup>75</sup> the nullification of this voice is accomplished by “the sound of a great uproar” of holiness. And by doing so, we merit the imminent fulfillment of, “He will sound the great shofar”<sup>76</sup> – specifically “the great shofar,” a reference to the Future [Redemption], together with, “A voice proclaims, proclaims and says”<sup>77</sup> – proclaiming the Redemption, which will take place in the very near future.

(From the talks delivered on Shabbos Parshas Naso 5745 and Shabbos Parshas Yisro 5740)

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Laws of Prayer 13:9

<sup>2</sup> Yisro 19:1 ff

<sup>3</sup> Yechezkel Ch. 1

<sup>4</sup> 31a

<sup>5</sup> Orach Chaim Ch. 494

<sup>6</sup> Megilla 31a, entry beginning with the word, “*BaMerkava*”

<sup>7</sup> Orach Chaim 494:4

<sup>8</sup> The Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch* adds, “The Holy One Blessed Be He (was revealed).” And in a handwritten manuscript of Rashi’s commentary...“on Atzeres upon Mount Sinai.”

<sup>9</sup> Ran on Megilla 31a: “for the Holy One Blessed Be He descended upon Mount Sinai with the glory of His Chariot.”

<sup>10</sup> Orach Chaim 494:1

<sup>11</sup> Yisro 20:2-3; Makos 24a, beg.; Hurios 8a, end

<sup>12</sup> Yisro 20:15

<sup>13</sup> 1:28

<sup>14</sup> See Tanchuma Tzav 12, etc. (See Footnote 15 in the original.)

<sup>15</sup> To note from what is written in *Zohar Chadash* on Yisro (37d, end ff) – that the vision of Yechezkel was on the holiday of Shavuot, on the day of the Giving of the Torah, etc. (See Footnote 17 in the original.)

<sup>16</sup> Rashi’s expression on Megilla 30b, commentary beginning with the words, “*Ha k’d’isa*.”

<sup>17</sup> In the Diaspora, where two days of Yom Tov are observed.

<sup>18</sup> Quote from the Alter Rebbe in *Shulchan Aruch* ibid 4.

<sup>19</sup> 2:20 ff. See the opinion of the first Tanna, from Megilla 31a, “On Atzeres, ‘Shiva Shavuot’ [is read] and they conclude with Chabakuk.” But nowadays, this is the Torah portion and Haftora read on the second day, as the Gemara concludes.

<sup>20</sup> And the *Levush* ibid 2 writes, “which is also about the account of the Chariot.”

<sup>21</sup> Chabakuk 3:3, etc. See Footnote 23 in the original.

<sup>22</sup> Notes of HaBach ibid.

- <sup>23</sup> Rashi on Megilla *ibid*.
- <sup>24</sup> Tanchuma (Tisa 21) and Shmos Rabba (42:5), cited in Radak on Yechezkel *ibid*.
- <sup>25</sup> Ch. 6
- <sup>26</sup> See also Zohar II 82a.
- <sup>27</sup> That is the opinion from Ramban's commentary on the Torah (Yisro 20:7) – that these two Divine Statements [of the ten], “they heard the speech and understood it as Moshe understood them.” However, according to the opinion of Rambam (*A Guide to the Perplexed* 2:35), among others, they did not attain the level of Moshe even in these two Divine Statements, etc. See Footnote 29 in the original.
- <sup>28</sup> Mishna Chagiga 11b; Rambam's Laws of the Foundations of the Torah Ch. 2, end.
- <sup>29</sup> *Chak Yaakov* *ibid*, siman katan 3.
- <sup>30</sup> The Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* Orach Chaim 494:5
- <sup>31</sup> Mishna Megilla 25a, end (and in Mishnayos, Ch. 4, end).
- <sup>32</sup> Rabbeinu Akiva Bartenura on this Mishna, *ibid*. See also Rambam in his *Commentary on the Mishnayos*, *ibid*.
- <sup>33</sup> On Mishna Megilla *ibid*.
- <sup>34</sup> Mishlei 17:28
- <sup>35</sup> See the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim 284:11: The one reading the Haftora should not begin until the person rolling the Torah scroll has completed his task in order that also that person will be able to **understand and listen** to it [i.e., so his attention will not be diverted from the Haftora while being preoccupied with the Torah scroll], for it is incumbent upon everyone to listen to the Haftora just as one listens to the reading of the Torah portion ... In fact, there are those who have the custom ... not to rely on hearing [the Haftora] alone, rather, they read the Haftora themselves [concurrently in a low voice], etc.
- <sup>36</sup> Wording of Rambam in the introduction to *Moreh Nevuchim* Part 3.
- <sup>37</sup> Chagiga 13b.
- <sup>38</sup> Commentary of Rashi on Chagiga *ibid*.
- <sup>39</sup> To note what is mentioned in the commentary of Tosafos on the words, “Village Person,” Chagiga *ibid*.
- <sup>40</sup> See *Moreh Nevuchim* Part 3, Ch. 6, end, and the commentaries there.
- <sup>41</sup> That is, in comparison to the other prophets, excluding Moshe. See *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. 9, pg. 204, Footnote 7.
- <sup>42</sup> Along the lines of what it says in *Tanya* Ch. 42 (61a) in the note.
- <sup>43</sup> Part 4 Ch. 18, end.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid* Ch. 19
- <sup>45</sup> Wording of *Avodas HaKodesh* *ibid* in explaining the verse, “From its midst was the likeness of four Chayos.”
- <sup>46</sup> 1:5-13
- <sup>47</sup> See Footnote 50 in the original.
- <sup>48</sup> To note from *Seifer HaSichos* 5705 (pg. 102) that three things were given at the time of the Giving of the Torah: 1) the revealed dimension of the Torah, 2) the esoteric dimension of the Torah, 3) the power to serve G-d. See there.
- <sup>49</sup> See Rambam Laws of the Foundations of the Torah Ch. 8; Ramban's commentary on the Torah, Parshas Yisro 20:7, among others.
- <sup>50</sup> Tanchuma VaEira 15; Shmos Rabba 12:3.
- <sup>51</sup> See *Tanya – Shaar HaYichud V'HaEmuna* Ch. 1 and Ch. 3.
- <sup>52</sup> B'Reishis Rabba 10:6; Zohar II 171b, etc. See Footnote 55 in the original.
- <sup>53</sup> See the words of the Rebbe Maharash (*HaTamim* Issue #3, pg. 27 (130a)) – that the fact that the Alter Rebbe writes in *Shaar HaYichud V'HaEmuna* (Ch. 3, beg.), “were the eye given permission to behold, etc., the physicality of the creation, its materialism and its tangibility, would not be seen at all to our eyes” – the intent with the reference to the vision of the eyes is only without Divine service, but through the service of G-d it is within the capacity of everyone to see, etc. Look it up there.
- <sup>54</sup> Rambam's Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, beg.
- <sup>55</sup> See Mechilta and the commentary of Rashi on Parshas Yisro 19:5.
- <sup>56</sup> Zohar II (93b, end ff.). See also Zohar II 82a.
- <sup>57</sup> Yechezkel 3:12.
- <sup>58</sup> Wording of the Alter Rebbe in his *Shulchan Aruch* 494:4.
- <sup>59</sup> See commentaries there.
- <sup>60</sup> See *Likkutei Torah* Bracha 97b, etc. – see Footnote 63 in the original.
- <sup>61</sup> *Seifer HaMaamarim* 5661, pg. 198.
- <sup>62</sup> Yisro 19:16.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid* 20:19.
- <sup>64</sup> T'hilim 68:9.
- <sup>65</sup> Zohar III 53b; *Gur Aryeh* B'Reishis, beg., in the name of the Radak.
- <sup>66</sup> Megillas Ester 9:28, etc. – see Footnote 69 in the original.
- <sup>67</sup> Whereas the majority of the Torah – even though the Torah (as the Sh'l'a puts it (13b; 161a ff; see Asara Maamaros, maamer Chikur Din 3:23)) “speaks about the **Supernal Realms** and only alludes to the Lower Realms” – is written and stated specifically in the lexicon of human beings.
- <sup>68</sup> *Tanya Igeres HaKodesh* Ch. 26 (142b)
- <sup>69</sup> See Laws of Torah Study of the Alter Rebbe 1:4, end. See also the preface of Rabbi Chaim Vital to *Shaar HaHakdamos*.
- <sup>70</sup> Expression of the Tikkunei Zohar (Tikkun 6, end), etc. – see Footnote 73 in the original.
- <sup>71</sup> Divrei HaYamim I 28:9
- <sup>72</sup> Wording of the Alter Rebbe in *Tanya Kuntres Acharon*, section beginning with the words, “To understand what is written in *Pri Eitz Chayim* (156b; see Chart of Corrections there)
- <sup>73</sup> See at length on this subject in *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. 16, pg. 340 ff.
- <sup>74</sup> Melachim I 19:12.
- <sup>75</sup> Wording of the Gemara, Makos 24a, end.
- <sup>76</sup> Yeshayahu 27:13. See *Likkutei Torah* Rosh HaShana, words beginning with, “It will be on that day” (58a ff).
- <sup>77</sup> Liturgy for Hoshanos on Hoshana Rabba.