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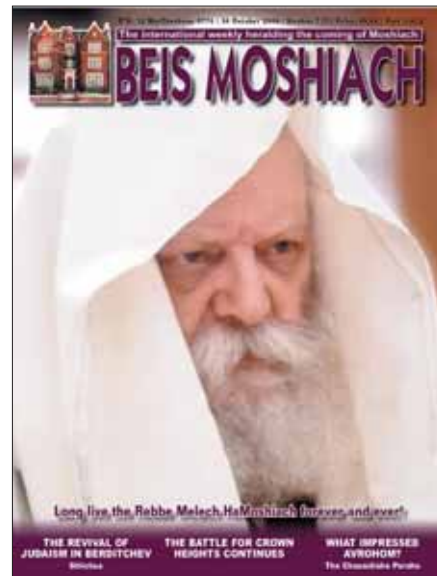
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# AVROHOM'S ODYSSEY

Sichos In English

## WHAT THE TORAH HIGHLIGHTS

Every school child knows the story of Avrohom - how he discovered G-d as a child, broke his father's idols, and then was thrown into the furnace by Nimrod and saved by G-d.

None of these particulars, however, can be found in the Written Torah.

The Torah mentions Avrohom briefly at the close of Parshas Noach, [1] telling us that he was born, that he married, and that he accompanied his father on his journey to Charan.

But the focus of those verses is on his father Terach, not on Avrohom.

It is in Parshas Lech Lecha, with the command, [2] "Go out of your land, your native country, and your father's house," that the Torah begins highlighting the history of Avrohom as the founder of our people.

The other stories mentioned previously although part of the Oral Tradition, are not included in the Written Torah.

What is at the heart of this choice of emphasis?

Before receiving this command, Avrohom had already attained high rungs in his divine service. It was at the age of three that he had "recognized his Creator," and from that age onward, he continued to grow in his devotion. He had been willing to sacrifice his life for G-d,

and a great miracle was performed to save him.

All this, however, represented merely his own striving to unite with G-d.

Receiving the command Lech Lecha, "Go out of your land," began a new and deeper stage in Avrohom's relationship with G-d. For, as our Sages state, [3] "a person who observes a mitzvah because he is commanded to do so is greater than one who observes it without having been so commanded."

The word mitzvah and the word tzavsa, meaning "together", share the same root. [4]

When a person fulfills a divine command because he has been commanded to do so, the act which he performs is G-dly, and connects him to G-d in all His infinity. If he performs the same deed without having been commanded to do so, his act, however worthy, remains merely a good deed: it does not establish a connection of the same nature.

This is implied by the command, "Go out." Avrohom was commanded to depart from his limited mortal framework of reference and establish an unlimited connection with G-d. [5] By doing so, he defined the nature of the relationship between G-d and his descendants, the Jewish people of all time.

Our relationship to G-d is not dependent on our love,

understanding, or belief, but is instead a response to G-d's initiative.

Our Rabbis [6] underscore this concept, stating that Avrohom's service anticipated the bond with G-d made possible after the giving of the Torah.

## NEW VISTAS

Lech also means "proceed," indicating the beginning of an ongoing journey of divine service.

This concept is also alluded to in the Torah's description of Avrohom as "continuing on his way, steadily progressing southward," [7] i.e., in the direction of Jerusalem, [8] the place where G-d's presence is manifest.

Real progress means leaving one's previous state entirely.

As long as an individual's personal growth depends on his own power alone, his progress will be limited. [9]

He cannot go beyond the bounds of his own understanding. When, by contrast, his progress is guided by G-d's commandments, there are no limits to the potential for growth. The Torah and its mitzvos can take a person far beyond his own vistas.

To accentuate this point, the command Lech Lecha tells Avrohom to proceed "to the land which I will show you" without mentioning a specific destination. For following G-d's commandments brings a person to horizons which he could not appreciate on his own.

## SELF-DISCOVERY

The expression "I will show you," Ar'eka in Hebrew, can also be rendered "I will reveal you," i.e., through the journey to Eretz Yisroel, Avrohom's true self was revealed.

This is also indicated by the expression Lech Lecha, which literally means "go to yourself," i.e., "to your essence," [10] to the very source of the soul.

This also points to an unlimited potential, for a Jew's soul is "an actual part of G-d." [11]

A person's spiritual journey involves transcending his ordinary habits and ways of thinking, and tapping his essential G-dly core. [12]

As we proceed through life, each of us is given the chance to discover who he is, what G-d is, and that the two are in essence one.

## PASSING THROUGH SHADOWS

In the midst of his spiritual journey, a person may be forced to confront challenges, situations which require him to struggle to continue to advance. Nevertheless, since these phases of his journey are also guided by Divine Providence, he must realize that the motivating intent for them is also positive. These situations are, to borrow an expression from our Sages, a descent for the purpose of ascent.

Why must a person face such challenges? Two reasons are given:

a. To bring out the fundamental power of his soul. As long as a person does not have to confront a challenge, it is sufficient for him to rely on his ordinary powers; he need not tap his core. When, by contrast, he must face a challenge, he summons up his innermost spiritual resources.

b. In the process of overcoming these challenges, the person elevates the sparks of G-dliness they contain.

For all existence is maintained by G-d's creative-energy which is vested within it. Since G-d desired to create a physical world, this divine-energy is hidden within the world's material substance and as a result of this concealment, challenges arise. When a person overcomes these challenges, he reveals the inner G-dly nature of existence.

Avrohom's spiritual journey also contained such phases. Shortly after he entered Eretz Yisroel, he was

forced to descend to Egypt. Egypt is described as "the nakedness of the land;" [13] its very name Mitzrayim is related to the word meitzarim meaning "boundaries" or "limitations". [14]

And yet, Avrohom's descent to Egypt brought him blessing. He left Egypt "very rich in cattle, in silver, and gold." [15] Moreover, this material wealth came from spiritual effort; Avrohom had elevated the sparks of G-dliness invested in that land. [16]

## JOURNEY WITH OTHERS

A person's spiritual quest should not be a lonely journey.

On the contrary, one of the signs of one's personal development is the capacity to inspire others to join in this endeavor. Avrohom surely gave expression to this thrust, as our Sages commented [17] with regard to the verse, [18] "And he called in the name of the G-d of the universe": "Do not read VaYikra ('And he called'), read VaYakri ('And he had others call')."

This concept is also reflected in the changing of his name from Avram to Avrohom. [19]

Rashi [20] explains that Avram has the implication "father of Aram," while Avrohom alludes to the Hebrew words meaning "father of many nations."

The change of his name implied that Avrohom had been given the potential to inspire and influence all the nations in the world to begin striving toward spiritual purpose.

## A SIGN IN OUR FLESH

Significantly, Avrohom was given this name in connection with the mitzvah of circumcision.

Circumcision, the mitzvah which affects the most material aspects of our being, demonstrates that our spiritual quest is not an attempt to escape our worldly reality, but rather

an attempt to refine it.

Circumcision represents a "covenant in the flesh," [21] and endows our physical bodies themselves with a dimension of holiness. [22]

## THE PROMISE OF ERETZ YISROEL

The above concepts also enable us to appreciate why the promise of Eretz Yisroel to Avrohom's descendants is mentioned in connection with the mitzvah of circumcision.

Circumcision reflects the unification of the spiritual and the physical in one's own person, while the relationship between the Jews and Eretz Yisroel reflects the unification of spirituality and physicality in the world at large.

In this sense, the promise of Eretz Yisroel represents the culmination of Avrohom's spiritual journey. For the most complete departure from a particular spiritual environment is the transformation of that environment itself.

Thus the fulfillment of G-d's command for Avrohom to leave the confines of material existence (Lech Lecha) comes about through his descendants efforts to transform Eretz Yisroel into a dwelling for G-d.

In a complete sense, the promise of Eretz Yisroel will not be realized until the Era of the Redemption and in that sense, the journey of Lech Lecha remains an ongoing endeavor for all of Avrohom's descendants.

Until the coming of Moshiach, we are constantly in a state of flux, going beyond the limits of our immediate spiritual level and striving to bring ourselves and our surrounding environment to its ultimate state of fulfillment.

*Adapted from Likkutei Sichos, Vol. V, p. 57ff; Vol. XX, p. 59ff, p. 301ff; Vol. XXV, p. 52; Seifer HaSichos, 5750 p. 96ff.*

[Continued on pg. 23]

# THE REVIVAL OF JUDAISM IN BERDITCHEV

By Nosson Avrohom

*25 Tishrei marked 200 years since the passing of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev. We spoke to Rabbi and Mrs. Thaler, shluchim to Berditchev, who work devotedly in reaching out to the Jews of their town and to all the visitors who come to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok's gravesite.*

It was already early evening, but R' Thaler's office was still humming with activity. About 1000 people would be arriving from all over the world to visit the gravesite of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev (1740-1809) for his 200<sup>th</sup> yahrtzait, and there was a lot to do to prepare.

"We will be hiring a security firm, and renting large tents and portable toilets for the visitors to the gravesite. There will be a place to wash hands, coffee and cake, and a big tent set up at the shul for a seuda for the many guests."

The Chabad shul's proximity to the gravesite of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok has made the Thaler family outstanding hosts. In addition to the preschool, shul and yeshiva, the

shluchim – particularly the shlucha – are kept busy hosting scores of visitors who come to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok's grave.

\*\*\*

Evening descended upon the quiet Ukrainian town of Berditchev, a town that has a place of honor in Jewish history thanks to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, Defender of Israel, who served as *Mara D'Asra* for 25 years. It is said that just mentioning the name "Berditchev" serves as an arousal of spiritual defense for the Jewish people.

The Jews of Berditchev were busy making their final preparations for Rosh HaShana. Only a few hundred Jewish families live in the poor town of Berditchev today. No fewer than

80% of the Jews of the town are in touch with the shluchim, Rabbi Moshe Shmuel and Mrs. Chana Thaler.

## TREMENDOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

R' Thaler is a personable Chassidishe young man. Only someone as patient as he, can handle the challenges of a Jewish community that has suffered seventy years of oppression by the communist government. R' Thaler is a people person. He truly listens to people, a rare talent and a boon for the elderly, unfortunate and lonely. His office is open all day and any Jew with a problem can stop by and pour out their heart.

Our interview was interrupted several times by people who had come by to discuss matters that were weighing on their minds. Surprisingly, when I asked R' Thaler for special stories, he said he had none for me. He does not measure his success by stories about baalei t'shuva but by action.

He has built magnificent mosdos, a shul, a preschool, a school, and a Chabad house, and he runs holiday programs and interacts with the thousands of visitors. His yardstick for success is whether a Jew feels better now than before.

R' Thaler is a nice guy but when it comes to things he has to fight for, he's not afraid of anyone. For example, when it comes to preventing the destruction of graves, the desecration of the honor of the dead, or assimilation, he is fierce.

## ANSWER FROM THE REBBE

How did the Thalers end up in Berditchev?

R' Thaler is a descendent of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok. So when he was asked, at the end of his year of learning on K'vutza in 770, to go on





**A Hachnasas Seifer Torah in Berditchev. Rabbi Moshe Thaler, the Rebbe's shliach to Berditchev, is in the center.**

Merkos Shlichus to Berditchev, he didn't think twice.

Rabbi Shmuel Plotkin was working there at the time. He started Chabad activity there back in 1989, when the communist bloc was just beginning to crumble. Two years later, in 1991, R' Plotkin left Berditchev for Zhitomir. When he passed by the Rebbe for dollars, he received two dollars, one for Zhitomir and one for Berditchev.

To him this was a sign that he couldn't abandon Berditchev, so along with his work in other Ukrainian cities, he brought T'mimim to work in Berditchev and kept in touch with the Jews of the town.

Ten years ago, on Erev Rosh HaShana, Rabbi Plotkin sent R'

Thaler to Berditchev. R' Thaler had no idea at the time that he would be returning after he got married as the town's official shliach.

He was there for half a year, opening a shul, establishing a kollel for seniors and working with young people. Then he left for Eretz Yisroel, where he got married and stayed for the next two years. Other T'mimim took over in Berditchev.

He and his wife intended on going on shlichus. The name Berditchev came up as a possibility, but the sacrifices entailed in going there were many. Then a bracha in the Igros Kodesh, volume 14, p. 438, clinched matters:

**I received your letter and p'n to be read, at an auspicious time, at the gravesite of the Rebbe, my**

**father-in-law. I was pleased to read that you are a descendent of the tzaddik, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev.**

**If in physical matters they have resolved that nothing is lost, all the more so in spiritual matters, including our heritage which is eternal. That is, it has its effect on children, grandchildren etc. especially when the tzaddik, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev had the trait of Ahavas Yisroel. Love draws close, drawing close even those who are distant, and all the more so those who are close in body and close in soul.**

**Obviously, my purpose here is not mere words, but for additional requests for efforts in spreading Judaism and strengthening it in all**

## GUESTS ALL YEAR

Many guests visit Berditchev year-round in pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok. Admurim and famous rabbanim have also been among the recipients of the shluchim's hospitality and all of them express their thanks and admiration for the Rebbe and the institution of shlichus. At the end of last year, the Skvere Rebbe visited the Ukraine, the birthplace of Chassidus. He and his entourage visited Berditchev and met with the shliach, who presented the Admur and his Chassidim with a T'hilim with the commentary of the *K'dushas Levi* which he had published for the occasion.

The Admur took an interest in the shliach's work and gave a donation towards the Chabad mosdos. He blessed R' Thaler that he continue in his holy work in being mekarev Jews to their Father in heaven.

During the visit the shliach also met Rabbi Avrohom Yaffe Schlesinger, the rav of Geneva, who visited the Chabad mosdos. Rabbi Schlesinger visited the preschool and the elementary school and was suitably impressed by the work of the shluchim.



With the Skvere Rebbe



The Tzanzer Rebbe visits the mosdos



With the Belzer Rebbe

**your surroundings with Ahavas Yisroel. And the merit of ancestors helps him to succeed in this and the reward for this is as the Mishna says; the reward for a mitzva is a mitzva, namely the truest and deepest spiritual satisfaction from the goodness and kindness that is accomplished through this. That is in addition to the bracha to the one who invests effort in this; the bracha of the Ohev Yisroel who is Hashem, Creator of the world, whose trait is measure for measure but many times more so.**

The answer was clear. The couple packed their bags and got on a plane. Their destination: Berditchev.

## REVIVAL AFTER SEVENTY YEARS OF COMMUNISM

The residents weren't waiting for the shluchim with bouquets of flowers. The long years of communism had made deep inroads. R' Thaler had to start from the beginning. The Jews looked at everything with dollars in their eyes.

"I asked someone to come to shul and he asked me how much I'd pay him. Another person whom I asked to come to shul said he didn't need the money. It took me years to explain that Judaism is not a business; it's about faith and truth."

R' Thaler realized he needed to take little steps. He wasn't looking to make baalei t'shuva, even though that happened eventually. His goal

was consistent work, especially with young people.

"The work here is complicated, hard and intense, but we're not complaining. Our job is to do and not to constantly look for results and success. It's enough that one Jew understands that Judaism is something deep and not superficial, and let that be our reward. We're not looking for thunder and lightning but just go about our shlichus.

"Last week there was a funeral for a man who regularly came to shul. We made him a bris and he began coming back to his tradition. For many years he had a bitter relationship with his mother even though he was her only child. She rejected him and we adopted him with warmth and lots of love. When he passed away, we made him a proper Jewish burial but his mother mixed in and told us what to do and what not to do.

"She even accused us of killing him and her attitude and comments were really offensive. We just did what the halacha requires despite her crushing and offensive intervention. A shliach doesn't take his personal feelings into account but does what is expected of him. I had tremendous satisfaction when the day ended with our having provided the man with a Jewish burial."

## THANKS TO YOU AND THE REBBE

Along with all the difficulties, the shluchim also have many joyous moments. One such occasion was a Hachnasas Seifer Torah which took place last year. The entire community watched in amazement as Jews danced in the streets. Streets were closed off and Berditchev rejoiced.

"The next day I met a journalist who told me it was the first time she had seen so many happy people without any vodka."

Many guests gathered in the early afternoon, along with shluchim and rabbanim who came from all over the Ukraine for the writing of the final letters of the new Torah. Around the table where the Torah scroll lay, a few local Jews shed tears of joy.

The older people still remembered scenes like this from their childhood, but for most of the community this was the first time in their lives that they were witnessing the completion of a Torah scroll.

When the writing was finished, the parade got underway. Hundreds of Jews proudly marched and danced their way through the streets. The local police helped out. At times it seemed as though Berditchev had reverted back in time to the days when most of the town was Jewish.

At the Seudas Mitzva which followed, the mayor, Mr. Vassily Konstantinovich, who is on good terms with R' Thaler, spoke. He stressed the great sense of indebtedness that he felt towards the Jewish people. "If not for the Jews, Berditchev would not be known to the world. Thank you, and thanks to the Rebbe who sent you."

Purim is also a very joyous day in Berditchev. The community gathers for a Jewish fair which consists of numerous activities for men, women, and children. The variety of activities ensures that the vast majority of the Jews will do the mitzvos of the day.

Towards evening, the members of the community gather in the shliach's home for a Chassidishe farbrengen that lasts for hours. R' Thaler urges them to take part in Jewish life being that they are part of the Chosen People.

## NOT OPEN WARFARE

As in many countries in the CIS, anti-Semitism is ever-present. This hatred for Jews and Judaism flared up two and a half years ago when someone broke the fence around the



**Rabbi Thaler (left) with the shliach and chief rabbi of Zhitomir, Rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm (center)**



**Rabbi Thaler at a chuppa for one of his talmidim**



**The mayor speaking at a Chabad event**

grave of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, broke the windows and threw rocks and bottles inside, and defaced the outside of the grave with swastikas and Nazi slogans.

R' Thaler, who is also rav of the town, immediately turned to the mayor and the police, who eventually caught the perpetrator. The Berditchev municipality blocked the entrance to the gravesite and did not allow photographs to be taken for fear of worldwide reaction.

R' Thaler also found himself leading a battle to prevent desecration of the graves when construction was taking place at the cemetery.

"I was in Eretz Yisroel when I found out about it and since we had good connections with the mayor I

sent my assistant to him to ask him to take action."

The mayor immediately ordered a halt to the construction. The mayor even cut short his vacation in order to see the vandalism for himself.

Speaking of battles, R' Thaler has found himself in several and he knows that it pays to work behind the scenes as opposed to waging open war and publicizing problems. He knows people in authority and the lay of the land, and in his experience this is the best way to operate.

"I often fight against autopsies on Jews or for someone to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. Sometimes it takes lots of persuasion to convince a person to undergo a bris mila or



## I WANT TO SEE THINGS THROUGH YOUR EYES

Chanoch Bressler – Olam HaChassidus

“Berditchev is the name of a sacred town. Just mentioning its name can arouse mercy and merit for the Jewish people ... since it was the dwelling place of the Defender of Israel, the tzaddik Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, author of *K’dushas Levi*.

“I had the privilege of sitting next to Rabbi Moshe Thaler, a Jew who breathes the air of Berditchev 24 hours a day. More than breathing the town and its name, he breathes its Jews, near and far - many, many of whom are far - and it is only through his work and the work of his fellow shluchim in town that they are drawn close to Judaism and mitzva observance.

“R’ Moshe Thaler is a genuine Chassidic fellow who was born in the Chabad community of the United States. He learned in Chabad yeshivos in Eretz Yisroel but settled in Berditchev where, together with his family who accompanied him to this barren land, he works to raise up the Sh’china from the ground by establishing a network of mosdos Torah and chinuch as a shliach of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

“Now, as I was invited to take part in an evening of appreciation and chizuk for the Chabad shluchim in the CIS, I asked my table mate, R’ Moshe Thaler, to lend me his glasses. ‘I very much want to see things with your eyes,’ I told him.

“R’ Thaler is used to sharing with others and to tell you the truth, anybody who is a shliach in an isolated place knows that he doesn’t have things of his own. He gives up what he has and what he doesn’t have, and he usually lacks more than he has. Here he lives for others, he breathes for others. There is no ‘he’ and ‘his.’ There is only pure shlichus.

“Therefore, although R’ Thaler doesn’t wear glasses on a daily basis, when he heard my request he immediately gave me his glasses ...

“R’ Moshe is on his own although not literally alone because every day he works with hundreds of talmidim in a growing k’hilla. Obviously, they did not come from the same Chassidishe background he did, so he doesn’t have people with whom to share experiences, to exchange news on his level. He is alone while living among many people, as R’ Mendel of Kotzk said, “True being alone is within a crowd.”

“Through those glasses that almost never see Chassidishe men, R’ Moshe discovers – as do I by looking through his glasses – that there is a world full of Chassidim; there is a big commotion about Chassidus; there is tremendous work. The world around him revolves so quickly; a beautiful world with life and Chassidic life.

“Through R’ Moshe’s glasses I discover that all those cities and towns that are familiar to us from stories of tzaddikim and Jewish history are not just names but real towns. There are places like this and there are Jews that can be drawn close, children who can be protected so they are not lost to the Jewish people. And there are also Chabad shluchim, in each place one man, a man and his family who are a shining point of grace within the desolation.”

not to intermarry. Although this town has powerful Jewish roots, I have to start from the beginning.”

There are many mekuravim, though as I pointed out, this is not R’ Thaler’s way of measuring success. When pressed, he finally told me about one of his mekuravim.

“There’s a man who served in a high position in the Ukrainian army. He was married to a non-Jew and last year he began taking an interest in Judaism. He had a bris and he fasted on Yom Kippur. He now regularly attends shul, started putting on t’fillin and participates in the t’fillos and shiurim. Last Rosh HaShana (5769) he donated five sacks of potatoes, which is a nice donation.

“There is another shluchim couple here, Rabbi Akiva and Mrs. Rivka Nimoy who work in the Chabad mosdos. They work a lot with the Jews in and out of the town. We added more shiurim and home visits. Our goal is to reach every single Jew and change their lives. This goal is feasible because the town is very small and only a few hundred Jews live here.”

## A REAL JEW WEARS A YARMULKA

Mrs. Thaler is fully involved in working with the Jewish community of Berditchev. Throughout the week she is busy and she does her work happily and with love. On Sunday she runs a Jewish school which is attended by most of the Jewish children in town.

“For three hours we teach them about Judaism, give them a nourishing breakfast, and do crafts and play games with Jewish themes. The rest of the week I’m busy with the preschool. Unfortunately, most of the children are the products of intermarriage and their fathers are not Jewish. Their knowledge of Judaism is nil and we work hard on building up their Jewish awareness



so that a new generation will understand its uniqueness as part of the Jewish people.

“Just this week a mother of a child in the preschool knocked at my door on Shabbos. At first I was nervous about her visit but then she told me that her daughter didn’t want to wear pants anymore, just a skirt, like my daughter Freidy. ‘Her grandmother tried to convince her. We gave her candy and things she likes but she refused.’ ‘Pants are not modest,’ explained the little girl to her astonished family.

“We have plenty of stories like that. Like the boy in preschool who decided he wasn’t taking off his yarmulke even after school hours because our son Mendy told him that a real Jew needs to wear his yarmulke all the time. In general, the children make a big kiddush Hashem.”

Every week the shlucha gives a shiur on the parsha and other relevant topics. It is very popular and well-attended.

“We learn how all issues in Torah are relevant to the life of a woman living in the Ukraine nowadays. We speak a lot about Jewish identity, which was squelched for many years, and about the privilege of being a Jew. At the end of every class I ask what they got from the shiur and I am happy to see that the point got across. It’s touching to hear from women who are intermarried yet committed to eat only matza on Pesach. That too is a real accomplishment.”

If you have visited Berditchev you know that R’ Thaler is the spiritual father of the community and his wife is the mother.

“I make every effort to unify the community so that we feel like one big family. Last Pesach I took the children of the school and bought them suits in a quality store so they would know what it means to prepare for Pesach. I brought an artist who decorated the shul and



**Rabbi Thaler at a Purim seuda with seniors in Berditchev**

drew Jewish symbols for Pesach, for the purpose of making a lasting impression on them.”

The town has undergone major changes and upheavals over the years. Long ago, the town was very Jewish in character, whereas in recent times, the vast majority of the Jewish residents were unfamiliar with their identity. Now Berditchev is finally returning to its roots.

“Today every Jew here knows what being a Jew is about and how to celebrate the holidays,” says R’ Thaler.

## **NOT FAZED BY THE ECONOMIC SITUATION**

Mrs. Thaler feels that despite the difficulties the Rebbe is blessing them, particularly in the hard times.

“Once, when my children were sick I wished we were in Israel so they could be checked by a proper doctor. That night we had some guests who came to visit Rabbi Levi Yitzchok’s grave. One of them was a doctor from Kiryat Seifer.

“I am sure that every shliach has numerous hashgacha pratim stories. It’s a privilege to be a shliach of the Rebbe.”

Life hasn’t been easy this past year. The worldwide economic downturn did not pass them by. But R’ Thaler continues his work with increased energy, with lots of inner strength, faith, and a deep sense of purpose.

“We are constantly experiencing miracles. Someone who had promised me money many times and did not produce it finally made a nice donation recently. Then along came another individual, who asked me how we are managing in the recession. We replied with bitachon and faith, which impressed him and he also made a donation. The Rebbe gave us money in the past and he is giving it now too; you just have to work harder to be a keili.”

This past year was especially hard for the shluchim due to financial stresses, but R’ Thaler is characteristically optimistic.

“If you look at it in the ordinary way, there is no doubt that money helps you be mekarev people to the Rebbe, but we know it doesn’t work that way. The Rebbe is with us and he gives each of us what we need. We must continue with our shlichus until we merit to greet Moshiach.”

# THE BATTLE CONTINUES

By Avrohom Ber

*When Brownsville was abandoned and became rundown, all anticipated that the nearby Crown Heights would soon share the same fate. However, Lubavitch remained as a stronghold in Crown Heights and when thousands of guests arrive in Tishrei they see a vibrant Jewish neighborhood which prevailed while Harlem, the Bronx, Brownsville and East Flatbush could not. \* Part 3*

## SAVING THE SHULS

After the sicha of Acharon shel Pesach 5729/1969, Anash of Crown Heights began to wake up and try to buy the houses and shuls that were for sale at low prices. Many of the shuls and shtiblach in the neighborhood were saved as a result, and over the years they became Lubavitcher shuls.

The three Chassidische shtiblach at the junction of Montgomery and Kingston, for example, were rescued in this fashion. They became Lubavitcher shuls which exist till today. The fate of dozens of other shuls was not as rosy; they

were sold to gentiles and the more fortunate among them were turned into apartments.

Entire k'hillos fled, leaving their shuls and mosdos up for sale. Famous yeshivos in Crown Heights moved too. Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin rebuilt itself in Flatbush while Rabbi Baumel's Crown Heights Yeshiva relocated to Georgetown in southwestern Brooklyn.

The Skulener Rebbe remained in Crown Heights after all his Chassidim left. He would go to daven in 770 every day, where he had a minyan. (One time, as he davened Shacharis upstairs, the

Rebbe quietly said he should be given the third aliya, the aliya which the Rebbe is given. When the Skulener Rebbe heard about this later he stopped davening upstairs and would only daven downstairs). When he told the Rebbe that his Chassidim were pressuring him to move to Williamsburg, the Rebbe told him: 'They need to come to you and not you to them.' The Skulener Rebbe finally made the move to Williamsburg in the mid 70's.

R' Sholom Jacobson, member of the Vaad L'Hafatzos Sichos, remembers how when he was a bachur he would go and chazer







**85 Kingston Avenue, corner of Empire in the early days of Crown Heights. You can see trolley tracks on the street.**  
(from the archives of Sholom Ber Goldstein)

Chassidus in the shul on Troy between Union and President Street. He had a nice relationship with the congregants. One Shabbos when he got to shul he was shocked to see a big cross on it. The building had transferred ownership in a hasty sale and till today it serves as a church.

He wasn't surprised that they hadn't told him. Some Lubavitchers were "kana'im" (zealots) after hearing the Rebbe make an outcry and they took action against those who considered leaving. Many of those who planned on leaving were

careful not to disclose their intentions to Lubavitchers.

Many shuls were left without a minyan. Beautiful shuls that had been frequented by dozens or even hundreds of people every Shabbos could no longer get a minyan together. Bachurim from 770 would go to make up a minyan in all these shuls. This went on for years. We see in a report on a meeting of Tzach in 5738 that R' Mendel Shemtov, who was a member of the Community Council, called upon every Chassid to go at least twice a month to daven in a shul that

needed a minyan.

One of the last shuls to remain in operation was the Belzer shtibel on Eastern Parkway between Brooklyn Avenue and New York Avenue. The shul had a kollel headed by Rabbi Berish Shapiro, the son of the Naroler Rebbe. This shul lasted until recent years even though it was the only Jewish presence on the block.

In a letter that the Rebbe wrote to the kollel in 5736, he expressed his fondness for the mosdos that remained in Crown Heights:

**And there is a special element**



as pertains to all of the above – as pertains to the place and neighborhood of the Jewish people - it is fifty years and more that the sound of Yaakov is heard there, the sound of Torah and t'filla, and also through the kollel was added in the blessings of Hashem, materially and spiritually with apparent and revealed good in its Great Houses – these are the shuls and battei midrash – and in the Jewish homes there, about which it is said, “and I will dwell in them” – within each one of them, and throughout the neighborhood in general – and you will dwell securely.

Till this very day bachurim and Anash go to daven in distant shuls which barely have a minyan.

Sadly, the disgrace of the flight from the neighborhood is still not erased. On many black churches in former Jewish neighborhoods you can still see evidence that these were once shuls.

## BUYING HOMES IN CROWN HEIGHTS

The most basic step taken to prevent the takeover of the neighborhood was to buy houses. Every Jewish stronghold broadcast: We are here and we're not running.

R' Shneur Zalman Gurary a"h, who was one of the askanim who worked on this, lent \$5000 on easy terms to whoever wanted to buy a home in Crown Heights. In those days the cost of a home could be as low as \$15,000 and a loan of \$5000 was quite significant. Today, the price of a home in Crown Heights is thirty or forty times the price of what it was then. Those who bought back then got a great real estate deal, contrary to the predictions of the experts.

The Rebbe's "koch" in buying homes applied even to those who intended to go away on shlichus. R' Chaim Farro, shliach in



Manchester, related that in a yechidus before his wedding he asked the Rebbe whether to buy a home in Crown Heights or to rent. The Rebbe answered, “It’s better to be a homeowner for a year than to rent a house.”

The couple understood from this that the Rebbe wanted them to go on shlichus after a year, a shlichus that they are on till today. The Rebbe did not concede on his demand that people buy houses because he wanted more Jewish-owned property in Crown Heights. Many stories circulated about amazing things that took place

when it came to buying homes (see box).

A certain Lubavitcher bought a home in New Jersey. As a Chassid, he went to ask for the Rebbe's bracha for his new home but the Rebbe was not pleased at all and instructed him to move to Crown Heights.

“But I gave a down payment already!” protested the Chassid.

“You need to live in Crown Heights. If you can get back the down payment, fine; if not, also good. But you need to live in Crown Heights.”

The shocked Chassid accepted



this but his wife, who was present at the yechidus, told the Rebbe that she was afraid to live in Crown Heights.

“Hashem watches over a Jew in every location, especially here,” said the Rebbe.

The Rebbe spoke extremely sharply about those who left Crown Heights. The Rebbe did not accept any justifications, as we can see from the following response. When someone wrote to the Rebbe that “very distinguished people recently left Crown Heights, some of whom sold their homes to gentiles,” the Rebbe responded on 20 Kislev,

***“You need to live in Crown Heights. If you can get back the down payment, fine; if not, also good. But you need to live in Crown Heights,” said the Rebbe.***

1970:

The truth is as mentioned above, and if so, and all the aforementioned are involved in matters that are more important to them, they should announce this once and for all.. Based on conduct until now, there is room to say that they will explain themselves with excuses that so-and-so and so-and-so are to blame etc. but I am not at all interested in excuses just as they are not interested in excuses in matters that truly affect them.

R' Yosef Reitzes of Crown Heights relates that in 5748, he had the opportunity to buy the building that his parents lived in at a bargain price. He hesitated since it was still a lot of money. Moreover if he would buy the building he would be the only Jew on a block, except for the semi-active Belzer shtibel.

When he wrote to the Rebbe about it, the Rebbe answered, “You know my opinion about this already.”

The house, which had originally been owned by a Bobover Chassid who had sold it at a loss to a non-Jew, reverted to Jewish hands. Today, over ten Jewish families live in the building.

In the year following that, Shnas HaBinyan, the Rebbe encouraged the purchase of private homes and gave \$100 as his contribution towards every house that a Jew would buy. Over 150 Jewish homes were bought that year, strengthening the Jewish hold on Crown Heights.

(Of course there were instructions to certain people not to live in Crown Heights. These instructions were given to individuals whose shlichus in spreading Torah and Judaism was elsewhere. However, those who did not fill such a role were generally told to live in Crown Heights).

On Kingston Avenue, opposite 770, there was a building belonging



***Since they are selling “shares” in the company I will buy a share and pay for it with individual dollar bills and they can publicize that whoever buys a share in the company can get one of my dollars.***

to a Jewish organization. When the members of the organization left the neighborhood, they planned to sell the building to non-Jews. The contract was almost signed to the satisfaction of both sides. The only ones who were dissatisfied were the Lubavitcher askanim. They spoke to the members of that Jewish organization and asked them how they could sell the building to non-Jews.

They replied that in principle they would agree to sell it to Chabad even though they would offer a much lower price, but practically they wouldn't sell to them for the simple reason that Chabad would also eventually leave Crown Heights and the profit from that sale would go to them.

When the askanim heard this they promised them - and even signed to it in the contract - that the profit of a future sale would belong to the organization. The place was never sold and today the R' Levi Yitzchok Library and Tzach offices are located there.

## **THE FORMING OF AN ORGANIZATION TO PURCHASE HOUSES**

In order to deal with the problem of buying houses to stabilize the community, a corporation was formed. The corporation was the Rebbe's idea and he even gave \$500 towards it. In order for the corporation to be able to buy every house that was

put on the market, it had to raise a lot of money. Among the founders of the corporation were R' Chaikel Chanin and R' Tzvi Yair Steinmetz.

Even after the corporation to buy houses was formed, there was still more to do. Members of the corporation searched for every cheap house available for sale and tried to buy it as quickly as possible so as to keep it in Jewish hands. However, the rate at which they purchased houses was relatively slow and the Rebbe demanded more.

On Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz, 5731, the Rebbe referred to the corporation, its work and its difficult financial state. The Rebbe demonstrated the importance and urgency with which he viewed the work of the corporation by doing something unusual – the Rebbe gave a segula.

**It was decided to make a corporation and to buy houses – has something happened with this? They say there is no money and without money you can't do anything. I asked whether they advertised. Does anyone know about this? Nobody knows about it and they want me to publicize it!**

**I thought of connecting it to a segula, even though in general Chabad is different than Chagas [Poilisher Chassidim] but we see that the world prefers how the Poilisher do it and since they are selling “shares” in the company I will buy a share and pay for it**

with individual dollar bills and they can publicize that whoever buys a share in the company can get one of my dollars. In this manner let us see how people will finally wake up...

**It's completely not understood. Something that is a din in Shulchan Aruch which is connected with “and do that which is proper and good,” they don't want to do. But the Polish approach, something which makes no sense, Poilishe inyanim, shirayim, everybody copies that.**

**But that is what the world wants and so they will announce: Whoever buys a share will get a dollar and there is a limited amount of dollars so whoever comes first will get one. Even though it's a Poilishe way of doing things, all the good things that come with the dollar will come and all the brachos are dependent on me.**

A commotion ensued. Many Lubavitchers invested all their savings and borrowed additional money in order to be able to buy shares in the company where the Rebbe himself had shares. About \$150,000 were raised in this way.

However, as the poet Tzvi Yair Steinmetz wrote in a report to the Rebbe dated 11 Nissan, 1971: “In the two months of the corporation's existence we bought about ten houses at the average price of \$30,000-\$32,000. The cost of ten houses is about \$300,000 and the corporate capital amounts to about \$150,000, which means we don't have enough money.”

The Rebbe contrasts the lack of activity in Crown Heights to the action taken by the staff of the *Morgan Journal*, even without a leader, in what is apparently a response to that report:

“... Within 24 hours after the closing of the *Morgan Journal* they have already begun selling their own new newspaper (their leader



isn't in town) and I – after 24 months of speaking about the neighborhood, I don't know whether as of now they have brought one person to settle in the neighborhood. And it didn't even help that \$150,000 cash was put, through an "arousal from Above," into their fund."

The big problem facing the corporation was the fact that non-Jews were willing to pay more than Jews. The Jews wanted to live in the area that had remained Jewish, near 770, and were unwilling to consider houses that were being sold on Schenectady for the same price that they could pay for a house near Kingston. The gentiles were willing to pay nearly 50% more for a house, which made it far more profitable for someone to sell to a non-Jew than to a Jew.

Unfortunately, the desire for money and the attempt to cover the tremendous losses entailed with the "white flight" resulted in house after house being sold to non-Jews. A few people in a family or a young couple built a home in a different neighborhood and the rest of the family followed them.

"Persuasion does not help and they have permission to sell from their rabbanim and g'dolim," the administration of the corporation reported to the Rebbe in the summer of 1971.

An additional difficulty that they had in buying houses was the fact that banks made it difficult for a business to get a mortgage, as they preferred giving mortgages to private homeowners. Most Lubavitchers could not

## WHO TAMPERED WITH THE FILE?

Many Chassidim who bought houses had unusual "Heavenly assistance" in obtaining mortgages. One of those Chassidim was R' Michel Vishedsky.

At the time that the Rebbe was urging people to buy houses in Crown Heights, R' Michel was a young newlywed. Since neither his parents nor his in-laws had much money, the couple had to pay for their wedding themselves. Although many of his friends were buying houses, he simply couldn't afford to do so.

After the farbrengen of Acharon shel Pesach, 1972, in which the Rebbe spoke about strengthening the neighborhood, R' Michel decided to buy a house. A house was for sale on Montgomery Street. It was old and neglected and needed renovations. The owner, an older woman, was asking for \$35,000 for the house.

The couple liked the house and the price seemed reasonable. When they asked the Rebbe about it he said to buy it, and that he will mention it at the gravesite. (This was not a typical answer. Usually the Rebbe said "it should be in a good and auspicious time" or "as knowledgeable friends advise").

R' Michel paid for the services of a lawyer, Listman from Boro Park, who prepared the paperwork. Immediately after signing the contract he sent them to the bank to get approved for a mortgage. They expected to get a mortgage for \$27,000. The remaining thousands of dollars they hoped to raise on their own, even though it was a fortune for them.

The bank sent someone a professional to assess the house in order to establish the amount of the mortgage. The assessor kept commenting about the dilapidated state of the house. In a letter they got from the bank, it said they would approve a mortgage for only \$17,000.

R' Michel and his wife knew they could not come up with the remaining \$20,000 and considered canceling the contract. Then R' Mendel Futerfas came to Crown Heights. He heard their story and censured them, "The Rebbe said to buy it! He did not give you the option of canceling this instruction."

R' Michel and his wife wrote to the Rebbe again. They explained the situation and said they were buying only because the Rebbe told them to buy. After a short time they received the Rebbe's response: "I will mention it at the gravesite."

In the meantime, over a month had gone by since they had gotten the letter about the mortgage and they still hadn't received word from the bank telling them to come and get the money. In every contract written in the United States there is a stipulation that if thirty days go by and the mortgage was not received, the seller can cancel the contract. The homeowner had already said that if the notice from the bank did not come in a day or two, the deal was off.

The lawyer Listman called the bank. The clerk asked him to call back in an hour. An hour later Mr. Listman was transferred to the manager, who explained that the file couldn't be found. When he called a third time the manager said it still hadn't been found. "This is the first time since I have been working here that a file disappeared. We will have to redo the process but we will speed it up this time."

The new assessor who came was a lot nicer than the previous one, and the next day the bank approved a mortgage for \$28,000 and they bought the house.

Someone up Above "tampered" with the file.

***The Rebbe took an interest in every detail of the corporation's work. It was not unusual for them to field questions from the Rebbe about particular houses, with the Rebbe referring to specific addresses.***

qualify for mortgages, but those who applied for one saw miracles occur.

The Rebbe took an interest in every detail of the corporation's work. It was not unusual for them to field questions from the Rebbe about particular houses, with the Rebbe referring to specific addresses. The members of the committee were asked to give detailed reports about what was happening with the homes. The Rebbe reacted to one letter in an unusual manner, quoting lines from the letter and asking pointed questions about them.

For example, when the members of the committee said regarding a certain building that they had heard it was going to be sold to a Jew and then "nothing further was heard for several months" until they discovered that the Jewish owner had sold it to a goy, the Rebbe responded by quoting this paragraph:

**This is the main thing – what were all fifteen men with the responsibility for their "corporation" doing throughout all these months – so that the situation would not deteriorate to the way it is now (especially when with some houses they saw the results of their approach not to do anything until there is no doubt "that it is burning down," r"l? It seems to me that lack of activity also has its limits.**

The Rebbe ended this unusually sharp letter with heartbreaking

words: **This was written in great sorrow.**

When the members of the corporation tried to claim that the responsibility for certain things was not theirs and that they had done all they could since the corporation was formed, the Rebbe responded: "Surely even the corporation knows that 1) the sicha about the neighborhood etc. was **on Acharon shel Pesach** 2) that all the members of the hanhala were **all** over bar mitzva **then** ..."

When Tzvi Steinmetz reported to the Rebbe about progress in buying houses, the Rebbe responded, **"Thank you for the good news. May this be a good beginning for more good news, especially regarding the sh'chuna."**

The Rebbe was unwilling to release anyone from his job despite his criticism. For example, in 5735/1975 the Rebbe wrote the following in response to the chairman of the Vaad HaKahal regarding his intention to resign due to differences of opinion among the members of the Vaad, etc.:

**"Surely the first priority amongst all of the above is the good of the neighborhood [the Jewish people who live therein – may they increase – shuls and battei midrash and schools and chesed organizations etc. etc.] – and according to this it is obvious that the resignation of anyone from the Vaad, and all the more**

**so the chairman of the Vaad, has no place at all, for this is an outright damage to the neighborhood."**

Yet, when someone wrote the Rebbe that he wanted to raise money on his own and buy buildings in Crown Heights so he could sell them to Chassidim at low prices, the Rebbe replied:

**"This pertains exclusively to the Vaad of the neighborhood and not to private people no matter who they are, as is obvious."**

Similarly, the Rebbe told Rabbi Sholom Dovber Wolpo, back in 5729/1969 when he was a Tamim in 770 and feeling the Rebbe's pain, when he told the Rebbe that some bachurim had formed a group to buy houses, **"This is not your birurim."**

It was only a few years after its founding that a change was made in the corporation and they began buying houses in every possible location. The gentiles were not pleased that Jews were getting houses cheaper than they were managing to get them, so they tried to defame the corporation for racism. These claims were debunked time and again in the newspapers by the askanim in Crown Heights. R' Yisroel Rosenfeld a"h was one of the foremost defenders. Nevertheless, the company had to be very circumspect. According to the law, the corporation, which was formed as a business venture, could not sell exclusively to Jews.

Hundreds of homes were bought over the years and this was followed with the purchase of many larger buildings, including apartment buildings. Every so often there were Melaveh Malkas to strengthen the community and the Rebbe would participate with mezonos and mashke from the farbrengen.

[To be continued be"H]

# THE CHASSIDIC JAZZ MUSICIAN BEHIND THE SIMCHAS BEIS HA'SHOEIVA

by Yitzchok Wagshul

With Tishrei over, people all across the globe are settling back into their normal routines — invigorated with the renewed sense of purpose and inspiration that only comes from spending the *Yomim Tovim* in Crown Heights.

This is a good time to look back at some of the high points of the experience in somewhat greater depth than was possible amid the whirlwind of events. Let's combine this magazine's interest in the stories of inspiring chassidim with a chance to get to know the talented young musician behind this year's *Simchas Beis HaShoeiva*.

Every night from 10-2, Shlomo Recu and Shaya Lieberman, leading a hand-picked group of performers, electrified throngs of thousands — from Crown Heights residents to Jews from and all walks of life elsewhere — who crowded onto Kingston Avenue between Crown and Montgomery Streets to rejoice in the unique experience of *Simchas Beis HaShoeiva* in the Rebbe's neighborhood. Who are these people, these magicians who whipped us into a frenzy night after night after night? Let's start by listing their names; after all, these

musicians deserve some recognition for all that hard work. Shlomo Recu, whom many recognized as the drummer from countless *chassunos* and other events, worked with bassist Shaya Lieberman — also well regarded for his wedding work — to assemble and lead a first rate band this year. The core members were Shlomo and Shaya, of course, on drums and bass respectively; Shalom Lieberman on keyboard; Gur Lorber on flute; and Yoni Lorber on guitar. These were supplemented by the expert services of soundmen Stas Olshansky and Baba Z. of Sound Occurrence, who usually work with the famous Neginah Orchestra, as well as by guest appearances by flutists Yehuda

Piamenta on Sunday night and his father, Avi Piamenta, Monday night.

And now for the story behind the story...

## SWIMMING CHAMPION

Some people have a natural capacity for intensity. Whatever they do, they do it all the way. Whether competing as an Israeli swimming champion, performing as a jazz drummer with world-renowned musicians, or learning and teaching about *Moshiach* and *Geula*, Shlomo Recu is one of those people.

Shlomo grew up in Beersheva, Israel, knowing very little about



Gur Lorber, Yoni Lorber,  
Shlomo Recu, Shaya Lieberman



religious Judaism. Instead, he was committed to... swimming. He began at the incredibly young age of two, and from ages 3–16 he competed in matches appropriate for his age class. By the time Shlomo was 14, he was ranked Israel's number two swimmer in the 14–16 age group, and was offered the opportunity to train for the Israeli Olympic swim team. But, somewhere along the way, he'd realized how much he enjoyed banging on his mother's pots and pans, and at 14, he was wrestling with a big decision: should he continue swimming, or devote himself to drums instead?

## THE BIG BREAK

Now, we may interject at this point that most parents would be skeptical of their 14-year-old's chances of making a living as a drummer. The Recus were no exception, and discouraged Shlomo from pursuing that path. But if you think that stopped him, then you have underestimated that intensity, that determination, that drive. Young Shlomo's parents would not pay for drum lessons, so he secretly went around to Beersheva nightclubs in search of a job as a busboy that, he hoped, would finance his training. They say that Hashem works in mysterious ways, and in light of the Rebbe's eventual advice to Shlomo that he pursue his career as a musician (we'll get to that in a bit), He must have been behind what happened next, because this is where our hero gets his first big break. There is a famous club in Beersheva that was then known as the Cobra, and is now called the Forum. Shlomo stopped in to ask about busboy positions just as the club band was rehearsing, and, as he watched, the bandleader got angry at the drummer and fired him. Now without someone to play that evening and seeing a young

man hanging about, the bandleader called out to Shlomo, "You know how to play drums?" Meekly, Shlomo nodded yes (a wild exaggeration at the time, to say the least) and the musician told him to come sit at the drums. Of course, it didn't take more than a few moments for the man to realize that Shlomo didn't really know how to play, but, without any other options, he taught him two important basic rhythms, saying, "When I hold up one finger, play number one, and when I hold up two fingers, play number two." That night, Shlomo played his first concert before 500 people, and every night for the next three years—while his parents thought he was just out with friends—he was drummer for the Cobra house band.

At 15, Shlomo was introduced to jazz, and when he finally began formal lessons at 17, he studied in Tel Aviv with Areleh Kaminsky, a famous jazz musician and pioneer who helped introduce the genre to Israel. After six months, Shlomo became Kaminsky's protégé, and would sometimes sit in and replace him on gigs. In this way, even at such a young age, Shlomo was able to meet and perform with some of the biggest names in jazz in Israel.

## THE PATH BACK TO JUDAISM

Since people of all backgrounds enter the Israeli army, the military has a special classification for soldiers who possess outstanding skills or knowledge in their fields. The theory is that people who can potentially make important contributions to the country should remain able to do so if at all possible. When Shlomo entered the army, he was designated as a *musicai mitztayen*, or "outstanding musician," which allowed him to serve a shorter and relatively easier term. Possibly, it also put him in the

right place to begin his path back to Judaism.

As a sergeant in charge of the kitchen on his base, Shlomo came under the influence of an older man who was a *mashgiach* supervising kashrus there. The fellow's friendly approach impressed him; when the man explained that it is important for Jews to keep kosher, Shlomo began doing so even outside the army. By the time he was 22, he was *shomer Shabbos*, and confronting the inevitable challenge of balancing his newfound beliefs and his budding post-army career as a jazz musician. Shlomo was quite busy playing five gigs a week, three of which were on the most popular day for entertainment: Friday night and Shabbos. He cancelled the three Shabbos jobs, and soon after was offered a lucrative contract with the Hilton Hotel that paid more for one weekly appearance than the three cancelled gigs combined.

The young musician's religious leanings were strengthened when his grandfather passed away around then. Since Shlomo's mother is an only child, there was no one in the family to say *Kaddish* for the departed, and Rabbi Yosef Simcha Ginsburg, the *rov* of Omer, ruled that since his parents wished it, Shlomo could say *Kaddish* for his grandfather. As a result, he *davened* with a *minyan* three times a day for almost a year, and was very inspired by the words of the *t'fillos*. (Interestingly, after Shlomo's grandmother passed away many years later, that same *rov* reversed his earlier ruling, saying he had since learned that the Rebbe had said it was improper.)

Meanwhile, his musical training was ready to move on to the next level. After the army, Shlomo had toured abroad with a band representing Israel, and had attended Israel's top school for jazz, the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music. His teachers

***Finally, the Israeli bachurim he loved to argue with told him, “Listen, if you want to argue, you can, but first you have to know what the facts. Otherwise, your opinion won’t have any basis.”***

there knew him from his days as Areleh Kaminsky’s protégé, and urged him not to “waste his time” in Israel — Shlomo needed to go to New York. But by that time, Shlomo was the busiest jazz drummer in Israel — even his teachers would call asking if he could book them for gigs — and he didn’t leave right away. His plan was to save enough money for an exploratory trip: he would audition at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music, investigate other schools, and visit New York jazz clubs, then return to Israel and await word from the schools.

It didn’t work out quite that way.

**“If there is anywhere in the world where people sincerely try to live that way, it is worth joining them.”**

Just before leaving for New York, someone brought Shlomo to a Tanya *shiur* in Tel Aviv. It was given by Rabbi Yossi Gerlitzky, and the subject was *Perek Lamed Beis* — the 32nd chapter, in which the Alter Rebbe discusses the key to true *Ahavas Yisroel*. When Rabbi Gerlitzky asked what he thought, the young man replied that if there is anywhere in the world where people sincerely try to live that way, it is worth joining them. Rabbi Gerlitzky just smiled, and remarked that the way you can tell if people are trying to live that way is to observe whether they have *chayus* — enthusiasm, “life.” He did not mention anything about Chabad; Shlomo didn’t realize, at the time, that either the rabbi or the subject



Young Shlomo

matter were connected with Lubavitch. When he heard that Shlomo was about to travel to New York, Rabbi Gerlitzky asked him to take along a letter for his friend, Rabbi Shlomo Kugel of Chabad of the West Side. Unbeknownst to Shlomo, it was a letter of introduction about himself, but when he arrived in New York the rabbi was not available right away, so Shlomo just dropped off the letter and left. After a few days of trying to find an apartment in Manhattan, though, he thought, “why not ask that rabbi,” and ended up at the Chabad House again. “I’ve been trying to find you for days!” exclaimed Rabbi Kugel, and suggested that Shlomo would have a better chance of finding an affordable apartment in Crown Heights.

## ARGUING AGAINST MOSHIACH

Shlomo arrived in Crown Heights in Elul, 5758 (August, 1998), having just turned 24. He spent his first six months engaged in music, davening in 770, learning, and arguing against *Meshichism*. Finally, the Israeli *bachurim* he loved to argue with told him, “Listen, if you want to argue, you can, but first you have to know what the facts. Otherwise, your opinion won’t have any basis.” They referred him to *sichos* about *Moshiach* and *Geula*, especially those from the years 5752 and 5753, and suggested he study them on his own (as a Hebrew speaker, this was not a problem despite his limited background) so that he not suspect them of trying to influence his understanding. Learning those *sichos* made Shlomo realize there is something going on around the concept of *Moshiach* that he didn’t know, and he stopped arguing. Instead, he dedicated himself to studying the subject in further depth.

Also around then, Shlomo was told that he had been accepted into the Manhattan School of Music and awarded an 80% merit scholarship. Although this was his dream come true, Shlomo was ready for another of those life-changing decisions: his exposure to life among *frum* Jews in Crown Heights had convinced him that there was something real about Judaism; something he needed to know. Shlomo resolved that, if he was going to devote four years of his life to studying — an opportunity he would not get again — it would be better to use the time providing himself and his future family with a solid grounding in Jewish knowledge. He decided to turn down his place in the Manhattan School of Music and enroll in yeshiva.

It was Rabbi Gerlitzky’s advice at the Tanya *shiur* in Tel Aviv that

# ***Students show up for their drum class thinking about rock stars and expecting, perhaps, a guy with long hair and tattoos, and instead, who is at the drums? A bona fide, bearded chassid!***

helped Shlomo decide on his next stop. He visited several Lubavitcher yeshivos for *baalei t'shuva*, and decided that, for him, Seagate had the *chayus* he was looking for. He spent the next six months there in intensive learning, after which he learned in 770 for six months and in Tzfat for another six months.

All that time, he did not so much as touch a drum.

## **ANSWERS FROM THE REBBE**

This was not the path that Shlomo's secular Israeli parents had expected for their son. While he was still in Seagate, Shlomo's mother decided to write to the Rebbe with her "complaints." She wrote a letter mentioning three points: 1) She did not approve of Shlomo's new beard; 2) Shlomo was wasting his time in yeshiva; and 3) Shlomo was not going to university as planned. The Rebbe's reply was astonishing: the letter was placed at a point in the *Igros Kodesh* where there were three letters from the Rebbe, directly addressing, in order, Mrs. Recu's three points. In the first, the Rebbe wrote that he is surprised at her, a compassionate mother, for not supporting her son in his decision to grow a beard despite the family's disapproval; the Rebbe added that he hoped she would forgive the Rebbe for his "harsh words." (When Mrs. Recu read that, she broke down in tears.) The Rebbe's second letter said that she should thank G-d that her son has the *z'chus* to learn in *Tomchei T'mimim*. Finally, the Rebbe said in the third letter that, as

for her question about university, that would come after spending some time in *Tomchei T'mimim*.

By now, Shlomo was a dedicated chassid and an ardent *Meshichist*. He went through the cycle of the *sichos* of '52 and '53 each year for three years, and came to the point where he felt he could doubt anything else *but* that the Rebbe is Moshiach. He now wrote to the Rebbe himself, seeking guidance as to how to progress in his learning and development. He received a surprise: just as the Rebbe had indicated in his earlier response to his mother, the Rebbe now instructed Shlomo to leave yeshiva and resume his studies from before yeshiva, adding that Shlomo should not forget to bring Jews closer to Judaism.

## **A "COOL" RABBI?!**

Armed with such clear direction from the Rebbe, Shlomo enrolled in the New School in Manhattan, later switching to the more prestigious (and affordable) music program at City College. He would learn *sichos* on the subway to and from school, and found that he was going through five to seven *sichos* a week — more than when he was in yeshiva! He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in music.

As for bringing Jews closer to Judaism — Shlomo says that jazz musicians are extremely spiritual people. This is reflected in their music, which is 90% innovation, and they are open to spiritual things.

Sometimes, Shlomo would *daven* in the hallway at City College, and students would stop at the sight of a Jew wearing *tzitzis* and *t'fillin*. Many would ask Shlomo to help them put on *t'fillin* as well, and plenty of meaningful conversations took place in those halls.

All throughout school, Shlomo kept busy with gigs and touring. After graduation, he put his degree to use as a music teacher in several New York-area Jewish schools. And here is where Shlomo has been making his biggest impact: students show up for their drum class thinking about rock stars and expecting, perhaps, a guy with long hair and tattoos, and instead, who is at the drums? A bona fide, bearded chassid! His playing blows them away; they never imagined a rabbi could be so "cool." Those students are completely won over, and hang on Shlomo's every word. He is a valuable role model at these Jewish schools.

## **THE STUDENTS DANCED YECHI**

This incident happened last year at Torah Academy of Brooklyn (TAB), a *Litvishe kiruv* school where Shlomo teaches, and illustrates the above—as well as the power of sincerity and strength in one's beliefs:

One day, as Shlomo entered his classroom, his students—seven 17-year-old boys—began dancing to the tune of *Yechi*, and announced that they had decided to become Lubavitchers like Shlomo. He smiled and said it won't affect their grades, whereupon they danced again. The boys told Shlomo they had only one problem: how could he say the Rebbe is Moshiach? Shlomo answered that this is a personal belief and strong feeling of his, and if they want to ask about such a personal matter—why he feels and believes a certain way—they should each undertake some personal



improvement, a *hachlata*, of their own and then he will tell them. Sure enough, each boy chose a *hachlata* for himself, and then Shlomo discussed his belief in the Rebbe with them. After class, he found the *menahel*, Rabbi Davidowitz, waiting for him in the hall: he had heard the sounds of the students dancing *Yechi* in Shlomo's classroom, and was summoning him to his office to demand an explanation. Shlomo related what had happened, and the rabbi asked, "Well? Do you believe the Rebbe is Moshiach?" So Shlomo told Rabbi Davidowitz the same thing he had told the boys: this question has nothing to do with their relationship as employer and employee, but is a personal question about Shlomo's own beliefs, and in exchange for Shlomo sharing the answer, he would appreciate it if the rabbi reciprocate by undertaking his own personal improvement. But, Shlomo added, so as not to put the rabbi on the spot, he did not have to tell Shlomo his *hachlata* right then; rather, he could think it over and decide in his own time. After the conversation, Shlomo went home, and no sooner did he come out of the subway than his cell phone rang. It was the principal, Rabbi Gottesman, who was second in command to the *menahel*. It seems Rabbi Davidowitz had been so impressed by Shlomo's pure *emuna* that he called Rabbi Gottesman and



Shlomo Recu with drums at SBH (Mendy Hechtman)

said, "I want this young man to teach for us more." Rabbi Gottesman was calling to increase Shlomo's hours of teaching!

## SIMCHAS BEIS HA'SHOEIVA

At the *Simchas Beis HaShoeiva*, Shlomo and his colleagues tried to offer a medley of popular *chassidische niggunim*, while at the same time infusing them with a bit of a twist. He says the experience was humbling and very exciting at the same time, because from where the band played, especially during the peak hours of around 12:30–2, the entire street was so packed that the people weren't visible; there was just

a sea of black swirling and twisting, as though the asphalt itself were moving, bobbing up and down. And, he realized, they were bobbing to his bass drum! Each time he pressed on his foot pedal, hitting the drum, the "street" would jump. And nothing compares, he says, to the experience of shouting, "We want..." and hearing thousands of people respond in unison, "Moshiach now!" May we all realize that yearning with Moshiach immediately.

*Shlomo and the band wish to thank Zev Cadaner and the Vaad HaKahal for giving them the opportunity to play for the people of Crown Heights. Shlomo Recu lives in Crown Heights with his wife and daughter, and can be reached at 646-769-0689.*

[Continued from pg. 5]

### Notes:

1. Genesis 11:26-31.
2. Genesis 12:1.
3. Kiddushin 31a.
4. See Likkutei Torah, Parshas B'Chukosai 45c.
5. There is also another dimension to this point of transition. Previously, Avrohom's service was primarily inner-directed, while his journey to Eretz Yisroel began a phase of working with others. The two concepts are interrelated, for the infinite power of a mitzvah allows a person to go beyond his own personal limits.
6. Torah Or, Parshas Lech Lecha 11c. Seifer HaArachim Chabad, erech Avrohom, sec. 4.
7. Genesis 9:12.
8. B'Reishis Rabba and Rashi on this verse.
9. In this vein, Chassidic thought interprets the command, "Go out of your land, your native country, and your father's house," as a charge to leave one's established habits and ordinary way of thinking.

In this context, it is significant that this charge was addressed to Avrohom. Avrohom's habits and way of thinking were on a developed plane. Nevertheless, he was instructed to proceed to a higher level, one which transcends the limits of mortal potential.

10. Alshich on this verse, Or HaTorah, Lech Lecha, p. 680b et al.
11. Tanya, ch. 2.
12. This also relates to the divine service of t'shuva which chassidic thought interprets, not as "repentance," but as "return," a return to one's essential G-dly core. See the essay entitled "T'shuva - Return, not Repentance" in Timeless Patterns In Time, Vol. I, (Kehot, N.Y., 1995).
13. cf Genesis 42:9, 12.
14. Torah Or, VaEira, p. 57b ff.
15. Genesis 13:2.
16. In this vein, our Sages (B'Reishis Rabba 40:6) explain that Avrohom's journeys to and from Egypt served as a forerunner for the subsequent descent and ascent of his descendants. Like him, they suffered difficulty in that land, but ultimately, left (as G-d promised to Avrohom, Genesis

15:14) with "great wealth." And as explained with regard to Avrohom, this wealth was symbolic of the elevation of the G-dly sparks contained within the land.

17. Sota 10a.
18. Genesis 21:33.
19. Ibid. 17:5.
20. In his commentary to that verse.
21. Genesis 17:13.
22. Our Sages (Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:3; Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 8, p. 58 and sources cited there) contrast the mitzvos performed by the forefathers with those performed after the giving of the Torah, explaining that the mitzvos performed by the forefathers were "ethereal," i.e., they did not affect the nature of this material world. In contrast, the mitzvos we perform infuse our material existence with holiness, to the extent that the articles with which mitzvos are performed become consecrated. [See the essay entitled "What Happened at Sinai? What the Giving of the Torah Means to Us" (Timeless Patterns In Time, Vol. II, Kehot, N.Y., 1995).

# RABBI BENTZION LIPSKER A”H

By Menachem Ziegelboim

*Chabad Chassidim were shocked and saddened by the news of the passing of Rabbi Bentzion Lipsker at the relatively young age of 65. R’ Lipsker was the rav of Arad for 32 years, as well as a member of the Chabad Beis Din in Eretz Yisroel.*

A large crowd assembled for the funeral of the rav of Arad, Rabbi Bentzion Lipsker a”h. The Chief Sefardic Rabbi of Arad, Rabbi Yosef Albo, eulogized him and said that for over thirty years they had worked together in the rabbinate and R’ Lipsker was like his friend and brother. “It’s a great loss for Arad. We all feel what Chazal say about Yaakov, that when he left Beer Sheva the glory of the city left with him.”

Gideon Bar Lev, mayor of Arad, spoke of the tremendous work R’ Lipsker had done for the residents of Arad for 32 years and about his graciousness to one and all. He described R’ Lipsker’s great simcha on Yomim Tovim, at simchos, and the annual Lag B’Omer parade.



R’ Lipsker when he attended yeshiva in Lud

Rabbi Ashkenazi, rav of Kfar Chabad, noted R’ Lipsker’s

uniqueness as both a shliach of the Rebbe and a rav of a city. “He was a loyal shliach of the Rebbe who was involved in kiruv and hafatza. He loved people and brought them to Torah.”

A representative of the Ben Tziyon shul, Yeshaya Unger said, “You were connected to everyone and everybody was connected to you. You attended every event you were invited to and every siyum of a tractate. When you were unable to attend you apologized. There were no barriers with you. Your children learned together with ours in the state religious school. Up Above, pray for your family and for the residents of Arad.”

The rav’s son-in-law, Rabbi Mendelsohn, related that R’ Lipsker’s final words were, “I love them all,” and then he recited the Shma. “You never rested. You constantly thought about how to make progress and how to work with the Russian immigrants, arranging brissin and weddings. For every meal you wanted guests. When you walked in the street on Sukkos after the davening you looked for people so you could enable them to do the mitzva of lulav. The Rebbe sent you here and you were a loyal shliach of the Rebbe. When the Rebbe met the Gerrer Rebbe, he asked him, ‘Do you know my man in Arad?’”

Many years ago, R’ Lipsker granted *Beis Moshiach* an interview in which he told his personal story, about private audiences with the Rebbe, letters and instructions. The following is taken from that interview.

## RABBI LIPSKER SPEAKS TO BEIS MOSHIACH

I was born in Georgia in the former Soviet Union. What was my Ashkenazic family doing in Georgia? My parents were sent there by the Rebbe Rayatz. For a

long time there was a Chabad presence in Georgia, led by the Chassidim Rabbi Shmuel Levitin and Rabbi Avrohom Slavin. They disseminated Torah there for many years. During World War II, when numerous refugees arrived in Georgia, they were there to assist them.

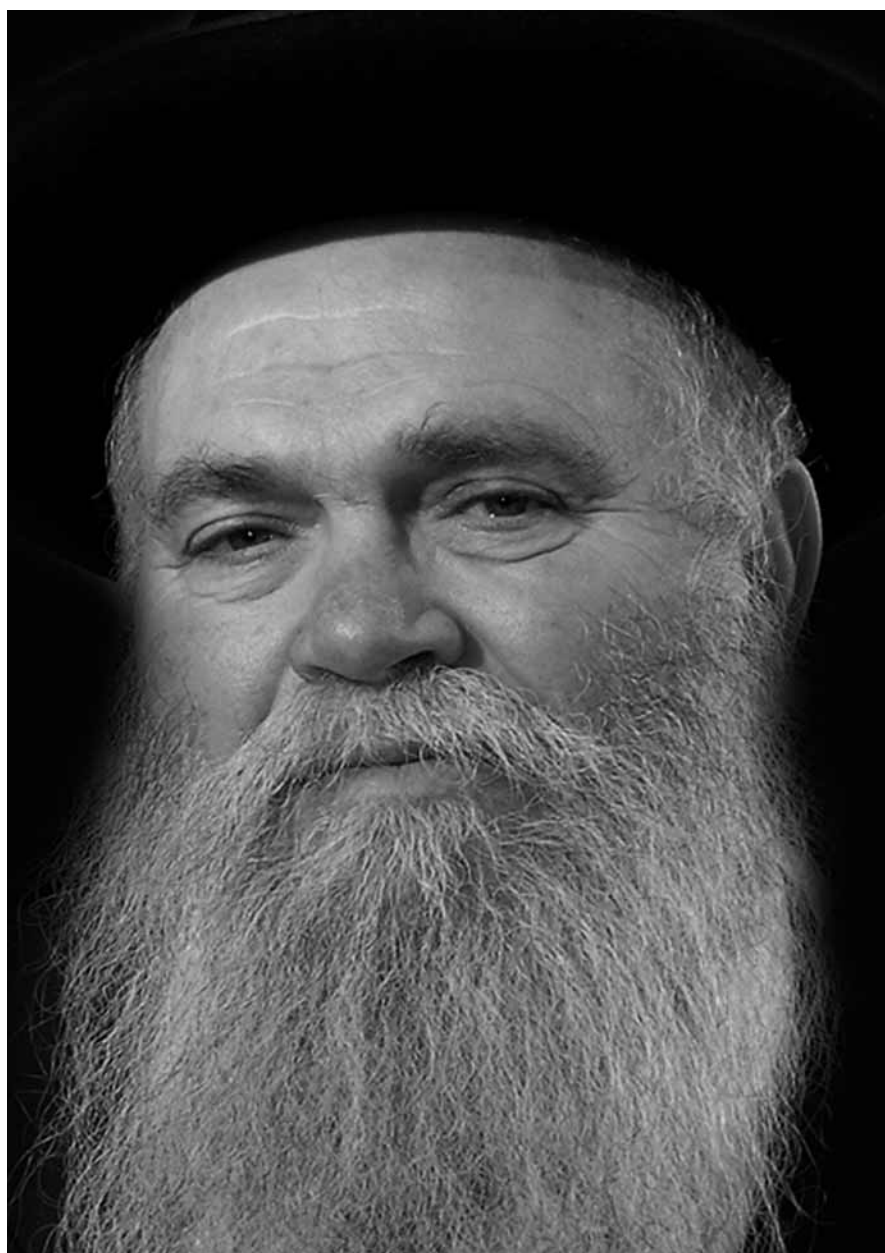
Our family lived in Georgia for thirteen years. My father, R' Aryeh Zev, opened a branch of Tomchei T'mimim. At the age of 18 he was a Mashgiach in Tomchei T'mimim and the Rebbe Rayatz said about him, "I am amazed by him, how he is a maven in a bachur ..."

We illegally crossed the border in the well-known escape from Russia and arrived in Germany in 1946, together with other Lubavitcher families including R' Avrohom Drizin, R' Mordechai Perlow and many others. My father immediately founded another branch of Tomchei T'mimim. My first haircut was given to me in Germany and I still remember it.

We arrived in Eretz Yisroel during the War of Independence. We spent the first month in the transit camp in Beer Yaakov and then we moved to nearby Lud. My older brothers soon left to learn in the Chabad yeshiva in Tel Aviv. Some time afterwards the yeshiva in Lud was founded with my father, of course, being one of the people involved.

My early childhood years were spent in the Chabad school in Lud but since there was no class for children my age, from age six to eight I traveled to Kfar Chabad to learn. Then I returned to Lud, where I learned with boys who were three years older than me.

The Chassidic figure who I remember more than anyone else is the mashpia, R' Shlomo Chaim Kesselman. From the age of 4 to 22, I was close to him. He also lived in Lud and between our



***When my father asked the Rebbe whether I should look for a shidduch, the Rebbe wrote that I could do so on condition that I continue learning for several years after I got married. This was not at all the usual letter one received from the Rebbe regarding a shidduch.***



home and the yeshiva building where he lived there was just one wall. All of my Chassidishe childhood memories are of him. The songs, the stories, the niggunim, the farbrengens, the conduct – I saw and heard it all from him.

He was a friend of my parents from Russia; when he was exiled to Poltava he would come and eat at my parents' home every day. My mother a"h related that he once came to our house on a Friday shortly before candle lighting and asked whether he could still eat something since he had davened at such length that he did not conclude until Mincha.

I still remember R' Shlomo Chaim going in the morning to the zal for Chassidus. It was usually around the same time that my mother would open the grocery store and every so often he would come in and help her raise the shutters, and he would always greet her pleasantly, "Good morning, Malka."

I also remember special moments from yeshiva in Pardes-Lud; the veteran Chassidim, the mashpiim and shluchim that we have today in Chabad, developed in the yeshiva in those years. I remember R' Gershon Mendel Garelik, R' Itzke Springer, R' Munke Gruzman, R' Elozor Garelik, R' Zelig Feldman, R' Moshke Naparstek, R' Yisroel Friedman, R' Meir Friedman, R' Moshe Slonim, R' Yeshavam Segal, R' Yisroel Dubroskin H"yd, R' Simcha Zilberstron Hy"d, and the Lifsh brothers.

## A SURPRISING INSTRUCTION FROM THE REBBE

As the date for my bar mitzva, 8 Av, 1957, approached, my father asked the Rebbe how to celebrate it since it was Erev Tisha B'Av.

***From the Rebbe's answer I understood that I had to return to kollel and learn. I went to R' Efraim Wolf and showed him the Rebbe's answer and asked him to accept me in the kollel. He shrugged and said that he was told by the Rebbe that a married man should learn in kollel for two years and so he could not accept me.***

The Rebbe's answer is printed in volume 15, p. 257 of Igros Kodesh:

**As for what you wrote about the seudas mitzva, find out if there is a custom in your place under these circumstances and if not, make it on time, i.e. the night of the 8<sup>th</sup> of Av. If, for whatever reason, this is not possible, then on the Shabbos that follows. May he go from a ben 13 for mitzvos to a ben 15 for Gemara etc. and may you and your wife have from him and all your children much genuine nachas which is Yiddishe, Chassidishe nachas.**

From a young age I received letters from the Rebbe with various instructions. The common denominator in all of them was to learn diligently. I once asked the Rebbe whether to be a counselor in a summer camp, which was an accepted practice among the bachurim. The letter I received from the Rebbe said that instead of being a counselor I should learn. That's the way it went throughout the years. The Rebbe constantly urged me to learn and to be involved in learning.

My first yechidus took place when I was a bachur on K'vutza in 5724. The Rebbe spoke to me the

entire time about limud ha'Torah. When I asked about other things in avodas Hashem, the Rebbe told me I should be involved in limud ha'Torah, fulfilling mitzvos b'hiddur, and avodas ha't'filla and that the other things would work out as a matter of course.

The Rebbe told me, "All the questions you asked regarding yourself and the others you mentioned, it will all work out with learning."

When my father asked the Rebbe whether I should look for a shidduch, the Rebbe wrote back that I could do so on condition that I continue learning for several years after I got married. In those days that was highly unusual because Kollelim were not widespread. In the letter that the Rebbe wrote to me he said, "This does not contradict what I said about learning diligently, especially according to what the Alter Rebbe paskens about learning for two or three years after marriage." This was not at all the usual letter one received from the Rebbe regarding a shidduch.

I had thought I would be an askan or someone who gave shiurim in yeshiva, or something along those lines. The Rebbe,

however, told me to learn.

After I got married I learned for several years. At that time, married men learned for two years in Kollel at most and then left to make a living or be involved in klal work. Two years after I began learning in kollel, people from the yeshiva in Kfar Chabad came and asked me to teach one of the upper classes. They offered a decent salary.

I told them I had to ask the Rebbe but they suggested that I start working and if it worked out, then I should ask the Rebbe whether this should be a permanent job.

After two months I wrote to the Rebbe and asked whether I should continue teaching, but I did not get an answer. A few months later I asked again and still there was no response. A year went by and I felt constantly in a quandary, wondering whether I was doing the right thing or not.

At a certain point I decided to ask again. I wrote a long letter. On one page I wrote all my personal matters and on the second page I wrote that I was a maggid shiur in Kfar Chabad, that I was successful with the students, but I didn't know whether I was doing the right thing. I added that I hadn't received an answer yet from the Rebbe and I was asking whether to continue and if so, I asked for a bracha. If not, then I wanted the Rebbe to tell me what to do.

A few weeks went by and then I received an answer to everything I had written about. As for my future, the Rebbe added in his handwriting: **It would be right for you to try and learn in order to receive heter horaa v'rabbonus etc. (rabbinical ordination).**

Nothing was said about teaching in yeshiva.

The Rebbe's directing me towards rabbanus surprised me. I



R' Lipsker receiving a Tanya from the Rebbe



R' Lipsker with his students in yeshivas Achei T'mimim in Rishon L'Tzayon

had never considered being a rav. I wanted to be a shliach or an askan but not a rav. From the Rebbe's answer I understood that I had to return to kollel and learn, and that is what I did. I went to R' Efraim Wolf and showed him the Rebbe's answer and asked him to accept me in the kollel. He shrugged and said that he was told by the Rebbe that a married man should learn in kollel for two years and so he could not accept me. That left me stuck, not knowing what to do next.

I spent Yud Shevat of 5730 with the Rebbe and before I went,

I wrote a long letter. I asked the Rebbe regarding my father, for he had been made an offer to move to a new neighborhood established in Kiryat Malachi where he would get a nice apartment and the weather was better than in Lud.

Then I wrote about my problem and said that the Rebbe had written that I should learn in order to get rabbinical ordination but in Eretz Yisroel things worked according to political considerations and "pull" and getting a rabbinic position was nearly impossible without protektzia.

## THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEV SIMCHA AND R' LIPSKER

The Rebbe's shliach and rav of Arad, Rabbi Bentzion Lipsker, had a special relationship with the Gerrer Rebbe, the Lev Simcha (Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter, d. 1992):

"The Gerrer Rebbe visited Arad many times. At first, we were the only religious Jews in Arad. He started coming to vacation here many years before he succeeded his brother, the Beis Yisroel, as Rebbe in 5737/1977. After assuming the mantle of leadership, he still continued to come five or six times a year on vacation. He loved the city very much. He maintained that Arad is spiritually significant and that this is where the Avos passed through. He brought proof from Tanach and various other sources like the Targum Yerushalmi, that the king of Grar is the king of Arad.

In 5740 he founded Kiryat Ger in Arad and he encouraged his followers to live here, saying that it is a city which has a segula for giving birth to children.

We had close ties long before he founded the Ger enclave here. He would daven in the Pe'er Yisroel shul and "Yarmak" and every Friday night he made sure I addressed the congregation while he himself listened closely. Over the years that he was here, he only held a *tish* two or three times for his Chassidim, and then too, he directed me to say divrei Torah before he himself did. He was simply unwilling to begin speaking until I said something.

Naturally, I reported this to the Rebbe and one time I got a note from the Rebbe in which he asked me whether my connection with the Lev Simcha was ongoing. On another occasion, the Rebbe asked me in yechidus, "What do you hear from the Gerrer Rebbe?" One time, when I passed by the Rebbe for dollars, the Rebbe asked me, "Have you seen the Gerrer Rebbe lately? How is he?"

The Gerrer Rebbe was witness to the enormous difficulties directed at me in the early years. He also witnessed the tremendous work that I did as I started out. In one of my first months here we met and he said to me, "They simply want to drive you out of here." Then he asked me, "Who sent you here?" When I told him, he said, "If the Lubavitcher Rebbe

sent you here, nothing will help them. You will remain here."

At a certain point he was instrumental in raising money for my shiurim and sustenance when I had nothing to live on. He gave me tremendous support throughout my hardest times. A Litvishe rav once came here and said that the eiruv was pasul. I made the rounds with him and he pointed out what seemed no good to him. Rabbi Rubin was with us and after another check I said that I thought the eiruv was kosher. We went to Rabbi Wosner, who listened to each of us and then paskened that the eiruv was kosher.

I told the Gerrer Rebbe what happened and he asked me, "What do you say?" I said that I thought the eiruv was kosher.

"If you think it is kosher, then it's fine," he said, and as a sign of kiruv he gave me mandlach (almonds) and cited the verse in Mishlei, "My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart rejoices, as do I."

The following Shabbos he took his handkerchief in his hand and said, "Chutzpa, there is a man here who is moser nefesh in order to provide Yiddishkait here and someone from the outside comes and tells him what to do." Then the Rebbe left his house publicly holding his tallis and walked to the Gerrer shtibel, which made quite a tumult.

If that wasn't enough, the following two incidents are chilling. There was someone here who greatly interfered with my work. I told the Gerrer Rebbe and he said along the lines of the well known idiom, "If he doesn't understand Yiddish, I will speak to him in French." A short while later, the man experienced many personal tzaros and he lost his public standing.

The municipality was making me problems and the Gerrer Rebbe called for one of his Chassidim and told him to try to settle things as they ought to be, and that if the municipality was still unwilling, he would tell his Chassidim who lived there not to pay *arnona* (property tax).

I have no doubt that the honor he gave me was thanks to my being a shliach of the Rebbe.

When I entered for yechidus, I submitted this note. The Rebbe read it quickly and began to answer: "Regarding Nachalat Har

Chabad, it's a very important inyan. Speak to Efraim Wolf to see whether you could get an apartment there; it would be good

for you to move to Nachalat Har Chabad. If your wife agrees, then move to Nachalat Har Chabad. As for your father, how is it possible?





**R' Lipsker teaching someone how to put on a tallis**



**R' Lipsker holding the coronation text appointing him as rav of Arad**

He needs his doctor, his shul and his friends.

"As for your work in Torah study, continue learning in order to get rabbinic ordination. Since you also need some parnasa, work half a day in yeshiva. As for politics etc. and your saying it's hard to get a position, nevertheless, you will be helped."

I stood there stunned. I was utterly confounded. Within a matter of moments, the Rebbe had changed my entire life. I had recently moved to Lud at the time, after having exerted much effort to get my apartment, and now the Rebbe was sending me to Nachala while leaving my father in Lud!

I went back to learning in kollel and taught in the afternoons. I taught for six or seven years after my wedding while simultaneously studying for smicha at Heichal Shlomo.

I began looking for a rabbinic position, as the Rebbe had directed. The search lasted six years, from 5732 to 5738. I didn't search intensively but considered different suggestions which were nixed one by one. What kept me going was what the Rebbe had told me, "you will be helped." I knew that if the Rebbe was

involved, the matter was in good hands.

### **"ARAD IS AN IMPORTANT CITY"**

In 5734 I received an offer for rabbanus in the southern city of Arad. I asked the Rebbe about it in yechidus and the answer was negative: "It is an important city and you don't have experience yet as a rav - you will fail there."

Although Arad was a small city, it was considered significant. The mayor was Bayge Shochet, the son-in-law of Levi Eshkol. The city was ardently Mapai, a stronghold for the Left. The Rebbe once said to the Gerrer Rebbe that "Arad is a chashuve city."

Very few religious Jews lived in Arad at that time and in hindsight, I also realized that the time wasn't right for me. In 5738, an open call to apply for the position of rav was announced. The day before the closing of the open call, someone met me and suggested that I submit my candidacy. I said that the Rebbe had already told me not to go to Arad.

This was after a major transitional time in Israel, when the Left was out of the

government and Menachem Begin had become the Prime Minister. I approached some askanim and consulted with them about the offer nonetheless. They told me that several years had gone by since the Rebbe's response and perhaps that no longer applied after the political scene had changed.

After receiving this advice, I sent a telegram to the Rebbe and asked whether to submit my candidacy. The answer surprised me. The Rebbe said that since several years had passed, "perhaps things have changed and you should speak with rabbanei Chabad and askanei Chabad." I spoke with rabbanei Chabad and they told me to submit my candidacy.

Some time afterwards elections took place and I was among the candidates. I went to Arad for a Shabbos and spoke in one of the shuls. I was a complete unknown but when the Rebbe is involved, things don't work out in the natural way. I was elected relatively easily despite my anonymity. Just one month later I began to experience tremendous difficulties, as I will go on to tell you.

***I was the only Lubavitcher in the city. I davened in the main shul and after everybody had already gone home to eat, I still stood there, wrapped in my tallis, thinking about the distance between me and the Rebbe and a proper Chabad minyan.***

### **ONE LUBAVITCHER IN ARAD**

The official elections were actually to fill the position of council member of the local rabbinical council, but in practice, the person who filled the position would fill the role of Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of the city.

I began with chinuch. I went to the schools and introduced myself as the new rav of the city and said I wanted to give some Yiddishkait to the children. Although this was a city of Mapainiks, they welcomed me graciously. There was a great interest. We made big rallies for all the children and taught about Judaism. We rented the local movie theater and in a series of rallies all the children - about 3000 of them - attended gatherings for Shavuos, Rosh HaShana and the rest of the holidays.

Before Rosh HaShana I went to each school and blew the shofar and made a presentation about the holiday. There wasn't a child in the city who did not learn about the Yomim Tovim and did not hear the shofar.

I did a Jewish Education Day. All the teachers of the schools convened for a day of lectures at the sports complex. Professor Branover and other great lecturers spoke about the importance of chinuch. It was unbelievable how they all cooperated with this,

without exception.

People still approach me and tell me that they remember a story I told twenty years ago. We don't always see results until years later, and all the baalei t'shuva here testify to that. Perhaps the "t'shuva revolution" back then laid the foundation for the spiritual revolution taking place now.

That period wasn't easy; not at all. After living as a resident of Shikun Chabad in Lud and Kiryat Malachi, among many Chassidim, the loneliness was very hard. But I can say with certainty that in Arad I felt that the Rebbe was with me more strongly than I felt in 770!

I remember my first Rosh HaShana in Arad. I was the only Lubavitcher in the city. I davened in the main shul and after everybody had already gone home to eat, I still stood there, wrapped in my tallis, thinking about the distance between me and the Rebbe and a proper Chabad minyan. I began to daven and suddenly I felt that I was standing in front of the Rebbe. I felt close to the Rebbe; a personal connection with the Rebbe, just the Rebbe and me. It was an amazing feeling.

The difficulties in this distant city were many. From every direction problems cropped up - most were premeditated. You can't imagine how hard it was.

I arrived from Kiryat Malachi

with three small children. Chinuch was a big problem for there was no "kosher" chinuch in Arad at the time. It was no simple matter to send them to Beer Sheva or to Kiryat Malachi every day. The second year of my rabbinate was a Shmita year and we could not obtain bread with a proper hechsher locally. My young daughters who learned in Beer Sheva would return home with bags of bread. Not to mention that Arad did not even have meat, fish, or fruits and vegetables with a proper hechsher. The city was distant not only physically, but spiritually too.

### **UNCOMPROMISING BATTLE FOR JEWISH PRINCIPLES**

My work shook up the small city. Some people might say that a rabbi ought to enter quietly and then conquer the city with quiet work, but I entered in a storm, as the Rebbe's shliach, which did not make me so popular in all circles. Problems arose from the religious council and from various people who piled obstacles in my way at every step. Since they wanted to trip me up, they made me responsible for the kashrus department.

I began to closely check out the existing kashrus system and was taken aback by what I found. I saw that we could not continue this way and I decided to start it all from the beginning again, to establish rules and new standards, as well as conditions and safeguards. I removed many hechsherim from hotels that were unwilling to accept the new terms.

One day, I was called to an urgent meeting with the mayor. He was sitting with the Sefardic Chief Rabbi, the head of the religious council, the mayor, and the leading hotel owners who were

very powerful and influential men. In order to understand what this was about, I must explain that Bayge was the supreme boss. He was one of the builders of Arad and his standing in the city was authoritative. He was furious with me since tourism brought in a lot of money and employment opportunities to the city.

One of the hotel owners attacked me, saying, "He is making us problems. He wants to ruin us." I was the new, young rabbi who had to face the powers-that-be without a single person on my side.

I replied to the accusation with confidence. "I am just a young rabbi," I acknowledged, "but I am from Russia, where my father suffered from persecution by the KGB. He wasn't afraid of them. When it came to Judaism, he just did his own thing. Now I am letting you know that just as he wasn't afraid of their jails, I am not at all afraid of you. If you abide by the rules, you will be certified, and if you don't, you won't. This is a democratic country and just as nobody obligates you to have kashrus certification, nobody obligates me to give you a hechsher without your abiding by the kashrus guidelines!"

My response was effective and the meeting quickly ended. This was also one of those things where I saw the results years later. Boruch Hashem the hechsher of the Rabbanut of Arad now has a good reputation as one of the more reliable hechsherim, and that is my reward for my efforts back then.

I have told you this story as one example of the enormous difficulties and nonstop pressure I had to contend with. Boruch Hashem I stood up to them. It took a lot of work.



**R' Lipsker with bar mitzva boys on Masada**

## **SPECIAL TREATMENT FROM THE REBBE**

All along the way I got special treatment from the Rebbe. When I arrived in Arad, the Rebbe wrote to me, "Change your location, change your mazal."

As I related, we had problems with chinuch because there were no religious schools yet (it was two to three years later that Ger built up a neighborhood here). It was very hard. The Rebbe sent me answers as a father to a son. Do such and such. Send your eight year old daughter to Beer Sheva and the next one to Nachalat Har Chabad, and send the other one to Kfar Chabad. We were told what to do with each daughter at each stage.

In 5743 there were elections for rav of the city. It was a long process and there were answers from the Rebbe about it. There were difficult days until I finally decided to submit my candidacy. There were nights that I did not sleep and days where I nearly broke. It was only what the Rebbe had told me in yechidus years before that kept me going; "you

will be helped."

I finally submitted my candidacy and I saw the hashgacha pratis here, too, in that in the end, I was the only candidate. Before the election I called the secretary, R' Groner and told him that the elections would be taking place shortly and he should inform the Rebbe. R' Groner told the Rebbe that they were going to elect R' Lipsker as rav now. I called back ten minutes later and R' Groner went back to the Rebbe and said, "Now R' Lipsker is being elected as rav of Arad." The Rebbe smiled broadly, a rare smile of enormous pleasure.

I later received a letter from the Rebbe which began, "I received the news via phone and thank you." In the margin the Rebbe added, "With blessing for success in rabbanus and avodas ha'kodesh."

The Rebbe once told me, "You should expand yourself in the city, in addition to the expansion to date." That is hafatzas ha'maayanos. In this regard as well, there were interesting reactions from the Rebbe. At one



***The Rebbe is alive and he is leading us!  
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point, I considered opening Chabad mosdos but did not get a response. It was only after R' Yitzchok Raskin, who served as director of Tzach in the city, asked the Rebbe about it that he got an answer to ask Aguch. After much discussion it was decided that the Chabad house would open schools while I would supervise them. However, Aguch said I should open a kollel and a yeshiva, explaining that it is accepted worldwide for rabbanim to head yeshivos and kollelim. Opening mosdos is the gateway to building a k'hilla.

I don't run the schools and preschools. That job is done by my capable son-in-law, R' Yaakov Mendelsohn. I run Ohel Levi Yitzchok V'Chana which includes the yeshiva, kollel and local Chabad house.

It is very hard to wear both hats. Unlike other cities in which a rav works only in rabbanus, I work on both fronts. The mosdos and the many baalei t'shuva demand a lot of my time. I also have to arrange funding for activities and I need to be a father to very many families - whether

families of the Chabad k'hilla or to families of Russian immigrants. Actually, I need to be the father to every Jew in the city. Anybody can call me at any time and I try to help each one with whatever they need.

Along with all that I am also involved with general Chabad issues in my role as member of the Beis Din Rabbanei Chabad. It's definitely a tough job. It means I sit on dinei Torah, attend meetings, and am part of formulating general resolutions. I deal with the construction of Chabad mikvaos and work with individuals and various institutions that need help in making decisions.

### **THE REBBE RUNS CHABAD**

There is a lot to do. At farbrengens I constantly refer to what the Rebbe said to the shluchim at the Kinus HaShluchim, 5752, about the final and only shlichus, to be mekabel p'nei Moshiach.

I constantly try to convey the message that the Rebbe lives with us and directs things now too. I

explain that Chabad is growing, as we see in our k'hilla in Arad and in other Chabad k'hillos around the world. I am not talking about the natural growth of mosdos Chabad but the growth which is a result of the influx of new baalei t'shuva. When you think about it, it's really exciting!

The significance is that the Rebbe is alive and he is leading us! I'm not talking just about "just as his children are alive, so is he alive," as some people like to say, but that *the Rebbe himself is running Chabad*.

Take, for example, the writing to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh. Thousands of people are answered this way, and it's a tangible example of how the Rebbe himself is continuing to lead Chabad. It proves more than anything that the Rebbe is alive and leading us.

We have to say it again and again and internalize it, because without utter hiskashrus to the Rebbe, we cannot be Chassidim. We need the Rebbe, we need his leadership, and we have to be mekasher to him.

The main way of being mekushar is to be involved in the Rebbe's inyanim, and the Rebbe's main inyan is the coming of Moshiach and the Geula. Hiskashrus to the Rebbe entails being involved in the main topic which is Moshiach and Geula, and in the merit of fulfilling this shlichus, we will soon be mekabel p'nei Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

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# AS IF IT WAS NEVER THERE

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated by Michael Leib Dobry

*My father made the difficult and courageous decision not to have the operation. The doctors were skeptical. They tried to convince him to change his mind, telling him how many people in similar situations initially refused to have the operation, but they eventually returned to the hospital when they realized that they had no choice. “We’ll be expecting you here in another few weeks,” they informed him. Yet, he remained steadfast in his decision, and only Hashem knows where he found the emotional strength to make it.*

“This is not some fable or myth, an exaggerated rumor or something that I dreamt. This is an amazing and exciting miracle that I experienced myself before my very eyes,” began Mr. Yoel Halla, supporter of the Chabad House in Pardes Chana. His voice cracked as he relating his story, finding it difficult to conceal his emotions. It was quite clear that

despite the many years that had passed since the traumatic chain of events took place – more than a quarter of a century - the life-saving miracle in the merit of a bracha from the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, remains clear and intact in his memory.

\*

“This story took place during the eighties, when I was still quite

young. My father, Shlomo, of blessed memory, was a well-known paint contractor in the region. During those years, the supply of experts in this field was not as great or varied as it is today, and many people in the vicinity knew him and maintained close friendship with him. The material needs of our home were available in great plenty. My father would work long hours, literally from sunrise to nightfall. The life of our family was conducted in an atmosphere of calm and tranquility.

“All this came to a halt one day when my father began to feel strong pains in the lower portion of his back. He was not that old, and he thought that the pains were due either to a slight cold or cramped muscles, which would last for a few days and then pass. However, the pains did not subside, rather they intensified from day to day. I will never forget those somber and gloomy days, as I saw him writhing in agony, unable to get out of bed. After a few days, they understood that this was something serious, and he was taken to the Hillel Yaffe Hospital in Chadera for a series of x-rays and examinations. The entire family was praying for his recovery.

“According to the medical diagnosis of several expert physicians, he was suffering from pressure on his vertebrae and a seriously slipped disc. The doctors’ words hit him like a clap of thunder on a clear day. It was apparent that the heavy physical work over the years had taken its toll. Every professional they consulted described the condition as ‘irreversible’.

“My father’s overall mood had become most dispirited. He was a Jew who usually woke up early each morning to toil in his handiwork, and now he was

confined to his bed, lying still and immobile. He remained hospitalized over a period of several months, hoping for some improvement in his condition.

“The doctors secured my father to the bed with weights in such a fashion that it wouldn’t place any pressure on his vertebrae. It was a pitiful sight to see. Naturally, all of my father’s work came to a complete halt. The family’s economic situation became quite difficult. Young and inexperienced as I was, I tried to help in whatever way I could.

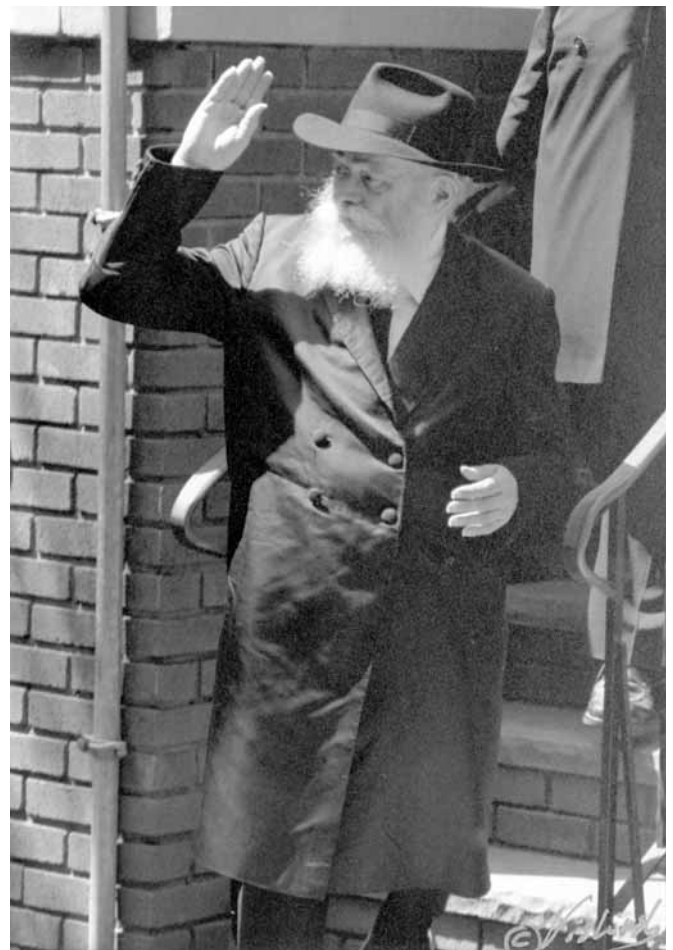
“At the end of this period of several months, as my father’s hospital room turned into our second home, the doctors decided that since his condition remained unchanged, as they saw when they compared the x-rays taken throughout this period, the only option left was to operate. Success in operations of this type ran at close to fifty percent at the time. Failure, however, could lead to paralysis.

“My father made the difficult and courageous decision not to have the operation. The doctors were skeptical. They tried to convince him to change his mind, telling him how many people in similar situations initially refused to have the operation, but they eventually returned to the hospital when they realized that they had no choice. ‘We’ll be expecting you here in another few weeks,’ they informed him. Yet, he remained steadfast in his decision, and only Hashem knows where he found the emotional strength to make it. He signed his release papers, left the hospital, and began his recuperation at home.

“His good friend, Mr. Yossi Parchi, who came to visit him and saw his state of health and how much suffering he was enduring, asked him if he had already written to the Lubavitcher Rebbe about his condition.

“When my father replied in the negative, his friend proceeded to express his great praise of the Rebbe, bringing stories of his tremendous spiritual abilities and the many miracles that he heard took place in the merit of the Rebbe’s brachos. My father became quite excited and asked him to obtain the telephone number of the Rebbe’s secretaries in New York.

“They called the office, and my father described his life story and what he had gone through over the previous few months in great detail. The secretary promised him that he would submit his request to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and they would get back to him as soon as there was an answer. And so it was. Not long afterwards, the secretaries called him back and informed him that the Rebbe had blessed him



with a complete recovery.

“It was nothing less than an absolute and incomprehensible miracle. Right after the Rebbe’s answer, my father’s condition began to improve in a simply amazing manner. His pains proceeded to decrease, and after just three days, he could already stand and walk upright as if nothing had happened. This went completely against all logic – and certainly defied the doctor’s confident predictions!

“Words are inadequate to describe the great joy that engulfed all of us. My father couldn’t stop thanking, praising, and lauding the Rebbe for instilling him with a renewed and revitalized life. The story caused shockwaves and was publicized throughout the city.

“He returned to the hospital, and the doctors thought that he had come to ask to have the operation. They were stunned to look at the results of the new x-rays and see that it was as if there had never been anything there. It wasn’t that the pain had lessened or had become tolerable – it had disappeared as if it had never been. The doctors reacted with absolute shock and determined that



this was a case of a medical miracle. Naturally, my father told them the entire chain of events. With one bracha, the Rebbe had wiped out the root of the problem.”

It is clear that the great miracle experienced by his father had deeply penetrated Yoel’s soul. The events of those days remained engraved in his mind, and he has difficulty hiding his feelings over this wondrous occurrence.

\* \* \*

“In conclusion, I would like to tell another amazing incident that occurred in our family, this time involving my brother:

“My father, together with my brother and his wife, traveled to New York for the wedding of our aunt. My father arranged the trip so that he could be at Sunday dollars distribution and thank the Rebbe personally for the miracle. When the moment came, my

father did just that, and the Rebbe gave him a dollar for a bracha. Afterwards, my brother and his wife passed by the Rebbe, who gave them three dollars – one for my brother, one for his wife, and a third for the child on the way... They were thunderstruck. How did the Rebbe know that she was in the early stages of pregnancy, especially when they had yet to tell anyone about it?...”

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[Continued from pg. 39]

project got underway. Things were slow at first, with people dropping in here and there. They wondered about the red brick building that was so out of place amidst Israeli architecture. Sometimes, visitors merely gawked at the façade and had no idea what the building was about.

These visitors were invited by R’ Meir to come inside. The tour initially began with three rooms on the first floor: “the secretaries room,” “the broadcasting room,” and “Rabbi Chadakov’s office.”

Over the years, R’ Meir and R’ Gershom developed a program. With the help of donations they transformed the rooms into an impressive and effective programming tool. “The secretaries room” serves as a reception room, where the tour begins with a short lecture about the Rebbe. The visitors watch a video of the Rebbe too.

Then they are shown where the Rebbe distributed dollars for tz’daka every Sunday and where the Rebbe’s room is. They are told about the “great light” which emanates from this room (the original, that is) which lights up the world. The imminent revelation of the Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach is explained too.

The tour usually ends with t’fillin for the visitors and parting words devoted to the Besuras Ha’Geula and the hastening of the hisgalus.

R’ Meir always sat at the end of the hall on the first floor, ready to welcome people. He offered everybody a cold or hot drink and other refreshments. About nine years ago, when I wrote an article about this project, R’ Meir agreed to give me information that shed light on his work. He told me about ongoing farbrengens and shiurim and added:

“There are many stories about special people that occur here. Boruch Hashem, thanks to this place many Jews get more involved in Judaism. R’ Gershom and I keep in touch with them.

“There are different types of visitors and we don’t always know who we are dealing with. We have seen people put on a kippa at the entrance to the building, say some chapters of T’hillim, give tz’daka, write a letter and put it in a volume of Igros Kodesh. I see them opening and reading the letters twice and three times and smiling. Then they leave without saying a word.”

R’ Meir ran the kiosk called “Gittele” for years. It was a lively place at all hours of the day. When someone walked in who looked like he didn’t put on t’fillin, R’ Meir

would encourage him to do so in a loving way. He did it firmly but sensitively and he was very successful.

He didn’t just work with t’fillin but also inspired many of them, whether with a pithy saying or by discussing the person’s empty lifestyle. If you got ‘caught’ by R’ Meir it was unlikely that you would avoid putting on t’fillin and strengthening your mitzva observance.

The years went by and R’ Meir experienced much suffering. He left the running of the kiosk but not his outreach. He set up a shipping container near the kiosk with s’farim and signs about the Rebbe’s mitzvaim. He put on t’fillin with people there and learned Torah with every salesman who came to one of the stores in the area, and many visitors to the Kfar.

In recent months he was very sick, and he passed away on the night of Rosh HaShana. He is survived by his wife Sarah and his children: R’ Yaakov Friedman, shliach in Moscow; R’ Chaim Ezra of Kfar Chabad; Mrs. Shayna Brook of Rishon L’Tziyon; Mrs. Chaya Zalmanov of Kfar Chabad; Mrs. Pessia Meir of Kfar Chabad, and by his brother R’ Yisroel.

# R' MEIR FRIEDMAN A"H

By Shneur Zalman Berger

*His dedication to the Rebbe's directives knew no bounds. He oversaw mivtzaim activities across Israel, raised money for the yeshiva, arranged Shabbatons, danced with the IDF orphans, ran a wide range of activities in the 770 building in Kfar Chabad, and during the years that he operated Gittele's kiosk, he would be busy with mivtza t'fillin from morning to night. \* This was R' Meir Friedman of Kfar Chabad, who passed away this past Rosh HaShana Night.*

He was opposed to being called "HaRav Meir Friedman" but the name "Reb Meir" came to represent a distinct concept in Kfar Chabad. It encapsulated the image of a special Chassid with an inner fire and Chassidishe chayus, devoted heart and soul to the Rebbe MH"M and his directives. He passed away on Rosh HaShana at the age of 75.

\*\*\*

R' Meir Friedman was born in Kiev, capitol of the Ukraine, in 1934, to his parents R' Yaakov and

Gittel Friedman. His father was the son of Rabbi Zusha Friedman, rav of Odessa, and a seventh generation descendent of the Mezritcher Maggid. His mother was the daughter of the dayan, Rabbi Pinchas Boruchstadt, a Boyaner Chassid, descendent of Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz and the Ruzhiner Admurim.

R' Meir's parents settled in Odessa after they married but communist persecution forced them to move to Kiev. Since it was practically impossible to find a job



R' Meir Friedman

where a person could keep Shabbos, his father worked in a local cemetery.

The Rebbe's parents, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok and Rebbetzin Chana Schneersohn, visited their home several times when they spent time in a dacha in the Kiev area. Many years later, when Mrs. Gittel Friedman arrived in New York, she visited Rebbetzin Chana. Before she went in she was told that she would only be spending a few minutes with the Rebbetzin, but they ended up reminiscing about those difficult years for an hour and a half.

The Friedmans had three children: R' Aharon a"H, secretary of the district council of Emek Lud and a distinguished askan in Kfar Chabad; R' Meir a"H; and R' Yisroel, rosh yeshivas Oholei Torah in Crown Heights. World War II broke out when the three brothers were children, and their father was drafted into the Red Army. He was sent to the front and never returned.

The family was able to obtain proof that R' Yaakov had been shot and killed but they didn't dare to tell

their mother the news, so she thought of herself as an aguna for 45 years, until she passed away.

R' Meir and his brothers grew up as orphans and their lives were quite complicated. During the war they fled with their mother and other relatives to Samarkand. At the end of the war they left Russia and arrived at the DP camp in Peking, where they learned in the Chabad Talmud Torah established there. Their connection with Chabad grew and when they made aliya they settled in Kfar Chabad.

## SAD MEMORIES

Mrs. Friedman and her three children were allotted a two storey Arab house that was situated near where the post office and kiosk are located today. She ran a kiosk in her home, which her son Meir took over after her passing.

Patrons of the kiosk who were not religious put on a kippa that was provided for them in a corner of the room and they said brachos. Mrs. Friedman asked this of them and they all willingly agreed. Her son Meir continued this practice and along with running the business he did a lot to strengthen the Judaism and Chassidus of the customers.

R' Meir learned in Tomchei T'mimim in Pardes-Lud and after a few years he was appointed madrich of the agricultural school in Kfar Chabad. He was there during the massacre of 1956 in which five talmidim and their madrich were murdered.

About three years ago, R' Meir spoke about the aftermath of the tragedy:

"Right after the shooting I took out many children from the area and brought them to the home of R' Shlomo Chaim Feldman, whose house was opposite the school. Then, together with R' Shia Gopin and others, we made Herculean efforts to remove the wounded,



R' Meir at a farbrengen in Kfar Chabad. From right to left: R' Avrohom Maiyor on the extreme right, R' Yona Eidelkop (partially hidden), R' Itche Mendel Liss - standing, R' Dovid Kagan, R' Yitzchok Meir Greenberg, R' Meir Friedman, R' Avrohom Lieder, the journalist Shmuel Avidur, R' Chaim Schreiber. Standing behind, from right to left: a Tamim, R' Eliezer Mogilevsky, R' Avrohom Lison, R' Abba Levin

***R' Meir, as a Chassid and disciplined soldier, stood up in the military command car as it rode through the streets of Teveria and sang, "U'faratzta." It was quite a sight, a bearded man traveling on Shabbos and singing joyous Chassidic songs.***

especially my friend, Simcha Zilberstrom who was in critical condition. This was a problem because the residents of the Kfar were afraid that the terrorists were still lurking and would ambush those who tried to help.

A long time passed until we assembled whatever weapons were in the Kfar and managed to remove the wounded. The worst moment for me that night was when I schlepped Simcha by myself and I was powerless to help him.

"I ended up accompanying him



After the massacre in Kfar Chabad, looking in shock at the bloodstains



***“It was a pleasure to listen to him at farbrengens,” said an acquaintance. “He was suffused with Chassidishe flavor, and he told it like it is. He unconditionally demanded the fulfillment of the Rebbe’s horaos, of himself and others.”***

to the hospital, where I spent hours with him until he was taken in for surgery. Simcha did not survive the operation.

“I went through many difficult things since then, fighting in the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, but the terrible sights of the slaughter in Kfar Chabad are engraved in my mind forever. Sometimes, when I am reminded of the bloodbath, I shudder.”

After the massacre the Rebbe sent a group of shluchim to Eretz Yisroel. These shluchim worked hard to promote the idea of traveling to the Rebbe. They told about how those in the Rebbe’s presence feel, about the giluyim, the light, and urged everyone to go to the Rebbe and not to be satisfied with the information they got from Beis Chayeinu in dribs and drabs.

R’ Meir took their advice and borrowed a lot of money in order to be able to go to the Rebbe for Tishrei 5717/1956.

## **ONE OF THE LEADING ASKANIM**

R’ Meir married Sarah Bronstein, daughter of R’ Zalman, a resident of Kfar Chabad. Their home was always open to guests, Lubavitch and not-Lubavitch.

In the following years R’ Meir became active in various projects. He was one of the main organizers of the Shabbasos Iruach, which were

earlier versions of what later became known as Shabbatons, in Kfar Chabad, and he worked at yeshivas Tomchei T’mimim in a number of jobs, even flying abroad to raise money.

At a certain point he served as Mashgiach, alongside Rabbi Yaakov Katz, the Rosh Yeshiva in Kfar Chabad, as well as a night madrich in the yeshiva.

He established a branch of Tzeirei Chabad in Kfar Chabad long before the concept of a “Chabad house” spread across the country. At that time he oversaw mivtzaim nationwide and worked tirelessly to implement the Rebbe’s directives regarding mivtzaim, which were taking off at that time.

During the Yom Kippur war he was sent to the front in military campaigns. There too, during his army service, he brought cheer to his fellow soldiers and was a Chassid of the Rebbe. As they recounted later, when his troop was ordered to move northward from Yerushalayim, it was Shabbos. R’ Meir, as a Chassid and disciplined soldier, stood up with a bottle of wine in the military command car as it rode through the streets of Teveria and sang, “U’faratzta.” It was quite a sight, a bearded man traveling on Shabbos and singing joyous Chassidic songs.

## **CHASSID AND SOLDIER**

R’ Meir Friedman was one of the unique elder Chassidim renown in

Kfar Chabad. Clever and wise, he was a genuine Chassid who constantly offered up Chassidic aphorisms and inspired his surroundings with his pleasant way with words. Being in his presence was always surprising and interesting. Wherever he was he would promote the teachings of Chassidus with a deep and sharp Chassidic vernacular traditionally reserved for Chassidim of an earlier era.

He was a man of truth and chesed; modest on the one hand and strong on the other hand; and he measured out both appropriately.

Many people enjoyed hearing him sing the “Poltaver Niggun” in his unique way. “It was a pleasure to listen to him at farbrengens,” said an acquaintance. “He was suffused with Chassidishe flavor, and he told it like it is. He unconditionally demanded the fulfillment of the Rebbe’s horaos, of himself and others.”

Some people remember him, every year on the night of 11 Nissan after Maariv, bursting into song, “Yifrach b’yamav tzaddik.” He would sing and dance with great joy.

He was also blessed with a big heart and warm feelings towards every Jew. He was ready to help anybody with anything, even when he wasn’t asked. He was simply gifted with a nose for ferreting out a Chassid in need. He would show up quietly, without fanfare, and with a smile.

One of the people who davens in 770 in Kfar Chabad said, “I remember how R’ Meir would sit on Shabbos in the room opposite the entrance to 770 and offer a cup of coffee to every guest who hadn’t had a drink or anything to eat before the davening.”

His hiskashrus to the Rebbe was boundless. His ego did not stand in the way when he had to carry out one of the Rebbe’s activities. He was a man of action and a disciplined and loyal soldier who asked no

questions and made no conditions. He would carry out the Rebbe's horaos wholeheartedly.

He gave everything he had to the Rebbe, whether it was at the kiosk that he ran, providing the youth of Kfar Chabad with some much needed chizuk and a listening ear, or offering assistance to people from the outside who came to the Kfar.

When he met someone in the Kfar who he thought had not put on t'fillin that day, from his suppliers to patrons who had a job-related connection with someone in the Kfar, he would take him to a room he had on the side of the kiosk and put t'fillin on with him.

A friend related, "A few months ago, at the beginning of the summer, I saw him on a blistering hot day rushing through the Kfar 'dragging' a truck driver, who had delivered merchandise for one of the stores, after him. He entreated him, 'Come put on t'fillin.' The man refused but R' Meir pleaded with him, 'Do me a favor; come for a minute.' It was impossible to withstand a request like that and he put t'fillin on with him. Two minutes later the driver was gone but R' Meir was left with a victorious smile on his face."

Someone else told about an individual from Ramle who worked in the Rivkins' vegetable store in Kfar Chabad. "I arrived at the entrance to Kfar Chabad one morning. That worker was waiting there for a ride to the vegetable store. I stopped and said I was passing right by the store and could bring him to work.

"When we got to the center of the Kfar, he asked me to stop. 'I have to go to Meir Friedman as I do every morning,' he said. He told me that every morning he put t'fillin on with R' Meir and only then did he continue on to work."

These are just a sampling of the many stories like this about R' Meir Friedman, who knew that even in the center of Kfar Chabad there are



Rejoicing at the bar mitzva celebration of war orphans



Activities in the shipping container

many opportunities for reaching out.

## REACHING OUT IN 770

Decades ago, R' Meir ran the branch of Tzeirei Chabad in Kfar Chabad and oversaw mivtzaim that were done around the country, participating himself wherever there was a need, whether with mivtza t'fillin in distant places or dancing with war orphans at the bar mitzvas. He did all this devotedly without agendas or narrow minded considerations.

For a number of years he was in charge of activities geared for

visitors to the 770 building in Kfar Chabad. This began in 5755, when R' Shlomo Maidanchek, director of Agudas Chassidei Chabad in Eretz Yisroel, asked him to organize the visits to the new 770 building. This was an attraction that drew many outsiders.

"People and groups come on visits to Kfar Chabad. Why shouldn't they walk into 770 and visit there too, and hear about the holiness of the place?" reasoned R' Shlomo.

R' Meir took on the job. He enlisted R' Gershom Ochana and the

[Continued on pg. 35]

# WHAT IMPRESSED AVROHOM?

By Rabbi Yosef Karasik  
District Rav Bat Chefer – Emek Chefer

*A fascinating look at the parsha from the perspective of Chazal, Kabbala and Chabad Chassidus.*

## WEEDING AND HOEING? THAT'S FOR ME!

Chazal say an amazing thing. How was Eretz Yisroel chosen to be the home of the Jewish people where the Beis HaMikdash is built and where the Sh'china rests forever? It all began with the first Jew, Avrohom Avinu, who was favorably impressed by the nations who lived in the land and this is why he chose it for his descendants, as the Midrash relates[1]:

“When Avrohom was in Aram Naharayim and Aram Nachor, he saw the inhabitants eating, drinking and carousing. He said, may my portion not be in this land. When he arrived in Sulama of Tzur and saw them engaged with weeding and hoeing, he said, may my portion be in this land. Said Hashem, to your children I will give this land.”

In other words, the idea of developing the world through cultivating the land attracted

Avrohom. In fact, Avrohom himself, immediately after moving to Eretz Yisroel and walking its length and breadth, planted an orchard in Beer Sheva.

This Midrash is puzzling. What so impressed Avrohom that made him exclaim, if only my portion is in this land? Was Avrohom so enthused by the simple work of farmers? And what stood out to make this land to be the chosen home of the Jewish people for generations and the location of the Beis HaMikdash? That the people who lived there were hard working folk and not parasites or lazybones?!

Furthermore, if Avrohom was so impressed by the character of the people of the land, why did he make his servant Eliezer swear not to marry off his son Yitzchok to a girl from Canaan?

The Midrash says[2], “The deeds of the Canaanites were more

corrupt than that of all the nations and the place where the Jews settled was the most corrupt of all.” How does Avrohom’s enthusiasm for these people fit with the fact that their behavior was the worst of anybody else?

## WORK ETHIC

Avrohom did not scorn the people of Aram because they ate and drank but because they caroused; they sat idly and did nothing productive. Work doesn’t only save us from boredom. It’s a goal unto itself, to build up and rectify the world. Hashem created the world so that man would work in it and improve upon it as Chazal say on the verse, “that Elokim created to do” – to do means to fix. Hashem commanded humankind to build up the world.

So to Avrohom, Eretz Yisroel was ideal because a livelihood depended on honest work which led to a decent morality while in wealthy Aram Naharayim which was blessed with everything good without having to work for it, they sat around idly. When Avrohom saw the people of Canaan and their work, he saw that the reason that they toiled – which was not what other nations did – came from an inner urge which was within the earth itself. This power which was in the earth urged its inhabitants to create and build and not to sit about unoccupied.

This is the simple reason why Avrohom chose Eretz Yisroel for his children, so they would absorb a work ethic from the air of the land and so they would learn the importance of work from the nations that lived there.

Avrohom’s enthusiasm wasn’t because of the personalities of the people who lived there for they were corrupt. He was impressed by their motivation to work and this is what he wanted to bequeath to his



descendents. A life of toil and creativity is what characterizes the land and its inhabitants as opposed to other lands whose inhabitants waste time on entertainment and pleasure seeking. Consequently, a real “entering the land” means to be aware of this land’s character and to acquire it as Chazal say[3], “Every man was created for toil as it says, for man was born to toil.”

### **A PERSON WANTS WHAT HE WORKED FOR**

What’s good about work is not merely that a person must be occupied and not waste his time on nonsense, but there is a more positive aspect of this as well. Hashem created man with an inclination towards building and creating as Chazal say[4] “A person wants a small measure of his own more than nine measures of his fellow.” A normal person with a healthy outlook prefers one loaf of bread that was baked from wheat that he himself toiled over, that he plowed, planted, harvested, ground and baked, over nine loaves that he bought, that he did not work for.

In spiritual matters too a person is far happier over one inyan in Torah that he worked on and understood by himself than nine inyanim that someone taught him. He relates to the inyan he figured out for himself and remembers it far better than the nine other things.

Most people don’t take full pleasure in something they get for free. On the contrary, they’re embarrassed by a handout and are happy to obtain something that they worked for and earned. Why is this so? Why did Hashem create people with this feeling of being happier with something they worked for rather than something they are given?

For creating, building, and giving are actually G-dly traits, while receiving without working is a trait



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of created things. When Chazal tell us that a person wants his own small measure etc. they are telling us that Hashem implanted this G-dly trait within us, to be givers and builders.

This is why Hashem did not create the world completely finished. He left room for man to work and build a house, plant trees, plow and plant.

Hashem could have made nature so that it produced everything humanity needed. He could have made all the discoveries that scientists work so diligently to find be open information. Hashem could have had a baby born retaining all

the Torah knowledge that it is taught before it is born. But He didn’t do so because this is His greatest gift to us, the desire to be like Him, to be a partner with Hashem in Creation!

This teaches us something about influencing others and chinuch. We should not be giving everything to the student but getting them to work and develop on their own, inducing the inborn trait of independence and initiative.

Youthful rebellion, the desire that a maturing young person has to be independent, to decide things for himself and what his course in life will be, is not a negative trait. It’s a

tremendous gift that Hashem implanted in youth to want to initiate and create and not rely only on what others did for him, i.e. his parents and teachers who provide him with everything. It's a G-dly trait that Hashem endowed His creations with in His great kindness, especially to the Jewish people, and it is apparent from an early age. This is the positive take on youthful rebellion which obviously must be channeled properly in order to be fruitful.

## PHYSICAL LABOR AND SPIRITUAL LABOR

Although man is happy with everything he creates, when he creates something new, when he invents something – the excitement is much greater and the joy far deeper. This too is because man's creating is similar to Hashem's and so when man comes up with something new he achieves a higher level of partnership with the Creator. This is the reason why he feels greater pleasure in his accomplishment.

How does a person achieve a new creation?

There are two types of toil: 1) physical toil that serves the body, 2) spiritual toil that serves the neshama like the toil of Torah, the toil of t'filla, the toil of mitzvos.

What does a person have greater pleasure and satisfaction from? Where can a person be a greater innovator – in constructing material

things whether actual physical structures and making discoveries in nature, or in Torah study?

Every material creation is not really a new entity for everything was already created during the Six Days of Creation and man's job is to reveal that which is hidden in nature, to reveal rather than to innovate, and to a certain extent even animals build new things in nature.

It is in the spiritual realm though, in the holy Torah, where man's accomplishment really stands out, especially the true innovations of a Jew:

As Chassidus explains on the words, "behold, a ladder was standing on the ground and its top reached the heavens," that through avodas Hashem a Jew is elevated above the world and he brings new kochos to the world that Hashem did not place there during the Six Days of Creation.

This is also accomplished by t'filla through which we can undo bad decrees like the tzaddik whose brachos and prayers bring about salvation to someone whose situation is hopeless in the normal way of things, like a patient that doctors have given up on. A tzaddik is a true innovator in that he brings supernatural, new powers to the world through which he can bring about the healing of a person who was deemed incurable.

In Torah study a Jew can achieve true innovation, being a partner on a level that is most like the Creator

by delving into Torah and adding and innovating in it. This is why the pleasure from the toil in Torah is so great, far greater than physical innovation.

## "DO ALL THAT YOU CAN" – TO WORK TO BRING THE GEULA

The principle of man doing the work himself is most significant in the primary mission we have "all the days of your life to bring to Yemos HaMoshiach," for which the world was created. The true and complete Geula comes about through the work a Jew does in rectifying the world and not as a gift from G-d.

This seems explicit in the famous sicha of the Rebbe in which he says:

"Do all that you can to actually bring Moshiach Tzidkeinu. May there finally be found ten Jews who will insist that they must get Hashem to actually bring the true and complete Geula immediately." [5]

The greatest chiddush that there will be in the world – the ripping away of the curtain of galus and the coming of Moshiach - can be accomplished through the independent efforts of every Jew. May we merit it now!

*Sources: Likkutei Sichos vol. 15, p. 93, Igros Kodesh vol. 22 p. 377*

### NOTES:

- [1] B'Reishis Raba, parsha 39, s'if 8
- [2] Toras Kohanim, Acharei, 18, 3
- [3] Meseches Sanhedrin daf 99b on the verse in Iyov, perek 5, pasuk 7
- [4] Meseches Bava Metzia, daf 38a
- [5] An interesting note: The Rebbe Rayatz once indicated that his choice of America was for the same reason that is brought regarding Avrohom Avinu – because of the hard work and toil of the gentiles that reside here (Seifer HaSichos 5609, p. 130).