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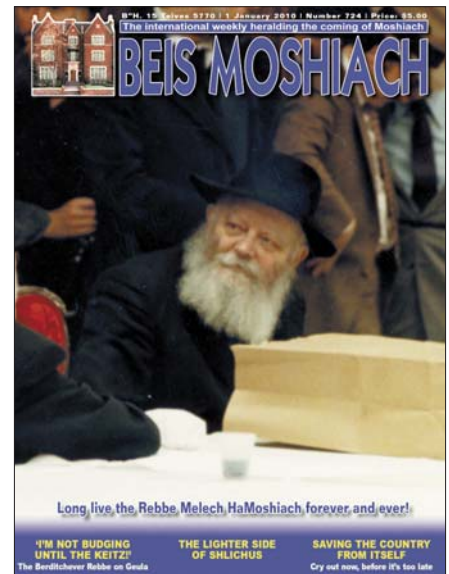
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SAVING THE COUNTRY FROM ITSELF

Shleimus HaAretz | Shai Gefen



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TRUE LIFE

Sichos In English

YAAKOV'S BEST YEARS

When the Tzemach Tzedek was a young boy, his cheider teacher taught him the verse, "And Yaakov lived in the Land of Egypt for seventeen years," [1] and explained that these were the best years of Yaakov's life. [2]

The Tzemach Tzedek asked his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe:

How was it possible that the best years of Yaakov's life would be spent in Egypt, a depraved land?

The Alter Rebbe answered him:

"Even before he arrived, Yaakov sent Yehudah to Egypt to establish a yeshiva. [3] When one studies the Torah, one comes close to G-d. This closeness allows one to live - with true and genuine life - even in Egypt." [4]

Indeed, the depravity of Egypt enhanced the life experienced by Yaakov.

For the transformation of darkness reveals a higher quality of light.

Similarly, Yaakov's establishment of Torah life amid the darkness of Egyptian society expressed the essential quality of life which he experienced and endowed to his children.

TO LIVE WITH THE TORAH

True life can be ascribed only to G-d, as it is written, [5] "And G-d your L-rd is true; He is the living G-d."

Just as truth is uninterrupted and unchanging, so too, life is in essence an unchanging and eternal quality.

Thus our Sages describe [6] a stream as "living water" only when it continues to flow without drying out from time to time. [7]

Mortal existence, by contrast, is

temporary and subject to change. [8]

Nevertheless, by drawing close to G-d through Torah study, a person can tap a certain dimension of G-d's eternality, as it is written, [9] "And you who cling to G-d your L-rd are all alive today."

This was the thrust of Yaakov's entire life.

When the Torah sets out to convey the nature of his personality, it describes [10] him as "a simple man, dwelling in tents," i.e., the tents of Shem and Ever, [11] the leading houses of study of that age.

In these domains, Yaakov's character was shaped and molded.

And yet, Yaakov did not remain in those houses of study forever.

As an expression of the fact that the connection to G-d he established through Torah study was genuine, his life encompassed a varied scope of circumstances and challenges.

And throughout these different experiences, he maintained his connection to the Torah.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Yaakov reached the pinnacle of this lifetime journey in Egypt.

There he was presented with challenges of a different nature than he had experienced previously, for he dwelt in the ultimate of prosperity, amid a land of decadent people.

But as mentioned, even before Yaakov entered Egypt, he resolved these difficulties by sending Yehudah to establish a yeshiva.

With this act, he set the tone for his future in Egypt.

Moreover, not only did Yaakov study himself, he involved his children and his grandchildren in this spiritual endeavor.

Rather than accept the values of

the surrounding culture, Yaakov's descendants joined him in study.

For them the descent to Egypt represented a radical transition, for the majority of their adult lives had been spent in Eretz Yisroel, in an atmosphere of holiness.

Yet motivated by Yaakov's example and guidance, they were able to extend the atmosphere of Eretz Yisroel into Egypt through devotion to study.

Yaakov's unchanging and uninterrupted commitment to the Torah despite the various settings in which he lived demonstrates the true life with which the Torah endowed him.

His connection with G-d was all-encompassing, permeating every aspect of his being and personality.

YAAKOV STILL LIVES

The above enables us to understand why the Torah reading is named VaYechi - "And he lived" - although it speaks of Yaakov's death.

As the events of the Torah reading demonstrate, Yaakov's life was one of connection to G-d that transcended his material settings.

And since he shared this quality with his descendants, it was reflected in a posterity that extends beyond his mortal lifetime.

As our Sages say: [12] "Yaakov, our ancestor, did not die. Just as his descendants are alive, he is alive."

Moreover, this concept does not apply only to Yaakov's immediate descendants, but to all Jews at all times.

The vitality a Jew experiences in his divine service today reflects the life of Yaakov our ancestor. [13]

And conversely, the connection to the Torah which Yaakov nurtured is the source of life for all of his descendants throughout the generations.

True, within Jewish history, there have always been, as there are today, some members of the Jewish people, who - at least to outward appearances - do not conduct their daily lives according to the directives of the

Torah and its mitzvos. But that is merely an expression of their external reality. The inner truth is that they are alive, and that their vitality stems from the Torah and its mitzvos. [14]

Our Sages state: [15] “Although a Jew sins, he remains a Jew” and the Rambam rules: [16] A person whose evil inclination compels him to negate the performance of a mitzvah or to commit a sin... [still] wishes to be part of the Jewish people and desires to fulfill all the mitzvos and separate himself from sin. It is only his [evil] inclination which forces him [to do otherwise].

Regardless of his actual conduct, every member of our people remains a Jew and shares a connection to the entire Torah. “The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of congregation of Yaakov.” [17]

This is the spiritual legacy Yaakov bequeathed us, the sign of his continued life and our own vitality.

(The above also points to the approach to encourage a person to express this connection to the Torah.

A potential which exists seeks to express itself and that tendency is enhanced by the knowledge of its existence.

Spreading the awareness of the inner nature of a Jew will spur the desire to have that nature realized in the actual observance of the Torah and its mitzvos.

And this is not merely a point of theory, it is borne out by experience.

Conversely, an approach which criticizes harshly those Jews who at present do not observe the Torah and its mitzvos and threatens them within ominous Divine retribution does not encourage anyone to increased Jewish practice or greater observance of the Torah and its mitzvos. Quite the contrary, it weakens many people’s feeling for Judaism and turns them away from t’shuva.) [18]

EGYPT IS NOT FOREVER

Although his ability to create a Torah center for his descendants in Egypt is a sign of Yaakov’s life, it is not the culmination of his

achievements.

For the ultimate place for Yaakov and for his descendants is not in Egypt, but in Eretz Yisroel.

Therefore, Yaakov called his sons together with the intent of revealing the time of the Redemption to them. [19]

And he assured them that they would be redeemed from Egypt promising, [20] “G-d will be with you, and He will bring you back to your ancestral land.” For it is in Eretz Yisroel - and more particularly, in the Eretz Yisroel of the Redemption - that the life of Yaakov and his descendants will flourish.

STRENGTH AND ENCOURAGEMENT

This Shabbos is called Shabbos Chazak, because of the custom [21] of declaring, Chazak, Chazak, V’Nis’chazeik (“Be strong, be strong, and may you be strengthened”) at the conclusions of the Torah reading, in acknowledgment of the completion of the Book of Genesis.

The awareness nurtured by the reading of VaYechi generates strength.

When a Jew knows that he has been granted a heritage of essential life that is expressed through a connection to the Torah, and that ultimately, there will come a time when this connection will flourish in a consummate manner, he will possess the inner strength to confront the different challenges presented to him by his environment.

By heightening the expression of this potential by our people as a whole, we hasten the time when it will blossom into complete fruition in the Era of the Redemption.

May this take place in the immediate future.

Adapted from Likkutei Sichos, Vol. X, p. 160ff, Vol. XV, p. 422ff; Sichos Shabbos Parshas VaYechi, 5751

Notes:

1. Genesis 47:28.

2. Baal HaTurim on the above verse.

This is reflected in the fact that 17 is numerically equivalent to the Hebrew word tov meaning “good” (Or HaTorah, VaYechi p. 354a).

3. Rashi, Midrash Tanchuma to Genesis 46:28.

4. HaYom Yom, entry for the 18th of Teives.

5. Jeremiah 10:10.

6. Para 8:9, using the terminology of Numbers 19:17.

7. More specifically, to be considered “living water,” a stream may not dry out within a seven year period.

This limit is chosen, because our world is structured in a cycle of seven millennia. Since our existence as a whole is temporary, the timelessness of “living water” need not be absolute.

8. Note the distinction made by the Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 2:10) between G-d’s life and mortal existence. G-d’s life is one with Him, while a mortal is, by nature, separate from his life-force.

9. Deuteronomy 4:4.

10. Genesis 25:27.

11. B’Reishis Rabba 63:10, and Rashi on the above verse.

The connection of Yaakov with the Torah is also emphasized by the verse (Psalms 78:5): “He established statutes in Yaakov and placed the Torah in Yisroel.”

12. Taanis 5b.

13. This concept of continued life is mentioned with regard to Yaakov and not with regard to Avraham and Yitzchak, because, in a complete sense, the concept that “his descendants are alive” applies only to Yaakov. “Yaakov’s bed was perfect” (Rashi, Genesis 47:31), i.e., all his sons were righteous and their offspring became the Jewish people.

In contrast, Yishmoel descended from Avraham and Eisav from Yitzchak (P’sachim 56a). (See also Maharsha to Taanis, ibid.)

14. A parallel exists with regard to Yaakov himself.

In the Talmudic passage which states: “Yaakov, our ancestor, did not die,” a question is raised: Was he not mourned, embalmed, and buried? Our Sages answer, “It only appears that he died; in truth, He is alive,” i.e., here too, there is an inner spiritual reality which runs contrary to outward appearances.

15. Sanhedrin 44a.

16. Mishna Torah, Hilchos Gerushin 2:20.

17. Deuteronomy 33:4.

18. See the essay “Every Jew Has a Silver Lining” (Sichos In English, Vol. 47, p. 11ff) and the sources mentioned there where these concepts are explained at length.

19. Rashi, Genesis 49:1.

20. Genesis 48:21. See also Rashi, Exodus 3:18, which relates that the promise (Genesis 50:24): “G-d will remember and bring you out of this land,” which served as the code for the redemption was originally conveyed to the Jews by Yaakov.

21. See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim in the conclusion of Chapter 139. See also Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 25, page 474.

OPERATE WITHOUT ANESTHESIA...

By Shneur Zalman Berger

*His face was that of a Chassid. You could see the suffering that he went through behind the Iron Curtain, but this did not take away from his Chassidishe appearance. * Portrait of a Chassid, R' Avrohom Aharon Chein, a"h.*

I still remember that exciting moment when I stood in the dusty g'niza (storage for remnants of holy texts and old Jewish books) of the shul in Tashkent over a decade ago. The knowledge that many Lubavitchers had lived in this city over fifty years before made me believe I might find something of interest - and I did. I found Tanyas, a Siddur Torah Ohr, a Derech Mitzvosecha of the Tzemach Tzedek, and more.

When I opened the Derech Mitzvosecha (on the binding it said "Siddur L'T'filla" so that the owner wouldn't be accused of belonging to the Schneersohn movement) I found in a small neat print, "This seifer belongs to Avrohom Aharon Chein." Leafing through the pages, I found a pidyon nefesh that he

wrote in those difficult years.

I knew R' Avrohom Aharon well. He was my neighbor in Nachalat Har Chabad. This made my find all the more exciting. When I brought him the volume a few weeks later, he was thrilled. He began to tell me about his life in Russia. Unfortunately, I didn't have much opportunity to learn of his history before he passed away. This article is about a special Chassid from the previous generation.

HIS YOUTH

R' Avrohom Aharon was born on 29 Av 5672/1912 in the Chassidishe town of Nevel. His father was the Chassid, Rabbi Peretz Chein. In his home he absorbed the spirit of Chassidus which he preserved till his final day.

He was also influenced by his grandfather, the outstanding Chassid, Rabbi Meir Simcha Chein.

His Chassidishe upbringing made a deep impression on him. One day, his father, R' Peretz, planned to go to the Rebbe Rayatz. When little Avrohom Aharon heard about the proposed trip, he begged to go along. His father refused and he cried and pleaded all night, "Tatte, take me with you to the Rebbe."



His father was finally convinced and took him along. When they entered for yechidus, R' Peretz told the Rebbe, "The child cried all night that he wanted to come here." The Rebbe responded, "If only he uses those tears to learn Chassidus."

When he got older he left home and went to learn in various branches of Tomchei T'mimim. In those days, the yeshivos wandered from city to city so they wouldn't be caught by the communists. Despite the fear, persecution, and surveillance, R' Avrohom Aharon happily joined his fellow T'mimim. He showed great aptitude in both the study of Nigleh and Chassidus.

A WEDDING THE NIGHT OF B'DIKAS CHAMETZ

When the authorities began to dog the steps of his family in Nevel, they moved to Moscow. There it was easier to hide among the crowds. R' Peretz worked at various odd jobs in order to be able refrain from desecrating the Shabbos. For a long time he worked as a baker, a job which was barely sufficient to support his family of seven children.

In the winter of 5798, R' Avrohom Aharon became engaged to Minna Raskin, the daughter of R' Yitzchok (Hy"d) who was a shochet and mohel in Leningrad. The *tenaim* took place in the kalla's parents' house and was attended by dozens of Chassidim. R' Yitzchok's joy was boundless. His daughter was engaged to a Chassidishe bachur with an intact beard who was a yerei Shamayim and a tremendous



Avrohom Aharon with his brothers and sisters
Standing - right to left: Berke, Leah (Metz), Avrohom Aharon. Sitting - right to left: Dovid Leib, Tonya (Minkowitz), Feivish, Chaya

scholar besides, despite the difficult conditions!

The joy didn't last long. The night of 11 Adar II, the "Angels of Destruction" burst into the homes of nineteen distinguished Chabad

Chassidim in Leningrad, including that of R' Yitzchok Raskin. They took him to an unknown destination. Before he left he managed to instruct his daughters to continue on the path of Torah

When little Avrohom Aharon heard about the proposed trip, he begged to go along. His father refused and he cried and pleaded all night, “Tatte, take me with you to the Rebbe.”

and Chassidus and not to wait for his return before they get married.

What an enormous tragedy. Rumor had it that all those arrested had been shot that same night, but nobody could verify the news. The simcha in the Raskin home had turned to tears and sorrow. The heartbroken family certainly did not feel like making a wedding, but R' Yitzchok himself had told them to go ahead with their plans and not to wait for him.

S'firas HaOmer was approaching, so the date of the wedding was set for the night of B'dikas Chametz, the last night they could make a wedding until after Shavuot. Due to the great fear, only a small number of people arrived at the kalla's house for the celebration. It was with a mixture of joy and sadness that R' Avrohom Aharon Chein and his kalla went to the chuppa.

Years later they found out that R' Yitzchok Raskin had been shot to death seven nights earlier.

R' Avrohom Aharon was now responsible to provide for his family. The government demanded that its citizens go to work and if a person was absent, even for one day, he was punished. It was extremely hard to find work without desecrating the Shabbos. He made ends meet by performing menial labor which was barely enough to support them.

With the outbreak of World War II, R' Avrohom Aharon fled with his wife and son, Ben-Tziyon, to the

town of Kirganda in Kazakhstan. Other Lubavitcher families were there too, having fled the German bombing of Leningrad, including his father and his brother, R' Dovid Leib. Since they had a minyan of Chassidim, they arranged to daven in private homes, secretly, far from the eyes of the authorities.

At this time, R' Avrohom Aharon worked at fixing machines that dug for coal. Since this work was vital to the country, he was given a “white ticket” which meant a full exemption from the army. This ticket saved him from being sent to the front where so many were killed.

He earned a paltry sum which was not enough to sustain his family, so in his free time he fashioned iron chains. Chains like these were unobtainable in the entire area and for the villagers who lived on *kolkhozes* it was a very important commodity. In exchange for the chains he got flour, which in those days of starvation was worth more than gold.

When he arrived home exhausted after a long day's work, he did not rest but devoted himself to the chinuch of his son.

After the war he returned to Leningrad, which was almost completely destroyed by the Germans' heavy bombing. He lived there for only a short time. When he heard that many Chassidim were leaving Russia and smuggling over the border, he traveled to the border city in order to try his luck at fleeing the Soviet nightmare.

He, his wife, and their seven year old son arrived in Lvov.

Despite the many years that passed since then, his son Ben-Tziyon still remembers some details about their stay in Lvov, about the hardships and the Chassidishe farbrengens:

“We lived in R' Dovid Leib, my uncle's house. Aside from us there were many other Lubavitchers living there. His small house boasted only two rooms and until this day I don't understand how everybody had a place. Despite the great danger, his house was like Avrohom's tent, open to all. The house was always full of Chassidim. In the evening they would sit down to farbreng and the tears and mashke flowed like water as all wished one another that they get out of the country safely.

“Despite their efforts, my father and his two brothers were unable to leave Russia. We remained in Lvov, becoming official residents and were even assigned an apartment.”

When R' Avrohom Aharon realized he would have to live in Lvov for many years to come, he built a small factory for fabric from which he could earn a living. He invented a special lining for suits that prevented them from wrinkling. The lining was filled with horse hair. Word soon got around about his innovation and as orders began to pour in from all over the Ukraine, his financial situation took a tremendous turn for the better. He kept the secret of his lining to himself so he wouldn't have competition.

The chassid R' Mordechai Kozliner heard of his successful innovation. “In those days I lived in Chernowitz,” he relates, “and I heard about R' Avrohom Aharon's invention. I went to him and asked him to teach me the secret of the lining so I could make a similar factory in my city and have a dignified parnasa. Although he was so careful to guard his secret, he

generously taught it to me.”

“My father always remembered the period of time after his wedding when it was hard to make a living and he wanted to keep Shabbos,” said R’ Ben-Tziyon Chein. “So he made it his practice to help young people support themselves honorably without desecrating Shabbos.”

THE ARREST

In the years after the war, Stalin ruled the empire with terror tactics. One of the difficult problems was the law about attending public school.

“I remember that I did not want to endanger my parents and I went to school because I had no choice,” says R’ Ben-Tziyon. “My uncle Berke, though, convinced me not to go to school at all on Shabbos. I would skip school and my mother gave gifts to the teachers so they would turn a blind eye from my weekly absences.”

Mrs. Sarah Katzenelenbogen (Hy”d) who was known as “di Mumme Sarah,” was R’ Yitzchok Raskin’s sister. Whenever she was in Lvov, she stayed in R’ Avrohom Aharon Chein’s house. She was a key figure in the smuggling of Anash out of Lvov and into Poland and thanks to her work and mesirus nefesh, many families were able to escape the prison that was Soviet Russia.

When the government discovered what she was up to, they began to dog her steps, eager to catch her in their net. For this reason, she had to keep moving from place to place and could not let people know where she was hiding. Her picture was distributed to all the police stations throughout the country and they searched diligently for her.

Naturally, R’ Avrohom Aharon was terrified of hosting her because if she was caught in his house, he



R’ Avrohom Aharon on the left with his friend R’ Chaim Tashkenter (Horowitz)

The simcha in the Raskin home had turned to tears and sorrow. The heartbroken family certainly did not feel like making a wedding, but R’ Yitzchok himself had told them to go ahead with their plans and not to wait for him.

would be killed. Nevertheless, his family graciously welcomed her into their home.

One day, a Jew who tried to leave Russia was arrested. He had been a frequent guest of R’ Dovid Leib Chein in Lvov. The police realized that this man knew a lot about the mass escape of Anash and that he knew the key figures involved and they interrogated him

with threats and torture. In the end, he was unable to withstand the test and he revealed what he knew. He told them about R’ Dovid Leib’s house, which was a base for the Chassidim, about R’ Berke and R’ Avrohom Aharon and about many of Anash who visited the house on their way to crossing the border with forged papers.

These revelations were a

When the interrogators saw that I wasn't giving them any information, they tried to break me another way... I wasn't that worried about myself. Although I was 19, my papers said I was 16, still a minor, so I knew that I would be released in a few days.

bonanza for the secret police and they worked quickly. First, they went to arrest the three Chein brothers. Their arrest is described in the book, *Yahadus HaD'mama*:

"It was 5710/1950. One night, the Angels of Destruction swooped down on the home of R' Dovid Leib. They did not only come to arrest him but also a number of other people that they had been told were visiting, including his brothers R' Dovber (Berke) and R' Avrohom Aharon.

"Fortunately, there was nobody at home at that time aside from R' Dovid Leib and his wife. Although shortly his brother Berke had visited shortly before, he had left in time. They made a lengthy search of the house and then took him in the 'black wagon' to jail. Two of them 'went to work on him' in the car, with one of them beating him on the face and head.

"His wife heard that they were looking for the two brothers, so she decided to run to their homes and tell them about her husband's arrest and to warn them to escape. She first went to her brother-in-law Avrohom Aharon, who lived not far from her house. When she got there, she found her sister-in-law looking upset. Her sister-in-law told her that the KGB had come to her house in order to arrest her husband. As they searched they noticed a telegram lying on the table. They read it and she could

see smiles of victory on their faces. One of them stuck the telegram in his pocket and they left the house.

"What was in the telegram? R' Avrohom Aharon had traveled to the health spa in Chechaltova, near Kutaisi. He had stayed there for a while and when he planned to return home he sent a telegram to inform them of his arrival so they would come and meet him at the train station. The telegram, which had just arrived, was still on the table when the KGB arrived. Of course the KGB went to meet him at the door of the train and took him straight to jail.

"Seeing that this was a lost cause, she hurried to R' Berke's house to see whether she could save him before the KGB showed up. At four in the morning she fearfully walked in the direction of his house, which was some distance away.

"In Russia, every large building had a superintendent whose job it was to supervise everything that went on there. As she approached the building, her strength depleted, she feared that she would meet this super, who was liable to turn her over to the police. But then she noticed a crowd gathering. It seemed a fire had broken out in a wing of the building.

"She took advantage of the commotion to slip inside and went to R' Berke's apartment. She told him what had happened to her

husband and brother and advised him to leave immediately. R' Berke took his tallis and t'fillin and left and that is how he was saved from certain arrest."

When a search was made of R' Avrohom Aharon's house, the Chassid R' Aryeh Leib Demichovsky was there. After the search was conducted he was arrested and taken for interrogation. He recounted those terrifying hours:

"I was a young bachur and I lived in R' Dovid Leib's house. One night, about midnight, I arrived at the house. From inside the house I could hear screams and terrible crying. I immediately realized the worst had happened; the KGB was there. I looked right and left and when I saw that nobody was following me, I ran to R' Avrohom Aharon's house, which was on a parallel street.

"At his house at that time were his wife and two sons, Ben-Tziyon and Yehuda Leib. I told his wife Minna what was happening at her brother-in-law's house. A minute or two later the KGB knocked at the door and I was caught and arrested."

R' Ben-Tziyon relates:

"When my father was arrested I was only 11 years old. What I remember of the arrest is that my mother returned from the train station without my father. She was schlepping his suitcases. When I asked her where my father was she said tearfully, 'They took him where they took my father [R' Yitzchok Raskin].'

"The next day I sat with my friend R' Shulem Stroks and we said T'hillim and cried bitterly all day for the release of my father, uncle and Leibel Demichovsky. A day or two later, Demichovsky was released and we rejoiced with faith that our prayers had helped. We continued to say T'hillim with tremendous concentration for the

release of my father and hoped for the best.”

R' Leibel Demichovsky adds:

“The KGB in Lvov had two headquarters, one that dealt with criminal offenses and the other with betrayal of the Motherland. When they brought me to the building that deals with traitors I knew the situation was dire.

“They immediately began to interrogate me under threat that if I refused to cooperate I would be sent to prison for twenty years. When they saw that I wouldn't answer, the interrogator took out a rifle and aimed it at me. However, I had been trained to be quiet and not to say an extra word.

“The truth is that I didn't know much about the smuggling and the main players. During the smuggling operation I was only 15. I didn't have a beard yet and looked like a child and so they weren't afraid that I would be arrested. The people in charge relied on me and gave me false papers. They orally transmitted the information about the families who were supposed to get the papers and how to match up papers with the families.

“After I gave the papers to the intended recipients, I made myself forget the details that I had just learned by heart. When my beard started to grow, I wore a bandage so it wouldn't be noticeable.

“When the interrogators saw that I wasn't giving them any information, they tried to break me another way. They stood me against the wall for hours, flanked by two soldiers on either side. I wasn't allowed to do anything and I certainly couldn't sleep. I wasn't that worried about myself. Although I was 19, my papers said I was 16, still a minor, so I knew that I would be released in a few days.

“I was mainly worried about the Chein brothers. As I thought about them, I suddenly heard frightening cries. I recognized R' Avrohom



From right to left: R' Berke Chein, R' Avrohom Aharon Chein, R' Dovid Leib Chein

As the KGB officials searched, they noticed a telegram lying on the table. They read it and she could see smiles of victory on their faces. One of them stuck the telegram in his pocket and they left the house.

Aharon's voice. They tortured him terribly.”

Indeed, the interrogations of R' Avrohom Aharon and his brother R' Dovid Leib were particularly harsh. The interrogators tried to extract information from them about the people who visited R' Dovid Leib's house. Who had they helped cross the border? Did they forge passports? And they were asked about their ties abroad. When they saw that they were hard nuts to crack, they brought the informer to confront R' Dovid Leib personally, but R' Dovid Leib denied everything.

Pesach was approaching and R' Avrohom Aharon began to worry. Until then, he had kept kashrus with mesirus nefesh and had hardly eaten anything, but with Pesach

approaching he needed matza. His wife traveled to Leningrad to try and get matzos to her husband. She left her two sons, ages four and eleven, at home with R' Dovid Leib's wife. She tried to ascertain at the KGB offices where her husband was imprisoned, but instead of helping him, her efforts only served to get her arrested as well.

R' Ben-Tziyon relates:

“A few years later, when my mother was released, she told me that interrogators tortured her mercilessly. They demanded that she tell them where her aunt, Mumme Sarah was. She knew where she was but refused to tell them. The interrogators told her, ‘We usually don't arrest both parents since we don't want children left alone at home, but in

DIAGNOSES AND THE MASHKE CURE

R' Avrohom Aharon lived for some time in Tashkent among Chassidim, and when Chassidim are together, of course they farbreng and support one another. One of these farbrengens was especially memorable for R' Ben-Tziyon:

"The farbrengens always lasted a long time. At this particular farbrengen, the main speaker was my uncle, Berke Chein. At a certain point, the mashke was almost finished and there was only one more bottle. R' Berke had had a number of l'chaims already, and he put on a white coat that looked like a doctor's jacket and asked everybody to stand near the wall.

"One of the bachurim stood next to him like a doctor-in-training accompanying a specialist. The bachur held the bottle of mashke and spoon and R' Berke went to the first bachur and put his ear to his chest and then said, 'Oy, he has the *taavitzkes* (taavos – desires) illness.' He told his assistant, who had a concerned look on his face, 'Give him two spoonfuls, he is very sick.' Then he went to the second bachur and he listened to his heart. After a moment he raised his head and said in disbelief, 'You are afflicted with *gaavitzkes* (gaava – pride)' and he told his assistant, 'Give him one spoon.' To the third he said his illness was unknown and this was the most dangerous. Thus he went from one to the next..."

this case we will do all we can to find this woman.'

"They told her that hundreds of KGB agents were searching for her throughout the Soviet Union and they were checking in every possible place. 'If you help us find her, you will soon return to your children,' they assured her. She burst into tears, as she yearned to see her two sons who were so far away and without their parents, yet she did not break. When she finished telling what she had gone through she said, 'How could I have turned her in for my freedom?'"

10 YEARS OF EXILE AND HARD LABOR

After months of uncertainty, the family heard that the Chein brothers had been sentenced to ten years of exile and hard labor in Siberia for betraying the Motherland. Though the brothers were sent to the same area, they were separated and sent to different

camps and did not see one another the entire time.

R' Avrohom Aharon was exiled to a camp called "Comi SSSR" where there were two other chassidim, R' Simcha Gorodetzky and R' Yosef Nimotin. The family was allowed to send letters to prisoners twice a year. R' Dovid Leib's wife sent them packages with basic staples. She made every effort to send them vital items, and even antibiotics which were almost unobtainable at the time.

During the years that R' Avrohom Aharon was in exile, he kept kashrus with mesirus nefesh. He never ate treif even though he did hard labor throughout the day.

In that area of the world, way up north, he had a problem with the timing of t'fillos since there was no day or night. For ten months there is darkness most of the day and for only two or three hours is there some murky light, the way it looks before sunrise. Right after that, the moon shines. In the remaining two

months the sun shines day and night.

You can well imagine the halachic complications for a mitzva observant prisoner. In addition to back-breaking labor, he has to contend with problems in daily mitzva observance like times for davening, when Shabbos and Yom Tov begin and end, etc.

R' Avrohom Aharon was put to work sawing down massive trees. Every morning he would go out with a group of prisoners to the distant forest. The conditions were frightful and snow fell constantly. The ground was covered with a heavy layer of snow. The footprints of the first people in the group tramped down snow no less than three feet deep.

Under these miserable conditions they were supposed to walk to the forest and it was not uncommon for them to stumble and fall into pits covered with snow. There was no prior warning and no way to avoid them.

There were blizzards and blustery winds strong enough to sweep away an unwitting prisoner. In these instances, the guards put out a rope and the prisoners had to hold on so as not to fall or get out of line. Each prisoner knew that any deviation from the line would be accompanied by a rain of bullets from the guards. After all these travails, they would arrive at the forest and start their grueling work of sawing thick trees that were decades, even hundreds of years old.

R' Avrohom Aharon lived like this for years. Each day that he survived was a miracle. The hard labor, severe conditions, and poor nutrition broke him. His strength waned until he was paralyzed. He was hospitalized in the primitive and unsanitary camp hospital. The administration despaired of his situation, but Hashem sent a group of prisoner-doctors, including some

Jewish doctors who were suspected of having ties abroad and in betraying the Motherland.

They decided that his only option was an operation that might save his life. Unfortunately, there was no anesthesia in the camp. R' Avrohom Aharon suggested that they operate anyway, without anesthesia, and he would try to deal with the pain. He later related that during the operation he concentrated with all his might on maamarei Chassidus and he did not feel any pain at all. After the operation he recovered slowly and regained his strength.

He was given a boost by the letters he received from his children. He found out that his son Ben-Tziyon had gone to live with his grandfather, R' Peretz Chein, and his younger son, Yehuda, was staying in the home of the Chassid, R' Yehuda Kulasher in Malchovka, where his uncle, R' Berke Chein, was hiding. When he moved to Samarkand he took his nephew with him so he would be in good hands.

LIFE AFTER PRISON

After the death of Stalin in Adar, 1953, all files were re-opened and many prisoners were sent home. In 1956, R' Avrohom Aharon and his wife were released. R' Avrohom Aharon was weak and ill in body but spiritually, he was strong as ever.

The authorities forbade them to return to their home in Lvov due to her association with the activities of Mumme Sarah. After much discussion they moved to Samarkand, where several dozen Lubavitcher families, who were unable to escape via Lvov, lived.

Once again there was the problem of finding work without desecrating the Shabbos. Some Lubavitchers in Samarkand, including R' Avrohom Aharon,



R' Avrohom Aharon and his son Ben-Tziyon (third from left)

She tried to ascertain at the KGB offices where her husband was imprisoned, but instead of helping him, her efforts only served to get her arrested as well. The interrogators told her, 'We usually don't arrest both parents since we don't want children left alone at home, but in this case we will do all we can to find this woman.'

came up with an idea. They started a factory with the profits divided equally among them. Some people laughed at them and called them communists because their dividing profits equally was the communist ideal, but the business prospered for several years and supported many families.

When Chassidim are together they farbreng and support one another. Farbrengens that lasted until dawn were routine.

Years later, R' Avrohom Aharon moved to Tashkent, where he bought a home in the old city next to the Stambler, Gorodetzky and Klein families.

R' Ben-Tziyon tells of those days in Tashkent:

"We were almost completely cut off from the outside world. Any contact with the west was forbidden and unfortunately, a connection with the Rebbe was nearly impossible. Throughout those difficult years, we were sustained spiritually by 'tourists' who were actually shlichim of the Rebbe in disguise. Each time, they left packages with kosher food and Jewish items in the shul or in someone's home.

"One of these tourists would sit in the shul in the Tchorso neighborhood in the old city and

CUSTOMS AND THEIR MEANINGS

R' Avrohom Aharon spent much time learning Chassidus and writing his own explanations on it. In his nice handwriting he wrote over 400 pages with deep explanations on various topics in Chassidus. These writings were given to the Rebbe along with a question – should they be printed?

The Rebbe said, “This issue pertains, as is known, to Aguch on location in Eretz Yisroel. I will mention it at the gravesite and the time is auspicious.” After consulting, the writings were given to some famous mashpiim in Eretz Yisroel for them to prepare it for publication. The mashpiim were surprised by the depth and asked R' Avrohom Aharon to help them edit it and explain the parts they did not understand, but he was already an older man and did not have the strength for it.

He had certain practices that few other people had. He would fast a lot and for a significant period of his life he would fast 48 hours, eat a little at night and continue fasting another 48 hours and so on. He liked to get plenty of fresh air, and to this aim he would walk a lot and tried to sleep on the open porch, even in the winter. He would not speak much. He explained these practices as “health matters.”

But after his passing, when they looked at his writings, they found an explanation according to Chassidus for each of these practices. He wrote, “In order to be a proper vessel for the illumination of the intellect a person needs, 1) to take in a lot of air, 2) the veins of the brain to be expansive, 3) to limit his speech ...

Anash in Nachalat Har Chabad describe him as a spiritual person who had no interest in gashmius. Some of them did not understand why he spent so much time walking. His son Ben-Tziyon says, “When he came home after a lot of walking, he would say, ‘Now my mind is more clear,’ and he would sit down and write inyanim in Chassidus.”

sing Chassidishe niggunim for hours. The Chassid, R' Levi Pressman who was musically gifted, would sit nearby and listen. Then he would run home and record them on tape. Later, he would play the niggunim at farbrengens and thus we learned Chabad niggunim that we didn't know before.”

R' Avrohom Aharon tried a number of times to leave the country but he was always turned down. Even in the 60's, when many Lubavitchers were allowed to leave, he was denied permission to go and he and his wife remained in Tashkent.

His wife Minna passed away in 1978 after much suffering. Before she died he promised her that he

would bury her in Eretz Yisroel. When she was buried, he made sure that he would be able to take her out, when the time came, in order to bring her to Eretz Yisroel.

A year later, in 5739/1979, he finally received permission to emigrate. He got all the papers, including one that allowed him to take the casket. He arrived at the airport with all his bags and with hopes that things would work out well. The border officials refused to allow the casket out, even after he showed his official papers. They just laughed at him. He stood there sadly, not knowing what to do, when a high-ranking officer suddenly appeared from a nearby room and ordered that the casket

be permitted out.

R' Avrohom Aharon moved to Eretz Yisroel and lived in Nachalat Har Chabad. Anash in the neighborhood knew him as a modest Chassid. All commented about the special sweetness and length of his davening. As he davened he would sing niggunim, the tears flowing from his eyes.

DEATH WITH A KISS

About five years before he passed away, R' Avrohom Aharon bought a plot in the cemetery in Lud. He asked the gabbai of the chevra kadisha to sell him three additional plots so he could determine who his neighbors in the cemetery would be. The chevra kadisha told him that legally, a person could buy only one plot. So he bought a plot for himself and two for his sons. When he bought them, he went to the cemetery together with the gabbai of the chevra kadisha in Lud, R' Moshe Hillel, where he explained how he wanted to be buried and what the grave and the stone should look like.

A week before he passed away, R' Moshe Hillel returned from a long stay abroad. When R' Avrohom Aharon saw him, he asked in concern, “Where were you? I was waiting for you to get back. Now that you are here, I am calm.”

A week later, on Friday, 21 Iyar, 5760/2000, he did not feel well. Friday night towards midnight he asked his son to pour him a cup of water and then he went to sleep and never woke up. He was 88 years old.

After his passing, his family saw that he had arranged and bound the hundreds of pages of his explanations in Chassidus that had been scattered about the house over the years.

He was an unforgettable Chassid.

PREPARING THE BODY FOR MOSHIACH

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

BODY OR SOUL

One of the issues that any serious student of Judaism is forced to contend with is the relationship between body and soul. In my studies, prior to immersing myself in Chabad Chassidus, the conclusion seemed obvious that the soul is primary and the body exists only to house the soul so that it may fulfill its purpose and mission in this world. As such, the base, lowly drives and urges of the body are expressions of its inherent worthlessness, and need to be completely subjugated. The heroes of the spirit that we, as religious youth, were taught to look up to, were those who had not only achieved personal greatness in Torah but had also conquered their bodies.

In fact, a major focus of the early opposition movement to Chassidus centered on the issue that Chassidus seemed to glorify many aspects of the physical, attributing lofty significance to activities previously understood to be less than desirable indulgences. One can find diatribes against Chassidim excoriating them for the custom of imbibing strong spirits, as well as holding regular gatherings which included food and

drink. In the words of some of the early anti-Chassidic polemics, “They are people who eat, drink, and rejoice, and make all their days into holidays.”

What made things really confusing for me — and just about anybody I ever discussed the issue with — is that many of those same ideas that Chassidus promoted have worked their way into the so-called mainstream of Judaism, creating very mixed messages. On the one hand, the soul is everything and the body is worthless; on the other hand, what distinguishes Judaism from its usurper religions is that the focus is on elevating the body and all physical activities. (When you get into the details and seemingly conflicting statements of the Sages it gets a lot more complicated than that, but for the purposes of a brief article it will have to do).

As I started delving into general Chassidic works, I discovered that there were conflicting messages to be found there, as well. As an American boychik, who grew up on pizza and hot dogs (and much more) on the one hand and constant messages about the all importance of Torah study on the other, that confusion was not simply an

intellectual one, but played out internally. I felt pulled to polar extremes without any clear guidance as to how to deal with it, except, as I was told on those few occasions when I consulted a Mashgiach or Rosh Yeshiva, to “just sit and learn and don’t think about these things.”

During my studies in Lakewood Yeshiva, I refused to attend the weekly underground Tanya classes or occasional farbrengens until one time I allowed myself to be convinced to make an appearance. My friend worked on me for some time, raving about this wonderful Mashpia from Eretz Yisroel who learned and davened all day and night with hardly any sleep, and so on. That is how I ended up at a farbrengen in the basement of one of the Chassidic rebels, with the featured guest being Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Offen. Apparently, some of the participants thought that my showing up was a big deal and, after the oohs and aahs, told Rabbi Offen that he should work on me since I was a “real Misnaged.”

He invited me to sit up next to him, which triggered some hooting and hollering, but I decided to be a good sport and did so. He spoke very sincerely about how some of the greatest Chassidim were those who had previously been opponents, the reason being that if someone is passionate about things, when he ultimately discovers the truth, he will be passionate about that also. He then returned to his original topic, which was the significance of the revelation at Sinai as explained in Chassidus, namely the fusion between the highest spiritual realms and the lowest physical realms. He expounded on this theme (while plying me with liberal doses of vodka), suggesting that due to my larger than average physical presence, I was more suited to connecting to the highest spiritual levels, which (surprise, surprise!) could only be accessed through the

study of Chassidus.

I can't say that I walked (tottered) away convinced, but at least everyone there had a good time.

BODY AND BODY

Of course, the obvious denouement to all of the above would be that once I started learning Chabad Chassidus in depth (I hope), all my questions were resolved and we can all live happily ever after. Alas, that was not meant to be. In fact, I discovered that even learned Chassidim, and even more so those of limited background and knowledge, have a great deal of confusion in understanding the relationship between, and the roles of, body and soul according to Chassidus. This confusion is even more pronounced when it comes to applying these concepts in practice as pertains to the degree and nature of involvement in and with the physical world.

It turns out that one can learn a great deal of Chassidus and glean a vast wealth of insights on the interplay and even interdependence of the spiritual and physical, far beyond what is available on this topic in any other area of Torah, and still not achieve personal clarity. Chabad Chassidus turned out not to be a destination, but the beginning of a whole new journey on a whole new level.

“And Esther was taken to the king, Achashverosh...in the month of Teves...(Esther 2:16),’ the month that the *guf* (body) derives pleasure from the *guf* (another body),” (Talmud, Megilla 13a). Rashi explains that this is due to the extreme cold of the month of Teves, and this was planned from

Above to make her more dear to the king over the other candidates.

For the Jew who quite rightly vaunts the spirit over the body, the whole idea is mind boggling. Here



A major focus of the early opposition movement to Chassidus centered on the issue that Chassidus seemed to glorify many aspects of the physical, attributing lofty significance to activities previously understood to be less than desirable indulgences... In the words of some of the early anti-Chassidic polemics, “They are people who eat, drink, and rejoice, and make all their days into holidays.”

we have the great, righteous heroine, Queen Esther who was instrumental in one of the greatest miracles in history, a prophetess no less, deferred to by all the Sages of her time including Mordechai HaTzaddik, and whose story is distinguished among all the writings of Scripture under her very own name. And yet, the very first miracle is a major event capturing the attention of an entire empire focused on nothing more than the raw

physicality of the body!?!)

It was not her wisdom or her righteousness or her illustrious lineage, but the timing of the physical contact with the depraved Achashverosh that foreshadowed the coming events? And how does that fit with the basic premise that the miracle of Purim was a result of the *mesirus nefesh*, the total self sacrifice, of all the Jews of that time?

Chassidus cites this Talmudic

description of the month of Teves and explains it to mean that it is the month that the *Guf* (the Essence of G-d) [Note: the word *guf* here is not understood as “body,” but in the context of the essence of a thing as in the Talmudic term *gufei Torah*] derives pleasure from the physical body of a Jew. In the month with the longest nights and coldest days, indicating that the impact of the sun — which represents divine revelation — is at its lowest, that is when the true essence of the body of a Jew — which is higher than the soul and is a direct creation of the Essence of G-d and was chosen by G-d at Mount Sinai — is revealed. This revelation will only be fully completed in the time after the Resurrection, when the body will not only be higher than the soul, but the soul will derive its “nourishment” of Divinity from the body.

To explain each point in the above paragraph requires many lengthy discussions, but what we need to address here is the idea that ultimately, the body is higher than the soul, and that this comes to the fore in the deepest, darkest spiritual times, when the soul’s ability to assert itself is limited.

SOUL OVER BODY, BODY OVER SOUL

“Whoever goes out to the battle of the House of Dovid writes a divorce to his wife” (Talmud, Shabbos 56a, K’subos 9b).

Rashi explains that the reason for this is that if he did not return from battle, she would be divorced retroactive to the day he gave the divorce, thus protecting her from later complications in remarrying. On Simchas Torah of the year 5661/1901, the Rebbe Rashab gave an address to the students in Yeshivas Tomchei T’mimim in Lubavitch, citing this statement as an analogy for the students of Tomchei T’mimim who must “go

out” and fight the spiritual battles of “the House of Dovid” against those “who mock the footsteps of Your anointed one.” As such, they must “write a divorce” severing themselves from all worldly matters.

This talk was transcribed and published for the first time over forty years later, by the Previous Rebbe in America, for the students of the fledgling yeshiva recently established in the Western Hemisphere, Tomchei T’mimim.

In the year 5718, 1957/8, the then relatively new Rebbe announced that the time for a defensive war (as the Rebbe Rashab defines it in that very talk) is over. It is now the time to go on the offensive with the slogan of *U’faratzta*, “and you will spread forth,” bringing the light of Torah and Mitzvos and the wellsprings of Chassidus out to the larger Jewish world. This represented a clear change of direction (see HaYom Yom 14 Elul – “Avoid, to the absolute extreme, [engaging in] an offensive war...”) from earlier generations, and also entailed a higher degree of involvement with the outside world in all its materialism and depravity.

Throughout that year (and countless times since), the Rebbe specifically addressed the conflict of leaving a completely spiritual environment and intentionally putting oneself “out there” for the purpose of reaching out to others on a large scale, often framing the conflict in context of the issue of what has primacy — the soul or the body.

On Purim of that year, the Rebbe held a very intense farbrengen (ask anybody who was there and see how they are transported, “ahh, Purim Tav Shin Chai!”), some of which is published in volume 4 of Likkutei Sichos. In the portion that was published later as an appendix to volume 11 (p. 326), the Rebbe explains that an analogy must be

exact in its particulars relative to the lesson being learned. When those soldiers who wrote conditional divorces for their wives returned from battle, the love between the couple was incomparably greater. The increase in the love was commensurate with the selflessness of having released their wives before. The same must hold true for those who “write a divorce from material concerns.”

“Similarly in the analog, through the divorce from matters of the body and this world, subsequently, ‘And Esther was taken in the month of Teves,’ the body derives pleasure from the body, literally. The Essence and Being (since Achashverosh refers to G-d, as the ReM”A explains – for those who require proof from Nigleh, the ReM”A was a *posek*) becomes invested into, and chooses, the physical body, and derives pleasure from that body, as the ultimate intent of Essence is accomplished through mitzvos of action.”

The Rebbe goes on to explain that it is through *mesirus nefesh*, sacrificing one’s personal thoughts and desires for anything of this world for the sake of fulfilling the Divine Will, that he will ultimately have all the benefits of this world in larger measure. “And then there is the promise of the *guf* derives pleasure from the *guf* — in the Future Time the soul will be nourished from the body.”

Although Chassidus is replete with ideas expressing the lowliness and corruption of the body and all things physical and the need to subjugate them, along with explanations of how the body and the physical exist to express the very Essence of G-d which is not expressed in even the loftiest of spiritual realms, this does not represent a contradiction. It is through rejecting the calls and lures of the body and the physical world even while operating within their

confines to carry out G-d's Will that we strip away the external negativity and reveal the true Essence of the physical body of a Jew.

Purim is the holiday celebrating the salvation of the Jewish body through *mesirus nefesh*. That is why it will continue to be celebrated even after Moshiach comes, since that is when the true nature and superiority of the body will be revealed as a result of the *mesirus nefesh* in the time of exile. And that is exactly why the story begins with the *mesirus nefesh* of Esther in allowing herself to be taken to the king and the impact of the body in that initial meeting to set off the entire chain of events. The month of Teves, a month of cold days and even longer colder nights, is when the capacity for *mesirus nefesh* which transcends the rational is revealed and thus the true essence of the body of a Jew is revealed. "And Esther was taken...in the month of Teves, the month when the body derives pleasure from the body."

The Rebbe continues in that sicha, "And this is demanded from those who go out to the battle of the House of Dovid, and especially in the generation of *Ikvisa D'Meshicha*. It is certain they will be victorious, and through them will be fulfilled the promise of 'and the earth will be filled...and all will know Me... And this will be done by the students from the original founding until the end of days, that they will accomplish that there will be a

I ended up at a farbrengen in the basement of one of the Chassidic rebels, with the featured guest being Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Offen. Apparently, some of the participants thought that my showing up was a big deal and, after the oohs and aahs, told Rabbi Offen that he should work on me since I was a "real Misnaged."

'dwelling for Him' and they will triumph in the battle of the House of Dovid, until it will be 'and my servant Dovid will be king over them.'"

BODY AT THE READY

Thirty years later, in the year 5748, the Rebbe started talking in terms of the work being completed and the need to start making the necessary adjustments in anticipation of the final revelation. This language became more pronounced and detailed in 5751 and 5752, when the Rebbe explained that this new adjustment period had already begun in 5748 with the passing of the Rebbetzin (see sicha 22 Shevat, 5752). Now, it is no longer about fighting against the body and the material world as a means to revealing its true potential,

but we must actually reveal how the body itself and the material world are manifestations of G-d's Essence, existing only to carry out His Will and not as separate existences.

In fact, the Rebbe offers this as a possible explanation for the "shocking delay" of the Geula due to the fact that we were lacking in the service of Hashem in such a manner, and goes on to say that now this "delay" no longer exists (see at length, sicha Simchas Torah 5752).

We have already won the "battle of the House of Dovid," through the work of "writing a divorce" to the materialism of this world, which leads to the "greater love" of "and Esther was taken to the 'King' in the month of Teves." May we merit to be "taken to the 'King'" in this very month of Teves, immediately, NOW!

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'I'M NOT BUDGING UNTIL THE KEITZ!'

By Menachem Ziegelboim

A compilation of stories and statements about Moshiach and Geula from Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev. Presented to commemorate 200 years since his passing, 5570-5770.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN THE TANNERY

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev once journeyed to a small town where he knew no one. The tzaddik arrived towards evening, and walked through the town hoping to find a place to stay. A Jewish tanner noticed him and invited him home.

The house was permeated with the offensive stench of animal hides, and R' Levi Yitzchok felt it wasn't fitting to daven Maariv there. He went to the empty beis midrash and poured his heart out to Hashem.

While he davened, a thought suddenly arose. He visualized the Divine Presence in exile, standing in the tannery with head bent. His

heart constricted in sorrow, he cried bitterly over the pain of the Sh'china in exile until he fell to the ground in a faint.

At that moment, the Sh'china was revealed to him in its glory and he saw the light of 24 different levels. The Sh'china said to him, "Be strong, my son. Great sorrows are destined to befall you, but do not fear since I am with you."

(Kehal HaChassidim HaChadash)

HALF A JOB

R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev went to a shul where an itinerant preacher rebuked the people for their sins. When the preacher finished his speech, R' Levi Yitzchok

said to him,

"You did half a job. Go and finish it. Until now you rebuked Jews for their sins. It would be proper that you now also rebuke their Father in Heaven who enslaves them in exile, brings suffering upon them and tortures them with severe and bitter torment."

(Chassidim Mesaprim)

SHE HAS NO CONSOLER

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev said,

When a woman gives birth she suffers but after the birth she rejoices. The others in attendance are happy throughout, for they knew that shortly they will celebrate the





arrival of a child.

The same is true for Tziyon. Even now, when it has pain over its destruction, it is merely like a woman in labor. Hashem, though, is very happy because He knows that the pain is only temporary; afterwards, the city will be rebuilt in all its glory.

(K'dushas Levi – Eicha)

INVITATION TO THE BEIS HA'MIKDASH

The tzaddik, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev constantly anticipated the coming of Moshiach and prepared for that day. Before the grand wedding in Zhlobin where the descendents of the Alter Rebbe and

R' Levi Yitzchok were wed, they brought the wording of the invitation to him. When he saw where it said the wedding would take place he tore it up and instructed that it should be rewritten thus:

“The wedding will take place, G-d willing, in Yerushalayim the Holy City and in the Beis HaMikdash, may it built and established speedily in our day. If Moshiach Tzidkeinu does not come, heaven forbid, by then, the wedding will take place in the town of Zhlobin ...”

(Be'er HaChassidus)

OY, MOSHIACH STILL DID NOT COME

One year on Erev Tisha B'Av,

after the final meal before the fast, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev stood near the window and looked out at the distant horizon with anticipation and longing. Every so often he strained his ears; perhaps he would finally hear the footsteps of Moshiach.

The sun set and people began gathering in shul for the recitation of the Kinos. The moments dragged on, but the rav of the city, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, had not arrived. When a long time had passed, the congregation became impatient and the shamash went to see where the tzaddik was. Finding him standing silently near the window, the surprised shamash exclaimed, “Rebbe, the people are waiting for the reading of Eicha!”

The tzaddik said to himself as he moved reluctantly from his place, “Oy, Moshiach still did not come. Once again we have to say Eicha.”

(HaTzaddik M'Berditchev)

CAST YOUR BREAD

One year, a large crowd came to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok's sukkah and it was extremely crowded. R' Levi Yitzchok said to his disciples:

“We need to suffer with the crowding of even the simple people because in the future, when the tzaddikim will sit with their crowns on their heads in the sukkah of the Leviathan, I will also push to sit there with all the tzaddikim. When they come to remove me from there, saying ‘what is a coarse person doing in the company of the holy,’ I will tell them that I also tolerated the presence of simple, coarse people in my sukkah.”

(Toldos K'dushas Levi)

NULLIFYING THE ACCUSATION AND JEALOUSY

Rabbi Boruch of Mezhibuzh, the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov,

SAYINGS REGARDING MOSHIACH AND GEULA FROM RABBI LEVI YITZCHOK OF BERDITCHEV

PROPER PREPARATION

R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev asked:

"The pasuk says, 'Behold I am sending to you Eliyahu HaNavi before the coming of the great and fearsome day of Hashem?' Why, then, did Melech HaMoshiach tell the Tanna, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, that he is coming 'today, if you hearken to His voice?' And why does Eliyahu have to come before the Geula?"

When R' Levi Yitzchok saw that nobody present was responding he answered his own question:

"The reason is because people are immersed in the doings of the world and are preoccupied with its vanities. Eliyahu must come before the coming of Moshiach to detach all of them from their preoccupations and to prepare them to greet Moshiach.

"But 'if you hearken to His voice,' and we shake ourselves off from the vanities of the time on our own, then Moshiach can come 'today,' immediately, without Eliyahu having to come and alert us ahead of time." (*Sifsei Tzaddikim B'Haalos'cha*)

AND YOU SHALL TELL YOUR CHILD

When R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev got up to the part of the fourth son in the Hagada, the son who does not know how to ask, he would enthusiastically say:

"The one who does not know how to ask is me, Levi Yitzchok. I don't know how to ask, Master of the universe, and even if I knew, would I dare?"

"How could I dare to ask You: Why and for what reason have all

the tzaros come upon us? Why are we chased from galus to galus? Why are our enemies permitted to torment us so much?

"But in the Hagada it says regarding the one who does not know how to ask, 'You open/begin for him as it says, 'and you shall tell your child.' As for me, Master of the universe, I am Your son; I am not asking that you reveal to me a little of the mysteries of Your ways, since my understanding is scanty. But you begin and tell me – the things taking place now, what is their intent for me? What do they demand of me? And what are You, Master of the universe, telling me with this?"

"I don't want to know why I am suffering unless I am suffering for Your great and fearsome name." (*Hagada shel Pesach, Shulchan Tahor*)

HOW THEY WILL READ EICHA

R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev asked:

"In the future they will also read Megillas Eicha on Tisha B'Av, but how will they explain it?"

"Eicha' - how was it that until now the city was alone? And now, the presence of G-dliness is revealed throughout the world, but especially in this city. 'The great of population, the leader amongst countries...has become a source for tariffs' – now all the nations pay taxes to Israel. 'She cries at night and her tears are on her cheek... there is no one to console her' – and now she no longer needs someone to console her.

"That is how they will read the entire Megilla, with great pleasure, when the righteous Redeemer comes." (*Be'er HaChassidus*)

would often speak against Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev and disparage him. Those who heard him were certain that he found some flaw and deficiency in the avoda of R' Levi Yitzchok. Rabbi Moshe of Zevil, the son of the holy R' Michel of Zlotchov, was a regular at the Shabbos table of R' Boruch, finally clarified the matter.

One Shabbos, R' Moshe of Zevil heard a Chassid, who had seen R' Levi Yitzchok's avoda, recount to R' Boruch what he saw of his ways, his bizarre movements and bowings during davening. R' Boruch reacted with laughter as though mocking it.

R' Moshe was very upset and he resolved to return home immediately after Shabbos.

When he went on Sunday to say goodbye to his Rebbi, R' Boruch asked him in surprise why he was leaving so quickly. R' Moshe could not restrain himself and he said he could not stay any longer when he saw how R' Boruch mocked the holy avoda of the holy R' Levi Yitzchok.

R' Boruch said, "I will explain. For some years now, the angels have been looking enviously at the sacred avoda of R' Levi Yitzchok, and the Satan has been contending that with his lofty intentions and service of Hashem, R' Levi Yitzchok precludes the need for a Beis HaMikdash and the sacrifices of the High Priest and the coming of Moshiach. In order to nullify this accusation and jealousy, I have to mock and disparage this avoda. The truth is that I know and recognize exactly how great he is.

(*Toldos K'dushas Levi*)

JUST ONE TEKIA

In R' Levi Yitzchok's speech before the blowing of the shofar, he would say:

"Master of the universe! You told us, 'A day of blowing this shall be for you,' and for this one command hundreds of thousands of Jews blow 100 sounds each year for thousands

of years.

“And we hundreds of thousands of Jews cry out and pray and plead and request of You these thousands of years, blow just one tekia on the great shofar of our redemption. Why haven’t You blown it yet?”

(Toldos K’dushas Levi)

GENTILES HAVE COME TO YOUR PORTION

R’ Levi Yitzchok related the following parable:

A king’s son dirtied the palace. The king was very angry but he did not want to personally destroy his son’s chamber because he could not bear his son’s pain. What did the king do? He went away and immediately the enemies came and destroyed it. The fact that the king did not personally destroy the palace that he built affirms that he still loves his son.

This is the meaning of “A song of Asaf, Elokim, gentiles have come to Your portion.” The gentiles are the ones who destroyed the Beis HaMikdash, but regarding the destruction of the goyim it says, “I alone have trod in the winepress;” Hashem will destroy them

The angels have been looking enviously at the sacred avoda of R’ Levi Yitzchok, and the Satan has been contending that with his lofty intentions and service of Hashem, R’ Levi Yitzchok precludes the need for a Beis HaMikdash and the sacrifices of the High Priest and the coming of Moshiach.

personally.

(K’dushas Levi – Eicha)

MAY HIS GREAT NAME BE AGGRANDIZED AND SANCTIFIED

R’ Levi Yitzchok’s prayer:

Good morning to you, Master of the universe!

I, Levi Yitzchok ben Sarah Sasha of Berditchev, have come to You with a din Torah on behalf of Your nation Yisroel.

What do You have with Yisroel? Why did You impose Yourself on Your people Yisroel?

Regarding every matter it says,

“Command the Jewish people.”

Regarding every matter it says, “Speak to the Jewish people.”

Merciful Father, how many nations are there in the world? — Persians, Babylonians, Edomites.

What do the Russians say? — Our czar is the czar!

What do the Germans say? — Their kingdom is their kingdom!

And I, Levi Yitzchok ben Sara of Berditchev, say:

Yisgadal v’yiskadash shmei rabba!

I will not budge from my place until the ketz, until the end of galus.

Yisgadel v’yiskadsh shmei rabba!

(Sefareinu vol. 4)

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WELLNESS OR MEDICINE?

By Dr. Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

Suddenly I realized I was stuck. All the course work was behind me — the botany, zoology, statistics. My thesis topic was approved, I had read all the relevant background literature, my hypothesis was stated, methods chosen, data collected over four years, results analyzed, and conclusions made. In the emerging discipline of Applied Ecology, this doctoral thesis had all the ingredients of a significant contribution.

There was only one problem. It wasn't written. All the information was ready to go, but the words just wouldn't come. Not even the first words. I'd write a sentence, scratch it out, try again, nix that. I'd go for a walk, get a coffee, try a different workspace, do some other stuff, and try again the next day. And the next and the next. Weeks turned to months and then to seasons, but no progress. At all.

I visited the campus services office and described my plight. The counselor there put a name to it: Writers Block. There. That felt better, but what to do about it? Surely hundreds of people had gone through the same at the University of Toronto over the years. Is there a coach? A self-help book? No, came the reply. You have to go see a psychiatrist.

"A psychiatrist! For writers block?" I was incredulous, but at this point I was ready to try

anything. "Do you have any suggestions?"

"Try the yellow pages."

Over the next little while I spoke to three psychiatrists who all turned me down at the first meeting. The reason: I wasn't mentally ill.

"But what difference does that make? You are supposed to understand how the mind works. I want you to help me figure out why my thesis is not moving so I can overcome whatever mental block I've got and help me get my life back to normal."

"I'm sorry sir. We don't deal with normalcy. We deal with pathology."

That was an eye-opener. We only deal with sickness, not health. Hmm.

Eventually I did overcome my mental block and the thesis did get written. The solution was actually to become a baal t'shuva but that's a story for another time. The point here is this: What's the right approach to health? Is it remediating illness or achieving wellness? And is there a difference?

Materialistic medical science, so it seems to me, implicitly defines health as the absence of illness. But for most of us that's just the beginning of what we want. We want energy, fitness, alertness, a sharp mind, a great night's sleep. We don't just want to avoid falling apart, what we really want is joy and that's a qualitative value, not a quantitative one.

The past half-century has seen an immense paradigm shift from curing sickness to creating and sustaining wellness. We are more focused on prevention and health enhancement than ever before. We are turning away from pills and procedures and embracing healthy eating, exercise, nutrients and supplements, anti-oxidants, anti-ageing, stress reduction, meditation, yoga, in short anything that boosts our quality of life, not just our number of diseaseless days on the planet.

A perfect example is biofeedback. Thousands of scientific and medical studies have demonstrated conclusively that people have the ability to literally will themselves into better health. Through trial and error, patients mysteriously yet effectively learn to manage a variety of biological processes such as brain activity, pulse, blood pressure and skin temperature by "trying" mentally to control computerized displays that mirror their physical condition. And it works!

In this way tens of thousands have already learned to effectively treat conditions such as bronchial asthma, drug addiction, anxiety, tension and migraine headaches, cardiac arrhythmias, hypertension, incontinence, irritable bowel syndrome, ADD and ADHD, epilepsy, menopausal hot flashes, chronic pain syndromes, and anticipatory nausea associated with chemotherapy.

The risks are negligible, the gains very significant. Medication requirements diminish and often vanish. The patient takes control of his own care, and the body is trained to heal itself.

Biofeedback is but one small component of the emerging trend toward mind-based medicine in general. And mind-based medicine is but one component of a much broader trend in science as a whole, and that is the replacement of the old materialistic view of man and

nature with a more holistic integrative perspective that celebrates consciousness as a cornerstone of reality.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains, for example in Likkutei Sichos Vol 15, that the ultimate goal of science is to prepare the world for the times of Moshiach. The wellness, sustainability, consciousness and unity that we will attain in that era is already being foreshadowed now, thanks in part to developments in science, technology and medicine. (The other part is Chassidus.)

We only have to open up our eyes, especially our mind's eye, to

see that real progress is being made in this direction. And just as with biofeedback, if you think good it will be good, really, practically and tangibly, for us and for the world at large.

Moshiach NOW!

Dr. Aryeh Gotfryd is a Toronto-based scientist, author, educator and a popular speaker on the interplay of science and faith. You can call him at 416.858.9868 or visit him at www.arniegotfryd.com.

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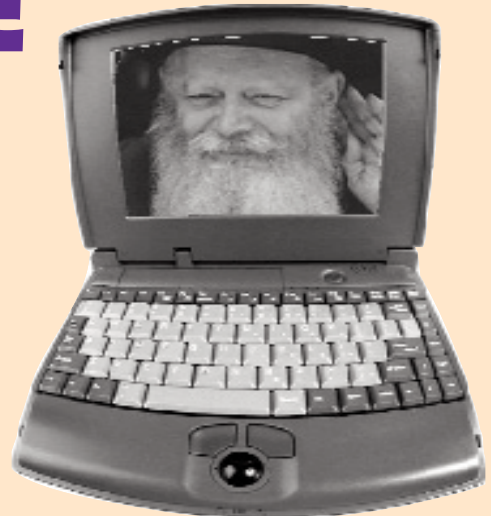
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THE LIGHTER SIDE OF SHLICHUS

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz

THE NEED TO BE CLEAR

A few days before Yom Kippur, someone asked a shliach how to go about doing Kaparos in the best possible way. The shliach told him that he could do it with money or a fish but the best way was to use a chicken.

Two days later the man said to the shliach, "I did Kaparos with a chicken. What do I do with the chicken now?"

The shliach answered that it is customary to throw away the chicken's innards and to eat the chicken.

"What innards are you talking about?" he wondered. "I bought a frozen chicken without any innards at the supermarket!"

THE NEED TO BE CLEAR: TAKE 2

A number of years ago, a veteran shliach invited a family of mekuravim to the Friday night meal. They had a nice sized family so the shluchim prepared accordingly. There were phone calls back and forth until a time and all the details

were arranged.

Friday night, the shliach returned from shul with the children and the family sat and waited for their guests. They waited and waited but they did not show up. It was quite late when they finally gave up and ate the meal alone. They were rather surprised that they had not shown up, but had no way of finding out what happened.

On Motzaei Shabbos the house was in disarray, to say the least, as anybody with young children experiences, and in the middle of Havdala there were knocks at the door. It was the missing guests! They were dressed in their best and were all smiles. To say the shluchim were stunned is an understatement. The guests apparently noticed their hosts' distress, and immediately asked in surprise, "You invited us for Shabbos night! Isn't it Shabbos night now?"

They quickly regained their composure, opened the table and had a festive Melava Malka meal with their guests. They learned an important lesson — that it is

always a good idea to verify that all concerned are on the same page and are understanding the facts the same way. And if you say "Shabbos night," make sure people know whether you mean Friday or Saturday night!

Though now they laugh about it, at the time the shluchim certainly didn't find the incident funny. This is true on shlichus and in life in general. When things are happening we get bogged down by the details and can't see the broader picture. It's only afterwards, in hindsight, that we realize that it was a story.

It's like the Purim story. People who lived in the time of Achashverosh didn't think of writing it down. They were witnesses to what happened but did not connect the dots until it was all over and they realized that here was a story that could be appreciated for generations.

The same is true with the story of the Geula. One day soon we will realize that what happened before our very eyes was part of the story of Geula. Yud and Yud-Alef Shevat, 22 Shevat, 27 Adar, and 3 Tammuz are all chapters in the Megilla of Geula.

HALACHIC QUESTIONS IN THE ATLIT PRISON

Rabbi Moshe Akselrod, shliach in Atlit, is a chaplain and teacher in the Atlit prison. Many of the inmates (some of whom I met in Beit Shaan) consider R' Akselrod their personal rabbi and they ask him all their halachic questions.

One day, a prisoner asked him, "Rabbi, is it permissible to call the police on Shabbos?"

He explained why he was asking.

“I was recently in Kiryat Malachi and on Shabbos morning I broke into the house of one of the rich Chassidim there. I had checked ahead of time and knew they had gone on vacation to Teveria and that I could work undisturbed. I opened the safe and packed the bundles of money into a pillowcase from the bedroom.

“A Chassid who was a neighbor noticed that I was there and called the police. They caught me next to the open safe. So tell me, was the Chassid allowed to call the police on Shabbos when there was no danger to life?”

I can’t tell you what the rav answered, but the inmate did praise the man whose house he had broken into.

“That Chassid is a real tzaddik. He came to the trial just to see who had broken into his home. Do you know what he said? He said that on Shabbos morning he had been told – through a non-Jew – that his house had been broken into and he didn’t even come back to Kiryat Malachi from Teveria. He just asked – through the goy – that someone should keep an eye on the house until he arrived on Motzaei Shabbos. A real tzaddik. But why did the neighbor have to call the police on Shabbos?”

Another inmate in the Atlit prison asked the rabbi, “Are you allowed to tie people up with towels from the mikva?”

This question, too, was of a practical nature. “One day I was at ‘work’ in Shikun Vizhnitz in B’nei Brak. I did my work early in the morning. I broke into two nice apartments. But then some Chassidim who had gotten up early in order to immerse in the mikva before davening caught me in the act. They tied me up with towels from the mikva and beat me up; they nearly killed me. Miraculously, the police arrived and saved me. When I saw the blue lights of the police cars

“A Chassid who was a neighbor noticed that I was there and called the police. They caught me next to the open safe. So tell me, was the Chassid allowed to call the police on Shabbos when there was no danger to life?”

it was like the lights of the Geula ...”

Thanks to the police, this man ended up in R’ Akselrod’s beis midrash in the Atlit prison and he has two years to learn Nigleh and Chassidus without any disturbances.

SH’HECHIYANU OVER SAYING T’HILLIM

Rabbi Aharon Shiffman, who gives shiurim and does programs in some moshavim near Tzfas, was sitting with some people and learning the laws of the Three Weeks. When they got up to the halacha about not saying the “SheHechyanu” bracha during this period of time, one of the attendees expressed his disappointment.

Ever since R’ Shiffman told them to say T’hillim according to the days of the month, he had been saying the SheHechyanu brachos at the end of every month when he completes the book. What was he to do on 29 Tammuz – could he say the bracha?

R’ Shiffman told him – in addition to telling him that we don’t say the SheHechyanu bracha when we complete the T’hillim – that this question is one that should be asked of the Baal Shem Tov, because only righteous and sincere Jews of the caliber that were drawn to the Baal Shem Tov could reach this level of rejoicing and loving T’hillim so much that they would be moved to say this bracha when finishing it.

Another shliach (who wishes to remain anonymous) once organized

a get-together for Russian immigrants for Shavuot. He enlisted some bachurim in order to get the word out that there would be a gathering with refreshments and the Aseret HaDibrot.

The immigrants showed up in droves and listened to everything that was said. It was at the end that they asked when the movie (the *seret*) would be shown, since the bachurim had told them there would be a-*seret*, i.e. Aseret HaDibros.

THE PICTURE SPOKE

Rabbi Shimshon Tal, shliach in Hod HaSharon, tells of an amazing miracle that took place in the stairwell of the Chabad house in his city:

“I was sitting in my office in the Chabad house that is located on the ground floor of the building when I heard the cook of the soup kitchen coming down the stairs. When she reached the large picture of the Rebbe she stopped and said affectionately, ‘Shalom, HaRav.’

“I figured she was addressing me and I answered, ‘Shalom u’v’racha, kol tuv, tizki l’mitzvot.’ The cook heard, with her own ears, that she had said hello to the Rebbe in the picture and he had answered her! She was overcome with emotion and just continued standing there.

“A minute later the second cook came downstairs and the first cook said to the second, ‘Praised be His name! I said hello to the Rebbe and he answered me!’

MOSHIACH: WHAT WE BELIEVE.



By Rabbi Gershon Avtzon

PART 5 OF 20.

As the saying goes, “75% of known facts are either not known or not facts.” This is especially true regarding belief in Moshiach and Geula, where there are many preconceived notions and questions that remain unasked – and unanswered.

In our past articles, we established that every Jew must believe in and anticipate the redemption. We must now address another fundamental issue:

WHY MUST I BELIEVE IN A HUMAN MOSHIACH?

To clarify the question: Human beings are fraught with limitations. Indeed everything about a human being is limited. We are limited to a specific space and time and we are limited in — and by — our intellect. Hashem is just the opposite. He is not confined to any limitation at all. Would it not make more sense that the era of redemption — in which miracles will be the nature of the world, and G-dliness will be revealed in an unlimited way — be ushered in by Hashem Himself? (Such a possibility is actually discussed in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 99a) but this is

not the accepted opinion. Rambam (Hilchos Melachim chapter 11) writes clearly that one must believe in “him” — a human Moshiach — and brings verses from Parshas Balak that clearly refer to a human Moshiach. See also Chasam Sofer T’shuvas Yorah Deia 356.

The answer must be prefaced by a brief explanation of two fundamental Jewish concepts: (1) The role of Tzaddikim and (2) The implications of the term “Geula.”

The Alter Rebbe, in Tanya Shaar HaYichud V’HaEmuna, teaches that Tzaddikim were put into the world because Hashem had mercy on the human race.

Man’s purpose is to serve G-d despite the struggles and temptations of the world around him. This causes great pleasure to Hashem. The struggle that we experience stems from the fact that we have a “double-identity.” We have the Nefesh Elohis, a G-dly soul that yearns to serve Hashem, but we also have the Nefesh HaBahamis, an animalistic soul whose all-encompassing desire is to enjoy physical pleasures.

Perfect Tzaddikim, having no animalistic nature, do not experience

this struggle. Their purpose in the world is not for themselves; rather, they are here to inspire us to change ourselves and serve Hashem. When we see a human who is totally dedicated to the service of the Creator, we are inspired to do likewise.

As an analogy, imagine a city where all the inhabitants walked on their hands instead of their feet, with their heads facing the ground. One day, a visitor comes to town. He is an enigma in this city, because he walks erect; his head is above his heart and he can look to the heavens. In the beginning, the people will laugh at him, but eventually some will realize that they, too, are capable of “following in his footsteps”, i.e., elevating their status from animals to humans.

Would it not make more sense that the era of redemption — in which miracles will be the nature of the world, and G-dliness will be revealed in an unlimited way — be ushered in by Hashem Himself?

What is Geula?

Geula means freedom. The true definition of freedom is not the ability to do whatever you want —

such undisciplined behavior is very animal-like. Rather it is the liberty to express who you truly are and to fulfill your potential. A case in point would be a musician, who may feel more free in a prison with his instrument, than without his instrument in an open field.

The worlds' true reality is the fact that it is "Hashem's Garden," a place where G-dliness is revealed and expressed. During Galus, the Sh'china is concealed.

When Moshiach comes, the world will be free.

Freedom for the world at large comes from the freedom of the Neshama (soul) in its small world — the human body. When the Jewish People "free" themselves — by bringing out and revealing their true identity, i.e. Geula Pratis — this brings about the Freedom for the entire creation — Geula Klalis.

This is why we need a human Moshiach. Moshiach is the true "free man." When one looks at Moshiach, he sees the Neshama radiating. Just think how many people were aroused to T'shuva — and even converted to Judaism — by seeing the Rebbe for a few moments. Moshiach inspires us to free ourselves, which in-turn brings freedom for the entire creation.

Having established that Moshiach is a human being, we are left wondering: how can I identify him? What are the signs?

PART 6 OF 20

Before we discuss the qualifications of Moshiach, we must first establish a more basic premise. We all must understand that there actually exists a human being, **in every generation**, who is righteous enough to be Moshiach. This individual can be an unknown Tzaddik who is serving Hashem in a very private way, not even realizing himself that he is the potential Moshiach. If the generation is

worthy, Hashem will bestow upon this individual the "spirit of Moshiach" and he will begin the activities that Moshiach needs to do to redeem the Jewish people. (Chasam Sofer, T'shuvas Choshen Mishpat 98 and others).

To put this into perspective: Moshe Rabbeinu was born circumcised, and the house filled with light — people knew that he was **worthy** of being the eventual redeemer of Klal Yisroel from Mitzrayim. Yet for 80 years he minded his own business and was a shepherd, serving Hashem as he saw fit. At a certain point — in the desert, through the burning-bush — Hashem "hired" him to redeem the Jewish people. Only after that did he begin doing the activities of the redeemer of Klal Yisroel — strengthening the spirit of the Jewish people, 10 plagues, etc.

There are certain qualifications that, if seen in an individual, permit — and require — the people around him to assume and act towards him as if he will be the ultimate Moshiach. These qualifications are enumerated by Rambam (Hilchos Melachim Perek 11 Halacha 4):

1) He must be a "King." This obviously does not mean a literal king, as we are talking about Jews in exile. Rambam is telling us that Moshiach must be a true leader — not of a specific group, but of the entire Jewish people.

2) He must be a descendant of King Dovid. Hashem promised the tribe of Yehuda — and King Dovid in particular — that kingship will be their everlasting destiny. (see Yaakov's blessing to Yehuda in Parshas VaYechi)

3) He must be totally involved — not as a 9-5 worker, but like a company owner — in learning Torah and doing Mitzvos. The main objective of Moshiach is to bring the world to a higher awareness of Hashem and his entire existence must therefore be one of Torah and

Mitzvos.

4) He will be involved in "forcing" all Jews to serve Hashem. The term "force" does not mean that Moshiach will use physical force, but rather endeavor to influence world Jewry. Rambam is referring to an individual whose goal and mission is to reach and educate — which is considered "forcing with words" — every Jew, whether personally or through his emissaries.

5) He will "fight the wars of Hashem." The "wars of Hashem" are things that threaten the Jewish people. Whether it is spiritual assimilation or actual physical wars that threaten Jewish lives, Moshiach will be at the forefront. One must understand that there are different ways of fighting wars. Moshiach will not be shooting bullets from a gun; when Klal Yisroel is in danger, he will institute special spiritual campaigns — like Mivtza T'fillin by the six-day war — to strengthen Klal Yisroel. (See Metzudos Zecharya 9,10 and Igros Moshe Orach Chayim, volume 4, responsa 81)

The above explanation in "fighting the wars of Hashem" helps resolve an age-old question. Chazal tell us that the reason why King Dovid was not given the privilege of building the holy Beis HaMikdash was because his hands were red with the blood of the wars — of Hashem — that he fought. How, then, can Rambam say that Moshiach will fight wars and build the third Beis HaMikdash? It is understood that Moshiach will fight his wars in a way of peace as explained above.

These characteristics qualify an individual as a strong candidate to be Moshiach — in Halachic terms, "Chezkas Moshiach." We still need to address: What must one do to prove that He IS the actual Moshiach? IY"H we will explain that in our next article.

RABBI SHLOMO RASKIN RECALLS HIS FAMILY'S OWN PERSONAL HOLIDAY OF REDEMPTION:

A MIRACLE IN THE OFFICES OF THE K.G.B.

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

*Rabbi Shlomo Raskin is one of the more recognized Chabad personalities in Tzfas. He is a member of Agudas Chassidei Chabad and the director-general of the Beis Chana campus in Tzfas, one of the most outstanding Chabad institutions in northern Eretz Yisroel. In his first interview, he reveals the hardships of his youth behind the Iron Curtain and his family's personal exodus from exile in the merit of a strange instruction from the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach. * First installment of this series.*

The interview that comprised this article lasted three hours. Three hours of delightful, nostalgic, and thrilling conversation. It was far more than

a piece of history. This was the story of the trials and tribulations of a Jewish boy growing up and receiving his education in a home based on the values of Judaism and

chassidus, in the face of the fierce storms of heresy and atheism surrounding him from every direction.

Today, Rabbi Shlomo Raskin serves as the director-general of Beis Chana Institutions in Tzfas, among the finest and most magnificent of the Chabad mosdos in Eretz Yisroel. I met a rare kind of chassid, a man who seeks to educate his six hundred students according to true hiskashrus to the Rebbe, certain that the secret to his success is concealed there.

He obtained his education in the home of his parents, counted among the community of Chabad chassidim for generation after generation, since the times of the Alter Rebbe. He came to know some of the greatest chassidim during his visit as a young lad to the city of Chernovitz, and later during farbrengens and Torah classes in the city of Samarkand, where he studied in the underground yeshiva together with his older brother, R' Yehoshua. He and his family endured a long and treacherous journey filled with difficulties and pitfalls, expressions of spiritual strength and self-sacrifice, until they finally emigrated to Eretz Yisroel. They received their exit visas due to the miracles of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach. Rabbi Raskin found that he adapted well in the yeshiva in Kfar Chabad, and he eventually engaged in activities among the first waves of Jewish immigrants arriving from the Soviet Union.

During the interview, the first part of which appears in this article, I found myself sitting before a marvelous chassid – stubborn and firm on the one hand, gentle and pleasant on the other. A chassid, who despite that the many years that have passed, remains energetic and determined, as many of his fellow chassidim, not to become indifferent. He is

instilled with an unusual and youthful motivation in his fulfillment of the Rebbe's directives.

Anyone who is acquainted with him knows that despite his great achievements and his impressive resume in connection with the founding and development of the Beis Chana complex, he conducts himself as a generally reserved and unassuming chassid with every fiber of his body and soul, a unique askan of a vanishing breed.

THE CHILDREN'S SELF-SACRIFICE

The Raskin family lived in city of Gorky (now called Nizhny Novgorod). After a very large group of Chabad chassidim left Russia in 5706-5707 through the famous "ashlonim" trains, the family made an attempt to follow suit, but their efforts proved unsuccessful. The father even managed to get his sisters over the border, but when he tried to do so himself, it was already too late, and he remained behind to build his family in Russia. "Gorky was a closed city, saturated with Communist values, perhaps more so than any other city throughout the Soviet Union. Much of the security and defense industry operated there."

The city had a population of about one million residents, including close to twenty thousand Jews. Of these, there were only two Orthodox families who stubbornly observed a lifestyle of Torah and mitzvos and educated their children accordingly. "The two families were ours and the family of my uncle, Rabbi Leibel Raskin. Naturally, we were counted among the community of Chabad chassidim. My father had been born in the city in the year 5682.

"Until the start of the First



World War, my grandfather, Rabbi Shlomo Raskin, lived in the city of Kovna, where he made a living in the store run by his uncle, Rabbi Mendel Raskin. With the war's outbreak, the Russians drove all the Jews out of the city, as they did to all Jews residing close to Russia's western border.

"The Yiddish language was prevalent among Russia's Jews, and this gave the Czarist army reason to believe the Jews were not loyal enough and perhaps spying for the Germans. They commanded every Jewish family living near the front to move deep into Russia. Thus, my grandfather found himself arriving in the city of Gorky, at the home of another uncle who lived there at the time, Rabbi Moshe Raskin (father-in-law of Rabbi Nissan Nemenov). Back in those days, the city bubbled with a thriving Jewish community. The

Second World War and the accompanying ruin and destruction wiped out virtually everything, leaving only a few minyanim of elderly Jews for prayer services on Shabbos and Yom Tov."

The synagogues were closed under lock and key during the 1930's. Most regrettably, the second generation of Russian Jews was assimilated and absorbed into the local population, while only a very few of the more elderly Jews kept the fire of their Judaism burning. "Looking back, it was literally a miracle how my parents managed to continue giving us Jewish values and a chassidic education. It's an even greater wonder how they succeeded when we were the only Jews among a sea of Gentiles, going to school and playing with them. There can be no question that it was all in the

SO SPOKE THE DONKEY

“During my stay in Samarkand, I concocted a story that I was suffering from an illness in order to get out of serving in the Red Army, and as a result, I was confined in the local hospital for a week. On my first day there, I found a passageway between two shacks, where I went each morning and put on t’fillin. One of these shacks served as a makeshift morgue, and when someone died during the night in the hospital, his body was placed there. In any event, the place didn’t scare me, and I would go there to daven.

“One day, in the middle of davening, I began to hear ear-splitting screeches. My whole body started to shake with fear. I thought that it had something to do with one of the dead bodies, but a quick look revealed an angry donkey that had trapped itself in the other shack and was heehawing loudly...”

merit of our forefathers and even more, in the merit of my parents who managed to instill us with proper Jewish faith.

“Our father shouldered the burden of making a living, working at various odd jobs from sunrise until sunset, provided that they were jobs that would not require him to violate Shabbos. He worked for a lengthy period of time as a bookbinder. Almost every day, our mother would tell us stories from the Tanach, practical Jewish stories with an educational message, and chassidic miracle stories of the last generation. She would infuse us with the desire and anticipation to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel, and the tremendous faith that the day would soon come when we would leave the darkness of exile and come into the light of redemption.”

The traditional Jewish education that the Raskin family members received, emphasizing stringency in mitzvah observance and insistence on regularly wearing tzitzis and a hat, frequently created situations that quickened the heartbeats of these young children. “You have to understand that I would go to school every day, just like all the other children, and I was even an outstanding student. One day, the school doctor visited the classroom in order to examine

the students, and we had to remove our shirts. What was I supposed to do? I had a pair of tzitzis on underneath, and the last thing I needed was for the matter to become exposed publicly. I remember the feeling of fear that gripped me to this very day.

“We had already prepared ourselves for such situations. In this specific instance, I created some confusion and asked for permission to leave the classroom in order to go to the bathroom, where I removed the tzitzis until after the examination. Those moments of paralyzing fear come back to me often. Our lives were filled with such battles. We grew up faced with the reality that while the teachers and educators espoused apostasy and atheism, hidden in our hearts there burned a fiery faith in G-d. We knew that they were one thing and we were something else. At the time, we called it ‘survival’, but in essence, this was pure self-sacrifice.”

During the summer months, when every child in the city was obligated to participate in the camps run by the Communist Party, the Raskin parents refused. “We were sent out of the city to our uncle, Rabbi Moshe Vishetsky, who lived in Chernovitz. Those three months gave us a Jewish

chassidic battery charge for the whole year. One year that was particularly etched in my memory was when we traveled to my great uncle, Rabbi Yosef Vigon, who lived on a collective farm located on the side of a frozen island. He was already in his seventies, a Jew with a long, flowing white beard, a chassid with all his heart and soul, who would wake up every morning at the crack of dawn to learn ‘Torah Ohr’.

“We were very inspired by him, and I frequently recall his conduct of sheer abstinence. In the courtyard of his home, there was a skinny cow that he would milk each morning in order to avoid the need to drink *ch”v* non-Jewish milk. He would take the milk’s cream, make it into cheese, sell it to the local farmers, and make a living that way. He had a thrilling life story. He was drafted into the Czar’s army during the days of the Rebbe Rashab, and before he was sent to the front, he went to the Rebbe to ask for a bracha. The Rebbe blessed him that nothing would happen to him and he would return home healthy and whole. During the war, a bullet penetrated his coat, but he escaped uninjured, just as the Rebbe had said.”

The Chabad feeling never departed from the Raskin home. R’ Shlomo himself had been named after his grandfather, who had a vast communication of letters with the Rebbe Rayatz. They spoke much at home about the Chabad Rebbeim, chassidic customs, and prominent chassidim from whom they should learn. “I often recall how Jews would come to our house and ask to be reminded about the Jewish dates. Our home was like a pearl of Yiddishkait and emuna amidst a sea of heresy and atheism. Among these Jews were many family members and chassidim who had returned from lengthy periods of imprisonment in

exile, and on their way to Moscow, they would stop to refresh themselves and draw renewed strengths.

“Such scenes of thick-bearded chassidim getting off the train at the depot, dressed in tattered prison clothes, and coming to our home to rest, regain their vigor, and change into more appropriate attire, are burned into our memory. I can picture chassidim such as R’ Shimon and R’ Moshe Katzenellenbogen and my uncle R’ Moshe Vishetzky - Jews with pale faces yet adorned with full beards, an open sign that despite all the suffering and oppression, they changed neither nor their names nor their attire. Representatives of the authorities, both open and in secret, who understood that our home had been transformed into a center for Jewish activities, would regularly visit the neighborhood for the purpose of investigating and interrogating the neighbors on what was happening in our house.

“On Shabbos Mevorchim, my father would bring many Jews into our home to farbreng. For many of the adults, this was perhaps the only opportunity they would have during the month to eat some hot, nourishing, and kosher food. Even without having to say so explicitly, we knew that ‘You have chosen us from all the nations’, and we were totally different from all of our Gentile friends and neighbors. We knew that the goal was not that we would remain in Gorky, rather the day would come when we would emigrate to Eretz Yisroel or settle in a city with an observant Jewish population.

“Therefore, it came as no surprise when at the age of sixteen, my parents made me a tempting offer – to live in a chassidic environment, receive chassidic values, and learn Judaism in a more orderly manner in a place where I could meet other



Rabbi Shlomo Raskin (left) as a boy with his older brother, R' Yehoshua

young Jewish boys being educated in the same fashion. Without a moment’s hesitation, I immediately accepted their offer to go learn in Samarkand, as this was my true desire. While we were living in Gorky, my parents were already paying one of the local Jews to come to our house each day and learn Shulchan Aruch and the weekly Torah portion with us. It was only years later, after we had left Russia, that I realized that I had been sent to learn in the underground yeshiva.”

IN THE UNDERGROUND YESHIVA

In the year 5725, Rabbi Raskin made his way to Samarkand. En route, he stopped at the home of his cousin in Tashkent, Rabbi Mottel Gorodetzky, and it had apparently been worked out together with R’ Shlomo’s parents that Mottel would take the responsibility for finding him an appropriate place of lodging. “He was anticipating my arrival, and by the very next day, we were making our way to Samarkand, where he asked me to wait for him in a certain place for a period of time. After about an hour and a half, he met me again. With a cheerful

expression on his face, he said that he had managed to arrange a place for me at the home of Rabbi Eliyahu Mishulovin, who lived in the same building with Rabbi Avraham Zaltzman and his son, Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman. For the coming year, this would be my home.”

The young lad quickly became acquainted with the yeshiva’s clandestine nature and its separate learning levels. The bachurim were divided into three groups: students from Samarkand, students from Tashkent, and those coming from the rest of the Soviet Union. “This was not a yeshiva according to today’s recognized standards. We learned in different locations, groups of two or three, and we changed places daily. Because I had to catch up in my studies, they arranged for Rabbi Yankel Notik to be my private tutor. Each day when he would return from work, he would learn Gemara with me for several hours.

“The only times when we would meet together with the other bachurim was for minyanim and farbrengens, when I heard about the Rebbe with greater clarity for the first time. The Rebbe’s black and white photograph from the early years, more black than white,

made the rounds among the bachurim and elicited great feelings of emotion. Everyone yearned with great anticipation for the long awaited day when we could see the Rebbe with our very own eyes. The fear that gripped us was so real that we copied 'Likkutei Dibburim' out of the original seifer into a notebook and studied it from that, so that if we would be seized by the authorities, they would see that we were simply reading notebooks, not texts on Judaism."

The conduct of the T'mimim was characterized by the tremendous vitality that surrounded them. "There was a great sense of brotherhood, despite the separation and secrecy. At farbrengens, we could hear from two generations. There were those from the older generation, who spoke longingly of the mashpia, Rabbi Nissan Nemenov, and from the newer generation, who spoke with enthusiasm about the mashpia, Rabbi Mendel Futerfas, whom I remembered from the early years of my youth when we traveled to my uncle, Rabbi Moshe Vishetzky in Chernovitz. During these visits I was exposed to the great Chabad personalities of those times, such as Rabbi Chaim Zalman Kozliner, Sholom Vilenkin, Moshe Chaim Dubrawsky, and others."

Yet with all the unique chassidic euphoria, they all knew that the secret police could come at any moment and put a halt to everything. "The fear that you could be arrested at any moment, whether for studying Torah or staying in a city without special permits, was sometimes paralyzing. For this reason, everyone acted with suspicion towards one another. Samarkand was home to chassidim who became experts in secrecy, and many of them made no compromises in observing

Torah and mitzvos with the utmost stringency. There were those who had a mikveh in their home, and no one knew anything about it. For example, in the house where I stayed, the home of the Zaltzman family, their daughter Chana was born, and it was only after many weeks and months had passed that they thought it would be appropriate to reveal that she had been named after the Rebbe's mother."

Rabbi Raskin still recalls how shocked all the T'mimim were when he told them what city he came from. "On more than one occasion, the bachurim expressed their amazement that my parents had succeeded in maintaining our observance of Judaism in a city that was so symbolic of irreligious hostility and estrangement. What brought me at once into the daily chassidic routine was my first farbrengen in the home of Rabbi Berel Zaltzman. Many of the students gathered there to learn 'Likkutei Dibburim' together around a table with mashke and refreshments."

He recalls that farbrengen with a nostalgic smile on his lips. "At ten o'clock, I was getting very tired. I simply wasn't used to being awake at that time of night. I was a good boy from a good home, and I never imagined that they were planning on spending the whole night saying inspiring words of Torah. When the hour reached midnight, I was really struggling with the exhaustion that engulfed me. I couldn't shake the drowsiness, and I can't forget how my friends were speaking to me but I had difficulty responding because I was so sleepy. Nevertheless, I fought to stay awake."

Participating in that farbrengen were numerous chassidim and other men of action, among them Rabbi Yankel Notik, with whom

Rabbi Raskin learned on a daily basis. "Rabbi Notik was not a man of words, and he sat silently during the whole farbrengen, not uttering a word. At a certain point, when each bachur was asked to tell about his past, I said that I had learned in government-run schools, where each school had eleven grades. Rabbi Notik then stopped me, stood up and said, 'Ten s'firos – that's *k'dusha*, eleven – that's *kliya*.' He was a Jew totally imbued with faith and holiness, who looked at all matters and every issue in accordance with the teachings of chassidus.

"I was absorbed into the double life lived by the yeshiva's bachurim, as each one concocted his own strange life story. One said that he learned in university, another said that he worked... The fear that there was a government mole among the bachurim made everyone act with extra caution. When my turn came to tell my story, I played along and said that I came to town to register with a school to learn for my high-school diploma. That's how things went throughout the year, while I got into the yeshiva routine. In effect, this was the year when I acquired my spiritual world."

A MIRACULOUS DEPARTURE FROM THE U.S.S.R.

One day, Rabbi Raskin was summoned to the post office for a phone call from his mother, who informed him that they were preparing to submit the papers to the Russian emigration offices to receive the coveted visa to leave Russia. "When I told my friends that I was leaving the yeshiva to go home, everyone was very sad. But in accordance with the laws of caution that I had learned from them, I couldn't reveal to them the real purpose behind my departure.

I merely told them that I was going to register in the university, when I was really going to arrange my military exemption. Rabbi Eliyahu Mishulovin promised me monetary compensation if I would just return to Samarkand, but I politely declined the offer.

“Like everyone else, he was unaware of the real reason. He naively thought that I had been broken and I wanted to learn a trade and live my Jewish life as a professional, not a full-fledged chassid. However, I simply couldn’t allow myself to let them know of my true plans, and this really bothered me, particularly in the face of the great sorrow it caused them. During those days, the Soviet authorities were starting to issue the long-awaited emigration visas to Eretz Yisroel, but in small numbers and only to the elderly. There was a stressful relationship between the Soviet Union and Israel, due to the military assistance the Communist regime gave to the Arab nations. The Communists declared that they have no intention of providing soldiers to the Israeli army, and therefore, young people will be prevented from leaving Russia for Eretz Yisroel.”

One of those who managed to leave the valley of death was Rabbi Raskin’s uncle, Rabbi Moshe Vishetzky, of blessed memory. It was on Tes Kislev, 5726. “Their son, Michel (today a mashpia in Kfar Chabad) lived in my parents’ house during the fifties for close to five years, after his father had been arrested and imprisoned by the Russians. In 5725, when he was on his way to his parents’ house in Chernovitz to make the necessary arrangements for the exit visas, he stopped in Gorky to say goodbye to us. Back in those dark days, it was impossible to know whether people would see each other again. During his brief stay in our home,



Rabbi Shlomo Raskin (standing) in his youth, with his father and his brother

he told us that a chassid had recently come on the Rebbe’s shlichus to visit the various Anash congregations.

“His name was Rabbi Binyomin HaKohen Katz and he lived in New Haven, Connecticut. He taught his listeners the new niggunim, such as *‘Hoshia Es Amecha’*, and all the Rebbe’s instructions and customs that were not known behind the Iron Curtain until then. It was a tremendous boost of encouragement, like cold water for a tired soul, to know that Lubavitch is alive and well in the outside world.

“After our uncle managed to get out, he traveled to the Rebbe and went in for a ‘yechidus’, during which he asked for a bracha for his brother-in-law – my father. He told the Rebbe, ‘My brother-in-law

is in need of a great salvation.’ The Rebbe replied that he also needed a miracle, because according to the Communist authorities, he too should have remained in Russia. Yet, miracles, whether great or small, are all the same to G-d. My uncle then asked the Rebbe if we should leave Gorky, which was a closed city.

The Rebbe replied that there was no need to leave the city, since the Communist regime was in control everywhere. Suddenly, the Rebbe said that it would be appropriate to submit the application papers for emigration specifically at the emigration offices in Gorky. R’ Moshe was stunned, as this was a city where everything was under strict and rigid supervision with conditions much harsher than in any other

city.

When he told the Raskin family about the Rebbe's answer, they were in total shock. Gorky is a very difficult and dangerous city, and of all places, to submit the application forms there!? Any normal person would consider such a suggestion totally illogical. However, when the Rebbe says, you don't argue – and the first step was to bring the boys home from the yeshiva in Samarkand.

The Raskin family home was located in a joint courtyard with several non-Jewish neighbors. When the letter with the special emblem arrived in the mailbox, one of these neighbors opened the box, and when he saw the letter, he was certain that it was a harsh government decree. He panicked and quickly threw the letter into the snow... Only afterwards, when he realized that he could get into trouble for interfering with government documents, did he retrieve the envelope and slip it under the door of the Raskin family home. It was the invitation for uniting with families in Eretz Yisroel, sent by the mother's brother, Rabbi Sholom Ber Laine.

After receiving the letter from Eretz Yisroel, a new problem cropped up: There *was* no emigration office in Gorky. It was simply inconceivable in the eyes of the regime that a resident of this security city would go anywhere. The parents eventually decided that if the Rebbe said that the papers should be submitted specifically in Gorky, then they would have to go to the local offices of the KGB. The KGB building is four stories tall above ground, and no one knows how many more levels there are underground... People would take a circuitous route several blocks out of their way in order to avoid passing by this building. The mother, Mrs. Rivka Raskin, and

the older brother, Yehoshua, were the ones to go in and submit the applications. With their hearts laden with dread, they asked the reception clerks where to go to submit emigration papers. The guards at the door became furious and began to hurl insults and curses.

In an instant, they were joined by another officer and another soldier, who began to yell "Traitors!" in the direction of Mrs. Raskin and her son. The fear was intense.

Suddenly, in the midst of all the confusion, the door to one of the rooms opened, and a woman wearing captain's insignia came out and asked to know what all the commotion was about. When she heard about the request, she brought them into her office. The captain listened attentively to Mrs. Raskin, however, as mentioned earlier, such a request could not be fulfilled in Gorky. She called Moscow, and the clerk at the emigration office there instructed her on how to open a special emigration file for the Raskin family. One minute Mrs. Raskin thought that she wouldn't get out of the building alive, the next minute everything changed. The Rebbe had opened an emigration office for the Raskin family in the KGB building in Gorky!

The clerk asked her to fill out forms and documents, and now all that remained was to come for another meeting at the KGB to hear if their application request had been approved. A week later, the family received an invitation to come to the KGB building. The tension was incredible, as when an invitation of this type comes so quickly, it usually doesn't mean good news.

On the appointed day, Mrs. Raskin arrived and was led into the building's conference room, which was built in the shape of a

letter "Ches". Around the table sat officers and clerks with stern expressions on their faces. The tension in the room was so thick that you could literally cut it with a knife.

After a few seconds of tense silence, one of the officers rose and said, "Do you want to withdraw your request? You have that right and we will make certain to make as little trouble as possible as a result of your treason." The mother gathered her courage and replied, "I appreciate what the Communist regime has done for us, such as my sons' university education, and who knows if they will be able to continue their studies when we arrive in Israel. However, the Germans murdered my entire family. I only have one very sick and weak brother who lives in Israel, and therefore, I want to travel there and care for him. If he was healthy and strong enough, I would ask him to come here and live with me."

Silence reigned for a few moments in the room. The officer suddenly changed his threatening tone of voice, took out a signed letter authorizing the emigration from among his documents, and handed it to her. It became clear that if she would have been frightened by his threats and asked to withdraw her request for an exit visa, the signed letter would have stayed in his briefcase...

Thus, the Rebbe took the Raskin family out of Russia legally and officially – but also miraculously! The Rebbe had restructured the laws of nature for them.

Their excitement knew no bounds, but their troubles were not yet over. Foremost among them was when they discovered that their exit visas would be valid for only another four days. This was on a Thursday.

After quickly selling all of their

possessions, they traveled together to Moscow, arriving there on Friday, and there they received their visas to Eretz Yisroel. The journey would take place on Sunday morning, via the train from Moscow to Austria by way of Poland, and from there to Eretz Yisroel. “Only when we arrived in Austria did my father feel that the Russian nightmare had ended and he could let out a sigh of relief. The entire process of leaving the U.S.S.R., from the moment when we submitted the application, was accompanied by incredible Divine Providence. While the visa request of many Anash members was rejected during this period, everything for us went smoothly without any delays or obstacles, defying all nature. We felt that the Rebbe was taking us on his shoulders and leading us to the long-awaited departure.”

Rabbi Raskin becomes very excited when he speaks about the Divine Providence. “My parents put all their faith in the Rebbe’s bracha, even when we already felt that the secret police were in front of our house, watching our every step day and night. They feared no one, and this was an important lesson for us in having faith in tzaddikim. From my vantage point, the most glorious event took place a month and a half later, when we received the exit visas. After we returned the apartment to the public committee and our jobs to the relevant agency, it dawned on me that I still needed my military discharge.

“When I was in Samarkand, I tried to get an army exemption based on health reasons, but this attempt was a total failure. After a brief inquiry at the local induction center, I discovered that they were absolutely determined not to release me. What happened then was something totally miraculous to anyone to who knows how



Rabbi Shlomo Raskin as a young man

things worked in those days under the Soviet Communist regime. The KGB officer who gave us the visas to depart from Russia called the local induction center and asked that I received my discharge papers. When this didn’t work and the officer on the line flatly refused, she took the initiative and called a more superior officer, the regional office commander, who acceded to the request and gave me my discharge...”

Miracle followed miracle until at last, the family settled in Kfar Chabad.

“The night before receiving the visa to leave the Soviet Union, my father had a fascinating dream in which he saw a refined looking Jew carrying a satchel on his back. The man approached my father and placed the exit visa in his hand. The next day, my father realized that this was no inconsequential dream when we were called to the KGB headquarters, where we received the visa. The most amazing part was when my father entered the first house in Kfar Chabad and was surprised to see hanging on the wall – a picture of the Jew he had seen in his dream. He understood that this was the Rebbe...”

THE ATTRACTION IN THE Kfar: T’MIMIM FROM RUSSIA

The Raskin family arrived in Kfar Chabad on Purim Katan, 5727. Rabbi Raskin was then about eighteen years old, and he went to learn in the yeshiva in Kfar Chabad together with his brother. “We quickly turned into the main attraction of the yeshiva, when everyone learned that we had just been privileged to leave the Soviet valley of death with the Rebbe’s bracha. The bachurim carried us on their shoulders and they all broke into wild and heartfelt chassidic dancing. I still went around with my Russian fur hat, but I adapted to my new environment relatively quickly.”

As Tishrei approached, it became known that the Rebbe was inviting all those who had been privileged to leave Russia that year to come for Yom Tov, and the Rebbe even asked that their travel expenses be covered.

The Rebbe’s secretariat announced that only those at least twenty years of age would receive a ticket. “My brother Yehoshua, who would celebrate his twentieth birthday during the month of Tishrei, asked if he would be considered twenty years old, and he received a positive response. I also asked for a ticket, claiming that since my nineteenth birthday also falls in Tishrei, I would thereby be entering my twentieth year. Rabbi Efraim Wolf said that he would have to ask. A few days passed, and after he apparently asked Rabbi Chadakov, I learned that the Rebbe had given his approval for half a ticket. With tremendous self-sacrifice, my father acquired the funds for the other half. In those days, that accounted for a lot of money, especially for a new immigrant.”

The visit to the is etched deeply

“ANYONE WHO COMES FROM THAT COUNTRY...”

“The first time I saw chassidim who didn’t send their children to the Communist schools, in violation of Soviet law, was when I came to Samarkand. Those children lived in perpetual fear. With every knock at the door or ring of the bell, they were certain that the authorities were coming to take them away. On the other hand, however, their parents protected them against the evil winds of the Communists.

“When I went in for yechidus the very first time, I wrote to the Rebbe that regrettably I had learned in Soviet public schools. The Rebbe looked at me and replied: ‘Anyone who came from that country is considered as one who was compelled, and the Torah thereby exempts him.’”

in Rabbi Raskin’s memory, and it intensified the fire of his *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe and Beis Chayeinu. “We were privileged to receive some rare expressions of affection. Just before the t’kios on Rosh HaShana, the Rebbe asked that we stand on the bima close to him. During davening, the Rebbe asked that we stand in the first row. Similarly, we were privileged to stand on the platform during *farbrengens*. We were very excited and deeply moved by this powerful experience.

“As we were leaving New York, we met three Jews from Yerushalayim, who asked us what we were doing in New York. When I told them that we had come to spend Yom Tov with the Rebbe, they replied, ‘Isn’t there a mitzvah to be in Eretz Yisroel for the holidays?’ I chose to remain silent, rather than answering back with ‘So what are you doing here?’ For me, the incredible experience of spending Tishrei in the Rebbe’s court and all the tremendous revelations we were privileged to witness were so great that there was no need to get into a discussion with them. By the way, a few years ago, nearly forty years later, as I was waiting at the baggage check-in, a young Jewish businessman from Lakewood asked me the same question, ‘Aren’t you

supposed to spend Yom Tov in Eretz Yisroel?’ This time, I had the nerve to explain to him that a Jew is also obligated to pay homage to his *rav* three times a year, and my response satisfied him. This represented an excellent lesson for me how the same questions, complaints, and arguments that were used before Gimmel Tammuz remain in force no less today.”

A few months after his first visit to the Rebbe, a group of yeshiva students was organized to go learn on *k’vutza* for one year in Beis Chayeinu. Rabbi Raskin naturally had an intense desire to join them, and he added his name to the list of young men seeking army approval. “To my great regret, my name was removed from the list because I had just been to the Rebbe for Tishrei. All of my efforts to get the askanim to appeal on my behalf went to no avail. The law clearly stated that I could only make a trip in another three years. However, that was far more time than I could bear, and I tried other ways to get approval to join the *k’vutza*, going as far as speaking with Mr. Menachem Begin.

“At the time this all took place, Mr. Begin was serving in the national unity government headed by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, as a minister without portfolio in the Ministry of Defense. Since I had

heard that he was a warmhearted Jew, I thought that it might be possible to get a visa through him. My brother and I made an appointment for a meeting with him, during which I pleaded for his assistance in allowing us to travel to the Rebbe. Initially, he claimed that every young man must first know to handle a weapon, but when I remained adamant in my request, he promised that he would write to the Rebbe and would do whatever the Rebbe told him. Over the next few months, I would come each Friday to the office of Mr. Yechiel Kadishai, Mr. Begin’s personal assistant, to hear if there was any news. Finally, after six months of waiting, he informed me that an answer had arrived.

“He told me briefly that the Rebbe’s answer was to allow me to come to 770, and Mr. Begin was already working on the matter. A few weeks later, the assistant told me that Begin had tried, but was not successful. He promised that he would give me a copy of the Rebbe’s answer, but he kept forgetting. Then one day, I met Rabbi Shloimke Maidanchik, who admonished me for daring to approach such a high-ranking government official. He then said that the Rebbe had stated the importance of *bachurim* from Russia spending time in 770 first, and only afterwards learning to hold a rifle. R’ Shloimke then made serious efforts to help me, until one day he approached me with the news that his efforts had borne fruit. His only request was that I leave him a monetary deposit to guarantee my return after one year. My brother Yehoshua had already managed to get his name on the list for army approval, but they apparently didn’t notice that he too had already been there and approved his request. By this time,

he had returned, married, and begun to raise a family.

“When he heard about Rabbi Maidanchik’s conditions, he was happy to help me. Throughout all those years, I felt that Rabbi Maidanchik had used his influence to the fullest in assisting me to fulfill the Rebbe’s directive, although he never admitted it. I arrived in 770 for Tishrei, 5732, the Rebbe’s seventieth year, and that was probably the most meaningful year of my life.”

ACTIVITIES WITH NEW IMMIGRANTS

Even before his trip to the Rebbe, Rabbi Raskin, together with his brother and other highly motivated young men, started activities with the first waves of immigrants arriving from Russia. “My brother got married at the start of 5731. During that same year, Rabbi Yisroel Leibov received an instruction from the Rebbe to begin working with the new immigrants. Rabbi Leibov met my brother and placed him in charge of organizing activities with immigrants in various locations. He took a team of bachurim with him every day, and he went out to the immigrant absorption centers to raise the spirits of the new arrivals and illuminate their lives with the light of Yiddishkai. Naturally, I was privileged to be counted among the bachurim involved in these activities.”

When Rabbi Raskin arrived in Beis Chayeinu for his k’vutza year at the end of Elul, 5731, he heard from one of his close friends that the Rebbe knows about his activities and appreciates it. “During one of my first days in the king’s neighborhood, I met Rabbi Moshe Bronfman, who was one of my roommates in yeshiva. I remember him as a very quiet and introverted bachur. He told me



The bachurim who left Russia farbrenging in Kfar Chabad. Standing from left to right: Rabbi Zalman Stambler, Yitzchak Skolnick a”h, Chaim Meir Chazan, Hershel Okanov, Rabbi Shlomo Raskin, ??. Standing above: Chaim Ber Stambler. Seated from left to right: Meir Okanov, Rabbi Mordechai Chazan, Rabbi Yehoshua Raskin, Yaakov Yanush Stambler.

that the Rebbe wants chassidim to work with the new immigrants, but he found the task a bit difficult. When he went in for yechidus, he told the Rebbe about these difficulties and was surprised to hear the Rebbe state, ‘Shlomo Raskin will be arriving here soon and you can ask him.’”

Even during the k’vutza year, Rabbi Raskin maintained his work with the Jewish Russian émigrés in cooperation with the Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe (FREE) Organization, and to a certain extent, his activities in this area continue to this day. In addition to his tremendous work as director-general of the “Beis Chana” institutions, he also provides substantial assistance to a Chabad organization named Lapid, which does considerable work with Russian immigrants throughout Eretz Yisroel. “These Jews went through several generations of separation from the traditions of their forefathers. It’s impossible to expect immediate results. We have to operate with greater fortitude

without expecting results and only then will we see the fruits of our labors.

“A proven formula of success is to work with a lot of empathy and respect, and not in a haphazard and sporadic manner. But above all, we must take action and not just rest on our laurels. Today, there is a vast and widespread array of activities with Russian immigrants, both in Eretz Yisroel and in former anti-Soviet countries in the Western world, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. Quite often, I meet American tourists in Tzfas who are originally from the Soviet Union, and it’s rare to find even one of them who is not connected, one way or another, with Chabad activities where he lives. When we succeed in kindling the hidden Jewish spark, it immediately becomes a great flickering flame.”

(The next article IY”H will deal more with Rabbi Raskin’s activities and his private audiences with the Rebbe.)

SAVING THE COUNTRY FROM ITSELF

By Shai Gefen

THE STATE VERSUS THE TORAH

The State of Israel is once again flexing its muscles against the religious Zionist community. The battle of the heads of the Defense establishment against the Hesder yeshivos, and the State calling upon Hesder rabbis to sign that they accept the authority of the military command even if their orders conflict with Torah, is another attempt to force the religious Zionists to bow to the laws of the State.

When it came to the Gush Katif expulsion, the State won. Most of the Hesder and religious-Zionist rabbis bowed to the State and did not listen to Rabbi Avrohom Shapira's call for soldiers to refuse orders to take part in the plan that evicted Jews from their homes and gave away parts of Israel. (This was not the first time that Rabbi Shapira's warnings went unheeded. During the days of the Oslo Accords, he was one of the founders of an organization which declared that handing over parts of the land of Israel to gentiles, even with a peace agreement, contradicted halacha and was therefore

forbidden.)

Now, when the State is once again trying to dismantle settlements in Yehuda-Shomron, they want to use the Hesder and religious students as cannon fodder to do their dirty work for them. The same rabbis who "koshered" the expulsion with rationalizations about following the law of the land and maintaining unity in the army, look as though they are going to do the same thing again. In the meantime, they are taking the public out to hold demonstrations to show that they're doing something, but we saw where their true intentions lie.

At the Yesha council's recent demonstration they tried convincing us that they will lead the battle, but it was obvious to all that regardless, all the government's terrible plans will be G-d forbid carried out. Naturally, they did not call for the resignation of Netanyahu but only "to strengthen him from within," just as Mafdal did not want to leave Sharon's government in order to topple a prime minister from the Right, and together they destroyed an entire region and endangered the nation.

Frightening as it seems, it looks as though history is going to repeat

itself in Yehuda-Shomron. Don't believe the Yesha politickers. It's a game to allot more money to the yishuvim and get them included in "national priority zones" to sweeten the pill of the freeze that will never be rescinded. Does anyone believe that after ten months, the freeze will suddenly thaw? In exchange for these allocations Netanyahu gets some quiet from the heads of yishuvim. He sends his ministers Begin and Yaalon, who have long proven themselves to be scaredy cats, to calm the public and to fool the settlers.

If we don't cry out now to turn public opinion and expose Bibi's treachery, we'll be crying a few years from now when it is too late. We must immediately get the Yesha council out of this battle because they are not capable of a real fight. The religious-national and chareidi sectors are busy licking their fingers over the party favors gained by being in the government, and are prepared to be part of the march towards the destruction of Israel. Their steps may be slow, but their destination is no secret.

Let nobody delude themselves. Victory is still possible. What's needed is the genuine desire to win and to stop the destruction.

It's up to us. Whoever thinks that with the expulsion from Gush Katif we already saw the final act doesn't know what they're talking about. The game has just begun and it's not in our favor.

LYING TO OURSELVES!

After the initial shock the public has experienced over Netanyahu's fraud, many have said, "Bibi lied to us," "Bibi broke his promise to the voters," etc.

The blame is not entirely on Netanyahu — we ourselves are at fault. We lie to ourselves time after time. There is a movement called Manhigut Yehudit which convinces

the Right to work for Likud, explaining that this is what will protect Israel. Thanks to this movement, seven seats from the religious sector voted for Bibi. The practical outcome was that these Rightists voted in favor of the freeze and once again try to fool the public by claiming that they will get their way with Netanyahu.

Anyone who has been following Netanyahu in recent years knows that the man cannot withstand pressure. He just can't. He's a good speaker and he does wonderfully in interviews but he does not withstand international pressure. He caved in with Chevron at the Wye Accords and he's continuing the same course today. The voters who imagined that he had changed for the good have no excuse not to have known better.

Our real problem is that we fool ourselves time and again. We anesthetize ourselves with declarations from the Right that have no substance and ignore the bitter truth — all the leaders on the Right in the past thirty years, including the religious parties, betrayed the Jewish people and Eretz Yisroel in the most shameful way.

All those who supported the chareidi parties and the Likud should know they are at fault. By voting for them they collaborated with Netanyahu and Barak. If the public would ignore the lying Right there would be a chance for something to really change.

24 YEARS AGO

The sicha the Rebbe said 24 years ago in which he discusses negotiations over Yehuda-Shomron is amazing in its relevance. It is from Motzaei Chanuka, 5746:

Unfortunately, the way of behaving in the Holy Land is just the opposite. After every victory that Hashem gave the Israel Defense Forces, giving them territory in Eretz Yisroel with open

If we don't cry out now to turn public opinion and expose Bibi's treachery, we'll be crying a few years from now when it is too late. Whoever thinks that with the expulsion from Gush Katif we already saw the final act doesn't know what they're talking about. The game has just begun and it's not in our favor.

miracles, the politicians quickly send messengers to announce their readiness and willingness to return the parts of Eretz Yisroel that Hashem has given the Jewish people.

This is what they did right after the victory in the Six Day War. They sent a delegation to Washington to tell them that they were ready to return everything (except for the Old City of Yerushalayim and a few other things like that) at a time when nobody even considered such a thing! The miracle is that the Arabs did not agree to take what they wanted to give them! In the period following that, they tried again: they signed the Camp David Accords in which they promised to return all the territories.

After all this, when we see how this "peace agreement" led to a "crying for generations," they continue on the same path with Jordan, too, by announcing that they are ready to return Yehuda and Shomron so they will be willing to sign a piece of paper which has the word "peace" on it.

Why is it that in the period preceding Camp David they trembled before an Israeli soldier while today, the situation is the opposite? A Jew with a weapon who walks the streets of Yerushalayim, Chevron or even Tel

Aviv, is not sure an Arab won't come behind him and attack him and do to him what he did in the past. What changed in the meantime is the "peace agreement" with Egypt and the announcement that they are ready to return Yehuda and Shomron in exchange for a "peace agreement."

... The only reason for the deterioration in the security situation is the "peace agreement" with Egypt and the repeated announcements about their willingness to return Yehuda and Shomron in exchange for a piece of paper called a "peace agreement!"

The big tzara is that it's not a matter of "what was, was," because they are explicitly announcing that they plan on continuing this approach, "I ate and I will eat more." That is how I behaved in the past and I am not the first, for that is how my predecessor behaved, and therefore, I will also continue to follow the same approach.

Have you ever heard such a claim before? Since in the past there was someone who failed and endangered Klal Yisroel, a crying for generations, therefore he will continue in the same way since he's not the first!

And if this "explanation" isn't enough, they put the matter up for a vote, since this is a democratic

country... but all members of the party must vote a certain way. And they are not embarrassed to publicly announce that even though, among members of the party, there are those whose conscience obligates them to vote differently, nevertheless, the party obligates them to vote according to the instructions of the party, the opposite of his personal conscience!

A dictatorship like this, in the guise of a democracy, cannot be found anywhere else in the world, not even in Soviet Russia! Woe that we have reached a situation like this in which we have to bring proofs from them that even in the "most corrupt of the nations" they don't behave like that.

A dictatorship like this, in the guise of a democracy, cannot be found anywhere else in the world, not even in Soviet Russia! Woe

that we have reached a situation like this...

IN THOSE DAYS – AT THIS TIME

I'll conclude with a lesson from Chanuka, the holiday that we just celebrated:

The victory of the Jewish people during Chanuka is that they remained loyal to the Jewish nation, to the Torah and its mitzvos, and they went with the strength of "the pride of Yaakov" without being fazed by the pressure of the Yevanim and the Misyavim (Hellenizers), Jews who pursued the Yevanim, capitulated to them, and tried to curry favor with them at any price.

Unfortunately, there are Jews today who follow the approach of the Misyavim, and they are the ones who caused all the failures with the Yom Kippur War, the

Camp David Accords, the Peace in Galilee and the other things that happened in between.

Amazingly, in all these instances, these "Misyavim" were able to influence all the others (even those with high positions in the government) to agree with them.

Those Misyavim can be Jews who put on t'fillin every day, but in this matter they are like "captive children." They were educated that you have to be impressed by the goy, capitulate to him, and try to curry favor with him, or as they put it, "be a Jew in your home and a man when you go out."

Even if in this matter they are like "captive children," this does not justify the fact that they appoint a Jew like this as minister and a leader, when they see that his leadership and approach causes failure after failure! (Mikeitz 5744)



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