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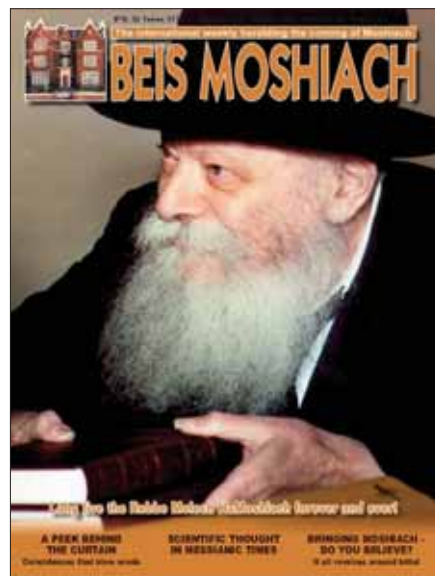
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CHALLENGE, GROWTH, & TRANSITION

Sichos In English

CONFRONTING CHALLENGE

On one hand, people shy away from challenges.

There is a danger of failure - were there not, it would not be a challenge - and no one appreciates a brush with failure.

On the other hand, we seek challenge, for confronting a challenge taps our inner resources, lifting us out of the mundane doldrums of ordinary experience.

Similar concepts apply with regard to our divine service.

G-d does not want our divine service to be in the doldrums.

And so, He presents us with challenges. Some of these challenges are limited in scope, and some are deeper, forcing us to summon up our deepest resources of commitment.

This is the nature of the challenge of exile.

During the Era of the Beis HaMikdash, the open revelation of G-dliness inspired the Jews to serve G-d with heightened feeling and deep intent.

In the era of exile, by contrast, G-dliness is hidden, and we are presented with many different hurdles in our observance of the Torah and its mitzvos.

We can no longer rely on our external environment to motivate deeper understanding and feeling for

G-dliness.

Instead, our focus must become internal; the challenges of exile arouse our deepest resources of soul, and elevate our connection to G-d to a higher level. [1]

THE PARADOX OF EXILE

These concepts are reflected in our Torah reading which describes the successive descents experienced by the Jewish people in Egypt.

As long as Yosef and his brothers lived, the Jews lived in prosperity and security.

But with the death of Yaakov's sons came the conscription of the Jewish people to hard labor, and afterwards, the casting of their offspring to the Nile and other acts of cruelty.

Even after Moshe returned with the promise of redemption, the oppression of the Jewish people grew to the extent that Moshe himself cried out: [2] "Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people."

Nevertheless, coupled with these difficulties, the Torah reading also relates how the Jews cried out to G-d, awakening His attention. [3]

In response, G-d conveyed the promise of Redemption and His pledge that, "when you take this people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain," [4] i.e., G-d

committed Himself to give the Jews the Torah. This opened the possibility for a higher and deeper bond with G-d than could have possibly been reached before.

THE STORY A NAME TELLS

These two polarities are reflected in the name of the Torah reading Shmos, which means "names."

There are two dimensions to a person's name.

On one hand, a name represents the external aspects of a person's being, as apparent from the fact that a person's name is necessary only inasmuch as he relates to others.

For himself, as he is involved in his own matters, he does not require a name.

Moreover, several individuals of totally different natures can share the same name, demonstrating that on the surface, a person's name does not show who he is. [5]

Nevertheless, as the Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya, [6] a name represents an entity's nature and life-force.

It is the channel that allows that inner nature to be expressed. [7]

And this is not merely an essential factor, it affects a person's day-to-day conduct; we see that when a person is called by name, he turns to the caller with attention.

And for many people, no sound is dearer than that of their own names.

Moreover, we find that when a person faints, it is possible to rouse him to consciousness by calling him by name, or whispering his name in his ear.

To relate these points to the concepts of exile and redemption:

As long as what is revealed is merely the external dimension of the Jews' name, it is possible for the Jews to be subjugated to worldly powers.

But when the essence of the Jews' name, Yisroel, is expressed there is no potential for exile.

For the name Yisroel indicates how "you contended with G-d and

with men and prevailed.” [8]

This points to the fundamental difference between exile and redemption.

For exile does not represent a change in the essence of our relationship with G-d.

From His perspective, even in exile we are “[His] children. And to change [us] for another nation, [He] cannot.” [9]

And with regard to the Jewish people, on the verse, [10] “I am asleep, but my heart is awake,” our Sages comment, [11] “Although I am sleeping in exile, my heart is awake for the Holy One, blessed be He.”

What is the difference between exile and redemption?

Whether “our name is being called” and we are responding, i.e., whether this relationship is openly expressed or concealed, and remaining merely as a potential. [12]

DESTINY AND DIRECTION

The cycle of exile and redemption is not a coincidental circumstance, but a Divinely ordained process.

G-d desired that the Jews reach higher peaks of divine service, and so He structured a setting, the challenges of exile, which would compel them to express their deepest spiritual potentials. And at the outset, He gave them the potential to overcome these challenges.

This is also alluded to in the Torah’s mention of the names of the tribes at the beginning of the Torah reading.

Our Sages explain [13] that this is an expression of how deeply G-d cherishes our people. “Since they are like stars, He called each of them by name.”

In Torah law, [14] we find the principle: “An important entity can never be nullified.”

By repeating the names of the Jewish people, [15] the Torah emphasizes how important they are to G-d and ensures that their

existence will not be nullified by the challenges of exile.

The Torah mentions, not the name of our people as a whole, but rather, the names of each of the tribes.

The tribes represent different approaches to divine service.

This indicates that not only the essence of the Jewish people, but also the various different individual approaches of the Jews are endowed with the strength to endure the exile, and advance and grow through this experience.

FROM EXILE TO REDEMPTION

The cycle of exile and redemption is significant, not only for Jewish people, but for the world at large.

The purpose of creation is to establish a dwelling for G-d. [16]

This dwelling is fashioned by the Jewish people who involve themselves in different aspects of worldly experience and reveal the G-dliness enfolded in these elements of existence.

During the exile, the Jews are scattered in different lands and brought into contact with diverse types of encounters.

As the challenge of exile lifts the Jews to a deeper level of connection to G-d, it also elevates the surroundings in which their service is carried out, making manifest the G-dliness which permeates our world as a whole.

The saga of exile and redemption is not merely a story of the past.

On the contrary, at present the concept is most relevant, for this is the essence of the transition whose ripples are affecting all dimensions of existence at present.

To borrow an expression from the Previous Rebbe, [17] “Everything is ready for the Redemption; even the buttons have been polished.”

All that is necessary is a change of focus, that we open our eyes, see Moshiach’s influence, and create a setting for it to encompass mankind

as a whole. [18]

Adapted from Likkutei Sichos, Vol. III, 843ff; Vol. XVI, p. 36ff; Vol. XXVI; p. 301ff; Sichos Parshas Shmos, 5751

Notes:

1. More specifically, the reference is to the level of yechida, the dimension of soul which is absolutely one with G-d. This level is revealed through the challenges of exile.
2. Exodus 5:23.
3. Ibid. 2:23-24.
4. Ibid. 3:12.
5. And yet a person with insight can see how an individual’s name tells us volumes about his character. In that vein, Yoma 83b relates that Rabbi Meir would be able to recognize a person’s character by his name.
6. Shaar HaYichud V’HaEmuna, chapter 1.
7. Likkutei Torah, Behar 41c.
8. Genesis 32:29.
9. Kiddushin 36a; Rus Rabba, Pesichta 3; Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XI, p. 3 and sources cited there.
10. Song of Songs 5:2.
11. Zohar, Vol. III, p. 95a, see Shir HaShirim Rabba on the verse.
12. This concept also gives us insight into the nature of redemption: that redemption does not require the creation of anything new, but the revelation of a potential which already exists.
13. Similarly, this idea points to the manner in which we can endeavor to bring this potential into expression by all Jews regardless of their immediate level of Jewish involvement. What is necessary is to call the person by his name Yisroel, and to give him an opportunity to reveal who he is. Since he is a Jew and by nature, he “desires to fulfill all the mitzvos and separate himself from sin” (Rambam, Hilchos Gerushin 2:20), he will respond, showing who he is, and expressing his inner nature.
14. Shmos Rabba 1:3 (quoted by Rashi in his commentary to Exodus 1:1) in response to the question why the names of the tribes are repeated in this Torah reading after having been mentioned in the Book of Genesis.
15. Z’vachim 73a, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deia 110:1.
16. See also Peia 7:1 (and Rambam, Hilchos Matanos Aniyim 5:23) which states that an entity with a name is never considered as forgotten. The fact that its owner gave it a name indicates its constant importance in his eyes.
17. Midrash Tanchuma, B’Chukosai, sec. 3. See Tanya, chs. 33 and 36.
18. Sichos Simchas Torah, 5689.
19. Sound the Great Shofar (Kehot, N.Y., 1992), p. 112-113.

BRINGING MOSHIACH – DO YOU BELIEVE?

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

BELIEF IN SELF?

As I began my initial journey in studying works of Chassidus from the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples, I discovered that many of the ideas expressed could be found in Chazal and earlier classical Torah works. This left me wondering what the whole fuss of the early war against Chassidus was about. The popular cultural explanation, that the whole difference between Chassidim and Misnagdim is one of emphasis, didn't satisfy. The severity of the oppression on the part of the persecutors and the degree of self-sacrifice on the part of the persecuted, to my mind, had to be about a lot more than a dispute over emphasis, or a handful of customs, or subtle exegetical disputes regarding mystical esoterica.

A theme that seemed to repeat itself throughout a number of the early seminal works of Chassidus is "that the Baal Shem Tov came to reveal the *neshama* (the soul) of all things." Based on this, I began to analyze each Chassidic teaching to

understand how it was perceived prior to the revelation of Chassidus, and what new soul-aspect Chassidus revealed on this given topic. Therefore, when I encountered a teaching of Reb Nachman of Breslov that a person has to have *emuna*/faith in himself, I couldn't help but wonder what was uniquely "Chassidic" about that idea.

Any American kid who grew up with "The Little Engine that Could," should have absorbed from an early age the importance of self-confidence, and in fact, the entire culture (at least before the age of political correctness) celebrated those who achieved great things as a result of believing in themselves. Even in the yeshiva world I grew up in, there was a tremendous emphasis on inculcating the belief that one was capable of achieving "greatness" in Torah, and the strong encouragement of personal ambition in Torah and spiritual growth. So what exactly is the Chassidic idea of "emuna in self," and how is this the result of revealing the

"neshama/soul"?

This was not simply an analytical exercise for me, but a key issue in my internal spiritual wanderings. I never doubted my gifts, talents and abilities, and, unlike the little engine burdened with an inferiority complex, I was more than confident that "I could." The part that was difficult to navigate was not about "could," but about "should." So what if I can, but why should I bother? Is it all just about personal achievement and the attendant rewards, or avoiding the horrific punishments in store? The answers that I was given at that time were less than satisfactory. So, perhaps if I could unlock the mystery of "emuna in self," I might progress from "could" to an inner sense of "should" and thereby motivate and invigorate my "would."

The answer is actually contained in the Hebrew word *emuna*. It doesn't mean simply to believe, but rather a faith in that which is beyond human comprehension. Self-confidence comes as a result of knowing and understanding what you are capable of. To believe in anything beyond that is delusional. Even ambition in Torah for those who are less gifted, comes from the belief that if "I put in the effort," G-d programmed the Torah and the person that "I will find" and enjoy success beyond my natural abilities and efforts. This, too, can be demonstrated as a rational cause and effect. Even without a belief in the absolute truth of the words of the Sages, I can rely on the experiences and testimony of those who came before me, which does not require "emuna."

However, the belief that I have a *neshama* that has powers beyond anything I can imagine and the belief that G-d loves and cares about me beyond my wildest imagination, and the belief that every move I make is of profound significance to G-d and the entire course of history - that

requires a huge leap of faith, as well as assiduous reinforcement if it is actually to impact my daily life and behavior. Reb Nachman goes on to posit that there are many people who had great faith and superior talents but remained spiritually stunted due, primarily, to a lack of emuna in themselves.

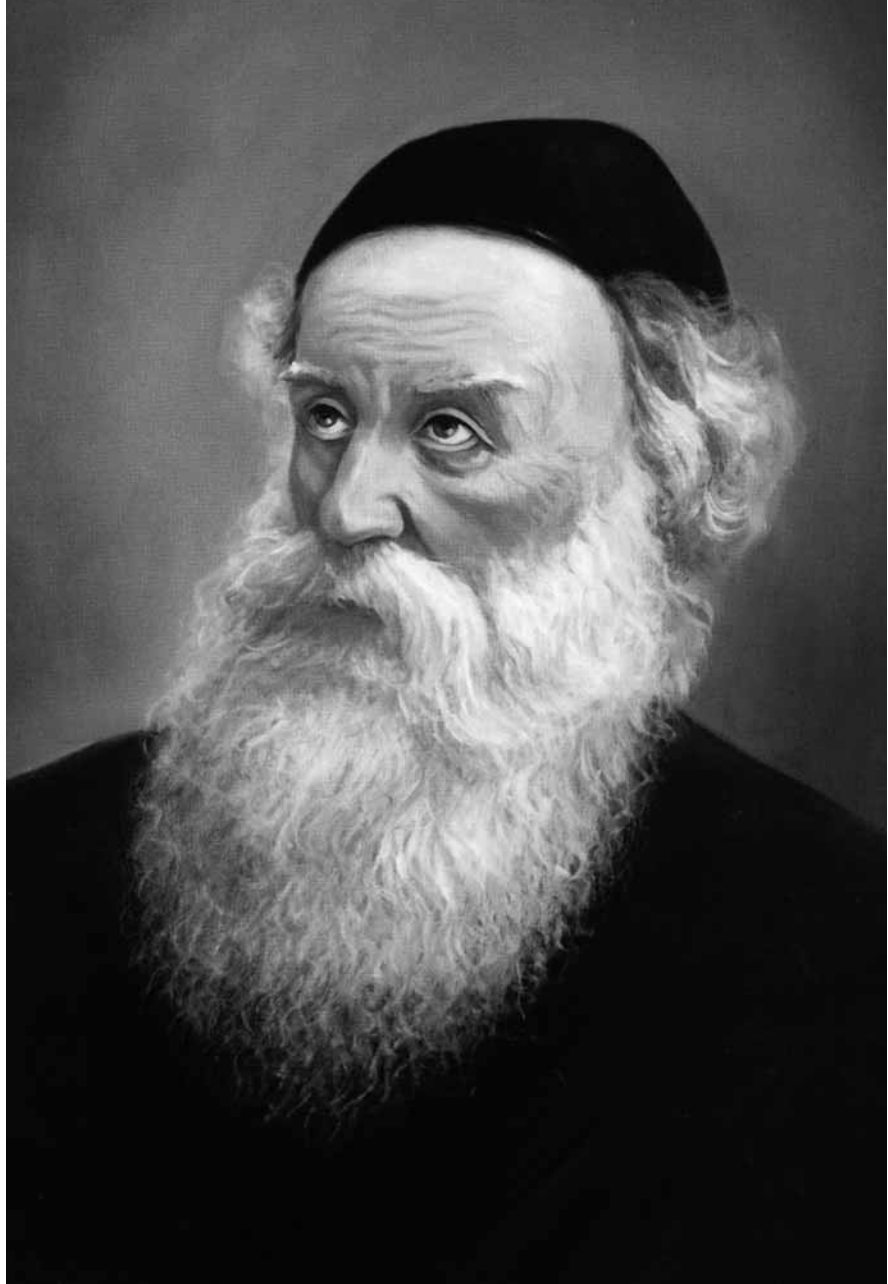
No, don't worry, this is not a treatise on Breslov philosophy!

A few years later, as I began looking tentatively into Chabad, I would pick the brains of people I encountered who had any prior experience with Lubavitch. At that time, I encountered a Breslover Chassid who told me that the reason he left Chabad for Breslov was because Chabad was all about telling you how you are nothing and nobody in the name of bittul/self-nullification, yet most Lubavitchers comport themselves in a forceful, sometimes even brash, manner. Breslov, on the other hand, was all about building you up and the importance of believing in yourself, and still most of the Chassidim were self effacing and humble.

Aha! Now I had something specific that certainly bore looking into.

SEEING AND BELIEVING

Shortly before the passing of the Alter Rebbe in the village of Piena on the 24th of Teves, he wrote a missive addressing and elaborating upon many deep Kabbalistic concepts. This letter was later published by his sons in the fourth section of Tanya, Igeres HaKodesh, chapter 20. The core point of the letter was to show that despite the seeming lowliness of the physical in relation to the spiritual, in actuality the latter originates from a higher source. Because the spiritual cannot create the physical, the "bringing into existence of the physical is from Atzmus" (the Essence of G-d himself) as opposed to it coming



Chabad was all about telling you how you are nothing and nobody in the name of bittul/self-nullification, yet most Lubavitchers comport themselves in a forceful, sometimes even brash, manner. Breslov, on the other hand, was all about building you up and the importance of believing in yourself, and still most of the Chassidim were self effacing and humble.

Though Chabad Chassidus addresses myriad aspects of a person's inner world, it all revolves around bittul. Because after all, who are you to perceive yourself as a separate being and who do you think you are, trying to serve G-d?

from any spiritual, albeit infinite, revelation and manifestation of G-d.

In a talk given on Acharon shel Pesach, 5694 (1934), the Previous Rebbe provides a colorful and captivating description of how this letter was received by the Chassidim of that time and the impact it had upon them. He concludes, regarding the aforementioned point, "When this statement was first revealed, not only did it lend the physical world a more beautiful countenance in the eyes of Chassidim, but it released a wellspring of exuberance in the fulfillment of the practical mitzvos" (for English version, Likkutei Dibburim vol. 2 ch. 1). In fact, the Alter Rebbe himself concludes that letter:

"And after these words and truth, knowledge comes easily to the discerning, to understand through all the above the great loftiness of the practical commandments, which are the ultimate purpose for the descent of souls to this physical world. As it says, 'Today, to do them,' and 'better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world, than all the life of the World to Come.'"

In the tradition handed down by Chassidim regarding the actual passing of the Alter Rebbe, it is reported that the Alter Rebbe told his grandson the Tzemach Tzedek, who was present at the time, that he no longer could see the physical ceiling, only the "Word of G-d" that

creates and sustains it. This is consistent with what the Alter Rebbe writes in chapter 3 of Shaar HaYichud V'Ha'Emuna, "However, if the eye were permitted to see and to apprehend the life-force and spirituality which is in every created thing, flowing into it from 'that which emanates from the mouth of G-d' and 'His breath,' then the physicality, materiality and tangibility of the created being would not be seen by our eyes at all. It is completely nullified in relation to the life-force and spirituality within it."

We know that the end of the life of a Tzaddik in this world is the culmination of his divine service throughout his lifetime, and yet regarding the final days and moments of the Alter Rebbe we seem to be getting conflicting messages. At the time that he reached the pinnacle of his life, he revealed for the first time the superior quality of the physical over the spiritual as will be revealed in the future time. And yet he is described as experiencing the total nullification of the physical to the spiritual life-force within so that he no longer saw the tangible physicality of the ceiling [indicating the total worthlessness of the physical relative to the spiritual].

YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT

Long after I had overcome the inner psychic inhibitions to exploring

the study of Chassidus that I had absorbed from my Misnagdishe upbringing, I still found myself wrestling with the issue of Chabad versus other Chassidic points of view. This entailed confronting many issues, some more obvious and others more nuanced. One of the protests I heard came from a friend who said, "All they talk about in Chabad is bittul, bittul and more bittul." So yes, even though Chabad Chassidus addresses myriad aspects of a person's inner world, it all revolves around bittul. Love of G-d, and certainly fear of G-d, prayer, Torah study, mitzva performance, inner refinement and character development; it all has to be with bittul. Because after all, who are you to perceive yourself as a separate being and who do you think you are, trying to serve G-d?

Superficially, this may seem to be a very limited and limiting approach to divine service. However, once a person fully processes the philosophical teachings of Chabad Chassidus, to the point that he actually experiences reality that way (even if only for brief moments in time), then it becomes obvious that the experiential impact of true inner bittul actually frees the person from his prior limitations in all areas of divine service.

The more one is capable of perceiving his own nothingness in relation to G-d, the more he is able to function as an extension of the Divine Will, which is infinite. Internalizing the concept that if we saw the G-dly energy within the physical then we would not see the physical object at all, and applying that to oneself and the world around us, enables us to achieve levels of love of G-d, fear of G-d, climbing the spiritual ladder of prayer etc, far beyond our natural abilities. It is not about "be all you can be," but "be all that being one with G-d enables you to be."

The more you transcend "belief

in self” as a result of nullifying yourself to G-d, the more you empower your not-self to achieve, as a result of seeing oneself as a part of the larger G-dly reality. The more you “see” the nothingness of the physical “ceiling,” (the finite and limiting aspect of physicality), the more you can truly appreciate the physical as a manifestation of the Divine Essence, “lending the physical world a more beautiful countenance and releasing a wellspring of exuberance in the performance of the practical mitzvos.”

It is true that a lack of belief in self at the outset can cause a person to not even take the necessary steps to transcend belief in self. As the Rebbe expressed it, self-doubt in the form of the question “who am I and what am I” is one of the most destructive forces of our time. But the ultimate goal is to leave “belief in self” behind, because it is actually limiting relative to the belief in what G-d can accomplish through me (not-me) and my (not-my) actions. Yes, if one sees the physical as the primary reality, he will never transcend its limitations and will be pulled away from G-d and G-dliness.

One must first “see” how the physical is totally nullified to the spiritual, but this is only in order to see the truly infinite source and potential of the physical.

And that is the apex of the Alter Rebbe’s life and teachings on the 24th of Teves, to not see the physical “ceiling” and to reveal the futuristic reality, of the physical being higher than the spiritual.

This is also the concept behind the institution of shlichus. Through “bittul, bittul and more bittul,” before G-d and “Moshe, His servant,” the Rebbe, even people of limited strengths and abilities can accomplish things that are “impossible” and require “infinite” power to execute. As the Rebbe said regarding the transformation of France into a place of holiness, it could only be accomplished with the “power of Atzmus.” The ability to access that power doesn’t come from *belief* in self; it comes from *nullification* of self. When you truly believe that you can accomplish anything because it’s not you who are doing, it is G-d acting through you, then your demeanor is strong and forceful, sometimes even brash. Self effacement is for when you are

operating as “you.”

The week following the well publicized talk of 28 Nissan, 5751, when the Rebbe said that “I am giving it over to you to do all that you can to bring Moshiach,” the Rebbe addressed the objection that people might have as to “Who am I to bring Moshiach?” (see sicha Shmini, 5751). The answer is simple. If you think it’s about you and your abilities, then at best you are delusional. There is a long letter from the Rebbe Rayatz where he addresses a whole host of questions sent to him by the correspondent, at the end of which he writes, “this that you write that you feel that you have a special role to play in bringing Moshiach – *yevaker eitzel rofei nerven mumcheh* (you should visit an expert psychologist).”

It is only when we undertake this mission with the realization that this is what G-d wants from us at this time, as He revealed it to us through the Rebbe, and we nullify ourselves to this will – then you better believe that we have been given the ability to get the job done, immediately, NOW!



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A WAR OF MIRACLES AND WONDERS

By Rabbi Avishai Afergon
Rosh Yeshivas Chabad in Kfar Saba

Last Chanuka marked the beginning of Operation Cast Lead, as Israel finally retaliated against the almost constant barrage of Hamas missiles. For three weeks, the IDF fought the terrorists in Gaza. **Since then, the miracle stories have not stopped** – the hundreds of soldiers who were miraculously saved from booby-traps, and ordinary people who left only moments before the place they had been was demolished

by Grad rockets or Kassams.

From a military standpoint there was no explanation for this. That a large, crowded civilian population for the most part lacking in defensive protection, was bombarded with 600 rockets and mortars and sustained only a few casualties is **an open miracle**.

The miracle is more pronounced in light of the fact that the terror organizations used large Grad

rockets (carrying payloads of up to 26 kilograms), and even heavier Iranian rockets (with payloads up to 40 kilograms), as well as heavy mortars (120 mm) which are considered military grade artillery weapons.

Desiring to copy Hezbollah, Hamas took advantage of the imaginary ceasefire to thoroughly prepare a large scale delivery system. About 3000 rockets were stockpiled



and hundreds of launchers camouflaged with vegetation. Some of them were even hidden deep in the earth, requiring cranes to bring them up and deploy them. In order to determine the best locations, they measured distances and angles of fire towards crowded civilian areas. This careful preparation made it very hard for even the air force to stop the shooting, enabling dozens of rockets to be fired even on the last

day of the campaign.

Despite the heavy shelling, it seems that the command personnel and civilian leadership managed to survive and continued to wage war with a vengeance. The disproportionately small number of casualties could hardly be a natural occurrence. It was Hashem's kindness that led to hundreds of miracles for thousands of Jews.

One incident followed another in

a veritable miracle-story competition. The word "miracle" became the catch-phrase that everybody used to describe what was going on. We even got used to it ... and even began to take it for granted. Each time we heard about a rocket that landed in a civilian area, we waited to hear sensational stories of survival.

It was a supernatural way of life within the nature of every day

The house sustained a direct hit – right into the children’s bedroom! A huge hole gaped in the ceiling. The terrified father ran in, anticipating the worst, and found his daughter lying in bed, sleeping peacefully, completely unharmed. The noise of the explosion didn’t even wake her.

happenings.

We cannot forget the description of a father whose house sustained a direct hit – right into the children’s bedroom! A huge hole gaped in the ceiling. The terrified father ran in, anticipating the worst, and found his daughter lying in bed, sleeping peacefully, completely unharmed. The noise of the explosion didn’t even wake her.

Or the incredible miracle of the protected area where the city’s many workers would assemble when they heard the siren, which was hit by a rocket and destroyed completely... the one time that the siren didn’t work.

The instructions from the Rear Command and the assembling in protected areas, though undeniably important, in no way explain the small number of casualties. The vast majority of the population does not live in buildings with steel reinforced concrete shelters (which became mandatory only after the Gulf War), and even these protected areas cannot withstand a direct hit of Kassam rockets, and certainly not Grad or long-range rockets.

Katyushas were shot twice from Lebanon. One of them struck a senior citizen center in Kiryat Shmone. The Katyusha penetrated all the floors of the building and wreaked great havoc. All, that is, but the bottom floor - where **all the**

residents were gathered for breakfast. No one was hurt.

This particular assault could have had far-reaching consequences. Had something far worse resulted, the Israeli government would have been forced to react strongly against Hezbollah (who were, directly or otherwise, responsible for the attack). That would have opened a second, far more dangerous front against the Hezbollah and maybe even Syria.

An expansion of the war fronts would have dramatically increased the dangerous potential of the situation. Remember that the governments of the Arab nations were under enormous internal pressure to declare war against Israel. The Arab media reported non-stop, in a distorted and fraudulent fashion, the results of the air force bombing and the IDF’s artillery shelling - the tremendous destruction, the many civilians wounded (especially women and children), the “humanitarian situation,” etc. They used terms like “genocide” and blamed Israel for deliberately killing innocent people.

These reports caused large demonstrations in Arab countries and increased the internal pressure, especially on the Syrian government. A second front against Lebanon could easily have led to Syria’s involvement (since they are

Hezbollah’s patrons) in the guise of “defending the Palestinian people and Lebanon.” The splintering of the IDF forces would have given Syria an advantageous position to attack the Golan Heights.

MIRACLES IN THE SOUTH

We can divide the war into three stages: 1) the air force’s preliminary work (the surprise opening air raid, softening up the targets). 2) The ground force (initial push followed by a holding battle to gain control over vital area and part of the urban areas). 3) Increasing the pressure on Gaza City (where the main urban battles took place).

In each of these stages the Yad Hashem was apparent:

In the initial stage, dozens of fighter planes simultaneously attacked many targets and concentrations of Hamas. The one that stands out is a graduation ceremony for policemen attended by hundreds of people, most of whom were wounded or killed. **Boruch Hashem, the aerial attack was a surprise and the strikes were amazingly accurate.**

Despite the great tension and the numerous daily attacks, Hamas did not change its modus operandi and did not take any extra precautions. Apparently even the Hezbollah experts in the Gaza Strip were not forewarned, and the attack was an utter surprise. On the first day of the fighting, about 200 Hamas men were killed, most of them in the initial surprise air attack.

According to press releases, the IDF figured that Hamas would respond accordingly, anticipating a massive attack of 200 rockets a day. In actual fact, on the first day they sent only about 80 rockets and in the weeks to come the number went down to only 20-25 a day.

The fear of a wave of terror attacks, whether from the direction

of Yehuda-Shomron towards the cities in the center of the country, or from terror cells in the south (via the tunnels), boruch Hashem was not realized.

The warm weather with few clouds and rain, which was spoken about a lot last year, turned out to be a **major factor** in the success of the fighting. The excellent visibility (without clouds, fog, or winds that affect the planes and interfere with the bombs) enabled them to be remarkably successful in their air attacks.

As the campaign went on, and the ground forces entered the area, the weather would become even more critical since the primary help for these forces is from combat and transport helicopters and unmanned drones which, because of their low altitudes and smaller dimensions, are even more affected by visibility and the weather. **It was obvious that the good weather was a gift from heaven for both the air and the ground forces.**

THE CHIEF OF STAFF SAID: "THIS IS THE HAND OF HASHEM"

During the ground incursion, four brigades of infantry soldiers entered the area, backed up by armored troops, artillery, engineering corps, and Special Forces - according to the reports, about 10,000 soldiers. We drew encouragement from the sheer size of our invading force, but still recognized that we were all that much larger of a target at the same time.

During the Second Lebanon War, already in the initial battles (in which they moved towards their objectives), dozens of soldiers were wounded and killed. Even the Merkava tanks and Achzarit armored half-tracks of the infantry, which are considered of the finest quality in the world, took heavy



Those living in the south were amazed time after time by the open miracles.

That a large, crowded civilian population, for the most part unprotected, was bombarded with 600 rockets and mortars and sustained only a few casualties is an open miracle.

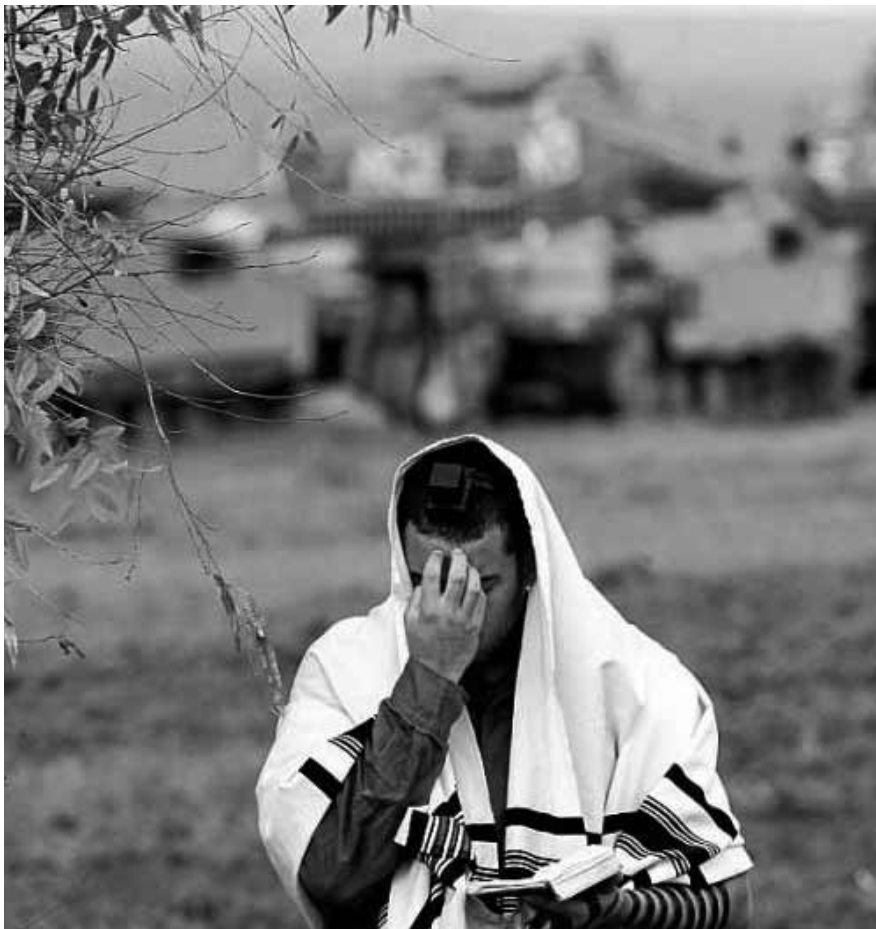


losses from new generation Russian anti-tank missiles. These "smart" missiles are used for armored vehicles and include two explosive heads for every missile. The first blasts a hole through the armor while the second enters through the hole to the compartment where the crew is. Hamas bought advanced anti-tank missiles and smuggled

hundreds of new model RPG rockets.

Hamas used the supposed ceasefire to line the roads that lead to cities in the Strip with hundreds of explosive devices and mines. An enormous amount of explosive material was used to build these fortifications. Mortars and other missiles were shot towards the roads, and snipers and machine gunners lay in wait in houses nearby. The soldiers were in great danger. The Jewish nation listened to the news of the start of the ground incursion with an apprehension tempered by bitachon in Hashem, and prayed for good news.

And miracles happened. Lots of them. The soldiers moved forward in foot formations as well as in armored vehicles and tanks and were able, with Hashem's help, to cross the booby-trapped and targeted



In general, it was apparent that the soldiers did not go to war with the feeling of “my strength and the power of my hand,” but with prayer, emuna and bitachon in Hashem. Entire units asked for tzitzis and dozens of pairs of t’fillin that were donated “on condition that they be used every day” were grabbed up.

areas with very few losses. The effects of those t’fillos became apparent as word came back about explosives that did not explode, mortars shot at the foot soldiers that landed among them but did not

explode, and advanced anti-tank missiles that were shot and missed or did not explode. Last year *Beis Moshiach* reported about a missile that hit an armored bulldozer. The first explosive head detonated and

made a hole but the second one, that went through that hole, did not explode!

The Chief of Staff himself was quoted at the time as saying “**this is the hand of Hashem.**”

The soldiers then took control of the perimeters of the urban areas and the missile launching sites. The battles took place in crowded civilian neighborhoods (Gaza is considered the most densely populated area in the world). The terrorists took refuge behind children, family homes, schools and mosques, thus making a response very difficult.

The terrorists had a definite advantage in that they knew the territory and our operational capabilities intimately. In addition, Hamas had prepared for war by digging numerous tunnels and even an underground city where the terrorists hid, emerging only to conduct surprise attacks on Israeli soldiers who moved about, exposed in the streets. Hamas also placed booby-traps in the streets and alleyways.

In a war like this, that is conducted house to house and from room to room, face to face with the enemy, the combatants are in great danger. The IDF’s great advantages in space, the air and at sea were not very helpful when the fighting was limited to foot soldiers forced to fight within neighborhoods and houses. There is no question that the limited number of casualties is solely the result of **miracles and wonders.**

In the third stage, the Israeli army began to up the pressure on Gaza while improving their positions and penetrating deep into the urban centers (up to only a kilometer away from the center of the city). At this point most of the fighting was done in developed areas and hundreds of terrorists were killed in face-to-face combat in the alleyways, houses and neighborhoods.

Hundreds of private and public buildings (including schools) were

discovered to be booby-trapped. Every movement and the touching of any item was liable to set off a series of fatal explosions. In the houses they discovered that even furniture and dolls concealed explosives within.

The rigging of the Palestinian zoo was publicized, along with the story about the group of soldiers that found a place to sleep in a classroom. The next morning the soldiers found that the piano was booby-trapped. If any of them had decided to try it out, the ending would have been a sad one.

The Palestinians even booby-trapped mosques. One time, the soldiers opened fire in the direction of a mosque that looked suspicious. Before their astonished eyes the entire front of the building collapsed, exposing dangerous tunnels that were prepared nearby in order to attack or kidnap soldiers. The tunnels were also used in other kidnapping attempts, all of which failed, boruch Hashem.

Before the start of the campaign, the accepted assessment was that Hamas, as an extremist Moslem organization, would put up a good fight. When it came down to it, though, a sizable part of Hamas did not fight at all. The distinctive uniforms of those units were found in houses while the fighters themselves wore civilians clothing so as not to get hurt. Other units were attacked and disbanded. Entire battle areas were empty of terrorists.

Countless soldiers reported hair's breadth survival of missiles aimed directly at them. One soldier even related that a bullet shot at him penetrated his armored vest and stopped only because of the dog tags he wore on his chest.

At a thanksgiving gathering held at the Chabad house in Kfar Saba, two soldiers (who are not yet observant) told many miracle stories that happened to them and their buddies and how they felt,



Miracles in battle. Above: an F15 loaded with bombs. Below left: an Apache helicopter. Right: IDF artillery.



throughout the war, that a Higher Power was leading them to do the right things, to avoid danger in time, and was watching over them.

In general, it was apparent that the soldiers did not go to war with the feeling of “my strength and the power of my hand,” but with prayer, emuna and bitachon in Hashem. Entire units asked for tzitzis and dozens of pairs of t’fillin that were donated “on condition that they be used every day” were grabbed up. Many songs of faith in Hashem were sung by soldiers. Even in the rear there was a great interest in saying T’hillim for the welfare and protection of the soldiers and civilians living in the south. In various yeshivos they announced a campaign in which each bachur dedicated his learning to the welfare of a soldier whose name he received.

The soldiers fought bravely with mesirus nefesh on behalf of Klal Yisroel. The percentage of Reservists who showed up was 100%. The soldiers in these units, already middle-aged, were not afraid to participate in the most difficult battles. The Rebbe mentioned more than once that all the military failures are the fault of the political sector and not the Israeli soldiers who are moser nefesh.

The army learned their lesson from the Second Lebanon War, and were far better prepared this time around. Ample and up-to-date equipment was purchased (including weapons that they never had before, like bunker-penetrating explosives) and a lot of training was done especially for those in the Reserves.

Still, senior military officials said that they expected the losses to be

far greater than in Operation Defensive Shield (which took place in 5763) because of the difficulty in waging war in a congested area and facing at least 15,000 terrorists in addition to tens of thousands of armed civilians. They estimate that in the Gaza Strip there are over 100,000 people who have weapons! They knew that the area was full of bombs and booby-traps and enormous quantities of anti-tank weapons and explosives had been smuggled in. These are some of the reasons why the political leadership was afraid, in recent years, to respond militarily in Gaza.

They estimated that 200 of our soldiers would be killed but what actually happened is that only 10 were killed (tragically, four of them were killed accidentally by our own forces). The truth is that every Jewish soldier is an entire world and may these be the last losses we sustain.

MIRACLES ON THE POLITICAL-SECURITY FRONT

There were miracles on this front as well. Throughout Olmert's leadership he negotiated with the Palestinians, especially since the Annapolis summit. According to what was reported to the public, it seems that on the eve of the war the sides were about to make significant "progress" in the course of which Israel was going to give up the territories - including Yerushalayim! - and would even agree to allow the

"return" of a certain number of Arab refugees. These insane developments were forestalled thanks to the military action. **The negotiations were immediately halted** because Abu Mazen did not want to look as though he was collaborating with Israel, who was fighting his people.

Another negotiation that was going on was between Israel and Syria. After a few rounds of preliminary talks in Turkey, the former prime minister went there himself. On Shabbos, when Operation Cast Lead began, he was there. Before his flight, Olmert announced that the "Syrians will be surprised by his positions towards them." In plain terms that meant that Olmert was ready to do what his predecessors did not dare - to relinquish the Golan Heights.

In an interview with the media on April 27, the president of Syria said that in his negotiations with the Olmert government, the Syrians were closer to getting the Golan Heights than during the negotiations with Barak in 5760. According to him, during the preliminary talks in Turkey, the sides were up to discussing the borders after Israel retreated. You can imagine what the consequences would have been if the negotiations would have continued as direct talks with Olmert himself present.

However, boruch Hashem, that Shabbos when Olmert was in Turkey, Cast Lead began, and even Olmert had no choice but to respond with force. He had to quickly return to Israel, the

negotiations stopped, and were not renewed since. **We saw clearly that Hashem was watching over us.**

The true face of Turkey, which served as "a trusted mediator" in the negotiations between Israel and Syria, was exposed. The president of Turkey attacked the government of Israel with threats and anti-Semitic diatribes that do the president of Iran proud.

Hashem's help was also obvious in the international arena. The United States and Europe did not exert significant pressure to stop the fighting. **Even Egypt supported Israel** and said Hamas was to blame. The Egyptian government withstood internal pressure to declare war on Israel. Boruch Hashem that possibility was averted.

These miracles and wonders that took place in all aspects of the fighting, on the front and in the rear, ought to strengthen our awareness that "hinei Moshiach ba." A gilui Elokus like this and the great number of miracles was something we experienced only in the Six Day War (and maybe in the Gulf War). Chabad Chassidim know, based on the Rebbe's sichos, that these were auspicious times for the Geula. That is how we ought to feel now, especially when the miracles, the gilui Elokus and the chasdei Hashem, continue till this day.

Recognition of the miracles, thanking Hashem for them, and publicizing the miracles are **the Rebbe's horaa (sicha VaYeishev 5752)** and they hasten the Geula.

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HE SAW IT COMING

Translated By Michael Leib Dobry

An emergency conference of leading rabbinical authorities in Eretz Yisroel is contending with the looming issues of fake conversions and efforts to force rabbanim to perform marriages between Jews and Gentiles. HaRav HaGaon R' Gedalia Axelrod, rav of the Chabad community in Haifa, who initiated the fight against bogus conversions decades ago at the express instruction of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, speaks to Beis Moshiach Magazine about this tremendous catastrophe, the problem facing rabbanim in Eretz Yisroel, and the way to a solution. Shai Gefen reports.

Rabbi Axelrod, the issue of fake conversions has moved to the forefront of the public agenda in recent months. As someone who dealt with this issue for decades at the direct instruction of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, can the rav explain to us what, essentially, has been taking place in this public struggle?

Since we began this battle at the direct order of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, there has been progress on this matter, particularly since the ruling of the High Rabbinic Court that the conversions performed by Rabbi Chaim Druckman are halachically null and void because the converts did not sincerely accept the yoke of mitzvos.

Until then, there had never been an explicit decision on this charged issue and no one wanted to touch it. This is a very positive development, together with Rabbi Druckman's dismissal from the Prime Minister's Office's national conversion authority. This has shocked the entire conversion system. Rabbis involved in the process of preparing converts have begun a serious self-examination when they realized that these conversions were not valid according to the halacha handed down to us from generation to generation since Moshe Rabbeinu.

Nevertheless, the problem has regrettably not been solved at all, because the chief rabbis have not expressed their support for Rabbi Avraham Sherman's ruling. Therefore, the conversion institutes that work according to Rabbi Chaim Druckman's formula maintain their operations, which leads us to the great disaster that threatens the very existence of the Jewish People and creates fear of the worst possible form of assimilation.

I understand that when the rav initiated this struggle thirty years ago, he was the only one speaking out on this matter.

That's quite true. In fact, when I was serving then as an av beis din, I proved that most converts never accepted the yoke of Torah and mitzvos, and thus the conversions are not in accordance with Torah law. There are no two ways about it. Such people are still non-Jews, and any effort to include them among the Jewish People causes only disaster and terrible assimilation. Furthermore, rabbanim today are being obligated to marry couples, even when it is clear that one of them is a total Gentile, and this is the greatest tragedy.

When I began this fight, I was concerned about how things would actually be accepted and whether I should make a furor on the issue.

When they wanted to interview me, I asked the Rebbe. It was Lag B'Omer, 5744, and his prompt reply came just as he was leaving 770 to go to the Ohel. The Rebbe said, **“Since he is a rav and initiated this mitzvah, where is there room for a question now?”**, and he instructed me to do the interview with full force against this outrage. In fact, I am happy to say that the sense of awareness among rabbanim continues to grow, and even more rabbanim have declared that they will not give further sanction to marry such mixed couples that underwent questionable conversions.

Is there a difference between a Reform conversion and this type of conversion?

None whatsoever. At the conversion institutes, they teach the “converts” to lie to the rabbanim and tell them to respond as if they have every intention of fulfilling mitzvos, when in fact, the overwhelming majority of them – more than ninety-five percent (!) – have never observed mitzvos at any time. These are absolutely “wink and a nod” conversions, and they aren’t even embarrassed to admit this openly.

The damage caused is immeasurable when rabbanim perform marriages between Jews and these “converts”, creating terrible assimilation among the Jewish People.

How many have been



“converted” so far according to this approach?

According to our estimates, there have been approximately eighty thousand such conversions, and they claim that they still have to convert all of the non-Jewish youth. There are hundreds of thousands en route to conversion through this approach, without any commitment to mitzvah observance.

Forty years ago, in 5730, the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, was the first to cry out against the “Viennese conversions.” This was a form of bogus “quickie” *giyur* being carried out at the time by representatives of the Jewish Agency upon immigrants from Poland and

Russia, who were then staying in transit camps in Vienna. The Rebbe MH”M turned to Rabbi Zevin and demanded his forceful involvement, since the Chief Rabbinate had elected to remain silent on the matter. After much urging, Rabbis Unterman and Kolitz were sent to Europe, where they determined that all of these conversions were a colossal joke with no legitimacy whatsoever.

The main point behind the Rebbe’s forty-year struggle regarding the terrible edict on the question of “Who is a Jew?” is the issue of admitting Gentiles within the Jewish People, which has relevance to the very essence of Judaism. This is exactly what they want to do – to remove all barriers separating between Israel and the nations of the world. It seems ridiculous

considering that it is a known fact that even the simplest Jew is prepared for self-sacrifice to prevent the deliberate assimilation of Am Yisroel.

How many assimilated are there today in Israel?

Today, they’re already talking about tens of thousands of assimilated. There are those who thought that part of the solution would come by removing the nationality from the *teudat zehut* (identity card issued by the Israel Ministry of the Interior), which demonstrates how far they’re willing to go against any shred of Jewish identity. The whole concept of these

RABBI AXELROD AND THE FIGHT FOR “WHO IS A JEW”

“In 5747, I organized a petition signed by the majority of rabbinical judges in Eretz Yisroel, stating that no one has the right to establish anything on the matter of the “Who is a Jew?” which contradicts the Torah of Israel. A huge public outcry arose throughout the country, and calls were made for my dismissal from my judicial post. Even the police came to question me on the matter. I was summoned to an urgent meeting at ‘Heichal Shlomo’ in Yerushalayim, seat of the Chief Rabbinate, where there would be a discussion regarding the issuing of an apology over this petition.

“When I arrived at the meeting, the chief rabbis were already seated, and then something totally fantastic happened. Just as I was entering the conference room, the secretary rushed in and told me, ‘You have a phone call.’ On the line was the Rebbe’s secretary, who informed me that I have a bracha from the Rebbe for the judges’ petition – ‘I will mention it at the *Tzion*.’ By an incredible case of Divine Providence, the Rebbe’s answer had come just as I was going in for a hearing with the chief rabbis of Israel.

“I returned to the conference room with a renewed sense of strength, and I gave a very forceful speech, declaring that judges have no need to apologize, since the matter was done with the power of the Torah. There was a serious debate in the conference room over whether they should express any regret over the ‘judges’ petition’, but in the end, no apology was issued. I saw clearly how the Rebbe was running things.

“In 5744, R’ Asher Zuckerman, a very prominent journalist with the ‘Erev Shabbos’ newspaper, approached me with a request to do an interview on

the ‘Who is a Jew?’ issue and the matter of wholesale conversions. Since I didn’t know how to respond to the request, I asked the Rebbe what I should do, emphasizing that it was ‘urgent’, since the paper needed to know as soon as possible before it went to print. My son, Moshe, who serves as the Rebbe’s shliach in Atlit, brought my letter to the secretary, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Groner, on Lag B’Omer. When he saw the note, Rabbi Groner said there was no chance that the Rebbe would respond that day, since there would be a parade and the Rebbe was going to the Ohel immediately afterwards. A few hours later, Rabbi Groner was urgently looking for my son. The Rebbe had issued an answer right before he went to the Ohel: **‘Since he is a rav and initiated this mitzvah, where is there room for a question now?’** After receiving such a clear and totally unexpected response, I gave the interview with all the proper shturem.

“As a result of the Rebbe’s wonderful answer, about one hundred and eighty rabbanim and dayanim, constituting the majority of rabbinic justice authorities, signed the petition calling upon all marriage registrars not to make any wedding ceremonies for converts who have not accepted the yoke of Torah and mitzvos.

“Due to all the publicity stemming from this interview, the Chief Rabbinate established a special committee to check the status of conversions in Eretz Yisroel. I issued a special booklet on the subject, called ‘A Conversion Certificate Under Halachic Examination,’ and sent it to all marriage registrars and rabbinical authorities. The committee’s findings were astounding: Rabbi Yisroel Lau brought me a survey made among ‘converts,’ showing that eighty percent don’t even light Shabbos candles!”

fictitious conversions is a means to remove all tenets of religion from the Jewish state. It is their desire to compel the rabbanim to act against the holy Torah, and this is the most frightful thing of all.

What is the main battle being waged today between the rabbanim and the government?

The struggle today is to make certain that the rabbanim are not forced to conduct marriage ceremonies between Jews and non-

Jews. The rabbanim are simply being coerced by the legal advisor of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Recently, the case of Rabbi Blau of Ashkelon was publicized. He was ordered to preside at weddings of Jews and these false “converts” who never accepted the yoke of mitzvos. When he steadfastly refused, he was threatened with prosecution for committing a criminal act.

At my own initiative, I turned to the Chief Rabbis and the Chief Rabbinical Council with a demand

that the legal advisor of the Ministry of Religious Affairs be fired immediately for interfering in rabbinical matters. The legal advisor then had the incredible chutzpah to turn to the rabbis with a demand for written clarification as to whether they intended to marry Jews and non-Jews in the future.

I want to mention here a most amazing fact: Back when the question of “Who is a Jew?” was an especially front-burner issue, I asked Rabbi Shmuel Chefer, chairman of

the Committee for the Preservation of the Jewish People, why the Rebbe had instructed them to stop taking action on the matter. He replied that he had asked the Rebbe about the issue, and the Rebbe told him that the Chief Rabbinate is supposed to be handling it. At that same time, the huge waves of immigrants from the Soviet Union began to arrive in Eretz HaKodesh, and through his tremendous *ruach ha'kodesh*, the Rebbe had already seen that nothing would help any longer. It was the primary responsibility of the Chief Rabbinate to stand in the breach and protect the People of Israel – something which regrettably did not happen.

Is there a chance for change?

The rabbinical authorities today operate “in name only”, compelled to do the state’s bidding and officiate at weddings between Jews and Gentiles – or lose their jobs. It is literally a case of *pidyon shvuyim* to help these rabbanim prevent assimilation.

Is there any official data on the status of these fictional converts produced by these conversion institutes?

I have an amazing statistic that proves how these converts represent such ridicule and contempt.

It is stated in the laws of divorce that when someone who converted in accordance with halacha and then later stopped observing the mitzvos gets divorced, the words “*ben Avraham*” are not written in the *get* after his given name. However, if he continues keeping Torah and mitzvos, when he gets divorced, he is called “*ben Avraham Avinu*”. According to an official computer data analysis, we find that in 97.2% of all halachic divorce certificates involving converts during the last fifteen years, the words “*ben Avraham Avinu*” do not appear. This shows clearly how the whole thing is

The whole concept of these fictitious conversions is a means to remove all tenets of religion from the Jewish state. It is their desire to compel the rabbanim to act against the holy Torah, and this is the most frightful thing of all.

deemed trivial, a joke, and utter nonsense.

After all the noise that I made in the past at the Rebbe’s instructions, a committee of inquiry was established, and the majority of rabbinical judges demanded an investigation regarding whether converts to Judaism continued to observe Torah and mitzvos after their conversion. The results were not surprising: Eighty percent don’t fulfill even one mitzvah! The status of the conversions made in the armed forces is far worse.

What is the rav’s position on what a shliach is supposed to do when a Gentile comes to him and asks to be converted?

It is forbidden for a shliach to deal with matters of conversion. We’re talking about a very complicated issue, requiring the involvement of a rabbinical authority who is trained and experienced on this issue. The situation today is simply catastrophic. I have heard numerous hair-raising stories that resulted from conversions made by unqualified rabbis. I receive telephone calls from bachurim learning today in some of the most prominent yeshivos, whose maternal grandmothers underwent improper conversions. While they (the grandsons) became baalei t’shuva, in truth, they are actually Gentiles in every respect. In order to prevent this form of assimilation, it is important to know that there exists an absolute halachic obligation to

check out every conversion several generations back, so as not to bring *ch”v* any non-Jews into the House of Israel. There must be an increased sense of public awareness regarding the harsh and difficult problems of mixing Jews and Gentiles.

Eretz Yisroel today is run by a Hellenist regime that has the objective of removing all partitions between the Jewish People and the nations of the world. This applies in equal measure to the battle for the preservation of the entire Land of Israel and halting the breach of the walls of Judaism. They are inexorably connected with one another.

Does the rav have a few words to say in conclusion?

We recently celebrated the holiday of Chanukah, and the Kohen HaGadol who guards the pure cruse of oil in our generation is the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, who will soon redeem us. This year, we mark forty years of the Rebbe’s struggle on the issue of “Who is a Jew?”, and it is our holy obligation to do everything possible to actively promote awareness and pressure on this campaign in which the whole house of Israel is at risk.

The Guardian of Israel will surely protect the remnants of His People, and the very essence of this just and holy struggle will bring us to the True and Complete Redemption with the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, leading the way.

OVER FORTY— FIVE YEARS OF TANYA SHIURIM

By Avrohom Ber

R' Meir Roness, an inseparable part of the 770 scene and responsible for arranging Tanya shiurim in yeshivos, tells of many bachurim who were mekurav to Chassidus and the Rebbe through these shiurim.

“Tz’daka, Hoshana Raba, chevra” – there is hardly anybody who has been in 770 who has not met R' Meir Roness announcing, in his exuberant way, one line or another. Not everybody knows that behind R' Meir and the “tz’daka” that he collects, are over forty-five years of experience in organizing Tanya shiurim in non-Lubavitch yeshivos, under the auspices of Tzeirei Agudas Chabad.

During these many years, dozens of bachurim became deeply involved in Chabad Chassidus and many of them are shluchim today.

R' Meir shared some anecdotes

which he heard or saw in connection with these shiurim.

STARTING OUT

I worked in camp Gan Israel from the end of the fifties until the middle of the sixties. I was a substitute counselor. Every three weeks, each counselor had two days off, and my job was to replace them on those vacation days. Every two days I had a different bunk. There were times I had five year olds and fifteen year olds in the same week. I ended up being the counselor of most of the kids in the camp (R' Meir added that he had recently

returned from visiting Camp Emuna and he found out that the driver, who came from a non-Lubavitch family, had spent his summers in Gan Israel along with his brothers and remembered having him as a counselor).

Part of the day’s routine included shiurim. I had to give a shiur every day, each time to a different age group. I didn’t want to prepare a daily shiur that would suit a different age group each time so I would learn the laws of the Three Weeks with all of them and then tell stories of tzaddikim. Since most of the children were not from Lubavitcher families, I didn’t want to tell them stories only about tzaddikim who were no longer alive; I mainly told stories about the Rebbe so the children would know that tzaddikim were not just history.

Years later, one of the campers called me. He had already married and had a few children. He told me that one of his children was seriously ill with an illness that they hadn’t diagnosed yet (they later figured out it was a genetic disease). He asked me for the phone number of the Rebbe’s secretaries. He had remembered the stories I had told about the Rebbe and decided to ask for his bracha. That’s when it registered – look how influential stories of tzaddikim are when told to young children, and how it affects them their entire lives.

After camp ended, I kept in touch with many of the children, who were learning in non-Chabad yeshivos. They were young bachurim who had a good connection with Chabad and were prime candidates for learning Chassidus. I spoke with Rabbi Dovid Raskin and we concluded that I would start organizing Chassidus classes in all these yeshivos.

At first, R' Raskin saw to the money and then I began raising my own funds. We found Maggidei Shiurim, Tmimim and balabatim

who were able to explain Chassidus well, and we began bringing them to those yeshivos. During the summer the bachurim would go to camps and give shiurim there. These shiurim continue till this day.

Many of the bachurim who were niskarev and came to Lubavitch later gave shiurim themselves and discovered more neshamos who were chosen to learn in Tomchei Tmimim.

THIS MERIT WILL STAND BY HIM

R' Meir recalled an interesting story that happened with one of the bachurim who undertook to arrange the shiurim in his yeshiva.

Rabbi Shloma Majeski was sent by the Rebbe in the first group of bachurim-shluchim to Melbourne, and when he returned from there he regularly visited one of the famous Litvishe yeshivos to give a Tanya shiur.

At that shiur was a bachur who had made nice progress and was one of the organizers of the shiur. Before Pesach vacation he fell and broke his elbow. The doctor put his arm in a cast and told him that as it was a very bad fracture, he would have to have it in a cast for at least eight to nine months. The bachur and his family were understandably very concerned; after all, a cast usually is on for only two months, so this injury was severe indeed.

When he came back to yeshiva after Pesach, he approached R' Majeski after the shiur and requested that he ask for a bracha for him. When R' Majeski returned to 770 it was around two in the morning on Thursday night, yechidus night. He wrote a note with the bachur's name and his mother's name and said that he was one of the organizers of the Tanya shiur in his yeshiva.

Yechidus ended at about four in the morning. R' Majeski remained in



R' Meir Roness receiving a dollar from the Rebbe

Years later, one of the campers called me... He had remembered the stories I had told about the Rebbe and decided to ask for his bracha. That's when it registered – look how influential stories of tzaddikim are when told to young children, and how it affects them their entire lives.

770 a while, farbrenging. At five o'clock he heard that the secretary, R' Binyamin Klein was looking for him. R' Klein told him that right after yechidus, the Rebbe read his note and had an answer for him. (It was unusual for the Rebbe to read a note and answer immediately after yechidus).

The Rebbe circled the words that he had written about the bachur organizing the shiur and made an arrow and wrote: **this merit (and he should also increase) will stand by him in his request.**

THE RESULTS

A few days went by and the bachur went for a routine X-ray.

While it was being developed, the doctor began examining his arm. He immediately noticed that his palm did not look the way you would expect it to look after a month of inactivity and asked the bachur whether he had used the hand during that month. The bachur said that since his hand wasn't in the cast, he thought he could use it and had played some basketball.

When the shocked doctor digested this information, he began yelling at him for possibly having done irreparable damage. Basketball with a broken arm could move the bone out of place.

The nurse walked in with the X-ray and showed it to the doctor. The

About my father writing that college wouldn't hurt me (in my observance), the Rebbe wrote that he knew many who had gone to college and all of them had been harmed.

doctor checked it and looked back at the bachur with a frown. The nervous bachur asked the doctor why he was looking at him that way. The doctor, one month after seeing the X-rays that showed the break, said that he could not believe his eyes.

"I am looking at the X-ray and don't see a break."

When the bachur explained that he had been given a blessing by a great rabbi, the doctor was even more surprised. He told him to continue wearing the cast for the next month to be sure there was no mistake.

A month later the X-ray was perfect. The fracture had healed. Instead of eight to nine months, the cast was on for only eight-nine weeks.

DIFFICULTIES ON THE WAY TO LUBAVITCH

In yeshivas Torah Vodaas, the Tanya classes began in the thirties, before the Rebbe Rayatz came to America, and were given by Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson. From these shiurim, Tmimim were "born" with whom the Rebbe Rayatz started yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim, people like Rabbi Meir Greenberg and Rabbi Mendel Feldman a"h. Over the years, these shiurim also became R' Meir Roness' responsibility.

One of the bachurim who learned Chassidus in Torah Vodaas wanted to have yechidus before his wedding but R' Groner said no, that yechidus before the wedding is a

privilege reserved for talmidim of Tomchei Tmimim.

"The bachur asked me to help him out," related R' Roness, "and I was able to convince the secretary that he learned Chassidus and was a Lubavitcher in every respect. He reminds me of this now and then and says that he is grateful to me for it till this very day."

It wasn't easy for those bachurim. There was pressure from the outside, from parents who did not always like their child's new "meshugaas," while at the same time many of them felt that they did not fully belong in Chabad.

WORRIED PARENTS

"There was a bachur who learned in yeshivas Achei Tmimim in the Bronx and then in Tomchei Tmimim on Bedford. His parents wanted him to go to college and the bachur refused. The shocked and upset parents arranged a yechidus with the Rebbe in the hopes that he would convince their son to go to college (in those days it was the norm for bachurim to go to college after some years in yeshiva).

"When they saw they would not convince the Rebbe to allow their son to attend college, they got up to leave, feeling greatly disappointed. The Rebbe told them that they couldn't leave the room that way and they had to smile.

"I had a similar story. My father wanted me to go to college but I refused. My father wrote to the Rebbe asking him to explain to me that I had to go to college. I didn't

know about this. When I went home for Pesach, my brother told me that a letter from the Rebbe had come.

"In the letter, the Rebbe explained to my father that Hashem is the one that provides parnasa and He also gives it to those who don't attend college. About my father writing that college wouldn't hurt me (in my observance), the Rebbe wrote that he knew many who had gone to college and all of them had been harmed. The Rebbe negated the idea of my being half a day in yeshiva and half a day in college, explaining that it's like jumping from a hot room into cold water a few times a day – it wasn't possible for this not to be harmful."

Another worried parent had a few children who had gotten involved with Chabad and he was concerned they wouldn't find good shidduchim. He shared his worry with a friend who had himself come to Lubavitch through Tanya shiurim. The clever Chassid asked him whether he knew R' Nissan Nemenov.

"Oh, R' Nissan? Sure I know him." He knew R' Nissan from the time after the war.

"After I came from Kamenitz to Lubavitch I did a shidduch with his granddaughter," the Lubavitcher placated his friend.

SHIUR BY WAY OF THE CEMETERY

R' Meir tells about underground shiurim:

In a yeshiva in Monsey there was a large shiur with about eighteen talmidim, which was given by R' Avrohom Stone. At first the shiur took place in a shul near the yeshiva but someone must have tattled to the hanhala, because one time he showed up, and was confronted by the Mashgiach, who threw him out and told him not to return. He also warned the bachurim not to attend the Tanya shiur.

This was a little too late in the game since the bachurim who had learned there had already gotten a taste of Chassidus and wanted to continue. To their astonishment, they discovered that the Rosh Yeshiva and the Mashgiach were patrolling the area around the yeshiva in a car in order to catch anybody who committed the crime of learning Tanya. The talmidim were very scared.

Some bachurim decided that they would continue the shiur, no matter what. They wanted to learn Chassidus! A Lubavitcher by the name of Dr. Hayes a”h, a psychologist, opened his office in Monsey for this holy purpose. But how could they get out from under the watchful eyes of the patrol without being caught?

Next to the yeshiva was a cemetery. At night, the bachurim would go out the back door to the cemetery, where they would meet up with the Maggid Shiur, and from there they wend their way to the office. They returned the same way, with a circuitous route to the cemetery and from the cemetery to the yeshiva. Three out of six of the bachurim who attended this shiur eventually came to Lubavitch.

One of these bachurim met me years later. He hugged and kissed me and gave me a \$50 donation for the shiurim, explaining, “If not for your shiur I would have remained a Misnaged.”

THE LITVISH ROSH YESHIVA GETS A RIDE WITH THE MAGGID SHIUR

Not all roshei yeshiva were so opposed. R’ Zushe Feldman, for example, would give a shiur in Beis Midrash Elyon in Monsey, where Rabbi Gedalia Schorr a”h was the rosh yeshiva. R’ Schorr knew about the shiurim and, since he lived in

To their astonishment, they discovered that the Rosh Yeshiva and the Mashgiach were patrolling the area around the yeshiva in a car in order to catch anybody who committed the crime of learning Tanya.

Crown Heights at the time, he would get a ride with the bachur who gave the shiur on his way back to 770. On the way they would talk in learning.

When Rabbi Boruch Lesches, rav in the Chabad k’hilla in Monsey, once went to give the ongoing Tanya shiur in Lakewood, Rabbi Shneur Kotler a”h, the rosh yeshiva, was standing in the entrance. When he saw the car turn in, he asked why the bachur had come and when he was told, he nodded and said, “Gut, gut.”

TO SHOW THAT THEY KNOW

When the Rebbe Rashab started yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim, he explained that the name “Tmimim” is because the bachurim study “Toras Hashem T’mina”- Nigleh and Chassidus. In connection with this, R’ Meir related:

It wasn’t only shiurim in Chassidus that brought bachurim to Lubavitch. Many bachurim who considered themselves b’nei Torah met learned Tmimim, and were amazed to discover that in Lubavitch they know how to learn Nigleh. For many of them, this is what gave them a feeling of respect for Lubavitch and Chassidus. For others, it was the first step on their way to Tomchei Tmimim.

I remember how one of the Tmimim who would give Tanya shiurim at one of the Litvishe camps, got into a deep conversation in

learning with some yeshiva bachurim. They saw that he was more knowledgeable than they were in every subject and sent one of the lamdanim of the yeshiva to talk to him in learning. Within a few minutes the lamdan saw that he was no match for the Tamim.

Chassidishe cleverness was also an important tool in debates like these. One time, Rabbi Sholom Lipskar (today a shliach in Miami Beach, Florida) was in a Litvishe camp and they wanted to test him in learning. He said they could test him in any masechta they wanted. He knew that in our yeshivos and their yeshivos they learned the same mesechtos and so what could they ask him already? The exam ended when the bachurim discovered to their amazement that he knew all of Shas ...

I have a relative who is a Litvishe rosh yeshiva. I knew he would attend my wedding and I arranged with three Tmimim who knew how to learn well (Rabbi Leibel Kaplan a”h, Rabbi SZ Labkowski, and R’ Sholom Lipskar) that I would point out who he was and they should speak to him.

At the wedding, they respectfully approached him and asked him to tell them something in learning. They spoke in learning with him for a while. Two days later he attended one of my Sheva Brachos and told me in amazement that he didn’t know that Chabad had iluyim (geniuses) like that.

THE RUFFIANS OF RAMOT RETURN

By Nosson Avrohom

A multifaceted person, R' Moshe Binyamin is a director of a high-tech firm, founder of a shul, rav of a k'hilla, an inventor, and mentor for kids off the derech. * In this fascinating interview, R' Binyamin talks about his life, his work, and a miracle.

One evening a few months ago, R' Moshe Binyamin's cell phone rang. On the phone was the police chief of Ramot. R' Moshe wasn't surprised since many of the youth he works with have deteriorated into lives of crime. He is successful in bringing these children back on track and parents praise him to the skies. He assumed this was the reason for the call.

He was right. The police chief praised him for his work and offered his help. R' Moshe had to turn him down because any connection with the police would undermine the trust

the kids have in him. The police chief understood. At the end of their conversation he said, "You should know that since your work has gone into high gear, not only has crime by youth gone down in this neighborhood, but the phenomenon of fringe kids has dropped tremendously."

R' Moshe has received such calls – both the compliments as well as requests for collaboration – before, from various offices and organizations that work with these kids. I wanted to hear about his professional success but also got to

hear about a Chassid who is so very mekushar to the Rebbe. A seemingly unrealistic answer in the Igros Kodesh turned into a shlichus.

He is called "the spiritual father of the fringe kids," by people in the neighborhood. He puts all his energy into working with them and "when you plant and water, you see success," he says.

FOUR TENSION-FILLED DAYS

Before we got to discussing his work with wayward youth and the messages he wants to share, R' Binyamin told us how he came to Chabad nearly two decades ago.

"For many years I lived in yishuv Shaalavim and attended the schools there. I was a religious-nationalist through and through. I studied the Musar approach for many years and was convinced that this was the best approach to life.

"My worldview was changed abruptly starting with a phone call from my wife. She sounded hysterical and she asked me to leave work and come home immediately. I left in a hurry and prayed that all would be well. When I arrived home I saw that one of my daughters was lying on the floor unresponsive.

"We rushed her to the clinic, where the doctor instructed us to take her to the nearest hospital. He said that it looked like meningitis. They confirmed his diagnosis at the hospital and one of the doctors called me into his office. He looked grim and he didn't mince words. In his experience, my daughter was on her deathbed.

"Within four days, he said, she would lose consciousness and a few days later she would die. It took a few moments for his words to register. Coming from a senior doctor, I was inclined to believe his diagnosis and I didn't know what to do. I did not tell my wife what he said; there was no point in worrying

her further.

“This happened on a Tuesday. On Thursday she lost consciousness. When that happened I thought all was lost. On Motzaei Shabbos at one in the morning I left the department and went home to rest. I was swamped at work and as strange as this might sound, I tried to maintain my routine as much as I could. I guess I didn’t fully digest what the doctor said.

“When I parked near my house I saw R’ Michoel Kalman, a Lubavitcher Chassid who lives in Afula. He would come every few weeks to visit his mother who lived in Shaalavim. We would say hello whenever we met, but we were nothing more than acquaintances.

“He noticed that I wasn’t myself and he gently asked me what was wrong. I told him the situation and that I was coming from the hospital. I didn’t expect him to be able to help me in any way; I was merely unloading my burden to him. When he heard my story he said that the Rebbe says that in cases like this the mezuzos in the house should be checked. ‘Listen, I’m very tired,’ I told him. ‘Come to me tomorrow.’

“He was persistent and said we would check the mezuzos then and there! I was sorry I had told him my woes. I had checked all the mezuzos just four months prior, but he didn’t give up and stubbornly insisted that I take down all my mezuzos.

“It’s a matter of *pikuach nefesh*,’ he insisted, and I grudgingly complied. All went smoothly until we got to the mezuzah on the front door. Before I had put that mezuzah up, four people had checked it and they all said it was beautiful and was good for at least twenty more years, so I had installed it tightly. I told him that this mezuzah could be left alone but insisted that they all had to be checked. When he had all the mezuzos he asked for my phone and called a sofer who lived in Shikun Chabad in Lud.



My worldview was changed abruptly starting with a phone call from my wife. She sounded hysterical and she asked me to leave work and come home immediately... one of my daughters was lying on the floor unresponsive... my daughter was on her deathbed.

“It was already two in the morning. I tried to protest that it was too late and why not wait until morning, but he wasn’t listening. As far as he was concerned, this was a

matter of saving lives.

“After a few rings, a tired voice answered the phone. Michoel said his piece and the sofer agreed that we could come over immediately.

TORAS HA'CHASSIDUS FOR ALL



In recent months the many viewers of Chabad.info have been enjoying the shiurim on D'var Malchus given by R' Zalman Notik. These shiurim are given in R' Binyamin's shul in Ramot. In addition, R' Binyamin records and videotapes all of R' Notik's shiurim and posts them on his website, as well

as articles and explanations about the eternity of the soul and, of course, inyanei Moshiach and Geula.

"This week I was happy to find that in a one day period there were over 600 viewers of R' Notik's D'var Malchus shiur.

"I saw that R' Notik has a very positive power of influence and he is terrific at explaining deep things. He opened my eyes with Chassidus and showed me how it doesn't all work with reward and punishment. A Torah life also gives us a good material life. When I saw how talented R' Notik is, I decided to share this with others, and that is how I came to make the site."

After last Rosh HaShana a woman sent her feedback to the site. She said that previously she had been fearful of the Day of Judgment but now, after hearing R' Notik's shiur, she experienced a calmer and wonderful Rosh HaShana.

When we arrived in Lud the sofer was waiting for us in the street in his pajamas. He brought us into his house and began checking the mezuzos. All were kosher. Then he got to the mezuzah of the front door. It was only after he used a special screwdriver that he was able to get the case open.

"I couldn't believe how the parchment looked. It was burnt and all the letters were blackened. You couldn't read a single word. Apparently, I had sealed it too well and the summer heat had scorched it; the plastic had melted onto the parchment and the mezuzah was ruined.

"The sofer looked at me and stated, 'Now that we've found the problem, your daughter will recover, with Hashem's help.'

"From your mouth to G-d's ears," I responded emphatically. He

gave me a replacement mezuzah and returned the other mezuzos. I put them back up at four in the morning. Of course I got almost no sleep. I woke up a little late the next morning and yawning, I got into my car and went to work.

"When I arrived at my office, the manager told me that my wife had called and wanted me to go to the hospital right away. I was terrified, fearing that the doctor's prognosis had been right.

"I drove to the hospital like a madman. I was sure it was all over. I hurried toward my daughter's room, but my wife intercepted me. "What happened to her?" I asked in a panic. "I called you to come and get her," she replied calmly. "She's fine."

"I felt that soon I would be the one needing hospitalization. I looked at her incredulously but when I saw

her smiling face all my fears dissipated and were overtaken by tremendous joy. What happened? How did it happen? When did it happen? I bombarded her with questions and she answered that the night before, between three and four o'clock, our daughter had opened her eyes, asked that the IV be removed and said she wanted to go to the bathroom. My wife had nearly fainted. Quickly, she summoned a nurse, who was no less shocked by the turn of events. She, in turn, called a doctor, who examined her and was equally amazed.

"Some said it was a heavenly miracle. I realized that someone is running the show, that there is a Rebbe in the world. I told my wife what I had done the night before. I slowly began to come to the realization that there is no such thing as Judaism and mitzvos that are separate from the world; they are interdependent.

"The doctors didn't release our daughter so quickly. They spent hours examining her and doing tests to make sure she was perfectly fine. They soon realized that a miracle had taken place.

"That week we made a big thanksgiving celebration at the yishuv, where I told my friends about the miracle we experienced thanks to the Rebbe."

LEARNING CHASSIDUS IN DEPTH

At the thanksgiving celebration, Moshe Binyamin decided that to express his thanks for the Rebbe's miracle, he would begin to devote himself to the Rebbe's activities:

"The first step was to learn what Chabad Chassidus is all about. After a lot of searching I discovered the mashpia, Rabbi Zalman Notik. It wasn't easy for me. It took me time to disconnect from the Musar approach and to internalize the way of Chassidus. I remember how

surprised I was to see Lubavitcher bachurim learning enthusiastically and not just learning because that's what you have to do. I couldn't believe that this was possible. Today I know where this chayus comes from."

In the past decade, R' Binyamin moved to the Ramot neighborhood of Yerushalayim.

"I never thought I would work with off-the-derech kids," he confides. "It was the Rebbe who got me involved in this.

"It got underway one Motzaei Shabbos when I was in the Chabad house run by Rabbi Nosson Oirechman in Akko. In a video that was shown that night, I saw the Rebbe saying that we don't know what is delaying the Geula and therefore we have to try every possible avenue.

"I was very affected by this and decided to take action. I went to the library, took a volume of Igros Kodesh and said, 'Rebbe, I want to know what I should do. Please guide me and tell me what I, as an individual, can do.' I opened the volume and read a long letter in which the Rebbe spoke about the importance of working with youth. I was very excited by this and I committed to working in the area of chinuch."

MEETINGS UNTIL TWO IN THE MORNING

There is a pizzeria near R' Moshe's house that attracts all the dropouts. He decided to start with them. The very next day he went into the pizza store and approached a group of boys and asked them who wanted free pizza. Of course they were all happy to take him up on his offer and he said it was on condition that they listened to a shiur in Chassidus.

"At the first shiur there were seven boys. When we finished, I arranged to meet with them every



Boys learning with R' Moshe Binyamin

Wednesday and things took off from there. Every week more and more boys joined until it reached a point where I couldn't pay for the shiur myself. Now the manager of the store, Avi Bitton, contributes the refreshments.

"My approach is to first get the boys away from the street, away from the things that lead to their deterioration. I discovered that it doesn't matter what I talk about during our meetings. I can just schmooze with them too. The main thing is they shouldn't be idle on the street.

"On Shabbos I sit with them until one and two in the morning. People wonder whether I'm normal but what can I do? This is what prevents them from going to town and spending their time in idle pursuits.

"After a few weeks they forget about the street and associate with things that are real. At the Friday night meals I tell them stories of Chassidim with a lesson and it has a tremendous effect. There are usually questions and I spice my answers with more ideas from Chassidus. It touches them deeply. Many of the boys I worked with went back to school. They go back to believing in themselves and their abilities. I tell

them about the really important things in life and it works.

"A few weeks ago, I met R' Erez Markowitz from Ramot Alef. I saw he was excited about something and asked him what happened. He told me that the previous Shabbos, his sister-in-law had joined them for the meal. As she walked home, alone, late that night, a group of drunken, wild boys accosted her and threw water and rocks at her. She was terrified. Then another group of boys passed by and chased the first group away. She heard them saying, 'R' Binyamin does not permit violence in the neighborhood.'

"There are challenging times too. There are boys who don't know how to be grateful, how to appreciate what is being done for them. I have thought on occasion that maybe this is not for me, but each time the Rebbe manages to send me chizuk. The last time I had these depressing thoughts a kid came over to me and asked me to walk with him. I had no idea what he wanted.

"He was one of the toughest boys and various scenarios went through my head as to what he had in mind. When I got to the doorway of the building he lived in, he asked me to wait a moment. He returned within a few minutes with a carefully

HE'S AN INVENTOR TOO

R' Moshe Binyamin is a multifaceted individual. A conversation with a friend of mine in his neighborhood brought to light yet another aspect of this interesting person.

R' Binyamin has many patents in the field of communications. At the present time he is working together with the Disney Corporation on a revolutionary invention in children's toys. He could not give me any details about it but only said, "Chassidishe messages will enter millions of homes throughout the world."

wrapped gift.

"Apparently, he had collected money from all the guys and they bought me a gift as a token of their thanks.

"I just got a call from the father of one of the boys that I had helped straighten out. He said to me, 'You deserve a big thank you. My son got back to himself and I have a lot of nachas from him now.'"

R' Binyamin tells me these thrilled reactions without any arrogance. He tells the parents and clerks in offices that work with youth the same thing he told me in the interview - that the success isn't because of him but because of the Rebbe, and it is the Rebbe who deserves thanks.

AN ARGUMENT THAT LED TO A DRASTIC CHANGE

R' Binyamin told me how he saved the life of a kid who dealt in drugs:

"One day, I was sitting in the pizza shop with the guys and a kid walked looking absolutely petrified. He begged me to let him hide under the table.

"I asked him what happened and he said that four drug dealers wanted to kill him because he owed them money. I told to him calm down and join the shiur.

Interestingly, the shiur was about the mitzva of Ahavas Yisroel. After a few minutes, my friend Uri Revach, of television fame, walked in. I asked

him to take over for me since I had something to take care of outside.

"Outside, I met four impatient, rough and tough kids. From what I understood, it was because they respected tradition and did not want to walk in and disturb in the middle of a shiur. I guess killing a Jew didn't bother them as much.

"I spoke to them softly and asked them to join the shiur. When I saw them hesitating I approached the leader of the gang, patted him on the shoulder and gave him a hug. I told him to come inside and I would make sure to straighten out their money argument. The other guys standing there were taken aback. One of them told me afterwards that he was afraid that the leader would vent his anger on me, and if he didn't like something, he could kill. I wasn't afraid of him, though. I knew I was working with the z'chus of the Rebbe and in the end, they agreed to come in.

"Throughout the shiur the four of them threw murderous looks at the boy they wanted to attack but I made sure to keep things calm. At the end of the shiur I started a dance with all the boys. After the others went on their way, we sat down and within a few minutes had resolved the problem which had nearly taken a Jewish life.

"The leader, who had cast his fear upon the neighborhood, became very close with me and turned into a decent person. When his mother meets me she can't thank me enough. I feel tremendous

satisfaction that I helped avert bloodshed."

SEVENTY PEOPLE ON SHABBOS

In addition to his work with youth, R' Binyamin is the founder and rav of the Mishkan Menachem shul, where dozens of people daven every day. He does not mix the shiurim and farbrengens that take place there with his work with the youth, even though it was that outreach work that led to his opening the shul.

"I looked for a place where I could expand my work with the kids. The pizzeria was too small. I went to the local sports center and rented a hall from them. When the guys wanted a minyan, too, I opened a shul there.

"Since I couldn't rely on the boys for a minyan, I advertised a new shul, Nusach Chabad, and the minyan grows from Shabbos to Shabbos. At this point we have about 70-80 people on a Shabbos. In addition to t'fillos we have shiurim on Shabbos and weekdays. Every Shabbos there is a big farbrengen.

"Another area that I deal with is writing to the Rebbe. Many people who daven at the shul write to the Rebbe and see amazing things happen. The same is true for the many people who call in to my broadcast segment on the program hosted by R' Revach on Moreshet Radio."

R' Binyamin is the kind of person you talk to for hours. He's a people person with outstanding social skills and has amassed a sizable collection of stories that way. I asked him to pick one story and it was only after lengthy deliberation that he was able to select one.

"One of the regulars at the shul called me and said, 'I have a serious problem.' His wife, who had recently given birth, was suffering from

serious depression. He called me at eleven o'clock at night and said his wife had chased him out of the house and did not let him back in. It was her fifth baby and there had been no problems with the previous births. Whoever he had tried to get involved, whether relatives or close friends, had been unsuccessful with her.

"I asked him to give me their home phone number. I called the wife and introduced myself and suggested that we write to the Rebbe with the Igros Kodesh and that whatever the Rebbe would say, she would do. Although she was not religious, she agreed.

"The Rebbe's answer was amazing. The Rebbe referred to the story of Sarah Imeinu and wrote to someone that he had to remain with his wife despite the suffering this caused him. I called her back and told her the answer, that she had to let her husband into the house. After some hesitation she agreed. When I told him that she would be allowing him back, he didn't believe me until the actual moment that he walked into his house.

"A week went by and the woman called me and said that since her family had grown, they decided to move to a more spacious apartment and maybe this was the source of their shalom bayis problems. She said that a big building was going up in the neighborhood and the apartments being sold in it were reasonably priced.

"We wrote to the Rebbe and the Rebbe's answer was to stay put and not move. She thanked me for my help but two weeks later she called back and said that she had not listened to the Rebbe. She loved the idea of moving and had given 10,000 shekels to the contractor. Now she wanted to write again because her conscience was bothering her. She apologized for not listening to the Rebbe and promised that if the Rebbe gave her

She was very disappointed and hung up on me. A few days went by and I got a call from her husband. I could hear shouting in the background. It sounded like bedlam and chaos. What was going on?

a positive answer then she would keep Shabbos.

"I wrote a letter for her but I explained that the Rebbe couldn't be bribed. When I opened the Igros Kodesh, the Rebbe, once again, was opposed to her moving. I had to disappoint her and tell her that the Rebbe did not give his bracha to the move. She was very upset and said, 'What – the Rebbe doesn't want me to keep Shabbos?!' I told her that the Rebbe doesn't take bribes. He sees with a different sort of vision and gives brachos accordingly.

"After another three weeks she called me again and said, 'Tomorrow I have to give 100,000 shekels towards the purchase price. Please ask the Rebbe again.' I agreed to write and this time the letter was written to someone who wanted to move and the Rebbe said he shouldn't rush to leave his present location since he was already set up there.

"She was very disappointed and hung up on me. A few days went by and I got a call from her husband. I could hear shouting in the background. It sounded like bedlam and chaos. What was going on?

"You won't believe how farsighted the Rebbe is!' he exclaimed. 'After a long argument, we decided to listen to the Rebbe and not give the contractor the 100,000 shekels. I am at the building site and during the excavations they discovered an ancient cemetery. Now there are demonstrations going on against further excavations. The building won't be built in the end.'"

R' Binyamin told me another interesting story that happened this past summer:

"This summer I decided to go on vacation with my family to the Keinar Hotel in Teveria. Before we went, I asked the Rebbe for a bracha through the Igros Kodesh that the trip go well. I wanted to renew my energy both physically and spiritually with this vacation. In the letter that I opened to, the Rebbe wrote that physical health is not at the expense of spiritual health and that they are connected. He advised that when you go on vacation you must still make set times to learn Torah.

"We set out but I had no idea who I was supposed to learn with. The very first night, after I davened Maariv in the hotel shul, someone came over to me. He was a Lieutenant Colonel in the army, and was traveling on the road that passed the hotel and remembered that there was a minyan for Maariv there, so he stopped in. He was disappointed to find out that the davening was over. I suggested that since he had already come, we should at least sit down and learn Chassidus together, and he happily agreed. We got to talking and it turned out that he was originally from a Chassidishe family.

"When we finished learning, he suggested that since he lived in the area, perhaps we could learn every night, and so we did. The Rebbe suggested that I have set times to learn and he even found me a good chavrusa."

SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT IN MESSIANIC TIMES

By Prof. Shimon Silman, RYAL Institute and Touro College

The more that science reveals of the unity inherent within nature, the more the unity of G-d is revealed – from below. This sets the stage for the complete revelation of the unity of G-d from above in the Era of Moshiach.

SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT

There are two searches — the search of the mind and the search of the soul.

The search of the mind is the search of the scientist who seeks wisdom from within the world in order to describe the world as he sees it. He examines, experiments, and constructs mathematical models and theories to describe what he sees.

The search of the soul is a search for wisdom from beyond the world in an attempt to explain why it is this way. The soul looks to the Torah for the underlying

truth and for instruction on how to live in accordance with that truth.

The ultimate goal is that the two searches converge, for the same truth must be reached from whichever direction it is approached. But this goal is attained only in the Era of Moshiach (the Messianic Era) when “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as water covers the sea.”¹ At that time all knowledge will converge to and be covered by the knowledge of G-d.

At first glance the search of

the mind and the search of the soul seem to conflict. After all, the conclusions of the scientists have often been very different from the teachings of the Torah. In fact, historically, those who studied the sciences often did so with the intent of substituting human perceptions and reason for belief in G-d, and atheistic ideologies would typically refer to science in an attempt to negate belief in G-d.

In light of this, one would imagine that the belief in Moshiach, a personality who will bring the whole world to believe in G-d and to be concerned only with the knowledge of G-d, is diametrically opposed to everything that science represents. Surprisingly, that’s not the case.

On the contrary, some of the greatest scientists of the 20th century say that their study of the universe brought them to an awareness of a Supreme Being above and beyond the universe, a Creator who created the universe with a definite purpose. Some have even characterized their research as an attempt to find out what G-d had in mind when He created the universe.

The greatest 20th century scientist, Albert Einstein, expressed this as follows: “I want to know how G-d created this world. I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know G-d’s thoughts. The rest are details.”² The famous theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking, said “If we do discover a theory of everything...it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would truly know the mind of G-d.

In 1992, another famous theoretical physicist, Paul Davies,

published a book discussing the relationship between science and religion called “The Mind of G-d” which won him the Templeton prize of \$1,000,000. The scientist who led the team that cracked the human genome, Francis Collins, director of the U.S. National Human Genome Research Institute, in his book “The Language of G-d,” writes, “When you have for the first time in front of you this 3.1 billion-letter instruction book that conveys all kinds of information and all kinds of mystery about humankind...I can’t help but look at those pages and have a vague sense that this is giving me a glimpse of G-d’s mind.”

Something must have happened to break the barrier between the search of the mind and the search of the soul and enable their convergence to begin. But what happened and when?

The answer to this question is to be found in one of the *sichos* (talks)³ of the Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach based on the Zohar, the classic text on Kabbala, written nearly 2,000 years ago by the great sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. The Zohar makes an amazing prediction based on a verse in the Torah about the flood in the time of Noah.

The Torah says that, “In the 600th year of the life of Noah...all the fountains of the depths split open and the windows of heaven opened up”⁴ Referring to this, the Zohar makes the following statement: “In the 600th year of the 6th millennium [the year 5600 on the Jewish calendar which corresponds to 1840 on the secular calendar] the gates of wisdom above will open and the fountains of wisdom below and thus the world will be set to enter the 7th millennium,” the

Messianic Era.

The opening of the “gates of wisdom above” refers to the tremendous revelation of the deeper levels of the Torah — the teachings of *Chassidus*, especially the publication of the works of the *Alter Rebbe*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chassidus, which give us a deeper understanding and greater knowledge of G-d. This prepares the world for the coming of Moshiach when “The world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d.”

The “fountains of wisdom below” refers to the discoveries and development of modern science. This requires some explanation — how could scientific progress actually *play a role* in preparing the world for Moshiach? Science has always been considered the enemy of religion. How could it come about that science not only becomes a friend of Judaism but actually helps prepare the world for the greatest Jewish religious event of all time — the coming of Moshiach?!

In the *sicha*, known in Torah-and-science circles simply as “*The Sichah of Parshas Noach*”, the Rebbe MH”M discusses three ways in which the sciences prepare the world for Moshiach:

In describing the unique character of the knowledge of G-d in the Era of Moshiach, the Prophet Isaiah says, “All flesh will see that the mouth of G-d has spoken,”⁵ i.e. that G-dliness itself will be visible. The first way in which modern science and technology prepare us for the Era of Moshiach is by enabling us to visualize certain concepts relating to G-d which would otherwise be understood only abstractly. As an example, the Mishneh in *Avos* tells us to be aware that there is “an

eye that sees and an ear that hears”. We believe that G-d is always watching everything we do. Now that we are familiar with communication technology which transmits audio and video signals across the world so that people can be seen and heard instantly on the other side of the world, it is easy to comprehend — to actually visualize and not just believe in — the omnipresent watchfulness of G-d.

Secondly, by making use of the technology derived from the sciences. For example, communication technology can be used to spread knowledge of G-d -Torah — throughout the world. As mentioned, the Era of Moshiach is characterized as a time when “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d.” The electromagnetic waves which carry knowledge of G-d over radio or TV bring this information not only to listeners and viewers all over the world, but even to places where there are no listeners, since the electromagnetic waves spread throughout the whole world. Thus these broadcasts actually *fill the world* with the knowledge of G-d.

On the deepest level, the sciences themselves — the theories developed and the knowledge derived — prepare us for the Era of Moshiach in a third way: the ultimate knowledge of G-d that will be revealed in the Era of Moshiach is the absolute unity of G-d. But the world as we perceive it appears to present an opposite picture of reality — many different forces of nature and many different substances rather than any kind of unity. In the last 160 years, however, it has been shown through scientific research that the various forces of nature are just combinations of a few

The famous theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking, said “If we do discover a theory of everything...it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would truly know the mind of G-d.”

basic forces and the various substances in the world are built from a few basic components — protons neutrons and electrons. This deeper understanding of the unity within the physical world which was discovered through scientific research helps prepare us for the revelation of the ultimate unity – the *Achdus P’shuta*⁶, the absolute unity of G-d which is revealed in the time of Moshiach.

The unity that exists within nature is an expression of the unity of G-d, the Creator. Since He is one, His creation, with its multitude of materials and forces, has an intrinsic unity. Thus, our awareness of the unity within nature is essentially an awareness of the unity of G-d. The more that science reveals of the unity inherent within nature, the more the unity of G-d is revealed – from below. This sets the stage for the complete revelation of the unity of G-d from above in the Era of Moshiach.

Thus we may say that the 20th century scientists, who came to an awareness of the Creator through their scientific research, were merely riding the crest of a new wave — a wave from the flood of a new type of knowledge flowing into the world. This was knowledge of a type that showed unity in the world and induced the scientist with an open mind and a sensitive heart to recognize the Supreme Power, the Master

Planner who designed and created the universe with a certain purpose in mind.

Theoretical physics, in particular, seems to have developed into a search for G-d. Earlier, we quoted Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking and Paul Davies who described their quest to know the “mind of G-d.” Davies once wrote that science offers “a surer path to G-d than religion.”⁷ Another prominent theoretical physicist, David Finkelstein, described his life’s work as a quest to understand “how G-d might have thought the world into existence.”⁸

An “exception that proves the rule” is the recent book *The Trouble with Physics* by Lee Smolin, a prominent theoretical physicist. It is a survey of the history and current state of affairs of modern theoretical physics. It is not about science and religion. Yet the first sentence of the book reads, “There may or may not be a G-d...” All of a sudden he’s talking about G-d!

What happened here? Was he copying from the wrong manuscript? No. For him theoretical physics is nothing less than what we have described as the “search from below,” as he goes on to explain, “Yet there is something ennobling about our search for the divine...which is reflected in each of the paths people have discovered to take us

to deeper levels of truth. Some seek transcendence in meditation or prayer....Another way of engaging life’s deepest questions is science...If they are physicists, they want to know about space and time, and what brought the world into existence.”

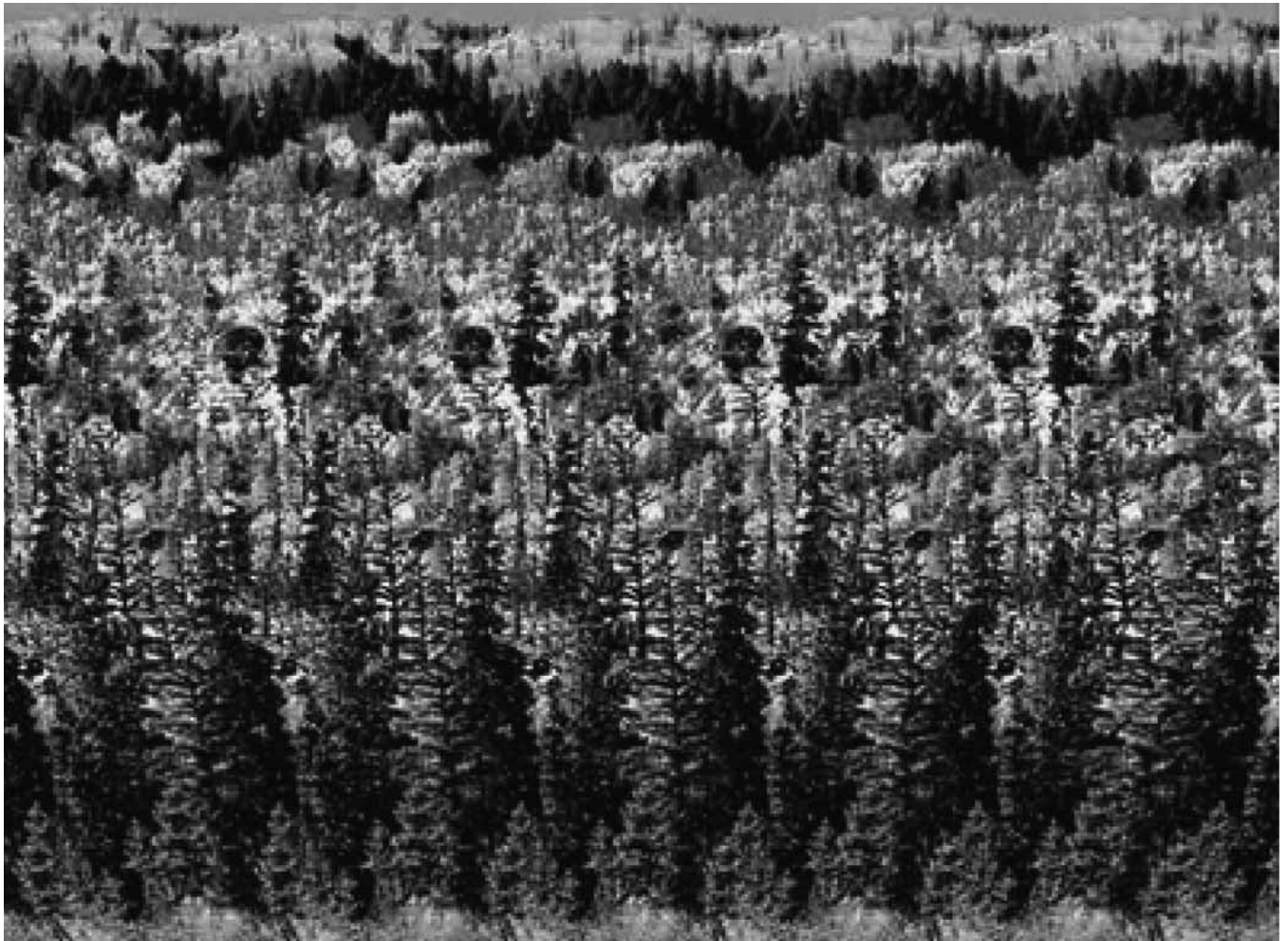
For Smolin, it seems that science itself is a search for G-d.

Similarly, it has been asserted that mathematicians whose field of interest is mathematical logic (like me) are not like other mathematicians whose primary interest is the mathematics itself or the applications of mathematics to other areas. Mathematical logicians, it is claimed, are engaged in a metaphysical quest – they are searching for G-d.⁹

An outstanding feature of Smolin’s book is his emphasis on unification. As he traces the development of modern scientific theories, he explains how each new stage of development brought greater unification among the existing theories. (Perhaps Smolin’s emphasis on unification is related to his feeling that science is a search for the divine.) This, of course, is of fundamental importance to us since the unification of the forces and materials of nature is the aspect of modern science that prepares the world for the Era of Moshiach.

...IN MESSIANIC TIMES

The Zohar says that this new flood of knowledge is a prelude to the Era of Moshiach. But what exactly is the Era of Moshiach and who is Moshiach? The Era of Moshiach and Moshiach himself are discussed extensively in the Prophets, the Talmud and Kabbala, and in many subsequent books throughout the generations. The readers of this



The deer is “hiding” in plain view – just open your eyes!

magazine are certainly already familiar with much of this information. But for now we want to make the point that we are currently in the Era of Moshiach. There are actually two points to address — one identifying the era and one identifying Moshiach himself.

The emergence of the great Jewish leader who is ultimately revealed as Moshiach, is described by *Rambam* (Maimonides) in his work on Jewish Law, *Mishneh Torah*.¹⁰ He describes the sequence of events leading up to the revelation of Moshiach. He begins by stating that Melech HaMoshiach (the King

Moshiach), a descendant of King David, will arise and restore the dynasty of King David. He then describes the gradual emergence of the Jewish leader from the House of David who will speak in Torah, deal in Mitzvos, return the Jews to the observance of Judaism, strengthen the observance of Judaism where it has been broken and fight the wars of G-d. This leader is assumed to be Moshiach. This description has characterized the leadership of the Rebbe MH”M since 1950, bringing many Jews to look to him as the leader who would be revealed as Moshiach. While he was opposed to publicizing this until recently, over the years some people who

addressed him as Moshiach received a positive response, myself included.¹¹

As the Persian Gulf War began to brew at the end of 1990, the world braced itself for an intense, high technology war expected to last for months, while the fear persisted that the international entanglements might naturally lead to a world war as had happened twice before. The Rebbe MH”M, however, in his talks during those months, repeatedly quoted a Midrash from the *Yalkut Shimoni*¹² which foretold the war. The Midrash says that these events would take place in “the year that Melech HaMoshiach is revealed”, that the

“Some seek transcendence in meditation or prayer... Another way of engaging life’s deepest questions is science... If they are physicists, they want to know about space and time, and what brought the world into existence.”

entire world and especially the Jewish people would be worried but that G-d would say (through a prophet) to the Jews, “My children, do not be afraid...the time of your redemption has arrived.”

Thus the Rebbe MH”M said prophetically that Israel would be safe and encouraged Jews to travel there, and indicated that the war would be over by Purim. Everything happened exactly as he said. Even though 39 Scud missiles fell in Israel, no Jews were killed by them. And the war ended on Purim. It was then clear that this was the revelation of Melech Moshiach. In his talks during 1991-92 the Rebbe MH”M stated many times that this was in fact the case and made it clear that he is Melech HaMoshiach. On two occasions in May, 1991, he publicly encouraged the singing of the declaration “*Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu V’Rabbeinu Melech HaMoshiach L’olam Va’ed!*” (“Long live our master, teacher and Rebbe King Moshiach forever”) and subsequently encouraged many people who were publicizing the fact that he is Moshiach to continue doing so.

It should be emphasized that this phrase, “The time of your redemption has arrived,” is the key phrase by which Melech HaMoshiach is identified, as we see from the continuation of the Yalkut Shimoni: “At the time that

Melech HaMoshiach comes...he announces to the Jews, ‘O, humble ones, the time of your redemption has arrived!’ ” The Rebbe MH”M made it clear that he was making the declaration that identified him as Moshiach.

In a very powerful speech on 28 Nisan, 5751 (1991), the Rebbe MH”M addressed himself to the Jewish people with the message, “Do everything in your power...to bring about the actualization of Moshiach *Tzidkeinu* immediately.”¹³ Moshiach had already been revealed and we were being instructed to bring this revelation to the world. Many projects to implement this were initiated with the Rebbe MH”M’s encouragement.

In the spring of 1992, he suffered a stroke, following which the activities to bring Moshiach intensified with his encouragement. Two hundred Rabbinical authorities worldwide signed a *P’sak Din* (Halachic ruling) dated 11 Nisan, 5752 (1992), declaring that the Lubavitcher Rebbe has the assumed status of being Moshiach (*B’chezkas Moshiach*) as stated in Rambam.

Throughout the year 5753 (1992-1993), whenever the Rebbe MH”M would enter “770” for *davening* (prayers), sometimes three times a day, the service, in which thousands participated,

would be followed by the singing of “*Yechi Adoneinu...*” The Rebbe MH”M encouraged this enthusiastically and, on occasion, it was broadcast worldwide via satellite.

In the Talmudic writings there is a description of a conversation that will take place between the Jews and Moshiach after he is revealed. The Jews approach him, addressing him by the title *Rabbeinu Melech HaMoshiach*, (“our Rebbe, King Moshiach”) and ask him certain questions about the redemption.¹⁴ This is the title by which countless Jews throughout the world now refer to him and thus in this book we refer to him as the *Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach* or the *Rebbe MH”M*.

On 27 Tishrei 5754 (1993), I was part of a group that had the privilege to pass before the Rebbe MH”M and receive from him a dollar-for-*tz’daka*.¹⁵ As I passed before him, I greeted him saying, “*Shalom Aleichem, Melech HaMoshiach!*” and he nodded to me in acceptance.

Melech HaMoshiach has emerged and has been clearly identified and we are now living in the Era of Moshiach as the Rebbe MH”M himself said on 19 Kislev, 5752 (1991): “*In these days — the Days of Moshiach — which we are now in, all we need to do is open our eyes and then we see that the true and complete Geula is already here, literally.*”¹⁶

The idea that one “opens his eyes” to see something means that the thing is already there in front of him, but that he doesn’t really see what he’s looking at. This may mean that he must take a deeper, more penetrating look, possibly on a more abstract or spiritual level. But it could simply be that he is looking at something, or listening to something, and he doesn’t grasp

or notice certain aspects of it, even physical aspects. This may be because his senses are not attuned to it or because his mind is not focused on it or is distracted by some other aspect of it.

This happens frequently when one is so preoccupied with the details of what he is considering that he misses the overall picture. This is described by the famous metaphor “he can’t see the forest for the trees.”

In recent years, a technique known as “magic eye” has been developed to generate certain computer images that appear to the viewer as a certain two dimensional scene. For example, in the image reproduced here, it is a field of flowers. When the viewer deliberately “blanks out” his focus and “opens his eyes” he sees a three dimensional image instead of a two dimensional image, with new objects visible in the scene.¹⁷ In this image it is a deer standing in the middle of the field of flowers. The deer – a metaphor for Moshiach – is hiding in plain view! The viewer need only open his eyes.

As another example, a few years ago I heard a report on NPR radio by someone who was researching the chirping of birds. In one case he recorded the

chirping of a certain bird that sounded to the human ear as a one tone tweet. But when he played it at a much slower speed, one could hear that this single tweet was actually an entire song with different tones, high notes and low notes etc. All this was blurred at normal speed and thus inaudible to the human ear.

The story is the same for all our senses, as well as our intellectual perception. For that matter, the history of science is replete with the misperceptions of one generation being corrected by the revolutionary new theories of the next generation.

The Rebbe MH”M is telling us that the same is true of the world as we are used to looking at it – a world of *Galus*. But this is a misperception due to our past experience and former ways of looking at things. He is now telling us to open our eyes and see *Geula* in the world.

NOTES:

1 Isaiah 11:9

2 *The Expanded Quotable Einstein* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 202

3 *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, pp. 42-48

4 B’Reishis 7:11

5 Isaiah 40: 5

6 Achdus P’shuta literally means

“simple unity,” which means a unity that does not consist of parts. There is only one G-d and He has no subdivisions.

⁷ Reported in the *Albany Times Union*, March 9, 1995

⁸ Quoted in Lee Smolin, *The Trouble with Physics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), p. 322

⁹ David Leavitt, author of *The Man Who Knew Too Much: Alan Turing and the Invention of the Computer* (Norton, 2005) in a radio interview on the John Batchelor Show.

¹⁰ *Laws of Kings*, ch. 11-12

¹¹ In 1985, my family sent a gift to the Rebbe MH”M for his birthday, 11 Nisan. It was the 1st edition of the seifer *Beis Aharon V’Hosafos*, compiled by his ancestor (on his mother’s side) Rabbi Avraham Dovid Lavut. I wrote a cover letter in which I addressed him as *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* and to which I received a positive response expressing thanks.

¹² *Yalkut Shimoni*, Isaiah, sec. 499

¹³ *Seifer HaSichos* 5751, vol. 2, p. 474

¹⁴ *P’sikta Rabsi*, Chapter 15, sec. 71

¹⁵ This has been the only such event since the stroke.

¹⁶ *Seifer HaSichos* 5752, vol. 1, p. 173

¹⁷ The magic eye technique, in addition to being fascinating and fun, it is also used in various vision therapies.

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THE LIGHTER SIDE OF SHLICHUS – TAKE 2

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz
Shliach, Beit Shaan

After last week's column, some shluchim contacted me with amusing stories of their own. These were just too good not to share...

THE “FOUR QUESTIONS” FOR PURIM

Out of respect for the yishuv, I will not mention its name, but there is a lovely yishuv somewhere in the north where, due to their great admiration for the Rebbe and Chabad, the administration of this public school agreed to have a shliach serve as the school's rabbi. He visits all the classes once a week, gives a shiur, and invites the children and their parents to all the Chabad house activities.

This beloved rabbi asks the children questions during the course of his lessons. The children usually know the right answers but sometimes, they're a little off the mark.

Here's a sampling:

Question: Who knows why we eat dairy foods on Shavuos?

Answer: It's because of Sarah and Golyas.

Question: Who knows why we eat doughnuts on Chanuka?

Answer: Because of the flour that rose when they left Egypt.

Question: Who knows why Avrohom Avinu made a tent with four doors?

Answer: So he would have fresh air from all directions.

Question: Who knows why we call the upcoming holiday Yom Kippur?

Answer: It's because of the Yom Kippur War.

The rabbi explains the real

answer, that it's a day of kappara (atonement) for all the Jewish people, and then asks: Who knows what “kappara” is?

Answer: Kappara is like neshama or motek (terms of endearment). “Like when my mother calls me, ‘Come, my kappara.’”

Question: Why does the fourth son not know how to ask?

Answer: Because he is embarrassed that everyone will know that he doesn't know how to ask.

HOW COME WE DON'T “PLANT” PLAY EQUIPMENT

Questions and answers such as these are not exclusive to children. An older man went to the shliach in his city before Sukkos and asked where he could buy the four minim. He said that in previous years he had looked enviously at the people going to shul with their minim but he had never known where to buy them.

That year, in order to be prepared, he had searched up and down the aisles of the big supermarket but had not found where they kept the four minim.

In another incident, a municipal worker asked the city administrator why they weren't completing the city playground. “It's missing a see-saw, slide etc. and parents are complaining.”

The administrator somehow got things mixed up, explaining that the playground equipment was made out of wood and was not allowed to be installed in the ground in a Shmita year.

WONDER OF WONDERS ON LAG B'OMER

For some reason, due to a widespread error among certain Jews, they refer to all the days of the Omer as “Lag B'Omer.” In Dimona, someone told the shliach, R' Yisroel Gliss, that he had three sons and

they were all born on Lag B'Omer. They called one Shimon, the second Bar, and the third Yochai.

The shliach was quite surprised that all three were born on Lag B'Omer until he found out that the man meant the period of S'firas HaOmer.

Another person once approached the shliach in his town on Lag B'Omer and excitedly told him that he had checked the calendar over many years and he had discovered that every single year Lag B'Omer falls out on the same day in the Omer, the 33rd. And amazingly, the numerical value of the letters Lamed and Gimmel (LaG) are 33! How incredible that Lag B'Omer always falls out on the day that we count 33.

Another widespread error is to call all the first Nine Days in Av "Tisha B'Av." Someone once said that in his community they did not eat meat on Tisha B'Av. I thought this pretty obvious, considering that it's a fast day. It took a while till I realized that he meant he does not eat meat during the Nine Days.

PARSHA SHEET IN THE BATHROOM

The following story is sad but moving - sad because of the ignorance but moving because it shows how interested Jews are in matters of holiness.

Rabbi Roi Tor, shliach in the Beit Shaan Valley, is constantly making great efforts to expand the circle of talmidim-mekuravim to Chassidus. He began publishing a colorful weekly parsha sheet that he calls *Likrat Kalla* and he distributes it among members of the kibbutzim.

One of the mekuravim, a member of an irreligious kibbutz, began keeping mitzvos after reading this page and participating in a shiur, but sadly, his wife wasn't interested in shiurim and mitzvos. What did the mekurav do? Every



week he left the sheet in various places around the house so his wife would see it.

Lately, said R' Tor, he is looking for the most strategic places to ensure that his wife will read it. He discovered that the bathroom is an excellent spot because people read whatever they find there.

The story reminds me of how Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz was annoyed (about pages of Chassidus blowing around outside) and the Alter Rebbe found merit ... We all hope that soon we won't need methods such as these because the earth will be covered with knowledge of Hashem like waters cover the sea.

When I first began getting involved with Chabad, there was a story going around about a yeshiva bachur who had gotten interested in Chabad and learned that Hashem is everywhere including impure places and He sees everything.

This was a chiddush to him because he had always learned that Hashem is not in impure places. He asked one of the rabbanim in his Litvishe yeshiva, who confirmed

what he had thought previously. The bachur asked, "If Hashem is really not in the bathroom, then can we sin there?"

The rabbi thought about it and finally replied, "No, because Hashem can do anything and He sees you through the keyhole!"

T'FILLIN ON FRIDAY NIGHT

One of the shluchim told a story that happened around the time of the terrorist attack in Bombay. You will remember that until Shabbos began we did not know what had happened. One of the mekuravim of the shliach in our story went to shul Shabbos morning and told the shliach excitedly, "Last night (Friday night) I heard on the news what happened in India. I was so upset when I heard the shluchim were murdered that I decided I had to do a mitzva to triumph over the terrorists. I immediately went to the closet, took out my t'fillin, put them on and recited the entire t'filla."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev would love this story.

A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

By Dr. Aryeh Gotfryd

Usually we can find a way to write off these coincidences to random chance. But then there are coincidences that do more than raise eyebrows - they blow minds.

Freaky. Spooky. We've all had that feeling when those random details that comprise daily life suddenly fall into place as if... as if... they are not really random after all.

Like when you have just mentioned someone's name and they unexpectedly call or walk into the room. Or when you suddenly feel you're being watched and you turn to surprise some stranger who had been mindlessly gazing in your direction.

Usually we can find a way to write off these coincidences to random chance. After all, the guy behind me had to be looking in *some* direction, and there are only so many people I could be speaking about who are likely to call or walk into the room.

But then there are coincidences that do more than raise eyebrows - they blow minds. Here's a personal story to exemplify.

My father died when I was three years old and because he was sick for quite a while, I never got to know him. In fact, I have only one

memory of him. It was late December and my mother took me to visit him in the hospital during his final days.

We stopped in the gift shop and as little kids do, I set my fancy on a little something and would not be swayed. It was a cute little wooden evergreen tree with some red decorations and snow-white trimmings. My mother said, "No, let's get daddy something else," but I started to cry and make a fuss and soon the prized little gift was in my hand.

Daddy was lying in the hospital bed when we arrived. I handed him the little seasonal memento and he took a good look at it and then set it down on the bedside table. Then he turned and picked me up with his strong arms and held me over him, playing with me and turning me this way and that... and that was all. He passed away a few days later on the 24th of Teves in 1959.

Twenty-two years later, I lit a *yahrtzait* candle for my father, as I did every year on the anniversary of

his passing. But that year, another candle somehow got lit - the candle of my soul - as a result of what seemed like a chance encounter with a Chabad rabbi.

The experience would not have been more transformational if I had walked into the room a caterpillar and left, a butterfly. My cocoon was a six-hour argument with a man who had questions for all my answers and answers for all my questions.

I was intrigued by his message of how to live a passionate yet dignified life, but did not want to be sucked into any dumb religion. After all, to my view then, religion was a crutch and G-d was just a theory. And with all the religions around, why would Judaism be the true one, and who says that there's a soul or an afterlife, and what about the age of the universe and Darwin and the big bang, and Moses' nepotism, and the oral tradition's broken telephone, and all those crazy miracles and even if they did happen, why don't they happen today? Besides, how could the Jews be "chosen" since all people are alike, and what about the six million and why do bad things happen to good people if G-d is just?

Somehow, as educated as I was, and by that time you could say I was in Grade 20, on every single issue, this Chabad rabbi presented challenging perspectives and information that turned my questions back on me, and also opened my eyes to the fact that the rabbinic tradition has involved more than spending three millennia trying to memorize the ten commandments. Did that leave me a believer? Not exactly, but it certainly suspended my disbelief and left me open to the possibility that when Jews pray and say the word "ata," Someone may in fact be listening.

Within a few weeks, I was praying and studying a little every day. By three months I was keeping kosher and Shabbos. And after a

year, I was engaged to a nice Jewish girl, a miracle in and of itself.

On the afternoon of the 24th of Teves 1982, a year to the day from my transformational encounter with Chabad, I found myself hurrying through the final pages of a book that I really wanted to finish before rushing off to the other side of campus to close a very big open bracket in my life. I was going to say the *Kaddish* prayer for my father for the very first time.

The book was called *The Philosophy of Chabad* and as I turned to the final page, a curtain suddenly lifted and I caught a glimpse of the invisible Hand of G-d. The book, which is mainly a biography of the Alter Rebbe who founded the Chabad movement, concludes with mention of his *yahrtzait*, the 24th of Teves.

The synchronicity was overwhelming. Here I'm reading

The experience would not have been more transformational if I had walked into the room a caterpillar and left, a butterfly. My cocoon was a six-hour argument with a man who had questions for all my answers and answers for all my questions.

about the Alter Rebbe's *yahrtzait* for the first time, on the date itself, which is also my father's *yahrtzait*, as well as the anniversary of my doing *t'shuva* a year before on the same date as a result of an encounter with the very movement that inspired me to *t'shuva*.

And all this at the moment that I'm about to mark the date with my first *Kaddish* prayer, so long

overdue.

Even my one and only memory of my father seemed like a link in the chain, for what could possibly be going through the mind of a holocaust survivor from a chassidic family as he receives a toy Xmas tree on his deathbed from his three-year-old son? Only *t'shuva* - a *t'shuva* that reverberated in heaven and spilled out into my life decades later in an awakening from above.

Freaky? Spooky? Not for me. I have an explanation. But for those readers who are skeptically inclined to invoke "dumb luck" rather than the invisible Hand of G-d, refer to the article, *The Whole Megillah* on www.arniegotfryd.com, which also serves as a good warm up to our next big holiday, Purim.

When Moshiach comes, there will be no Argument for Design, there will just be the Artistry of the Designer, revealed for all to see, and no more will we have to satisfy ourselves with little glimpses behind the curtain for "our eyes will behold our Teacher," with the coming of Moshiach NOW!

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