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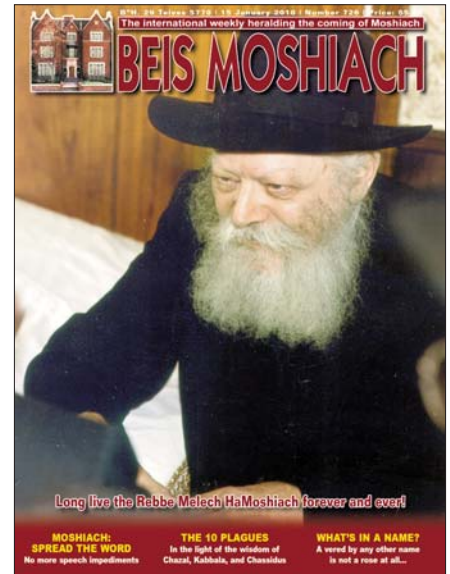
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Beis Moshiah (USPS 012-542) ISSN 1082-0272 is published weekly, except Jewish holidays (only once in April and October) for \$160.00 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and in all other places for \$180.00 per year (45 issues), by Beis Moshiah, 744 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213-3409. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY and additional offices. Postmaster: send address changes to Beis Moshiah 744 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213-3409. Copyright 2010 by Beis Moshiah, Inc.

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# SEEING AND BELIEVING

Sichos In English

## PRISONS OF THE MIND

When the Torah mentions the name of a place, the intent is not only the geographic location, but also a state of mind, and a spiritual set of circumstances.

In this context, Mitzrayim, the Hebrew name for Egypt, serves as a paradigm, teaching us what exile is, and demonstrating the essence of the spiritual challenge which our people have confronted throughout their national history.

Mitzrayim relates to the Hebrew word *meitzarim*, meaning "boundaries," or "limitations."

The nature of material existence confines and limits the expression of G-dliness in the world at large, and the expression of the G-dly spark within our souls.

This is exile - an unnatural state.

For the true reality, that the world was created to be a dwelling for G-d, [1] and that a person's soul is an actual part of G-d, [2] is concealed.

In such a setting, a person's center of focus becomes himself and his individual concerns, the daily routine of his life, and the objectives he sets for himself.

Spiritual values - if he considers them at all - are interpreted according to his own conception and personal makeup. [3]

Moreover, exile is an environment that naturally perpetuates itself.

Our Sages relate [4] that not one slave could escape from Egypt.

Similarly, in a spiritual sense, in exile, the setting in which a person lives reinforces his fundamental conception.

There appears no way to change the situation.

To borrow an expression from our Sages: [5] "A person in fetters cannot set himself free from prison."

Since the person's thought processes are shaped by the environment of exile, he has no means of seeing beyond his existing horizons.

## AN END TO EXILE

And yet, the exile will not last forever.

Although man cannot set himself free through his own powers, G-d refuses to allow exile to continue indefinitely.

The first step of redemption is a direct revelation of G-dliness.

Since the fundamental aspect of exile is the concealment of G-d's presence, the nullification of exile involves revealing G-dliness openly within the context of our material existence. And this will also have an effect within the personal sphere, shaking people out of their self-concern and opening them up to spiritual awareness.

This is the message of this week's Torah reading, Parshas VaEira.

VaEira means "And I revealed Myself."

The root of VaEira is the word

r'iya meaning "sight."

VaEira refers to a revelation of G-dliness that can be directly seen by a person.

This theme is continued throughout the Torah reading which describes seven of the ten plagues, open miracles which had a twofold purpose as the Torah states: [6] "I will display My power... I will bring forth My hosts from Egypt.... And Egypt will know that I am G-d."

These plagues made the world at large conscious of G-d's presence.

Even the Egyptians whose ruler had proudly boasted, [7] "I do not know G-d," became aware of Him and acknowledged, [8] "This is the finger of G-d."

Moreover, this awareness was not merely intellectual.

Because the miracles were openly seen, they transformed the peoples' thinking.

When an idea is communicated intellectually, it takes time before it is assimilated into one's thinking and begins to affect one's conduct.

When, by contrast, a person sees something, it immediately changes the way he thinks.

And the effects are more powerful.

Once a person sees an event transpire, there is no way he can be convinced that it did not take place. The impression sight creates is lasting, indelibly imprinted upon his mind. [9]

## A RICH INHERITANCE

It is, however, natural for a person to ask:

"When have I seen G-dliness?"

Perhaps in the past, there were miracles, but of what relevance are they at present?

The answer to this question is found in Rashi's commentary to the verse from which the Torah reading takes its name, [10] "And I revealed Myself to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov."

Rashi comments “to the forefathers.”

Seemingly, Rashi’s comment is superfluous.

We all know that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, served as the forefathers of the Jewish people.

After the verse mentions them each by name, there is no need to mention their title.

Rashi, however, is emphasizing that the revelations were granted to them, not because of their own individual virtues, but because they were forefathers, and their spiritual attainments would be transferred as an inheritance to their descendants in subsequent generations. [11]

By revealing Himself to our forefathers, G-d made the awareness of Him a fundamental element of the makeup of their descendants for all time.

## TAKING POSSESSION OF THE LEGACY

Nevertheless, although the legacy of our forefathers is an active potential within our hearts, it is not always in our conscious forefront.

Each of us must endeavor to internalize the faith our forefathers endowed us, and make it his or her own.

And this will not necessarily happen by itself.

Unless we make efforts, it is possible for our inner faith and our conscious thought to operate on skew lines, creating a dichotomy between belief and actual life.

The need to resolve this dichotomy explains why, the previous Torah reading, Parshas Shmos, concludes by telling how Moshe approached G-d, and asked: “O G-d, why do You mistreat Your people?”

Moshe’s question did not reflect a lack of faith.

Undoubtedly, Moshe believed; and so did all the people, for Jews are by nature “believers, and the descendants of believers.” [12]

But Moshe realized that his responsibility was to be a shepherd of faith, [13] to nurture the people’s faith until it affected their thinking processes. And for this reason he asked.

### Miracles in Our Lives

In response to Moshe’s question, G-d brought about the miracles described in our Torah reading.

Moshe’s endeavors to make our people’s faith a factor in their everyday lives evoked a response from G-d that showed that the faith was justified.

Similar concepts apply in every generation, for miracles are not a thing of the past. [14]

In every generation, G-d shows His great love for His people by performing miracles that transcend the natural order.

At times, the person to whom the miracle occurs does not recognize what has happened, [15] and on other occasions, the miracles are open, plainly obvious for all to see.

Indeed, in the recent past, we have seen great wonders which G-d has wrought on behalf of the Jewish people, among them: the Gulf War, the fall of Communism, and the massive waves of Jews coming to Eretz Yisroel.

Our prophets have promised, [16] “As in the days of your exodus from Egypt, I will show you wonders.”

Just as the miracles which G-d wrought in Egypt heralded the exodus, so too, may the miracles we have witnessed - and will witness in the future - foreshadow the ultimate Redemption.

And may this take place in the immediate future.

*Adapted from Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XVI, p. 52ff; Vol. XXXI, p. 25ff; Sichos Shabbos Parshas VaEira 5745; and Sichos Chaf-Vav Nissan, 5751*

### Notes:

1. Midrash Tanchuma, Parshas B’Chukosai, sec. 3. See Tanya, chapters 33 and 36.
2. Tanya, chapter 2.

3. In this context, the concept of Mitzrayim - Egypt - becomes personal in nature. Everyone has his Egypt which confines him and from which he must be redeemed. For one person, the forces preventing his inner G-dly nature from being expressed are his unchecked physical desires, and for another, they might be the reservations of his intellect. There is even an “Egypt of holiness,” which constrains a person who is devoted to the study of the Torah and the observance of its mitzvos, but who is held back by an unwillingness to make an unrestrained commitment.

No one should remain in “Egypt”. The nature of our personal “Egypt” may differ, but the obligation to struggle to transcend these limits applies universally. This is the inner meaning of the requirement to recall the exodus from Egypt every day.

4. Mechilta quoted in Rashi, Shmos 18:9.

5. Brachos 5b.

6. Exodus 7:4-5.

7. Ibid. 5:2.

8. Ibid. 8:15.

9. The effect of sight is reflected in a principle of Jewish law: that a witness cannot serve as a judge (Rosh HaShana 26a).

Once a person has seen the event in question, he is unable to fairly appreciate an argument advanced in behalf of the defendant.

10. Exodus 6:4.

11. This concept is also accentuated by a point in Jewish law.

The transfer of property to an heir is unique in that, unlike a purchaser or the receiver of a present, the heir is not considered as a new owner, but as a continuation of the testator’s estate. (See Bava Basra 159a, Tzafnas Paneiach, Milluim 13a, et al).

Similarly, with regard to our inheritance of our forefather’s spiritual legacy, the revelations which they received are passed on to us as they were received by our forefathers, without modification.

12. Shabbos 97a. See Rashi, Exodus 4:2.

13. See Torah Or, Ki Sisa 111a, and the maamer, V’Kibel HaYehudim 5687. The Pesichta to Eicha Rabba, sec. 24, refers to Moshe with the Hebrew title which means “faithful shepherd.”

The Aramaic version of this name, (which serves as the title of one of the component parts of the Zohar), has that meaning, but also the connotation “shepherd of faith.”

14. Therefore the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 218:9), a text which contains only laws applicable in the present era, includes a requirement to recite a blessing acknowledging a miracle that transpired in one life’s.

15. See Nidda 31a.

16. Micha 7:15.

# MOSHIACH: SPREAD THE WORD

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

*Suspended in midair with a half of a toe on each set of bleachers, I was able to see the Rebbe in profile and catch a few words in fits and snatches... \* Why is it that in our time it is the job of every person to teach and spread the wellsprings of Chassidus? Why did the Rebbe Rayatz speak and write so strongly against those who turn Chassidic ideas and teachings into sermons and lectures, offering their own explanations and imagery, while the Rebbe insisted that his Chassidim do just that (albeit with great care not to dilute the original)?*

## A WAR OF WORDS

On Shabbos afternoon, on the fourth day of the month of Shvat, in the year 5751 (1991), I was born again.

Okay, that definitely didn't come

out sounding right. However, that doesn't make it any less true.

The Rebbe Rayatz (cited in HaYom Yom, 30 Shvat) said, "Many Chassidim considered the day they arrived in Lubavitch to be their 'birthday.'" I had been in 770 many

times before as a child and had seen the Rebbe on numerous occasions, and even had the delightful experience of being tossed unceremoniously out of the path made for the Rebbe. However, this was the first time I went to the Rebbe with the conviction that I wanted to connect myself to him as his Chassid.

It was a few days after the January 15<sup>th</sup> deadline set for the first Gulf War, and the first rockets had been fired towards Eretz Yisroel that Friday. My family had just returned from a four-month trip in Eretz Yisroel, where I had immersed myself in a crash course on Chabad Chassidus and the nesius of the Rebbe and his teachings in particular. I fully accepted the prognostications of the Rebbe regarding the upcoming war in the Middle East, not only as prophetic but also as an expression of the power that the Tzaddik of the generation has to influence outcomes through the power of his words.

That Shabbos morning in Kensington, I decided that I had to walk to the farbrengen. My wife and in-laws expressed concerns about my safety especially considering that I only had a vague idea of the general direction and was relying on meeting up with other people walking from Flatbush or Boro Park. So, after davening and the Shabbos day meal, I set out toward the general vicinity of Prospect Park. Fortunately, I met up with two bachurim learning in the Novominsker yeshiva walking from Boro Park.

When I got to the farbrengen, shortly after it had already begun, it was readily apparent that there was no place to stand where one could both see and hear. Although it was completely out of character, I decided to climb up between the bleachers at the front end of the Rebbe's platform and the bleachers



that cut off the front end of the shul. Suspended in midair with a half of a toe on each set of bleachers, I was able to see the Rebbe in profile and catch a few words in fits and snatches. (I later found out that the only reason I wasn't sent flying from my precarious perch was because I was still clean shaven at the time so people felt sorry for the crazy "outsider").

At one point the Rebbe inclined his head towards the right and in a louder tone spoke about the impending miracles and the terrible defeat of Saddam, and added that G-d should put the right idea in the mind of President Bush so that he finish off Saddam completely. This part of the sicha I was able to hear

loud and clear, and I felt a jolt of electricity as the Rebbe looked directly at me with a look that said he knew what I was thinking, that yes the Rebbe was not just making prophetic pronouncements but actually fighting the war with words. After the farbrengen, I joined one of the circles reviewing the sichos, and of course people were excited about what the Rebbe said regarding the war, although there was still speculation in the media that the rockets fired towards Israel had contained bio-chemical payloads.

When the edited version of the farbrengen came out before the next Shabbos, I was shocked to see that this portion of the Rebbe's remarks had been excised. After some

investigation, I found out that the Rebbe had instructed the reviewer who would review the sichos over the phone immediately after Shabbos to omit that portion and the same applied to those in charge of putting it into writing. It was only twelve years later when a new president named Bush actually completed the mission of putting down Saddam that we gained some insight into why the Rebbe had withheld publicizing his statements at that time.

### A WORD, IF I MAY

Over the next year I continued to walk in on occasional Shabbasos and although I never did find a place from where I could hear clearly, at the review sessions following the farbrengens it always seemed as if the Rebbe touched on whatever Torah topic I had been thinking about during my walk, as well as issues that had recently been on my mind. One time, I encountered a Chassid walking to the farbrengen and we struck up a conversation. I asked him if this was a common experience amongst Chassidim that the Rebbe seemed to read their minds and address their questions and issues at farbrengens. He assured me most emphatically that this was pretty much universal for those who bothered to pay attention to what the Rebbe said.

Although I had no problem accepting this on faith, one Shabbos I decided to conduct an experiment. Instead of thinking about something in Chassidus relating to the parsha, which would have a greater likelihood of coming up in a Shabbos farbrengen, I decided to focus on a topic that had no obvious connection. The topic I chose to think about was whether or not the idea of reviewing one's study of Torah a hundred and one times was still applicable today or if it was even a good use of time.

Sure enough, during the review



afterward, someone mentioned that the Rebbe had spoken about reviewing a topic in learning one hundred times, as they did back in the time of the Gemara, and even one hundred and one times. However, those who were close enough to hear couldn't piece together how that had fit in with what the Rebbe was talking about, before and after, and remarked about how it seemed to be a *maamer ha'musgar* (parenthetical statement). You can imagine that I was suitably blown away and even a little ashamed for having contrived my little "test." (See sicha B'Haalos'cha 5751, para. 5, where what the Rebbe has to say on the topic is incorporated into the sicha.)

One whole year later, on Wednesday, the third of Shvat, I decided to go to 770 for Mincha with the Rebbe as part of my spiritual preparation for my first "Chassidic birthday," which would be that night and the following day. After Mincha, the Rebbe indicated that he would say a sicha. At that time, the issue that plagued my mind was how to reconcile the fact that the Rebbe demanded that everyone go out and teach and promote Chassidus with much of what I had read from the Rebbe Rayatz, which seemed to make it quite clear that not everybody could or should teach the loftiest secrets of the Torah unless he was on a certain level. As a newcomer, I was conflicted between the idea of "Who am I to open my mouth," and the Rebbe's insistence that "If you know Alef, then teach Alef."

In that sicha, the Rebbe addressed the fact that the Rebbe Rayatz suffered an impediment in his speech in the later years of his life, which, according to the rules of nature, limited his ability to influence others in promoting Jewish study and practice, and especially in the realm of teaching and spreading Chassidus. So although we have no

way to explain why Hashem made it so, our only response can be to increase in the study of his teachings with speech and especially in spreading the wellsprings outward, so as to fill the lack that was caused by his impaired speech. (See Sichos Kodesh 5752, p. 559-564, Seifer HaSichos 5752, sicha Bo 5752, paras 12&15.)

Although the Rebbe spoke with his head down for almost the entire sicha, when he started talking about the need for each of us to fill in with his own speech, I thought to myself, "Oh no, he can't be talking to me, 'I don't know enough yet,' 'I don't like getting up in public,' etc." At that instant the Rebbe raised his head sharply, looked straight at me and then went back to looking down, as my kishkes fell through the floor (or at least seemed to).

I knew then that I was going to have to overcome my hang-ups and inhibitions about "spreading the word." However, we still need to understand what changed. Why is it that in our time it is the job of every person to teach and spread the wellsprings of Chassidus? Why did the Rebbe Rayatz speak and write so strongly against those who turn Chassidic ideas and teachings into sermons and lectures, offering their own explanations and imagery, while the Rebbe insisted that his Chassidim do just that (albeit with great care not to dilute the original)?

## THE EXILE OF THE WORD

In the sicha of the following Shabbos, the Rebbe relates the situation of the later years of the Rebbe Rayatz and that of Moshe Rabbeinu immediately prior to the exodus from Egypt, when he too suffered a speech impediment that required that his brother Aharon speak for him or that Hashem miraculously make his speech understandable. The reason for this,

as explained in Kabbala and Chassidus, is that "the speech was in exile," referring to the Divine Speech as well as that of Moshe, who although he personally experienced the highest revelations of the future time could not communicate them to the world and his generation, because the world couldn't receive such revelation.

Similarly, the passing of the Rebbe Rayatz on the tenth of Shvat, Parshas Bo, alludes to the fact that he personally experienced the highest revelations of redemption, but it could not be contained in a physical body within the physical world, nor could he communicate it to the world. The Rebbe concludes, however, that in our generation there is no such problem since the world is ready and as such there is no limitation of speech or possibility of expiry of soul from body. It is only after saying that in our generation there is no lack, that the Rebbe says that each of us needs to fill in the lack that was generated by the seeming impairment of the Rebbe Rayatz over forty years previous to that time. What is going on here? What does it mean that speech is in exile or not, and how does our behavior become an issue when the conversation is about the spiritual leader of the time and his ability to "communicate" the Divine revelations that he is privy to, up to and including the revelations of the Era of Moshiach?

G-d created the world through speech. He "spoke" the "words" of Creation, and the world as it was before Adam sinned, came into being. Words are paradoxical in nature. They reveal to the listener what the speaker is thinking or feeling, but they do so by concealing the actual inner experience of the speaker. The listener only gets a description of what is being talked about. However, while the speaker is talking, the words actually make his own experience more intense,

***Speech has a very different effect on the listener than on the speaker. To the speaker, putting something into words makes it more clear, more real, more powerful. For someone who is just listening, as much as words can open up doors to new knowledge and ideas, they are always hiding more than they are revealing.***

adding new insight and clarity. So it turns out that speech has a very different effect on the listener than on the speaker. To the speaker, putting something into words makes it more clear, more real, more powerful. For someone who is just listening, as much as words can open up doors to new knowledge and ideas, they are always hiding more than they are revealing.

When G-d “spoke” the world into existence, since the world itself was part of the Divine communication it did not experience itself as something outside of and separate from G-d. That is why Chazal tell us that at the beginning of Creation, G-d’s *ikar Sh’china* was present in the lower world; the Divine speech expressed and revealed the highest levels of Divine communication (*ikar Sh’china*) through which G-d manifests himself. The world was part of the speaker, not a separate listener. When Adam sinned, the Sages tell us that the *Sh’china* was banished from earth up to the first heaven, and moved further away with the sins of progressive generations. That is what it means when we speak of speech in exile. We and the world experience ourselves as “listeners,” and to us it sounds like the “word of G-d” (even when passed along via a

human conduit, such as Moshe Rabbeinu) is speaking of a different reality than our own.

Regarding the future time it says, “And all flesh will see that the mouth of G-d has spoken.” Moshe Rabbeinu brought G-d back down to earth during the revelation at Mount Sinai, but we couldn’t contain the intensity. Our souls “got it,” but our bodies couldn’t handle it, and so “with every word, their souls flew out, and G-d resurrected them with the dew of resurrection.” When Moshiach comes, he will have prepared us and the world to the point that not only our souls can relate to being an extension of the “Speaker,” but our bodies will relate to that as well.

## **REDEEMING THE WORD**

The Rebbe informed us repeatedly that we are the last generation of exile and the first generation of redemption. On the very first day, he announced that our mission is to bring the *ikar Sh’china* down to earth. This in turn enables the world to receive far loftier revelations, even the very revelation of G-d Himself. In later years, the Rebbe indicated that the job was done. So what changed? Before, when the “speech was in exile,” it was impossible for me to fully

experience myself as the “word of G-d” or “breath of G-d” or “part of the mind of G-d,” and certainly not “part of the very Essence of G-d.” I could only experience myself as separate, unless I worked very hard to lift myself up above the limitations of my physical being and the physical world, with the direct assistance of the Rebbe of each generation. That is why you had to be careful about giving over the teachings of the Rebbe in a way that was as close to his original words as possible, and you needed to have attained some sort of spiritual level.

In our generation, the *Sh’china* has come down to earth. There is no impediment to speech due to the lack of refinement of the physical world. You can “hear G-d” and “see G-d” without your soul having to leave your body. The operative word is C-A-N. After the complete revelation of Moshiach, the whole world and all flesh – will see. In this intermediate time, the time for preparing for that transition, we are capable and have the means and tools to experience ourselves and the world as part of progressively higher levels of Divine expression, but we need to “fill the lack” that we carry with us from the past through our own verbalizing of Divine truths in our own words using some of our own imagery and insight. The words of the Rebbe, especially on the topic of Moshiach, are not simply to convey concepts and ideas describing far off and future events. Those words actually convey and communicate the very reality of Geula, directing the events that grow out from the spiritual reality, and most importantly making it all accessible to us.

And by spreading those words of the Rebbe, we fill the lack within ourselves and the lack within the world, and bring about the True and Complete Redemption immediately, NOW!

# R' SHLOMO RASKIN: A CORNERSTONE OF TZFAS

By Nosson Avrohom  
Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

*The holy city of Tzfas was a far cry from the bustling spiritual hub it is today when Rabbi Shlomo Raskin and his wife settled there shortly after their wedding. If anything, it was closer to a spiritual desert. Under very harsh conditions, he and a small group of shluchim, headed by Rabbi Leibel Kaplan a"h, established the Chabad community of Tzfas and all its institutions. Rabbi Raskin founded the Beis Chana School for Girls, which has become a magnificent campus providing education for hundreds of chassidic students. In this special interview, Rabbi Raskin describes the early years, the difficulties, and the construction work that has created the vast and glorious institution that it is today. \* Part 2 of 3*



[Continued from issue #724, pg. 30ff]

For several weeks, all the Rebbe's shluchim living in Tzfas pounded the pavement in cities and towns throughout northern Eretz Yisroel. They informed parents about the new school opening its doors and asked them to send their daughters there.

No one then believed - or even dreamed - that the institution opened then at the initiative of the CHAMAH Organization for new immigrants would eventually become one of the largest and leading Chabad institutions in the world.

"When the first academic year began in 5737 (1976) for the seventh and eighth grade, there were thirty-eight students, a number that was considered a huge success at the time, especially since the vast majority of them came to us from homes that were marginally traditional at best. Today, many of them are grandmothers of beautiful chassidic families..."

Rabbi Raskin's memories are laced with tremendous nostalgia. It seems that this might be the first time in his life that he allowed himself to stop for a





moment, take a deep breath, and look back with pleasure and satisfaction. Together with the shluchim in Tzfas, headed by Rabbi Leibel Kaplan *a"h*, and with a staff of excellent and dedicated teachers, he built one of the most highly recommended and outstanding Chabad institutions in Eretz Yisroel and the world. His office displays neither splendor nor gaudiness. Rabbi Raskin is not the type of askan who serenely rests on his laurels after attaining great success. Even today, he invests most of his efforts in developing the institution he founded, and he was privileged just last year to observe the completion and dedication of a large new building in the Beis Chana complex.

## THE FIRST SHABBOS IN TZFAS

Rabbi Raskin arrived in Tzfas with his wife in Elul, 5733, just nine months after he got married. "After our wedding the previous Kislev, we moved into the absorption center in Kfar Chabad (today the hostel for new immigrants), as my wife was then a

new immigrant from France. I spent my first months in Kfar Chabad learning in kollel. A few months afterwards, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Kaplan arrived in Eretz Yisroel on the Rebbe's shlichus. He had been given the mission of establishing a Chabad community in Tzfas, and in the words of the Rebbe, 'With institutions as they exist in Nachlat Har Chabad – and more than Nachlat Har Chabad.' Thank G-d, we were privileged to be among the first couples to respond to this call and head up north.

"The secretariat issued a directive in the Rebbe's name, stating that anyone who feels that he is fit for this shlichus needn't ask whether or when to travel; they should pack their belongings and go to Tzfas without asking questions. I personally know couples that did ask the Rebbe about the proposal to go to Tzfas, and the Rebbe replied to them that since they asked, they shouldn't go. This entire shlichus was cloaked in mystery. The Rebbe wanted to restore the Chabad community in Tzfas as quickly as possible. In fact, just a few months later, his reasons became clear.

"At the beginning of Elul, forty days before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, we packed our belongings and placed them in a van headed for Tzfas. The Rebbe's request was to renovate the 'Tzemach Tzedek' Synagogue, which then was a pile of rubble, and go in and learn there in a kollel framework. Until it was rebuilt and renovated (in an amazing and miraculous fashion - that is a story unto itself), we learned in the Ari Synagogue. Since this was at the end of the summer (tourist) season, there were no houses available in the Old City for long-term rental, and we were forced to live in a small apartment in the Canaan neighborhood."

"We arrived in the city on Erev Shabbos afternoon. By the time we managed to bring our things up to the second-floor apartment, Shabbos had already begun. My mother, Mrs. Rivka Raskin, had prepared for us a basket with challos, wine for Kiddush, and several cans of sardines. At the Shabbos meal on Friday night, we ate sardines once for the fish course, a second time with a different sauce as 'soup', and the third time, the sardines served as



The Oranim Hotel, home to Beis Chana Institutions during the early days.

***At the Shabbos meal on Friday night, we ate sardines once for the fish course, a second time with a different sauce as 'soup', and the third time, the sardines served as the meat course... This meal was the tastiest and most joyous we had ever experienced in our lives to this very day, for we were privileged to be shluchim of the Rebbe!***

the meat course... This meal was the tastiest and most joyous we had ever experienced in our lives to this very day, for we were privileged to be shluchim of the Rebbe!

"The other avreichim who comprised that first group of shluchim arrived in the city around the same time. Among them were Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Levkivker, Rabbi Meir Aharon, Rabbi Zalman Stambler, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Offen (who came to learn in the kollel as a bachur), Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Levkivker, Rabbi Pinchas Efraim HaLevi Beitch, Rabbi Yosef Shmuel Goldstein *a"h*, and Rabbi Eliyahu Aryeh Friedman *a"h*. In the

months that followed, arrivals included Rabbi Aharon Yitzchak Leichter *a"h* and Rabbi Shneur Zalman Eliyahu HaKohen Hendel.

"As I mentioned earlier, the first shlichus was to re-establish the Tzemach Tzedek Shul and to transform it into a place of prayer and Torah study. In the first letter to the shluchim/avreichim that came to Tzfas, the Rebbe wrote that he wants to restore the glory of Tzfas and renew its Chabad community. But the Rebbe wanted that everything should be done as quickly as possible, and thus the instruction was to complete the building renovations in time to

daven there before Rosh HaShana.

"From an objective point of view, this appeared totally detached from reality. The structure was in ruins, the roof and part of the walls had collapsed inside. All the building contractors who were asked to give an appraisal couldn't promise that they could finish the job in such a short period of time and subsequently withdrew from this 'unachievable' project. And if that wasn't enough, a few days later, the Rebbe declared that he wanted us to be able to assemble on the premises for Slichos.

"Suggestions were made that we erect a temporary tent or shack, however the Rebbe rejected the tent proposal outright and apparently expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of erecting a shack. Rabbi Aryeh Leib Kaplan *a"h* was in constant contact with Rabbi Chadakov, and was also in charge of carrying out the Rebbe's instructions. At last, a Tzfas building contractor named R' Moshe Shleifstein came on the scene, and he gave his word that he would complete the construction within a short period of time. I recall how he checked the foundations, the supports, and the dividing walls, determined that they were strong enough, and quickly got to work on the building project.

"There was a doubt whether even he actually believed that he could make good on his promise, but that's exactly what happened. Over a period of several days and nights, he built a wall and a half of stone, laid a light, unfinished asbestos roof, and on the Motzaei Shabbos before Rosh HaShana, all the avreichim gathered together there to say Slichos. It was an unforgettable sight. The shluchim alone were not enough for a minyan, and we scrambled for local residents who could give us the mandatory ten men. There

was still a smell of fresh paint and the fluorescent lights were hanging by chains.

**“The previous night, Rabbi Kaplan and I went around to the shuls where the Torah scrolls that belonged to the Tzemach Tzedek Synagogue had been deposited after its destruction to ask for them back. The gabbaim fervently claimed that they that had been rendered unkosher over the years, but when we wouldn’t relent, one of the gabbaim eventually agreed to return one Torah scroll, which served our needs for the next several years.**

**“During the days of Slichos, each of the shluchim was privileged to receive a letter from the Rebbe with a bracha for the new year (see inset). At the conclusion of the letter, the Rebbe signed with a blessing for ‘success in our shlichus’.”**

When Rabbi Raskin recalls that first Slichos night, you can see how the events and emotions of those days come back to him. “We experienced then such a great feeling of joy to be participating in activities that the Rebbe wanted so much, and this also helped us achieve much success. This past Shabbos T’shuva, I came to daven in the Tzemach Tzedek, and I recalled the special memories and experiences of that first year. I remembered the smell of paint, the faces of my fellow shluchim, and the first t’filla that we davened there from the depths of our hearts. We soon began doing all our davening and all the kollel studies in the newly rebuilt and renovated shul.”

None of the chassidim fully understood then the reason for all the haste. But a few weeks later, when the Yom Kippur War began, Rabbi Chadakov said that it was now clear why the Rebbe had accelerated the construction of the synagogue. The whole purpose in sending shluchim to Tzfas and



**Rabbi Raskin presenting the Rebbe with a picture portraying a bird’s-eye view of the Beis Chana complex.**

rebuilding the shul, and doing so as quickly as possible, was to serve as no less than a fortress built by the Rebbe in northern Eretz Yisroel, to check the advance of the Syrian Army. As we all know, the Syrians reached as far as the slopes of the Golan Heights, but they stopped there and did not press further into Eretz Yisroel because they thought that the Israel Defense Forces had surely laid a trap for them. The Rebbe had built a spiritual wall to stop them, Rabbi Chadakov explained, and therefore, when the Rebbe learned that it would be difficult to build the shul by Rosh HaShana, not only would he not allow any delays, he even ordered that they complete the construction in time for Slichos. Everyone thought that this directive was too incredible to believe, but the prophetic vision of the Rebbe foresaw it all.

It is interesting to note that the kollel in Tzfas is the only one in Eretz Yisroel financed by the Rebbe’s secretaries. In Crown Heights, the custom was that an avreich learned in kollel for one year, and afterwards if he wanted to continue learning for another year, he would have to receive special

permission. However, in the kollel in Tzfas, if an avreich had not secured gainful employment after two years in kollel, they asked the mazkirus if he could learn for another year of studies. Rabbi Chadakov said that according to the Rebbe’s direct instructions, avreichim in Tzfas could learn for a longer period of time.

“Since our arrival in Tzfas that Elul, none of us left the city until after Yom Kippur. Our original plans were to visit our parents and family members for the Sukkos holiday. But when the Yom Kippur War broke out, we didn’t know if it would be appropriate to leave the city under these circumstances, and we decided to ask the Rebbe’s advice. In his reply, the Rebbe allowed the shluchim to leave Tzfas for Sukkos, however, they had to return for Simchas Torah.

“Ever since then, the original shluchim customarily spend Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Simchas Torah either in Beis Chayeinu or in Tzfas. During Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur of that first year, we hosted many yeshiva bachurim who were fascinated to see for themselves how the new Chabad community of Tzfas that



the Rebbe had founded had materialized out of nowhere. When the war started, all these Tmimim were called into action with the many soldiers who filled the streets of Tzfas. In general, the entire community was mobilized to visit the soldiers who were returning from the front and staying in the local hotels and hostels, or those who had been wounded *r"l* and had been brought to the hospital."

## ON THE BATTLEFRONT IN THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

The young Tzfas avreichim also found themselves rather quickly taking part in the far less pleasant side to spreading the wellsprings of chassidus – at the funerals of Tzfas residents killed during the war, paying Shiva calls, participating in yahrtzait ceremonies, and comforting the families on behalf of the Chabad institutions. "We quickly found ourselves involved in an array of regularly continuing activities. The events of the war were most difficult, and many Jews were in need of words of encouragement and comfort, and this is what we were asked to do. During those days, we received clear instructions from the Rebbe on what to do and how to do it, and we worked according to these instructions on a round-the-clock basis."

During the days of Chanukah, the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Israel sent buses of Chabad activists to the battlefield on the Golan Heights, and the avreichim in Tzfas served as their guides. "Even in Elul, before the war began, the Rebbe asked for children to gather at the Western Wall in Yerushalayim and pour out their hearts in prayer to G-d. The Rebbe then mentioned the pasuk 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings You have established might, to counter Your enemies, to silence

foe and avenger,' and it was only when the war began that we understood why the Rebbe asked to arouse the prayer of Jewish children. We in Tzfas set out on our mission with enthusiasm, and after much effort, we managed to bring hundreds of children. You must remember that we were operating merely as a group of avreichim, still without any organized Chabad institution in Tzfas."

The Yom Kippur War was burned in the memory of the general public as a harsh conflict saturated with blood. In this context, Rabbi Raskin recalls a story that he heard nearly twenty years later, in 5751, when he was on a visit to Russia. "One Shabbos, we held a gathering for Jews in Moscow, and one of the participants, who heard that I had lived in Tzfas since before the Yom Kippur War, asked to share a story that he has carried with him since the conflict. He had emigrated to Eretz Yisroel, was inducted into the army, and fought in the area of the Golan Heights during that war. Even when he was living in Eretz Yisroel, his atheist education went with him, and it was only a serious encounter with a Syrian army division that aroused his faith in G-d. He recalled how he and his unit were stuck for a whole day between the rocks with no way to dig trenches, totally exposed to the murderous Syrian artillery bombardment that killed and wounded many soldiers. Then, he suddenly decided to pray. He turned to the Creator in his heart and said, 'If You exist and You save me from this valley of hell, I promise to stop smoking on Shabbos.' The next Shabbos, he and his unit found themselves alive and well in Tzfas, and volunteers from the soldiers' welfare organization offered them (among other things) a pack of Don Hill cigarettes, which he especially liked. It took him a few

minutes until he remembered his promise and drew back his hand. He's been faithful to his word ever since."

The chareidi community in Tzfas at the time was very small. In those days, there were two kollel programs in operation: one belonging to the Sanzer chassidic community and another belonging to the Lithuanian sector. The Sanzer kollel had three students who were sent to the city for two years and spent their time in the beis midrash, and another six young men who would come from the yeshiva in Kiryat Sanz in rotation each three months. There was a similar arrangement at the Lithuanian kollel, where students would come from B'nei Brak or Yerushalayim, returning after a short period of time.

"Periodically, a nursery school or a kindergarten for slightly older children would open, but it would never last long. When we arrived in the city, these kollel students said on several occasions that now that the Chabadnikim have come, they will succeed in establishing a lasting institution. Indeed, almost as soon as we opened the first Chabad kindergarten, they started sending additional kollel students to Tzfas... Those who were especially pleased with our arrival in Tzfas were the city's local residents. I will never forget the Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen we held at the Herzliya Hotel with the participation of many soldiers staying in the city.

"This was a deeply joyous chassidic farbrengen with a degree of inner feeling that I had never experienced before. The relief over the victory our soldiers achieved in the war and the defeat of the Syrian enemy was coupled with the joy of commemorating the Alter Rebbe's release from prison. There were many Jews from all sectors of the population, yet they all joined together in celebration, placing



their hands upon their neighbor's shoulder and dancing for many long hours. I can never forget how Rabbi Yankel HaLevi Beitch, of blessed memory, got up on the table with a bottle of mashke in his hand and aroused the participants. The joy was quite contagious, and even the hotel manager caught the bug, deciding to open the hotel storerooms and bring out all the mashke after the first supply ran out.

## ACTIVITIES WITH RUSSIAN IMMIGRANTS

In the meantime, the renovations in the Tzemach Tzedek Synagogue had been completed, and the place was transformed into a beacon for the entire community, where they studied Torah, davened, and farbrenged. In addition to his kollel studies, Rabbi Raskin was constantly busy with his work in outreach activities, due to the large waves of immigrants arriving from the Soviet Union, many of whom were coming to settle in northern Eretz Yisroel. "The Jewish Agency was not equipped to handle the large number of Jews coming from these countries, so in addition to the immigration centers, they rented two large hostel facilities and the Rakefet Hotel. Hundreds of new immigrant families came to live in Tzfas, and I undertook to work with them.

"In any event, someone had to accept this initiative, and I decided to take the responsibility of organizing a variety of outreach activities. These included regular Torah classes three times a week, large pre-holiday assemblies and farbrengens, and communal prayer services on Shabbos and Yomtov, followed by a Kiddush and some words of Torah.

"During that period, I would walk with Rabbi Kaplan every Shabbos to the Rakefet Hotel. I



Completion ceremony for Beis Chana's first scholastic year. From left to right: Beis Chana director Rabbi Shlomo Raskin, Rabbi Yehoshua Raskin, (speaking) Deputy Mayor Rabbi Yisroel Chaim Berkowitz (Aguda), Rabbi Leibel Kaplan, Rabbi Moshe Nisselevich, Rabbi Pesachya Lipsker.

***The whole purpose in sending shluchim to Tzfas and rebuilding the shul, and doing so as quickly as possible, was to serve as no less than a fortress built by the Rebbe in northern Eretz Yisroel, to check the advance of the Syrian Army.***

would organize the minyan, numbering several dozen Jews of various ages, and Rabbi Kaplan would lead the davening. At the conclusion of the prayer service, hundreds of men, women, and children waited in the dining hall until he would make Kiddush. It should be noted that these Jews adopted this custom on their own, without being asked to do so, despite the fact that they had been educated according to the tenets of Communism. I felt that these immigrants had an intense thirst for Yiddishkeit, and this intensified my happiness in working with them even more. Not a Shabbos passed when we didn't host at least several immigrant couples in our home, many of whom later got closer to

their Jewish roots and became baalei t'shuva.

"These activities bore much fruit. A prime example was R' Victor Shaul *a"h*. He was a Jewish artist living in Tzfas who knew nothing about Judaism, and he started a step-by-step journey back to his traditions. His wife eventually joined him, and they established a chassidic home together. After his passing, his wife left Eretz Yisroel and lives today in Crown Heights. Their daughter was a student in Beis Chana, the institution I was privileged to found many years later. Today, this former student lives in Florida and runs a chassidic home in every respect."

## INTUITIVE VISION

“At a time when no one even thought of establishing a girls’ school in Tzfas,” recalled Rabbi Raskin in a voice filled with emotion, “the Rebbe had already envisioned its founding. It was in Adar, 5736, when I went in for yechidus with the Rebbe. My wife did not have a regular teaching job that year, and she worked as a substitute in several local schools. I asked the Rebbe if it would be appropriate to operate along a certain course of action, but the Rebbe rejected the idea and then proceeded to explain why. The Rebbe concluded by saying that I must consult with the school administration. I spoke with friends, but no one seemed to understand what the Rebbe meant.

“When I returned to Eretz Yisroel, I went to see Rabbi Moshe Slonim, then-director of Reshet Oholei Yosef Yitzchak, and he also didn’t understand the meaning of the Rebbe’s words. About five months later, when ‘Beis Chana’ was founded and I was appointed as its director, I understood which administration of which school I had been told to consult...”

## ACTIVITIES WITHOUT RESOURCES

Back in those days, the institution of shlichus was not as extensive as it is today, and Rabbi Raskin’s activities were breaking new ground. “It was only about a year later that our activities became firmly established as an official branch of the Chamah Organization. We organized numerous Chabad evenings in the surrounding cities where new immigrant communities had been formed. Similarly, we conducted house visits each evening at the homes of new immigrants, for whom this was their first encounter with Judaism. During Elul, 5736, the secretaries issued a directive in the Rebbe’s name to the shluchim sent that year to Eretz Yisroel that they should initiate activities in schools throughout the north in preparation for the upcoming holiday season.”

Since Rabbi Raskin was already involved in public activities and had acquired the necessary organizational and logistical experience, he was asked to become the driving force behind this project. “You must remember that

there were no resources at the time, and public transportation was not as organized as it is today. I was the only one among the new shluchim in town who knew how long it took to travel from one part of the city to another, the fares for buses and taxis, how far you could travel via bus, and from what point you needed to take a cab. The only avreich who had a telephone in his home was Leibel Kaplan. In order for two parties to make contact with one another, they had to set a time for each of them to be near a public telephone...

“Another thing lacking that was desperately needed was a copy machine. Since I worked with the Russian immigrants and they knew me from the absorption centers, they would periodically let me sit in the office for several hours and make copies, and also to make all the logistical arrangements necessary for activities on such a wide scale. Despite (or perhaps due to) the meagerness and simplicity, there was a marvelous atmosphere of unity among the Anash families in Tzfas. If one of us celebrated a joyous occasion, it was a simcha for the whole community. All the

families without exception would prepare cooked food and bake cakes.”

## TREMENDOUS SATISFACTION ON SHLICHUS

A year later, all the avreichim who had come to Tzfas, including Rabbi Raskin, found apartments in the Old City and took up residence there. “Prior to the building of Kiryat Chabad, the entire community revolved around the Old City. The shuls and kindergartens were there, as were the main stores in town where we could buy kosher l’mehadrin dairy products once a week. We had to order bread the day before in exact amounts. Meat and poultry could also be acquired via a special order made by Rabbi Kaplan. Despite the difficulties, everyone felt a tremendous sense of satisfaction that they had the privilege of being the Rebbe’s shluchim.”

We can see evidence of this deep inner feeling of satisfaction from a letter Rabbi Raskin and his wife sent to the Rebbe during their second year of shlichus in Tzfas. “We sat together and composed a letter filled with words of thanks to the Rebbe for choosing us to have the great merit to be his shluchim. We asked for nothing; all we wanted was to express our great appreciation. The answer that we were privileged to receive from the Rebbe shaped my entire outlook. Among other things, the Rebbe wrote: ‘Success in all matters [pertaining to] Tzfas’. I have understood ever since that the Rebbe wants Tzfas matters to have relevance to me. The Rebbe placed upon me the duty to care deeply whether his activities succeed.

“The Rebbe’s request that I care reminded me of a special occurrence that I was present to witness at the farbrengen on

Simchas Torah, 5728. I walked that year on Tahalucha together with Rabbi Meir Roness, one of the more visible figures with the Lubavitch Youth Organization in New York. We walked for several hours in a torrential rain and windstorm to a small shtibel where all the congregation members were middle aged, Yiddish-speaking Jews – a scene that reminded me of the underground shuls in the city where I lived in Russia. The shtibel's rav was a chareidi Jew who was older than all of them. I will always remember how his face lit up when he saw that Chabad hadn't forgotten him this year, despite the pouring rain.

“He was very happy, and we were pleased that we had merited to bring joy to other Jews on this day and to be the shluchim of the Rebbe. When we got back to 770 very late, long after everyone else had already returned, I understood why it was only the two of us who had walked so far. 770 was filled to capacity. It was in the middle of the farbrengen, and it was only with some difficulty that I managed to reach the top of the right pyramid. I got to my place as everyone was singing a niggun. After the singing ended, the Rebbe began a new sicha. He spoke about how he had received a letter from a bachur in ‘that country’ who needs true self-sacrifice to live his life as a Jew there. He didn’t ask for his physical needs, nor did he ask to leave the country. What did he write in his letter? He asked for a bracha that he shouldn’t be plagued by any impure thoughts when he says *Krias Shma*...

“The Rebbe began to cry and sob bitterly, and wherever I looked, I saw people sobbing. This was the first time in my adult life that tears began to stream down my face. After several moments the Rebbe finally stopped, wiped his tears, and proceeded to express his



Former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir speaking at the dedication of Beis Chana's new dining hall.

***The Rebbe began to cry and sob bitterly, and wherever I looked, I saw people sobbing. This was the first time in my adult life that tears began to stream down my face.***

amazement at the great quality of this bachur, who was interested by nothing more than having no impure thoughts during davening.”

For Rabbi Raskin, this demonstrated once again how much warmth and affection the Rebbe felt towards the Jews from the Soviet Union. “During that Tishrei, there were other instances when the Rebbe spoke words of praise and distinction for the Jews that came from ‘that country’. In one sicha, Rebbe said that these immigrants have a great responsibility due to their experience and ability in the ways of self-sacrifice, and they know that they can use this quality in the face of any difficulties or obstacles they may encounter in the free world. G-d will then look to see if they are involved in serving Him and spreading the wellsprings outward, and then He will deem it appropriate to change the laws of

nature and take the Jews out from there. However, if a Jew wastes his potential by investing all his energy in dealing with his worldly affairs, e.g., looking for an apartment, searching for a job, etc., that will not bring G-d’s miracles. The order of a Jew’s conduct will determine whether G-d will continue to take Jews out from there.”

## **BANDS OF SCHOOL REGISTRARS ALL OVER THE NORTH**

It was only natural that when Rabbi Raskin was asked to head the new Chabad high school for girls with a dormitory for immigrant students from the Soviet Union, he accepted without hesitation. “Prior to my active involvement, the heads of the Chamah Organization, Rabbi Moshe Nisselevich and my brother, Rabbi Yehoshua Raskin, came to



Tzfas and met with Rabbi Kaplan. At the time, they were working a great deal with immigrant children coming from Bucharria and the Caucasus region, seeking to get many of them to enter Chabad institutions. The Ohr Simcha yeshiva in Kfar Chabad was also founded during this time.

“The major problem encountered was in finding a Chabad framework for girls. While there was no lack of non-Chabad chareidi programs that happily agreed to accept them, these immigrants were looking specifically for Lubavitch. Chamah eventually decided that they would find an appropriate program for these girls in Tzfas. They were prepared to pay rent on a place for the institution, and later they would even build a proper facility, with the shluchim taking full responsibility for all administrative and operational matters. Thus, the Beis Chana institution was created.

After a hectic search, they found a suitable location to rent at the Oranim Hotel in the Canaan Bet neighborhood, which they would turn into a school and dormitory for high school girls. “When the negotiations with the hotel administration had been concluded, they appointed me at the head of the new institution, to my complete surprise. While I knew that there were numerous hidden problems connected with the establishment and administration of an institution of this type, nevertheless, I decided to take the plunge into the sea of action. It was summertime, and we initiated Chinuch Campaign activities on a level that had unquestionably never been done before.

“We began registering girls in an institution that didn’t yet exist and still didn’t have a suitable facility. Groups of avreichim and shluchim went out almost every night to the cities and settlements of the Galilee

Heights, house after house, to convince parents to register their daughters in a school that offers a Chabad education. The Chamah Organization accepted the task of bringing girls from new immigrant families throughout the country, while we took responsibility for bringing as many as Israeli students as possible from the northern region.

“Since we didn’t want to conduct the registration in the Chabad shul, for obvious reasons, we received a permit to hold the registration in the education department of the Tzfas municipality building. Thus, we found ourselves placed at the entrance to the department offices, and we opened the registration process for all interested girls.

“After more than a few difficulties, we opened the academic year with thirty-eight seventh and eighth grade students passing through our school’s gates. If I thought that this would mark the end of the initial problems, I quickly found that assessment to be a bit premature. The challenges had only just begun... Every morning, I received reports of complaints, problems, anguish – most of which I didn’t have the slightest idea how to resolve.”

The first principal was Rebbetzin Rochel Hendel. Mrs. Shapira served as counselor, and Mrs. Beitch was housemother.

“During those first weeks, I developed excruciating back pains each morning that I had never felt before or since. All the tension was taking its toll. Most of the immigrant students quickly left and moved on to different programs, as they were not used to the Israeli mentality and the alien surroundings. Every time the girls went home for Shabbos, it was hard to get them to come back. Many of them didn’t even speak Russian, making it difficult for me to have a



discussion with them. Whenever one issue was resolved, another problem developed.

“All this created a situation of considerable instability. Some of the students, perceiving the weakness in the school administration, understood that they could complain even more if their requests were not granted. In any event, neither I nor the administration would compromise on any principles, and a group of girls threatened to leave en masse. It reached a point that when the Pesach vacation came, I was certain that a sizable portion of them would not come back from vacation and the school would have to be closed. I put my concerns in writing and sent the letter to the Rebbe.

“The Rebbe replied, ‘May it be G-d’s Will that the news should be gratifying from now on.’ In fact, in accordance with the Rebbe’s bracha, despite all the concerns, the students all returned from Pesach vacation and the school continued to blossom and flourish.

“For about two years, the Chamah Organization financed the institution, and even provided considerable assistance in obtaining permits from the various government ministries. However, once this period ended, they began





**Initial stages of construction on Beis Chana's first building. Then-Tzfas Mayor Ze'ev Perl placing the cornerstone. Standing to his right is building contractor Rabbi Moshe Yosef Friedman. Rabbi Shlomo Raskin stands to his left.**

to have budgetary problems of their own and they could no longer continue with their support of our activities, when the students were receiving full room, board, and transportation, and since many came from needy immigrant families, most of the parents did not pay tuition."

## **ONE BUILDING, AND THEN ANOTHER**

In 5737, another group of the Rebbe's shlichim arrived in Tzfas, among them Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Chitrik. He began working at Beis Chana, and was later appointed to be the school's principal. "We decided very quickly to embark on a revolutionary path. Until then, almost all of the students came from non-religious families – only a small portion came from traditional homes. Though the entire staff worked with devotion, sacrifice, and in marvelous harmony, we still had not succeeded in achieved the goals we had set – that the girls would aspire to be chassidic women in its fullest sense.

"We finally realized that for practical purposes, the girls had no model to emulate. The teachers and

rabbis were not their peers, and it was vital for them to see girls their own age conducting themselves in the manner we try to teach and instill within them. We asked the Rebbe, and we received his approval to start bringing Chabad shlichos from Kfar Chabad and Nachlat Har Chabad to learn in the school. We chose especially chassidic girls, and every student came on shlichus for two years.

"The success was soon apparent. Many girls who came from non-Chabad homes became true b'nos Chabad, and eventually even built chassidic homes that would make Lubavitch proud. In the meantime, the Chabad community in Tzfas was also growing older, and when their daughters reached the appropriate age, they enrolled in the institution.

"During the twelve years that the school occupied the Oranim Hotel, there was a feeling of impermanence. The hotel manager, Mr. Moshe Stern, was not Torah observant, and initially he often interfered with the school's operations. But over the years, he became an observant Jew and one of our most fervent supporters. It was naturally most difficult for him

to see the hotel, built with his own hands, turned into a dormitory for girls, and he became somewhat resentful. Yet, with a considerable amount of patience, he too came closer to his Jewish roots. Eventually, I bought him a pair of t'fillin and he became a full-fledged baal t'shuva. When we would come from the Old City for Shabbos to make a minyan for the girls, he would participate regularly."

"After ten years, we started building the institution's first facility, and when it was completed, the school moved in to resume its operations there. Today, the school fills a magnificent complex of buildings. If you would ask me today how we built each building, I wouldn't have a satisfactory answer. We received a place of total desolation, filled with rocks, thorns, and thistles. It was impossible to believe that we could possibly build everything that exists on this campus today. Except for the dining hall, donated by philanthropist Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak HaKohen Gutnick, all the buildings were constructed in a manner that surpassed nature, and with G-d's help, we will continue expanding our activities on all fronts."

# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By Dr. Aryeh Gotfryd

*The Tzemach Tzedek related: The Baal Shem Tov was very fond of light, and said, "Or, light, is the numerical equivalent of raz, secret. Whoever knows the 'secret' contained in every thing can bring illumination."*

- The Rebbe, HaYom Yom, 6 Elul.

An industrial engineer at Ben Gurion University of the Negev has constructed a surprising new "bridge" between Torah and science, a bridge that is firm enough to withstand the strict standards of scientific scrutiny.

On a hunch, Prof. Haim Shore started exploring the mathematical relationship between modern measures of natural phenomena, and the gematria or numerical value of their Biblical Hebrew names. For example, what could the Hebrew word for pregnancy have to do with the period of gestation? It turns out that the word, *heraiyon*, with a numerical value of 271, maps exactly into the length of the average human pregnancy, which is 271 days.

In his highly acclaimed and controversial book, *Coincidences in the Bible and in Biblical Hebrew*, Shore gives dozens of examples including many stunning correlations that defy any natural explanation. For instance, Shore analyzes the five colors often mentioned in *Tanach*, plotting the numerical value of their names

against their wave frequencies. Even though light waves are a fairly new idea and were only first measured in the 19th Century, the statistical correlation between the Biblical name and the actual wavelength is astoundingly precise.

Correlations like these are not just probabilistic curiosities - they indicate that the two quantities are actually measuring the same thing, albeit in different ways. Shore exemplifies this with the correlation of two temperature scales: Whether you measure in Celsius or Fahrenheit, the temperature is obviously the same. If you want to convert from one measure to the other, you use the formula  $F^{\circ} = 32 + 1.8C^{\circ}$ . If you were to then graph the relationship, you would get a straight line. That straight line tells you that the two measures have an inner unity. The unity between the word and the reality is consistent with Judaism's claim that Torah is the "blueprint of creation."

Who would have predicted that the numerical values of the Hebrew words for day, month and year - *yom*, *yerach* and *shana* - would correlate precisely to their durations on a logarithmic scale? In any area of science, this degree of correlation would be considered very significant. The question arises: Are these time-words like zip files full of minutes, and their

gematrias like kilobyte labels indicating the "size" of the file?

The same applies to the diameters of the sun, moon and earth. When Shore plotted NASA's values for the sizes of these heavenly bodies against the numerical values of the Hebrew words *shemesh*, *yareiach*, and *aretz*, he once again got a very significant statistical correlation.

Is it possible that the ancients knew the diameters of the sun, moon and earth?

The question reminds me of a hospital administrator friend of mine who marvelled aloud about the amazing coincidence that on the eighth day of a person's life the concentration of the blood clotting factor, Vitamin K, is at its highest. "How amazing," she said, "that the ancient Hebrews in Egypt knew about Vitamin K so many thousands of years ago."

I begged to differ.

The Jews in Egypt did not know any more about Vitamin K, than they did about the diameters of the sun, moon and earth, or the wavelengths of red, yellow, magenta, green and blue light.

The truth is that the one and same Intelligent Designer who gave us the commandment of circumcision on the eighth day, also gave us the wherewithal to optimally heal ourselves of the wound.

Similarly, the Hebrew words that convey Torah's wisdom to us have infinitely more wisdom within them, scientific and otherwise, than we will ever be able to download, for in fact they are an earthly impression of the Divine speech with which the world was created. They exist above as "black fire on white fire" according to the kabbalists, continuously creating the world and all that's in it *yesh me'ayin*, ex nihilo.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains

that it is because mankind is already on the threshold of the complete and ultimate redemption, that these profound mystic realities are already "in the air," i.e., an intrinsic part of world culture. Ours is called the Information Age and we are increasingly aware that information creates reality. More than that, it's not too far-fetched to say that indeed information IS reality.

John Wheeler, certainly one of the greatest physicists of the 20th Century, used to spend six months

a year on a little island off the coast of Maine contemplating exactly this: How information creates reality, and even is reality. His final major paper, *It From Bit*, celebrates information as the mediator between the conscious, indivisible wholeness which is the ultimate ground of reality, and the physical world that emerges from it.

But while physicists have been celebrating this concept for mere decades, the Jews have been celebrating it for millennia. G-d

said, Let there be light, and there was light. *Baruch sh'amar v'haya ha'olam*, and sh'hakol nihya b'd'varo.

Very soon the time will arrive that "The world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea." At that point even Shakespeare will realize that a *vered* by any other name is not a rose at all.

*Looking for a speaker on the interplay of science and faith? Call me at (416) 858-9868, or visit me at [www.arniegotfryd.com](http://www.arniegotfryd.com).*

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# THE STORY OF RUTH

By L. Magen

*Ruth Benjamin is the popular author of Jewish novels: “Yesterday’s Child,” “On a Golden Chain,” “All the Hidden Children,” “Stranger to Her People,” “Music of the Soul,” “Selby Printout” and “The Mysterious Lighthouse of Chelton.” While most people are familiar with at least some of her books, her own fascinating life story is not as widely known... but definitely worth reading.*

Years ago I read a Jewish novel which from the very start had a Chassidic flavor to it. Since the book was published by a non-Chassidic publishing house in Lakewood, this surprised me. The author’s name was Ruth Benjamin. I sensed that she had a special personal story and that she was revealing a glimpse of it in her book. When I found out about her life while preparing this article, I saw how right I was.

## QUESTIONS

Ruth was born during World War II and was the second child of

an English couple who lived in India. When the war began they returned to London. During the bombing of London, her father, who at first served in the Royal Engineer Corps of the British Army, became an officer in the Infantry Corps and was sent to serve in distant Burma.

When the blitz worsened, the British Home Guard recommended that its citizens sleep inside metal cages to protect themselves.

It was within this traumatic atmosphere that little Ruth grew up. Her earliest childhood memories are of sirens, bombs, and the collapse of houses.

From the age of 12 Ruth began asking questions about faith. Her parents found this intolerable. Those around them challenged her father. “Your daughter is asking unacceptable questions,” they said. “Do something about it!”

Her parents, who knew that she was not comfortable with the religious beliefs they had raised her with, sent her at the age of 15 to an Anglican boarding school from which they hoped she would return more cultured.

Instead, Ruth spoke with the religion teachers until late at night. They were happy to discuss creation and the meaning of life with an eager pupil. They had no idea where it would ultimately lead.

Over the years she asked a lot of questions, directing her inquiry to everybody possible. As her questions became deeper and more complicated, and threatened their belief system, they began responding angrily.

## CONVERSION

In the course of her search, someone mentioned the Jewish religion. When Ruth asked about it she was given odd answers.

“Oh,” said one woman, “Jews are the ones who soak their dishes in water before Passover and things like that.” Another said, “Don’t you know history? There are none left. They were all killed in the war.” Ruth assumed that authentic Judaism was a thing of the past. In Johannesburg of those days there were very few people who could help her.

Then it happened. A friend told her about a couple who had come from the United States that she might want to visit. “They’re a bit different,” she said. “The wife wears a wig and I don’t know why. I think they are religious Jews.”

That is how Ruth met Rabbi Tanzer and his wife. Ruth was





***“Do your doctorate,” the Rebbe said, “but not in religion and not in philosophy. Don’t study apikorsus (heresy), as it will lead others to study apikorsus.”***

suddenly struck with the feeling that this was the truth. The answers that she got proved that she had finally found what she had been seeking for so long.

Ruth made her way to Eretz Yisroel and on 15 Sivan, 1965, she

converted at the Beis Din in Chaifa. She wanted to do everything: kashrus, Shabbos ... Every mitzva was exciting and wonderful for her.

She attended shiurim and got into religious life. When she married Dr. Dovber (Bernie)

Benjamin, a psychiatrist, she put on a sheitel and observed halacha punctiliously. The couple had every intention of settling in a religious area one day, though of course life rarely turns out as planned. They both worked at a psychiatric hospital, Shaar Menasheh (she is a clinical psychologist), and lived in the doctors’ quarters.

Shaar Menasheh has an unsavory history. During the period of aliyot it was known as Ein Shemer, the infamous immigrant camp which endeavored, for the most part successfully, to choke off the Judaism of the new immigrants, especially of the Yemenites. Many years later, when it was turned into a hospital, there were still ruined buildings with addresses on the walls that testified to what it had been before.

There were no religious people living there. When they saw Ruth with a wig, they looked at her askance. They criticized her stringent observance of kashrus. “What’s the problem with regular kashrus?” they wanted to know. “Why are you extremists like the old-fashioned Jews?”

Ruth read many books in order to try and find more guidance. She read references about Chassidim, Chassidus and Lubavitch. She and her husband visited Kfar Chabad, where Ruth felt that she had found the answer to her prayers.

Kfar Chabad was still mainly an agricultural village. The Benjamin couple walked around one hot afternoon and happened upon cows, chickens and... a Chassid who did his best to understand them but knew hardly any English.

A few months later, Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin returned to South Africa, where they lived in the heart of the warm, small religious community. It was a mixed bunch of Yekkes (German Jews), Polish Chassidic Jews, and some Litvishe families.

Ruth and her husband spoke a lot with Rabbi Bernhard, who had had the privilege of meeting the Rebbe in yechidus. Ruth began writing to the Rebbe and receiving answers, and it wasn't long before she committed to be mekusheres to the Rebbe as a Chabad Chassida.

In 1971, Rabbi Shmuel Levy and Rabbi YY Weinberg went to South Africa for a university lecture series. Chances of a permanent shliach in South Africa, though, seemed slim. But a year later, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar arrived and the place hasn't been the same since.

R' Lipskar worked day and night and when you look at the community today - at the schools, yeshiva and shuls - you can see the fulfillment of the Rebbe's bracha for the success of his shlichus.

## THE FIRST YECHIDUS

"In Sivan, 1972, I had my first audience with the Rebbe. I took my daughter Devorah Chana with me. I had written the Rebbe a note- a somewhat lengthy one. Someone had told me I could only write one page, so I had written everything on one legal-size page in block lettered printing so small that the Rebbe took a magnifying glass to read it.

"There were many matters about which I wanted to ask the Rebbe: I was busy with my master's thesis on the psychology of Judaism and had sent the Rebbe a copy of what I had done so far. I also asked if I should continue, after completing this, with my doctorate.

"My husband was a psychiatrist and I was a clinical psychologist in Johannesburg. We saw many non-Jewish patients. I asked the Rebbe whether we should steer them towards Christianity or whether we should let them build up their faith in G-d within themselves. I had also brought in a letter from someone who was questioning the value and meaning of life."

Another matter Ruth wanted to clarify was about the fasts written about in Igeres HaT'shuva in Tanya. She had learned what it says there and had not understood it correctly. She was fasting half days on Mondays and Thursday. She also got up early in the morning to learn and asked the Rebbe about these two practices.

"After the yechidus, I wrote down everything I could remember. (Bear in mind, this was a long time ago, and today I would never have addressed the Rebbe so casually.) Though the wording of the conversation is not precise, the gist of it is accurate.

The Rebbe spoke first to my daughter. He asked, "What are you learning in school?"

Debby (speaking inaudibly): "Torah and mitzvos."

The Rebbe turned to me, "What did she say?"

"She said, Torah and mitzvos," I repeated for her.

"What Torah are you learning?" asked the Rebbe.

"Chumash," answered Debby.

The Rebbe asked: "Which Chumash? Which part? The second? Third? Fourth?"

"I think the fourth part."

The Rebbe asked, "The fourth part? (to me:) How old is she?"

"She was six on Lag B'Omer."

The Rebbe gave her a small green Siddur (which is her dearest possession) and said to her that it would help her in her studies. The Rebbe showed her where the t'fillos, brachos, and T'hilim are found and gave her a bracha for her future studies and happiness.

Her yechidus was over and she left the room.

The Rebbe said, "You converted."

I began to explain that it was a halachic conversion and the Rebbe said, "It's fine, it was the Beis Din in Chaifa. You must consider yourself Jewish. That is your

obligation."

The Rebbe looked at me for a few seconds and then smiled and said, "How good a Jew you want to be is up to you."

I said, "I want to be the best I can be."

The Rebbe said, "What does your husband say about your wanting that?"

I told the Rebbe he was happy.

Part of our discussion concerned my graduate work.

"Finish your thesis," the Rebbe advised. "It is ninety percent finished."

"Shall I do a doctorate?" I asked him. "What about on taharas ha'mishpacha (laws of family purity)? It is psychologically brilliant, of course."

"Do your doctorate," the Rebbe said, "but not in religion and not in philosophy."

I was surprised. "Not in religion?"

"Nor in philosophy," the Rebbe answered. "Don't study apikorsus (heresy), as it will lead others to study apikorsus. Do it in something else. You need it to help you in your work."

"I can still be a psychologist without a doctorate," I offered. "It would just mean that I cannot call myself 'Dr. Benjamin.' Is that important?"

"It is important for prestige," the Rebbe answered.

"But isn't prestige a bad sort of motivation?"

"I mean prestige for Yiddishkait. If you have a doctorate and a woman comes to you and you tell her about taharas ha'mishpacha, she will listen to you."

I then asked him, "What about non-Jewish patients?"

"They have seven laws," the Rebbe answered. "Lead them to these laws, to all of them. This is part of our duty. Don't lead them to Christianity. That's avoda zara."

He then enumerated the



Noachide Laws: no idolatry, no blasphemy, no illicit relations, no murder, no theft, no cruelty to animals, the importance of law and order.

"These people need something," I continued, thoughtfully. "One man tried to commit suicide a couple of times and came to my office. I got him to the hospital in time. He then came to me and said, 'You are responsible for my being alive. Now give me something to live for.'"

"Tell him he is part of G-d's world and he has a responsibility to Him," the Rebbe replied.

(The man was in a state of despair. He had lost his wife and his job and it seemed there was no hope. Shortly after the yechidus, his wife came back to him and he found a better position than the one he had held for years).

"Have we a responsibility to the non-Jew?" I countered.

"We have a responsibility to the Jew first and then to the non-Jew," the Rebbe answered.

We drifted to the discussion of suicide, which the Rebbe sternly addressed: "Suicide is exactly the same as murder. Our bodies do not belong to us. We cannot do what we like with them. They are not ours. Get them to understand this. We cannot even hurt our own bodies in any way."

The Rebbe then mentioned the person whose letter I had brought to him, the gentleman who was questioning the worth of life.

"You should tell such people that they have a double duty to perform after the last war, when so many Jews were murdered. They have to live not only for themselves but for all these." The Rebbe was emphatic. "They must live to draw people to Judaism. In doing this they will find that their own turmoil will pass."

The Rebbe made sure that I would convey this message. He

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ברוקלין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d  
16th of Cheshvan, 5734  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mrs. Ruth Benjamin  
1, Eastwold  
32 Hunter St.  
Yoeville  
Johannesburg, So. Africa

Blessing and Greeting:

This is to confirm receipt of your correspondence.  
In the meantime, you no doubt received my previous letter.

With reference to your writing about the idea of settling in Eretz Yisroel in the near future, about which you ask my opinion -

I have often emphasized, as you may be aware, that a Jew considering emigration from any part of the world to any other, must not take a narrow view, but should consider it in broader terms. What I mean is that Jews are, of course, a minority among the nations of the world, and must therefore always think in terms of self preservation. Wherever Jews are they must consider themselves in a state of perpetual mobilization to protect their independence, not only insofar as they themselves are concerned, but also insofar as the Jewish people as a whole is concerned. This applies to all places, but the situation varies, for there are some places where the percentage of Jews is relatively smaller, and hence more vulnerable. And among the Jews themselves there are places where those who are active in the strengthening of Torah and Mitzvoh, the very foundation of Jewish existence, are very few, which increases their responsibility all the more, especially those who have been active and successful, whose departure would leave an irreparable void.

And as already mentioned, this is a question of survival not only for local communities, but for the Jewish people in general. Clearly, one's first responsibility is towards the community where one has been brought up, and to which one can contribute effectively.

Now, let us consider South Africa, where Jews originally came mostly from Lithuania and similar places, where Jewish life was flourishing. I do not have to tell you what the situation is in the R.S.A. in terms of true Yiddishkeit, even in JHB, which has the largest Jewish community in South Africa. Consequently, you and your husband occupy a very

***"Oh," said one woman, "Jews are the ones who soak their dishes in water before Passover and things like that." Another said, "Don't you know history? There are none left. They were all killed in the war."***

concluded with a blessing, saying that he was awaiting the rest of my thesis.

I told the Rebbe that sometimes the past troubled me.

"Sometimes I find non-Jewish

tunes playing in my head and it makes me uncomfortable. Tanya speaks about extraneous thoughts ..."

The Rebbe replied, "It says there (in Tanya) to ignore them. Don't

## THE REBBE'S GIRLS

When the Benjamins lived in Israel in 1966, her husband became sick with cancer. He underwent surgery and treatment and was declared healthy. (The illness returned 18 years later and he died in 1986). At this time, they had one daughter, Debby.

"In 1973, I wrote to the Rebbe and asked for a bracha for another child despite the doctors' prognostications. The Rebbe immediately responded with a bracha and then immediately sent another letter with a bracha. Less than a year later, Rivky was born.

"Rivky's due date was 29 Kislev. For various reasons, Dr. Shimi Friedman wanted to induce early birth and I said I had to ask the Rebbe. The Rebbe said it wasn't necessary since the baby would be born before 19 Kislev. Rivky was born on 17 Kislev.

"We saw that there were two knots in the umbilical cord that were potentially very dangerous. The doctor was amazed by how a rabbi in America knew when the baby would be born when he, the doctor caring for me, did not!

"Right after the birth, the doctor said, 'Nurse, this is a miracle. Now I believe there is a G-d in the world. Nurse, do you know that there is a G-d in the world?'

"Before Sarah Dina's birth the same thing happened. I wrote to the Rebbe for a bracha and she was born less than a year after I wrote."

have any connection with Christianity. Don't think about it. If such thoughts come to you, think about something else. If questions or doubts arise ..."

I assured the Rebbe I had no doubts.

The Rebbe said, "Remove your thoughts completely from them. Don't worry or think about these matters any longer. Keep a distance from them."

"What about Jews involved in Christianity?" I asked.

"Speak to them about Judaism," the Rebbe advised. "If you speak to them about Christianity, you will just cause them to be on guard. Show them Judaism. Let them see something new that will capture their interest. Speak to them about Judaism."

The yechidus lasted 30 minutes.

## BEIS CHABAD – THE BENJAMIN FAMILY

After this yechidus, my daughter

decided to write to the Rebbe. In her letter, she thanked the Rebbe for the yechidus and told him about the trip to 770. Naturally, it was the type of letter a six year old writes.

Several months later she received a response from the Rebbe. The care and concern with which the Rebbe responded to a six year old amazed everyone. The Rebbe took her feelings into account and explained why the letter was arriving so late. The message in the letter serves as a guide for life.

\*\*\*

Ruth became an integral part of the developing Chabad community. It was an amazing experience for her.

The Benjamin family watched as the colorfully-clad, yoga-practicing Jews they welcomed into their home and hearts became respected Chassidim garbed in hats and sirtuks. As a Beis Chabad, the Benjamins hosted between twenty and thirty people for Shabbos

meals. Jews at all levels of observance were among their guests.

Erev Pesach, Ruth's house turned into a butcher store as a tremendous chicken kashering project covered a table spanning the length of three rooms. Her doctor husband was on call to tend to any fingers that got cut during the kashering process.

The community grew and flourished. Farbrengens in the "Chassidim Shul" were a byword. Mekuravim traveled from Johannesburg to the yeshiva in Morristown, New Jersey or to yeshivas Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad. They returned full-fledged Chassidim, finding their place within the community and contributing to its growth.

## POSITIVE CONNECTION

Ruth's parents observed her life from the sidelines, never quite knowing what to expect from this strange religion. Sitting in a sukkah for a week was somewhat strange but tolerable. The laws of kashrus were as hard to accept as to understand, and the observance of the laws of the Nine Days really concerned them.

A serious problem arose when they referred to the deity they believed in, in the presence of Ruth's children. Her three daughters would sit wide-eyed and listen to stormy debates. Ruth asked the Rebbe for his bracha in the successful raising of her girls. Ruth would have had the 770 office on her speed-dial, had such a feature been available on the old rotary phones.

In her next yechidus, Ruth asked the Rebbe whether to cut off ties with her parents because they were a bad influence on her children. The Rebbe's answer was surprising. "Maintain a good relationship with them," he advised her. "You need to



be better than a non-Jew.”

The Rebbe told her to decrease her contact with them somewhat but to retain a positive relationship, and she did as he instructed. Her parents eventually realized that differences of opinion and debates did not benefit anyone. The change in their outlook was definitely a result of the Rebbe's bracha.

Some time afterwards, Ruth's mother had to undergo an operation and was very frightened. She asked Ruth to ask the Rebbe for a bracha for her! Ruth wrote her mother's name and grandmother's name to the Rebbe and the Rebbe quickly responded: “Until the operation she should give charity, even on Saturday.”

Ruth took care of her parents until the end. When her mother died, her father donated a sum of money to Torah Academy, the Chabad school, in her memory. Their attitude had completely changed.

## THE SECOND YECHIDUS

In 1974, the Benjamins decided to ask the Rebbe for a bracha for aliya. They wrote their letter not as a question of whether to go but as a request for a bracha for a decision they had already made.

They were answered in a long letter (see photo) which left no doubt as to their mission in life. The Rebbe wrote about the importance of the survival of the Jewish people and about the personal and collective job incumbent upon every Jew. He referred to the background of the Jewish community in South Africa and said that the Benjamins had a decisive share in the founding of the community and the strengthening of Judaism there. The Rebbe demonstrated great sensitivity and understanding of their desire to make aliya but emphasized that now, more than



ever, they were needed where they were.

As faithful Chassidim, they shelved their plan. In 1975, the Rebbe referred to this topic. They were informed only hours before that they would have yechidus on the Sunday after Shavuot at 11:00. Ruth, her husband, and daughters Debby and Rivky were present. Rivky slept in the carriage.

Ruth's letter had already been submitted but now her husband submitted one of his own. The Rebbe read it slowly. Then he opened Ruth's letter and placed it with her husband's. There were Hebrew words marked on her letter. The Rebbe began to speak, as though saying a sicha.

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“We leaned forward in order to hear the Rebbe. The Rebbe said that the first question in both of our letters was identical. In the first part of the yechidus, the Rebbe looked at the letter and at my husband.

“The Rebbe said that in South Africa my husband would do a lot for Jewry but would not accomplish a lot for himself. In Eretz Yisroel, it would be the other way round. It was better for us to remain in South Africa, but we could travel to Eretz Yisroel for several weeks,

with all arrangements made in advance.

“In response to my husband's question about doing research in Israel, the Rebbe thought this idea might not be acceptable to the Israelis because they may want something more concrete, more for their money. The Rebbe said they might not want to set up a research project or a research facility for mental health. He added that they didn't have the money for it.

“The Rebbe said we should continue spreading Judaism but with greater simcha. ‘Remain in South Africa until Moshiach comes. Then he will come and take you with him to Eretz Yisroel, and not at your expense ... Until then, prepare South Africa for Moshiach.’

“The second question had to do with what I mentioned earlier, about my conversion and how to relate to my parents. The Rebbe said that if I had a good relationship with them before my conversion, I had to keep it up now, too. I explained how they could be very hostile, even in the children's presence.

“The Rebbe said to be in touch with them less but to maintain a good relationship, that we couldn't confuse the children. He said that

for whatever reason, Hashem did not make them Jews.”

Ruth had written in her letter that although the Rebbe had said not to write her thesis about religion or philosophy, it was getting into both those areas anyway. The Rebbe answered that the reason he had told her to avoid those subjects – and the Rebbe quoted what he had said three years earlier in yechidus – was because she was likely to influence others to do as she did. Perhaps she could deal with it but someone else, who was not as strong in their Judaism, might attempt to follow her example and not handle it well. However, since she was already working on it, she could continue, but she had to stress the Torah aspects, not only in the preface or forward but throughout the thesis.

Ruth asked the Rebbe whether to write it only for Jews and the Rebbe said, “Don’t limit your readership to Jews only.” The Rebbe also said not to write about Judaism in the first pages; otherwise, it would seem narrow in focus. But he said he was only referring to the first pages.

It was only ten years later, when she began writing novels, that the Rebbe’s choice of words, “your readership,” became clear.

She also asked the Rebbe about Shabbos guests who could have a bad influence on others on topics such as Christianity or in negative behavior. The Rebbe answered that if it entailed danger, not to permit it, but to invite that person alone.

As for chinuch for their daughters, the Rebbe said to do their utmost. If there were two schools, one close and the other far, to send to the school that was faithful to Torah despite the distance.

She asked whether to allow the girls to read secular books and the Rebbe responded that if there is only one book available, that’s what

you read. There can be gripping adventure stories that are Jewish in nature. Ruth mentioned Marcus Lehmann’s books and *The Broken Bracelet* and said that there weren’t enough books like that.

The Rebbe said they needed to be good and nicely printed, books of Torah content, and the Rebbe referred to Feldheim publishers, etc. Today, Ruth realizes that the Rebbe was once again guiding her in her future writing career.

“What about my chapter of T’hillim? Should I say the chapter that corresponds to my biological age or from the time I converted?” Ruth wondered.

“15 Sivan, 5725, the date you converted,” the Rebbe answered. “That’s important. The past does not exist. Say chapter 10. You did not exist before then.” The Rebbe continued to point at the date written in the letter.

We asked whether to join the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists. The Rebbe said he recently spoke with them and asked them why they didn’t try to spread Judaism. They said they were not missionaries. However, this is not about changing people from one thing to another, but revealing what already exists. The Rebbe said we needed to try and influence them.

Towards the end of the yechidus Rivky woke up and looked at the Rebbe. The Rebbe asked Debby what special bracha is said when lighting candles for Shavuot. She couldn’t utter a word. The Rebbe gave her matches and two dollars, one to give to tz’daka and one to do with as she pleased.

### THE THIRD YECHIDUS

Ruth had a third yechidus in Sivan, 1980, with her three daughters, Debby, Rivky, and Sarah Dina.

Sarah Dina was very tired and

wanted to go home. R’ Binyamin Klein, the Rebbe’s secretary, tried to calm her and asked her whether she wanted a dollar from the Rebbe, but she was uncomfortable in the unfamiliar surroundings. The promise of a dollar meant nothing to her, and she still cried as the family stood near the Rebbe’s door. Her cries ceased as they entered the room.

“I gave the Rebbe the note. This time it only said our names. Due to the difficulties with Sarah, the note had gotten crumpled. I noticed this only when I gave it to the Rebbe and apologized for it. The Rebbe said it was fine.

“The Rebbe asked about my husband’s health. I said, ‘Boruch Hashem’ and was surprised that the Rebbe had asked. I didn’t dream that in another few years, he would no longer be with us. The Rebbe asked about his work and whether he was working hard. When I said he was working too hard, the Rebbe said I couldn’t say ‘too hard’ because it is beneficial to work hard – and the older you get, to work longer hours.

“Then the Rebbe inquired about my work and I said there were ups and downs. The Rebbe wanted to know why there were downs and I began to explain. The Rebbe said that for prestige it was good to work at a hospital and not only in private practice; at least a few hours a week, ‘like your husband who works at ... hospital’ (citing the name). I did not recall ever having written that to the Rebbe. The Rebbe said it was important to be at the hospital at least once a week.

“I said to the Rebbe that I worked at the hospital for two months while I wrote my thesis but it was hard. The Rebbe repeated that it was important, at least once a week.

“I said that I had done rounds, not for the money but had stopped

because of the difficulty with the children. The Rebbe did not answer. I told the Rebbe I would go back to it.

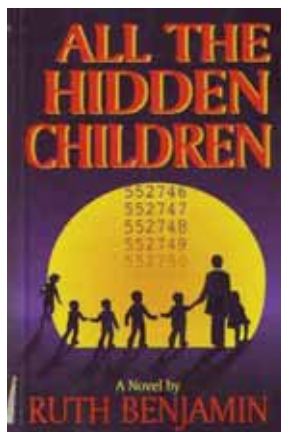
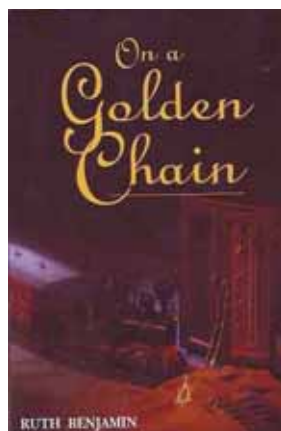
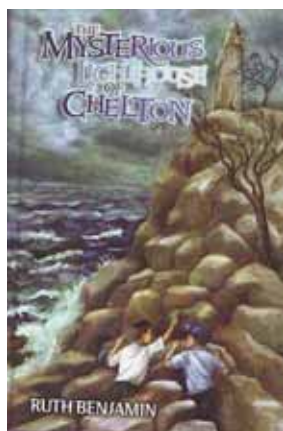
“The Rebbe asked about the research work and gave his bracha for nachas from the children and additional success in helping people: to bring more and more people to Judaism and to help more and more patients.

“The Rebbe said that since I had gotten a taste of working in being mekarev Jews to Judaism, he hoped the taste would increase my appetite to do much more.

“The Rebbe then asked the girls if they know what tz’daka is and said that they should give the money he gave them to tz’daka in South Africa. I asked the Rebbe whether the dollar could be exchanged for other money. The Rebbe agreed and went on to ask whether the girls lit Shabbos candles. I said that they did and that Sarah was four already. The Rebbe said that the custom is to give tz’daka before lighting and he took out three nickels from his pocket and gave one to each girl. Then he gave me a dime and said in Afrikaans, ‘For the mother.’”

## CONSTANT MIRACLES

Ruth received many answers from the Rebbe over the years for mekuravim and for herself. She, her husband, and even her non-Jewish patients have experienced miracles and wonders in their personal lives thanks to the Rebbe’s brachos. She writes only their first name and adds their mother’s name if they are Jewish. She maintains confidentiality and does not mention any identifying details. She has been witness to astounding results where she feels she can’t



Some of Ruth Benjamin’s books

take any credit for the improvement.

Ruth gives us an example:

“I asked the Rebbe about a couple who came to me for marriage counseling. The Rebbe said it was easy to destroy; an animal can also destroy. The Rebbe said it was important to work on keeping people together even when they weren’t Jewish. He gave his bracha.”

After 27 Adar, she sent a fax to the Rebbe in connection with a trial in which she serves as clinical psychologist. The defendant had tried to commit suicide in jail and was taken to the hospital where she worked. He was accused of something he couldn’t possibly have done but the situation looked so grim that even the defense lawyers said he had to plead guilty.

The lawyers had her meet the

public prosecutor before the trial. After the formal introduction, he asked everybody to leave but Ruth. Then he asked her what really happened and when he heard, he said, “Then I will close the case.”

When she left the room she told the lawyers what happened and they asked her again and again what she had said to him.

Twenty minutes later the man appeared in court. The judge said that the file was closed and the accused could leave. He could hardly believe his ears.

Another patient, also not Jewish, was in a very bad state. One week, she said she felt much better because she saw an old rabbi in her dream and he had assured her that everything would be fine.

“Over the years, many miracles happened, and are still happening, thanks to the Rebbe’s brachos. There are so many that I have forgotten some by now. Miracles have become daily fare and I have concluded that this is only a small component of what constitutes hiskachshus to the Rebbe.”

## POSTSCRIPT

Ruth Benjamin merited what great Chassidim, born and bred, have not merited: personal and detailed guidance from the Rebbe.

Ruth completed her doctorate as the Rebbe told her to do. She is active within the Chabad community and is a successful writer. She continues to live and work in South Africa despite the passing of her husband in 1986 and although her daughters live far from her. She is staying there until Moshiach comes, as the Rebbe himself told her to do.



# MOSHIACH: WHAT WE BELIEVE.



By Rabbi Gershon Avtzon

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

## PART 7 OF 20

In our previous article, we explained the qualifications and characteristics that are needed for an individual to be considered a worthy candidate of being Moshiach. The big question is:

### WHAT MUST AN INDIVIDUAL DO TO PROVE THAT HE IS MOSHIACH?

The answer can best be appreciated by prefacing with a very basic concept. To judge if someone is successful, one must first understand the meaning of success. If one does not have a clear and defined goal, how will he know if he has reached it? It is only when you know what the goals of Yemos HaMoshiach are, that you

determine whether they have been attained.

For example, when a community is seeking to hire a Rabbi for a Shul, they will not look for someone that has a gold medal in water-skiing. At the same time, when one is looking for a successful water-skier, he will not look for someone that knows the entire Shulchan Aruch by heart!

There is a tremendous misconception as to the reason we await Moshiach. While living in tremendous wealth and having an abundance of any physical delight will be a reality in the times of Geula, it is not the **purpose** of Yemos HaMoshiach. The main objective and goal of the Messianic

era is to bring the world to its ultimate state. In the times of Moshiach, we will be free and able to learn all the secrets of the Torah, and to do all of the 613 Mitzvos.

In the times of exile, we are limited in our abilities and our understanding of the Torah. In addition, we are limited in the amount of Mitzvos that we are **able** to fulfill – not to mention the fact that most of Jewry are not fully observant of even those Mitzvos that we can do. It is therefore imperative that the true Moshiach act effectively toward restoring Torah and Mitzvah observance.

What are the main Mitzvos that we can't do in the time of Galus?

1) All –150 (at least!) Mitzvos connected to the Beis HaMikdash and Korbanos - sacrifices.

2) All the Mitzvos which are connected to the land of Eretz Yisroel. These include - but are not limited to - the laws of Shmita, Yovel, Bikkurim etc.

Therefore, the Rambam writes (Hilchos Melachim chapter 11 Halacha 4) that Moshiach Vadai must:

1) Build the Beis HaMikdash -

thereby insuring the return of the laws of korbanos etc.

2) Gather all the Jews from around the globe and bring them to Eretz Yisroel. It is only when all Jews are in Israel that we can truly fulfill the laws which are connected to the land of Eretz Yisroel.

3) Win all the battles that he fights for Hashem and the Jewish people. The Jewish people must be living in a peaceful and worry-free environment for all the above to happen.

## PART 8 OF 20

Now, you may ask:

Is it not a known fact that the Beis HaMikdash will descend from Above and NOT be built by man?

To elaborate a little on the question:

Rambam himself writes (Hilchos Beis HaBechira) that when King Shlomo built the First Beis HaMikdash, he already knew that it would be destroyed. He therefore build a system of underground tunnels, to store some of the important vessels of the Beis HaMikdash.

How did he know that it would be destroyed? Did he know with Ruach HaKodesh that the Jews would sin?

The Rebbe explains ( Likkutei Sichos Volume 21, Parshas Truma) that the fact that a human being built the Beis HaMikdash - even if one as holy as King Shlomo - means that it has limited existence. The length of that existence was dependent on our actions, but nothing that is made by man can be eternal.

It is known that the third Beis HaMikdash will last forever. This can only come about if it is built directly by Hashem. Being that Hashem is infinite, He can create a building that will exist forever.

[The need to say that the Beis HaMikdash will be built in heaven

is also based on Halachic requirements. See Rashi, Gemara Sukka 41A, and Tosfos there.]

If so, why does Rambam write that Moshiach will build the third Beis HaMikdash?

In the Sichos of the Rebbe, there are four answers:

1 - Rambam himself writes ( in Hilchos Beis HaBechira, chapter 1), that the exact measurements and design of the Beis HaMikdash is not clear from the P'sukim in Yechezkel. We do know that some parts will be similar to the form of the second Beis HaMikdash. We can then say, that the parts which are clear, Moshiach will build. The rest will be built by Hashem.

2 - Moshiach will build his Beis HaMikdash. Hashem will send down the Beis HaMikdash from above and they will "fuse" together. This is based on how the Talmud (Eruvin 63a, Yuma 21b) describes the fire on the Mizbeiach - after the Kohen lit the fire on the Mizbeiach, a fire came down from heaven and they united into one.

3 - It all depends on the level that the Jews will be when Moshiach will come. If we are on the higher level, the Beis HaMikdash will be revealed from heaven. If we are on the lower level, Moshiach will have to build the Beis HaMikdash. This is based on the Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a) that asks a question from two seemingly contradictory P'sukim. In Daniel (7:13) it describes Moshiach arriving "on clouds". In Zecharia

(9:9) it describes Moshiach arriving on a donkey. The Gemara explains that it is not a contradiction. It all depends on the level of the Jews at the time. If we are full of merits, Moshiach will come from above. If not, he will "arrive on a donkey," in a more natural fashion.

[One may ask: If so, why does Rambam say that Moshiach will build the Beis HaMikdash? Is he expecting the Jews to be on a lower level?

The answer is obviously not! Rambam hopes that we will be on the higher level. This seifer, though, is a book of Halacha, not of prayer or hopes. Halacha has to speak in worse-case scenario. This is why he writes that Moshiach will build the Beis HaMikdash.]

4 - The Beis HaMikdash will come down from heaven, but Moshiach will put up the front gates. The Midrash (BaMidbar 15:13) writes that the gates of the Beis HaMikdash were not destroyed; they merely sunk into the ground. Moshiach will restore those original gates. This is based on the Gemara ( Bava Basra 53b) that holds that if one puts up the doors of a home, it is as if he built the entire home.

Having clarified the criteria that the Rambam lists for Moshiach, we are still left wondering about one glaring omission. In the next article we will IY"H explain why Rambam omits the making of miracles as a requirement for Moshiach.

# SHLUCHIM BUILDING COMMUNITIES

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz  
Shliach, Beit Shaan



A shliach goes to a town. The Chabad k'hilla is comprised of himself and his wife but as people get involved, a shul is opened, then a preschool, and soon (it's all relative) there is a k'hilla of people who come to daven, attend shiurim, send their children to the preschool, etc.

Last Purim we had a seuda at the Chabad house. We barely publicized it and the families of Anash and the closest mekuravim filled the Chabad house! More and more chairs were taken from neighbors and the simcha and unity were tremendous. It suddenly registered that we had a k'hilla of over a hundred people!

But the most interesting thing happened the day after Purim. I wanted to send text messages of thanks to the families who had helped in the preparations and cooking for the seuda, and I realized that there were about twenty people who had made the seuda a success.

## A BEAUTIFUL CHASSIDISHE K'HILLA

I spent a Shabbos in the Chabad

k'hilla of Afula because of a family simcha. I must admit, I was pleasantly surprised. Although I have known the Chabad k'hilla in Afula for more than twenty years what I saw that Shabbos went beyond my expectations. (I sometimes visit their shul which has turned into a sort of shtibel with one minyan after another throughout the day and night.)

When that Shabbos began, the spacious shul was packed with dozens of sirtuks, Tmimim, children of Anash, knitted yarmulkes, and just Jews. It was a Chabad davening, complete with dancing of Yechi after Lecha Dodi. R' Segal told me that thirty years ago, he told his Yerushalmi uncles that he was going on shlichus to Afula and his uncles barely knew where that was. They asked whether any Jews live there.

After the davening, before my astonished eyes, nearly everybody sat down around large tables and at each table there was a shiur: in Torah Ohr, Maayan Chai, a sicha in Hiskashrus, a shiur for children, and even a "shiur" for the little ones, which was to say the 12

p'sukim with one of the Tmimim. Due to lack of space there was even a shiur outside and a shiur in the women's section.

A similar scene took place the next day after Shacharis. Nearly the entire k'hilla sat down to a Shabbos Mevarchim farbrengen which included a family simcha as well. For hours R' Dovid Kretz held people's interest with Chassidishe ideas, stories and sichos of the Rebbe.

I found out that these numerous shiurim, mainly the shiurim of the children, were established 15 years ago with the help of R' Dovid Kretz's children, and are supported by his grown children and donors. With my own eyes I saw that sets of s'farim were given as prizes to the children - Mishnayos Kehati, Hisvaaduyos, etc.

The k'hilla in Afula consists of more than 100 families and they all seek to bring the light of Chassidus into their household. They all want to host shiurim and farbrengens in their homes. On Sukkos, for example, a farbrengen and Simchas Beis HaShoeiva are held in someone else's house every night.





A Chassidic k'hilla (artwork by Chassidic artist, Zalman Kleiman)

*When they arrived in Afula, that shul had only one minyan for Shacharis at 5:30 and immediately afterwards the shul was locked until Mincha. Today, the shul is open 24 hours a day and is always bustling.*

### THE GABBAI, THE MASHPIA AND THE SHLIACH

In preparing this article, I spoke with R' Shlomo Segal (the brother of R' Chaim Sholom) who is also a shliach in Afula and he told me that everything I saw that Shabbos in shul is only the tip of the iceberg of their activities. He said that when they arrived in Afula, that shul had only one minyan for Shacharis at 5:30 and immediately afterwards the shul was locked until Mincha. Today, the shul is open 24 hours a day and is always bustling with t'fillos, an evening kollel and a kollel for seniors, farbrengens, shiurim, etc.

All this was built with great effort over many years, with the work falling mainly on R' Chaim Sholom, the main gabbai of the shul. R' Segal finds a volunteer or donor every week to pay for the expenses of the Shabbos farbrengen. Nearly everybody attends the farbrengen and the mashpia, R' Dovid Kretz teaches Torah and tells stories and gives over Chassidic insights, which is the tried and true recipe to

strengthening a k'hilla.

R' Kretz fills other roles in the k'hilla. His love of s'farim is evidenced by the hundreds of bookshelves of s'farim that fill the walls of the shul. He buys every Chassidishe book that is published and assigns it a spot in the shul's bookcases.

Some time ago, someone from Afula, a talmid Chacham, walked into the shul and asked whether there was a book on gilgulim. R' Kretz showed him the shelf and the man returned to the Chabad shul again and again and told his friends about this terrific place.

Afula is just one example. Every year, every month, new Chabad k'hillos open their doors or expand, even in places where you wouldn't expect it: Atlit, Yakneam, Karmel Maaravi, Yerucham, wherever a shliach is to be found. These k'hillos are preparing and waiting for the Geula when everybody will be gathered to the Rebbe MH"M and march to the true and complete Geula.

### LAST MINUTE RESCUE

The following story I heard from

Rabbi Michael Reinitz, shliach in Rechovot:

Erev Pesach, 2008, a fellow contacted Rabbi Reinitz with an urgent request. His in-laws live in the Carpathians and receive matzos and wine for Pesach every year from the Jewish community in Budapest, but this year for some unknown reason, nothing arrived. The man begged R' Reinitz to help his parents.

A few phone calls determined that the shliach in Budapest, R' Oberlander, was not there but there was another shliach he could call, R' Raskin. He promised to see what he could do in the remaining hours before Yom Tov. The man called every half hour to find out what was happening.

Two hours before Yom Tov, he called to say gratefully, "My father is crying on the phone in joy! Everything arrived - thank you Chabad! - even meat, fish, haggados, charoses, marror and of course matza and wine."

He said that two bachurim suddenly showed up at his in-laws' house. They had made a special trip to bring everything they needed.

***“We didn’t realize how organized and coordinated all the Chabad houses are. How wonderful it is that we have the Rebbe and the shluchim whose only goal is to help bring simcha, even to people they never met before.”***

## SHLUCHIM WORKING TOGETHER

A Lubavitcher girl from abroad was in Israel learning at a seminary in Tzfas. She went by bus to Tzfas and on the way the bus stopped for seven minutes at a gas station near Bat Shlomo, a small yishuv.

She got off for a few minutes and did not notice when the bus took off without her. She was left there on the road, her bag and wallet still on the bus. It was late at night and not a (familiar) soul was about, however, she realized, there are lots of Chabad houses all over the country (and the world, for that matter).

She called a relative in Kfar Chabad, who called the Chabad house in Chaifa and R’ Yossi Lifsh quickly dealt with the problem. He called R’ Noam Dekel, the shliach in nearby Yakneam, and he dropped whatever he was doing and drove to the gas station. The girl couldn’t believe her eyes when a shliach drove up a few minutes later to help her.

R’ Dekel brought her to his house and she was surprised to discover that his wife was a teacher in her seminary. The shluchim provided her with a good meal, a bed for the night, and money for her trip and all ended well.

This was not the first time Rabbi

Dekel was involved in networking for a roadside rescue.

About two and a half years ago, there was a car accident on Highway 6 and some people from Yakneam were injured and hospitalized in Petach Tikva. R’ Dekel called the shliach in Petach Tikva, who went to visit the family and made sure they had t’fillin, shofar on Rosh HaShana, Yom Tov meals, and things that greatly encouraged the family. Afterwards, the mother of the family had to spend time in rehab in Raanana. R’ Dekel called the shliach in Raanana, who arranged for someone to be with the family on weekdays and Shabbasos throughout the rehabilitation process.

When the family returned to Yakneam, they said, “We didn’t realize how organized and coordinated all the Chabad houses are. How wonderful it is that we have the Rebbe and the shluchim whose only goal is to help bring simcha, even to people they never met before.”

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# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEN PLAGUES

By Rabbi Yosef Karasik  
District Rav Bat Chefer – Emek Chefer

*The ten plagues that Hashem inflicted on Egypt were not meant merely as punishment. They were the means to correct the sins and corruption of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who did not believe in the Creator and Ruler of the world. As well they are a lesson for us, as explained in Chazal, Kabbala and Chabad Chassidus.*

## A REASON FOR EACH OF THE PLAGUES

Our Sages give many reasons for the ten plagues. The following is from Rabbeinu Bachai:

**Blood** – because the Egyptians made the Jewish people draw water from the river, its waters were turned to blood.

**Frogs** – since they woke the Jewish people up early in the morning for slave labor and the Jewish people “croaked” in suffering and pain, they were afflicted with frogs which croaked everywhere, including their innards.

**Lice** – the Egyptians did not allow the Jewish people to bathe to prevent and rid themselves of lice

so the Egyptians were punished with lice.

**Mixture of wild animals** – the Egyptians ordered the Jewish people to hunt animals for them, and so they were punished with a mixture of wild animals.

**Plague** – since the Egyptians made the Jewish people care for their sheep and cattle, their animals died in a plague.

**Boils** – since they made the Jewish people heat their ovens, they were punished with boils that burned their bodies.

**Hail** – since they stoned the Jewish people, they were stoned by hail.

**Locusts** – for making the Jewish people do work on their trees, locusts destroyed their fruits.

**Darkness** – for locking the Jewish people up in dark dungeons, they were afflicted with darkness.

**Death of Firstborn** – for killing the Jewish people who are Hashem’s firstborn, the Egyptian firstborns were killed.

Punishments from Heaven are not expressions of Hashem’s revenge or anger but a way of correcting man’s corrupt and sinful ways. They are also “educational punishments” designed to rouse them and us to repentance.

The Ten Plagues were also not meant as revenge but as a means to correct the sins and corruption of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, whose crimes were committed due to a lack of belief in Hashem who rules the world. The Ten Plagues taught them that there is a Creator and Ruler of the world – “so that you know that I am Hashem in the midst of the earth (VaEira 8:18)” - and thus “the Egyptians will sincerely repent (S’forno 7:3)” for their crimes against the Jews. The prophet Yechezkel (25:14-17) says that Hashem takes revenge on the enemies of Israel so that “they know that I am Hashem.”

Another reason for the Plagues is to fulfill the promise made to Avrohom at the Bris Bein HaB’sarim (15:14) “and the nation ... I will judge.” Hashem promised to punish Egypt for enslaving and



killing the Jewish people.

## TO SHOW THE JEWISH PEOPLE G-D'S MIGHT

In addition to the reasons mentioned thus far, the Torah tells us another reason for the Ten Plagues – so that they will tell how “I mocked Egypt and about the signs I placed on them,” so that “they know that I am Hashem.” In other words, Hashem punishes Egypt so that “Yisroel will recognize the might of Hashem” and as Rashi says (7:3), “Hashem brings punishment upon the Egyptians so that the Jewish people will hear about it and be afraid.”

This is remarkable! Mighty events take place in the world - Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the Sea, etc. - and all this is so the Jewish people will be afraid and impressed by Hashem's might.

The Baal Shem Tov once explained (Maamarei Admur HaZakein) that sometimes mighty things take place in the world even for one Jew (and not for the Jewish people as a whole). He stated that there was a bloody war lasting seven years [perhaps the Seven Years' War, 1756-1763] which was orchestrated in Heaven so that a tzaddik would hear the sound of the trumpeting warring armies and learn from them to compose a niggun “to serve Hashem with this niggun!”

Is this not incredible? Upheavals take place in the world, a military infrastructure is built, armies battle, people are killed and wounded and any sensible person would attribute this to political reasons, historical reasons, jealousy, imperialism, etc. Says the Baal Shem Tov – no! This war took place just so that one Jew could improve in an aspect of his avodas Hashem, a niggun in the service of Hashem.

Similarly, the Rambam writes in

***Hashem arranged for him to build this palace, with a great investment of money and effort, for the sole reason that one day a pious Jew who would be passing by could rest in the shade of the mighty walls... So too... He will say to them: ‘My children, do not fear! Everything I did, I did only for you! Why are you frightened? Don’t be afraid - the time of your redemption has arrived!’***

his introduction to his commentary on Mishnayos about a king who built a beautiful palace, ostensibly to aggrandize the glory of his kingdom. But this was not the real reason. Hashem arranged for him to build this palace, with a great investment of money and effort, for the sole reason that one day a pious Jew who would be passing by could rest in the shade of the mighty walls.

So too, the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshaya, perek 60, remez 499) says, “Rabbi Yitzchok said: The year that Melech HaMoshiach will be revealed, all the kings [leaders] of the nations will be struggling against each other... All the nations of the world will be trembling and shaking and falling on their faces... The Jewish people will be trembling and quaking and saying: ‘Where can we go? Where can we go?’ And [Hashem] will say to them: ‘My children, do not fear! Everything I did, I did only for you! Why are you frightened? Don’t be afraid - the time of your redemption has arrived!’ (The final Geula will be unlike the first Geula because the first Geula was followed by exiles while the final

Geula will not be followed by any servitude to the nations).”

All the events taking place in the world are only for the sake of the Jewish people. So too, back in Egypt, Hashem smote the Egyptians in order to show the Jewish people His might.

## THE PLAGUES DIVIDED INTO THREE GROUPS

In kabbalistic works it is explained that the Ten Plagues are divided into three groups. In our Hagada, when Rabbi Yehuda gives acronyms for the plagues, he likewise divides them into the three words - D'tzach, Adash, B'achav - and not into two or four words.

If you look carefully at the description of Moshe's encounters with Pharaoh before the plagues, you will see that there is a specific order to their meetings. With the first plague of each group, Moshe meets with Pharaoh alone on the banks of the river, warns him and gives him a spiritual message. In the second plague of each group, Moshe meets with him and his magicians and servants in the palace and only warns them. With

the third plague, he doesn't even meet with him.

The first group, D'tzach, consisted of Blood, Frogs and Lice. Before the first plague, blood, Moshe warned Pharaoh ("the waters of the river will turn into blood") and added a spiritual message ("thus will you know that I am Hashem"). Before the second plague, Moshe warns Pharaoh and his magicians ("I will strike your borders with frogs") but he does not add a message that Hashem is the Creator. Before the third, he does not warn them and does not give any message; he doesn't even meet with Pharaoh.

The same format appears with the second group, Adash: Mixture of Wild Animals, Plague, and Boils. In the first of the series, mixture of wild animals, Moshe warns Pharaoh ("I will send... the mixture of animals") and adds a message ("so you know that I am Hashem"). Before the second plague in this series, Moshe warns Pharaoh and his magicians ("a very severe plague") but does not convey a message that Hashem is the Creator. Before the third plague, boils, he does not warn nor convey a message; he doesn't even meet with Pharaoh.

In the third group of plagues, B'achav - Hail, Locusts, Darkness, and Death of Firstborn - the sequence repeats itself. With the first plague in this series, hail, he warns Pharaoh ("I will cause to rain ... a severe hail") and adds a message ("so that you know that there is no one like Me in all the land"). Before the second, locusts, Moshe warns Pharaoh and his magicians ("behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts within your borders") but did not say anything about Hashem being the Creator. Before the third plague, darkness, he did not warn or convey a message; he did not meet with Pharaoh.

The division of the plagues into three groups has to do with their function in educating Pharaoh and his people, and the Jewish people, to absolute belief in G-d.

### **THREE PRINCIPLES IN BELIEF IN HASHEM**

There are three principles in emuna: 1) Hashem created the world, 2) Hashem runs the world and nature is not independent. Hashem guides even the most natural occurrences, and He sustains and provides for the mighty animals down to the tiniest of creatures. 3) Hashem can change the rules of nature in a miraculous manner.

Pharaoh denied all three principles. 1) He denied the existence of Hashem. "I do not know Hashem." He thought nature operates on its own and that the river was god. 2) He denied that Hashem runs the world. "Who is Hashem?" Pharaoh challenged Hashem's authority to tell him what to do. 3) He denied that Hashem can change the rules of nature and said, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him?" In other words, "what ability does He have that I should submit to Him and listen to Him? The rules of nature work consistently and Hashem cannot change them and harm me."

Each of the three groups of plagues taught a particular lesson and corrected one of these errors.

### **BELIEF IN HASHEM**

The first group, D'tzach, taught Pharaoh to believe in Hashem and so before the first plague Moshe said, "With this you will know that I am Hashem," i.e. you will know and recognize the existence of the Creator.

1) The first plague, blood – the Egyptians considered the river a

deity since it irrigated their fields. By turning the river to blood, Hashem showed them that there is a higher power than the river because "the One who told the river to be water, told it to be blood."

2) The second plague, frogs – the rivers swarmed with frogs and when they emerged onto dry land and entered the ovens etc. the Egyptians saw there is a G-d who rules the river, "the One who told the frog to live in water, told the frog to go up on dry land."

3) The third plague, lice – the One who told the earth to produce food to support life (wheat, fruits, vegetables) will tell the earth to swarm with lice that will eat off man and animals. After this plague, the last in the series of plagues that taught belief in G-d, the magicians conceded, "It is the finger of G-d."

### **THAT HASHEM RUNS THE WORLD**

The second group, Adash, taught Pharaoh to recognize that Hashem supervises and runs the world and nature does not operate on its own, as Moshe said before the plague of the mixture of wild animals, "so you know that I am G-d in the midst of the earth."

1) The fourth plague, the mixture of wild animals – In contradiction to the natural impulse of wild animals to attack everyone without differentiating between people were not allowed to strike at Goshen where the Jewish people lived. This showed that Hashem rules the world and supervises nature.

2) The fifth plague, animals dying in a plague – here too, Hashem separated between the animals of the Jews and the animals of the Egyptians and only the animals belonging to the Egyptians died, also proving that Hashem controls nature.

3) The sixth plague, boils – although boils erupted throughout Egypt, it did not affect the Jewish people, to show that Hashem controls nature. Furthermore, it first afflicted the magicians and only afterwards the rest of Egypt, since the magicians were the ones who misled Pharaoh and his nation, saying the plagues were not from Hashem. After this plague, the last in the series that was designed to teach that Hashem controls nature, the Torah says “and the magicians were unable to stand,” because they became aware that nature is in Hashem’s hands.

## HASHEM CAN CHANGE THE RULES OF NATURE

The third group, B’achav, taught Pharaoh to recognize the fact that there is a G-d who judges

us, who gives a reward to the righteous and a punishment to the wicked. He lowers the arrogant and elevates the meek and He rules and changes nature. The plague of hail was prefaced by the message, “in order that you know that there is no one like Me in the midst of the earth.”

1) The seventh plague, hail – Chazal describe the many miracles with which Hashem displayed his full control of nature during this plague. Fire and ice coexisted, the hail struck only the resha’im among the Egyptians even though the difference between an Egyptian “tzaddik” and rasha is slim, and many other miracles.

2) The eighth plague, locusts – Hashem’s mighty army covered the land; there was no escaping them. The fields of the tzaddikim, however, though surrounded by the

fields of the wicked which were demolished by locusts, remained untouched by the locusts.

3) The ninth plague, darkness – Once again this was an incredible miracle whereby it was dark only for the wicked while the tzaddikim had light.

4) The tenth plague, death of the firstborn – it was clear that Hashem made distinctions in judgment as only the firstborn died.

The ten plagues with which Hashem smote Egypt were a preparation for the exodus from the darkness of galus to the great light of Geula. May we soon merit in our days “as in the days that you left Egypt, I will show you wonders,” with the true and complete Geula with Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

*Sources: Commentaries on the Torah; Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 33*



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# KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

By Eli Shneuri

Translated by Michael Leib Dobry

***The stories that shluchim usually tell are thrilling tales of spiritual success. What we don't always hear about are the tremendous difficulties and dangers that shluchim endure and the Hand of Heaven that protects them. The story of Rabbi Dror Moshe Shaul, the Rebbe MH"M's shliach in Dharamsala, India.***

I thought that all the harsh descriptions were already long behind us. I didn't think that it would be appropriate to use them any longer. I'm not happy to have to bring them again, but what can I do? Facts are facts: The Rebbe's shliach vomiting from all the nausea on the way to the hospital with blood spurting from his eye! What's important, though, is that the story has a happy ending!

The following story is told by Rabbi Dror Moshe Shaul, the Rebbe MH"M's shliach in Dharamsala, India, located at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains:

"When we returned about a year ago to resume our Chabad House activities in Dharamsala, India, my wife bought a few chicks to keep our children occupied when they would go out and play in the yard.

"One Friday, several hours before Shabbos, when I was already dressed in my Shabbos clothes, my daughter came into the house looking very upset. She told me that a wild animal had entered the yard and devoured one of the chicks.

"There was an Indian slingshot in the yard, and I tried to use it on the vicious creature. However, I failed to take into consideration that this was a typically flimsy Indian contraption. Before I managed to release the sling, it turned around and sent the rock smashing into my glasses, and the lens penetrated my eye.

"At first, I thought that my eye had literally come out of its socket. I went over a mirror to try and see what had happened. It was only with some difficulty that I managed to ascertain that the eye had sustained

deep cuts and was filled with blood. I was terrified. My eye had stopped functioning. I quickly checked the severity of the injury by waving my hand in front of my eye, and it appeared that I could make out shadows. I was somewhat encouraged.

"I called my daughter and asked her to call my wife, who became very alarmed at the sight. I tried to calm her down, telling her that I was certain that everything was by Divine Providence, and whatever G-d does is for the good. Now we had to consider what to do under the circumstances. I don't know how I managed to keep my composure.

"The closest hospital was about an hour and a half away. It would be more accurate to call this place a *beit cholim*, as opposed to a *beit refua*, as this hospital itself constitutes a serious risk to its patients and visitors due to infection and the unhygienic conditions that prevail there. Anyone who came there healthy would likely leave there sick...

"We decided to consult with the Indian who owned the Chabad House building, assuming that he was a bit more familiar with local medical services than we were. I called him and explained more or less what had happened. After pondering the matter for a few minutes, he suggested that we make a journey of several hours to an expert ophthalmologist who could try and help us.

"The eye wouldn't stop bleeding, and the pains were simply excruciating.

"We immediately took a taxi and set out on our way. Even under the best of circumstances, journeying in this area often triggers nausea and dizziness, as it required traveling through mountain ranges along winding roads.

"We arrived at the hospital in the middle of the lunch hour, and anyone acquainted with the local

custom knows that Indians never pass up on their lunch break...even if they see someone dying right in front of their eyes.

"We tried explaining that this was a matter of great urgency that could not be delayed. It took about fifteen minutes until we finally managed to get the doctor to come out. After examining the eye thoroughly with a flashlight and a magnifying glass, he suddenly turned to my wife and asked, 'What citizenship do you have?'"

"German," my wife replied.

"And you?" he asked me.

"Israeli," I answered, not quite understanding what he was driving at.

"Listen carefully," he told us, "even if you were to travel to Germany or Israel, you will not be able to see with this eye again! There is no chance!" Though he tried to impress upon us his own perception of the situation, his words were unconvincing. "My wife was very alarmed, and I tried again to calm her down. I remained certain that Divine Providence was watching over us, even at this most difficult hour.

"We called our Indian contact again, wondering what we should do now. He suddenly remembered that he has a nephew who is a leading eye surgeon with one of the hospitals in India. He called his nephew and updated him with all the relevant details, emphasizing that this was in reference to a very important person. (I realized only later why I was considered such a VIP.. He was underhandedly obtaining all of his utilities – telephone, electricity, water, etc. – through our lines...) The Divine Providence was simply incredible. Why did he suddenly remember about his nephew? Why didn't he suggest that we go to him from the very outset? It turns out that his nephew was supposed to travel to Indonesia the previous day,



Rabbi Dror Shaul on outreach activities in Dharamsala

***We arrived at the hospital in the middle of the lunch hour, and anyone acquainted with the local custom knows that it is customary in India to never pass up one's lunch break... even if they see someone dying right in front of their eyes.***

but he missed his flight... A miracle – a literal miracle!

"The decision was made immediately to go see him. Since it was getting close to Shabbos, and leaving the Chabad House unattended was out of the question, my wife went back to the Chabad House and organized things for Shabbos. Naturally, this was no easy task. However, each of the children took on some important task and tried to do so with simcha. By the way, that Shabbos produced several baalei t'shuva who today learn in yeshivos and midrashos throughout Eretz Yisroel...

"We set out on a journey that was expected to take about eight hours. One of the Israeli tourists, a pleasant young man named Hillel,

accompanied me. I said chapters of T'hilim and Tanya from memory the whole way there. It's interesting to note that just a few days earlier, I had begun to learn Epistle 11 in Igeres HaKodesh, which discusses how everything that G-d does is absolute good. Again the trip was no smooth ride, filled with twisting ups and downs. At a certain point in the middle of the journey, I couldn't take it anymore and I asked the driver to stop. I got out of the car and began to throw up on the side of the road from all the nausea. As I was vomiting, my pulse began to race to such an extent that my eye wouldn't stop bleeding... It was absolutely horrible.

"We arrived at the hospital at midnight, two hours later than

***I got out of the car and began to throw up on the side of the road from all the nausea. As I was vomiting, my pulse began to race to such an extent that my eye wouldn't stop bleeding... We arrived at the hospital at midnight... to our shock and dismay, the place was closed.***

planned. However, to our shock and dismay, the place was closed. It turned out that the hospital does not work from Friday through Sunday.

"After making a few frantic phone calls, the eye surgeon arrived and opened the hospital especially for us. He examined the eye from every angle, and after looking over the test results for a few minutes, he looked at us squarely and said flatly, 'The chances are slim, but I'll try my very best.' The treatment was exceptional, and this time for the better.

"They told us to prepare for an operation scheduled for two o'clock in the morning. In the meantime, I utilized the time spent waiting by learning maamarim I remembered by heart together with my Israeli companion, Hillel - who, by the way, received tremendous spiritual strength from the study session.

"At two a.m., I went in for the operation. All the nurses were running from room to room when the procedure finally commenced.

"The operation concluded after several hours, and I soon received a report from the surgeon himself: 'The condition of your eye was most complicated,' he said, 'and we had to make five stitches in it. We'll only be able to determine the results tomorrow since the eye is still bleeding.'

"The following day, I underwent another examination, and the doctor informed me that according to the

results, the lower incision had knitted quite nicely and the operation was a success.

"In the meantime, my brother from Eretz Yisroel surprised me with a visit to my bedside, and he too derived considerable spiritual strength from the whole experience.

"One day, a member of the doctors' staff came in to wake me up, but I didn't respond verbally since it's forbidden to speak before washing *negel vasser*. He didn't understand what was going on, and I motioned to him that I have to wash my hands. He turned to my brother and said, 'Your brother is very religious.' My brother nodded in agreement, but didn't appear all that surprised. The doctor responded by clarifying exactly what he meant: 'Your brother is very very religious...'

"The treatment I received from the medical staff there was indeed extraordinary, both in reference to the special room they gave me and the various services they performed. I truly felt that they were treating me

like a shliach of the Rebbe...

"Baruch Hashem, my condition improved miraculously, and within a few days, I was released from the hospital. I called the Israeli embassy in New Delhi to request that they prepare a joint letter of thanks with Chabad, but they were concerned about this unprecedented display of obvious cooperation with the Chabad House.

"The next day, the hospital staff organized a press conference, during which I expressed my deep appreciation for their dedicated treatment and how they had been the Divine messengers that saved my eye. Naturally, I chose not to waste the opportunity to deliver the Rebbe's message to the world that Moshiach is coming!

"The story was publicized the following day in all the papers throughout India. People recognized me in the street, and this made a tremendous Kiddush Hashem when they accepted the message of fulfilling the Seven Noachide Laws and preparing for the imminent Redemption."

\* \* \*

When we heard about the profuse bleeding and the serious injury to his eye, we fully expected to see R' Dror Shaul with huge scars. Yet, we were amazed by the fact that the eye appeared totally intact without any sign of an accident or damage. Everything looked absolutely normal, and its functioning improves from day to day.