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INSPIRING LIGHT

Sichos In English

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A WISE MAN TALKS

The Rambam writes: [1] "Just as a wise man can be recognized through his wisdom and his character traits, and in these, he stands apart from the rest of the people, so too, he should be recognized in his conduct."

The Rambam's intent is that the Jewish conception of knowledge is not a theoretical one.

Instead, a person's knowledge must shape his character, and more importantly, influence his actual behavior. This is what distinguishes him as wise.

Among the types of conduct mentioned by the Rambam as appropriate for a wise man is refined speech, as he continues: [2]

"A Torah scholar should not shout or shriek while speaking.... Instead, he should speak gently to all people.... He should judge all [his fellow]men in a favorable light, speaking his colleague's praise, and never mentioning anything that is shameful to him."

The wording employed by the Rambam, "judging... in a favorable light" and "never mentioning anything that is shameful" indicate that the Torah scholar may recognize faults within a colleague's character. Even so he will also "speak his colleague's praise."

When speaking to his colleague privately, he will patiently and gently rebuke him for his conduct. [3] But when speaking to others - and when viewing his colleague in his own mind - he will think and

speak favorably of him.

This is not only a reflection of the scholar's own personal refinement.

By continually highlighting the other person's positive qualities, he actually encourages their expression.

Causality is a multifaceted system, and thought and speech can bring about appreciable changes within our world.

For this reason, at times, the Maggid of Mezritch would recite concepts which he knew that his listeners could not understand, with the intent of drawing the idea into our world, so that later, it would be possible for it to be comprehended by others. [4]

To cite a similar concept in the realm of human relations:

Our Sages state [5] that lashon ha'ra (malicious gossip) [6] kills three people: the one who speaks it, the one who listens, and the one about whom it is spoken.

We can understand why such conversation affects the one who speaks and the one who listens - both are party to a sin which our Sages consider [7] as equivalent to the combined effects of idol worship, murder, and adultery. But why should the person about whom the gossip was spoken be affected? He did not take part in the transgression.

In resolution, it can be explained that speaking about a person's negative qualities spurs their expression.

Although the person might not even be aware that he is being

spoken about, the fact that his character faults are being discussed fans the revelation of these qualities.

Had these faults not been spoken about, there is a greater probability that they would have remained hidden.

"Positive attributes are more powerful than the attributes of retribution," [8] and similar concepts apply with regard to speaking about a person's positive character traits.

The consistent mention of the good a person possesses - and within every individual, there are unfathomed reservoirs of good - will facilitate the expression of that good in the person's conduct.

A COMMAND TO SPEAK

The above concepts relate to our Torah reading which is called Emor.

Emor is a command, telling one to speak.

In the context of the Torah reading, this command has an immediate application: to communicate the laws pertaining to the priesthood.

Nevertheless, the fact that this term is used as the name of a Torah reading indicates a wider significance: A person must speak. [9]

And yet, we find our Sages counseling: "Say little," [10] and "I... did not find anything better for one's person than silence," [11] implying that excessive speech is not desirable.

Nor can we say that the charge "emor" refers to the commandment

to speak words of Torah, for there is an explicit command, [12] “And you shall speak of them,” encouraging us to proliferate words of Torah.

Instead, the charge “emor” refers to speaking about a colleague’s virtues as explained above. [13]

LEARNING WITH LIGHT

Our Sages [14] associate the command “emor” with the obligation of chinuch, the education of our children, commenting:

[It is written:] [15] “Speak” and [it is written,] “tell them.” [Why the redundancy in the same verse?] To adjure the adults concerning the children.... L’hazhir, the Hebrew word translated as “to adjure,” shares the same root as the word zohar, meaning “radiance.”

This communicates a fundamental lesson with regard to education; it must be characterized by radiant light.

In general, there are two ways to educate children to reject undesirable behavior: to emphasize how base it is, or to show the positive alternative.

L’hazhir underscores the importance of spreading light, confident that “a little light repels much darkness,” [16] and that by shining light, one will arouse the inner light which every person possesses within his soul. [17]

AS LIGHT KINDLES LIGHT

There is a deeper dimension to the above concept.

In a complete sense, the chinuch (education) of one’s children - and by extension, all the others whom one influences [18] - should not be viewed as a further obligation beyond one’s own Divine service - another task to be accomplished - but rather as a natural outgrowth of that Divine service itself.

When a person’s Divine service

reaches a consummate peak, and in keeping with the thrust of ahavas Yisroel and achdus Yisroel (the love and unity of the Jewish people), he joins together with others, his contact with them will foster their personal growth.

The light that shines forth from his conduct will inspire and educate all those with whom he associates.

And this approach will lead to the era when “the wise will shine as the splendor of the firmament” [19] and “Israel... will leave their exile with mercy.” [20]

May this take place in the immediate future.

Adapted from Likkutei Sichos: Vol. XXVII, p. 159ff; Sefer HaSichos 5750, p. 443ff

NOTES:

1. Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Deios 5:1.
2. Ibid.:7.
3. See *ibid.*, 6:7.
4. Maamarei Admur HaZakein HaK’tzarim, p. 464. See also Keser Shem Tov, sec. 256.
5. VaYikra Rabba 26:2. See also Erchin 15b, Hilchos Deios 7:3.
6. This is the direct opposite of the subject mentioned previously, speaking positively about a colleague despite the fact that he possesses faults. For as emphasized by Hilchos Deios 7:2, lashon ha’ra does not refer to inventing lies about a colleague - that transgression is referred to as motzi shem ra. Lashon ha’ra refers to making deprecating statements about a colleague even if they are true.
7. Erchin, loc. cit., Hilchos Deios 7:3.
8. Sota 11a.
9. The connection of the Torah reading to proper speech is also emphasized by its conclusion, the narrative of the blasphemer, which gives an example of the opposite approach. See VaYikra 24:11ff and commentaries.
- Parshas Emor mentions the Counting of the Omer, and is always read during this period of the Jewish year. The Counting of the Omer also shares a connection to the concept of proper speech, for this period is marked by certain customs of mourning in

commemoration of the death of Rabbi Akiva’s students (Shulchan Aruch HaRav 493:1).

As the Maharsha (in his Chiddushei Agados to Yevamos 62b) states, the spiritual source for the plague which killed Rabbi Akiva’s students was their inability to respect each other, and the lashon ha’ra which they would speak.

10. Pirkei Avos 1:16.

11. Ibid.:17.

12. Deuteronomy 6:7.

13. The importance of the potential of speech is also expressed by the Midrash (VaYikra Rabba 26:1, commenting on the opening verse of our Torah reading) which focuses on the difference between G-d’s speech, which brings existence into being, and ordinary human speech, which has no lasting effect in this world.

Nevertheless, since “the righteous resemble their Creator” (B’Reishis Rabba 67:8), there is a potential for mortal speech to affect change as explained above.

14. Yevamos 114a, quoted by Rashi in his commentary to Leviticus 24:1.

15. Leviticus, *ibid.*

16. Tanya, ch. 12.

17. This approach is also emphasized by the word emor itself.

The word dabber also means “speak,” but it is associated with harsh tones (Makos 11a, Sifri and Rashi, commenting on Numbers 12:1). Emor, by contrast, is associated with gentle words (Mechilta and Rashi, commenting on Exodus 19:3; Sifri and Rashi, commenting on Numbers, loc. cit.), an approach of giving.

18. For students are also referred to as children (Sifri, VaEs’chanan 6:7).

19. Daniel 12:3.

20. Raya Mehemna, Zohar III, 124b-125a. This teaching explains that the Redemption will come in the merit of “this book of yours [i.e., of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai], the Zohar, the Book of Radiance.” Significantly, the yahrtzait of Rabbi Shimon is usually celebrated in the week before or the week after the reading of Parshas Emor.

MOSHIACH: DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

CONFLICTING MESSAGES

One of the strangest sensations that a person can experience is when he finds himself declaiming passionately for a position or point of view that he once argued against almost as passionately. It is the closest thing to feeling like a split personality short of actually suffering a severe mental health disorder. I can recall a situation when I felt this most acutely, that took place over sixteen years ago. I was invited by a group of Lubavitch bachurim who arranged Tanya classes and other activities in Yeshiva University, to hold a farbrengen one Thursday night in a nearby fast food place owned by a Lubavitcher. For over four hours, I spoke about the belief that Chassidim have in the Rebbe, based upon the Chassidic understanding of the role of Moshe Rabbeinu, citing numerous sources in Talmud and Midrash, and going on to later singular figures in Jewish history such as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and the Arizal.

Since these were Modern Orthodox yeshiva and university

students who saw themselves first and foremost as rational thinkers, I presented the material using a matter of fact delivery, calmly (and humorously) proving each point as if nothing could be more obvious. Although my external demeanor was extremely laid back and relaxed, and to all appearances I was just having a good time, on the inside, my guts were turning over. Part of my brain was focused on the material and the audience, but another part of my brain was saying things like, "Who are you kidding? Only a few short years ago you were championing old-style Lithuanian rationalism, decrying the modern day trend in the yeshiva world of turning Roshei Yeshiva and leading Rabbis into Chassidic style Rebbees, treating them as if they had a direct line to G-d, and as such must be followed blindly and could not be questioned or disagreed with." At the time, I felt like the world's biggest phony (to the point of nausea, preventing me from partaking of the lavish spread), and the only thing that kept me going was the idea that I was only the messenger and it was not about me.

Looking back even further, I

realize that even in my most rabid Misnagdic period I was intensely conflicted. I loved to quote the commentary of Reb Chaim Volozhin on the Mishna in Avos that lists *Emunas Chachamim* (faith in the Sages) as one of the 48 traits necessary for the acquisition of Torah. He explains there that one must have faith in the superior knowledge and insight of the Torah greats and teachers of his time, yet that does not preclude using his own faculties of judgment and drawing his own conclusions.

As far as consulting the Tzaddik regarding personal matters, I was raised on the classic proof that absolute faith in even the greatest person not on the level of prophecy is misplaced and misguided from the verse (Shmuel 2, 16:23) that asking advice of Achitofel was like asking the *Urim V'Tumim* (consulting G-d via the prophetic responses from the stones on the breastplate of the High Priest). This would seem to indicate that this was a one time and singular phenomenon for someone who was not an actual prophet. Wisdom and/or righteousness should inspire faith, but not the absolute faith promulgated by Chassidic tradition. I was even aware of the letter in Tanya (Igeres HaKodesh ch. 22) where he decries the practice of consulting a Rebbe on material matters, stating emphatically that this is not a part of Jewish tradition as far back as the Sages of the Mishna and the Talmud, and was the exclusive domain of the prophets of yore.

As I mentioned in a previous article, from my earliest childhood I felt a very strong, almost empathic, connection with Biblical characters. This extended to certain central figures in later history as well. One that stood out from the rest, for me, was Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. As far back as I can remember, well before my teen years, I could not

sing the song Bar Yochai (to the words authored by the Kabbalist, R' Shimon Lavi) without being moved to tears. It didn't matter if it was on Lag B'Omer or at the *hakafos* on Simchas Torah as per the custom in some shuls and yeshivas, at an ordinary *seuda shlishis* on a regular Shabbos or alone by myself in a secluded area.

As I got older, I became progressively more mystified by this almost automatic reaction as it didn't jibe with my image of myself as a rational though emotionally expansive person. What connection did I have with the author of the Zohar and primary conduit of the mystical tradition of Judaism? Why does a song about this man that is mostly comprised of esoteric references move me to such an extent? Could it be that the Chassidim are correct insofar as there are soul connections that transcend critical thinking? Why when it comes to Rashbi do I respond with the blind faith and absolute belief characteristic of a simple Chassid or Sephardic Jew?

HIDDEN MESSAGES

The answer that Chabad Chassidus gives as to why the Chassidim (at least in Chabad) continued to consult the Rebbe of each generation on personal matters pertaining to livelihood and the like even after the Alter Rebbe's letter of protest was made public, is that Chassidim believe that the Rebbe is indeed endowed with the gift of prophecy. The Rebbe pointed out on a number of occasions that the Alter Rebbe himself continued to receive and respond to such queries, indicating that he conceded the point to the Chassidim and thereby openly acknowledging that he was a prophet, and the same applies to his spiritual heirs, the Rebbe of each subsequent generation.

The obvious question that arises

is why is it that in the time of the Tanaim (Sages of the Mishnaic period) and Amoraim (Sages of the Talmudic era) we don't find that the Sages were possessed of actual prophecy and therefore were not consulted about matters of employment and the like. Whereas in our time, beginning with the Baal Shem Tov, we say that the leader of each generation has the standing of a prophet and as such is privy to knowing those things that are normally hidden even from the greatest scholars and can even exercise control over the Divine channeling of blessing in the areas of life, livelihood and reproduction.

In the tradition of the Polish Chassidim the answer as to why there are more miracles and miracle workers in the later generations is not despite, but because of, the lower spiritual level of the times. The analogy offered by Reb Elimelech of Lizensk in the name of the Maggid is of a king who has left his palace and is traveling on a long and arduous road. When he is in his palace only those who are on a truly exalted level can come close to him, and it is only upon the truly deserving that he bequeaths gifts of power and influence. However, when he is on the road, far away from his palace, any lowly citizen that really makes an effort and extends himself to offer assistance to the king is deserving of the king's beneficence. Similarly, those Tzaddikim who serve G-d with great personal sacrifice in the dark and lowly times of exile are granted the ability to effect miracles on a scale unseen in earlier generations.

Chabad Chassidus, however, discourages the practice of going to seek the assistance of miracle workers, and encourages turning only to the one Rebbe, the one all-encompassing soul of the entire generation, as this individual is operating not from a position of begrudging favor due to the

exigencies of the time, but is actually on the soul level of the Biblical prophets. This is based on the teaching of the Arizal that the prophets were souls of the world of *Atzilus*, which is a manifestation of the Creator and transcends created reality. Unlike them, the Tanaim were souls of the world of *Beria* and the Amoraim of the world of *Yetzira*, both of which are the spiritual origins of actual creation. The prophets were operating from a position above creation, whereas the great Sages of the Mishna and Talmud were above this lowly world but not above the limitations of created existence.

The Arizal lists an exception from the Tannaic period who was possessed of a soul of *Atzilus*, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, which is why he is the one who merited to reveal the deepest secrets of the Torah to all later generations, since the hidden portion of the Torah is the Torah as it is in the world of *Atzilus*. Similarly, the Arizal informed his main disciple, Rav Chaim Vital, that the two of them were souls of *Atzilus*. Rav Chaim Vital discusses in a number of places the questions that he raised to his teacher on this topic and the answers he received, but the bottom line remains that in each generation, even when there is present more than one soul of *Atzilus*, there is one all-encompassing soul and in the time of the Tanaim it was Rashbi, and in their generation it was the Arizal.

The fact is that such a soul existed in every generation, who was known only to a small number of close colleagues and disciples, but until the Baal Shem Tov the presence and identity of that individual was not public knowledge. Even Rashbi in his lifetime was not publicly known to be above and beyond his colleagues, as Rabbi Akiva told him (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin), "It is enough that I and your Creator recognize your

power.” In other words, even his own colleagues were not aware of the loftier spiritual stature of Rabbi Shimon. This remained the case for well over a thousand years before the Zohar was discovered and before the Arizal and his disciples really developed and expounded upon his teachings along with the significance of his role in revealing those teachings.

Similarly, with the Alter Rebbe and his fellow disciples of the Mezritcher Maggid, we find that not all of them appreciated his unique status. One of those that clearly did was Reb Zushe of Anipoli, who was once learning with his son and suddenly began to tremble uncontrollably and fell off his chair and rolled under the table. In response to his son’s query as to why the sudden attack of awe, he said, “When a *neshama* of Atzilus walks by, how can one not tremble?” The son went to the window to see who was walking by and saw that it was Rav Shneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe.

In every generation there is such an all-encompassing soul, an extension of Moshe Rabbeinu who is possessed of the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu, although who and what he was often was hidden from public view. Beginning with the Baal Shem Tov those individuals began to go public, taking on progressively more overt and far reaching leadership tasks, guiding, teaching, directing and protecting their fellow Jews. As Moshe Rabbeinu in his time, they encountered opposition from a wide spectrum of Jewish society, from troublemakers, great scholars, tribal spiritual leaders, and even close family members.

FINAL MESSAGE

The Rebbe Rashab in the classic Hemshech 5666 refers to Lag B’Omer as the Mattan Torah of P’nimius HaTorah (the Giving of

the Torah, of the “inner” esoteric portion of the Torah), much as Shavuos is the time of the Giving of the Torah for the revealed portion of the Torah. In the Chabad Torah journal HaTamim (vol. 2 p. 94 [188]) , published in Poland in the years immediately preceding WWII, the Rebbe Rashab is quoted as saying that the 19th of Kislev is the Mattan Torah of P’nimius HaTorah. The editors (the Rebbe being the editor-in-chief) of that publication address the seeming contradiction, but the bottom line is that each of these dates represents a tremendous leap forward in the process of divine revelation begun at Sinai, and which will only be fully revealed with the coming of Moshiach. As the Rebbe Rashab writes elsewhere that the main revelation of the future time is the revelation of G-d and G-dliness as He is manifest in the deepest secrets of the Torah.

In the words of the Midrash Koheles, “the Torah that a person learned in this world is *hevel* (lit. a puff of air, meaning totally insignificant) compared to the Torah of Moshiach.” And as Rashi writes in his commentary on Shir HaShirim (1:2), on the verse, “[Would that] He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth,” that this is the prayer of the Jewish people in exile, recalling the revelation of the giving of the Torah and the promise that Hashem would reveal Himself in the future time and reveal its deepest and most hidden secrets.

So yes, each of us does have a deep soul connection with not only the Avos, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech and the like, but also with Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the Arizal, the Baal Shem Tov, the Alter Rebbe etc. all the way to the Rebbe of our generation. Some may have a stronger awareness of this connection, some may sense it only on an intuitive level, and some may even claim to oppose it. But

everybody has it and our job is to reveal it in an even stronger way within ourselves and within those that we are able to reach out to, through being immersed in the teachings of Kabbala and Chassidus as explicated in Chassidus Chabad. That has been the primary focus and mission of Chabad Chassidus from its inception to this day, even when Chassidim were compelled to take the lead in preserving and promoting the basics of Judaism.

We have been enjoined to prepare ourselves and the entire world for Moshiach. This preparation has many aspects to it including publicizing the message of redemption to the entire world, learning in depth and in groups the topics of Moshiach and Redemption, adding in Tz’daka and so on. Yet, to a Chassid, the main focus has to be on the study and teaching of Chassidus, as the Rebbe indicated many times (see for example Sicha Mikeitz - Chanuka, 5752) based on the statement of Moshiach to the Baal Shem Tov that he would come “when your wellsprings spread outward.”

Reb Hillel of Paritch writes that he heard from Reb Aizik of Homil in the name of the Alter Rebbe (Pelach HaRimon Shmos p. 7, see also Chonoh Ariel, B’Reishis p. 58) that “to lofty souls like Rashbi no destruction took place at all,” as they continued to experience the light and revelation as before. This is true of the lofty souls that followed and devoted their lives to revealing that light and revelation to us through the teachings of Chassidus, which remains our main tool for overcoming the darkness of exile, for acquiring and developing a taste and appreciation for the future revelations of the secrets of the Torah, and for bringing about the True and Complete Redemption, immediately, NOW!

RAV, MASHPIA, MECHANECH

RABBI CHAIM ASHKENAZI A”H

By Menachem Ziegelboim

*As a child he watched the elder Chassidim in the Chabad k’hilla in Tel Aviv in their davening, avoda, and farbrengens. A Chassid and a mashpia, Rabbi Chaim Ashkenazi succeeded his father and His grandfather was the rav there, his father was the rav there, and then he became the rav. * Rabbi Chaim Ashkenazi a’h was a Chassid and mashpia. Beis Moshiach was the beneficiary of his words of wisdom in numerous articles. Sadly, we now offer a brief remembrance for a fallen comrade.*

The news of the sudden death of the Chassid and renowned mashpia, Rabbi Chaim Ashkenazi a”h, rav of the Chabad k’hilla in Tel Aviv and a well-known mashpia, was a shock. He passed away on Motzaei Shabbos, Shabbos HaGadol, 13 Nissan, the day of the passing of the Tzemach Tzedek. Hundreds of people escorted him on his final journey on Sunday, from On Sunday, hundreds of people

attended his funeral which left the famous shul in Nachalat Binyamin from where it went to Shikun Chabad Lud and then to Har HaMenuchos in Yerushalayim.

CHILDHOOD AMONG THE GREAT CHASSIDIM

Shortly after Rabbi Chaim Ashkenazi was appointed as the rav of the Chabad community in Tel

Aviv, I visited his home to talk about his appointment (see issue #607, Tammuz 5767, for the complete interview).

I sat with Rabbi Chaim Ashkenazi in his home, in a cool room full of s’farim, with an old-fashioned ceiling fan whirring. In order to conduct the interview, he had to put his activities for the day on hold, take the phone off the hook, and shut his cell phone. R’ Ashkenazi was a fascinating person. He knew how to talk and when to be quiet.

He was born in Tel Aviv on 23 Iyar, 5709/1949. His father, was Rabbi Moshe Ashkenazi, who served as rav of the Chabad k’hilla in Tel Aviv for 47 years, and as a member of the hanhala of Aguch. His mother was Rebbetzin Devorah nee Karasik. Her father, daughter of Rabbi Eliezer Karasik, who was also rav of the Chabad k’hilla in Tel Aviv and one of the people who got Chabad on its feet in Eretz Yisroel.

R’ Chaim learned in the Chabad Talmud Torah on Rechov HaRav Kook 16 in Tel Aviv and grew up within the Chabad k’hilla that focused around the shul on Rechov Nachalat Binyamin.

The focal point of Chassidic life was the farbrengens on Shabbos:

“I was a boy and a boy did not sit near the farbrengen table. Back twhen I was a boy, children did not get near the farbrengen table, not only in the physical sense but even in the spiritual sense. Children knew that their place was not near the table but around it (in general, in those days, there wasn’t much of an emphasis on children participating in farbrengens. The Rebbe is the one who emphasized the importance of this). Nevertheless, I would try to stand behind the benches and listen. I was always on the alert to go and bring mashke or the chulent from the home of R’ Moshe Yaroslavsky or someone elseothers in the community.

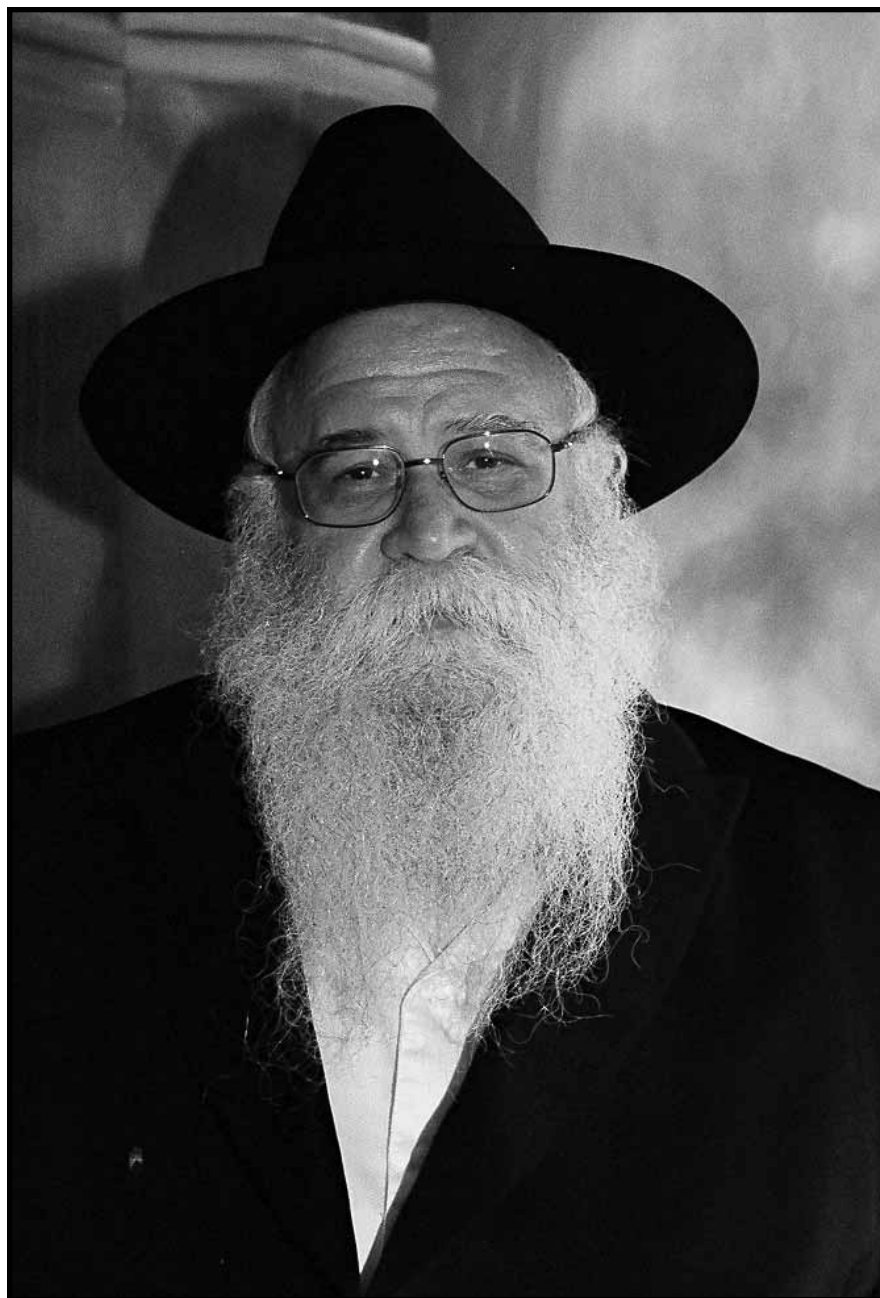
“In general, Tel Aviv was different in those days. It was like being on another planet compared to how it is a different planet than the one we are familiar with now. Tel Aviv was secular then, too, but the secularism wasn't in the streets; it was but in the homes or on the beach. The streets were quiet and there were few privately owned cars (especially during the time of austerity, when every car had to be idle one day a week). Secularism was a quiet, intellectual- heresy, and not something externally visible.”

The Chabad community in Tel Aviv at that time was led by Rav Eliezer Karasik at that time, who was also one of the main Chabad askanim in Eretz Yisroel. On Friday night, 5 Nissan, 5720/1960, R' Karasik had the Shabbos meal at home in the course of which he sang many Chassidische niggunim.

After the Shabbos meal, he told his grandson, Chaim Ashkenazi (who lived in his house when, at from the age of 11, when his father sent him from Brazil in order to learn in Eretz Yisroel), “Now you have vacation and we can learn Gemara together.” After finishing “*shnayim mikra v'echad targum*,” he went to bed, where he had a heart attack in the middle of the night.

A doctor who lived in the neighborhood was called. and he gave R' Karasik a strong injection, but it didn't help. Towards morning, R' Karasik passed away. Out of the entire extended family, only his eleven year old grandson Chaim was present, almost as if Divine Providence was indicating that he would one day take the mantle of leadership.

HeR' Chaim continued his education in yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim in Lud, in Rishon L'Tziyon with R' Shaul Brook a"vh, and in Kfar Chabad and Toras Emes in Yerushalayim, where he was also



sent by the Rebbe after his year on K'vutza. He spent his year on K'vutza between Pesach 5729 and Pesach 5730 and received smicha for rabbanus from Rabbi Yisroel Yitzchok Piekarski, rosh yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim-770.

After he married, R' Chaim was appointed mashgiach in the mesivta of Tomchei T'mimim in Lud. Two years after that later, he was offered a position in the yeshiva k'tana which

was called “charifita” back then. After the Rebbe instructed him to find out whether it entailed any *hasagas g'vul* (encroachment), R' Ashkenazi received the Rebbe's bracha.

R' Chaim Ashkenazi served as mashgiach for twenty years in the yeshiva in Lud and guided thousands of talmidim in Torah and Chassidische behavior. He was a devoted father to them and he



Three generations of rabbanim: Rabbi Eliezer Karasik (sitting) with his son-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Ashkenazi, and grandchildren (from left to right) Rabbi Mordechai Shmuel, Rabbi Nosson a"vh, Rabbi Chaim a"vh

“I feel like a little boy putting on his father’s big shoes, taking his hat and umbrella and saying, ‘I am like Abba.’ Who am I to fill the place of my father and grandfather? Who am I that I should serve as rav in a place which was the birthplace of Chabad in Eretz Yisrael?... But this is what my father wanted.”

dedicated his time to their advancement. Every night talmidim would visit him, at their own initiative to talk things over with him, and he wouldn’t return home until and he returned home late at night.

When bachurim returned from mitzvaim on Fridays, they would see their mashgiach schlepping wobbly chairs and tables from the beis midrash to make room for better ones.

In order to provide the talmidim with more than what they got within

the yeshiva schedule, he would host Melaveh Malkas in his home for Shiur Beis. In this homey atmosphere he told Chassidishe stories and brought out lessons that can be learned from them.

At a certain point the work was too much of a strain and due to medical problems he had to leave the position as mashgiacha klali. He remained as a mashpia. He did not shun any educational position. When he was offered the job of teacher in the elementary school in Lud, he took it and performed it with

youthful joy and a sense of mission. Wanting to encourage the children, he didn’t suffice with marks but wrote notes like “It’s a pleasure to teach a student like you.”

In recent years, he was mashpia in Tomchei T’ mimim in Ohr Yehuda. He got the yeshiva “on its feet,” as he brought years of experience with him from the yeshiva in Lud. The new yeshiva quickly gained a superlative reputation for its high standards in learning and the students’ Chassidishe behavior.

An entire generation of students was educated by him in Lud when it was nearly the only yeshiva for young students in Eretz Yisroel.

IN RABBANUS

During a yechidus that his wife Bruria had, in which the Rebbe spoke about the role in yeshiva, the Rebbe smiled and said: “Your husband has smicha for rabbanus ...” When he heard about this, R’ Ashkenazi said he was afraid that one day he would have to serve as rav.

After Rabbi Karasik passed away in 1960, his son-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Ashkenazi took over for the next 47 years. After R’ Moshe passed away, in Teves 5767, R’ Chaim took over the rabbanus of the k’hilla in which he had been raisedgrown up in. The kehillacongregation was no longer the same magnificent k’hilla of his childhood. Most of the distinguished members were no longer alive and many of the young ones left because of the secularism of the city. This wasn’t a particularly prestigious appointment but he wanted to do as his father wished and have the position remain in the family.

“On a number of occasions, my father said he wanted someone from the family to take over.”

At the end of the Shloshim for his father, R’ Chaim was formally appointed as rav in the presence of

his brother, Rabbi Mordechai Shmuel Ashkezai, rav of Kfar Chabad, the gabbai ha'roshi and mashpia, Rabbi Sholom Ber Butman, congregants and family members. In his speech at that event, R' Butman spoke in praise of the previous rav, R' Moshe, as well as the uniqueness of the shul where the great Chassidim of previous generations davened. He referred to R' Moshe's desire that the shlichus and rabbanus be taken over by a family member and announced the decision to appoint his son, R' Chaim.

When it was R' Chaim's turn to speak he said, "I never thought I would be a rav; it was the furthest thing from my mind," and those who knew him knew this to be true. "However, it was my father's wish which he expressed in a number of conversations.

"Who am I to take on this position? Now too, I feel like a little boy putting on his father's big shoes, taking his hat and umbrella and saying, 'I am like Abba.' Who am I to fill the place of my father and grandfather? Who am I that I should serve as rav in a place which was the birthplace of Chabad in Eretz Yisroel? But this is what my father wanted."

R' Chaim didn't see rabbanus as a position of power but one of servitude. He began to work not only within the shul and but outside of it, as well, with his goal being not only to preserve the shul but to bring back the glory days and, to increase the size of the congregation.

He began giving shiurim which built up the attendance at the t'fillos. On Thursday nights he gave a shiur in D'var Malchus which he lately more recently followed with a Gemara shiur.

"One of the reasons I agreed to accept the position," he said after the appointment, "is that I hope to help attract more people to the shul. I plan on doing this by giving



Rabbi Chaim Ashkenazi at his wedding

shiurim and trying to make the farbrengens interesting, as well as through mitzvaim which will create a bond between the congregants and residents in the area. Remember, the shul is in the center of Tel Aviv.

"The Rebbe's approach is not to wait until they come to us but to go out into the street with a lantern. We are planning a series of events such as Shabbos meals for residents of the area together with Lubavitchers. There is definitely an interest in this and it will attract people to the shul. There is plenty to do in Tel Aviv, with many people who are seeking meaning in life."

R' Chaim emphasized the Chassidic aspect of the function of a rav: "Just like there is a melamed and there is a Chassidishe melamed; a rosh yeshiva and a Chassidishe rosh yeshiva; a shochet and a Chassidishe shochet, and while the same applies to shluchim. There are many movements that send out shluchim to places around the world, and there is a vast difference between a shliach and a Chassidishe shliach, a shliach of the Rebbe. This same holds true regarding rabbanim, there is a rav and a Chassidishe rav.

"The common denominator of

them all is expressed in the question: who is working for whom? Is the rav for the k'hilla or is the k'hilla for the rav; is the shliach for the city or is the city for the shliach, etc. In other words, how do I look at the k'hilla, – how I want it to look or how the Rebbe wants it to look?

"This question is a reflection of one's point of reference. Was there first a k'hilla after which they appointed you to run it, or is the k'hilla there to serve you, to give you honor and a nice position. That's where you see the difference between a real Chassidishe rav and a your average non-Chassidishe rav. [NOT NICE!] Someone who is not a Chassid is generally not embarrassed to say straight out – 'The k'hilla is for me; I am a rav the son of a rav, from generations of rabbanim; I inherited this k'hilla from my father or father-in-law who built the k'hilla and I succeed them.' But if the starting point is that I am here for the tzibbur, then it's not about me, but rather position of power but one of about servitude."

PILLAR OF CHESED

In addition to Alongside being a master educator and Torah Yid, R' Ashkenazi was outstanding in chesed. His father, R' Moshe, would walk the length and breadth of the diamond exchange in Ramat Gan, where he was a member for years, and ask the dealers and workers for donations towards "kimcha d'pische" (lit. flour for Pesach, providing holiday expenses for needy families). Thanks to his efforts, he would deposit huge amounts of money into the tz'daka fund of the community in Lud for needy families who did not have the wherewithal to make Pesach. When his father died, R' Chaim told the gabbai of the organization that he would continue his father's tradition.

It was only after R' Chaim's passing that the full extent of this



Rabbi Chaim Ashkenazi with his father and brother, R' Mordechai Shmuel



R' Chaim Ashkenazi with his children, Menachem Mendel, Meir, Yisroel and Eliezer at his father, R' Moshe's house

commitment it was discovered. that he had taken personal loans in order to meet the expenses of this lofty charitable endeavor, and he left behind large debts. He supported many people while he himself made do with little. During his final days, which were the days before Pesach, he worked hard to provide people with money for Pesach the holiday.

After they moved to Tel Aviv, he and his wife opened their home to the unfortunate every Shabbos. R' Chaim made sure to feed them and to speak encouragingly to them. Many young people who were first discovering Judaism and Chassidus also came for an enjoyable Shabbos.

Rabbi Boaz Segal, gabbai of the shul said, "One of my first memories of him is from thirty or forty years ago, when he was a young man and would frequently visit his father in Tel Aviv. At that time, the Chabad shul didn't have an urn for hot water and the Chassidim would use the urn in the Gerrer shtibel on the second floor over the shul.

"One day an older Chassid came into the shul and asked whether I could go upstairs for him and make him a cup of tea. I was in the middle of Krias Shma and I motioned to him that I was in the middle unable to interrupt. R' Chaim came over to me after the davening and told me the story about the Chassid, R'

Michoel der Alter. One time, as he was in the middle of Shma, he noticed a bachur with torn shoes. He got up and made efforts to get him other shoes and made sure the bachur took them. When they asked him afterwards how he could interrupt the saying of Shma for shoes he said, 'Shma Yisroel is about *yichuda ila'a* (lit. Supernal Unification, the transcendent aspect of Divine Oneness) and doing a favor for a fellow Jew is also *yichuda ila'a*.' That was R' Chaim's approach to chesed, – chesed without recompense, with all his heart and soul."

SPREADING TORAH AND CHASSIDUS

In recent years, R' Chaim moved into his parents' house in Tel Aviv and turned the house into a center of kiruv. During Chanuka, for example, he lit the menorah with young Tel-Avivians. [this paragraph needs something more – it seems to fall a bit flat. It was a centre for kiruv... once a year.]

He gave many shiurim, not only in his capacity as mashpia in the yeshiva but also outside the yeshiva and in his role as rav.

R' Sholom Ber Butman, mashpia from Tel Aviv who is also a relative, related, "R' Chaim had 'a mouth that gave forth pearls.' He could repeat a maamer of the Rebbe, for example, at a farbrengen, in a simple style which everybody could understand, even someone without a background in maamarim. If you didn't know it was a maamer, you could think it was just a nice vort."

In the past decade, when he regularly went to his parents' house in Tel Aviv, he joined the farbrengens taking place at the shul and contributed his special distinctive touch to them.

The special Tanya classes he gave in various places were well-known. Hundreds of people from all walks



The last picture: At Kiddush Levana after Shabbos with the T'mimim

Someone who is not a Chassid is generally not embarrassed to say straight out – ‘The k’hilla is for me; I am a rav the son of a rav, from generations of rabbanim; I inherited this k’hilla from my father or father-in-law who built the k’hilla and I succeed them.’ But...

of life attended his shiurim, where they learned he explained the concepts which he explained clearly and with Chassidishe warmth.

R' Chaim was also well-known for the farbrengens he led. He was invited all over the country to lead farbrengens where he transmitted to the next generation the wealth of knowledge which he acquired over the years from the great Chassidim and their mentors and transmitted it to the next generation. He emphasized the belief in the coming of Moshiach and the hisgalus of the Rebbe and urged people to strengthen their emuna in the Besuras Ha'Geula. He shared his farbrengens with the readers of *Beis Moshiach* in dozens of articles, bringing examples, parables and stories from the lives of Chassidim of previous times.

Not surprisingly then, the last public event he attended was on Beis Nissan last month, at the huge

gathering for kabbalas p'nei Moshiach that was organized by Matteh Moshiach on Beis Nissan.

On the last Shabbos of his life, he attended a "Shabbos Achdus" for the T'mimim where he was the guest speaker. After he suddenly passed away on Motzaei Shabbos, some talmidim remembered that towards the end of a farbrengen that Shabbos, R' Chaim repeated a vort from something the Alter Rebbe said that when Chassidus was revealed, Gan Eden descended to the level of Gehinom and they opened a new Gan Eden. R' Chaim then said that since Gimmel Tammuz, a new channel opened which is the T'mimim. He concluded by saying, "May we merit to be in the Gan Eden of the T'mimim and although this doesn't pertain to our generation because of 'eternal life,' there are levels to this ..."

R' Chaim's brother, R' Mordechai Shmuel announced, on behalf of the family, that Rabbi Shlomo Halperin, R' Chaim's son-in-law, will succeed him in all his public positions and would serve as rav of the k'hilla in Tel Aviv. R' Halperin is a Maggid shiur of shiur gimmel in the yeshiva g'dola in Tzfas and is a *moreh tzedek* in the Chabad k'hilla in Krayot.

"The quickest way to reveal Moshiach is by learning the Torah sources about Moshiach & redemption" שי"פ תוריע ומצורע ורבינושי"א



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APPROBATION

I strongly recommend the esteemed project of Radio Moshiach, which operates here in our neighborhood of Crown Heights, "Here has Hashem commanded His blessing," as well as in other surrounding neighborhoods. Radio Moshiach enables countless individuals to listen to the Rebbe's Farbrengens, to divrei Torah in the concepts of Geulah and Moshiach, to niggunei Chabad and more, which generates a holy, uplifted atmosphere in the homes of all listeners.

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Upon this statement I affix my signature, Sunday 20th Tamuz 5766



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SHLICHUS IN AFRICA

By Mendel Tzfasman

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

A new high quality video by this name has just been launched to coincide with the upcoming Lag B'Omer celebrations. It describes the unique and unexpected shlichus of a man who is creating a Torah revolution against the backdrop of the distant African jungles, starring professional actors who give their all to convey a string of chassidic messages. Our correspondent viewed the trailers, met with the cast, and got the inside story.

No one ever dreamed that the renowned “roving shliach,” R' **Yosef HaLevi Weinberg**, who blazed his own trail with Tanya classes over the radio, would turn ever his Dakar shlichus experience into fancy movie production with tens of thousands of copies being distributed through Chabad Houses all over Eretz Yisroel at the Lag B'Omer parades.

The Year of 770 – “Paratza” – seemingly must possess special segulos to break through all the barriers and merit the use of the latest technology to bring the Rebbe,

Melech HaMoshiach and his message before the eyes and ears of countless children and their parents from all walks of life. This is no traditional promo pamphlet; this is an “up-to-date” smash-hit DVD.

The credit for this undoubtedly goes to the “Tzivos Hashem” youth movement in Eretz HaKodesh, headed by Rabbi Dovid Nachshon and administered by his son, Rabbi Levi Nachshon, who also founded the “Tzivos Hashem Center” and took the responsibility for producing a series of educational products with

prominent Chabad messages. Among their regular publications are “B'Machane Tzivos Hashem”, “D'var Malchus L'Noar”, Lag B'Omer story booklets and games and puzzles with Chabad and Geula'dike themes. Nor do they hold back in the area of multimedia, possessing a full supply of educational computer disks and cassettes for children, and more



recently, educational films. Those in charge of this constantly modernizing organization do not rest on their laurels.

One of their more outstanding productions was the film “Adventure in Egypt”, made in cooperation with the Chabad company “N'tzutzos Shel K'dusha” (Sparks of Holiness) for distribution during last year's Lag B'Omer celebrations. This marked a tremendous change from the standard productions of years past, when it was decided not to settle for the traditional parade story booklet (a publication also worthy of

much praise for its success in conveying such important messages through a flowing and illustrative tale).

Rabbi Levi Nachshon discussed this decision and the one that preceded it: “Regrettably, today’s children are less bookish and more connected to visual media, films, computers, computer games, etc. This may not be the most ideal

production. As opposed to a book project, which requires a limited number of people working on it, a film project demands sizable resources, tremendous manpower, countless corrections, revisions, and editing. Nevertheless, we came up last year with the idea of producing a film based on an interesting story line. We eventually chose the amazing story of Rabbi Gershon

about the needs of the Jewish community in Egypt, making certain to send the Chabad reporter with a sh’chita knife and kosher t’fillin in place of those no longer fit for use.

“We distributed twenty thousand copies of this special story, as adapted for the screen by ‘N’tutzos Shel K’dusha’ and produced at a reasonable cost. The enthusiastic responses we received, together with a demand for a super-professional production that would win the hearts of children, encouraged us to take another step forward and upgrade the quality of the acting performances by bringing in highly professional actors and making a film far more impressive than any other chassidic presentation on the market.”

It is worth mentioning the contribution made by Rabbi Aryeh Levy, who wholeheartedly and happily provided much financial assistance to this unprecedented project in spreading the wellsprings of chassidus.

THIS IS NO “ACT”

A few months ago, the directors of the “Olam Umlo’o” production company, another Chabad-run business, traveled to Haditch to pray at the holy gravesite of the Alter Rebbe on his yahrtzait, the 24th of Teves. At this very same time, representatives of the Tzivos Hashem Organization in Eretz HaKodesh approached them with a proposal to produce a film for the Lag B’Omer parades based on a story with the Rebbe. The production would be at the most professional level possible.

When they wrote to the Rebbe MH”M about the proposal and received positive and encouraging answers via “Igros Kodesh”, they decided to dedicate themselves to the project and even agreed to participate in the sizable production expenses. They felt that that they



situation, but that’s the way it is. We had been trying for four years already to figure out how to harness this media for the needs of spreading the wellsprings of chassidus. We want that when a child comes back from the Lag B’Omer parade, he puts the disk into his computer and watches the intriguing story on the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, together with his family, friends, and neighbors.

“However, plans got ‘stuck’ every time for a variety of reasons, foremost among them the huge budget required for such a

Jacobson, a well-known journalist, editor of the ‘Algemeiner Journal’, who also wrote for Israeli periodicals and submitted regular news from the Rebbe and about what was happening in 770 and the Lubavitch world.

“When he decided to travel to Egypt and see what was going on there, he wrote about the idea to the Rebbe and received a very positive response, together with a batch of strange and puzzling instructions. In retrospect, it turns out that the Rebbe actually saved his life when he saw through his *ruach ha’kodesh*

were preparing to carry out a virtually impossible mission: creating a professional motion picture production of powerful content in a minimal amount of time.

In order to provide details and obtain greater understanding of the unusual filming “locations” and the special effects, we have to tell you a little bit about the story that serves as the plot of this film.

Rabbi Yosef HaLevi Weinberg, the roving shliach of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, was sitting on a plane traveling from South Africa, when it suffered technical problems in flight and was forced to make a landing for two days in Dakar, capital of the West African nation of Senegal, until repairs could be made to the aircraft. At first, he was depressed, but then he suddenly remembered the special “yechidus” that he had with the Rebbe before departing on his shlichus. The Rebbe asked him if he was planning to make a stop on the way, and when he replied in the negative, the Rebbe asked him again if he was sure or maybe it was possible that he would have a stopover somewhere.

Rabbi Weinberg understood that the Rebbe foresaw the future, and was arranging a shlichus for him in some distant city. As soon as he left the airport, he started looking for Jews, but to no avail. Suddenly, someone approached him and asked him if he was Jewish. This gentleman, named Joe Clement, was an Egyptian Jew who had come to the city forty years earlier in order to work with his uncle, and this was the first time in ages that he had seen a Jew. He was disturbed by the fact that his religious lot in life seemed destined to be similar to his uncle’s. He prayed to G-d that He would send him a messenger who would help him to fight his religious battles.

The connection with this Jew proceeded to get much closer. Rabbi Weinberg taught him to put on

t’fillin. The man eventually introduced the Rebbe’s shliach to other Jewish families who were very far from Torah and mitzvah observance.

At a later stage, the Rebbe sent t’fillin and other Judaica items to the Jews of Dakar, including shmura matzos for the Pesach seder, and they were most happy to know that our generation also has its tzaddik, the Moshe Rabbeinu of the generation, who will take B’nei Yisroel out of their state of isolation and exile, for he feels their pain and perceives their needs like a merciful father.

* * *

That’s a synopsis of the actual story as it happened. To play the role of Rabbi Weinberg in the film, the producers chose the Chabad actor, R’ Michoel Veigel, who gives an awesome and outstanding performance. As a chassid on the one hand and a professional thespian on the other, he first made an in-depth study of Rabbi Weinberg’s biography, going through the letters that the Rebbe wrote to him and reading stories from his life on shlichus. It’s a pleasure to see him sitting in an airplane seat with an old copy of “*Shiurim B’Seifer HaTanya*” and a pen and notebook at his side. It’s equally exhilarating and thrilling to see him in the Rebbe’s yechidus room in 770, and then agonizing to see him stranded in the middle of nowhere in those moments between the trial and the miracle...

In the plot as presented in the film, the producers added a little action and drama. For example, the uncle is depicted as an opponent to the shliach’s activities, and he wouldn’t be satisfied until he drove the shliach out of the city in shame. However, no shliach of the Rebbe ever loses hope, and he stayed in the city despite everything. He goes through a series of unique

experiences, among them – what else? – meeting a Jewish policeman who is so lost and remote that he is unaware of his Jewishness. During the period of contact between them, the Rebbe’s shliach saved the policeman’s life. In the film’s most moving scene, we see the policeman looking at an old picture of the Rebbe and crying out with emotion: “Is that the Lubavitcher Rebbe? I owe him my life!”

The role of the policeman was aptly played by a talented young man named Guy Mesika. This is not his first film working with Chabadnikim, and he has many friends among the Chabad chassidic community. “The Rebbe has a very big place in my life,” he says with a chassidic tone.

When we asked him what form this connection takes, Guy told us that his main hiskashrus to the Rebbe is through his teachings and his s’farim. Of course, he has a picture of the Rebbe in his home. “Naturally, when I have a question or certain doubts, I turn to the Rebbe through ‘Igros Kodesh’ and ask for his advice,” he replied quite simply...

You emotionally call out in the film, “The Rebbe saved my life!” Were you actually bonding with the script or were you simply just a good actor?...

“I really do owe the life of my family to the Rebbe. When my father (may he live and be well) was cured of a grave illness through an open miracle, this was in the merit of the Rebbe’s bracha.” (NOTE: Guy promises, *bli neder*, to share the details of this personal story with our readers.)

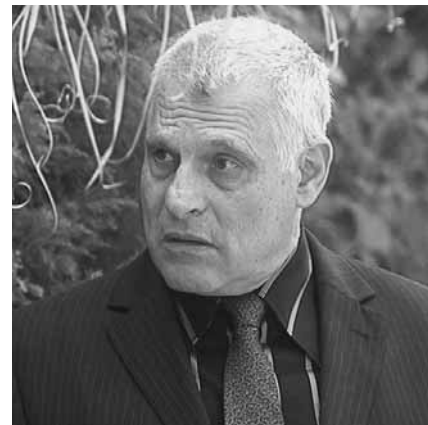
Mesika, who has considerable acting experience behind him, is genuinely impressed by the Chabad producers. “They constantly work towards improving their product’s effectiveness. They make no compromises and put out a highly professional work – something that



Oded Menaster



Avi Horwitz:
“The Rebbe is the Rebbe!”



Shlomo Sadan: “The Rebbe’s shluchim are connected to a special engine.”

is quite unbelievable when you consider that it’s being made by graduates of chassidic yeshivos, not schools in film production. Even in connection with the message, you can get it through the ‘D’var Malchus’ booklet that comes to your home. But the whole idea here is to devise clever methods in conveying the message specifically through the cinematic profession. I can safely say that they have succeeded in their mission with their films!”

The well-known actor Avi Horwitz, who opens the conversation with “*A gutte voch*” in a Galician accent, also offers words of praise for this magnificent production. Avi, who learned both in Ponevitch and in Kfar Chabad, declares, “I am not religious in the fullest sense, but I am traditional and G-d fearing, and I am surely in awe of the Rebbe...” This is Avi’s first appearance in a Chabad film, and he sums up the acting experience with expressions of deep appreciation and emotion for the Chabad group, which remained steadfast in its chassidic principles above all ratings considerations. “They are extremely talented, and they devote their entire soul to the project, as if it’s their mission. Without a doubt, they know exactly what they want from themselves, and as with any chassid, they maintain

their sense of good humor...”

While Horwitz declared that he’s not religious, he proceeds to reveal that he is a chassid no less, when he proclaims at the end of the interview, “The Rebbe is the Rebbe! What can you say?”

The role of “Uncle Albert”, who opposes the activities of the shliach and denies his Judaism, is played by the veteran actor Shlomo Sadan. The story’s happy ending, when the uncle makes a one hundred and eighty degree turn, takes place due to an embarrassing incident with his Gentile business partners, just as the Rebbe’s shliach is in his house together with the rest of his family celebrating the bar-mitzvah of his son, whose Jewish education he fervently opposed.

To everyone’s surprise, the uncle bursts into the house, but instead of getting angry at his family or the shliach, he asks, “Do you need a tenth for the minyan?” In response to their great puzzlement, he tells them, “I was just now on my way to make the business deal of my life with the city’s finest hotel in the best part of town. It was my idea, my project – the deal had been closed. I went to collect the money from the partners that I had encouraged and... they gave me an embarrassing rejection. Why? Because I am Jew. ‘I’m not a Jew,’ I said to the Gentile

partner. ‘Let’s close the deal.’ But the Gentile replied, ‘It won’t do you any good. You’re a Jew. You were born a Jew and you’ll stay a Jew.’ (Takes a deep breath) The Gentile is right. I’m a Jew.”

As part of his chassidic film projects, Sadan also traveled numerous times to Kiev and Nepal, where he personally met with the shluchim in both locations, including Rabbi and Mrs. Chezki Lifschitz. He was most impressed how the shluchim are able to manage in a foreign land, and even received valuable help and advice from them and the entire production crew. “It’s amazing to see how the shluchim are cut from the world and everything around them. It’s also hard to understand and explain this phenomenon. Clearly, the shluchim are connected to a very powerful ‘engine’.”

THE STORY OF EVERY CHABAD HOUSE DIRECTOR...

The amazing cinematic vistas, such as a marketplace filled with black-skinned Africans at an abandoned village that looked like Africa in Israel, a swaying aircraft (or maybe it was the camera), the scenes at the airport – aroused my curiosity. I asked the “Olam

Umlo'o" company to share with our readers some unique episodes of what happened behind the scenes of filming this production.

What were the set guidelines before you got started?

We were trying to give over to the children not just a miracle story, but a story in which parents and children alike could feel that the Rebbe is the leader of our generation, an emanation of Moshe in our generation, who cares for each and every Jew no matter where they are. It is thereby much easier for children to accept the announcement of the Redemption and why specifically the Rebbe will be the one who will come and redeem the Jewish People. In truth, the film provides a look at a classic story that took place in the past in the reality of modern times, showing clearly how the Rebbe is the nasi, the leader, and the prophet of the generation.

Why did you choose specifically this story with Rabbi Weinberg?

We had several guidelines in connection with the choice of the story. In general, we were looking for a story that conveyed four messages. 1) Every word of the Rebbe is absolutely precise. 2) The Rebbe is the eternal leader of the generation who thinks and cares about every Jew located anywhere from the four corners of the earth. 3) Divine Providence. 4) We tried for the first time to present viewers with a look at the image of a "shliach", totally subject to the will of the m'shaleiach with no room for inner conflicts, fears, or doubts.

We chose to go to a "hole in the wall" such as Africa and see those people thirsting for Yiddishkait and no one to provide it. The film serves as a mirror of our times, where many Jews are living under such conditions and want very much to get some Judaism. Our job is to reach them and have an effect upon them.

When a friend or merely an acquaintance watches this film, he gets a real glimpse of the concept of "the Rebbe's shliach", his self-sacrifice, devotion, true Ahavas Yisroel, and bittul to the Rebbe and his instructions.

Similarly, we added some action scenes that bring a lot of drama and excitement to the plot of the film, in order that children who are hooked on the content of certain television programs will also be attracted to the film's story line. On the other hand, we were careful not to change or exaggerate the nature of the Rebbe's miracle.

One change that we did make in the film as opposed to the original story was putting in a "bar-mitzvah" instead of a wedding, taking on a much more religious aspect, so that even a child watching the film can connect more easily to the experiences and dilemmas of his age group.

Of course, it would be appropriate to note that the film underwent spiritual editing by Rabbi Chaim Levi Yitzchak Ginsberg and Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Levkivker, even at the earliest discussions on the project and during the initial stages of the script.

You have accepted upon yourselves a rather complicated project. Where do you get the strength?

First of all, we must point out that we have seen marvelous help from Heaven every step of the way. We saw how the Rebbe was simply leading us. For example, on one day of filming, we started at seven o'clock in the morning and finished at around eleven at night, working non-stop, scene after scene, without rest and virtually with a break to eat. Anyone who understands something about the field of cinematography knows that filming four scenes a day is a lot! You feel as if it's not coming from your own strengths.

Apart from that, we received

(Baruch Hashem) certain talents from G-d, and the Rebbe demands that we utilize them in a positive direction. Today, you see in other religious sectors such tremendous things as 'Hidabroot', film productions by Shuli Rand, and the like, and you say, 'Why should we be left out?' It is forbidden to forget that it was the Rebbe's innovation to use all the various forms of modern technology as means of spreading Yiddishkait, as when Rabbi Weinberg gave Tanya classes over the radio and the Rebbe would listen to them himself.

AFRICA – ISRAEL

Powerful locations, marketplaces, streets, airplanes, and an airport filled with dark-skinned Africans – were you roaming around Africa?...

Absolutely not. We obtained filming rights at an abandoned village in the central part of the country where a few families still lived. We set up our operations at this village and filmed there. We brought Sudanese from southern Tel Aviv, communicated with them in English, and we discovered that they weren't such bad actors themselves...

As with other locations that demanded special permits and closing off the area during filming, the filming at the airport was very complex and required a lot of procedure. However, when we said that this was a film for the Lag B'Omer parades – all doors were opened for us...

Tell us about some of the special experiences during the filming...

There was one sequence describing when Rabbi Weinberg was traveling in a taxi and speaking with an African driver. R' Yiftach Luzia portrayed the driver, dressed as an African, enhancing the plot with a good dose of humor.

In general, when we film a scene with dialogue inside a moving car, we place the vehicle on a tow truck, together with all the cameras and the lighting and sound equipment. The tow truck moves, and those sitting in the car being towed shift in their places, thus creating the illusion of a moving car. However, since our operating budget was a bit inadequate, we improvised a different method of filming: We set the camera at the desired angle on a special device connected to the car, with the "effect camera" placed on the car. The vehicle moved as the production, sound, and lighting team ran alongside and recorded the scene. It was particularly enjoyable to hear the silence of the monitor, as if there was no disorder and the dozens of people running.

*

It's impossible to finish this article without the happy ending to this film:

Six months after the unexpected landing, Rabbi Weinberg was walking towards the entrance to 770, when he happened to find himself facing, of all people, Joe Clement, the young man from Dakar, wearing a hat, a chassidic suit, tzitzis, and a beard.

At first, R' Yosef almost didn't recognize him.

"Joe?" he blurted.

"Yoel. That's my real name," the young avreich answered. "I'd like to let you know that the Jewish



Yaniv Chaim

community in Dakar is continuing to develop. I have to tell you, Rabbi, you changed my life!" said Joe-Yoel with much emotion.

"The Rebbe changed your life. I

was just the shliach," Rabbi Weinberg said in reply.

Yoel: "Oh, I forgot to tell you. The Rebbe sent us shmura matzos and various holy items for the Pesach holiday. We sat together for the Seder nights and read the Hagada. Uncle Albert kept emphasizing that similar to Moshe Rabbeinu at the Exodus from Egypt, our generation has the Rebbe, our Moshe Rabbeinu. He shows concern for every Jew, even those in the most remote places of the world..."

And together they walked into 770...

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MORE POWER TO YOU

By Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

Does morality have any influence on a person's physical strength? A new discovery by scientists reflects ancient wisdom on the subject while providing new insight into a curious yet popular Jewish expression of appreciation.

The healthier the soul is, the greater is its control of the body and the ability to correct the body's failings.

--The Rebbe, Mind Over Matter, p. 311.

There's an interesting expression that Jews use to congratulate one another when they do good for others, and that expression is, "Yasher Ko'ach." It's an unusual phrase because on top of being a misspelling and a mispronunciation, it's also idiomatic and enigmatic to boot.

But if it's so untranslatable, why analyze it at all? Why not just let it remain an inscrutable epithet for "Thanks, you're amazing," and let it go at that?

There are at least three good reasons to take a closer look: (1) Everything in Judaism is meaningful - whether it's Torah, its interpretation or customs based on it. (2) This particular

phrase is especially rich, as it reflects all of these - a verse of Torah, its deeper meaning, and a long-standing custom, and (3) New research relating good and evil to physical power gives us a completely fresh perspective on what "Yasher Ko'ach" is all about.

With proper diction, the expression is really supposed to be "Yashar kochecha" which literally means "May your strength be enriched" or "May your strength be straight." These days, the closest idiom would be "More power to you."

Its origin is the Talmud where it comments on G-d's endorsement of Moses breaking the Tablets in response to the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf.

And how do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave His approval? Because it is said, 'Which you have broken' (*asher*

shibarta).' Reish Lakish said, (*Yashar kochecha sh'shibarta*) 'All strength to you [i.e., congratulations] for breaking them.' [1]

But isn't it strange? Why would a man whose whole life embodied Torah trash the very stones in which it was engraved? And engraved by the Hand of G-d, no less. The basic answer is that Moses' life mission was to serve and protect the Jewish nation, so he tore up the contract, so to speak, by destroying the only written record of the Torah they had transgressed. Only by putting loyalty before law was Moses able to break the tablets.

The details are instructive too. The Sages relate [2] that as Moses approached the scene, the letters flew off, his hands became weak, and the Tablets broke. This was no Charlton Hestonesque temper tantrum throw-the-plate-against-the-wall outburst. Moses, despite his absolute commitment to G-d and His Torah, knowingly sacrificed Torah truth for Jewish continuity. In response, G-d Himself co-operated and literally removed the message from the medium. The tzaddik decreed and the One Above fulfilled. [3]

At the end, what was left? A lump of stone. As the beloved Torah Tablets, Moshe could carry them; as mere rock, it was too much to bear. Our Sages say [4], each tablet was a block of sapphire 6x6x3 handbreadths in size. Following R' Chaim Na'eh that a handbreadth is 8 cm, and knowing sapphire to be four times as dense as water, and water to be one gram per cubic centimeter, the total weight of the two Tablets was about 440 kg or nearly 1000 pounds!

No wonder he found it heavy. But how did he manage to carry it before the sin? Was it a miracle

or was he really that strong? Of course Moshe was a G-dly person, so normal rules need not apply. Nonetheless, there must be a lesson here for us.

To understand this, let's consider the case of Bruce Anderson of Anchorage Alaska.[5] One spring afternoon, he was repairing his 1985 Volkswagen station wagon when it slipped of the jacks and pinned him to the ground. Trapped beneath the car, Bruce's cries for help summoned his 17-year-old son, Riley. Realizing that his father was in trouble and that help was far away, Riley did the amazing: he took hold of the bumper and lifted the 2500 lb vehicle off of his dad.

For the love of his dad, 2500 pounds was not too heavy for Bruce to lift. For the love of G-d, 1000 pounds was not too heavy for Moses. Yet Moses chose to carry something much heavier - the burden of leading the entire Jewish people.

Where does strength come from? Diet and exercise are only part of the picture. According to fascinating experiments in social psychology recently completed by Kurt Gray and his colleagues and Harvard University, good (as well as evil) deeds and thoughts are potent triggers of physical power.[6]

Volunteers were given a dollar

and told to keep it or donate it to charity. The decision made, they were asked to hold a weight for as long as they could.

Surprisingly, those who had done a good deed were able to bear the load for almost ten seconds longer than the others. In a follow-up experiment even thinking about doing good increased their physical stamina after the fact.

Scientists have discovered that doing and even thinking good for others gives "More power to you." Moral fortitude unlocks a wellspring of strength that even permeates our physical muscles. Moses had that dual strength and Jews have been blessing each other with it for thousands of years since then. It's nice to know that the scientists are finally catching on to the causal connection between goodness and strength as well.

In our time, no one exemplifies these qualities better than the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Sleeping only two or three hours a night, eating very little, standing all day greeting and blessing thousands of visitors one by one, handing to each of them dollars for charity or other items. Where does all this strength come from? From his goodness no doubt.

Among the qualities a person must have in order to become a

bona fide prophet, Maimonides lists self-discipline, Torah expertise, scrupulous mitzvah observance, and physical strength. Understanding that Torah scholars and prophets don't generally "work out" so much, perhaps that strength comes from all the good that they do.

More than anything else, the times of Moshiach are characterized by two things: Moral excellence and complete wellness. What science and Torah both seem to be telling us is that pursuing the former will get us the latter. Do another mitzvah and get another "Yasher Ko'ach" to bring Moshiach NOW!

Dr. Aryeh (Arnie) Gotfryd, PhD is a chassid, environmental scientist, author and educator living near Toronto, Canada. To contact, read more or to book him for a talk, visit www.arniegotfryd.com or call 416-858-9868.

NOTES:

- [1] Tractate Shabbos, p. 87a
- [2] Midrash Rabba on Exodus 9:11
- [3] Tr. Shabbos 59b
- [4] Tr. Bava Basra 14a
- [5] Front page of the May 29, 2008 edition of the Alaska Star.
- [6] in press, Journal of Social Psychological and Personality Science

Thanks to Tomer Meldung for drawing my attention to Gray's research.

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THE REBBE AND THE RAMBAM

By Gai Kantor

For eight years, Rabbi Yaakov Gottlieb, the top Maggid shiur in the Darkei Noam yeshiva high school, researched the teachings of the Rambam as they are explained in Chabad Chassidus in general and the Rebbe's teachings in particular. In the course of his research, he came to the conclusion that the Rebbe fits the criteria for Moshiach as delineated in the Rambam. * Presented in conjunction with the Siyum HaRambam. * Part 2 of 2.

[Continued from last week]

What did they think at the university about your affirmation that the Rebbe saw himself as a fulfillment of the Rambam's description of Moshiach?

When I wrote it, I was a little apprehensive about how my mentor would take it, but he read the quotes from the Rebbe and accepted them. That doesn't mean he believes the Rebbe is Moshiach. It means it's

clear that this is what the Rebbe himself said. Whether one chooses to believe it or not is another story but it's certainly what the Rebbe meant, because when you collect what the Rebbe said, item by item, and put them together, it's quite obvious.

When the Rebbe says, "and builds the Beis HaMikdash in its place" refers to 770, the message is clear. When the Rebbe says there's

the "b'chezkas Moshiach" and he specifies the name of Moshiach and writes explicitly: there are three generations according to their closeness to us, that are alluded to in the word "miyad," starting with Moshiach – Menachem is his name, Yosef Yitzchok and Dov Ber, the last three Chabad Rebbeim -what more do you need than this?

If the Rebbe says that the name of Moshiach is Menachem and that Beis Moshiach is 770 Eastern Parkway, he is saying that he is Moshiach!

These are the Rebbe's teachings which are written in the Rebbe's sichos. He doesn't say "the world says," but says so himself. If the Rebbe wrote this, he wants to inform us that this is the fact. You cannot mistake the Rebbe's intentions.

Furthermore, what's interesting about the Rebbe's teachings is that he saw all the historical events of the past years from the same perspective, that they are messianic and part of the Geula process. For example, when the communist bloc disintegrated the Rebbe said, "We see how the fighting of Hashem's wars is taking place and he [Moshiach] is being victorious in several areas, specifically with wars of peace."

With this point, the Rebbe lays out a brilliant game plan to reconcile the approach of the Rambam which describes the Geula in natural terms, with prior Chabad teachings which talk about the miraculous aspects of the Geula. The Rebbe was telling us that the Geula has two stages. The first stage, which the Rambam speaks about, is a natural process. The later stage is miraculous and it is then that the Resurrection etc will occur. When we talk about a Geula in a natural manner, that doesn't mean without miracles (we say in davening "for Your miracles every day with us" – our entire life is miraculous; the existence of the world is a miracle). We're talking

about a miracle that breaks the usual rules of nature.

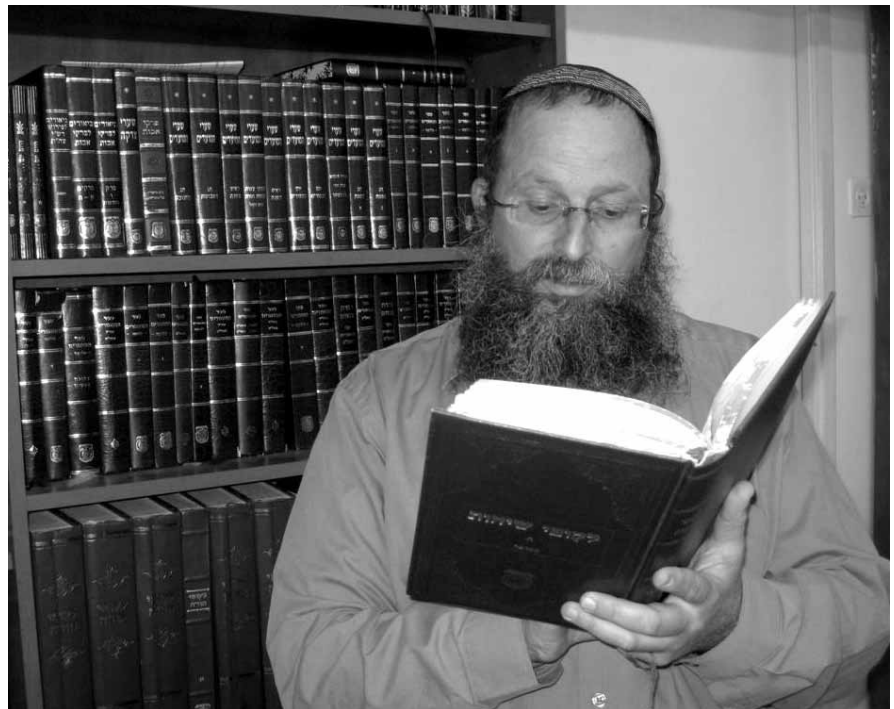
Although throughout the years the Rebbe did not consider the State of Israel as the *is'chalta d'Geula*, not even as a first, natural stage of Geula, nevertheless, when the Jews began leaving Russia in 5750, the Rebbe said that this is a taste of the ingathering of the exiles.

The goal of that chapter of my thesis is to show how the Rebbe's activities are built upon the halachic rulings of the Rambam, which strengthens the connection between the Rebbe and the Rambam. Seeing how the Rebbe was constructing the messianic process on the Mishneh Torah's outline and succeeded in doing so, obviously strengthens the admiration and connection that the people have towards him.

We see the difference between how the Rebbe looks at things and how the world of research looks at things, particularly with this section of the Rambam that deals with identifying Moshiach. The Rambam put the chapters about Moshiach last. In the world of academic research, they say that Rambam put it there in order to finish the Mishneh Torah on a positive note with hope for a better future.

The Rebbe sees it completely differently. The coming of Moshiach appears at the end of the Rambam because this is the culmination of it all. The entire Mishneh Torah leads to these two chapters. It's not relegated to the sidelines; not left for the end because it's not as important; quite the contrary!

The Rebbe related to the Rambam, too, as a messianic figure. Throughout the generations there were some great individuals deserving of being Moshiach; their activities moved the world along towards Geula. One of these great men was the Rambam. So without a doubt, the halachos concerning Moshiach in the Rambam are very important.



Before moving on to other questions not related to your doctoral work, I want to ask you what “grabbed you” in the Rebbe’s teachings about the Rambam?

One of the intriguing aspects of the Rebbe's approach to learning Rambam is that sometimes he illuminates the Rambam's words in a completely new way. Although I come from the world of academia and it's hard for me to accept that the Rambam meant what the Rebbe was mechadesh, I definitely can see how what he is saying is a legitimate interpretation of the text itself, if not necessarily what the author had in mind when he wrote it.

I greatly enjoyed discovering that the Rebbe's explanations of the Rambam are not an anthology of commentaries but an analytical approach toward the Mishneh Torah as a whole from a strictly halachic perspective. It's fascinating to see how the Rebbe applies this to the topics of anticipating the Redemption and the Days of Moshiach. In the Rebbe's teachings he emphasizes that Yemos HaMoshiach is the

completion/perfection of Torah and halacha.

It's not a patchwork set of teachings applying individual patches to difficult passages, nor is it a collection of vertlach. There is a worldview here. This is the case in all the Rebbe's activities, as Yitzchok Krauss demonstrated in his research. When you present things in their entirety you see them in a different light.

Out of all the chapters, my favorite is the last one that addresses the topic of messianism. I don't know if I innovated anything but I did add perspective in the way I presented things, in the classification of things and their arrangement.

After reading what I wrote in the last chapter, you can see how the Rebbe's activities are linked with the messianic model of the Mishneh Torah, how the Rebbe understands it and how the two things are connected.

I didn't just happen to finish with this chapter; it's the climax of all the work and of the connection between the Rebbe and the Rambam; an essential point.



CHASSIDUS AND ACADEMIA

What do you make of the fact that academics are doing research on kabbala, Torah, Chabad Chassidus, the Rebbe and messianism?

I know that Chassidim look askance at turning Chassidus into a research subject. I am personally very happy about it. Of course, each academic work needs to be looked at individually and critically to see what the author's assumptions and theses are; are his proofs actually proofs, etc., but academic research definitely has a lot of offer.

I think it's important that the Rebbe's teachings are being researched and I'm seeing it more and more. While I wrote my doctorate there were two other research projects going on that concerned the Rebbe: Dr. Kraus' and Dr. Shelly Goldberg, who did her work on the Chabad Rebbeim in

general with a significant portion devoted to the Rebbe.

More research is being done and it's very important. Perhaps before this it seemed that in certain places it was looked upon as an ethereal subject not suitable for academic dissertation, but as soon as it was tackled and as a research subject, it gave it a very serious and respectable platform. Especially when the goal was not to attack or debunk but just to present the material in what is perhaps a more organized way and to relate and compare it to all sorts of other works.

This research can serve not only the outside but the Chassidim too. Chassidim can benefit from the theses of Dr. Krauss and myself. Dr. Goldberg's work is on a slightly higher level, more intellectual with a great deal of subtleties, but those who want to explore the subject of how the Chabad Rebbeim looked at the topic of histalkus and prayer at the gravesites of their predecessors,

will find it very interesting. If you want to know about how the Rebbe regarded the Rambam, how the Chabad Rebbeim viewed the Rambam, you'll find it here. I see all this research as a blessing.

Do you consider your research work as a shlichus to spread the Rebbe's teachings?

It's certainly a part of it. My research served my own interests, of course, but I also see it as a great accomplishment that I was able to work on the Rebbe's teachings and expose more people to it.

Is the Rebbe pleased with my work? I can't know for sure, but I think so. During my work I felt a certain assistance and push that led me to believe that the results were desirable and good. I'm not talking about every detail of it but most of it, the general approach. There is a hafatza here of the Rebbe's teachings to circles that might not otherwise be exposed to it. And again, I think that Chassidim who are familiar with the Rebbe's teachings can benefit from how I presented them.

Professor Moshe Chalamish (your work is based on his several times) passed by the Rebbe and gave him a book he had written on the Tanya. The Rebbe stressed that he needed to fulfill what was written there, even when he tried to wiggle out. That demonstrates the difference between the professor's outlook and that of a Chassid. What is your view?

It was clear to me from the Rebbe's teachings that we cannot suffice with intellect and research. To the Rebbe, what one learns has to penetrate the soul and then ultimately "action is the main thing." Every person makes his efforts to internalize the Rebbe's teachings ... I try to do it in my own way. It doesn't always match the approach of the Chassidim but I certainly try not only to take the intellectual dimension of what I researched.



Professor Moshe Chalamish (and his son) presenting the Rebbe with his book on the Tanya.

Have you had the opportunity to present the Rebbe’s teachings to people who wouldn’t otherwise be exposed to it?

Sure. In divrei Torah that I say in shul, I repeat sichos of the Rebbe, thought I don’t always mention the source, and sometimes in yeshiva, where I teach. It can be in conversations with people, where I can occasionally learn more things myself. I take special pleasure when I discover a new teaching of the Rebbe. Any sicha that I personally enjoy, I share with others.

THE TAKANA TO LEARN RAMBAM

We have just concluded a cycle of Rambam study. What are your thoughts about the Rebbe’s takana and what benefit do you think there is for someone who follows the study cycle of Mishneh Torah over the course of a year or three years?

The takana was enacted by the Rebbe in 5744, if I am not mistaken. I see it as an important milestone. I mention it in the introduction to my book and on the back of the book, too. That a Chassidic Rebbe chooses, after Chitas, to enact Rambam – I don’t think people have paid attention to this dramatic, revolutionary move. This takana – which includes women and children, who study Sefer HaMitzvos – is highly significant.

What the Rebbe saw in the

Rambam, which others don’t always see, is the shleimus. Generally speaking, the Rambam is another view that is learned along with other Rishonim. When learning the various commentators, the Rambam doesn’t always fit the mold. This engendered many s’farim on why the Rambam wrote what he did, and it became a scholarly pursuit. Often, it’s the lamdanus of the rosh yeshiva more than of the Rambam himself that is being touted in these works. What is revolutionary in the Rebbe’s approach is to take the Rambam on its own merit, not as another pilpul on the Gemara, but rather as a uniquely complete Oral Torah.

All the books written after it are incomplete in some way. Only Mishneh Torah is complete. The name the Rambam gave his work, Mishneh Torah, is quite bold, for it implies that all a person needs in order to understand all of the Written Torah is this work. The Rebbe ascribed to Mishneh Torah the importance the Rambam ascribed to it. The Rambam wanted his work to be known fluently and you can see this in letters he wrote to his students, to the point that he promoted learning it over the study of Gemara.

The Rebbe says that Mishneh Torah has to be studied from beginning to end and not read only in connection with one *sugya* or another. For example, people tend to simply skip over the first four chapters of Hilchos Yesodei

HaTorah, which are the basis for the knowledge of Hashem, but the Rebbe wants them, too, to be learned as is fitting for a work authored by the Rambam. I think that no matter a person’s connection to the Rebbe, he should join this learning of the Rambam if only to learn it through in order as the Rambam himself intended.

Whether we pasken like the Rambam or not is irrelevant. The Rebbe asserts that through studying the Mishneh Torah of the Rambam, one fulfills the obligation the Alter Rebbe lays out in Hilchos Talmud Torah, that a person must know the entire Torah. The verse in T’hillim says, “The Torah of Hashem is complete, it restores the soul.” As wonderful and fulfilling as learning twenty daf Gemara in depth may be, what restores a person’s soul is learning a complete Torah which can be done with Rambam’s Mishneh Torah.

The Rebbe wanted to achieve another goal thereby, to unite the Jewish people. It is fitting that the Rebbe spoke about learning Mishneh Torah since the Rebbe is a model of a complete individual, very much like the Rambam. We find that though he was often attacked for it by his opponents, the Rebbe spoke constantly about shleimus ha’Aretz, shleimus ha’Am, and shleimus HaTorah.

NOBLE FIGURES IN SAMARKAND

Prepared for publication by Avrohom Rainitz

*My uncle and aunt did not have children of their own, but they were never jealous of our family, instead showering us with affection. As my parents' youngest child, they loved me more than the others. They would repeatedly say, "We don't have children of our own and you will be our Kaddish." * R' Hillel Zaltzman presents the next installment of his memoirs about the elder Chassidim who shaped the Chassidic character of Samarkand.*

Chassidic life in Samarkand, which I wrote about at length in the previous installment, was comprised of a special combination of elder Chassidim and young idealistic bachurim who burned with Chassidic fervor. The previous installment discussed the young people; I will focus in the following installments on my sweet memories of the elder Chassidim whom we

were privileged to know and learn from.

I will devote this chapter to my uncle, R' Boruch Duchman. He was married to Alte Raiza Genesha, my mother's sister. My uncle was the son of Dovber Duchman and the grandson of the famous Chassid, Mordechai Yoel who was taught by R' Isaac of Homil (R' Isaac was his shadchan). My uncle had three

brothers: R' Yisroel Noach who left Russia and settled in Eretz Yisroel; R' Zalman who left Russia in 1946 via Poland and settled in New York; and R' Chaim Avrohom who remained in the Soviet Union and lived most of his life in Omsk.

Before the war my uncle Boruch lived in Medved near Leningrad where he was a shochet. During the war he was among the Lubavitcher Chassidim who fled the Nazis to Samarkand and he stayed with us until he got permission to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel in 1957. After the war his brother Chaim Avrohom also went to Samarkand but in the beginning of the 50's, during the Doctors' Plot when Jews and Lubavitchers in particular were persecuted. He later returned to Omsk where he died.

Those years that the two brothers were in Samarkand were years rich in Chassidic stories, since both of them had spent many years in the home of their grandfather, R' Mordechai Yoel, and the latter told them numerous incidents and sayings that he heard from his teacher, R' Isaac of Homil, a Chassid of the Alter Rebbe!

R' Mordechai Yoel, my uncle Boruch and his brother Chaim Avrohom all had excellent memories and were careful to tell stories accurately, so the stories that we heard were utterly precise. They were so meticulous in how they related stories that when there was a detail in a story that was not understandable and we asked them to explain it, they would say: 'We don't know; that's how we heard it from our grandfather.' Therefore, every story that they told was very precious to the bachurim and young men in Samarkand.

My uncle said that when he was a boy, he often slept at his grandfather's house. Before his bar mitzvah, if he awoke early in the morning, his grandfather, already up and sitting and learning, would go

over and cover him, saying, "Sleep, my child. A little boy needs to sleep..." But after he was bar mitzvah, if he remained in bed after six in the morning, his grandfather would wake him up and say, "Get up, get up, how can a Jew sleep so late?"

R' MORDECHAI YOEL'S STORIES

I don't want to go off topic but I can't refrain from telling a few stories that I heard from my uncle which he heard from his grandfather, R' Mordechai Yoel:

R' Hillel Paritcher was considered a maskil in Chassidus, a great yerei Shamayim, and a holy man. He was utterly mekushar to the Mittlerer Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek. Chassidim related that the Tzemach Tzedek once said that he had two and a half Chassidim, with R' Hillel being the "half a Chassid." When the Tzemach Tzedek was asked why he called him only half a Chassid, he answered, "The other half is Rebbe!"

R' Hillel Paritcher was extremely stringent on Pesach. Even in the home of the Tzemach Tzedek, he came with his own utensils and put his pot in the kitchen on top of a brick, rather than directly on the stove. When the Chassidim asked him, "R' Hillel, in the Rebbe's kitchen you put a brick under your pot?!" he said: "If I ate from the Rebbe's plate, that would be fine since 'no mishap befalls a tzaddik,' but from another plate, I don't know..."

R' Hillel spent a lot of time traveling. By order of the Tzemach Tzedek he would visit colonies in the Charson district every several months to review Chassidus for the simple Jewish farmers. They say that one time, R' Hillel asked the Tzemach Tzedek what benefit there was in this. The Rebbe answered that he should continue saying Chassidus because though the

simple Jews didn't understand the Chassidus they heard, their neshama understood it. Being a big yerei Shamayim and punctilious with mitzvos, he would take along a minyan of men so he would have a minyan as he traveled. He was a Levi and made sure that one of them was a Kohen so that the minyan would be complete.

R' Isaac of Homil was known as a lamdan and oved, and he davened at length. R' Isaac and R' Hillel of Paritch were once farbrenging. Although R' Hillel was younger than R' Isaac by about twenty years, R' Isaac asked him to say Chassidus. R' Hillel said, "Am I the lamdan with

Hashem for having merited to serve the [Alter] Rebbe for nineteen years."

R' Mordechai Yoel once built R' Isaac's sukkah and was surprised by the amount of s'chach R' Isaac instructed him to use to cover it. R' Isaac realized this and said in his customary niggun, "I covered the sukkah for the [Alter] Rebbe and when he saw how I covered it, he said with his customary niggun, 'Dense, more dense.'" Then R' Isaac lifted his hand and concluded, "I cannot do otherwise."

After the histalkus of the Alter Rebbe, the Chassidim would invite one of the distinguished elder



A Chassidische farbrengen with my uncle R' Boruch Duchman before he left Samarkand

the good head?" because R' Isaac was considered an extraordinary scholar. R' Isaac replied, "It doesn't count because I did not attain it with avoda." R' Hillel said, "Do I daven at length?" for on his travels he was unable to daven at length since he tried to daven with a minyan. R' Isaac said, "Nu, what can I do when I have the free time ..." R' Hillel persisted, "Did I serve the Alter Rebbe?" R' Isaac could not deny that and he stood up and covered his forehead with his hand and said with his customary niggun, "I thank you

Chassidim to the Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen, put him at the head of the table and he would talk about the Alter Rebbe. As the years passed it became increasingly difficult to find a Chassid who had known the Alter Rebbe. One year, they found a simple old Jew who had seen the Alter Rebbe. They put him at the head of the table and asked him to relate what he knew of the Alter Rebbe. The simple man didn't know what to say. He said l'chaim, closed his eyes in d'veikus and began to say, "Der Rebbe...oy, what a Jew he

was... Oy, what a Jew he was... Oy, what a Jew he was..." Each time he uttered these words, his voice rose until he began to cry as he repeated, "Oy, what a Jew he was." The Chassidim present at the farbrengen related afterwards that this simple Jew described the Alter Rebbe in the best possible way, better than his predecessors.

It's a pity that I can't convey in writing the voice of my uncle when he described how the Rebbe Rashab would bless the bachurim: "*Zolst lernen, zolst davenen, un zolst dinnen dem Oibershten*" (You should learn, you should daven, and you should serve Hashem). When he reached the word "Oibershten" he would raise his voice as though elevating the word above the rest. So, too, when he would relate what the Rebbe Rashab once said at a farbrengen about lofty spiritual levels: "What Atzmus is, we don't know. Nor do we know Adam Kadmon. But we can have an approximation for we are neshamos." When he reached the word "neshamos" he would raise his voice as though elevating the word above the rest.

MEN OF CHESED

My uncle Boruch had long peios and he would tie them above his head and cover them with his yarmulke. I found this strange since this wasn't Chabad custom. Afterwards, I heard that he was once dangerously sick with pneumonia and he took on the hiddur of never cutting his peios.

My uncle and aunt did not have children. Rather than being jealous of our family, as my young mind may have thought, they showered us with endless love. Since I, their nephew, was my parents' youngest child, they lavished their affection on me in particular. They would repeatedly say, "We don't have children of our own and you will be



R' Boruch Duchman

our Kaddish."

My father did not earn enough to support our family and our financial state was terrible. Since I did not eat well, I was very thin and was considered a weak child. My uncle Boruch was a shochet so there was always meat and other food in his house. My aunt and uncle tried getting me over to their house so they could feed me. Whenever I went to their house I felt it was as though I was announcing, "I am starving and I came to eat." Even as a little boy, I was embarrassed to go to their house.

I remember that my uncle tried in all sorts of ways to persuade me to come. He once asked me, "Why don't you come to visit us?" I answered, "Why would I come and visit just like that? If I need something, I'll visit." My uncle made a face as though he took offense by my answer and said, "What? You will come only when you need something? Why won't you come just like that to visit us and see how we are?"

I realized I had made a mistake and that it was chutzpah on my part to answer in that way.

My aunt was very sensitive. She understood that I was embarrassed to go to them to eat and so, when I

went to them, she was very careful to serve me in a natural manner so I wouldn't feel that she was doing something special for me. For example, when she prepared a fried egg for me she used two eggs. That was a luxury at that time and she always made sure I would be out of the kitchen while she prepared it so I wouldn't see. If I expressed surprise at the large fried egg she would dismiss it, "Nu, sometimes the eggs are large." My father was arrested when I was seven years old, and my aunt and uncle took me into their home. I will never forget my uncle's great devotion towards me. Although he was very weak after an illness, when I would wake up at night and cry that I wanted to eat, he would get up and serve me Bucharian pita with raisins, just the way I liked it, and took care of all my needs.

After my father was released from jail, I went back home. Our financial situation continued to be difficult so each week, my aunt would bring us some of the meat my uncle received in his job as a shochet. My mother refused to accept it. She said she was unable to pay for it and did not want it as a gift, but my aunt, who was particularly sharp-tongued, used her sharpness for chesed purposes and yelled, "You can deprive yourselves but not the children! I am not asking you to pay me. If you insist on paying me, then when you can do so when you have the money."

Sometimes my uncle would bring the meat. We lived on the second floor and it was hard for him to climb the stairs but he did all he could to convince my parents to accept the meat. Each time my mother would write down how much meat she received and when our financial state improved she paid for it all.

If our financial situation was dire in those days, it was even worse during the war when my father was sick. One time, my mother obtained

a few fresh eggs in the market and I, a child of five, asked for one. She sadly explained that these eggs were for my father and when he recovered and went back to work, we would be able to buy lots of eggs. Boruch Hashem, the readers of this magazine cannot relate to that poverty.

After a while I became sick and again my mother obtained eggs, this time for me, but I was so sick that I had no appetite. My mother pleaded with me to eat and my aunt reminded her, "When he begged for an egg, you didn't give him one; now you are begging him ..."

REBUKE WITH A SMILE

My uncle Boruch had a pleasant temperament. When he gave rebuke, he did so with a smile. He once said to me, "Don't be angry that I am rebuking you. You should know that out of cream you can make butter, but not out of yogurt."

When I got older he would rebuke me and said that I needed to learn more Chassidus, that the time would come when I would be wearing a tallis (i.e. married) and I wouldn't have what to meditate upon during davening. "Then you will regret it and think: 'Oy ... why didn't I learn Chassidus in my youth?'"

After the horrific war when the hearts of all Jews were broken, my uncle tried to see the good and to calm everyone. He would say that all the world events of today are for the good of the Jews. During the terrible period of the Doctors' Plot, when they began arresting Lubavitcher Chassidim in Samarkand, someone in the know warned him that the KGB were inquiring about him and he should flee. He moved to a relative's house in another section.

People asked him: "Nu, what do you say now?"

My uncle did not lose his trust in Hashem for a moment. He



R' Avrohom Zaltzman, the author's father, during the period in Samarkand

maintained: "You will see that good will come out of this for the Jews."

It seemed far-fetched in those awful days, but he was right. Within a short time Stalin died suddenly and his evil deeds were exposed. The entire situation changed for the better. The doctors were released and my uncle predicted that the day would come when they would throw Stalin's body out of the mausoleum in Moscow. And that's what happened. On 21 Cheshvan, 5722/1961, Nikita Khrushchev ordered that Stalin's body be removed and buried near other minor leaders of the Revolution near the Kremlin wall.

THIS TOO IS FOR THE BEST

In 5716/1956, my uncle received an invitation from his brother Yisroel Noach in Eretz Yisroel. This enabled him to submit a request for a visa with the stated reason being unification of the family. This invitation posed a dilemma for my aunt and uncle. On the one hand, there was the slight chance they would be allowed to emigrate. On the other hand, on every official form in those days, even for a job, one had to answer whether he had a

relative living abroad. Of course everybody said they didn't so as to avoid any problems. But that negative answer they had given previously would get them into trouble: If you had a relative abroad, why didn't you say so until now?

Furthermore, the invitation was to go to Eretz Yisroel, which Russia considered one of the western capitalistic countries.

Although it was several years after Stalin's death, there was still a feeling of fear. My aunt was very apprehensive and said it was better to ignore the invitation and not request to leave. My uncle felt that it was hashgacha pratis – he had not corresponded with nor heard from his brother in over twenty years and now he suddenly received this invitation.

"It's a sign from Heaven," he said.

My aunt agreed to submit the papers only after she was convinced that after they left it would help our family, too, since she would be able to send us an invitation. Otherwise we had no hopes of leaving Russia since we had no relatives abroad.

It took several months to prepare the papers and the week they finished preparing all the forms, my aunt and uncle went to OVIR on a



The author, R' Hillel Zaltzman, in his youth in Samarkand.

Tuesday (the day “ki tov” was said twice). OVIR was the KGB office that accepted requests to emigrate. When they returned home, they heard on the radio that a three-pronged attack had been initiated by the French, British and Israelis against Egypt in order to liberate the Suez Canal. The Soviet Union was the ally of Egypt and requesting to leave for the enemy’s country was more dangerous than ever.

I cannot describe how terrified we were but my uncle was strong in his trust in Hashem and continued to say, “It’s all from Hashem and everything will be for the best.” In the end, my uncle’s strong trust won out over the black prognostications. Half a year later they received permission to leave Russia and another half year later they received passports (that is how long the bureaucratic process took) and exit visas.

At the Kinus held in Kfar Chabad in 5768, the rav of Kfar Chabad, Rabbi Mordechai Shmuel Ashkenazi said that when my uncle arrived in Eretz Yisroel, the talmidim of Tomchei T’mimim in Lud, himself included, went to welcome him at the airport. When R’ Boruch came down the ramp from the plane and saw the T’mimim, he was very

moved and he kept murmuring, “The same T’mimim ...” Those words of R’ Boruch, said R’ Ashkenazi, reverberate in my ears till this day.

THE GREATNESS OF SPIRIT OF MULLA YOSEF THE SHOCHET

Since my uncle Boruch was a shochet for Anash in Samarkand, he felt responsible not to leave the city without a shochet. There was another shochet, a Bucharian Jew by the name of Mulla Yosef, but Boruch knew that we would be uncomfortable eating from his sh’chita since we didn’t know him personally.

Mulla Yosef was one of the bachurim that R’ Simcha Gorodetzky had sent to learn in Tomchei T’mimim and he was considered one of the distinguished Lubavitcher Chassidim among the Bucharians. During the big wave of arrests he was captured and sentenced to 25 years in exile and it was only after Stalin’s death that he was pardoned and released.

My uncle testified to his yiras Shamayim and said he could be relied on wholeheartedly. He told us that after his release from jail, Mulla

Yosef came to him and said that since before his arrest he had done sh’chita and now times had changed a bit for the better, he wanted to resume shechting. However, since he had not done so at all during the five years he was in prison, he was relearning the laws of sh’chita and checking the knife. He wanted my uncle to test him on the laws and his ability to check the knife and then give him a new ordination for sh’chita.

My uncle, who even before this knew Mulla Yosef as a yerei Shamayim, refused. He said he did not doubt his skill and knowledge, but Mulla Yosef insisted that if my uncle didn’t test him and give him a new kabbala, he wouldn’t resume shechting. Having no choice, my uncle agreed. He tested Mulla Yosef, who displayed proficiency in all the halachos. Then he took out a knife full of nicks and gave it to him to make it perfectly smooth. Mulla Yosef did not suffice with that but had my uncle observe him while he shechted and only after he saw that his sh’chita was done according to all the laws and hiddurim, would he accept the renewed kabbala for sh’chita.

My uncle told us all this and concluded, “I promise you that you can eat from his sh’chita without any misgivings whatsoever.”

After my uncle left, we ate from Mulla Yosef’s sh’chita but there were some people who, despite everything, wanted to check the knife each time to ensure it was smooth. Since I had a bicycle I would go to the Old City to buy meat, and the community asked me to check the knife before sh’chita. I knew how to check a knife and even the most particular among them relied on me.

It was very hard for me to ask to check his knife. Not everybody, or to be more accurate – nobody, is happy to give his knife to be checked. And I was a young bachur, twenty years

old, while he was a distinguished man and experienced shochet who was sixty years old. How could I have the chutzpa to ask him for his knife? But I had no other choice since the men had told me that if I did not check his knife they would not eat his meat. I went to Mulla Yosef and hinted diplomatically that I was interested in checking his knife.

I was amazed by his tremendous humility. He simply handed me the knife and from then on he did not shecht a calf before I came and checked the knife. On a few occasions I showed up late and the animal was already lying on the ground and the butcher was urging him to hurry up and shecht since he was afraid of the government, but Mulla Yosef did not respond to his shouts, nor did he motion to me to ask why I was late. He merely asked

me to come to a side room so I could check the knife with full concentration and wouldn't be disturbed by the shouting.

If it happened that I did not like the condition of the knife, he would smooth it again on a towel and after the sh'chita, when the animal was glatt kosher, without adhesions, he

insisted that I be the first to take what I needed from the meat and then others would have. I have no words to describe how amazed I was by Mulla Yosef's elevated behavior.

More about the noble figures of Chassidic Samarkand in the next installment, with Hashem's help.

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ELIYAHU HA'NAVI OF THE AIR FORCE

By Alon Chakshour

The unique shlichus of Rabbi Eliyahu Gabbai, shliach to the kibbutzim in the south of Israel, including tales of hashgacha pratis, miracles and unmitigated chassidische chutzpah for authentic Jewish education.



In 5746 I was a 19 year old bachur serving in the air force in the south of the country. My job dealt with flight training for new cadets using a simulator. This training program saved the cost of countless hours of real flights.

Before I was drafted I was a student at ORT in Kiryat Bialik, where I quickly became immersed in Chassidus. I gained a lot from my mashpia, Rabbi Reuven Dunin a"h, "the Rebbe's tractorist," and the mekubal Rabbi Yitzchok Ginsburgh.

I started learning in the yeshiva in Tzfas (I later got in some more learning in Tomchei T'mimim in Kiryat Gat) but I was unable to postpone my army service since I had graduated as a technology major in the field of electronics and the army had already invested a lot of money in my professional training and had assigned me a senior position. The air force was absolutely opposed to putting me in the category of a yeshiva bachur and I was drafted.

After I felt stronger religiously I decided to start doing hafatza on the base. In those years the Rebbe spoke strongly about Shaloh (Shiurei Limud HaTorah, the Israeli equivalent of the Released Time program for public school students) and I was fired up and ambitious. At my base, as with every air force base, there is an area where the families of the pilots and of some of the officers who maintain the planes live. Some of the more traditional families asked me to learn with their sons for their bar mitzva. I jumped at the opportunity and for several months, after work, I would change out of my uniform and into my jacket and hat and go to their section to teach the boys.

The boys enjoyed it and I was satisfied that the Rebbe had nachas from me. None of us wanted to stop the lessons even after the boys celebrated their bar mitzva and so I continued working with children,



Rabbi Eliyahu Gabbai

and the classes kept growing. I had each child bring a friend and get a prize. It worked well and within a short time about eighty kids were coming, most of them from families of pilots who came from kibbutzim and were not big lovers of religion. Just picture it, twice a week a unit of soldiers in Tzivos Hashem circled the base and shouted the p'sukim and T'hilim, quite a chiddush considering the place and their background.

I operated in a l'chat'chilla aribber manner. I made sure each child had a Siddur and a cup for negel vasser and I encouraged them to use them. Every time we met I made sure to tell them stories of tzaddikim.

One time, I told them a story about Eliyahu HaNavi and the children decided that since my name is Eliyahu they were going to nickname me "Eliyahu HaNavi." From then on they called the program "Eliyahu HaNavi's chug (group)." It was one of the nicest periods in my life. I was on a high. I was giving nachas to the Rebbe and was doing so with children from irreligious families.

Things went well for five months but, like any holy matter which is



Ron Chuldai

opposed by the "other side," difficulties soon arose.

ANGRY AT ELIYAHU HA'NAVI

The problems began with no less a personage than the commander of the base himself, Ron Chuldai (today the mayor of Tel Aviv). He walked into his house one early evening and saw his son Gad davening from a Siddur. Taken aback, he asked his son why he was acting strangely. Since he was in the middle of davening, he did not respond. His son's ignoring him made Ron even more puzzled and he asked his family what was going on.

His wife told him not to worry; "He started going around with the traditional bar mitzva boys and they taught him to pray."

Slowly, as the mothers began talking about their children's strange new behaviors, the parents came to the conclusion that all the children were being brainwashed by the Lubavitcher rabbi who came and taught them Judaism.

When the commander heard about it, he summoned all the Leftist officers to an urgent meeting. They decided that they must immediately

put a stop the work of Eliyahu HaNavi. The commander, Ron C. said he would take care of it personally.

The following morning I got a phone call from a friend of mine, a senior officer, who told me about the meeting the night before. He said that all the command staff were furious with Eliyahu HaNavi and planned on stopping me. They called me the Pied Piper of Hamelin of the base who hypnotized the children to follow me.

I immediately sent a fax to the Rebbe describing my work and the problem. I was confident that the Rebbe would find a solution to get me out of the mess.

LOOKING FOR ELIYAHU HA'NAVI

Since my outreach work was not done in uniform, the commander did not realize that "Eliyahu HaNavi" was a soldier from his own base; he thought it was a rabbi who came in from the outside. When he wanted to stop my program he called security and instructed them not to let any Chabad rabbis into the base. The security officer said that he had never allowed any rabbi from Chabad entry, certainly not twice a week. So Ron spoke to the chaplain. Perhaps he had allowed the mysterious Eliyahu HaNavi in. But Rabbi Boruch B., the chaplain, also had no idea what he was talking about and declared that he did not know who the Lubavitcher Eliyahu HaNavi was.

Ron was utterly confused. He called the commander of the air force himself and told him the problem, about the rabbi who came to his base and made a *balagan* (chaotic mess) without anyone approving his entry and nobody knowing where he came from. When the commander of the air force asked the name of this rabbi, Ron said, "Eliyahu HaNavi." The

commander of the air force laughed uproariously, thinking it was a good joke.

Ron continued to investigate until one day he caught me in the middle of a shiur with one of the kids. He immediately called me for a dressing down in his office. I was told what a nerve I had for entering the pilots' area and teaching the children against their parents' knowledge etc. At the end of the diatribe he told me to pack my bags and gave me 24 hours to get off the base and return to the processing base of the air force to be assigned a new posting.

That night, I saw the Rebbe in a dream. He approached me and asked, "Eliyahu, nu, what's new?" I began to cry like a frightened child and told the Rebbe that all the officers were looking for me and the commander of the base wanted to throw me off the base. While I sobbed hysterically, the Rebbe approached and in a fatherly way he opened his sirtuk and put my head against his chest and covered me with the edge of his coat as though to say, 'calm down, for I am with you.' Then I woke up.

In the morning I was called urgently to the post office on base. When I got there, I saw a letter for me from New York. On the letter it said "Gabbai – Chatzerim" with no address. It was surprising that it had come at all. In the envelope were two letters. One was written in the Rebbe's name and said "your *pa*" was received and thank you for the activities." The other was a "general letter" that the Rebbe had written for Purim. To me it was a sign that the Rebbe was telling me not to worry and everything would work out just fine.

MIRACLES AT THE PROCESSING BASE

A few days later, I sat facing an officer from the air force adjutancy

office who was examining my file in order to see about my new assignment. After a few minutes he asked me, "I don't understand what they want from you. Everything looks in order. You have no professional problems... no behavior problems...no medical problems... Why did they send you here? And anyway, there is nobody to replace you and it will take a lot of time and money to train another soldier in your place." He explained that there were very few soldiers trained and certified to do my job. I did not respond. He looked annoyed and he said, "Nu, open your mouth and say something."

I told him, "This whole business has nothing to do with my job as a soldier on the base. All I did was some religious activities with the children in the officers' neighborhood and people got upset and they threw me out."

"Tell me, does this have to do with the Lubavitcher Rebbe?"

"Yes, I am a shliach of the Rebbe at this base."

His face got redder and he banged on the table and declared, "If it's because of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, I am sending you back to the base even if it costs me my job!"

I must admit that I did not expect this from someone who did not look religious. I was quite stunned by his reaction. I asked him why and he said, "It's very simple. The Rebbe saved my father's life and I owe him everything!"

"You must tell me what happened," I insisted. He got up, closed the door, made me a cup of coffee and told me this story.

AN OPEN MIRACLE ON YUD-TES KISLEV

"My father was a driver for the Dan bus line for fifteen years. One fine day he woke up suddenly unable to move his feet. He was taken to the hospital and the doctors

concluded that he had a problem with his nervous system and he needed to be flown to Mt. Sinai hospital in New York where experts could treat the problem. We did as they said and brought my father to New York. He underwent many tests but the doctors couldn't find a way to treat him.

"One day some Lubavitchers came to do *mivtzaim* at the hospital. They put *t'fillin* on my father and when they heard what his problem was, they decided to bring him to 770 for the *Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen*. 'You have nothing to lose,' they said, and they simply put him into a taxi and brought him to the Rebbe's *farbrengen*.

"Since my father was in a wheelchair, he was brought close to the Rebbe. Those were the nicest moments of his life. During the *farbrengen*, the Rebbe motioned to him to say *l'chaim*. One of the *Chassidim* poured a small cup but the Rebbe motioned for a larger one. My father said *l'chaim* on the first cup and the Rebbe said it should be refilled. Once it was in his hand, the Rebbe instructed him to rise and say *l'chaim*. My father thought the Rebbe didn't see he was sitting in a wheelchair and he pointed to the chair. The Rebbe smiled and repeated his request to get up and say *l'chaim*.

"My father was confused and pointed at the wheelchair again. This time, the *Chassidim* looked at my father and shouted, 'Get up!' He had no choice and, with the help of a *Chassid*, he lifted himself up and, to the surprise of them all, he stood on his own two feet for the first time in weeks and said *l'chaim* to the Rebbe.

"This was the turning point in his recovery and he slowly regained his ability to walk like anybody else. After a miracle like this, do you think I am going to allow someone to undermine our Rebbe? Come what may, Eliyahu, you are returning to the base!"

I returned to the base to the dissatisfaction of the officers. A few days later I asked my commander if I could conduct a final program with the children to say goodbye properly. I gathered the children and told them, "Children, you remember that I told you that in the time of Rabbi Akiva there were harsh decrees and the children learned in caves? There are decrees now too, and from now on we will have our chug in hiding in the underground plane hangars." The children loved the idea and we arranged that every week we would write in secret code on the bulletin board of the club room so that only we would be able to understand where we would meet without being caught.

And Eliyahu HaNavi's chug continued until I was released from the army a year later.

REAPING THE FRUITS

A few years ago I was on a bus to Tel Aviv and a young man came over to me and asked whether I recognized him. I didn't.

"I am Gad C., the son of Ron."

As we spoke he asked me, "Do you remember what I promised you?"

"The truth? Not really."

"What? You don't remember that I promised you that I would be a Chassid in my heart?" he asked me in surprise. "Since your shiurim, I did indeed remain a Chassid in my heart."

That's when I realized what an impression the lessons had had on the children. They took it with them for life. Fortunate are we to be



Rabbi Eliyahu Gabbai addressing children of Tzivos Hashem

Chassidim!

This is just one story out of many amazing stories that happened during my army service. When I got to the base I was the only Lubavitcher out of thousands of soldiers. When I finished, there were other Lubavitchers, who became so after I had revealed the spark within them. During my service a Tanya was printed on base, we opened a Chassidic library, and we invited Rabbi Yechezkel Sofer to farbrengens on base. I arranged a minyan and by the end of my service the base had six locations where Mincha was davened at different times. We also opened a night Kollel with classes in Tanya and shiurim in Chassidus. When it was Hakhel, we arranged gatherings at the movie theater on base. I would sit down to learn deep Chassidus into the night and believe me, when a pilot learns

the Sefer HaMaamarim 5666 with you - *the heavens are the limit.*

Now, about thirty years later, I am privileged to work in an area where I can see the results. For example, in the course of my work in forming religious k'hillos and shuls on kibbutzim in the south, I recently went to Kibbutz Chulda with a donor of a Torah scroll. The donor suddenly asked, "How often will they read in it if the kibbutz doesn't have a regular minyan?"

For a moment I was afraid that I was going to lose a shul at the kibbutz but boruch Hashem, at the last minute someone came up with an idea, that since the kibbutz had a winery where everybody was religious, they could open a shul in the winery and the Torah would be in constant use. So we did, and the shul at the winery also serves the members of the kibbutz. At present we are in the midst of opening another shul on the kibbutz itself.

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WHY RASHBI?

By Rabbi Yosef Karasik
District Rav Bat Chefer – Emek Chefer

How many people know when the Yemei Hilula of the Avos are? How many people know the Yom Hilula of Moshe Rabbeinu? What about Dovid HaMelech, Shlomo HaMelech, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi? What is special about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that we mark the day of his passing? * A fascinating look at Lag B'Omer from the perspective of Chazal, Kabbala and Chabad Chassidus.

“A JOYOUS DAY FOR ISRAEL”

Throughout the generations, the Jewish people have celebrated the 33rd day of the Omer, the day that marks the passing of the Tanna Eloki Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Tachanun is not recited, bonfires are lit in his honor – especially at his gravesite in Miron – and all schools in Israel, even irreligious ones, have the day off and go on outings.

The customs of Lag B'Omer have holy origins – from the holy Ari and his great disciples who extolled the day. The great Chassidic masters, students of the Baal Shem

Tov, followed the Kabbalists and made Lag B'Omer a holiday. They wore Yom Tov clothes, held a *tish* and said divrei Torah as they do on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

The Alter Rebbe writes that on Lag B'Omer “Hashem’s kindness shines and effects salvations in the midst of the earth.” For his son, the Mitteler Rebbe, Lag B'Omer was a special day when they went out to the field and he performed many miracles, particularly in connection with the birth of children. The Chassidim looked forward all year to Lag B'Omer. The Rebbe also marked the day in a special way with a farbrengen etc.

The Arizal would go north to Miron with his family and stay there for three days, and merited the revelation of Rashbi. When Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, the holy Ohr HaChayim, would reach the foot of the mountain where the grave is located, he would get off his donkey and climb up on hands and knees, crying out the entire time: “How can lowly me enter a place of fiery holiness with all the retinue of Heaven and all the souls of tzaddikim?”

Hundreds of thousands of Jews go to Miron every year for Lag B'Omer. The experience is described thus: within the room housing the gravesite there is the awe of Yom Kippur while out in the yard there is the dancing and tremendous joy of Simchas Torah.

We Chabad Chassidim fulfill the Rebbe’s request that every boy and girl (separately of course) should march in a parade “all Jewish children united as one,” say the p’sukim, learn about the greatness of the holy Tanna, daven for the Geula, and give tz’daka.

What is the secret to the special power of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that we celebrate on the day of his passing? How many people know when the Avos passed away? How many people know that 7 Adar is Moshe Rabbeinu’s birthday and yahrtzait? How many people mark the passing of the Rambam? How many people know when Dovid HaMelech, Shlomo HaMelech, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and other great men passed away? Why is Rashbi’s passing universally celebrated? And why were we told to hold parades on this day?

IT’S A DAY WHEN THEY STOPPED DYING AND IT IS A YOM HILULA

In addition to what the kabbalists tell us, that Lag B'Omer is the Yom Hilula of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai,

something else happened on this day. 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died during the days between Pesach and Shavuos and on Lag B'Omer they stopped dying. This is an additional reason for rejoicing on this day.

These two events, says the Rebbe, are two sides of the same coin. Lag B'Omer is a day of a lofty revelation and this was manifested in the fact that the students ceased dying ("turn from evil") and that it is Rashbi's Hilula ("and do good").

The death of 24,000 students was a heavenly punishment for "not being respectful of one another," despite the superlative chinuch they received from Rabbi Akiva that "love your fellow as yourself" is a "great principle of the Torah." Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who was also a talmid of Rabbi Akiva, excelled in Ahavas Yisroel for every Jew to the point of material and spiritual mesirus nefesh.

Although he was on an extremely high spiritual level in Torah and holiness, with all his time dedicated to the Torah and service of Hashem, he took the time to help his fellow Jews. He had enormous love for every Jew, even for the lowest of people. His outstanding behavior was a tikkun for the 24,000 students who were not respectful and this is why he died on the day that the students stopped dying because he rectified their souls.

FIRST LIGHT

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev says (K'dushas Levi VaYeitzei), "From Lag B'Omer there begins the illumination of the Maamad Har Sinai and Kabbalas HaTorah." Amazing! Rashbi's enormous k'dusha on the day of his passing causes the illumination of Mattan Torah to begin already on this day.

Rashbi was an incredible G-dly Tanna, a tremendous tzaddik and an

When Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, the holy Ohr HaChayim, would reach the foot of the mountain where the grave of Rashbi is located, he would get off his donkey and climb up on hands and knees, crying out the entire time: "How can lowly me enter a place of fiery holiness with all the retinue of Heaven and all the souls of tzaddikim?"

extraordinary man. The angels listened to him and the entire generation was protected by him. He was accustomed to miracles; his life was a series of wonders and visitations by Eliyahu HaNavi and the souls of tzaddikim.

He was way above the people of his generation. The Zohar describes the holiness that radiated from his face as "a powerful light of the sun." He studied the secrets of the Torah "that which was unseen by man." He not only delved into those mysteries (like other Tanaim) but also combined the Concealed Torah and the Revealed Torah and revealed secrets to his students. He wrote the holy Zohar, which is mentioned with great reverence by all Jews.

TORASO UMNASO

"Toraso umnaso" – Torah is his occupation. He learned Torah like a craftsman works at his craft - with pleasure, holy enthusiasm and utter devotion. Anything else was trivial and secondary to Torah. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai made great strides during his thirteen years in hiding. Twice a day he was visited by Eliyahu who revealed secrets of the Torah to him. His days and nights were devoted to Torah study and to nothing else, not even mitzvos.

His love for Torah and those who

study it was such that he would say, if I would be at Har Sinai when the Torah was given, I would have asked for two mouths, one with which to study Torah and another mouth for everything else, so that all my life I would be able to learn Torah and not waste a moment.

He would say (tractate Brachos): one who does His will and learns Torah all day and all night, does not have to work for a living, "his work will be done by others."

He established many students who grew to become Torah giants. He especially cherished his disciples and called them, "his chabura," and "chevraya." Chazal refer to them as "Rashbi and his chaveirim." The Rebbe says this stresses the mitzva of chinuch of talmidim and children on Lag B'Omer and is why we have parades for children on this day.

In addition to being a Torah giant and mentor to his holy chabura, he was a leader of his generation, encouraging even the simple people to learn Torah and serve Hashem. He would say (tractate Menachos): Even if a person did not read anything but the Shma in the morning and at night, he fulfilled the mitzva of Torah study. This is how he encouraged even the simple people to be involved in Torah.

After thirteen years in the cave he went to Teveria and helped the people with their material needs and in healing the sick. His son, R' Elozor, saw people involved in worldly pursuits "abandoning eternal life (=Torah) and being involved in temporary life (=material pursuits) and he punished them, while Rashbi brought them succor and healing.

We see that when ascending to the heights, far from lowly people who are busy with worldly pursuits, one feels distant from the material world. Rashbi, however, took an interest in ordinary people despite his spiritual attainments.

SAVING FROM JUDGEMENT, RAINBOW, IN AN EMERGENCY

Rashbi said "I could exempt the entire world from judgment," even those who did not behave properly and who deserve a punishment. Rashbi defended them and removed the judgment from them so they would not be punished.

"Rabbi Shimon can be depended on during an emergency" – when in a tight spot, he can be relied upon.

"Throughout his days a rainbow was not seen in the clouds" – A rainbow indicates the low spiritual standing of the generation which deserves a flood. That is when a rainbow appears. It is a reminder of the covenant that Hashem made with the world that He would never bring a flood again. In the generation of Rashbi no rainbow was seen because there was no reason to punish them for he protected them.

THE ZOHAR – FOUNDATION OF KABBALA AND CHASSIDUS

The holy Zohar is one of our treasures. It is a guide in the

confusion of the world and of life and a source of vision for the holy people who know its secrets. Even the ordinary people are warmed by its light. Most of the Zohar is written in Aramaic in the style of the Talmud. It includes "Zohar on the Torah," "Tikkunei Zohar," and "Zohar Chadash."

Many of the teachings in the Zohar are excerpts of conversations that Rashbi and his chabura had during their travels and gatherings. The Zohar contains stories, Maaseh B'Reishis, the study of the soul, life in the World to Come, Yemos HaMoshiach, the secret of G-dliness and the "other side," the fate of souls in this world and the next, explanations of verses, and more.

YOU WILL GO OUT OF GALUS WITH THE ZOHAR

One of the great students of the Arizal, Rabbi Avrohom HaLevi, who was a reincarnation of Yirmiyahu HaNavi, said the prayer of Nacheim every day (when we ordinarily say it only on Tisha B'Av) in his great sorrow over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash and the exile of the Sh'china and the Jewish people.

When he went to the gravesite of Rashbi on Lag B'Omer with his Rebbe he said Nacheim. After he did so, the Arizal told him that Rashbi was annoyed with him for saying this mournful prayer on his special day. R' Avrohom was punished severely. The Rebbe explains:

Rashbi was one of those souls for whom the churban did not exist (since he was on the level to experience the loftiest revelations of the Beis HaMikdash even in exile) and consequently, there was no place for sorrowful feelings about the churban on Rashbi's Yom Hilula, even for someone not on his level. To Rashbi there are no negative consequences of churban.

Lag B'Omer is an auspicious time to bring the hisgalus of Moshiach through the avoda of simcha. Regarding the Zohar it says (Raya Mehemna BaMidbar): With the Zohar the Jewish people will leave galus with mercy and it will be fulfilled in them "Hashem alone guided them and there is no foreign god with Him." And their parnasa will be from the Tree of Life without evil and dissension "and the spirit of impurity I will remove from the earth."

Particularly on this day, the day Rashbi went up and united in an eternal bond with Hashem, it is an auspicious time to bring Moshiach.

TORAS HA'CHASSIDUS – A CONTINUATION FROM TORAS RASHBI

The Kabbala of the Arizal and his disciples and the teachings of Chassidus of the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples until the Rebbe are a direct link to the holy teachings of Rashbi. The revelations in Kabbala and Chassidus are sourced in the Zohar and they are an explanation of deep concepts in the Zohar.

Since Chassidus is a continuation and explanation of the teachings in the Zohar, "Toraso shel Moshiach," learning more Chassidus hastens the Geula, as Moshiach himself told the Baal Shem Tov, that he would come when the Baal Shem Tov's teachings spread outward.

Demanding of Hashem that He send Moshiach and trying to get all Jewish children to march in a parade on Lag B'Omer are two activities that the Rebbe assures us will hasten the Geula. May we soon merit to walk in the grand parade with Moshiach leading us, towards the third Beis HaMikdash.

Sources: Likkutei Sichos in the sichos and hosafos for Lag B'Omer, volumes 1, 3, 17, 22, 52, 57. Shulchan Aruch HaRav siman 495. Igros Kodesh Admur HaZakein p. 117.

MY OFFSPRING SHOULD BE LIKE ME

By Rabbi Shlomo Raskin
Dean of Beis Chana, Tzfas

If we were blessed that our children should be like us, how many of us would answer amen?

We know that parents' setting an example for their children is all important. We know what a being a good role model is and try to do it right. But as the years go by and we get used to hearing all kinds of concepts, we don't pay as much attention to what they really mean, particularly to us.

Let's take this example of setting an example. There is a Midrash about a person who is thirsty and exhausted. He passes by a fruit tree with nice shade, juicy fruits, and a spring of pure water flowing at its base. The man ate some fruit, drank from the water and rested in the shade. He enjoyed it so much that he wanted to give the tree the very best blessing possible and he said, "Tree, tree, with what shall I bless you?"

The man couldn't come up with a more apt blessing than – all of your fruits should be like you!

This Midrash is speaking about "man is a tree of the field" as much as an actual tree, and this little story has a connection to us all. Let



each of us ponder: If someone came and blessed us that our fruits should be like us, how many of us would answer amen?

Out in the world, there are many people who consider themselves intelligent, well-mannered, educated and *lamdanim*, who would reply with a hearty "amen." But we are T'mimim who are concerned about p'nimius, and the simple meaning

of an example is that the child copies his father's behavior and consequently, his fruits will be like him.

When speaking about the concept of being good examples to our children, parents might say, "yes, we need to try," but when it comes down to your son actually growing up to be like you, the nice metaphor of a tree becomes something quite serious.

In order for children to be as they ought, it's not enough to be a tree with nice shade; you need to be much more than that. R' Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, mashpia in Tomchei T'mimim, would say: "If you want to warm a room so that it's nice and comfortable, let's say 70 degrees, the oven (or boiler) has to be set much higher than that. The same is true when a parent wants his children to be 'warm' to Judaism. The parent has to be an oven that produces a great amount of heat so that his children will have even a fraction of that warmth."

What will happen when the child, who is cooler than his parent, is responsible to provide heat for his own children? His children will be even less warm; still above freezing but quite cool. And how will the child who is cool warm up the next generation?

The analogy drives home the point that in order for children to be reasonably warm towards Judaism, the parent has to be hot, and that is what is meant by being a personal example. To be a flame takes work. It's not enough to be moved by the idea of your fruits being like you. There is work to be done and you need to invest thought and effort into it every day, and remember that this is serious business and you can't stop stoking the oven. If we generate this much warmth, then our children will want to be ovens.

Someone told me that his son told his teacher: "My father demands many things of me, but I

"My father demands many things of me, but I look to see what he does out of all the things he tells me to do, and that is what I do. I know that the things he actually does are what are really important."

look to see what he does out of all the things he tells me to do, and that is what I do. I know that the things he actually does are what are really important."

I wish us all that when we are blessed to have fruits like ourselves,

it shouldn't be difficult to say amen happily. Furthermore, that the Rebbe should be able, in the true and complete Geula, to point at us and at our children and say, "see the produce that I have raised."

(From a speech at a Shabbos Chinuch)



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