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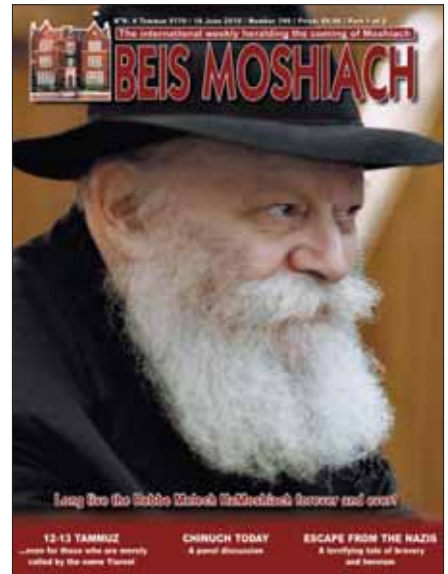
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# BEYOND THE REACH OF KNOWLEDGE

Sichos In English

## WHAT MORTAL KNOWLEDGE CANNOT GRASP

The category of chukim refers to mitzvos whose rationale cannot be grasped by human intellect.

Within this category, however, the laws of the Red Heifer stand out as unique.

Thus the Midrash [1] quotes King Shlomo (about whom it is written: [2] "And Shlomo was wiser than every man on the face of the earth"):

"I was able to comprehend all the [other difficult passages in the Torah], but with regard to the passage of the Red Heifer, I asked and I sought; 'I said, 'I will become wise,' but I [saw] that it was far from me.' [3]

Indeed, it was only with regard to Moshe, that the Midrash [4] states: "The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe: 'To you [alone] will I reveal the rationale for the Red Heifer.'"

On one hand, these quotes imply that the laws of the Red Heifer do not transcend the realms of intellect entirely, for Moshe was granted comprehension of their rationale.

Nevertheless, this rationale obviously transcends ordinary knowledge, and thus it could not be perceived by Shlomo, nor did Moshe communicate it to others. [5]

Indeed, even Moshe's appreciation did not come as a result of own powers of comprehension.

As the Midrash states: [6] "It is a chukka, a decree which I have ordained. And no created beings are able to comprehend My decrees."

Why was Moshe able to grasp this rationale?

Because he was granted a unique gift from G-d.

G-d is omnipotent - able to fuse transcendence and limitation together - and it was by virtue of this omnipotence that Moshe was able to appreciate this rationale.

## TO TAP THE ESSENCE OF THE TORAH

The question, however, arises: Why only to Moshe?

If appreciating the rationale of the Red Heifer would advance one's Divine service, why didn't G-d - or Moshe - share it with others?

The resolution of this question depends on insight into the nature of the Torah.

The Torah is one with G-d; [7] it is an expression of His essential will.

Therefore, just as His will is above intellectual comprehension, so too, the Torah.

Nevertheless, G-d gave the Torah to mortals, not because He desired their obedience, but rather,

because He desired their welfare.

He wanted man to develop a connection with Him, and moreover, for that connection to be internalized within man's understanding, so that G-dly wisdom would be part of his inner makeup. And with that intent, He enclothed the Torah in an intellectual framework.

This intellectual dimension is, however, merely an extension of the Torah.

The Torah's essence remains transcendent G-dliness that cannot be contained within any limits - even the limits of intellect.

To relate to this essence, man must approach the Torah with a commitment that transcends his wisdom and logic.

To highlight this dimension, it was necessary for at least one aspect of the Torah to remain above intellectual comprehension entirely.

This is the message of the laws of the Red Heifer.

These laws which transcend our understanding attune us to appreciate the entire Torah in this light, and develop our sensitivity to its inner G-dly core.

Were the entire Torah to have been enclothed in reason, man would be motivated to follow his own understanding and would have difficulty in rising to a challenge that requires mesirus nefesh, self-sacrifice.

Indeed, limiting our spiritual commitment to the intellectual sphere would encourage man's natural material, inclination.

There would be a tendency to follow one's desires and to rationalize one's conduct even when it is lacking, finding explanations to justify one's spiritual failures. [8]

And without making a unlimited commitment to the Torah, man would not be able to relate to its unlimited truth.

The laws of the Red Heifer, however, imbue a person with an awareness of the unlimited nature of the Torah, pushing him forward, and stirring him to devote himself entirely to the Torah, both to its observance and its study. [9]

Becoming conscious of the inner G-dly nature of the Torah awakens the inner G-dly nature of our souls, enabling us to develop a complete bond with Him.

To underscore this unique dimension contributed by the laws of the Red Heifer, the Torah refers to them as *chukkas ha'Torah* ("the decree of the Torah"), [10] rather than *chukkas ha'Torah* ("the decree of the [Red] Heifer"). [11]

Using this term emphasizes that our connection with the entire Torah is dependent on commitment which transcends intellect.

## A SELFLESS SELF

This explanation, however, leads to a further question.

If leaving the laws of the Red Heifer as a *chok* is essential to our approach to the Torah, why did G-d reveal their rationale to Moshe?

According to the above, this would detract from Moshe's commitment.

The resolution of this question revolves upon the idea that the rationale for the laws of Red Heifer is not an intellectual concept which Moshe understood.

Instead, the intent is that G-d's

essential will was revealed within Moshe's thought.

That which cannot be understood became the cornerstone of his intellectual powers.

To explain:

Moshe represented the personification of the attribute of *Chochma*, usually translated as "wisdom."

There is, however, a difference between our ordinary conception of wisdom and *Chochma*.

All conceptualization is made up of two elements:

the intellectual idea itself, and the process of opening oneself up to appreciate that idea, letting go of one's previous way of thinking and stepping beyond.

*Chochma* relates to the second element, and thus *Chochma* is identified with *bittul*, selfless existence. [12]

This *bittul* makes *Chochma* an appropriate vessel for the *Ein Sof*, G-d's Infinity, to rest. [13]

And this spiritual process - that the *Ein Sof* rests within *Chochma* - is reflected in G-d's making known to Moshe the rationale for the laws of the Red Heifer.

For this reason, knowing the rationale for the laws of the Red Heifer did not detract from Moshe's commitment.

Moshe's selflessness enabled him to be identified totally with G-dliness.

Unlike other mortals, he did not have a separate, individual self-image; he saw himself only as a medium for the expression of G-d's truth.

*Mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice, was his fundamental nature, and hence it could never be diminished.

In the Era of the Redemption, *Moshiach* will offer the tenth Red Heifer, purifying the entire nation. [14] And we will continue to proceed in our Divine service to the age when the purification of the Red Heifer will no longer be necessary.

For "He will swallow up death for eternity," [15] and G-dliness, the source of all life, will be overtly revealed throughout all existence.

*Adapted from Likkutei Sichos  
Vol. XVIII, p. 229ff*

## NOTES:

1. BaMidbar Rabba 19:3.
2. I Kings 5:11.
3. Ecclesiastes 7:23.
4. Loc. cit.:6, Midrash Tanchuma, sec. 8.
5. Moreover, we find that *pilpulei d'Oraisa*, the process of didactic reasoning through which the Oral Law is elucidated was also given to Moshe as a gift from G-d.
- In this instance, however, Moshe taught this method of study to the entire Jewish people (Nedarim 38a).
- The fact he did not teach the rationale of the Red Heifer to others, thus indicates that he was unable to do - that it represents an intellectual plateau that is inaccessible to others.
6. Koheles Rabba 8:1 (5).
7. Zohar I, 24a.
8. See the commentary of the Ramban (Leviticus 19:2) which speaks about the possibility of being "a degenerate with the Torah's license."
9. See the essay in this series entitled "Real Growth" which explains how B'Chukosai - the appreciation of the dimension of *chukim* in the Torah - inspires one to "labor in Torah study," to apply oneself arduously, beyond one's ordinary limits.
10. Numbers 19:2.
11. In reference to the laws of the Paschal sacrifice, for example, it is written (Exodus 12:43): "This is *chukkas ha'Pesach* (the decree of the Paschal sacrifice)."
12. See Tanya, ch. 3.
13. Tanya, ch. 35.
14. Para 3:5; Rambam Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Para, the conclusion of ch. 3.
15. Isaiah 25:8.

# DO YOU THINK THE WORLD REVOLVES AROUND YOU?

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

***“It is not only me that Hashem redeemed on the twelfth of Tammuz, but all those who hold the Torah dear, those who observe Mitzvos, and even those who are called with the name Yisroel...”***

## WE ARE THE WORLD

One of the most infuriating things about Lubavitch and its belief system to those on the outside looking in, whether they identify as Misnagdim or Chassidim of other denominations, is the casual certitude that their role is such that their actions are the central determining factor as to the fate of the entire Jewish people and the world. One of the harder to swallow manifestations thereof is the fact that they have their own holidays, even as they insist that these holidays are universal in nature and should be celebrated by all Jews. We always knew that you couldn't blame the Chassidim for this, since it was coming from the top, but that didn't make it any easier to tolerate.

You couldn't ask for a better example of this than the letter written by the Rebbe Rayatz in the year 5688/1928 in honor of the one year anniversary of his release from captivity on 12-13 Tammuz 5687/1927. There he writes, **“It is not only me that Hashem redeemed on the twelfth of Tammuz, but all those who hold the Torah dear, those who observe Mitzvos, and even those who are called with the name Yisroel as a sobriquet...”** In a letter from 1932, he refers to 12 Tammuz as the day that was established as the *moed ha'moadim* (holiday of all holidays). Yes, we knew that the first year there were some other great people who proclaimed this a day of celebration, such as Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld in Eretz

Yisroel, but beyond that it all seemed too exaggerated and even delusional.

Oddly enough, the knowledge that Lubavitchers believe that their Rebbe is Moshiach actually made them seem a little more reasonable. If you believe that a certain somebody is going to redeem the Jews and the world as the anointed scion of the House of Dovid, it makes a little more sense to believe that every move he makes and every event in his life has global impact and significance, although it makes it no less annoying to those who are not quite convinced.

Of course, that very belief provided more ammunition for debate when encountering Lubavitchers, especially after the Rebbe came out with a sharp statement discouraging the promotion of that belief. Within a few hours of the end of Shabbos Parshas B'Reishis 5745, the fellows in the yeshiva where I hung out during the holiday break that Tishrei were up to speed on the latest news from 770. I remember clearly standing on the corner of Coney Island Avenue and Avenue M, across from the yeshiva and a





block away from home, as one of the guys who assiduously followed the goings on in Lubavitch quoted the Rebbe's statement, emphasizing that the Rebbe did not deny the belief, but rather addressed the possible negative public relations repercussions.

This perception, that the Rebbe actually endorsed the belief while discouraging its broad dissemination was the prevalent view in the yeshiva circles that I traveled in. In fact, I knew a few guys that got their kicks at that time from confronting Lubavitchers as to whether they believed the Rebbe is Moshiach, and found it hilarious when they hemmed and hawed as a result of the Rebbe's strong statement. One year later, on Simchas Torah 5746, when the Rebbe seemed to pull back from his earlier restraining order, I was learning in Eretz Yisroel in a yeshiva that was less involved in such issues so I didn't get the news until I returned to New York the following Pesach.

I could list any number of ideas and statements that broadcast loudly and clearly the worldview that the Chabad Chassidic movement is the driving force of implementation of the Divine Plan, which I was aware of this before I considered the serious study of Chassidus and possibly entertaining the outrageous premise that these ideas and statements might even be valid. As disturbing as that possibility was to me, my previous perusal of general Chassidic texts had prepared me for the idea that metaphysical truths are not readily corroborated by human logic and rational thought, and that one had to pray that G-d open his eyes to recognize spiritual truths beyond the ken of finite intellectualism. What intrigued me most was the claim that Chabad Chassidus makes it possible to take those

beliefs that one could access only through the soul's inherent spirituality and "bring them down" so as to be grasped by the human mind.

## ORIGINS OF THE WORLD

As mentioned previously, I never really struggled with issues of faith even as I struggled mightily with the issues of love and fear of G-d, as well as the need for submission to divine decree and divine authority, that is, my own personal relationship with G-d. Thus the theory of evolution was to me nothing more than ignorant nonsense and I didn't have the patience or the interest to bother reading those Jewish works that tried to debunk and disprove said theory. I had even less patience for those who approached me claiming that they were struggling with the possibility that evolution was true, as opposed to the Torah account in B'Reishis. On the other hand, I was fascinated by the spiritual dynamics that allowed such a patently absurd notion to gain such a degree of universal credibility that the term "creationist" became an extreme pejorative.

Even more disturbing was the direct link between the development of that theory and the theories of the existentialist philosopher whose views on men and supermen inspired the ideas behind the final solution. Additionally, there was a similar link to the theories of the Jewish apostate who inspired the worker's revolution that became a superpower committed to uprooting any vestiges of Jewish faith and practice. And although it took a longer time for that theory to worm its way into the American consciousness, as America had and

has a much stronger faith base than Europe, it ultimately became the foundation for the licentiousness and profligacy that has become endemic in American life. Having been exposed to certain Kabbalistic principles early on, such as the idea that the forces of evil mirror the realms of holiness in opposition, the fact that this one fatuous theory played such a prominent role in the death and persecution of so many of my fellow Jews and the abandonment of Jewish belief and practice by so many others, intrigued me to no end.

Over time, I worked out a possible explanation for this phenomenon, only to discover later that same idea in Chassidus with far greater clarity. The basic idea is that there are two aspects to creation. There is the clearly miraculous act of creation of "something from nothing" by an omnipotent being, and then there are the "laws of nature" that govern the everyday running of the world in a manner of "cause and effect." G-d's role in creating "something from nothing" is something that is completely hidden from the created beings. In fact, Chassidus explains that that is why it is described as creating "from nothing" despite the fact that we know that, in the words of Dovid HaMelech, "since everything is from You." The same is true for G-d's hand in the everyday affairs of the world that seem to operate under the rules of cause and effect.

However, although we have no way of "seeing" the act of creation itself in our world, by accepting that premise on faith (and even more so when understanding that creative process to the degree that is humanly possible as it is explained in Chassidus) we do have the capacity of discerning Divine Providence in the everyday

events in our lives and the world. As the Ramban explains regarding the miracle of splitting the sea and the other miracles of the exodus from Egypt, the purpose of miracles that are above nature is so that we realize and discern that what we call nature is nothing more than ongoing miracles. The way in which we can do so on a regular basis, even when there are no obvious miracles is through constantly looking to see the hand of Divine Providence in everything.

This is in fact the deeper dynamic of the "exile" and "redemption" of the Jewish Nation. "Exile" is when we live in a state where G-d's presence and involvement in our world and our lives is concealed from our eyes and our consciousness. Thus, in Egypt, we were enslaved to Pharaoh who proclaimed, "The Nile is mine, and I made myself," "Who is G-d (YHVH) that I should listen to His voice." In order to "break" that concealment, there was a two-step process. The first step is when Pharaoh is confronted by Moshe (both in his palace and at the side of the Nile when doing his business) and visited by plagues so that it becomes clear that the Nile is not his and "so that you will know that I am G-d (YHVH)..." Initially, before he is broken, Pharaoh fights back even harder by enslaving the Jews even more deeply. Finally, he is forced to concede and "let My people go." The next step is when he tries to make a last ditch effort to re-enslave the people until he is finally destroyed in a miraculous fashion when it becomes fully manifest that "I am G-d your G-d who took you out of Egypt."

Later in the desert, even after the Giving of the Torah, it becomes clear that experiencing a high degree of divine revelation by way of regular miracles in everyday life is not sufficient to



# ***Every aspect of Jewish life today is a clear testament to the transition from the concealment of “exile” towards the revelation of “redemption,” when the miraculous becomes an everyday reality.***

undo the tendency to separate the “Creator” from the “normal” everyday “cause and effect” system of the world. In fact, during the era of the First Temple when they experienced the “ten miracles in the Temple” and a much higher degree of divine revelation, they made it clear that they wanted G-d to be less involved in their lives and preferred to live in the “normal” world of “cause and effect.” This was actually predicted in advance in the “rebuke,” where they were told that if they prefer to live in a world of “happenstance,” Hashem would give them just that although the consequences would be horrible and they would be forced to experience “exile” again and again.

## **FIXING THE WORLD**

The process whereby we are to extricate ourselves from the final exile, requires that we overcome both the inability to “see” G-d in creation and our everyday lives and that we embrace His involvement and welcome His presence. As we entered into the era universally recognized as the final days before Moshiach, or in Talmudic terms, “the footsteps of Moshiach,” there was tremendous push-back from the forces of evil which presented in various forms but all based to some degree on the idea of rejecting G-d in his role as the Creator, and embracing the idea that the world runs in

random fashion with the only order imposed on the world being by human agency. “The Nile is mine, and I made myself,” “Who is G-d that I should listen to His voice.”

The response to this is also a two-step process, albeit played out over a much longer period of time. The first step was that the “Moshe” of that time had to confront “Pharaoh” in his “palace,” the most feared Communist prison, representing the seat of power from which this heartless colossus wreaked havoc on its own citizens and the world at large. On the night of his arrest, hundreds of religious leaders, Jewish and otherwise, were simply taken out and shot. And yet, he stood up to them by completely ignoring their authority, and ultimately they had to bow in defeat and release him to freedom. Just as in Egypt, the first response was for the forces of evil to fight back even as they knew that this was the beginning of the end of their being broken entirely. They threw everything they had at us, from holocausts to relentless persecution, from forced apostasy to the seduction of everything goes, but the core was already broken. So yes, 12 Tammuz is a “day of redemption” for all Jews, whether they know it or not, whether they appreciate it or not.

This time around, the second step of the process, unlike in Egypt, is to synthesize the

miraculous and the mundane, so that we not only “see” and appreciate the hand of Divine Providence in world events and our everyday lives, but we yearn for the degree of revelation when it will be obvious to all “and all flesh will see that the Mouth of G-d has spoken,” and happily accept it when it comes. Every aspect of Jewish life today is a clear testament to the transition from the concealment of “exile” towards the revelation of “redemption,” when the miraculous becomes an everyday reality. This is the case with the existence of the State of Israel and its survival, and the tremendous growth of the yeshiva world with tens of thousands learning in Kollel and endless more examples. Those people may not recognize or even actively reject the idea that this is all an outgrowth of the mesiras nefesh of the Rebbe Rayatz, and the work of the Shluchim in bringing G-dliness into every place in every corner of the world, but that doesn’t change the spiritual and physical reality.

Those of us who have been privileged to be shown the inner workings of the Divine Plan and our role therein, and having been told that we have completed the job of “bringing the One (G-d, as He is above nature) into the Ten (G-d, as He operates within nature)” as well as “elevating the Ten to the level of the One (so that nature itself proclaims the Oneness of G-d),” cannot allow ourselves to be distracted by the last vestiges of exile, which is our own inner resistance to accepting G-d within every facet of our beings and every aspect of our lives. We need to “accept Moshiach” and prepare the world to “accept Moshiach,” so that we “see” G-d Himself revealed in our world, immediately, NOW!

# COMRADE BASHKOV'S PINTELE YID

By Menachem Ziegelboim

*The following is based on a journal account written by the Rebbe Rayatz. \* Presented for 12-13 Tammuz.*

## PART I

Leningrad. Motzaei Shabbos, the night of 11 Adar I, 5687/1927.

The Rebbe Rayatz left his house and boarded a swift carriage that would take him to the Nikolaeva station, where he would board a train for Moscow.

This was an exceedingly difficult time. Black clouds covered the skies over Russian Jewry. Angry winds in the form of the Yevsektzia, rash young Jews, were being abused by members of the accursed GPU. The Jewish Yevsekim superseded the original communists in their hatred and they furiously persecuted any sign of Judaism.

The Rebbe Rayatz, leader of the Jewish people, led the war, guiding the "ship" with great courage and determination between the stormy waves that broke against its sides. Every achievement for the sake of the

Jewish people was an entire world. The Rebbe persistently moved forward step by step. There was no one ultimate achievement; every small attainment was a success unto itself.

The Rebbe was busy, very preoccupied. He was planning on traveling to Moscow in order to attend a meeting which would facilitate his work on behalf of the Jews of Russia. The Rebbe knew that every small deed on his part could incriminate him and anything he said could be used against him. Nevertheless, he took his place at the head, exposed to attack, although he tried to minimize this possibility. He knew that even if they could not bring him down, they could make things difficult him, and he sought to prevent this.

As usual, he arrived at the train station with only minutes to spare. "Only two or three minutes remained until the train would set

out," the Rebbe wrote in his journal. "It is unpleasant to remain at the train station for long, even on the platforms leading up to the trains, because of the watchful eyes that observe the length of the boarding platform, examining every passerby."

As he did every time, the Rebbe left with one of his three daughters accompanying him to the train station. This time it was his third daughter, Sheina. The platform was nearly empty since most of the passengers were already sitting on the train. Only four minutes remained until the train would leave and the Rebbe boarded a sleeper where there were special compartments with beds and a writing desk.

The Rebbe entered the compartment with majestic grace. In the entrance was a tall, coarse looking Russian who stared at the Rebbe threateningly.

Sheina wanted to use every last







minute to speak to her dear father before they parted. She also noticed the severe look of the man in the entrance.

"Tatte," she whispered.

"Yes, my daughter," the Rebbe responded.

"When you get to Moscow successfully, please inform us by phone that 'the old man recovered,'" she whispered. The Rebbe nodded his consent. Both of them understood the code.

The Rebbe knew that he was being watched and that there were people trying to invent stories about him. This was the reason that the Rebbe had been careful not to appear on the street for even a few extra minutes. All the more so the train station, which was swarming with secret police.

"Once the journey began, my heartfelt lighter," wrote the Rebbe.

## PART II

The Rebbe was in his

compartment looking around and noticing that this train was a newer model. The compartment was relatively spacious, with a good desk in the center, a proper chair, and a lamp on the table.

There was a long whistle and the train set out into the dark of night that Motzaei Shabbos. The Rebbe noted that the compartment was not swaying too much. He was satisfied. He figured he could write the maamer "V'Ata Tetzaveh" that he had said on Shabbos. He hoped to finish writing the maamer soon so he could send copies to guests who were with him and heard him deliver it.

A monotonous tone could be heard, the sound of the wheels clacking against the tracks. Still, the trip is quiet and calm. For two hours the Rebbe wrote the maamer.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts. He did not respond. He assumed it was

one of the train employees to offer a cup of tea or the like. Barely half an hour passed and there was another knock.

"Enter!" said the Rebbe.

The door opened and there was a train employee standing there. The Rebbe managed to get a glimpse of the guard who had stood in the doorway of the compartment at the beginning of the trip. He was walking the length of the car and when he passed near the doorway he stopped for a few seconds, looked malevolently at the Rebbe and at the entire compartment and then moved on.

"Excuse me for disturbing you," said the man with a little bow. "In the next car is a passenger who since the beginning of the trip has asked me to show him your ticket where your name is written. I did not agree to show it to him, but when the conductor came around to check the tickets of all the passengers, your neighbor showed a document to the official, who then took out your ticket with your name. About half an hour later he called me and asked me to knock on your door and to tell you that one of the passengers wants to visit you."

He kept quiet for a moment, scratching his forehead as though searching for the words he wanted to use.

"I tried to get out of it and said you would surely be sleeping, but when we recently stopped at a station he saw through the window that you were sitting and writing and so he insisted I knock at your door. I knocked a few times and you did not answer. Not much time elapsed when he called me again and told me to knock stronger and to tell you that he wants to visit and talk to you."

The Rebbe thought quickly. From the crumbs of information he received he realized that the

*The Rebbe thought quickly. From the crumbs of information he received he realized that the man next door wasn't just anyone. Very possibly, this was one of those searching for him and dogging his footsteps.*

man next door wasn't just anyone. Very possibly, this was one of those searching for him and dogging his footsteps. He was not interested in meeting with the man.

"Tell him that I am not accustomed to making acquaintances on trips," said the Rebbe. "In addition, the hour is late and it's not a pleasant time for visits. I plan on sleeping now." The Rebbe asked the attendant to wake him at six in the morning. The man bowed again and left.

Sad thoughts rose in the Rebbe's mind. One by one, images of various instances of persecution against the Jews of Russia came to him: the closing of shuls, the destruction of mikvaos, the arrest of rabbanim, shochtim and melamdim, as well as many libelous charges against religious Jews. In his six years of experience as leader, the Rebbe noted that the oppression was mainly in cities where Jews held positions in law enforcement.

The Rebbe's thoughts wander yearningly six years back. He recalls the talk he had with his father, the Rebbe Rashab. It was a Friday morning, 8 Adar, 5780/1920, shortly after the communist revolution and the changes they began to impose on the life of the people and the country. Among other things, his father told him sorrowfully, "Heavy clouds are passing over Russia; 22 years for sure. The

Alter Rebbe said that a kingdom that persecutes the Jewish religion and stops Torah study must be destroyed. That is what happened in the final years of Nikolai, who persecuted the Jewish religion and Torah for years until he had to fight a war which broke him and his advisors."

The Rebbe Rashab concluded on a hopeful note, "In the end, Hashem will also break the Jewish youth who hound religion but until then, they (the Jews of Russia) will suffer a lot from their wickedness and conspiracies."

The Rebbe remembered this and the trembling that overtook him when he heard this from his father, and a heavy sigh burst forth from his pure heart. At least twenty-two years we will have to suffer! He was horrified when he thought about the intense bitterness of the previous seven years, and to think there were another fifteen years like this ahead!

The Rebbe pictured in his mind when his father suddenly turned to him, his only son, and said: "**Yosef Yitzchok! You should have actual, not just potential, mesirus nefesh to spread Torah with fear of Heaven and strengthen Judaism.**"

Exhausted, the Rebbe Rayatz lay down, with his heart constricted in pain. He suddenly saw a vision of his father sitting in his holy room next to the desk between two windows on the

western wall. The Rebbe was wearing holiday garb, the lamp in the middle of the room was lit with candles, and on the desk were two candles and the Eitz Chaim of Rabbi Chaim Vital open to "Shaar Purim," Chapter 6, which deals with "the secret of Mordechai and Esther."

In the vision, he entered his father's room and his father looked at him, put down a red silk handkerchief on the open book and with a very serious demeanor he said to his son, "Why are you crying? When Adar enters we rejoice. If your work is overwhelming, remember my warning to you to be moser nefesh for spreading Torah with fear of Heaven and actually strengthening Judaism, not just potentially."

It was a palpable vision, so clear ...

The Rebbe woke up and looked at the time and saw that it was three o'clock at night. The clickety-clack of the wheels could be heard in the still of night. The Rebbe went back to sleep and slept well.

\*\*\*

As ordered, the attendant knocked at his door at six o'clock. The Rebbe got up, davened – after making the requisite preparations – and then had a cup of tea.

At eight o'clock he sat down to continue writing the maamer he had begun the night before. By his reckoning only a short while remained until they arrived in Moscow, and he wanted to complete as much as possible. The steward told him that the train would not be arriving on time and would be at least half an hour late since at one of the stations there had been a search of five compartments and twelve people had been arrested.

For an hour and a quarter the Rebbe continued to write

assiduously and then there was another knock at the door.

"I am here once again by request of your neighbor," bowed the attendant. "He wants to meet with you."

The Rebbe did not display his dissatisfaction but he knew that this time he could not just turn the man away. He told the attendant to bring him in for a few minutes. Before the visitor arrived, he packed up his belongings to avoid unwanted scrutiny.

A few minutes later the door opened. The guest bowed politely and introduced himself as Mark Bashkov. After clearing his throat he referred to his title, "Soviet Council Chairman of Chelyabinsk and member of the National GPU."

In a glance, the Rebbe took everything in, including the fact that the man's head was covered.

"And I am Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn," said the Rebbe, as he extended his hand.

"And your title?" asked the man.

"I am a Jew," said the Rebbe politely without elaborating.

"All of Yisroel are Jews," added the man, "but what is your title?"

In this duel of wits the Rebbe persisted, "Yes, all Yisroel are Jews and this itself is their true title, a title which does not change. Unlike other bearers of given titles, who if they misbehave lose their position and title, a Jew, even if he sins, retains his title as our Sages say, 'Yisroel, even though he sins, is Yisroel.'"

The Rebbe realized that the man was a knowledgeable Jew and he tried to win his heart, to soften him and perhaps even to be mekarev him to Torah and Judaism. The Rebbe went on to explain, "The *pintele Yid* is eternal but there are levels. There are those who just love their nation and respect the sages and the



***The Rebbe pictured in his mind when his father suddenly turned to him, his only son, and said: Yosef Yitzchok! You should have actual, not just potential, mesirus nefesh to spread Torah with fear of Heaven and strengthen Judaism.***

Torah, value the mitzvos of Hashem and cherish Jewish customs. Then there are those who are ready to be moser nefesh for the fulfillment of even one custom, even more so the fulfillment of one positive command or not to transgress one of the prohibitions. All this is the work of the *pintele Yid* which lies hidden within every Jew. Its revelation depends primarily on the type of education and life events a person lives through."

The voice of the attendant could be heard announcing that in another few moments the train would be entering the station in Moscow.

The guest looked at the Rebbe with a hooded glance. "I was born in the city Orsha in the Mohilev

district. I strongly desire to get to know you better. Over the next two or three days I will be very busy but afterward I will be available and if you are still in Moscow, I would like permission to visit you. If you have already left for your home in Leningrad, I ask permission to make a special trip to your house in order to meet with you."

The Rebbe sensed that the man's request was more than just a whim but he still did not know whether this desire was that of an enemy or whether it came from a deep place within his Jewish soul. This dilemma was resolved immediately.

A small tear could be seen in the corner of the man's eye. "I greatly respect the memory of my



parents, they and their entire family who were Chabad Chassidim. The names of the Chabad Rebbeim were constantly on their lips and my grandfathers, my paternal and maternal grandfathers, would go to Lubavitch a hundred years ago...”

The man got hold of himself and came back to the current reality. They could hear the whistles and groans of the engine as the train slowed as it approached the station.

“Tell me which hotel you will be in while you are in Moscow.”

A heavy weight had rolled off the Rebbe’s heart. “At the Stara Varvaskaya Hotel,” said the Rebbe.

The man touched his finger to his hat in a parting gesture and said, “Thank you! Be well and successful!”

### PART III

The Rebbe exited the train deep in thought, still under the impression of the meeting with the senior figure in the communist party, the Soviet Council Chairman of Chelyabinsk and member of the National GPU, the very same organization which instilled terror in all citizens regardless as to their standing in society, and nevertheless, he was still proud of the fact that his ancestors were Lubavitcher Chassidim.

“Deep in thought I walk slowly and the porter carries my belongings.” The Rebbe was still thinking about how the meeting with Bashkov was not happenstance and recalling the saying of the Baal Shem Tov that everything that happens in the world is by Divine Providence and even a piece of straw moving in the wind is not for naught; all the more so when speaking of a Jew who bears such an important

position.

By the time the Rebbe left the train station, the swift carriages that he was used to traveling with had already left. His musings were interrupted by the gravelly voice of a wagon driver who called out to him. The Rebbe got into the carriage, but not before paying the porter who loaded his baggage into the wagon. “To the Stara Varvaskaya Hotel,” said the Rebbe.

“Gut,” answered the wagon driver in Yiddish and for a moment the Rebbe wondered whether the man who happened to throw out a word in Yiddish was actually Jewish. His doubt was resolved a few minutes later when the carriage passed through a narrow alleyway at which point the Rebbe turned to the wagon driver asked how he came to be in fluent Yiddish.

“It has been many years since I’ve seen you,” he said, and introduced himself as Yaakov Lifschitz.

“I am from Veliki Loki. My father would go to Lubavitch.”

He went on to talk about himself, saying that for a period of time he had learned with other balabatim in his city every day between mincha and maariv by the old melamed R’ Velvel Gittelis.

“I did not like to learn,” he admitted, “and until I was drafted into the army I was in business. I dropped t’fillin and as I traveled I would eat non-kosher food.

“When the lottery was held for those who would be drafted, I was released and sent home. Fortune had smiled upon me but I continued to desecrate the Shabbos. This exemption wasn’t forever for when the war (World War I) broke out, all young men were drafted, even those who had been exempted in the earlier lottery. I was among the first to be drafted and my father advised me

to go to Lubavitch and get a bracha, which I did.

“I went to your father in Lubavitch in Elul, 5674/1914, about a month after war was declared. When I entered for yechidus your father said, ‘Avoid eating treif, put on t’fillin every weekday, and commit to keeping Shabbos. When you do these three things, Hashem will protect you and no bullet will touch you and He will send you back home healthy and whole.’

“I was in the army for a year; bullets flew around me but I was never wounded. At a certain point they gave me two months leave so I could rest up. When the two months were up, before I went back to the army, I returned to Lubavitch. When I arrived at the train station in Rudnia I saw your father getting ready to travel with the train that had come from Vitebsk and was heading for Smolensk. I joined him. The Rebbe blessed me a second time and his bracha was fulfilled.

“When the war was over and the new regime began to rule, I chose this profession so I would be able to keep Shabbos and daven every day. My wife and I keep Shabbos and kashrus and guide our children in the ways of Judaism.”

The wagon driver finished his story and silence filled the carriage, as both the occupants lapsed deep into thought. Then the wagon driver spoke up again.

“I live in a nice apartment, because as a worker I am considered amongst the special class, and I have three rooms. I can place a large room at your disposal and my wife will cook for you. Why stay in a hotel where you will be constantly under their watchful eyes?”

The Rebbe thanked him for his kind offer and said that he enjoyed hearing his story and in order to

encourage him in following his father's instructions he said, "and surely his brachos will be fulfilled," but he did not accept the invitation and asked him to hurry towards the hotel.

When they stopped at the hotel the wagon driver refused payment no matter what the Rebbe said. The Rebbe wanted to say a few more words to him but the man said a brief goodbye and left.

## PART IV

Monday, 12 Adar I  
At the hotel, Room 16  
4:30 pm

The sun's rays shone into the hotel room windows and illuminated the face of the Rebbe Rayatz as he was completing the maamer, reminding him that it was time for mincha. When he finished davening the Rebbe glanced at his watch and hurriedly left his room in order to get to one of the conferences taking place with Jewish askanim.

He was walking quickly down the long corridor when he noticed a young man running towards him. It was the assistant to the telephone operator of the hotel, coming to inform him that there was a call for him in the office. In those days, a telephone was a rarity and every phone conversation had to be ordered ahead of time. When a call came in for one of the guests at the hotel, they would send the boy to call them.

The Rebbe, who was under constant surveillance by the Yevsektzia, was suspicious.

"Who called?" he asked.

The boy shrugged and said he didn't know. The Rebbe followed him into the office. The clerk, Kratov, sat there waiting for him. He was from the Yevsektzia and his job was to keep tabs on everything taking place at the

***The Rebbe turned to the boy and said firmly, "I don't want to talk with anyone on the hotel phone." Kratov paled and could barely react, he was so taken by surprise. Nobody had ever dared to talk to him that way...***

hotel. "Talk into the phone on the wall and I will listen on the extension on my desk," he ordered. "I want to hear who is talking to you and what you talk about."

The Rebbe, with typical Schneersohn Jewish pride, turned to the boy and said firmly, "Tell whoever wants to speak to me that he should provide his phone number and who to ask for because I will call him in another fifteen minutes from another phone. I don't want to talk with anyone on the hotel phone."

Kratov paled and could barely react, he was so taken by surprise. Nobody had ever dared to talk to him that way. The telephone boy gave the Rebbe's message to the person on the line.

Kratov recovered relatively quickly and threatened menacingly, "I order you to speak here, otherwise, you will be sorry."

In the interim, the boy gave the Rebbe a piece of paper with the information on it. The Rebbe turned to leave without saying another word. Kratov shouted after him, "Citizen Schneersohn, I warned you before witnesses!"

The Rebbe then recalled that Mr. Bashkov, whom he had met on the train, wanted to meet him on the third day of his stay in Moscow and he figured that the phone call had to do with arranging a time to meet. The

Rebbe went to the first store he saw and asked to use the phone. He dialed the number he was given and asked to speak with the person staying in the room number he had been given. A few moments went by until Mr. Bashkov came to the phone.

"I would like to meet with you at six tonight," said Bashkov.

The Rebbe looked at the time and said, "Had I known this earlier I would have arranged my schedule differently, but now that it is arranged this way I will try to return to my room at the hotel at seven." Bashkov said he would be there at 7:30.

After this phone call the Rebbe hurried to the meeting he was supposed to lead. The phone call had delayed him by twenty-five minutes and he asked the participants' pardon. The Rebbe was given a brief overview of the discussions which had taken place before he arrived, as well as the reports that were given.

Towards seven o'clock the Rebbe hurried them up and said he had to return to his hotel, though he did not say why. He parted from the others, first arranging to meet again at eleven that night.

## PART V

The Rebbe slipped away from the gathering place and traveled to Novi Radi near Kremlin Square-Red Square, where he bought

***As he spoke he took out a document from his pocket and showed it to Kratov and the others. The faces of the four men turned white...***

fresh fruit and then went to the hotel. Before going up to his room he asked that a samovar with cups of tea and sugar be sent to his room, "and I waited to greet the son and grandson of Chassidim, Mark Bashkov, Soviet Council Chairman of Chelyabinsk and member of the National GPU."

A few moments after 7:30, in walked Mark Semyanovitch Bashkov, this time with his hat in hand. With a wave of his hand, the Rebbe invited him to sit down. He looked around him, inquired as to the Rebbe's welfare and asked whether the Rebbe had enough time to see him. He himself, Bashkov said, was free until 9:30, at which point he had to attend a meeting and the following night he was to return to distant Chelyabinsk.

The Rebbe told him graciously that he had cleared his schedule for this conversation. "It is very precious to me to hear stories of memories from yesteryear which include memories of the lives of my ancestors and customs of those days which are slowly being uprooted for no reason."

Bashkov sighed and began to relate his personal tragic story while tapping his finger on the arm of the padded chair.

"My father, Shimon Bashkes, was a melamed. My mother would organize and arrange weddings for wealthy Jews in Orsha. Her reputation spread beyond the city and that was their main source of parnasa.

"My grandparents on both sides were Chassidim of the old

Rebbe of Lubavitch whose name I don't recall; I only remember that they said that Nikolai I invited him to Petersburg and asked him to arrange proper permits for Jewish schools. He refused to do it and Nikolai put him in jail."

The Rebbe nodded and said, "Yes, it was my father's grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek."

"I heard many stories about this Rebbe as well as stories about his son who would visit Alexander III and worked hard to put an end to the pogroms against the Jews in the Kiev area."

Once again the Rebbe nodded and said, "Indeed, that was my grandfather, my father's father, R' Shmuel."

Bashkov sighed and went on. "I was a good student and until I was 14 I learned well. One day I decided to travel to one of the yeshivos in Minsk. I spent three years there but then I threw off the yoke and left Judaism. I went back home but I couldn't tolerate the ways practiced there and I ran away. I became friends with young socialists in Warsaw and from there I went to England to study various fields.

"Then I returned to my hometown and for three or four years I worked in various factories while I recruited people to the socialist party." He went on to describe in detail his arrest by the Czarist government, his subsequent move abroad and his return to Russia with the beginning of the revolution, as well as his diligence in his work.

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He did not see his parents for twenty years and he was already an honored member of the Cheka (the organization that preceded the GPU and the NKVD) in Moscow. His yearning for his parents, as well as his maturity and the ability to better appreciate their way of life, motivated him to travel to Orsha to see them.

When he got there he found out that his mother had died two years earlier. He barely recognized his father, who had aged with bent back and gaunt face. He learned that his father was no longer at home but stayed with Zalman Yaakov Lipkin, a distinguished member of the Jewish community in Orsha and a great Chassid. When he entered his father's room he found him lying and groaning.

His father did not recognize him. "Did you come to arrest me again? First give me time to recover from my illness," he called out and then burst into tears.

It was quite some time before Bashkov was able to reassure his father that he had no ill intentions against him and only then did he tell him that he was his son Meir. His father gave him a long, cold look and was quiet. It was only when his son suggested that he take him to Moscow where, he promised, his father could live with him and would lack for nothing, that his father looked at him in disdain and said, "There used to be a need for a melamed. Today, for teaching Torah they put you in jail and beat you. So now it is essential to be a melamed and endanger our lives in order to teach Torah secretly to Jewish children."

Bashkov understood that his father was turning down his offer. He took out forty rubles from his pocket and gave them to his father, but he pushed them away contemptuously. "I have what I



need.”

As Bashkov related this to the Rebbe, a thought flashed through the Rebbe’s mind – if he only knew that his father Shimon and his uncle Aryeh Shlomo, are melamdim in Orsha and his uncle Menachem Shmuel is a melamed in Yekaterinaslav, and that they receive their salaries from us, how would he react?

Bashkov continued to tell about his travels as a senior member of the GPU in different cities until he received this honorable position as Chairman of the Soviet Council of Chelyabinsk two years before and then he had been promoted to a senior rank in the central GPU.

## PART VI

As they spoke, the door to the Rebbe’s room burst open and in stormed Kratov with three other young men, one dressed in a policeman’s uniform. They all, except for Kratov, brandished revolvers.

They had barely recovered from their surprise when Kratov shouted, “Citizen Schneersohn, you are under arrest and don’t move. If you move, they will shoot you and it will be your own fault.” Without waiting he added, “Where are your bags? We need to check them.” He ordered one of the men, “Grishka, close the door.”

Bashkov continued to sit. He was shocked and angered by the invasion. Although his face was red with anger he restrained himself and didn’t utter a word. The Rebbe, who was used to searches and sudden visits of this sort, continued to sit serenely and calmly said, “The small bag is here and the big one is near the bed behind the curtain that separates the sitting room from the bedroom.”

Kratov ordered the others to conduct a search of the Rebbe’s

baggage while he sat down on one of the armchairs facing the Rebbe and his guest and began mocking Jews and the Jewish religion. He told how in his hometown of Amtzislav he had arrested rabbanim and melamdim and knocked out their teeth and destroyed their eyesight. He didn’t stop at that. He bragged about how he had caught two older rabbanim and hitched them to a wagon that brought dung from the stable of Kozma the cobbler. The old rav could not continue pulling the wagon and fell to the ground and broke an arm and a leg and died that same day. The other rabbi continued to drag the wagon until he also fell “and I kicked him in the stomach and he rolled in agony and two days later he died too,” laughed Kratov.

In the meantime, the others conducted a thorough search of the Rebbe’s baggage and clothing and leafed through his s’farim, though they left his manuscripts on the desk.

At this point, Kratov ordered the Rebbe to stand so they could examine his pockets. He emptied the Rebbe’s pockets and put the contents on the table.

“We young heretics, together with our communist friends, will bring an end to fanatic Jews. We will uproot their rabbis and teachers without leaving a root and your lot, Citizen Schneersohn, will be the same as theirs. There are only two paths before you. One is to put you in front of a wall and to shoot you, and the other is to send you to the Salovaki desert where you’ll rot.”

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When they finished examining his belongings and pockets, Kratov turned and said mockingly to Bashkov, “And now comrade, get up and we will check you too. Perhaps you are one of Citizen

Schneersohn’s men whose job it is to build mikvaos, to arrange chadarim and to support counter-revolutionary rabbis and teachers and those similar to them from the dark ages.”

Since he had finally turned to Bashkov, the latter responded coolly in measured tones, “Comrades, Citizen Schneersohn is apparently not knowledgeable enough in the laws of this country but you surely know the law” – and here he cited the chapter and paragraph – “that says that whoever comes to conduct a search of citizens, whether they are from the police or the GPU, must show their identity card and a search warrant. This warrant must be stamped by the office that authorized the search. Show me your documentation so we will know who you are.”

Instantly, Kratov exploded in rage. He eyes bulged and his lips curled in fury as he began to scream, “I am a member of the Yevsektzia who is appointed to supervise everything that goes on in this hotel as well as the clerks, employees and guests in this hotel and their visitors. Somebody walks in off the street – a glutton just coming from the market” – and he pointed at the table where the fruits were – “and this dog asks for my ID! Stand up and allow me to examine your pockets, and if you refuse I will give you such a beating that I will erase your filthy face. Come, comrades,” he called to the others, “and give it to him good! It looks like we have fat fish in our net.”

He moved threateningly towards Bashkov, put a hand on his shoulder and said, “There is a place for you, too, in one of the cellars of the ‘hospital’ (notorious GPU prison) on Lubyanka Street.”

Bashkov did not lose his cool. He said, “I am demanding that the law be kept!”



**Lubyanka prison**

Kratov and his cronies began laughing and they approached him menacingly. Bashkov got up in a rage, took off his hat, and said a word which the Rebbe did not understand. As he spoke he took out a document from his pocket and showed it to Kratov and the others.

The faces of the four men turned white as ghosts. They backed away and then stood there in shock.

“Come over here and show me your ID,” said Bashkov officiously.

Kratov stood there terrified. “My ID is in the desk in the office.”

“Go get it then,” ordered Bashkov drily, and he told the other men to come over and show him their ID. He checked them one by one and wrote down their information. When he asked them for the search warrant they said Kratov must have it.

Bashkov realized they were merely Kratov’s lackeys and he dismissed them, telling them to appear the next morning at the GPU offices at the office of

Investigator Yermalov.

In the meantime, Kratov had returned with his ID.

“And where is the search warrant?”

Kratov said he did not have one. “I conducted the search on my own authority since I am responsible for the guests at this hotel. Since I suspected that Citizen Schneersohn is a counter-revolutionary, I am allowed to search his belongings and his room.”

Bashkov shook his head in dissatisfaction and said sneeringly, “You, too, must appear tomorrow at the GPU at Investigator Yermalov’s room and he will explain to you the laws of visits and searches and will teach you how to talk to people.”

Kratov begged not to have to appear before the investigator but Bashkov insisted. “I must finish my conversation with Citizen Schneersohn and do not delay me any further because I must leave shortly.”

When they had all left the room and it was quiet once again, Bashkov looked at the Rebbe

sympathetically, wanting to appease him for the violent entry into his room. He explained that this wasn’t the official behavior of the communist regime and was the manner of the reckless young men. “I am sure they won’t dare do something like this again.”

The Rebbe responded, “We all know that all the persecution is from the Yevsektzia, most of whom are young and impetuous.”

Bashkov got up to leave and asked the Rebbe to report to him if something like that happened again, and he gave the Rebbe his address.

## **PART VII**

By the time Bashkov left the room it was very late. The Rebbe closed the door and davened maariv slowly and with concentration. “I contemplated the hashgacha pratis that I saw, the revelation of G-dliness, and remembered the vision that I saw on Motzaei Shabbos when I traveled to Moscow.”

There were knocks at the door but the Rebbe did not go to open it. He assumed that Kratov or one

of his friends was there to ask him to put in a good word for them and the Rebbe did not want to see them. They also tried calling the Rebbe but it was only on the fourth try that the Rebbe agreed to pick up and ask who was calling.

He recognized Kratov's voice. "I knocked on your door a few times but you did not respond. I would like to talk to you for a few minutes."

The Rebbe said he was very busy as he had to leave and would be returning late at night.

Kratov's voice sounded beseeching, "Just a few minutes."

"I am sorry," said the Rebbe and hung up the phone.

Kratov waited out in the corridor as a last resort. He began to importune the Rebbe to put in a good word for him, assuring him

that from then on he would act on his behalf and would inform the Rebbe whenever they spoke about him at the Yevsektzia offices. Not only that but he had a group of loyal followers who would also look out for the Rebbe. He promised that if the Rebbe spoke well of him, then he and his friends would save him from trouble.

The Rebbe shrugged and said, "I cannot get involved."

Kratov tried a veiled threat, "You will fall into the traps that the Yevsektzia will lay for you."

The Rebbe responded coolly, "I cannot flee the troubles and if Hashem wants, then He will provide me with various means of rescue. In any case, I will not do something which goes against the truth, against justice and against

my judgment."

"You are happy that I am in trouble," said Kratov.

"I am not happy but neither am I sad or worried."

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That night the Rebbe returned to the meeting of askanim to help our Jewish brethren throughout Russia. They spent a long time summing up the discussions of the previous days, made resolutions, and parted with blessings.

"Although the hour was late," wrote the Rebbe in his journal, "my emotions were overwrought and my head hurt and I thought that the fresh air and the light of the moon would compose me. I called for a car and I traveled to the Salonika forest, and at 1:30 AM I returned to my room at the hotel."

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ב"ה



# ESCAPE FROM THE NAZIS

By Menachem Metzger

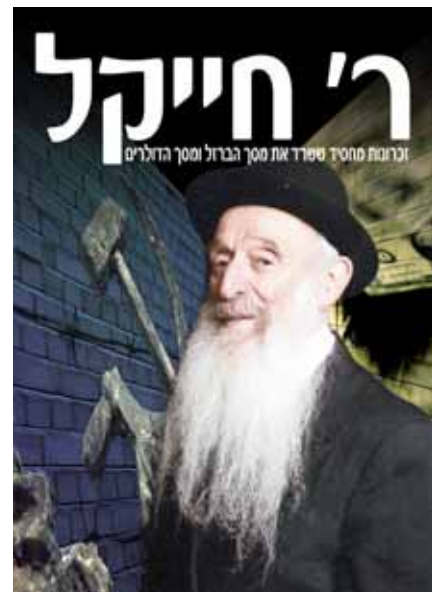
*In this fascinating chapter of memoirs, the story of Rabbi Schneerson's escape from the Nazis unfolds. While fleeing from place to place, he brought with him a group of young orphans that he had rescued. This is a story full of miracles and faith every step of the way.*

As I write the articles and record the history, I discover new details that were omitted because they were previously unknown to me.

For example, I did not understand the disappearance of Rabbi Jacobson from the time he left the Rebbe Rayatz in Otvozk, in the beginning of Elul, until the time he boarded the *S.S. George Washington* in Le Havre, France, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Elul. I made a simple calculation: Rabbi Jacobson left the United States on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Menachem Av 5699-1939 together with six yeshiva students. The trip took seven days; they stopped in Paris and spent some

time at Rabbi Schneerson's house, where they also met the Rebbe M"HM. Accordingly they arrived in Otvozk on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Elul at the earliest.

Under the directive of the Rebbe Rayatz, Rabbi Jacobson left the six students at the yeshiva and departed just a few days after he arrived. (It is important to remember that the war broke out on Friday, Sept. 1/ the 17<sup>th</sup> of Elul. On that same day, Otvozk was bombed. The American students immediately left the city and, through tremendous miracles, arrived in the United States after the High Holidays.) If Rabbi Jacobson had left Otvozk



sometime between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> of Elul, where was he during the course of the next twenty days until the 28<sup>th</sup> of Elul?

I spoke with the daughter of Rabbi Schneerson, Rebbetzin Hadassah Carlebach, who solved the riddle. Rabbi Jacobson traveled to the home of the Schneerson family located at Rue Dieu 10, in Paris, and stayed there until his return to New York.

## RABBI SCHNEERSON FLEES PARIS FOLLOWING THE CHILDREN

The war began with the conquest of Poland by the Germans. Although the Germans did not reach Paris until six months later, one could sense the danger in the air from the very beginning.

With the influx of Belgian refugees following Germany's attack on Western Europe, Rabbi Schneerson sprang into action. As related in the previous chapter, he established a number of shelters. The fall of France in Iyar



**Police station. The sign “police” and the French flag are visible here.**

5700/1940 marked the beginning of a new chapter of Rabbi Schneerson’s rescue activities on behalf of Jewish children.

In a joint effort with the Jewish Organization O.S.E. (Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants – Society for the Protection of Children), Rabbi Schneerson established six shelters in the Free Zone (known as Vichy France) for children who had fled Paris. The O.S.E. was an international society originally established in Russia in 1912, to promote the well-being of Jewish youth. In 1933, the society was moved to Paris. During World War II it was active in fifteen cities and numerous prison camps. The society maintained dozens of orphanages for children ranging in age from infancy to ten years old. The parents of these children had been murdered or interned in camps, or had placed their children into hiding. Many were refugees from Belgium and other European countries.

With the aid of the O.S.E., three hundred and fifty children sailed to the United States between May of 1941 and May, 1942. When the Nazis invaded the



**Rabbi Zalman Schneerson with his students in France**

south of France, the O.S.E. went underground. However, it continued its activities by hiding children and sending them to safe havens such as Switzerland.

Rabbi Schneerson was the administrator of a children’s home located in Brout-Vernet, approximately 20 kilometers from the city of Vichy. Prior to the German invasion, he sent his two children, Hadassah and Sholom Ber, to live there, while he

remained in Paris. Rabbi Schneerson was completely preoccupied with rescue work. He did not think of saving himself and his wife until the Nazis were at the outskirts of Paris. At the last moment, and with great difficulty, the couple fled the French capital and made their way to Vichy. Denied permission to settle there, they consequently traveled to Brout-Vernet and stayed at the children’s home.

***“I spoke to his heart and requested that as a French patriot who is faithful to his country, he should help me save children and youth, despite the wrath of the Nazis.”***

Rabbi Schneerson did not remain there for long. Concerned that the presence of a prominent person as himself might endanger the children’s home and its young residents, he left Brout-Vernet, together with his wife, and traveled to Marseilles, which also lay in the independent French zone.

### **“I DESIRED TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE POLICE OF MARSEILLES”**

In Marseilles he rented a home located at Rue Sylvabelle 33, not far from the police station. Within a short while, the house became a center of Jewish emigration and activities. Rabbi Schneerson established a yeshiva for adults and children, radio and technology instruction, and sewing classes for women and girls. In a parallel development, he rented a beautiful estate for the refugee children. The estate, located about eight kilometers from Marseilles, not far from the sea, was called La Maison d’Enfants Chateau de la Vieille. Throughout the day Rabbi Schneerson carried out his activities at Rue Sylvabelle 33. Nights, however, were spent at Chateau de la Vieille.

Rabbi Schneerson writes in his letter to Mr. X, “I desired to have good relations with the police of Marseilles. Therefore, I thought it would be a good idea to make the acquaintance of Mr. Rue, the

Chief of Police of the vicinity.” Let us not forget that even the “free” zone of Vichy was essentially a satellite of Germany, subject to German influence and control. The French police collaborated with the Nazis through the spreading of propaganda, crushing opponents, and isolating Jews. Only a truly strong and courageous person such as Rabbi Schneerson could operate in a manner of *l’chat’chilla aribber* – leaping over all boundaries, to ingratiate himself with the friends of the Nazis.

He writes:

“At first I requested my secretary, Mr. Leon Poliakoff, to attempt to set up a meeting with Mr. Rue. However, he felt that this was not only crazy but also extremely dangerous. He refused to go. However, I stubbornly insisted that he heed my request. Without a choice in the matter, he went and wandered around near the police station until he mustered up enough strength to enter.

With the help of G-d he arranged, without any difficulty, a meeting for the next day. When I arrived at the police station I had a feeling that the doorman was waiting for me. He asked, ‘Monsieur le Grand Rabbin?’ and he immediately brought me up to Mr. Rue’s office. My first words to Mr. Rue were, ‘My French colleagues speak French better than I do. However, they talk and I work.’ I spoke to his heart and

requested that as a French patriot who is faithful to his country, he should help me save children and youth, despite the wrath of the Nazis.”

At that time, Rabbi Schneerson had no idea to what extent he was on target. After the war it became known that Mr. Rue was a member of the French Resistance, the massive underground who fought the Nazi occupation. Rabbi Schneerson writes, “That visit saved the lives of many Jews.” It was also revealed after the war that the Commissariat des Affaires Juives (German Commission for Jewish Affairs) had demanded that the Marseilles police arrest Rabbi Schneerson, on a complaint that his activities went beyond the scope of a regular rabbi. However, the police declared such action unnecessary.

### **OFFICIAL IMMUNITY FOR RABBI SCHNEERSON’S ENTOURAGE**

On Nov. 15, 1942, five days after the Nazis overran Vichy France, Mr. Rue granted immunity to Rabbi Schneerson, the children in his care and his entire entourage. On the following day (7 Kislev, 5702/Nov. 16, 1942), Rabbi Schneerson left Marseilles, together with 100 people. The group, which filled two train cars, left Marseilles in broad daylight and traveled to an estate near the city of Domes in the Gers region. Rabbi Schneerson had rented the estate in advance for a time of emergency.

Apparently, at this point communication between Rabbi Schneerson and the Rebbe Rayatz ceased. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, the Rebbe Rayatz sent a letter to Mr. Yitzchok Schneerson, stating that he was searching for his cousin



Rabbi Zalman Schneerson. (The letter was quoted in the previous chapter.) In the absence of a response, the Rebbe wrote an additional letter on the 1st of Adar 5703/1943:

**Please inquire via telephone with Mr. Schwartz, director of the European Joint, to find out if he knows where Rabbi Schneerson from Paris is. For a period of time he was in Vichy and afterwards in Marseilles. What has happened to the children's colony that he directed? Also, perhaps he knows where Mr. Yitzchok Schneerson is, possibly in Lisbon or someplace else.**

The day that Rabbi Schneerson arrived with the children was bitterly cold. Much to their relief, the Red Cross arrived that evening with blankets, pillows and other necessities. The students chopped wood and lit up the furnace, and the chateau soon began to warm up.

Rabbi Schneerson writes, "That night, when I walked by the rooms, by chance I overheard a brief conversation between two young girls who slept near each other.

*Child one:* 'Swear!'

*Child two:* 'I swear by the head of the administrator!'

*Child one:* 'No, that is not what I want. That's not enough!'

*Child two:* 'Then what do you want? What would be enough for you?'

*Child one:* 'Swear by the head of the *Grand Rabbin* [Chief Rabbi]!'

*Child two:* 'Okay. Fine! I swear by the head of the *Grand Rabbin*!'

At that time I was amazed that they valued my head more than the head of the administrator Mr. Philip Paist, a noble and wealthy person who did not request anything in return for his work and was extremely beloved by the



The Jewish center at 33 Rue Sylvabelle (circled), in close proximity to the police headquarters

***On that day, when the eighteen children were taken from us, I felt as if the sun had set forever and would never shine again.***

children. However, after the war, when I recalled this conversation, I thought, 'how true are the words of our sages, that since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash prophecy was given to children (*Bava Basra* 12).' In the end, the administrator, Mr. Philip Paist was exiled and died in one of the death camps, may G-d avenge his blood, whereas to my great *mazel* I still carry my head on my shoulders."

During those few months, there were times when there was no bread. Rabbi Schneerson procured kernels of wheat, which the students ground in a hand-operated coffee grinder. The flour was very coarse. However, after it was mixed with water and some salt, which held it together, and

baked in the rural oven, the crude bread had the taste of Gan Eden.

## TRAGEDY AT THE TRAIN STATION

After a number of months, the Germans reached the area and it became dangerous to remain there. "With superhuman efforts, we traveled to the city of Voiron, near Grenoble."

When the Germans conquered France in Iyar of 5700/1940, it was divided into two sections. The north of France became the Nazi occupied zone. In the south, a "Vichy" government was established, and in the southeast of the country, a small zone was given to the Italians. Now that all

## ADDENDA

A Czechoslovakian composer by the name of Aryeh ben Erez Abrahamson revealed to Rabbi Schneerson in Marseilles that he had papers to emigrate to the United States and that he was about to flee there. Rabbi Schneerson decided to send a letter to the Rebbe Rayatz with him.

Correspondence via the post was irregular or did not exist at all. Perhaps the “Jewish post” would be the solution! After all, the Rebbe Rayatz was surely worried about him. As the leader of world Jewry, he must be informed of all that happens to his flock. He must be informed of the danger facing the Jews under Vichy rule, their hardships, and of the UGIF – Union Generale Des Israelites de France. The UGIF was established for the purpose of eradicating all other existing Jewish organizations in France and to serve as a Judenreich in the Nazi conquered areas.

Rabbi Schneerson sat and wrote a detailed letter in Russian in pencil. Due to the danger of the letter being found, Rabbi Schneerson hid it between the binding and the cover page of a Tanach – Yeshayahu Yirmiyahu. He resealed the binding and requested of Aryeh that if he arrives safely in New York he should immediately go and give the Rebbe the *seifer* with the letter in it.

On the cover page of the *seifer*, Rabbi Schneerson wrote:

**To my highly esteemed friend, G-d fearing  
Moreinu HaRav R' Aryeh Abrahamson  
In remembrance of our time together in  
France.**

**Schneur Zalman Shas [Schneerson]  
18 MarCheshvan, 5702**

(The 18<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan was two days prior to the conquering of Marseilles and independent France by the Germans. Apparently the invasion was anticipated and Aryeh ben Erez desired to flee from France with his family in advance.)

Despite the danger, Aryeh ben Erez Abrahamson carried the letter from southern France through Spain and Portugal to the ship that brought him and his family to America. They arrived in the United States on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1941 (Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, 5702), ten days before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Immediately upon landing on American shores, Aryeh Abrahamson traveled directly to 770 Eastern Parkway – Chabad headquarters in Brooklyn to fulfill his mission, while his wife and children traveled to relatives in the Bronx. To his surprise, he



The Seifer Tanach within which was hidden the letter of the Rebbe Rayatz

was not granted permission to enter and personally hand the *seifer* to the Rebbe. He was unwilling to give the *seifer* through the Rebbe's secretary.

During the course of the following days and weeks, Aryeh ben Erez returned to 770 numerous times to personally give the *seifer* to the Rebbe and he was repeatedly rejected by the Rebbe's secretaries. The letter remained hidden in the *seifer* until just a few months ago.

In the year 5752-1992, Aryeh passed away, and he left his library to his daughter Chana Abrahamson. A few months ago, Chana decided to contact Rebbetzin Hadassah Carlebach regarding the Tanach-Yeshayahu Yirmiyahu. Rebbetzin Carlebach remembered the incident and requested that Chana carefully open the inner binding where the letter was found still in its place.

Our gratitude is extended to Mrs. Chana Abrahamson, the daughter of Aryeh ben Erez, for permission to publish the images of the Tanach. The merit of the community is hers.



of France was conquered by the Germans, R' Zalman fled with "his" children to the Italian zone, where it was safer for Jews. The Italians protected the Jews and did not permit the French police to cause them any harm.

"We rented a home, Chateau de Manoir, in a small village called S. Etienne de Crossey. However, eventually the Germans arrived there, too. We were advised to travel to Nice with the hope that it would remain under Italian rule. However, to our anguish, our hopes were dashed and Nice was also soon taken over by the Germans. We resolved to return to St. Etienne de Crossey, which was in the French section. For this purpose we were equipped with false documents which contained French names. The majority of the children and the administrator, Mr. Philip Paist passed through the checkpoint at the Nice train station without incident. The guards did not suspect that anything was amiss.

However, to our great anguish, the age of a young child by the name of Belk did not correspond with his external appearance. Mr. Paist, who had already passed through the checkpoint, turned back to attempt to help the child. He began to talk to the guards in a strong heavy accent. They realized that his documents were also false and both were arrested. After the war, the young boy (Belk) returned alive from the death camps but our dear Mr. Paist perished, may G-d avenge his blood. So is the irony of fate."

## THE CHILDREN REFUSE TO LEAVE

Upon reaching St. Etienne de Crossey, the children were divided into groups and placed throughout homes Rabbi Schneerson had rented. One group of eighteen



The hideouts and escape route of the children

boys, called the "intermediate group," was led by a young man by the name of Boruch Ravinsky. A gifted pedagogue, he watched over his two younger brothers who were also in this group. Out of fear of being discovered, extreme caution was taken. The adults did not leave the house; when necessary, the young children, who were less suspicious, would go out and buy food.

I had hoped that I would be able to illegally transfer the group to Switzerland. I invited them to a meeting and I told them my plans. To my great surprise, they refused. When I asked why, they responded, "Who will buy food for the adults who remain in St. Etienne de Crossey?" I assured them that surely the adults do not wish to put the lives of children between ages of eight to fifteen in danger. They continued, "How will we put on *t'fillin* while traveling?" I suggested that perhaps they could conceal a pair of *t'fillin*. In addition, I added, in the instance of danger, they are

not halachically required to put on *t'fillin*. They countered, "Third, in Switzerland we will not be able to receive the education and guidance that we receive here." To this I responded that if we survive, we will meet after the war and study together once again. Despite my arguments, they refused to leave. I looked at the young heroes and realized that nothing I could say would convince them to change their courageous decision. (It was learned later that at that time, the border with Switzerland was completely sealed. Even if the children had chosen to cross the border, it was too late.)

During this period, R' Zalman, his wife and a number of older students hid in one of the secret locations. Unfortunately, the neighbors noticed smoke wafting from the chimney and they notified the local gendarmes, who immediately arrived to investigate. The students managed to hide in the cellar but Rabbi Schneerson was caught and arrested. Fortunately, the chief of police,



fearing retaliation by the Resistance, had him released after a few days.

Remaining in that house would be dangerous, so new quarters were quickly found. The group traveled by taxi but, wary to trust the driver, they ended the ride a distance away from the house. (Their suspicions were later confirmed: the driver indeed served the Germans and was eventually executed by the Resistance.)

Rabbi Schneerson writes, "Women remain women. After a few days my wife decided to return to our old home to retrieve some personal possessions. I expressed my fear but she assured me, 'They won't notice that I am a Jewess.'"

The moments turned to hours, and then to days, but she did not return.

A few days later, Rabbi Schneerson learned what had happened. His wife was arrested by the French militia, who lay there in wait. She was tortured and forced to eat soap and clean floors soaked with the blood of the Jews the militia had just murdered. In spite of their demands that she reveal her husband's hiding place, she courageously remained silent. After a number of days she was released.

## THE NOOSE TIGHTENS

On Thursday, the 28<sup>th</sup> of Adar, 5704/1944, Rabbi Schneerson and his wife felt that the noose was tightening around them even in their new residence. Along with the students accompanying them, they resolved to leave the house immediately. Despite Rabbi Schneerson's limp, they walked many kilometers in the dark until they reached the home where the intermediate group had hidden.

The administrator who had walked with them entered the

home first. When he emerged, his face was white as plaster. The house was empty! Apparently the neighbors had notified the authorities. The militia had taken all the children, together with Boruch Ravinsky and his two young brothers, and sent them to the deportation center in Drancy. From there they were sent to death camps in Latvia, where all eighteen boys perished in sanctification of G-d's name. May G-d avenge their blood.

Rabbi Schneerson writes:

"On that day, when the eighteen children were taken from us, I felt as if the sun had set forever and would never shine again. I remember receiving the news of my beloved mother's passing in Russia. I felt as if the heavens fell on me. However, I eventually accepted the tragedy and continued living. But the exile of the children was an experience too difficult for me to bear. I felt an inner push akin to an actual physical feeling, to go to the Germans, fall at their feet, and beg for the release of the children. My wife did not oppose me, but she said calmly, 'What will you gain from this? They will take you too.'"

With great anguish, and little choice in the matter, Rabbi Schneerson and his entourage left the vacant house for another located in the mountains, where they hid together with the young girls.

## THE REBBE RAYATZ IS CONCERNED FOR HIS SAFETY

While Rabbi Schneerson was moving from one secret location to another, the Rebbe Rayatz was concerned for his safety.

**B"H**

**Tammuz 5704**

**Brooklyn**

**To the honorable Mr. Ulman, may he be well,**

**Greetings and blessings!**

**In response to your letter regarding my cousin Rabbi Schneerson from Paris, I do not know with whom he maintained correspondence. I am deeply worried because I have not heard from him at all since the Germans conquered France. I have inquired and sought after him and his family without receiving any response.**

**Perhaps you are a descendant of the Ulman family from the city of Grosswardein, some of whom lived in Vienna? Perhaps you know where the Ulmans of Grosswardein are currently?**

**Seeking your peace, and blessing you**

This chapter is only a brief synopsis of Rabbi Schneerson's activities. In his letter to Mr. X., he writes: "If I desired to describe my life in Russia and that which I experienced in France, I could fill a thick book. My descriptions are merely one hundredth of what I went through during the war."

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# PANEL DISCUSSION ON CHASSIDISHE CHINUCH

*A chacham knows how to extricate himself from trouble and a navon knows how not to fall in to begin with. Lately there is the feeling that Chassidishe chayus among young people has cooled off. Is there truth to this? \* Chinuch today – how not to fall into trouble and how to extricate oneself.*

When you read the stories about T'mimim and Achyos HaT'mimim of the previous generation and compare them to today's generation, you get the feeling that they lived in a different atmosphere, an atmosphere of chayus, enthusiasm, a thirst for things of k'dusha. Is there a coldness today towards inyanei k'dusha among our young people?

**Mrs. Wilschansky:** We don't have scientific data but the feeling is there.

**Mrs. Nitzan:** Yes, there is definitely (a lot of) coldness in inyanei k'dusha. The prevailing atmosphere is not one of chayus and a thirst for k'dusha.

**Mrs. Karniel:** It's very hard to characterize the atmosphere as

"coldness" towards inyanei k'dusha. Obviously there is *yeridas ha'doros* (spiritual decline) and it's not surprising, since today's youth never really encountered our Rebbeim personally.

There is also the idea of the generation of "hinei zeh Moshiach ba." In the world at large there is an apathy to deep ideas and a preference for easy to understand concepts. Unfortunately, this has affected us too. But when you know how to present things properly to our youth, you will see that they, too, get inspired. There are wonderful T'mimim who come for Shabbos and Yom Tov to help out at Chabad houses. There are wonderful "achos T'mimim" who do great work. They should be encouraged!

**Mrs. Ralbag:** Our youth in essence are good, even in comparison to the previous generation. Now, as then, there are those who are more talented and those who are less so, those who are more disciplined and those who are not, those who are more sensitive and those who are less so, etc.

The problem begins in the environment in which they grow up. The family, school, chevra and overall environment shapes the individual. The child is merely a reflection of the atmosphere in his home and surroundings.

True, the atmosphere today is completely different than that of previous generations, and provides fertile ground for the growth of egotistical youth – even in our community and on our level – with a lack of discipline, and a paucity of values and vision, in which attention-grabbing achievements are worth more than quality.

**Mrs. CY:** It's not pleasant to have to admit, but it's far more than a feeling; it's the reality. It's a fact (although of course there are exceptions) that our youth is drawn more and more by the "chutza" and the prevailing atmosphere of coldness and apathy to inyanei k'dusha.

**What are the reasons for this?**



#### How can we improve matters?

**Mrs. Wilschansky:** We are living today in an instant society, in a

disposable society, in an era of abundance and the klipa of Amalek. Everything is easily obtainable, even

ruchnius; you can buy s'farim easily, there are dozens of flyers announcing shiurim on Chassidus, Moshiach and Geula etc. And there are videos. Just come and help yourself ...

It used to be that these things were hard to come by and consequently, what you got was valued.

A question was posed among the teachers as to whether the concept of mesirus nefesh exists among our students who attend Chabad schools

#### PANEL PARTICIPANTS:

**Mrs. Malka Wilschansky** – teacher in Seminar Beis Chana, Tzfas

**Mrs. T. Nitzan** – mechanechet in the Shomron

**Mrs. Henny Karniel** – principal Beis Chana high school in Nachalat Har Chabad

**Mrs. Sima Ralbag** – principal and educator in Yerushalayim

**Mrs. CY** – mother, resident of Nachalas Har Chabad



today. Can there be a situation of giving over one's ratzon and truly living with k'dusha?

From a Chassidic viewpoint the concept of mesirus ha'ratzon exists today too. However, "each generation and its seekers," we cannot find the people from the stories of yesteryear here, in today's day and age.

First, we need to change our way of looking at things. The generation, conditions, needs and ideas have changed and in accordance with this, the demands have changed too.

Mesirus nefesh used to be necessary to attend an underground shiur while today's avoda is to attend a shiur openly. My mother-

a range of channels for action so that every one of our youth can actualize themselves in a positive way.

**Mrs. Nitzan:** There are many reasons: the general deterioration of society, the plague of immodesty, tremendous materialism, the media in all its forms and tremendous exposure to it, the computer and Internet and other enticements that our youth are attracted to.

In order to overcome it all, the staff needs to be role models in dress (even after hours), speech and in behavior in the spirit of Chabad.

Another point, when involved in mitvzaim and at various opportunities during vacation times,

teachings and ways of Chassidus need to surround us 24 hours a day. We have to breathe the air of Chabad.

How? By learning, knowing and drawing upon the spiritual wealth in the sichos and messages of the Rebbe, for they are the cure for all our spiritual ailments. From *Klalei HaChinuch V'Hadracha* to the weekly sidra, it is all in the Rebbe's teachings. What more can we do for our children? First and foremost, we need to serve as an example. The children are sincere and genuine and they want us to put into practice what we teach.

They have a developed a critical sense and they do not tolerate pretty talk that just remains talk. It has to be real.

In general, especially in our schools, we need to stress the content of the material being learned and not the academic achievements.

The approach to teaching should be to develop concentration and listening and not just handing out busywork.

We should be valuing principles and approaches of teaching that come from our Torah-true sources over dubious newfangled ideas.

**Mrs. CY:** It has to do with several things. First, the chutza has become more liberal, the world has "progressed" and everybody is rushing forward. The question is where are we in this atmosphere? After all, nobody wants to seem dated.

All around us there are computers, videos, fax machines, cell phones and mp3 players. It's a completely different world from only a generation or two ago.

The attractive "other side" has entered our homes. These young people, don't forget, were once children. They breathe and absorb the atmosphere in the home. Once upon a time, the radio was "not for us" while today it is "muktza." It has been accepted into our lives. Add the

***Doing leads to chayus. This is substantiated in Judaism, Chassidus and l'havdil in psychology. When you invest in something, you connect to it and value, cherish and bond with it. You see it in girls who come back from camps, shlichus, and mitvzaim – they come back with a different chayus.***

in-law a"n, when she was a young girl in Russia, stood on line to get bread for the bachurim and endangered her life. Today that is no longer relevant. We have to look at the proper direction for *our* times and judge the results based on that.

Another point is the need to do. Doing leads to chayus. This is substantiated in Judaism, Chassidus and l'havdil in psychology. When you invest in something, you connect to it and value, cherish and bond with it. You see it in girls who come back from camps, shlichus, and mitvzaim – they come back with a different chayus. So we need to encourage and spur them on, create

it is very important to occupy children in positive ways.

**Mrs. Karniel:** In order to improve the situation we have to be role models as teachers, parents and as graduates who still feel warm towards things of k'dusha. We must relate to young people in "ways of pleasantness," as the Rebbe noted more than once. Things have to be presented to them in a way that will make them receptive. Today, too, a lot depends on the home.

**Mrs. Ralbag:** As Chassidim and mekusharim we have the way paved for us. We have to stick to the horaos from the Rebbe which deal with all aspects of our lives. The

street, billboards, it all looks glamorous. You **cannot** ignore it. Nobody asked us before flaunting everything in our faces. Even while just innocently waiting for a bus, we are exposed to so much.

Then we go to school, which also wants to be progressive, and the atmosphere there is about achievement: marks, matriculation, tracking. It seems to be what life is all about. This is done l'chat'chilla, not b'diaved. The reason given is, "Because the government requires us to do so." And whatever happened to the Torah? They didn't forget it, G-d forbid, but it doesn't exactly take first place and that is very unfortunate.

Parties have turned into showy displays. You can't just have an "ordinary" party and rejoice (with a Siddur etc.) because what will people say? Add chutzpa to the mix. "Progress" has become a slogan which means to be like everyone else. We lack **pride**. We lack the fulfillment of the first halacha in Shulchan Aruch, "do not be ashamed before those who mock."

This is why our general approach has to be to increase our Jewish-Chassidish identity. Real progress is in our hands. It's ours. The so-called progressive ones are in actuality marching backwards.

If the "other side" is pulling on us so strongly, we have to pull even more strongly towards the side of k'dusha.

**Practically speaking, what can we as parents change in our daily behavior to move things in the direction of warmth for things of k'dusha?**

**Mrs. Wilschansky:** It begins with the atmosphere in the home. The atmosphere is created by simple daily activities. For example, in my family we have accustomed our children to think as follows when faced with a dilemma: If I was in yechidus now, at dollars at the Rebbe, and I gave in a note, what

would the Rebbe answer? When a child gets used to thinking this way he develops a sense of discerning the right thing to do.

Another example: When the Rebbe said we should prepare for Geula we would associate every mitzva, the giving of tz'daka, the lighting of candles etc. with this hastening the Geula.

A chacham knows how to extricate himself from trouble and a navon knows how not to fall in to begin with. In order not to fall in we need a positive atmosphere. Parents who are cynical about matters of k'dusha, a halachic matter, someone in the community, in relating to the establishment – set a dangerous precedent. Their children may very well copy this attitude and take it

subjects is warm and with enthusiasm for every single activity, then of course this will have an impact.

**Mrs. CY:** Practically speaking, there are two things that we can and should change to have a positive effect on our children. The first is the atmosphere in the home. The children need to feel that inyanei k'dusha are regarded seriously. Second, the atmosphere in school. We need to be careful that our children are not picking up a sarcastic attitude toward k'dusha, with comments like, "this tzadekes" etc. which really mean anything but that. It would also be beneficial to increase inspirational classes which will respond to questions that arise. The answers should be relevant and

***"Progress" has become a slogan which means to be like everyone else. We lack pride. We lack the fulfillment of the first halacha in Shulchan Aruch, "do not be ashamed before those who mock."***

even further, using it for other things which the parents won't be happy about.

**Mrs. Nitzan:** Perhaps we can add to the warmth when we are enthusiastic in telling a Chassidishe story. At least a few times a week let's tell a Chassidishe story at mealtime. Let them see us with the HaYom Yom, davening and with Chitas. On Shabbos Mevarchim start saying T'hilim early, etc.

When our children see that we are living with Chassidishe feeling, this will affect them, too.

**Mrs. Karniel:** Setting a personal example is all-important. When parents are excited about inyanei k'dusha and aren't fazed by distance or a particular difficulty; when the talk in the house about these

genuine, and in order to do that you have to feel and live with these truths. Telling a lot of Chassidishe stories also helps to give over the Chassidishe warmth. At school and at home, praise and give prizes for everything in k'dusha.

**Let's take a common example. A parent sees a child act in a way that is disparaging or cold towards something of k'dusha. Some will say it's a passing stage and you should leave it alone while others say address it immediately. How should a parent know what to do?**

**Mrs. Wilschansky:** This example is representative of the whole issue of transmitting values. You have to consider how the child will react, and weigh the gains versus the losses. You have to think about how

frequently it happens, how urgent it is. Will a reaction on your part get a good response?

In chinuch there are no formulas, no black or white. It all depends. Based on the circumstances you will choose to either react immediately or wait, you will be sharp or easygoing about it, you will have a lot to say or not much at all, you will be direct or roundabout ...

We are always reacting because even deliberately not responding is also a response. Just don't ignore it.

Another thing to consider is the parent-child relationship. When the relationship is a good one and is based on respect, admiration, love and understanding, you have a foundation from which you can react and they can handle a comment.

***We have accustomed our children to think as follows when faced with a dilemma: If I was in yechidus now, at dollars at the Rebbe, and I gave in a note, what would the Rebbe answer?***

Remember that the foundation of good relations between teachers and students is built on the basis of respect, trust and discipline, as the Rebbe Rayatz brings in his Klalei HaChinuch V'ha'Hadracha: 1) look at the basic nature of the student, i.e. consider his situation, his personal background 2) relate with love and affection, 3) examine the process of the child's growth in relation to his background and nature.

In a case where the parents feel that they don't have good communication with their child, they should get someone else to stand in for them.

It's a long discussion but we can sum it up thus: In order to succeed at chinuch, you need to act like an

aggressive salesman who puts great effort into attracting the customer and enticing him, even with external things, and then getting him to see the value of the product.

**Mrs. Nitzan:** You need to use both approaches together. Depending on the circumstances it's a good thing to react immediately so the children know that we did not have nachas and we are disappointed, but you should not exaggerate and refer to it endlessly. If I already pointed something out recently (that same day) then I can't go and criticize something else unless it's very serious and problematic. Too much negativity will just be ignored and our words will fall on deaf ears.

Sometimes we have no choice

but to wait patiently and hope that things will straighten out on their own. We continue to pray and beseech Hashem that He endow us with the requisite wisdom and direct us.

**Mrs. Karniel:** The answer lies in the question. Neither approach is right. There has to be a reaction but in the right way. When does there need to be a reaction? It depends!

If you don't react, what guidance does that provide for the child? How will the child know how to behave? That can't be the right approach. The reaction needs to be careful, not spontaneous, and timed right.

**Mrs. Ralbag:** There always needs to be a reaction but we cannot say definitely what it should be. You have to seriously weigh the incident,

the frequency, the urgency, and the child. You also have to consider the kind of reaction and the child's temperament.

**Mrs. CY:** In some cases you can be patient and in some cases you must take action. When it comes to emotional outbursts you can hold back until they calm down but when it comes to actions, you have to be firm.

Young people are looking for stability, security, and clarity. Not the opposite.

**In 5752 the Rebbe announced that the avoda of shlichus now needs to be permeated with the point of "how does this lead to kabbalas p'nei Moshiach." How can we do this within the framework of Mivtza Chinuch?**

**Mrs. Wilschansky:** Like I said before, by **doing**, by connecting everything to Moshiach, talking about Moshiach, learning about Moshiach. It has an impact.

**Mrs. Nitzan:** Learning about it together and strengthening various mivtzaim to hasten the Geula. Talking and reading and thinking about the coming of Moshiach. *Let's Get Ready: Moshiach through children's eyes* (SIE) written by Malka Touger is helpful.

**Mrs. Karniel:** Mivtza Chinuch takes place mainly in the home. The school can only supplement. So the question is addressed primarily to parents.

When the atmosphere at home is permeated with the avoda of kabbalas p'nei Moshiach, mivtzaim, etc. the children get caught up in it.

**Mrs. Ralbag:** A person seeks shleimus (perfection) so we need to convey the idea that the shleimus of everything that we do will take place with the coming of Moshiach, when the world will be rectified. If we instill the ambition for shleimus in everything, we will actually be instilling Moshiach in everything.



# THE ADVISOR'S ADVISORS



By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz  
Shliach, Beit Shaan

*We are all aware of and try to implement the directive of the Rebbe to publicize to the entire world that Hashem has appointed one individual to serve as the “judge” and “advisor” of the generation. Shluchim in particular often find themselves having to represent the Rebbe in this role since “a person’s emissary is like himself.” The following are some stories of shluchim doing just that.*

## A SHLIACH’S SUGGESTION

Rabbi Moshe Lazar, shliach and rav for the Persian community in Milan, Italy, told this story about his son, Berel, chief rabbi of Russia, at a farbrengen two years ago in the yeshiva in Milan:

There was a discussion among the members of the Russian government about the need to change some laws regarding

religion as well as curricula in the schools. Under communism, the Russian government fought against belief in G-d and all religions. For decades they persecuted religious people and sentenced them to prison, hard labor in Siberia and death.

With the fall of communism the religious persecution ceased and shuls were opened. Shluchim went to hundreds of cities and towns

throughout the CIS and revitalized Jewish communities, opened Jewish schools and generally fanned the flagging flames of Yiddishkait. In light of all these changes it was proposed that new laws be passed that would express the permission granted to lead a full religious life with belief in G-d.

A meeting was held with the participation of senior representatives of all religions and parties and each representative was able to suggest laws according to his religion and beliefs. Then there was a vote to decide which suggestions were supported by the majority. Rabbi Berel Lazar participated as an observer. The meeting began, suggestions were made, but when it came to vote not one proposal was accepted. When the Christian representative suggested something that favored Christianity, all the other representatives voted against it and so on.

When they saw that it was impossible to ratify any laws this way, they decided to hold another meeting and in the interim they were to think of new ideas to propose that would be accepted by the majority.

A moment before the meeting ended, R' Lazar got up and asked



**Rabbi Berel Lazar**  
with the president of Russia

for the floor. He said that it was possible that time would go by and they would not be able to hold another meeting and it would be a shame if in the meantime they didn't pass any productive resolutions. He suggested that until the next meeting they accept the Seven Noachide Laws. He briefly explained what they are and how they affect the world. The many participants liked his proposal and it was accepted with a majority vote.

Because of this one suggestion from a shliach, a resolution was passed that in all schools in Russia the children would learn about the Seven Noachide Laws.

## **A SHLIACH SAVES A LIFE**

Eight years ago my son Sholom Ber learned in the Chabad yeshiva in Lud. Every Friday he went to Nes Tziyona for mitvza t'fillin, which was arranged with the local Chabad house run by Rabbi Sagi Har Shefer.

One day, my son came home with an extraordinary story about what happened the last time he went on mitvzaim. "I got to the center of town and saw a large crowd. Police, ambulance, firemen, even the mayor was there, along

with other municipal people, psychologists and numerous onlookers. All attention was focused on a spot high on a building where there was a young man threatening to jump.

"The police and psychologists tried to talk him down but he said if anybody approached him he would jump. He finally said that there was only one person he was willing to talk to and that was R' Sagi of Chabad."

At that point, all the hundreds of people there focused on one thing – how to get the rabbi down there (this was before the era of cell phones; today nearly everybody in Nes Tziyona has the shliach's number in their phone's memory).

One person said that he knew where R' Har Shefer was and he ran to call him. Everybody waited for the rabbi to come and save the man. R' Har Shefer dashed up, went up to the roof and spoke to the man for a minute and a half, at which point the man agreed to come down and went home (and for further treatment). Everybody breathed a sigh of relief and dispersed, and my son continued with mitvza t'fillin.

Later on they asked the young man why he was willing to listen to the Chabad rabbi after turning a deaf ear to anything anyone else said. He explained: "All the professionals came and spoke to me in professional terms, because this is their job and they get paid for it. The rabbi really loves me and when he says something I know it's really for my benefit."

## **HE TURNED HIS LIFE AROUND**

Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Diskin, shliach and rav in Kiryat Ata, helps many people who consult with him. His ability to counsel goes back to when he was quite young.

He was learning in yeshiva in Kfar Chabad and he occasionally went on mitvzaim to the jail in Ramle. On these visits, a certain inmate serving a life sentence became close to him and under the influence of this Lubavitcher bachur he began putting on t'fillin. Not only that but the inmate followed him to every wing of the prison and called on the other inmates to put on t'fillin. He invited the rav to visit more frequently, and on two occasions R' Diskin even spent Shabbos with the inmates (but then he got a call from the Rebbe's secretariat with the message that the Rebbe was not in favor of the bachurim spending so many hours with inmates).

This inmate changed his way of life and they began calling him "the chaplain." He adopted R' Diskin as his rav and personal advisor. The prison authorities were aware of this and when R' Diskin got married this "chaplain" got permission to attend the wedding. He arrived in an unmarked vehicle and was accompanied by several prison guards and he danced like one of the family.

He continued to grow in Torah and mitzvos and R' Diskin was his advocate to get him freed. He wrote letters to the president of the country, Efraim Katzir and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and others and he explained that the man had changed his entire way of life and it would be a shame for the prison atmosphere to halt his progress. His lobbying as well as his letters helped and the man was set free. He went to yeshiva and even got engaged to a fine girl.

He did not forget his rabbi. R' Diskin got an invitation to his wedding and was happy to see that it would be a completely religious affair. Nobody in their wildest dreams could possibly know from

where this man began his journey to the world of Torah. R' Diskin left the hall soon after the chuppa because he didn't want anyone to ask him which side he was from and how he knew the chassan.

## **R' DISKIN KNEW HOW TO HANDLE HIM**

As I said, many people consult with R' Diskin about chinuch, shalom bayis, arguments with neighbors as well as legal and financial matters. A member of the k'hilla was in dire financial straits and was on the verge of bankruptcy. R' Diskin told the judge how the man should be helped by allowing him to pay his debts in many small payments. This helped the man get back on his feet.

Recently, the Lottery Authority built a sports arena at the religious school where R' Diskin is the rabbi. For the opening ceremonies the school prepared a fancy invitation describing the program which included putting up a mezuzah, a d'var Torah, and words from the Chairman of the Lottery Authority. The administration of the Lottery Authority was not pleased with the d'var Torah part of the program and sent a fax to the school telling them to take it off the agenda.

The school said that it was out of the question not to have the rabbi speak at the ceremony. The PTA tried to intercede and even the mayor got involved and explained that every ceremony in the city began with R' Diskin's divrei Torah, but the administrator of the Lottery Authority did not concede. In the end the compromise was that the rabbi would say a few words when they put up the mezuzah and the invitation was printed without a d'var Torah listed in the program.

The mayor was so annoyed by

the stubbornness of the Lottery Authority that he said there should be two sound systems prepared, one for the hall where the official ceremony would take place and one for outside the building where the ribbon would be cut and the mezuzah would be put up so the rabbi could speak as long as he liked and nobody could stop him. There were apprehensions about an unpleasant confrontation during the ceremony but R' Diskin knows how to be diplomatic and it all worked out in the end.

When it was time to put up the mezuzah, R' Diskin took the microphone and quoted the Rambam, "the body being healthy and whole is amongst the ways of the service of G-d." He explained that they were dedicating a large building that would be a place which would promote physical health, as is encouraged by the Gemara and the Rambam.

Then they all went into the hall and R' Diskin and the chairman sat next to one another. They got to talking and the chairman told R' Diskin that he did not know that Judaism addressed matters of health so explicitly. He recalled his childhood and spoke candidly about his family, his education etc. and in short order the two were friends.

When the chairman rose to speak, he did not present his the address he had prepared. Instead, he emotionally shared with the audience that he had just told the rabbi about how he grew up in a religious home and then left Jewish practice but he now saw how amazing Judaism truly is because it even has laws about health.

His speech was so heartfelt that his assistant went over to R' Diskin afterwards and exclaimed, "How did you do that? He never talks about his personal life or about his childhood. You really touched him deeply!"

R' Diskin finds the path to the hearts of all and is able to bring harmony to all members of his k'hilla with their differing opinions. Thanks to him they live in peace.

## **IT PAYS TO LISTEN TO THE REBBE**

A story from Ramat Yishai:

Yisroel Berko is a successful businessman in the computer field. He is the director of marketing for a computer company and oversees dozens of branches in Israel and around the world. He is a neighbor and good friend of the shliach in Ramat Yishai, R' Yosef Yitzchok Volosof.

About twenty years ago, he decided to run in the elections for leader of the local regional council, facing off against Dror Fogel, who had already successfully served in two rotations. Berko consulted with R' Volosof, who advised him to ask the Rebbe for counsel and a bracha. The rabbi sent a fax for him to the Rebbe and the next day he brought the Rebbe's answer to him: The Rebbe says that you will be outstanding in everything you do, but at this time it is not worthwhile to run but rather to develop in your own field.

Berko did not listen to the Rebbe. He ran in the elections, invested huge sums of money and much effort but he lost by five votes! He ended up returning to the private sector and developing his business. He told R' Volosof, "It's a shame I didn't listen to the Rebbe because I had to do what the Rebbe said anyway."

I spoke with Mr. Berko on the phone and he said, "Now I see how right the Rebbe was. Today I am happy that I was not elected and that I don't have to deal with all the public's needs. I have truly merited to be outstanding in everything I do."



# A LAWYER'S SOUL – REVISITED

By Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

*A Bas Chabad on Mivtzaim met a lawyer who promised he would keep kosher if she could prove to him that the soul exists. She asked me to help so I wrote him a letter (last week's column) to which he and many others replied. Below are some of the responses (minus the lawyer jokes).*

**Now to the heart of the matter. To put it plainly, everyone has criteria for what can be reliably considered true... If an idea meets those standards, it is fit to be believed and acted upon. If it does not, then it is not suitable for belief or as a basis for action. But one may not adopt certain truth criteria when it is convenient, and then drop them when it is not. Therefore, it is assumed that anyone who is seeking a proof is not merely doing so for the sake of intellectual exercise, but would indeed live by his conclusions.**

***The Rebbe, Mind Over Matter, Ch.1.***

Aryeh, That was an amazing quote from double-Nobel chemist, Ilya Prigogine, about the probability of life coming about by chance being zero. Did he mean it the way it sounds, or is there a but...? **Moshe S.**

**No buts about it. And Prigogine is not alone in recognizing the existence biological life as a *bona fide* miracle. The amazing thing about him is that his fame was made in chaos theory and the self-organization of random chemical**

**systems. One would think that such research would lead him to the opposite conclusion but as with many top scientists specifically, his 'seichel bari' (sound mind) led him to conclude that life by chance is impossible. AG**

Dr. Gotfryd, I think you took the wrong tack with scientific proofs of the soul. I think a better piece of evidence may be the various tales of near-death experiences, where people died and saw dead family members and tunnels of light, etc. I personally do believe that my being is more than just a collection of proteins and neuron firings, but it is significant the degree to which our minds are in fact tied to our mechanicals. If they weren't, things like mind-meds and brain surgery wouldn't work! **Moses F.**

**Actually, I left out NDE's intentionally because it is so anecdotal and subjective, but you may be right about that being a more persuasive line of discussion. About your last point however, you should read "The Brain that Changes Itself," a NY Times bestseller by Dr. Norman Doidge. Modern science clearly shows that thought can do much more than surgery or medications to fix brains! AG**

Reb Aryeh, I liked your arguments and all but I have a few questions: **Toby B.**

(1) Why can't we say that the soul is just a function of the body... like an ape or fish, plant or a protozoan react to their environment in certain ways so does man have his reactions, triggered by a physical sensory system which is part of his 'survival of the fittest' pack, sort of like how the talking doll comes with the batteries.

**I see where you are coming from. Your starting point is materialistic 19<sup>th</sup> Century dogma that has been long overthrown by a host of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century discoveries. Your worldview is characterized by material realism (if you can't touch it, etc. it doesn't exist), logical positivism (if it isn't logical it isn't true), causal determinism (show me all the particles and forces and I'll show you everything that will ever happen) and epiphenomenalism (we're just a bag of bones and hormones, love is a chemical reaction).**

**All these assumptions have long been consigned to the rubbish heap of history. Consciousness is no longer seen as a biochemical hiccup. Rather it is widely accepted by physicists as the ultimate ground of reality.**

**Now on to some specifics - The battery-operated doll is not talking... we are listening. The noises the doll makes mean nothing to it. It is not conscious, not communicating. We are**

communicating via *it*, but *it* has no way to process that knowledge, as far as anyone knows. The batteries create movement but do they create life? Awareness? Sentience?

Experience? Self-consciousness? Yet *we* have all those functions!

Now once you speak about animals, who is to say they are not conscious? Plants too have their senses. I will be the last one to deny that even objects have souls, and if rocks have souls, how much more so do humans.

(2) If the odds are zero that the world was generated by accident or accidents as 'Ilya Prigogine' said, I think you have to admit that the odds that there is a G-d that created it are even less. I think it makes more 'sense' or the odds are better that there never was a beginning and everything was just always there like flying out into space... you can't imagine the end so to here we can't imagine the beginning.

Let's assume as you do, that there was no beginning to the cosmos and space/ time/ matter/ energy are eternal. Does that remove the principle of cause and effect? And if eternity is an effect, what is its cause? And if you will say that cause and effect work all the way up to the level of the universe as a whole but beyond that it breaks down, what assumption are we then making about the universe? That it is not an effect of any prior cause? Isn't that one of the definitions of G-d? That It is the First Being? That would mean, Toby, that you believe in one god, but that god is nature. Voila, you are a pantheist. To say that something has no cause is usually considered absurd and irrational, yet you claim the opposite?!

Also, (and I am not advocating Big Bang cosmology), most people these days still buy into the Big Bang. That says there definitely was a beginning. Don't you

consider yourself more rational to accept a beginning? And how does your theory account for the Doppler Red Shift?

(3) Maybe all those parapsychological facts you state are really just interesting nuances of the human consciousness but have nothing to do with an entity called a soul.

Okay, so you would like to say that there is a metaphysical consciousness but not a soul. But what is a soul, then, if not a metaphysical entity?

And if there is *no* soul, what is your alternative hypothesis to explain these parapsychological facts as you call them? Anybody can say, "Nah, that's dumb" about anything. But that does not constitute a cogent argument. Against the hypothesis of the non-physical nature of will, consciousness and imagination, must be some kind of materialistic alternative. In the absence of such, we probably agree more than you realize.

(4) And even if there is a soul, why would that prompt a person to do Torah? Who says the soul is governed by such rules? Maybe heaven is reserved for whomever dies with a sword in his hand (I remember Kirk Douglas saying that in the end of "The Vikings" and it's adopted by other cultures), or perhaps the angels really did appear to Joseph Smith when he wrote the book of Mormon, etc., etc. With hundreds of competing religions, the most reasonable view is that they are all wrong.

For someone who is simply looking for something to latch on to, yes they are all equivalent. Just go with any mythology that sounds stimulating or satisfying and don't consider whether or not it's true. But for the more sophisticated consumer of belief systems (and which of us wants to be considered a dupe or a bonehead?), one

should not have to compromise an evidence-based perspective for judging whether something is fit to be believed or not. Intelligent, critical thinkers like to consider the diversity of people from different standpoints and backgrounds that buy into an idea, they want to know how the ideas originated and to what the degree there is fidelity of the story and the transmission of the details. With Torah you are not dealing with a single mystic or small group who then persuaded or forced adherence to their beliefs. Rather you are dealing with a direct public revelation to millions and an extremely hi-fidelity unbroken chain of tradition from then until now. For example see the chapter on the Existence of G-d in the book *Mind Over Matter* or on [Chabad.org](http://Chabad.org). AG

Hi, I think that you made the wrong response. My approach is different. Just get the person to eat kosher food, even if you have to personally cook and deliver it. I did once, and the man grew his beard, stopped driving on Shabbos, became regular in shul, etc. He also got healthy. The best scientific proof is one in front of the person. **Elisheva R.**

\* \* \*

Now what about our lawyer friend? Our answers generated more questions from him, several of them similar to the ones above. The eastern mystics say, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." If there is truth to that, then this panel of teachers is testimony that yes indeed he is ready. We'll let you know when his kitchen is koshered.

*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](http://www.arniegotfryd.com) or call 416-858-9868.*

# THE ‘RASHBI’ COMMUNITY IN THE SUNSHINE STATE

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michael Leib Dobry

*Once a of just eight people, today the Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai community constitutes a whole congregation of hundreds of Jews from families all over the region. \* Part 2 of 2*

[Continued from Issue #743]

A rav has to stick up to his principles, not just smile and give a hug. “We have many young people who come from liberal homes without even an iota of Jewish tradition. Foremost among those who deal with these youngsters is a new shliach couple that recently arrived to help in this shlichus, Rabbi and Mrs. Yosef Duch, baalei t’shuva from backgrounds similar to those in this community.

“We invest much in intra-community solidarity, creating the dynamics for a large and extended family among all community members, each one helping another. We have seen thus far that such an environment can do a great deal towards preventing assimilation. When a young person feels that he is part of your family, you can talk with him about anything – even his own personal life.”

Recently, much effort has been invested in saving Jews from getting involved in a local cult, which has already succeeded in capturing

numerous confused neshamos. When we asked him to describe what has been happening in greater detail, Rabbi Shahino declined to elaborate. “We are in the midst of a rescue operation, and any word about it can cause damage.”

## DIRECT GUIDANCE FROM THE REBBE FOR COMMUNITY FAMILIES

The shul’s communal prayers are conducted according to Sephardic custom, as the community is comprised almost entirely of Jews of Sephardic origin. Nonetheless, their overall conduct is faithful to the teachings of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach and Chabad chassidus. “We act in accordance with the halachos of the Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch and Chabad minhagim. In general, the Jews here are devotedly bonded to the Rebbe. Whenever a problem or hardship arises, they come to me and ask that I write a letter to the Rebbe for them via Igros Kodesh, and quite often they see miracles

and wonders as a result.

“We have a very nice custom in our community: Every Shabbos, both by night and by day, we sit and eat the Shabbos meal together in the synagogue. Everyone without exception takes part in the seuda, resulting in a tremendously heartfelt feeling of closeness.”

Rabbi Shahino has many stories, and he tells us one of the more special ones now:

“Four years ago, Ilan Shavit and his wife Galit arrived in Florida from Eretz HaKodesh in search of a better future, and joined the community. When we met them at the start of their journey, they were very far from Torah and mitzvah observance. They settled near the synagogue, and when they took a peek inside, they quickly caught the bug. Israelis in Chutz LaAretz are looking to be a part of a community, and this couple soon became an integral part of ours. They didn’t just come for the prayer services, but also for the Torah classes and other activities.

“At a certain stage, the couple decided to put their process of getting closer to G-d into high gear, and they asked if they could host a Torah class in their home. After the first shiur, the hunger for more classes intensified, and so it continued. One day, I received a phone call from them, asking for an appointment to meet with me. They told me about the serious indecision





Rabbi Duch in a mobile sukkah with mekuravim



Rabbi Duch on Mezuzah Campaign activities

they were having about whether they should increase the size of their family, despite the fact that they still didn't have regular employment. Naturally, I explained to them the Rebbe's opinion on the matter, emphasizing that there is no need to write to the Rebbe to ask about issues stated clearly in halacha. Nevertheless, they still were determined to write a letter regarding parnasa, and they were privileged to receive a precise bracha for their request.

"Nine months passed, and we received the joyous news of the birth of their first-born son. They were very excited, and they came to meet with me a second time. They were once again faced with a difficult dilemma. They wanted to know what name to give their son, and confided that a bitter argument had erupted between them on the matter. There were several possible names that they were considering, and since I was the rav of the community, they wanted to consult with me and even ask for the Rebbe's bracha. Here too, I explained to them the Rebbe's position on the subject, how G-d bestows a form of prophecy upon the parents to give the child a proper name. However, they were determined to have the Rebbe decide and no one else...

"The wife wrote the three options for names, and she asked the Rebbe to choose the proper

name for her from among the three. I was personally quite curious to see what the answer would be. In any event, here was a young couple that had only been familiar with the Rebbe for the past year and a half, and now they wouldn't make a move without consulting with him first. This inspired me very much. The answer appeared in Vol. 4, pg. 390, and I began to read the letter out loud:

**"...My honored and revered teacher and father-in-law, the Rebbe, related that [the *n'siim*] used to start the bar-mitzvah maamarim with '*Naaseh Adam*'..."** The woman jumped up from her place, tears streaming down her cheeks. I asked her to wait until I came to the end of the answer, but she refused.

"I must tell you something, Rabbi," she said. "Ever since I was a girl, I swore to myself that I would name my first child 'Adam'. I loved this name very much, and I always told this to everyone. My husband can testify to that." A few months earlier, she told her husband's family about this, but they frightened her by saying that it's not a good name, and it even may cause harm to the child. Some of her close friends agreed with this appraisal, and with a heavy heart, she gave up on using the name. However, she couldn't find another name that appealed to her the same way. She and her husband had been

wrestling over which name to call their child for quite some time, and here the Rebbe writes explicitly the name 'Adam'. Even though this portion of the letter had been in Yiddish and she didn't speak the language, she still understood the name as I was reading...

"While I was very moved by her story, I asked her to wait until I finished reading the whole letter. With every word that I read, I became more and more amazed: ... **This means that the bar-mitzvah [bachur] must know that he possesses the quality of the title 'Adam', which is the most exceptional among the four titles of man – *adam, ish, geveir, enosh* (see Kuntres Toras HaChassidus 5687. V'Yavo Amalek 5709, sec. 2), and he must work on this immediately and not leave it for later, and he will be helped to become a man [*adam*] (see Seifer HaToldos, pg. 64).** In other words, the Rebbe explains that among the four names: *adam, ish, geveir, enosh* – the name '*adam*' is the loftiest of all...

"All of us sat there in total silence, having some difficulty absorbing the astounding clarity of this answer. These were Jews who had asked the Rebbe with pure faith that he should answer their question, and the Rebbe responded in the clearest way possible.

"The emotion that I felt became more intense at the bris mila, when

I said, 'And his name in Israel shall be called', and the father replied: 'Adam Menachem', with the latter name added in honor of the Rebbe...

"During the festive meal that followed, the father emotionally told the whole story, and he explained that they decided to give their son these two names: Adam, after the world's first 'nasi' – and Menachem, after the last 'nasi', who will speedily bring the Redemption." This coming from people who not long before had no connection whatsoever to Yiddishkeit...

## A REVOLUTION IN THEIR LIVES

The activities run by Rabbi and Mrs. Shahino include all members of the Rashbi community – men, women, and children, religious and those who are only in the early stages of their process of kiruv. One of the activities that prepares the community's next generation and strengthens its point of Jewish identity is the Hebrew school, operated by Mrs. Orna Ester Shahino and Mrs. Bracha Duch.

In addition to the regular Torah classes on Shabbos and weekdays, there is also a regular shiur in the Laws of Family Purity. "The teacher for this class, and the one who also prepares the prospective brides and grooms before their wedding, is Rebbetzin Dana Miara.

"We have a rotating shiur, held each Tuesday in a different home. People pass up their business meetings, travel plans, and important errands in order to share this experience together."

Numerous families and individuals have made a one hundred and eighty degree turn in their lives, and have become full-fledged baalei t'shuva. Rabbi Shahino knows plenty of examples, and he chose to tell about one of

them, R' Sharon Twig. "He was one of the first young people to join us eight years ago, soon after we came on shlichus. When we met him, he was a secular Jew who wore neither a kippa on his head nor tzitzis, like most of the thousands of other young Israelis who have flooded onto the sunny shores of Florida.

"One visit to the Synagogue of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai connected him to the place. He fell in love with the style of the davening and the bond between the community members and the overall atmosphere of togetherness and unity that reigns in our shul. While his parents are not Torah observant, when he was a boy, his father used to take him to the Sephardic synagogues near their home in New York. Our prayer services brought back all the old memories. The pleasant environment drew him in, and he became an inseparable part of the community. He later wanted to expand his understanding by learning more about his Jewish roots and heritage, and started to participate in the regular classes on the weekly Torah portion and the Rebbe's sichos.

"From the outset, I could see that he was someone who would make a complete transformation in his life. He had developed strong ties to chassidus and the Rebbe, and one day he 'accidentally' took an Arizal siddur and started davening from it. It pleased him very much. He would read word for word out of the siddur with much emphasis and fulfillment. The siddur was followed by Chabad t'fillin, Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam, and as things progressed, he resolved to begin wearing a hat and suit, to deepen his knowledge of chassidus, and to adopt the path and mode of conduct of the Rebbe to become a full-fledged chassid.

"When he reached marriageable age, we recommended that he travel

to Eretz HaKodesh to find a shidduch there. He eventually went and met his future wife, Yasmin, who also had a fascinating story about her own connection to Chabad. She was born into a prominent Litvishe family, but she didn't like the path in which she had been educated, and she searched until she discovered the teachings of chassidus. R' Sharon stood under the chuppa wearing a kapote and a chassidic fedora, as if he had been born a chassid. A Chabad rabbi performed the ceremony, with the singing of the 'Niggun of Four Stanzas' and the other Chabad customs. After the wedding, they returned to Florida and began to start a splendid chassidic family.

"There are many more examples of this type, may they increase in number..."

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Looking back, the situation in the community can definitely be described as an absolute revolution. From a community of just eight people, it has grown to a list of hundreds with a spiritual connection at one level or another! Many community members have gone through a process of strengthening their Torah and mitzvos observance. Mezuzos have been checked and replaced, numerous pairs of t'fillin have been purchased, many have begun to keep Shabbos, and the list goes on.

The credit, of course, goes to R' Shahino. He is a young, dynamic, and vigorous shliach who doesn't rest on his laurels, filled with giving and love yet unafraid to stand firm in matters of halacha. If you ask Rabbi Shahino, he's only at the very start of his journey on shlichus. He has only recently completed the shul renovations, but his mind is already pondering other projects to expand the institution's activities.