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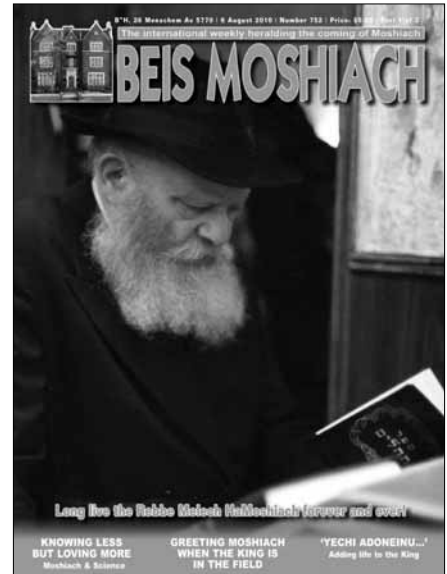
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Story | Nosson Avrohom



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V'DIBARTA BAM: R'EI

Sichos In English

“The blessing: That you hearken.” (11:27)

QUESTION: Rashi writes “*Al m'nas asher tishm'u*” — “on condition that you shall hearken.” What insight does Rashi add with this comment?

ANSWER: Before entering *Eretz Yisroel*, the tribes of Reuven and Gad asked for the land on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe made their request conditional on their participation in the war to conquer the land of Canaan — *Eretz Yisroel*. In the *Gemara* (*Gittin* 75a) our sages established guidelines regarding the making of a “*tenai*” — condition — based on Moshe’s negotiation with the tribes of Reuven and Gad.

One of the rules of a “*tenai*” is that “*tenai kodem l'maaseh*” — “the terms of the condition precede the action to be accomplished.” Thus, if one wants to marry a woman on a condition, he should say, “If you give me x amount of money, you are married to me with this coin I am giving you now.” (In order for the marriage to become effective the woman must fulfill the condition, namely to give the man x amount of money.) However if he says, “You are married to me with this coin if you give me x amount of money,” she becomes married and the

condition is ineffective (see Rambam, *Ishus* 6:2-4).

In the dialogue between Hashem and the Jewish people, the *bracha* — blessing — is the *maaseh* — action to be fulfilled — and the hearkening is the condition. If so, should not Hashem have said the reverse, “If you shall hearken, you will receive the blessing”? The statement would then be similar to statements in other parts of the Torah such as, “If you will observe My decrees (condition), I will provide your rains in their time (action)” (*VaYikra* 26:3-4). Or, “If you are willing and obey (condition), you will eat the goodness of the land (action)” (*Isaiah* 1:19).

An exception to the rule (of *tenai kodem l'maaseh*) occurs if the man says, “You are married to me *mei'achshav* — from now — with this coin, if you will give me x amount of money.” Or, if instead of saying “*mei'achshav*” — “from now” — he says “*al m'nas*” — “on the condition” — when she gives him the specified amount of money, they are married retroactively (Rambam *Ishus* 6:16-17).

Hence, in order to remove the superficial difficulty in Hashem’s dialogue, Rashi adds the words “*al m'nas*” — on the condition — so that the “*tenai*” —

condition — is effective even though it was not mentioned before the *maaseh* — action.

“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you will drive away worshipped their gods. On the high mountains and on the hills... You shall not do this to G-d, your G-d.” (12:2-4)

QUESTION: Who would dare think that we should destroy Hashem’s property just as we destroy property associated with idol worship?

ANSWER: The *Gemara* (*Avoda Zara* 45b) says that the *halacha* which forbids a Jew from deriving any benefit from an idol refers to one placed on top of a mountain and worshipped, but not a mountain or hill which was itself worshipped as an idol. This is derived by joining the end of one *pasuk* to the beginning of the next and reading the words “*eloheihem al he'harim*” as one phrase, meaning “their gods on the mountains” and not “the mountains [worshipped as] their gods.”

However, even though it is permissible to have *personal* pleasure from the mountain, nevertheless, “You shall not do this to G-d your G-d” — for Hashem’s purposes, such as the construction of an altar, it is forbidden to use stones chiseled out of such a mountain (see Rambam *Isurei Mizbeiach* 4:7).

“And you shall obliterate their names from that place. You shall not do this to G-d, your G-d. Rather, only at the place that G-d, your G-d, will choose.” (12:3-5)

QUESTION: What is the connection between the *Beit HaMikdash* and the prohibition of erasing Hashem’s name?

ANSWER: The *Gemara*

(Sukka 53b) relates that when King David excavated the *shittim* — foundations — for the *Beit HaMikdash*, waters rose from the abyss and threatened to flood the entire world. Achatofel advised him that if he would write Hashem's name on a piece of earthenware and throw it into the water, it would cease to rise. He was not concerned that it would cause the holy name to be erased because the Torah had said that it is permissible to erase Hashem's Name in the case of a suspected woman in order to make peace between husband and wife. How much more so, then, must it be permissible to make peace between the people of the world and their Father in Heaven.

The *Gemara* (*Makos* 22a) derives the prohibition of erasing Hashem's name from the *pasuk* "You shall not do this to G-d, your G-d." From the fact that the succeeding *pasuk* is, "Rather, only at the place that G-d, your G-d, will choose," it can be derived that for the building of the *Beit HaMikdash* this prohibition does not apply.

"You and your families shall eat there before G-d, your G-d, and you shall rejoice in all that you put your hand to, as G-d, your G-d has blessed you." (12:7)

QUESTION: Why, when eating of the sacrifices, should a person also rejoice in "*b'chol mishlach yedechem*" — "all that you put your hand to"?

ANSWER: The Rambam (*Yom Tov* 6:17) writes that on *Yom Tov* there is an obligation to rejoice, but Hashem is not content with one who celebrates privately with his family. We must invite the needy to our festive meals and make sure that they also rejoice. Consequently, one must "send for the poor" — either invite them to

rejoice together with him, or send food to them so that they may rejoice in their own homes.

The word "*mishlach*" comes from the root word of "*shalach*," which means "sending." The *pasuk* is teaching us that when one sits down to a festive meal together with his family, his major joy should be "*b'chol mishlach yedechem*" — all the poor that he "sent for" to be at his table and all the poor to whom he "sent" provisions and made happy.

"You shall not eat it, in order that it be well with you and your children after you, when you do what is right in the eyes of G-d." (12:25)

QUESTION: How do the children benefit when the parents avoid eating blood?

ANSWER: There is a popular adage, "Man is what he eats." The character of a person is affected and ultimately molded by his diet. For instance, eating spicy foods makes one excitable and temperamental while bland foods are calming and relaxing. Eating blood makes a person insensitive and even cruel.

Children inherit the character traits of their parents, so avoiding certain foods not only benefits the parents, but also prevents the children from inheriting undesirable character traits.

"If there should stand up in your midst a prophet... and that prophet...shall be put to death." (13:2-6)

QUESTION: The *Baal HaTurim*, in old editions of the *Chumash*, writes: "*b'kirbecha* — "in your midst" — has the numerical value of 324, which is also the numerical value of '*zu ha'isha*' — 'this is the woman.'

To which woman is the *Baal HaTurim* referring?

ANSWER: Many years ago in Europe all books on Torah subjects were carefully scrutinized by a censor. He was a representative of the church who would delete or make changes if the content of the *seifer* was derogatory to Christianity.

Originally, the *Baal HaTurim* wrote: "*b'kirbecha navi* — *zu ha'isha u'b'na*" — The words "*b'kirbecha navi*" have the numerical value of 387, the same as the numerical value of the words "*zu ha'isha u'b'na*" — this is the woman and her son — referring to the infamous mother who brought to the world a son ("*oto ha'ish*" — "*Yeshu HaNotzri*"), who became founder of Christianity. He tried to impress upon the world that he was a prophet sent by G-d as *Moshiach*. Ultimately, he was put to death.

The censor was unhappy with the *Baal HaTurim*'s comment that there is a hint in the Torah that *Yeshu* was a false prophet and should be put to death. Thus, he deleted the words "*navi*" — "prophet" and "*u'b'na*" — "her son." Hence, the censor's amended version seems difficult to comprehend.

"And the *raa* and the *aya*, and the *daya* according to its kind." (14:13)

QUESTION: Rashi explains that these are not three different birds, but one bird with three different names. What is the significance of these three names?

ANSWER: The word "*raa*" connotes eyesight. We are told that the *raa* "can stand in Babylon (which is a valley) and see a carcass in the Land of Israel" (*Chulin* 63b). This bird is unclean because it uses its excellent vision to view things negatively and find deficiencies.

Many people have keen vision in detecting the faults of others, but fail to see their own shortcomings. A housewife once complained to her maid that the house was not cleaned and dusted properly. The maid blushed in astonishment, for all looked immaculate. Finally, she turned to the housewife and said, "Madam, I think the dust you see is on your own glasses." The woman removed her glasses and, sure enough, the lenses were covered with dust.

The second name of the bird is "*ayah*," which means "where." This bird is very clever in its ability to evade capture, jumping from one hideout to another. The hunter finds himself muttering, "*ayah* — where is it, and how can it be taken?"

There are people adept at this game of escape. When their help is urgently needed in a worthwhile community project, they cannot be located. This slippery "bird" refuses to join a communal endeavor lest his whereabouts become known to other institutions. Even when they express interest in helping the *minyan* or participating in a *shiur*, they do not appear and people wonder "*ayah* — where are they?" The Torah condemns the policy of evasion and escape and calls it "unclean."

"*Daya*" is the third name. Its croak sounds like the word "*daya*" — "enough," the cry of those who feel they have given more than necessary. They cry, "*daya!* There are far too many appeals, functions, and campaigns these days. Enough!"

"Purity" for a Jew lies in 1) seeing things with a "good eye," 2) being involved in communal Torah endeavors and activities, and 3) always giving with a grateful and generous heart.

"The *chassida*, and the *anafa* according to its kind." (14:18)

QUESTION: The bird is called "*chassida*" because it does *chesed* — kindness — and shares its food with its friends. The Jerusalem Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 3:5) states that a mouse is wicked because when it sees a pile of grain it calls its friends to eat from it.

Why is the bird's act considered *chesed* — kindness — and the mouse's considered *rishus* — wickedness?

ANSWER: The *chassida* shares the food it gathered for herself, with friends. To share one's own property with others is praiseworthy. The mouse, however, calls its friends to enjoy someone else's pile of grain. Being generous with what belongs to someone else is not kindness at all, but the reverse.

"You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting." (14:22)

QUESTION: There is a *Midrash plia* — wondrous *Midrash* — which links this *pasuk* to the *pasuk*, "*Im ha'smol ve'eimina v'im ha'yamin v'esm'ila*" — "If you go left then I will go right, and if you go right then I will go left" (*B'Reishis* 13:8).

What is the connection between these two *p'sukim*?

ANSWER: In the *alef-beis*, the *shin* and the *sin* are identical except for the position of the dot on the top. If the dot is placed on the right side, it is read as a "*shin*" and if the dot is placed on the left it is read as a "*sin*." Thus, when the letter *shin* is placed between the letters *ayin* and *reish*, if the dot on top is on the right, it spells the word *asheir* "rich" and if the dot is placed above on the left, it spells the word *aseir* "a tithe."

In a play on the words "*aseir te'aseir*" — "you shall tithe" — the *Gemara* (*Taanis* 9a) says, "*Aseir bishvil sh'titasheir*" — "Give '*maaser*' — 'a tithe' and Hashem will reciprocate by making you '*asheir*' — 'rich.'" "

The wondrous *Midrash*, in quoting the *pasuk* "*Im ha'smol ve'eimina v'im ha'yamin v'esm'ila*," is alluding to this thought. It is telling us that, "*im ha'smol*" — if a person will read the word with the dot on the left side — "*asseir*" — "give a tithe" — then "*v'eimina*" — Hashem will put the dot on the right side and the person will merit "*te'asheir*" — "to become rich." However, "*v'im ha'yamin*" — if one puts the dot on the right side and thinks that "*asheir*" — one becomes richer by keeping it all for one's self and not giving *tz'daka* to the needy, then, G-d forbid, "*v'esm'ila*" — Hashem will put the dot on the left side and decree that "*te'aseir*" — the formerly rich person will remain with only a tithe of his wealth.

An allusion to the concept of "*Asseir bishvil sh'titasheir*" — "by giving a tithe one will be showered with riches" — is also found in the *pasuk*, "*kaf achat asara zahav meleia*" — "one gold ladle of ten shekels filled" (*BaMidbar* 7:14). The word "*kaf*" in Hebrew also means "palm [of the hand]." The Torah is teaching us that "*kaf*" — the palm of the hand — "*achat asara*" — which gives away one of ten — will merit in return, "*zahav meleiah*" — to be filled with gold.

"If the road will be too long for you, so that you cannot carry it, because the place that G-d, your G-d, will choose to place His name there is far from you, for G-d, your G-d, will have blessed you." (14:24)

QUESTION: Since it says, “*Ki yirbeh mimcha ha’derech*” — “If the road will be too long for you,” the words, “*ki yirchak mimcha ha’makom*” — “because the place...is far from you” are a redundancy?

ANSWER: The Dubner Maggid explains the *pasuk*, “But you did not call out to Me, O Yaakov, for you grew weary of Me, O Israel” (Isaiah 43:22) with the following parable: Someone once sent a messenger to pick up a package. Afterwards, the messenger refused the payment offered, claiming that it was not sufficient for carrying the heavy bundle. In amazement the sender said, “If the package tired you, obviously you were not carrying my package. My package was very small and contained valuable gems.” Similarly, the prophet is saying to the Jewish people, “If you grew weary and became tired doing My *mitzvos* — obviously you did not call out to Me, O Yaakov, i.e. they were not done for My sake — the sake of Heaven — because My *mitzvos* are a delight and not a burden.”

Our *pasuk*, too, is telling the Jews that, “*ki yirbeh mimcha ha’derech ki lo tuchal se’eito*” — if one considers a Jew’s life of Torah and *Mitzvos* an arduous journey and a burden difficult to carry — the problem is “*ki yirchak mimcha ha’makom*” — there is a great distance between you and “*HaMakom*” — Hashem (Who is considered “*mekomo shel olam*” — “the place of the world” — i.e. He contains the world, rather than the world containing Him, see *B’Reishis Rabba* 68:9). Those who realize that Torah and *mitzvos* are valuable gems, find it delightful to live according to Hashem’s Will.

“If there shall be a destitute person among you... you shall

not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother.” (15:7)

QUESTION: The *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 9b) relates that the prophet Yirmiyahu was having problems with the people of Anatot and he cursed them that when they have a desire to give *tz’daka*, the recipients should be non-deserving people so that they would not receive any reward.

Why did Yirmiyahu wish this on them?

ANSWER: The prophet loved his people, and their behavior pained him very much. Out of concern that Hashem, G-d forbid, would punish them, he prayed that they give *tz’daka* to undeserving people. Thus, the good angels in Heaven would be able to say to Hashem in their defense, “They are not selective about whom they help, and give even to the undeserving. Similarly, You too should not scrutinize them so meticulously; lift Your countenance to them regardless of their merits.”

“If there shall be a destitute person among you, one of your brethren... you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother.” (15:7)

QUESTION: Why in the beginning of the *pasuk* does it say, “*mei’achad achecha*” — “one of your brethren” — while in the end it merely says, “*mei’achicha ha’evyon*” — “your destitute brother” — without the word “*mei’achad*”?

ANSWER: When Yitzchak lived in Gerar, Avimelech the king of the Philistines took Rivka for himself as a wife, thinking that she was Yitzchak’s sister. When he learned that she was married, he reproved Yitzchak, “What is this that you have done to us? *Kime’at shachav achad ha’am et*

ishtecha” — “One of the people has nearly lain with your wife.” Rashi explains that the term “*achad ha’am*” — “one of the people” — means “*ha’meyuchad ba’am*” — “the most distinguished one of the people” — the king himself (see *B’Reishis* 26:10).

The wheel of fortune does not discriminate between prominent people and ordinary people. While people are usually more inclined to help a prominent person who is in need, the Torah has concern for all Jews alike. Therefore, when this *pasuk* discusses offering aid, it talks of both “*evyon*” — a destitute person who is “*mei’achad achecha*” — among the most distinguished of all your people — and also “*achicha ha’evyon*” — the poor man who does not possess any specific qualities besides the fact that he is “*achicha*” — “your brother.” To both of them you should give generously.

“You shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother.” (15:7)

QUESTION: The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 29b) equates a miser to a mouse lying on a pile of coins. What is the meaning of this comparison?

ANSWER: When a mouse lies upon flour it feels comfortable and has food to nibble on. When it lies on loaves of bread or stalks of wheat, although it is not comfortable, at least it enjoys eating. A mouse lying upon coins is both uncomfortable and hungry. Thus, our sages are telling us that a miser, like a mouse lying on a pile of coins, renders his wealth useless since it benefits neither himself nor anyone else.

GREETING MOSHIACH WHEN THE KING IS IN THE FIELD

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

Why is such a great revelation needed if the whole point is just to grant easier access? The answer is that there are some who are not even in the field, but they are in the desert, a place “where no man has settled,” meaning that they are caught up in sinful behavior, so in order to reach them and inspire them to leave the desert and come to the field, and then to the very palace of the King, Hashem reveals His infinite attributes of mercy and compassion.

PLAYING THE FIELD

One of the unique phenomena in the yeshiva world of the post war generation is the prevalence of (for the most part) well intentioned individuals who try to create a synthesis between the various schools of thought within Judaism, in an attempt to (in their minds) extract the best from each. The idea being that this somehow offers the person the best of all worlds while allowing him to rise above the rancor and pettiness associated with each group’s insistence on the superiority of their particular path. In fact, some of the most sought after spiritual guides of yesteryear and in current times were/are practitioners of the cholent approach to Judaism.

Somehow, although I knew and admired many people who adopted this approach in one form or another, I never quite bought into the whole “you can have it all” idea, since it seemed to me that certain points of theology were by definition mutually exclusive. That is probably (partially) why, later, when I had already invested a great deal of study and thought into Chassidus, I concentrated a great deal on trying to define what are the points of similarity and what are the irreconcilable differences. This in turn, forced me to confront the difficult choice of changing my allegiances in the face of what I believed to be a greater truth.

This point was driven home for me even more strongly when in the early months of my involvement in Chabad, back in late 1991, I bumped into an acquaintance from Lakewood in the courtyard behind 770 Eastern Parkway. On the one hand he was excited to see me, as he had been one of the hangers-on of the “Chassidic crowd” in Lakewood, who had felt that I was sincere in my spiritual search despite my tendency to lambast in

sharp and colorful terms Chassidic ideas and practices that set me off for one reason or another. On the other hand, he was a little distraught over the fact that I had “gone all the way,” in the sense that I saw all other approaches as fundamentally deficient without the Torah revelations of Chassidus as revealed and explicated by the Rebbes of Chabad.

This fellow is a grandson of a prominent late Rosh Yeshiva transplanted in America from Lithuania proper, and the great-grandson of one of the most famous Rosh Yeshivas of yore in Lithuania. As such, his great appreciation for Chassidus is tempered by the need to feel that “they are all beloved, they are all pure, they are all mighty, and they all carry out with awe and fear the will of their Maker.” To this end, he shared with me his view that “everyone is trying to accomplish the same thing,” the only difference being what motivates them. The way that he categorized it was that “Litvaks” are motivated by the desire to acquire the World to Come, “Poilisher Chassidim” are motivated by the desire to give “nachas to the Oibershter,” and “Chabadskers” are motivated by the mission to build a “dwelling place for Hashem.”

I remember standing there in shock, thinking to myself, “wow, he really doesn’t get it.” I found it completely incredulous that he had absolutely no idea that by his own definition and categorization, each group was actually working towards a completely different goal and could hardly be said to be “trying to accomplish the same thing.” This despite the fact that all agreed that the primary means to achieve said goals is through Torah and Mitzvos. On the other hand, since I knew where he was coming from, I realized why he had a mental block that prevented him from drawing the obvious conclusion that derived

directly from his own observation. Instead, I decided to respond to him in a roundabout fashion, directing the conversation towards the implications of the three approaches insofar as they touch upon the degree that the focus is on self or the focus is on G-d and away from self. Also, how the different approaches are actually outgrowths of different understandings of the verse, “There is naught else but He.”

STUDYING THE FIELD

In the ensuing exchange, I pointed out to him that when one is focused on earning something for oneself, even if the reward in question is “to delight upon G-d,” then one is by definition focused entirely on self, and G-d is at best peripheral. Yes, He is the one that issues the commandments, He is the one that came up with all that brilliant Gemara logic, He is the one that pays the reward and He is even the direct source of the delight which is the reward. However, after everything is said and done, I am still working for my own interests, and I certainly experience myself, as well as everything I do, think and feel, in the context of my own existence.

So, even in the throes of convulsive prayer, in the midst of scrunching one’s forehead and squeezing one’s eyes shut in supposedly intense concentration, that person can’t help but think thoughts like, “So, how am I doing? Oh boy, I am really davening up a storm now. G-d must be really loving this. This one is for the history books. Oy, those other poor schnooks all around me have no idea what it means to have a geshmake davening.” Yes, I am being a bit facetious, but the point still stands. There is no other context for the thoughts of that person. To him, the meaning of the

verse, “There is naught else but He,” means that are no other deities out there, but as far as our created world, G-d is looking from the outside in, and my existence is just made up of “me” and is just about “me, myself and I.” And so, his learning, davening, even his acts of kindness towards others, always comes back to me, me, me...

Contrariwise, when one is focused on giving “nachas to the Oibershter,” there is a genuine desire and effort to turn the focus away from self, driving away any thoughts of “me” in the pursuit of trying to make Him happy, wanting Him to be pleased and satisfied. An illustration of this idea can be found in an exchange cited in one of the works of the teachings of the Chozeh of Lublin. It is brought there that the Chassidim once asked the Chozeh how does one know if his prayer was a proper one, and that he responded that the only way to know is if the person, when stepping back from the Shmoneh Esrei and bowing, is filled with great joy even as he feels such a deep shame in the very core of his being that he can’t pick up his eyes, and he certainly can’t meet the eyes of someone else.

The question is indicative of the fact that the Chassidim understood clearly that the most basic ingredient of “proper” prayer is that one be so focused on G-d that one is completely oblivious of self. This created a conundrum for them, because if one is completely oblivious of self, how does one go about assessing one’s performance in order to try to pinpoint what areas need improvement. The Chozeh, in his response, acknowledged the correctness of their basic understanding of the Chassidic approach to prayer, and explained that even the self-assessment process should not be taken up with analyzing oneself and the details of one’s performance,

but should be measured only by the degree that you succeeded in letting G-d in.

That is because the more one succeeds in resisting the natural tendency to focus on “me and my desires” and focusing his concern on “G-d and His desires,” the more he creates a vacuum within himself allowing G-d’s presence to be felt. When a person feels G-d’s presence, he is filled with the joy of such a great privilege and the shame of a nonentity in the presence of the King of all kings. This approach is based on the Chassidic interpretation of the verse, “There is naught else but He,” to mean that literally nothing else exists except for G-d. However, since this is something that we can only take on faith, as every fiber of our beings is screaming the exact opposite, we can only hope to suppress to whatever extent possible the sense of self that gets in the way. Since, ultimately, except for the great Tzaddikim, one cannot completely suppress one’s sense of self, a compromise needs to be struck. So the focus remains on G-d and what gives Him pleasure, but I get the satisfaction of knowing that I was instrumental in providing Him that pleasure.

And then there is Chabad. The Alter Rebbe recognized that as long as the Chassidic axiom that nothing else truly exists except for G-d remains in the realm of faith, there is still no resolution to the seeming contradiction to that axiom that each person experiences constantly in his or her own consciousness. It was only through bringing down that Divine revelation that “you were shown to see” at the Giving of the Torah, and which was re-revealed as a bedrock article of faith by the Baal Shem Tov, into the realm of intellect via Torah, that the inner consciousness of a Jew could apprehend his or her own non-existence. The same paradox of an

Omnipotent G-d that allows for “There is naught else but He,” and “In the beginning G-d created,” also makes it possible for a Jew who is “a part of G-d above, literally” to grasp his own non-existence even as he recognizes that he exists but only as a means to fulfill G-d’s will and desire for “a dwelling place in the lowly realms.”

OUT OF THE DESERT AND INTO THE FIELD

One of my early Lubavitch connections is a fellow who for various reasons, despite being a Tamim the son of a Tamim, ended up spending some time in a Lithuanian yeshiva that was transplanted here in the USA. One of the topics he likes to expound upon is the difference between the Misnagdic view of the month of Elul and that of Chabad Chassidus:

In the yeshivas that attempt to preserve some remnant of the aura and atmosphere of the old-time Lithuanian yeshivas that were strongly influenced by the Musar movement, the month of Elul is overtly serious and even somber. After all, the Days of Judgment are nigh, and one has but a relatively brief time to get his spiritual house in order. And by the way, the judgment in question is no walk in the park as it deals with every aspect of a person’s life and wellbeing including if he will live or die.

Conversely, the Alter Rebbe raises the question in his discourse Ani L’Dodi in Likkutei Torah, that since it is explained in Kabbala that Elul is a time when there shines forth into the world the “Thirteen Attributes of Mercy,” which is an even higher revelation than that which shines forth on most Jewish holidays, then why don’t we celebrate the entire month as one long holiday?

Although the distinction is a

revealing one, as far as the difference between a more negative and a more positive outlook on Judaism; there is a lot more to it. The difference in approaches cited earlier is even more pronounced when it comes to T’shuva, which is used to mean repentance even as the literal meaning is to return. For someone whose whole frame of reference is self and personal performance in the context of payday or payback, with G-d in the background as this all-powerful (and honestly, pretty scary) taskmaster, the knowledge that he has to face Him in His roles as witness, judge, jury and executioner, should make him feel quite terrified. And thus, the prime motivation for repentance must ultimately be to get in His good graces, so as to earn reward and avoid punishment.

For someone who is focused on getting away from self and closer to G-d, Elul should be quite a happy time, as it is a time of closeness to Hashem and leading up to the days of the greatest closeness, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, Sukkos and Simchas Torah. It is true that the closeness is manifested differently at each of those times and on each of those days, but ultimately the important thing is that one appreciate and celebrate this closeness as well as to utilize the opportunity to repent and correct those things that stand in the way of being truly close to Him. That is why in many Chassidic courts there is preference given to holding weddings in the month of Elul, and there are many joyous tunes included in the High Holiday liturgy and the like.

Then there is Chabad. The focus is not on me or even what I can do to make Him happy, but on the idea that I have no true existence outside of my role in carrying out His plan and His purpose, which is also only about Him and not about me.

I can only truly repent out of love and take full advantage of the opportunity to “return” and be “one” with Hashem, if it is based on that fundamental sense of self-negation alluded to in the trembling induced by the shofar.

Therefore, even my efforts towards correcting my sins and coming close to Hashem also only have significance in the context of fulfilling G-d's will and realizing His goals. So, these efforts should be done with great joy as there is no greater privilege, but at the same time we must be aware of whose presence we are in and that what is at stake is the very purpose of all existence.

This combination of celebration and trepidation is expressed in what the Alter Rebbe explains there that although Elul is a time of far greater divine revelation, we do not celebrate it as a holiday because it is analogous of a “king in the field.” He explains that when a king has been traveling and is finally returning to his home in his palace, he passes through the fields where the simple folk are busy working to give them an opportunity to greet him and accepts their greetings with a pleasant demeanor and shows a smiling countenance to all of them. As he continues along his way, all those who came out to greet him are allowed to join his entourage and enter into the palace with him all the way to his ruling chamber, as opposed to normal times when only those that are close to the king are allowed in.

The point of the analogy is that we only celebrate the divine revelations of the “King in His Chamber” as Jewish holidays, but the days of Elul are, despite the

loftiness of the revelation, the time when the “King is in the field” to make Himself accessible to each and every one of us even as we are busy with everyday workday affairs. Why is such a great revelation needed if the whole point is just to grant easier access? The answer is that there are some who are not even in the field, but they are in the desert, a place “where no man has settled,” meaning that they are caught up in sinful behavior, so in order to reach them and inspire them to leave the desert and come to the field, and then to the very palace of the King, Hashem reveals His infinite attributes of mercy and compassion.

The Rebbe explains in a maamer that the element of trepidation alluded to in the blowing of the shofar in the month of Elul, as the Tur explains this custom with the verse, “Can a shofar be blown in a city, and the people will not tremble,” is only a stepping stone in the divine service of “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.” This is because every aspect of divine service, especially loving G-d which is an expression of me and how I feel towards Him, has to be predicated upon the bittul that derives from the awareness in the very essence of the soul that “There is naught else but He.”

I can only love Him because He commanded it and He wants it for the purpose of constructing His dream home. Similarly, I can only

truly repent out of love and take full advantage of the opportunity to “return” and be “one” with Hashem, if it is based on that fundamental sense of self-negation alluded to in the trembling induced by the shofar. The Rebbe goes on to say that the very first day of blowing the shofar on Rosh Chodesh Elul should be sufficient for a complete “repentance from fear,” so that the rest of the person's energies be devoted exclusively to achieving the highest levels of love so that he can enter the palace as one of the King's close people.

TIME TO LEAVE THE FIELD

The same ideas and lessons could and should be applied to the times that we are living in now. The Rebbe has told us repeatedly that the condition for Redemption cited in the Gemara and brought as a legal ruling in the Rambam, namely that “Yisroel will not be redeemed except through T'shuva,” has already been fulfilled. And yet, that does not mean that on a personal level there is no need to get one's spiritual house in order. Quite the opposite, this is a special time when “the Redemption is already here” on the one hand, and “the only thing that remains is to greet our righteous Moshiach” on the other. Similarly, it is a time to celebrate the coming of Moshiach, even as we are pained over the delay of the process and fearful of the remaining challenges of exile.

All that is because we are in the final moments before the King officially enters His dwelling/palace that we made for Him, even though He has always been here all along, and He reveals Himself to us “in the field” within the exile so that we prepare ourselves and grab those last people still stuck in the desert to greet our righteous Moshiach, immediately, NOW!

The Chabad community of Baltimore is celebrating the redemption of the local Chabad Tzemach Tzedek synagogue, where the Rebbe Rayatz visited eighty years ago.

GEULA IN THE HOME OF THE ORIOLES

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

For more than twenty years, Rabbi Mendel Gafni and his wife, Menucha Rochel, have been doing the Rebbe's work in the city of Baltimore, Maryland, after arriving there "on the wings" of Divine Providence. The situation with young Israelis, who had no organized activities, touched his heart, and he started outreach activities with them. A tremendous miracle that he experienced with his daughter inspired him to put these activities into high gear, moving from a weekly to a continual daily basis. This was no easy job, particularly in light of the fact that he had experienced numerous forms of harassment from members of the city's large ultra-Orthodox community who hated Lubavitch. With a lot of vigor and stubbornness, he nonetheless met with absolute success.

The crown jewel of Rabbi Gafni's success came last year, when the shliach and his supporters managed in a most Heavenly-inspired manner to redeem the Chabad Tzemach Tzedek Synagogue from the hands of the Christian church. This shul had been established about two



hundred years ago by Chabad chassidim who had escaped from the Russian pogroms and settled in Baltimore. The Rebbe Rayatz once paid a visit, even giving over three chassidic maamarim and receiving a large number of people. For many years, Rabbi Avraham Eliyahu Axelrod served as the shul's rav, proudly leading his congregation and meriting to receive letters and instructions from our Rebbeim.

The gradual disappearance of the congregation and the synagogue began with the passing of Rabbi Axelrod in 5712, nearly sixty years ago. With the decrease in the number of Torah observant Jews in the area, the shul was left empty and under lock and key. Regrettably, the situation continued to deteriorate, and the building was eventually sold. What had been a house of holy study and prayer now served as a Christian place of worship. Not



even the arrival of the Rebbe's shluchim to Baltimore or the opening of a local Chabad yeshiva could redeem the synagogue back to its true heritage. It was only due to a story of amazing Divine Providence and numerous brachos from the Rebbe via Igros Kodesh that the circle was closed, the glory of Torah was restored, and today chassidim can once again daven on the premises.

Rabbi Gafni's community is an exemplary model that should be imitated by others. Today, there is no one in Baltimore who seeks conflict with him or make problems for his activities. With a lot of Ahavas Yisroel, sincerity, and energy, he succeeded in melting away the opposition of all who initially opposed him – Litvaks, Conservative, and Reform – and turning enemies into friends. It's quite commonplace to see longstanding Litvaks alongside "brand-new" mekuravim in Beis



Rabbi Mendel Gafni with a group of Anash and T'mimim with the redeemed shul in the background. Small pictures: The synagogue's name engraved on the wall, selected pictures of the shul's interior.



Moshiach of Baltimore, asking to write a letter to the Rebbe. They don't make a move without getting the Rebbe's bracha and his advice, and perhaps this is the secret to Rabbi Gafni's success. Without any barriers, everyone is equal. A homeless Jew receives exactly the same treatment as a person of material means. This is the motto by which he marches and by which he leads his community.

AN AGREEMENT WITH THE LOCAL PHILANTHROPIST

When Rabbi Gafni began his outreach work in Baltimore, he anticipated that it would be no easy job. Baltimore is like an American version of B'nei Brak, with sizable portions of its Jewish population connected to the Litvish sector. There are large

Reform and Conservative communities in another part of town, and many belong to modern Orthodox congregations. Baltimore has two Chabad shuls in operation.

"I first came to Maryland twenty-two years ago," says Rabbi Gafni. "I was working for the Chabad Mobile Centers in Eretz HaKodesh, and I came in order to raise money for the organization. This was the first time in my life

that I was being asked to do this type of work. The visit was a bit too gloomy, and I saw the great hostility towards the teachings of chassidus that existed there at the time, particularly towards Chabad and the Rebbe. This awoke within me a desire to engage in activities among the local residents and spread the light of Chabad.

“Another fact that bothered me was that numerous Israeli families of Sephardic origin did not receive proper treatment from the ultra-Orthodox communities. These families conduct traditional lifestyles, but they didn’t even have a synagogue. From day to day, the feeling grew ever stronger that I must do something and take action. In the meantime, I made contact with a local philanthropist, and the connection between us became solid. We made an agreement between us: I will take action, and he will assist me from a financial standpoint as much as he can. This is essentially how the Shma Yisroel organization was founded, and we conduct a range of activities, particularly on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

“I would bring R’ Yehuda Dunin and R’ Mendy Gerufi, who were young T’mimim at the time, to Maryland at my expense. I sent them to those Israelis with whom I had a connection, and they would strengthen them in matters of Torah and mitzvos. While these activities were on a wide scale and involved many people, they were still not on a daily basis. This all changed on the night of Purim 5749, when I traveled with my outreach activities partner, Rabbi Mendel Hurwitz, to make a birthday farbrengen at the home of Itzik Avrahami, one of our supporters who lived downtown. On our way back, an incredible miracle took place.

“My daughter and I were sitting in the front seat, and at a certain

point, the driver asked that instead of crowding the space near him, we should sit in the rear together with Rabbi Hurwitz. Naturally, we agreed and moved to the back. Minutes later, the driver suddenly lost control and crashed into a tree. He managed to open the door at the last second and jump out of the car. If he hadn’t done so, he almost certainly would not have survived the crash. The entire front of the car had been crushed and shattered. Thanks to Alm-ghty G-d and His Infinite Kindnesses, we emerged totally unscathed. At that moment, I realized what would have happened if we hadn’t moved to the rear of the car. We were saved by a miracle.

“Right then and there, I promised myself and to the Rebbe that I would intensify my activities and devote myself entirely to shlichus from that moment on. We rented a location and started conducting prayer services, farbrengens, Torah classes, and anything else that a standard Chabad House would do. Minyanim were held primarily on Shabbosim, and bringing people together for Shabbos davening proved to be no easy task, as each participant in the minyan lived in a different part of town. But with a little perseverance and drive, this arrangement lasted for over five years. Since most of those who davened in our minyan were émigrés from North Africa, the services were primarily conducted according to Sephardic custom.

“Then, the Israeli community of Baltimore sustained a tragic and painful loss: One of the community members left his store and was attacked by masked assailants who demanded all his money. When he apparently tried to fight back, they shot him to death. The murder shocked the entire community, and in response, his friends made a clear decision: to unite and open a

synagogue in his memory. They rented a place, but they were missing a seifer Torah. The visit by billionaire Edmund Safra to Baltimore solved the problem. He promised to provide not only a seifer Torah, but also a beautiful facility. Two weeks later, he suddenly passed away, but his widow fulfilled his promise.”

BRINGING A GROUP OF SUPPORTERS TO THE REBBE

With the founding of the Sephardic shul, the volume of activities did not diminish. On the contrary, there was more room for Rabbi Gafni to spread the teachings of chassidus and the announcement of the Redemption in an open and friendly manner. Throughout this period, Rabbi Gafni regularly wrote detailed reports to the Rebbe on the activities and often received encouraging answers. But the event that is most etched in his mind was when he headed a group of Chabad supporters Beis Chayeinu on Sunday, the 26th of Adar, 5752. “We traveled as a delegation of ten Israelis, together with the wealthy benefactor who helped us a great deal. We passed before the Rebbe as a group, and the encounter with the Rebbe created a virtual revolution among many people.

“Three of them decided, on the way back from 770, to become baalei t’shuva, and today lead strong chassidic families. The Rebbe merely looked at them and achieved a complete one hundred and eighty degree turn. One of these special individuals is Eliyahu Nadiv. When we would come to his store on mivtzaim, he would give a warm traditional Israeli greeting, but he would laugh when we asked him to put on t’fillin. He showed absolute cynicism for any

Jewish subject. Anyone else would have lost hope already, but I refused to give up. Despite the ridicule and scorn, I kept coming back to him. Then, when I came with an offer that he join a group trip to the Rebbe, he immediately agreed.

“To be perfectly honest, I was amazed. ‘Not only will I come,’ he told me, ‘I’ll even take my wife and children with me.’ From the moment that Eliyahu saw the Rebbe, his entire approach changed completely. He simply turned into a brand new person. I was shocked when he told me after dollars distribution that he wanted to put his children into Talmud Torah. I thought that this was just a momentary surge of excitement, but apparently it all had a very inner and deep effect upon him. Today, Eliyahu lives an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle in its fullest sense. He emigrated back to Eretz Yisroel, where he settled in Rechovot and now runs a kollel.

“Another story involves a young girl from nearby Columbia, Maryland, who was a university student. One of the shluchim who knew her made the connection between us, as she was a native Israeli and he thought that I might have a better effect upon her. She had planned to marry a Gentile she knew from school. Invitations were already being made for the ceremony, which was to be held in the non-Jewish place of worship. All the shliach’s efforts to dissuade her from taking this catastrophic step were to no avail. She stayed in our home for a few Shabbosim, but everything we told her fell on deaf ears.

“That Sunday, she joined us for the trip to Crown Heights. The Rebbe blessed her, told her something that touched the depths of her soul, and she cancelled the wedding.

“She left 770 after meeting



Farbengen with community members.



Farbengen at the home of a community member.

with the Rebbe sobbing uncontrollably. We didn’t know how to calm her down, nor did we understand what had happened so suddenly. After she had composed herself, she was silent for several hours. It was only on the way back to Baltimore that she started to open up. She informed me that she is leaving her Gentile boyfriend and now she wants to learn about Judaism. True to her word, she left the non-Jew and the university, and she started learning Yiddishkait intensively, turning her life into one of Torah and mitzvos. She returned to Eretz HaKodesh,

got married, and now lives in Haifa.

“Several weeks of intense effort on the part of two shluchim failed to budge her whatsoever from her decision. One look from the Rebbe, one brief word, made a complete turnaround. Not over a period of time, but in an instant!

“One person who really helped me to assist both of these people, including placing Mr. Nadiv’s children in Talmud Torah, was Rabbi Menachem Mendel Feldman. He had lived in Maryland since the time of the Rebbe Rayatz and had a

The electricity went out and all the houses on the street were darkened, including the four Litvisher shuls. However, unbeknownst to me, we had an operating generator, and the light continued to shine in our shul...

tremendous amount of influence in ultra-Orthodox circles, including in the city's Litvak community.

EXPANDING ACTIVITIES AFTER GIMMEL TAMMUZ

After years of strenuous activities, the Gafni family returned to Eretz Yisroel and settled in Yerushalayim. Their children were already reaching marriageable age, and their parents had to find proper shidduchim for them. After two of the children already got married, Rabbi Gafni returned to the United States for another fund-raising trip. He boarded the plane, not knowing how much it would change his life and determine his future.

"I arrived once again in Baltimore, in the hope of meeting with the wealthy benefactor I had met at the start of my journey to garner his financial support for a project I was working on. When we eventually did meet, he told me that my absence was really felt.

"Other Israelis whom I met in town told me the same thing. 'Ever since you left, nothing was the same. There are no activities and things here are in a state of spiritual decline.' Hearing such things pained me to no end.

"With Yud-Tes Kislev on the horizon, I hired a caterer, rented a synagogue, and publicized all over town about the upcoming farbrengen. This was after Gimmel Tammuz, 5754. A few days before

the event, the rabbi of the synagogue I had rented called me and asked if I was one of those who believe that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is Melech HaMoshiach and chai v'kayam. When I replied in the affirmative, he then asked if I was planning to speak about it, and I said that I have no intention of concealing my views. 'Then I can't let you use the shul,' he said firmly. 'There's a committee of rabbanim, and they've decided that there's to be no Moshiach in Baltimore,' he added sarcastically.

At that moment I made up my mind to tear down this ideological wall. I invited Rabbi Sholom Ber Kalmanson, the shliach in Cincinnati, Ohio, rented a local restaurant, and then informed everyone about the change of venue. In the end, everything worked out just fine. At first, we were expecting about fifty people, but close to two hundred showed up, including a fair number of Litvaks.

"Rabbi Kalmanson talk was earnest and passionate yet down to earth, and the farbrengen lasted until four o'clock in the morning. The restaurant owners were held equally spellbound, which helped us in extending the farbrengen long past the official closing time. After the farbrengen, we decided that we must strengthen the concept of Moshiach throughout the city.

"As the Chanukah holiday approached, I made the decision to

remain in Baltimore and kick off some Chanukah activities. All the money that I had raised, down to the last nickel, went for these activities. Then I saw how the Rebbe was already leading the way and helping to provide everything that we needed.

"A friend of mine suggested that I get in touch with an acquaintance of his from Baltimore. He told me that this was a Jew who had some money and would be able to help. In fact, he turned out to be a very wealthy and affable person, and we spoke together about Yiddishkait. We met again the following day, and I told him about our activities. He didn't make too many inquiries; he just asked me to come back the next day and pick up a check for twenty-five thousand dollars. Thus, all the activities' expenses were covered.

"Later, I received a clear instruction from the Rebbe through Igros Kodesh on the subject of shlichus. I therefore decided to bring my wife and family from Eretz Yisroel. We rented a house and we resumed our activities in Baltimore."

THE POWERS OF NATURE FIGHTING THE WARS OF THE SHLIACH

Rabbi Gafni's many supporters were delighted by his return, and the decision was made to conduct operations on a more continual and serious basis in the format of a regular Chabad House. The first activity was a big farbrengen on the auspicious day of Yud-Alef Nissan. During Pesach, the daily minyan for Shacharis was formed, and slowly but surely, this was followed by a schedule of Torah classes and chassidic gatherings. A real community started to materialize out of nowhere. It was comprised of people who knew

Rabbi Gafni from the last time and others who were happy about the new community.

However, they faced a great deal of opposition. “We lived in a Litvak neighborhood, and the residents were very uneasy about the Chabad House being built right before their eyes. The opposition came from every direction. The owner who rented us the house was heavily influenced by the opinions of his friends and neighbors, and he asked us to leave the premises by Erev Shavuot. All this happened specifically at a time when the activities were growing with ever greater intensity. The T’mimim would come to us from 770 and remain for lengthy periods of time, and local Jews begin to get closer to Judaism in a most serious fashion. We realized that we were facing a difficult problem. Who would rent us an apartment in this area? We decided to remain in the house as long as the contract allowed us to do so. All of the owner’s efforts to get us out went for naught.

“One day, he came to the house and informed us that we had twenty-four hours, no more, to leave the premises. Naturally, I was not moved by him. I told him that the house is functioning as a shul with regular prayer services each day, and until I find another place to house the shul, we are not leaving. This initiated a series of harassments and plotting by him and his cohorts. While this created a most unpleasant situation, we simply had no choice. This generated a tremendous uproar, and many neighborhood rabbanim took part (including those who are now our friends).

“There was an overall atmosphere of incitement, and demonstrations frequently took place in front of our house. One day, they even lodged libelous



Davening at the Chabad House. Rabbi Mordechai Anati (center) during a visit.

charges against us and summoned us to court. On the morning of the hearing, I wrote to the Rebbe via Igros Kodesh, and I understood from the answer that I don’t have to appear at the hearing. I informed the shul members who wanted to join me on the trip to the courthouse that we would not be going. The plaintiff in the case, the owner and his cohorts, traveled a considerable distance to get to the courthouse, only to find that the building was closed. It turned out that a flock of birds had entered the air conditioning system, shutting everything down... If we had gone, it all would have been for nothing. We felt that G-d was on our side.

“One day when I wasn’t home, the owner entered my house together with another rav who lived on that street. Only my wife was home at the time. They threatened her in very harsh terms, and the owner even picked up a picture of the Rebbe and ripped it to shreds right before her eyes. My wife was very insulted by this conduct, and in a moment of emotional fury, she wrote to the Rebbe and asked that they stop all the harassment.

This took place during the

winter season on a stormy night with howling winds, torrential rains, thunder, and lightning. The storm caused considerable damage throughout the neighborhood. Just half an hour later, two huge trees fell down on our street – one on the home of the rav, and the other on the home of our building’s owner... After sustaining such severe devastation, they apparently felt that this was a case of Divine Providence after what they had done. They returned to our house the following day to apologize, and informed us that they take back everything that they said to us... This was something above and beyond all nature.

“With the passage of time, the owner sustained financial losses and subsequently moved to Los Angeles to open a butcher shop. Before departing, he asked forgiveness from my wife for everything. He understood that the Hand of G-d had done it all... My wife told him that there was no need to ask forgiveness from her, but rather from the Rebbe, whose picture he tore up. He asked what he could do to correct his mistake, and she suggested that he give out pictures of the Rebbe and tell people what had happened to him.

This is exactly what he did. A large picture of the Rebbe adorns the wall at the entrance to his butcher shop, and he gives out the Rebbe's picture to all his customers, telling all of them what he experienced..."

In the meantime, the scope of activities continued to expand. More and more Jews asked to take part in prayer services and Torah classes, and soon the shul was too small to hold everyone. Rabbi Gafni had to rent a larger facility for the activities.

"On Erev Rosh Hashanah, I saw a notice about a building for rent. The owner asked me to come immediately and we would make an agreement at a good price. After receiving the Rebbe's bracha, we closed the deal and we immediately started moving everything over so we could hold our Rosh Hashanah services there.

"During the davening on the night of Rosh Hashanah, something interesting happened: The electricity went out and all the houses on the street were darkened, including the four Litvisher shuls. However, unbeknownst to me, we had an operating generator, and the light continued to shine in our shul... Suddenly, we saw hundreds of Jews coming in to daven. This was something more than symbolic – it created a great sense of unity.

"Since then, the opposition stopped completely."

THE PRIEST DIED SUDDENLY, AND THE SYNAGOGUE WAS PUT UP FOR SALE

For the next four years, activities were held in the new building. T'mimim came from 770, organized by HaTamim Yossi Dabush, to assist with the daily programs.

Behind the building, there was

a large grassy area, about a thousand square meters in size – the dream of any shliach. The Chabad House uses the land for large rallies and farbrengens, sometimes catering to more than five hundred people of all ages and all sectors of the neighborhood. No one even remembers the great opposition directed towards Rabbi Gafni during the early years.

One day, Rabbi Gafni decided that if activities are already in place and growing, then the time has come to buy a building.

"Two years after we arrived in Baltimore, we heard about Rabbi Avraham Eliyahu Axelrod, who is buried in the city's old Jewish cemetery. He was a chassid with every fiber of his being, and he was privileged to see the Rebbe Rashab, the Rebbe Rayatz, and even the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach. He was among those who pushed for the Rebbe to accept the leadership. Later, we discovered that he ran the Chabad synagogue, located downtown. We didn't know the precise location of this shul or what it was called. One fine day, I went out in search of this synagogue, having in mind to buy it.

"A long and arduous search was conducted, during which we learned that the shul had been closed for sixty years already due to a lack of congregants. As a result, it had been sold to a local priest, and the place now serves, *l'havdil* to the nth degree, as a church. I found out the priest's name and got in touch with him. When he heard what I wanted, he responded in absolute terms that that the building would never return to Jewish hands during his lifetime. To put it simply, stop dreaming. I tried to use various means to influence him, but he was determined. When I wrote to the Rebbe on the matter, I received an answer in Vol. 25, a long two-page

letter discussing the re-building of the Tzemach Tzedek shul in the Old City after it had been liberated...

"The amazing thing was that I didn't know then that 'our' shul was also called the Tzemach Tzedek. I naively thought that the Rebbe was blessing us that we would eventually succeed in redeeming the old Chabad synagogue, just as the Tzemach Tzedek shul in the Old City of Yerushalayim was restored to Jewish hands after the Six Day War. Together with our friends and supporters, we visited Rabbi Axelrod's gravesite to daven there. He was a marvelous chassid, and we asked, among other things, that he pull some strings in Heaven to return the synagogue to Jewish chassidic hands once again.

"Then one day, as I was passing by the building, I was astounded to see a 'For Sale' hanging on it. I discovered that the priest had died suddenly and his family had decided to sell the property. I didn't want to waste the opportunity, and immediately called the real estate office. It was a Sunday, so I didn't expect anyone to answer the phone; my intention was simply to leave a message. To my great surprise, someone did pick up the phone, and she arranged to meet with me there.

"We must acquire ownership of this building," I told her, "as it was once run by great Jewish tzaddikim." As we were talking, some unexplained noise emitted from the structure. She believed that it was something supernatural, and she was very startled. Right then and there, she declared, "This building will be yours, and I will do everything possible to achieve that..." At the start of the negotiations, the priest's family wanted one million dollars, but they eventually settled for four

hundred thousand dollars. The down payment of ten thousand dollars came from funds quickly collected from community members.

“Every stage of the purchase process fell on an auspicious Chabad date. The real estate agent understood that I had to collect donations in order to pay for the building, and she agreed to give me the keys even before final payment had been made, something that was usually not done. I received the keys on Rosh Chodesh Kislev. Over a period of several nights, I worked to remove all the idols and other signs of avoda zara that had been affixed there. When I took down the main idolatrous symbol with the help of several congregants, we saw that underneath was written the words *‘Beit HaKnesset Tzemach Tzedek, Nusach Arizal’*, and then I recalled the Rebbe’s answer in Igros Kodesh. There was not a dry eye anywhere...These were very emotional moments.

“As a result, I began to inquire about the shul’s past. I met with a senior rav, Rabbi Polikar, who leads the synagogue for Baltimore’s Russian immigrant community, which is very close to Chabad. He told me that he remembers when the Rebbe Rayatz made his historic visit, held farbrengens, and even said several chassidic maamarim there. I contacted Rabbi Axelrod’s daughter, an elderly woman who today is married to the head of a well-known Litvisher yeshiva from New York. She told me that not only had the Rebbe Rayatz visited there, she also remembers, as a girl, that many Jews came to the synagogue to receive his bracha.

“These accounts strengthened my determination to redeem the shul, whatever the cost.

“On Yud-Tes Kislev, I transferred another sixty thousand



The shul’s interior after its redemption. Scenes of ruin and destruction.



Digital simulation of how the synagogue interior will appear after the planned renovation.

dollars to the real estate agent. A Lubavitcher chassid from South America made a nice donation, as did a contributor from Australia who has business dealings in Baltimore. We experienced a whole chain of amazing wonders that could fill a book on its own, until we managed to raise the full amount. The Rebbe made miracle after miracle throughout the entire process. For example, just half an hour before the deal was due to be canceled because I had been unable to acquire all the necessary funds, a Jew from South America agreed to cover the remaining



Rabbi Mendel Gafni davening with great fervor in the shul during the first minyan after its redemption.

amount! The money was transferred to the bank and within twenty-four hours, I paid everything to the real estate agent.

“On Yud-Alef Nissan, the Rebbe’s birthday, the deal was signed, and on Yud-Gimmel Nissan, the yahrtzeit of the Tzemach Tzedek, in whose memory the synagogue was named, we made a festive opening ceremony. It would be fair to use some literary license by saying that there was electricity in the air. It’s hard to describe the emotion that prevailed at the moment, as the glory of Torah was restored. Chassid and non-chassid alike shed tears of great emotion.”

CHASSIDIM ALONG SIDE LITVAKS, LIFERS ALONG SIDE BA’ALEI T’SHUVA

One of the strong characteristics of Chabad in Baltimore is how they accept every Jew, no matter whom, and serve as the address for every concept in Judaism – and every Jew as well. This is not just some slogan; it forms the basis for everything they do. “This already started from the very first days of activities. Since there is no Chabad community around us as in other places, all the activities focus on the mekuravim. It was often difficult to organize the weekday minyanim, as people are naturally working and quite busy. Thus, we found ourselves asking every Jew we met if he would just come in and help us complete the minyan.

“Homeless people often come in, and in exchange for a good meal, they would agree to complete the minyan. As a result of our work with them, we organized a Pesach seder for all the city’s Jewish homeless, determined to make certain that no Jew remain in the streets on this night. In fact, they all came. It was thrilling to

see the connection that had developed between the Israelis and the other Jews who also came for the seder. Suddenly, we all realized that we are one people with mutual responsibility towards one another, something that we are inclined to forget over the course of time. In addition, we are most active with young school dropouts, some of whom have gotten mixed up with drugs and alcohol. We work with them under all circumstances.

“The Chabad House has a most unique and rare atmosphere of brotherhood prevailing among all. When someone is ill or needs assistance, everyone joins together to help him. I am often stunned and amazed in the face of the Ahavas Yisroel that exists among those who come to the Chabad House. People here simply devote themselves to one another. This all-embracing attribute of love towards one’s fellow Jew has brought many Litvaks, who had previously opposed us, to understand that we are worthy of some appreciation, and surely not slander and condemnation.

“A year ago, on a Friday night just a few minutes before sundown, two young Jews walked into the Chabad House, beaten and battered from head to toe. It was a very disturbing sight.

One of these young men was the son of the head of one of the city’s largest yeshivos. He had left the traditions of his forefathers and had *r”l* descended into the world of narcotics.

They told us that they had gone to buy drugs, but the drug and his friends proceeded to beat them bloody, apparently over an old drug debt. They were afraid to go to the hospital for medical treatment, because they were ashamed to admit how they received their injuries. They stayed with us for Shabbos, and afterwards, my wife, a homoeopath

by profession, gave them considerable help until they were completely healed. This incident affected them deeply. They repented over their immoral ways, and they have a connection with us to this day, as they come to daven in our minyan every Shabbos.”

When we speak about the Chabad community of Baltimore, it can be said that this is one of the most colorful and exciting communities around. Litvaks and chassidim daven side by side, as do life-long observant Jews with baalei t’shuva, young and old.

One of the community’s more interesting characters is Rabbi Gedalia Goodman, a horse trainer who began his journey to the Rebbe and Lubavitch when he was still living in Los Angeles near Rabbi Shlomo Cunin. He went to the Rebbe and received instructions to continue his involvement in training horses in order to raise such matters to holiness. His appearance as an Orthodox Jewish horse trainer is quite well-known and has received much publicity in the local papers.

“One day, an Israeli who also worked with horses came up to him. He was living with a non-Jewish girl at the time, and he told him, ‘When I saw you praying before the race, I knew that after such a prayer, you were sure to win...’ It had a tremendous influence on this Israeli to see a religious Jewish horse trainer, and perhaps this was what the Rebbe intended.”

GUIDANCE FROM THE REBBE BRINGS FAITH IN MOSHIACH

Many Jews in Baltimore write to the Rebbe regularly through Igros Kodesh, even those who normally wouldn’t step foot in a Chabad shul.

“At the moment that people

write and see answers, the whole concept of Moshiach and the Redemption is internalized within him,” Rabbi Gafni declares. “They’re ready to understand everything, even in the intellectual sense. Every Wednesday, we hold a class in D’var Malchus, in which a wide variety of Jews participate. The common denominator among all of them is the *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe through writing him letters. There are many Litvisher bachurim who don’t do anything significant in their lives without writing to the Rebbe, and this is quite amazing. Most of them come from Yeshivas Ner Yisroel, the large and prominent Litvak yeshiva for which Baltimore is known.

“It’s interesting to note the history of this yeshiva, and perhaps this is the cause of the *makif* that had such an influence upon its students. The person who assisted in the establishment of this yeshiva was the chassidic patron, Rabbi Chaim Nachman Kovlasky. When he was asked to finance the building of the yeshiva, he posed the question to the Rebbe Rayatz. The Rebbe replied that he should offer his assistance despite the Litvisher approach that they advanced, since these were days when the ship is tossing in the sea, and the need now is considerable. However, the Rebbe Rayatz set one condition – the yeshiva must hold a weekly Tanya shiur – and in fact, such a class existed there for many years. Many students from that yeshiva maintain regular contact with us.

“One day, one of the yeshiva’s students came to us with a request: His father had taken ill and he wanted to ask the Rebbe for a bracha. When he started reading the Rebbe’s answer, his face turned pale. The Rebbe wrote about the caution that Kohanim must take when they are under a tent cover. He was stunned. He



Rabbi Gafni during activities at a Baltimore nursing home

told me that his three brothers all worked as surgeons, and this subject was constantly discussed. The answer sharpened the discussion among the family, they acted accordingly, and their father was cured of his illness. The family has since moved to Los Angeles, and whenever a problem or doubt arises, they come to the Chabad House run by Rabbi Amitai Yemini and write a letter to the Rebbe.

“We recently had a most interesting story: One of the young men who regularly frequents the Chabad House was being threatened with some serious criminal charges. If convicted, he might have ended up spending several years behind bars. As a result, he came to me and cried bitterly over his fate. My advice was for him to write to the Rebbe about the problem, and so he did. In his reply, the Rebbe wrote that he should spread the concepts of modesty and family purity. He turned as white as a sheet, and explained that the charge lodged against him was for a related matter. He agreed to act according to the Rebbe’s advice, and he has done so to this day. The judge handling the case rejected the claim, and since then, the man’s

wife and children have also joined our activities.”

Jews in Baltimore live with the announcement of the Redemption and the identity of the Redeemer with great fortitude. They make the holy proclamation of “Yechi Adoneinu” with much chassidic pride, and they speak about the prophecy of the Redemption without hesitation. Despite the fact that there are Litvak communities in the city, the public is accepting the message.

“A long line of mashpiim have been visiting with us over the years, and all of them have been strengthening this point. Contrary to what people might think, the public accepts the message without any problem; however, they must do so *b’p’nimius*. If you really demand this of yourself, and you are truly connected to Moshiach, this illuminates from within you,” says Rabbi Gafni.

“When people see that you are a serious Jew who stringently fulfills all the mitzvos, large and small, and are properly connected to Torah study, they will be ready to hear whatever you have to say. You must be a candle to illuminate. At the start of my journey in Baltimore, I would daven in the city’s Satmar synagogue. Then, no one paid any attention to my existence, but after I began using their mikveh, and they understood how important it was to me, they started accepting me more seriously and we arranged to learn chassidus together. They accepted me as a serious person, and it was thereby much easier to talk about everything. To this day, we give over Tanya classes in their shul, bring copies of the Beis Moshiach Magazine, and farbreng with them. They actually want us to come.”

(This translation is dedicated to all the Chabad institutions throughout the State of Maryland, foremost among them, the Bais Menachem Chabad Student Center in College Park, under the direction of Rabbi Eli Backman.)

Rabbi Yitzchok Hendel z"l, former Rosh Av Beis Din in Montreal and rav of the Chabad community there:

BY DECLARING ‘YECHI ADONEINU’ WE ADD CHAYUS TO THE KING

*Since Simchas Torah 5753, the proclamation of “Yechi” became a primary inyan with the approval and direct encouragement of the Rebbe. Over the course of a year, the Rebbe came out nearly every day and encouraged the singing of Yechi. Every Chassid remembers those special moments. * An interview with Rabbi Hendel z"l ten years ago.*

Many ask about the significance of “Yechi Adoneinu” and why it became so important to say.

It is explained at length in the Rebbe’s sicha of 2 Nissan, 5748, that proclaiming “Yechi HaMelech” adds life to the king to the point of “arise and sing Dovid Malka Meshicha.” That’s what makes it so essential, since it is especially imperative now to add life to the king.

Yet how could something that

came from the Chassidim, which was not explicitly instructed by the Rebbe, become that central an inyan?

It should be emphasized again that this is not something the Chassidim invented. It is based on the Rebbe’s sicha and therefore, we need to treat this proclamation with the importance it deserves, at least as much as we accord anything the Rebbe says in the sichos.

As for the fact that this inyan

became more central in the lives of Chassidim in recent years, the reason is simple. Since the inner desire of every Chassid is to add life to the king – the Rebbe MH”M – when a Chassid hears from the Rebbe that there is a proclamation that adds life to the king, well of course this immediately becomes extremely important to him!

Above all else, since Simchas Torah 5753, the declaration of Yechi became central because of the Rebbe’s approval and direct encouragement of it. Over the course of a year, the Rebbe came out nearly every day and encouraged the singing of Yechi. Every Chassid remembers those special moments. I remember how I stood next to the Rebbe on one of those occasions and blessed the Rebbe with Birkas Kohanim and Yechi Adoneinu and the Rebbe answered “amen!”

From the time the Rebbe began encouraging this proclamation, it ceased being a personal inyan of Chassidim and became the Rebbe’s inyan. That means that although it is true that it started with the Chassidim and

for a long time the Rebbe negated it and did so using harsh terminology, but once the Rebbe accepted it, obviously this changed.

I personally experienced this in 5748. It was long before 27 Adar and we were farbrenging in Montreal and someone suggested that we all sign a letter to the Rebbe in which we asked for his immediate hisgalus as Moshiach.

I signed too and on the side I added a note, "May the Rebbe hasten the true and complete Geula."

To ensure that the letter wasn't publicized and there wouldn't be "yenikas ha'chitzonim" (i.e. negative repercussions from those opposed), we decided to send the letter with a trusty shliach who would give it directly to the Rebbe's secretaries.

After a few days I received a call at home from R' Leibel Groner who asked, on the Rebbe's behalf, about the letter: "From where have you judged me?" (A halachic expression referring to the right of a plaintiff who has been ruled against to demand that the judges provide the sources for their ruling).

I said that the source is in chapters 11 and 12 of the Rambam's Hilchos Melachim which fit the Rebbe exactly.

Then the secretary asked about the letter being publicized for it had appeared in other places around the world. I told him that we had agreed when we signed it that we intended for the letter to

be sent directly to the Rebbe with a shliach so that there wouldn't be a yenikas ha'chitzonim.

Nonetheless, the letter had been seen all over and the Rebbe was not pleased. Following this, the one who initiated the idea asked the Rebbe for a tikkun.

The next time I was by the Rebbe and I blessed him as always with the Birkas Kohanim, he responded with a sicha about K'huna, and Chassidim said it was meant to appease me.

But after a while, when I proclaimed Yechi to the Rebbe, as I mentioned earlier, he not only accepted it but he even answered amen. There was a major change, and what the Rebbe had previously protested he now encouraged.

From this we need to learn how sensitive the topic is and we need to conduct ourselves properly so as not to remain with "Lights of Tohu" that haven't come down into "Keilim of Tikkun."

Some say "Yechi" is a superficial inyan.

Whoever says that apparently never said Yechi with a p'nimius. In other words, his entire emuna in the coming of Moshiach is weak and that's why he says what he does. A Chassid who lives with the inyan and its importance understands that the form of expression used in this proclamation is **exactly the form that the Rebbe coined for us!**

Meaning, when the Rebbe said that the inyan of the proclamation is that it adds life to the king, that means that this is not a feeling or something that is only meant to be thought about, but something that needs to be proclaimed, verbalized. Like all inyanim, this too needs to be in "Keilim of Tikkun" but that doesn't negate the need to say it.

Some people say that none of this pertains after 3 Tammuz, especially when it adversely affects our achdus and only brings to machlokes among Chassidim.

I don't understand that. What changed after 3 Tammuz? Isn't there more of a need to add life to the king? Now, more than ever, it's important to add life to the king!

As for associating it with machlokes and achdus, how can you associate machlokes with a declaration that is based on the Rebbe's sichos and on the Rebbe's nonstop encouragement of it for a year?

It's altogether unacceptable for a group of people to decide to oppose the thousands of Chassidim who believe in the Rebbe's hisgalus and who are working to hasten it, and to claim that whoever declares Yechi is undermining achdus! If they stop their opposition there will be achdus!

As a Chabad rav, what do you think is the



When a Chassid hears from the Rebbe that there is a proclamation that adds life to the king, well of course this immediately becomes extremely important to him!

proper way to spread the Besuras Ha'Geula?

First, regarding the proclamation of Yechi, as mentioned before it is sourced in the Rebbe's sicha and is very important today.

The Rebbe said to listen to the rabbanim and right after 3 Tammuz, a temporary rabbinic organization that operated then, which I headed, issued a p'sak

din with the signatures of all the rabbanim of this organization that included rabbanei Anash from all over the world, and it said that those who said Yechi should continue to do so.

As for publicizing the identity of Moshiach, we stated in the p'sak din that the publicity should not be in a way that adversely affects the dignity and honor of Lubavitch. Care should be taken

that it be done properly.

The p'sak din was signed by rabbanei Anash from all over the world and was meant for all of Lubavitch. At the time, it was publicized in all centers of Anash as well as in the *Algemeiner Journal* because other Chabad publications were unwilling to print this p'sak ... (this was before *Beis Moshiach* had the reach it does today.

In conclusion ...

Every one of Anash must steer clear of machlokes, yet not forget that Yechi received the Rebbe's explicit approval, and that a proper p'sak din of rabbanei Anash has ruled to continue. This is how we will achieve real achdus.



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RABBI MOSHE BEN TOV Z”L

*Rabbi Moshe Ben Tov passed away on Erev Shabbos Parshas D’varim, 5 Av. * R’ Ben Tov was known as the “Mezuza Reader” for his ability to discern what personal problems needed correcting when he looked at people’s mezuzos. He was close with the Rebbe and even merited a miracle through him. When the Rebbe announced Mivtza Mezuza, he enthusiastically joined.*

By Mendel Tzfasman



Rabbi Moshe Ben Tov with his son-in-law, Rabbi Yoel Kaplan

Rabbi Moshe Ben Tov z”l was born in 1930 in Varzazat in the Atlas mountains of Morocco. The tzaddik, Rabbi Dovid U’Moshe appeared to his mother in a dream and asked that she name her son for him, and she complied with this request.

When he was five, the family moved to Casablanca, where he studied with the scholars of the city and in yeshivas Otzar Ha’Torah. He benefitted greatly from the Rebbe’s shluchim, Rabbi Binyamin Gorodetzky, Rabbi Shlomo Matusof, and Rabbi Michael Lipsker, who had gone to Morocco shortly after the Rebbe accepted the nesius. From them he also gained strong feelings of love and hiskashrus for the Rebbe which grew over his lifetime.

He did well in his learning but when he turned 18 he needed to help his father in his business, wholesale marketing of packaging materials, which employed about 500 workers. He sadly left yeshiva but remained deeply connected to it. He used his free time to learn. When he was 24 he married his wife, Rosa.

When he was 18 he was drawn to the letters of the mezuzah and he would ponder them greatly. While still in Morocco he would go from house to house and check mezuzos. When he found a problem he would fix it himself or buy a new mezuzah, often with his own money. He did this all his life, even after moving to Israel. Those close to him relate that in order to save money he would buy skins and prepare the parchment himself.

When he was 40 the Rebbe announced Mivtza Mezuzah and he joined in enthusiastically.

In Elul, 1957, R’ Moshe moved to Eretz Yisroel and settled in Kiryat Shemone. Then he moved to Beer Sheva where



Rabbi Moshe Ben Tov and Rabbi Kaplan learning together

He was a kana'i (a zealot) for the 'd'var Hashem zu halacha.' It was a zealotness of purity and holiness. No compromising. No skirting the issues. He dwelt amongst his people; he felt their pain but wasn't afraid to 'tell it like it is' and expose those areas that needed improvement.

his ten sons and three daughters were born. In addition to investing his energies into the education of his own children he spread Torah to the people of his city.

In 1986 he and his sons started the organization "Toras Dor V'Dor." Operating mainly in Yerushalayim and Beer Sheva, its purpose is to increase purity in Am Yisroel, to strengthen Torah study and to help the needy. Their main activity is providing training for many hundreds of chassan and kalla teachers and rabbanim who specialize in shalom bayis and raising awareness of family purity. He

was actively involved in preserving the religious character of the city as far as Shabbos, kashrus, taharas ha'mishpacha and chinuch are concerned.

Under the auspices of the organization, men study Torah diligently. The rav and his family started many kollelim: a Kollel Netz that operates at dawn, a Kollel Yom, a Kollel L'limud HaKabbala, a Kollel Erev, a Kollel Erev Shabbos, and even a Kollel Ohr Zoreiach for the blind.

R' Ben Tov gave many shiurim in the kollelim he founded and in other places, for adults, youth and even children.

THE REBBE SAID: LOOK AT THE KIDDUSH WINE

As mentioned earlier, R' Ben Tov was gifted with the ability to help people by looking at their mezuzos. For example, he suggested that someone change his mezuzah because his mezuzah had become pasul in the word "your heart," thus saving him from heart surgery. To someone who suffered from various problems he said he should start putting on Rabbeinu Tam t'fillin after he saw a problem with the word "and you shall bind."

Someone came to him with his daughter who suffered from a tumor in her ear. R' Ben Tov told him to change his mezuzos and then to take another X-ray of the ear. The difference between the first and second X-ray was enormous.

"Our father did not do miracles," says a family member. "These people committed to being more careful with Torah and mitzvos and Hashem helped. My father was only a facilitator."

R' Ben Tov's warm regard for p'nimius ha'Torah and the study of Chassidus grew from his connection with giants such as Rabbi Yisroel Abuchatzteira (Baba Sali) in Morocco and Eretz Yisroel and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu. He was exceedingly fond of the Chabad movement, starting back in his youth in Morocco. He often attended farbrengens that took place in Chabad houses and Chabad shuls.

According to his sons, he had a lively correspondence with the Rebbe in which he received special brachos. He even went to see the Rebbe in 770 and had an amazing miracle with him. This was many years ago when R' Ben Tov had terrible pain in his eyes. When he wrote to the Rebbe and asked for a bracha, the Rebbe told

him to gaze upon the wine in the cup as he recited Kiddush. R' Ben Tov did so and after Shabbos the pain was completely gone.

Two of his sons-in-law are Lubavitchers. Rabbi Sheor-Yashuv Elharrar is rosh kollel Yakirei Beer Sheva. He and his wife Pua started and run the Chabad high school in Beer Sheva. Rabbi Yoel Kaplan is a shliach with his wife Ruth in Salonika, Greece.

R' Kaplan has this to say about his father-in-law:

"We spent hours upon hours together and he, in his unique way, would describe to me what he saw by the luminaries of the previous generation, the g'dolim and perushim of Morocco. 'Do you know what their true gadlus was?' he once asked me. 'Their fear of Heaven preceded their wisdom ... Their clear knowledge that with all their holiness they dwelled among their people.' That was my father-in-law, greatness in simplicity and simplicity in greatness. As a man among equals.

"In his love for mitzvos, with his enthusiasm, he would get all those around him caught up in it. The emphasis was on oneg Shabbos. He so cherished and tried to increase the honor and oneg of Shabbos."

As a shliach, did you learn anything from his approach to kiruv?

"The intensity with which he was mekarev thousands to Torah and mitzvos, the way he went about things, he's definitely my role model. He welcomed everybody with simcha. His captivating smile reached the hearts of numerous people. He was mekarev them with his love and compassion.

"At the same time, though, he was a *kana'i* (a zealot) for the 'd'var Hashem zu halacha.' It was a zealotness of purity and holiness. No compromising. No skirting the issues. He dwelt amongst his people; he felt their pain but wasn't afraid to 'tell it like it is' and expose those areas that needed improvement.

"He merited to guide people on the way to rectification and t'shuva, a way of purity in and out of the house. He responded to many thousands of queries and saved many souls. It's hard to estimate how many neshamos came into the world because of his blessing, encouragement and support. It is a privilege for me to be his son-in-law. I heard many things over the years from people close and not so close to him, from rabbanim, men of stature, ordinary people, knowledgeable people and ignorant people."

What did he think about your being on shlichus?

"He highly valued the Rebbe's work and the work my wife and I

do to strengthen Jewish life. He said that the work that he did was according to the Rebbe's derech and direction. He was devoted to removing the *he'elem* (concealment) from the *olam* (world) according to the way of Kabbala and the path of Chassidus."

What points did he focus on in his kiruv efforts?

"For many decades he urged the observance of taharas ha'mishpacha and the laws of Shabbos. He told me on more than one occasion, 'Don't look for leniencies or stringencies. Do what it says.' He was very pained by the situation in Eretz Yisroel. His views about the Land were according to what it says in halacha and according to the Rebbe's passionate concern. One time, I think it was before the terrible Disengagement, he cried out, 'Eretz Yisroel is like a gift that we have to return the same way that we got it. How can we give parts of it away to alien peoples?'"

Rabbi Moshe Ben Tov z"l was close to 80 when he passed away. He is survived by numerous children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He left magnificent mosdos Torah which he founded and supported with great effort, and thousands of brokenhearted talmidim.

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KNOWING LESS AND LOVING MORE

By Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

The one G-d illuminates and animates the entire soul, through being enclothed in its faculty of Chochma (wisdom) which is beyond any graspable knowledge or intelligence.

—*The Tanya, Ch. 18*

The Danish Poet, Piet Hein, wrote “Love is like a pineapple, sweet and indefinable.”

As elusive as love may be, we can still talk about different kinds of it. Let’s take the love of food for instance. Is it fish that you fancy? Then maybe the best way to express that would be to let them swim rather than fry and eat them. And what about money? It’s also a materialistic attraction (and how!) but a little more abstract, especially nowadays when physical currency is not so current, and cash today is neither cold nor hard, but just a transient blip in cyberspace.

For a somewhat more refined kind of love, there’s the love of arts, literature, and music. Moving on to an attraction more ephemeral yet, there is the world of ideas and refined character traits, such as dignity, humility, or wisdom.

But all of these don’t reach the truest quality of love, because with each of the above, the bottom line is self-love, not love of another.

Think fish. I love satisfying *my* hunger. Whether it tickles my taste buds, ear buds, funny bone or brain, the object of my interest is really me, and the more that’s true, the less it is truly love. So how can I transcend? How can I move from mirror to window and learn to love for real.

Nearly 3,000 years ago, upon completing the construction of the First Temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon wrote an ode to the love between man and G-d, the biblical Song of Songs. Couched in the language of romantic love, its very premise seems strange to us today - How can a human love some Being that is absolutely unknowable, indeed so unknowable that many are not even sure He exists? We have a hard enough time loving those we know. And if such spiritual love can be attained, will it not be better expressed more cerebrally?

The key to the answer lies in the metaphor itself. My significant other is much like myself, a being of body and soul. Loving for the

body is about chasing a feeling and in that way, it’s like the list of loves above - selfish. But the spiritual side is not like that.

How so? For starters, picture yourself having a conversation with someone, anyone. Whether it’s family, friend, client or stranger, where do you look when you really want to share? Normally, it’s the eyes. And where in the eye? The pupil.

Isn’t it strange that when we want to ensure that communication is for real, the place of all places that we rest our gaze is the one place where there is nothing to see? Think about it. We have just one organ that’s dedicated to recording and interpreting incoming light and it only is satisfied when focusing on a spot that won’t give any?

What are we looking for over there, anyway? Words aren’t there, they come from the mouth. Body language isn’t there, it’s in countless details of everywhere else. Is it the retina we seek or the brain itself? No way. We are looking for the essence, the person himself. And what is that essence? The soul.

The eyes are the window of the soul. Poetically, the most sensible place to seek an invisible soul is in an invisible place, a place of nothingness, or in slightly other words, of no thingness. And this is the key to love.

When I love according to what I understand, my love goes no further than what I appreciate. The gestures I know are the measures of the responses I will have. If you are only so lovable, I will love you only so much.

But the pupil carries another message entirely. It marks the immeasurable realm of the unknown. When I love the infinite, unbounded you, my love is likewise unlimited too. The more we appreciate, the more there is to

appreciate, as the infinity of my soul touches the infinity of yours.

Returning to the Temple and the Song of Songs, we can now get an inkling of what's going on. The Infinite One that was revealed in the Temples touches the infinite soul that rests between mine.

Wonders and miracles, while exciting and inspiring, are mere externalities. We are impressed by their grandeur which we readily appreciate. At a deeper level there is just a Presence, an Infinite Beyond we can never know. And that's what evokes a love that's true, an infinite commitment from my own infinite depths. Measure for measure in an immeasurable way.

Piet Hein was a scientist and designer too. He is best known for his "squircles," or square circles, cleverly modeled shapes mathematically known as superellipses, that blend roundness and four-sidedness to create better roadways, nicer dishes, and more elegant furniture.

The classic ellipse, a kind of oval, is an interesting shape, and it lends us a graphic perspective on

Wonders and miracles, while exciting and inspiring, are mere externalities. We are impressed by their grandeur which we readily appreciate. At a deeper level there is just a Presence, an Infinite Beyond we can never know. And that's what evokes a love that's true, an infinite commitment from my own infinite depths.

this lesson of love.

According to one view of gravitation, small objects orbit larger objects not in circular paths, but rather elliptical ones. Geometrically it turns out, ellipses have not one centre, but two, and each is called a focus. The greater object lies at one focus, and the lesser object orbits around. But what lies at the other focus, the second equally important centre of elliptical motion. The answer is nothing, no thing, it's just a spot around which things turn, going

on forever like the planets in the sky.

Infinite love, like an infinite orbit, is motivated by both - the revelations we can see and the reality we can never know. When Moshiach comes, the two will unite, the physical and the spiritual, the two foci will become one and the circle will be closed, with G-d and man together forever.

Moshiach Now!

References: Kuntres U'Maayan, and Sich'a of 19 Tishrei, 5724.

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LIFE ON SHLICHUS: ABOVE NATURE WITHIN NATURE

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelevitz
Shliach, Beit Shaan

Chassidus teaches that in the merit of a Jew's efforts to imbue his everyday affairs with holiness, Hashem bestows His blessings in a way of "higher than nature" within nature. The following are shlichus stories that bring this concept to life.

SUPERNATURAL CAR

The following story happened at the Chabad house of Azor. The shliach, Rabbi Shimon Yardeni was driving in his old jalopy when it let him know that it had finished its mission in this world. R' Yardeni had a problem. It wasn't worth buying another old clunker (been there, done that) and a better car was beyond his means. As for a new car, forget it. What should he do? Write to the Rebbe, of course!

He considered going to the bank and asking for a loan to purchase a car but the answer he opened to in the Igros Kodesh said not to rush but to wait for an opportunity. So R' Yardeni waited for an opportunity.

A few days went by and one of the mekuravim, a car salesman, walked into the Chabad house. "I heard you are looking for a car," he said, "and I have one that is a real opportunity for you." As soon as R' Yardeni heard the word "opportunity" he immediately told the man, "Bring me the car. I've bought it." The man was taken aback. "First ask me what kind of car it is, how much it costs, take it for a test drive, use it for a day or two. Why are you making a snap decision?" But R' Yardeni insisted, "It's okay. Bring me the car."

Two days later the mekurav brought him a late model commercial vehicle in great

condition which was perfectly suited for the Chabad house's needs. The price was reasonable at 42,000 shekels. R' Yardeni paid 7000 shekels as a deposit and went to the bank for a loan for the remaining 35,000 shekels to complete the deal.

A conversation ensued between R' Yardeni and the car salesman. The shliach told him that the reason for this successful purchase was the answer he opened to from the Rebbe in the Igros Kodesh. The salesman told the story to some friends, which led to an astonishing development.

A month went by and the bank delayed in granting the loan. A friend approached R' Yardeni with a complaint, "I heard that you bought a car and that you went to the bank for a loan. How could you do that without telling me? How much money did you ask for?"

R' Yardeni told him the amount and the man took out his checkbook and gave him a check for 35,000 shekels.

A real "opportunity" – above nature.

IT'S NOT WORTHWHILE

Rabbi Binyamin Karniel, shliach

in Gadera, saw and heard many stories from his mekuravim about parnasa coming in a supernatural manner, while if they did not act according to Torah then the losses were also supernatural.

“One Friday, I drove up to a gas station about an hour before Shabbos (to prepare for a long trip that would take place right after Shabbos). When the attendant came over I asked him when his shift ended. The young fellow said that he finished at midnight.

“In a friendly manner I said, ‘Dear brother, it doesn’t pay to work on Shabbos.’

“I will never forget what he answered me. He said, ‘I have already decided to stop working on Shabbos and today is the last time that I have to finish my shift. Do you know why I decided to stop working on Shabbos? Because I saw clearly that every time I work on Shabbos, I lose the money I earn that day. I expect it by now.’

“As we spoke he suddenly pointed at a car that had just filled up and left without paying. ‘You see? I just lost everything I will earn by working tonight. I don’t even get excited about it anymore. It is clear to me that it’s because of chilul Shabbos but this is really the last time.’”

SHABBOS OBSERVANCE ON A NONRELIGIOUS KIBBUTZ

Another mekurav of the Chabad house in Gadera told R’ Karniel many years ago about the chairman of a very large business who called all the employees to a sudden meeting. He informed them that from then on, the business would be closed on Shabbos.

Some of them wondered whether he had become religious or was trying to get them to keep Shabbos. His answer was that it was due to financial considerations. “I noticed



Rabbi Tzvi Slonim with R' Avrohom Fried near the Niflaos HaTeva HaYehudi building in Mitzpeh Rimon

that on every one of the last 16 Saturdays something went wrong at the company or with one of its vehicles. The damages sustained canceled out the earnings of that day.”

The chairman showed them a graph that charted the expenses and income for the previous 16 weeks and the employees saw how there were profits for six days and only losses on Saturdays. “Now do you understand why it pays to close on Shabbos?”

WONDERS OF NATURE IN MITZPEH RIMON

Rabbi Tzvi Slonim, shliach in Mitzpeh Rimon, was extremely busy recently since he was able, in a supernatural manner, to buy a three story building in the town center and he even obtained nice donations to renovate it inside and out. The goal is that the building will contain all of the Chabad house programming. The inside renovations are already done and seminars and lectures, t’fillos, clubs and shiurim are taking place there. The outside of the building is already looking like Beis

Moshiach – 770. The first floor is done and now the two upper floors are awaiting their façade of red bricks.

At first there was no chance for the Chabad house to buy this building. The initial bid R’ Slonim submitted was turned down. It was only thanks to some supernatural events that he received the approval of the Amidar Company to buy the building.

He saw this as a sign from heaven and a siman bracha and he asked the Rebbe, in the Igros Kodesh, what to call the building. The answer (in a response to shluchim in Morocco) was not to call the building (and the programming) by the name Chabad, but people should nonetheless know that Chabad is behind it.

After all the miracles and G-d’s kindness which he saw in the buying and renovating of the building, he decided to call it, “Niflaos HaTeva HaYehudi,” a name which is reminiscent of the charming desert scenery in the area while also referring to the miracles that enabled him to buy the building.

As we spoke he suddenly pointed at a car that had just filled up and left without paying. 'You see? I just lost everything I will earn by working tonight. I don't even get excited about it anymore. It is clear to me that it's because of chilul Shabbos...

THE REBBE REVEALED: YOU HAVE AN OLDER BROTHER

Rabbi Yigal Tzipori, shliach in Kiryat Shemone, relates:

Three years ago, two sisters, ages 20 and 23, called me from Kiryat Ata. They introduced themselves as single religious girls, and they asked me whether I could be mekarev someone from Kiryat Shemone by the name of Moshe Davidowitz (a pseudonym). They begged me to invite him to shiurim, t'fillos etc.

I knew Moshe. He had visited the Chabad house a few times and put on t'fillin, but I was curious why the sisters were asking me to do this. The story they told me is beyond belief. This is what they said:

"Since we have been waiting for

a long time to get married, someone suggested that we ask the Lubavitcher Rebbe for a bracha through the Igros Kodesh. We went to the Chabad house in Kiryat Ata and were told how to go about it. The answer we opened to was very surprising. It said, 'In connection with the request for a bracha for a shidduch, you should try to mekarev your older brother ... and may this be a help to you as well as to him, materially and spiritually.'

"We were in shock. On the one hand it was a direct answer about a shidduch but on the other hand, we don't have an older brother!"

They lived in Kiryat Ata with their mother. Their father, who lived in Tel Aviv, had cut off ties with them many years before, and neither the sisters nor their mother knew

about an older brother. The sisters found out their father's phone number in Tel Aviv and called him after years of estrangement and they told him they were going to visit him.

After some polite questions they asked him directly whether they had an older brother. "What? Are you crazy?" was his response. They tried to the best of their ability to get more information but he was insistent that there was no older brother. One sister gave up and went home while the other sister begged her father to tell her more. She believed absolutely in the Rebbe's answer and she wanted to ascertain the facts.

After much importuning, at one in the morning he finally "broke" and confided that before he married their mother he had been married to another woman. They had a son by the name of Moshe Davidowitz and he lived in Kiryat Shemone.

This is why the girls were asking whether I could be mekarev him.

Thanks to R' Tzipori's efforts, Moshe got more and more involved in a life of Torah and mitzvos. A year went by and Moshe and his two sisters married and they established fine Jewish homes.

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THE DISENGAGEMENT IS EXPLODING

By Sholom Ber Crombie

*Critics of the expulsion warned us, and it all came to pass – and more. * The public “understood” but not well enough to withstand the hype that promotes yet more withdrawals. * “We trust Netanyahu to do things right,” many say, but Chabad knows to stand firm with the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch.*

Five years later: thousands of Kassam rockets and nonstop suffering, plus one soldier kidnapped. That's what we got from Ariel Sharon's "Disengagement." In just five years, all the gloom-and-doom prognostications have come to pass. One by one the disengagement illusions exploded in our faces and brought upon us all the tragedies written on the placards the demonstrators carried on the eve of the expulsion, plus more that were not written.

Imagine that in a television studio, before the expulsion, one of the people who opposed it would have been interviewed and he would warn about a soldier being kidnapped. What would have happened? The broadcasters would paint him as delusionary and would

surely explain that the kidnapping of one soldier is not what stops an entire nation. Or if someone back then would have said that within five years, Israel would fight another two wars, risk losing Jerusalem, and freeze all construction in Yehuda and Shomron, his predictions would have been met with an endless barrage of cynical criticism.

The euphoria which blinded those who championed the expulsion idea caused them to cast aside all logic. They heard the general warnings of “creating a climate that supports terror,” and decided it doesn't frighten them. Gloomy forecasts of scenarios like the kidnapping of a soldier or Hamas taking control of Gaza were jeered at.

Today an entire country is paying

the price. It's not only the security situation in those areas around Gaza and the northern Shomron that have been adversely affected by the expulsion, but the entire country that is affected. When Nasralla threatens Tel Aviv with long-range missiles and Ahmadinejad shares his fantasies of the future, they derive their force and strength from the shameful scene of thousands of terrorists who entered Gush Katif after we fled and destroyed and burned the shuls and set up a terror base. They demonstrated that the State of Israel capitulated to terror and it is with this message that all our enemies who used to be afraid of the strongest army in the world, celebrate.

THE WORLD GOT THE MESSAGE

When the Rebbe spoke about security in Eretz Yisroel and about shleimus ha'Aretz, he connected the two on the practical level as well as on the ideological level. The Rebbe taught us that when the Jewish nation stands up for itself with Jewish pride, the world respects this and this is Israel's true deterrent power. As for the Arabs, the Rebbe taught us, we cannot give an inch. If we concede something we are saying that we aren't sure it really all belongs to us.

The real damage of the expulsion

is the undermining of the legitimacy of our claim to Eretz Yisroel as the Rebbe screamed about in the past. The chilul Hashem that was caused by the Arabs celebrating over the expulsion made it difficult for Israel to conduct itself properly over the subsequent five years. Israel-American relations are at an all-time low. Even with Bush senior who treated Israel shabbily we continued building in the settlements and nobody said anything about “building only in those places from which Israel won’t withdraw.” The Americans always wanted to see us within the Green Line but they naively thought that Israel would be unwilling to retreat to the ‘67 borders and as such they had to live in peace with our settling the land.

Since the expulsion everything changed. The world sees that Israel doesn’t really believe that its land belongs to them and even the security claims ring hollow after the State abandoned the entire security infrastructure it had in Gaza. The new situation forces Israel to battle with public opinion about its right to stop ships with terrorists on board that intend on entering its territorial waters. The world is not quite convinced of Israel’s rights.

Unlike Yamit, Gush Katif was considered by the world as an established long-term settlement that was an immutable fact of life. They went only so far as to talk about uprooting Netzarim and maybe Kfar Darom, areas that were isolated within the hostile Arab surroundings. When they destroyed the Gush, the conceptual wall that protected all the settlements beyond the Green Line was also destroyed. The Americans now say: It’s not that you cannot withdraw and it’s not that you believe that you will remain there at any price, so what you did in Gush Katif and northern Shomron you need to do in Yehuda-Shomron too. Unfortunately, this is not unjust considering those who said they had

no problem expelling Jews and giving away our land to terrorists.

The Rebbe, with his holy vision, saw what even many great politicians on the Right did not see. They thought that if you give terrorists a small area they would shut up. The Rebbe said “not an inch” for a reason.

IT’S THE SAME OLD LIE

The nation sobered up. Everybody understands that the rosy promises concerning the disengagement went up in smoke. Polls show that most people strongly oppose another withdrawal, and the candidate for Prime Minister who spoke about stopping the withdrawals was elected by a majority. Strangely enough, in this same country, this same Prime Minister comes up with a new expulsion plan every day. Journalists continue drumming into their audiences the need to retreat to the ‘67 borders (with minor changes) and the facts on the ground indicate that we are headed for another withdrawal.

Where else could something like this happen? In America, when the Democrats won it was clear that the Health Plan was going to go through. In Israel, a candidate was elected who said no to more withdrawals and he immediately began planning a withdrawal.

So maybe the nation didn’t really sober up. There were missiles as far as Chaifa (in the north) and Ashdod (in the south) but they didn’t really accept that all of Eretz Yisroel belongs to us and that we need to say so proudly to the world. They realized that withdrawing was a mistake and that their home in the Galil is not safe because the expulsion was a capitulation. Withdrawing from Gush Katif was done without a national consensus and in such a shameful way. So was our fleeing from Lebanon. Barak

fled because he was a coward.

B-u-u-u-t ... and here comes the big “but” with which Netanyahu and all his advisors and the journalists lie to us: But this time we have a strong leader who proclaims that we cannot give in to terror; the brother of Yoni Netanyahu Hy”d. Surely he won’t undermine the Jewish settlement in Yehuda-Shomron. He only ordered a freeze and is preparing plans to preserve the “settlement bloc” (and it makes no difference that this is precisely what Sharon said). You can rely on Netanyahu. With your eyes closed.

And the lie is the same lie. As long as they are willing to concede, even one small piece, the situation continues to deteriorate and the world continues to push us into a corner. As long as the captains of the Israeli ship forget Siman 329 of Shulchan Aruch and do not understand that when gentiles besiege Jewish towns you go out against them with weapons and not with flowers and love, you cannot expect any real change. They continue toying with the public with their word games and their public relations team is already thinking about how to market the next expulsion.

IN OBAMA’S WORDS

As President Barack Obama put it, “I think that not only is Prime Minister Netanyahu a smart and savvy politician, but the fact that he is not perceived as a dove in some ways can be helpful in the sense that any successful peace will have to include the hawks and the doves, on both sides.” This was said in an interview with Israeli television. After it was aired, the anchor in the studio clapped his hands and said, “Obama is repeating the slogan – Only Likud Can Do It.”

Netanyahu doesn’t believe in “not an inch.” In votes in the Knesset and in the cabinet over the



Disengagement soldiers (photographed by Yisroel Bardugo)

expulsion from Gush Katif, he voted in favor. In the four years since then - as he sat and shouted about how the disengagement was dangerous – there was only election propaganda and lies. Over the backs of 122 dead soldiers in Lebanon and 13 killed in Cast Lead, Netanyahu built his candidacy and was elected as prime minister in order to perpetuate the same dangerous policies with maybe a few slight changes.

The conclusion that ought to

reverberate five years after the expulsion crime is that we cannot compromise on anything and our only guarantee for our existence here is the promise from G-d that all of Israel, every centimeter, belongs to us.

Until that one and only leader comes and redeems us from our troubles, we Chabad chassidim have to show others the way. We've got to get people to see the lessons from the Gush Katif disaster so they

understand that the problem was not that we enabled Hamas to take control in Gaza or that we left without the proper arrangements, because the situation would not be any better with any other terrorists. The problem is that we spoke about giving away parts of a "land with the eyes of Hashem your G-d upon it" to another nation and we have undermined our right to be here and protect ourselves according to Torah.

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SHLICHUS IN SWANKY RAMAT AVIV

By Sholom Ber Crombie

*The exclusive Ramat Aviv Gimmel neighborhood is one of the legends of Israeli society, a symbol of glittering hedonism. But there is another, deeper dimension to it. With thousands of people in the Ohel HaT'filla on the Yomim Nora'im and thousands more at the Hakafos Shniyos, Rabbi Shneur Chaviv, director of the Chabad house in Ramat Aviv Gimmel is shattering preconceptions. * Part 1 of 2*

It was 9:00 on a Friday morning and I was standing at a bus station in Tel Aviv waiting for a bus that would take me to Ramat Aviv Gimmel, where I could survey the work of Chabad there. I called Rabbi Shneur Zalman Chaviv, director of the Chabad house, and reported that I was on my way. "Get off at Mercatz Schuster," he told me. "I'll be waiting for you there."

Hmmm ... a Chabad house in

Mercatz Schuster! But R' Chaviv said it nonchalantly as though it isn't one of the most exclusive malls around.

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed an older man looking at me. He got up and motioned to me to come over. I was uncomfortable with his standing up just to talk to me but he seemed emotionally overcome and he stammered, "I am very moved ... Over 75 years ago I learned in yeshiva and my



rebbe had a reddish beard like you. When I saw you I suddenly remembered him. You brought me back to my days in yeshiva."

For a number of years, he confided, he had been trying to remember the name of the third tractate of the "bavos." He knew there was Bava Kama and Bava Metzia but what was the third? When I told him it's Bava Basra he sighed in relief. "Oy, so many years passed since then. When we came to Israel we forgot everything. I am over 90 now and I've had nobody to ask this question."

When I told him that I was on my way to Mercatz Schuster in Ramat Aviv Gimmel he told me he was getting off there, too. "Come with me. I'm still excited about meeting you."

R' Chaviv took me around the mall. The cafes were packed; there are boutiques and expensive stores bustling with people. In one of the cafes I saw the former Chief of Staff Dan Chalutz. R' Chaviv commented, "If you get excited over every famous person sitting here, you will be excited over and over all day." The sight of two



R' Shneur Chaviv with Scouts



R' Chaviv at a Chassidishe farbrengen in the home of a friend

religious Jews making their way through the crowds seemed bizarre to me at first, but after ten minutes at the mall with R' Chaviv I felt at home.

At the entrance to the mall an older man called out to us. He was wearing shorts and a T-shirt. "Kudos to you rabbi! You are doing your holy work and we are proud of you." As for the opposition to Chabad that was covered in the media he says, "Oy vavoy if you become afraid of them. You should know that they are a minority and they do not represent anyone. We people of the neighborhood love you and we all want you to stay."

A young woman who overheard our conversation chimed in, "It's great seeing you here. A friend told me that she's planning to attend an event of yours for women and I may join her. You've got to stay here. We are happy to see you developing nicely and may your work be successful. If you teach our kids some Judaism, what will happen?" She ended on this rhetorical note.

The older man said that on TV

that morning he had seen an interview with the rabbi of the Chabad community in Ramat Aviv, Rabbi Yossi Ginsburgh. He was invited to present his side following pressure by a group of residents who were frightened by the impressive growth of Chabad there. R' Ginsburgh soothingly said that Chabad had no intentions of taking over the neighborhood and noted that this goes counter to Chabad's way of doing things. "On the contrary, Chabad doesn't bring in a group of people to take control of the neighborhood. One person – a shliach – comes, and he works with the people in the neighborhood and shares what he has with them, without trying to chase anyone away, G-d forbid."

I walked around Mercas Schuster with that "one person" as he told me a bit about the neighborhood. "Ramat Aviv Gimmel is where Chabad's work in Ramat Aviv began. The truth is, we are reaping what others sowed. Rabbi Dovid Oshaki, director of the Chabad house in Eiver HaYarkon has been working here devotedly for over twenty years

and when R' Ginsburgh came, the revolution really took off."

R' Ginsburgh came to Ramat Aviv 15 years ago. He is presently the rav of the Chabad community and runs the mosdos yeshivas Chabad in Ramat Aviv. At that time, the Ginsburghs' move to the neighborhood was seen as risky and not likely to last long. The neighbors weren't exactly welcoming to the newcomers but R' Ginsburgh greeted everybody with a smile.

"R' Yossi's house was actually the first Chabad house in Gimmel. On Friday nights, R' Yossi would go to the Merkaz and return home with a bunch of young people who came to make Kiddush. R' Yossi's 'kiddushim' quickly turned into p'nimius'dike farbrengens. Many of those young boys and girls who visited the Ginsburgh home are now Chassidishe shluchim and shluchos."

R' Chaviv pointed out the huge Menorah that has been standing since Chanuka in the center of the bustling plaza. A couple passes by and I couldn't help but notice their scornful look. I asked R' Chaviv

for his reaction to what is called “the opposition of the residents” but he doesn’t want to address it. “Look, we are busy 24 hours a day and there is work for another ten couples just to respond to those that turn to us, so to think of the situation as though we are living in ‘hostile territory,’ is simply a falsification of the reality.”

R’ Chaviv invited me to the t’fillin stand which has been run by Shimi Mor for over ten years. In recent years he has been joined by Yair Rosenthal, today of Kfar Chabad and recently one of the bachurim-shluchim in the yeshiva in Ramat Aviv. The stand is located in a shady corner and has a white cloth around it that gives it a Shabbosdik look. On the table is a pyramid of colorful candle lighting kits, brochures, booklets and Moshiach flags for children in addition to t’fillin, of course.

“The stand has become a fixture here,” says R’ Chaviv. “There are the regulars who come to put on t’fillin and just to talk or ask for advice. Children come over on their own and ask for a Moshiach pin. By the way, it has become a fashion trend for the Boy Scouts of Gimmel to wear it on their gray uniforms.”

We continued on to the Chabad house. It looks as though every fourth person knows R’ Chaviv. He asks how they are and talks a bit, and it’s all with a smile and warmth. Some of them ask about the times for t’fillos at the Chabad house, about shiurim or about having their t’fillin or mezuzos checked. A woman with large sunglasses and holding a small dog comes over and asks, “Excuse me, I wanted to know how your shlichus began. I happened to be talking with friends about Chabad and shlichus and I’d like to know some details.”

R’ Chaviv responds patiently to all, incorporating explanations about Judaism and Chabad’s outlook, and then he invites them to take part in the programming. Even those who look at him askance are greeted with a hearty hello and it seems to me that his warm approach and personality are effective.

We get into the elevator and go down to the bottom floor where the Chabad house is. It’s a spacious hall, nicely decorated and furnished in a modern style, with parquet floors, upholstered chairs, overflowing bookshelves and a large plasma screen which shows videos of the Rebbe.

At the entrance to the Chabad house, between the walls and the glass doors, is a large picture of the Rebbe printed on canvas facing a huge window display of a Judaica store. Inside are neatly arranged shelves with Jewish books, washing cups and other Jewish items. Eren Dror Levanon runs the store, which is also the reception area of the Chabad house. You can leave t’fillin and mezuzos there to be checked and find out about any of the Chabad house’s services, such as registering for bar mitzva lessons, koshering a kitchen, yahrtzait, aliyos, and times for davening and shiurim. Eren is also responsible for mitvza mezuzah and he makes house calls to check t’fillin and mezuzos.

“One day as I was leaving the Chabad house,” said Eren, “a woman came downstairs and yelled, ‘Why are you here?’ I thought she was criticizing us but she didn’t wait for an answer and continued yelling, ‘Why aren’t you upstairs? A Chabad house should be upstairs in the center of the Mercaz!’”

The Chabad house made a fantastic impression on me. A lot

of work has gone into ensuring that it fits the style of the neighborhood. The place has a pleasant atmosphere which makes it hard to leave.

“What do you want to drink?” R’ Chaviv asked me.

“Nescafe,” I said, and he appeared with two cups of “nes” and we sat down to schmooze.

R’ Shneur, as he is called here, is a quiet person who is also dynamic and perseverant. He came to Ramat Aviv after learning in 770, shlichus in a Chabad house for French speaking people in Yerushalayim, and shlichus in Poona with R’ Shimi Goldstein.

R’ Shneur returned from India to Eretz Yisroel and planned to travel to 770 and from there to shlichus in Tokyo. His ticket was already waiting for him in 770 and even the boxes of meat that he was supposed to take along were ready. But it seemed nothing was going according to plan.

One night, at the wedding of a mutual friend in the Jordan Valley he met an old friend, Yoel Gansbourg, who suggested that he spend the days before his upcoming trip in Ramat Aviv.

“We arranged that I would come for Shabbos. I left my house on Friday but missed the last bus to Tel Aviv. I returned home and wondered about the mishaps that just didn’t stop plaguing me. I opened an Igros Kodesh and was taken aback. In a letter to Rabbi Yudasim of Tel Aviv, in volume 14 page 166, the Rebbe writes:

I received your letter from the first day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev in which you write about visiting the neighborhood Maoz Aviv and not finding many of the people at home. Since most of them returned already, it would be best to visit there again ... May Hashem guide your mouth so your words are accepted and have a practical effect as relates to

At the entrance to the mall an older man called out to us. He was wearing shorts and a T-shirt. “Kudos to you rabbi! You are doing your holy work and we are proud of you.”

deeds in actuality and in daily life
...

“I understood this to mean that the Rebbe was directing me elsewhere.”

The following Sunday R’ Chaviv was on his way to Ramat Aviv. After talking with R’ Ginsburgh he joined the group of shluchim who were already working in the yeshiva. A little over a year later, at the end of 5761, he married his wife Nechama Dina. It was clear to him that his shlichus was in Ramat Aviv.

“I grew up on shlichus. My father, R’ Yitzchok Chaviv, runs a Chabad house for French speaking people in Yerushalayim. Our house lived and breathed shlichus. From the youngest age it was obvious to me that shlichus is where I was headed and I never took an interest in anything else.”

At this point the yeshiva was already operating in its new quarters in the Neve Avivim neighborhood. In Ramat Aviv Gimmel a small minyan remained that took place in a classroom and was run by Alon Dvir, a Chassidishe businessman who lives there.

Alon felt all along that there was great potential for outreach in Ramat Aviv Gimmel, to supplement the work being done in the yeshiva in nearby neighborhoods – Neve Avivim and Ramat Aviv HaYeroka. Upon consulting with R’ Ginsburgh he asked R’ Shneur to get involved and promised his support.

It was the end of the summer and R’ Shneur decided that his first step would be to put up a tent for the t’fillos of the Yomim Nora’im. He discussed it with Alon and others who took part in programs in the neighborhood and they decided to do it. Yom Kippur came out on a Sunday night, and so on Erev Shabbos a huge tent was put up in a parking lot in the center of the neighborhood. Hundreds of chairs were arranged and they brought an Aron Kodesh and bima.

Within a few hours municipal workers showed up with a demolition order that had been issued by the presiding judge.

“It was Friday afternoon and we immediately enlisted the services of a lawyer, Eren Nardi, a friend of Chabad. We ran to the courthouse and managed to get a stay order for 48 hours. The 48 hours ended two hours before Yom Kippur began, but I don’t have to tell you that the tent remained standing until after Yom Kippur.

“Hundreds of people came for t’fillos. The tent was dismantled the very next day and since then, for five years now, the tent has become the central place for t’fillos on the Yomim Nora’im. The numbers grow from year to year. At the last N’ila, over 1600 people from the neighborhood participated! Now we have permission from the municipality, which even supplies us with electricity for the tent.”

The “prayer tent” served as the opening salvo for the joint work of

R’ Shneur and Alon Dvir. Later on, Efraim Marzel joined them and together with Rabbi Shneur Schneersohn, who is the mashpia at the shul, the nucleus for what later came to be the “Chabad house of Ramat Aviv Gimmel” was established.

Putting up the tent was the breakthrough. It let everybody know that there was a shul, albeit temporary and makeshift, in the neighborhood, and got many people to rally around their family traditions. If it seemed before that something like this wasn’t possible in Ramat Aviv Gimmel, now everybody saw that even here, many people are interested in opening their hearts to Judaism and connecting with tradition. What at first seemed like a grandiose idea was surprisingly accepted with open arms and became the most natural thing in the world. For many, this was their first connection and they began participating regularly in the t’fillos that took place at the shul in the classroom.

The first “prayer tent” that was put up in Ramat Aviv Gimmel became something for other shluchim to copy. Now, many shluchim put up tents for the Yomim Nora’im. R’ Shneur explains that people relate more readily to a tent like this where they are invited for the t’fillos of the Yomim Nora’im. They don’t feel threatened by it. The t’fillos take place in an uplifting and joyous atmosphere with excellent chazanim. The crowd also listens to brief explanations in those parts of the davening where this is possible and this makes people feel comfortable when many of them are not familiar with the davening. R’ Shneur is careful to point out that the entire davening is conducted with the nusach and niggun of Chabad.

[To be continued, G-d willing]

FAINTING IN LINE FOR DOLLARS

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

“The Rebbe leaned towards him and whispered something. The man fainted and they dragged him outside and revived him. When he came to, I asked him what the Rebbe had, but he refused to reveal anything...”

The following story took place more than twenty years ago in Toronto. The Shavits were a young couple who, like many Israeli couples, left Eretz Yisroel after their wedding to seek their future in a foreign land.

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We arrived in Toronto, Canada after our wedding, in search of a change of environment, as we tried to build a better and more successful future. At the time, we kept our distance from anything that even smelled of Jewish tradition. We didn't keep Shabbos or any of the Jewish holidays, conducting our lives with absolute freedom in all respects. We settled in a neighborhood where we were assured that the chances of meeting Torah observant Jews were very slim. It wasn't long before I was employed installing burglar alarms in homes and automobiles, and we

easily made friends with the Gentiles around us. These were wonderful times for us. We had everything that a young couple could ask for, and were making a very good living.

Then one day, while out on a work assignment, my usually good sense of direction failed me and I found myself completely lost. After several long minutes, I realized that I was simply going around in circles on the city streets, and I drove into a gas station, pulled out a map, and tried to figure out where I was and how to find my way out of this maze. After about a minute, I heard someone tapping on the car window. I looked to see who it was, and I saw standing before me a young Jew dressed in a black suit and wearing a black hat. He had a totally ultra-Orthodox appearance, the last thing I wanted to come across when I was preoccupied and

under pressure to get as quickly as possible to my waiting client.

This young man had a determined look to him, with none of the hesitation characteristic of someone tapping on a car window in need of assistance. I opened the window and he asked, “Have you already made a blessing on the lulav today?” His question had me totally confused.

“Today is Sukkot?” I asked him in complete astonishment. “And how did you know I was Jewish, anyway?”

He looked quite relaxed, not understanding why I was asking so many questions. Apparently, it's hard for a Jew to conceal his identity. I got out of the car, and he explained to me how to shake the Four Species. This was the first time in my life I had done so. He showed himself to be a very nice and pleasant young man, and to my surprise, I found that I couldn't part from him so quickly.

When I finished making the bracha on the lulav, he inquired as to where I lived, and when I told him, he asked for my exact address, and with that we parted from one another. I periodically thought about this meeting with the Jewish young man over the next few days, but over time I simply forgot about it.

However, if I thought that was the end of it, I was in for quite a surprise. A few months later, the telephone rang in my house, and on the line were two young Jewish men who said they were in the area engaged in activities on behalf of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and they wanted to come over and talk with us.

"What will we talk about?" I asked.

"Whatever you like," they replied.

I couldn't refuse such a simple request, and we set a day and time for their visit.

My wife and I sat with them until one in the morning, bombarding them with questions on faith, the Jewish holidays, the army, and anything else that a non-observant Jew would be inclined to discuss when he has his first serious encounter with a faithful and pious Jew. Our inquiries had no adverse effect upon them, and it appeared that they had gone through far more complex experiences than this. They replied thoughtfully and with

great clarity to all our questions, and we walked away from the meeting simply astounded. It really wasn't so bad to be together with such people. They were a far cry from what I had thought of Jews in black garb. Before they left, they gave us a gift of books on Judaism, together with the address of the new Chabad House for Israelis that had just opened in the area where we lived.

At this stage, Judaism began to arouse my curiosity, but I knew little about it except for the basic fact that I was a Jew. I knew nothing of the whys and wherefores of my Jewish identity. I'll never forget the first time I arrived at the Chabad House run by the shliach, Rabbi Yisroel Landa. As I prepared to enter the building, I immediately noticed a group of ultra-Orthodox young men, and I was startled... I quickly turned around and disappeared as if the ground had swallowed me up.

"A few days later, I returned to the Chabad House, and I slowly began to like it. I felt myself fighting

an internal war not to get carried away, but in the merit of the resolve of these chassidim, I started participating regularly in the Torah classes taught at the Chabad House. What really intensified the level of our closeness to the path of our forefathers was when Rabbi Landa moved, of all places, into the very building where we lived. This naturally made our connection even stronger.

We had heard much about the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his hidden strengths, his wise advice, and his tremendous genius in Torah. Therefore, we were quite happy when Rabbi Landa told us one day that he was organizing a trip to 770.

"This was in the middle of 5750. Many members of the community joined the group, and we were hosted by Crown Heights families with great warmth and hospitality. At the time, I told myself that whether I enjoyed the experience or not, at least I'll have a weekend in New York City...

"However, when I actually saw the Rebbe for the very first time, I was gripped by a feeling of awe and wonder. This was a total shock! The thousands of chassidim...the Rebbe's entrance...it was simply electrifying.

"It excited me with an intensity I had never experienced before – or since. The melodic tones coming from so many people and the looks the Rebbe gave to those in attendance hit me like a laser beam, so similar to the descriptions I had depicted in my mind of a man of G-d. From the moment that I saw the Rebbe, my process of kiruv took on a far deeper, inner, more serious dimension. I wasn't just groping in the dark any longer; I had the understanding and knowledge I needed in order to bring about a one hundred and eighty degree change in my life.

"When we passed by for Sunday



dollars distribution, I came to the realization that I had discovered something amazing, G-dly, and spiritual that I had never been educated in before. I was engulfed by a feeling of inner bliss.

“During that trip, something very interesting occurred. Seated next to me on the bus down to New York was a middle-aged Jew named Meir Berliner. Lonely and forlorn, he had come from Eretz Yisroel to live in Toronto with his only son. He told me that before the outbreak of the Second World War, he lived in Poland, where they had a rebbe to whom they would travel via horse and buggy before every Jewish holiday. And what happened? They were all murdered by the Nazis in the ovens and gas chambers. As he put it, the Torah of these tzaddikim did them no good, and despite their stringent observance of their Jewish traditions, they were slaughtered to the very last. ‘This all happened in real life,’ he repeated again and again like a mantra. I listened, and I let him pour out his heart. I really didn’t know what to say to him. Even on Shabbos, he reacted with scorn to everyone’s exhilaration, stating that he remained unconvinced.

“In line for dollars on Sunday, he was standing in front of me. The line moved slowly, and when we reached the small passageway where the Rebbe was standing – anyone who has been there knows what I’m talking about – we were just six feet away from the Rebbe. We would be standing in front of him at any moment, and the excitement continued to grow. I felt a tremendous spiritual elation. My legs were starting to shake. Looking at the Rebbe was enough to fill a person with tremendous fear, awe, and respect.

“This Jew came before the Rebbe, received the customary dollar and the traditional blessing: ‘Bracha v’hatzlacha.’ I watched in

amazement as the Rebbe then leaned towards him and whispered something to him. When the Rebbe finished speaking, the man fainted and they had to drag him outside and revive him.

Afterwards, when he came back to life and managed to calm down a bit, I asked him what the Rebbe had said to him, but he refused to reveal anything. I tried everything I could to get him to open up, as did other members of the tour group, but he stubbornly maintained his silence. For the duration of the trip back to Toronto, he remained totally withdrawn and wouldn’t say a word. Whatever it was that the Rebbe told him had obviously shaken him to the core. The only thing that he would agree to tell us was that the Rebbe is a ‘man of G-d.’

“This incident strengthened my appreciation of the greatness of the Rebbe. The story of Meir Berliner’s newfound faith spread like wildfire among Toronto’s Israeli community. No one knew what the Rebbe had said to him in secret, but what they did know was that it completely changed his opinion of Chabad. A year later, when I needed my own personal salvation, I didn’t think twice. It was clear to me where I had to turn in a moment of distress.

“This was after we had already been blessed with our first son. We wanted to have another child very much, but all our efforts were to no avail. Time after time, my wife entered a pregnancy that came to a premature end not long afterwards. We went to various doctors, but they couldn’t find any medical problem. Together with the shliach Rabbi Landa, we wrote a letter to the Rebbe’s secretariat. Not settling for just sending the letter, we made the long trip the following Sunday from Toronto to Crown Heights for the purpose of taking part in dollars distribution. I passed by first, and

the Rebbe gave me the standard blessing of ‘Bracha v’hatzlacha’. My wife then passed and said that she had already miscarried several times, and we are asking for a bracha that we should merit to have another child.

“The Rebbe gave her a dollar, and a second one for our eldest son, and then blessed her to have more children. When she had already gone through, the Rebbe called her back and gave her another dollar for her to give to me. When we finally got outside, the chassidim told me that if the Rebbe gave me another dollar, it has the power to bestow a special bracha.

“One month later, we were told that my wife was expecting a child, and eight months after that, following an easy and normal birth, we were blessed with the arrival of our daughter. We naturally wrote a letter to the Rebbe to inform him of the good news and thank him for his blessing.”

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Yuval says that the Rebbe’s eyes accompany him to this day in everything that he does in life. He always remembers the story of that middle-aged Jew, who has since passed away, no less than the Rebbe’s bracha that led to the birth of his daughter.

“Today, after four years studying in prep school, my daughter is fulfilling her national service obligations in Tel Aviv. As the years passed, we decided to return to Eretz Yisroel because we missed our family very much. Here too, we established a connection to Chabad, and we have continued our life in the Chabad community.

“Hundreds of thousands of Israeli émigrés owe their deepest thanks to the Rebbe for the marvelous system of shluchim that connects Jews living in foreign lands and illuminates the nekuda of their Jewish souls.”