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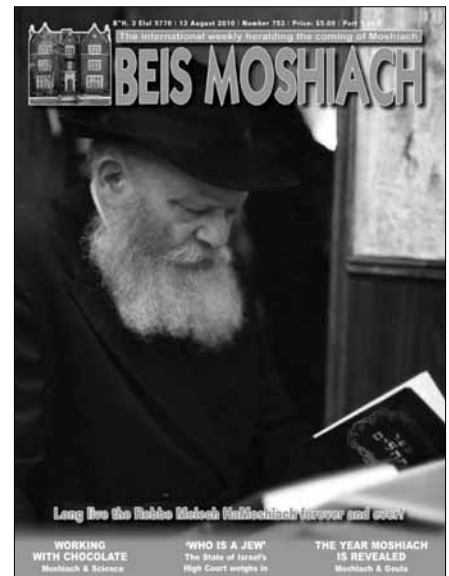
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V'DIBARTA BAM: SHOFTIM

Sichos In English

“Judges and officers you shall appoint for you in all your cities.” (16:18)

QUESTION: The word “*lecha*” — “for you” — is superfluous?

ANSWER: In a person’s face there are seven openings: two ears, two eyes, two nostrils and a mouth. The Torah is indicating that besides judges for all cities, you should also appoint judges “*lecha*” — “for yourself” — i.e. you should judge carefully and police whatever you see with your eyes, hear with your ears, smell with your nostrils, and speak with your mouth.

Since *Parshas Shoftim* is always read around the beginning of the month of *Elul*, when *t’shuva* is primary, the Torah calls to our attention with the word “*lecha*,” that every person should carefully judge and police his own body especially during this month, and rectify any wrongdoing committed through these senses.

“You shall not take a bribe, for the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise.” (16:19)

QUESTION: Why is the Hebrew word for bribery “*shochad*”?

ANSWER: According to the *Gemara* (*Kesubos* 105b), the etymology of the word “*shochad*” is “*chad*” — “one.” Rashi explains that when a judge accepts a bribe from a litigant he becomes “one” with him and therefore can no

longer judge objectively the argument of the other litigant.

Alternatively, according to the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 10a), when a judge rules a case honestly he becomes a partner with Hashem in the creation of heaven and earth. Since the judge who accepts bribery cannot offer a just decision, G-d now remains alone, without a partner.

“You shall not take a bribe... [for the bribe] perverts the words of the righteous.” (16:19)

QUESTION: If he accepted a bribe, why is he called “*tzaddik*” — “righteous”?

ANSWER: A *Din-Torah* once took place before Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta. While the *Din-Torah* was in progress, one of the parties felt that he was going to lose, so he asked permission to leave the room for a short while. In the hallway outside the *Beit Din* room, he noticed the Rabbi’s coat and placed a sum of money in the pocket.

The *Din-Torah* resumed, and the Rabbi, who up until now was beginning to formulate a certain opinion, suddenly began to change his line of thought. The Rabbi, puzzled as to why his way of thinking was suddenly changing, told the two parties that he would like to call a recess and have more

time to think over the matter.

In the interim he prayed to Hashem to be blessed with the proper wisdom to see the truth. A few days later, as he was putting on his coat, he put his hand in his pocket and suddenly felt a bundle of money. The Rabbi exclaimed, “Now I understand what happened to me. A bribe is so powerful that even though it was given to me without my knowledge it had an effect on my thinking.”

Thus the Torah is telling us that even though the judge may indeed be a *tzaddik* and would not accept a bribe, a bribe given to him, even without his knowledge, may pervert his judgment.

“You shall not plant for yourself an idolatrous tree.” (16:21)

QUESTION: From the juxtaposition of this prohibition and the law of appointing judges, the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 7b) derives that appointing an unsuitable judge is comparable to planting “an idolatrous tree.”

Why is an unsuitable judge compared to an idolatrous tree?

ANSWER: It is not difficult to recognize an idol when it is a carved or chiseled image, but an idolatrous tree looks the same as all other trees.

An improper judge is compared to an idolatrous tree because the outer appearance of every judge is alike: A beard and *peios*, and Rabbinic garb, but the corrupt ones are rotten inside.

An honest judge is one who has a mind of his own. He does not permit people to influence him, nor does he waiver one iota from Torah teaching. An improper judge is one who permits himself to be easily influenced by those around him. He is compared to a tree since he bends and sways to all sides in the wind of public opinion, trying to satisfy the

group with the most potential for advancing his interests.

“By the testimony of two witnesses or three witnesses shall the condemned person die; he shall not die by the testimony of a single witness.” (17:6)

QUESTION: The word “eid” — “witness” — seems extra. It could have just said “*lo yumas al pi echad*” — “he shall not die by the testimony of one”?

ANSWER: When the Jews would go to battle against their enemies, the special *Kohen* anointed for battle would address them saying, “*Shma Yisroel*— Hear, O Israel you are coming near to battle, let your heart not be faint...” He would begin his remarks with the words “*Shma Yisroel*” to tell the Jews that even if they only had the merit of the *mitzvah* of reciting *Shma*, they were worthy of Hashem’s help (see 20:3, Rashi).

In the verse, “*Shma Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad*” — “Hear, O Israel, G-d, our G-d is the One and Only” — as it is written in the Torah (5:4), the “*ayin*” in the first word “*shma*” and the “*daled*” in the last word “*echad*” are written in large letters. These two letters spell the word “*eid*” — “witness” — informing us that by reciting the *Shma* the Jew is offering testimony to Hashem’s Oneness.

Our *pasuk* is alluding to the *Kohen*’s proclamation that when a Jew goes to battle, which of course involves mortal danger, “*lo yumas*” — “he shall not die” — “*al pi eid echad*” — if his mouth has proclaimed the *Shma*, which testifies to Hashem’s Oneness.

“If a matter of judgment is hidden from you, between blood and blood, between verdict and verdict, between plague and plague, matters of dispute in your cities, you shall rise up and ascend to the place that G-d, your G-d,

shall choose.” (17:8)

QUESTION: Instead of “*bein dam l’dam, bein din l’din, u’bein nega la’nega*” — “between blood and blood, between verdict and verdict, between plague and plague” — it could have said “*b’damim, b’dinim, u’b’nega’im*” — “[matters of] blood, verdicts, and plagues”?

ANSWER: Even in countries where democracy supposedly rules, there is rampant anti-Semitism. Regardless of the Jewish contributions to the country’s welfare and society at large, when Jewish blood is spilled, it is not treated with the same seriousness as the blood of other nationalities. Unfortunately, throughout the years of our exile, much stiffer decrees and verdicts have been placed upon the Jews than upon any other people, and the “plagues” of persecution which the Jews have suffered have been especially harsh.

The Torah is telling us, “*ki yipalei*” — should you be perplexed and wonder why there is a difference — “*bein dam l’dam*” — “between blood and blood” — our blood and their blood — “*bein din l’din*” — “between verdict and verdict” — the verdicts placed on us and those placed on others — “*u’bein nega la’nega*” — “between plague and plague” — the “plagues” the Jews endure more than any other nation — the answer is, “*divrei rivos bi’sharecha*” — “there are disputes in your cities” — lack of unity and baseless hatred prevailing in the Jewish community is the cause.

“You shall not deviate from the word that they [the judges of the Jewish courts] will tell you, right or left.” (17:11)

QUESTION: Rashi quotes the *Sifri* that, “*Afilu omer lecha al yemin shehu smol v’al smol shehu yemin*” — “You must obey the decision of the courts even if they are telling you that right is left and left is right”

(see Ramban and *Torah T’mima*).

The simple meaning of the *pasuk* is that you should not deviate from anything they tell you. What does the *Sifri* want to add with the expression “right is left and left is right”?

ANSWER: In the *alef-beis* the letters *shin* and *sin* look identical except that a *shin* has a dot on the top right and a *sin* has a dot on the top left. In the *Gemara* there are times when a word in a *pasuk* is written with a *sin* and the sages interpret the *pasuk* as though it were a *shin*, and vice-versa.

For instance, the *Gemara* (*Brachos* 14a) says that a person who goes for seven days without dreaming is called “*ra*” — “wicked.” This is derived from the words of King Shlomo (Proverbs 19:23) “*Vesavei’a yalin bal yipakeid ra*” — “He will rest sated and not be visited with evil.” The sages take the word “*vesavei’a*” which is written with a *sin* and say, “Read not “*vesavei’a*” (with a *sin*) but “*v’sheva*” (with a *shin*) — meaning “seven” — and therefore derive that one who sleeps seven nights without being visited with a dream from Heaven is considered wicked. Similarly, the *Gemara* (*Mo’eid Katan* 5a) says of the *pasuk*, “*V’sam derech ar’enu b’yeisha Elokim*” — “Then preparing [lit. set] the way, I will show him the salvation of G-d” (Psalms 50:23). Read not ‘*v’sam*’ with a *sin*, but ‘*v’sham*’ with a *shin*: ‘He who appraises’ — i.e. the person who acts intelligently in all situations and can evaluate the benefits or drawbacks of a given action — ‘I will show him the salvation of G-d.’” (See also *Brachos* 15b.)

On the other hand, the *Gemara* (*Taanis* 7b) says that it is permitted to hate an impudent person since Scripture states “*Chachmas adam ta’ir panav v’az panav yeshuneh*” — “A man’s wisdom lights up his face, and the boldness of his face is transformed” (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

Read not “*yeshuneh*” — “transformed” (with a *shin*) — but *yesanei* — “hated” (with a *sin*). Thus, the *pasuk* is teaching us that “*v’az panav*” — the impudent person — “*yesanei*” — may be hated.

Also, regarding Yaakov’s words about Naftali “*Ha’nosein imrei shafer*” — “Who delivers beautiful sayings” (*B’Reishis* 49:21), the sages (*Sota* 13a) read the word “*shafer*” as though it were “*seifer*” — exchanging a *samach* for a *sin*, and explain it to mean that Naftali’s family delivered the documents to prove Yaakov’s burial rights in the *M’aras HaMachpeila*. (See also *Brachos* 57a.)

In light of the above it can be explained that the *Sifri* is teaching us that the words of the sages should be cherished and greatly respected even if they are telling you that “right is left and left is right” — i.e. they exchange a *shin* for a *sin* or a *sin* for a *shin*.

A story is told of a Rabbi who walked into the *Beit Midrash* one *Shabbat* afternoon and noticed some students who were engaged in *d’varim beteilim* — idle talk. The Rabbi went over to their table and said to them, “The word *Shabbat* is an acronym for *shina b’Shabbat taanug* — ‘Studying Torah on *Shabbat* is a delight.’ It is also an acronym for *sheinah b’Shabbat taanug* — ‘Sleeping on *Shabbat* is a delight.’ If you are too tired to study Torah, then partake of the other delight and you will awake refreshed and in a spirit to study Torah further.”

One of the students replied to the Rabbi, “The word *Shabbat* is also an acronym for *sicha b’Shabbat taanug* — ‘Talking (*shmuesen*) on *Shabbat* is a delight.’ “The Rabbi looked at him with disapproval and said, “King Shlomo says, ‘A wise man’s heart is to his right, while a fool’s is to his left’ (*Ecclesiastes*

10:2). Since this cannot be taken so literally, I always wondered what he meant by this. Your remark makes me realize that he meant the following: When the wise man sees the ‘*shin*’ in the word ‘*Shabbat*,’ he places the dot above it on the right side and thus reads the acronym to indicate either that learning *shina* on *Shabbat* or sleeping *sheinah* on *Shabbat* is a delight. However, the fool places the dot on the left side which makes the letter a *sin* and reads it as *sicha* — ‘idle talk’.” The students quickly understood the Rabbi’s message and started learning diligently.

“When you come to the land... and you will say, ‘I will set a king over myself, like all the nations that are around me.’ “ (17:14)

QUESTION: Since the Torah permits the Jews to have a king, why was the prophet Shmuel angry when the Jews asked him to appoint one?

ANSWER: The Torah is not opposed to the institution of monarchy in Israel, providing a Jewish king rules in accordance with the Torah and inspires the people to be totally dedicated to Hashem. However, Shmuel was upset with the people’s saying “Appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations” (*I Samuel* 8:5). He realized that they wanted to be ruled by secular and not Torah law. Their desire to give up the uniqueness of the Jewish people and emulate the nations of the world provoked Shmuel’s anger.

Alternatively, the Torah says “*som tasim alecha melech*” — “you shall surely set over yourselves a king” — i.e., you should place yourselves *under* the yoke of the king and be permeated with awe of him. Shmuel was displeased when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” He understood that they wanted a king who would be subject to *their* control and rule according to *their* directions.

Alternatively, when the Jews approached Shmuel to appoint a king, they preceded their request saying, “You are old” (*I Samuel* 8:5). Since Shmuel was only fifty-two at the time of his death, he definitely could not be considered an old man by any means. He was therefore upset that they did not ask *him* to become their king. Shmuel sensed in their words that they considered the ideas and ideals for which he stood “old and antiquated,” and this angered him very much.

To comfort him Hashem said, “It is not only you whom they have rejected, but it is Me whom they have rejected from reigning over them (*ibid.* 8:7).” With this Hashem meant, “You are indeed justified for being upset when they rejected you as their potential king, but do not feel bad because they did the same thing to Me. Shortly after My taking them out of Egypt they made a golden calf which they accepted as their god instead of Me.”

“From among your brothers shall you set a king upon yourselves.” (17:15)

QUESTION: A king must be from “among your brothers” and not from a family of converts. If so, how was it permissible for Rechavam to succeed Shlomo when his mother was Naama, an Ammonite convert?

ANSWER: The Rambam (*Melachim* 1:4) rules, “one whose ancestors were converts cannot be appointed king unless his mother was born Jewish.” The *Kesef Mishna* explains that the Rambam’s statement, “Unless his mother is Jewish,” implies that he is qualified ‘all the more so’ if his father was born Jewish, even if his mother is a convert. Thus, although Rechavam’s mother was a convert, he was eligible to be appointed king by virtue of the fact that his father,

Once the Rambam had achieved popularity as a great physician and had held the post of personal physician to the Sultan and many other high government officials, he was compelled by the government to remain.

King Shlomo, was born Jewish.

Tosafos in the *Gemara* (*Sota* 41b) asserts that if one parent is born Jewish, the person is considered “*mi’kerev achecha*” — “from among your brothers” — and may hold a position of authority. The office of king, however, is an exception, and to qualify, both parents must be born Jewish. If so, how was Rechavam permitted to succeed King Shlomo?

Since the instruction, “From among your brethren shall you set a king upon yourself” is preceded by the words, “*Som tasim alecha melech*” — “You shall surely set over yourselves a king,” the rule of being “from among your brethren” only applies to the *first* member of a family who is being set upon the people as a king but does not apply to his descendants who inherit the throne after him. Their kingdom is not considered an assumption of authority from anew. Proof to this is the fact that the son of the deceased king, needs no anointing (Rambam, *Melachim* 1:11). Therefore, although Rechavam’s mother was a convert, he inherited the throne from his father King Shlomo, whose both parents were born Jewish.

“So that he will not return the people to Egypt... for G-d had said to you ‘You shall no longer return on this road again.’” (17:16)

QUESTION: If it is forbidden to return to Egypt, why did the Rambam and other Torah scholars take up residence there?

ANSWER: Since the prohibition is worded, “You shall no longer return on this road again,” the Jews were only commanded not to return from *Eretz Yisroel* to Egypt with the *same itinerary* with which they traveled from Egypt to *Eretz Yisroel* (i.e. through the desert). The Rambam traveled to Egypt from Spain, and thus the prohibition did not apply to him.

Alternatively, it is prohibited to live in Egypt only when *Eretz Yisroel* belongs to the Jewish people. However, when Hashem decreed that we be exiled and dispersed to all corners of the world as a result of our sins, Egypt became just like any other part of the Diaspora. Now it is only forbidden for a Jew to intentionally move out of *Eretz Yisroel* to another country, otherwise one may live in any country including Egypt.

Alternatively, it is only forbidden to move back to Egypt to live there permanently. However, it is permissible to live in Egypt temporarily for personal reasons, such as business. If afterwards one decides to remain there permanently, while it may be questionable, one does not violate a negative commandment of the Torah.

The Rambam originally did not return to Egypt with the intention to take up permanent residency. However, once he had achieved popularity as a great physician and

had held the post of personal physician to the Sultan and many other high government officials, he was compelled by the government to remain.

“And he [the king] shall not have too many wives.” (17:17)

QUESTION: The *Midrash Rabba* (*Shmos* 6:1) says that when King Shlomo married more women than he was permitted, the letter “*yud*” of “*v’lo yarbeh*” — “he shall not have too many” — came before Hashem and complained: “Didn’t You say that no letter in the Torah can be nullified? King Shlomo is not following your edict!” Hashem responded: “Shlomo and thousands like him will be nullified, and not one iota of your letter will be touched.”

Why did only the letter “*yud*” complain and no other letters of the words “*lo yarbeh*” — “he shall not have too many”?

ANSWER: Ruth of Moab was the ancestor of King David and King Shlomo. Because of the *pasuk*: “*Lo yavo Amoni u’Moavi b’kehal Hashem*” — “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem” (23:4) — some may have considered Ruth unfit to marry into the Jewish people, thereby rendering King Shlomo unfit to reign.

However, since the word “*Moavi*” is written with a *yud*, our sages (*Yevamos* 69a) interpreted this commandment to include only the males of Moab and not the females. Were it not for the extra *yud* in the Torah, Ruth would not have been permitted to marry into the Jewish nation and King Shlomo would not have reigned. Thus the *yud* came before the Heavenly throne and said: “Thanks to me King Shlomo is what he is, and yet he does not follow the ‘letter’ of the law meticulously!”

THE YEAR THAT MELECH HA'MOSHIACH IS REVEALED

By Rabbi Avishai Efargun

(The author served in the IDF Intelligence Corps during the Gulf War and today is a rosh yeshiva in a yeshiva for baalei t'shuva in Kfar Saba.)

*11 Av twenty years ago marked Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, an event that made the world panic. Jews the world over were petrified by the threats of Iraq's dictator to attack Israel with missiles. At this point, the Rebbe revealed that this was a series of miracles that opened "The Year that Melech HaMoshiach is Revealed." The Rebbe also emphasized the continuation of the process, citing the Midrash that says "at the time that Melech HaMoshiach comes, he stands on the roof of the Beis HaMikdash and announces to the Jewish people: humble ones, the time for your redemption has arrived." The following is an overview of the dramatic events of Av-Elul 5750/1990. * Part 1 of 2*





Monday, Rosh Chodesh
Menachem Av, 5750:

“The Rebbe entered for Shacharis ... after the davening it became known that the Rebbe was going today to the Ohel – this is the first time the Rebbe is going to the Ohel on Rosh Chodesh! (Beis Chayeinu issue 49).

Not only that, but the Rebbe remained at the Ohel for over ten hours!

It's interesting, amazing actually, that in the final report to the American Congress about the Gulf War it states that on this very date (July 23, 1990) the Defense Intelligence Agency went into heightened readiness for war in the Gulf.

The week before, Saddam Hussein strongly criticized Kuwait and the United States and accused them of overproduction of oil which led to a drop in price and huge losses to Iraq. Other accusations had already been hurled at Kuwait regarding territorial and economic matters. Immediately after this speech, American surveillance satellites saw the movement of tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of tanks of elite units – the Republican Guards – heading towards Kuwait. The Kuwaiti army was on high alert and urgent diplomatic efforts were being made behind the scenes.

Leaders of Western nations and American diplomats were in and out of Saddam's palaces and tremendous pressure was exerted from various directions. It seemed as though the political efforts were effective and Saddam promised that he wasn't heading to war. The alert status was downgraded and the impression was that the crisis had passed. However, Iraqi army movements did not cease and the US detected an increase in combat planes in airfields next to Kuwait. What were Saddam's intentions? His complicated persona

In this uncertainty, when even the largest Intelligence agencies in the world didn't know what the future would bring and how to properly assess the situation, the Rebbe's unusual conduct testified to upcoming developments and their enormous importance to the world.

confounded more than one Intelligence agency in the world. They just could not figure out what his plans were.

In this uncertainty, when even the largest Intelligence agencies in the world didn't know what the future would bring and how to properly assess the situation, the Rebbe's unusual conduct (going to the Ohel on Rosh Chodesh Av and then again on Rosh Chodesh Elul) testified (obviously from our limited perspective) to upcoming developments and their enormous importance to the world.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 5741, in connection with the Iran-Iraq war (1981-1988), the Rebbe began talking about the world "shaking" (*"di velt shukelt zich"*). The Rebbe announced the mitvza of the general Sifrei Torah and in 5746 announced that *"hareini mekabel ..."* should be publicized and *"ach tzaddikim."* He said this was so that the world will stop shaking.

When Binyamin Netanyahu came to 770 as Israeli ambassador to the UN, he was informed of what the Rebbe said about the world shaking. The Rebbe said that even though the Iran-Iraq war seemed a local

matter, it affected the whole world since Iraq was unafraid of Iran despite Iran being bigger and stronger, and that gives reason to fear that **shortly Iraq will begin to fight the entire world.** Indeed we witnessed that Iraq was not afraid of starting up with fifty nations including the US and European powers, as the Rebbe said several years before the Gulf War!

From a military standpoint, the Iran-Iraq war was the turning point for Iraq and it led to the Gulf War. In 5741, Saddam ordered his army to attack Iran (although Iran is four times larger than Iraq). Iraq enjoyed initial success because of the temporary weakness of the Iranian army (due to the instability created by the Islamic revolution). However, as the war raged on, Iran drafted hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Iraq was repelled and part of Iraq was conquered.

In order to salvage the situation, Iraq began large scale conscription, a massive weapons purchasing campaign and a large weapons manufacturing program. This was done with the aid and support of the European nations (and the US) who saw Iraq as a bulwark against radical Islam. The Iraqi army reached the

enormous size of 1,250,000 combat soldiers and 650,000 militia soldiers.

In order to withstand the huge numbers of Iranian soldiers, Iraq began, with the help of European companies (especially German), to develop chemical weapons – poison gas. Large-scale attacks from Iran were easily stopped with the use of chemical weapons.

It was the fear of these terrible chemical weapons that led Iran to agree to end the war. Saddam considered this a major victory and it intensified his megalomaniac tendencies. His mighty military was armed with 6000 tanks, 750 fighter planes, 550 helicopters, 4500 heavy artillery guns and 200 anti-aircraft missile batteries and was considered the fourth largest army in the world (only smaller than China, Russia and the US). This, together with his large and developed military industry, his chemical weapons and missiles, gave him tremendous confidence.

The Iraqi army was considered superior since most of its weaponry was bought from European powers (which also trained the Iraqis in their usage) and it had battle experience from the war with Iran. American military experts considered the Iraqi engineering corps, for example, to be one of the best in the world (according to those reports submitted to Congress).

Intoxicated with pride over his recent victory and the might of his army, and motivated by his old dream to become the leader of the Arab world, Saddam sought a new enemy against which he could mobilize his people to divert their attention from Iraq's dismal economic situation as a result of the war.

It soon became apparent that he had "accounts to settle" with Israel, which had destroyed his

nuclear reactor at a time when he could not retaliate (because he was fighting in Iran). In a series of bombastic speeches that he delivered between 5749 and 5750, he announced that he would defend the Arabs against Israel, and if Israel took action against the Palestinians or one of the nations in the area, then he would use his army and weapons against her.

In the winter of 5750, Jordan and Iraq announced the formation of a Pan-Arab Air Force to consist of Iraqi and Jordanian warplanes **located in Jordan**. This step enabled Iraq to place his Mirage F-1 jets (made in France) in close proximity to the Israeli border, and they then began flying the length of the Israeli-Jordanian border. Armed with advanced spy equipment, they spied upon and photographed Israeli territory. This was an extremely serious security threat since the gathering of aerial intelligence generally indicates an imminent attack.

In Adar, 5750, the US announced that its spy satellites had located the construction of five bases for Scud missiles, directed at Israel. All the alarm bells began to ring.

A few weeks later, Prime Minister Yitzchok Shamir announced to the newspapers that Israel would not stand by quietly in the face of Iraq's nuclear ambitions. In response, in his speech of Nissan 5750, Saddam excoriated Israel and threatened to burn half of Israel. Israel understood this to mean that he was threatening them with chemical weapons and maybe even the biological weapons at his disposal. Two weeks later he stated that if Israel attacked his missiles then it would signal the beginning of a war that would never end until Israel is (Heaven



A chemical warhead for Iraqi Scud missiles that is empty and ready to be filled with a chemical compound

forbid)...

In Iyar, Saddam declared his intentions to forcibly liberate Jerusalem and all of Palestine in the near future. The situation was on the verge of exploding.

“THE GUARDIAN OF ISRAEL DOESN'T SLUMBER OR SLEEP”

At the end of May, at the Arab Summit in Baghdad, the Iraqi leader attacked and blamed Kuwait who, he claimed, hurt Iraq economically. Iraq demanded the annulment of its debts plus additional money. When his demands were not met, he brought up an old-new claim: Kuwait used to belong to Basra (today a city in Iraq) under the Ottoman Empire and so it belonged to Iraq. Then his army began moving towards the Kuwaiti border.

Diplomatic efforts failed and on the night of 11 Av, 5750 (August 2, 1990), Iraq invaded Kuwait. Saddam explained that this was the first step in his war against Israel since that war would be funded by Kuwaiti money.

Dr. Chaim Yaavetz, security

expert, said after the invasion, “Saddam's getting himself caught up in this mess is a big miracle for Israel but the one experiencing a miracle does not always recognize it as such.” A large coalition of fifty countries faced down the enemy, shattering his mighty army as well as his dreams. In 5763-4, Saddam had his final downfall and was hung – may all G-d's enemies meet similar ends.

But before the denouement, Saddam's mighty army was going to be directed at Israel. Still, “the Guardian of Israel does not slumber or sleep” and as the Rebbe repeated, “the heart of kings and ministers is in the hand of Hashem” – with Hashem's miracles and numerous kindnesses, Saddam turned, at the last minute, in the direction of Kuwait, and this is what led to his destruction.

Perhaps this is what is meant by the Yalkut Shimoni, “All that I did, I did only for your sake” – what does the Midrash mean when it says “for your sake?” If it means the miraculous salvation from the missiles, one could say, “Don't give me from your honey or your sting,” i.e. thanks but no

thanks. Why did Hashem bring about a Gulf War which led to the firing of dozens of missiles and the miracles that were needed to save us from them? But once you understand that they were originally intended to be directed against Israel, naturally the entire war was only for our sake.

As one air force commander said, it was better to suffer the Gulf War than to “absorb 30,000 wounded on the front and in the rear areas.” That would have been the price of war between Israel and Iraq if not for the Gulf War.

The Rebbe prepared us for the big miracles that would take place. On 2 Sivan, 5750, the Rebbe announced that the coming year would be one in which “I will show them wonders” and this should be put on the calendars. On Shabbos Parshas Balak, 14 Tammuz, the Rebbe said: “The great wonders to Him alone (because only Hashem recognizes them now, His wonders) ... and all this is more revealed this year ... the year of miracles which is a preparation for the year 5751, which [in its Hebrew letters hei, tav, shin, nun, alef] is an acronym for *hayo tehei shnas arenu niflaos* – great wonders even relative to the miracles of 5750.” In s’if 9 it refers to the brachos etc. that Jews receive, particularly in Eretz Yisroel, in order to fulfill Torah and mitzvos with peace of mind and body, with joy and serenity.

On Sunday 7 Av, at “dollars,” the journalist Shlomo Nakdimon, who was very famous in Israel and around the world for his book *Tammuz B’Lehavot* (Tammuz in Flames – about Israeli’s strike on Iraq’s nuclear reactor), spoke to the Rebbe. He said that he had seen the Rebbe together with Prime Minister Begin and that he had interviewed the Rebbe 26 years earlier. The

Rebbe replied, “If you waited 26 years to see me again that is a sign that you were very busy.”

Nakdimon gave the Rebbe his book about the IDF’s attack in Iraq and the Rebbe looked at the book and asked whether it was the last book he had written – just four days before the invasion of Kuwait!

THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD MAKING A COMMOTION

The attack began on Thursday morning with Kuwait being hit simultaneously from the air, sea and land by elite units of the Republican Guard. Amphibian commandos traveling in commando boats and by other means avoided the Kuwaiti Navy and Coast Guard, landed on the beaches of Kuwait and launched a surprise amphibian attack. Once the beaches were taken, the commandos headed towards the capitol, Kuwait City. At the same time, under cover of darkness, attack helicopters dropped hundreds of commando soldiers in dozens of strategic points throughout Kuwait. These elite soldiers fought Kuwaiti forces and took control of key areas as well as police structures, banks, etc. By evening Kuwait was conquered. Saddam now had 45% of the world’s oil under his control.

This professionally executed invasion was a testament to the excellent training and skill of Iraq’s army, which was armed by European powers. This strengthened the fear that war with Iraq would necessarily lead to a high casualty rate (the fact that in the end, the war was brief and with hardly any casualties was, **as the Rebbe said, supernatural** and not due to any inadequacies on the part of the

Iraqi army).

Many countries, led by the US, denounced the invasion and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. Two American aircraft carriers began heading towards the region and many additional units were put on high alert.

Iraq, for its part, announced the annexation of Kuwait and moved part of its army to the Kuwaiti-Saudi border. There it arraigned itself in attack formation and began to resupply the ammunition and fuel depots. Tensions ran high as it was feared they were heading into Saudi Arabia. Within a few days, 200,000 soldiers and 2000 tanks were amassed on the Kuwaiti-Saudi border.

President Bush sent Defense Secretary Cheney to Saudi Arabia to show satellite photos of Iraqi forces. With Saudi Arabia’s consent, the US announced Operation Desert Storm, whose goal was to prevent Iraq from conquering Saudi Arabia. About 700 aircraft and 400 huge ships began transporting hundreds of thousands of soldiers and millions of tons of military equipment. The world was in turmoil – kingdoms starting up with each other. Stock markets fell and the price of oil doubled. The US worked feverishly to form an international coalition. About 50 countries participated out of which 38 sent military forces (the rest provided logistical or financial support). Many of these countries were Arab or Moslem countries, as well as countries from the communist bloc which had just started coming apart.

This itself – the formation of an international force against Iraq – was an enormous miracle which the Rebbe referred to many times in his sichos – “I’ll makei Mitzrayim b’v’choreihem” – that

the “firstborn” of the very nations themselves struck at the “Egyptians” (enemies of the Jews).

Right after the invasion it was feared that the Soviet Union and China would defend Iraq (which was their main customer for weapons) and impede the rapprochement of the US and the USSR and might even come to serious conflict. Throughout, the US showed great deference towards the USSR in order to

prevent any such potential conflict. With Hashem’s kindness, the Soviet Union supported the coalition.

In Israel there was fear, uncertainty and tension. A few days after the invasion, Saddam announced that this was only stage one on the way to war on Israel, and that Kuwait’s enormous resources would be used to fortify his army for the purpose of realizing this goal together with the Arab nations.

Would he carry out his threats? Would he save himself and his army from the Americans by leaving Kuwait and turning, instead, to war against Israel? What would the American reaction be then? Would America defend Israel as it defended the rich oil nations? Would Arab nations join Iraq? Would Iraq use chemical weapons against Israeli soldiers and Israeli citizens? Nobody had the answers.

[To be continued G-d willing]



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ISRAEL'S HIGH COURT WEIGHS IN ON 'WHO IS A JEW'

By Sholom Ber Crombie

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

In response to the new “Conversion Law,” which has once again aroused the whole painful issue of “Who is a Jew,” Beis Moshiach conducted a special interview with Rabbi Gedalia Axelrod, former av beis din of Haifa, who has dealt with this issue in depth for many years.

Recently the political machinery in Eretz Yisroel was in a tremendous state of commotion as a result of the new “Conversion Law” proposed by a Committee of Knesset and the aftermath as the full legislative body prepares to vote on it. We’re not talking about an historic amendment to the injustice of “Who is a Jew” but at least it’s an attempt to curb the involvement of the Israeli High Court of Justice in the conversion issue. The breach that the High Court wants to create is liable to turn conversions into something totally meaningless, thus opening the way for anyone who wants to

be registered as a Jew – by certifying the Reform “conversions” in Eretz Yisroel as well.

The situation thus far is such that the Law of Return has been rendered ineffective by the absence of the word “*k’halacha*” (in accordance with Jewish law). As a result, conversion certificates from overseas are honored by the State of Israel, even if it is signed by a Reform “rabbi.” But there’s at least one wall that has remained unbroken: the State does not recognize Reform “conversions” made within Eretz Yisroel itself; rather it accepts only those issued

by the Chief Rabbinate. Now, the High Court of Justice wants to breach this wall as well, enabling the establishment of Reform “conversion institutes” even in Eretz Yisroel. The new “converts,” i.e., Gentiles who want to register as Jews, won’t even have to travel overseas.

The Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Eretz Yisroel, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, came out against all this and galvanized the entire political order. The one who has stood behind and sponsored this legislation is Yisroel Beiteinu Knesset Member David Rotem. While Rotem’s party has made a commitment to its voters – the Russian immigrants – to facilitate the conversion process, the political parties to the debate this time around – Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman on one side and the ultra-Orthodox on the other – have succeeded in reaching a viable compromise.

According to the proposed legislation, the bureaucratic conversion process will be speeded up and will allow the chief rabbi of each municipality to create a beis din on conversion matters, giving

those who wish to complete this process the opportunity of doing so much more easily, without the need to wait for a special rabbinical court that deals with such issues. In return, Lieberman and his party have promised firm support for the new law, which will ensure that the State of Israel does not recognize the Reform “conversion institutes.”

Rabbi Axelrod, as one who is familiar with the painful issue of the conversion problem in Eretz Yisroel, and as one who has served as an av beis din for many years, how should we relate to this proposed new law?

At first glance, it appears that according to the law’s provisions, there are facets that are beneficial to religious affairs. However, since it also caters to the interests of Russian immigrants – there are certain quirks in the law. We don’t exactly know what was devised between the two sides who have jointly proposed this legislation. According to what has been revealed to the public, this appears to be a good law, as Rabbi Shlomo Amar had requested, determining that conversion will be under the authority of the Chief Rabbinate.

This law is designed to curb the High Court, since at the present time, there are unresolved cases before the High Court on the issue of conversions, regarding which the Court has yet to discuss or issue a ruling. Instead, it leaves these files open, reserving for itself the possibility of adjudication. It is clear to us that if the High Court will take this law for its own management, the results will be bad and most bitter. Therefore, the intention is that as soon as the proposed legislation becomes law, the High Court of Justice will not be able to deliberate on matters of conversion, and the law will establish that conversions in Eretz Yisroel are only in the hands of the Chief Rabbinate.

And will the situation improve when the conversions fall under the control of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel?



I have already stated my position in the past, as to our regret, no more than five percent of all conversions carried out by the Chief Rabbinate are truly done in earnest. I’m being careful about what I say, but unfortunately, this is the situation. Furthermore, this five percent is a lot compared to where things stand now. Ninety-five percent of the conversions that take place in Eretz Yisroel are utterly worthless.

Just today, a Chabad shliach called me from one of the settlements in Eretz HaKodesh and told me that their neighbor asked them to host for Shabbos a non—Jewish woman who wanted to convert. Since she needs the approval of the Chief Rabbinate, she is obligated to become familiar with the traditional Jewish way of life, as is demanded according to halacha. As a result, she spent the Shabbos meal at their home. During the evening, they asked her if she really intends to keep Torah and mitzvos after she receives her conversion certificate, and she replied derisively that she has no such intention. I immediately instructed them to cut off all contact with her. Furthermore, they were to inform the neighbor that made the connection between them that a rav had told them that they are not allowed to render any assistance to such a fictitious conversion. And this was a conversion that was supposedly under the supervision of the Chief

Rabbinate of Israel.

If this is actually the case with conversions performed through the Rabbinate, then why is there all the fighting to put it on the books?

First and foremost, there is a matter of chillul Hashem. If the State of Israel will officially recognize Reform conversion as legitimate, it will result in a desecration of G-d’s Name unparalleled in scope. The very fact that the High Court of Justice – an official state institution – will proclaim that the Reform Movement can conduct conversions according to their customs is a dangerous breach that absolutely

A Jew who practices Reform Judaism – if born of a Jewish mother or converted in accordance with halacha – is a 100% kosher Jew just as any other member of the People of Israel. Nevertheless, it is impossible to accept his movement’s manner of conversion, because it is of no value.

must not be made. Today’s Reform Movement is worse than the Sadducees and the Boethusians of the Talmudic era. It conducts intermarriage ceremonies and makes joint weddings performed by a Reform “rabbi” on one side and a priest on the other *r”l*. Their rabbis are literally puppets in this whole masquerade, acting as if they are fulfilling the law of Moshe. With them, there is no Judaism and no religion – just a social club.

However, wouldn’t it be preferable that the Reform conversions be recognized, and thus anyone who wants to hold an empty conversion ceremony will get his bogus certificate, but at least he won’t have a certificate from the Chief Rabbinate and we’ll know that he had a Reform conversion that is officially worthless?

That’s not correct, since to our great regret, there are many simple Jews who understand nothing about their Judaism. People who don’t know what Yom Kippur is can’t understand the difference between Reform conversion and any other conversion. For these Jews, this can prove to be a terrible breach, as they naively think that since the person before them is holding a kosher certificate with a stamp of approval from the

High Court of Justice, that should be sufficient. In the present situation with the Chief Rabbinate-sponsored conversions, they at least are requested to do a preparatory course for conversion and there are a few real converts who actually fulfill this obligation. If the Reform breach takes place *ch”v*, these simple and innocent people can be completely misled, and the situation will become far worse.

In any event, the situation is pretty bad, with breaches appearing from every direction. What is the solution?

The only solution is to shut down the entire conversion program in Eretz Yisroel completely. There is no other option. We have to conduct ourselves here the way they did in Argentina, for since there is such a tragic problem with the issue of conversions, they ceased doing them altogether. Anyone who wants to undergo a real conversion will find the way to come to the Jewish People, but according to the state of affairs that prevails today, we must completely put a halt to conversion activities, which cause new tragedies every day. This is the only plan of action that can stop this situation. As long as conversions in Eretz Yisroel are done in a problematic manner and

are not in reliable hands, the whole issue of conversion must be suspended.

In one of the arguments on this matter that I had with then-Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi of Israel Avraham Shapira *a”h*, he told me, “What do you want? The Reform should do the conversions?” I replied: “I prefer theirs to yours.” In response to this, he asked: “And if I would appoint you as head of the rabbinical court on matters of conversion?” I rejoined: “The result would be that I would close the beis din and there would be no more conversions.”

But you can make fictitious Reform conversions in Chutz La’Aretz.

The truth is that the main problem is not with the Reform conversions performed in Chutz La’Aretz. All those who undergo a Reform conversion there are not endorsed by the Orthodox so there is a clear demarcation. The problem is here. There are instigators who actually buy airline tickets for people to come from Chutz La’Aretz in order demand a Reform “conversion” and thereby provoke the Government.

After they complete their provocation, when they are rejected by the Chief Rabbinate, they return to their native lands and they are never heard from again. Those who bring them here are the problem, because they are looking for every possible way to cause injury to Yiddishkait.

These are the same people who run out on Friday afternoons near the security fences with the Arabs and demonstrate against the Israel Defense Forces. Just as they have no problem engaging in disgraceful collaboration with the enemy in matters of foreign policy, so too on this issue. They turn to the world Reform community and agitate its members against Judaism.

Now they go around and cause alarm among American Jews, implying that the new law will affirm that a Reform Jew is in fact not Jewish. This is an absolute falsehood. A Jew who practices Reform Judaism – if born of a Jewish mother or converted in accordance with halacha – is a 100% kosher Jew just as any other member of the People of Israel. Nevertheless, it is impossible to accept his movement's manner of conversion, because it is of no value.

Why has everyone suddenly woken up regarding an issue that seemingly no one had been discussing for years?

If the Israeli High Court of Justice wouldn't have interfered, this law would have been pushed off, as no one had any interest in arousing a debate on the subject. The real problem is the High Court of the State of Israel. It makes rulings, involves itself in everything, and now it has decided to get involved in the subject of conversions as well. While there are anti-religious movements and organizations that constantly petition the High Court on conversion matters, the Court has never gotten involved in the issue before. Now, however, it has left several petitions on the matter unresolved as "open files." This means that it has reserved for itself the right to deliberate on them.

How does the present law stand in relation to the Rebbe's demand at the time of the struggle to amend the original law on the question of "Who is a Jew?"

The breach on the "Who is a Jew" question has long since been made. The old law has already caused so much catastrophic tragedy that it's doubtful whether it can ever be repaired. As a result of this calamity, they have even removed the word "Jew" from



Back in the old days. Lubavitcher chassidim demonstrating in front of the homes of religious Knesset Members.

national identity cards. There was an ultra-Orthodox Minister of the Interior who didn't want to register people bringing a Reform conversion certificate as Jews. Therefore, it was decided to erase completely the classification of "nationality" from national identity cards. This is utterly absurd. A country that defines itself as a Jewish state can't register its citizens as Jews, so as not to have to register tens of thousands of total Gentiles as Jews. Even in Russia, up until a few years ago, the government registered Jews as "Hebrew" in their national identity cards. Thus, the breach that the Rebbe wanted to prevent some years ago has already penetrated far too deeply.

The Rebbe wanted the Knesset

to amend the Law of Return to include the word "k'halacha." Yet, everyone knows that at a certain stage, the Rebbe put a halt to the struggle. Rabbi Shmuel Chefer, who was chairman of the general council that dealt with the struggle during those years, told me that he went in once to the Rebbe and asked him what we should do on the "Who is a Jew" issue, and the Rebbe replied that this pertains to the Chief Rabbinate.

This seems rather difficult to understand. During the '70's, the Rebbe would cry out with great intensity every Shabbos on this issue, and now suddenly he says that it pertains to the Chief Rabbinate?! I claim that the Rebbe saw by then that the conversions of the Chief Rabbinate didn't meet

the required standards in any case, and thus in practical terms, the struggle now pertains to them. To put it simply, what good will it do to yell and holler, if afterwards the Chief Rabbinate makes a joke out of the matter and does wholesale conversions?

Today, it is quite clear that the Rebbe envisioned everything in advance. If the religious and other opposing Knesset Members would have listened to the Rebbe then, it would have saved everyone a lot of anguish.

Then there's nothing that can be done today?

In principle, the present law is a very positive one. For despite the fact that the conversions themselves, as performed by the Chief Rabbinate, are not done in a serious fashion, nevertheless, the rabbinate's instructions are not to convert anyone who doesn't accept the yoke of mitzvos – and that counts for something. If the High Court of Justice takes the reins of conversion into its own hands, it will be a useless crime and a shame.

Reform conversions often don't even require a course of study, which means that anyone who so desires – even if he has absolutely no connection to Jews or Judaism – can be registered with the Reform Movement as a Jew, and then nothing can prevent him from entering the country according to the Law of Return. Under this umbrella of opportunity, millions of Gentiles can enter Eretz Yisroel if they want, and the Jewish state will even finance their absorption with a full package of immigrant rights...

What are the consequences stemming from the bureaucratic leniencies that people are asking for in amending this proposed new law?

Today, four thousand conversions are performed in Eretz

Yisroel each year, and this is what happens when the conversion process can be made only through a special rabbinical court. According to the proposed new law, every municipal rav can establish a beis din on conversion matters, and he only has to get two other "experienced" rabbanim to join him.

It's clear that if there will be more battei din, there will be more fictitious and false conversions. According to the proposed new law, half a million Russian Gentiles, who emigrated in order to leave Russia, will be able to convert in Eretz Yisroel within a month. In Haifa, for example, there are whole villages that emigrated from Russia and came to live in Eretz Yisroel. This could also pose a possible disaster. Therefore, I have said that we're talking about a very complex and painful subject. This is no simple matter and each side has potentially wide-ranging consequences.

THE MOST DANGEROUS INSTITUTION

Where is the source of the problem today? Where can we start to fix things?

The most prevalent issue today is the danger posed by the High Court of Justice. Since Justice Aharon Barak decided that "everything can be subject to adjudication," the High Court is the most dangerous institution to Yiddishkait. I once said in a radio interview that among all the groups and organizations created to work against Judaism, the High Court of Justice is located at the foot of the ladder. Practically speaking, Justice Aharon Barak's declaration that "everything can be subject to adjudication" means that the country is in the hands of its High Court – the guardian of

the state. If the High Court once interpreted the laws of the Knesset, today it determines what the Knesset can decide and what it can't. All the power is in the hands of the High Court, and it utilizes that power to assault Yiddishkait in every way possible.

They have made the rabbinical courts void of all authority. Even those issues which were solely under the control of the rabbinical judges to establish in accordance with the laws of Torah, e.g., matters of divorce, the High Court of Justice is now taking entirely into its control. In the past, the High Court had the right to intervene only when judges had certain problems with effective management during deliberations.

In recent years, however, the concept of "*tik bavli*" has been used to strip the law of Torah of all its power. "*Tik bavli*" has established that while rabbinical judges do have the right to issue halachic rulings, nevertheless, if Torah law contradicts the laws of the state, judgment must be made in accordance with secular law. For example, if a woman owns property registered in her name and she chooses to get divorced, according to halacha, the property belongs to her, whereas property registered in her husband's name belongs to him. But according to the laws of the state, all jointly owned property must be divided equally. Thus, when a couple comes to get divorced, *lo aleinu*, this places the judges in a complex dilemma, in the event that there is property registered in the name of either the husband or the wife only. The rabbinical judges can not issue a ruling against halacha, stating that they divide the property equally, but they also can't rule against the laws of the state.

During the last decade, the High Court of Justice has declared

a total attack on anything connected to Judaism. Now, it has also taken on the issue of conversions. The Knesset has debated this issue already for sixty years, since the founding of the state, and no one is getting in line to bring the issue to a debate once more. No one within the Reform Movement has addressed this matter, nor are they asking now more than in the past that their conversions should be recognized. On its own initiative, the High Court has decided to assail Judaism on this issue as well.

Thus, the source of the problem today is the High Court of Justice.

What can be done to combat the legislation that has established that “everything is subject to adjudication”?

We must make opposing legislation, establishing that the subject of conversion is too delicate and wide-ranging an issue to allow a few students of law, who perhaps know how to deal with convicting murderers and thieves, to determine its future. Even the unsympathetic Ben-Gurion, who was no fan of ultra-Orthodox Jewry, decided not to make any decrees on this issue.

As is known, Ben-Gurion sent letters to twenty Jewish scholars, including the Rebbe, and asked for their opinion of the question of determining who is a Jew. After receiving answers from all of them and understanding the problematic nature of the issue, he decided to leave the matter alone and not deal with it.

So what is the solution now?

The solution is that since the High Court of Justice has proven to be totally hard-hearted on all these issues, there must be appropriate legislation to take them out of its hands. This is the very same High Court of Justice that threw thousands of Jews into the street with no roof over their

As is known, Ben-Gurion sent letters to twenty Jewish scholars, including the Rebbe, and asked for their opinion of the question of determining who is a Jew. After receiving answers from all of them and understanding the problematic nature of the issue, he decided to leave the matter alone and not deal with it.

heads. This is the very same High Court of Justice that distorts the laws of the State of Israel to suit its purposes penalizing the Chareidim.

In its place, scholars should be appointed through democratic elections, and they will take action together with legal advisors, as obligated by law, to deliberate on such matters. There is a need for scholars who will act according to the law, not judges whose whole claim to greatness is that they know how to be good attorneys and prosecute as many as criminals as possible. Today, you can't do anything to a judge, as he is protected from the law. It has therefore been said, “For were it not for the fear of [the government's] authority, a man would swallow his neighbor alive.” This is exactly what happens with the judges who feel that they are above the law. They fear nothing – and surely not the government – and thus, they illustrate the saying of “a man would swallow his neighbor alive.”

Will democratic elections achieve the results?

The majority of the general public in Eretz Yisroel opposes the frontal attacks on Judaism. The public does not want Judaism to

disappear.

Above all, we must dismantle the existing High Court structure and cry out that the emperor has no clothes and that the current High Court of Justice cannot continue to function. If we place honest and upright people at the head of the High Court, who will act for the overall good, with their heads on their shoulders and no affiliation with a narrow left-wing sector, the situation will undoubtedly improve. Today's High Court of Justice has shown that it is against the Jewish religion and represents only a small percentage of the general public.

A few words in summation.

We must conclude on a good note. We are on the eve of the True and Complete Redemption, and the only solution is for us to merit immediately the revelation of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, and thereby all these problems will stop. We see today the overall awakening of t'shuvah in the world, and this surely is a source of much encouragement. We believe with absolute faith that the Redemption will come long before this process will take place and we will merit “the King is his splendor shall our eyes behold.”

WORKING WITH CHOCOLATE



By Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

Every soul has its particular Avoda, in the areas of intellect and emotions, in accordance with that soul's nature and character.

--The Rebbe, HaYom Yom, & Nissan.

Very late one Thursday night, Reid, a relative newcomer to town, slipped in through the side door of a certain residential dwelling, took the narrow stairs down into the basement, turned the handle gently and pushed.

He found what he was looking for. Seated at the head of a long, well-laden table of half-consumed refreshments and a dozen men listening, a bearded man in a dark suit and black fedora was talking.

The conversation was about "avoida," an Ashkenazi-Hebraic term for divine service. What do we have to do in the face of temptation? Avoida. What is the best way to focus our energies and talents? Avoida. How can I transform my nature and improve? Avoida.

Jewish though he was, Reid was an all-American boy from the deep South, so the nuances of Ashkenazi Hebrew were lost on him. Finally however, he got the point. "Oh, I get it now. You're talking about

serving the Creator."

"So what did you think we were talking about for the past hour?"

"Actually I thought you were talking about women."

"What... Why?"

"Well, every time you said 'Avoida' I thought you were actually saying, 'Avoid her.'"

It was pretty funny at the time (yes, it really did happen - I was there), but there is more to it as well. Our relationship with the One Above is likened to a marriage. And our affair with worldly pleasures is compared to... well, an affair.[1] How, one may ask, shall we deal with things we want but shouldn't have? Just as we would with the neighbor's wife - Avoida - Avoid her.

Chabad ideology takes this concept to a whole new level. Two hundred years ago, the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, said "What is forbidden is forbidden, and what is permitted is unnecessary." [2] But why would someone want to be so ascetic and strict? Doesn't it contradict what the Jerusalem Talmud says, that "On the day of judgment, every person who saw choice food and did not partake will be held

accountable for his actions." [3] Besides, aren't those Chabad folk all into good food and drink, singing and dancing, nice homes and clothes, working in the world and using modern technology?

Looking deeper, there is really no contradiction here. The idea is not so much what we enjoy, but how and why. Conscious consumerism Chabad-style says, yes, enjoy your material blessings, but focus on the divine purpose they fulfill, not the physical desire they satisfy. [4] It sounds simple but that's deceptive. If you think you've digested the concept already, think about eating chocolate for the sake of heaven and not for the sake of yum. [5]

It's reminiscent of the plain Jew who watched the great Tzaddik (saintly person) eat an apple and think to himself, "How is he greater than me? He eats an apple, I eat an apple." The Tzaddik, sensing his doubts, said, "You know the difference between you and I? You make a blessing because you want an apple. I eat an apple because I want a blessing."

But even this is not yet the true standard of divine service, "Avoda." The absolute rejection of



materialistic values is merely a preparation. Ultimate “Avoda” is transforming the physical itself into a channel for the Divine.

This of course takes lots of discipline - a quality that many of us feel is beyond us. How many of us have tried dieting again and again? And that’s about eating properly for one’s own sake. How much harder is it to eat for G-d’s? Is there any practical way to achieve this? The answer is yes - Chassidus - the study and implementation of chassidic teachings.

What exactly is Chassidus? We are not the first to ask. In Vienna, during the winter of 1903, Sigmund Freud interviewed the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe about Chassidus, asking “What manner of scholarly discipline is this?”

The Rebbe said, “The discipline of Chassidus requires that the brain advise the heart what the person should want, and the heart implement in the person’s life that which the brain understands.”

Freud then asked, “How do you do this? Are not the head and the heart two continents separated by a vast sea?”

The Rebbe responded, “The task is to build a bridge that will

span these two continents, or at least to connect them with telephone lines and electric wires so that the light of the mind should reach the heart as well.”[6]

The Rebbe’s bridge is the goal. It means truly moving the concept from theoretical to practical, from spiritual to physical. Lines of communication are the next best thing. With communication, the idea influences the emotions from afar but does not truly transfer and transform.

Some maintain that such radical transformation of human nature is simply unachievable, but if that is your belief, it has just gone up in smoke - literally (well almost literally).

A new study of smokers shows not only how our thoughts can change our habits, but how they can change the physical properties of the brain itself. The research, directed by a Yale psychiatry professor, shows how just thinking about the damage smoking does to one’s health creates changes in two separate but related brain centers. Mentally trashing tobacco boosts processing in the prefrontal cortex, the area responsible for reasoning and behavioral inhibition, and simultaneously slows it down in the striatum, a key area for reward seeking and drug craving.[7]

The practical result is that cravings go down and quitting gets easier. A healthier, physically rewired you emerges, all with the power of thought.

There’s a message for us here that is pertinent to our times. Many people say the world is what it is and there’s no chance it can get any better. The truth is they have said the same about human nature, yet we see that was wrong. We used to think that the brain had a fixed number of cells and circuits and that was that. Only recently have we discovered that the brain can be rewired at any stage in life,

just by exercising it.

The same is true of the world at large. Without work, of course things don’t change, but we’ve been working on the world for a long time. Change is happening. The Alter Rebbe talks about Avoda and says that the future redemption is being made today, and how? Through working in Torah and mitzvos.

It took penetrating rays of energy to see how the physical workings of the brain respond to the ephemeral workings of thought. Similarly, by the penetrating light of Chassidus we can better understand the physical workings of the world and see how it responds to our spiritual efforts in Avoda. Moshiach is unfolding already. It’s as certain a process as mind over matter. And that fact has already unfolded.

NOTES:

[1] See for instance, the third paragraph of the Shma prayer, BaMidbar 15:39 as interpreted in Tractate Brachos 12b.

[2] HaYom Yom, 25 Adar Sheini.

[3] Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 48b.

[4] HaYom Yom, 5 Menachem Av.

[5] Of course eating chocolate for the sake of a higher purpose can be done in many ways: Saving it for Shabbos when delicacies are a mitzvah, rewarding someone, expressing love or appreciation, eating a portion so your guest will not be shy to partake. Here we speak of celebrating the joy in G-d who gave the chocolate I am eating exceeding the joy I have in the physical flavor.

[6] Based on a diary entry made by the present Lubavitcher Rebbe, on 24 May 1932.

[7] Our Brain Can Be Taught to Control Cravings, New Researcher Finds. ScienceDaily (Aug. 3, 2010)

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SHLICHUS IN SWANKY RAMAT AVIV GIMMEL

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 preconceived notions. * Part 2 of 2

[Continued from last issue]

In the last installment we discussed the tremendous turnout for the Yomim Nora'im. Sukkos followed with equal success. Every year – since outreach began in the neighborhood – a public sukka was erected in Ramat Aviv Gimmel,

which welcomed passersby to come and do the mitzvos of the day. At night there were farbrengens and people sat there riveted, thoroughly enjoying it. This particular year the erection of the sukka was a direct continuation of the tent that had

been put up for the davening, and even more people than usual showed up. Many people, who previously would have hesitated, were now willing to participate.

Another event that took place in the neighborhood, also connected to the Yomim Tovim, was the Hakafos Shniyos that is held in the Schuster center and is the neighborhood's biggest event. R' Chaviv says that even events that commemorate dates of Israeli significance are not as well attended. Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lau, rav of Tel Aviv, attends along with the mayor, Mr. Ron Chuldai and other distinguished personages.

These events were the impetus for further outreach activities and they decided to copy the model of the public sukka year round and start having programs every Shabbos. This, too, was a new approach which had never been tried before. Every Friday night, groups of bachurim from the yeshiva in Ramat Aviv began going to the Schuster Center to run a Shabbos table. They invited the many kids hanging out there to join them for Kiddush and something to eat and to enjoy the Shabbos atmosphere.

The Shabbos table idea was very successful and since then, every Friday night there are dozens of young people for Kiddush and many of them stay on till late at night to farbreng with the bachurim. Every Friday night they look forward to partaking of the Kiddush and the beloved Shabbos z'miros. Some of them have even found their way to religious observance.

One of the well-known phenomena in Ramat Aviv is that every act of opposition ends up being a springboard for more outreach. R' Chaviv relates:

"One day, a letter came from the municipality which said we had to leave the small classroom that

served as a shul on Shabbos and Yom Tov. The davening in the classroom had been approved in Yossi Ginsburgh's time by the former mayor, Ronnie Milo and we could not understand their insistence that we leave now – especially when that same school also had a Yemenite shul there which had been left alone.

"It was a Friday when we reached the end of our rope. All of our attempts to get them to back down had failed and it looked as though the following week we would have to vacate the shul and we didn't know where we would go. Nearby was a school for special education that we had no connection with but Alon Dvir suggested we try there and we went to check it out.

"Alon went to the school to meet with the principal, and he warily broached the subject of us davening there. To our surprise she was overjoyed to help us. She gave us the spacious main hall whose architectural design gave it the appearance of a shul. We soon realized that Someone above had decided that we needed to go up a notch."

Later on, the same "concerned citizen" who had ousted them found out that not only hadn't the shul closed, but it had expanded. Once again he tried to prevent them from davening in the school. This time those who davened in the shul decided to take it to court. The case lasted several months, at the end of which the judge decided in their favor and forced the municipality to permit the minyan to continue in that location.

Purim fell out shortly before the fateful decision at the court. The Chabad house prepared, as they did every year, for the reading of the Megilla and the distribution of mishloach manos to residents of the neighborhood. On 7 Adar that year, one of the regulars' wives



R' Chaviv at a Chanukas HaBayis of a friend

gave birth to a son and he wanted to have the bris in shul. Excitement ran high since this was the first bris in the k'hilla and in the shul. The bris took place on Taanis Esther so there was no seuda and the parents of the baby decided to sponsor the Purim seuda the next day, instead.

The atmosphere at the Purim seuda was very uplifting. Having had a drink or two, R' Chaviv said he wanted to hold court, similar to the Shpole Zeide's mock court case, wherein the sentence issued would be decreed at the physical court. Judges were called up to the table, as well as witnesses and two lawyers to represent the sides. In the end, the Purim court ruled that the municipality had to allow the shul to continue in that location, and that is what actually happened.

Time passed and the scope of their activities widened. The k'hilla became more firmly established and they realized that they needed an actual Chabad house and could not suffice with activities at the school. Ilan Peretz, one of the main supporters of the Chabad house began looking for a place that could serve both as a shul and a permanent Chabad house. After a long search and various

attempts, including a deal to buy a large campus which fizzled a few minutes before the final signing, they found a store that had just closed.

"Ramat Aviv Gimmel is not big and its real estate is highly desirable. As soon as something becomes available, dozens of people jump on it. One day, our friend Ilan found a place for rent. It wasn't large and the location wasn't ideal but that is what was available and we didn't think twice about it. We arranged a meeting with the owners of the Center, signed a contract and began renovating. A few days later Ilan noticed unusual activity in a very large store which was in a better location. He looked inside and saw a large room, empty shelves, and a worker packing stuff up.

"Ilan found out that the big sporting goods store had closed just a few days before and nobody had taken it over yet. We made an appointment with the owner who, it turned out, was an old acquaintance of Alon Dvir, for that evening. Along with us came other businessmen who were also interested in the place. We waited for them to go and then we said we wanted the place for a Chabad

When he heard I was writing an article he said, “Write that Rabbi Shneur Chaviv saved my life.” I asked him to explain and he repeated, “R’ Shneur saved my life. There is no other way to explain what happened to me since I became acquainted with the Chabad house.”

house. He agreed and brief negotiations were held on the spot, standing among the boxes, and we shook hands. The next day we met with the owners of the center and signed a contract for the new place.”

Before moving in, the store went through a professional makeover and the place was renovated – to the tune of tens of thousands of shekels – to make it suitable for a Chabad house. All the members of the shul got involved by donating their money and time. Within a few weeks the sporting goods store looked like a respectable shul and shortly after they moved in, two Sifrei Torah were donated and there were two celebrations. One of them was attended by Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger.

Establishing the new shul and Chabad house gave the stamp of officialdom for the first time to the local activities. They switched to three t’fillos a day. Many people began attending shul regularly and taking part in the shiurim. Every Shabbos and on special dates there are uplifting farbrengens and throughout the year there are numerous events to which the residents of the neighborhood are invited.

The ring of the phone

interrupted us. R’ Chaviv was asked to bring additional t’fillin and kipot to the stand. “I’ll be back,” he said, as he apologized for leaving me alone in the Chabad house. Not two minutes went by and in walked someone by the name of Yaniv. When he heard I was writing an article he said, “Write that Rabbi Shneur Chaviv saved my life.” I asked him to explain and he repeated, “R’ Shneur saved my life. There is no other way to explain what happened to me since I became acquainted with the Chabad house.”

When I asked him to elaborate he said he was in a rush to pick up his daughter from school. “If you want, come here on Sunday and I’ll sit with you and tell you the whole story,” he said. He explained that before he discovered the Chabad house he had spent a year and a half in a crisis at his business until he met R’ Chaviv and everything changed.

Since then he comes every day to put on t’fillin, usually at eight in the morning, but if he doesn’t make it then, he shows up in the afternoon. That is what happened that day, when he came in to put on t’fillin and daven. Before he left he had a few more words of appreciation for the Chabad house and R’ Chaviv and said that the

Chabad house saves many people who find it a supportive environment.

Yaniv is not the only one. Since the Chabad house moved into its permanent location it has become a unifying base for the residents of the neighborhood and a unique k’hilla has built up around it. The k’hilla is eclectic and includes everybody, young and old, Lubavitchers, mekuravim and people who enjoy attending shul on Shabbos. If you would have asked a local person three years ago what the chances were for a shul with three t’fillos a day to succeed in Ramat Aviv Gimmel, the answer would have been that it’s a nice dream but completely unrealistic.

The highlight of the community’s activities is definitely the farbrengens that take place every Shabbos. After Musaf, dozens of people sit down for a Chassidishe farbrengen around a table set with refreshments. These gatherings often last into the late afternoon. R’ Chaviv says that the farbrengens take place even on short winter Shabbasos.

When I asked him who runs the farbrengens, he said that Rabbi Shneur Schneersohn always starts the farbrengens but then every person there takes part. He said that one of the special things about the k’hilla in Ramat Aviv Gimmel is the fact that this k’hilla grew entirely from those who were touched by the various events and activities. This gives each member of the k’hilla the feeling that he is an inseparable part of the shul and its activities. This is true for the farbrengens and shiurim and all the other activities which R’ Chaviv runs.

Another unique quality of the k’hilla is the array of shiurim that are available throughout the week which are attended by the people who daven there and residents of

the neighborhood. Every day there are shiurim after Shacharis, between Shacharis and Mincha, and a shiur – or sometimes two – every evening.

“There is an enormous interest in learning Torah these days, especially by the intelligentsia and hoi polloi. The demand is tremendous and you just have to teach and people will show up. There is a momentum that can’t be allowed to go to waste.”

One of the biggest shiurim is the one that takes place after Kabbalas Shabbos and Maariv which is attended by all the members of the k’hilla. The shiur began during the winter, when Shabbos begins early in the day and many people want to learn something before they go home, but they kept it going even during the summer. Everybody stays for a shiur in Tanya. Some of the shiurim are given by R’ Efraim Marzel, who is the rav of the shul. He does a wonderful job with the shiurim and many people also enjoy his farbrengens. He speaks well and with real Ahavas Yisroel.

There are also shiurim and activities for the women of the community, who also take an active part in the Chabad house programming.

R’ Shneur Chaviv says that the shul is really what changed everything:

“Until then, we met people once a week on Shabbos and now we see them every day.” In connection with this he says that in general, everything they do in Ramat Aviv Gimmel is revolutionary both because of the type of neighborhood it is and because of the type of programming they provide. “Ramat Aviv Gimmel is a neighborhood with a very distinctive character and we have to plan our activities accordingly.

“For example, our Lag B’Omer



R’ Chaviv and mekuravim saying Kinot on Tisha B’Av at the Kosel

parade is presented as the annual Lag B’Omer festival. The Ten Commandments for children is marketed in English as an ‘Ice Cream Party,’ and two years ago we started making a ‘Festi-Chag’ during the days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur during which we have crafts and performances that teach children about the Yomim Tovim in Tishrei. The same is the case with the day camps we have during the Pesach break and during the second session of summer vacation (during the first session a successful day camp has been run for decades by R’ Dovid Oshaki). R’ Dovid Chaviv of Kfar Chabad runs the summer camp.

“We are opening a library for children with hundreds of Jewish books which will be the first children’s library in northern Tel Aviv to offer Jewish-Chassidic material.”

During our conversation, R’ Chaviv wanted to correct the impression that they operate under attack:

“In general, the community is very tolerant. There is positive feedback all the time and people enjoy being involved in our programs. Yes, there are a few

people who don’t like our presence and I understand them, but they are not the majority.”

Mr. Pinchas Broyer, a resident of the community, even received an award, “Yakir HaShana” for helping the work of Chabad in the neighborhood. R’ Chaviv showed me the official booklet from the municipality about the award where it enumerates, among his other activities, his aid to the Chabad house. It shows that the city recognizes his contribution on behalf of the community, which is no small thing.

We got to talking about people who got involved due to “chance” encounters in the street. A woman 80+ years of age used to work in the Defense Ministry with IDF widows. She is Polish, stubborn, and a perfectionist. When she decided, at her advanced age, to get involved in Jewish life, she went all the way and became a baalas t’shuva.

“How do people get to you?” I asked R’ Chaviv.

“First of all, there is word of mouth. That’s the best advertising. People that come and are helped or like what they see, tell their friends. Sometimes there is incredible hashgacha pratis that

The anticipation of Geula and the belief in Moshiach are the most positive things I see at the Chabad house... I saw how everything is run in the most natural way, as though they see the Rebbe, and I felt that if everything is running so naturally then it can't be any other way.

directs people to us. One day, R' Yuval Barness, a shliach in Tel Aviv, came to visit a mekurav at a barber shop in Tel Aviv. A friend of the barber was sitting there. The two got to talking and the friend said that his son would be celebrating his bar mitzva in a few months.

"R' Yuval asked him where he lived and he said, Ramat Aviv Gimmel. R' Yuval called me and we arranged to meet. I taught the boy for his bar mitzva and the family became part of the k'hilla."

R' Chaviv finished the story and a few seconds later I heard him exclaim, "You won't believe who just walked in. That's Shmuel Kleinman, the hero of our story." We told Shmuel that we had just been talking about him and asked him to join us.

He comes to the Chabad house every morning to daven. He bought himself a pair of t'fillin which he leaves in shul. About the farbrengens he has this to say, "It's a shortcut to HaKadosh Boruch Hu." He said that one of the participants always tells stories of Chassidim and he enjoyed it so much that he bought a book of these stories and reads it avidly. His life also underwent drastic changes once he got to know R' Chaviv. He began keeping Shabbos and, although he still doesn't wear a kippa, he considers himself a baal t'shuva in all respects. On

Shabbos, for example, he climbs ten flights of stairs to his apartment. "The neighbors think I lost my mind."

Have you lost friends as a result?

Definitely. Some of them don't understand what happened to the Shmuel they once knew. What's most important is that they are slowly seeing that nothing happened and everything is fine. I hope that I will eventually be able to bring my friends and neighbors to the Chabad house and then they, too, will see how terrific it is to learn a maamer of the Rebbe and how wonderful a Chassidishe farbrengen is."

What does your family think?

I won't deny it. At first, my wife was very frightened but as time passed she saw that it was leading me towards a better place and it was truly fulfilling for me. My wife can tell you – and I say this humbly – that since I've gotten involved I am a better person. She greatly respects this and we have a kosher home. In the beginning everything was new and this was very hard but she accepted it even though she didn't like it much. Today she is enjoying the beauty in Judaism. She sees the difference it has made in me, whether in working on middos or needing to be b'simcha, and it affects her too. She started lighting Shabbos candles and a year and a half ago,

Erev Pesach, she even said the Birkas HaChama. On Shabbos I keep the food on the hotplate and the family eats the Shabbos meal with me. My son, thanks to whom I am here, puts on t'fillin on his own every day and this makes me very happy.

"It wasn't easy with the extended family either, at first, but with time they learned to respect my new way of life. My father-in-law is turning 80 and they have already announced that all the food for the party will be kosher so I can participate. I see that although it's been difficult, things have changed for the better and thanks to my not yet looking like a religious person, they feel comfortable to come and try and understand what caused me to get so involved in Judaism. Now I realize that at first many people kept their distance because they simply didn't know what to say. People were afraid to approach me because they thought something had happened ... I still live at the cutting edge but they all know something changed and it's definitely for the good."

What did you think of the subject of Moshiach as it is presented at the Chabad house?

"The anticipation of Geula and the belief in Moshiach are the most positive things I see at the Chabad house. We recently learned the Rebbe's sicha of 28 Nissan about 'do all that you can' and this made a great impact on me. I went to 770 together with my son and when I was there I felt that the Rebbe is chai v'kayam. I saw how everything is run in the most natural way, as though they see the Rebbe, and I felt that if everything is running so naturally then it can't be any other way. During the davening we cried, we were so overcome by emotion, and the visit made an indescribable impression on us."

You were part of the neighborhood before the Chabad house was founded. How do you think it has made a difference in the neighborhood?

“There’s no doubt that the Chabad house has changed the neighborhood. At first it was perhaps a tad odd but today everybody appreciates it. I’ve been with R’ Shneur for a while now and I can tell you it hasn’t always been easy, but thanks to his perseverance we’ve gotten to where we are today. I still remember the Shabbasos when the minyan took place in the school and R’ Shneur would come on Friday to set up the place. People’s attitudes have changed and today more and more people are interested. Every so often we see new people coming to daven and I – as someone who lives in the place and is part of the neighborhood – can tell you that the numbers of people who are interested in the programs are growing.”

As far as publicizing the Besuras HaGeula and the Rebbe’s identity as Moshiach, I asked R’ Chaviv:

How is it that a Chabad house in an exclusive neighborhood comprised of many intellectuals, openly talks about all aspects of Moshiach? How do you do that?

R’ Chaviv considers it the secret to his success and he explains it as follows:

“In the famous sicha of 28 Nissan, the Rebbe gave us a tough



Above: R’ Chaviv with R’ Dovid Oshaki and R’ Yossi Ginsburgh at the opening of the new center

Below right: The giant sukka in Ramat Aviv Gimmel

job: to do all that we can to bring the Geula. That is why we are here and this is what we have to do, nothing else. In the same sicha the Rebbe told us how to do it. He emphasized ‘Lights of Tohu in Vessels of Tikkun.’ That’s the method, the secret, and our motto at the Chabad house. We convey the message and make sure it’s well received and do it without compromising on the message. Yes, it’s much harder; it takes work, planning, care, creativity, originality, explanations and learning. But we have no choice. Any attempt to veer away from it, to take shortcuts or to rely on others to do the difficult work, misses the goal and is no longer ‘doing all that we can.’

“We make every effort that everything we do is permeated



with Moshiach. On our advertisements we have the prophecy of Geula and Yechi, and at the same time we explain things to people. I believe there is nothing that cannot be marketed. It all depends on how you go about it. If the Arabs have been able to convince the world that evil is good and good is evil, *l’havdil*, then surely we can, with the proper explanations and mutual cooperation, let the world know that good is good.”

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R' REFAEL CHUDAITOV'S AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT



Another chapter in the memoirs of R' Hillel Zaltzman
Prepared for publication by Avrohom Rainitz

About twenty kilometers from Samarkand, R' Refael Chudaitov set up a Jewish agricultural settlement where he grew grapes for wine manufacturing and had a factory to dry fruit. The employees were mostly rabbinic clergy that the government had stripped of all rights, and banned from civil service. Thanks to R' Refael they got decent jobs for decent pay, where they could keep Shabbos and Yom Tov. The moshav flourished until the government stepped in...

One of the most colorful and beloved people in Samarkand was R' Refael Chudaitov. My memories of him begin in my early childhood

years. R' Refael lived in the Bagishomol quarter on the outskirts of the new city not far from the train station on the edge

of the city. We lived in the old city, about eight kilometers away.

R' Refael, who always sought to spend time with Chabad Chassidim, would cover the distance on his bicycle. I remember him pedaling on his bicycle through the narrow alleyways of the old city with his long beard blowing in the wind. At first it was a strange sight to me – an older person on a bike – but that was his mode of transportation and in general, he was almost as active in his senior years as he was in his youth.

R' Refael's strong desire to be involved with the Chabad community while belonging to the Bucharian community put him in a position of being neither here nor there. The Chassidim, who were very wary about possible informers and were even nervous about those within their community, did not rush to embrace him, and to a certain extent they ignored him. The Bucharians treated him like someone who defected to the Ashkenazic camp.



illustration

I remember an episode that illustrates the delicate situation he was in. When I was a young boy after bar mitzva, R' Refael met me on Chodzomski street, the main street of the Jewish ghetto in the old city. He grabbed my hand and asked me to join the sheva brachos of his daughter Yeshua with Gavriel Saidov a"h. I couldn't get out of it because he was strong and when he held my hand there was no way for me to extricate myself.

When we got to the sheva brachos he sat me at the table and served me fruit and also poured me a cup of mashke to say l'chaim. He did not offer me any of the delicious foods that were served because he knew that we Lubavitchers did not eat everywhere.

Why was it so important to him that I attend the sheva brachos? I found out during the meal. When he said l'chaim to the young couple he said: "See this boy? You have to raise your children to be



R' Refael Chudaitov (center) at a family simcha

like him!"

NABBED BY THE POLICE

R' Refael was born in 5658/1898. In accordance with the tradition of the Bucharian community where they marry young, he married his wife Rochel when he was 19 and she was 13. His wife was a yiras Shamayim, clever, and had fine middos. Right after he was married, R' Refael began working in business. At that time the communists were taking their first steps in Russia and hadn't reached the Moslem countries of Central Asia yet. But after a protracted war with the Moslem Basmach resistance movement (the local partisans who were led by an Uzbek by the name of Basmach) they went to Samarkand and began implementing their new rules including persecuting and robbing wealthy citizens.

R' Refael had been able to get a special document from the

government that attested to his being an international businessman and he also received permission to move freely abroad. That is how he was able to continue doing business which included dealings in Bucharria, an independent country at the time.

One time, before one of his trips to Bucharria, one of the chachamim in the community, Chacham Yosef, confided in him that he had a treasure of gold, silver and pearls. His grandfather had bequeathed it to his father, who had in turn handed it down to his son, and both had also added to it over the years. Since the communists had taken over Samarkand, Chacham Yosef was afraid that they would try to get their hands on his wealth and he wanted to send it to his relatives in Bucharria (an independent entity at the time, not under communist rule). Since R' Refael had the status of an international businessman with special permits, and they surely did not check him

One day, the authorities called for R' Refael and said: "Since we trust you fully and know you as an international businessman with all the benefits that entails, including free movement abroad, you are considered our man and we are now giving you the job to convince the Jews you know to cooperate with us..."

as thoroughly at the borders, would he do him a favor and take his treasure to Bucharria?

R' Refael, who was by nature a good person with great trust in Hashem, did not think twice but immediately said he would do it. When Chacham Yosef asked him whether he realized the extent of the danger and wasn't he afraid, R' Refael said, "Chazal say that emissaries to do a mitzva are not harmed." Knowing R' Refael I am sure that he also thought that this mission would be a z'chus and a segula for him.

When R' Refael was about to leave for Bucharria, someone asked him to take along an orphan boy and bring him to his relatives in Bucharria so they could send him to Eretz Yisroel. R' Refael readily agreed to help with this too and went with the boy to the train station.

Before boarding the train, he managed to get in another mitzva. A Jew he did not know put a small suitcase into his hand and begged him to take it for him, saying, "You are an international businessman and they won't check you thoroughly. Do me this big favor and take this suitcase from me for a few minutes. Take it with you on the train and I'll take it back from you there." R' Refael

agreed and headed for the train.

Before he entered the compartment, two policemen suddenly approached him and said he was under arrest and ordered him to follow them. R' Refael was very frightened but he did not lose his cool. He firmly told the policemen that he was an international businessman with business dealings in Bucharria and he could not miss the train. The policemen were unimpressed and began dragging him to the police station.

One of the policemen disappeared, and only one policeman continued to hold on to him and pull him to the police station. On the way, the boy accompanying R' Refael asked him, in the Bucharrian language, what the policemen wanted of him. When the Russian officer heard the boy speaking to R' Refael in a foreign language he began shouting, "What's he saying?" and he slapped the boy so hard that blood began to flow.

The policeman, afraid that he would be accused of assaulting a child for no reason, walked away to get some water to wash off the child's face. Just at that moment a wagon passed by with two Jews whom R' Refael knew. They were on their way to Bucharria. He

quickly threw Chacham Yosef's treasure into the wagon and asked them to give the box to the Chacham in Samarkand. He saved the treasure, which eventually reached its destination, and he also saved himself from the police.

Miraculously, the policeman did not notice the box that had been thrown into the wagon and after returning with water and washing the boy's face, they continued to the police station. R' Refael raised a hue and cry: "What do you want from me? I am an international businessman and I have business to conduct in Bucharria and because of you I missed the train!"

In those days, the economy was terrible and the communists looked for ways to rob citizens. They were unimpressed by what R' Refael said and insisted on searching his suitcase. R' Refael said the suitcase was not his; that someone had given it to him and said he was going off to use the washroom and would come right back. The policemen said they knew that the suitcase wasn't his because they had followed that man, and they forcibly took the suitcase from R' Refael. Once the suitcase was in their hands they calmed down and released R' Refael and the boy.

RELEASED BY THE NKVD

As mentioned, the communist authorities searched for gold and silver that belonged to citizens. They demanded that citizens "sell" them their gold and precious stones in exchange for worthless rubles. To achieve their aim, they used all sorts of methods to coerce people to sell them their valuable metals.

One day, the authorities called for R' Refael and said: "Since we trust you fully and know you as an international businessman with all the benefits that entails, including free movement abroad, you are

considered our man and we are now giving you the job to convince the Jews you know to cooperate with us and sell us all their valuables. In our estimation, you can obtain at least half a ton of gold for us from them.”

When they finished their speech they took out a relative of his from jail, who had been incarcerated for purposes of extortion, and they told R' Refael to go off with him to a side room in order to convince him to accede to their demands. When the two were alone in the room, the relative said that he had considered giving them 20% of his property so that perhaps they would leave him alone. He begged R' Refael to advise him.

R' Refael, who knew that their desire for wealth knew no bounds, told him not to give a single gram of gold because the moment he capitulated they would not leave him alone and would torture him until he gave them everything he owned.

The two men were unaware that on the other side of the thin wall sat an investigator who heard every word they said. After they finished their conversation the interrogators called R' Refael and began shouting at him: “We thought you were loyal to us and it turns out that you are a traitor to our country and are working against the interests of the country!”

R' Refael desperately tried to wiggle out of it and claim that they hadn't understood him and he had meant just the opposite but they weren't buying it and they locked him up. During his stay in prison his wife came to visit often, bringing food with her. On one of her visits he was able to tell her, “Go to Tashkent and tell Efnasiyev that they arrested me.”

Over the years, R' Refael had been able to form good ties with various influential people in the



political sphere. One of them was a Russian goy by the name of Efnasiyev who had previously been a high ranking official in Samarkand. He was transferred to Tashkent where he was given an even more senior position.

R' Refael's wife managed to find out which government office Efnasiyev worked in and she went there with her brother-in-law Bentzion, R' Refael's brother. They decided to wait for the man near the building that he worked in, at the end of the day.

Within a short time he walked out and the two of them told him about R' Refael's arrest. He said that they should come to his office the next day. The next day, he gave them a letter for one of the ruling figures in Samarkand. He warned them to take care of the letter since, if the contents were disclosed, both he and they would be shot.

They returned to Samarkand and gave the letter to the designated party and within a few days R' Refael was released. He told them that one night that week he had seen an old man in his

dream who said: “Your wife is pregnant and when she gives birth to a girl, name her Yeshua.”

That's what happened. And his daughter Yeshua is the mother of the Chassid, R' Moshe Chai Cohen who was one of the outstanding talmidim in our yeshiva in Samarkand and who lives now in Crown Heights.

R' SIMCHA GORODETZKY THE “AGRONOMIST”

R' Refael lived in the Jewish ghetto of the old city. There were many Jews there who tried to ingratiate themselves to the communist authorities and tattled on one another. The situation was so bad that secrets that were relayed under the most private conditions were known by the government the following day.

R' Refael, who couldn't stand this ugly behavior, left his house in the ghetto and moved to the new city, to the distant Bagishomol quarter that was nearly outside the city at the time.

In those days, the government

in Samarkand turned a blind eye, to a certain extent, to *klei kodesh* (rabbinic clergy) such as shochem, mohelim and rabbanim. They did not bother them and sufficed by saying that these individuals were “stripped of all rights,” i.e. they were not allowed to have government jobs. At the same time, though, they were encouraged to work.

R' Refael took advantage of this opportunity and founded an agricultural settlement in the Soviet style. The moshav was located about twenty kilometers away from the city and mainly had vineyards for wine manufacturing and a factory for drying fruit. As a branch of his moshav he bought a large piece of land in the Bagishomol quarter, where he planted additional vineyards and built another factory for drying fruit. He built large storage houses for the fruit. In these places he hired all those *klei kodesh* and paid them ample salaries.

During World War II, when thousands of Jewish refugees flooded the city, R' Refael housed hundreds of Polish refugees in these storage houses and on the large property he owned. He also fed these hundreds of people. He, together with other Bucharian Jews, went from house to house and asked people to commit to giving towards the food fund for the refugees.

When even more refugees came, R' Refael and his friends went to Jewish-Bucharian homes on Shabbos and said: “How can you eat the Shabbos meal while our brothers, who were saved from the fire on the front, are sitting and starving?”

R' Refael, like other Bucharian Jews, did not wait for the refugees to come to them but would go to the train station in order to meet them and to immediately arrange lodging for them in Bucharian

Jewish homes.

They said about R' Refael that he would take the food that his wife prepared for the family and give it to refugees. When she complained and asked: “What should I give our children to eat?” He said: “Our children have parents who take care of them while these Jews have nobody to look out for them.”

After the war R' Refael continued to develop the moshav he started. Apparently his great success aroused the jealousy of the government and they sent inspectors to look for problems to complain about. Since the fruit ripened in Elul, it once happened that the fruit arrived at the factory during the Yomim Tovim at a time that R' Refael and his Jewish employees did not work. Some informers used this opportunity to snitch to the authorities that the fruit was outside the factories where it could rot.

The inspector sent by the government arrived at the factory on Simchas Torah and saw R' Refael and all his employees celebrating and not working. R' Refael served the man *mashke* to the point that the man became drunk and then he sent him home.

R' Refael, who knew that soon they would accuse him of activities that were against the economic interests of communist society, decided to beat them at their own game. At that time, there was a serious shortage of truck tires which caused stoppages in many segments of the economy, and as soon as Yom Tov was over he went to Tashkent and used his connections to buy a large quantity of tires. A short time after he returned to Samarkand with the tires he was called to an interrogation at the main office which was responsible for the factory he owned.

As expected, they said that

instead of working on behalf of the Soviet economy he was celebrating with his workers. R' Refael shouted: “You are not ashamed to accuse me of lack of concern for the economy when you all know about the tire shortage and are doing nothing about it. I was the only one who cared and I made a special trip to Tashkent in order to bring hundreds of tires here, and now this is how you treat me?”

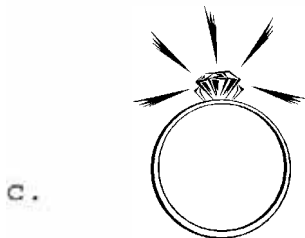
Fortunately for R' Refael, they accepted this and they turned on the person who incited them against R' Refael.

The moshav and the factory for fruit were a source of *parnasa* for dozens of Jews. They did not have to work on Shabbos and Yom Tov and they earned ten times the going salary. R' Refael was a very talented businessman. He took fruits that in Asia were very cheap and after the drying process he would sell them throughout Siberia for a good price and made a lot of money. This enabled him to pay his workers fifty rubles a day when a typical employee earned 5-7 rubles a day. With the remaining money he bought various farming tools.

When the Joint Distribution Committee found out about the Jewish enterprise they decided to get involved and help. They bought tractors and other heavy tools to work the ground. After several years, the communists decided that R' Refael's moshav was a capitalist operation, that its employees were too well paid, and that Joint support had to be terminated since it was a bourgeoisie Jewish organization connected with American imperialists. The results were swift and painful. The government announced the closing of the moshav and destroyed the buildings.

[Continuation to follow, G-d willing]

QUIZ



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THE LIGHT OF MY LIFE

Mrs. Penina Eliyahu tells us how her entire family became baalei t'shuva thanks to her son Lior.

My parents made aliya from Iraq about sixty years ago. After we left the transit camps my father started a shul in Ramat Gan. Although my parents were traditional, our whole world centered around one topic – Zionism. My older brothers were involved in all the activities and decisions of Zionist organizations and this was the most-spoken about topic at home. I was the seventh child in the family and I, like my brothers, absorbed the love for Zionism.

I got married at 17. My husband's family also had strong religious roots but he had dropped all observance when they came from Iraq. Our wedding took place in Tel Aviv at the Ohel Moed shul. My expectations for the future were ordinary: I wanted a home, children; I wanted them to attend university like my uncles who worked as doctors, accountants and the like.

We had three children. We named the oldest Lior (a hint of things to come – the light that would permeate our house). Two years later, our daughter, Ayala was born, and our youngest daughter, Inbar, was born seven years later.

We led a nice life. My husband ran a wedding hall that was very profitable so I had no need to go out

and work. We lived in a large beautiful house and had a private yard with many flowers. Our neighbors were our friends and the children started public school near our house. What more could I want?

One day Lior came home with Chanuka gelt in a little bag.

"What's that?" I asked curiously, and he said, "There is a picture here of the Rebbe from Chabad. He sent every one of the children money for Chanuka." This was our first encounter with Chabad and I did not know who the Rebbe is. Still, my natural instinct was to keep the picture like a charm. I put it in my pocketbook and took it with me wherever I went.

Our spiritual life was a mish-mash. I would light Shabbos candles but then I would sit down to watch television. My husband made Kiddush with the key to the car next to the cup, ready for our Shabbos outing.

Today, when I go on mitzvaim, I explain about Shabbos and mitzvos, fully understanding those who are not yet religious since I used to be one of them. I tell the ladies: "I was in this movie. Try to live a new script. You won't be sorry."

Lior was a source of nachas for me and my husband. He was

refined, handsome, and very talented, especially in music. He learned to play the piano, the flute and the clarinet but what he loved the most was musical composition. We encouraged him and he joined a youth orchestra. At age 14 he registered in the high school for the arts in Givatayim.

At school Lior enjoyed philosophy. I saw him change as he sought his identity. At a certain point he decided to leave the school and take up a bohemian lifestyle. He went abroad and remained there for half a year until he was drafted.

When he was drafted it was during the war in Lebanon. He still continued studying music with his teacher, Ron Colton, but Ron wasn't the same teacher that he used to be. He was in the process of becoming a baal t'shuva and Lior, an ardent philosopher, took a great interest in religion. Ron brought him the book *HaAdam V'HaBria* by R' Meir Blizinsky and my bookworm read it avidly.

In his next meeting with Ron, Lior said he found the book very interesting. Ron offered to introduce him to the author. At first Lior thought he was joking but Ron continued to ask him whether he wanted to meet R' Meir, eventually explaining, "I learn with R' Meir every week."

Though I did not know then about the meetings between Lior and Ron with R' Meir, I noticed that Lior was often away from home. He would come home from the army, take a nap, and then leave the house. I didn't ask him where he was going. I thought a young man needed friends and his privacy.

I sensed that something was changing in Lior and that this was for the good. He became more refined, he offered his help more readily, and he spoke in a way that was not common for his social circle. Previously, he had been demanding, wanting to be spoiled,

but now this changed to an attitude of respect towards my husband and me. I once saw him protectively holding a book and I asked him what it was. He told me “Tanya” but did not elaborate.

The next incident that lit a red light for me was when he said he wanted to go to Tzfas for Pesach. Maybe, if he had told me he was going alone, I would not have asked him so many questions, but his sister Ayala echoed his request: We want to go to Tzfas for Pesach.

After many years I realized how wise my son was. He knew that he was young and that we, his parents, were much older than him. It would not be easy to convince us to change our ways. But his sister was 21, had finished the army and had traveled. He felt comfortable enough with her to tell her about his journey and she did not dissuade him from it. On the contrary, she jumped like Nachashon ben Aminadav into the sea of Chabad Chassidus.

Lior followed the Rebbe’s principle – if you know alef-beis, teach that to someone else. Ayala was ripe for Lior’s message and unlike him, where the process was slow and sure, she went ahead full force. Tznius, Shabbos, Kashrus, it all changed at a dizzying rate like at a comet streaking across the sky.

Then came the announcement: Ima, Abba, I am going to learn at Machon Alte in Tzfas. Lior was already learning in Tomchei T’mimim in Tzfas. I saw that brother and sister were determined and something began to change within me. Lior asked my husband to change his life, to start keeping Shabbos, to daven, to put on t’fillin. I, however, was considered the “tough nut to crack.” It was not that I had any opposition to religion – on the contrary, I valued religion very much. But there was something that caused me to shy away from the t’shuva being done by my children. Ayala had been about to get engaged



to a young man who was wealthy, intelligent, and very nice. It hurt me that my darling daughter was going to throw away a rosy future just because he wasn’t religious. I felt that this would be the mistake of a lifetime for her and my heart was torn in two. It was the religion that had caused her to make such a choice, and I resented it for that. But Lior and Ayala were stronger than the superficial world that I knew. They asked, demanded, explained, and helped me overcome my reticence over the new path they had chosen.

I began learning with Uzit Schneersohn of Kfar Chabad and with Rochel Hendel of Tzfas. When Ayala was invited to the home of Rabbi Tzeitlin in Tzfas she had them invite us, too, and we spent Yomim Tovim and Shabbasos together. For an entire year my husband and I got involved in Jewish life... and then the misfortune happened.

I had often heard my father-in-law say: “If you profit but not in the right way, you can lose it all in a day.” I asked him what he meant by not the right way and he looked at me and sadly said, “If you don’t keep Shabbos, don’t tithe your money, are not particular about Kashrus ...”

Now I experienced it. One night, our wedding hall, the source of our livelihood, went up in flames. We had no insurance and there was no source of money for renovations and starting over. Today, in hindsight, I say: “Hashem gave and Hashem took,” but back then ... our entire world crumbled before our eyes. Time and again we sustained heavy losses yet did not want to see the connection. One day I sat down with my husband and we spoke about what happened and we arrived at the painful but true conclusion: there is a connection.

Hashem did a chesed with us. He took out His anger on wood and stone and not on us. My mother would say: “When you lose money or property, you lost it instead of life.” We knew that we had not been particular about Shabbos observance in the wedding hall, nor about the Kashrus of food, and so we kept quiet and accepted the judgment upon us.

One question niggled at me, though. I have two adult children and they will want to marry soon. How will I be able to marry them off without money?

My life had changed. In addition to our source of income being

destroyed, our house was suddenly empty since my three children had gone to the United States to school. Lior was in Seattle, Ayala was in Machon Chana in Crown Heights, and Inbar was in Beis Rifka high school in Crown Heights. I finally decided to go to New York too.

This was in 5748, shortly before the passing of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka a"h. My daughters met me at the airport and I was moved to see how much they had grown, physically and spiritually. As I sat ensconced between the two of them in the back of the taxi, I blurted out, "I'm not going to the Rebbe without a wig."

They were flabbergasted and didn't know what to say. I repeated what I had said and added, "We are going right now to buy one."

I noticed that Ayala, who was sitting to my right, was crying and I turned to my left to ask Inbar if she knew why Ayala was crying and was surprised to see that she, too, was in tears. I looked at the driver — at least *he* didn't seem overwrought. I had no choice but to wait until they calmed down and could tell me the reason for this sudden outburst of emotion.

They told me that the night before they had spent hours discussing how to convince me to cover my hair before I met the Rebbe. They came up with one idea after another, dismissed it, and so on. They were very afraid that I would never agree to cover my hair.

They decided on an unconventional approach. They directed their thoughts at me on the plane and prayed: "Ima, please, we, your dear daughters, ask and pray that Hashem illuminate your heart so that you will agree to do this mitzva of covering your hair."

They prayed like this for a long time and so my declaration in the taxi was their dream come true. Just listening to this made tears come to my eyes too.

The first time I saw the Rebbe was at a convention for women that took place downstairs in 770. I was in shock. I was overcome by such excitement that I had never felt before in my life. I would not have been able to explain to you why I felt this way. I knew (from Ayala) that I should say a bracha upon seeing the Rebbe walk in.

I took earphones for a translation from Yiddish to Hebrew so I understood what the Rebbe was saying. It was a sicha about the importance of having a pushka on the wall of the kitchen. The Rebbe spoke about women's role and I sat riveted to everything he said.

The days flew by and I went with my daughters from shiur to shiur, from "dollars" to a party at Machon Chana. I met Ayala's friends from Machon Alta who had also come to New York. I sometimes thought to myself: "Whoa, Penina! How did you fall into this?" I knew Kfar Chabad a little bit and had learned with some Lubavitcher women, as I mentioned, but 770 was another world entirely; a world that was all Rebbe, Chabad and Chassidus. I didn't know how I fit in but I enjoyed every minute.

A girl I met in Machon Chana caught my eye; I thought she would be perfect for Lior. Ayala was in the middle of a shidduch, so I thought it was time Lior started going out, too, but he disagreed.

"First of all, I'm on shlichus. Second, I have a mashpia in yeshiva and he will take care of me when the time comes. You don't have to worry about it," he assured me.

I used all my persuasive powers on him but Lior insisted he didn't want to meet her. You would think I would back down but I don't give up that easily. Instead, I decided to go to the top, to the one person who could change Lior's mind. To who? To the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of course!

My daughter and I went to 770 and waited on line. I was very

nervous. I so badly wanted the Rebbe to tell Lior to get married and I hoped I could say the right words to explain myself. The line kept moving and there I was, right in front of the Rebbe. I didn't manage to say much. I did not mention a wedding or date or shidduch or anything like that. I just asked for "a bracha for my children" and said no more, but the Rebbe envisioned everything.

I will never forget what happened next. The Rebbe smiled broadly and he handed me two dollars and I began to tremble. "This is for the children — mazal tov, mazal tov!"

I nearly fainted. As in a dream, I felt them lead me outside. Everyone around me was wondering what had happened.

I continued trembling, still unable to contain the emotion I felt from the moment I saw the Rebbe standing facing me. It was the feeling of a little girl who suddenly discovers her father after his absence from the house for many years. I couldn't stop thinking of his smile.

That night my daughter got engaged and Lior got an answer from his mashpia to meet the girl I had seen at Machon Chana. Not long afterwards he, too, announced his engagement. Now the Rebbe's two dollars and his response to me was clear.

The weddings took place in Israel. They were dignified affairs that were attended by many mashpiim, rabbanim, and friends. Ayala got married in Beis Menachem in Kfar Chabad and Lior in Ramat Gan.

I continued to travel to the Rebbe together with my husband and we received brachos for many things. For example, my husband asked the Rebbe for a bracha for parnasa. The answer was: check t'fillin. We were so surprised because we had bought the t'fillin by a top sofer. When we had them checked we were told that the middle parsha had been put in

upside-down. This was immediately corrected and we informed the Rebbe.

My life became full of Chassidus. Sometimes I forgot that there was ever a time I wasn't a Lubavitcher. But there were other times, especially when I made a cheshbon ha'nefesh, when I said: "Hashem, why didn't I know all this thirty years ago? Why wasn't I able to start out with a life of Torah and mitzvos, Chabad Chassidus?"

Then I think about Lior and my heart swells with love and thanks to him for everything he brought into my life. I know that he poured out his heart in prayer for me and my husband and it says that t'fillos that come from the heart go directly through the gateway of prayer and are accepted. Lior would pray that our entire family do t'shuva and Hashem listened to his prayers.

I remember how he asked Ayala to help him and how she was the "bulldozer" that moved things along so rapidly. I am amazed by my younger daughter Inbar, and how she decided that being religious is the most important thing she has to do. She was only 13 yet with complete kabbalas ol, she willingly switched from a secular school to a religious one with all the changes this move entailed. She has powerful soul powers. She is also the one who made sure that we continued on the path of Torah and mitzvos and wouldn't slacken, and was a sort of



"mashgiach ruchni" for us.

I thank Hashem for my three wonderful children and the tremendous happiness they give me and my husband. Our nachas is when we see our grandchildren being raised to a life of Torah and mitzvos from birth.

I work in a wig salon and I encourage women to cover their hair. I believe that the Rebbe MH"M will redeem us very soon and I

constantly explain the importance in proclaiming "Yechi Adoneinu ..." and "Yechi HaMelech" in addition to darchei ha'Chassidus. When I talk to people who aren't yet religious about the big change I made in my life, I tell them that the way of Chabad is so terrific. Try it out and you'll see, as we did. The real light in the world is the light of Torah, the light of Chabad, and the light of Melech HaMoshiach.

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BRINGING THE BEIS HAMIKDASH TO LIFE

By Nosson Avrohom

The children's video, "Shlomi and Stam in the Beis HaMikdash," is a wonderful example of turning lofty ideas into something easy to understand. To take such a great and holy building, concepts that are so high, and put them into a delightful children's video which teaches so much, mainly about the structure of the Beis HaMikdash, is really an art. Mrs. Rachel Noam of Kfar Chabad, the person behind this production, tells us how this video came to be made.

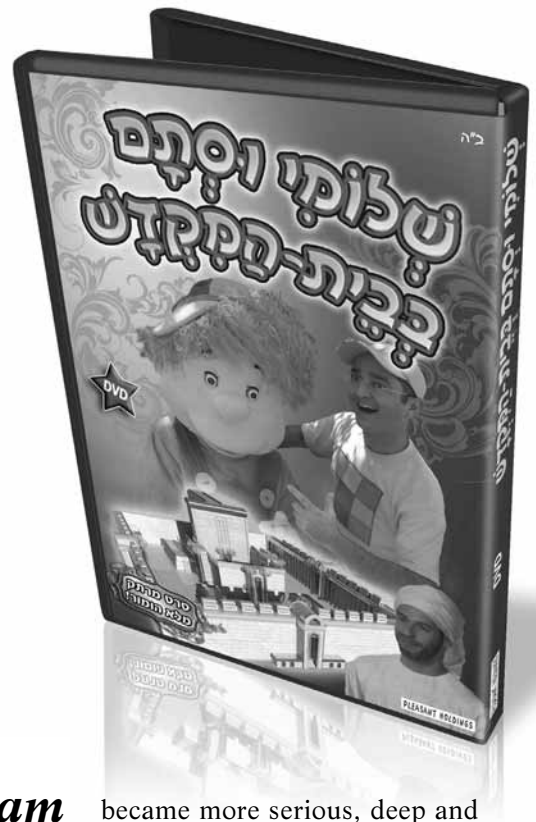
From when the Rebbe announced the imperative to study the Hilchos Beis HaBechira, asking us to "build" the Mikdash through learning about it, especially during

the Three Weeks, many projects have been done on the subject. Books were written, numerous lectures were delivered, and public awareness about the Mikdash

became more serious, deep and most importantly – real.

However, all those books, albums and lectures targeted adults. The assumption was that children cannot grasp all the nuances of the construction of the Mikdash, and when the subject was taught it was done in general terms without much explanation.

Well, this assumption was proven wrong when *Shlomi U'Stam B'Beit HaMikdash* (Shlomi and Stam in the Beis HaMikdash) appeared on the market, produced by Mrs. Rachel Noam of Kfar Chabad. The video tells the story of a child who yearned to build the Beis HaMikdash. It has a fascinating plot laced with humor. The child, Stam, a life size puppet operated by actor Josh Sagi, yearns to go to the Beis HaMikdash. On the way, he learns from actor Shlomi Laniado (there was an article about him in issue #708 of *Beis Moshiach*) about the "straight path" to build the Beis HaMikdash and he ultimately gets



to visit it in a sort of dream.

The dream is a virtual tour of the Mikdash where he gets to walk around in the actual dimensions and have a Kohen explain to him how the Mikdash is constructed, its purpose and spiritual content. "Producing the video took a long time," says Mrs. Noam. "The animation alone took over a year. It's a real tour within the Bayis which shows children – and even adults – the Mikdash in its actual dimensions and in vivid color. Rabbi Menachem Makover helped us a lot, along with animator Meir Barkil."

The film is light and full of humor, professional and suited to every boy and girl, no matter their background. The script was conceived by Shlomi Laniado. Along with the spreading of the wellsprings, the child watching it will have an enjoyable time learning fundamental concepts in Chassidus that hasten the Geula, such as Ahavas Yisroel, korbanos, *Ikvisa d'Meshicha*, "our deeds and avoda throughout the exile," and will truly look forward to Geula and the building of the Beis HaMikdash. Most importantly, the child will also understand that he has the ability and power to build the Beis HaMikdash.

The video was filmed using advanced technology with High Definition cameras in rich color. The producer and editor, Omri Refael Perry, did a painstaking job with utmost patience, along with the professional production team.

Anyone who watches the video can't help but notice how much work went into it both professionally and as far as the content. I met with Mrs. Noam, a popular lecturer of Chassidus, a former kibbutznik who experienced clinical death as a student in the Shenker Institute, an experience which led her to Chabad. Many people have read

her book *Chazara L'Chaim* (*The View From Above* in English) in which she describes the events of her life from when she was a girl until she discovered the Rebbe.

Mrs. Noam did not study filmmaking, nor was she involved in musical productions. She ran several businesses and companies in the north of Israel after successfully completing her degree in manufacturing and management. And yet, she is the one behind two excellent productions for children, the CD "Dalik U'Stam" which contains the 12 P'sukim and this new CD about the Beis HaMikdash.



How did you end up making these productions and why for children?

"Over a decade ago I put out the first CD "Dalik U'Stam." The star of the film was Dalik Volinitz, a highly regarded actor. In that film he is seen going on an extraordinary trip in the wake of the Creation of the world. The production has easy to learn songs and fun surprises. The words of the twelve songs on the CD are the 12 P'sukim which the Rebbe wants every child to know as part of the preparations for Geula. I wanted to spread the Rebbe's vision

among a broad public so we chose to work with an actor known in the secular world. It was a big success."

Feedback was positive. The CD reached boys and girls who lived in places without much in the way of Judaism. Who knows whether they would have heard anything about Judaism if not for this CD. "You won't find a Lubavitcher kid who doesn't know the 12 P'sukim, but the Rebbe wants to reach every child. The most moving thing was seeing a bereaved father lighting a memorial bonfire on Mt. Herzl on Independence Day and reading the pasuk, "Kol Yisroel ..." When he

was asked why he chose it he said he saw it on a CD that his grandson was watching and the pasuk "grabbed him."

Ten years went by since the success of "Dalik U'Stam," and Mrs. Noam decided that since we still don't have the hisgalus, we need another production that will reach every Jewish boy and girl.

"The Rebbe talks about preparing the world to greet Moshiach and I wondered what else could be done that can be categorized as

I FELT THAT THE REBBE WAS TELLING ME: I KNOW YOU ARE HERE AND I BLESS YOU

Mrs. Noam lives in Kfar Chabad. In her free time you will find her giving lectures in which she tells her life story about growing up on kibbutz Ruchama near Ariel Sharon's ranch.

"I often went on his jeep when I was a kid to get a ride out of the kibbutz."

Her father joined HaShomer HaTzair (a virulently anti-religious socialist Zionist movement) when he was a boy and that is how he raised his children. Her mother, a Holocaust survivor, recoiled from communism and did not believe that ideology.

"Stalin is not the sun of the nations but a lowly murderer," she would say to my father.

It was her mother, who had witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust, who raised her daughter with the idea that there is a G-d.

"I was conflicted. I would turn towards heaven and ask to be able to see G-d. 'If you are there, I want to see you,' I would murmur. I was more inclined to believe my mother but I didn't know what G-d is and what His role is until the accident, while I was a student at Shenker. A construction beam fell on my head and I experienced clinical death. After that I began searching for the truth.

She was fortunate that she met her husband at this time and he helped her in her search.

"The search took me seven years. A visit to friends in Yerushalayim, a little reading from a siddur, and I was on my way. My husband and I realized that the truth lies in Judaism but we still needed someone to guide us. We asked Rabbi Yosef Yashar of Acco and he referred us to Chassidus and the Lubavitcher Rebbe."

The Noams wrote to the Rebbe and received a fascinating response. Step by step they progressed until they became Chassidim.

"The Rebbe says that the difference between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and the other Tanaim is the difference between the Creator and His creations. We felt that way with the Rebbe, too, that the difference between him and other rabbis was enormous. When we went to the Rebbe I couldn't get over it. It was a literal gilui Elokus. The Rebbe gave my daughter a coin for tz'daka and then looked at me as I stood at some distance. I felt that the Rebbe was telling me: 'I know that you are here and I bless you.'

"At the 19 Kislev farbrengen, 5747, I asked myself why the Rebbe was speaking in Yiddish and not in Hebrew. Just then, the Rebbe himself asked my question aloud and he answered that hafatzas ha'Chassidus needs to permeate the world and Yiddish is a language taken from many languages so it refines the world. I was flabbergasted at having the Rebbe answer my question during the farbrengen. Then the Rebbe explained what a keresh is, that it is both 'kesher' and 'sheker.' The kesher transforms the world of sheker. I felt that the Rebbe was directing this at me because my transformation began with a keresh (beam) that fell on my head."

preparation. I decided to produce a video that would deal directly with Geula. But how could a video like that be made for children?"

The decision was made six years ago, but time passed with more difficulties than progress. Several attempts were made at writing a script but nothing worked out well.

"There was a big producer to whom I pitched my idea and I even gave him a lot of money in advance. He spent a lot of time on it but was unsuccessful. He gave the money back to me and said that he did not understand what happened to him but he was unable to turn the concept into anything concrete. That is precisely the idea of getting the 'Lights of Tohu' into 'Vessels of Tikkun' – to take the Beis HaMikdash and convey it to children, even those who are not religious. I realized I would have to produce this myself.

"Like every Chassid who runs into a brick wall, I wrote to the Rebbe and asked for guidance and a bracha. The Rebbe's answer was in volume 23, p. 194, and it really surprised me. The Rebbe laid out with his answer precisely how the video would look. In a long postscript the Rebbe gives explanations for every one of the vessels of the Beis HaMikdash. The explanation is really detailed. That's when it hit me – I'm trying to do something about the Geula but Geula is a very broad concept. The Rebbe chose just the right topic for the video – the Beis HaMikdash. Now I was more focused. The work still wasn't easy because the Beis HaMikdash is also a broad and abstract topic. I spent days studying it.

"I knew Shlomi Laniado, a famous actor for children in Israel who has a warm spot for Chabad and the Rebbe. When he was a boy he was seriously ill and his parents wrote to the Rebbe and asked for his bracha. They were told to put

him in a Chabad school and he had a miraculous recovery. When he was in the army he was in the unit where kidnapped soldiers Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser served, together with Ayal Benin, Shani Turgeman and Einan Sharabi who were killed in an attack on the Lebanese border. He was with them earlier that day and it was only by a miracle that he did not join them but remained behind at the observation tower.

“When I spoke to him after the tragedy about this production – a video about the Beis HaMikdash – he offered to perform for free in memory of his friends. We began working together on a script. He prepared sketches and I filled them with themes from Chassidic teachings.

“One day Shlomi wrote up an idea for the video. Stam, the child, sets the stage for the unfolding events, after which he would sleep and do a virtual tour of the Mikdash in his dream. It turned out to be an ingenious idea that children relate to. Shlomi is definitely a terrific educator who understands children.”

While Mrs. Noam was engrossed in this project, she received a visit from a young man from Yerushalayim by the name of Shlomo Sabag. He had read her book in which she wrote that she is a direct descendant to the Alfandri family. The young man had a surprise for her – a genealogical book that shows that the Alfandri family traces its roots back to Betzalel who built the Mishkan.

“I was excited to get another sign that my work was on the right track. R’ Makover helped us a lot and we finally finished it. The finished product has a nice plot interwoven with high quality animation.’

I asked Mrs. Noam how she

was able to produce something that children can relate to when the Beis HaMikdash is a hard topic for them. To my surprise, she saw this as a compliment.

“That’s what we accomplished. ‘Lights of Tohu,’ and there aren’t higher lights than the Beis HaMikdash, in ‘Vessels of Tikkun,’ so that children can understand it. There are many things that seem removed from us, even to adults, and yet, the Beis HaMikdash pertains to every Jew at every age and level of understanding. The video brings out this point through Chassidus.

“The text of the video breaks



down these lofty matters and explains them in simple terms, according to Chassidus, and turned out to be a winning combination of all these factors.”

As in every matter of holiness, the *sitra achra* did all it could to interfere but Mrs. Noam kept her cool.

“The work took years. You need endless patience for something like this, for every step, every song, every day of filming, every change that is made, and all the consultations. It all takes time, lots of time, certainly when we needed to get many people

together in one place. Just coordinating it all is exhausting but I prepared myself and did not allow the challenges to sabotage our goal.

“I’ll give you just one example out of many. Shortly before our scheduled day of filming, something that requires plenty of coordination, my father fell in his house. My father is 95 and I went with him to the emergency room and helped him for three weeks until he recovered. He got out two days before we filmed. Nearly every day of filming someone couldn’t make it at the last minute. So I let whoever I brought in for

any job know ahead of time that I wouldn’t be getting annoyed at anything. People did not understand how I didn’t get upset that things weren’t running as they should. These delays proved to me that we were working on something worthwhile.”

Tell us how you managed to turn concepts into something your young viewers could appreciate.

“Here’s an example. One of the concepts we worked with is that the pillar of smoke could not be moved by the wind. The way we showed this was that we put many

flags on the Beis HaMikdash and in the video you can see them waving in the breeze while the pillar of smoke remains straight. When a child sees this, he understands how great the miracle was. Another topic was the crowding, that despite their standing crowded together, they had plenty of space to bow. We showed a lot of people bowing on the ground and explained the miracle with a picture.”

How did you get involved in producing videos and for children?

“I often wrote to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh and opened to answers about chinuch, but I didn’t know what to do with them. I did not see myself suited to chinuch in the usual way. One day I came up with the idea of a video for children. It says that Moshiach will teach Torah in a visual way and I realized that you can teach a child for years such concepts as the Beis HaMikdash with models and pictures but what a child will grasp by seeing one video is much faster, more tangible and has a greater impact.

“From the feedback we see that the message got through. Children understand concepts connected to the Mikdash and are not just making do with rote learning. The Beis HaMikdash is connected to each one of us, not just to adults. The Kohen Gadol, for example, is the heart of the Jewish people, all Jews, young and old. Our goal was

to take this difficult concept and make it clear to children while not diluting it.”

Most of the feedback they get is from the irreligious. Mrs. Noam refers to a phone call she got shortly before the interview.

“Someone called Shlomi and said that he did not get a religious education and doesn’t plan on giving one to his children but he wanted to thank him for the video. He said that his son once asked him what korbanos are, since he had heard about it from his teacher, and he didn’t know what to tell him. After watching the video and understanding the explanation given by Chassidus, he had the answer for his son.”

With a little smile Mrs. Noam told me some criticism she got from a religious Jew who noted that Shlomi doesn’t have a beard. She understands the criticism but doesn’t necessarily agree with it.

“The idea was for the video to reach all sectors and we tried to create a balance. Our goal is to reach everyone and I hope we succeeded.”

While working on the CD, Mrs. Noam opened the Igros Kodesh to many encouraging answers from the Rebbe. We asked her to tell us about one special letter and she told us the following:

“We had the idea of referring to the Rebbe in the video. When I wrote to the Rebbe I opened to this clear answer in volume 20, p. 43:

I will begin regarding my participation in the aforementioned project by prefacing that in an undertaking as critical as this – if a little bit is pasul then the entire thing is pasul. And even if it is only that in some area an explanation that is not suitable is printed, that makes a flaw in the entire project. From this we understand that the one responsible can only be someone who has the time to devote to it as necessary, to review the entire commentary from one end to the other and to review it with the proper depth in order to avoid any veering from the path of tradition, which is the straight path.

Obviously, as to the aforementioned project - a shliach or representative cannot be appointed because something as critical as this cannot be done by trusting others and relying on them. Especially according to the aphorism of the Tzemach Tzedek that a word that is spoken is for the audience present; in writing – for the generation; in print – for generations to come.

Therefore, I must refuse to accept that suggestion and negate it not only because of responsibility but also so as not to associate my name with the project since that is synonymous with taking responsibility, as is obvious.

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