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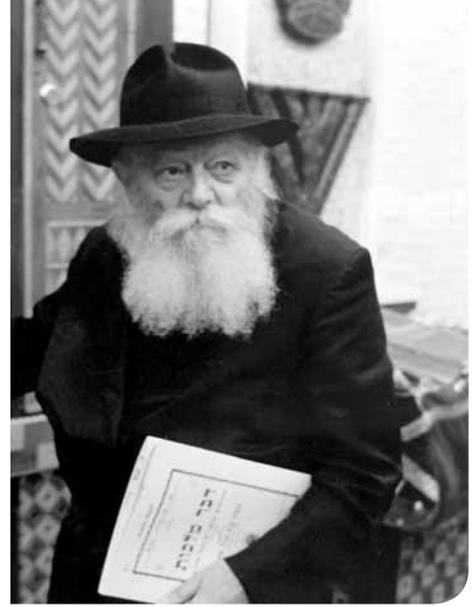
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BASI L'GANI 5731

In honor of Yud Shvat, Beis Moshiach presents a selection of the maamer the Rebbe MH”M delivered on Yud-Alef Shvat 5731, which is being studied this year by chassidim all over the world, in accordance with the custom established by the Rebbe to review each year a section of the Rebbe Rayatz’s maamer “Basi L’Gani” of 5710. • This year we begin the 20-year cycle anew, focussing on the first section of the profound and foundational chassidic discourse. • Part 1



Translated by Boruch Merkur

1. [...] In the first section of the *maamer* “Basi L’Gani” (the portion that is relevant for this year), there are two concepts that constitute the main theme:

a) The dwelling place that is established for G-d in this world [through the Divine service of *iskafia* (compelling one’s Evil Inclination to act in accordance with G-d’s will), etc.] serves as a home for His very essence, referred to as “*ikar Sh’china*,” the primary and inner dimension of the Divine Presence, the aspect of light that transcends the worlds.

b) This dwelling place is located, as it were, specifically in the **lower realms**.

And these two concepts are interrelated: A dwelling place for G-d’s essence is established specifically through the Divine service of the lower realms, by resisting the influence that stems from the Other Side [the side of evil] and transforming that darkness into light.

2. The discussion of the reason for Creation brought in the

beginning of the Rebbe Rashab’s Hemshech 5666 sheds light on this central theme of “Basi L’Gani.”

In the Hemshech, the Rebbe Rashab cites a) the Zohar that says that the reason for Creation is in order for G-d to be known by His creations. The Rebbe Rashab also quotes b) Rabbi Chayim Vital’s *Eitz Chayim* – that Creation provides a forum for the revelation of G-d’s powers and deeds, etc.

The Rebbe Rashab comments that the reason for Creation brought in the Zohar is not the ultimate true reason, for the intent of “in order to be known” is fulfilled specifically in the higher worlds, especially in the world of Atzilus, where the knowledge of G-dliness infinitely surpasses the knowledge that can be acquired in the worlds of Bria and Yetzira, and it certainly exceeds the knowledge of G-d that is attained in this lower, physical world. Thus, on the basis of this reason alone it would not have been necessary for there to have been the creation of the physical world at all [to

which we have ascribed paramount importance].

Similarly, it is impossible to say that the reason for Creation is for the sake of attaining perfection – that He should [be revealed to] be perfect in His deeds, etc. – as asserted in *Eitz Chayim*, for to achieve this end it also would have sufficed to create just the higher worlds [and the lower worlds thereby become superfluous].

The ultimate reason for Creation is as it is said in the Midrash on the verse in Shir HaShirim, “‘His calves are pillars of marble’ – ‘His calves (*shokav*)’ refers to the world, which G-d yearned (*nishtokek*) to create.” No intellectual reason is provided as to why G-d had this yearning; G-d simply desired to draw down a revelation of the essence of His Infinite Light specifically into the lower dimension [the physical world]. Indeed, our Sages have said, “G-d desired to have a dwelling place in the lower worlds,” referring to the impetus for Creation as G-d’s “desire” because it is not compelled by an intellectual rationale. It is, rather, a desire, a state that transcends reason and intellect. To further elucidate this point, our Rebbeim of blessed memory have said on the matter, “Questions cannot be asked regarding a desire,” meaning that this desire [for Creation]

stems from a dimension that is not subject to questioning, etc., insofar as it is beyond reason and intellect, even transcending the very origin of primordial intellect, the aspect of Divine Wisdom.

The approach of the Zohar – that G-d created the world in order to be known by His creations – provides a reason and intellectual explanation. Namely, in order that G-d's creations should come to know [His qualities of perfection and excellence] that He is [for example] merciful and gracious, etc. Likewise, the intent of Creation offered by *Eitz Chayim* – so that the perfection of G-d's powers and deeds, etc., should be revealed – is an intellectual reason and consequence that will be revealed from latency to actuality. However, according to the words of the Alter Rebbe, the true motivation for Creation is at a level that transcends reason, etc. In fact, there is no explanation or intellectual reason; G-d simply desired to have a dwelling place in the lower worlds.

We may, therefore, assert the following elucidation of the Rebbe Rayatz's statement in his *maamer* that “the *ikar Sh'china* was present in the lower realms [originally, at the beginning of Creation].” Since G-d “desired” to have a dwelling place in the lower worlds, [the nature of] the dwelling place reflects its source, the place of its origin, which is the very essence and being of G-d, transcending any possible reason, etc. And since there was a Divine “desire,” so it was in actuality [for G-d is omnipotent and infinite, therefore any latent Divine capacity is also manifest]. Thus, the *ikar Sh'china*, G-d's being and essence, was indeed originally present in the lower worlds.

It was explained above (quoting the Midrash) that the sins of the early generations caused the

“The ultimate reason for Creation is as it is said in the Midrash on the verse in Shir HaShirim, “His calves are pillars of marble’ – ‘His calves (*shokav*)’ refers to the world, which G-d yearned (*nishtokek*) to create.” No intellectual reason is provided as to why G-d had this yearning; G-d simply desired to draw down a revelation of the essence of His Infinite Light specifically into the lower dimension, into the physical world.”

Divine Presence to depart. The Rebbe Rayatz's *maamer* elaborates on this point, saying that [this process was not irreversible, rather] repentance for the sin, etc., evokes, “I have returned to My garden (*gani*)’ – to My private chamber, etc.” Repentance elicits the return of the Divine Presence, the *ikar Sh'china*, to the lower worlds. The inference here is that the *ikar Sh'china* would be present once again as it was prior to the sin. However, in truth we are forced to say that repentance evokes an even higher revelation than prior to the sin.

Support for this assertion is derived from the analogy of the descent of the soul into the body, insofar as it is known that its descent is for the sake of a subsequent ascent. For were it no so, what would be the point of its original descent? This line of reasoning is said regarding something particular (the descent of an individual soul), but the same is true – in fact, it is even more certainly true – regarding the general process of Creation (*hishtalshlus*), etc. Thus, the revelation brought about through repentance (which follows the descent of sin) surpasses the revelation that existed prior to the sin.

However, at first glance we can say that there is actually no proof derived from the concept of the descent of the soul into a body;

no proof, that is, of any benefit resulting from the original descent of sin. Rather, it appears that the analogue departs from the analogy, as follows.

The descent of the soul to the lower world is the order originally established in the process of Creation. Of force we must say then that the intent of the soul's descent is that it should ascend higher than the place from where it descended. But the sin of the Tree of Knowledge and the subsequent sins, were not part of the plan, as it were. For did not G-d create Man upright? (Koheles 7:29) These sins, rather, were a result of the freewill granted to Man. Man freely chose to sin, thereby blemishing himself and transgressing the proper path. Thus, there is apparently nothing compelling the notion that the elevation of repentance that follows sin should surpass the height that existed prior to the sin; it is sufficient to say that it simply repairs the damage [and takes the soul back to where it was prior to the sin].

But in truth we must say that there is indeed a greater height attained, that through repentance one reaches an even higher revelation, etc. And this is because the descent of sin is in fact analogous to the descent of the soul in the body, as will be explained.■

[To be continued be”H]

SOUL TREK IN THE HIMALAYAS

After 25 days of meditation and isolation from the world and surviving on little food, I lost my way in a forest amidst the Himalayan mountains. In the moment between despair and hope I called out to the Creator of the world for the first time.

By Shneur Zalman Berger

Dror, a young man in his forties, is a shliach in northern India. To look at him you would find it hard to believe that he himself spent time in the ashrams of India in

search of Truth or, as he put it, “to find *shleimus* (wholeness).” Today he sports a black hat and full beard with the refined face of a Tamim.

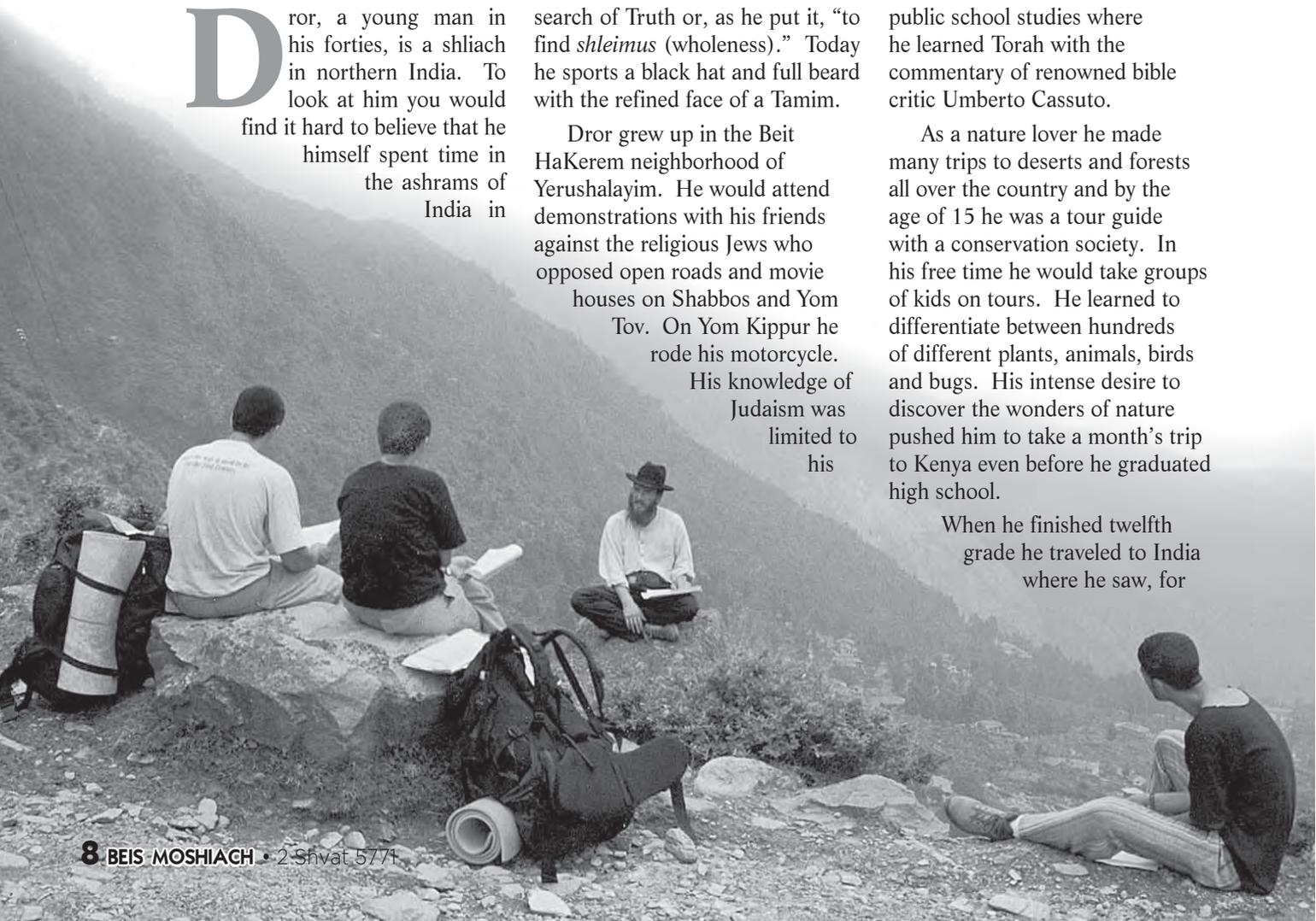
Dror grew up in the Beit HaKerem neighborhood of Yerushalayim. He would attend demonstrations with his friends against the religious Jews who opposed open roads and movie houses on Shabbos and Yom Tov. On Yom Kippur he rode his motorcycle.

His knowledge of Judaism was limited to his

public school studies where he learned Torah with the commentary of renowned bible critic Umberto Cassuto.

As a nature lover he made many trips to deserts and forests all over the country and by the age of 15 he was a tour guide with a conservation society. In his free time he would take groups of kids on tours. He learned to differentiate between hundreds of different plants, animals, birds and bugs. His intense desire to discover the wonders of nature pushed him to take a month’s trip to Kenya even before he graduated high school.

When he finished twelfth grade he traveled to India where he saw, for



the first time, local people bowing to idols and offering incense. He was horrified.

He started his military service as a medic in the paratroopers but then switched to the unit that he really wanted to be in. He was placed in charge of a navigational unit, and later he conducted a survival course for soldiers in special units.

“In the survival course soldiers learn how to manage on little food and how to sustain themselves emotionally if taken captive, G-d forbid, and what to do when lost in unfamiliar territory.” When he finished his army duty, Dror worked in various tour-related jobs.

“The survival course that I offered for civilians was a challenging one, with the central idea being, ‘there is nothing that stands in the way of the will.’ I taught them how to survive in a desert and under the harshest conditions. The highpoint of the course was a solo exercise in caves. Each participant was placed in a cave in the Judean desert equipped with only a liter of water; no flashlight, no sleeping bag or anything else, and that is where they spent the night.”

Throughout this period of time Dror had no connection to Judaism. At home he absorbed acerbic anti-religious attitudes. Despite his strong connection to his land, he felt that it was too small for his ambitions. He packed his clothes, took some money, and went on a long trip in India. For three months he traveled through India and Nepal with only his backpack. More than anything else he loved the Himalayan mountains.

Nature made him feel wonderful and this is what he sought. The majestic mountains and the magnificent scenery



“ I visited libraries in religious areas of Yerushalayim and found the Heichal Menachem library on Yeshaya Street. I walked in without a kippa and with a long ponytail and sat down to read.

captivated him. Neither spirituality nor politics interested him.

“I hiked and toured until the thrill of the great outdoors wore off and I lost interest. I sought something to identify with, something that would appeal to me. I began visiting ashrams. I met monks and talked to them about spirituality and even had a conversation with a guru. I became acquainted with various cultures and religions but did find any that sat well with me.

“One day I arrived in Dharamsala in northern India where Tibetan refugees live. Most of them fled from China after the Chinese murdered over a million of them. The Tibetan leader, who serves as both the spiritual

and political leader of the Tibetan people, lives there. There are a number of ashrams where the locals study Tibetan philosophy. Though it is presented as a scientific philosophy, it’s actually a religion, i.e. avoda zara (idol worship). Because of their dismal political situation, the Tibetans are very interested in having people from Western countries study their religion, for thus they gain worldwide popularity. Although I was anti-religious I joined the classes in the Tibetan ashram.

“The approach was attractive to me and I found it very interesting. I studied it for ten months and used my free time to read many books that they had in their library. I felt great, thinking I was achieving that state

of perfection I had been searching for. At a certain point I seriously considered becoming a monk, G-d forbid.

“Then certain things happened that began to wake up the Jewish soul within me. These signs made me realize there is a Creator of the world who wanted to get me back to my people.

“The classes were given by a monk who spoke Tibetan and were translated by one of his followers into English. I discovered that the translator was a Jew from England who had suffered from anti-Semitism in her youth and decided to convert. She moved to India and studied Tibetan religion, language and culture.

“Then one day she began to miss home. It was at the end of a long day of classes, Friday night. She came over to me and asked me to say ‘Gut Shabbos’ to her. That seemed odd since I considered Yiddish to be a primitive language that was extinct and I my connotations of the word ‘Shabbos’ were from the demonstrations in Yerushalayim. But I said it to her and she began to cry and told me that it made her so homesick for her parents’ home and Judaism. Suddenly, Judaism was on the map. It made me think. A short while later another thing happened.

“I was sitting as usual in a restaurant in the center of Dharamsala one morning, when one of the people there, a German who attended some of the same

classes as I did, came over to me. I was writing in my diary and he asked me what language I was writing in. When I told him that I am Israeli and I was writing in Hebrew, he laughed. When I asked him why he laughed he said, ‘For five years I tried learning Hebrew because I wanted to study the Kabbala which is the truest teachings in the world. When I gave up on learning Hebrew, I sufficed with coming here to study meditation according to Tibetan teachings, but you know Hebrew! Why don’t you study Kabbala?’

“Until that point I was so immersed in worlds distant from Judaism, but what he said woke me up and led to me to think, ‘Hey, I am Jewish, a member of the Jewish people.’ But another part of me whispered that Judaism was archaic and irrelevant. Besides, if it had anything to do with how Charedim behaved back home it surely was not the Truth.

“I continued visiting ashrams and in one of them I found books on Kabbala! Since that German had spoken highly of it, I looked at the books and felt that I was connecting to what they said, but obviously it was hard for me to understand what was written in these books.

“After a few weeks I found booklets written in Hebrew lying on top of bookcases in the library of the ashram where I studied. An Israeli had left them behind. I read the booklets and found them written in a light and easy style.

I enjoyed the content – it was about worlds, s’firos, and souls battling for a person’s neshama. Although I had learned a lot about the Tibetan religion’s secrets, it did not enable me to feel that I belonged because I studied it only out of curiosity and as an outsider. In contrast, what I read in those booklets moved me. I felt it pertained to me and spoke to my heart.

“As it says in Tanya, there are two inclinations battling within a person, and the evil inclination within me woke up in full force. I was suddenly overcome with anger against those who spread Judaism even in this small Tibetan village. There was another Israeli guy who was with me in the ashram, equally immersed in Tibetan teachings and he shared my feelings about religion. ‘They’re chasing us even here?’ I exclaimed to him in disbelief. He responded cynically, ‘Who knows, maybe one day it will have an effect on you ...’

“I continued studying as usual. But something subtle had changed within me. I had softer feelings towards Judaism and not the same level of hate that I felt back home.

“At that period of time I was convinced that I would stay with the Tibetan people forever. At a certain point I decided that I wanted to check out whether meditation gave me what I wanted: satisfaction, joy, and the feeling that I belonged. The experiment was complicated.

“I packed my clothes, food, some equipment and a tent and hoisted it all on my back. I then began climbing in the mountains. I looked for a deserted place that was inaccessible. After a protracted search I found a place that met my needs and pitched my tent. This would be my base for the next thirty days, in the course

“I eventually learned that the purpose of learning Chassidus is to prepare the world for Moshiach. I also learned about the Nasi HaDor through whom all energies flow to the entire world and it was an especial pleasure for me when I realized that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is Melech HaMoshiach.”

of which I would do a certain form of meditation while being disconnected from friends and family. This location enabled me to be completely cut off. My plan was to try it for thirty days and then decide whether this was the path for me.

“For twenty-five days I sat there on the mountain, removed from the world and focusing my energies for the purpose of understanding the inner workings of the soul until I could connect to my innermost core. I barely ate, but after a time, I had hardly any food and drink left. I became very weak. As the days passed I concluded that meditation had nothing to it and accomplished nothing.

“In order to see my plan through (thirty days) I began packing up on the twenty-fifth day since I knew that I had a five day journey until I reached Dharamsala.

“The weather was fine and the snow had started to melt. The melting snow caused erasure of the paths and road markers embedded in rocks and I lost my way. I was astonished, since from a young age I had been traveling to distant and unfamiliar places across Eretz Yisrael, Africa, India and Nepal and I had never gotten lost.

“I was weak from lack of nourishment. I was in an endless forest, which seemed to have no beginning or end. I was plagued by anxious thoughts. What will I do if I break a leg or injure myself while climbing? Who will rescue me if I’m not on a path or any place where people go? The sun set and I sat leaning against a tree and slept.

“In the morning I began climbing to the top of the mountain I was on and while climbing, in the moment between despair and hope, I called out to



Close to the heavens in the Himalayan Mountains

the Creator of the world for the first time in my life and asked Him to save me. In my heart I vowed that if I got out safely I would immediately return to Eretz Yisrael and there, near the Kosel, I would say the HaGomel blessing. I remembered once hearing from my older sister, who had learned a bit about Judaism, that when a person experienced a miracle they had to say this blessing. I was sure the blessing took at least an hour to say.

“When I arrived at the summit

I saw smoke in the distance. With hope in my heart I set off and after two exhausting days I arrived at the hut of an Indian family who lived in the middle of this forest in the Himalayan mountains. The smoke was emerging from the chimney of the oven in their home. They graciously hosted me and I ate something and regained my strength. Then my host showed me the way back to Dharamsala.

“A short time later I boarded a plane and I arrived in Eretz Yisrael early on the morning of Shavuot.

FEAR UPON THE NATIONS

The day Boruch slaughtered the chickens for Pesach, the yard was filthy with blood and feathers. What a day for the landlord to show up! When he saw the mess he was furious. “Pack up your belongings and get out of here!”

We couldn’t possibly leave Erev Pesach and find another place to live and do our programs! Boruch brought the landlord over to the large picture of the Rebbe and told him, “This rabbi is the one who sent us here. If you throw us out you will have to deal with him.”

The man kissed the picture with respect and said quietly, “Okay, clean up and everything will be fine,” and he left.

My family was surprised by my unexpected arrival but were even more surprised when I asked my brother to accompany me to the Kosel. He exclaimed, ‘You, were so anti, and now you want to pray at the Kosel?!’

“It was still the morning of Shavuot when I arrived at the Kosel. Thousands of people in holiday clothes and wrapped in tallitot were calmly walking the streets of the Old City. Before my mind’s eye I could see the Tibetan monks dressed in their orange robes and contrasted that with the completely different scene before me. I felt so connected to these Jews and how much I loved them because they were part of the nation that I had so wanted to abandon.

“I discovered that the HaGomel blessing is just one sentence, but that blessing near the Kosel was a milestone on my way towards Judaism and Chassidus.

“I developed a warm feeling for Judaism. I naively thought that I would find books about it in the public library but I soon

discovered that this was not the place to find what I was looking for. I visited libraries in religious areas of Yerushalayim and found the Heichal Menachem library on Yeshaya Street. I walked in without a kippa and with a long ponytail and sat down to read. The book *Sod Hashem L’Yirei’av* by Rabbi Yitzchok Ginsburgh really appealed to me. He explains the soul and the world according to Kabbala.

“I wanted to learn more about Judaism, especially about Jewish mysticism. I attended lectures given by rabbis and visited yeshivos of the kabbalists. I began wearing a kippa and started observing mitzvos like Shabbos and kashrus, which brought on pressure from my family: ‘What – you became religious all of a sudden?’

“One evening I went to the Yeshurun shul for a shiur given by Rabbi Yitzchok Ginsburgh. What he said made a deep impression on me and gave me a strong desire to study mysticism. This led me to the Chabad yeshiva in the Yad Eliyahu neighborhood in Tel Aviv, which is run by R’ Ginsburgh. I loved learning Chassidus and more than anything else – the maamarim of the Rebbe Rashab from the year 5670, which we studied in depth there. It was an indescribable pleasure for me to learn this.

“I eventually learned that the purpose of learning Chassidus is to prepare the world for Moshiach. I also learned about the Nasi HaDor through whom all energies flow to the entire world and it was an especial pleasure for me when I realized that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is Melech HaMoshiach.”

At a certain point, Dror moved to Yerushalayim and married. Shortly before the wedding he visited his grandmother who told him that in addition to the name Dror he was also named Moshe,

so his k’suba was written with his correct name: Dror Moshe.

His wedding took place in Sivan, 5758, at Moshav Orah near Yerushalayim. The guests were from all segments of Israeli society: friends from the tour groups, Chassidim from Breslov and Chabad, students of Rabbi Ginsburgh, etc.

After the wedding the new couple lived in Tzfas and Dror continued growing in Judaism and Chassidus through a friend, Yisrael Cohen. He continued learning Chassidus and broadened his knowledge of Judaism. He attended farbrengens and before long he was wearing a sirtuk, hat, and gartel. He continued learning in the Chabad Kollel in Tzfas, where he began studying for smicha.

“After a while, I was asked by Ascent to lead tours for the seminars they ran. After my initial reluctance I agreed, but this time I sat down to prepare what messages I would convey. Together with R’ Ginsburgh I prepared concepts from Chassidus and Kabbala that I taught along with explanations about the plants and animals we saw.

“I could see that the people were thirsty for spirituality and mysticism and I knew I had to find the right way to reach them based on methods I had learned in India. In the many conversations I had with R’ Ginsburgh we came up with a system of Chassidic concepts based on Kabbala which I taught. It was based on contemplation of the higher worlds and S’firo as they manifest in the human soul, along with soulful Chassidic niggunim.

The classic example is chapter 11 of Igeres HaKodesh in Tanya. It says there, ‘When a person meditates with the depth of his understanding and pictures his

coming into being from nothing at literally every moment, how could he imagine that it is bad for him or that he has any suffering related to children, health, and sustenance or other sufferings in the world. For the *ayin* (naught) which is His blessed wisdom is the source of life, welfare and delight ... In fact, however, no evil descends from above and everything is good.” During the course, I directed the students to meditate in great depth on “something from nothing” as the basis of knowing that everything is good and no evil descends from above.

“We also incorporated other concepts based on G-d’s greatness as well as on the G-dly and animal souls.”

Throughout his journey towards Judaism and Chassidus, Dror did not forget the picturesque Tibetan village of Dharamsala and the young guys there who sought Judaism but didn’t know it. He kept thinking about them and one day he came up with the idea of going to India and contacting the hundreds of Israelis immersed in the cults there, for the purpose of exposing them to the light of Chassidus.

“I had misgivings about the idea,” said Dror candidly. “We had a baby, our oldest son, Levi Yitzchok, and we didn’t know what to do. I consulted with R’ Ginsburgh and R’ Shaul Leiter of Ascent and both of them encouraged us to go on this unique shlichus.

“We also asked the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh and the answer we opened to gave us the strength we needed to go on shlichus. The letter was from 27 Sivan, 5716. It’s a long letter and I’ll quote just a few lines, ‘May you have good news to report soon from the ongoing activities you’ve written about ...



The Rebbe’s picture greets all guests

“About 170,000 Israeli tourists go to India every year! 3000 of them visit the Chabad house in Dharamsala.

may it be in a permanent way. By the organizers having a sense of permanent commitment in time and in the soul, this will make it more established and will attract even those who, for now, say that they are still not of Anash ... and in a way that even after your return from there, in a good and successful hour, the connection will be ongoing and be a channel for instilling Torah and mitzvos, illuminated by the light of Toras Ha’Chassidus. May it be with outstanding success and your influence will affect the ones you are trying to influence.’

“We knew that the physical and spiritual conditions there for a religious couple would be extremely difficult. In order to gain the strength we needed for this challenging trip we flew to Beis Chayeinu for Yud Shevat,

5760, and then Michal, the baby and I felt we were ready for shlichus. We didn’t have much money. People in Tzfas, especially R’ Leiter, paid our expenses. After the Purim meal in R’ Ginsburgh’s house which was also a goodbye party, we flew from Tel Aviv to Delhi.

“R’ Nachman Nachmanson, shliach in India, welcomed us and helped us tremendously. Shortly after we arrived in Delhi we took a jeep with a local driver and drove 18 hours to Dharamsala. On this exhausting trip we were stopped by policemen who conducted a thorough search of our luggage. We had 90 kilograms of matzos, personal stuff, and the beginnings of a Chabad house, which included: sifrei Chassidus, brochures on Moshiach and Geula and more. The policemen

expressed their surprise about how much we had with us. I told them that I was bringing ‘holy bread for the holy nation’ ... I explained to them that a group of Jews lived in Dharamsala and they were a holy people and I was bringing them the holy bread, which they eat. The policemen allowed us to continue.

“The trip itself was full of experiences and mishaps. An 18-hour trip with one’s wife and baby is no small thing ...

“As soon as we arrived we took a room in a local hotel and began our work. In the meantime I started looking for a house, which was no easy task. I knew I needed to find a big house from where I could start large-scale outreach. The main problem was that many houses in Dharamsala are rented to tourists by the room, so one room may be available but the other rooms are occupied. It’s hard to rent an entire house.

“We started seeing miracles just about as soon as we arrived. We managed to rent the largest house in the village. In the days before we arrived the rooms were quickly vacated, one after the other, and the landlord did not find replacement guests so we could immediately sign a contract and move in.

“There are hundreds of Israelis in the village on a continuous basis. Some of them are tourists who come and go and others live there permanently. The latter know the place well and helped us buy kitchen equipment and some minimal furniture. They even helped us arrange the first

farbrengen, which was attended by thirty Israelis.

“The Chabad house began to hum with life. We had over 100 guests for every Shabbos meal. The chevra davened together and joined the meals and along the way they learned concepts of Judaism and Chassidus and had an authentic Jewish experience. Every Rosh Chodesh we had a big farbrengen with dozens of Israelis. Our main activity was ‘Meditation Seminars,’ which was actually Chassidic thought.”

How did the Israelis find out about your programs?

We gave out flyers in the restaurants and guests houses and word got around. There are hundreds of Israelis in Dharamsala and the turnover is great, with people constantly coming and going. Many of them come for a ten-day course in an ashram, which is attended by about 80 people. The Israelis call the course “the silence” because the participants have to practice meditation exercises with their eyes closed while focusing on impure names for 16 hours a day! Throughout this ten-day course they have to be absolutely silent.

How many of the 80 participants are Jewish?

Most of them are Israelis. The Chabad house on the way to the ashram so all visitors first see our huge sign that reads, “And Mordechai the Jew did not bend nor bow.”

Pesach night, the Israelis in the ashram heard the singing coming from the Chabad house – “One

is our G-d in the heavens and the earth” – which made a tremendous impression on them and directed their attention towards Judaism.

What motivates Israelis to go there?

When they are in Eretz Yisrael they feel that spirituality is bankrupt and they seek something fundamental and maybe even unusual that will interest them. The atmosphere in Eretz Yisrael in general is tense while in India there are endless cults with a completely different way of life which is more primitive but also more serene.

About 170,000 Israeli tourists go to India every year! 3000 of them visit the Chabad house in Dharamsala. When they come here and see the big “Chabad house” sign in Hebrew, it affects them deeply. They come in, listen, learn, join a course that we give and this encounter with the depth of Chassidus at the foot of the Himalayan mountains does something in their neshama. Many of them entered for what they thought would be a quick visit to see what was going on and ended up staying for a shiur or t’filla and then stayed on for weeks. They slept, ate and learned in the Chabad house and made significant strides in their move towards Judaism.

What did the locals think of you?

Our initial welcome was from our landlord. When he saw the picture of the Rebbe at the front of the Chabad house, he bowed down to the picture and asked for his blessing. I told him, “Behave as you should and then he will bless you.” And then we got into a discussion about the Seven Noachide Laws.

In general, Indians admire those who stick to a spiritual path and disdain those Israelis who

“When the landlord saw the picture of the Rebbe at the front of the Chabad house, he bowed down to the picture and asked for his blessing. I told him, “Behave as you should and then he will bless you.”

vacillate between exploring the religions and cultures of India and partying with reckless abandon. When they saw me dressed in religious garb, many of them simply came over to see and even to help us.

Tell us about the meditation seminar that you do.

We have eight seminars, each one lasting five full days, from nine in the morning until six at night. It includes shiurim with particular attention given to Chassidic concepts such as belief in G-d and fear and love of G-d. We mainly learn Tanya and maamarim combined with Chassidic niggunim, intensifying the spiritual experience. The learning is done in lectures and with chavrusas (study partners) and we quickly see results. Many ask for more than one seminar and stay on for several. Others become regulars at the Chabad house and start putting on tefillin and keeping Shabbos. These regulars help the new ones acclimate to the Chassidic environment.

My wife gives a special seminar for women, paving the way for them get involved in Jewish life..

In India it's much easier to win Israelis over. There are many reasons for this, one – they are far away from the ideas prevalent in Eretz Yisrael. Two – the atmosphere in India is such that people are open, and Dror takes advantage of this feeling to instill Chassidic concepts.

“I once tried to arrange a similar seminar back in Eretz Yisrael but didn't find many people who were interested in attending.”

The participants at the seminar in India express their satisfaction with the Chassidic ideas they learn and begin taking serious steps towards religious observance.



Twelve guys plus my wife and baby went on a grueling hike in the mountains

Some start doing mitzvos and some go back home and attend the yeshiva in Ramat Aviv. Dror keeps in touch with all of them.

“There was an interesting incident with a girl who, towards the end of the seminar, told us she was leaving to take the ‘silence’ course at the ashram. I could see that I could not dissuade her. We parted ways and I hoped for the best.

“One of the rules in the silence course is that it is for ten days. Nobody walks in or out of the ashram; even a dropout has to stay there until the course is over.

“Two days later the girl came

back to the Chabad house. We all wondered how she got out in the middle of the course. She started crying and when she calmed down she told us what happened. ‘Every time I tried closing my eyes and concentrating on the meditation exercises, I just couldn't do it. In my head I could hear the Shir HaMaalos that they always sing in the Chabad house before Birkas HaMazon. Along with the tune I also thought about the concepts I had learned in the Chabad house. When I saw that I just could not continue, I explained this to the monks and left.’”

That is just one story out of many about the impact the



Spiritual hike in the mountains with his baby on his back

“ I considered turning back when a fellow named Nir (who had taken three courses with us) said emotionally, ‘Dror, you always tell us what it says in Tanya, – no evil descends from above because all was created from the ayin which is all good,’ so how can you despair?

Chabad house has on its visitors. Dror tries every possible way to reach all the young people who are searching for something. One day he came up with the idea of going on a Chassidic hike into the mountains.

“We went on a three day trip in the mountains together with a group. As a ‘professional tourist,’ I led the outing with the road markers being Chassidic ideas connected with what we saw. We traversed glaciers till we got to a high ridge where, in the serenity which cleans the mind, we sat and delved into Chassidic ideas and farbrenged now and then.

“We were twelve guys, my wife and our baby. A trip like this requires tremendous

physical exertion as you climb the mountains with a large backpack. The first night, eight of them dropped out. There are no words to describe my feelings at the time; I was on the verge of despair. I considered turning back when a fellow named Nir (who had taken three courses with us) said emotionally, ‘Dror, you always tell us what it says in Tanya, – no evil descends from above because all was created from the *ayin* which is all good,’ so how can you despair? Turn it around – think of it as you going with your wife and child on a hike in the Himalayas, on your own, when you suddenly encounter four Israeli guys who join your Chabadi outing!

“He said this sincerely and he

changed my outlook. He showed me how what I taught was actually absorbed. Tangible proof that ‘no evil descends from above’ was something we saw a few hours later. As darkness descended, a hailstorm began pounding the mountains. Within a short time the ground was covered with a layer of hail twenty centimeters thick. Hail continued to fall and we were soaked to the bone. We looked for a cave or any sort of shelter when one of the guys suddenly noticed a small hut not far away. We ran into the hut where some locals were already sheltering.

“As we sat there, we noted that if the eight people hadn’t left us and we would have continued moving, we would not have had any shelter on this stormy night. ‘No evil descends from above.’

“We got up in the morning, davened, and started hiking again. We began climbing the ridge, which is 4000 meters high. With great effort we reached the summit and felt closer to the heavens than ever. At this point, when we were all on a high, we turned to Ronen, who until now had refused to put on tefillin, and I said to him, ‘Ronen, we are close to the heavens now; it’s your chance to put on tefillin.’

“Ronen thought it over and then, with a little tear in the corner of his eye, he quietly said, ‘Since my bar mitzva I have not put on tefillin. Now I am ready to put on tallis and tefillin and I also want to blow the shofar. That is how I will feel close to G-d.’

“Ronen davened with great passion for the first time in his life on a mountain peak in the Himalayas. As our trip continued we felt like one family and I was able to have heart-to-heart talks with the guys. At the end of our trip they committed to putting

on tefillin daily and to continue attending classes on Chassidus in the Chabad house.”

Where did you get kosher food from in Dharamasala?

We bought fruits and vegetables in the local market but we had big problems with all other products. We had brought many staples with us from Eretz Yisrael, as well as food for the baby. We had pas Yisrael since my wife baked bread. We had no meat at all except for Pesach.

Pesach was very special. Boruch Shinhav and his wife joined us, as well as the bachur Nir Goshen, and they helped us out, particularly with the seder, which was attended by over 200 people! Nir slaughtered dozens of chickens for us.

That is how the Shaul couple’s shlichus in Dharamasala began, with this four-month stint. They reached hundreds of Israeli youth and taught them a bit of Chassidus, which woke up their

souls and brought many closer to Torah and mitzvos.

The physical and spiritual conditions were extremely difficult and when the tourist season was over, they returned to Eretz Yisrael, where their daughter was born. They had set up an infrastructure in Dharamasala and the following Elul another couple – Zohar Dovid and his wife – went there for Tishrei and did tremendous work. They have since made Rishikesh their place of shlichus. ■

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GIFTED CHILDREN

A class was recently opened for gifted children who learn in Chabad yeshivos in Eretz Yisrael. We spoke with Mrs. Nechama Rosenberg about this educational endeavor that she initiated. Perhaps it provides a model for Chabad communities in other parts of the world.

By Nosson Avrohom



After a few years of indecision and consultations, the first class for gifted Lubavitcher children opened. The person behind this complex project is Mrs. Nechama Rosenberg, whose son was tested as gifted. This class is an experiment and the way it looks now, interest in this program is growing.

“These children are not having their needs met within the system and they’re bored,” she explains. “The teacher explains something for the third and fourth time, and they understood it the first time or maybe even before the teacher began the lesson.”

The first school participating in this experiment is the Talmud Torah Chabad in Petach Tikva. The principal, Rabbi Meir Bostomsky, realized the potential in a class like this. The teacher chosen is the shliach, Rabbi Pinchas Altheus. So far, the talmidim meet only once a week for a day packed with educational adventures and challenges. The class is for young students in the lower grades and they hope to expand it to other grades.

“We started the bureaucratic process of being recognized by the Education Ministry, which will be a big help in the cost. Many of the parents who spoke with me in response to our advertising said the only obstacle for them is the cost. We are already halfway through the process of being officially recognized,” says Mrs. Rosenberg.

The opening of a class for the gifted generated plenty of discussion and debate. The question was whether it was right to open such a class. There were educators who supported and educators who opposed it, but they all agreed in the end that it is a response to an existing reality.

We always knew that weak children need help. Their difficulties with the material create problems and frustration, and educators deal with it. There are teachers in Special Education who have studied various approaches to diagnosis and treatment for weak students, but the gifted student, who also requires ‘special education,’ has been neglected. It’s just as hard for them to sit in the classroom as it is for weak students. The child who grasped the material within the first minutes of the lesson sometimes sits for a day or even two, doing nothing. He is bored and the boredom often leads to trouble making. He has to be a tzaddik to sit in class for days doing nothing when he knows it all.

These children become impatient. They get sent out of class and problems multiply. However, “in the class for the gifted that takes place once a week, we are providing an excellent solution,” say R’ Altheus. “They learn new concepts to broaden their knowledge, they learn chapters in Jewish history in a program that was compiled



Children from the gifted class on an educational trip to Kfar Chabad

“These children are not having their needs met within the system and they’re bored,” she explains. “The teacher explains something for the third and fourth time, and they understood it the first time or maybe even before the teacher began the lesson.”

especially for them. They learn Tanya or sichos of the Rebbe on the parsha. They study the Mikdash and the keilim (vessels), material that is not usually in the curriculum and which piques their interest and is challenging for them.

This kind of learning gives them so much and it changes their behavior. We see tremendous improvement. When they return to their regular classroom they need to make up the material that they missed, which gives them something to do, and the very fact that they know that once a week they will leave the classroom for intellectual stimulation stills that desire to stir up trouble.

“The parents of the children

who learn with us say that it positively affects the entire week. We have a child whose teacher said he cannot sit for five minutes, though with us he listens closely for an hour and a half. They often say that these children have behavior problems, but this is not true; they are simply bored and need to be taught on their level, and this is what we are doing.”

It wasn’t easy starting a program like this. Like most new endeavors, the costs are high, but according to Mrs. Rosenberg, it’s worth it.

“I have a son who has been tested as gifted and it was hard for him to manage in a regular classroom. At the end of last year I decided to do something about



Creative lessons in the gifted class

“I was apprehensive about whether I could get something like this going. I wrote to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh and the answer I opened to left no room for doubts. The Rebbe wrote that he was ‘happy to hear that a Talmud Torah was about to open’ and we were on our way.

it. After the school in Petach Tikva agreed to host us, I put an ad in the Kfar Chabad newsletter and got phone calls from many parents who were dealing with the same problem. Together we decided on a format and got the program off the ground at the start of this school year with a small group of children. The class keeps on growing as new students join.

“In the planning stages, of

course, I was apprehensive about whether I could get something like this going. I wrote to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh and the answer I opened to left no room for doubts. The Rebbe wrote that he was ‘happy to hear that a Talmud Torah was about to open’ and we were on our way.”

Who is considered a gifted child?

“The question is, how do we

know who has greater intellectual abilities than the average child? First, we have a professional evaluation done. In addition to that, parents can sometimes identify this on their own. This is child who loves to learn and who, when he comes home, is a bookworm, a child who wants to know and acquires a broad knowledge. This same child is often bored and disruptive in school and yet, his marks remain high. These are signs that indicate that he is gifted.

“Not every child who is disruptive or somewhat more mature than his classmates is gifted, of course. There are also children who are gifted who manage to ‘go with the program’ and remain ‘good children’ and behave, but it’s a pity that their abilities are going to waste.

“We set up a curriculum which is challenging. A child who cannot keep up with it is not gifted. When a child joins the program and doesn’t keep up, he goes back to the regular program immediately. We’ve had a number of those.”

Did the Rebbe refer to anything on this subject?

“In the yeshiva in Lubavitch in the time of the Rebbe Rashab there were tests with high thresholds and if you did not pass them, you were not accepted. The Rebbe designated outstanding students who were called *shivvas ha’kanim* (the seven branches of the Menorah).

“We didn’t invent this need,” explains Mrs. Rosenberg. “We shouldn’t be asking whether it is right or not right to start this program; rather, where were we until now? How many gifted children suffer from problems because their educational needs were ignored and nobody bothered finding out why they behaved the way they did?”

"I spoke with Rabbi Gluckowsky and Rabbi Yeshaya Weber and they were both very encouraging. Some people warned that we were creating a dangerous precedent, but the opposite is true. Just as people did not recognize the need for Special Education for weak students, the same is true in this case. There are gifted students who, if their needs aren't met, will fall out of the system. This is not about elitism and parents who are snobs who don't want their children learning with others who are on a lower level. Not at all! This is a serious problem that has not been addressed in the past.

"The program, for the meantime, is only once a week but we are wondering whether one day is sufficient to address the larger

problem of their learning needs. One day a week is not our idea. The Education Ministry designated one day a week for the gifted, and this decision was made by people with experience in education. On this one day they don't merely learn but they meet other children like themselves whom they can relate to intellectually.

"That they have to make up the work they missed in the regular classroom is good for them. It would be a mistake to remove them entirely from the regular classroom and provide them with a separate track because they need to know how to get along with average children. If we take them out of a regular class entirely, they will lose contact with normative society."

Mrs. Rosenberg knows that this class won't solve all the problems of the gifted. "A soup kitchen will not solve the problems of the poor and a hospital won't solve the problems of the ill, but they can provide a great deal of help. This program won't solve all the problems, but it definitely provides a solution for many of them.

"It's a small class with a few children and each one can speak up. It's very important for a gifted child to be able to express his view, and the inability to do so is very bad for him. This way, he knows that one day a week he can express himself relatively freely."

Perhaps parents in other locales will be motivated to try a similar initiative. ■

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THE ANGELS WERE BAFFLED

By Rabbi Heschel Greenberg



Two weeks before the Exodus G-d introduces the first Mitzvah to Moses and Aaron, “This month shall be for you the head of the months. It shall be the first of the months of the year for you.”

There is a puzzling Midrash on this verse:

When G-d said “This month shall be for you” the ministering angels said to G-d, “Why did you tell Adam ‘On the day you shall eat from it you shall surely die?’”

G-d answered, “In the future the son of Yishai [King David] will emerge and will say, ‘Tremble and sin not; reflect in your hearts on your beds, and be utterly silent forever.’”

This Midrash is culled from a body of Midrashic selections that were designed as riddles so that we should search to discover their inner meaning. Presumably it was not just to sharpen our minds but, rather, to uncover a deeper layer of meaning that is relevant to our own lives.

Let us try to decipher this Midrash:

The Midrash quotes the opening words of the commandment to establish a system of determining the months, “G-d said, ‘This month shall be for you’”. What does this verse say and what does it imply?

The simple meaning of this phrase is that on the first day of the month of Nissan, G-d informed Moses and Aaron that when they see the new moon it

would represent the beginning of the month, the first month of the year.

However, the Talmud uncovers a deeper meaning, one that has had far-reaching legal and even physical ramifications:

The Talmud focuses on the words “for you,” and states that the decision and ability to declare the new month resides with you, Moses and Aaron, or with your duly selected successors, the members of the Sanhedrin, whose function it would be to determine each month on the basis of the sighting of the moon. It is you who are empowered to declare when the new month will commence.

Furthermore, the Talmud teaches us, even if the courts were in error about the day they declared to be the first of the month, and even if it was deliberate on their part to delay the onset of the new month, it is still sanctified. The courts were given the power to change the timing of the new month. And, on that basis, the Holidays will follow suit. Passover, for example, which is on the fifteenth of the month of Nissan, will be on the fifteenth of the month, counting from the day the courts declared it to be Rosh Chodesh, even though in truth it should have been the day before.

According to the Jerusalem Talmud, this declaration – which advances or delays the onset of the new month (and the same is true about the declaration of an extra leap-month to bring parity

to the lunar and solar years) – can actually alter the biological changes that hinge on time because the Torah has endowed us with the power to control nature!

This is a revolutionary concept, revolutionary even with regard to the celestial forces. As the Midrash states that G-d and his entourage of angels in the “heavenly court” will “descend” here to consult with the human courts as to when the new month will be declared.

This indeed is the power entrusted to the Jewish people that they are not subservient to nature; on the contrary, nature can be subservient to them.

When the angels realized this revolutionary power that was given to humans, they realized that those human beings do not essentially need external support for them to toe a straight line. If the human being, they argued, has the capacity to control nature, how much more so that he has the power to control his or her own internal impulses.

Why then, the angels asked, did G-d tell Adam that on the day he eats from this specific tree he shall surely die? The meaning of this threat was to discourage him from succumbing to his base instincts and animal nature. But why did Adam need to be threatened with death in order urge him to comply? Shouldn't it have sufficed for Adam to know that even if his nature tells him to eat of the forbidden fruit his mind should

and would exercise control over his desires?

Adding to their confusion was the fact that the day that Adam was commanded not to eat the forbidden fruit was (according to the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yehoshua) the first day of Nissan, the same day that G-d told Moses that he did indeed have control over nature! But if this day did indeed give us the dynamic power to dominate nature, then why then did Adam need the threat of death on that very day?

The angels were baffled. They could not comprehend the complexity of the human condition. Yes, there are certain people and certain times when the mere suggestion by a Higher authority that one should suppress one's own nature because it is the proper thing to do is sufficient. But, there are also certain individuals and certain times when mortals are more vulnerable and must be reminded of their mortality. This lack of consistency, the mono-dimensional angels could not comprehend.

There is a story in the Talmud about one of the greatest Sages, Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, who moved away from his colleagues and the center of Torah at Yavneh to a town known for its choice wine and other worldly delights (in fact, the Talmud relates that the exiling of the Ten Tribes was a consequence of their close proximity to that place known for its sybaritic nature). As a result of his "attraction" to these delights he forgot his Torah knowledge and even mispronounced the verse cited above. Instead of reading the Hebrew *ha'chodesh ha'zeh lachem* – This month shall be for you, he read: *hacheresh haya libam* – Was their heart silent. In Hebrew spelling the two phrases are almost identical.



This indeed is the power entrusted to the Jewish people that they are not subservient to nature; on the contrary, nature can be subservient to them.

From this we derive that while a human being is endowed with the capacity to control nature, we also have the ability to travel to places, or to put ourselves in situations, where we are tempted or where we become desensitized, and where our minds no longer wield the same influence over our desensitized hearts. In these situations we must temporarily rely on the more morbid consideration of our mortality in order to win the battle with our evil impulse.

G-d's response to the angels thus was to quote the son of Yishai, who alludes to the approach outlined in the Talmud: When one is plagued by the evil impulse he should ideally study Torah or read the Shma – which proclaims G-d's unity – in order to disarm this evil impulse. And if neither of these tactics work, then, the Talmud tells us, remember the day of one's death.

When we lose control—or never had it in the first place—we should have a fall back position, to help keep us going on the true Torah path. Thus G-d subtly suggests to Adam, "You may not have the ability to control nature all the time, but nevertheless you can overcome your temptations by realizing that you are mortal.

G-d was not threatening Adam with death; he was telling him that a human being has two options: "You can exercise your G-d given ability to transcend your own nature, but to maintain that level of transcendence you must keep your mind attuned to the Torah. It is the Torah mentality that transcends nature and temporality. And to the extent that your mind is saturated with Torah knowledge it is to that

degree to which you will always be in control.

However if you lose that ability because you allowed yourself the license to distance yourself from Torah study and dabble in foreign pastures, as did Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, then you must descend to the second alternative: to realizing your own mortality and that therefore physical and material pleasures are merely transitory."

Commentators point out that the gematria (numerical value) of the words "This month shall be for you" is the same as that of Moshiach the son of David. This suggests that the power to control nature, which is implicit in this verse, will become obvious and the exclusive influence in the Messianic Age.

Moshiach will usher in a new consciousness wherein we will always be masters of nature. The world will follow the dictates of the Torah, and we will no longer need to invoke our own mortality. Thus life will return to the way it had been before Adam sinned—eternal life. There will be no need for mortality to keep us straight.

As long as we are in exile we must utilize the two-pronged approach in dealing with our challenges. But as we prepare for the imminent Redemption, the angels' objections to the need to remind man of his mortality will be sustained. By saturating our minds with Torah, specifically the parts of Torah that deal with Redemption, we gradually wean ourselves from the need to be reminded of our mortality and, instead, we prepare ourselves for the eternal life which will follow the coming of Moshiach and the complete Redemption. ■

A MESSAGE OF HOPE AMID THE ASHES

An amazing story that happened twelve years ago in one of the Carmel yishuvim following a huge fire in the area.

By Sholom Kramer

PART I

Three girls were having a lively discussion. It was two against one.

“No way! How will it help us?” exclaimed Ora.

“What do you have to lose?” insisted Mali. “It will take five minutes and even if it doesn’t help, it won’t hurt.”

“It just doesn’t sit well with me,” said Yafit squirming uncomfortably. “All this mystical stuff gives me the willies.”

“First of all, it’s not mysticism. Second, how do you know it’s not for you? Did you ever try it?” challenged Mali.

“Fine, let’s go then,” said Yafit. “But first I want to watch and listen and only then will I make my decision.”

Mali, a resident of Rechovot, had come close to Chabad a few years earlier. She frequently wrote to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh and she wanted her friends to do the same. The three friends who had just finished seminary went to the Borochov home in order to write to the Rebbe and ask for a bracha for a shidduch.

Mrs. Borochov welcomed them graciously, invited them to sit down and explained to the newcomers what the Igros Kodesh are and how to ask the Rebbe for a bracha.

Before leaving Yafit Cohen confided in Mrs. Borochov. “I have a problem,” she said hesitatingly. “My parents were in a terrible car accident. My father’s spine was injured and he is confined to a wheelchair. He took it very hard and cannot understand how G-d can do this to someone. His faith has faltered, and he stopped doing even basic mitzvos.”

“Tell him what you heard here,” suggested Mrs. Borochov. “Tell him about the Rebbe and the

Igros Kodesh, and convince him to write a letter to the Rebbe.”

“It won’t help,” said Yafit sadly, shaking her head. “Many people have tried talking to him but he refuses to listen.”

Mrs. Borochov thought for a moment and then said, “I have an article that was printed in secular newspapers about the Igros Kodesh phenomenon. Give it to him, and perhaps it will convince him.”

“I know my parents,” sighed Yafit. “They won’t listen. Many have tried but to no avail.”

“If you see that they’re not willing to read the article, then just leave it on the table. Who knows? Maybe one day they will read it and be convinced.”

Yafit agreed and took the article.

PART II

The many lights shining in the hall glared in her eyes and the noise level of voices and laughter interfered with her ability to think. The bass reverberating from the loudspeakers banged away at her like pounding fists. Mrs. Borochov scanned the room for the happy kalla (bride) Mali. She had that wonderful feeling of joy and satisfaction; this was the third kalla in half a year. The three girls who had come to her to ask for a bracha for a shidduch had found their match and two of them had already married. Now it was the turn of the third one, the one who had persuaded the others to ask for a bracha.

She noticed the kalla sitting on her special chair. One of her friends was bent over her, whispering into her ear. The kalla laughed, and the friend raised her head. Two pairs of eyes met and Mrs. Borochov tried to remember why that face looked familiar.

“If you see that they’re not willing to read the article, then just leave it on the table. Who knows? Maybe one day they will read it and be convinced.” Yafit agreed and took the article.

“Hello Mrs. Borochov, how are you?” The girl didn’t notice Mrs. Borochov’s uncertainty and went over to her with a big smile.

“Thank G-d, I’m fine but perhaps you can remind me ...”

“Sure, I’m Yafit Cohen.”

Mrs. Borochov immediately remembered who she was and said, “Ah yes. Is there any good news about your parents?”

For a moment Yafit’s face turned serious and she said with a sigh, “No, nothing changed.”

It seemed to Mrs. Borochov that she was hiding something and that this something wasn’t good, but she didn’t push her. If Yafit didn’t want to share it, that was her prerogative.

PART III

At first it seemed like an ordinary fire. A field of thorns and weeds had begun to burn and from there it spread to some trees. Then, suddenly the entire Carmel was burning. Firemen announced that there was nothing to worry about, “within a day, it will be fine,” but they underestimated the power of the blaze. The wind fanned the flames and the fire rapidly spread to forests, fields and even the yishuvim in the area. Tons of water had been dumped and hundreds of volunteers were called upon to control the fire. The firemen used helicopters, trucks, hoses, anything which would help to fight the blaze, but the fire, as if mocking their efforts, continued to advance, acre by acre, field after field.

The residents of the yishuv where Yafit’s parents live were not concerned. The firemen had said that the fire was not heading in their direction and they had nothing to worry about. So when they saw the curtain of flames from their windows it was a terrible shock. People ran back and forth from their homes to their cars in the attempt to save whatever they could but the fire was advancing rapidly and they were forced to evacuate immediately.

The fire spread through the yishuv all that day and it was only the following day that they could return to their incinerated homes and try and see if anything remained. When Yafit’s parents saw their home, they were shocked. All the other homes that were affected by the fire had been partially burned and something remained even of those homes that had been badly affected. As for their home, it was completely gone. All that remained was a pile of ashes.

With tears of sorrow and despair, Yafit’s mother sifted through the ashes. Perhaps she would find something of value. She suddenly noticed something that had not turned to ashes. Her eyes widened in amazement. It was a piece of paper she recognized; it was the newspaper article her daughter had given her to read about the Igros Kodesh which she had refused to look at. This article was the only item to survive the conflagration. Even the table that the article had been on had turned to ash.

She bent over and with trembling hands picked up the paper, shook it off, and standing there in the ruins she read it. At first she was still crying and her tears dripped on to the paper. When she finished reading it she felt a glimmer of hope.

PART IV

Mrs. Cohen spoke on the phone with Mrs. Borochov and told her everything she and her husband had been through. She told her about the car accident. Although she felt a certain measure of relief in unburdening to the person listening to her, there was a hesitancy in her voice as she finished her story and said, "The truth is that I wasn't so sure about whether to call you ... I didn't know what I was supposed to do and then I remembered that my daughter had mentioned you and I decided to call."

"You did the right thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Borochov reassuringly. "Now take your husband, wheelchair and all, and come over. We have a lot to talk about."

"Wh...what did you say?"

"Get into the car and come over!" repeated Mrs. Borochov. When she realized that Mrs. Cohen was still uncertain she began telling her miracle stories, one after the other, that happened through the Igros Kodesh. Mrs. Cohen was impressed and made an appointment to meet on Chanuka.

When they arrived at the Borochov home, a woman there said to them, "Hi, who are you?"

"We came to hear more information about the Igros Kodesh," said Mr. Cohen somewhat dubiously.

"And maybe to ask for a bracha," added his wife.

"Then I have a story for you." And the woman launched into her story about a malignant tumor in her brain and how, after asking the Rebbe for a bracha, the tumor had disappeared.

Encouraged by her story, the Cohens sat with Rabbi and Mrs. Borochov and talked. Then R' Borochov said to Mr. Cohen, "So what do you think about asking the Rebbe?"

Mr. Cohen went over to the bookcase and took volume 10 of the Igros Kodesh. He opened it randomly to page 306-7 that contains two letters. The second letter was a letter of consolation to the residents of Kfar Chabad after the massacre in which five T'mimim were murdered by Arabs. The Rebbe quotes the Alter Rebbe about the trait of compassion:

I heard from the mouths of lofty saints explaining the aphorism people say that after a fire you become wealthy. The reason for this is because the channeling of the supernal holy attributes is thus: chesed (kindness), din (justice), rachamim (mercy, compassion). Accordingly, after the severity of the fire, the attribute of compassion is aroused which is greater than the attribute of chesed at the outset, as we know that this [compassion] is the trait of Yaakov, an inheritance which is boundless, that links from one end...

Then the Rebbe quotes the Mittlerer Rebbe:

I've come to console your hearts for the hand of G-d has touched upon them ... your hearts should not despair for surely Hashem will arouse His great kindness and mercy on you ... and it is known that every din consists of hidden kindness. Therefore, everything the Merciful One does is for the

good and no evil descends from above ...

Then the Rebbe quotes the Tzemach Tzedek:

I received your letter and I had already heard about this previously, and I hereby come to console them based on what was copied from a handwritten note of my grandfather [the Alter Rebbe] that he wrote to someone of Anash who suffered a fire ... I heard from the mouths of lofty saints about the aphorism people say that after a fire you become wealthy that it's because the channeling of the supernal holy attributes is thus: chesed (kindness), din (justice), rachamim (mercy, compassion), so after the severity of the fire, the attribute of compassion is aroused which is greater than the attribute of chesed...

The Tzemach Tzedek goes on to say:

Therefore he instructed to the recipient of the letter to be strong and to rebuild his home in its place. And from his holy words it would seem correct to say in your case that you should help each other and you should rebuild your homes in their location.

R' Borochov then went on to read the two lines on the top of p. 306 that completed the letter from the page before:

[Do not] uproot your dwelling because of the incident, as it is there, specifically, where Hashem will command his blessing and mercy, a boundless inheritance.

Mr. Cohen's eyes nearly popped from his head.

"How can that be?" he muttered in amazement. "I didn't tell anyone. How does he know?"

"What are you talking about?" asked R' Borochov.

“After the fire, we presented a claim to the yishuv administration, asking them to pay for all the damages due to the fire, but they refused. They weren’t even willing to listen to our demands. After living and working together for so many years, their flat-out refusal was an insult. We were planning to leave the yishuv. We didn’t tell anyone of our intentions, not even our daughter. And here, it’s as though the Rebbe read our thoughts and is telling us not to move. This is astounding! A miracle!”

There was nothing to say. The letter was about a fire and consisted of many blessings with an explanation that the attribute of justice is followed by the attribute of mercy and kindness in a more expansive way than previously experienced.

“The Rebbe said many times that mezuzos and t’fillin are a segula for protection,” said R’ Borochov, trying to strike while the iron was hot. “What do you think about checking your t’fillin and mezuzos?”

“Yes, of course we should do that,” said Mr. Cohen, “but we want you to check them.”

R’ Borochov willingly went to their temporary dwelling that the government provided for them and just as he expected, the mezuzos and t’fillin were invalid. He made another trip in order to bring the family kosher t’fillin and mezuzos, and at that point he assumed the story was over.

PART V

Some time later R’ Borochov was asked to farbreng in a non-Lubavitch yeshiva. He was happy to do so. He sat with the students Friday night and farbrenged till the wee hours of the morning. Among the topics discussed was



“After the fire, we presented a claim to the yishuv administration, asking them to pay for all the damages due to the fire, but they refused. They weren’t even willing to listen to our demands. After living and working together for so many years, their flat-out refusal was an insult. We were planning to leave the yishuv. We didn’t tell anyone of our intentions, not even our daughter. And here, it’s as though the Rebbe read our thoughts and is telling us not to move. This is astounding! A miracle!”

an explanation about the way people use the Igros Kodesh to communicate with the Rebbe. One of the stories he told was the story in this article. The rabbis and students listened with great interest. There was however one rabbi who had a strange expression on his face.

After the farbrengen the man came over to R’ Borochov. R’ Borochov braced himself for an argument, but the man had something altogether different in mind.

“I knew about the story you told about the fire although I did

not know about the Igros Kodesh part of it. As a neighbor of the couple I can add a few details.

“The fire stopped about four houses away from their house and inexplicably, the fire skipped those four houses and landed right on their house. It looked as though Hashem wanted to give them a push of some kind. As for what you said that he opened to in the Igros Kodesh, you should know that everything the Rebbe said, happened! The leaders of the yishuv acceded to all their demands down to the smallest detail and they got whatever they wanted!” ■

JEWISH TIME

What a coincidence! Here he was on the 24th of Teves reading about the founder of Chabad’s passing on the 24th of Teves, while preparing to say Kaddish for the first time for his father who passed away on the 24th of Teves.



By Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

I t is now 30 years since my first encounter with Chabad and my introduction to authentic Judaism. To mark the occasion, here is a new and improved version of a personal story I previously published, for the benefit of those who may have forgotten it or missed it the first time around.

The yahrtzait candle was still burning as Avraham readied himself for New Year’s Eve. He put on his best jeans – naturally faded and slightly shredded – and brushed out his shaggy mane of flowing hair down to the middle of his back. He was in classic form, closely conforming to the non-conformist style of the day, the tail end of the hippy era.

Closing the door to his trendy bachelor pad on the fringes of downtown Toronto, little did he realize that he was also closing the door on life as he had ever known it.

For years that lone candle was his lone connection to personal Jewish observance. It was also his only connection to the soul of his father, a man he never knew because he died over 20 years earlier when Avraham was just three years old.

Moshe Fishel had been a strong

man, a staunch Zionist from a traditional family of Chassidic stock in pre-war Poland. He survived the Nazi concentration camps by the skin of his teeth, risking his life daily by smuggling extra food rations to the needy so they would not die. In April 1945 he was liberated from the camps, but not from the rheumatic heart disease he contracted while there.

Only one event managed to etch itself in Avraham’s memory from his early childhood days, and that involved his father. Avraham’s mother had brought him to the hospital to visit his dad during his final days in this world.

They stopped at the gift shop and while mom was choosing flowers at the counter, a colorful little item caught little Avraham’s fancy and would not let go. It was a small wooden carving of an evergreen tree with snow-tipped branches and little red ornaments.

“No sweetheart, let’s try something else. Here. What do you think of this?”

Avraham wouldn’t even look. “NO! This one!” he cried.

“I’m sorry, we can’t get that one. Here, have a candy.”

Avraham let out an ear-piercing

wail that turned heads in the otherwise solemnly silent store.

“Okay, okay,” mom sighed as she rang out the seasonal memento at the cash. Eyes moist but celebratory, Avraham clutched his little trophy totally oblivious to its religious and cultural symbolism. Soon he was standing at his father’s bedside, his little heart brimming with love.

His mother gave Moshe Fishel the flowers and he smiled broadly, setting them down on the bedside table. It seems Avraham caught the spirit of giving and spontaneously reached out, handing his dad his most prized possession.

Moshe Fishel looked it over slowly then set it softly down beside the flowers. What thoughts could traverse a man’s mind at a moment like this? A man whose Jewish identity was emblazoned on his mind and heart by his faith, his traditions, his politics, his persecutors, his friends and family.

And now powerless in the closing moments of his life on this earth, his little boy, who he never had a chance to raise and who he never would have a chance to raise, passes him a token of a future he never dared imagine – total assimilation.

Avraham stretched his arms out

towards his dad who summoned up his remaining strength to lift the boy up, giving him a hug and holding him high above himself as he lay prone on the hospital bed.

Moshe Fishel ben Kalman passed from this world days later on the 24th of Teves, 5719.

Over the years, the total assimilation Moshe Fishel feared started to materialize. Avraham grew up knowing very little about the faith he inherited, and practiced next to nothing of that. His matza on Passover had ham between, and his annual hour in synagogue for Yom Kippur was followed by a much less noble ritual, a cheeseburger for lunch. As for his beliefs, they were just as secular as his lifestyle.

But now, as the yahrtzait candle burned overtime and Avraham's little red VW Beetle sped into overdrive en route to the party, the wheels of Divine Providence were making extra machinations of their own.

Avraham, on a dare from a gentile friend, Gordon, broke with tradition and was attending for the first time in his adult life, a great big party by and for Jews. Gordon had called him a bigot for not going out with Jewish girls. Avraham defended his antithetical stance, claiming they were all neurotic, materialistic JAP's (Jewish American Princesses). Gordon said there's good and bad in all people.

"Try it and you'll see. There is a Jewish girl out there for you for sure." But Avraham was not so sure at all. Still he decided to try the Jewish singles scene after all. Boy, was he in for a surprise.

The guest speaker was a Chabad rabbi who was discussing love, dating and relationships. That segued into face-to-face six-hour argument about religion generally

and more particularly about traditional faith, modern science, and how they may or may not be reconciled.

That discussion plowed the field for the growth and fruition of Jewish life for Avraham as mitzvah after mitzvah grew on him like a hand into a glove.

One year later, Avraham lit the yahrtzait candle once more. Actually by now he was Aryeh Avraham with the new first name taken in honor of his teshuvah (return) to Jewish faith and practice. The other news in his life was his status – engaged, and to a Jewish girl no less.

At 1:00 pm on the afternoon of the 24th of Teves, Aryeh Avraham was racing to finish a book, the Philosophy of Chabad, because momentarily he would have to get up and go pray the afternoon service. Not that he was so committed to congregational prayer. What he was really after was an opportunity to recite the mourner's prayer – Kaddish – for his father, and this would be his first time saying it ever, and he didn't want to be late.

As he turned the last page of the book, his eyes settled on remarkable fact given the context. The founder of Chabad, R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi, aka the Alter Rebbe and author of the Tanya and Shulchan Aruch HaRav, passed away on the 24th of Teves.

What a coincidence! Here he was on the 24th of Teves reading about the founder of Chabad's passing on the 24th of Teves, while preparing to say Kaddish for the first time for his father who passed away on the 24th of Teves. And here it was, exactly one year since his teshuvah started, while the candle was still burning for his father, of whom he had but one memory, in which his father no doubt did teshuvah himself,

wishing with all his heart and soul that someone would turn the wheels of Divine Providence for his little boy, away from destiny of total assimilation and toward a better life, a Jewish life.

And Someone did.

Dumb luck? Some might think so. But with about 354 dates in your average Jewish year, the chances of this happening are one in 354 for the father, times 354 for the Rebbe, times 354 for the teshuvah and times 354 for the Kaddish. This comes out to one chance in 15,704,099,856.*

Now on top of all this, what were the chances that he would go to a Jewish event at all (1 out of 4,000 days of my adult life), and an event with a Chabad rabbi speaking (one of at least 10 Jewish parties I could have gone to), and a rabbi who was erudite in a host of natural sciences (maybe 1 in 100)? And what were the chances of becoming baal teshuvah at all (1 in 10?), and happening across that book (1 in 1,000?), and having just that one memory of his father (impossible to imagine)? By now it's down to one chance in 100 billion billion.

At that moment, the heavens parted and Aryeh got to peek behind the curtain of nature and its laws to see Divine Providence at work. He had no doubt he was a pawn in the Divine game of chess called his life. But then the curtains closed and his destiny was back in his hands – or so it seemed.

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Some of you have written me wondering how this probability thing works. Baruch Hashem for "Oholei Torahniks," really! My three sons never took English or Math and I am not sorry. I think they have all come out ahead. Now

thinking about three aheads gives me an idea of how to explain the statistics, as follows:

Imagine you have three pennies and you want to toss them all hoping that all three will come up heads. What is the chance of that? In other words, if you were to toss these three pennies at once, say a million times over, what per cent of the time would it turn out that each of three was heads?

Baruch Hashem we do not have to toss the pennies a million times, a thousand times, or even once(!) in order to get an accurate answer. We can make a cheshbon, and I'm going to show you how to do that. But before we make that cheshbon, let's stop for a moment to think about all the different scenarios how one three-coin toss could turn out. Each scenario is called an outcome.

So if you think about it, either it's going to be all tails, all heads, two heads and one tails, or two tails and one heads. Is there any other possibility? No. Now what is going to be more common if you did this three-coin toss thing many times over: Three of a kind or a mix? Your intuition may tell you that a mix is more common, and your intuition would be correct. Let's make a list – we will refer to the outcomes by letters H and T. The outcomes are this:

- 1) HHH
- 2) HHT
- 3) HTH
- 4) HTT
- 5) THH
- 6) THT
- 7) TTH
- 8) TTT

That makes eight possibilities altogether. But notice – outcomes 2, 3, and 5 are essentially the same – two heads and a tails. That makes 3 out of 8 possible ways of

getting that mix. The probability of tossing three coins at once and getting two heads and a tails can be expressed different ways: As a fraction ($\frac{3}{8}$), as a decimal ($\frac{3}{8} = 0.375$) or as a per cent (37.5%).

Now notice that two tails and one heads is just as common (outcomes 4, 6, and 7) which is another 3 out of 8 possible outcomes. So that's another 37.5%.

The rare outcomes are heads only and tails only which each come out 1/8 of the time. That's 12.5% for heads only and another 12.5% for tails only.

Notice you can add these percentages all up to get 100%, which makes sense because with all this we account for 100% or all of the possible outcomes.

Now I will teach you a short cut (like the one I used in the article above). The probability of all three coins being heads is the probability of the first one being heads multiplied by the probability of the second one being heads and then multiply all that by the probability of the third coin being heads too. Because each coin has only two possible outcomes and they are equally likely so the chance of one coin coming out heads is 1/2, or 50%.

So the combined probability of 3 coins being heads can be calculated simply as $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$. Now here's a trick you might not know. When you multiply fractions together, you multiply all the top numbers together for the top number of the answer and you multiply all the bottom numbers together for the bottom number of the answer. So that's 1x1x1 on top – that's 1. And 2x2x2 on the bottom – that's 8. So the probability of throwing three heads in a row is 1/8, which is exactly what we figured out above.

Let's use this same multiplying trick to figure out how likely the Hashgacha Pratis in the story would be if it happened according to Hashem's same Laws of Chance. In that case it wasn't like the coins or the Azazel where there were only two outcomes. With dates there are usually 354 outcomes – Nisan 1, Nisan 2... all the way to Adar 29.

What we are analyzing is the chance of all these related events in the story lining up to be Teves 24. First there's my father's yahrtzait, that's 1/354 that it would be then. Then there's the Alter Rebbe's hilula, that's another 1/354 probability. Then there's my teshuvah falling out at the same time all those years later for another 1/354. Then there's finding out from a "random" book about the Alter Rebbe's hilula being the 24 Teves the next year on precisely that date. Let's call that another 1/354.

Just like with the pennies we will multiply each probability together to get the total. So that's $\frac{1}{354} \times \frac{1}{354} \times \frac{1}{354} \times \frac{1}{354}$. That's one divided by a very big number, about 15.7 billion. When you multiply in all the other related mazal factors, you get to one chance in 100 billion billion.

Of course you and I both know that we don't need statistics to recognize Hashgacha Pratis in our lives. But if the animal soul says, "Naah, it's just luck," we can answer the animal soul in its own language and say "Oh yeah? If it were luck, it would turn out according to one of the other 99,999,999,999,999,999,999 possibilities and not this obviously meaningful one!"

Now do you understand? It's not luck at all... it's Mazal! And that's the fingerprint of Hashem on the events of daily life. ■

LAMPLIGHTERS UNDER ARREST

Two T'mimim were detained at the U.S.-Canadian border for no apparent reason on tenuous charges. Yet a reason emerged. A story of Chanukah mivtzaim.

By Nosson Avroham
Translated by Michael Leib Dobry

Every year, a large group of T'mimim, having completed their year of *k'vutza* in Beis Chayeinu, arrive at the MADA Chabad Center in Montreal to study for their examinations in rabbinical ordination. While they're there, they spread the light of Chassidus among the growing Israeli population in the Canadian city. Four years ago, when this story takes place, was no different.

After six weeks of intensive studies at the start of the winter, some of the *k'vutza* members got a hankering to spend Chanukah in 770 with the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, and revisit the Jews they had gotten to know from the previous year. The bachurim who remained in Montreal engaged in activities with the local population, while the returning T'mimim rented a car and headed for the American border.

When they at the U.S.-Canadian border, they were checked by American border policemen. Two of the boys had problems with their travel documents, and were denied permission to enter the United States. The two T'mimim got out of the car and were sent back to the Canadian border checkpoint, while their other *k'vutza* colleagues

continued their journey to New York.

Realizing that the Americans had refused to allow the bachurim the cross the border, the Canadians conducted their own thorough check of their travel documents, and they also found reason to delay them. These bachurim had tourist visas from the provincial government of Quebec, but none from the national government of Canada, and staying in the country required both. The bachurim pleaded with the border officials, explaining that they had only recently arrived in Canada as students, they had already submitted their applications, and they were still in the process of receiving these visas. However, the stubborn border guards were not satisfied with this explanation, and they placed the young men in detention until a decision could be made in their case.

* * *

In the meantime, back in Montreal, Chanukah activities were underway with a great *shturem*. Thousands of Jews were exposed to the light and the message of the holiday of Chanukah. Dancing in circles, lots of candles and jelly donuts – the



joy broke through all boundaries and the activities were highly successful.

Late that night, exhausted but satisfied, the bachurim returned to the Chabad House, lit their menorahs, davened Maariv, said Krias Shma, and then began a sweet and deep sleep. The long and tiring day had left its mark.

It's thereby no wonder that the loud ringing of the telephone, which penetrated the silence of the bedrooms, failed to awaken any of the bachurim from their slumber. The next day would be equally busy with Chanukah activities, Chanukah parties, dancing, central menorah lightings, and house visits well into the night, and the boys needed all the rest they could get.

"The following morning, on our way to the mikveh, we noticed that our phones were indicating a large number of missed calls and new voicemail messages," said one of the bachurim, "but we assumed they were just messages in connection with our Chanukah activities, which could be dealt with later in the day.

"When we arrived at the mikveh, we discovered that the phones of the yeshiva's rabbanim also had rung throughout the night, with a large number of



messages left. A brief check revealed that one number appeared on everyone's phone, and it belonged to one of the bachurim who had set out for 770. In the messages he left, he said that the American border guards had detained him and his companion; however, he didn't offer any additional details. Constant efforts were made to call him back, but his phone was apparently cut off.

"The only ones who could possibly provide any information were their friends en route to New York. They, however, had no mobile phones and we had to wait until they reached 770. Finally, after several nerve-wracking hours, one of these bachurim called the Chabad House and told us that two of their group had been stopped at the border. All of their numerous pleas had fallen on deaf ears, and the two were not allowed to cross the border with them.

What had happened to them? The bachur wasn't sure.

"We quickly called the American border police, who informed us that they had sent them back to the Canadian side. Another call to the Canadian border police, and the picture became clear. The bachurim were in their custody, charged with not being in possession of valid entry visas from the Government of Canada, a petty accusation that usually does not lead to arrest. However, since the Americans had already stopped them, it was being taken much more seriously and they remained in border police detention. Together with a Canadian avreich who had provided much assistance to the Chabad House, we immediately made our way to the border police station.

"When we arrived at the police station, we identified ourselves as Canadian citizens and friends

of the two detainees, and we promised that we would accept full responsibility that they would receive the necessary visas within two weeks from both the provincial and national governments. But the border officials remained intransigent, refusing to listen to anything we had to say on the matter. It appeared to us that this story would take quite some time before it could be resolved, and who knew whether they would ever be allowed to return to Canada?

The policemen with whom we spoke suddenly received an urgent call and went outside. Looking out, we saw that the Canadian border police had stopped a car carrying five Americans, and they were bringing them into the station.

"All five of these young men appeared to be Gentiles in every respect, young Americans who went to travel in Canada. The police had stopped them and

decided to hold them on the charge that they had problems with their entry visas into Canada. The five were brought into the same waiting area where our two friends were being held. One of the T'mimim in custody didn't know a word of English, except to ask 'Are you Jewish?' Despite the unpleasant situation, he decided that he would not sit by idly, and he asked each of the American youths if he was Jewish. One of them said yes.

"After the border police had conducted their investigation of the American youths, they decided that there was no basis for their suspicions. When the door opened as they left the waiting area, I caught a glimpse of the T'mimim. Catching my gaze, my friend pointed in the direction of one of these American youths. I got the hint and realized that he was Jewish and was in need of some 'Jewish treatment'. I directly approached him and asked him if he would like to put on tefillin. He looked at me with a mixture of contempt and confusion, and categorically refused.

"A brief inquiry revealed that while he really was Jewish from birth, his parents didn't think that Jewish tradition was something appropriate to pass on to him. We also discovered that he had never put on tefillin before. When I realized that this represented a case of 'a head that has never worn tefillin', I became a bit more stubborn and would not give in. Even his companions began to take my side. 'What do you care?' they asked him. 'You're a Jew, and it's a part of your religion.'

Another member in this group then said that he was also a Jew, recalling that he had visited the Western Wall in Yerushalayim with his family for his bar-mitzvah and had put tefillin on there. Despite all the urging, this young man



As he put on the tefillin, we took several pictures. The flashing bulbs attracted the attention of the border guards, who came in angrily to ask who was snapping photographs... His Gentile friends took the rap... The guards erased their photographs, while our pictures remained.

was a hard nut to crack, and he emphatically continued to refuse for several minutes, but neither I nor his friends would relent. He eventually gave in and put on tefillin.

"After he removed the tefillin, we told him about Chanukah and the Jewish meaning of this holiday. He was very moved. You could see his soul burning within him during those moments. We learn in chassidus about the G-dly soul as a literal part of G-d above, and how a Jew neither can nor wants to be separate from G-dliness. As he prayed while wearing tefillin, his face turned red with emotion and his hands were literally shaking, and the concept we had heard so many times suddenly became tangible reality.

"Though he had never put on tefillin before, and had never even heard about it either from his father or his grandfather, the emotion was plainly visible on his face. Now having put on tefillin, he was a proper vessel to listen and accept. He was turned into a much softer person and he wanted to hear more and more about Judaism.

"As he put on and wore the tefillin, we took several pictures. The flashing bulbs attracted the attention of the border guards, who came in angrily to ask who was snapping photographs, which is forbidden at the border. His Gentile friends agreed to take the rap as if they had been the paparazzi, and the guards went to

each one of them and erased their photographs, while the pictures we had taken of the event remained with us.

"The heartfelt conversation between us and the two young Jewish men continued for several minutes, and before they left, we presented them with menorahs and candles from our knapsacks, after we explained to them what to do and which blessings to recite.

"As we were parting from one another, before the young men even had a chance to get back into their car, the border police officer asked to see our passports again. A few minutes later, he came back accompanied by the two T'mimim and informed us that they were being released on their own recognizance, and we only had to make a commitment that they would arrange their permits in Canada. We were stunned, never imagining that everything would work out so quickly. We had assumed that we would have to remain there for several long hours, and perhaps even light the Chanukah lights on the border.

* * *

"On our way back to the Chabad House, we were struck by the Hashgacha Pratis of it all. G-d had arranged for us to meet them and kindle the flame within the heart of that Jewish American boy who had previously known nothing about Judaism. The mitzvah candle and Torah light kindled then will surely shine brightly until Moshiach comes NOW! ■



Yisrael Konstantini (left)
with shliach Mendy Mathless,
the donor (right)

THE ULTIMATE GIFT

On the fifth day of Chanuka, Yisrael Konstantini celebrated his personal Chanuka miracle. At the farbrengen held at the Mercaz Chesed in Crown Heights, he told the story of how his life was saved by a kidney transplant. Among the participants at his farbrengen were Mendy Mathless, the kidney donor, and Rabbi Avrohom Lider, director of Ahavas Chesed, who orchestrated the miracle.

Photographed by Meir Dahan, New York

When Yisrael Konstantini says the verse, “and examines kidneys and the heart,” each word has special significance to him. Twelve years ago, when he needed a heart transplant, he thought that one successful transplant was all he could ask for in life, but then the doctors told him that he needed a new kidney if he wanted to remain alive. That’s when the miracle occurred.

Yisrael told his story at a thanksgiving farbrengen that was held at the Mercaz Chesed. Sitting there were Mendy Mathless, shliach in Albany, and Rabbi Avrohom Lieder, director of Ahavas Chesed, who got the donor for him and made all the medical arrangements.

R’ Yisrael relates:

Until twelve years ago, I was a regular guy with no health problems. Then I suddenly developed heart trouble and the doctors recommended a bypass operation. Unfortunately, the surgery did not go well. My heart failed completely and I experienced clinical death. A month after the operation I was still very weak and fatigued, when people older than me went home right after the surgery and were back on their feet. After a series of tests the doctors told me that if I wanted to remain alive I needed a heart transplant.

My state of mind was abysmal, but I refused to allow myself to lose hope. A few years earlier I had started getting involved with Chabad, and the Rebbe’s brachos, through the Igros Kodesh, strengthened me a lot. Faith enabled me to endure difficult days of illness and I became very interested in the Rebbe’s sichos and the mitvtzaim. I manned a tefillin stand in the pedestrian mall

in Netanya and in the central bus station.

After a few months, I got the call I was waiting for. They had a heart for me. I got up from the operation with a feeling of renewal. I felt my new heart was pumping fresh energy into me.

I returned to normal life. I went back to work in a jewelry factory and continued doing mitvtza tefillin a few times a week. I felt that this gave me the strength to continue. We went on to have two more children after the operation and life looked good.

THREE YEARS OF SUFFERING

The medicine I took to prevent my body from rejecting the heart transplant ruined my kidneys and I had to go on dialysis. I cannot describe to you how hard these treatments are. I had to do it three times a week but I suffered from it all week. I struggled to contend with the harsh side effects. It’s hard to work before the dialysis and even harder to work afterward. And in the background the doctors were warning that my delicate medical condition was endangering my heart.

At first I thought that after half a year on dialysis my condition would improve, but I slowly realized that I would have to continue these treatments until I got a kidney transplant. When the doctors told me that I needed a new kidney, I wasn’t completely surprised. I was anxious, but I thought I had been through the worst with a heart transplant and that a kidney transplant couldn’t possibly be as bad. But I quickly learned how hard it is to get a kidney. My forty-year-old sister underwent all the tests and was found to be compatible, but at the last minute, before the transplant,

they saw that her blood pressure was unstable and she was deemed unsuitable.

My brother Shlomo and I consulted with the shliach in Netanya, Rabbi Menachem Volpe, and we realized that we had to widen our search because in Eretz Yisrael I would have to wait years for a donor. Organ donation is not common, whether for the sake of a mitvtza or as the result of a signed organ donor card. The line is very long and there were plenty of people ahead of me. That’s when I realized what a miracle it was that I had already gotten a heart transplant.

THE MAN OF CHESED IN CROWN HEIGHTS

R’ Volpe referred me to Rabbi Avrohom Lieder, director of Ahavas Chesed in New York. R’ Lieder spoke to me on the phone and said, “Come, and I will take care of you and do all I can to find you a donor.” I made the arrangements with Kupat Cholim in Israel so they would pay for some of my treatment, and I came to New York, straight to Crown Heights, to Rabbi Lieder’s house.

R’ Lieder treated me like a king. He hosted me, fed me, and took care of all my medical treatments, which included dialysis and numerous tests in preparation for a transplant. At the same time, he spread the word that we were looking for a kidney donor. Aside from myself, there are other Lubavitchers in Crown Heights who need a kidney donation.

And then I had my personal miracle. Two Lubavitchers who have type O blood like me, told R’ Lieder they were willing to have themselves tested to see if they were a match. I was thrilled by this news, though I was also apprehensive lest they not be a

match or they change their minds. I prayed that all would be well.

R' Lieder went with these two men for medical tests at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Manhattan. That same day I had to be in the hospital and was surprised to meet R' Lieder there with these two men. At the time, I simply assumed these were people R' Lieder was helping. I didn't associate them with my situation. Neither the doctors nor R' Lieder think it's a good idea for the patient to meet potential donors so there won't be pressure on them if they change their minds.

It was a few days later, when R' Lieder told me that R' Mendy Mathless, shliach in Albany was a match and he was willing to donate a kidney to me, that I realized that he was one of the men I had seen in the hospital. I was examined by some doctors and they declared my heart would be able to withstand the operation.

R' Lieder told me that Mendy is a 26 year old shliach and father of two. He was very impressed by him and saw that this was a Chassidic person whose decision to be a donor came from genuine Ahavas Yisrael and the desire to save the life of another Jew. R' Lieder described Mendy as a man of truth, a real Chassid.

The period of time from when R' Lieder gave me the good news until the operation was not easy. On the one hand, I was thankful that I had found a donor; on the other hand, I was constantly plagued by the thought that he might back out.

The kidney transplant process is long and exhausting, with numerous tests for both the donor and the recipient. Every test contains the possibility that something won't match and we would have to start over, so it's

extremely nerve wracking as you wait for the results.

Aside from the medical tests, the donors also undergo psychological testing to see whether they are strong enough to do this and that they aren't donating an organ for unacceptable reasons.

During the waiting period, I went into shul one Friday and stood near the entrance. I suddenly saw one of the men I had seen the week before in the hospital. I had the feeling it was the unknown "Mendy" who had expressed his willingness to donate his kidney. I was very moved. I knew that according to the rules I wasn't supposed to talk to him but he stopped near me and looked at me. Apparently he knew that I was the one who would be getting his kidney.

I couldn't restrain myself and I motioned to him to come over. I introduced myself and, after confirming that he was the potential donor, I asked him, with great trepidation, whether this was his final decision. He smiled reassuringly and said, "Definitely."

My entire body trembled in great emotion. I felt that a heavy stone had rolled off my heart.

A BRACHA FROM THE REBBE WITH A MESSAGE

After hearing that Mendy was determined, I was much calmer but nevertheless, anxious thoughts occurred to me now and then. The day before the momentous operation I was standing in 770 and thinking about the next day. I knew all the phases I would have to undergo, starting with the exam before the operation until the recovery period. I also knew what Mendy, my good angel, would undergo. And yet I felt lost in a sea of uncertainty. What would

happen at the last minute if Mendy got cold feet and backed down from his noble offer?

I felt a powerful need for the Rebbe's bracha. There on the table was volume 20 of the Igros Kodesh. I took the volume and asked the Rebbe, from the depths of my heart, to bless me with success in the operation and opened the volume.

It opened at random to page 102 and the Rebbe's letter said: **Thank you for the good news about the successful medical treatment and may she return to her strength soon and relate good news on her own.**

The letter, which was four pages long, had to do with chinuch, and at the end of it the Rebbe concluded that thinking that the health problems resulted from exertion and efforts in the school was wrong. **"It is more likely to say the opposite, that the successful medical treatment and regaining her strength etc. were the result of exerting herself and efforts on behalf of the school. And if, as it seems from the letter, they are confident that giving money to tz'daka had a connection to the successful treatment, as great as the mitzva of tz'daka with money is, it is no comparison to tz'daka done with one's body and neshama."**

At that moment I decided that after a successful operation I would get even more involved in the Rebbe's mitzvaim and I would devote myself to being mekarev people to their Father in heaven.

WHY HASHEM GAVE ME TWO KIDNEYS

We went to the hospital at 5:30 in the morning. Mendy arrived with his mother and I showed up with my brother Shlomo, who had



Yisrael and Mendy at the thanksgiving meal. On the right is the brother Shlomo Konstantini. Standing is Rabbi Avrohom Lieder.

come in from Israel and with my cousin who lives in New Jersey.

In the waiting room, R' Lieder sat with both families and spoke encouragingly to them. R' Lieder later told me that Mendy went into the operation with utter simcha and bitachon. Two other Lubavitcher men who had also donated a kidney in the past because of the mitzva, came to encourage him.

Mendy's mother had mixed feelings. On the one hand, she was nervous for him, but she tried to reassure herself with the knowledge that he had made the decision to do this mitzva and nobody could stand in his way. The two families became close in the waiting room

After the successful operation I thanked Hashem for His kindness and I wanted to thank Mendy, too, for the amazing thing he did in parting with one of his kidneys to help a Jew he did not even know. I was too overwhelmed with emotion to speak to him on the phone; I couldn't say a word.

At a certain point I felt that I could no longer hold back my feelings of gratitude. I got out

of bed and looked for Mendy. I entered his room, crying, and asked everybody to leave so I could speak to him alone.

At first, I couldn't say anything. I hugged him and cried on his shoulder. Then Mendy said, "What makes me most happy is that the doctors said the operation was a success and you are a healthy man."

After I calmed down a little, I told Mendy that to me, he will always be the dearest person on earth, a good angel. I told him how he saved me from the pain of the dialysis treatment and a difficult, painful, limited life; how he gave me life itself. How he gave me and my family hope.

It's hard to believe there are people like this in the world; may there be many more. Pure people, real Chassidim of the Rebbe. I can just imagine what beautiful work he does as a shliach in Albany. I can never repay him on this scale and in any case, he refuses to accept even a small gift.

Mendy modestly told me that he did it with the belief that this is what should be done and that one should always think about

others, about others' pain. He said, "I have two kidneys and I can live a full life with one. Why did Hashem give me two kidneys? So that if I see a Jew in need of a kidney to live, I can give him one of mine. Boruch Hashem, I am healthy and don't make too much of it, I am not the first one in the world to do this. Seeing you healthy is my reward."

Today, the fifth day of Chanuka, I am celebrating my personal Chanuka miracle that I got my life back with this kidney donation. There are people who wait years for a donor. It's a miracle that I went to R' Lieder, a miracle that this terrific young man was willing, and a miracle that it all went well. Now I am fulfilling the Rebbe's instruction to relate the miracles that Hashem does for us, and in another month I will be returning home to my wife and children in Eretz Yisrael. ■

If you are interested in more information about donating a kidney, call Ahavas Chesed at 718-221-2424

Esther Schwartz, Yediot America helped prepare this article

NINETY YEARS YOUNG

He was a lamdan and an outstanding masmid; a storyteller and a baal menagein; he was a tremendous baal chesed. Rarely does such a diversity of talent find its way into one individual but the elder Chassid, R' Levik Pressman of Nachalat Har Chabad a"h was one of those. He passed away Motzaei Shabbos VaYechi. He will be greatly missed.



By Shneur Zalman Berger

Shortly after Shabbos Parshas VaYechi, Rabbi Levi (Levik) Pressman a"h, a distinguished elder Chassid, talmid chacham, expert on the history of the Admurim and their Chassidim, well-known baal t'filla, and a true Chassid who dedicated his time and energy for the sake of Heaven, passed away. He was 90 years old. Until his final days he was active, keeping his learning schedule and running his chesed enterprise.

The faces of the many Chassidim, filled with grief, who gathered near his home before the

funeral procession set out, said it all. They all spoke in praise of a man to whom anyone could turn with a questions in learning, halacha, customs or the history of the Admurim and their Chassidim. They spoke of a man who leined (read from the Torah) with the utmost precision; who was a baal t'filla and baal menagen. Many spoke of his incredible devotion to the Gemach (interest-free loan fund) which he ran for decades.

I don't think anybody ever saw R' Levi Pressman idle. Those who were close to him knew

that he considered halacha and minhag inviolable, and there was no possibility of veering from Shulchan Aruch and the sifrei minhagim for even a millimeter. That is how he lived and that is how he raised his children, and he tried to instill this supreme value in all those who would heed him.

DRAWN TO CHABAD

R' Pressman was born on 25 Sivan 5680/1920 in Telenesti, Bessarabia (now Moldova). His parents were Avrohom and Sheindel, Hy"d. His father, who

served as the official chazan of the local shul was known as Avremel Chazan. R' Pressman inherited this singing talent from his father, for he too was a Chassidishe baal t'filla who was gifted with a sweet voice.

His parents were Hosiatin Chassidim, and he was raised in this way, but at a certain point he was drawn to the Chabad shtibel in his city where Chabad Chassidim davened in previous generations and where survivors of Chassidic stock davened. The heads of the shtibel quickly noticed his talents. They asked him to lain for them and to give a shiur in Shulchan Aruch HaRav. This was the start of his involvement with Chabad Chassidus.

In his youth he learned in the famous Kishinev yeshiva, and over the years he kept in touch with his friends from yeshiva.

TWO CHASSIDIM IN THE URALS

During World War II he was conscripted into the Red Army, and he suffered greatly over the next two years. A few years ago, he related to me that during that period he lived in unbearable physical and spiritual conditions. He did not even have t'fillin.

After many journeys and travails, he arrived in Chelyabinsk in the Ural mountains. At that time the government had tens of thousands of people deployed to factories. The employment of citizens was vital for normal life in the country during the war, as well as for maintaining a steady flow of ammunition and medical equipment to the blood-drenched front. Despite the fact that R' Pressman was young and strong, he remained with the soldiers who worked in a military factory instead of fighting. There in



Giving a shiur in Kollel Tiferes Levi Yitzchok
(From right to left: R' Tzvi Milevsky, R' Zalman Levin, R' Levik Pressman)

“Those who were close to him knew that he considered halacha and minhag inviolable, and there was no possibility of veering from Shulchan Aruch and the sifrei minhagim for even a millimeter.

the Ural mountains he met two Chabad Chassidim, R' Dovid Geisinsky and R' Dovid Karasik. He told me the following about this period in his life:

“I worked in a factory in Chelyabinsk and was able to take vacation on Rosh HaShana 5704/1943. I used my free time to go to the local shul where I met R' Dovid Geisinsky who worked in a factory at the other end of the city. R' Dovid had been a student in Tiferes Bachurim in Kiev and was exiled. At the end of his period of exile he was told not to return home but to work instead in the factory in Chelyabinsk that had been turned into a makeshift power station that generated electricity.

“We were together for the two days of Rosh HaShana. At night we slept on benches. These two days were special for me, for it was

the first time that I met a young Lubavitcher Chassid who was a yerei Shamayim (G-d fearing) in the fullest sense, and he was truly happy, even though he worked hard and suffered a lot.

“On the first day of Rosh HaShana we were in for a surprise. Early in the morning, a senior military officer walked into shul. R' Dovid and I wondered why he had come. During the davening he sat together with everyone and davened. We were even more surprised when this officer was given Maftir and read it like a pro. We learned that his name was Dr. Rivkin and he was a veterinarian by profession, a frum (religious) man who had been drafted. He came to shul every so often and the others knew him.

“In time I met other people who worked in factories and were from religious families. One of

FROM A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE



R' Pressman and the author of this article

R' Levik to me wasn't only a distinguished Chassid but a Chassid whom I had the privilege to know personally. In his last decade I lived near him. From time to time I heard pearls of wisdom from him, many of which I wrote for this magazine.

The R' Levik that I knew was a Chassid who had not a moment of idleness. I never saw him "just schmoozing." His "d'varim b'teilim" were the histories of Admurim and Chassidim. The lion's share of his time was devoted to learning or running his many chesed projects.

His care in fulfilling every detail, his punctiliousness in his mitzvos and those of others – these were a byword. He was exceedingly frustrated by those who

spoke during davening and did not hesitate to challenge someone who changed from the established custom. At farbrengens he would sometimes tell stories of Chassidei Chabad as well as those from other Chassidic groups that he knew, and everybody eagerly listened to every word he said.

Those who attended the shul in Nachala in recent years were quite familiar with the chavrusas for Gemara, R' Pressman and his good friend and mashpia of the k'hilla, R' Michoel Mishulovin. They learned together, argued in learning together, and it was all done quietly, without fanfare. Up until a few years ago the two would learn on the Pressmans' porch where they felt free to learn loudly without it being "showy." However, it would happen that in their great enthusiasm their voices would grow louder, and this gave spiritual pleasure to the neighbors. The apartment of my father-in-law, R' Lipa Klein, is above that of the Pressmans and the sound of learning would rise up and fill their home. The chayus, seriousness and simcha were an inseparable part of their learning, and they were role models for everyone in Nachala.

R' Levik would tell stories. He helped me and others involved in Chassidic history and yet, it was very hard to get him to talk about his own life. However, since he was so good at depicting events, it would happen that when he told a story about one of his friends, he would also describe what happened to him at that time. Sometimes, when his children asked him to tell about his past, he would do so but would first tell about Tzaddikim and Chassidim, which did not leave him much time to tell about his painful family history.

them was R' Dovid Karasik who ended up here during the war. [This R' Dovid was a brother of R' Eliezer Karasik, who was the rav of the Chabad k'hilla in Tel Aviv

and director of Aguch in Eretz Yisroel]. I was regularly in touch with these people and others, and they described to me how difficult their lives were.

"As opposed to those workers who worked under difficult conditions, I worked in a munitions factory where the work was much easier. I was always amazed to see R' Dovid Geisinsky in a constant state of joy despite the fact that he had been sentenced to backbreaking work because he was a released prisoner,.

"After the war we davened in the house of someone who lived near the factory where my friends worked. I was the chazan, and there was a large crowd including Polish Chassidim who attended this makeshift shul. They filled the house and yard.

"I was released from my work before the Pesach of 1946 while R' Geisinsky and R' Karasik continued laboring. I found a small apartment, and both of them would come to my house on a regular basis. R' Dovid Geisinsky occasionally ate with me on Shabbos and Yom Tov."

RAV OF CHELYABINSK

Despite his young age, R' Pressman was appointed rav of Chelyabinsk, although he did not serve in this role for long. In 1948 rabbis were persecuted once again in the Soviet Union, and when persecution began in Moscow his sister there sent him a telegram urging him to leave his position before he got into trouble. She said it would be preferable for him to leave the city altogether. After a brief time he went to Sverdlovsk where he lived for a year and met a few more Chabad Chassidim.

On his first Shabbos in Sverdlovsk, he noticed that the Chassid, Rabbi Yitzchok Gershon Burovik, remained in shul and continued davening for a long time. He later found out that R' Burovik had learned in Tomchei T'mimim in Lubavitch and had



Two weeks before he passed away, at the grave of the Admur of Hosiatin



Receiving a dollar from the Rebbe

also been the chozer of the Rebbe Rayatz. His davening and review of Chassidus made a tremendous impression on R' Pressman, who began to understand and feel what Lubavitch Chassidus is about.

Another Chassid he was in touch with was R' Leib Rochlin, who was the shamash of the local shul.

Years later he related:

“Even after we parted ways, R' Dovid Geisinsky did not forget me, and he wanted to make a shidduch with me and a relative of his. He sent me frequent letters begging me to leave for Samarkand where I could meet his relative. However, my first priority was finding a match for my single sister. It was only after she married in 5710 that I went to Samarkand where I became engaged.”

R' Pressman married Malka Goldschmidt in Adar 5711. Her father R' Yitzchok had been a ben-bayis (member of the household) of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn, and he was a great help to him. They lived in Samarkand where there was a large Lubavitch community. R'

Pressman began to integrate within the Chabad Chassidic community and even learned Tanya regularly with Rabbi Eliyahu Levin (who had been a chozer for the Rebbe Rashab).

Due to financial difficulties, he moved to Tashkent where he found work in small factories where frum people worked. This enabled him to keep Shabbos.

The years to come were ones of mesirus nefesh (self sacrifice) in which he faces the challenge of raising his children in the ways of Torah and Chassidus despite communist oppression. With heavenly assistance, he was able to raise an upright generation with all his sons and daughters going in the way of Torah and Chassidus and eventually establishing beautiful families of their own.

Like many Chassidim, the Pressmans wished to leave Russia, but the Iron Curtain was tightly closed. In the 70's it opened a crack, and the Pressmans were able to escape. On Chai Elul 1971 they arrived in Eretz Yisroel, having taken along with them a

large quantity of holy books which they managed to take out legally.

MEMBER OF THE VAAD OF NACHALAT HAR CHABAD

After moving to Eretz Yisroel he settled in Nachalat Har Chabad and was a pillar of the Chassidic community there. Shortly after he arrived, he was appointed as a member of the community Vaad. He served in this position for nearly forty years until his final day.

He worked as a fundraiser for institutions and as a mashgiach in a slaughterhouse in Kiryat Malachi. He performed these responsibilities solely to provide for his family; they were not his primary occupations. His priorities were learning Torah and providing for the needs of the community. For 25 years he ran Kollel Tiferes Levi Yitzchok and for 30 years, until his final day, he ran a Gemach that provided numerous loans. These he started following a request of the Rebbe in 5740 that institutions be started



Chavrusos: R' Pressman (right) and R' Michael Mishulovin

and named for his father, R' Levi Yitzchok. R' Pressman's father-in-law, R' Yitzchok Goldschmidt of Dnepropetrovsk, had told him many things about the gaon and mekubal R' Levi Yitzchok Schneersohn, and R' Pressman felt connected to him.

When the Iron Curtain opened and new shluchim began to go to the former Soviet Union, R' Pressman also went there on shlichus. His son R' Nachum, shliach to Germany, relates:

"This was 5750, and going on shlichus back then wasn't easy. My father was already 70 years old, but nevertheless, he went to Kiev alone where he accomplished great things. The conditions were tough, and yet he accomplished so much. He even considered bringing my mother and remaining there permanently."

He traveled frequently to the Rebbe and did so with a strong feeling of *hiskashrus*.

Every year he would be the chazan for Maariv of Motzaei Yom Kippur. People wondered why this elderly Chassid, after a day of fasting, wanted to be the chazan. The answer was that he knew that many people run through this t'filla quickly because they want to end the fast, and this is why he went

over to the amud to daven, word by word.

A few months ago R' Pressman turned 90. Despite his advanced age, he acted like people many years his junior.

Erev Rosh Chodesh Teves is the yahrtzait of the Admur of Hosiatin to whom R' Pressman was attached since his youth. A few weeks ago on that date, he traveled to Teveria to prostrate on his grave. Then he davened at the gravesites of the tzaddikim R' Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, R' Avrohom of Kalisk, and others. Thus, he parted (and perhaps was reunited) with the great Chassidic masters to whom he felt so close.

The night before he was hospitalized he davened before the amud, and then he gave a shiur on the three daily chapters of Rambam, in place of the usual lecturer who could not make it. He also spoke about the importance of answering "amen" and the severity of talking during davening. Then he went home and sat for a long time with R' Avrohom Makovitsky, one of the administrators of the Gemach Levi Yitzchok, and together they reviewed recent loans and repayments. Close to 11:00 that night they finished their Gemach

work, and R' Pressman went to bed.

Early in the morning his wife noticed that he was unconscious, and they immediately called for an ambulance. Friends and relatives who were at the ICU found it hard to believe that R' Levik, who had been so active, was lying inert. Sadly, he passed away on Motzaei Shabbos.

The funeral left from his house with hundreds of Chassidim escorting a man who was active in the community just three days earlier. His stroke had been on Thursday.

When the funeral reached the shul, his good friend and mashpia of the k'hilla, R' Michael Mishulovin, spoke briefly, emphasizing that R' Pressman had asked a number of times that his praises should not be sung after his death. In a voice choked with tears he said that R' Pressman had been devoted to the community at large, as well as to every individual. "It's a great loss for the shul, a great loss for Nachalat Har Chabad, a great loss for every one of us." Then R' Sholom Ber Garelik related some special acts of chesed that R' Pressman did modestly, without publicity.

From Nachalat Har Chabad the funeral proceeded to Yerushalayim where R' Pressman was buried on Har HaMenuchos, near his friend and neighbor, R' Mottel Kozliner. They had been friends for over fifty years during their lifetime, and now they are buried side by side.

His is survived by his wife Malka and children: R' Avrohom – Yerushalayim; Mrs. Sheindel (Yaffa) Lipsker – Natrat Ilit; Mrs. Batya Raskin – Kfar Chabad; Mrs. Esther Raskin – London; Mrs. Yehudis Feldman – Kfar Chabad; R' Yitzchok – B'nei Brak; R' Nachum – shliach in Germany. ■