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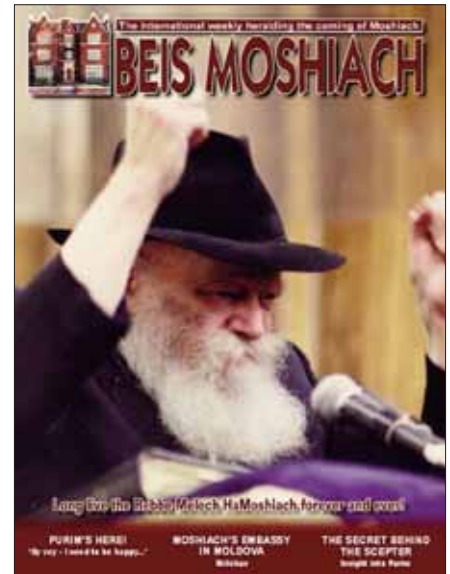
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# A PARADIGM OF LEADERSHIP

Sichos in English

*Aharon has the potential to spark the divine service of the Jews and inspire them with light and warmth, but for the flame to burn as “an eternal light,” “from evening until morning,” Moshe’s influence is necessary.*

## A LEADER’S COMMITMENT

Leadership involves self-sacrifice.

Everyone understands that to receive you have to give, but true leadership is above this type of barter.

A genuine leader rises above self-concern entirely.

He identifies totally with his people and their purpose and is willing to give up everything he has for them.

Moshe Rabbeinu epitomized this type of leadership.

When G-d told him that He would destroy the Jewish people because of the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe responded: [1] “If You would, forgive their sin. And if not, please obliterate me from the book You have written.”

By making this statement, Moshe offered to sacrifice more than his life; he was also giving up

everything that he stood for.

“The book You have written” refers to “the entire Torah.” [2]

Moshe was identified with Torah. [3]

“He dedicated his soul for it.” [4]

Nevertheless, he was willing to sacrifice his connection with the Torah for the Jewish people.

Why?

Because Moshe is one with the Jewish people.

“Moshe is Israel, and Israel is Moshe.” [5]

However deep his connection was with the Torah, Moshe’s connection with the Jewish people was deeper, touching the very essence of his being. [6]

This bond connects Moshe to every single Jew, regardless of his level of divine service. [7]

For whom was Moshe willing to sacrifice everything?

For the Jews who had worshipped the Golden Calf.

Regardless of what they had done, Moshe’s commitment to them remained unchanged.

Since the connection he shared with them stemmed from the essence of his being - and touched the essence of their being, their conduct, however far removed from the spirit of Moshe’s teachings, could not sever the bond between them.

## THREE PROTOTYPES OF RIGHTEOUS CONDUCT

Our Sages compare three righteous men: [8] Noach, Avrohom, Moshe.

Noach was himself totally righteous, but he showed little concern for the people around him.

He spent 120 years building the ark to arouse the people’s curiosity, and would tell them of the need to repent if they asked. [9]

But nothing more.

He did not seek to influence his neighbors to change their conduct, nor did he pray to G-d to avert the coming of the flood. [10]

Avrohom, by contrast, sought to improve the people among whom he lived.

On the verse, [11] “He proclaimed there the name of G-d, eternal L-rd,” our Sages comment, [12] “Do not read va’yikra - ‘he proclaimed,’ but va’yakri - ‘he

made others proclaim.’

“Avrohom would publicize G-d’s presence and motivate others to call on Him. Moreover, when G-d told Avrohom that He was going to destroy the city of Sodom, Avrohom prayed for the people, challenging G-d: [13] “Will You wipe out the righteous and the wicked? ... It would be sacrilege for You ... to kill the righteous with the wicked ... Shall not the whole world’s Judge act justly?”

Moshe, however, showed a more encompassing commitment.

Avrohom’s prayer was for “the righteous.”

Moshe, by contrast, prayed for the Jews who had worshipped the Golden Calf.

As leader of his people, his commitment extended to every Jew, even those whose conduct stood in direct opposition to his own values.

It was for the sake of these people, Moshe told G-d: “If not, please obliterate me from the book.”

## DEEPER THAN A NAME

Our Sages state: [14] “A curse given by a wise man, even when conditional, becomes manifest.”

On that basis, our Rabbis explain [15] that even though G-d accepted Moshe’s prayer for the Jews, the malediction he pronounced on himself had an effect.

Moshe’s name is mentioned in every Torah reading from Parshas Shmos which describes his birth, until the book of Deuteronomy, which conveys his farewell addresses with one exception: Parshas Tetzaveh.

In this reading, Moshe’s name was - in keeping with his request - stricken out.

This does not, however, mean that Moshe is not associated with Parshas Tetzaveh.

On the contrary, a name reflects merely the dimension of a person which relates to others.

The essence of a person’s being, who he really is, is above his name.

Parshas Tetzaveh does not mention Moshe’s name, for it communicates the aspect of his being which cannot be expressed in a name.

Moshe’s self-sacrifice for the Jewish people stemmed from the essence of his being.

It is this fundamental dimension which Parshas Tetzaveh brings to our attention.

## INTERRELATED BONDS

These concepts are reflected in the opening phrase of the Torah reading: [16] V’Ata Tetzaveh es b’nei Yisroel, “And you shall command the children of Israel.”

Tetzaveh translated as “command” relates to the word tzavsa which means “connection.”

The verse is a charge for “you,” the very essence of Moshe, [17] to connect with every Jew.

The connection initiated by Moshe also has a bonding effect within the Jews themselves, making them - even those on the lowest levels, those for whom Moshe prayed, “If not, obliterate me...” - one entity.

Simultaneously, the connection with Moshe binds and connects the Jewish people with the Or Ein Sof, G-d’s infinite light. [18]

Moshe serves as a “shepherd of faith,” [19] sustaining and nurturing the Jewish people’s faith in G-d by prompting the expression of the essential bond they share with Him. [20]

The two interpretations of the bonds evoked by Moshe are interrelated.

By revealing the essential G-dly potential every Jew possesses, Moshe establishes bonds of connection among the Jewish

people themselves.

For this G-dly potential exists within every member of our people without exception.

And it is through highlighting this shared spiritual resource that true unity can be established. [21]

## SO THAT AN ETERNAL LIGHT WILL SHINE

The above concepts relate not only to the name, but also to the content of the Torah reading.

Although the Torah reading focuses on the priesthood and Aharon’s service, Moshe’s influence was necessary to lift Aharon’s service to a level to which it could not reach on its own.

This is reflected in the continuation of the charge to Moshe, [22] “And they shall bring you clear olive oil, crushed for the lamp.”

One might ask: why should the oil be brought to Moshe? It was Aharon who kindled the menorah.

The answer is found in the continuation of the verse, “to raise an eternal light.”

Aharon has the potential to spark the divine service of the Jews and inspire them with light and warmth, but for the flame to burn as “an eternal light,” “from evening until morning,” [23] Moshe’s influence is necessary.

For it is Moshe who enables every Jew to tap his innermost spiritual resources and maintain a constant commitment.

For similar reasons, the investiture of Aharon and his sons in the priesthood was performed by Moshe. For the seven days of the initiation of the altar, Moshe served as a priest. His service enhanced Aharon’s subsequent efforts, contributing a deeper dimension of connection to G-d. [24]

[Continued on pg. 9]

# OY VEY – I NEED TO BE HAPPY

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

*Purim, when the Jewish people were at the highest point of mesirus nefesh, ready to sacrifice their lives for G-d and His Torah, that is when they experienced what it was like to go beyond the limits of their finite self-centered beings and connect to the infinite soul powers. And that is when they experienced true joy and happiness.*

## WHY SO HAPPY?

In the early years of the Chassidic-Misnagdic controversy, one of the bones of contention was the Chassidic emphasis on joy. The wags within the ranks of the Chassidic movement have suggested that this was not so much a theological issue as a regional personality issue, since Lithuanians and those of the bordering areas in Poland and Russia tended more to saturnine than to sunshine in their personalities.

The favorite joke of my old roommate in Lakewood was, “Why do we read certain portions of Megillas Esther with the Eicha tune? Answer: So that the Litvacks will

also be happy. If so, why don’t we say the whole thing with the Eicha tune? Answer: That would be holelus/profligacy.” Although I may not have shared the same degree of hilarity over that tired jest, I was always sympathetic to the Chassidic position on the issue of serving G-d with joy.

Even after studying the early source material denouncing the renegade reformers as rowdy revelers raucously rollicking and carousing contrary to common convention, annotated with voluminous citations of the Sages warning against inappropriate gaiety and licentiousness, I wasn’t buying. I may have been a Misnaged. I may

even have been a miserable Misnaged. But there was no way that I was going to be a champion of misery. My misery most assuredly did not love company. If I was going to hang out with friends and/or acquaintances, I preferred to be around more upbeat people. And when I found myself in the company of the perpetually morose, I considered it my sacred charge to crack them up. (Of course, the “serious” guys looked disapprovingly upon what they considered my comedic excesses).

Despite the fact that my predisposed bias was towards the Chassidic view on this matter, I nonetheless was confounded by a number of questions, which in turn led to conclusions that led me back to the less than flattering stereotypes promulgated by the movement’s detractors. The questions being, “What are they so happy about? Do these people really think that sitting around singing a niggun while eating herring (the smellier, the better) with your hands, and tossing back glasses of slivovitz or vodka (as per regional preferences), makes one a happy person?

Over the years, as I read more general Chassidic literature and even kabbalistic literature and the approach of those schools of Jewish thought towards joy, I found the theological theses theoretically sound but hardly attainable on a consistent



basis for those not on a particularly high spiritual level. It just seemed like a paradox. In order to attain any truly lofty spiritual level one must serve G-d with great joy, but in order to get that excited over doing a mitzva and the privilege of serving G-d, it would seem that one would first have to be on a fairly high spiritual plane. As to the actual masses that made up the body of the many streams of the Chassidic movement, I found that those who tended to be more intellectual were hardly paradigmatic of the classic effervescent Chassid of folklore. All this, of course, fed into the stereotype of the jolly Chassid being a bit dim in the wit department.

## HAPPY AS A STATE OF MIND

Stories of great Tzaddikim known as brilliant Torah scholars and their great joy in the service of G-d, were of no particular help. For example, there is the story of Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev who came late one day to shul for morning services. When the Chassidim inquired as to the cause of his tardiness, he told them that he had woken up that morning and begun thinking about the need to serve G-d that day with joy. However, when he thought about himself and his spiritual state, he concluded that he was such a lowly being that he had nothing in the

world to be joyous about. As time passed, he realized that he had to begin his daily supplications regardless. He began saying the morning blessings and when he reached the blessing “that He did not make me a gentile,” he realized that no matter how decadent a creature he was, he was still a Jew and not a gentile, and that itself was sufficient cause to rejoice. And so, he began to sing and dance and that caused him to be delayed.

I had heard that story even as a child and found it inspiring, but not very useful. You see, on my own level, I also had similar inspired moments of great joy over the years (another entry in the weird personal revelations file). Similarly, even at the lowest points of my life, I never had any difficulty with rejoicing at the Torah appointed times, such as Simchas Torah and Purim. (I don’t think I ever met the type of Misnaged described in the sichos, who would pinch their cheeks on such occasions to create the appearance of happiness). The problem was that after each joyful high I would crash, sometimes to the point of feeling quite the opposite towards my Jewishness and the burdensome obligations attached thereto. What I needed was to figure out how to hold onto that joy on a regular basis and channel it into a deeper and more enthused dedication to the seemingly routine

grind of everyday prayer, Torah study and mitzva performance.

When I began to learn Chabad Chassidus in a serious way, I discovered the idea that each Jewish holiday serves as the source of a particular spiritual energy for the entire year, until that holiday comes around again the following year. As such, Purim, in addition to transforming the entire month of Adar into a month of joy and happiness, is the source of joy for the entire year. This is expressed in the rabbinic obligation to become besotted to the point of “not knowing,” that is - to tap into the joy of the soul that originates from the very essence of the soul which transcends intellect. When one succeeds in tapping into that source, he draws down the capacity for joy within the bounds of intellect and everyday life for an entire year.

I remember thinking, wow, this stuff sounds great, but how does that translate into reality. Later, as I got to know more real people of all levels who identify as Lubavitch Chassidim, I realized that I was not alone in my struggles, but that was little consolation. Especially, since in our generation, the Rebbe repeatedly demands joy more than ever before, to the point that some people walk around depressed because oye vey, how can they live up to the Rebbe’s demands and standards as regards the imperative of serving G-d with joy. Additionally, the Rebbe emphatically linked the avoda of joy with the mission of our generation to expedite the True and Complete Redemption, thus providing an infinitely more powerful motive for any Evil Inclination inspired guilt trip.

## WHAT, ME HAPPY?

One of the challenges facing those whose minds have been sharpened and expanded through the analytic study of Talmudic



## ***When he thought about himself and his spiritual state, he concluded that he was such a lowly being that he had nothing in the world to be joyous about...***

exegesis, as well as the more esoteric Inner Dimension of the Torah, is the tendency to complicate rather than simplify. Shlomo HaMelech writes in Mishlei (Proverbs) 20:5 “*mayim amukim eitza b’leiv ish, v’ish tevuna yidlana*,” (counsel is like deep waters in the heart of man, and the man of understanding will draw them forth). In the verse, he is acknowledging the great difficulty in deriving practical advice or counsel, for to do so one must dig really deep into his own heart. To successfully extract those deep waters requires a man of “tevuna.” What exactly is tevuna? It is clearly related to the Hebrew word *Bina*, and is also translated as understanding, but it clearly seems to be different.

Chassidus explains the relationship between the two (Shaar HaYichud ch. 2 and elsewhere) as follows. Bina is the intellectual faculty through which one analyzes and develops a given idea or concept, and therefore its focus is on the purely intellectual rather than the practical implications of that idea or concept, which are implicit therein but remain as “deep waters in the heart.” Tevuna is a component of Bina, but its function is to strip away all the intellectual complexities and intricacies and extrapolate the “bottom line,” or in Chassidic terminology, to determine the “b’chein” (the “therefore”).

The “bottom line” and the “therefore” of every single Chassidic teaching, and of every single Chassidic story, related to the topic of joy, is actually quite simple. Every human being (except those with

extreme forms of mental illness) has the power to direct his or her thoughts to whatever topic or perspective that person chooses. When one directs his thoughts towards “me, myself and I,” and sees the world from that perspective, happiness will remain forever elusive even as he continues to pursue it. However, when one “goes out of himself” by directing his thoughts towards that which is beyond himself, and he looks at himself and the world from the perspective of G-d as revealed to us in the Torah, then he will discover infinite number of sources of joy, including that “He did not make me a gentile.”

“I” and “me” will never be able to find and hold on to long term happiness. It is only from the vantage point of “not I” and “not me” that even “I” and “me” can experience and channel true happiness. When I think about what “I” have made of “myself,” if I was to be truly honest I would realize that I have little or no reason to rejoice (as Reb Levi Yitzchok concluded), but when I shift the focus to what “He [did or] did not make me,” only then can I truly experience the joyfulness of my very Jewishness. From there, I can channel that into joy in doing a mitzva, and as the Arizal explains, this needs to be the greatest joy in life.

### **HAPPY TO BE FREE**

“With joy, they will go out.” In order to “go out” of one’s self it has to be with joy, and in order to be truly happy it is necessary to “go

out” of yourself. This is not a paradox or a “catch-22.” It is the way that G-d set up the world so that even when engaged in the world’s idea of the “pursuit of happiness,” we should realize that there is no true happiness outside of Him. Purim, when the Jewish people were at the highest point of mesirus nefesh, ready to sacrifice their lives for G-d and His Torah, that is when they experienced what it was like to go beyond the limits of their finite self-centered beings and connect to the infinite soul powers. And that is when they experienced true joy and happiness. And in that state of happiness, they voluntarily reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah.

Never throughout the history of the Jewish people has there been a leader who incessantly repeated the need for joy, and that “joy breaks boundaries,” as in our time. That is because we are the strangest generation. By any system of reckoning we have to conclude that we are the closest generation to redemption, and yet the Evil Inclination has us walking around feeling that we are further than ever before. He does this by making sure that we keep our focus on what we naturally tend towards, which is “me, myself and I.”

The Rebbe, who keeps reminding us how close we are, and then informs us when we are not just close, but we are already in the “days of Moshiach,” must keep on reiterating the need for joy to break us out of the final “boundaries” of our internal exile. This is especially so in the month of Adar and around the holiday of Purim, when we have the capacity to experience “not knowing” and “infinite joy,” which is the preparation for “and all will know Me,” with infinite joy, immediately, NOW!

*Positive comments and constructive criticism welcome: rabbizvi@aol.com*

[Continued from pg. 5]

## THE AGENT OF REDEMPTION

With regard to Moshe, our Sages state: [25] “He is the first redeemer, and he will be the ultimate redeemer.”

The natural result of the arousal of the essential connection to G-d and the unity among mankind introduced by Moshe is the Redemption.

In this vein, our Sages explain [26] that the redemption from Egypt had the potential to be the ultimate redemption.

Had the Jews’ sins not prevented Moshe from leading the people into Eretz Yisroel, there never would have been another exile. [27]

Similarly, in subsequent generations, it is the “extensions of Moshe Rabbeinu” [7] who infuse the yearning for redemption among our people, uniting them in the desire for Moshiach’s coming.

These efforts serve as an “eternal light,” pointing our people and mankind as a whole to its ultimate goal.

*Adapted from Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XXI, p. 173ff, Vol. XVI p. 204ff; Vol. XV, p. 34ff; Seifer Maamarim Melukei, Vol. VI, p. 129ff*

### Notes:

1. Exodus 32:32.
2. Rashi on the above verse, Shmos Rabba 47:9.
3. C.f. Malachi 3:22.
4. Mechilta commenting on Exodus 15:1; Shmos Rabba 30:4.
5. Rashi, Numbers 21:21.
6. This approach has its source in a more encompassing motif.

Our Sages state (Rus Rabba 1:4, Tanna d’Vei Eliyahu Rabba, ch. 14): “The righteous resemble their Creator.”

G-d invests Himself in the Torah [and thus the word Anochi, the first word of the Ten Commandments, serves as an acronym for the

Aramaic phrase Ana Nafshis Kesavis Yehavis, “I wrote down and gave over Myself” (Shabbos 105a)]. And yet, G-d’s bond with the Jewish people is deeper.

The Jews are G-d’s children (Deuteronomy 14: 1), His firstborn (Exodus 4:22) as it were. Thus “Israel comes before the Torah” (B’Reishis Rabba 1:4, Tanna d’Vei Eliyahu Rabba, ch. 14).

For this reason, even when the Jewish people sin, G-d is willing to bypass their transgressions, and accept their t’shuva.

See also Timeless Patterns in Time (Kehot, N.Y., 1993), Vol. I, p. 49ff).

7. Although Moshe - and his spiritual heirs, “the extensions of Moshe” who lead the Jews in every generation - share a bond with every Jew, there is nevertheless, a special degree of closeness and care reserved for those who make efforts to nurture this connection.

8. Zohar I, 67b; See Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XV, p. 40 and sources cited there.

9. Aggadas B’Reishis 1:2.

10. And therefore, the flood is referred to as “the waters of Noach” (Isaiah 54:9), indicting him for his failure to influence the people of his age.

11. Genesis 13:4.

12. Sota 10b.

13. Genesis 18:23-25.

14. Makos 11a.

15. Baal HaTurim on the opening verse of Parshas Tetzaveh; Zohar Chadash, Shir HaShirim; Rabbeinu Bechaye on Exodus 32:32; Likkutei Sichos, Vol. II, p. 674ff.

16. Exodus 27:20.

17. Kli Yakar on the above verse.

The word tetzaveh itself alludes to Moshe’s essence which is above his name. Tetzaveh is numerically equivalent to 501.

With regard to the number 500, our Sages state (Kohes Rabba, ch. 7, 1:2): “[G-d] traveled a distance of 500 years to acquire a name.” Thus 501 refers to the essence which transcends the name.

18. This concept is explained in the maamer, V’Ata Tetzaveh, 5679 (Seifer

Maamarim, 5679, p. 254) and in other sources.

The Previous Rebbe’s maamer, V’Kibel HaYehudim, 5687 (ch. 4), mentions a similar, but not identical concept, that Moshe connects with the Jewish people. In that maamer, the Previous Rebbe does not, however, mention that Moshe connects the Jews with the Or Ein Sof.

19. [We find the Hebrew original of this term Ro-eh Ne’eman in the Pesichta to Eicha Rabba, sec. 24. The Aramaic version of the term, also alluding to Moshe Rabbeinu, serves as the title of one of the component parts of the Zohar. See also Torah Or, Ki Sisa 111a.]

20. In the Previous Rebbe’s maamer, V’Kibel HaYehudim, 5687, the emphasis on Moshe’s efforts as a “shepherd of faith” is on his infusing the Jewish people with knowledge that allows them to bridge the dichotomy between the essential G-dly potential and their conscious thought processes.

This activity, however, is possible only because Moshe sparks the expression of the essence of the Jewish soul. When the essence of the soul has been stirred, its influence can be projected into one’s conscious experience.

21. See Tanya, ch. 32.

22. Exodus, loc. cit.

23. Ibid.:21.

24. A connection to Moshe’s service is also seen in another of the subjects mentioned in this Torah reading: the incense altar.

Ketores Hebrew for “incense” shares the same root as ketar, Aramaic for “bond.”

The ketores offering was intended, in a way similar to Moshe’s influence, to intensify the inner bond mankind, even the wicked (see Krisos 6b), share with G-d.

25. Shmos Rabba 2:4; Zohar, Vol. I, p. 253a.

See Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XI, p. 8ff.

26. Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XX, p. 230 and sources cited there.

27. Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XIX, p. 346 and sources cited there.



# MY PURIM MIRACLE

By Yaala Ben Aruya

## THE YEARNING OF A LITTLE GIRL

The happy group of girls crossed the field that bordered on the big swimming pool in the Nechemia neighborhood of Nes Tziyona. They dropped their briefcases and chased one another, their playful shouts and laughter filling the air. Sometime later, panting, tired and smiling, they gathered their belongings and continued homewards.

"Hey, Chanali, what's up with you? You lost something in your briefcase again?" they shouted at their friend. She had lagged behind as she searched her briefcase.

"Don't wait for me," she said, her head burrowed in her bag.

When the group had disappeared from sight, Chanali ran towards the high fence on the edge of the field. She intertwined her fingers in the fence, her face pressed close to the twisted iron. She stood in fascination, watching the girls who filled the yard on the other side. Their movements seemed to her more refined and gentle in the skirts they wore. "I want to be there with those girls in the long skirts," she thought. She yearned for something precious, but it was more than just the iron fence that separated them.

"Ima, I want to go to the school near the pool," she pleaded when she arrived home.

"You're not going to any school near the pool," declared her mother.

"They don't learn anything there. It's a religious school where they learn Torah all day. What do you want to go there for? What will become of you if you go there? Nothing! We've already discussed this many times. Forget about it."

"I was seven years old," relates Chanali Binyamin. "Every day I came home from school with the same request. I cried and pleaded until my mother got hysterical. I didn't even understand why a girl from an irreligious home wanted it so much. What was it about the place which I later learned to be the Chabad girls' school 'Oholei Yosef Yitzchok' that so attracted me?"

"My grandfather emigrated from Morocco to Canada and from there to the US, but he would visit us in Israel occasionally. I was captivated by his habits – he would rise at 5:00 and put on t'fillin and daven for a long time. After one of his visits, I discovered that he had left his Siddur behind, and adopted it. I would sneak off to my parents' room, close the door and open the Siddur with awe. I don't know how but I realized that it was a book of prayer and that what is called 'Shacharis' is the morning prayer and that 'Arvis' is the evening prayer. Whenever I had the opportunity, I would pray. If someone walked in suddenly, I would immediately hide the Siddur. I knew my parents would see it as a threat."

## CONNECTING TO THE REBBE

When Chanali was 18 she followed her family to the US, where they had taken up residence.

"You must go to the Rebbe," insisted her mother. Not sure what to make of this odd request, Chanali simply ignored it.

Her mother would go to 770 every Sunday and felt a strong connection to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Though she still wasn't observant, she tried in her own way. She would buy meat, for example, in any supermarket and "kosher" it at home by soaking and salting it.

After her repeated requests were ignored, her mother enlisted Ariella Benhiyouan's help. Ariella told Chanali fascinating stories about the Rebbe, and explained to her at length about the holiness of a visit to the Rebbe. Having won her over, she suggested that Chanali commit to certain good practices as preparation to see the Rebbe.

"I made some good hachlatos, including the commitment to use only chalav Yisroel (I naively thought that chalav Yisroel meant kosher milk), and I went to the Rebbe. I was anxious to meet the man my mother described as an angel. I saw before me a special man with a beard and an impressive countenance. He blessed me but I don't remember a word that he said.

"Since then, without connecting it to the visit to the Rebbe, I began improving in my Jewish observance. Things I had never paid attention to before suddenly took on a greater importance. At restaurants I resolved not to eat cheese but only pasta; not to eat meat, just fish ... until one day, I asked a waiter, 'What kind of fish is this?' and discovered I was eating shark. I realized that kashrus is not that simple and I couldn't continue eating in non-kosher restaurants.

"Usually Chabad seeks out



mekuravim. Now, I looked for Chabad and I quickly found it.

"In Canarsie I met Chagit Borochoy, who became my mashpia. Every Wednesday she would prepare close to twenty kinds of cakes. I'll never forget the sight of the dozens of women sitting around the table full of goodies, listening closely to the Chassidus and words of inspiration. She sat in an armchair with a baby in her lap and sometimes drifted off in her exhaustion, the main thing being that people listen and be inspired. Although she was busy with a few little ones, she always found the time to put in the work so that people would be drawn to Hashem and the Rebbe.

"From the first time I attended, I carried home with me the awareness that we have to bring about the hisgalus of the Rebbe MH" M. At that event I met a woman who today is a good friend of mine. She

repeatedly pointed at the Rebbe and proclaimed, 'That's Moshiach!' At the time, I thought,

'Something's not quite right with this woman ...'

"The second time I went to the Rebbe was about a year after I got married. I went with a friend whose son was very sick. The doctors offered no hope. She cried to the Rebbe, 'Rebbe, save my son.' The Rebbe gave her two dollars, one for her and one for her son, and gave a bracha for a refua shleima. The women in charge of moving people along urged us to move on quickly, but the Rebbe lifted his hand to stop them and motioned that they shouldn't touch me. At that yechidus I was utterly dazzled. It was a completely different feeling than the first time. I was struck by the light and the Rebbe blessed and blessed ..."

"I don't understand this,' my friend wondered. 'My son is sick and the Rebbe gives me a dollar and another dollar and dismisses me with a bracha. As for you, can you explain why the Rebbe gave you so much time? What did he say to you?' I opened my mouth to tell her, but found myself speechless. All the words flew away for I had forgotten what I heard. To this day I don't remember anything that he said to me. But since then, my husband and I became stronger in our

observance, thanks to the Rebbe's bracha.

"Several years went by and in 5754 I could no longer see the Rebbe and receive his brachos face to face. But the Rebbe does not abandon his flock and he is always with me and I see his brachos in my life. Two years later, in Av, 5756, I gave birth to my oldest daughter, Shirel."

## THE PLUMBER ARRIVES

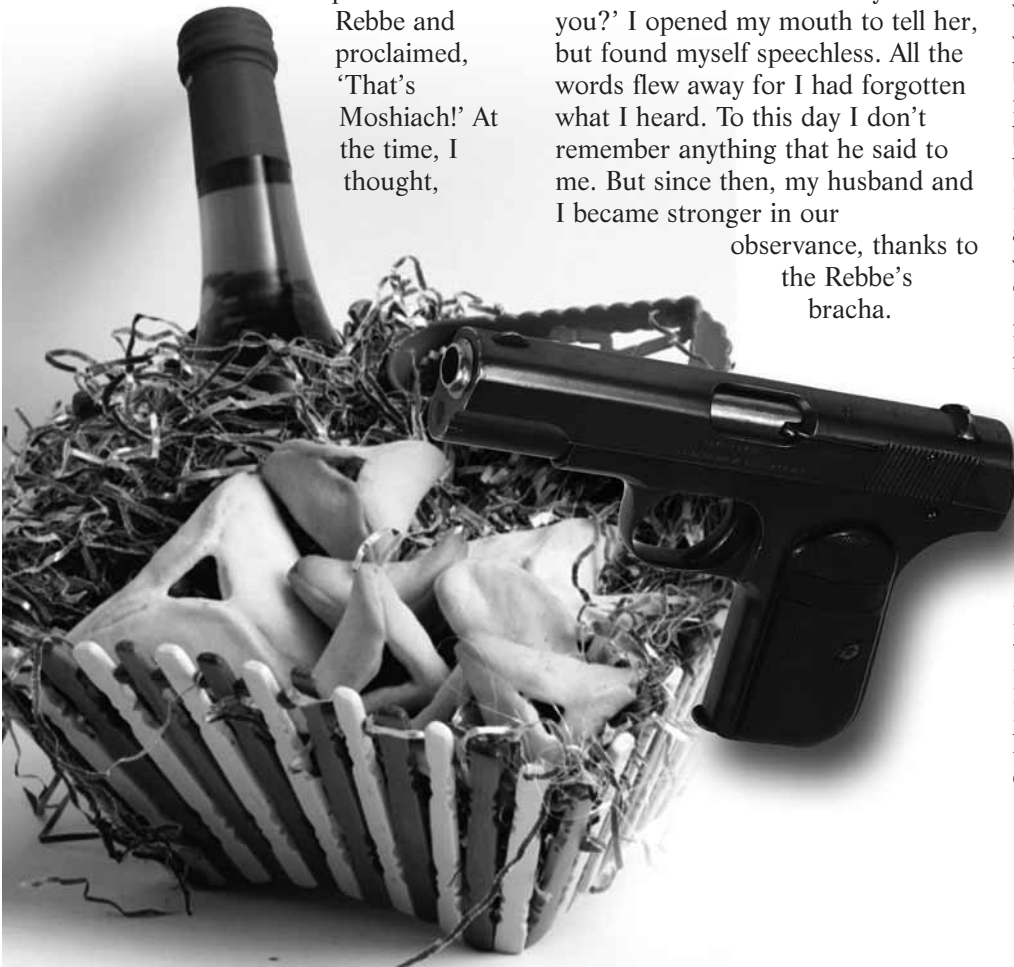
That year, as Purim approached, Chanali decided to do something special:

"I wanted to give matanos la'veyonim (gifts to the poor) but I didn't know any poor. I decided to give mishloach manos to all the widows in our building. There were many widows, old women, Holocaust survivors. I eagerly anticipated doing this mitzvah. I imagined how my package would look and the sparkle in their eyes as they received it."

On Taanis Esther, at six in the morning, when her husband left for work, she went down with him. She went to the local supermarket and bought all the delicacies she needed for her mishloach manos. She brought them home and excitedly began arranging beautiful packages. By eight o'clock, the table was already laden with cellophane wrapped and ribbon-tied packages. The sight pleased her and she looked forward eagerly towards fulfilling the mitzvah.

At the time, she was hosting a friend, the friend who had gone past the Rebbe with her. Boruch Hashem, her son had recovered and she had come to celebrate Purim with her second son at the Chabad Neshama Center. The place is close to Chanali's house and is run by Rabbi Zushe Winner, shliach in Brighton Beach. It was 8:30 and she hadn't left the house yet when the doorbell rang. Who could it be?

"Check before you open the



***Holding the baby, Chanali got up and walked casually to the door, which was opened wide. The sight of the man standing there froze her blood. She cowered in shock and terror.***

door,” she called out to her friend who was closest to the door, but the friend was so fast that by the time Chanali finished warning her, she had opened the two locks. Two days before, Chanali had told her that they were changing the bathroom fixtures in all the apartments in the building and the person on the other side of the door said, “It’s the plumber.”

Holding the baby, Chanali got up and walked casually to the door, which was opened wide. The sight of the man standing there froze her blood. She cowered in shock and terror. “I felt as though I had landed in a horror film. The man looked like a black Og, King of Bashan. He was huge, a Golyas. A mountain of a man whose head touched the lintel and whose giant hand was inside his jacket in a way that left no doubt that he was holding a gun.

“In that second that lasted an eternity, my baby started screaming in a way that she had never done before. We both felt in danger.”

The black giant shut the door with his foot and with his free hand he pushed Chanali down, the baby still clutched in her arms. The door slammed shut, revealing the presence of her friend standing on his right, frozen. His surprise lasted only a moment. He immediately recovered and took the gun out and began pistol whipping the friend, his other hand firmly holding Chanali down. The friend screamed while Chanali, who hadn’t stopped murmuring Shma Yisroel, started

shouting towards her, “Say Shma Yisroel, say Shma Yisroel!”

He dragged both of them into the living room. “Leave her alone. This is my home,” shouted Chanali. He turned towards her, aimed his gun at her head and shot.

“By amazing Divine Providence, at just that moment I had turned to the side with the baby and the bullet whizzed by my head and disappeared. We didn’t know where it went.”

In the meantime, the man tied up the friend’s hands in handcuffs, ran to the hall and to the kitchen and disconnected the phones. She was shocked at how he knew precisely where the phones were and was familiar with every corner of the house. He returned to the living room, lifted her with the baby and tossed them like a ball into one of the bedrooms.

He returned to the living room and beat the friend, who didn’t stop screaming. “He hit and she screamed and nobody heard, as though we were alone in a desert. Here in Brighton Beach, the buildings are so cut off and the neighbors don’t hear you. Sounds are drowned out in the noise of trains and the street.”

## **A STAMP COLLECTION**

Adir, the friend’s son, was sleeping on the floor of the room and had no idea what was going on. Fortunately for him, the dangerous intruder hadn’t noticed him yet. “Adir, get up and hide under the

bed,” whispered Chanali urgently. The giant dragged the friend to the doorway and tossed her inside. Then he turned to Chanali and demanded in a threatening tone, “Where’s the money? Where is your jewelry?”

“In the living room, in my pocketbook,” she answered weakly. As though he didn’t hear her, he turned the room over, opening drawers, emptying them, throwing things all over. Then he noticed a large safe in the closet. He imagined that it contained unanticipated treasure. He ordered Chanali to open it.

“I don’t know how ...”

“Open the safe!”

In fact, the safe was practically empty. Her husband had gotten it from a partner after they disbanded the business and there was nothing in it except for a small stamp collection. Chanali, however, didn’t know the combination.

For twenty minutes, the giant grabbed her injured head and banged it into the metal knob of the safe again and again, demanding that she show him the treasure inside.

Chanali, her head dizzy and in terrible pain mumbled Shma Yisroel nonstop while he continued banging her against the metal and insisting, “Open the safe, open the safe!”

“Till this day it’s not clear to me how, after all that, I remained alive. I asked him permission to call my husband to ask him how to open it. The intensified abuse indicated what he thought of that suggestion. He finally gave up and changed tactics. Picking up my baby by the back of the neck he held her like a rag doll, aimed the gun at her head and threatened, ‘I’m counting till three. If you don’t open it, I’ll shoot her,’ and he began to count.

“Okay, okay! I’ll open it,’ I quickly said. He let go of the baby and let her fall to the ground. Boruch Hashem there was a thick carpet.”

Chanali crawled over to the safe with her remaining strength and wondered what to do. She had to gain time until a miracle happened. Beaten and terrified, she didn't feel her body at all. She was completely focused on the fog that rose up and burst forth from her aching head with the question: Hashem! What will be?

With her remaining strength, she began turning the dial this way and that. In another moment he would realize that she didn't know what she was doing and only a miracle would save them. The man's patience ran out.

"Okay, that's it!" he hissed. He aimed his gun at her head. "I'm counting to three and killing you."

Chanali felt the cold metal of the gun on her forehead.

"One!"

She whispered, "Shma Yisroel..."

She felt weightless, as though she was floating, hovering, touching the sky with her silent scream. Scenes of her life quickly flitted past like a slide show that seemed interminably distant. Suddenly, she cried out, "Rebbe! Save me!"

"I suddenly felt a tremendous power suffusing me. It happened in a split second. As he pulled the trigger, I raised my hands and – with enormous strength which came from I don't know where – I pushed the gun. The bullet that had been aimed at my head instead went through my hand. Until this day, I don't know how I managed to do that.

"Taken by surprise, my assailant retreated to the living room. Keeping an eye on us to ensure that we wouldn't flee or do something to call for help, he gathered whatever came to hand with amazing speed. When I later described what happened to the police, they said he was a professional and clever criminal who had apparently done surveillance on my apartment and habits for a long time."



**Shliach Rabbi Zushe Winner at the upsheren of Chanali's son**

## GREAT SALVATION

While he rummaged through the living room, Chanali whispered to Adir to crawl from under the bed and bring her the phone. Since the room was small and crowded, he held one of the phones under the bed and amazingly, the intruder didn't notice. Her friend, who heard her daring request, tried to dissuade her son from endangering himself. "Don't you dare! He'll shoot and kill you! Don't you dare, Adir!"

Since they were all in danger anyway, he crawled quickly, grabbed the phone, and placed it near Chanali.

"I was shaking from fear as I hid the phone with my blood-spattered body. My heart pounded. Who should I call? Who could provide us immediately with the right kind of help? I saw that the thug was busy elsewhere and I quickly dialed Rabbi and Mrs. Winner who lived in the same building, a few floors up. I saw that my friend, who had kept on spitting on her hands, had managed to slide them out of the handcuffs. The phone at the Winners rang and I glanced again at the living room. The hoodlum had found my

pocketbook and was emptying it. When he looked towards us he saw me lying on the bed, bloodstained, and thought I had died. He was relaxed but quick at what he was doing. In the meantime, I heard the pleasant voice of Mrs. Winner.

"Hello, who is it?" she asked in English.

"It's me, Chanali,' I said weakly in Hebrew.

"Who?"

"It's me, Chanali ... someone shot at me.' I tried to raise my voice a bit.

"She didn't make out what I was saying in Ivrit.

"Someone shot at me. Call the police!"

"Mrs. Winner called for her husband who, by divine providence, was leaving late that day. He understood what I was saying and called the police. With my head spinning and finding it hard to talk, I managed to call my mother."

Chanali threw the phone under the bed. It felt as if a black curtain covered her eyes. She couldn't see anything. She felt weakness come over her, a sweet faint that took her away from the pain. Quiet, not



***“This is truly coming full circle. Although I didn’t get to realize my dream and go to the school I so yearned to attend, my tears didn’t go to waste for I can now send my daughters there.”***

hearing...not seeing... She felt a sudden terrible thirst. “Water, give me water,” she muttered.

### **IT’S TAMEI!**

“Don’t faint!” Her friend sprang over to the negel vasser basin that Chanali had forgotten to empty in her haste to go shopping for mishloach manos that morning. She emptied the basin into the cup and tried to give some drops to Chanali. Chanali, who felt herself losing consciousness, heard her friend tell her to drink. She felt the water in her mouth but then suddenly spit it out directly into her friend’s face. She had realized that this water was tamei and this sudden awareness restored her to consciousness.

“It’s tuma (impure)!” she said, and tried to ward off her friend, who was trying, with all her might, to give her a drink.

“I don’t care. I don’t want you to die.”

Sirens could be heard outside and within moments armed policemen had burst into the apartment. Rabbi Winner and Chanali’s mother followed. The policemen sent the wounded to S. Vincent’s hospital in New Jersey, which is considered one of the best hospitals in the area and specializes in trauma victims.

On their way from the examining room to their hospital room, they passed through many corridors. Chanali lay on a stretcher, fully conscious, accompanied by a nurse and her terrified mother. The first

thing Chanali noticed was a huge cross.

She hadn’t had a chance to digest that sight when after another few steps there was another cross, and soon after, another one. “Are we in a church, or what?” she asked sarcastically.

When they arrived at her room, she saw, to her dismay, a cross at the head of the bed. Before leaving her there, the nurses reassured her that Dr. So-and-So, an Arab name, would be coming soon to check on her.

“I’d rather die than stay here!” she said to her mother.

“Are you crazy? Chanali! You can’t leave.”

“Ima, I’m not staying here.”

The results of the tests showed that, boruch Hashem, aside from skull fracture there were no internal injuries, which was an open miracle. She did not need stitches.

“Thank G-d for the miracles!

When I think of the beating my head endured, I can’t believe it stayed in one piece. I still was left with the hand injury, shards that penetrated my body, and terrible pain from the blows. Months later I still suffered from terrible pain all over my body.”

### **BULLET IN THE SIDDUR**

“I insisted and boruch Hashem, got out of there and went to a different hospital. During the examinations there, when they patiently checked every injured part of my body, I started laughing.

“I don’t get it. You were just

shot at and you’re laughing?’ the doctor asked incredulously.

“You don’t understand why I’m laughing?”

“Well, why?”

“G-d saved me and my Rebbe protected me, so what do you want me to do, cry?”

“The doctor didn’t know what to make of this. The hospital staff was constantly around me on high alert, as they didn’t regularly deal with trauma victims. The doctor who saw my hand wound said that I had a double miracle. He explained that this kind of bullet has a spinning motion and according to the way the shooting was described, it was likely that the bullet would have continued to the heart.”

After Chanali was treated at the hospital, she went to her mother’s house. She could not consider returning to her own apartment, to the scene of the nightmare. It was not until six months later, before Rosh HaShana, that she mustered the courage. She wanted to get the precious Siddur of her grandfather. Taking along a friend for support, she went to the apartment and headed directly to the bookshelf. Nothing else was more important to her than the dusty Siddur there.

To her surprise, she noticed a small hole that wasn’t there previously. When she opened the Siddur and turned the pages, she was shocked to find a bullet wedged inside. “Hashem! This was the first bullet that he aimed at my head! Thank you, Hashem, for the miracle!”

“I immediately called the police and told them about the bullet I found. I gave them the Siddur and asked that they return it to me as soon as they extracted the bullet. They told me, ‘What enters the lab doesn’t come out, sorry.’

“I tried to convince him. ‘No, it’s a holy book and I must get it back. It’s a precious gift that I got from my grandfather. I can’t leave it here.



You can't do this to me ...' It didn't help. I went home brokenhearted.

"A week later I got a phone call from the police. 'Mrs. Binyamin, come down to the office. We have something here for you.' When I got there, the policeman – an Italian non-Jew – held out my Siddur and said, 'I have one request. Take this holy book and put it in a nice frame so that everyone can see it. When they ask you what it is, tell them that thanks to your faith in G-d and thanks to your being religious and observing His Torah, G-d saved you.'

"When I finally recovered sufficiently to return to my apartment and begin cleaning up, I took all the mezuzos, which I had bought half a year before the incident, to be checked. Three of them were pasul, including the mezuzah of my room. In that mezuzah the word 'your hand' was erased."

Chanali's feelings of joy and gratitude to Hashem for the miraculous end to a horrible story could not dispel the panic attacks that woke her in the middle of the night, trembling in fear and bathed in a cold sweat from head to toe. She felt the enormous and threatening form of the man standing near her, breathing down her neck. Any sudden movement or any ringing sound made her jump. For years she went to doctors, psychologists and various healers in the attempt to be rid of her fears and nightmares. The doctors said it was irreversible damage. "You have to live with it." They gave her pills which she threw into the garbage. She sought a genuine cure and didn't want to be beholden to dubious chemicals.

The next miracle she experienced came to her because of her efforts and faith. Her friend, Rochel Dan, who heard about her suffering, offered to learn Tanya with her. Chanali was grateful for the opportunity, as this was something

***To her surprise, she noticed a small hole that wasn't there previously. When she opened the Siddur and turned the pages, she was shocked to find a bullet wedged inside. "Hashem! This was the first bullet that he aimed at my head! Thank you, Hashem, for the miracle!"***

that had been on her mind for some time. During one of the first shiurim, to her surprise and delight, she learned that Tanya is the cure for all spiritual sicknesses of our generation. She was thrilled that she finally found the cure she had been seeking for so long. She continued her sessions with Rochel Dan and learned, as well, with Yael Liebowitz.

The Tanya "medication" worked the miracle that years of medicinal therapy could not. The doctors, when they examined her again after five years of Tanya study, couldn't believe it. This had never happened before in their experience. Not a sign remained of her psychological trauma. They said it was a miracle. Today, Chanali says that nothing remains of the fear that had so long held herself and her daughter in its grip, just great simcha and gratitude.

## **BACK TO SCHOOL**

"Speaking of miracles, I recall my story as a little girl, looking through the fence at the Chabad school in Nes Tziyona and yearning to be there. Today, when I think about this, I see how G-d repays us..."

"We made aliya and went straight to Rechovot where my good friend, Chagit Borochoy, lives. When it came to enrolling my daughters in school, I told Chagit that I wanted to register them in a Chabad school in Rechovot.

"'In Nes Tziyona,' Chagit corrected me.

"'What do you mean? There's no school in Rechovot?'"

"'It's in Nes Tziyona.'"

"'Where, exactly? Don't tell me it's on Rechov Geula...' My heart pounded as the near-forgotten childhood memories and yearning washed over me.

"'Yes, it's on Rechov Geula. Why?'" she asked me curiously.

"'I can't believe it!' It seemed like I was in a dream, hearing the school bell ringing, seeing the girls with their skirts. And here I was today, a mother with two daughters who would soon – IY"H – be in that very schoolyard."

Chanali went to see the school in Nes Tziyona from the other side of the iron fence. The principal, Mrs. Chaya Zalmanov, welcomed her warmly, yet she still felt doubtful. From her past experience with schools in the US, she knew it wasn't so simple to get in to the school of your choice. She anticipated questions and demands before they decided whether to accept her girls and she was nervous.

"Can I register my girls here?" she asked hesitantly.

"Of course!" said the principal with a reassuring smile.

"This is truly coming full circle. Although I didn't get to realize my dream and go to the school I so yearned to attend, my tears didn't go to waste for I can now send my daughters there. Amazing!"

# CHICKENS AND EGGS

By Dr. Aryeh Gotfryd

*A chicken without eggs is fruitless, and eggs without chicken, no more than breakfast. Only together do you get life begetting life, a viable species, a taste of the infinite within the transient world of natural events.*

*In order to plumb the depths and truth of something's essence or make-up, scientists research the material sources and causes. But through Torah, one can discern the spiritual root and source, and also know the purpose of this object's creation.*

*--The Rebbe, Mind Over Matter, p. 171.*

Sooner or later, the question always comes up.

Once the human mind develops the capacity to associate cause and effect, everything becomes subject to scrutiny.

A young child's endless string of "why"s testifies to that, as does the physicist's experiments and the businessman's analysis of market conditions. Whether it's how did we get here, what killed the dinosaurs, or why does \$4.05 sound like so much more than \$3.95, we are fascinated with the story of how one thing leads to another, how the past

leads us to the present, and how the now takes us forward.

So too it is with that most primordial of cause-and-effect questions: What created G-d?

For believers, the question is a non-question. There is a First Cause and if you're First, there is nothing before you. The end.

But no two minds are alike so what's simple for one is complicated for another. In fact, I've heard this How-did-the-Big-Guy-get-here question raised countless times at Chabad Houses, Shabbos tables and Jewish schools.

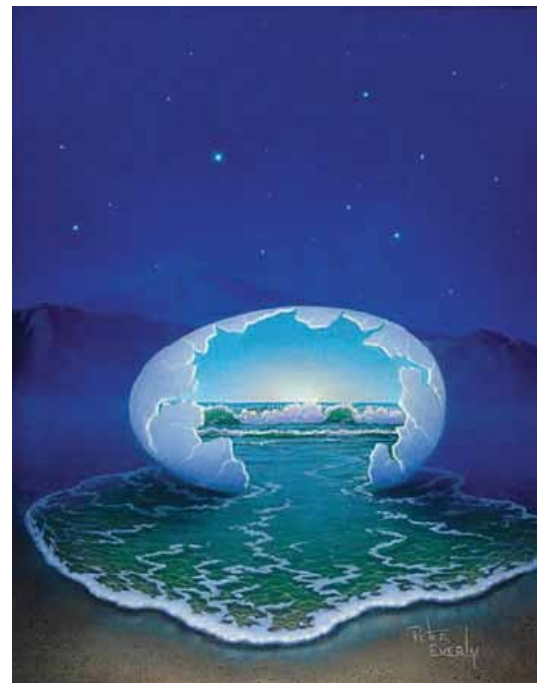
Here is the cognitive context of the conundrum: In our minds, time is a given, so if we say that the Creator exists, He must exist within time. But if He exists within time, then before and after apply to Him and we can ask what came before Him.

If you want to play along philosophically, you could answer as follows: Now if, *ch*"v, we allow that

something came before G-d, then that thing would be the First Cause, at least compared to G-d, but then that thing would be G-d, in which case G-d exists. Welcome back to traditional faith.

However, if one wants to extend the argument (i.e., keep avoiding G-d) and say that time extends backward into the past indefinitely, and therefore there is no First Cause, then it would follow that cause-and-effect are eternal. That would mean that everything has a prior cause, so cause-and-effect should have one too, in which case it is not eternal. Hmm. We may as well stick to G-d!

Our Sages tell us that when G-d started dictating the Torah to Moses, he went on strike over the first three words, *B'Reishis bara E-lokim* - which means "In the beginning G-d created" but literally reads like "In the beginning created G-d. Moses declined to write it that way saying that people would think that there is this entity called "In the beginning" and that this entity created G-d! G-d answered that whoever wants to make a mistake will make one in any case, so he may as well write it this



way (which he did).

Perhaps the simplest way to explain the matter is to draw a straight line with a beginning and an end and label it "time." Just like we are viewing this line from outside of it, Hashem too is outside of time, since He is the One that made it.

Now, if you want to get really fancy and say the time line has no beginning, then you could represent it with a circle which also has no beginning and end. Similar to how we can draw a circle and enter it and exit it at will, Hashem too can create infinite time without beginning or end and be both within and above, all at the same... um... er... time!

The Torah actually embraces both of these concepts of time - the eternal cycle, and the linear flow.

The eternal cycle is the *seider z'manim* - the pattern of time. It's the regularity of the seasons, of day and night, of lunar cycles. Like a picture of an orbit, you see the whole path at once. The infinity of the cycle reflects the infinity of the cyclist, Hashem, whose very name represents past, present and future as one continuous now.

The flow of time is the *halichas ha'z'man*, the experience of the path. It's our perspective from within the system. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is yet to come, and we follow the dot of now as it floats off into the horizon. This is the limited aspect of

time as a finite creation.

The two are interwoven, like the tapestry of events comprising the Miracle of Purim, where every happening in and of itself is a natural, finite, limited detail of no apparent significance. Yet taken as a whole, the picture is perfect, poetic, meaningful, and transcendent.

What happens when you weave a circle of infinite heavenly time with a chronological arrow from history to destiny? You get a spiral - the unfolding of a divinely ordained, meandering human drama with a divine light at the end of the tunnel, spanning from the Garden of Eden to the Coming of Moshiach.

It is not by accident that the Biblical journey of the Jewish people starts with Avrohom - the inquisitive child-philosopher who pondered the motions of the sun and moon and inferred the First Cause from there. The dance of the details belies the choreography of the plan, and from there it's but a step to the mind of the Director.

Nor is it by accident that the ultimate expression of Biblical wisdom in the Era of the Redemption will be found within none other than the Book of Esther - a revelation of the Divine entirely integrated within the context of the natural.

When Moshiach comes, the question of who created G-d will



fade before the much greater question, what came first - the chicken or the egg. For a chicken without eggs is fruitless, and eggs without chicken, no more than breakfast. Only together do you get life begetting life, a viable species, a taste of the infinite within the transient world of natural events.

This leads us ineggsorably to a conclusion at which you should not bok - Haman's plot never hatched because the Creator really does eggssist. Haman was just too chicken to admit it, and by the end, even though he scrambled to make it over easy, things ended sunny side up for the Jews instead and that's no yoke.

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# HOW CHICAGO'S 'FREE' CAME TO BE

By Reitza Kosofsky

My mother grew up in a Chassidic home in Zaslav, a town very close to Slavita, where the first Tanya was printed. She spoke often about the pogroms and suffering she endured until she escaped Russia, around 1920. Her stories made the plight of the Russian Jews very real to me.

In 5733 (1973), five Russian Jewish families from Minsk arrived in Chicago. These families were the first of the great exodus from behind the Iron Curtain to the free world. The N'shei Chabad, under the leader of Rebbetzin Chaya Sara Hecht, the senior Shlucha in Chicago of those years, made a welcoming gathering for the newly arrived immigrant women. The newcomers were each presented with silver candlesticks and encouraged to light candles for Shabbos. Rabbi Hershel Shusterman spoke to the women in the language we all shared, Yiddish, which came to be the mode of communication between the American Jews and the new immigrants from Russia.

After this gathering, Rebbetzin

Hecht called the Rebbe's Secretary, Rabbi Chadakov, and asked whether the Rebbe prefers the work with the Russian Jews to be under N'shei Chabad, or a separate organization. The answer was that it should be its own entity.

Meir Okounov, two weeks before his wedding, came to Chicago to teach me the organizational work. He let me use the name 'FREE', which the Rebbe had suggested for his organization in New York.

We incorporated as a non-profit charitable organization. In the beginning my kitchen was the office. I carried a baby in one hand, cooked with the other, and had a telephone pressed to my ear. One day I received a call from Joseph Zaretsky, representing the Beis Midrash HaGadol Kesser Maariv Anshei Luknik. He offered us the use of the Hebrew School rooms in back of the Shul. It was the start of a new era for FREE. Now we could offer English as a second language classes, and have a real office.

We filled out papers and got a grant for eighteen people to work for us. This was a gift of Hashem's bounty, enabling us to help the immigrants without resorting to fundraising. They became our entire staff, filling positions ranging from secretarial to retail, tutoring to driving children to Jewish school. In addition to this we performed thousands of circumcisions and Jewish weddings, ran a Gan Israel summer camp, and put out a Russian Torah Newspaper with a readership throughout the US. Arkady Fleischman, who drove the children to the various Jewish schools, probably earned this merit having spent seven years in Russian prison because he had been employed as a driver for a Jewish general who gave Golda Meir a tour around Moscow.

The Federation initially viewed FREE with a great deal of suspicion. Every new family was assigned a Russian speaking social worker to help them resettle. The social workers kept asking their clients if FREE had pressured them to become religious. When they got feedback from the Russian Jews themselves, denying that there was any pressure going on, and that the people at FREE were kind, friendly and helpful, they began to trust us.

As the immigrants came pouring in to our city, we became more and more busy. If not for my mother's help, I certainly could not have managed. The Yiddish I learned from my parents helped me communicate with the Russian Jews. As more and more people came and the pressure grew, Hashem sent me Russian speaking Betzael and Mira Shif, from Israel. Betzael organized the Shalom newspaper, which is published till this day, arranged circumcisions and chuppas, and hosted a radio program.

The organization merited no small measure of Divine assistance.



In 5734 (1974), shortly after the influx of Russian Jews to Chicago, I was sitting in my car on Devon Avenue, waiting for my children to come out of the candy store. Along came a man who I knew from my days in B'nei Akiva. He and I had never exchanged a word with each other, for he belonged to the older groups, but today he greeted me with, "How are you?" Instead of my usual "Fine, Baruch Hashem," I found myself confiding, "Oy, I've got big problems." I went on to explain that the year before I had made a seider for thirty five Russian Jews, but this year there were three hundred, and I simply didn't have the means! He promptly said, "I'll help you." It turned out that this was Zvi Kurs, the president of the Maos Chittim committee, which supplied thousands of Passover boxes filled with fish, meat, wine, Matzo and whatever else would be needed for the holiday. From that day on, the committee has been providing Passover necessities to the Russian Jewish Immigrants.

Several years ago, FREE made a Russian Bar Mitzva in congregation B'nei Reuven. One of the congregants, a professor, was so inspired by the Bar Mitzva that he called up and asked to host a Russian family for Shabbos. We sent him the family who lived closest to his home. During the meal, they began talking and the Russian woman said she had a cousin in the United States who she had lost track of. She began describing her cousin, and they realized that it was this man's late wife. He called us Saturday night and exclaimed emotionally, "Do you know who you sent us? *Do you know who you sent us?*"

Once, thirty Russian Immigrant Children were refused entrance to the Jewish Day school system in Chicago. The school took as many Russian children as they could, but

***He and I had never exchanged a word with each other, but today he greeted me with, "How are you?" ... I went on to explain that this year there would be three hundred for the seider and I simply didn't have the means! He promptly said, "I'll help you." It turned out that this was Zvi Kurs, the president of the Maos Chittim committee, which supplied thousands...***

they couldn't afford to overload the ratio of Russian students. We took the thirty children into our offices at FREE and opened a school for them. However, we didn't have the money to pay the teachers' salaries. (Interestingly enough, both teachers had the same name - Esther Rabinowitz.) We made an appointment to have a meeting about money with Rabbi Dr. Leonard C. Mishkin. My husband told me that Rabbi Mishkin, when still a young lad in Europe, had davened Nusach Ari. One of the teachers warned us that we would be told to send the children to Public School, and have them go to a Hebrew afternoon Talmud Torah. Had I not had this warning I would have given up right there. Sure enough, I was asked, "Why can't they go to afternoon Talmud Torah? Who says they need to go to a Jewish day school?" I firmly shot back, "The Lubavitcher Rebbe, that's who!" They gave us the money to pay the teachers.

Early on, I had been approaching the Jewish Federation of Chicago for funding for the work we were doing with the Russian Jewish immigrants. We wrote a proposal, detailing all our programs. After being turned down for a few years, they finally

relented and gave us a few thousand dollars. One day, I was causally reading Chicago's Jewish weekly journal and a column by Borris Smolar, head of the Jewish Telegraphic agency, caught my eye. He was praising the Jewish Federation of Chicago for bringing the Russian Jews closer to Judaism. He listed the various Jewish activities that the Federation was doing, and I suddenly realized that I was reading my own proposal to the Jewish Federation! They were taking credit for all these activities, when in truth, it was a Lubavitch woman with small children, doing the Rebbe's work, who was behind all of this. I was too busy to contact Mr. Smolar and set him straight.

Gazette Shalom is sent to cities around the USA, and FREE is well known and appreciated in the community. After the Shif family left, Hashem sent Rabbi Shmuel Notik and his wife, who relieved me of some of the pressure of running the organization and went on to build FREE as we know it today. But that is a subject of its own.

*Reitza Kosofsky can be reached by email at reitza770@aol.com*

# THE SECRET BEHIND THE SCEPTER

By Rabbi Yosef Karasik  
District Rav Bat Chefer – Emek Chefer

*In Kabbala, the relationship between Achashverosh and Esther is compared to the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. Touching or grasping the king's scepter symbolizes different levels of G-dly revelation. \* A fascinating look at Purim from the perspective of Chazal, Kabbala and Chabad Chassidus.*

## A TWO-FOLD SALVATION

In the two fateful meetings between Esther and Achashverosh, Achashverosh extended his scepter to her as a sign that he was pleased with her, thereby sparing her life. The Alter Rebbe reveals the secret behind the scepter and presents it as the critical factor in the miracles of Purim. While seemingly just a minor point in the story of the Megilla, Esther's touching the king's scepter is expounded upon in Torah Ohr and explained as a major event that opens the curtain to the behind the scenes activities in the Purim story.

In Kabbala it's explained that beyond the story of Haman's decree and the miraculous salvation that came about through Esther, there lies an entire world of the spirit. There was a heavenly decree against the spiritual powers given to the Jewish people. In other words, the decree was two-fold, death and destruction on both the physical and spiritual planes.

The annulment of the decree had a two-fold significance. On the physical plane, the threat of extermination was transformed and the Jews prevailed over their

enemies, while on the spiritual plane, G-dly abundance was given to the Jewish people. Grasping the scepter symbolizes the entire convoluted Purim saga and its joyful culmination.

## PURIM VERSUS OTHER HOLIDAYS

The rabbinic establishment of Purim as a festival occurred many centuries after the Biblical injunction "and you shall rejoice on your holiday." Nevertheless, the mitzvah to rejoice on Purim is far greater





Purim in Yerushalayim

than on other holidays. On Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, happiness has limits, “one must not be drawn in by wine,” whereas on Purim there is no limitation on simcha; on the contrary, the mitzvah is to rejoice “*ad d’lo yada*” (until you don’t know...).

The statement of Chazal that in the time of Moshiach all Yomim Tovim will be annulled except for Purim testifies to its uniqueness. But this is not the only miracle the Jewish nation experienced. How is the miracle of Purim greater than the miracles of Pesach?

Let us first understand the significance of the scepter and then we will understand better what makes Purim special.

### THE ROYAL SCEPTER

The scepter is mentioned four times in the Megilla, in conjunction with two critical encounters between Achashverosh and Esther: when she approached the king before the party, “and the king extended the golden scepter in his hand...and she touched the tip of the scepter” (5:2) and the meeting after Haman was

killed and the royal seal was transferred to Mordechai, “and the king extended the golden scepter to Esther” (8:4).

Esther was very worried about these two meetings; actually, she was terrified. Before the first encounter she told Mordechai that her life was in danger since the king could have her killed for coming unbidden. The nation fasted and prayed on her behalf for three days. The second meeting was also worrisome as the verse says, “And she fell at his feet and cried and pleaded.”



In the end, things worked out well - the king honored her requests and the evil decrees were canceled. The sign that marked the success of the meetings was the scepter. When it was extended towards Esther, her wishes were granted. In Torah Ohr, the Alter Rebbe points out the following:

In the first encounter, when the king agreed to attend her party but Esther was not yet given permission to do as she saw fit and kill Haman, it says, “and she touched the tip of the scepter.” In the second encounter, when Haman was dead already and the king enabled her to do as she pleased, it says, “and the king extended his golden scepter to Esther,” i.e. he gave her the scepter. It wasn’t only that she touched it. It was given over entirely into her hands, allowing her to undo Haman’s decree.

## THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCEPTER

While the crown is the primary symbol of royalty, the scepter represents the **power** of the kingdom. The king leads the nation with his scepter as it says, “the one to whom the king extends the golden scepter will live” (4:11). A king without a scepter is like a king who does not rule his people.

The two responses of Esther, touching and later accepting the scepter, represent two ways the king provides for his people. *Touching the tip* of the scepter is an external or superficial connection and influence, while *grasping* it is an internal connection and influence.

At first, when Esther merely touched the tip of the scepter, she “fell before the feet of the king” because the relationship between them was only an external one (expressed in her falling at his feet rather than face to face). After she received the entire scepter, however,

it says, “and Esther got up and stood before the king” – she was able to stand before him and communicate face to face since an inner connection had been established.

## ACHASHVEROSH AND ESTHER – HASHEM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

In Kabbala the relationship between Achashverosh and Esther is compared to that of Hashem and the Jewish people (although Achashverosh was a non-Jew, and a wicked and foolish king as well, Kabbala is speaking of how he represents sovereignty which, in its purest form, belongs solely to Hashem).

The different ways of touching the scepter represent different ways G-dly powers can be revealed to us:

Shabbos and Yom Tov are days of rejoicing and blessing. It is not only about material abundance, i.e. good food, nice clothing, rest and relaxation, but about spiritual abundance as well. On Shabbos and Yom Tov we are given elevated, holy kochos. The real king, Hashem, gives the Jewish people his scepter, i.e. he showers His people with love and kindness and they, in turn, are elevated with joy and light to connect to His holiness.

The two forms of G-dly influence are like the two ways of giving the scepter: 1) as it is in the world now, where there are physical desires that block our love for Hashem and our relationship with Him is superficial, like touching the tip of the scepter 2) as it will be in Yemos HaMoshiach when all physical barriers will come down and we will cling to Hashem.

Esther’s receiving the scepter from the king represents the tremendous G-dly revelation that took place during the Purim story, which was akin to the revelation that will take place in the Future.

Now we understand what makes Purim so special. It is a holiday on which there is the loftiest G-dly revelation, direct, face to face contact between the king and queen, between Hashem and the Jewish people. There are a number of reasons as to why this tremendous revelation took place on Purim. One main reason which is related to our topic is:

The miracle of Purim transformed Achashverosh. With Pesach, for example, Pharaoh wasn’t changed. He remained the same evil person but was compelled to free the Jewish people. Achashverosh wasn’t threatened by Esther. She asked him to cancel Haman’s decree and he acceded to her request. This represents the submission of the forces of evil. This is the G-dly power which will be revealed in Yemos HaMoshiach, when “I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth,” and which we got a glimpse of on Purim.

## WHY WILL WE CELEBRATE PURIM IN YEMOS HA’MOSHIACH

1) The simcha of Purim is unlimited, unlike that of other holidays, because of the enormity of the G-dly revelation on Purim in contrast to other holidays.

2) In Yemos HaMoshiach, Purim will be celebrated and the other holidays will be nullified because the G-dly revelation on those holidays will be eclipsed by the powerful G-dly revelation of that time, just like the light of a candle is negligible in broad daylight.

Purim is an auspicious time for the revelation of Moshiach. Moshiach is about the ultimate unification of Hashem and His people, and Purim is the holiday which prepares the world for that revelation. May it be now!



IN RESPONSE TO RECENT TRAGEDIES:

# A CALL TO ACTION – BUT WHICH?

By Levi Yitzchok Liberow

*Written for the Shloshim of his brother, nine-year-old Avrohom Dovid Liberow, who was killed in a road accident on 21 Teves 5770/January 6, 2010.*

## THE CALL OF THE HOUR: ACHDUS!

At a time like this, when the voice of my brother's blood still cries out to me from the earth, writing is difficult. Yet now, while the wounds are still fresh, is the best time to write, for there is more of a chance that something positive will result.

In the summer of 5747/1987, a number of painful events took place in Kfar Chabad. The N'shei Chabad wrote to the Rebbe to ask what to do and how to rectify matters. The Rebbe responded, "Increase in Ahavas Yisroel and at least minimize the opposite of that."

What did the N'shei Chabad do? They organized prayers at the Kosel. When a mashpia asked one of the organizers why she was doing this, the answer he was given was, "It can't hurt."

Why do I bring this up? At the

conclusion of the Shiva for my brother, there was a well-attended Kinus in 770 where speakers delivered moving talks and good hachlotos were made to increase in the Rebbe's mitvzaim\*. But the main thing was missing.

The message that was sent to us from Above in this painful incident and the other sad events that took place recently is "to increase in Ahavas Yisroel and at least to minimize the opposite of that!" Following a similar incident that took place in 5747, the Rebbe said it was a sign from Above to increase in **achdus**. Mitvzaim in apartment houses are terrific, but young children don't need to die for that!

*Let it be clear that my intention is not to weaken those who made good hachlotos, G-d forbid, but merely to emphasize a particular point, as follows.*

## REAL ACHDUS!

There will be those who say that there is nothing more unifying than a cross-section of Chabad Chassidim who do mitvzaim despite their differences of opinion. In other words, "There is more that unites us than divides us; let us unite around those things which bring us together and set aside our differences."

This approach would be correct if the difference of opinion was about who should be in the Vaad HaKahal or which hechsherim to have in our mosdos, but the differences of opinion among us are about far more fundamental things. They pertain to basic questions: Is the Rebbe with us or...? Does mitvza Moshiach apply today or...? They affect the essence and character of the avoda of shlichus today, as well as other related issues. The differences of opinion are about **fundamentals of faith** of Chabad Chassidus. These differences of opinion are too important to be set aside so that we can busy ourselves with "that which unites us," because if we are not united in **this**, then what do we really have? If that which unites Lubavitchers is only spreading Judaism, then we have become just another outreach group like Aish and NCSY.

Real achdus doesn't mean that I do what I want and you do what you want and we don't fight. Real achdus means we have the same goal and are led by the same commander. There will be differences in **how** the mission is carried out – the particulars "depend on Chabad on the scene" as the Rebbe put it, and the type of place and people – but as far as the goal itself, there can't be any differences of opinion!

Saying about **these** differences of opinion that "there is more that unites us than divides us; let us unite around those things which bring us together and set aside our

differences,” is like a medical coordinator overseeing the care of a patient with a serious head wound who, upon hearing of the differences in the medical opinions about how to treat it, will say, “Since there are differences of opinion in how to treat the head, let us focus on the fractures in his hand!”

Any sensible person observing such a situation would demand that the two doctors sit down and come to a joint decision about how to treat the head! The claim that “we agree as to how to treat the fractures and so let’s focus on that and not on the head wound where we differ” is ridiculous!

The only shlichus we have left to do, “kabbalas p’nei Moshiach,” is not a side issue which we can neglect. It’s the **heart** of shlichus which gets the “blood which is the nefesh” flowing in all aspects of shlichus.

The debate over the eternal life of the Nasi HaDor is a machlokes about whether Chabad has a head today for if not, we need to look for another Rebbe; this is not “small stuff,” a broken arm or leg.

## THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

We have a problem. The problem is that we have differences of opinion! So what can we do? There is an explicit pasuk in Parshas Ki Seitzei (25:1) that describes what to do in a situation like this. “If there is a quarrel between people, they should go to the court and they will judge them.” In other words, if there is a difference of opinion about anything, you should go to a beis din and present the views and the beis din will “justify the tzaddik and incriminate the wicked.”

As for us, since there are differences of opinion among Chassidim about the most fundamental issues that have yet to be resolved, therefore, Lubavitcher

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Avrohom Dovid Liberow a”h

rabbanim and mashpiim must convene – without any time limits and without the intervention of askanim/politicians – and do what they are enjoined to do, “search out and investigate and ask well,” and arrive at the truth. There can only be one truth!

When the truth is clarified, Lubavitcher Chassidim and the shluchim who seek the truth will operate as one man with one heart as in the vort that “and they camped

... as one man with one heart”. Then we’ll have a united front, against the galus and as the Maggid of Mezritch promised, in any machlokes between Chassidim and their opponents the Chassidim will come out on top. Surely, the Chassidim will come out on top against the *sitra achra* which is the biggest opponent of Chassidus.

Establishing this beis din would fulfill two instructions of the Rebbe regarding our time in one shot, and the biggest proof to this is the insistence of the forces of klipa in preventing it from happening. The two instructions are: 1) 2 Adar, 5748: **Therefore, in every single matter, whether personal or general, act in accordance with instructions of the beis din tzedek of rabbanei Lubavitch (in every single place) for through them the piskei Torah are drawn down and revealed (that “Moshe received... and transmitted etc.”).**

2) Shabbos Parshas Tazria-Metzora, 5751, among others: **“And the addition in Torah study in inyanei Moshiach and Geula (“Malchus of Tiferes”) is the “direct path” to actually accomplishing the revelation and coming of Moshiach and the Geula.**

## DON'T GO TO THE KOSEL AND EVADE RESPONSIBILITY

To get back to the earlier point – the reaction in 5747 of the N'shei Chabad to the tragedies was to go to the Kosel despite the Rebbe's instruction to increase in Ahavas Yisroel and at least to minimize the opposite of that. This instruction requires a change in thinking and approach.

When asked why they went to the Kosel, they answered, "It can't hurt." True, going to daven at the Kosel is a good thing and it surely does not hurt, but it needs to be done at the right time and occasion.

If "going to the Kosel" is our reaction to tragedies which are a sign from above that we need to increase in Ahavas Yisroel and at least to minimize the opposite, that's an evasion of responsibility and justifying it definitely does hurt!

The campaign to "Adopt a building" and "Adopt a family" is definitely wonderful but is this the response to tragedies? Does it fulfill the Rebbe's intention in adding in Ahavas Yisroel?

## TOO MUCH POLISHING

This concept reminds me of a "sharp vort" that my father (Shneur Zalman ben Dubrasha should have a refua shleima) said often but was afraid to put into print for obvious reasons. In the sicha of 2 Nissan, 5748, the Rebbe said, "Note, the buttons shouldn't be overly polished for we see that too much polishing wears away the button and ruins its beauty."

This seems rather surprising because the nimshal of "polishing the buttons" is the work in spreading Torah and the wellsprings of Chassidus. What harm could be caused by putting on t'fillin and another maamer Chassidus? The answer is the same as above – going

***We have seen that many tragedies have affected Lubavitchers, especially families of shluchim. And there are numerous spiritual tragedies so that it has almost reached a state where "there is no house without someone dead."***

to the Kosel is a good thing, but if that is the reaction to these tragedies, it's harmful!

If the avoda of shlichus and birurim are over, as the Rebbe said they are, and the only remaining shlichus is "kabbalas p'nei Moshiach Tzidkeinu," and the new avoda is "to actually bring about the hisgalus-revelation in the world," and nevertheless, Lubavitchers continue spreading Judaism and the wellsprings of Chassidus **just like before, as though the Rebbe didn't say this**, then this causes terrible damage!

We have seen that many tragedies have affected Lubavitchers, especially families of shluchim. And there are numerous spiritual tragedies so that it has almost reached a state where "there is no house without someone dead." When a Chassidishe parent sees his son remove his beard, chas v'shalom, or their daughter not dressed in accordance with halacha, they suffer terribly and in a way, they suffer more than a parent who buries a child!

## STOP THE CRUELTY

Who am I to know what Heaven's accounts are, but the Rambam says (Hilchos Taaniyos, chapter 1, halachos 2-3) "for as the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when overtaken by trouble, everyone is bound to realize that evil has come upon them as a consequence of their own evil deeds,

as it is written: 'Your iniquities have turned away [these things], etc.' (Yirmiya 5:25), and that [their repentance] will cause the trouble to be removed from them. But if they don't cry out and sound an alarm, but say: 'this is the way of the world and it just happened,' this is a way of cruelty and causes them to cling to their evil ways and the trouble will lead to additional troubles."

This suggestion that my father "kocht zich" in very much, and which is unlike other inspired ideas, is based on what the Rebbe said on various similar occasions. In my humble opinion and in the opinion of many others, this is the right way to abandon the "way of cruelty."

Yehi ratzon that before the suggestion is put into action the Rebbe will see that we are little children who cannot manage on our own and he will take us out of this bitter galus immediately.

*\*The project, entitled 'Adopt-a-family' and 'Adopt-a-building' will pair up Crown Heights families with Brooklyn and Queens residents, for Mivtzaim on a direct personal level. They can visit once a week, once a month, or even just for holidays - to shake Lulav and Esrog, to make sure they all have Menorahs and Shmura Matza.*

*Those wishing to join can fill out the card and drop it off at the LYO Office - 305 Kingston Ave. or email [igudch@gmail.com](mailto:igudch@gmail.com)*

# MOSHIACH'S EMBASSY IN MOLDOVA

By Chani Nussbaum

*After two decades of outreach, Rebbetzin Leah Abelsky of Kishinev, Moldova, tells us about her shlichus.*

It's not every day that you find shluchim who returned to the place they fled, but Rabbi Zalman and Rebbetzin Leah Abelsky did just that. Sixty years ago they escaped the clutches of the communists, made aliya, and raised a family. Thirty years later, they were back in Kishinev. This time, they were there on shlichus, with the Rebbe's bracha.

They arrived with a three month visa but the Rebbe wanted more than that. In the twenty years they have been there, they have boruch Hashem seen the marriages of a number of grandchildren (some of whom are shluchim in the former Soviet Union) and the birth of great-grandchildren. They are unfazed but their distance from their family and the difficulties. They have no time to dwell on them because they are busy raising generations of proud Jews.

I saw pictures of an upsherenish celebration of a son of one of the mekuravim and I was amazed to see

Rabbi Abelsky and his wife glowing with joy as though it was their own grandson.

To start with, here's a brief rundown about their place of shlichus. Moldova was formerly known as Bessarabia. It is infamous for the pogroms that took place in Kishinev in 1903 and 1905, and was further shattered when many of its Jews perished in the Holocaust. Those who survived had to contend with the communist government which oppressed any Jewish activity. After the crumbling of the Soviet Union, the economic situation in the country became unbearable. Many Jews suffer from both material and spiritual poverty.

The Jewish renaissance in Moldova is thanks to the Rebbe's shluchim, the Abelskys, who are highly esteemed by the local Jewish community and who have personal relationships with senior political figures and the president of the republic.

During their years on shlichus,

thousands of Jews – and even non-Jews – have received material and spiritual aid from them. Today, the Abelskys have ambassadors throughout the world, the fruits of their blessed labor.

## ROMANIAN AMBASSADOR IN THE UN

Rebbetzin Leah Abelsky's story:

I was born in Chernovitz. I was orphaned at a very young age and I grew up in an orphanage. The Skulener Rebbe zt"l got me out of there and I went to Bucharest, Romania.

My husband was born in Moscow. He learned in the underground Chabad yeshiva in Samarkand and escaped over the Polish border. He survived the war with open miracles and then went to the DP camp in Poking, Germany, where a yeshiva was started by the Rebbe Rayatz. After a year, in 1948, the hanhala of the yeshiva sent my husband, by instructions of







***In the 70's there was a vote in the UN about Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe announced at a farbrengen that they should elect a UN in 770 and all the representatives should declare that Eretz Yisroel belongs to the Jewish people.***

the Rebbe, to Romania. Out of ten bachurim that the yeshiva suggested, he was chosen as the shliach of the Rebbe Rayatz.

He spent three years in Bucharest – without identity papers! – and his shlichus had big miracles.

We met by the Skulener Rebbe in Romania. We made aliya to Kfar Chabad, where we got married. In 1960, we were told by the Rebbe to go on shlichus to Kiryat Gat in order to start a school and a Chabad community.

After about thirty years, we felt we had done all we could there. Just then, at the end of the 80's, communism began to fall and we got an offer to go on shlichus to Kishinev, the capitol of Moldova. My husband sent in a note to the Rebbe with the question: Should we accept the offer and does the Rebbe agree?

The Rebbe underlined the word “agree” and added, “I will mention it at the gravesite.” On the Shabbos prior to our trip, my husband sent in

a bottle of mashke to the Rebbe and during the farbrengen he announced our shlichus to Kishinev and invited the Rebbe to visit. This past Chanuka marked two decades of our shlichus.

My husband has a spiritual connection to the place. Moldova and its capitol Kishinev used to be part of Romania. Since the Rebbe Rayatz sent my husband to Romania, the Rebbe considered him his representative there. In the 70's there was a vote in the UN about Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe announced at a farbrengen that they should elect a UN in 770 and all the representatives should declare that Eretz Yisroel belongs to the Jewish people. They appointed a representative for every country. There were two countries that didn't have a representative: Egypt and Romania. The Rebbe said that Rashag should be appointed for Egypt since he had traveled there with the Rebbe Rayatz. For Romania, they should appoint R' Abelsky since he was there on shlichus. My husband wasn't there at the time so the Rebbe said that our son Yosef Yitzchok, who was in 770, should be his shliach. That might be the reason that the response we got for our shlichus to Moldova was so immediate.

## **SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING**

The situation in Moldova was murky when we first went out on shlichus. People were apprehensive and didn't know what the future held for the CIS.

My husband went alone the first time. His visa was for three months, the longest that he could get a visa for.

We arrived here immediately after the dissolution of communism and you could see the after-effects of it everywhere. The country was in a state of deterioration. We had to

Regina (Rochel) Stauber relates: Lily, my twin sister, and I grew up, like all children in Kishinev, without knowing we were Jews. At age 12 our parents registered us in Sunday School so we would learn Hebrew. We enjoyed it very much and became friends with other children. A year later we encountered Chabad, visited the shul, and got to know Rabbi Zalman Abelsky who had come from Israel. With his warm smile and personal attention, we wanted to go back again and again. Rebbetzin Leah taught us about Shabbos candles, tznius, and whatever Jews girls need to know. Every week we would look forward to those special Shabbos meals. Of course we registered for the school when it opened.

Today, I live in California and I'm twenty years old, married and have a baby. I use all the good things I learned from the Abelsky family to help others with the organization we founded. That is the best "thank you" we can offer for everything they did for us.

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Mariana Kolpaktzi arrived in Kishinev from a small town called Plesht after her parents died. She decided to study journalism at the university in Kishinev. It took time for her adjust from primitive village life to life in the big city and she excelled in her studies.

From the first moment she met the shluchim she felt she had found another set of parents. She had a family once again and became acquainted with Judaism. She became part of the staff in the Chabad school and edited, together with Luda Chazin, a friend of her parents, the monthly newspaper which brings Judaism to thousands of homes throughout Moldova and is even distributed in the US.

Mariana, today Miriam, moved to Eretz Yisroel and while at Machon Alte in Tzfas she became engaged to Boaz. The Abelskys walked her to the chuppa as they accompanied her at every stage in her life since they met. Rebbetzin Leah sums up their special relationship:

"When I came to Kishinev, I "adopted" 50,000 children but the relationship with Mariana is special." And Mariana promised to call her "mother" Leah Abelsky every week as a good daughter does.

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Moshe and Luba

If you saw them on the street, a charming couple with their baby, you would never guess what a long, hard road they traveled to get where they are. Moshe, 45 years old, spent nine years in Soviet labor camps, four in the Ural Mountains near Siberia and five in

***Three years ago she lost her eyesight and with the death of her husband, her health began to deteriorate. One misfortune followed another and unscrupulous people took advantage of her blindness to get her to sign documents that said she relinquished ownership of her house. As a result, she and Livina became homeless.***

Corkova, near Kishinev. The fact that he is a Jew did not help make his stay any more pleasant; on the contrary.

In his last year at the labor camp in Corkova, someone told him that he had read an article written by the chief rabbi of Moldova. Moshe cannot explain it rationally but even though he knew nothing about the rabbi, he had no name or address, he felt that he wanted to write him about his life. The letter was long and written from the heart, and on the envelope he wrote: to the chief rabbi of Kishinev and Moldova. He hoped that his letter would reach its destination.

It happened! The day after receiving the letter, Rabbi Abelsky appeared at the camp to look for Moshe. Till this day, the memory moves Moshe to tears. He immediately sensed R' Zalman's fatherly warmth towards him. But that's not all.

R' Zalman spoke with the camp administration and explained about the prohibition of working on Shabbos. During the remaining nine months until he was freed, Moshe devoted much time to thinking and learning. When he was released he was provided with a place to stay at the yeshiva until he made the final transition to the big world. Rebbetzin Abelsky made his shidduch with Luba, a single mother whose son Shmuel was a student at the Chabad yeshiva. The Rebbetzin met Luba when she accompanied her son to

the Shabbos meal at the Abelskys.

The couple made aliya, and today are happy parents. Moshe works for Yad L'Achim and helps Jews from the CIS. No wonder that Moshe calls R' Zalman his second father.

\*\*\*

Nina Birnbaum, a 59 year old widow, lived in Blatzi, a few hours trip from Kishinev. She lived with her only daughter, 16 year old Livina. Three years ago she lost her eyesight and with the death of her husband, her health began to deteriorate. One misfortune followed another and unscrupulous people took advantage of her blindness to get her to sign documents that said she relinquished ownership of her house. As a result, she and Livina became homeless. They slept in shelters, on benches in public parks, or anywhere that offered her and her daughter a few hours rest.

A year ago, mother and daughter arrived at the home where their lives were saved. There were warm beds and food for body and soul for the mother and for the daughter who was registered for the local Chabad school. Rebbetzin Leah was determined to try and restore Nina's sight. A complication arose with an allergy that weakened Nina.

Ophthalmologists were afraid to operate on her because they feared she wasn't strong enough.

Rabbi Abelsky, with his power to bless from the Rebbe, blessed Nina. The doctors decided to operate on one eye first and today she sees with one eye. Nina's health is returning and she will shortly undergo a second operation. But even now she is thrilled to be able to see. Yes, life has improved 100% for Nina and her daughter thanks to the shluchim. The next step is to regain Nina's property which the shluchim are working hard at now.

To conclude with what Chani of Los Angeles, who was with them on shlichus when she was younger, has to say: "There's no one like you Rabbi Zalman and the Rebbetzin. I was with you on shlichus nine years ago and we enjoyed it tremendously. We will never forget with what mesirus nefesh you work there. Now that I am a shlucha of the Rebbe myself, I always picture how you did it, how you treated everyone, with a smile and sweetness. I derive strength from you for my shlichus here in California. Love, Chani."



stand on line for hours in order to get basic necessities. We had to import nearly everything from Israel, which was no simple matter. Our first home was a one room apartment, which we shared with a family with three children. I cooked for everyone under abysmal conditions. In that cramped, poorly-equipped space, we ran a Chabad house. My husband would teach the men in the main room while I taught the ladies in the kitchen. We subsequently moved ten times! We finally were able to settle in our present apartment.

When we arrived, Jews were thirsty for Judaism but knew nothing. About 70,000 Jews lived in Kishinev at the time (in contrast to the 12,000 who live there today, according to official data). The shul served as the Jewish embassy, with hundreds of Jews passing through the shul each week. Each one has his reasons but many of them got involved in Judaism on various levels. We have students who we sent to 770 and they came back Lubavitchers. We founded beautiful mosdos here. There is a school, preschool, yeshiva and girls' seminary. Many hundreds of students have gone through our schools and camps.

As in many other out-of-the-way places, many baalei t'shuva moved away to places where the conditions are better and have established families around the world. Others, even if they did not become fully observant, had their Jewish identity solidified. We built up Yiddishkait here out of nothing. The community encompasses a number of Bucharian families, where the parents have some traditional leanings while the youth forgot everything and need to have their Jewish spark ignited.

Today, there are fewer Jews because those who became more religious left, as well as those who had the opportunity to emigrate to Germany or Israel (today Germany only allows new citizens for the purpose of uniting families). On my visits to Eretz Yisroel I often





meet people who were in touch with us when they lived in Moldova. They are always thrilled to see us, and call to me excitedly, “Rebbetzin Leah!”

## THE POPULARITY OF THE SHABBOS TABLE

One of my first activities was to invite Jews, young and old, for Shabbos. Their excitement over being present at a traditional Shabbos meal was enormous. The Shabbos meals at our house got a reputation among the local and visiting Jews.

By Wednesday already the phones began to ring. People simply invited themselves for Shabbos. I had to organize a list so that everyone would have a chance.

The ignorance here was so immense at first that they lacked the most basic knowledge of Judaism. The little they did know only underscored how much they had left to learn. For example, one day a local woman came to visit and when she saw my husband in tallis and t’fillin she began to cry. She explained that her grandfather also had those black cubes. She didn’t even know the word “t’fillin.” One lady exclaimed at a Shabbos meal, “The fish is very tasty.” Then she

asked, “Who shechts the fish for you?”

We get all kinds of people at our Shabbos meals. Israeli students and businessmen, intellectuals and simple people, young and old, they all come to our table, and take in everything we say about Judaism, Moshiach and the Geula which is here! We sing Chabad niggunim that everybody knows in Russian and other niggunim which my husband put Russian words to.

The k’hilla here knows many Chabad niggunim and the men actively participate in the singing at the meals and at farbrengens. Our Shabbos table inspires people whose neshama seemed dormant.

## REACHING OUT TO STUDENTS

One of the areas on which we have been focusing in recent years is reaching out to Jewish students, especially those from Israel. There are usually about a hundred students here and this year we are expecting double. We are getting talmidim-shluchim to help us. Every day, between mincha and maariv, there is a shiur with Israeli students in Gemara, halacha and Chassidus.

The female students are visited weekly by N’shei Chabad and are

given candles at their lodgings. The bachurim who came for Chanuka this year visited the student lodgings every day. They put t’fillin on with the men and lit the menorah with them. One day they stopped by a student’s room while he was speaking to his parents in Israel via Skype. The student pointed at the bachurim-shluchim and told his parents, “they remind me every day about Chanuka and my Jewish identity.” The parents warmly thanked the bachurim, who took the opportunity to give a brief shiur to the parents. That’s using modern technology for k’dusha!

## CHABAD LUBAVITCH STREET

The very active shul is located in the center of the city. T’fillos take place three times a day (in the early years of our shlichus, when there were 70,000 Jews, hundreds of Jews davened there on Shabbos and thousands crowded in on holidays).

When we came here, we focused our efforts on the shul, though we weren’t successful in gaining a stronghold there. The one who ran the shul at that time had no interest in raising the level of observance there. With a lot of effort, my husband convinced the administration to forgo a microphone on Shabbos, but was able to make no further headway. After a year and a half, the president of the shul asked my husband to come to his office. He told him that he planned on making aliya and he wanted to turn over the administration to him. We were thrilled. By the way, the street the shul is on was named “Chabad Lubavitch” by the government in a gesture of appreciation.

In Moldova there are other shuls, some of which were built and renovated by us. The heads of the k’hillos are in constant contact with us and on Jewish holidays we send



them talmidim from the yeshiva and talmidim-shluchim.

## MOLDOVA IS READY TO GREET MOSHIACH

Our work, and in my opinion this is the secret to success on shlichus, is based very much on personal relationships with people at Shabbos meals, shiurim, and activities with children. The programs, shiurim and women's farbrengens are run by local women, students of ours, who are deeply involved in the shlichus on a regular basis.

My husband is a sought after speaker, so at every Jewish (and even some non-Jewish) event he is invited to speak and bless the attendees, to put up a mezuzah etc. Of course he proudly announces the Besuras Ha'Geula at every occasion.

My husband also gives many shiurim and we publish a newspaper every month which is distributed all over the country. It is called "Wellsprings of Life" and is written in the local language. Most of the paper deals with timely matters including holidays and dates in the Chabad calendar, and inyanei Moshiach. Mivtzaim are done regularly at the shul, the Jewish center, the Jewish library,



restaurants and businesses belonging to local Jews and Israelis, and during house calls.

We celebrate every Chassidishe date with farbrengens for men, women and children.

We have a Sunday school where the children have fun as they learn about Judaism, Chassidus and Moshiach. One evening a week the shul hosts a program for young people and businessmen. As a result of these activities, two men left their non-Jewish girlfriends and one of them had a bris.

Boruch Hashem, we do everything to live with Moshiach. The Jews of Moldova say Yechi in shul. Whoever visits Kishinev knows

about the special Yechi dance that takes place after t'fillos. Visitors, journalists and mashgichim of kashrus who, in other locations, would never dream of joining a dance like this, do so readily. They come from various Chassidic groups and some are not even Chassidic at all.

## LIFE GIVING VISITS

Every week I visit old ladies or people who are alone and have no one to look after them. Some of them have no relatives at all. Their plight is heartrending and I try to help them. Occasionally I or the girls from the seminary go to a

## TIDBITS FROM THE FAMILY

Their granddaughter, shlucha C.M. Maidanchik, who came to help her grandparents:

I was moved when I saw people saying a bracha on the lulav for the first time, including Israeli students, or women who lit Shabbos candles for the first time, with great emotion.

I attended a women's farbrengen organized by a 14 year old girl. It is so moving to see how she tells the participants miracle stories about the Rebbe in their language. She learns and teaches the Rebbe's teachings like a born and bred Lubavitcher. The special thing about these farbrengens is that the wives of businessmen attend them. They find the time to get together and learn about Moshiach and Chabad. Her mother runs a group for women called Chug Moshiach. Who would have believed that women who just became involved in Judaism would hear about Moshiach! The Shabbos meals are attended by regular students in addition to guests passing through. Many of them continue to 770 and some have become chassidim.

\*\*\*

Granddaughter and shlucha to Tashkent, Chani Colton, relates:

Before the school year began, a man came to register his son in school. He began telling the principal about his first encounter with the rabbi in Moldova 17 years ago. For nearly half an hour he didn't stop talking about him. The finale was when the principal said to him, "I have good news for you. His granddaughter is the rebbetzin here." He was ecstatic and when he came to me he repeated what a special man my grandfather is etc.

Why am I writing this now? Last Wednesday, six members of the k'hilla in Tashkent were circumcised. One of them was the son of that man, Grisha Millman. His son's name is now Elchonon Dovid.

\*\*\*

Their son Zushe Abelsky relates:

In 5750 I was a kid and I traveled to my parents for their first Pesach on shlichus in Kishinev. It was the very beginning, the first buds of Jewish life. We had just arrived and there was a baal t'shuva couple by the name of Portman (who now live in Monsey). When my parents arrived in Kishinev and didn't have a place to stay, they lived with them for about two weeks. Yasha (Yaakov) Portman was the Agudas Israel representative in Kishinev and he received a stipend from the US to make Pesach in a resort spot near Kishinev. He invited us to join them.

On Pesach there were about 200 Jews there and sh'chita had to be arranged for them. There was an old shochet there from the time of Rabbi Tzirlson whose name was Chaim Kaiserman a"h. He was a yerei Shamayim who walked two hours to shul on Shabbos (at the age of 80) and wore a gartel when he shechted. But they needed someone who could kasher that many chickens. That's when my mother came into the picture. Yasha Portman asked her to do it and she did.

The "other side" didn't rest though. The morning we were supposed to go and kasher the chickens, I returned home from Shacharis and knocked at the door and nobody answered. I knocked louder and finally heard my mother say weakly, "Maybe you can come back later?" Of course that made me very nervous and I asked her to open the door. She dragged herself to the door and opened it.

The boiler wasn't the greatest and the fumes from the heating element were poisoning the air in the room and she had fainted and taken a bad fall. She was in pain but wouldn't forego koshering the chickens that day. "Hundreds of people need to eat and there's nobody to do it so I have to do it." So she stood all day while suffering greatly and koshered the chickens. In the evening, when the work was done, she finally agreed to go to the hospital where they diagnosed the results of the fall. Boruch Hashem it wasn't a fracture.

house and find the woman just sitting there, in a darkened room, staring at the ceiling. They don't turn on the light because they are saving money. We help them arrange the payments. With every visit they receive an allowance, fruits and vegetables, and when necessary, nourishing meals along with kosher cake and treats. These visits give

them chayus and they see that someone cares about them. They welcome me with tears in their eyes. Many of them say that just that night they dreamt that the rebbetzin would come that day or they thought about me that morning.

They hear about Yomim Tovim and receive whatever they need to maintain Jewish life: matzos for

Pesach, candles for Chanuka, etc. When we leave, they can't thank us enough and they hug and kiss me as though I'm their mother.

During the course of my work I was able to get a mother and daughter out of jail. Ella A. was wasting away in the prison in Kishinev, which I visit every week on mivtzaim. As a repeat offender, her



future looked far from rosy. The tragedy was compounded by the fact that she is the mother of five children, and the youngest, three year old Georgette, was born in prison and grew up there with her mother.

When I heard about this I got permission to visit the jail. I was touched by the plight of the sweet, intelligent little girl who used street talk. After gaining the trust of the officials and after many visits to the jail, to other prisoners too, I got permission to take Georgette, who is now called Tanya, with me to a children's home. She was registered for our preschool and she and I have a close relationship.

The entire k'hilla adopted the little girl. The staff at the school brought her, step by step, towards Judaism and within two months her prison vocabulary was gone. I encouraged the relationship with Ella, her biological mother, and when I at last extricated her, too, they emigrated to Germany. We are still in contact with them.

### I WILL BLESS THEM

Rumor has it, I said to Rebbetzin Abelsky, that your husband received a special bracha from the Rebbe to be able to bless others in his name, "Bless Jews and I will bless them." He utters the brachos but they are the Rebbe's brachos.

My husband uses the bracha that he received from the Rebbe to constantly bless people, and miracles happen regularly. I'll give you some examples. We are here on the basis of partial citizenship. One of the times we had to renew our papers, we were several weeks late. When we went to the government office, they renewed our residence permit without any problem but since we had been late, we were called to court. The judge gave my husband a very small fine. After reading her



*A short time later, the son who lives here came and said that his parents had begun to recover but still had a long way to go. Taking advantage of the moment, my husband explained, "Listen, you are holding up your parents' recovery. You must leave your non-Jewish wife and find a Jewish wife."*

sentence she asked everybody present to leave. Then she asked my husband for a bracha. She was not even Jewish!

There was a woman who attended our class regularly, and loved it, even though her husband was a sworn atheist. They had a

***At first my husband went alone while I remained in Eretz Yisroel to help my daughter who had just had a baby. After two weeks I told her, "I can't leave Abba alone there. I'm going." And I followed him to Kishinev.***

baby but she was unable to nurse him and she absolutely refused to feed her baby formula. Although her husband was a doctor, they found no solution to the problem. She said to her husband, "I will go to Rabbi Abelsky to ask for a blessing. I heard that his blessings are fulfilled."

Her husband said, "Stay away from him and those like him; they are all charlatans and thieves." She insisted that she knew my husband was a man of integrity. She asked my husband for a bracha and the bracha was fulfilled and she was able to nurse her baby with abundant milk. When two years had gone by and my husband asked her whether she wanted a bracha that the milk stop, she said, "No, the baby should just be calm." My husband blessed her and she nursed him for another seven months. Of course her husband changed his view about Judaism because of this.

One day, a man rushed to our house and said he had come to get an urgent blessing for his friend who had injured his head. The injury was so severe that there was nothing that could be done for him, and they had put him in the morgue. My husband gave his bracha for the friend and for the man himself.

A short while later, he came back to us and excitedly told us that his friend had been moved to a ward since he had begun to show signs of life. The man recovered miraculously and within two weeks he was home.

Eighteen years have passed since

then. The man who requested the bracha for his friend now lives in Eretz Yisroel and is a big businessman, but he still keeps in touch with us. The friend who recovered does a lot of work for us. He renovated the shul and got very involved in Jewish life.

Another story happened two months ago. A Jewish couple came from Israel to visit their children who live here. While they were here they were involved in a terrible car accident and both of them were critically injured. They were taken to the emergency room and put on respirators. Because of the severity of their injuries, the doctors did next to nothing for them. They explained that the injuries were fatal and they did not believe that anything would help.

One of the sons is married to a non-Jew. He and his brother came to ask for a bracha from my husband. Within a short time, to the astonishment of the doctors, they began to see signs of life. We took advantage of the opportunity and explained to the sons that in order to be a vessel for the blessings, the son who returned to Israel should start putting on t'fillin. Also when the father would open his eyes they should put t'fillin on with him too and light candles for Shabbos with the mother.

A short time later, the son who lives here came and said that his parents had begun to recover but still had a long way to go. Taking advantage of the moment, my

husband explained, "Listen, you are holding up your parents' recovery. You must leave your non-Jewish wife and find a Jewish wife."

A few days ago he decided to take the plunge and divorce his non-Jewish wife. We are sure they will see more open miracles until their parents completely recover.

Occasionally, brachos are also given to non-Jews if a Jew is inspired thereby. There is a couple who are converts and are active in our community. The husband has served as the gabbai for six years now and his wife runs a group for women. They have five children who are following in their parents' ways. The daughter, who is only 14, runs the women's farbrengens. Her bas mitzvah two years ago was a Kiddush Hashem when she announced her affirmation to remain a Jew and her pride in being a Jew.

The woman's parents aren't Jewish but they greatly respect their daughter and her family. A short while ago, the father was in an accident when the car he was riding in collided with a truck. The father was sitting in the front passenger seat and was critically injured. Shortly after the accident, the daughter came to ask my husband for a bracha. Within a few days she told us that her father, who had been in a coma, had returned home in good health. He had been sitting in the most dangerous seat of the car, yet he was the only survivor of the accident. They saw that it was the bracha that had saved him.

## **THE DIFFICULTIES**

**When I pressed her, Rebbetzin Abelsky told me about the hardships on shlichus.**

I grew up all alone and then I raised my own family. I had barely married them all off when I left them and came here, to Kishinev. At first, as I said, my husband went alone

while I remained in Eretz Yisroel to help my daughter who had just had a baby. After two weeks I told her, "I can't leave Abba alone there. I'm going." And I followed him to Kishinev.

There we were, without enough food and clothing since we had planned on returning to Eretz Yisroel in three months. However, the Rebbe wanted otherwise. Practically speaking, the government didn't let us leave the first year. It was only after a year that they allowed us to travel to see our children in Israel.

That is the real hardship on shlichus. They get married, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are born, and we are so far away. At first we barely had use of a phone. Occasionally, we could speak only in the middle of the night so we hardly had a chance to speak to the family. We didn't have hot water. We used boilers that we heated ourselves. We lacked many basic things. We ate mostly vegetables. I learned how to prepare all kinds of salads that I make till this day. And like I said before, in order to get basic items we had to

stand on line for hours.

### How do you manage with kashrus?

Today, boruch Hashem, we can get everything here. Our grandson, Sholom Dovber Nachshon, who is on shlichus in Dnepropetrovsk, sends meat to us because he shechts. Just recently, my husband discovered that they produce champagne here that is exported to Eretz Yisroel without a hechsher. He convinced the owners to get a hechsher and expand their customer base. We have koshered three wine factories (two of them also manufacture vodka) under Jewish owners. One of the owners didn't even know he was Jewish. When they met him about koshering his operation, they discovered this.

Recently, the owner of another factory applied to our kashrus agency in order to get a hechsher on his nut business. Aside from that, a few times a week bread and fresh milk production take place under our supervision. For Pesach you can get kosher wine in Moldova under the hashgacha of the chief rabbi which is also exported to countries around the world under local

hechsherim.

Despite this, every time she goes to Eretz Yisroel, she brings back a lift full of products. Sometimes it weighs as much as half a ton which would normally cost a fortune but thanks to the goodwill that the Rebbe's shluchim generate these shipments are respected as legitimate needs of our outreach and the social services we provide.

## MESSAGE TO SHLUCHOS

### What do you have to say to young shluchos?

I can only reassure young shluchos and say that if you are going on shlichus today in Russia, you won't experience the hardships that we endured the past twenty years. Nobody was waiting for us or supported us. Things today are much more developed even though there are still some things in Kishinev that are like they were fifty years ago.

You've just got to do; there's no time to dwell on the hardships because Moshiach is about to appear.

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# MOSHIACH: WHAT WE BELIEVE



Rabbi Gershon Avtzon, Rosh Yeshiva in Cincinnati

## PART 17 OF 20.

*As the saying goes, “75% of known facts are either not known or not facts.” This is especially true regarding belief in Moshiach and Geula, where there are many preconceived notions and questions that remain unasked – and unanswered.*

In our previous article, we discussed the concept of personally identifying Moshiach to enhance our anticipation for his coming. We were left with a question:

### IS PUBLICIZING THE IDENTITY OF MOSHIACH A JEWISH CONCEPT?

To explain the question: We are talking about an individual who has learned what the Rambam writes about Chezkas Moshiach. Because of his anticipation for Moshiach, he takes the initiative and identifies an individual with the qualities of Moshiach. Is one supposed - or allowed - to publicize it to others?

As with all such questions, we should not rely on our preconceived notions, rather on Torah true sources. These must be our only barometer.

1) The Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 11:3) writes: “Rabbi

Akiva was the arms-bearer of Ben-Koziva (Bar-Kochva) and he said about him that he is Melech HaMoshiach.” Rabbi Akiva felt that Bar-Kochva had the necessary qualities that would make him fit to be Moshiach, and he did not hide his belief.

Although in actuality, Bar-Kochva was not Moshiach, the contention against Rabbi Akiva is merely that he should have made it clear that he is Chezkas Moshiach, not Moshiach Vadai. Once someone has the qualities of Chezkas Moshiach, it is meant to be publicized.

2) The Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a) asks, “What is the name of Moshiach? The students of Shiloh said that Moshiach’s name is Shiloh. The students of Yanai said that Moshiach’s name is Yanai.....” We see that these students made their feelings public.

There is another lesson to be learned here. It is only natural for students and Chassidim to feel that their teacher and Rebbe is worthy of being Moshiach, and there is nothing wrong with this. See Sichas Tazria-Metzora 5751, footnote 67.]

3) The seifer, Baal Shem Tov Al

HaTorah (Chelek Aleph Hakdama, Ois 23) relates that Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl announced that the Baal-Shem-Tov was Moshiach, even after his passing!

What is to be gained by spreading the identity of Moshiach?

By spreading the identity of Moshiach, you will awaken the anticipation of Moshiach by many other people. When people see that the arrival of Moshiach can be a reality - for we have a possible Torah-viable candidate - this will encourage them to do acts of goodness and kindness to hasten his revelation.

## PART 18 OF 20.

Some of you may be wondering:

### ISN'T THE SPREADING OF THE IDENTITY OF MOSHIACH A LITTLE TOO PUSHY?

Won't it scare people away from the whole concept of believing in Moshiach?

There is a similar question that we are also addressing. When Chassidim asked the Rebbe - in 5751-5752 - if they can spread the identity of Moshiach, the Rebbe answered “Talui B'Chabad Al Asar -

It depends on the leaders of Chabad in each place.” At first glance this answer is puzzling. If it is acceptable, it should be permitted in every place, and if it is not, shouldn’t it be forbidden everywhere?

The appropriateness of spreading the identity of Moshiach depends on the one who is spreading it!

In Igros Kodesh, Vol. 3, page 53, it explains that when somebody feels that he has something that benefits his life, he has no problem sharing it with others. On the contrary, his love for his fellow drives him, almost obligates him, to share the information with him.

The other person, seeing that the information was shared out of love, will accept it with joy.

For example: An American businessman, while on his business travels, finds out about a not-very-known but excellent doctor. This doctor does not practice conventional medicine, but the results of his therapy are astounding. One day, this businessman gets very sick and - when conventional medicine did not work – he goes to this doctor and is cured instantly.

One day the businessman’s close friend comes down with a sickness. Do you think that the businessman will think twice about suggesting the alternative-medicine doctor? Of course not! He will be eager to recommend the treatment that worked for him. He will strongly push his friend to take the time and travel to see this doctor.

How will the friend take it? He will be happy that his friend cares

***When Chassidim asked the Rebbe if they can spread the identity of Moshiach, the Rebbe answered “Talui B’Chabad Al Asar - It depends on the leaders of Chabad in each place.” At first glance this answer is puzzling. If it is acceptable, it should be permitted in every place, and if it is not, shouldn’t it be forbidden everywhere?***

for him so much, that he is telling him about this doctor. And when he is finally cured, he will feel forever indebted to his dear friend who advised him to meet this doctor.

To put matters into perspective: People do not like be bothered by telemarketers or salesmen who are trying to sell a product that they don’t believe in, just to make a few quick dollars on their expense.

If, however, the idea is given by a trusted friend, it is a different story. The salesman is thinking only about **himself**, and his message is unwanted. With your friend, you feel that he is thinking of **you**, and you therefore want to hear what he has to say.

The imminent arrival of Moshiach should be something that makes a person happy, and fills him with hope and optimism. It makes him a happier person to be around, and allows him to look at the world - and fellow human beings - in a very positive light. His Torah and

Mitzvos are done with more zest and enthusiasm, enhanced by the knowledge of the identity of Moshiach.

When people see him in such a positive mood, they will want to know what is “making him tick.” When he tells them that he has good news for them and it is that Moshiach is coming - **and we know who it is** - it will be readily accepted (“Ofen HaMiskabel”) by everybody.

If, however, one is himself skeptical and cynical about the whole Moshiach concept, then indeed, it will be very difficult to explain it to others. It actually may turn them away.

We are still left with a question: How do we know that the arrival of Moshiach is truly imminent?

This we explain IY”H in our next article.

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# BRINGING THE SH'CHINA DOWN TO RISHIKESH

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

*Rishikesh is one of India's most idolatrous cities, with thousands of Jews roaming around in search of inner meaning to their lives. Rabbi Zohar David, himself a veteran backpacker who conducted his own search throughout India, is once again wandering the streets of Rishikesh. This time, though, he's there with his wife as the shliach to this city, where he sees how the Rebbe touches the soul of even the most distant and remote Jew.*

The city of Rishikesh, located in northern India along the banks of the Ganges River, is renown as the yoga capital of the world. It is situated in a magical place at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains,

where the river turns from the majestic hills, flowing into the wide and prolific plains of the former crown jewel of the vast British Empire. This spot contains numerous yoga schools, temples,

and various ashrams that cater to thousands of visitors from across the globe.

Thousands of Jewish hikers and backpackers from Eretz Yisroel and all over the world visit the city each year. Most of them come to register with one of the dozens of courses offered in yoga exercise and meditation, or to look into the idolatrous cults in operation throughout the city. Many remain in the city for months, sometimes even years. Rabbi Zohar David, the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach's shliach in Rishikesh, and other Chabadnikim who come each year to assist him, try to help them recognize that the meaning they seek is found right in their own backyard, in the world of Torah and mitzvos.

Like many other shluchim working throughout India today, R' David was already acquainted with the country. He spent a considerable amount of time searching for the true and inner essence of his life in the Tibetan ashrams and monasteries. At the time, there were no active Chabad institutions in India, and he wandered around at will, trying to satisfy his spiritual hunger. When his funds ran out, he went to the United States to raise enough money to allow him to return to Rishikesh.

About ten years ago, his dream was realized and he left for Rishikesh, but with one minor difference. Rather than aimless searching, this time he is there on a holy mission – the shlichus of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach.

## THE BRINK OF DESPAIR

"I spent most of my childhood and adolescent years living a good and pleasant life in the city of Rechovot," begins Rabbi David. "I was raised in a traditional home, and in the fourth grade, I was enrolled in a government-sponsored religious school. We learned about Shabbos





**Rabbi Zohar David (left) at a Purim party in the Chabad House**

and the Jewish holidays, but not much more than that. We never got into the depth of the matter, nor did anyone bother to try and explain it to us. When I reached the age of military induction, I joined the Nachal airborne battalion, where the last remnants of my Jewish traditions quickly disappeared.

“I was very drawn towards music, and even at a very young age, I was strumming a guitar and writing songs. Towards the end of my military service, I had made the decision that after taking a backpacking trip, I would return to Eretz Yisroel and go to university to study music and philosophy. I set out on my trek to the East in search of a truer and deeper meaning to life – something that would give me peace of mind and spirit.

“Despite having learned in a religious school, I had not grasped Judaism as something that could provide an answer to my feeling of spiritual emptiness, rather, I felt it was a tradition filled with laws and rules devoid of any logical basis.

“During my trip, I made a



**Rabbi Zohar David, the Rebbe MH”M’s shliach in Rishikesh.** Photo by Meir Alfasi

difficult and most exhausting hike through the Himalayan Mountains, and I eventually succeeded in reaching the peak of the mountain that represented the final destination. It was a brilliantly sunny day without a cloud in the sky, but due to the high altitude, it was also bitterly cold. As I stood on the cliff, at the pinnacle of my journey, I suddenly broke into uncontrollable sobs. Instead of exhilaration, I felt

only despair. I felt that there was nowhere for me to continue from there, and anything else would be merely the same old thing in a new form.”

As he descended from the mountain, he realized that the challenging expeditions and thrilling experiences had failed to satisfy the depths of his soul, and he decided to enter a course at a prominent Tibetan monastery in the mountains

***As I looked carefully at the picture, I was stirred to the depths of my soul. This was the same Jew that I had seen in my dream. I went over to the drawer, took out the t'fillin that my mother had sent me, and for the first time in ages, I put them on in a sense of awe and fear.***

of Nepal. "I had many questions, and would constantly challenge the monks on the content of their lectures. One day, I approached the 'guru' who had lectured us on love, mercy, and compassion, and asked him what he would do if someone wanted to kill the chief 'guru'. Would he act in accordance with the saying 'If someone rises to slay you, slay him first'? He responded clearly that he wouldn't lift a finger to save his teacher.

"All of my enthusiasm instantly vanished. All that the monastery had strengthened within me was the Jewish identity that I had still not understood. There were many Jews in this monastery, and I noticed how we were drawn to one another. Among the hundreds of Gentiles staying there, it was specifically the Jews whose presence stood out. They asked questions, made inquiries, and you could feel how different they were from the other students.

"I recall how I sprained my leg just before the end of the course, and who was it that carried me for several miles? A Jewish actor who had arrived from the United States. I still remember how I was struck by the thought that only a Jew could reveal such concern for another Jew.

"There was a Jewish couple staying in the monastery, and when the woman saw that I was asking so many questions, she gave me a book on Jewish reincarnation. I read it

with a passion, and it was in the monastery, of all places, that I started to understand that Judaism was not what I had perceived it to be. It wasn't merely something superficial, rather it contained deep inner meaning. I had never realized that the depth I had been so sorely missing could be found there.

One day, everyone commemorated the death of one of the idolatrous priests, and they lit thousands of candles in his memory. Then, another Jewish woman staying in the monastery, also with a religious background, approached me and asked, 'Do you know what today is?' I had no answer, as you tend to lose all track of the dimension of time in such places. She told me that it was Chanukah, and asked if I remembered the blessings. I said that I did. She gathered together all the Jews and we blessed the candles with the brachos for the holiday of Chanukah. After making the brachos, we all started to sing 'HaNeiros Hallalu'. Today, I know that this was an awakening of the essence of the Jewish soul. In the depths of the klipa of idol worship, some Heavenly source made certain to remind us where we came from and what our roots were...

"This period was characterized as the first time that I became aware of my Jewishness. I remember telling myself that when I would return to Eretz Yisroel, I would go to yeshiva."

## **SIGNS FROM HEAVEN**

Implementing that decision was a different story. The moment of inspiration quickly faded, and he continued on his journey to Thailand, and from there to Japan, where he intended to work and earn enough to finance an additional trip to the Indian subcontinent. "In hindsight, I see how G-d was accompanying me, calling upon certain people and situations that clarified for me the nekuda of Yiddishkait. In Japan, I met an Israeli of Yemenite origin who had become acquainted with a native Japanese woman, married her, and moved with her to Japan. After about fifteen years, he connected with his Jewish roots, got divorced, and became a baal t'shuva.

"I had a good relationship with him, and we would have conversations lasting throughout the night. After several such talks, I called my mother and asked her to send me a Tanach. He tried to convince me to stop working on Shabbos, but I wasn't a proper 'vessel' for that yet. One Erev Shabbos, I happened to meet a local Japanese man named Yonatan, and when I expressed surprise to my companion that he spoke Hebrew, he explained that the man had converted and had become a Torah observant Jew. Literally just a few minutes before Shabbos, this Japanese man passed by me. When I asked him how he was, he quickly replied that everything was fine, apologizing that he couldn't continue speaking with me because he was rushing to go and light Shabbos candles. I was filled with deep embarrassment. I, who was born and raised a Jew, desecrate the Shabbos, while this Japanese man, who only recently came to recognize his Creator, shows such honor and respect for the holy day of rest.

[To be continued next week iy"H]