

A decorative black border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, featuring diamond-shaped motifs at the corners and teardrop shapes at the midpoints of each side.

Memento from the Wedding of

Pessi and Dovie

Levy

ט' אלול ה'תשפ"א

The 17th of August, 2021



בס"ד

Memento from the Wedding of

שלום דובער ופעסיל

שיחיו ליווי

Pessi and Dovie
Levy

ט' אלול ה'תשפ"א

The 17th of August, 2021

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Greetings

Dear Family and Friends שיחי,

As per tradition at all momentous events, we begin by thanking G-d for granting us life, sustaining us, and enabling us to be here together. We are thrilled that you are able to share in our simcha, the marriage of Dovie and Pessi. Indeed, Jewish law highlights the role of the community in bringing joy to the *chosson* and *kallah*.

In honor of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's wedding in 1928, the Frierdiker Rebbe distributed a special *teshurah*, a memento, to all the celebrants: a facsimile of a letter written by the Alter Rebbe.

In this tradition, we are honored to share:

- 1) The story of the chosson's maternal great-grandfather, Reb Zalman Bronstein, and his father Chaim Ezra and grandfather Zev Volf. The bulk of the material was sourced from his memoirs published in Kfar Chabad magazine. Additional material was accumulated by the chosson for this publication.
- 2) The story of the chosson's great-grandfather, and namesake, Sholom Dovber Pewzner, and great-great-grandfather, Reb Shmuel Pewzner. With thanks to Hertzel Pewzner

for his insight.

- 3) Several of the Rebbe's responses to the kallah's great-grandfather, Rabbi Yehoshua Pinson, within the framework of his involvement in various Chabad institutions.
- 4) The Rebbe's responses, and a transcript of a newly discovered private audience, between the Rebbe and the chosson's great-grandfather, Rabbi Berel Levy.
- 5) Letters from the Rebbe to the chosson's grandmother, Mrs. Malka Levy, grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Bronstein, and his great-uncle, Rabbi Aaron Lieberman.

We would like to thank Rabbi Dovid Zaklikowski, Chana Lewis and Yitzchok Cohen of Hasidic Archives for their dedication in preparing this memento.

We hope that you will enjoy the celebration, and share the happiness and pride we feel on this day. May we share many simchas in the near future!

The Levy and Fischer Families



SOLDIERING ON

The Life of
Reb Zalman Bronstein

DOVID ZAKLIKOWSKI



Reb Chaim Ezra Bronstein.



Secret Mission



The 1920s were a dangerous time under the new leadership that took hold in the Soviet Union. Communist forces were undermining Jewish life, and synagogues and schools were shuttered in rapid succession. Jewish leaders were imprisoned, exiled and murdered. Jewish activists were on high alert, terrified of the brutal acts carried out by the communist regime daily.

Zalman Bronstein felt this fear in the air he breathed. Silence was imperative for survival, and his father, Chaim Ezra, guarded his activities closely by concealing the details of his involvement. Chaim Ezra Bronstein had studied in the famed Tomchei Tmimim yeshivah in the town of Lubavitch, training to become an expert scribe and ritual circumciser.

By 1926, however, circumcisions were attended by a mere few. Thus, when Chaim Ezra asked his son Zalman to be *sandek* at a bris, Zalman was surprised by the unexpected initiation into his father's world. Silently, the duo arrived at a large villa, an anomaly in Homel. It held countless luxurious rooms, winding staircases and marble floors. Zalman understood that this was the home of a high-ranking communist official. While Chaim Ezra walked

confidently, Zalman's heart pounded with every step. An elderly woman entered the room clutching a small infant. Zalman did as his father instructed, sitting down on one of the ornate chairs and taking the eight-day-old child in his arms. Chaim Ezra quickly performed the bris, bandaged the child, gave him a Jewish name and handed the child back to the elderly woman.

They returned home. They did not exchange a word about what had taken place, and Zalman never uncovered the backstory to that particular circumcision, where father and mother were not present. Thus, Zalman was raised with the ethos of doing everything to uphold Jewish life, and his father Chaim Ezra and mother Shaina Gisa imbued this quality in him, seldom with words, but with action.



Righteous Roots



The Bronstein family had deep roots in Lubavitch. Zalman's grandfather, Zev Volf Bronstein, was known for being soft-spoken, cautious and quiet, spending hours in prayer daily. It was rumored that during the many years he spent in Lubavitch, he slept and ate little, causing his teeth to fall out. He was said to be a *beinuni*, a lofty standing requiring devotion to G-d and complete control over ones thoughts and actions.

Some referred to him as an angel on account of his conduct. To support his family, he worked as a guard for Shmuel Gurary, who owned a forest, while spending most of his time studying Torah.

At one point, he began to produce alcoholic drinks to sell on the black market, risking immediate arrest. Once, while deep in prayer, the authorities came to his home and found the bottles of alcohol he was producing. Before leaving, they sealed the door to the home distillery, saying they would return soon to press charges.

All the while, Zev Volf remained in prayer. When he finally removed his prayer shawl, his daughter Bluma frantically asked him what they should do. He calmly told her, "Now we will break the seal." He returned to his prayers, and quite mysteriously, the



Site of the original burial site of Reb Zev Wolf in Rostov.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

police never returned.

Zev wolf once asked the rebbe rashab for a blessing that he merit a jewish burial, a strange request for that time. Years later, in the early 1940s, when the lubavitch cemetery was plowed and replaced with high-rise buildings, they moved the body of the rebbe rashab, and the gurary brothers. Zev wolf's remains were moved as well, near the rebbe rashab's plot, prompting his family to recall his request for a jewish burial.

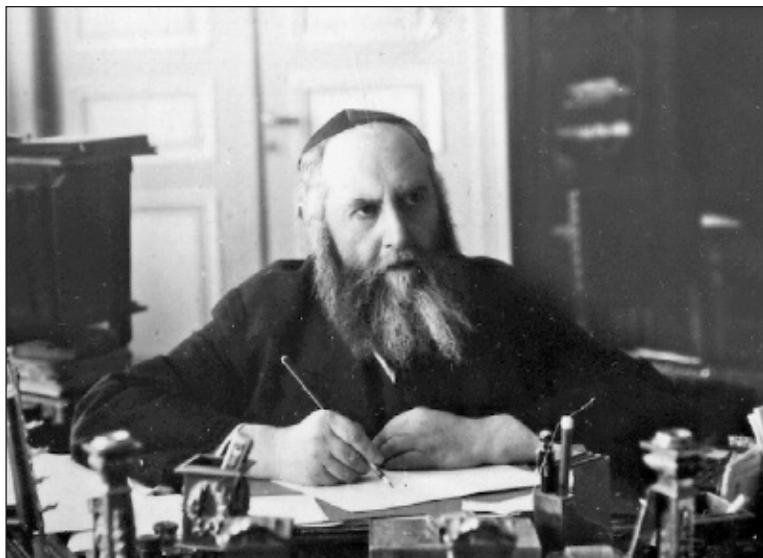
EZRA THE SCRIBE

Zalman's father, Chaim Ezra, exemplified the tenets of Chasidic life. When the yeshivah's founder, the Rebbe Rashab, encouraged students to become scribes, Chaim Ezra was of the first to accept the challenge. He was not only meticulous in his art form, but also in his spiritual preparation for the task. It was said that, when possible, each time he wrote G-d's name, he would first im-



The Rebbe Rashab.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES



The Rebbe Rayatz.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

merse in the mikvah.

Once, when Chaim Ezra was visiting the Rebbe Rashab, the Rebbe told businessman Shmuel Gurary that Chaim Ezra is in town and recommended that Shmuel have his *tefillin* checked by him.

Later, he was referred to by the Rebbe Rayatz as “Ezra the Scribe,” drawing a comparison to the righteous Biblical character by the same name. Once, at a *farbrengen* of the Rebbe Rayatz, after several rounds of *l’chaim*, Ezra found himself asleep under the table. The Rebbe said to those gathered, “A *sefer’el*,” referring to the word *sofer* (scribe), as well as a *sefer* (a holy book), “is under the table, and no one is lifting him up?”

Chaim Ezra’s connection to the Rashab was profound. When he received a telegram informing him of the Rebbe’s passing, he fainted. Chaim Ezra was also known for allowing others to use his address for communication with the Rebbe [Rayatz]. This was no



*The Ramash, circa
1930.*

simple favor as it placed him in full sight of authorities. For Chaim Ezra, however, the Rebbe took precedent.

It is also believed that the Lubavitch Rebbes had their tefillin written by him. The son-in-law of the Rayatz, the Ramash (later, the Rebbe), ordered a specific kind of leather for his tefillin (known as *ben pekuah*) that was difficult to come by. At a time when people lacked survival basics, it is notable that the Ramash apportioned a significant amount of money for his tefillin.

When the Ramash was later asked why he chose Chaim Ezra to write his tefillin, he responded that while there may have been other scribes with nicer writing, “Chaim Ezra is a truly G-d-fearing Jew.”



Torah on the Run



Born in Cherkasy, Ukraine, Zalman Bronstein and his siblings, Michoel, Eti and Bluma, never joined the compulsory government schools where atheism and disdain for religion was inculcated. This was made possible by a bribe to their doorman, who served as eyes and ears for the communists in the building, so that he would not report that the Bronstein children were truant. Zalman went to a *cheder*, an ad hoc Jewish school, where he studied with several other children.

In addition to *cheder*, Chaim Ezra wanted his children to study the *Nach* portion of the Torah. At the time, *Nach* was widely adopted by the Zionist movement, and it took some time for Chaim Ezra to find a suitable teacher for his children.

Eventually, the communists found out that Chaim Ezra's children were not attending a government school and they began to harass him. Despite the danger, Chaim Ezra refused to capitulate.

In 1920, Chaim Ezra told Zalman, 11, and his brother Michoel, 9, that they were to continue their studies in the clandestine Lubavitch yeshivah in Kremenchuk, which meant that they would be leaving home. They travelled some eighty miles, including a



The Dnieper River, Kremenchug, Ukraine.

PHOTO: ILYA

boat ride over the Dnieper River, before arriving at the yeshivah. It was housed in a decrepit space, which they later abandoned after the authorities discovered its location.

While delivering his children to the yeshivah, Chaim Ezra met fellow classmates from Lubavitch, including Rabbis Yisroel Noach Belenitzky and Yechezkel Himmelstein. The joy Zalman witnessed at this reunion was etched in his memory for decades.

Even the poverty in his own home could not prepare Zalman for yeshivah. They slept on benches in the women's section of a local shul, while rats scurried around them all night. The students would eat at the homes of local families, but at times they had nothing to serve the hungry students.

The self-sacrifice of his teachers taught him the price of studying Torah and practicing Judaism under communist rule. Rabbi Himmelstein, a thin, short man, was often ill, and struggled with swallowing solid food. One Shabbos, Zalman went to his home for

a meal, and watched as Rabbi Himmelstein struggled to eat chalah, but could not. He survived on bites of chocolate that would melt in his mouth. Someone once asked Rabbi Himmelstein's doctor how his patient manages to stay alive on such meager sustenance. The doctor responded, "His enjoyment in studying Torah sustains him."

Zalman recalled that every surface in Rabbi Himmelstein's room was covered in volumes of commentaries on the Gemara. As a lecturer, he would connect the basic text with numerous commentaries in a seamless fashion. "Despite being weak," Zalman recalled, "his voice boomed when he taught us."

After several years, in 1926, authorities shuttered the yeshivah. The students were eager to continue their studies, so the school split into two; one group joined the yeshivah in Polotzk, including Zalman's brother, and Zalman joined the other group at the yeshivah in Nevel.

There were fifteen students who studied in the women's section of the shul in Nevel. Their teachers were in acute danger, and the students feared for them daily. When an armed man appeared in the doorway of the shul one day, with a mere few glances, the students formulated a plan. Quickly, the students jumped on the man, wresting the gun from his hands. Their teacher escaped in those precious few moments. When they let go of the officer, he ran for his life, fuming at the group, and swearing swift retribution. It is unknown whether he returned, because they quickly packed up their makeshift study hall and moved on to another location.

THE REBBE'S RELEASE

While most of the young students never met the Rebbe Rayatz, they had heard much about him. His love and care for their material and spiritual needs was part of their reality. In 1927, when they heard the Rebbe was arrested, Zalman recalled their deep distress and fear for the Rebbe's future.



Rabbi Yisroel Noach Belenitzky.

When the Rebbe was freed a few months later, Zalman said, “There was such joy! *Ah*, what joy!” At the yeshivah, because of the surrounding danger, the students celebrated by singing and dancing in a way that the neighbors could not hear.

A few months later, word arrived that the Rebbe was leaving the Soviet Union, but would first spend the month of Tishrei in Leningrad. Despite the danger, many Chasidim planned on spending at least some of the festive month with the Rebbe. Fearing the worst, the yeshivah asked the students not to go, but Zalman could not pass up the opportunity.

It was a month of spiritual delight, Zalman would say. He recalled the Rebbe’s voice reciting the blessings at the Torah: “It was heavenly. Such sweetness. I dream of hearing that blessing, as it was recited then, once again.”

A farbrengen was held one day, but by the time Zalman arrived, there was no room for him. He saw a large heater hanging from the ceiling with a narrow space above it. When several peo-

ple saw him climbing up, they began to yell that the oven could fall on their heads. The Rebbe heard the commotion, looked up at Zalman, and said, "Let him, let him." Thus, Zalman spent the farbrengen wedged in a nook above the crowd.

While Zalman was away in yeshivah, his family moved to Nikolayev, Ukraine. Some eight days after Zalman arrived in Leningrad, his father joined him, followed by his brother Michoel who had come from yeshivah in Polotzk. They had made tremendous efforts to come see the Rebbe, perhaps for the last time.

Chaim Ezra was considering yet another move, this time to Malakhovka, a small suburb of Moscow, where there was a large Lubavitch presence far from the city where the secret police posed greater risk. He wanted the Rebbe's approval before making a final decision, so he asked to be received for a private audience. His request was denied, because the Rebbe – with rare exception – was not holding private meetings.

Chaim Ezra told his sons that he would visit Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah, the Rebbe's mother, whom he knew from his days as a student in Lubavitch, in hope that she would arrange an audience for Chaim Ezra with the Rebbe.

Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah was often referred to as mother of the yeshivah, and she, in turn, would refer to the students as her children. When Chaim Ezra entered her home accompanied by his sons, she asked, "These are the grandchildren?" With a wide smile, she blessed them. After a short discussion, the Rebbetzin agreed to arrange an audience with the Rebbe for the three of them.

When they entered the Rebbe's study, he greeted them, and echoing his mother, asked, "These are the grandchildren?" The Rebbe gave them a blessing, which Zalman later said held him in good stead for the next difficult fifteen years in the Soviet Union.

After a year in Nevel, Zalman went to learn in Vitebsk. When the communists discovered the yeshivah, it was closed before anyone could be arrested. Together with the rest of the students, he



***Rebbetzin Shterna
Sarah.***

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

went to a yeshivah in another city. Always one step ahead of the communist regime, they continued moving from city to city for the next two years.



A young Zalman



Building A Family



In 1930, Zalman, 20, moved to Nikolayev, and worked at knitting clothes from home. Because he was independently employed, he did not have to work on Shabbos. The years passed slowly, without much drama, and marriage prospects were difficult to come by. Unfortunately, the communists had been largely successful in repelling the children of religious Jews from the path of their parents, and Orthodox young women were few and far between.

In 1936, it was proposed that he meet his orphaned cousin Chaya Bronstein, daughter of Herschel and Leah. In 1920, the typhus epidemic spread quickly across Russia. Living in Rostov-on-Don, Herschel's younger brother Mottel became sick with the disease, and Herschel selflessly cared for him. Sadly, Herschel caught the deadly illness, too, and passed away in 1920, while his younger, and weaker, brother survived. Herschel passed away around the same time as the Rebbe Rashab. Fellow Lubavitchers would say that he was one of ten people, a *minyán*, that passed away in proximity to the Rebbe.

Shortly after Herschel's passing, his wife – Chaya's mother –



Chaya Bronstein.

PHOTO: AGUDAS
CHASSIDEI CHABAD
LIBRARY

passed away, too. Chaya moved in with her aunt in Moscow, where she later met Zalman. The two decided to marry, and they had a small wedding at the home of their aunt Bluma and her husband Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman in Malakhovka.

For the next few years, the couple lived in Moscow. In 1942, when Germany began making advances into the Soviet Union, they decided to retreat from the frontline. They went to Chimkent, Kazakhstan, where a family friend resided. This friend had often stayed at Zalman's parents' home, and they were certain he would welcome them until they'd find permanent accommodations. Indeed, the friend was pleased to see them, but his wife compelled them to leave.

From there, the couple went to Munkacs, and several days later Zalman's parents and siblings joined them. While they felt safe, there were few Jews in Munkacs, and they did not know where

other Lubavitchers had escaped.

With the war waging, and the Red Army constantly on the prowl for soldiers to recruit, the age for recruitment was widened, and Zalman found himself on the draft list. Being sent to the frontlines translated to a high probability of death, as well as extreme difficulty upholding Jewish practice.

Zalman met with the recruitment officer and succeeded in bribing him. From time to time, he would return to the office offering more money. After several months, the official showed up at Zalman's home in a drunken state. He demanded that Chaya come with him to the store to purchase cigarettes for him.

Fearing for her safety, the couple did not know what to do. If they refused, the officer vowed that Zalman would be drafted the next day. They quickly conferred with Chaim Ezra, who lived with them, and they decided that she should go, but father and son would follow closely in case the officer tried to assault her.

As they suspected, the official accosted Chaya; in response, she spit in his face and quickly ran home. As expected, the next day, Zalman received a draft notice. He went to the draft board and tried to bribe a doctor unsuccessfully. With no further options, he was enlisted into the Red Army.

According to family lore, the officer who tried to assault Chaya was later sent to the frontlines, where he lost his hands and feet in battle.



To the Front



Zalman joined the 123rd Regiment, and was given notice that they might enter the war at moment's notice. He soon learned that being a Jew in the army came with additional dangers. One soldier bluntly told him, "When we are sent to the front, my first bullet will not be directed toward the enemy, but at you."

Every morning, as the first rays of sun appeared, while everyone slumbered in their bunks, Zalman covered himself with a blanket and donned his tefillin. He said *Shema* and the *Amidah*, and removed his tefillin quickly, completing his prayers without them. On days they were out in the forest, he would hide between trees and put on tefillin.

Zalman would not eat any cooked foods, and survived on bread and vegetables alone. "It was not easy, but G-d helped with this, too," he recalled. He tried foraging for food on their trek toward the frontline, occasionally finding the rare potato he would cook in a pot he'd brought from home.

Because of severe vitamin deficiencies, Zalman had night blindness. One night, they were ordered to continue marching in



*The city streets of the Soviet Union became
the front lines of the war with the Germans.*

the frigid weather. Since he could not see, two soldiers led him the entire way. Towards morning, they arrived in a town where the soldiers went to rest in local homes. Zalman took off his wet clothes, placed them on an oven to dry, and fell into a deep sleep. He was awakened suddenly with the call that all soldiers need to immediately continue marching. Zalman quickly dressed and joined his regiment. After a few minutes, he realized that he had forgotten his tefillin behind. It was too late to return. “You cannot fathom,” he said, decades later, “the pain and anguish I experienced by that loss.”

On another occasion, he slept in a local home, only to spot a sheet of Torah parchment wedged in the corner of the room. It had been months since he'd seen a Jewish item of any kind, let alone a Torah, and he began to shake with emotion. He took out 50 ruble, all the money he had, and offered it to the elderly Russian woman in exchange for the parchment. He explained that he was a Jew and this particular sheet was important to people of his faith.

The woman began to cry. She told him that the town had been populated by many Jews before the Germans invaded and murdered them at the riverside. It was a realization for Zalman that the Jews had enemies on both sides of the war, with the Germans attempting to annihilate them physically, while the communists sought to eradicate their souls.

Before he departed, she gave Zalman the sheet of Torah scroll and wished him well.

ZALMAN TAKES ILL

Hoping that he might be released if he was ill or malnourished, Zalman stopped eating. Eventually, he came down with an acute case of hepatitis and was hospitalized. The doctors told him that he must eat in order to regain his strength, but Zalman responded that he did not have appetite. A Jewish doctor approached him and said, “*Shtupen zich*,” force yourself to eat, adding that he was too weak to even be permitted to return home. “I assure you,” she said, “that within two weeks when you are stronger, the hospital will send you home for a period of rest.”

Zalman followed her directions, and began eating bread and vegetables. After two weeks, she checked him again. Pleased with his progress, she kept her promise and he received two months off. Thus, he began the task of locating his family.

From time to time, he had received letters from his wife, who told him that his sister Etta Menkin (later Levitin) were joining many Lubavitchers in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. His wife, children and parents had followed Etta.

From Tashkent, Chaya wrote to him that she found work knitting socks and selling them on the black market. When Rabbi Nissan Nemenov learned that she was purchasing material and selling socks at the market on her own, he became concerned for her safety. He arranged for Rabbi Peretz Chein to bring her material, and

he would sell her wares and bring the profits to her.

Zalman, on leave, went to join his family in Tashkent. After two months, he went to the local hospital and bribed a doctor to extend his leave by stating that Zalman was still recuperating from his bout of illness. One month later, he was forced to return to his regiment stationed near Smolensk.

When Zalman arrived, the soldiers were resting between battles. The general announced that the first thousand soldiers to line up would be assigned menial work. The soldiers would do anything to avoid another battle, and quickly a massive line began to form. Zalman joined them. As he approached the registrar, a passage from the Midrash entered his mind: "The last is the most beloved." The thought wouldn't leave him, and he decided to return to the end of the line. Instantly, he regretted his decision, thinking that perhaps he had just given up the opportunity to save his life. After a thousand soldiers signed up, he was left behind with the other unlucky soldiers.

The next morning, they were ordered to march. Walking through fields, they were shocked to see the corpses of hundreds of soldiers blown to pieces. They soon learned that the thousand soldiers had been sent into a battle that few survived.

A NEW POSITION

At one point, on the front line, the Germans were not more than one hundred feet away. Along with many soldiers, Zalman was tasked with guarding the perimeter. They crouched on the ground in utter silence, prepared to open fire at moment's notice. The moonless night blanketed them in darkness. Suddenly, Zalman saw a car inching closer with its headlights off. He didn't have a chance to open fire, because the car was already beside him. He lifted his gun, shouted that they tell him the code, and banged the car with the back of his gun.



The Red Army in battle with the Germans'.

The car door opened and a Russian general peered out. He had come to test the readiness of the soldiers. Angrily, he asked why Zalman was holding him up in such an impertinent manner. Zalman apologized profusely, explaining that he didn't know who was in the car.

He was called to the general's quarters the next day, and Zalman feared the worse. Instead, the general told Zalman that he was being reassigned. He was to replace a soldier who had been tasked with retrieving mail and cigarettes from a local village, but had been caught stealing. Zalman happily accepted the new role.

The village was some six miles from the base, quite far from the front line. While there was a car available, he chose to go by foot to avoid any possible altercation with the Germans. The trip took him all day, but he was pleased that this position afforded some semblance of safety.

On Fridays, he would try to make it back to the base before Shabbos arrived. To lighten his load, he would leave most of his

equipment, aside from his weapon, at the base. One Friday, the Germans attacked the base by air. From a distance, he saw the intense bombing flattening the base, with trees flying into the air. Zalman went deeper into the forest, shaking and weeping. "I knew that at any moment," he recalled, "I could be wounded or killed."

The bombing lasted twenty minutes, during which he prayed and begged for G-d to save him. He thought of his wife lighting Shabbat candles at that exact moment, praying for his safety. He asked G-d to heed her prayers.

After the bombing subsided, Zalman emerged from the forest. He wandered in the direction of his camp, until encountering a soldier riding calmly on a horse. "I don't know where he came from," Zalman would later say, "but I believe he may have been a messenger from Heaven."

"Soldier!" the man called out to him. "Where are you trying to go?" Zalman explained that he was trying to return to his regiment, but the man on the horse only shook his head. "There is nothing left. Turn around," he said, and gave Zalman directions to another local base.

When Zalman arrived, he was told that his original base had been carpet-bombed, killing every last person there. He was the only known survivor.



The Folk Singer



He was transferred to the frontlines in White Russia. He was assigned to guard duty in a ditch close to the German camp, as he'd done in his previous base. At the end of his shift, he would rest in a bunker which afforded little protection from the Germans, but at least shielded him from the elements.

After one particular shift, a general entered Zalman's bunker in order to shave. It was an unusual occurrence, since the general could have easily shaved in his own bunker. The general began singing a Russian folk song wholly off-tune. Zalman, exhausted after his shift, was irritated by the intrusion, and said, "Dear General, it is such a nice song but you are doing it no justice."

The general was surprised by Zalman's frank remark, and asked Zalman to sing the song for him instead. Zalman tried brushing off the request but the general insisted. After Zalman finished singing the song, the general said, "With such a voice, it doesn't make sense that you are here on the frontlines. We must transfer you!"

Two days later, while lying in a ditch alongside seventeen



Zalman leading a choir in a Chasidic nigun.

soldiers, a radio message came through, “Singer Bronstein, to the command center!”

The base was not far from the Germans, and they often picked up each other’s radio communications. Thus, Zalman knew it was possible he would be targeted while leaving the ditch. He crawled on the ground, gun in hand, for half a mile, until the base was in sight.

Covered in mud, he arrived at the command center where a soldier was waiting for him. He was brought to the general, who smiled at him warmly and asked, “You haven’t lost your voice since we last saw each other?” Zalman was then told that he had been inducted into the official choir of the Red Army.

Zalman joined the large choir alongside forty musicians, soloists and directors. “I had no interest in music or singing,” he later said, “but this gave me a chance at surviving the war.”

The first concert he performed was at the generals’ club, where he sang that same Russian folk song that had landed him this po-

sition. After the concert, the musical director pointed out to Zalman that the generals were arguing over who would claim him for their unit.

It was the first of many concerts performed across the Soviet Union. As the choir moved through countless towns and cities, he saw the war's devastation first-hand. One day, they passed Nevel, where he had once studied in yeshivah, and he was deeply saddened to find it decimated.

Zalman was a popular soloist, despite being emotionally detached from his singing. When he felt he had clout to make demands, he requested to perform no more than three songs per concert. Eventually, a director urged him to sing with more heart, and leave behind his thoughts and yearnings. Far from home, Zalman continued to struggle.

During a concert for commanders and generals, a note was passed up to the stage. It was a request for Zalman to sing a song in Yiddish. Clothed behind Red Army uniforms were Jewish souls. After receiving permission from the director, Zalman sang a heart-warming song in Yiddish, bringing all of himself in hope that it would reach those in need.

On another occasion, a concert was scheduled for Yom Kippur, and while the choir prepared for the event, Zalman knew that he would not participate. On the morning of the performance, he informed the musical director that he was unwell and could not perform. The director tried persuading him, but Zalman was adamant that he would not join the troupe.

While the choir sang on stage, Zalman remained in his bunk and prayed as much as he could from memory. As his strength waned toward the end of the fast, someone knocked at the door. Three high-ranking officers stood in the doorway, and Zalman leaped up to salute them. He feared that he had been caught in a lie. When asked if he was Singer Bronstein, he responded affirmatively.

The three sat on a bed and were quiet for a while, until one asked, “Do you know what today is?” Zalman responded that he did. “We came to you,” the commander continued, “because we are Jewish, and we want to hear a song by which we can remember the holy day as it was in our parents’ synagogues.”

Zalman explained that he had been given sick-leave, and if anyone would hear him singing, he could be punished for his deceit. The officers suggested going into the forest and singing there. Zalman saw they were emotional, and had no ill intentions, and so he agreed. There, in the forest, he sang *Kol Nidrei*, *Unesaneh Tokef*, and as the sun set, he sang the words of *Shema* and *Hu Ha'Elokim*, traditionally recited as Yom Kippur ends.

These Jews only superficially disconnected from their roots. “I felt the words of prayer entering their hearts,” Zalman said. “Their inner Jewish spark was still alive and revealed.”

He eventually learned that a short while after he joined the choir and left his base, his bunker was bombed, and many fellow soldiers died or were badly wounded.

RETURNING HOME

Zalman missed his family, and thoughts of their wellbeing haunted him constantly. As the war continued, the demand for concerts waned and the need for soldiers grew. An order arrived disbanding the choir, aside for three members who would join the commander’s entourage. The rest would be sent to the front. Zalman was chosen as one of the three.

When the Red Army invaded Germany, rumors that the war was nearing its end began to spread. Many soldiers were released from service, and Zalman wondered when he, too, would join them.

One day, Zalman was called to the general’s office and told that a unit was leaving to Kiev. Zalman was asked to reorganize a



Mottel Gurary.

PHOTO: AGUDAS
CHASSIDEI CHABAD
LIBRARY

choir and join them. He was promised the salary and apartment of a commander. Zalman was desperate to return home to his family, and told the commander he would have to weigh the offer carefully. When he left the office, he met a friendly Jewish commander, and told him what had occurred. The officer advised Zalman to write to his wife, and ask her to arrange a telegram from a doctor stating that her health is failing, and he must immediately return home.

Indeed, a short while later, a telegram arrived from a doctor urging him to return home in haste. He brought the telegram to the general, who immediately suspected foul play. "I protected you from danger, and now you are running away from me," he said. "This is the act of a deceitful Jewish mind."

Nonetheless, he freed Zalman to return home.

Reuniting with his family was bittersweet. He was shocked to



*Rabbi Mendel
Aronov.*

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

discover that his father, Chaim Ezra, had fallen ill on Yom Kippur and had passed away.

Although Chaim Ezra was only around 50 years old, the difficult life he endured had aged him far beyond his years. Chaim Ezra's grandson, Mottel Gurary, had been called to his grandfather's deathbed. Chaim Ezra whispered the verse: "Be strong and of good courage, all you who place their hope in G-d" (Tehillim 31:25). In his final breaths, Chaim Ezra reminded his grandson to be firm in his commitment to Yiddishkeit and to withstand external pressures. As Chaim Ezra began to slip away on the Eve of Yom Kippur, his family encouraged him to hold on just a bit longer. He remained alive until the prayer of Kol Nidrei was recited, when he took his final breath.

After his passing, Shaina Gisa gave Mendel Aronov some of her husband's writings on parchment. As thanks, he wrote a few



Chaikel Chanin.

mezuzahs for her and affixed them on doors of her home. A short while later, she dreamed of her husband. In the dream, he told her that she needs to check the home's mezuzahs. Indeed, she brought them to a sofer, who told her they were adequate, but did not adhere to a customary format in which certain words appear first on the lines. She had new mezuzahs written according to that custom, and the following night, she dreamed of her husband again, where he confirmed that the mezuzahs were now good.

By the time Zalman returned home, Tashkent had become a Chassidic enclave as Lubavitchers flocked further away from the Germans and the communist regime. Zalman was overjoyed to be together with fellow Chasidim again, many whom he had studied with decades earlier. The atmosphere was communal and supportive. When someone had a difficulty, he recalled, others made every effort to find a solution.

To support his family, Zalman learned to repair watches.

At a gathering to raise funds for the needy, Chaikel Chanin requested that Zalman donate 500 ruble. Zalman had far less to his name, but recognized the need to give to those who were worse off than him, and over time he collected the funds earmarked for charity.



Escape!



Rumors began circulating in Tashkent about the possibility of leaving the Soviet Union with falsified Polish passports. They would have to travel to Lviv, and smuggle across the border. Committees were formed to arrange permits, papers, and bribing of officials.

When Zalman first arrived in Lviv, his sister Etta had already rented a room from an elderly Jewish woman. Etta told Zalman that her landlord's friend was connected with the train station manager, Paula, and perhaps she would be a helpful contact in enabling them to leave Russia by train. As it were, Paula was more than happy to assist them for a large sum of money. This way, the first group of seventy families was able to smuggle across on the 19th of Kislev in 1946. Zalman and his family were meant to join the group of 250 strong, but his wife gave birth that day to their daughter Shterna.

It was a joyous day for Zalman, marking the birth of his daughter, the first mass exodus of Chasidim, as well as the "Rosh Hashanah of Chasidus." Together with the committee, including Reb Mendel Futerfas and Reb Bentche Shemtov, Zalman recalled,



A Soviet locomotive train.

“We said a lot of *l'chaim*, took our shoes off and danced all night.”

By the next day, he was already working on organizing the next train, scheduled to leave a week later. As preparations were in full force, Zalman went to Paula's home to iron out the details. To Zalman's surprise, Paula insisted a small group leave that very night, and that she be among them. This meant that many families anticipating their escape would be left stranded. Zalman became very angry, and said, “Paula, either we all go together, or you will not be going either.”

She began yelling loudly at Zalman, insisting he leave her house that very moment. The landlord, hearing the screaming, came to see what was going on. After hearing the details, the landlady, in dismay, asked Paula how she could speak to Zalman this way after his sacrifice and personal risk to help others.

Paula calmed down and suggested an alternate plan. She told Zalman to meet the train station director at midnight and finalize the details with him. If he would be amenable to the trip, she



*A group of refugees after leaving the Soviet Union,
including Chaya Bronstein (center row, number 18).*

PHOTO: AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD LIBRARY

would join, but otherwise she would make her own way out of Russia.

Zalman returned immediately to the committee, and updated them about the new developments. The entire group would need to leave that night, and someone was tasked with informing all the families to prepare for departure.

At midnight, he met Paula and the train director. Nearby, another Lubavitcher awaited a signal to either alert the group that they had been exposed, or that their departure was imminent. While discussing the details, Paula slipped money into the director's hand, while Zalman simultaneously added more money to her purse. This continued until the director was pleased with the sum and agreed for the train to depart in the early hours of the morning.

Zalman signaled to the man waiting nearby that they had received the green light to depart. By 3:00 a.m., all the families wait-

ed a mile away from the station with their belongings in hand. Far from the watchful eyes of the communist guards, and under the guise of darkness, the train stopped at their location at the designated time.

As the families clambered on, Leibel Mochkin asked Zalman if he should join the group. Zalman answered, "We are going with self-sacrifice. If you agree to have self-sacrifice too, join us." Leibel immediately jumped on to the train.

Just before 4:00 a.m., Sarah Katzenelenbogen, a principal organizing member, approached Zalman, saying that there were more people eager to join. She wanted Zalman to stall the train, but it was not to be. The train began to depart.

The director wanted the train to reach the border before 6:00 a.m., when the guards changed, because the night guards had been bribed to let the train through. During those two hours to the border, everyone memorized new Polish names as they appeared on their false papers. At the border, the guards checked the documents, and asked the children for their names. Each child dutifully said their Polish name, and the soldiers, in on the scheme, chuckled between themselves, "Ah, they all remember their names!"

It was a stressful and tense experience for Zalman, but it was nothing compared to the relief they experienced in finally escaping the clutch of the Soviet Union. "The night we escaped was frigid and dark," Zalman said, "but after we crossed the border, our hearts glowed with warmth."

WANDERING THROUGH EUROPE

They arrived the following morning in Krakow, Poland, where they were suddenly detained by Polish police. They realized someone had informed on them, and that the Poles planned to transfer them back to Russia. It seemed their efforts had been for naught. Even worse, they knew the communists would punish them se-



*Lubavitchers
unloading their
belongings upon
arrival at their new
home in a suburb of
Paris.*

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

verely for their attempt to escape.

The group was brought to a large hall in the station, where they were told that each person would be stripped and checked. At Zalman's turn, they began rummaging through his belongings, when a high ranking officer entered the room. The Polish police rose to their feet hastily. Incredibly, he ordered them to immediately release the group.

Ten minutes later, the officer entered the hall, and sternly looked over the crowd before telling them they were free to continue on their way. They later heard that he was an American spy who helped many Jews survive the war.

They immediately departed from Krakow and headed to Prague, Czechoslovakia, arriving on Shabbos morning. The Zionist organization known as the *Bricha* wanted them to immediately continue to Austria. The Lubavitchers felt they were already out

of danger but the Bricha insisted they leave immediately across the border. They waited until after Shabbos.

When they arrived on foot at the border, Austrian soldiers detained them. Their guide suddenly shouted, "Three meals, *bim-bam*, three meals, *bim-bam*!" The group of Russian refugees peered at him oddly, unsure what he was talking about, but when the guards shook their heads in approval, they understood it was a secret code. They passed over the border safely.

They remained in Displaced Persons' camps in Austria for close to a year, receiving support from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ("The Joint"). The Bronstein family later moved to Paris, where Zalman tried his hand at manufacturing knitted clothing, but was not successful. Their meager income was provided by a French stipend for children of refugees, and the Joint.



Home at Last



Zalman wrote to the Rebbe Rayatz that he is weary of moving from one place to another, and that he'd like to settle permanently in Israel. In December 1948, the Rebbe Rayatz responded, encouraging them to leave for Israel. "G-d should assist that you have uneventful travels and settle well," he wrote.

In 1949, they travelled on the Kadima ship, arriving in Israel a few days before Pesach. The family was brought to the Pardes Chana immigrant camp, where there were already many Lubavitch families. They worked as farmers in the orange orchards, or at other menial tasks that came their way.

Together with other Lubavitchers, a committee was created to address their unique communal needs. Zalman was tasked with making contact with Lubavitchers already residing in Israel, and their umbrella organization, Agudas Chasidei Chabad ("Aguch"), which had an office in Tel Aviv.

Together with Aguch, they began negotiating with various governmental offices for a plot of land where they could live and farm. They struggled to find a suitable location. The Lubavitchers wanted to be in the center of Israel, and many of the suggestions



*Shazar (center) with members of the Chabad leadership in Israel.
Zalman is ninth from the left.*

PHOTO: AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD LIBRARY

were in the far north or south.

Various political parties attempted to win over the support of Lubavitchers in order to increase their voting power. On one occasion, the Mizrachi Party offered Aguch a large potential property, on condition that Aguch support their political faction. Aguch immediately refused, saying that as Lubavitchers they were apolitical. When pressure was building that they accept, a committee member was known to have said incredulously, “Does the Land of Israel belong to the Mizrachi Party?”

LEFT IN TEL AVIV

When Aguch members were scheduled to visit a potential location for the Chabad town, Zalman – the youngest of the group – was left behind at the offices in Tel Aviv. Zalman debated whether to head home to Pardes Chana, or wait for the group to re-



The Rebbe Rayatz's letter about the Bronstein family moving to Israel.

turn with their assessment. Standing outside for some fresh air, someone approached him, and asked if he was a representative of Aguch. When he answered in the affirmative, the man asked why Aguch was refusing the town of Safaria, a good location in the center of Israel. “All Aguch needs to do,” he said, “is join the Mizrachi Party and then you can immediately settle there.”

For Zalman, the information was gold; he now knew that land was, in fact, available in the center of Israel, and they could make efforts to negotiate via other channels. Zalman told the man that they would consider the offer.

He immediately went to the home of another Aguch member. They studied a map and realized Safaria was perfectly located. They waited impatiently for the other members to return so they



*The town of Safaria, in central Israel,
which Zalman found for the Lubavitch families.*

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

could share the news. Indeed, they were all excited to hear about Safaria because the place they had just visited was a poor fit for the community's need.

Since Zalman had first heard about Safaria, he took a leading role in investigating it. Early the next morning, he set out with another Aguch member. They were met with dusty roads, empty orchards, wolves and jackals. They also feared the possibility of terrorists, who were known to trespass into abandoned Israeli towns.

Their fear grew with every step on the dry dirt road. Suddenly, two guards approached them with weapons in hand. They gruffly asked what the two were doing there. After a few moments, Zalman realized they were probably guarding the premises to prevent anyone from squatting in the abandoned village. Zalman, taking a gamble, told the guards that Mizrachi had sent them. The guards asked, "You are from Chabad?" and the two confirmed that they were. The guards let them through without further question.

They walked to the center of the town, and quickly began mapping out various landmarks which could serve as schools and synagogues. They walked through the village until its border met the train tracks. They counted a total of 18 homes built from brick, and several more that did not seem habitable. There was no electricity or plumbing installed, and the task before them would not be easy, but the location was right and they saw its potential. While Mizrachi was still opposed to transferring the land, Zalman already had detailed plans for the village.

They returned to Tel Aviv and began to look for other ways to acquire the village. After several dead-ends, the Lubavitchers realized they would need to fight for the property.

When Mizrachi learned that Aguch knew of the location, they gave the Lubavitchers a deadline by when they must join their political ranks; otherwise, the homes would be given to others. Indeed, on another visit, Aguch members saw that several homes were newly occupied. Realizing that Mizrachi was determined to deny them the village, they decided they would simply move in, without clearance.

That night, three trucks arrived to Pardes Chana, and many left to the ramshackle village. The rest followed via public transportation later that day. It was a hot and dark summer night in 1949 when they arrived, and they could barely see anything. Children were crying, and the howling jackals frightened everyone. Zalman, who knew the village well, tried to calm them, and directed each family where to go. Within a few hours, the remainder of the homes were occupied.

By the next morning, the Mizrachi found out what had happened. They came to the village utterly enraged, demanding an explanation. Since the homes were occupied, the Mizrachi had little recourse. For the next few months, a bitter feud ensued. Ultimately a compromise was reached in which both groups would share the village.



A home being built in Safaria for a Lubavitch family.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

Although they were hopeful, the arrangement did not work out. Both Mizrachi and Lubavitch had specific lifestyles that did not jive well together. Nonetheless, it took over a decade until Safaria officially became the village of Kfar Chabad.

BIRTH PANGS

Many families in the village were living in decrepit conditions. Some lived in tents, while others shared homes that were not habitable. They used kerosine to light their homes, and water was brought from a well in the nearby field. The first thing they did was organize a primitive mikvah, no more than a ditch surrounded by a partition. Going out in middle of the night to use the outhouses, located far from the village center, was extremely frightening due to the animals roaming freely.

Slowly, they began to fix up the homes. The bureaucracy involved in establishing a village was difficult to navigate and the



Farming in the new Lubavitch village.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

Aguch committee members worked tirelessly. Eventually, they brought electricity to the village, followed by a paved road to the highway.

“Despite the difficult situation,” Zalman said, “people did not complain, not only because they were kindhearted, but because there was no one to complain to.”

Finally, after two years, the village received additional land they could build on. Lots were raffled off to families, and considerations were made to allow relatives to live near each other, and for larger families to receive larger plots of land.

Like others, under the guidance of an engineer and contractor, Zalman built his home on his own, with special funding from the Jewish Agency for such projects. It took him a year, and when they finally moved in, Zalman said, “We felt like we finally arrived in the Promised Land. In our own home, we could live a peaceful and tranquil life.”

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מו"מ א"א ב"ב ב"ר
פ"ה שניאור זלמן ש"י

בית כ' ס"ה תש"ו
ברוקלין

עלום וברכהו
אין ענטשער אויף אייער בריף פון י"א חשוון, אין וועלכען
איר שרייבט אז דער מצב הערנסה איז שווער און איר זייט דאס תולה
וויילע צו הקלאות דארטען אפולע געלט וכו'.

אבער דאס איז בכלל נישט טארשאנדיק, וויילע אין שילע
מאלען אין אה"ק ת"ר איז אשילי אן געזען פארקען פון זיין אייני בא
הקלאות. און עס איז א וואונדער וואס נישט קיין איין דעם וואס
אין האב שוין געשריבען פערענע סאל לאנשי הכתר בכללות, אז לויטן
תגם הצטח דוקאליך כ"ת אחרת ברכה, אפ"ר וואס ס'ער עס וועט זיין
גרעסער די אחרות, נישט נאר אין זנינים רוחנים נאר אויך אין ענינים
בשמים, אלץ גרעסער וועט זיין זי ברכה פון השי"ת, נישט נאר אין ג"ה
ענינים בשמים נאר אויך אין ענינים רוחנים (און דאס אליין וואס
קומט אן שווער, נאר א הורבטה נוספת, אז אין דעם אנדערשט זיך, זעלבסט
טארשפערליך, אז איך וויל באשאנען בחנוגע צו אייך בפרט, אבער דאס
איז נוגע בכללות אין די ענינים פון כפר, און כסילא איז דאס נוגע
יעדער פרט פון דעם כלל. און דעריבער קומט בא ס'יר נישט אויס, אז איר
זאלט ליקווידירען דאס וואס איר האט פאקוסען פון דער סיכנות וכו'.
ולמרט נאך דעם אז עס זיינען דורכגעגאנגען די שווערע יארען און זיי
זיינען שוין פון הינטערזיך.

איר בין געווען צוטרירען זייער צו זעהען אין אייער
בריף אז איר וויילט נישט צונעמען אייער זון פון דער ישיבה, און
פען האט געדארט צוגריידיגן זיך מיט דער הנהלה פון דער ישיבה
זי איז פאר עס פאסענד צו לערנען אויף ספיכה, און אויב יע, איז בי
גלייך אדער אסווארטען אביסעל צייט. און השי"ת זאל אייך מצליח זיין
צו אנוואנען גוטעס בכלי הנ"ל.

בברכת ה' חתה
[Signature]

The Rebbe's letter about Zalman's financial situation.

DAILY LIFE

Each family received chickens and a calf, but many were stolen by neighboring Arabs. Those that managed to protect their animals from theft struggled to care for them, having been city dwellers all their lives.

Many worked as farmers, but with little previous experience, they were considerably challenged. One year brought a drought, another flooding, and another was Shemithah. Many families survived on bread and butter alone.

In addition to the regular robberies plaguing the village, in



Zalman at a communal gathering (second from right), circa 1959.

PHOTO: RIVKAH ZAKLIKOWSKI/LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

1956, several youth were murdered by terrorists who opened fire on a synagogue full of children. The community was struggling.

Aguch made efforts to source more funding for the village. They often brought representatives of the Jewish Agency and other wealthy donors to tour the village. Zalman, at times, was asked to recite the *E-l malei rachamim* for the deceased members of a donor's family. It was said that his cantorial rendition would bring tears to their eyes.

There was true unity among the villagers, Zalman said, which was essential while they lobbied the government for their needs. Particularly memorable for him were the dedications of the shuls, as well as the bar mitzvah of his son Herschel, the first milestone event held in the village.

While they had makeshift premises for the boys to study, the girls would commute to a neighboring city. This arrangement was not sustainable because families aspired to have all their children

educated in the village. Zalman wrote to the Rebbe about his daughters, and the lack of a local school. In the Rebbe's response, he encouraged Zalman to make every effort to establish a school in the village. With this encouragement, the community refurbished a building and the Beit Rivkah school was established. For many years, Zalman took great satisfaction in the fact that his daughters attended a school whose inception they inspired.

With all of the challenges, Zalman said, the villagers persevered. Incrementally, the village grew to house many schools, mikvahs, shuls, and families with shared values.



Leading the Services



Zalman aspired to become a potato farmer. He woke at six in the morning and worked in the fields until nightfall. Unfortunately, this endeavor was a failure and they earned a pittance, not nearly enough to support his family. In 1954, Zalman wrote to the Rebbe about the money he lost, and the challenges that ensued.

The Rebbe responded that he does not understand why they invested their own money, when many in Israel are successful with using the tools provided to them by government agencies. “Therefore you should not liquidate that which the Jewish Agency gave you, especially since the difficult years are already behind you.”

The reason, the Rebbe felt, was because there was friction between the Chasidim. “The more unity there is,” the Rebbe wrote, “not only in spiritual pursuits, but also in material livelihood... the greater the blessings from G-d (and the fact that there are [financial] difficulties is a sign that this [lack of unity] is the issue).”

The Rebbe wrote that that this was not necessarily reflective upon Zalman, but that discord could be widespread in the village, and automatically this affects everyone.



*Zalman talks at the bar mitzvah of his son Yosef,
as Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman (center) listens.*

Zalman continued farming for the next two years, but sought additional sources of income to support his family. He contemplated becoming a cantor, but an episode from his childhood, which he had come to appreciate and cherish, as well as his experiences in the Soviet choir, held him back. As a child, he had joined a shul choir in his hometown, but his uncle, Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, criticized him, saying that if Zalman would one day become a singer, this was not the reason his parents had struggled to keep yiddishkeit. For this reason, when he led prayer services in Kfar Chabad, he despised being called a *chazzan*, but rather “a person who leads prayer services.”

By then, however, Lubavitchers were frequently visiting kibbutzim – which were typically staunchly anti-religious – to sing *nigunim* and teach Chasidus. Zalman took part in those events, and this got him thinking about his prospects.

When he received an invitation to be chazzan at the Great



The Rebbe with a group from Kfar Chabad, 1970's. Zalman is talking to the Rebbe.

the congregation, and the merit of the community should assist you in your needs.”

Zalman accepted the offer. After the holidays, the congregation asked Zalman to be their chazzan year-round for a respectable salary. They stipulated that he use a tuning fork on Shabbos, which would help with uneven pitch. Zalman was unsure if this was permitted on Shabbos, and he wrote letters to Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, a member of the chief rabbi’s rabbinical council. The former said it was okay, and the latter said it was not. Rabbi Shneur Zalman Garelik, rabbi of the village, told Zalman to do as he sees fit. Zalman was in a bind. He wrote to the Rebbe, and a few weeks later, the answer arrived: “G-d will send livelihood from another source.”

When he received the letter, Chaya told him, “Zalman, we may eat bread and margarine, but we will do as the Rebbe guided.”

Despite the difficulty, he immediately resigned from the position at the Great Synagogue.



Zalman leading a concert of Chabad nigunim in Caesarea, 1966.

Over the years, Zalman became a beloved chazzan in several shuls in Tel Aviv. The congregants loved him, not just for his good voice, but for the heart he brought while leading davening, and the personal connections he established with each congregant. For many, he furthered their involvement in Jewish life and practice.

In the shul in Tzalaha, a neighborhood in Tel Aviv, he catered to an upper-class community that included many high-ranking IDF officials. That year, he led the davening for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and the crowd was euphoric. They asked him to return for Simchas Torah. Despite this not being part of his contract, he went voluntarily. At the end of an inspiring holiday of dancing and singing, he convinced them to join him for Second Hakafof in Kfar Chabad after the holiday. He would proudly recall how they danced all night, taking pride in their Jewish roots.

He would later become manager of an Artik ice cream plant, and then manager of the Kfar Chabad grocery store, which grew from its tiny premises into a large supermarket.



Zalman learning at home.

For 20 years, Zalman met with the village committee every Motzei Shabbos. When he resigned from his volunteer post, he continued to be involved as a consultant. “After Lubavitch headquarters in New York,” Zalman said, “Kfar Chabad was the next epicenter of Chabad in the world.”

Kfar Chabad was not just another village in Israel, he said, but a fulcrum of Jewish activity that made waves across Israel. Every year, tens of thousands would come to study in the village’s schools, while hundreds of volunteers would leave its parameters to bring Judaism to Israelis across the country.

“With no doubt,” Zalman concluded, “its influence has reached the entire globe. In essence, this is what the Rebbe wanted... and I am proud that I was the one to find it [the location], and to assist in helping it flourish.”



The Home's Rock



Over the years, the Bronstein family struggled financially, often with little food to eat, but Zalman and Chaya built a happy home. Zalman said that this attitude, of being happy with what they had, was due to his wife. He says that she never complained, and encouraged him to continue his communal activities.

Chaya brought a spiritual atmosphere to the home. In every free moment, she would recite Tehillim, and seldom chitchatted. She davened with great concentration for at least an hour daily. The children knew that, while praying, she was not to be disturbed. In discussion with one of her children's teachers, she told the teacher that her children do not need to be scholars, "but they should daven as a chasid daven."

"She was the center of the tribe," her son Yosef said, and was constantly concerned for the wellbeing of her children. Daily, she would say every child and grandchild's chapter of Tehillim (per their age). When it reached the point when her descendants were numerous and it became difficult to keep track, she tried to say as much Tehillim as possible daily, starting from the beginning, in

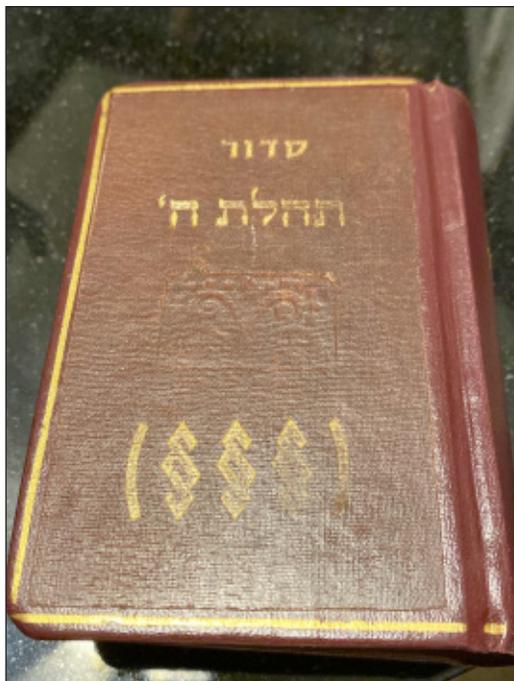


Chaya Bronstein.

order to cover all of their chapters.

In 1967, Chaya Bronstein went to New York. In a private audience, the Rebbe told Chaya that he is giving her son Yosef a pocket siddur, on condition that he receive a copy of the boy's report card. That year, Yosef worked hard to keep his grades up, and the principal arranged a beautiful one to send to the Rebbe. Yosef continued to send his report cards over the years. When he began to study in a *mesivta* that no longer gave report cards, he wrote to the Rebbe about it. In the Rebbe's response, he thanked Yosef for taking the time to inform him.

During Chaya's visit to New York in 1967, war was stirring in the Middle East. Chaya feared for her family, and wanted to return home quickly. In an audience with the Rebbe, she raised this idea. The Rebbe asked her how long her trip was scheduled for. She told him that she planned on being in New York for a total of 53 days,



The siddur the Rebbe gave to Yosef.

and she had another 17 days to go. Her return flight was scheduled on Wednesday, June 7th.

“Remain here as planned,” the Rebbe instructed. “The situation will stabilize and all will be good.” He then told her to speak at the upcoming Lubavitch women’s convention about the activities of Aguch in Israel. “You should report only good news from Israel,” he said.

On the fifth of June, war broke out. Her family called immediately, telling her not to return to Israel. Even if she wanted to, there were few available flights to Israel.

On Tuesday night, the Rebbe called her into a private audience. Emotionally, she told the Rebbe that she doesn’t think it will be possible to return to Israel. The Rebbe calmed her down, and told her that she should plan to leave the following week. “You will have a way to fly,” he assured her.



The Rebbe during the Lag Beomer parade, 1967, which Chaya attended.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES





*Zalman with his
great-grandson, Dovie
Levy.*

She told the Rebbe about her deep fears about her family and community, and her frequent prayers. “I am asking of G-d that everyone be healthy,” she told the Rebbe.

The Rebbe said that everyone will be well, and she will find them healthy at home. “Report good news, and give regards to the women and girls in Kfar Chabad, and be active in their activities,” he said.

She was immediately comforted by the Rebbe’s words. Indeed, Chaya left the following Sunday, just a day after the war ended.



CLEVER KINDNESS

*The Life of
Reb Shmuel Pewzner*



Students Worry



In the town of Lubavitch, Shmuel Pewzner was constantly on the lookout for people who would donate to the charitable causes he spearheaded. Among them, he ran a free loan society, assisted others with medical needs, and helped people deal with bureaucratic matters.

Even at the age of 20, between his intense study schedule, the clever student would bring his ledger to prayer services, hoping there might be a new face in town who would give a donation. When the Rebbe Rashab would receive people for yechidus, Shmuel would wait outside with his ledger open.

When Shraga Zarchin – a student at the yeshivah – took ill with a severe leg infection, his roommates did not know how to help him. Shmuel made his way over to see what he could do. After quickly assessing the situation, he told Shraga, “G-d willing, you will be healthy. I will bring a doctor.”

There was only one doctor in Lubavitch, and he lived on the other side of town. Shmuel made his way over in the snow and wind, bringing the doctor back with him. After examining Shraga, he prescribed medication. Without blinking an eye, Shmuel went



Reb Shmuel in his youth.



Reb Shmuel.

to the pharmacy and purchased the needed medicines. Over the next few days, Shraga healed. Sixty years later, he still warmly recalled the kindness.

EARLY LIFE

He was born around the year 1888 to Mordechai and Masha Mala Pewzner, who had deep roots in Chabad and were related to the Chabad Schneersohn family. The couple had three daughters, but tragically their sons all passed away in infancy.

After many years, Shmuel was born and Masha Mala was afraid that he, too, might not survive. Thus, when he was a baby, she pierced his ear and he wore an earring. The reason, she would say, was to ward off *ayin harah* from her only son. For this reason, when studying in Lubavitch, he was known as “*Shmuel mit der irengel*,” Shmuel with the earring. Years later in New York, when



Esther Hadassah.

his nephew, Mottel Rivkin, told the Rebbe Rayatz that he was Shmuel's nephew, the Rebbe touched his own ear lobe, as if to ask if he was referring to "Shmuel with the earring." In addition, for *segulah* reasons, he would not eat animals innards.

In 1913, he married Esther Hadassah Agarashkin in Klimavichy, Belorussia, where he became known as "Shmuel Masha Mala's," and worked as a schoolteacher. Esther Hadassah helped support the family by selling homemade bread in the market. Together, they had five sons and two daughters.

Early in their marriage, they resided in his parents' home. On a visit to Lubavitch, the Rebbe Rashab instructed them to move out. When he returned home on Friday afternoon, he told his wife what the Rebbe had said, and that he wants to fulfill the Rebbe's instructions as soon as possible, "even before Shabbos." The couple moved out immediately.

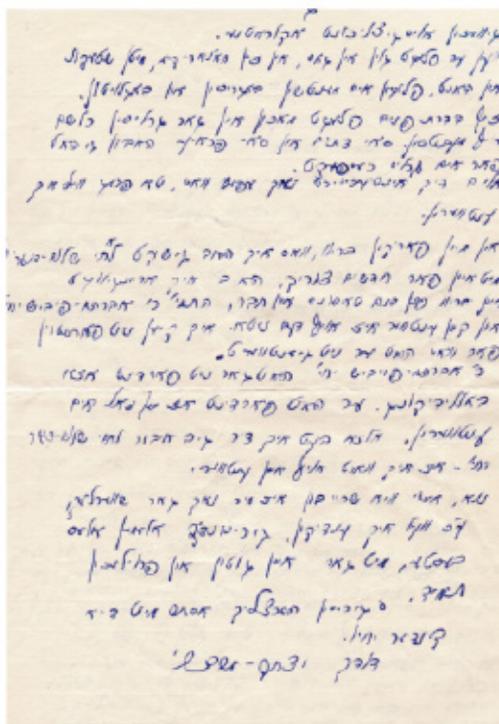
Shraga Zarchin's
letter about Reb
Shmuel Peuzner.



In the town, he was respected by all factions of the Jewish community. He was an attractive man with a penetrating gaze and strong facial features. When he would walk through the streets, garbed in a long frock, locals would flock to him. His beard was colored by *tabbak*, snuff tobacco, and his son Yitzchok Mordechai recalled, “It was wondrous, and made him look beautiful.”

One day, Rabbi Abba Pliskin met Shmuel in the street and asked how he was doing. Disheartened, Shmuel sighed. When asked what was wrong, Shmuel made a large circular motion in the air while humbly saying, “I should be like this, but... *Nu*, I’ve become a *Shulchan Aruch* Jew,” effectively saying that in his early years in Lubavitch, service of G-d with passion was at the center of his life, but now, it is as if he had just become another person fulfilling Jewish observance by rote.

In a postcard to his friend Rabbi Yosef Chein, he wrote that he finally understands what their *mashpia*, Rabbi Shmuel Groinem, told them: “Being in yeshivah is like davening. Just as [proper] dav-



*Reb Shmuel's son,
Yitzchok Mordechai,
shares his memories
of his father.*

ening influences your entire day, yeshivah influences your entire life.” He wrote that just as warming a home requires an even hotter stove, so too, in yeshivah the spiritual warmth needs to be intense enough that it will carry on to one’s life.

The family would later move to Ekaterinoslav (today Dni-pro), where he became close to the city’s chief rabbi, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, father of the Rebbe.

During the Russian Revolution in 1917, Shmuel debated whether his family should go into hiding due to the rising vitriol against Jews. Since he sported a full beard and feared going out into the streets, he sent his six-year-old daughter Risha (later Azimov) to ask Rabbi Levi Yitzchak what to do. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak answered, “Every bullet has an address. Your family does not need to go into hiding.” Rabbi Levi Yitzchak then gave her a blessing to



*Reb Sholem Ber
Pewzner.*

live a long life. Indeed, she lived until the age of 89.

During WWII, when rumors began amassing about German cruelty against Jews, Shmuel was aghast. He believed, as he had witnessed in WWI, that the Germans were a kind people. When the Germans entered the war with the Soviet Union, the couple escaped to Pochep, Russia. They were murdered on the 29th of Adar in 1942. Most of their children were not with them, and they survived.

Their son, Sholom Ber, smuggled out of the Soviet Union with a false Polish passport (see pages 40-45), and studied at the Lubavitch yeshivah in Brunoy, France. He would later marry the daughter of the yeshivah's mashpia, Rochel Leah Nemenov.

Their wedding was scheduled during the month following the Rebbe Rayatz's passing. Rabbi Nemenov wrote to the Ramash asking if they should reschedule the wedding for another time, or



*Rabbi Nissan
Nemenov (right)
and Reb Sholem Ber
Pewzner.*

perhaps not have music or the like.

The Rebbe responded that they should bring joy to the bride and groom through playing Chabad nigunim. The Rebbe added that at times *maamarim* have ideas that are directed to specific individuals. In the *maamar* printed around the time of the Rebbe Rayatz's passing, the Rebbe noted a hint to a wedding, where it talks about a sage who danced holding willows before the bride. "This is the solution to your question," the Ramash wrote, "and surely you will tell this to the bride, groom, and all the gathered—and it will be internalized—at it says [in the discourse]."

In 1951, they moved to New York, where Sholom Ber took an active role in publishing countless *seforim*, including many for the Rebbe, as a partner in the Balshon Linotype printing company.

While studying in New York, Yosef Bronstein, Zalman's son, was introduced to Shternie Pewzner, Shmuel's granddaughter. The



Rabbi Peretz Mochkin (right) and Rabbi Nissan Nemenov, at the sheva brachos of Yosef (left) and Shternie Bronstein.

two decided to build their home together, marrying in Adar 1977. For the Bronsteins, this marriage held special meaning extending back to World War I. Shternie was the granddaughter of Rabbi Nissan Nemenov, who had assisted Chaya Bronstein while her husband, Zalman, was serving in the Red Army.

Zalman, reflecting on the marriage that united these two families, said, “It is the result of G-d’s wondrous ways.”



**THE
REBBE'S
GUIDANCE
TO THE
FAMILY**



Paris, New York & Israel



After fleeing the Soviet Union, dozens of Lubavitch families made their way to a suburb of Paris, where they remained until finding a country to emigrate.

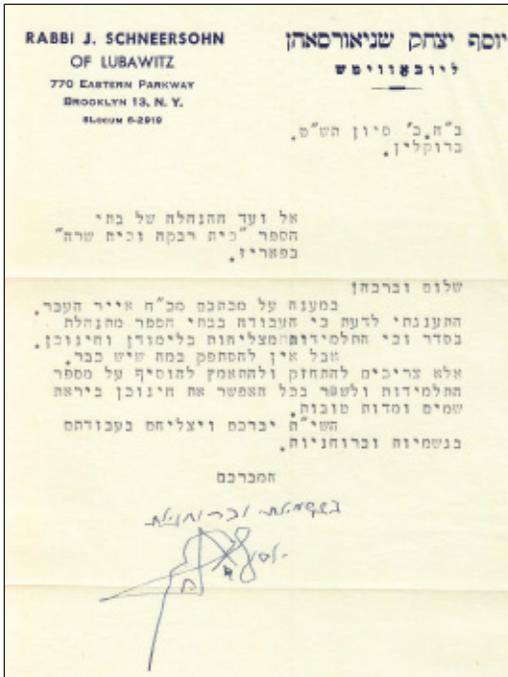
There, Lubavitchers established the Beth Rivkah school, and began to teach girls who had never experienced a formal Jewish education during their years in Russia. In the late 1940s, Rabbi Yehoshua Pinson, an upstanding chasid and an honest and organized individual, was appointed by the Rebbe Rayatz to the school committee.

In the summer of 1949, the Rebbe Rayatz notified the committee that he is pleased with the school's development and the progress of its students. "But you should not be satisfied with this," the Rebbe wrote. "You need to strengthen yourself, and make efforts to bring in more students, and to make the school as best as it possibly can be, so the students will be educated to have awe of G-d and good character traits."

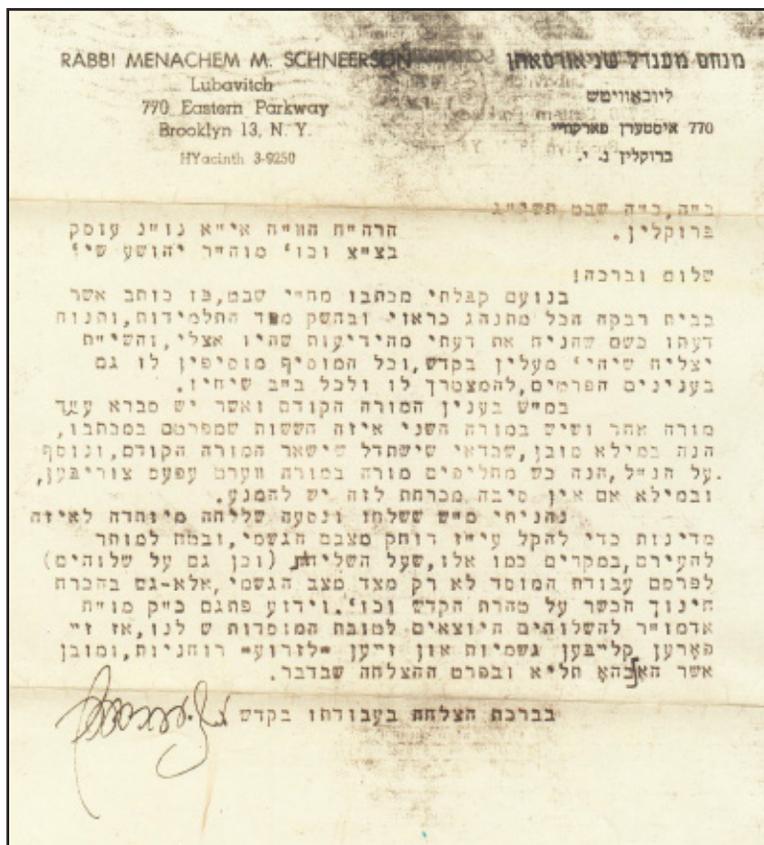
Upon arriving in the United States, Rabbi Pinson joined the committee of the Beth Rivkah school established in Brooklyn. In a 1953 letter, the Rebbe wrote that he was happy to hear that the



Rabbi Yehoshua Pinson (sitting left) with his parents and siblings, 1937.



The Rebbe Rayatz's letter about Beis Rivkah in Paris.



The Rebbe's letter about Beth Rivkah in Paris.

school was functioning well, and that the students are enthusiastic. “Just as these reports reassured me, you should be reassured,” the Rebbe continued.

The Rebbe blessed Rabbi Pinson and his family for his continued activism.

Rabbi Pinson once asked the Rebbe about replacing a certain teacher. While there was a teacher lined up to step into the role, there were doubts about her suitability. The Rebbe responded, “It is worthwhile to make efforts that the previous teacher return. In addition to the reasons you enumerated, when you change one



*Rabbi Pinson (standing left), as gabai of 770,
auctioning off the kibudim in front of the Rebbe.*

teacher for another, there is a rift that happens, and therefore, if there is no compulsory reason, you should refrain from replacing [the teacher].”

When Rabbi Pinson asked the Rebbe about sending a fundraiser abroad on behalf of the school, the Rebbe wrote that she should not only raise funds because the financial situation is poor, but because there is a great need for quality Jewish education.

The Rebbe further explained that the fundraisers also have the obligation to influence donors to send their own children to Jewish day schools. “Their purpose,” the Rebbe wrote, “is to collect material needs, and also to sow spirituality.”

For many years, Rabbi Pinson worked at the wholesale plastic store of Dovid Deitsch in Soho, Manhattan, while dedicating his evenings to learning and community activism. He retired in the mid-1970s from his day job, and took on larger roles in the Chabad community, becoming a *gabai* in 770.



*Rabbi Pinson (standing), gives a shiur in gemera,
at the Kollel Zkeinim Tiferes Levi Yitzchok.*

When the Rebbe called on communities across the globe to establish study groups for retired people, in memory of his father, Rabbi Pinson headed and taught at the Crown Heights division of Kollel Tiferes Zkeinim Levi Yitzchok. He also became director of Colel Chabad, the oldest existing charity organization in Israel.

His connection to Israel was also expressed in the funding of a large shul building, Beis Nachum Yitzchok, in Kfar Chabad, in memory of his father. And in Sefad, he sponsored a Chabad House, naming it Beis Luba after his wife who tragically passed away in a car accident in 1974.

In 1985, Rabbi Pinson wrote to the Rebbe that he was going to Israel for his father's *yahrtzeit*. Reb Nachum Yitzchok was arrested by the communists for his activities for yiddishkeit, and died in a Soviet prison. Because he could not go to his grave, as is customary on the day of his passing, for many years went to Israel instead to inquire about the shul he dedicated in his memory and go to burial places of our sages in Israel. He wrote that he planned on visiting the offices of Colel Chabad. Perhaps, he wrote, they



In front of the shul, in Kfar Chabad, he dedicated in memory of his father.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

could establish a food pantry in Jerusalem, which he heard was greatly needed in the city. The Rebbe responded:

לע"ע לא מצאתי שם עסקן אחד
שיכולים לסמוך עליו
לא זוהי כוונת המנדבים כלל
—אן שפארען ווארפען געלט

Until now, I have not found even *one* activist that could be relied upon. It is not *at all* the intentions of donors to donate to a program where there is no financial accountability— but rather there is *wasting* of the funds.

On another occasion, in regard to establishing a fund that would support families marrying off children, he wrote about a plan to work with a free loan society in Kiryat Malachi that would be managed under the auspices of Colel Chabad. The Rebbe, sensing potential friction, responded:

אין להכולל דכאן להתערב (וסו"ס לנהל) הפוליטיקע דשם

It is not [recommended that] the institution here [in the United States] become involved (or manage) politics there [in Israel].



Global Guidance



Printed below are three responses from the Rebbe to Rabbi Berel Levy, who headed the OK Laboratory and carried out many covert missions for the Rebbe in the Soviet Union. For context, we present several pages from *Kosher Investigator: How Rabbi Berel Levy Built the OK and Transformed the World of Kosher Supervision* (Hasidic Archives, 2017) by Dovid Zaklikowski:

“Would you give me a ride to the synagogue?” Rabbi Levy asked the occupants of the black car. “You are going there too, so why not just take me with you?”

The time for prayer services was approaching, but there were no taxis outside the Soviet hotel in Rostov. The Soviet secret police, the KGB, were following his every move. He knew that as soon as he found a ride, the car idling outside the hotel would make its way to the synagogue as well. But the two stone-faced men inside ignored his request.

“We finally got a taxi,” Mrs. Levy recalled. “We get into the taxi, and of course the black car follows right behind us.”

Rabbi Levy’s extensive travel schedule and his willingness to take risks spurred one of the Chabad movement’s most dar-



Rabbi Berel Levy dancing with his grandson Menachem Levy.

ing projects in the 20th century: sending Westerners to the Soviet Union with the goal of spreading Judaism, supplying Soviet Jews with ritual objects and assisting them in any way possible.

While the Soviet government did not outlaw religious practice, they did everything they could to uproot it. Public Jewish gatherings were forbidden. Young people were ridiculed by their teachers for attending synagogue, and most Jewish schools and institutions were shuttered or requisitioned for other purposes. Ritual items became difficult to find as the older generation died out.

For many years the Rebbe sent ritual items to the Soviet Union through the Israeli diplomatic mission in the Soviet Union. But when diplomatic ties between the two countries were severed after the Six-Day War in 1967, he began to look for an alternate route.

Around the same time, American Jewish activists began to publicly protest on behalf of Soviet Jewry. As his work in kosher took him to the Far East frequently, Rabbi Levy wondered if he might be able to assist Jews in the USSR. In 1967 he wrote to the



At the tziyon of the Rebbe's father, Reb Leivik.

Rebbe asking advice about entering the Soviet Union.

It was a dangerous undertaking. Not long before, a fisherman in Prague had discovered the body of Charles Jordan, a high official with the Joint Distribution Committee, in the Vltava River. Mr. Jordan dedicated his life to helping Jews and other refugees to flee the Soviet Union. The murder remains unsolved until today, but at the time it was believed to have been orchestrated by the KGB.

The Rebbe discouraged Rabbi Levy, stating that it was too risky, and he dropped the idea.

In 1972, Rabbi Levy wrote to inform the Rebbe that he would be in Europe for several days, and from there would travel to the Far East. In between, he would have a break of several days. "Should I go to the Soviet Union to assist the Jews there?" he asked. The Rebbe crossed out the words "Should I," and returned the letter. The message was clear.

Rabbi Levy's trip to the Soviet Union that winter was the first

of many.

On that first trip to the Soviet Union, the Levys did not know what to expect, or how to make contact with Jews in the country. In order to be granted visas, they were required to provide a detailed itinerary, with flights, hotels and tourist destinations scheduled to the minute. This itinerary had to be preapproved by the Soviet travel agency, Intourist. Founded by the infamous Joseph Stalin, the agency was staffed with secret police. It was said that “Intourist is to tourism what indigestion is to digestion.”

The Levys decided to focus their itinerary on cities that were important in Chabad history or had a personal significance. They scheduled visits to such places as Ilya, the town where Rabbi Levy’s maternal grandparents had resided, and Haditch, where the founder of the Chabad movement, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, was interred. They hoped that in each city they would be able to visit the synagogues and meet local Jews.

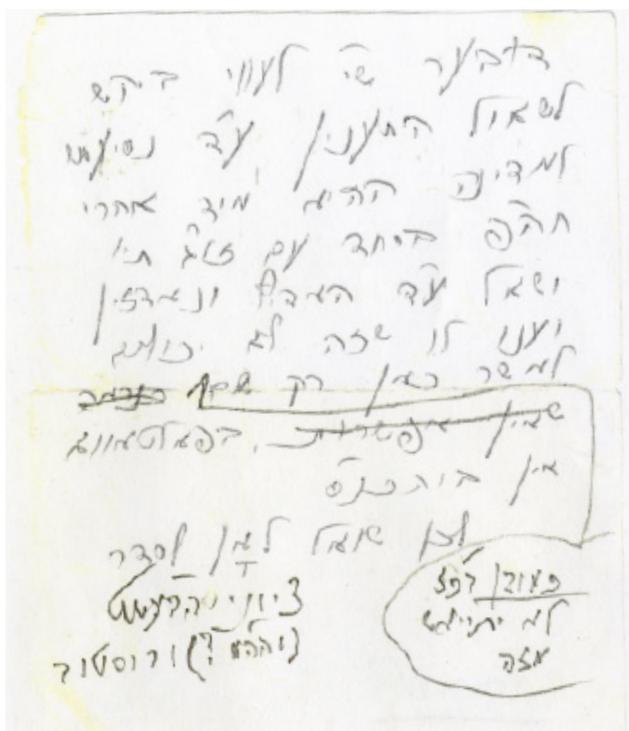
1. DON'T GIVE UP

Before a trip to the Soviet Union with his wife, Rabbi Levy informed the Rebbe that he had requested permission from the Soviet authorities to visit Haditch and Nizhyn, the burial places of the Alter Rebbe and the Mittlerer Rebbe. “And they responded that they cannot grant permission while I am here [in America]. It seems that it will not be possible [to visit the sites].”

The Rebbe crossed out “It seems that it will not be possible,” and wrote, “It is *understood* in all this, that he should not give up.” And at the end, added that Rabbi Levi should also try to visit the grave of the Baal Shem Tov, the city of Rostov (where the Rebbe Rashab is buried), and perhaps also the grave of the Maggid of Mezritch.



Few in the American Jewish community understood how dangerous religious observance had become in the Soviet Union. After



1. Don't Give Up

דובער שי לעווי ביקש לשאל התענין ע"ד נסיעתו למדינה ההיא מיד אחר חה"פ ביחד עם זוג' תי' ושאל ע"ד האדיץ ונאדזין וענו לו שזה לא יכולים לאשר כאן רק שם, כנראה שאין אפשרות, בפאלטאווא אין ביהכנ"ס

כ"ק אדמו"ר מחק: "כנאה שאין אפשרות" וכתב: **כמובן** בכ"ז לא יתאייש מזה

בסוף המכתב כתב הרבי: ציוני הבעש"ט (והה"מ?) ורוסטוב

מאחורה כתב: **מהיר**



Dancing with a group of yidden in the Soviet Union.

a visit to the USSR, Senator James Buckley spoke publicly about his visit to a synagogue and the fear he had witnessed in the Jews he met there.

“Religious persecution is an important part of the strategy of the Soviet rulers to erase all forms of freedom,” he wrote in a February 1975 statement. “In many ways [the Soviet Union today is] far more cruel and more oppressive than even the persecution under Stalin.”

Mrs. Levy was blunt about the anxiety she felt during their trips. “Freedom!! At last,” she began a letter to her daughter. “I have not slept one night yet since I left home. If I had to stay any longer, I don’t think I’d have made it.” Until they landed in the Rome airport, she wrote, she never believed they would make it out. “It’s just an awful country, and we don’t know how lucky we are to be living elsewhere.”

Though Rabbi Levy himself seemed to think little of the risks involved in his expeditions, others thought of them often. “Rab-



Rabbi Levy at the Rebbe's farbrengen (sitting on the left).

bi Levy is in Russia," Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, the Rebbe's wife, once said to the man who helped her with household chores. "It is very dangerous there. He brought there Jewish books and other items. I think about him every day." The rebbetzin had first-hand experience, having lived in the Soviet Union with her father, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, who was arrested and sentenced to death for the crime of strengthening Jewish observance. Under international pressure, his sentence was commuted and he was expelled from the country.

When she did not accompany her husband on his trips, Mrs. Levy worried incessantly. To Rabbi Levy, however, they were simply an exciting challenge. "I am doing so much for these people," he told his wife. "You don't have to be so frightened."

Those who encountered him in the Soviet Union confirmed that he seemed utterly confident and unafraid. "He knew that he was an emissary of the Rebbe," said Rabbi Yitzchok Kogan, who was a leader of the Chabad underground in Leningrad, now St.

Petersburg. “As an independent-minded person, he exhibited no fear in all of his doings and visits in the houses of the Chabad underground.” Now the chief slaughterer of the Russian Jewish community, Rabbi Kogan recalled how Rabbi Levy, on one of his trips, gave him the certification to be a shochet.

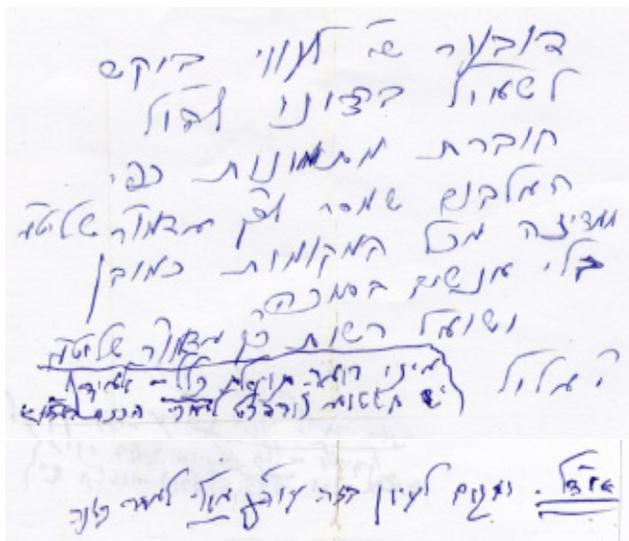
Rabbi Levy did not write or speak much about these trips, fearing to endanger the Jews he met. “I am not ready to say even one word about my trips there,” he once told a reporter who asked. However, he did make brief diary entries in order to be able to give the Rebbe a full accounting of everything that happened.

Once, Knesset member Menachem Hacoheh was in the USSR at the same time as Rabbi Levy, and they participated in a *farbrenge* together with one of the Chabad activists. Afterwards, Mr. Hacoheh wrote an article for *Yediot Achronot*, at the time Israel’s largest newspaper, in which he described the gathering and those who attended. In a private audience the Rebbe told Rabbi Levy how much the story had pained him, and fervently hoped there would not be repercussions.

2. PHOTOS IN SOVIET UNION

Rabbi Levy informed the Rebbe that he would like to publish, and publicize, an album of photos from his trip to the Soviet Union, while making sure that none of the faces could be seen in the photos. He asked the Rebbe’s permission to undertake the project.

The Rebbe responded, “I do not see any benefit *at all* from this – on the contrary, there are concerns (especially following the gathering in the Holy Land) and this *should be enough for those who understand* [the situation in the Soviet Union]. Perhaps the idea can be revisited in a year.”



2. Photos in Soviet Union

דובר ש"י לעווי ביקש לשאול ברצונו להו"ל חוברת מתמונות כפי האלבום שמסר לכ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א ממדינה [ההיא] מכל המקומות כמובן בלי אנשים ברורה ושואל רשות כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א י' אלול

כ"ק אדמו"ר ענה: איני רואה תועלת כלל - ולאידך יש חששות (ובפרט לאחר הכנס באה"ק וד"ל). ומקום לעיין בזה עוה"פ **אולי** לאחר כשנה

SOVIET LEGALITIES

In a recently discovered transcript of a yechidus between the Rebbe and Rabbi Berel Levy, new details came to light about the Rebbe's involvement in Levy's visits to the Soviet Union.

The following is a translation:

The Rebbe handed Rabbi Levy a bottle of vodka mixed with



Rabbi Levy, in the Soviet Union, gives out Chanukah gelt from the Rebbe.

wine from a farbrengen, to distribute to Jews in the Soviet Union.

Rebbe: They most probably will let this through [customs].

R. Levy: Yes, they always let it through.

Rebbe: Most probably you will give it out over there [to Soviet Jews], and then you can distribute it to where you will be [in other countries] after that.

Rebbe (handing Levy a stack of dollars): This, you will legally exchange to rubles and distribute there [for charity]. Do you have something else to discuss?

R. Levy: Yes, I wanted to ask several things. We are travelling Sunday morning to England...

Rebbe (pointing to the vodka): This is for Russia.

R. Levy: Yes. On Monday morning, we are travelling straight to Leningrad and we will be there for two days. Last time when I was there, I organized for Berel Medalia to study [Torah] with [...] the children ... I gave 3000 rubles for it... I did not hear back from

them... but I will try to continue [these efforts]...

The Rebbe knows that in Moscow there are *balei teshuvah*, and they informed me that someone told them in the Rebbe's name that those who have long *payos* should cut them [according to the Lubavitch custom].

Rebbe: I did not say this, and even more shocking is that no one ever asked me. Even if they would have asked me, I would have answered that this needs to be weighed according to the individual. This is the way I would have answered, but no one ever asked.

R. Levy: This is what I was told by someone who just left Russia.

I am not sure if the Rebbe was told that there is a Kohen *bal teshuvah* who married a convert, and they are waiting to see what they should do.

Rebbe: You should ask Rabbi Feinstein.

R. Levy: Reb Moshe? I spoke to him about this on Sunday.

Rebbe: Most probably he told you that he has to look into it.

R. Levy: He was not feeling well and he did not respond.

Rebbe: So ask him a second time.

R. Levy: The Rebbe told me that I should distribute Chanukah gelt. This means in *kopeks*, in Russian money?

Rebbe: Yes. Of course, it goes without saying, it needs to be exchanged legally. You should take the dollars and exchange them legally, according to [Soviet] law.



Sitting close to the Lubavitcher Rebbe as he spoke for hours at Chassidic gatherings, Rabbi Levy grew to share his desire to reach every Jew. The Rebbe wanted to strengthen Jewish observance in the most far-flung locations in the world, and Rabbi Levy's work took him to some of them. In an interview, he paraphrased a message he received from the Rebbe more than once: "There is no such

thing as traveling somewhere only for whatever mission I have to do in the food world. Every trip also has to be utilized for spreading Torah and Judaism.”

Rabbi Levy’s grandson Rabbi Yosef Gartenhaus, principal of Yeshivas Torah Temimah in Lakewood, New Jersey, remembered how his grandfather used to emphasize the importance of reaching out to non-observant Jews. “We need to bring people closer to Yiddishkeit,” Rabbi Levy would tell his grandchildren. “It is not only about us and our immediate community.”

“He lived it,” Rabbi Gartenhaus said. “We expected to always hear about his trips, and we knew that this [Jewish outreach] was what his life was really about.”

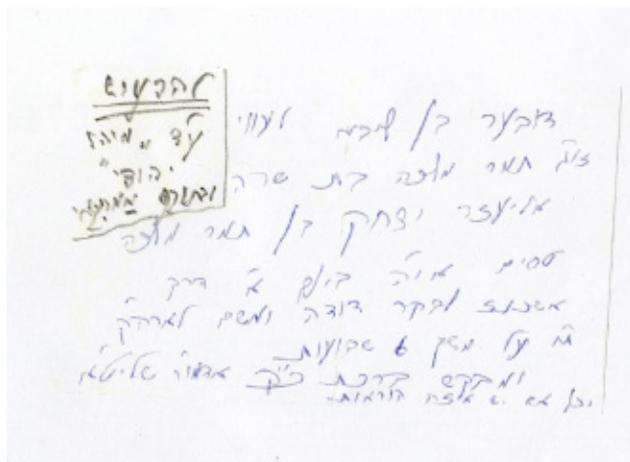
Rabbi Levy’s task as the Rebbe’s “ambassador” was not usually stated explicitly, and sometimes came as a surprise. But Rabbi Levy always rose to the occasion. “Man never knows what the Almighty has in store for him when he travels around the world,” he wrote in February 1985. “It’s true that my work is a melechet hakodesh, a sacred mission in itself. However... it seems that G-d has other missions for us [as well].”

Before every trip, Rabbi Levy would write to inform the Rebbe where he was going. The Rebbe’s responses varied greatly depending on Rabbi Levy’s destination, but were always short and to the point. “I felt like I was living in the times of the Baal Shem Tov,” Rabbi Levy said, referring to the cryptic instructions that the founder of Chassidism was known for giving his disciples.

3. AMERICANISM

Rabbi Levy informed the Rebbe that he, his wife, and his son Eliezer would be going to Germany to visit his aunt, and then to Israel for six weeks. He asked for the Rebbe’s blessing, and whether the Rebbe had “any directives,” for them during the trip.

The Rebbe responded, “*To make a ruckus* about *mihu Yehudi* and



3. Americanism

דובער בן ליבא לעווי

זוג' תמר מלכה בת שרה

אליעזר יצחק בן תמר מלכה

טסים אי"ה ביום א' דרך אשכנז לבקר דודה ומשם לארה"ק על משך
6 שבועות ומקש ברכת כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א וכן אם יש איזה הוראות

כתב כ"ק אדמו"ר: **להרעיש** ע"ד "מיהו יהודי" ובתוקף אמריקאי

with the firm attitude of an American."



Family Answers



THE GRASP OF A CHILD

In 1978, Menachem Levy, father of the groom, was standing outside 770 with his mother to greet the Rebbe and wish him a Good Shabbos. When the Rebbe appeared, the four-year-old child grabbed the Rebbe's hand, shook it and said, "Good Shabbos Rebbe, Good Shabbos Rebbe!"

After Shabbos, Mrs. Levy wrote to the Rebbe, saying she was pained by her son's act of disrespect, since, in Chabad, this is not common practice. Over the word "pained," the Rebbe wrote, "?!"

He then continued:

הרי אדרבא : גורם נחת רוח ע"י זה,

כי אין לשער גודל הלבביות והפשטות והתמימות והאמיתיות

של ילד -- הלואי מעין זה

בגדולים. ובפרט ע"פ המבואר בדא"ח בזה. וביותר שבא בהמשך וחותרם

ההפטרה באותו היום בגודל הענין בחסד נעוריק. ויגדלוהו וכל יוצאי

חלציהם שיחיו לתורה חופה ומעשים טובים ואזכיר על הציון.

On the *contrary*, it brought me gratification. You *cannot surmise* the magnitude of the heartiness, simplicity, innocence, and sincerity of the child—if only some of these qualities could be found in an adult.

This is especially so, in light of what is explained in Chasidus.

More so, in the Haftorah of that day, it discusses the magnitude of “the loving-kindness of your youth.”

May you raise all your offspring ... to Torah, *chupah* and good deeds. I will remember you at the resting place [of the Rebbe Rayatz].

HOLY NAMES

Rabbi Yosef Bronstein, grandfather of the groom, sold Judaica in Miami at one point. He had the idea of creating a Lucite casing with a model paper Torah scroll for children, which could be given as a bar or bat mitzvah present showcasing the child’s *parsha*. He sent a letter to the Rebbe iterating the details, and a prototype. The Rebbe responded:

הרי בהנ”ל שמות הקדושים
וכו’ ובאותיות מרובעות דוקא וכו’, ומי יכול להיות האחראי
שישמרו כדרוש (אפילו שלא כדרוש) וכו’. והרי כמה וכמה אופני
פרנסה ישנם ולא על ידי ענינים כהנ”ל וק”ל וד”ל
ויתיעץ ברב ירא שמים מורה הוראה בפועל מה יעשה בקשר עם הנ”ל

In the above, there are [G-d’s] *holy names* and the scribal art of the Torah [which should not be used except for a Torah, mezuzah, etc.], etc., and so who will take responsibility that it be treated properly (or even with minimal respect), etc.?

There are other ways to make a livelihood besides for this...



The sample Torah
in lucite, Rabbi
Bronstein sent to the
Rebbe.

PHOTO: AGUDAS
CHASSIDEI CHABAD
LIBRARY

You should seek the advice of a G-d-fearing rabbi, who actively provides *halachik* advice, in regard to the above.

SAME NAME

Rabbi Aaron Lieberman, great-uncle of the groom, headed a study group in Long Island called Chabarah. When he was later in California on shlichus and wanted to start a similar group, he wrote to the Rebbe. The Rebbe responded:

כיוון שבשם זה נקראת מכבר

חברה מסוימת במנהגים מסוימים כדאי שיקראו בשם אחר

Since there is *already* a specific group with specific customs called by this name, it is worthwhile to call it another name.

FULL AGREEMENT

There was a misunderstanding between several shluchim in Florida, and Rabbi Lieberman was tasked with mediating. When he wrote to the Rebbe about it, the Rebbe urged all the parties involved to work together:

בכללות --צ"ל החלטת

(רוב) עסקני אנ"ש שי' שעל אתר--באם ועד רבני חב"ד שי'
(המרכזי) ופס"ד שמצד הרב שי' קארף הכל בסדר גמור וישנה
הסכמה מלאה ממשלחי השלוחים--והוא בתוכם--שי'

In general, there should be a consensus of (most) local Anash activists according to the ruling of Vaad Rabonei Chabad, and that Rabbi Korf be in agreement, as well as agreement from the organization's leadership—those who sent the shluchim, him included.