

INTRODUCTION

With gratitude to Hashem, on the occasion of the Upshernish of our dear son, Chonon ^{שיחי'}, we present here a short biography of Chonon's great-grandfather and namesake, the Chossid Reb Chonon Halevi Levin A"H.

The biography and anecdotes of Reb Chonon's life were translated from a Teshura given at Shmuel and Chava Levin's wedding, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5766 (2006); additional details were added from an article in the Kfar Chabad magazine issue 761.

We also present a translation of an article written in Yiddish by Reb Chonon, entitled "A night in Stalingrad," where he describes his thoughts and feelings while on patrol one dark night during the battle at Stalingrad. This article was published in "Di Yiddishe Heim" in Sivan 5728 (1968).

It is our hope that these stories about an extraordinary Chossid and devoted soldier in Hashem's Army will inspire us to emulate his ways, and hasten the coming of Moshiach Now!

Itche and Nechomie Zalmanov

יום הבהיר כ"ח סיון תשע"ב

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הרו"ח אי"א נוי"נ וכו'
מוה' מנחם מענדל שי'

שלום וברכה!

במענה על ההודעה אודות יום הולדת השלישי של בנם ישראל יצחק שי' ,

הנה מועתק לקמן חלק ממכתב כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר זצוקלה"ה נבגי"מ זי"ע בנוגע למנהגי ישראל בזה. ויהי"ר מהשי"ת שיגדלו ביחד עם זוג' ה"י לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים מתוך הרחבה.


בברכה

וד"ל כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר.

..... ובדבר גזיזת השערות -אפשערעניש- הוא דבר גדול במנהג ישראל ועיקרו הוא בהחינוך דהשארת פלאות הראש, ומיום הגזיזה והנחת הפלאות של הראש, נהגו להדר להרגיל את החינוך בענין נשיאת ט"ק וברכות השחר וברכת המזון וק"ש שעל המטה. והשי"ת יהי' בעזרם שיגדלוהו לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים מתוך פרנסה בהיחבה ובמנוחת הדעת בגשמיות וברוחניות.

*The letter of the Rebbe MH" M for the Upshernish
of Chonon's father*



Reb Chonon receiving a dollar from the Rebbe MH”M

A DEVOTED SOLDIER

*A SHORT BIOGRAPHY AND STORIES OF THE CHOSSID
REB CHONON LEVIN*

Against the Nazis in Stalingrad and against the Finns in Finland he fought with bravery, not just the battles of Russia, but the battles of his fiery Jewish Neshama against the Communist regime and the tough commanders of the Red Army. After leaving Russia, and settling in Paris, he became a loyal soldier of Tomechei Temimim and worked for its benefit. Till his last day he fulfilled his duty as a servant of Hashem, a soldier in the Rebbe's Army.

Recognizing the good and thanking Hashem for everything He did with him, whether revealed good or even if the opposite was revealed, these were the basic traits of the Chossid Reb Chonon Levin A”H.

Throughout his entire life, he always saw Hashem’s kindness with him. Even in extreme difficult circumstances during World War II; in bone chilling weather in the war with Finland; in the bloodbath of hundreds of thousands of soldiers who fell defending Stalingrad; even then, he always saw the good side of the coin, and was able to thank and praise Hashem for the goodness and kindness he dealt with him. Also, in the end of his life, when he lay with great pain on his deathbed, he always showed a smiling face; and whoever visited him only heard “Thank G-d for all the good, it could be much worse G-d forbid;” and he make small his own pain and interested himself in another’s welfare.

Also when he had to rebuke someone during a Farbrengen, or any other occasion, it was always done with a smile and extreme refinement and gentleness. He never got angry; and according to the rule “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart,” his words were always accepted.

HIS GRANDPARENTS

Zeide Leibel

The Chossid Reb Chaim Yehuda Leib Levin (“Zeide Leibel”) was a Chassidishe Yid who lived in Pereiaslav, Ukraine. He was a son and grandson of Chabad Chassidim of many generations. Unfortunately, not much is known about him; we do know that he was the director and Gabbai of the Chabad Shul in his town, he ascertained that they Daven there Nusach Chabad. He would also deliver a Shiur in Tanya, Chumash and Ein Yaakov. His grandsons remember the Yud Tes Kislev Farbrengens held in the Shul.

He had a son named Avrohom, a lot was invested in this son, in the most difficult times his father taught him Chumash and Gemara at home, and they instilled the foundations of Chassidus deep in his heart. The child grew and became a man, and the daughter of the local Chossid Reb Benzion Bruzin was suggested for him. Reb Benzion established a Cheder with Mesirus Nefesh, he was also the

Melamed, and it was by him that Chonon studied as a child.

“We studied by him many years” Chonon related. “He would relate to each child as to his own son. He instilled in us a love for Chumash and Gemara. All the children reciprocated his love and loved him dearly. Even my sister Ita, who did not learn in the Cheder, still remembers how grandfather taught about the Mabul and Dor Haflogo. How can I forget? It was so fascinating how he would teach the children, he really lived with it.”

HIS PARENTS

Reb Benzion's daughter Pesha married Reb Avrohom; they established a beautiful family, five daughters and two sons were born, most of them passed away and were murdered in the wars. Later, his son Chonon lived in France, and his daughter Ita immigrated to the United States. Reb Avrohom raised his children on the same foundations that he was raised.

Their daughter Ita related some memories “I can not forget, besides the night of the Seder and other holidays, those nights of Farbrengens in father's home, and the Lchaims and singing; they are

especially engraved in my memory. I knew that on that night I won't be able to sleep (even if I wanted). I can't forget each Yud Tes Kislev, mother would prepare Shvartze Kashe. This is how we grew up, and my parents tried to instill this in us; our home was surrounded by secular Jews, and Lehavdil anti-Semitic and coarse Goyim; the bad winds gusted in the streets with their full strength, and in this thicket he raised his 'Esrogim,' which endure all seasons on the year; and despite, more so because of this survival and Jewish education, the beauty shone with all its strength, and all the seasons and winds raging in his and his children's life did not move them, and they sacrificed their life for Torah and Mitzvos."

"Father" Chonon once related, "would learn Likutei Torah and Torah Or each Shabbos, we would learn Tanya and Chassidus together. I recall early Shabbos morning, we slept, and father's voice would resonate from the living room, learning with a sweet tune the 'Chassidische Parsha.' The tune rings in my ears till this very day!!"

Babi-Yar massacre

On September 19, 1941 the Nazis advanced eastward in the Soviet Union till they reached the outskirts of Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. Kiev was

conquered by the sixth army and the 29th German army corps. Before the conquest, more than 100,000 of the 160,000 Jews of the city managed to escape.

The Nazi army headquarters in Kiev was on Khreshchatyk Street in the city center. On September 24, only five days after the Nazis entered Kiev, a bomb exploded in the Nazi headquarters, shocking the conquerors. The area was closed off, and all the citizens were held for questioning; but another bomb exploded minutes later, causing panic and mass flight of the Nazis and the rounded citizens.

During the next days, many bombs exploded on Khreshchatyk Street, injuring and killing Germans and many Ukrainian citizens.

On September 26 a meeting was convened, attended by the German military commander of Kiev, Major-General Kurt Eberhardt, the Higher SS and Police Leader of Army Group South, Obergruppenfuhrer Friedrich Jeckeln, the Einsatzgruppe C Commander, Dr. Emil Otto Rasch and SS Standartenfuhrer Paul Blobel. At the meeting it was decided to annihilate all the Jews of Kiev as retaliation to the damage caused to the many buildings. The task was imposed on Sonderkommando 4a soldiers, consisting of SD and

SiPo members, the 3rd company of the Waffen-SS Battalion for special missions, and a platoon of Police battalion 9, assisted by Police Battalions 45 and 305, together with Ukrainian Police forces.

On September 28, 1941 notices were posted all over Kiev by the German 637th propaganda company, published by the printing office of the 6th Army, as follows:

“All Jews living in the city of Kiev and its vicinity must come to the corner of Melnikova and Dokhturova Streets (near the cemeteries) by 8 o’clock on the morning of Monday, September 29, 1941. They are to bring with them documents, money, valuables, as well as warm clothes, underwear etc. Any Jews not carrying out this instruction and who are found elsewhere will be shot! Any civilian entering apartments left by the Jews and stealing property will be shot.”

Most citizens, including the Jews, thought that this was an expulsion of the Jews from the city, their mistake was grave.

At the appointed time, and even earlier, tens of thousands of Jews stood at the site; the masses were marched via Melnikova Street to the Jewish cemetery

on the outskirts of the area, which had been fenced, together with part of the Babi-Yar ravine, and guarded by Police and Waffen-SS soldiers of the Sonderkommando, and Ukrainian Police.

After they passed into the gates, the people were commanded to leave their belongings, which they were told will be loaded on the “luggage train.” The Nazis took a small group at a time and led them forward, gunshots were heard faraway, and the people started realizing what is really happening, but escape was now impossible, the Nazis did not allow anyone identified as a Jew to exit the gates.

Groups of 10 were led from the front of the line through an “aisle” of two rows of Nazi soldiers who hit them cruelly with sticks, to an area where they were ordered to undress and stand on the edge of the ravine. There they were shot and fell into the ravine. At the Babi-Yar massacre 100,000 people were murdered, mostly Jews, among them the parents of Chonon, Reb Avrohom and his wife Pesha HY”D, and they merited to die Al Kiddush Hashem.

Years later, an eyewitness villager told their son Reb Chonye “I was there, and I saw your father leaving his house together with your mother, wearing a white Kittel, similar to an angel, at the head of a

group of tens of people from his Shul, accompanied by soldiers; a very impressive Jew with a beard - on the way to a martyr's death. Your mother started crying bitterly, and then your father turned to her with a loud voice and said 'Peshe, here we have the Mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem, we will fulfill it; why do you cry, we are going to die Al Kiddush Hashem, is there anything greater than this?!'"

"The Kiddush Hashem of a Jew is in itself a Kiddush Hashem" Reb Chonon would conclude.

HIS YOUTH

A clever child

Chonon was born on 6 Teves 5671 (1911) in Pereiaslav. He was the 7th child in a poor family, which was supported with difficulty by his father; his family lived in poverty, and was satisfied with the little they had. In his childhood years, Chonon absorbed Mesiras Nefesh to keep Mitzvos.

Chonon was a child blessed with intelligence, and this benefited him later on, whether as a soldier in war, where he found favor in the eyes of his commanders with his clever answers (as we will soon

see), and also during Farbrengens, when he was able to cloak his rebukes with subtlety etc.

His sister Ita relates “Chonon was always the witty one in the house, when he was a small child, my mother would distribute sweet apples to all the children on Shabbos afternoon in honor of Shabbos, and like every child, he wanted another portion, he would always say ‘mother, there is place in my stomach for another apple,’ this comment was so amusing to hear from a child, and he would always get what he requested.”

When Ita was asked from where did he learn so much, to write such wonderful articles in Yiddish, to write wondrous and beautiful poems in his language he knew so well; his poems were published in many Yiddish newspapers, the editors were extremely amazed at his smooth command of the language, as one editor once wrote as an introduction “we publish here a poem written by a Lubavitcher Chossid, who lives in Paris; the smooth rhyme, the juicy Yiddish, the moving Yiddish content of the poem transports us back to the early days of Yiddish lyrics. We read the poem with pleasure and decided to publish it as an indication that the influence of Yiddish affects the Chassidische world very strongly.” The editors were not Frume Yidden, to say the least...

He utilized his talents for serving Hashem, he never studied the language; he just spoke it. He also had a talent for art; his works of art were not publicized, but whoever saw his drawings was amazed from its message as well as the beauty they conveyed.

So when his sister was asked “from where did he get all this?”

“That’s who he was!” she replied.

From childhood he was always the know-it-all, whatever you spoke to him about he knew; this was Chonye. His talents were utilized for spreading Yiddishkeit, and Chassidus in particular; as an example one can find a poem entitled “Ein Oid Milvado” published in a secular newspaper, and many such rhymes, short and to the point that contained big concepts.

Mesiras Nefesh for Mikva

When he was young, the Bolshevik revolution broke out in Russia, and learning Torah in Cheder started becoming more and more difficult, until eventually all local Jewish educational institutions

were closed down, and the new government forced the Jewish children to learn in public schools.

The family moved to Kiev, hoping that in the big city they could evade going to public school. The child started learning in an underground Cheder till his Bar Mitzva, and then continued learning in a Yeshiva which was a branch of the underground “Tomchei Temimim”. Then he continued learning half a day, and spending the other half assisting in earning a livelihood for the family. The father would receive leather to sew them to shoe soles, and the family members would help out; though the payment was meager, the father was glad he found work that did not entail working on Shabbos.

Not much is known from that era, but one thing is certain, in the home they constantly “breathed” Mesiras Nefesh. An example is seen in this story that occurred with the young Chonon at that time; his Mesiras Nefesh is also spiced with his genius, and these aided him in his courageous act:

In Kiev, where they lived in the early 30s, when Chonon was in his 20s, it happened once that the government officials informed the Gabbai of the Chabad Shul that half of the building is being allocated for the cultural-social needs of the party.

I.e. this portion will serve as a “club” for the party; obviously there was no room for debate, the Gabboim knew that when this same incident occurred in another neighborhood, and the Gabboim tried to protest – as punishment, they closed down the other half as well, and all sacred items including the Sifrei Torah were thrown out brutally, so therefore the Gabboim of the Chabad Shul were forced to make peace with this decree with closed lips.

However, unfortunately, in the Shul’s basement there was a Mikva, and the main faucet that brought water to the Mikva was in the section that was taken, and there was no way to get there. Here Chonon thought of a wild idea, to enter the lion’s den and steal their prey from their mouths. He took some “Mashke” and feigned intoxication, he entered the “club” and started dancing around, claiming that he wants to entertain them. The people there enjoyed his antics and prodded him to continue and repeat acrobatic feats he showed them earlier, he acquiesced, accompanying himself with a known folk song. He continued dancing till he was dripping with sweat; then he stopped, and while breathing heavily and sweating profusely requested to let him rest and then he will do one more round. Obviously, his request was well received; he went to a side room to rest without anyone suspecting a thing, when he saw

that no-one was watching he climbed quickly through the window to the main faucet that filled the Mikva, opened it and returned to his place. After a while, he bid them farewell assuring them that he will return, and they let him go with joy. If he would be caught “red handed” he would pay with a grave punishment; but for Chonon only one thing mattered: the Mikva must be filled. The Yidden are fortunate that they have self-sacrifice for their purity!

HIS WEDDING & THE WAR YEARS

His father-in-law and his wife

The Chossid Reb Eliyahu Michel Haft of Charkov, Ukraine – Reb Chonon’s father-in-law was a wealthy individual and would invite many guests; many great Chassidim found refuge in his house, including the famous Chossid Reb Itche Der Masmid (Reb Yitzchok Horowitz); this was done amongst great self-sacrifice; he also supported the Temimim and the Yeshiva; his entire life was a story of Ahavas Yisroel. He had one daughter and two sons: his firstborn Efrayim and his brother Yekusiel HY”D were never heard from again; his daughter Esther Rochel A”H, a very special girl, her father invested all his energy to educate her, his efforts bore fruit,

and his daughter literally endangered her life in many courageous acts. Her father needed to transfer money and clothes to many places to help the Temimim, but Reb Eli Michel couldn't roam freely; here, his daughter entered the picture, and during that whole difficult period would wear the clothes one on the other, and would thus transfer whatever was needed; many lives were saved and helped in the merit of her unlimited dedication.

Engagement, war and wedding

In the year 5699 (1939), Esther Rochel was suggested to Chonon Levin; they got engaged in an auspicious time. However, unfortunately trouble was brewing!

About a week before the outbreak of World War II, when Germany was about to invade Poland, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed. The German gain from the pact was that Germany was concerned from the reaction of the Soviet Union of the Polish invasion, Hitler wanted to avoid a war on two fronts while he would attack the west; in addition he estimated (and was proven correct) that a pact with the Soviet Union would weaken their alertness, and in case of a conflict, Poland would serve to enhance strategic posts against them, and Germany could

exploit Poland's natural resources, to strengthen their economy and army.

As for the Soviet Union: they wanted the German army to keep their distance; the Red army was unprepared for war due to the "cleansing" that Stalin did; besides the military unpreparedness, Stalin, who saw the fickleness of the west in Czechoslovakia, did not rely on the aid from the west; in general, relationships were weakened between the Soviet Union and the west due to the west's fear of communism; another factor was communism's influence on the territories they would receive.

Russia was supposed to enter the east of Poland, in order to "liberate" the Ukrainians – "our brothers in the west" – from Polish sovereignty; then began a general draft for the Russian Army. Reb Chonon with some friends escaped Kiev to be saved, but eventually Reb Chonon was arrested, drafted and sent with the "Liberating Red Army" to Poland, and in the course of a couple of weeks they concluded the "liberation" of eastern Poland. After some time, when Finland refused to sign a coerced "friendship agreement" with Russia (as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia had agreed to have Russia establish bases in their country), the Russian "liberating" forces were sent from Poland, Reb Chonon included, to help their

comrades who were dealt shameful defeats in battle with the Finns. This was in the dead of a very difficult winter, temperatures ranging between 48 and 52 degrees below zero. The Finns put up a strong fight, and notwithstanding the much greater numbers of the Red Army, they caused the Russians great casualties; only after 4 months of debilitating war did they finally concede to the Russians.

In beautiful style Reb Chonon describes in his diary, how his battalion reached Leningrad, where he saw for the first time trains coming from the north, full of wounded soldiers; and then describes the remainder of the horrors of this war till its conclusion, and then his return to war.

Reb Chonon joined the anti-aircraft division, whose job was to locate enemy planes flying 8-10 kilometers high and shoot them down. This position saved him from being placed on the front lines.

In the summer Reb Chonon managed to be discharged from Finland and return to Kiev. On 10 Elul 5700 (1940) his wedding took place in Charkov; it was done secretly and attended by a bare Minyan, who came very cautiously, not to arouse the attention of the authorities. The Mesader Kidushin was the

Chossid Reb Yehuda Chitrik, and the ceremony was very short.

The birth of a daughter

In Europe the fires of war are raging, but in Russia it is silent, thanks to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. However, in the summer of 5701 (1941) three million “Wehrmacht” Nazi troops invaded Russia, and moved quickly into Russia. Immediately, a quick draft began of all citizens, Reb Chonon was once more called for duty.

His wife was then due to give birth to her firstborn, and all his attempts to delay his draft till after the birth were utterly rejected. While still in the military camp in Charkov, as they were preparing to go to battle, Reb Chonon received a telephone call from a relative that his wife entered labor; just then German war planes were bombarding the area, all the women were quickly transferred to an underground shelter, and it was there that his daughter was born. Before Reb Chonon had a chance to even convey a Mazel Tov to his wife, he heard the commander roar “what are you doing here? Everyone already lined up to prepare to leave, and only you remained to speak on the telephone?!”

His request of the commander to discharge him for a while to see his wife and firstborn daughter was rejected. Then he approached the top commander and said simply “Comrade Commander! If I was the commander and you were the soldier requesting a most human request, to see his firstborn daughter that was just now born – I would surely discharge you for a while. So why do you deny my request?!” His words - said simply and emotionally - had an effect; a driver and a car was arranged to take him to see his wife and daughter. He then departed with choking tears thinking “who knows when, if ever, I will merit seeing you again.”

A mother’s Mesiras Nefesh

His wife A”H relates “when I came to the delivery ward, I overheard that they were planning on cutting my stomach, and not allowing me to give birth; and thus they went from room to room to cut and abort one baby after the other. I understood what is happening, I started screaming and yelling, especially when they were nearing me, I couldn’t run and I was terribly afraid. I closed my eyes and begged Hashem to save me; then, a doctor with a white coat appeared, and calmed me saying ‘Don’t worry, we will not harm you.’ He then told them something, or more

correct, yelled at them and then left. It was very wondrous.

“I am sure that Hashem, seeing the Mesiras Nefesh of my husband, sent me his prophet Eliyahu. As soon as my daughter was born, the bombardment started on the hospital, and I, with my daughter in hand, went down to the basement; and when we heard bombs from one side we ran to the other, and then when they bombed the other side we ran back. In these conditions my daughter was born and raised.”
A mother’s Mesiras Nefesh...

“Hashem reveals his secrets to those who fear Him”

Another interesting story she told “One day I receive a letter from my husband, asking how I and our daughter are doing; then, unexpectedly he writes to me pleading and begging that I should guard our daughter Sheina Rivka very carefully. I did not understand why he wrote this, and I almost ignored and forgot, but after a while that the girl did not return from the yard, where she went to play with other girls and their mothers, and one of the mothers was watching my daughter as usual, I went to ask the

woman where is the girl, and she simply answered that she thinks she returned home.

“After a while it was clear that she disappeared, I went all over to search her. At that time it was common that there were people with long cloaks who stole children, tempting them with candy; they would place the children beneath their cloak, kidnap them, and sell or adopt them. I was terribly afraid about our daughter - who was a beautiful girl - that they would kidnap her, and sell her for adoption. Suddenly, I see a person walking with a long cloak, and I see under the cloak another set of feet walking, and the shoes are somehow familiar. I ran and yelled at him that this is my daughter, and he simply claimed that he just found her and was about to return her, so I took her back.

“Luckily, Hashem helped and all ended well. Then I remembered the letter I received warning me to guard the girl, and I suddenly realized that he literally prophesized unknowingly.

“Generally, during the whole duration of his combat in war there were many wondrous divine providential instances; each time he was about to return home from another battle, I had a feeling that he was returning, and would prepare the house, and

my intuitions were always actualized; I felt that I was in good hands and that ‘Hashem directs the steps of man.’”

Wartime experiences

When Reb Chonon was once again called for duty in the summer of 5701 (1941), he remained in the army until the war was over.

Reb Chonon endured the horrors of war on many fronts; he was also sent with the army to defend Stalingrad, hundreds of thousands fell like flies, the Volga River was red with blood, but with Hashem’s help he survived even this battle.

About this blood-drenched defense, he describes in an article entitled “A night in Stalingrad;” a shuddering description, where he puts in words the thoughts of Chossid on one dark night (see article on Pages 62 & 65).

Words cannot describe what a Frume Chassidische Yid had to endure in a blood-drenched war in the company of crude gentile soldiers. Maybe one line which Reb Chonye once said in an uplifted moment at a Farbrengen, could attest more than anything his Mesiras Nefesh during the entire wartime; he testified

that during the entire duration of his war experiences, he was careful about three things, which he never desecrated: 1. He only ate Kosher food, and never touched “their” cooked foods; he made do with bread and water and dry goods, and if he had a chance, being near a river or sea, to catch a Kosher fish, this was a rare delicacy. Due to his lack of essential vitamins, his teeth fell out at a young age. 2. He put on Tefilin daily, and Davened at least a little with his Tefilin on (he received a Heter from a Rov to sew his Tefilin in his clothes, and thereby carry them even on Shabbos). 3. Chometz on Pesach:

Each year, before Pesach he would plan ahead what would be his “meals” during the eight days of Pesach. When he was in Finland, though the war ended before Pesach, the whole division remained there till after Pesach; he began put aside sugar cubes in clean pieces of linen, because this will be his main nourishment the entire holiday. However, in a wondrous manner he received on the second day of Pesach a package from home, containing an entire treasure: Matzos, sugar, nuts and more. The entire story of the package, Reb Chonon describes in his diary under the heading “My Pesach miracle;” the story is written on 20 pages.

Another year his division camped near a village, he began taking some of his bread and giving it to a woman in the village who had a milking goat; he agreed with her that in exchange for the bread he would receive for one week a certain amount of milk daily; the agreement was fulfilled, and no-one was more happy than him, that he was able to survive the holiday with milk and sugar.

In the remaining years as well his mind worked feverishly, to plan a way to survive Pesach without eating Chometz G-d forbid; his main nourishment was sugar cubes that he received from his comrades in exchange for bread and other items. When the Seder night came, each cube of sugar was used as a substitute for Matza, Maror, Korech and the four cups of wine; and it was with these cubes that he quietly recited parts of the Haggada from memory. How great was his joy each year on the last day of Pesach when he managed to endure; his joy was unlimited and from the depths of his heart he thanked Hashem for his kindness, to give him the strength to keep Pesach correctly.

Another problem that bothered him was as soon as he was drafted in the war against the Nazis; when he realized that the war might continue for a long time, he compiled a calendar; he knew all the calculations

very well, and was able to have a pocket calendar to know when all the holidays occur.

To get an inkling of what occurred there, and how he fought intensely to keep his Yiddishkeit, could be found in his diary. The situation was terrible; it was easy to lose one's bearings, or to literally become an animal. His friends in combat completely lost their human image, one needed his mind to control his heart not only to keep his sanity, and remain human, but sometimes even to survive, as the following episode attests:

Wartime was literally days of hunger; once, the commander distributed loaves of bread and announced that this must last them for three days; everyone grabbed and ate immediately without thinking, and after days of hunger, this caused them terrible stomach pains. Only Chonon refrained, and divided his loaf in many small pieces, and had what to eat during those days; everyone begged him for bread, like Haman who was sold to Mordechai for the same reason. Here too Chonye proved that under all circumstances the mind must control the heart.

The offer that was rejected

The war against the Nazis ended; victory against the forces of darkness. Now the time of freedom has come; Reb Chonon was about to return to Kiev to find out what happened to find out what happened to his parents and family members, and to Charkov to find his wife and daughter.

But before receiving his permit of discharge he was called to the commander's office; two other commanders were sitting there. At first, he was afraid that maybe someone accused him of some crime, but he was soon surprised to hear one of them say, that because his file was clean, and his commander's commend of his honesty, fulfilling his mission entirely, his trustworthiness and pleasantness, they are proposing him to remain in the Red Army and he will immediately be promoted to rank of commander. He rejected their generous offer politely claiming that he must first return to find out what happened to his family, and then he will consider their request. This excuse was not accepted easily, but with Hashem's help he managed to exonerate himself from them without any responsibility; "go explain them" he thought "that my refusal of their 'generous' offer is because I am a Frume Yid".

Helping a Jew

The trains returning from the battlefields were full of joyous soldiers celebrating their release. When he returned from Stalingrad he rode a train full almost completely with soldiers of many ranks, all of them literally like animals thirsty for blood.

“Suddenly” Reb Chonon relates “A Lubavitcher Chossid with a black beard, Reb Abba Pliskin A”H entered, I recognized him but he did not recognize me, because I was wearing a uniform. He was a small person, and there was a group of very coarse Russian soldiers, half of them drunk, they decided to throw him out on the tracks while the train was moving; it obviously was very thrilling for them to see a Jewish Rabbi die a terrible death.

“The truth be told, that during the journey many already experienced this misfortune; people’s lives were worthless in their eyes, especially after the war where people fell every second. I was very concerned for his life, but at the same time worried that these soldiers could easily do the same to me. But I saw that they were serious, he was already in their hands, and if I did not act immediately it would be too late. I quietly prayed and then approached them with the confidence of a commander-in-chief and yelled at

them that if they won't leave him immediately I will shoot all of them!

“As soon as I said such a thing, naturally this could be their excuse (though they didn't need an excuse) to take me and make me a victim as they saw fit. I was alone against a group of Goliaths; but a miracle occurred, surprisingly they softened and let him go with some fear, I knew this fear fell on them from heaven, and that's how miraculously both our lives were saved” Reb Chonon concluded. Here too we see the Mesiras Nefesh of a Chossid, who always risked his life for others.

The sad reunion

Finally, he reached Kiev; he disembarked at the station and continued walking to the city, to find out what happened to his family. Suddenly, by divine providence, he met his brother Shaul, who he didn't see in five years. This is how he described their reunion:

“I am going around searching what and who survived, all of the sudden, like an angel from heaven, my brother Shaul appears after so many years. It was a very emotional reunion, and when I wanted to embrace him, my brother turns to me

seriously and anxiously and tells me ‘thank G-d I managed to get all the permits, many of them were forged, and according to law I am someone else and not your brother, therefore’, he tells me, ‘I can’t hug you, we are not allowed to be together too much, so they shouldn’t see that we are related, this could jeopardize my leaving the country”. I left him with a taste of disappointment on one hand; I really wanted to spend time with my brother, but on the other hand I was happy that he could leave the country. I contained my feelings till we met once again in the Holy Land many years later” (as we will soon see).

At that opportunity he told Chonon that their parents were killed Al Kiddush Hashem on Yom Kippur, in the massacre known as Babi-Yar. Also the rest of the family members that didn’t manage to escape before the Germans entered the city, were murdered by the Nazis and their cohorts the Ukrainians. He also told him that many Chassidim escaped to the direction of the cities Tashkent and Samarkand in Uzbekistan, and that’s how they were saved; appropriately he should also go there, and perhaps find his wife and daughter. In any case, he has no reason to search in Kiev, in Charkov or any other place.

Reb Chonon tore Keri'ah and sat in mourning for his parents as per the law of someone who finds out later, and then set out immediately for the destination his brother has told him. When he reached Samarkand he met his family members and many Chassidim. At their reunion the joy was immense, and his friends made the Beracha of "Mechaye Meisim", because they did not have any communication during the years of war. The news spread like wildfire, everyone rejoiced and they prepared to make a grand thanksgiving feast, for the living miracle that came to town.

An unfamiliar father

He obviously went straight to his home, and there awaited him a little unpleasant surprise; his daughter did not want to accept that this was her father, because "father" is "the one in the photograph" she claimed as she was always told, and that photograph was from before the war. Only after some time, she finally consented that this was indeed her father. On Shabbos the family made a "Kiddush"; whoever didn't see the joy of brothers joyful at the survival of their friend has never seen true Ahavas Yisroel. The family members saw this as some kind of replacement for the wedding feast that never was.

“He wanted to settle peacefully”

Reb Chonon spent about a year in Samarkand, this was the best period spiritually since his childhood days; Torah Shiurim were held openly, and Reb Chonon spent his time studying, mainly Chassidus, with the Chossid Reb Sa'adya Liberov; he also received Chassidishe direction from him, and from then on began Davening on Shabbos at length for the rest of his life.

The escape

Meanwhile the Chassidim organized to leave Russia with the “known escape” and Reb Chonon joined them. He left with his family left Samarkand by train. “Finally we lived to this day to leave the walls of this terrible exile; however, it seems Hashem had other plans, and not too far from Tashkent, my wife suddenly entered labor. I” Reb Chonon smiles “really wanted she should delay this for some time; we finally managed to organize papers and go on the train, and suddenly now this “problem” befalls us. But obviously this wasn't in our hands, and we had to all disembark the train”. He managed to bring her to the local delivery ward, and after two days their second daughter was born; she was named Pesya

after his mother HY”D. They then continued on their journey and rejoined the Chassidim.

They arrived to Lvov, the exit gate to Poland. Before Rosh Hashono 5747 (1946) the family of Reb Chonon left Russia for Poland together with many other families on one of the “Eshalon”s (trains) with forged Polish passports. They didn’t want to remain in Poland too long and they moved on to Czechoslovakia, where there too they stayed for a short while, because also this country was part of Soviet control. When they reached Austria they remained there for a year and a half in a camp sponsored by the Joint. Immediately upon arrival they opened a Yeshiva there, but it was clear that couldn’t remain there indefinitely, and then the train brought them to their next stop in France, there they met the rest of the Chassidim who came via other “Eshalon”s through Poking in Germany and other places. From here the Chassidim dispersed to different places according to the directives of the Frierdiker Rebbe; some to the Holy Land, others to the United States, while others went to other countries in Europe, Africa or Australia while some remained in France.

FRANCE - HIS WORK AS SHADA'R

The Rebbe commanded

Reb Chonon - who really wanted to travel to America and finally settle near the Frierdiker Rebbe, something he still didn't merit - started arranging preparations to travel. Then, the famous Mashpia Reb Nissan Nemanov told him "Chonye, the Yeshiva "Tomechei Temimim" just opened now in Paris; as a Bochor, you didn't merit being a student of Tomchei Temimim all the years, at least now you should concern yourself with establishing and strengthening the Yeshiva in Paris, accept the responsibility of being a SHaDa'R (fundraiser) for the Yeshiva". He did not want this at all, "enough! I need some rest, I want to be a little with the Rebbe and think about my family, to stay more in my house after all we were through. Moreover, to ask people for money is totally against my nature". Only after much persuasion, did he agree to try it out, and together with his friend Dovid Chein began to collect. (See Picture on Page 61).

But this didn't suit him at all; he would pale like chalk at every door they knocked on. Then, he decided to finally emigrate to the U.S. He was about

to do so, he prepared the papers, packed his belongings, asked the Friediker Rebbe, and then, to his surprise, the reply came that he should remain in France, and that he is needed especially there. With complete Kabolos Ol he put aside his dreams, unpacked the suitcases, and continued being a SHaDa”R for the Yeshiva; from then on, he continued untiringly for almost 50 years in his task as SHaDa”R, he considered this a sacred task.

A new era

Thus started a new era in his life; it did not bring him peace of mind, the opposite was true, it was hard labor, “but what won’t you do for Tomechei Temimim” he would always say.

For himself he was content with a small salary, and he invested himself completely to raise money for the Yeshiva; whoever worked with him testify that his devotion to his task did not know boundaries; his honesty, integrity and pleasant manner coupled with a true and innermost Yiras Shomayim touched everyone he came in contact with. He was not content to raise money for the Yeshiva in France alone, but would travel, at least once a year, to England and Italy, and spend some weeks in each country.

Many episodes and stories are told about him and his task over the years; we tried to collect these anecdotes from all those who were involved with him in this respect. It is wondrous to see the affect that he made on people he met even once or twice; “there was something about him that his difficult to define” everyone says, “he spoke in a unique manner, he expressed himself wholeheartedly, and this won us over”.

Truth be told, he spoke French with difficulty; in the early years he spoke in Yiddish to everyone. At that time almost everyone spoke Yiddish; this is how he wrote in a letter to his sister in 5755 (1995):

“You write that you must learn English [she emigrated then to the U.S.]; I will write to you about myself, though I am ashamed to tell you: when we came here [to France] I started working in the Yeshiva, I dealt only with Jews, so I didn’t need to learn French (everyone spoke Yiddish), and so years passed, and I always delayed [learning French] with many different excuses”.

Honesty

His honesty was concerning a penny just like a hundred; “I recall” his daughter Louba Paris relates “he would report to Reb Nissan literally for each penny. First he would hand over the entire sum to Reb Nissan, and only then he would receive his commission, not the opposite like most people do”.

The big Chasuna

Reb Y”Y Kalmanson, Rosh Yeshiva in New Haven relates “The first Chasuna that took place [in Brunoy] was of his daughter Pesha with Reb Yisroel Labkowsky. The Chasuna was on Yeshiva grounds; in honor of the occasion they renovated the building somewhat. When we wondered, why is today different, because a carpenter in the Yeshiva was very rare, Reb Nissan told us that the donors of Reb Chonye are coming, so it must be respectful.

“What should I say, the Chasuna was the longest in my life” RYY”K continued, “the whole night we Farbrenge; the Chasuna was over at six in the morning, something very rare, and everyone was there, it was very joyful, whoever didn’t see that Chasuna never tasted a true joyful Chassidische

Chasuna; this underscores the esteem that Reb Nissan held for Reb Chonon”.

Naturally, many legends were woven about the fifty years of his SHaDa”R work. As mentioned, he would travel to England and Italy; Reb Nachman Sudak, Shliach in London relates “Once, Reb Chonye came to me and asked me permission to collect money for the Yeshiva in Brunoy. I agreed, but on condition that he gives the Chabad institutions in England a percentage of the profit, as is the custom. But such honesty I couldn’t imagine, for many decades he never left without leaving the percentage agreed upon, he never forgot to keep his side of the deal. I thought he would do this sometimes, but not for every sum”.

It is a pleasure to give him

His son-in-law Reb Levi Paris relates “In London there is a philanthropist Reb Nosson Vogel who receives hundreds of people in his house, and distributes Tzedaka generously. Naturally, Reb Chonye would visit him on his trips to London. Once, Reb Nosson told me ‘I meet hundreds of people in my house, each one with their need, but for some reason I am most impressed from your father-in-law; I never met a SHaDa”R like him, so refined and

devoted to his cause, it is a pleasure for me to give him.’

“I asked him ‘how do you know he is my father-in-law?’ So he told me ‘Once, Reb Chonye was in London, but he didn’t visit me, I went to him and asked him “Reb Chonye, why didn’t you come to me?” So he said “This time I came to get Nachas”, and that’s how I found out that you are his son-in-law; he came for his family and not for other matters, he told it to me so simply, but for me it was a lesson about education and family, he was completely immersed in what he did, without mixing matters.’

“When he would come [to London] he would Farbreng on Shabbos with the famous Mashpia Reb Mendel Futerfas. They Farbrenged for hours, they said L’chaim and we would sit for many hours. It was very uplifting, they would relate many Chassidishe Vertalach, sing together; it was truly a pleasure. We miss those Farbrengens” Reb Levi concludes.

Finding favor

“One of the countries he would travel to was Italy;” Reb Gershon Mendel Garelik, Shliach of the Rebbe to Milan relates, “Besides the pleasure of his presence, there is an interesting phenomenon; there is

a certain Shul that it is extremely difficult to collect money there, the people there contribute only to their own institutions. Believe me,” Reb Gershon Mendel says, “I don’t know how and what he did, but he would be accepted there with great respect and receive generous sums. Go figure how he won them over.”

Total devotion

For many years he would walk around collecting money for Tomchei Temimim; after many years it became difficult for him to walk, he suffered terribly in his feet, and the pains effected his back; he was forced to use a cane, but his pains did not lessen; his walking became slower, but nonetheless he continued his task with energy and enthusiasm. So too for Davening with a Minyan, he would go by foot.

Though due to his aching back and feet, he needed much rest, this never deterred him from waking up early and rushing to Shul. When he was asked to limit his activities, because walking was difficult, he answered simply “is this small walk more difficult than the walks during the war, when I walked for days in hunger and cold of 40-50 degrees below zero?!”

On Erev Pesach, he would take from his personal Matzah Shemura, and distribute to generous donors of the Yeshiva, so they should have the best Matzah for the Seder; notwithstanding the fact that the amount of Matzos he baked for himself and his family was minimum, due to their high price; this he did from his own earnings and initiative, without anyone asking him to do it; the directors of the Yeshiva didn't even know about this.

A miracle: one of the Chassidim who Davened in the same Shul as Reb Chonon, had six daughters, and he would always ask him for a Beracha to have a son. One year, before Yom Kippur his seventh daughter was born, and on Yom Kippur he wept bitter tears that he did not merit a son. Reb Chonon thought a little and then approached this person and told him very confidently "If you will promise a nice donation for Tomchei Temimim, I promise you that next year you will have a son." He agreed and accepted Reb Chonon's words, and right after Yom Kippur he fulfilled his promise. Reb Chonon was sure that Hashem would fulfill his request, because he did not do this for himself, but for Tomchei Temimim; and indeed, a year later a brother was born to the seven sisters.

ANECDOTES

Chabad settlement

When they arrived in France, everyone lived in a building in Paris, many ANa”SH families were there, and some lived in Brunoy; the atmosphere was uplifting, the feeling of unity was felt. After some years, they moved to Aubervilliers, together with other families; the place soon became the French Chabad settlement. They build a Shul, which was directed by his Mechutan, the Chossid Reb Shmuel Dovid Belinov A”H, and Reb Chonon was the unofficial Mashpia. He would Farbreng every Shabbos; oftentimes he would take some Mashke and add liveliness and joy to all the participants who enjoyed his Chassidische Vertalach said with warmth and pleasentness; if he didn’t attend the Farbrengen, due to his travels etc. his presence was sorely missed. It was a Chassidische Shtiebel of past times; they would study Chassidus every Shabbos before Davening and Farbreng afterwards.

To start at ten

A special Yechidus about this Shtiebel he related in a letter he sent to his family one of the first times he

travelled to the Rebbe; it was in year 5718 (1958). He writes as follows (after preliminary words of blessing) “Now, in regards my Yechidus, you most probably know that it was Sunday night, or more precisely Monday morning; I entered to the Rebbe Shlita at 7:20 and left at 7:50; it was half an hour. He spoke to me in a heartfelt and fatherly manner, like he was my own father; he answered all my questions. G-d willing when I will come in good health I will report everything; meanwhile Hashem should help that the Rebbe Shlita’s Brochos should be filled in their entirety.

“I will convey at this opportunity a general thing concerning the Shul; at the Yechidus, during the conversation we spoke about the issue of the time that the Davening begins on Shabbos morning in Shul. The Rebbe asked when we begin Davening, I replied ‘at 11 o’clock and sometimes later;’ he told me to convey that we should begin Davening Shacharis at 10 o’clock, and to do this already this Shabbos! Because I was planning to travel back home this week, he asked me to ascertain that this would be this Shabbos; however since I will only actually fly back on Motzei Shabbos, so I must convey the Rebbe Shlita’s directive; therefore I am requesting that you pass on the message verbatim,

and I will fill in the precise details when I return with G-d's help.”

The members of the Shul relate that Reb Chonye would always finish his preparations for Davening before 10, and begin Davening every Shabbos at exactly 10 o'clock, even if he was the only one, he was scrupulous as like with Matzah Shmura on Pesach.

His Hiskashrus to the Rebbe was extraordinary; he believed with all his heart that the Rebbe is Moshiach, and he will redeem us.

Simchas Torah

Special events are especially remembered, such as Simchas Torah; at that time, Reb Chonon who was usually serious, would become like a different person, young and energetic; he would jump like a child and enliven everyone; it was a scene of a Jew rejoicing with the Torah for which he devoted himself entirely. Then, when “his heart was merry with wine” he would turn up his beard and stick it under his hat, and would somersault energetically with the strength of a thirty year old man. He would perform acrobatic feats and headstands to entertain the congregants; he claimed that he inherited this

talent from “Zeide Leibe” who would stand on his head while his beard covered his face. Who could see this and not rejoice, pure joy!

He would also Daven sometimes for the Amud, and his name was known as an exceptional Baal Tefila. He was a wonderful Baal Tefila not because he learned Nusach or voice enhancement, but to Daven with feeling he was on the front line; he Davened wholeheartedly, it was a pleasure to hear. A member of ANa”SH in Paris relates “I would walk every Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur an hour and a half to hear his most beautiful Davening.” His family recorded on cassette parts of his Davening many want to hear.

To be a Chazzan in front of the Rebbe?!

In the year 5716 or 5717 (1955-6), he travelled for the first time to the Rebbe for the month of Tishrei. Being that the Yohrtzeit of his parents is on Yom Kippur, he would Daven for the Amud on Yom Kippur, he knew the Nusach well, his Davening was very heartfelt and many people enjoyed his Davening. Also when he was in 770 he arranged a Minyan to Daven for the Amud. When people heard his Davening they told the Chossid Reb Yochanan Gordon, the Gabbai of 770. Reb Yochanan asked Reb

Chonon to Daven for the Rebbe's Minyan; Reb Chonon refused, but he couldn't withstand the Gabbai's pressure and he Davened with trepidation and fear. Afterwards, Reb Chonon informed him that he will not Daven again for the Amud in the Rebbe's Minyan; ("Who am I, so small and insignificant to be the Shliach Tzibur of the Rebbe?!")

Going to Shul

In the later years, many Chassidim passed away, and the Shul was closed. He was forced to walk to the big Chabad Shul of the "Shneur" school in the city; it was a 15 minute walk. The people of the city related "we saw early each morning a Chassidische Yid walking with a cane on his way to Shul. Who wouldn't stop to offer a ride, but he would answer convincingly 'why are you depriving Reb Fisel (feet) of his livelihood, as long as he's working, let him work.' He would go very early in the morning, because not only would he be from the first ten, but the saying "Never did anyone precede me to Shul" suited him.

Mikva under all circumstances

His friend and former neighbor, Reb Chaim Tashkenter (Reb Chaim Horowitz) related “In the early years very few people would always go to the Mikva. Whoever was able travelled to Paris sometimes to go to the Mikva. The Seine River passed through our town, the water there was very deep, and in the winter it was all ice, and it didn’t seem like an option for Mikva. But not someone like Reb Chonye will be intimidated from difficult conditions, he already experienced Mesiras Nefesh for Mikva ‘there’; ‘here where no-one is preventing, how can we not go?!’ he would say.

“Indeed, in the early winter morning, Reb Chonye would go with a special stick to break the frozen ice and Tovel every morning, even though this bordered on risking his life (the depth and the cold).” “We wanted to join” his children added “but he would explain us very well how dangerous it is; he was very correct and convincing, but seemingly this only pertained to us, not for himself.”

“Once, he came to the Rebbe” his son Reb Mendel relates, “and he was staying by us. He just underwent surgery, and the wound didn’t heal completely; it would open sometimes and care was needed that

there shouldn't be an infection CH"V. I was really surprised when he informed me the first morning that he is going to the Mikva. I thought he forgot that the wound was still vulnerable, but he would never relinquish going to the Mikva, it seems that for him, Mikva was so important to the extent of Mesiras Nefesh.

Fulfilling commands

In the year 5747 (1987) the Rebbe spoke repeatedly about "Make for yourself a Rav"; the Rebbe demanded that each person should have a Mashpia. "That year he was going to travel to the Rebbe, and one day he calls me" his son-in-law Reb Levi Paris relates, "and he begs me 'Could you be my Rav? My Mashpia?' I was shocked from his simplistic, unsophisticated manner of speaking. But above-all baffled that 'he' his asking me; I tried explaining him 'Who am I, what am I, there are many others etc.' but he remained firm, and I too couldn't accept the idea. In the end, he compromised and said 'at least once in a few months.' I asked him 'What's this all about?' so he tells me 'I am travelling to the Rebbe; how could I show my face to the Rebbe, and I didn't appoint a Mashpia.' I thought 'Where are we? If only every Chossid would think this way.'"

A Tanya for the Rebbe

Reb Levi continues “Once, the Shver tells me ‘Oy, how stupid I am,’ and he relates ‘I had a very old Tanya from the first prints. When I travelled to the Rebbe I gave him the Tanya by a Yechidus; the Rebbe was very pleased, and then turns to me and says “you probably need another Tanya to learn from,” and he opened the drawer, and took out his own Tanya, which was worn with use, and offered it to me. I was unprepared, and didn’t think that I was owed anything, so immediately I told the Rebbe that I have one, and I don’t need etc. and the Rebbe put the Tanya back in the drawer.’ Reb Chonon concludes ‘now you understand what a fool I was.’ While I saw a Jew so refined, that doesn’t think he deserves anything at all.”

Not to sleep without Rambam

“Like every Chossid, not a day passed without learning Rambam,” Reb Levi relates. “Even in his later years, when he was in his eighties; when he would visit us from Paris, the trip would last a whole day, they would leave in the morning, and arrive at the end of the day; he was completely exhausted, but he would still finish the daily Rambam till late at

night. I would often plead with him to rest, and finish the next day; I saw the exhaustion on his face; but to no avail. Sometimes he would admonish me ‘How could you demand that I go to sleep before learning Rambam!’”

Caused people to do Teshuva

Whoever came in contact with him got caught in his warmth. “I was on Shlichus in France,” related one of his grandchildren “a woman became closer to Chabad, and heard that I was a grandson of Rabbi Levin of France, so she tells me excitedly ‘even your grandfather doesn’t know what he effected in my heart; I once saw him, and was impressed by his appearance; I approached him and discussed many issues with him; I spoke French better than him, but his heartfelt language was a language anyone could understand, and he captured my heart. I met him on many occasions, and I always approached him. Your grandfather always sat on the dais at Chabad gatherings in France; he obviously didn’t speak, but I would come just to see him; and then slowly I simply returned to Yiddishkeit, I wanted my children to be like that Chossid. This was your grandfather’ she concluded.”

Utilizing every moment

Every spare moment he had, he would sit and learn; he was never seen wasting time; he also demanded this behavior from his young children “don’t sit idly; if you don’t have what to do, take a Sefer and look in it, learn from it, just don’t waste time.” He would have many daily Shiurim besides Chitas and Rambam, he would have Shiurim in Likutei Torah, Torah Or, Gemara and Mishnayos. This was concerning the weekdays, moreover on Shabbos and Yom Tov in which days he would be diligent in his learning and Davening with devotion; and from the early morning till the beginning of Davening he already managed to learn many hours.

An emotional letter

In the year 5755 (1995) his sister Ita arrived in the U.S. he then travelled to meet her after not seeing each other for 55 years, since the war, and his subsequent departure for France, without having a chance to meet her. After their parents were killed, she was adopted by assimilated and Russian peasant families, which caused her to lose all she was taught at home (though she still recalls the holidays, and especially the Cheder and the Farbrengens at home).

She finally managed to leave in the year 5755; there was constant communication via letters, but under difficult circumstances, one out of two letters arrived.

When she arrived in the U.S. he sent her a long letter, divided in two; first he asks how she is doing and acclimating in a new place etc. The second part of the letter he asks her not to show to her family, which are all Yidden that are not Frum; though the letter is intended for them as well, but they shouldn't know that it comes from him. The letter is moving to tears...

“My dear sister, even before you departed Kiev, I spoke to you via telephone and told you ‘when Hashem would help and you would G-d willing arrive in America, in the four walls of your house, there should be a Kosher kitchen; no Treif should CH”V enter your home. I ask you not to get upset from what I will write to you; you are a Jewish daughter and you possess a holy Jewish Neshama. What we did there [such refinement, when he wants to mention not such good matters, he is also included] Hashem completely forgives, because it wasn't possible otherwise [he does not mention how he had Mesiras Nefesh there], but here everything is different!! Here there is possibility, there is no excuse, all that is needed is a will... does a difference

of a few dollars affect whether to eat Kosher food, which the Torah commands us, and we keep its laws since we received it on Har Sinai, from the master of the universe, through Mosh Rabeinu, and we guard it like the apple of our eye, or to simply eat Treif G-d forbid!!!

“I know Ita, and I am not blaming anyone G-d forbid, because the truth is that they are not to blame at all [her family that lived with her under the same unfortunate circumstances] for being born and raised in the years of ‘Stalin’s paradise’ may his name be erased; they surely are not to blame, they are all holy children of Hashem, with a holy Neshama in them; they should be healthy and happy. But now, that Hashem has helped and we reached this stage, we must start thinking in an active direction, slowly but surely; and when they will see how you behave, with time they will begin to behave accordingly. You are an example for them, if Aunt Ita does like this, and behaves like this, they will slowly understand that this is the only way to behave.

“When you will change the house to a Kosher one, and begin to light Shabbos candles every Friday, this will definitely light their Neshamos, and they will want to imitate you with enthusiasm and joy. Dear

Ita, Don't get upset with me, on whatever I wrote here; don't tell them that this came from me.

“My dear one, I will be happy with all my heart and soul, when I hear that you changed your house to a Kosher house, a Kosher kitchen; and you light Shabbos and Yom Tov candles, which will light your Neshama, your house, and the entire surrounding. With blessings for a long and bright life, Amen!”

HIS ILLNESS AND PASSING

Accepting pain with love

Before Purim 5756 (1996), he started experiencing severe stomach pains, and was quickly brought to a hospital. Even then, while experiencing great pains, he was able to overcome his pains and to hide them from those who came to visit him, even his close family members; he always accepted pain with love.

When his situation worsened, it was difficult for him to speak; but when he needed to say Birchos Hashachar or another Brocho, he exerted all his energy, and the words left his mouth clearly.

A month before he passed away he was still home, but emaciated and weak. At that time one of his grandsons, who was about to celebrate his Bar Mitzva, came to visit; when he entered, Reb Chonye jumped to rise (he would often do so in that time to show that he was still in good health), and requested to test him on the Ma'amor (as was his custom), and sat focused with Mesiras Nefesh for half an hour, listened, corrected and insisted that he should say slowly so it should be understood (later it was realized that this was an intuition that he wouldn't attend the Simcha); all this sapped his energy, but this did not deter him from giving attention to a grandson, so he should know that grandfather is involved and interested; to contrast, when answering questions of the doctors, he would just nod his head, unable to speak.

On Yud Alef Nissan, the Rebbe's birthday, there was a big gathering of ANa"SH. He was always accustomed to attend every gathering (and sit on the dais); when, in the hospital, he heard about the gathering; his condition was considered relatively serious; he begged to be brought there; "how can't I Farbreng on Yud Alef Nissan" he said. After being explained that it wasn't possible, he burst out crying over his disability, as if just then he became ill.

“He does the will of those who fear Him”

It could be said that Pesach was his special holiday, he was extremely scrupulous about every detail; everything he ate or came in contact with was checked and rechecked many times. This was in addition to the fact that for many years he didn't have any teeth, and he didn't use his false teeth; every piece of Matza he would chew was with great pain and Mesiras Nefesh, he would have many sores and blood would spill, but he didn't neglect any detail of the Seder G-d forbid. He was especially careful not to eat out of the house on Pesach, and he would never let himself be invited. In his later years his wife was too weak to prepare Pesach herself; “I would regularly invite them” their daughter Louba Paris relates, “but he rejected the invitation categorically. He would do most of the work, but to eat out of his house was never considered an option. ‘But this is Heimishe’ I would try to reason, but there was no-one to speak to.” Wonder of wonders, in his last year – he passed away on 30 Nissan (Rosh Chodesh Iyar) after two difficult months – he was still in his house, and managed to have his Seder at home, and only after the second Seder his condition declined and he was immediately taken to the hospital, from which he never returned. “He does the will of those who fear

Him,” and he was able to have his last Seder at home as was his custom.

His passing

In the last week he felt that his days were numbered, and expressed himself many times saying that they are coming to take him to heaven. One of his daughters relates “he told me that he feels his end is near; I stopped him, and then he told me not to stop your father, and let him speak. He then requested a few things, and especially to keep the family together, and take care of mother; this was the most difficult day of my life.”

Every day he would say “Vidui”, and even on the last day he requested a Siddur, he said “Vidui” and “Shema Yisroel”, and his pure soul ascended to heaven in purity, as he recited “Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu Verabeinu Melech Hamoshiach Leolam Voed” with pure faith in the Rebbe Melech Hamoshiach’s words that this hastens the prophecy of “They will arise and sing.” He was buried in the Chabad section on Har Hamenuchos in the holy city of Yershulayim, may it be built speedily.

The Levaya

One of the Temimim relates “I was in the Yeshiva in Brunoy on the day of his passing. All of the sudden, the Mashgiach Reb Yitzchak Nemanov and the Rosh Yeshiva Reb Yechiel Kalmanson entered, with grave expressions on their faces; and then Reb Yitzchak told the Bochurim that there was a Chassidishe Yid, who, for fifty years, gave his life for the Yeshiva; then he burst out crying, and told us that he passed away today, and he spoke at length about his great devotion to the Yeshiva; we were all very moved. We then, out of the ordinary, all drove to the house of Reb Chonye; we said Tehilim, and we all travelled to the airport, to accompany the person who accompanied the Yeshiva for so many years.”

“If we could summarize with one thing” says Reb Levi Paris, “someone told me at his Levaya ‘listen, I knew your Shver for Forty years, I could tell you that he never fought with anyone, he loved and was loved by everyone; beloved to man and beloved to heaven. Alas, for those who are now lost and are no longer found.’”

The “Moreh Shiur”

Reb Chonon would write down the “Moreh Shiur” (study schedule) in his later years; because he didn’t leave town much, and so till he got hold of a “Moreh Shiur” he would write down for a few months in advance. When he passed away, his “Moreh Shiur” was found in his Rambam, written till the date of his passing, 30 Nissan...



*Reb Chonon (right) with his friend Reb Dovid Chein
(See Page 36)*



אנטאפאט אין סטאלין'ס לאגראד

• חנן הלוי, פאריז

דער נאכט, עס זאל ניט צוקריכן עמעצער פונעם צד שכנגד און אנטאן "שאדן". שוין א סך טעג און וואכן אז עס גייען דא אן בלוטיקע שלאכטן. ווער קען עס גאר איבערצייילן די צאל געפאלענע זעלנער!! וויפל מענטשלעכע ליידן, שוידערלעכע יסורים און גרויליקע אנגסטן?! עס זיינען געווען טעג ווען די וואלגע איז געווען רויט פון בלוט. אונזער ארמיי האט זיך פארפעסטיקט דא אויפן רעכטן ברעג וואלגע, ביי דער חרוב-געווארענער שטאט סטאלינגראד. די דייטשן ווילן אונז אריינווארפן אין די וואסערן פון וואלגע און פארטירן דעם טייך. טעג נאך טעג האט דא געברענט די ערד ארום, ווי דער גאנצער גיהנום, ר"ל, וואלט זיך דא אריבערגעקליבן. ערשט מיט פיר וואכן צוריק איז נאך סטאלינגראד געווען א שטאט — מיט הייזער, גאסן, הויפן, פלעצער, און מיט א מענטשלעך לעבן. איצט איז זי א מדבר, א חורבה פון צעברעקלטע שטיינער, צעריסענע לעבנס. א שטאט אויפן רעכטן זייט פון דער וואלגע איז אפגעווישט געווארן פון דער ערד.

"אונזערע" האבן זיך דא איינגעקלאמערט אין דער לעצטער פאזיציע ביים סאמע ברעג טייך. ניטא קיין אויסוועג; ניטא קיין צורדיקטריט. גיין צוריק, מיינט — זינקען אין די רוישיקע וואסערן. איז מען געשטאנען פארדריקט צווישן פייער און וואסער מיט א שטארקן באשלוס: האלטן דעם פונקט פאר יעדן פרייז!

אין אין אזוינע פינסטערע נעכט, ווארפט

נאכט, א געדיכטע פינסטערניש ארום און ארום. א דראבנער רעגן א קאלטער, א הארבסטטיקער, גיסט און גיסט אן אויפהער, עקשנות'דיק, מאנאטאן.

איך שטיי אויפן פאסטן. מיטן "אויטא" מאט" אין האנט האלט איך וואך ארום אונזערע "זעניטקעס" (אנטי-עראפלאן קאנאנען). קאלטע רעגן-טראפנס ריזלען אריין דורכן קאלנער פונעם שינעל און געצן דורך די ביינער מיט קאלטן שוידער. אזא געדיכטע פינסטערניש — מיט דער האנט אנצורטאפן.

זעקס הונדערט מעטער פאראויס פון אונז, ליגן די דייטשע חיילות איינגעגראבן אין זייערע טראנשייעס; א פאר הונדערט מעטער הינטער אונז, כוואליעט די וואלגע.

פון צייט צו צייט צעהעלט זיך אין דער לופט א ליכטיקער ראקעט און באלייכט אונזער פאזיציע. עס ווערט ליכטיק אויף א האלבער מינוט. איך זע ווי די פיר הארמאטן פון אונזער באטארייע שטייען שטרענג אין א האלב-קרייז — מיט לאנגע, אויסגעשטרעקטע און דראענדיקע העלזער, געווענדיג דעט "אהיין"; און קרומלעכע שנירלעך רעגן ווי זילבערנע נאדלען פאלן אויפן נאסן גלאנציקן מעטאל און רינען ארונטער אויף דער ווייכער, צעקנאטענער ערד.

אין אז דער בלענדענדיקער "הענגלאמפ" לעשט זיך אויס, ווערט די פינסטערניש נאך געדיכטער און מאסיווער ווי פריער.

איך ביי "זיי" לייכטן אויף אזוינע "פאנארן" (לאמטערנעס). דאס באלייכט יעדער צד זיינע אייגענע פאזיציעס אין דער "בלינד"

מען אונז שטענדיק אונטער דורך דער וואל-
גע — פרישע „סאלדאטן“, בכדי צו פאר-
בייטן די געפאלענע; פרישע „שטאף“ פאר
דער ברענענדיקער מלחמה-מאשין.
די לעצטע פאר טעג איז עפעס שטיל:
די דייטשע כלבים האבן פיינט אנעלכע.
קאלטע-און-נאסע, רוטישע וועטערן. ליגן זיי
איינגערעכט אין זייערע טראגשייעס, ווא-
רעמען זיך ביי די אויוועלעך און צייכענען
מסתם ווידער זייערע פיינסטערע פלענער:
אפשר מארגן, אפשר איבערמארגן...

* * *

עס איז האלבע נאכט. דער רעגן ווערט
עסוואס שוואכער, אבער לאזט ניט אפ. א
קאלט ווינטל שמיסט דעם רעגן אין פנים
אריין. ערשט אין דריי שעה ארום וועט מען
קומען מיך אומבייטן. אבער מיר ארט דאס
ניט. פארקערט, דא איז מיר איצט בעסער
צו שטיין. עס ווילט זיך זיין מיט זיך אליין.
די געדאנקען, ווי די רעגן-טראפנס, יאגן
זיך און שניידן זיך אריין איינער אין אן-
דערן:

איז פאראן נאך ערגעץ אויף דער וועלט
אן ארט וואו מען שיסט ניט? ווי זעט דאס
אויס?... וועט נאך אמאל זיין א וועלט אן
מלחמה? און וואס פארא געפיל איז עס, ניט
צו שפירן דעם טויט-טעם טאג און נאכט?
ווען עס לויפערט ניט די קויל פון אלע
זייטן?... און אט קומט מיר אויפן געדאנק
די פאמיליע מיינע, מיינע נאענטע וואס זיי
נען אזוי ווייט פון מיר, די מחשבות ווערן
ברויזיקער, האסטיקער, כסדר, נאכאמאל און
נאכאמאל, דערמאן איך זיך יענע געשעעניש
— מיין לעצטן קאנטאקט מיט דער משפחה.
דאס איז געווען אין די ערשטע דריי
חדשים, ווען די מלחמה האט שוין ביי אונז
געבושעוועט אויף אלע וועגן. אונזער מילי-
טערישע אפטיילונג איז געשטאנען אין א
וועלדל, אין כארקאווער געגנט.

יענע טעג האבן איך געווארט אויף גוטע
נייעס אין מיין פאמיליע. אבער מ'האט מיך
ניט געלאזט באזוכן מיין משפחה, וואס האט
דאן געוואוינט אין כארקאו.

אין אינעם א טאג קומט אן א „פריקאז“
(באפעל) אז מען זאל אונז איבערווארפן נענ-
טער צום פראנט, און אין זעלבן טאג באקום
איך א טעלעפאנישע ידיעה (פון מיינער א
קרובה): א בשורה טובה, אז מיין פרוי האט
געבוירן א מיידעלע. זי דערציילט מיר אויך
ביי וועלכע אומשטענדן דאס איז געשען.
ווען מ'האט זי געבראכט אין שפיטאל אין
געבוירן-אפטייל, האבן פונקט דעמאלט די
דייטשע גרויזאמע מארד-„פייגל“ אנגעהויבן
באמבארדירן דעם דאזיקן שפיטאל. האט מען
די שוואנגערע פרויען אראפגעפירט אונטן
אין קעלער — אין טאקע אין יענעם מא-

מענט האט מיין פרוי, אין קעלער, געבוירן
א שווארצינקע טעכטערל...

די פרוי מיינע האט געבעטן: אפשר? —
טאמער קען איך פארט זיך אפבעטן, זיך
ארויסרייסן אויף א ווילע, כאטש אויף א
מינוט קומען א קוק טאן, זיך באקענען מיט
אונזער קינד?

טרערן האבן מיך גענומען שטיקן. ווי
שטארק כ'האב געגארט עפעס זאגן, עפעס
ארויסברומען פון אנגעלאדענעם הארץ —
אבער כ'האב קיין ווארט ניט געקענט אריין-
זאגן אין טעלעפאן-טרייבל. דוכט זיך, אפילו
קיין מול-טוב ניט איבערגעגעבן, און איידער
כ'האב מיך צעטשוכעט, האט א שטרענגע
שטימע מיך אוועקגעריסן פון טעלעפאן. דער
צימער איז שוין געווען אויסגעלידיקט און
אין גאס זיינען געשטאנען אנגעפאקטע אוי-
טאס פון סאלדאטן מיט זייערע כלי-זיין. איך
האב קוים באוויזן זיך ארויפצוכאפן אין
דער הויך אויף אן אויטא און מ'האט זיך
געלאזט אין „פאכאד“ צום פראנט.

צוויי יאר זיינען פון דעמאלט אדורך.
איצט דארף שוין מיין טעכטערל אלט זיין
צוויי יאר (ביז הונדערט און צוואנציק). איז
וואס מאכן זיי דארטן? וואו זיינען זיי איצט?
מיין טאכטערקע, מיין פרוי? און ווי זעט
אויס די קליינינקע? פרעגט זי אמאל: וואו
איז איר טאטע? און וואס ענטפערט מען
איר?...

שוין באלד צוויי און א האלבע יאר מל-
חמה! אזא שטיק צייט פון לעבן — פאר
וועמען איז דאס אוועק? ווען וועט זיך דאס
אלץ ענדיקן? ווי אזוי?

ארום און ארום איז חושך, אן אימה פון
פיינסטערניש ביז העט ווייט-ווייט, וואס
ווערט דורכגעריסן מיט שוידערלעכע פייער-
האגלען; נעכט פון טויט-שאטנס און טעג
אנעלכע רויטע, אנגעזאפטע מיט בלוט, בלוט
אן א שיעור...

אויך דער חשבון פון פארגאנגענע טעג,
חדשים, האט פארלאזן זיין המשך, זיין בא-
דייט. נאר דער מארגן עגבערט יא אמאל.
ניט ווילנדיק לויפט דורך אין מוח: ווער
ווייסט, וואס וועט מיר געשען? וואו וועל
איך מארגן אהינקומען? אבער אפילו אין
נאר הייסע מאמענטן גיב איך זיך ניט אונ-
טער. איך באקעמף אנעלכע מחשבות, א
דאנק דיר רבונג של עולם! ארום און ארום
שאטנט טאקע מיט אימת מות — אבער אין
הארצן ליכטיקט מיין גלויבן און האפן צו
דיר!

דער גאנצער חלל איז אנגעזאפט מיט
יאוש, פארווייפלונג — אבער מיך מוטיקט
דער בטחון צו דיר, מיין פאטער אין הימל!
נאר דאך בעט איך שטענדיק דעם אוי-
בערשטן: אויב שוין יא א סאלדאט, אויב

שוין יא דינען — איז שוין בעסער דינען
דיך! ויך דינער א סאלדאט! און העלן
מיר צו ויך דינער א געטרייער סאלדאט!
און נאך עפעס איז דא א סוד — א גע-
היימעניש צווישן דעם אויבערשטן און מיר.
קיינער קיינער טאר חלילה ניט וויסן: אין
קעשענע האב איך צוויי קלייניקע, אבער
גאר שטארקע באשיצונגס-פאנצערלעך — א
קליינע פאר תפילין און א פיצינקן תהלימל,
חלילה וחס ווען עמעצער אין דער רויטער
ארמיי דערוויסט זיך דערפון! און געלויבט
דער אויבערשטער, וואס איך האב נאך דער-
וויל קיין איין טאג ניט דורכגעלאזן אן
תפילין: אמאל געלייגט זיי אין פעלד, אמאל
אין א וועלדל, אמאל אין א ליידיקן וואגאן,
אדער אויפן בוידעם פון א פארלאזטן הייזל.
היינטיקן ווינטער, ווען אלץ איז געווען
אינגעהילט אין פראסט און אין שניי און
ס'איז געווען שווער צו געפינען א ליידיקן
ווינקל — פלעג איך זיך ארויפכאפן אין
אינעם פון די הויכע הילצערנע פישער-
שטיבלעך, ביי דער פארפרוירענער וואלגע,
וועלכע שטייען פארלאזטע און אונטערגע-
שפארטע מיט הויכע קלעצער, פארשאטענע
מיט שניי — דארט פלעג איך זיך אריינ-
גראבן אינעווייניק אינעם שניי, ארויסבא-
קומען מיך לינקע האנט פונעם גאנצן גע-
פאק קליידער און לייגן די תפילין... און
ווען איך בין שוין פארטיק געווארן און
גענומען קריכן צוריק, איז ביי מיר שטענ-
דיק גרייט געווען א תירוץ — טאמער בא-
געגנט מיך עמעצער ביים ארויסקריכן, א
תירוץ האט מען געמוזט האבן שטענדיק א
פארטיקן. אז ניט, איז ביטער... דערפאר
אבער ווען איך פלעג זיך שוין אפפארטיקן
מיט לייגן די תפילין, האב איך זיך געפילט
אזוי דערהויבן, אזוי דערווארעמט, כאטש די
פינגער האבן געשטאכן פון פארפרוירונג, און
גוט איז מיר דעמאלט געווען אויפן הארצן!
געפילט האב איך, אז איך בין ניט גלייך
צו אלעמען דא... געפילט האב איך, אז
מיט מיר פירט מען עפעס אן אנדער חשבון.

אנדערע באשיץ-מיטלען זיינען מיר געגעבן
געווארן...

איצט שטייענדיק דא בינאכט, האב איך
אינגאנצן ניט מרגיש געווען ווי די מינוטן
לויפן פארביי, איך וואלט געוואלט, אז די
נאכט זאל זיך אזוי ציען לאנג, לאנג, נאר
מיין בליק פאלט אויף דער לינקער זייט
וואלגע, דארטן, ווייט אויפן האריזאנט,
הייבט אן עטוואס העלער ווערן דער הימל,
די לייכטנדיקע „פאנארן“ האבן זיך שוין
אויפגעהערט צו צינדן אין דער לופטן.

ס'איז נאך פינסטער דא אויף דער ערד,
נאר ווען מען שטרענגט אן דעם בליק זעט
מען שוין בולט ארום און ארום די גאנצע
פאזיציע אנווערע: די נאסע הארמאטן, די
הילצערנע קעסטלעך סנאריאדן, די אינווא-
מע צעפליקטע בוימער מיט אפגעהאקטע
קעפ...

א דייטשער קוילן-ווארפער, האט פלוצלונג
געעפנט א פייער, אויסגעשטעפט א גאנצע
סעריע קוילן און ווידער פארשטומט גע-
ווארן. עס זעט אויס, ווי א שלעפעריקער
מענטש וואלט זיך פלוצלונג הויך צעגענעצט
און ווידער פארמאכט דאס מויל, איך הער
ווי אין זעמליאנקע טוט עמעצער אן די
שטייול, שטופט אריין א פוס, קלאפט צו
מיטן שטייול אין דער ערד — די פוס זאל
אריינקריכן, אינסטינקטיוו גיט מיין האנט א
ריר-אן אין דער הויזן-קעשענע די תפילין,
איך קוק אויפן האריזאנט און עס זאגט זיך
ארויס פון מיין מויל: „הגיע זמן קריאת
שמע של שחרית“.

באלד וועט מען מיר אומבייטן, אלע שק-
צים שלאפן נאך, וועל איך אריינגיין אין
זעמליאנקע, אויסווישן מיין נאסן אויטאמאט,
אנטאפן א ליידיקן פלאץ, וואו אלע לייגן
נאך צעלייגט אין זייער שלאף, כוועל זיך
אוועקלייגן, זיך איבערדעקן מיטן נאסן,
דורכגעוויקטן שינעל, און דאן — וועל איך
קענען אומגעשטערט לייגן מיינע תפילין,
געלויבט איז דער אויבערשטער, וואס טוט
מיט מיר חסד...

A NIGHT IN STALINGRAD

Chonon HaLevi, Paris

Night; thick darkness surrounds us. A light cold autumnal rain pours without letup, stubborn, monotonous.

I stand at my post. With an automatic rifle in hand, I remain awake by our anti-aircraft cannons. Cold rain drops trickle in through the collar of my coat and soak the bones with a cold shudder. Such thick darkness – it could be felt with your hands.

Six hundred meters ahead of us, the German soldiers lay buried in their trenches; a few hundred meters behind us, the Volga River rages.

Every now and then a bright rocket lights up the air and illuminates our position. It becomes bright for half a minute. I see how the four cannons of our battery stand firm in a half-circle – with long, stretched and threatening necks, facing “there”; and crooked laces of rain fall like silver needles on the wet shiny metal and drip down on the soft, kneaded earth.

As the blinding “lamp” is extinguished, the darkness becomes even thicker and more solid than before.

Also by them [the enemy] these “lamps” brighten the night. Each side illuminates their position during the blind night, so that no-one from the other side should creep in and do damage.

It has already been many days and weeks that bloody battles have been fought here. Who could count the number of fallen soldiers!! How much human pain, horrible agony and terrible angst?! There were days that the Volga River was red from blood. Our army remained firm here on the right bank of the Volga, near the destroyed city of Stalingrad. The Germans want to throw us in the waters of the Volga; to force us into the river. Day after day the earth burned all around us, as if – G-d forbid – the whole *Geihinom* has relocated here.

Just four weeks ago, Stalingrad was a city – with houses, streets, courtyards, plazas, and human life. Now it is a desert, a ruin of crumbled stones, lives torn apart. A city on the right bank of the Volga has been erased from the earth.

Our army banded here in its last position by the edge of the River. There is no way out; there is no retreating. Going back will mean drowning in the noisy waters. So we stood stuck between fire and

water with a strong resolution: to hold this position at any price!

And in such dark nights, they continually cast fresh [so-called] “soldiers” our way through the Volga, to replace those who fell; fresh “material” for the burning war machine.

The last few days are somewhat quiet: the German dogs hate this cold and wet Russian weather. So they lie buried in their trenches, warming themselves by the ovens and probably drawing once again their sinister plans, perhaps [to be carried out] tomorrow, or the day after...

* * *

It is midnight. The rain subsides somewhat, but does not cease. A cold wind whips the rain in my face. In only about three hours they will come to replace me. But it doesn't bother me. On the contrary; it is now better for me to stand here. I would like to be alone. My thoughts, like the raindrops, race and interrupt each other:

Is there still some place in this world where there is no shooting? What does it look like? ... Will there ever be a world without war? And how does it feel, not to suffer the taste of death day and night? When

the bullet doesn't lurk from all sides? ... And suddenly the thought of my family comes to me, my close ones who are so distant from me. The thoughts become more turbulent, hastier. Constantly, again and again, I am reminded of that incident – my last contact with the family.

It was in the first three months, when the war had already been raging all around us. Our military division was in a small forest, in the Charkov region.

Those days I was awaiting good news about my family. But they did not allow me to visit my family, which were living in Charkov at the time.

One day an order comes that they should move us closer to the front lines. On the same day I receive a message by telephone (from a relative) conveying good news that my wife gave birth to a baby girl. She also relates the circumstances in which this occurred. Just as she was brought to the hospital, while in the delivery room, the German ruthless murder “birds” started bombarding the hospital. So they brought the pregnant women down to the basement – and just at that moment, in the basement, my wife gave birth to a dark-haired little daughter...

My wife begged that perhaps I could somehow be excused, to leave for a while, even if just for a minute to take a look, to get acquainted with our child?

Tears choked me. I really craved to say something, to cry out from my over-filled heart – but I couldn't say a word into the telephone receiver. I surmise that I didn't even convey a *Mazel-Tov*. And before I had chance to gain my composure, a strict voice tore me away from the telephone. The room was already empty, and in the street stood vehicles packed with armed soldiers. I barely managed to jump on top of a vehicle, as we left on a “march” to the front lines.

Two years have passed since that time. My little daughter should already be two years old (till one hundred and twenty). How are they faring there? Where are they now? My dear daughter? My wife? What does the little one look like? Does she ever ask where her father is? And what do they answer her...

It is almost two and a half years of war! Such a big chunk of life – for whom was this all wasted? When will this all end? How?

All around is darkness, a dread of gloom to the farthest reaches of existence, torn apart by horrible

fire-hail; nights of death-shadows and days so red, saturated with blood, blood with no end...

The calculation of the past days and months, has also lost their continuum, their meaning. Only the future at times bores a hole [in my consciousness]. Unwillingly thoughts race through my mind: who knows what will happen with me? Where will tomorrow bring me? But even in these difficult moments I don't despair. I stifle these thoughts. Thank you master of the universe! All around the dread of death lurks, but in my heart shines my faith and hope in You!

This whole atmosphere is pervaded with despair and confusion – but I am encouraged by my faith in You, my father in heaven! Yet, I constantly request of G-d: If I am already a soldier, if I am already serving – I would rather be serving You! To be Your soldier! Help me be Your loyal soldier!

There is also a secret – a secret between G-d and myself. Absolutely no-one could, G-d forbid, know: in my pocket I have two small, but powerful protection-armor – a small pair of *Tefilin* and a tiny *Tehilim*, G-d forbid if anyone in the Red Army should find out! And praise G-d, meanwhile I did not miss a day without *Tefilin*. Sometimes I put them on

in the field, in a forest, in an empty wagon, or in the attic of a deserted house. This winter, when everything was wrapped in frost and snow, and it was difficult to find an empty corner – I used to break-away into one of the high wooden fisher-houses, near the frozen Volga, which stood deserted and supported by high beams, strewn with snow – there I would bury myself in the snow, extract my left hand from all the layers of clothes, and put on the *Tefilin*... and when I was done and started creeping back, I always had a ready excuse – in case someone will encounter me as I sneak out. A good excuse was always necessary. If not, it will be bitter... therefore, when I would actually finish putting on the *Tefilin*, I felt so uplifted, **so warm**, although my fingers would sting from frostbite. I felt wonderful! I felt, that I am not equal to everyone here... I felt, that I was reckoned with differently, I was given other protection-devices...

Now standing here at night, I do not feel at all how the minutes are passing. I would have wanted, that the night should continue like this, long, very long. But my glance falls on the left bank of the Volga. There, far on the horizon, the sky begins to brighten somewhat. The bright “lamps” have already ceased to illuminate the air.

It is still dark here on the earth. Only if you strain your vision, can you see our position protruding all around: the wet cannons, the wooden boxes of rockets, and the lonely plucked beheaded trees...

A German sniper suddenly opened fire, unleashing a torrent of bullets and it then once again became silent. It sounds like a sleepy man suddenly yawning loudly and then once again closing his mouth. I hear how in the dugout someone is putting on his boots, shoving his foot in, banging his boots on the floor so his foot should get in. Instinctively my hand touches the *Tefilin* in my pants-pocket. I take a look toward the horizon, and the words leave my mouth: “the time of the morning Shema has arrived”.

Soon they will replace me. All the *Shkotzim* are still sleeping. I will go into the dugout, wipe my wet automatic; grope for an empty place, where everyone is still lying asleep. I will lie down, cover myself with the wet, soaking coat, and then – I will be able to put on my *Tefilin* undisturbed.

Praised is G-d, who deals kindly with me...