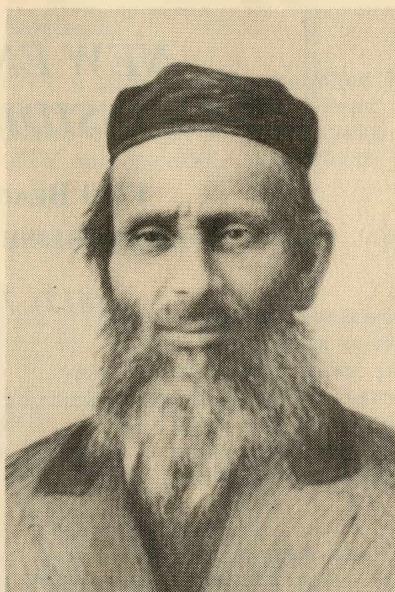


SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF CHASSIDIC LIFE IN AMERICA:

The Story of the Bostoner Rebbes



an authorized history

by Ira Axelrod

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CHASSIDIC CENTER***

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Cover Photos:

The first Bostoner Rebbe, Grand Rabbi Pinchos Dovid Horowitz, ztl, never approved of photographs. The illustration presented here is a snapshot of a portrait done of him by the late artist, Jacob Binder. The picture of the present Rebbe, Grand Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Horowitz, shlita, taken at a wedding, was selected by the Rebbe as most reflective of the personality he wishes to convey.

It was well along into the year 1915 when Rabbi Pinchos Dovid Horowitz, ztl, arrived in Boston's old West End, to answer the call to become the first active chassidic rebbe in America. It was not only a different world from the Brownsville section of New York City, where he had briefly been serving as a spiritual leader, but it was a far cry, indeed, from his recent travels in Greece, in Austria and, of course, in his beloved native land, Eretz Yisroel.

It was in Jerusalem that he was born in 1876 to Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke and Shayna Elke Horowitz, themselves third-generation residents of the world's holiest city. It was to that sacred place that the Lelover Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Biederman, had emigrated from Galicia in 1850, to help prepare his and future generations for the coming of the Moshiach.

And it was in Eretz Yisroel -- a place never reached by Rabbi Pinchos Dovid's saintly ancestors, like the Seer of Lublin, the Yud HaKodesh and Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolsberg -- where Rabbi Pinchos Dovid was born and raised, and where he studied.

Even his birth had an aura of mystique about it that could only happen in the Holy Land.

Rabbi Pinchos Dovid was born on a Friday. On the following Saturday night, his father was sitting at a melave malka with a group of other family members and friends, when a dove flew into the room through the open window, and didn't want to leave. Ultimately, Rabbi Lazer Mendel, the infant's maternal grandfather, suggested that the bird be caught and ritually slaughtered, thus giving everyone the chance to enjoy a particularly tasty delicacy.

There was little question that the family would name the new baby after yet another illustrious forebearer, Rabbi Pinchos, the spiritual leader of Frankfort, known as "HaFloh", an acronym for Pinchos ha-Levi Horowitz. But Rabbi Lazer Mendel felt that the incident with the bird should also be commemorated, and so he added "Dovid" to the boy's name, on account of the fact that the rare happening took place at the melave malka, the "seudah" (festive meal) of King David -- whose name could also be found on the family tree.

Rabbi Pinchos Dovid had barely reached adulthood, when he married into a family as illustrious as his own, whose ancestors

included, amongst others, the Baal Shem Tov (founder of chassidus), the Maggid of Mezritch, and the legendary Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev.

But the union, from whom a daughter, Frayda Gittel, was born, was not fated to last long, as his wife passed away while yet in her 20s. Her relatives, however, were so impressed with the learning and saintliness of character of the 24-year-old widower that his late wife's father informed him that he had no intention of letting him be lost to the family.

At the time of her passing, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid's wife had a six-year-old niece, Sora Soshe, daughter of Rabbi Yechiel Mechel Brandwein, known as the Torquer-Strettiner Rebbe. Shortly after the funeral, the Brandwein family arranged to have young Sora Soshe betrothed to the young scholar and, in 1906, when she reached her majority (12 1/2 years old, according to Jewish law), they were married.

The couple lived in the kabbalistic city of Tzfas, while Rabbi Pinchos Dovid continued his delving, full-time, into his advanced Talmudic studies and research. Three years later, they were blessed with their first child, a son, whom they named Moshe.

Meanwhile, however, another of Rabbi Pinchos Dovid's celebrated relatives, his uncle, the great Rabbi Dovid'l Biederman of Lelov, instructed his brilliant nephew to carry out a mission which was, for those times, a rather bizarre call to duty.

"Go to America," the Lelover informed his nephew, implying that that would be where his future life's work would be. As Rabbi Pinchos Dovid saw it, however, this was not exactly doing him any favors. At the turn of the century, America was still a vast spiritual wasteland, where traditional Judaism was concerned, and Rabbi Pinchos Dovid was, by contrast, dwelling in the holiest land in the world. As often as his uncle broached the subject, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid made ever clearer his opposition -- the only matter on which he refused to comply immediately with the tzaddik's wishes. This left the Lelover to counter his protestations by simply muttering, "we'll see", and temporarily dropping the subject.

World events, however, would soon conspire to leave a deep imprint on the future of Rabbi Pinchos Dovid and his family.



In 1913, a very important rabbinical tribunal was being established in Galicia. It was the custom, in those days, for virtually all Jewish communities in the Diaspora, poor as they were, to contribute whatever they could to the maintenance of the far more greatly impoverished Torah settlements in Eretz Yisroel, known as the "old yishuv".

Galicia was then the site of one of the world's largest Jewish communities, and its members fulfilled their obligation to shoulder a significant share of the global responsibility to underwrite the settlements in Eretz Yisroel. But with the comparatively large sums came an insistence that they direct how the money was to be spent. For their part, the Jewish residents of what was then called Palestine expressed their deep appreciation to their Galician Jewish benefactors, but insisted that, being on the spot, rather than 1000 miles away, they had a better idea of how to best apportion the funds.

Eventually, the arguments between the two sides became so intense that it was decided to settle the disputes through the Torah-mandated device known as a "bais din", or rabbinical court. Unlike the western system of using professional lawyers, each side chose one rabbinical member of the court, presumed to be partial to their point of view, and the two rabbis then chose a third, or arbitrating head of the tribunal, known as the "av bais din".

Rabbi Dovid Biederman was so widely-respected for his integrity and fairness that he was asked to recommend someone to go to Galicia as the advocate for the old yishuv. Without hesitation, he told the members of the litigating party that he had a very special nephew, whose brilliance and honesty well qualified him for the post. Admittedly, at only 36 years old, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid was unusually young to sit on such a bais din, but Rabbi Biederman assured those to whom he spoke that they would find many sterling qualities abundantly evident in his nephew.

With little waste of time, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid was summoned to present the old yishuv's case at the bais din. Not wishing to ignore his uncle's wishes on a second matter, the young scholar was compelled to come.

It made no sense to expose his wife and three-year-old son to such an arduous journey, so he arranged to leave them at home in Eretz Yisroel, fully believing that he would return within a few months. But as Rabbi Biederman saw his nephew off, he ominously repeated to him his prediction that he would be going to America to do important work there. For his part, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid could not see how a trip to Galicia, in Europe, to settle a judicial matter, would, in any way, be connected to a long journey west to the Jewishly-undeveloped nation on the other side of the world, so he again shrugged it off and concentrated on preparing for his new temporary assignment as a rabbinical magistrate.

Unfortunately for the young dayan, the case proved to be anything but temporary. What he originally believed would end in two months dragged on for more than a year. It actually might have gone on considerably longer, except for the intervention of world affairs, over which none of the participants in the case had any control.

In late July, 1914, which happened to coincide with the day of Tisha B'Av in the Jewish calendar, a group of Serbian nationalists assassinated Archduke Ferdinand, nephew of the head of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and World War I began.

With the nations of the world quickly choosing up sides, Galicia, as a part of Austria-Hungary, soon joined Germany and Turkey against the western allies. When it soon became clear that the din Torah had to be abrogated without coming to a decision, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid wished to return home, before finding himself stranded by the war. The most direct route would be through Greece, which, at the onset of the hostilities, attempted to retain its status as a neutral country.

But fate continued to vex Rabbi Pinchos Dovid. The day he was supposed to depart from Greece, the country finally decided to enter the war -- on the side of the allies. Travelling in Greece and being a resident of Palestine, which was then a part of the Turkish empire that was the traditional adversary of the Greeks, was never a particularly safe state in which to find oneself. But when the two countries were actively at war, it was clearly a life-threatening danger from which to instantly extricate oneself at all costs.

An even further complication involved the fact that, in those days, Jews did not have full citizenship in the Ottoman

Empire. Palestinian Jews were viewed as "stateless aliens". When they travelled abroad, they did it through an international system wherein passports were issued according to each individual's national origin, which, in Rabbi Pinchos Dovid's case, resulted in his using papers from his Galician ancestors' native land of residence, which was Austria.

But now, Austria was also on the side of the enemy, so he found himself in the unenviable role of being a stateless Turkish national, with an Austrian passport, having just arrived from Galicia and trying to figure out how to immediately depart from allied (and most hostile) Greece, in order to hopefully return to Turkish-ruled Palestine.

Desperately turning for assistance to Rabbi Yaakov Mayer, the chief rabbi of Salonika, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid's pleadings were not in vain. It was, regrettably, quite necessary in those days that, in order to preserve life, property and sanity, the Jewish community had to occasionally develop some bizarre alliances to combat pogroms, oppressive governmental edicts and anti-Semitism in general. Through these contacts, the chief rabbi was able to quickly procure for his anxiety-filled guest a forged Greek passport that would guarantee his safe passage out of the country. Gratefully, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid took it, and was fortunate enough to book passage on the last neutral ship permitted to leave Athens.

But its destination, as the Lelover could have probably foreseen, was to -- America!

It was a cool day, late in the year 1914, when Rabbi Pinchos Dovid alit from his somewhat primitive transatlantic ship onto the shores of New York City for the first time. Having never previously journeyed west of central Europe, he spoke no English, and his mind was preoccupied with both the rapidity of the swirling turn of recent events and of those loved ones from whom Destiny decreed he would be separated for an inordinately long period.

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There were small pockets of observant Jewry in New York City in 1915, particularly in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, where the members of the large and prestigious Congregation Reyim Ahuvim soon heard about the new arrival and persuaded him to become their spiritual leader and mentor.

Though one or two chassidic rebbes had also recently arrived in New York, they lived in virtual isolation, having made a few attempts to transfer to their new home the glory of the chassidic courts that they knew in Europe, and over which they presided.

Rabbi Pinchos Dovid, however -- to whom now constantly recurred the words of his saintly uncle -- decided to throw himself totally into the goal of establishing in the United States an atmosphere that would not only be adequate for himself and, ultimately, his family, but would conform to the chassidic lifestyle he had so cherished in Eretz Yisroel.

Due to the intervention of some chassidim in Boston, who had helped him eliminate some red tape with American immigration authorities, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid maintained contact with what may then have been a larger chassidic community in the Hub than in New York.

But this motley group had no cohesiveness or unified sense of purpose. One chassid had come to America to escape a pogrom, another to seek a shidduch, and a third to attempt to be an entrepreneur. They hailed from different countries and from different chassidic groups. Most importantly of all, the group had no rabbinic leadership.

As they came to know Rabbi Pinchos Dovid better, they developed a growing appreciation for his brilliance as a scholar and the fact that he was a scion of several major chassidic dynasties. The chassidim in Boston were followers of rebbes whom they would probably never see again, and Rabbi Pinchos Dovid had chassidic connections that were 8000 miles away. He had no previous affiliations in America, and his trip was an unplanned accident, rather than with a specific undertaking in mind.

Why shouldn't Rabbi Pinchos Dovid become their rebbe?

With a sense of some trepidation, but grateful to the chassidim of Boston for their assistance with resettlement in his new land, he agreed. Then came the question as to the title he would assume. The usual custom had been for rebbes to take on the name of the European city from which they came. The Satmarer Rebbe hailed from the Transylvanian city of Satu-mareh. The Gerer Rebbe was long located in the Warsaw suburb of Gur. The Skvirer Rebbe resided in the Ukrainian city of the same name.



Elizabeth Peabody House, ca. 1915, the first Chassidic Center in Boston's West End, where the Rebbe was born.

Rabbi Pinchos Dovid, however, came, not from a European city, but from Jerusalem! Every rebbe would love to call himself the "Yerushalmadikker Rebbe", so he felt that assuming such a title would be a bit presumptuous on his part. Not wishing to benefit in any way from the reputation of his saintly ancestors, while also feeling grateful to America for serving as his refuge, he took on the name of the American city to which he came, namely, "Bostoner Rebbe".

* * * * *

He right away went about the task of creating both a synagogue, Congregation Machseke Torah, and a support organization, the New England Chassidic Center, in the city's Jewish quarter in the old West End -- first in a small apartment on Barton Street and, beginning in 1920, for almost a quarter of a century at 87 Poplar Street.

Meanwhile, he sent a letter to the members of his family in Eretz Yisroel, informing them that he was alive and well and living in America. Having not heard from him for so long, and ever worrying about his welfare, his rebbetzin received the news with pleasant shock. When she ran to Rabbi Biederman and showed him the letter, his only reaction was, "we know". Whether this meant that his political intelligence operations were of a superior nature, or if it implied an understanding through a Higher Source, was a secret he never revealed.

Be that as it may, the new Bostoner Rebbe set about trying to see to it that his wife and son could rejoin him in still-neutral America. Just about all of the delicate diplomatic arrangements were in place, when America entered the war on the side of the allies. Fortunately for the Rebbe, America had no plans to either deport or incarcerate him, allowing him to move as freely about as before. But a trip for his family, from an enemy country to an allied one, was out of the question.

At war's end, the emigration negotiations had to begin anew. And even when everything was set, the trip for a young woman in her low 20s, accompanied only by her 12-year-old son, through the highways and by-ways of western Asia and most of Europe, was fraught with all sorts of danger. Nevertheless, Rebbetzin Sora Soshe and young Moshe arrived in Boston in 1920, not too much the worse for the wear and tear of the trip, and only too happy to be reunited with father and husband after an interval of seven years.

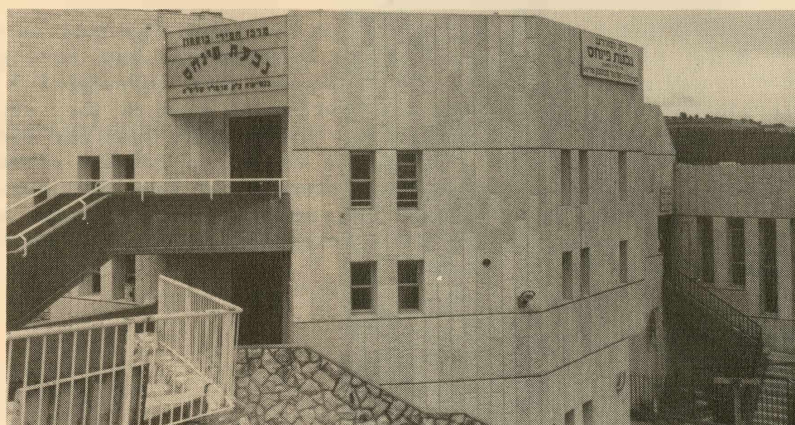
Headquarters of the Bostoner Rebbe



61 Columbia Road, Dorchester (1944-1961)



1710 Beacon Street, Brookline (1961-present)



2 Maalot Admur M'Boston, Har Nof, Jerusalem (1985-present)

A year later, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin had another son, whom they named after the Rebbetzin's celebrated ancestor, the Berditchever Rebbe, and who was to someday become Rebbe in the very same city as his father -- with the added distinction of becoming the first titled chassidic rebbe born in the United States. Shortly thereafter, a daughter, Feigie, was born, who would later marry Rabbi Yaakov Thumim and become the Altshtater Rebbetzin.

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As with new undertakings in the rest of America, the 1920s were a golden age for the development of the idea of building chassidus in Boston. The New England Chassidic Center was a veritable beehive of activity, helping out in matters of kashrus, medical problems, difficulties with immigration, job counseling, resettlement...and the list went on. The Rebbe also saw to it that his Poplar Street center housed the first yeshiva, as well, to intensify and guarantee the perpetuation of the traditional Jewish way of life in this still somewhat foreign and strange land. Many future Jewish educational institutions, both in Boston and nationwide, were modelled on this pioneering effort.

But despite his widespread success on so many fronts, the Rebbe continued to yearn to return to the Holy Land -- Eretz Yisroel. He first tried to accomplish this in 1929, but the combination of the Hebron pogrom and the American stock market crash (leading to worldwide depression) made his return to Boston more vital than ever.

Another attempt, in 1934, in connection with the bar mitzvah of his younger son, was also short lived, due to the repercussions felt in the Middle East from the war between Italy and Ethiopia.

By 1939, the decade of transition had taken its toll on the West End. With one of the greatest enemies the Jews have ever faced becoming stronger each day in Europe, many foresightful and observant Jews departed there for America as soon as they could, arriving primarily in New York City. As Boston's West End became more dilapidated and impoverished, it tended to attract elements of the population who were neither friendly nor even particularly tolerant of their Jewish neighbors, so numerous long-time West End Jews also moved to the more friendly environs of certain neighborhoods within New York.



The Rebbe at age 4.



The Rebbetzin as a child.

The Bostoner Rebbe, by now well into middle age and partially blind, had little interest in uprooting himself and relocating again. But when even the remaining few faithful members of his dwindling minyan would regularly get accosted on their way to and from shule, he decided that he, too, would be compelled to join the rapidly expanding Jewish community in Williamsburg.

Reestablishing his headquarters on Bedford Avenue, he was finally able to say that his group derived its title based on the city from which he came. And he was also able to claim the distinction of being the first rebbe to hold a chassidic Shabbos "tish" (festive religious meal) for all comers in what would soon become the greatest chassidic community in the western hemisphere.

On occasion, the Rebbe would take the train back to Boston to spend a Shabbos with his followers there, but it became increasingly obvious that the West End would soon become only a memory, corresponding to the rise of Williamsburg in the history of both Bostoner Chassidus and the development of chassidism in general on the shores of the United States.

For two years, the Rebbe again lived the life of a pioneer -- that of a chassidic rebbe in Williamsburg -- and, on the 8th day of Kislev, 5702 (1941), coincidentally in the same week as the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he passed away.

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With the close of the founding generation of the Bostoner dynasty in America, the Bostoner chassidim in Williamsburg invited the Rebbe's oldest son, Rabbi Moshe, to assume his father's position, a request to which he ultimately agreed. About 15 years later, he would move to Crown Heights and, in the late 1960s, to Boro Park, where he passed away in 1986, and where his eldest son, Rabbi Chaim Avrohom, began the third generation of Bostoner Chassidus in Brooklyn.

Meanwhile, back in Boston, a number of Rabbi Pinchos Dovid's followers refused to abandon the idea of continuing the chassidic way of life in the Hub city. Neither the disintegration of the old West End neighborhood, nor even the passing of their beloved mentor, could keep them from their determination to carry on.

Prior to his passing, Rabbi Pinchos Dovid formulated a plan whereby, with an eye to the future, his older son would assist him in his Williamsburg shtiebel, while his younger son would help him back in Boston, where his followers were already planning to relocate their headquarters to a new, elegant neighborhood, known as "Dorchester". As neither finances nor physical safety would be much of a problem, they hoped that the Boston branch of the New England Chassidic Center would undergo a major revitalization, and eventually reach greater heights than ever before.

After the passing of Rabbi Pinchos Dovid, it seemed that the logical step would be to invite his younger son, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, to assume the leadership of the shule on a full-time basis. Yet, this idea posed a few problems.

The proposed candidate was not yet married, although he was on the verge of being wed to Rachel Unger Leifer of Cleveland, a descendant of Rabbi Naftali of Rupschitz and other famous chassidic ancestors. Then there was the matter of age. At the time of his father's passing, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok was not even 21 years old.

Most importantly, there was the question of his response upon his being offered the position. Whereas his older brother was the first born son, trained and universally presumed to someday become a rebbe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok had no such actual or emotional preparation. In fact, his personality was one of such shyness and unassuming nature that, years later, classmates of his at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas would say that if they would have had to choose one of their number who would be least likely to turn into an internationally-famous and influential figure on the Jewish scene, he would have won, hands down.

To complicate matters yet further, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok wished to have no part of the rabbinate, and made every effort to avoid it. Fully aware of the plans his father had for him, he went to work as a diamond cutter, although he soon found that as he spent more time scanning the floor for gems that had popped out of their holders, rather than in cutting them, it seemed that he would be best off switching his desire for entrepreneurship to another field of endeavor.

He next invested virtually the entire sum he received in dowry into an envelope business, with the hope that it would produce a steady enough income to enable him to spend almost all

of his time learning Torah. But when this venture, too, ended behind the financial eight-ball, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok began to feel as if it was HaShem's wish, as well as his father's, that he take on the mantle of chassidic leadership.

Recently married and, at age 23, the youngest man ever to assume the title of rebbe in America, he finally agreed to become Bostoner Rebbe (in Boston) in 1944.

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The Rebbe has often spoken about the first time he entered the new shule, at 61 Columbia Road, and looked around him to discover that the average age of his congregants seemed to be well above 80. Then and there, he realized that the next generation had already begun to sadly assimilate, and a mighty effort would be needed to ensure that the new Congregation Beth Pinchas (named for his father), to say nothing of traditional Judaism in Boston, would have a viable future.

He quickly announced that his primary thrust would be aimed at the area's large number of college students, many of whom were away from home for the first time and in a perfect position (and with the greatest need) to partake of all that he felt that the Chassidic Center could offer them. Men who were older and, presumably wiser, than he tried to tell him that this was a fool's errand, that chassidus and college didn't and couldn't mix.

But the Rebbe persevered, and was personally responsible for returning so many university students to their Jewish heritage from Harvard, MIT and all of the other institutions of higher secular learning for which the greater Boston area has become famous, that, in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, his shule was able to boast that it had the youngest average age of congregants of any chassidic shtiebel in the United States.

As many of these collegiates, even those who hailed from New York and other distant cities, opted to stay in Boston, the Rebbe was also able to show that his percentage of doctors, lawyers, engineers, programmers, communications personnel and other professionals was the highest of any chassidic synagogue in the world, and one of the highest of all Orthodox congregations, as well.

But the year 1944 was not one for dwelling on the employment

opportunities of his future congregants as it was one of dealing with the even more pressing problems of the moment. The Holocaust, in all its tragic magnitude, had been openly revealed, and though it appeared certain that, in the long run, the Allies would win, the toll on world Jewry was becoming devastating. Even before accepting the position in Boston, the Rebbe had participated in the Orthodox Rabbis' March on Washington in 1943 to petition the President to aggressively deal with certain problems connected with the Holocaust.

In a less publicized and more local way, the Rebbe used political and other contacts to help refugees, and, after the cessation of hostilities, displaced persons, reestablish as normal a life as possible in the United States.

Also, long before he came up with the catchy acronym of "ROFEH" to accurately reflect his work of Reaching Out Furnishing Emergency Healthcare, the Rebbe found himself using his unique position in the medical capital of the world to help arrange for a person with a certain serious illness to travel to Boston and be assisted with translators, local transportation, kosher food and housing facilities for his family.

Ultimately, the Rebbe developed a wide network of allied health professionals, who realized that the emotional support given by the Rebbe and his organization to critically-ill patients was an important factor in contributing to their recovery. Both on a humanitarian plane, and taking into account the practical factor that it helped boost their success rate, many doctors and other medical personnel rushed to cooperate with the Rebbe in caring for individuals from all over the world, who came to Boston seeking a cure for their serious problems.

While this assistance has been extended to everyone from children to the elderly, and from the so-called "plain Jew" to world-famous rabbis, one of the most notable stories involves how, in the late 1960s, the Rebbe played a critical role in saving the life of the Satmarer Rav.

Then close to 80, the saintly leader of the world's largest chassidic group suffered a major stroke. Knowing that the best men in this field were located in Boston, the Satmarer Rebbetzin called the Rebbe and instructed him to spare no expense in flying the area's greatest specialist to New York to treat her husband. As the Rebbe phoned Dr. Raymond Adams, who, several years earlier, had treated President Dwight Eisenhower for a similar

ailment, he had very little hope that he could convince him to go outside of Boston to work with any patient.

To make matters worse, Dr. Adams politely told him that while, under normal circumstances, he would be happy to see the Satmarer in his Boston office, alternative arrangements would have to be made in this case, because he was just about to leave for his vacation. Diplomatically, but firmly, saying, "no, you're not," the Rebbe explained that the patient under discussion was the "biggest man in the world", and that, particularly in this situation, it would be necessary for the doctor to slightly postpone the beginning of his holiday.

Almost surprising himself, the doctor agreed, on condition that the Rebbe accompany him on his flight to New York. This being decided, the subsequent treatment was so successful that the Satmarer was able to live and function well into his 90s.

For those unaccustomed to such a red carpet being rolled out for them, the Rebbe arranged for kosher meals to be available in the hospitals and had no compunction about using the highest of political connections to arrange for the private plane transportation of critically-ill children.

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Even the best of political alliances couldn't help keep the once-fashionable Dorchester neighborhood from deteriorating and so, in late 1961, relocation became the order of the day again for Bostoner chassidus. This time, it was to the current headquarters at 1710 Beacon Street in Brookline, where the Rebbe's 29 years and counting has established a new Bostoner record for longevity and stability.

Whether in the West End, Williamsburg, Dorchester or Brookline, there are certain essential routines in the life of every practicing Jew that must be addressed. One of these is the creation and maintenance of mikvos. Even in the 1940s, when it was an unpopular issue, plagued by superstition, ignorance and distrust, the question of strict adherence to the laws of Jewish family purity was of vital concern to the Rebbe, who undertook the arduous task of raising money for the Boston area's first ritualarium. The organization he founded, and over which he still presides, the Daughters of Israel, also acted as an educational resource, in an attempt to not only raise money, but to acquaint hundreds of co-religionists about the beauty and the



At the Kenessiah Gedolah of Agudas Yisroel in Jerusalem, 1981.
Left to right, R. Shneur Kotler; the Rebbe; the Gerer Rebbe; R. Eliezer Shach, the rosh yeshiva of Ponovezh.



R. Shneur Kotler at the Chassidic Center on behalf of the Lakewood Yeshiva. *Left to right, R. Mordechai Savitsky; R. Shneur Kotler; R. Josef B. Soloveitchik; R. Leibel Cywiak, standing; the Rebbe; R. Hirsh Tennenbaum of Chelsea; R. Henry Landes of Revere.*

psychological advantages of fidelity to this crucial mitzvah. After the move to Brookline, the DOI, again under the Rebbe's active leadership, developed one of the most modern mikvos in the United States, at its current site at 101 Washington Street in Brighton.

Purity, or "tahara", also comes in the form of appropriate treatment of those who have, unfortunately, become deceased. The Rebbe again took the initiative, this time in the establishment of the Chevra Kaddisha, in which he revived the centuries-old respect for service in such an organization as one of the most important mitzvos one could perform. Both the efficiency and sensitivity of the Boston Chevra Kaddisha has created a new American standard for other Jewish communities to follow, but are hard pressed to equal, even in New York.

On the kashrus scene, the Rebbe has been concerned that strong efforts be made to insure that it would not only be in-patients who would have convenient access to kosher food, but that this guarantee would apply to everyone else as well. He was the first to introduce glatt kosher and cholov yisroel to a community that was initially quite unfamiliar with these concepts, although they are far more widely accepted today. He has also helped assure the existence and viability of such basic necessities as Shomer Shabbos bakeries and reliable hashgocha for the production of other kosher items that would serve not only the Boston community, but the rest of the United States, as well.

The New England Chassidic Center has become the first address for anyone with a "social" problem in Jewish life, from shidduchim, to baal t'shuvah difficulties with parents, to, unfortunately, gittin (Jewish divorce). The Rebbe has played an active role in countless thousands of simchas, and he has been a confidential and sympathetic source of support for those with the most sensitive of problems.

Nor are the Rebbe's special abilities as a counselor and as a human being restricted to his own community. He has been invited to sit on prestigious hospital advisory boards, including the Bio Ethics Commission of the Massachusetts Institute of Health and Harvard University, and 1710 is also now an important stop for candidates on the campaign trail.

In one of the more fascinating stories surrounding a serious matter involving the Rebbe; he, himself, had a unique problem on that Saturday night in April, 1972, when he learned that his

beloved mother had passed away. He wanted to accompany the body to its final resting place in Eretz Yisroel, but his passport had expired. Jewish law mandates instant burial, and the next day was a Sunday, when all government departments are closed. In the middle of the night, the Rebbe got through to the office of Congressman Tip O'Neill, then the Majority Leader (and later Speaker) of the House, and explained the position in which he found himself. The Rebbe was assured that the matter would be resolved, and an aide soon called back to report that he had contacted a well-placed functionary in the State Department, whom he informed that the Grand Rabbi of the United States would be departing from America without a passport, but who was to be allowed reentry without difficulty!

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Travelling to Eretz Yisroel with a plan has eternally occupied the Rebbe's mind, ever since he assumed his position. It has been his lifelong ambition to reestablish a community in his family's ancestral homeland and to accomplish the goal that even eluded his saintly father.

After several false, heartbreaking and, at times, expensive, starts, the Rebbe was finally able to arrange, in the early 1980s, for the development of an American-style community in the Har Nof section of Jerusalem. In only five years, it has become one of the most vibrant traditional Jewish centers in Eretz Yisroel, with the Rebbe having been personally responsible for the establishment of a school, a kollel, a housing project and a shule that is filled to overflowing. New immigrants, visitors and world-famous rabbis have all flocked to visit the Rebbe in Har Nof, to seek his help and to join him for Shabbos, Yom Tov or on other special occasions.

A lifelong activist with the Agudas Yisroel, first in America (as a member of the Presidium) and then in Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe was invited, several years ago, to become a member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (the Council of Torah Sages), the highest policy-making body for traditional Jewry in the Holy Land.

Many members of the Rebbe's own family, as well as hundreds of his followers, have permanently relocated to Eretz Yisroel, including six of the men who have served as president of his congregation in Brookline in the past quarter of a century. The percentage of members of his shule who have opted to move to

Eretz Yisroel can rival the numbers found in any Zionist organization in the country. The Rebbe and Rebbetzin, themselves, now spend half a year there, from right after Purim until just prior to Rosh Hashanah, while continuing to serve his American community during the other six months.

Each of the Rebbe's children has assumed responsible positions in service to the Jewish community in different places throughout the world. His oldest son, Rabbi Pinchos, has held the position of Chuster Rav in Boro Park for more than 20 years. His second son, Rabbi Mayer, is the rav of the Bostoner kehilla in Har Nof. The Rebbe's youngest son, Rabbi Naftali, is the rav of the Bostoner community in New England. In addition, each of them represent the Rebbe and his many projects in the locales in which they serve. The Rebbe's older daughter, Shayna, works together with her husband, Rabbi Yosef Frankel, in his role as Vayelopoler Rebbe in Flatbush. The Rebbe's younger daughter, Tobe, is actively involved with her husband, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Geldzhaler, in his duties as Bostoner dayan in Har Nof.

It was once suggested to the Rebbe, that, by being in Jerusalem during the hot summers and in Boston during the cold winters, he was doing just the opposite of what would be medically advisable for a man of almost 70 years old. Predictably, his response was that he goes where individuals need him: The tourists come to Eretz Yisroel in the summer, and the university students, for whom he still runs his famous Shabbatons and eternally open-door policy for Shabbos, are around during the winter.

Wherever the Rebbe goes, privacy is a foreign word in his vocabulary. There is always *another* medical case where someone needs help, *another* alienated college or post-college student who needs a warm and friendly ear. In his 46 years in the position, the Rebbe has personally brought to Judaic practice many thousands of college students, and he can now be considered one of the deans of the American chassidic rabbinate.

With the Rebbetzin as his partner in all of his activities, the Rebbe has not only demonstrated how important the role of a woman is to the perpetuation of traditional Judaism, but, on a personal level, he and his wife have created a living example of how every Jewish couple can and should live a happy and productive Torah life together.

The Rebbe's laid-back, but common sense, approach to

virtually any problem that he has encountered, no matter how difficult or controversial, has borne fruit more times than even he could probably enumerate at this point. Those whose lives he has touched can be found as professors in leading universities throughout North America and Eretz Yisroel, and at the top of their chosen fields of endeavor in medicine, business, high technology, law, communications, and a host of other fields, as well as, of course, in Jewish education, both as teachers, themselves, and as prize students. Non-Jews and non-religious Jews, politicians and clergymen and millionaires and the poor beggar on the street throughout the world have all heard of the Bostoner Rebbe and have all called him friend. While witnessing an unswerving devotion to speed the coming of the Moshiach, when all Jews will be instantaneously and miraculously transported to Eretz Yisroel, the last 75 years of the Bostoner Rebbes in America have transformed what was once a spiritual wasteland into a citadel of Torah Judaism that has, not surprisingly, also served as a model for exemplary citizenship in America, as well.

