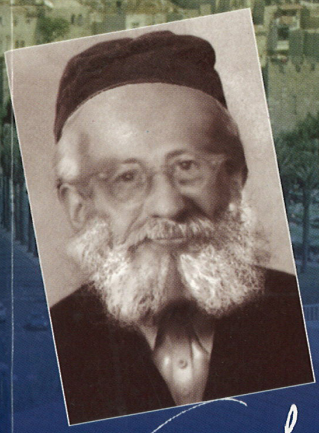


R' Moshe Kovalski





R' Eluzer Mokotowski

FROM MY ZAIDY'S HOUSE

Growth and Development of a Cheder Boy from Otwock, Poland to a Leader of the American Jewish Community

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky

FROM MY ZAIDY'S HOUSE

Growth and Development of a Cheder Boy from Otwock, Poland to a Leader of the American Jewish Community

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2024

FROM MY ZAIDY'S HOUSE

©Copyright 2000, by Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
All rights reserved. This book, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without the express permission of the copyright holder.

ISBN: 0-9702360-0-X

Published by:
American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion

Design, layout & printing:
Bottom Line Design/Brooklyn, NY
718.377.4567

The signatures of Rabbi Kowalsky's Grandfathers appearing on the cover are authentic replications

The author welcomes your comments:
Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
P.O. Box 31550
Jerusalem, Israel

ושלים של זהב



שלי ושלכם שלה היא

All that is mine and yours,
is because of her

(Kesuvos 63A)

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beloved wife, Shulamith, עמו"ש who encouraged and inspired me at each step as we walked through life together, and faced its challenges hand in hand. Her wise and sage counsel guided me through many a trying moment, and with her pleasant disposition and charm she opened and created many opportunities. It is my prayer to Hashem that He enable us to age gracefully together, in good health and cheer as we reap much joy and nachas from our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Table of Contents

Dedication *3*
Author's Preface *7*
Acknowledgments *8*
Prologue *11*
Torn From the Inner Soul *12*

Chapter One
The Earliest Years in Warsaw 15

Chapter Two
My Return to Warsaw *55*

Chapter Three
Departure for England 95

Chapter Four
Chicago 109

Chapter Five
Studies at Ner Israel Rabbinical College 123

Chapter Six
Education and the Jewish Day School Movement 151

Chapter Seven
New Bedford, Massachusetts 177

Chapter Eight
The Young Israel of Hillcrest 189

Chapter Nine
Rabbi in the Community 227

Chapter Ten
The Rabbi in the World at Large 265

Chapter Eleven
Soviet Jewry 289

Chapter Twelve
A Dream Fulfilled: *Aliyah* to Israel 329

Au Revoir 369

Pictures and Documents
Tracing our Family Roots 370
Family and Friends 371
Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren 383
Cousins, Nieces and Nephews 388
Sponsors 391
Shoah Letters 395
Gedolim 403
RCA 50th Anniversary 409
Dignitaries 413
Newark, N.J. 419
St. Louis, Mo. 421
Young Israel of Hillcrest 422
Rabbinical Council of America & Ezra Project 430
Keren Dorshei Zion Documents 446
Personal Letters 457
Conference of European Rabbis 467
A Letter to Heaven 470

Glossary 472

Bibliography 479

Author's Preface



s I reflect on the many twists and turns in the course of my life, it is easy to see the Providential hand of G-d guiding and shaping the events of the unfolding story. The upheaval, with the attending loss of family and home, followed by relocation to American shores and rebuilding our lives were nothing short of miraculous. I am humbled by these experiences and deeply awed by the mysterious ways of the Creator. To offer my deepest thanks and appreciation to Hashem seems almost presumptuous, for I know not why some perished while others flourished. I witnessed and had the merit to observe great sages, people of intense piety and profound knowledge, in the prime of their lives, with their greatest moments yet before them, all cut down by the vicious enemy. Haunting images flash before me as I recall family members and the last moments we shared together as we parted company and embarked on the trip to the new world. I felt impelled to tell this story, prompted by their memories and as part of the never-ending search to find some meaning amidst all the tragedy and death.

No book written by a human being is a self-contained work. No person is an island unto himself. This book fits the pattern and is no exception. There are many who contributed, some by their passing influence on me, and others more overtly by the manner and scope of our interaction. One person however, emerges and occupies the center stage. My wife, Shulamith, with whom I have spent *(bli aiyin harah)* the past fifty-five years, has had the foremost impact on my life. We have shared everything and are so closely aligned that it is impossible to separate and individualize our accomplishments. Together we faced life, functioning as true partners. She has been at my side at all times with words of wisdom and counsel, with great effort and participation and always with encouragement. We are forever intertwined and share equally in all accomplishments and achievements. I bless her and thank

her for all that she has done and express my undying love and admiration for her manifold talents and unparalleled patience, dedication and commitment. As in all other aspects of our lives, Shulamith, made a monumental contribution to the publication of this book. For months she worked tirelessly with me, reviewing, editing and rewriting entire sections. Many were the days we sat together, she hunched over her typewriter, and me pouring through articles, clippings, bulletins and pictures as we pieced together the events that formed the backdrop of our lives. Words can not capture the emotions of fifty-five plus years, nor express my deepest gratitude and appreciation. I only hope and pray that Hashem will grant us years together to enjoy our family, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the many people who joined in this undertaking and helped me bring this book to press. Mrs. Elli Roden listened to countless hours of tapes and patiently transcribed them to form the nucleus of this book. She fashioned my notes and dictation into a structure upon which all else was built. My friend, Dr. John Iatesta, helped me organize the material and encouraged me to persevere even as my health deteriorated. Charles Levine, a friend and confidant of long standing provided sound advice and many good ideas, particularly respecting sensitive issues. My nephew, A.J. Liberman, read the entire manuscript and not only provided much needed punctuation, but pointed out and corrected many errors in use of language. My grandson, David Eliezer Kowalsky, helped enhance many of the old pictures and advised me in respect to layout. Leah Kowalsky, his sister, spent many hours cataloging the hundreds of pictures we accumulated and had to sift through before selecting the ones inserted in the book. Mrs. Margie Pensak worked tirelessly in editing the text before her late husband (A"H), Stuart's illness forced her to give up this project as she devoted herself to his care. May Hashem reward her and bless her and the children. *Yasher Koach* to Rabbi Roy Albert for all the pictures of Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik.

Acknowledgments

Heartfelt appreciation to other family members who each in their own way helped make this book possible. My nephew, Rabbi Yonah Weinrib, advised me concerning the selection of a wonderful graphic designer/printer and counseled me in other matters in order to make this book a reality. Ms. Lori Hathaway organized and typed the entire manuscript, making a structure out of hundreds of pages. My daughter-in-law, Miriam Kowalsky, acted as my chief liaison with the printer and took that responsibility off my shoulders. My son, Eluzer, provided me with much needed support and help in maintaining my records and accounts. I wish to thank my daughter Aviva and her husband Chanoch for hosting Shulamith the past three months while I was in the United States finalizing publication. My son, Yosef, his wife, Rebecca, and their children were always there to lift our spirits and spur us on. A special thanks to my grandchildren, Chaim and Mimi Lazarus, who made a significant and greatly appreciated financial contribution to this publication. Finally, my deepest appreciation to my son and his wife, Avrum Moshe and Shifra Hadassah, in whose home Shulamith and I lived on and off for over one and one-half years during the past three years as we worked on this book. Without their support and Shifra's care, all this would still be a dream. Not only did they provide me with unstinting encouragement, but they also spent hours reading the manuscript, editing and giving advice for which I am greatly indebted.

Mrs. Ethel Gottlieb edited and proofread the entire book. The many revisions of the manuscript, organization of all the pictures, articles and documents as well as preparing a glossary were all vital components of her job. I truly appreciate her valuable suggestions, dedication and thorough attention to the many details necessary to bring this book to publication.

Yitzchok Saftlas and Yaakov Gerber of Bottom Line Design have produced a magnificent volume. Their artistry is evident on each page. The beautiful layout and graphic design of the book as well as the cover, attest to their many talents. I am also grateful for their devotion, patience and encouragement.

May Hashem reward and bless all those who helped me and grant them the merit to live full lives replete with happiness and joy, good health and *nachas* from their children and families. I am truly humbled by all the kindness that Hashem has bestowed on me and I thank Him daily for all the opportunities and bounty with which He has blessed me and the entire family.

אחרון אחרון חביב



am indebted to good friends who have supported me over many years with their friendship and care and who provided the wherewithal for the publication of this book. Their kindness can not be repaid nor can I thank them adequately for assisting in the publication of this book. Their friendship has enriched my life and each of them has a special place in my heart. I list them here in alphabetical order to perpetuate and acknowledge their contributions.

Rabbi and Mrs. Henry Book
Mr. and Mrs. Howard (Tzvi) Friedman
Mr. and Mrs. David Goldman
Rabbi and Mrs. Heshy Goodman
Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Haft
Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Hiller
Rabbi and Mrs. Avrum Moshe Kahana
Mr. Leonard Klirsfeld
Mr. and Mrs. Sam Kristal
Mr. and Mrs. Chaim S. Lazarus
Dr. and Mrs. Noah Lightman
Mr. and Mrs. William Mandell
Mrs. Lea Mathews
Mr. Yitzchok Neuberger
Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ratner
Dr. and Mrs. Marcel Reischer
Mr. and Mrs. Joe Rubin
Mr. and Mrs. Simi Schnall
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tenenbaum
Mr. and Mrs. Burt Weichselbaum
Mr. and Mrs. Mark Zborowski
Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Zborowski
Friends of Y.I. of Hillcrest in memory of Mr. Leo (Mendy) Skulnick

May the *z'chus* of their assistance bring them each many more years of fruitful and productive activity together with their loved ones and friends in good health and harmony.

Sholem B. Kowalsky

Prologue

Human beings, living and striving in this turbulent world, dream and plan. Of what avail are our plans when we are suddenly swept along by events that are not of our choice or making?

In my lifetime, I observed pre-war Poland, the Holocaust, the rescue and rebuilding of Jewish life in the United States and the re-establishment of our ancient homeland, *Eretz Yisrael.* I partook in the development of the day school movement, served three congregations, was a prime mover in many organizations and organized a foundation to promote Torah and *Yiddishkeit.* I befriended three mentors of blessed memory: the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Jacob Ruderman and Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik.

How do monumental events, activities and friendships of this dimension affect an average person? What choices have we when all we hope to accomplish would be for naught were it not for the will of the *Rebono Shel Olom*?

Let me reflect on this partnership – our efforts and His blessings.

I do this now, cane at my side, long gray beard, surrounded by my beloved *seforim.* I sit in my library near my devoted wife absorbed in her reading. Over my shoulder, guiding my thoughts, my actions, my ambitions, my entire life is the smiling face of Zaidy Eluzer Mokotowski, of blessed memory, father of my dear mother, of blessed memory. He has never left me.

Torn From The Inner Soul

In the end of the 1950's, as we began to emerge from the horror and devastation of the Holocaust, I was visited in my study by an aging, broken man who had somehow survived Auschwitz. "Rabbi," he said to me in Yiddish, "I have something that you should have." With that he handed me an envelope which contained a fragment, obviously cut from a Torah scroll and shaped like the sole of a child's shoe which you see depicted on the next page. As tears welled up in his eyes, he began in a quiet, shaky voice to tell me the story of this sole.

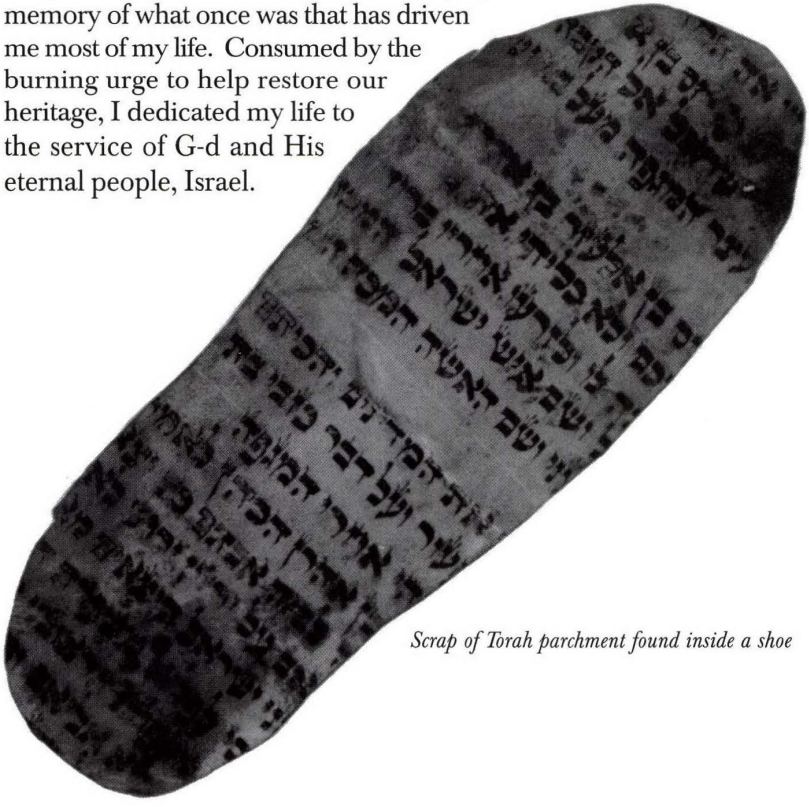
After being liberated, not knowing where to turn, he reluctantly made his way back to his small town in Germany and decided to set up shop as a shoemaker. He was good with his hands and hoped to eke out a living repairing shoes for his German customers. One day a woman entered with a pair of her child's shoes that needed resoling. When the shoemaker began to work on these shoes, he noticed this fragment inside the left shoe. Gently he extracted it confirming his first suspicion that this was indeed a scrap cut from a Torah scroll. He broke down crying, as images of the destruction of his family and European Jewry flashed before him. To him this was undoubtedly a sign to leave Germany and its cursed ground forever.

Finally arriving in the U.S., he settled with some relatives in New York who lived near my Synagogue. With the effects of his experiences taking their toll on his body, frail and in ill health, he decided it was time to entrust his treasure to an Orthodox Rabbi. Although he had not set foot in a *shul* since before the war, he instinctively felt that only a "true" Rabbi would appreciate the significance of his find. "Rabbi", he said, "I entrust this scrap to you. You will understand its significance and know how to safeguard its legacy."

After he left, I began to tremble as I studied the small piece of parchment to determine from which part of the Torah did it emanate. Imagine my shock, when I discovered that it was from *Parshas Pinchas*

(Numbers, 25:11-19). There the Torah relates how Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon the High Priest, by an act of zealotry stemmed a plague that was ravaging the people of Israel. On this little fragment, there appear the words "**and the plague stopped**" and "**it was after the plague.**" It was as if a Heavenly voice had called out across the great divide of the generations, proclaiming the end of the destruction – the Holocaust was over. It was an eerie feeling to sit staring at the small fragment, so miraculously preserved, and to receive this reassurance that a new era was being ushered in for our people, the plague was over, the slaughter had ended.

I never saw the old man again. He died shortly after his visit to my office. I owe it to him and to the many who did not survive to retell my story and pick up the pieces where they left off, cut down in the prime of their lives. It was this legacy and the memory of what once was that has driven me most of my life. Consumed by the burning urge to help restore our heritage, I dedicated my life to the service of G-d and His eternal people, Israel.



Scrap of Torah parchment found inside a shoe

The Earliest Years In Warsaw

The Kovalski Family Business

Warsaw, 1924.

 t is a Friday afternoon and once again my grandfather, Reb Moshe Kovalski is harried and exasperated. I stand watching him outside his imported goods emporium on Platz Alexander. A bitter cold wind bites my face, forcing tears down my cheeks. Overhead, heavy gray clouds fill the darkening skies as sunset approaches.

I'm excited. I clutch my father's hand tighter, afraid that I'll be lost in the crowd as I enter the long and narrow store stacked with sacks and cartons neatly piled on the shelves and floor. Servant boys dispatched from the houses of Poland's elite – politicians, academicians and army officers – wait anxiously to fill orders for high quality coffee and smoked fish, purchased to satiate their bosses' appetites.

The aroma of the finest freshly ground coffee fills my nostrils as I edge my way past the waiting customers into the back of the store. I watch silently, licking my lips in anticipation of sweet treats, and savoring the rich fragrances which developed my taste for good coffee. My aunts, tall, stately looking women speaking Polish, bustle behind the counter serving customers with tempting Swiss and German chocolates and wafers, assorted English teas and mountains of coffee beans. Nothing is too much trouble as they cheerfully hasten to fill customers' orders. For those shoppers whose baskets are piled too high with goodies for the weekend, there's home delivery. Meanwhile my uncles are busy loading and shifting the merchandise.

It's getting late, almost sundown. "Go home," my Zaidy yells to the long line of Polish *goyim* lined two abreast around the corner all the way down to the next block. "It's almost Shabbos and I have to close the store."

"Pan (Mr.) Kovalski," one of the regular customers entreats him, "it's only three o'clock. There are two more hours to Sabbath."

Ignoring him, my grandfather is already turning the keys in the locks and bringing down the iron grids. The wafting smell of the coffee lingers on and then spirals through the air as the sun begins to set and the customers remain steadfast in the queue as if glued to their places. I take one last look over my shoulder as we leave, wishing that we could stay a bit longer. It isn't often that I have an opportunity to roam amidst such goodies and interesting wares and I cherish these rare moments.

Reb Moshe finishes locking up despite the raucous protests and my father and I rush home with my Zaidy to his spacious apartment at 20 Spulner Street in time to prepare for the Shabbos, bathing and donning Shabbos clothing. On our return from Shabbos evening prayers at the *shteibel*, we sit down to dine around a large mahogany table set with finely crafted silver candlesticks and cutlery. After Zaidy's *Kiddush* over Israeli Carmel wine, we partake of a sumptuous Shabbos meal of carp, chicken soup, chicken, potatoes and dessert. The house rings to the spiritual melodies of the traditional Shabbos *zemiros*. Lively talk of the *Sedra* and events of the week preoccupy the whole family. The meal over, the adults retire to the drawing room to sip tea and coffee and the children march off to play with each other. Soon the parlor will be crowded.

My grandfather, Moshe Kovalski is a short man with a kind face. His most distinguishing feature is his long beard parted straight down with a large gap in the middle. He had been attacked by an anti-Semitic thug who ripped out the center part of his beard, and in the process tore out a chunk of skin from his face. My grandmother Rochel from the Grabski and Pinkert families, had died several years earlier. Together they had 16 children. Five I never knew since they died in infancy from disease. My father, Nachman, was the oldest son.

I never had the opportunity to meet my grandmother. Father told me that his mother had been a strikingly beautiful, wise and

pious woman whose advice was sought by women in the neighborhood. She found the time to tear herself away from her children to counsel others because my grandfather made sure that she had help in the house, one maid to help with kitchen duties and another to help with the children.

In fact, some of the descendants of her family, Leibel and Esther Pinkert now living in Kfar Saba, are following in her charitable footsteps.

Of their children, few survived the war. My father thank G-d was in America and my uncle, Rav Avrohom Shlomo Kowalski was in Switzerland where he was highly respected. A *shochet*, he managed to help many refugees who streamed into Switzerland. His wife, Hudel, a descendant of the Maharal D'Prague, was always prepared to feed and shelter them, often putting her own children to sleep on the floor while the weary guests were made comfortable.

They raised a remarkable family, all Gerer *Chassidim*. Their four daughters married well, to *talmidei chachamim*, Chani to Yankel Goldenberg; Esther to Leibel Borenstein; Rochel to Ziggy Mussbacher; Sara to David Yisacharov. Their son, Chaim Nachman, and his wife, Frieda, are usually my hosts on my frequent visits to Switzerland.

My father's younger brother, Benyamin, married his niece, Sara Manovitz, daughter of his sister Faiga and her husband Hershel. Hershel's son, Avrum Manovitz, became active in Mafdal and settled in Israel. Uncle Benyamin's son, Rabbi Zvi Kowalsky, was Rosh Kollel of the Sochachover Kollel for many years and is survived by his devoted wife Tova and many learned children and grandchildren. His other son, Moshe, is a fine learned gentleman who volunteered to serve in the Israeli army for three years. He and his wife, Chaya, are busy raising a beautiful family in Bnei Brak. My uncle's daughter, Rochel Goodman, her husband, Avrohom, and their family live in England.

Poland's Impoverished and Despised Jews

My grandfather was in a fortunate position, but life for most of Poland's Jews was bleak. They were still reeling from the military pogroms and pillages of the early 1920's that left approximately 30,000 Jews murdered and tens of thousands injured in Jewish communities across post-W.W.I Poland. The Polish peasants and soldiers, reared on the

legendary Catholic hatred of the Jews, massacred and violated Jews arbitrarily as they advanced across Poland's newly acquired territories. Families were torn apart, as they witnessed their loved ones dragged out into the streets and gunned down. Homes were burned and destroyed and Jewish businesses and stores vandalized.

Congress Poland had been declared an independent state at the close of W.W.I, in 1918. Despite the cessation of hostilities, it was only the threat of intervention by the allied forces that put a stop to the violence and murder of the Jews. Poland's three million Jews, by now ten percent of the population, were left devastated and threatened in a country caught up in a new nationalistic and militaristic fervor.

The Jews remained in a particularly precarious position. Violent blood baths devised to incapacitate the Jewish community prevailed. In 1923, the Polish government instituted the "cold pogrom" designed to deprive the Jews of education and welfare subsidies. The government used the time-honored racist slogan of "better to distribute the scarce food and jobs among pure Poles" than to share the resources among the intruders.

In this atmosphere it was easy for anti-Semitism to flourish. Poland's economy was barely functioning. The irony was that poverty was rampant in one of the most resource-rich countries in Europe. Although Poland was blessed with fertile land and boasted of many natural resources, oil, coal, zinc and lumber, only the ruling elite – the aristocratic landowners and the Catholic Church – had benefited from the wealth. The great mass of Polish peasants remained downtrodden and hungry for bread. The destitution and poverty provided fertile hunting ground for anti-Semites looking to vent their wrath on the Jewish population.

Despite their numbers Jews were easy victims for nationalistically motivated youths looking to prey on our people, thought to be associated with the Bolsheviks, the despised Russian Communists.

By 1924, unemployment was high and Polish gentiles were milling in the streets, huddled together for warmth and comfort in the icy cold winter. Food was scarce. Women with weather-beaten faces, surrounded by undernourished, scantily clad children hanging on to their skirts, waited in long lines outside the local market for a piece of herring and a few rotten potatoes.

My grandfather's imported goods emporium was far removed from this virulent poverty. It was located in a predominantly Catholic upper middle class neighborhood, near the Platz Alexander, close to the Polish Parliament. Here, Warsaw's affluent gentile residents shopped and Kovalski's store was renowned in the city as the place to purchase exotic foodstuffs. Reb Moshe Kovalski was an important and respected man – well-known to the elite military brass as a leading importer and supplier, or *podreichic,* of all other basic food items to the Polish army.

The Family Roots — Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe, z.l.

Warsaw Jewry held the Kovalski family in high regard. My grandfather was the descendant of Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe, the *Livush Mordechai* who lived in the sixteenth century, (1535 to 1612), the golden era of European Talmudic scholarship. His ten-volume *halachic* (Jewish legal) treatise fused rational and mystical thought in a book called *Livush Malchus.* He was particularly renowned for this work which was written in response to the *Shulchan Aruch,* Rabbi Joseph Caro's all encompassing body of Jewish ritual law.

The Jaffe family originated in the port of Danzig on the Polish-German border. Rabbi Mordechai Ben Avrohom Shlomo Jaffe was born in Prague. His parents sent him to Lublin in Poland at a very young age to study. He benefited from the tutelage of the noted mystic or *kabalist,* the *Maharshal,* Rabbi Shlomo Lurie and the *Remoh,* Rabbi Moshe Isserles, who taught the young Jaffe astronomy and philosophy, while simultaneously studying mysticism with Rabbi Mattathias Ben Solomon Delacrut.

His main life's work, the *Livush Malchus* was published between the years 1590 and 1604 at various presses in Lublin, Prague and Krakow. Unfortunately, it was critically received by the leading scholars of the time. During his lifetime, Rabbi Jaffe was not privileged to have his work acclaimed, but, by the end of the seventeenth century, this changed. In his preface to the reprinted *Sefer,* Rabbi Elijah Shapiro wrote that the *Livush Malchus* had become widely accepted.

The family eventually moved from Posen to Koval where my great great-grandfather, Reb Nachman Jaffe, was forced by the authorities to change the family name from Jaffe to Koval, after the Polish name of the town. It later became Kovalski, when the

Polish authorities insisted that all surnames end with "ski" denoting Polish nationality.

It wasn't only *yichus* which attracted Warsaw's Jews to my grandfather, Reb Moshe Kovalski. His lifestyle embodied the unusual combination of Torah erudition, *Chassidus* and wealth that he shared with those in need. Religious observance coupled with affluence was noteworthy and laudable because many of the more enlightened and prosperous Polish Jews were secular and had all but cast off any semblance of observing Jewish tradition.

From Sochoczow to Chabad

My grandfather deeply admired the Kotzker Rebbe whose ways and life philosophy of constant and deep Torah study were emulated by the Sochoczower Rebbe, his son-in-law. My father, Reb Nachman Kovalski, however, had his own ideas. He became a *Chabadnik*, a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Reb Nachman's attachment to *Chabad* was certainly not my grandfather's choice. He did not want his son educated in a *Chabad* yeshiva. My father had been ensnared by a group of *Chabadniks* when he was quite young. They caught up with Nachman Kovalski in the local *Beis Hamedrosh* when he was studying Talmud. After casting their glance around the students in the *Beis Hamedrosh,* their gaze fell on young Nachman who appeared to be engrossed in the holy texts. This serious boy appealed to the *Chabad Chassidim* as someone who might be responsive to their ideas and possibly be attracted to their philosophy.

Nachman Kovalski didn't give the *Chabadniks* an easy time, but they were an erudite and articulate bunch, all outstanding students. One of the leaders of the group and the most vociferous among them was the renowned *Chabad* scholar and orator, Reb Shraga Feivish from the village of Zalmanov. After a lengthy presentation of the teachings of the *Tanya*, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe's book, my father was convinced and readied himself to leave for the Lubavitcher Yeshiva.

An independent soul, Nachman Kovalski refrained from informing anyone about his plans or asking his father's permission. To him it seemed the right thing to do and following the dictates of his mind, left home and country, and went to Lubavitch, Russia. As soon as Reb Moshe Kovalski realized what transpired, he rushed to the

station and caught a train to Lubavitch. It was a four-day ride. My grandfather was determined to bring his son back home with him but he found Rabbi Sholom Ber's two-hour discourse on *Chabad Chassidus* so riveting that he changed his mind. Reb Moshe Kovalski was impressed that *Chabad Chassidus* dealt with the internal state of the person's belief. Prayer with *Chabad* included one hour of silent meditation before commencing each service.

"My son will stay here," Reb Moshe Kovalski said. The stay lasted a few years until my father returned to Warsaw. Hence, the *Chabad* roots of my name, Sholem Ber, named after the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, the rebbe who actually inspired my father.

Shabbos at the Home of Reb Moshe Kovalski

My grandfather, a staunch *Chassid*, well versed in Talmud, made sure that Shabbos in his home was observed joyously. All the family assembled and his house was alive with the sound of many guests. Warsaw winters were always bitterly cold but the Kovalski home was warm and inviting, heated by a *kochal,* a large stove and chimney filled with smoldering coals and covered by flat stones to retain the heat.

After their Friday night Shabbos dinner, friends would visit, talk about Torah, and *nosh* (eat sweets). The large salon was turned into a tea room and a servant served the visitors hot tea and lumps of sugar. Men crowded around the hot stove and poured themselves additional cups of tea from large copper hot water *samavars,* kept warm on top of the stones. The Shabbos visitors were in addition to the weekly stream of people, Jews who visited my grandfather throughout the week. My Zaidy made time each evening to receive and help them.

The unending stream of Shabbos visitors never ceased to amaze me. As morning dawned, even sometimes as early as four o'clock, men clad in traditional *Chassidic* garb, fur hats and heavy black overcoats with towels doubling as scarves wrapped around their necks, would stop in to warm themselves next to the stove and drink glasses of tea. They were on their way to or from bathing in the *mikvah* where they immersed themselves every Shabbos. Often, ice shards in their bushy beards would give away their previous port of call. It was difficult to dry off in Warsaw's winter sub-zero temperatures.

My Mother's Background

My mother Rivkah Mokotowski came from Kolobiel. At an early age, she married my father. The young couple settled in Warsaw on 19 Krucha Street. I was born on November 20, 1921, and was the only son, the middle child, and I had two siblings. My older sister Shaindel, named after our great grandmother, was born two years earlier, and my younger sister Chaya Rachel was three years younger than I. She was named after my grandmother Rachel Kowalsky who died at the young age of forty-three.

Generally at home, we all spoke Yiddish even though we lived in a Warsaw neighborhood populated by gentiles. My mother and sisters spoke Polish as well, a language I learned much later. We were not the only Polish speaking Orthodox Jews among our family members, although most *Chassidim* spoke only Yiddish.

A toddler at the time, I enjoyed the vibrancy of my extended family. I was surrounded by a whole slew of cousins who doubled as playmates. Shabbos was a particularly busy time of the week for getting together with them.

The streets were full of *Chassidim* dressed in their fur-ribbed hats or *streimels* and long caftans with fur collars, walking to and from their *shteiblech* and the *mikvah.*

Being the only boy, I was the center of attention and the apple of my parents' eyes.

I was aware of my favored status. Always curious and attentive to details, I liked to demonstrate my knowledge.

One Friday night, child that I was, a sense of joy overwhelmed me. That week I had attended Aunt Shaindel's wedding. My father left for *shul* and my mother lit candles. The table was set with an immaculate white tablecloth, fine silverware, porcelain dishes and glass cups.

Too restless to accompany my father to *shul* and only three-years-old, I watched pensively as my mother prepared the Shabbos table with all its dazzling crockery and glistening glassware. As soon as she finished, she left the dining room. Seeing the tall glasses, I acted on a sudden impulse.

With one swift jolt from underneath the table where I was crouched, I tugged at the tablecloth, sliding it off the table, shattering the fine porcelain and glass over the floor.

My mother came rushing into the room.

"Sholem, what did you do?" she screamed, eyeing the smashed dinnerware littered all over the room.

Surprised at her lack of comprehension, I explained my very reasonable action. Part of the wedding ceremony had included the bridegroom shattering a glass.

"You remember at Aunt Shaindel's wedding, I asked you why they broke the glass. You said it meant joy or *simcha.* I wanted to have *simcha* this Shabbos!"

My mother smiled and began to clean up. However, she seemed to spend more time coughing than cleaning. I was sad to see this and little did I know what would soon await me. My young life was to undergo a profound change.

I was four-years-old when my darling mother took me aside and slowly told me that she was sick. The cough would not go away. She had tuberculosis which hopefully could be cured in an isolated villa in Otwock. Father must go to England to seek a livelihood and I needed a strong and kind man to look after me, someone like her loving father Reb Eluzer Mokotowski. He and Buby Charna lived in Otwock and they would take care of me until she recovered.

Until then, I had only been separated from my mother one other time. She had taken me to Falinetz, a nearby town, a short distance from Otwock, set in dense pine forests. I had wandered off on my own, and got lost in the forest.

All of a sudden, the realization hit me like a bullet. I was lost and I wandered around crying and calling, "Mamma, Mamma." It seemed like an eternity, though it was probably only a short time. A kind Jewish vacationer found me and took me to the neighborhood where Jewish people rented summer homes. My mother had feared the worst and being fraught with worry, she fainted. Even the *felcher* (healer) could not revive her using the strongest smelling salts available. She only regained consciousness minutes after I was brought to her, safe and sound. After calling out my name, she fainted again, probably from exhaustion.

We were so attached to each other that it was heartbreaking to have to part from her. Sadly, there was no choice. When I let go of her hand to go into my Zaidy's house, she had tears in her eyes. She knew she would not see me for a long time to come.

So, it was with a good deal of trepidation that I entered my grandparents' home in Otwock, diffidently clutching my mother's hand. My heart ached at the thought of being separated from her.

Tugging at her apron, I appealed to her not to leave me.

"Mother," I beseeched her, "why me? Why not my sisters?"

"You are a boy," she said. "You need someone to teach you *Zemiros*, take you to *cheder*. You will love living with Zaidy and Buby."

I continued to squeeze her hand tightly until my fingers were practically white, but my apprehension only increased. Reb Eluzer Mokotowski was a tall handsome elderly man with a long white beard and a kind face. I had enjoyed visiting my grandparents on many occasions previously, but the prospect of having to live with them frightened me.

My grandmother was partially blind and stooped. Suddenly, everything looked gray and bleak. I shuddered. Tears came to my eyes and I was gripped with a sense of fear. Dark thoughts raced through my mind, but my grandfather's words comforted me.

"Sholemol," he said in a soothing voice, "don't worry, we will take good care of you. You know how much we love you." He bent down and kissed me.

Thus, my grandfather became the most impressive and significant influence on my life. To this very day, before every important decision I make, I say to myself, "What would Zaidy prefer?" His love, his gentleness, his kindness, his piety and honesty are the guiding forces of my being.

❧ *The Amazing Revival of Great-Grandfather Mokotowski, z.l.*

My grandfather was descended from a long line of survivors, most notably, his own father, Yehoshua Efraim Malach. My great great-grandparents had named their son Yehoshua Efraim on the day of his *bris*. When he was about 70-years-old, he became very

sick and collapsed. The *felcher* was called in, due to the unavailability of a licensed doctor. Unfortunately the *felcher*, hard as he tried, could not revive him and declared him dead.

Reb Yehoshua Efraim Mokotowski was no ordinary Jew. He was well-known in his home village of Korciew as a man possessing great knowledge and kindness. The street was crowded as the funeral procession began. The family was heartbroken watching as the pallbearers and the *Chevra Kadisha* loaded his lifeless body, wrapped in a *tallis,* onto the waiting horse-drawn wagon.

Halfway to the cemetery, a strange noise emanated from the wagon. The pallbearers looked at each other trying to ascertain the source of the unusual, barking-like noise. Again the noise was repeated. All of a sudden, one of the pallbearers noticed a slight ripple in the smooth *tallis.* The rippling didn't stop and neither did the noise.

Suddenly, Reb Yehoshua Efraim sat bolt upright! A tremendous commotion erupted. It became apparent they were about to bury him alive!

When the panic and screaming subsided to give way to joy, the rabbi pronounced that another name would be added to his original name. He would now be known as Yehoshua Efraim Malach, *Malach* meaning angel in Hebrew. He was the talk of the town for a long time afterwards, but he himself never spoke about it, never divulging the overwhelming shock at waking up wrapped in a *tallis.*

From then on, his blessings were much sought after.

Most of the day, he was immersed in Torah study while my great grandmother Mariyam Perel Mokotowski looked after him. He lived another twenty years until he died from natural causes at age ninety. His devoted wife died at the age of one hundred and two, a hardy woman who, at that age, still had all her teeth and never wore spectacles. She was eulogized by my father who was present on one of his rare trips home.

Reb Eluzer Mokotowski – z.l. His History and His Persona

I never had the privilege to know my great-grandfather, but I certainly became very close to my grandfather, Eluzer Mokotowski. I lived in his warm home at 4 Gurna Street in Otwock from 1925 to 1932 until I was 11-years-old.

Otwock was divided in the middle by railway tracks. It was more than just a physical division. It separated the poorer neighborhoods from the more prosperous side of town. The Mokotowskis lived on the poorer side of the railway tracks despite the fact that my grandfather was reasonably affluent and had a thriving business. He lived in relative comfort in a one-family house that served as the family's living quarters next to a *mikvah* and *Beis Hamedrosh.*

My grandfather and my grandmother Charna Eidel had seventeen children. Only nine survived past early childhood. My grandmother was born in Falinetz, a village adjacent to Otwock. She moved to Otwock years later with my grandfather.

When I moved in with my grandparents, only my mother's sister, Laiche, still lived with them. All the other children had married and left home. Nearby lived some of Zaidy's siblings, his sister Chaya Sara Tzeshinski, brothers Toivya and Yidel, Zaidy's son Yitzchak, Zaidy's mother Mariyam Perel, the Haventrager cousins, as well as many more relatives.

My grandparents' home was spacious and stylish. The heavy wooden front door opened into a hallway that led into the kitchen, where my grandmother spent a lot of time preparing meals for my grandfather. She insisted on doing this alone despite her handicap. She was partially blind having run into a fire in Kolobiel as a young woman. Most of the time she had a maid named Rivkah who helped her move from one room to the other, but she knew the kitchen like the back of her hand.

My grandmother always spoke to me in hushed tones. She didn't seem to look like the other grandmothers or "bobbas". She dressed in very austere dark-colored clothing and she had a *kupka*, a hair covering on her head which was completely bald. A hairdresser visited once a month to shave off all her hair.

Charna Mokotowski was very pious, praying three times a day – *Shacharis*, *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv.* She knew most of the prayers by heart, as well as most of the book of Psalms that she recited regularly.

Her greatest passion seemed be taking care of and pleasing my grandfather. She spent most of her day in the kitchen preparing meals for him. He ate twice a day and liked to eat only certain dishes. His favorite foods were *pitchai* (a jelly-like food made from calf's foot) and baked herring.

The baked herring was particularly tasty. My grandmother would wash, salt and then spice the herring. Once wrapped in paper she would bake it on hot coals. It was delicious. She also baked fresh bread and prepared other kinds of fish including carp, which Zaidy Eluzer ate at either of his two meals – at breakfast about eleven o'clock in the morning or at supper, seven in the evening.

Rising at 4:00 a.m. daily, Zaidy would immerse himself in the *mikvah* adjacent to the house. Refreshed, he quietly entered the room I slept in. For many years I was gently roused from my sleep by early morning soft lyrical murmurs. Zaidy followed a self-prescribed course of study to nourish his spirit – Talmud to sharpen his mind, Rambam to clarify the *Halacha* as well as *Zohar.* Each morning I awoke to this sight, which remained embedded in my heart.

Learning completed, he walked to the *Beis Hamedrosh* next door for early *Tefilos.* On Shabbos he felt more at home in the local Kolobiel *shteible.* In fact, as a *chassid* of the Kolobiela Rebbe, he presented a beautiful *Sefer* Torah to this *shteibel.* An excellent scribe spent four years to complete the monumental work.

The *Keser*, the *Aitz Chaim*, the *Yad* and breastplate were all crafted of silver. The velvet *mentala* was embroidered intricately and most important of all, there was absolutely no error in the text. For eight days, Zaidy and Buby had provided music, food, wine and liquor. This was a week well remembered.

Routinely, but without success, the elders of the Otwock community approached Zaidy to stand for election to the council as a *parnes* or representative to the Jewish *Kehila.* Toivya, his brother, did become the head of the *Kehila.* Zaidy preferred to remain an anonymous philanthropist. Of course, word of his deeds came to light, especially his *gemach*, his free loan fund. All week long, Jews and gentiles alike came for loans. The funds were kept in a special safe in his home and he personally distributed them, making sure no recipient felt uncomfortable.

A Child's View of the Mysteries in Zaidy's Home

One of the first homes to have a phone in Otwock was Zaidy's. Number sixty-seven was assigned to us. Were we the 67th to own

a phone? Perhaps. My greatest thrill was speaking to Warsaw. Imagine so far away and yet so close.

Zaidy Eluzer was in the flour business, distributing it to the Otwock stores and bakeries. The trains coming from the mill would unload the cargo of flour right on the tracks behind the courtyard of his house. The flour was stored in brick and steel buildings with iron doors closing them off from the street. The floors were concrete with wooden slats laid on top. The sacks of flour weighing twenty-five kilos each would be stored on the wood to protect them from becoming mildewed.

From there, the flour was loaded onto horse-drawn buggies and delivered directly to the bakeries. Despite the extremely heavy weight of the flour sacks, one of my favorite jobs as I grew older was to help load the wagons. The courtyard also held a certain charm for me as a youngster because of the variety of wildlife that trotted in. The usual visitors included geese and goats. The goat's milk was especially tasty and it didn't take this city bumpkin long to learn how to milk a goat and get a slurp of warm, tasty milk in the process. The goats, however, didn't belong to my grandfather who, when he discovered that I had been pilfering the milk, repaid the owner.

Surely, stray animals were not as regular an occurrence as the flour deliveries. Often the flour would be sold straight from the wagon. Once when the workers were taking some of the flour inside, I grabbed the wagon with the two horses and rode wildly into town. People scattered and screamed as I, only eight-years-old, was obviously unable to control the horses. Finally, another wagon driver jumped onto my wagon and stopped them.

Zaidy was furious, even though I explained that I was only trying to prove that I could assume the job of delivering flour, thus saving him much money. He laughed and said, "Well you proved that it will take many years yet. In the meantime, Sholemol, you must first devote yourself to learning Torah."

A room that soon caught my eye led from the dining room into the courtyard. It looked like an ordinary room but when you looked up at the ceiling, you could see that the ceiling was movable. Attached to the wall was a large handle with a heavy cord. When you turned the handle it wound the roof backward, exposing the sky.

It was fascinating to watch my Zaidy wind back the ceiling on *Succos.*

The weather was usually cool at that time. On more than one occasion, the rain drops began to patter down on the beautifully laid table just as soon as Zaidy began to recite the *kiddush.* When the downpour began, Zaidy loosened the cord. The roof closed and we continued the meal.

The area that fascinated me most was a closed-off storage space in the courtyard. It was crammed from wall to wall with sacks of flour, stacked much higher than my height. My focus was on a closed storage area concealed by a wooden door to the roof. I spotted a ladder perched against the wall that I stealthily ascended. Having reached the top without falling off or toppling over, I pushed open the squeaky door. There before my eyes lay a child's paradise – a whole storeroom crammed with discarded household items and utensils. A small wooden wagon, perched on top of one of the stacks, caught my eye. It was simply constructed with four wheels nailed to some wooden boards, an ultimate find for a plaything. Without thinking twice, I carried off the wagon and hid it like contraband. It was to become my cherished possession and sadly a source of contention between my grandfather and myself.

Watching both sets of grandparents, I learned that hard work was an investment that paid off. Both my grandfathers were businessmen.

I had the wagon and some boys wanted to slide down a steep hill the fastest way possible. I charged them one *groshen* per ride. (One hundred *groshen* made up one *zloty* but for a few *groshen* you could buy a treat.) I was making good money just as my grandfather showed up. It was Friday and Zaidy was passing by on his way home from the *mikvah.*

I tried to hide the wagon but my grandfather was obviously wise to my tricks.

"Show me what you have there Sholemol," he said. I complied and shamefacedly pulled out the wagon from behind my back.

"Where did you get the wagon?" my grandfather asked me. Embarrassed, I explained how I had obtained the wagon. Zaidy was not pleased with me for taking the wagon without permission but his mild anger paled to what awaited me.

One of my friends decided to spill the beans. "Sholem's charging us money for the rides," he said.

Zaidy's face turned a shade of bright red, a red I had never seen before. "You took the wagon without permission and now you use it to exploit your friendship with these boys," he admonished me.

My grandfather proceeded to explain to me the nature of friendship and he forced me to pay back every *groshen* to each boy, including several *groshen* I had saved in my drawer at home. I raced home to bring back the money all the while thinking, "there go this week's candied treats."

"Sholem," he said, "I'm going to punish you." This was the first time my Zaidy had ever punished me, so I was devastated. "You'll get the wagon back when your rebbe in *cheder* tells me that you are progressing in your studies and can recite and understand a section of the *Chumosh* and *Rashi* by heart. Soon after, the rebbe reported to my Zaidy that I had succeeded. Zaidy tested me again and sure enough, I became the proud owner of a repossessed wagon. The lesson on friendship and the guidelines set by my grandfather on that day have remained with me ever since.

The Cheder

Shortly after I arrived at my grandfather's house, I joined the other four-year-olds in the *cheder*. Studies were very rigorous and demanded a lot of concentration. I was a fun-loving child with dark curly hair, and side locks, brown eyes, rosy cheeks and a winning smile. When I saw the *cheder*, my heart fluttered. Lots of small boys, black little *yarmulkas* on their heads, were lumped together on a long wooden bench, slouched over the *aleph leumi* books with very tiny print. There were not enough to go around. These worn books with their browning and torn pages had to be shared.

As good fortune would have it, the rebbe took a shine to me, he pinched my cheek until it was bright red and ached. He deposited me on the bench right next to him at the head of the table. This was indeed a prestigious and honored place. Even then I sensed that there was a very real hierarchy in the *cheder*. The closer you were seated to the rebbe the more respected you were regarded by your fellow students.

Nevertheless, prestige didn't make a youngster's study time any easier. For hours, we sat on a long wooden bench next to the table and recited sentences from the *Chumosh* after repeating the morning prayers. Often our only relief from the rigid discipline was to play pranks on the rebbe. Not all the pranks ended in mirth and one had a particularly tragic ending.

The *cheder* class was divided into the *lobbeses*, the mischief-makers, and the rest of us who followed their lead. Early one morning the chief *lobbes* arrived at *cheder* stocked with nails. The plan was to place the small nails or tacks on the rebbe's chair. No sooner had he sat down than he jumped up screaming and hurled the nearest object, an old brass candelabra, from the shelf above him at the boy seated closest to him. The candelabra flew swiftly through the air and miraculously just missed my head by a hairsbreadth. Unfortunately it struck the head of the boy next to me. The blow knocked him unconscious. Pandemonium broke out as the small fragile four-year-old collapsed to the ground in a heap. Immediately, boys were sent to fetch the *felcher.*

Eventually, the boy regained consciousness, but he never fully recovered. For quite a while afterwards, he suffered from chronic headaches and other serious ailments. It was an accident, but this could not ameliorate the pain or comfort the parents. There was no way we could return to the *cheder* under the tutelage of this teacher. The parents realized he could not control his anger. They quoted a well-known Hebrew verse, "*lo hakapdan melamed*" meaning an angry man shouldn't teach. Out of work, he eventually packed up and left town. However, harsh discipline and rigidity in our *cheder* studies continued with the next rebbe.

My grandfather always took a keen interest in my activities and studies. The only boy in the house and the youngest, he lavished attention on me. I became his *ben zekunim* (son of his old age). He made sure to dress me in the finest clothing and I always looked dapper, even on weekdays when I went to *cheder.* He was proud that I was a dedicated student and always kept a discreet watch on my activities.

Life Wasn't All Bleak

As I grew older, soccer became a major attraction. Any spare time my friends and I had after school or during recesses, on

Fridays and holidays, we would kick around the only small ball we had. The four soccer players included Simcha, the son of Yonah the milkman, Boruch, Benzion and myself. We kept score and we became quite proficient at the game despite our handicap – one lousy undersized ball.

We all knew that real soccer action took place on Saturday afternoons. As sons of separate *Chassidic* dynasties, we would use Shabbos afternoons to stroll from one rebbe's house to the next, snacking at the various rebbe's *tischen* laden with food for visitors and listening to Torah.

Sometimes the walk would take a little longer than planned and the route would be a little more extended, actually circumventing a large open soccer field between Korciew and Otwock. It was here that Otwock's two leading young Zionist teams played against each other.

I was a staunch supporter of Betar. The players were members of the youth movement aligned with Ze'ev Jabotinsky's revisionist Zionist movement. The opponents were members of Hapoel, the more centrist Zionist labor movement. I probably looked out of place at the soccer game, but that didn't daunt me. I was a tall boy for my age, dressed in *Chassidic* attire – a black hat and a long heavy black overcoat with flowing side locks – and I was a keen observer, cheering my side. I would have played, but it was Shabbos and we were forbidden to do so.

Naturally, we were spotted at our irreverent Shabbos pastime and it was just a matter of time before my grandfather picked the moment to ask me about it.

"Sholemol, where do you go on Shabbos afternoons?" he asked.

"I go to visit rebbes," I answered with an air of innocence, knowing full well that I wouldn't be able to hold out for very long. Several minutes later, I admitted to also being at the soccer games.

"Who won?" he asked "Betar or Hapoel?"

At this point I realized that the game was up and he didn't need me to tell him about Otwock's soccer activities. "Betar," I said.

"What was the score?" Zaidy politely asked.

"Two to one to Betar," I answered feeling relaxed and pleased that I could talk soccer – the second greatest love of my life after learning – with my grandfather. Now I was in for a shock.

My grandfather rebuked me and told me that it was inappropriate behavior for a religious boy.

"It's not Shabbosdik. Don't go and watch the Yiddish *goyim* profane the Shabbos," he said. "I won't punish you this time. I'm sure that this was your first time and I hope it will be your last."

Not wanting to disobey my grandfather, I listened, and so ended one Shabbos afternoon pastime – but not my love of soccer.

Sports were out of bounds to yeshiva students and leisure was at a minimum. After we finished the long day of learning, there was little time for other activities. Subsequent to the soccer debacle, my friends and I resumed our practice of only visiting different rebbes' *tischen* where we gleaned snippets of their insights into the Torah.

The Kolobiela Rebbe's Tisch

My grandfather loved my company and often took me along on various outings.

Prior to *Rosh Hashana*h and *Yom Kippur*, Zaidy visited the Kolobiela Rebbe, Rabbi Uri Yehoshua Osher Elhonon Ashkenazi. For many years he traveled to Kolobiel and delighted in the rebbe's presence. When the rebbe moved to Warsaw, my Zaidy naturally went there as well. Once he took me along. I was devastated to see the rebbe. He had become partially blind. His residence on 5 Pave Street was a shambles. Uncomfortable old benches lined the room for his devoted *Chassidim.* Giving away most of his money to the poor, he lived in dire poverty.

When we entered, the *tisch* was in progress, as the rebbe distributed *shiraim* (leftovers). According to tradition, all *Chassidim* attending received a special *segula*, sips of the leftover wine from the rebbe's glistening large silver *becher;* the rebbe being sure to leave enough for a tiny sip for each person.

The room was crowded. I pushed my way through the sea of black hats and coats until I reached the center. The rebbe was seated with his back to a large open balcony. My excitement mounted at the

thought of obtaining a real *segula* right there and then and I inched even closer to him. I finally came close enough to touch the *becher.*

Chassidim were pushing me from all sides as they also tried to get closer to the rebbe. I held firm in my place as I swayed to and fro with the heaving crowd, hardly able to breathe. I finally got close enough and reached over with my hand extended towards the *becher.* Suddenly, one foot buckled. I lost my balance, falling backwards out of the balcony onto the ground. Amazingly and luckily, I landed in a soft pile of sand piled underneath the balcony. A few men came rushing out to see if I was hurt. They carried me off bruised and more than a little embarrassed.

The Cemetery

I had observed that Zaidy often left for Korciew, sometimes by foot and sometimes by wagon. The day came when I was privileged to go along and discover the reason for these mysterious treks.

We traveled by horse and arrived at the cemetery, of all places! It was the first time in my life that I saw these gray headstones. Soon we reached one grave etched with the name of my great grandfather, Yehoshua Efraim Malach. Next to him lay Aaron Mokotowski, Zaidy's son who had died at the young age of twenty-three. Tears welled in Zaidy's eyes. What sadness! I, too, was overcome. Zaidy turned to an empty spot next to Aaron's grave and gently said "Sholemol this is where I will rest." This was my first encounter with the concept of death. I had never given much thought to death. This momentous experience served to prepare me for what lay ahead and the event became buried in my unconscious mind.

One day I came into our courtyard after playing with some friends. Moishe, a cool Lithuanian *misnagid,* Zaidy's bookkeeper, was there supervising the unloading of a wagon of flour. Out of the blue, he asked me a question.

"Your Zaidy is so good to you, what will you do for him when you grow up?" Moishe asked me.

"I'll say *Kaddish"*, I replied innocently.

My answer upset and unsettled Moishe. "He doesn't need your *Kaddish*. He has sons and brothers", he said.

My Zaidy had two sons. One of the sons, Yitzhak Mokotowski lived in Otwock and the other son, Yehuda Leib, lived in Stock. Zaidy also had two brothers, Tovia and Yiddel.

A child occasionally is an unintentional prophet. The Holocaust wiped out many sons and brothers. I have observed my Zaidy's *yahrzeit* on the seventh day of the Hebrew month, *Tishrei,* and I am the only one to say *Kaddish.*

Purim in Otwock

There were happy times when all of Zaidy and Buby's family got together, especially so on Purim.

At Zaidy's house, they all gathered in fancy dress. My Uncle Yitzhak Mokotowski, the owner of Otwock's most famous shopping complex, was the best dressed.

We didn't have a Purim parade in Otwock. Yonah, the local milkman, organized the community's Purim celebrations. One of the customs was to visit the sick and Yonah would take a group of children dressed up as soldiers, actually riding on horses, to visit the sick and the elderly.

The fun continued at Zaidy's house when Yonah arrived on horseback. With big fanfare and lots of singing and dancing, Yonah would ride right into the center of the dining room and the antics would begin. There were actually small horses in the room! By then, everyone had already had a little *le'chaim* and we all sang, clapped our hands and danced around Yonah secretly praying his horse would not get frightened and create bedlam.

I was often quite tired by the time Yonah came around. I had spent a good part of the day walking all over town delivering a copious amount of *mishloach manos* to Zaidy's and Buby's relatives, friends and the poor.

I usually did a thorough job. Without the help of a couple of friends who lent me a hand, I never could have managed. One year, for some reason, I neglected to deliver the *mishloach manos* to Beirish, a poor man who lived on the other side of town.

It was already late afternoon and all the preparations for the *Seudah* were in high gear. Discovering the oversight, Zaidy dis-

patched me to Beirish's house with two bottles of Kosher for Passover wine.

I dashed out of the house eager to be back in time for the *Seudah*. The two bottles were safely ensconced in a little basket I used for carrying the deliveries, or so I thought.

No sooner had I passed the market when, to my utter horror, calamity struck. One of the bottles slipped out of the basket and shattered all over the cobblestone pavement. I had left the house in such haste that I had forgotten to tie the bottles. I always wanted to please Zaidy but this was no ordinary errand. It was a *shaliach mitzvah* errand to fulfill the command of giving charity to the poor!

I just stood there, motionless, gazing woefully at the broken bottle, the cost of which was prohibitive for a child – seven to eight *zlotys*. Miraculously, the bottle had dropped right outside Katz's Wine Store and the owners knew me well.

"Sholemol," one of the women said, "take this bottle of wine instead and you can pay us back a few *groshen* every month."

On hearing this, I was overjoyed and I skipped off merrily to Reb Beirish's house clutching the basket with the two bottles of wine tied in securely this time.

Go Home, Jew!

More often than not, my forays into the streets of Otwock would not end so joyfully. Anti-Semite gangs of youths sought to harass passing Jews. They would call out "dirty Jew, go home to Palestine." These words bothered me, and I often asked myself what I had done to them to incur their wrath. They looked at me as if they despised me. Try as I might, I could not understand the reason.

One Shabbos I decided to take the matter up with Zaidy. As soon as I could catch his undivided attention, I asked him about Palestine.

Zaidy patiently explained to me that Palestine meant *Eretz Yisrael*, the Holy Land, which was promised to our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jews always lived in *Eretz Yisrael* and even now many remained in the ancient biblical cities of Jerusalem, Hebron and Safed.

"Zaidy, let's go," I implored him in my youthful enthusiasm.

"Oh, my dear child, " Zaidy said, "not only can't we go, they won't let us in. Palestine is under the rule of the British Empire. They have closed the doors and forbidden us to enter."

A Calamity in Our Midst

Shabbos was a time when Jews shelved their problems and families gathered around the dining room table enjoying the traditional Shabbos meals and singing *zemiros.* It always had a particularly calming effect on me, but on one cold Friday night our Shabbos bliss was interrupted by loud sirens blasting outside our house. We looked at one another, set down our forks and knives and listened for clues.

It wasn't unusual to hear sirens but given the tense atmosphere we found ourselves in, we became more alert.

"Zaidy, can I take a look?" I asked, I wouldn't leave the Shabbos table without first obtaining Zaidy's permission.

My Zaidy readily agreed and I opened the front door gingerly, only to come face to face with a giant fireball and lots of black smoke filling the entire area. Police and fire engines continued to arrive, sirens blaring. All the activity seemed to be centered down the block. I ran there to investigate.

A Jewish home had been set on fire. Most of the inhabitants were burned alive. An anti-Semitic rogue had placed barbed wire around the windows and doors, effectively blocking all the entrances and exits to the house, trapping an entire family inside. Neighbors sought to help, but to no avail.

The ultimate cruelty of burning people alive shocked everyone and was a hint as to what lay ahead.

Somehow though, at that time our people had learned to suffer and place their trust in Hashem. Never was the thought of leaving Poland discussed or considered.

Daily Life in Warsaw

Zaidy kept in touch with relatives in Warsaw and was well aware of what transpired there.

In Warsaw, opinions ranged from Orthodox anti-Zionist to Zionist, some of whom were anti-orthodox. One of the most outstanding features of the city was the *Kehila* – the local Jewish council that was very active. The *Kehila* and the parliamentary Jewish *kolo* (political club) formed the nucleus of Jewish activism.

Warsaw was cosmopolitan and relatively liberal, and apart from the very Orthodox, many Jews wanted to fit in with their surroundings. The process of emancipation and liberalism started in the middle of the eighteenth century. Some Polish Jews were beginning to neglect their Jewish studies and traditions and integrate into the German and Polish environment. The religious Jews resisted the pressure to "modernize" and resolutely adhered to their own language and dress code. These two factors were significant in enabling them to maintain their isolated and insular lifestyle.

The influence of neighboring Germany's Jewish reformers exerted a wide-ranging influence on Jewish children who studied in the local public schools. In their senior grades, many tried to gain entrance into Polish society. This did little to enhance their standing. They were still despised by the average Pole.

Years later, I lived in Warsaw and encountered anti-Semitism in the house where I lived. Like other Warsaw apartment buildings, the entrance was through a courtyard with a gate that had to be opened by the janitor. He was invariably either too tired or too drunk to attend to his job, especially at night. The gate was locked at ten o'clock and it was always an effort to convince him to let the residents in later. They made sure to have small change and tip him, but this only increased his appetite for more, so the curses and insults continued. Thus, the janitor served as a daily reminder of how the average Pole related to Jews, even Polish-speaking successful Jews.

My grandfather, Reb Moshe Kovalski never lost sight of reality. He maintained contacts with senior officials and army officers. He also took special care to protect his property from anti-Semitic vandals.

Like other entrepreneurs, he enlisted yeshiva students to stay overnight in the store to guard against roaming bands of thugs intent on destroying Jewish property. The boys who guarded the premises were mainly out-of-town yeshiva students who studied at one of the highly acclaimed academies in Warsaw but could not

afford accommodation. Some of the older boys in the highest class of the Yeshiva went to local families for sleeping and for meals. Dormitories were scarce, so that many of them consented to be night guards. The young men were locked in the store overnight and in the morning they left when the owner opened the store. They presumably were armed with some weapon – maybe a heavy stick – and hopefully had the ability to break out of the store if need be.

Jewish Political Life

In 1919, independent Poland had held its first elections and the Jews were able to vote. They were splintered politically and the main rivalry was between Poalei Zion led by Yitzchak Greenbaum, Betar led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the Folkists or socialists, the Orthodox Jews affiliated with Agudath Israel and the Mizrachi movement.

Warsaw had the largest Jewish community of any city in Europe. Unfortunately, this community was divided between secular and religious Jews. Further fragmentation resulted from division within the religious parties. Since most religious Jews were not interested in politics, preferring to immerse themselves in *lemud* Torah (learning Torah), there were only three Orthodox deputies elected to the *Sejm*, the Polish parliament. Considering the total number of Orthodox Jews in Warsaw, this represented a very insignificant percentage. Had all the Orthodox Jews voted, there would have been many more Jewish representatives in the *Sejm*.

These three representatives faced a herculean task. Not only did they confront the *Sejm* with incidents of anti-Semitism, which was after all officially illegal, they also had a continuing battle with the secular Jewish representatives. Noah Prylucki and Yitzchak Greenbaum defended the rights of Jews, but not their religious rights. Often they smarted from insults from the Polish delegates who chanted: "Leave the *Sejm*. Go home to Palestine, Jews."

At the time of the second election, November 5, 1922, the Jews had learned the necessity of electing a large number of delegates and voted en masse.

Thirty-five Jewish delegates were elected. Twenty-five of the delegates were representatives of the Zionist parties. The others included six Agudath Israel representatives; Rabbi Meir Schapiro,

Rabbi Aaron Lewin, Eliyahu Kirshbaum, Leibel Mincberg, Feivel Stempel and Eliezer Syrkis.

Kolos or clubs were officially sanctioned by the government where delegates met to discuss legislation and socialize. Until 1922 Jews had been barred from belonging to any *kolo*. Now, the size of the Jewish representation in parliament was large enough to warrant a separate Jewish club – the *Kolo Zydovskie.*

By and large, the Jewish population was very poor. Many peddlers would assemble near the *Kolo* hoping to sell their wares. Some actually entered the building and approached the representatives who often remained late into the night.

There is an interesting story told of one poor woman. She sold socks and found her way into the building approaching each man and asking him to buy. She did not have much success. Soon she saw Rabbi Meir Shapiro, well known for his kindness and understanding. She headed straight for him and declared, "I am a widow and have to support my children. Nobody has purchased any socks from me. Please help me."

"Dear lady", he said, "Of course I'll buy a few pairs from you. You must realize however, that the men here are all politicians. Surely you know that politics is *sheker* (a lie). "*Sheker ain lohem raglaim,*" a lie does not have standing (feet). What need have they of socks?"

Perhaps this thinking led him to refuse a second term. This decision left many Jews disappointed, for he had been an eloquent spokesperson for the Orthodox *Kehila.*

My Great-Uncle, Senator and Religious Zionist Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski, z.l.

In 1923, my great-uncle Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski was elected to the senate. Outwardly he appeared no different than many of his colleagues. He was easily identifiable as an Orthodox Jew wearing a high *yarmulka* perched on the top of his head, his long black side locks curled neatly behind his ears, and dressed in traditional austere black attire. A staunch Zionist, he was constantly fighting the Agudath Israel representatives in parliament. My great-uncle ardently believed in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Until now, the concept of a Jewish homeland was advocated solely by secular Zionists. My uncle did not support the idea of a secular state. He advanced a state founded on Torah *V'Avoda*, Torah and work. With Rabbi Yaakov Reines, he founded Mizrachi – a movement that looked towards *mizrach*, the east. This state would become the eternal home for our people.

The Mizrachi movement was supported by many of Poland's Orthodox Jews, but never reached the popularity of the non-Zionist Agudath Israel.

My great-uncle was a fervent man who had the courage to move against the tide and speak his mind. He was short with a high forehead, sharp chin and a wandering glazed look, almost as if he had lost something. His deceiving look masked a very intense charismatic personality. A philosopher and a fine orator, he spoke five languages, Polish, Yiddish, Russian, German, as well as Hebrew, which he encouraged his family to speak at home.

Above all, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski was an outstanding Torah Scholar. He had received his *smicha* from the Avnei Neizer, the Sochoczower Rebbe, of whom he was a devoted and assiduous student.

For three years he lived in Israel with his family. During that time, he witnessed Arab riots in Jaffa. More than one hundred Jews were massacred. It distressed him deeply to see his brothers suffer while the British authorities did nothing to quash Arab violence.

With a heavy heart, he returned to Poland to raise funds for the *Keren Kayemes* and to gather support for the isolated and threatened Jews of the Old Yishuv.

His ardent Zionism incurred the wrath of many of the leading *Chassidic* rabbis of the time, including his beloved mentor, Rabbi Avrohom Bornstein. The Sochoczower Rebbe stood apart from many of his *Chassidic* contemporaries because he advocated settling the land of Israel, but he opposed the concept of a Jewish homeland at that time. A homeland would only come about when the *moshiach* (messiah) would gather all Jews from the four corners of the earth and return them on the wings of eagles to the Promised Land.

The two men were eventually driven to a showdown. The Sochoczower Rebbe offered my great uncle an ultimatum – either you leave Zionism or you leave me.

"If you don't give up your Zionist work, don't ever pass over this threshold again," the Sochoczower said.

My great uncle prostrated himself on the floor at the feet of his esteemed rabbi and teacher.

"Rebbe, Rebbe, I love you," Rabbi Kovalski said, "but I love *Eretz Yisrael* as well."

"Leibel, my dear son, please get up and listen to me," the Rebbe said. "Zionism will get you into trouble and your children may not follow in your footsteps."

Although he was moved by the Sochoczower's words, Rabbi Kovalski could not give up his mission for *Eretz Yisrael.* He chose Zionism, but continued to maintain contact with the Sochoczower Rebbe. Unfortunately, the Sochoczower's insight into my great uncle's future proved to be true. Only some of his children followed in his Torah observant footsteps.

Meanwhile, the rift between the Orthodox Zionists, Agudath Israel and the *Chassidim* grew more rancorous. In effect, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski was relentlessly hounded by other Orthodox Jews who wanted to excommunicate him. They put up posters in the towns where he had served as a rabbi – Grabow, Chorezele and Votzlavak – condemning him as a Zionist.

Nevertheless, Yehuda Leib Kovalski fought for his ideals in the senate and in religious circles of Poland. But he never really recovered from a nagging illness that relentlessly afflicted him. He died two years later, in 1925, at the age of sixty-three.

Summer in the Pine Forests of Otwock

Come summertime, the family shut themselves off from reality in our own vacation colony.

All year round, the Jewish population of Otwock was approximately 6,000 to 7,000. Every summer, the pensions and hotels – especially the Zolbergs Hotel and the Warshaviak Hotel – were transformed into a haven for about 40,000 to 50,000 vacationers who came from many cities, mostly from Warsaw.

Otwock was an ideal place for anyone suffering from lung disease because of its pine forests. At the time it was thought that the sticky liquid sap from the pine trees was a cure for tuberculosis. Many people, including *Chassidic* rabbis and their followers, came in droves. Often the wives and children spent the week in the pension. Their husbands would travel from the cities to join their families for Shabbos.

The neighborhood became a self-contained complex, with stores, a *mikvah,* and *batei medrash.* The existence of these *batei medrash* serving the varied groups of worshippers was evidence of the divisions existing in everyday life which were highlighted during summer vacations. Polish Jews were highly class conscious and class divisions pervaded all aspects of community life. Each group of artisans, craftsmen, or yeshiva students prayed separately. The shoemakers, the tailors, the carpenters, the ironmongers, and the bakers all had their own individual synagogues. The divisions reflected the way they lived the rest of the year in Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz and in other large cities.

The prevalent atmosphere in summertime Otwock was similar to the upstate New York bungalow colonies in the Catskill Mountains. Jews would flock to Otwock and black clad figures could be seen huddled in the forest bent over Talmud tractates. The only sounds heard were the noises of the forest animals and birds, the breeze gently rustling the pine cones and the humming of Torah repeated in lyrical tones. Meanwhile, children played tag and ran in and out.

I busied myself dancing among the pine trees, playing soccer, sleeping outside under the cloudless skies on my grandfather's porch. This was a favorite time of year for me, especially waiting to see which friends and relatives would come from Warsaw for the weekends.

Rabbi Arale Hopstein, the Koshnitzer Rebbe, and the Tea Hoax

The Koshnitzer Rebbe, Reb Arale (Aaron) Hopstein was among the famous *Chassidic* rebbes who spent time in Otwock. My father had known the Koshnitzer Rebbe while they were both young men and before Rabbi Arale Hopstein had become the Koshnitzer Rebbe.

The climate called for relaxation, but the country air was where many major business deals were concluded. My father was no exception. Many years before, he and Arale entered into a business venture. It was shortly

after both their marriages. My father, being the son and the son-in-law of wealthy families, had received a large dowry from both sides. Apparently Arale was also independently wealthy and together they decided to invest their money in selling quality tea. My father was supposedly a connoisseur of beverages, having grown up in the business.

The best place to directly purchase the tea was at the German-Polish port of Danzig. It was a train journey of several hours from Warsaw. As soon as they arrived at the port, they began searching for ships carrying a cargo of tea. This was not difficult to find. Tea was an abundant commodity and demand was high, especially among Poland's Jews who considered tea their traditional drink. Tea was served at every Jewish gathering and in every Jewish household. Shabbos was incomplete without sipping a *glessale* (glass) of tea while sucking an ample supply of sugar lumps.

Both my father and Reb Arale were young and impulsive. Despite the fact that my father had grown up in the family business, he did not have any experience. It was relatively simple for a sharp talking impostor to talk him into purchasing a whole wagon full of what he said was the finest tea at a fair price. Thinking they had struck a real bargain all the money was paid up front. My father and Reb Arale prepared to accompany their precious tea back to Warsaw on the cargo train that ran between Danzig and Warsaw.

They were by now both stone broke, but happy as they waited anxiously for the train to arrive in Warsaw. It took some time to unload the cargo but the two successful buyers had time. After all, they had just concluded a really good deal. The tea was finally unloaded and they rushed over to marvel at the contents of the container. They managed to pry open the wooden chest with a large blunt object, waiting for the strong aroma of the tea leaves to pervade the air.

However, the only odor they smelled was that of dry, malodorous leaves that had fallen from the trees the previous autumn. The aroma was extremely strong. The leaves had sat in the chest for several months and were completely withered, brown and shriveled. Dismayed, my father and Reb Arale realized they had been taken for a ride and that was that. This was the first and last time that my father and Reb Arale did business together. But they continued to maintain contact with each other and Reb Arale always remained a friend of the family, coming to our aid years later.

My father had left Poland for the United States. We received word in Warsaw that he had taken seriously ill. He had contracted some disease, but we only received scant details. The family was in a quandary. My mother felt we had to act. She traveled to Otwock to ask the Koshnitzer Rebbe, Reb Arale to give my father a blessing.

I accompanied my mother to the Rebbe's house. The entrance and hallway were packed with people like ourselves waiting to consult with this righteous man and receive a blessing from him. The demand for an audience with him was so great that he employed young *Chassidim* to regulate and control the visitors.

As soon as we introduced ourselves, we were ushered into the Rebbe's study and quickly told Rabbi Arale about my father's illness.

"Don't worry," he said, "the devil's not going to get him. We will add Chaim to his name." From then on my father was called Chaim Nachman.

The Rebbe blessed us. He also ordered his assistants to give my mother money for the fare home.

"This money," I said to my mother, "is blessed money and should not be used for transport. Please save it for charity."

A few years earlier, I had another opportunity to witness the saintliness and wisdom of the Koshnitzer Rebbe. One *motzei* Shabbos, I and some of the *cheder* boys decided to visit the Koshnitzer Rebbe in his home in Otwock.

Saturday night was a time for mirth and enjoyment at the Rebbe's house. The Koshnitzer Rebbe would play a violin. This violin was really unusual – it only had two strings – but the rebbe played it like a Stradivarius. The music was rousing and soon all the *Chassidim* were on their feet, dancing, singing, foot stomping and clapping.

All of a sudden, the door was thrust open and the head of Otwock's Communist Party who worked as the kosher baker's assistant and some of his coterie burst in on the festivities. This was no ordinary baker – he was well known in town as the *crimer kop* or "crooked head" because his head was constantly turned to one side. He immediately drew attention to himself.

The Rebbe stopped the merriment and called him over. He moved towards the door, not an easy feat in a room chock-full of *Chassidim.* On a signal from the Rebbe, some of the Rebbe's followers grabbed

him and dragged him through the crowd until he came face to face with the Rebbe.

"What's your name?" the Rebbe asked him.

"The *crimer kop*," the baker answered.

"From now on, you'll be the "straight head" and called by your given name," the Rebbe said. "Now," he continued, "you're going to have *chamim* (hot) tea this *motzei* Shabbos." The Rebbe instructed his *Chassidim* to collect the leftovers of all the glasses of tea drunk by all the *Chassidim*. He then told his assistants to gather all the pieces of leftover sugar lumps and put them onto a plate. The tea and the leftover sugar were set before the baker.

"Drink it," the Rebbe ordered.

The baker, disgusted by the whole affair, refused to drink the tea. The *Chassidim* formed an even tighter circle around him. It was virtually impossible for him, even though he was a tall heavyset man, to break free and make a run for it. His options were extremely limited and the Rebbe became more insistent.

"You're going to drink it because I say so," Reb Arale said slapping him on both cheeks.

Sensing that there was more to this whole affair than met the eye and knowing he was trapped, the baker complied.

My friends and I waited with bated breath anticipating an immediate miracle. True, the potion did not have immediate astounding results. The man's head didn't swivel around on his neck and become straight, but soon drastic changes were affected in the baker's life.

Not long after this episode, he was gripped with a surge of renewed belief in the Almighty and began to be observant. He became a *ba'al teshuva* and a respected man among the elders of the community.

Chofetz Chaim Visits Warsaw

Polish Jewry Appoints the Chofetz Chaim, z.l. to Plead its Case With the Premier

Otwock was overflowing with excitement. The venerated Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen Kagan Poupko, was on his way. Ninety-one years of age, this revered frail man was embarking on an important mission.

The Chofetz Chaim had been a leader throughout his life and in desperation the Jewish community urgently begged him to once more come to their assistance.

The latest election to the *Sejm* had been disastrous for our people. We had lost our political strength. The Polish deputies were preparing to pass legislation to prevent the study of Torah in the mornings. During these hours only secular studies were to be permitted and all students were required to speak the Polish language exclusively. The majority of the yeshiva students spoke only Yiddish and, of course, secular subjects were alien to them. The very thought of negating Torah at any time was unthinkable.

In our favor was the seeming sympathetic attitude of Premier Bartel and it was deemed appropriate that the Chofetz Chaim meet with him. Small in stature, he faced the most powerful man in Poland as tears streamed down his withered face. He began to speak, in Yiddish of course. Senator Yakov Trokenheim, at his side, attempted to translate when the Premier interrupted. "Good man, do not translate. The tears of this saintly man speak more eloquently than words. His wish will be honored."

I remember this event well. I was eight-years-old at the time and the news of the upcoming meeting had swept Otwock. He was on his way to Warsaw and the good Jews of Otwock were determined to be there as well. All Warsaw bound trains were packed to capacity and amidst that throng was I, little Sholem. Packed like sardines, we arrived in Warsaw where I fell out of the carriage onto the platform.

I was single-minded in my mission, to get as close as possible to the Chofetz Chaim. For many days my rebbe had been expounding on the virtues of this wonderful human being.

The Chofetz Chaim was born in 1838 in Russia. At the age of ten, he was sent by his parents to Vilna to study with the leading scholars of the time. Eventually, he was to become one of the greatest religious leaders of the period because of his piety, his humility and integrity.

After he settled in Radin, Poland, he became rabbi of the community. He chose not to be supported by the *Kehila* and his wife ran a small grocery store.

In 1873, he published his first work entitled *Chofetz Chaim* detailing the laws of *lashon harah.* This is a seminal work on the need

to carefully monitor one's speech and to avoid all kinds of idle talk, gossip, slander or talebearing. It was published anonymously. He followed this book with a second *sefer* on the same subject published in 1879 and a third work in 1925.

However, he is most famous for his six-volume *Mishnah Berurah,* published between 1894 and 1907. This *sefer* is a commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* and is recognized as an authority on everyday *halachic* issues.

All in all, the Chofetz Chaim published twenty-one *seforim* dealing with a variety of *halachic* issues. These included laws for Jewish soldiers serving in the army, laws pertaining to family purity, charity, obligation of Torah study and also a book, *Niddehei Yisrael,* encouraging immigrants to adhere to their Torah observant ways.

Determined to fulfill my teachers' wishes and along with tens of thousands, I crammed into Plotz Alexander waiting for the Chofetz Chaim to arrive. The streets were lined with Jews packed elbow to elbow all the way up to the Kronenberg Palace. There was no earthly way that I would be able to get a glimpse of him. Right now, this is what I wanted more than anything else. Well, I said to myself, when all else fails, cry, and cry is what I did. My tears didn't fall on deaf ears or dry shoulders.

As luck would have it, my cousin Leibel appeared next to me and the next thing I knew, I was sobbing uncontrollably on his shoulder.

"What's the matter, Sholemke?" he asked me. Speaking between heartbroken sobs I answered him. "I can't see the Chofetz Chaim," I said.

Leibel promptly hoisted me up around his neck and began pushing, elbowing and weaving his way through the massive, densely packed crowd. Nothing deterred Leibel. Inching forward, we finally moved to a point from which the Chofetz Chaim was visible. He had been lifted high in the air on a chair supported by a group of men. His position seemed tenuous as the throngs pushed and shoved even closer to look at the face of this beloved man.

Suddenly, either by chance or miracle, Label seemed to have achieved the impossible. I was close enough to actually see the face of the holy Chofetz Chaim. He was a short man of slight build. The masses gathered were dwarfed by his saintly presence. His eyes were

gentle and his facial expression was calm. His face bore the signs of his advanced years and his beard flowed wildly but neither the wrinkles nor the unruly beard could detract from the immense strength emanating from the Chofetz Chaim.

Swiftly I reached out to touch him. He was no longer facing me so I touched his *kapota* (coat) on the upper part of his right arm with my right hand. It probably only lasted a split second, but it felt like an eternity. I was elated, almost drunk with joy at having been privileged enough to come face to face and close enough to touch one of the most outstanding religious leaders of the century, the Chofetz Chaim. He represented the epitome of kindness, humility, dignity and *ahavas Yisrael,* unconditional love of all Jews.

By now my heart was beating fast and I embraced my cousin Leibel, hugging him tightly for having enabled me to realize my dream. At that point I knew that this moment would be eternally engraved in my heart and in mind and I would never forget Leibel's kindness. Unfortunately, Leibel perished at the hands of the Nazis, but I feel certain that he is reaping the rewards of his deeds in the *olam emes*, the "true world" (the World to Come).

Later, overwhelmed by the enormity of the incident, I refrained from washing my right hand. Hunger overcame my determination and before long I had to wash for the *Hamotzie.*

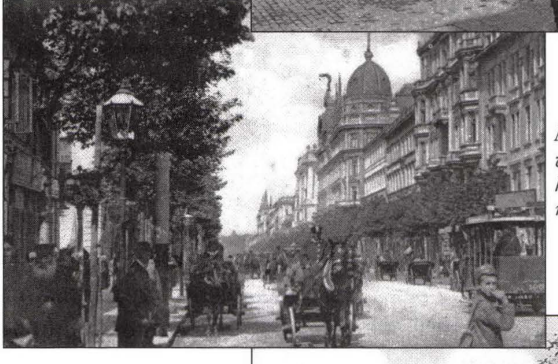
We didn't realize it then, but we were a decade away from the end of Jewish life in Poland. By the early 1930s, Europe was beginning to witness the rise to power of Germany's National Socialist Party leader, Adolf Hitler. Nazism was beginning to rear its ugly face on the streets of Germany as German youth dressed in shining brown uniforms and jackboots goose-stepped their way through main thoroughfares. Meanwhile, Nazism was rapidly spreading over the border, into Poland as well.



Leszno Street, in Warsaw, where part of the Kovalski and Mokotowski families lived



Jewish Council of Warsaw on Gzibovski Street



Marszalkowska Street where Zaidy Kovalski had his business in a non-Jewish neighborhood, Warsaw



Aleje Jerozolimskie – famous, affluent neighborhood in Warsaw

Solnizki's house and Bank in Otwock





House of my Uncle R' Yitzchok Mokotowski in Otwock

Kortchev Street, Otwock

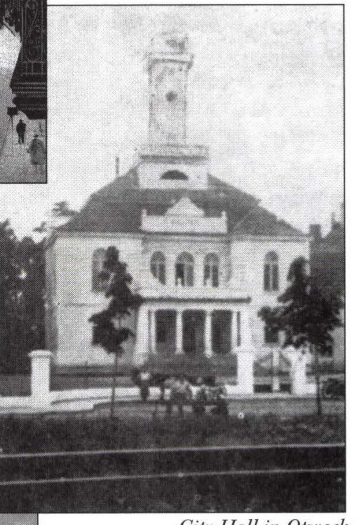




The Jewish bazaar and marketplace in Otwock



Nalewski Street in Warsaw – Main Street of the Jewish neighborhood where many Jewish shops were located.



City Hall in Otwock





מצבת הזכרון במרתף השואה בהר ציון, ירושלים

אלה אזכרה

אי אפשר לתאר במלים את חורבנו של עם ישראל בשנות תש"ש — תש"ח.

אי אפשר כלל למצוא ביטוי הולם לגודל צערנו על אבדן ששת חמיליונים יהודים, קדושים וטהורים, שעלו על המוקד בתקופת החורבן הנורא של יהודי אירופה.

אי אפשר למצוא איש שיוכל לקונן את קינת החורבן הזה.

אי אפשר לנו לעשות כעת דבר בשביל קדושים אלה.

אי אפשר אפילו להקים מצבה על קברם, כי חזזים הארורים שרצחו אותם, שרפו את גופותיהם ולא נודע אנה הלך אפרם.

אבל אי אפשר לנו לשכוח אותם!

אם כי מצבת אבן לא נוכל להקים על קבריהם, הרי יש לאל ידנו להעמיד להם מצבה רוחנית.

מצבה זו — תולדות העיר וזכרונות אנשיה — היא נר לזכרם, למען יחיה לעולמי עד.



My cousin Yentel Mirell with my Aunt Leah in Otwock



My cousin Leibel Mirell, Otwock



Laizer, one of my friends in Otwock



My friends Moshe and Ephraim in Otwock



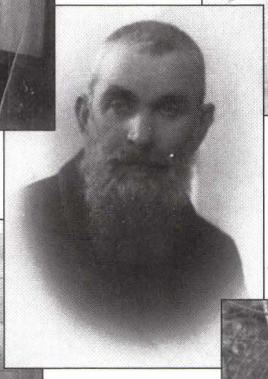
Chashmonaim – a part of the revisionist group in Otwock



Aunt Mokotowski and her daughter Yenta in Stocktz



My mother Rivka with cousin Leibel, Otwock



Great Uncle Tovia Mokotowski the head of the Otwock Jewish community



My friend Dovid and me, in Otwock



My friend Simcha Sharfman and me, in Otwock



My friends in Otwock – Menachem, Simcha and Boruch

My Return To Warsaw

Journey Back

The year was 1932, and sadly I was leaving my grandparents' loving home in Otwock for good. My mother had already returned to Warsaw, but I would not be living with her. I was about to embark on a new chapter in my life.

Eleven-years-old, I had graduated from *cheder* to yeshiva. Although my father was still in the United States, he had given strict instructions to my mother regarding his son's education. I, Sholem Ber, was to follow in his footsteps and enter the Lubavitcher Yeshiva, reestablished in Warsaw.

Faced with the unknown, I bade a tearful farewell to my beloved Zaidy and Buby. Alone, I waited for the Warsaw-bound train at the Otwock station. Although heralded by the announcement that it was the Warsaw train, distrustfulness held me back. I allowed my fellow passengers to board first, and only felt confident choosing a compartment when I noticed an elderly Orthodox Jew seated by the window.

I sat down and placed my single piece of luggage, one square suitcase filled with all my earthly possessions, on a rack above the opposite bench. This way I could keep an eye on it as the train rattled its way towards Warsaw. But as the train drew further away from the Otwock station and the gentle swaying movements became more vigorous, I forgot about my luggage.

Making myself comfortable on the narrow bench I was acutely aware of my Jewish look. I was wearing the traditional *Chassidic* garb, a black hat and long black coat. My side locks were neatly tucked behind my ears.

I took a close look at my traveling companions. A Polish lady in a summer frock and hat had seated herself next to the elderly Jew who occupied the window seat opposite me. The fact that the man was Orthodox with a long white beard was comforting. I relaxed, but we did not converse. His head was bent down as he scrutinized a tiny well-worn book of Psalms. Having him nearby afforded a certain sense of security and I sat back to enjoy the ride and dozed off.

Soon, a loud commotion in the compartment awoke me. The lady sitting opposite me was yelling anti-Jewish obscenities at the old man. The verbal attack seemed unprovoked and caught me by surprise. The passengers had all been minding their own business and although I had stashed my suitcase above her seat, I tried to avert my eyes from staring directly at her every time I checked the case. I certainly knew enough about the irascibility and fragility of relations between gentiles and Jews to avoid looking any strange gentile directly in the eyes.

The incident was turning ugly. The lady swerved towards the Jew, her veins bulging in her neck, which turned a bright scarlet as her fury mounted. The next instant, she was pounding her fists on top of his head. By now her knuckles had turned white and the pupils of her eyes appeared dilated. She had that glassy look that people get when they become consumed with mindless hate. The old gentleman was cowering in his seat.

I jumped up, lurching towards her. With one swift movement of my right arm, I jerked the suitcase out of its place. It came crashing down right on top of her head. Bulls-eye! She swayed from the blow and stopped beating the elderly man. Feigning remorse I apologized profusely for my carelessness. By now she was too shaken to respond. I, on the other hand, felt elated for the remainder of the journey. I had defended a Jew in spite of my youth. If I could do it once, I could do it again. Indeed, shortly thereafter I again had to use all my boyish wits to outsmart another Pole.

The anti-Jewish atmosphere was becoming more virulent in the Polish capital. Through a process of osmosis, Hitler's anti-Jewish propaganda was being easily absorbed by the Polish citizens.

In Germany, the process was swift. As early as 1930, the Nazi Party had won one hundred and seven seats in the *Reichstag*. With this success, the Nazis had become Germany's second largest party. Its leader,

Adolf Hitler, exercised every ounce of political shrewdness and plain terror tactics to scare the opposition into surrender. He succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Hitler's crass and virulent tactics coupled with the German fear of Russian Bolshevism launched him and his party to the top. Less than a decade after he was jailed for trying to overthrow the Weimar Republic, Hitler had risen to take the helm of Germany, albeit a crushed Germany of eighty million people still licking its wounds after their defeat in W.W.I.

By now, Hitler's oratory and rhetoric against the Jews – which had united a depressed German people behind him – had infiltrated the fabric of Polish society. Nazi propaganda espoused the benefits of ridding the world of Jews. Anyone contributing to this common goal deserved to be lauded by family and friends. More and more people began to attack Jews indiscriminately.

Early one morning, I was made aware of the Polish ramifications of Nazism. I was walking slowly down a street after *Shacharis* when a passing policeman ordered me to stop. I was stunned. I could not think of anything I had done wrong. With no choice, I had to obey orders. I had a gut feeling that things were going to get very bad.

"Polish my boots, Jew boy," the policeman hollered handing me a cloth.

I filled my mouth with spittle and began shining his filthy boots. This was not a situation I wanted to be in for too long. I used lots of elbow grease and finished the job in a flash. As I worked, my anger and resentment gave way to a devilish thought, as I hatched a plan.

I hadn't wasted all my spittle on the boots. I saved up a huge gob of spit. Success would be in split second timing and perfect aim.

The husky policeman bent to inspect the quality of my work, so now was the time to act. We came face to face and our eyes met. I opened my mouth as wide as possible spitting one huge gob of saliva directly into his narrowing eyes. Then I ran for my life. The chase was on. I could hear the policeman yelling behind me, hot on my trail. Soon he enlisted the aid of what seemed to be a posse of dozens of pedestrians. There was no way I was going to get caught. I raced down street after street determined not to be stopped. Finally, the huffing policeman and his company gave up. Reacting solely by instinct, this Jewish boy had triumphed!

Safely ensconced at home again, I breathed a sigh of relief and settled down to calm my quivering nerves.

I did not have much time that morning to savor my conquest. A quick breakfast and off I went to Yeshiva. My father was by now determined that I follow in his footsteps and attend the *Chabad* Yeshiva, Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim located at 17 Sapojzinsky Street. The Yeshiva had relocated twice. It moved from Russia to Warsaw, and in Warsaw the enrollment increased to such an extent that by this time the school was already in its second enlarged location.

The *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rabbi Yedel Eber was renowned for his devotion to prayer. He spent at least one hour before each service in deep silent meditation. He did not seem to be too concerned with the physical accommodations at the Yeshiva. Although I loved learning Torah and respected the rebbes, it was difficult for me to adjust to the environment. This, of course, made my transition very difficult. I had spent seven years in my Zaidy's house in relative comfort and was not prepared for this abject poverty. Yet, my parents felt it necessary to have me dorm so as to be completely surrounded by the *ruach* (spirit) of *Chabad.* This *ruach* was not enhanced by the poor conditions.

We slept cramped together in a loft. The bedbugs had a heyday in our straw-filled mattresses, multiplying faster than we could kill them. There was not much floor space, certainly not enough to put away all one's personal belongings. The bugs busied themselves crawling over the boys all night. We were lumped together like sardines in this suffocating atmosphere.

The dormitory faced a courtyard. On the opposite side of the courtyard, there was an institution for the mentally handicapped. At nights, cooped up in the loft, we could hear the patients yelling and screaming. When the screaming began, we would often go over to the window, throw it wide open and start mimicking their noises in our loudest voices. Admittedly, we were not sensitive to the pain of the inmates. Screaming out into the cold night air just served to release some of our boyish tensions.

Unbelievably, sleeping in the dormitory was considered a privilege! I think I owed this somewhat dubious privilege to the fact that

my father supported the yeshiva financially and my mother's apartment at the time was very small. Many boys who came from out of town were forced to find accommodations elsewhere. The dormitory was not large enough to accommodate all of them. Some of the *bochurim* hired themselves out as overnight store guards in exchange for a place to sleep for the night.

This system struck me as degrading. Indignantly, I protested to my family and friends over this lack of regard for the basic welfare of young boys who devoted themselves to the full-time study of Torah. I was angered by the callous and indifferent treatment toward those who were perpetuating our heritage. Unfortunately, money was scarce and the yeshivos just could not afford the cost of large dormitory facilities.

At Tomchei Temimim, we were educated according to the dictum of *bitul ha' yesh* – literally translated as a nullification of the self. The concept, very roughly defined, required a person to gain control over his base tendencies toward arrogance, overindulgence and gossip and concentrate instead on the qualities of humility and kindness.

Although we were taught that physical and material comforts are secondary to spiritual satisfaction, I became aware that it is hard to nourish your soul on an empty stomach. Food at Tomchei Temimim was limited and the meals – consisting mostly of a large pot containing some stew made with meat bones served with dry bread – were barely edible. We did have a stove in the building. After collecting coal and stoking the stove, we would pool our monetary resources – a few *groshen* – enough to purchase some spuds. The warmth of the stove felt good, even if the handful of potatoes were insufficient to quell our hunger pains. As for quenching our thirst, drinking chicory at the Lubavitcher Yeshiva was a memorable experience. At best, it was a lukewarm tasteless liquid and at worst it was a poor man's substitute for coffee. It certainly was not the high quality aromatic coffee I was accustomed to.

Actually, I was a lot more fortunate than most of the other students. I had a large family in Warsaw and I could go home or visit numerous uncles and aunts to share a meal with them. Most of the boys, however, were dependent on the yeshiva.

It wasn't just the physical conditions of the yeshiva that bothered me. I had been raised in Otwock by my mother's devoted father, my beloved Zaidy, a Kolobiela *Chassid.* In Warsaw, I had become familiar with the Sochoczower *Chassidus* of my father's father, Reb Moshe Kovalski. Although, they were different *Chassidic* dynasties, they were similar in some respects, including the attire and the daily routine, Torah study and loyalty to their rebbes.

Chabad was a different brand of *Chassidus* altogether. The dynasty was founded in Russia, as opposed to the other *Chassidic* groups that had their roots in Poland. *Chabad* had its roots in geographical proximity to the Russian Litvak or Lithuanian school of thought – the home of the *misnagdim.* This presented a dichotomous situation that had to be resolved for *Chabad Chassidim.* Unlike other *misnagdim* who resolutely opposed paying allegiance to any rebbe, *Chabad* did have a rebbe.

One of the main texts studied was the *Tanya,* written by the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman. I was entirely unfamiliar with the *Tanya* and I felt like a duck out of water in Lubavitch, having to study the *Tanya* first thing in the morning followed by lessons on *Chassidus.*

The dress code at Lubavitch was different as well. They did not wear the long caftans or *kapotes* to which I was accustomed. They sported shorter coats albeit tied at the waist by the traditional *gartel.* Even the hats were different, not the fur *streimels* worn by all the other *Chassidic* groups on Shabbos. Instead, they wore ordinary hats. The language also was slightly different. The Lubavitchers spoke Yiddish using a Russian dialect as opposed to a Polish dialect. I had trouble understanding this different accent in the beginning.

Lubavitch abided by the principle that the yeshiva educated you to *Chabad Chassidus,* leaving little room for independent thinking. One young student who did not conform to the norm was in fact thrown out of the yeshiva. He was a classmate who practiced Bretzlaver *Chassidus,* he believed that finding joy and happiness in everything you do is G-d's will. This particular student would get up, dance and clap his hands in the middle of studying. Unfortunately, his stay at the yeshiva did not last too long.

Time Out From Yeshiva

Although not satisfied at the yeshiva, I wasn't in the habit of going against my father's wishes. I stuck with it, earning a reputation as an assiduous student. Despite my exemplary behavior and my punctuality at *davening* and study times, I frequently disappeared from the yeshiva. This came to the attention of the eagle-eyed red headed *mashpia*, Rabbi Boruch Freedman.

Much to my chagrin, he kept a precise record of my frequent disappearances. I was always restless, both mentally and physically, but now more so than ever. It was hard to cut myself off from the troubling vicissitudes encountered by Poland's Jews. Whenever I had the chance, I would sneak out to hear a public speaker discussing the plight of the Jewish people and the miasma that was taking over Poland. On the way I often bought a newspaper – not the Agudath Israel Yiddish daily but *Der Moment*, a Yiddish daily written by people cut from a very different cloth. In the yeshiva world, all secular reading was strictly banned. After all, it detracted from time spent on Torah study and it filled young impressionable minds with some unwanted and uncensored ideas.

I was thirsty for information and *Der Moment* appealed to me. This newspaper was a prime source of news on Jewish events, anti-Semitism in Poland and information from the *Yishuv* in *Eretz Yisrael*. The revisionist leaders Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Menahem Begin were regular contributors and I concurred wholeheartedly with their ideas. Although I was an observant Jew, I identified with Jabotinsky's rhetoric. Europe was on the brink of war and the only hope for the millions of European Jews was to support the call for a homeland in Palestine, indeed, to leave for the Holy Land immediately. Everyone – Jews, Poles, Arabs, the British and the entire world read the Bible, Jabotinsky said. He believed that once the Jews started to come back to *Eretz Yirsrael* the land would eventually belong to them again. "The return to *Eretz Yisrael* is in our blood," he said.

Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I would attend these public lectures given by Jabotinsky, Begin or Rabbi Aaron Levine, the Raisha Rav.

In light of our deteriorating situation, the idea of a Jewish homeland seemed like plain good common sense. Despite the fact that I

was raised in a virulently anti-Zionist environment, I could still see the merit of religious Zionism, and was very proud that my great-uncle, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski, was instrumental in the founding of the Mizrachi Party. Sadly, this prominent senator and rabbi was *persona non grata* in family circles. The Sochoczower Rebbe, Rabbi Avrohom Bornstein, had parted with his beloved student, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski over the latter's fight for religious Zionism, even though he did recognize the positive precept of settling the land of *Eretz Yisrael*. *Yishuv Eretz Yisrael* is always a *mitzvah*. I found it hard to understand the apathy that surrounded me. True, *talmud Torah* is primary, but I felt it important to know what transpired in the world.

Although I was careful never to be caught reading *Der Moment*, which advocated the despised Zionist ideas, Rabbi Boruch Freedman usually caught up with me after I returned from my regular forays to the newspaper stand or public lectures. He'd corner me, fixing me to the wall with the piercing gaze of his fiery eyes that matched his fiery red beard and hair.

"Where have you been, Sholem Ber?" Rabbi Freedman asked me.

"I did not feel well," I answered trying to get away with a weak excuse but we both knew the truth. As usual I would accept the *knas* or fine. It was not a monetary fine but it entailed memorizing another two chapters of the *Tanya*. Thus, mostly by default, I was acquiring a solid education in *Tanya* and subsequently *Chabad Chassidus*.

Later this knowledge of the *Tanya* provided me with the capacity to understand the involved and intricate "*mamorim*" delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe himself, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson. I gained a tremendous insight into *Chabad* philosophy from his teaching.

I was surrounded by other *Chassidic* Dynasties, and it was hard to bury my head in the sand and knuckle down to studies at Tomchei Temimim. I felt the lure to explore deeper into the enigmatic world of *Chassidus*.

The Lure of Ger

Ger *Chassidus* was one of the largest *Chassidic* Dynasties in Poland in the early-1930s. Under the leadership of the third Gerer Rebbe, the *Imrei Emes*, *HaGaon*, Rabbi Avrohom Mordechai Alter, Ger was particularly intriguing and enticing.

Even if Gerer *Chassidim* weren't the largest *Chassidic* Dynasty, they were certainly the most powerful. The *Imrei Emes* who lived from 1866 to 1945 became known as the "Emperor of *Chassidus*." In 1905, at the age of thirty-nine, Rabbi Avrohom Mordechai Alter followed his father, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter, the *Sefas Emes*, as leader of the Gerer dynasty.

The Gerer Rebbe was extremely active in communal affairs, supporting the establishment of the Agudath Israel, the Yeshiva of Lublin, the *daf yomi* and the *Bais Yaakov* for Girls movement, as well as other yeshivos and *mesivtos*.

He often tore himself away from his duties in Poland to visit *Eretz Yisrael*. Like the Sochoczower Rov, the Gerer Rebbe deeply believed in the positive precept of settling the land of Israel or *yishuv ha'aretz*. His first visit took place in 1921 when he visited the Mediterranean port town of Jaffa where he remained close to one month. Three years later, in 1924, he returned and visited Jerusalem, Hebron, Tel Aviv and Tiberias for six weeks. It was only on his third visit in 1927 that the British officers guarding the entrance to the Machpela Cave allowed him to enter.

Due to his responsibilities, he reluctantly returned home to oversee the thousands of Gerer *Chassidim* in Poland.

Ger's control center or court was located in the town of Guer Kalivaria, thirty kilometers southeast of Warsaw, approximately a forty minute ride from the city. The general population of the town numbered roughly five thousand people and more than half were Gerer *Chassidim* who lived in Guer Kalivaria on a permanent basis. It was here that their beloved Rebbe lived and where the Ger *chadorim*, yeshivos and *batei medrosh* were established.

Everything revolved around the Rebbe. He had a trusted inner circle of loyal supporters who consulted him on every decision. They did not act until the Rebbe gave his approval and his blessing. Having many of the 200,000 *Chassidim* visiting the small town of Guer Kalivaria on the eve of the high holidays or on other auspicious Jewish occasions was not unusual.

Many Gerer *Chassidim* owned their own businesses while others were skilled artisans, craftsmen and traders. Their spare time was spent in intensive study of Talmud. A majority of them toiled long

hours to eke out a meager living, so Rabbi Avrohom Mordechai Alter instituted regular study periods Friday nights and Shabbos mornings at services. This custom exists even today amongst Gerer *Chassidim.* He regulated prayer times that had gone awry over the years, and he ensured that the morning, afternoon and evening prayers were recited at their halachically appointed times.

Apart from looking after the primary needs of his *Chassidim*, the Gerer Rebbe was heavily involved in community affairs. A keen observer of trends in the community, he noticed that some girls were being enticed from their religious roots. He realized they lacked Jewish education, and set about to remedy this situation.

It was the girls, not the *cheder* or yeshiva-educated boys, who went to the markets to shop for groceries. They ran other errands in town and were generally more exposed to a generous slice of Polish life. More often than not, they internalized their experiences and sometimes, to the chagrin and dismay of their parents, they strayed from their Jewish roots.

The Gerer Rebbe saw this and recognized the need for creating a formal Orthodox Jewish educational system for girls. He was instrumental in establishing the *Bais Yaakov* network of schools to educate them. Sara Shenirer, a very pious woman, was to become the guiding force in the schools.

Jewish studies for boys were still taught in stark contrast to their female counterparts. Their studies were much more rigorous – the boys would not learn a trade as part of their schooling. Girls were often taught home economics, sewing and embroidery as part of the school curriculum and in preparation for their future home-oriented life.

At Tomchei Temimim we studied *Chumosh* with *Rashi* and the Talmud. The grandeur and magnitude of Ger and the richness of Torah learning drew me like a magnet towards the *Imrei Emes*, the Gerer Rebbe.

Thus began my fleeting incursions into the world of Ger. I was not living at home and I hadn't been since I was four-years-old. So, like my father, I decided to try to imitate him and take off to another yeshiva without asking anyone's permission.

It started with a simple day at the Gerer Mesivta located in Warsaw, returning later to attend Tomchei Temimim where I still dormed. My main aim, however, was to reach Guer Kalivaria where I would really be able to soak up the majestic atmosphere surrounding the Gerer Rebbe and hopefully receive a blessing from him.

Reaching Guer Kalivaria was not an insurmountable problem. I was a smartly dressed boy, even in my *Chassidic* apparel. I was wearing the high quality leather boots Zaidy had ordered for me and my clothes were well pressed and spotlessly clean. I still had a few groshen in my pocket for fare. A friend of my father's usually brought me five dollars twice a year and this American money went very far. Of course, I had to allocate it carefully, for once spent, I was broke.

Achieving My Goal — Arrival in Guer Kalivaria

My father's eldest sister, Tobele lived with her family in Guer Kalivaria. It struck me as a little unusual that they lived there. My uncle, Yaacov Toman wasn't a Gerer *Chassid.* He was a Skernivitzer *Chassid.* Nevertheless, he was highly respected and was appointed head of the Gerer *Kehila.* My uncle and aunt were warm hospitable people who always welcomed me into their home.

I arrived at their house on Friday in time for Shabbos. As a matter of course, I attended the Gerer Rebbe's *tisch* with my uncle after dinner on Friday night. Once again I was struck by his saintly aura. The sheer size of his following – thousands of *Chassidim* packed in a huge hall of the *beis hamedrosh* – waiting to participate in the *tisch* and see the Rebbe, thrilled me. Considering all the odds, I did not think I stood too much of a chance of even getting close to him.

But I had *protektsia,* special protection. My uncle edged forward towards the *bima.* The *bima* with its four supporting posts was the most strategic point for young boys. Four boys were chosen to be helped by the *Chassidim* to climb to the top of the posts and have their feet tied around the pole with a *gartel* (belt). The four lucky boys had a privileged spot coveted by the masses of milling *Chassidim.*

To my sheer delight, I was grabbed off the floor by a group of *Chassidim* and swiftly shoved up the slippery wooden post. I grabbed the top of the pole and hung on for dear life as the boys down below worked to

bind my ankles around the pole. Once I was safely secured to my pole I could concentrate on the proceedings. Being ensconced in the "gallery" also had its disadvantages. With my hands occupied and my feet tied, there was no way I could sip the precious *segula* wine from the silver *becher* or taste the blessed Shabbos *chalah*. Still, it was worth it. I felt privileged to have seen the Gerer Rebbe from a very close vantage point.

I was to get an even closer look on *Motzei* Shabbos. My uncle and I set out to meet the Gerer Rebbe face to face. Accompanied by one of my uncle's closest friends, Yitzhak Meir Levine, the son-in-law of the Gerer Rebbe and the rebbe's "foreign minister", we slipped through the massive waiting crowd and were awarded an audience with the Rebbe.

The Imrei Emes, Rabbi Avrohom Mordechai Alter, z.l.

The Gerer Rebbe was a short man known for the speed with which he tackled every task, both mental and physical. He was so concerned not to waste even a second of his precious time from Torah learning, that he kept two time pieces. One, a favorite pocket watch, the other a clock. It was too time consuming to pull out the pocket watch so he would glance at the clock. Precious seconds could not be wasted.

I stood in awed silence as he glanced swiftly at his clock. He was standing behind a table looking intently at the open volume of *Gemora* before him.

The Rebbe looked at us for a second barely lifting his eyes from the *Gemora*. My uncle stepped forward and introduced me.

"This is my wife's brother's son from Warsaw," he said. "Sholem Ber is a good student. He yearns for a *brocha* from the Rebbe so that he will be able to learn more and become a *talmid chachom*."

The Rebbe then looked me straight in the eyes as he spoke, "You are able to learn so apply yourself diligently and G-d will help. You will then have *hatzlacha*."

After I had some time to think about it, I was able to appreciate the wisdom of the Gerer Rebbe's words. I concentrated on memorizing the Talmudic tractate of *Gitin* and the *Rashi* commentary, detailing the laws of divorce. This particular Torah study was to become very useful to me in the future, serving to enhance my entrance into one of the leading Torah academies in Europe.

My Uncle, HaGaon, Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg, z.l.

During the years 1932 and 1933, I visited Guer Kalivaria three times. Although I considered it, I never made a clean break with Tomchei Temimim and I continued studying there for the duration of those two years.

Meanwhile, everyone in my family was concerned about Hitler's continuing rise to power. By late January 1933, Hitler had assumed full power in Germany. Five weeks later, on March 5, 1933, Germany held new elections. Hitler won. He then demanded from the *Reichstag* that he be allowed to assume full dictatorial powers. The *Reichstag* acquiesced. Overnight, Hitler became *Der Fuhrer.*

Despite the growing violence in our daily lives, inflamed by Hitler's rhetoric geared towards the Aryan race's world-domination and the destruction of the Jews, we continued to proceed with our plans. In late 1933, I was on the move again. Although I continued my studies at the Lubavitcher Yeshiva, I left the dormitory and went to live with my uncle, Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg. He was married to Hodis, my father's sister.

For me, this was a particular honor. My uncle was an outstanding scholar and the author of *Reishis Bikurim.* He was a short man but one of great mental stature. By achieving his reputation as an outstanding *talmid chachom* and *tzadik,* he had fulfilled the Sochoczower Rebbe's prophecy.

When he was eleven-years-old, the father of the first chief Rabbi of Israel was his mentor. Rabbi Herzog lived in Lomzer near my uncle's home in Stuchin. Rabbi Herzog decided to introduce him to the Sochoczower Rebbe, Rabbi Avrohom Bornstein, in the hope that the Sochoczower would accept him into his yeshiva.

When the Rebbe saw the boy, he was not impressed.

"What do you think I have here?" the Rebbe asked. "I'm not running a *cheder.* I have a yeshiva for older serious students, *lomdim,*" he said.

Rabbi Herzog was undaunted and insisted that this was indeed the place for the young Weinberg.

"I want to leave the boy here just for one night," Rabbi Herzog said. He assumed that by the time he returned the next day, the Sochoczower Rebbe would have changed his mind.

When Rabbi Herzog returned the next day, he found the Rebbe was indeed impressed.

"Avrohom Weinberg will be one of the great Torah giants of our era," Rabbi Avrohom Bornstein said.

Needless to say Avrohom Weinberg was accepted into the Yeshiva. When he left he was a recognized *gadol b'Torah.*

Despite his great scholarship, my uncle lived in a very modest apartment in Warsaw. I slept in a narrow bed in a cramped corner of the apartment while he quietly learned in my room. When I awoke, he brought me *negal vasser* (water to wash) saying that he wanted to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *pidyon shivuim.*

My uncle applied himself to full-time learning, a luxury afforded him by my grandfather, Reb Moshe Kovalski. An affluent businessman, my grandfather made a point of supporting all his sons and sons-in-law so that they could devote themselves to Torah study.

However, the time came when Reb Moshe Kovalski could no longer carry the financial burden. He was getting older and the oppressive economic atmosphere was forcing him out of business.

During the Holocaust, my uncle's brother manufactured shoes for the Nazis. All registered employees were protected. He offered my uncle a job so as to save his life. This offer was refused, as he preferred to continue studying Torah, proclaiming this to be the ultimate support of his people. Eventually both of them were killed by the Nazis.

A Meeting of Great Men: HaGaon, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, z.l. and HaGaon, Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg, z.l. Burn the Midnight Oil

Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg became a candidate for the Warsaw Rabbinate. Not having an official *smicha*, he turned to his friend Rav Meir Shapiro to ordain him, at which time I had the unexpected good fortune to meet Rabbi Shapiro. It was shortly before his death in October, 1934. I was living in my uncle's house when I heard that he was preparing to receive Rabbi Shapiro that night. During his term at the *Sejm*, the *Gadol Hador,* Rabbi Shapiro, had often commuted between Lublin and Warsaw. Now that he was no longer involved

in Polish politics, he traveled less frequently to Warsaw. However, that night, he did take an active part in local Jewish Warsaw politics by endorsing my uncle's candidacy for the Warsaw Rabbinate.

It was already late at night when Rabbi Shapiro arrived at the house. After serving him refreshments, Rabbi Shapiro and my uncle sat down together to discuss Torah.

There was no way I was going to sleep through this meeting of great minds. I was not an invited guest, but I was determined not to miss the conversation that I knew would be a once in a lifetime experience for me. I crept out of bed after the two were deeply embroiled in a particularly difficult Talmudic discussion. I curled up as tightly as I could and pressed my ear to the door to try and catch every spoken syllable. Their exchange of ideas enthralled me and it was hours later – at least four o'clock in the morning – when my uncle came out of the room to discover me sitting on the cold floor, huddled outside the room. He was angry. After all, a responsible guardian, he had sent me to bed hours earlier and he was upset to find me crouched on the stone floor listening without permission.

Rabbi Shapiro interceded on my behalf.

"Don't be angry with him," he said. "If a boy can sit half the night to try and listen to words of Torah, then you should forgive him."

I stayed until he left and felt privileged to have been in the company of these scholars.

Agudath Israel Delegates to the Sejm *Work Against the Anti-Semitic Tide*

The support of Rabbi Shapiro ensured my uncle's election to the Warsaw Rabbinate. He now worked closely with representatives of the *Kehila*, Warsaw's Jewish community organization. It was here that many important decisions were made concerning the fate of religious life in the capital.

At that time, neither the Warsaw Rabbinate, nor the activists at the *Kehila*, nor the Jewish delegates to the *Sejm* could stem the tide of economic and religious oppression in the country.

There were eight Jewish delegates to the *Sejm* and one senator elected in 1930, who continued to fight for Jewish rights.

March 16, 1931, a law was passed to use Jewish cadavers in the dissecting rooms of the universities. Jewish delegates were aghast. Human bodies are sacred and are not to be tampered with. Burials must be carried out quickly, the same day if possible, with the body intact.

We shall never renounce an iota of our Torah and no sacrifices are too great for us in the defense of the laws of the Torah.

The situation was gradually worsening. On February 4, 1932, Rabbi A. Lewin told the members of the *Sejm* that Jews would not be able to support themselves much longer. The entire community was on the verge of collapse.

"The position of the Jewish merchant has completely broken down" he said. "He is breathing his last. The onerous tax burden has deprived him of any possibility of surviving. Jewish merchants are being excluded from government and state trade."

Anti-Jewish rhetoric was everywhere. On November 23, 1933, the Polish opposition party daily *Gazeta Warzawska* ran an overtly anti-Semitic editorial calling for the expulsion of the Jews.

The Jewish population of Poland was by now over three million and growing all the time, with Jews comprising more than ten percent of the population.

The Opposition to Zionism

The work of the Jewish delegates in the *Sejm* was not discussed in my uncle's house. He did however oppose Zionists in the *Sejm*. Such disagreement led to discord and disunity among Jews.

My uncle and my Aunt Hodis were united in their opposition to Zionism. In this there was little difference between them and the rest of the family. Both my father's side of the family, the Kovalskis, and my mother's side, the Mokotowskis, regarded all Zionists with disdain, whether they were religious or not. In this atmosphere, I was careful not to mention my penchant for Zionist views or my own religious Zionist *yichus*, my grandfather, Reb Moshe Kovalski's brother, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski. The less said, the better.

I was in fact very proud of my great uncle. Rabbi Yehuda Leib was first and foremost a leading Torah scholar. The depth of his Talmudic knowledge earned him respect from all who came into contact with him. This Torah knowledge, combined with his deep love of *Eretz Yisrael,* gaining him many supporters. His platform stressed the urgency of the Jews return to their homeland, an idea that he promoted and advocated as a senator in parliament.

I was cautious about expressing my own views because I was boarding in my uncle's house and still attending Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim.

In 1934, the tenth of *Kislev,* I turned thirteen-years-old. My Bar Mitzvah was celebrated without any fanfare at all at the yeshiva. The date of my birthday coincided with a Lubavitcher commemoration. The tenth day of *Kislev,* my birthday, was the same day that one of the Lubavitcher Rebbes was released from prison in Russia. True to the Jewish custom of not celebrating two joyous occasions simultaneously, my *simcha* appeared relegated to the back burner.

Already one month earlier, I had begun to use my *tefillin.* These *tefillin* were special. The head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Shmaryahu Gurary, one of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's sons-in-law, had called me into his office. Feeling nervous, I dragged my feet slightly as I gently knocked on his door. As he bid me to enter, my breathing quickened slightly. I started to recall all the times I had disappeared from the yeshiva without permission in pursuit of secular speakers and literature. If the revered rabbi was about to confront me, I had no choice but to admit that I had indeed done these things. Of course I knew that apart from the shame I was already feeling, I would be thrown out of the yeshiva which would cause enormous embarrassment to my father. Blushing guiltily, I approached Rabbi Guraya's desk.

"Sholem Ber," the Rabbi said, "you're going to be Bar-Mitzvah in a few weeks and your father has sent you a pair of *tefillin* from *Eretz Yisrael.*"

Heaving a huge sigh of relief, I was thrilled. My father was still in the United States, but he must have commissioned a scribe living in *Eretz Yisrael* to write these *tefillin* for me. Having learned the laws of *tefillin,* I appreciated this pair for its beautiful crafted work. In fact, I still use them today.

Thanking the rabbi, I made a speedy exit. On the day of my Bar Mitzvah, I arose early to *daven.* I put on my *tefillin* and was called

up for an *aliya*. By performing these two obligations, I had actually completed observing my formal Bar Mitzvah.

The Jewish rite of passage from boyhood into manhood is usually accompanied by a festive meal attended by family, friends and teachers. The yeshiva did provide several glasses of *schnapps*, probably vodka. They toasted me with *le'chaim*, but since I was slightly allergic to the drink, I had to abstain. None of my family attended this short ceremony and I felt very alone.

The fact that I had participated in other family Bar Mitzvos that were celebrated where the Bar Mitzvah boy was surrounded by family and friends at a large *seudas mitzvah* only served to compound my feeling of loneliness and to a certain extent, envy.

Although I missed all my family – mother, father, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents – on this occasion, my thoughts turned especially to my beloved Zaidy, Reb Eluzer Mokotowski who was already ailing and could not be with me on this special day. Soon after, however, I managed to visit him in Otwock.

As usual, on seeing my Zaidy, my heart filled with joy. His warmth always moved me. Even though he was now frail, he and Buby had prepared for my Bar Mitzvah. He gave me a small silver *becher* engraved with my name. I use this *becher* lovingly. I also received a second Bar Mitzvah gift, a *Chumosh* from an elderly lady who was a friend of the family.

I left Zaidy's house with a heavy heart, fearing for his health, and returned to my uncle's house with several treasures in hand – Zaidy's *becher*, my father's *tefillin* and the small *Chumosh* – which helped compensate for my meager Bar Mitzvah celebration. At the time, nothing could approach the satisfaction I felt when I put on my father's *tefillin* every morning and when I used Zaidy's precious *becher* every Shabbos.

Shabbos at the Weinberg Home: The Brisker Rov and Rabbi Yitzchak Piekarski, z.l.

Shabbos was always a delightful time at my uncle's house. Every Shabbos afternoon my uncle received his *Talmidim* at his table for the third meal, *seudah shlishis tisch,* and I had my work cut out for me. It was a smelly chore, but I enjoyed the responsibility. It was practically

a tradition at every rebbe's *tisch* to serve herring and I was the designated herring man. On Fridays I went to Reb Zelig's stall where I bought the freshest herrings I could find. On Shabbos afternoons I arranged them on large serving dishes and handed them out to the *Talmidim.*

Usually by *Shalosh Seudos* time, the room was dark. There were no lights on and the sun was already setting, adding an air of holiness. The *Chassidim* sang melodious Shabbos songs, interspersed with words of Torah that my uncle delivered. As soon as I set the platters of herring out, the singing came to a halt. It took a split second for the *Chassidim* to deal with the herring leaving not a trace of evidence that any fish, let alone herring, ever existed.

Once, a long-time friend of the family, Rabbi Piekarski came into the room. Whenever he was in Warsaw, he took the opportunity to attend my uncle's *tisch.* This was one of those potentially embarrassing moments. A special guest had come to dine but the main course had disappeared!

From previous experience, I knew my job well. I had set some herring aside for latecomers and I was really happy I had done so when I saw Rabbi Piekarski.

"How did you know to set some aside?" Rabbi Piekarski asked me.

I explained that I always took this precaution so as not to find myself in an awkward position.

"You know," Rabbi Piekarski said to me, "The Brisker Rov's son did something similar at another occasion." He then proceeded to tell me about that event.

"It was Pesach. You know it is a tradition to buy a new suit of clothes for the Shabbos twice a year – before *Rosh Hashana* and before Pesach.

"The Brisker Rov, Rabbi Yosha Ber could not afford a new suit for his son, Chaim. Chaim was a young impressionable boy who felt a twinge of embarrassment when he attended *davening* at the *shul* and saw that he was the only one among his friends wearing a worn suit of clothing.

"That night, at the *Seder,* he hid the *afikoman* and so was able to negotiate for a new suit. He bargained hard and close to midnight his father agreed. But Chaim was in for a surprise. When the *afikoman*

was distributed his father said 'Chaimeke, I'm sorry, you are not getting your piece of *afikoman* until you renounce your demand'.

"Chaimeke grinned broadly. 'You do not have to worry father, I have already saved a piece for myself.'

"Like Chaim", Rabbi Piekarski said, "you must have learned to save a few pieces for yourself and your friends."

Tragedy Strikes — Zaidy's Death

I was surrounded by a lot of family members and I welcomed the opportunity to visit my uncles, the Malinak and Zahler families, my aunts and cousins, including Zaidy's daughter, Laiche who was now married to Menashe Mirrel. They had twins, a boy and girl, Leibel and Yente. One of my greatest pleasures was taking care of them in the summertime. I often brought them to Zaidy's house in Otwock and let them enjoy the pleasures and treasures of his house that I had reveled in as a child.

I showed them the vegetables growing in his yard and the goats that used to stray into the yard to snack on the vegetables. Leibel and Yente shrieked at the animals and giggled joyously as I ran wildly around the yard gesturing and chasing them out of the yard. It wasn't all carefree fun. I also had to clean, feed and diaper them. I loved every minute of it.

"Sholem," Laiche said to me, "you're ready to get married because you know how to take care of the children so well."

Daily life in our city was getting tougher all the time. By now, Jews could not get work. They were systematically shut out at every level. Jews were being tossed out of the universities. In the early 1920s, Jews made up close to twenty-five percent of the student body but by the early 1930s, the number of Jewish students had dropped to approximately seven percent, with medical students being cut by half.

My family was still managing to keep its head above water with difficulty. My father sent us money from America. I continued to live at my uncle's house and frequently visited my mother and sisters who lived at home with her. My father insisted that I remain with my uncle to be imbued by his *derech,* hoping that I would be inspired to follow his example and devote myself to Torah learning.

My Zaidy, Eluzer, felt the full thrust of the harsh economic sanctions. The flour distribution business collapsed leaving him bankrupt. These pressures had a terrible effect on his health. I visited him as often as I could get permission from the yeshiva.

The year 1936 marked the most tragic event of my life. Before *Yom Kippur* I went to Zaidy and Buby's house for a *brocha* prior to the *chag*. The steam engine had given way to the electric train, cutting travel time to Otwock to less than an hour.

On arrival, I knocked on the front door and was surprised that no one answered. I pushed the door open and walked into the lobby and then into the dining room expecting to find Zaidy sitting at his usual place at the head of the large dining table. The house was empty. Suddenly, I remembered it was time for *Mincha* and Buby would be visiting a neighbor while Zaidy went to *daven*. I rushed to the *Beis Hamedrosh* next to his house just in time to recite *Ashrei*. I did not have to look far to spot Zaidy. He had a permanent seat in the *shul*.

Seeing me he said, "Sholemol, please take me home. I do not feel good."

We left immediately. He hobbled home, resting on my arm, looking very pale. I decided to make him comfortable and then to run for the *felcher*. Zaidy appeared to be getting weaker and weaker.

"Sholemol," he said, "undress me."

He lay down as I pulled off his boots, removed his long black coat, and all his heavy outer clothing. As I removed his *tzizis*, he asked me to put them on again. I gently did so.

"Cover me, open the window and bring me a little water," Zaidy said.

I quickly did all of those things and hastily returned to his bedside, not wanting to leave him alone for a second.

"Say with me *Shema Yisrael*".

Straight away, I began to recite the prayer.

"Hear o' Israel. The L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one. And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might."

By the time I reached the end of the sentence, Zaidy's breathing was barely audible. Before I had time to finish the prayer, everything

suddenly went deathly silent. Almost instinctively, I bent my head low over Zaidy. I pressed my right ear to his chest. Not a murmur was heard, there was no movement. Frantically, I began shaking him and calling his name in a shrill voice.

"Zaidy, Zaidy," I cried, but Zaidy had stopped breathing altogether. Horrified, I forced myself to look at his face. His eyes were set in a blank stare. Full realization of what had happened hit me like a bullet. Zaidy had slipped away peacefully from this world in a matter of seconds.

Terrified, I threw open the door and dashed out of the house screaming for help. The *felcher* finally came, but nothing could be done to revive Zaidy. The *Chevra Kadisha* rushed over. They laid Zaidy on the floor, covered him and lit a candle.

Meanwhile, Zaidy's son, Yitzchak Mokotowski, the owner of the Otwock grocery, had been informed of his father's death and made his way over to the house. As soon as Yitzchak arrived, he dispatched me on a mission.

"Sholem, go to Stocktz and tell my brother Yehuda Leib".

It was hard to believe that, I, a young boy was asked to undertake such an emotionally draining task, but I did not refuse. There was no train station in Stocktz, so I boarded a train to Warsaw. It was 4 o'clock in the morning and pitch dark when I arrived. Taxis were generally few and far between, and especially at that unearthly hour, they were almost impossible to find. By 4:30, by the grace of G-d, I found a taxi. Hearing my dilemma, the driver, with the help of a generous tip, reluctantly drove me to Stocktz. I did not know my way around Stocktz, but found a Jew who directed us.

Needless to say, the family was shocked to see me on their doorstep so early in the morning. By now, I had gathered my thoughts together and devised a strategy.

"Zaidy is very sick," I said, not wanting to throw everyone into shock.

Immediately, my uncle made plans to accompany me back to Otwock and by ten o'clock in the morning we were outside Zaidy's house.

At the same time, my mother arrived. One look at her father lying on the floor and she fainted. Horrified, I screamed, "Mama do not die, do not die". The *felcher* bent over her, but she lay there

very still and unmoving. Suddenly, a man appeared, raised her left hand, and put a string around her wrist, which he gently pulled. Slowly her eyes opened, and soon overflowed with hot tears. Both she and I have never been consoled over the loss of this loving, tender, devoted, precious human being.

My Zaidy still stands before me, always guiding me and giving me the courage to face every challenge and every disappointment. My love for him has never faded.

News travels fast in a small town. By midday, the whole town of Otwock knew that Eluzer Mokotowski had died and was to be buried at one o'clock in the afternoon. The pallbearers assembled outside his house ready to carry the coffin on their shoulders all the way to the cemetery in Korciew. Thousands – Jews and gentiles alike – accompanied the funeral procession amid cries of "*Jutku, Jutku* (grandfather), you've left us now".

Zaidy had always been a very generous person and treated everyone with great respect. Included among them were the hired help and cleaning staff in his home, his *shtieble* and *mikvah*.

"Whose going to help me now?" the janitor of the *mikvah* cried. "Whose going to give me bread now?" he screamed.

He had left instructions that there would be no eulogies at his funeral. He would be sorely missed in the community. Zaidy was renowned for his hospitality, generosity, kindness, philanthropy and Torah scholarship.

But I felt no one would miss him as much as I would. After the initial shock of his death finally settled in, I was overcome with grief and practically inconsolable. There was a void in my life. It felt like a gaping crater in my heart and it seemed then that nothing would ever be able to fill it. I wept for days.

I was so distraught that I began smoking. I was to suffer the painful consequences of this teenage habit later on in my life. My cousin Yente kept me supplied with cigarettes from her father's supermarket. I would never have dared to smoke when Zaidy was alive.

I was brokenhearted because I had been so close to Zaidy for so much of my impressionable youth. Consequently, I was loath to part with anything he had given me during his lifetime.

When the funeral and *shiva* were over and the family gathered together to read Zaidy's will, a test of my tenacity was to ensue.

The Missing Talmud

Zaidy had a huge collection of *seforim* that he had bequeathed to the *beis hamedrosh* in Korciew, including a leather-bound set of tractates of the Talmud. One volume was missing. I quickly acknowledged that I had the missing volume – the tractate dealing with the laws of Shabbos, inscribed with Zaidy's name inside the front cover.

Family members insisted that I return it. However, I remained steadfast in my resolve not to part with this treasure and heirloom.

"Zaidy gave it to me during his lifetime," I told them. "You can take me to a *din Torah* to settle the dispute. You have two choices," I said. "Either give me the whole set or let me keep this volume."

The Mokotowski family did not relent and summoned me before a rabbinical judge, Rabbi Reuven Zaiman, the Rabbi of Otwock.

He received us in the Goldberg Synagogue, the only custom-built Lithuanian synagogue in Otwock. It was not a one-story cramped *shtieble* or *leumi hamedrosh* but a two-story edifice with a ladies' gallery upstairs overlooking an elegantly furnished men's section.

Sensing my distress at having to turn over the *Gemora*, Rabbi Zaiman ruled in my favor and I was allowed to keep the volume.

"You have the *Gemora,* given to you by your grandfather, four or five years ago," Rabbi Zaiman said. "You can take it and do what you want with it."

This tractate Shabbos, and a *Siddur Lekutai Tzvi* that Zaidy gave me were the only *seforim* from Zaidy's entire collection that remained after the Holocaust. Ultimately, I gave both these treasured *seforim* to my son Eluzer, who was named after my Zaidy.

Daily Life Back in My Own Home

Unbelievably, in 1935, no one could have ever imagined what was to become of the Jews in less than four years. New elections were once again called and it was becoming increasingly difficult for Jews to retain their parliamentary seats. An amendment to the constitution had introduced a law whereby candidates could no longer be voted in by

constituencies but only by government-influenced electoral colleges. This meant that some senior government officials actively thwarted the election of Jews. Only two Agudists managed to remain in the *Sejm*.

By 1936, despite the good work done by the Agudists, the economic situation of the Jews had become intolerable. On June 4, 1936, Poland's Premier General, Felicijan Slawoj Skladkowski, officially sanctioned an economic battle against the Jews.

This policy came to be known as *Owszem* and was readily accepted and enforced by "pure" Poles, who were only too eager to see starving Jews voluntarily leave Poland in search of more fertile pastures.

I made plans to leave. Life at home wasn't easy. My sleeping quarters at my Uncle Avrohom Weinberg's house were becoming increasingly cramped for me. I was a growing lad and the narrow bed I was sleeping in could no longer accommodate my sprouting height.

I moved back home into my mother's house. My mother had always tried to ensure that I would have a male role model to emulate and to guide me through my infancy and childhood, especially since my father only returned to Warsaw from the United States every few years.

Sad as it is, I hardly recognized my father on his visits to Warsaw. He was an imposing man and I respected him, but there was very little warmth or conversation between us. It was difficult to maintain a close relationship with him, separated as we were for such long periods of time across continents. When he did return home, I was entrusted with the task of polishing his boots and pressing his pants. While in themselves these were mere menial tasks, I felt honored to be able to serve my father in some way. Secretly I hoped that if I performed these tasks well, my father would be drawn closer to me and show me some affection and maybe even stay at home, at least for a while.

I knew the years of separation were particularly difficult for my mother, but I never heard her complain. She busied herself looking after my two sisters. During my infrequent stays at home in between yeshiva studies, my younger sister Chaya Rachel would often toss her long black pigtails in my face imploring me to play with her. My older sister Shaindel, only two years older than me, was far too grown up to bother with her younger brother.

If I felt lonely at home, I tried not to show it. Until early adolescence, I always had a father figure who kept abreast with my scholastic progress in Talmud and accompanied me to *shul.*

Under the tutelage of my Zaidy, Eluzer, followed by my uncle, Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg, I had a good basis in observant Judaism. My goal was to emulate my mentors. I had reached my fifteenth birthday and was already self-disciplined enough to rise early for morning prayers and to devote myself to my intense studies. I was also very eager to explore other youth activities in Warsaw.

The "Hasmoneans" — Getting My Feet Wet in Politics

Whereas most of my time was spent learning in yeshiva, I noticed that some of my friends had recently become politically active in a religious Zionist youth movement, the "Hasmoneans".

The idea of joining the "Hasmoneans" attracted me. It was the religious youth movement affiliated with Ze'ev Jabotinsky's secular revisionist Betar Zionist movement.

I heard Jabotinsky speak and his words were much more than polemics – they mirrored my most basic sentiments about the situation of the Jews in Poland. "Polish Jews, you will be liquidated in the next war," Jabotinsky lambasted the crowd who had gathered to hear him.

"The twelfth hour has come when the powers of the east and the powers of the west will fight each other," he said.

I joined the Hasmoneans and became very active in counteracting the propaganda of the socialist Bundists who were promulgating Marxist Communist theories in Poland. The busiest day in the year for soap boxing on any available corner was May 1, the Socialist Workers' Day. Surprising as it was to me, even some of my closest friends were taken in by the Bundist rhetoric that the Socialists and Communists would help the "comrades" oppressed by the "fascist pigs". The Bund was an amalgamation of the Jewish workers, unions of the porters and loaders or the *tragers* and *shleppers,* as well as the wagon drivers, the delivery and messenger boys. They were instrumental and effective in combating and quashing the *Endekes,* a group of virulently anti-Semitic militant university students.

The *Endekes* combed the Jewish neighborhoods at night looking for Jewish victims to beat into pulp. They were especially active on January 6, the day observed by Orthodox Christians as the day Jesus was crucified. The Roman Catholic Poles believed it was the Jews who crucified him.

Bundists, sick of being beaten up and left for dead and taunted with "Jew boy, you killed Christ," took matters into their own hands. Not being able to rely on the police for any assistance, the Bundists organized vigilante groups that patrolled the Warsaw neighborhoods, seeking out the *Endekes*.

Eventually, faced with a taste of their own indiscriminate brutality, the *Endekes* who were more scared of the Bundists than the Bundists were of them, ceased to disturb us.

Although we appreciated their courageous actions protecting Jews, we could not condone their ideology. When we weren't out trying to convince unsuspecting victims that the Bundists were no better ideologically than the Fascists, we hid out in the forest of Schvidervalt, not far from Otwock. Here we trained in self-defense and shooting methods although we did not have any weapons. Some of us intended to leave Poland as soon as we were old enough and perhaps join the underground forces in Palestine fighting the British and the Arabs.

I kept my membership in the Hasmoneans secret. My mother would have been extremely upset to find out that I had been devoting precious study time to such activities.

The Gateway to Torah Glory — Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin

I was very restless. I was involved with the Hasmoneans, progressing in my studies, and at the same time I was turning my sights to the esteemed centers of Jewish learning in Poland. Students from all over the Diaspora flocked to the great Torah institutions of Mir, Telz and Lublin, among others. I had my heart set on entering Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, founded by Rabbi Meir Shapiro.

The city of Lublin had been renowned as a center of Jewish learning for centuries. Renowned scholars had emanated from the yeshivos in Lublin, including Rabbi Moses Isserles known as the *Remoh*, who wrote a *halachic* (Jewish legal) work, *Darkei Moshe*,

outlining the *Shulchan Aruch* for Ashkenazim. Rabbi Moshe Isserles's brother-in-law, Rabbi Shlomo Luria the *Maharshal*, who was a noted *kabbalist,* wrote comments on the prayer book as well as a commentary on the *Mishneh Torah.*

Other great scholars had also lived for some time in Lublin, including my ancestor, Rabbi Mordecai Yaffe (1530-1612), the *Livush Mordechai* who wrote the *Sefer HaMalchus.*

For centuries the Jewish community in Lublin was at the forefront of East European Judaism. Adolf Hitler with his insane hatred of the Jews also concentrated on Lublin. It gained notoriety as the area designated by *Der Fuhrer* for his first mass concentration camp for Jews after he invaded Poland. The plan for Lublin was scrapped and currently the yeshiva is being used as a medical school.

Attending Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin was becoming more and more attractive to me as the days passed, especially since I had met Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the founder of the Yeshiva.

He had contributed so much to public life, both as a parliamentarian and as an innovative inspiring educator and great scholar, that it was impossible to know where his greatest contribution to Polish Jewry lay.

His philosophy was one of unity. In 1922, Rabbi Shapiro had approached Bundists, revisionists, religious and secular Jews alike and tried to unite all of them into one *Kehila.* Eventually he succeeded but only in Poland.

In 1923, Rabbi Shapiro had already addressed the *K'nessiya Gedola* (Great Assembly) of the Agudath Israel at which time he introduced the program for *daf yomi.* The *daf yomi* study program was adopted by many *Gedolim* of the time including the Gerer Rebbe and the Chofetz Chaim.

In May 1924, Rabbi Shapiro laid the cornerstone for Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin and in the same year he was appointed Rabbi of Pietrikov.

"When all is said and done" Rabbi Shapiro wrote, "I wait for another location, another place, under other circumstances for the nation of *Yisrael* in the Holy Land of Israel, before the Divine King of Israel".

Unfortunately, Rabbi Shapiro never saw his dream come true. In mid-October, 1934, he spent *Succos* in Lublin. On *Simchas* Torah he led the opening procession around the synagogue with the Torah. After *Succos*, he traveled to Lodz where he acceded to the community's wishes that he serve as their rabbi until a replacement could be found. He died on Friday night, October 27, 1934, at the age of forty-six, at the Yeshiva in Lublin.

The legend of this great man lived on and I was determined to gain acceptance into the venerated academy of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin. This was no mean task. The best Talmudists in Europe vied for places in the finest dormitory yeshiva in Europe. Even the one hundred dormitory rooms were not enough to accommodate all the students who applied.

Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, located on Lubartovska Street in Lublin had been formally opened on June 24, 1930, amid much publicity. The Polish press turned out in full force to cover the event and the public flocked to the opening. This yeshiva was like no other Talmudical academy in Europe. Chachmei Lublin was to other Polish yeshivos what a prince was to paupers.

Success: Studying at Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin

The first time I set eyes on the Yeshiva, I was flabbergasted. Seven years after its inauguration, the building remained in immaculate condition.

A pine grove with thousands of saplings lined the entrance to the Yeshiva. The exterior of the building was impressive with its tall structure and embossed gold letters spelling out Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin and a verse from Psalms. When I saw the interior, I was overawed.

The ground floor contained baths and a *mikvah*, locker rooms and a laundry facility with washers and dryers, but that was not all.

Many of the students lived in other parts of Poland, so the Yeshiva provided them with a post-office where they could send and receive mail and conduct financial transactions. The Yeshiva had its own bakery with special machinery for preparing dough for challos, breads and cakes. The aroma of the freshly baked goods wafted into the nearby dining room with seating capacity for hundreds of students.

The ultimate "piece de resistance" was located on the ground floor. Rabbi Shapiro had commissioned one of the finest Jewish craftsmen, Henoch Weintraub, to construct a large-scale model of the Second Temple. The level of accuracy was astonishing and no cost was spared – including the use of gold leaf – to give a realistic appearance. The model, built to demonstrate the fine intricacies of the Talmudic tractate *Kodshim* soon became a major attraction for visitors to Lublin. Next to the model was a scriptorium where scribes were taught their trade. Additionally, there were several rooms specifically reserved for *masmidim.* These students studied practically twenty hours per day. Here the lights burned continually as these students only slept two to three hours per night.

There was a large lecture hall, an auditorium and a fully stocked library containing thousands of *seforim.*

The entrance to a three-story synagogue with a large gallery was also on the first floor. A three-meter high brass Chanukah Menorah stood outside the synagogue. Last but not least, were the one hundred dormitory rooms on the floors above.

At the time I entered the Yeshiva, studies were in full swing.

My knowledge of the Talmudic tractate *Gitin* on divorce laws, was my entrance ticket into the *Mechinah.* I had studied it several years earlier, along with the *Rashi* commentary, after I received a *brocha* from the Gerer Rebbe. I remained at the Yeshiva six months, from *Pesach* to *Rosh Hashana,* under the guidance of Rabbi Zvi Frimer.

I loved the time I spent at Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin. The learning was wonderful and I, a Polisher *Chassidic bochur*, finally felt as if I belonged. All this was apart from the fact that living in this Yeshiva dormitory was tantamount to living in the lap of luxury. At that point, I could not have been happier.

Sadly, my stay at the yeshiva was cut short. In America, my father heard through the grapevine that I had left Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim. He was furious. He messaged my mother to immediately pull me out of Lublin and bring me back to Warsaw. I had little choice in the matter if I wished to obey the Torah precept to honor your father and your mother. Reluctantly, I packed my belongings. I took one last lingering look at the model of the *Beis Hamikdash* and one last stroll down the pine-lined avenue leading to and from the yeshiva.

I left Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, but did not return to the Lubavitcher Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim. Instead I returned to the old haunt of my earlier youth – Warsaw Gerer Mesivta. Here too I felt uneasy. The dress code was different. The boys sported long flowing side locks while mine were shorter and neatly tucked behind my ears. Instead of long pants, they wore pantaloons or short knickers (*gatkas*) tied at the knees. Long stockings covered their legs from their feet to their knees. I was dressed in ordinary pants, but my ambivalent feelings toward Ger ran deeper than just dress code. I did not really aspire to become a Gerer *Chassid.* I had felt the most comfortable in Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin with its mixture of *Chassidic* and *misnagid* students and its reverence of Talmudic learning.

When I returned to my mother's home in Warsaw in September 1937, everyone saw the handwriting on the wall. We all knew war was imminent.

The atmosphere in Europe had been charged with anti-Jewish propaganda for several years, but now the airwaves were crammed with talk of war. I followed developments through my small short-wave radio that I listened to as often as possible.

Hitler's speeches were broadcast regularly and although I did not speak German, I spoke Yiddish and understood the main gist of Hitler's words. I knew then that it was time to leave Poland. I repeatedly asked my mother how could we stay in Poland. Unbeknown to me, my mother had already made plans for us to leave.

With money sent by my father, she had purchased tickets for one of the last boats leaving for England and America. Now all we needed were American visas.

❧ *Could We Escape Poland in Time? The Visa Saga*

We anxiously arrived at the American Consulate. Waiting in line for what seemed like an eternity, we were eventually ushered into the room where our fate would be sealed.

After looking us over, the Consul agreed to grant visas to my mother and sisters, but not to me.

I was devastated. Thank G-d, there was an elderly lady, in the Consulate, a secretary, who came from Otwock and knew our family.

"They are one family," she told the Consul in a pleading tone.

Breathlessly I waited as he checked and then double-checked my documents. My face turned an ashen white as I practically stopped breathing. If he stamped the exit visa, I would be on my way to a new life, out of this inferno, but if he did not move his hand to pick up the stamp – I was doomed.

I watched him intently. Seconds passed as the Consul studied my face for signs of anxiety. I was careful to show no emotion and to stand practically motionless. At last he lifted his right hand and stamped the document. I heaved a great sigh of relief as he handed it to me. I grasped it and clutched it tightly. I thanked him and made a hasty retreat along with my mother and sisters.

Now I was certain that with G-d's help we were on our way out of Poland. With the little time left, we bid farewell to friends and relatives.

Next we trekked to Otwock to say goodbye to Buby Charna and the whole Mokotowski clan. There we spent a few days, as each of us had many friends. Our parting was very emotional. My mother was devastated saying goodbye to her elderly blind mother who was not well. It was not easy for us to take leave of a family, a mother and buby, uncles and aunts who loved us and to whom we were very much attached.

Alas, the only sibling of my mother to remain alive was her sister, Surali, married to Barish Landau, the Byaler Rebbe's son. Before the upheaval she and her family had emigrated to Israel. She, and my sisters, Chaya Rochel and Shaindel, were the only survivors of the huge Mokotowski family.

Drunk, for the First and Last Time

The trip back from Stocktz where we had gone to say farewell to my Uncle Leibel, Yehuda Leib Mokotowski, Zaidy's son and his family was unforgettable. I was sick as a dog on the train back to Warsaw. I was never fond of *schnapps.* Even on my Bar Mitzvah, I avoided drinking a *le'chaim* with the other boys because I knew alcohol did not agree with me. Now I was over 16-years-old and I was on the verge of embarking on a journey into the unknown. A little drink could not harm me, I thought.

Uncle Leibel had offered me a beer. Uncle Leibel, like his brother Yitzchak, was the owner of a grocery store in Otwock. He had cases of beer stocked in the store. Never having tasted beer, it seemed like a good idea. I popped open the top of a small bottle and downed the contents. It neither tasted particularly good nor particularly bad, but it was effervescent and warm, so I helped myself to another bottle. Bottles later, I did not feel so well. In fact I did not feel anything at all. Numbed as I was by the alcohol, my uncle loaded me onto the train. It did not take long for the train ride to help shake up the contents of my stomach and I became violently ill.

Arriving back in Warsaw, I had a terrible hangover but there was no time to waste. We packed our belongings and readied ourselves for the departure to England.

The Demise of the Overcoat

Personally, packing was not an arduous task. My entire worldly belongings consisted of several articles of clothing, including a new suit and tie that my mother had commissioned the tailor to sew for me. But the outfit was incomplete without an overcoat. This was not an oversight. My mother had paid the tailor to fit me for a heavy winter coat. It would be ready in time for the voyage, he said. A few days before our departure, my mother reminded me to collect the coat. I wove my way through the Warsaw streets until I reached the tailor's store. I picked up the coat and slung it over my arm as I rushed back home.

Close to my house, I saw Uncle Feivel, my father's brother. We greeted each other and discussed my father's welfare and our imminent departure to join him in New York. After a few minutes of conversation, my uncle asked me to show him the winter coat I was carrying with me. The weather was spring-like – it was March – and I wouldn't need the coat right away. Uncle Feivel, another Polish Jew encountering economic hardship, admired the fine tailoring as he felt the quality and thickness of the woolen material and the silken lining.

"Keep it," I said to Uncle Feivel. "They give away coats on the streets in America," I said, thinking that I would easily be able to acquire another coat just like it there.

My uncle did not refuse. He was grateful for the gift and thanked me.

I knew my mother well enough to anticipate her reaction. She also had a more mature understanding and finely tuned sense of reality regarding the economic situation in America. They did not give away anything on the streets, let alone winter overcoats.

As I entered the house my mother took one glaring look at my empty hands.

"Sholem Ber," she said, "why did you not go to the tailor?"

"He was closed," I lied.

My mother cautioned me not to forget to pick up the coat before we left Warsaw. On the eve of our departure, my mother once again reminded herself about the coat, but now there would be no time to collect it.

"Oy vey!" she said, very distraught. "You forgot the coat. You did not pick up the coat," she cried.

We were already on our way as I revealed the truth. Preparing myself to assuage her anxiety and anger over the loss, I said, "Mama, don't be angry" and told her of Uncle Feivel's joy with the coat. Mama grimaced, but I was convinced that I had done the right thing.

In the month of March, 1938, we made our way to the port of Gdynia. The whole family – aunts, uncles and cousins – came to see us off. It was a tearful parting because most of us sensed that this would be the very last time we would ever see one another again.

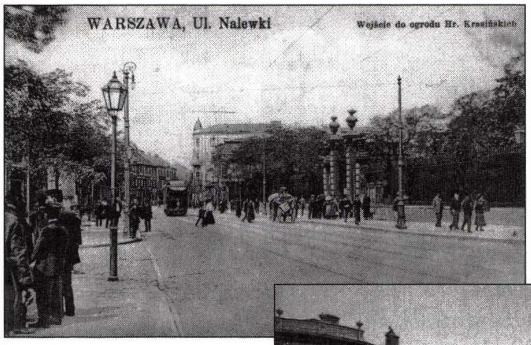
My grandfather's last words saddened me immensely and were just another indication that this parting was final.

With tears streaming down his cheeks, Reb Moshe Kovalski bid me farewell.

"Sholem, don't forget us," he said.

The words touched my heart, but I was also buoyed by the knowledge that I would soon be starting a new life in a new country. The memory of my other Zaidy, Reb Eluzer Mokotowski, surfaced.

At that moment, I saw his face as clearly as if he had been standing there and I identified with Joseph when he was tempted into evil by Potiphar's wife in Egypt. All of a sudden, Joseph saw the image of his father Jacob's face before him and he was reminded to choose the path of righteousness. *"Demus deyoknoh shel abba"* "his father's image appeared" the *Midrash* says, and I too knew that my grandfather's lessons would accompany me on my journey to America and guide me in making the right choices. From that moment on, I was always accompanied by *demus deyoknoh shel saba* – the image of my saintly grandfather's face appearing before my eyes. He had taught me that honesty and hard work would carry me far in life. Now more than ever, I was determined to succeed in the *goldener medina,* in America, where the streets were paved with gold, or so I thought.



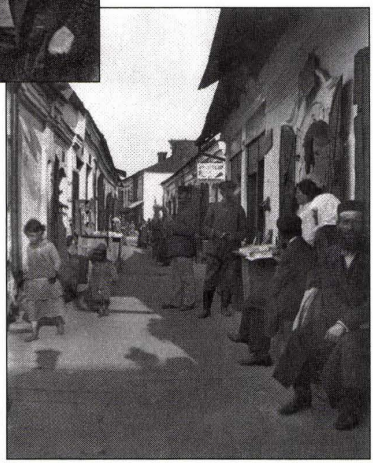
Nalewki Street –
Main street of the
Jewish section of Warsaw,
pre-World War II



Kapucynska Street,
a busy thoroughfare
in Lublin



Men in Warsaw,
pre-World War II



Zelig Shenitzer (on extreme right)
a herring merchant and student of
R' Avrohom Weinberg



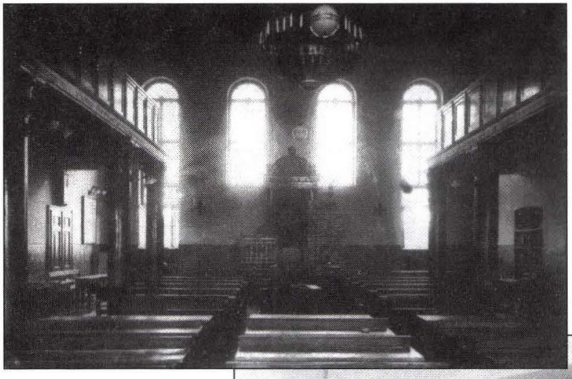
Sholem B. Kowalsky,
age 15 in Lublin



Rabbi Yehudah Leib Kovalski,
Rav of Votzlavak, Uncle,
Senator and Zionist



Rav Avrohom Weinberg,
Rosh Yeshiva of Sochoczow, Rav of Warsaw



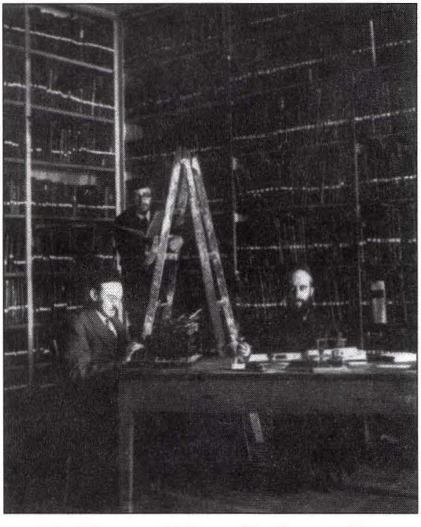
The interior of the Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, pre World-War II



Some of the bochurim at Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin with Uncle, Rav Avrohom Weinberg



Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the Lubliner Rav



The library at Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin

A letter from Rav Avrohom Weinberg to Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the Lubliner Rav

Departure For England

A New Life Begins



tanding on deck as our England-bound ship began pulling away from the moorings, waving good-bye to the friends and relatives packed together on the pier, I felt nauseous. It wasn't the beer or the choppy sea but fear. I was gripped by an encompassing fear I'd never experienced before.

I was just over 16-years-old and already my life was at a crossroads. The preliminary rush of excitement I had felt on contemplating all the advantages of starting over and the relief at being able to leave Poland was beginning to subside. The exhilaration was being replaced by an overwhelming sense of sadness, for everything familiar I was leaving behind and everything unknown I was about to face.

All my life I attempted to stretch to the limits the boundaries placed on me. Years earlier, I had secretly begun amassing knowledge in the fields of history and mathematics at the library in Otwock. All kinds of dictionaries and history books were concealed under my pillow at the yeshiva dormitories, so I had an inkling of what I was about to encounter, but no more than that.

Until now, I had choked back the tears when all at once the deep sadness of the whole situation crushed me. Here we were, a Jewish family that had once been secure, being wrenched from its environment, uprooted, seizing the last opportunity to make a break for freedom, leaving everyone else behind to face his fate alone.

My feelings were ambivalent. On the one hand, we were abandoning relatives and friends – some elderly, weak and impoverished, but others very young and able – I blamed them all for not picking up their belongings and making an effort to leave. I could not deny the reality of the situation any longer. As far as I was concerned, Jabotinsky had predicted the outcome for Polish Jewry years earlier – annihilation in an impending war. I believed him. Why did they not believe him, I asked myself. Why did they not even listen to him? Why was a Zionist *treif?* Could they not wait for *moshiach* in Israel?

I stole a quick sideways glance at my mother and sisters, who were leaning over the railings, sobbing, their salty tears melting into the murky waters below. Seeing them, my resolve broke. No matter how much or how fast I swallowed, I could not hold back the tears any longer as I watched the Gdynia Harbor disappear into a foggy mist.

The boat ride across the Baltic and North Seas from Gdynia to Southampton was long and tedious. We were now refugees, packed together in the berths and steerage of the ship for the duration of this voyage.

It was drizzling when we docked at Southampton. In the short time I was to spend in England, I got used to the dreary weather – the gray skies and rain that alternated between light drizzle and a heavy downpour accompanied by icy hailstones.

As soon as we disembarked, my mother, sisters and I boarded the train for London. This took us to Victoria Station in West London, but we were headed for the East End of London. We hailed a taxi. The taxi driver took one quick glance at us, virtually eliminating the need to inform him of our destination.

"Whitechapel, ma'am?" he asked, addressing my mother. My mother didn't speak any English but she clutched in her hand a small wrinkled piece of paper that contained the address of an inexpensive boarding house which she gave to the driver.

Our destination was in fact Whitechapel Road. Stepping out of the taxi with our few pieces of luggage, I momentarily forgot I was in London. The scene was somewhat Kafkaesque. It was almost as if a small Polish *shtetl* had been transported to the East End of London.

What I saw was totally reminiscent of the poorer Jewish neighborhoods in Warsaw, hundreds of Jews still dressed in their Eastern

European apparel – with the bearded men in skullcaps over their side locks and long caftans and the women in kerchiefs and long coats – milling around the streets. The neighborhood was crammed with small grocery stores, *shteiblech* and small houses all joined together.

Even the odors were familiar. The storefronts overflowed with barrels of herrings and pickled cucumbers. The fresh garlic was strung up near the entrances alongside the smoked meats. Fresh loaves of onion bread were spread out on the counter.

Yiddish was the predominant language. All the signs were in Yiddish – *kramer* (grocery), *shneider* (tailor), *metzger* (butcher) and all the bartering and purchasing were conducted in Yiddish.

Most of the thousands of European refugees who had preceded us to London lived in Whitechapel. They began arriving in East London from the Russian and East European Pale of Settlement in the late 1800s. By the early 1900s, there were at least sixty thousand Jews living in London. Approximately thirty thousand were refugees and of those, about twenty thousand lived in Whitechapel or what was derogatorily referred to as "Jewtown." The two miles that constituted "Jewtown" stretched from Whitechapel, through Mile End to St. Georges. Large families shared overcrowded, ramshackle and often squalid houses. Many houses didn't have indoor lavatories. The "outhouses" as they were called, were located in small sheds in the cobblestone alleyways behind the houses.

Bathing presented a problem that was solved by vapor houses or public baths. For a small sum of money, you could fill a tub with hot water in a local bathhouse that would become especially crowded before Shabbos and Jewish holidays.

Although I had become used to deprivation in my latter years in Poland, I was not used to such squalor. We stayed in this boarding house in the East End where the conditions were at least livable.

Native British Jews generally looked upon the influx of immigrants with disdain. Although they were cordial, I found London's Jews to be unfriendly. They didn't appear to have much empathy for a Polish Jewish youth asking directions in Yiddish. They tried their best to understand me and supply me with the requisite information, but the help stopped there. They didn't extend any token hospitality to the newcomers in their city.

Those native London Jews I approached to ask information or to buy something from seemed genuinely embarrassed by my Yiddish demeanor. For centuries, they had tried their utmost to blend into the highly class-conscious British society and to downplay their Judaism.

The wave of Jewish immigrants pouring into England once again drew attention to native British Jews, alerting the general British public to the fact that maybe the Jews weren't so "enlightened" after all. Thus, British Jewry represented by the Board of Deputies tried to speed up the acculturation of the newcomers to their new environment by integrating them into local London schools. Yiddish remained the mother tongue despite the fact that they studied English in school.

By March 1938, the influx of immigrants was still in high gear, with more relatives coming to join their families. Consequently, it would be years before English would become the predominant language in the East End of London.

Feeling my way around, I first ventured close by, exploring the nooks and crannies of the neighborhood, including the local market.

Exploring the Bustling East End

Petticoat Lane was famous among Londoners as the place to get anything you wanted – except pig – at rock bottom prices. Amid shouts in Yiddish of *koife, veiber, koife* – "buy, ladies, buy," I wove in and out of pushcarts loaded with fruit and vegetables, *shmates,* cheap clothing, umbrellas, buttons, handkerchiefs, old coins and stamps, watches and clocks. Some of the merchandise was good quality but most was useless junk. However, the pushcart owners were artful in their salesmanship and most of us bought the goods. Invariably, the shiny unmarked apples lay on top of the pile but the apples that were rapidly shoveled into the brown paper bag were the spoiled ones that had been lying on the bottom of the pile. Even so, it was a few pennies well spent.

Despite all the odds against them and their tenuous economic situation, the first wave of immigrants who had arrived in the latter part of the nineteen century had managed to establish community facilities, including synagogues, ritual baths and *shtieblech.*

After a few days, I felt quite comfortable in the East End, but it was a totally new experience for me. It was like coming out of a huge dark cave into the bright sunshine. It was freedom and it was exhilarating. It didn't take me long to get used to it. I didn't feel hounded simply because I was Jewish. I stopped looking over my shoulder to see who was following me. Nobody spat at me and nobody made a threatening move towards me, let alone, beat me up. I had reached the emancipated western world and I could actually taste the freedom.

The Mystery of the Egyptian Mummies

There were certain things I had to get used to, such as navigating the London Transport System, especially if I wanted to accomplish my goal. I had heard about the British Museum and the British Library and I was determined to visit both monumental buildings as frequently as possible during my short stay in London.

Warsaw did not have such museums. There were libraries in Warsaw, but none could compare to the British Library. The only library I had had the opportunity to visit was in Otwock. Mendel the librarian had been kind and considerate enough to recommend books to me. They included all the Jules Verne tales, which I smuggled into *cheder* and later into the yeshivos. Mendel also introduced me to history and mathematics, and I began to learn Polish so that I could expand my reading. The British Library held a real fascination for me, as did the British Museum with its historical exhibits and documentation.

To reach my destination, I had to get from the East End of London to the West End. London buses differed from Warsaw trams, but this was not the hard part. It was easier to identify the correct red bus going in the right direction than it was to find my way through the maze of the London Underground. With the help of a map and a lot of questions to strangers, I reached my destination, Tottenham Court Road, certainly a mouthful to pronounce.

With wonder, I rode the escalators, breathing a sigh of relief as I emerged from the Underground into the open air. Both the British Museum and the British Library were close by. After visiting the library and browsing through the huge reading rooms with thousands of volumes, some archaic, I made my way to the museum.

The British Museum was an imposing building with its tall ionic columns and raised roof. I walked through all the long rooms of displays until I reached the mummies, laid out one next to the other in glass caskets. They were swathed in the same reams of white cloth they had been wrapped in by the ancient Egyptians centuries ago. Studying them more closely, I was amazed to see that they retained their original form. After thousands of years, all parts of the body – the head, eyes, mouth and limbs – were intact and easily identifiable. It was incredible how the ancient Egyptians had managed to preserve the bodies.

Looking at them, I was reminded that these mummies were a source of bitterness to the Jewish people. They had been laid to rest in the huge pyramids – a source of Egyptian pride – built by my forefathers, enslaved Israelites, who toiled under cruel and harsh conditions until G-d crushed Pharaoh's will and Moses led them out of bondage to freedom. Surrounded by this slice of ancient history, my thoughts returned to the plight of European Jewry.

Politically, Britain was in a state of upheaval at the time. Neville Chamberlain, a Conservative, had succeeded Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister on May 28, 1937.

Chamberlain's three years in power were marked by Hitler's aggressions against Europe. In the years prior to the outbreak of W.W.II, his policy of appeasement with Adolf Hitler was relatively popular in Britain. When Germany invaded Czechoslovakia and then Poland on September 1, 1939, Chamberlain declared war. He simultaneously expanded his cabinet to include the leading Conservative Winston Churchill who was to take over from Chamberlain as Prime Minister and lead Britain to victory.

In 1938, Londoners were not oblivious to the expansionist policies of Nazi Germany. The daily press abounded with reports of Hitler's plans for the creation of an Aryan race to dominate the world, his rhetoric against the Jews and plans for incursions into other European countries.

Apart from the media, London had its own hot spot for airing these issues. Nazis, Fascists, Liberals, Jews and Christians of all persuasions gathered most Sunday mornings at Hyde Park on Soap Boxes. The debates were often heated and sometimes became

violent. The ferocity with which the proponents of various ideas argued their cases reflected the heated atmosphere of the times and I knew that the worst was yet to come. The varying ideas and thoughts expressed were generally stated in English and, although I did not understand the words, the passion and oft times anger in which they were expressed left an uneasy impression on me.

It was with these feelings of uncertainty about a nebulous future that after ten days my family left London to join my father in New York.

Bracing ourselves for a stormy Atlantic Ocean crossing we boarded the ocean liner "Manhattan" which would dock in New York several days later.

The Megilla *Reading*

The holiday of *Purim* was celebrated several days after we left England. We set about organizing the reading of the *Megilla.* This proved to be easier said than done. The task was to assemble a *minyan* and find a *Baal Koreh* (reader). No one volunteered.

I had no experience. I had mostly studied in *Chassidic* yeshivos where we sang a lot but never learned how to read the Torah with all the correct notes. However, I decided to give it a try. It certainly wasn't the best rendition of *Megillas Esther,* but neither was it the worst.

Reading the *Megilla* is not the only *mitzvah* associated with *Purim.* It is also incumbent on Jews to partake of a feast, to give *mishloach manos* (gifts of food) and give charity to the poor.

In order to fulfill this last obligation, I had to do some planning of my own. I put out a collection plate. My *Megilla* audience was generous – the total take equaled the equivalent of seven dollars, a handsome sum of money. I felt very rich. I had enough money to give to charity and some spending money that would come in handy when we reached America.

Mishloach manos wouldn't have posed a problem either if I had given more thought to it earlier. When we boarded the boat, friends and relatives had given us lots of chocolate and candy for the journey. I put myself in charge of the candy that, of course, was to be shared with my sisters. But the temptation was too great. With my

sweet tooth, it didn't take me long to eat the lion's share of the chocolates and candies. My sisters didn't hold it against me because they were tucking into the kosher meals served on the boat. I did not eat much and saved very little candy for them.

When *Purim* began, my sisters asked me for candy for the *mishloach manos* parcels. I could not deliver, I had just polished off the last candy and chocolate bar. For them, revenge was sweet. Shortly afterwards, we encountered a storm. As the white crested ocean waves beat ferociously against the stern and hull of the ship, tossing the ship backwards and forwards, I rocked back and forth in the berth below, clutching my stomach, discharging its contents in a horrible fashion.

Reaching the Shores of America

Excitement reigned as we sighted the Statue of Liberty. We arrived in New York in late March on a Friday night. Shabbos had already begun, preventing us from disembarking without profaning the Sabbath. I had already taken into account that we would be docking on Shabbos and therefore unable to sign the immigration forms.

Gaining access to the captain of the "Manhattan" was not too difficult. It proved more problematic to explain to him why we wanted to sign our documents early – before sunset on Friday. Nevertheless, he agreed and I convinced many other passengers to follow suit and fill in their forms before we reached New York.

My father was waiting for us on Pier Forty as the "Manhattan" was ferried by tugboats into the New York Harbor. Seeing his family walking down the ramp, he began to flail his arms all around gesturing and screaming to us.

"Sholem, it's Shabbos. Don't sign anything. Don't carry anything," he yelled at me. "Leave everything on the boat. We'll come back on *motzei* Shabbos to pick it up."

"Don't worry," I shouted back. "Everything is under control."

We disembarked, hugged father and cleared through immigration as prearranged. Customs would be taken care of Saturday night when we were due back to pick up our luggage.

Our First Shabbos in the U.S.

After a joyous reunion with my father, we proceeded to walk several blocks to 42nd Street, to a third floor apartment owned by a kind Jewish lady who let us stay over Shabbos.

We were all exhausted. We davened and soon we were served *Kiddush*, a traditional meal of gefilte fish, chicken soup and chicken. We finished eating and quickly retired, falling into a deep, relaxed sleep.

My mother was especially grateful that she had been able to bring her three children to safety in the United States. This had not been easy. My father had enlisted the help of numerous friends in an effort to get them to vouch for his family. He succeeded in obtaining permission for our entry after the intervention of Senator Barkley.

After Shabbos we returned to the ship, picked up our belongings and headed for Williamsburg where my father had rented an apartment for us. Two days later, I boarded a trolley which took me to the Lower East Side. This was a new city to explore and as always I was eager and excited to learn about new places, people and things.

To my sheer amazement and delight, Manhattan's Lower East Side resembled London's East End. Yiddish was everywhere – the signs, the newspapers and the street language. I saw the same small storefronts, tasted the same foods from back home and smelled the same odors as I had in London, only here the currency was different.

I bought bread for two or three cents a pound and apples cost no more than one to five cents per pound. People bustled around the markets and streets all day. The trading went on long after the sun set. At night the pushcart owners lit naphtha lights and business continued as usual.

Here, too, the crowding and congestion was overwhelming. Approximately six hundred thousand Jews lived in New York. Three hundred thousand Jews were living on the Lower East Side of which over half, about one hundred and fifty thousand, were immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Whereas London's East End Jewish immigrants lived in cramped houses, New York "greenhorns" were squashed together

in tenement houses which were often run-down brick structures with narrow passages and steep rickety wooden stairs.

The festival of Passover was approaching and preparations were in high gear.

The grocery and hardware stores were filled to capacity with shoppers buying new utensils and goods stamped "Kosher for Passover." Boxes of *matzos,* were stacked wall-high. The horseradish vendor was especially busy. A large grinder stood on his pushcart as he fed sticks of white horseradish into the machine that he had padlocked to the lamppost. The horseradish sold was served with the gefilta fish and used for the bitter herbs or *maror* at the Passover *Seder.*

Fate of the "Oustjuden"

We felt relatively safe in America. The news from relatives and friends in Poland was devastating. Some months after we left Warsaw, on Friday, October 28, 1938, Hitler expelled thousands of Jews of eastern origin or "*Oustjuden*" – mostly men and youths above the age of eighteen – from Germany to Poland. Stranded on the Polish-German border in the City of Zbonshin, they made their way through the forests in the cold winter to cities like Warsaw and Lodz. Some never made it at all and perished during the long trek. At first, the Polish government acceded to the entry of the "*Oustjuden*" who took refuge in villages, towns and cities.

Hitler did not stop with the first deportation. The next Shabbos morning, the Gestapo rounded up the rest of the "*Oustjuden*" – women and children – and proceeded to herd them into trains bound for the border. This time the Poles were less benevolent. Poland refused the *"Oustjuden"* entry and they were turned back to Germany.

Europe's Jewish population had increased from two million in 1800 to thirteen million in 1914. Eight million Jews had lived in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. They were referred as "*Oustjuden*"– a pejorative German term for Jews of Eastern European origin who were mostly orthodox. Moving about in Europe, they usually retained the citizenship of the country of their birth. In the early 1900s, they comprised one fifth of

the Jewish population in Germany. Most of them became skilled craftsmen – tailors, shoemakers, seamstresses and tradesmen – and they formed the backbone of religious and Zionist organizations. They had a higher birthrate than the native Jewish population that was kept lower by assimilation, intermarriage, conversion and family planning.

The Polish government, aware that Hitler intended to deport all the "*Oustjuden*", declared that all Polish citizens living in Germany would lose their citizenship and their passports unless the Polish Consulates validated their passports before a deadline in October. They had no intention of taking them back and the Polish Consuls refused to stamp the passports of the thousands of Jews who waited for hours in long lines outside the consulates. On the other hand, Germany had no intention of keeping them either.

Kristellnacht

On the evening of November 9, 1938, the worst pogrom of the decade broke out across Germany; it is known as *"Kristellnacht"* or the "night of the broken glass." Germans rioted all across the country destroying, burning, looting and pillaging anyone and anything Jewish. The riots were ostensibly sparked by the assassination in Paris of a German embassy official by a Polish teenage boy, about my age, Herschel Grynszpan. He said he wanted to avenge the fate of his parents – "*Oustjuden*" – who were forcibly deported to Poland and incarcerated by the Polish military in the army camp stables. After Herschel received a letter from them in Paris describing the deplorable conditions his parents were living under, he decided on this drastic action.

After the looting and burning ended, thousands of Jews lay bleeding and beaten on the streets of Germany and twenty thousand Jews were arrested and interned in camps. On *"Kristellnacht"*, half a year's worth of output by the Belgian cut glass industry lay in shattered shards all over Germany. The clean-up and repair operations were enormous. To defray the costs of the damage, Jews had to pay fines of up to one billion *Reichsmarks*. The following day, Germany's morning newspapers referred to the riots as a "spontaneous demonstration of the German people."

The Jewish newspapers in New York described these horrors vividly. We were shaken and we huddled together praying that our loved ones in Poland would be spared. What could we do? We had arrived but a short while ago and were distracted by all the problems entailed in setting up a new home in a strange environment.

From New York to Chicago

A week later my father enrolled me in Mesivta Torah Vadaas in Brooklyn where I entered the highest class taught by Rabbi Gedalia Schor. The standard suited me and I deeply respected Rabbi Schor, but all the *shiurim* were in Yiddish.

I desperately wanted to learn English. With my first five and a half dollars, I ran out to buy a "Webster's Dictionary" which proved to be an invaluable investment. I was determined to succeed and that's why I was grateful when an unexpected opportunity arose to attend a yeshiva that combined a morning program of secular studies and *Limudai Kodesh* in the afternoon.

During *Pesach* I accompanied my father on a visit to an old acquaintance, the great *gaon,* Rabbi Chaim Heller from Lodz, Poland. At his house we met *HaGaon,* Rabbi Chaim Zimmerman, the son of Rabbi Yaakov Zimmerman and the nephew of the Kaminitzer *Rosh HaYeshiva,* Rabbi Baruch Ber.

Rabbi Chaim Zimmerman was friendly and conversed freely with me in my mother tongue. I had no qualms about explaining to him my quandary. More than anything right now, I wanted to learn English. Although I tremendously enjoyed Rabbi Gedalia Schor's *shiurim,* I really preferred to concentrate on English first.

Rabbi Zimmerman had a perfect solution. I was truly surprised and gratified when he made me an offer.

"Why don't you accompany me to Chicago where I am *a Rosh HaYeshiva?*" Rabbi Zimmerman asked. "You can learn English. You can go to school and you can also learn Torah," he said.

My father was very suspicious of the plan. Formerly, he had fervently opposed my acquisition of any secular studies. He was especially insistent that I not receive any formal secular education,

even when an ocean and a distance of thousands of miles separated us. Now that he had me by his side, he was not about to capitulate so easily.

My father voiced his disapproval.

"I'll take good care of him," Rabbi Zimmerman assured him.

My father remained unconvinced, making but one compromise.

"Let's ask Rabbi Chaim Heller what he suggests."

Rabbi Heller turned towards me and asked me what I thought of the Chicago idea and what I wanted to do.

"I want to be in an environment among young men, teachers and rebbes who speak English," I replied.

"Will you take good care of him?" Rabbi Chaim Heller asked Rabbi Chaim Zimmerman.

"What a question," Rabbi Zimmerman retorted, somewhat offended.

My father finally acquiesced.

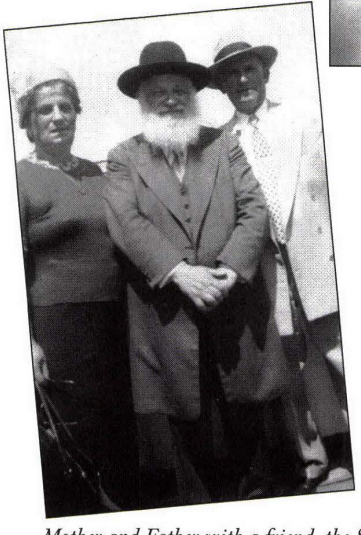
Immediately after *Pesach* I once again packed all my earthly belongings – my one new suit, one tie, a hat, two *yarmulkes* (skullcaps), two shirts, three pairs of underwear and three pairs of socks – and I set off for Chicago with my mentor, Rabbi Chaim Zimmerman. Rabbi Zimmerman had decided that the time had come to transform this "greener," Sholem Ber Kovalski, into a real American. I had no idea of what was in store for me.



Pass used in Warsaw Ghetto



Myself, before I left for U.S.A., March 1938



Mother and Father with a friend, the Sunday after we arrived in U.S.A., March 1938



Mother and sister, Jean, March 1938

Chicago

The Hebrew Theological College

It was a long journey from New York to Chicago, plenty of time for my fertile imagination to go to work. For me, Chicago was synonymous with the notorious Al Capone and all the other gangsters I had heard about. I half expected to get off the train and walk straight into the middle of a gunfight. When they weren't harassing loan sharks, the fictitious gangsters were probably traveling around the world in eighty days, or had hired a submarine that had taken them twenty thousand leagues under the sea.

I had religiously read all of Jules Verne's works in Yiddish in Otwock and they endlessly fired my imagination. Now I was about to embark on a real-life adventure which I was convinced would open up new corridors for me in the world of adventure, literature and intellectual thought.

I had already delved into many of the available works in the small Otwock library on present-day political thinking – including Socialism, Communism and Democracy – yet knew that I had only scratched the surface. I looked forward with a great sense of anticipation to the time when I would be able to browse through an American library and pick any volume – fiction or non-fiction – from the shelves and easily comprehend its contents.

Rabbi Zimmerman didn't waste a moment. As soon as I was settled in a tiny room in his apartment, he enrolled me in an intensive seven week pre-high school English course. We studied from early morning to five o'clock in the evening five days a week. I was used to the grueling hours from my childhood experiences in *cheder.* Moreover, I was grateful for this opportunity to study English.

The course and additional studies were in Manly High School. I was in Mrs. Kelly's class and getting along nicely. I had become acquainted with a number of students, boys and girls who were more than a little intrigued by this refugee boy who had suddenly shown up.

I was a source of comic relief to my public school and yeshiva classmates. On hearing that I was attending public school, they decided to play a few pranks on me.

"When the teacher calls the morning roll and you hear your name, Sholem Kovalski, the correct answer is 'shut up,' " one student kindly explained to me. Figuring that I needed some more of his tips on the intricacies of the English language to get me through the day, he also filled me in on how to request permission to go to the washrooms. "You must say 'I want to go to the office,' " he said.

Armed with all this rudimentary and very helpful information I attended my first day at school.

I handed a note to the teacher and took my place. Soon the morning roll call began. I listened very carefully for my name, practicing my response under my breath over and over again until I felt I had it down pat in colloquial American.

"Sholem Kovalski," the teacher said loudly and clearly.

"Shurup," I said in loud confident tones.

The whole class cracked up, laughing hysterically. I was truly baffled and it took me a little while to understand that I had been set up. When I put up my hand to ask to go to the office, I was not surprised that my question initiated the same response – hysterical laughter.

"You must ask to go the washrooms," the teacher gently explained to me.

From then on, I checked and double checked any "helpful" tips on the English language supplied by my yeshiva classmates, who were generally a fun-loving and easy going bunch of guys.

But the real work at becoming an American only began when I finished the course. Rabbi Zimmerman's yeshiva, Hebrew Theological Academy, was like no other yeshiva I had ever attended or heard of.

It was a combination of college and yeshiva – this was American Orthodoxy and it was completely new to me. Many of the Yeshiva students were already college graduates and a few years older. I had a long way to go – first of all I had to earn a high-school diploma.

Rabbi Zimmerman enrolled me at Manly High School for the morning hours. In the afternoons, I would study at the yeshiva. After taking a test in the Yeshiva I was placed in one of the higher classes under the tutelage of a rebbe who was a well-learned but rather humorless teacher.

As luck would have it, we were learning the Talmudic tractate of *Gitin*, which I had first studied at age eleven. I had continued to brush up on the same tractate several times since then, until I was familiar with all its subject matter and many of the primary commentaries *(Rishonim* and *Achronim).* I had capitalized on my knowledge of *Gitin* previously when I was tested for Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin.

Now, I delighted at the opportunity to dazzle teachers and classmates with my knowledge of the Talmud. I dressed differently and I could not speak English, but my East European Torah background stood for a lot even in emancipated and enlightened America.

My constant questions and answers on the *Gemora* went down fine with the students who were thankful for my sparring interlude with the rebbe, as a form of relief from the rather dry *shiurim.*

My rebbe, on the other hand, did not hide his irritation. He was a serious man, a *kapdan* who never cracked a smile. My innocent antics did little to amuse him. He did not find any charm in a Polish Yiddish-speaking wisecracking *yingle* (young boy) showing off his Talmudic erudition. He spoke to me after class and asked me to refrain from making any comments at all during his *shiurim.* This proved too formidable a task. It was virtually impossible to study as dynamic a text as the Talmud without any discourse at all.

After one particularly rousing *shiur,* he stormed into the administrator's office. The dean, Rabbi Yaakov Greenberg, a mild mannered sweet tempered person, was a little taken aback by the rebbe's agitation. Rabbi Greenberg cautioned me to tone down my comments. I managed to restrain myself for a while but my silence didn't last too long. Once again, the rebbe complained. This time he went straight to Rabbi Chaim Zimmerman, my mentor.

Rabbi Zimmerman tested me on the material we were learning thinking that maybe this was the problem. When he found me to be proficient he sent me right back to the class.

Although the rebbe was a little disappointed at the outcome of the meeting, my fellow students were certainly not. They enjoyed my baiting the rebbe because he was generally quite caustic in his remarks to them.

Returning to the *shiur,* I was apologetic although I genuinely felt that I had no reason to be. After all, I thought, "Isn't the essence and process of learning about questions, answers and discussion?"

Nevertheless, I approached my rebbe. "Please forgive me," I said to him. "Maybe I didn't understand what disturbed you."

"Don't talk so much. Be quiet," he responded. *Siug le'chachmah shtikah,* "silence is a precaution for wisdom."

I tended to abide more by the famous saying of the Kotzker Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Morgenstern. *"Shtikas hapeh shtikas halev",* "the silence of the mouth is equivalent to the silence of the heart."

All it took was several more outbursts and I was out on my ear.

"You are a nuisance," the rebbe shouted at me. "Don't come to my *shiurim* anymore. Go to Rabbi Rubinstein's class."

This yeshiva was generally not a gateway to becoming an ordained Rabbi, since most of the students aspired to qualify as physicians, dentists or lawyers. Nevertheless, they were well versed in Torah and Talmud.

I was living with Rabbi Zimmerman in his overcrowded apartment. *Sforim* were everywhere. In fact, some found their way into the hall. This did not disturb anybody since the apartment was on the top floor. One day, however, an irate landlady climbed up the

three flights to demand overdue rent. Appalled by the sight of *sforim* precariously strewn about, she shouted at him.

Unperturbed, he responded, "You don't like what you see here? I will move, but I'm very comfortable."

Tenants for a third floor walk-up were not plentiful. The distressed landlady, happy to collect her rent, departed somewhat subdued.

Although amused, I decided the time had come for me to find more suitable quarters. I found a room for ten dollars a month which I shared with another student.

My First Apartment

I would have to earn the rent – five dollars a month. Thanks to Rabbi Yaakov Greenberg, who found me a small job, I managed the rent.

The yeshiva's sisterhood held weekly bazaars. They hired me for a small sum of money to sort out the clothes. The real bonuses, however, were the bargains I picked up. For a mere twenty cents, I could buy a shirt, or ties for fifty cents. I was finally able to supplement my very meager wardrobe thanks to the yeshiva sisterhood.

Still, money was always tight. After I paid the rent, there was not much left over. Sometimes, I was invited out for meals though not often. One who often extended himself was Rabbi Jack Nathan, a bachelor who had just obtained his *smicha.* Jack lived in Chicago with his parents and he invited me many times. Who was to imagine that this kind family and I would become *Mechatonim*? Many, many years later my youngest son, Yosef, married David and Serene's daughter, Rebecca. David is Jack's brother. I also felt privileged to be invited into the home of Rabbi Greenberg, even though his wife was ailing. Generally, he made it a practice never to invite *yeshiva bochurim* home.

Noticing *tzizis* hanging out of the corners of my clothes, Rabbi Greenberg said, "I see you wear *tzizis*." I was surprised that this impressed Rabbi Greenberg. He took a special liking to me. An engineer by profession, he possessed an unusual amount of patience and spent precious time listening to my thoughts and opinions on everything new in America, all rendered in my broken English. I was never embarrassed to speak English in front of Rabbi Greenberg. He represented the epitome of a modern Orthodox scholar, clean-shaven, neat and well dressed.

"If you want to learn English, Sholem," he said to me, "go to the movies." He often gave me a quarter to go to the movies especially on Friday afternoons during the summertime when Shabbos began late.

I had never been inside a movie theater before coming to Chicago. In Otwock, we always passed by the movie theater and stopped to look at the posters on the billboards that included pinups of Shirley Temple and posters advertising the Ashkenazi Brothers starring in the Yiddish play, "The Dybbuk."

Although Rabbi Chaim Zimmerman supplemented the sisterhood's wage and Rabbi Greenberg added quarters with a few dollars here and there, money was often tight.

Family Aspirations For Me

I did not know the exact state of my parents' finances, but they seldom sent me money. My father had been reluctant to let me go to Chicago in the first place. He hoped that I would stay in New York, and only grudgingly gave me permission to leave.

"There are enough yeshivos in New York," he had said to me on the eve of my departure.

My father had thought that I would arrive in America and immediately become imbued with the immigrant's dream and ambition – to reap the materialistic rewards of living, working and earning money. Little did he realize the inadequate choices for a young man with minimal skills in English and no higher education.

Indeed, my father remained adamant in his desire for me to find my place in the job market.

"Go out and find a job," he urged me.

The reason was probably twofold. Firstly, although he was a very well learned man himself, I had the distinct impression that he wasn't confident that I had the ability to sit and learn Torah. The second consideration was probably a financial one. Both he and my mother thought that I should start to make money and contribute towards the household.

"Learn to cut diamonds," my father told me, but my heart was in education. I was determined to learn English and pursue my

yeshiva studies. I did not want to allow the glitter of American materialism to lure me away from my goals. Consequently, I bore the brunt of the hardship and the cost of an education.

Precious Remnants From the Holocaust

I tried to visit my parents in Williamsburg as often as I could. On one occasion I was in for a shock.

I had only managed to bring some very select *seforim* with me from Poland to America, including a copy of *Reishis Bikurim,* written by my uncle, Rabbi Avroham Weinberg, acquired when I visited his house for the very last time. It was his farewell gift to me. He was one of the very last family members I bade farewell to before leaving. It was an emotionally charged meeting. Nothing could assuage my sorrow at having to part from my beloved and revered uncle who had taken me under his wings and into his home when I needed him. I promised myself to take good care of his gift which he personally inscribed.

When I reached America I discovered that *Reishis Bikurim* was a rare treasure. In fact, it was practically impossible to find this *sefer* in any of the Judaica libraries. I knew I had to guard it very carefully. It was all the more reason to leave the *sefer* in the safety of our *seforim* library at home when I went off to Chicago, or so I thought.

Imagine my dismay to discover the *sefer* missing!

Distraught at the loss of such a precious gift, I asked my father if he knew what had become of the *sefer.*

"I lent it to Rav Gedalia Schor," he said.

I wasted no time in contacting Rabbi Schor.

"I'm sorry," Rabbi Schor said to me. "Regretfully I left it in the *Mesivta* and it disappeared."

Distressed and trembling, I left him. Horrified, I realized that I had lost practically the only surviving tangible memento of my uncle. The only solution I could come up with was to pray for a miracle – the safe return of the *sefer.*

While praying, I suddenly remembered Rabbi Mordechai Goldman and his offer of long ago. Rabbi Goldman owned a *seforim* store in New York together with the Gerer Rebbe.

I had first met Rabbi Goldman in Warsaw. He was a friend of my father's. As soon as my father learned that Rabbi Goldman was on his way from New York to Warsaw, my father contacted him and asked him to get in touch with my mother and check on the well-being of his family. After he arrived in Warsaw, Rabbi Goldman called my mother in Otwock where we were both living in different places at the time. I was at my grandfather's house when my mother arranged a meeting for us.

Rabbi Goldman tested me on the *Gemora* that I was learning.

"You're doing very well," he said. He assured me he would tell my father that I was progressing very well in my studies and that my father would be happy to hear this. However this wasn't all. Rabbi Goldman told me that he owned a *seforim* store.

"When you come to New York, feel free to come in whenever you need *seforim*. If you continue to advance in your studies, I might even give them to you as a gift," he said as an added incentive for me to continue to learn. Since this was a serious offer, he gave me his address, 180 Clinton Street. I carefully stowed it away and frankly forgot about until the *Reishis Bikurim* slipped through my hands.

Frantically, I searched, found the address and rushed over to the store. I wasted little time introducing myself to Rabbi Goldman and reminded him of his promise to help me, asking if he had a copy of *Reishis Bikurim* to sell. Sadly, I was out of luck. Rabbi Goldman did offer me a flicker of hope, however.

"If I find it I'll buy it for you," he said.

I felt despondent. Nevertheless, I thanked Rabbi Goldman. Time passed while I continued to hope that the book would turn up.

Two years later I heard from Rabbi Goldman again. By now I had moved from Chicago to Ner Israel in Baltimore. I was in the middle of a *shiur*. Rabbi Goldman called to inform me that Rabbi Borman's *seforim* library from Los Angeles was being auctioned off in New York.

"Come immediately," Rabbi Goldman advised. "Rabbi Borman was a colleague of your uncle. They both studied together in Sochoczow under the tutelage of the *Avnei Nezer*. They were good friends and there's a good chance that the *Reishis Bikurim* will be in the collection."

Fired with hope, I left on the first train to New York and like a dream come true, Rabbi Goldman's assessment was correct. For

a mere three dollars, a copy of that rare treasure, *Reishis Bikurim* was mine to take home.

It wasn't the copy inscribed to me by my uncle, but it contained another hidden treasure. Once at home I opened the *sefer* and a handwritten letter dropped out!

It was a personal letter containing a *dvar Torah* in my uncle's handwriting to *HaGaon* Harav Meir Shapiro. This was indeed a wondrous find and I took care to preserve this valuable document under the glass tabletop of my desk, always careful to take it with me every time I changed locations.

Many years later in Hillcrest, I put this inspiring letter in its place of honor underneath my glass tabletop. It remained there until one *erev Pesach.*

I returned from *shul* late, having been detained for quite a long time selling *chametz.,* I walked into my library and glanced at my desk. Shocked, I noticed a bare space where the letter had been. I almost fainted. The letter was definitely gone from an otherwise glowing, polished and spruced up room.

Rushing into our bedroom, I woke up my wife.

"What happened to my letter?" I asked her.

It took awhile until she was awake enough to understand what I was stammering about. But as soon as she realized what letter I was speaking about, she followed me into the library.

"Oh my goodness," Shulamith said. "Conklin was cleaning here today."

Conklin was our one-day a week dynamo. Well aware that it was soon *Pesach,* she must have tossed out the slightly worn-looking letter. Devastated, we rushed to the garbage pail outside, silently praying that the garbage truck hadn't disposed of it yet. Fortunately, we made it in time and we started to methodically search through every shred of garbage.

This was a really unpleasant task, but everything had to be done to find the letter. Finally, after we sorted through what seemed like an unending litter hill, we found it discarded among a bunch of newspapers and magazines. Thankfully, it was in good condition. My joy at finding this precious letter was unsurpassed.

New Relatives

During my sojourn in Chicago, I had the good fortune to become acquainted with distant relatives of my mother, Mr. and Mrs. Mendel Goldrich. Their twin sons, Al and Abraham, attended the Theological College. When they realized our relationship, they invited me to St. Paul to spend our summer vacation together. Their mother, Raizel, took a quick look at me and decided to fatten me up a bit. Her delicious cooking, concern and care warmed my spirits.

That memorable summer, one aspect of American life began to intrigue me, baseball. I became a fan of the Chicago Cubs. I followed their games, singling out my baseball heroes. This relaxing vacation was one of the most pleasant experiences of my life.

Anesthetized at the Outbreak of W.W.II

Too soon, summer vacation ended.

Reluctantly, we returned to the Yeshiva but once more my studies were interrupted. My throat was bothering me and it became apparent that I needed a tonsillectomy.

Returning home, I was admitted to the hospital and underwent surgery. Resting in the hospital, slurping ice cream, I read with horror the screaming headlines emblazoned with the terrible news of war in Europe. Baseball seemed a mere triviality in the face of these escalating events in Europe.

Jabotinsky had predicted it years earlier and the world media had been regularly recording the events that led up to Hitler's invasion of Poland on Friday, September 1, 1939. The German army had already subdued Austria on March 13, 1938 and Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939.

That day Britain and France declared war on Germany heralding the start of W.W.II.

A little dazed from the anesthetic, I comprehended the words but Poland seemed so far away at that moment. As I lay in my clean hospital bed with its crisp sheets and medicinal odor, it took a lot of effort to transport my thoughts to the life I had left behind in pre-war Poland. It took an even greater effort to imagine what might lie in store for all the family and friends stranded there.

I had an overwhelming feeling of helplessness and fear. At the same time, the hushed tones of the American hospital staff busying themselves in the ward trying to make me comfortable and attending to my recovery clouded my sense of reality.

It would not be long before the full impact of war in Europe and America's policy of isolationism would come to the forefront of the world.

Several months later while I was still living and studying in Chicago, I learned of the death of revisionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky, one of the ideological guides of my youth. He was still very much involved in influencing youthful minds when he died of a heart attack in upstate New York visiting a Betar youth camp in the Catskill Mountains in the summer of 1940.

Hearing of his death, my thoughts returned to my youth in Warsaw when I clamored to hear his every word even though he was denounced as a Fascist by Jews. After the surge of anti-Semitism in Poland, Jabotinsky proposed in 1937 that one and a half million Jews be evacuated to Palestine over a ten-year period. This plan was rejected out of hand by most Diaspora Jews who felt that this scheme would give credence to the predominant anti-Semitic contention that Jews were not entitled to citizenship in their country of residence.

Poalei Zion representative Yitzchak Greenbaum joined in the attack against Jabotinsky and vehemently denounced him as a fascist. Unfortunately, like many other secular Zionist *Sejm* members, Greenbaum proved to be a poor defender of Jewish rights.

Jabotinsky had supported illegal immigration to Palestine and eventually, in 1936, became the supreme commander of the underground armed defense against the British, the "*Irgun Zvah Leumi.*" By 1937, Jabotinsky often traveled around the world so that his influence in the *Irgun* was greatly diminished. Opposition to Jabotinsky within the *Irgun* grew during his long absences and they finally split after his death in 1940 when Avraham Stern formed the "Stern Group".

Prior to his death, after the outbreak of W.W.II, Jabotinsky had advocated the creation of a Jewish army to fight alongside the Allies against the Nazis. This plan, too, was rejected by Jewish Diaspora leaders until much later after his death.

Meanwhile, the Nazis were gaining a strong foothold in Eastern Europe. I closely followed the news media for every detail of Hitler's progress through Europe. It took a mere month for Hitler to overrun Poland. The Allies, having supported a policy of appeasement until 1939, were ineffectual in stopping Hitler's army in Poland.

Entrenched in the appeasement mode, and refusing to believe Hitler's pronouncements in "*Mein Kampf*" that he intended to overrun Europe, the Allied leaders felt that Hitler would now be satisfied with his conquests. The Allies also acquiesced that Germany be freed from the constraints of the Versailles Treaty.

It took just a little over a half a year for Hitler and the German generals to re-supply and consolidate the German troops. In April 1940, the Nazis blitzkrieged through Norway, Denmark, Holland, Luxemburg and Belgium in long armored columns. The entire operation took ninety days. The Germans managed to flank the French Maginot Line entrapping the French army and driving off Britain's Expeditionary Force.

Two months later, on June 22, 1940, France surrendered to Germany. Fascist Italy led by General Benito Mussolini allied itself with Germany. This left an isolated Great Britain, which Hitler assumed would not pose much of a threat to his campaign. He could now turn his attention to Russia.

My own reaction to the war manifested itself in a strengthening of my desire to make a substantial contribution to the Jewish community. With this nebulous goal in mind I decided that it was time for me to leave the Hebrew Theological College in Chicago and move on to a yeshiva that trained rabbis and educators only. There I would study for *smicha.*

I chose to transfer to Ner Israel in Baltimore. I left Chicago, thanking those teachers and mentors who had given me the tools to move into mainstream America. They had afforded me the opportunity to learn the English language and they continued to imbue me with a love of Torah learning. It was then I knew that this was the direction I wanted to pursue and Baltimore was the next step.

לעילוי נשמות

ר׳ שלמה מנחם בר׳ חיים גולדריטש
מרת רייזיל בת ר׳ משה אבנר לוי



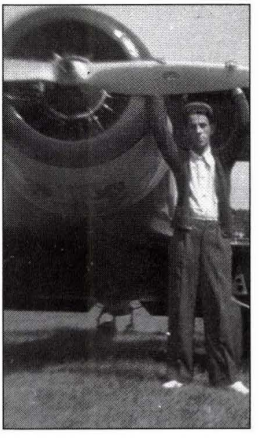
Avraham Goldrich

נדבת בנם
אברהם גולדריטש

במעלות קדושים

In memory of
Avraham Goldrich's parents

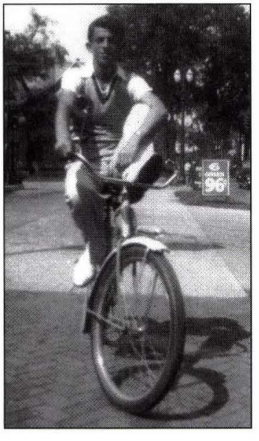
Myself, in St. Paul
learning to fly a plane,
circa 1939



Myself, in St. Paul, MN. –
Summer 1939



Myself –
Chicago, 1940



Myself –
Chicago, 1940



Studies At Ner Israel Rabbinical College

The Lifelong Influence of HaGaon Rabbi Yaakov HaLevi Ruderman, z.l.

Never having been to Baltimore before, I wired ahead to the Ner Israel Yeshiva administration informing them of the date and time that Sholem B. Kowalsky would be arriving at the Baltimore train station and that he would like to be met. Apparently, this strategy only worked in the movies!

A little disappointed to see that no Yeshiva delegate was awaiting me, I had to hail a taxi and turn over a good deal of my hard-earned cash.

Upon arrival, I headed straight for the administration office. Since Ner Israel had approximately thirty-five full-time *bochurim* in 1940, it was only a matter of hours before I was introduced to the *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rabbi Yaakov HaLevi Ruderman.

Rabbi Ruderman's reputation as a pillar of Torah strength preceded him, but I knew little else about him. Bravely, I approached him, feeling confident that he would be impressed with my Talmudic knowledge and welcome me.

His appearance was not striking. He was a man of average height, wearing a very simple and well-worn *kapota.* Although he had a pleasant face, heavy dark horn-rimmed glasses served to accentuate his rather stern and severe demeanor. Moreover, he did not smile.

"Ir zeint a Peilisher" ("You're Polish"), he said to me in distinctly Lithuanian Yiddish. His question threw me off balance, but only for a split second. I was thrilled to have reached the point where I could enter a yeshiva like Ner Israel on my own and I remained undeterred by this starkly cold reception. I often heard the expression "cold Litvak," which Rabbi Ruderman seemed to typify. Yet, I dared to hope to break through the stern Lithuanian exterior.

Defiantly, I answered his question with a question. Obviously, there was no denying that I was a Polish youth.

"Why? Is that a disadvantage?"

"Only if you can't learn," Rabbi Ruderman replied.

Rabbi Ruderman wasted no time asking me to prepare certain pages of the Talmudic Tractate of *Nedarim* (vows).

It took several days until he found the time to test me. Meanwhile, I was relegated to sleeping on a hard narrow bench in the *Beis Hamedrosh.* Although there weren't any tuition fees, a student nevertheless had to be accepted into one of the *shiurim* before he could avail himself of the facilities. Moreover, the yeshiva was housed in Rabbi Ruderman's *shul* Tifereth Israel and dorm space was at a premium. So I waited patiently, sleeping fitfully, until the *faher,* the test, which would determine to which class level I was suited. Thankfully, I passed easily and was placed in Rabbi Ruderman's *shiur.*

I had already been eating with the other boys in the kitchen and now was entitled to a bed that the administration requisitioned for me. Stuffed into an already overcrowded room, I set about getting used to my new surroundings.

My new yeshiva was very different from the Theological College in Chicago. In Chicago, the day was divided into college studies in the morning and *limudei kodesh* in the afternoons. At Ner Israel, the entire day was devoted to *limudei kodesh.* Since college was also important to many students, Ner Israel allowed them the option to study at various universities in the evenings.

Despite my meager grasp of the English language, this study arrangement appealed to me as the optimal way of combining a high-standard religious education and also a good secular education.

Johns Hopkins University

My ambition was to enroll at Johns Hopkins, but first I had to pull some strings. My command of English certainly was not up to par, but I was able to make an impression on most of the adults I came into contact with as a determined, and aspiring student. One of the more prominent members of the Baltimore Jewish community, a friend of the Yeshiva, was Rabbi Samuel Rosenblatt, the son of the famed Warsaw cantor, Yossele Rosenblatt, whom I had had the distinct pleasure of hearing sing in concert in Warsaw. Rabbi Samuel Rosenblatt was a professor of Semitics at Johns Hopkins University and the Rabbi of Congregation Beth Tefiloh, near the yeshiva.

Hearing that this Polish *yingle (boy)* was interested in obtaining a college education, Rabbi Rosenblatt put me in contact with his friend, Professor William Albright, the well-known archeologist who subsequently invited me to attend his lectures. Walking into that first weekly lecture with some other yeshiva students at Johns Hopkins was awe-inspiring. I felt at once both elated and fearful. This was the first time I sat in such a large lecture hall. Looking around, at about fifty young men and women already seated, I opted to sit alone near the exit. I was not alone for long. Despite the fact that there were many empty seats in the hall, a smartly dressed man in a somber suit and tie chose to sit next to me. I had already come into contact with gentile American students at Manly High School in Chicago where I had befriended many of my classmates. University life appeared less friendly and I felt a little self-conscious in my large black *yarmulke.* That first day especially felt awkward, and I was more than a little embarrassed at not being able to take notes. After all, I still needed a dictionary to understand what the professor was talking about.

My First Brush with the Clergy

After the lecture, this gentleman student started to converse with me. Apparently my *yarmulke* did not leave much to conjecture.

"Are you a rabbinical student?" he asked me politely.

I replied that I was and it turned out that he was a clergyman, Father Thompson. He offered to help me understand the lectures provided I would teach him Talmud. I obviously could not com-

ply with this grandiose demand, but I did agree to teach him the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith.

That was not all. Being a good Christian, Father Thompson eventually tried to convert me to Catholicism – obviously to no avail.

"You're wasting your time," I told him on more than one occasion.

I maintained contact with Father Thompson long after I left Johns Hopkins. Many years later, on a trip to Rome, I asked his assistance in helping me gain access to the Vatican's collection of Judaica, Torah covers, manuscripts and jewels that had been taken out of Spain. The collection was magnificent – the only sorrow being that it remained locked up in the Vatican.

Father Thompson did help me with my notes at Johns Hopkins, but I certainly did not want to place all of my eggs in one basket. I did my own research, preparation and background reading. I was resourceful and tenacious and did not feel disconcerted over my lack of total comprehension.

After the lecture, I entered the huge divinity and theology library at the university. There were thousands of volumes of Judaica on the shelves, including all the various editions of the Talmud – Vilna, Babylonian and Yerushalmi, as well as sets of the Meiri among many other *seforim*. Here I felt completely at home and spent hours browsing through the library. Unfortunately, I was not the only yeshiva student who used the library frequently. Eventually, we were less welcome after too many students borrowed books and forgot to return them.

On Fridays, I managed to while away many hours browsing through the piles of dusty *seforim,* although I had other studies to attend to. In what might be termed a grandiose gesture of self-confidence, I enrolled in two other courses at the university at night – American History and English Literature.

The other *bochurim*, including Moshe Sherer who was later to head Agudath Israel in America, as well as my learning partner (*chavrusa),* Nachum Kreisman from Baltimore, helped me as much as they could with English, but I still faced a lot of hard work. The poetic words of Byron, Shelly, Keats and Browning practically danced in front of my eyes as I burned the midnight oil in an effort to understand the intricacies of the language and the subtleties

of the text. My greatest sense of achievement came with the ability to memorize stanzas of my favorite poetry.

For my part, I tried to repay them for their kindness and investment in me. Each night at ten o'clock, I went down to the kitchen and prepared mounds of sandwiches for my hungry friends. I often woke them up in the mornings in time for *Shacharis.*

Although I had what might be considered by my American peers in Yeshiva as a difficult childhood, I nevertheless felt privileged that I had the opportunity to grow up in an environment surrounded by giants of the golden era of Polish Jewry. This accounted, to some extent, for the self-confident air I exuded. At times, my assertiveness and persistence served to ingratiate me with adults while at other times they were aggravated by what they deemed to be my pushiness. Such was the case in Chicago at the Hebrew Theological College, but at Ner Israel I blossomed.

Administrative members including Rabbi Naftali Neuberger went out of their way to help me. Rabbi Neuberger arranged for me to teach young students at a Hebrew School at least once or twice a week and Rabbi Rosenblatt arranged to pay me for giving a *shiur* in *Mishnayos* once a week between *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv* on Sundays.

Rabbi Ruderman took a personal interest in my development. Both he and his wife, Rebbetzin Faige, were extremely hospitable to me, regularly inviting me to their home for meals. I felt privileged to enjoy their hospitality and my original intuitive feeling regarding my *Rosh HaYeshiva* proved to be true. It did not take long at all before he and I became friendly and he extended to me the same warmth he reserved for other diligent students.

Happenings in Europe

In addition to the new vistas that had opened up to me since my arrival in America some two and half years ago, I was keenly concerned over the plight of the European Jews, as more details became known to us.

Thousands were being rounded up daily, among them the *Oustjuden,* who were taken to the borders and ports and left to fend for themselves during the bitter cold winter. Many starved to death. Thousands more were herded onto German ships with false visas for Latin America or

phony British entry permits into Palestine. Refugee ships overloaded with German and Polish Jews were regularly turned back to Germany to await their horrendous fate at the hands of Adolf Hitler.

By 1940, it was virtually impossible for the trapped and oppressed Jews to obtain legitimate exit visas to Britain, Palestine or America. Only an unprecedented amount of international pressure brought to bear on the Nazi regime could possibly secure an exit visa for escape to freedom in the West.

The Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Avrohom Mordechai Alter did in fact achieve this feat. By March 1940, the Rebbe had already left Guer Kalivaria for the Warsaw home of Rabbi Moishe Rozenstock in an effort to avoid detection by the Nazis. Even while in Warsaw, he constantly moved around because he was wanted by the Nazis.

Orthodox Jews throughout the Diaspora were working to pull strings for the Rebbe by lobbying their government representatives to grant him a visa. Their efforts eventually paid off when a United States Congressional Committee obtained an entry visa for the Gerer Rebbe to Palestine.

The Rebbe, together with his wife, Faige Mintze and his sons, Rabbi Yisroel, Rabbi Simcha Bunem and Rabbi Pinchas Menachem left Poland in late March, 1940 under Nazi guard. They arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* after *Pesach.*

A year later the Nazis began to develop their heinous plan for the mass murder of the Jews in the "Final Solution." As Germany prepared to invade Russia, word spread through the Reich Main Security Office that Hitler had empowered a senior officer, Reinhard Heydrich to execute the plan for the Final Solution.

On July 30, 1941, Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering ordered Heydrich to "take all preparatory measures required for the final solution of the Jewish question in the European territories under German influence."

❧ *Chief Rabbi Herzog, z.l. Visits Ner Israel*

This order was but the beginning of the annihilation of the Jews. Around this time, Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of the *yishuv* in *Eretz Yisrael* visited Ner Israel. Both students and

faculty received him warmly and listened intently as he addressed us. The Chief Rabbi came to Baltimore by way of Washington where he had just met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and reportedly discussed the fate of European Jewry and the Jews in Palestine. The president tried to deter Herzog from returning to *Eretz Yisrael* insisting the seas were too dangerous to cross. He implored Herzog to remain in America, while Rabbi Herzog was adamant in his desire to return to *Eretz Yisrael.*

"We, the Jewish people, have had two destructions – that of the First and Second Temples," Rabbi Herzog told the president, "but there is no indication of a third destruction."

By January 1942, it had become clear to all people who chose to listen that the Nazis intended to exterminate the Jews. Heydrich exposed the German plan for mass murder at a conference of the International Criminal Police Commission in Berlin. Fifteen senior SS and Gestapo officers listened as Heydrich explained that the war with Russia had made further plans for mass deportations impossible, including the plan to deport the Jews to Madagascar. They would now have to be exterminated.

Part of Russian Jewry had already been exterminated by the SS troops during their incursion into Russia. They routinely rounded up and exterminated Jews as they made their way from Poland to Russia to Western Europe, passing through the Ukraine where they slaughtered thousands of Jews.

Although two thirds of Russian Jewry fled into territory still under the control of the Red Army, at least one million were trapped in the German occupation zone and were subsequently executed.

Disease and Death in the Warsaw Ghetto

The Final Solution was in full swing in Poland with all of Polish Jewry being rounded up into ghettos. In Warsaw alone, some 450,000 Jews were crammed into an area previously inhabited by 150,000 people. At least thirty percent of the Jews within the ghetto walls died of starvation, squalor and disease.

Drips and drabs of information concerning the plight of my family in the Warsaw Ghetto reached us in America.

We received postcards from my grandfather, Reb Moshe Kovalski and other members of the family who were trapped in the ghetto. The Nazis censored all the mail, but family members managed to convey the seriousness of the situation through hints, writing the address of a long-deceased relative or using their names. They realized that there was little hope for escape or survival and we, too, came to this realization.

Although I felt a terrible sense of frustration and to some extent guilt at having been saved, I was at a loss to know what to do to help the relatives we left behind. The news was often too shocking and almost unbelievable, although we knew it to be true. I did what I could to help in my own small way. We regularly mailed food and clothing packages to our starving relatives, although very few commodities actually reached their destination. The Nazis usually opened the parcels, took whatever they wanted and gave the little that was left over to the rightful owners.

As time wore on, contact from our family grew more rare and eventually disappeared altogether.

Disease, starvation and death were everyday events. One report filed by the Postal and Telegraph Censorship in London stated that deportees from Germany into the Warsaw Ghetto preferred suicide to deportation.

"There were quite a number of people who died in the streets and they were simply covered up with old newspapers, where they lied for days, until a cart came around to pick them up. Then they were taken outside the town and dumped into a common grave."

Moreover, the report stated that any medical supplies, including bandages, found by the Germans were automatically confiscated.

The situation continued to deteriorate. By April 1942, the Bund reported that the Nazis were randomly massacring Jews.

"The Gestapo arranged a bloodbath," a letter smuggled out of the Warsaw Ghetto read. "They dragged Jews, men and women from their homes, picking them from a prepared list and killed them in a beastly fashion in front of their gates. Some they could not locate in their homes. Every day since April 18, they kill Jews in their homes or in the streets during the daytime."

The report went on to say that more bloodbaths were expected. A year later, on April 19, 1943, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising took place.

The ghettos were just one facet of the Nazi Final Solution. In March 1942, despite all the gruesome techniques of the Nazis to annihilate them, two million Polish Jews were still alive – too many for Hitler and the Nazis.

In the spring of 1942, the Final Solution took on another dimension. Heinrich Himmler and Heydrich appointed a fanatic anti-Semite, Odilio Globocnik to set up extermination camps. Maidanek, Chelmo, Treblinka and Sobibor were all established. Six thousand to ten thousand Jews were being rounded up every day in the Vilna, Lodz and Lublin ghettos, herded into trains and transported to the death camps.

Several months later, August 1942, accurate intelligence reports were being circulated in the West concerning the fate of the Jews. Both Jews and gentiles in the West were aware of the Final Solution.

The starkest evidence of this fact was the communiqué from Dr. Gerhart Riegner, the secretary of the World Jewish Congress in Switzerland to the US State Department on October 22, 1942.

Two months earlier Riegner had been contacted in Switzerland by a leading German industrialist who informed him that Hitler had ordered the extermination of all European Jewry. Zyklon or prussic acid gas was the preferred method of extermination.

Riegner was horrified. In his communiqué to the Americans he wrote, "four million Jews are on the verge of complete annihilation by a deliberate policy consisting of starvation, the ghetto system, slave labor, deportation under inhuman conditions and organized mass murders by shooting, poisoning and other methods. This policy is being repeatedly proclaimed by Hitler and is now being carried out."

In November, 1942, reports from Poland and Germany of the extermination of the Jews reached US President Franklin Roosevelt, personally. He did nothing.

The Allies Turn a Blind Eye to the Fate of the Jews

It was a year since America had entered the war but so far the Allies had declined to intervene on behalf of European Jewry.

One year later on December 8, 1942, American Jewish activists initiated proposals, taking up the dreadful fate of the Jews with the White House. Rabbi Stephen Wise led a delegation to Roosevelt aimed at impressing upon the President the severity of the situation and imploring the United States to salvage the lives of any Jews who could still be saved.

The meeting was of the utmost importance and Rabbi Wise came prepared. He brought with him a twenty-page document entitled, "Blueprint for Extermination," detailing the Nazi Final Solution. At this point, the crematoria at Auschwitz were not yet activated. Had the US intervened then, at least one million lives could have been saved.

Rabbi Eliezer Silver of Cincinnati, head of the Agudas HaRabonim of America, led a delegation of 300 Orthodox rabbis to Washington to meet with President Roosevelt to plead with him on behalf of the Jews of Europe. He refused to meet them.

The United States and Britain continued to cling to the same falsehood. Any mission to save the Jews would impede the allied war effort, so nothing was done.

Frustration and anger welled up inside me. It had taken over two years for America to relinquish her isolationist policies and to actively join the allied front. When America eventually supplanted its lend lease policy to Britain with active troop maneuvers, I felt sure that the mighty and benevolent United States would help rescue European Jewry. However, my hopes were to no avail. I cried myself to sleep and spent hours praying.

In 1940, I was asked to appear before the Draft Board. Disappointment in US foreign policy was not my reason for seeking exemption, by using the legitimate excuse that I was a divinity student. The real reason for not serving was my sincere belief that I could better help my people by learning Torah and subsequently being ordained as a rabbi. I achieved this aim in 1944 when I received my *smicha* and graduated from Ner Israel with a Masters Degree in Talmudic law. I volunteered to serve as a US chaplain in 1944. By then, the army no longer needed additional chaplains and I was rejected.

The fact that I wasn't needed as an army chaplain did not reflect on my experience as a communicator on religious issues.

During my stay at the yeshiva, Rabbi Ruderman often asked me to speak in Yiddish. I spoke on the radio from time to time on behalf of the Yeshiva. I performed these duties gladly, hoping that Ner Israel would reap some financial rewards from my efforts and thus be somewhat repaid for their kindness to me.

Forging Close Ties with the Rudermans

Over my years in Ner Israel, I developed a unique relationship with the Rudermans and a dedication to the Yeshiva that I shared with my father, Reb Chaim Nachman Kovalski. He, too, became very involved with the Yeshiva, serving as one of its most prominent fundraisers. He began to work for the Yeshiva after he came to visit me one day. On that occasion, he spoke to Rabbi Neuberger and Rabbi Ruderman. Together they decided that he would fundraise for the yeshiva.

He worked for the Yeshiva for about thirty-five years and although he and Rabbi Ruderman definitely differed – my father was a *Chassid* and Rabbi Ruderman was a *misnagid* – they got along admirably. My father would quietly inform the students about the *Tanya* and his adherence to the daily practice of reciting verses from *Tehillim.* Notwithstanding their different outlooks and philosophies, the Rabbi and my father developed a strong personal relationship becoming very dear friends. Rabbi Ruderman had great regard for my father.

I, in turn, felt an overwhelming sense of respect and warm friendship towards Rabbi Ruderman. The Rebbetzin acted as a second mother to me while I studied at the Yeshiva. She was always concerned about my health and welfare and made me very welcome in their home. Heavily involved with her husband's work, she organized fundraising events on behalf of the Yeshiva. Apart from her work for the Yeshiva, the Rebbetzin was also well known in Baltimore for her charitable acts and her excellent speeches in Yiddish.

My emotional attachment to the *Rosh HaYeshiva* lasted throughout his lifetime.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, z.l. Arrives in New York

In 1940, I learned that the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson had escaped from the burning inferno of the

Warsaw Ghetto and would be arriving in New York around *Purim* time. Hearing this amazing news threw me into an emotional turmoil. It took me back in time to the Poland of my childhood when I attended Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim and the Rebbe would deliver enraptured "*mamorim*" on *Chassidus*. Thinking about everybody I had left behind, I was gripped with an overwhelming sense of urgency to see him. There and then, I resolved that I would meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe at the harbor.

I looked forward with intense anticipation to the moment when I would stand at the harbor and watch the Rebbe disembark. I was truly excited about my impending trip to New York and I asked Rabbi Ruderman for permission to leave. It was common courtesy to request the *Rosh HaYeshiva's* permission. I certainly didn't anticipate a flat refusal.

He caught me off guard when, in fact, he did refuse. "It's *bitul Torah,* a waste of Torah time," Rabbi Ruderman said.

Years later, during one of my visits to my *Rosh HaYeshiva*, he confided a remarkable anecdote to me. His father was quite advanced in years when he was born and surprise of surprises, his father took him to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Sholom Ber, whom I was named after. The Rebbe blessed the young boy and said he would be a *gadol B'Yisrael.* Laughingly, Rabbi Ruderman said. "See his blessing was not *mekayim* (fulfilled). I'm not a *gadol* – I'm quite short."

Of course, I disagreed with this remark. It seems his father died shortly after this visit. He was sent to the Slobodka Yeshiva where he became a true *misnagid*, and so Rabbi Ruderman, ever the logical and practical *misnagid* refused to waste vital learning time visiting *Chassidic* Rebbes. I was surprised and disappointed and felt I had to do something. The Lubavitcher Rebbe had escaped to the West! It was a significant event. I just could not ignore it so I used the telegram idea once again. Hopefully, this time it would work.

I decided to send a welcoming telegram directly to the ship. Hopefully, the Rebbe would receive it as he docked in New York. This was a long shot. There was no assurance that he would personally receive it and read it, but it certainly seemed a worthwhile effort. Dissatisfied that I could not actually be there in person to greet him, I felt a little better for having acknowledged his arrival.

Shortly after *Purim,* the Yeshiva recessed for *Pesach.* I returned home to Williamsburg and also visited the Rebbe at his home in Crown Heights.

Queuing up along with hundreds of other Jews waiting to receive a *brocha,* I remembered the telegram. It was unlikely that he had read it and I made a mental note to apologize to him for not being able to meet him at the harbor.

After what seemed like an eternity, I finally reached the Rebbe. He greeted me warmly and to my great pleasure he immediately acknowledged my telegram.

"Sholem Ber, I thank you for the telegram," he said.

After we spoke for a few minutes, the Rebbe invited me to be a student at the newly established Tomchei Temimim Yeshiva in Crown Heights. Honored, I thanked him, received a *brocha* and left.

I never actually did attend his yeshiva. I chose to remain at Ner Israel to receive my rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Ruderman.

The Moditzer Rebbe, z.l. in Baltimore

Shortly afterwards, I was faced with another dilemma which pitted my *Chassidic* background against my Litvisha yeshiva. An opportunity presented itself for me to be instrumental in bringing to Baltimore a *Chassidic* Rebbe who had escaped from Europe.

The Moditzer Rebbe had managed to flee with his wife and children from Otwock to Shanghai, and from there gained an entry visa to America.

Hearing that he had arrived in the US, I deemed it a good idea to introduce him to the Baltimore community and the Yeshiva. Even in those days, the minute an idea appealed to me, I became practically obsessed with seeing it through despite all obstacles.

The biggest challenge in this case was to overcome all opposition to *Chassidic* visitors among the leaders of the Baltimore community. Luckily, despite their *misnagdus,* they were receptive to the idea.

The next step was to convince the Moditzer Rebbe – a quiet humble man – to travel from Williamsburg to another city. I contacted his son, Rabbi Yitzchak Taub, whom I knew intimately from

Otwock, and I explained to him the importance of introducing the surviving great leaders of Polish Jewry to American Jews, many of whom were second generation Americans.

Yitzchak was easily convinced and very amenable to the idea. He assured me that he, in turn, could convince his father to make the trip provided I would take care of all the arrangements. We accomplished this easily. Several *ba'alei habatim* and I met him and his son at the train station.

The Moditzer Rebbe was a great *lamdin* and was a noted composer and singer of cantorial and *Chassidic* Music in Poland. We arranged for him to *daven* for the entire congregation on Friday night, and knew he would awe the worshippers.

I wanted to introduce the Rebbe to Rabbi Ruderman. I was well aware of his views on *Chassidus* and *Chassidic* Rebbes and I knew that he would probably want nothing to do with the Rebbe's visit. So it was. When I broached the subject, I was careful not to mention my role in bringing the Moditzer Rebbe to Baltimore. This was a clandestine mission and I, as a Ner Israel *bochur*, had to be sure that Rabbi Ruderman didn't get wind of the fact that I was behind it all.

The *Rosh HaYeshiva* dismissed my suggestion with a wave of his hand.

Others in the Baltimore community didn't concur with Rabbi Ruderman. They flocked to *Tiferet Yisrael* on Friday night to hear his *tefilla* and lyrical singing. At the conclusion of the services, the Rebbe held a *tisch*, which was crowded to capacity as hundreds of curious people crammed into the hall to hear the words of Torah of the Moditzer Rebbe and to share his *shiraim*.

Eventually, immensely impressed with the depth of the Moditzer's Torah learning, one of Baltimore's *ba'alei habatim* convinced Rabbi Ruderman to meet him.

Greatly surprised with the Moditzer's erudition in Torah and Talmud, he seemed pleased at having had this opportunity. Shortly afterwards, Rabbi Ruderman discussed the Moditzer's visit with me. Perhaps he suspected that I had something to do with it. I could not conceal my joy. The look of happiness on my face was proof enough for Rabbi Ruderman that I had not stood by the sideline.

Some time thereafter my parents moved to 215 Rodney Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where my mother renewed her friendship

with the Moditzer family. She helped organize a ladies auxiliary to raise funds for the *shteibel.* At the same time she took a personal interest in the welfare of their children, advising them to enter the diamond business, and introducing them to a friend who helped them. Both sons, Yitzchak and Yechezkel, prospered greatly.

The Moditzer was a staunch believer in settling in *Eretz Yisrael.* His son, Rav Shmuel Taub, settled in Tel Aviv before the war and on his last visit to him, the Rebbe passed away. He is buried in Har HaZeisim.

Rav Sheftel Kramer, z.l. is Nifter

Was it my *Chassidic* compassionate heart or our warm relationship that prompted Rabbi Ruderman to entrust me with a very painful mission? While visiting the Rudermans, Reb Sheftel Kramer, one of the Lithuanian *gedolim,* beloved father of the Rebbitzen, became very sick. The best medical and home care was provided, but within a short time he passed away.

Rabbi Ruderman asked me to help arrange the funeral. He requested that I solicit the aid of Rabbi Joseph Shenker and Rabbi Naftali Neuberger. Rabbi Neuberger is the husband of Judy, Rebbitzen Ruderman's sister and he immediately took charge and assigned me the responsibility of coordinating with the *Chevra Kadisha.* Many distinguished Rabbis eulogized Rav Kramer. At that time, Rabbi Neuberger was already the capable administrator of Ner Israel and with his far-sighted vision and ability he also directed the development of the beautiful new campus. My father was tremendously helpful. His fundraising activities made possible the erection of some of the most majestic edifices that grace the premises.

Rabbi and Mrs. Herman Neuberger named their firstborn son Sheftel after Rabbi Kramer. This son is now a respected rabbi and assists his father at Ner Israel.

Meeting My Life's Partner

Long hours of study and diligent application were making their mark. It became apparent that many of us would be rewarded. The *Rosh HaYeshiva* gave us his blessings and we commenced preparation for *Smicha.*

This seemed like an appropriate time to look ahead. Both my mother and sister Rose were hinting that they may have found a fine young lady for me to consider. I had already dated a few girls. I was never bashful. At Bodners Hotel in Lakewood, New Jersey, I met the first girl I dated. She was two years younger than I and lived in Flatbush. She had a car and would pick me up at the train station. This was the life for a poor yeshiva *bochur*. Yet, in spite of these incentives, I was left unimpressed.

One eventful weekend I went home to relax from my intensive studies. My sister Rose had invited her friends from the Bnos Agudath Yisrael to a gathering in our home. She did this frequently, though usually not when I was home. I took advantage of the situation and ambled into the room. Rose introduced her favorite and only brother to her friends. Shulamith was in the midst of discussing plans to attend an Agudah sponsored concert that night in which her brothers would be performing. It seemed most of the young ladies had agreed to be there. I interrupted saying, "You must have heard your brothers before, why not go to a concert with me?"

"Okay. If you show up first, that's what I'll do."

I think she was not sure the offer was serious. Never had she been asked for a date so publicly. I made sure to show up first and off we went to the Marcy Avenue train station. No fancy cars, just a very special companion. Conversation went smoothly and soon we arrived at our destination. Together we approached the box office where I almost fainted. I started to empty my pockets pretending I had forgotten some money. She caught on and said, "You know the program tonight really doesn't look exciting. If you really don't mind, I'd rather go to a movie."

What a clever girl! And so thoughtful! I certainly preferred a movie, that I could easily afford in addition to an ice cream afterwards.

At the ice cream parlor, I dazzled her with my new found knowledge of palm reading. I had recently read a book on palmistry and here was a sophisticated skill I could easily do. After a while we settled down to more substantive conversation.

She was a volunteer who prepared affidavits for the Agudah to help bring Jews from Europe to the States. In addition, her own parents had rescued many members of their family with their own

affidavits. Reb Chaim Goodman, her father, was not a wealthy man, yet he was able to produce an impressive financial statement. He did this by borrowing money, mainly from friends, the Yellin and Allerhand families. He deposited these funds into his bank account and then received a letter from the bank saying that he had had an account since 1929 and the current balance was a large sum of money. They saved four families with these papers. All of them subsequently spent a few weeks in their small apartment sleeping in the parlor until suitable quarters were found.

I confided some of my dreams to her and the evening passed very quickly. This was the beginning of a successful courtship and before long we both realized that we were meant for each other.

I dashed out to buy a diamond engagement ring with funds my parents provided and she bought me a Bulova watch. Her father also surprised me with a *Vilna Shas*, a rare treasure at that time.

Proud of my choice, I invited Shulamith to accompany me to Baltimore to meet my *Rosh HaYeshiva* and my friends. She was a bit apprehensive. The thought of meeting this Torah scholar and his outstanding Rebbitzen gave her a bit of stage fright. But, being a good sport, she dared the trip.

Rebbitzen Ruderman invited us to dinner and set a magnificent table. The conversation was engaging and we spent a few pleasant hours there. Viola Kramer, the Rebbitzen's sister, was also present and invited us to tour Washington with her. That trip was not as pleasant as anticipated because Shulamith was stricken with a number of nose bleeds. I was quite frightened, but when assured that it had happened previously and there was a cure for it, I relaxed and we cut the Washington trip short.

Wedding Plans

Wedding plans coincided with another great event in our lives. I was appointed principal of the Yeshiva of Newark. The months prior to our special day were filled with simultaneous plans for the wedding and my installation. It was actually a harbinger of things to come when our private lives were constantly intermingled with community affairs.

Shortly before our wedding, I vividly remember one of our conversations. "Can you imagine how I feel? Here I am in America,

about to be married and we, the Kowalsky family, have not a single relative to invite to our wedding. In Warsaw or Otwock had there been no war I would have been surrounded by grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends of long standing, all celebrating with me. I am only 22-years-old and suddenly everyone whom I love and cherish may already be dead, gone, gone from my life. I thank G-d that you have family. I was so happy when your grandfather Eluzer Elimelach Gold give me his cherished Buzaner Rav's *sforim.* I will cherish them and I think your grandfather and grandmother Mirel and I will become very close. I certainly admire your aunts and uncles, all upstanding religious Jews."[1]

Under the stars at the Gold Manor in Brooklyn, March 19, 1944, we became man and wife. The wedding was beautiful and a bit distinctive. My unconventional father insisted the *seuda* be *parve.* He had his way. He always did.

That night we spent at the Taft Hotel in Manhattan. The big bill for the evening came to about $9.00. Of course, we had *sheva brochos* all week. The next day I commenced my new position.

Becoming Better Acquainted With My In-Laws

Chaim Goodman wasn't a tall or imposing man. In fact, he was quite short in stature and a bit frail. Yet he impressed everyone who had the good fortune to make his acquaintance. He was remarkable for his quiet dignity and genteel manner. No one could recall him ever being noticeably or outwardly angry. Somehow no matter what the situation, he maintained his peaceful disposition and even temperament. Never would he speak evil or in a demeaning manner of another. Even as he responded to a provocation, Reb Chaim did not lose his presence nor react out of frustration or with hostility. Calmly he would attempt to explain or correct, guide and teach until the force of his logic accomplished his purpose.

Together with his wife, Chana, they forged a new life in a strange, unfamiliar land. He arrived in New York in 1923, from Galicia, while Chana and Shulamith followed in 1929, just in time for the great Depression. They struggled very hard to adjust to a new culture. With effort, they learned the new language and ways of survival,

and established themselves in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York. There, with other compatriots, they built a life centered around the fledgling Jewish community. Reb Chaim, educated and trained as a teacher in Europe, sought and found a position as the second grade rebbe in Yeshiva Torah Vadaas. There he remained and taught young boys for over 34 years. His skill as a teacher was legendary and countless students benefited from his tutelage. Reb Chaim Goodman was remembered fondly by the thousands he taught during his tenure. Skilled in pedagogy, an astute observer of human nature and blessed with infinite patience, Rabbi Goodman was able to reach all his students. He left an indelible impression upon them, and many were the times in the ensuing years that he was approached and thanked by a grateful former student.

Ever industrious, my mother-in-law, Chana, made do with almost nothing. Somehow she managed to raise and feed a family on her husband's meager salary, which was often months late in coming. With two young sons born in America, Chana Goodman nurtured her family. She was an amazing homemaker. Her energy knew no bounds and her food was the envy of the neighborhood. Often walking miles to find a *metzeiya* (a bargain), she stretched each dollar and ran the household. Even during the dark days of the Depression, Chana succeeded in keeping her family fed and clothed against all odds.

Only her love for the Jewish settlements in Palestine could take her away from home. For hours on end she would perch herself on Lee or Bedford Avenues (the two main thoroughfares of Williamsburg), and "man" her *tzdaka pushka* for the JNF or American Mizrachi Women. She helped with luncheons and bazaars and was legendary for her dedication to these causes, instilling a love for *Eretz Yisrael* in all her children.

When the Nazi threat swept through Europe, they struggled mightily to help family members escape and reach safety, obtaining sponsorship letters for many of their European relatives. Today, family members and their offspring owe their lives to these acts of kindness. The Goodmans were not politically connected or sophisticated and it was only through perseverance, ingenuity, unselfishness and countless long hours spent pleading and waiting on lines at various government and politicians' offices that they succeeded.

My in-laws' commitment to Torah and Am *Yisrael* infused their home and it was no small coincidence that both of their sons, graduates of Yeshiva University, became practicing rabbis and educators in the Yeshiva Day School movement. Rabbi Irving (Yisrael Zvi) Goodman, married to Leah Laufer, serves as the Rabbi of Woodridge, New York and is the founder and dean of the Sullivan County Hebrew Day School. His brother, Rabbi Isaac Goodman (Yitzchak Meier), married to Batya Gluck, serves as the rabbi of the Young Israel of Far Rockaway, N.Y. and is also an educator of long-standing, currently serving as a rebbe in Frisch High School in New Jersey. Both my brothers-in-law are capable leaders, respected in their communities and they have raised wonderful families. We are very close to them and admire their talented and loving children.[2]

A Personal Philosophy

My conviction that I could always improve and also help other Jews stemmed from my past. I was plagued by an innate sense of guilt at not having done enough to save my relatives from the Holocaust. Realistically, there wasn't much a boy of my age could have done, but I could never rid myself of these guilt feelings. Possibly, I overcompensated for them. I thought the Almighty must have saved me from the gas chambers for some higher purpose than to gratify my own desires. This led me to believe that I had a mission to make a lasting contribution to my people.

I saw immediately that the need for the highest quality of Torah leadership consisted of four components: *yehadut* (Judaism), Torah, *chinuch* (education) and *rabbanut* (rabbinical leadership).

As a youth in my Zaidy's house, I grew up learning from the *mesorah* of the *Rabbanim* in my family, Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe and Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kowalsky. Moreover, I had the distinct privilege of living with my uncle, Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg and learning from him. All these Torah sages were a great inspiration to me, as well as role models to emulate.

My Immediate Family

My father, Rabbi Chaim Nachman Kowalsky, was a legend in his own lifetime. He was a majestic figure, and despite his *Chassidic*

background and manner of dress, he was always immaculate. He had a distinguished presence that drew attention wherever he went. Aglow with love for his fellow Jew, Chaim Nachman's face projected a shine and zest for life. *Ahavas Yisrael* was his hallmark, and in *Chabad Chassidic* circles he was known as *Bruder* Nachman, brother Nachman. The nickname was obtained as a result of his deep feeling and attachment to Jews of all walks and shades of life.

He arrived in the United States in the 1920's from England. Years later, he accepted a fundraising position as an emissary for the fledgling Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore, Maryland. On behalf of this Yeshiva, he crisscrossed America and was on the road the greater part of the year. During his travels, Reb Nachman never deviated from his *Chassidic* practices. Often he carried his food with him and to accommodate his Kashrus standards, developed a fruit and vegetable diet that was a precursor to the health diets of recent vintage. Even before Linus Pauling, he advocated the benefits of a vitamin C rich diet. It was not uncommon for him to consume a dozen oranges or lemons at a single sitting in lieu of a meal.

But what endeared him to communities across this country and led to his legendary success as a fundraiser was his advocacy of brotherly love for fellow Jews. He leant an attentive ear and patiently listened with obvious concern, as people unburdened themselves to him. He was never too busy to listen to their troubles and always kept his *Tehilim* handy to offer a special prayer to alleviate the problem. Rabbi Kowalsky dispensed advice and counseled absolute trust in G-d's infinite kindness wherever his travels took him. He featured himself as a traveling salesman for *Yiddishkeit.* For many of the small communities he visited, Chaim Nachman Kowalsky was the only connection to authentic, traditional Judaism. So profound was his influence over people that for years after his retirement, faithful admirers throughout the United States continued to forward annual contributions to Ner Israel in his honor, without solicitation.

My mother, Rivka, a woman of immense internal strength, anchored the Kowalsky home. Father's frequent trips imposed upon her the task of maintaining the stability of the house. She had to be father and mother at the same time, to care for and address the needs of her family. She had an aristocratic bearing and her mannerisms exuded royalty. Rivka involved herself in

charitable pursuits and opened her home to strangers. My father would not hesitate to arrive home with two or three guests in tow without any advance notice. He had implicit faith that his wife would manage. On the spur of the moment and without any hesitation she welcomed these strangers into her home and succeeded in serving all gathered about the table without any indication that their presence had not been anticipated.

During a short sojourn in Israel (in the 1960's), Father engaged the services of a famous *sofer* (scribe), Reb Nachman from the *Batai Ungar*, to write a special *sefer* Torah which has been in our family ever since. I flew to Israel to participate in the gala celebration.

When my younger sister, Rose, became of age, we were fortunate to welcome my beloved brother-in-law (of blessed memory), Rabbi Leibel Isbee, into the family. A *talmid* of Rav Shlomo Heiman and Rav Aharon Kotler, Reb Leibel was a gem of a person. From a distinguished family that lived in Detroit, he studied first in Torah Vadaas and then in Europe. Reb Leibel was one of the outstanding crop of new *talmidei chachamim*, home grown on American soil. We were all proud that Rose had married such a wonderful man. Rabbi Isbee went on to have a distinguished career both as a Rabbi and educator. He served as a rebbe, first in his alma mater, Torah Vadaas, and later at Yeshiva University's Talmudical Academy. For over 32 years he was the spiritual leader of the Young Israel of Astor Gardens, in Bronx, New York. He passed away at age 77 after living a most productive life.

Together, my sister and brother-in-law raised a beautiful family, two sons and a daughter, who were the pride of their parents. Eluzer, the older son was also a *musmach* of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak HaLevi Ruderman *Z"L*. He was a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Law and a member of the Maryland Bar. After marrying Aviva (Newman), they settled in Baltimore where Reb Eluzer became a civic leader of national repute. His hand guided numerous charitable and educational institutions and endeavors. Tragically, however, he was struck down in the prime of his life causing his family and all his many admirers prolonged and painful grief. At the helm of every worthwhile project, he left a vibrant legacy to the Baltimore community where his memory shall live on forever.

The second son, Rav Yitzchak Isbee, was a *talmid chacham* of great repute. He studied at the Philadelphia Yeshiva and was a prized student. After his marriage to Miriam Kronglass, daughter of the famed *Mashgiach* of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, Rav Dovid Kronglass *Z"L,* he moved to Baltimore and continued his studies for over ten years in the Ner Yisrael Kollel. Everyone was impressed with his diligence and brilliance. In Baltimore, he gave the *Daf Yomi Shiur* and all marveled at his clarity of thought and ability to instill and teach complex subject matter to advanced and novice students simultaneously. Rav Yitzchak left the walls of the Yeshiva when he was selected as Rav of the Agudas *Yisrael* of Avenue L in Brooklyn, New York. There both he and his community thrived. He was a sought after lecturer and teacher and brought the full range of his knowledge and erudition to each class, speech or *shiur* that he gave. Shortly after the death of his older brother, tragedy struck again, and after battling cancer, Rav Yitzchak Isbee too was taken to the heavenly court. My sister and the entire family are reeling from this twin assault, and a day does not pass without some memory of these outstanding young men passing through my mind. The ways of Hashem are mysterious and inscrutable, and though we suffer these losses, we trust that there is a purpose and Divine plan in which this is for the good.

My sister was blessed with a devoted daughter Miriam, who is married to Rabbi Yona Weinrib. Yona is a *talmid chacham* and a talented, internationally acclaimed calligrapher. His monumental work, *Pirkei Avos,* has graced many exhibits. They are raising a large, beautiful family.

My older sister Shaindel (Jean) *Z"L,* married to Herbie Steinberg, was blessed with a charming daughter, Cheryl. She was sickly most of her life, but found joy in her daughter and grandchild. She fought valiantly to keep abreast of their growth and development.

Visiting my Alma Mater — Ner Israel

In their late years, when the children were all married and on their own, my parents moved to Baltimore. They lived in a lovely apartment on the campus my father had worked so hard to build. The sprawling campus on Mt. Wilson Lane on the outskirts of Baltimore has become renowned throughout the world as a center for Torah learning and scholarship.

At one time, my mother took quite sick and I had to spend *Rosh Hashanah* at the Yeshiva to be near her. Forgotten were some of the *minhagim* I had practiced while studying at the Yeshiva.

As I entered the *Beis Hamedrosh* on *Rosh Hashanah* morning, Rabbi Ruderman invited me to sit near him. As they finished *krias haTorah,* the *Bnei HaYeshiva* rose from their seats to leave.

"Come Reb Sholem, let's make *Kiddush,*" Rabbi Ruderman said to me. "Surely you remember that this is the *minhag* (custom) in the Yeshiva."

I had forgotten the Yeshiva's custom of making *Kiddush* after reading the Torah, before blowing the *shofar.* The *Rosh Hashanah* service is the longest *davening* of all the *Yomim Tovim,* barring *Yom Kippur,* and this *minhag* prevented fasting.

This was not my custom. Now that I was no longer a student at the Yeshiva, I preferred not to do so. However, I did not want to offend the *Rosh HaYeshiva.* I walked with him, but I did not make *Kiddush.*

Years later, residing in Israel, I never visited the U.S. without stopping to visit with my beloved *Rosh HaYeshiva* and Rebbitzen, bearing a gift from Israel, usually some produce of the land.

It wasn't only the produce of *Eretz Yisrael* that interested him. He wanted to know what was going on in *Eretz Yisrael* – not the politics, he said, but what the ordinary Jew on the street was saying and thinking.

"I want facts, not politics," he said. "I get politics from Rabbi Sherer. Does Torah Judaism have any influence on the life of *Medinas Yisrael* and if so, how?"

Relations between religious and non-observant Jews particularly interested him. In answering his questions, I tried to be non-partisan but it was often difficult to reply to his queries at length and in depth without referring to the political situation in Israel.

Occasionally, he requested my help in other matters that bothered him.

His eyes were getting weaker all the time. He asked me where to obtain the services of an expert ophthalmologist.

"I'm using all kinds of instruments," Rabbi Ruderman told me, "maybe you know a better doctor in New York?"

Conducting an in depth search, I found an expert in the Bronx recommended by my brother-in-law, Rabbi Louis Isbee. I took the *Rosh HaYeshiva* to see him, but unfortunately the prognosis was not good and I was faced with the unpleasant task of telling him there was little hope for improvement.

Rabbi Ruderman's eyesight continued to deteriorate and yet he was always grateful to me for trying to help him. I, for my part, always considered it a *z'chus* to have been asked.

Rabbi Ruderman was a member of *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* and visited Israel on a number of occasions.

He was elected head of the Torah Umesorah Movement and gave much of his time to the organization.

I was very honored that Rabbi and Rebbitzen Ruderman attended my wedding. He was the *Mesader Kiddushin.* When we parted he wished me *hatzlacha* in my new position in Newark.

1. Gold Family: Rudolf and Chuma Herzlinger, Nathan and Fannie Gold, Esther and Abie Migdal, Helen and Max Botnick, Ruth and Phillip Fruchter, Joseph and Blanche Katz-Renov, Aaron and Jeanie Gold, Joseph and Francis Schecter, and Sarah and Jack Rosenfeld.

2. Molly and Joseph Rothstein, Hadassa and Howie Goldsmith, Esther and Dr. Yaacov Elefant, Rabbi Moshe David and Shani Goodman, A.J. and Mimi Lieberman, Yisrael and Chaya Goodman, Yumi and Yocheved Goodman, Shlomo and Bina Simon.

Ner Israel 1940, the first building was on Garrison Blvd. Now, at a new, beautiful, most impressive campus



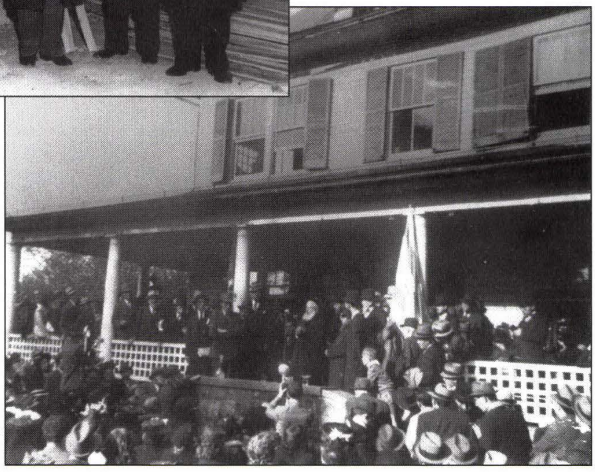


New campus being built at Mt. Wilson Lane

Left to Right: Herbert Steinberg, (brother-in-law), R' C.N. Kowalsky (father), Rosh Yeshiva, R' Ruderman, Mr. B. Chertkoff, Rabbi Blumenkrantz



R' Ruderman – Rosh Yeshiva, Ner Israel, Baltimore



Rabbi Herzog visiting Ner Israel, 1941



Ner Israel graduating class, 1945

Rebbetzin Faigah Ruderman and my mother, Rivka Kowalsky





Father commissioned a Sefer Torah from Bnei Brak in 1969



Rabbi Herzog arriving at Penn Station, Baltimore, MD

ב"ה

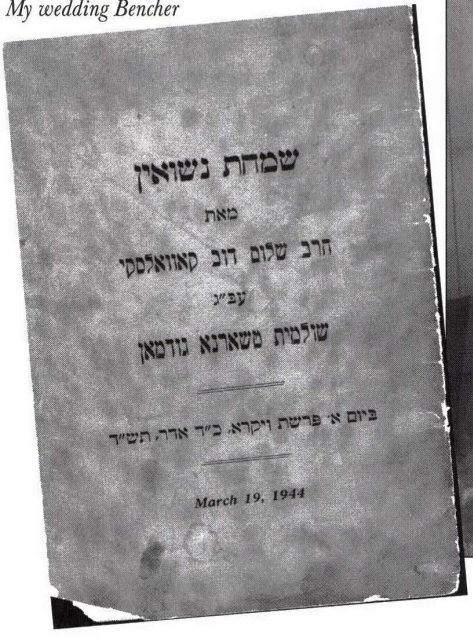
Mr. & Mrs. Chaim Goodman
Rabbi & Mrs. Nachman Kowalsky
cordially invite you to attend the
Engagement (תנאים) of their children
Shulamith to Sholom
Sunday, June 27th, 1943, at 1:30 P. M.
כ"ד סיון תש"ג לפ"ק
at Gold Manor
665 Willoughby Avenue Brooklyn, N. Y.

T'naim invitation

My father-in-law R' Chaim Goodman escorting his father, R' Eluzer Elimelech to our chupah



My wedding Bencher





Wedding portrait of Sholem and Shulamith Kowalsky March 19, 1944

Education and the Jewish Day School Movement

Newark, New Jersey and St. Louis, Missouri

Settling in Newark with my young wife was a happy occasion. We lived close to the Yeshiva. I became heavily involved with my work and she with our apartment. Often her knowledge of English and her clerical skills came to my rescue. I, too, progressed and learned to communicate well with my new associates. I was very thankful to Rabbi Emanuel Marcus of Yeshiva University for placing me in the Hebrew Academy of Newark, to be its principal and executive director.

Soon after my arrival, I was officially installed at a well-attended banquet. Rabbi David Hollander was the guest speaker. He lauded my education at Ner Israel where I received not only my rabbinic degree but also a Masters degree. He spoke of my studies at Johns Hopkins and generally was very eloquent. My remarks, thereafter, were very cordial even as I agonized over my accent. At any rate, they were well received. The famous New York Metropolitan opera tenor Richard Tucker entertained the gathering. The evening was festive and I hoped it boded well for the future. At that time, there were not many Jewish day schools outside of New York and, even there, very few.

The Hebrew Academy of Newark was established, but by no means flourishing. The student body consisted of four students. It was a start. They already had a building – a one-family house in Newark.

Looking back, I stand in admiration of those early pioneers who had the foresight to purchase a building and engage a principal while only attracting four students. Obviously, they had faith in me and in the future. Among them were Rabbis N. Kahana, Max Ehrenkrantz, M. Greenblat, Messrs. Julius Silverman, Louis Blumberg, Max Silverberg, Jacob Groner, Ben Shulman, Yidel Schreiber, Sam Stein, Dr. Ben Asher and the entire Epstein family. Ultimately, the school grew, and we engaged Rabbi Larry Cohen, a colleague of mine from Ner Israel to be assistant principal and to teach. He married the daughter of Rabbi Louis Weller, who was also active in the Academy.

On arrival, Mrs. Schwinder, our only employee, ran the day school that was actually only a kindergarten. It seemed I would have to start from scratch. Newark was a large Jewish community of approximately one hundred thousand Jews, divided among Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and non-affiliated Jews. The potential for a successful day school existed, but the opposition to parochial education was overwhelming.

The challenge was immense. I was still very much a greenhorn, despite the fact that I had rid myself of the Polish spelling of my surname. I was now known as Sholem B. Kowalsky and, in fact, my parents too changed the spelling of their name.

Jewish day schools were not yet popular in the United States and certainly not in Newark. I was taken aback by the opposition I encountered. It was particularly surprising to me to realize that even Orthodox Jews opposed such a wonderful concept. Many were immigrants who had not yet achieved financial security. Concerned that their children acclimate to the new country and achieve financial success, they were afraid that a Jewish day school would frustrate their goals for their children. They assumed that public schools were better prepared to teach their children how to gain access to universities, to business opportunities and especially to the professions.

Among the non-orthodox the comfort of school buses and hot kosher lunches was a great attraction. It was a definite consideration in favor of a private Jewish Day school. Another benefit to all Jewish families would be access to friends with similar interests. These parents were not very happy with the attitudes, quality and discriminatory behavior of most of the non-Jewish students who attended public schools.

First Encounter With Reform Leadership

It was in Newark that I first encountered Reform Jews and their leadership. They were a different breed altogether. The Reform temple was close to my apartment and I was curious to see what went on there. One Friday night, after Shulamith and I finished our Shabbos *seuda*, we walked over and entered the sanctuary. I was wearing a *kippa* and sat down in the rear. After a few minutes an usher came over and asked me to remove my head covering. Well!! I never did find out what transpired there.

However, I was soon to learn how deep their aversion to tradition went. It certainly included the Day School. Dr. Joachim Prince, their spiritual leader, was the arch-enemy of the Academy.

"You see the palm of my hand, Rabbi Kowalsky," he once said while stretching out his smooth hand at a Jewish Federation meeting, "You will have as many students in your school as there is hair on my palm."

At those meetings he fought vigorously to obstruct Federation aid to us. He even said, "We are not going to provide you with funds to raise Orthodox Jews. We do not need Orthodox Jews. They need *shtieblech* not day schools. Besides, the strength of America is the public school system which integrates students from all walks of life. You are trying to create ghettos."

To my sheer delight, the Jewish Federation in Newark was the first federation to include our Academy in the annual budget. This resulted after two years of extensive effort on my part and with the help of some of our influential members.

Dr. Prince's words had a remarkable effect upon me. They motivated and propelled me. Not only was he wrong, but I set out to demonstrate his errors to the entire community.

I had to convince my co-religionists that the highest level of secular and Jewish education would be available at the Academy. I had to demonstrate that without Jewish education and without a bond to tradition, American Jews would assimilate. Though I was living in this country a relatively short time, I had come to this realization. Chicago had been my training ground.

The Beginning

I commenced a campaign to enroll students and canvassed for applicants whenever I encountered individuals in synagogues or on the street.

One interesting encounter took place on a Shabbos afternoon. I was walking near my apartment when a young boy ran up to me.

"Mister, mister," he yelled. "Where I can I buy a carton of Camel cigarettes?" He was only about six-years-old – too young to smoke.

I asked him what he wanted cigarettes for. "Tomorrow is Father's Day," he said, "I have $1.10 saved up and I want to buy cigarettes. My father smokes Camels. Maybe you know a store that sells them."

"What's your name?" I asked him.

"Herbie," he answered.

"Herbie, you know what today is?"

"Yes," he said. "It's Saturday."

"Have you ever heard the word Shabbos*?"*

"Sure," Herbie said. Assured that he was Jewish, I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you. If you give me your address, I'll bring you a carton of camels tonight after Shabbos. That way, you won't have to shop and you'll save money at the same time."

He gave me his address. I kept my word. After *Havdala,* I arrived. The apartment was one flight up. I gently knocked on the door and Herbie opened it. He was happy to see that I kept my promise. Immediately, he introduced me to his parents.

"This is the man I told you about," he said.

The parents were a little embarrassed and uncomfortable. Nevertheless, they did not turn me away. They invited me in and asked me to sit down. I began to explain to them who I was and what the function of the Jewish day school was. I told them I wished to enroll Herbie and teach him Torah – their heritage (and his) that had been passed down from generation to generation. It was now Herbie's turn to learn about our religion so that he could pass it on to his children. Herbie was the link in this G-d given chain. Without him, the chain would be broken. "We need your son in our day school," I told them.

Herbie was the oldest of several siblings and my words must have struck a chord. His parents enrolled him and Herbie went on to become an outstanding student as well as a truly observant Jew. Later I helped him enroll in Yeshiva Torah Vadaas in New York. Herbie became a distinguished member of the Borough Park Community. His family is Orthodox and all his siblings eventually attended the Hebrew Academy of Newark.

There were many other "Herbies" who entered the school having little or no knowledge of Judaism. Before long, they, too, were impressing everyone with their progress.

Word was spreading that the Hebrew Academy of Newark provided both a quality Torah and secular education. We engaged an excellent staff and parents were beginning to seek us out.

One day a lady knocked on my door.

"I hear you sharpen students' minds," Mrs. G. said.

"Yes, we have special sharpeners," I replied, "and they're called Torah studies."

After inspecting the school, Mrs. G. was satisfied that this would be the ideal school for her son. He was a top student in his public school class and he remained so after transferring to the Academy.

When it came time for Mrs. G.'s son to graduate and move on to high school, I was presented with a different challenge. The boy's mother had in mind to enroll him in West Point. I persuaded her to send him to a Hebrew high school in New York. Ultimately he graduated from Yeshiva University.

The Curriculum

As soon as the children enrolled in our school they were taught Hebrew reading and *tefila.* They then gained familiarity with the *Siddur* and *Chumosh.* This was a new phenomenon in Newark – six-year-old boys and girls who could attend *shul* on Shabbos and remain immersed in the services.

Our school provided an overall, encompassing view of Torah Judaism. This manifested itself in festive celebrations; *Pesach Sedorim; Purim Megila* readings and masquerade parties; *Chanukah Menorah* lighting and plays. On *Succos,* we put up a *succah* where all the children ate.

Before *Chaggim*, we encouraged the children to visit Jewish people in nursing homes and share with them the joy of *Purim* or *Simchas Torah*. They presented shows and danced with the Torah. Moreover, we invited the entire community to all the programs we ran part-time for the children.

We were in constant competition with the Reform afternoon Hebrew school. Our aim was to destroy the myth that the Hebrew school -- which operated mainly on Sunday mornings – could provide an adequate basic Jewish education. Many of their graduates could barely read Hebrew. This was sad enough considering that they attended classes for several years. Even more worrisome was the fact that the Hebrew school took its children only as far as Bar or Bas Mitzvah. There was no subsequent program and after attaining Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the child was left to fend for his or her own self. Moreover, the smattering of Jewish learning and reluctance to stress observance of *mitzvos* impeded any further development.

As soon as we were able to, my wife and I found a way to further involve the Academy students in a Shabbos atmosphere. We instituted a *seudah shlishis* program. This meant that many of the students, who lived within walking distance of our home, would be able to spend this third meal with us.

The program soon caught on. The children enjoyed my wife's delicious assortment of dishes and pastries. With zest we sang the *zemiros*, Torah stories and an interpretation of the *parshas hashavuah* were included. I felt this was a positive achievement because the student body was very diverse in matters of Sabbath observance. During *seudah shlishis,* all the differences were erased.

In their homes, the degrees of Shabbos observance spanned a wide spectrum from totally non-observant to Orthodox. The non-observant had no vestige of *Yiddishkeit* and often, in these houses, even the Sabbath candles were not kindled.

By establishing a Shabbos program, we were able to make our student body more homogeneous.

There was a small influx of young families moving from New York and Philadelphia to Newark. They were usually businessmen who owned factories or industries outside of the New York area and wanted to reduce their commuting time. Two brothers, Max and Aaron

Schreiber, owned a women's wear factory outside Philadelphia. They lived in New York but wanted to move closer to their place of business, either to Elizabeth or Newark. Both cities boasted a Jewish day school. After checking out the schools and the cities, they chose to move to Newark. Others did likewise and before long, our little day school in Newark was swelling in numbers, a combination of local residents and those who had relocated from other areas.

Most of the families who sent their children to the school pitched in with fundraising and the upkeep of the school. Some did volunteer work, others gave or raised funds. Most noteworthy among them were Jerome Sisselman, President, and the Groner, Schreiber, Weiss, Stein, Epstein, Gottesman and Shulman families.

I established an active Parents-Teachers Association and soon we helped spearhead a PTA program in Connecticut. Moreover, we did not work in a vacuum. I was in constant contact with Torah Umesorah in New York. I was also a member of the Jewish Board of Education of Essex County whose chairman of the board, Michael Stavitsky, was very helpful to the Academy.

My involvement with organizations often boosted recognition for the school. I was an active member of Hapoel Hamizrachi, later becoming national vice president. My involvement with this movement increased the profile of the Hebrew Academy. Leading figures in Mizrachi, including Dr. Rafael Gold and Rabbi Israel Schorr were among the invited lecturers to our community.

The School Expands

Within one and one-half years we were able to purchase a new school building.

Mr. Jerome Sisselman, a land developer and President of the Academy spearheaded the successful building drive. We bought the Masonic Temple Building on Clinton Avenue. Our first building was essentially a converted one-family house on Clinton Street. This new building was large enough to accommodate two hundred fifty students.

The four-story building contained ten classrooms, a gym, an office and a dining room as well as all the other necessary facilities. This certainly beat my previous makeshift office. In the first building, I had in fact built my own office with a few plasterboards set up in a strategic area.

We hired a cook and provided hot Kosher lunches for the children – sometimes the only kosher meal they ate all day. We also had a gymnasium and our facilities compared favorably to those of the local public schools.

Now that we had the new building, I wanted to use it also for a day center on Shabbos in order to provide a Sabbath atmosphere for the families, not just for the children who lived within walking distance to the school and enjoyed the Shabbos program. Unfortunately, I was not supported in this venture. This was particularly distressing to me since I could see the benefit of having a central educational and spiritual center to cater to the whole family.

Apart from the ongoing challenge of encouraging people to be *shomrei* Shabbos, there were the daily battles in the school to ensure that all boys wore *tzizis and kipos* and that *kashrus* was observed.

These issues posed problems. Firstly, the wearing of *tzizis* was a hard rule to enforce – some boys did and some did not. Most of the complaints against wearing *tzizis* came from the parents. They fell into the categories of "the *tzizis* stick out of the clothes; they get dirty; or we need several pairs."

I tried to solve the problem by buying dozens of pairs and distributing them to the boy. Although verbally I insisted that they wear *tzizis*, there was no actual way to coerce them to do so.

Maybe the opposition to *tzizis* was the manifestation of two things. One was that they considered me a religious fanatic and I continued to remain so in the eyes of many people throughout my stay. Second, there was a tremendous amount of parental ignorance.

When we moved into the new building, one of the young parents assisted me in hanging *mezuzos* on the doorposts. I tried to explain to him their purpose. He simply failed to understand how pieces of parchment inscribed with paragraphs from the Torah and encased in wood or metal are holy and could protect his children.

"Rabbi, you're so superstitious," he said. "Is this piece of parchment going to be my watchdog? Why don't you hire a security service?"

Shortly afterwards, I brought a *sofer stam* from the Bronx to our school to present a public demonstration on writing *mezuzos*. This helped clarify the issue of *mezuzos* – how they are written, on what

type of parchment, what is written on them, where they are to be hung and their spiritual significance.

But a multitude of questions and misconceptions remained. Questions about Shabbos observance abounded. Listening to radio on the Sabbath was a real problem. I had to patiently explain to them why it was not within the spirit of the law to attach the radio to a timer on Shabbos. This ruling was especially perplexing to many since I had said that electric lights could be switched on and off by timers.

Confusion

This confusion was apparent in many other areas. One parent came to inform me that she was moving to a new house.

After hearing a description of the new house, I naturally told her that I was delighted that she was moving.

"But Rabbi," she said, "I have a problem. I've put off moving because of *sefirat haomer,* remembering what my mother had taught me."

She felt that it was not a propitious time to move to a new house during this period. "After all it is a period of mourning" she said. "Shabbos is a joyous day, so maybe I should move on Shabbos."

I also encountered certain ignorance concerning the role of a Jewish rabbi from some of my neighbors.

There was a doctor's office next door to my apartment on Clinton Street and people were regularly coming and going from his office. Some of the patients would approach me with questions.

One morning a woman made a request. "Rabbi, please pray for Johnny," she asked.

Of course, I immediately agreed. Knowing that she was a gentile, I didn't ask for Johnny's mother's name.

Several weeks later I met her again. She seemed really pleased to meet me. "Rabbi, Johnny's health has really improved," she told me happily.

I was very pleased. Anytime I could be of service to someone, I felt good.

"Rabbi," she added, "would you like to meet Johnny?"

"Of course," I said.

"Here's Johnny," she said, casually tugging on the leash of her dog.

Personal Events in Newark

We made many close friends in those early days. Among them were Yaacov and Betty Groner, Yidel and Lillian Schreiber, Jack and Ruth Epstein, Zigmond and Celia Epstein who were pillars in the American Mizrachi organization. Also included in our close circle were Aaron and Blanche Schreiber, Max and Hinda Schreiber, and Nathan and Ann Morgenstein.

Saturday nights found us meeting and eating bagels and lox. We were all active in Hapoel Hamizrachi and debated solutions for all of Israel's problems. Uppermost in our minds, though, were the horrendous smatterings of news we received about our brothers in Europe.

As for myself, hardly a day went by without my thoughts turning to the beautiful and large family we left behind. Mail at that time had ceased, whereas previously we had been able to receive a card now and then. From those letters we had received tragic hints.

One letter described a wedding attended by various members of the family. The wedding was to a cousin long since dead. We surmised that all those mentioned had perished.

We were devastated. Long into the night I blamed myself. Where had been my courage? Why did I not shout to them? "Listen to Jabontinsky. He is G-d's *shaliach.* Take his advice. Go to Israel and meet *Moshiach* there. Remaining in Poland will not hasten his coming. He will come when the *Rebono Shel Olom* so decrees." But I was a coward. I did not shout. In fact, I hid my alliance with the revisionists. Only great uncle Yehuda Leib had the foresight and courage to stand his ground.

There was a heaviness in my heart. My only solace was that perhaps my efforts for Hapoel Hamizrachi were in some way going to be helpful. Some day we would all find our way to *Eretz Yisrael.* Amazingly, though, even with these thoughts, busy activities had a way of intruding and transporting my mind to daily responsibilities.

The size of the student body at the Academy had grown remarkably. I do believe our success helped Newark become a vibrant and thriving Orthodox community outside of the New York metropolis. I felt especially complimented when the Ner Israel alumni chose Newark for the site of their annual dinner.

We were honored by the presence of Rabbi Ruderman. Fortunately, we managed to entertain him for the full day, not just for the few hours of the function. After giving him a tour of the Hebrew Academy, we invited him to our home for lunch.

Rabbi Ruderman displayed his keen sense of humor. On entering the dining area, he exclaimed "My, My! Such a beautifully set table, fine china, tall glasses, silverware! I am afraid there will be little to eat."

His fears were soon allayed as Shulamith brought forth ample delicacies, serving them graciously as was her custom.

May 24, 1946, saw the birth of our first child. The *bris* was well attended at the Academy. Rabbi Hershal Cohen was the *mohel* and my father-in-law the *sandek*. My son was named Avrohom Moshe after my uncle Rav Avrohom Weinberg and my Zaidy Reb Moshe Kovalski. Attending, were our family, many esteemed rabbis, all of the school officers, board of directors and their families. The event was sparkling and we the proud parents, prayed that our first born son would grow up to be a credit to both families and *Klal Yisrael*.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. We were overjoyed and countless celebrations took place in Newark. Afterwards, I went to New York, to Mesivta Torah Vadaas where the *Menahel*, Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendelovitz, was dancing and celebrating with his students and *rabbaim*. The proclamation of the State of Israel was greeted with joy by all Jews.

After hours of rejoicing, I visited our old neighbor Rabbi Avrahom Zalmanovitz and we made a *Lechaim*.

Rabbi Avrahom Yitzchak Zalmanovitz was a *talmid* of the *Avnei Neizer* and he studied together with my uncle Rabbi Weinberg.

He was also a *Rosh HaYeshiva* in Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon Yeshiva.

Shortly thereafter, on an erev *Yom Kippur*, he passed away and Rabbi Soloveitchik rushed in from Boston to be *maspid* (eulogize) him. He quickly dropped into my parents' home, across the street from the Zalmanovitzes, to have a bite. He was worried about getting back to Boston in time for *Yom Kippur*. There was a shuttle available in

Newark. I whisked him to the airport in time to board the plane. I called his rebbitzen to arrange for a police car to escort him to *shul.*

With G-d's help, we succeeded and he often reminded me of this hazardous trip.

At this time, there was much to be thankful for. My son Avrum Moshe, born in Newark and destined to become a distinguished *talmid chachom* and attorney, was a precocious child and enlivened our days. The war was over. Our people finally had a home of their own, a country that would be a haven for all Jews. I prayed that I would soon be able to become a citizen of that land.

Farewell to Newark

Looking back, I am amazed and proud of what I accomplished in four and one-half years. A relative newcomer to the States, I became ordained as a Rabbi and developed a fledgling school into a remarkable Torah center with 250 students, dedicated parents and yes, admirers of Rabbi Kowalsky. Just the same, there was one nagging problem. I was having a difficult time with my president. He had become a fixture in the Academy and prevented others from making inroads. His dictatorial manner was frustrating. I started to make inquiries at Torah Umesorah for a new position and was soon rewarded.

Newark had been a training ground for me. Apart from my difficulty with English, though vastly improved during my sojourn there, I made mistakes which I hoped never to repeat.

I erroneously neglected my own secular education. This in fact I was never able to correct, mainly because as my personal and professional responsibilities grew, I could never spare the time to devote to my own schooling. In retrospect, and even at that time, I felt that I should have been able to complete a formal education. True, I had a Masters degree from Ner Israel and attended numerous courses, yet I never attained a university degree.

While I was in Newark, I labored under the misconception that experience was the key with which to open all gates. To a large extent, this is true and still remains true, but there is always that vacuum which is filled with a diploma.

Jewish education and the rabbinate always paid a meager salary so returning to school was an ever receding option – but I did try to learn from some other mistakes I made.

When I first arrived in Newark – young, eager and enthusiastic – I was fueled by a driving mission to initiate and implement an Orthodox educational system. It was certainly a Herculean task, but I felt I was up to the challenge.

I toiled tirelessly, constantly presenting my message to all who would listen, often bombarding my audience with lectures on this topic so close to my heart. I was neither diplomatic, nor compromising. I deeply believed in the necessity and justice of my cause. This sometimes made me insensitive to the negative reaction I stirred in my opponents.

The louder I rallied for my cause, the more others felt Newark was being burdened by a zealot. Moreover, my total commitment and my refusal to budge on any point did not serve to ingratiate me with the Orthodox leadership in the community.

True, they were not very supportive, but I didn't take enough advantage of that small window of opportunity that always exists. I did not make enough effort to draw the Orthodox rabbis into plans for the school or inform and include them in all phases of its development. I might then have been able to gain more support and cooperation.

The Move to Missouri

Bearing this is mind, I was anxious to move on and was delighted with the offer from Torah Umesorah to fill the position of superintendent of education at the Epstein Hebrew Academy in St. Louis.

This was an already functioning Hebrew day school established after the former Chief Rabbi of the Orthodox community of St. Louis, Rabbi Chaim Fischel Epstein, passed away. It was his dying wish that a day school be established and the community and his family ensured that his dream was fulfilled. The school began with an enrollment of twelve students in the first grade. By the time I arrived, it had an enrollment of one hundred and fifty students. This time, at least, I wouldn't have to start from scratch. I succeeded Rabbi Sugarman who left for Los Angeles. He left the school in good shape and I was ready to begin work – to maintain and improve upon what

had already been achieved. At the time I wondered why he left. Everything seemed so perfect.

The community at large received us warmly. We spent the first few weeks in the home of Hy and Esther Miller while seeking adequate living quarters. We found a lovely apartment on 6320 Enright Avenue and soon set up home there. I was immediately thrown into my position and kept busy from morning to night. Shulamith was pregnant with Avivala and preparing for that event kept her very occupied.

Aviva was due to arrive *Pesach* and this was the first time we would not be celebrating *yom tov* with our parents. A new community, a new home and preparing for *Pesach* were overwhelming for Shulamith. We decided to call upon our old faithful friend, the cook at the Yeshiva of Newark. Sure enough, she agreed to come and help us prepare for the holiday. She arrived two days before the first *seder*. We had already shopped for new dishes, pots and pans. Aunt Mindel took one disapproving look and ordered bigger pots. I ran down and purchased fifteen quart pots for soup and fish. We could not understand why she insisted on cooking so much. But her foresight came in very handy indeed.

No sooner were we finished with the second *seder*, than Shulamith was rushed to the hospital. Unfortunately, she took very sick and her parents flew in. It seemed everyone converged on our home. Aunt Mindel took over the household, feeding them all while preparing for the homecoming of Shulamith. She and my mother-in-law turned out to be excellent baby nurses. Aviva came home a few days before Shulamith. The baby was tiny, black haired and darling. A dynamo, Aviva, always a devoted daughter, eventually earned a B.A. at Stern College and a Masters at Queens College. Avrum took great pride in showing her off. Soon we were all reunited in good health.

Under the Thumb of the Kehila

When I commenced my work at the Academy, I was sure I had the support of the St. Louis community. Unlike Newark, the battle had already been fought and won. The Epstein Hebrew Academy functioned and I surmised that I would have complete autonomy in its running.

I could not have been more wrong. All religious institutions were under the jurisdiction of the *Vaad Ha'eir.*

The overall running of the *Vaad* was entrusted to Rabbi Eichenstein. All the synagogues and religious educational institutions in St. Louis were affiliated with the *Vaad.*

The St. Louis reform rabbi was just as radical, if not more radical, than Dr. Joachim Prince in Newark.

Dr. Isserman's interpretation of Judaism was hedonism. He adhered to a philosophy that as far as religion goes, one can do as one pleases. In his book on Judaism, he approved the eating of ham. This was enough for me. I destroyed the book immediately.

I knew that we had absolutely nothing in common. Matters were complicated because of the *kehila* setup and the role of the Chief Rabbi Menachem Eichenstein.

Trying to please all the parties in the *kehila* created a problem for him, which in turn created a problem for me. He did not want to make any waves, but this attitude made my job more difficult. I wanted to institute changes and changes necessarily make waves.

❧ *School on Christmas*

One of those changes concerned an issue that aroused the ire of the entire Jewish community. This was the issue of schooling on Christmas day. Surprisingly, it aroused little attention from the gentile community, but the Jews were up in arms.

I had previously encountered opposition in Newark towards keeping our school open on Christmas day, but it did not create a major controversy. Although St. Louis was a predominantly Catholic city with many parochial schools, the Jewish reaction was personally shocking.

Convinced of the merits of my position, I boldly directed that our blue and white school buses, unmistakably the Epstein Hebrew Academy buses, roll out on Christmas day and New Years day to drive the children to school! This action generated much controversy. After all, this was Missouri and here people are genteel. "We don't want to offend our gentile neighbors", my critics told me. "You come from the East Coast. Here, we do things a little differently."

Of course, I got my way, despite the disapproval and without the backing of Rabbi Eichenstein. From that day on all talk of closing on Christian holidays ceased. Ours was a Jewish day school operating according to the Jewish calendar.

However, it was a little more difficult to fight the *Vaad* on issues that were not directly under my jurisdiction.

Summer camps were among those issues. Rabbi Eichenstein had given his *Kashrus hechsher* to the Poalei Zion camps in St. Louis. He contended that it was preferable to run Jewish camps that served kosher food, rather than let the children eat *traife.*

We strenuously objected to this. True, they served kosher food but in our opinion, their ideas were *traife.* This was exactly the kind of secular Zionism I had encountered in Poland, advocated by anti-religious Jews. I suggested instituting our own day camp program, but this idea was rejected. Nat Lefkowitz, a parent of a student, prominent attorney and son-in-law of Sam Pollack, a leader in the Mizrachi movement, publicly supported our position. He agreed that *traife* ideas were more dangerous than *traife* food.

Fire

In 1950 (one year after our arrival), I was awakened one night by a phone call. Our school was on fire! I rushed over and tried to save whatever I could, but the building was demolished. Immediately, we went to work. Mr. Sam Lefton, president of the Academy, managed to obtain the use of a public school. Sam always stood on my side giving moral support. Just one day of learning was missed and the school building was rented for one dollar a year. The location was not the most desirable nor was it in good condition, but with much cooperation from an alarmed community, we made the premises fairly comfortable.

Many other exciting events occurred. Most exhilarating was the birth of our son Eluzer Elimelach named after my beloved grandfather Eluzer Mokotowski and my wife's grandfather Eluzer Elimelach Gold who had recently passed on. Eluzer was born on Father's Day and a wonderful present he was.

Sadly, Shulamith had again taken quite ill after his birth and was not present at his *bris.* She was still hospitalized. Naturally, this put

a damper on the entire celebration. Her worried parents had flown in from New York, and her mother, with the help once more of Aunt Mindel, who chose not to miss any *simcha* in our *mishpocha*, prepared the *seudas mitzvah*. Countless friends attended as we celebrated in the Yeshiva,Dr. Markovsky, the orthodox *mohel,* performed the *milah.*

He was a smiling happy child who always seemed to be in good spirits. As a youngster he loved to run around the table and kiss everyone. He also enjoyed taking all toys apart and trying to reassemble them. This was a very expensive activity since it invariably involved buying new ones.

The School's Progress

The excellence of our educational program came to the attention of the St. Louis Board of Education. After visiting the school, they lauded the school's progress in every area. Board members J. Harry Pohlman and William Hall Todd were so impressed that they wrote, "The Rabbi H.F. Epstein Hebrew Academy seeks to emphasize Jewish cultural and religious training in an all day school without detracting from the fullness and the richness of the best public schools of the country."

I, too, was delighted with the results but there was much more to do and this was what I tried to convey to the community. In my address at the annual dinner in 1950, I told the audience that we must never become complacent.

"Some of us may be satisfied with these accomplishments," I said, "however, there is much more to be done. With your continued cooperation, we shall G-d willing progress and perhaps see a Yeshiva high school in our city."

Mutual Understanding Between Catholics and Jews

Mrs. Violet Baskin was the Principal of our English Department. She was an inspired principal who headed an excellent staff. However, as much as she understood the Jewish religion, there were some nuances that puzzled her.

One day she came into my office very exasperated.

Like most of the secular teaching staff, she was an observant Catholic. It gravely disturbed her to see any of the teaching staff not setting the proper example.

That particular day was a fast day.

"Rabbi, I just noticed one of the teachers eating on a fast day," she said. "Rabbi," she said anger rising in her voice, "this teacher is violating the law."

She had approached the teacher and asked him what he was doing, to which he replied by giving a strange and indiscreet answer, "I must eat sweets when I feel like this."

Not wishing to pursue the conversation any further and feeling offended, she decided to take the matter up with me.

"Mrs. Baskin," I said, "the teacher is a diabetic and must eat to remain alive. Of course, it would have been preferable had he done so in private."

Mrs. Kurtz, another English staff member, also a practicing Catholic, had an interesting idea for an eighth grade excursion.

She knew that I was deeply concerned about the growing rate of intermarriage and that I was doing everything within my power to try to inculcate the students, even at an early age, to reject this possibility later in life.

"Jews aren't alone in being concerned about intermarriage. Catholics also try to encourage their children to marry within their own religion," Mrs. Kurtz said. She found the perfect way to get the message across.

"Rabbi, I think it would be a good idea to take the eighth grade to meet my priest."

More than a little perturbed by her concept of an educational outing for the eighth graders of a Jewish school, I gently expressed my doubts.

She persisted. Her reason? Well it seems her priest rallied against intermarriage and so he would be a good influence on Jews. Having my students guided by a priest was not my greatest ambition. It took much diplomacy to convince Mrs. Kurtz that this was not the way to solve the problem of future intermarriages.

The school flourished. Mrs. Baskin produced many student plays, through which the children developed poise and a love of music and drama. She was alert to the activities of each teacher, guiding and encouraging them.

The Hebrew staff was also top quality.

We were fortunate that teachers, Rabbi Akiva Egozi and Rabbi Zalman Uri, who came from the Kletzker Yeshiva in Europe, joined our staff. Rabbi Aaron Kotler, the great *gadol* in Torah, was their *Rosh HaYeshiva* and we hoped his inspiration would be transmitted through them to our students. Also prominent on our staff were Rabbis Schmuel Haber, Sholem Rivkin, Jacob Elbaum, and Ms. Laura Landau.

I, myself, enjoyed teaching the youngsters and so we were never at a loss for a substitute teacher. I always filled in. Sitting in on the kindergarten class was a particularly rewarding experience. Hearing the toddlers recite the *modeh ani* always filled me with a sense of warmth and achievement. The city began to further appreciate the ideals imbued and instilled in the youngsters and saw great hope for the development of a Torah community.

Confusion in the Classroom

We always tried to demonstrate the customs and rituals performed on each *chag* to help better acquaint the students with the procedures.

Before *Yom Kippur,* I demonstrated to a class the ritual of *shlogging Kaparos* (asking forgiveness). A teacher entered my office with a smile. He was uncertain how to explain to a confused student his father's strange behavior when performing this ritual.

"Rabbi, you taught the children that *shlogging Kaparos* is performed in several fashions," the teacher said.

"When a woman says the prayer, she swings a live hen around her head three times while reciting the following lines, "This is my atonement, this is my donation, this is my alternative offering, this is the chicken that will expiate and I will be written down for a good life." A man repeats these same *pesukim* (sentences), using a live rooster. The third more widely used choice is for anyone, regardless of gender, to utter the same prayer substituting money for a bird while proclaiming that "this is the money that will go to charity."

"One of my students has another version," the teacher continued. "He told me his father used to *shlog Kaparos* everyday in Russia. He didn't use either money or a hen or a rooster. He said, "A *Kapara zol ehr zein,"* using his neighbor's name – an anti-Semitic gentile. Waving his outstretched arm around his head three times, the father intoned his neighbor's name and repeated 'a *Kapara zol ehr zein'* three times.

"Rabbi, how should I handle this?"

"Tell the poor fellow his father simply hoped his unkind neighbor would repent."

Other Interests

My devotion to the Academy did not prevent me from becoming very involved with other matters. I kept in close touch with Rabbi Israel Klaven, the executive vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and a close friend of mine. Often I flew to New York for important meetings and to attend many conventions.

The ideology of the Hapoel Hamizrachi remained close to my heart and I became national vice-president. In that capacity, I chaired many events and invited illustrious guests to the city – The first and only Orthodox mayor of Jerusalem, Shlomo Zalman Shragai, Professor Frankel of the Hebrew University, Rabbis Zev Gold, Israel Miller and others graced our events.

I well remember Professor Frankel's visit. He was the guest speaker at a gala *Melava Malka* one Saturday night. The room was packed and a good deal of money was raised for the Hapoel Hamizrachi. At the conclusion of the event, Rebbitzen Eichenstein invited the professor to her home to meet a few generous donors. She implied that perhaps more funds would be forthcoming. We were delighted to accept. I drove the professor to her home and was amazed that the room was crowded with the entire assembly, enjoying her lavish spread.

"Oh I just put together a little dessert," she said.

Of course no further funds were raised and the professor was a bit annoyed. The hour was late and he felt imposed upon. He would have preferred to retire. After a short while he asked me to drive him back to his hotel.

On the way, he turned to me and said "I'm starved. I did not take time to eat there and was too nervous at the *Melava Malka.*"

I took Professor Frankel home and we quickly served him cheese, fish and challa with a bit of fruit for dessert.

"This is a meal!" he said. "Now, may I sleep on your couch? I hate sleeping in hotels." What a pleasant guest!

A Few Survived

By now we were already keenly aware of the horror of the total tragedy that had struck our nation. This was an aberration the human mind could not contemplate. My thoughts kept returning to my beautiful Otwock, and to Warsaw. Just think, gone are the men returning from the *mikvah* at 4:00 in the morning, icicles clinging to their beards, gone are the men who found purpose and joy in life amidst poverty and want, gone are the *shteiblech*, the tailors, the scholars, the servants of G-d, the gentle women, gone is my home, my family, gone are the descendants of our illustrious ancestors. Only we, my father Chaim Nachman, my uncles Benjamin in Israel and Avrum Shlomo in Switzerland and Doda Surala Landau and their families are left. May Hashem increase our families and may we find the strength and inspiration to once more light the torch of *chesed* and Torah.

As these thoughts kept reverberating in my mind, I was even more committed to helping Israel through whatever means possible and gave my very best efforts to the Hapoel Hamizrachi as we continued our myriad events.

These activities sustained my spirits and raised the awareness of the community to the greater world at large. At the same time they were a source of irritation to Rabbi Eichenstein. He preferred to be the initiator and resented any initiative not of his making.

Expanding

Among these initiatives were two that were destined to be my undoing. When it became necessary to elect a new chairman of the Board of Education of the Academy, a very powerful family, with great influence in the community and with the support of Rabbi Eichenstein, insisted that a gentleman who was an ordained

Rabbi from the Reform Theological Seminary in Cincinnati become the chairman. I violently rejected this idea and the price I paid for that rejection was very high indeed.

Secondly, it had become apparent that the old school building was not adequate for our over 250 students. Mr. Sam Lefton, my ever-cooperative president and a true leader, encouraged the search for new quarters. We concentrated on an area on the outskirts of the city, but an area where the Jewish community seemed to be directed.

An ideal spot was located on a spacious estate on Price Road with magnificent grounds, surrounded by trees of every description. There were pine trees, fruit trees, colorful flowers, paths and ponds, all at a price we could manage. When presented to the Board, they enthusiastically agreed and we purchased the property making a significant down payment.

Havoc broke loose. This was the beginning of most of my *tzoros* (troubles) in St. Louis. Dismayed that the Academy would become the prime mover in the city, all sorts of obstacles were placed in my path. I was maligned with false gossip; many covert excuses to find fault with whatever I did were invented. One fool went so far as to suggest to the Board that I permitted unsafe buses to transport children, an outrageous lie. Simply put, Sholem Kowalsky was getting too big, too popular and had to be cut down to size. The *rechilus* (gossip) involved many innocent people who were influenced by so-called influential people. Although I had a multitude of supporters like the Miller, Funk, Zeffrin, Saffron, Fredman, Pollack, Lefkowitz, Lefton and other families, the pressure was affecting my family and we decided, enough was enough.

How well I recalled the words of my neighbor and friend, Rabbi Chaskel Hartman of Congregation Tifereth Israel. "Sholem be careful. Don't cross the red line. Rabbi Eichenstein and his friends will not like it. You will get hurt. Even if you are absolutely right, avoid actions that may antagonize them. Watch your step. You have a family to support."

I had devoted four hard years to developing a school renowned throughout the Hebrew Day School movement as a first class institution, and when word went out that I was interested in a change, many opportunities opened up. A bit frustrated, I decided to leave

Chinuch (education) and give the Rabbinate a try. When a position was offered to me in Brooklyn, Shulamith and I were overjoyed. It was close to my in-laws and parents. It would be an excellent apprenticeship into the Rabbinate and so we gladly accepted.

After I left, the Price Road project was abandoned, thus dashing the aspirations of those who had vision, foresight and dared to dream.

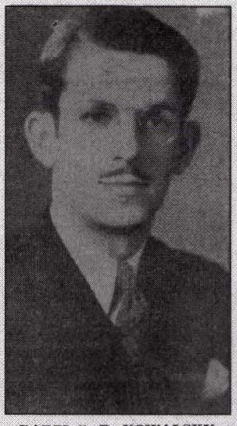
The New York Experience

A beautiful apartment was rented and we settled in.

Although a twenty minute walk from my *mishpocha*, we soon realized that the population in Brooklyn had shifted in our absence and now varied from street to street. Although the synagogue itself was stately, alas it was far too huge for the small attendance. There were 1,600 seats (men and women) and the sounds of the prayers echoed hauntingly in its expanse. The streets surrounding the *shul* were very mixed, with a preponderance of non-Jews and other minorities. The neighborhood became dangerous to traverse at night and the membership was aging and dwindling. I was very unhappy.

The experience though was well worthwhile. It offered me an opportunity to prepare and deliver *shiurim* and sermons. I learned not to push so hard, to be a little less assertive. I realized it really was not at all necessary. I learned how to handle *baalei batim* (lay members) with compassion. Patience certainly became an extremely important virtue when dealing with their problems and relating to them on a personal level.

It became abundantly evident after a short time that this position was not enough of a challenge for a young, energetic rabbi and my frustration increased. When the placement service of Yeshiva University informed me a year later of an opening for a rabbi in a congregation of over two hundred families in New Bedford, Massachusetts, I gladly applied and received the position. New Bedford was a lovely, peaceful community near Boston and Providence and only a four hour drive from New York.



RABBI S. B. KOWALSKY

In March, 1942, a group of persons including Max Silverman, the late Max Kollinger, Aaron Narol, Nathan Schlanger, Rabbi Isaac Greenblatt, Rabbi Mordecai Ehrenkrantz, Rabbi Bernard Weiss, and Hannah Weisberg representing the Ladies' Auxiliary, founded the Yeshiva. Its first home which will be occupied until July 5, is located at 709 Clinton Avenue.

The Yeshiva opened its doors in September, 1942, with an enrollment of two students. Today its enrollment includes 150 students and its new facilities will house 700. H. Jerome Sisselman is the president of the institution.

Classes are conducted from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. daily with half of the instruction in Hebrew and half in English. Beginning with the Fall term an additional year of training, the fifth, will be inaugurated.

Friday night services on June 21 will open the dedication program and will continue with ceremonies on Saturday morning. Cantor Berele Chagy and the choir of Samuel Steiner will participate.

Five delegates from each of the fraternal, veterans and other organizations have been invited to attend a Saturday night program. National presidents of these orders will speak.

A parade on Sunday afternoon at 1 p.m. will be held from the old building on Clinton Ave. and 13th Street to Seymour and Clinton Avenues. The Jewish War Veterans, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts will be in the line of march.

Audience at Chanukah party, Dec. 1946, Newark





Kindergarten Yeshiva of Newark Pesach Seder, 1946

After two years we already had a large faculty

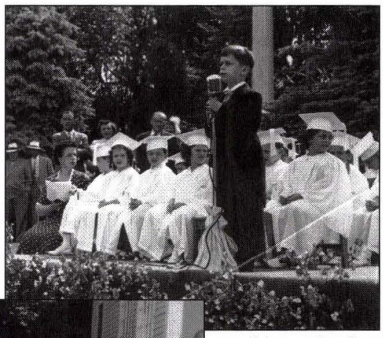




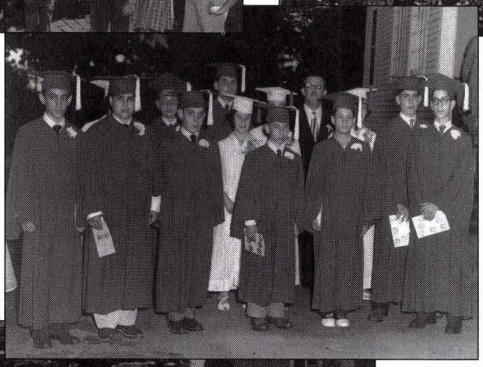
My first position – Principal in Newark Day School



Students in St. Louis disembark from bus



My son Avraham speaking at his kindergarten graduation St. Louis, 1951



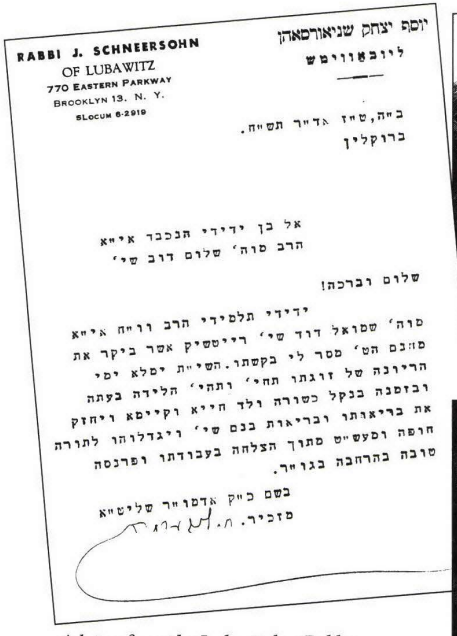
St. Louis, day school graduation



Kindergarten graduation St. Louis, 1951



My installation ceremony. To my right, Rabbi Ephraim Epstein, son of Chief Rabbi of St. Louis, Chaim Fishel Epstein, after whom the school was named



RABBI J. SCHNEERSOHN
OF LUBAWITZ
770 EASTERN PARKWAY
BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.
SLOCUM 6-2919

יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

ב"ה, ט"ז אדר תש"ח.
ברוקלין

אל בן ידידי הנכבד א"י
הרב סוה' שלום דוב ש'

שלום וברכה!

ידידי תלמידי הרב וו"ח א"י
סוה' שמואל דוד ש' ריישטיק אשר ביקר את
פה"ק הט' מסר לי בקשתו. הש"ת ישלא ימי
הריונה של זוגתו תחי' ותתי' תלידה בעתה
ובזמנה בנקל כשורה ולד חיא רקיסא ויחזק
את בריאתו ובריאות בנם ש' וגדלוהו לתורה
חופה ומעש"ט מתוך הצלחה בעבודתו ופרנסה
טובה בהרחבה בגו"ר.

בשם כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א
מזכיר.

A letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe wishing my wife a speedy recovery when she was expecting



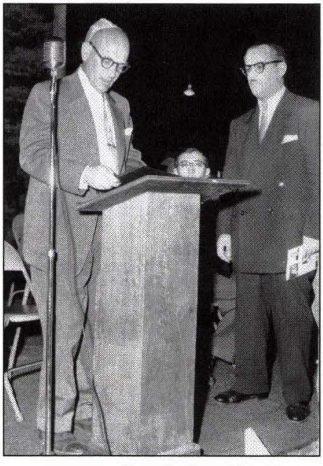
Property for building expansion – Price Road, St. Louis, MO.



The Mayor of St. Louis, 1949



Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky being honored at a testimonial dinner, St. Louis, MO.



Sam Lefton, President – a major supporter of mine

New Bedford, Massachusetts

On the Air

"Good morning. This is Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky with the 'Voice of Judaism.'"

This was the introduction to my weekly Sunday morning radio program in New Bedford, where I discussed pertinent Jewish issues of that week's agenda and the Torah portion. I taped the program either on Thursday night or Friday morning.

My children were always thrilled to hear their daddy on the air. Sunday mornings I tried to be with them and so it was one particular Sunday that they were in the car with me. We were on our way from the airport where we had just met Mr. Victor Geller, one of the administrators of Yeshiva University. Mr. Geller was scheduled to be the guest speaker at a breakfast function in honor of the Yeshiva. We turned on the radio in time to hear a rousing invitation to the community to attend and enjoy the words of our guest speaker. Mr. Geller was very impressed. On his return to New York with one hundred thousand dollars from a generous philanthropist, he told my distinguished friend, Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin, what transpired. I do believe Dr. Belkin felt rewarded that Yeshiva University had recommended me for this position.

The radio program was supported by the community at large, including members of the Conservative synagogue. Holiday programs were produced under the direction of Georgie Sawyer and Esther Green, two capable women. Mrs. Sawyer had a lot of radio experience having been a member of the cast of a popular national program, "The Goldbergs."

We made sure to advise our listeners of all Israeli news. Often this was the only positive information affecting the Jewish community that both Jews and Gentiles were exposed to on the airwaves.

New Bedford was a small city and many of my congregants were also members of the Conservative synagogue. I suppose they hedged their bets and wanted insurance on both sides. Rabbi Ziskind, the rabbi of the Conservative synagogue and I were on good terms and cooperated on many matters of mutual concern to the Jewish community.

The Shabbos Program

A Greek Orthodox priest, an Episcopalian reverend and I lived on the same street. We respected one another and affectionately referred to our street, Seventh Street, as Holy Street.

Our home was a short walk from the *shul*, the Ahavat Achim Congregation. Many of our members lived in the vicinity in close proximity to the *shul*. Just the same, there was not a particularly large attendance at services Shabbos morning. However, the synagogue was a fine location for our youth. They attended services and many remained for lunch which was prepared by the Sisterhood. They enjoyed *zemiros*, discussions and the warm atmosphere. Some even remained for *Mincha*, *seuda shlishis*, *Maariv* and *Havdala*. A whole day in *shul*, it was a revolutionary experience in New Bedford. While this entailed a great deal of work for me and Shulamith, it also meant that our children had activity and friends for Shabbos.

Jewish Education in New Bedford

There was no day school in New Bedford, just a Talmud Torah attached to the synagogue.

My wife was the school's best asset, she was an excellent teacher and the students returned to visit her long after they left the Hebrew School. I also devoted a lot of time promoting the Talmud Torah, canvassing for students.

The closest day school was in Providence, Rhode Island. Since my three children were already of school age, I had to hire a private chauffeur to drive them. Mr. McNamara undertook this job for five years, driving thirty-two miles each way in any weather. We were gratified to have Rabbi Akiva Egozi, as the principal of the Hebrew Day School of Providence, where he went after leaving St. Louis. We were destined to meet this scholarly, dignified man many times in our lives as our paths often intertwined.

Although the trip was difficult, the children enjoyed learning there.

Rewarding Experience

The greatest reward of living in New Bedford was its close proximity to Boston, the home of one of the *gedolei hador,* Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik *(zt"l).* He gave *shiurim* every *motzei* Shabbos which I attended religiously. Studying with the Rav became the highlight of my week. Every *Motzei* Shabbos I took my oldest son, Avrohom Moshe to his *shiur.*

"Daddy, I don't understand anything," he often protested.

"One day, you'll tell your children that you heard Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik," I told him.

This was just the beginning of a very close personal relationship with Rabbi Soloveitchik that was to develop over the years.

The Boston Orthodox leadership was dealing with the same burdens that we had in New Bedford – increasing intermarriage and declining observance of *Kashrus.* After the *shiur,* Rabbi Soloveitchik and I often discussed these problems.

Intermarriage on the Rise

I invested great effort and much time to combating intermarriage. My main weapon was enhanced educational programs geared to the older teenage children and college youth. Often daunted by the task which seemed to overwhelm my efforts, there were many times I thought to surrender to the tide. At such moments, I remembered the words of the Baal Shem Tov, "A person doesn't come to a place with nothing to accomplish."

I plugged along, but it was always difficult to convince young people not to intermarry when they were raised almost totally

devoid of any knowledge of their Jewish heritage. Despite denying their children our rich tradition, the parents were always distraught at the thought of their children marrying a gentile. This was true even if the parents hardly practiced their religion.

Sam was no stranger. He attended synagogue services occasionally and especially on *Yom Kippur*. He came to consult me about a serious problem.

"Rabbi, my son is going to marry a Catholic girl in church," he told me with tears in his eyes. He implored me to stop the wedding. I said I would do my utmost and both of us should pray.

The first step was to meet with Benny, Sam's son. It was not easy to convince him, but eventually he agreed to see me.

"Benny," I said, "your father is deeply upset by your plans to marry out of the Jewish faith."

Looking me straight in the eyes without a trace of guilt, Benny said, "Why does my father care?"

Benny explained that his father hardly ever did anything vaguely reminiscent of Judaism. "What kind of a Jew is he?" Benny asked. "Why does he want me to sacrifice if he never sacrificed? He makes a *Seder* on *Pesach* and that's about it," Benny said.

He had a point. I kept discussing the issue, but could not convince him. I definitely had to come up with a different strategy to prevent this marriage.

In record time, I found the officiating priest of the church. I wasted no time in requesting an appointment with him, which he willingly granted.

I explained to the priest that a Jewish boy would be marrying one of his congregants soon and that it would in both our interests to prevent it. He could not have agreed more. I knew he didn't have a particular liking for Jews, and he told me that if Benny wouldn't convert to Catholicism, he would refuse to perform the ceremony.

Thus, the wedding was off. Benny's future parents-in-law were informed of the priest's opposition to the match. They convinced their daughter to call off the wedding which she reluctantly did.

While Benny was shocked, Sam was forever grateful to me and presented me with a beautiful set of silver candlesticks.

Though I always refused to take money, in spite of the fact that funds were a bit tight at times, I accepted the gift graciously.

An Act of Chesed is Rewarded

Wednesday's usually found me on a plane to attend courses at Yeshiva University. As I landed one day, I was surprised to be paged via the airport loudspeaker. I rushed to the information desk to learn that Joe Askenazi, a prominent member and dear friend had passed away. Shocked and dismayed, I immediately turned around and flew back. In gratitude, the family installed a new ark in his memory.

Jewish Holiday Innovations

The relationship between the Jewish community and the Christians was very cordial, so much so, that I discovered in that first year that my president, Mr. Max Bressler, donned the traditional Santa outfit, beard and all, and distributed gifts to children in the local department store. How was I to combat this?

Chanukah coming so close to Christmas gave me a perfect opportunity. I galvanized the ladies auxiliary where Sadie Werner was not only president but a very close friend and advisor to Shulamith. We organized a gala celebration with a huge Menorah outside the synagogue. We invited the mayor, the entire community, and newspaper reporters to this public community candlelighting. To my knowledge, this was a first in America. We also got Hutchensons, a fantastic toy store, to display Chanukah decorations in an entire window and sell Chanukah toys and home decorations. The season took on a new spirit and our members were suddenly very proud of this innovation. I even got Mr. Bressler to distribute Chanukah gifts to our children. Cantor Chasin recited the prayers and Rabbi Ziskind, the Conservative Rabbi, thanked us for this unusual undertaking.

When *Pesach* rolled around, Shulamith had her class present a model *seder*. She was loved by the youngsters and they did a rousing good job. The parents were very proud and many a child even managed to teach father and mother a few intricacies. One mother called her to ask if her child had learned the four questions correctly.

"The child says why is this night different from all other nights? On other nights we eat *matza* and *chometz*." She repeated the entire section and said, "These are answers, not questions!" I laughed and explained.

New Bedford boasted a lovely lake not too far from our premises. What a treasure! Perfect for *Tashlich!* People were flabbergasted, but not for long. This was to be a family outing on *Rosh Hashana*h. We gathered outside the synagogue at three o'clock. Bags of goodies were distributed, as well as breadcrumbs. We sang our way to the lake. The weather was balmy, the aroma of fall foliage perfuming the air. As we gathered around the lake, I chanted the proper prayers, explained the purpose of this ritual, and crumbs were cast into the water along with all our sins. For the remainder of my stay in New Bedford this was a yearly practice.

Jewish Boy Scout Troop

Sitting in my study and learning, I reflected on a strange turn of events. I, a Yeshiva *bochur, talmid* of Lubavitch, Ger, Lublin and Ner Israel, was now embarking on an American venture. Boy Scouts! Which of my congregants did not have a child in Boy Scouts? Practically none. Well, we had to introduce a Jewish Scout troop. Mr. Irving Feinberg was an experienced Scout Master. We enticed him to proceed with the project and proceed with a vengeance he did. Kosher food at the jamboree. No activities on Shabbos. Our son Avrohom Moshe became a model scout and enjoyed this experience very much.

Bar Mitzvah Celebration

May 1959 we celebrated Avrohom Moshe's Bar Mitzvah. The entire community was invited. The Sisterhood prepared a gala *kiddush* and lunch. Mrs. Pildes and her daughters, Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Weissman, were the unofficial chairpersons in charge of preparations. Everyone had a hand in helping, Mmes. Werner, Shuster, Brody, Kaplan, Green, Sawyer, Askenazi, Bebchik, Nisson and Levy in particular.

Avrum davened, chanted the Torah portion and Haftorah and gave a beautiful *dvar Torah.*

Our parents celebrated with us as did our brothers and sisters. On Sunday, we had a catered dinner from a caterer from Boston. Many distinguished Rabbis and their wives traveled a great distance to honor us with their presence. Rabbi Herman Neuberger, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz (the Bostoner Rebbe), Rabbi Charles Weinberg, Rabbi Moshe Chait, Rabbi Akiva Egozi, Rabbi Emanuel Marcus and Rabbi Sam Chill and his brother, Rabbi Abe Chill, as well as my brothers-in-law and their families, Rabbi Leibel Isbee, Rabbi Yisrael Goodman and Rabbi Yitzchok Goodman. My sister, Jean, and her family also were there, as well as Rabbi Ziskind of New Bedford.

Each Rabbi was called upon to address the Bar Mitzvah boy and Shulamith agonized that wonderful as the speeches were, surely the congregants would be very unhappy to sit so long. But surprise of surprises, they next day, the phone kept ringing. "To think that our city was honored with so many distinguished visitors." What a relief!

The Good Deed that Wrought the Move to Hillcrest

One day Mr. Morris Bloch arrived in our neighborhood. He was an Orthodox lawyer who was also a reserve captain in the US Army and he made annual visits to an army base near New Bedford. He phoned, asking for the address of a kosher restaurant. Shulamith said 21 7th Street. He was very surprised when it turned out to be our home and he was also invited for Shabbos.

He was deeply impressed by the quality of our work in New Bedford. He was especially captivated by the children's service and program at the synagogue that spanned the entire Shabbos.

Little did we know when we said good-bye to Mr. Bloch, that this would only be the beginning of our relationship with him. He was to play a very instrumental role in our lives.

Morris Bloch was a graduate of Yeshiva University and very close to Dr. Belkin. After his visit to New Bedford, he told Dr. Belkin that he was impressed with Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky's work.

At that time, the Rabbinic placement bureau of the Yeshiva was looking for a rabbi to lead and develop a community in Hillcrest.

This was a community with great potential and the candidate would have to be a young dynamic individual with a proven track record for initiating and implementing innovative programs.

Thanks to Morris Bloch, the bureau thought I was the man to apply for the position. We gave the matter serious thought. The family had settled in New Bedford. Except for the schlep to school every day, things seemed to be running reasonably well, and once more we would have to start from scratch if we moved.

There was an additional drawback. I would have to take a salary cut and it seemed we would not be able to manage. However, Yeshiva University offered to supplement my income for two years.

The position and the location were both challenging and enticing. My children would have accessible Orthodox schools in a location that was beautiful and near relatives. The potential for growth was unlimited. I relished the challenge and applied for the position.

Election

On a Sunday morning in June I met with the officers and search committee on the porch of congregant, Rabbi Sol Berman. We discussed the responsibilities of a Rabbi. I assured them I would do my utmost to bring honor to the community and *Klal Yisrael* and I outlined some of my ideas. They seemed impressed and invited me to address the congregation on Shabbos and spend that weekend in Hillcrest. There were other candidates to consider and their decision would be made at the end of July. I advised the president, Mr. Simon Erber that I would be at my sister Jean Steinberg's apartment in Briarwood at that time.

Thursday night, the last week in July, Mr. Erber called with the glad tidings of my election to the position of rabbi of the Young Israel of Hillcrest. He invited me to come over to meet with the members and personally receive their *mazel-tov brochos.* At that memorable meeting one sour individual assured me I would regret the move to Hillcrest as the synagogue had no funds to pay even the small salary I had agreed to.

"Don't worry," I said. "Under my leadership the synagogue will G-d willing thrive. Surely you remember the saying, '*Lee*

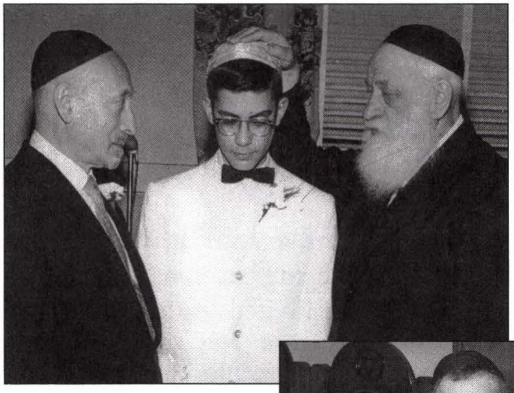
hakesef v'lee hazahav, omar Hashem, to Me is the money and to Me is the gold, G-d says.'"

Needless to say all the other people gathered there that evening were very cordial and encouraging.

The Centennial

We departed from New Bedford after five years, leaving behind good friends and warm memories. Changing locations did not end our relationships. Years later we were invited to the centennial anniversary of Ahavath Achim Congregation. We were especially honored to be the guests of Rabbi and Mrs. Barry Hartman for dinner Friday night. I delivered the sermon Shabbos morning. The synagogue was packed because many old friends came. The *parve* Shabbos luncheon in the Krivoff Hall was in our honor.

New Bedford had a new look. The Jewish population had moved and the neighborhood near the *shul* was refurbished with many homes bearing plaques informing passersby who owned them years ago. These historical homes were well kept and we had the privilege of occupying the room used by Herman Melville when he wrote Moby Dick.



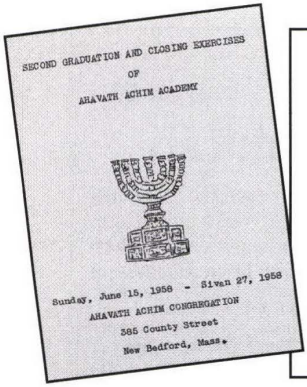
Rabbi Chaim Goodman, and Rabbi N. Kowalsky, Grandfathers, blessing Avrohom Moshe at his Bar Mitzvah



Avrohom Moshe's Bar Mitzvah – New Bedford



The Board of Directors, New Bedford, 1956



SECOND GRADUATION AND CLOSING EXERCISES
OF
AHAVATH ACHIM ACADEMY

Sunday, June 15, 1958 - Sivan 27, 1958
AHAVATH ACHIM CONGREGATION
386 County Street
New Bedford, Mass.

PROGRAM

PROCESSIONAL

Please rise - remain standing until after the invocation.

1. STAR SPANGLED BANNER
led by Cantor Solomon Chasin
2. INVOCATION
David Miller
3. OPENING REMARKS
Charles Gedacht, School Board
4. PRESENTING
Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky

THE GRADUATION THEME

"SALUTE TO ISRAEL"

IN HONOR OF
ISRAEL'S 10th ANNIVERSARY

THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 1958

Robert Barash — John Drucker
Mitzi Dolinsky — Susan Halpren
David Miller

PRESENTING OF THE TORAH
Accepting - Rhonda Bressler

5. "THE DERECH ERETZ AWARD"
donated by Samuel Hurwitz in memory of Hyman Hurwitz
6. "THE CHAIL AWARD"
presented by Susan Rakatansky
7. THE ZIONIST ORGANIZATION AWARD
by Harry Freedman
8. SCHOOL SONG BY THE STUDENTS
led by Cantor Solomon Chasin
9. PRESENTING DIPLOMAS
Isidore Shuster, President, Congregation
10. THE TORAH AWARD
by Ahavath Achim School Board
11. PRESENTING MERIT CERTIFICATES
Mrs. Nathan Werner, Representing Sisterhood
12. BENEDICTION
Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

AWARDS AND MERITS

COMMITTEE

Mr. Charles Gedacht — Mr. Samuel Hurwitz
Mrs. Elihu Sawyer

SCHOOL BOARD
Albert Lasher, Chairman

Mrs. Joseph Cohen — Mrs. George Joblon
Mr. David Dolinsky — Mr. Myer Miller
Dr. Henry Elkind — Mrs. H. Rakatansky
Mr. Charles Gedacht — Mrs. Elihu Sawyer
Mr. Samuel Hurwitz — Dr. S. Schellman
Mr. Isidore Shuster



Rabbi and Mrs. Sholem Kowalsky and Mrs. Basil Brewer, publisher of paper, New Bedford, MA., 1955



Listen to the
"Voice of Judaism"
Every
SUNDAY MORNING
AT 8:45 A.M.
On Station WBSM
1420 on Your Dial

HAPPY NEW YEAR 5719 1958

A Program of Jewish Interest

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
Director



Installation of Rabbi Kowalsky, 1955, pictured with Mr. Nisin, President

Jewish Families Prepare To Observe Hanukkah

There is a holiday spirit in virtually every home in the country.

As their Christian neighbors go about with Christmas plans, Jewish families are completing preparations for Hanukkah. This eight-day festival, opening tomorrow night, is one of the most popular in the Jewish calendar and is based on happenings 21 centuries ago.

Along with the religious celebrations of Hanukkah, with the attendant impressive ceremony of lighting the candles in the Menorah, another appeal of the occasion is the exchanging of gifts. In the traditional way, children receive dreidels (tops) and Hanukkah gelt (money), friends remember other good friends and families express their feelings with presents.

A new trend in Hanukkah giving is presents of flowers, which often have a deep Biblical heritage. For example, more than 100 varieties are mentioned in the Bible and research has revealed that the "burning bush" which appeared to Moses was actually crimson-flowered mistletoe. Solomon's rose of Sharon has proven to be the counterpart of the modern tulip.

At Hanukkah, the blooms especially popular as gifts are those of blue and white, the Jewish colors. Selections available at this season include delphinium, iris, cornflowers and forget-me-nots for blue and carnations, bouvardia, gladioli, anemones and others for white. Bouquets, centerpieces and corsages combining these flowers will be wired all over the nation and abroad to help celebrate the Feast of Lights.

Since decorating the home is another important aspect of Hanukkah, flowers may be arranged to represent the six-pointed Star of David. For the Winter festive touch, evergreens and holly are added. Some homes also include the handsome white poinsettia plant in the decorating plans.



First Chanukah Menorah lighting, New Bedford

The Young Israel of Hillcrest: From Inception to Maturity

An Island of Orthodoxy in a Sea of Conservative and Reform

Hillcrest looked like its name – a scenic green neighborhood nestled in the beautiful borough of Queens; a suburb within the city, offering the best of both worlds.

Moreover, Hillcrest was surrounded by neighborhoods with equally inviting and charming names – Fresh Meadows, Kew Gardens Hills and Utopia. The residents were proud of their neighborhoods and took great care to maintain the beauty of the parks, lawns and gardens. Properties were reasonably priced and consisted of many one family detached homes.

For many, Hillcrest was an oasis. Most of the synagogues in the neighborhoods surrounding the Young Israel were either Reform or Conservative. The only other Orthodox community within walking distance was the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills under the leadership of Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld. Bayside, under the guidance of Rabbi Louis Bernstein was a little further out. *Chassidim* were already represented in Queens with one *shteible* in Kew Gardens Hills.

I had just been elected rabbi of the smallest Young Israel in Queens – approximately twenty-five families – but the potential for growth was immense. Houses were plentiful and inexpensive and the environs were charming. True, the neighborhood did not yet offer all the facilities necessary to raise an Orthodox family, but it did not take a large stretch of the imagination to envision that these would develop and the community would grow.

One sure way to ensure this growth was to increase its population. This we did with a crying bang. Yosef Yaacov was born January 10, 1960, a few short months after our arrival. A little rebel from the start, he brought much joy into our lives. A mischievous, fun-loving youngster, he kept us on our toes. Who was to dream he would become an outstanding dentist, serve in the Israeli army and raise a magnificent family? Did Hillcrest inspire him?

Who could foresee the opportunities this minute congregation would present to me? It was here that I remained until my retirement and here I was able to devote myself to the kind of community service that I aspired to. With the backing of my loyal members, I was able to apply myself to myriad activities. They stood by me as together we promoted aid to *Eretz Yisrael*, to Russian Jews through packages to Russia and educational programs in the United States and later in Israel. They were not averse to the hours I devoted to the Rabbinical Council of America where I served in a number of offices and chaired both the Ezra Commission and the Pension Fund. I promoted the election of Rabbi Simcha Teitelbaum to serve as principal of the Yeshiva High School of Queens and I helped Rabbi Eliyahu Marcus establish the Ezra Academy. My congenial, warm congregation was proud that I was elected president of the Council of Young Israel Rabbis and president of the Vaad Harabonim of Queens, while I elevated the activities of the Jewish Federation and United Jewish Appeal. On my retirement, we had grown to a membership of approximately five hundred families, with the largest Young Israel membership of any branch in New York.

The first five years I never took a vacation, summer or winter. I was obsessed. This had to become a well integrated, harmonious Orthodox community. Our facilities were extremely limited. Everything was makeshift – classrooms, office, Beth Medrash, rest rooms and a *simcha* hall. We were constantly shifting positions, utilizing each area as needed for a specific time and purpose. The synagogue upstairs often served as lecture hall and at times became a dining area.

Within five years, many young Orthodox families had moved into the area. This was facilitated by a unique action on our part. Many local residents close by were not happy with the incursion of an Orthodox synagogue and commenced putting their homes

up for sale. We let the word out that it would be worthwhile for them to advise us and we would recommend customers. Our office became a clearing house. I encouraged Ann Nussbaum, Blanche Taub and Carol Rappaport and others to become agents. Whenever calls came in from either seller or buyer, we referred them to these ladies. Thus, our community grew with families who would feel comfortable in our midst.

We aspired to be a self-sufficient microcosm within a larger macrocosm. In order to be successful, we had to learn to be kind to each other, to be united and to turn to the *Rebono Shel Olom* with faith in the future. Many of our members were survivors of the *Shoah*, still suffering with the doubts that such an experience inflicted upon them. The challenge was to integrate **all** segments of the community, American and Europeans who descended from various countries and cultures, and did not see eye to eye and often conflicted with one another. I had to mold them all into a homogeneous community and promote an Orthodox way of life.

"Our people have been saved through many miracles and *chesed* from the *Rebono Shel Olam*," I told the congregation. "Yet one wonders how long we will continue to inflict upon ourselves the greatest punishment, one that has caused lasting anguish, the plague of disunity. Throughout our troubled history this *pirud halvavot,* splintering of the hearts, has been responsible for untold tribulation.

"A people blessed with sages and scholars interpreting Torah," I said, "would be expected to be understanding and united. Therefore we must find our common denominator, predicated on the unity of our people based on three things; G-d, Israel and the Torah."

The gist of my sermons over *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* dealt with the themes of *chesed* and unity.

The approaching festival of *Succos and Simchas Torah* was an ideal opportunity for my wife and me to offer home hospitality. We extended an invitation to all members for *kiddish* on *Simchas Torah* in our home. We aimed to know each family individually and this was a good place to begin. We also built a very large *succah* in the back yard of the synagogue and invited the entire community to come and dine with us the first and second nights of the *chag*. We hired a caterer who charged a reasonable price. It was a much

bigger success than we envisaged. We were so overbooked that we had to turn people away, but this event set the tone for friendship between the rabbi, his family and the congregation. To many families, sitting in a *succah* was a novelty. We encouraged the purchase of *arbah minim* from Israel and years later there were hundreds of *lulovim* and *esrogim* enhancing our *Hallel* prayers, and an abundance of *succos.*

For *Pesach,* I baked my own *shmura matzos* for my family, usually on Shushan Purim. This first year in Hillcrest, I ordered a large supply of *shmura matzos* to be delivered to the synagogue before *Pesach,* which I personally paid for. These I distributed to anyone who came to sell *chametz.* They were very thin and for many people a novelty. Usually the comments after *yom tov* were extremely positive.

Siddurim and *Chumoshim* were constantly added to our shelves by Daisy Solomon. She was chairperson of the book fund of the Sisterhood. Donations in memory of a loved one or in honor of a *simcha* were given to the fund. Eventually, *taleisim* and other needed *tashmishei kedusha* were thus funded.

I sensed that newcomers were very honored if the Rabbi visited them on Shabbos. Once before *Mincha,* I dropped in on Mr. X. He opened the door with a wide smile. I noticed that he had a *blech* on the stove. Naturally, Mrs. X offered me tea and cake which she assured me was purchased from a *shomer* Shabbos bakery. I accepted. She opened the refrigerator door and to my dismay, the light went on. Diplomatically, I explained that opening the door triggered an electrical device that automatically switched on the light. This was forbidden but there was a solution. "Simply loosen the light bulb from its socket before Shabbos and the electrical circuit will be broken." I drank only the tea and hoped she understood why I left over cake taken from the refrigerator.

After Shabbos I usually phoned absent worshippers to inquire about their health. My concern for their welfare touched them and they became staunch members of Young Israel.

Dr. and Mrs. Ernest Schwarcz were contemplating a move to Queens. They spent several weekends in each area. The second Shabbos in Hillcrest, they were not in our *shul.* I called them and asked if their absence was due to illness. Dr. Schwarcz was

surprised that they were missed and very impressed by my concern. He returned, settled in Hillcrest and became a stalwart member of the community.

All newcomers to Hillcrest were greeted by a cake or another gift from Shulamith. The Board Members were divided into two groups and we invited each group on a different *motzei* Shabbos for *Melava Malka.* We would have preferred to have all of them come together, but space was limited. A very festive spread was offered and soon everyone raved about Mrs. Kowalsky's culinary arts. To offset jealousy, we slowly extended invitations to all members. Unfortunately we had to forsake this practice when the community grew beyond our capacity.

My vision of community growth wasn't just limited to the Young Israel of Hillcrest. I saw all of Queens as fertile soil for introducing Jewish minds to Judaism, provided we cooperated with the other Rabbis in the area. Immediately, I established a good relationship with Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld and often we exchanged pulpits to deliver the Shabbos sermons.

Once, on arriving at his synagogue, I was directed to the front of the *shul.* I sat down on the folding chair that was placed between the plush seats usually occupied by the Rabbi and President.

A number of people motioned to me to move to the Rabbi's seat. I did not. When I arose to speak, I said, "My good neighbors, I don't want you to be under the wrong impression that I am too modest to sit in your Rabbi's seat. Life itself is sometimes like a hard seat and I want to get used to it."

Everything Begins with Jewish Education

My first sermon at the Young Israel of Hillcrest fell on a week when the Torah portion of *Matos Masei* was read. I focused on the following message:

"Moses told the two and a half tribes, Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe, who wanted to live in Transjordan that they must build cities for their children. The tribes interpreted Moses' words as building cities in which to increase their materialistic well-being, but Moses had used the words – *arim le'tapeinu* – "cities for our young children."

I stressed the importance of educating our children and directing them to a Torah path in life. This was best accomplished by example. A father who studies Torah, who is honest in his dealings, who spends time with his children, who *davens* with a *minyan*, who discusses Jewish concerns with his family and who is charitable, will be the most effective teacher.

I then implored the Congregation to support the Talmud Torah.

In order to do this we needed to have a place in which to conduct classes. The *shul* was located in a small two-story building on 169th Street and Jewel Avenue. Immediately, I recommended to the Board and the president, Mr. Simon Erber, that the bottom floor be divided in half with classroom space set aside for the Talmud Torah.

I was politely informed that there was no budget for teachers. I offered my Rebbitzen as a teacher, knowing that with success the membership would support growth. I also knew that if pushed hard enough, the Board would cooperate. Eventually, ours became one of the most successful Talmud Torahs in Queens.

Much effort was expended to arrive at that level. I reached out to a neighboring area for students and so had to purchase a van to serve as a makeshift school bus. With five hundred dollars to spend, I found a suitable van priced at one thousand and five hundred dollars and commenced negotiating with the wary salesman. We bargained a long time until he agreed to accept $700.00, with a $500.00 down payment and the balance in two months.

Delighted that I had closed the deal at half the price, I failed to notice that the van was made in Germany and received a lot of flak for this oversight. My intentions were good. The school bus was not for my personal gratification. It was to serve the community.

Now we were all set to go, or so I thought. Again, it was a matter of budget. Thank G-d our maintenance man, Charlie Hibler, was a totally dedicated and hard working employee and paid no attention to overtime. He agreed to also drive the school bus. When he wasn't available, I substituted. I had to personally raise all the operating expenses. Rosalie Specter supervised the day to day running of the bus and collected a minimum monthly fee from parents. I was never asked how I managed. Many students came from neighboring Electchester. This naturally increased attendance.

At one point we had twenty students in the Bar Mitzvah class alone, taught by my son-in-law Chanoch Lazarus. Shulamith had 31 children in the first grade and managed to keep order and cram into their fertile minds the beauty of Shabbos and holidays, as well as preparing them for the *siddur.* Rabbi Baruch Charney complimented her and advised our board that ours was the only Talmud Torah that enabled two students to enter the second grade of Yeshiva after but one year in Talmud Torah.

At closing exercises a few years later, Mr. Morris Benathen, chairman of the Education and Cultural Committee, complimented Shulamith and all the capable staff, Mr. Jacob Bernstein, Mr. Yehuda Feldman, Ms. Ruth Levin and Mrs. Paula Shulman, who eventually became the principal of the Talmud Torah.

Within a comparatively short time, we stepped up the enrollment to 150 children. We had two first grades. Our efforts to educate the children did not end there. We ran post-Bar Mitzvah lessons in conjunction with Kew Gardens Hill's Young Israel. Together, Rabbi Schonfeld and I touched hundreds of children's lives in Flushing and Queens.

The Talmud Torah was in no way competing with the day school. It was complementing it. Indeed, I encouraged the students from the Talmud Torah to transfer to the day school.

In those early days, Young Israel was one of the only movements involved in drawing non-observant youngsters into synagogues. I encouraged our synagogue to utilize all our resources to attract them.

I often found myself stepping in as a teacher because either we could not afford to pay the substitutes or they just were not available. I always believed that a class should never be dismissed because of a lack of a teacher, and was prepared to step in.

The same rule applied to all areas of maintaining the *shul,* including sanding down the icy driveways in the wee hours of the morning. Charlie worked long hours but his day did not begin at four a.m.

Chores Performed by the Rabbi

When faced with snowstorms, I was determined that the *shul* would be open and ready for *tefila.* Stepping carefully and noiselessly at four

o'clock in the morning, I left my house, made my way over to the *shul* to shovel the snow and only paused for rest when the frozen pathway was cleared and sanded. I unlocked the *shul,* turned on the heat and lights, satisfied that all was now ready for the morning *minyan.*

One of the first to arrive was Mr. Herman Levine of Jamaica Estates. This dedicated and helpful man hardly ever missed a *minyan* and in fact always called and encouraged others to attend. On such days he was always amazed to see the pathway cleared. Soon other congregants came. "Rabbi, where did you find someone to clear the pathway at this unearthly hour?" they asked me incredulously.

"Where there is a will, there is a way," I smiled.

Blizzards often caused great distress. The snowplows struggled to get through to clear the area. My contacts with the local Queens borough council proved life saving on one of those occasions. Alex May had a sudden heart attack. All the roads were closed. He had to be rushed to the hospital to save his life. I managed to commandeer a garbage truck with snow tires. It whisked him to Queens Hospital where he hovered between life and death. We prayed ceaselessly for his recovery and thanked G-d when he pulled through.

As far as the *shul* was concerned, even though I was doubling as teacher, caretaker and bus driver, I was stretching the budget to its limits. With each passing week I innovated new and exciting programs. The board was quickly discovering that I never ran out of ideas.

My ideas included breakfasts, lectures, *shiurim* and dinners. Most people were caught up in my enthusiasm, but there were always dissenters. I well remember planning for our first dinner.

"What do we need a dinner for?" one board member complained.

To a degree I prevailed. A year after my arrival, we held the first dinner. It wasn't only a fundraising dinner accompanied by speeches and *divrei* Torah but, to my utter dismay it was followed by ballroom dancing. I strenuously objected to the dancing and left before it began. I didn't let the matter go. It was uncomfortable for all concerned to have the rabbi walk out, but I was left with no choice.

Soon, the practice died a natural death. The community became religiously observant and the demand for dances ceased.

This trend towards increased Orthodoxy was apparent in other synagogue affairs as well. I had to fight a battle with several synagogue officials over a New Years Eve party. Celebrating the incoming new year on January 1 was a totally non-Jewish custom. I made it quite clear that the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashana* would be the only New Year to be celebrated in our synagogue. This was not an easy fight to win.

"Rabbi, January first is a secular holiday, not a Christian holiday," Jack Nussbaum, the men's club president said. "Anyway, it's not run by the *shul,* it's run by the men's club."

I was adamant that this party would not take place and stood my ground. The party was canceled and the idea for a New Year's Eve party never came up again. Jack Nussbaum eventually became president of the synagogue. We became very close friends.

Independence and the Synagogue Board

In the early years, I had to consult the Board for the most mundane matters.

I decided that I had to find some kind of forum to express my ideas and propose suggestions to the entire membership. A bulletin would be the answer, an independent voice with a Torah message from me and updated information on community affairs. The Board approved the financial outlay for printing costs while I retained editorial control.

The first bulletin was written, typed by our competent and dedicated secretary, Mrs. Anne Goldgeier and sent to the printers. The copies were stored in a locked cupboard in my office. Only one other person had access to the cupboard apart from me.

I planned to mail out the first bulletin before Shabbos. Using one of the only two existing keys, I unlocked the closet. To my utter amazement, the shelf was empty. Someone had gotten there before me. It could only be that one person and I knew he had an interest in preventing the bulletins from being circulated. In the office that week, he had glanced at a copy and expressed his opposition to a paragraph that recognized the contribution of some members whom he disliked.

I didn't confront him. The harshest punishment was to ignore him and find a solution.

I had invested time and effort in preparing it. More significantly, I had to prove that I was not easily defeated. This was my first difficult encounter in the *shul* and there was no way I was going to bow out gracefully.

I consulted Max Nussbaum. He advised me to photocopy my surviving copy and he would personally cover the cost.

I wish I had seen the face of the perpetrator when the bulletin reached him.

Max Nussbaum, who was also a member of the Hillcrest Jewish Center, was a major contributor who insisted that he never be honored for his generosity. All he asked of me was that I keep an eye on his grandchildren and ensure that they be Sabbath observers. Of course, I did my best to honor his wish.

Mrs. Goldgeier and I published many more bulletins until I discovered the talents of Herb Hoffer. He was an excellent writer and also a future president. He assumed the responsibility and remained the editor until I left Hillcrest.

The Installation

Within two years, the community had already grown considerably. I had postponed a formal installation, wanting to be sure they were certain they would retain me as their rabbi. It was now or never and I consented to the Board's request. I had a three-year contract that would expire the following year.

Apparently our members were certain that they had made the right choice. They were impressed by what I had accomplished and encouraged me to continue.

The ceremony itself was very dignified, organized by several people; the Chairman of the Youth Commission, Mr. Moe Ciner, Editor of the "Young Israel Voice," Mr. Herb Hoffer and Synagogue President, Mr. Simon Erber.

The event was well attended. We were elated to have my *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rabbi Yaakov Ruderman *zt"l*, as keynote speaker. Rabbi Ruderman was introduced by Rabbi Herman Neuberger, *Menahel* of

the Ner Israel Rabbinical Yeshiva. Rabbi Ruderman spoke well of me, "Although I thought Rabbi Kowalsky would remain solely in education, I'm glad to see that he is developing a community that glorifies the Almighty, *Leshem, Lechavod Uletifferes.*"

My proud parents and in-laws beamed as we greeted them. My sisters and their husbands, my brothers-in-law and their wives, as well as many relatives and friends came from far and near.

The hand of the Sisterhood was very apparent. These spirited ladies were a huge asset both to the synagogue and to me. Always at my side, they did their best to help out wherever needed.

Accolades to the Sisterhood

Where would the Talmud Torah, the youth groups and indeed the spirit of our synagogue be without the Sisterhood? They provided funds, ran interesting programs, served refreshments, and often accompanied our youngsters on outings. They attended *shiurim* and often sponsored their own lecturers. As the Young Israel benefited from their devotion so too did they develop spiritually and religiously.

The first president I met was Mrs. Ida Altman who set the tone and inspired her successors.[1]

Each president added her own special mark. I was awed by their contribution and at the same time marveled at their own personal development as they assumed their responsibilities. I well remember Fran Laufer's initial acceptance speech as the paper she held quivered in her hand. But a relatively short time thereafter she became a leader in the greater Orthodox community, speaking extemporaneously without a single note. Our Young Israel was her training ground. In fact, each president assumed office with trepidation only to grow in stature and leadership.

When we first assumed our position in the *shul*, Shulamith was the program chairman. Her goal was to involve numerous members in each program as speakers, actors or singers in plays. This always assured a large turnout and increased membership considerably. As soon as good replacements offered their services (Naomi Perlman, Selma Block and Sara Teicher), she took a back seat and found other ways to assist.

Helen Zeines capably served several terms; Lillian Farkas graduated from her presidency to attend Queens College and acquire a Masters Degree in Education.

Ann Nussbaum gained the confidence to become a good real estate agent. They all had the ability to gain the cooperation of loyal assistants.[2]

An outstanding team was Frieda Gold, her friend Frieda Goldstein, her daughter Julia Haft and granddaughter Erica, three generations of one family dedicated to Sisterhood. Years later Erica's husband, Kevin Leifer, served as president of the synagogue. This family's dedication was emulated later by Susie Hiller, a dynamic chairman of many functions, and her husband Leonard Hiller and their son Danny. Both these men also eventually became presidents of the Congregation.

Expansion

Within a relatively short time our reputation attracted countless newcomers to the vicinity and we were bursting at the seams. Adjacent to the synagogue was a vacant lot that was a natural location for expansion. We had to act quickly to obtain possession of this property. This was achieved as a result of Simon Laufer's drive and energy and the cooperation of the building fund committee.

Zoning laws precluded the expansion of the synagogue. Mr. Ben Glass, an attorney and member, worked tirelessly to obtain a building variance. Once successful, our committee[3] forged ahead towards the purchase of the lot. As usual, we were short of funds. Discreetly, Ida Altman, Fran Laufer, Helen Zeines and Frieda Goldstein urged the Sisterhood to come to our rescue with a ten thousand dollar check.

This modest beginning encouraged a full scale building fund campaign. The goal of $250,000.00 seemed monumental, but with such a large and dedicated committee and with *Seyata D'shmaya* (help of G-d), nothing could deter us.

We engaged the services of architects, Shuman and Lichtenstein. Plans were drawn. We were permitted only two floors. The lower

level was designated for classrooms, a youth lounge with bride's room, a multi-purpose room, office, Rabbi's study and library.

The upper level was designed to house an expanded sanctuary with a majestic *bima,* a social hall, meat kitchen and large entrance hall. There were to be seats for three hundred and fifty people on Shabbos and room for additional chairs for eight hundred worshippers during the High Holy days. It did not take too many years before these chairs were used every week.

The Talmud Torah would comprise five large classrooms and also serve as club or prayer rooms. The library was to be fully equipped to provide *seforim* for members and students. The auditorium or social hall was designed for large gatherings and dinners. The kitchens were to be equipped with modern facilities to provide adequate catering needs.

The estimated cost of the actual building was approximately half a million dollars, a huge undertaking for our still small but rapidly growing community. The initial plan was to ask each member to donate two hundred and fifty dollars. It was an affordable sum and would give us a head start.

We approached the Queens Savings Bank on Main Street for a mortgage. The bank wasn't prepared to approve a large mortgage just because the local rabbi asked for one. I had to prepare the groundwork first.

Weeks before approaching the bank president, I asked members to open savings accounts there. When I finally got an appointment to meet the president, I didn't need much of an introduction. The bank had had a steady flow of new customers referred to them by Rabbi Kowalsky. The president saw that we were hardworking and it would be profitable to have dealings with us. As a result, we were granted a mortgage for seventy five thousand dollars.

The next stage in our campaign was to raise larger sums. Plaques were ordered to honor donors and these were to be placed in the lobby.

These plaques would indicate the benefactors for each section – the Talmud Torah, the cornerstone, *aron kodesh,* eternal light, windows and so on. Of course, we could not raise enough by this method, so

we offered members the option to invest one thousand dollars in the *shul* that would act as a long-term loan. Ten percent of this sum or one hundred dollars would be redeemable every year toward dues and obligations. We commenced two campaigns simultaneously – a fund raising campaign in conjunction with an information campaign. We held open evenings for the builder and architect to explain their plans. Every evening we visited members and neighbors to obtain their pledges.

Eluzer Elimelach Shines

We commenced the construction of the building. When all the walls were up, *davening* took place in the unfinished building.

Well do I recall the memorable Shabbos of my son Eluzer's Bar Mitzvah. The windows were not in place yet. We prayed there would be no rain. Hashem answered our *Tefilos* and as Eluzer *davened, leined* and delivered his *pshetel*, birds could be seen flying in and out.

We could not serve the *seuda* in the synagogue and so invited the entire congregation, family and friends to a gala affair Sunday at the Flushing Jewish Center. Many distinguished guests graced our head table, Rabbi and Mrs. Ruderman, Rabbi and Mrs. Israel Klaven, Mayor Zalman Shragai of Jerusalem and his lovely wife, Shlomo Carlbach, and Shulamith's parents. My parents were in Israel. Many *chavayrim* of the RCA and community leaders kindly celebrated with us.

Eluzer was outstanding in everything – *Tefilos*, *Krias HaTorah* and *Pshetel* and we felt especially blessed.

Life Contract

By 1965, most of the building was complete and the dedication was held. This was a landmark event for the entire community. Nineteen sixty-five also became a personal landmark year for me. Young Israel of Hillcrest awarded me a life contract. Both events were celebrated simultaneously at a gala weekend.

Receiving the *k'sav rabbanus* was a real honor as life contracts were a rarity in 1965. I was elated that the community had chosen me as their *morah d'asrah*, their spiritual leader for life. Simon Laufer, Simon Erber and Morris Benathen were the primary movers in this decision.

sion. They were helped by Alex May, Reiner Auman, Max Weil, Jack Nussbaum, Herb Hoffer, Al Haft and Jack Cohn. Their leadership bore fruit and the vote by the membership was almost unanimous, the only exception being one member. I insisted the decision be unanimous and, eventually, he withdrew his opposition.

"The *k'sav rabbanus* given by your community to its rabbinic leader is in the best of Jewish traditions," the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations wrote to our president, Mr. Laufer. "Young Israel of Hillcrest is setting an example for the entire Jewish community by establishing such permanency of relationship with its rabbi. It is the lack of this permanency which has prevented the true flowering of Torah spirit in many localities.

"Your rabbi is a nationally known rabbinic leader respected for his integrity, for the depth of his convictions and for the courage with which he represents the Torah point of view to the Jewish community and the outside world. His leadership is a blessing not only for the Young Israel but for the entire greater New York Jewry."

Hillcrest was one of the pioneering congregations in this aspect. Several congregations followed suit and offered life tenure to their rabbis.

The Contract

Vice President Morris Banathen was responsible for the text of the contract.

> *The Young Israel of Hillcrest hereby unanimously confers a life tenure on our teacher, Rabbi Sholem Ber Kowalsky, a man of many talents, profound knowledge.*
>
> *He emanates from a dynasty steeped in the pearls of Torah and the fear of G-d (yirat shamaim). He is truly dedicated with all his heart and all his soul to the Torah of Israel and to the people of Israel.*
>
> *For five years, he has served our community with much grace. With his Torah and his faith and the pleasantness of his ways and the righteousness of his words, he has lit up our eyes and made our hearts cleave to the work of the Holy One Blessed Be His Name. With his Torah and with his wise rulings, he has shepherded his flock with*

love, fraternity and friendship and he has raised the honor of his congregation for the glory of G-d.

Therefore we all concur: Give long life to our Rabbi and Teacher of our community so that he may sit on the rabbi's seat in our congregation until the arrival of the prophet at Shiloh.

Let it be the will of our Father in Heaven that the merits of our holy forefathers will protect us and will help us to amass valor and courage to spread Torah and to draw us closer to Him. We pray that we will be brought under the wings of the Divine Presence (Shechina) and that we will occupy ourselves with the needs of the community and the good of our brethren, the Children of Israel in every place they may be.

Let the Holy One Blessed be He prolong Rabbi Kowalsky's life and let his years be filled with goodness and pleasantness and that we together will merit to see Zion in a new light that will shine in our times.

In his times and in ours, Yehuda will surely rest in security and Israel will saved.

We the undersigned, in the name of all the members of our community, approve and immediately implement the community decision to confer on Rabbi Kowalsky life tenure.

The *k'sav rabbanus* was awarded to me at a ceremonial dinner on the gala weekend of February 13, 1965. The tenth of *Adar Alef, Parsha Tetzave.*

The weekend began with a Friday night *oneg* Shabbos chaired by Mr. Alex May and Dr. Mattis Yellin and organized by the Sisterhood. President of the Sisterhood, Mrs. David Blumstein, and President of the Men's Club, Mr. Harry Rosenfeld delivered greetings on behalf of their respective organizations. We were honored to have two distinguished rabbis deliver *divrei Torah* and speeches. A stimulating question and answer period followed the words of Rabbi Marvin Luban of the Young Israel of Forest Hills and Rabbi Ephraim Sturm, National Director of Young Israel.

On Shabbos morning we were privileged to have the famous Cantor Chaskala Ritter, accompanied by the Sapir Choir conduct our

services. Their beautiful melodies enhanced our *tefilos.* President of the National Council of Young Israel, Rabbi David Hill and our neighbor Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld both delivered inspiring sermons and spoke about the *k'sav rabbanus.* Afterwards, Mr. Morris Benathen welcomed the congregation and extended greetings on behalf of the officers, followed by Cantor Jonah Zuckerman who chanted a *mi sheberach* prayer for the safety, health and well being of the Rabbi. Simon Dienstag and Azriel Jacobs were *gabboim.*

A gala dinner was held on *Motzei* Shabbos. Over three hundred fifty people attended the event that was magnificently catered by the Esplanade Caterers. The guest speaker was Rabbi Israel Miller, President of the Rabbinical Council of America.

The entire evening was directed capably by Mr. Jack Cohen. The *k'sav rabbanus* was read by Mr. Simon Laufer. Mrs. Fran Laufer presented a beautiful tea set to my wife and Mrs. David Blumstein presented her with flowers from the Sisterhood. Other presentations included a Bible to the previous year's banquet Chairman Marvin Zborowski in appreciation for his efforts. Alex May was especially warm with his greeting, "First, the Rabbi undertook to increase our membership from a handful of thirty to our present large happy family. His efforts day and night, with no vacations, produced these results. He called upon me on many occasions, as well as most of the Officers and Trustees, to visit people to obtain pledges. He is also our official Minister of Health. I, for one, had the experience to see what the Rabbi does when a member of the congregation is sick, or when G-d forbid, is in distress. I owe my life to the Rabbi."

Yonah Fuld, the Youth Director, delivered greetings on behalf of the youth department. Jack Nussbaum introduced our outstanding toastmaster, Max Weil, who presided over the remainder of the evening including entertainment by Emil Cohen and George Paul. Before dinner, Reiner Auman was honored with saying the *hamotze* and at the conclusion of the meal, my father-in-law, Rabbi Chaim Goodman chanted *Birchas Hamazon.*

Each table was adorned by a beautiful ceremonial journal produced by Jerry Teicher. The journal contained testimonials and greetings.

The Young Israel also received many messages of congratulations,[4] among them, from my *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rabbi Ruderman and from Rabbi Soloveitchik.

The community valued my service and I was grateful for their recognition. But at the same time I was humbled by the occasion.

"We at the Young Israel of Hillcrest are bringing a *korban todah* (thanksgiving offering)," I said. "We are gathered this February 13, (10 Adar I), not to honor me, your rabbi, but rather to show gratitude to the *Rebono Shel olam* for His magnanimity. It was He who directed us to the Torah wilderness of Flushing to build Him a sanctuary destined to provide spiritual comfort to a vast multitude. I am grateful and humble to be the symbol of your *korban todah*."

Onward

Building finished! *K'sav rabbanus* received! What next?

Edifices do not a home make, or a synagogue for that matter. A house needs to be filled with joy and laughter, comradeship, dreams and aspirations, cooperation, trials and tribulations. We certainly had our share of all.

With *Seyata D'shmaya* we were blessed with remarkable presidents[5] who spent endless hours negotiating for property, overseeing building plans and raising funds. This did not however rob us of energy to initiate other activities and seek new approaches to reach out to the membership.

We filled the long Friday evening hours with lectures and *shiurim,* many of which were given by our own members.[6]

We sponsored awareness events to make world events part of our lives.

Yom Haatzmaut, Israeli Independence Day became more meaningful than even July 4. Of course, we were proud to be citizens of the greatest democracy, the most generous nation of the world, the United States. However, the ecstasy we experienced with the creation of a Jewish state in our lifetime after two thousand years of yearning, spiced our existence. We celebrated that day with *Tefila* programs, suppers, singing and Israeli dancing far into the night.

Nor did our enthusiasm end there. Bond drives gave us the opportunity to share in the development of the *Medina* and always

resulted in large purchases. The success of the drive was due to our tireless chairmen, the guests of honor[7] and the Committee.

The U.J.A. drive was cited by the national organization because of our 100% participation. No member declined to donate. The Federation drive was equally successful and often our ladies were guests of honor at their annual luncheon.

A Hebrew Ulpan was organized. This class was under the capable direction of Mrs. Penina Bakst and many were inspired not only with the language but with a love for *Eretz Yisrael.*

Naturally I stressed *aliya.* So often was I engrossed in these discussions that we wondered why even at that early stage I did not set the example. Of course, it did not take too long for that momentous decision.

Remembering the Shoah

The concept of *Zechor*, remember, was brought to the attention of the world by the *Sh'airit Haplayta*, the survivors of the Holocaust. They understood how little was known. For many years their overwhelming pain smothered their ability to even describe in small measure their unbelievable and painful experiences. They, the witnesses, lost all ties, families, loved ones, neighbors, homes, families, citizenship. Humanity had gone mad and disappeared from the horizon. Hashem hid His face – it was a period of complete *Hester ponim.*

How can one visualize camps expressly erected to eradicate a complete nation? A million and a half innocent children were annihilated. Six million human beings created in the image of G-d were burned and gassed!

It took many years for the floodgates of emotions to burst. The time had come to speak out, to remember, to shout "this is what happened!" Perhaps the increased consciousness would assure that such a catastrophe would not be repeated. "We must bear witness", Eli and Marvin Zborowski declared. They organized *Yom HaShoah* commemorations throughout America.

Some time later, Mr. and Mrs. William Mandel who had also been one of the original organizers, donated a six branch electric menorah to be lit at all times in the synagogue. Leonard Hiller and his son Danny became very involved in these *Shoah* programs.

Israel Born Again

If there breathes a being who doubts the hand of G-d in human affairs, the spectacular reestablishment of the modern State of Israel should put his disbelief to rest.

Who could imagine that the nations of the world would finally come to terms with *Netzach Yisrael*? The Jewish people are here! They deserve a place on this earth all to themselves! That speck of land, Israel, was recognized by the United Nations at Lake Success on November 29, 1947, as they approved the establishment of our state.

We held our breath until the last vote was announced, then ran out into the streets and danced and sang for joy far into the night.

We stood in admiration of our indomitable warriors, the Irgun, the Stern Gang, Ben Gurion and the Haganah whose valiant fight against the British occupiers had forced them to abandon their mandate. Entry into the occupied land by the survivors of the Holocaust had been illegally blocked by the British. Yet secret night landings of refugees arriving in rickety boats, the capture of British soldiers and their weapons, the quiet determination of the *olim* were instrumental in ridding our shores of these usurpers. As soon as the British left, David Ben Gurion on the 5th of Iyar 1948 declared the independent State of Israel, *Eretz Yisrael.*

Immediately the Arabs attacked.

Outnumbered, with few weapons, the situation seemed desperate. They urgently needed funds with which to buy weapons. Golda Meir came to the United States determined to raise fifty million dollars.

At that time, the RCA members were attending their annual convention at the Pine View Hotel. The officers and board members were sitting in a conference room on the second floor and trying to decide what our organization could do. The discussion was lengthy and seemed headed nowhere.

I suggested that every Rabbi be obliged to individually raise a specific sum within ten days, to be forwarded to the RCA and immediately given to the Israeli Embassy. The discussion became heated as many members felt they could not assume such an awesome responsibility.

I jumped up, ran to the door, locked it, threw the key out the window and declared, "Gentlemen, no one is leaving until each and every member pledges to raise his share. Israel is in danger. All we need to do is roll up our sleeves and at least share the financial responsibility. We are leaders of congregations. It is our task to mobilize our members. We can do it."

So we did, to the glory and honor of Orthodox Jewry. With pride and determination we rose to the occasion.

The War Years in Israel

Many feel the *Shoah* was the supreme price we paid for a country of our own. Although this was a horrendous price, it was not the only cost. With blood, tears and great sacrifice our *Medina* was established.

Israel withstood major wars. Who can forget the elation and euphoria engendered by the victory of the Six Day War when the present borders were expanded to include our beloved ancient Jerusalem. With its outbreak, once more we immediately commenced raising funds. Many of our youngsters stood on street corners with huge envelopes collecting from all who passed by. Of course, we had appeals in *shul* as well. Thankfully, miraculously, it was over before we could come to our senses.

The *Yom Kippur* War was another trauma. During services that day some of our members were a bit concerned with the outcome of the World Series. The news reached us when one congregant went out to inquire of Charlie Hibler what the score was.

Returning, he ran up to the *bima* and whispered in my ear. I turned white and the *Tefillos* stopped. Informing the congregation what had befallen us, I said *davening* could not just continue. The need to become involved in a tangible, meaningful way overcame me. Immediately I made an appeal to raise funds for an ambulance and medical supplies. When the prayers resumed, the increased fervor was palatable, as each congregant felt it was his or her personal war. At the *Neila* services, I again spoke and said that although we had pledged a monumental sum that afternoon, it was nothing compared to the sacrifice of our brethren. All day the news was relayed to us, and it was grim. I said I would not go home to eat unless we do better and suggested each member double his pledge then and there. So it was. Leonard Hiller and Al Haft worked tirelessly to see this appeal through and within two days the Israeli

Consul received a large check from the Young Israel. My members declared that it was my moving words, "I shall not go home to eat" that brought forth such an outpouring so quickly and so generously. I did not quite agree. The atmosphere of the Holy day, the fear for our country, the intensity of the situation all contributed. The fact that our people were conditioned over many years to respond with care and concern whenever Israel or, for that matter, any Jew was trapped in harm's way, helped propel the Congregation into action.

Lectures

The Yom Kippur War dragged on with much bravery demonstrated by our soldiers. We continued to pray and contribute until finally a breakthrough was achieved and the war drew to an end. Our attention once more was directed to study and activities. To encourage attendance at lectures, I conceived the idea of combining them with a supperette. So started a highly successful venture. We invited respected personalities to address us.[8] Our wonderful Sisterhood prepared the food, made calls, and worked tirelessly to ensure maximum participation at each lecture.

Relationship with Youth

In private homes I held intercollegiate forums and personally discussed problems of concern to the students. I realized that they were heavily burdened and needed much time and expertise. I advised the appointment of a director for college youth to be paid for by the synagogue. Unfortunately, this was deemed too expensive. Rabbi Moshe Goldberg and Dr. Seymour Simpson helped me and volunteered to form a learning group with them.

Our youth department sponsored Shabbatons hosting young people from various cities. Rabbi and Mrs. Charles Weinberg of Boston spent a memorable Shabbos with us. Rabbi Fuld who was now assistant principal of S.A.R. brought his students, as did many others.

We organized a nursery school, as well as a basketball team coached by Elliott Cohen and Richie Levine.

Large delegations of both our youngsters and adults joined the Salute to Israel parade each year. Bernard Suss organized a young marrieds club. Many of these activities were enhanced by either the Sisterhood or our caterer, Mrs. Desser, who provided the refreshments.

Shavuos cultural programs chaired by Dr. Ernest Schwarcz attracted a huge attendance each year in our synagogue.

"Perek on the Green" was another unique idea. During the warm summer weeks on Shabbos, we assembled on the lawns of our members to listen to *Perek shiurim.* This program was extremely popular and before long had to be moved to the synagogue. The lawns were simply not big enough.

With the coming of cold weather, Shulamith instituted weekly Torah portion *shiurim* given by women for women in the synagogue.

An Expanded Youth Department

Our majestic new synagogue continued to expand. Alone, I could not possibly continue to serve all segments of our membership. Our young members needed a tremendous amount of time and energy. Our youth leader at this time was a recent graduate of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Yonah Fuld, who followed Rabbi Richard Auman. We engaged his services both as youth director and teacher. Eventually, he also became principal of the Talmud Torah. Rabbi Fuld blossomed in our midst, arriving as an inexperienced youthful graduate and eventually becoming an important personality in the community. We organized a *Chevra Kadisha* and Rabbi Fuld became its head with Rabbi Richard Auman and Dr. Stanley Halpern assisting him. When the *Eruv* committee was formed, he was encouraged to head it as well. I personally assigned him to be *magid shiur* of one of the most important *shiurim* Shabbos afternoon. With these experiences, Rabbi Fuld acquired a reputation that was to serve him well in future years.

At this time, Rabbi Fuld's primary responsibility was the youth department which flourished under his leadership. Soon we realized that our facilities were too cramped and tried to purchase the ranch house adjacent to our property.

The owner was happy with his home, a delightful house. However, he was certainly not satisfied with his neighbor. Although he himself was Jewish, he was very hostile to religion to the extent that he chose *Yom Kippur* to mow his lawn.

Just about that time, the man's father died. Although he had no intention of consulting me to organize a Jewish burial for his father, I had other plans. The man certainly didn't want to seek my advice

and was more than a little annoyed to see me standing on his doorstep later that day. He was never particularly fond of rabbis, especially the rabbi from the Orthodox synagogue next door.

"You are the Rabbi, aren't you? What do you want?" he asked me gruffly.

"I want to help you arrange a proper Jewish funeral for your father," I said. "I'm not here as a rabbi, I'm here as a neighbor and I will not charge you."

He wasn't interested, but his wife was a little more practical and invited me in. Once inside it was easier for me to influence him.

Eventually, I took care of all the funeral arrangements, affording his father the respect accorded to a member of the Jewish faith. I also persuaded him to recite *Kaddish* for his father and to sit *shiva*. Every day I was there with *Divrei Torah* to awaken his frozen heart.

That year, he attended daily services to recite *Kaddish*. When he decided to sell his house, he surprisingly did not put it up for sale.

"Rabbi, I'm offering you the option to buy my house. I know you have health problems. If you moved next to the *shul*, it would be much easier for you to get to services during the cold winter months," he said.

His offer was genuine. Certainly I had no intention of buying the house for myself. As it was, I was already part rabbi, part teacher, part driver and part *shamash*. I was on call practically day and night and did not want to increase my availability by moving right next to the *shul*.

Yet this was the offer I had been waiting for. The property would be the prefect site for the youth center. The next problem was how to raise $43,000. Once again, we managed to raise the down payment from private donors with Yosef Steglitz helping to get a mortgage and Irwin Shimoff donating legal services. Soon the property belonged to the synagogue. My friend, Rabbi Avraham Moshe Kahana rented it, with the understanding that he would vacate when we were ready to renovate.

Mikvah

The ranch house owner was right about one thing. My deteriorating health was becoming a matter of great concern. By 1969, I had my first heart attack.

Chapter Eight

I was forty-eight years old and not in the best of health. Two years earlier, I lost part of a lung because of histoplasmosis. On a lecture tour in Mexico, I took ill and returned to New York and spent the following months in and out of hospitals.

On my way home from *shul* on *Shemini Atzeres* in 1969, I suddenly felt sharp chest pains and was rushed to the hospital.

I had just embarked on a very important project – to build a *mikvah* in Hillcrest. This was a matter very close to my heart, recalling the sad words of the Chofetz Chaim, "The *mitzvah* of *mikvah* lies buried in the ground", meaning that it is a neglected *mitzvah*.

Despite the fact that I felt strongly committed to building a *mikvah* in Hillcrest, the subject had not yet been discussed with the Board. It was a very expensive project and I knew their reluctance to spend additional money.

This was to be purely an independent undertaking. A non-profit organization was formed with interested parties residing in Hillcrest and Kew Gardens Hills. Nathan Sapperstein, an attorney, and the president of the Young Israel of Kew Garden Hills assisted. Of course, we expected our synagogue's help.

Frankly, the subject of *mikvah* was not discussed very much in Hillcrest. People erroneously assumed that building a *mikvah* in the neighborhood would open a Pandora's box. They feared that a public discussion might lead to exposure of who did or did not observe *Taharas Hamishpacha*.

My idea was to have the *mikvah* run by women for women with no interference from anyone.

The nearest *mikvah* was in Kew Gardens Hills, approximately a twenty-minute walk. During the week, this was not far, a short drive by car. On Friday night or a festival night, in winter, it was a different matter.

Our new synagogue complex, replete with Talmud Torah, youth center, adult education institute, men's club and sisterhood, would be incomplete without a *mikvah*.

The plans called for building the *mikvah* in spacious premises that could accommodate a *mikvah* downstairs and a beauty parlor upstairs. Unlike other *mikvaot*, it was to be located on the main road and not off the beaten track. We assumed that women would feel more comfortable

using a *mikvah* that would be indistinguishable from other buildings rather than attending a *mikvah* that was tucked away on a side street.

Convinced that building a *mikvah* was imperative, I clandestinely proceeded with plans to build one. Searching for properties for sale, a one-family house on Jewel Avenue was shortly identified as being suitable and affordable.

The house was selling for thirty two thousand dollars. After advancing the initial down payment of ten percent on the property, I was ready to go public with my plan. Within sixty days, the contract had to be ratified and the balance paid.

Kol Nidre night was the optimum time to inform the congregation. Surely in the *zechus* of the *Yom Kippur* atmosphere the *mikvah* project would come to fruition. Every *Kol Nidre* night the *shul* was packed to capacity. More than one thousand worshippers crowded into the *shul* upstairs and several hundred more were squeezed into a second *minyan* downstairs to participate in the awe-inspiring *Yom Kippur* prayers.

That particular *Kol Nidre* night, I felt particularly elevated by the mournful tunes of the *Kol Nidre* service. As I rose to speak, I could feel the electrified atmosphere of the people seated before me, fasting and praying together.

After the opening comments about the solemnity of *Yom Kippur*, I announced that a house suitable for a *mikvah* of our own in Hillcrest had been bought.

"There are many components which go into the making of a community, particularly, an Orthodox Torah observant *Kehila.* If we give serious thought to the matter, we readily see that Hillcrest is lacking in one very basic and important institution. A *mikvah.*" I then delved into the topic of family purity.

My words were received with a shocked silence. I had dropped a bombshell. The atmosphere remained charged. After the conclusion of the services, people discussed the rabbi's words. The discussions continued throughout *Succos.*

We had time until after *Succos* to come up with an additional $30,000 to finalize the purchase. It wasn't an enormous amount of money, considering that we were buying a house. On the other hand, it was a significant amount to raise in a short period of time for a novel idea.

There was a substantial number of people who resisted or were indifferent to a *mikvah*. To convince the community and rally support for the project took many hours of persuasive discussions. It was definitely a tense time for me, and during *Succos*, as the deadline for going forward neared, the tension mounted. Unfortunately, the stress took its toll and I suffered my first heart attack on *Shemeni Atzeres*.

Recovering in the hospital, it was hard for me to relax. I had too much unfinished business waiting for me. At the top of the list was the *mikvah*. If we didn't act quickly we stood to lose the property.

There wasn't much I could do in the hospital, yet I could not stop worrying and decided to find someone to take over the project until I was well enough to continue. This was easier said than done.

A meeting of all the rabbis and senior community members from the Young Israel of Hillcrest was in order. Hillcrest had many ordained rabbis who were members of the *shul*. They were not pulpit rabbis but rather educators, college professors and academicians. I asked Shulamith to call this meeting. The idea was that she would present the plan and try to convince someone to take over the project. As hard as she tried to impress upon them the importance of building a *mikvah* in the neighborhood, no one agreed to assume the responsibility of spearheading the effort.

The date to make good on the contract came and went as I continued to recuperate. The dream fizzled. In hindsight, perhaps I should have left the men out of the picture. Had Shulamith gathered members of the Sisterhood together, the results might have been different.

This was one of the greatest disappointments of my life. There was another yet to come.

The Myth of the Prosperous Rabbi

In spite of all our accomplishments, in spite of the adulation and cooperation I received, there were personal pains.

"The Rabbi is wealthy." That was a popular misconception. The congregants knew I was paid a modest salary, yet we seemed to lack for nothing. My children were nicely dressed and attended yeshivos where the tuition was high. The synagogue provided a down payment of four thousand dollars for a house, but the mortgage was my responsibility. I owned a car and never complained. Was I wealthy? Certainly not in money, only in family and dignity.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, full-time community rabbis, including myself, eked out meager salaries. The synagogue board always balked at giving the rabbi a substantial raise, even when individual members prospered.

When first interviewed for the job at Hillcrest, the board informed me that the salary was very small, commensurate with the size of the community. In fact, I took a substantial salary cut upon leaving my position in New Bedford. Despite this, we wanted to move our family to New York, where an Orthodox Jewish day school system would be more readily available. Moreover, Shulamith was pregnant with our fourth child and her dream was to be close to family.

The position in Hillcrest seemed optimal from every angle, except the financial one. The salary was so low that Yeshiva University offered me a stipend for the first two years to help supplement my income and allow me to take higher education courses at the university. A little later, I supplemented my income with *kashrus* work at a local nursing home where kosher food and Sabbath services for the Jewish residents were introduced by me.

I also received some gifts from community members for services performed, including weddings and funerals. The money from the funerals was donated to the Torah Fund and I certainly didn't get rich from officiating at the infrequent weddings from this young congregation.

Fortunately, I wasn't resentful. There was one big advantage that outweighed the struggle to support my family. Young Israel of Hillcrest never owned me. I was independent, maintaining the right to veto any program not acceptable to me and I didn't have to automatically rubber stamp decisions by the Board – I was never their "yes man." Therefore, I was able to be a better spiritual leader, capable of making controversial decisions. They had a double-time rabbi receiving a quarter-time salary.

Throughout my twenty-plus years at Hillcrest I never bemoaned my financial plight or asked for a raise. Bank loans were available, though at a high interest rate.

Even when the community awarded me a life contract, I was grossly underpaid – receiving a raise of five hundred dollars. When I lay sick in the hospital recuperating from a heart attack, it never

occurred to the synagogue officers to provide extra funds to defray the increased costs of medical care or to tide the family over.

Yosef Yaacov's Day

Prosperous or not, Yossi's Bar Mitzvah was celebrated in style. This little rebel grew up and surprised us with a masterful rendition of his *Pshetel*, *Krias HaTorah* and beautiful *davening.*

We preferred to celebrate in our own synagogue. The congregation had grown tremendously so the dining hall was not large enough to accommodate all our guests at one time. Therefore, Sunday afternoon we entertained about four hundred family and friends, and then in the evening five hundred Hillcrest members. All told it was an exhilarating day with *divrei Torah* delivered by our Rabbinic friends, music, dancing, singing and partaking of a sumptuous repast. Mrs. Desser, our caterer, outdid herself.

Yes, the memory still lingers on.

---

1. Sisterhood presidents who served during my tenure – Ida Altman, Mollie Balsam, Evelyn Beeber, Blanche Blachman, Selma Block, Pearl Bumstein, Lillian Bruder, Mimi Danziger, Alice Erber, Lillian Farkas, Frieda Gold, Sarah Gutenmacher, Estelle Krim, Florence Langert, Fran Laufer, Ann Nussbaum, Naomi Perlman, Iris Schacter, Daisy Solomon, Sara Teicher, Helen Zeines

2. Edith Auman, Marian Adler, Helen Magier Braun, Lilly Cohen, Ella Berenstein, Beverly Flaum, Rita Halpern, Gusta Goldstoff, Matilda Grosser, Marcia Hirschfeld, Dorris Klein, Esther Keller Meier, Pearl Kurtz, Rae Leichtman, Marcia Levine, Caroline Nathan, Lea Mathews, Lorraine Nelson, Rae Perlistsh, Judy Sanders, Rae Simon, Faye Schlossberg, Jean Slovin, Lola Tennenbaum, Betty Weiner, Tola Zukerman and Ida Zukerman.

3. Reiner Auman, Chairman, Moe Ciner, Jack Cohen, Simon Erber, Simon Gold, Leon Goldstein, Al Haft, Herb Hoffer, Sam Kristal, Simon Laufer, Alex May, Aaron Nathan, Jack and Max Nussbaum, Max Root, Joseph Steiglitz, Jerry Teicher, Henry Tenenbaum, Max Weil, Marvin Zborowaski, Henry Zeines, Charles Zuckerman, Cantor Jona Zuckerman

4. Vaad Haraborim of Queens, the Union of Orthodox Congregations, the National Council of Young Israel and the Rabbinical Council of America, *Chinuch Atzmai* of Israel, Yeshiva Hadorom of Israel, Yeshiva of Central Queens, and Yeshiva Tomchei Teminim, Rabbi Louis Isbee and Rabbis Irving and Isaac Goodman.

5. Presidents who served in my time – Maurice Ballabon, Jack Cohen, Simon Erber, Sam Greenfield, Leonard Hiller, Herbert Hoffer, Leonard Krim, Simon Laufer, Aaron Nathan, Jack Nussbaum, Joseph Rubin, Kieve Stubenhouse, Bernard Suss, Max Weil and Marcel Weisman.

6. Lecturers – Dr. Herbert Danziger, Dr. Norman Fredman, Rabbi Yona Fuld, Rabbi Simcha Lent, Dr. Harris Neirman, Rabbi Jonas Prager, Dr. Ernest Schwarcz, Rabbi Isaac Suna, Rabbi Jonah Weinberg, Dr. Sol Weintraub and Dr. Mattis Yellin.
7. Ignaz Brand, Henry Bernstein, Moe Ciner, Sam Greenfield, Avi Hauptman, Murray Harris, Zriel Jacobs, Nachmen Kanovsky, Leonard Klirsfeld, Leo Kaminer, David Klapholz, Sam Kristal, Joseph Kuznitz, Kevin Leifer, Jack Lubliner, Isak Litwin, Jack Lichtman, David Marcus, Mark Montag, Aaron Nathan, Harry Rosenfeld, Hy and Morris Sanders, Marc Sieratzski, Reubin Slovin, Leo Skulnick, Simi Schnall, William Solomon, Bernard Suss, Henry Tennenbaum, Jerry Teicher, David Weinberg, Henry Zeines, Charlie Zuckerman, Marvin Zborowski, and all officers of the congregation.
8. Mr. Eliyahu Amikam, Rabbi Joshua Bakst, Dr. Maurice Ballaban, Rabbi Louis Bernstein, Mr. Robert Coleman, Dr. Herbert Danziger, Rabbi Y. Dolgin, Prof. Abraham Duker, Rabbi Norman Fredman, Rabbi A. Goldwirth, Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt, Rabbi Manny Holzer, Dr. Sidney Hoenig, Mr. Gershon Jacobson, Rabbi Jason Jacobowitz, Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, Rabbi Gilbert Klaperman, Rabbi Jacob Kleinman, Dr. Norman Lamm, Rabbi Simcha Lent, Minister G. Katz, Rabbi Aron Lichtenstein, Rabbi Israel Miller, Rev. Haily Moshe Paris, Rabbi Pinchas Pelly, Dr. Jonas Prager, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, Rabbi Chaim Rappaport, Rabbi Bernard Rosenzweig, Rabbi Zalman Scharfman, Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, Dr. Ernest Schwarcz, Rabbi Herbert Silverberg, Rabbi Sol Silverman, Rabbi Isaac Suna, Rabbi Simcha Teitelbaum, Rabbi Jonah Weinberg, Dr. Sol Weintraub, Dr. Mattis Yellin, Mr. Chaim Zohar.



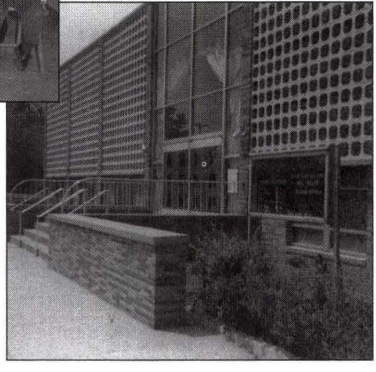
Our bus on the way to the Hillcrest Talmud Torah, Flushing, N.Y.



Hillcrest Talmud Torah class, Mr. Berenstein, teacher



First year Talmud Torah, Mrs. Shulamith Kowalsky, teacher



Young Israel of Hillcrest – New building, under the leadership of Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
לשם לכבוד ולתפארת

Young Israel of Hillcrest participating in Israel Day Parade – this picture appeared in the NY Times





Hachnasas Sefer Torah procession – presented to Young Israel of Hillcrest by the May family



Presenting the Ketav Rabbanut Life Contract, 1965, Simon Laufer, President, Mr. Rosenfeld, chairman of the Mens Club and Alex May chairman of the Board

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, MARCH 22, 1965.

Orthodox Rabbis Elect A National Chairman



Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky

The Council of Young Israel Rabbis announced yesterday the election of Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky of Hillcrest, Queens, as its national chairman. The Council represents 100 Orthodox synagogues throughout the country.

Rabbi Kowalsky is first vice president of the Rabbinical Board of Queens, treasurer of the Rabbinical Council of America and a chaplain at the Queens House of Detention. He is a graduate of the Rabbinical College Ner Israel in Baltimore.

Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld of Kew Garden Hills, Queens, was elected secretary of the council.



My installation – Mr. Morris Bennaton, chairman and close personal friend (seated to my left), Herb Hoffer and Max Weil



My installation as Rabbi of Hillcrest, 1960 – Rabbi Ruderman, Rosh Ha Yeshiva of Ner Israel, Baltimore seated on far left



Mrs. Frieda Goldstein representing sisterhood of Young Israel of Hillcrest at the installation of Shul officers



Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky presents his wife, Shulamith, with a medal for being the most devoted Rebbetzin to Young Israel of Hillcrest, "This is your life Dinner", 1974



Guest speaker Rabbi Israel Klaven, executive Vice President RCA



Rabbi Manny Marcus – in charge of placement for Yeshiva University who recommended me for the job in Newark and Hillcrest – congratulating Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky



Mr. and Mrs. Simon Enber at reception with Shulamith and myself. Simon was the first president who was instrumental in electing me as the Rabbi of the Young Israel of Hillcrest

HIGHLANDS 5-4687

יוסף דוב הלוי סאלאוויטשיק
JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK
24 HUTCHINGS STREET
ROXBURY 21, MASS.

יום ה', ח' תשרי,
תשכ"ב

June 22, 1961

Dear Rabbi Kowalsky,

In reply to your letter of June 9, I wish to advise you that I have always considered the supervision of a business establishment engaged in catering Kosher and non-Kosher food to be extremely unwise. Any Rabbi endorsing the Kashruth of such an establishment assumes responsibilities far more complex than those involved in supervising a catering business specializing in Kosher food.

Judging by past experiences I am inclined to assume that the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of America and the Rabbinical Council of America were right in refusing to endorse the Kashruth in establishments where both kinds of food are served.

Sincerely yours,
Joseph Soloveitchik

Katz brothers sued. This is a letter from Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik which caused the case to be thrown out of court (See Chapter 9)



Dinner honoring Rabbi Kowalsky in the Young Israel of Hillcrest Standing Left to Right: Rabbi Herman Neuberger, President of Ner Israel Rabbinical College, Rabbi and Mrs. Manny Holtzer, Chairman of OU Rabbinic Committee Sitting left to right: Rabbi and Mrs. Sturm and Rabbi and Mrs. Fabian Schonfeld



Installation of Rabbi Kowalsky, Young Israel of Hillcrest



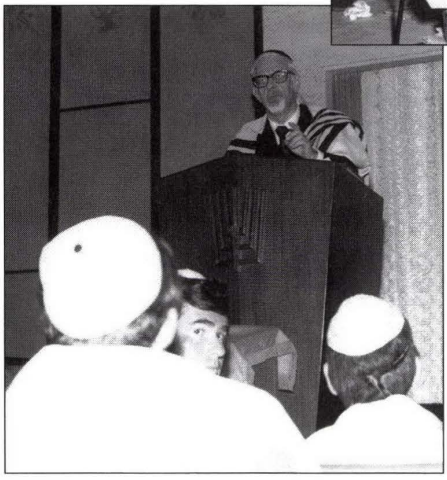
Rav Ruderman at the installation of Rabbi Kowalsky, Young Israel of Hillcrest



Installation of Rabbi Kowalsky, Young Israel of Hillcrest Left to right: My father Rabbi Chaim Nachman Kowalsky, myself, Rabbi David Hill, President of National Council of Young Israel, and Rabbi Moshe Sherer, President of Agudath Israel of America



Mrs. Shulamith Kowalsky speaking at the installation of Sisterhood



Rabbi Kowalsky speaking to the youth after Shacharis on Yom HaShoa at the Young Israel of Hillcrest

ב"ה

SECOND ANNUAL

CULTURAL FORUM

1963-5723

sponsored by

Young Israel of Hillcrest

in cooperation with

Sisterhood & Mens Club of Y. I.

General Theme

JUDAISM AND THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN LIVING

Presenting Distinguished Lecturers, Scholars and Artists

AT THE

Auditorium of the Synagog

169-07 JEWEL AVENUE

FLUSHING 65, N. Y.

OL 8-9226

"לב אבות על בנים ולב בנים על אבותם

ב"ה

ANNUAL

CULTURAL FORU

1967-68 – 5728

sponsored by

Young Israel of Hill

in cooperation with

Sisterhood & Mr. & Mrs.

General Theme

INVISIBLE OR INVINCIBLE

CAN I LIVE AS A JEW IN AMERICA?

Presenting Distinguished Lecturers, Scholars and Artists

AT

169-07 JEWEL AVENUE

FLUSHING, N. Y. 11365

JA 3-4030

"והשיב לב אבות על בנים ולב בנים על אבותם"

ב"ה

ANNUAL

CULTURAL SUPPER FORUM

1968-69–5729

sponsored by

Young Israel of Hillcrest

in cooperation with

Sisterhood & Mr. & Mrs. Club

General Theme

SOCIAL CHANGES IN THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Presenting Distinguished Lectures, Scholars and Artists

AT

169-07 JEWEL AVENUE

FLUSHING, NEW YORK 11365

JA 3-4030

ולב בנים על אבותם
והשיב לב אבות על בנים

Rabbi In The Community

Determined to be their *manhig*, I turned my attention not only to general synagogue problems and expansion plans, but to the myriad needs of individual members.

A respected gentleman in our synagogue faced a very painful situation. He was a devoted husband and father who had committed a felony and was convicted in a Federal court. In spite of the brilliant lawyers that defended him, he was sentenced to three years in a Federal penitentiary. He appealed and I attended the appeal.

I entered the courtroom apprehensive, yet hopeful.

As the case progressed, it seemed the judge was not moved. Dramatic action was absolutely necessary. Arising, I drew his attention by exclaiming, "Your Honor, I, Sholem B. Kowalsky, Rabbi of the defendant, ask if you will kindly permit me to approach the bench."

"Permission granted," he responded.

Shaking, I slowly approached him. My success might save the family and the community. I did not even want to think about the *loshon hara* that would surely erupt if this man were incarcerated.

"Your Honor, what I have to say should be heard in your private chamber. Would you be good enough to permit this?"

He agreed. After about an hour in his chambers, he reentered the courtroom and announced, "Case postponed until I investigate what the Rabbi told me."

Eventually the Judge reconsidered and the sentence was revoked.

A Helping Hand

Visiting the sick and lonely was a responsibility I took very seriously.

Rabbi Simcha Teitelbaum was rushed to Long Island Jewish Hospital with a serious heart ailment. His condition was critical. The family hovered over him and waited breathlessly as the chief surgeon examined him. "Perhaps an operation might save him," the doctor said, "But he is too weak and I fear that if I operate he will not make it."

Obviously it seemed useless to him to operate. The doctor was certain, either way the patient would not live through the night. He excused himself and prepared to leave.

I was aghast. Not even to try! I ran up to the doctor, grabbed his coat lapel and shouted, "We must try everything. We just can't let him die. Operate and G-d will guide your hands. You cannot leave."

He was taken aback and angry. We were both extremely agitated. I stepped to the door and stood there. He watched me and slowly calmed down.

"Okay. If that is your decision, pray. I will do my best, but remember I warned you."

We remained transfixed in the room as we recited *Tehillim.* It seemed like endless hours later that the exhausted doctor returned. Simcha's life was extended a number of years and the Yeshiva continued to reap the benefits of this dedicated man and great educator.

The Issue: Minority Housing in Hillcrest

Before long, I reluctantly became involved in politics. It certainly was not on my agenda. How was I drawn into the sidelines of this battleground?

In 1971, New York Mayor John Lindsay declared his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for President. He was challenging George McGovern. I had an old score to settle with Lindsay and was anxious to see him defeated.

Ordinarily, I kept my personal political preferences to myself and refrained from using the pulpit to endorse any politician or political cause except for Israel. If I ever made a political statement from the pulpit, it was to encourage people to do their civic duty and vote.

Mayor Lindsay was no stranger to Hillcrest or the Va'ad HaRabbanim of Queens. We had had ongoing negotiations with Lindsay ever since he introduced plans for the City to build low cost housing for minorities in our neighborhoods.

Lindsay, a tall, handsome man with a pleasant demeanor, was a smooth talker. He wasn't a personal adversary, but as our protracted negotiations continued, I knew that Lindsay wasn't ready for any compromise. He was a "bleeding heart liberal," and I was an Orthodox Jewish liberal. There was going to be a clash and one of us was going to crash – hopefully Lindsay.

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, low cost housing had become a nationwide necessity. Inner cities were crammed with low income groups crowded together in slum areas. This in turn caused an increase in the crime rate – an already high statistic in the United States compared to other nations in the Western world.

I appreciated the socio-economic causes. Lack of adequate housing was a factor. Moreover, my head was not buried in the sand. This problem affected us even if it was not yet in our backyard. However, to disturb the relative tranquillity of our neighborhood and catapult crime right into our backyard was not a solution.

There was no choice but to strenuously fight City Hall. I talked to other rabbis, clergy, lay leaders and politicians in Queens. They were generally sympathetic, but sympathy is a far cry from action. It became quickly obvious that people in neighboring Fresh Meadows were not as perturbed as we were, despite their geographical proximity to our neighborhood.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld and I garnered enough support to organize mass demonstrations in front of City Hall. We did this after Mayor Lindsay refused to come to Hillcrest during Chanukah to discuss the matter.

Lindsay's policy for introducing low cost housing into middle class neighborhoods was part of an overall policy to integrate

neighborhoods. We knew that during Chanukah he would be able to see our already integrated community. The Jewish residents exhibited lit *menorot* in their living room windows. Their Christian neighbors lit and decorated Christmas trees in their front windows or yards. A policy of "live and let live" reigned supreme. In my mind's eye, this was a fine example of integration.

Although never personally participating in the demonstrations – I definitely supported their goals. I sincerely believed that demonstrations were an effective tool to influence local public opinion and draw media attention, and so I played an active role by organizing a bus motorcade to City Hall. We had already circulated an open letter to the New York media. The demonstrations served to beef up our message.

Thousands of Queens Borough residents showed up, as well as sympathizers from other New York boroughs. Lindsay wasn't moved. He was determined to erect low-cost housing in Hillcrest at any cost, even at the risk of losing Jewish support for his upcoming campaign. Moreover, if he could not build in Hillcrest, then he proposed Forest Hills as an alternative.

To my regret, the Jewish population of Queens could not present a united opposition to City Hall. The spiritual leader of the Conservative congregation, Rabbi Israel Moshowitz, declared publicly that he was not averse to the housing project.

His approach angered me. "When you're ready to build low cost housing in your backyard, then we'll build low cost housing in our vicinity," I said to him.

Overall the message was beginning to hit home. New York was traditionally a Democratic bastion and the Jewish voter usually supported the Democratic candidate. Lindsay decided to take his chances. He was convinced he could garner enough support from the African - American, Hispanic, Italian and Irish communities and need not depend on the Jewish vote.

Lindsay was not operating in a vacuum. He had a lot of support from liberal Democrats in New York, including New York Senator Jacob Javits, who was Jewish.

Javits reiterated the prevalent political thinking of the Democrats. His message to the lower and upper middle classes and to

the Jewish community was clear. "You'll have to share your wealth, otherwise there will be trouble."

Realizing the seriousness of our predicament both on a professional and a personal level – I stood to lose my job if they succeeded – I had to swing into action. If Lindsay's plan passed, the Young Israel of Hillcrest would be unable to attract more young families and the Jews would begin to move out.

It was public knowledge that Lindsay planned to open his campaign that summer in Miami Beach, a city with a large Jewish community, known as the gateway to the South. This event coincided with a trip to Israel that I had already planned. I was determined that Lindsay and his entourage would feel my presence even if I was not there in person.

The Strategy

The strategy was to disrupt his opening campaign speech without resorting to heckling. It was a two-pronged assault. The first was to distract the crowds from Lindsay and the second, which was just as important, was to get our message across to potential voters.

I flew to Miami Beach to canvas public opinion. I met with various clergymen and local community leaders. My message was simple – if it can happen in Hillcrest, it can happen in Miami Beach. I explained that Lindsay was running on a liberal ticket. He felt he had enough support from interest groups representing lower income ethnic citizens to win the nomination. "He has their interests – albeit genuinely deserving causes – at heart, but the lower middle class and upper middle class will suffer the consequences." I said.

The thrust of my words were that Mayor John Lindsay's policies were noble, but we also had rights and it was in the interests of us all to prevent him from encroaching on our territory.

This was the essence of democracy in America. I had grown up in a society where my personal rights and religious freedoms had been grossly violated. I was not going to stand by silently ever again and watch Jews become subservient to others.

After several meetings with the Miami leadership, the message seeped through and some clergymen agreed to use their pulpits

to spread the word – Lindsay was not a good choice. Others agreed not to invite Lindsay to address their congregations.

However, the problem remained. How were we to reach potential voters during the opening campaign speech? Basically, it boiled down to saying, "Don't vote for Lindsay", without actually mouthing the words.

One idea was to distribute fliers, but fliers have a tendency to do exactly that – to fly. It wasn't powerful enough. We had to come up with an idea that would be both gimmicky and powerful.

Write it in the Skies

Visiting Miami Beach many times over the years and strolling on the boardwalk I often saw Pipers, light civil aircraft flying overhead leaving a smoky message trailing behind. This was an extremely popular and relatively successful advertising method for beach resorts.

Here was the perfect idea. Elated at having hit on a solution, I reported back to the Va'ad HaRabbanim of Queens and got their approval. This battle involved the whole Queens community.

Immediately, I set the wheels in motion. I signed a contract hiring a Piper for several hours on Sunday, choosing our message carefully. I left for Israel assured that matters were under control.

Succinct and to the Point

"Lindsay spells *tzoras* for the Jews."

This was our slogan. Fortunately for us, Lindsay arrived in Miami on a cloudless day. The sun was shining and the turnout was excellent. At midday, he mounted the podium and moved close to the microphones. Miraculously no amount of amplification could drown out the drone of the Pipers circling lazily overhead.

As soon as he opened his mouth, the whir of the light aircraft hovering above distracted the crowds. Their attention was riveted on reading the message in the sky: "Lindsay spells *tzoras* (trouble) for the Jews."

Aides looked alarmed, and expecting more trouble, immediately closed ranks around the prospective candidate. Lindsay was livid. Face growing redder by the minute, he finished his prepared speech and was quickly hustled away.

The flak was tremendous. Friends called me in Israel to give me first hand reports of the fiasco that I had created. "Good job, well done", was the general consensus.

The Fallout

Lindsay's aides were furious. They set about finding the culprit. This proved to be an easy mission. I had advanced funds and signed for the aircraft. "We'll get the guy who did this," one of them said.

From then on I was blacklisted by the Lindsay New York City administration. The Va'ad HaRabbanim of Queens and community leaders continued to meet with Lindsay, but without me.

News spread like wildfire. I was *persona non grata* at City Hall. Administrative aides advertised that, "Mayor John Lindsay will not sit with Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky at the same table."

This rebuff was a compliment. However, that was not the end of the episode.

I had exercised my democratic right of freedom of speech and expression. Lindsay wanted his pound of flesh. He succeeded.

For close to a decade I had served as a Chaplain for the Prison Services in Queens. Even though the New York Board of Rabbis appointed me to the position, I was a New York State employee. After ten years, I would be entitled to a New York State pension. Lindsay managed to terminate my job just prior to the end of my tenth year.

Legally, I could have sued the City for unjust dismissal but I wanted to avoid any more controversial publicity. As it was, I had to weather a certain amount of criticism from some congregants who claimed that I spent too much time on politics and not enough time within the community. A screaming New York Post headline, "Rabbi Sues City" would not have helped my standing too much.

Still, I had one more card up my sleeve and the time had come to play it.

I attempted one more maneuver. Abraham Beame was the New York City Comptroller in Lindsay's administration, and I appealed to his integrity and to his Jewish conscience to have the dismissal notice rescinded. Moreover, Beame had a reputation as a fair man.

At a public meeting I addressed him. "Avremele, you're supposed to be an *ish chesed* (a kind man)." His reaction was cold. He resented the familiarity of how he was addressed and joined forces with Lindsay.

Lindsay did not win the Democratic nomination and rescinded his proposal to build the housing project in Hillcrest. Low cost housing was eventually constructed in neighboring Forest Hills, but it was a compromise project. With the ardent help of Rebbitzen Grunblatt, mainly Russian Jewish immigrants moved in.

The Rabbi is a "Political Animal"

As much as I tried to keep my activities under wraps, these endeavors came to the notice of the New York Democratic Congressman, Benjamin Rosenthal, who lived in Queens.

"I tip my hat to the Rabbi who is able to protect his flock," Congressman Rosenthal said.

I had several meetings with Congressman Rosenthal over the years. Unfortunately, he died young, leaving the Queens Borough seat vacant in Congress. Leading Jewish residents of Queens were anxious to fill the seat with a Jewish candidate. Supreme Court Judge Benjamin Glass and Queens Borough President Donald Manes approached me with an offer to run on the Democratic ticket for the congressional seat.

I took the offer seriously. It came from Donald Manes whom I knew well. He was an effective borough president always available to help in any Jewish endeavor and was generally popular in our community. He was not an Orthodox Jew but he adhered to a traditional Jewish lifestyle, and was a member of a congregation in Jamaica Estates where he lived with his family.

Manes admired rabbis and always remained on good terms with them. He helped the Young Israel of Hillcrest to win the necessary variances for the *shul* building and advised us on how to handle the construction. Twice he issued proclamations in my honor when the congregation honored me.

He was particularly responsive to any issues connected to Israel and never failed to offer political help. At this time, Manes and Ben Glass said they were looking for a candidate who was "an active person willing

to fight for his beliefs and ideas." This was true, but they never stopped to question my beliefs. I was actually a closet Republican.

I was tempted though, even if the thought of campaigning was exhausting. But there were other considerations. If the seat was won, it would mean moving my family once again, this time to Washington DC. Since I always played to win, this was a serious consideration even before the race.

True, I played to win but that didn't mean that success would be assured. Hence, my second consideration – the risk factor. I had received a life contract from the Young Israel of Hillcrest, at a time when it wasn't common practice to award life contracts to rabbis.

The instant the campaign began, I would have to relinquish my position in the Young Israel. There were already several people in the community who openly criticized my political activities. It didn't matter that my critics were few and my admirers many.

There was a third consideration to turn down this appealing offer. They were looking for a politician not a preacher and I didn't have positive feelings about politics. In my opinion, politics was the equivalent of *sheker* or deception. It might prove too difficult to make the switch from preacher to politician and to reconcile myself to a life of deception.

Thus, the offer was declined but with a heavy heart. The opportunity of a genuine challenge always set my adrenaline running, but this time reason won out. Years later I regretted the decision. After all, my great uncle, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kovalski was both a rabbi and a senator in the Polish *Sejm*. He managed to successfully mold or combine politics with the *rabbanut*, but then again times were different. He considered his political career to be *pikuach nefesh* (the *mitzvah* to save a life). This wasn't pre-W.W.II Poland. It was America and I could save more Jewish lives as a community rabbi.

Another Campaign

I did not take a back seat for too long. In 1976, Jimmy Carter won the presidency with a narrow victory over Gerald Ford. He was the first Democratic president since Lyndon Johnson was defeated in 1968. At this time New York's Democratic Governor Hugh Carey was running for a second term against Republican Frank Duria.

I decided to get involved in the gubernatorial race by actively lobbying for the Republican contender.

Realistically, it would be difficult to defeat a Democratic incumbent in New York, but it was worth a try. I was convinced that a Democratic governor working together with a Democratic president would not bode well for Israel. To date, Hugh Carey had only expressed pro-Israel sentiments. Carey spoke before the New York Board of Rabbis saying that he was in favor of helping Israel and was well aware of the importance of American assistance. But his resolve to stand up against a Democratic president on important issues was a risk the Jewish community could not afford to take.

This was a particularly important election as far as US -Israel relations were concerned. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin was on the verge of making a sacrifice in the Middle East peace process, three years after Egypt's rousing defeat in the *Yom Kippur* War.

I felt it was important to try and weaken Carter's power by lobbying for Republican candidates in the local elections, bearing in mind that any Republican candidate we voted into office as Governor of New York would undermine Carter and might eventually run for president.

I invited Duria to my house to address a breakfast meeting of the Va'ad HaRabbanim of Queens. Unfortunately, Duria lost and Hugh Carey went on to run for a third term in 1980.

Presidential Elections

This defeat did not deter me in the least from further involvement. Soon we were again faced with presidential elections. I definitely supported Reagan over Carter, especially since the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1977. I felt Carter had put undue pressure on Begin to give away the Sinai Desert in the peace settlement with the Egyptians based on the exchange of Israeli territory for Egyptian non-belligerency.

If Carter won a second term, he would surely not support Israel. I felt strongly about the role of the Americans in the Middle East peace process.

This election aroused a lot of attention among Jews in Queens. Synagogues and Jewish centers were used to host public debates.

One such debate was to be held at the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills. The two debaters were Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld and his conservative colleague, Rabbi Asher Kirschblum of the Main Street Jewish Center.

The hall was packed. Kew Gardens Hills had become a bastion of Orthodox Jews and they dominated the audience. There was standing room only outside the main entrance and droves of people continued to arrive. I showed up purely as a spectator. Suddenly, Rabbi Schonfeld informed me that he had to attend to an emergency.

He pleaded with me to fill in for him. "If you don't substitute for me, we won't have anyone to present our point of view." Knowing that, I just could not refuse.

Rabbi Kirschblum began his opening remarks. "I want you to know that I am an Orthodox Jew," he said. "The Lubavitcher Rebbe sent me Rabbeinu Tam's *tefillin* and I put them on every day."

I was shocked to hear this from Rabbi Kirschblum. As everyone knows, Rabbeinu Tam's *tefillin* are a second pair of *tefillin* put on by *Chassidic* Jews after taking off their Rashi *tefillin,* usually at the end of *davening.*

"If you're such an Orthodox Jew," I retorted, "why did you need the Lubavitcher Rebbe to buy those *tefillin* for you?"

The audience aware of this custom, burst into laughter. "Moreover, " I said, "what does this have to do with Carter?"

I received a resounding round of applause. Rabbi Kirschblum was furious.

"I'm the Orthodox representative for Carter" he said. This, too, was greeted with derision.

By this time Kirschblum had already lost his credibility and the political issues hadn't yet been debated. Needless to say, he lost that debate with me hands down, especially after I told the audience that our votes for Reagan could topple Carter. I went even further. If we could topple an incumbent this time, then we could certainly unseat Reagan in the next election if his policies were not in our interest.

Indeed, Carter lost, and Reagan's two terms with Secretary of State George Schultz were the most productive years of cooperation and support for Israel.

The Ugly Side to the Kashrus Business

I knew when I moved from Massachusetts to New York the pace of life would be faster, but did not think that I would become involved in *Kashrus* problems.

Soon a *Kashrus* operation run by two brothers came to my attention. The Rabbis Green (not their real names), posed as rabbis and offered their *hashgacha* to all the food establishments in Queens and Long Island.

Once involved, death threats and actual attempts on my life haunted me and my family.

When I arrived in Hillcrest, the Va'ad HaRabbanim of Queens was a new organization starting to monitor *Kashrus* in the neighborhood restaurants, synagogues and catering halls.

This organization began a campaign to raise the consciousness of the Jewish residents of Queens and inform them that the Green brothers were not maintaining proper *Kashrus* standards.

The local Jewish press and our pulpits were used to get this message across loud and clear.

"We must establish hard and fast rules as to what's kosher and what's not," I told my congregation. "Establishments under the *hashgacha* of the Green brothers are not acceptable."

One of the main reasons for our campaign against the brothers was that apart from never being ordained as rabbis and operating a mafia-controlled business, they awarded *Kashrus* certificates to establishments that served kosher and non-kosher food under the same roof.

We bombarded the Jewish press with announcements, hoping the message would hit home. It did. Before too long, the Green brothers were taking a loss in income and took us to court suing us for defamation of character.

We enlisted the help of the leading *Posek,* Rabbi Soloveitchik. Responding to our request for a *psak din* (ruling) on the issue, he wrote a *teshuva, halachic* response, citing the illegality of serving

kosher and non-kosher food under the same auspices. Rabbi Soloveitchik's letter was presented in court as an authentic opinion on the nature of *Kashrus.* The judge ruled in our favor.

Once the brothers lost the case, we were in deep trouble. They set the wheels in motion for stopping our activities. Theirs was a gangster set-up and they possessed unlimited means to deal with opponents like us.

The Mafia Goes to Work

First they tried scare tactics. At about three o'clock every morning, they incessantly called the homes of the various rabbis. The first time the phone rang in the middle of the night, I jumped up and dashed to pick up the receiver.

"If you don't lay off mister, we know how to take care of you," the coarse voice on the other end of the line said.

It was not a pleasant experience, but we were up to the challenge. The more we became personally acquainted with the "Rabbis" Green and their so-called *Kashrus* operation, the more resolute we became in our determination to put them completely out of business.

Soon they increased the level of harassment. Death threats became actual attempts on my life. I was frightened, yet would not give in.

Shortly after the phone calls, driving over the Wiliamsburg Bridge at an average speed, I glanced in my rear-view mirror. Rapidly pulling up behind me at high speed was a highly polished Cadillac, the type driven in Brooklyn by unsavory characters who spend all day Saturday tuning up their cars and "souping up" the engines.

The car was so close behind me that it was more than "tailgating." I could actually feel it on my tail. I pressed down on the gas pedal but the car in front of me was slowing down, forcing me to do the same if I wanted to avoid crashing into him.

Fear gripped me and sweat started pouring down my forehead. I was about to be crushed between two Cadillacs. I could not pull out because I was trapped.

The nightmare had just begun. All of a sudden, the Cadillac tailing behind me shot out and overtook my car nudging me to the side of the bridge, near the water. Scared stiff, I hung on to

the steering wheel for dear life hoping to keep control of the car and steer it on course.

As I was being forced closer and closer to the edge, several other drivers started honking their horns and my two assailants made a hasty retreat.

If this experience with gangster tactics was meant to scare me, it succeeded. One more nudge and I might have been knocked off the Williamsburg Bridge. I visualized myself in slow motion, dropping into the depths of the East River.

Mercifully, I managed to turn off the highway at the next exit onto Norfolk Street. I drove as fast as I could, not concentrating on my destination until I got lost. I finally stopped the car in a park where I sat for at least two hours with all the doors locked and the windows rolled up. I realized that I was suffering from post-traumatic shock and I just could not get myself to go home right away.

Eventually, I started to move. Several hours later, I walked into the house as white as a sheet. Shulamith only had to take one look at me to know that something was very wrong. I told her what had happened.

"Sholem, lay off," she said. "You're going to get yourself killed."

Obviously we knew that we weren't dealing with amateurs and lives were in danger as long as we threatened their business. We had already siphoned off some of their busiest caterers who now used the Vaad *hashgacha.* I was scared for my family and for myself. These thugs knew perfectly well where we lived. I feared that they were watching the house, waiting for an opportune moment to enter.

No Surrender

Just the same, my colleagues and I were bravely determined to maintain this war.

Knowing we were playing for really high stakes, we became even more resolute in our determination to run them out of Queens.

The scare tactics and harassment persisted. I was just calming down after the bridge episode when I was awakened at about two o'clock one night by incessant ringing of my front door bell. I came to the door and looked through the peephole.

Two thugs stood there. Hearing me come to the door, they yelled. "We have to see the Rabbi."

"Wait till I get my robe," I replied.

Sensing impending danger, I made a beeline for the telephone and called the police. Meanwhile, they encircled the house as in a siege. The doorbell ringing continued first in the front and then in the back of the house. Quickly, the police officers arrived and immediately the hired guns disappeared.

I was becoming more shaken day by day waiting for the hammer to drop. Simultaneously, we were making steady progress with the caterers. We already had a majority of the major caterers under our *hashgasha.* They were in competition with each other. As soon as they saw our clients attracting more business because of our upgraded *Kashrus* certificate, they too used our services.

The stream of disgruntled customers was becoming so large that the Green brothers were forced out of business just in the nick of time. I wouldn't have capitulated to their gangster tactics, but fear of what they would try next was beginning to take its toll on my family and myself.

Over the years I encountered other aspects of the *Kashrus* business which disturbed me, but no one played as dirty and as dangerously as the "Rabbis" Green. Once they were off the map, there was no problem in controlling *Kashrus* supervision in Queens and Long Island.

Kosher Nursing Homes

I also discovered that there were other areas of concern. Queens had several nursing homes in Kew Gardens Hills and Forest Hills, none of which supplied kosher food for their Jewish residents.

The largest number of Jewish residents lived at Fairview Nursing Home so it was there that I decided to start introducing *Kashrus.* Mr. Frank Klein, a Gerer *Chassid,* owned the home.

I slowly began to befriend him and then broached the subject of serving kosher food. Mr. Klein wasn't averse to the idea. As long as I would do all the work, Klein said, he would welcome the change.

It turned out to be an onerous job, *kashering* all the ovens and sinks and changing all the utensils. Soon Fairview became the first kosher nursing home. This was also my first private *hashgacha* job.

Unfortunately, leading the Young Israel of Hillcrest and attending to all the needs of the congregation didn't provide a substantial income. This *Kashrus* responsibility certainly helped.

A Kashrus Certificate at Any Price

One of my congregants was a successful baker. However, his bakery remained open for business on Shabbos.

One day he informed me that he wished to obtain the *Kashrus* certification of the Vaad. I informed him of all our requirements. They fell into two categories. Firstly, he would have to *kasher* his whole bakery and secondly, he would have to remain closed for business on Shabbos and have all ingredients approved.

He agreed. He desperately wanted the business of the growing Orthodox community. He complied with all our requirements including closing on Shabbos and so we gladly awarded him our *Kashrus* certificate. Additionally, we provided a supervisor to watch over the baking on his premises.

He began to appear for services every Shabbos morning. There was no doubt in my mind that he took the *Kashrus* certification seriously and that he was willing to go to great lengths to retain it. Of course, business had improved tremendously since he displayed the *hechsher* and he would do everything within his power to keep it.

Everything appeared proper until one of my members spotted something suspicious near the bakery one Friday night.

"Rabbi Kowalsky," he said to me, "late Friday night I was passing the bakery when I spotted several trucks taking off in different directions. I know they belong to the bakery because all the trucks were marked."

Before taking action, we had to investigate. We hesitated to confront the baker with any accusation lest it be inaccurate, but the report of *chillul* Shabbos was very disturbing.

There was only one thing to do – hire a non-Jewish private investigator who would stake out the bakery over Shabbos. Next

Friday night, the investigator with camera in hand was observing the premises. About midnight, lo and behold, the bakery trucks started to roll up. The drivers hurriedly loaded and took off with their freshly baked bread.

As soon as the evidence was supplied, we confronted the baker.

"Rabbi, how can I be profaning the Shabbos?" he asked me innocently. "I'm here with you *davening* in *shul* every week," he said.

"While you are in *shul*, your trucks are delivering bread," we answered.

Intermarriage and Marriage Counseling

Intermarriage and how to prevent its escalation is one of the most difficult tasks faced in the rabbinate. Fortunately, on more than several occasions, I was effective in breaking off a relationship.

Troubled people from nearby neighborhoods, embarrassed to speak to their rabbis, consulted me at times. One day, a middle-aged gentleman entered my office. He introduced himself.

"May I talk to you privately?"

"Of course," I said.

"I live in Forest Hills," he said. "I have a big problem. My daughter's going to marry a *sheigetz* (gentile)."

The problem was not unique. When a son or daughter wanted to marry out of the faith, the parents, who had imbued their offspring with little or no Jewish heritage, were in a state of shock. They had no idea how to prevent the union from taking place.

After Mr. A filled me in, he agreed to attempt to convince his daughter to meet with me. Unlike some young people I encountered, she was willing to do so. She told me of their mutual love and I realized only a novel solution might work.

"Do you drink?" I asked her.

"No", she said.

"Does your boyfriend drink?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Then go out and have a good time," I said.

"Rabbi, what are you saying?" she asked me, bewildered. She expected me to convince her to stop seeing her boyfriend, not to encourage her to continue the relationship.

Then I turned to her father. "Give your daughter extra money for drinks so she can go out and have a good time," I said casually.

He was more than confused. He was disappointed. He was thinking that if this is the best the rabbi can do, then why had he bothered to consult him. Nevertheless, he complied with my wishes and dug into his pocket.

"Please come back and see me after your night out," I said to Mr. A's daughter.

She did. Now her story was a little different. During the previous meeting, she had told me that she loved her boyfriend and nothing could come between them. The fact that they came from different backgrounds was of little or no consequence because this was the twentieth century and their children would be brought up non-sectarian.

She was very upset. "Rabbi, he got very drunk and he cursed me," she said.

Her Polish *goyish* boyfriend was no longer the apple of her eye.

"If he gets drunk now and curses you before you're married, you're going to be the first casualty of his potentially violent behavior after you're married," I said. "He may take a strap to you when drunk."

I knew this from my own experience in Poland. I witnessed this kind of behavior countless times.

My words to Mr. A's daughter served as food for thought. She wanted some time to think about what I had said. After all, he didn't seem like the kind of boy who would act violently towards her – they were both students at Columbia University – but neither did she dismiss my words out of hand.

She returned to her boyfriend and confronted him with an ultimatum – either stop drinking or the wedding is off.

He promised never to drink again and she was satisfied with his assurance that there would never be a repeat performance.

She came back to see me convinced that everything was going to be all right.

"Ok. Let's try an experiment," I said.

"Mr. A please throw a party in your house and invite his friends and relatives. Be sure to have an ample supply of liquor and be very courteous and friendly towards them."

So he did. The food he prepared was hardly touched while the liquor flowed. In no time, spirits were high and soon words were passed that were shocking to the host's family. The drinking continued unabated. By midnight the boyfriend had to be dragged to the washroom to disgorge.

At our next meeting, I suggested she join Young Israel intercollegiates.

Fortunately, she took my advice and dated boys I had suggested, one of whom she later married.

Her father, a tailor by trade, was eternally grateful to me for saving his daughter.

Mr. A was the owner of a men's clothing store in Manhattan. He invited me to choose from the most expensive suits. I didn't want to accept money for doing a *mitzvah.* I did accept the clothes at cost price. As a result, I never had any problems with dressing for any occasion. People often wondered how the rabbi managed to look so dapper, living on his income.

Difficult Marriages

There are many personal problems that congregants bring to their rabbis. To feel confident, I attended a number of courses in marriage counseling. They proved very worthwhile, especially when disgruntled and frustrated men and women approached me with bitter complaints about their spouses.

I do not believe in divorce unless there seems to be no alternative. *Shalom bayis* can be attained with proper guidance.

During my tenure as rabbi both in New Bedford and Hillcrest only one couple was divorced. I really feel I succeeded in bringing peace and tranquillity.

I encountered children who refused to join youth services or clubs because they were preoccupied with tension at home. Children suffer most in any dysfunctional family.

With this in mind, I observed the rebellious youngsters in our midst and invited their mothers to talk to me. I stressed that the mother was the one G-d instructed to direct children in the proper path. "Do not neglect the Torah of your mother" is our creed. The school alone cannot imbue a child with values.

At this point I would often hear a familiar refrain, "How can I imbue my child with values? I have so many pressing personal problems. My husband is disinterested, selfish and stubborn. I would prefer to divorce him and raise my children properly."

I encouraged soul searching and possible solutions. Very often this refrain was just an excuse for a wife who had other things in mind.

On one occasion, one of my congregants came to me and said, "Rabbi, I want to leave my husband, but I must keep my children. Can you help me? As you know, he is a *baal t'shuva* and has gone overboard on religion."

Outwardly, theirs seemed to be a good relationship. Both were professionals with four gifted young children. Soon the real motivation came to light. She had found a warm man, "who appreciated her talents," though I assumed her husband fit this description as well.

I was determined to repair the situation. I threatened to tell the court in any custody battle that she was involved with someone else and unfit to raise her children.

"I told you this in confidence. You are not allowed to betray that confidence! You have no right to interfere with my private life!" she screamed. Obviously, she had forgotten who initiated the matter. The happiness of her children was at stake and I was there to look out for their interests. They were yeshiva students and needed to remain under the influence of their father. Furthermore, I knew she would eventually come to her senses.

I could not mediate between this lady and her husband. Had he known she was involved with someone else he would have surely terminated the marriage. I found a different way of destroying her relationship. "Very well," I said. "Maybe you are right. Let's discuss this matter and let me talk to your friend." He was from a different city. She gave me his phone number. I arranged an

appointment and drove to meet him. It did not take me very long to convince him that she was a difficult person. She was accustomed to an easy life. It would be to his advantage to take a break and think the matter over carefully. Needless to say, he did, and the relationship ended. For a long time thereafter she avoided me. Eventually, she told me that she was very grateful to me for saving her marriage.

A Trying Failure

One of my congregants, a successful businessman, moved out of his home. His wife came to me for help. The children were bewildered.

She informed me where I might meet her husband. I had quite a time convincing him that I was not an agent for his wife and acting on her behalf.

"I am open-minded," I told him. "Maybe you need some help. I am always willing to listen."

"I am part of the business world and meet interesting people. My wife is too homebound. I cannot take the pressure that prevails in the house," he said.

I had the interest of the children at heart. During the 1950s and 1960s, there was a stigma attached to divorce, especially in Orthodox circles. Children from divorced parents had a harder time finding a *shidduch* (mate).

His children were of marriageable age and concerned about their own future.

I was careful never to tell him that his actions were wrong, saying that I respected him and that his actions were on his own conscience. I did impress upon him that he was jeopardizing his children's chances at finding marital happiness with suitable partners.

"You should come home at least until your oldest children are married," I advised him. He did so, and once the children were on their own, they were divorced.

The Chaplaincy

Working as a chaplain was a different experience entirely. My education and training were ill-suited to the skills and abilities

necessary for dealing with the criminal element. Fortunately, the New York Board of Rabbis provided a much-needed training course that I attended.

I was appointed Chaplain of the Queens Detention House in Long Island City.

The job as outlined included organizing services, delivering sermons to inmates and providing pastoral counseling. This was far from an accurate description. Sermons were superfluous. It wasn't a pulpit. It was a prison. Incarcerated individuals need the rabbi to show them compassion and faith. Almost immediately, I scrapped the sermons and concentrated on interpersonal relationships.

The prison provided me with an office to hold private sessions with the inmates. I made full use of it and tried to instill in my charges a desire to improve their lives and also provide them the tool with which to do it – faith in G-d.

I explained that believing in G-d and learning about and adhering to Jewish values, provides both an emotional and cerebral outlet for their guilt and anger. Once they accepted that G-d was omnipotent and that they existed not to serve their own hedonistic needs but to serve Him, they would be able to progress with their lives.

Equally important was the warmth and understanding that I sought to share with every one of them. They were seeking a role model to show them that Jewish religion is not just about guilt, blame, indictment and responsibility. It is also about repentance, forgiveness and love – the love of G-d, of one's fellow man and last but not least, the love of oneself.

This was no easy task and I devoted many hours to being a good listener.

Friday was chaplain's day. We held services in the morning. When I first started working in the prison, I encountered a different problem. To my surprise, the chapel was filled with African – Americans. I gently explained that a Jewish service was about to commence and maybe they were looking for the Baptist or gospel minister.

"No sir," one man said. "We like Judaism and we'd like to participate in your services."

Although this may have been true, it placed me in a difficult situation. It would have meant that my limited time would have to be shared among others and my first commitment was to the Jewish men. I therefore had to dissuade our guests from attending the services.

I ultimately whittled the group down just to the Jewish men.

The Yom Kippur Trade-off

Over the years, I established a close relationship with the warden. With his help, we were able to provide two kosher meals on Erev *Yom Kippur*. The first meal, consisting of gefilte fish, chicken soup, potatoes, and grape juice was to be served before the twenty-five hour fast and the second meal would be served after the fast, the following night.

There was one condition to participate in the meals that I presented to my charges. Any Jewish inmate who wanted to partake of the repast had to consent not to eat, drink, smoke or watch television for the duration of the fast.

Everyone agreed. When I returned the following week, I was greeted by an eerie silence in the chapel. It didn't take a genius to know that something was wrong.

"What's the matter, boys?" I asked.

Just then, one of our regulars came into the chapel to join us. His arm was bandaged in a sling and his face looked as if he had taken a heavy beating.

"What happened?" I inquired.

One of the men jumped out of his seat in a rage and pointing towards the forlorn victim said, "Rabbi, a beating is too good for him, we should have killed him. He agreed to your conditions, but we caught him smoking during the fast. Not only has he violated your honor and trust, he's betrayed his religion. He committed a grave injustice. He certainly should not have betrayed you, Rabbi."

All the men nodded in agreement, but obviously violence was not the way to deal with every situation. It was time for a moralistic speech.

"I know that you did this out of respect for me and to protect my honor, but violence isn't the answer. I recognize that you have

your own code of justice, but that's not the way. I will speak to him privately. Try not to bear a grudge and I'm sure he won't repeat his mistakes," I said.

The Armed Robber and "Friends"

For many of the inmates this message was redundant. The only way they knew how to communicate was through violence. Throughout my tenure at the prison, I encountered violence in many forms. I thought that I had become immune to surprises, but a phone call received from a couple residing in Forest Hills left me speechless.

The husband explained in an agitated and anxious tone, "Our son-in-law attends services in your chapel in the prison. We desperately need your help to get some information from him."

He was a gang member who had been convicted for his role in an armed robbery. I told the parents-in-law that I was willing to help them in any way, but informed them that it would be unethical for me to betray the confidence of their son-in-law. Anything he said to me in private was confidential information and I would need his permission to relay that information any further.

"We understand, but you are our only hope," the husband said. "We don't want to involve the police at this stage.

"Our son-in-law is a very heavy gambler and card player. Before he was arrested and convicted for the robbery, he signed an "I Owe You" note for ten thousand dollars to a group of gamblers."

By this time, his voice had begun to crack and I could hear him choking back his tears.

"He signed our daughter as collateral, Rabbi."

He described his daughter as a beautiful twenty-seven-year old Boston University graduate.

"The gamblers have been harassing us for weeks. We do not have ten thousand dollars to pay them. They have continued to threaten that they are going to make good on the IOU," he said.

"They told us that if we did not come up with the money they would take our daughter. Rabbi, neither I nor my wife took the threat seriously enough," the husband sobbed. "Now our daughter has disappeared. Please, you have to help us find her. Talk to

my son-in-law and try and make a deal. We're depending on you. The mob told us to stay away from the police. We're terrified that they will harm our daughter."

Shaking, I replaced the receiver. If I went to the police with this story, I might be endangering his daughter, and if I didn't go, I might also be endangering his daughter. I had no way of knowing whether I was dealing with hardened criminals. I also had no way to gauge whether they were prepared to use violent means to achieve their goal or if they were just threatening. Perhaps they were only a bunch of petty criminals and amateur gamblers.

There was only one way to find out. I had to see the son-in-law as soon as possible and get him to give me the information.

The inmate was brought into my office. He confirmed all the details of the story. Still, he was surprised to hear that his wife had disappeared. Signing her as collateral for the money was a flippant action, he said. He never thought they would act on it, but now that they had there wasn't much he could do to help.

"Rabbi, if I name names, they'll get me on the inside. If they don't get me on the inside, they'll get me on the outside as soon as I'm released. This is a no-win situation."

"I understand your predicament," I said. "We'll make a compromise. You don't have to reveal names. Just give me some information that would help me to contact them, preferably a telephone number. Your wife is an innocent victim. She might be scarred for life or killed. You must help her."

Thankfully, he recognized the seriousness of his wife's plight and was reluctantly willing to jeopardize his personal safety to help her.

He described the person I would be dealing with. He certainly didn't think he had it in him to kidnap his wife – let alone harm her. The group was using scare tactics. All they really wanted was their money back. He felt that if we played ball and paid up, his wife would be released unharmed.

"They are guys who get together to gamble," he said.

What an oversimplification. Guys who get together to play cards do not go in for kidnapping. I knew that I had to exercise extreme caution.

"What about the money", I asked him. He came from a very wealthy family in Boston. His father was a prominent attorney.

"My parents want nothing to do with me. They've cut me off."

He claimed that he had no other financial resources. He gave me a phone number and wished me luck.

Tangling with the Gang

I left the prison and resolved to handle it alone. The terrified parents needed my help ,and I felt obliged to risk my own security.

Arriving home, I headed straight for the telephone and called. A man called Bob answered. He said, he would meet me if we could settle this matter without police intervention. There was one condition – I was to come alone to a specified meeting place at a designated time.

Meanwhile, I contacted the distraught parents and asked, "How much money can you come up with?"

They told me that they could probably put together five thousand dollars from various sources, but could not raise a cent more. They lived in a small apartment in Forest Hills and were people of limited means.

I promised to do my best to negotiate on their behalf. Petrified, they said they would wait near the phone.

Several hours later, the plan was in place. Bob told me to meet him at a sleazy bar in Long Island City at eleven o'clock Sunday night. Immediately, I called the parents and told them I had arranged \a meeting.

They weren't the only ones I told. I also told my wife.

"I'm going to meet a gambler," I innocently informed her.

I had already been married to my wife for close to twenty years and this wasn't the first time I attempted some harebrained scheme.

Her reaction was usually the same.

"Sholem," she said "how can you go alone? You are risking your life."

But I was determined to go ahead. As I rushed out of the front door and jumped into my white car I yelled at her not to call the police, "otherwise, you'll ruin the whole deal."

Driving off into the night, I had no doubt that I had made the right choice. The drunkards milling around outside the bar looked at me curiously as I marched up to the entrance. This was not surprising as I cut an unusual sight, clad in classic rabbinical garb.

As soon as I swung open the door to the smoky filled interior, an overpowering smell of beer accosted me. I started to feel a little nauseous. The odor of the beer conjured up pictures from my youth in Poland – memories of being sick after I consumed too many bottles of my uncle's beer.

The sensation only lasted a moment as I fully concentrated on a man winding his way through the crowded bar towards me. I noticed that he was of average height, clean-shaven with short-cropped blond hair and extremely well dressed.

"Hi, Rabbi, I'm Bob," he said stretching out his hand. "I appreciate your coming down here to meet us."

Everything about him was smooth, including his tone of voice. He oozed confidence and even in the dimmed light of the bar, I saw that every detail of his appearance was top notch. This was no two-bit operator.

Quickly, he led me to the back of the bar and introduced me to four other friends seated at the table sipping their beers. He certainly hadn't come alone, but fortunately I knew they were more interested in recovering money than in intimidating or harming a clergyman.

The Boys in the Bar

"Rabbi, have a beer," Bob said, sensing that I was relaxed enough in their company to drink with them. Of course, I refused the beer, but ordered a Coke, sipping it slowly as Bob tried to casually cut me into the deal.

"Rabbi, both of us can profit. We can work together and make a buck," Bob said.

He was obviously naive enough to think that I had agreed to this clandestine meeting to improve my own interests and that I could be bought off by the scent of money.

Sitting comfortably back in my chair, I raised my hand to my breast pocket, casually withdrawing five choice Havana cigars.

"Boys, care to have a smoke?" I said, offering each a cigar.

When everyone was contentedly puffing away, I began to put my cards on the table.

"Gentlemen, I'm not very different from you. I'm a rabbi and also a gambler."

"Really, Rabbi, you play cards? Poker?" Bob asked.

"My only game is twenty-one which I picked up as a young boy on Chanukah," I said, eyeing the two Jewish looking gamblers.

"I gambled by coming here tonight, but I don't gamble for the lives of other people. The reason I'm here is to help a family in dire need. If I go home empty-handed I'm out of the picture, having failed in my mission. However, in desperation the girl's parents will then go to the police. I found you and so will they. The game is up. You boys will be slapped with a kidnapping charge. But if we can negotiate a deal, perhaps you'll get what you want and I'll get what I want. I need your cooperation for if we fail, the results will be painful for all of us," I said.

"Rabbi, you know what our price is," Bob said. "Ten thousand dollars in one hundred dollar bills."

"Be reasonable," I said. "If the family could raise that kind of money, they would have handed it over to you by now. You know where they live, in the tenements in Forest Hills. You know they aren't wealthy people, they're just working stiffs like you and me. You've staked out their apartment often enough to know I'm telling the truth. The best offer they can make is five thousand dollars. I advise you to accept their offer and release the girl. If you ever need me to testify on your behalf, I'll be there for you."

By now, the woman had been missing for some time and her parents were frantic with worry.

Bob was obviously the brains behind the operation and even though he thrashed out the alternative choices with the others for a few minutes, he was the decision-maker.

Realizing that I would not be bought and had pushed him into a corner, he capitulated.

"Okay, Rabbi, we agree. We'll arrange a straight exchange. You'll receive the girl as soon as we receive the cash," Bob said.

We shook hands and I committed myself to arrange the exchange. I paid for the two Coca-Colas and left the bar.

Chased by the "Boys in Blue"

It was close to two o'clock in the morning as I started to make my way home. Coming off the expressway into my neighborhood, the early morning silence was shattered by shrieking police car sirens. They seemed to be chasing me. A little unnerved, I kept on driving. I wasn't speeding so they weren't going to stop me for that, but two marked cars were definitely closing in on me although they weren't signaling for me to stop. Suddenly, they blocked me off, one tailgating the rear and the other one pulling up in front of me. It was a similar experience to being edged off the Williamsburg Bridge, only this time, the cops were after me.

I came to an abrupt stop and rolled down my window.

"Rabbi, your wife's climbing the walls with worry. What are you doing driving around this time of the morning?" an officer asked.

"Thank you, officer for your concern. I'm on my way home now," I said bidding the officer good night and breathing a sigh of relief that he didn't ask me any more questions.

The deal went through as planned. The parents brought five thousand dollars in one hundred-dollar bills and the gang returned the woman unharmed, but only after they checked each bill with a special machine to be sure it wasn't counterfeit.

She recovered from her ordeal and told her story. In the parking lot of her building, she was forced into a car and taken to a house where a family took good care of her.

Since then, I met several times with the parents of the inmate. Years later, after his release I encouraged them to try and enter their son-in-law into a rehabilitation program, but to no avail. He refused. Unfortunately, prison conditions are not conducive to rehabilitation – there are too many constant temptations in that closed environment.

Only Glatt-Kosher Food for Us!

As chaplain I encountered Jewish inmates arrested for a whole slew of charges, including forgery, deception and tax evasion.

So, I was not surprised when several otherwise observant Jews found themselves under my auspices. They had been convicted for fraud and were sentenced to three months in prison. They began to serve their term just before *Pesach*, one of the busiest times of the year for me.

At that time, my responsibilities were varied and included *kashering* the kitchens of the Fairview Nursing Home and making sure that each family in my congregation sold its *chametz*. I put out bulletins and booklets about the complicated laws of *Pesach* and gave *shiurim* on the laws of Passover.

Additionally, I arranged for all the Jewish prisoners in the Queens lockup to receive Kosher Passover food for the entire eight days. I had also arranged a *Seder* at the prison. I left the jail on Passover eve feeling that I had taken care of everything.

I was, therefore, a little disturbed to receive a desperate phone call from the prison warden on *chol hamoed Pesach* (the intermediate days of Passover).

"Rabbi, you have to come over quickly. Some of your religious wards are giving us a hard time. They are crazy. They don't want to eat Manishevitz's gefilte fish or *matzos*. What do they want?" the warden asked. "I ate the gefilte fish and it was superb."

By ten o'clock in the morning I was in the prison talking to these prisoners. They insisted that they would only eat Satmar gefilte fish from Williamsburg and *shemura matzos*.

I was on my way to visit my brother-in-law, Rabbi Heshy Goodman, in Sullivan County and was not prepared to drive around Williamsburg looking for gefilte fish bearing the appropriate *hechsher*. Instead, I tried another solution.

They had been sentenced just before *Pesach*. I tracked down the judge.

"Judge, please release those men on bail until after Passover," I said. "They're making the warden and the entire prison staff crazy."

He was sympathetic but he was bound by protocol. "Rabbi, I can't just release them without a court hearing," he said.

One hour later, the Judge had convened court and had the prisoners released on bail until *Isru Chag*.

More Kosher Problems

This wasn't the only time, I encountered a problem with kosher food in the prison. One Friday morning as I arrived, a Jew was being remanded.

"Are you the rabbi here?" he asked, making sure that I wasn't just another Orthodox Jew being hauled into jail.

After assuring him that I indeed was the rabbi at the prison, he hurriedly emptied his pockets and tossed me all his valuables, including checks and cash, all the while cursing the prison guards.

Accepting them, I knew that I would have to turn them over to the authorities to be put into the prison safe. I did this, got the receipt and then went to speak to him.

"What are you in for?" I asked him.

"He's here for putting sub-standard products into food at his Kosher Deli," the officer accompanying him said.

It turned out that he had received numerous warnings from health inspectors, all of which he ignored. Now he was arrested and awaiting a court hearing. I assumed that it was too close to Shabbos for his family to arrange a bail hearing and post a bond.

As with every prisoner, I offered him my services. He had a list of demands prepared, especially since it was *erev* Shabbos.

"You have to bring food from Williamsburg," he said. "If it's not from Williamsburg, I'm going on a hunger strike and I'm going to raise the roof here."

Under these circumstances, and to avoid problems the whole weekend, the warden approved the special treatment and I drove to Brooklyn to pick up the necessary items for Shabbos. The shopping list included a bottle of grape juice – alcohol wasn't allowed – two challos, chicken and fish but there was a problem with the challos.

The guard wanted to slice it to be sure nothing had been smuggled inside the loaves. This action would have posed a problem for the prisoner who could only use the challos on Shabbos if they remained whole.

I finally convinced the guard not to cut them and delivered the whole package to the deli owner.

He was very grateful. I, however was interested to know if he had learned anything from his short stay in jail.

"Well, have you learned your lesson?" I asked him.

He was furious with me at having asked the question.

"They're a bunch of anti-Semites," he said. "They turned me in because I decreased their kickbacks and their portion of the take. "Please call my family and tell them what's going on," he said. It shocked me to learn that his family was unaware of his arrest. He was obviously too embarrassed to tell them and never availed himself of his allotted phone call.

I flatly refused. "I'm not going to tell your wife and kids. Ask the clerk to allow you to call."

Defending his right to produce food as he saw fit, he asked me, "What do they know about quality, Rabbi?"

Monday morning, his lawyer obtained his release on bail and he wanted his valuables back. I gave him the receipt and told him to pick up his envelope from the clerk. He was dismayed that I had handed over his valuables to the authorities.

"Whose side are you on?" he asked me.

"I'm on the side of the law," I answered.

Several weeks later, he was back in custody pending trial. Apparently he had accused the police of being on the take, and claimed he was being harassed in a kickbacks scheme. The authorities responded by leveling additional charges against him and he was rearrested. Although I tried to help him, the warden was very reluctant to make any more exceptions for him. He was eventually sentenced to six months in the Brooklyn Detention Center.

Not in the Business of Bribes

He wasn't the only Jewish prisoner to attempt to use me to sidestep ordinary prison procedure.

As soon as an inmate propositioned me during our private sessions, I was obliged to report the conversation to the warden. It was not uncommon for prisoners to offer me a new Cadillac or one thousand dollars in exchange for a favor they wanted. This practice of reporting to the warden never compromised my office as a confidential counselor because the inmates knew the rules as well as I did. They knew they were forbidden to offer me bribes, but apparently this did not always stop them.

"Rabbi, I have a proposition for you. I need twenty-five thousand dollars in bail money," one of them told me one Friday.

"I have the money," he said. "I was involved in a hold-up and stashed the cash. I need you to get it for me. There's fifty thousand dollars stashed there. If you help me out, we'll split the money. You can take twenty five thousand dollars for yourself and bring me the other twenty five thousand. I'll tell you exactly where the cash is. You go to an apartment house at 1070 Bushwick Avenue in Brooklyn. Go down to the basement. The door is open. On the right hand side there are four loose bricks under the floor. Lift them up and you'll find a bag containing a gun and fifty thousand dollars. Take the cash, but don't touch the gun. Bring me back twenty five thousand dollars and keep twenty five thousand dollars for your trouble."

I had been propositioned before, but I had never been privy to such detailed information about a heist.

"You really expect me to do this for you?" I asked.

"Yes, Rabbi. Money buys everything and everyone, including the United States President," he said.

"Don't proposition me," I said. "You know you'll get into trouble and I have to report this conversation to the warden.

Undeterred, he persisted trying to convince me to make a deal.

"Can't you get someone to do it for you?" he asked.

"Look, you've got the wrong man," I said. "What you're asking me to do is illegal and immoral. It's not kosher money."

He finally dropped the subject. I was duty bound to report the conversation. I never knew if my room was bugged or not though I preferred to assume that it wasn't. Thus, I only told the warden that the inmate had tried to proposition me but did not reveal all the details.

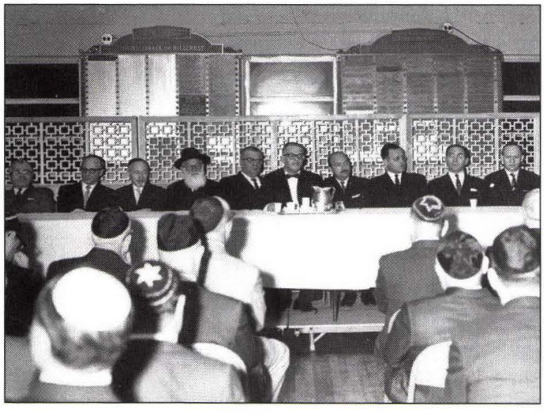
Some time later I was passing by the apartment building at 1070 Bushwick Avenue, when curiosity got the better of me. It was a black neighborhood so I stood out like a sore thumb. I decided to enter the building and go down to the basement. The door to the basement opened easily and I quickly found the four loose bricks. The bag was gone!



Bond Dinner,
Young Israel of Hillcrest, 1976
Mr. and Mrs. Zborowski, honorees,
Rabbi Kowalsky, J. Rubin,
M. Harris



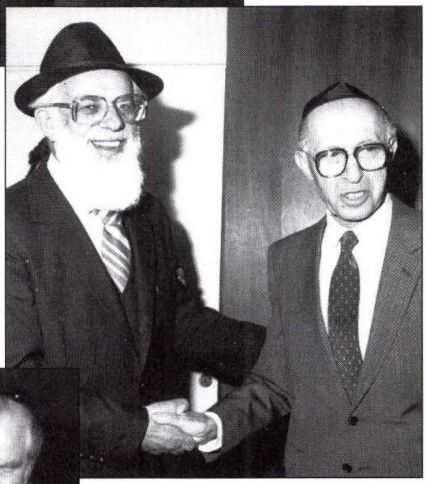
Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky and
Rabbi Milton Furst, on my left,
honoring Rabbi and
Mrs. Jonah Weinberg on behalf
of Yeshiva University



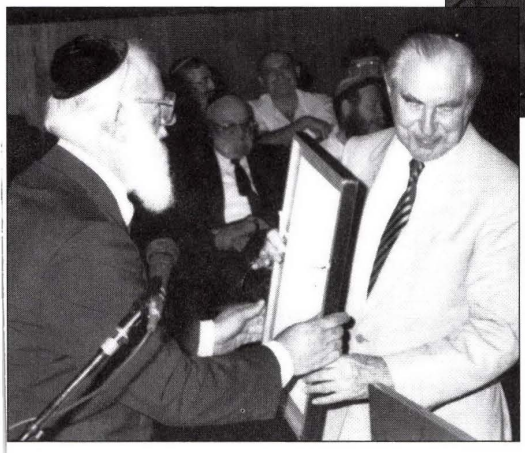
Ner Israel honoring
Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky
(center), 1960.
Also pictured, Rabbi M. Sherer,
(3rd from right),
Rabbi Laven
Chaim Goodine
Rabbi Nachman Kowalsky
Rabbi J. Schachter
Rabbi D. Hill
Simon Enber
Moe Ciner
and Cantor Stanley



Rav Ruderman and Rabbi Schonfeld congratulating me upon being honored by the Council of Young Israel Rabbis



Myself greeting former Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin



50th Anniversary of the RCA in Jerusalem – Rabbi Kowalsky presenting a letter to Chaim Herzog, former President of the State of Israel that the RCA issued to Rabbi Herzog during his visit to America in the 1940's stating that they support his halachic views regarding American Jewry.



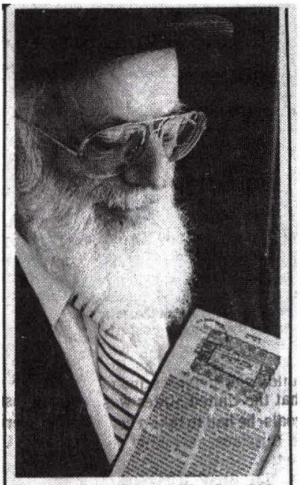
Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky and Chaver HaKnesset Rabbi Avrohom Werdiger (See article at right)



Mr. and Mrs. Groob and Mr. Sol Altman – always working for the benefit of the Young Israel of Hillcrest



Dr. Sidney Finkelstein and the Kowalskys at the Pinsker Shul melava malka – Jerusalem



Rabbi Kowalsky with the 200-year-old book he presented to MK Avraham Verdiger.

(Dan Landau)

Verdiger gets old memento of grandfather

By GREER FAY CASHMAN
Jerusalem Post Reporter

MK Avraham Verdiger (Morasha) last week received a memento of his grandfather, whom he last saw in Poland before World War II.

The memento, a 200-year-old book entitled *Rabbeinu B'Hayei*, was presented to Verdiger by Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky, special adviser to the Chief Rabbinate and Religious Council of Jerusalem.

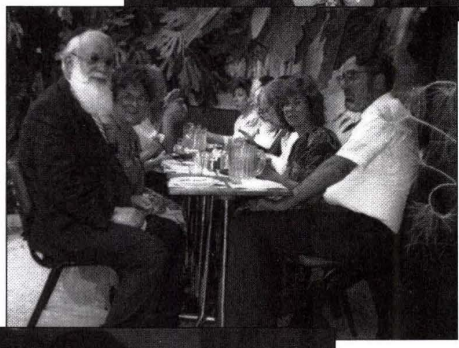
The book belonged to the MK's grandfather,' Israel Hanoch ben Rabbi Simcha Bunem Verdiger, who posed as a gentile and eluded the Nazis until 1944, when he was identified and shot.

Kowalsky found the book by chance a year ago among several boxes filled with Jewish texts in a library in the medieval section of Prague. When he saw the Verdiger name on it, Kowalsky felt that there might be some connection with Avraham Verdiger.

Inquiries verified his hunch, and he presented the book to Verdiger a few days ago.



Left to Right: Rabbi Israel Klaven, executive Vice President of RCA, my son-in-law Chanoch Lazarus, and my son Yossi, Mr. Farkas and Mr. Summers at my 50th Birthday party. Myself and Shulamith seated in front



Rabbi Kowalsky gave a reception in Jerusalem for R' Mark Angel after he was elected President of the RCA



Left to Right: Marvin Zborowski, myself and William Mandel – members of the Young Israel of Hillcrest instrumental in creating the z'chor for Yom HaShoa



Rabbi Kowalsky being honored by the Jewish Federation of New York for outstanding work



Testimonial Dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Rubin, (bottom row) (Top row) L. Hiller, Professor Yeshayahu Bronover, a physicist from Riga helped by Ezra Fund of R.C.A., Al Haft and L. Krim



Mr. Leonard Hiller representing the Young Israel of Hillcrest, presents Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky with a large silver menorah for his service to the congregation upon retirement



Mr. and Mrs. Sol Nussbaum (seated center) being honored by the Young Israel of Hillcrest

The Rabbi In The World at Large

Involvement in Diaspora Affairs, Active in the RCA and Rabbi of a Prominent Synagogue



any vistas were opened to me, affording the opportunity to get involved in diverse aspects of Diaspora and Israeli communal life. It also presented me with unusual opportunities. Imagine my surprise when I was offered the position of Chief Rabbi of Zurich when I visited that city on a mission for Ezra. Wisely, my wife refused to move again. She had made her home in Hillcrest.

"If you want to go Zurich," Shulamith said, "Switzerland will have a chief Rabbi without a chief Rebbetzin."

During my years in Hillcrest, I was president of the Va'ad Harabonim of Queens and National Chairman of the Council of Young Israel Rabbis. I was extremely involved in the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) serving in many capacities, and vice-president and founder of the Ezra Commission. Active in Hapoel Hamizrachi, I held the office of national vice-president. I served as a member of the Board of Education of Yeshiva of Central Queens and later as its chairman. Ezra became an international fund for Soviet Jewry, culminating in two conferences for European Rabbis held in conjunction with two British Chief Rabbis. I founded and headed the EPNA (English Program for New Americans) at Touro College where Russian immigrants attended classes in Jewish studies and *Yiddishkeit*, and I was the initiator of the Keren Dorshei Zion fund.

I had the good fortune to mingle with many senior Israeli government officials. These included Presidents, Zalman Shazar, Yitzhak Navon and his wife Ofra; Israeli Prime Ministers, David Ben Gurion, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Menachem Begin and Yitzchak Rabin; Israeli Minister of Religion, Zerach Warhaftig; was advisor to Minister of Education, Zevulun Hammer and former Israeli Chief Rabbis, Isser Unterman, Yitzchak Nissim, Ovadya Yosef and Shlomo Goren. They were all sympathetic to the cause of Russian Jews and also appreciated the help to Israel offered by my congregation.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin was the guest speaker at a *shul* dinner at which time we raised close to one million dollars for Israel Bonds and I had the distinct pleasure of once again hearing this great orator speak. It took me back to my youth when I stood on street corners in Warsaw clamoring for a centimeter of space so that I could hear him speak about a Jewish Homeland.

In 1972, I received an award from President Zalman Shazar for my work with Soviet Jewry, which spanned three decades of my life.

I met with senior US officials, including President Jimmy Carter at the White House and President Ronald Reagan, as well as New York Governor Hugh Carey and other important officials.

Appealing to the King of Belgium for Israel

In Europe (in the early 60s), Shulamith and I met the King of Belgium at a European Conference of Rabbis in Brussels. As an associate member of the organization, I attended many of their conferences. At this particular assembly, I was designated to present a plea on behalf of Israel.

I begged the King to use his influence to intervene on behalf of Israel, to stop the Arab bloodshed, war and terrorism.

"According to our tradition," I said, "a king never serves unless it is the will of G-d. I have a humble request to make of you in the presence of Rabbi Toaff (Chief Rabbi of Rome) and Rabbi Max Schreier (President, Rabbinical Council of America). I appeal to you to use your good offices to halt terrorism which has filled our cemeteries in Israel with over eighteen thousand young men and women."

My remarks brought tears to his eyes.

"How long do we have to be the victims?" I continued to plead with him.

The King was visibly moved by my appeal. "I am grateful for your words," he said. "I will do my utmost to fulfill your request. I agree, it is time that Israel has peace."

Walking away from the King, Rabbi Schreier exclaimed, "Sholem, you reduced the King to tears."

Attending the European Conference of Rabbis posed a small problem for some of the American rabbis. We stood out amongst our European counterparts because we were generally clean-shaven, while almost all Orthodox European Rabbis sported beards.

Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld and I debated whether to grow beards before the conference commenced.

Rabbi Schonfeld knew of his wife's disapproval so he abstained. I went for the full beard and have kept it ever since, with Shulamith's blessing.

Developing Relations With the Sages of the Generation *(Gedolai Hador)*.

All through my youth I merited (had the *z'chus*) to meet Torah giants of my generation, many of whom were born and grew up in Poland, but were tragically annihilated during the Holocaust.

Some great leaders and *Rabbonim* managed to escape to the west. I tried to keep abreast of these Torah giants and *Chassidic* Rebbes who came to America. As I had done in my youth I made every effort to meet them and to learn from them.

The Hungarian Rebbes

During my first Lag B'omer at Hillcrest, I went to visit the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, in Williamsburg. I arrived at his *tisch* and Rabbi Yosef Ashkenazi, the Rebbe's *gabbai,* introduced me to the Rebbe. Glancing at him, I was struck by the way his face shone as if the *Shechina* was resting upon him.

I was well aware of the Satmar Rebbe's aversion to Zionism. He was definitely opposed to the establishment of the State of Israel. He told his *Chassidim* that he could never support a secular homeland for the Jews. The Jewish people would only return to Zion when the Messiah came was his position.

Recognizing and respecting his opposition to Zionism, I was a little uncomfortable when the Rebbe asked me to sit down next to him.

"They say about me that I'm a *shtickle tzioni* (a small Zionist). Perhaps it is not appropriate for me to sit at your table," I said.

"Don't talk nonsense," he answered. "I have bigger problems than that."

After this first encounter with the Satmar Rebbe, I continued to visit him in Williamsburg occasionally.

Once on *Hoshana Rabba,* I arrived while he was already reciting the traditional *Hoshanos* prayers while circling the *bima.* He was so intensely involved in his prayers that he wept, especially when he beat the *aravos* on the table in front of him, causing the leaves to be scattered at his feet.

This was the first time I had ever experienced such intensity on *Hoshana Rabba.* The praying, weeping, the *divrei* Torah and shofar blowing at each *Hakafa* continued late into the afternoon. At four o'clock, I reluctantly returned home to prepare for *Shemini Atzeres.* I would have preferred remaining in his radiant presence.

The Klausenberger Rebbe

Another Hungarian Rebbe who settled in Williamsburg was the Klausenberger Rebbe, a man with a tragic past. The Nazis murdered his wife and 11 children. Only he was saved and made his way to America. That first Shabbos he held a *tisch* on Friday night at the Tzelemeh Rebbe's *Beis Hamedrosh* in Williamsburg where I spent Shabbos with my in-laws.

He was a man emotionally torn apart. After singing the traditional Shabbos song of *Shalom Aleichem,* welcoming the Shabbos, he made *kiddush.* When the food was served, he made a heartrending speech.

"G-d, You have punished me," he said, "but you didn't take my life. There must be a purpose. My purpose is to recount the great miracles that I have seen and lived through. I entreat You to open the gates of justice and bring salvation for *Klal Yisrael.*"

His words touched everyone in the room. I identified with him, having lost many of my relatives in the Holocaust but not having lost my faith, and knowing that my purpose was to educate people about the greatness of the Almighty. The Klausenberger Rebbe inspired me immensely.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, z.l.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson had a profound effect on my life. He stepped directly out of my past into the present and future. I had heard him speak in Warsaw and he knew my family. In fact, he had such a strong connection to my family that he consulted my uncle, Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg about one of the most important decisions of his life.

It was in Warsaw during the war when the Lubavitcher Rebbe sent a messenger to my uncle, asking for advice.

"Should I remain in Warsaw or take refuge in a small town?" the Lubavitcher Rebbe asked.

"Unfortunately, I can't give you an *etzah* (advice)," my uncle responded sadly. "An *etzah* can only be given by a person who studies Torah for its own sake (*Torah lishma*). Since the beginning of the war I haven't been able to do this, so I can't give you an *etzah.*"

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson escaped from Poland in 1940. My uncle chose to remain, although he had an opportunity to obtain a visa to Israel. He opted to stay with his community.

The arrival of Rabbi Schneerson in America was a tremendously joyous event for me and it drew me closer to my *Chabad* roots. My first *yechidus* with the Rebbe left a lasting impression. I remember it as if it happened yesterday. He asked me to attend Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim in New York. I was already quite well settled in Ner Israel Rabbinical College and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and chose to remain there.

That *Pesach*, I traveled with my father to Lakewood, New Jersey to spend the Rebbe's first *Seder* in America together with him. My father was able to sit with the Rebbe in the same room throughout the *Seder*. Much to my dismay, I wasn't allowed to enter the overcrowded room and thus missed a great opportunity.

I maintained a close connection to the Rebbe throughout the years. There were many occasions during which I was privileged to meet with him in *yechidus*. We discussed many topics and I was able to hear the Rebbe's views on many personal issues.

When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson passed away, I remained close to his successor, his son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

I was present at the first *farbrengen* of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. A huge crowd was present in the hall. I managed to make my way through the crowd, squeezing into a small place close to the Rebbe. The crowd had divided into two columns, creating a path for the Rebbe to walk down. I followed in his footsteps and I remained very close to him for the remainder of the evening. This wasn't the only time I participated in the Rebbe's *hisvadus*.

During one particular *hisvadus* I presented the Rebbe with the first volume of my "*Peneenay HaChassidus*."

The cover page stated that the *sefer* contained a compilation of explanations and interpretations from all the great *Chassidic* Sages.

"How can you prove **all** the great *Chassidic* sages are included?" he asked me. "Can you be certain that there aren't any *Gedolei HaChassidus* who aren't included here?"

I recognized the wisdom of his words. In the second volume, we eliminated the word "all."

The Rebbe's razor sharp powers of perception and accuracy amazed me. In contrast, I wasn't sensitive to the use of the word "all."

The Rebbe also commented on the content of the *sefer*. "*Ir hut genumen chassidus vus is nitzchis un farbinden mit Toras netzach*, you

have taken *Chassidus* that is everlasting and connected it to the everlasting Torah," he said.

Close Ties with the Lubavitcher Rebbe

I often consulted the Rebbe on important issues and missions, especially those related to my position in Hillcrest. Throughout the twenty-five years at Hillcrest, I was heavily involved in *Kiruv*, introducing non-observant Jews to an observant lifestyle. It was in this context that we discussed one such issue. I was fortunate to be received by him in private sessions and felt he had a deep personal liking for me as, indeed, he had for every Jew.

The growing strength of the Conservative movement was a challenge. I attempted to make Hillcrest an Orthodox enclave.

The Rebbe was an expert in this field. *Chabad* was a leading movement in *Kiruv* and the answers I received from him were priceless.

Our discussions focused on the spiritual needs of the average American Jew. For me, the Rebbe was the only person who could suggest the best and most suitable method to draw Jews closer to Torah and *Mitzvos*.

He advised me on how to deal with Holocaust survivors who had moved into our neighborhood. Many of them came from highly respected Jewish homes. Here they seemed headed towards a secular lifestyle. I understood their problem. They had experienced a deep trauma which shook their belief. I was determined to rekindle a religious spark, by visiting newcomers and speaking to them. Most preferred not to be associated with Orthodox Jewish life. How to reach them became my obsession. The Lubavitcher Rebbe guided me. His approach to people was gentle. He taught me to see the goodness in each person, how to encourage and praise him.

I had resisted Shabbos visits, as I feared they would be uncomfortable to have me in their homes on that day. "On the contrary," the Rebbe said, "If people are aware that the Rabbi is coming, they will make an effort to observe those laws they are familiar with and remember from home. The impending visit of the Rabbi would probably encourage them to boil water for tea and leave it on a *blech*, to buy kosher cake and so on."

On a number of occasions, I followed his advice with remarkable results.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe and Rabbi Chaim Nachman Kowalsky

The Lubavitcher Rebbe was also an influential force in my father's life. Reb Chaim Nachman, my father, was so close to the Rebbe that the inscription on his tombstone reads, "bound by his heart to our Rebbe and our leader until his last day". He was buried directly behind the Rebbe.

For ten years, my father maintained the unusual custom of bringing the first fruits of the season (*bikurim*) to the Rebbe on Shavuos. He would bring him baskets of fresh fruits and cakes that cost hundreds of dollars. During the *farbrengen* on the second day of Shavuos, my father stood on a large table before the Rebbe and presented him with the basket, after which the Rebbe instructed him to distribute the contents to all the *Chassidim.* He then blessed my father saying, "May you have the merit to bring *bikurim* to the *Beis Hamikdash.*"

I asked my father why he brought the first fruits. He explained that "770" (770 Eastern Parkway, Crown Heights, Brooklyn) is to him today's *Beis Hamikdash M'at* and the Rebbe is the *kohen gadol* of our generation.

Moreover, my father always believed that the Lubavitcher Rebbe was the *Moshiach.* He expressed this sentiment publicly many years before it became fashionable. My father said that the Rebbe was a complete person and he possessed all the characteristics of *Moshiach* mentioned by the Rambam. However, my father felt the Rebbe refused to reveal himself publicly as the Messiah and, therefore, it was incumbent upon him to persuade the Rebbe to do so.

During one particular *farbrengen* at "770," my father stood at the head table and announced, "Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Jews are suffering so much after this hard and bitter war that the time has come for you to reveal yourself as the Messiah."

The Rebbe sighed deeply and said, "Reb Nachman, don't speak like this and don't force me to leave the *Beis Hamedrosh.*"

My father never made the same remark publicly again. Privately he continued to believe that the Rebbe was indeed the *Moshiach.*

Mediating Between the Lubavitcher Rebbe And Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik

I had the opportunity to act as a mediator between the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson and Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik at a very sad time.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson had just died and he was sitting *shiva*, three days before *Yom Kippur.* The usual seven days of mourning were cut short, as *Yom Kippur* fell on a Wednesday.

Every year during the Ten Days of Repentance (*aseres yemei teshuva*), the Rav delivered a rousing *shiur* on the laws of repentance which thousands of people attended.

That year, the Rav presented the *shiur* on Sunday night and it was my privilege to attend. When the Rav entered the hall with his family, I quickly approached him and carefully told him the sad tidings. I offered to drive him to the Rebbe if he chose to pay his respects and comfort him. He was very grateful and said to meet him at the end of the *shiur* to finalize the arrangements.

He asked me if I would be available the following day, Monday the eighth day of Tishrei at 1:30 in the afternoon. "Certainly," I said and so we arranged for me to pick him up at Yeshiva University.

It sometimes happened that the Rav would make an appointment which, because of poor health or other personal matters, he had to cancel. Therefore I did not inform the Rebbe's secretary that Rabbi Soloveitchik would be coming.

There was a daily *Mincha* service at the Rebbe's mother's house at 3:30 in the afternoon. I surmised that we would arrive in time for *Mincha* and only after we set out from Yeshiva University did I stop at a gas station and call the Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Leibel Groner. I felt it was important for him to know that Rabbi Soloveitchik would be arriving and should be ushered in immediately. At the same time, I also called several friends, rabbis who

were close to Rabbi Soloveitchik, Rabbi Israel Miller, Rabbi Hershel Shachter of Moshalu Parkway Jewish Center among others, and invited them to join us.

The journey from Yeshiva University to Crown Heights took over an hour, affording me lots of time to discuss the Lubavitcher Rebbe with the Rav. During the discussion, I asked the Rav to tell me about the Lubavitcher Rebbe as a person – his imposing character, his personality and his great Torah scholarship, as well as his relationship with him.

The Rav told me that he was a great admirer of the Rebbe. He said that their relationship began when they met in Berlin where they were both studying at the University of Berlin. During that period they would often meet at the home of the *Gaon*, Rabbi Chaim Heller. It was in the course of these meetings that a strong friendship developed between the two men, both of whom were destined to become outstanding spiritual leaders of the century.

The Rav recalled that the Rebbe always carried the key to the *mikvah* with him when he attended lectures at the university. "At about two or three o'clock every afternoon when he left the university he would go straight to the *mikvah.* No one was aware of this *minhag* and I only learnt about it by chance," the Rav said.

"On another occasion, I offered the Rebbe a drink. The Rebbe refused, but when I pressured him I understood that he was fasting that day. It was Monday and the Rebbe was fasting. "Imagine that," Rabbi Soloveitchik said to me, "a Berlin University student immersed in secular studies maintains this custom of *mikvah* and fasting."

"These things made a huge impression on me. Additionally, the Rebbe had an amazing memory." The Rav described the Rebbe's memory as "*gevaldig*" (astounding). "In all my life, I never encountered someone with such a memory."

Then the Rav proceeded to describe his understanding of the Rebbe's Torah.

"Those of us who emanate from Brisk don't adhere to the *pilpul* system perpetuated in Poland," the Rav said, "but the Rebbe has a *gevaldiger* comprehension of the Torah.

"There were other Jewish students from other communities in the university, studying together with us at the time. Some of them are considered today to be famous *gedolei* Torah. In the university they behaved the same way as other university students, but this Jew (the Rebbe) behaved like a Jew from Warsaw or from Russia. Berlin made absolutely no impression upon him at all."

The drive came to an end and we arrived at our destination on President Street. Many distinguished rabbis had gathered there to console the Rebbe. However, as soon as they heard that Rabbi Soloveitchik had arrived they immediately cleared the way for the Rav and we both went straight through to the small room where the Rebbe was sitting. At that particular moment, two *Roshei HaYeshiva* – Hagaon Rabbi Yitzchak Piekarski whom I knew from Poland and later in Queens and Hagaon Rabbi Mordechai Mentlick – were sitting with the Rebbe. Several Lubavitcher administrators were also present.

As soon as the Rav entered the room, the Lubavitcher Rebbe rose from the low stool he was sitting on. As the Rebbe sat down again, Rabbi Soloveitchik was presented with an armchair especially brought in for him to ease his back pains.

"It isn't possible for us to speak *divrei Torah* because *pikudei Hashem yeshorim mesamchei lev* (G-d's direct commands bring joy to the heart) and this is a time of mourning," the Lubavitcher Rebbe said to the Rav. The Rebbe then began to discourse with the Rav in respect to the laws regarding *onane* (a person remains on *onane* on the loss of a close relative until the burial).

The question was "may a *Kohain onane* eat *teruma* at the time he is on *onane*?" The Lubavitcher Rebbe said, "The Rambam speaks about this issue." Rav Soloveitchik responded that he does not recall such a Rambam.

The Rebbe said it is in the Rambam's *Peirush HaMishnayos.*

The Rav said "Yes, yes. I think you are right, Lubavitcher Rebbe."

What really amazed me as I stood on the side listening was the way in which the two men were discussing the texts with each other and the ease with which they tossed out *marei mekomos*, references, without ever actually citing the words themselves.

The *shiva* call lasted close to two hours. I could not hear all of their words because Rabbi Soloveitchik and the Rebbe sat very close to each other and spoke very quietly. I stood behind Rabbi Soloveitchik and the high back of his armchair prevented me from hearing everything that was said.

Several weeks later, I returned to Yeshiva University where I met the Rav. He told me that the Lubavitcher Rebbe had sent him a thank you letter for coming to comfort him. In the margin of the letter, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Soloveitchik's forgiveness for the fact that he had said "*kach kasuv baRambam.*" He had meant that the explanation of the Rambam he was referring to didn't appear in the Rambam's *sefer* "*Hayad Hachazaka*" but in the Rambam's explanations on the *mishnayos.* The Lubavitcher Rebbe was concerned that the latter reference to the Rambam was in response to an interpretation of his earlier words. The Rebbe said that it is forbidden for a person to express words that cannot be clearly understood.

"Only the Lubavitcher Rebbe manifests this phenomenon in his character with his *ehrlechkeit,*" (honesty and gentleness) Rabbi Soloveitchik said. "There's no other person like him. Another person would have dropped the issue, but the Lubavitcher Rebbe, an *ish emes*, a man of truth, apologized to me. Moreover, he asked my forgiveness."

Sometime later, the Lubavitcher Rebbe's mother-in-law passed away. His wife, Mushka and her sister, Chana Gurary, were sitting *shiva* at the residence of the deceased on the upper floor at 770 Eastern Parkway. The *minhag* by *Chassidim* is that the ladies sit in a room and the male visitors and *Chassidim* pass by and are *minachem.* However, when I again brought Rabbi Soloveitchik, we were ushered in. The Rav knew them well from Berlin. As he was seated, the Rebbe and Rav Gurary, Chana's husband, also arrived.

This time the conversation turned to the strong relationship that existed over the years between the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Sholem Ber and Rav Chaim Brisker.

At this point, the Rebbe recounted an incident that occurred during a conference of rabbis in St. Petersburg. The subject on the

agenda was if rabbis should study the language of the state and if they should receive a certificate of higher education as required by the Russian government. The *Gaon*, Rav Chaim Brisker attended this meeting in St. Petersburg.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Sholem Ber, was staying in the private home of one of his *Chassidim.* At one point, Rav Chaim paid a visit to the Rebbe. The Rebbe's secretary, his son, Rav Yosef Yitzchak, who became the next Rebbe, said that Rav Chaim could enter but that he should be aware that his father was sitting and crying.

"Why are you crying?" Rav Chaim asked as he entered.

"I'm crying because we have arrived at the stage where Rabbis themselves will be dependent on the government and will be obliged to study the language of the state. This is a decree that should not be agreed to at any price," the Rebbe said.

"Of course you know that I agree with you, but we have to discuss it because there are other *Gedolim* who differ and want to discuss this issue. Please stop crying and we will do everything in our power to remove this subject from the agenda tomorrow," Rav Chaim said. Whereupon, the Rebbe said, "I depend on Rav Chaim to do what he can."

When they arrived at the meeting the following day, they walked into the middle of a heated discussion among the rabbis. Rav Chaim climbed onto the *bima* and requested from all the rabbis present that the subject be dropped from the agenda. The rabbis agreed.

"Now Rabbi Chaim has done what he was able to do," the Lubavitcher Rebbe called out.

The reason why the two families – the Lubavitchers and the Briskers got along so well, the Rebbe said was because both sides worked towards the "ultimate attribute of truth."

Then the Rav began to talk about his student days, together with the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Berlin. He mentioned the difficulties they encountered in observing Torah and *Mitzvos.* Someone else who was present in the room responded to the Rav's words mentioning the role that Rabbi Chaim Heller played at the time. Rabbi Chaim Heller's home was open to everyone who wanted to share a meal or to discuss spiritual matters. Both sages concurred and this conversation concluded our visit.

Interfaith Relations

Several years later I once again acted as an interlocutor between Rabbi Soloveitchik and the Lubavitcher Rebbe. That year, the Vatican invited the Rabbinical Council of America to Geneva, Switzerland, to conduct an interfaith dialogue. The aim was clear to me: to spread the impression that the Vatican was extending good will and empathy to the Jews following the Holocaust. Many saw this primarily as a political ploy on the part of the Vatican especially since world Jewry made it quite clear that the Church hadn't done enough to save Jews during the Holocaust.

It was up to Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Samuel Belkin, heads of the Halachic Commission of the RCA, to decide if the RCA delegation should meet the Vatican delegation. Rabbi Soloveitchik was definitely opposed to a meeting between the Vatican and the RCA that included religious issues.

"We can talk," he said, "about general issues such as health and social problems but not about religious issues. This doesn't come into question."

When the Lubavitcher Rebbe heard what was transpiring, he swung into action. Because of his relationship to me, and the fact that I was an officer of the RCA, he had his secretary contact me. I was asked to inform the RCA of the Rebbe's unswerving opposition to any meeting with Vatican representatives and that he supported the Halachic Commission.

However, there were several dissenting opinions among some RCA members. After great internal debate and as a result of a fear that rejection of the invitation would be a public affront, the RCA sent a delegation to the Vatican. However, the scope of its participation in discussions with the Vatican was greatly curtailed. In the ensuing discussions the Commission abided by the restrictions imposed on them and concentrated purely on the peripheral issues of health and social affairs.

Further Encounters

When I lived in New Bedford, I often vacationed in Onset where Rabbi Soloveitchik also spent a great deal of time.

One particular Shabbos my wife took our children to visit her parents in the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York. Rabbi Soloveitchik and his wife, Rebbetzin Tanya invited me to spend Shabbos with them. I gratefully accepted their gracious invitation. There, a special surprise awaited me.

"I'd like you to deliver the Shabbos sermon and appeal." Rabbi Soloveitchik said.

I was flattered and anxious, since I would be uncomfortable delivering a sermon in his presence. I demurred and asked, "Why me?" I said that I had been looking forward to hearing his sermon.

"No, I'd like you to do it," Rav Soloveitchik said. "You've come a long way since you spoke in Polish Yiddish. You're going to do just fine. I want you to make an appeal."

By then I already had a reputation as a dynamic fund-raiser. I did hope to impress the Rav and agreed. I got busy preparing the sermon during which I presented a *chidush*, a new interpretation of the text.

When we say in *Krias Shema* in the first *parsha* "*veshenantom levonecha*," *Chazal* teach us that these words mean, you are obliged to teach your children, your grandchildren and all Jewish children the words of Torah. The Rambam interprets these words likewise.

I asked the following question, "Why do we have to learn from the two words found in the first *parsha*, *veshenantom levonecha*, to teach your children, your grandchildren and all Jewish children? Why not just your own children? Why don't we learn this from the second *parsha* which says *Velemadetem osom es beneichem*, and you shall teach your children."

I interpreted as follows: The first *parsha* commences with the words, "And you shall love your G-d". To demonstrate our love of the *Rebono Shel Olom*, we are obliged to teach **all** Jewish children, ours as well as others. Teaching our own children is a natural tendency and does not prove we have *ahavas Hashem*, love of G-d. We want our children to develop into fine, decent human beings, and so we inculcate them with the love of Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. When we extend our teaching of Torah to other children as well, we confirm our *ahavas Hashem*."

The congregants must have been impressed with my words. The appeal was very successful.

The Rav's Second Request

Rabbi Soloveitchik was exceptionally erudite in all secular fields. He received a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin, Germany, where he met his wife, Tanya, a relative of the renowned Torah scholar, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna. At that time, she was also preparing for her doctorate in philosophy.

During my visit, they were discussing an offer made to the Rav to become Chief Rabbi of Israel. Despite the fact that both Rabbi Soloveitchik and his Rebbetzin were highly educated in both Jewish and secular studies and very involved in community work, the Rav insisted that accepting the position of Chief Rabbi of Israel was out of the question.

"I'm not interested," Rabbi Soloveitchik said. "I'm not the kind of person to get involved in politics. I'm a *melamed*, a teacher."

After lunch, the Rav took his daughters, Atara and Tova out into the garden to learn *"Shulchan Aruch"* with them. He was accustomed to do this every Shabbos afternoon. His son, Chaim wasn't home that Shabbos.

At *seudah shlishis* the Rav had another request.

"We don't sing *zemiros*. It's not our custom," he said, "but I'd like you to sing. It doesn't matter if you're not a singer, I'd like to hear the tunes."

"I'll sing my grandfather's *zemiros*," I said.

I sang all the songs I was familiar with, many of them *Chassidic* tunes.

Keeping in Touch with the Rav

Over the years, even after we moved to New York, I kept in close contact with Rabbi Soloveitchik. There were certain things I felt I could or should tell him in friendship and with respect.

The Rav was the kind of person who was always preoccupied with lofty thoughts so often he did not pay too much attention to the state of his clothing.

He often wore *yarmulkes* until they were tattered and faded. I usually made a point of carrying a new *yarmulke* in my pocket every time I visited the Rav.

"What's the matter with the old *yarmulke?*" he joked.

"It doesn't befit the *Gadol Hador* to walk around with a worn *yarmulke*," I said.

His daughter Tova married Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein. After several years in America, they immigrated to Israel with their children. The Rav's son, Chaim, a linguist, was also in Israel studying at the Hebrew University, researching different *leshonos* in the Talmud. Rabbi Soloveitchik was not pleased about this. "I don't want my son to deal with *nusach leshonos.* He should sit and learn," he said.

After the *Yom Kippur* war in 1973, I was on my way to Israel. I visited the Rav before leaving.

"It would be a nice thing if you sent some money to your children," I told him.

He was not pleased that his daughter and son-in-law had moved to Israel. He missed them and his grandchildren, feeling he was deprived of learning with them.

"Who asked them to go to Israel?" the Rav said.

However, he agreed to send some money with me. "How much shall I send?" he asked me.

"Give them at least five hundred dollars each," I suggested.

"Can you lay it out?" he asked me.

"Of course," I answered.

A Word of Comfort from the Rav

In 1967, I needed an emergency operation and found myself in Rochester, Minnesota, hundreds of miles from home. My wife spent much of her time by my bedside while I recuperated from my operation.

One night the phone rang at ten o'clock. A little surprised, my wife picked it up.

"Hello. May I speak to Rabbi Kowalsky?" an unfamiliar voice on the other end of the line asked.

Knowing that I was about to fall asleep, Shulamith wasn't keen to permit this unless it was a really important call.

"May I ask who is calling?" she asked.

"Rabbi Soloveitchik," the man said.

Shulamith was a little incredulous. It was unlikely that Rabbi Soloveitchik would call me at ten o'clock at night. She thought a close friend of ours was playing a joke. Roy Albert was given to playing practical jokes and he was most likely up to his usual *shtick* (tricks).

"Ten o'clock and its Rabbi Soloveitchik. From Boston or New York?" Shulamith asked in a sarcastic tone.

"I'm calling from Boston," the gentleman answered. "Is it too late to disturb the Rabbi?" he asked.

Now my wife was sure that she was speaking to Roy.

"I guess it's you Roy. For you it's never too late. We could really use some cheering up."

Shulamith was having a difficult time in Rochester spending so many hours in the hospital with me. Any small distraction was appreciated, including a friend's late phone call.

"This is Rabbi Soloveitchik," the man insisted. "May I please speak to Rabbi Kowalsky?"

"You'll soon be believing it yourself, Roy," Shulamith said. Then she asked about the health of his wife, Joy. At that point, the man became aggravated.

"Will you or will you not call Rabbi Kowalsky to the phone?" he asked irritably.

"Okay," Shulamith said.

"Sholem, I think it's either Roy or Louie on the phone. Whoever it is won't speak to me so you better pick up."

I took the phone, pleased that my friends had remembered to call me and said "hello." The voice on the other end was distinctly familiar.

"Rabbi Kowalsky. Is that you? How do you feel? This is Rabbi Soloveitchik speaking," the Rav said.

After a short hiatus, I answered. "I'm feeling a lot better, thank you. This is a great honor."

We conversed for several minutes. I asked about his health. He explained that he was unable to visit me but was fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* over the phone. I expressed my gratitude for his concern. Soon the call was terminated. I was beside myself. Red faced, I glared at my wife who thought I was going to have another heart attack. Thank G-d, she managed to calm me down and assuage my irritation. "You should be happy that the Rav called you," she said.

Several years later we were honored by the presence of Rabbi Soloveitchik at the *sheva brachos* of our son, Eluzer, at the home of Rabbi and Mrs. Emanuel Holzer. This in itself was an unusual event because the Rav wasn't accustomed to attending *sheva brachos* in a private home. As the evening progressed he delivered a *dvar Torah.* When he prepared to depart, Rabbi Roy Albert volunteered to drive him to the airport. As they were leaving, my wife said, "Thank you Roy. Please drive carefully." The Rav looked up and with a twinkle in his eye said, "You know Rabbi Albert, sometimes they call me Roy also."



European Rabbis Conference, 1960



To my right: Rabbi Katz (Chief Rabbi Czechoslovakia; we arranged for his exit papers in the 1960's). Later he became Chief Rabbi of Be'er Sheva, Israel. Seated: Rabbi Berzon



Rabbinical Council of America Dinner in Jerusalem, 1972, honoring Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky. Seated to my left is Rabbi Berzon, RCA President



European Conference of Rabbis, 1960



RABBI KOWALSKY

Hillel

The Friends of Hillel will meet on Dec. 18 at 8 p.m. in the auditorium of Cong. Anshei Israel.

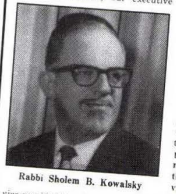
Rabbi Sholem D. Kowalsky will speak on "Can We Survive As Jews In The 20th Century."

He is an alumnus of Near Israel Rabbinical College of Baltimore and Rabbi of Young Israel, Hillcrest, L. I. He is national vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America, honorary president of National Council of Young Israel Rabbis, and president of the Rabbinical Association of Queens, Chaplain, Queens House of Detention for Men, co-chairman College Campus Commission of Rabbinical Council, and recepient of the 1963 Rabbinical Award of Near Israel Rabbinical College.

There will be a musical program presented by the Gilbert & Sullivan Theater Group of Tucson. Refreshments will be served. The meeting is open to the public.

Ezra Completes Eighth Year Of Service For Soviet Jews

At last, at least part of the story can be told. For years we have been urged to tell the full story of our Ezra Fund. For years, it operated by necessity almost clandestinely and painfully evading the limelight. Its inner operations remained known to a few. The Rabbinical Council membership, as a disciplined and responsible body, responded loyally and generously. Thousands of Jews behind the iron curtain are the grateful recipients of their generosity. The story of the Ezra Fund is one of the brightest chapters in the modern history of the Rabbinical Council. On more than one occasion, our executive



Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky

vice-president has been asked what the R.C.A. is doing for Russian Jewry. He usually invited the critic to quietly observe the functioning of the Ezra Fund and this proved to be sufficient. The arduous work and direction of the fund have been the sole responsibility of the chairman, Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky and his associate Rabbi Nuta Shainberg.

The history of the Ezra Fund begun with the midwinter conference of the Rabbinical Council in 1962. At that time, the rabbi of Czernowitz, Rabbi Chayim Mayer Kahane spoke at one of the sessions and moved the R.C.A. into action. "Destiny made us the 'pushka' for 'Klal Yisroel' for Russian Jewry," Rabbi Kowalsky stated.

past year a thousand families have received matzot shipped from England. The committee has worked in this area with Mizrachi and Agudah groups. At the outset, the committee had the cooperation of the National Council of Young Israel. The committee operates under the principle of "ain bedkim limzonot" and has become known for that in east European countries. The committee has also provided religious items for Russian Jewry.

When the issue of exit permits to Israel became real, Ezra became actively involved. New arrivals in Israel have testified the effectiveness of the Ezra's work. Rabbi Herbert Bomzer recently wrote Rabbi Kowalsky, **"I had an unforgettable experience on July of this year. I visited a "merkaz "klitah" in Bet Shemesh where I met 25 Jewish Russian families who had entered Israel only two months earlier. During very long, animated and intriguing discussions, I asked what American Jews can do for Soviet Jewry. One of the answers pertained to a package program and there seemed a unanimity that these packages were the salvation as a method of survival and practically the only way to get funds for the various documents needed for emigration."**

Package Program

Ezra's cardinal rule has been no publicity or fanfare. The recent aliyah from Russia has made this article possible and revealed what Ezra had accomplished. The package has become the symbol of solidarity and was the first contact with the outside world. Hundreds of unrequested packages indicated a concern with the very existence of Russian Jews. Ezra has never violated American or Russian law. Russia has probably permitted the program because it brought it foreign currency. The packages can be sold in government cooperative stores in full accordance with existing law.

Over a half million dollars has been expended since the committee's formation. Thousands of families in every section of Russia have been the beneficiaries. The Ezra Committee received its addresses from various sources which still cannot be made public. Much of the Rabbinical Council's work has been in arranging for the packages to be sent to Russian Jews on a person to person basis. Among the organizations and individuals active in helping Russian Jews with whom the Ezra Committee cooperates are Ezras Torah, Lubavitch, Rabbis Zevin, Teitz, and Hollander and the Sekuhner "rebbi." There are other sources as well.

Religious Needs

The committee has also been active in providing Russian Jews with "matzot Shmurot." During the

Israel

In a recent visit to Israel, Rabbi



Rabbi Nuta Shainberg

Kowalsky formed a committee of Rabbinical Council members in Israel to continue working with Russian Jews there. Rabbi Robert Marcus is serving as chairman of the committee. Ten thousand dollars has been already allocated and most of it already spent to help Jews arriving in Israel. The program provides for direct allocations to newly arrived immigrants.

Rabbi Kowalsky envisions a program which will include an airport welcome for Russian immigrants. He met with newly arrived Jews who expressed their gratitude for Ezra's help. He feels that the problem of extending spiritual help is not a financial one. He met with President Zalman Shazar for a lengthy discussion of Georgian Jews. He feels that the religious community is primarily responsible for the spiritual welfare of the newcomers. He has recommended that the Rabbinical Council of America negotiate with the Jewish Agency to provide a religious counsellor at each "merkaz klitah." The future thrust of Ezra is to continue to help Russian Jewry in the U.S.S.R. and Israel.

בע"ה

הסתדרות הרבנים דארצות הברית וקנדה

הננו מתכבדים להזמין את מע"כ להשתתף במסיבת

ארוחת צהרים רבתי בועידתינו בירושלים עיה"ק

ביום חמישי, י"ט טבת, תשל"ב

ששי לינואר,

בשעה אחת בדיוק

במלון טירת בת שבע

רחוב המלך ג'ורג' 42

ירושלים השלמה

במסיבה זו נרים על נס את חברינו

אורח הכבוד הרב שלום דב קובלסקי שליט"א

עבור מסירותו ועבודתו הפוריה ומסירות הנפש הנשקפת

בעבודתו כיו"ר הועד העורה למען יהדות רוסיה

בטוחנו שכבר ירצה להשתתף עמנו במסיבה זו.

בבקשה להחזר את הכרטיס מיד



Conference in Brussels to save Russian Jews.

Left to Right:
Rabbi Israel Miller, President of RCA, Rabbi and Mrs. Kowalsky, John D. Eisenhower Jr., ambassador to Belgium and Arthur Goldberg, former member of U.S. Supreme Court, UN Ambassador



Dedicating a new Bais Ulpana building



Left to right: Rabbi Sheinberg, Rabbi Brisman, Rabbi C. Goodman, Rabbi Ruderman and Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky



Rabbi and Mrs. Shlomo Zalman Shragai, Rabbi Kowalsky and Leib Gelbman, President of Mizrachi



Rabbi Kowalsky with Rav Ruderman – award of honor being presented from the Council of Young Israel of America



Rabbi Nissim, a distinguished former Chief Rabbi meeting with various Rabbis



Being greeted by Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef at a Rabbinical Council of America reception.

RCA Dinner honoring R' Kowalsky in Jerusalem; family and friends participating





Sholem B. Kowalsky addressing European Conference of Rabbis, in Brussels. Rabbi Chaikin and Dayan Fisher seated to my right



Sitting left to right: Rabbi Zalman Shragai, first Mayor of Jerusalem, Rabbi Max Kirschblum, President of Mizrachi and chairman Jewish Agency, Minister Zorach Warhaftig, Minister of Religion. Standing to my left is Uncle Benyomin Kowalsky

Soviet Jewry

The year 1945 brought joy and sorrow. We breathed a sigh of relief. The war was over. Soldiers were returning victorious but exhausted. What they witnessed during and after the war was indescribable. Slowly we realized the extreme horror of the Holocaust. All we had heard paled beside the actual realization that these barbaric events had indeed taken place, in our time, in our generation.

My family and I waited, inquired and searched anxiously, hoping to obtain any snippet of information about relatives we had left behind in Poland seven years earlier. The news was increasingly bleak. We had no leads and it seemed that almost no one had survived from the Mokotowski, Zaller, Kovalski, Malinak, Grabski, Manovitch, Mirrel, Shor and Toman families. It quickly became apparent that most of my aunts, uncles and cousins had perished in the Holocaust.

So it was with much joy that we learned that two cousins had survived. One cousin, Yehoshua Malinak had managed to reach *Eretz Yisrael*, still called Palestine, in 1946.

Another first cousin, Lazar Manovitch had fled over the Polish border into Russia and had been conscripted into the Red army. At the end of the war, he was with the Russian troops who entered Berlin. Once in Berlin he and several other Jewish soldiers sneaked out of the base and rampaged through the city, shooting people and destroying property, avenging themselves

on the Germans who had slaughtered six million Jews. Their blood screamed for revenge and Lazar and his friends didn't hold back. The Germans were well aware of the Russian soldiers' intentions to take revenge for all the Russian blood spilled during W.W.II so they barred their doors and stayed off the streets.

Lazar then deserted and fled to the American zone in Berlin there he made contact with the Red Cross who supplied him with information regarding our whereabouts.

He managed to get word to us that he was alive. Overjoyed, we immediately began lobbying several Congressman and Senators to try to secure a visa for Lazar. Three months later, with the help of Senator Barkley, he was on his way to America.

This was the beginning of my desire to help Russian Jewry. Being able to secure the passage to freedom for my cousin, Lazar Manovitch, a Russian soldier, was a turning point in my life.

When he arrived in New York, we were waiting for him at the pier. My feelings of joy were marred by an overwhelming sense of loss. We hoped that Lazar would be able to give us some indication as to the whereabouts of any surviving relatives, even though he had spent the war years in Russia isolated from the rest of his family.

By the time he arrived in New York, Lazar was depressed and deeply troubled. It took a little while until he was able to speak coherently about the war. We waited anxiously in the hope that he would be able to shed some light, but he knew of no one who had survived in Poland. Devastated, as the last trickle of hope ebbed away, we had no choice but to resign ourselves to the horrific fact that there were no other survivors.

Once in America, Lazar was restless and despondent. After several months he requested to go to *Eretz Yisrael* to visit his brother and sister who lived there. His brother, Avrum Manovitch, lived in Bnei Brak near his sister, Sara, who had married her uncle Benyamin Kowalsky. Benyamin was my father's brother, so the Israeli family was closely intertwined. Both these families had emigrated to Israel in the 1930s. We acquiesced to Lazar's wishes and booked him passage on a boat leaving for Palestine. But even when he reached *Eretz Yisrael,* he could not find any peace. One day he

picked himself up and returned to Poland. He was never heard from again.

As time progressed, many Polish Jews who had fled from Poland to Russia, along with my cousin Lazar, also returned to Poland. Poland was a land soaked in the blood of millions of Jews murdered in concentration camps and in the ghettos, where Jews had begged for help from their gentile neighbors but received no response.

Their return shocked the Poles who thought that Poland had become *Judenrein.* Pogroms broke out in Katovitz and other cities. But the Jews hadn't returned to Poland to stay. From there they could emigrate to other countries. Meanwhile, the Iron Curtain sealed all the exits from Russia, trapping the multitude of Jews who had not managed to escape to Poland. Millions of Jews were locked in Russia ruled by the totalitarian despot, Stalin who oppressed and killed indiscriminately.

Having observed all of this and realizing that I had been saved from the Holocaust for a purpose, I came to the conclusion that I had a mission in life. The mission was twofold; firstly, to devote my life to building Jewish families in America. Secondly, I felt I must help Jews in Europe at any cost. I felt that any Jew who survived the Holocaust should be hugged and loved. He was so very precious.

Now I stood on the sidelines in the free Democratic west and watched as a new monster reared its ugly head to replace the Nazis. Total physical annihilation of the Jewish people had failed. Communism attempted to annihilate the Jewish soul. We, in the west, could not stand by silently and watch millions more Jews be destroyed either physically or spiritually without doing everything in our power to help them.

The RCA was one of the earliest organizations in America to become involved with Russian Jews. As early as 1956, Rabbi David Hollander headed the first delegation of rabbis to Russia. They encountered Jews facing all kinds of hardships, ranging from repression of religious freedom to harsh imprisonment, to inability to sustain themselves economically.

In the late 1950s we were successful in extricating the Rabbi of Chernovitz, Rabbi Chaim Meir Kahana from the Soviet Union.

We accomplished this with the intervention of the First Lady, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt who had been contacted by Britain's Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie. Mr. Sender Shweid was also instrumental in working to obtain the exit visa for Rabbi Kahana.

In 1959, I was Chairman of the mid-winder RCA conference. Rabbi Hershel Schecter of the Bronx and I invited Rabbi Chaim Meir Kahana to address us in Belmar, New Jersey. He described the tenuous situation of Russian Jewry – how Jews were being deprived of earning a livelihood and were forbidden to practice their religion.

Rabbi Kahana's words served to validate what we already knew. Hearing a firsthand report brought home the magnitude of the problem and the need for organized aid programs.

RCA and the Ezra Fund

It was during that conference that the Rabbinical Council of America took one of the most glorious steps in its history, by establishing the Ezra Commission on behalf of Russian Jews. I was asked to assume the chairmanship of this commission.

This was an assignment close to my heart and I welcomed the opportunity to assist Russian Jewry, with the full support of an organization like the RCA behind me. At the same time, I realized the enormous task that lay ahead of me – to help three and one half million Jews virtually imprisoned in the Soviet Union, while at the same time attending to the responsibilities of my congregation.

Immediately, with the untiring assistance of my co-chairman Rabbi Nuta Sheinberg, I swung into action. We formed a large committee, including Rabbi Israel Klaven, our executive vice-president, Rabbis Pesach Levovitz, Israel Miller, Zalman Scharfman, Fabian Schonfeld, Hershel Schecter, Bernard Twersky, and Louis Bernstein.

We consulted the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Soloveitchik, Rabbi Ruderman, the Gerer Rebbe in Israel and other *gedolim.* They all advised us to work discreetly. This meant that our Ezra meetings had a cloak and dagger feeling about them. We tried to keep our activities clandestine so that we almost became an underground organization.

It was imperative that we increase our outreach while keeping our activities out of the limelight. Consequently, we concentrated on rabbis throughout the United States who were capable fund-raisers and who could be depended upon for discretion. Their function was to obtain funds for an unknown cause. Fortunately, the response was overwhelming and we managed to raise large sums of money.

Noteworthy among the many who helped us were Rabbis Gil Klapperman, Akiva Egozi, Max Kirschblum, Tibor Stern, Edward Davis, Bernard Rothman, Simon Dolgin, Maurice Lamm, A. Gottesman, Emanuel Feldman. In Baltimore, Maryland, Dr. and Mrs. Noah Lightman offered their home for a private fund-raiser that included individuals who maintained their help throughout the years in a very discreet fashion.

Smuggling Religious Artifacts into the Soviet Union

Succos was approaching. For millions of Soviet Jews trapped behind the iron curtain, there were no *esrogim.*

Our mission was to find ways to send *esrogim* into the Soviet Union and to have them distributed among various communities. Even one *esrog* in each large Jewish enclave would provide a moral boost to the community. We selected thirteen of the finest *esrogim.* The number wasn't arbitrary. Thirteen symbolized the thirteen *midos harachamim*, the merciful attributes of G-d.

The task ahead was risky. My colleagues and I discussed this sensitive issue at a meeting in London. Legally, this plan was impossible. Several leading American and European Soviet Jewish activists were present at the meeting.

Up until that point, we had concentrated on sending clothing, food, medicine and *matzos.* This was no easy matter because lists of names of eligible families had to be smuggled out of the USSR. The doors of the Soviet Union were sealed tight. Misinformation was the order of the day so any piece of real information was invaluable.

Many of these lists of names were smuggled into the west by Rabbi Chaim Meir Kahana who had spent eight years in Siberia for his Jewish activities. He brought the lists to Americaby writing

the names and addresses of Jews on tissue paper that he pasted to different parts of his body, managing to successfully evade routine Soviet checks. Mr. Shweid supplied more lists of names to Ezra.

After some time, we commenced sending packages from London and Zurich, as well. They now also included medicine, jeans, sweaters, fake fur coats, babushkas and dresses, as well as some men's items. The clothing was of very high quality. The parcels were insured and all the taxes paid. The US, England and Switzerland maintained an international postal agreement with the USSR. As soon as the packages were received, our contacts would sign for them. In this manner we received confirmation that our parcels had indeed arrived. The clothing was generally not for everyday use. The parcels contained valuable items that were traded in at the dollar stores. These dollar stores were scattered over the USSR. They served as trading posts for exchanging western-made goods for Rubles. The clothing we sent fetched high prices engendering money that went to feed many hungry families and for religious activities.

At the time we were severely criticized. Many felt we were in fact supporting the Communist regime, essentially helping to boost the Communist economy. But as time passed, the criticism subsided as the positive effects of our project became public knowledge and others followed. We worked very closely with the international Jewish Distribution Committee.

The Finnish Connection

But, getting *esrogim* into the USSR was a totally different story. We could not send religious artifacts through the mail. Thus far, we had managed to conceal some *seforim*, *talleisim* and *tefillin* in the luggage of western tourists to the Soviet Union.

Lulavim were available there, but the *esrogim* were grown in *Eretz Yisrael.* The problem was how to smuggle in the *esrogrim* right under the noses of Soviet officials.

"With the help of G-d, I'll find a way of getting a small amount of *esrogim* into Russia," I assured my colleagues.

Reminding me of the dangers of risking doing it myself, Sender Shweid said, "If you take them in personally, the authorities will search you and possibly imprison you."

Thus, I had to find a courier who would be inconspicuous enough to undertake this clandestine mission. It took me several days until I managed to devise a unique plan which I hastily started to implement.

I began by contacting an officer of the British Vegetarian Society. During our meeting I asked him for a contact in the closest country to the USSR. He gave me the name of an individual. With this information in hand, I bought an airline ticket bound for Helsinki.

Finland is the nearest democracy to the Soviet Union. Crossing the Finnish-Russian border into St. Petersburg, or Leningrad as it was called then, was a routine affair for some Finnish businessmen. I surmised that a Finnish tourist would not necessarily draw much attention to himself.

I wasn't really looking for a run of the mill businessman or tourist. I was interested in finding someone who would not look out of place carrying our contraband. A member of the Finnish vegetarian society could well be my man. My idea was to offer to send him on fully paid trip to the USSR carrying fruit and vegetable supplies which were in short supply in the Soviet Union. Ostensibly, he would just be carrying his own food supplies with him. The thirteen *esrogim* would be inconspicuously intermingled with lemons.

All the citrus fruits would have to be carefully wrapped so as not to differentiate between the *esrogim* and the others. It was essential that the *esrogim* be protected from any damage and handled gently even though we sent *esrogim* without a *pittom.*

Indeed, even as I thought over the plan on the airplane, it seemed a logical solution but at the same time far-fetched. Before leaving London, I had not discussed my plans with anyone for fear of jeopardizing the whole project. One of the many things the Lubavitcher Rebbe had taught me was to keep all our activities for Russian Jews under wraps. Secrecy in all our projects was of the utmost importance because the long arm of the KGB stretched all over the West, as international espionage played a major role in the cold war between the US and the USSR.

During the trip I rehearsed my explanatory speech to the Finnish contact, but no amount of rehearsing could diminish the

fear that he would think that I was some kind of crazy nut. After all, suggesting to a complete stranger to voluntarily participate in a scheme that involved such a high level of risk was not an everyday affair. By the time the plane landed I had decided how to make my pitch. I was sure that with G-d's help I would be able to convince this Finnish Christian to assist a Jewish cause. I felt that anyone with a humanitarian conscience would be convinced by my words.

Additionally, many Finns retained strong anti-Soviet sentiments, stemming back to the time when Russia invaded Finland. I certainly planned to utilize all possible tactics, including the fact that many Jews had fought with the Finns against the Russians.

Now the time had come to translate my thoughts into action. After I settled into a hotel I called an officer of the vegetarian society. Time was of the essence, as *Succos* was approaching. I introduced myself and he was responsive to the meeting. I left nothing to chance. I came prepared for the possibility that he would think this entire discussion was some grandiose hoax. I brought with me a message from the British Vegetarian Society. Even though I wasn't dressed in my conventional rabbinical garb – I was wearing a light straw hat and light colored suit so as not to draw too much attention to myself – I was able to prove that I was a bona fide rabbi.

Having crossed that hurdle, I got down to the business of explaining what was involved. At the mere suggestion of doing anything illegal, he raised his eyes.

Undaunted, I continued to explain the significance of this religious observance and that it would be a moral boost to those oppressed Jews.

"G-d sent me to you," I told him. "I'm a messenger and I beg you to help us."

I had his attention and continued to outline the plan. I told him that it involved taking a select number of fruits – that resembled lemons – across the border and deliver them to a Jewish contact in Moscow who would distribute them to other cities in the USSR. It would be preferable if he could find a traveling partner. Two officials of the vegetarian society traveling together carrying their own food supplies would look natural.

Emotionally, I described the excruciating tyranny and oppression of the Soviet authorities against Jews. Jews were arrested and imprisoned for believing or practicing anything connected to Judaism, including applying for exit visas to Israel, and for merely publicly professing to believe in G-d or for possessing any religious article or studying any Hebrew books. I told him that these were just some examples of the Communist repression of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. Many Jewish professionals had already lost their jobs and were reduced to poverty after they demanded the right to emigrate to Israel. Others were exiled to Siberia where they languished in oppressive labor camps for the same crime. Additionally, the Soviet authorities tried to break the resolve of other "refusniks" imprisoned in the infamous Christopol Prison in Moscow.

Carefully listening, he showed no emotion whatsoever. I took comfort in the fact that he had told me that he had some Jewish friends. This meant that he wasn't a total stranger to Jewish concepts. Moreover, he also expressed overtly anti-Communist views.

I then proceeded to explain to him the financial arrangements for the mission. I would cover the fares for both men and additionally, each would receive two thousand dollars in cash. An anonymous donor in Hillcrest had donated six thousand dollars to fund the project.

For a few minutes he was silent. "I need a few days to think it over," he said, expressing some fears about the whole plan.

"We don't have a few days," I said insistently with a note of urgency in my voice. "It has to be now."

"All right, if that's the case," he said, "we have to discuss it further."

Shortly after mulling over the procedure, he said, "I don't see any problems."

I felt elated when we shook hands sealing an agreement. I was careful not to put anything in writing or sign any document, so as not to leave any trace of our dealings for the KGB.

I had brought the *esrogim* with me to the meeting, all wrapped in soft tissue paper for protection. I left the *esrogim* and the money with him.

That same day I flew back to London and then back home to America where I waited to hear from him. It didn't take too long before I received a phone call.

"Everything's done as you requested," he said.

Happily I offered him an additional bonus. "Thank you" he said. "I will not accept it. I was rewarded with the completion of the project."

Two weeks after *Succos*, the Communist daily, Pravda ran an article demanding an official explanation as to how Russian Jews received *esrogim* for *Succos* from Israel.

My Finnish accomplice continues to remain anonymous. Only two other people ever knew about the operation.

One of them was Rabbi Kahana. When he heard that Pravda wrote about this mystery, he asked me if I knew anything about it. His reaction jolted me.

"There are three reasons why I would have advised against this venture," he said.

"First, I do not trust a stranger when it comes to our work. Second, the *esrogim* could have been damaged and become *posil.* Finally, our contact man in Moscow could have been exposed, thereby risking the shut down of our entire operation."

My answer calmed him somewhat. I explained that before leaving for Finland I asked three *gedolim* to give me a *brocha* for success on a secret mission. I recalled the chapter in *Bamidbar* when Kolev went with the spies to Israel. Before he departed he traveled to Chevron to the *Meoras Hamachpala* and prayed for success in the *zechus* of our three *Avos,* Avrohom, Yitzchak and Yaacov. I had no opportunity to travel there, but I did pray for success in the *zechus* of the three *gedolim* I approached. I always believed that if a mission is carried out *leshem shamaim*, then with the help of G-d, it should succeed.

Silently I thanked G-d that we did succeed.

Exodus

At this time, Ezra expanded its activities to other domains including facilitating the exit of Russian Jews from the Soviet Union. One of the most prominent people Ezra helped to extricate from

the clutches of the Soviet authorities was Professor Yirmiyahu Branover. Professor Branover was in Riga and wanted to leave Russia, but he was unable to provide the large sums of money they were demanding. At that time the Soviet authorities insisted that anyone who wanted to leave had to pay the government for the cost of his education. The "cost" was tremendous, amounting to tens of thousands of dollars. Ezra provided part of the money for Professor Branover's exit visa and he immigrated to America.

At the first opportunity he had, he came to an RCA convention and thanked us for the role played by Ezra in helping him to reach the U.S. Professor Branover is a brilliant physicist having dealt with hydrogen water in Russia. He eventually was active in organizing the Shamir Organization that, together with Ezra, provided help for Russian Jews settling in Israel.

The International Conferences

By the early 1970s many different organizations were working for the Soviet Jewish cause. These included the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in America and the Thirty-Fives in England. It became clear that we needed to consolidate our efforts. Two major international conferences organized by the Chief Rabbi of England, Rabbi Immanuel Jacobovits and myself with Rabbi A.M. Rose, coordinator, aimed to take the lead and unify and amalgamate international efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry. The first one was held in Bournemouth, England in 1972 and the second in Paris, France in 1978.

The conferences were attended by many leading Soviet Jewish activists including many prominent rabbis: Boruch Borchardt, Louis Bernstein, H. Bronstein, Pinchas Teitz, Murray Guauer, Samuel Horowitz, Pesach Levovitz, Haskel Lookstein, Yaakov Pollak, Bernard Poupko, Abraham Rosenberg, Fabian Schonfeld, Zev Segal, Simon Dolgin, Yehuda Gur, Chaim Meir Kahana, Yitzchak Kalman, Avraham Halevi Sher and Abba Dunner.

Other activists attending included: Mr. Bezalel Schiff, Mrs. S. Becker, Mrs. Zena Clayton, Mr. Peter Kalms, Mr. J. Lossos, Mr. Alexander Schweid, Miss J. Stiebel, Mr. C. Gutwirth, Mr. L. Matzliach, Mrs. V. Rotbard, Mrs. I. Chaiken, Mr. Zalman Weinman and many others.

The Bournemouth Conference mainly dealt with coordinating our efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry, including the consolidation of the package campaign and all the lists of addresses and names. It lasted one week.

The Paris Conference proceedings included the need to evaluate the developments of our activities in the field. We also had to review the areas of practical aid to Soviet Jews inside and outside Russia. Moreover, we needed to coordinate the activities of those people working in similar fields, to exchange know-how and to learn from the experiences of others.

I explained that although we weren't presently dealing with the broader ramifications of the political efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry, the problems faced by Russian Jews should be viewed in the context of the political situation.

We all generally agreed that the situation of Soviet Jews had worsened over the past few years, although emigration had been on a steady rise – an increase of approximately two thousand people each month. Moreover, several "refusniks" had also been released. I told the conference participants that only one third of all the "refusniks" who had been waiting for more than five years or more had now been released.

Meanwhile, there had been some major setbacks. A complete ban had been imposed on the importation of *matzos*. Another setback was the decree banning private *minyanim* unless they were registered with the authorities.

Trickling Immigration to Israel

Some one hundred and sixty thousand Russian Jews were being absorbed into Israeli society but there were thousands more languishing in the transit camps in Italy. Others had already secured entry visas into the United States and needed help adjusting and being absorbed into American society. This was true for other countries as well, including England and Canada.

Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jacobovits told the audience that he and I had just come from a Conference of European Rabbis where we had discussed these issues. The response was good and several rabbis asked if their communities could participate in the package campaign.

As our work was no longer secret, we were faced with a whole new set of concerns. Firstly, how to aggregate our financial efforts so as to efficiently disburse the resources within Russia and resettle the refugees. Secondly, we desperately needed to branch out and invest in the field of education. Without Jewish education, there was no way we could influence the thousands of Jews cooped up in transit camps in Italy.

Rabbi Haskel Lookstein said that we should continue to support the officially sanctioned Judaism in Russia. He said that we must support the synagogue Jews as long as the synagogues continue to exist. Additionally, we must continue to encourage all those Jews who have no connection with the synagogue to become acquainted with the rudiments of Judaism. He felt it important to continue to escalate our package campaign while providing other forms of relief to ease the financial burden of needy families. We were urged to encourage *Aliyah* to Israel and continue to visit the USSR taking with us as many religious items as possible for distribution.

From June through October 1979, I was involved in implementing the decisions made at the emergency conferences. In my capacity as the chairman of the Ezra Commission, I was able to visit the transit camps in Italy, followed by an extensive trip to the USSR.

The Drop-Outs and the Transit Camps

Although all exit visas issued by the Soviet authorities were designated for Israel on the basis of family reunification, only twenty to thirty percent of Russian emigrants chose to move to Israel. The rest made their way to Italy where they waited for visas to various countries. They were referred to as *noshrim*, dropouts.

The reasons for the high dropout rate were varied, but most had their basis in reports about the harshness of life in Israel. Some reports were pure misinformation, but others were based on the experiences of family and friends who had settled there and sent negative information.

Russian Jews who finally obtained their visas thought that in a free society they would be able to integrate and obliterate their burdensome identity. So far, being a Jew had just caused them suffering and pain.

Reports from Israel revealed a shortage of decent or affordable apartments. The potential immigrant also quickly learned that he would lose his refugee status in Israel. One of the biggest problems for the Russian Jew wasn't financial at all. In Israel he heard that his Judaism would be questioned. He had to prove that he was indeed Jewish and if he could not, he feared that he would become a second class citizen, possibly being denied rights afforded to others. The Russian media kept on blasting away with distorted news that the Arabs were rioting and that the Jews do not have security. The coup de grâce was the threat of war in the Middle East, always imminent.

I understood and empathized with their feelings. "Why leave the hell they know for a land filled with new problems?" The answer was crystal clear: "The emigrant wants a secure life, free from harassment and he believes this will be his lot in the free societies of the world, most preferably in the United States, Canada and Australia."

We were keenly aware, however, that they must start from scratch wherever they would go. We have a *Medina* and only because we have a *Medina* are they able to leave Russia. They are needed in Israel. Even the most irreligious Jew in Israel remains a Jew. There is hope for him. In *galus*, he may become assimilated and totally lost to our people. Is this what we are working for? A way must be found "to rectify the situation."

At that point, I decided that it was important for me to see for myself and report to my colleagues what was actually transpiring.

The Visit to the Transit Camps in Italy

I contacted the JDC. They were very cooperative, making arrangements for Mr. Sender Shweid of London and myself to visit the transit camps in Ladispoli, Ostia and Rome. I had invited Mr. Schweid to accompany me on this mission because he had worked with me on the Ezra project for many years and he was a devoted and tireless worker on behalf of Russian Jewry.

We knew that the refugees' first stop was Vienna and from there many flew directly to Israel, if that was their choice. The remain-

der were flown to Italy. It is interesting to note that the Russian city of origin of the emigrant seemed to be a determining factor in their decision to go to Israel or not. Jews from the Carpathian region like Munkacs and the Hungarian sectors, as well as Jews from Riga and Georgia were better Jewishly informed and hence more likely to choose Israel. Jews from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Odessa had been under active Communist domination longer. They knew less about their Jewish heritage and consequently they tended to reject *aliya.*

Since we were primarily interested in the dropouts, we flew to Italy, arriving there on April 29, 1979. We found the emigrants scattered throughout three locations – Rome, Ostia and Ladispoli.

The Israeli government guaranteed that they would not become public charges and would not work or remain in Italy, and so they were granted transit visas by the Italian government. Surprisingly a large share of the cost of the entire operation was met by US government refugee funds. These funds were available to any organization that became involved.

Once we visited the various communities we were able to confirm the activities of ORT, HIAS and JDC. ORT provided English language training while HIAS handled all the legal paperwork for emigration to any western country. JDC was responsible for their welfare and cultural programming.

The Process

The route taken was usually the same for all the refugees. On arrival in Italy they were housed in a non-kosher hotel for a short time and given money for shelter and food until they secured visas for the country of their choice. JDC also maintained four clubs, two in Rome and one each in Ostia and Ladispoli. These clubs were intended to provide information on Judaism and be a venue for English lessons and cultural programs.

Dr. Akiva Kahana of the Geneva office of the JDC arranged for us to meet Mr. Carmi Schweitzer in Ladispoli, our first stop. I found Mr. Schweitzer to be a fine, young, intelligent and dedicated individual in charge of the four clubs. He said he was not religious and was doing his utmost for the comfort of his charges. He

arranged for us to meet the entire staff at a seminar held for them that day. We were shocked to observe that, with a few exceptions, the staff was made up of individuals not oriented to Judaism or Israel and certainly not to religion. Many of them – Americans, British, and Swedes and several Israelis – actually expressed negative attitudes to Israel and religion.

We had arrived a few weeks after Passover. We inquired as to how the festival had been celebrated. They told us that they had held *Sedorim* for approximately eleven hundred people out of a total population of eleven thousand five hundred or about ten percent of the population. Moreover, although the food provided at the *Sedorim* was kosher, the *Seder* wasn't conducted in accordance with tradition. Nobody there knew how to conduct a proper *Seder.* From my point of view, this was a disaster. For the first time in their lives, these people had the opportunity to celebrate *Pesach* but they were not made aware of the significance of this festival of freedom.

Bringing the Russian Jewry Issue To the Attention of the Knesset

From Italy, I made my way to Israel where I met with members of the Knesset, Jewish Agency officials, cabinet ministers, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Diaspora Affairs, Yehuda Avner and Prime Minister Menachem Begin. I advised them of the severity of the problem and asked them for aid. I told the Prime Minister that a primary reason they did not come to Israel was that they wanted to maintain their refugee status in order to receive American funding.

"What!" he exclaimed, "never will a Jew be considered a refugee in Israel. This is our home. I will not agree to this condition."

Immediately, I dispatched Rabbi Chaim Meir Kahana to Italy. His *mesirus nefesh*, dedication and devotion to Russian Jews, coupled with his first hand experience as a victim of the Soviet system made me feel that he was the best choice for the job of introducing the refugees to Judaism.

Meanwhile, I remained in Israel for a short time where I continued to lobby Israeli officials on behalf of Soviet Jewry. From

Israel, I traveled to England where I met with Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jacobovits and some other people to brief them on the situation.

Indifference in America

Back home, we at the RCA had to consolidate a plan. I told my colleagues that they should not become overwhelmed with the dimensions of the problem, but on the other hand, we dare not remain indifferent. I was personally dismayed with the lack of commitment by the Orthodox community to the cause of Soviet Jewry. This sentiment was verified in a meeting I attended on June 11, 1979 for the Conference of Soviet Jews in Washington. Primarily, Reform and Conservative rabbis and lay leaders participated and were vitally concerned while practically no Orthodox rabbis attended.

Moreover, I was surprised by the report of the situation in Italy given by one of the leaders of the conference. He echoed my sentiments exactly. "Where are our Orthodox leaders who are now crying *al chait* (we have sinned) over the Holocaust?" both he and I asked. "We have an opportunity to direct, to inspire a lost generation of Jews and we do not yet fully comprehend the opportunity given to us."

The gist of my plan was this. I proposed that in conjunction with the JDC we would provide a large staff of religious, Israel-oriented Russian speakers to imbue the emigrants with a positive leaning towards *Yiddishkeit* and Israel.

Camps and Clubs in Italy

In concrete terms, this translated into a suggestion to open a kosher coffee house and food concession. This would take care of *Kashrus* for the community, but I also knew that we had to establish programs specifically to attract youth. I suggested we organize a three-week sleep-away camp led by *madrichim* or youth leaders to inspire them. Of course, it was essential to establish a synagogue led by a dedicated rabbi and also invite guest lecturers.

Once again we needed funds to implement these program. We knew we would run into difficulties soliciting such large funds.

Thank G-d, with the help and cooperation of the Joint, the Jewish Agency, Israeli government and several anonymous donors, we were able to reach our goal. In effect, the Joint subsidized the extra cost of the kosher food, two thousand five hundred dollars per month. Moreover, Joint officials agreed to fund the cost of five religious youth leaders at a cost of seven thousand dollars each per year.

The rest of the funds came from Ezra. We contributed ten thousand dollars. Rabbi Breich in Zurich raised an additional ten thousand dollars in his community and Rabbi Chaim Meir Kahana raised another five thousand dollars.

With these funds in hand, we could cover the initial cost of the project, including the cost of storage of the kosher food and renting facilities for a synagogue and for educational programs. Unfortunately, the funds were insufficient and the project ran into a deficit of thousands of dollars per month.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Kahana had already spent one week in Italy and made a tremendous impact on the various communities there.

I returned to Italy two months later, in August 1979, in order to meet some of the religious needs of the emigrants in Ladispoli and Ostia. Rabbi Kahana accompanied me on this trip. We intended to rent suitable facilities to set up a club where Jewish children and adults could assemble to receive traditional Jewish training and conduct religious services.

In Ostia we concentrated on providing adequate storage facilities for the kosher food. We bought a refrigerator for meats and chickens, as well as other products.

Both the club and the arrangement to provide kosher food proved extremely successful in Ostia. Next, we implemented similar projects in Ladispoli to expose the thousands of Jews languishing there to the rudiments of *Yiddishkeit.*

At the end of our visit, both Rabbi Kahana and I came to the conclusion that this project – that was fully supported by the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Rabbi E. Toaff – had achieved some of its goals. The project had made it possible for emigrant Jews to receive traditional religious instruction and guidance in order to begin to understand the importance of their heritage, and to learn to live as proud Jews in a free society.

The Russian Expedition

One month later, Shulamith and I left the US for our memorable trip to Russia. We planned to spend the High Holidays visiting various communities. Surprisingly, the Lubavitcher Rebbe did not immediately given me a *brocha* for the visit. I went to see him before *Rosh Hashana,* as I did every year, and I told him about our plans to spend the *Yamim Noraim* in Russia.

"Why are you running to Russia for *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*?" the Lubavitcher Rebbe asked me.

He knew that the High Holidays were the busiest time of year at Hillcrest – close to two thousand people attended the services – and the Rebbe was as concerned about them as he was about Russian Jews. The Rebbe gave his blessing only after I told him they had arranged for Rabbi Kleinman to be in charge. I also advised him I had resigned and was planning *Aliya.* He gave me his blessing for success on the trip and *Aliya.*

The Rebbe advised me to converse with Russian Jews, to strengthen their hearts and to lift their spirits by telling them that better days were surely ahead.

Shulamith and I had planned the visit meticulously, stuffing as many religious items into our suitcases as possible. These included a copy of the *Chumosh "Peneenei HaChasidut",* just published. It became very in useful at the Moscow airport. Other items included *mezuzos* that we distributed everywhere we went. We also carried *siddurim* with Russian translation, *tzizis*, *yarmulkes*, Bibles, *shofros*, *taleisim,* dictionaries, commentary on Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik's *shiurim*, calendars, letters from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, recently published, *gartels*, copies of the *Tanya* and tapes of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and *Chabad* tapes. We also took wine and other food items as well as panty hose, calculators, *babushkas*, chewing gum, ladies shoes, cigarettes and cigars.

We took with us one special *tallis.* This *tallis*, not available in Russia, had been specifically requested by Zalmon Goldstein. I assumed that he wanted to use it for his daily prayers. Later he sent me a photograph of himself draped in this *tallis.* The ultimate purpose of the request, he explained, was to possess a *tallis* to pray in and eventually to be buried in.

First Stop: Moscow

Amply supplied, we left for Moscow September 20, 1979, with six large, heavy suitcases.

We approached the customs counter with trepidation. Fortunately, the counter was manned by a young woman of Polish descent. I spoke to her in Polish. Happy to meet a *"landsman"*, she gave our luggage a cursory check. She opened the first suitcase and saw a copy of my *Chumosh* lying on top with my picture on the front cover and was very impressed when I said that it was a book on philosophy. I explained that the other suitcases just contained clothing for a worldwide trip. We were delighted that she deemed it unnecessary to open the rest of our suitcases. Her only request was that we list all jewelry and cash that we possessed. Breathing a deep sigh of relief, Shulamith and I made our way out of the airport.

Feeling this positive experience was a good omen that boded well for the rest of the trip, we proceeded to meet our Intourist guide who drove us to our hotel, The Russia.

Welcome Russian Style: Around the Clock Surveillance

The Intourist guide was an integral part of any visit to Russia. She served a dual purpose. For the Russians, this system was a way to assure that the visitors were controlled and go only where permitted. For the traveler, it was convenient to be met at the airport and guided to and from the various cities, until the last drop-off at the point of departure. In the hotel, surveillance is continued with the aid of a key lady who has access to the rooms on each floor. She gives you a key to your room that must be exchanged for a hotel entrance pass each time you leave the hotel. This process is repeated in reverse when returning to the hotel. Thus, she is able to accurately record everyone's coming and going and check rooms whenever she chooses to do so.

The first morning in Moscow, we took a cab to the synagogue in time for *Shacharis*. Shulamith sat in the rear of the synagogue next to a desk and phone. I moved inside the *shul,* but I chose to sit at the back of the men's section so as not to disrupt the services

by drawing too much attention to myself. Still, everyone turned when we entered the *shul.* Right away they all knew that we were American tourists, yet they remained cautious. The first person to approach me was the *shochet,* Reb Motel Lifshitz. Beaming, he welcomed me. "*Sholom Aleichem,*" he said. Once Reb Motel broke the ice, other people approached me and shook my hand in a warm greeting. Several people were expecting me and I had prepared specific gifts to distribute to them. Discreetly, I handed over the various religious items I had brought.

The Official Yeshiva

After the services, a yeshiva student, Yosef Ben Zvi, introduced himself to me and invited me to visit his yeshiva. We climbed the stairs to the second floor of the synagogue where he ushered us into a large room containing *shtenders, seforim* and all the paraphernalia found in a study hall in any Yeshiva.

Randomly selecting a *sefer,* I saw that it was the *M'or Anaim* printed in 1863. Yosef Ben Zvi told me that about fourteen students studied at the Yeshiva, but I soon discovered that not one of them ever spent any time in the Yeshiva. Despite the outward trappings of a Yeshiva, including the Rebbe, the Moscow Yeshiva didn't function at all. Even more unsettling was the fact that none of the students seemed to have the first inkling about *Yiddishkeit, davening* or making *kiddush.* However, they told me that a few of the students were learning *shechita.* I didn't have the opportunity to verify this report, although I assumed it to be true.

After the official guided tour of the yeshiva, we were directed to the office to meet the new president or *gabbai,* Mr. Adolf Grand. He was a former Moscow yeshiva *bochur* who had been appointed president one month earlier. This appointment set a precedent, as it was the first time a young man had assumed the helm of the congregation. The very nature of his youth meant that he had limited experience or understanding of the workings of a synagogue, or of the Jewish community as a whole. He had no link to the past.

I presented him with my *sefer* and he in turn presented me with a new Hebrew calendar printed in Moscow. He was cordial, if not overly friendly. He showed me around the synagogue and agreed

to accompany me, together with Mr. Noodleman, an elder of the synagogue, to Chief Rabbi Fishman who was hospitalized for an illness. He also introduced us to the leadership of the *shul.*

Visiting the Chief Rabbi

It was one o'clock Friday afternoon when we left for the visit. The hospital was approximately one hour's drive from the synagogue. On the way, we were assured that this hospital was no different from other hospitals in the Soviet Union. This knowledge didn't assuage our shock at the sub-standard conditions. Rabbi Fishman's room contained three metal beds, although he was the only occupant at the time. The bed linen was made of a coarse grayish material. It wasn't difficult to visualize the discomfort of having to lie on this bed for several weeks.

If we were despondent by what we saw, we were buoyed by his delighted reaction on seeing us. He had been ill for a few months, in and out of the hospital for most of that period. We brought him gifts and regards from several of his friends in the West. He thanked us for the gifts, but his greater satisfaction was that I had consented to officiate at the *Rosh Hashana* services.

Soon, we headed back to the hotel to prepare for Shabbos and *Yom Tov.* Unfortunately the cab we had arranged for did not show up, but we managed to hail another one. On the way, Mr. Noodleman insisted that we stop to buy some fruit for *Yom Tov.* He entered a bazaar in a huge building with various fruit stands. He showed his card that entitled him to purchase good quality fruit without difficulty. Obviously this was a privilege reserved for special members of the Communist Party.

The High Holidays

That evening, the first night of *Rosh Hashana,* we prayed in the beautiful Moscow Synagogue. It was definitely a rare privilege to be there on *Rosh Hashana* when services draw the largest crowd of worshippers. The only other festival services that attract such a large turnout is on *Simchas Torah.*

That night every one of the hundreds of seats was filled, with more people cramming the aisles. Outside, where thousands of Jews had

congregated, the street was closed to traffic. The crowds included people who wanted to be identified with the Jewish community, but were not observant. Also included were others who wanted to pray, but considered the synagogue representative of the Communist establishment. Many were young people and some were "refuseniks."

Despite the fact that the synagogue was identified with the establishment, we certainly never dismissed its importance as a legal place for Jews to congregate. Moreover, the synagogue was run by citizens who were law abiding and loyal to their country.

As I entered the synagogue, I was asked by the president, Mr. Grand, to sit in Rabbi Fishman's seat. I declined. I assured them that it wasn't respectful for anyone to sit in the rabbi's seat and I believe it pleased them to hear this. The cantor, Mr. Kleinman, made a short speech welcoming the worshippers, explaining the Rabbi's absence and greeting us, the American Jews, representatives of the RCA. This announcement generated a lot of excitement and all eyes turned towards us.

The Center of Attention

After the speech, the *tefillos,* beautifully chanted by the cantor and choir, commenced. During the services I was aware of individuals in *shul* who wanted to communicate with me. They were expecting me and I knew about them, but our paths were blocked. I felt like a prisoner on the *bima.* When the services were over, we wanted to mingle with the people, but during our stay in Moscow the so-called yeshiva students surrounded us, effectively reducing our exposure to the crowds. After services they ushered us into their quarters where they had prepared a festive meal for us. The meal seemed very tasty – wine, vodka, apples, honey, fish, soup, chicken, vegetables and compote – but we could not eat and felt trapped. We tried to sing some *zemiros.* They didn't seem to know any, so we confined ourselves to conversing about our recent trips to Israel and Russia.

The second day we noticed the president was not in *shul.* Shulamith was worried that the authorities had detained him for having taken us to visit Chief Rabbi Fishman. Our fears were unfounded. We were relieved to see him in *shul* that evening.

A First: An American Rabbi Speaks in Moscow on the High Holiday

On the first day of *Rosh Hashana*, I was asked to deliver a sermon in Yiddish. I was the first American Rabbi to ever address the congregation on the High Holidays. It was an honor, as well as a great responsibility.

Before speaking, I was introduced to a representative of the Ministry of Culture. I rapidly learned the importance of measuring each word. At the end of my sermon the room was filled with applause and the atmosphere was charged with emotion as the congregants wiped away their tears. Although many visitors passed through Russia, few if any had the opportunity to address such a large gathering of Jews. This was a unique experience. The women crowded around Shulamith and asked her if there were other rabbis like her husband in America. They found it incongruous that we should leave our family to come and be with them for the *Yamim Noraim.*

It became quickly apparent to me that living in fear alters and weakens the human spirit. People become completely self-centered with no concern for neighbors or friends. Each person is out for himself because he mistrusts everyone else.

We witnessed two incidents that manifested this mistrust. On the first day of *Rosh Hashana*, Shulamith sat in the women's balcony and had an excellent view. Mid-morning she noticed a man enter the synagogue and carefully examine each and every worshipper. At first, it seemed that he was looking for someone. A few minutes later another man came and repeated the ritual. Within half an hour approximately ten men had all entered the *shul* and scanned the worshippers. They had very obviously taken an inventory of everyone in the synagogue that morning. The whole process was very disturbing and intimidating.

The atmosphere wasn't any different in the balcony. Two women were sitting on Shulamith's left side. Intrigued by her new Russian *Machzor*, one of them asked to borrow it. She gladly lent it to her. Right away, the woman sitting next to her asked her why she lent her *Machzor* to a Communist. However, within a short time both women were avidly reading the Russian translation. Soon they

noticed a man looking up. Immediately, the *Machzor* was thrust back as if it were hot coals. The distrust each person felt for the other was the most heartbreaking experience. Even activities that might have been permissible were avoided because of fear. It hurt me deeply to realize that Jews could not even relax in *shul.*

The second night of *Rosh Hashana,* we firmly excused ourselves from the group of yeshiva *bochurim* who had whisked us off for dinner the previous night. We managed to elude them in time to merge with the throngs outside.

"From out of the depths I call unto Thee" (*mema'amakim keroticho Ko*), and so it was. Thousands of people all risked the wrath of the authorities by overtly identifying as Jews. What sheer courage and what defiance I thought to myself. I was amazed at the thousands of people who came out of their homes to mark the day as Jews. Some people were just standing in circles and chatting. Meanwhile, a group of beautiful girls from Izbeck were melodiously singing Modern Hebrew songs. In the background a woman was playing a violin and singing Jewish *liedlich.* Another young man was playing *Hava Nagila* on his guitar while a group of youngsters were singing Russian songs and dancing the *hora.* Lacking education, the *Baal Shem Tov* would say that this is their prayer.

As soon as our presence was noticed, people came over, communicating with us in English or in Hebrew. At this point we made contact with three special people and arranged to meet them after *Yom Tov.* Before leaving we gave our *Machzorim* to two youths hungry for *Yiddishkeit.*

"Look at these children of parents long since lost, avowed Communists, returning – returning if only given a chance and in spite of all odds. Should the happy days come and the doors open, they will be shining stars. Alas, these brave ones are not permitted to leave," I said to Shulamith.

We mingled for a little longer speaking to different groups who had congregated there. By eleven o'clock it was time to leave. We felt both simultaneously elated and dejected.

The second day of *Yom Tov* we were already recognized. Many courageous souls came over and spoke to us. It became apparent that most of them would leave Russia given the chance. Upstairs

in the balcony, women who felt a little more free, came over to Shulamith and conversed with her. Nearly all expressed the desire to emigrate to America where the "Jews live in great wealth."

Deliberate Misinformation

Overall, most of the people we met were totally misinformed about Israel. They obtained their news by reading the Soviet newspapers and from a Jewish Communist paper printed in Israel that completely distorted the Israeli scene. The daily newspapers constantly printed that Israel is a Fascist state that keeps its citizens imprisoned with no available employment. Shulamith did her utmost to repudiate these distortions. She spoke glowingly of *Aliyah*, a n important contribution in itself. We realized that we needed to have more contact with Soviet Jews in order to give them accurate information. Their thrust at that time was for migration to America. Unfortunately, many of the *shlichim* they met in Russia and later in Vienna, also directed their paths towards America.

The exceptions were the educated "refuseniks." We discovered that there were over three hundred people, mostly under the age of forty, studying *Ivrit* (Hebrew) in Moscow. Our first real encounter with them was on the second day of *Rosh Hashana.* I had announced in *shul* that I would be saying *Tashlich* at the Volga River after *Mincha.* I prevailed on one of the *yeshivaleit* to walk with me to the river. He was from Tashkent and seemed more dedicated than some of the others. On the way he told me that he was studying *shechita* and that he felt a need for added *chalafim* since those they shared were quite old. Subsequently, the Ezra Fund made them available.

Tashlich at the Volga

As soon as we reached the riverbank, we saw groups of young couples gathered there. On seeing them, our guide vanished. Meanwhile the couples started walking towards us. After greeting us, a barrage of *sh'aylos* (questions) were directed to me. More people arrived and joined in the discussion. The *sh'aylos* were profound and on my return I referred some of them to Rabbi Soloveitchik and Israeli Chief Rabbi Goren. The answers were

mailed back to the synagogue. Meeting young Russian couples on the banks of the Volga River reciting *Tashlich* and asking *sh'aylos* was a truly heartening experience. It was such a pity they didn't have a Rav or a *madrich* to guide them, I thought.

In the Homes of the "Refuseniks"

Motzei Yom Tov we took a cab and drove one hour or more to the outskirts of Moscow to the apartment of a remarkable woman who was a "refusenik." There were people in all three rooms of the apartment. We brought some Hebrew-Russian dictionaries and boxes of Bartons chocolates. Our hostess clasped one dictionary to her heart. "*Zeh sheli, zeh sheli*" ("this is mine, this is mine"), she said. The chocolates, although appreciated, were of minor interest.

In the largest room of the apartment we met a group of very sophisticated intelligent people who were well-informed about affairs in Israel. They formed a *chug Ivri* and they studied regularly together. They invited me to address them, and a lively discussion ensued.

I asked them what prompted them to endanger their safety to gather together to study. I wanted to know what motivated their return to their heritage. I discovered that all of them were children of avowed Communists. Their parents were pioneers of the new freedom for the Russian masses who raised their children as atheists. They expressed varying reasons for their return to the fold and drive to rediscover their Jewish roots. Some were shocked by the Stalin trials. Others were exhilarated by the *Yom Kippur* War. Still others were affected and hurt by the current wave of anti-Semitism and simply felt the existence of a void that had to be filled. They asked themselves the time-old question about the meaning of life. Surely, they said, life is just not waking, eating, working and sleeping. Thus, they embarked on the search together in the *chug Ivri.* They managed to acquire some basic books and taught each other.

"Imagine, I made *kiddush* for the first time a few weeks ago," one member of the group said. "My grandmother wept. She said that she remembered hearing this before as a child in her father's home. I had to explain what little I know of Judaism to my mother."

Another intense young man who was an artist asked if it was true that the law of *z'nut* to legalize prostitution had been introduced into the Israeli Knesset by MK Shulamith Aloni. I was flabbergasted to learn that they knew about this. Reluctantly, I admitted that their information was indeed correct. Some were observant Jews, sporting *kippot* although this young man was a non-observant Jew. Nevertheless, he was outraged.

"How can I go to a country that even considers the violation of the sanctity of Jewish daughters?" he asked hysterically. "For this I should leave Russia? Are we worse than most civilized nations?" he shouted. He continued his tirade against everyone, especially the rabbis for allowing the situation to evolve.

His outburst provoked a lively discussion on the nature of democracy and the women's liberation movement, among other topics. Happily, I realized that these rebels, these "hooligans," as they were called by the authorities, were in fact highly moral and very conservative individuals, striving for a better Jewish existence for themselves and their families, a dream some hoped to fulfill in Israel. We conversed late into the night until I left wishing them that G-d answer their prayers.

We also experienced two more encounters that made an impression on us. While we were outside the synagogue on *motzei Yom Tov*, we met Misha, a *ba'al teshuva,* and Professor Grisha who was a mathematician. We agreed to meet them, but away from the synagogue. Misha hailed a cab and soon, we found ourselves in the professor's sparsely furnished apartment. His charming wife and son were home. Their son was the first boy to receive a Jewish education in Moscow, although on *erev Rosh Hashana* a *cheder* was opened with three boys attending. This was the first *cheder* in Moscow in fifty years.

Professor Grisha and Misha both invested a lot of effort acquiring and improving their Jewish knowledge. They were obsessed with the idea of writing a *sefer* on Kabbalah. I felt they lacked a good deal of basic learning. Misha had valuable *seforim* in his possession. However, they were missing some of the *seforim* that they needed for their studies. Both men were out of work and struggling immensely to keep their heads above water. We brought them as much kosher food as

we could spare. They really appreciated this gesture. They pleaded with us to try to send them *seforim* and packages to keep them going. They also asked that we encourage rabbis to come to Moscow to teach. Professor Grisha showed us an invitation he had received to address an Institute for Mathematical Studies at a prestigious university in the United States. He asked us to convey his apologies as he was refused permission to leave. Moreover, they were both denied a telephone. In my heart I felt that they would prevail someday, perhaps, even find some way to write their *sefer.* Their determination and conviction knew no bounds.

From their apartment we went to visit Professor Ilya Esses, an outstanding scholar and *gelassener mentch* (calm person) whom we had been advised to contact. He understood that he had to set limits to his acts of defiance. If he didn't, he would only cause additional problems. Therefore, he tried to live within the framework of the law. He forbade any international phone calls in or out of his apartment. Having already lost his job when he applied for an exit visa, he devoted himself to teaching and preparing students for university exams and teaching Hebrew. Some students were able to pay him, but there were many who could not pay. They weren't turned away. Moreover, in keeping with his philosophy to work within the framework of the law, he approached the authorities with a request to pay income tax on earnings for teaching Hebrew. The response was typical of the Soviet authorities. He was told that there is no such language as Hebrew and therefore, he could not be teaching it.

We had brought with us certain *seforim* that he had requested from Ezra. He was overjoyed to receive them. Among them was Rabbi Besdin's lecture series of Rabbi Soloveitchik's *shiurim.* He was especially pleased with a copy of Tradition Magazine that he used for his lectures and classes. He said that he would be grateful to receive the four editions of Tradition that he was missing. He acknowledged the assistance he received from Ezra. The two packages that we sent enabled him to exist for six months, therefore he only had to earn a living for the remaining half a year. Thankfully, his living conditions were adequate.

Professor Essas impressed me as an extremely intelligent man and I was convinced that he was destined for greatness. He possessed a rich and imaginative mind and he manifested the capacity

to absorb every morsel of knowledge imparted to him. His leadership qualities shone through. He was thoughtful and deliberate in his actions. I felt that he was a truly remarkable person and it was my *z'chus* to know him.

Meeting all these tremendously dedicated people who encountered such hardship trying to practice Judaism, begged the question of why they didn't adopt a vegetarian lifestyle, thus making *Kashrus* easier. Soon we discovered the answer.

The vegetables available were green and red cabbage, beets, potatoes, some cucumbers and tomatoes in season and very few carrots. The fruits were of unbelievably low quality, apart from being hard to obtain. The only available fruits were apples, pears, grapes and sweet melon in season. Oranges, grapefruits, plums, peaches, kosher margarine and oil was not available.

Riga

Tuesday morning we left for Riga. After the plane filled up, some important official arrived on board and one passenger was asked to give up his seat for him. At the same time another person was taken off the plane although we weren't sure if this was connected to the official or if he was arrested for some reason.

In Riga, we checked into the Latvia Hotel where the furniture was of very inferior quality. In fact one chair collapsed as I sat down. There weren't any carpets on the wood floor and stairs. After we finished unpacking we proceeded to look for the synagogue. We knew that it was in the old city, not far from the hotel. We attempted to hail a taxi. Most ignored us. Others did stop but refused to take us to the synagogue, or pretended not to know where it was. We kept on walking in the direction of the old city until I noticed a man approaching us. I took a chance. "*Ehr zeit ois vee a yid*" (you look like a Jew), I said to him. Surprisingly he said yes and he told us that we weren't too far from the *shul*. However, he refused to accompany us to show us the way. Riga is steeped in anti-Semitism and we could well imagine him standing in front of a mirror to locate his mark of Judaism.

Fortunately, after half an hour of walking around searching for the synagogue, we met a man who was on his way to the *shul* for

Mincha. He gladly accompanied us and when we arrived, the cantor and leader of the community were waiting to greet us. They said they had been to the airport to meet us, but we had missed one another.

The Riga Synagogue

Right away we were impressed with the beautiful ancient edifice. About thirty people were gathered to receive us, after word arrived from Moscow that we were on our way. They rolled out the red carpet and the cantor became our unofficial host. He brought us milk and told us about life in Riga.

The following morning, I filed an application with the authorities to visit the city of Dvinsk where, prior to W.W.II two great luminaries resided and were now buried. We were concerned with the state of the Jewish cemetery in Dvinsk. The request was refused. Subsequently, we learned that Jewish cemeteries are vandalized. We heard that the grave of the Berditchover Rebbe in Berditchov was in dire need of repair.

Since permission was denied, the cantor took us instead to see the cemetery in Riga. At the rear of the cemetery is a stone wall riddled with bullet marks. This was the site where the Nazis had forced Jews to dig graves and then lined them up against the walls and shot them. The cemetery seemed to have lost its Jewish identification. The authorities had erected a monument to fallen Russian martyrs.

Just about this time I got word of a funeral of a prominent Jewish physician which was to take place in a few hours. Arrangements were being made to book six violinists to play at the graveside. It took a good deal of persuasion on my part to convince them that this wasn't in keeping with Jewish tradition.

The following day, I accompanied the cantor to a dollar store which is the only place where tourists are permitted to buy gifts. I purchased two carpets for the synagogue to replace the old worn out ones. The cantor told me that it gets very cold and that the carpet will help to make it warmer for him when he *davened* and for the *kohanim* when they *duchen.* Needless to say, they were overpriced by our standards but the joy they brought was well worth it.

Shabbos in Riga

Shabbos approached. There was a tremendous amount of activity on our behalf. The women had been baking for two days and the men were busy shopping in anticipation of a big *kiddush* that was being prepared in our honor – everyone was invited.

At the *kiddush*, the cantor had a message for me. "Please tell our American friends what you see here", he said. "We have freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, the young people do not come to *shul,* but I hear it is like that all over the world. We who come are free to worship as we wish."

"It is an honor to have you here with us," he added. He introduced me and asked me to address the congregation, which I did, once more, eliciting tears and generating excitement.

My speech was followed by a very moving experience. Many of the worshippers stood up. Some said a few words and then broke out into song. Others just got up to sing songs in our honor. Many of the songs were nostalgic Yiddish melodies. One man rose to sing a cantorial tune but was told by the others that this was inappropriate for the occasion. Of course, I insisted on hearing it. Two young men caught our attention. They usually didn't worship there, but they had come specifically to see us. We managed to give them two *Machzorim.* However, the old-timers prevented us from conversing with them.

This could have continued all day, but by three o'clock I was tired. I thanked them for their hospitality and left amid pleas that I return again next year. Walking home, we were accompanied by the cantor and another gentleman and their wives. As we were crossing a wide intersection we were spotted by a cab driver who sharply swung out of his lane in an attempt to hit us. Miraculously, we escaped by a hairsbreadth, but we could see his hateful defiant eyes glaring at us as he drove off. The cantor's little speech a short time ago rang hollow in my mind as I witnessed first-hand the hatred of this *goy* for the Jews. I feared for the lives of the Jews should there be an uprising in the country.

We returned to the hotel and they sat in the lobby for a while with us. A young woman attempted to enter in order to go to the club downstairs, but the doorman refused to let her in. A commotion ensued and she was forced to leave. This scenario was repeated

a little later with a young man. We soon realized that the club was an exclusive Communist hangout and off limits to non-members.

Leningrad

Our next stop was Leningrad. The drinking water there was considered unsafe, and we decided to buy Pepsi Cola to take along. This was usually sold in the hotel lobby, but they were out of stock. Shulamith took an empty bottle and tried to buy some elsewhere. She walked down six long streets showing the bottle to people standing on various lines in front of different food establishments. Some didn't know what it was while others laughed as if to say she was looking for the impossible. Finally she decided to settle for fruit instead. She went into a fruit store and started selecting apples near the window. The saleslady and manger of the store both descended on her, grabbed the apples out of her hand while showing her a bushel of inferior, hard and partially spoiled fruit. Immediately she exclaimed, *"tourista."* They relented and let her take two fairly good apples. This was just a typical scene in daily Soviet life.

On Saturday night, we were scheduled to leave by train in a first class sleeping car for two bound for Leningrad where we would spend *Yom Kippur.* However, when we opened the door to our cabin, we were surprised to see four berths, two on each side of the cabin. A gentleman lay in the upper berth on the right side of the cabin. A woman was sitting on the lower berth looking very nervous. Imagine our chagrin, but we made the best of an uncomfortable situation. We spoke to each other in English, asking each other what were the alternatives since the train was overcrowded. We all agreed to sleep in our clothes.

The woman spoke fairly good English. "We also thought we would be alone. We are also Jews," she said. Therefore, we felt that we had a lot of *mazel* on this trip. We had to make up the beds ourselves with damp linens that we attained for two rubles.

Conversing with this couple was an experience in itself. The wife was a chemist who had supervised the cement mixture used in every major dam in Russia. Her husband was a professor, but as soon as their daughter applied for an exit visa they were both dismissed from their jobs. There isn't any severance pay in Russia, but they were eligible for pensions and thus able to manage.

In the morning, I put on my *tefillin.* The professor said that his father had a *mezuza* just like that. They were aware that *Yom Kippur* was approaching and that if they chose to they could tune into clandestine radio from Israel and hear the prayers. They told us that they had children in New York who sent their grandchildren to Hebrew School there. They could not believe this.

It seemed incongruous to them that we would come to Russia just to be with Jews. It took much convincing to assure them we had no family and just wanted to give courage to all our Jewish brothers and sisters.

They were amazed that we had taken it upon ourselves to make a trip of this scope for the *Yomim Tovim.* Furthermore, they were astonished to hear that there were people in New York helping Russian refugees – spending their own money and expending time to help strangers. This idea of helping strangers was so alien to them that they said that they would have to give it some serious thought. This was a perfect example of Communism in action. I had met two people, both avid Communists and both supposedly equal citizens who had difficulty conceiving of the idea of mutual aid. This encounter continued to prove what we had surmised all along – the Communist philosophy brings out the most selfish aspects of human behavior. As we left the train, the man said, "I will help you with your luggage." It seemed we had made a little progress already.

Yom Kippur in Leningrad

In Leningrad we stayed in the Astoria Hotel, near the synagogue which was one of the most beautiful synagogues I have ever seen. The seating capacity was eighteen hundred people. Once again, word that we were on our way had preceded our visit and we were royally received by Mr. Plotkin, a charming man, president of the Synagogue. We also met his sister who was responsible for the ladies in the *shul.* She in fact was the *shamista* and we realized that each *shul* has a *shamista.*

Mr. Plotkin assigned an aide to squire us around. We were already used to this service which limited our movements considerably, although the gentleman was very helpful and courteous.

The *shul* was packed to capacity. Each seat was taken and all three aisles were filled with people standing crammed together. Outside, many more people had gathered. However, in Leningrad we were effectively prevented from stepping outside the *shul.* We did manage to make one miraculous contact inside the *shul* when one young man passed us an address.

The cantor and the choir inspiringly chanted the *tefillos.* Everyone remained in *shul* for the entire day, many standing for the duration of the prayers. Most people didn't have *machzorim* but they stood transfixed in their places, just listening. Then I spoke. My *drasha* evoked intense emotion and for over half an hour thereafter there was much whispering.

For Shulamith and myself personally, the prayers took on an added meaning. We felt the meaning of *mechaya hamaysim* (revival of the dead). The cantor spent an especially long time on *Aneinu,* asking G-d to answer their prayers and *vekorev pezureinu mebein hagoyim,* asking the Almighty to gather in the exiles from among the nations.

All of a sudden a stone came flying through the window, shattering the glass next to where I sat. Apparently, this was not an uncommon occurrence in Russia and no one was shocked.

Neila, the closing service of *Yom Kippur,* was completed a half an hour too early. I had to delay the blowing of the *shofar* which would signal the end of the fast. Swiftly I stopped the *ba'al tokeya* and startled everyone by *davening Ma'ariv.* They respected my wishes. At the conclusion of *Ma'ariv,* we made *Havdala* and then we blew the *shofar.*

Afterwards, on the *bima,* we danced and sang, *leshanah habaah b'Yerushalayim and u'faratzah,* let the exiles be gathered in. Many people came up onto the *bima* to join. Soon the lights started to go out and the worshippers drifted out of the synagogue as a new year dawned.

Home Hospitality

Once again we were cornered and firmly escorted to a side chamber where a meal was prepared for us to break our fast. We ate some fruit and then begged off the rest of the meal, saying we were very tired and wanted to go to bed. We were escorted back to the hotel where, after a quick bite, we packed the balance of our supplies and

left for the home of the young man whom we had met at *shul.* He was Yitzchak Kogan, the *Tzadik* of Leningrad. We arrived at his home to find that he had assembled fifteen people to meet us. It was similar to the meeting we had in Moscow. They too studied *Ivrit.* They recounted that often people tried to pick fights with them and harassed them in the streets. If you resist, they said, a fight erupts and the Jew is arrested. They have to live with this degradation. Decent work is out of the question for "refuseniks." Kosher food is almost non-existent although Kosher chicken is sometimes available. The *shochet* is eighty-seven years old. Due to the lack of available kosher products, our hostess had baked a cake substituting *shmaltz* for shortening. After our repast, they moved the table aside revealing a board. Lifting it, our eyes popped – there was a hidden *mikvah* underneath. We were told his grandfather had died in prison for having built a *mikvah* elsewhere!

The young people who gathered asked us to intercede on their behalf to obtain permission to use the *succah.* We did try, and before leaving we asked Mr. Plotkin who said that if they didn't sing loudly, he would permit it. Hopefully, we were successful. Even if Mr. Plotkin stood on protocol, he did a good job managing the *shul.* He had the wedding room refurbished and Jewish weddings were still held in that room.

We spent our last morning in Leningrad speaking with two women who came to see us about a problem involving a *get.* I told them that I would have to send them a reply. They gave me their address and then they left only to return a few minutes later. They wanted me to remove the address from my book and send their reply directly to the *shul.* The reason for this, they said, was they feared that the authorities would examine my luggage on leaving, find my address book and later question them. I complied and upon returning to the US, I sent the reply as requested.

We left Leningrad and, thank G-d, none of our almost empty suitcases were opened. We had distributed most of our belongings. At the airport, the airline officials demanded $135 for our overweight baggage. I started to protest, as there was no way the empty suitcases exceeded the weight restrictions, but was quickly silenced by Shulamith who said, "Don't argue. Pay and let's run." It was a trip that will remain etched in our hearts and minds forever.



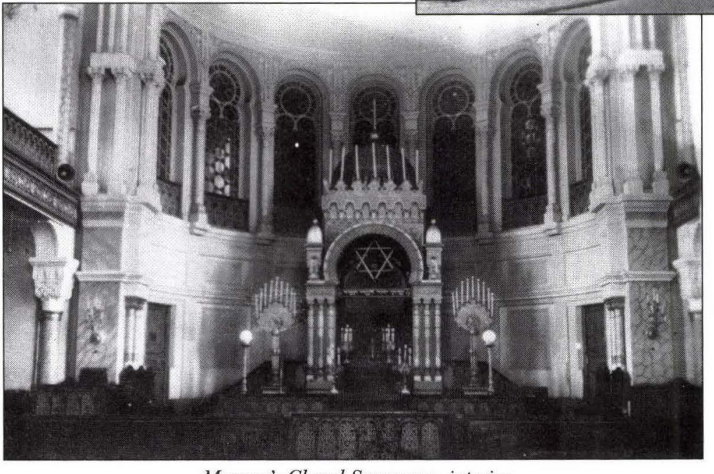
Jewish New Year Card from Russia

Moscow's Choral Synagogue





Memorial for Riga Jews



Moscow's Choral Synagogue, interior



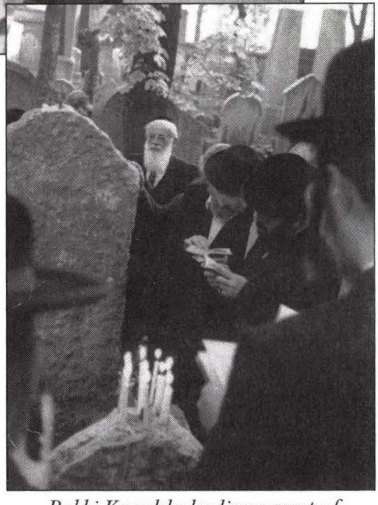
President of Moscow Synagogue, Mr. Kleinman

A class I conducted in the Moscow Synagogue





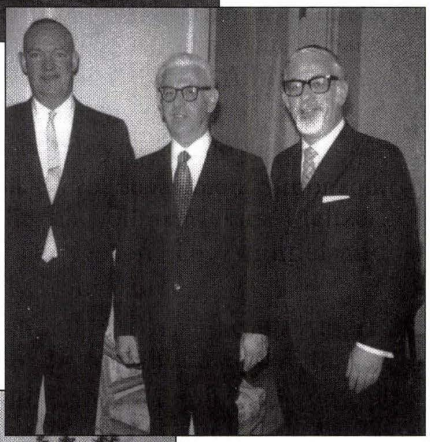
"Shamista" Moscow Synagogue



Rabbi Kowalsky leading a group of Rabbonim, from Eretz Yisrael, to visit the Maharal's Kever in Prague



Russian Baalei Teshuvah



John Eisenhower Jr. Arthur Goldberg, U.S. Supreme Court Justice and R' Kowalsky at Brussels Russian Conference to help Russian Jews



R' Sholem B. Kowalsky with Yosef Mendelevich



Rabbi Fishman, former Chief Rabbi of Russia



The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l greets Rabbi Kowalsky upon his return from Israel



Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky and Mr. Grand, the newly elected President of the Jewish community of Moscow

A Dream Fulfilled: Aliyah To Israel



ow many years had I spent pleading, cajoling, urging the members of my congregation to make *Aliya!* How many Israeli guests had we hosted? Many of them had eloquently described the beauty of the land and kindled a yearning enhanced by the legendary lure of Israel. How many trips had I taken to experience for myself the joy of living in Israel? How long was it since I had purchased a home there? The time had come!

On a memorable Shabbos morning I announced to a startled congregation that we were finally taking our leave. The reaction was mixed. How can you, a relatively young man, even think of retiring? What will you do with yourself? You are so active, so involved. What will we do without you?

Others were genuinely happy for us and wished us well.

After prolonged negotiation, we obtained a small settlement which, with Social Security, seemed sufficient to get by. In fact, for all the years in Hillcrest, no pension fund was created by the Congregation, the little we had we paid for ourselves. The synagogue did not contribute. We were very disappointed that these people who professed so much love could not find it in their hearts to be more giving and generous. They were certainly generous in their praise. I recalled all the affairs in our honor, the "This is Your Life" evening, the twenty-fifth anniversary dinner, and so on.

When it came to parting with money, they became very frugal indeed.

This, of course, did not dampen our happiness at the prospect of living in our homeland. We were elated, and within a few months started packing and taking leave of friends and family.

We were given a beautiful farewell dinner and left in good spirits.

A year later, Rabbi Simcha Krauss of the Young Israel of St. Louis was elected to succeed me. Reputed to be a capable, scholarly rabbi, I had the pleasure of installing him.

Arrival

Hearts pounding, our plane descended. The landing was smooth and the passengers clapped, smiled and bid one another *shalom.*

We were met by many members of the family who whisked us off to our magnificent apartment in Jerusalem. We had purchased the apartment in 1970 and with the help of a few friends who insist on remaining anonymous we made a substantial down payment. Slowly we paid it off and furnished it.

Settled in and unpacked, we breathed a sigh of relief and were thankful to Hashem for this wonderful opportunity to live in our holy land. Within a few days, we explored our neighborhood and inhaled the *avir* (the air), the *kedusha* (the holiness), the charm and beauty of Jerusalem. We were truly ecstatic. A lifelong dream had come true.

Officially, I came to Israel to retire, but retirement did not mean inaction. On the contrary, it meant finding new adventures, new meaning to life.

It did not take long for adventure to find me.

"The Time is Short and the Work is Much."

It was a cold Thursday night in September, the Jewish month of Elul and I had just returned home having recited *Slichot – z'chor brit.* Although it was late at night, Shulamith had waited up for me with a cup of hot tea and an important message. Rabbi Louis

Bernstein had called from New York, with an anxious message to call him as soon as I got in, no matter how late.

This had to be urgent. I returned his call immediately.

"Sholem, this is an SOS," he said. "This morning I was called to the bedside of one of my members. A few hours before he had suffered a heart attack on hearing from his daughter. She is in Israel and called to tell him that she is going to marry an Arab this weekend."

"Louie, did you say an Arab?" I asked him.

"Yes. She met him in a restaurant. He is a waiter there. But imagine this! He wears a ring with a Magen David on it. At first she didn't know he wasn't Jewish. It's my guess that he was out to capture the heart of a gullible Jewish girl and she was a perfect victim. She's stout and not very popular. Her mother told her that perhaps she would meet her *besherta* (destined match) in Israel. Sholem, please drop everything and rescue her," he pleaded with me.

"Louie, my dear, this is a tall order at this time of night. Give me her name and address and I'll try," I said.

He didn't have her address, but he told me her friend worked in the smallest restaurant on Hillel Street in downtown Jerusalem. He also described the girl. This wasn't much to go on, but it was enough to begin with and I knew I had to get started right away.

It was already really late and I needed transport. The Semadar Taxi Service sent a chauffeur to drive me around Jerusalem. As soon as the taxi arrived I explained to the driver the nature of our night outing.

Overwhelmed, he said, "Even if it takes all night, Rabbi, I'll be with you."

The Sleuth

Our first stop was the restaurant that we found easily enough, but I hesitated to go inside. It was now well past midnight and a rabbi with a long white beard would have aroused suspicion, What was he doing asking questions about Arab employees? So, I delegated the driver to investigate while I waited in the taxi. He proved to be a competent sleuth. He established that the Arab who

sported the Magen David ring did indeed work there but had not shown up for his shift that evening. After the taxi driver explained the purpose of our inquiries, the restaurant owner gave us his employee's address. Unfortunately, he only knew the name of the street and the neighborhood in which the apartment was located, but he didn't know the number. We had our work cut out for us. We drove to the Gilo neighborhood in Jerusalem and we began knocking randomly on doors. More than once we aroused the wrath of angry residents who resented being awakened so late at night. Some people even threatened to call the police. The situation was starting to get frightening. Hopefully, we would find our couple soon before we ended up in prison charged with harassment and disturbing the peace.

Fortunately, not too long afterwards we hit the jackpot at one of the last buildings on the street. Again we braced ourselves for a raucous reaction to our tentative knock. So far people had just hurled insults and threats at us, but it was getting very late and we began to worry that the next thing hurled at us might not be so easily shrugged off. We knocked and waited. A middle-aged woman of slight build opened the door. We told her that we were looking for a young couple and proceeded to describe them, explaining that the young man was an Arab about to marry a Jewess.

Horrified that she rented to an Arab boy who wanted to marry a Jewish girl, she gladly volunteered the information.

"Yes, I rented the apartment to that couple several days ago but they've checked out already. The young man had packed all their belongings into suitcases and the girl said that they were going to meet his parents.

She recalled the name of the village located near Jerusalem. By now both the cab driver and I were exhausted but determined to plod on. "Tomorrow is *erev* Shabbat," I told the driver. "We have to finish tonight."

He said that he would stick with me and decided we needed some reinforcements. It would have been far too dangerous to venture into an Arab village in the middle of the night. So, I told the driver to head for Jerusalem's central police station at the Russian Compound. Once there we sought help.

I explained to the police officer on duty that we had come to report a missing person. She was an American tourist who had been enticed by an Arab man to go to his parents' house in their village.

"How old is she?" he asked.

"She's twenty," I said.

"Then she's considered an adult. I'm sorry we can't help you."

The White Lie

Disappointed, we started to leave the station. Fortunately, on our way out a young detective wanted to know what brought the rabbi to the police station so early in the morning.

I told him the whole story, but this time I was a little wiser. I chopped three years off the girl's age, making her seventeen.

Furious, he said that he was at our disposal for the rest of the night. "My name is Goell," he said. "We will find her. I promise you that. Too many American girls are duped into marrying Arabs so that they can leave for America where they rob and desert them."

He drove his police car while we followed in the cab. When we reached the village we remained parked on the outskirts. Goell went in, assuring us that with the help of G-d he would soon return with the couple. "I won't come back without her," he said.

Stuck in the middle of nowhere in the silence of the night, we anxiously prayed for Goell's safe return and the success of his mission. The driver and I sat glued to our seats fearing that any sound we made might alert the villagers of our presence. We waited until we made out figures coming towards us. As they drew closer, we saw that it was Goell with the couple. By three o'clock in the morning we were on our way back to the Russian Compound. On arrival, Goell offered us a private room.

I explained to the girl that because of her age, she wasn't considered a child and was responsible for her own decisions. I knew I had to convince her to leave her Arab boyfriend.

She cried and spoke incoherently for a long time. "I finally found a man who loves me and you want to take him away. I love him and he loves me. Leave me alone," she begged.

For my part, I told her that she was indeed an adult. I could not force her to do anything against her will, but I proceeded to describe the ramifications of her actions in no uncertain terms.

"Are you aware that your father has suffered a heart attack as a result of your wedding plans. He's been hospitalized and is in serious condition. Your mother, in one last desperate attempt to stop you from doing this, is leaving your father alone to rush here. She will be arriving in the next day or two as soon as she can arrange a ticket.

"Moreover, Arab men are extremely cruel to their wives, treating their donkeys more respectfully than their wives. And do you know that many Arab men just use marriage to an American to gain access to the US? Often, as soon as the couple arrives in the US, the Arab husband deserts his wife."

I suggested that she go home to think things over before she makes this rash decision.

"Go home," I said. "Call your mother and tell her not to leave your sick father's side. Tell her you'll come home. I promise that you'll be rewarded with a fine Jewish American husband for respecting your ailing father and overwrought mother."

Finally, she agreed. But the matter didn't end there. Her Arab boyfriend refused to relinquish her passport, ticket and suitcase.

"If you want to get out of here alive," Goell threatened him, "you had better give them to her now." The boy continued to insist on his right to speak to his girlfriend. Goell refused. After some persuasion, the boy finally relented and returned all the girl's belongings.

Morning dawned and we were on our way to the airport. I helped her board the plane, not wanting to leave anything to chance. It meant that she would be traveling on *Shabbat.* I prayed to the Almighty to forgive me for helping a Jew profane the Sabbath, but I considered the situation to be one of *pikuach nefesh* (life-threatening) which takes precedence over any other *halachic* injunction. I also requested *mechila* (forgiveness) for the white lie I told about the mother. In fact her mother wasn't coming to Israel at all. Surely, if this falsehood helped to convince her to call off the wedding, it was worth it.

I called Rabbi Bernstein to have someone meet her at the plane. I suggested that she be supervised for a long time.

Eventually, she married a Jewish boy and is probably thankful to Rabbi Bernstein and myself for caring enough about her to have saved her from a fate only second to death – a disastrous marriage.

Divine Providence

Somehow, even the most insignificant daily events appeared to take on another dimension in Israel. One morning, strolling on a Jerusalem main thoroughfare, Strauss Street, I was approached by a young man, who, looking into my eyes, asked me, *"Tachkemoney Ulica Street?"*

Surprised to hear someone address me in Polish, I answered him and asked,

"Yes. Do you also speak Yiddish, Hebrew or English?"

"No, only Polish," he said.

We continued to converse in Polish. My interest in the young man's story was sparked by the nature of the meeting. I always had a strong sense of *Hashgacha protit,* Divine Providence, so I was careful not to brush off any chance meetings. Maybe something significant was about to unfold.

The youth's name was Stephen. He was a handsome fifteen-year-old gentile from Cracow, who was visiting Israel as a tourist. He was here alone on a visit paid for by a Jewish Australian travel agent he had met in Cracow. The travel agent had read Stephen's high school project on the history of the renowned Remo Synagogue in Cracow. He was impressed with the youth's intense desire to visit Israel and gave him a free airline ticket.

I had to admit that, thus far, his story seemed a bit farfetched, although it struck me that he was a very sincere young man and not a prankster. As I listened to him, I began to understand why the travel agent would respond positively to his request to visit Israel even though he was a minor whose parents opposed the trip.

Stephen talked about his pressing innermost desire to discover Jewish heritage. He himself didn't know why he felt so strongly about it. He recalled episodes in his earliest childhood, days when he yearned to know more about Judaism, although both his parents were gentiles and avowed anti-Semites.

His story was fascinating.

Stephen's Story

"One night when I was eight-years-old, I awoke in the middle of the night crying and screaming out, 'I am a Jew, I am a Jew'.

"My parents burst into my bedroom. They were shocked at what I had said. I myself was terrified by the sheer intensity of what I screamed out in my sleep. My mother was furious. 'If you don't stop crying and screaming right away, I'm going to throw you out into the dark night,' she said to me. 'It's a disgrace for Polish boys to even think of Jews. They're the dirt of the earth.'

"After that she calmed me down and I fell asleep again," Stephen said. "I almost forgot the entire incident until something happened to remind me of it.

"A short while later my father died and my mother remarried. Although my father had hated Jews, my stepfather was even more intense in his hatred of Jews. I was engulfed in anti-Semitic rhetoric, but the conversations jarred my memory about the dream. One night I had the same dream again.

"Four years later when I was twelve years old, again I awoke in the middle of night crying and screaming out, 'I am a Jew, I am a Jew.' This time however, I didn't get off so lightly. My stepfather nearly went berserk. He beat me to a pulp. At that moment I resolved to find a way to leave home and go to Israel.

"Meanwhile, I tried to gather information about Jews. Having a good singing voice, I decided to audition for the Cracow Theater Choir. Though gentile, they sing Jewish songs. True, it's a strange phenomenon, but it's a big tourist attraction. It is also good propaganda for the Poles trying to rid themselves of their anti-Semitic image. Due to their effective acting on and off stage, they manage to convince Jewish tourists that they are welcome in Cracow.

"My mother had no objections to me earning extra money. I was accepted into the cast. I hoped to utilize the opportunity to learn and understand why Christians annihilated Jews.

"Joining the theater only succeeded in arousing my curiosity about Judaism even more. I met some Jews through the performances and I became more familiar with the repertoire of Jewish songs. But with each passing month my desire to unravel my inner turmoil grew more intense.

"When I turned fourteen, my teacher asked the students to write about something of interest in Cracow. I chose the Remo Synagogue and I was surprised to discover a lot of information about the synagogues of the city in local libraries. I became immersed in and fascinated with the project, to the extent that I began to believe that this project would be the ticket to my escape from home.

"Approaching the Synagogue one day to complete my project, I spotted some of my friends pursuing and harassing a Jewish man with a long beard, frock coat and a fur hat. I yelled at them to stop. 'He's my friend,' I told them and they ran off. I pulled him aside and we struck up an animated conversation, during which I told him about my dreams of waking up thinking I was a Jew. I also told him of my project about the Synagogue and my intense desire to visit Israel. Subsequently, I begged him to help me leave Poland. He was sympathetic, but told me that he could not help a minor. His mission in Poland was to locate Polish Jews and help them leave for Israel. However, he did say that if I ever made it to Israel, he would help me.

"But the day's surprises weren't over yet. Unbelievably, my strange hunch about the project being my key to freedom turned out to be true. I entered the synagogue and met a Jewish Australian travel agent who took an interest in my project. We became friendly and I told him about my intense and gnawing desire to see Israel and learn more about the Jewish people.

"The travel agent empathized with me. He read my school report and was so impressed with my sincerity that he disregarded the fact that I was a schoolboy who wanted to make this expedition alone without my parent's consent. He trusted my instincts. He told me he would give me a free ticket.

"Everything has fallen into place," Stephen said to me, "now I'm desperate to find the Jew whom I met at the Synagogue who promised to help me."

Stephen kept clinging to me as we continued to walk down Strauss Street. I stopped off at a bookstore and bought a Polish-Hebrew dictionary and a few tapes of Hebrew songs for Stephen.

After paying, I turned from the counter and noticed Stephen trembling.

"Here's the man who promised to help me," he said, looking directly into the eyes of the bearded customer standing next to him.

It was instant recognition and Rabbi Jakobowitz confirmed the entire story. He hadn't forgotten his promise. He said he would indeed take care of the youth whose full name was Stephen Kalish.

It transpired that a Russian immigrant had already taken Stephen under his wing and had let him dorm at Yeshivat Ohr Someach – one of Jerusalem's Yeshivot for *ba'alei teshuva.*

Shortly thereafter, I introduced Stephen to Jerusalem's Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Kulitz. He was impressed by Stephen's dream and surname, Kalish, which is the name of a great *Chassidic* dynasty in Poland. After the meeting, Rabbi Kulitz told me that he felt Stephen had a Jewish soul.

I continued to maintain an ongoing relationship with Stephen. I bought him clothes and gave him some money. I even called his mother in Poland to assure her that Stephen was in good hands.

"You filthy Jew,' she said. "Send my son back." After she cursed me some more, I knew that I had made the right decision to help Stephen settle in Israel.

Resolution of Stephen's Predicament

At the time I had to leave on a visit to the United States, and Stephen went to stay with my children Aviva and Chanoch. He remained there until my return, when I contacted Rabbi Jakobowitz who wanted him in Kfar Chabad. Eventually, we found a family for Stephen in B'nei Brak. They accepted him into their home and he began studying the fundamentals of Judaism in earnest. He changed his name and he was converted to Judaism

by Rabbi Karelitz of the Bnei Brak *Beth Din.* Moreover, Rabbi Kulitz endorsed Stephen's conversion to Judaism.

He is now nineteen-years-old and looks like any other *Chassidic* young man in Bnei Brak, with long flowing *payot.* He speaks both Yiddish and Hebrew fluently and is well entrenched in the yeshiva world. He visits me often, and whenever he needs it I offer him advice and financial support.

My meeting with Stephen wasn't an isolated incident. I found that in Jerusalem, strangers often connected with each other.

Filling a Void

Shortly after I arrived in Israel, I accepted the position as Rabbi of Kehilat Migdal Hashoshanim in Talbiah. In addition, I was appointed Special Advisor to the Chief Rabbinate and Religious Council of Jerusalem. I also founded and was chairman of American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion, an organization dedicated to the construction and preservation of synagogues, *mikvaot* and other religious buildings. These were not by any means my only commitments. At the time I was president of a girls seminary – *Beth Ulpana* – for immigrants and refugee girls from the Soviet Union and Iran. Meanwhile, I continued to work for Soviet Jewish causes. After all, I was retired! I needed a good rest. This was just what the doctor ordered.

American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion

After the Six Day War, the face of Jerusalem changed as the city expanded. The Jerusalem municipality could not begin to cope with the cost of constructing synagogues and *mikvaot* for the thousands of residents pouring into new neighborhoods.

In each new neighborhood, the Housing Ministry designated plots of land for synagogues and *mikvaot,* but the actual construction was never carried out. There was never enough money for such projects.

People were often found worshipping in bomb shelters or school buildings. Sometimes, groups merely gathered and stood outside in available open spaces, weather permitting. As for the lack of

mikvah facilities, women often had to travel long distances to the closest *mikvah* in other neighborhoods.

As advisor to the Religious Council, I suggested that a crash program had to be set up to remedy this situation. This suggestion was taken very seriously, especially since the members of the Council felt that I could raise funds in America. So it was that Keren Dorshei Zion was founded as a non-profit organization to raise funds for the city's spiritual needs.

The first thing we did was commission a professional, Charles Levine, to survey the city and analyze the problem. The results were nothing short of shocking, especially when one considers Jerusalem's status as the epicenter of the Jewish faith worldwide.

The report detailed the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 and the subsequent development of strategically crucial suburbs to the north, east and south of the formerly truncated city. The major new communities were Gilo, Ramot, Talpiot Mizrach, Har Nof and Neve Yaakov. The survey revealed the dearth of synagogues and we confirmed that not enough funds were available to meet the religious needs.

The problem was more acute in some neighborhoods than in others. Gilo, with thirty-five thousand residents in sprawling communities had just one *mikvah*. In short, this meant that many women had to walk over an hour to reach the *mikvah* on *Shabbatot* or *chagim* (holidays). Although Gilo had twenty-six *minyanim*, there were only four synagogues in the neighborhood, and residents were praying in shelters.

All these issues were pressing and we set about raising funds in the United States through the American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion. Our most innovative project – the construction of a *mikvah* to serve handicapped women – dominated our early efforts.

First Mikvah for Handicapped Women

Throughout the world, unfortunately, there are handicapped women. Nowhere are there special *mikvaot* for them. Why here?

In Israel where women serve in the military, accidents are more prone to happen. In addition, we are known for our horrendous road accidents so that we do have a larger proportion of handicapped

people. There is also a greater demand here. Sephardim, especially, have strong views about *mikvah* and even those families who may be lax in observing other *mitzvot,* are very meticulous in observing *Taharat Hamishpocha.*

Walking into my office in the Jerusalem Rabbinate one day, I was greeted by a group of handicapped women, some of them in wheelchairs. They suggested that we build a *mikvah* that would make immersion easier for them. I listened to them and this became the top priority of the Keren.

At first we envisioned ramps and special chairs to descend into the water. Our chief Rabbinate, after consulting with professionals, surprisingly came up with a much better plan. They envisioned ramps and an electric pulley with a canvas sling to hoist the woman free of her wheelchair and lower her into the *mikvah.* The plan devised called for two ritual baths: one for women severely handicapped where they could lie down in the water, and another one for those who could sit up. All these plans certainly were within the bounds of *halacha.*

We immediately approved this idea. This pulley made access available to the woman's assistant. Complete privacy was assured. The baths were constructed from marble and gleaming tiles. Rows of window boxes containing flowers lined the entrance ramp. It was both functional and beautiful.

The Jerusalem Post and the entire Hebrew press lauded our accomplishment. Women from all over the country continue to find their way to the *Mikvah.* I received a letter from a woman in Ashdod who informed us she comes to Jerusalem every month. Others wrote that they were temporarily injured and delighted to find this facility.

I am proud of the thankful calls and letters received. One lady called early one morning to say in a most excited tone, "Thank you, thank you. Yesterday was the first time since my accident that I could use a *mikvah.* Please give me a *brocha* that I should bear a child."

This, of course, I did and one year later I was invited to be the *sandek* at the *brit* for her beautiful son. She was sure my *brocha* did the trick.

While handicapped women were the biggest beneficiaries of the *Mikvah*, handicapped men were also able to use it. Men are not bound by *halacha* to immerse themselves, but we made the facilities available to handicapped men during early daylight on *erev Yom Kippur*. Some men commented that they felt a deep religious uplift by being able to go to the *Mikvah* before the High Holidays. Naturally, the *Mikvah* is reserved solely for the use of handicapped women after nightfall. Gidon Street in Baka is now well-known. The *Mikvah* is in a wing of an older one, with a private entrance for its special clientele.

The *Mikvah* has not only filled a religious void, but it also serves a social function – that of reducing marital strife. Before the *Mikvah* was built, religiously observant handicapped women had trouble immersing themselves in the *mikvah*. The *halachic* restrictions imposed on married couples before the wife immersed herself in a *Mikvah* contributed to marital tension. This special *Mikvah* was prompted not only by religious reasons, but also by social concern to assuage the pain and fulfill the needs of the handicapped.

The Formal Opening

Funding for a project of this magnitude was a major problem but with G-d's help, we were able to meet the challenge. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Kevelson of Jerusalem who contributed a substantial amount to the *Mikvah*, the project was completed. The donors attended the opening ceremony on Tuesday, June 4th, 1985, alongside the chief rabbis of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shalom Messas and Rabbi Yitzchak Kulitz and Jerusalem Religious Council Chairman, Rabbi Yitzchak Ralbag, were Messrs. Aaron Krombein, Eliezer Yellin, Rabbis F.E. Rottenberg, Nosson Lobel, and Yehoshua Pollack.

During the opening ceremony, Yechiel Kirshenbaum, Director of Development of New Synagogues and *Mikvaot* demonstrated the *Mikvah*'s extraordinary features.

The feeling was that this *mikvah* was just a start. Keren Dorshei Zion would surely change the face of Jerusalem.

Mikvah Renovations Throughout the City

So it was. The Keren turned its attention to the *mikvah* in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Kiryat Hayovel which was in a bad state of disrepair. This facility was completely gutted, reconstructed and

streamlined into a modern ritual bath for the growing community. Rabbi Yosef Gutnick of Australia donated thirty thousand dollars to this project.

We had an even more challenging task ahead of us when the Keren undertook to renovate the Beir Sheva Ritual Center in *Beth Yisrael*, one of Jerusalem's poorest neighborhoods.

The project first came to the attention of the Keren in 1988 when I went to see the building and was overwhelmed by the state of neglect and disrepair of the *mikvah* and synagogue. The *mikvah* had already been condemned. I knew that we could not let this historic building go to ruin. The residents of this neighborhood were all poor and I knew that they could not manage to save the building by themselves.

"It is a very special community with people who possess great dignity but no funds," I said. "They don't have the political savvy or standing to raise the money themselves."

"You wouldn't believe how this *mikvah* looks," I told my colleagues at Keren Dorshei Zion. "Thousands of people use a *mikvah* that has cracked walls and wires hanging exposed over the water. It's inhuman." We immediately went to work.

The Ministry of Religion gave forty thousand dollars, but the refurbishing costs rose to five hundred thousand dollars. With a commitment from the Religious Council of Jerusalem, we commenced a campaign in the United States. Major movers in the project were Mr. and Mrs. Saul Quinn of Great Neck. Mr. Quinn was treasurer of Keren Dorshei Zion. He made a very large contribution and chaired a dinner in honor of Mayor Teddy Kollek in the Miller home.

While in New York, Mayor Kollek also attended a luncheon chaired by Rabbi Israel Miller, vice-president of Yeshiva University. He was ably assisted by Mr. Morris Green, a famous *baal tzdoka,* board member of Yeshiva University and President of Religious Zionists of America. Mr. David Arnow of Swig, Weiler and Arnow was the host. *Bonei Yerushalayim* awards were received by Mr. and Mrs. Saul Quinn, Mr. and Mrs. Al Haft and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rubin. At this auspicious occasion, Mayor Kollek stressed the important accomplishments of KDZ on behalf of religious institutions in the Holy City.

Over sixty friends of KDZ participated in a fund raising event at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Raphael Levine. All were awarded a plaque for their support. Dr. Charles Popper and Rabbi Stanley Rosenberg served as co-chairmen of the breakfast and all the Rabbinic leadership of Englewood, Rabbis Menachem Genack, Samuel Goldin and Isaac Swift attested to the important work of KDZ. Rabbi Max Schreier, President of the RCA was the guest speaker.

At an inaugural dinner at the Ramada Renaissance Hotel in Jerusalem, held in the presence of the Chief Rabbis of Jerusalem and coordinated by Dr. Morris Mandel, the extraordinary efforts of Mr. Hirsch Wolf, President of the Eitz Chaim Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Shimshon Krupnick, Mr. and Mrs. Sholem Schwartz and Mr. and Mrs. Aron Krombein were recognized. They each received a *Bonei Yerushalayim* Award. A special historical chronicle devoted to the history of the old city of Jerusalem and the work of Keren Dorshei Zion was written by Mr. Charles Levine and Mr. Shabtei Zecharia and distributed to all the distinguished guests.

At a parlor meeting in Monsey, at the home of Rabbi Baruch Cohn and arranged by Rabbi N. Lobel, a plaque was given to the guest of honor, Rabbi Henry Book, a great supporter of our Russian work and *Tefillin* project. Rabbi Book encouraged the attendees to emulate the guests of honor, philanthropist Cantor Jack Rosenbaum and Mr. Irving Eisman, in their generous support of KDZ.

The Yemenite Synagogue

Surely, the most ambitious project handled by Keren Dorshei Zion was the construction of a new Yemenite Synagogue and Community Center, the largest in Israel, designed to function as a nationwide center for the preservation of Yemenite tradition.

My romance with Yemenite Jewry began on my first trip to Israel in 1955. In fact, I made so many trips to Israel before coming on *Aliyah,* I could have bought my own jet.

On that first trip, befriending many new immigrants from Yemen, I found them to be a special people, humble, decent, and undemanding with a quiet self-respect.

When we finally made *Aliyah,* I sought out the Yemenite Jews. Mr. Zion Garami, a senior officer in the *Misrad Hadatot,* introduced

me to his countrymen. When they learned that I was associated with the Religious Council of Jerusalem and Keren Dorshei Zion, they pleaded with me to help them build a synagogue to serve both as a place of prayer and a center of activities.

With the help of Rabbi Freddie Wolf of Great Neck, we recruited a wealthy Persian Jew, Mr. Yehuda Sassouni, living in Kingsport, Long Island. We convinced him to underwrite the project. Although Persian Jews usually prefer to contribute to causes within their own community, we persuaded him to cross ethnic lines and help this effort.

"The attachment to Jewish tradition and the Land of Israel runs deep in the Sassouni family," Mr. Yehuda Sassouni said.

The Yemenite Synagogue and Community Center was eventually built in the Kiryat Moshe neighborhood. The plaque outside the beautiful edifice states that the building is dedicated in memory of Mr. Sassouni's parents, Yosef and Duvall Sassouni.

"In addition to regular daily services and *shiurim* conducted by Rabbi Yoseph Kalazan, the Rav of the Synagogue, plans are in formulation for regular youth activities on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*," Zion Garami said.

Mayor Teddy Kollek and KDZ

We received the full backing of the Jerusalem municipality for our projects. The mayor considered our work a necessity. To the surprise of many people, Teddy Kollek gave us his full support.

He was a major fund-raiser for the Jerusalem Foundation which funded many cultural projects for the City. Whenever he went to the United States to raise funds, he always drew a large crowd who supported his drives handsomely. American donors had become accustomed to the fact that Mayor Kollek generally raised funds for projects of a culturally pluralistic nature and not for religious purposes.

However, Mayor Kollek's work for KDZ was an exception as he accompanied me to the United States to usher in a drive for KDZ. The local American Jewish press reported that his trip to the United States to raise funds for synagogues was an unusual one. Kollek was renowned for his unwavering secularism. This mission surprised many American Jews.

At a meeting in his honor at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ira Miller of Great Neck, Kollek said, "I'm not a religious man and I would never pretend to be. But I do want a strong community and for that you need synagogues.

"Not only religiously observant people benefit from religious facilities. Don't forget," Mayor Kollek said, "the synagogue serves non-religious purposes as well. It is a center where people can meet and study, where young people can be involved in things of concern to the community."

The mayor acknowledged that, because of the rapid increase in demand in Jerusalem, the government had been unable to fulfill the needs in the new neighborhoods. He was very grateful to American Friends of KDZ. He posed for pictures snapped by Kalman Zeines, our volunteer photographer.

Rabbi Yitzchak Ralbag & Jerusalem's Chief Rabbis

Rabbi Yitzchak Ralbag, Chairman of the Religious Council of Jerusalem was also responsive to the deteriorating situation.

Rabbi Ralbag was not the only elected religious official to respond to our plea. Jerusalem's chief rabbis, Rabbi Shalom Messas, the Sefardi Chief Rabbi and Rabbi Yitzchak Kulitz, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, provided us with moral support for our efforts.

In a letter to the KDZ, they wrote, "It is our profound privilege and honored challenge to recognize the traditional imperative, 'out of Zion shall come forth Torah, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem.' No other city in the world, even in *Eretz Yisrael,* is so charged as a fulcrum of Holiness and spiritual energy. This is our mission and we rise to the call gladly. Our city has been blessed with unprecedented growth in recent years, especially since 1967 when Jerusalem was reunited again for all time to come, G-d willing. Ours is now the largest city in Israel with close to half a million souls living, working and praying in our environs.

"It is absolutely essential that the crucial needs of Jews be met. They needed roofs over their heads and they were provided. They needed supermarkets and community centers and multi-lane highways, and they have been built. Yet with all this amazing progress, the spiritual needs – no less important, and indeed higher in importance – have not been matched with equal vigor. Although we

of course were apprised of this situation, we were startled by the critical proportions of this situation as outlined in the report initiated by you as special adviser to the Chief Rabbinate and Religious Council of Jerusalem. The fact that insufficient synagogues and *mikvaot* exist today in these areas is unacceptable not only to the Jews of Jerusalem, but to the Jews of the world who turn to us for uplift and inspiration. We fully bless you in your efforts to counter this situation."

KDZ's Work for Soviet and Ethiopian Jews

KDZ was also involved in working to spiritually absorb new Soviet immigrants. We aimed to promote *Ahavat Yisrael,* especially to repair the spiritual damage inflicted on Russian Jews.

The rekindling of *Yiddishkeit* in this multitude of Jews, lost to us for over seventy years, was a top priority. My commitment took up so much time that my children often complained, "Daddy, please think of us as one of your Russian Jews."

My dream of seeing our Soviet brothers released from their bondage was coming true, but it wasn't complete. We had to reach their very souls, imparting the meaning of Judaism and bringing them back into the Jewish fold.

We recruited American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion to help organize and finance *brit milah* for many new immigrants as well as to arrange weddings, bar mitzvot and bat mitzvot. We organized educational seminars for the whole family, as well as launched a major fundraising campaign to provide all Soviet immigrants with a special "Absorption Kit" consisting of a collection of religious articles, *tefillin, mezuzot,* candlesticks, *becher* and *tallit* as well as a basic library of Jewish books.

A special *ulpan* was established with stipends given to gifted students many of whom were professionals. They were taught the history of Israel stressing the work of early pioneers, as well as a love of *Yiddishkeit.* Rabbi Nosson Lobel was in charge of this program. In fact, he was employed by us throughout this time to help raise funds and supervise all religious and cultural undertakings. Mrs. Jeanette Halpern served admirably as secretary and former prisoner of conscience, Joseph Mendelevich, was our outstanding director of the staff and a foremost teacher.

More Efforts for Russian Jews

We provided the new immigrants with Passover packages and arranged *Sedorim* throughout the country for thousands of these immigrants.

We didn't just concentrate our efforts in Israel. We also continued to send packages containing *tashmishei kedusha* to Russia. We were able to finance the purchase of one thousand pairs of *tefillin.* The cost was enormous – two hundred sixty thousand dollars.

The Tefillin

One of the grateful recipients of a pair of *tefillin* was a yeshiva student in Kishinev, Alexander Anastas, a convert to Judaism (*ger tzedek*) who wrote to me.

"Until now, I never merited owning a pair of *tefillin.* Every day I prayed in the yeshiva without *tefillin* and after the *tefila*, I would put on the *tefillin* of another student. Last *Shabbat*, Rabbi Diskind arrived from Israel. He came to our Yeshiva and I received a pair of *tefillin.* I can't describe my great joy. It is like a great dream. Understandably, after I converted and accepted upon myself all the *mitzvot,* I never thought that I would spend a day without putting on *tefillin.* I want to thank the Rabbi and Keren Dorshei Zion for this precious gift. Next year I hope to immigrate to Israel and to study in one of the yeshivot."

His is but one letter. There were countless others.

Israeli Minister of Religion, Yosef Burg

Our work for Russian Jews was well received by many people in Israel. Former Minister of Religion and Interior, Yosef Burg was among them.

"This special field of your involvement is a most laudable one. It gives tangible expression to our conviction that the dimension of Jewish spirituality and tradition is a dominant part of the life-blood of our existence as a nation."

Accolades for the Work

The Religious Council of Jerusalem paid tribute to me.

"If a microcosm and living symbol exists of the Jewish condition in the twentieth century it is embodied in the noble figure of Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky. The Rabbi was raised and nurtured in a family steeped in *Chassidic* tradition. He is the son of Rav Chaim Nachman Kowalsky, an outstanding pillar of *Chabad,* and grandson of Reb Moshe Kovalski and Reb Eluzer Mokotowski in whose home he was imbued with a love and understanding of a *Chassidic* way of life.

"His lifetime of devotion to causes and commitment to authentic Jewish values – *ahavat Yisrael* and *chesed* foremost among them – is legendary. Rabbi Kowalsky has been an activist and leader for the Jewish people from his youth in Poland, where he battled to preserve Jewish dignity in the face of humiliating oppression. Today, as a venerated Rabbi in "active retirement" in Jerusalem, he is continuing his life's work, bringing seemingly unlimited energy and fervor to all he does. His is a story of accomplishment replete with determined struggle, racing from continent to continent and working tirelessly for the spiritual and physical freedom and well-being of Jews throughout the world."

President Shazar Dons a Hat

At the RCA winter conference held in Jerusalem in 1973, I was honored for my work.

"Warm hearts. This is the motto of Rabbi Kowalsky when Russian Jews are spoken about. It's not enough to give these Jews money but you have to give them your heart as well," the guest speaker, Rabbi Meir Feldman, said. Rabbi Louis Bernstein who just arrived from a mission in Russia was also present at this auspicious occasion along with Rabbi Berel Leib Berzon, President of the RCA. I was presented with a plaque (*luach hakavod*) attesting to my efforts.

Just a short while before the dinner, Rabbi Berzon and I were involved in an uncomfortable situation with Israeli President Zalman Shazar. Rabbi Berzon requested a photo session with President Shazar at the President's Residence. As we stood in line to take the photograph, Rabbi Berzon whispered to me that he could not be snapped standing next to a bareheaded President for the RCA brochure.

"Don't worry," I said, "he'll put on a *yarmulke.*"

I approached President Shazar and introduced myself. "I'm Sholem Ber Kowalsky and I have a special *brocha* from the Lubavitcher Rebbe for you."

President Shazar reacted immediately. "Just a minute," he said. "Don't go away."

A moment later he returned wearing a Homburg hat. We talked some more about the Rebbe and then we took the picture.

Rabbi Berzon was really astounded. "You really are a master," he said to me later. "Imagine getting him to put on a hat so indirectly."

Prisoner of Zion, Yosef Mendelevich

Famous Soviet Jewish "refuseniks" recognized the efforts of KDZ. They had benefited from our packages. Yosef Mendelevich wrote to us and thanked us for ten parcels for *Pesach* for the members of a *Kollel* of Russian immigrants. "I'm also expressing my gratitude and blessing to your entire operation. For years you have demonstrated self-sacrifice on behalf of refugees and drawing closer all those distanced from *Yiddishkeit.* I well remember how the parcels from the Ezra Fund of RCA to us in Russia sustained us during those terrible years."

RCA Supports Israeli Sailors

Although we mainly concentrated on new immigrants, we never forgot our Israeli brothers who were also in need of spiritual enrichment.

We supplied *tashmishei kedusha* to the Israeli Navy after the *Yom Kippur* War in 1973. This included one hundred pairs of *tefillin*, one hundred *talleitim* and one hundred Bibles. We also supplied them with *kippot*, *siddurim*, *menorot*, candles and *Tehilim.*

"The RCA adoption of the Israeli Navy was indeed appreciated," Rabbi Elihu Marcus, Director of Synagogues at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, wrote. "It is through the selfless efforts of a dedicated chairman like yourself that we have been able to inspire our heroic fighters."

Chaplain David Segal of the Israeli Navy responded to our contribution. "There is no doubt that your religious gifts will contribute a great deal to enforce Jewish commitment amongst our soldiers.

These religious items which were distributed were given to our fighters and were received with joy and blessing,".

Mr. Marvin Zborowski was very generous and also donated shavers using batteries, pens and watches to be distributed to Israeli soldiers and sailors, which were sent together with our religious items.

The "Who is a Jew?" Debate

Israeli law only recognizes conversions to Judaism performed by Orthodox rabbis (*halachic* conversions); therefore only people converted by an Orthodox *Beth Din* are eligible for Israeli citizenship. They and their children are considered Jewish in every way. However, much distress was caused to families in America who believed that they were Jews after they received a Reform or Conservative conversion.

A woman who had received a Reform conversion came to me in tears.

"Rabbi, other women in the community are telling me that my children aren't Jewish," she said. "I was an active member of Hadassah Women's Organization in America and I belonged to the temple sisterhood. My daughter lights candles on Friday night and my son attends Friday night services. I, too, light Sabbath candles on Friday night and participate in services. Even so, people here continue to tell us that we're not Jewish. Other children bother my children all the time asking them whether they're Jewish or not."

Attending a new synagogue and school in Israel, the other boys badgered her son about the fact that he was not circumcised. "Rabbi, we converted to Judaism. We're Jewish, right?" she asked me."

Trying to get the bottom of the matter, I asked her about the conversion.

"I was converted by my Rabbi at our Reform Temple," she said.

"Did you go the *mikvah*?" I asked her.

"No," she replied.

"Did you study?" I asked.

"For a few weeks," was her reply.

"Did you accept the yoke of the Jewish faith and agree to practice Torah and *mitzvot*?" I asked.

No, she hadn't, she said. She left me no choice but to tell her the brutal truth.

"The other women are correct," I said. "Your children are not *halachically* Jewish. Orthodox conversion is a long process that may take up to two years. You received a Reform conversion, but Reform Jews don't believe in *Halacha* and in Torah. If the Reform rabbis don't accept these basics of Judaism, how can you accept them? I'm sorry," I said to her. "You were deceived."

She was devastated. I told her that I would try to help her if she was interested, but first she should go home and discuss it with her husband and children.

One month later she returned with her husband. They had thought it over and decided they wanted to become *halachically* Jewish. I explained that I would not handle it myself and introduced them to a competent Orthodox rabbi. A year later, they were *halachically* converted and they began a life of Torah and *mitzvot.*

Her son was happy. "Come in to the washroom and I'll show you," he proudly retorted to the other boys teasing him about his circumcision.

The Controversy Over Suzanne Miller

Many of these stories did not have happy endings. One case was an episode involving a Reform convert, Suzanne Miller. She arrived in Israel and applied for an Israeli identity card in 1987. Her application was rejected by the Minister of the Interior, Rabbi Yitzchak Peretz, the leader of the Shas Sephardic Torah Party.

After the rejection, she took her case to the High Court. They ruled that the Ministry must issue an Israeli identity card for her. Thus, the High Court established precedent for a change in existing law.

Suzanne Miller had succeeded in pitting the religious establishment against the secular establishment, amid conjecture that the American Reform Jewish movement had sent her to Israel to test the waters.

Suzanne Miller eventually left Israel before collecting her identity card. Hers had been a test case. She did not alter the status quo.

For my part, I could not sit on the fence and watch. I, too, participated in the ensuing raging debate that spilled over into the media. I got involved in a letter debate in the press.

On Thursday, March 7, 1987, Mr. Aryeh Sapperstein wrote a letter to the Jerusalem Post, in defense of Suzanne Miller.

"She was not completely unaware of the difficulties she would face. Her commitment to Judaism was a true one. If she had undergone a second 'procedure' to please a political group, she would have done so without any spiritual meaning whatsoever and would have undermined her own integrity in the process."

Mr. Sapperstein goes on to castigate the entire Israeli establishment for rejecting "Jews" who love Israel.

"What has Israel become when it does not welcome all Jews? Why is it front page news when an Israeli rabbi suggests that all streams of Judaism have legitimacy? The Supreme Court wanted to discover this fact a month ago. We, in Colorado Springs, discovered it a decade ago. If we don't pull together, we pull apart! The Torah charted it centuries ago, demanding *ahavat Yisrael* for *Klal Yisrael.* The totality of the Jewish people is a prerequisite for Torah realization. How is it, the very rabbis who are supposedly leading us in the ways of Torah are the last ones to understand its true intent?" Mr. Sapperstein wrote.

My Answer to Reform Conversions
Reprinted in The Jerusalem Post

Ever since David Ben-Gurion was the Prime Minister of Israel, Israeli law abides by *halacha* on the issue of who qualifies to be a Jew. In my response to Mr. Sapperstein, I clarified the issue in a feature article in the Jerusalem Post.

"Obviously Ms. Miller is a sincere human being who has been badly hurt and I sympathize with her. I do not doubt her integrity or her sincerity. She wishes to be Jewish.

"How does one define a Jew? A Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother or a gentile converted to Judaism according to *Halacha.* The government of Israel under the guidance of the late David Ben-Gurion, himself not an observant Jew, incorporated this decision into its laws. Wherein does the problem lie?

"There are a host of spiritual leaders the world over who are very much plagued by a dwindling Jewish population and a dwindling membership in their temples. They have under the banner

of Reform Judaism, disregarded the rules. I believe they have lost touch with truth and reality. I do not doubt that they love Israel and are morally fine people and able leaders. In fact, many non-Jews are morally fine people, able leaders and love Israel.

"What is it that distresses me? Why do I not accept their conversions?

"In 1885, the Reform Movement adopted its 'Pittsburgh Platform' negating Mosaic Laws and the Land of Israel. In 1937, with the 'Columbus Platform', a change took place. At that time both Israel and the Torah were tolerated and each rabbi was given the freedom to interpret as he saw fit.

"What have we now? Just a peek at the New York Times Monday morning and we are bombarded with columns of mixed marriages performed by rabbis together with gentile ministers. The children of these marriages are accepted by Reform rabbis as Jews, even if the mother is gentile. There are six-hour conversions and in some areas of Florida even these six hours of study are waived. These converts are misguided, misdirected and misinformed human beings.

"Are we so bankrupt that we must accept and recognize these people as Jews? Have we lost all pride?

"To become a citizen of the United States takes five years of residence plus a stringent test and allegiance pledge.

"Our Reform friends would have us, at the discretion of each rabbi, recognize their converts. How are we to know the criteria of each Reform rabbi? By lowering the standards of conversion the fabric of *Klal Yisrael* (the unity of Israel) is weakened and a division amongst our people created. One group of Jews no longer tolerates the other group.

"Let us go one step further. In the event of a divorce, the Reform Movement accepts civil divorce. There is a *halachic* procedure for divorce. In fact, in the event of remarriage, the children born to Jewish mothers who were not properly divorced are *mamzerim* (illegitimate).

"Therefore, it pains me and all my Orthodox colleagues that the Reform Movement demands of the State of Israel that exceptions be made for them. Once we make exceptions for any group there is no telling where it may lead. The fence cannot be broken.

"Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, of blessed memory, embodied love, compassion and concern for his people. He was revered as the greatest *posek* (religious authority) in his generation. It was his *ahavat Yisrael* that prompted the decision that reform marriages be considered null and void. His reasoning was that since Reform rabbis do not accept the laws of the Torah and some even deny the very existence of G-d, they were certainly not to be entrusted with the continuity of Israel, the *Am Hakadosh* (the holy people). They could not be considered witnesses to the sanctity of marriage.

"By declaring this verdict, Rav Moshe enabled those unfortunate women who remarried, to have children who would not be labeled *mamzerim*. This is truly *ahavat Yisrael*. He welcomed converts and loved them, but only if the convert studied the laws of the Torah and agreed to abide by them. Anything else would be a farce.

"How may we accept a rabbi, who himself denies the validity of the Torah, to convert non-Jews?

"Now you may say that a vast percentage of Jews do not observe the Torah. Are they not Jews? The answer is that every human being is capable of sin. He may be a sinner but he still has the option of repentance. Whoever is born into the faith, no matter how he may deviate, is a Jew and is to be loved as a Jew. To become a Jew, however, entails the acceptance of Judaism in total.

"This can only be bestowed upon a gentile by one who is himself a believer. Membership in any movement that denies the validity of the Torah removes the mantle of authority from the rabbi, no matter how sincere, how moral, how loving or how dedicated.

"To Suzanne Miller and all people in her predicament, I can only offer my apologies and sincere regrets. Should she or they wish, they may reconsider. We offer them education, understanding and proper conversion. I feel genuinely sorry for them and would gladly help. As to the rabbis who misguide them, I consider that not an act of G-d, but rather an act of deceit."

A New Venture

About the year 1976, I had a discussion with my neighbor, Rabbi Yitzchak Feigenbaum, that would thrust us into a partnership producing a monumental work that took eighteen years to complete.

We were both perturbed that the *Chassidic* dynasties which flourished prior to the Holocaust were practically annihilated and little was left of their *Chassidic* Torah writings that was easily accessible to the public at large. We commenced assembling data and soon engaged Rabbi Chaim Sholem Porush to assist us. We culled gems from various *Chassidic seforim* interpreting *Chumosh* and printed these interpretations at the bottom of each page of the *Chumosh* as it applied to the text above. This was similar to the style used in *Torah Temimah.* Many *Chassidic* dynasties were represented, among them, the Gerer Rebbe, the *Chidushei Ha'Rim,* the Kotzker Rebbe, the Sochachover Rebbe, the Modzitzer Rebbe, the Satmar Rebbe, the Lubavitcher and a host of others. Our *seforim* were named *Peneenay HaChassidus.*

We began with the teachings of the *Admorim* and how they view *Toras Moshe* both in *drash* (interpretations) and in *pshat* (simple explanations). The three of us used index cards. Upon each one we wrote down the explanation of one *Chassidic* commentator on a particular verse plus *Rashi* or *Targum* commentary. We each took different commentators and then sat together and chose what to include.

Apart from sharing in the research and organization of the material, it fell upon me to raise funds needed for publishing the five *seforim.* With the help of G-d and a substantial contribution from Maurice Wohl for the first edition, the project was successfully completed as many other generous people helped along with added sponsorships. In each *sefer* there is a list of sponsors. We are eternally grateful to them.

Private Lives

What allowed me, indeed, drove me to function in so many levels and pursue so many tasks almost relentlessly was the overriding thought of rebuilding my family, of replacing all that was lost, and rekindling the spark of *Yiddishkeit* in a new emerging generation.

My *mishpocha* was grounded and nurtured by my loving wife, Shulamith, a true soulmate dedicated and devoted to our common goal. She stood by me through thick and thin and her good cheer and disposition helped me through many tough times. Whoever knows my wife and appreciates the multitude of demands placed upon her, understands that if not for Shulamith, all my involvement and accomplishments would never have been possible. No words can adequately describe all that she has meant to me

and our family. Forever at my side, she was and remains the quintessential *Ezer K'negdo*, my loving support and faithful comrade.

We are blessed with four lovely children. They are our mainstay and our inspiration. To this day, I am thankful and appreciative to G-d for these wonderful gifts, Avrum Moshe, Aviva, Eluzer Elimelach and Yosef Yaakov. Each in his own unique way, and together as a family, were part and parcel of my success. Often were the times that I called on each of them to shoulder some responsibility or fulfill some task in my name when health or other circumstances prevented my participation. I had a family of assistant rabbis. My sons, at early ages, spoke in *shuls*, gave classes and lectures, sold the *chametz*, helped me bake hundreds of pounds of *matzot*, selected *esrogim* and tied *lulavim* for distribution to my members, visited the sick and acted as chaplains in my stead in the state correctional institution. These were but some of the varied duties I assigned to them. Under fire, I forged leaders – thrusting them into rabbinic roles repeatedly.

In retrospect, they all thanked me for this invaluable training which enabled them to assume leading roles in their respective communities. Our family life instilled in them qualities of leadership and the deep sense of communal duty they evidence to this day.

To my daughter Aviva I must give special attention. Not only is she my *bat yechida* but she always remains at my side, ready and able to help Shulamith or me. Shortly after her marriage to Chanoch Lazarus, son of Ruby and Molly Lazarus of Monsey, New York, they settled in Hillcrest. Chanoch joined the Young Israel and daily assisted me and lent full support to my activities. Together with Shulamith, he enhanced our teaching staff at the Hebrew School. There was hardly a *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov* that passed when we did not share at least one meal together. I am forever indebted to them for all the moral and actual succor they provided.

Aviva and Chanoch preceded us to Israel and were there to assist and to greet us. When illnesses took their toll and increased my needs, Chanoch and Aviva remained at our sides. Their two handsome sons and their wives are a source of pride and joy. Baruch Betzalel married Chaggit, the daughter of Leibel and Shoshana Katz of Jerusalem. They settled nearby and visit us frequently. Chaim Simcha and his wife Mimi chose to make Brooklyn their headquarters. She is the daughter of Psachya and Shirley Gross of Brooklyn.

My oldest son, Avrum Moshe followed in my footsteps and attended Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore. He, too, received *Smicha* from Harav HaGaon Yaakov Yitzchak Halevi Ruderman, *Z"L.* After marriage to Shifra Kelman, daughter of our dear friends, Rabbi Avraham *shlita* and Leah Kelman, *Z"L,* they settled in Baltimore. Avrum attended the University of Maryland School of Law and received a Juris Doctor degree with Honors in May of 1970.

A practicing attorney, Avrum and his dear wife, a special reading teacher at Talmudical Academy, are continuously involved in community and *shul* projects. In these past few years, Shulamith and I have lived on and off in Baltimore. There I became a member of Congregation Shomrei Emunah and enjoy Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Weinreb's Torah and friendship. I receive excellent health care at Johns Hopkins Hospital and from the many dedicated community health care providers and physicians who are friends of my children. Particularly attentive have been Drs. Marcel Reischer, Noah Lightman, Jerome Koeppel, Chaim Haber, David Gichtin, Shabsie Tajerstein, Professor Jeffrey Brinker and Melvin Falk.

Shifra has welcomed us into her home for extended periods. She is caring and dedicated to our well-being so that we have developed the closest of relationships. May Hashem bless them with much *nachas* from their son, David Eliezer, married to Lara and father of our first great grandson, Yaakov Yonatan, and from their beautiful daughter Leah.

My son Eluzer Elimelach attended Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and ultimately received his *smicha* from Hagaon Rav Yitzchak Piekarski *Z"L.* When he completed high school, he studied in Yeshivas Beer Yaakov and enrolled in Machon Lev in Yerushalayim. He interrupted his studies to marry Miriam Shapiro, the daughter of our dear friends, Rabbi and Mrs. Solomon Shapiro. Eluzer completed his studies and received a joint degree from Machon Lev and Bar Ilan University. Miriam, a graduate of Michlala, is a constant source of inspiration to Eluzer. She is also my ambassador in New York. I often call upon her to help with various commitments which she does graciously and kindly. Eluzer never misses an opportunity to meet my plane on arrival to New York. Their home is our haven in Brooklyn.

Their daughter Temima was born in Israel, however, shortly thereafter the family returned to the United States and settled in

Brooklyn. Eluzer is now engaged in finance and together with Miriam raised Temima, Rabbi Chaim Nachman, Yitzchak Yair and Yehuda Moshe. These three attentive sons are all studiously learning Torah *L'shma*. Temima married Rabbi Avi Feldman, son of Rabbi and Mrs. Yoel Feldman of Baltimore. They are the happy parents of my second great grandchild, Yosef, and live in St. Louis where Avi is attending Kollel and assisting his synagogue rabbi. As we go to press, G-d blessed us with a third great grandchild, born to Temima and Avi. She is named Rivka after my mother, *A"H*.

My youngest son, Yosef Yaakov, was born a little rebel. Mischievous and fun loving, he was the darling of the Hillcrest community. Yeshiva University is his alma mater. While there, Rivka Nathan, a student at Barnard, caught his attention. Shortly thereafter they were married and relocated to Chicago near her parents, attorney David and Serene Nathan. Yossi, our dentist, graduated from Loyola University. Already he was the father of Yitzi when the three of them packed their belongings and flew to Israel, settling in the pioneer town of Effrat. Yossi, with Rivka at his side, opened a dental clinic. He is a reservist in the Israeli Army and father of six delightful children, Yitzchok Yehuda, Rachel Channa, Chaim Nachman, Tamar Leah, Natan and Ayala Yocheved. Our walls are covered with the many honor certificates these gifted children bring us. Their happy smiles add sunshine to our lives.

We have made many friends and even today, as I write these words years later, I still get invitations to their *smachot*. The phone is a constant source of connection. Every *erev Shabbat* the Hillers call. *Rosh Chodesh* is the time of Marvin Zborowski's call. The regulars like the Blocks, Hafts, Kristals, Mrs. Mathews, Schnalls, Klirsfelds, Tennenbaums, Rubins, Mandels, Wallachs, Warshaviaks, Kaufmans, Laufers, Zionists and Weils and Rabbis A.M. Kahana and H. Book plus a host of other former members, as the mood strikes them, also call and it is always very welcome.

In Baltimore, I hear from Rabbis Prero, Scharfman, Simonson, Hollander, Weiss and Gilad Moshe, as well as Messrs. Meltzer, Krombeim, and Krupnick, and Dr. Rosen, Dr. Mandel and Mrs. Ziskind, who phone regularly from Israel.

My buddies Rabbis Holzer, Schonfeld, Rosenzweig, Alberts and Sladowsky keep me up to date on rabbinic matters.

May G-d bless them all for adding sunshine to my life.

You are cordially invited to attend
the dedication ceremony of

MIKVA LENECHOT

(Ritualarium for Handicapped Women)

To be held Tuesday,
15 Sivan 5745, June 4, 1985,
5:00 p.m.

At Rehov Gideon 7, Baka'a, Jerusalem

In the presence of distinguished
rabbinical and spiritual leaders

In honour of

Mr. & Mrs. NATHAN KEVELSON
of the U.S.A.

Come and participate in an
inspiring and historic event.
Followed by Reception

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
Chrmn. Exec. Board of Keren

Rabbi Izhak Ralbag
Chrmn. Religious Council

בס"ד

כבודו מוזמן בזה להשתתף בטכס חנוכת

מקוה טהרה לנכות

שיתקיים בעז"ה ביום שלישי, ט"ו סיון תשמ"ה
בשעה 5.00 אחה"צ בשכונת בקעה
רחוב גדעון 7, ירושלים

בהשתתפות:
הרבנים הראשיים לירושלים שליט"א
ראשי המועצה הדתית
אישי ציבור

במעמד זה יוקדש המקוה על שם
מר נתן קבלסון ורעיתו מארה"ב
על תרומתם הנכבדה

נעריך מאד השתתפותו בטכס מיוחד זה

הרב יצחק רלב"ג
ראש המועצה

הרב שלום ב. קובלסקי
יו"ר הנהלת הקרן



Delegation of the Chief Rabbinate of Jerusalem to a Police Headquraters meeting. Yehuda Wilks – State of Israel, Chief of Police



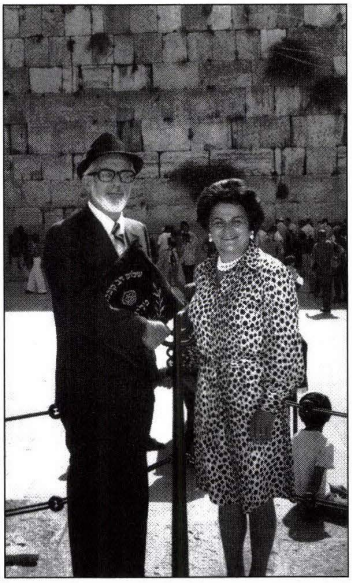
Gathering at first Mikvah for handicapped women R' Messas, Chief Sefardic Rabbi of Jerusalem, R' Kulitz, Chief Ashkenazik Rabbi of Jerusalem, Nathan Kevelson, R' Kowalsky, R' Mintz, R' Yehoshuah Pollack



Plaque for first Mikvah for handicapped women



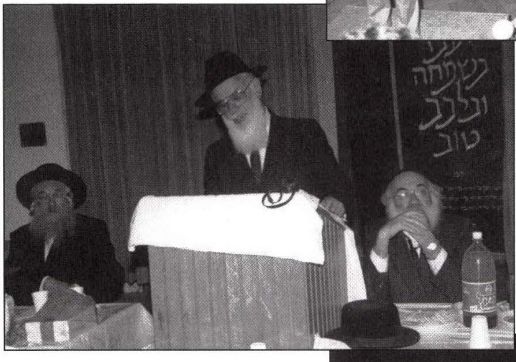
Visiting Kevarim in Tzefas



Shulamith Kowalsky's first visit to the Kosel

Over 300 Rabbis from Europe and America attend the 50th Anniversary of the RCA, the I.D.F. choir sang at Binyanei HaUmah Jerusalem, Israel





Left to Right: Rabbi Chaim Sholom Porush, Rabbi Kowalsky, Rabbi Eliyahu Carlbach on an evening of dedication to Chassidic literature

Left to Right: Rabbi Kowalsky, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Louis Bernstein and Rabbi Sol Scharfman attending 50th Anniversary RCA in Jerusalem





An evening dedicated to Mr. Morris Wohl in the succah of Mr. Landau (standing to the right) from London. Rabbi A.M. Rose, Director of Conference of European Rabbis (seated middle right side)

Keren Dorshei Zion at Work



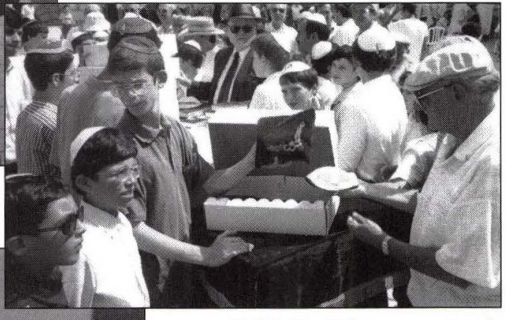
Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky at Keren Dorshei Zion office



Packages to be distributed to poor people in Jerusalem



Ethiopians receiving Passover packages



Rabbi Max Schrier overseeing the distribution of Talleisim and Tefillin to Russian boys at the Kotel



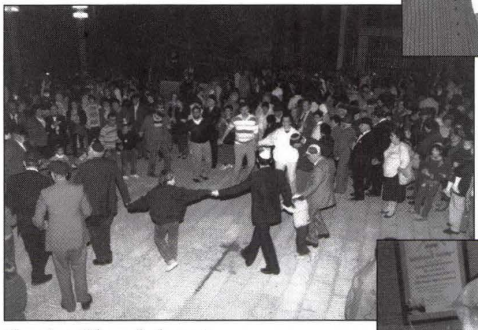
Tashmishei Kedushah distributed by Keren Dorshei Zion to Russians and other immigrants



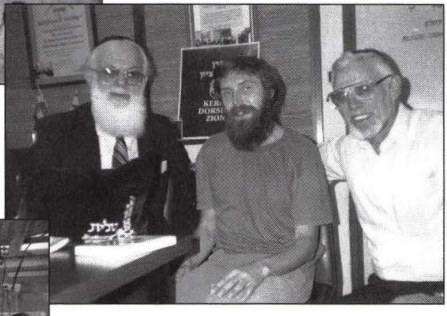
Left to Right:
Hirsch Wolf,
Sol Schwartz,
R' Kowalsky,
R' Sholom Messas,
Rabbi Yitzchok Kulitz,
Dr. Morris Mandel,
Samson Krupnik
at the inaugural Jerusalem
Keren Dorshei Zion dinner



Rabbi Kowalsky
made and performed the wedding
of Yemenite couple Mr. and Mrs.
Moshe Gilad, who assisted me in
Keren Dorshei Zion for 7 years



Left to Right:
Rabbi Kowalsky, Mr. Plotkin,
correspondent for "Pravda" who
came to Israel and became a
Baal Teshuvah, Rabbi Nosson Lobel,
assistant to Rabbi Kowalsky



Russian Chanukah party
in front of Haichal Shlomo,
Jerusalem



Keren Dorshei Zion
Simchas Beis Hashoaivah,
for Russian Jews at the
Pinsker succah, Jerusalem



Shul built by Keren Dorshei Zion for Yemenite Jews in Jerusalem



Ethiopians receive aid from Keren Dorshei Zion



Ethiopians welcomed at Chanukah concert at the Great Synagogue



A newly married Russian immigrant receives a Tashmishei Kedusha package from R' Kowalsky; Cantor A. Goldberg is on the right



Ulpan in Heichal Shlomo for Russian intellectuals. These students received a stipend for living expenses



Over 300 attended the dinner at the Ramada Hotel honoring the Russians who completed Ulpan of Keren Dorshei Zion



Halachic marriages performed for Russians in Israel by R' Kowalsky



Numerous Russians who were Halachically married in Jerusalem



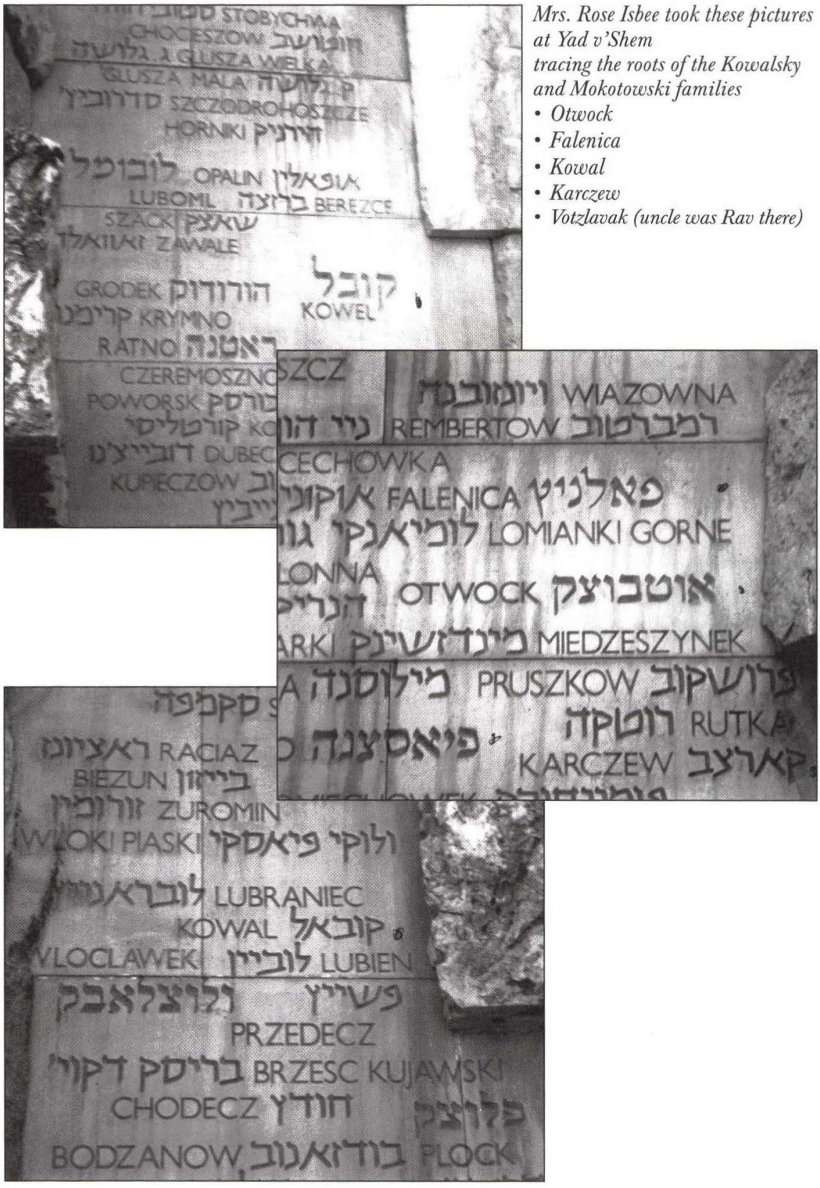
Kallas and Chasanim after the marriage ceremony performed by Keren Dorshei Zion Rabbonim in Jerusalem

Au Revoir — Shalom — L'hitraot



am sitting on my porch in rather poor health. The years have flown and life seems much too short. There is so much more to do. I guess others will take over. Our *Medina* is overburdened with turmoil and at the same time basking in glorious accomplishments. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of our modern statehood. Our country is *Baruch Hashem* thriving economically, although too many are living below the poverty line. We are exporting our products throughout the world. Israelis are recognized for their ingenuity. Torah is flourishing with more students than at any time in our history. The Arabs are still a thorn in our sides, never having accepted the concept of a Jewish state. The media is still biased against us even as a majority of the population of the world are beginning to see the justification of our cause. I thank *Hakodosh Baruch Hu* for allowing me to live in this exciting time, for blessing me with my outstanding family, for bringing me from my Zaidy's memorable house to the land he and my ancestors loved and yearned for. May it be a light unto the nations.

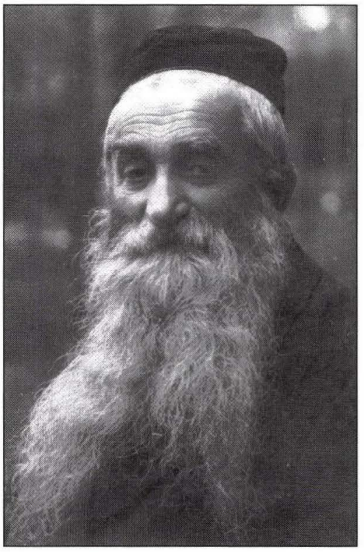
Tracing our Family Roots



Mrs. Rose Isbee took these pictures at Yad v'Shem tracing the roots of the Kowalsky and Mokotowski families

- *Otwock*
- *Falenica*
- *Kowal*
- *Karczew*
- *Votzlavak (uncle was Rav there)*

Family and Friends



Zaidy Eluzer Mokotowski,
my maternal Grandfather



Bubby Charna Aidel Mokotowski,
my maternal Grandmother



Zaidy Moshe Kovalski,
my paternal Grandfather

A photo of
Bubby Rochel Kovalski,
my paternal grandmother
was not available.
Bubby passed away
9 Sivan, 1921



Father, R' Chaim Nachman Kowalsky



Mother, Rivka Kowalsky



Sholem B. Kowalsky at age 7, 1928



R' Chaim Nachman Kowalsky at the Kotel



Uncle Binyamin and Aunt Sara Kowalsky, who lived in Bnei Brak



Uncle Avrohom Shlomah Kovalski and Aunt Udel



Aunt Esther Zahler, my mother's oldest sister who was killed in the Shoah, wife of the great gaon, Rabbi David Zahler



My mother with her sister Sara Landau in Israel



Cousin Yenta Mokotowski from Otwock, she perished in the Holocaust



Cousin Dobche Malinack from Warsaw, she perished in the Holocaust



Yechezkel Gricman, friends of the family from Otwock – perished in the Holocaust



My friend Menachem (left) with me in Otwock, he perished in the Holocaust



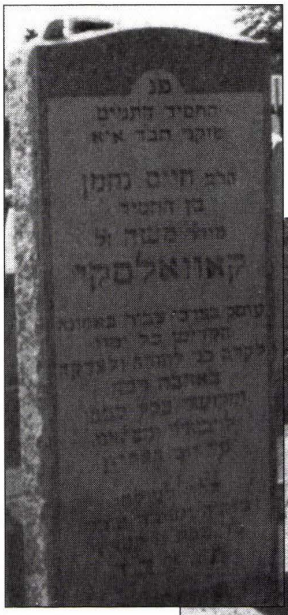
Rabbi Chaim Goodman
my father-in-law



Mrs. Chana Goodman
my mother-in-law, and my wife Shulamith

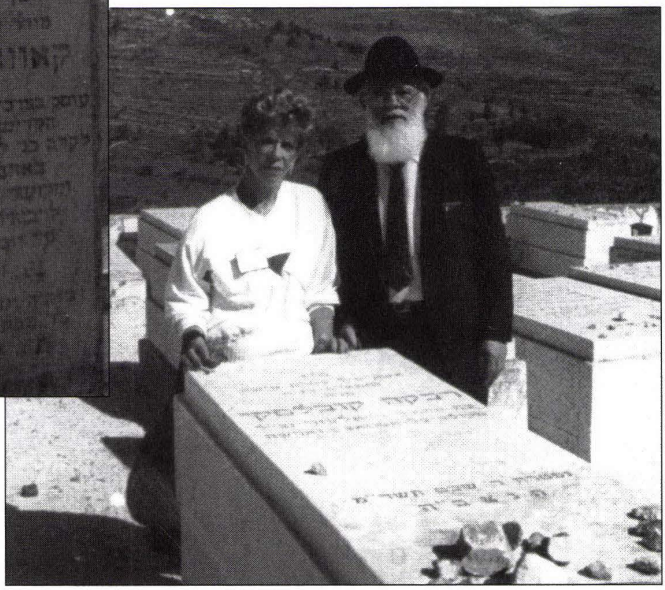


Rabbi Avrohom Shlomo, father's brother and his family, Zurich Switzerland



Kever of father, R' Chaim Nachman Kowalsky buried near the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Old Montefiore Cemetery, Queens, N.Y.

Myself and my sister, Rachel Isbee at mother's kever, Har HaMenuchos





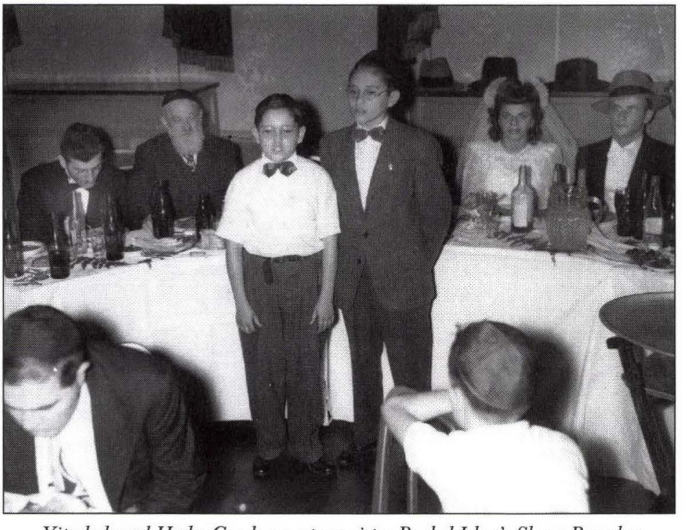
Kevorim of Chaim and Chana Goodman – Har HaMenuchos



Left to Right: my mother, Mrs. Rivka Kowalsky; my sister, Rachel Isbee, the bride; and my sister Jean A"H, 1945



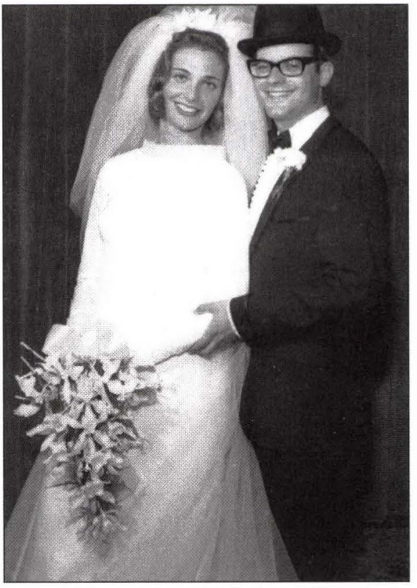
My sister, Rachel Isbee and chason, Rabbi Leib Isbee at their wedding,1945



Yitzchok and Heshy Goodman at my sister Rachel Isbee's Sheva Berachos



Avrohom Moshe Kowalsky, Valedictorian of his kindergarten class, St. Louis, MO



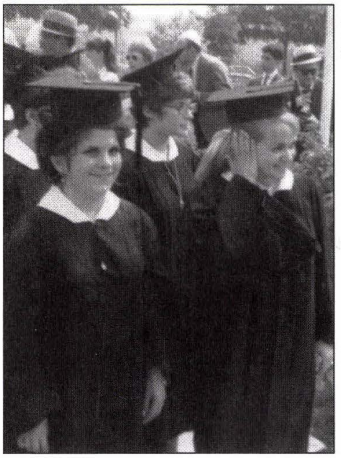
Avrohom Moshe and Shifra Haddassah (Kelman) Kowalsky, 1968



Sheva Berachos of Avrohom Moshe and Shifra Haddassah Kowalsky

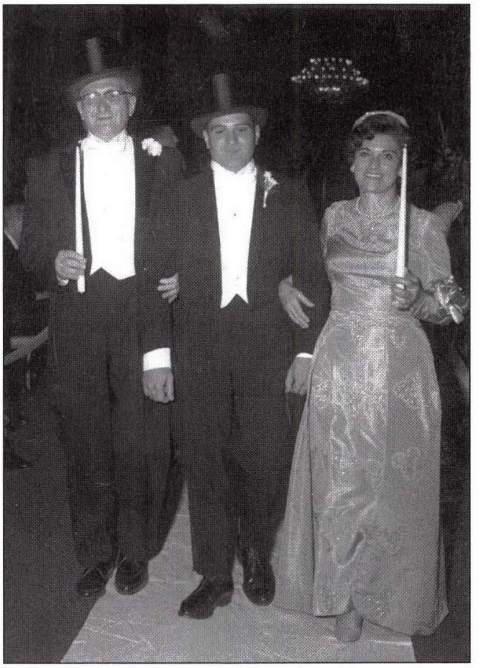


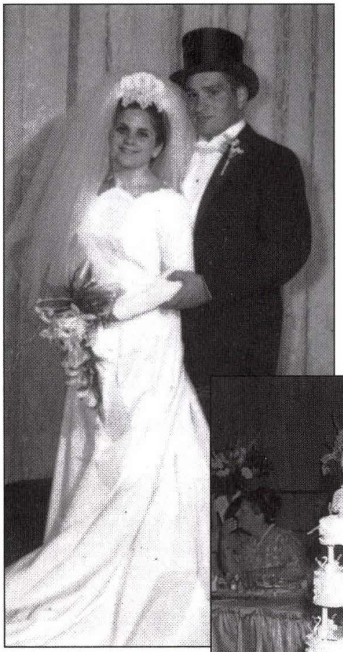
Avrohom Moshe and Shifra Haddassah Kowalsky



Aviva Kowalsky (left)
graduating Stern College

Mr. and Mrs. Reuven Lazarus escort
my son-in-law Chanoch to the chupah





Chanoch and
Aviva Lazarus, 1967

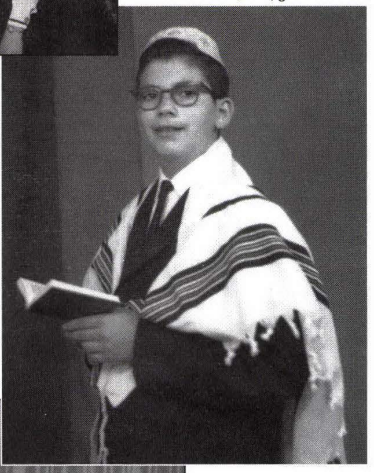


(Left to Right) Mother, Rivka Kowalsky, Shulamith,
Aviva, Chanoch, Reuven Lazarus and myself



Eluzer Elimelech Kowalsky on his way to Camp Daromah in Israel, 1964

Eluzer Elimelech Kowalsky Bar Mitzvah, June 1964

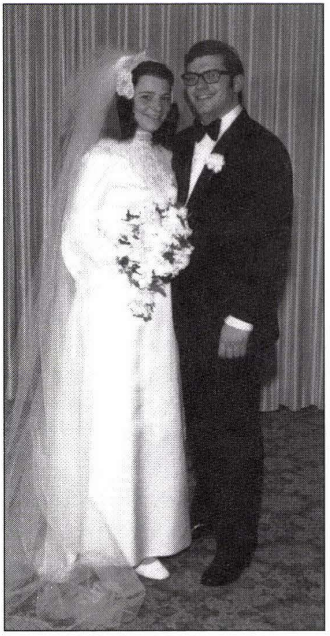




The Kowalsky clan, 1964



Rabbi Z. Shragai speaking at Eluzer's Bar Mitzvah next to Rav Ruderman



Wedding of Eluzer and Miriam (Shapiro) Kowalsky, 1973



Eluzer and Miriam Kowalsky along with Shulamith and myself at the wedding of my granddaughter Temima to Avi Feldman



Sheva Berachos of Eluzer and Miriam Kowalsky at the home of Rabbi and Mrs. Holtzer. Left to Right: R' Mordechai Shapiro, Eluzer and Miriam, R' Shlomo Shapiro, Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik and R' Fabian Schonfeld



Which Is The Girl?

NEITHER ONE! Yosef Kowalsky, left, 2½-year-old son of Rabbi and Mrs. Sholem Kowalsky, of Flushing, N.Y., has six months more to go before those curls get snipped off according to traditional rite, on his third birthday. He's shown with Aaron Sodden, son of Rabbi and Mrs. Jacob Sodden, Bronx, N.Y., both here with their parents for the Rabbinical Council of America's convention at Waldman's Hotel. Aaron is over 3, and therefore has had his long locks shorn. — See Story On Page 2.



Dr. Yossi and Rivka Kowalsky, 1980, Chicago. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. D. Nathan are standing next to us

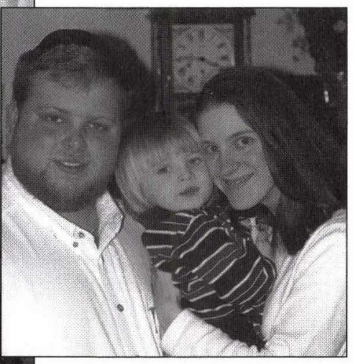
Mrs. Helen Zions, Mrs. Kahane, myself with Rabbi A.M. Kahana at Yossi's Bar Mitzvah



Grandchildren and Great Grandchildren



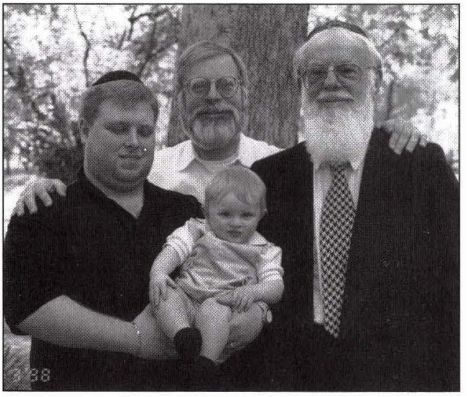
My children Avrum and his wife Shifra, their daughter Leah and their son David with his wife Lara at their wedding



Grandchildren David and Lara Kowalsky with their son Yaakov Yonatan

Great-grandson Yaakov Yonatan Kowalsky

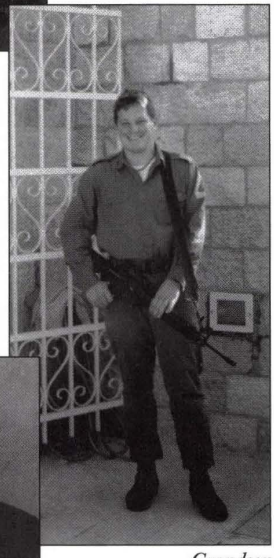




4 generations of Kowalskys. (L to R) Grandson – Dovid, Son – Avrum, Great grandson – Yaakov Yonatan and myself



Grandson, Chaim Simcha Lazarus (left) with parents Aviva and Chanoch, brother Baruch at his Bar Mitzvah at the Jerusalem Ramada Renaissance Hotel



Grandson Baruch B. Lazarus serving in the Israeli Defence Force

Seated left to right:
Mrs. Molly Lazarus, Mr. Reuven Lazarus, (mechutanim),
Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky, Mrs. Shulamith Kowalsky
Standing left to right:
Aviva (Kowalsky) Lazarus, Mimi Lazarus,
Baruch Lazarus, Chaim Simcha Lazarus, Chanoch Lazarus

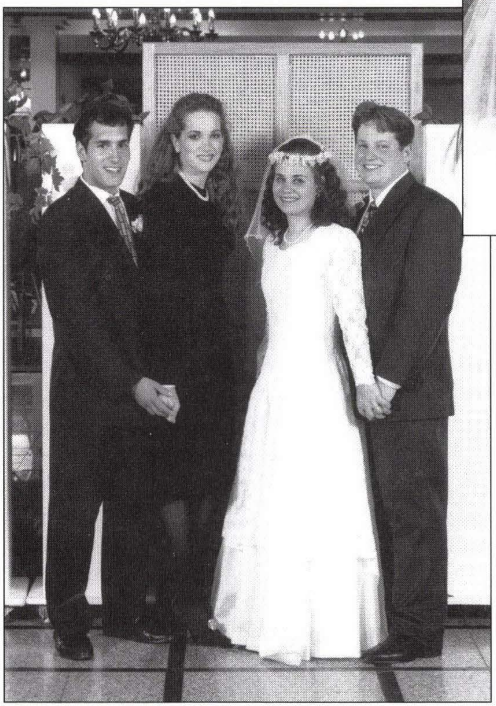




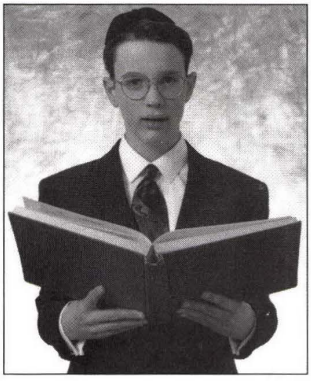
Grandchildren Chaim and Mimi Lazarus

Grandchildren Baruch Betzalel and Chagit Lazarus

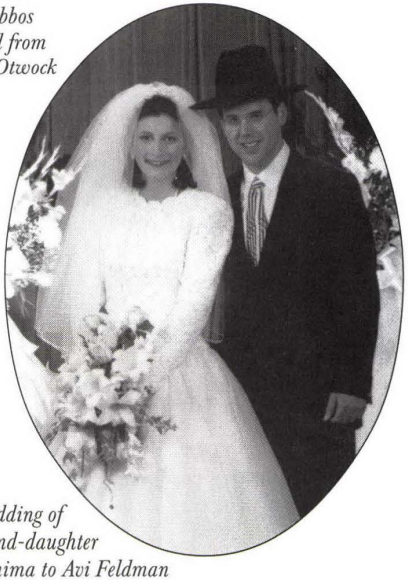




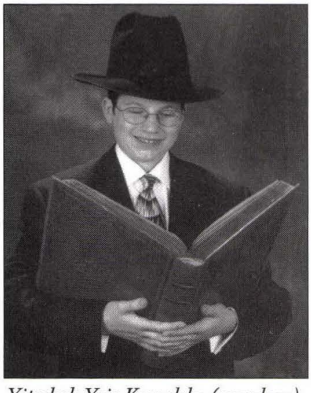
Left to Right: Grandchildren Chaim Simcha and wife Mimi, Baruch Betzalel and Chagit Lazarus at their chasunah



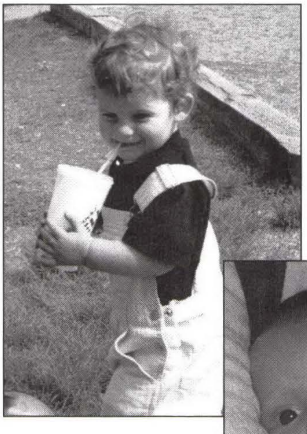
Chaim Nachman Kowalsky, Eluzer's son, at his Bar Mitzvah, March '91 – holding the same Mesechta Shabbos that I received from my Zaidy in Otwock



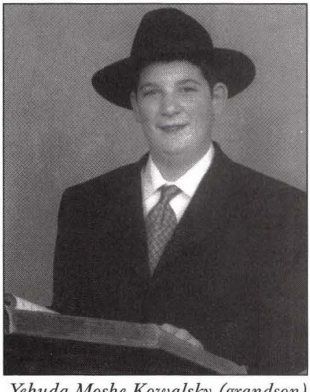
Wedding of grand-daughter Temima to Avi Feldman



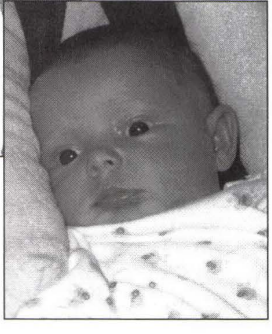
Yitzchok Yair Kowalsky (grandson) Bar Mitzvah, Dec '95



Yoseph Feldman (great-grandson) Temima & Avi's son St. Louis, Mo



Yehuda Moshe Kowalsky (grandson) Bar Mitzvah, Nov '99



Rivka Feldman (great-grand-daughter) Temima & Avi's daughter 4 weeks old St. Louis, Mo.

Yossi's family in Israel:

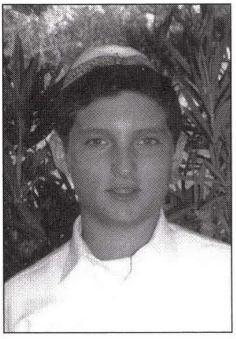
Front row (L-R):
Chaim Nachman,
Natan Yisroel, Tamar Leah

Back row (L-R):
Yitzchok Yehudah, Rochel Chava,
and Rivka holding Ayalah Yocheved,

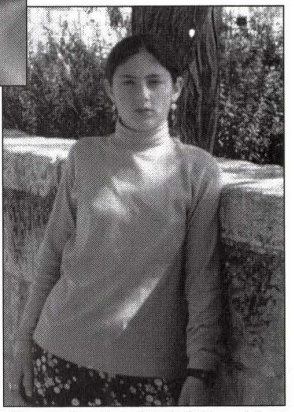


Buying grandson's hair for Upsherin of
Natan Kowalsky of Efrat





Grandson
Yitzchok Yehuda Kowalsky
on his Bar Mitzvah in Efrat



Grand-daughter Rochel Kowalsky
on her Bat Mitzvah in Efrat

Cousins, Nieces & Nephews



Cousins from Switzerland
Mr. Chaim Nachman Kowalsky
and his wife Freida



Cousins Avrohom and
Bas Sheva Manowitz
in Bnei Brak



Myself rejoicing at a wedding of my cousins,
the Goldenbergs of Zurich



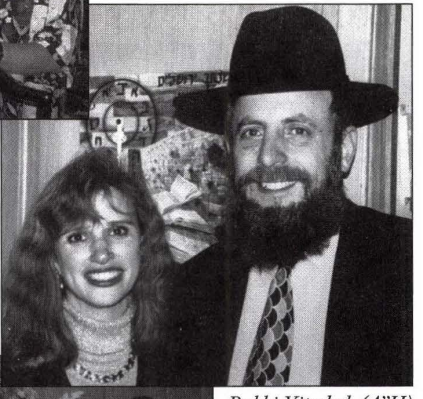
Niece Cheryl Steinberg,
daughter of my sister Jean, A"H

Aviva and Eluzer (A"H) Isbee, niece and nephew, Baltimore, Md.





Left to Right: Myself, great-niece Shira holding Chava Rivka, niece Aviva Isbee, and my wife Shulamith



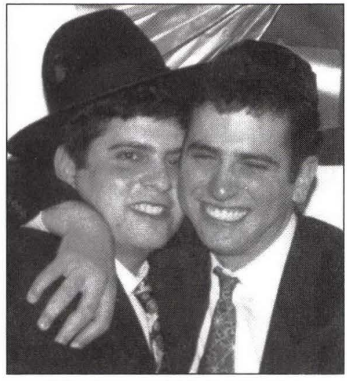
Rabbi Yitzchok (A"H) and Miriam Isbee, nephew and niece



The Weinrib family left to right: Nechemyah, Mrs. Weinrib, Mimi, Yonah, Aviva, Avi, Ayala, Miriam, Yona, Esti, Yisroel Katz



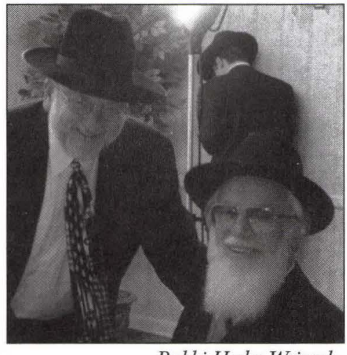
Rabbi and Mrs. A.J. Lieberman, niece and nephew



Meir Levy and Nechemia Isbee, brothers-in-law and great-nephews



Nechemia and Chayale Isbee great-nephew and niece



Rabbi Heshy Weinreb, a good friend and myself



Matisyahu Levy, great-nephew, son of Shira and Meir Levy

Sponsors



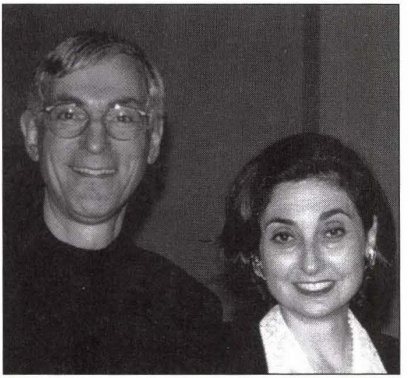
David Goldman and his wife Elizabeth, Pa.



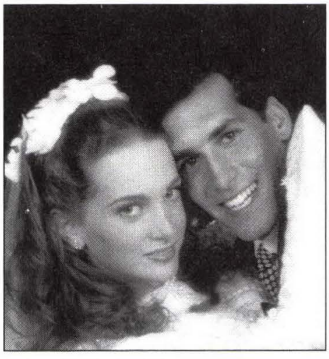
Leonard Klirsfeld, Hillcrest



Sam and Mia Kristal, Hillcrest



Noah and Ellen Lightman, Baltimore, Md.



Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Lazarus,
(Grandchildren) Brooklyn, N.Y.



Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Haft,
Hillcrest



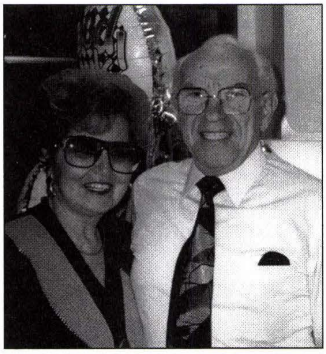
Mr. and Mrs. Howard Friedman,
Baltimore, Md.



Mr. and Mrs. Simi Schnall,
Hillcrest



Mr. (ע"ז) and Mrs. Mathews,
Hillcrest



Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Hiller,
Hillcrest



Rabbi and Mrs. Heshy Goodman,
(Brother-in-law & sister-in-law)
Woodridge, N.Y.



Rabbi and Mrs. Henry Book,
Monsey, N.Y.



Henry and Lola Tenenbaum,
Hillcrest

My heartfelt appreciation to the following sponsors for their friendship, encouragement and generous support. (Pictures were not available)



Rabbi and Mrs. Avrum Moshe Kahana

Mr. and Mrs. William Mandell

Mr. Yitzchok Neuberger

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ratner

Dr. and Mrs. Marcel Reischer

Mr. and Mrs. Joe Rubin

Mr. and Mrs. Burt Weichselbaum

Mr. and Mrs. Mark Zborowski

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Zborowski

Friends of Y.I. of Hillcrest
in memory of
Mr. Leo (Mendy) Skulnick

Shoah Letters

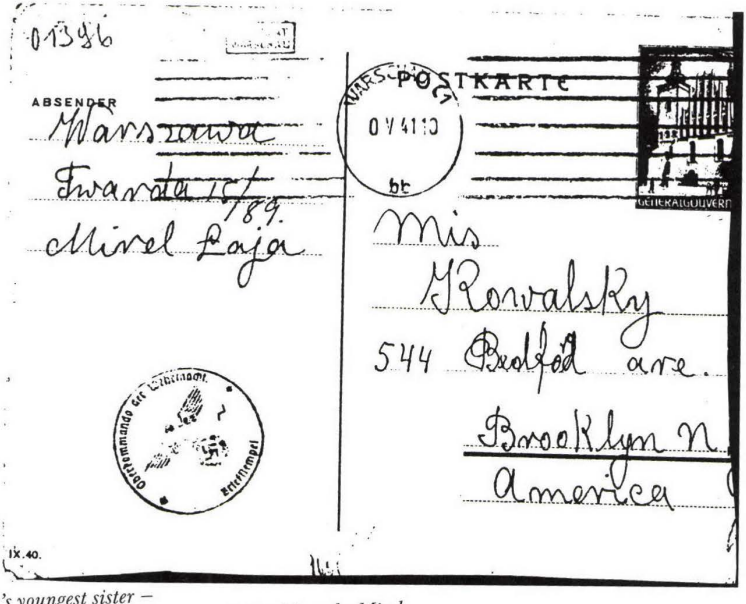
In an effort to help our family during the War, we constantly sent them packages and letters. We never received any acknowledgment and did not know if they ever arrived. On the following pages are letters written by the family during the Shoah (translated)

Dear Sister,
I received Your letter on the 3rd of April, 1940. All of us are ~~[illegible]~~ alive, but I don't feel well. We live in a very little apartment entirely outside the city. Dear Sister, It would be very Good if it would be possible to send us old clothes. Regards to all of You.
Your brother Leyb. Mokotowski
Stock

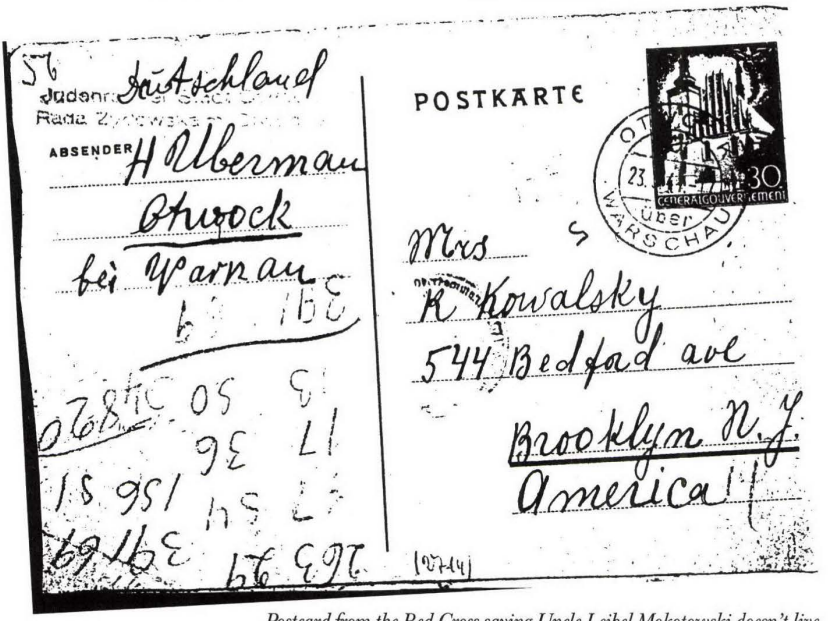
(8/4) April 8, 1940
We are in place. I mailed several letters. We received nothing from Natka. Write to her, her parents and all are well. Why don't You write.
Regards



Mother's oldest sister – Esther Zahler (Warsaw)
wife of Rav Dovid Zahler, Zt"l



Mother's youngest sister –
Laja Mirel lived in Warsaw, married to Menashe Mirel



Postcard from the Red Cross saying Uncle Leibel Mokotowski doesn't live in Stocktz (liquidated). They informed us that there's a Mokotowski in Otwock. The Uberman family were friends in Otwock.



Uncle Yehuda Leib Mokotowski, one of Mother's brothers from Stocktz

O'clock, the 20th of May 41 - Dear Regina!
Finally, I received the first (receipt ~~notice~~ NOTICE?) since the beginning of the war. It brought me pleasure and, at the same time caused me worry. What kind of surgery did you have? Write how you feel, for nobody can commiserate with you as I do. Forgive me if I touched a sensitive spot. Your silence hurt me. - I don't ask anything from you, but look upon you as the only dearest person in the world and in such a critical situation you forgot me. Besides the general troubles (cares) I am very unhappy. It is almost a year that I am sitting home and see no way out of my illness. Oh how I need you! Many times I thought that maybe you are not well, because you know how sensitive I am & think of you. Write immediately how you feel. How is your husband & and your dear children? Why did you move? Your Mother received the (receipt or notice?) but didn't yet get the package. My Dear! write me a letter, write about everybody & everything. ----- Regina! do you ~~keep~~ have contact with our Natka? I sit at home & constantly think of you and remember everything, our lives ~~and~~ I day dream and cry. But this doesn't help me any. My husband & children are well but generally it is not good. Be well.

Warsaw, Febr. 24th 1941.

Dear Aunty!
I received your postcard. I was wondering why you didn't write to me the entire time during the war. I wrote several letters but didn't get any response. I couldn't understand what happened. Dear Aunty! How are you? How is Uncle & Your children? As to me, what can I write You? That I cannot endure the suffering anymore. I don't work, we live in the worst possible conditions. I feel that I have no more strength left to take the suffering. Dear Aunty! Please, maybe it is possible for You to send us a food package? You asked about Your sisters, Chaya was sick, she had pneumonia, she feels now better. Write to her daughter to send her packages. Best regards to all.

Bajndla (Sheindla)
Sisstar of
Father

Warsaw, March 30, 1941

My Very Dear Son!
On the 25th of March I received a package of very little worth. I paid more for the cost of postage than it's worth. It does not pay to send these kind of packages. On the 27th of March, I received a 2nd package; four little packets of tea. For this I thank you very much. My very dear son! I beg You send such packages often, as much as You can. I am well, but make every effort to send me these packages, ~~I am~~ to me Your loving Father

Regards to everyone. If you could, send me a little coffee. Please, please. Everything in small quantities but often. Perhaps also some pepper.

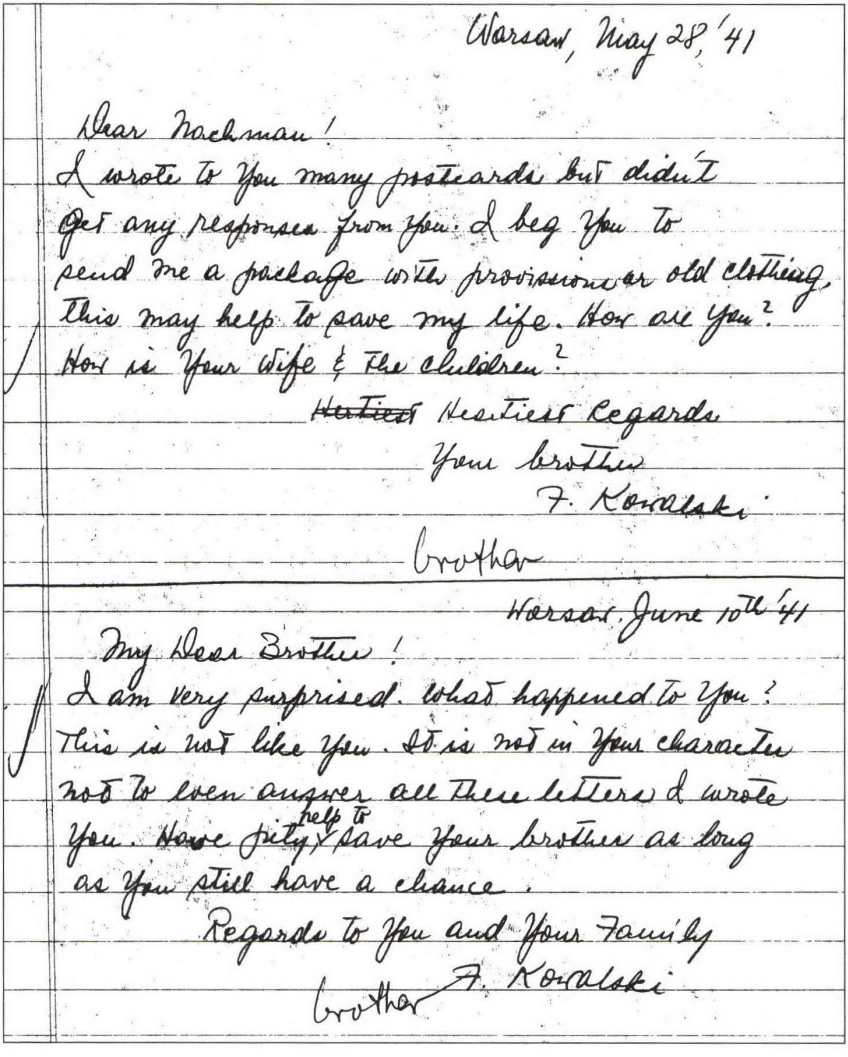
M. Kowalski 1911
— DLN —

Warsaw Nov 5th 1942

My Very Dear Children!

I received Your packages with everything in them But am surprised that you didn't remember me during the entire 2 years of war. How could You restrain Yourself from helping me? You cannot imagine how Your packages put one on my feet, for just one minute. However, I am worried that if I don't get the next package and very soon, I don't know how I will survive! I beg You, send packages, at least once a month, otherwise, I don't know what will happen to me. Have pity on Your old Father. Don't wait for an answer but send packages immediately because it takes a long time to get them. I beg You, the packages should come to me regularly every month, so that I should not miss them even once. At the same time, please write to me how all of you are doing. Regards to everyone, Especially to my daughter-in-law.

DBN Kowalski
1911 Father of Ch-N.



Warsaw, May 28, '41

Dear Nachman!
I wrote to You many postcards but didn't get any responses from you. I beg You to send me a package with provisions or old clothing, this may help to save my life. How are you? How is Your Wife & the children?

~~Hartiest~~ Heartiest Regards
Your brother
F. Kowalski

Brother

Warsaw, June 10th '41

My Dear Brother!
I am very surprised. What happened to You? This is not like You. It is not in Your character not to even answer all these letters I wrote You. Have pity, help to save your brother as long as You still have a chance.

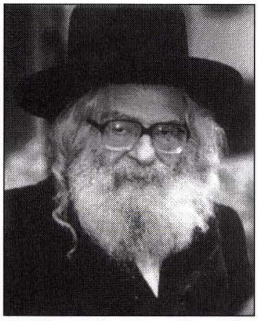
Regards to You and Your Family
Brother F. Kowalski

Gedolim
(Whom I Knew)

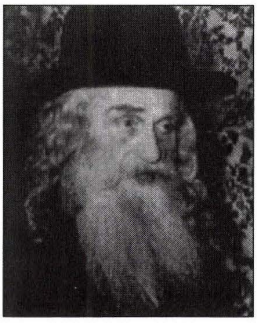


© 1991 Torah Personalities Inc.

Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter
the "Imrei Emes", Zt"l
of the Ger Dynasty



Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter
The "Pnei Menachem"
of Ger, Zt"l



Rabbi Yisroel Alter
The "Beis Yisroel"
of Ger, Zt"l



Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter
The "Lev Simcha" of Ger, Zt"l



The Alexander Rebbe, Zt"l

מאדזשיצער ניגון



The Modzitzer Rebbe

סך זענען זיי געווען די רבישע הייף און חסידים־שטיבלעך אין אטוואצק. יעדער הויף, יעדעס שטיבל מיט זיין ניגון, מיט זיין נוסח, מיט זיין אופן פון תורה־זאגן און טיש־פירן. טיפע דיסטערישע נשמות געווען און מיט זייערע ניגונים, באַלייט מיט הויכע תורה־געדאַנקען, מיט דער התלהבות פון די תפילות פאַרברענט די טריס פונעם שטו, דעם אייביקן אַנרייצער פונעם מענטשלעכן גביריט.

אטוואצק האָט זיך געווויגט און געטריסלט אין חסידישע ניגונים, אַבער איבער אַלע האָט אַפּגעהילכט דער מאַדזשיצער ניגון. עס איז געווען דאָס קול פון גבורה, וואָס האָט זיין אַפּשטאַם געהאַט אין דער פּייערלעכקייט פון „אַז ישיר משה ובני ישראל״ און עס האָבן זיך געהערט אין אים די משיח־טריס פון אחרית־הימים, די גרויסע פרייד, וואָס קומט פון טרויער...

דער אַפּיציעלער פאַרשטייער פון מאַדזשיצער חסידות איז ביז זיין פטירה געווען דער באַרימטער רבי, שאַפּער פון נגינה, ר׳ שאול־ידידיה אלעזר טויב, באַרימט אויך אלס חובב־ציון, איז נסתלק געווארן אין ארץ־ישראל, אין די שנהן, ווען ל״ג מלוכות האבן ביים כסא־המשפט געאָרטיילט, אַז יידן האָבן די רעכט אויף זייער היסטאַריש לאַנד.

אַנגעהויבן האָט דער פאַטער פון דער מאַדזשיצער דינאַסטיע, ר׳ יחזקאל קאַמירער, אַן אייניקל פון איינעם פון בעש״טס תלמידים, ר׳ שלמה־זלמן, און אַליין אַ תלמיד־מובהק פונעם לובלינער „חוזה״. ר׳ יחזקאל האָט שטאַרק געהאַלטן פון נגינה, געזאַגט, אַז ער פילט נישט קיין עונג־שבת, אויב עס איז נישטא קיין נייער ניגון צו די זמירות; אַז שירה און נגינה ווערן געשאַפן פון דעם מאַטעריאַל, וואָס גייט איבער דאָס הארץ. אַ גרויסע צאָל אַנאַניאַמע ניגונים, האַלטן חסידים, שטאַמען פון אים.

זיין זון, ר׳ שמואל־אלי פון זוואָלין, איז געווען אַ מגנן בחסד עליון און אַליין געשאַפן פאַלקס־מעלאַדיעס, וואָס האָבן אויסגענומען אפילו ביי מתנגדים... ער האָט געזאָגט: „אַלץ, וואָס גאָט האָט באַשאַפן, אויף דער וועלט, זאָגט לויב און געזאַנג, אפילו די קיי זינגען... געזאַנג ווירקט אויף די צוהערער, זיי זאָלן זיך דערהייבן צו השתפכות הנפש... די וועלט טאָר קיין מינוט נישט בלייבן אַן אַ ניגון. די טויערן פון נגינה טארן נישט פארשלאָסן ווערן... אַן אַ ניגון וועט די וועלט חרוב, פאַרזינקען אין מעלאַנכאָליע... מיטן כוח פון זמר׳ל ווערן וועלטן געבויט... נגינה האָט דערהויבן דעם מענטש צו נבואה, והיה כנגן המנגן ותחי עליו יד ד׳... די גאַנצע מענטשלעכע נשמה איז געקנעטן פון געזאַנג־אוצרות״.

זיין זון ר׳ ישראל, וועלכער מאַדזשיצער רב און רבי, האָט דערהויבן דעם חסידישן ניגון צו דער העכסטער הייך, געשאַפן וווּנדערלעכע קאַמפּאָזיציעס. „אַן דעם ניגון — האָט ער געזאָגט — וויסט ער נישט ווי דער צדיק קען דערגרייכן צו די טויערן פון תפילה״. ער האָט פאַר־בונדן די זיבן מדרגות אין נגינה מיט די ז׳ ספירות און דערפאַר איז די הארפע פון בית המקדש געווען פון זיבן סטרונעס. די מוזיק, האָט ער אַנגעוויזן, לערנט אונדז, אַז אפילו ווען מען איז שוין אויף דער העכסטער הויך פון קול, אפילו ווען מען שרייט אַן די העכסטע סענגער, דאַרף מען אָפּ־ציען דעם ערשטן גיידעריקסטן טאָן, דעם ערשטן מצב פון שפּיות... אזן האָט ער אַ טאָג נ־שט געשאַפן קיין ניגון, האָט ער זיך שטאַרק מצער געווען.

זיין ממלא מקום איז געווען זיין זון ר׳ שאול־ידידיה־אלעזר טויב, וועלכער האָט זיך פרי אַרויסגעוויזן אלס מוזיקאַליישער גאון. אויפן פאַרלאַנג פון זיינע חסי־דים האָט ער זך באַוצט אין יאָר 1929 אין אטוואצק, וווּ די חסידים האָבן אים געקויפט אַ וויליע און אויפגעשטעלט אַ ריזיק בית־המדרש און דאָרטן אין דער ריינער אטוואצ־קער לופט זיך אַנגעזאַפט מיט רוח ד׳ והיה כנגן המנגן. אין אטוואצק האָט ער געגרינדעט די ישיבה „תפארת ישראל״, אין וועלכער עס האָבן זיך בינן אויסברוך פון קריג צעפונען בחורים מופלגי תורה, למדנים, בעלי־הוראה, אין דער רבי האָט זיי באַזארגט מיט אלע הצטרכותן.

אַ למדן אין בריסטסטן זין פון וואַרש, געפירט טיש־געזאָגט חידושי תורה און עזזונגען וווּנדערלעכע ניגונים. אלס שאָפער פון חסידישער נגינה איז ער געווען אַ יחיד ברורו. ער האָט געשאַפן אַן ערך זיבן הונדערט ניגונים, אין וועלכע, טיפער צער און חסידישע חדווה הארמא־ניזירן אויף אַ סינטעטישן אופן. זיין לעבן איז געווען איין גרויסער ניגון, פאַרוועבט אין דער וווּנדער־לעגענדע פון חסידות. ער האָט זיינע אייגענע קאַמפּאָזיציעס אי״ס געזונגען אויף אַ וווּנדערלעכן אופן, איז געווען אַן אומ־אויסשפּעכער קוואַל פון הערלעך געזאַנג און האָט מיט זיין מעכטיקער שטים באַצויבערט הונדערטער און טויזנ־טער, וואָס האָבן געשטראָמט קיין אטוואצק הערן זיינע ניגונים און דערנאָך פאַרשפרייטן זיי איבער גאַנץ פוילן.



Rabbi Shimon Kalish
The Amshinover Rebbe, Zt"l,



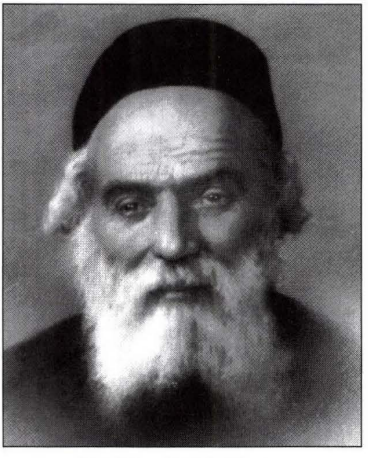
© 1991 Torah Personalities Inc.

Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, Zt"l,
the Satmar Rav

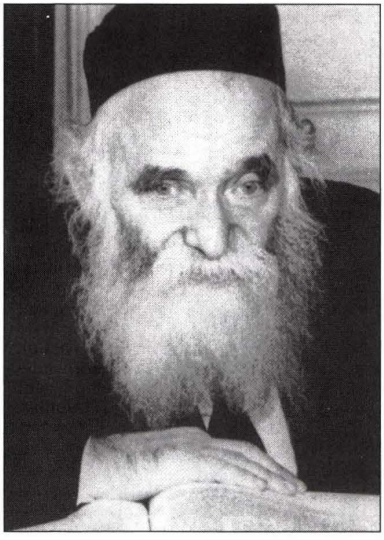


© 1991 Torah Personalities Inc.

Rav Eliezer Silver Zt"l, famous for his hatzalah work during WWII. President of Agudas Harabonim of U.S. and Canada



Rav Yisroel Meir Kagan,
the "Chofetz Chaim Zt"l



Harav Aharon Kotler Z"tl

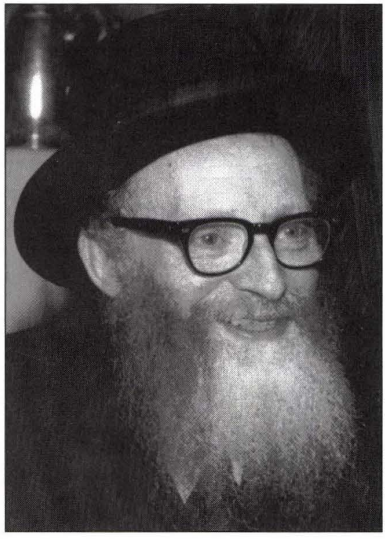
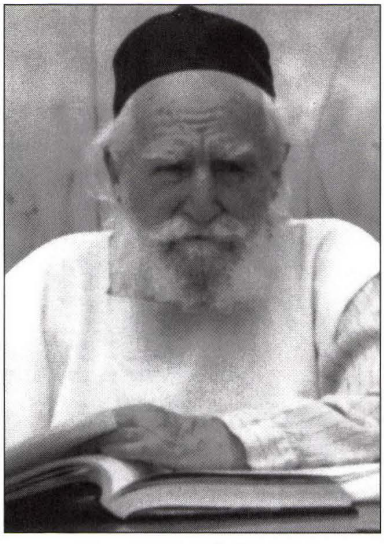


Photo taken by Trainer Studios

Harav Schneur Kotler Z"tl, who advised Rabbi Kowalsky regarding Soviet Jewry



© 1991 Torah Personalities Inc.

Harav Moshe Feinstein Z"tl

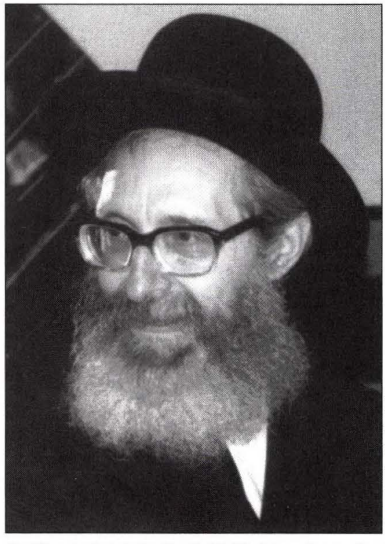
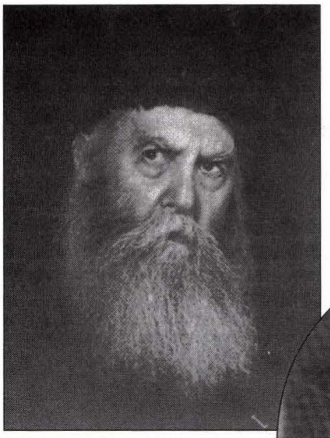


Photo taken by Eliyahu Safdias

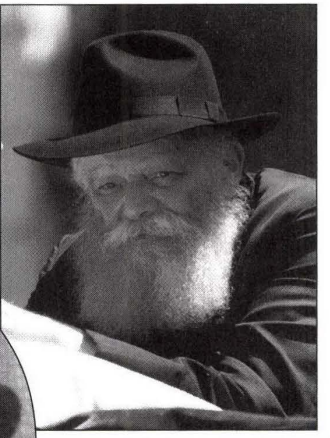
Rabbi Finkel, Mir Rosh HaYeshiva, Jerusalem



Rav Yoseph Yitzchok Schneerson Zt"l from Lubavitch



Rav Sholem Ber Schneerson, Zt"l whom I was named after

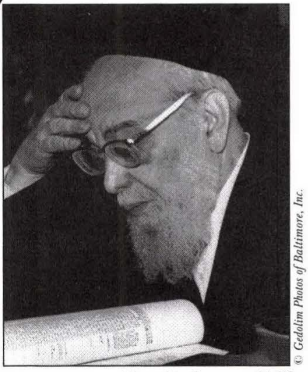


Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt"l the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe



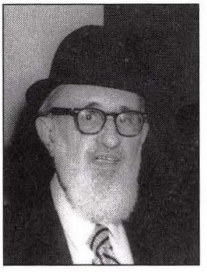
© 1991 Torah Personalities Inc.

The Bluzhover Rebbe Zt"l



© Gedolim Photos of Baltimore, Inc.

Rav Ruderman Zt"l



Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, Zt"l

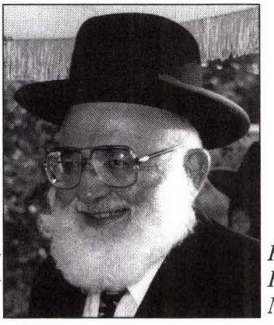


Photo by Esky Cook

Rav Weinberg, Zt"l, Rosh HaYeshiva, Ner Israel



Sketch of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik by David Mood

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik Zt"l, whose letter (facing page) graced the book published to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Rabbinical Council of America

RCA 50th Anniversary
(in Jerusalem)

קונטרוס זה, היוצא לאור בירושלים במסגרת חגיגת היובל של הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה, מוגש בהכרת טובה מקרב לב

לכבוד מורנו ורבנו הדגול

הרה״ג הר״ר יוסף דב הלוי סולובייצ׳יק שליט״א

אשר

— האיר את דעתנו בדברו אל ליבנו...
— תוך ניתוח סוגיות והארת הלכות לימד אותנו גם להתעטר בהצלחה וגם להתמודד עם היגון...
— בדרך אל האמת הפגישנו עם החסד...

רבם של בני הגולה ומקור השראה לעם השוכן בציון

* * *

מדברי הרב

״׳ויעפו נערים ויגעו ובחורים כשול יכשלו וקוי ה׳ יחליפו כח יעלו אבר כנשרים ירוצו ולא ייגעו ולכו ולא ייעפו׳ (ישעיהו מ: ל־לא)...

״...הפילוג המכאיב במחנה הדתי והשנאה הטרגית של היהודים החילוניים ליהודי הדתי לא ידחפו אותנו ליאוש ורזיגנציה. אמנם לא השגנו הרבה בשטח זה, אנו בבחינת ׳ילכו׳, של הליכה אטית. אולם, ׳לא יעפו׳, לא נטוש את תקוותנו הגדולה לאחדות ישראל, ולא נחדל להטיף לאהבת ישראל, הבנה לכל היהודים, אף אם יהודי עושה עוול. נקיים את ׳והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות׳ וגם נקיים את התפילה של ׳א־לוקי, נצור לשוני מרע ושפתי מדבר מרמה, ולמקללי נפשי תדום׳. באחת: לא היגיעה תרדימנו למצב של מנוחה ו׳שלום עליך נפשי׳ והעייפות לא תורידנו ליאוש. וקוי ה׳ יחליפו כח!...״

(מתוך ״חמש דרשות״)

ראשית דבר

חג היובל של הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה

ובל הוא תאריך של חשבון נפש, אך חליפת חמשים שנות קיום פורה ויצרני הינה סיבה מספקת לחגיגה. כי הרי הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה חוללה מהפיכה רוחנית עצומה ביהדות ארה״ב, בבנין תשתית לעתיד מבטיח על יסודות איתנים.

אותה יהדות אמריקה, שנחשבה בימים הראשונים כנידחת ואולי גם כאבודה מפאת הריחוק ממרכזי התורה בפולין וליטא, קיבלה רוח חיים עם ייסוד הגוף הרבני התוסס הזה. הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה נטלה על עצמה את המשימה הקשה של תחיית העצמות היבשות, באמצעות ריענון החיים היהודיים, על ידי טיפוח השורשים העתיקים במציאות החדשה.

מול רגשי ייאוש של באי עולם שהלך ונחרב, כתוצאה מהמציאות ההרסנית שהשחיתה כל חלקה טובה, קם דור צעיר של דבקים בהלכה ובמורשת אבות. דור חדש זה הכריז מלחמה בנחשלים שהיו אדישים נוכח ההתפתחות של העידן החדש, שנראה היה כמאיים על קיום תשתית חיי תורה מלאים.

חידושה של הסתדרות הרבנים היה לא רק הצורה אלא גם בסגנון. המלחמה התנהלה בדרכי נועם ובלשון נקיה. הנשק בה השתמשו הרבנים הצעירים היה מסוג אחר לגמרי ממה שהיה מקובל עד אז; החרב היתה עטופה במעטה של מחרישה; לא עוד כלי ברזל המשחית, אלא אבני בנין.

הסתדרות הרבנים זכתה לשנות את המפה הציבורית. הרוח החדשנית הפכה להיות עזר להגשמת המטרה של קירוב יהודים לעמם ולתורתם. הזהב המאיים של חצי כדור הארץ המערבי ציפה את הכלים שעשו את מלאכת הקודש, כך שבסופו של דבר צמחה הימנו ברכה מרובה. במקום נשירה והתמוטטות קם והיה המפעל הכביר של תקומת הדת ומוסדותיה, בדמות החינוך המעולה שכלל קומה שלימה ממסד ועד הטפחות.

רעיונה של הסתדרות הרבנים נעוץ במקורות. ״ליכא מידי דלא רמיזי באורייתא״ קבעו כבר קדמונים, והדברים כמעט מפורשים בתורת חיים.

וכן מוצאים אנו בחז״ל (יומא לז, א): מונבז המלך היה עושה כל ידות הכלים של יום הכפורים של זהב. הליני אמו עשתה נברשת של זהב — — אותם הכלים ללא

שינוי ואפילו קל ביותר, אלא שהפעם עוצבו מזהב, בהתאם לצורך השעה, לכבודה של תורה ולתפארת עבודת המקדש. וחז"ל הזכירו אותם לשבח על פעולתם, למרות החידוש שהיה בדבר. לעומת זאת היו אחרים שהוזכרו (שם, לח, א) לגנאי: בית גרמו, שלא רצו ללמד על מעשה לחם הפנים; בית אבטינס, שלא רצו ללמד על מעשה הקטורת, ואם כי נתנו נימוק משכנע ביותר: יודעין היו של בית אבא שבית זה עתיד ליחרב, שמא ילמוד אדם שאינו מהוגן וילך ויעבוד עבודה זרה בכך.

לכאורה יש כאן טענה צודקת וחשש שאינו רחוק. למה, אם כן, גינו אותם חז"ל בצורה חריפה? התשובה היא כי זה שצופה רק חורבן ראוי לכל ביטויי גנאי.

דרך התורה היא דרך של בנין, ולא חרדה של חורבן. שמרנות הכרוכה בהסתכלות באספקלריא של חורבן פסולה היא בתכלית. לעומתה, התחדשות שמנצלת את כל הסממנים המודרניים — בתור ציפוי בלבד — לבנין ולפריחה ראויה לשבח.

זו תמצית משנתה של הסתדרות הרבנים: לקדש את החדש, לפתוח שערים, ולקרב לבבות כפי שהורה לנו רבינו־אהובנו הגדול, הגאון המפורסם רבי יוסף דוב סולובייצ'יק שליט"א, שלכבודו היקר לכולנו מוקדש ספר זה. יאריך השי"ת ימיו ושנותיו בבריאות השלימה.

וביום חגה חייבים אנו לעסוק בשבחה תוך כדי התויית תכניות לעתיד, בבטחון ובאמונה כי נזכה ללכת מחיל אל חיל עדי יראה אל אלקים בציון.

כה לחי
הרב שלום ב. קובלסקי שליט"א
יו"ר ועדת היובל בישראל



Sefer Hayovel, published to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Rabbinical Council of America – it had a Hebrew and English section. Rabbi Kowalsky, chairman



Rabbi Shapiro, former Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel alongside Rabbi Kowalsky, reviewing the Journal of Jewish Thought (Sefer Hayovel) dedicated to Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik

Dignitaries



Rabbi Kowalsky and former President Jimmy Carter in front of the White House at the signing of the Peace agreement with Egypt

JIMMY CARTER
October 29, 1980

To Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky

No matter what else may be added to my life's work, I cannot imagine anything that will give me more happiness than the contribution I was able to make to help Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat achieve the historic breakthrough for peace. At the time of the negotiations at Camp David leading to this milestone, there was a great deal of discussion about the "political risk" involved in such a venture. It was an opportunity for peace, and I gave it the maximum effort. When the leaders of Israel, Egypt and the United States signed the Egyptian-Israeli treaty on the White House grounds, it provided the first real hope in a generation for Middle East peace. It was a moment none of us will forget. Our goal now must be to continue the Camp David process, something Prime Minister Begin assures me he wants with all of his heart.

That larger peace we seek will not be achieved by campaign rhetoric, although it is gratifying that all of the Presidential candidates are pledged to the continuation of the "special relationship" between America and Israel. My pledge has been backed up by Camp David, by unequaled economic and military assistance for Israel, by a strong anti-boycott law, by opposition to an independent Palestinian state, by refusal to recognize or negotiate with a PLO committed to the destruction of Israel. I see Israel not only as a close friend and partner but as an important strategic ally of the United States.

As a strong democracy in a troubled part of the world, Israel is a major strategic asset. A strong secure Israel is not just in Israel's interest. It is in the interest of the United States and in the interest of the entire free world.

I am grateful for the help my Administration has received from the Jewish community in these and other important national efforts. We shall need this support more than ever in the years ahead. I am concerned about the shrill voices that would end our struggle to achieve social justice, that would put a stop to our efforts on behalf of the poor and the victims of discrimination, and that would tear down the

Letter from former U.S. President Jimmy Carter



Golda Meir, late Prime Minister of Israel greeted at City Hall; Rabbi Kowalsky standing directly behind her

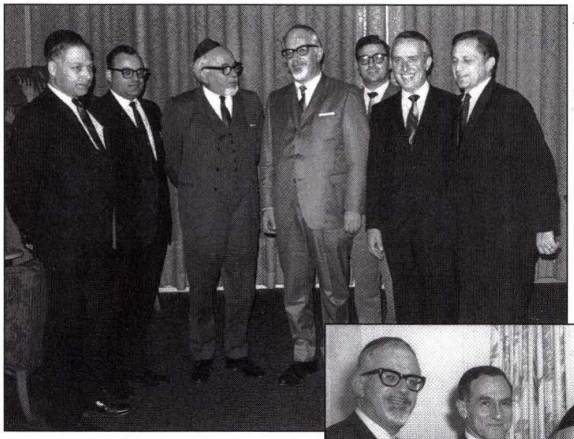
(Picture from N.Y. Times)



Rabbi Kowalsky with late Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin upon return from Russia



Late Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin addressing the RCA mission to help Russian Emigrants



Dr. Belkin, President of Yeshiva University (3rd from left) and myself next to him at the RCA Convention



Left to Right: Rabbi Kowalsky, Mr. Nathan Saperstein, Rabbi Isser Unterman, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Sturm, Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld



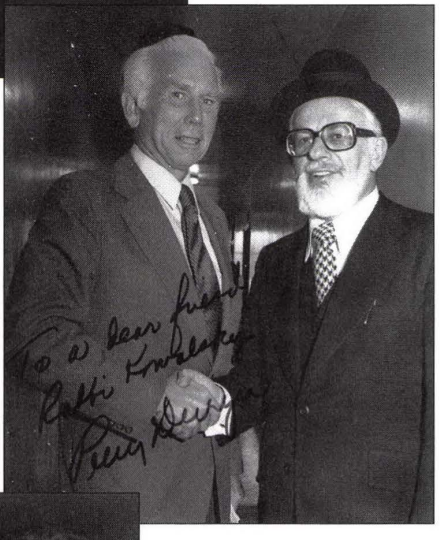
Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel



Mr. Morris Green, great philanthropist of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yitzchok Kulitz, Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, myself, and Mr. Sam Kevelson



Left to Right: Rabbi Kowalsky,
Rabbi Moses Rosen, Chief Rabbi of Romania,
Rabbi L.A. Salgo, Chief Rabbi of Hungary



Mr. Perry Duryea, candidate
for N.Y. State Governor,
running against Carey,
with Rabbi Kowalsky



Rabbi Kowalsky,
Mr. Donald Manes,
Borough President of Queens
and Rabbi Fabian Schoenfeld,
at the Young Israel of Queens



Left to Right:
Rabbi Israel Klaven, Ex-Vice President of RCA of America, Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, Rabbis Kowalsky, Avrutig, Israel Miller, Dr. Major Yaffa – Head of Heichal Shlomo at the RCA Conference on major Jewish issues of the 1960's



Left to Right:
Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Kowalsky and Rabbi Solomon Schapiro



Left to Right:
Rabbi Heshy Reichman, Rabbi Kowalsky, Mr. Shlomo Zalman Shragai, former Mayor of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shimon Dolgin, Rabbi of Ramat Eshkol; Rabbi Reuven Marcos. Dinner in Israel, honoring Rabbi Kowalsky for his work helping Russian people in Russia



Pinchas Sapir, former Minister of Finance State of Israel at Bonds Conference to help Israeli economy



Left to Right: Mr. Sam Klappholtz, Mr. Henry Berenstein, Mr. Simon Laufer, the host, and Rabbi Kowalsky at a simcha with the Bobover Rebbe, Shlita at home of Mr. and Mrs. Shimon Laufer



Left to Right: Mr. Henry Tenenbaum, Mr. and Mrs. Eliezer Farcas, Menachem Begin former Prime Minister of Israel, Joseph Rubin, Rabbi Kowalsky at a bond dinner, Young Israel of Hillcrest



Mr. Teddy Kollek, former Mayor of Jerusalem greeting Rabbi Kowalsky, 1973



Former President of Israel, Schneur Zalman Shazar good friend of Rabbi Kowalsky

Newark, N.J.

GALA PROGRAM PLANNED FOR DEDICATION OF YESHIVA'S CLINTON AVENUE BUILDING

Three Day Session of Varied Activity To Mark Opening of New Facilities

School Is 'Promoted' With Pupils

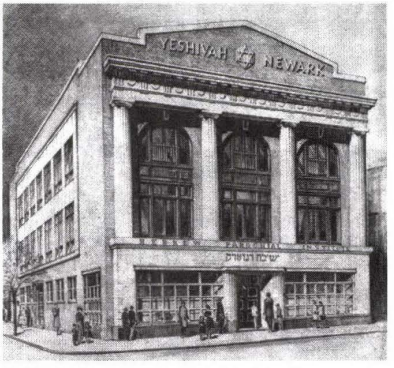
Yeshivah of Newark Adds Class Each Year After Starting With Kindergarten

A school that started with a kindergarten and each year is adding a grade as its pupils advance, the Yeshivah of Newark, Hebrew parochial institution, is the first of its kind with this educational procedure in the Newark area. New pupils may be enrolled in any class, but the program is based on adding one class each year, a custom that dates back to Biblical times. When the first class has advanced to high school, it is expected that a high school will be built, and later a college.

The school is a non-profit organization, its support coming from donations, many from non-Jewish contributors. A small tuition fee is charged, which does not cover the cost of books, food or transportation afforded each child.

The Yeshivah is primarily an educational, not a religious institution, although its founders hope that some graduates will become spiritual leaders in the community. It is licensed by the Board of Education and the nine persons on its faculty are licensed religious and secular instructors. The teachers come from the Newark Board of Education.

In the autumn the school, now located at 709 Clinton avenue, will be moved into the former Masonic Temple at 526 Clinton avenue, which has been purchased. A campaign for $100,000 is being conducted for funds to remodel and modernize the school's



Architect's drawing of remodeled building for new school.

(Staff photos, A. W. Johnston)

NEW YESHIVA BUILDING

An elaborate three-day program which will attract several thousands Essex County residents to the new Yeshiva of Newark building at 526 Clinton Avenue is planned for June 21, 22 and 23. Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky is the principal of the school.

Established four years ago, the Yeshiva has attained an outstanding reputation for its work in the educational world. Its accomplishments have been noted by many outstanding people.

HARRY A. COOPER
BLOY STREET, HILLSIDE, N. J.

March 24, 1947

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
Yeshivah of Newark
741 Clinton Ave.
Newark, N. J.

Dear Rabbi Kowalsky:

I am happy to learn that you have agreed to serve on the Executive Committee for the 1947 United Jewish Appeal Campaign of the Rabbi's Group.

I want to welcome you into the family of United Jewish Appeal workers. In assuming this responsibility, you manifest your awareness of the tremendous continuing needs for rescue, relief and rehabilitation of the remaining hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors. Your efforts, together with those of the other leaders of your group will, I know assure the success of our 1947 campaign.

You will undoubtedly derive great personal satisfaction in your participation in this undertaking and I look forward to working with you.

With best wishes for success in our joint efforts,
I remain

Sincerely yours,

H. A. Cooper

Harry A. Cooper
U.J.A. Chairman

P. S. I am enclosing a Key symbolic of your being a member of "Keymen" a permanent organization of our active campaign workers.

St. Louis, Mo.

EVERGREEN 5-2823

"בית התלמוד" מרכז לתורה וליראה"
INSTITUTE FOR TALMUDIC RESEARCH
BETH HATALMUD
OFFICE: 603 MILLER AVENUE
BROOKLYN 7, N. Y.

ESTABLISHED BY THE UNION OF ORTHODOX RABBIS
OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

PRESIDENT
LOUIS H. CLARK

VICE-PRESIDENTS
JACOB LACK
MORRIS LIFSHITZ

TREASURER
SAMUEL GOLDFARB

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
IN FORMATION:
SHABSE FRANKEL
NATHAN HAUSMAN
ALEXANDER P. HIRSCH
HENRY HIRSCH
ISAAC MEISLIN
DR. ADOLPH MEYERSBURG
HARRY J. SANDLER
JOSEPH SCHECHTER
IRVING SCHNISSEL
MEYER SKLAR
LOUIS SOLASH
ELCHONON STERNSTEIN

ב"ה יום ה' פ' שופטים ה' אלול תש"א

לכבוד ידידנו עוז איש האשכולות ורב פעלים לתורה ולתעודה, שמו נודע בשער בת רבים לשם ולתהלה הרב הגאון המפורסם כש"ת מוהר"ר דב קאוואלסקי שליט"א רב בסנסילוואים יצ"ו, שפעת שלו' וברכת כל טוב לו ולמשפחתו תכבודה הי"ן

לקרת ימי חדין חבעל"ס הננו בזה לקדם את חו"כ בברכתנו החמה ברכת כתיבה וחתימה טובה שיזכה הוא ומשפחתו לשנה טובה ומאושרת בספרן של צדיקים לחיים טובים וברוכים וימלאו כל משאלות לבבו המחור לטובה.

מלאים אנו רגשי תודה והכרה למעכ"ת על התעניונתו הגדולה ועל עבודתו הנאמנה אשר עבר בעד מוסדנו החשוב היחיד במינו בעת המפעל דשנה העברה בשלהי חודש מרחשון. ידידנו הרב הגאון המובחק ר' ברוך ליב ששון אשר ביקר בעירו אז בעד בית התלמוד פיו מלא תהלה למעכ"ת על כל הטוב אשר עשה עמו המקום ינמול אותו גמול שלם בעד כל אלה ויכתבהו בספר הזכרון אשר לפניו ליראי ד' ולחושבי שמו לזכות לעד ולנצח נצחים.

גם בשנה זו בע"ח יבקר ידידנו הנ"ל בעירו לטובת "בית התלמוד", ובודאי כת"ר כמעשהו אז כן יעשה גם עתה טובה וחסד עם מוסדנו וינצל מאמציו והשפעתו לבצע המפעל בהצלחה ויסייע בכל מיני סיוע שיהי' בידו.

בית התלמוד ב"ה חולך ומתפתח באופן נעלה מאוד ולמרות כל הקושיים שעברו עלינו חנה כבר הוא בשנה הרביעית מעת הוסדו וכל העת עומד על מדרגתו חרמה בתורה וביראה עד שחכמי ישראל יפליאו את ד' אמות של הלכה אלו אשר הם יחידים במינם בדורנו זה, וזכות רב אין ערך יהי' לכת"ר כי יקח חלק ויתן ידו בקיום חבית חק' הזה, וחמקום ישלח ברכה בכל מעשה ידיו ובכל אשר יפנה ויזכה להרבות פעלים לתורה להרים קרנה להגדילה ולהאדירה.

בחזקרה רבה ובברכת התורה
משם הנהלת "בית התלמוד"

Young Israel of Hillcrest

First Bulletin of Y.I. of Hillcrest

הקול

THE VOICE

Kislev, 5720 ב"יה Vol. 1, No. 1 December, 1959

The Chanukah Festival



Of

THE YOUNG ISRAEL OF HILLCREST

will be held

Saturday night, December 26, at 8:30 P.M.

Supper Served . . . .

PRESENTING Israeli Folk Singers

Music . . . .

$3.00 per person *R.S.V.P.* *Call JA 3-4030*



From The Rabbi's Desk

CHANUKAH — THE FESTIVAL OF REDEDICATION

"Thou didst work a great deliverance and redemption at this day. And thereupon Thy children came into Thy House, cleansed Thy Temple and purified Thy Sanctuary."

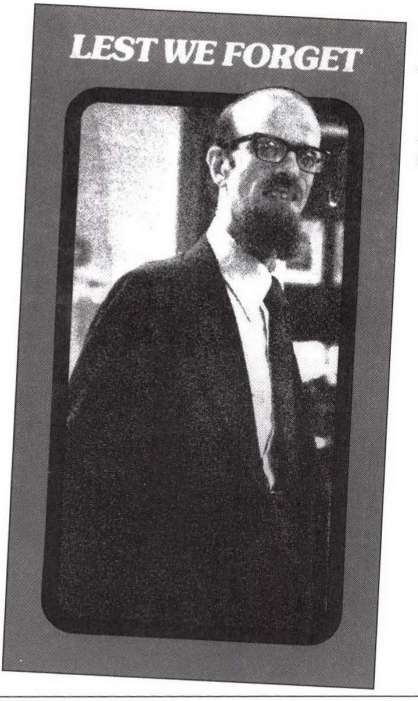
Each year it is incumbent upon us to reflect upon these words. For surely the miracle of Chanukah is constantly with us. Does not the "Rebono Shel Olom" always deliver us? Perhaps we do not face the sword and dagger, but we are ever beset with problems and anxieties. Our very lives are constant miracles and daily we are redeemed.

Therefore as we enter the House of The Lord each day, we must remember that it is a "Mokom Kodosh," a Holy Sanctuary and upon us lies the responsibility of purification and cleansing. A House of Prayer — a "Beth Tfillah" can only be sanctified in a spirit of loving kindness and mercy. As we face one another, we must remember we are here by the grace of G-d. We are obliged to Him to respect His creation, our fellow man. When we learn to live with respect for one another, then we are able to sanctify His Home and cleanse His Temple.

At this season of Chanukah, the Festival of Rededication, let us once more resolve to ever forgive and forget. Let our motto be "Chaverim Ze La Ze" and let us live in peace and harmony with utmost regard for our neighbor's feelings.

A happy Chanukah to all.

Sholom B. Kowalsky, *Rabbi*



Rabbi Simcha Teitelbaum, founder and Principal of Yeshiva High School of Queens – assisted by Rabbi Kowalsky to raise money for the high school

JTA daily news bulletin

Published by Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Inc. 660 First Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016

Contents copyright: Republication only by previous arrangement.

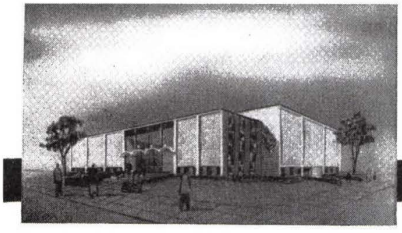
Vol. XXXV - Fifty-First Year | Wednesday, March 6, 1968 | No. 45

Queens Rabbi Opposes Housing Project as Threat to Integrated Community

NEW YORK, Mar. 5 (JTA)--A Queens rabbi who appealed to Mayor John V. Lindsay to drop plans to place a low income housing project in the Queens section where his synagogue is located said today he had done so because of fears that the project might destroy an already integrated and stable community. Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky, spiritual leader of Young Israel of Hillcrest, said he had told the Mayor in a letter that "as a religious leader of my people," he wanted to describe "how we feel about this project and what it will do to the existing community." He emphasized that "all decent people" supported the right of individuals to choose housing in accordance with their means and that this was why "we take pride in considering Hillcrest a well integrated community." He reported that the community was made up of about 60 percent whites, 38 percent Negro and two percent Chinese. Some 90 percent of the white residents are Jews. The religious leaders of the various groups, he said, meet frequently at local police precinct station "to discuss mutual problems".

He said that implementation of the low income housing project would lead to creation in the area of "another ghetto" and reduce a "decent neighborhood to shambles." He declared that such a project "in the heart of a middle class community" would inevitably "reduce the entire community to the level of the lower income element." He asserted some families had already started to move away.

In a telephone interview he said that the low income project would provide apartments for 5,000 families in a community of 20,000 and said this would impose severe new strains on present community facilities and city services. He added that there had been many community meetings, some in his synagogue, to protest the project and that community leaders were planning legal action to block it.



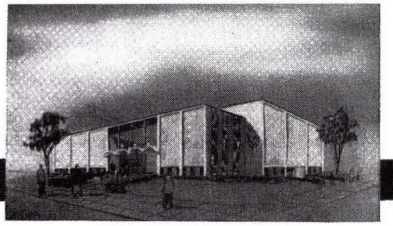
Young Israel of HILLCREST

APRIL, 1973 ב"ה NISAN, 5733

JERUSALEM DEDICATION



From left to right: Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky, Chairman of the International Ezra Commission representing the European Conference of Rabbis and Rabbinical Council of America congratulating Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of England on the dedication of he first "Botai Ulpana" in Jerusalem, a school for Russian girls of university age, Rechov Horav Frank, Jerusalem, Israel.



Young Israel of HILLCREST

MARCH-APRIL, 1974 ב"ה NISAN, 5734

AN EXPRESSION OF THANKS



From Mr. Zalman Goldstein of Sokhoumi, U.S.S.R. expressing gratitude for receiving Talisth sent by Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky. In his letter, he states "I am grateful for this beautiful Talisth. Now I have what to be buried in."

FELIX WRÓBLEWSKI, M.D.
755 PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021
(212) 249-2856

May 13, 1974

Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky
70-11 164 Street
Flushing, New York 11365

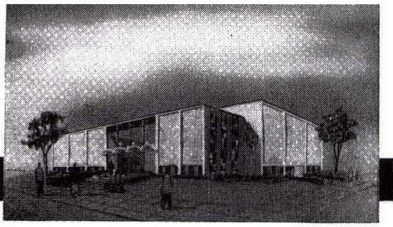
Dear Rabbi Kowalsky:

Besides a delightful occasion and a sumptuous party, the impressive gathering at your synagogue was a glowing tribute to you and your noteworthy contributions to your community and to Jewry at large. It was an overwhelming compliment to be numbered among the guests and your friends, and I shall cherish the privilege of having been present and having shared with all in paying you homage.

My heartfelt congratulations and sincerest best wishes for continued health and happiness.

Cordially,

Felix Wróblewski, M.D.

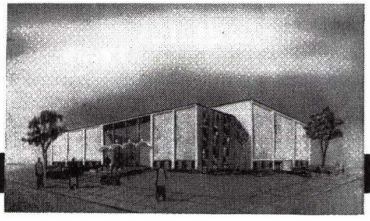


Young Israel of HILLCREST

Sept. & Oct. 1974 ב"ה Tishri, 5735



A Historic Gathering with Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren of Israel and Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky. at Y.I Hillcrest Dinner in honor of Rabbi



Young Israel of HILLCREST

October 1978 Tishrei, 5739



Our Rabbi, Mrs. Kowalsky, President of the State of Israel, the Honorable Yitzchok Navon and Mrs. Navon at their home, Jerusalem, Israel.

PERRY B. DURYEA
OLD MONTAUK HIGHWAY
MONTAUK, NEW YORK 11954

November 28, 1978

Rabbi and Mrs. Sholem B. Kowalsky
73-04 169 Street
Flushing, New York 11366

Dear Rabbi and Mrs. Kowalsky:

Thank you very much for your kind letter.

Although the results were personally disappointing, I do hope that on the statewide level we were able to properly present the problems facing New York State and to offer reasonable alternatives to the policies of the current administration over the past four years. Aggressive action by all of those involved in state government will be necessary if New York State is to regain its vitality and the leadership role for which it has been recognized over the years.

Your counsel, aggressive support and warm hospitality were all very much appreciated. There is something to be gained from every one of life's experiences. The host of people with whom I've had the opportunity of working over the past year gave me an insight into many personal relationships which I had not previously experienced. You contributed to that wonderful experience.

With warm personal regards, I am

Sincerely,

Perry B. Duryea, Jr.

Rabbinical Council of America & Ezra Project

Thanks to "Ezra" for Packages

Thanks to "EZRA" for Tax + Exit Funds

Rabbi
S. J. ZEVIN
JERUSALEM, 5 JONA

TEL. 25514 טל.

הרב
שלמה יוסף זוין
ירושלים, יונה 5

ב"ה ערב כ' דג' מנ"א חשל"ב

לכבוד ידידי הדגול הרה"ג וכו' כש"ח מהו"ר שלום דב קוכלסקי שליט"א!

שמחתי מאד לשמוע בעת בקורו אצלי היום על דבר פעולותיו הרבות של ועד העזרה ליהודי רוסיה, שעלו ככר והעומדים לעלות אי"ה בקרוב לארצנו. אף אני יודע מפעולותיו הגדולות של מר מאת ידידי הדגול הרב יהודה גור, שרבות ונצורות פעל ופועל עדיין כין במשלוח הרבה מאות דרישות לשם, וכשלש מאות מהם ככר עלו לארץ, במשך השנים האחרונות, ונמצאים אחנו פה כ"ה, (ומהם גם כמה משפחות מהקרובים שלי) ובין על ידי מתן עזרה מרירה של כיסוי הוצאות יציאתם מרוסיה ובין בהנשת סיוע כספי בקליטתם בארץ בבואם הנה. ואף קבלתי ממר כמה אלפי דולארים לסוכה כמה משפחות שבאו מהתם להכא, ואף לאלה שיבואו בקרוב לכאן אי"ה, לכל הפעולות שועד העזרה עשה ועושה הם מכוחו ומכוח כחו של מר.

והנה ישנם אנשים כאלה האומרים, שבנוגע לעזרה ליציאה של העולים מרוסיה, אין צורך כלל בעזרה מיוחדת מאחרים, כי השגרירות ההולנדית במוסקבה נוחנת סכום של אלף רובל לכל דורש עבור הוצאת הדרכון וויתור על הנחינות הרוסית. ובכן איפוא אני מעיד: כתי ובעלה מהעיר אוזגורוד שברוסיה, שעלו כ"ה ימים אלה לארץ, מסרו לי, שהם פנו לשגרירות ההולנדית במוסקבה ובקשו עזרה כספית כשביל הוצאת הדרכון ויתה ההצאות הנחוצות לצאת משם (כהסתמכם על מכתבי להם) ולא נענו אף כפרוסה אחת, כאמרם שאין להם כסף לתת לעולים לישראל. הם היו מאוכזבים ואובדי עצות מה לעשות? וח"ל שעלה בידם על ידי מאמצים גדולים ורבים להשיג פה ושם הלואות על מנת לשלם כאן בארץ, והודות לכסף שקבלתי מהרב גור בשם מר, הצליחו לצאת משם ולבוא הנה. והם אינם היחידים שעמדו בנסיון קשה שכזה. ישנם עוד שלש משפחות, שאני יודע שהן עומדות לעלות והמכוגרים שבהן הם 8 אנשים, וגם להם אין די אמצעים משלהם לכסות את סכום הכסף הרב הדרוש לשלם שם כדי לצאת. ואף במקרים אלה הכסיף לי הרב גור להשחדל להשיג את סכום הכסף הדרוש להם אשר כרוכם הגדול יקבל מאת מר.

זכות פעולותיו הקדושות להצלת אחים ניחים, שיש בזה משום פדיון שבויים והצלת נפשות גם יחד, תעמוד למר, שיחברך מאת השמים בכריות גופא ונהורא מעליא ובכשו"ס בגשם וברוח.

ידידו המברכו ודורשה"ס בלונ"ח

שלמה יוסף זוין

Thanks to "Ezra" for Tax Funds

בעז"ה

הישיבה המרכזית „בית יוסף" ביאליסטאק

Central Yeshiva Beth Joseph Rabbinical Seminary

נוסדה בגוברדיק בשנת תרנ"א

1427 — 49TH STREET
BROOKLYN 19, N. Y.

PHONES: GEDNEY 6-7991
GEDNEY 6-8146

מרן הגאון ר' אברהם יפתין שליט"א
ר"מ ראשי
RABBI ABRAHAM JOFEN
Dean

Officers

HENRY L. KRAUSHAR
President
IRVING M. SUNIM
Vice-President
BER MANDEL
Vice-President
MORRIS ROKOWSKY
Treasurer
GEORGE RUBIN
Financial Sec'y
LOUIS KALMANOWITZ
Rec. Secretary

Board of Directors

ABRAHAM M. DRUCKMAN
Chairman
RABBI A. FEIVELSON
RABBI H. B. FASKOWITZ
RABBI ISAAC STOLLMAN
RABBI LEO J. COGAN
RABBI MORDECAI KIRSHBLUM
RABBI DR. BERNARD LANDER
JULIUS BIENENFELD
WILLIAM BLATT
MEYER BLECH
REV. MORRIS BLUSTEIN
DR. ERNST BODENHEIMER
SAM CHERAVSKY
SOLOMON EIGER
ISIDORE FARBER
MOSES FEUERSTEIN
SAMUEL FEUERSTEIN
DAVID GOLDBERG
HENRY HIRSCH
DAVID JOTKOWITZ
STEPHEN KLEIN
BENJAMIN KOSTITSKY
SAMUEL LANGBAUM
MAX MARKOWITZ
RUBIN MARKOWITZ
IRVING OCHS
JACOB POMERANTZ
SAMUEL RIMPLER
JOSEPH ROSENZWEIG
MELECH SALTZ
ISAAC SHALOM
ZELIG SHLANSKY
MEIR STEFANSKY

RABBI JACOB JOFEN
Rosh Yeshiva
RABBI LEIB NEKRITZ
Rosh Yeshiva

May 8th, 1973

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky,
Ezra Fund, R. C. A.
220 Park Avenue S.,
New York City.

Dear Rabbi Kowalsky:

Permit me to express to you my deep gratitude for your substantial help in connection with the 'pidyon shevuyim' of the members of the Levitan & Zweigorn Families from Kovno, who as you know, are decendants of the saihted Harav Yosef Horowitz, the Sovo of Novaradok, z'tl.

Your deep interest in this case of saving the lives of the relatives of the late R'Horowitz, is a glorious link in the chain of your magnificent achievements of the Ezra Fund over which world famous activity you so ably preside.

May the zchus of the Sovo of Novaradok stand by you in your wonderful work in all Jewish causes. May the Almighty give you good health, energy and strength to continue on behalf of world Jewry.

With my expression of great esteem for you and with my very best wishes for everything good, I remain

$1000

Very sincerely yours,
Rabbi Leib Nekritz,
Rosh Hayeshiva.

Thanks to "Ezra" for Passover Packages

Rabbi CH. MEIR KAHANA

~~10, Dehaven Str.~~

JERUSALEM
Kiryat Matersdorf
5, Panim Meirot Str., Entry 3
Tel. 531791

רוב מאיר כהנא

בעיה"ק ירושלים
ירושלים, קרית מטרסדורף
רח' פנים מאירות 5, כניסה ג'
טל. 531791

Jerusalem 6.V.73.- ב"ה ירושלים

Rabbi Sholem B. Kovalsky
Chairman of Ezra-Fund Committee of
Rabbinical Council of America
New York

Dear Rabbi Kovalsky

Hereby I am glad to confirm the receipt of your contribution of $ 15.000- (fifteen thousand Dollars) you have kindly granted for our action of sending Matsoth-Parcels to Russia. By your checks to "Chesed L'avraham" we were able to pay off our debts to this organisation, which has helped us with loans and credits in dispatching the Matsos before the money of contributors had reached us.

By your generous donation you have an important share in answering the call of our brethren, all over the wide planes of Sowietian Russia, to provide them with kosher Matsos, mostly impossible to obtain and even in the places where matsos are backed, the quantity is not sufficient and the kashtout dubious. This facts I know so well from my own experience and my inunterrupted contact with the newcomers and the Jews meanwhile remaining there.

Therefore I want to express my hearty thanks to you, Rabbi Kovalsky, your colleagues, Rabbis and your congregations.

Thanks to the participation of our poeple (Orthodox Jewry) in USA and Europe, we have been able to send about 10.000 packages, containing 4 Kg. at the cost of $ 20-25 each, though we have tried to avoid publicity

Sincerely

Rabbi Chaim Meir Kahana

צבא הגנה לישראל
ד.צ. 1068/2
טל. 03/693567
כ"ג חשון תשל"ד
18 נובמבר 1973

ב"ה

לכבוד

הרב שלום דב קובלסקי

רב הקהילה בניו-יורק

כבוד הרב,

ברצוני להביע תודתי העמוקה לך ולבני קהילתך הקדושה, על תשמישי הקדושה ששיפקתם לחיל-הים במלחמת מצוה זו. קיבלנו ציוד רב ושימושי מאד, כמו סידורים, כיפות, טליתות, תפילין חומשים, חנוכיות והחילים. ללא ספק יחרום הציוד רבות להגברת התודעה היהודית בקרב חיילנו. הציוד שנמסר על ידכם חולק ללוחמים ונתקבל בשמחה ובברכה.

אבקשך להעביר לבני קהילתך הנדיבים את הבעת תודתי זו, בתקוה שעוד נעמוד בקשר הדוק ופבורף.

בברכה ובהוקרה,

סרן הרב דוד סגל

Translation of Hebrew Letter from Israeli Navy

Israel Defense Forces
Military Mail
1068/2
03/693567
23 Heshvan 5734
November 18, 1973

Rabbi Sholom B. Kowalsky
Rabbi of the Congregation in New York

Dear Rabbi Kowalsky,

I would like to express to you my deepest feeling of thanks to you and the members of your community for the "Tashmishi Kdusha" religious articles that you have supplied to our naval forces in this Holy War. We got a great deal of very useful supplies such as sidurim, yarmulkas, talithim, tfilim, chumashim (Bibles), Channukkah menprahs and thilim. There is no doubt that this supply will contribute a great deal to enforce Jewish committment amongst our soldiers. These religious items which were distributed through you were already given to our fighters and were received with joy and blessing.

I will greatly appreciate if you can transmit to the donors of your congregation my heartfelt thanks and with the hope that we will remain in constant touch.

With personal appreciation and gratefulness,

Chaplain
Rabbi David Segal
Israel Navy

מדינת ישראל

משרד הדתות
לשכה ראשית
ירושלים

תאריך:

מספר:

2 Kislev 5734
November 27, 1973

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
Young Israel of Hillcrest
169-07 Jewel Avenue
Flushing, N. Y. 11366

Dear Rabbi Kowalsky:

On behalf of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the State of Israel, permit me to express our gratitude for your thoughtfulness and generosity.

Your personal adoption of the Israeli Navy was indeed appreciated. The Tashmishei Kedusha you supplied were received with great joy and thanksgiving. It is through the selfless efforts of a dedicated few like yourself that we have been able to weather this most terrible and costly war.

Once again, our best wishes for continued good health and productive activity.

With Torah greetings, I am

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Elihu Marcus
Director of Synagogues
Ministry of Religious Affairs
State of Israel

Transferred to the Israeli Navy:

1. 100 pair Tefilin
2. 100 Taleisim
3. 100 Kepot
4. 200 Siddurim
5. 100 Bibles
6. 100 Tehilim
7. 100 Menorahs and candles

מדינת ישראל - משרד הדתות - בתי הכנסת
STATE OF ISRAEL - MINISTRY FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS - SYNAGOGUES DEPARTMENT

מדינת ישראל - משרד הדתות - בתי הכנסת
STATE OF ISRAEL - MINISTRY FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS - SYNAGOGUES DEPARTMENT

228371 טל'

רח' יפו 30 ת"ד 1167 ירושלים 91 000



THE RABBINICAL RECORD

Convention To Honor Ezra Fund Chairman

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky will be honored on at the annual convention of The Rabbinical Council of America on Monday evening June 21st for twenty years of service as



Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky

chairman of the Ezra-Russian affairs committee. The Ezra Committee has been actively engaged in aiding Jews behind the Iron Curtain for the two decades of Rabbi Kowalsky's stewardship of the committee both materially and spiritually.

The rabbi is currently the rabbi emeritus of the Young Israel of Hillcrest in Queens, New York. He was recently elected spiritual leader of a congregation in Talbiyah, Jerusalem where he now resides most of the year.



Education of Torah, Commandments, and Good Citizenship, in the Land of Israel



The only Institution in Israel that absorbs girls of college age and teaches them the fundamentals of Judaism

The girls who study in the Ulpana come from countries where Jewish education is forbidden and the observance of Torah and its commandments is dangerous to their lives. Most of them were isolated from the sources of Judaism and received no Jewish education. When they arrived in Israel, they understood that the Land of Israel without Torah is like a body without a soul. In the Ulpan they found a Jewish spirit and soul. In all of the Land of Israel, the Ulpana is the only institution for matured girls that has a special environment for the education of Torah and observance, as well as good citizenship and a successful absorption. Many of the young ladies came to the Ulpana after they were in non-religious institutions where there is no religious instruction and where they received no Torah values. These girls were looking for a different kind of learning which they found in the Ulpana. It is here that they have peace of mind and happiness.

An Exceptional Institution

In the Ulpana, there are very distinguished visitors every week — government ministers, Members of Knesset, leaders in the Educational field, professionals in immigrant absorption, and many public figures involved in Israel and the Diaspora. All of them describe, with great praise, the special environment that prevails in the Institution, the personal devotion and dedication that each girl receives and the excellent system of education that was created.



משרד החינוך והתרבות
האגף לתרבות ולאומנות
המחלקה לחינוך מבוגרים

זאת לתעודה כי

בית האולפנה לעבדית ויליקנדי תקוה

נבחר כמוסד מצטיין לשנת תשכ"ח

בין כל המוסדות מסוגו במחוז ירושלים

בזה אנו מביעים את הערכתנו לצוות העובדים ושגל ההוראה
על עבודתם המסורה ועל הישגיהם הנאים.

לאה פורת
מנהלת האגף

אברהם צביון
מנהל המחלקה לחינוך מבוגרים



בית אולפנא - ירושלים

ללמודי עבריה ויסודות היהדות · מרכז חטכי לעולות חדשות ולפזורות בוסתון הקונגרסות הרבנים דאפריקה, הרב הראשי ליהדות בריטניא, ועידת רבני אירופה

תעודת הוקרה - ועדות נאמנה

למעלת כבוד נשיאנו הדגול
איש המורם מעם ראש וראשון לכל דבר שבקדושה, הרב הגאון
פורנו שלום דוב קובלסקי שליטיא
מרא דאתרא קהילת ישראל והצעיר דהילקרסט כי
וסגן נשיא הסנהדרות הרבנים דאמריקה
על פעלו, עזרתו ומסירות נפשו לביסוס וקידום
בית אולפנא - ירושלים
מפעל קליטה וחנוך לבנות עולות חדשות
מרוסיא, סוריה ורומניה,
אשר שנים רבות נגזל מהן היהדות בעת שבתן מאחורי
סורג ובריח, ועתה זכו בעזיה לעלות ליצון בריטה
להתקלט באולפנא ולהתחנך לאהבת התורה
ואהבת הארץ ושמירת מצוות,
לבנות ולהקים בתים נאמנים בישראל.

ותרך מבנאל הברכות בכל מילי דמיטב, לברכות בגופא ומהורא מעליא. להזריעא לאור עולם שאיפרת נפשו להרבות פעלים לתורה ולחסד, עד מאה ועשרים שנה ביחד עם רעיתו

ההבנית שולמית תחי'

בתוככי ירושלים עיר הקודש תותבביא
עד כי יבוא שילה ולו יקהת עמים.

ועל זה באנו על החותם:

הרב אברהם י. דהלבין
יו"ר ועד הוהנהלה

הרב יצחק קלמן
ראש האולפנא

ירושלים השלימה, אדר שנת תשליח.

JTA Daily News Bulletin

AMERICAN RABBI TO LAUNCH CAMPAIGN FOR HEBREW IN THE USSR

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- The Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox), will soon launch a campaign to allow the teaching of Hebrew in the Soviet Union, Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky, vice president of the Council, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Kowalsky, in Jerusalem for Succoth, had just spent two weeks in the USSR, where he preached in synagogues during the High Holy Days.

"They want Jewish books, they are hungry for books," he said. According to Kowalsky, Soviet Jews -- particularly the younger generation -- showed remarkable knowledge of events in Israel, but were upset about their inability to study Hebrew properly.

"All languages known to man are permitted to be taught in the USSR except Hebrew," Kowalsky said. He called on the Soviet authorities to rectify the situation. He said special efforts would be made in that direction in the near future. This was one of the subjects he raised here in a meeting with Interior Minister Yosef Burg. He is scheduled to meet Premier Menachem Begin later this week.

Culmination Of Years Of Work

Kowalsky went to the Soviet Union with his wife Shulamit. It was his first visit there, culminating years of work on behalf of Soviet Jewry. "I felt that because of the High Holidays this was the most appropriate time to meet Russian Jews." Indeed, he found out that thousands of Jews came to the synagogues as these were the only places where they could assemble legally as Jews.

Continued on facing page

During the High Holy Days, the rabbi preached in three synagogues. On Rosh Hashanah he spoke in Moscow and the week after in Riga. On Yom Kippur, he officiated in Leningrad, the first time in 50 years that a foreign rabbi was allowed to speak in the Leningrad synagogue, Kowalsky said. In Moscow he was asked to speak by Chief Rabbi Yaacov Fishman who is presently hospitalized.

Thousands of Jews attended the services, Kowalsky said, and heard his call for universal peace and a plea for their return to their ancient faith. "Their enthusiastic response was overwhelming," he said. "They shed tears of joy upon hearing the words 'We are one people' and in union they responded 'amen.'"

Thousands Of Young Jews In Synagogues

Kowalsky said he was surprised to observe thousands of young people who emerged in each city at the synagogues. "They surrounded the synagogues, praying, singing and dancing to proclaim to all the world to see their bond to their faith," he said. "It was more a meeting of Jewish national identification than a religious one. They have no way of identifying other than in this fashion."

Kowalsky said many Soviet Jews were returning to the study and observance of Torah and mitzvot. "People besieged me with halachic questions," he said.

His wife noted that despite their strong Jewish consciousness, many Jews preferred the U.S. to Israel because they felt American Jewry was doing more on their behalf. She said that many Jews, particularly among the older generation, were affected by the strong anti-Israel propaganda. The American rabbi said he was treated "courteously and correctly" by the Soviet authorities.

לשכת ראש הממשלה

ירושלים, ט"ו באב תשל"ט
8 באוגוסט 1979

לכבוד
הרב ש. ד. קובלסקי
נשיא בית אולפנא
רסגן נשיא הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה
רחוב גרץ 5
ירושלים

ידיד יקר,

רגשי תודתו של ראש-הממשלה נתונים לך ולרעיתך, על הברכות והאיחולים הטובים אשר הואלת לשגר אליו במכתבך.

כל טוב,
בברכה נאמנה,

קדישאי.

מנהל לשכת ראש-הממשלה

RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA • הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה
275 Seventh Avenue • New York, New York 10001 • (212) 807-7888

ב"ה

15 Tevet 5749
December 23, 1988

President
RABBI MAX N. SCHREIER

Executive Vice President
RABBI BINYAMIN WALFISH

Honorary President
RABBI MILTON H. POLIN

First Vice President
RABBI MARC D. ANGEL

Vice Presidents
RABBI HESHIE BILLET
RABBI AARON BOROW
RABBI ELIEZER LANGER
RABBI MYRON E. RAKOWITZ

Financial Secretary
RABBI HASKEL LOOKSTEIN

Treasurer
RABBI ALVIN M. MARCUS

Honorary Treasurer
RABBI EMANUEL HOLZER

Recording Secretary
RABBI KENNETH AUMAN

RCA HOUSE IN ISRAEL
18 Rechov Bnai Brith
Jerusalem, Israel
Tel. 221-923

Director
RABBI NAFTALI HOLLANDER

Cable: HISRABONIM,NY

Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky
1433 E. 13th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11230

Dear Reb Sholem: ("/)

I apologize that this letter was not written to you sooner. I had automatically assumed that the president of the Rabbinical Council of America who was in office at the time of the conference, had written this letter to you. I deeply regret that this was not done and after having learned this fact, it is my pleasure to write the letter to you.

I take this opportunity to thank you for the work that you did on behalf of our 50th Anniversary Convention in Jerusalem. In spite of the unfortunate loss which we suffered due to the bankruptcy of the travel agent all the other aspects of the convention were excellent. The sessions, the arrangements and the preparations were done in a most professional fashion. I am certain that everyone who attended, enjoyed that aspect of the convention and all recognize that the greatest measure of appreciation for what was accomplished, belongs to you.

Thank you again for your herculean efforts for the excellent job you did and for the mesirat nefesh which you displayed in planning and in executing our 50th Anniversary Convention. May Hashem grant you many more years of good health together with your family to perform noble tasks on behalf of our organization and Klal Yisroel.

With warm personal regards and best wishes, I am

Cordially,

Rabbi Binyamin Walfish
Executive Vice President

BW/hr

ההתנגדות הישראלית שהרפורמים בהתנתקות לא רוצים שתצא לאור

חרב שלום בעיר: המלחמה של תמונת הניצחון

14 ■ „העיר שבת", ס' תמוז תשמ"ה (28.6.85)

Keren Dorshei Zion Documents

Statement of Purpose.

Israel - her government and her people - are gripped with the amazing, overwhelming in-gathering of tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Jews from the USSR and Eastern Europe. The issues are clear: work must be found and housing must be provided.

No less challenging and perhaps of greater importance is the need for a return by the masses of Olim to their religious and cultural heritage which they know almost nothing about after decades of being cut off from their spiritual roots.

To this purpose, the A.F. of Keren Dorshei Zion under the auspices of the Religious Council of Jerusalem has undertaken to sponsor a Jewish Heritage Institute for Russian Olim arriving daily en masse in Israel and Jerusalem.

ב"ה

Jerusalem Municipality
Culture Department

עירית ירושלים
האגף לתרבות תורנית

חמועצה חדתית ירושלים
THE RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM



THE JEWISH HERITAGE
INSTITUTE
FOR
RUSIAN OLIM

SPONSORED BY

קרן דורשי ציון ירושלים

American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion Jerusalem

1120 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS • SUITE 4346 • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036

רחוב החבצלת 12 • ת.ד. 13, ירושלים 91000 טלפון 234361 פקס:436602
12 HACHAVAZELET ST. P.O.B. 13, JERUSALEM 91000 - ISRAEL TEL. 234361 FAX: 436602

בוני ירושלים

Tishrei 5748 BONEI YERUSHALAYIM Vol. I Issue 1

A SIGNIFICANT BEGINNING



(L-R) Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shalom Messas, Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Kolitz and Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky, Chairman of Keren Dorshei Zion.

In its short, two-year history, Keren Dorshei Zion has both pinpointed a severe need in Jerusalem – the shortage of religious facilities in many neighborhoods – and made a significant beginning in easing the situation.

The efforts of the non-profit foundation, created by the Jerusalem Chief Rabbinate and Religious Council, are the result of a report, commissioned by Keren Dorshei Zion and prepared by a blue-ribbon panel of city consultants and councilmen, which revealed a critical lack of synagogues and *mikvaot* in the newer Jerusalem suburbs of Har Nof, Gilo, Neve Yaakov, Ramot and Talpiot Mizrach.

Makeshift Synagogues

"Since the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967," says **Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky,** Chairman of Keren Dorshei Zion, "the construction pace in the city has barely kept up with demand. The surge of newcomers to these neighborhoods has left thousands without suitable facilities of a most vital character."

Every Shabbat finds thousands of observant Jews worshipping in makeshift synagogues, often no more than bomb shelters, with some *minyanim* even held out of doors, weather permitting. Similarly, countless women must travel great distances by bus in quest of an operating mikvah."

Some 60 synagogues and at least four new *mikvaot* are planned for the new Jerusalem neighborhoods, explains Rabbi Kowalsky, who served as rabbi of the Young Israel of Hillcrest, N.Y., for over 20 years prior to his *aliyah* to Israel. But, as a result of a lack of funds, there is very slow progress in their construction.

A second facet to the shortage of religious facilities, is that existing synagogues and *mikvaot* throughout the city are literally crumbling, and there is no money for their repair.

Through Keren Dorshei Zion, some $200,000 has been raised and distributed to support the construction of new synagogues. Renovation projects by the Religious Council like the $70,000 refurbishing of the Rehavia mikvah and

Continued on page 2

NEW LIFE AT 100

Keren Dorshei Zion Dinner Set

One hundred and sixty exceptional donors from Jewish communities around the world will soon have the opportunity to help restore one of Jerusalem's oldest and most historic ritual centers through a unique campaign of Keren Dorshei Zion.

The foundation has set **Monday, February 29, 1988 – 11 Adar 5748** – as the date for its Inaugural International Dinner, with the aim of raising $160,000 for the complete renovation of the facility in Beit Yisrael. The dinner, at the **Ramada Renaissance Hotel** in Jerusalem, will be coordinated by well-known psychologist and author, **Dr. Morris Mandel,** a resident of Jerusalem.



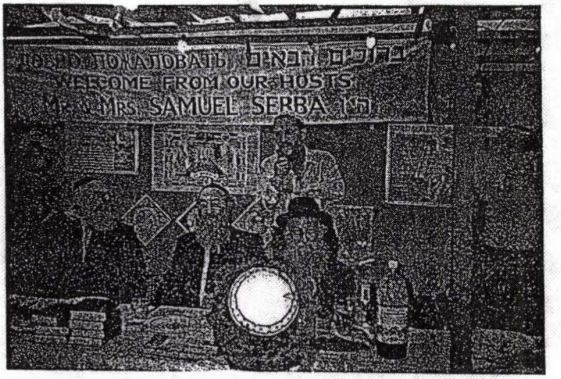
Dr. Morris Mandel, Coordinator of the International Inaugural Dinner.

"We are looking for dedicated *Bonei Yerushalayim* – Builders of Jerusalem – who will ensure the securing of our $160,000 objective for this important historic project," says Keren Dorshei Zion chairman, Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky. The walls of the 100-year-old ritual center, one of the first built outside the walls of the Old City, "are

Continued on page 2

הצופה

כ"ה, יום שני י"ז במרחשון תשנ"א (5.11.1990) • שנה נ"ג • גליון 15448 • המחיר: 1.70 ש"ח, כולל מע"מ



מבצע קליטה רוחנית ע"י המועצה הדתית בירושלים

מאתיים ראשי משפחות לומדים באולפן להקניית ערכי היהדות

מעילות עניפה נעשית עתה המיבצעה בירושלים בנושא קליטה רוחנית של העולים החדשים, בשבראשה עומד הרב ש.ר. קובלסקי, יו"ר ירידי ישרן דורשי ציון" באר"ב.

ביסיעת מליאת המועה"ד נסקרו בהרחבה מסכת הפעילות שנעשו לאחרונה, החל במבצע חלוקת תשמישי קדושה לעולים הכוללים תפילין, טלית, מזוזה, כיפה, סדור, פמוטים לשבת, ספרים ותע"ך, דרך קיום מסיכות ראש חודש ושמחת בית השואבה.

בימים אלו נפתח אולפן להקניית ערכי היהדות בו לומדים כמאתיים ראשי בית אב, במחזור שיימשך כחודשיים ימים.

טקס פתיחת האולפן נעשה בהשתתפות הרבנים הראשיים לירושלים ואישי ציבור.

בי"ד מיוחד

המועה"ד בירושלים נהפכה לכתובת מרכזית לכל הארגונים והמוסדות בארץ לפתרון בעיות קליטה רוחנית.

גולת הכותרת במבצעים אלו היא הקמת בי"ד מיוחד לבירור יהדותם של "העולים והפנייתם לעריכת גיריות. בבי"ד זה יושבים רבני השכונות בבירושלים בודקים ומבררים בסוגיות של עליה וקליטה.

ביסיעת המליאה הובעה תודה והערכה להרב ש.ר. קובלסקי, על הירתמותו לנושא יהודי רוסיה ועזרתו להשגת המשאבים הכספיים להצלחת המבצעים הללו.

בתמונה נראים הרב הראשי לירושלים, הרב יצחק קוליץ, הרב ש.ר. קובלסקי, הרב יוסף מנדלביץ, ועוד.

American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion Jerusalem

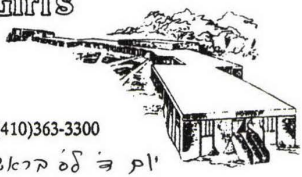
1120 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS • SUITE 4346 • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036

CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES
to
RABBI SHOLEM B. KOWALSKY שליט"א
Special advisor to the Chief Rabbinate
and Religious Council of Jerusalem for establishing
THE JEWISH HERITAGE INSTITUTE FOR RUSSIAN OLIM
at Heichal Shlomo
Yosef Mendelowitz – Educational Advisor
Rabbi Zev Mishkoff – Dean
Mrs. J. Halpern – Administrator
עלו והצליחו!

בס"ד

Bais Yaakov School for Girls

בית יעקב לבנות



11111 Park Heights Avenue, Owings Mills, MD 21117 (410)363-3300

יום ד' לסדר קרואשין תשנ"ג פה ירושלים תובב"ה

Dear Rabbi Kowalsky ט"ו שבט תשנ"ג

Please accept my heartfelt appreciation on behalf of the Yeshiva of Kishinev, Moldova, for the two pairs of Tefillin contributed by the generosity of Keren Dorshei Zion. I recall that a few years ago, I was privileged to be your שליח מצוה in delivering a pair of Tefillin to a Kishinev student.

Kishinev Yeshiva has succeeded over the past six years to produce a remarkably high percentage of students who went on to Yeshivas in Israel and the States, and have committed themselves to a life of Torah and Mitzvos. Many are on the way to becoming תלמידי חכמים.

The two boys who will receive your Tefillin, currently daven every morning without Tefillin simply because there are not enough to go around. After the davening, they borrow from the more fortunate ones and are then מניח תפילין and repeat ק"ש. The thrill of actually wearing Tefillin during the complete davening will be a new experience for them; and a tremendous Z'chus for you and the Keren.

Best wishes for a year of good health and for שנת ברכה והצלחה.

Most Sincerely
Hirschi Diskin

אלכסנדר אנסטס
Alecsandru Anastas
Republica Moldova, Chișinău
pr-t Moscovei, 5, 223

אלכסנדר אנסטס

תודה גדולה לך

אולי בע"ה אני אוכל לפגוש אותך בשלח ישראל ולהודות לך אישית.

בשנה הנכחה אני אקוה לעלות לארץ ישראל לתמיד ולעזור במשרד העליה. רופא יהודי בדרך כלל "קרן קיים" עבור המשרד העליה. את כל האצות שלא יהיה לי יום אחת שאני לא אניח תפילין ח"ו. אני מאחל סיב ותפילין שקיבל מכתבך הרב. אני לא יכול לתאר את השמחה שבבי שעברה בי הרב ביסקינד מאבא ישראל. לשיבה שנו וקיבלתי ציוה עלי. כי מאז כאן בלוס עיר. אומן שעמוי שרשיתי וקיבלתי הפילין ותפילין שקיבל מכתבך הרב. אני לא יכול לתאר את השמחה

צריך שעבר בי הרב ביסקינד מאבא ישראל. לשיבה שנו וקיבלתי ביישיבה כלי תפילין ושמרי תפילה הנעתי את התפילין על אחד אהתלמידים.

אל תכעס לא כביתי שיהיו לי תפילין אלי. כי יום יום התפללתי כאב בלב אך פי כן דיני התורה.

הלואים, בשנה הבאה אחרי כאן השנה נתקבלתי בקייב אבל הרב כליק ושמחתי הרבה. שארתי את כל האצות שהייתי יכול הרוב ה' בלבלתני שהיה לי חשק עבור להיות יהודי. זאלתי אאוד הלואים" בתורה בשמא אני תלמיד בישיבת קישינב. נפטרתי לשיבה לפני שני שנים אפני

בכבוד הרב שלו ז. קוקלסקי שלום אב

ב"ס ע' אלחנון מתת"ב קישינב

JEWISH WORLD•AUGUST 19-25, 1988 7

Kowalsky: A guardian angel for Jerusalem's lost tribes

By YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

JERUSALEM—When Rabbi Sholem Kowalsky left the pulpit of the Young Israel of Hillcrest and made aliyah in 1982, his family expected a quiet retirement. Instead, Kowalsky began a new career: ombudsman for Jerusalem's neglected Jews.

"My family thought I was crazy," says Kowalsky, an imposing man with a long but carefully trimmed white beard. "I had to leave Hillcrest to look for problems?"

But the problems seemed to look for him. "I realized," says Kowalsky, "that there are Jews here who don't know how to mobilize to get government support, who can't reach out to American Jews."

Kowalsky's first project was the construction of a mikvah for handicapped women, the first in Israel. He raised most of the money among members of his shul in Hillcrest.

"Handicapped women were embarrassed to use a mikvah," recalls Kowalsky. "It would take four or five women to bring one handicapped woman to the mikvah. Now, women come from all over the country to use our mikvah. The importance of our mikvah is that it respects the dignity of the handicapped woman. She should not have to feel shame while doing a mitzvah."

Purifying Waters

Kowalsky has founded an organization to support his building projects in the city, called Keren Dorshei Zion. The organization's most recent project is the renovation of the mikvah in Beit Yisrael, Jerusalem's poorest neighborhood. Working with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Keren Dorshei Zion is trying to raise $200,000 to transform a filthy, hazardous building into a modern, hygenic facility.

"You wouldn't believe how this building looks," says Kowalsky. "Three thousand people use a mikvah that smells so bad you can't breathe within ten feet of it. And the danger: wires hanging over the water. It's inhuman. When they showed me the building, I said I'll do it. Then I asked myself, 'Sholem, where will you get the money?' But I'm not worried. God has a lot of money."

Kowalsky's most ambitious project is the construction of a new Yemenite synagogue and community center, the largest in Israel. The synagogue will function as a nationwide center for the preservation of Yemenite tradition.

Kowalsky's romance with Yemenite Jewry began on his first trip to Israel, in 1954. ("I made over 100 trips to Israel before coming on aliyah. I could have bought my own jet.") On that first trip, Kowalsky befriended new immigrants from Yemen. "I found them the most remarkable people," he says. "Humble, decent, undemanding, with a quiet self-respect."

When Kowalsky made aliyah in 1982, he sought out the Yemenite Jews, but couldn't find them. "They disappeared. Their culture was dying. I said to myself, 'We must do something for them, give them back their dignity, their pride in their heritage.' "

Kowalsky recruited a wealthy Persian Jew living on Long Island to underwrite the project. Though Persian Jews, according to Kowalsky, prefer to contribute to their own community, Kowalsky convinced the philanthropist to cross ethnic lines and help his effort to preserve a dying tradition.

In addition to his work with Dorshei Zion, Kowalsky serves as advisor to the Jerusalem Chief Rabbinate. But that role often merges with his other job as ombudsman for Jerusalem's neglected Jews. "I get the problems," says Kowalsky, laughing. "But believe me," he adds, "these are not burdens. I feel grateful to God for having the honor of living in this city and serving here, for having even a small part in building Jerusalem."

(Further information about Keren Dorshei Zion is available from: American Friends of Keren Dorshei Zion, 1433 E. 13th St. Brooklyn, NY, 11230.) □

ירושלים

הקהלה 26, פרי נוף

ד"ר ב. קוסקוביץ

מיכל מלקיאל

אהבה יתמך בעוז היחיד והכלל,

בריאות ונחת, שתקבה בשבילה לתתיאה טובה ונעניים רבות עד

מאוד, ינקבה בשבילה יהיה לה אותה היחס השמחים ביותר

שהקבלן התפילין יהיה לה אותה היחס בקישוניצה

תודתי שמוקה לך בשבי ובשה בהתור בקישוניצה

אופני שאשרי הרהנות ובאוצבה בבריות שאתה מצין אותן,

שוב בפני נסיעתי, ובאומת ניתקיים "ברוך שומר ומשה", מה אניב

שמחות בשבה הכסף, בקשה תרכוש ותשלח לי נוף תפילין כשר

לזריך בכל יום בשעוב תפילין מתנמיד אתר, ומיד בהגיעה

שפני נאן מנצן נשיה בללואה ובשאר מצוות, ושון בן תפילין מפלן

בתשומת לב בציבור להשתדל שם בתור חבש בישבת קישוניצה

להביא את בתפללות מטובות לב כבי ומצוה הוסף שכן

על בדרך קדישנצה, ושוני יכוון בשלוה את הכוונה בלי

אני שכשיו בבן עזריון" ומאתין שהשוירון עלמוד לשמרם

כבוד בדב אחד חשוב כ' שלום קובלסקי שליט"א

בסוף שוב עוד פעם בבית תשובה שהה תפלתו עליה



עיריית ירושלים
אגף הגבעה

بلدية اورشليم القدس
قسم المجتمع



25 ביולי, 1999
י"ב באב, התשנ"ט
ג. המטוס (DA19)

לכבוד
הרב קובלסקי

שלום רב!

הנדון: **הבעת תודה והערכה**

ברצוני להביע את תודתי והערכתי העמוקה מקרב לב, על תרומתך החשובה של 4 זוגות תפילין מהודרות עבור העולים החדשים בגבעת המטוס.

תרומתך סייעה לנו רבות והדבר היה נתון מאוד לעולים.

העולים בגבעת המטוס עלו בשנה וחצי האחרונה, הם זקוקים לחיזוק דת עפ"י כללי שו"ע ומורשת ישראל ולכן אני עושה כאמץ רב, בעניין הלימוד כדי שהעולים יקבלו את המיטב.

בעניין תשמישי קדושה, קשה ליל להשיג עבורם וגם לעולים קשה מאוד למכן בכוחות עצמם תפילין וטלית. (העלות של זוג תפילין היא גבוהה מאוד).

אנו מברכים אותך על מפעלך החשוב שמארגן ומסייע בתחומים רבים, נשמח להעזר בשרותך גם בעתיד.

בברכה,

אלעד סנבטו
רכז דת
גבעת המטוס

העתק: דני דוראני - מנהל אתר גבעת המטוס

Teddy lends hand to synagogues

City addition

Myra Noveck

Orthodox residents seeking to build synagogues and *mikva'ot* in the city's satellite suburbs are to get a boost from a charity which won't tell them what to do with the money.

The organization, Keren Dorshei Zion Jerusalem, presents money to congregations which have started raising money on their own or commissioned architects to start designing synagogues and ritual bath houses. However, the charity, which is connected with the Jerusalem Religious Council, doesn't tell communities where to put them, how to build them, who will do the work.

Last week, Mayor Teddy Kollek, who was on a fund-raising visit to the U.S., spent one day [illegible]rk helping the [illegible]shei Zion launch its $1 million campaign. He immediately raised $100,000 and the consciousness of New York's Jewish community. "People never realized that the synagogue and *mikve* shortage in the capital's newest areas is so acute," Dorshei Zion chairman Sholem Kowalsky said.

★ ★ ★

Jerusalemites have been turning out this month to see the 11-hour film *Shoah*, at the Jerusalem Theatre, and this week the municipality and the theatre honoured Claude Lanzman, producer and director of the film.

In a gala ceremony at the theatre, attended by Vice Premier Shimon Peres and Education Minister Yitzhak Navon, Mayor Teddy Kollek gave Lanzman the title Friend of Jerusalem.

Also honoured by the city this week was poet Yehuda Amichai, who received the municipality's Agnon Prize for Literature. Amichai has lived in the city for half a century, and Jerusalem has played a large part in his writing. He was awarded the prize for his latest work *Me'adam ata ve'el adam tashuv (From Man You Come and to Man You Shall Return)*.





Breakfast on behalf of Keren Dorshei Zion in the home of Mr. Eli Schlosberg.

Left to Right: Eli Schlosberg, Mr. Avrohom Moshe Kowalsky, Rabbi Heshy Weinreb, Rabbi of Cong. Shomer Emunah in Baltimore, Dr. Lightman, R' Kowalsky, Dr. Marcel Reicher, Rabbi Eluzer Isbee, A"H



Left to Right: Mr. and Mrs. Richard Jedwad being presented by R' Kowalsky with a special award on behalf of Keren Dorshei Zion. Standing to the right is Rabbi Nosson Lobel assistant director, Keren Dorshei Zion in Long Island



Rabbi Akiva Egozi being presented with a Kos shel bracha for his outstanding work on behalf of Keren Dorshei Zion



Parlor meeting in Great Neck, L.I. on behalf of Keren Dorshei Zion at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kirsch. Pictured here are the grandchildren of Mr. and Mrs. Charley Zuckerman

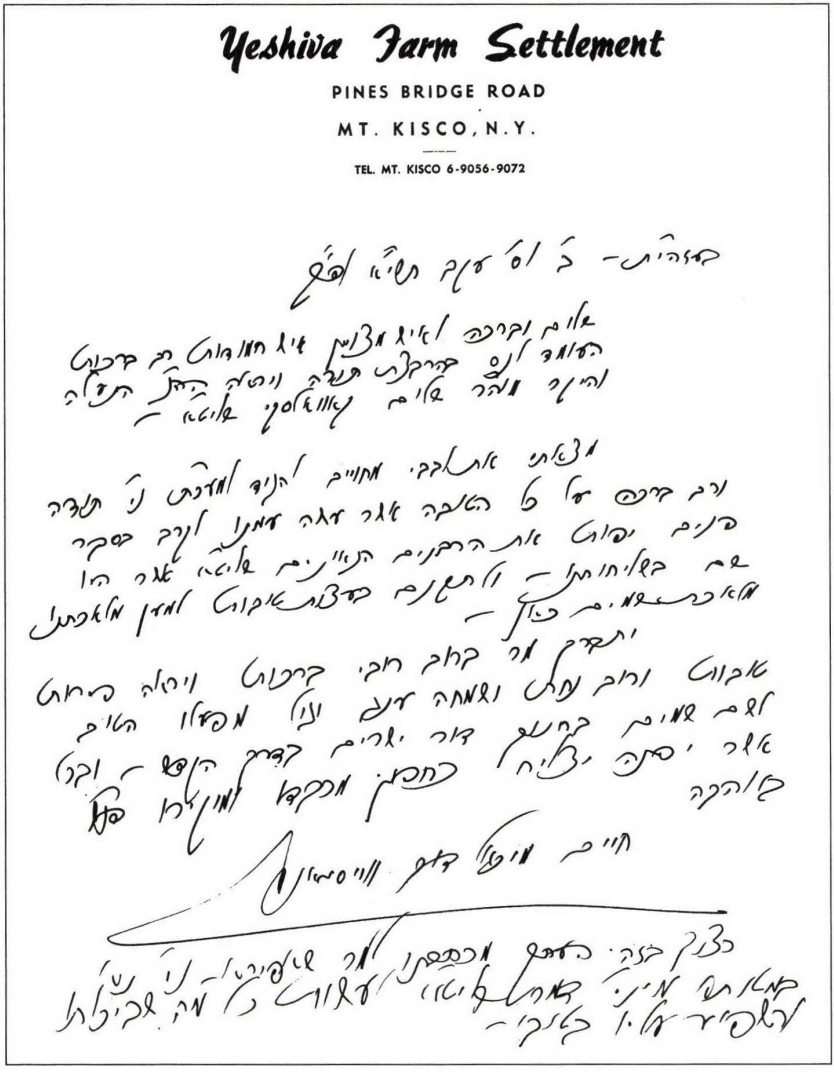
Personal Letters

RABBI MOSES FEINSTEIN
220 HENRY STREET
New York City

Tel. GRamercy 3-5377

משה פיינשטיין
ר"מ תפארת ירושלים
בנוא יארק

בע"ה



Yeshiva Farm Settlement

PINES BRIDGE ROAD

MT. KISCO, N.Y.

TEL. MT. KISCO 6-9056-9072

הברית העולמית של צעירי־, החלוץ־ והפועל־המזרחי
THE WORLD UNION OF THE ZEIREI-, HECHALUTZ- & THE HAPOEL-HAMIZRAHI

ההנהלה הראשית
ת ל - א ב י ב
רחוב אחד העם 108
ת.ד. 481, טלפון 4474-5

EF ADMINISTRATOIN
TEL AVIV
Ahad Ha'am Street
P. 481, TEL. 4474-5

ב"ה, יום ...ז"א מנחם אב תשי"ז...

מס. אחב/שיב/67

לכבוד
החבר הרב שלום דב קובלסקי
סגן יו"ר ארצי להסתדרות הפועל המזרחי בארצות הברית
ניו יורק.

ח.מ.נ.

בשמחה ועונג רב שמעתי כי נדבך לבך לצאת לדרום אמריקה בשליחות "קרן תורה ועבודה", מכשירו הכספי של "הפועל המזרחי".

אין צורך להאר לפניך את מאבקה של היהדות הדתית פה בארץ ואת מלחמתה על קיומה, ועל קיומו והרחבתו של המפעל שנוצר ע"ה בפסירות ונאמנות כה רבה.

בהכירי אותך כחבר מסור ובעל וחק בעבודה החנועה, בטוח אני כי בע"ה תצליח בעבודתך. ובשליחותך, וכי בכל מקום בואך תחקבל בלבות פתוחים, כראוי לשליחה של חנועה זו שהיא החנועה הדתית הגדולה ביותר בישראל.

חזקה עליך שתמצא את הדרך הנכונה לשאת את דברו של הפועל המזרחי אל כל הקבוצים היהודיים בדרום אמריקה שאליהם תגיע.

בשם כל הנהגת החנועה ובשמי הפרטי הנני מאחל לך איפוא מקרב לב תצלחה בדרכך ובשליחותך.

בברכת תורה ועבודה

משה שפירא
שר הדתות והסעד

יוסף דוב הלוי סולוביצ'יק
JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK

June 24, 65

Dear Rabbi,

Since I am unable to thank the individual members of the R.C.A. for their thoughtfulness during my recent illness, I wish to express my gratitude to you, their worthy representative.

When I stepped over the threshhold of the hospital on a sunny afternoon I felt immediately that I have entered a different world, the world of the sick. In this realm prevails but one norm and one goal: the sanctity of life and its preservation. It is a small world where haughtiness and vanity disappear quickly and loneliness, in its deepest meaning, and helplessness come to the fore. My world too began to shrink and revolve around its own axis consisting of anxiety, pain and hope. The world with its problems and dilemmas seemed so remote

Continued on facing page

that its distance could almost be measured in light years. My only contact with the outside world were my beloved ones, whose faces and voices penetrated the invisible wall surrounding me.

Shortly after the operation the nurse brought in flowers and handed me a card. Frankly, I did not even look up. It seemed incongruous to have flowers in my room where the very air was permeated ~~with~~ with pain and discomfort. However, a little later I raised myself and looked up. A beautiful bouquet of pastel colored flowers met my eyes. It was so pretty, so fresh looking like the face of a sleeping baby. It brought a smile to my lips. I read the card containing best wishes for a speedy recovery from the R.C.A. My first reaction was why should anybody care whether I am sick or well? Why do I deserve their concern? And then

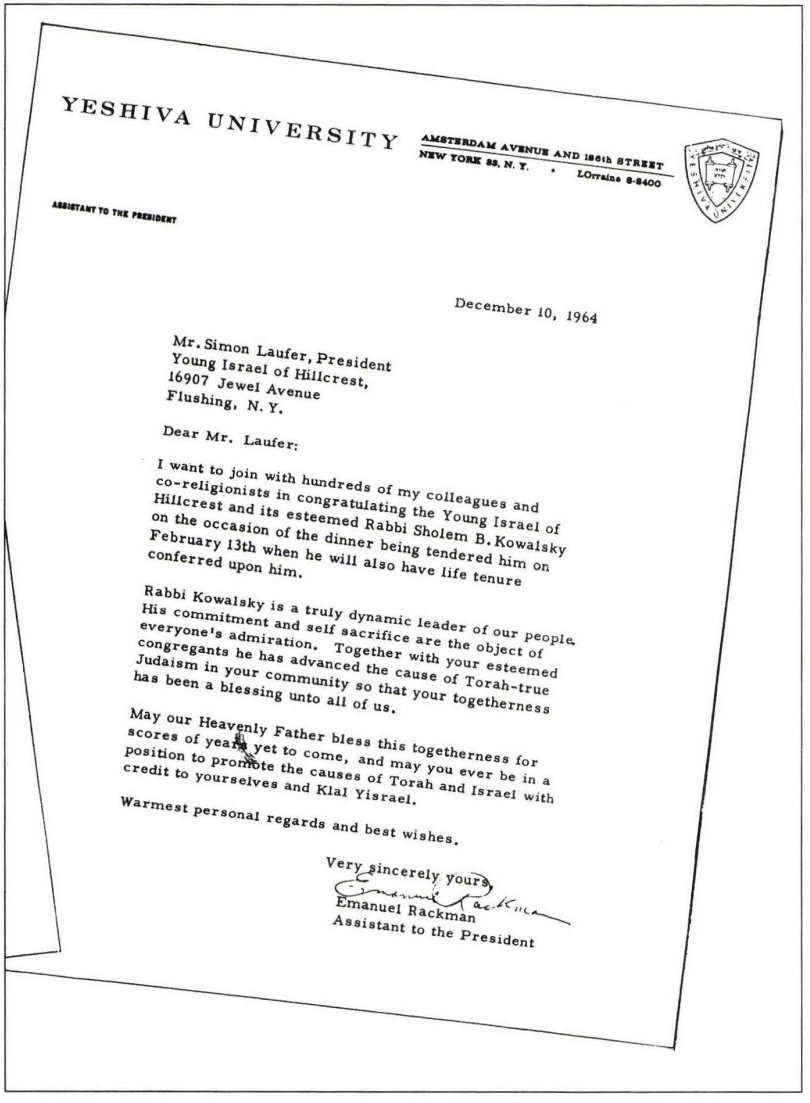
Continued on following page

I knew: because there is so much kindness (or) in the human heart that it extends itself to others regardless of merit.

For the flowers that brought the first smile to my lips, for the good wishes that cheered me up, for the subsequent gestures of friendship I thank you sincerely.

With best regards

Tonya Soloveitchik



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

AMSTERDAM AVENUE AND 186th STREET
NEW YORK 33, N. Y. • LOrraine 8-8400

ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT

December 10, 1964

Mr. Simon Laufer, President
Young Israel of Hillcrest,
16907 Jewel Avenue
Flushing, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Laufer:

I want to join with hundreds of my colleagues and co-religionists in congratulating the Young Israel of Hillcrest and its esteemed Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky on the occasion of the dinner being tendered him on February 13th when he will also have life tenure conferred upon him.

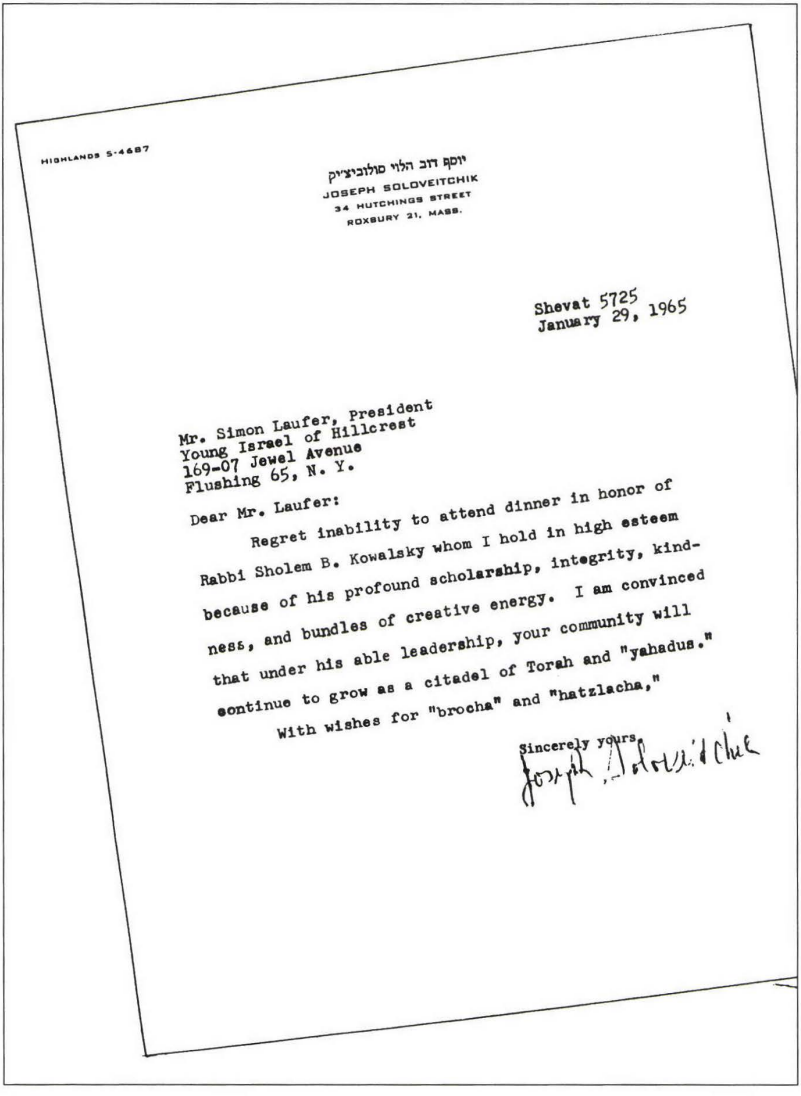
Rabbi Kowalsky is a truly dynamic leader of our people. His commitment and self sacrifice are the object of everyone's admiration. Together with your esteemed congregants he has advanced the cause of Torah-true Judaism in your community so that your togetherness has been a blessing unto all of us.

May our Heavenly Father bless this togetherness for scores of years yet to come, and may you ever be in a position to promote the causes of Torah and Israel with credit to yourselves and Klal Yisrael.

Warmest personal regards and best wishes.

Very sincerely yours,

Emanuel Rackman
Assistant to the President



HIGHLANDS 5-4687

יוסף דוב הלוי סולוביצ'יק
JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK
34 HUTCHINGS STREET
ROXBURY 21, MASS.

Shevat 5725
January 29, 1965

Mr. Simon Laufer, President
Young Israel of Hillcrest
169-07 Jewel Avenue
Flushing 65, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Laufer:

Regret inability to attend dinner in honor of Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky whom I hold in high esteem because of his profound scholarship, integrity, kindness, and bundles of creative energy. I am convinced that under his able leadership, your community will continue to grow as a citadel of Torah and "yahadus."

With wishes for "brocha" and "hatzlacha,"

Sincerely yours,

Joseph B. Soloveitchik

Conference of European Rabbis

ב"ה

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN RABBIS

DIRECTOR: *Rabbi Moshe Rose, P.O.Box 5324, Jerusalem 91052, Israel, Phone 02-812859, Fax. 02-810080*

ועידת
רבני
אירופה

ADLER HOUSE
TAVISTOCK SQUARE
LONDON WC1N 9HN

PRESIDIUM:
President
Chief Rabbi
Lord Jakobovits

Vice President
Grand Rabbin
Joseph Sitruk

Honorary Vice Presidents
Grand Rabbin
Jacob Kaplan

Grand Rabbin
Meir Warschawski

Chairman, Standing Committee
Grand Rabbin
Samuel Sirat

Chief Rabbi
David Moses Rosen
Eastern Europe

Chief Rabbi
Elio Toaff

EUROPEAN COORDINATOR:
Rabbi H.I. Grunewald,
36 Monarch Court,
Lyttelton Rd,
London N2,
Fax. & Phone 01-455-0811

Rabbi Sholem B Kowalsky
5 Rechov Gretz
Jerusalem

22 Elul 5752
20 September 1992

Dear Rabbi Kowalsky

Since its inception in 1957, the Conference of European Rabbis has always laid great emphasis on its duties and responsibilties towards the large section of European Jewry that was living behind the "Iron Curtain". Our identification with their plight, even in the darkest days remained steadfast and constant. We were encouraged and strengthened in our faith by the historic and courageous activities of the Ezra Committee of the Rabbinical Council of America of which you served as the distinguished Chairman for many years. Our joint activities were an important element which, with seyaita dishmaya, helped to preserve the flickering flame of yiddishkeit under near impossible conditions.

At our eighteenth Conference, due to beld in Basel. November 1 to 4 1992, under the siman of "vachai bahem", we would like to pay tribute to your pioneering and heroic efforts as one of the leading figures in stimulating and guiding the efforts of religious Jewry during the vital decades of fighting for Russian and East European Jewry.

We are glad to know that your devoted Rebbetzen will be coming with you to Basel and look forward to welcoming you both there.

With warmest wishes for ketivah vachatimah tovah

Sincerely

Moshe Rose

Rabbi Moshe Rose

c.c. Emeritus Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits, President.

ועידת רבני אירופה

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN RABBIS

"ברך ה' חילו ופעל ידיו תרצה"

(דברים לג יא)

מוגש כאות הוקרה והערצה

לכבי הרב **שלום דב קובלסקי** שליט"א

באנו כאה רבני אירופה שנתאספנו יחדיו בעיר באזל, שוויץ, לרגל הועידה השמונה עשרה, בסיון ויהי בהסי

ביום שהוכפל בו "כי טוב", ז' לחודש מרחשון תשיג

ברכות לראש משביר למעלת ידידנו ומכובדנו על פעולותיו הנחשוניות והברוכות בעזרה וסיוע ברוחניות ובגשמיות, שבמשך כשלושים שנה הושיט לאחכי שהיו נתונים במצור ובמצוק בשלטון הזדון מעבר ליפסך הברזלי.

כויר ועזת עזרה של "הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה" הוא שס לילות כימים כדי להזעיק את תכיריו הרבנים באוהיב ובאירופה ולאחד אותם במפעל מיוחד במינו כדי להציל נפשות ולקרב יהודים במצוקה לחיק היהדות.

הוא השכיל להמשיך את דרכו בפעולות חינוך צדקה וחסד בארצנו הקדושה ובפרט בעיהיק ירושלים תובכיא.

יהיר שיזכה עוד רבות בשנים להמשיך בפעולותיו הברוכות, יחד עם נריב הרבנית **שולמית** שתחי', להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה, יזכו לכל מילי דפנשכ מתוך בריות נופא וטהורא מעליא, ויפלא ה' כל משאלות לבם לטובה ולברכה.

וכה באנו על החתום

Someone I Admire

The person I admire is a very special person to me. He is a person who has been there whenever I needed him. This person is my paternal grandfather, Rabbi Sholem B. Kowalsky.

My grandfather, through his actions has taught me many things. By observing him, I learned how to treat people with respect, to be kind to anybody even if from another religion, and how to care for myself. I admire him for always telling me what in life is most important, even if I sometimes don't want to do it.

My grandfather's motto is: "Always do today whatever has to be done, for there will be many other things that must be done tomorrow". A few of my grandfather's many accomplishments were assisting his Mother and sisters to leave Poland just prior to the outbreak of World War II, going to the former U.S.S.R. to help free Jews, raising money for the building of a mikveh (Jewish ritual bath), and the writing of an in-depth commentary on the Chumosh (Five Books of Moses).

My grandfather has worked very hard all of his life helping Jews around the world. I am very glad and grateful that my grandfather is able to fulfill his lifelong dream of living in Jerusalem.

Yitzchak Yair Kowalsky
Yeshiva Tiferes Torah
9th Grade

A Letter to Heaven

By Avrum M. Kowalsky



Photo by Eiky Cook

20 Tamuz 5759
July 4, 1999

Dear Rebbe:

You left so quickly we barely had a chance to say good bye. The sickness struck with such rapid severity that many of us first learned of your situation when your fate was already sealed. We never took proper leave and this tugs at our hearts. The last day was given over to dignitaries and our voices were not heard. We stood at your side, our tears flowing freely, our hearts torn and anguished but the words would not come. We could find no comfort and nothing said addressed our pain. There was so much left unsaid, unspoken, not expressed or evoked.

In your time of need, we were not to be found. Each of us swept up and engrossed in our mundane pursuits. You, who were always there for us, to comfort, guide, upraise, must surely have wondered in silence, where were all your pupils, the thousands you nurtured and fathered. In truth we knew and cowered in fear. Our teacher and master, the tower of strength, was engaged in a last mighty battle, and we his students, inept and afraid, hid from the daunting reality, for we knew not what to do. Please forgive our inadequacies, as you were not there to teach and direct us.

Realize and know that our love and respect for you knows no bounds. We deeply appreciate the priceless and precious gifts you implanted in each of us. The countless and long hours of caring tutelage demonstrated your relentless dedication and commitment to our growth. Your brilliance, profundity and depth of perception were peerless. Nevertheless, you transcended these unique abilities and taught your students and countless Jews, traveling across continents to impart Torah, with deep insight, patience and selflessness.

The chain of the *mesorah* (tradition) requires a focus on three links, past, present and future. Rebbe, you bridged the chasm between the tradition of Europe embodied in Rav Ruderman TZ"L and Rav Hutner TZ"L and connected this *mesorah* to your *talmidim*, the third link, that must inevitably follow if the chain is to continue. You enabled and empowered us to develop our own initiatives and individual approaches, always rooted in the *mesorah* and predicated on the teachings of the past great Masters of Torah. Never did you allow a latent talent to be suppressed, rather you cajoled, coaxed and induced the full blossom of each student's aptitude. You allowed each of us to discover and advance our own special talents and strengths, to find our own way, always guiding and inspiring us to a life of service to the *Ribono Shel Olam*.

The pursuit of truth was the mainstay of your teachings. Never did you permit us to flinch from its imperative. It produced a most painstaking

A Letter to Heaven

Continued

reading of Holy text with a logical force that elicited untold lessons and unlocked previously unrealized explanations. Under your guidance, the Torah and its wisdom had nothing to fear, no question or subject was taboo, no problem too difficult or obscure. All of modernity was scrutinized, analyzed and understood in the light of the Torah. This quest for reality and veracity did not protect even you, our Master. At various times, students recall a penetrating question stopping you in your tracks, causing a complete re-evaluation of a lecture or stated position, even an interruption in the class discussion until you had sufficient time to rethink the issue. No cover up, no dodge, no subterfuge only absolute honesty. Your approach was always fresh and broached no hiding from the truth.

Compassionate, caring, empathetic you set standards of behavior as an exemplary role model. Never cross, with a gentle smile you greeted all, accepting each human being for his or her G-dly essence. We marvel now in retrospect at the small things that you did to put us at ease, as we opened our hearts and poured out our problems. Never too busy to lend an attentive ear, you were able to console our anguish, steady our nerves and fortify our resolve. No one came away without obtaining the answer so desperately sought. Yet now, alas where do we turn, to whom do we address our problems, who will listen with attentive patience, who has your wisdom and understanding?

Your dignified manner and royal bearing commanded utmost respect and would not tolerate schism. Rebbe, by continuously stressing *Shalom*, you unified our community and bound us together, refusing to allow differences to dissipate our strength with debilitating conflict. Even with those who failed to accord you proper honor, you made common ground to further the cause of Torah Judaism. With silence did you respond and with quiet majesty did you react.

We all owe you not only our undying gratitude, but our deepest apologies for we inconvenienced you daily and at all hours. We took you from your beloved *seforim*, books and family. We deprived you of any private life as we unburdened upon you incessantly, constantly demanding that you address our needs. Rebbe, you spurned all worldly possessions and we found no way to demonstrate our appreciation. Many were the times we struggled with this dilemma. How do we show gratitude to a Master who has all he wants because his needs are few? Only the Al-mighty can give you your true measure, but we hope that as the years pass you will derive some pleasure from the accomplishments of your students who miss you so terribly and who dedicate their efforts to your memory.

With the deepest respect and admiration, we remain your students forever.

Glossary

All words are Hebrew unless otherwise indicated



Afikoman – matzah that commemorates the Passover sacrifice (bigger half of the matzah put aside during *yachatz*) eaten at the end of the *Seder* meal.

Aitz Chaim – wooden handles of the Torah scroll

Aliyah – pilgrimage or immigration to Israel

aliya – the honor of being called to the Torah

Arba Minim – the four species the Torah commands us to take on Succos



Ba'al Teshuva – repentant or returnee to religious observance

Ba'alei Habatim (pl) – head of a household

Becher (Yid) – wine cup

Beis Hamedrosh – study hall of Yeshiva or Shul

Bima – podium upon which the Torah is placed and read in Shul

Blech (Yid) - lit: "tin"; – a stove top covering placed over an open fire on Shabbos

Bochur/bochurim (pl) – unmarried male student(s)

Bris – circumcision

Brocha – blessing



Chag/chaggim – holiday(s)

Chametz – leavening; substance forbidden on Passover

Chassid/Chassidim (pl) – follower(s) of a *Chassidic* movement

Chavrusa – learning partner

Cheder – Orthodox boy's elmentary school (usually taught in Yiddish)

Chesed – kindness

Chevra Kadisha – volunteer Jewish burial society

Chinuch – education

Chumosh – the Five Books of Moses



Derech – the proper way in religious life

Din Torah – judicial case based on Torah law

Dvar Torah – Torah lecture (literally, words of Torah)



Eruv – a legal device whereby several areas of ownership are merged into one joint ownership permitting the participants to carry on Shabbos

Esrog/esrogim (pl) – citron fruit (one of the four species used on Succos)

Eitzah – advice



Farbrengen (Yid) – gathering of *Chassidim*



Gadol b'Yisrael – a great religious Jewish leader

Gadol b'Torah – one who is great in Torah learning

Gadol Hador – the most outstanding person of his generation

Gartel (Yid) – belt worn during *Davening*

Gemach – free loan fund

Gemora – Talmud

Goyim – gentiles



Halachic – according to Jewish law

Hatzlacha – success

Havdala – ceromony at the conclusion of Shabbos

Hester panim – when Hashem conceals himself from us



Kaddish – prayer recited by a mourner (or other individual) in honor of the deceased

Kapdan – strict, impatient

Kapote (Yid) – long day coat worn by *Chassidic* Jews

Kehila – **1.** Community **2.** Congregation

Keser – crown

Kiddush – prayer recited over wine before eating on Sabbath or Festivals.

Kippa – skullcap; Yarmulke

Krias HaTorah – Torah reading



Lamdin – accomplished learner

Lashon hara – gossip, slander

Le'chaim – lit: "to life", usually expressed over liquor

Limudei Kodesh – religious studies

Lulav/lulavim (pl) – palm branch (one of the four species)



Ma'ariv – evening prayer service

Magid shiur – Torah teacher/lecturer

Manhig – leader

Maror – bitter herbs

Masmid/masmidim (pl) – diligent Yeshiva student(s)

Mechina – preparatory class

Megillas Esther – Book of Esther, read on Purim

Melava Malka – meal eaten after *Havdala* in honor of the departing Shabbos

Mentala (Yid) – Torah cover

Mezuzah/mezuzos (pl) – small parchments with passages from the Torah, affixed to most doorposts in Jewish homes

Mikvah – ritual bath

Mincha – afternoon prayer service

Minhag/minhagim (pl) – custom(s)

Minyan – quorom of ten men necessary for conducting communal prayer service

Mishloach Manos – sending of food portions on Purim

Mishpocha – family

Misnagid – opponent of *Chassidism*

Mitzvah – Torah commandment

Mizrach – East

Mohel – person who performs a circumcision

Motzei Shabbos – end of Shabbos; Saturday night



Netzach Yisroel – glory of Israel



Olim – immigrants



Parshas hashavuah – weekly Torah portion

Perek – *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers)

Pidyon Shivuim – redemption of prisoners, ransom money

Pushka (Yid) – charity box



Rebono shel olam – Master of the Universe

Rechilus – slander

Rosh HaYeshiva – dean of the Yeshiva

Ruach – spirit



Sandek – person who holds the infant on his lap during the circumcision

Sedra – weekly Torah portion

Sefer/Seforim (pl) – religious books

Segula – talisman; spiritual remedy

Seudah Shlishis – the third Shabbos meal

Seudah – festive Purim meal (one of the *Mitzvos* of Purim)

Seudas mitzvah – festive meal marking a *Mitzvah (i.e.* a *Bris)*

Sh'airit Haplayta – remnant of the Jewish people

Shacharis – morning prayer service

Shaliach Mitzvah – one who is sent to perform a *Mitzvah*

Sheva Brachos –

1. 7 blessings recited at a Jewish wedding and *Bircas HaMazone* during the first week after the wedding when a *Minyan* is present to rejoice with the bride and groom
2. Celebratory meal in honor of the newlyweds; it is customary to have these celebrations for seven days

Shiraim – remainders of a Rebbe's meal, eaten by his *Chassidim*

Shiur/Shiurim (pl) – **1.** Class **2.** Lesson

Shiva – seven day mourning period observed for the death of a close relative

Shoah – Holocaust

Shochet – ritual slaughterer

Shteibel (Yid) – *Chassidic* shul

Shul – synagogue

Simcha – joy, joyous occasion

Smicha – rabbinic ordination

Sofer Stam – scribe of religious articles

Streimel (Yid) – round fur hat worn by *Chassidim*



Tallis/Talleisim (pl) – prayer shawl(s)

Talmid Chacham/Talmidei Chachomim (pl) – Torah scholars

Talmid/Talmidim (pl) – Yeshiva student(s)

Tashlich – Prayers customarily recited beside a body of water on the first day of Rosh Hashana after *Mincha*

Tashmishei Kedusha – religious articles

Tefila/tefilos (pl) – prayer(s)

Tefillin – phylacteries

Tisch/tischen (Yid) – lit: "table"; ceremonial Shabbos meal publicly conducted by a *chassidic* Rebbe with singing and *Divrei Torah*

Tzadik – righteous saintly person

Tzaros – troubles

Tzdaka – charity, kindness

Tzitzis – fringed garment



Yad – pointer

Yahrzeit – anniversary of a person's death

Yichus – important family lineage

Yishuv ha'aretz – settling the land of Israel



Z'chus – merit, privilege

Zemiros – Sabbath songs

Bibliography

Baumol, Rabbi Yehoshua, **A Blaze in the Darkening Gloom**, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem, Israel and New York, NY, 1994

Berrol, Selma, **East Side, West Side, Eastern European Jews in London and New York, 1870-1920**, Praeger Publishers, Connecticut, 1994

Bromberg, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak, **Rebbes of Ger, Sfas Emes and Imrei Emes**, Mesorah Publications Ltd. in conjunction with Hillel Press, Jerusalem, Israel, 1987

Bunim, Amos, **A Fire in His Soul**, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem, Israel and New York, NY, 1989

Chabad Research Center, **Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Volume 1**, Kehot Publication Society, Brooklyn, NY, 1971

Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1966

Encyclopedia Judaica, Keter Publishing House Ltd., Jerusalem, Israel, 1971

Fein, Leonard, **Where Are We? The Inner Life of American Jews**, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, NY, 1988

Gilbert, Martin, **Auschwitz and the Allies, The Politics of Rescue**, Hamlyn Paperbacks, Middlesex, England, 1983

Gilbert, Martin, **The Holocaust, A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War**, Henry Holt and Co., New York, NY, 1985

Graetz, Heinrich, **History of the Jews, Volume 5**, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, PA, 1946

Green, Arthur A., **The American Jews, The Dimensions of Ethnicity**, The Belkrap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., London, England, 1982

Leibman, Charles S., **The Ambivalent American Jew, Politics, Religion and Family in American Jewish Life**, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, PA, 1973

Morse, Arthur D., **While Six Million Died, A Chronicle of American Apathy**, Ace Publishing Corporation, New York, NY, 1967

Newman, Louis I., in collaboration with Samuel Spitz, **The Hassidic Anthology, Tales & Teachings of the Hassidim**, Bloch Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1944

Pomerantz, Rachel, **The World in Flames, A Short History of the Holocaust**, C.I.S. Publishers, Lakewood, NJ, 1993

Rabinowicz, Rabbi Tzvi, **Chassidic Rebbes, From the Baal Shem Tov to Modern Times**, Targum Press, Southfield, MI, 1989

Reitlinger, Gerald, **The Final Solution**, Sphere Books Ltd., London, England, 1971

Rubenstein, Richard L., **After Auschwitz, Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism**, The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., Indianapolis, IN, 1966

Sachar, Howard Morley, **The Course of Modern Jewish History**, Delta Publishing, New York, NY, 1958

Shindler, Pesach, **Hassidic Responses to the Holocaust in the Light of Hassidic Thought**, Ktav Publishing, Hoboken, NJ, 1990

Spanjaard, Barry, **Don't Fence Me In, An American Teenager in the Holocaust**, B&B Publishing Co., Saugus, CA, 1981

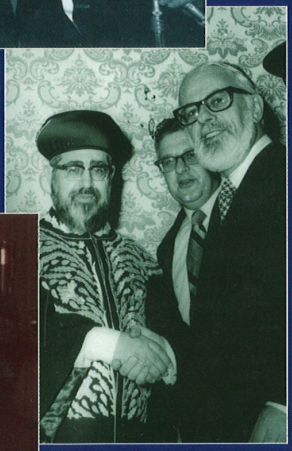














Clockwise from upper left:

Rabbi Kowalsky and
former President Jimmy Carter

Rabbi Kowalsky with
the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zt"l*

Rabbi Kowalsky with
Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, *zt"l*
and Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld

Rabbi Kowalsky with
Chief Rabbi of Israel,
Rabbi Ovadia Yosef

Rabbi Kowalsky with Rav Ruderman, *zt"l*

Rabbi Kowalsky with the late
Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin

Rabbi Kowalsky with Yosef Mendelevich

Cover: Bottom Line Design 718.377.4567