Reb Yankel Lipskier

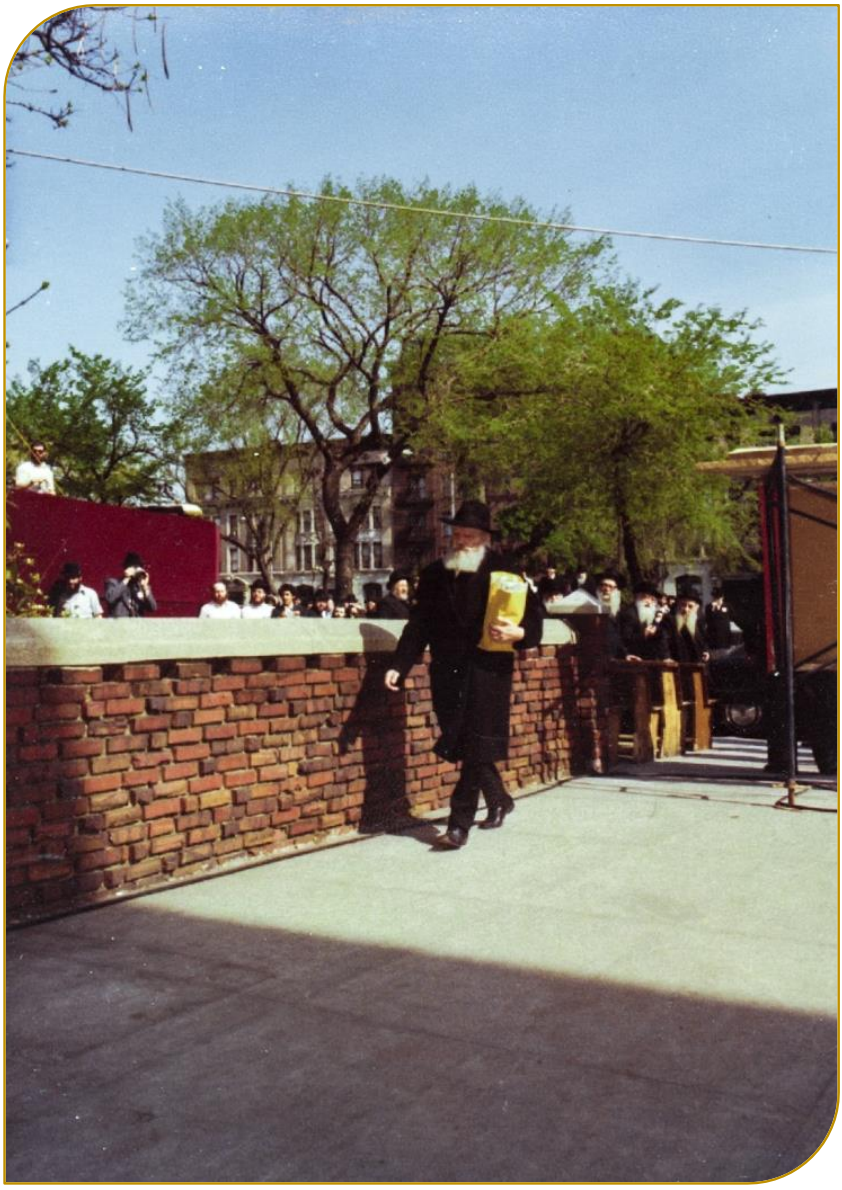
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Memento

From the
Bar Mitzvah Celebration of

Yankel Schmukler

ב׳ אייר תשפ״א – תפארת שבתפארת



– 18 Iyar 5740/1980 –
Yankel Watches the Rebbe enter 770
Credit: Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad

ב״ה

Chapter One:
Early Life

״איך בין געבוירן אין 1906, אין אַ קאָלאָניע גראַפסקינד, יעקאַטירענאסלאווסקער גובערניע. דער טאַטע ז״ל איז דאָרט געווען דער רב״

"I was born in 1906 (sic) in the Grafskaya colony, Province of Yekaterinoslav. My father was the Rav there"

– Yankel Lipskier's Memoirs

What began as a plot to cunningly keep the Jews disenfranchised, ended up being one of Russia's greatest economic goldmines. "Colonize the Jews" was the idea. Keep them in their desolate communities far away from the elite and, as the saying goes, out of sight out of mind.

The "Ukase" of December 9, 1804 allowed Jews in Russia to purchase land for farming settlements for the first time. Large areas of Ukraine had just come under control of the Czarist regime. The Russian government was anxious to develop this region. And at the same time the government sought a way to relieve itself of the so-called "Jewish Question", particularly in what are now Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus – crowded and economically poor

centers in the north. Jews were provided with various incentives: tax abatements, reduced land prices etc. Very soon, Jews began moving to these far flung settlements in search of a peaceful life.

Nobody foresaw these hamlets growing. By 1900 there were about 100,000 Jewish colonists throughout the Russian Empire. With a population almost solely Jewish, these agricultural colonies soon became flourishing Shtetls.

The Jewish agricultural colonies became more successful than the Russian government initially expected. For example, the sugar-beet industry in these colonies produced more sugar for Europe's insatiable sweet tooth than any other source. Eventually Russian Jewish agricultural colonies would become models for communal agricultural efforts worldwide. Karl Marx cited the "kolonii" as an example of workers taking control and lifting themselves up through hard work. Zionists in the early 20th century used Russian kolonii as models for Kibbutzim in Israel.

In the Yekaterinoslav area, the Tzemach Tzedek helped establish 18 such colonies. Expanding on his father's efforts in his early days as Rebbe to found such communities, the Tzemach Tzedek's goal was to create thriving Jewish towns enriched with Yiddishkiet and Torah. Grafskaya (today Proletarskiy) was one such town, located between two small rivers, the Gaytsur and the Yanchul [nonexistent today]. It was there that this fairly flat countryside lay with sparse vegetation. Though other Jewish colonies were created nearby, the entire region was very much "off the map" with nearest towns such as Mariupol and Berdyansk being nearly 50 miles away. There were no major roads even coming near it, and the closest train station was in Rozivka – some 20 miles away. From there one would have to hire a wagon to get to the remote settlement.

As intended, the community revolved completely around Yiddishkait. The large 3,600 square foot Shul resided in the center

of the town, right near the post office and government mandated school. Aside from its doctor, a single policeman and two general stores, Grafskaya had its very own Mikva, Melamdim and cemetery. The people of Grafskaya spent their days taking care of their land, harvesting and plowing the divided plots, and leaving the designated communal area to let the cattle graze on. Their chickens and horses strayed aimlessly around, and most of the women used sewing as a pastime.

A large portion of the community originated from Lithuania. Most built small feeble homes with their own hands, which could barely withstand the rigors of the Russian climate. Water was drawn from the wells or nearby creek and lighting was provided by oil lamps. When times were good, heat was supplied by regular firewood. Otherwise, other foul smelling materials had to be used.

It was after their beloved Rav, Rabbi Pinchas Komisaruk's untimely death in 1897 that the Lipskier family stepped into the picture.

Bas-Sheva Mamyaffo came from a respected Lubavitch family in Mariupol. Her older brother, Mendel, was a wealthy Chossid who owned a surprisingly successful soap factory there. Surprising, due to the fact that he would ignore the line of customers with empty wagons waiting while he spent hours each day Davening B'Avoda. Every year on Rosh HaShana he would come to Lubavitch and push together with the young Bochurim to try and hear Tekios from the Rebbe Rashab.

The Rebbe Rashab was close to Bas-Sheva's family. Her sister was married to the well-known philanthropist and Talmid Chacham Reb Menachem Man Berman. When the Rebbe Rashab first arrived in Rostov he stayed by them before finding a permanent residence there.

Reb Chaim Hirsh Lipskier

Bas-Sheva Lipskier (Mamyaffo)

The family's lineage went back directly to the Levush – Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe. In tribute to his greatness, the family was called Mamyaffo an acronym for **יפה מרדכי ממשפחת**.

Eventually Bas-Sheva married Chaim Tzvi "Hirsh" Lipskier from Poltava. Originally Aronoff, he changed his last name to avoid the army draft. He came from an Oilumisher family, and with his passion for learning and Smicha from some of the greatest rabbis of the generation, he was destined to become one himself.

As a young man he studied in the Yeshiva of Vloshin and was described as being one of the exceptional Bochurim there. The man of the house that hosted him would come late at night to remind him to come home to eat and sleep. "Just a few minutes and I'll come" would be the response and he would immediately return to his learning. After this would happen multiple times, his host would need to nearly drag him out of the Yeshiva to make sure he was well fed with a good night's rest.

It was in this climate that Yankel was born – on the 8th of Shevat of 5667/1907, and named after his paternal grandfather's father.

Grafskaya, Circa 1906. Credit: Chaim Freedman

His earliest memories were of the peaceful days prior to the chaos of World War I:

"איך געדענק נאָך די געסלעך פון דער קאָלאָניע, די שוהל, בפרט שבת. ווען עס פלעגט קומען דער שבת-טאָג, זיינען די אידן פון דער גאַנצער קאָלאָניע געווען אויף די גאַסן אַרום דער שוהל. עס איז געווען אַ נחת-רוח צו זען ווי דער הייליקער שבת לייכט אויף יעדן איד. מען האָט ניט געוואוסט וואָס עס הייסט ניט קיין שומר שבת"

"I still remember the streets of the colony, the shul, especially on Shabbos. When the day of Shabbos would arrive, the Jews of the entire colony were on the streets around the shul. It was so enjoyable to see how the Holy Shabbos shined on every Jew. We didn't know what it meant to not be Shomer Shabbos"

Their father's sole trade day and night was Torah. When the children would wake up at night they would hear him studying at the table, and to his sweet voice they would drift back to sleep.

As the Rav of the town, the community wanted him to have the official title of Rabbi; something he would need to take a government test on secular subjects to attain. He refused however, stating he spoke and wrote in Russian and could take the test on whatever knowledge he already possessed. Even as a Yeshiva Bochur, on a rare trip home he was notified that a number of his fellow students began reading secular books and were leaning towards the Haskala movement that was growing at the time – and

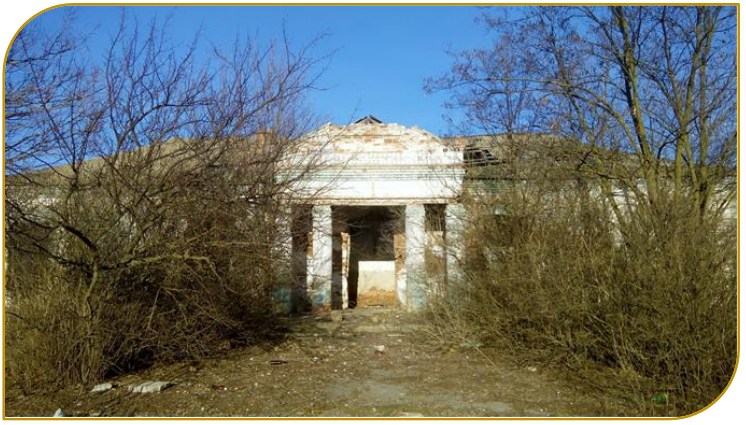
refused to return there. So that's how the matter stayed and the official title was never given.

Chaim Hirsh was an extremely upstanding individual. It is said that when people would come into him for a Din Torah, he would keep his eyes closed the whole time as to not allow their appearance to influence his Psak.

He was a very clean and tidy individual as well, reluctant to even eat from a plate that one of his own children ate from.

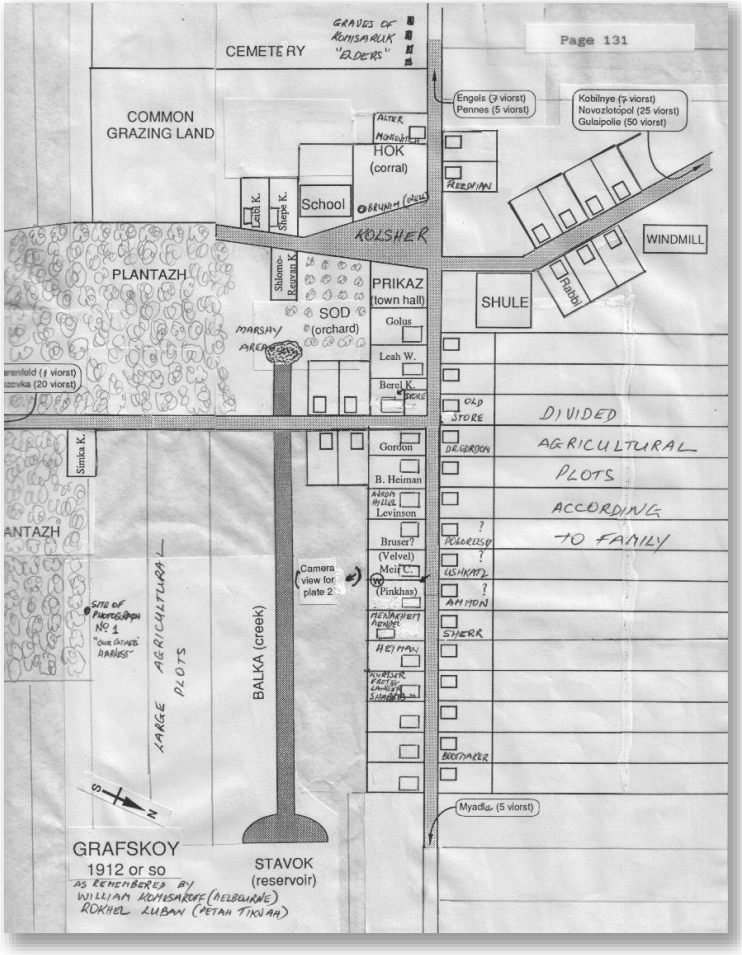
Most of his time he spent teaching his children. A "Yeshiva" of sorts was set up in the house, pairing the youngsters with their siblings closest in age and he would teach them in groups. Yankel with his brother Michoel and two townsboys their age, Areye Leib with a friend or two, with the same system implemented for the girls. During the week they would study Gemora with Tosfos, and on Shabbos and Yom Tov, Likkutai Torah.

Davening was part of their education as well. They would need to stand next to him during Tefilos – including on Shabbos – and Daven aloud.

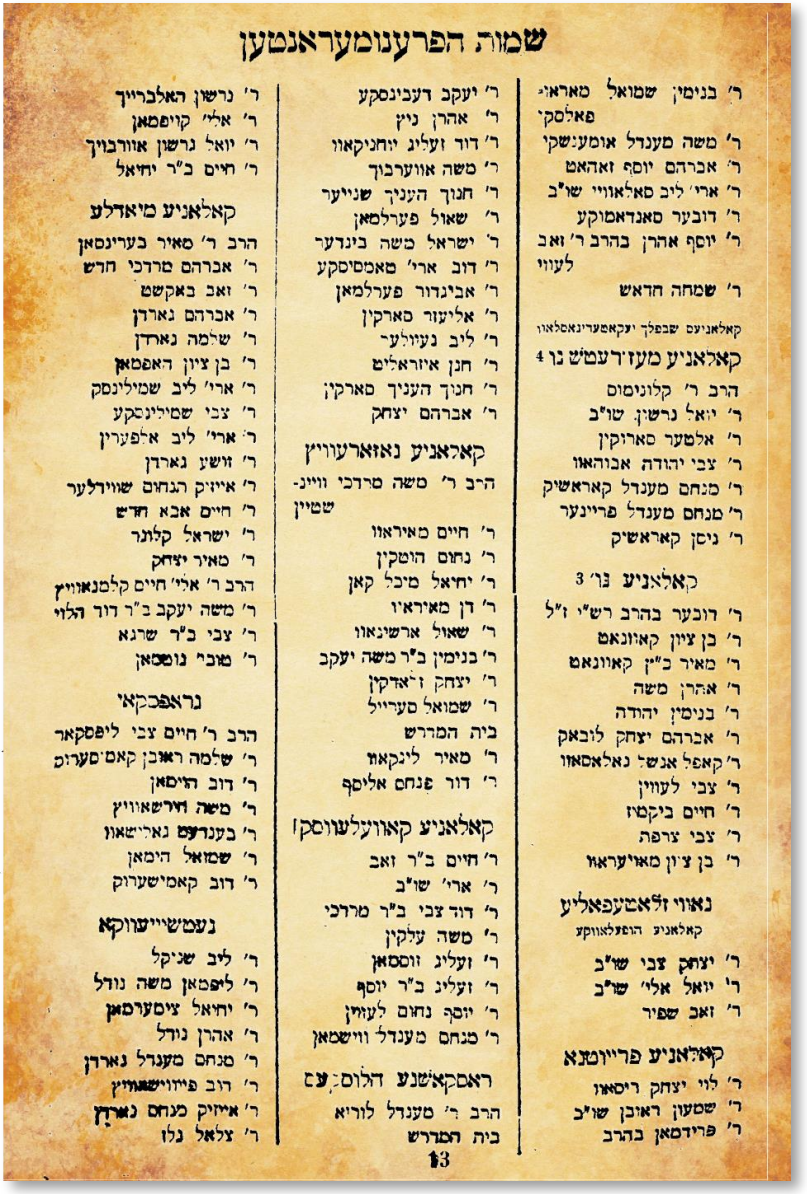


The Shul of Grafskaya, today. Credit: Chaim Freedman

While this was happening their mother would take care of all the household's physical needs. A true Akeres HaBayis, she single handedly would milk the cow that gave milk for the family, make cheese and other dairy products from it and bake bread twice a week. At the end of the long day she would sit plucking the feathers of the poultry while telling her children stories from Yiddish story books such as Rabbeinu B'Chaye and Tziena U'Rena. The feathers



Map of Grafskaya, Circa 1912. Credit: Chaim Freedman



שמות הפרענומעראנטען

ר׳ בנימין שמואל מאראו-
פאלסקי
ר׳ משה מענדל אומענשקי
ר׳ אברהם יוסף זאהאט
ר׳ ארי׳ ליב סאלאוויי שו״ב
ר׳ דובער סאנדאמוקע
ר׳ יוסף אהרן בהרב ר׳ זאב
לעווי
ר׳ שמחה חדאש

קאלאניעס שבפלך יעקאטערינאסלאוו

קאלאניע מעז׳רעטש נו׳ 4

הרב ר׳ קלונימוס
ר׳ יואל גרשון שו״ב
ר׳ אלטער סארוקין
ר׳ צבי יהודה אבוהאוו
ר׳ מנחם מענדל קאראשיק
ר׳ מנחם מענדל פריינער
ר׳ ניסן קאראשיק

קאלאניע נו׳ 3

ר׳ דובער בהרב רש״י ז״ל
ר׳ בן ציון קאוונאט
ר׳ מאיר כ״ץ קאוונאט
ר׳ אהרן משה
ר׳ בנימין יהודה
ר׳ אברהם יצחק לובאק
ר׳ קאפל אנשל נאלאסאוו
ר׳ צבי לעווין
ר׳ חיים ביקטוז
ר׳ צבי צרפת
ר׳ בן ציון מאויעראוו

נאווי זלאטעפאליע

קאלאניע הופעלאווקע

ר׳ יצחק צבי שו״ב
ר׳ יואל אלי׳ שו״ב
ר׳ זאב שפיר

קאלאניע פרייוטנא

ר׳ לוי יצחק ריסאוו
ר׳ שמעון ראובן שו״ב
ר׳ פרידמאן בהרב

ר׳ יעקב דעבינסקע
ר׳ אהרן ניץ
ר׳ דוד זעליג יוחניקאוו
ר׳ משה אווערבוך
ר׳ חנוך העניך שנייער
ר׳ שאול פערלמאן
ר׳ ישראל משה בינדער
ר׳ דוב ארי׳ פאמסיסקע
ר׳ אביגדור פערלמאן
ר׳ אליעזר סארקין
ר׳ ליב נעיולער
ר׳ חנן איזראליט
ר׳ חנוך העניך סארקין
ר׳ אברהם יצחק

קאלאניע נאזארעוויץ

הרב ר׳ משה מרדכי וויינ-
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ר׳ חיים מאיראוו
ר׳ נחום הוטקין
ר׳ יחיאל מיכל קאן
ר׳ דן מאיראיו
ר׳ שאול ארשינאוו
ר׳ בנימין ב״ר משה יעקב
ר׳ יצחק זלאדקין
ר׳ שמואל סערייל
בית המדרש
ר׳ מאיר לינקאוו
ר׳ דוד פנחס אליסף

קאלאניע קאוועלעווסקי

ר׳ חיים ב״ר זאב
ר׳ ארי׳ שו״ב
ר׳ דוד צבי ב״ר מרדכי
ר׳ משה עלקין
ר׳ זעליג זוסמאן
ר׳ זעליג ב״ר יוסף
ר׳ יוסף נחום לעווין
ר׳ מנחם מענדל ווישמאן

ראסקאשנע הלוסקעס

הרב ר׳ מענדל לוריא
בית המדרש

ר׳ נרשון האלברייך
ר׳ אלי׳ קויפמאן
ר׳ יואל גרשון אוורבויך
ר׳ חיים ב״ר יחיאל

קאלאניע מיאדלע

הרב ר׳ מאיר בערינסאן
ר׳ אברהם מרדכי חדש
ר׳ זאב באקשט
ר׳ אברהם גארדן
ר׳ שלמה גארדן
ר׳ בן ציון האפמאן
ר׳ ארי׳ ליב שמילינסק
ר׳ צבי שמילינסקע
ר׳ ארי׳ ליב אלפערין
ר׳ זושע גארדן
ר׳ אייזיק הנחום שווידלער
ר׳ חיים אבא חדש
ר׳ ישראל קלונר
ר׳ מאיר יצחק
הרב ר׳ אלי׳ חיים קלמנאוויץ
ר׳ משה יעקב ב״ר דוד הלוי
ר׳ צבי ב״ר שרגא
ר׳ טובי׳ נוטמאן

נראפסקאי

הרב ר׳ חיים צבי ליפסקאר
ר׳ שלמה ראובן קאמיסערוק
ר׳ דוב הוימאן
ר׳ משה חירשאוויץ
ר׳ בענדעט גאלישאוו
ר׳ שמואל הימאן
ר׳ דוב קאמישערוק

נעמשייעווקא

ר׳ ליב שניקל
ר׳ ליפמאן משה נודל
ר׳ יחיאל צימערמאן
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ר׳ מנחם מענדל גארדן
ר׳ דוב פייווישאוויץ
ר׳ אייזיק מנחם גארדן
ר׳ צלאל גלז

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ספר אמרי שמואל – נדפס תרע״ב
Reb Chaim Hirsh is listed as one of those that
helped pay for the printing of the Sefer

would be placed in pillow cases for the house and as presents for her children when they would get married as was the tradition at the time. She was very artistic and skillful needleworker.

The Matza baking for town also took place in their home, with Bas-Sheva supervising at the oven.

On July 21, 1911, Mendel Beilis was arrested for the murder of a 13-year-old gentile boy some 3 months before. Although the police investigation discovered the true murderers, the Russian system wanted a Jew to be the culprit and not a flaw in their own justice system. The initial investigation was soon discredited, the investigator accused of accepting bribery, and a new "investigation" began.

The Rebbe Rashab got very involved in the court proceedings, saying that the Czarist government wasn't just trying to frame a single individual - rather the Jewish people as a whole. He offered to help the defense team in any way he could, writing letters of counsel, lending books from his vast library and sending Chassidim to help. This became Chaim Hirsh's sole personal connection to the Rebbe Rashab (that we know of), as he tried his best to help the fight against this blood label. Eventually, though not a big win, Beilis was acquitted.

The Lipskiers moved around a bit to other colonies, such as Bakhers (Zatishe) and Dritnumer (Krasnoselka). They finally settled when Yankel was 10 years old. His father decided they had to move to a more urban city in order for his children to get a proper Jewish education in Yeshiva, and at the end of 1916 the Lipskier family moved to Poltava.

World World I was raging, and as tremendously frightening and difficult as it was, it only got worse when the Ukrainian War of Independence broke out a year later. Although the Russian Empire entered the war with much enthusiasm, it would very soon lead to their permanent downfall. The impact of the war on the country

was demoralizing. Food and fuel were in short supply, casualties were increasing, and inflation was mounting. Strikes rose among low-paid factory workers, and there were reports that the peasants were restless. Just mere months after the Lipskiers moved to Poltava, the Czarist regime was overthrown. This great void led to four brutal years where the city was overrun by war, and power changed from week to week, sometimes multiple times in one day.

Depending on which faction ruled, the red army Bolsheviks, Denikin's whites, Makhnodiets, Petliuraistin, and various groups of Kazakhs led by independent atamans would terrorize the townspeople. Dubbed the "Silent Pogroms", due to the assaults usually being against individuals, every day more people were attacked and beaten, and a few Jewish homes were plundered. Since it dragged on for months, the Silent Pogroms victimized the entire Jewish community. As the main purpose was quick robbery, especially of money, jewelry, valuables, there were thank G-d very few murders.

Yankel's family had a few close calls themselves. Their home on Zhantsmanske Street was on the outskirts of town, right near the local circus, soldiers station, and prison. Though their large courtyard which their house shared with 11 other Jewish families was protected by high iron doors, it didn't help much. Each time their city had a change in authority, the new soldiers would break in, demanding food, clothes and money.

It happened once late at night that a known murderer began banging on the Lipskier's door, shouting that they should open up. Bas-Sheva immediately recognized his voice and with her quick wit began saying how her children are sick and one has a fever with typhus.

Upon hearing about the dreaded and most contagious disease, the man abruptly left, not before asking who owned the barn at the courtyard.

Suddenly they heard banging again. Peeking through the cracks of the boarded up windows they saw him at the barn, screaming at the non-Jewish owners, threatening to kill them. He was appeased by just taking their horse and buggy.

Through it all the Lipskiers persevered and bore witness to many great miracles during the years of war.

Chaim Hirsch was the Rav of the "Saldatzke Shul", which held members that were ex-soldiers. These men were Cantonists, famously taken away from their families, raised in the army devoid of Torah and Mitzvos, and yet never totally assimilated or gave up their faith. Once they served their allotted 25 years in the army, many would band together with their fellow soldiers – their only family – and create small communities together. Often they would even build a Shul, where the illiterate men would hire a Rav to guide them.

Chaim Hirsh's father Yehuda ("Leib") Chenoch, though not a Chossid himself, would Daven in a nearby Shul called the Bolnitzer Shul (on account of it being near the local hospital) where the Chassidim Davened. Already an elderly man, the children didn't have much time to spend with him. One day he came for lunch to Yankel's family home. His wife Zlata had just passed away two months before on 15 Shevat. The entire time he refused to eat, sitting silently next to the warm furnace instead. After the meal he went to Daven Mincha and Maariv. Upon his return he asked Yankel to walk him to the restroom, after which he washed his hands and asked for a place to lay down. Yankel tried offering him a bed, but his grandfather refused, opting to lay on the "Canapé" (a sort of wooden couch). Yankel pushed it to the middle of the room as requested and helped the frail Leib Chenoch lay down, covering him with a blanket. Bas-Sheva wasn't home, she had gone to Chaim Hirsh's brother's home to borrow some books.

It was just the children and their ailing grandfather in the house. His lips moved silently, tears rolling down his cheeks. The young Yankel worked up the courage to ask his grandfather why he was crying, but immediately burst into tears as well. Their older sister Aida ran to call a neighbor who happened to be a nurse. As soon as the nurse saw the scene she told the children to step back as it was over. Their parents then came rushing in, but it was too late. Though Leib Chenoch attained the most peaceful of deaths, it frightened the children considerably.

Upon arriving in Poltava, Yankel initially began learning in the local Chabad Cheder and was taught by the Rav of Poltava, the Chossid Reb Dovber Grinpress. [Though a year younger, Rabbi Pinchas Mordechai Teitz of Elizabeth, NJ, learned with him there as well]. This didn't last long as the Bolsheviks soon deconstructed and shut down all the schools in the city.

Chaim Hirsh began looking into other Yeshivos for his children. The local Shochet, Machlis, told him that if he wanted his children to remain Frum he should send them to Lubavitch. With his wife pushing to send them to Chabad Yeshivos, so they can be Temimim like her brother, he decided to send them to Tomchei Temimim. The older children were sent to Kharkov, and the younger ones – Yankel included – to Kremenchuk. When the city's Chassidisheh Melamed heard the news, he told Chaim Hirsh that a short while before his passing, Leib Chenoch confided in him that he hoped his grandchildren would learn in Lubavitcher Yeshivos.

Shortly before the planned departure, Yankel began to have vision issues and extreme migraines. It was decided that he would stay home for a while, while his brothers left for Yeshiva.

With no Yeshiva, the young boy started looking for work in an effort to help his family. Eventually he became the "Zevulan" of sorts for the family, supporting and taking care of them. Keeping a steady job proved difficult though, as he wouldn't compromise on

The Lipskier Siblings in Poltava with their parents and children.
1–2: Leibel and Malka 3–4: Moshe and Luba Neimark 5: Yankel 6: Michoel 7: Motty 8–9: Sender and Eida Menkin 10: Elye 11: Menucha

the fact that he would not work on Shabbos. He went from trade to trade, but was never able to properly settle with one due to his religious needs. At one point he stayed the week at a factory in Charkov, only returning home for Shabbos. It was in Charkov that he served as Reb Itcheh Der Masmid's assistant for three months.

At the young age of 24, Yankel's older brother told him that it was simpler to find a job and still keep Shabbos in Kutais, Georgia, where he was currently living. Always the fighter, Yankel decided to travel to Kutais - 650 miles away.

Georgia had a long history of hosting the Jews, always with a friendly attitude. Even after the Soviet government occupied and took over the country in 1921, things were still easier for the Jews there. The Georgian people's un-industrialized mentality couldn't be further from the Russian agenda. Never fully accepting Russian rule, tension was always high and the government in power tried to

steer clear of them. Another benefit to the Jewish community was that the communist ideology never really captured the hearts of the Georgian youth. No Yevsektsiya was ever set up. Georgian Jews had much more religious freedom, though they were always careful not to push the envelope.

With the annexation of Georgia to the USSR, many Jews and Chassidim began relocating there, opening schools and Yeshivos.

Upon Yankel's arrival, a small branch of Tomchei Temimim with around 10 Russian Bochurim was already there. Unable to sit and learn himself, he decided to take them under his wing – tending to all their needs, even when the Yeshiva continued to expand.

Yankel settled in, getting a well-paid manager position at a local government owned textile factory. Never willing to break his commitment to keeping Shabbos, on Fridays he would go around with a pail of that held money covered by fabric, and gave it out to the foremen. The exact excuse varied from week to week, but suddenly the week's quota was completed and everybody was off till the next week. Perhaps there was suddenly a shortage of materials and they had to wait for next week's shipment. Sometimes, the pail had to make its way as far as the local police station to bribe a few officers there. Whatever the case, Yankel was finally able to keep Shabbos in peace.

This continued until one greedy woman thought she deserved a share of the pot too. Offended that she wasn't being bribed, she secretly began collecting material. One Friday, when she finally had a substantial amount, she spitefully pulled it out and said "I have yarn! We can work, no problem!"

Yankel, unfazed, said the factory would close regardless. This was all she needed, and she went to the local authorities to inform them of Yankel's wrongdoing. Undermining the communist ways was a serious crime, and Yankel got a summons to appear before a federal judge in Georgia's capital – Tbilisi.

The judge sat behind his ominous desk, a large stack of papers stating Yankel's misdemeanors in front of him. Yankel approached the judge, and subtly asked with a smile "how much would it cost to throw this pile into the fireplace behind you?"

A price was set and thus began the "ritual". Every so often someone – sometimes even non-religious employees, upset that they had less work days – would inform on Yankel's "illegal" operation, he'd make his appearance in court, pay the rising "fees," and return to Kutais where he was able to enjoy Shabbos.

The business was very successful, and Yankel used it as an opportunity to help others, giving jobs to widows and the downfallen.

Chapter Two: Marriage

Yankel was already 25 years old and began seriously looking into marriage prospects. All Yankel wanted was a Frum woman, someone that would be okay with upholding high standards of Kashrus, and as he put it "someone who never 'tasted' Chilul Shabbos in her life."

Yankel heard that in the town of Batum (Batumi), by the Black Sea, there was a Boyaner Chossid named Baruch Lepkivker who had pious daughters. Baruch was a Rav in a local Shul in Batum, as well as the Chazzan, Shochet and traveling Mohel.

Baruch and his wife Leah were known for their Yiras Shomayim and strict observance of Torah and Mitzvos. They refused to send their children to the local municipal school on Shabbos. While many young adults unfortunately left the Torah lifestyle due to raging Stalinism that was destroying Judaism at the time, they instilled in

their children a special reverence for Yiddishkeit. Subsequently the Lepkivkers would become famous as being from the few families from which all of their daughters covered their hair in Soviet Russia.

The family's religious devotion had consequences on the children as well.

Baruch received a summons to appear at the police station and his two oldest daughters went along with him. After hours of interrogation, Baruch appeared with a police officer on either side of him.

"They are arresting me, but go home and I will see you later", he said to his daughters. The girls created such a tumult of crying and bawling that people gathered at the window of the police station.

Three days later he was released. From then on, people called his daughters "Shabbatziveh" (Russian for the "one who keeps Shabbos") and giggled behind their backs, "Look, those are the girls who caused the tumult by the police station."

Baruch would always say "L'Koved Shabbos Kodesh" each time before he would eat on Shabbos. A few Bochurim eating at his house once snickered at this somewhat comical scene. Putting his spoon down and pointing to his five daughters, all of them Frum - quite a remarkable feat in Russia, he said "This comes from 'L'Koved Shabbos Kodesh.'"

Yankel traveled to Batum and asked Baruch if he could marry his oldest daughter.

On Lag B'Omer 5692/1932 Yankel got engaged to Taibel Lepkivker. A keen and intelligent woman, she was very learned and excelled in piety – a rare combination in those days. Their wedding date was to be decided at a later time. Yankel traveled back to Kutais, looking forward to his upcoming wedding.

Dreams have always fascinated people, Yankel's memoirs are peppered with them. This would be the first of many. It was early morning, a few months earlier, in the beginning of the month of Adar II 5692/1932. Yankel's father came to him in a dream and informed him that he had passed away and that he should wrap him in his Talis.

Yankel and Taibel around the time of their engagement

Yankel awoke with a panicked scream. His host ran in and asked if everything was alright, but he refused to say what happened. He tried to remain composed throughout the day, but at work in the factory that day his emotions got the better of him and he burst into tears. It was then that his friend that worked for him admitted to withholding a telegram that arrived that day for him. It bore the tragic news. Chaim Hirsh had passed away.

With nothing left in Poltava, Yankel's mother and siblings moved to be with him in Kutais, his mother moving in with him. With the family's arrival the wedding was postponed. During the year after his father's passing Yankel had many dreams about his father, yet the most important one was yet to come.

"דעם פערטן טאָג אין חודש שבט, שבת פאַרטאָג, איז מיין פאָטער צו מיר

געקומען אין חלום און האָט מיט מיר אָפּגעלערנט אַלע דינים וואָס אַ חתן דאַרף

וויסן. נאָכדעם האָט ער מיר געזאָגט אַז כאָטש ס'איז נישט צוגעגרייט, נאָר דינסטאָג זאָל זיין די חתונה. "דו וועסט זיך אויפכאַפּן וועסטו מיינען אַז ס'איז אַ חלום, גיב איך דיר אַ סימן, זאָלסט צוגיין צו דער מאַמען און דערציילן דעם חלום". און אַזוי איז געווען, און די מוטער ז"ל האָט געזאָגט אַז ס'איז אַ ריבטיגער חלום, און מיין חתונה איז געווען אין אַ גוטע שעה דעם זעלבן דינסטאָג. אונטער דער חופה האָב איך געזעהן מיין טאַטן שטיין לעבן מיר".

"On the fourth day of the month of Shevat, Shabbos at dawn, my father came to me in a dream and taught me all the laws that a Chassan must know. Afterwards he told me that although the wedding was not prepared, it should be the following Tuesday. "You will wake up. You will think it's a dream. So I'm giving you a sign. You should go to your mother and tell her the dream." And so it was, my mother said it was a true dream, and my wedding was in a good time that same Tuesday. Under the Chupa I saw my father standing next to me."

Yankel and Taibel got married in Kutais on 7 Shevat 5694/1934. Though he had previously not kept his beard due to concerns that

Circa 1933. R-L: Michoel, his wife Taibel, Bas-Sheva, Yankel

it would hinder Shidduchim prospects, he now began to grow his beard like a proud Lubavitcher Chossid.

During their 12 years living in Kutais, Yankel and Taibel had their first five children. In addition, a few years after their marriage Taibel's mother passed away, so she took in her little sister Freida who was a small child at the time. Eventually, the rest of her family moved to Kutais as well. Yankel helped them settle in and find jobs, some working for him and some elsewhere.

The Lipskier residence was open to all the Temimim learning in Kutais. Many students would later recount the graciousness of this loving couple and the warm Chassidic atmosphere that their home held. Farbrengens took place many times in their house, on Purim or the relatively new Yom Tov Yud Beis Tammuz. Yankel's factory had its ups and downs, but throughout it all their foremost concern was the Yeshiva.

Their house had a terrace around it and was built in a fashion that, although one could enter straight into the Lipskiers home through the lower entrance, to get to the kitchen you had to go through the landlord's house. Though this irked the landlord, as he thought he was renting to just a single family, and not a dozen students, he kept quiet about it and turned a blind eye. Even a high ranking officer who shared the courtyard with the Lipskiers held his tongue, as while talking to Yankel once, the officer discovered that he was ultimately Jewish.

Though they originally came to escape persecution, as time progressed the Soviets began to crack down and the Yeshivos had to go underground. Now completely illegal, it was a major risk to be in the Yeshiva. Many of the students opted to leave instead. The remaining students had to sleep in a different location every night, as it was illegal for them to even be in the city. Always there for the Bochurim, the Lipskier home became an oasis for these illegal refugees. Unable to Daven publicly in the Shul, the students would

make a Minyan on Shabbos at the Lipskiers. Many times, they hid there during routine government inspections.

Even the simplest knock on the door was a cause for fear. The Bochurim would scramble to hide, some under beds, and many times climbing onto the roof through the back and waiting out the inspection there. This took an emotional toll on the Lipskier children as well, constantly living in fear of the police.

Taibel herself would many times be stopped in the street, and asked why she was wearing a head covering. Each time it was a different excuse – perhaps a headache or injury.

The Lipskiers themselves were not completely legally living there, so their children couldn't be registered in school and needed to be homeschooled. Despite the inherent danger, when their children turned five they couldn't be homeschooled anymore. Two private Melamdim were hired: Reb Mendel taught them Hebrew studies and Reb Binyomin taught "worldly" subjects such as math and how to write.

Like his mother, Yankel would bake the Matza for his community in his own home. Covering every flat surface possible with fresh white sheets, a mini Matzah Bakery would take over the Lipskier home each year.

On top of all this, Yankel was still getting summonses from time to time due to his factory closing on Shabbos. Things reached a breaking point when they purposely made his court hearing on Friday. Tremendously irritated at this blatant attempt to separate him from his family for Shabbos, and perhaps even having to violate the sanctity of Shabbos itself, he vowed to be back before sundown.

He took a flight to Tbilisi, entered the now very familiar judge's chambers and listened to the judge read his offences. When finally asked what he had to say for himself, aggravated, Yankel pounded

his fist on the table and clearly stated: "I do not *work* on Shabbos. I never *worked* on *Shabbos*. And I never *will* work on Shabbos!"

Seeing this strong display of passion, the judge simply stamped the documents, told him he's acquitted and that he should go home for Shabbos. Yankel rushed to the airport and successfully made it back to spend his holy day with his loved ones.

Understanding the strains of dealing with soviet law, and how far a few dollars can go, Yankel spearheaded campaigns to help many of those in need. When Jacob Rosenberg from Poland, a young father of two small children, was arrested upon entry to Kutais due to his last name "making him sound like a spy". Yankel began collecting, borrowing and pawning jewelry from the community who barely had anything for themselves as it was. He managed to collect a substantial amount and bribed the local police to release Rosenberg – saving his life and that of his family. [His son later said that whenever he visits the Ohel he visits Yankel's gravesite as well to thank him.] Unfortunately, due to the corrupt and greedy officials in Kutais, this wasn't a one-time story.

Taibel also did her fair share of helping the lesser abled members of the community. If there was ever a poor bride who didn't have enough funds for her wedding, Taibel and her sister would get all dressed up. As the prestigious woman in the community she was, Taibel would collect a large sum of money from merely going door to door.

It was around that time that Bas-Sheva fell ill. Taibel was in her ninth month of pregnancy, so her youngest son Eliye took her to Leningrad to seek medical care. After an unsuccessful operation, she passed away and was buried there on 29 Adar I 5700/1940. Just two weeks later Yankel and Taibel had their first son after two daughters. The night before he dreamt that his mother appeared to him, and turning to his wife she said, "You will have a son. Name him after your mother's father. He has one of the nicest names."

Waking up disoriented, he turned to his wife and asked "What's your grandfather's name?"

"Avrahom" she replied.

And so it was, the child was named Avrahom Levi – Levi after Taibel's mother.

This wasn't the only dream connected to the birth of one of their children.

It was early on a Shabbos morning in Adar 5702/1942. Yankel was still sleeping. He began to dream, vivid dreams that transported him far away, to a place where a Jew could walk the streets without fear that every passing car was filled with secret police.

Yankel suddenly found himself standing on a broad, busy avenue, looking up at a red brick building crowned by three triangular peaks. The tops of the pointed roofs were white, and beckoned like points of light.

For some reason Yankel felt himself drawn to the building and he walked over. Standing on the threshold, he could hear people singing Chassidic Niggunim on the second floor. When he opened the door and walked inside, it felt as if he were being pulled by an unseen force. Making his way through an entrance hall, he quickly climbed a flight of stairs to the second story and walked down a short hallway. He saw a large room filled with dozens of Chassidim who were sitting and singing Chassidisheh Niggunim. Many he recognised as people who had immigrated to the United States.

Suddenly the room went silent. All eyes were on the doorway as a tall Bochur wheeled the Rebbe [Rayatz] into the room in a wheelchair.

Yankel himself had never seen the Rebbe. The Rebbe Rayatz left Russia in Tishrei of 5688/1927, and more than 14 years had

passed since then. But Yankel had no doubt that who it was. He was sure it was the Rebbe [Rayatz].

The Rebbe [Rayatz]'s chair was wheeled over to the table by a tall Bochur and the Farbrengen began. Suddenly, the Rebbe [Rayatz] turned to the side where Yankel was standing and said: " דו זאָלסט אויס'חזר'ן דעם מאמר והריקותי ברכה עד בלי די – You should make sure to Chazzer the Maamar 'Va'harikosi Lachem Bracha' "

As he heard these words he was suddenly jostled awake by Taibel. "Call a midwife! It's too late to go to the hospital!" A short time later their second son was born.

Due to the political climate, the Lipskiers would have Bochurim staying in a second room of their home all the time. On Shabbos mornings Yankel would usually wake them up to say Tehilim and learn Chassidus. This time he had all the more reason to, asking the knowledgeable students if any of them knew the Maamar of "Va'harikosi Lachem Bracha."

Unfortunately, none of them did. So much so, that they told Yankel that most Maamarim of our Rebbeim begin with a Possuk or saying of Chazal, and are based on previous Maamarim of Rebbeim before them. "For that reason alone your dream is peculiar, because there just aren't any Maamarim starting with those words – even from other Rebbeim." Not only that, after describing the dream to them and sparing no details, one of them – who had seen the Rebbe Rayatz in Leningrad a few years before – poured more cold water on the story. "You said that the Rebbe [Rayatz] was being wheeled in a wheelchair, and I don't remember him being that ill. Of course, the intervening years could have taken their toll. But the face you describe is that of an old man, and the Rebbe isn't that old! I don't believe that the person you saw in your dream is really the Rebbe."

Though slightly discouraged, he refused to give up hope. His dream had been so lifelike and vivid; he knew it had to be true.

Yankel still didn't have any children named after his father, but due to his dream, eight days later Yankel named his newborn son "Sholom Dovber" after the Rebbe [Rayatz]'s Father. [The name Chaim was added about a year later during a medical crisis].

Yankel would later say that it ended up being a year of "Va'harikosi Lachem Bracha."

Chapter Three:
Travel

Although World War II raged throughout most of the civilized world, the Lipskiers and all those in Georgia were scarcely affected. News of what was going on would trickle in once in a while, but the grand catastrophe and devastation happening throughout Europe was barely known to them. Kutais served as a haven, its people lived out the years of the war quite peacefully. The Germans would never make it over the Caucasus Mountains, though escape plans were made in case of an emergency.

Every night after Kriyas Shema, right before going to sleep, the Lipskier children would say a small prayer of hope that "דער אויבערשטער זאָל געבן מיר זאָלן זיך זען מיטן רבי'ן – Hashem should help us that we should see the Rebbe." Where this fierce love for the Rebbe came is unknown – neither Yankel or Taibel ever met him. The passion and yearning was there, however. Yankel's children recall creeping out of bed late at night and seeing their father Farbrenging with his Chassidim, sobbing "Rebbe...Rebbe..." This instilled in the entire family an intense desire to travel to the Rebbe. Practically this was only wishful thinking, and not something anybody ever dreamed could come true while living under Russian

Regime. With reports of Polish citizens being allowed to exit Russia, in 5706/1945 Yankel and his wife decided to attempt making this fantasy come true.

That year, on Shmini Atzeres, Yankel took a cup of L'Chaim, and turned to the participants in the pre-Hakofos Farbrengen.

"איך וויל בעטן אַ ברכה און איר זאָלט ענטפערן: דער אויבערשטער זאל העלפן און דער רבי זאל זיין געזונט און מיר זאלן זיך זעהן מיט און זיין ביי אים אַ שמש אויפ'ן טיר"

"I want to ask for a Bracha and you should answer: The Aibishter should help that the Rebbe [Rayatz] should be Gezunt and we may see and [if need be] be by him to serve him by his door"

The group of men answered with a resounding "Amen!" and that night Yankel danced Hakofos with the fervent hope that next year he should already be in 770.

After a few months of making the necessary preparations it was finally time to go. Motzei Shabbos, the Lipskiers hosted a farewell Melava Malka for themselves. Though it was devastating in a sense to lose these pillars of the community of so many years, the people were elated that this special family was finally trying to do what they all only dreamt of. During the spirited festivities, a group of Kohanim gave them Birchas Kohanim as they were about to embark on a most treacherous journey.

Early Sunday morning the Lipskiers collected their belongings, and passports in hand left the city which graciously sheltered them for over fifteen years in the direst of times.

Their final stop before getting out of the USSR was L'vov (Lemberg). Getting there proved much more simple than expected, but their four weeks there were very hard. Finally they managed to purchase Polish passports to get them across the border.

With all their luggage, the Lipskiers boarded a packed cattle car that would take them over the border. Though trying not to let their keen children pick up on it, Yankel and Taibel were terrified. Like many Chassidim at the time, they used the repatriation of the Poles from Russia to finally get out of the cursed country – the only issue being that though they held Polish passports, their origins were clearly not from Poland, not even speaking one word of the language. Their successful departure was nothing short of a miracle.

Shortly before arriving at the border, the legitimate Poles in their cart began pulling out exquisite soft quilt blankets and stunning toy dolls. Giving them to the Lipskier children who were sitting on the floor to play with a wink. Upon arriving at the border they did all the talking for all those in their cart and after a quick search through their possessions were allowed to continue past the border. Immediately all the blankets and toys were collected, in which this rich Polish family had hid gold coins and diamonds. Their silence and help was bought, due to the Lipskier children unassumingly helping them smuggle their fortune across the border.

Their first destination was Kraków. Things didn't get better there though. With his long beard making him visibly Jewish the native Anti-Semitic Poles would shout "Żydka do Palestyny! – Jews to Palestine!"

It wasn't like the local Jews made it any easier. Harassing Yankel about his beard, they began waving money in his face saying, "Here! Take this and get a shave!"

"I didn't leave Russia for this!" Yankel sternly replied, "There we went with beards and we will continue to go with beards!"

Yankel didn't want to stay in Kraków. He sent a telegram to the Rebbe Rayatz in New York and got an answer to travel. They promptly picked up and moved to Łódź, arriving on a Monday at 66

Zachodnia Street – a Shul that had a kitchen. An acquaintance from Kutais by the name of Hirsh Kirshentzveig was aware that they would be coming and arranged lodging for them, which they were able to move into as soon as Friday.

Łódź was a beacon to refugees of the war. More than 50,000 Jews migrated there shortly before the Lipskiers' arrival, making it the second to largest Jewish community in Poland – but also was rampant with intense poverty. It took time for the Lipskiers to adjust. This was something they were not used to and needed to adapt. The Rav of Łódź, Rabbi Abram Krawiec tried to help accommodate them.

Being a Russian citizen in Poland was difficult at the time. Unable to request typical aid, Yankel approached two representatives from The Joint (JDC) that were in Łódź and explained to them his predicament. Because he was a Lubavitcher Chossid they said they would call 770 the next day and try to get in touch with someone that can help them.

A few stressful days passed until Yankel finally got the call. He was told to send a letter to an address in Warsaw and they would begin to receive 250,000 Zlotys a month [equivalent to about $8000 today].

Life in Łódź was still challenging. The Lipskiers yearned to be able to move on, but the days and weeks passed by. Soon, six months had passed and the Lipskiers had nor foreseeable destination in sight.

A few times a week Yankel would go to the numerous offices to register for various things and to find out if any papers or visas arrived. Taibel would always accompany him, leaving the children alone at home, in fear that he may get arrested and she would have no idea where he was taken.

Relations between non-Jewish Poles and Jews were already strained before the war, as Anti-Semitic propaganda was spread by members of parliament and clergy, who were constantly encouraging and trying to drive the Jews out of their country.

In Kielce, one polish man decided to aid his country by hiding his son and pretending that he was kidnapped by a Jew. The volunteer city guards broke into the alleged perpetrator's home. A gun was fired and the violence began. So began the Kielce pogrom, a day full of rampage killing and bloodshed. The news terrified Polish Jewry.

The breaking point was about a week later. Yankel sat in Shul with the local Chassidim Farbrenging on Yud Beis Tammuz. Across town a young couple was having a wedding. Suddenly a messenger burst in, shouting that it was unsafe to remain in a Jewish Shul. Quickly returning home they were treated to the sound of gunshots the whole night. Yankel and his family stood the entire time saying Tehillim, and thank G-d the night passed without anybody getting hurt.

The Lipskiers moved to Katowice, but living there wasn't any less frightening, so they swiftly moved on to Prague. After living in Prague for a few weeks they finally left Poland for Austria, arriving in Vienna – the city of music and song – only two days before Rosh HaShana. The influx of refugees in Vienna forced the Lipskiers to live in large, post-war, vacant army barracks. Immediately they sent a telegram to the Rebbe Rayatz asking if they should remain there or continue on. The reply came right after Yom Tov: Travel to Paris.

Soon afterwards, a telegram arrived from the Rebbe. [It is unclear when the relationship between the Rebbe and Yankel began, but it seems they had been already writing to each other for a period of time.] The telegram asked if perhaps Yankel knew the whereabouts of his mother – Rebbetzin Chana. The Rebbe had been searching for a means of contacting his mother, his efforts

had been unsuccessful due to the fact that he didn't know under which last name she was traveling. Coincidentally, Yankel had spotted writing on the wall in their barrack, with a message about Rebbetzin Chana traveling to Pocking. He immediately sent this crucial information to the Rebbe, who in turn began researching a potential contact there.

[In the beginning of Cheshvan the Rebbe got in touch with Rabbi Sholom Mendel Kalmanson, Pocking's communications director stationed by the Rebbe Rayatz in Prague, who finally put him in touch with his mother. The Rebbe immediately began working on getting her a visa.]

The festive month of Tishrei was celebrated with an extra euphoric feeling. Finally, a glimmer of hope after a most troublesome year.

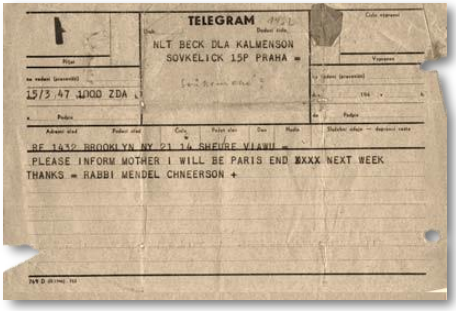
Immediately after Sukkos, the Lipskiers set out, arriving in Paris by train in the beginning of Cheshvan 5707/1946. This was a commendable feat, as extremely few families actually got a visa to travel from France. The amount of Anash that had accomplished this at the time could be counted on one hand. Only in the spring of that year would there finally be the mass exodus of Chassidim to France. This made Yankel one of the main Chassidim there at the time, helping the arriving Chassidim and serving in various roles for the community.

Their home was on the fourth floor of a double building on Rue des Rosiers – a street at the center of the Jewish quarter unofficially called "the Pletzl". This neighborhood's narrow streets had celebrated Jewish tradition since the thirteenth century, and had the honor of the Rebbe Maharash, Rashab, Rayatz and our Rebbe laying their holy feet on its cobblestone ground.

Meanwhile in the US, the Rebbe had finally managed to get a visa for his mother to France – and hopefully from there – to America. In Adar, Rebbetzin Chana arrived in Paris and stayed with

her relative Schneur Zalman Schneerson, in an apartment on the third floor.

The Rebbe promptly began planning his trip to finally be reunited with his mother. He hadn't seen her since he departed Russia at the end of Tishrei in 5688/1928, nearly 20 years before.


TELEGRAM

NLT BECK DLA KALMENSON
SOVKELICK 15P PRAHA =

15/3 47 1000 ZDA

RF 1432 BROOKLYN NY 21 14 SHEVRE VIAHU =
PLEASE INFORM MOTHER I WILL BE PARIS END XXXX NEXT WEEK
THANKS = RABBI MENDEL CHNEERSON +

Telegram from the Rebbe about his trip

The Rebbe booked a flight from New York to France for Monday night, the 25th of Adar, set to arrive the next afternoon in Paris.

Tuesday was an exciting day for the Chassidim in Paris – the Rebbe's son-in-law would be arriving! Many of Anash had never even seen the Rebbe Rayatz and a welcoming celebration was planned to take place at the residence where Rebbetzin Chana was staying. A phone call was placed to the airport to find out when the plane would be landing as a delegation was to be sent to greet him, as is befitting for a guest of his stature. However, the staff at the airport reported that the flight had been delayed two hours.

As the Chassidim began planning how and who would be going to the airport, a telegram arrived from the Rebbe Rayatz addressed to the "RaMaSh" as he was called at the time: "Boruch Ata B'Voecha! – Blessed shall you be on your arrival!"

Yankel piped up, saying that if such a telegram came from the Rebbe Rayatz there was no delay and the Rebbe was already in France. Before the small debate even ended about if they should go to the airport or wait, the door suddenly opened and there stood

a striking individual whose poise expressed both dignity and grace – the Rebbe.

The room suddenly fell silent, the embarrassment the Chassidim felt that they hadn't come pick him up from the airport – not even helping with his bags! – was quite apparent. Easing the tension, the Rebbe smiled and said, "I won't return to the airport just so you can pick me up"

Due to the miscommunication the Rebbetzin had stepped out and the Rebbe in turn went to the local Shul to Daven. When she returned, the Rebbe was taken to his mother. For the first minute they just stared at each other in silence, after which someone escorted them into a private room, where the two spent some fifteen minutes together after not seeing one another in just shy of two decades.

When the Rebbe and Rebbetzin Chana emerged, the Chassidim sat down for a Farbrengen. When speaking about Yosef being separated from his father for 22, the Rebbe got quite emotional.

Farbrengen upon the Rebbe's arrival to Paris

The Rebbe would live in France for just over three months to arrange an American Visa for his mother. During his stay he asked Yankel – whom he finally had gotten to meet in the flesh – if his wife would be willing to take care of his meals, and the Lipskiers happily accepted the honor.

For the very first meal Taibel made her famous blintzes, but when the Rebbe received it he said with a smile, "ניט אויף אַזאַ געריכט האָב איך געמיינט! – I didn't mean you should make such a fancy course!"

The Rebbe asked for his meals to consist of fish – once explaining that in Seforim it states that the Neshomos of Tzaddikim are reincarnated in fish. For a certain amount of time no fish was available at the local market, and when Yankel asked the Rebbe for an alternative, he simply replied "What's wrong with herring? You can fry herring". [Yankel would later say how amazed he was that the Rebbe would eat such a malodorous dish.]

The Rebbe didn't have any meat during his three months in Paris. The Rebbe also requested that Yankel buy bread at a particular bakery that he had done research on its Halachic standards. Once, Yankel noticed that the hardboiled egg he had brought the day before remained uneaten. Worried that perhaps he shouldn't bring one again, he asked the Rebbe. The Rebbe simply said "I don't eat cracked eggs" and left it at that.

Each day, Yankel was to bring the food his wife Taibel would prepare to Hotel Edouard VII, an upscale hotel in the Opera Square. [Someone once came to visit the Rebbe in his hotel and wasn't allowed entry since he wasn't wearing a tie.] Sometimes he would walk over with one of his children as well. At five to eleven, the Rebbe would unlock his door for Yankel and leave it open for for a few mintues. If Yankel was late, the Rebbe would've already locked the door and moved on to other.

Once, although Yankel was punctual, the Rebbe took a little bit to open the door, for which he apologized when he finally did. "It was nothing" said Yankel with a wave of the hand, "it was only a minute after all."

"How could a minute be "nothing" to a Yungerman?" asked the Rebbe sternly.

At the time, hundreds of Jews were ending up in DP camps throughout Europe, and the Rebbe Rayatz sent his son-in-law Rabbi Shmaryahu Gourary (the Rashag) as he was commonly known) to visit Europe and check on the state of the Chassidim. During his short stint in France the Lipskiers prepared his food as well. Rabbi Gourary told Yankel about a letter the Rebbe Rayatz sent him, asking that he take care of his health and eat properly.

The Rebbe too would eat very little, and on some days Yankel noticed the Rebbe wouldn't eat at all. Though usually one to mind his own business when it came to Beis HaRav, Yankel brought this letter up to the Rebbe. The Rebbe's response was: He didn't write to me!

Yankel would also do errands for the Rebbe. After a very busy Friday afternoon once, Yankel realized he forgot to give the Rebbe his change from a purchase. The entire Shabbos it bugged him and immediately upon Shabbos's conclusion, he went over to the Rebbe's hotel to return the money. Handing the Rebbe the stack of bills, unsystematic and disorganized. The Rebbe seemed displeased, "געלט דאַרף מען האַלטן גלייך – Money has to be kept orderly". The Rebbe also mentioned that we usually try not to settle debts on Motzei Shabbos.

Some individuals scoffed at Yankel's commitment to "the Rebbe's son-in-law". But Yankel shot back aggressively; "Shotim (imbeciles)! I would crawl all the way from Kutais to Paris serve the Rebbe's son!"

Yankel would use his visits as an opportunity to ask the Rebbe questions. On one of these visits, he arrived when the Rebbe was on the phone with Monsieur Chouchani, a brilliant yet enigmatic man living in Paris at the time. A phenomenal philosopher, Chouchani was also proficient in science, mathematics, physics, the history of philosophy, world religions, languages, literature and especially Talmud and Kabbala. He became close to the Rebbe during the period the Rebbe was in Paris, and they were often seen discussing and debating on various subjects. Soon after the Rebbe's departure he would go into a short stint of teaching, mentoring a number of distinguished students such as philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, Rabbi Yehuda Léon Askénazi and Elie Wiesel.

Though the Rebbe was in the middle of an intense and deep conversation, in his renowned sensitivity and perceptiveness he noticed that Yankel had something on his mind that he wanted to ask. While Chouchani was speaking, the Rebbe told Yankel that he could ask whatever he'd like while he was replying to Chouchani and he'd listen to Yankel while Chouchani spoke. And so it was, to Yankel's astonishment the Rebbe had two conversations simultaneously; one of them being extremely deep and complicated. Though it was usual for the Rebbe to be on the phone, writing, and giving Yankel instructions at the same time – and as amazing as that itself was – this for Yankel was a whole new level.

[A little over 10 years later Rabbi Binyomin Klein was in Montevideo, Uruguay on Merkos Shlichus with Rabbi Pesach Bogomilsky. Upon hearing that an acclaimed genius that knew the Rebbe in France now resided there, they set out to find him. They finally found Chouchani wearing tattered clothes sitting in a Shul, and they told him they were Chabad Chassidim.

"Do you know the Rebbe?" Chouchani asked.

"Yes," they answered, "we see him every day"

"You see him, but you don't know him" was the curt reply.

He then requested that they ask the Rebbe on his behalf to send him a Talis and a set of Shas. Upon returning to New York and reporting this to the Rebbe, he arranged for Chouchani's request to be fulfilled. He was later buried in this Talis.]

It was also at this time that Yankel finally mustered the courage to ask the Rebbe something that never ceased to burden him – the Maamer "Va'harikosi Lachem Bracha".

Upon his arrival in France he had asked some of the knowledgeable Chassidim there about the Maamer. Zalman Schneerson even joked that perhaps he meant the Niggun and began playfully humming it. Now that the Rebbe [Rayatz]'s son-in-law was here – who better would know if such a Maamer existed.

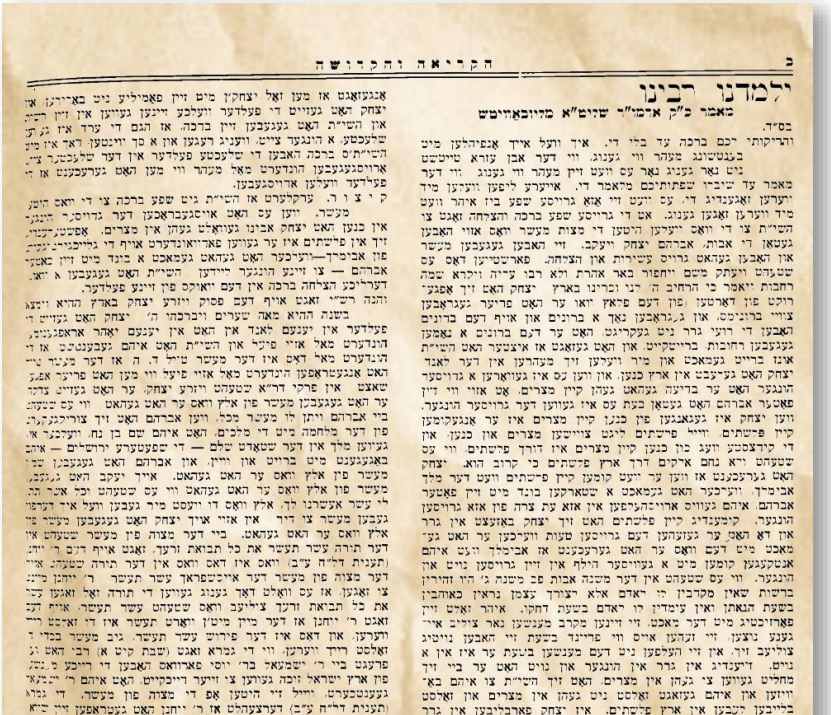
The Rebbe was very surprised by the question. "צוליב וואָס דאַרפסטו וויסען? - Why do you need to know?"

Yankel was evasive, not really wishing to repeat his strange dream to the Rebbe. But the Rebbe was persistent, and it just poured out.

The Rebbe was staring at Yankel so intently it felt as if he too were participating in the dream. When he finished his recitation, the Rebbe asked him when the dream happened and to repeat it again. He then asked if at the time, Chassidim in Kutais knew that the Rebbe Rayatz was in a wheelchair. Yankel replied in the negative.

The Rebbe asked a few more questions about the various details Yankel had seen.

Then, without saying anything, the Rebbe walked over to a corner of the room and opened a small suitcase. He took out a yellowing publication and handed it to Yankel. It was a copy of HaKriya VehaKedusha dated Teives 5703/1942, in which the Rebbe Rayatz's Maamer "Va'harikosi Lachem Bracha " was printed.



ילמדנו רבינו

מאמר כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א מיובאחיטש

בס"ד.

והריקותי רכם ברכה עד בלי די. איך ועל איך אנשהלען מיט בעגעטונג מעהר ווי גענוג, ווי דער אבן עזרא שרייבט מאמר עד שיברו שפתותיכם מאמר די. אייערע ליפען זאלען זיין ווערען ווארעמגעדיג די. עס זיינען זיי אלא גרויסע שפע ביז איהר וועט מיד ווערען זאגען גענוג. אז די גרויסע שפע ברכה והצלחה זאגט צו השי"ת צו די וואס זיינען היטען די מצות מעשה האט אזוי האבען געטאן די אבות, אברהם יצחק ויעקב. זיי האבען געגעבען מעשר און האבען געהאט גרויס עשירות אין הצלחה. פארשטיינען דאס עס שטעהט ויעקב משם יחפוץ באר אחרת וכא רבי עייה ויכבה שמה רחבות יאמר כי הרחיב ה' רני וכרינו בארץ יצחק האט זיך אפגעריקט פון דאר טען (פון דעם פראץ יאו אר האט פריער געגראבען צוויי ברונים, און גערגאבען נאך א ברונים און איזיף דעם ברונים האבען די רועי גרר ניט געקריגט, האט עס דעם ברונים א שמאנן געגעבען רחובות ברייטקייט, אין האט געזאגט אז איצטער האט השי"ת אונז ברייט גמאכט פון מיר וועלען זיך מפרהען אין דער אלנד יצחק האט געגעבן אין ארץ כנען, און דען קיין פלשתים אין גרויסער הונגער קיין אר ברייטן געזאגט געהן קיין מצרים. אז אזוי ווי זיין פאטער אברהם האט געזאגן בעת עס איז געווען דער גרויסער הונגער, ווען יצחק איז געגאנגען פון כנען קיין מצרים איז ער אנגעקומען קיין פלשתים, ווייל פלשתים ליגט צווישען מצרים און כנען, אין דיר בצמצום וועט כון כנען קיין מצרים איז דורך פלשתים, ווי עס שטעהט ויא נתם אליהם דרך ארץ פלשתים כי קרוב הוא. יצחק האט גערעכענט אז ווען ער וועט קומען קיין פ"שתים וועט דער מלך אבימלך, וועלכער האט געפאהרען א שטארקען בוזד מיט זיך פאשער אברהם איהם געוויס אריינהערפען אין אזא עת צרה פון אזא גרויסען הונגער. קומענדיג קיין פלשתים האט זיך יצחק באדעצט אין גרר אין דא האט ער געזעהען דעם גרויסען טעות וועלכען ער האט געמאכט מיט דעם וואס ער האט גערעכענט אז אבימלך וועט איהם אנטקעגען קומען מיט א גרויסער הילף אין זיין גרויסען נויט אין הונגער. ווי עס שטעהט אין דער משנה אבות פ' משנה ג' הי' זהירין ברשות שאין מקרבין לו ראדם אלא ציורך עצמו נראין כאוהבין בשעת הנאתו ואין עומדין לו ראדם בשעת דחקו. איהר זאגט זיין פארזיכטיג מיט דער מאכט, זיי זיינען מקרב מעגשען נאר צוליב איר גענע נעצען. ווי זעהען איהם ווי פרייבט בשעת זיין האבען נויטיג צוליב זיך, אין זיי העלפען נוין דעם מעגשען בשעת עס איז אין א נויט. דיענדיג אין גרר אין הונגער אין נוים האט עס ער ביז זיך מחליט געווען צי גהען מצרים, האט זיך השי"ת צו איהם באר וויזען אין איהם בעזאגט ואל"ס ניט גהען מצרים אין ואל"ס בלייבען בעזאגט אין ארץ פלשתים. אין יצחק פארבליבען אין גרר און האט זעהר פיעל געוויסען פון די איינוואינער בי דער מלך האט

אין דאס אידיינע פאיק האן געווען אמת יעלכסטשטענדיג, פריי אין גייסטיג.

אז דאס אין דער אמת'ער חשבון הנפש בצביר, דער חשבון האמה. יואל מיר דארפען אינגעראיינען הייר"אדיגען מבת אין דעם יאהרציטאג פון אונזער חיבון. אזוי לאנג ווי איך וזכרו דעם נאצ"אנאלען „פקוד" אנשטאט דעם צווייטען דיגען „פקוד יפקוד" פון דעם נאצ"אנאלען דרעטיגען לבבנו. מעהרען מיר דיידען חבר' משיח מיט אדער אן דערקלאראציע. מעגען אידיש אנשטעהנדיג קריגען דעם צוזאג פאר וויצען ביים שיום"טים ביי שטוטשטחר"ס דערסטער האנד. אין אזוי לאנג ווי זי הייגע אידען וועלען גיט א טראכט גיבען ערענטש ווערגען דעם „לאחר תשובה" רוף. מעהרען זי אפילו ניט זיין פאראיינ פאר דעם „לאחר גאולה", ווערלכער קומט איהר"ש גאר בקרוב אין ניט צוזייטיג דער אידיזער ערלאזונג אויף דעם אפילו ניט צוזייטיג זאגר בעזאגט בספר אין דער מעגליכקייט דערפון נור יחיד ס'איז ב"ה דער „בעתה" ווען די גאו"ל דארף קומען סי' איז סי' ד' הינטערגיגן טבת האיט עס שיין ב"ה ביי דעם אידיזען „לך דל" אויף צוריק פון גיות צוריק צו ארץ ישראל פון חרבן צו נחמה. אין אן ערנסטער חשבון הנפש ווען עדען אידען איבערצוגיגען אז דער ניט"גריינען אין רוף „לאחר תשובה — לאחר לגאולה" אין טבת התש"ג איז אפשר פחדקט אזוי ווענינ בארעמטיגט ווי דער ניט' גליינען אין דער ווארנונג „לאחר לחרבן" פון טבת ג' שי"ל. מיט 2367 יאהר צוריק!

„אפשר" פאר דיי לייגרעשע אינניקלאך כון די אמאהליגע צווייי פלער. פאר אונז איז דאס א זעקרהיים!

דו יואס גליובען אין דער גאולה דורך „פקוד יפקוד" האבען שוין דעם חשבון גמאכט אין ער שטימט ב"ה אפשטעגדיג.

The Maamer "Va'harikosi Lachem Bracha" as was originally printed in HaKriya VehaKedusha

"ס'איז ביי מיר אַ פלא – it's fascinating by me" said the Rebbe, "דער מאמר איז ערשט געווען און איר האָט שוין פון עם געוואוסט! - The Maamer had just been [printed] and you were already aware of it!"

The Rebbe gave it to him, "דו זאָלסט גוט אויסלערנען און צוריק געבן – learn it well and and give it back [to me]" he said. [The Maamer is printed today in Sefer HaMaamorim Yiddish page 92.] Yankel returned home in seventh heaven. Finally, a satisfying close to this concerning tale, especially after years of harassment and snickering from people he asked for help.

Another time Yankel told the Rebbe about a dream he had where his father took him to see how the world would look when Moshiach will come – as well as giving Yankel three signs of when Moshiach's arrival will be. [In his later years Yankel only remember two of them.] Again, the Rebbe was intrigued and asked him to repeat the dream again.

As Pesach approached, the Rebbe relied on Yankel for his uncompromising Kashrus standards. Kosher wine was a rarity in France at the time, how much more so Kosher L'Pesach wine. Reb Zalman Butman – a Chossid in France at the time – used a method of making wine from raisins, as grapes were hard to come by and offered some to the Rebbe – but the Rebbe declined. The Rebbe went to Yankel and asked that he personally make the wine, specifying "נישט פון ראָזשינקעס – not from raisins". The Rebbe told

Yankel about a certain retailer who sold grapes – albeit very expensive, and it was with those grapes that Yankel made the wine that the Rebbe used for the Daled Kosos and Kiddush over Yom Tov.

The Rebbe was to have the Sedarim with his mother at the Schneerson home. As not to offend them, the Rebbe asked Yankel to buy brand new dishes (and Toivel them himself) and casually gift

אין דעם יאָר פון אבלות, איין פרייטאָג צו נאַכט, האָט מיר דער פאָטער ז"ל געזאָגט אין אַ חלום, "קום מיט מיר וועל איך דיר ווייזן ווי עס וועט זיין ווען משיח וועט קומען". און ער האָט מיר גענומען פאַרן האַנט און מיר זיינען געגאַנגען, און עס איז געווען אַזאַ פינצטערניש אַז איך האָב דאָס אין מיין לעבן נישט געזען. שפּעטער האָט זיך גענומען אויפהויבן אַזוי ווי אַ פאָרהאַנג, און עס האָט גענומען ווערן ליכטיג און מיר זיינען אַלע געגאַנגען און ער האָט אַלץ געזאָגט אַז אַזוי וועט זיך דערנענטערן צו דער ליכטיקייט. איך האָב געזען אַ גרויסע עדה אידן איינגעוויקלט אין קיטלעך און די טליתים, און זיי האָבן געזונגען "קול רנה וישועה". און מיט די ווערטער האָב איך זיך אויפגעכאַפּט, און איך האָב נאָך אַזאַ ליכטיקייט ניט געזען.

(From Yankel's Memoirs)

them to his hosts, thereby making sure there was no question of the Rebbe's Halachic standards being upheld.

From time to time during his stay the Rebbe Farbrenged for the members of the community. Once he spoke about the importance of living by the Rebbe, something which due to financial woes and much legal red tape seemed impossible for the average Chossid in Paris at the time. When Yankel was bringing the Rebbe one of his meals a short time later the Rebbe asked, "Yankel, why don't you Takkeh move near the Rebbe [Rayatz]?"

"A Chossid cannot just pick up and move!" replied Yankel, "I would need to get the Rebbe [Rayatz]'s permission!"

"Such things you don't need to ask!" said the Rebbe, "You just go! A Chossid must live and be by his Rebbe."

[Years later, when certain individuals heard this story, they tried to act upon its lesson – but the Rebbe forcefully told them that they must ask about such things, for now he sees things differently.]

Yankel also introduced the Rebbe to a cousin of his that lived in Paris. Shortly after his arrival, Yankel was fundraising money at a woman named Edmée's home, where he complimented her on the elaborate chandelier in her home.

"My grandfather made it" she replied plainly, "he was a great Chassidic Rebbe, Rebbi Shmuel of Lubavitch. He made a few of the artifacts in my home."

Yankel nearly choked – she was referring to the Rebbe Maharash – who was famously ordered by doctors to engage in handicrafts due to his health condition. How did these precious items end up in France?

The Rebbe Maharash's son, Reb Menachem Mendel, was a businessman in Russia. After a few foul deals, he had to leave the country settling in Corsica, a mountainous Mediterranean island in the French region. Every year or so he would return to Russia to visit his family with false papers, and it was perhaps during these visits that he imported these prized possessions.

Being an avid craftsperson himself Yankel was extremely intrigued and when the Rebbe arrived in Paris a few months later, he made the introduction between the two. She would later give the Rebbe family photos as well as a Megilas Esther written by the Rebbe Maharash himself, both of which were featured in his biography the Rebbe made, published just two weeks after his return to the states.

Toward the end of his stay in Paris, the Rebbe offered Yankel a tip of 5,000 Francs as a thanks for his services, but Yankel was aghast. He refused to take the money.

"If I had known that you wouldn't accept payment," said the Rebbe, "I never would have troubled you so much."

"If I had known that you intended to pay me," Yankel replied, "I never would have agreed to be your Shamash."

In the end a compromise was reached: Yankel would accept the money, but give it to Maamed together with his wife. The Rebbe also gifted her with a bound edition of Likkutei Dibburim.

A departure celebration was made for Rebbetzin Chana in Beis Rivka shortly before her trip, Yankel's oldest daughter, 13-year-old Tzivia, greeted Rebbetzin Chana with flowers and a small speech, as they were from the few families in France that spoke Yiddish.

On 22 Sivan the Rebbe and his mother boarded a ship [due to her fear of flying] en route New York, arriving there six days later on 28 Sivan 5707/1947. During his visit he had gone to the boys school and tested the students, and upon returning to New York sent a package of Siddurim as prizes for the students that excelled – Yankel's son Berel included. The Rebbe asked that a stamp he had asked Yankel to make stating "A Gift from Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch and Machene [Yisroel]" should be used in all the Sefarim he sent as prizes.

The Rebbe kept in touch with Yankel, asking him to be updated on the going ons in Paris.

B"H, 18 Menachem Av 5707 [1947]

כבוד הו״ח א״א נו״מ וכו׳ מהור״י ש״י ליפסקער

Sholom U'Brcha!

In response to your letter:

I inquired whether your letter to my father-in-law the Rebbe Shlita was received, and apparently it didn't arrive here yet.

What happened at the end by your visit to the consul?

I'm sure that the stamp "A Gift from Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch and Machene [Yisroel]" has long been made, and it is best to send it to Reb Zalman ״ש״ Butman

I'm certain you will inform me about what is happening in particular about Beis Rivka and with Anash in general.

Wishing you all the best,
Rabbi Menachem Schneerson
Chairman of the Executive Committee

While in Paris the Rebbe had begun an initiative to reprint the Seforim of the Alter and Mitteler Rebbe with the help of a Chossid that was visiting at the time from Pocking, Reb Dovid Brafman. After the war, an opportunity arose to print large quantities of books at a low-cost in Germany. The country, rich in advanced technological equipment, remained battered and economically devastated after the war. The value of the German mark was very low and in view of the high demand for labor and low wages, prices were reduced tremendously. Thus an opportunity was found to produce high quality things at a low cost. The Rebbe decided to take the opportunity to reprint many of the Sefarim that were out of print, such as the Tanya and Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe, which was not readily available in the United States at the time.

As part of this effort, original copies of these Seforim needed to be found in Europe. A complication to this effort was that many Seforim were missing the title page with their unique designs, something essential for the Sefer which the Rebbe would not forgo.

Letters were sent out to heads of various communities asking for help in tracking down some of these Seforim. Yitzchok Goldin was a Chossid stationed in France to help with the relief movement for Lubavitcher Chassidim and tried his best to help:

"על דבר הינר מצוה ותורה אור' ב' שבועות מקודם שלח ר' יעקב ליפסקער על ידי ציר לאשכנז, ופה לעת עתה אין מן הנמצא"

"About the "Ner Mitzvah" [From the Mitteler Rebbe], Reb Yankel Lipskier already sent it two weeks ago to Germany via carrier, and there is nothing else here for the time being"

During this time, Rebbe Rayatz opened a European Branch of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, appointing Yankel to be one of its core members, sending the following official letter:

B"H 25 Tammuz 5707 [1947]
Brooklyn

To the board of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch

Sholom U'Bracha!

I hereby approve the establishment of a new committee under the Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch in Europe to work on: A) Arranging Beis Rivka and Beis Sara girl schools under its administration, obtaining financial support and getting rid of past debts B) Obtaining the financial means necessary for the printing of Seforim published in Europe by Merkos and Kehot.

To be the members of the above-mentioned committee, I appoint these men:

Zalman Katzenelenbogen, Chaikel Chanin, Yehoshua Pinson, Yaakov Lipskier, Yisroel Leibov, Nochum Zalman Gurevich, and Naftali Gloskin.

The authority is given to the above-mentioned committee to annex members who they find necessary for their work and any names of the new members they should report to our branch here.

B'Bracha

The Rebbe Rayatz sent a personal letter as well:

B"H 25 Tammuz 5707 [1947]
Brooklyn

The committee for Beis Rivka schools and for printing needs in Europe, via Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch

Sholom U'Bracha!

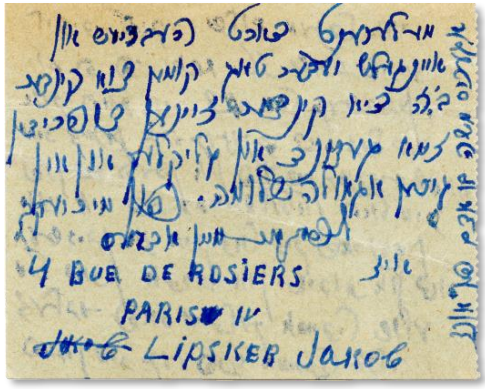
After informing Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch about my approval of your committee and the appointment of its members, I appeal to you to strengthen and strive with the help of Hashem in your

sacred and most important work and to engage in it vigorously and happily without admiring any obstacles.

Hashem will reward you in your work and bless you and all who help you physically and spiritually.

Blessing you,
[Signature]

Yankel held the position of secretary. One of the new organization's primary roles was to further establish the first Lubavitch Girls school in France – Beis Rivka. The Rebbe had a hand in its institution during his visit as well. Yankel took care of its financial needs together with Rabbi Zalman Kazen[elenbogen]. The caring individual he was, he also dedicated himself to helping refugees and people trying to find their lost family members.


4 RUE DE ROSIERS
PARIS IV
LIPSKER Jakob

Letter from Yankel while in Paris

Thursday of Parshas Yisro, 16 Shevat [5708/1948], Paris
To my good friend Sholom Mendel [Kalmonson],

I have written to you twice, we are well Boruch Hashem, the same from you and your whole family.

Since the Rebbe [Rayatz] Shlita wrote to me that I should be busy making schools and Yeshivos and the same for girls, as we have opened here a girl's school.

They learn Hebrew and English, the children come every day, and Boruch Hashem the children are happy.

May you be healthy and happy and very soon may we have the Geulah Shleima.

From Yaakov Lipskier,
My address is 4 RUE DE ROSIERS PARIS IV – LIPSKER JAKOB

* * *

B"H, Tuesday of Parshas Teruma, [28 Shevat, 5708/1948] Paris
To my good friend Sholom Mendel [Kalmonson],

I received your letter today about what you are writing about your father, but nothing has changed. Until R' Binyamin [Goredetzky] will arrive I have no answer for you.

Zeligson went to Austria today, I wanted to show him your letter, but I couldn't find it. I think you should write to him in Vienna and in other cities in Austria. Two days ago two brothers named Karik from Leningrad arrived from Austria. They told me that they had seen your father. R' Binyamin [Goredetzky] should be arriving there shortly; you should really write him a letter about everything.

May you be healthy,
From Yaakov Lipskier – who wishes you to soon see all your friends and parents and sisters and brothers Geulah Shleima soon [...] and regards from Moshe ben Adam, and from me, Yaakov Lipskier. I will inquire about your father and will answer you right away, but you know how [...] thinks he's a whole Knaker and no one is allowed to interfere.

Perhaps you may have heard something regarding the whereabouts of Taibel's brother, Yaakov Lepkivker?

After a year and a half in France the Lipskiers finally got visas to the United States with the help of Rabbi Shmaryahu Gourary (Rashag). Initially Taibel wanted to immigrate to Israel where most of her family had settled, but Yankel was insistent that they must move to be near the Rebbe.

Edmée had found out the whereabouts of a small table that the Rebbe Maharash had made, and after tracking it down and obtaining it, it was decided that Yankel would bring it to the United

States for the Rebbe. [Until this very day, this special table sits in the Rebbe's room.]

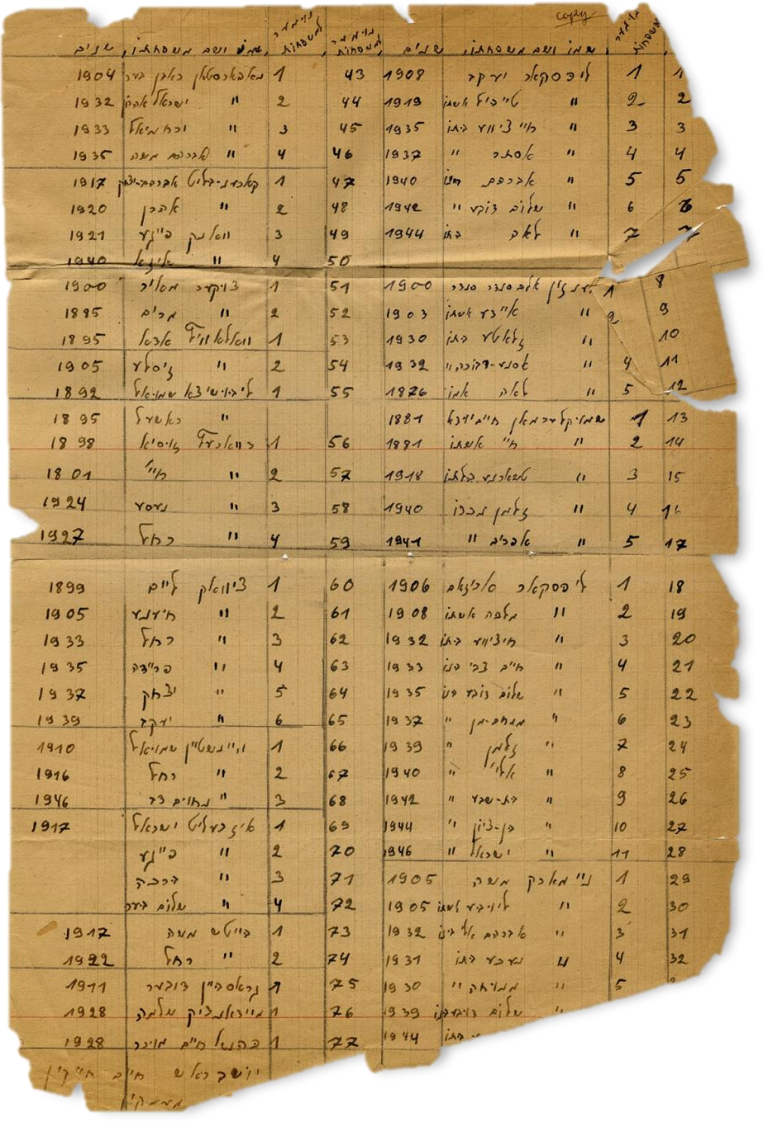
The Lipskier Family shortly before leaving France

On Erev Pesach 5708/1948, after packing all their belongings, the Lipskiers boarded the MS Sobieski for New York. Their dreams would finally come true. The jubilation cannot be described as the ship left the harbor. The culmination of 2 years of fear and terror were now at an end. The ship was only set to depart the next day – on Shabbos. All the Frum Jews boarded a day early, making sure not to bring any Chometz with them. Yankel had carefully prepared all the necessary items that he would need for a Seder, bringing Matzah and brand new dishes with him.

As it was Pesach, Yankel arranged special permission to prepare his own meals. There were about 450 passengers on board. Always the mover and shaker, Yankel would end up making the Kosher L'Pesach meals for many of the religious Jews on board as well.

The MS Sobieski

Their happiness slowly came to a halt as they had to brace tumultuous weather for the first three days of the journey. The boat rocked constantly, and being third class passengers they felt every little jostle. The Lipskier children would stay on the somewhat steady deck as long as possible, dreading having to go all the way to their turbulent cabin. Taibel had an infant and was pregnant with another as well. The entire family got sick, but that wasn't even the worst of their troubles. At one point the raging weather was so terrible the lifeboats were prepared for the evident emergency procedures. Thankfully it didn't come to that, and the Lipskiers arrived sore and battered to the golden shores of the United States on Thursday, 27 Nissan 5708/1948.



A list of refugees in France
The Lipskiers are the first on the list
Credit: Lubavitch Archives

Chapter Four:
United States

The captain of the Sobieski offered Yankel a permanent chef job on the ship as he was very successful at his small stint at the profession. Yankel politely declined – after his family's chaotic week, life at sea was clearly not for him.

Shortly thereafter the Lipskiers went into Yechidus with the Rebbe Rayatz. Yankel looked up at the redbrick building in front of him – the building from his dream. [He would also later recognize the room where the Rabbe Rayatz would Farbreng, even the tall Bochur who wheeled him in.]

The entire family walked into his study with bated breath. Who would believe that their plea of "מיר זאָלן זעהן זיך מיטן רבי'ן" had finally came true. The Rebbe Rayatz sat upright in his chair, his face radiant like an angel. The family said the Bracha of Shehechiyanu in unison with great emotion. The Rebbe looked at each of the six children smiling. A family to get out of Russia complete and whole was unfortunately a rarity at the time. "To see such a family come out of Russia, I should be the one to say Shehechiyanu" [alternatively: "Mechaye HaMaisim"] he said, and then give them an abundance of Brachos.

Yankel also sat with the Rebbe for a while, giving him a full report of what Paris was like since he had left a year prior.

The Joint set up the Lipskiers in two apartments in 81 Montgomery Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, right down the block from the water. The apartments were tiny and inconvenient, being across the hall from each other.

The girls would commute to Beis Yaakov in Williamsburg and the boys went to Yeshivas "Yaakov Yosef," a well-known school just a few blocks away from their home. [Today RJJ of Staten Island.]

Besides for the designated money the Joint would give to new immigrants to help start them off, Yankel didn't have a penny to his name and needed to find a job. As a gesture of appreciation to Rabbi Gourary for helping with their papers, Yankel began working for him as a fundraiser for the United Lubavitcher Yeshiva.

The arrangement continued until Kislev of the next year. Though he was a very successful fundraiser, Taibel couldn't stand the thought that they were living off money that was contributed to the Yeshiva. Rabbi Gourary tried to convince him the importance of the job. His life and his decisions always in the Rebbe's hands, Yankel told Rabbi Gourary he would arrange to go into Yechidus to consult with the Rebbe Rayatz.

At this time, some Jews (with the help of the UJA) were looking into the potential of farming, as it was a profession that made it easy to keep Shabbos. Machene Yisorel even had a subdivision focused on helping Jews uphold the sanctity of Shabbos and would help by loaning them money to purchase farms.

Yankel was unaware of all this, so when the Rebbe Rayatz suggested he buy a farm, he was quite taken aback for a moment. He immediately had a few questions: "Where do I buy a farm? Where will I get money for such a thing? What will I do about my children's education?"

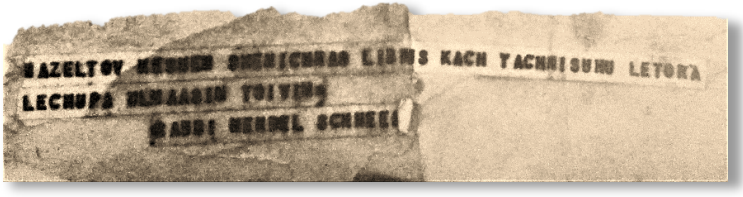
"In the Morgen Journal they have advertisements for such things" was the Rebbe Rayatz's reply, "go buy a newspaper and bring it here"

Dashing out of 770, Yankel ran to a confectionery store near the corner and bought the above mentioned paper. Returning to the Yechidus room, he set the newspaper on the desk and after briefly

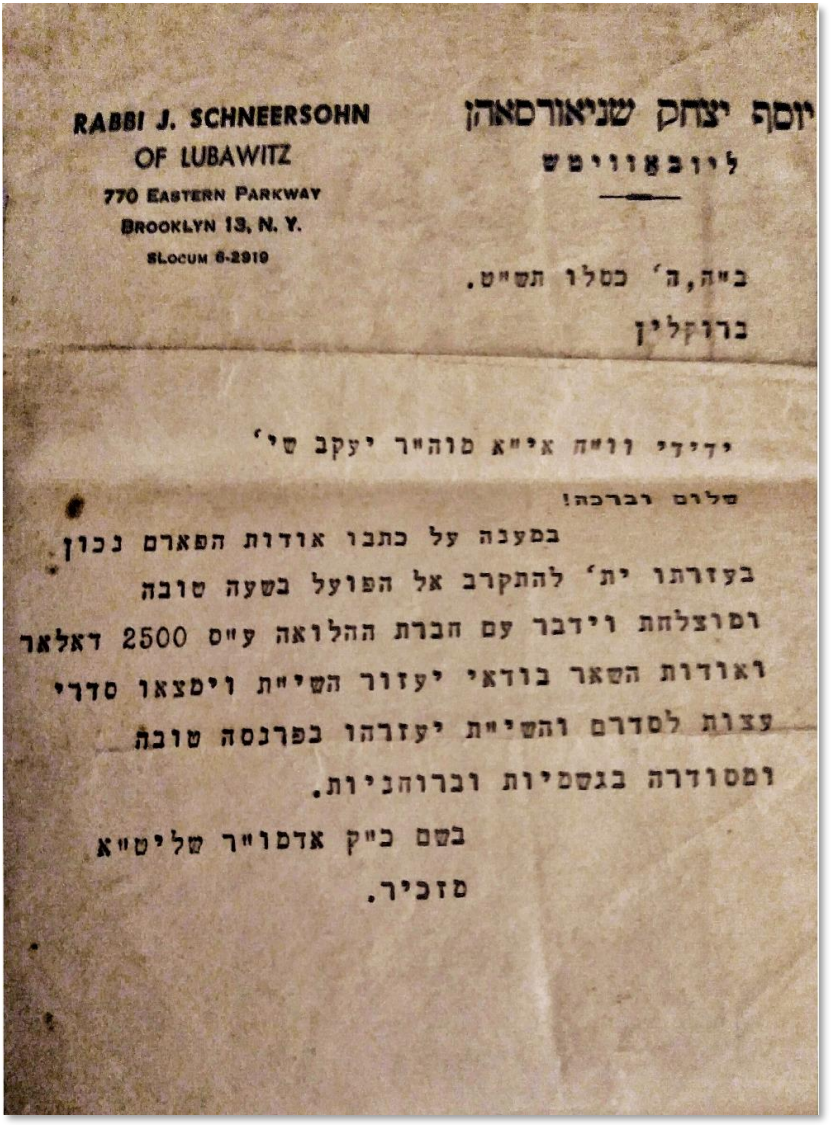
scanning the ads pointed to one; a chicken farm. "The offices here will lend you $1,000 [worth over $10,000 today] for the down payment," said the Rebbe Rayatz. "About your children: Shabbosim they can spend at home, but during the week, the girls you can rent an apartment for and they should continue learning where they did until now. The boys can learn and dorm in Tomchei Temimim."

And so it came to be, the farm was purchased and preparations were underway as they packed their bags yet again for another major change in their lives.

It was at that time that Yankel and Taibel were blessed with their seventh child – a boy. Naturally Yankel didn't have anybody else in mind other than the Rebbe Rayatz to be Sandek. Upon receiving the invitation, he sent back a reply that though he couldn't come physically, he would send a Shliach – his secretary Rabbi Elye Yaichel Simpson.



"MAZELTOV KESHEM SHENICHNAS LIBRIS
KACH YACHNISUHU LETORALECHUPA ULMAASIM TOIVIM
RABBI MENDEL SCHNEERSON"
Telegram from the Rebbe upon the birth of their son



RABBI J. SCHNEERSOHN
OF LUBAWITZ
770 EASTERN PARKWAY
BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.
SLOCUM 6-2919

יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

ב"ה, ה' כסלו תש"ט.
ברוקלין

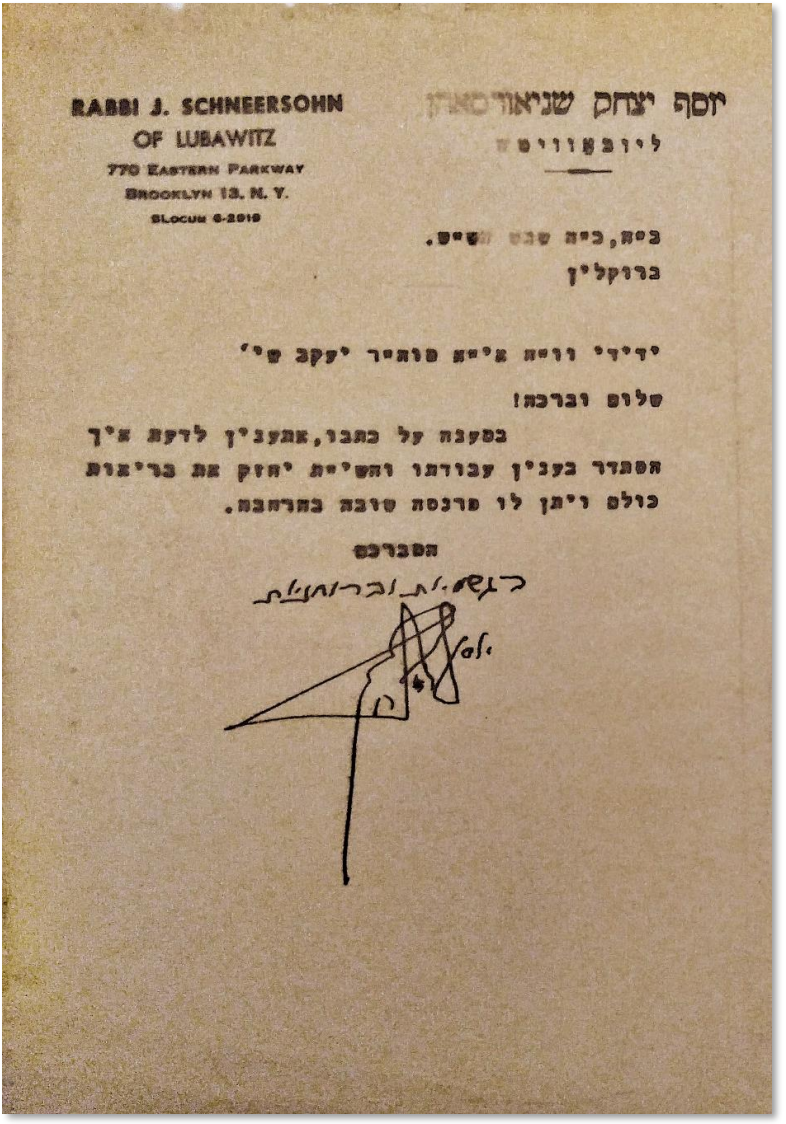
ידידי וו"ח א"א מוה"ר יעקב שי'

שלום וברכה!

במענה על כתבו אודות הפארם נכון בעזרתו ית' להתקרב אל הפועל בשעה טובה ומוצלחת וידבר עם חברת ההלואה ע"ס 2500 דאלאר ואודות השאר בודאי יעזור השי"ת וימצאו סדרי עצות לסדרם והשי"ת יעזרהו בפרנסה טובה ומסודרה בגשמיות וברוחניות.

בשם כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א
מזכיר.

Follow up letter from the Rebbe Rayatz
shortly after Yankel's Yechidus



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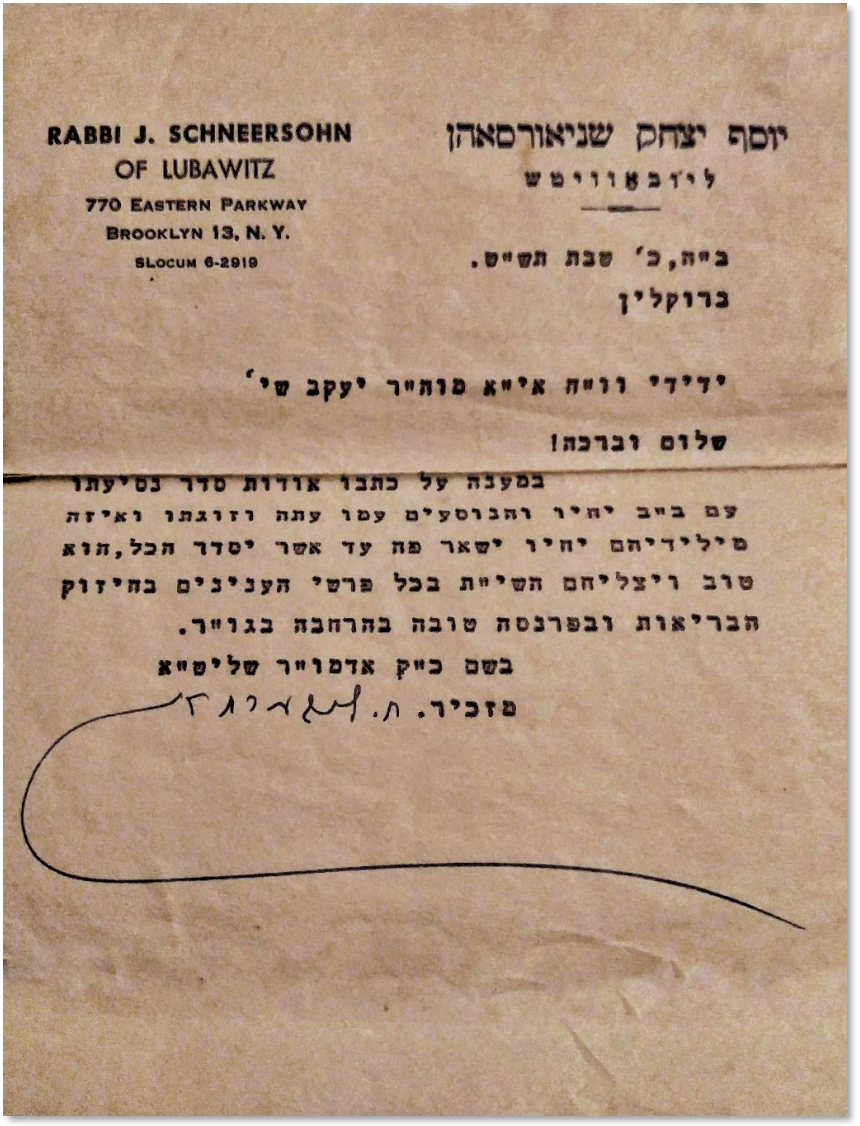
יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

ביה, כיה שבט תשיש.
ברוקלין

ידידי וויה איה פוהיר יעקב שי'
שלום וברכה!
בסענה על כתבו, אתענין לדעת איך
הסתדר בענין עבודתו והשיית יחזק את בריאות
כולם ויתן לו פרנסה טובה בהרחבה.

הסברכם

Letter from the Rebbe Rayatz shortly after the Lipskiers arrival asking how they are settling in



RABBI J. SCHNEERSOHN
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יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

ב״ה, כ׳ שבת תש״ש.
ברוקלין

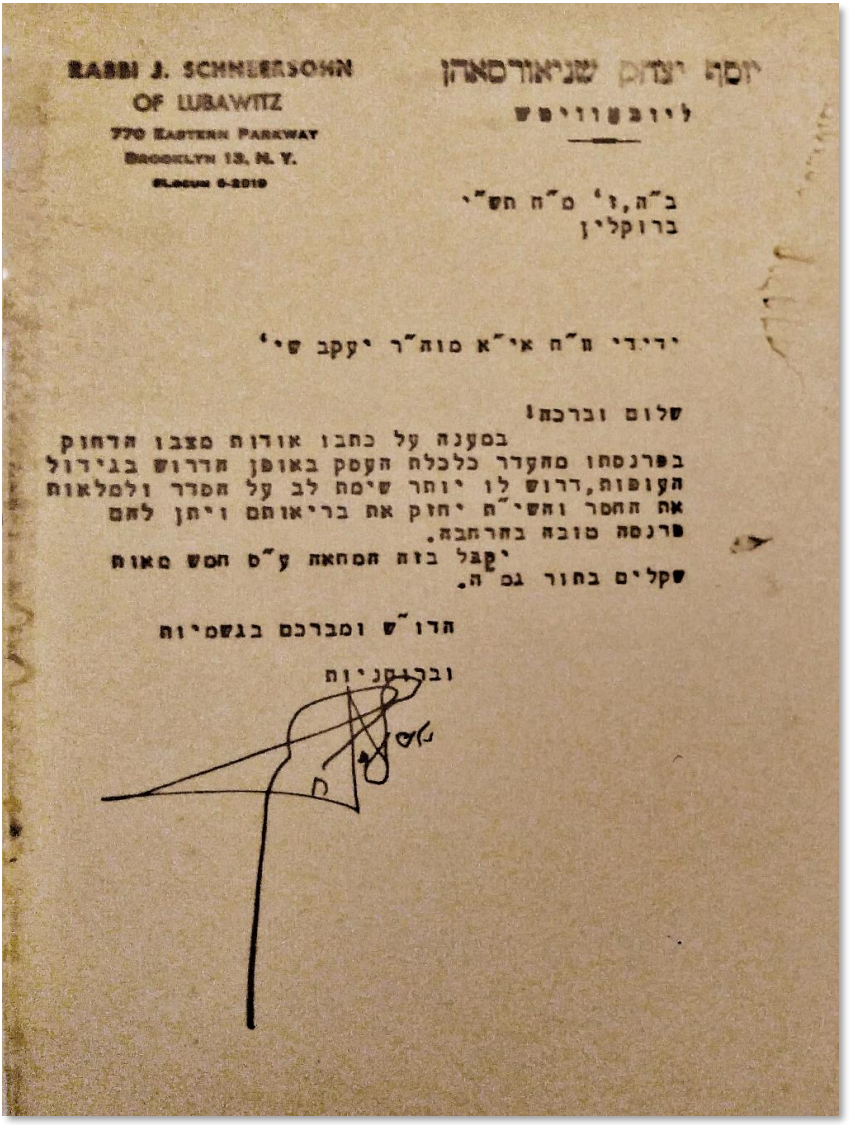
ידידי וו״ח א״א מוה״ר יעקב ש׳

שלום וברכה!

במענה על כתבו אודות סדר נס״עתו
עם בי״ב יהיו והבוסעים עמו עתה וזוגתו ואיזה
מילדיהם יהיו ישאר פה עד אשר יסדר הכל, הוא
טוב ויצליחם השי״ת בכל פרשי הענינים בחיזוק
הבריאות ובפרנסה טובה בהרחבה בגו״ר.

בשם כ״ק אדמו״ר שליט״א
מזכיר. ת. לשאריצ׳

Rebbe Rayatz's response to a letter from Yankel detailing the travel plans to the farm



RABBI J. SCHNEERSOHN
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770 EASTERN PARKWAY
BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.
FLOCUM 6-2019

יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

ב"ה, ז' מ"ח תש"י
ברוקלין

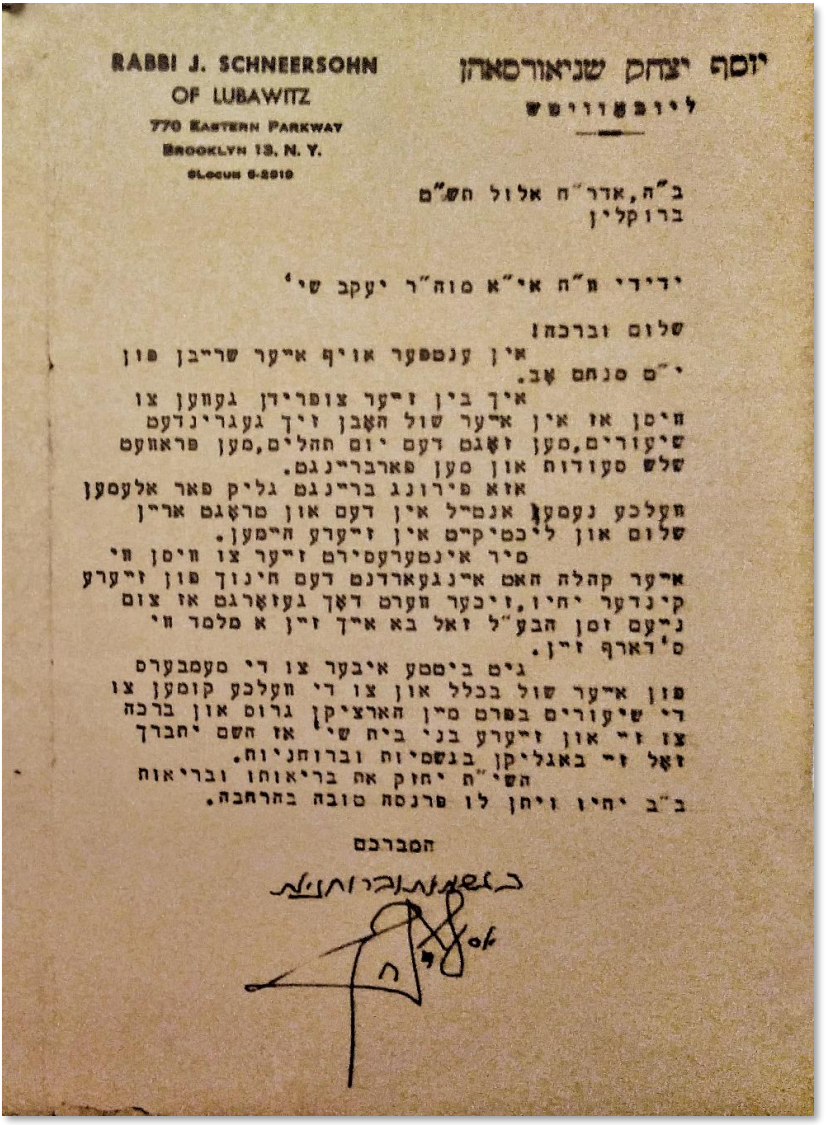
ידידי ח"ח אי"א מוה"ר יעקב ש"י

שלום וברכה!
במענה על כתבו אודות מצבו הדחוק
בפרנסתו מהעדר כלכלת העסק באופן הדרוש בגידול
העופות, דרוש לו יותר שימת לב על הסדר ולמלאות
את החסר והשי"ת יחזק את בריאותם ויתן להם
פרנסה טובה בהרחבה.
יקבל בזה המחאת ע"ס חמש מאות
שקלים בתור גמ"ה.

הדו"ש ומברכם בגשמיות

וברוחניות

Rebbe Rayatz's response to a letter from Yankel
detailing his financial troubles



RABBI J. SCHNEERSOHN
OF LUBAWITZ
770 EASTERN PARKWAY
BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.
SLocum 6-2910

יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

ב"ה, אדר"ח אלול תש"ם
ברוקלין

ידידי ו"ח א"א מוה"ר יעקב שי'

שלום וברכה!

אין ענטפער אויף אייער שרייבן פון י"ם סנחם אב.

איך בין זייער צופרידן געווען צו הייסן אז אין אייער שול האבן זיך געגרינדעט שיעורים, מען זאגט דעם יום תהלים, מען פראוועט שלש סעודות און מען פארברייגגט.

אזא פירונג ברייגגט גליק פאר אלעמען

וועלכע נעמען אנטייל אין דעם און טראגט ארין שלום און ליכטיקייט אין זייערע היימען.

מיר אינטערעסירט זייער צו הייסן די אייער קהלה האט איינגעארדנט דעם חינוך פון זייערע קינדער יחיו, זיכער ווערט דאך געזארגט אז צום נייעם זמן הבע"ל זאל בא אייך זיין א מלמד די ס'דארף זיין.

גיט ביטטע איבער צו די מעמבערס פון אייער שול בכלל און צו די וועלכע קומען צו די שיעורים בפרט מיין הארציקן גרוס און ברכה צו זיי און זייערע בני ביה שי' אז השם יתברך זאל זיי באגליקן בגשמיות וברוחניות.

השי"ת יחזק את בריאותו ובריאות

ב"ב יחיו ויתן לו פרנסה טובה בהרחבה.

המברכם

בגשמיות וברוחניות

Letter from the Rebbe Rayatz to Yankel
intended to be given over to the Jewish community there

The farm was located in Hightstown, N.J., 60 miles southwest of Brooklyn. Sprinkled with lilac, blackberry and cherry trees, at first the farm seemed like it would be a nice place. They even had a cow that Taibel would use to make various dairy products such as milk, cheese, and butter. However the family was in dire straits financially because of the drought in the summer of 1949. The drought affected the laying capabilities of the chickens, causing most of them to die.

Yankel returned to the Rebbe Rayatz, asking if perhaps he could move to Crown Heights as he clearly didn't know what he was doing as a farmer. "I didn't send you there to be a farmer," said the Rebbe Rayatz, "many others can be farmers. I sent you there to make Frum Yidden". And so he did. With a new sense of purpose Yankel returned to the farm.

Their neighbors were mostly coarse non-jewish farmers. Nearby in Roosevelt though, nearly everybody – mostly fellow immigrants from Europe – was Jewish, but perhaps only a handful were religious. The nearest Shul was two miles away from their house and only had a Minyan on Shabbos morning. Yankel did his best to kindle the latent spark of Judaism within them. Just seeing a Jewish farmer walking to Shul each Shabbos in his Chassidic garb made a strong impression on them – some bringing their Neshamas out of the cobwebs to join him as well.

Slowly over his years there, the sleepy Shul became alive with classes in Tanya, Ein Yaakov and Shulchan Aruch. Yankel became close friends with these lost souls. On Simchas Torah he would dance enthusiastically with each of them. Every Yom Tov his entire family would walk over to the Shul for Davening. Now there was a Minyan Friday night and Shabbos afternoon as well, and even a small learning session between Mincha and Maariv.

All this was out of selfless devotion to the Rebbe. While attending the Yud Beis Tammuz Farbrengen in 5709/1949 – a short

time after their arrival on the farm – the Rebbe Rayatz asked if he started any Shiurim there yet, to which he replied in the negative but they would be starting soon. After the Farbrengen the Rebbe came over to Yankel quizzically.

"Why didn't you tell my father-in-law that the Shiur already started?"

Yankel was confused, "Why would I tell the Rebbe [Rayatz] something untrue?"

"To give him Nachas you could've said that you already started the Shiur" was the reply.

Sometimes a Shochet would come to them, such as Rabbis Scharfstein and Kalmanson. A bright spot in the monotony of loneliness and poverty that was their lot was when the Rebbe Rayatz would dispatch groups of rabbinical students to the area. Sleeping on the Shul's hard benches, the young men would travel from farm to farm every day for several weeks, selling Seforim for nominal fees, encouraging the farmers to increase in their Yiddishkeit, and reminding them that there was a Jew in Brooklyn who cared for them deeply.

Yankel would try to come to 770 as much as time permitted. The few Farbrengens of the Rebbe Rayatz that were held during the week were a given, but on Yom Kippur he stayed in Crown Heights with his older boys – something he already made sure to do the year before when they were living on the Lower East Side.

A hot summer afternoon in the beginning of 5709/1949 brought a group of five Bochurim arrived before Shabbos (the other three had gotten lost on the way and spent Shabbos elsewhere.) Leading the group was Tzvi Hirsh ("Hershke") Gansburg, who told Yankel that they had been called into Merkos's office and given a specific instruction from the RaMaSh from his father-in-law: find out the full Hebrew name of Moshe Greenberg.

Yankel's mind began racing. He knew just about everybody in the tight-knit Jewish community, and he could not think of anyone named Moshe Greenberg.

Shabbos morning came, and Yankel approached the Gabbai of the Shul, Mr. Shatz, to see if he perhaps knew the identity of the mysterious Moshe Greenberg.

"Yes, I know who he is," Mr. Shatz said. "Morris. He lives around here but has never stepped foot in our Shul, not even on Yom Kippur. Oddly enough, he came to Shul this morning and is actually sitting and Davening right over there." The caretaker gestured discreetly in the direction of a man sitting at a table silently gazing around.

Looking at the stranger, Yankel realized that his face was familiar. Every Shabbos, as Yankel walked to Shul he would see the man waiting at the bus stop for the express bus to Jersey City.

Hershke began to think about how he could approach Greenberg and ask for his mother's name. He was afraid of the man's reaction. Yankel told him that if he wanted, he would find out the mother's name and Hershke agreed.

At Shalosh Seudos, during which the visiting Bochurim shared words of Torah and lively Niggunim, Yankel made sure to sit down next to the newcomer.

One of the Bochurim got up and said a story from an introduction written by the Rebbe Rayatz to the Kuntres "Pokeiach Ivrim", The tale is about the Chossid of the Alter and Mitteler Rebbe – Reb Yosef Baal Agala from Beshenkowitz. The tale describes in detail how Reb Yosef always wanted to be a Rav, but the Alter Rebbe told him that it is good for his soul to become a wagon driver. In this position, he would eventually be instrumental in influencing a Jew named Shlomo Leib, who had abandoned his wife and children and married a gentile woman, to become a Baal Teshuva.

As everyone was seated around the table, happily tucking into the herring, kichel and L'chaim, Yankel raised his glass and asked if everybody can make a L'chaim for his mother's Neshama as he was marking her Yartzait, "Bas-Sheva was her name... what was your mother's name?" he asked Greenberg as nonchalantly as he could.

"Sarah" Moshe replied.

With the prized information in hand, the Bochurim were able to report back to the Rebbe with the information he had requested.

Meanwhile, Yankel was curious to know what would happen to Greenberg. The following Shabbos, as he walked to the Shul, he passed the bus stop, but Morris was nowhere to be seen. The same thing happened the next week, and the next. Moshe had disappeared.

"Do you know what happened to Morris Greenberg?" he asked Mr. Shatz, who seemed to know everything about everyone. "I have not seen him for several weeks now."

"You ask where he disappeared to?" chuckled the Gabbai. "Everybody is asking where he went and nobody knows, not the place where he worked, not the neighbors, not his friends, and not even his non-Jewish family. After spending Shabbos with the Bochurim sent by the Rebbe [Rayatz], he suddenly left them and moved out of town!"

It was on a Motzei Shabbos a few weeks later that Yankel got the fateful phone call. "The Rebbe passed away" the voice said bluntly before it went dead.

Though it was a possibility in the recesses of his mind, Yankel didn't believe it could really be referring to the Rebbe Rayatz. Though he had gone through a lot in the last two decades, he hadn't even hit the age of seventy yet, and Yankel's whole life revolved around him. It was unimaginable.

"Perhaps he's referring to the elderly Rav of Roosevelt," he thought to himself. He quickly called Mr. Shatz, but he said everything was fine with the Rabbi.

Trembling slightly, he dialed the number to 770. Rabbi Rodshtein, a personal secretary of the Rebbe Rayatz answered and to the question if everything was alright, simply stated "יענקל, קום צו פאָרן – Yankel, come" and not able to say anything more, hung up.

Yankel once brought Mr. Shatz (The Gabbai in Haystown) to the Rebbe for a Yechidus.

The Rebbe asked him whether he knew how to learn and Mr. Shatz said he knew a little bit.

The Rebbe asked him if he knew how to learn Chumash with Rashi and Mr. Shatz said that he certainly knew how to learn that.

Said the Rebbe, "If only I knew how to learn Chumash with Rashi!"

When he left the Yechidus, Mr. Shatz asked Yankel in bewilderment, "Does the Rebbe really not know how to learn Chumash with Rashi?"

Yankel took his oldest son Avremal and set out to Crown Heights immediately in his car. Taibel and the rest of the children remained at home sobbing.

As the sun rose, throngs of Chassidim were arriving from all over the United States. They gazed at the Rebbe Rayatz's barren spot in the Shul, the Shtender he would Daven with taken away to be used for his Aron.

At 9am Yankel set out with a Minyen of Anash and Bochurim to Montefiore Cemetery to dig the Kever. The Rebbe Rayatz was laid to

rest later that afternoon, leaving our Rebbe to take the mantle and unleash his great light onto a seemingly dark world.

Their children remained alone during the week. When they arrived, their oldest Tzivia was only twelve, living with her sister Esther in an apartment in Brownsville. They sent the oldest two boys, Avremel and Berel, to Yeshiva by themselves at 8 and 6 years old. If they couldn't get a ride, the four of them would take public transportation home for Shabbos.

Shortly after the Rebbe Rayatz's passing the girls, Tzivia and Esther, were walking down Kingston and met the Rebbe crossing Eastern Parkway on the way to visit his mother at her Lincoln Place apartment. He had a short message for them "The Rebbetzin would like to see you."

Flattered, the two made their way 346 Brooklyn Ave – the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's apartment at time. When Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka opened the door, she welcomed them in, asking what they were there for.

"Didn't the Rebbetzin want to meet us? We met the Rebbe and he told us you wanted to see us"

The Rebbetzin laughed. "מסתמא האָט ער געמיינט זיין מאַמע, רעבעצין חנה – he most probably meant his mother, Rebbetzin Chana"

The girls were a little embarrassed. Though it was only mere weeks since the previous Rebbe had passed away, it had already been instilled in them that the "RaMaSh" was now Rebbe. [Around that time their brother Berel, who was eight years old, was standing in 770's lobby when the Rebbe left his room to Daven Mincha. Seeing the boy, he put his hand on his shoulder and asked, "How's your father?". Though young, he was already taught and understood in front of whom he was standing and didn't utter a word.]

– Motzei Simchas Torah 5740/1979 –

Tziva and Esther headed over to Rebbetzin Chana's building, but upon arrival one was too shy to go up. The Rebbe was still there visiting his mother, and asked that they both come up.

Rebbetzin Chana wanted to know about two young girls dorming alone. How they were settling it, how was school, how their family was, and so on.

For the Lipskier parents it wasn't so simple. Life on the farm was hard. The community remained painfully small, and there were few if any other young Chassidic families for miles around. The Rebbe continued the practice of his predecessor and would send Bochurim to the farm from time to time. The individuals that Yankel helped bring closer to Yiddishkeit moved to more vibrant religious communities.

For example, there was a pharmacist who Yankel would Farbreng with him about closing his place of business on Shabbos, but to no avail. On Simchas Torah one year, after a couple of L'chaims he confided that he had gotten a heart condition and

didn't know what to do. Yankel, without missing a beat, promised him that if he closed his store on Shabbos the Aibishter would take away his heart issues.

Surprisingly, the man accepted and closed his pharmacy thus forth on Shabbos and low and behold, after a few weeks his condition went away by itself. The man would eventually become fully religious, and moved out of town as it wasn't Frum enough. All three of his daughters married Lubavitcher Chassidim.

Though Yankel's spiritual endeavors thrived, his farm floundered. The family would collect the eggs and clean them and a salesman would come pick them up – but it wasn't enough. So much so, when there was a Bochur who the Rebbe didn't want to spend time in the streets during the summer, he sent him to Yankel's farm. Yankel didn't have enough to pay him, so the Rebbe arranged that Merkos would give the Bochur a small salary.

In order to supplement his income, even just to feed the chickens, Yankel had to take up a job at a mill nearby schlepping bags of, ironically, chicken feed.

The government would supply a large shipment of potatoes to farmers twice a year for each cow they owned. The Lipskier's cow Betsy only got to eat the peels as they would use the potatoes to feed their children instead. Yankel would also buy the cheaper day-old bread, but only from bakeries that were closed on Shabbos.

Yankel and Taibel barely got to see the Rebbe. When the children would come home for Shabbos, Taibel would ask about all small

"When leaving through the lobby tonight, the Rebbe saw a bottle of Mashkeh on the table and told us to say L'chaim because Yankel Lipskier had a baby boy"

(Diary of Reb Moshe Levertov,
Motzei Shabbos
9 Kislev 5712/1951)

בס"ד, ר"ד על ה"אפשערניש" של בנו של הרה"ת יעקב ליפסקער שי' י"ג כסלו ה'תשי"א.

רשימה פרטית בלתי מוגה

(כ"ק אד"ש גזז השער קצת למעלה מן הפאה הימנית ואח"כ אמר): אז מיר שערען לאזן מיר איבער די פאות צוליב חינוך.

יעדער זאך איז אויך אויסגעטייטש עפ"י חסידות.

איר זאלט מגדל זיין אים לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים און ער זאל אויסוואקסאן א חסיד למדן און ירא שמים.

details of the happenings there. How did the Rebbe's Farbrengens look? How many women would come? What were they wearing? Did they wear Sheitels?

Yankel felt he had to ask the Rebbe permission to leave the farm, but upon doing so, the Rebbe strongly negated the idea. The Rebbe said that the Rebbe Rayatz already told Yankel he had to stay, and there was nothing he could do to change the answer. Yankel asked the Rebbe several more times and each time, the Rebbe said the same answer, and so deciding it wasn't meant to be, he stopped asking.

It happened suddenly in 5714/1954 after around five years on the farm. Yankel was in Yechidus and the Rebbe had responded to what he had written, the Rebbe stopped and thought for a while and then said, "Nu, that's enough. It doesn't have to be a farm necessarily. Move back to the city."

Stunned, Yankel asked "Where should I move to?" and the Rebbe told him to move to Crown Heights.

Before he began looking for a home in Crown Heights, Yankel would need a job. The Rebbe told him to find a business in Crown Heights.

Yankel (sitting on right) at a wedding in 1954

Yankel purchased a grocery store on the corner of Union on Kingston Ave from an elderly Jew who would soon be retiring. The man tried to give Yankel all sorts of "tips and tricks" on how to make it in the industry. Adding random small items to bills, putting your finger on the scale a bit and so forth. [Yankel wouldn't hear of it though, when he would run the store it would be just the opposite, causing his profits to go in that direction too. He would always add a little after it was weighed in case he accidently charged a little too much.]

There was another grocery store in Crown Heights owned by a Mr. Stilerman. He was initially worried about this new competitor, but the Rebbe reassured him that he would not lose any Parnasa from this.

Finding a customer for the farm proved difficult. It wasn't a good time to sell a farm and nobody was buying. A few potential customers showed up but nobody who completed the deal. Standard practice at the time dictated a $100 non-refundable deposit from potential buyers to see the farm, but Yankel didn't

have the heart to keep the money and would return it. A long period of time passed like this.

Once, Yankel stopped the Rebbe about to enter his office, telling. him about his difficulty in selling the farm. "It seems that from 'Above', they don't let me sell it" He said.

The Rebbe raised his hand in a dismissive motion and said, " וואָס טוט זיך למעלה ווייס מען. פאָר געזונטערהייט און פאַרקויף דער פאַרם - What goes on 'Above', we know. Go in good health and sell the farm."

When he returned to the home, he found someone waiting there for him. This man wanted to buy the farm. The deal was sealed that night and Yankel was free to begin looking for a home in Crown Heights.

It was very hard for a large family to get an apartment, especially when the family numbered 11 people. After a long period of fruitless searching, Reb Shea Pinson helped him find a large apartment in his building on Park Place and Nostrand Ave. As a fervent Chossid, he wouldn't complete the lease without the Rebbe's permission and Bracha.

The Rebbe's answer: "Take it temporarily and you should meanwhile continue looking for a new one."

Yankel was at wits end. Who would agree to rent their apartment at the time, instead of the usual 2-year lease?

The three sat down for a meeting – Yankel, Pinson and the landlord. Yankel was trying to negotiate him down from $87.50 a month to $85. "I have a large family, and just started a new business" he pleaded, all the while thinking how in the world would he convince him after this to forgo an official lease. He was scared

to even bring it up at all because this man was even willing to let such a large family into his building at all.

As they haggled, the man got thoughtful and suddenly blurted out, "How about no lease and you pay the 87.50 monthly?"

Yankel was flabbergasted, but quickly got his bearings and accepted the deal.

In Elul of that year the Lipskier family settled in their new home and Yankel continued looking for another apartment as the Rebbe directed. Despite all his efforts, he did not find anything suitable.

Finally, after spending most of their life never able to properly settle, the Lipskiers thought they finally could live in peace.

But it was not to be.

Exactly a half a year later, Yankel's younger brother from Morocco, Michoel, came to visit the Rebbe New York. Michoel was the Rebbe's very first Shliach. Just ten days after the Rebbe Rayatz was Nistalek, the Rebbe sent him a letter stating that from the very last things he discussed with his father-in-law before his passing was the decaying state of education among the Sefardic Jews in Northern Africa. Michoel was Paris at the time and went straight to Morocco. This was his first time in New York.

It was a Thursday night and Michoel Lipskier had a Yechidus at twelve o'clock at night. Usually Yankel's sons would stop by the store on the way home from Yeshiva on Bedford and Dean, spending time with their father and helping until closing time at 11pm. That night instead of walking home, the trio headed over to 770 to wait for Michoel. The Yechidus lasted two and a half hours, with Michoel detailing all that had transpired thus far on his mission in Morocco. Finally, the Rebbe said it was time for him to rest after his long trip and ended the meeting. As he was leaving the Rebbe

told him to make a Kiddush on Shabbos. Michoel nodded and left the Rebbe's holy room, but then stood there puzzled for a moment not sure what the Kiddush was for.

Michoel went outside to his waiting family, his brother and two sons who were waiting outside with the suitcases. They walked to their house, where the boys went to sleep while their parents sat and talked to Michoel after not seeing one another for seven years.

Suddenly, Yankel smelled smoke. He tried to bring it to the attention of Taibel and Michoel but they didn't smell it. When the smell got stronger, Taibel got up and opened the door. Thick black smoke billowed in. They quickly woke up the children and ran to the fire escape. The blazing fire took the top two floors of the building before it was finally subdued by the fire department. On that cold night, Yankel and Taibel saw their house and all its contents go up in flames. Their children didn't even have coats.

They stayed by a non-Lubavitcher that Shabbos. Their eldest daughter, Tzivia, asked her boss for two weeks' salary in advance and bought some basic clothes and winter attire for her siblings.

The Kiddush the Rebbe mentioned? Celebrated with great happiness and enthusiasm, thanking Hashem that nobody got injured in the freak accident.

For the next week Heishke and Askeh Dubravsky graciously let them stay in their home. The Lipskiers managed to find another place of residence on Carroll Street and Troy Avenue, where they lived until they finally purchased their legendary home at 1458 President Street and moved in right before Pesach two years later in 5717/1957.

– Elul 5717/1975 –
Yankel (left) gazing at the Rebbe
as he enters the Shalash for Mincha

Shortly thereafter, at the young age of nine, their son Zalman got the dreaded polio disease. It struck him terribly and he went into a deep coma. The doctors were very pessimistic, telling his parents that he probably would not survive, and if by chance he does, in all likelihood he will remain completely paralyzed his entire life.

Yankel and Taibel were crestfallen and turned to the Rebbe, who bestowed them with Brachos. Against all odds, Zalman awoke a short time later, fully healthy sans one arm remaining paralyzed. But for the Rebbe this wasn't enough. The Rebbe would ask Zalman how he was doing and instruct him to seek out new treatments that could potentially benefit the functioning of his hand.

The years passed. Yankel and Taibel would send in various doctor's recommendations, but the Rebbe rejected them.

In 5725/1965, the Rebbe suggested getting in contact with a certain doctor and asking his advice. He recommended a series of surgeries, and the Rebbe agreed to his proposal. That summer

Zalman underwent a series of surgeries, designed to bring back partial function to his paralyzed hand.

While prepping for the first operation, he was given a surgical gown to change into. Thinking he wouldn't be able to wear his Yarmalka during the procedure, he began to make a fuss, saying he won't have the surgery.

A Jewish nurse came to calm him down, and reassuring him everything would be fine, taped some masking tape to a surgeon's cap and wrote on it "DO NOT REMOVE CAP FROM PATIENTS HEAD DUE TO RELIGIOUS BELIEFS"

"If I assure you that this hat will be on your head during the whole operation, would you agree?"

Zalman agreed and underwent the procedure. Taibel and Berel were waiting for him in the recovery room. Berel was so excited about the note on his brother's head, that he took it off, put it in an envelope, and sent it to the Rebbe. The Rebbe's reply: " ת"ח ת"ח ולהחזיר המצורף – Tach Tach [An expression the Rebbe often used to express his satisfaction with something], return what was included [in the envelope to the sender]

This seemed to be the end of the story but a week later, Yankel got a call from the Rebbetzin, saying that the Rebbe wanted to see Zalman. The Rebbetzin instructed him not to tell anyone nor to coordinate with Mazkirus, but simply to wait near the Rebbe's room before the Mincha, and after Rabbi Binyamin Gorodetsky left the room, they should both go inside.

And so it was. As soon as they entered, the Rebbe asked Zalman, "Do you still have the Yarmalka?"

At first Zalman was puzzled and did not understand what the Rebbe was talking about, but after a few brief moments of contemplation he realized the Rebbe meant the cap with the note. "Yes, I think so"

"You should give it to your children, to your grandchildren, and to your great-grandchildren!" Apparently the Rebbe appreciated the sincerity and Mesiras Nefesh of 16 year-old

Then the Rebbe asked Zalman to show him what he can already do with his hand since the first surgery.

* * *

The Lipskiers had adjusted quickly to living in Crown Heights. Soon they were hosting many events in their home, be it Simchos of relatives, Tzach Melava Malkas, or Farbrengens.

Living in Crown Heights at the time had its perks for the children too. Very few Lubavitcher Families lived there at the time. So any interaction from the Rebbe was especially felt by them.

On Motzei Shabbos the week after Rosh Chodesh, the Lipskier children would gather outside the Rebbe's door. Many times the Rebbe would come out and ask them to go and check if the moon is visible and it is possible to perform a Kiddush Levana. The Rebbe would leave the door of his room slightly open so that they can update him. Some of them even remember the Rebbe telling them the traditional "Sholom Aleichem" during the Tefila.

Whenever the Rebbe finished Davening with a Minyen or a Farbrengen, the children would run to Gan Eden HaTachton to sing as the Rebbe entered his room. The Rebbe would encourage the singing in his holy hand, and since there were so little children in the community at the time, this little ritual had a very personal aspect and feeling.

– Winter 5718/1957 –
Yankel makes Havdala for his family
Seen are Hershel, Zalman and Fitzy

The Lipskiers would take turns with the other boys, who would get to move the table when the Rebbe stands up for Shmonei Esrei, and push it back when he sits down.

As all children, they couldn't sit for too long and spent most of the Rebbe's Farbrengens outside running around. Many times the Rebbe asked that kids be called upstairs to say L'chaim, and someone would frantically run and get them. They would each get a cup, stand on a table near the Rebbe and say L'chaim before running back. A rare occurrence was when the Rebbe would send them some of his cake.

Before a natural spring was found deep under 770 and a well was built, Chassidim would have to walk to the Botanical Gardens of Brooklyn each year for Tashlich on Rosh HaShana. The Rebbe would lead the way, followed by Rabbi Chadokov, various elders, and then the rest of the Chassidim. The children would walk right near the Rebbe, singing songs as they marched down Eastern Parkway. Sometimes the Rebbe asked them to sing certain songs, like the original Yiddish version of the Shabbos song, "If I would have the might."

The children of Crown Heights lives revolved around the Rebbe. Even their games stressed this. They would play Farbrengen: one boy would be in charge of making a path for the Rebbe, another set up his place and the rest as the Chassidim in the crowd. They would notice every little thing he did. On Shabbos they go to check what time the Rebbe has arrived, and try to find out why this time it was later or earlier.

Once Bar Mitzah, one was able to do the Mitzvah of Daled Minim with the Rebbe's own Lulav and Esrog. In those years, the Rebbe would sit in the Sukkah, with an open Sefer in front of him. The small crowd would take turns, forming a line passing the Lulav and Esrog from one to another, as the Rebbe would glance out of his Sefer for a brief moment to look at each one that passed by.

Yankel was always trying to bring people to the Rebbe. Once, on a hot summer day, he found a man crying on a bench. While most people walked right passed him, Yankel stopped and asked if everything was alright.

The man's name was Leizer, a holocaust survivor who lost all touch with his religion after the war. He explained that he had come from Tzfas to New York with his six-year old daughter suddenly lost her ability to speak two years before. Doctors in Israel told him to come here, but after having the suggested operation, he situation worsened.

Yankel knew exactly what to do. Bringing Leizer to 770 he asked Rabbi Chadakov to arrange a Yechidus for him. When explained how long he'd have to wait, Yankel saw the man was about to break down again so he gave him a suggestion – stand by the Rebbe's door for when he leaves for Mincha.

And so it was, Lezier explained to the Rebbe his dire predicament, and the Rebbe suggested a certain doctor to see. The

Rebbe also asked if he would be willing to take upon himself to start keeping Kosher, as well as to help the Tzemach Tzedek Shul, which was near where he lived.

Within two days of following the Rebbe's orders, the girl was sitting in her bed calling for her father.

That Rosh Hashana, Leizer carried his daughter to the Rebbe's Farbrengen and the Rebbe seeing him, gave him a piece of Challah to give to her.

* * *

Gershon Ber Jacobson was a young Yeshiva student and unsure what to do.

Siberia had affected his father more than imagined. Trying to put the past behind him he had settled with his small family in Toronto, but Reb Simon Yaakovshvili's (Jacobson) soul left him in the summer of 1953. His wife's death followed shortly thereafter, leaving their three young sons to fend for themselves.

The Jacobson trio traveled to New York to learn in Tomchei Temimim. The youngest was only seven years old at the time. The Rebbe suggested that Gershon Ber find a family to take him in and pay them a stipend. After some research he found a wealthy childless couple that wanted to adopt his brother – they would even pay him a tremendous amount of money!

Excited, he told the Rebbe about the offer, but the Rebbe's answer was vehement. "אַ ברודער פאַרקויפט מען נישט – a brother you don't sell. Find a family and pay them to take care of your brother. It shouldn't be for free"

Gershon Ber was a Bochur with no real money. So the Rebbe got him a job editing "Kovetz Lubavitch," a Lubavitch news bulletin

at the time. His salary went straight to the family that would "adopt" his brother.

The family? The Lipskiers.

Yankel and Taibel said "We made it work with *nine* children, and now we'll make it work with *ten* children".

So it was, before Pesach of 5715/1955 that Sholom Jacobson moved into the Lipskier abode – mere weeks after a fire engulfed their home and destroyed all their worldly possessions.

Everything was done to try to make this orphan feel comfortable, to a point that he might have even felt uneasy by how much they were spoiling him. For the next few years – until he went off to Yeshiva – Sholom was one of the Lipskier children.

[This actually kind of led to the Shidduch of their eldest daughter, Tzivia, to Sholom's brother who would come visit him at the Lipskier home – Gershon Ber.]

Though not comparable to adopting a child, the Lipskier home was open in other ways as well. Yankel's grocery, called "Lipskiers," was a beacon for the many colorful misfits that Crown Heights had to offer. They knew they would never be thrown out, like in other stores. They would come to speak to Taibel who patiently would speak to every one of them. In more extreme cases, these "therapy sessions" sometimes brought these odd individuals to their home, some even sleeping over. Taibel always listened to their troubles and always had a kind word to say.

Perhaps Yankel was too goodhearted to do business in such a warm community that he cared so deeply for. He would beret his wife Taibel for giving discounts to the needy, telling her that if she wanted to give Tzedaka it was fine, but business is separate – and that is no way to run a business. And yet he would do the same thing

The Lipskiers in 5719/1959 – 1: Leah 2–3: Gershon Ber and Tzvia Jacobson 4: Berel 5:Yankel 6:Taibel 7–8: Esther and Berel Raskin 9: Avremal 10: Hershel 11: Fitzy 12: Shmuel 13: Sholom Jacobson 14: Zalman

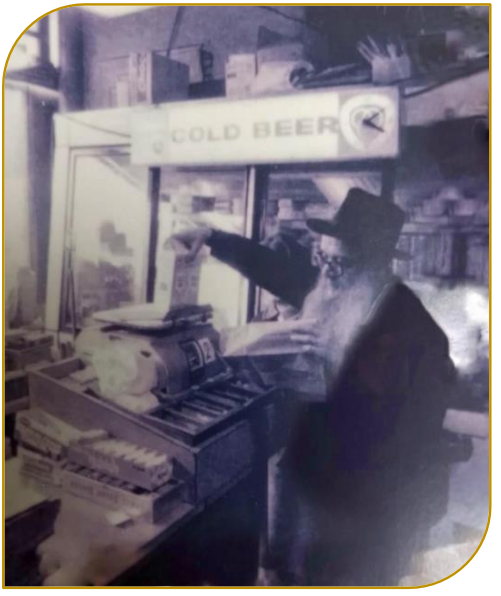
for many of his poor customers and widows, sometimes waiving their bill altogether.

A young teen that was in the process of becoming Frum once placed a non-Cholov Yisroel ice cream on the counter intending to purchase it. Yankel walked around the counter and put it back, and picking out a different one told him, "take this, it tastes a lot better". Cigarettes were majorly discounted for Bochurim.

While Lipskier's may not have been the greatest source of income, Yankel had the merit that the Rebbe and Rebbetzin would purchase their groceries from his store. Not willing to send their workers to deliver the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's groceries, Yankel would let his children have the Zechus. When the Rebbetzin called to place an order, "דאָ רעדט שניאורסאָהן פון פרעסעדענד סטריט – this

is Schneerson from President Street speaking...", it obviously took precedence. The line at the counter would stop and Yankel would be in another world as he take down her order.

Once, while Taibel was manning the counter in the empty store the phone rang. The Rebbetzin needed a chicken from Mermerlsteins and wanted to know if someone could pick it up for her and bring it to her house on President Street. "מיר ווייסען אַז מיר קענען אויף אייך פאַרלאָזן – we know we can rely on you." [Yankel was resting, so Taibel stopped a Bochur on the street asking if he wants to "do something really special" and gave him instructions on how to deliver.]



Yankel in his store

The Rebbetzin calling for deliveries to other stores was a standard occurrence.

Next door to Lipskier's Grocery was a bakery called Pinchevskies. The bakery didn't deliver, so if the Rebbetzin needed something she would call Lipskiers and ask if they could pick it up.

Once, in the late 5710s/1950s, the Rebbetzin called and asked to pick up a cake. Their youngest, Shmuel, went to deliver it. The cake had white and blue frosting and said "ו"א ניסן" written on the top.

The next day Shmuel was doing another delivery to the Rebbetzin and he saw the cake on the counter with part of it eaten, and the Rebbetzin wrapped up a piece and gave it to him.

Sometimes it was the Rebbe who answered. He would walk away so that whoever it was can put down the bags, returning to see the receipt. The Rebbetzin would usually tell Yankel beforehand whether to put the order on the bill or if she would be paying, but many times the Rebbe would pay regardless, going into another room to get money and saying " דער איבערקע זאלסטו געבן אויף צדקה לעניים – the extra you should give to Tzedakka for the poor".

This was one of the reasons the children preferred when the Rebbetzin answered, as when she gave a tip she would say "Buy yourself something good".

Once, two of Yankel's teenage granddaughters, Bracha Richler and Bassie Komar, stood nervously outside, murmuring to one another about who would answer the door and take the package from them. Would it be the Rebbe? The Rebbetzin? Someone who worked in the house? They went around to the back and knocked on the door.

A few minutes passed and the Rebbetzin herself answered the door. The Rebbetzin invited them to come inside. She was beautiful, with a gentle, refined face and light blue eyes. She spoke softly, enunciating each syllable clearly, telling them to place the package on the table, and then asked them their names and how old they were. Upon answering they began to back out the door, but the Rebbetzin called them back. "Girls," she said, "I want you to always remember one thing! Enjoy life!"

It was due to these interactions that the Lipskier children – and later, many of the grandchildren – developed a connection to the

Rebbetzin. She told many of them that they can call whenever they want, and as they grew older, they would come to her home to speak to her and get advice.

This wasn't the case originally. In 5732/1972, some of Gershon Ber's cousins got out of Russia and came from Israel to spend Pesach in Crown Heights. They wanted to meet the Rebbetzin, so Tzivia asked her father for the number. She was shocked when he wouldn't give it to her, so she came up with a plan. She bought a dozen roses and sent it with her daughter to the Rebbetzin explaining that her cousins wanted to meet her and ended off with a phone number.

A half hour later the Rebbetzin called. She was most perplexed about the flowers, so Tzivia explained that her father refused to give her the Rebbetzin's home number so she came up with this idea. The Rebbetzin chuckled and said "ער איז אַ קלוגער איד – he is a smart Jew"

A postscript to the story, is that the next time the Rebbetzin spoke to Yankel, she mentioned what had transpired and said " איר האָט אַ גאון'שע טאָכטער – you have a genius daughter"

Yankel would call the Rebbetzin several times a week. Every Motzei Shabbos when he spoke to her nobody was allowed in the room with him.

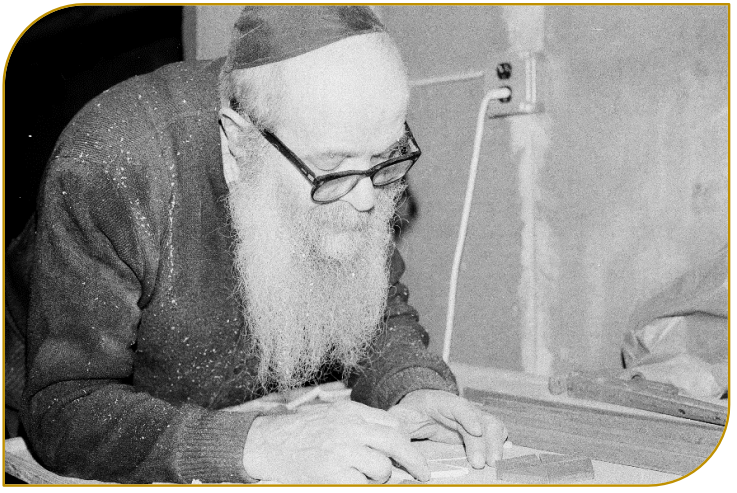
When Yankel once asked the Rebbetzin when it's okay for him to call her and she simply replied, "Any time you need help, even in the middle if the night"

This ended up unfortunately happening, by various medical crises. When Yankel would call her "Rebbetzin" she would say " איך בין נישט א רעבעצין – I'm not a Rebbetzin". Finally, one time he

blurted out, "but you call me Reb Yankel!" From then on she never protested the title again.

He would also send the Rebbetzin Meshloach Manos each year with one of his children or grandchildren. Once, the Rebbetzin asked one grandchild, Chanie Kaminetzky, if she helps with her grandfather's carpentry hobby – to which she replied no. When the Rebbetzin asked why, she replied simply, "I don't have the patience."

Yankel was always tinkering in his basement. This was where he kept all his wine making equipment and barrels of fermenting wine for Pesach, and it was there he would make all his wood projects. Yankel made Pushkos as presents, napkin holders, clocks, tables, and once even a Menorah for his granddaughters' school project. He loved the work, no matter if he was building bookcases or a Challah board with a secret slot to keep dollars from the Rebbe for safekeeping. A lumber yard would give him scrapings of wood



Circa 5736/1976
Yankel working in his basement
Credit: RebbeDrive

people cut off and left behind, and it was with these he would make his works of art.

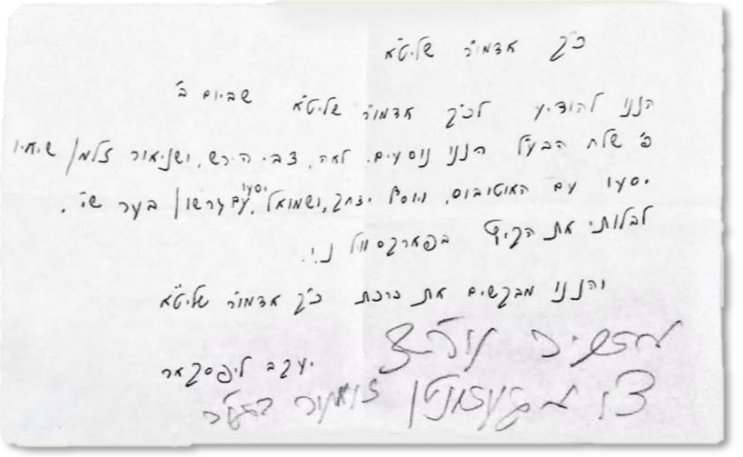
He would bring his grandchildren down proudly and they would watch him at work. He would show them how he makes the various shapes. Down in the basement was also all the treats that Bubby Taibel wasn't allowed to know about.

They were always amazed how he would somehow know the weather days ahead, perhaps due to his arthritis. He also loved riddles and jokes, teasing his grandchildren with brain twisters and tricks.

As mentioned, many of his creations he would gift to relatives and friends. Some he would sell at the Renaissance Fair in Morristown, New Jersey.

Renaissance Fair in Morristown

The Lipskiers would many time spend times spend their summers in Parksville, New York.



Letter to the Rebbe asking for a Bracha for the summer in Parksville and the Rebbe's handwritten answer

They were there during the Rebbe's visit to Camp Gan Yisorel in 5720/1960. When it was time for the Rebbe to return to the city, Yankel got into a car with Gershon Ber and Sholom Jacobson and they began following the Rebbe's car back. There was a major traffic jam but somehow the Rebbe car was making its way through at the normal speed, and though they were trying to stay directly behind the Rebbe's car, they eventually got stuck as the Rebbe's car faded out of sight.

Sitting up in his seat, Yankel Lipskier told his son-in-law, that he was able to see every time the car changed lanes, that it was the Rebbe pointing to his driver which lane to go into next.

* * *

Chof Cheshvan, 5722/1961. In a large auditorium in Tel Aviv, a few sweaty Bochurim ran around chaotically as the microphone

system wasn't working. Over a thousand people filled the hall to celebrate the Rebbe Rashab's birthday. The young Shluchim running the Farbrengen were sent by the Rebbe after Tishrei that year – Berel Lipskier included. Berel was supposed to Chazzer a Maamer for the crowd – one that he had heard from the Rebbe during Yom Tov a month before and he would have to try to do it loud enough for all to hear.

Nearly three weeks later, the Lipskiers were gathered outside the Rebbe's room to get a Bracha from the Rebbe in honor of their youngest's birthday. The Rebbe turned to Yankel and asked if he ever receives letters from his son in Eretz Yisroel.

When Yankel replied in the negative, the Rebbe gave them regards from their reclusive son.

"ער האָט געחזר'ט אַ מאמר פון דעם און דעם און האָט ניט גענוצט אַ מייק, אָבער ס'געהערט אַזוי ווי אַ מייק – He repeated over a Maamer from so-and-so [the Rebbe], and didn't use a mic, yet everybody was able to hear as if he was using one." The Rebbe offered "דער קענסט גיין צו מאַמע און זען בילדער – you can go visit my mother and see photos [of the event that I gave her]".

Rebbetzin Chana lived on the same street as them. Each day she would take a walk up and down the block, stopping to chat with Yankel if she met him outside her home. She got to know all the Lipskier children, and they would sometimes introduce her to their friends. Each year Yankel would send her a special Mishloach Manos.

In front of Rebbetzin Chana's building was a large courtyard where the Lipskier children would play. They would run to have the honor of holding the door open for the Rebbe when he arrived daily to visit his mother. Once while the Rebbe was crossing the street on his way there, their ball rolled straight towards him. They froze

momentary in fear, but to their shock, the Rebbe kicked the ball back to them with a smile.

It was on the Shabbos of the Ufruf of Berel Raskin, who would get married to Yankel's daughter Esther later that week, in Adar of 5719/1959. Mrs. Esther Sternberg was visiting Rebbetzin Chana. The Rebbetzin asked if she can walk her down Kingston, to the fruit store where Berel worked at the time for his older brother, explaining: "איך וועט גיין צום פרוט-סטאָר און מיט דעם אָפּגעבען מזל טוב לצד החתן און דען וועל איך גיין צו די גראָסערי-סטאָר און ב'וועל שטיין דאָרטן א פּאָר מינוט און דאָרטאן וועל איך געבען מיינע ברכות – [I can't attend the wedding, so] I want to go to the Fruit store, and then I'll go to the grocery store and stand there for a few minutes and it will be there that I give my Brachos [to the couple]."

The wedding was to take place in Brownsville. In order to cut wedding costs, the parents of the Chosson and Kalla didn't hire a caterer and prepared all the food themselves.

The Rebbe agreed to officiate the wedding. In typical fashion, the wedding was running late. It was in the middle of the Kabolas Ponim and the Chosson was saying the Maamer. Yankel had enough and cut him short, saying they must board the buses to 770 immediately in order to be on time for the Rebbe.

After the wedding, Rabbi Chodakov called Yankel, thanking him on the Rebbe's behalf for not keeping him waiting at the Chupa.

[The Chosson Berel also got a knock on his door, a message from the Rebbe to finish the Maamer during the days of Sheva Brachos.] Yankel cared tremendously about the Rebbe – something clearly instilled in all his children. He wasn't a Chossid that only stuck around if the Rebbe was smiling. He understood the

– 1 Adar I 5719/1959 –
The Rebbe at the Chupa of Berel and Esther Raskin

importance of listening to the Rebbe through thick and thin. He constantly advocated for people to leave their communities they settled in after the war and move to be near the Rebbe. Perhaps it was the Rebbe himself that taught Yankel his fierce Hiskashrus and made him so devoted to him.

At a Farbrengen in the winter of 5715/1955, the Rebbe was extremely displeased. There was a considerable amount of pushing in 770's small Shul where the Rebbe Farbrenged. Hushed whispers

grew louder and disturbed the Rebbe as he spoke. The Rebbe requested that both should be stopped, but it only intensified.

The Rebbe finished talking and opened up his Siddur to make a Bracha Achrona and leave. He signaled to sing, but the Chassidim were too embarrassed to sing a joyous Niggun, so the Rebbe got up, said "Ah Gutten Shabbos!" and left.

That night there was a Tzach gathering at the house of Reb Moshe Dubinsky. All that the people could talk about was what transpired at the Farbrengen.

Yankel was adamant that they go ask the Rebbe forgiveness, but most made excuses why they wouldn't go with him. Only Moshe Dubinsky joined him.

They arrived at 770 a little after 10 PM, when the Rebbe would generally go home on Motzei Shabbos. They waited by his door and when he exited, they told them that on behalf of the Chassidim they'd like to apologize for what happened. The Rebbe smiled and said "אַ פרײַלעכע וואָך און אַ פרײַלעכע חודש – [it should be] a happy week and a happy month". They weren't sure what that meant, so they asked if the Rebbe would give them a way to rectify what happened, but the Rebbe just smiled again, repeated himself, and headed home. Though worried that the Rebbe would not Farbreng the next Shabbos Mevorchim, their fears were quelled when he did, just as if everything was normal.

Another example where Yankel chose to do what was needed and not shy away like most was after the Shevuos Farbrengen of 5724/1964.

The Rebbe spoke about the dire situation of those exiled in Russia, but for some reason, nobody said L'chaim or sang when he finished. "Nu!.. Nu!..." he gestured with his head. But all was quiet.

The Rebbe became visibly disturbed, saying "Regarding your brother or relative, you don't need to be reminded, but now, regarding an entire group of people, nobody cares..." Realizing the mistake, people began singing Hoshiah Es Amecha, but the Rebbe clearly wasn't satisfied. He began quietly singing to himself Essen Est Zich, expressing a deep bitterness. Some individuals didn't understand that the Rebbe was expressing his frustration, and they began to sing along, but the Rebbe showed his displeasure again, throwing a napkin onto the table and knocking over his (nearly empty) Becher in the process.

– Circa 5721/1961 –
Yankel listens to the Rebbe's Sicha at a Farbrengen
Credit: RebbeDrive

With a terribly pained expression, the Rebbe began to speak. "Tomorrow, you'll come to ask about sending papers to a brother or relative, but now, when there is an Eis Ratzon and you could have helped two,/two and a half million Yidden to go out, nobody cares..." The Rebbe continued with some some sharp and painful

words and then asked for a child under Bar Mitzvah to sing, because "I can't have any 'Taanos' to them," and the children sang Hoshiah Es Amecha together with the Rebbe, who sang with a profound Deveikus.

For the next five years (at which time the mass "exodus" of Jews from Russia began), at every Farbrengen Yankel would say L'Chaim to the Rebbe for the Jews in Russia.

At the end Shevat of 5729/1969, Yankel and Taibel went into Yechidus in honor of his birthday. As usual, planned on asking the Rebbe for a Bracha for Taibel's Brother Yankel.

Yankel Lepkivker was in a perilous situation. Still trapped in Soviet Russia with his family, he was told quite bluntly by the government that he would never be given permission to leave the USSR.

Deeply concerned about the wellbeing of his brother-in-law, Yankel would always ask a Bracha from the Rebbe whenever writing him a letter – usually getting encouraging answers, but never a commitment from the Rebbe.

This time though, before he could even ask, the Rebbe smile and said, "אי"ה היי יאָר וועט איר זיך זען מיט אייערע שוואָגער – Im Yirtzeh Hashem this year you will see your brother-in-law"

This was a pleasant shock and the Lipskiers were overjoyed to hear the good news.

Less than a month later Yankel Lepkivker was visiting an acquaintance who worked in the government office that dealt with exit visas. Constantly trying to deepen his connection in an effort there, on March 8th – International Women's Day – he brought her flowers to her office.

– 29 Elul 5736/1976 –
Chassidim give their Pa"n to the Rebbe
Credit: RebbeDrive

"Don't tell anybody yet," she whispered to him, "But congratulations! You will be granted permission to leave soon.

By Nissan the Lepkivkers were already in Vienna, living in an old castle leased by the Israeli Government as a stopover before traveling to Israel.

They had understood that there's a possibly that the Rebbe wanted them to travel to New York instead of Eretz Yisroel. The problem was that at that time, the Rebbe was going to the Ohel nearly every day and not sending out any responses to questions.

The final plane to Eretz Yisroel was about to leave, and Yankel decided that there was no way they were spending Pesach in Vienna and him and his family took the flight, arriving on 13 Nissan.

Thousands of miles away, Yankel and Taibel were oblivious to all that transpired.

The next day when the Rebbe would distribute Matza to the Chassidim, the Rebbe told him: "נו, איך קען מבשר זיין – Nu, I can inform you that your brother-in-law is already in Eretz Yisroel"

During their time in Russia Yankel would privately send care packages to them, [by mistake letting it slip five years later, that it was only at that time that he finished paying back all the loans he took out to help his family stuck behind the iron curtain.]

A few years earlier, in 5724/1964, the Rebbe sent Reb Binyomin Katz to Communist-oppressed Russia to bring Judaism and Jewish articles to Soviet Jewry. Known for his brilliant mind and photographic memory, this came to good use in his travels in Russia, when he memorized people's names and messages to pass on the Rebbe. He later recorded the following encounter:

One Motzei Shabbos, while leaving his hotel on the way to the old marketplace, he noticed a young couple trying to catch his attention. He followed them to a side street, where they darted anxious glances, ensuring they were not being watched.

The two introduced themselves as Yaakov and Sarah Lepkivker. They had various requests and messages to send the Rebbe. Before parting ways with Katz, they asked about their family in the United States, "Reb Yankel Lipskier, you know him?"

"Who doesn't know him?" Katz asked with a smile.

"What does he do" they asked, wanting any scrap of information they

can get about their relatives.

"He has a grocery store" was the reply. Apparently the answer didn't please them, because they asked again, "what does he do?"

"He has a large family; he helps his wife" perhaps that is what they were looking for?

"What does he do?"

Katz said the last thing he can think of: "He Davens. And He is the Gabbai of the Rebbe's Shul. Every Thursday he stays in the Shul until very late, locks the doors and does carpentry work and when he's finished, cleans up and goes home"

"*This* is what we wanted to hear!" they said with a smile, "If you knew him in Russia, this was always his dream. To be near the Rebbe, to take care of his Shul, just to be able to clean its floors or fix a table"]

Though it was a rarity for the Rebbe and Rebbetzin to accept presents, the gifts Yankel would send adorn their home. Putting in so much love and care, he created Pushkos – one with a mechanism inside that sent the coins into various containers – a table and a grandfather clock for their 50th anniversary.

It was this love for the Rebbe and his Shul that led him to take up fixing it up and trying to make it more beautiful. While when most people see something that needs to be rectified they find someone to talk to about it, Yankel would right then and there begin to get to work, even though it wasn't his job. He realized that the Rebbe's Shul was everybody's responsibility – and for him those weren't empty words. When 770 first built its Shul downstairs in the Shalash during Tishrei of 5720/1959,

Right after Yom Tov Yankel purchased wood and constructed four benches for the new Shul.

Until that time, the platforms for Krias Ha'Torah would break every year during Simchas Torah because of the crowding. Yankel decided this had to change.

Before building the Bima, he brought the plans to the Rebbetzin at her home to show her. Laying it out on the table and explaining the idea, the Rebbetzin made various observations – for example to perhaps make the stairs wider to make it easier for the Rebbe to walk up and down.

This time, Yankel built a Bima that was made almost entirely of one piece and it was able to withstand the elements for about thirty

The new Bima in 770

years until 5750/1989 [when it was replaced by his two sons Berel and Zalman, who arranged for the building of the one that resides there until this day]. This is the Bima the Rebbe would stand on and say Haftorah each week as well as by many rallies as well.

When the Shul was expanded, Yankel decided he needed to grace the front wall with a beautiful new Aron Kodesh. Yankel had worked on the Aron in the upstairs Shul as well – only decorating the one that was already there from the days of the Rebbe Rayatz, based on the Rebbe's directive. Yankel also improved the Amud for the upstairs Shul in the same fashion.

Now, he would have a chance to build something from scratch. Something glorious that befits the Rebbe's Shul. At this time there was a small, six-foot- tall Aron Kodesh. One of the major issues was that during Farbrengens it was a perfect place to keep bottles of wine. This was a major problem if the bottle got knocked over, with all its contents seeping inside the Aron Kodesh. To rectify this Yankel wanted to build a large tall Aron Kodesh.

Again he brought his drafts to the Rebbetzin, and once more she gave her feedback and new ideas, like incorporating a crown in the design at the top of the Aron Kodesh.

With the help of his son Zalman, he spent long nights in his basement working on bringing his dreaming to reality. Creating it in pieces, he rolled it all to 770 on poles late one night during the days of Slichos in Elul of 5728/1968. Putting it all together on a giant frame to make his grand Aron Kodesh, took almost the whole night. Initially Yankel wanted to design it so that it should be built into the wall, like the style of many Shuls of the time. The Rebbe told him no, since that's not how it was in the Shul of his father-in-law, the Rebbe Rayatz. He then lined the inside with waterproof sheets to keep the Sifrei Torah safe.

– 22 Elul 5729/1969 –
The Rebbe places a Torah into the relatively new Aron Kodesh
Credit: Kehot Publication Society

When 770 got expanded during Tishrei of 5733/1972, the Aron Kodesh got an expansion as well as now there were many new Sifrei Torah and more room was needed. Erev Yom Kippur Yankel, with the help of some of his sons and Bochurim, added the two cabinets on the side, completed the Aron Kodesh as it looks until today.

Each year on Erev Yom Kippur the Gabbai of 770, Reb Yochanan Gordon, would go into the Rebbe's to give him the traditional Malkus. Whilst there in 5729/1968, right after the Aron was completed, the Rebbe asked, "אַז געבויט דעם ארון קודש האָט יענקל ליפסקער ווייס איך, אָבער פון וואו האָט ער גענומען די האָלץ – This that the [new] Aron Kodesh was built by Yankel Lipskier I know, but where did he get [money for] the wood from?"

Though Yochanan replied he didn't know, most of Yankel's projects he paid for himself, feeling that the responsibility was for nobody but himself.

It was because of his commitment that when Yochanan passed away that year, Yankel became an obvious candidate for the position. Many people voted for him to take the job, which he accepted and was the Gabbai in 770 for the last 15 years of his life.

Soon afterwards, the President of Israel – Zalman Shazar visited the Rebbe on Purim. This was a visit of historical proportion, as he would be the first sitting president to come to the Rebbe. Security was tightened, police were everywhere – but how would they ensure only Chassidim would come into 770 for Megila reading that year?

Yankel seemed to know everybody; he stood by the door of 770 with officers identifying who can enter and who cannot.

– End of Tishrei 5738/1978 –
Yankel fixing the Tefilin of Reb Getzel Rubashkin
Credit: JEM // the Living Archive:

– 16 Elul 5740/1980 –
The Rebbe uses a Shtender and table crafted by Yankel
Credit: RebbeDrive

During his tenure as Gabbai, Yankel would continue to build tables and Shtenders to Daven on for the Rebbe, as well as many for the Shul as well. A Farbrengen Bima that was used for many years was added to his resume. It wasn't just Yankel that had a love for the Shul. He shared his dream of being by the Rebbe with his wife Taibel, and they both cared for him greatly. Each Erev Shabbos, Taibel would lovingly polish the crowns of the Sifrei Torah – especially that of the Rebbe's Sefer Torah and Moshiach Sefer Torah. When she noticed that the Rebbe's Farbrengen tablecloth was creased and dirty, Yankel began bringing it home for her where she would wash and iron it to so it would look perfect on the Rebbe's table.

On Tisha B'Av, he wanted the Rebbe to be more comfortable as befits a Melech and would bring a large wooden Cotts soda box from his store for the Rebbe to sit on each year (until a permanent proper box was eventually made).

His carpentry hobby came into play at the store as well. He built air ducts and contraptions with wood. Come Chanukah time, a mechanical spinning Dreidel would be on display for the customers.

Yankel would also build *another* Aron Kodesh. Though this time due to a misunderstanding.

On Shmini Atzeres 5738/1977, to the shock of the Chassidim celebrating Hakafos with him, the Rebbe had a heart attack. For the next few weeks he would be kept under the care of top doctors while staying in his office in 770.

Yankel's son Berel had remembered that as a Bochur, he would have the merit of being in the Reb be's room for various Maamorim and Brachos. He would always see in the corner of the room, the table of the Rebbe Maharash that his family brought in 1948, and on it a Sefer Torah.

Berel felt that perhaps the Rebbe might be uncomfortable sleeping in a room with a Sefer Torah and suggested to his father Yankel to perhaps build a private Aron Kodesh for the Rebbe.

Upon its completion, Yankel and Berel carried it to the Rebbe's room and explained its purpose.

– 14 Nissan 5722/1962 –
The Rebbe Maharash's table and Sefer Haftoros can be seen in the Rebbe's room

The Rebbe smiled and explained that, though they appear similar, this was actually a Sefer *Haftoras*, written by the Rebbe Meharash.

The Rebbe told them to bring the Aron Kodesh to the library next door – to the bewilderment of the uninformed librarian there.

Living in Crown Heights gave Yankel ample interactions with the Rebbe. Once at a Farbrengen he went over to the Rebbe with a cup of L'chaim and told him that he had just had tenth grandchild.

The Rebbe's reply: "אייניקלעך ציילט מען נישט – we don't count grandchildren"

After a lengthy Yechidus once where the Rebbe answered a whole list of questions he handed to him. He exited content and pulled out a scrap of paper to jot down what the Rebbe had told him while it was still fresh. He was mortified to discover the note he intended to give to the Rebbe still in his pocket – realizing he had given the Rebbe a shopping list.

Though uneasy, he was amazed at the open miracle that the Rebbe knew his questions regardless. Later he told someone how sensitive the Rebbe was, and didn't want to embarrass him by telling him that it was the wrong sheet of paper.

– 19 Kislev 5739/1979 –
Yankel in hs usual place behind the Rebbe
Credit: RebbeDrive

During another Yechiuds, Yankel was holding a child and sneezed. As is the custom he gave a little tug on his ear. The Rebbe told him that one shouldn't cross their hand over their face, and in the future he should pull the ear on same side as whichever hand he is using – and the Rebbe mimicked the motion.

Taibel; once mentioned something about one of their children's teacher, using the term "Rebbe", which the Rebbe apparently didn't like. "איר מיינו זיין מלמד – you mean his Melamed"

When one of their children got eczema, the Rebbe told them to get him a new mattress. Not able to afford one they just switched his with another child's. Within a short while, nobody had ecxema in their home.

* * *

As the years wore on, Yankel's business was causing him more anguish than profit. It got to the point that the IRS audited him due to the amount of Tzeddaka he was giving. Though his income was much less, Yankel had continued giving Tzedakka like the days in

Kutais when he had money to spare. The IRS assumed that he must have a lot more money off the books if this is how much he is giving to charity.

His daughter Tzivia went with him to the hearing. "Look at the torn suit he is wearing!" she told the officials there. "This is a man that would rather not buy clothes and eat less in order to give charity! This is how he lived in Russia and this is how he lived today."

Impressed with her statement, they dropped the subject.

– 18 Iyar 5740/1980 –
Greeting the Rebbe on his way into 770
Credit: RebbeDrive

But it wasn't enough.

Yankel tried to get a business loan. With no line of credit, and nothing to back his request, he tried to come before a judge to see if he could help him with his request.

A short time before this, a well-dressed black man had walked into the store and asked if he could borrow some money for the train. Yankel immediately gave it to him and didn't think much more of it. Now this very same man sat before him – judging his case!

He got the loan.

In spite of all his efforts it just wasn't worth it to keep the business. In 1978 he sold his store to Berel Kahan.

* * *

Elul 5741/1981 –
Collecting the money from 770's Pushkas
Credit: JEM // the Living Archive.

With the store in new hands, Yankel was now free to relax and spend his final years doing what he loved most: taking care of 770 and carpentry.

He was mostly in charge of the Aliyos and Chazzanim. He only allowed those that had beards be Chazzan. When emptying Pushkas, he would also make sure to do it together with a second person.

Yankel took his position very seriously. He may have been a great uncle or friend, but when it came to 770, it was as if he didn't see you. There was no special treatment if you wanted to stand on the Bima to be able to see or hear the Rebbe better etc.

He couldn't stand the way people desecrated the Rebbe's Shul. He would say that instead of people nullifying themselves in this holy Mikdash M'at – they feel that they are its owners. Turning 770 into their workroom, knocking shelves and nails into the walls wherever they please, along with all the assorted implements and contraptions to get a better view of the Rebbe.

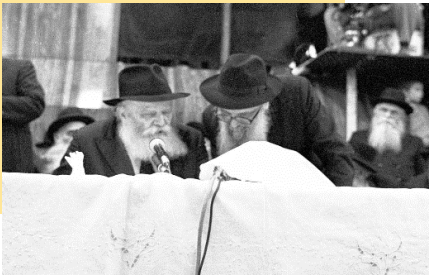
When Michoel Lipskier was sick, the Rebbe asked Reb Dovid Raskin to make a Mi Shebeirach for him. After saying the Nusach, Reb Dovid paused, not knowing Michoel's mother's name. The Rebbe told him:
"Ben Bas Sheva"

* * *

On the last Yud Alef Nissan of Yankel's life, we went over to the Rebbe during the Farbrengen to ask a Bracha for his younger brother:

"מיכאל האָט געבעטן אַ ברכה אויף קומען אַהיים פאַר פסח"

"אמן! זאָל זיין בשעה טובה ומצלחת"



Jem // The Living Archive

At the Rebbe's Farbrengen once, the makeshift bleachers collapsed, severely injuring a Bochur, shattering his legs. Bedridden for a long time and in need of expensive medical procedures, the insurance didn't want to pay for it, saying he put himself in a perilous situation.

The Shul's insurance refused to pay as well, saying that it was the people who erected this hazardous bleachers fault.

Yankel went to his insurance company and fought with them, telling them that a bench in 770 doesn't move without his knowledge or permission, and therefore the accident was his fault, pressuring them to pay the medical bills. [The Bochur only found out about this many years later.]

Being Chazzan for Shachris in 770 on Shabbos was coveted. It meant that you got to be standing on the Bima right near the Rebbe as he read the Hatorah. Musaf on the other hand was a lot

harder to get someone to commit to.

It was already in the middle of Kriyas HaTorah one Shabbos, and Yankel still could not find someone willing to go to the Amud for Musaf. Turning to the Chazzan from Shacharis, he asked if he could please do him a favor and Daven Musaf too. The Chazzan made a motion to his throat, that his vocal chords had gone through enough for one day.

Yankel glared at him, "This is the last time I'm asking you!"

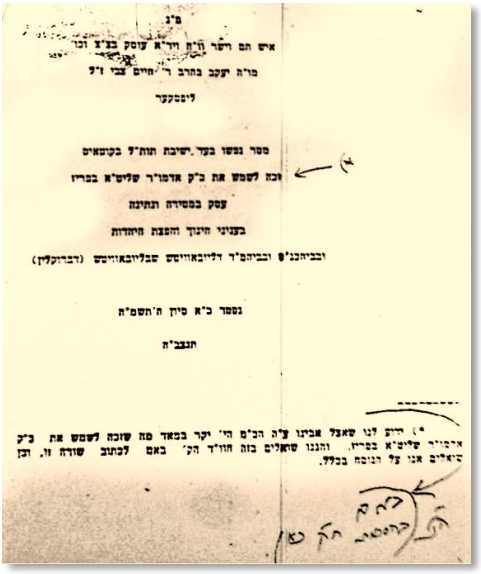
The date was Shabbos Mevorchim Sivan 5745/1985.

* * *

The Sheva Brachos of Bassy and Zalmy Komar was ending. Though it was in Oholei Torah, Yankel had attended the Kabolas Ponim of the wedding due to it being his granddaughter's wedding, but went home due to his steadfast principles. He usually wouldn't step foot in there as it used to be a conservative synagogue.

Now at the Jacobson home he got to celebrate the Simcha with his family. He played a bit with his great-granddaughter who was a toddler at the time before heading home.

Yankel collapsed at home sometime after 1 AM, returning his Neshama to its maker on 21 Sivan 5745/1985.



ב"ג

איש תם וישר וו"ה ויר"א עוסק בצ"צ וכו'

מו"ה יעקב בהרב ר' חיים צבי ז"ל

ליפסקער

מסר נפשו בעד ישיבת תות"ל בקטאוס

וכה לשמש את כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א בפריז

עסק במסירה ונתינה

בעניני חינוך והפצת היהדות

ובביהכנ"ס ובביהמ"ד דליובאוויטש שבליובאוויטש (דברוקלין)

נספר כ"א סיון ה'תשמ"ה

תנצב"ה

*) ידוע לנו שאצל אבינו ע"ה הכ"מ הי' יקר במאד מה שזכה לשמש את כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א בפריז. והננו שואלים בזה הוו"ד הק' באם לכתוב שורה זו, וכן שואלים אנו על הנוסח בכלל.

The Rebbe gives his approval to Yankel's Matzeiva

Postscript: Each year the Raskins would host a Kiddush home on Shmini Atzeres.

Shortly before Shmini Atzeres 5746/1985, Berel Raskin mentioned to Sholom Ber Gansburg that him and his wife were hesitant if they should make a Kiddush that year, as his wife's father Yankel had just passed away a few months before. Unbeknownst to him, Sholom Ber Gansburg had passed this on to the Rebbetzin, who a short time later relayed it to the Rebbe over dinner together. Sholom Ber Gansburg later conveyed the Rebbe's reaction:

"וואָס פאַר-אַ פנים וועט דאָס האָבן – [What will it look like] when Reb Yaakov will come down from Gan Eden into the Sukkah and there will be empty tables and chairs?"

Of course they proceeded to make the Kiddush to make the Kiddush that year – a tradition that carried on to this very day.

A few days before her passing, one of Yankel's grandsons was speaking to Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka on the phone, reminiscing about Yankel. "He definitely wasn't a simple man," he said, to which she replied, "Ah, no!!"

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ליובאוויטש

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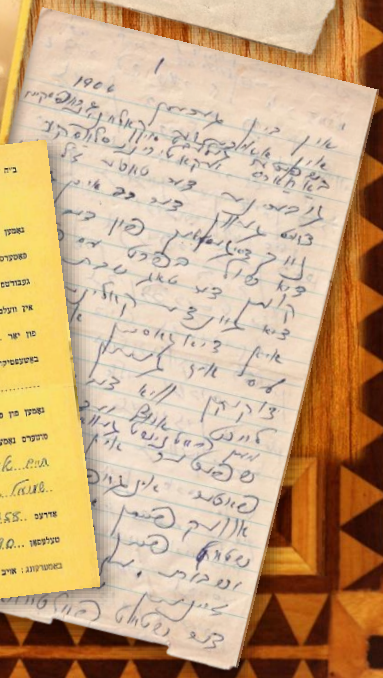
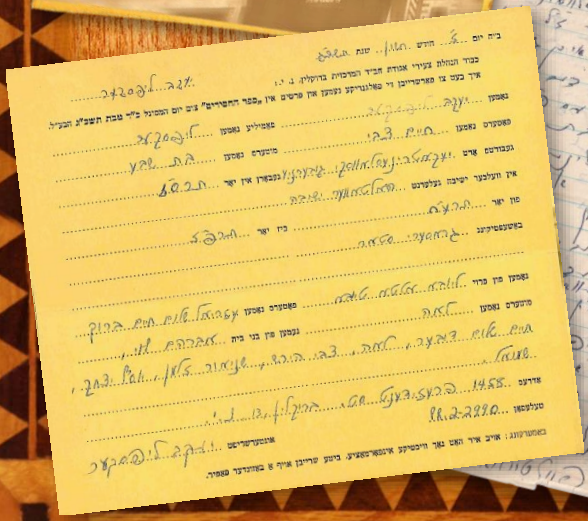
ב"ה, כ"ד סיון תשמ"ה
ברוקלין

משפחת ליפסקר -
שליט"א

נצטערתי להשמועה מפטירת הרה"ח הוו"ח אי"א
נו"נ עוסק בצ"צ כו' מו"ה יעקב ע"ה.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון ויורושלים.

ומכאן ולהבא אך טוב וחסד ימצא אתכם תמיד כל
הימים.

בברכה

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Mr. Jacob Lipskar
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