

*Lemaan
Tisaper*



The Rebbe's Commandant

The Memoirs and Reminiscences of
Rav Mordechai Simcha



Zeh sefer toldos adam. This is a book of the generations of a man. And this man, Rav Mordechai Simcha, shlita, is a book of the generations of Man. His story is a history, an account that reveals much about the essence of the Jewish people in the last century: Their holy antecedents, their challenges and struggles and their triumphs in a New World. The Introduction will elaborate upon this theme, but here is the place to speak about the superlative qualities of the author, despite his firm insistence that we not do so (על כבוד דא אין שומעין לו).

Our father and teacher is a chad b'dara—unique in his generation, and perhaps in several generations. A Gavra Rabba, a person who contains within him the sharfkeit of Kotzk and the genteel bearing of royalty. He is miShiyarei Knesses HaGedolah—a throwback to the chasidim and anshei maaseh of an earlier era, those who yearned with every fiber of their being to serve Hashem and observe His Torah properly. Real people.



Rav Mordechai Simcha

Lemaan Tisaper



The Rebbe's Commandant

The Memoirs and Reminiscences of
the Right Hand of Gedolei Torah,
Tireless Askan, Legendary Mechanech and
Post-War Builder of Klal Yisroel

The Memoirs and Reminiscences of Rav Mordechai Simcha

שיחי' לימים טובים וארוכים



Brought to publication by the children,
grandchildren, disciples and friends of the Rav
חודש ניסן שנת יחד נבנה לה' אלקי ישראל



Translated by Yocheved Lavon

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Please note: I have a request to make of my dear reader.

I would like the reading of this book to be in accordance with the *passuk* representing my name, Mordechai: *Mah ahavti Sorasecha, kol hayom hi sichosi*. Please do not read it at the time and place that you have designated for Torah learning, but only at those times and places where your "*sichah*," your conversation, is about Torah.

Author's Preface

2 Shevat 5570

(first day of the *sidra* "*lemaan tesaper*")

"Praise they give to Him, **all the host of heaven.**" How much more must we, creatures formed of earthly matter, give Him praise, and fulfill our obligation of "*Dor ledor yishabach ma'aseicha ugevurasecha yagidu* — Each generation shall praise Your deeds to the next generation, and tell of Your might."

This book is my response to the many people who have asked me to write down the stories of my past for posterity, and to turn my "*vayehi*," with its connotation of trouble and pain, into "*vehaya*," with its connotation of joy, which in Hebrew is *simcha*, our family's name. I accede to their request so that our youth should not bring shame to our old age, and our days should be renewed **as they were in previous times**, which are on the verge of being forgotten and lost.

With thankfulness and a prayer to the Creator of all worlds for a *refuah sheleimah* for my wife, the *tzidkonis* Beila bas Duba, daughter of the *chassid* and *tzaddik* Reb Dubid Weinzicher Hy"d.

Mordechai ben Dovrish (Simcha)

*A*uthor's Preface to the English Edition

First and foremost, I would like to thank Hashem, for all of the good He has done in the past, present and that He will do, *iy"H*, in the future. Part and parcel of our obligation to thank Him is to relate, to our family and friends, all the wonderful history (his-story) that transpired in our lives. When we realize the extent of His kindness, it is a catalyst for us to better understand where we come from and to where we must reach. Although this autobiography has already been published in Hebrew, many people have asked for this important work to be translated into English. As much as my dearest grandson would like not to be mentioned, I cannot withhold from expressing my utmost gratitude to R' "Didi" Levitan, for undertaking this project of love with his trademark efficiency and generosity. Special thanks to Mrs. Yocheved Lavon who did a truly remarkable job in rendering the translation. And a thank you to R' Henech Moshe Levin for making the "shidduch" with R' Yechezkel Spitzer, who shepherded this monumental work through its stages and helped with many of its technical details. May Hashem grant me and the entire family, along with the rest of Klal Yisroel, many more fruitful and satisfying years of Avodas HaKodesh, and may we see the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash in our days.

Mordechai ben Dovrish (Simcha)

Divrei Bracha

by HaRav Elya Fisher *shlita*
Rosh Kollel Gur, Brooklyn, New York

Every member of the Jewish people has his stories to tell, concerning his personal life or the events of his times. Often, however, these stories are of no particular interest to others because they merely recount ordinary, everyday occurrences. This is not the case when it comes to our friend HaRav Mordechai Simcha *shlita*, who is known to all as an out-of-the-ordinary person. His amazing inner *chiyus*, the vivacity of his mind and spirit, is what sets him apart, and it immediately catches the attention of everyone who comes into contact with him.

I have had many conversations with him over the years, and I have discovered that the events of his life have also been out of the ordinary, and they too are full of a special inner vitality, such that others will also find them interesting, especially the people of our own Gerrer community. His life story tells of times spent in the company of his fellow Gerrer *bochurim* in pre-war Poland, in that luminous atmosphere, and

our friend goes on to tell us about the hardships of trying to establish a similar Gerrer community in Eretz Yisrael in the years preceding the Holocaust and the years immediately following that terrible *churban*. He then tells of the struggle to preserve Yiddishkeit in Eretz Yisrael in the early days of the State of Israel, and afterwards he writes of his travels abroad and of his part in the development of the Gerrer community in America.

When I realized how many fascinating experiences our friend has had, I told him they ought to be written down and published for posterity, and on the strength of that, with his usual vitality and *simcha* (his name suits him well), he got to work on the manuscript. And now, here is the book in all its glory.

I call upon my abovementioned friend, and upon our entire Gerrer community, and especially on the young people of our flock, to take this book home (after paying for it in full), and let the wise heed and absorb its lessons.

In the Torah, HaKadosh Baruch Hu says to Moshe Rabbeinu *a"h*, "Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart...in order that I should place these signs of Mine... and *lemaan tesaper*, in order that you should recount..." A question arises here: Is it worthwhile for the Children of Israel to suffer enslavement and be immersed in deep levels of impurity, just so that they

will have something to tell about? But rather, what we can learn from this is that the value of *sippur*, of recounting what happened, is so high that it is worth suffering for, and this teaches us the importance of *sippur* — the *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* of our nation and of the individual. May Hashem grant redemption to the Jewish people, and then the wonders of our destined *geulah* will be recounted, and, as is said at the end of the first chapter in *Berachos*, the wonders of *yetzias Mitzrayim* will be secondary in comparison to them.

5 Shevat 5750

(the *yahrzeit* of Maran HaSefas Emes,
may his merit shield us, amen)

Elya Fisher, Rosh Kollel Gur, New York

The Torah says, "*Lemaan tesaper b'oznei bincha*, in order that you should recount in the ears of your son," and accordingly, with praise and thanks to G-d for all His graciousness to me, I name my *chamishah chumshei Torah*, the sons and sons-in-law with whom I have been blessed:

- My firstborn son, Reb **Akiva shlita**, of Monsey, New York, and his family
- My son-in-law who is like a son to me, Reb **Shimshon** Richard *shlita* of Boro Park, New York, and his family
- My son-in-law who is like a son to me, Reb **Shmuel** Schwirtz *shlita* of Bnei Brak, and his family
- My son Reb **Dovid shlita**, of Detroit, Michigan, and his family
- My son-in-law who is like a son to me, Reb **Chaim Zev** Levitan *shlita* of Monsey, New York, and his family

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל



Introduction

Noach and Daniel and Iyov each saw three worlds: A developed world, a destroyed world and a rebuilt world (*Midrash Tanchuma* §5). We may add to that list our father and teacher, Rav Mordechai Simcha, *shlita*, who has also seen three worlds: The world of pre-war Europe, with its irreplaceable leaders of Torah and Chasidus; the world of Churban Europe; and the rebuilt world after World War II. But note this point well: Rav Simcha was not merely a witness to the rebuilding. He was one of those rare few who were the rebuilders. He was one of the architects of the blessed and flourishing world in which we live today.

A diligent student of history does not skip to the last page of the book. We know now how the efforts of the pioneers in Israel and America turned out. But *they* didn't know how their efforts would turn out. If we want to appreciate what they invested in those early years—and perhaps why HaKadosh Baruch Hu granted them such extraordinary hatzlachah—we need to understand the era they lived in and the emunah they lived with.

Rav Mordechai Simcha and his brilliant counterparts lived in a very discouraging time, just after the war, The *saltah v'shamnah* of Klal Yisroel—the best and the brightest—had not left Europe alive. The conventional wisdom in the United States was that the few truly Orthodox Jews would soon die out—and Orthodox Judaism with them. In the fledgling State of Israel, Ben Gurion felt he could afford to throw the yeshivos a few bones since they too would soon become statistically insignificant. There, in Israel, who had the strength to care about furthering authentic Yiddishkeit amidst the wars and the austerity?

Rav Mordechai Simcha did. The Gedolei Olam of that time saw in him an **אוד מוצל מאש**, an ember saved from the fire, but not just any fire: He was an ember from the fire of Torah, from the fire of Chasidus, from the fire of Ahavas Hashem and from the fire of Ahavas Yisroel. An ember that could relight these fires in the New World and bring warmth and illumination to the Yidden living there. So our father and teacher became their right hand, their *shliach*, and he has never stopped acting in that role. שליחותיהו דקמאי עבדי, he and his peers act with the authorization of the great men of earlier times.

When the previous Gerrer Rebbe, the Pnei Menachem, met Rav Simcha on one occasion, a person in the room asked the Rebbe if he remembered Rav Simcha.

"Of course I do," the Rebbe said, turning to Rav Simcha, "You were my first Commandant!" [In the Chasidus of Ger, the battle against the yetzer hora is taken very seriously and the campaign for spiritual aliyah is framed in military terms.] For the Pnei Menachem's nephew, the current Gerrer Rebbe, Rav Simcha was a Commandant as well, and much, much more besides. If a tree can be judged by its fruits, then Rav Simcha is an ilana ravreva (a magnificent tree) indeed.

But the greatest tree cannot endure without roots, and Rav Mordechai Simcha could not have achieved what he achieved without his *eishes chayil*, our Ema and Savta, Rebbetzin Beila Simcha, נ"ע. She took full responsibility for the needs of the home, with its five children, allowing her husband to learn and teach and reach out to thousands.

You will read in the following pages of the wondrous circumstances surrounding Rav Mordechai Simcha's birth. It is therefore fitting to record here the story of Rebbetzin Beila Simcha's extraordinary survival.

She was one of fourteen children. Her father was a Kotzker chasid by the name of R' Dovid Weinzicher. They lived in Warsaw. It was 1935 and Beila was fifteen years old. The storm that would engulf Europe, and Poland in particular, had just begun to gather. At that time, Agudas Yisroel used to run an annual raffle. The three or four winners would get a free ticket to Eretz Yisroel. Beila was one of the winners that year and she was eager to go, but her father, the Kotzker chasid,

wouldn't hear of it. The land that was then called Palestine was not the best environment for a single girl without a nearby family.

The day she would have to give an answer to Agudas Yisroel was imminent. If she would not be using the ticket, they would give it to someone else. That day, the Kotzker Rebbe visited Warsaw and Beila suggested that the question be put to him. Her father agreed to go ask him, but she said, "I want to go along too."

"Go along? What for? He won't look at you. The Rebbe doesn't look at girls."

"I want to hear the answer myself."

So she went with her father to the Rebbe and her father presented the question to him. The Rebbe raised his eyes to glance at her and said, "Shick ir. Dus kleiner vet kein mol nisht kaleh veren. [Send her. This small one will never be spoiled.]"

Beila went to Eretz Yisroel, found work and sent money back home regularly until 1939. She was the only one to survive from her entire family.

Our Ema and Savta was niftar on the first night of Sukkos, 5760. This sefer is dedicated to her, whose memory lives as an inspiration in the heart of her husband, in the hearts of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, and in the hearts of innumerable talmidim and talmidos.

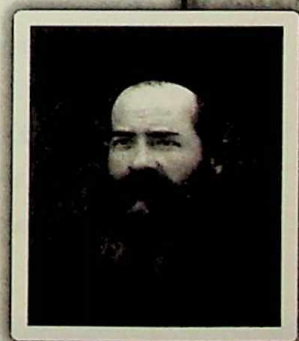
We who bring this sefer to press would like to express

our deep gratitude to Yocheved Lavon of Kiryas Sefer who rendered the Hebrew into an elegant and eminently readable English while somehow preserving the flavor of the original. Her devotion and her craft show on every page. And we would like to thank Rav Yechezkel Spitzer, *shlita*, and his Achiezer ben Achisamach, R' Aron Einhorn, for turning a digital file into a handsome sefer and for his efforts in shepherding the project to completion.

Of course, we want to express our gratitude, from the depths of our hearts, to Rav Mordechai Simcha himself, for his devotion, craft and artistry in cultivating our souls and guiding our lives. We pray that, through this sefer, he should impart a measure of his radiant soul to thousands upon thousands of our fellow Yidden, who should merit to delight in Hashem's goodness.

The sons, sons-in-law, talmidim and admirers of the author

**Our Family's Roots:
Rebbe Meir of Primishlan**



Our Family's Roots: Rebbe Meir of Primishlan

I have heard that it all began with the holy *tzaddik*, Rebbe Meir of Primishlan of blessed memory. One of his closest followers was Reb Yisroel Avraham, who, in the manner of a faithful *chassid*, clung to his Rebbe with every fiber of his being, yet did not wish to bother him with his personal troubles. There was, however, a very pressing situation regarding his home life — he had no children. To make matters worse, twelve children had been born to his wife and him, but not one of them had lived. His wife, the *tzidkonis* Maras Chaye Sarah, urged him, quite rightly: “Yisroel Avraham! You have a close relationship with a *tzaddik* who is world-famous for bringing miraculous deliverance to people with all sorts of troubles, and yet you don’t even ask him to pray for us and implore Heaven to have mercy on us!” But her husband persisted in evading the issue. Eventually, Maras Chaye Sarah decided that, unless he spoke to the *tzaddik* about their sorrow on his very next trip to Primishlan, she would travel there and get an audience with the Rebbe herself. She

informed Reb Yisroel Avraham of her decision, and thus he was forced to promise her he would go to see the holy man the very next day. His righteous wife, however, told him she would accompany him this time and stand in the doorway to encourage him.

And so they made the trip. Reb Yisroel Avraham was admitted to the Rebbe's presence, and hesitantly, he began to relate his sad story. The Rebbe apparently saw no way of helping him, however, and merely consoled him, saying that one could still be a faithful servant to Hashem without having children. The righteous Chaye Sarah, hearing this from the doorway, became so distraught that she threw herself down prone in front of the door and declared that she wouldn't get up until the Rebbe promised them children who would live to have children of their own. The Rebbe then turned to his chassid Reb Yisroel Avraham, and told him he should go to the Holy Land, and there, with Hashem's help, he would be blessed. As soon as the couple heard these words, they turned to go, but the Rebbe called them back for a moment and said, "This is the sign of your salvation, for Yehoshua brought the Bnei Yisroel into the Land of Israel." Again, they started to leave, and again the Rebbe stopped them and added, "But do not reveal this sign to anyone." They parted from the Rebbe full of faith and trust that their need would be fulfilled.

In Tzefas

After nearly a year of traveling from place to place, Reb Yisroel Avraham and his wife finally arrived in the Holy Land and settled in the city of the Kabbalists, Tzefas. Less than a year later, a daughter was born to them. Swept away in a holy fervor, Reb Yisroel Avraham literally climbed onto a table and danced for joy. After a few celebratory cups of wine, he remarked that if only the child had been a boy, he would have named him Meir after the Rebbe, forgetting that custom forbids naming a child after a living person. His friends pointed out his error and asked why he would think of naming a son after the Rebbe. Then the whole story came rushing out, and Reb Yisroel Avraham even forgot the Rebbe's warning and mentioned the sign that the Rebbe had told them to keep secret. Soon afterwards, to everyone's great sorrow, the baby passed away, like all their previous children. The couple's anguish was indescribable. But Reb Yisroel Avraham and his righteous wife were not the sort to give way to despair, even when facing a tragedy like this.

They traveled back to Primishlan to appease the *tzaddik*, for they were afraid that the misfortune had struck them because they hadn't heeded his warning and hadn't kept their promise to him. As Chazal say, "One who transgresses the words of sages is liable to death" (*Berachos* 4b), and in this case the

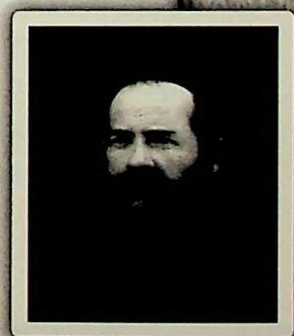
Divine wrath had fallen upon an innocent baby. When they came to Rebbe Meir, he consoled them and said, "When one transgresses and repeats it, the thing becomes to him as if no longer binding"¹ — cross over and go back once more to the Holy Land, and then Hashem will unbind you from your trouble."

As the *tzaddik* said, so it was, as it is written: "You shall state your decision, and it shall be carried out for you" (Iyov 22:28). They returned to Tzefas, and a year later, a son was born to them. Reb Yisroel Avraham gave him the name Alter Yechiel Chaim, apparently in order to confer life and length of days upon him in triplicate. That child became my grandfather, Reb Alter Yechiel Chaim Simcha *ztz"l*.

Incidentally, before I began to tell about the amazing life of my grandfather *ztz"l*, I would like to say for the record that after much searching, I found it written in a Midrash, which unfortunately I have not managed to locate again, that Yehoshua bin Nun had no children, and after he entered Eretz Yisroel, a daughter was born to him.

¹ Translator's note: Rebbe Meir's words in Hebrew were, "*Avar veshanah, na'aseis lo keheter*," an allusion to a statement found in several places in the Talmud. The Rebbe's advice was based on a novel interpretation of the Hebrew words: *avar* means crossing over or passing, either in a physical sense or in the sense of transgressing a law of G-d or man.

My Grandfather





My Grandfather

My grandfather was a marvel. He lived more than a hundred years and passed away in Vienna, Austria. I will tell the little that I remember of him from my childhood and youth. As related above, he was born in Tzefas, the city of the Kabbalists, and there he learned and taught, and rose to ever-higher levels in fear of G-d and knowledge of Torah. If I remember rightly, he studied under the Ridbaz, author of a famous commentary on *Talmud Yerushalmi*, and under other great sages of the city. He lived there after his marriage as well, and sons and daughters were born to him, among them my father and my uncle Reb Yitzchak Moshe Zilber ztz"l, a prominent member of the community who devoted his life to rescuing his Jewish brethren who had fled Europe and entered Eretz Yisroel under the British Mandate in the days preceding World War II. Reb Yitzchak Moshe was a modest man; I will say more about him in later chapters, and about my father as well, to the extent that a son can give testimony about his father. But now let us speak a little about my grandfather.

Due to the plagues and earthquakes that struck the city of Tzefas, leaving it in ruins, my grandfather took his family and escaped to Vienna, where he lived a holy, pure family life, studied and taught Torah, and contributed greatly to the community in which he lived.

The Vizhnitzer Kloiz, Vienna

As one of the heads of the Vizhnitzer Koiz, where the finest of Vienna's Jews met for prayer and learning, my grandfather taught Torah and Chassidus to the *chassidim* of Ottynia-Vizhnitz and to all the Jews of the city. He made a bare living selling homemade wine; his customers included distinguished families, and famous *rabbonim* and *admorim* such as HaRav Chaim Yitzchak Yerucham Altstadter ztz"l.

My grandfather also served as *shaliach tzibbur* in the *kloiz* of Rebbe Yitzchak Meir ztz"l, the Admor of Kopitshnitz, grandson of the Oheiv Yisroel ztz"l. There, too, he shared his rich stores of Torah and Chassidus with those who frequented the shul. Everyone referred to him as "Reb Alter Eretz Yisroel Yid," because he was always homesick for the Holy Land, and I believe that he also kept all the customs and halachic rulings observed by the Jews of Eretz Yisroel. (I should point out that with Hashem's help, I will be referring to these personalities again and again, and to stories involving them and others.)

The Vizhnitzer Kloiz, however, was the main venue for my grandfather's public life. He was a very influential figure there, delivering *shiurim* which left a lasting impression on individuals and on the community. If my memory serves me well, other prominent figures were spreading their influence there at the same time: HaRav Chaim Gellis ztz"l, HaRav Hershel Schechter ztz"l, HaRav Chaim Preminger ztz"l, and HaRav Yisroel Singer ztz"l (grandfather of HaRav Yisroel Singer *shlita*), HaRav Tzvi Dikman ztz"l, and many other inspirational figures of the day.

We children easily absorbed Torah, *yiras Shomayim*, and genuine *ahavas Yisroel* in that environment. And that reminds me that the elder Vizhnitzer Rebbe — the Ahavas Yisroel — visited Vienna several times, and I was told that he served as *sandek* at my *bris*, and that his son, the Damesek Eliezer, served as *kvatter*, which is known to be a *segulah* for the childless, for he had not been blessed with children. (I believe I heard this from my father ztz"l, who was wonderfully adept in the art of keeping silent, and exerted much influence on others through his silence.)

Regarding my grandfather, though, the biggest wonder was that he remained in Vienna, where the Nazi regime, may its memory be blotted out, had its headquarters — and survived. He lived there through World War II and for about twenty more years after the Germans' downfall. People say — and it

was written up extensively in the papers as well — that he remained there, hale and hearty, maintaining full Chassidic dress and appearance. The non-Jews revered him and called him *der heiliger Yid*, the holy Jew. He would go to the *mikveh* every day as long as it remained open under the onslaught of war.

One of the reasons he stayed there until his death, rather than returning to Eretz Yisroel, was that he hoped to find his daughters, my aunts, who had been taken away by the accursed Nazis, may their name and memory be blotted out. But his staying there had been arranged by Hashem; I cannot describe the efforts he made and the sympathy he felt for the refugee Jews who passed through the city, and how much aid he organized on their behalf from our Jewish brethren in America. (When I visited Vienna some years ago, the elders of the community told me that he also helped to return the renowned *beis medrash*, the Schiffshul, to Jewish hands. I saw a memorial plaque there which mentioned some of the work he undertook on behalf of his fellow Jews. Of course, everything I have mentioned is merely a tiny sampling of his life story, garnered from the memories of my youth.)

My Father, My Father

My father, too, was born in Tzefas. He moved to Vienna

because of circumstances in the family, mainly because my sister Chaye, a"h, fell from a donkey when she was three years old, and then contracted polio after the accident. He decided to move to Vienna with her and my other sister Fradel a"h, who devoted herself to Chaye as long as they both lived, may their memory be blessed.

My father ztz"l was a righteous, pure-hearted man, modest in his ways. I remember meeting some young boys as they came out of the shul where he sat day and night, and without knowing I was his son, they said to me, "Rabbi, do you know that in that shul, right there, sits one of the *lamed-vav tzaddikim* (the thirty-six righteous men in whose merit the world exists). As Chazal say (see *Pesachim* 66b): "Leave the Jews alone; if they are not prophets, they are surely the children of prophets." Or, as the saying goes, where there's smoke, there's fire. Despite all the troubles he went through, I never heard my father shout or moan; he always accepted the suffering with love, faith, and trust in Hashem. Like his father before him, he too served as *baal toke'a*, blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah in the minyan of the *Admor Rebbe Yitzchak Meir of Kopitchnitz ztz"l*, and he passed away in Tel Aviv and was buried in the Zichron Meir cemetery, Bnei Brak.

My Uncle's Life Mission

My father's younger brother, Reb Yitzchak Moshe Zilber, whom I mentioned earlier, remained in Tzefas all his life. He and his wife Tzipporah a"h had a modest little shop where they sold kitchen utensils, making a bare living. Their life's mission was rescuing Jews who sought refuge on the shores of the Holy Land, because the British Mandate authorities had imposed severe restrictions on immigration. People in Tzefas told me that my uncle had a special set of clothes that he would put on every few months, and he would travel to Jerusalem to see the highest-ranking Mandate official and beg him to grant a pardon to hundreds of Jews who had been caught at the Syrian border. He signed bail amounting to thousands of liras and helped them to get across the border and settle in Eretz Yisroel, without taking any form of remuneration, only out of a sense of dedication. I heard all this from people who didn't know I was his nephew. My uncle also had the merit of bringing his father's remains from Vienna to be interred in Tzefas, his birthplace.

A Joyful Mother of Sons

As I write these lines it is *erev Shavuot*, the *yahrzeit* of my righteous mother, Maras Dovrish a"h, daughter of Reb Shimshon ztz"l. It would take a whole book to write about her

and her life extensively, but I will try to say as much as I can in brief, so as not to burden the reader too much. (I also feel it an obligation, and a great merit, to write more lengthily about matters concerning *klal Yisroel*, the Jewish people as a whole, in which I played a small part due to Hashem's great kindness.) My mother *a"h* dedicated every fiber of her being to aiding, consoling, and encouraging the downhearted.

I remember that our home in Vienna, my birthplace, was always crowded with dozens of people and families, especially refugees from the earthquakes and famine of Tzefas. Sometimes several chairs would be placed alongside a bed so that three or more people could sleep on it crosswise, and many weddings were conducted and celebrated in our courtyard, among countless other acts of charity and kindness on my mother's part.

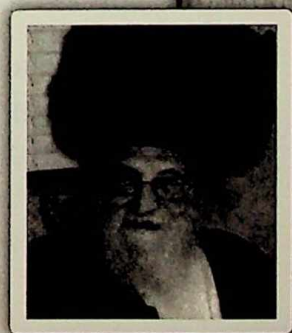
And then, when the *tzidkonis* Sarah Shenirer *a"h* founded the Bais Yaakov movement, my mother was in the vanguard, together with such great figures as Dr. Leo Deutchlander and Reb Shabsai Scheinfeld, the Secretary of Agudas Yisroel, and our very own Reb Dovid Turkel, chairman of Agudas Yisroel's Vienna branch. She helped to organize Bais Yaakov as a worldwide movement and to set up sources of funding, traveling to almost every country in the world to spread the

word about the concept of formal education in authentic Judaism for Jewish girls.

After my parents settled in Vienna, my brother Reb Yisroel Avraham was born, may Hashem preserve and keep him. He studied Torah constantly, learned in yeshivos and taught students privately. He is living in London now, where my mother a"h passed away, and he brought her remains to be buried alongside our father ztz"l in the Shomer Shabbos cemetery of Zichron Meir in Bnei Brak. After him, our sister Maras Raizel a"h was born. She, too, suffered many hardships, and she fulfilled the mitzvah of kibbud av beautifully; may this be her reward.



Life in Vienna



Life in Vienna

As I mentioned earlier, I, too, was born in Vienna. I went to a school that was government-certified, and therefore the curriculum was mostly secular studies. Just a few times a week, a rabbi named HaRav Neuwirth z"l would come to teach us religious studies. The school's administrators were Torah-observant, and there were even *talmidei chachamim* among them, but some of the secular studies teachers were non-religious or even non-Jewish. One teacher was suspected of being an anti-Semite. Apparently all this was due to government requirements for compulsory education. In the afternoon we attended a *cheider* called Yesodei Torah, and there, we learned only *limudei kodesh*. In the evenings and on Fridays, we went to Pirchei Agudas Yisroel, which was an absolute lifesaver for the young generation of the time.

There, we came under the influence of outstanding Torah scholars and educators such as the *gaonim* HaRav Elimelech Rumpler ztz"l, HaRav Yaakov Teitelbaum ztz"l, HaRav Chanoch Padwa ztz"l (who later became *Av Beis Din* in London), HaRav Herschele Schmerler ztz"l, and HaRav Yaakov Orenstein ztz"l.

Ten years later, I had the privilege of being together with the latter at Mesivta Eitz Chaim of Bobov. Baruch Hashem, ten students who were close to me have remained so to this day, and I had many meetings and long conversations on important matters with the Bobover Rebbe *shlita*, the Herzog brothers, and others. All of them went on to be very active when they were saved from the murderous claws of the accursed Nazis, going first to England and afterwards to Eretz Yisroel or to America. To tell their stories in detail here would be too difficult, not only because it is hard to remember everything accurately, but also because it would take a whole volume to do justice to each one of them. This is just a brief account of one man's life, and I can only hint at the greatness of these illustrious figures.

As my love and desire for Torah developed, albeit in a childish way, I began to frequent various *batei medrash* and shuls. One summer, at a resort called Semmering in the Austrian Alps, I met an outstanding young scholar, a fine man by the name of Reb Alter Safran-Fuchs. Thanks to Hashem's kindness he took a liking to me and gave me a great deal of encouragement to learn Torah. In fact, every day he devoted a few hours of his precious time to me, and in his merit I began preparing to become a candidate for testing on two hundred *blatt* of Gemara with Rashi and Tosefos, in order to be accepted as a student at Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin. One of

the reasons for this was that my teacher and master Reb Alter Fuchs ztz"l was appointed as Rav in Dvinsk after the passing of the *gaon* HaRav Yosef Rosen, author of *Tzofnas Pa'aneach* (also known as the Rogatchover), who had attested that Reb Alter was a precious vessel of Torah. Accordingly, when the *Tzofnas Pa'aneach's* *levayah* took place in Vienna (he was *niftar* in a hospital there), the people of Dvinsk prevailed upon him to become their Rav, although he was a *bochur* and only about twenty-three years old. He wanted to take me with him, but something childish in me made me refuse, saying he would be too busy to learn with me. Surely this was Hashem's doing, and meant for my good, because if I had gone with him, who knows if I would have been saved from the claws of the wicked, may their name and memory be blotted out.

After he left, I felt as if my world had gone dark, for I had never met anyone like him. I looked in the *batei medrash* for someone who would take me under his wing, and I met a very distinguished person named HaRav Tuvyah Rosenwasser ztz"l. He was a man who had endured much suffering, on a scale rarely found at that time, and it was he who helped and encouraged me to persevere with my Torah learning. Through him, I met another great man, HaRav Meir Nosson Hopstein ztz"l, who devoted much of his time to working with youngsters, drawing them onto the path of Torah and encouraging them. A direct descendant of the Avodas Yisroel, he influenced me to

choose the path of *dveikus b'tzaddim*, attaching oneself to the righteous. Since he was close to the Lubavitcher Rebbe at that time, he wanted me to go that way, as well.

The Gaon and Tzaddik HaRav Yonah Forst ztz"l

One of the unique personalities to emerge from Vienna was my childhood friend, the *gaon* and *tzaddik* HaRav Yonah Forst ztz"l, who was not blessed with any actual offspring, yet in the full sense of the word he merited "that your children should multiply." When it comes to progeny, one has a specific number of children, but Chazal say "*Bneichem, elu talmideichem* (your students are your children)," and a person can have students without limit, or, as it says in *Kesubos* (17a), "regarding others, there is no prescribed quantity." This *tzaddik*, however, had someone to carry on his work after he departed from this world: a *talmid* whom he took as a foster son, the *gaon* HaRav Shlomo Feldman *shlita*, who founded a Talmud Torah school in his memory and called it *Tiferes Yonah*. And it is indeed a splendid and glorious institution, living up to its name. Situated in the heart of Boro Park, Brooklyn, it attracts hundreds of boys from all circles of the Jewish community, and this is something that will surely help to hasten the *geulah*, at a time when our hearts aren't quite so united as they could be.

I also had the privilege of speaking to these *talmidim* once.

Some two hundred and fifty boys were in my audience, *bli ayin hara*, and it's hard to describe how deeply impressed I was with the *kedushah* of the place. Boys gather to learn there at nearly all hours of the day and evening; many of them are *talmidim* from other yeshivos who come voluntarily in their spare time, eager to grow in Torah and *yiras Shomayim*. And all this is in the merit of HaRav Yonah ztz"l and ybdl"ch, the *talmid* is who like a son to him, HaRav Shlomo *shlita*.

My Meeting with Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch

Once, when the Frierdiker Rebbe of Lubavitch was visiting Vienna, I met Reb Meir Nosson in the street. "Mordechai!" he said. "Come take a ride with me!" Together, we boarded a streetcar. I had no idea where we were going, or who we were going to see. We went into a house, and there sat an elderly man of venerable countenance; I recalled having seen him at some large assembly. Then I learned that this was Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak ztz"l of Lubavitch. He turned to me and said, "Speak some words of Torah with HaRav Asher Lemberger, and come to us, to Otvotzk."

Otvotzk was a health resort near Warsaw where the Rebbe was living, and there was a yeshivah there called Achei Temimim. I didn't quite understand what the Rebbe meant,

and apparently he thought I was hesitating, so he added a few words that surprised me very much: "If you want, I will send a message to your parents, and I'm ready to take you with us immediately." Of course, I was even more baffled now, and there the conversation ended, and I went home.

(Incidentally, when I met with the last Rebbe of Lubavitch *ztz"l* some years ago, I gave him a detailed account of this story, and he asked me, so what happened? I answered that I was just a young boy at the time and I didn't understand what his father-in-law meant. He rejoined that the question applied not to me but to the *avreich*, meaning Reb Meir Nosson *ztz"l*. Surely he had understood — so why had nothing come of the meeting? I have no answer to this question.)

I was also advised to go to Yeshivas Mir by a number of rabbis, including HaRav Yosef Hess *ztz"l* and HaRav Parkovsky *ztz"l*. Another of my advisers was a *bochur* by the name of Yonah Fershko-Ehrenkrantz *ztz"l*, who passed away in London at an early age. He used to sit in the Belzer Kloiz in Vienna, which was founded by HaRav Meilech Rumpler, HaRav Duvid Spotz, and HaRav Yosef Vitles Deutch. I would sit there sometimes to learn, as it was nice and quiet there, and the aforementioned Reb Yonah tried to influence me to go to Belz. He even promised to give me his passport, because my parents had become stateless when the government of Eretz

Yisroel passed from Turkish to British hands. Everyone knew I had passed examination before the admissions committee of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin on two hundred *blatt* of Gemara with Tosefos, so each one wanted me for his yeshivah.

I also had the privilege of learning in yeshivos in Austria; first I learned in Yeshivas Tzhelim, where the Tzhelimer Rav, son of the Arugas HaBosem, spread his legacy of Torah and *yiras Shomayim*. Later on he moved to the United States and there he founded the first community of European Jews with its own strictly *mehudar* kashrus organization and a basic infrastructure. There I learned a large portion of those two hundred *blatt*. After about a year there, I transferred to Yeshivas Mattersdorf under HaRav Shmuel Ehrenfeld. I also learned for about a year under the *gaon* HaRav Yisroel Taussig.

I had the privilege of learning in the *beis medrash* where the Chasam Sofer used to teach; people said that he had a few hundred *talmidim* there, in a place that could hardly hold eighty to a hundred. They called it a miracle comparable to what occurred in the Beis HaMikdash, where, Chazal say, the people would stand crowded together, yet when they prostrated themselves, each one had ample space around him (see Avos 5:7). So I, too, was privileged to learn in a place where a miracle was done for our forebears. Thus the time came that I had dreamed of: I fulfilled the Sages' dictum of "Be exiled to a

place of Torah," to a place where the Torah lived in exile after its sojourn in Spain and in France — Poland.



On the Road to Poland



On the Road to Poland

What I related above was not meant as self-glorification, G-d forbid. It is only meant to glorify those who uphold the Torah, for there were so many different groups that sought to have an adept learner join them, because they all believed that their own yeshivah was the very best place to grow in learning and *yiras Shomayim*. In other words, they had my benefit in mind. In the end, though, I met with a great and distinguished man, HaRav Shlomo Rabinovitz ztz"l, a direct descendant of the Tiferes Shlomo, and he influenced me to choose the town of Sosnovitz, where there was a group of high-level scholars, known as a *kibbutz*, belonging to the Keser Torah network of yeshivos under the leadership of the Admor of Radomsk Hy"d. My friend Reb Yonah Fershko z"l had told me that since it was already after the Yamim Noraim and Succos, he was no longer so enthusiastic about my traveling to Belz. He gave me his passport, allowing me the freedom to go wherever I chose, and my decision was to go to the yeshivah of the Radomsker Rebbe, Hy"d.

A travel agent, an *avreich* by the name of Mordechai Blitz z"l, was very helpful with the complexities of arranging a trip on someone else's passport. He reassured my worried parents, too, giving them his personal guarantee that with Hashem's help, it would all work out fine. I said goodbye to all my friends and acquaintances, of whom there were many, *baruch Hashem*, and set out for the train station with a pounding heart. All through the trip I said *Tehillim*. At the border, the Polish police came aboard to check the passports. When my turn came, I kept right on saying *Tehillim*, and with Hashem's help I was allowed into Poland without any trouble.



With the Admor
of Radomsk



With the Admor of Radomsk

When I arrived in Sosnovitz after a very lengthy trip, I went to a tailor first of all, and bought *chassdishe* clothing so as not to look different from the other students at the yeshivah. Then I went to the Admor of Radomsk, and he received me very kindly. He enjoined his *chassidim* to make me feel welcome and see that all necessary arrangements were made for me.

I also participated in a *shiur* given by the Rebbe's son-in-law, HaRav Moshe Rabinovitz Hy"d, one of the brilliant younger men of that time. I remember how, during Chanukah, every night he gave a *drashah*, offering more than ten solutions to the *kushya* of the Beis Yosef on *Hilchos Chanukah* (*siman* 670), where he asks why we celebrate the first day, since there was enough oil for one day. Altogether on the eight nights of Chanukah he gave more than a hundred *teirutzim* to that question, displaying tremendous astuteness. My regular *maggid shiur* there was a great *gaon* by the name of HaRav Yosef Lask tzt"l, a Belzer *chassid* with a sharp mind and broad knowledge

of all parts of the Torah; it was a great privilege for me to be among his *talmidim*.

I remember a fellow student in the kibbutz, Reb Duvid Grinboim, whom I met decades later in America; he is an outstanding *talmid chacham* and as of this writing, he is a *maggid shiur* in the Gerrer *beis medrash* at Forty-Ninth Street and Thirteenth Avenue in Brooklyn. He is the father-in-law of the Rav of the Gerrer community in America, the *gaon* HaRav Moshe Fogel *shlita*, and of my *talmid*, HaRav Betzael Moshe Teitelbaum *shlita*.

Although I was doing well there in every way, I still missed my learning with HaRav Alter Safran-Fuchs and the special personal influence he had on me. Feeling troubled, I went to the Rebbe and poured out my heart to him, asking him to seek out a *talmid chacham* who would learn with me privately. He said he was very sorry that I was thinking of leaving, and revealed that he had even wanted to ask my parents to allow him to adopt me as a son.

The Rebbe had recently suffered the loss of his grandson, the only son of his daughter, who was herself an only child. The tragedy had shaken all of Poland, since it meant that the last scion of the Radomsker dynasty was gone. The Rebbe had tried to arouse Divine mercy by every means at his disposal; among other things, I recall that he gave the child's weight in

silver coins to *tzedakah*. He refused to accept *kvittelach* from his *chassidim*, and gave donation vouchers to Keser Torah, the network of dozens of yeshivos that he had founded, and which, as one of Poland's wealthiest men, he supported with his own money. I was there at the boy's *levayah*. It was a heartrending scene, on a Friday afternoon, attended by thousands.

The Rebbe heeded my request, however, and he found me a mentor from among his *chassidim*, an older *bochur* who was an *ilui* and possessed an enormous body of knowledge in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah; his name was HaRav Itche Meir Dzurker ztz"l. When he came to Sosnovitz, the Rebbe spoke convincingly to him about me and asked him if he would take me with him to his hometown and let me learn with him. Reb Itche Meir agreed, and a few days later we traveled to Dzurik, where he lived, and we learned together there very diligently. I thought I had found a safe haven, but like Yaakov Avinu, who sought to dwell in tranquility, I was jolted out of my peace of mind: my *rebbe* became engaged to be married. I then learned that he had been engaged years earlier, but the *shidduch* had been called off for various reasons; now that I was with him, Heaven had come to his aid and the *shidduch* had been renewed. He, too, told me I could remain with him and move to the town of Bendin along with him after his wedding. But just as I had responded to Reb Alter Fuchs, I told Reb Itche Meir too that I was sure he wouldn't have time to learn with

me constantly, as we had been doing up until then. So I turned down his offer and began preparing to leave town, although I didn't know where to go.

I went out to the street to think out what I should do; I was just walking about randomly and crying. I met a young *bochur*, the son of the local Rav, and he noticed the state I was in. "Why are you crying?" he asked me. I hesitated at first, but after some moments I poured my heart out to him, and told him I was looking for a big *talmid chacham* who could learn with me all day, because my soul yearned for Torah. Speaking gently, he said that he didn't have a solution for me, but he was an active member of Tzeirei Agudas Yisroel, and at meetings he'd attended he had heard that the Rebbe of Gur had nearly a hundred thousand *chassidim* and admirers, and he thought that surely the Rebbe would be able to recommend someone and persuade him to learn with me, like the *bochur* who had been learning with me here in Dzurik. His suggestion caught my interest immediately, and I asked him to help me to act upon it. Up until then, I had been receiving pocket money from my parents, but just around that time they had temporarily stopped sending money for some reason, and I had only five zlotys to my name, so I didn't know how I could arrange a trip to Gur. I told the Rav's son about my predicament, and seeing how upset I was, he thought for a moment and said, "If you haven't got enough money for a ticket to Warsaw at

the moment, I have an idea for you. Every night at midnight, there's a truck that goes out to Warsaw, and if you give the driver five zlotys, he'll take you along."

This idea infused me with new strength, and I resolved to go that very night. I didn't want to cause pain to Reb Itche Meir, and I was also afraid he would try to prevent me from leaving, so I sat down and with tears in my eyes, I wrote him a long goodbye letter, explaining in detail why I had decided to go away. About a year later, however, I received a letter from him, in which he expressed a degree of resentment, mainly because I had left without telling him. He said that if he had known, he would have understood my feelings, and he would have escorted me honorably — with drums and dancing, as he put it.

In Warsaw

In any case, I went to the marketplace exactly at midnight. The truck driver was there, and he took money from me and from another passenger, whom he seated next to him, and he hoisted me up into the back of the truck to sit among the empty boxes and crates. I rode that way for six hours, and by the time we reached Warsaw I felt bruised, battered, and half-dead. I came to a street where many Jews lived, although I didn't know a soul, and I placed myself in the hands of

Heavenly hashgachah, as it says in *Tehillim* (55:23): "Cast your burden upon Hashem, and He will sustain you."

I felt at a loss, not knowing where to turn in a place where I had no connections. But indeed, Hashem was looking after me, for right away I came upon a precious *avreich* who asked me my name and why I was there. We began to talk, and I learned that he was a grandson of the *Admor*, the *Imrei Emes* of Gur. I told him almost everything about who and what I was looking for, and that I wanted to meet with the *Gerrer Rebbe* about it. The whole thing seemed to strike him as a bit strange. But first of all, he did as *Avraham Avinu* would have done; he took me to a restaurant and got me to eat a filling meal, which really put some life back into me. After I'd rested a bit from my exhausting journey, he brought me to the *Gerrer beis medrash* at number 19 Nalbaki St. There I saw hundreds of *bochurim* wearing their long *peyos* down, engrossed in Torah study, with such *yiras Shomayim* reflected on their faces; I had never seen such a sight in my life, anywhere. And there I sat down to learn, and waited for an opportunity to travel to Gur and meet with the *Admor*.



A Trip to Gur



A Trip to Gur

The next day, one of the *bochurim* came over to me and said he was traveling to Gur, in case I wanted to join him. I eagerly told him I would like that very much, and he went on to say that the *avreich* I had met the previous morning had told him a little about me — among other things, that I had no money, and therefore he had sent along a small sum as a loan, to be paid back when my situation improved. (Incidentally, I forgot to mention that when I parted ways with the *Admor* of Radomsk, *Hy"l*, he urged me, if I ever needed money, to contact him, and he would provide whatever I required, but I am a bashful sort by nature, and I was afraid that I hadn't behaved properly towards the *Admor ztz"l*, so I couldn't bring myself to turn to him for aid.)

I set out for Gur with the *bochur*, who never did tell me his name. We boarded a kind of small train called a *kolejka*. I was told that this train line drew most of its business from the *chassidim* who traveled to Gur nearly every day to see the *Rebbe ztz"l* and came by the thousands at Yom Tov time to bask in his company. Upon arriving in Gur I met one of the

bochurim known as the "yoshvim"; his name, if I remember correctly, was Reb Leibel Wolozelbaker z"l, and he took me under his wing.

In Gur

First of all, I asked him if he could arrange for me to see the Rebbe. He explained to me that there was a set procedure for this: one had to go and have a *kvittel* written by a certain Jew called Reb Zelig Kvittel-Schreiber, who lived in a little side street. I went to him and asked him to write down everything I told him. He agreed to this, and the result was a *kvittel* that filled a whole page, telling the Rebbe all that was in my heart. At the end, however, I stated my request clearly, that he should place me under the tutelage of a *talmid chacham*, and I declared my willingness to travel anywhere in the world that he would send me. When I returned to the *yosheiv*, Reb Leibel, with my *kvittel*, he brought me to the Rebbe's house, and there, on an ordinary weekday, we found hundreds of people waiting in line to receive his *shalom*. About half an hour later I was standing before the Rebbe's little table, shaking with fear and reverence. I handed him my *kvittel*, and he studied it for a few moments; then he said just these few words to me: "*Men lernt un men davent, un men is oifgeroimt*," which means, "When one learns and davens, one is uplifted." I left feeling rather disappointed, of course, because I had childishly expected the

Rebbe to give me a clear answer and arrange everything for me.

The *yosheiv*, Reb Leibel z"l, saw the disappointment on my face, and he comforted me. He told me this was how things were done here: "When someone comes for his first *shalom*, he only gets a few words of general guidance, but *b'ezras Hashem*, everything will fall into place." He recommended that I stay until Shavuot, when thousands of *chassidim* would be arriving, and then probably my request would be fulfilled. Not knowing what else to do, I stayed. He arranged for me to lodge with a group of *bochurim* who came from the town of Kalish for every Yom Tov — the "*Kulisher chevra*," he called them.

I don't have the words to describe how friendly they were to me, and how much they encouraged me, these few dozen boys, all of them sharp in intelligence and pure in *yiras Shomayim*. Each night, a different *bochur* would sleep in the *beis medrash* and give his bed to me — although I didn't know about this arrangement, otherwise I wouldn't have accepted it. They gave me a nickname, "*der Viener ilui*," just to encourage me; maybe it was also because my desire to learn was so strong. I sat down to learn, but regular learning was hard for me at that point because I'd been through so many changes of place and so many worries (only a small part of which I've described here), and also because of my tender age. So I decided that

for now, until I achieved my purpose and got settled, I would mainly just learn the Rambam's *Yad Chazakah*, from beginning to end, without the *Nosei Keilim*, the *Kesef Mishneh*, and the *Maggid Mishneh*. I would have done well to keep this habit up, part-time, for the rest of my life; it's a pity I didn't.

There I sat day and night, studying page after page, chapter after chapter of the Rambam, but in my childish innocence, I didn't know enough to hide my *sefer* behind a Gemara, so I was rather conspicuous among the *bochurim*. With no intention of teasing me, *chas veshalom*, they would come over once in a while and test me on my learning in a gentle manner, with half-smiles on their faces. Hashem came to my aid so that I wouldn't be put to shame, and I gave the right answer nearly every time, even when they asked me questions on *perakim* I had long since finished, so they were no longer fresh in my mind. They were pleased with my answers and liked me all the better for it, and after that they helped and encouraged me even more.

That Shavuot, nearly ten thousand *chassidim* came to Gur, and I experienced the meaning of the words in *Tehillim* (126:1), "We were like dreamers," because I could hardly believe it possible that such a huge number of people would converge on such a little town in order to extend their Yom Tov greetings to one man, albeit a great and holy man. In my hometown,

a large capital city, I wasn't used to seeing such things. But although there were so many *chassidim* present, I still saw no sign of the purpose of my trip being fulfilled. However, I had no choice but to stay on with the *Kulisher chevra*, who continued showering me with kindness. I began developing a deep appreciation for them and for the path of Chassidus in general, and particularly for the *Gerrer derech*. It was like a kingdom, ruled by the King of the Universe, with people from all walks of life united under one earthly king who governed them by virtue of his spiritual strength, as it says in *Mishlei* (16:32): "He who rules over his spirit [is better] than he who conquers a city."

With the "Kulisher Chevra" in Gur

After Shavuot, when it was time for everyone to go home, Hashem's salvation came for me at the last moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Among the *bochurim* of the *Kulisher chevra* was a very special one by the name of Reb Yechezkel Sender ztz"l; he had been orphaned of his father, Reb Reuven ztz"l. Although he was only about nineteen years old, this *bochur* was remarkably brilliant, practically a young *gaon*, in learning, in pure *yiras Shomayim*, and perhaps most of all in his sensitivity towards others. He approached me and said, "Mordechai! I've heard that you asked the Rebbe to find you a big *talmid chacham* to learn with you, someone like Reb Alter Fuchs. Well, I'm not

anything like him, but here's my offer: come with us to Kalish, and I'm willing to help you in any way I can."

I understood him to mean that he was ready and willing to learn with me in his hometown. Although I didn't see any other option, I still wouldn't agree until I'd clarified exactly what he meant and how he intended to arrange things so that at least I would have some semblance of my childish dreams. After a long conversation, we settled on an arrangement: we would rent a room near the *beis medrash* of the *chassidim*, which was called the *Fiftzener Shtiebel* after the house number (fifteen), and as much as possible we would learn there together day and night; only on Fridays we would go to the *mikveh*. Meals would be sent in from a nearby kosher restaurant. When the *chevra* heard about this plan, they made a big fuss, because they felt that it would disrupt the equilibrium of the *beis medrash* to have one of the best *bochurim* taken out. Instead, they wanted us to strengthen the learning atmosphere by sitting in the *beis medrash* with them. They promised us they would let us follow our regimen of constant learning, from ten to sixteen hours a day, with *shiurim* and *chavrusos*, just as long as we wouldn't separate from them and go into what they called "the cave of Rabi Shimon bar Yochai." They made every effort to persuade us, but our decision, on my part especially, was to stay with the plan we had made.

In Kalish



In Kalish

We arrived in Kalish, and since the room wasn't ready yet and I was too shy to board with a family, or even in my friend's home, he showed his great sensitivity by staying with me in another *chassidishe shtiebel*. We began learning there, and there we also slept until we managed to rent a room in the home of a wealthy Jew named Rottenberg z"l, who was a grandson of the Chiddushei HaRim. The rent was less expensive there than the usual rate. We ordered our meals from a restaurant, as planned, and there we sat almost around the clock, hardly leaving the place except to go to the *mikveh* on *erev Shabbos*. I wish I had learned all my life with such *hasmadah* and enthusiasm. In about three months, we covered a few hundred *blatt* of Gemara with Rashi and Tosefos, and dozens of *simanim* in *Shulchan Aruch*, as well as many chapters in the Rambam and in *sifrei yirah* and Chassidus. It was like heaven on earth. The *bochurim* sent delegations from the *shtiebel* to visit us and try to persuade us to change our minds, but to no avail. We did get a lot of encouragement from these visits, and we appreciated their good will and

their desire to have us with them, but our feeling was that we couldn't leave our "Gan Eden" for the ordinary world.

For this short period of time, we sat in tranquility, but once again like Yaakov Avinu, we had our peace of mind disrupted. My dear friend Reb Yechezkel suddenly became seriously ill, and we were forced to part. He went to the hospital, and afterwards he was confined to his home, and I was left alone in our rented room. The *bochurim* continued to visit us both — Reb Yechezkel, who was physically sick, and me, sick with longing for my beloved friend and the Torah we had learned with such fiery, youthful fervor. I consulted with one of the outstanding *bochurim* from the *shtiebel*, and he understood the way I was feeling, as if a thunderbolt had struck on a clear day, leaving me abandoned. I told him about how, back in Vienna, I'd passed the test for admission to Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, and when he heard that, he said that he thought I should go there, because that was the only place where one could learn Torah constantly with peace of mind. And besides, he added, he had heard from Reb Yechezkel himself that before he met me, he had wanted to go and learn in Lublin, so he would be accompanying me in spirit, if not in body.

Off to Lublin

And so it was — I went off to Lublin, and headed straight for

the yeshivah. To my immense disappointment, they weren't willing to admit me right away; they said I must pass another *bechinah*. Apparently, they were justly annoyed with me for not having come to the yeshivah right away after passing my first test. I could see their point, and I said I was willing to be tested. In my heart, I said to myself, "*Mishpetei Hashem tzadku yachdav* — Hashem's judgments are altogether just," for this would spur me on to learn and review more intensely than usual. Displaying the attribute of *chesed shebegevurah* (kindness within stricture), they allowed my *bechinah* to be on the same two hundred pages that I'd been tested on before — *Masechta Brachos* and *Masechta Pesachim*. But they warned me that I would have to remember even the Tosefos by the opening phrase, the *davar hamaschil*, alone. And in addition, before the *bechinah* they would give me a page of Gemara of their own choosing to study by myself. They gave me more than a month to prepare, and said I must do so outside the yeshivah premises.

In the Beis Medrash of the Pri Tzaddik ztz"l

With help from Above I found a precious Jew named Reb Yaakov Soniker ztz"l, whose family was away, and he took me in for as long as I wished. He also gave me a key to the *beis medrash* of the Tzidkas HaTzaddik, HaRav Tzadok HaKohen, and there I sat down to learn with strong motivation, for I wanted to do well in the *bechinah* and find my place in Yeshivas

Chachmei Lublin. I found a *remez*, an allusion to my situation in the *pasuk*, "*Hachodesh hazeh yihiyeh lachem* — This month will be for you." For me, this month was a time of encouragement and consolation after everything I'd been through. I reviewed the Gemara with Rashi and Tosefos dozens of times in this way: while I was learning the Gemara, I covered up the Tosefos and repeated them by heart, and while I was learning the Tosefos I covered the Gemara and repeated it by heart. Every few days I asked people to test me on what I'd learned so far, to see if I remembered the page, and the place on the page, for every topic they mentioned in the Gemara, and if I could say the Tosefos by heart if they prompted me with the opening words.

The Bechinah

After this month of review, I informed the yeshivah administration that I was ready to be tested. They gave me a *blatt Gemara* to learn by myself, *Chullin* 11, and in the afternoon of that same day, I was called into the office for the *bechinah*. A testing committee of big *talmidei chachamim* was sitting there and so was the *mashgiach ruchani*, HaRav Dovid Mintzberg. I was very nervous, and I prayed in my heart that I wouldn't be humiliated. One member of the committee posed some very difficult questions.

I will repeat just one of them here; Hashem was really

looking out for me and helped me to give the right answers. For example, he asked me, "If a person has two challos, and one of them is still whole, but with a cut that divides it almost in half, and the other one is half a challah, can he use these to fulfill the *hiddur mitzvah* of *lechem mishneh*?" My answer was derived in part from the page of Gemara they had given me that morning to learn by myself, *Chullin* 11a, where it talks about the head of a *korban olah*: When is it considered cut? asks the Gemara. When it is completely detached, but if it is still partly connected, it is considered connected. I remembered the second part of the question from *Berachos* 3b, where there is a discussion of the division of night into four watches. Rav Ashi says, "A watch and a half are also referred to as 'watches,'" from which we learn that one and a half are considered like two. I was asked questions like these, which really need *siyata d'Shmaya*, assistance from Above, to recall the applicable passages. And then I heard that one of the *Rishonim* gave the same answer, and I realized that they were going out of their way to make it hard for me, which puzzled me very much.

Afterwards I found out that friends of mine from Vienna had tried to do me a favor... without asking me if I wanted them to. They'd told a member of the testing committee that I was a Tchorckover *chassid*, but then he'd learned that I'd gone to Gur, and that I associated mainly with Gerrer *chassidim*. So he suspected that I'd asked my friends to say that, and he

wanted to make it hard for me to get into the yeshivah. But He Who knows everyone's innermost secrets came to my aid in an almost supernatural way, and in the end, I was admitted as one of the yeshivah's youngest *talmidim*.

At Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin

To say all there is to say about that wonderful yeshivah would be very hard in these brief pages. Much ink has already been spilled describing it, and whole books have been written about its founder, HaRav Meir Shapiro, who was both father and mother to the yeshivah and to every one of its *talmidim*, and to *klal Yisroel* as well. Only those who were with the yeshivah in its earliest days could give readers a small taste of the reality they were privileged to experience there and sing its founder's praises.

I still hadn't found what I was looking for, though, someone like Reb Alter Fuchs ztz"l or Reb Itche Meir Dzurker ztz"l, or like my good friend Reb Yechezkel Sender ztz"l, whose recovery I was hoping and praying for so that we could go on learning together (although not in our "cave" in Kalish). But here in Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin I had what every *lamdan* needs, a place where, if he has the will, he can learn for months or years without distraction. Right there within the yeshivah building was everything a diligent scholar could require –

dormitory rooms, a dining hall, a *mikveh*, laundry and shoe repair services, and even a beautiful, spacious garden to walk in, so there was no need to go out to the street.

And for the ten months or so that I was there, I actually never left the yeshivah premises, and I don't think I was the only one living that way. Of course, in the present privileged times, it doesn't seem so remarkable that all this was made available to the *talmidim*, but then it was really unusual for hundreds of scholars to be able to sit and learn with utter peace of mind, trouble-free, and indeed many great *talmidei chachamim* and *yirei Shomayim* came from there and went on to uplift many others, and there were even some survivors, although most of the yeshivah and its accomplishments were wiped out by the evil, accursed ones and the terrible destruction they inflicted. May Hashem avenge the blood of the *kedoshim*.

Unfortunately however, it happened once again that although Mordechai sought to dwell in tranquility, trouble sprang upon him, this time in the form of the police of the Lublin precinct. Evidently someone reported the yeshivah to the authorities for harboring illegal aliens, and the police came to examine the enrollment records. The yeshivah administration sadly informed me that they were very much afraid they would be asked to furnish proof of my legal status. I took the hint, and sorrowfully packed my things and went back to Gur, where I

hoped to be reunited with the many friends I'd acquired there. As the author of *Mivchar HaPeninim* put it, "A thousand friends should not seem in your eyes to be too many..."



*B*ack in Gur Again



Back in Gur Again

On my second arrival in Gur I felt as if I had already been there dozens of times — everywhere I went, friends kept popping up; I could hardly believe it was possible to have made so many friends in such a short time, and in a place frequented by thousands of people from all over Poland and beyond. Once again I met the *bochurim* from the *Kulisher chevra*, and they were just as friendly to me as if I had never left them — in fact, they were even friendlier than before.

When I went to receive *shalom* from the Rebbe, something very unusual occurred. Even the elders among the *chassidim* said they didn't remember such a thing ever happening before: the Rebbe looked at my face and said to me, "*Du zeist ois a bissel blass*" (You're looking a little pale), and he rose from his chair and went to another room where a chest of money was kept. He opened it and came back with ninety zlotys, which was a considerable sum in those days; he gave me the money and said, "*Far nach Otvotzk un raveh zich op*" (Go to Otvotzk and get some rest). I was overcome with emotion; I didn't know what

to do. After I left I met one of my new friends. He, too, could hardly believe it, but he didn't waste much time lingering with me. Together, we went to carry out the Rebbe's orders. My friend helped me make the travel arrangements, and off I went to the famous resort of Otvotzk.

At The Otvotzk Resort

Once there, I went straight to the best-known hotel, a place called *Pension Zulberg*, a favorite resting spot for the cream of Polish Jewry: *talmidei chachamim* and *rabbonim*, *Admorim* and wealthy *balebatim*. The proprietor, Rabbi Zulberg z"l, greeted me like a father taking in a son, since it was very rare for a young *bochur*, little more than a child, to arrive at such a place alone. After a few days of rest, something happened that caused me some anguish. Another young *bochur* arrived from Warsaw, a surprising thing for the proprietor. This boy, whose name I don't remember, came over and began chatting with me. He mentioned that the famous Rebbe Aharon of Kuzhnitz lived in town, and asked me if I would join him in paying a visit to the *tzaddik*.

Without much enthusiasm, I agreed. I really only found out after we got there that the *Admor* led his flock in a very different manner from other *Admorim*. But soon I realized that he dealt with many Jews who had fallen away and brought

them back to Yiddishkeit. Among his followers was one whose name was Isaac, as I recall, who had been one of the heads of the underworld in Lodz before he met the Kuzhnitzer Rebbe. When we came in, on an ordinary weekday, the Rebbe was conducting a *tisch*, as is usually done on Yom Tov. He called them by the Polish word for "army" — *wojsko*, as if they were soldiers. "*Wojsko*," he said. "Where is my snuff box?"

Immediately they all got up from the table and went looking for the snuff box. The *bochur* whom I'd come with also started helping in the search, but the Rebbe stopped him. "*Du geneivishe futretel, gei un zitz op* (You look like a thief, go sit on the side)," he told him. After that, one of the men said, "Maybe it's in the waiting room?" and everyone went to look there. The young fellow also tried to get up and join them, but again, the Rebbe restrained him. Since I'd heard that this Admor was an amazing man, I was very cautious, and I stood on the sidelines the whole time.

When we returned to the hotel, some policemen from Warsaw were waiting at the entrance. They grabbed my companion and pushed him into their car without any preliminaries. When they were asked what this was all about, they replied that the young fellow was a thief, who had also stolen some receipt books. This showed me that the Kuzhniter Rebbe really was

a marvel, just as I had heard. His intuition had been almost superhuman.

After about two weeks of rest and recuperation in fulfillment of the mitzvah of heeding the words of *chachamim*, I returned to Gur. It was wonderful to be back, like a cold drink for a tired, thirsty man. And this was the place where, every time I found myself at a crossroads, someone showed me which way to turn next.

Reb Pintshe Kaminer, "The Kommandant"

As soon as I entered the *beis medrash* I beheld a scene that's hard to describe. Several hundred *bochurim* stood crowded around one *bochur* who had a refined, spiritual look, but no beard. He was quietly saying something that I couldn't make out, but everyone was listening in silence without interrupting him. I asked one of my new friends who this was, and he told me it was Reb Pintshe Kaminer, the "*kommandant*." He was the acknowledged chief among the young scholars at the *beis medrash* of the Chiddushei HaRim on Dzelna Street in Warsaw. I innocently asked, "But why did he clip off his beard?" The story was an interesting one: it seems that he was one of the very few *bochurim* who, when faced with conscription into the Polish army, was permitted by the Gerrer Rebbe to go ahead and be drafted. "*Oif ihm hab ich nisht moira* (About him, I have

no fears)," said the *Admor* when asked about Reb Pintshe. And so Reb Pintshe *ztz"* I was enlisted in the army, and the letters he sent to the Rebbe and to his friends were permeated with *yiras Shomayim* and longing for the *kedushah* of the *beis medrash*.

Upon hearing this I thought it was a vivid example of *Shechinta b'galusa*, the Shechinah in exile. And it really was so — my friend went on to say that Reb Pintshe had learned to play chess and had mastered the game well enough to play with some of the highest officers in the army. He was recognized as one of the best players among them, and of course this helped him a lot when it came to being allowed to live his own lifestyle. He had just finished his three years of service and come back to the *beis medrash*, and that was why everyone had crowded around him with such joy and respect, because this was the first time they were greeting him since he was drafted. With Hashem's help, I made friends with Reb Pintshe; he gave me a lot of encouragement, and I became very attached to him. He was a strong influence on me, and I considered him one of the spiritual heroes of my generation. I still keep up a friendship with his family today, especially with my close friend Reb Boruch Kaminer *shlita*, a prominent *Gerrer chassid* in Eretz Yisroel.

Another Kommandant – Reb Matisyahu

I remained in Gur for several weeks. One day, a *bochur* with a glowing face came up to me. He looked familiar, but I couldn't remember who he was. "Marcus!" he almost shouted at me. "Don't you recognize me?" Then he started speaking to me in German and suddenly I realized who it was: Reb Matisyahu Gelman, the leader among the *Gerrer bochurim* in Cracow, and a native of my own hometown, Vienna. He was an amazing person whose heroism in the Cracow ghetto has been written about in articles and books by HaRav Moshe Prager ztz"l and others. I remembered him from back home, but to be honest, since his legendary character traits hadn't yet become obvious, at least not to someone as young as I was, at the time I hadn't been impressed with him to the extent that he deserved. But I'd heard so much about him in the meantime that now I felt a strong rush of love and respect for him.

Coming straight to the point, he asked me what my situation was and I gave him a brief account. Right away he said, "Mordechai, you're coming with us to Cracow! We were together once in Vienna, and now we'll be together in Cracow." I consented to his proposal, not only because I saw no other viable alternative, but because I felt I had found what I was missing — someone who would not only learn Torah with me, but provide me with guidance through his personal example

and the wisdom of his life experience, which was so vital to me in my situation. And so I went away with the "Cracover chevra" and their leader.

8

In Cracow



In Cracow

When we arrived in Cracow I was informed that the money my parents sent me from Vienna would be delivered to the Admor Rebbe Moshe of Boyan, one of the greatest men of that generation. At the time he was also the *nasi* of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, and because of this I had the privilege of visiting the Boyaner Rebbe nearly every week. With the help of my newfound friends I set myself up in my new surroundings. I rented a room together with another *bochur* from Vienna, a Tchortkover *chassid* named Duvid Schechter *shlita*, who now lives in Monsey, New York, and I've seen him there many times. Most of my days, and many of my nights as well, were spent in the *shtiebel* at 67 Ditelsgasse, which belonged to a wealthy and respected Gerrer *chassid* named Reb Avraham Lipa Klein *ztz"l* whose sons were part of the *chevra*. I've heard that one of them lives in Antwerp, Belgium. They also arranged for me to learn a few hours a day in a *makom Torah* under the management of HaRav Tzvi Eisenstadt *ztz"l*, a son-in-law of HaRav Kurnitzer *ztz"l*, the Rav of Cracow, and there I learned together with the Zilberberg brothers *shlita*

from Lizhensk, Merkshover *chassidim*. They were sons of the great *talmid* and successor of the Tzidkas HaTzaddik, HaRav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin *ztz"l*, and *baruch Hashem* they are still with us, and big *talmidei chachamim* they are.

And so it could be said that I had another period of tranquility then, in a sense. There was a little peace and quiet left in the world then, until World War II came, although of course it was the quiet before the storm. Throughout it all, this group of Gerrer *chassidim* took upon themselves to live a life of Torah and Chassidus come what may. They also undertook to support their *kommandant*, Reb Matisyahu *ztz"l*, so that he could live respectably as befit a gifted leader and mentor such as him. But once again, as the following story will show, I was not fated to enjoy peace and quiet for long. What happened was seemingly a small thing, but, together with the wisdom and perspicacity of Reb Matisyahu Gelman *ztz"l*, it led to a chain of events, the upshot of which is that I survived to a ripe old age, and may Hashem Yisborach grant me continued life, *ach tov vachessed*.

After several months spent in Cracow with the cream of young Gerrer *chassidim*, a *bochur* named Pinchas Ornbach *ztz"l* came to me one fine day bearing a newspaper clipping. It said that the Palestine Bureau in Warsaw under the auspices of the British government was looking for a man named Marcus

Simcha, 67 years of age, as there was a certificate waiting for him there, permitting him entry into Eretz Yisroel. Since Reb Pinchas had heard that in Vienna I was sometimes called Marcus, he thought that the notice was probably referring to me, and that my age had been printed as 67 instead of 17 due to a typographical error. Although this definitely seemed probable, I didn't like it. In my innocence, I just wanted to stay where I was, with my friends.

I decided I would ask the Rebbe. But as it was customary to consult with another wise person first, before going to the Rebbe, I talked the matter over with our leader, Reb Matisyahu ztz"l. The counsel he gave me saved me from the clutches of the wicked Nazis, *yimach shemam*. His words to me were, "Mordechai, the question of your staying here instead of going to Eretz Yisroel involves *mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice, and we aren't permitted to instruct others to sacrifice themselves if there is another way out." He advised me, therefore, to go to Warsaw and stay there until I found out whether the notice in the paper was about me.

Stopover in Gur

I traveled to Gur first, and there I spoke with HaRav Itche Meir ztz"l, the Rebbe's son-in-law. I told him what had happened and explained my hesitation about going to Eretz Yisroel. In

response, he related that before the Rebbe had left on his last trip to Eretz Yisroel, a *chassid* had come in and asked him, what will become of us now? The Rebbe answered him, "You have the *Kosel* here, too." I also told the whole story to the Rebbe *shlita*,² and he told me, "Have no fear. Make the journey. There are *chassidishe bochurim* with *peyos* there, too."

So with their encouragement, I decided I would go to Warsaw to see what I could do about preparing for a journey to Eretz Yisroel. While still in Gur I met Reb Pintshe Kaminer *ztz"l*, the "*kommandant*" of the *beis medrash* known as Eisengasse 57, which the Chiddushei HaRim had built. He asked me what my current situation was, and I told him all about it. Right away he invited me to join him and his group, who were also planning to go to Warsaw. I felt that he was a faithful friend and accepted the invitation gladly. When we arrived there, one of the *bochurim* took me to his house. But while I waited at the door, I heard his mother yelling at him inside the house. I had a feeling she was angry at him for bringing me without prior notice, so I asked him to take me to the *beis medrash*, because I took the incident as a sign that I should be among those "fortunate ones who sit in the house of Hashem" instead of staying with strangers. As it turned out, I slept, studied, and

² The reference is to the Admor Rebbe Simcha Bunim Alter, the Lev Simcha, who was not yet Rebbe at that time.

ate in the *beis medrash* for nearly half a year until the time was ripe for me to leave for Eretz Yisroel.

8

*W*ith the Young
Lions of Warsaw



With the Young Lions of Warsaw

Besides Reb Pintshe the *kommandant*, there were other *bochurim* with great minds and noble spirits; it would be hard to talk about them all, so I will mention only a few.

First of all, there was the grandson of the *Admor*, the son of the Beis Yisroel, whose name was Reb Leibel ztz"l. If you watched him closely you could see that he tried to live in a modest, simple manner, without calling attention to the fact that he was the scion of a great dynasty, and this is just what made him great, in my opinion. (Later on, I will tell a story involving his father, which took place when I was in Jerusalem.)

Reb Chanan Kaminer ztz"l, the *kommandant's* brother, was another modest and noble-spirited *bochur*. He was gifted with a fine voice and a wonderful degree of musical creativity. Most of the well-known Gerrer melodies for all the special days of the year were composed by him, as well as dance tunes and other *niggunim*. People say that one day the Rebbe (the *Imrei Emes*) summoned him to his inner sanctum and asked

him to sing a *niggun* of the Baal HaTanya for him, which says something about this young man's spiritual caliber as well as his musical ability.

There were two other *bochurim* that were older than the rest, because they were trying to avoid the spiritual danger of the Polish army. Their names were Reb Fishel Goldberg *ztz"l* and Reb Aharon Spillman *ztz"l*. Through their refined characters and wisdom in Torah, they had an influence on the whole *beis medrash*, where they learned regularly.

Aside from the organized group, which consisted of about a hundred *bochurim*, there were young boys who came from all parts of the city to gain from the spiritual atmosphere and receive guidance. There was one that I remember; his name was Mordechai Yosef. He is still living today, *baruch Hashem*, and I have met with him in many places: there in Warsaw, and in Eretz Yisroel, and in England, in the town of Gateshead and in London. His good name precedes him wherever he goes — HaRav Mordechai Yosef Kamyunka *shlita*; *b'ezras Hashem* I will have more to say about him later. I lived in that *beis medrash* for a rather short time, but for me it was one of the most important periods of my life. It was just before I left Poland, where our brothers' blood cries out from the earth, and that earth will never be able to cover the blood of our six million brothers and sisters to the end of days. May Hashem avenge

their blood, and may the leader of that fine group be the first to be avenged. He took me in as a full member, with the same obligations and privileges as the others.

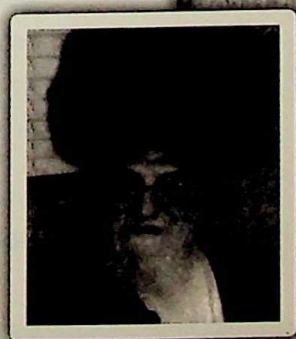
And since I insisted on not leaving the *beis medrash*, they took turns coming, a few *bochurim* each morning and evening, to make my learning and my life more pleasant. Throughout the time I was there, they would come earlier than their usual time, at four o'clock in the morning instead of at five, which was the hour prescribed by the Rebbe for nearly all the *Gerrer chassidim* in Poland. Almost every morning when the *bochurim* came to strengthen and be strengthened, we would dance ardently for a few minutes. And sometimes I sang songs for them in Yiddish that would move them to tears, some of which I had heard and others that I had composed. I can remember two of them. One began with the words, "*Yiddelach, vozhe shloft men* (Jews, why are you sleeping)," and the other with the words, "*Mara shechora is doch nisht kein sechora* (Melancholy is a worthless commodity)." I would sing other songs, too, including some that the *chevra* in Cracow sang. All this was my way of trying to give something back to Hashem Yisborach, and to the *bochurim*, for everything they'd done for me.

Several weeks passed in this way, and I nearly forgot what I'd come to Warsaw for. Then a letter came from my parents, by way of my sisters in Vienna, telling me that the entry visa

I'd been granted was my mother's doing. She was in London, and she'd arranged it directly through the royal palace of King George VI, who had phoned the Jewish Agency in London and told them to send what was then known as a certificate, without putting me on the usual waiting list. I was also offered the alternative of going to London or to Holland, but that was out of the question for me, as I was hardly even willing to go to the Holy Land, much less some other country.



I Leave Poland,
the Valley of Tears



I Leave Poland, the Valley of Tears

The letter from my family was a reminder to me of what I'd come to Warsaw for, although I wasn't quite sure how to begin, as I had neither the money nor the knowledge of how to go about this sort of thing. I consulted with our chief, Reb Pintshe, and he said that he thought the first thing I ought to do was to go to the office that had placed the notice in the paper, and after that we would see. I went to the office (as I recall, it was on a street called Jeruzalemski Gasse, named after the Holy City that was my destination). I told the clerks there that I was the person they were looking for, and that there had been a typographical error regarding my age. I couldn't furnish any further proof of my identity, though, since I had entered Poland on a friend's passport, and now, unfortunately, I had no identifying documents. I was able to give them some details that almost convinced them my story was true, but from a practical point of view they didn't know how they could process the paperwork and solve my problem.

Then an incredible thing happened: one of the officials there, a man named Mr. Geiger, asked to speak to me. He said

he was willing to help me without taking any payment for his efforts; all he wanted was not to see a precious certificate go to waste. He was even willing to hire lawyers at his own expense for the purpose. (Years later, I met him in Tel Aviv next to the Histadrut building on Allenby Street. I assume that in the merit of his having worked so hard to save a life, his own life was saved, *middah keneged middah*.) Mr. Geiger paid for taxi rides and everything, and he took me around to several different lawyers, but they all said they didn't see a way of helping me out of the tight spot I was in. In fact, they said that if I were to reveal that I was in Poland illegally without a passport of my own, I would immediately be arrested and sent to a concentration camp for foreigners from enemy states, since Poland was now officially against Germany and Austria.

I went back to Reb Pintshe, and he cautioned me not to do anything rash. He went with me to see the secretary of the Warsaw *kehillah*, Reb Hillel Zeidman, may Hashem guard and keep him, who is living among us today in New York. I want to thank him for all his kindness and goodness to me back then. Reb Hillel sent us to HaRav Yitzchak Meir Levine *ztz"l*, who was one of the heads of the community and of Agudas Yisroel, and later he served as president of the Agudah in Eretz Yisroel. I went to his home, where I met his son Reb Pinchas Yaakov *ztz"l*, and from the moment we met, we began forging a very strong friendship, which continued to grow afterwards when

he came with his family to Eretz Yisroel with the Rebbe (the Imrei Emes), as I will relate later on.

Both father and son worked with all their might to help me through their various connections in the government and the police. They spoke to the chief of police, called the *stromsta*, I think, in Polish, and told him there was a certain young man in a certain situation, and they needed his advice on how to help him. I assume that they also promised him the customary generous payment for his assistance. He replied that the smallest punishment that might be arranged for me for such a big offense was a month in jail, at the very least, plus a fine, and that I would receive an exit visa only once, which I must use within one month after my release from jail.

All the friends and acquaintances I had made, with Hashem's help, thought this was a terrible thing, but I didn't take it so very hard. I could see the *chessed shebegevurah*, the kindness mixed in with the harsh judgment. I had heard that there was a group of Jews in Warsaw who helped to make things easier for prisoners, and they let us know that they'd see to it that I had good, kosher food to eat. They also shared the information that a distinguished *talmid chacham* who'd been imprisoned for performing *shechitah* was due to be released in a day or two (laws against kosher slaughter were in effect in Poland at that

time), and they would try to arrange that I would be given the room for important prisoners that he currently occupied.

When I heard all this, I went back to the home of my good friend Reb Pinchas Yaakov Levine *ztz"l*. He received me with warmth and friendliness that I can hardly describe, and even went so far as to provide me with a whole bag full of oranges, a very expensive commodity at that time which was usually purchased only for sick people. He also gave me a package of *seforim* to sweeten my sojourn in jail. I was almost glad to be going there, as I'd been sleeping on a hard bench in the *beis medrash* for half a year, and it had weakened me. Now I felt as if I were going for a rest cure in a resort hotel.

But while I was having these thoughts, I learned that HaKadosh Baruch Hu had made other plans for me. Suddenly the community leaders sent word that through the efforts of HaRav Yitzchak Meir Levine *ztz"l*, I had been granted clemency. I was exempt from all punishment on condition that I leave Poland within two weeks. Of course Reb Pinchas Yaakov and I were both overjoyed, but he said he felt a bit sad that I'd be going away so soon.

I went straight to the *beis medrash* and told the *kommandant* and the whole *chevra* what had happened. They were all very happy for me, and they made a *seudas hodayah* for me. They said that if a thanksgiving meal is made for a prisoner upon his

release, all the more so should it be made for one who's been saved from going to prison in the first place. They also saw to it that I wouldn't make the journey without decent clothes, and since my tefillin weren't in such good condition, either, they ordered a new, *mehudar* pair for me urgently from a well-known *sofer* in the town of Wengrov, and a number of other articles. In particular, a *bochur* named Yisroel Moshe went out of his way to help me; may Hashem Yisborach remember him for the acts of kindness he did with no thought of reward, along with all the other *bochurim*. Some of them told me they envied me and wished they were going with me.

I very much felt the pain of parting from them. Practically the whole *beis medrash* rode to the train station to see me off. I told them that this was a happy sort of *levayah*, because they were accompanying me on my way to *Eretz HaChaim*, the land of the living, rather than to the *beis hachaim*, a cemetery, *chas veshalom*. They brought along a few small bottles of drink, which were called *sedkes* in that part of the world, and just before the train departed we did a big, lively dance. The police stood on guard, because they thought that some important *rabbini* (rabbi) was leaving on a trip. I can hardly describe my feelings, but I don't think I've ever experienced such an emotional farewell as that, from so many faithful friends, in my whole life.

My Journey
to Eretz Yisroel



My Journey to Eretz Yisroel

As my train sped through Europe I was enveloped with the feeling that here I was, on my way to Eretz Yisroel at last, while in the regions we passed through, shots and explosions could be heard not far away. The scent of war was definitely in the air, but we had no idea of how big a war it was going to be, and certainly we didn't expect a war of extermination against the Jewish people from the German Amalek, *yimach shemo vezichro*. On board the ship I met the Goldman family, whose offspring live in Eretz Yisroel today. A friend of mine, one of the longtime *talmidim* of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin who went on to teach Torah, was their son-in-law, HaRav Menachem Mendel Weitz ztz"l, and he was the father-in-law of the *tzaddik* HaRav Yaakov Aryeh *shlita* - the Gerer Rebbe of today, a son of the current *Admor shlita* [ztvk"l].³ Other noteworthy families also descended from the Goldmans. Another of my fellow passengers on the ship was HaRav Shalom Wax *shlita*, who also has distinguished offspring in the Holy

³ Rebbe Yaakov Aryeh Alter *shlita* is the current Gerrer Rebbe at the time of this translation. His father was the Lev Simcha, Rebbe Simcha Bunim.

Land. One of the *roshei yeshivah* of Petach Tikva, whose name has escaped me, was also with us on the ship, and many of the passengers learned a lot from him.

We arrived at what was then called Jaffa Beach. The ship laid anchor far from the shore, and small boats came to bring us ashore. One of the port workers was a Gerrer *chassid*, a refined *avreich* by the name of Reb Leibush Berliner *shlita*. He guided us safely to shore and did all he could to make things easier for us, which cheered us up immensely after the hardships of our long journey.

The Laundry Room Shtiebel

When I reached Tel Aviv, I headed for the *shtiebel* first of all. This *shtiebel* later became the famous Beis HaChassidim of Gur at Rechov HaKishon 33, but when I first came to Tel Aviv, it was located at Rechov Herzl 72, in a rooftop room that had formerly been used by the residents of the building as a laundry room. The Gerrer *chassidim*, however, used it for laundering souls.... At that time they hardly had a *minyan*, but with their fervor and enthusiasm, they turned that tiny room into one of the greatest and most renowned Gerrer *shtiebelach* of those times.

I innocently thought that I could and should establish a *chevra* of *bochurim* there, and I made my lodgings there, in

the laundry room *shtiebel*, in an attempt to attract a group of outstanding *bochurim*. Some of us *bochurim* did manage to meet there from time to time, including Reb Mendel Weitz ztz"l and Reb Yitzchak Meir *shlita*, who was mayor of Bnei Brak and also served in other important positions; he is the author of the book *Al Chomosayich Bnei Brak*. There were quite a few others as well, too many to list here, all of them *talmidei chachamim* and *marbitzei Torah* from Gerrer Chassidus, and a number of them are still alive today.

Yeshivas Sefas Emes

Not long after that, World War II broke out. Chronologically, it was the second world war, but it took first place in cruelty, in its number of casualties, and in its catastrophic effects on our people, who were subjected to torment, captivity, and slaughter. I moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem at that time and became a *talmid* at Yeshivas Sefas Emes. Due to the tragedies taking place in Europe, the yeshivah was in financial crisis, since Polish Jewry was its main source of income, and in every Gerrer *shtiebel* in Poland there was a rule that every man who was called up for the Torah reading must make one of his *tzedakah* pledges to Yeshivas Sefas Emes. When these donations stopped coming in, the yeshivah was almost shut down. Only the *bochurim* who had come in from Poland before the war were kept in the yeshivah, and I was among them. Half

a lira per week was allocated for each boy, and we had to cook and fend for ourselves. We learned with very great diligence.

The yeshivah's administrators were very much with us, and that surely contributed towards our *hasmadah* and to the spirit of togetherness and brotherly love that united us as one family. But outside, the bereaving sword raged. Bad news began to filter in. I remember the rescue efforts made by a faithful *chassid* named Reb Mordechai Yehudah Einfeld ztz"l, who awakened the public and stirred them to action on behalf of the Rebbe (the Imrei Emes) and his family, who were still in the death-trap of Poland. Influential Jews in several countries joined the effort, and with Hashem's help, soon afterwards we had the joy of seeing the *Admor* and part of his family in the Holy Land.

Daven For My Leibel

The Rebbe's safe passage to Eretz Yisroel was a bright spot in the midst of the weeping for the large portion of the Jewish people that had already been wiped out. He and his family were in an emotionally shattered state, over the large Jewish community they had left behind, and over their own family members who had been ready to leave with them, but had stayed behind at the last moment. I have a particularly clear memory of the Beis Yisroel coming over to me in the courtyard

of Yeshivas Sefas Emes and saying, "Mordechai, you are a good young man, and a friend of my son's. Please daven for my Leibel..." Afterwards, I heard that at just about the time the Rebbe was speaking to me, Reb Leibel ztz"l had crossed the border into Italy, but had been caught by border police who forcibly returned him to Poland.



Our First Chevra in Eretz Yisroel



Our First Chevra in Eretz Yisroel

During these dark days, two of the finest *bochurim* approached me (one of them was HaRav Binyamin Alter *shlita*), and said that now the Rebbe was with us, it was high time we organized a strong group of *bochurim* in the yeshivah to bolster the broken spirits of the *chassidim*. I told them I would find it very hard to stop the learning schedule I already had in place, as I had two learning sessions of six hours each, morning and afternoon, with my close friend Reb Pinchas Yaakov ztz"l. I consulted with him about this proposal that I should take on the responsibility of being the *kommandant* for this new group in these difficult circumstances. He said that since it was such a big responsibility, that was exactly why I had a sacred duty to take it on, and he promised to help me so that I shouldn't have to lose too much of my learning time or give up my *chavrusa* with him. So, in a very short time we organized a group numbering thirty-five *bochurim*, *bli ayin hara*. We all began learning *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* with the *Magen Avraham*, in groups of two or three *bochurim*, until seven-thirty in the morning, when we davened *Shacharis*.

After Shacharis and breakfast we learned *sifrei yirah* or *mussar*, or works of the Maharal, in small groups. I tried to learn with a different group each day so that over time, I would learn with everybody every few days.

My experience in Cracow and Warsaw as a *talmid* and loyal friend of the *kommandants* there had taught me how to manage this. The leader of a *chevra* must know how to be an equal among friends, and at times, even less in stature than the others, and this only increases their love and esteem for one another, as it was among us then, with Hashem's help.

After about half a year, though, I began to feel that the condition I'd set down wasn't being fulfilled. My learning was being disrupted quite a bit. I decided to do something about it (and later I realized that I hadn't thought out my steps well). I gathered the *chevra* together and announced that I was handing my position over to my close friend Reb Pinchas Yaakov Levine. With some hesitation, he accepted the post, and once he had taken it he threw himself into it with his usual fervor. I was very glad about that. I tried as much as I could to share the burden with him, and for a while, everything worked out nicely. But he was so good-hearted that he ended up taking almost the whole yeshivah into our select group. The only exception was one *bochur*, who unfortunately went off the path of Yiddishkeit. I heard that he told his acquaintances that he

did it out of bitterness, because of being the only one left out of the chevra. Aside from this sad case, however, everything went on as before.

After a separation of decades, I once again met the gaon HaRav Pinchas Menachem Alter *shlita*,⁴ son of the Beis Yisroel *ztzllh*"h and *rosh yeshivah* of Sefas Emes. I asked if *kevod Toraso* still remembered me, and he answered, "What sort of question is that? You were my first *kommandant*!" What more need be said?

The Sudden Passing of Reb Pinchas Yaakov Levine

Like a thunderbolt on a clear day, like a sunset at noon, it came upon me, upon us all, and to a certain degree upon all of *klal Yisroel* — a young prince of the Jewish nation fell in the bloom of his youth. He was my beloved friend, beloved of Hashem, beloved of his people, a *tzaddik* who lived but two decades, Reb Pinchas Yaakov Levine *ztz"l*. A few days before his *petirah*, I had to travel to Tel Aviv to take care of a really vital matter. When I said goodbye to him he had a stomachache. He was lying on a sofa, but nothing seemed to be seriously wrong. Still, I had some misgivings about going away. He told

⁴ Later, the *Admor* the Pnei Menachem, who served as Rebbe after the *petirah* of his elder brother, the Lev Simcha.

me that if the trip was important, I should go. "Those who travel to carry out a mitzvah don't come to harm," he said, quoting our Sages, "and surely they don't do any harm." His joke only made me feel even more hesitant about going, but nevertheless, I decided to go because my business in Tel Aviv was very urgent. Before I left, he held my hand for about half an hour. And a few days later, when I was in Tel Aviv, one of the *bochurim* came to me with the terrible news that my friend had passed away, and he was lying in the mortuary at Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem. I hired a cab right away and sped to Jerusalem. When I arrived at the hospital and saw his coffin waiting there, I fell to the ground and almost fainted. The family told me afterwards that they'd never seen even an actual brother mourn so intensely as I did for my friend.

And I must confess we were even closer than brothers — may the living be separated for life. Somehow, in consequence of this it came about that not only were the two of us separated, but our group, the very first *chevra* of Gerrer *bochurim* in Eretz Yisroel like the *chavuros* in Poland, lost its cohesiveness and began to split up into new groups as the number of Gerrer *chassidim* in the Holy Land increased, *kein yirbu*.

The Hespel of the Imrei Emes

His coffin was brought to the *beis medrash* of Yeshivas Sefas

Emes, where his grandfather, Rebbe Avraham Mordechai, the Imrei Emes, eulogized him in terms that had never been heard from him before, even in his *hespedim* for his son, Reb Itche, and his wife, the Rebbetzin a"h. To the best of my recollection he said, "He Who rides the highest heavens rejoices when a clean and righteous soul comes to Him." He went on, uncharacteristically, to utter such expressions as, "Er is geven opgehit (He was clean, and he guarded himself)," "Er hot getven mit ondere (He influenced others)," and other phrases that I cannot remember, since I was so full of emotion at the time; it's no exaggeration to say I was personally in mourning.



The Yeshivah
in Kfar Chassidim



The Yeshivah in Kfar Chassidim

Some time after this, the diamond trade began to take root in Eretz Yisroel. Diamond dealers came from Belgium and from the United States, set up workshops, and sought out skilled cutters and polishers, and they tended to find more of them among yeshivah students. The high pay to be earned in this profession lured many poor parents to take their sons out of yeshivah, cutting them off from learning to sacrifice them to the Molech of diamonds, as I called it at the time in jest. I felt a certain sense of responsibility to do whatever I could to stop this plague from spreading, and Hashem Yisborach sent something my way which seemed to me then, in my youthful enthusiasm, to be the very solution I was looking for.

In Haifa, I met a distinguished Jew, a *rosh yeshivah* by the name of HaRav Robman ztz"l. I don't know why, but he took a liking to me, and he told me he was trying to start a branch of his yeshivah in a place near Haifa called Kfar Chassidim, but he didn't have enough *talmidim*. In the course of our conversation I mentioned my concern for my fellow *bochurim*. It was hard for them to stand up to the pressure, I said, because some

parents might do as Chazal tell us Hurkanos did to his son Rabbi Eliezer,⁵ because he had run away to learn Torah. The reason was different, of course, but the story was basically similar, as in both cases a father was putting pressure on his son to help him have a comfortable place in This World.

When HaRav Robman heard this, he asked me to come with him to Kfar Chassidim. He would show me the place, he said, and if I was interested he was willing to put me entirely in charge of it. There were only three *bochurim* there, and if I agreed, they would remain there; if I thought they weren't suitable for my purposes, then he would find a way of transferring them to another yeshivah.

I gladly accepted this plan, and we went off together to Kfar Chassidim. The Jews there, especially the elderly ones, received me very warmly, and they begged me to start a *chassidishe* yeshivah there, as this had been the wish of the original founders, who were Kuznitzer *chassidim*. They said they would provide the *bochurim* with all their needs — room, board, clothing, and whatever else they required, if only they would come. I was deeply impressed with them, and I promised I would try to send my friends, but I told them that I myself

⁵ Hurkanos decided to disinherit his son for abandoning his work on the family farm, but changed his mind when he discovered that Rabbi Eliezer had become a great Torah scholar.

wasn't prepared to leave Yeshivas Sefas Emes altogether. If I was successful in influencing my friends, I said, I would manage things from Jerusalem.

I traveled back to Jerusalem and called some of my friends together for a meeting, particularly those who were under pressure to go to work, or who were working already. I pledged them all to secrecy, and we met quietly in the *beis medrash* of Batei Orenstein. I told them that if they were willing to go away to learn Torah, like Rebbe Eliezer, I would send them to the Rebbe (the Imrei Emes) to receive his *brochah* on their departure, and they would leave letters for their parents explaining what they had done. I will mention no names, and not even the number of *bochurim* at the meeting, but I will say that they all agreed, like one man with one heart. After a few days of preparing in secret, they visited the Rebbe's inner sanctum with a *kvittel* telling the whole story, and the Rebbe gave them his *brochah*, wishing them success.

Every Bochur in His Place

The group set out from Jerusalem, joined by a few others on the way from Tel Aviv to Haifa. They arrived safely in Kfar Chassidim and proceeded to turn it into a *makom Torah*. Already on the second day I received an express letter from them, in which they wrote very excitedly about how they were received

by the residents. They mentioned an elderly Jew named Reb Moshe Yehudah ztz"l, and the Rav of the moshav, HaRav Kroll ztz"l, father of HaRav Shlomo Noach Kroll *shlita*, whom I will tell about later. With all their fiery, youthful enthusiasm they wrote down their daily schedule in detail — what time they got up and went to the *mikveh*, when they learned and davened and ate breakfast, almost down to the minute.

When the other *talmidim* heard that I'd founded a yeshivah, many of them wanted to go there, and started making preparations. The *roshei yeshivah* of Sefas Emes, and what was then known as its Tel Aviv branch, were worried about the survival of their yeshivos, and according to what I heard, they went to the Rebbe to inform him of what was going on, and what they were afraid of. As soon as I heard about this, I sent out word that the new yeshivah had been created especially and exclusively for that group of *bochurim*, who had been pressured into leaving yeshivah or were going to leave. I asked everyone to please stay where they were in peace and quiet, each one in his own yeshivah. With Hashem's help this message was effective, and none of the *talmidim* left.

But the father of one of the *bochurim* who had gone to Kfar Chassidim raised quite a stir over it, and my human feelings sympathized with him. He went to the Rebbe and told him that although he regretted taking his son out of yeshivah and

sending him to work, nonetheless he demanded that his son come home. I was summoned by the Rebbe's assistant, HaRav Shamai Ginsburg, to come to the Rebbe outside of the usual reception hours. I went in immediately, and the Rebbe said to me, "*Ich hab nisht gevost os der tatte is nisht maskim; schreib em er zal tzurik kumen* (I didn't know that his father didn't agree; write to him that he should come back). *Kibbud av is for allemen* (Honoring one's father comes first)."

The Return to Sefas Emes

As soon I left the Rebbe I caught the next bus and made my way to Kfar Chassidim to bring the man's son home. Today, by the way, that *talmid* is one of the community leaders in Gerrer Chassidus; I heard that the Chazon Ish had recommended him strongly for a certain important position. But the incident had a chilling effect on the group's enthusiasm. At the same time, the whole story had an influence on the community, and parents began to slacken the pressure on their sons to go to work. The result was that one by one, the *bochurim* left Kfar Chassidim and returned to their former yeshivah. Not one of them went back to work, however, and they grew up to be men of great importance to the whole Jewish community and to the Gerrer community in particular. Their children and grandchildren still carry their legacy of distinction in Torah and Chassidus. Looking back on it, I think that all the effort

I put in and the difficulties I overcame during that episode (which are too many to describe here) were well worthwhile, considering the results.

Around this time, some of the remnant of Israel, refugees from the sword, began to arrive on the shores of the Holy Land. Among them were also Gerrer *chassidim* from Poland, including distinguished individuals such as the brilliant *mechanech* HaRav Godel Eisner ztz"l, and HaRav Zelig Schtitzberg ztz"l, who was a young *bochur* at the time, but already great in Torah, *yirah*, and Chassidus. Together with many other *avreichim*, they stood at the side of the "*kadosh Yisroel*," Maran Admor the Beis Yisroel, and that community bore fruits which produced another generation of fruits, disseminating Torah in holiness and purity in Eretz Yisroel and around the world, especially in England and the U.S.

My feeling is that during the Beis Yisroel's time, and through him, we saw the fulfillment of Shlomo Hamelech's words in *Mishlei*, "*Yafutzu mayanoseicha chutzah* (Let your wellsprings gush forth)," for perhaps the word *mayanoseicha*, wellsprings, is used rather than the word *meimeicha*, your waters, to suggest that the living waters of Torah should spread outward not merely as water, but as wellsprings of water that will themselves serve as sources of water, and this is what happened in the generation of the Beis Yisroel, as it says in

the will of the Chasam Sofer, who prayed that the wellspring should not be put to shame.... This idea is also implied in *Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, Chapter 8, in the story of Elkanah, whose deeds brought a shower of abundance on the whole Jewish nation.

There are many friends I would like to mention, but since I haven't yet managed to get permission from them to mention them by name, and perhaps I will be able to do so before this book is printed, I am mentioning only those who I feel sure will agree, since all this is being written for the benefit of generations to come.

Success Stories From Kfar Chassidim

As Chazal said, the words of *chachamim*, even if said conditionally, are fulfilled nevertheless. And so it was with our yeshivah at Kfar Chassidim. Although the Rebbe told me to bring back a certain bochur, as I related above, and this caused other bochurim to leave, it was all part of Hashem's *hashgachah*. Encouraged by the yeshivah's good name, another group of outstanding bochurim decided to go there, and I will list some of them here:

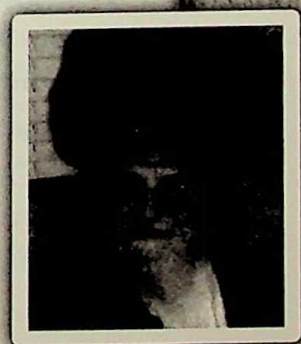
- the gaon and tzaddik HaRav Nota Zehnwirth and lbl"ch, his brother the gaon HaRav Yosef shlita

- » the gaon HaRav Shlomo Meltz shlita, now serving as Rav in Raanana
- » the gaon HaRav Shlomo Miller shlita, the leading mohel in Petach Tikvah
- » HaRav Yisroel Diker shlita, a yeshivah administrator in Tel Aviv
- » HaRav Shmuel Gelbart shlita, author of a sefer on Chumash with Rashi
- » HaRav Noach Fromm ztz"l, son-in-law of Reb Reuven Aharonovitz ztz"l, former mayor of Bnei Brak
- » and above all, my close friend, who brings merit to himself and to the community alike, a pillar of chessed in our times, our teacher HaRav Yerachmiel Kampinsky shlita, who established generations of talmidei chachamim, in particular his son the gaon and chassid HaRav Duvid Kampinsky shlita, a prominent Gerrer chassid in the United States

They considered themselves my talmidim because of the goals they set for themselves when they went away to Kfar Chassidim, and they later said they had finished ten masechtos in about three years. Never in their lives, they declared, had they had such an intensive learning experience as they had then, learning in the yeshivah with HaRav Kroll.



The Levayah
of the Imrei Emes



The Levayah of the Imrei Emes

One shattering event was followed by another. I've only just told the story of the *petirah* of Reb Pinchas Yaakov Levine ztz"l, and the *hesped* that was said for him by his grandfather the Imrei Emes, and now I must recount the *petirah* of his eulogizer. Our world went dark with the passing of the Rebbe, the Rav of the whole Jewish nation, may his merit shield us and all the generations of Israel. He was not eulogized suitably, despite all the *hespedim* that were said for him by the great *rabbonim* of the day, for they did not know him. They were not intimately acquainted with this leader, this king of the Jewish people in the most difficult *galus* we have endured since becoming a nation.

I would like to tell a little story involving myself and one of my friends from Yeshivas Sefas Emes who was not a Gerrer *chassid*. I met him in Tel Aviv just after the crown of our head was taken from us, and he said to me sadly, speaking straight from the heart, "Mordechai! What's going to be now?" I remember answering him, "Am Yisroel has been through many different eras — we were led by the Avos, by Moshe Rabbeinu

and by the Zekeinim, by the Shoftim, the Nevi'im, and the Melachim, by the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah, the Tannaim and the Amoraim, the Rabanan Sevurai, the Geonim, the Rishonim and the Acharonim, the Gr"a and the Baal Shem Tov, and of our own times it is said, *bashuv Hashem es Shivas Tzion* (when Hashem brings the return back to Zion). This is the time of *hayinu kecholmim* (we were like dreamers)..."

Decades later I met this same friend in Bnei Brak, and he remembered our conversation. Because of this alone, he said to me, "You aren't just my friend, you're my master and teacher..." I understood him to be saying that he had received great *chizuk* from my words. He told me he believed I had zeroed in on the truth, because everything that had happened after that had been like a waking dream. Who would have imagined, after the terrible destruction of body and soul that devastated our people, that there was any future for us? Yet, *bli ayin hara*, the generation was found worthy and it became a blooming garden of Torah and Chassidus, and it is an act of kindness that it is hard to remember such a time as this.

One unique man, with the Creator's help, was able to revive the dry bones of a generation that was on the brink of despair, and restore what was lost to the Jewish people: this was the *kadosh Yisroel*, the Rebbe, the Beis Yisroel. Of course, he did it together with other giants of spirit and mind whom I will

mention later, but they all acknowledged that it was due to his special strength and influence in that orphaned generation and that situation of absolute *pikuach nefesh* — life-and-death urgency — in both the physical and spiritual sense.

Since a disciple is required to speak in the language of his teacher, I will repeat a few of the things he said to me on various occasions. He would always begin with the words, "*Mordechai, du vist doch* (Mordechai, you know)!"

"Mordechai," he once said, "you know we are not missionaries," and he added, "*Bei uns, felt hasbara* (what we're lacking is public relations)."

Another time he said "*Mordechai, du vist doch ya Ger nisht Ger, abei Yiddishkeit* (Mordechai, you know that Gur or no Gur, the main thing is Yiddishkeit)." And Yiddishkeit meant Torah and mitzvos, pursued in purity and holiness. For me, this was sufficient guidance. And it perfectly defined his immeasurable influence, not only on *Gerrer chassidim*, but on all of *chareidi* Jewry, and by extension, on semi-*chareidim* and even on many who were not religious at all. There are countless testimonies to this, and examples too numerous for me to write about.



A Friend Indeed



A Friend Indeed

With the passing of the Imrei Emes, the loss to *klal Yisroel* was tremendous, and that should give my readers some idea of how hard it was on a young *bochur* living on his own, with no one and nothing to lean on but his Father in Heaven... and his friends. I had a certain very close and devoted friend, whose name I will mention so that his great *neshamah* should be elevated; this was the *gaon* HaRav Moshe Shlomo Kasher ztz"l. He was my teacher and master in the works of the Maharal of Prague. Few could match his ability to comprehend the full depth of the Maharal's words and to explain them. He also wrote books of Chassidic thought, gleaned from many sources which he explained beautifully, and dozens of other essays and *seforim*. But for me, at that juncture in my life, he was like a brother, and perhaps even more than that. It was he who helped me to find a good *shidduch*, and it was he who was at my side with all the preparations and the expenses for such basic necessities as clothing and so on.

I should also mention another faithful friend, and may this be for his *ilui neshamah* as well: the *chassid* HaRav Tzvi Rigel

ztz"l, who was there for me from the start when I was still staying in the "laundry room shtiebel" on the roof of number 72 Herzl Street in Tel Aviv. He may have been the first person in Eretz Yisroel to be a *kest yungerman*, as it was called in Poland, that is, a bridegroom who learned Torah and got his sustenance — literally — at his father-in-law's table. His father-in-law was one of the most distinguished and prominent Gerrer *chassidim*, HaRav Chanoch Irenstein ztz"l, who headed an exemplary household even in those stormy times. Such spiritual giants as the Chazon Ish used to come to his *simchas*; as I recall, he attended the bar mitzvah of Reb Chanoch's *ben zekunim*, HaRav Menachem Irenstein *shlita*, whose brother HaRav Moshe Irenstein *shlita* was mayor of Bnei Brak. Since the Chazon Ish rarely left his house, this is testimony to the esteem in which he held Gerrer Chassidus in general and the Irenstein family in particular. HaRav Tzvi Rigel, the son-in-law who lived with them on the first floor of at 72 Herzl Street, where I was spending my days and nights in the room on the roof, would carry a large sofa up several flights of stairs every single night, so that I could sleep on a comfortable mattress instead of on a bench as I had planned to do.

As it says in *Tehillim*, "*Ashrei maskil el dal*, (Fortunate is the one who discerns the need of the poor)" and this, perhaps, refers not to a pauper necessarily, but to anyone who lacks something. A thing like that is hard to forget. Later on, when I

was preparing for my marriage, he and my good friend HaRav Moshe Shlomo Kasher ztz"l were involved with helping me in many ways — so much so that they even followed the example of their master the Rebbe, who had noticed I looked pale and sent me off to the resort town of Otvostk. They, too, noticed I looked pale, and they decided to send me off for a vacation in Tzefas, the city of my ancestors, not only to cure what was ailing me, but to make me feel really good. They put their heads together and decided that HaRav Moshe Shlomo ztz"l would go with me, and so it was.

We took the trip together, and for both of us it was a balm for body and soul. It's difficult to describe in words what a deeply invigorating effect it had on me. I remember us sitting in a restaurant, and I was so full of joy that I began singing a *niggun* on the words *Tiferes u'Gedulah* from the Shabbos davening... and my friend said jokingly that *tiferes* was a *remez* to the yogurt we were eating, and *gedulah* to the cheese. Naturally, we spent time learning together, and we went hiking in the mountains around Tzefas, talking in Torah all the way, as the *pasuk* says in *Tehillim*: "*Mah ahavti Toresecha, kol hayom hi sichosi*," which happens to be the *pasuk* for my name, Mordechai, in the *pesukim* for names to be said after the Amidah.

After this vacation I returned to Yeshivas Sefas Emes like a newly-created man, prepared and ready for my personal Yom

Kippur, the day of my *chuppah*. (There may be an allusion to this idea in *Maseches Gittin*, where it mentions *hamechapeh al bas achoso*; in the same way, Hashem *Yisborach* is *mechapeh*. He covers over our sins, but we have to do *teshuvah* and not rely on that.)

Although, as I've mentioned, the *chevra* had broken up, nevertheless they "remembered the kindness of my youth," and they filled up three buses just to come to the reception, as is customary among Gerrer *bochurim*, who don't go to weddings. Yet, except for a few who were unable to make the trip for various reasons, they all came. All this is engraved on my memory, because it shows how much sensitivity and capacity for appreciation my friends had, and I will always remember that.

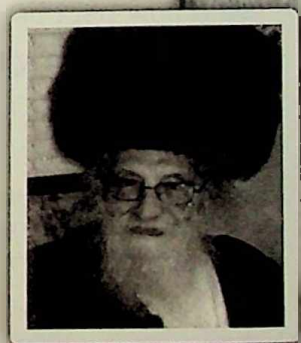
The wedding took place in the private home of the *gaon* and *tzaddik* HaRav Diskin ztz"l, who became Rav of Pardes Chanah a few years later. He was attached to the Chazon Ish with an almost Chassidic fervor. People say that once he expressed a wish to leave his rabbinical post, and when the Chazon Ish asked him why, he said that Shabbos desecration was common in the town, and he couldn't bear to see it. "So you want to hand over your position as Rav to someone who *can* bear to see *chillul Shabbos* in his town?" the Chazon Ish rejoined. Of course, HaRav Diskin remained at his post, where

he accomplished much, and he raised a fine family to carry on his name. (There is much more to be told about him, like all the other eminent personalities I've mentioned, but since I and most of my readers prefer brevity in personal memoirs, I don't feel that space permits me to go into their life stories, so I will leave it to their families to provide us with their detailed biographies and I hope they will excuse me.)

After my marriage to one of the students of the *tzidkonis* Maras Sarah Shenirer a"h, my wife Beila, may she live long and happily, robust in body and soul, my friends organized *sheva brachos* meals for us twice a day, afternoon and evening, hosted by a different friend each time, with HaRav Moshe Shlomo Kasher ztz"l coordinating the arrangements. With Hashem's help I enjoyed the privilege of a visit from Maran the Beis Yisroel at one of these meals, and the present Rebbe *shlita*⁴ took part in one of the daytime meals, which was held in the home of my friend HaRav Mendel Borokovsky. Thus began my life as a married man, a *chassidishe avreich* which may be aptly described by the *pasuk*, "*Mah tovu ohaleicha Yaakov* (How good are your tents, Yaakov)," for a *chassidishe avreich* lives in two tents: his home, and the *shtiebel* where the *chassidim* meet.

⁴ The Lev Simcha, who was Rebbe when the author wrote the original Hebrew edition of this work.

The Shtiebel for Avreichim on Kishon Street



The Shtiebel for Avreichim on Kishon Street

The name *shtiebel* is an affectionate diminutive form of *shtub*, the Yiddish word for house. There was a housing shortage in Tel Aviv at that time, and the practice of letting out apartments for *dmei mafteach*,⁷ “key money,” was coming into vogue. I lacked the means to pay a large, lump sum, so I was forced to move into a housing project in nearby Holon, where I rented a one-room apartment with a kitchen that was shared with my neighbor, my long-time friend from Vienna, Lublin, and Yeshivas Sefas Emes, the *gaon* HaRav Yitzchak Hochberger *shlita*. Nearly every Shabbos I would walk to the *shtiebel* at 33 Rechov Kishon, Tel Aviv, which took almost an hour and a half, to daven with the rest of the *avreichim*. During a *zman*, close to two hundred men would be there, although the *shtiebel* consisted of only one room, and not a large one, with a little corridor and a courtyard of no

⁷ This is an arrangement whereby the tenant pays a lump sum and acquires the right to live in the apartment as long as he wishes to stay, but with no transfer of ownership. The arrangement has become very rare today.

great size. Among the more prominent *mispallelim* were the *gabbai*, HaRav Itche Zishinsky ztz"l, a person of strength and courage, and the directors, HaRav Nachman Duvid Melevsky ztz"l, a tremendous *talmid chacham* and a pure *tzaddik*; HaRav Vove Zilberstein ztz"l, the *rosh chevra*, who was leader and guide to most of the *avreichim*, and father to the young lions of Gerrer Chassidus in Tel Aviv, and later on, throughout Eretz Yisroel; and *yblch"t* HaRav Meilech Solnik *shlita*, to name only a few.

It was a great and distinguished place, despite its small size, a true *mikdash me'at* in every sense of the term, a model the like of which has hardly been seen before or since. The abundance of Torah, *chesed*, and *kedushah* that shone out from that spot is indescribable. One thing worth mentioning is that there was *no talking* there — not during the Shabbos davening, and not during the everyday davening, three times a day, from Mah Tov... until after Aleinu. For decades, I found a warm, friendly, sociable atmosphere there, such as is rarely found in such a large community, which made all the difference to me during that difficult period. And in a world shaken by the storms of atheism and rebellion against *Malchus Shomayim* and against every value held precious by faithful Jews, it was like a lighthouse and a fortress.

That little *shtiebel* of greatness gave me, too, the spiritual

strength I needed to keep up my meager efforts at Torah and *avodah* while living under the harsh conditions of poverty and seeing the suffering of my friends and peers, the whole chareidi community, and the entire Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel and abroad. I felt that if Hashem would help me to shoulder my part of the burden, there were two hundred more *avreichim* behind me, *chassidim*, *yirei Shomayim*, but also men of action. And I said to myself, with this kind of backing, something can be done to strengthen the souls of this stiff-necked people and save them from spiritual extermination.



Yaldei Teheran



Yaldei Teheran

After most of our finest and holiest people and the world they built were wiped out, may Hashem avenge their blood, thousands of Jewish children from Poland arrived as refugees on the shores of Eretz Yisroel. They were known as the *Yaldei Teheran*, the “Teheran Children,” because they were brought in via Iran — Persia, the land of Mordechai and Esther where our people were saved from destruction at the hands of Haman the Amalekite. But sad to say, due to the wickedness of rebels among our people and to a certain extent, due to our apathy, most of these children were torn away from Yiddishkeit and handed over to be raised as *kofrim*, deniers of the Torah’s authority. Only a small fraction of them were placed in homes or institutions that were faithful to authentic Yiddishkeit, in accordance with the wishes of their martyred parents, and I had the privilege of being one of those who greeted them upon their arrival in the Holy Land.

One of these children was the well-known HaRav Nachman Elbaum *shlita*, who grew up to serve the Jewish community in many capacities. He once told me that he has never forgotten

me ever since that day. But if thousands of children from Poland were lost to Hashem and His Torah, hundreds of thousands more were lost to Middle Eastern Jewry when they came in from Yeman, Morocco, Tunis, Syria, and other countries. Whole communities, precious and illustrious, assimilated into a world of anti-religious atheism, thanks to the energetic efforts of the rebels within our nation, and unfortunately many of these children joined the ranks of their destroyers and followed in their footsteps.

To Save As Many As Possible

All this happened before our eyes, and it would be hard for us to say that our hands did not spill this blood, and our eyes did not see. Regarding myself, I saw it as a case of *kal vachomer*: While still a young *bochur*, I had gone to so much trouble to save a few friends from leaving yeshivah and going out to work, and I haven't the shadow of a doubt that they would have remained faithful to the Torah either way; in fact some of them did go to work and still kept their innocence and *yiras Shomayim*. This being the case, it was a far greater duty and privilege to take action and organize all those who were still loyal to Hashem and His Torah in an effort to save whatever could be saved, whether by fighting against the forces of atheism or by bringing the spiritually wounded back to Torah and mitzvos — our brothers, sisters, and children from the

Middle Eastern countries, groaning under the oppression of rebels seeking to take them away from the knowledge their ancestors passed on to them, people who eagerly kept every holiday in the Jewish calendar because they honored their traditions. They were uprooted and placed in transit camps, known as *ma'abarot*.

We heard about their terrible situation from HaRav Dovid Hillman *shlita*, a big *talmid chacham* who woke us up to the horrors these innocent Jews were being subjected to. The children, especially, were victimized; they were taken away from their parents and brought to youth camps, where their *peyos* were cut off forcibly. They were made to transgress the laws of the Torah and its spirit, and it gave me bitter anguish to see all that is sacred to Hashem and His people being devoured.

I knew we must try to save them, so I called a meeting of all the *avrechim* of the *shtiebel* to discuss the crisis and begin forming a plan. We decided that we should take the approach of Avraham Avinu and do *chessed*, physically and financially. In this way, we could compete in some small measure with those who supplied the needs of the new *olim* out of public funds.

We launched the campaign with an announcement in the *shtiebel* that everyone was to bring used clothing and other articles, collected from his own home or from his relatives

and friends. A few days later, the courtyard was full and overflowing with clothes, edibles, toys, and all sorts of useful items. Now we needed to hire a truck to bring it all to the *ma'abarah* in Beit Lid, near Netanyah. That was arranged, and we showed up at the transit camp ready to shower the olim with gifts. They were overjoyed to see us; their eyes lit up as if they were greeting their redeemers, come to release them from exile and spiritual bondage. We started organizing Torah learning for the men and children, and they begged us to come back again. Afterwards I got in touch with the Kaufman brothers, Reb Yosef *shlita* and Reb Mordechai *shlita*, who are with us today in America, and they enthusiastically joined the effort. We visited other *ma'abarot*, and at one of them we met the fourth partner in our organization, Reb Yosef Govitz *shlita*.

My next step was to go to the Jewish Agency bureau in Tel Aviv, where I asked for a job teaching in the *ma'abarot*. With Hashem's help, I somehow found favor with them, and despite all their antagonism towards Yiddishkeit, they hired me to work in the transit camps on a regular basis, teaching "Hebrew culture," as they called it. I was now a Hebrew teacher for new immigrants, a living fulfillment of the *passuk*, "*Birtzos Hashem darchei ish, gam oyvav yashlim ito* (When Hashem is pleased with a man's ways, even his enemies will make peace with him)" (*Mishlei* 15:7).

They never even dreamed what would come of giving me this position... but everything I'm about to tell you regarding the *olim* happened because of it. Within a few days, we had organized schools for these Torah-thirsty children. The camp administrators, however, were totally against using any of their classrooms for Torah study, so I went back to the parents and told them about the administrators' refusal. The parents then agreed, almost unanimously, to empty out several of their tents to serve as schoolrooms, and to make room for the displaced families in shared quarters with other families, so that we could teach Torah to the children. Thus the Torah's words, "*Mah tovu ohaleicha Yaakov* (How good are your tents, Yaakov)," were realized in the most literal sense, for they were willing to live crowded together and turn their tents into "*ohalei Torah*." I was deeply impressed with this amazing show of *mesirus nefesh* by these precious Jews.

My dear friend, Reb Yosef Govitz *shlita*, who was still a *bochur* at the time, was my partner in this enterprise: totally dedicated to saving the children, he stayed in one camp while I stayed in another. I taught the children in shifts, about eighty children at a time; altogether I taught hundreds of children every day. I sang songs from the *tefillah* with them, and I taught them the basics of learning in Torah and Mishnah, and the *siyata d'Shemaya* was tremendous. I continued in this way for a time, shining the light of Torah on these pure, precious

souls, but the forces of darkness, denial, and rebellion against the Heavenly King couldn't bear to look on at our success, and they began to find all sorts of ways to put obstacles in our path, the path of Hashem and His Torah, because they were afraid "lest they multiply and make war on us," as Pharaoh said.

When we saw this development, we returned to Tel Aviv and communicated with the Agudas Yisroel and Mizrachi party representatives in the Knesset, and to their credit, it must be said that they did try every possible way of helping us in such a difficult situation. At their initiative, the new Israeli government selected an investigative committee, which came to the conclusion that anti-religious coercion was being used against the children and their parents to an even greater extent than we had told them. The government reached a decision to establish publicly-funded schools on two different tracks, religious and general. However, since the government-employed officials in charge of school registration were non-religious, of course they intended to exert every possible pressure on the parents not to register their children in schools that would teach them Torah and *yiras Shomayim*, because they feared the power of a large religious community.

Fulfilling the Words of a Sage: The Chazon Ish

I traveled to Bnei Brak to take counsel from the Chazon Ish, and to the best of my recollection, he answered me in these words: "Go to the yeshivos, and in my name, ask the *roshei yeshivos* to give you *bochurim* that are *davka masmidim*, the most diligent learners, because they will take strong action, finish it quickly, and get back to their learning, whereas *batlanim*, those who tend to waste time, will only hold things back from being accomplished quickly."

With the feeling that the mitzvah of fulfilling the words of sages was even greater if done without delay, I immediately began going from yeshivah to yeshivah. And since a mitzvah is rewarded with another mitzvah, I received my reward right away: with Hashem's help, success shone upon me. Tens, perhaps hundreds, of *bochurim*, the most diligent scholars in the yeshivos, came to join the effort and urge the parents to resist the government's pressures. They spread out to the various *ma'abarot* and other locations, and *baruch Hashem*, we won a great victory. The vast majority of the new *olim* placed their children in schools on the religious track.

Encouraged, I went back to the yeshivos a second time, once again fulfilling the mitzvah of applying the advice of the sages. I gathered the *masmidim* together and we held a rally, giving them a pep talk such as military officers give to their troops

before battle. We sent the *bochurim* out to all the transit camps and to every school registration center in every town.

Again, we were blessed with success, and nearly all the parents registered their children for religious schooling. I saw we were likely to come to a point where we would need teachers, *melamdin*, and *madrichim* for hundreds, perhaps thousands of children, a height of success that the *yishuv* had not been prepared for prior to that time. We expanded our activities, and although we tried to keep our expenses down, our efforts were costly — in more ways than one. As my sacred duty and privilege, I must at least make mention of three of our most outstanding and generous financial supporters: HaRav Yechiel Benedikt ztz"l, who later became a *mechutan* of the Brisker Rav, Reb Nachum Halperin ztz"l, and third but not last, Reb Fishel Feldman ztz"l. Of these men, along with our many other supporters, I can only begin the praises, but I cannot finish, because their good deeds are still bearing fruit to this day, as is hinted in *Tehillim*'s words, *nosei meshech hazora*, and to the end of days, amen.

Due to our phenomenal success rate, we found ourselves facing a shortage of educators. In potential, the supply may have been plentiful, but not in actual fact — so in order to realize the potential, we organized an accelerated teacher training course. I spread the word that *mechanchim* were

desperately needed, explaining that there were many *avreichim* among us who possessed the requisite talent, and I made use of the joke about the fellow who said he knew how to play the violin, but had never actually tried to play one. I told my fellow *avreichim* that this was their chance to try out their talents and prove to themselves that they really did have the ability to teach Jewish children, to be a positive influence on them, and to save their souls.

And wonder of wonders, the collective power and merit of so many Jews stood us in good stead, and our success was greater than any of our estimations. Nearly a hundred *avreichim* signed up for the course, and they came every day for six weeks to hear lectures from experts in *chinuch* and class management. Most of them did quite well when they subsequently went out to the transit camps, schools, and *chadarim*. And so began the spiritual revolution against the rebels of that generation, whose rebellion went so far that one of their poets even had the effrontery to write, "*Al tishma beni mussar avicha* (Do not listen, my son, to your father's admonitions)," brazenly contradicting the *passuk*. (That poet, by the way, did *teshuvah* late in life.) Of course, the forces of darkness were shocked and dismayed by these developments. They tried everything that their money and power could do, including pressure tactics and threats against the parents. They tried starving them into submission,

too, by holding back food supplies at the transit camps and preventing them from getting jobs.

Another tactic they tried, successfully I'm sorry to say, was separating the children from their parents and placing them in youth camps where they were trained to disregard all the boundaries of the Torah, pursuing their activities in mixed groups and desecrating Shabbos — and when the children objected, they were deceitfully told that the Torah and its mitzvos were given only for Jews who were still living outside of Eretz Yisroel, *chas veshalom*, and that the only purpose of these "*minhagei Torah*," as they foolishly called the mitzvos, was to prevent the Jewish people from assimilating among the non-Jews. But here in Eretz Yisroel, they claimed, it is permitted and even a mitzvah, *chas veshalom*, to throw off the yoke of Torah and mitzvos, and to involve oneself solely in building up the land physically, while trampling Jewish souls underfoot. It is well known that the spoken word makes an impression on the human heart, and all the more so on the hearts of innocent, precious Jews such as these brethren of ours who came from the Middle Eastern countries, where they had never encountered heresy among their own people. And we were only a handful of young *avreichim* without much of life's bitter experiences. (Here I must make a confession, and publicly ask forgiveness of my family, whose material needs I neglected to a certain extent. They were literally hungry

for bread at times, and I — not intentionally of course, *chas veshalom* — was “cruel as a raven,” instead of acting like an eagle that hovers over its young.)

In time, however, the situation changed for the better with Hashem’s help, because all the political parties, chareidi, religious, and even the far left, began pressing for separate schooling, and four different educational tracks were endorsed by the government: (a) the Agudas Yisroel schools, superintended by Rabbi Dr. Deutch ztz”l, (b) the Mizrachi schools, (c) the general public schools, and (d) the leftist Histadrut schools. This official recognition enabled the chareidi community to set up its educational institutions in a more organized way, and out of this original organization the Chinuch Atzmai system developed, which I will say more about later.

The new *olim* were moving out of the transit camps to small towns, *kibbutzim*, *moshavim*, and even to the cities. Once they were no longer united, it became easier for the leftists to snatch away the children for their schools and harder for us to save them. But on the other hand, we now had our own official conduit for *chinuch*. The Agudas Yisroel track provided us with the framework, and for several months I continued to spend every other Shabbos at the transit camp with my good friend Reb Yosef Govitz *shlita*. He was still single at the

time, but I had a wife and children who were left alone at home in Tel Aviv while I was at the camp, and I felt bad about it; my heart was telling me that this might *chas veshalom* be a *mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah*, a mitzvah accomplished through a transgression, which is no mitzvah at all. Once, while we were davening by ourselves without a *minyan*, because we didn't want to call attention to our activities, I prayed in my heart, "Ribono shel Olam, I'm staying here for Your glory, not for mine, on principle because on Shabbos it's easier to exert a good influence on the children without interference. And therefore I pray and plead with You that, since I am taking care of Your children, You take care of my wife and children and keep them well..." And I can testify that this prayer of mine was answered. Give thanks to Hashem, for He is good.

We hoped to open *chadarim* and *yeshivos* for *olim* who wanted to engage in full-time Torah learning, but this could not be done in the *ma'abarot*. However, registration for all four educational tracks was available in the transit camps. I remember one incident well. Registration was scheduled to take place at the Rosh HaAyin camp, near Petach Tikvah, and we found out about it only the day before. We were worried that the *olim* would be intimidated into signing their children up for secular education out of fear for their *parnassah*, because the same Histadrut officials who controlled organized labor were also in charge of school registration. All of our hard

work, all the battles we'd fought, might *chas veshalom* come to nothing if the leftists should succeed in ensnaring these children. And then an idea from Hashem, Who graciously gives intelligence to man, suddenly sparkled in my brain. I went to the office of Rabbi Dr. Deutch ztz"l, the superintendent of the Agudah school system, to consult with him, but the office was already closed for the day. Since this was a situation of *pikuach nefesh* for hundreds of souls and there was no time to spare, I broke in and wrote myself an official letter on the stationery of the deputy superintendent, saying that I had been sent as the Agudah's representative to oversee the registration at Rosh HaAyin. I dressed up as elegantly as I could, hired a fancy taxi, and showed up there looking as official as possible.

We had a Yemenite *askan* in Rosh HaAyin by the name of Reb Tzadok Yitzhari z"l. In Yemen he had been an advisor to the king, but in Eretz Yisroel he was granted no status because he was associated with the chareidi community. He came to the registration center and told the frightened *olim*, "We have a rabbi here, a supervisor from Agudas Yisroel..." He exaggerated somewhat in order to instill them with confidence, saying things like, "Doesn't he look like an angel of G-d? With him here, you needn't fear the Histadrut representatives... have mercy on the souls of your children and register them in chareidi schools..."

With the help of Hashem Yisborach, within a few hours we had several hundred children signed up for the Agudah schools, and by the next day, their fear was already gone and nearly all of them registered with us. When the school opened, it had an enrollment of nearly a thousand pupils, *kein yirbu*, the largest of all the Agudah schools in Eretz Yisroel at that time. This gave encouragement and impetus to the entire chareidi public to keep up the struggle for Torah. Of course we made an effort to work in all parts of the country, leaving no small *yishuv* neglected, since every Jewish soul is a whole world. With our limited manpower, though, it was easier to act effectively in places where there were larger concentrations of *olim*. And then, on the heels of one enemy came another: a terrible decree that, by the ruling of all the *gedolei Yisroel*, almost without exception, must be resisted as a *yehareg ve'al ya'avor* — meaning that one must face death, if necessary, rather than submit.

I would like to recount one of many conversations I had with the Chazon Ish. I had come to him to discuss what I thought was a personal matter, but his answer turned out to be of great import for *klal Yisroel*. It was during this segment of my life when I was so deeply involved in working to save our Jewish brethren newly arrived from Middle Eastern countries that I was devoting almost all my time to it. Some of my friends, who shared my views, had begun remarking to me, "Mordechai!

You've been devoting all your energy and talent for *chinuch* and *zikui harabim* to the newcomers, and you're neglecting the community you grew up in." Their remarks made a deep impression on me, and I went to the Chazon Ish to tell him what my friends were saying and receive his guidance on the matter. He answered me in his usual calm way, but with quiet passion: "Anyone who does nothing to help the Jews from the Eastern countries —" and he pointed to a volume of Rambam on his table — "anyone who won't help them has no right to open the Rambam, whose Torah came to us from that part of the Jewish world." But he went on to say that on the other hand, our own Ashkenazi children, too, needed our help. Eighty percent of them had been orphaned in their parents' natural lifetime, he told me, and his advice to me was to take the path of not neglecting either group for the sake of the other. After that, to the best of my ability I went on with my activities, channeling my efforts for the benefit of Jews from all communities.



Compulsory Army Service for Women



Compulsory Army Service for Women

Nearly all the *gedolei Yisroel* of the day came out publicly with *piskei din* that army service for Jewish women was absolutely forbidden under all circumstances. Their rulings were printed in the newspapers and plastered on notice boards in the streets all over Eretz Yisroel, and even in America and Europe. After consulting with the *gedolim*, we held a meeting and decided to take action by every means at our disposal. I reasoned that this case, too, was a *kal vechomer*: if young girls were being instructed to resist going to the army even if it meant giving up their lives, then at the very least we must work with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our resources to abolish this terrible decree. The state of affairs at that time was that girls would be enlisted in the Israeli army by force, and what we were fighting for was to repeal the decree for all girls, not only for religious girls.

With the encouragement of the *gedolim*, we began first of all to organize a mass demonstration, not only in the new

part of Yerushalayim, but also in Tel Aviv, in other cities, and in the *ma'abarot* and other places where many *olim* were concentrated. As I recall, the preparatory meeting was held once again in the Gerrer *shtiebel* on Rechov HaKishon on an ordinary weekday, but nevertheless almost all the *avreichim* came. (As I write this, it occurs to me that there is a fitting *remez* here: Hashem Yisborach is called *Keil Tzevakos*, such that even the word *tzava* — army — contains a hint that we should learn from soldiers how to be constantly ready to serve Him and give our lives for His sake. So it was clearly *middah kenegged middah* — they wanted to take *bnos Yisroel* to the army, and two hundred precious *avreichim* were assembled there to show their readiness to fight the *gezeirah*, and they proved it afterwards by their actions.) As the Chazon Ish wrote in a letter to the Chief Rabbi of Israel, this was “a heartrending decree for us all,” and to our sorrow, it seemed to apply literally to him, as he was *niftar* soon after writing that letter. He also gave me permission to write on the announcements that the Chazon Ish would be taking part in the demonstration (he sent the Rebbetzin).

At the meeting it was decided that we would organize a big demonstration at the Great Synagogue on Rechov Allenby on the following Sunday. We printed large announcements proclaiming, in a few short words, that this was a matter of

crucial importance and an evil that every Jew was obligated to fight, and all were called upon to take part.

Tel Aviv at that time was saturated with opposition to the Torah and Torah Jewry. To organize a demonstration like this in Tel Aviv, according to moderate, cool-headed thinkers, was practically an impossibility. But as we know from the Rambam z"l, if it weren't for the madmen, the world could not be maintained — and there is also such a thing as *shigayon leDavid*, a holy kind of madness.

Without a doubt, the success of that demonstration was not *bederech hateva*, it was miraculous. On the Shabbos before the demonstration, we davened Shacharis early in the *shtiebel*, at six o'clock instead of seven-thirty. We davened straight through to the end without the break in the middle that is customary in the Gerrer *shtieblach*, and at seven thirty, we divided up into pairs and spread out among all the shuls in the area. There were a hundred pairs of us going from shul to shul, such that we managed to visit about **four hundred shuls** during the morning davening. At each shul the congregation was asked to please interrupt the davening for a few minutes, as this was a matter of *eis la'asos* — a time for urgent action, and the *avreichim* spoke to them, explaining the urgency and importance of their participation in the next day's demonstration. Posters and fliers were handed out to everyone, and wonder of wonders,

the *avreichim* encountered no opposition, perhaps because the people saw their selfless dedication, as it says, "*Amcha ra'u.*"

I should also mention that before Shabbos I went to the police to apply for a permit for the demonstration, and the police chief said to me, "*HaRav, atah holech b'derech hamelech* (Rabbi, you are taking the King's Road)," and he gave me not only a permit, but plenty of police protection, including officers on horseback, because I had told him we were concerned about violent opposition from the *hoi polloi*. Regarding this miracle, too, I can repeat, "*Birtzos Hashem darchei ish*" — in this case, the *Chazon Ish* — "*gam oyvav yashlim ito* (When Hashem is pleased with a man's ways, even his enemies will make peace with him)." The demonstration went well, without any trouble, *baruch Hashem*. According to police estimates, about seven or eight thousand people took part, besides all the people watching from the sidelines. This was the first demonstration; afterwards I will tell about the second one.

The draft law was indeed amended regarding women soon afterwards, such that girls who were religiously observant were granted the option of coming before a conscription committee, and with great difficulty, receiving an exemption from army service. But the *sitra d'smola*, i.e., the leftists, did not desist from their designs, and I'm sorry to say, they were supported in this by various half-religious elements. The upshot was that

after much deliberation it was decided that no girl could be let off scott-free, and a new law was proposed requiring girls who were exempt from military service to enlist for "Sherut Leumi," which meant that they wouldn't actually be soldiers, but must work for the army in some other way. Most of the *gedolim* opposed this decree, as well, and came out against it just as vehemently. One of them told the Prime Minister that even if they were to draft girls to daven and say *Tehillim*, it would be opposed, because a Jewish woman may not be removed from the guardianship of her father or her husband and put into a situation of coercion in any form and for any purpose whatsoever.

We printed street posters against the proposed legislation and placed similar announcements in *Hamodia*, signed by all the *gedolei Torah*, all the leading *roshei yeshivos*, and all the *Admorim*, stating that Sherut Leumi must also be resisted as a matter of *yehareg ve'al ya'avor*, a case where one must give up one's life, if necessary, rather than submit. With no advance preparation or organization, many religious girls went to police stations and announced that they were ready to go to prison if they must, but not to report for Sherut Leumi service since it was prohibited by the ruling of the *rabbonim*. This made a tremendous impression on the general public as well as on the government, and a lot of stormy debate ensued, both in Eretz Yisroel and in the Jewish communities of America and Europe.

A certain government official was in London at the time, and was deeply affected by the intensity of chareidi sentiment on this issue. "The fear of the Jews fell upon them," and the government called off this second decree, which was more dangerous, in a way, than the first, because not everyone understood what was so dangerous about it. We decided that it was urgently necessary to stage another mass demonstration to make our voice heard, and with Hashem's help it was even more successful than the first. The first demonstration had been held at the Great Synagogue; this one was held at the Moshav Zekeinim shul on Rechov Allenby and was attended by more than twelve thousand Jews, *kein yirbu*. After the rally, there was a march, but there were so many people that it was impossible to walk more than a few steps — the streets were packed all along Rechov Allenby and all the way to Rechov HaYarkon, which runs along the beachfront. The people had to be led back through another street, and it was a great *kiddush Hashem*. All the newspapers were full of praises for the way it was organized — even the leftist papers, like the bad angel who has no choice but to say *Amen*....

With Hashem's help, the option of being exempted from Sherut Leumi, too, was included in the law allowing religious women to decline enlistment in the army, and so it stands to this day. Fortunate are all those people who helped bring this about.

During that same period of time, Agudas Yisroel held its fourth *Knesia Gedolah* (World Congress), which was the first one to convene since the Holocaust, and the first ever in Eretz Yisroel. The most prominent figures of the chareidi world, with the exception of those at the extreme right or left ends of the spectrum, were in attendance.

I remember that I was feeling somewhat stressed at the time, because the burden of our work to bring Torah education to Jewish children was being borne by a small number of *avreichim*, and we felt a need for support and encouragement from a broader spectrum of Jewry. So I wrote a small, modest invitation to a meeting about the future development of our activities, to be held in a small lecture room at the Babad Hotel, and had it delivered by a *bochur* who had helped me in the past with my work. Wonder of wonders, all the invitees actually came: the Beis Yisroel, the *gaon* HaRav Aharon Kotler ztz"l, the two *Admorim* of Sadigura, HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin ztz"l, HaRav Elya Meir Bloch ztz"l of Telshe Cleveland. (Of course, the little that I am writing here pertaining to our work on behalf of the public, and the great successes we had with Hashem's help, were all only due to the merit achieved by and for the larger community during those days of extreme spiritual crisis, when the forces of impurity were seeking to overwhelm and dominate the broken, shattered world of chareidi Judaism. What I relate here in this little book of memoirs is for the

benefit of my offspring and their children after them, to bear witness for them to Hashem's never-ending kindness.)

Some time after this, the government abolished the four educational tracks it had set up earlier, which operated almost entirely on an independent basis, and in their place two official educational systems were established: the *mamlachti klali* (general governmental), and the *mamlachti dati* (religious governmental). The members of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah in Eretz Yisroel and other *gedolei Torah* around the world feared that the new religious schools would be more *mamlachti* than *dati*. After deliberating on the best solution to this problem, they decided to set up the Chinuch Atzmai school system. From this beginning, and from the exemption of our daughters from army service, emerged most of the chareidi schools for all the tribes of Israel, from the East and the West.

All this was achieved despite differences of opinion, which are natural and healthy, and on top of it all we achieved a sense of unity, like the *dor deah*, the generation of knowledge that camped (*chan*, from the same Hebrew root as *chein*) at Har Sinai like one man with one heart. Now that we no longer merit such unity, we can, at the very least, fulfill "Remember the days of old; reflect upon the years of past generations" (*Devarim* 32:7). I say this in the hope that we will see yet another *kal vachomer* here: if we could fulfill this in our times,

when we were beset by poverty and had little power against an entire regime of hostile leftists, then surely we must fulfill it now that we live in the midst of material and emotional wellbeing, and the power of our adversaries is diminished.



With The Satmar Rebbe



With The Satmar Rebbe

I will return now to more personal and family-oriented memories. Conditions were very hard at that time, for me and for all my friends, and when I sought counsel from the Beis Yisroel and other *gedolim*, they ruled that it was permissible for me to travel to *chutz la'Aretz*. My trip to the United States was for a *shlichus* given to me by the Brisker Rav *ztz"l* and other *gedolei Yisroel*, principally concerning conscription of women and the rescue of immigrant children from spiritual annihilation. I met with all the leaders of chareidi Jewry in America, including the Satmar Rebbe, with whom I had several long meetings. In the course of our conversations he expressed pain over the opposition he encountered within the chareidi community. He said that every time he organized a gathering with other groups, everyone ended up dismissing his ideas as "*ah Satmare ma'aseh*."

And since I was there at the bidding of the Brisker Rav, among others, he asked me why the Brisker Rav didn't come out "with sword and spear" against the forces of *kefirah*; he was known to be a zealot in his views, after all. In a very

reverential manner, I answered that the Rebbe should hold fast to his principals even though he encountered widespread opposition, for the sake of the honor of the Jewish people, because the absolute truth is known only to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Whose seal is truth (and this is a *remez* to teach us that the truth is revealed only in the end, when it is "sealed" by HaKadosh Baruch Hu), and if everyone holds by only one *hashkafah* and the truth turns out to be otherwise, then the Jewish people's honor will be demeaned (and there is a *remez* to this in the Torah where Yaakov Avinu says, "And now I have become two camps," so that if one should be attacked, the remaining one would survive). And I saw that the Satmar Rav nodded his head in agreement.

Before returning from my *shlichus* in America I visited with my close friend HaRav Akiva Ehrenfeld *shlita*, son of the teacher and master of my youth, the *gaon* and *tzaddik* HaRav Shmuel Ehrenfeld *ztz"l*. After hearing about my financial state, he wrote to urge me to come to America. When the Brisker Rav was told about this, he remarked that "*Reb Mordechai Simcha vet in America oif oiftuen* (Reb Mordechai Simcha will get things done in America, too)," which was something of a consolation to me, because I was very deeply attached to Eretz Yisroel. On my way to the Haifa port I cried bitterly over having to leave the Holy Land, the birthplace of my parents and grandparents.

We set out from Haifa on a ship bound for London, where we met with my mother, the *tzidkonis* Maras Dovrish *a"h*, and my brother *n"y* and sisters *a"h*, who weren't in such a good financial state themselves. I was forced to borrow money from an old acquaintance from Vienna, Reb P. Greenwald *shlita*, one of London's wealthy men. A short time after arriving in the United States I sent him the repayment, although I was still short of funds and I knew that he really meant the "loan" to be a gift. But we pray in Bircas Hamazon, "*vena al tatzricheinu...*" and I didn't want to begin this new period of my life depending on flesh and blood for my sustenance.



Our Kehillah in America



Our Kehillah in America

As we learn from Chazal's *drash* on "*kerum zulus livnei adam*" (*Tehillim* 12:9), it goes hard at first for someone who is lifted to more prosperous circumstances, and it went very hard for us in our new surroundings, especially when it came to choosing schools for our children. At that time, there was hardly anything to choose from. So we placed one of our two sons in Yeshivas Chasam Sofer, which was run by my aforementioned friend HaRav Akiva Ehrenfeld, and the other son in Yeshivas Ohel Yaakov, which had just been founded, and the three girls in Bais Yaakov in Boro Park. *Baruch Hashem*, considering the state Yidden were in at the time, they did very well indeed, and they all went on to establish homes faithful to Hashem and His Torah; may Hashem *Yisborach* continue to show us only good and kindness, *amen*.

Since the *heter* and consent for my going to the American *galus* had come principally from the Beis Yisroel, I didn't launch any projects on behalf of the Jewish public in general, but focused mainly on helping and encouraging the people of my own Gerrer community to build a solid infrastructure

of *shtieblach* for the *avreichim* and schools for our children. My family and I were lacking these things, too, since the community was still small and had few *mosdos* of its own. These few, however, were run by precious Gerrer *chassidim* who had arrived in New York broken and shattered, survivors from the death camps of the Germans, *yimach shemam vezichram*. I regret to say that I was unable to understand how deeply their experiences had affected them, and I was very surprised that so little had been organized. But perhaps that was also for the best, because it woke me up and energized me to take action against what I mistakenly thought was apathy on the part of my community.

I must make mention, though, of the *gaon* HaRav Yisroel Moshe Orlevsky ztz"l, Av Beis Din of the Zeller *kehillah*, who accomplished much after the war in Europe, too, but chiefly in the U.S., where one by one, he laid the foundations of the first Gerrer institutions in America, and of his sons, the *chamishah chumshei Torah*: my *mechutan* Reb Yehudah Aryeh *shlita*, a *maggid shiur* in the Gerrer *shtiebel* on Fifty-first Street, the *gaon* Reb Duvid Shlomo Zalman *shlita*, who teaches in *Mesivta Beis Yisroel d'Gur*, a brilliant speaker who brings merit to many Jews, the *gaon* Reb Yehonoson *shlita*, well known as an extraordinary *talmid chacham*, Reb Avraham Mordechai *shlita*, a dynamic activist in the *chassidishe* Bais Yaakov system in

Eretz Yisroel, and the *gaon* HaRav Yaakov Yitzchak *shlita*, who *rosh kollel* in Kollel Polin.

HaRav Yehudah Aryeh Goldberg *ztz"l* was active in laying down those first foundations in the United States, and after him, his sons, the *shishah sidrei Mishnah* who all work energetically on behalf of the educational *mosdos* both in Eretz Yisroel and the U.S.: Reb Shimon *shlita*, Reb Avraham Yaakov *shlita*, Reb Tzvi Yosef *shlita*, and Reb Dovid Menashe *shlita* in America, and in Eretz Yisroel, Reb Mordechai *shlita* and Reb Shmuel *shlita*.

Their work was continued and augmented by other dynamic *askanim*, dedicated *avreichim* who lent a hand and helped to build up the strong Gerrer institutions we know today.

But as I began to relate above, when I first arrived in New York I found the Gerrer community in disarray, and the main reason for this was simply that our numbers were so small. Boro Park didn't even have a Gerrer *shtiebel*. Some time later a group of our people founded a *shtiebel* in a small apartment over a laundry at Fifty-second Street and Twelfth Avenue, where only about two *minyanim* davened. After a few years, when the *kehillah* was bigger, we moved to a new *shtiebel* that took up a whole house that had been bought for the purpose. After that it wasn't long before there were more than a hundred of us davening there, because Gerrer *chassidim* moved into the

neighborhood from Williamsburg and Crown Heights. (Once again I must emphasize that I am skipping many important events, because this brief account is meant to be my personal memoirs, and so I only mention events in which I played a role, however small.)

Bochurim from our community were beginning to travel to Eretz Yisroel to attend Yeshivas Sefas Emes in Yerushalayim and Yeshivas Chiddushei HaRim in Tel Aviv, and the yeshivah in Bnei Brak that was later named Yeshivas Imrei Emes. When they came back to the States, some of them married and settled here, and they felt the need for a *shtiebel* for *avreichim*. I understood very well how they felt. So I went with one of them and put down an advance payment on a place for the first *shtiebel* for *avreichim* in the U.S.A. For some people it was a little hard to see why this was necessary, and we encountered some opposition. But one of the *bochurim* told me that when he was about to leave Yerushalayim and he went in to receive a parting *brochah* from the Beis Yisroel, the Rebbe had said to him, "*Du vist di yungeleit haben zich gemacht a shtiebel* (You know, the young married men have started a *shtiebel*)." This report was very encouraging, and it infused us with the strength to stand firm against those who were displeased with our plan. We went ahead with it, although at first we only had eight *avreichim* (I will not name them, just as I am not naming certain others, because I didn't get their permission,

and I don't want to cause any embarrassment to anyone who didn't take part for some reason.)

At first we didn't have a *minyan* every day, only on *sheini* and *chamishi* and on Shabbos, when the Torah is read, but as with any new venture, it was all done with fervor and enthusiasm. We truly felt the *no'am Hashem aleinu*. For example, every Friday two different *avreichim* would wash the floors and tidy everything up for Shabbos. This also served as an opportunity to discuss anything that was necessary for the *shtiebel's* upkeep, or for the expansion of our existing *mosdos* or the founding of new ones. As the *navi* says (*Malachi* 3:16), *az nidberu....*

And in *Tehillim* it says *Mah ahavti Torasecha* (how is my love for Torah expressed?), and the answer is *kol hayom hi sichosi* (I talk about it all day long). We talked about the fact that most of our people in other neighborhoods were moving into Boro Park, and it was becoming urgent to found our own Talmud Torah, and also to enlarge the *Mesivta* by adding classes for our *chassidim*. We also talked about starting a *kollel avreichim*. Since this all seems as if it happened yesterday, I will be very brief here, to make room for our hopes and prayers that all these institutions should continue to grow in the present and the future, and also because the institutions themselves have already documented their history in detail. Needless to say, we all worked hard at developing the *mosdos*, since it was our

sacred duty, each of us doing all he could, be it something big or something small. Nothing was done without the advice and guidance of the Beis Yisroel, which we obtained either by means of travelers who went to him personally, or by means of letters, and with Hashem's help we always received encouragement to step up our efforts.

The Founding of Yeshivas Yagdil Torah

The first new Gerrer institution to be founded while I was living in America was Yeshivas Yagdil Torah. The yeshivah got its name from a holy source. This is how it happened: we sent a very *choshuve bochur* (who later became one of America's great *rabbonim*, the *gaon* HaRav Mendel Shafran *shlita*) to ask the Beis Yisroel what the yeshivah should be called. The Rebbe's response was, "*Vos darfen zei a nomen* (What does it need a name for)?" Our *shaliach* answered that it would make it easier to collect contributions, and then the Rebbe said, "*Zohlen zei es rifen Yagdil Torah* (So call it Yagdil Torah)." I recall that a short time after that, when I was in Yerushalayim, the Beis Yisroel said to me, "*Men darf zehn oz es zol zein Hashem chafeitz Yagdil Torah* (They must see to it that Hashem should be pleased with Yagdil Torah)." It is hard to comprehend the depth of the words of *chachamim* and to unravel their riddles, but I took it as a hint that we should work to help this holy yeshivah to live up to its name, and so it has been. The yeshivah has grown in

both size and quality, bringing honor to our community and to the entire Jewish people.

The Mesivta Grows

After this institution was firmly established we all felt the need to expand our Mesivta for younger *bochurim*. After much activity on the part of our best *askanim*, several new classes were added to the Mesivta, taught by *talmidei chachamim* who were experts in *chinuch*, and infused their *shiurim* with holiness and purity. And together, the *mosdos* grew in both size and quality, such that we were blessed with the *brochah* mentioned by Chazal in the story about bringing more benches into the *beis medrash* of Raban Gamliel, implying that there was always a lack of benches, not of *talmidim*. This, *baruch Hashem*, was true of all our institutions.

Machaneh Gur

Conditions in New York City are such that it is very hard to spend the summer there, and many city residents, especially those blessed with large families, go to the mountains, where the air is cooler, for two months or more. For older children, summer camp is very important. As it says in *Mishlei*, "*Oger bakayitz ben maskil* (An intelligent son gathers in the summer)," and we often see that *talmidim* gain tremendously while they're

away at summer camp, because not only is the air better there, but the atmosphere, too, has a very healthy influence on them both physically and spiritually, and the effects make a difference throughout the year. After I discussed this need with the Beis Yisroel, he did everything he could to push the idea to fruition.

After much hard work and difficulty, the Gerrer summer camp became a reality, joining the rest of the illustrious *mosdos* founded by the people of our community.

The Kollel

Of all the Gerrer institutions founded after my arrival in America, I have saved the one I love best for the end: the superb Gerrer kollel, headed by my close friend the gaon HaRav Elya Fisher *shlita*, who encouraged and urged me to mention in these memoirs that there is hardly a Gerrer *avreich* in the U.S. who didn't start out his married life learning in the kollel. It has turned them into outstanding individuals, and has become a tradition passed on from father to son. The kollel reminds me of what is told in the name of the Chiddushei HaRim, who reportedly said, "If I had eighty *avreichim* who were willing and suitable, I would send them to America to create a revolution there." Likewise, one of the *bochurim* who came back from learning in Yerushalayim told me that when he parted from

the Beis Yisroel, the Rebbe had said to him, "*Far tzurik un macht dort a revolutzia* (go back and make a revolution there)." I am writing all this down so that we should know how to value and esteem our institutions, and above all, the one that is hardest to maintain but also the most important, the kollel for our Gerrer *avreichim*, under the friendly and fatherly leadership of the *rosh kollel*, whom I know to have been given this task by the Beis Yisroel in his time, and who now benefits from the guidance of *Maran HaAdmor shlita*,⁸ may he live long and good days until the coming of the Redeemer, *amen*.

The Bais Yaakov of Chassidei Gur

Now it is time to say something about the new dawn that shone over Zion, about the third strand in the threefold cord of the *Imrei Emes*, the Beis Yisroel, and *lehavdil l'chaim tovim v'aruchim*, the *Admor shlita*,⁹ who shows in every aspect of his conduct that he is a merciful father figure to the whole Jewish nation, both the good and the not-so-good (excepting, of course, those who are in the category of *mesisim umedichim*, those who instigate their fellow Jews to sin, to whom the Torah forbids showing mercy, as is written, "Do not have pity

⁸ The Lev Simcha, who was the current Gerrer Rebbe when the Hebrew edition of this work went to press.

⁹ The Lev Simcha.

and do not have mercy.") And it was he who bid us, as was said to Moshe Rabbeinu, "*Ko tomar leveis Yaakov* (so shall you say to the house of Yaakov," i.e., the women of the Jewish nation), initiating the founding of girls' schools for the Gerrer community both in Eretz Yisroel and the U.S. As the *passuk* says of the *tzaddik*, "You make a decision and it will be carried out for you," (Iyov 22:28).

We carried it out promptly, and now we have our own Gerrer Bais Yaakov in America, and it may be said of all those who worked and contributed towards its establishment, "Blessed is he who upholds the words of this Torah" and the mitzvah of fulfilling the words of *chachamim*. Our Bais Yaakov waves its banner proudly, and with the completion of our Gerrer *mosdos*, we can say, like Moshe Rabbeinu *a"h*, "With our sons and with our daughters we shall go," and also, "Bais Yaakov, come and let us go," all of us, to greet the *goel tzedek*, *amen*.

Here I will end this first volume, and with Hashem's help, I will write a second volume starting from where I left off and telling the rest of my story, up to and including the coming of the Redeemer, may it be speedily in our days, *amen v'amen*.



**A heartfelt tribute to Rebbetzin Beila
Simcha, ע"ה, to whom this volume is
dedicated, written by her youngest
child, Rebbetzin Rochel Levitan**

She was my mentor, she was my confidant, she was my best friend...I was closer to her than anyone else!

Those were the sentiments we heard from multitudes of people throughout the Shiva we sat for Ima A"H. Everyone felt they were her favorite-and these were not blood relatives! Can you imagine how I felt? Being her youngest daughter- her "baby", as she affectionately introduced me to everyone even when I had eight children of my own!

She was the quintessential Eishes Chayil- with not one bit of exaggeration.

Mi Yimtza? How did we find the strength to continue after she was niftar? We always hear her voice in our heads, guiding us to do the right things, and trying to make her proud of the legacy she left behind.

We were truly zoche to have her spend the last few months of her life in our home. She was niftar in my arms, leaving a gaping hole of sorrow in my heart. She continues to shep all the nachas she was so proud of from her children and grandchildren.

May we continue on the path she so lovingly showed us and may she continue to join us in all our simchos-because that's what she lived for.

Rav Mordechai Simcha was much loved and cherished by the Gedolei HaDor of the previous generation. He was the founder and nurturer of so many Torah projects over so many decades and the mechaber of many wonderful seforim, both for the advanced scholar and the simple Jew. He is a veritable gusher of chiddush and hischadshus—innovation and renewal. His thoughts, words and deeds are, at the same time, a Torah of simcha and a simchas haTorah. The sefer you are holding provides a glimpse of his persona, although it describes merely one percent of his holy endeavors.



