A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, featuring diamond-shaped motifs at the corners and teardrop-shaped ornaments at the midpoints of each side.

Memento from the Wedding of

***Chaya and Mendel
Denburg***

ו' אדר שני ה'תשפ"ב

The 9th of March, 2022



בס"ד

Memento from the Wedding of

מענדל וחי'ה
שיחיו דענבורג

Chaya and Mendel
Denburg

ו' אדר שני ה'תשפ"ב

The 9th of March, 2022

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LubavitchArchives@gmail.com

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Greetings

Dear Family and Friends שיחי,

As per tradition at all momentous events, we begin by thanking G-d for granting us life, sustaining us, and enabling us to be here together. We are thrilled that you are able to share in our simcha, the marriage of Mendel and Chaya. Indeed, Jewish law highlights the role of the community in bringing joy to the *chosson* and *kallah*.

In honor of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's wedding in 1928, the Rebbe Rayatz distributed a special *teshurah*, a memento, to all the celebrants: a facsimile of a letter written by the Alter Rebbe.

In this tradition, we are honored to share:

- 1) The story of the *kallah*'s namesake, Mrs. Chaya Bronstein.
- 2) The story of the family connection between the grandfather of the *chosson*, Reb Leibel Denburg, and the great-great-grandfather of the *kallah*, Reb Nissan Nemanov.
- 3) The story of the Pewzner family, beginning

from the times of the Baal Shem Tov, through the kallah's grandfather Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner.

- 4) The story of the Denburg family's cousin, Mrs. Ida Bloomberg and the Rebbe Rayatz. This story was related many times by the grandfather of the chosson, Reb Leibel Denburg.

All the above was researched and collected by the kallah's brother, Dovi Levy, to whom we are greatly indebted. For comments or corrections on the above, please send an email to: teshurafeedback@gmail.com.

In addition, we would like to thank Rabbi Dovid Zaklikowski, Chana Lewis and Yitzchok Cohen of Hasidic Archives for their dedication in preparing this memento.

We hope that you will enjoy the celebration, and share the happiness and pride we feel on this day. May we share many simchas in the near future!

The Denburg and Levy Families



TRANSPLANTED SACRIFICE

*The Life of
Chaya Bronstein*



A young Chaya Bronstein.

PHOTO: AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD LIBRARY



Alone



Born in the fall of 1915, Chaya “Chayussa” Bronstein was raised by her parents, Tzvi Hersh “Herschel” and Leah, under difficult circumstances. She was witness to self-sacrifice displayed by those around her, which gave her the courage to face the hardships required to preserve Jewish life at all cost.

Her father had been a student of the original Tomchei Tmimim yeshivah in the town of Lubavitch. After leaving the yeshivah and returning to his parents’ home in Cherkasy, Ukraine, he married Leah in 1913.

As rumblings of war closed in on Lubavitch, the Rebbe Rashab moved to Rostov-on-Don. Deeply connected to the Rebbe, Herschel would make his way to be with the Rebbe Rashab on Rosh Hashanah even during wartime.

Reb Leib Kahan described one of those difficult journeys , in 1920, during the Russian Civil War:

We began to plan our trip to the Rebbe. We found someone with a motor boat, which allowed us as much as possible avoid the trains which were dangerous. As we travelled up the Dnieper River to Ekaterinoslav [today



The Rebbe Rashab.
PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

Dniprol], we were fired upon and chased by a ship of robbers, but we miraculously made it to the city unscathed, thank G-d.

We stayed at a hotel for a week, along with many other Lubavitchers planned on travelling to the Rebbe. However, we were told that the journey was dangerous, and that at the train station of Ilovais'k, Jews were targeted, beaten and robbed.

When we heard this, we were worried and despondent about what to do next.

We decided to continue, with the hope that G-d who assisted us until then would continue to in the future. From Ekaterinoslav, many joined us, and understandably we were frightened as we inched closer to Ilovais'k. When we arrived, two Kozaks entered the wagon and began to



The Rebbe Rashab's chotzer in Rostov.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

check our passports. Thank G-d they did nothing to us, and we arrived safely to Rostov.

That year, the typhus epidemic spread quickly across Russia. When visiting the Rebbe, Herschel's younger brother Mottel contracted the disease. Extremely contagious, those who caught typhus were placed in isolation, and few would place themselves in danger to care for them. Despite this, Herschel – a strong, healthy man – selflessly cared for his younger brother who ultimately survived.

Sadly, Herschel caught the deadly illness, and tragically passed away at a young age. He left behind three orphans, Chaya, 5, Rivka, 4, and Zev Volf, 2. The Rebbe Rashab passed away within a few weeks of Herschel, and fellow Lubavitchers would say that he was one of ten people, a *minyan*, that left this world in proximity to the Rebbe.

When Chaya was 14, her mother passed away. Chaya then



The Kesselman family in Paris.

PHOTO: AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD LIBRARY

moved in with family, including her aunt and uncle, Bluma and Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, who lived near Moscow in Malakhovka. The years passed slowly, without much drama. Her aunt taught her extensively about Jewish observance and provided her a solid foundation to face challenges. By the time Chaya reached young adulthood, marriage prospects were difficult to come by. Unfortunately, the communists had been largely successful in repelling the children of religious Jews from the path of their parents, and Orthodox young men and women were few and far between.



Chaya's mother, Leah.



The War



In 1936, Chaya was introduced to her cousin, Zalman Bronstein, and they decided to marry. They had a small wedding at the home of the Kesselmans.

For the next few years, the couple lived in Moscow. In 1942, when Germany began making advances into the Soviet Union, the Bronsteins decided to retreat from the frontline. They left to Chimkent, Kazakhstan, where a family friend resided. This friend had often stayed at Zalman's parents' home, and they were certain he would welcome them until they'd find permanent accommodations. Indeed, the friend was pleased to see them, but his wife compelled them to leave.

From there, the couple went to Munkacs, and several days later Zalman's parents and siblings joined them. While they felt safe, there were few Jews in Munkacs, and they did not know where other Lubavitchers had escaped.

With the war waging, and the Red Army constantly on the prowl for soldiers to recruit, the age for recruitment was widened, and Zalman found himself on the draft list. Being sent to the frontlines translated to extreme difficulty upholding Jewish



Chaim Ezra.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

practice, and a high probability of death.

Zalman met with the recruitment officer and succeeded in bribing him. From time to time, he would return to the office offering more money. After several months, the official showed up at Zalman's home in a drunken state. He demanded that Chaya come with him to the store to purchase cigarettes for him.

Fearing for her safety, the couple did not know what to do. If they refused, the officer vowed that Zalman would be drafted the next day. They quickly conferred with Zalman's father, Chaim Ezra, who lived with them, and they decided that she should go, but father and son would follow closely in case the officer tried to assault her.

As they suspected, the official accosted Chaya; in response, she spit in his face and quickly ran home. As expected, the next day, Zalman received a draft notice. He went to the draft board and



Etta Menkin.

PHOTO: AGUDAS
CHASSIDEI CHABAD
LIBRARY

tried to bribe a doctor unsuccessfully. With no further options, he was enlisted into the Red Army.

According to family lore, the officer who tried to assault Chaya was later sent to the frontlines, where he lost his hands and feet in battle.

During this time, Chaya's sister-in-law Etta Menkin (later Levitin), joined many Lubavitchers travelling farther away to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Chaya, her children and Zalman's parents soon followed.

In Tashkent, Chaya found work knitting socks and selling them on the black market. When Rabbi Nissan Nemanov learned that she was purchasing material and selling socks at the market on her own, he became concerned for her safety. He arranged for Rabbi Peretz Chein to bring her material, and he would sell her wares and bring the profits to her.



Zalman Bronstein.



*A group of refugees after leaving the Soviet Union,
including Chaya Bronstein (center row, number 18).*

PHOTO: AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD LIBRARY



New Life

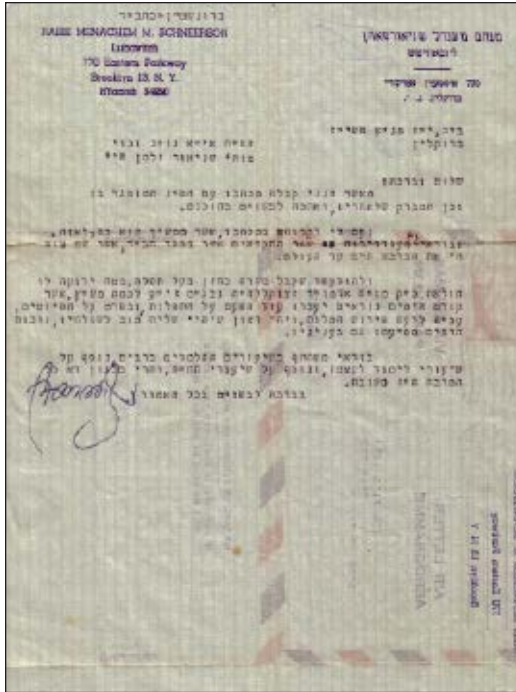


After the war, Zalman returned home. Soon after, the family learned of a route smuggling Jews across the border to Poland and decided to chance escape. After a terrifying and taxing journey, the family, along with other Lubavitchers, made it to Paris, France.

With the blessings of the Rebbe Rayatz, in 1949, they made their way to Israel, where they became founding members of the small village that became known as Kfar Chabad. Zalman tried his hand at several trades in order to support their family, but was largely unsuccessful.

Over time, he became known for his good voice, and he contemplated becoming a cantor. When he received an invitation to be *chazzan* at the Great Synagogue in Herzliya, Zalman wrote to the Rebbe about the position which would supplement his modest farming enterprise.

The Rebbe responded that he was pleased Zalman was continuing to farm, and that surely he is doing his utmost to uplift the spirits of other farmers in Kfar Chabad. In regard to the cantorial position, the Rebbe wrote that before Rosh Hashanah one



The Rebbe's letter about Zalman's employment.

should review the *davening*, especially the *piyutim*, and know their meaning. The letter ended, “It should be G-d’s will that you be a good conduit for the congregation, and the merit of the community should assist you in your needs.”

With the Rebbe’s letter in hand, Zalman accepted the offer. After the holidays, the congregation asked Zalman to stay on as their chazzan year-round for a respectable salary. They stipulated that he use a tuning fork on Shabbos, which would help with uneven pitch. Zalman was unsure if this was permitted on Shabbos, and he wrote to Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, a member of the chief rabbi’s rabbinical council. The former said it was okay, and the latter said it was not. Rabbi Shneur Zalman Garelik, rabbi of the village, told Zalman to do as he sees fit. Zalman was in a bind. He wrote to the Rebbe, and a few weeks later, the answer arrived: “G-d will send



Zalman at a communal gathering (right), 1965.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

livelihood from another source.”

When he received the letter, Chaya told him, “Zalman, we may have but bread and margarine, but we will do as the Rebbe guided.”

Despite the difficulty, Zalman immediately resigned from his position at the Great Synagogue. He later found other job opportunities that did not make this demand.



Continued Challenges



Over the years, the Bronstein family continued to struggle financially, often with little food to eat, but Zalman and Chaya built a happy home. Zalman said that this attitude, of being happy with what they had, was due to his wife. She never complained, and encouraged him to continue his communal activities.

In fact, without fanfare, she would give from the little they had to the poor. When a needy person left their home, she often continued looking for money, and would run after them in the event she had more to offer.

A sensitive person, she took other people's challenges personally. One woman recalled that when her father passed away, she saw Chaya approaching her childhood home in order to console the family. She heard Chaya's footsteps on the outside stairwell but after several minutes, no one came in. Again, she heard Chaya outside, going up and down the stairs. Chaya could not bring herself to face a grieving widow and orphans, and eventually just left.

When their first daughter was born, they named her Leah, after Chaya's mother. In those early months, when she would speak





*Their children Mussia Kok (left), Sara friendman (second from left),
Sterna Drookman (second from right) and Liza Gurary (right).
Also seen are Zalman and his sister Bluma Tzefasman.*

her daughter's name, she would recall her mother whom she had lost at such an early age, and would break down in tears. Eventually, they decided to call their daughter by the nickname Liza.

Chaya brought a spiritual atmosphere to the home. In every free moment, she would recite Tehillim, and seldom chitchatted. Before she ate, she would daven with great concentration for at least an hour daily. The children knew that while davening, Chaya was not to be disturbed.

In discussion with one of her children's teachers, she said that her children do not need to be scholars, "but they should daven as a Chasid davens."

Chaya was aggravated by people who chatted in shul. When someone told her to stop taking everything so seriously, she referred to the words of Tanya on the topic, where the Alter Rebbe wrote "*Gevald, gevald!*" in regard to talking during davening.

She was modest, and took religious observance seriously, constantly seeking more stringent ways to uphold Torah law. If family members expressed disapproval, especially regarding kashrus, Chaya would voice her disappointment.



Trips to New York



On Chaya's visits to New York, she had several private audiences with the Rebbe. On one occasion, she told the Rebbe about her daughter Leah (Liza), and a prospective match with a cousin, Mottel Gurary. She expressed nervousness about the possibility of cousins marrying. The Rebbe responded, "In my family, it is also like that."

On another visit, the Rebbe gave her son Yosef Yitzchok a pocket siddur, on condition that he receive a copy of the boy's report card. That year, Yosef Yitzchok worked hard to keep his grades up, and the principal arranged a beautiful one to send to the Rebbe. Yosef Yitzchok continued to send his report cards over the years. When he began to study in a *mesivta* that no longer gave report cards, Yosef Yitzchok informed the Rebbe of this. In the Rebbe's response, he thanked Yosef Yitzchok for taking the time to let him know.

During Chaya's visit to New York in 1967, war was stirring in the Middle East. Chaya feared for her family, and wanted to return home quickly. In an audience with the Rebbe, she raised this idea. The Rebbe asked her how long her trip was scheduled for. She told



The Rebbe during the Lag Beomer parade, 1967, which Chaya attended.

PHOTO: REBBE DRIVE

him that she planned on being in New York for a total of 53 days, and she had another 17 days to go. Her return flight was scheduled on Wednesday, June 7th.

The Rebbe replied, “That is just before Shabbos. It is worthwhile to stay until after Shabbos. By the time you get home, the war will be over.” He then instructed her to speak at the upcoming Lubavitch women’s convention about the activities of Agudas Chasidei Chabad in Israel. “You should report only good news from Israel,” he said.

On the fifth of June, war broke out. Her family called immediately, telling her not to return to Israel. Even if she wanted to, there were few available flights.

On Tuesday night, the Rebbe called her into a private audience. Emotionally, she told the Rebbe that she doesn’t think it will be possible for her to return home. The Rebbe calmed her, and told her that she should plan to leave the following week. “You will



With their children Yosef Yitzchok (right) and Herschel (left).

have a way to fly,” he assured her.

She told the Rebbe about her deep fears regarding her family and community, and her frequent prayers. “I am asking of G-d that everyone be healthy,” she told the Rebbe.

The Rebbe said that everyone will be well, and she will find them healthy at home. “Report good news, and give regards to the women and girls in Kfar Chabad, and be active in their activities,” he said.

She was immediately comforted by the Rebbe’s words. Indeed, when she left New York on Sunday, June 11th, as the Rebbe originally instructed her, there was already a ceasefire in place with Egypt and Jordan. By the time she landed in Israel, a ceasefire with Syria had been established, ending the war.



Rabbi Peretz Mochkin (right) and Rabbi Nissan Nemanov, at the sheva brachos of Yosef Yitzchok (left) and Shternie Bronstein.

FAMILIES UNITED

While studying in New York, Yosef Yitzchok Bronstein, Zalman and Chaya's son, was introduced to Shternie Pewzner, daughter of Sholom Ber and Rochel Leah (nee Nemanov). The two decided to build their home together, marrying in Adar 1977. For the Bronsteins, this marriage held special meaning extending back to WWII. Shternie was the granddaughter of Rabbi Nissan Nemanov, who had assisted Chaya while Zalman was serving in the Red Army.

Zalman, reflecting on the marriage that united these two families, said, "It is the result of G-d's wondrous ways."





A Fulfilled Life



Of his mother, Yosef Yitzchok recalled, “She was the center of the tribe,” and constantly concerned for the wellbeing of her children.

Daily, she read the Tehillim corresponding to the ages of her descendants. When it reached the point that it became difficult to keep track, she tried to say as much Tehillim as possible daily, starting from the beginning, in order to cover all of their chapters.

She passed away on Adar 3, 1996, meriting much nachas from her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

May her memory be for a blessing.



ADOPTED BY
REB NISSAN



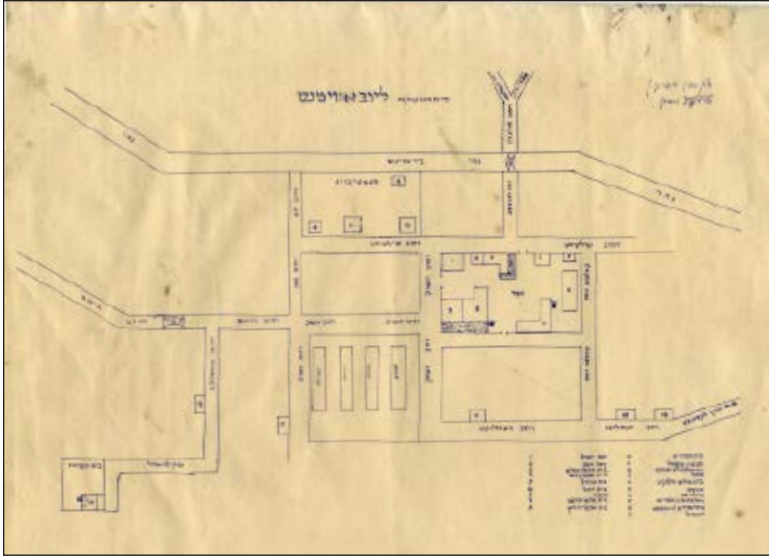
Students Worry



It was 1916, and WWI was rising across Europe. Shaya Denburg, a quiet scholarly student at the Tomchei Tmimim Yeshivah in Lubavitch, was suddenly drafted to the Red Army. Shaya, 22, was known for his phenomenal memory, capable of reciting any passage of *Gemara* from memory, but this skill would do little to protect him on the battlefield. Furthermore, religious Jews were often sent directly to the frontlines, translating to almost certain death for an unprepared young soldier.

When Shaya consulted with the Rebbe Rashab, he was advised to confer with the famed Gurary brothers, owners of a sugar factory in Kremenchuk. They successfully had his draft cancelled, and Shaya remained in Kremenchuk for a while. He then began his travels back, some 550 miles, to the small town of Lubavitch.

On the way, while travelling from city to city, he was accustomed to reciting folio after folio of *Gemara* as if the volume was open before of him. Upon arriving in Zlobin, he was greeted by the townspeople. He met Reb Yitzchok Nemanov, beloved leader of the Jewish community and successful businessman. When Shaya said he was on his way back to Lubavitch to continue his studies,



A map of the town of Lubavitch by Hendel Lieberman.

Reb Yitzchok asked if he could send his young son Nissan, just before bar mitzvah, with him.

Although Reb Yitzchok was not Lubavitch himself, he had heard that, in Lubavitch, children are taught to be G-d fearing, and resistant to the oppressions against Jewish life that were becoming widespread in the Russian Empire.

Shaya agreed to take him, saying that he would ensure Nissan's acceptance at the yeshivah. It was difficult for the Nemanov family to part from their son, but they understood the dire need. The family escorted him from the city, and Mrs. Shaina Chaya Nemanov wrapped her child with a warm blanket and pressed some sweets into his palm.

By the next day, they arrived in Lubavitch where Nissan was accepted into one of the younger classes of the local Lubavitch *cheder*.

MARRIAGE

War raged through Russia and rapidly neared Lubavitch. During this turbulent time, Shaya was encouraged to meet a young woman named Henya Nemanov. When he heard that she was Nissan's sister, whose parents bravely sent their son to study in Lubavitch, he agreed.

While the couple was courting, Reb Yitzchok conditioned a future marriage: in keeping with the statement of the sages, "Hate the rabbinate" (Ethics of our Fathers 1:10), he should not accept a position as rabbi, or ritual slaughterer, in the town of Zlobin.

Shaya and Henya would later marry, cementing the Denburg and Nemanov families for life. The couple had two children, Yehudah Leib "Leibel" and Rasha.

Reb Shaya worked on a farm, tilling the land while studying Gemara from memory. Later, he would become a *schochet*.

As the Germans began their conquest of the Soviet Union in WWII, the Denburgs moved further from the frontline, to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Tragically, due to hunger, Reb Shaya passed away in 1943.

After his father's passing, Leibel, 20, became close to his uncle Rabbi Nissan Nemanov, known simply as Reb Nissan, who took him under his wing. By then, Reb Nissan was one of the leaders of the Lubavitch underground in the Soviet Union.

Reb Nissan was fearless in taking on new initiatives, despite the rabid danger surrounding them. Indeed, Leibel recalls the words of the famed Chasid, Reb Yisroel "Nevler" Levin: "I could perhaps learn Chasidus and *Niglah* better, but what can be done if I am a mere soldier, and Reb Nissan is a general?"

LEAVING THE SOVIET UNION

In the summer of 1946, Reb Nissan and the extended Neman-



Reb Nissan and Masha Nemanov with their family.

ov family joined many Lubavitchers in a daring escape from the country, masking as Polish refugees returning to their homeland.

Sitting beside his uncle aboard the train taking them to freedom, Leibel watched Reb Nissan recite Tehillim by heart for several hours. All aboard were frightened of calling attention to themselves lest they be outed as deserters by the Soviets, or illegal immigrants by the Polish, but Reb Nissan stood up, wrapped his tefillin and began to pray with great fervor. “There is no way to describe how much internal strength it takes to be so brazen,” Leibel said.

When they finally arrived in Poland, authorities began checking all the falsified Polish papers, and asked everyone their names. One person stumbled over his new name, and was removed from the train. The train was supposed to depart at 2:00 a.m., but the hour passed and they had not budged. All the escapees aboard the train were terrified that they had been outed as fugitives.

Many wanted to get off the train and run for their lives. They



A group of Chasidim in the DP camp in Germany. Reb Nissan is at the first table, fourth from the left, and on his right is Rabbi Avrohom "Mayor" Drizin.

thought this would give them some chance to survive, and staying on the train meant certain doom. Reb Nissan, Leibel recalled, told everyone to stay put, and all obeyed. A short while later, the train departed.

From Poland, they continued their journey to Germany, and from there, to their final destination. At one point, they had to cross the border into Czechoslovakia on foot. They were told to leave their belongings behind but Reb Nissan was adamant about taking a small suitcase.

At one point, Reb Nissan asked Leibel to hold the suitcase. At the German border, the suitcase was checked and determined to contain nothing of value. When they arrived at the Displaced Persons camp in Pocking, Germany, Reb Nissan opened the lining of the suitcase, and removed gold coins that had been collected over the years from Chasidim in the Soviet Union. He sent them to the Rebbe Rayatz in New York.

After a few weeks in the camp, they received instructions from the Rebbe Rayatz to open a yeshivah. However, they had little money for basic needs, and a school seemed unfeasible. None-



Henya Denburg,
1947.

PHOTO: AGUDAS
CHASSIDEI CHABAD
LIBRARY

theless, they did as the Rebbe asked. They all believed the Rebbe Rayatz had an abundance of money in America, and it would just take time until he sent financial support.

For the time being, Reb Nissan sought a loan. He turned to Rabbi Yekutiel Halberstam, who had an established organization running. Rabbi Halberstam told Reb Nissan that he generally does not provide loans, but that he would give the needed funds on condition that the yeshivah be called *Sh'erit Ha'pletah*, and remain under his umbrella of schools. Reb Nissan refused the offer, saying that the Rebbe Rayatz tasked him with preserving Tomchei Tmimim, “and when I give back the key, it will be the same organization.”

Leibel recalled that when Reb Nissan returned to the DP camp, he said, “A smart man he is, but a Rebbe, I am not sure.”

France provided visas to many Lubavitchers, and Reb Nissan



Reb Nissan preparing for davening.

soon departed. Leibel followed his uncle, while his mother and sister stayed in Germany.

Leibel recalled that when they came to France, Reb Nissan believed that, finally, his communal work was over and he could immerse himself in Torah study all day. Then a letter arrived from the Rebbe Rayatz, tasking Reb Nissan with responsibility for the yeshivah. Reb Nissan answered the call.

Leibel studied in the yeshivah for one year, marking his only formal year of Torah study. His mother, all the while, tried arranging visas to the United States. With the efforts of a cousin and supporter of Lubavitch in Montreal, Ida Bloomberg, the family received visas to Canada.

THE LATE MESSAGE

Among the Lubavitch community in France, common practice was to get married before emigrating to the United States.



The Rebbe Rayatz's letter to Rabbi Kramer about the Denburgs arrival in Montreal.

When Leibel's mother received a visa for him, he went to Reb Nissan and said he does not see himself marrying any of the young women in France.

Reb Nissan advised Leibel to write to the Rebbe Rayatz. Leibel mailed a letter but never received a reply. Turning to Reb Nissan again, the elder rabbi responded, "There were greater Chasidim then you and they did what they did."

Leibel took this as an indicator that he should leave with his family. Nonetheless, the Rebbe's silence left him uneasy. Upon arriving in Montreal, an entire contingent of Chasidim greeted them at the airport, which moved Leibel tremendously.

Decades later, someone showed him a letter from the Rebbe Rayatz, written in the spring of 1948. It read:

The student, Mr. Yehuda Leib Denburg, who is in Paris, wrote to me that he plans on traveling to Montreal by plane. And from Germany, his mother and sister.

I am asking you to let me know if he already arrived,



Reb Nissan farbrenging at the yeshivah in Montreal.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

or you are waiting for him to arrive in the coming days. The same for his mother and sister.

Finally, Leibel felt relieved that his journey to Canada had been with the Rebbe's blessing, and that the Chasidim in Montreal who greeted them at the Montreal airport had done so at the Rebbe's behest.

MONTREAL VISITS

In Montreal, Leibel married Esther Sonnechein, and found success in the garment industry, as did other Lubavitcher immigrants.

Leibel encouraged Reb Nissan to visit Canada, where Leibel would help raise funds for the yeshivah in France. It became a yearly tradition cherished by the Denburg family. Leibel would take off from work and drive his uncle to meet various business

associates.

Living in a small home, the Denburg boys often shared a room with their great-uncle. They recall Reb Nissan as an earnest, quiet and soft-spoken man. They would watch in awe as Reb Nissan would slowly and intently say each word of *Modeh Ani*, wash his hands and then bring *negel vasser* to the sleeping child in the room. He would recite the morning *brachos* for 40 minutes, have a cup of tea and then leave to shul, where he would learn and pray until one in the afternoon. During the week, he would not eat chicken or meat, and sufficed on a diet of mostly rice. Leibel would then take him to fundraise.

One day, the hot water tank at the local Montreal mikvah broke, and the water was freezing cold. “It took your breath away,” recalls Rabbi Moshe Denburg, a young boy at the time. He told his father something must be done immediately since it would be difficult for the elderly Reb Nissan, who was visiting at the time, to immerse. “*Ach*, he will be fine,” Leibel told his son, recalling the frigid waters in the Soviet Union.

Leibel would ask Reb Nissan to learn with his children. “He would not run through the text,” Rabbi Denburg recalls. “Reb Nissan was methodical and slow.” Once, while learning *Lekutei Torah*, the light in the room began to flicker. The child was annoyed by the constant flicker, and hoped that Reb Nissan would leave the room for a moment so he could fix the bulb, but Reb Nissan did not flinch, utterly unbothered by such a seemingly minor matter.

Once, in a discussion amongst several Lubavitchers, someone mentioned that the Rebbe Rayatz had said Reb Nissan is on the level of a *beinuni*, as discussed in Tanya. Later, one of the Denburg children innocently asked his elderly great-uncle if it was true.

Reb Nissan responded, “What would you do to be a *beinuni*?”

I would say Tehillim, the child replied.

“While saying Tehillim, would you think of something not good?”



*Reb Nissan with Reb
Leibel.*

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

No, I would not.

“Would you say something that is not good?”

No, I would not do anything. I would just be saying Tehillim, the child said.

“Let me see.”

The child recited a chapter of Tehillim.

“You see, now you were a *beinuni*. Now do it another minute, and then another, and you will be a Tanya *beinuni* for even longer,” replied Reb Nissan.



Reb Nissan during a farbrengen at the Montreal yeshiva.

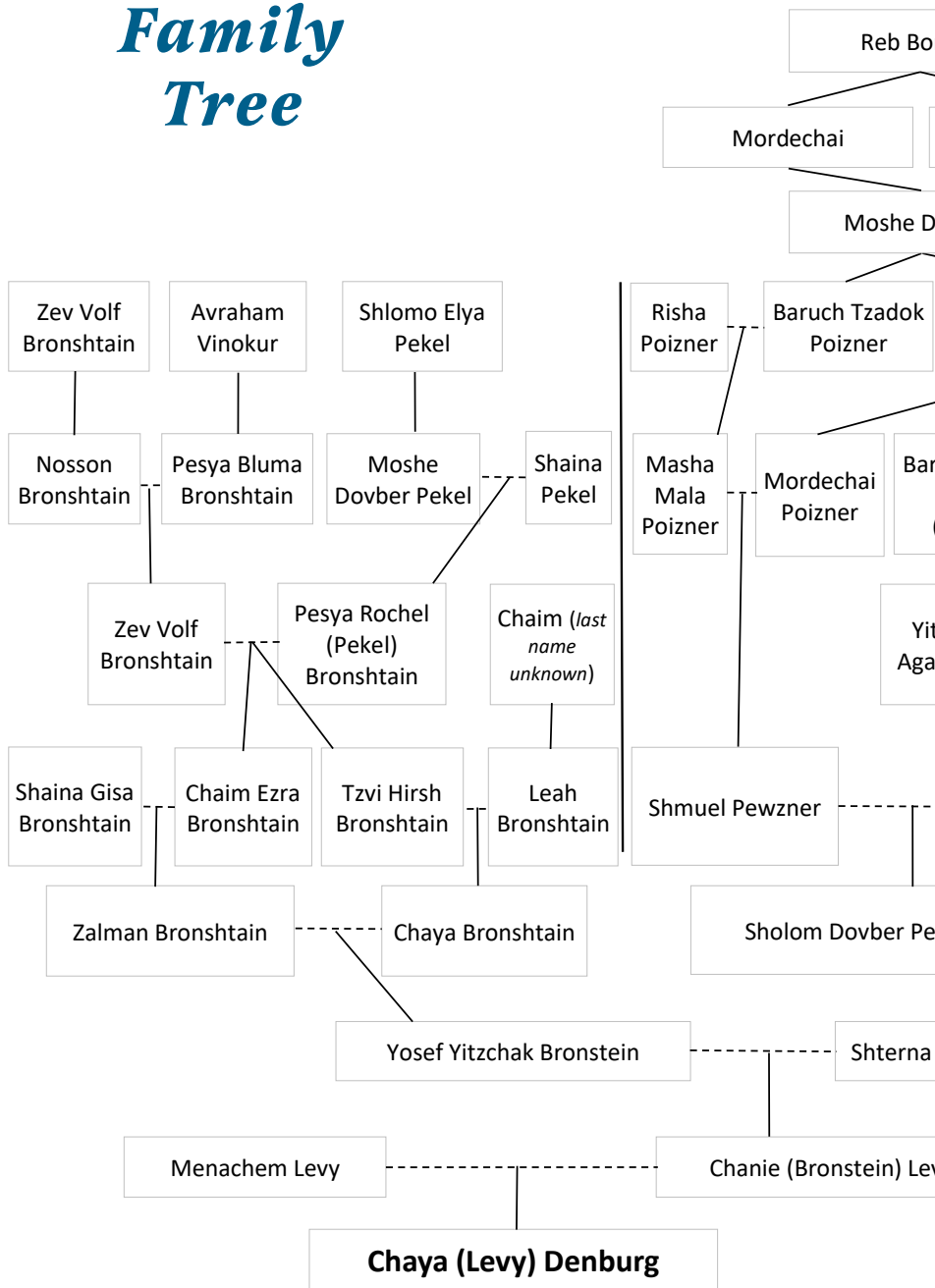
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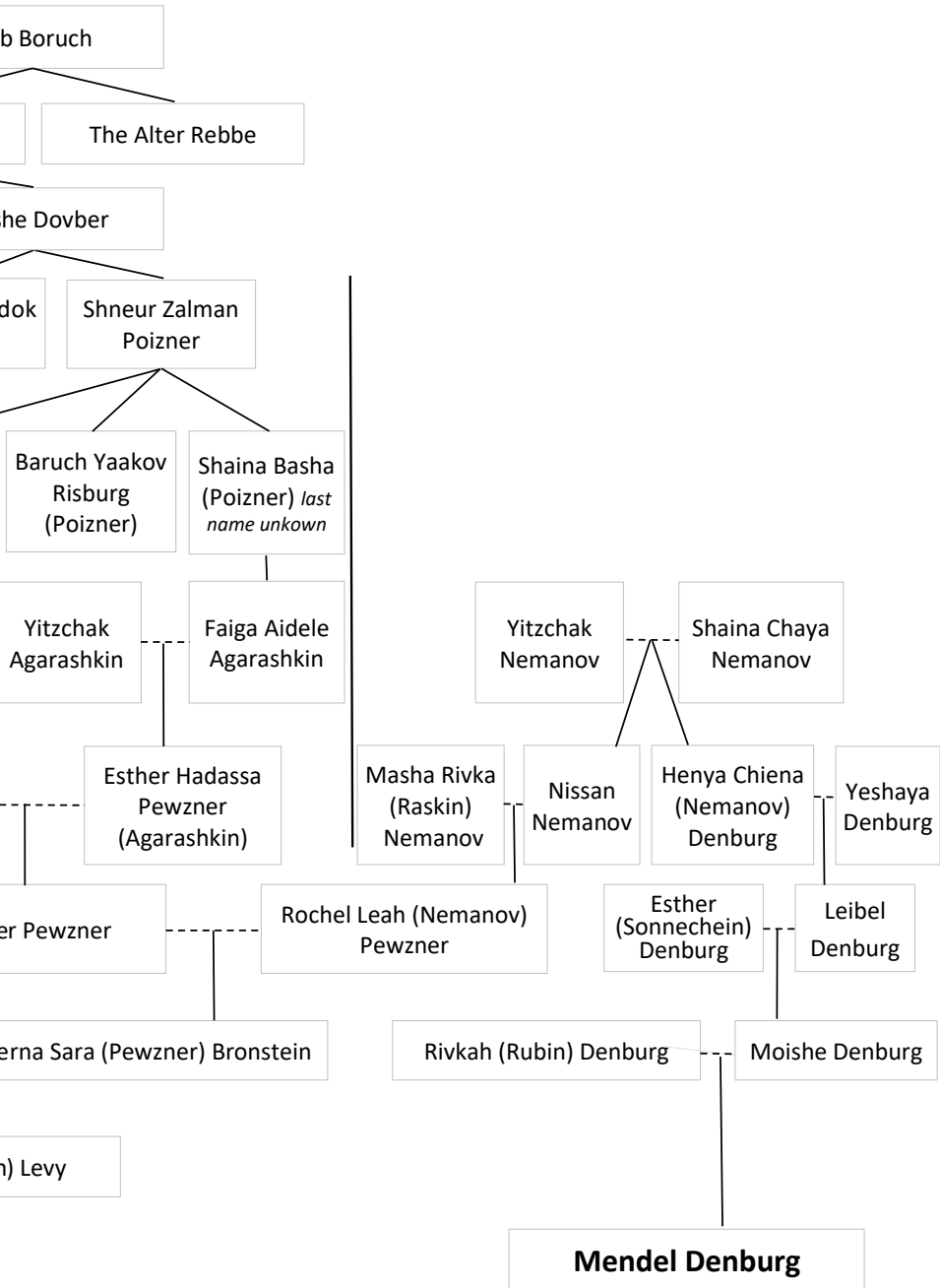


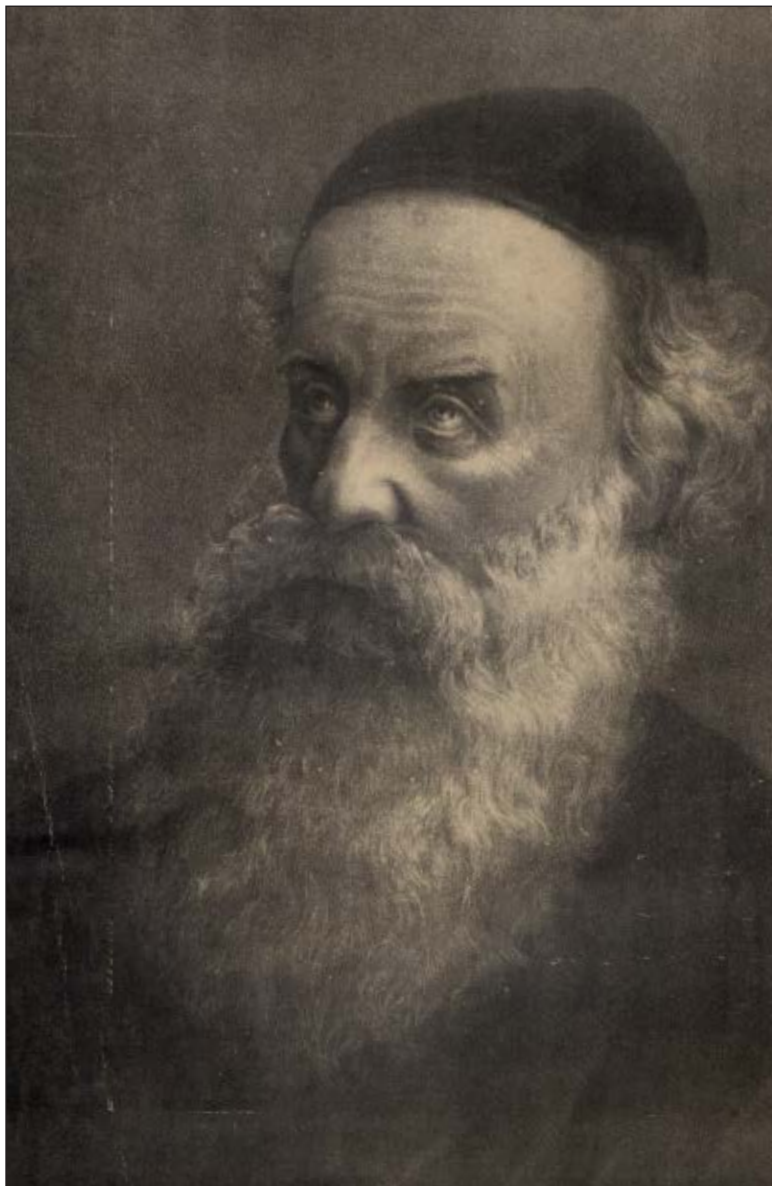
FAITHFUL CHAIN

*The Pewzner
Family History*

Family Tree







Reb Mordechai was said to look like his older brother, the Alter Rebbe.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES



Lubavitch Roots



In the early 1700s, the scholar Reb Baruch struggled to support himself, but had decided on principle to refuse charity, come what may. He settled in the town of Liozna, in White Russia.

Nearby lived another scholar, Reb Avraham, who worked as a farmer. One day, he met the young Reb Baruch, and hired him as a farmhand. Quickly, he realized that Baruch was a learned and refined scholar who might make a fine match for his daughter Rivkah, and invited him to join the Passover *seder* with his family. The young scholar, profoundly opposed to taking from others, refused to accept an invitation for even a Passover meal, and permanently left the vicinity.

Avraham was undaunted. One day, on a trip to Vitebsk some 25 miles away, he found Baruch. This time, he got straight to the point, and revealed his true intent: a match between Baruch and Rivkah. Rivkah was a scholar in her own right, who studied and prayed deeply for hours daily.

In September 1743, the couple married and settled in Liozna, where they had four children, all Torah scholars. They were



The kever of Reb Baruch, the father of the Alter Rebbe and Reb Mordechai.

followers, at first in secret, of the Baal Shem Tov. Their eldest son, Schneur Zalman, is perhaps most well-known as the founder of Chabad Chasidus, the Alter Rebbe. Their third son was Mordechai, who looked much like his older brother, and was known from a young age for his sharp intellect and way with words. The Tzemach Tzedek would later say that Mordechai, his great-uncle, would study each Talmudic passage at least five times. “He would ascend to level after level of understanding, with novel insight into the discussion at hand, and his explanations were always pleasant,” wrote the Tzemach Tzedek.

The Alter Rebbe would later open his own *beis midrash*, where he placed his brother Reb Mordechai in charge of Talmudic studies. One of the practices the Alter Rebbe established amongst the students was that twice weekly, two students would present their questions, ideas and insights on the topics studied. Reb Mordechai would then clarify and explain the material yet further.

Mordechai would later become the rabbi of Orsha. He had at

least three children, including a son Moshe Dovber. Moshe Dovber also had at least three children, including two sons, Schneur Zalman and Baruch Tzodok.

At one point, Baruch Tzodok began to suffer from severe orthopedic issues. Despite this, when he would pray with great devotion, he showed no signs of the intense physical pain he endured. He would later pass away during surgery on his foot.

Baruch Tzodok's wife Risha, with whom he had five daughters, was scrupulous in following Torah law. She had been married previously and had five daughters before deciding to divorce her husband for not being a scholar and Chasid to her standard. In Klimavichy, where they resided, townspeople would say that she was on the caliber of a rabbi.

One day, the two brothers Schneur Zalman and Baruch Tzodok met. Baruch Tzodok expressed his distress about being unable to find a match for Masha Mala, his eldest daughter, who followed the ardent ways of her mother. Schneur Zalman said that he had a son, Mordechai, who may be a good fit. Together, they went to the Rebbe Rashab, who gave his blessings for the match.

When Schneur Zalman returned home, he greeted his son with a "Mazel Tov!" Mordechai had no idea what had transpired, and asked his father to what he was referring. Schneur Zalman gave his son a light slap on the face, and said, "You just received a blessing from the Rebbe and this is what you are asking?!" Masha Mala and Mordechai married and established a home together.

Mordechai was lighthearted and jovial, and would regularly poke fun at himself. A gifted speaker, he would use humor to uplift the spirits of others. Once, the Rebbe Rashab asked him to give a talk in front of the gathered. However, out of deep respect and awe for the Rebbe, he was unable to. The Rebbe handed him a *l'chaim*, a spot of alcohol, and Mordechai began to talk. For decades later, the Chasidim present recalled how they laughed so heartily, to the point that they were holding their stomachs in pain.



A view of the forest near Klimavichy.

The Rebbe Rayatz would later say with a smile, “Ah, he was a *geshmake yid!*”

In Klimavichy, the townsfolk held deep respect for Reb Mordechai, and he was given a seat next to the city’s rabbi.

Deeply connected to the Rebbe Rashab, Reb Mordechai would regularly travel to Lubavitch. Years later, when his first grandson, Zalman Feldman, was of age to study in Lubavitch, he accompanied him, expressing his deep desire that all his grandchildren will do the same.

To support his family, Reb Mordechai would travel from town to town teaching young children, and simultaneously raise funds for the yeshivah in Lubavitch. Every few months he would return home with a small amount of money for his family to live off, until his next trip home.

He was once journeying home on the 19th of Kislev, when he found himself in a town where the locals, who were *misnagdim*, would not be marking the auspicious day. He decided to tell



*Reb Mordechai
Pewzner's kever.*

townspeople that he was marking a *yahrtzeit* and made a *farbrengen* with them. He spent most of the money he earned on a celebratory spread. When he came home with empty pockets, his wife was not at all pleased.

His daughter Chana later told her husband, the famed Chasid Reb Yisroel “Nevler” Levin, “They say you *farbreng* and inspire people, but you don’t come close to my father.”

Masha Mala, who was known for her wit, would spend many hours in deep prayer on Shabbos.



Keeping Him Alive



After having three daughters, Masha Mala expressed her deep desire to have a son, “to say *kaddish* for me.” Tragically, all the sons she birthed passed away in infancy.

After many years, in the late 1880s, Mordechai and Masha Mala had a son whom they named Shmuel.

Masha Mala was fearful that he, too, might not survive. Thus, when he was a baby, she pierced his ear and he wore an earring. The reason, the local women told Masha Mala, was that if he looks like a girl, he would survive like his sisters.

For this reason, when studying in Lubavitch, he was known as “*Shmuel mit der irengel*,” Shmuel with the earring. Years later in New York, when his nephew, Mottel Rivkin, told the Rebbe Rayatz that he was Reb Shmuel’s nephew, the Rebbe touched his own ear lobe, as if to ask if he was referring to “Shmuel with the earring.”

Masha Mala also dressed her son in old clothes, so that he would ward off death in his youth by passing as someone older. In addition, for *segulah* reasons, Reb Shmuel would not eat animal innards.

As a young child, Shmuel would visit his grandfather Schneur



Mottel Rivkin.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

Zalman in Khislavichi. Once there he would study with his paternal uncle, Baruch Yaakov Rizberg (who changed his family name to avoid an army draft), a well-known educator in the town. Reb Baruch also taught the famed Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik in his youth. As recorded in *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* by Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff:

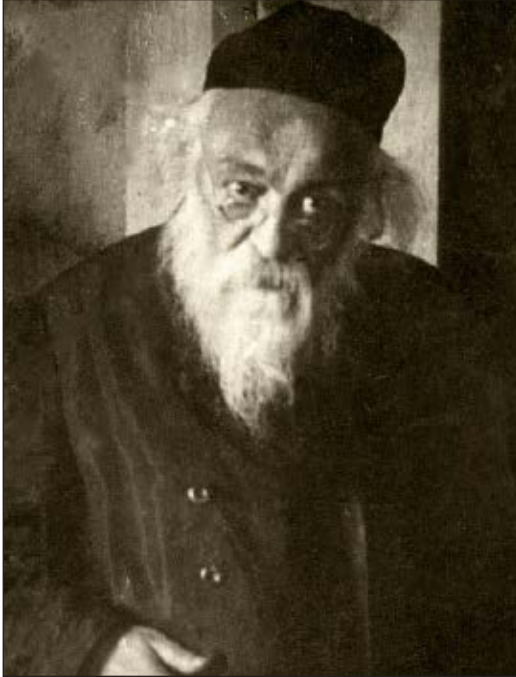
The young Joseph Soloveitchik spent his formative years in Khaslavichy. At the local *cheder*, he came under the influence of a *melamed*, Reb Baruch Rizberg, who was a Lubavitcher hasid. That year, the young Soloveitchik learned more about the Tanya, the focal classic of Chabad Chasidic literature, than about the Talmud. The influence of this gifted teacher and the study of the Tanya were to remain with the Rav (as Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik was later popularly known) for decades to come. It introduced the youngster to the disciplines of Chasidic thought, philosophy, and theology.

The Rav, in his eulogy for Rabbi Moshe Dovber Rivkin, related:

I heard the following from my father in the name of my grandfather Reb Chaim. As you know, Reb Chaim was not a hasid, although he was closer to Chasidic thought than most people would imagine. Reb Chaim stated about a certain Chasidic rebbe that when he recited a blessing those listening would cry because of the emotional experience. This was the heart of Chassidus; to teach a Jew how to properly recite a blessing.

What do I know about Chabad? I know quite a bit, since as a child I had a *melamed* who was a Chabad hasid. Instead of teaching me Gemara, he taught me hasidut. Even today, I still know sections of the Tanya by heart, especially the *Shaar Hayihud Vehaemunah*, dealing with faith and the attributes of the Almighty. It was my father who taught me *Gemara* and enabled me to master the rabbinic idiom. Nevertheless, if not for my Chabad *melamed*, I would today be lacking in an entire dimension of knowledge. Many of my *drashos* are based upon the knowledge imparted to me by that *melamed*. Those who enjoy my *drashos* owe him a thank-you. His name was Reb Baruch Yaakov Rizberg, and I remember that he told me that he was a descendant of the author of the Tanya, the founder of Chabad.

I vividly recall how Reb Baruch would teach Tanya. During this period, my father would visit the *chadarim* in Khaslavichy on either Thursday or Friday. The *melamed* had lookouts who would inform him when the rabbi was on his way. Immediately, the volumes of Tanya would be hidden. The Tanya was a small book, and it was easy to hide. We would quickly take out the large *Gemoras* and shout as if deeply involved in Talmudic study. Somehow we always shouted when we studied *Gemara*. My father would look around and not notice anything out of the



*The Brisker Rov, Reb
Chaim Soloveitchik*

ordinary.

Once, however, when I accompanied my father to a wedding in Brisk, my grandfather Reb Chaim tested me. Instead of reciting portions of *Merubah* [the seventh chapter of Baba Kama] which we were supposedly studying, I recited sections of the Tanya by heart.

My father and grandfather may have been angry, but I am in debt to the *melamed*. His teachings broadened my horizons in Judaism. The *melamed* inspired me with his descriptions of the Kingship of G-d and of the *sefirot*, or emanations, from the Divine Presence. The *melamed* had studied in the Yeshiva in Lubavitch, and his method of speech uplifted and transformed me. At the time I was too young to truly comprehend many of his teachings. Only later did I understand and appreciate the lessons

in their full depth. He taught me how to pray with emotion and ecstasy, and gave me an appreciation for the High Holy Day prayers. I often think of him on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

“Do something simple,” he would say, “but do it with emotion and feeling.” That is the basic message of Chabad. Do something mundane and simple, but do it with divine inspiration and meaning! That is the general message of hasidut and certainly the touchstone of Chabad.

The author continues:

In 1968, together with a friend of mine, I travelled to Russia. Of course, I visited the main synagogue on 8 Arkhipova Street in Moscow. The shul was divided into three parts: the main central sanctuary and two wings to the right and left of it. On the left side were the mikveh and the library which, of course, were locked. On the right side was the *Beis Medrash* in which there was a Chabad *minyán* which davened *Nusach Ari* in accordance with the Lubavitcher practice.

For the first day of the Sukkot festival, my friend and I came to daven in the main shul. We mentioned to some of the worshippers that we studied in Yeshiva University and we mentioned our teacher Rabbi Soloveitchik. I kept on mentioning this for I thought that perhaps someone would recognize the Soloveitchik name.

The next day we came back to the main shul. As we walked in the corridor a man came out of the Beit Medrash and told us that somebody there desires to meet with us. I was amazed. I did not know anyone in Russia. Who wants to meet me? A tall thin man came out and said to us in Yiddish: “I hear that you studied with a student of mine.”



Rabbi Soloveitchik.

I did not have the foggiest notion of what this man was talking about. He continued: “Yesterday you said that you studied with Rabbi Soloveitchik.”

I remember his next phrase clearly, even though my Yiddish was not the best. “*Er iz geven meiner ah talmid*” (He was my student). I had no idea what this man was talking about since I knew that the Rav’s rebbe was his father.

All of a sudden, it hit me. This man had come out of the Chabad *minyán*. He had to be the Chabad *melamed* that the Rav constantly spoke about! The man continued and said: “He was such a good *talmid* that after half a year he did not need me anymore.”

I then related to him that the Rav always described how he also taught him Tanya. The *melamed* denied this very

emphatically and emphasized that they only studied *Gemora*. I felt that there was something about his protest that was a bit more dramatic than if his response was truly factual.

I asked the man: “Do you want me to send a message to the Rav?”

He said: “Send him regards from Reb Baruch.”

“Reb Baruch whom?” I asked.

He said: “Reb Baruch from Khaslavichy. That will be enough.”

While I heard the Rav speak about this *melamed* many times, I never heard his actual name mentioned. Now, for the first time, I learned that his name was Baruch.

When I returned to New York, I went up to the Rav after his shiur to tell him about this experience. The Rav was very tired after his lecture. I said to the Rav that I have regards for him.

“From whom?” the Rav asked.

I answered: “He would not tell me his full name. He just said to tell the Rav that he has regards from Reb Baruch from Khaslavichy.”

Upon hearing this name, there was an electrifying response on the part of the Rav. His entire body came to life as he exclaimed: “It cannot be. It cannot be. Reb Baruch Rizberg cannot be alive. He must be dead!”

“But, Rebbe,” I said, “you have never mentioned the name. I could not have told you his name without hearing it from Reb Baruch.”

“All right,” said the Rav. “Then he must be a very old man.” Subsequently, I heard that over the ensuing years when the Rav retold stories about his *melamed* he would mention that one of his students met the *melamed* in

Russia.

Related by the Rav in an interview published in Ma'ariv:

In my youth I grew up in Khaslavichy which was a Chabad town. My teacher was a devotee of Chabad and his influence upon me was great. My late father engaged this person to teach *Gemora* to me and to a few other youngsters. However, this *melamed* did not stress the *Gemora* but rather taught us Chabad classics such as Likutei Tanya and Likutei Torah. My father visited the *chadarim* in Khaslavichy once or twice a week to check on the progress of the students.

I remember that we had “spies” who stood outside the *cheder*. When they saw the rabbi, my father, approaching, they would inform us. Then we would put away the Chabad volumes and begin singing the tune we utilized when studying the *Gemora*. Afterwards I studied *Gemora* with my father and under his tutelage I mastered the Oral Tradition. There was no longer any need for another *melamed*.

Nevertheless, had I not studied the *Tanya* and the *Likutei Torah* with that *melamed*, I would not be able to comprehend the philosophy of Chabad. Their doctrines and teachings have greatly influenced me until today, although I am a *misnaged* in the tradition of Volozhin.

Rabbi Soloveitchik told another story about his teacher, which is printed in *Chumash Mesoras Harav*:

I recall an incident from my childhood. I was seven or eight years old in a small town in White Russia, and like all Jewish boys, I attended the little *cheder* school. I still remember that dreary winter day in January; it was cloudy and overcast. The Torah portion of the week was *Vayigash*, and Chanukah had just ended, taking away with it the joyous holiday spirit from our small town. A

long, dark winter lay ahead for us cheder boys. We had to rise when it was still dark, and return home holding a lantern, because nightfall was so early. That day, we cheder boys were in a depressed mood, lazy and listless. We chanted mechanically the first verses of Vayigash in a dull monotone, droning the words in Hebrew and translating them into Yiddish.

One boy finished reciting Joseph's question: "*Hayesh lachem av* [Do you have a father]?" and the ensuing reply, "*Yesh lanu av zaken.*" Yes, we have an old father.

Then something unusual happened. Our teacher, a Chabadnik, suddenly jumped to his feet, and with a gleam in his eyes, motioned to the reader to stop. He turned to me and addressed me with the Russian word *podrabin*, meaning assistant to the rabbi. The teacher asked me: "What kind of question did Joseph ask his brothers, 'Do you have a father?' Of course they had a father, everybody has a father! The only person who had no father was Adam, created by G-d. But everyone else born into this world has a father. What kind of a question was that?"

I tried to offer the answer, "Joseph simply wanted to find out whether the father was still alive. His question intended to ask, 'Is your father alive, or is he dead?'"

"If so," our teacher thundered back at me, "Joseph should have phrased the question: 'Is your father still alive?'"

It was useless to argue with our teacher. He was now no longer addressing only us little boys. He began to speak rhetorically as if some mysterious guest had just entered that cold room. "Joseph," our teacher pronounced as if from a pulpit, "wanted to know whether his brothers were still attached to their roots and origins. 'Are you,' Joseph was asking, 'rooted in your father? Do you

look at him the way the branches or blossoms look on their roots? Do you see your father as the foundation of your existence? Do you see him as your provider and sustainer? Or are you just like rootless shepherds wandering from place to place, from pasture to pasture, who forget their origin?”

Our teacher suddenly stopped addressing the invisible visitor and turned his focus directly to us. Raising his voice, he asked us: “Are you truly humble? Do you look down condescendingly at your old father as representing an archaic tradition? Do you think that your old father is also capable of telling you something new and exciting? Something challenging? Something you didn’t know before? Or are you so arrogant and vain, that you deny dependence on your father, upon your source?”

Our teacher exclaimed, “Do you have a father?!” pointing at my study-mate Isaac, who was considered the town’s prodigy. The teacher turned to him and said, “Who do you think knows more? Do you know more because you are so well-versed in Talmud, or does your father, Jacob the blacksmith, know more even though he can barely read Hebrew? Are you proud of your father? When we recognize the supremacy of our father, then, ipso facto, we accept the supremacy of our Universal Father in Heaven.”

I will never forget our teacher’s novel interpretation of the Joseph story.



A purported portrait of Reb Shmuel in his youth.



Kind Student



As he grew older, Shmuel left to Lubavitch to continue his studies. There, he was constantly on the lookout for people who would donate to the charitable causes he spearheaded. Among them, he ran a free loan society, assisted others with medical needs, and helped people deal with bureaucratic matters.

Even at the age of 20, amid his intense study schedule, the clever student would bring his ledger to prayer services, hoping there might be a new face in town who would give a donation. When the Rebbe Rashab would receive people for *yechidus*, Shmuel would wait outside with his ledger open.

When Shraga Zarchin – a student at the yeshivah – took ill with a severe leg infection, his roommates did not know how to help him. Shmuel made his way over to see what he could do. After quickly assessing the situation, he told Shraga, “G-d willing, you will be healthy. I will bring a doctor.”

There was only one doctor in Lubavitch, and he lived on the other side of town. Shmuel made his way over in the snow and wind, bringing the doctor back with him. After examining Shraga,



The town of Lubavitch, 1994.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

he prescribed antibiotics. Without blinking an eye, Shmuel went to the pharmacy and purchased the needed medicines. Over the next few days, Shraga healed. Sixty years later, he still warmly recalled the kindness.



The Agarashkin (right to left): Faiga Eidele, a brother, Chaika Rivkin, Bracha and Esther Hadassah Pewzner.



Joy and Tragedy



In 1913, Shmuel married Esther Hadassah Agarashkin (a first cousin once removed) in Klimavichy, Belorussia. As an only son, it was a joyous occasion for his family. His father Mordechai drank heavily at the wedding, and took deathly ill.

On his deathbed, his wife Masha Mala asked him to share his future hopes with their children. With his wry sense of humor, and wanting to divert attention from himself, he spoke of the goat in the next room, “The goat is banging on the door... it wants food... go open the door.” A short while later, he passed away.

Masha Mala forged on after her husband’s passing. She had a large home, and all of her daughters, their husbands and children, lived with her early in their marriages. Each family had a set time to cook their meals so as not to crowd the kitchen. Like the others, Shmuel and Esther Hadassah resided in the family home.

On a visit to Lubavitch, the Rebbe Rashab instructed Shmuel to move out of Masha Mala’s home. When he returned home on a Friday afternoon, he told his wife what the Rebbe had said, and that he wants to fulfill the Rebbe’s instructions as soon as possible, “even before Shabbos.” The couple moved out immediately.



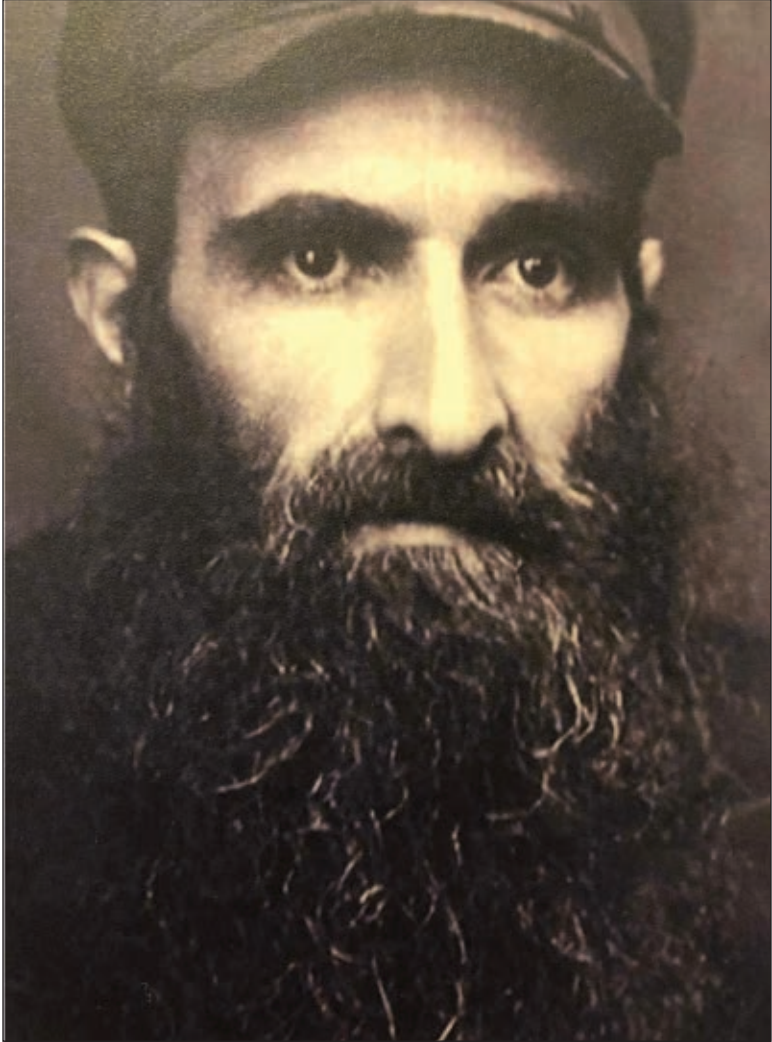
The invitation to the wedding of Shmuel and Esther Hadassah.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

Despite this, Masha Mala continued to extend her influence on their lives, and Shmuel became known in the city as “Shmuel Masha Mala’s.” Like his father, he worked as a schoolteacher, and Esther Hadassah helped support the family by selling homemade bread in the market. Together, they had five sons and two daughters.

In the town, Shmuel was respected by all factions of the Jewish community. He was an attractive man with a penetrating gaze and strong facial features. When he would walk through the streets garbed in a long frock, locals would flock to him and ask his advice. His brown beard was colored by *tabbak*, snuff tobacco, and his son Yitzchok Mordechai recalled, “It was wondrous, and made him look beautiful.”

One day, Rabbi Abba Pliskin met Shmuel in the street and asked how he was doing. Disheartened, Shmuel sighed. When asked what was wrong, Shmuel made a large circular motion in the air while humbly saying, “I should be like this, but... *Nu*, I’ve become a *Shulchan Aruch* Jew,” effectively saying that in his early years in Lubavitch, service of G-d with passion was at the center



Reb Shmuel.

of his life, but now, he had become just another person fulfilling Jewish observance by route.

In a postcard to his friend Rabbi Yosef Chein, he wrote that he finally understands what their *mashpia*, Rabbi Shmuel Groinem, told them: “Being in yeshivah is like davening. Just as [proper]

davening influences your entire day, yeshivah influences your entire life.” Reb Shmuel wrote that just as warming a home requires an even hotter stove, so too, in yeshivah the spiritual warmth needs to be intense enough that it will carry on to one’s life.

Once while travelling with his young daughter Risha, a soldier threw a toasted piece of bread to her. Despite having little food to eat at the time, Shmuel explained to her that they had no way of knowing if the bread was kosher, and that they would not be eating it. She would recall this story, stressing the self-sacrifice she was taught in regard to being scrupulous in mitzvahs.

A GRANDMOTHER’S INFLUENCE

Masha Mala would teach the *nigunim* her late husband had composed to their grandchildren. At meals, she would sit at the head of the table and lead, with one of her sons-in-law, whom she would call by their last names (“Feldman! Levin! Rivkin!”), sitting across from her at the other end.

As she aged, she saw the destruction the communist regime was wreaking on Jewish life. Presumably because she didn’t want anyone who was not religious to be named after her, or because she did not want her name to be adapted to Russian, she asked in her will that nobody should carry her name.

When one of her Rivkin grandchildren ended up in a hospital and refused to eat non-kosher food, she danced with joy, while Reb Yisroel Nevler, her son-in-law, danced on the other side of the table. On another occasion, when her granddaughter Risha Pewzner married Rabbi Chaim Hillel Azimov, a Lubavitch yeshivah student with a beard, she danced the whole night.

GOING TO THE REBBE

Even after his marriage, Reb Shmuel continued to travel to the Rebbe Rashab in Lubavitch, and later to Rostov for Rosh



Esther Hadassah.



The Rebbe Rayatz.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

Hashanah. Risha would keenly remember the scene of her father taking his belongings, placing them in a backpack, and slinging it onto his shoulder before departing on his travels to the Rebbe.

For many years, when her children would go to school, Risha would not let them wear a backpack, telling them, “It is a sacred act that one does when going to the Rebbe.” Eventually, she got used to it.

When his maternal nephew, Zalman Feldman, was a young child, he would join his father on his trips to Lubavitch. Adjacent to the Rebbe Rashab’s room, there was a tree which children often climbed to peek on people in *yechidus* with the Rebbe. The position of the tree only allowed the climber to see the Chassid, but not the Rebbe, in the room. Zalman recalls seeing his uncle meeting the Rebbe. Decades later, he said, “I can’t forget the way Reb Shmuel stood with such humility, respect and awe. It was apparent in his face and posture.”

Following the Rebbe Rashab’s passing, Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson



*Rabbi Yisroel
Jacobson.*

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

recalled the efforts Chasidim undertook to see the Rebbe Rayatz in Rostov. Reb Shmuel was a seminal part of this group:

More or less normal train service was restored during the summer of 1922. When I heard that the Rebbe might consequently travel to Lubavitch *Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul* to visit the resting places of his holy predecessors, I was most anxious to go there too.... I was eager to see the Rebbe for the first time since he had assumed the office. I immediately wrote to some friends in Lubavitch, former fellow students, asking them to let me know if the news was true, by letter if there was time, or else by telegram. (Telephone calls were rare indeed; between cities, practically unheard of.) On Tuesday, the 28th of Menachem Av at 11 A.M. a telegram arrived. Yes, the Rebbe would be in Lubavitch *Erev Rosh Chodesh* – that is, the next day, Wednesday.

At 4 P.M. that Tuesday, there was a train from Homel going in the right direction. A group of five Chasidim boarded it; at 9 A.M. Wednesday, we arrived at a station [and] we saw the Rebbe there at the station. Those Chasidim who had accompanied him there told us of his activity since his arrival – a “typical” schedule, every moment used constructively and to good account. The Rebbe had arrived at Lubavitch the evening before at dusk; at night he had delivered a *maamor* (a Chasidic discourse) in one of the former buildings of the yeshivah.

By the time we met him at the station at 9 A.M. Wednesday, he had already *davened*, visited the gravesite of the Rebbeim, and made the two-hour journey to the depot...

The Rebbe greeted us warmly, shaking hands with the three older members of our group. Then he suggested that we all purchase tickets. After great effort, we were finally able to get just two tickets, for the Rebbe and the Chasid traveling with him. We were told there were no more seats available.

When the train arrived, the Rebbe, his companion, [who was] one of our group, Rabbi Pewzner, and I boarded the train, but the three whose hands the Rebbe had shaken were asked for tickets, so they went on to Lubavitch instead, to the Ohel [of the Tzemach Tzedek and the Rebbe Maharash]. The train was completely empty, yet we had to pay ten times the price of the tickets denied us at the station – typical government chaos and harassment.

The Rebbe then returned to Moscow, together with Rabbi Pewzner, and I to Homel.



*Rabbi Levi Yitzchak
"Reb Levik"
Schneerson.*

PHOTO: LAHAK/
LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

ESCAPING THE FRONT

Towards the end of WWI, Reb Shmuel, Esther Hadassah and their family, were forced to flee. They moved far from the front to Ekaterinoslav (today Dnipro), taking with them just a few valuables, notably a *becher*.

They became close with the city's chief rabbi, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak "Reb Levik" Schneerson, father of the Rebbe, and Reb Shmuel would spend much time in his company.

During a specific period, when rioters were roaming the streets and looting homes, many families, in case of possible attacks, would go nightly into hiding. Shmuel asked Reb Levik whether his family should go into hiding, especially since he sported a full beard identifying him as a Jew. Reb Levik answered, "Every bullet has an address. Your family does not need to go into hiding."



The monument marking those who were murdered by the Germans in Pochep.

The family never did go into hiding, and one night their home was broken into. A violent Cossack lined up the family from eldest to youngest, intending to kill them. Before he had a chance, Esther Hadassah grabbed the sword out of his hand. The man was surprised at her boldness and shouted, “Bravo, bravo!” While he took all their valuables, he did not physically harm them, except for Esther Hadassah who was left with a scar.

Once, their son Pesach fell and injured himself. Esther Hadassah told her daughter Risha to run to Reb Levik’s home to bring their father back. At Reb Levik’s home, she tripped. Reb Levik saw what happened, and told her, “Don’t worry. Your father does not need to go home because Pesach will be completely fine. And you will also live a long life.”

Indeed, Pesach had only a minor injury that healed quickly – and Risha lived well into her late 80s.

END OF AN ERA

Later, the family moved back to Klimavichy, where on Kislev 18, 1927, their son Sholom Ber was born.

The family resumed selling baked goods in the market, and Reb Shmuel would send most of their earnings to the Rebbe. Once, when Esther Hadassah was pregnant, other Chasidim told him to keep more of their money for themselves. Typical to Reb Shmuel, he said, “It is more important that the Rebbe should have silk laces than for my children to have extra bread.”

Once, after the Rebbe Rayatz had left Russia, there was a farbrengen that continued deep into the night. As people were slowly retiring to their houses, the few remaining Chasidim found Reb Shmuel sitting on the floor weeping, while singing the song “*Der Aibeshter zol gebben...*,” Hashem should give life and health, and that we merit to be together with the Rebbe.

In 1941, Masha Mala passed away, and Shmuel was able to say kaddish for his mother, as she had so wished.

During WWII, when rumors began amassing about German cruelty against Jews, Reb Shmuel was aghast. He believed, as he had witnessed in WWI, that the Germans were a kind people. In addition, he hated the communists who were destroying Jewish life, and would say, “It is better to end up in a church than in the hands of the communists. In a church, at least they believe in G-d.”

They hoped that when the Germans entered the war with the Soviet Union, the Soviets would be defeated, and the Germans would bring prosperity and religious freedom.

In 1942, around a year after Masha Mala died, shortly after he finished saying kaddish, Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassah Pewzner were murdered by the Germans on Adar 29 in Pochep, Russia. Most of their children were not with them, and survived.



Legacy



Their son, Sholom Ber, smuggled out of the Soviet Union with a false Polish passport, and studied at the Lubavitch yeshivah in Brunoy, France. He would later marry the daughter of the yeshivah's mashpia, Rochel Leah Nemanov.

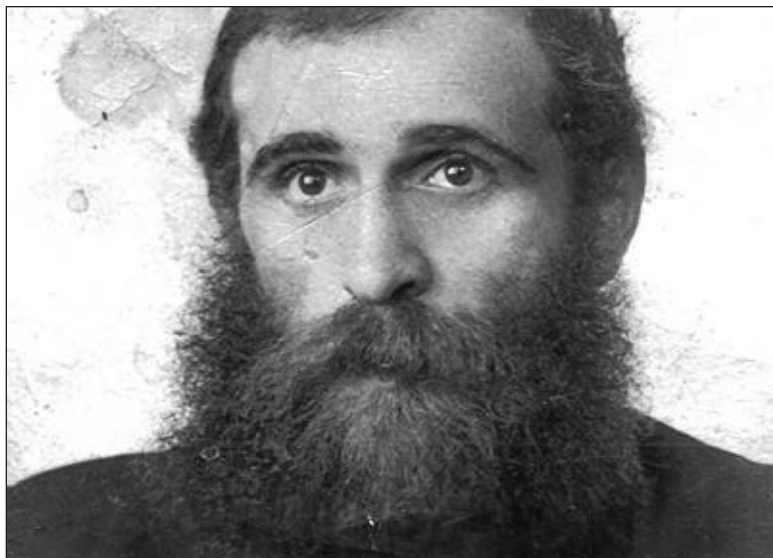
Their wedding was scheduled during the month following the Rebbe Rayatz's passing. Rabbi Nemanov wrote to the Ramash, son-in-law of the Rayatz and successor, asking if they should reschedule the wedding for another time, or perhaps not have music or the like.

The Ramash responded that they should bring joy to the bride and groom through playing Chabad nigunim. The Rebbe added that, at times, Chasidic discourses have ideas that are directed to specific individuals. In the discourse printed around the time of the Rebbe Rayatz's passing, the Ramash noted a reference to a wedding, where it talks about a sage who danced holding willows before the bride. "This is the solution to your question," the Ramash wrote, "and surely you will tell this to the bride, groom, and all the gathered—and it will be internalized—at it says [in the discourse]."

In 1951, Sholom Ber and Rochel Leah Pewzner moved to



Rochel Leah Pewzner.



Reb Sholom Ber.

New York, where he took an active role in publishing countless *seforim*, including many for the Rebbe, as a partner in the Balshon Linotype printing company.

His siblings—Risha Azimov, Chana Gurevitch and Yisroel Pewzner—survived WWII and escaped the Soviet Union. They all raised large families, today amounting to thousands of descendants residing across the globe, many leading vibrant Jewish communities.



Reb Nissan (center) and Reb Sholom Ber listen as Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Bronstein says the maamar at his wedding.



**MOTHER OF
THE YESHIVAH**



Whose Frum?



Perhaps more than any other donor to the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Montreal, Ida Bloomberg (nee Finkelstein) took responsibility for the yeshivah's success. Mr. Arnold Dalfen still recalls the day in the early 1940s, when Rabbi Leib Kramer came into their home and described how he had gained her support. "Mrs. Bloomberg liked Rabbi Kramer and what he was doing. She was very attached to him and, later, to his family."

The children of Chabad chassidim, the Finkelsteins arrived in Montreal, in 1904, with not much more than the clothes they were wearing. At a young age, Ida left school and got a job in a textile factory. The first week, when she told the foreman that she could not work on Saturday, she received the usual response: "This is not the old country. If you don't come tomorrow, don't come on Monday."

Her parents encouraged her to follow her convictions, so she found herself searching for another job. After repeating this scenario several times, however, she grew frustrated and decided she would go to work on Saturday but refrain from activities explicitly prohibited on the Sabbath, such as writing or handling



Mrs. Ida Bloomberg.

PHOTO: KRAMER FAMILY/LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

money. But this, too, proved to be very difficult, and soon she stopped observing the holy day altogether. At seventeen, she married Samuel Bloomberg, a simple, nice man who took the backseat in their marriage.

With ambition and an aptitude for business, Ida climbed the ranks and eventually saved enough money to open her own successful clothing store, New York Fashions. “She was a businesswoman,” said her granddaughter Gloria Lupas (nee Dubin). “She wasn’t the type to stay home and kiss the children and grandchildren. She was the type to be out there in the store, where she was the boss.”

Although she had abandoned much of Jewish observance, Mrs. Bloomberg never forgot where she came from. She supported all the efforts at Jewish education in Montreal out of the desire to provide for others what she had not had herself.

When she heard about the new Lubavitch school, she wrote to



The Rebbe Rayatz receives his United States citizenship, 1949.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

the Rebbe Rayatz, asking if he would accept money from her even though she was not observant. According to her family members, the Rebbe responded that he certainly would. It was a great merit to support Jewish education for young children.

She immediately took charge of the project, rallying the Jewish community behind the newly established yeshivah. “Pioneering in education does not end with an initial success,” she said about supporting the yeshivah, “It is a continuous and arduous process with much to be done. Education stands out as a beacon of light, which shines forth brightly even today, when the whole world is still cloaked in darkness. We must keep this light burning brightly. We must never let it be extinguished.”

What had been done so far, she wrote, “is indeed an inspiration to all those farseeing individuals to whom the ideal of education is ever dear.” But, she continued, “we must make these facilities available to all. Self-dedication to this chosen task, good will in



The Montreal Gazette reported the celebration honoring Mrs. Bloomberg for her twenty years of support for the yeshivah, 1963.

PHOTO: KRAMER FAMILY/LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

this performance and indefatigable efforts are the compelling considerations. These must characterize one's efforts in the future for the successful attainment of our mission."

The first time that Rabbi Kramer brought Mrs. Bloomberg to visit the Rebbe Rayatz, she had a long private audience and spoke in Yiddish. Though she kept most the conversation private, she did say that the Rebbe had given her many blessings for her work in Jewish education. So many, in fact, that she became uncomfortable. "I should have known better and remained *frum*," she remembered thinking.

"Genug," she told the Rebbe, enough with the blessings.

"Why would you not want more?"

"Rebbe, I am not *frum*."

The Rebbe, emphasizing a Chabad tenant that one should not examines another person's deeds and decide who is religious or not.



Dignitaries join Mrs. Bloomberg (right) at the 1960 groundbreaking ceremony. Montreal Mayor Sarto Fournier (second from right) and Canadian Postmaster General William McLean Hamilton (extreme left).

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

Being *frum* is striving to be a better Jew. Thus, the Rebbe looked at her and said (paraphrased), this “*tochter meiner* [my daughter], we don’t know who is truly *frum*, only Hashem does.”

Because of her involvement with the yeshivah, the entire Finkelstein family became very close to the Rebbe Rayatz. Her grandfather would regularly visit New York for holidays, and would sleep inside Lubavitch headquarters.

For many years, every week after Shabbos, Rabbi Kramer would go to Mrs. Bloomberg’s home and discuss the latest challenges and happenings at the yeshivah and brainstorm ideas to raise more funds. Ms. Lupas said that her grandmother’s kitchen was not kosher, so Rabbi Kramer only had a glass of water at these meetings. Despite the differences in observance, “He was a part of the family.”



*Rabbi Kramer affixing a mezuzah with the
Gordon family, nephews of Mrs. Bloomberg.*

PHOTO: BEN GORDON/LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

One of Mrs. Bloomberg's first projects was to show Rabbi Kramer how to organize a fundraising campaign. She asked her staff at the store to make calls to her contacts, and overnight raised large sums of money. "She was so respected and so admired



The grand opening of the new building.

PHOTO: KRAMER FAMILY/LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

in Montreal,” Rabbi Feigelstock said. “Everybody listened to her. She was a person of iron, a true leader. She was dedicated to the yeshivah with all her heart and soul.”

During the yeshivah’s early years, Mrs. Bloomberg hosted teas and meetings, inviting her friends and business acquaintances. After someone spoke about the good that the yeshivah was doing, she would get up and say that she was pledging a large amount. Then she would call on each person and ask how much they were pledging. Many of the people were wealthier than she was and felt ashamed to give less. They also knew that she would not hesitate to call them out publicly for pledging too little.

“When she wanted something, she got it,” Rabbi Feigelstock said. “She knew how to make people give money.”

In 1949, she established an annual bazaar to raise money for the school. She placed her son-in-law, Louis Lendman, in

charge of the bazaar, which sold off-season goods (donated by the manufacturers) at discount prices. Customers didn't care if it was last year's fashion, Ms. Lupas said, because the clothing was excellent quality. Together with members of the Bloomberg family, their employees, Mrs. Kramer would assist in looking for merchandise to sell, and auction off higher priced items.

Many would look forward to the event, where there was an entrance fee of ten cents, \$1.25 in today's value. At the bazaar there would be raffles and entertainment for children. Over the years, it raised millions of dollars. "Always ready to follow in the footsteps of her family to help Lubavitch in general and the yeshivah in particular," Rabbi Kramer wrote in 1979, Mrs. Bloomberg earned herself the title "Mother of the Yeshivah."

