

# 21 Moments with the Rebbe

## WHEN ONE THINKS OF THE NEFASHOS

**1** Reb Berel Baumgarten, the first *shliach* to Argentina, was always very open with the Rebbe, in his simple, direct, *chassidishe* style.

During one of his travels across Europe in the early 5730's (1970's), Reb Berel was very moved to see the new, state-of-the-art building of Lubavitch in one European city. While rejoicing at the success of *hafotzas haYahadus* in another country, Reb Berel could not help himself from feeling down, for this luminous structure made his modest Chabad center in Buenos Aires look like a little shack.

The next time Reb Berel was in *yechidus*, he poured out his feelings to the Rebbe. The answer was not long in coming, "Who needs great buildings of brick and glass when one thinks of the *nefashos* - the four *bochurim* you sent here to learn in the *yeshivah*!"

The Rebbe then took a recent report from the *hanhala* out of his drawer, and showed Reb Berel that his *baalei teshuva* are from the most outstanding.

## "WE'LL THINK ABOUT IT"

**2** Hour after hour the Rebbe would stand, despite the doctors' advice, and receive his children, *Klal Yisroel*. Often, after handing out dollars for many hours, the Rebbe would have to treat his arm, but under no circumstances would the Rebbe hear of taking breaks while *Yidden* waited.

It happened once on a *Yud Shvat* that the Rebbe returned from the *obel*, where he had been standing for many hours, and went straight to *daven minchah* and *maariv*. Then, the Rebbe immediately began to distribute a *kuntres* to the *chassidim* as they filed past.

Reb Yaakov Yehudah Hecht, a warm *chossid*, approached the Rebbe and begged him to taste something, as the Rebbe had not eaten anything at all since the night before. The Rebbe replied, "We'll think about it – tomorrow..."

The distribution of *kuntreisim* continued deep into the night.

## “I CANNOT SLEEP AT NIGHT...”

**3** During the month of Tishrei 5721 (1960), Harav Shmuel Chefer, the dean of Beis Rivka of Kfar Chabad, had a lengthy *yechidus* with the Rebbe. During the *yechidus*, the Rebbe began to discuss the location of the girls' school and seminary. The Rebbe raised his voice and said, “I cannot sleep at night due to the close proximity of the girls and boys schools!”

This view was echoed in a letter written to President Shazar (Igros Kodesh, vol. 24, p. 126), where the Rebbe writes that only due to technical difficulties was the Kfar originally set-up as one village. But now that it has been made possible, the educational institutions “should be situated in separate locations, the boys in Kfar Chabad, and the girls in Kfar Chabad II.”

The letter continues on to say that while the villages should be separate, they should be close enough that the residents may be able to visit each other on Shabbos. The Rebbe's vision was indeed realized, with the completion of Kfar Chabad II in 5735 (1975).

## A SHUL WITH A ROV

Reb Chaim Klien, director of the Heichal Shlomo Institute in *Yerushalaim*, had an interesting *yechidus* with the Rebbe:

The Rebbe asked him, “Who is the *rov* of the *shul* where you *daven* on *Shabbos*?” Reb Chaim answered that there was no official *rov*. To this the Rebbe replied, “If you seek my advice, then on Friday nights, for *kabolas Shabbos*, take your son to a *shul* where there is a *rov*. It makes no difference which *shul* – as long as there is an officiating *rov*.”

“A *Yiddishe* child must know that at the end of *davening*, he approaches the *rov* to wish him a ‘*gut Shabbos*’ and the child will look forward to receiving a ‘*gut shabbos*’ back from him.”

(As told by Simcha Raz in his book *Sipurei Tzadikim*, page 342)

## THE LEARNING OF THE BOCHURIM

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The learning of the *bochurim* was always very dear to the Rebbe. The *banhala* of the *yeshiva* in 770 would go to the Rebbe regularly to report regarding the *bochurim*'s learning and as to how they are utilizing their time.

In fact, the Rebbe once explained (at the *Purim farbrengen* of 5745 (1985)), that the Rebbe's *farbrengens* don't begin until 9:30 p.m. so as not to disturb the *seder* of the *yeshiva* which extends until that time.

For the *kidush levanah* of Kislev 5739, the Rebbe came out at 8:10 pm, ten minutes after the beginning of *seder Chassidus*. The Rebbe told the *mazkirus* (secretariat) to announce that he will be saying *kidush levanah* with a certain *minyan*, on the condition that no *bochurim* disrupt their learning to come out!

# 6

## YOU TOO HAVE BEGUN TO WEAR THIS SHMATEH?

Reb Chatzkel Brod, a chossid from pre-war Russia, remembers the first *farbrengen* of the Rebbe that he attended:

Shavuos 5711 (1951). It was extremely crowded, and I sat on the window sill, with one leg in the room and the other outside through the window. But I did not feel any discomfort, as I was transfixed by the Rebbe.

At that time, the Rebbe's *farbrengens* had a family like atmosphere, and the Rebbe would often give individual attention to those present.

During the *farbrengen*, I lifted my cup to say *l'chaim* to the Rebbe. The Rebbe looked at me, and then at the tie on my neck. The Rebbe smiled and asked, "You too have begun to wear this *shmateh*? Remove it!"

Needless to say, I took it off immediately, and ever since, I am not very particular with the American dress code...

## "WHEN WILL YOU MASTER ALL THESE SEFORIM?"

A conversation that took place on 13 Nissan 5712 (1952):

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A young boy, free from *cheder*, was playing outside the Rebbe's room. When the Rebbe saw him, he inquired why he was not learning. The child explained that there was no *cheder* during the days preceding *Pesach*. The Rebbe repeated his question, and the child, thinking that the Rebbe had not understood him, repeated his answer.

Seeing that the child was not comprehending, the Rebbe took a *sefer* from his table, opened it to the last page, and patiently said to the child, "Do you see how many pages there are in this *sefer*? And do you see how many *seforim* there are in this room? And do you know that there are many more *seforim*?"

The child nodded his head in the affirmative, and the Rebbe continued. "When will you master all these *seforim*, if you do not learn in your own time?"

## WHAT THE REBBE DOES ON SHABBOS

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Reb Yosef Menachem Vainshtok relates:

During the year 5718 (1958), I would stay for many *Shabbosos* at the home of the Bostoner Rebbe, who lived directly across the street from the Rebbe.

One *Shabbos* after midnight, the Bostoner Rebbe called me over to a corner of the house and said to me, "The Lubavitcher chassidim think that their Rebbe sleeps on *Shabbos*. Let me show you what really happens."

He then revealed to me that by standing at a certain angle, it was possible to peer into the Rebbe's dining room, because one of the blinds was slightly damaged.

The Rebbe was sitting and learning. Every so often we would see the Rebbe get up to get a *sefer* from the bookcase. We stood there for three hours in silence, watching the Rebbe delve into the depths of Torah.

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## DAILY COMMITMENT

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During one *yechidus* with Mr. Peter Kalms, a famous British philanthropist and activist, various world issues were discussed (Teves 5737 (1977)).

"I would like to change the topic," the Rebbe suddenly interjected. "It would be a good idea for you to begin setting aside time to learn Torah."

To this Mr. Kalms replied, "Certainly, Rebbe. I will set aside time twice a week for Torah study."

But the Rebbe was not satisfied with this. "No, it has to be every day. It could be for just a few minutes at a time, but it must be a daily study. It is not important that you learn from the original; many *seforim* have already been translated."

"And," the Rebbe added with a smile, "If you do it in public, without keeping it a secret, others may learn from you..."

## THE BEGINNING OF AVODAH

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Even before the Rebbe accepted the *nesius*, many *bochurim* already knew the Rebbe from before the *histalkus* of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Reb Dovid Goldstien was one of them. One *Shabbos* in the year 5710 (1950), as the Rebbe finished *davening*, Dovid found an opportunity to ask the Rebbe something that had been on his mind.

In Reb Dovid's own words:

"I asked the Rebbe how to begin serious *avodah*. The Rebbe looked at me with such warmth, and said, '*Techilas ho'avodeh iz, az m'tut nit vos m'vil.*' (The beginning of *avodah* is to withhold from doing as you wish).

"Later that day, as the Rebbe was walking Rebbetzin Chana down the stairs, the Rebbe's eyes met mine. 'Dovid,' the Rebbe said to me, 'This does not mean that if you wish to lay *tefillin* one day, you should overcome your wishes...' and the Rebbe and his mother smiled."



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## THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S WORK

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Reb Dovberish Shapiro, the son of the Rebbe of Norol, served as the principal of the Belzer *cheder* of Williamsburg during the 5710's (1950's). Many of the students, as well as Reb Dovberish himself, resided in Crown Heights.

The students usually travelled by school bus to Williamsburg, but one day, the bus broke down. Seeing no other way, Reb Dovberish was compelled to collect all the children in order to take them with public transport. And so it was, a procession of little *Yiddishe* children paraded through the streets of Crown Heights, with Reb Dovberish in the lead.

Suddenly, they saw the Rebbe walking on the sidewalk in their direction. The Rebbe stopped, smiled a broad smile of satisfaction, and said to Reb Dovberish: "*Tr tut dem Baal Shem Tov's arbet!*" (You are doing the *Baal Shem Tov's* work!)

The day's mood changed for Reb Dovberish. What had begun as a miserable failure of a morning, turned out to be a memory he will cherish forever.

## IN THE MIDDLE OF YOM KIPPUR...

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Yom Kippur 5737 (1976) at 770. The Rebbe finished davening *musaf*, and made his way up to his holy chamber.

Suddenly, Reb Shlomo Maidanchik, the mayor of Kfar Chabad, was summoned. Harav Chodakov had an important message for him from the Rebbe: "The Rebbe has just told me to pass on the message that he wishes a new organization be founded in the Kfar. This institution should assist woman who have just given birth, *mit a vindel un a vegaleb* (with diapers and strollers).

"Everyone should enjoy the assistance of this institution, even the very wealthy, in order to prevent embarrassment of anyone receiving aid. The name should be 'Shifrah and Puah' after the midwives in Mitzrayim."

# 13 IN LUBAVITCH...

On *Erev Yom Kippur* and on *Hoshana Rabah*, the Rebbe would stand for many hours on his feet, handing out *lekach* (honey cake) to thousands of *Yidden*—men, women, and children. Many *brochos* were given together with the *lekach*, and many a person would walk away feeling lighter from a warm word they had heard from the Rebbe.

A little girl waited patiently in line for her turn to get a piece of *lekach* from the Rebbe's hand. When her turn finally came, her face fell. She looked up to the Rebbe with big, disappointed eyes, "Rebbe, why is there no icing?" The Rebbe smiled, and answered the child in a soft, fatherly tone, "In Lubavitch there is no icing..."

## YIDDISHKEIT ON THE SPOT

*From the diary of a bochur learning in 770, Sunday, 23 Teves 5731 (January 20, 1971):*

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Today, the popular, secular writer and novelist, Mr. Herman Wouk, was in *yechidus*. When he came out, we asked him if he would repeat anything he had heard from the Rebbe. He told us that the Rebbe had discussed with him the situation of the American youth, the "hippies." The Rebbe said that they are ready to hear, so we must provide them with *Yiddishkeit*.

He told the Rebbe that they would not be interested because they are impatient, and only go for things which are immediate, like "instant coffee." To this the Rebbe replied, "That's perfect! The '*Shulchan Aruch*' means 'a ready table!'"

Mr. Wouk was very inspired by the *yechidus*, and expressed great admiration for the Rebbe's insightful ideas.

# "WHEN I ASK FOR SOMETHING..."

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The Rebbetzin A"H related:

The Rebbe once came home from 770 with a distraught expression on his face. To the Rebbetzin's inquires, the Rebbe responded, "A number of days ago, I requested at a *farbrengen* that the *chassidim* report to me how much *nigleh* and *chassidus* they have each learned in the past few months.

"As I passed Brooklyn Avenue, I was expecting to see a line of people waiting to give in their notes, but no one was there. I approached Eastern Parkway, and again, there was no one. Then I came into 770, and I received this much..."

The Rebbe paused and demonstrated with his fingers, showing a small pile. The Rebbe continued in a strained voice, "When I give out *lekach* or *kos shel brachah*, the queues are teeming with people! To take – everyone comes. But when I ask for something, which in truth is for **their own good**, very few participate..."

*(As heard from Rabbi Leibel Groner)*

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### "HOW MANY P'ROKIM TANYA DO YOU KNOW?"

Rabbi Noach Vogel relates:

In the year 5736 (1976), I spent Sukkos with the Rebbe. Among the many fond memories I cherish from that visit, there is one that shall never leave me. It was Yud Gimmel Tishrei during *davening*, and a young *bochur*, a guest like myself, was snapping photographs of the Rebbe. He had a strategic position, and looked very proud of himself. After *davening*, the Rebbe turned to go. On the way out, he passed the *bochur* and said something to him. From afar, I could see the *bochur's* face turn white.

After the Rebbe left the room, the *bochur*, still quaking, told us what the Rebbe had said to him: "*Vifl p'rokim Tanya kenstu baal peh?*" (How many chapters of Tanya do you know by heart?)

A similar incident is recorded in a chossid's diary of Chol Ha'moed Sukkos 5741 (1980). The Rebbe told a *bochur* to learn twenty-two *p'rokim* of Tanya by heart, to compensate for the twenty-two pictures he had taken!

## POSTPONING THE MAIL

*Yechidus* had finished in the wee hours of the morning, and the Rebbe had asked Reb Leibel Groner to bring in the mail. After working through one pile, the Rebbe asked for another one. And then another.

Reb Leibel knew how exhausting *yechidus* is for the Rebbe, and he realized that these letters would keep the Rebbe awake until *shacharis*. But on the other hand, a *mazkir* must do as he is told. Not daring to suggest anything to the Rebbe outright, Reb Leibel came up with a plan. He wrote a note suggesting postponing the mail for tomorrow, and placed it atop the next pile of letters that the Rebbe asked for.

When the Rebbe saw the note, the Rebbe looked up, smiled and commented, "Do you want me to put this letter off for tomorrow too?" And the Rebbe continued dealing with *Klal Yisroel's* questions, requests, and prayers all through the night.

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## THE WAY OF AVODAH

Reb Chaim Sholom Deitsch relates:

“There was a very serious *bochur* with whom I was in close contact. He would daven *ba’arichus*, learn diligently, and make a regular *chesbbon hanefesh*.

“This *bochur* was a deep thinker and was also very self-aware. Being especially honest and naturally critical on himself, he was always working on different parts of his character which he believed needed improvement.

“Before he went in to *yechidus*, he prepared many pages of self evaluation, of his past and his present, providing detailed descriptions. It was a masterpiece of a *chesbbon hanefesh*.

“When he went in to the Rebbe’s room, the Rebbe lifted the stack of papers and said, ‘*A shod! In der tzait volstu gikent shraiben a chibbur in Torah...*’ (What a shame! In the time [you spent on the *chesbbon hanefesh*] you could have written on Torah matters...)

“The *bochur* was shocked. It took him time to realize that he had been overly engrossed in himself to the point of obsession. In one minute, the Rebbe pulled him out of self-absorption, and saved him from himself. Indeed, today he devotes his time to studying Torah rather than studying himself.”

## PREPARING FOR THE OHEL

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Reb Binyomin Klein A"H related:

"The Rebbe's preparations before going to the *Ohel* were extremely serious. Even after going for forty years, the preparations still felt like the preparations of *chodesh* Elul for Rosh Hashanah.

"The day before the trip, the atmosphere reflected that 'tomorrow is *Ohel* day.' Everything was different. There was a sense of urgency. The Rebbe's answers would be shorter, and answers of a non-urgent nature were left for later."

Reb Leibel Groner related:

"In Elul of 5719 (1959), Reb Moshe Schneerson, a distant relative of the Rebbe, was *niftar*. The Rebbe joined the *levaya* until the *beis bachayim*, but did not enter. The Rebbe explained to me: 'I cannot go into the *beis bachayim* without going into the *Ohel*—I cannot go into the *Ohel* without the appropriate preparations...'"

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## THE *OHEL* IS WARM

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For hours on end, both in the scorching sun and in the heavy snow, the Rebbe would stand at the *Ohel*, davening for *klal Yisroel*.

Understandably enough, elder chassidim often begged the Rebbe to watch over his health, and make these visits shorter and less frequent.

On one such occasion, *Shabbos Parshas Vayikro* 5727 (1967), a delegation of elder chassidim, headed by the venerable *mashpia*, Reb Shmuel Levitin, entered the Rebbe's study, and explained that because of the extreme cold at the *Ohel*, they were anxious for the Rebbe's well-being.

The Rebbe would not hear of it.

"I cannot work without going to the *Ohel*," he said. "I must carry the load. And as to your claim that it is cold at the *Ohel*, ask Reb Zalman Duchman (who was one of the delegation). He goes there often, and he'll assure you that it's very warm there."

# 21

## WHEN WILL MOSHIACH COME?

In the summer of 5735 (1975), the famous Russian *baal teshuvah*, Professor Yirmiyahu Branover, and his son Daniel went for *yechidus*.

Daniel asked the Rebbe what he thinks of the rumors that in the writings of the *Arizal*, hints have been found alluding to the fact that Moshiach will arrive in the year 5736.

The Rebbe answered the child:

"From the *Rambam*, it is understood that there were many instances when Moshiach should have come, but due to minor mishaps, he did not arrive. There is no reason to wait until 5736. Moshiach can come in 5735 too! I just spoke at a *farbrengen* about the superiority of the third day of the week, but Moshiach may come on a Monday too!"

The Rebbe then became very emotional, and finished off pointing to himself, and then to them: "If I will improve, your father will improve, and you will improve – **then** he will come."