

THE  
MAKING  
OF A  
CHOSSID PART II



לעילוי נשמת  
יעקב בן אייזיק ע"ה  
גלב"ע ח' טבת ה'תשע"ז  
ת"צ'ב'ה'

נדפס ע"י בנו  
הרה"ת ר' אלכסנדר  
וזוגתו מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו  
קאלער



Rabbi Yaakov Immanuel Schochet was a unique figure in *dor hashvi'i*; handpicked by the Rebbe to work on some of the deepest works of Chassidus and also instructed by the Rebbe to attend college and become a professor at a university. Even without the archetype characteristics of a “typical” Chossid, he was a staunch and ardent Chossid of the Rebbe.

When the Rebbe wanted the Tanya to be translated to English, Rabbi Schochet was the one he chose to translate *Iggeres Hakodesh* (which is arguably the most difficult part); when the Rebbe wanted *mafteichos* to be made of various works—Rabbi Schochet is the one he appointed; when the fate of everything was on the line during the *sefarim* case, Rabbi Schochet was on the witness stand to convey the meaning of a Rebbe. When the Rebbe was fighting for *mihu yehudi*, the purity of the Jewish nation, Rabbi Schochet was at the forefront. As a pioneering lecturer and writer, he traveled the world to speak on Chassidus, Moshiach, and the authenticity of Yiddishkeit.

Rabbi Schochet was a strong Chossid and *mekusher* (and, at one point, he was even a member of the Rebbe's secretariat), but if you met him as a teenager you wouldn't necessarily believe he would end up that way.

In Part I of this article we began with Rabbi Schochet's early years: when he came to Lubavitch at the age of fourteen with a mind of his own, how the Rebbe was *mekarev* him tremendously, dealing with him patiently and lovingly through his teenage years and all that it entailed. In Part II we will discover how he became involved in the Rebbe's work, as a powerful advocate for Torah and Yiddishkeit.

## MARRIAGE

After Immanuel completed his studies in yeshiva, he moved to Toronto and became a teacher.

After a few years, the Rebbe began pushing Immanuel and his parents to look into *shidduchim*. When he ultimately decided to travel to England to meet his future wife, he wrote to the Rebbe about it. The *mazkirus* called him with the Rebbe's *bracha*, and he also received a letter from the Rebbe encouraging him to utilize his time in London to meet with various people for the benefit of Lubavitch. On the way to London, he stopped off in New York, where the Rebbe spoke to him about those meetings, and added, with a smile, "you will surely send me a postcard from there."

He met his *kalla* in London, and they decided to get engaged. Immanuel sent a telegram to the Rebbe, and in reply he received a telegram from the Rebbe wishing him mazel tov for the *tnaim*.

In the airport on the way out of London, he suddenly remembered the Rebbe's request to get a postcard. He bought a postcard, together with two bottles of *mashke*, and sent it to the Rebbe. The following week, the Rebbe sent him a lengthy letter giving him *brachos* again for the *shidduch*, thanking him for the postcard and gift, and also adding some notes on articles that he wrote that year.

Rabbi Schochet later related: "At the time, my mother was in the hospital following a heart attack. The Rebbe gave a whole *bracha* for my mother, and wrote very strongly that doctors have permission to *heal*—as it says ורפא ירפא—but they have no permission to predict, and do not mind what they say.

"That year, 5722, I had five or six *yechidusen* and probably a dozen letters—the Rebbe showered me from every direction.

THE REBBE'S LETTER WISHES MAZAL TOV TO IMMANUEL ON HIS ENGAGEMENT, 9 MARCHESHVAN 5722.



A TELEGRAPH FROM THE REBBE WISHING IMMANUEL MAZAL TOV UPON HIS ENGAGEMENT.

"Around Purim, my *kalla* came to visit from London, and we went in to *yechidus* together. On the way to London for the wedding, I stopped off in New York for yet another *yechidus*, which took place on Rosh Chodesh Sivan, right after Mincha. I brought the bottle of *mashke* from my *ufruf*. In the middle of the *yechidus*, the Rebbe asked me to be *mochel* and open a little cabinet in the back of the room and take out his *kos*. He took the cup, filled it up to the top with the *mashke* I brought, and gave it back to me. יעצט איז דאס מיינע, דאס הייסט השתתפות—אין די חתונה giving it to you for the wedding.' [This

was the Rebbe's participation in his wedding.] " (Rabbi Leibel Groner later told me that now he understood something that had occurred on Shavuot: The Rebbe had brought a bottle of *mashke* into the *farbrenge*, and in the middle of the *farbrenge* he filled up his cup and drank it. That was the *mashke* from that *yechidus*.)" The Rebbe also opened his drawer and gave Immanuel some bills as a *drasha geshank* for his wedding, as well as a few five dollar bills towards a *farbrenge* in London. Now, before the *yechidus*, Immanuel had written to the Rebbe



## THE REBBE ADDED, WITH A SMILE, "YOU WILL SURELY SEND ME A POSTCARD FROM THERE."

about the following dilemma: He really wanted the Alter Rebbe's *niggun* to be played by his wedding (especially since it was a *niggun* he had always loved), but no-one would know it there. A recording wouldn't be the same...In fact, the Rebbe told him that it shouldn't be recorded, but instead suggested that he send the notes to the choir and *chazzan* in London, and they can learn it that way; and that's what they did.

Then there was another issue that he was dealing with: A *chossan* would usually daven with the Rebbe's *siddur* before the wedding, but his wedding was overseas. The Rebbe paused for a moment, took out a small *siddur*, and gave it to him. Then he took out another one, for the *kalla*, and blessed him with the traditional *bracha* אויסבעטן אלעס גוט.

The wedding took place on 3 Sivan, and on the way back to Toronto the couple stopped off in New York—two *yechidusen* within a week! The Rebbe gave them many *brachos*.

Immanuel's sisters had been planning to make his *sheva brachos* in New York, but Rabbi Hodakov suggested that he make one in 770. He arranged a simple, short *sheva brachos*; Immanuel *chazzered* from the *maamar* of Shavuot, Reb Yoel Kahn *chazzered* some of the *sichos*, and there was singing.

The Rebbe asked Rabbi Hodakov about the singing—why was there singing before Mincha?—and he told the Rebbe about my *sheva brachos*. The Rebbe remarked that Rabbi Hodakov was "מכוון לדעת גדולים" (his thinking was in line with that of great people) in suggesting that the *sheva brachos* should take place at 770.

## THE WRITING CAREER

Several years prior, Immanuel had embarked on what would become a distinguished writing career. It started in 5720, which marked 200 years since the Baal Shem Tov's *histalkus*. He decided to write a biographical sketch about the Baal Shem Tov in the *Yiddishe Journal*, a daily publication in Toronto that had an English section. What he had planned to be a small project encompassing two or three articles turned into twenty.

As the Rebbe received the articles, he sent Immanuel letters encouraging him to keep it up and giving his *haaros* and feedback on them. The Rebbe ultimately told him to publish it in a book, and "Rabbi Israel Baal Shemtov" was published by Merkos in 5721.

After Immanuel got engaged, he began thinking about how he would support his family. At the time, he was teaching in the morning and afternoon, but now a proposition arose in the business of vending machines.

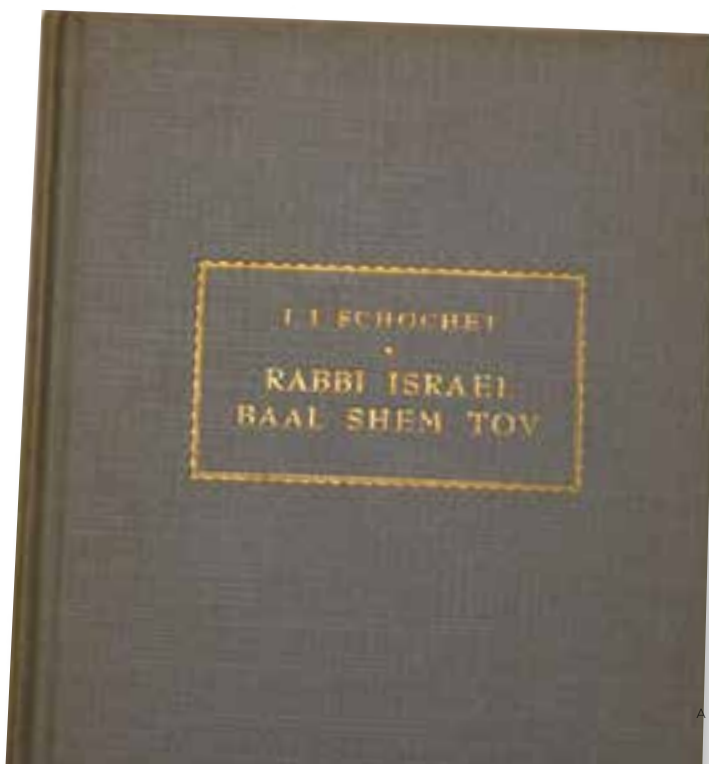
He was thinking about getting involved in this with his brother, and he wrote to the Rebbe asking if this was something he should consider.

"Rabbi Hodakov called me with the Rebbe's answer, and I wrote it down word for word. It was a very long, detailed answer, and it filled over a page. The Rebbe went into the vending machine business in detail—that one must be careful because the mafia is often involved, and other things to look out for—a whole long letter.

"At the bottom, the Rebbe wrote: כל הנה"ל בנוגע לאחי. בנוגע אליהו מהנכון שיקדיש כל זמנו ומרצו לתורה ולמדע, ועל זה בכתב.

This is all regarding your brother. In regards to yourself, you should dedicate all your time and energy towards Torah and science, and [you will receive detailed instructions regarding] all of this in writing.

"Until that point I had perhaps wanted to go to college because I would make double the salary from teaching, but once I got engaged and needed to make a living I no longer *wanted* to go to years of college. But now the Rebbe was instructing me to go. When I *wanted* to go, the Rebbe



IMMANUEL'S FIRST BOOK, A COLLECTION OF HIS ARTICLES ABOUT THE BAAL SHEM TOV THAT APPEARED AS A NEWSPAPER COLUMN.

didn't allow it; now that I *didn't* want to go, the Rebbe was instructing me to.

"But what about making a living? The Rebbe asked me to start working for Merkos—to compose the news bulletins that they would send out; to translate things; to write articles, and more. He gave me a whole list of things. This went on for three years, until I got my B.A."

## ON THE REBBE'S SECRETARIAT

A few months later, Rabbi Uriel Tzimmer passed away. In addition to his work as a writer and activist,<sup>1</sup> he had worked on the Rebbe's secretariat translating letters in several languages—incoming letters from people, and the Rebbe's reply to them.

**"THE REBBE REPLIED THAT I MUST TRANSLATE EVERY WORD. YOU CAN NEVER KNOW HOW THE PERSON EXPRESSES HIMSELF AND WHAT'S BOTHERING HIM..."**



The Rebbe asked Rabbi Schochet to take over this job, even though he would have to work remotely from Toronto.

"I received a whole pack of letters that had piled up since Rabbi Tzimmer had stopped working, and I started reading them. I soon discovered that many of the things people would write to the Rebbe about seemed like irrelevant information, and I asked the Rebbe whether I should write summaries of those parts of those letters instead of translating the whole thing.

"The Rebbe replied that I must translate every word. You can never know how the person expresses himself and what's bothering him, so the entire letter must be translated in detail."

Rabbi Schochet continued in this capacity for several years.

## TRANSLATING IGGERES HAKODESH

Throughout this time, the Rebbe was encouraging him to write. Around the year 5724 he was in *yechidus* with his wife, when the Rebbe asked him to translate *Iggeres Hakodesh* of Tanya.

He related: "I didn't feel like I could do it. *Shaar Hayichud*—okay. *Iggeres Hatshuva*—I could handle. But *Iggeres Hakodesh*, with all its Kabbalistic concepts, is practically impossible to translate. [In several letters of the *Iggeres Hakodesh*, the Alter Rebbe discusses difficult passages and contradictions in Kabbalistic works. –Ed.] I might sometimes *think* I understand what it's talking about when I learn it in *Chitas*, but there's no way I can articulate it, especially in a translation. For example, *siman chof, Ihu Vichayohi Chad*—try translating such a thing!

"The Rebbe said that nevertheless, I should do it. When I suggested *Shaar Hayichud* or *Iggeres Hatshuva*, the Rebbe thought for a minute and said,







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IMMANUEL PRESENTS A NEW BOOK TO THE REBBE AFTER A YECHIDUS KLOLIS, 13 SIVAN 5747.

the Alter Rebbe's Chassidus—and to know all the nuances.

“I said that I would try, and the Rebbe told me to ask other Chassidim for help. I approached prominent Chassidim, who were well-versed in Chassidus, but they all said that they didn't know.

“At the next yechidus, I told the Rebbe that no-one knows. The Rebbe laughed and said, *zei veisen takke nisht*, they truly don't know—they aren't trying to avoid you, they actually don't know.

“It was a very interesting *yeichidus*; the Rebbe spoke at length about the Mittler Rebbe, how none of the other Rabbeim published as much as he did in their lifetimes.

“The Rebbe said that there are two incredible things (“*pelles*”) about the Mittler Rebbe: The first is that he hardly mentions the Tanya. He discusses all the concepts that are in the Tanya, but he hardly quotes it. The second thing is that his Chassidus is practically not studied—even though he published so much in his lifetime.”

That project never came to fruition, but the Rebbe continued giving Rabbi Schochet projects.

## THE MAFTEICHOS?

In 5736, the Rebbe told him to put together footnotes and indexes on the *sefarim* of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid.

“I didn't enjoy making these indexes, it's mechanical work. It's not my cup of tea. Some people make *mafteichos* by just choosing words that match, but to make a true *mafteich* requires total immersion to know the material and choose what belongs and what doesn't.

“The Baal Shem Tov was relatively easy, they are short *toros*. But the Maggid's *toros* are more extensive and difficult. I started working on the Maggid's *mafteich* in 5736, but it wasn't going well.

“For an entire year I tried—I learned through the Maggid's *sefarim* and all the *sefarim* before—and I was making no progress. But the Rebbe didn't let go. In every letter, every note, every contact from 770, the Rebbe

kept asking about the *mafteichos* for the Maggid.

“Two years passed and the Rebbe kept pushing, but it wasn't going. The Rebbe once wrote me a sharp note: למה זה נוגע אליו אינני יודע, ולמאי נפקא מיני. *Why it's your job—I don't know. But what difference does it make?*

“At one point I called Rabbi Hadakov and told him that if this project has a (spiritual) connection to me, I'm willing to sponsor someone else who's talented in these areas to make it. The answer came back: No. Yet I still couldn't manage to get it done.

At the farbrengen of Shabbos Mevorchim Elul 5737, the Rebbe began talking about the idea that Shabbos Mevorchim Iyar and Shabbos Mevorchim Elul are the two crucial Shabbos Mevorchims of the year: Shabbos Mevorchim Iyar is for the whole summer, and Shabbos Mevorchim Elul is when we *bentch* Elul, which includes Tishrei and the following year. And then he went into a third month, Shabbos Bereishis.



IN PASSIONATE DEBATE WITH MISSIONARIES ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS.

## TAKING THE STRAIGHT APPROACH

*Rabbi Schochet is famous for debating missionaries and bringing Yidden back to teshuva. He had one yechidus with the Rebbe on the topic, but he refused to reveal what was said. When asked about his perspective of the Rebbe's views on philosophy, he said:*

The Rebbe was very straightforward. Even his responses to the so-called contradictions between Torah and science are fairly based on common sense. People sometimes think that by getting involved in sophisticated arguments, you prove your status as a genius; by raising earth-shattering issues.

What could be called revolutionary about the Rebbe's approach was the simplicity; the fact that he avoided the hair splitting and philosophizing, and instead dealt with the issue directly: Let's take things at face value. What does it say and what are you after?

It's a simple approach, but profound in its simplicity. The Rebbe looked at things in a way that answered the question without resorting to complex philosophical arguments that would confuse. That's not to say that the Rebbe was unable to go into these things; there are letters where the Rebbe does go into these sophisticated arguments—but as a response, and sometimes to show the fallacy thereof.

"I felt that the Rebbe was talking to me: Shabbos Mevorchim Iyar and Elul were the two Shabbosim that I would come to the Rebbe every year, religiously. (Shabbos Mevorchim Iyar was around the first time I came to Lubavitch, 26 Nissan, and Shabbos Mevorchim Elul was around my birthday). Being that the Rebbe was

talking about Shabbos Bereishis, I made up my mind on the spot to come to the Rebbe for Shabbos Bereishis as well.

"Then, on Shemini Atzeres 5738, the Rebbe had a heart attack. I was in a dilemma—what's the point of going Shabbos Bereishis if there will be no farbrengen? But I had made up my

mind to go, which is like a *neder*—so I went for Shabbos Bereishis.

"Now, the instructions at the time were that people should continue writing their *duchos* and reports regularly as before. At the time, my practice was to write a *duch* to the Rebbe once a month, so I handed in my *duch* on Friday, Erev Shabbos Bereishis.

"This was a few days after the heart attack, and there were almost no answers from the Rebbe at the time. You couldn't even go into 770 upstairs, the doors were locked! But of the three *maanos* that came from the Rebbe that week, one of them was to me.

"Within an hour I received the answer. It contained a single word:

המפתחות? *The mafteichos?*

"At a time like this, that's what the Rebbe was thinking about! That shook me up. I decided that I have to try again. And somehow, after that it suddenly *worked*; what I couldn't complete in three years was done within two months. It came out Yud-Daled Kislev that year, dedicated to the Rebbe's fiftieth wedding anniversary. (Even then, I wasn't happy about it completely, and later, after I had edited all the Maggid's *sefarim*, I reworked it completely, and from a 30 page *mafteach* I made a 200 page *mafteach*. Over time I developed a system in my mind of how to go about it.) I got a big thank you from the Rebbe for that one...

From then on, I added Shabbos Bereishis as a date that I would come in every year.

"The Rebbe always kept on urging me: keep writing, keep writing. He demanded it every time I went by dollars. When a new book came out and I sent it in—he'd give me one dollar for the current *sefer*, and another dollar for the next one. The Rebbe never let off, never let go—always pushing me to keep writing.



“One time, I told all my children, ‘We’re going to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe will *bentch* you.’ Now, at home we *bentch* our children on Friday night, so when my son, who was just before his third birthday, heard the word *bentching*, that’s how he understood it.

“By the *yechidus*, the Rebbe gave a *bracha* to everybody, we were ready to go out and suddenly my son sat down on the floor crying. I didn’t understand what was going on. My wife tried calming him down, and when I asked her what was happening, she said, ‘He says the Rebbe didn’t *bentch* him.’ He expected the Rebbe to put his hands on his head and say ‘*Yevarechecha*’—the way we do it at home. Obviously, that hadn’t happened. The Rebbe asked what was going on, so I told him. I felt embarrassed.

“The Rebbe says ווילסט איינפירן גייע מנהגים אין חב”ד—You want to introduce new *minhagim* in Chabad? He called him over, put his hand on his head, and gave him the *bracha* with ‘*Yevarechecha*.’ (The rest of the family had already left the room, and the Rebbe told me not to tell them so that it shouldn’t cause jealousy.) My son was happy, he had received a *bracha meshuleshes* with the Rebbe’s hands on his head...”

## EVERY SINGLE CHILD

“I once went by dollars on Sunday holding my grandson Levi. The Rebbe gave him a dollar, looked at me, and said, פארוואס האב איך עם נעכטן נישט געזען, באם פארבריינגען—Why didn’t I see him at the farbrengen yesterday?

“He was less than three years old. I thought the Rebbe was making conversation, so I looked at the Rebbe with a smile. But the Rebbe looked at me again and repeated, איך האב עם נעכטן נישט געזען באם פארבריינגען. I didn’t know what to answer.

“As we went home, I mentioned it to my children. My daughter told me, that’s funny. Normally she would bring him to the farbrengen every shabbos, but that Shabbos he wasn’t feeling well or something, and she didn’t bring him...”

“Can you imagine, you have a few thousand people at the farbrengen, of all ages—a packed house, with so many children. My grandson was a small child. That the Rebbe should know and remember who he sees and who he didn’t...? And it was, in fact, the one Shabbos he wasn’t there.”

## A NEW WORLD

Reflecting on the Rebbe’s affect throughout the entire Jewish world,

and indeed the whole world, Rabbi Schochet once shared:

“Throughout the generations, there have been *tzadikim* who had the power to bring the entire world to *teshuva*. Many people came by the Rebbe for dollars without having any connection to or an understanding in Chassidus or the Rebbe. Yet, when these people came into 770 and saw the Rebbe, even before their turn, they often burst out crying—just being in the presence of the *tzadik* had an effect, even on a subconscious level. They *felt* the *kedusha*. Who knows what the aftereffects were, just from being in the presence of the Rebbe.

“The Rebbe quotes in *Hayom Yom* that every movement of a *tzadik* has an impact. The Shpuler Zeide said that



IMMANUEL RECEIVES KOS SHEL BROCHO WITH ONE OF HIS GRANDCHILDREN, MOTZOEI SHAVUOS 5748.

when he was a child, the Baal Shem Tov once put his hand on his heart—and from then it's still warm. Every movement of a *tzadik* has an impact, and how much more so when he *looks* at you, how much more so when he *speaks* to you—he's focusing on you.

“Thousands of people walked by the Rebbe, but each one felt as if the entire world dissolved around them—it was just the Rebbe and you. The Rebbe concentrated everything on you.

“The Rebbe's impact on the entire world is immense. But it's up to us to finally complete the job and bring the *geula* in actuality.” <sup>1</sup>

1. See “*Devoted Chossid, Man of the World,*” Derher Sivan 5778.

## THE REBBE GAVE HIM A DOLLAR, LOOKED AT ME, AND SAID, “WHY DIDN'T I SEE HIM AT THE FARBRENGEN YESTERDAY?”



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