

A photograph of two rabbis standing in front of a stone monument in a forest. The rabbis are wearing dark coats and hats. The monument is made of stone and has a decorative archway. The background is a dense forest of tall trees.

THE ATVOTZKERS

*The Lives of Rabbis
Moshe Elya Gerlitzky
and Mottel Bryski*

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Rabbis
Moshe Elya Gerlitzky
and Mottel Bryski

DOVID ZAKLIKOWSKI

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www.LubavitchArchives.com

LubavitchArchives@gmail.com

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HasidicArchives@gmail.com

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Memento from the wedding of

חיים אלעזר וגאולה
שיחיו הכהן קאהן

***Geulah and Chaim
Kohn***

ראש חודש שבט ה'תשפ"א

The 14th of January, 2021

Greetings

Dear family and friends,

Thank you for being a part of our *simchah*!

It is customary at Jewish weddings to remember the deceased grandparents of the *chassan* and *kallah*. Considering our grandfathers' shared histories and friendship, it seemed appropriate to record the stories of their lives in honor of our wedding.

Chaim's grandfather, Rabbi Mordechai Meir ("Mottel") Bryski, was generally a man of few words. When pressed to speak, he preferred to do it through song.

Singing played a central role in his life. Be it the songs he grew up with, Chabad *nigunim* or the *nigunim* he would sing and compose during his daily prayers.

His favorite was the Shir Hageulah, the Song of Redemption (see page 34). It is a song about life (Chaim) and redemption (Geulah), and it seemed to encapsulate the two most significant themes of his life.

At one point during his years in Shanghai, he got terribly ill with typhus, and while lying in the hospital bed he overheard someone saying, "*Er pekkeled zich ois*," this one is getting ready to go. When hearing this, he made a fervent resolve to recover, and not only survive, but thrive. In spite of all the pain, he remained fully committed to life, and always in the most practical way.

He had an unwavering faith and practical perspective on Moshiach. He perceived and experienced Moshiach, not as escapism, but as a progressively unfolding reality happening within our lifetime.

With that, he spoke at a *bar mitzvah* during the week of *parshas Bo*, where it tells of Moshe meeting resistance on the part of some to leave Egypt. He candidly and passionately told the gathered about the danger of becoming comfortable in what he called a, "*geshmake galus*," a luscious exile.

He was fully committed to life on the ground, while not growing complacent with the status quo. It was the truth that lies within the paradox. To be a Chassid takes talent. It is a life full of paradoxes: To dance while sitting, scream quietly and stand straight with your head bowed.

In an almost poetic fashion, Rabbi Bryski passed right after Shabbos *parshas Vayechi*, “And Yaakov *lived* in the land of Egypt.”

We would like to thank Dovid Zaklikowski, and the staff at Hassidic Archives, who on short notice, tirelessly worked on collecting, documenting and preserving our precious history.

In addition, we would like to thank those who assisted in gathering the information (alphabetical order): Rabbi Menachem Bryski, Rabbi Avraham Gerlitzky and Rivky and Rabbi Mordy Katz.

Koheles (7:2) tells us, “*Vehachai yitein el liboi*,” the living shall take to heart. The objective in learning about our ancestors is so that we can draw strength from their experiences and the lessons they teach us. We could only learn from them, because they were—just like we are—human, beautifully imperfect beings capable of the divine.

May we all find our individual and collective song of redemption with Moshiach now.

Sincerely,
Chaim & Geulah



“It Could Be Better”

Mottel Brzyski, 16, had been studying for around six months at the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Otwock, Poland when he made his first trip back home for Pesach in 1939. These months in yeshivah were his first experience away from home.

Though four years older, Chaim Meir Bukiet, who also hailed from Chmielnik, took Mottel under his wing. Chaim Meir, one of the older students, was held in esteem by the dean, Rabbi Yehuda Eber. He often studied through many a night, and expected the same from Mottel. Before Pesach, Mottel’s father sought out Chaim Meir to ask how his son was doing at the yeshivah. Chaim Meir, honest to a fault, simply could not fib. He shrugged and said, “*Es ken zain beser*”—it could be better.

It was a flippant response, but for Mottel there were serious consequences. Throughout his stay at home, his father would emphasize: “*Muttel, oib es ken zain beser, muz zain beser,*”—Mottel, if it can be better, it must be better.

These were one the last words Mottel heard from his father, just before departing to yeshivah. A short five months later, the Germans conquered Poland. Mottel never made it home again, and his parents and siblings perished.

After surviving the war, he eventually made it to the United States, married and built a Jewish home. By then, Rabbi Mottel Bryski (whose name was changed upon entry to America) was still dear



*A young Mottel
Bryski.*

friends with Rabbi Chaim Meir Bukiet, who had become dean of the Central Lubavitcher Yeshivah in New York.

Tragically, both of their families had been murdered by the Germans. In one of his father's parting messages, Mottel discovered a motto by which to live. They echoed in his mind and heart for the rest of his life. He never settled for mediocrity and strove to make circumstances better and better—*and better still...*

He did this as a parent, an educator of young children, and an activist in Crown Heights. Every evening upon returning home from a long and tiring day, he would sit in his dining room and study Torah. Later, he would study with his Chmielniker landsman, Rabbi Bukiet.

For most of his life, there was little he shared about his early years, yet this story he would tell repeatedly. *Es muz zain beser*—it must be better. In fact, he toiled to make matters better, for himself, and for many others, too.

Early Years

Mordechai Meir (Mottel) was born in 1923 to Chaim Elazar and Rochel Tzilka Brzyski. He was one of six, and the first son after Esther Shaindel, Chana Miriam and Faygeh Leah.

His maternal grandfather was Rabbi Yechiel Aharon Weinreb, known as the Dalashitzer Rav, after the city Dzialoszyce, where he was a rabbi for many years. He became a rabbinical figure in Chmielnik, hired to respond to questions in Jewish law. Mottel's father studied under Rabbi Weinreb, and ultimately married his daughter.

The small city of 12,000, with 10,000 Jews, was a bastion of Chassidic life where Mottel thrived. He recalled the many shtieblach, such as the Trisker shtiebel, where they would daven.

Most of the town inhabitants struggled for their daily bread. However, people were not depressed or ashamed by their poverty because it was simply the norm.

There was Yisroel Yosef, who taught in the yeshivah, "He was always happy, and every time he would see my father, he would grab him for a dance."

His father would study before davening from various volumes of Chassidus such as *Maor Vashamesh*. Mottel spoke of those early mornings sitting beside his father, listening and learning along. His father prayed at length, and would then begin the study regiment of *Chok Leyisroel*.



The Chmielnik market place, 1917.

Mottel took pride in his father, whom people respected. When people heard who his father was, they'd often note, "He is an *Ehrlicher Yid*," a fine Jew.

He had fond memories of his grandmother, Chave Sarah Weinreb, who was very learned. Chave Sarah was a woman of few words, but many turned to her for advice. She was dedicated to her children's wellbeing, and was known for being gracious and dignified.

As a child, Mottel studied at a local cheder. He recalled his mother would bring him every day a hot meal for lunch.

NEW PATH

Kalman Brzyski, Mottel's uncle, had studied in the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Warsaw. Kalman devoted himself to learning throughout most of the day and night. It was said that he never went to sleep; rather, he would fall asleep on a bench while learning Torah. He spoke often of the Rebbe Rayatz's teachings, and Chaim Elazar eventually became close to Lubavitch.



Rabbi Bryski's grandson, Chaim Kohn, davening in front of what was the Chassidic Beis Midrash in Chmielnik, 2019.

One year, the Rebbe Rayatz spent Tishrei in Riga, and Kalman was in attendance with fellow Chmielmikers Yossi Goldstein and Avrohom Sonshein. The Rebbe called them over, placed his hands on their shoulders and said, “When you go back to Chmielnik, establish a yeshivah there.”

Upon returning home, they immediately got to work establishing a school for local children. When he was old enough, Mottel joined the yeshivah.

When the time came for Mottel to advance his studies, his grandmother Chave Sarah felt that he should follow Kalman’s path and attend the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Otwock. Among other reasons, Mottel recalled that they favored the yeshivah because it was reputed to teach Torah and Chassidic studies with joy.

The yeshivah became his home. He studied under Rabbi Dovid Teiblum, who never stopped learning, even when walking from his house to the yeshivah. Rabbi Teiblum, with the encouragement of the Rebbe Rayatz, would later become the Kotzker Rebbe.



Chaim Kohn in front of Kilińskiego 18, Rabbi Bryski's childhood home in Chmielnik, 2019.

The Rebbe Rayatz lived on the other side of the village. Several times a year, he would attend the yeshivah for a farbrengen. Mottel recalled that once when the Rebbe was returning home from the yeshivah, instead of the horse pulling the wagon, they pushed the coach. “I was one of them,” he would proudly say.



Students have a discussion outside the Lubavitch yeshivah in Otwock.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

War!

In September 1939, German tanks rolled into Poland, swiftly crushing the ill-prepared Polish army and sending the country into chaos. Speaking of the war's commencement, Mottel recalled, "Poland mobilized in one place, fortifying themselves with munitions and so on, but the Germans came in through another side and nothing stopped them."

The yeshivah disbanded as students fled Otwock in search of safety. Mottel's father sent a telegram saying that he should return home. Traveling by train required a *shapuska*, a travel permit, so the teenager waited in line for many hours to obtain one. At two in the morning, it was announced that they would not be issuing more permits. Exhausted and alone, Mottel cried bitterly at his fate.

Later, he learned that his life had actually been spared since the Germans were bombing those very lines.

He made his way to Warsaw, where he received money from the Rebbe Rayatz. He heard that it was best to travel close to the Russian border, for soon it would become a part of the Soviet Union. As part of the German Axis, there would be no bombing there. He would later reflect on the absurdity of being a young boy wandering alone through Eastern Europe.

Someone encouraged him to go Bialystok, so he began inquiring about how to get there. Eventually, he found a truck that was delivering merchandise to Bialystok, and he travelled in the back.

On Rosh Hashana, the Germans entered Bialystok, striking terror with their very appearance. There were rumors, however, that they would not stay long. On Erev Yom Kippur they left the city, only to be



Refugees on the run during WWII.

replaced with the Russians. When the Russians arrived, there was joy and jubilation in the streets. “The Russians were screening movies,” Mottel recalled, “and playing music in the streets.”

A short while later, on a Saturday many people left to Baranovich, which was closer still to the Russian border. Mottel joined, but after two miles, “I sensed that I couldn’t do it, so I went back to Bialystok.”

He saw this once again as the hand of G-d guiding his every move, because the route to Baranovich was bombed and many were killed.

Soon there were trains running, and he made his way to Baranovich. There, he was encouraged to go to Vilna, because soon it would become independent from the Soviet Union.

The Short Oasis

In Vilna, he found thousands of refugees, including many yeshivah students. “There were shuls, and many Jewish establishments and organizations,” he said. “Vilna was a place of refuge.” There he found a branch of the Lubavitch yeshivah. To his delight several fellow students from Otwock were there too.

The students heard painful reports regarding Poland’s devastation. Mottel sorely missed his family, and in a letter, he asked them to take a family photo and send it to him. Mail was censored, and though a return letter arrived, the photo he’d requested had been removed. It greatly pained him that he was left without a memento. Years later, he said, “I don’t know why they had to take this from me.”

While he was relatively safe, he worried about his parents in Chmielnik. He understood that with Germans occupying their town, money would help them survive. He considered ways to get them funds, but feared the Germans would confiscate it. After brainstorming, he had an idea stemming from a story in the Gemara (Nedarim 25a) known as the Cane of Rava:

A case came before Rava to adjudicate. A creditor said to the borrower: Repay me your debt. The borrower said to him: I already repaid you. Rava said to him: If so, take an oath that you repaid him.

The borrower brought a hollow cane, placed the money inside it, and went leaning upon it to the court. He said to the lender: Hold



*Shortly after
arriving in Vilna,
1940.*

PHOTO: AGUDAS
CHASSIDEI CHABAD
LIBRARY

this cane in your hand so that I can take an oath while holding a Torah scroll. The borrower took the Torah scroll and swore that he had repaid the entire sum that had been in his possession. The creditor became angry upon hearing the false oath, broke the cane, and all the coins placed inside fell to the ground. It turned out that the borrower had given the oath in sincerity, since he had returned all the money at the time of the oath by giving the creditor the cane with the money inside. However, this was a deceitful tactic, as he intended that the creditor return the cane and the money in it after the oath.

In a similar fashion, Mottel found a wooden box, and hid the money in a false bottom. He sent it home with a note stating that this was a matter pertaining to the Cane of Rava. If they have further questions, he wrote, they should ask Uncle Kalman.



Mottel Bryski (right) with his friends in Vilna (left to right): Yisroel Ratzer, Chaim Meir Bukiet, ? and Yosef Borenstein.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

In subsequent correspondence, he learned that the message and support had indeed been received and had served to ward off hunger and deprivation.

Mottel wrote to the Rebbe Rayatz in the United States, asking about his spiritual development. The Rebbe responded that it was good he was listening to the directives of the older students, but it was not enough. He encouraged Mottel to study and memorize Tanya with an average of a chapter a week, and a longer one over two weeks.

The Rebbe also wrote to the students imploring them to alert anyone in Poland to leave as soon as possible. In order to not to alert the censors, they wrote in carefully worded letters: “Our *Grossfater* [grandfather, the Rebbe] is here and he wants you to come.”

He also wrote to Chaim Meir Bukiet’s parents several times, urging them to send their son to Vilna. Chaim Meir’s parents were reluctant to allow their only son to leave them, but Mottel was insistent. Soon the letters were written with more alarm: “Grandfather urgently



Students of the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Vilna, 1940.

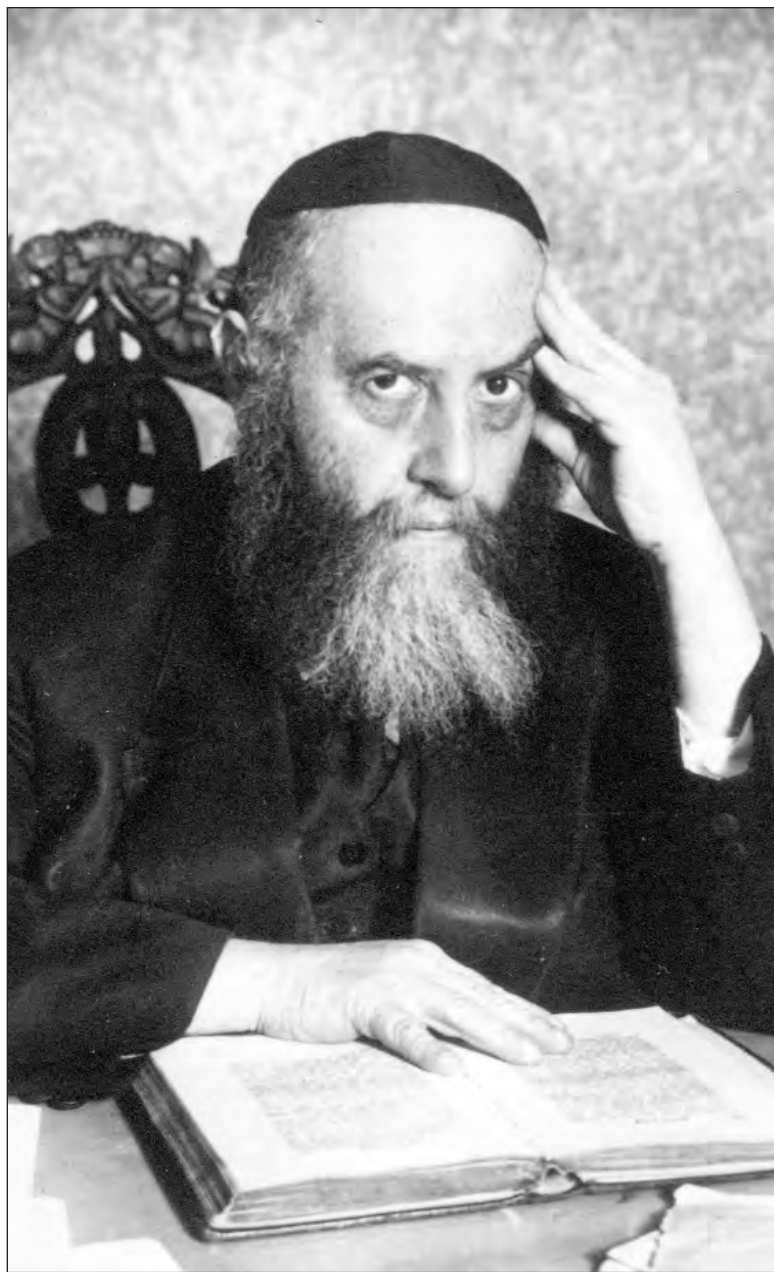
PHOTO: GHETTO FIGHTERS' HOUSE

wants you to come!” Finally, Chaim Meir arrived in Vilna, saving his life.

A short while later, a letter arrived at the yeshivah addressed to Chaim Meir. Mottel told the mailman that he was not there at the moment, but that he’d give it to Chaim Meir. After signing for the envelope, he looked it over and recognized the handwriting as his father’s, and the return address was to his own home. Overcome with curiosity, he decided to open it. In the letter, his father wrote that his wife, Mottel’s mother, had passed away, and asked that Chaim Meir inform him.

Mottel’s father wanted Chaim Meir to break the news gently to his friend. Instead, Mottel was met with the crushing news in a moment of shock. Mottel recalled, “I cried out in such anguish. I emitted such screams.”

Soon, their lives were once again upended when the Russians recaptured Lithuania. They learned that the Russians sent refugees to Si-



The Rebbe Rayatz.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

beria where survival was difficult under normal circumstances, less so during wartime.

“We didn’t have food, and we didn’t have money,” he said, but falling into the hands of the Russians was the fear that occupied them the most. “We were worried simply about remaining alive.”

Seeing the Rebbe Rayatz again was their greatest hope, but communication with him in the United States was slow. In times of dire need, the Rebbe guided them to seek the counsel of Rabbi Shimon Sholom Kalish, the Amshinover Rebbe. When they asked him about their predicament, Rabbi Kalish said to make every possible effort to leave the Soviet Union.

All the while, the Rebbe was trying to obtain visas for his students to the United States, but the process was at a standstill. In the meantime, they desperately needed a route out, and they found it in Chiune Sugihara, the Vice-Consul for the Japanese Empire in Lithuania, who granted them transit visas.

“He was like an Angel from Heaven,” Mottel said of Mr. Sugihara. “Not to be understood.”

Incredibly, they were soon on their way to Japan via rail through the Soviet Union. The trip was long, but it was a harrowing experience for other reasons. The refugees were unaccustomed to the freezing Siberian temperatures, and they were starving. When their train stopped in cities, villages and towns, they would beg for any morsel of food that could be spared. Mottel recalled throwing them some of the little food they had.

They finally arrived in Japan on a Friday. They would be travelling to Kobe, where there were arrangements for their stay, but they were concerned they wouldn’t arrive in time for Shabbos. The various yeshivah students differed in their opinion as to whether they’d be allowed to travel by bus after sunset. Many thought it was a matter of life and death, but the Lubavitch students felt that no harm could befall them in Japan, where there was no war at the time, and the trip should be halted if Shabbos approached.



*Chiune Sugihara
at his desk in the
Japanese consulate.*

They arrived safely in Kobe just before Shabbos in February 1941.

Mottel recalled the terrifying ascent toward the house they would reside in. "It was so high and steep to the peak of the mountain that I thought we'd fall off with the bus," he said.

Japanese Tea

One requirement toward obtaining a visa to Japan was to have cash for living expenses. The Rebbe Rayatz arranged the funds, and for the first time in years, the boys had money in their pockets. With the freedom Japan provided, and the abundance of merchandise suddenly available after months of deprivation, many went on a purchasing spree.

Mottel wouldn't hear of it. He could not fathom buying things when back home his own family had nothing to eat.

It had become impossible to send packages to Poland, but he was desperate to make contact with his family. Someone suggested he send envelopes containing tea. When mailing it, he was told, he should list it as tea samples and not a package.

The concept was that the Germans, who could not obtain tea in Poland, might purchase Japanese tea from Mottel's family. Shortly after the first package was received in Poland, he was sent a return letter in German, thanking him for the tea that enabled them to buy potatoes and carrots.

Soon, hundreds of refugees were sending such envelopes to their families in Europe. The post office in Kobe was concerned about the sudden influx of tea samples sent to Poland, and they stopped permitting them. Mottel, unrelenting, travelled to Osaka and sent them from there.



Lubavitch students leaving Kobe, Japan.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

When the others heard, they appointed him as their agent to mail their packages. One day, news arrived that mail service between the two countries had ceased. In total, he sent 56 packages.

They made their way around the foreign city with makeshift maps provided by the locals. Mottel, challenged with map-reading, once ended up at a military camp where civilians were not permitted.

He was interrogated, but did not understand a word they were saying. They believed he was a spy, despite his inability to speak or understand the language. They brought an interpreter in and began to ask him many questions. At one point, they told him to take off his shirt. He had been wearing a tie, held closed with a small piece of paper. They took the paper and questioned him about it. “They thought this was part of my spying maneuvers,” he said.

After many hours, he convinced them that he did not present a threat to the empire.

As weeks passed, they waited to hear news regarding their American visas, but it was not meant to be. The USA did not want refugees from enemy countries out of concern they might be spies.

While the Japanese extended their visas beyond the initial 10 days they'd been granted, they wanted all refugees out as they planned to enter the war allied with the Axis. Thus, in August 1941, the students began their journey to Shanghai, China.

Tragedy and Reunion

In Shanghai, at first, the Chabad and Lublin yeshivahs shared a building. Mottel recalled, that they would both share words of Torah during the meals they had together. In addition, the Lubavitchers “repeated Chassidic discourses, while the Lubliners sang their melodies.”

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japan took control of Shanghai and stripped it of its international status, turning it, in effect, into a Japanese city. Influenced by their German allies, one of the first Japanese initiatives was the creation of a ghetto in Shanghai.

By then, there was almost no communication with the United States. They had no funding to cover their basic needs, and they would go hungry many a day. When asked who took care of him during that time, Mottel said, “The One Above.”

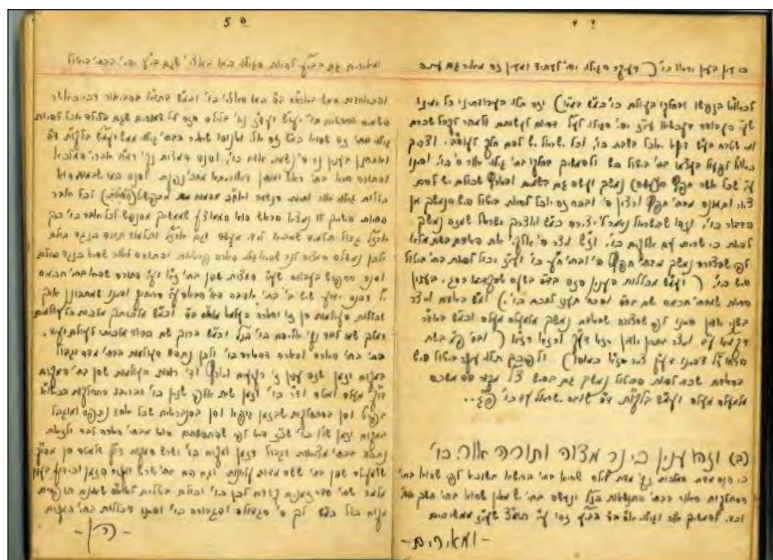
Despite the difficulties, they tried to learn as much as they could. In an attempt to keep busy, they would sing *nigunim* and various songs for hours. One song in particular, composed by fellow student Yisroel Dovid Rosenberg, *Shir Ha’Geulah*, was very dear to Rabbi Bryski.

In Shanghai, they received snippets of information regarding their families and happenings in Poland.

After four long difficult years, in August 1945, the war reached Shanghai. Near the ghetto were several important buildings that the Japanese believed would be spared by American bombs. This was not the case. One day while they were in shul, which was housed in a stur-



Identification papers issued by the Polish consulate in Shanghai, 1943.



Handwritten pages of Kuntres Etz Chaim written by Mottel in Shanghai, 1943.

dy building relative to the ones they resided in, there was a bombing nearby which claimed the lives of many Jews.

In the spring of 1946, the Japanese surrendered, and the city was liberated by American troops. Mottel said, “There was dancing in the streets, and great rejoicing.”

As plans were organized for the students to travel to the United States, Mottel became unwell. While the others were to travel by boat, he departed first via airplane to the United States.

It was a long trip, with four stops. On one leg of the journey, he was asked if he wants Coca Cola. Of course, he had never heard of the American staple, and his response was met with laughter. “When you come to America, you will know what Coca Cola is,” the man said, and served him a glass. Mottel was stumped by the dark liquid and was afraid to drink it. This was his first initiation to life in America.

At the airport in San Francisco, he was greeted warmly by several of the local Jewish community. At shul that Shabbos, he spoke to the community about the importance of observing Shabbos. He spoke with a passion and conviction that deeply touched many in the audi-

[illegible]

A 1942 letter Mottel wrote to the Rebbe Rayatz for himself and the members of his family in Poland.



Students of the Lubavitch yeshivah in Shanghai, circa 1946. Mottel is in the second row from top, fourth from the left.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

ence. One man approached him and said that he resolved to begin fully observing Shabbos.

After a stop in Chicago, Rabbi Bryski arrived in Brooklyn, New York at the age of 23. As the only surviving member of his family, he was orphaned and alone, but he also felt that he had found his place spiritually. He was provided room and board near 770 Eastern Parkway, the new Lubavitch headquarters, and soon picked up where he left off as a student of the Lubavitch Yeshivah.

At his first audience with the Rebbe Rayatz, he recited the blessing *Shehecheyanu*, to which the Rebbe responded Amen. After years of suffering and anguish that would leave lasting scars, he had at last reunited with his Rebbe, whom he regarded as a caring and loving father.

During Mottel's time in Shanghai, the Ramash had been in touch with the students about printing several *seforim* there. When Mottel first met the Ramash in New York, the Ramash asked how he navigated



*Mottel's Tanya
printed in Shanghai,
1943.*



*A Lekutei Diburim
printed on cheap
Chinese paper by
the committee for
printing Chassidus
in Shanghai, 1942.*

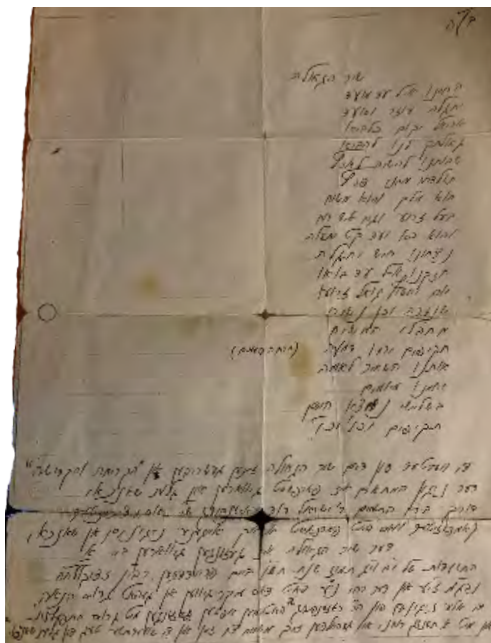


American visa issued in Shanghai, 1946.



Rabbi Greenglass wrote about Mottel's health to the Rebbe Rayatz. The Rebbe responded with his blessing for a complete recovery and a good journey.

the halachic implications of crossing the dateline when he'd stopped in Honolulu. "I recognized a distinctive refinement about him," Mottel recalled, "and an eloquence of speech that didn't exist in others."



Rabbi Bryski writes the story of *Shir Hageulah* and the students in Shanghai.

בע"ה

שיר הגאולה

החיינו א-ל עד מועד
יתגלה עוזר וסועד
אריאל יקום כלביא
גאולתך לנו להביא
שבותנו להשיב לארץ
תולדתו מבני פרץ
הוא מלך והוא משיח
בעל זרוע וגם איש רוח
והוא בא ועד קט יתעלה
נצחונו חיש יתגלה
חזקנו א-ל עד בואו
יום יחשוף גואל זרועו
שנוכה וכן נשיח
מחבלי המשיח
תקיפים ירדו דמעה (הרבה פעמים)
אותנו השאיר לאומה
יחינו מיומיום
בשלישי נמצא חיים
תקיפים וכו' וכו'

Translation:

Let us live until the time comes.
May it be revealed
The helper and supporter
Ariel will stand up like a leopard
It is upon us to bring the geulah
Our captives to be returned to the land
He descends from the sons of Peretz.
He is a King; He is anointed
A strong one and a man of spirit
He will come and quickly rise up
His victory will quickly be revealed.
Give us strength until he comes
The day that the redeemer will lift his arm
We will merit and soon talk about it
The Galus pangs will be behind us



Singing at a farbrengen in Shanghai.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

Our enemies will go down,
and we will be left a nation
Let us live many days
In the 3rd redemption we will be found living.

די ווערטער פון דעם שיר הגאולה זיינען געשריבען אין "הקריאה והקדושה" דער ניגון המתאים איז פארפאסט גיווארען אין גלות שאנכאי דורך הרב התמים ר' ישראל דוד ראזענבערג שי' אויסגעצייכענטעק קאמפאזיטער וואס האט פארפאסט אסאך אייגענע ניגונים אין שאנכאי

דער שיר הגאולה איז געזונגען גיווארן ביי אַ התועדות של י"ב וי"ג תמוז שנת תש"ז ביים פריערדיקען רבי'ן צוקללה"ה נבג"מ זי"ע און דער רבי נ"ע האט דאס מייקר גיווען און געהאט גרויס הנאה.

די אלע ניגונים פון הר' ראזענבערג שי' האט מען אפטען געזונגען מיט גרויס התפעלות און מיט א תענוג רוחני און געהאלפען זיך משמח צו זיין אין די שווערסטע טעג פון גלות שאנכאי.

New Life

In 1946, Rabbi Bryski was introduced to Ethel Eckhaus, the daughter of Yisroel Yosef and Baila Eckhaus, operators of the Borough Park Mikvah on 52nd Street. They soon married. Rabbi Bryski would say, “Perhaps the greatest miracle of all was that an American-born Yankee would want to marry a bearded, orphaned Polish student.”

After a year studying Torah, Rabbi Bryski was dispatched by the Rebbe Rayatz to serve as a spiritual advisor at the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Montreal.

In 1948, he returned to New York to serve as a teacher at the Lubavitcher Yeshivah on the corner of Bedford Avenue and Dean Street in Brooklyn. In a teaching career that spanned twenty-three years, he was beloved by his students. Many still talk about his warmth, wisdom and sensitivity during those chaotic times after the war.

Throughout this period, while residing in the Borough Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, the Bryski family continued to grow. With the birth of each new child, he believed he was seeing the reason for his survival. “There were a lot of times when I experienced not just miracles, but miracle of miracles. This was all in the merit of the future, of what would be,” he said.

In 1950, the Rebbe Rayatz passed away, and one year later the Ramash accepted leadership of the Lubavitch movement.

In 1969, when the Bryski family grew to eleven children, his earnings as a schoolteacher were not sufficient to cover the family’s expenses. Rabbi Bryski asked for a blessing to move to Crown Heights



Rabbi and Ethel Bryski on their wedding day.



The Rebbe Rayatz appoints him for a position in the Lubavitch yeshivah in Montreal, Canada, 1946.

and pursue a career in real estate. The Rebbe granted his blessing on condition that Mottel remain involved in Jewish education.

In his career as a real estate broker for homes in Borough Park, Rabbi Bryski developed a reputation for conducting transactions with patience, honesty and integrity. As he continued to hone his skills, he was offered a position by the Board of Education for the City of New York to negotiate leases on its school buildings. He accepted, working at the Board of Education by day, and at his Borough Park real estate office at night.

He was loved and respected in the city offices, and in 1987, Rabbi Bryski would be formally recognized and commended by the city of New York for his exemplary dedication and conscientiousness as an outstanding civil servant.

In the 1970s, as more Jewish families began leaving Crown Heights in favor of safer, more homogenous neighborhoods, the Rebbe launched a campaign encouraging families to stay, and moreover,



Rabbi Bryski leading a choir at the United Lubavitch Yeshivah on Bedford and Dean.



Rabbi Bryski with his class at a 19 Kislev farbrengen at the United Lubavitch Yeshivah on Bedford and Dean.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES



A young Bryski family.

to recruit families living outside of Crown Heights to move into the neighborhood. Central to this campaign was his call for programs to make home ownership in Crown Heights as accessible as possible to Jewish families.

With his reputation in this arena well-established, Rabbi Bryski was asked to play a role in this effort. With an uncanny ability to seek out homeowners willing to sell and to negotiate favorable prices for buyers, Rabbi Bryski facilitated scores of home sales.



Rabbi and Mrs. Bryski, 2012.

Sweet Forgiveness

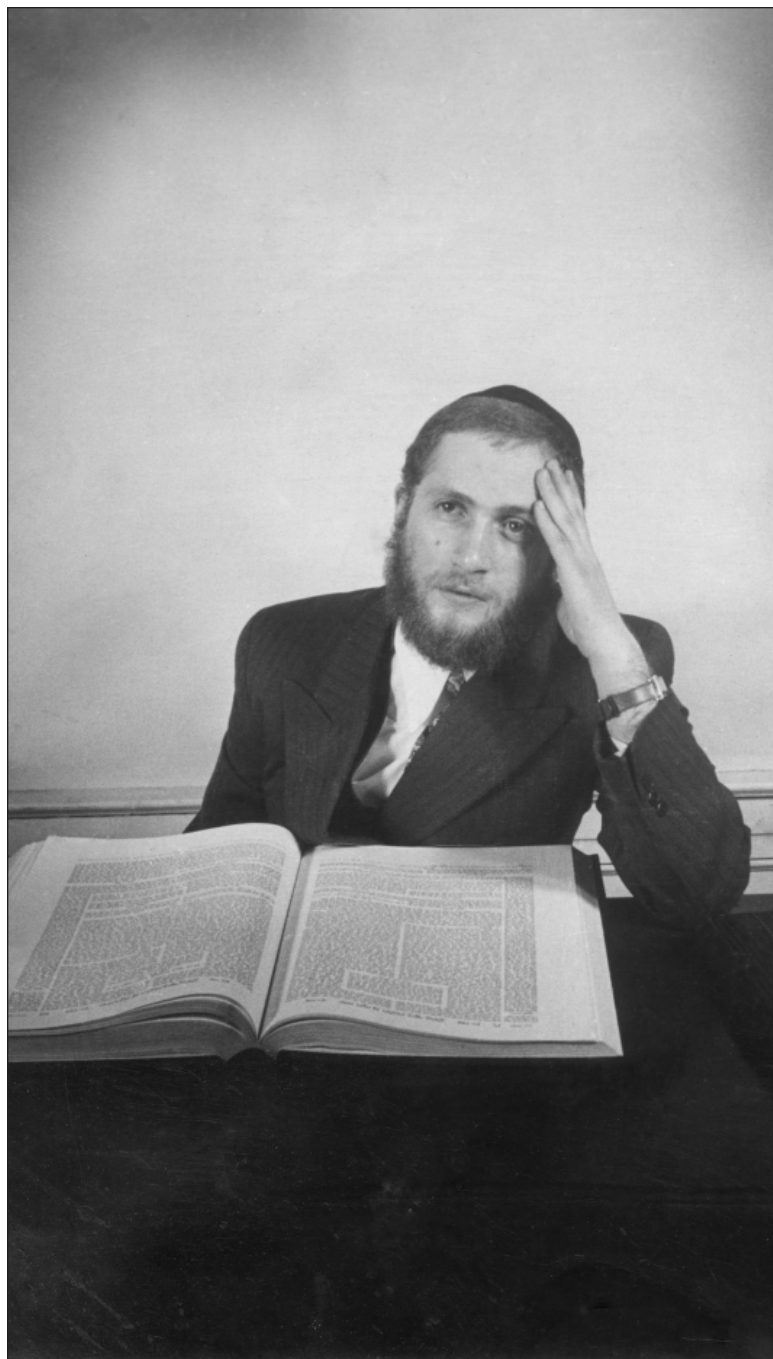
Despite living a life of great hardship, he never faltered in his love of G-d and his acceptance with equanimity of His grand designs, nor in his love and respect for his fellow man.

When pressed about the lessons he would like the younger generation to glean from his life, Rabbi Bryski responded, “I don’t know if I have good character traits,” but he stated that one good trait was his commitment to “overlook, pass over, forget,” what others may have done to you, “and not to hold a grudge to anyone.” He said that this trait would also help keep together many marriages. “G-d created the power of forgetting for good things,” he would say. “Sometimes it is important to forget. That is the way I went through my life. [If others did the same]... there would be *shalom bayis*.”

He placed his children at the center of his life. One son, while dorming at yeshivah, was once struggling with his studies. After a long day’s work, Rabbi Bryski would visit late at night to tutor his son in Gemara.

Speaking of his children, and the very different lives they led, Rabbi Bryski said, “Every individual has their part in the world that they need to refine. I have *nachas* from them all. I am happy with everybody.”

If one would listen closely, Rabbi Bryski was often humming a tune, especially during davening and learning. He had a creative compilation of nigunim that he matched to various sections of davening.





“His davening was unlike any that I have ever seen,” said Dovid Drizin, who attended the Agudah Shul with Bryski. “For me, this was so beautiful. It portrayed to me how one can take a few minutes of their day, and devote it to making prayers to Hashem so heavenly. One would be able to literally witness the beauty within the words of *tefillah* simply by watching him sing.”

In the last few years of his life, even as his health failed and his feet could barely carry him, he still went to shul. Many recall that as he would walk the block to shul, he’d sing nigunim.

He continued to go to the office in Borough Park in order to remain active and productive, to do the shopping for his wife and to be a source of encouragement to others.

In his final weeks, as his condition forced him to finally surrender his car and remain at home, he took the time to meet with each of his children and grandchildren and convey his wishes and blessings to them.

On Shabbos, December 31, 2011, they informed him that a great-grandson had been born. The baby’s father, Yossi Bryski, told Rabbi Bryski that he would like him to have the honor of *sandek* at the *bris milah*. Though weak and barely able to speak, Rabbi Bryski insisted that he would be there. However, during the next week, his condition further deteriorated.

Toward the end of the week he became unable to speak, yet would still motion for *negel vasser* to be brought to his bed, for his Tallis and Tefillin to be wrapped around him, and for help in writing out checks to charity. He constantly inquired as to the date and time, and about the status of the upcoming bris.

During this time, the recordings Rabbi Bryski had made of the songs composed in Shanghai, as well as other meditative and lively melodies, were constantly played at his bedside. He would nod his head, move his eyes and lift his hands to the melody of the songs.

When the doctor came to see Rabbi Bryski one night that week, he advised the family that it may not be possible for him to attend the bris, and as it was to be held on Shabbos, he could not attend by car.





Receiving Kos Shel Bracha from the Rebbe.

The following Friday night, the family held Shabbos services at the house during which Rabbi Bryski mouthed the prayers and motioned along with the singing. Later that same night, the doctor paid another visit. Once again, the family inquired about the *bris* to be held the next day. The doctor said that if, by some miracle, he rallies and regains strength, then, by all means, his attendant could wheel him to the bris.

That night, he slept more peacefully than he had on any night in prior weeks. When he awoke in the morning, he appeared well-rested and was dressed in his Shabbos best in anticipation of the morning minyan held at the house.

He was able to receive the last *aliyah* from *Chumash Breishis*, which describes how Yosef lived to hold his great-grandchildren on his lap. It is from here that we extrapolate the great merit being a sandek at a great-grandson's bris brings to their *neshamah*, especially after they pass away.

When asked whether he wished to be wheeled to the bris, he nodded vehemently in the affirmative. A doctor on hand confirmed that he could go. Positioned in a wheelchair complete with oxygen and an



With his son Rabbi Moshe Bryski at the end of Yom Kippur, 2005.

IV hookup, Rabbi Bryski was wheeled to the home where the bris was held several blocks away. Along the way, his grandchildren marched alongside and sang.

Upon arriving at the bris, Rabbi Bryski looked at each guest and nodded a “Good Shabbos.” He held the child on his lap as sandek. After the baby was given the name Menachem Mendel, the room erupted in euphoric singing and dancing. Rabbi Bryski vigorously nodded his head to the singing and motioned with his arms for the joy to continue with even greater intensity.

The next morning, he fell into unconsciousness. Hours later, with his wife and children by his side, he passed away at the age of 88.

REDEMPTION IS NOW

A few years before Rabbi Bryski passed away, after many years of silence regarding his past, his children pressed him to record his memories. In addition to many of the stories documented here, they asked



*Birchas Kohanim at
his granddaughter's
badeken, 2012.*

him when he believed Moshiach would come, to which he explained that the process had already begun.

He explained that life in the United States is nothing that anyone in Europe could have fathomed. In America, no one is systematically persecuted for being Jewish, for studying Torah or praying peacefully, and this is even granted with the blessings—and even assistance—of the government. He said that if you would tell someone from pre-war Poland that Jews would have a good livelihood, “to him, this would be *geulah*.”

He explained that since the Holocaust, the process of Moshiach has been happening progressively. “So I feel that the coming of Moshiach began a long time ago,” he said. Every Jew returning to Judaism, he continued, is also a part of this process.

He concluded, “We just need the actual revelation of Moshiach.”



Collector of Souls

At first, the Canadian Jews were taken aback. With his black wool coat, fedora, and long beard, Rabbi Moshe Elya Gerlitzky was an image ripped out of their family albums—the fading, sepia photos of their great-grandparents in the Old World.

“They had never seen a Jew with a beard,” recalled real estate developer Harold Medjuck, a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the rabbi visited at least once a year. “They had never heard of *Chasidus*.”

He may have resembled their great-grandparents, but Rabbi Gerlitzky was young and full of energy. One of nine Lubavitch students selected to travel from Shanghai—where they had established a yeshivah-in-exile during World War II—to Montreal. Upon arrival in 1941, they were eager to restart life in the city. However, the Rebbe Rayatz had other plans for them. He instructed the nine young men to open a Lubavitch Yeshivah and enroll as many local children as possible.

“We walked around the streets of Montreal,” Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled. “When we saw a mezuzah, we knocked on the door and asked if they had a child who could learn in yeshivah.” Child by child, over the next year, the young men assembled a student body several hundred strong.

Though they appreciated the Jewish education their children were receiving, most families could not afford to pay tuition. So the school had to find outside sources of funding. When Montreal proved unable



Rabbi Gerlitzky learning with Montrealers at the overnight camp they established, 1942.

to support the school on its own, Rabbi Gerlitzky was asked to travel to other Canadian communities to raise money.

By foot, bus, and train, he made his way through Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. No Jewish community was too small: Edmundston, Carlton, Fredericton, Moncton, and St. John's all got a yearly visit from the young rabbi.

It was a physically exhausting journey, one that Rabbi Gerlitzky undertook out of a profound sense of obligation, both to the school in Montreal and to the Rebbe in New York. Yet those who met him in his travels sensed only his joy at encountering another Jew. The rabbi's sparkling eyes and magnetic personality attracted people, Mr. Medjuck said, "as to a fire on a cold winter day."

The small, isolated communities began to look forward to their yearly visit with the rabbi. "He was the epitome of *Chasidus*," the businessman said, "a microcosm of a world that the first-generation Canadian-born had never seen."

Rabbi Gerlitzky saw himself as more than a fundraiser. He was the Rebbe's emissary to these small communities, and it was his duty to encourage and assist them in their Jewish observance. As the Rebbe Rayatz explained, a fundraisers mission was to, "sow spirituality and reap material support."

Those who met him said Rabbi Gerlitzky placed the emphasis on the sowing. Manuel Sand recalled the day when the rabbi appeared in his New Brunswick store—he had come to meet with the seven Jewish families who lived in New Brunswick at the time. The two hugged and exchanged pleasantries.

While Mr. Sand was writing out a check for the yeshivah, Rabbi Gerlitzky seemed to have other things on his mind. "Mendele," he said using the diminutive form of his Jewish name, "when was the last time you opened a Torah volume?"

The young man turned red, and Rabbi Gerlitzky understood. "Good, tonight I will sleep at your home, and we will study together."

That night, after Mr. Sand closed the store, the rabbi accompanied him home. They ate dinner together and studied until the wee hours of the morning. Mr. Sand treasures the memory of that night, not only because he enjoyed the learning, but because this respectable rabbi had given up a night that he could have been at home with his own family in order to study with him.

He learned from Rabbi Gerlitzky "to be totally dedicated to the good of another person," he said.

The rabbi's dedication sometimes forced others to look in the mirror and ask who they were and what they should become, Mr. Medjuck said.

"He was a collector of souls in the world of truth. After all these years, I could tell you, he gave much more than he ever received."

Searching Soul

Moshe Elya Gerlitzky was born in 1915, in Lodz, Poland. His parents, Avraham Yitzchak and Leah, were devoted Aleksander Chasidim. Shortly after Moshe Elya's birth, the family moved to the city of Konskie, where they became followers of Rabbi Yoav Yehoshua Weingarten (1845-1923), a student of the Aleksander Rebbe, Rabbi Chanoch Henoeh Levin (1798-1870).

Rabbi Gerlitzky had fond memories of Rabbi Weingarten, who would test him on his studies and give him blessings. After his bar mitzvah, Rabbi Gerlitzky studied in the Kielce yeshivah for a short period, but he felt dissatisfied with it and decided to look for another school. Over the next three years, he traveled from yeshivah to yeshivah, looking for a place where he would feel at home. He wanted more than just intellectual Torah study, he told his parents. He yearned for spiritual instruction as well.

One year, when he returned home to celebrate the High Holidays with his family, his cousin Rabbi Moshe Pinchus Katz took notice of his fervent study and *davening*. Rabbi Katz told him about the Lubavitch yeshivah in Lodz, describing in detail the Rebbe Rayatz's selfless dedication to Jewish education, and the unique teachings of Chabad *Chasidus*.

After Sukkos, Moshe Elya joined the branch of the yeshivah in Lodz. "When I first arrived," he recalled, "I didn't know anything about Lubavitch, not even what a *farbrengen* was."



*Moshe Elya, circa
1930.*

He was immediately struck by the Lubavitchers' devotion to *davening*, however. He recalled how Zalman Schneersohn, a wealthy businessman, would spend hours in prayer each day. During the holiday *Musaf* prayer, when Reb Zalman reached the line, "Because of our sins," he would burst into tears. "And you could already imagine what kind of sins they were," Rabbi Gerlitzky said years later.

It was at Reb Zalman's home that he first took part in a classic Lubavitch *farbrengen*. The Chasidim sang "*Padah Beshalom*," the *nigun* composed on the occasion of the first Lubavitch Rebbe's release from prison. It made a deep impression on the young Rabbi Gerlitzky, and became one of his favorite melodies.

TISHREI IN THE VILLAGE

At every *farbrengen*, Rabbi Gerlitzky heard about the Rebbe Rayatz, and soon he developed a strong desire to see the Rebbe him-



The Ramash, circa 1930.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

self. In the summer of 1931, the Rebbe held a gathering in Warsaw to mark the anniversary of his liberation from Soviet prison. The dean of the Lodz yeshivah set a high bar for those who wanted to attend: They must learn by heart thirty folios of Gemara and twelve chapters of Tanya.

Rabbi Gerlitzky was among the thirty students—out of one hundred—who fulfilled the requirement. He attended the gathering, where the Rebbe recited a Chasidic discourse, and participated in the *davening* and the singing of *nigunim*. He also had a private audience, where the Rebbe inquired about his studies and gave him a blessing. The students then returned to Lodz until the following Tishrei, when the Rebbe Rayatz came from Riga to be in Otwock (pronounced “Atvotzk”), a small vacation village near Warsaw, for the month.

Hundreds of Lubavitchers descended on the town to spend the holidays with the Rebbe. There, for the first time, Rabbi Gerlitzky felt

that he was part of a greater movement, and observed some of the famous Chasidim about whom he had heard so much.

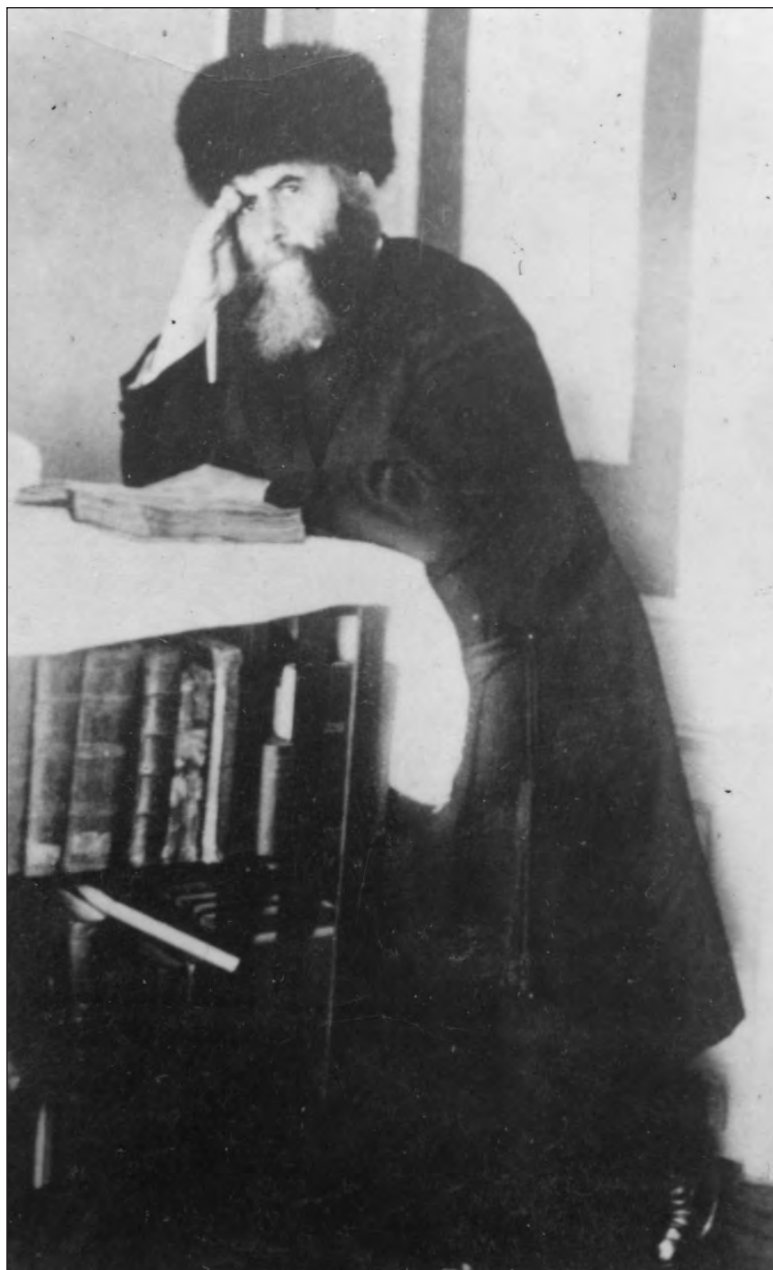
There was Rabbi Yitzchok Horowitz, “Itche der Masmid,” who would spend hours *farbrenging* with the crowd. As young students and elders sat transfixed, he would dissect Chasidic stories and teachings, gleaning fresh lessons and ideas. Another Chasid, Reb Mottel Chefetz, would stand, statue-like, the entire Yom Kippur, not even sitting down in his awe of the day. But on Simchas Torah, he came alive, dancing, singing, and encouraging the Chasidim to new heights of joy.

Then there was Avraham Kavash, a student who held that “one is obligated to be present at the recital of the *ma’amar* [Chasidic discourse] by the Rebbe.” The Rebbe’s aide, Rabbi Chatche Feigin, held a different view, however, and would permit only ten students, who received special permission, to attend the Rebbe’s discourses. Despite this, Avraham always found a way to sneak in. One time, seeing him there, Rabbi Feigen took his *dakshik* hat and threw it out of the room. Unruffled, Avraham took out another one of the soft hats, which he kept folded in his pocket, and placed it on his head.

One day during that memorable month, Rabbi Gerlitzky heard that the Rebbe Rayatz had instructed his son-in-law Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, known then as “the Ramash,” to *farbreng* with the Chasidim.

No one knew what to expect from the experience. “He was very unassuming,” Rabbi Gerlitzky said of the Ramash. “He would sit from time to time and listen to the way the others would review the [Rebbe Rayatz’s] *ma’amar*, but seldom interjected. He would listen to the way the students would study, but would infrequently correct them.”

Dozens of Chasidim arrived at eight o’clock to listen to the Ramash, and what they heard astounded them. “From the first minute that he opened his mouth, the crowd was mesmerized,” Rabbi Gerlitzky said. The talk covered dozens of sources, and decades later was printed in the *Reshimos* (issue seven).



The Rebbe Rayatz.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES



Rabbi Yehudah Eber.

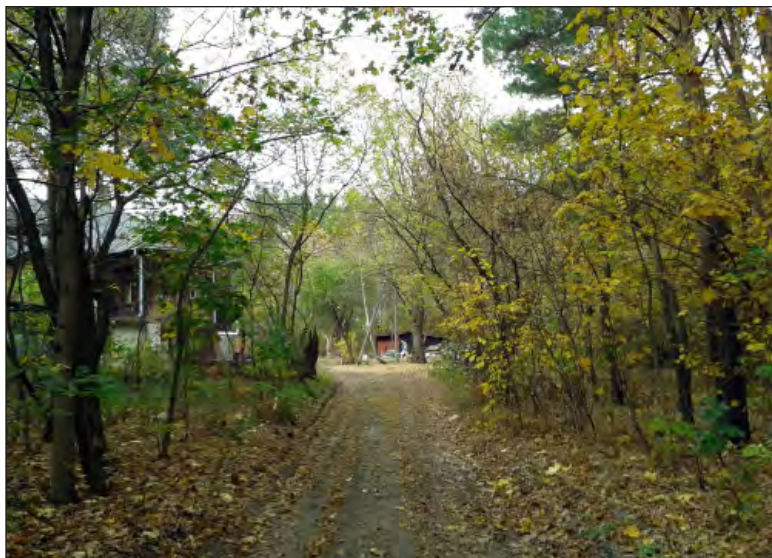
PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

Until that night, Rabbi Gerlitzky said, the Chasidim had respect for the Ramash as the Rebbe Rayatz's son-in-law. "Now it was a totally different appreciation and awe."

WARSAW MEMORIES

At the end of that memorable Tishrei in Otwock, the Rebbe Rayatz told Rabbi Yehudah Eber, dean of the Warsaw yeshivah, to choose several of the students from Lodz to remain in Warsaw. As part of this select group, Moshe Elya was exposed to a more rigorous level of study in the central Lubavitch yeshivah. He enjoyed the Gemara classes of Rabbi Yehuda Eber, but his favorite time was after Shabbos, when the dean would teach the students Chabad *nigunim*.

In Warsaw, Moshe Elya became known as the student who placed others before himself, even to a fault. For this reason, teachers often asked for his help with various tasks.



The original yeshivah building (left) surrounded by trees, 2014.

PHOTO: SILA ROSENFELD /LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

In 1933, the Rebbe Rayatz moved to Warsaw to be closer to the yeshivah. The students were asked to unpack the Rebbe's belongings, among them, twelve bookcases and twelve large crates of *seforim*. The Rebbe Rayatz asked three students, including Moshe Elya, to unpack the crates into the bookcases. He told them to handle the books with care, and, above all, not to open them.

The students did their work, studiously refraining from looking into the books, some of which were original manuscripts and priceless first editions.

Then they happened to see a small booklet of letters from the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905) to the Rebbe Rashab. Rabbi Alter, also known as the Sfas Emes, was one of the most well-known Chassidic Rebbes in Poland, and the young men's curiosity was aroused. "Nu, as young Polish lads, we wanted to see at least something from there," Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled. They crowded around to look at the booklet. Just then, the Rebbe entered the room.

“We almost fainted,” Rabbi Gerlitzky said. The students were beside themselves with embarrassment, but the Rebbe merely smiled. “Just don’t look into it,” he reminded them.

On a different occasion, Rabbi Eber sent Moshe Elya to the lodgings of the Ramash to borrow a *sefer*. There, he saw three tables organized in a U-shape, piled with *seforim*. “I saw him [the Ramash] go from one end of the room to the other, caught up in his thoughts. It was an unforgettable scene.”

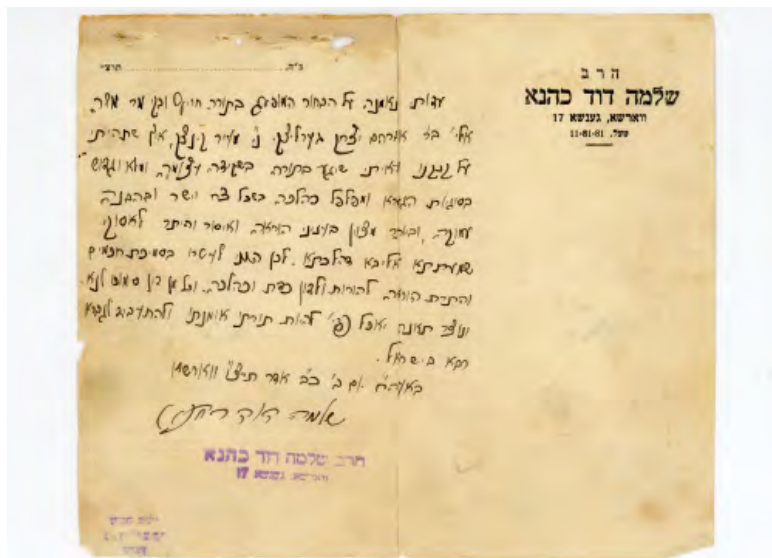
One year, before Sukkos, he was asked to help put the *s’chach* on the Rebbe Rayatz’s sukkah. The Rebbe stood watching while Elya Moshe went up the ladder. When he thought he had placed enough *s’chach*, he stopped. But the Rebbe told him, “*noch*,” to place more. This happened several times, until there was a very large pile of green branches on the sukkah.

STUDYING AMONG THE TREES

In 1935, the Rebbe moved to Otwock, and the yeshivah followed him. The resort town, leafy and tranquil, suited the twenty-year-old Moshe Elya perfectly.

Life in Otwock was one long spiritual feast, he recalled. Freed from the distractions of the city, the students were able to focus fully on their studies, and on Shabbos, they spent hours *davening*. “They knew that there would not be much left for them to eat,” he said. “They were happy if there was some challah for them to make *Kiddush* on.”

The yeshivah was situated outside the town, in the middle of a forest. During the summer, they would study outside in the fresh air. Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled how the students recited *Kabbalas Shabbos* among the trees, singing “All the trees of the forest will sing...” On Shabbos afternoons, they would sing *nigunim*. “You cannot imagine, nor will I be able describe accurately, the sweetness, and spiritual pleasure, of those moments,” he said.



Rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Shlomo Dovid Kahane.

In 1936, the Rebbe instructed him to receive rabbinical ordination. He studied for it, and received *semicha* from, among others, Rabbi Shlomo Dovid Kahane (1869-1953), a prominent rabbi in Warsaw.

Two years later, the Rebbe told Rabbi Gerlitzky to return to Lodz, this time to teach in the yeshivah. Still, each year, he would return to Otwock for the month of Tishrei to recharge. “The atmosphere there was true joy,” he would say, recalling how, on Simchas Torah, the Rebbe Rayatz would dance with the Ramash, or with his other son-in-law, Rabbi Shemaryahu Gurary, the Rashag.

Every year, on Sh’mini Atzeres, the Rebbe’s mother, Rebbetzin Shterna Sara, hosted a farbrengen for the Otwock students. They would stay for hours, Rabbi Gerlitzky said, sharing Chassidic ideas and stories, singing, and dancing. Once, Rabbi Gerlitzky drank a little too much, and turned a summersault in the middle of the dancing.

Later, Rebbetzin Shterna Sara, who knew him from the days when he was a student, told him that she had told the Rebbe Rayatz about his antics, and the Rebbe had laughed heartily.

Dyplom Rabiniczny
„SMYCHOH“

Nr.

Warszawa, dnia 25 lutego 1936 r.

RABINAT m. st. Warszawy.

Niniejszym stwierdzamy, iż p. Moszek-Eljasz GERLIKI, syn Abrama -Ioka i matki Iai z domu Cymerman urodzony w roku 1915 w m. Końskich zdał przed nami egzamin rebiniczny z wynikiem bardzo dobrym, wykazując głębokie zrozumienie i znakomite opanowanie całości kształtu nauk rebinicznych oraz kwalifikacje niezbędne do rozstrzygnięcia wszelkich spraw religijnych, a także gruntowną znajomość przepisów religijnych, zawartych w "H A L A C H A" w T A L M U D Z I M.

Wobec powyższego wydajemy p. Moszkowi-Błyszczowi GERLICKIEMU niniejszy dyplom, upoważniający Go do objęcia stanowiska RABINA na całym obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i stwierdzamy, że we wszystkich sprawach religijnych miana na nim w zupełności polegać.

Z Błogosławieństwem

Комисия Экспертная.

Pratini: N. Roggiani

Palma Ch. Pomer

Finding Joy in Danger

The peace in Otwock was shattered on September 1, 1939, when German bombs began to fall on the town. Within a short period of time, German and Soviet forces had conquered Poland. In Lodz, German soldiers were swarming the streets, and it was clear that the Jewish residents were in imminent danger. Yet, when Rabbi Gerlitzky was offered an opportunity to escape, he refused, saying, “What will be with the others if I leave?”

Soon, however, the yeshivah was forced to close. With eleven others, Rabbi Gerlitzky hid in the basement of the yeshivah building, where, despite the lack of food, they did their best to study and *daven* as usual. At night, they would venture out to search for food for the next day.

When the custodian of the building learned about their hiding place, he demanded money, threatening to turn them over to the Germans. They gave him what little money and valuables they had, hoping that the danger would pass. But after more than a month, the Germans were still there, and they had nothing left to give.

The custodian wasted no time informing the Germans about the group of hiding Jews. That afternoon, the young men heard the infamous sound of the German soldiers’ boots. There were six of them, with guns in their hands, breaking down one door after another in their search.



*Rabbi Gerlitzky,
1940.*

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

Rabbi Gerlitzky ran to a back room to hide, then climbed through a window and ran to the next building, where he hid in the firewood storage space in the floor attic. At night, after the city curfew began, he made his way to the home of an acquaintance, where he hid for a few days.

A week later, Rabbi Gerlitzky woke up with a sense of hope. It was a day like all the others, of hunger, fear, and constant, looming danger, yet something was different. When the *nigun* of the Mittlerer Rebbe suddenly popped into his head, he realized that it was a Chasidic holiday: the anniversary of the day the Mittlerer Rebbe was freed from tsarist prison, where he had been held on false charges, in 1827. Rabbi Gerlitzky thought to himself, “This is a good sign that my personal redemption is close.”

He sent a message to his friends Rabbis Volf Greenglass and Moshe Feder, fellow students of the Lubavitch yeshivah, saying that he wanted to go to the Rebbe Rayatz in Warsaw. “It is a day of redemption, and



*Rabbi Greenglass,
1940.*

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

we should go today.” Accordingly, that night, the three of them set out on foot for Warsaw.

They trekked by night and hid in the forests by day, arriving in the Polish capital a few days later. Many of the homes of Lubavitch community in the city were destroyed, but the young men eventually located a Lubavitcher who told them where the Rebbe was.

The Rebbe advised the young men to flee as well: “Go to Russia and you should be successful.” He told them to ask Rabbi Eber for money for their expenses. When they sought out their former dean, he said nothing, but gave them money, tears flowing from his eyes. It would be the last time they saw him. He was later murdered by the Germans in Riga, Latvia.

The young men headed north on a rough dirt track. The path was scored with deep ruts that had become giant, muddy puddles in the winter, and, in the dark, it was almost impossible to avoid them. When

one of the three men fell into a puddle, the other two had to pull him out. By the time they were done, they were all covered in mud.

After a few days of this, they approached the Bug River, which now formed the border between Germany and the Soviet Union. There, they saw hundreds of people with large wagons filled with belongings waiting at a German checkpoint. Penniless, covered in dirt and dung, the young men were keenly aware that they stood out among the well-to-do refugees. "It was an oppressing feeling," Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled.

The Germans were questioning each person, examining their belongings and giving people a difficult time. The students felt sure that they would be turned back, or worse, but when they got the checkpoint, the Germans merely looked at them in disgust and waved them through: "Get out of here, dirty Jews." Thus, they managed to pass the checkpoint without answering any questions, Rabbi Gerlitzky said. "In the end, our situation turned out to be a virtue."

In the Soviet Union, they made their way to a shul, hoping to rest after their long journey. But the shuls were crowded with refugees already. It happened to be a Friday, and someone in the shul invited the students to come home with him for the Shabbos meal. When he heard that they had nowhere to stay, he let them sleep on several chairs pushed together in his living room.

On Sunday, the students continued their journey. They travelled from city to city until they met other Lubavitch students, who told them that the Rebbe Rayatz was advising everyone to go to Lithuania, which had been granted independence from the Soviet Union.

The three young men, under the guidance of locals, headed toward the border. It would be a dangerous crossing—Lithuanian border police would not hesitate to send them back—so they decided to split up and cross individually.

That was how Moshe Elya found himself alone in a Lithuanian forest, in the midst of a snowstorm. He quickly became disoriented, wandering aimlessly among the trees. Suddenly, he reached the edge of the forest, and there, to his surprise and delight, he met Shialeh Bronstein,



Students of the Vilna yeshivah bid farewell to their teacher Rabbi Yitzchak Ushpol (holding attache case). Rabbi Gerlitzky is fourth from the left.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

his friend from yeshivah in Otwock. “I literally could not believe it. He appeared like an angel from heaven,” Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled. Shialeh took him to the Lubavitch yeshivah in Vilna, where several of the other students who had smuggled into the country had congregated.

Years later, Rabbi Greenglass recalled how, in a matter of weeks, the young men lost their homes, their families, and their possessions, becoming penniless refugees. “It was only Reb Moshe Elya’s lively

spirit that maintained us and kept us going during our long and difficult journey.”

INTO ASIA

Over the next few months, more Lubavitch students slowly trickled into the Vilna yeshivah. They tried to maintain a regular study schedule, but worry was a constant distraction. The Soviets had reoccupied the country. The communists were ruthless to religious Jews, in the eyes of the Lubavitchers at that time, even worse than the Germans.

It was decided that they could not remain in Vilna. In New York, Chabad was trying to obtain visas for them. All they had to do, they thought, was find a temporary place to shelter until they could go to America. They went from embassy to embassy, but were turned away. Finally, at the Japanese consulate, Chiune Sugihara granted them transit visas via Japan. The students were among the six thousand Jews that Sugihara enabled to flee Europe, saving their lives.

“I recall the moment that I received the visa,” Rabbi Gerlitzky told Sugihara’s family in 2001. The weight of fear was lifted from his shoulders, he said. “I felt as if I was reborn.”

They made their way through the Soviet Union to Moscow, where they remained for nine days until they received transit visas from the USSR. From there, they traveled to Vladivostok via rail, then by boat to Kobe, Japan.

The students had hoped the American visas would be waiting for them in Moscow, and later Kobe, but the visas never materialized. After some seven months in Japan, they were notified that their transit visas had expired—they would have to leave the country. As an alternative, the Polish embassy in Japan was trying to arrange visas to Canada for the many Polish refugees in the country. They secured eighty-one of them, nine of which were allotted to Lubavitch students.

The logistics took time to arrange, however, and in the meantime, the refugees were expelled from Japan. Everyone, including the nine



Students of the Lubavitch yeshivah in Shanghai, circa 1941. Rabbi Gerlitzky is sitting, fourth from the left.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

students, was taken by boat to Shanghai, an international “open city,” which did not require a visa. After several months there, they received their Canadian visas and booked passage on a steamer bound for California. They would travel by train from there to Montreal.

The boat was to depart Shanghai on the eve of Yom Kippur, 1941. According to some halachik opinions, on the holiday they would be crossing the international date line, while others not. Not knowing which day is Yom Kippur, this raised the question of whether the Jews on board would be required to fast for two days.

Most of the observant Jewish refugees chose not to go on the boat. But the Rebbe Rayatz had sent a telegram advising the Lubavitch students to leave “*behekdem haefshari*,” as soon as possible. Thus, they decided to go. In the end, the boat stopped in Hong Kong to pick up several hundred stranded Americans, and remained there for the holy day.

Mission in Montreal

Three weeks after they departed Shanghai, the students finally arrived in Canada on Friday, October 24, 1941. The Montreal Jewish community had arranged for the refugees to spend time in a vacation town in the Quebec mountains to recover from their ordeal. But the Lubavitch students politely declined the offer. They had received a letter from the Rebbe Rayatz on their arrival, stating that they should waste no time in establishing a yeshivah in the city.

The very next night, they organized a grand *melave malkah* for the community, where they announced that the new yeshivah would open on Sunday morning. All were invited to send their children to receive an authentic Torah education.

Seven boys showed up the next day. Then the question became which of the nine rabbis would teach. “We were all good students,” Rabbi Gerlitzky said, “and we all wanted to have the merit to teach the first class.”

They decided to make a raffle. Even decades later, Rabbi Gerlitzky felt proud to have won: “G-d gave me the merit,” he said. He began with “*Shneim oichzin betalis*,” the first chapter of *Baba Metziah*.

With the encouragement of the Rebbe Rayatz, the young men went house to house recruiting students. Within two months, there were two dozen children enrolled.

Benny Leibenstein recalled the day his father took him to see the yeshivah. He was immediately taken with the “atmosphere of good



The Montreal community welcomes the nine students to Montreal. Rabbi Gerlitzky is sitting, fifth from the left.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

fellowship and true friendship,” and became one of the first students to enroll. Gradually, more boys joined, attracted by the charismatic young teachers. The boys would follow the teachers around, even after school hours, Mr. Leibenstein said. “We hated to part, even for a short time.”

Not every child was as enthusiastic as Benny. When Louis Avrutick’s father told him about the nine Lubavitch students who had come from Poland and opened a yeshivah, he was unimpressed: “I was not excited about the idea, but just passed it up, thinking it did not concern me.”

At his father’s insistence, he went to observe the learning. Young boys sat at long tables, pouring over thick, Hebrew volumes that Louis couldn’t even begin to decipher. “Seeing this sight for the first time in my life, a change came over me,” he said. Like everyone, he found the young rabbis irresistible. “Like a magnet they pulled me towards them, and soon I began to feel as if I knew them all my life.”



With his class, circa 1943.



With the class of Rabbi Yehudah Citrik, circa 1949.



*Rabbi Gerlitzky with some of the campers at the camp
the nine students organizaed, 1942.*

Perhaps it is not surprising that the rabbis' conduct made a deeper impression on their young charges than the curriculum. Rabbi Gerlitzky once met a parent on the street and asked if he was happy with the education his son was receiving. "Ah, yes," the parent replied. "I can say that over the last few months, he became a mensch."

Rabbi Gerlitzky saw that tears of happiness were rolling down the man's face. "Was he not a mensch before?" he asked.

The man explained that he and his wife worked long hours and did not have patience to deal with their son. As a result, the boy had become rebellious and disrespectful. "You know, there were times when we were very worried. We thought, what will be with our *boychick*?"

Since beginning to attend the yeshivah, he said, his son had changed completely. He had become scrupulous in the observance of mitzvahs and developed respect for his elders.

In Poland, Rabbi Gerlitzky had taught a higher level of Gemara to students with a much broader knowledge than the Montreal children possessed. If he sometimes missed that challenge, interactions like this made him feel that his new mission was just as important.

THE MONTREALER REBBE

Chasidic Jews were unusual enough to attract attention in Montreal, but they were not unheard of. At that first *melave malkah*, when the young men announced the opening of the yeshivah, they met a rabbi who would prove a crucial friend and ally: Rabbi Yochanan Twersky, known as the Tolner Rebbe, had come to Montreal in 1934 and established a small shul and study hall.

"He turned to us with such warmth," Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled. Delighted to have young, energetic Chasidim in Montreal, Rabbi Twersky offered to help them in any way possible. "My house is your home," he said. "All that I have is yours."

He proved true to his word, Rabbi Gerlitzky said. The Tolner Rebbe accompanied the students to government offices to serve as a trans-



*Rabbi Yochanan
Twersky, the Tolner
Rebbe.*

lator for immigration paperwork, checked in on them regularly, and gave advice on how to acclimate to their new surroundings.

He did it all “in a respectful way, not as if we were pity cases that needed help,” Rabbi Gerlitzky said. On the contrary, Rabbi Twersky made the students feel that they were doing him a favor by coming to Canada.

The Rebbe Rayatz heard about his efforts and wrote to thank him, “for this that you are befriending my dear students, the exalted, who are close to my heart...for the past and a request for the future...to stand by their side at all times. They are worthy of your support...for their great activities to teach Torah and the fear of G-d. This is in addition to their own virtues of Torah scholarship and fear of G-d according to the ways of Chasidus.”

He continued to assist them until he moved to Israel in the 1950's.

A New Kind of Joy

The students' first year in Montreal was coming to an end. Simchas Torah was quickly approaching, and rumor had it that the Lubavitchers were going to celebrate like no one else.

The locals wondered whether the holiday could possibly be more exciting than the Sukkos that had just passed. The students had hosted *farbrengens* every night in the sukkah, often ending at dawn. "It was very lively," Naomi Feder, a Montreal native, recalled. "Montrealers were not used to this type of Sukkos."

Entering the Nusach Ari shul on Simchas Torah evening, the crowds beheld the nine refugees, who still did not know what had become of their families, dancing as though they had never experienced greater joy in their lives. The students were doing summersaults in the air: one would put his hands out, another would run forward, and be flipped over the head of the first.

Among the crowd that night were two old time Montrealers, Yosef Levi Shano and his son-in-law Noteh Rosenblum. Mr. Rosenblum had been married to Reb Yosef Levi's daughter Mindel, but, tragically, Mindel passed away in 1926 at the age of twenty-one, leaving behind a two-year-old daughter.

A genuine Gerrer Chasid who arrived in Montreal in 1900, Reb Yosef Levi had maintained his observance, customs, and Chassidic dress with great self-sacrifice. He had resisted the forces of assimila-



Yosef Levi Shano.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH
ARCHIVES

tion, he would later tell his grandson, by being “stubborn and strong for *Yiddishkeit*.”

“The *zeide* was a very strong personality and held up *Yiddishkeit* to the strongest degree,” his granddaughter Rochel Kviat said.

After her mother’s passing, young Chana Rosenblum became close to her grandfather, who taught her about Jewish observance and passed on his uncompromising ethos. In the autumn of 1942, she was an observant young woman ready to get married, and Rabbi Moshe Elya Gerlitzky had been suggested as a possible match.

Thus, Reb Yosef Levi and Mr. Rosenblum were watching the nine students with more than idle curiosity that *Simchas Torah*.

In the midst of the dancing, Rabbi Gerlitzky got up and gave a *drasha*, then jumped back into the revelry with renewed vigor. “I like him. He is full of energy,” Reb Yosef Levi told Mr. Rosenblum. “You should take him for a son-in-law. If need be, you should sell your last shirt for him to be part of your family.”



*A young Chana
Rosenblum (née
Shano).*

When the idea was suggested to him, Rabbi Gerlitzky consulted the Rebbe Rayatz, who had filled the parental role of doing research about potential matches for the young men. The Rebbe sent Rabbi Katz, Rabbi Gerlitzky's cousin, who had first brought him to Lubavitch and was now living in New York and his wife, Mindel, to meet the young woman.

Their impression was favorable, and the Rebbe wrote to Rabbi Gerlitzky giving his approval. He cautioned, however, that Rabbi Gerlitzky should make sure that the young woman understood that, as the wife of a Lubavitcher, observance was not enough. She must understand, he wrote, "the need to act in the way of self-sacrifice—not just in the form of talk, but in actuality, in the home....At the proper time, this needs to be discussed."

The two became engaged soon after, and a date was set for the wedding.



The Rebbe Rayatz's letter in regards to meeting Chana Rosenblum.

Though the Polish students were prohibited from entering the United States, Mr. Rosenblum and his daughter, as Canadian citizens, were able to visit the Rebbe Rayatz in New York to receive a blessing for the upcoming marriage. During their private audience, Mr. Rosenblum gave voice to the doubts he still harbored about the unusual match.

"Our students we call family," the Rebbe Rayatz told him. "And when a student reaches the stage of looking for a wife and becoming engaged, we are the in-laws. And with such in-laws, you could appreciate that G-d's kindness will be to give them much good, materially and spiritually."

Turning to Ms. Rosenblum, the Rebbe said, "The vessel for these blessings is the fear of G-d. Be strong in the fulfillment of all that is connected to the Jewish woman. May you be blessed with the blessings of *mazel tov*. You should build a home suffused in Torah, with abundance of livelihood, materially and spiritually."



Around the time he met Ms. Rosenblum.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Gerlitzky wrote to the Ramash, and the other students sent a separate, supporting letter, asking that he travel to Montreal to officiate at the wedding. The Ramash responded that his father-in-law had delegated so much work to him, in addition to his regular duties with the US Navy, that he would not be able to attend. He sent a *ma'amar* (discourse) from the Rebbe Rayatz as his participation in the event.

The Rebbe Rayatz sent two hundred dollars, some five thousand in today's currency, for Rabbi Gerlitzky to purchase clothing and the like. In the enclosed letter, the Rebbe wrote that he should dedicate himself to the yeshivah, the teaching of Torah, and the ways of *Chasidus* with self-sacrifice. And he should do it as he had in Poland: relishing the service of G-d as life's greatest pleasure.

"Chassidic Torah and mitzvahs, Chassidic service of the heart in prayer, good Chasidic character traits, with a fiery and intense love of your fellow Jew," all this, the Rebbe wrote, should be done with the unequivocal commitment to G-d, *kabbalas oyl*, in the "*shmaltz tepel*"—the boiling warmth of a pot of oil bringing life and taste to every aspect of the service of G-d.

The wedding was to take place in the winter of 1943. Rabbi Gerlitzky was the second of the nine students to marry, and the previous affair had become a spectacle, with crowds of Montrealers pushing and shoving to see the bride and her bearded bridegroom.

Thus, one of the nine students, Rabbi Leibel Kramer, was particularly concerned about maintaining order during the ceremony. As it turned out, it took all his energy to keep the crowds under control, and just when he had finally established some order, the grandfather of the bride, Reb Yosef Levi, got onto one of the tables and began to dance.

Rabbi Kramer politely approached him and suggested he dance on the floor. "I am trying to keep it as organized as possible, and here you are dancing on the table!" But Reb Yosef Levi, most of whose children had assimilated, could not contain his joy at his granddaughter's mar-



Their keshubah.

rying a religious young man. "Ah," he replied, "when you will marry off a granddaughter, you will also dance on the table."

Leaving the Tent

As the first of the nine students to be designated as a teacher, Rabbi Gerlitzky expected to continue in that role. “G-d should assist you to manage in the ‘tent’ [four corners] of Torah and mitzvahs,” the Rebbe wrote to him during his first years in Montreal, “and be well materially and spiritually.”

Material considerations soon took precedence, however. With the yeshivah in dire need of funds, one summer, the young rabbis split up and traveled to towns outside of Montreal to raise money. They had little success—one student was unable to pay for his train ride back home. Only Rabbi Gerlitzky seemed to have a knack for getting Canadian Jews to give.

In 1943, he took another trip with the Rashag to raise funds for the Central Lubavitch Yeshivah. And once again, he was successful.

Without consulting him, it was proposed to the Rebbe that he should travel regularly to fundraise. The Rebbe approved of the idea, writing to Rabbi Kramer, “In regards to my colleague, student, Rabbi Moshe Elya Gerlitzky visiting the cities outside of Montreal to encourage them in the [support of the] needs of education, G-d should give him material and spiritual success in this.”

Rabbi Gerlitzky accepted the mission happily, though his personal preference lay elsewhere. He often expressed the wish to be “in the tent of Torah,” teaching at the yeshivah, and, in addition to his fundraising, he still managed to teach several classes each year.



The Rebbe Rayatz encouraging Rabbi Gerlitzky's teaching at the yeshivah, "The tent of Torah," 1942.

Indeed, his success as a fundraiser may have been due, in part, to his lack of interest in money. Larger donations never gave him particular pleasure; he found joy in the *way* people gave, and in their personal growth.

Once, on his way out of a small Canadian town, he realized that he had forgotten to visit a specific woman whom he called on every year. He would have to turn back, he told his companion, though they had already traveled for an hour. Much later, the woman's small donation in hand, the two set out again. Why, his companion asked, had they delayed themselves for such a small sum? Rabbi Gerlitzky responded with gusto, "She gives it with her whole heart."

A NEW REBBE

In the winter of 1950, the Rebbe Rayatz passed away. Many of the Chasidim asked the Ramash to become the Rebbe. But, during the year



*The Rebbe Rayatz's
letter to Rabbi
Kramer about Rabbi
Gerlitzky (number
four).*

following his father-in-law's passing, he steadfastly refused to assume leadership of the movement. Nevertheless, many, including the students in Montreal, considered him to be their Rebbe. "That year, even though he was not the Rebbe yet, we asked about all our needs...and he would respond," Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled. "We knew that there was no one else who could be Rebbe besides him."

On the 12th of Tammuz 1950, Rabbi Gerlitzky travelled to New York and went to see the Ramash. At one point, the Ramash told him to sit down.

The Lubavitch custom is not to sit in a private audience with a rebbe. "I knew that he was going to be the Rebbe," Rabbi Gerlitzky recalled, "so I did not want to." The Ramash repeated the invitation, but Rabbi Gerlitzky, increasingly uncomfortable, remained standing.



Rabbi Gerlitzky (sitting, second from left) leads a community gathering.

Finally, the Ramash seemed to realize what was going on. He gave Rabbi Gerlitzky a wide smile and left the issue alone.

During that year, the Ramash continued to lead *farbrengens*, which the Montreal students attended whenever they could. Each time, they came away more convinced that there could be no other replacement for the Rebbe Rayatz. “The talks were so precious,” Rabbi Gerlitzky said, “and when he wanted the crowd to be joyous, he began a happy *nigun*....They were always amazing.”

In the late 1940s, when the Rebbe Rayatz’s health was declining, someone asked Rabbi Gerlitzky what would be when the inevitable happened. “I almost fainted,” he recalled. He told the person, “What do you mean? The Rebbe will live forever. It cannot be that he will pass away from the world.”

His experience during the year after Yud Shevat 1950 had convinced him that, indeed, the Rebbe’s presence was still with them, albeit in a different form. And when the person approached him again, he had an answer ready: “The Ramash will be the Rebbe.”



A young Gerlitzky family.

A GIRLS' SCHOOL

Within a few years of their arrival in Montreal, the nine students, now young leaders, had built a successful Jewish day school for boys. Jewish girls in the city, however, had no choice but to attend in local public schools, supplementing their education with the yeshivah's after-school program run by the students.

One day, in the mid-1940s, Rabbi Gerlitzky received a call from the Ramash. "The Rebbe [Rayatz] says that there needs to be a Jewish girls' school in Montreal," he told him.

Rabbi Gerlitzky hung up feeling overwhelmed at the idea of creating a new institution out of thin air, but Mrs. Gerlitzky encouraged him to start small—with a class for their own daughters in their home. Thus, Montreal's first Jewish girls' school opened on the bottom floor of the Gerlitzky residence with a teacher handpicked and sent from New York.

While it had been relatively easy to recruit students for the boys' school, they found that Jewish parents at the time considered a Jewish education unnecessary for girls. Lacking students, the school closed.



*Speaking at a
yeshivah dinner.*

In 1954, Mrs. Gerlitzky wrote to the Rebbe about the idea again, and the Rebbe responded that he had voiced his opinion on the subject almost a decade earlier.

It was of the utmost importance that their daughters attend a Jewish day school, the Rebbe wrote, even if they had to board in someone's house in Brooklyn. Of course, it would be much better if a girls' school could be founded in Montreal. Soon thereafter, the Gerlitzkys, together with others, opened Beth Rivkah Academy of Montreal.

Time, and changing attitudes about women's role in society, had shifted the community's ideas about education for girls. Within the first year, fifty children were enrolled, and they had to rent a larger space for the school. Today, the Academy occupies several buildings that span a city block. It runs from preschool through high school, including a teachers' seminary, and enrolls nine hundred students.

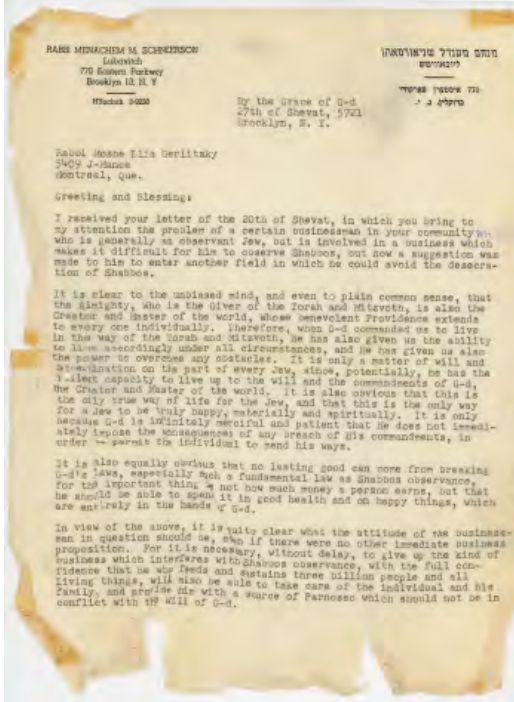
One Rabbi, Many Communities

Rabbi Gerlitzky's yearly trips made him the de facto rabbi for many of the communities he visited. The relationship continued throughout the year, as the communities turned to him for their Jewish needs, material and spiritual. His children recall lying in bed at night listening to their father talking to people across Canada. One community needed a chazzan, another some kosher food, yet another advice and a blessing. Rabbi Gerlitzky welcomed the calls and did his utmost to assist them.

When people asked for advice on weighty matters or for blessings, Rabbi Gerlitzky would connect them with the Rebbe. Often, he would consult the Rebbe on their behalf. "Thank you for the good news," the Rebbe wrote to him in 1957, "and the good prospects for [name omitted] and his son. It should be G-d's will that also in the future you should report good from all those you come in contact with."

Once, Rabbi Gerlitzky wrote to the Rebbe that a man in one of the communities he visited was having trouble keeping Shabbos because his job required him to work on Saturday. The Rebbe wrote a response in English (usually he wrote in Hebrew or Yiddish), so that the letter could be shown to the individual and others:

I received your letter of the 20th of Shevat, in which you bring to my attention the problem of a certain businessman in your community Mr. [name omitted], who is generally an observant Jew, but is involved in a business which makes it difficult for him to



The Rebbe's letter to Rabbi Gerlitzky about Shabbos.

observe Shabbos, but now a suggestion was made to him to enter another field in which he could avoid the desecration of Shabbos. It is clear to the unbiased mind, and even to plain common sense, that the Almighty, Who is the Giver of the Torah and Mitzvos, is also the Creator and Master of the World, Whose benevolent Providence extends to everyone individually. Therefore, when G-d commanded us to live in the way of the Torah and Mitzvos, He has also given us the ability to live accordingly under all circumstances and He has given us also the power to overcome any obstacles. It is only a matter of will and determination on the part of every Jew, since, potentially, he has the fullest capacity to live up to the will and commandments of G-d, the Creator and Master of the world. It is also obvious that this is the only way for a Jew to be truly happy, materially and spiritually. It is only because G-d is infinitely merciful and patient that He does not



*Receiving lekach
from the Rebbe.*

immediately impose the consequences of any breach of His commandments, in order to permit the individual to mend his ways. It is also equally obvious that no lasting good can come from breaking G-d's laws, especially such a fundamental law as Shabbos observance, for the important thing is not how much money a person earns, but that he should be able to spend it in good health and on happy things, which is entirely in the hands of G-d.

In view of the above, it is quite clear what the businessman in question should be, even if there were no other immediate business proposition. For it is necessary, without delay, to give up the kind of business which interferes with Shabbos observance, with the full confidence that He who feeds and sustains three billion people and all living things, will also be able to take care of the individual and his family, and provide him with a source of Par-



A letter from the Rebbe about Rabbi Gerlitzky's travels, specifically about his spreading Judaism to far flung communities, 1958.

nosso [livelihood,] which should not be in conflict with the will of G-d.

I trust you will convey the above to the gentleman in question, as well as to others who might be in a similar position.
 Hoping to hear good news from you,

The Rebbe was pleased that Rabbi Gerlitzky did not confine his activities to fundraising. “You should always report good news about the spreading of the wellsprings to outside,” the Rebbe wrote in the winter of 1958, “and this is a part of your activities. This should be done with the three known aspects of a person, with their body, money, and soul. ... Also in this we were commanded to ‘add in holiness,’ and whoever adds, [G-d] adds to them.”

The Happy Rabbi

“**W**e need to always be happy,” Rabbi Gerlitzky would say, beaming from ear to ear. And indeed, to his vast network of friends and acquaintances, he was a beacon of joy. Because he was indifferent to wealth and influence, he rarely got involved in community politics—it was the people who made up the community that he cared about.

His daily walk to shul was an opportunity to greet everyone he met and inquire about their wellbeing. Knowing that he always had a good word to say, people would smile as soon as they saw him.

After davening, he would announce the *mazel tovs* with enthusiasm, as though it were the first engagement or birth the community had ever had, making sure to add some specific details about the people involved.

When things went wrong, he never singled out individuals for blame, but encouraged change in the group. For example, when weekly booklets of the Chitas were becoming available in the community, he encouraged people not to forget to use a real *sefer* once in a while. Seeing that the *Tanyas* were sitting on the shelf, he banged on the table, “People, we need to use the *Tanyas*!”

His relationship with the Rebbe remained one of reverence and affection. He once described a dream he had: He came to 770, and it was empty aside from the Rebbe and his aides. The Rebbe looked worried, and he was told that the Rebbe’s *kapote* was at the cleaners, and





With his sons (left to right): Rabbis Menachem, Avraham and Yosef.

would not be ready in time for Shabbos. Rabbi Gerlitzky offered his own, which, in his dream, was new and nice. The Rebbe said, “If it is good on me, I will take it.”

Rabbi Gerlitzky became animated by the idea that he could make the Rebbe happy, even if only in a dream. “The kapote fit perfectly, and the Rebbe was then very serene.” The dream, he said, had ended with “great joy [in 770].”

His travel and his busy schedule limited the time that Rabbi Gerlitzky spent with his family. Shabbos, however, was reserved for them, and he made sure that they spent the time focused on the holiness and joy of the day.

Mrs. Gerlitzky was once reading the *Montreal Star* after Shabbos ended, and was shocked to learn that a train coming from a place her husband had just visited had been in a terrible crash the previous day.

Surely her husband could not have been onboard, she thought. He had arrived home late on Friday and spent a peaceful Shabbos with the family without mentioning anything. When she showed him the news, he nodded. “I was on the train.” Incredulous, she asked why he hadn’t



With some of his daughters.

said anything. He shrugged, with his signature smile. “There was no reason to worry anyone.”

On another occasion, he took his children outside after Shabbos to show them a new car that he had purchased on Friday. When his children asked why he had not told them about it before, he said, “I did not want the conversation on Shabbos to be about the car.”

MONTREAL THE UNFORGETTABLE

Though much of his time was spent traveling, Rabbi Gerlitzky never forgot about Montreal. It was his home, and he devoted his considerable powers to supporting and strengthening the Lubavitch community there.

Refugees who arrived in Montreal after the war without family had open invitations to the Gerlitzkys’ for meals. The couple hosted those in need during the week as well as on Shabbos, even when they themselves were living off a shoestring budget.

They once rented out a room in their home to a Holocaust survivor. Rabbi Gerlitzky knew the man would never be able to pay rent. To maintain the man's dignity, and Mrs. Gerlitzky's patience, he would give money to the man, who would then give it to Mrs. Gerlitzky as "rent."

Discretion and respect for those he helped were the rabbi's hallmarks. In the late 1980s, he noticed that there were families in the community who were not making ends meet. He asked a local organization to prepare checks for specific people, which he would cover. When he arrived at shul in the morning, he would walk around greeting people as usual, the checks tucked into the *siddurim* under his arm. When the people in question arrived, he greeted them warmly and handed them the prepared prayer books. In this way, one hundred families received weekly stipends for Shabbos.

In some cases, when people needed more help, he would approach a local free loan society and say, "This person needs a loan, make a check, and I will work out the payments with him."

Later, he would pay back the loan himself without telling anyone. After he passed away, it came out that he had paid many loans in this way. "He had a very big talent for hiding things that he knew from others," said Rabbi Yossi Kessler, director of the Montreal loan society. "He made as if he did not know, but then would discretely assist them."

A founding member of the Lubavitch shul he attended, Rabbi Gerlitzky established several *shiurim*, including the Daf Yomi shiur, in 1967, which continues until today. At many a *farbrengen*, he would say with deep conviction and excitement, "Moshiach needs to come already, immediately, now!" The congregants marveled that a man who had lost so much had maintained his faith with such purity.

Even into his nineties, Rabbi Gerlitzky seldom missed a service in shul. If he was in the hospital, he would make the effort to put on his hat and *kapote* before praying.

Before Pesach of 2010, at the age of 95, he came to shul as usual and asked the teachers if the yeshivah was up to date with their pay-



Rabbi Gerlitzky address a gathering of the Montreal community, circa 1998.

PHOTO: LUBAVITCH ARCHIVES

checks. Then he went to give out *shmurah* matzah to those who would otherwise not have it.

On *motzei Shabbos chol hamoed*, he completed his usual daily study regimen, studied Gemara with one of his grandchildren, and recited *Krias Shema* before bed with all of his signature enthusiasm.

The next morning, he woke up early in the morning, washed his hands and said *brachos*, and suddenly passed away.

Afterward, they found a small note asking that any money he possessed should go to support the community. When the extent of his charitable activities was discovered, several people established The Gerlitzky Shabbos Fund, which assists hundreds of families every week with their Shabbos and *yom tov* needs.

On the Thursday before his passing, Rabbi Gerlitzky told his son Rabbi Avrohom, “I crossed the ocean with nothing besides the clothing on my back. I have to thank G-d for the hundreds of grandchildren and great-grandchildren that G-d has blessed me with.”



The Shanghai Nigunim

[א]

פארבריינגען מיט חסידים

Chorus:

צו פארבריינגען מיט חסידים
צו זיין פריילאך
צו ווערען נענטער צו אונזער מלך
בקרב ממש וועט משיח קומען
דער העלם והסתר וועט ווערען אראפגענומען

ווי אזוי זאל זיך א איד פירן אויף דער וועלט
אז זיינע אויגן זאלן ניט זיין טונקל און פארשטעלט
ער זאל ניט לעבן ווי א חי' אויפן פעלד

א – אמונה צו האבען און צו לערנען תורה
צו דינען דעם בורא עולם מיט אהבה און מורא
אמונה צו האבען און צו לערנען פנימיות התורה
און צו טוען נאר דאס וואס איז דער רצון הבורא

Chorus

אמונה צו האבען און צום פארען צום רבי'ס
און דארטען צו זוכען דער דרך האמת
אמונה צו האבען און צו זיין מקושר צום רבי'ס
און נאך דעם וועט מען צוקומען צו א שטיקעלע אמת

Chorus

ב – בטחון צו האבען אין בורא עולם
אבער עס זאל זיין מיט שכל און נישט ווי קיין גולם
בטחון צו האבען אבער צו טאן א מעשה
וועט מקויים ווערען דער פסוק "וברכתיך בכל אשר תעשה"

Chorus

ווי אזוי זאל זיך א איד פירן אויף דער וועלט
אז זיינע אויגן זאלן ניט זיין טונקל און פארשטעלט
ער זאל נישט לעבן מיט קיין צרות אויף דער וועלט

ג – גאות פיינט צו האבען בתכלית השנאה
ווייל גאות איז דאך קעגען אמונה
מיט וואס האט דען א מענטש אזוי גרויס צו זיין
גרויס איז דאך נאר דער בורא עולם אליין

Chorus

גאות און אמונה זיינען דאך ממש באמת א סתירה
ווייל ישות און מציאות איז דאך דער ענין פון כפירה
עס איז דאך א חוב אויף יעדען אידען צו וויסען און פארשטיין
אז נישט דא קיין אנדערע מציאות אויף דער וועלט נאר דער בורא עולם אליין

Chorus

ד – "דעת" ווערט אנגערופען אין זוהר דער מפתח פון די מידות
דערפאר איז דאך דעת דער יסוד פו חסידות
מען קען זיין א מאמין און א חכם און א מבין
אבער עס פעלט עס דעת וועט זיך גארנישט אנהויבען

Chorus

ווי אזוי זאל זיך א איד פירן אויף דער וועלט
אז זיינע אויגן זאלן ניט זיין טונקל און פארשטעלט
ער זאל נישט לעבן ווי א צוטומולטער אויף דער וועלט

ה – התחזקות צו האבען און נישט קוקען אויף די שווערע צייט
נישט נתפעל ווערען וואס דער גייט און יענער שרייט
וואס אויף דעם אלעם זאגט דער רבי אז דאס נאר א מוכיח
אויף מקרב זיין אלעמען צו תשובה קודם ביאת המשיח

Chorus

ו – דער וואס האט אויגען און זעט אן דער וואס האט אויערען הערט די טריט
אז משיח קומט שוין אן און עס איז שוין די לעצטע עטליכע מינוט
משיח איז זייער נאענט און שטייט שוין ממש אונטער דער וואנט
דאס איז אלץ דעם רבי'ס ווערטער און נישט דער אייגינער פארשטאנד

Chorus

ז – זירוז צו האבען צו אנטלופען געשווינד

פן אזעלכע זאכען וואס קען ח"ו בריינגען צו א זינד
זירו צו האבען צו אויפנוצען די קורצע צייט
ווייל בקרוב וועלען אלע זען אז משיח גייט

Chorus

ווי אזוי זאל זיך א איד פירן אויף דער וועלט
אז זיינע אויגן זאלן ניט זיין טונקל און פארשטעלט
ער זאל נישט לעבן ווי אן חסידות אויף דער וועלט

ח – חסידות צו לערנען מיט גרויס יגיעה
אבער מען דארף וויסען אז נישט דער עיקר איז די ידיעה
צו חסידות דארף מען זיין בלב ונפש איבערגעגעבען
דעמאלט וועט מען מרגיש זיין דעם אמת'ען חסידי'שען לעבען

Chorus

ט – טהרה דארף מען וויסען איז פון די ערשטע יסודות
אן א טהרה איז גאנץ שווער צו טוען אין חסידות
אמת אז מקוה איז נישט קיין ספעציעל מצוה
אבער וואס מקוה פועלט אין נפש האט גארנישט קיין קצבה

Chorus

ווי אזוי זאל זיך א איד פירן אויף דער וועלט
אז זיינע אויגן זאלן ניט זיין טונקל און פארשטעלט
ער זאל נישט לעבן מיט קיין חיצוניות אויף דער וועלט

י – יראת שמים זאל מען וויסען קומט נישט פון חיצוניות אליין
נאר מען דארף פריער הארעווען אין חסידות מען זאל עפעס פארשטיין
אז נאר דורך הבנה און השגה דארף זיין דער ואהבת את ה' אלוך
אזוי ווי עס שטייט וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך

Chorus

כ – כבוד קדושת מורנו הבעש"ט האט מגלה געווען עבודה על פי השגה
און חב"ד פאדערט אין דעם פנימיות מיט א סדר והדרגה
אז נאר מיט אהבה און יראה ווערט ואהבת את ה' אלוך
אזוי ווי עס שטייט וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך

Chorus

ל – לומדות איז זייער גוט אז ווער רעדט נאך צו זיין א גאון
אבער נישט מיט דעם אליין קען מען דעם עולם החושך דורך טוען
מען דארף טאקע הארעווען אין "אביי ורבא"
מען דארף אבער אויך זיין געהיטען אין מעשה דיבור ומחשבה

Chorus

ליצנות לוינט אין גאנצען נישט צו דערמאנען ווייל עס איז פון די נידעריג'סטע זאכען
וואס בכדי זיך צו מאכען קלוג טוט מען פון צוויטען אפלאכען
און טאקע אן שכל אנושי איז דאס א מדה מגונה
און בפרט אז די חז"ל זאגען אויף דעם אז אין מקבלין פון שכינה

Chorus

מ – מחשבה צו היטען מיט א שמירה מעולה
מחשבה צו היטען דארף מען פארלייכען א סאך כח
ווייל נישט קיין מחשבה טובה איז פוגם אין מוח

Chorus

ווי אזוי זאל זיך א איד פירן אויף דער וועלט
אז זיינע אויגן זאלן ניט זיין טונקל און פארשטעלט
ער זאל נישט נאכגעבען מיט דער יצר הרע אויף דער וועלט

ג – נקמה צו נעמען דער יצר הרע וואס וועט איבערגיין די מענטש בזה ובבא
די יצר הרע איז ביי די מענטש אויף יעדער מינוט
מען דארף מיט איר מלחמה האלטען אויף יעדער שריט און טראט

Chorus

[ב]

אונזער פאטער אין הימעל

עצבי הגוים, כסף וזהב; מעשה, ידי אדם –
א געמאכטן גאט האבן זיי,
וואס זיי האבן אליין באשאפן.
אך און וויי און וויסט איז זיי,
א געמאכטן גאט האבן זיי!

Chorus:

אבער, אלוקינא בשמים: אונזער פאטער אין הימעל
כל אשר חפץ עשה: וואס ער וויל דאס טוט ער
וואס ער וויל דאס טוט ער, וועם ער וויל דעם גיט ער
וועמען ער וויל לייגט ער, און וועמען ער וויל הייבט ער

פח'להם, ולא ידברו –
א מויל האט זייער גאט

נאר ער קען נישט רעדן.
אך און וויי און וויסט איז זיי,
א שטומען גאט האבן זיי.

Chorus

עינים להם, ולא יראו –
אויגן האט זייער גאט,
נאר ער קען נישט זעען.
אך און וויי און וויסט איז זיי,
א בלינדן גאט האבן זיי.

Chorus

אזנים להם, ולא יאזינו –
אזנין האט זייער גאט
נאר ער קען נישט הערן.
אך און וויי און וויסט איז זיי,
א טויבן גאט האבן זיי!

Chorus

אף, איך־שִׁירוֹחַ בִּפְיָהֶם –
א נאז האט זייער גאט,
נאר ער קען נישט שמעקן.
אך און וויי און וויסט איז זיי,
א סמארקאטן גאט האבן זיי!

Rabbi Bryski's Favorites

בני (באבוב)

בני בני, אל תלך בדרך אתם מנע, מנע, מנע, מנע. מנע רגלך מנתיבתם

עד מתי

עד מתי עוזך בשבי ותפארתך ביד צר. עוררה גבורתך. . והושיענו למען שמך

יבוא אליהו

יבוא, יבוא אליהו ויבשרנו

יבוא אליהו ויבשרנו

יבוא אליהו ויבשרנו

וואס, וואס וועט ער אונז אנזאגן

אז יתגלה ויבוא משיח צדקנו

אז יתגלה ויבוא משיח צדקנו

אוי געוואלד, געוואלד, ווען וועט ער שוין קומען

שווייג, שרייט ניט, ער וועט באלד קומען

אבער ווען, ווען, ווען וועט עס אבער זיין

במהרה בימנו ממש

במהרה בימנו ממש

זאג שוין אלע, וואס פאר א טאג וועט דאמאלסט זיין

יום גילה יום רינה יום דיצה וחדוה, גילה רינה דיצה וחדוה.. אמן ואמן

א גוטע וואך

Chorus:

גוטע וואך א גוטע וואך

א גוטע וואך א גוטע וואך

איך בין געגאנגען אין א וואלד

שפילען פייגלאך יונג און אלט

איין פייגעלע שפילט רו רו רו

אדיר איום ונורא

בצר לי לך אקרא

ה' לי ולא אירא

רו רו רו רו רו רו

Chorus

איך בין געגאנגען אין א וואלד
שפילען פייגלאך יונג און אלט
איין פייגעלע שפילט לי לי לי
גדור פירצת היכלי
מהר חכלילי
ה' היה עוזר לי
לי לי לי לי לי לי

Chorus

איך בין געגאנגען אין א וואלד
שפילען פייגלאך יונג און אלט
איין פייגעלע שפילט סי סי סי
ה' אלקי ישועתי
סי סי סי סי סי סי

Chorus

בבנה ביתך (מודז'יץ)

בנה ביתך כבתחילה,
וכונן מקדשך על מכונו
והראנו בבנינו
ושמחנו בתיקונו

ובכן צדיקים (ברסלב)

ובכן צדיקים יראו וישמחו וישרים יעלוזו וחסידים ברנה יגילו