

תשורה

REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER:  
A DOCUMENTATION  
PART ONE.



BAR MITZVAH OF  
*Berl Pewzner*  
17 SIVAN 5782



## Greetings

Dear Family and Friends שיחי,

As per tradition at all momentous events, we begin by thanking Hashem for granting us life, sustaining us, and enabling us to be here together.

We are thrilled that you are able to share in our simcha, Berl's Bar Mitzvah. Indeed, Jewish tradition highlights the significance of celebrating a Bar Mitzvah with family and friends.

In honor of this simcha and in connection to the 35th yahrtzeit of Berl's great-grandfather and namesake, Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner, we are honored to share with you a unique publication with the story of his life, titled: Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner: A Documentation - Part One.

We hope that this teshura will inspire the readers, including many of Reb Sholom Ber's descendants, to follow in his unique way and keep up the special family tradition.

We would like to thank Rabbi Hertzel Pewzner for doing much of the research and directing the writing.

We would also like to thank Rabbi Yankel Oster for his help in the writing and editing.

In addition, we would like to thank Rabbi Dovi Levy for heading and coordinating this project.

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

**Nissen and Mira Pewzner**

14 Sivan 5782 (2022)



CHAPTER 1

# Roots

## Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner

The goal of this publication is to document the life of Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner and to provide a glimpse into his character and personality. His life of just sixty years was filled with so much, and this writing is a first attempt to tell his story. The information presented is gleaned from his archives and stories recounted by his children and acquaintances. This account is in no way comprehensive, but the hope is that it will be a small step in perpetuating his memory for the time to come.

Born in communist Russia and educated in the spirit of dedicated *Mesirus Nefesh* for *Yiddishkeit* and *Chassidus*, Reb Sholom Ber lived by his convictions. He was known for his deep mind and gentle soul. His unique blend of ever-sensitive graciousness and perceptive wit brought him to be appreciated by so many while he always retained his own rich inner world of ideas, inspirations, and perspective.

After spending the years of World War II learning in the underground Yeshivos of



*Reb Sholom Ber at age 22, Paris, France. Photo dated 21 June 1949*

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Tomchei Temimim and ultimately arriving in France, he prepared to travel to the Frierdiker Rebbe in New York. Just as plans were being finalized, he became engaged to Rochel Nemanov, the daughter of the famed chasid, Reb Nissan Nemanov. They married in Adar 5710 (1950), weeks after the Frierdiker Rebbe's passing, and they arrived in America several months later at the inception of the Rebbe's nesius. Unaffected by what he called "the humel-tumel of America," they built their family on the solid foundations of Chassidus and simple Jewish integrity. Reb Sholom Ber was gifted with an array of talents and interests, but his pursuits were always focused on the *kavanah Elyonah* and fulfilling the Rebbe's instructions. His life was filled with gratitude, and his loving dedication to his family was legendary.

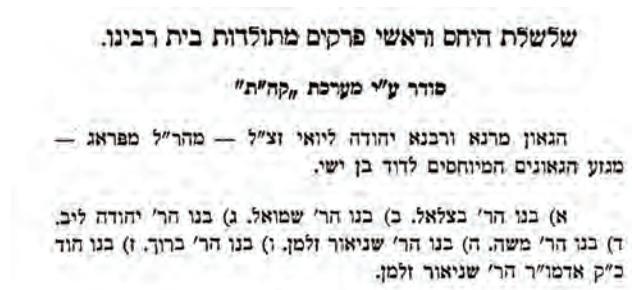
In his signature quiet demeanor and unassuming posture, Reb Sholom Ber rarely spoke about himself, yet hopefully, this collection will provide a glimpse into who he was.

### The Pewzner Family

Reb Sholom Ber's genealogical background revolves entirely around one family, the Pewznors or as they were originally called, the Poizners. His father was a Pewzner, as was his mother's grandmother. Furthermore, his father's parents were also both Pewznors. The common ancestor on all sides was Reb Moshe Ber Poizner, the son of the Alter Rebbe's brother, the holy Gaon Reb Mordechai.

The Pewzner or Poizner name originates from the city of Posen (or Poznan) in modern-day Poland. In this city, which was once significant enough to be its own autonomous state, lie the roots of the family from over ten generations ago.

As detailed in the beginning of *HaYom Yom*, the Alter Rebbe and, by extension, his brother Reb Mordechai were direct descendants of the famous Maharal of Prague. Their father, the *tzaddik*



*HaYom Yom's Listing of the Seven Generations from the Maharal to the Alter Rebbe*

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - ROOTS

Reb Baruch was the son of Reb Shneur Zalman, a melamed in Liozna, whose father was Reb Moshe, the Rosh Hakohel of Posen and a great-great-grandson of the Maharal. It appears that Reb Moshe was the first one to use the last name Poizner, given his leadership role in representing the community.

### The Family's Historical Timeline

In what is unusual for families in the post-holocaust world, the Pewzner family is traceable in a father-to-son line for many generations back. As a direct father-to-son descendent of the Alter Rebbe's brother Reb Mordechai, in turn a father-to-son descendent of the Maharal whose direct lineage goes back to the *Geonim* of Bavel, direct descendants of *Dovid HaMelech* and *Malchei Beis Dovid*, Reb Sholom Ber can be tracked to be the 124th generation from *Adam HaRishon*.

A brief history would run as follows: *Yechonya* or *Yehoyachin HaMelech* was the second to last king of the family of *Malchei Beis Dovid*. Eleven years before the destruction of Bayis Rishon, this nineteenth-generation descendent of *Dovid HaMelech* was exiled to Bavel, leaving his uncle Tzidkiyahu to be the last king of Yehudah. However, despite their exile, the family's role as Talmidei Chachomim and leaders of the Jewish people did not end at that point.

In Bavel, Yechonya served as the first Reish Galusa — the leader of the Jewish people in exile — as did his son Shaltiel and his grandson Zerubavel. Notably, Zerubavel, of whom the Gemara states that he was fit to be Moshiah, was instrumental in returning the Jewish people to Eretz Yisroel and rebuilding the Second Beis Hamikdash. Despite his arrival in Eretz Yisroel, he later returned to Bavel to continue his role as the Reish Galusa, a position his descendants would hold for about 1500 years.

There would become several branches within the dynasty of Reish Galusa. The Pewzner family originates from the first line of Rashei Galusa who would later turn towards becoming the Torah leaders of the times. Some of the Rashei Galusa held dual positions of leadership, serving both as the political leader as well as the leading Rosh Yeshivah of the generation. Primary examples are Rav Huna the elder — of the last generation of Tannaim — and Mar Ukva — of the second generation of Amoraim — as well as other prominent teachers of Torah of the time from whom the family descends.

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When the office of the Reish Galusa was temporarily disrupted by the Persian authorities, the family fled to Eretz Yisroel. The position of Reish Galusa in Bavel was taken by their relatives while they would serve as Roshei Yeshiva in Teveria for ten generations. Following this, they moved back to Bavel where they would remain for a further five generations as Torah leaders culminating in Rav Sharira Gaon and his son, Rav Hai Gaon, perhaps the most influential of the Gaonim and the greatest Torah leader of his generation.

Following Rav Hai Gaon, the family moved to Spain for apparently around 200 years. They then moved to Germany, eventually bringing us to Reb Yehuda Leib, the Maharal's great-great-grandfather, who was Rosh Yeshiva in Worms, Germany, a longtime center of Jewish life and Torah study. Reb Chaim, the grandson of Reb Yehuda Leib and the grandfather of the Maharal, sent his son Reb Betzalel to Posen where he would later serve as Rosh Hakohel. This move to Poland cemented the family into the history of Eastern European Jewry's Torah leaders.

Although he is known as the Maharal of Prague, the second Rabbi Yehuda Leib spent his life moving back and forth between Prague in Bohemia — modern day Czech Republic — and Posen in Poland. He would serve as Rav in both cities, in a fascinating unofficial rotation with the Levush, Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe. The Maharal's son Reb Betzalel was Rosh Yeshiva in Cologne, Germany. In turn, Reb Betzalel's son Reb Shmuel served as Rosh Hakohel in Prague, and Reb Shmuel's son Yehuda Leib moved back to Posen where he served as Av Beis Din. Reb Yehuda Leib had a son named Moshe who became Rosh Hakohel in Posen, and as mentioned above, he was the great-grandfather of the Alter Rebbe and Reb Mordechai. As stated, it seems that he was the first one to be given the last name Poizner.

In a few short paragraphs, a few thousand years of Jewish history have been outlined. Leaders have been named, and the background of the canvas has been filled in. Perhaps interesting to note is how the generations switched back and forth between roles of community leaders to positions of Torah giants. This happened as the family went from Yerushalayim to Bavel to Spain to Germany to Poland and Prague, finally arriving in Posen.

### **Posen and Beyond**

Reb Moshe Posner, the Rosh Hakohel of Posen, was quite the character. He was a noted Talmid Chacham, as well as a community leader. He was a

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - ROOTS

successful advocate for the welfare of the Jewish community, even traveling to the Vatican for this purpose. Interestingly, although the Maharal was a Kabbalist, Reb Moshe actually opposed the spread of *pnimiyus haTorah* and its lifestyle.

Reb Moshe's son Reb Shneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe's grandfather, was the son-in-law of Reb Boruch Batlan, also of Posen. Reb Baruch descended from Portuguese Jews who fled the inquisition and was a dedicated follower of Reb Yoel Baal Shem of Zamutch, the primary successor of Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem of Worms. As is well known, these *Baalei Shem* served as the forerunners of Chassidus in many ways. Together with his scholarly wife, Rebbetzin Rochel, Reb Shneur Zalman led a life in line with *pnimiyus haTorah*. Thus, the Pewzner family is intertwined with the very genesis and evolution of Chassidus, even before it was an official movement. Reb Shneur Zalman and Rochel had a child named Boruch, named after his grandfather, and moved to Liozna in the north of modern-day Belarus. The town was then associated more with Lithuania, leading the Alter Rebbe to be known as the Litvak.

In the memoirs of the Frieddiker Rebbe, he describes the life-journey of Reb Baruch who was orphaned at a young age. He details how he came to discover Chassidus, ultimately becoming a chassid of the Baal Shem Tov. Reb Baruch married Rebbetzin Rivkah, the daughter of the hidden tzaddik Reb Avraham “the gardener” of Liozna, and they established their home in an estate just outside of Liozna. There, they raised their outstanding children while Reb Baruch provided a livelihood for many Jewish families.

### **Reb Mordechai's Family**

The marriage of the Alter Rebbe and Reb Mordechai's parents, Reb Baruch and Rebbetzin Rivkah, took place in the summer of 5503/1743, and the Alter Rebbe was their eldest child, born in 5505/1745. Reb Mordechai, was their third son, born after Reb Yehuda Leib and before Reb Moshe. In the early days of Chabad, he would live in Liozna alongside the Alter Rebbe, and later, he would serve as Rov in Orsha. Although surely incomparable to the Alter Rebbe, the Frieddiker Rebbe describes Reb Mordechai with great praise, among them titling him HaRav HaKodesh. In the inception of the Alter Rebbe's leadership, he was instrumental in the Chadorem — the special advanced Yeshivos — which the Alter Rebbe set up. There, his focus was on the in-depth and organized teaching of Nigleh and in the adminis-

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tration of tests on the subject matter.

The Tzemach Tzedek described his great uncle Reb Mordechai as being tremendously sharp and a master of deep, yet straightforward thinking. His multi-tiered layers of explanation were always especially clear and pleasant. After the Alter Rebbe's passing in 5573/1812, Reb Mordechai worked alongside his brother the Maharil in reviewing the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch in preparation for print. Reb Mordechai passed away ten years after the Alter Rebbe on 11 Adar, 5583/1823, and is buried in Kapust.

Reb Mordechai and his wife had at least one son and two daughters. The son was named Moshe Dov Ber, which is speculated to be for Reb Mordechai's grandfather, Reb Moshe of Posen, and for the Maggid of Mezritch. Interestingly, this seems to identify Reb Mordechai as a talmid or chassid of the Maggid in addition to his hiskashrus to his brother, the Alter Rebbe. One of the daughters whose name is unknown married a Reb Shimon Lifshitz, and their son was the Chassidisher Gaon, Reb Dovber Lifshitz. The Rov of Vietka, Belarus, he is known for his sefer *Gulos Iliyos* on the laws of Mikvah. The second daughter (perhaps Basya) became the matriarch of the Levertov family.

### **The Two Brothers and Their Families**

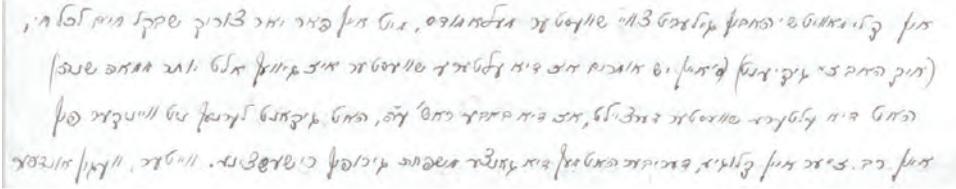
Reb Moshe Dov Ber — the son of Reb Mordechai and cousin of the Mittlerer Rebbe — had two sons, Shneur Zalman and Boruch Tzadok.<sup>1</sup>

It is unclear as to where Reb Moshe Dov Ber lived, but his son Reb Shneur Zalman resided in the town of Chaslavitch, Russia, which was relatively close to the town of Lubavitch. Meanwhile, Reb Boruch Tzadok would move to Klimovitch, a town where Chassidim lived even in the era of the Alter Rebbe. There, he married an outstanding character in the Klimovitch community. Her name was Risha, and it is possible that she was somehow a relative. She was known to be a very learned individual and a tremendous *yirei Shamayim*. Many years later, two older women of the local Melamed family who had survived the war would tell over that she was a Talmid Chacham on the caliber of a Rov.<sup>2</sup>

1 There is a Pasachson family who claims that there was also a daughter of Reb Moshe Dov Ber named Tzipora who married a Shimon Dov Ber Pasachson and had a large family. At this point, we were unable to verify this information.

2 In the Klomovitch cemetery, there is a kever of Rochel Melamed born in 1888 and passed on in 1979. It is likely that she is the one referred to here.

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*Letter of Itche Mordechai Pewzner dated 22 Iyar 5744 recording the recollection of these women.*

It is said that she had been married previously and had five daughters before deciding to divorce her husband for not being a *yirei Shamayim* to her standard.<sup>3</sup> Reb Boruch Tzadok and Risha would have another five daughters together. Their oldest was Masha Mala who was known to be an unusually holy woman. She would daven at great length and was turned to for spiritual healing. She would marry her first cousin, Reb Mordechai, the son of Reb Schneur Zalman, and is viewed as the matriarch of the extended Pewzner family of today. Her sisters include Chana, who married Reb Shmuel Dovid Belinov, a local bachur; Sheina Rochel, who married Reb Avraham Abba Bunin; and Chaya Sarah, who married Reb Moshe Nissan Azimov. In the town of Klimovitch, this family stood out and was often called by a nickname “Rishastzine,” that can be loosely translated as “Risha’s bunch.” Today, many thousands of Lubavitcher chassidim trace their lineage to at least one of these sisters.

Meanwhile in Chaslavitch, Reb Shneur Zalman had at least three children, Sheina Basya (Basha), Mordechai, and Boruch Yaakov.<sup>4</sup>

Sheina Basya (Basha) lived her days in Chaslavitch where she married a fellow by the name of Reb Yisroel Chazanova and had at least four children. She would live to an advanced age of almost 100 years old, ranging somewhere from the 1830s to the 1930s. Particularly relevant to this documentation, she was the paternal grandmother of Esther Hadassa, Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner’s mother. Her children were Frada; Fayga Eidele who married Reb Yitzchok Agarashkin, the parents of Esther Hadassah; Pesach; and Sima.

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<sup>3</sup> Risha had a son named Yehudah Leib Kasachkov of Khotsimsk who was most likely from her first marriage. Additionally, she also had a grandson Nochum Ber Natkin.

<sup>4</sup> While the name or background of Reb Shneur Zalman’s wife is unknown, there is reason to speculate that it was Esther Hadassa. This is in consideration of the two known instances in which the eldest children of her descendants carry this name.

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Reb Mordechai was younger than his sister and was probably born in the 1840s. Named for his great-grandfather the Alter Rebbe's brother, he was known for his gracious demeanor and deep mind. He was also a talented orator and *baal menagen*. As mentioned, he would move to Klimovitch and marry his cousin Masha Mala, the daughter of his uncle Reb Baruch Tzadok. They were the paternal grandparents of Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner, the subject of this documentation, and are the forebearers of the present day Pewzner family.

Reb Boruch Yaakov, Reb Shneur Zalman's second son, remained in Chaslavitch and married a local girl of the Rizberg family. They were somehow related, and the shidduch was arranged for him to be able to take on their family name and avoid the draft. Reb Boruch Yaakov was a Melamed and a thoroughly Chassidishe Yid. In what can only be seen as recognition of his impressive, value-focused character, the Misnagdishe Rov of Chaslavitch, Reb Moshe Soloveichik, the son of Reb Chaim Brisker, asked Reb Boruch Yaakov to teach his son Yosef Ber who would eventually become famously known as Rabbi J. B. Soloveichik. On many occasions, Rabbi J. B. who would attest that he had Chassidishe values embedded within him for the duration of his life by his childhood Melamed. Reb Boruch Yaakov had several children, including a daughter Shifra who passed on in 5732.

### Reb Sholom Ber's Grandparents and Parents

As stated, the Pewzner family of today descends from both Reb Shneur Zalman and Reb Baruch Tzadok. Sometime in the 1870s, the Shidduch was made between the children of these two brothers with the approval of the Rebbe Maharash, and Reb Shneur Zalman's son Reb Mordechai married Masha Mala, Reb Baruch Tzadok's daughter.

Reb Mordechai and Masha Mala would have three daughters followed by a single surviving son. The oldest was Esther Hadassah who married Reb Shlomo Chaim Feldman and was followed by Sheina Basha who married Reb Yehoshua Zelig HaKohen Rivkin. These two sons-in-law were local Klimovitch Bochurim. The third daughter, Chana Michla, married the *tomim* Reb Yisroel Neveler. Each of these sisters are the forebearers of



*Masha Mala Pewzner.  
Photo in possession of Mrs.  
Zelda Saks of Kfar Chabad*

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large Lubavitch families.

Reb Mordechai and Masha Mala also bore several sons but none would survive infancy. Their youngest child was a son named Shmuel who was born in 5649/1888. He was named for the Rebbe Maharash who was *nistalek* several years earlier in 5643/1882. As is well known, his mother Masha Mala had his ear pierced and affixed him with a golden earring soon after his birth as a spiritual *shmira* that he not perish like his brothers. Additionally, she made a *gorel* as to which food he should not eat as some *segulah*, and as a result, he refrained from eating liver.

Reb Shmuel was a devoted chasid with a generous heart and bright mind. He was well-liked and respected by all who knew him. As a bachur, Shmuel spent several years learning in Tomchei Temimim in Lubavitch, as did many of his relatives. These years were especially formative for Reb Shmuel, and he forever yearned to live everyday life with the full inspiration and devotion of Tomchei Temimim.

As was already common in his family, Reb Shmuel also married a relative. As mentioned, his father Reb Mordechai had an older sister who lived in Chaslavitch named Sheina Basya. As also conveyed, Sheina Basya's eldest daughter was Feige Eidela who was married to a Yitzchok Agarashkin or Agorskin. At this point, Feige Eidela's oldest daughter, Esther Haddassah, was of marriageable age, and the shidduch was made between her and Reb Shmuel Pewzner. Simply put, Esther Haddasa was Reb Shmuel's first cousin once removed. As a result, Reb Sholom Ber's roots can be traced three different ways to the Alter Rebbe's brother Reb Mordechai, twice through his father's side and once through his mother's.

Born in 5656/1895, Esther Haddasa was about six years younger than Shmuel but had already lived through a lot. She grew up in the town of



*Reb Shmuel Pewzner in his younger years*

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Chaslavitch, where her mother's family lived. Her father, Reb Yizchok Agarashkin, was a rather simple businessman who traveled the area pursuing trade. Reb Yitzchok and Feige Eidla had five children together. As stated, Esther Haddasa was the oldest and was followed by three sisters, Tamar (or Tamara as she was called), Chaya, and Brochah, and finally a brother named (Yisroel) Alter.

Tragically, Reb Yizchok once returned from his business travels with a chill and passed away soon thereafter. Feige Eidela was left a widow with a house of young children. She struggled to support them, and eventually, Tamar was sent to America where she was sponsored by Reb Yitzchok's brother.<sup>5</sup> After Esther Hadassa's marriage, Chaya would live with her in her household as an almost big sister to the children, while Brochah and (Yisroel) Alter remained with their mother.



*The Agarshkin family. From left to right: Esther Hadassah, Brochah, Chaya, (Yisroel) Alter, their mother Feige Eidla.*

Some time after Reb Yitzchak's passing, Feiga Eidela remarried Reb Zelig, the Rov and Shochet of Zacharina, near Chaslavitch. Unfortunately, he too passed away in the mid-1920s and she was left a double widow. After the war, Feige Eidla spent some time in Samarkand where she lived with her grandchildren, Reb Sho-

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<sup>5</sup> Tamara married a fellow whose last name was Kral and lived her life in Detroit. Unfortunately, her husband passed away young in 1957. She was survived by at least one son named Philip.

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lom Ber's brothers, first with Reb Yisroel and then with Reb Itche Mordechai. She passed away 17 Teves, 5710/1950.

Eventually, Esther Hadassa's sister Chaya married Reb Meir Rivkin, the son of Nachman Yehoshua Rivkin. After surviving the war, they immigrated to Eretz Yisroel where they lived with their family in Kfar Chabad. She lived a long and fruitful life of kindness and passed away on 4 Adar 5747/1987. Brochah who was born in 1905, was married and widowed and would live out her years in the Russian village of Kresttsy, passing away on 29 Tishrei, 5743/1982. The youngest sibling, Alter, was killed by the Nazis in Smolensk.



*Reb Itche Mordechai Pewzner at the kever of Feige Eidla Agarashkin*

## Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassa's Children

The marriage of Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassa took place in Klimovitch on Tuesday, 13 Shvat, 5673/1913. Initially, the couple lived in an apartment in the same large house as Reb Shmuel's parents and married sisters. The whole family was under one roof, and the house was quite a happening place.

At the time of their marriage, Reb Shmuel's fa-



*Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassah's Wedding invitation*

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ther, Reb Mordechai, was unwell, and he passed away several months later on 24 Iyar, 5673/1913.<sup>6</sup> He was buried in Klimovitch where his grave remains intact to this day. During this time, the 24-year-old Reb Shmuel assumed many of his father's responsibilities and inherited his place in shul which was adjacent to the Rov.

Eventually, upon the guidance of the Rebbe Rashab, Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassa would move to their own home where they would raise their children.

At least after World War I, they

lived at 32 Sivreler Street. The house was simple. Like most homes in Klimovitch, it was built of wood and did not have running water. It was furnished with one kerosene lamp. "When it was cold, the wind blew through all the holes and cracks, yet we were happy," the oldest child, Itche Mordechai, would later remember.

The couple would have seven children, five boys and two girls.

In their first year of marriage on 7 Kislev, 5674/1913, they had their first son and named him Yitzchok Mordechai after both of his grandfathers. As mentioned above, Reb Yitzchok Agarashkin had passed away a while back, and Reb Mordechai Pewzner had just recently passed away a half a year earlier.



*Reb Mordechai's kever  
as photographed in  
5731/1971*



*The kever as it appears today*

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<sup>6</sup> It seems that he suffered from some terminal illness for several years. Evidence for this can be found from the fact the Reb Shmuel refers to his father as Mordechai Chaim in the year 5670/1910. Considering the fact that the name Chaim does not appear on his matzeivah, nor was it given to descendants named after him, it is fair to assume that it was added due to an illness from which he did not recover—in which case the added name is not retained.

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*Reb Shmuel Pewzner*



*Esther Hadassa Pewzner*



*Reb Itche Mordechai and Esther Pewzner*

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Itche Mordechai, as he was called, was an intelligent child and would later document many of his early memories in his eloquent pen. He was a *tomim* who studied in various yeshivos during his youth and married his first cousin Rivkah Levin, the daughter of Reb Yisroel Neveler and Chana Michla. They had one son together. In 1941, Itche Mordechai was drafted into the Russian army where he was wounded in battle sometime in 1943. Meanwhile, his wife and son were killed by the Nazis *Yms"b* together with his parents. Itche Mordechai remarried to Esther, the daughter of Zalman and Rivkah Fradkin, and together they had two children, Hadassah and Shmuel.<sup>7</sup> Due to his ill health, Itche Mordechai never made it out of Russia and lived in Riga. He lived like a chasid his entire life, and by means of his brother, Reb Sholom Ber, he was in constant contact with the Rebbe. He passed away on 19 Tishrei, 5746/1985, and is buried in Riga.

Their second son, Yisroel, was born on 10 Nissan 5675/1915 and was named after Esther Hadassa's maternal grandfather, Reb Yisroel Chazanova, the husband of Sheina Basha of Chaslavitch. He was known as a *geshamke chassidisher yid* whose *ahavas Yisroel* was legendary. He too was a *tomim* who studied in various yeshivos during his youth and married a Pewzner relative Risha Belinov. After being an influential member of Anash in Smarkand and Riga, he managed to immigrate to Eretz Yisroel in 1970. He and Risha had three children, Chanah Brosky, Esther Goldstein, and *yblch"t* Zlata Litzman of Nachlas Har Chabad. Reb Yisroel passed away on 20 Teves, 5756/1996.

Soon afterwards, in approximately 5677/1917, Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassah had their first daughter. She was named Risha after her grandmother Risha Poizner, Masha Mala's mother. In 1936, she would marry the noted *tomim*, Reb Chaim Hillel Azimov, also a Pewzner relative. After leaving Russia, they arrived in France where they served in various roles doing the Rebbe's work. They had seven children, and she passed away on 1 Sivan 5765/2005 and is the grandmother of today's extended Azimov family.

Sometime around 5678/1918, their third son, Pesach, was born. He was a distinguished *tomim* and is remembered for his *eidelkeit* and *yiras Shamayim*. Tragically, during the time when he was learning in the yeshivah

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<sup>7</sup> Hadassah married Shmuel Menachem Mendel Rivkin who is a descendent of Reb Baruch Tzadok and Risha Poizner, and they have two sons. Both the Rivkins and Shmuel Pewzner immigrated from Russia in the early 1990s and reside in Petach Tikvah.

REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - ROOTS



*Reb Yisroel Pewzner*



*Mrs. Risha Azimov*



*Hatomim Pesach Pewzner*



*Mrs. Chana Gurevitch*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

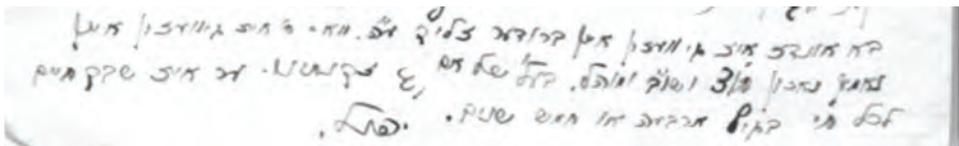
in Samarkand hunger was rampant and he went without food. Not wishing to bother anyone too much about himself, he ate some grasses which were possibly poisonous and passed away on Shushan Purim, most likely of 5704 or 5705 (1944 or 1945).

Soon after their son Pesach was born, the family was forced to flee Klimovitch. World War I was raging in the region, and as many people did at the time, the Pewznerns fled south to Ukraine. They arrived in Yekaterinoslav, where the Rebbe's parents led the activities of tending to the large influx of refugees. There they found an apartment and lived for some while. There, Reb Shmuel would spend much time basking in the presence of the Rebbe's father, the holy Gaon and Mekubal Reb Levi Yitzchok Shneerson. As the war ended, the Russian revolution broke out, and as several revolutionary groups fought against each other, the Jewish community was caught in the middle and targeted from all sides. At that time, there were several close calls when fighters entered the home and threatened them with weapons. Itche Mordechai remembered their mother's bravery in diffusing at least two such attacks.

A few years later, in approximately 5684-5685/1924-1925 on 20 Tamuz, their second daughter, Chana, was born. In 1936, she was sent away from home to avoid attending the communist school and lived with her already married sister Risha Azimov in Homel. In 1946, she would marry Reb Yissochor Ber (Berel) Gurevitch just before leaving Russia while he was arrested and prevented from leaving. They were reunited in France in 1949 and went on to direct Beis Rivkah of Yerres, France. Together, they raised a large family of twelve children. Chana passed away on 30 Nissan, 5760/2000.

The subject of our documentation, Reb Sholom Ber, was born on 18 Kislev, 5687/1926.

Sometime after 1924 and likely after the birth of Sholom Ber in 1926, a fifth boy, Zelig was born. He was named after Esther Hadassa's step-fa-



*Undated Letter of Reb Itche Mordechai Pewzner where he informs Reb Sholom Ber about this brother Zelig.*

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - ROOTS

ther, Reb Zelig, the second husband of Feiga Eidla who had recently passed away. He had been the Rov and Shochet of Zacharina, a town outside of Chaslavitch and was a notable *yirei Shamayim*. Little is known about this brother Zelig aside from the fact that he did not survive childhood and passed away at four or five years old.

In the following chapters, Reb Sholom Ber's story will be told. Hopefully, this introductory chapter offers some context to his life, personality, and ideals. It is valuable to point out that much of the information in this chapter was not known to Reb Sholom Ber, at least not until his later years. He lived life focused on the present and never gave off any flair about his ancestry. It can be said that this itself is an emulation of his illustrious ancestors. Just as they did not pride themselves with their lineage or talents, so too he perceived himself with a certain no-nonsense simplicity.









CHAPTER 2

# Childhood

**R**eb Sholom Ber Pewzner was born on Yud Ches Kislev, 5687/1926, in the town of Klimovitch, or Klimavichy, Belarus. As detailed in the previous chapter, his family had roots there which stretched back for several generations. He was the family's first son born after the passing of the Rebbe Rashab in 5680/1920 and was thus named Sholom Dovber.

For Russian Jewry in general, and Chabad chassidim in particular, the years of Sholom Ber's childhood, the 1930s, were quite tumultuous. The communist regime was already well established, and they had made significant headway in uprooting the basic infrastructure of Yiddishkeit.

The events of World War I and the Russian revolution which followed caused drastic changes to life in Russia. Almost a decade prior to Reb Sholom Ber's birth, the family had been forced to flee to Yekaterinoslav, joining many families of Jewish refugees. There, they underwent hardship and trauma which they withstood with conviction. After the war, the Pewzner family was able to return home to Klimovitch and reestablish themselves. However, the town they came back to was not quite as they had left it.

## **The Klimovitch of His Youth**

Before the war, in 1913, Klimovitch was home to 3,400 Jews who made up half of the local population. All of the town's shops and businesses were exclusively Jewish owned with the non-Jews focusing on farming, a forbid-

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

den occupation for Jews at the time. The community had five active shuls, numerous chadorim, and a Yeshivah. While the majority of the community's Jews were affiliated with Chassidim, the non-chassidim ran three of the five shuls, as well as the yeshivah. Its Rosh Yeshiva had been Rabbi Eliezer Henkin, the father of the famous Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin who immigrated to America in the early 1920s and headed the organization Ezras Torah. Overall, Yiddishkeit flourished and almost all of the Yidden were properly observant.

These conditions changed drastically over the course of the next decade. Communism subjected all of the shops to repossession by the government, and the yeshivah was closed in 1922. The Jewish community struggled economically, and by the time Reb Sholom Ber was born in 1926, there were only 2,600 Jews living in Klimovitch. In 1929, the shuls were closed as well, and chassidim held small minyanim in homes.

As was the case throughout the Soviet Union, Chassidim made every effort to keep Yiddishkeit afloat. One documented example is a letter sent to the Frierdiker Rebbe in 5694/1934 which reports that Klimovitch had a properly functioning Mikvah.

Overall, the local communist party put little effort in persecuting the Chassidim. Instead, they focused most of their resources in assimilating the youth and transforming the local young Jews into communist workers. They set up reeducation farms just outside of town and welcomed the locals.

### **The Pewzner Family's Circumstances**

For the Pewzner family, times were not easy. Parnosah wasn't plentiful to say the least, and they had to extend every effort to raise their children as chassidim. Reb Itche Mordechai would later point out the endless amount of credit their mother deserves. "She was a Tzadeikes in the fullest sense of the word," he wrote. Despite the challenges and all the physical and emotional trauma from their time in Ukraine, she was always positive and never said a bad word about anything. No matter how little they had, she always made it feel that they had plenty, and the children felt content with what they had.

During the early 1920s, Esther Hadassa would rise early and bake bread. Then, she would go and sell it in the market, making just enough to keep

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - CHILDHOOD

some for her family. Itche Mordechai would recall the scene of her returning in the black scarf she wore as a tichel and her distinctive green jacket.

Providing their children a proper chinuch was Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassa's ultimate priority, and thank G-d, their efforts bore fruit. Despite the steep challenges of the time, every one of their children ultimately lived as fully committed chassidim. This did not come easy, and to avoid sending their children to communist influenced schools, they often had to send their children away from home.

In 1924, they sent ten-year-old Itche Mordechai to Chaslavitch to learn with his uncle, the famed melamed Reb Baruch Yaakov. Later, he went to other communities where he remembered eating "teg" in the homes of local families. Similarly, Yisroel and Pesach each left home in those years, going to learn in the various underground Yeshivos.

These conditions provide at least some of the background for Sholom Ber's childhood. It seems that growing up he would barely know his older brothers, and he was probably closest to his sister Chana who was just a few years older than him, as well as his sister Risha and his younger brother, Zelig, who would pass away while Sholom Ber was still a young child.

### Sholom Ber

As a child, Sholom Ber — or Berel as he was called — was a smart young boy with a sharp mind. He was also playful, a bit mischievous (a shtifer as Itche Mordechai would put it), and he enjoyed Niggunim. Itche Mordechai would later reminisce how their parents, already in their forties, were kept on their toes by their young son's antics.

It is unclear who the melamdim of Reb Sholom Ber were during his childhood. His father, Reb Shmuel, served as a melamed at least at some point, and it is possible that he learned with him. Additionally, Sholom Ber would often speak about things which he had remembered from his uncle Reb Yisroel Neveler, who also served as a Melamed in Klimovitch for some time. While Sholom Ber would spend time with him later in life in Samarkand and in Pocking, it is possible that he learned from him during his childhood, back in Klimovitch. Another



*Reb Gershon Merim*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

possible teacher was Reb Gershon Merim, a Chasidisher Gemora melamed who lived in town. His wife Malka was the daughter of Reb Hirshel Poizner, the local Shochet and a possible relative.

A major shift for the Pewzner family took place in 1935. Life in Klimovitch was exceedingly difficult, and the majority of the extended family moved to a settlement outside of Moscow called Igorovsk. Sholom Ber's grandmother Masha Mala went along with her three daughters married to Feldman, Rivkin, and Reb Yisroel Neveler (Levin) respectively, together with their families. This city was in the Moscow region, and they did so to escape the hardships of living in the more outling Klimovitch. Also, residents of the Moscow region had the slight possibility of procuring exit visas, and this was their hope, something which did not come to be.

While Masha Mala moved with her daughters, her son, Reb Shmuel, stayed in Klimovitch. This split led to Sholom Ber not knowing the rest of the family very well, despite the togetherness previously experienced. He probably saw his grandmother for the last time at age 8, and understandably, he had not heard or learned very much from her at that point in time.

In the late 1930s, Reb Sholom Ber's oldest three siblings, Itche Mordechai, Yisroel, and Risha married. All married Pewzner relatives from Klimovitch, and it is possible that some of them stayed nearby for some time.

### **Leaving Klimovitch**

The year of 1938 brought important change to the Pewzner family. It was apparently then that Reb Shmuel and Esther Hadassa made the decision to leave Klimovitch and relocate to Pochep, Russia, a relatively larger city further to the east. It is possible that Sholom Ber went to live there first and his parents only joined him later; the exact sequence is unclear, lost to history.

One of Reb Shmuel Pewzner's best friends was Reb Levi Zev Volf Malkin, known as Volpe der Pocheper. Reb Volpe lived in Klimovitch for many years serving as its Shochet and Mohel, even Sholom Ber's. He was a thoroughly Chassidisher yid with outstanding midos. Around that time, he would also relocate to Pochep, his hometown and namesake, and perhaps he is the reason why Sholom Ber's family moved there as well. Below is a picture of him and his wife Sara, who was known for her davening bearichus and for her knowledge of Chassidus, including the mastery of the entire Tanya by

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - CHILDHOOD

heart. She was the daughter of Reb Hershel Poizner, the elder Shochet of Klimovitch, and a brother of the famed tomim, Reb Avrohom Dovid Klimovitcher. As mentioned above, they were possibly related.

From their time in Pochev, we actually have a picture of Sholom Ber, taken in 1938. This came from a neighbor named Rabinowitz who lived on their block of Groiss Strodover Street. Many years later, Reb Itche Mordechai would happen to meet her on a visit to Pochev. She mentioned that Sholom Ber is pictured in the street at eleven years old in the shade of a street while she, a teenage girl at the time, was having her picture taken. Although she would not give the original to Itche Mordechai, she allowed him to make a photocopy which is presented here. The time in Pochev takes us to when Sholom Ber left home to go to Yeshiva, the last time he would see his parents.



*Reb Zev Volf and Sara Malkin*



*Under the tree shade is 11-year-old Sholom Ber Pewzner.  
Pochev, 1938.*







REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - CHILDHOOD

קאָק זיך גאָס מיין. <sup>2</sup>  
פאָר גאָס זיך אונזער  
פאָר, אונזער טאָט, און אונזער  
אונזער אונזער אונזער אונזער  
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A letter from Reb Itche Mordechai to Reb Sholom Ber in which he explains the background the 1938 photograph from Pochep



CHAPTER 3

# Underground Yeshivah

## Leaving Home

At twelve years old, with all of his siblings out of the house and his younger brother Zelig already having passed away, he was his parent's youngest child and somewhat of an only child. Nonetheless, with true *Me-siras Nefesh*, his parents sent him away to learn in the Lubavitch system of underground Yeshivos.

Sometime in the year 5699/1939, when Sholom Ber was still 12 years old and approaching his Bar Mitzvah, his parents took the step to send him away to Yeshiva. The 1930s had been the dark age for Yiddishkeit in Russia, and the Yeshiva system had been — rightfully, albeit unfortunately — viewed by the communists as the very foundation and epicenter of Yiddishkeit's continuation. They had pursued and attacked the Yeshivos and all of those associated with them. So fraught with danger was the organizing and running of Yeshivos that Chassidim had decided that the task would be undertaken exclusively by older Bachurim without families. 5698/1938, the year before Sholom Ber would join the Yeshiva system, would infamously become known as *Shnas Tirzach* — the year of murder — when the KGB began to mercilessly arrest and then execute dozens of Chassidim. Thus, to avoid the issue of *Agunos*, only the unmarried were allowed to involve themselves with such peril.

As such, it would have been justified to keep a young boy before Bar

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

Mitzvah at home for some more time. The situation was not as dire at home, and besides for the emotional pain of sending away Sholom Ber, effectively an only child at this point, making the physical arrangements was challenging and life-threatening. We can only imagine the inner fortitude and courage possessed by Sholom Ber's parents when sending him away. This courageous move had strong roots; Reb Shmuel was a proud Tomim himself and had for years risked his life to fundraise money for the Yeshiva. Likewise, Esther Hadassa had steadfast conviction and *bitachon*.

His parents wished him farewell and sent him off to Yeshiva. Ultimately, Sholom Ber would never see his parents again. They would be murdered by the Nazis a few years later. The impact of this *Mesiras Nefesh*, as well as the loss of loved ones at such an early stage in life, would have a major impression on Sholom Ber, influencing his entire life and presumably the extreme value he would place on his connection with relatives later on in life.

Over the years to come, Reb Sholom Ber spoke very little about his childhood. Perhaps the pain of speaking about the family members and the life which he had lost was too great. He had been a very young boy when he left the house and for his entire life would have to rely on his older siblings for information about his parents and family, as he would never be able to hear it directly from them.

### Melitopol

The first known location where Sholom Ber went to learn was Melitopol, Ukraine. Located near the Crimean Peninsula and about 450 miles from home, Melitopol was a city which had a larger Jewish community before the war and was a hub for business. Although far from Moscow, the secret police had a strong presence in the city and practicing Yiddishkeit was perilous. Thus, to house the Yeshiva in a Shul — as had been done in other cities — was out of the question. Instead, the Chassidim rented a cellar from a single woman who lived on a small hill on the outskirts of the city.

In the cellar, there was a lot to be desired. The few *Bochurim* that were there — at one point Sholom Ber was the only one together with the *Mashgiach* and *Mashpia* — would sleep on the benches that they learned on with their clothes under their head, and one can imagine that even the most basic of amenities were lacking in the dark cellar with its cold, dirt floor.

Food was extremely scarce. Sholom Ber would describe how they would

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - UNDERGROUND YESHIVAH

sometimes all be forced to simply eat out of the same plate as there was no way possible to properly divide the food into proper portions.

Perhaps even more unsettling was the strong KGB presence in the city and their strong resolve to root out any hints of Yiddishkeit. A single KGB officer kicking down the door to the house was all that separated them — six young boys — from the most severe consequences. Nonetheless, and with true Mesiras Nefesh, Sholom Ber would spend almost two years at the Yeshiva in Melitopol with about five other Bachurim.

It seems that when Sholom Ber arrived in Melitopol, the Yeshivah was being run by the 18-year-old, Rabbi Sholom Mendel Kalmenson, later of Aubervilliers, France. However, around Lag BaOmer 5700/1940, presumably not long after Sholom Ber arrived, Sholom Mendel was assigned to serve as Mashgiach in the Yeshiva in Kutaisi, Georgia. His vacancy in the Yeshiva would be filled by two 17-year-old Bochorim who would be sent from Kutaisai, Reb Hershel Ceitlin, later of Montreal and Reb Sholom Marozov of Crown Heights.

Reb Sholom Ber had fond memories of these two Bachurim and their dedicated investment to teaching and guiding the younger bachurim.

Reb Heshel was several months older than Reb Sholom, and he had already been learning in the underground yeshivos for several years by the time he arrived in Melitopol. Having left home for the first time at the tender age of seven, and then again at age 14, Heshel had his fair share of mesiras nefesh experiences, and had what was necessary to inspire the younger Bachurim.

Reb Sholom Marozov was raised by his father, the dedicated chassid and secretary of the Rebbe Rashab and Friediker Rebbe, Reb Chonye Marozov. Already then, he had tremendous knowledge in many areas in Torah and



*Reb Sholom Marozov*



*Reb Heshel Tzeitlin as a Bachur. This photo was in Reb Sholom Ber's possession from Europe*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

extended much effort in tending to the younger bachurim.

After almost an entire year had passed, Hershel received notice that he needed to appear at the local government office for his papers to be looked over. Together with this notification, he was informed that the government was also looking for Sholom Morozov. The two realized that the level of danger for them was rising in Melitopol and that the end would be near if they stuck around. Without hesitation, they made plans to flee, and they headed back to the relative safety of Kutaisi.

This incident apparently left the younger bachurim to fend for themselves until a replacement would arrive, however this was not meant to be.

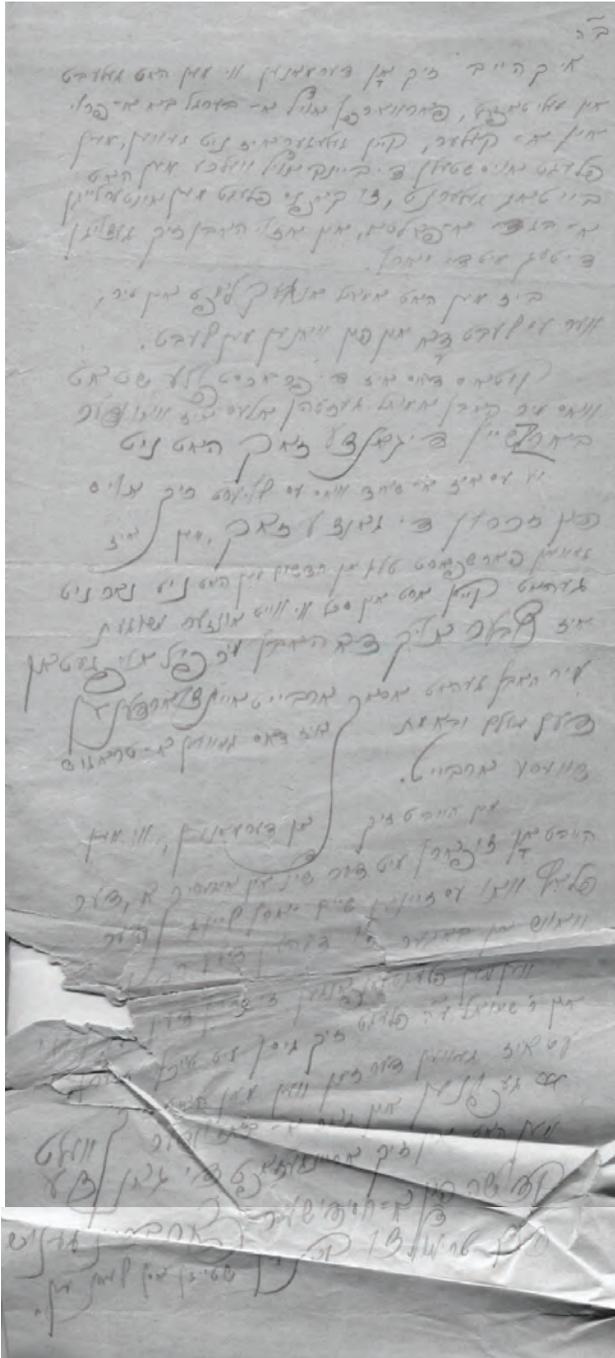
About Melitopol, Sholom Ber later wrote: "I start to recall how we lived in Melitopol, deserted on a hill in a woman's cellar. There was nothing on which to sleep; at night we would sleep on the benches which we learned on during the day, putting some clothes under our heads. This is how days and years passed until they came banging on the door, [demanding to know] who lives here and what how do you support yourselves?"

With tremendous *hashgachah pratis*, this knock on their door from the local KGB saved their lives. Somehow, they managed to get away and quickly leave Melitopol, traveling east to Georgia sometime in the summer of 1941. This was just weeks before the Nazis *yms"b* occupied Melitopol on October 6, 1941. Within one week, the entire Jewish population of Melitopol numbering 2,000 men, women and children would be murdered by the Nazi death squads. Thankfully, the "illegal" activities of the bachurim saved them from the clutches of the Nazis.

### **The Watermelon**

At one point in his early studies in Yeshiva, and possibly in Melitopol, Sholom Ber's shoes wore out, and as a temporary solution he found two discarded shoes of different makes, a German shoe with a pointy tip and an English shoe with a flat front.

Somehow, Sholom Ber managed to secure some sort of communication with his father and asked him to send money for him to be able to buy new shoes. Having received the necessary money for the new shoes, Sholom Ber set off to the marketplace to buy them. Upon arriving in the market, he saw an enticing site, a farmer's truck full of watermelons. One can imagine how desperately starving the young Sholom Ber was, and he would later relate



*Sholom Ber's jottings on his experience in Melitopol, as well as in the other underground yeshivos*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

that until then, he had never tasted watermelon. His desires overcame his judgment, and Sholom Ber lost the inner battle, giving in to his hunger, curiosity, and temptation, buying the watermelon and bringing it home. He squandered the hard earned money which his father had sent for the shoes, and tragically, when he brought the watermelon home to eat, the watermelon turned out to be rotten. It made him sick, and he threw up, leaving him with no watermelon or shoes, no money, and a pain in his stomach.

Whenever Sholom Ber would recount this story, he would shed a tear. There was something about his vulnerability at the time and his complete loss to his temptations, wasting his precious resources and being left with nothing, that struck a deep note. Perhaps the story with the watermelon is an analogy for our struggles with the temptations of this world, sometimes losing the battle, wasting what we have and being left with absolutely nothing.

Once, at his Shabbos table, a guest complained about a certain lack of comfort. In response, Reb Sholom Ber recounted how at one point he did not have shoes, and to go outside, he would tie a piece of wood to his foot with a string. They would cover their faces with scarves so no one would see their beards, and like this they would venture out into the freezing cold to go to the Mikvah in a local body of water.

### **Georgia**

After fleeing from Ukraine and what was most probably a treacherous journey, the Bochurim would arrive in Kutaisi where there was already a functioning Tomchei Temimim. Far away from Moscow, the secret communist police were not as strong in Georgia, and the Jewish community faced far less persecution. Thus, a Yeshiva was able to operate, and the local Jewish community played a hand in supporting it.

The first Bochurim had arrived in Kutaisi sometime in 5698/1938. Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia and its largest city, was avoided out of fear of heightened KGB surveillance. They would initially be taught by Reb Yosef Goldberg, the future Rosh Yeshiva in Brunoy, who was then a 22 year old Bochur. Throughout the next few years, the Yeshiva would grow, and it would provide an authentic Tomchei Temimim education for many dozens of Bochurim during the tumultuous war years. The yeshiva would remain in operation until 5706/1946, when many Chassidim escaped from Russia following the war.

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - UNDERGROUND YESHIVAH

For Reb Sholom Ber, arriving in Kutaisi was quite a novelty. He would write: “Kutaisi was the most colorful city I have ever seen; everything was spectacularly beautiful (Vunderbar Shein).”

In Georgia, the fifteen-year-old Sholom Ber would learn under the tutelage of Reb Shmuel Notik, a tomim and an outstanding Yid in every aspect. It was in Georgia where Sholom Ber would truly advance in his study of Torah and absorb a tremendous wealth of Chassidus and mesirus nefesh. Beyond their studies with Reb Shmuel, they would farbreng with him often, and he would inculcate them with a strong sense of hiskashrus and imbue them with the strength to continue in those dark, difficult times.

Reb Shmuel Notik was a true tomim who had learned in Lubavitch as a Bochur. He was proficient in both Nigleh and Chassidus and had a particular enjoyment in teaching Rabbi Akiva Eiger. Once, when he was a Bochur, he had received notice of being drafted to the Russian army. When he went to the Rebbe Rashab for Yechidus and brought up this issue, the Rebbe Rashab told him, “instead of serving in the army for four years, learn Shas in four years.” A thoroughly Chassidishe Yid, he would serve as a Rov after marriage. He was recognized for his tremendous knowledge of Nigleh, had tremendous Mesiras Nefesh to avoid sending his children to Communist school, and would become a marked man by the KGB, eventually being arrested and imprisoned.

Thus, Reb Shmuel Notik would embody the theme of the yeshiva in Kutaisi. While the situation was not as dire as it had been in Melitopol, Mesiras Nefesh was still required. At the same time, the yeshiva was quite functional, and Reb Sholom Ber would be shaped into a chassid imbued with the values of Tomchei Temimim, giving him a lifelong geshmak in learning.

Reb Sholom Ber would write years later: “I remember beginning to travel by ship to America, the place we had longed to go to for years, to see the Rebbe. There, I reflected back on the days in Georgia where we would begin to sing a [particular] niggun, and tears would begin to pour from Reb Shmuel Notik like a river longing for the Rebbe. Those days were a time when we found a completely different world, when we absorbed the entire holiness of a Chassidishe Farbrengen. This is what gave us the madness to *shteig* in learning.”

## The Murder of His Parents Hy”d

At that time, the Nazi onslaught in Eastern Europe was at its peak. Sholom Ber’s parents, still in Pochev, Russia, would come under Nazi occupation in the summer of 1941. Meanwhile, Reb Itche Mordechai had been drafted into the Russian army, and his wife Rivkah — a daughter of Reb Yisroel Neveler — and their young son had been trying to flee towards Moscow, but that was simply impossible. She would write to her parents, “Everything around us is burning.”

When the Nazis arrived in Pochev in the summer of 1941 (on 29 Av 5701), they required all Jews to register and wear a yellow star of David. In November 1941, the Jewish families were forced into two ghettos, each surrounded by barbed wire. Men and boys over 14 were kept in a school building and women and children were kept in a former poultry processing plant. The conditions in the ghettos were appalling, and the mortality rates were high. During the winter, those of working age from both ghettos were forced to do a variety of physical work. This is how the winter of 1941 into 1942 passed.

At the end of the winter, the Nazis decided that it was time to murder Pochev’s Jews, killing them all during the spring. Reb Itche Mordechai, fighting for the Russian army on the front, would be informed of the tragedy and hear the solemn details from two people from the town, one of them some sort of government official in the local municipality.

On 28 Adar, the women were all taken together with the children out of the town where they were shot. Townspeople would recall that when the Germans were invading, a ditch had been dug outside of the town to prevent tanks from entering. It was there where the Nazis would shoot the Jews. Amongst these women and children were Esther Hadassa, Itche Mordechai’s wife Rivkah and their young son. The next day, on 29 Adar, the men would be likewise murdered, and Reb Shmuel together with his friend Reb Zev Volf were killed Al Kiddush Hashem, Hashem Yinkom Damam.

As stated, Reb Itche Mordechai was the one who found out about this, and he relayed this information to his sister and her husband, Risha and Reb Chaim Hillel Azimov. It is unclear when Reb Sholom Ber learned of this tragic information; was it later upon being reunited with his siblings in Samarkand, or did some traveler pass on the information while he was still in Georgia.

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - UNDERGROUND YESHIVAH

Regardless, Sholom Ber would not receive the full details of what had happened in his parents until forty years after their murder in 1942 in a correspondence with Reb Itche Mordechai. Only then would Reb Sholom Ber ask Reb Itche Mordechai why they are keeping two days Yahrzeit; was it unclear which day they had passed away on, or was there an actual reason. Only then was he informed the details of their murder, clarifying that his mother had been killed on 28 Adar and his father on 29 Adar.



*The Monument in Pochep on the Site of the Murder.  
Photo by Reb Itche Mordechai Pewzner, 1971.*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER



*The Monument as it stands today*

### **Life in Georgia**

Reb Sholom Ber's time in Georgia was not limited to a single location. Having too many Bochorim in one location would attract too much attention, and the Yeshiva was divided into multiple smaller towns. Later, Reb Sholom Ber would list a number of cities and towns around Georgia where he spent time learning: Kutaisi, Sukhumi, Poti, Kulash, Sadreri, and Sudjuni.

From his time in Georgia, Reb Sholom Ber would recall several families who made an impression upon him. He mentions the Lipskers, the Neimark family, Reb Mordechai Perlow and others. Significantly, he was especially moved by the Menkin family. He wrote that "It was a joy to see how their house ran, the goodness and dedication of the children. The eidelkeit of the entire family was simply indescribable. It was our proper instructor for correctness."

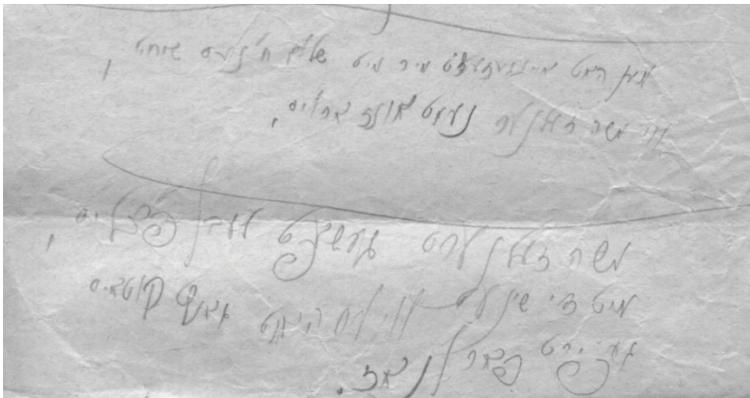
Bochorim were required to participate in the physical aspects of the Yeshiva as well. They would be tasked with organizing and transferring funds, as well as other similar matters. As a result, it once happened that Reb Sholom Ber was arrested together with his older colleague, Reb Sholom Morozov, and they would spend some time in jail. It is unclear what the crime was, though it can be assumed to be associated with the Yeshiva. Thankfully, their imprisonment did not last long, and they would be freed

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - UNDERGROUND YESHIVAH

due to the efforts of the legendary Moshe Zelner.

During the war in 1943, a character named Moshe Lemberg — more affectionately known as Moshe Zelner, or Moshe the soldier — would arrive in Georgia. He was a Polisher Chassid with tremendous ahavas Yisroel and incredible charisma. He arrived wearing the uniform of a Russian soldier and made many important connections with the local authorities. Moshe Zelner even had connections in the KGB; it is told that when a certain high-ranking KGB officer's car — a rare commodity then — needed a new tire, it was Moshe who arranged one for him. Thus, with Moshe's connections, Yiddishkeit fared better in Kutaisi, and it was him who freed Reb Sholom Ber and Reb Sholom Marozov from jail.

Reb Sholom Ber would use vivid and at times poetic expression. He would recall Moshe Zelner's charismatic character saying that "he was able to drag the whole city by his nose."



*Sholom Ber's jottings recalling his arrest and Moshe Zelner's intervention to have them freed*

## Samarkand

During the war, countless people fled the Nazi invasion by fleeing eastward into the depths of the Soviet Union and found refuge in the areas of Uzbekistan and the surrounding Asian countries. Amongst the refugees were many hundreds of chassidim who were lucky enough to avoid the almost certain death of the holocaust. Before long, a significant community of chassidim formed in Samarkand, and the local Tomchei Temimim began to flourish. The KGB's persecution had largely abated in that locale, and before long, well over a thousand chassidim took up residency there. With many distinguished chassidim arriving there and Reb Nissen having

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

come to Samarkand from Tashkent, the yeshiva became the cornerstone of Lubavitch in Soviet Russia.

At some point, the Chassidim in Georgia learned about the Yeshiva in Samarkand which was more established, even than their current Yeshiva with the relative freedom afforded in Kutaisi.

Slowly, the majority of the Bachurim learning in Georgia relocated to Samarkand.

Sholom Ber arrived in Samarkand sometime around 5704/1944 where he was able to reconnect with some of his family members, his sisters Chana and Risha, as well as his brother Pesach, and he joined the Yeshiva led by Reb Nissen Nemanov. There, Sholom Ber continued to learn with more Hatzlacha.

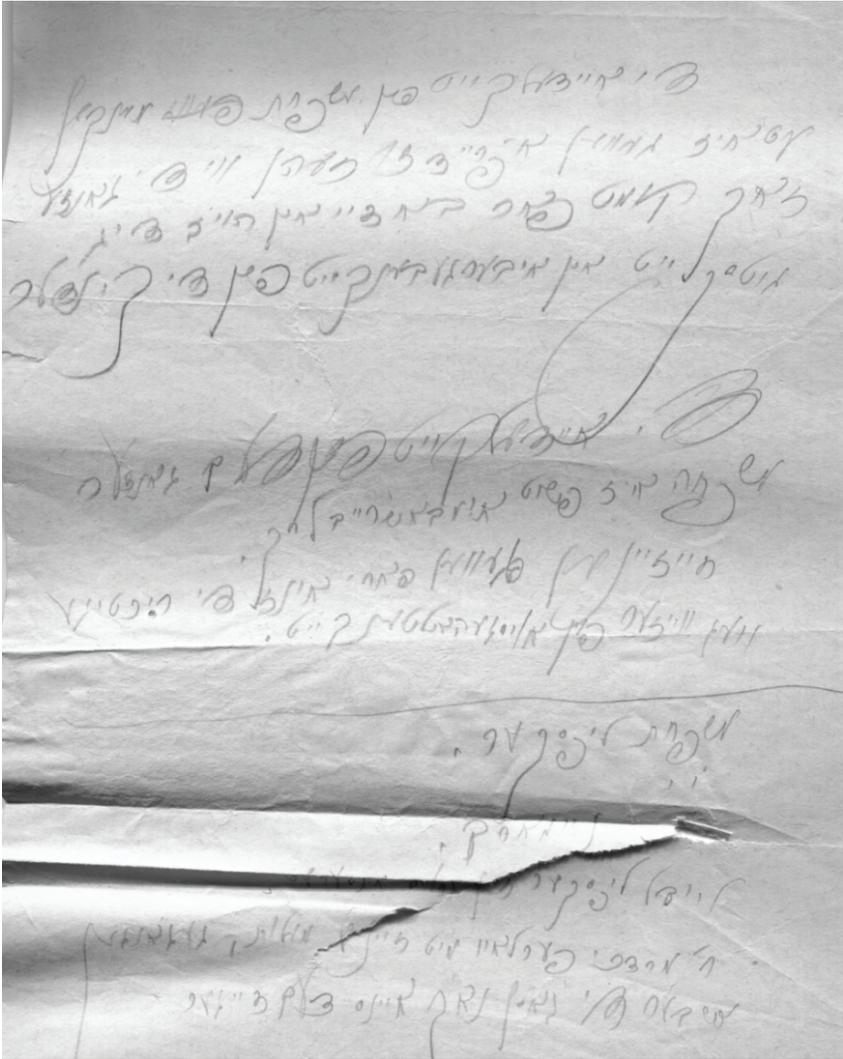
Living during wartime was very difficult in Georgia and Samarkand. There would be periods of hunger due to severe food shortages. The Bachurim used to smoke heavily in order to abate their hunger, and Sholom Ber would lose his teeth as a young man due to malnutrition, smoking heavily, and the general lack of health. As a result, Sholom Ber would always tell his sons that he did not want them to smoke. When he was twenty years old, he already had the appearance of a much older man, and Sholom Ber would report to the Rebbe about heart problems developed during the war.

### **Leaving Russia**

After the war had ended, in 1946, exiting Russia was starting to be discussed among the circles of Chassidim. Many Chassidim were worried and unsure about leaving, including Reb Nissen, and opposing an exit would stay the official position until they received the Friediker Rebbe's instruction to leave. The story of the forged Polish passports and the trains from Lemberg/Lvov is already well known, and Sholom Ber would head to Lemberg with his sisters to depart Russia. Reb Itche Mordechai had been injured in the war and would remain in Russia for the rest of his life, while Yisroel would make it out of Russia in 1970 and would settle in Ramat Gan, Israel.

Finally, at age 19, Sholom Ber would leave Russia, taking his first breaths of freedom.





*Sholom Ber's jottings recalling the various Chabad families in Georgia and the impression they made upon him*

BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

אין פאריקן קרונו האסטך זיך ג'י'פ'ת'ג'ט, פאך וואס פראוואן זיך  
 יארצייט - 3.ווי.ט'ע. ג'ט אט ד'ת'ל'ג'י, זיך פ'ת'ח' זיך זיך ז'ת'ג'ר  
 ש'ת'ל' כ'ג'ל'ג'ק' ד'ו' י'ד'ו'פ' א'ו'פ'ן ד'ז' פ'כ'ל'פ' ד'ו'י' פ'ש'א'פ'  
 וואס ז'י'ת'ן א'ו'ל'ק'ו'ל'א'ן א'ז'ג'ז'ז'ר ז'ט'ט'ג'ו'ן ז'ז'יך כ'ק'פ'ס ו'פ'ת'ו'.  
 פ'א'ח' זיך זיך ז'י'ד'ג'י' ז'ד'פ'א'ט'ו'ן פ'ו'ן ז'א'ם פ'ל'ק'ז'א'ז'ר פ'ס'ן ש'ט'א'ט'  
 פ'א'צ'ז'פ'. א'ז'ן ו'ז'א'כ'ו'ן ז'ד' פ'א'ט' ג'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן א'ז' ז'י' א'ז'ג'י' ז'י'ת'ן  
 ז'א'ז'ז'ק'ו'ל'א'ן ז'א'ם ז'ו' א'ז'ן א'פ'צ'ו'ט'ו'ן א'א'ר'ט' 1942 י'ז'א'כ', ו'ז'א'ס א'ז' ז'  
 ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן א'ז' א'ז'ג'ז'ז'ר א'ז' - כ'ו' ו'כ'ט' א'ז'ז'ר. כ'ה' פ'א'ט'  
 א'ז'ן ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן ז'י'ת' פ'ל'י'ז'ן א'ז'ן כ'ט' ז'י'ת' א'ז'נ'פ'י'ל', א'ז'א'ס א'ז'ז'ט'  
 ז'א'ם מ'ש'כ'ן א'ז' ז'י'ת' א'ז'א'ז' א'ז'ן כ'ק'פ'ס א'ז'ז'ק'ו'ל'א'ן כ'ה' א'ז'ז'ר  
 א'ז'ן ז'א'ר'ט' א'ז'ז'ר, א'ז'יך ק'ל'ב'כ' ס' ז'א'ג' - ו'ז'א'ל'ס א'ז'א'ל'י'ן פ'ש'ו'ק'  
 ד'ד'ק' ק'ל'מ'א'ו'ו'ט'ש'י' ז'י'ת'ן ז'א'ז'ז'ק'ו'ל'א'ן כ'ט' א'ז'ז'ר.

ז'א'יך ו'ז'א'ט' ז'יך ו'ז'א'ל'ן ז'א'ם ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן א'ז'ן א'ז'ן ז'י'ת'ו'ן פ'ו'ן פ'א'צ'ז'ד'ס,  
 ז'א'יך ז'י'ת' ג'י'ז'ד'ז'ק'ט' ס' פ'א'ק'ו'ן ק'ל'ז'ד'ן ק'ש'כ'י'ל'א'ט' ג'ו'ט' א'ז'ג'ז'ר  
 ק'י'ז'ד'ז'כ'א'ל'ס, י'ג'ט' ס'ג'ז' ו'ז'כ'ר'ט' ו'ז'א'ז' ז'א'כ'ס א'ז'פ'צ'י'כ'ס.  
 פ'א'ק'ו'ן ז'י'ת' ז'י'ת' ו'ז'א'ל'ן ז'א'ם ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן.  
 ו'ז'א' ז'י'ת' ז'י'ת' א'ז'א'ס'ט' ק'ו'ן ז'א'יך ז'א'ן ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן א'ז'ו'פ'ן ש'ד'פ' - א'ז'א'ז'ז'ר.  
 פ'א'ק' ז'י'ת' ז'א'ן ז'א'ם ק'רו'ן א'ז'פ'י'ש'י'ק'ט' ל'א'ז'ו'ז'ג'ל' כ'א'ט' ר'ת'ו', א'ז'ן פ'פ'י'  
 פ'צ'ו'ר' ג'י'ת' - פ'ל'ל' ד'ז'פ', ו'ז'א'ט' ז'י'ת' ז'א'ק' ז'ן פ'ת'ת' ג'ו'ט' ו'ז'א'ל'ן א'ז'ן  
 ז'א'כ'פ' ז'י'ת' ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן, א'ז'ן ז'י'ת' פ'א'ק'ו'ן א'ז'ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן פ'כ'א'ו'ו'ן  
 י'ז'א'ר'ט' 3.ווי.ט'ע. א'ז' ז'י'ת' פ'א'ק'ו'ן ז'י'ת' א'ז'ז'ק'י'ז'ז' מ'ש'ד'פ'  
 פ'א'ל'מ'פ', פ'א'ק'ו'ן ז'י'ת' א'ז'ק' א'ז'ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן ו'ז'א' א'ז'ן פ'ת'ת'  
 ז'י'ת' ג'ו'ט' י'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן י'ת'ו' ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן. ק'ט'ן ש'א'ו'ל'ת' מ'ז'ו'ד', פ'א'ק'ו'ן  
 ז'י'ת' ג'ו'ט' ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן. ו'ז'א' ס'ג'ז' ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן ז'י'ת' ז'י'ת', ו'ז'א'ט' פ'ל'ל' כ'  
 ש'מ'י'פ' א'ז'א'ז'ז'ר ד'ז'פ', א'ז'ז'י' א'ז'י'ת' ו'ש'ט'ז'ט' ז'י'ת' ז'א'ק', א'ז'ן  
 א'ז'ז'י' א'ז'י'ת' ד'א'ס ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן. א'ז' ד'א'ס א'ז'י'ת' ד'ז'ר ג'י'ז'ש'כ'י'ק'ו'ן א'ז'ז'ר  
 ז'י'ת'ן ש'א'ל' ד'פ'ת'ל'ג'ז'ר, י'ז'א'ר'ט'ט'. א'ז'י'ת' פ'ת'ח' ז'י'ת' ג'ו'ט' א'ז'ז'ר  
 ז'י'ת'ן ז'י'ת' ז'א'ר'ט' ז'א'ק'.

Reb Itche Mordechai's letter recalling the details of their parent's murder, 13 Sivan 5742.

CHAPTER 4

# Leaving Russia

After the war had ended, exiting Russia was starting to be discussed among the circles of Chassidim in 1946. As is well known, there was a short period of time during which Polish citizens who had fled into Russia during the war were given the ability to leave the Soviet Union. Considering that the communists almost never let anyone leave the country, this was a significant opportunity. All that would separate a Jew in Russia from freedom was a Polish passport which could be purchased for a hefty sum on the black market or forged. Many Chassidim were worried and unsure about this exit strategy, including Reb Nissen, and opposing an exit would stay the official position until they received the Frieddiker Rebbe's instruction to leave.

Ultimately, well over a thousand chassidim were able to escape Russia in this manner, boarding trains from the border city of Lemberg/Lvov. Likewise, Sholom Ber would head to Lemberg with his sisters to depart Russia. It is unclear which of the trains transported Sholom Ber out



*This photo appears to be the earliest portrait of Sholom Ber Pewzner taken in 1947 soon after his escape from Russia. He was 20 years old, something unrecognizable from his appearance*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

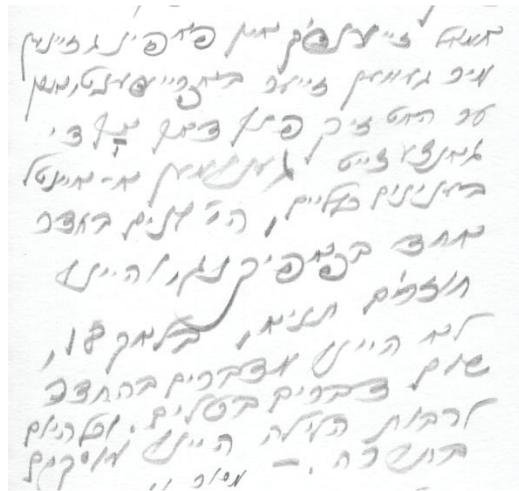
of Russia, but it was sometime between summer of 5706/1946 and winter of 5707/1946 that Sholom Ber would leave Russia at the age of 19.

The first stop after departing Russia was Krakow where they were greeted by a special Jewish committee to assist refugees. Poland was under the Soviet bloc, and having just defrauded the Soviet authorities and escaped the Iron Curtain using forged passports, it was advisable to escape from there to the west as soon as possible. Sholom Ber traveled, together with many other Chassidim, to the American sector of West Germany, to a Displaced Persons camp in Pocking, Germany. There his papers were processed and the German spelling of his last name was set. Therefore instead of Pewzner as phonetically pronounced, it is spelled Pewzner, as the letter W is pronounced with a V sound in German. Additionally, there must have been someone with a "Polishe accent" assisting in the documentation process causing his name to be spelled "Schulim Ber."

### Pocking

In the DP camp in Pocking, a branch of Tomchei Temimim had been established which Sholom Ber immediately joined. He would recall that the Bochorim got together and enjoyed their freedom with renewed vigor in learning. He described how the environment was focused fully on Ruchniyus. He shared a room with Reb Dovid Raskin and recounted how even their dormitory was no place for leisure, instead, they spent a lot of time reviewing Tanya Baal Peh as per the instructions of the Frierdiker Rebbe.

Perhaps one of the most significant elements of their newfound freedom was that they were finally able to communicate directly with the Frierdiker Rebbe in New York. Over that time period, there are several letters which Reb Sholom Ber merited to receive from the Frierdiker Rebbe.



*Reb Sholom Ber's diary entry describing his time with Reb Dovid Raskin*

REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - LEAVING RUSSIA

**RABBI J. SCHNEERSOHN**  
OF LUBAWITZ  
770 EASTERN PARKWAY  
BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.  
BLOCUM 8-2919

יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן  
ליובאוויטש

כ"ה ז' טבת תש"ז.  
ברוקלין.

אל החלמיד מר שלום דובער שי'

שלום וברכה!

במענה על מכתבו, נהניתי לשמוע  
משלומי, ובדבר בריאותי יעשה כדעת הרופא  
מומחה והשי"ת ישלח לו רפואה ויצליח בלימודו  
ויעזר לכל הנזכרים בכתבו זה בהדרוש להם  
בנשמיות וברוחניות, המנרכו



S.B. Pevsner  
Pocking 13b, Block F17

*His first letter from the Friediker Rebbe responding to his general circumstances and wellbeing. He also reported about his health issues, and the Friediker Rebbe directed him to consult an expert doctor.*

BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

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יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן  
ליובאזויטש

ב"ה כ"ו ניסן תש"ז.  
ברוקלין.

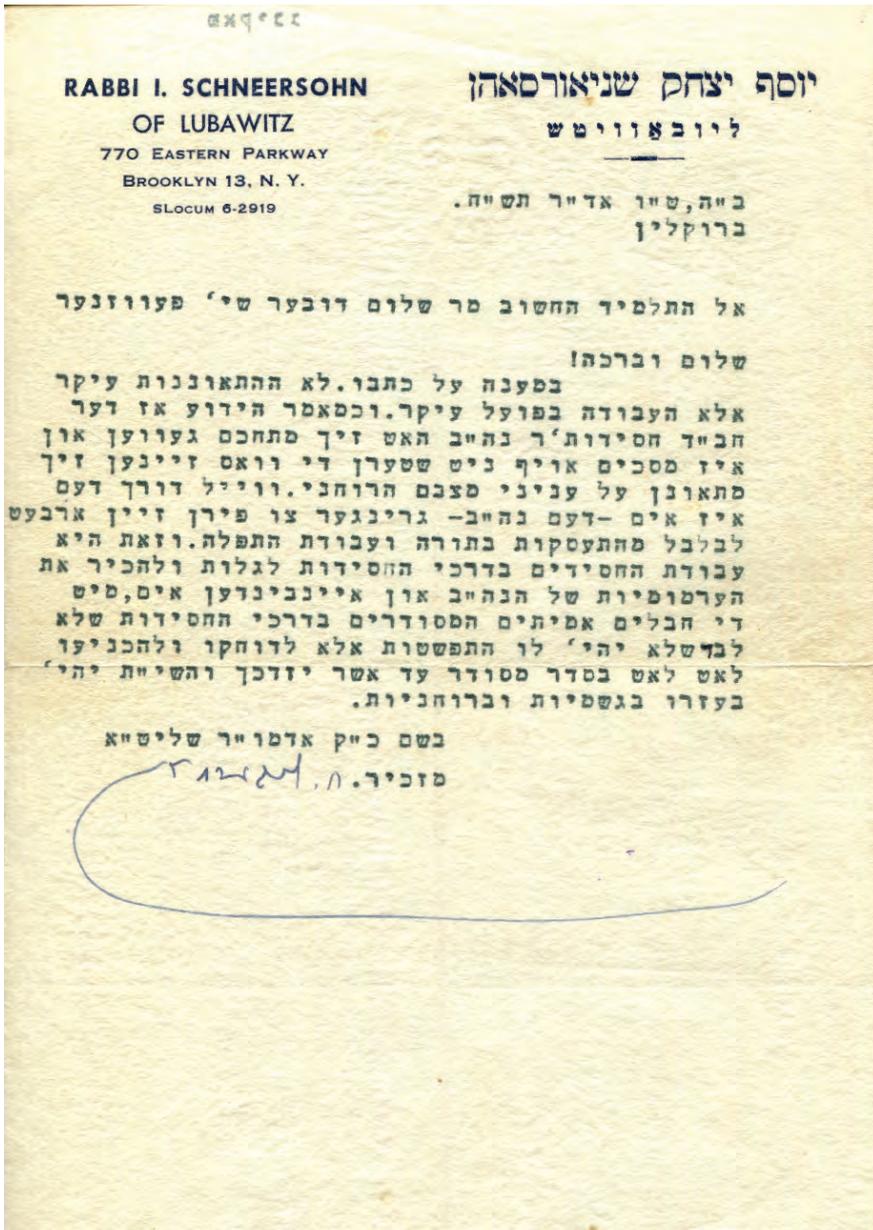
אל החלמיד מר שלום דובער שי' פייזנער

שלום וברכה!

במענה על שאלתו ישתדל להזור  
בע"פ חניא כמה שביכולתו והלימוד בנולה  
ודא"ח יהי' במסירה ונתינה על הענינים לידע  
אותם בטוב והשי"ח יהי' בעזרו בנשמיות  
דברוחניות.

בשם כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א  
מזכיר. ח. א. ג. ג. ג.

*In this letter dated 26 Nisan, 5707/1947, the Friediker Rebbe answers Sholom Ber's request for guidance by instructing him to review Tanya by heart as much as he can and to devote himself in his learning of Nigleh and Chassidus to know it well.*



*In this since published letter, the Friediker Rebbe responds to Sholom Ber's complaints regarding his standing in Avoda. The Friediker Rebbe replied that your complaints do not come from Kedusha; they come from the Nefesh Habehamis, and you need to push them away and focus on your Avodah while exerting effort to subdue and refine the nefesh habehamis.*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

At that time, Sholom Ber was 20 years old, and being seven years into his Yeshiva education, he was looked up to among the bachurim. Reb Yankele Katz — who would later become the Rosh Yeshiva in Kfar Chabad — had joined the Yeshiva despite not being from a Lubavitch home and would later tell the following story: Once, two Bochorim had gotten into an altercation. Matters had gotten physical, and one Bochor had hit the other one. Reb Nissen, who was directing the Yeshiva at the time, launched an investigation into the matter. Having heard that Sholom Ber Pewzner was present during the incident, he asked him what had happened. Sholom Ber refused to tell him on principle.

Faced with defiance, Reb Nissen suspended Sholom Ber from Yeshiva for a week. Sholom Ber dutifully accepted this punishment and did not enter the yeshivah, even for davening. Instead, he would stand by a window and listen in to the minyan. On one of those next few days, as Sholom Ber was davening outside of the Zal and Reb Nissen was not present, the Gabbai, who was looking to create some excitement, called up Sholom Ber for an Aliya. Thus, Sholom Ber was faced with a predicament: Should he defy Hanhola and take the Aliya or should he refuse the Aliya — something which is considered disrespectful to the Torah?

To solve the issue, someone came up with a solution. The Halacha is that someone who enters the Beis Hamikdash through the window is not fully considered to have entered, having various Halachic ramifications. He suggested that if Sholom Ber would enter Zal via the window, he could accept the Aliya without having truly entered and not having defied Reb Nissen. Sholom Ber would climb through the window, displaying his regard for Hanhola and further displaying his commitment to a fellow Bochor.



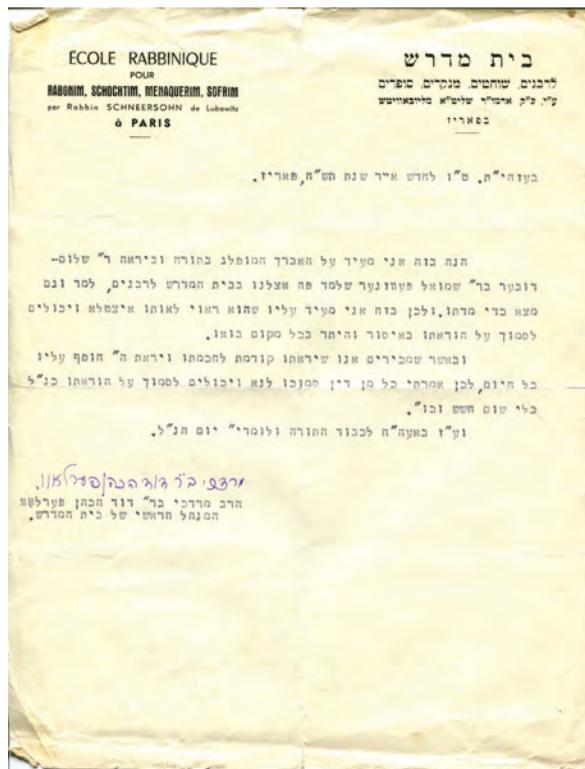
*Reb Sholom Ber posing alongside his cousin Reb Yitzchok (Itzak) Rivkin in Pocking*

France

The stay in the DP camp was meant to be only temporary. After almost a year in Germany, Sholom Ber would relocate to France to join the recently established Yeshiva there. He would arrive during the week before Purim 5708/1948. The Yeshiva in the Paris suburb of Brunoy had recently been opened by Chassidim who had made their way to a DP camp in Halen, Austria. They had then moved to Paris, and they finally opened a Yeshiva outside of the city with Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman. Once the Yeshivah was established, the bachurim of Pocking joined as well, and the leadership of the Yeshivah was transferred to Reb Nissen. Soon after, Reb Shlomo Chaim would head to Eretz Yisroel.

In Brunoy, Reb Sholom Ber continued learning. He was considered to be a Maskil in Chassidus and received Semicha from Reb Mordechai Perlow. Later, he learned Shechita which was something that the Friediker Rebbe encouraged at the time, though it seems that he never finished.

At that time, Bo-churim yearned to leave Europe and travel to the Rebbe in New York. It was far easier to head to Eretz Yisroel, which many Chassidim did, including many of Sholom Ber's extended family members. However, Sholom Ber was part of a group of Bo-churim who were committed to travel to the Rebbe. Making arrangements was challenging and took some time, and thirteen Bo-churim were approved to travel with student visas around Iyar 5709. In the Friediker Rebbe's letter to Reb Nissen dated 24 Iyar, 5709/1949, Reb Sholom Ber was listed second of the lucky group.



Reb Sholom Ber's Smicha dated Iyar 5708/1948

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

At the same time as plans were being made to travel to New York, Reb Nissen was looking for a Shidduch for his daughter Rochel Leah — known as Rochel. Born on Shvi'i Shel Pesach, 5689/1929, she was her parents oldest child and only daughter. Her mother was Masha Rivka, the daughter of Reb Moshe and Rochel Leah Raskin. At the time of her birth, her parents were living in Leningrad. Living there, Reb Nissen was operating a small yeshivah. He had been arrested when she was an infant, and for the first three years of her life, he would remain in prison. They then spent most of her childhood during the 1930s in hiding, often moving from place to place, and by the time they would arrive in Tashkent and then Samarkand, she was already a teenager.

She was perceptive and dignified, gracious and sensitive to others, and had a knack at understanding the full picture of situations. During her youth, she grew up saying a lot of Tehillim with her mother, causing her to know the entire Tehillim by heart already in her youth. Her exit from Russia followed a similar trajectory to Sholom Ber's, and she would arrive in Bru- noy together with her father, Reb Nissen, a short while before Sholom Ber.

After receiving guidance from the Freirdiker Rebbe on 27 Nisan that he look into various options for his daughter, Reb Nissen thought that Sholom Ber was the correct choice. They met sometime in Iyar, and on 24 Iyar, the very same day the Frierdiker Rebbe approved Sholom Ber to travel to New York, the Rebbe also wrote to Sholom Ber with his approval and bracha for the shidduch while instructing him to write several options of settling down after the wedding.<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, just over a month after the Shidduch was made, Reb Nissen received a letter from the Frierdiker Rebbe instructing for the wedding date to not yet be set, along with a brocha that everyone be healthy. Although long engagements were not unheard of, the Frierdiker Rebbe's instruction to postpone the wedding seemed unusual. In the end, the directive to delay the wedding was revealed to be a clear miracle of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Unbeknownst at the time, Rochel had a health issue requiring surgery and recovery. Had she become pregnant, it could have led to life-threatening complications.

With the Frierdiker Rebbe approving the match and instructing them not to set a date for the wedding, things were now up in the air; how would

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<sup>8</sup> The letter to Reb Nissen approving the shidduch is dated three days later on 27 Iyar

REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - LEAVING RUSSIA



*Reb Sholom Ber in France, dated May,  
1948*



*Rochel in France, dated August,  
1948*



*Reb Nissen Nemanov*



*Masha Rivkah Nemanov*

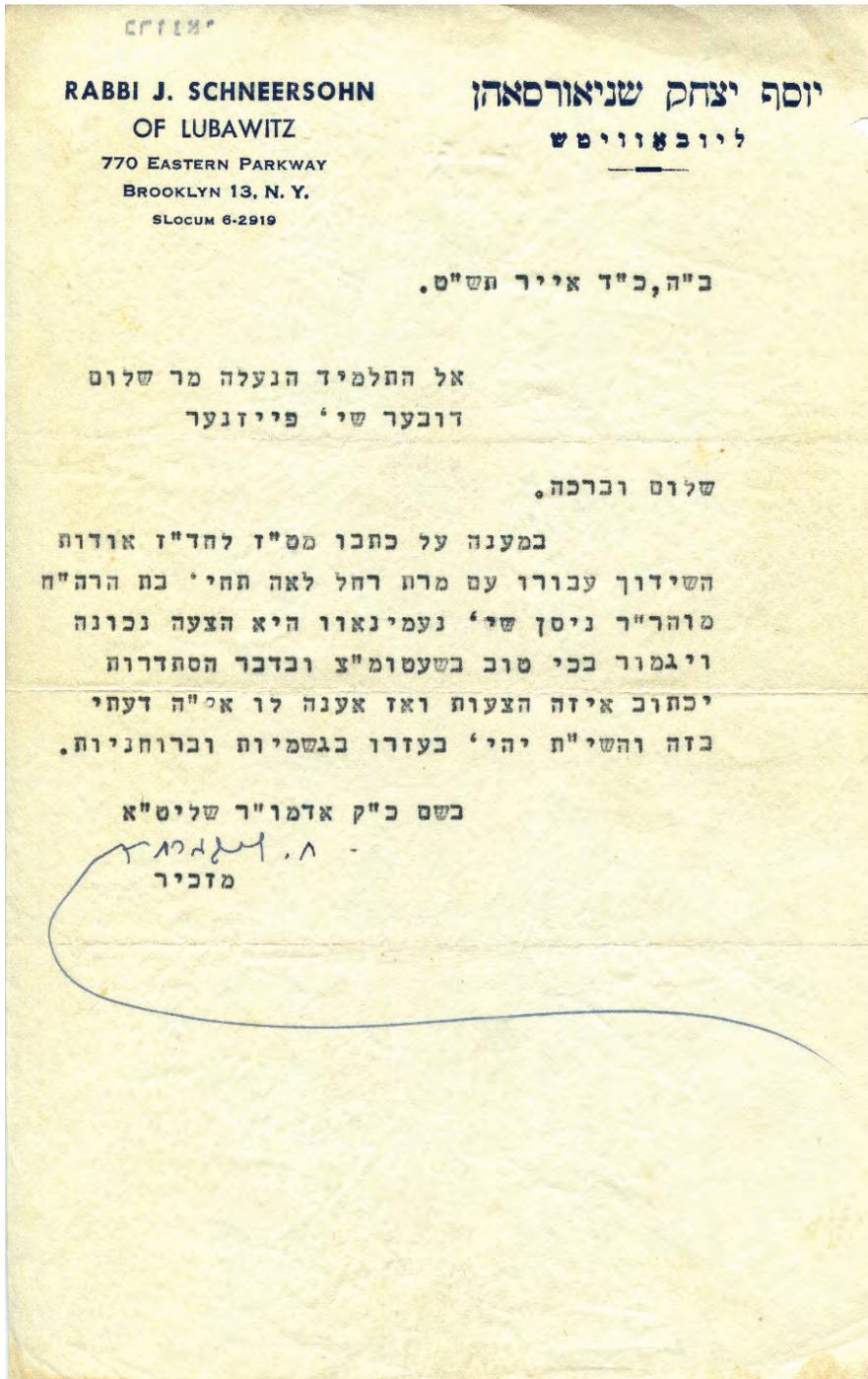
## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

Sholom Ber be able to travel to New York, and would he travel already married or not? Sholom Ber had written a letter to the Frierdiker Rebbe with this question but had not received a reply. He turned to the Mazkir Chaim Lieberman to try and get a response. He repeats the content of his two most recent letters to the Rebbe and asks him to verify if the letters were received and if indeed there is no response yet.

Ultimately, it appears that no response was ever received as the situation was clarified over the course of time. In Cheshvan, the Kallah underwent surgery, and one of the three letters of the Frierdiker Rebbe regarding the situation instructed that the Kallah take some time to recover and also acclimate to her future role as a homemaker. Meanwhile, the chosson, Sholom Ber, was meant to leave the immediate premises of the Bronoy yeshivah. Finally, the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed for the wedding to take place during the month of Adar, ten months after the Shidduch was finalized.

The Bochorim eventually traveled to New York in Teves, 5710, and with the Chasuna instructed to take place in Adar following the Frierdiker Rebbe's instructions, it meant that Sholom Ber could not yet travel.





*The Frieddiker Rebbe's letter approving the Shidduch between Sholom Ber Pewzner and Rochel Nemanov*



*A picture of a slightly  
younger Rachel  
Nemanov*

*Rochel Nemanov*

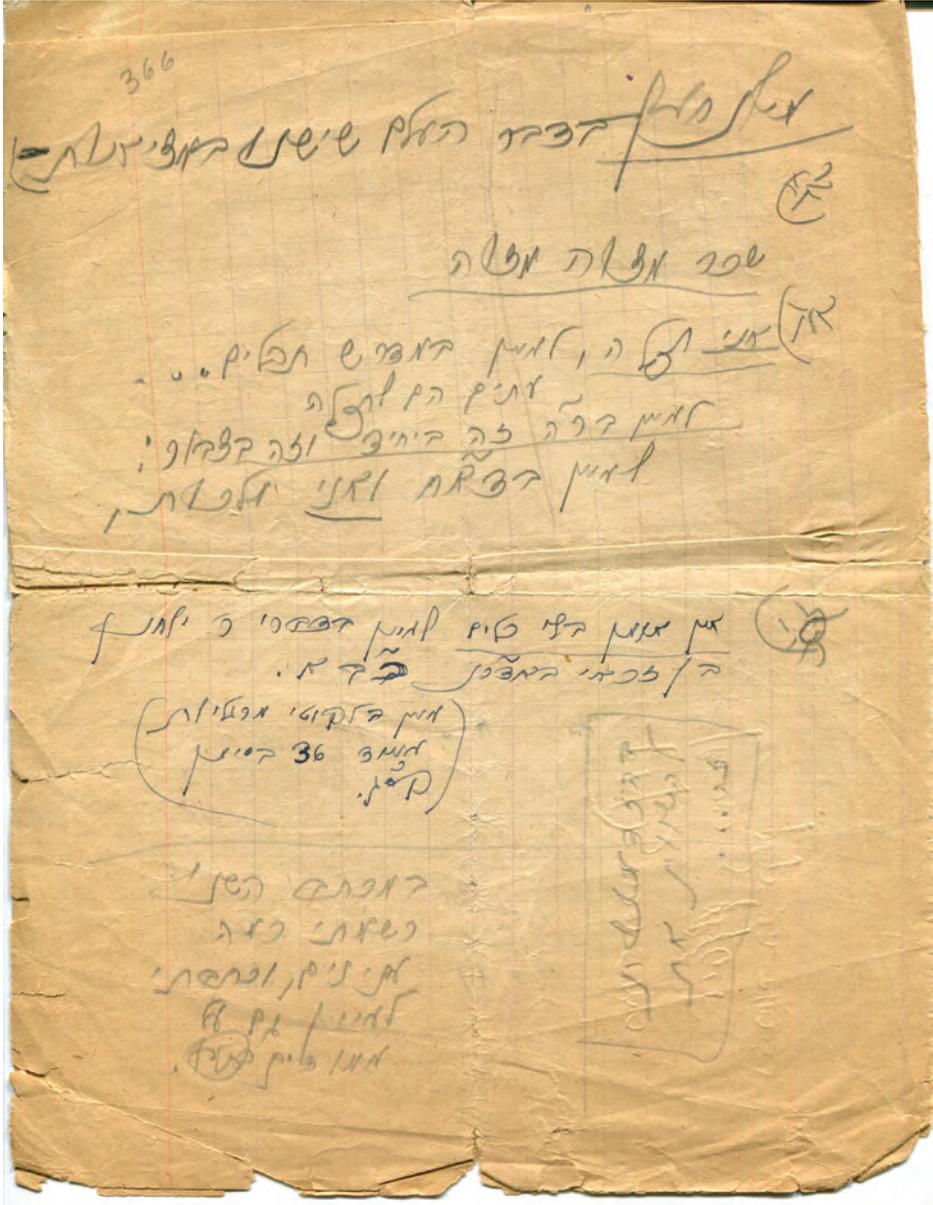


*Rochel pictured with  
friends in France*





SOME OF REB SHOLOM BER'S WRITINGS FROM FRANCE



Notes on letter requesting the sefer Simla Chadasha



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Gramen written by Reb Sholom Ber for a simchah



SOME OF REB SHOLOM BER'S WRITINGS FROM FRANCE

Handwritten text in Hebrew script on aged, yellowed paper. The text is arranged in several columns and paragraphs, with some lines starting with large decorative initials. The script is a cursive style typical of Ashkenazi Jews from the 17th or 18th century. The paper shows signs of wear, including tears and discoloration.

Gramen written by Reb Sholom Ber for a simchah



SOME OF REB SHOLOM BER'S WRITINGS FROM FRANCE

Handwritten Hebrew text on aged paper, likely a simchah (wedding document) written by Reb Sholom Ber. The text is written in a cursive script and includes phrases such as "אני נתתי לך", "אשר נתתי לך", and "אשר נתתי לך". The document is dated "120" and mentions "אשר נתתי לך".

Gramen written by Reb Sholom Ber for a simchah











CHAPTER 5

# Wedding and Arrival to America

As mentioned, in Cheshvan 5710/1949, the Frierdiker Rebbe instructed for the wedding of Sholom Ber Pewzner and Rochel Leah Nemanov to take place in Adar, noting that both halves of the month — before and after Tes Vov — would be auspicious for the wedding. It is unclear if a specific date was initially set, but plans were in the works for it to take place then.

Around a month before the wedding was to take place, on Yud Shvat 5710/1950, Lubavitch was shocked with the Histalkus of the Friediker Rebbe. Reb Nissen, the Kalla's father, was devastated, and in his broken state, he could not fathom making a wedding. In response to his letter inquiring what to do, the Rebbe replied that the wedding should be held at the previously planned time and that Lubavitcher Niggunim should be played at the Chasuna to be mesameach the Chosson and Kalla.

The Rebbe continued further in what is the first letter addressing an individual's question to be printed in Igros Kodesh, "It is famous that the Rebbeim — and I heard especially the Rebbe Maharash — would say certain words that were only intended for some of the listeners while reciting a Maamer, and everyone would only hear what was intended for them. But the Rebbe Rashab asked his father to hear all of the words, and he agreed. I heard this from my esteemed father-in-law, the Rebbe, may his memory guard us.

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

“In the Maamer for the Yom Histalkus there are many seemingly inexplicable words, and the answer to your aforementioned question is, to the best of my knowledge, there in the beginning of chapter five; you will certainly hear — internalize — what it says in the beginning of chapter five and relate it to the Chosson and Kalla and to all of those who attend...”

The beginning of Seif Hei in the maamar Basi LeGani 5710 describes how the Amoraim would be mesameach a Chosson and Kalla, a form of Shtus Dekedusha, one of the Maamer’s main practical focuses, and the Rebbe concluded the letter with wishes of Mazel Tov and Brachos for the marriage and the new couple, to build a Beis Ne’eman BiYisroel and for Dor Yeshorim Yevorach in a revealed manner, a Binyan Adei Ad<sup>9</sup>.

For Reb Nissen and the Chosson and Kallah, this was an incredible Kiruv and a clear instruction. For them and many others, this was a clear indication that Bnei Yisroel had a Rebbe.

### תקסב

בֵּית ה' אדר, ה'תש"י

הרה"ח הו"ח אי"א נו"מ וכו' מהורנ"ג שי

שלום וברכה

במענה על שאלותיו הפרטיות:

לפענ"ד ישמח את החתן וכלה בניגוני חב"ד וכיו"ב. וכל המשמח כו' זוכה כו' וזוכה כו' ביב לזמן דקול חתן וכלה משמח חתן עם הכלה.

ידוע שאצל הנשיאים ובפרט שמעתי שאצל אדמו"ר מהר"ש נ"ע חנה בעת אמירת המאמר ה' אומר מילות בודדות שהיו שייכות רק לפרטים מן השומעים וכא"א ה' שומע רק השייך אליו. אלא שכ"ק אדני"ע ביקש את אביו שהוא ישמע גם את כל המילות הנ"ל וניתן לו – כך שמעתי מכ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר זצוקלה"ה נבג"מ זי"ע הכ"מ.

וחנה גם במאמר שליום ההסתלקות ישנם כמה וכמה בעל שם־סקע ווערטער ופתרון שאלתו כמש"כ לעיל הוא לפענ"ד שם רפ"ה ובטח ישמע – דערהערן – מש"כ ברפ"ה וישמיע להחור"כ ולכל המסובין. ואחתום בברכת מזי"ט מזי"ט לחתן וכלה שיעלה הזוג ליפה ויבנו בית נאמן בישראל בדור ישרים יבורך בגילוי בנין עדי עד.

בברכת מזל טוב

הרב מנחם שניאורסאהן

*The Rebbe's letter with instructions for the wedding*

9 Notably, these brachos are a direct quote of the Maamer Basi LeGani which the Rebbe explained to be referring to them.



## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

A mere six days after the Rebbe's letter was written, the wedding took place in Brunoy on Yud Alef Adar, 5710/1950, the day after the Frierdiker Rebbe's Shloshim.

### Immigration

After the young couple's wedding, the subject of how to get to New York was of primary importance. After years of yearning and hoping, Sholom Ber had been approved to travel to the Frierdiker Rebbe, and now, after the Histalkus and as a Yungerman, he still had every desire to travel to 770. It is unclear if anyone discouraged these plans, and the hanhola of Tomchei Temimim led by Rashag who had already cleared Sholom Ber to go and arranged visas for the other Bochorim, continued to overcome the hurdles involved, enabling Sholom Ber and his wife to travel. To this end, they were issued an affidavit that Sholom Ber would have a one year scholarship, that instruction would be in Hebrew and Yiddish meaning that knowledge of English was not necessary, and promising full room and board. The young couple was to be completely taken care of, and a Yeshiva board member even produced a statement that he would personally cover the expenses for the young couple to exit America at the end of the year and to travel to the new state of Israel.

This circumvented a major issue. After the war, when many chassidim exited Russia, most wanted to travel to America. However, the gates of American immigration would not open to war refugees until 5712-5713/1952-1953, and most chassidim were either forced to wait until then or to settle in Eretz Yisroel and other countries. Thus, with their student visas issued with the assistance of the central Tomchei Temimim at 770, they were able to arrive on American shores during a time when almost no one else could. For his entire life, Sholom Ber would always have much gratitude to Rashag for extending this unique opportunity to him.

The arrangements for travel was an ordeal which took several months. Finally, at the conclusion of the Tishrei Yomim Tovim



*Their ship docked in Ellis Island*

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - WEDDING AND ARRIVAL TO AMERICA

the young couple would depart France on the Saturnia ship bound for New York. When they arrived at Ellis Island on 11 Cheshvan of 5711/1950, Rochel was eight months pregnant. At Ellis Island, there was an issue with paperwork which held them up for longer than usual.

Meanwhile, they had not brought very much with them, and they were approached by a photographer who was doing a story for Life Magazine, documenting the issues faced by arrivals at Ellis Island. Offering money, he asked if he could take their picture. They took up the offer, and indeed one of the pictures which he took ended up being printed. In it, Rochel is sitting at a table, and Sholom Ber is davening Mincha, perhaps Maariv. The photographer was very much taken by the picture, and in fact, Life again featured the picture as one of their best pictures ever taken in the centennial edition. A few years ago, Life Magazine sold their archive, and it was posted online bringing additional pictures to light.

Life Magazine's website currently reads, "Near the end of that long run, in the fall of 1950, LIFE photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt went out to the island in Upper New York Bay to make some pictures. The rough machinery of politics had brought confusion and delay to the processing of thousands of men, women and children looking to step on to American soil. But beyond chronicling the impact that political rivalries in Washington were having on real lives, Eisenstaedt's pictures also encompass a more permanent truth about the immigrant's journey, and these images mirror photographs made at Ellis Island decades before."

The caption for the picture, published on page 127 of the magazine issue from Nov. 13, 1950, reads as follows, "Together but separated by their lonely preoccupations, Rachel Pewzner and her husband Schulim



*The photo featured in Life Magazine*

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

wait in a corner of a big noisy room. He has turned his face to the wall and is praying, perhaps for the child his wife will soon have or perhaps simply for a speedy release. A rabbinical student, Schulim has a scholarship waiting for him at a Brooklyn institute but has been detained because of some irregularity in his papers. He and his wife came from Warsaw, did forced labor in Russia, wandered to Germany and then to France. Hardships have made them look far older than they really are — she is 20, he 24.”

While the photographer was inaccurate while writing about their geographical history — given the fact that they both escaped Russia with assumed Polish papers — his statement about their appearances rang very true. At a relatively young age, both of them had already faced hardships which most thankfully never do. Perhaps this was what intrigued him so much. Ellis Island truly was the promised land for the young Pewzners; it signified their arrival to freedom, the end of their decades long escape from religious persecution. And while unbeknownst to the photographer, their arrival was of great importance because it signified their arrival at the Rebbe's doorstep, where they would merit to spend the rest of their lives.

It is unclear exactly where the couple ended up on arrival in New York. As one would imagine — and they probably knew so as well — Yeshiva at 770 did not have the paid apartment and the other arrangements ready to go, and they must have had some other temporary accommodations. In fact, at the very beginning they were put up somewhere in Manhattan.

It seems that Reb Sholom Ber's first time seeing the Rebbe was during the day at a 3:15pm Mincha with the Bochorim.

When asked by a nephew what exactly happened at this initial meeting, Reb Sholom Ber recounted that the Rebbe approached him and greeted him with a warm (verbal) Shalom Aleichem. Then, the Rebbe inquired as to why Sholom Ber and his wife had come, implying that after the Histalkus, there was no need for him relocate to be by the Rebbe. At the time, with Chassidim dispersed all around the world due to the upheaval of World War Two and the holocaust, the Rebbe was encouraging everyone to stay where they were and to involve themselves in Hafatzos Hamayanos, rather than come to be in the arou of 770. Apparently, Reb Sholom Ber nervously responded that they had come to be by the (present) Rebbe. To this the Rebbe, who was yet to formally accept the nesius, motioned dismissively with his hand indicating his approval.

Sometime after they arrived, they managed to settle in their first apart-

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - WEDDING AND ARRIVAL TO AMERICA

ment in Northern Crown Heights, on 1013 Prospect Place, just several blocks up Kingston Avenue from 770. During this period, the Lubavitcher Olam in Crown Heights was very small with only a handful of Russian Chassidim. Their eldest daughter Esther Hadassa was born shortly thereafter on 27 Kislev; she was named for Sholom Ber's mother who had been murdered by the Nazis. That Shabbos, at the Kiddush in honor of her birth, the Rebbe Farbrenged and spoke on the topic of what the birth of a daughter represents in the perspective of Chassidus.

As mentioned, after exiting Ellis Island they were initially staying in Manhattan upon arrival to New York. Their first or second Shabbos was Shabbos Mevorchim Kislev, 5711/1950, and Reb Sholom Ber walked to Crown Heights to attend the Rebbe's Farbrengen. It was a difficult walk for a new immigrant in a foreign land who was not in the best of health.

This walk and Sholom Ber's commitment to attend the Rebbe's Farbrengen would become a steadfast feature of his entire life. From this Farbrengen and on, Sholom Ber seldomly ever missed a Farbrengen throughout his entire life, until Shabbos Parshas Shlach, 5747/1987. In his diary, Sholom Ber would express surprise at a Bochor who had missed a Farbrengen to go and meet his future Kalla, and once, when his son-in-law and daughter, Reb Aharon and Sheindy Lieberman were making a Bris in La Jolla, California on Yud Tes Kislev, Sholom Ber was very uncertain about going. He eventually ended up going, but together with a few trips which he took overseas, this was one of the few Farbrengens that he ever missed.

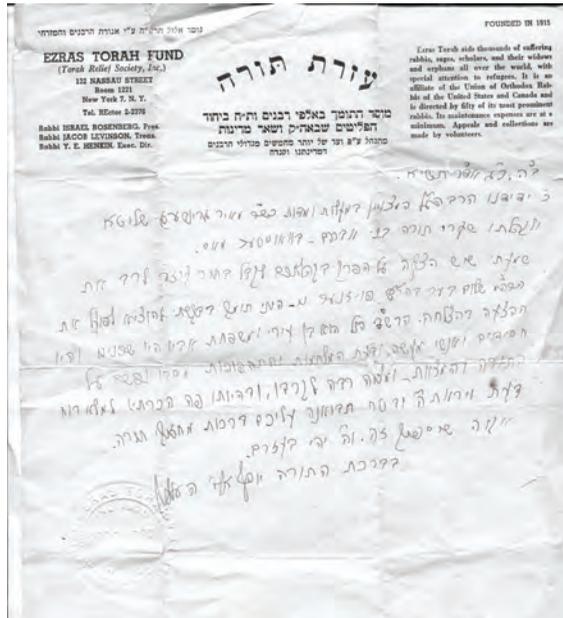
Reb Sholom Ber would share his respect for the Rebbe's Farbrengens with his children. He would ensure that they would not come to the Rebbe's Farbrengens to run around and instead taught them to stand quietly, trying to understand as much as possible. When one of his children was eight years old, he found for him a place on the bleachers amongst the bachurim where he would be able to monitor from afar, giving him the opportunity to observe the Rebbe's Farbrengens from an early age.

Upon arrival in NY, Reb Sholom Ber was reunited with some of his colleagues from Yeshiva, the group which had traveled in 5710. Throughout his life, Reb Sholom Ber would have various Chavrusos, and he would learn with some of them during the earlier years in the Yeshiva at Bedford and Dean.

# BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

## Occupation

Before going to work at the print house where he would spend most of his life involved in printing Seforim for Lubavitch and the Jewish community in America, he would initially work in the Yeshiva's office for Rashag. As well, he would work for a period of time in a fish store. Also, it seems that he did consider a Rabbinical career being that there is a letter from Rav Henkin dated Adar 5711 recommending him for a Rabbinic position in Worcester, Massachusetts. However, it is unclear how seriously Reb Sholom Ber considered this position being that he had spent such a short amount of time in New York at that point.



*Rav Henkin's Letter of Recommendation*

It was Shevat 5713/1953, when he would join Reb Mordechai or Motel Schusterman at his printing business. At the time however, Sholom Ber did not have the money to enter the business as a fifty-fifty partner and was only able to put in a bit at a time, eventually paying off his share. Reb Mottel would write in his memoirs that his main concern when looking for a partner was to have a friend who he could trust, and the financial aspect was not a primary concern.

The business was very unique, and it would operate under two names, Ezra and Balshon. The name Ezra came from the printing press which the Rebbe Rashab opened in Rostov and was used for the printing of Kehos Seforim. The name Balshin, coming from a second name used by Ezra for Mordechai, meaning the knower of many languages, would be used when printing all other Seforim. The Rebbe spoke about the printing press at the Purim Farbrengen of 5716/1956, asking them to take the business to prosperity which would bring prosperity to Hafatzas HaMayanos and would provide Parnassah to families of Anash. This would become the mission

statement of the business; they would only print Sifrei Kodesh, and they were able to provide Parnassah for multiple Anash families.

Uniquely, Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch was a full partner in the business, and all profits would be split between the three partners, Mottel Schusterman, Sholom Ber Pewzner, and Merkos. Also, the business, printing much of the new Seforim of the age, both for Lubavitch and for the rest of the Frum Jewry in America. The first volumes of Likkutei Sichos were printed at the press, as well as the first editions of Igros Moshe.

In this context, Reb Sholom Ber would interact with their clients forming relationships with many of the leading Rabbonim and Mechabrei Seforim of the time throughout New York and America, and he would often use these relationships to spread the Rebbe's viewpoints and opinions to the wider Jewish world. In fact, Sholom Ber would sometimes prepare notes with references to supply when discussing hotter topics with these Rabbonim.

Also, the Rebbe was personally involved in many of the projects at the print shop, reviewing all of the Kehos Seforim before they would be printed. They would prepare galleys, large papers with multiple pages on each sheet, which they would send to 770 for the Rebbe to review. The Rebbe would add notes, and to the Frierdiker Rebbe's Maamarim, he added the Haoros. Thus, the print shop was full of the Rebbe's Kisvei Yad, and they would send the Kisvei Yad back to 770, leading to a constant back and forth of the Rebbe's holy writings.

Throughout his life, both in his personal life and at the print shop, a signature quality of Reb Sholom Ber was his particular pleasantness and nesias chein.

### **Family**

As time went on, Reb Sholom Ber and Rochel's family grew. After Esther Haddasa was born in 1950/5711, their first son Yosef Yitzchok was born in Shevat 5713/1953. Somehow, despite the fact that Reb Sholom Ber was orphaned from his own father at fifteen years old, they chose to give him the name of the Frierdiker Rebbe who, of course, they had never met. This provides an ounce of insight into the sense of connection held by the chasidim who never saw their Rebbe through the long years of communism.

In 5714/1954 on 4 Shevat their second daughter, Sheina Chaya (Shein-

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

dy), was born, and they named her for Reb Nissen's mother. In Kislev of 5715/1954, Shterna Sara was born, bearing the name of the Alter Rebbetzin as she was called, the wife of the Rebbe Rashab. In Teves of 5722/1961, their second son Shmuel was born; he was given the name of Reb Sholom Ber's father, and finally in Nissan 5728/1968, Menachem Mendel, their third son, was born.

In 1971, tragedy struck the family when Zelda Nemanov, the wife of Rochel's brother Reb Sholom Ber Nemanov and a young mother with a house full of children, passed away from an illness. At that point, Sholom Ber and Rochel took in their twin nephews Yisrael and Mendel who they raised in their home as well.

These few lines cannot do justice to the life lived by Reb Sholom Ber and Rochel Pewzner and the manner in which they raised their family. With Hashem's help, we will be able to prepare and publish a second installment of this documentation, providing more information and insight about the life and personality of Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner.



## Life Magazine Pictures from Ellis Island



# BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER



ELLIS ISLAND 1950 *continued*



**EXHAUSTED PARENTS** in crowded hall will keep their child amused and quiet. Most of them will go on with neither protest nor whim, but hoping something will get better from the time they arrive.

**IN WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT**, crowded with bookshelves, women sit idly on their beds. At right is Maria Kuznetsov of Italy, here for a few months only. She receives more treatment as those who will stay.



**THEY CHIEF** is ready to get ready with his head on the floor and his hands clasped in prayer. There is a hardy kitchen for applicants here.



**TOGETHER BUT SEPARATED** by their common purpose. Berl Pewzner and his brother-in-law, the owner of a dry-goods store. Berl had turned his face to the wall and is packing packages for the child he will soon have to give up for a family to have him adopted. A traditional custom.

Scullin has a scholarship waiting for him at a Brooklyn business but has been denied because of some irregularities in his papers. He and his wife came from Warsaw. His brother-in-law, Isidor, landed in Germany and then in France. Berl's wife has made three trips to the city since they really came—only to see the city.



## Various Documents Regarding Reb Sholom Ber and Rochel's Immigration and Entry into the United States

OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
(RABBINICAL SEMINARY)

19 GRANT SQUARE (BEDFORD AVENUE COR. DEAN STREET) BROOKLYN 16, NEW YORK

August 4, 1950

Hon. American Consul  
Paris, France

AMERICAN EMBASSY  
PARIS, FRANCE  
RECD AUG 8 1950

RE: SCHULIM BER PEWZNER  
and his wife RACHEL

Honorable Sir:

Please be advised that at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Central Yeshiva Tomchei Tainim Lubavitz of the United States of America, held recently, the Board unanimously voted to grant to SCHULIM BER PEWZNER a one year free scholarship. This free scholarship includes tuition fees, books, food, clothing and dormitory facilities for him and his wife.

Upon the arrival of the said Mr. Pewzner to the United States, he will be housed in one of the school dormitories and will be furnished with all the necessities of life.

Our Rabbinical courses are conducted in the Hebrew language. There is therefore no need for the knowledge of the English language. Also, in the case of advanced students, it is possible to complete the studies for the Rabbinate in one year. We have instituted such a course to enable qualified students to complete their studies for the Rabbinate in one year.

We hereby undertake and guarantee to the Honorable American Consul that upon the completion of the course of studies of the said student, he will depart from the United States.

Assuring you, Honorable Sir, of our deep gratitude for your favorable action, we beg to remain,

Very sincerely yours,  
*S. Gourary*  
Rabbi S. Gourary  
Chairman,  
Executive Committee

SG:B

BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

Tel. Sterling 3-1127

ב"ה

CENTRAL YESHIVA  
TOMCHEI TMIMIM LUBAVITZ  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
(RABBINICAL SEMINARY)

הישיבה ומתיבתא המרכזית  
תומכי תמימים ליובאוויטש  
ברוקלין, נ. י.

19 GRANT SQUARE

(BEDFORD AVENUE COR. DEAN STREET)

BROOKLYN 16, NEW YORK

July 11, 1950

Hon. American Consul General  
Paris, France

RE: PEWZNER, SHULIM BER  
and his wife RACHEL

Dear Sir:

In connection with the application of Mr. Shulim Ber Pewzner for a visa to come to the United States to study at the Central Yeshiva Tomchei Tmimim Lubavitz of the United States of America, I heroby wish to assure the Hon. American Consul General that upon Mr. Pewzner's completion of his courses at our Rabbinical Seminary I personally guarantee to provide him and his wife with the costs of their transportation to the State of Israel.

Thanking you for your kind consideration in this matter, I remain,

Very truly yours,

Sammuel Palmer  
Vice- Chairman

SP:B

IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

ANNÉE 1949 Du 8 août mil neuf cent 49

N° 51

MARIAGE

ENTRE : Schulim Berl PEWZNER

Né le 2 octobre 1926, à Varsovie

Arrond<sup>t</sup> d. dépt<sup>t</sup> Pologne

Profession étudiant

Domicilié à Brunoy (Seine et Oise)

Fils de Schmuel PEWZNER

Et de Ester AGROSTINAK, épouse décédée mariés

Veuf de

ET Rachel NEMANOW

Née le 1<sup>er</sup> mai 1930, à Sockezie

Arrond<sup>t</sup> d. dépt<sup>t</sup> Pologne

Profession sans profession

Domiciliée à Brunoy

Fille de Wlison NEMANOW

Et de Yata RASKIN mariés

Veuve de

Contrat de mariage usant

SIGNATURE DE L'ÉPOUX,

PEWZNER

SIGNATURE DE L'ÉPOUSE,

Nemanow

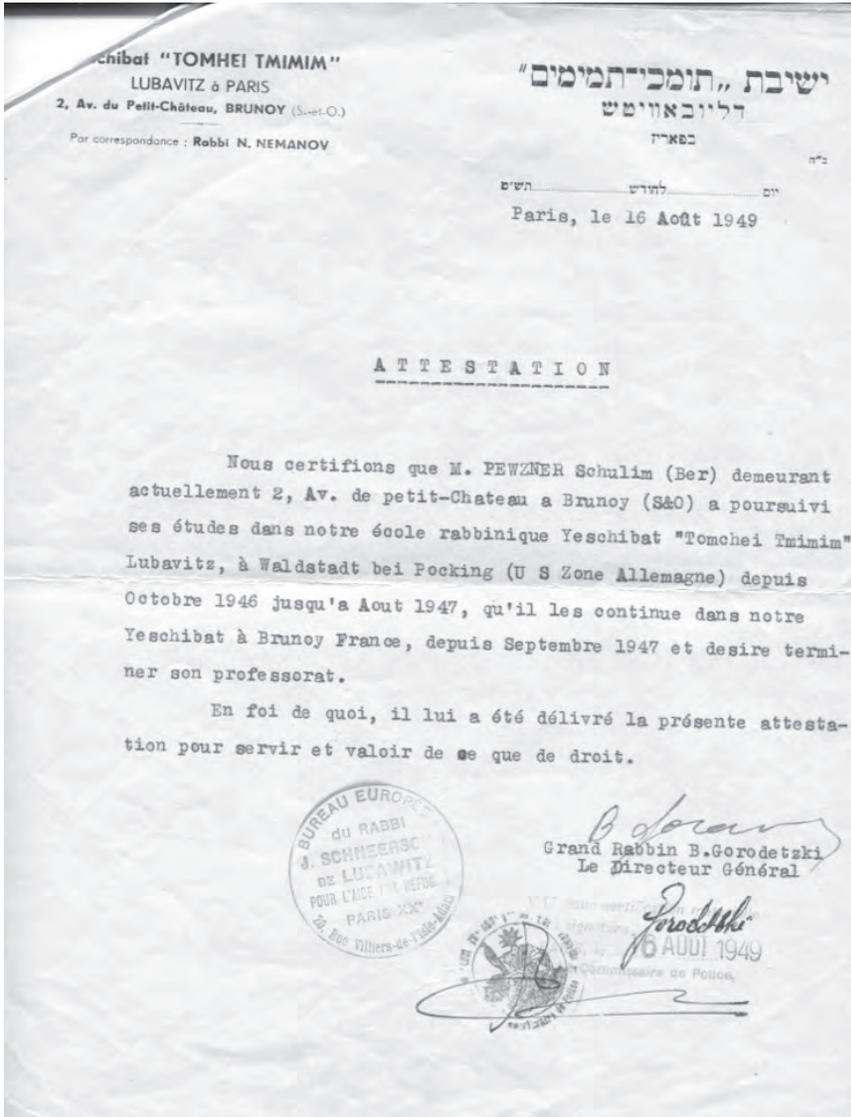
Délivré le 8 août 1949

L'Officier de l'état civil,



Handwritten signature of the civil officer in blue ink.

BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER



# IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

התאחדות החרדים בצרפת

ASSOCIATION DES ISRAELITES PRATIQUANTS DE FRANCE

10, Rue Dieu, 10 - PARIS (X<sup>e</sup>)  
Tél. BOT 77-98

La Synagogue ADATH YECHOUROUN  
25, rue des Rosiers PARIS 4<sup>e</sup>

PARIS, LE 17 avril 1950 104

## Certificat

Je soussigné Mendel DUBRAWSKI, Rabbin de la Synagogue ADATH YECHOUROUN, 25 rue des Rosiers Paris IV, certifie par la présente, que M. PEWZNER Schlim Per a qui j'ai donné des leçons privées (clandestinement) a KUTAISY URSS avait au commencement de ses études chez moi déjà quelques connaissances de PEIROUCH HATFILTH (l'explication des prières), CHUMESH (Bible), la première partie de TANACH (Livre des prophètes) et avait eu une certaine idée du Talnud General.

M. PEWZNER avait appris les sujets sus-nommés avant la guerre dans un cours préparatoire à OTWOCK (Pologne).

*Dubrawski Mendel*

Fait à Paris le 15 avril 1950

# BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

התאחדות החרדים בצרפת

ASSOCIATION DES ISRAELITES PRATIQUANTS DE FRANCE

10, Rue Dieu, 10 - PARIS (X<sup>e</sup>)  
Tél. BOT 77-98

La Synagogue ADATH YECHOUROUN  
25, rue des Rosiers PARIS 4<sup>e</sup>

PARIS, LE \_\_\_\_\_ 194\_\_

## DECLARATION

Je soussigne Rabbïn Mendel DUBRAWSKI declare que j'ai donne  
des leçons de Theologie Israelite a PEWZNER Schulim Ber a KUTAISY  
(URSS) des l'ete 1943 jusqu'au juillet 1946.

Je ne puis indiquer dex date plus precise quant au debut  
de ses etudes,mes souvenirs etant un peu brouilles

Ce certificat a ete delivre a M.Pewzner pour servir et valoir  
ce que de droit.

Fait a Paris le 24 juillet 1950

*Dubrawski M.*

# IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

27383

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE  
PRÉFECTURE DE SEINE-ET-OISE  
Service des Étrangers

AUTORISATION PROVISOIRE DE SÉJOUR

Signature du Titulaire  
*Pewzner*

Dans le Interdit dans les départements du Haut-Rhin, du Bas-Rhin, de la Moselle et des Alpes-Maritimes.

M. *Pewzner* née *Nemanow Rachel*  
né le *15* 19*26* à *Dachau*  
de nationalité *polonaise*  
demeurant *Brunoy*  
est autorisé à résider jusqu'au *15 août 1950*

Séjour autorisé jusqu'au *15 novembre 1950* à *Versailles* le *9 MAI 1950*

Pour le Préfet  
Le Secrétaire Général  
Le Secrétaire Général et P. O.

Le Préfet  
Secrétaire Général  
Secrétaire Général et P. O.

*Richard*



TRANSLATE FROM FRENCH

DISPATCH, Notariety PEWZNER Schulimber, June 27, 1949.

Excerpt from registrar's office of the Justice of Peace, from Judiciary district of Boissy-St Leger, comprising the administrative district of Valleneuve-St-Georges borough Corbeil, department Seine-et-Oise, seated at the judiciary headquarters of Boissy-St-Leger, No 38, rue de Paris.

Of the said draft it has been excerpted as follows:

In the year nineteen hundred and forty ~~SIX~~ nine and on June twenty seventh, in the presence of Us, Pierre MERIMEE Justice of Peace of the borough Boissy-St-Leger, department of Seine-et-Oise, assisted by Mr. Guy DEDES Registrar in our cabinet in the dwelling of Justice of Peace at Boissy-St-Leger HAVE APPEARED:

- 1/ Mister TARCZIS here 59 years of age, handiman residing at Boissy-St-Leger rue de la Fontaine,
- 2/ Mister UHR Alfred, 23 years old student, residing at Boissy-St Leger, rue de la Fontaine,
- 3/ Mrs. AWEBACH Miriam born GERCHENSOHN, 59 years old, without profession, residing in Paris 4, rue d'Ormesson 11,

who in the capacity of major witnesses and filling the required conditions have declared and stated that they knew perfectly well Mr. PEWZNER Schulimber, student, residing at Brunoy, avenue du Petit Chateau,

and have stated as truth of of public notariety that the said Mr. PEWZNER was born on October second nineteen hundred twenty six at Warsaw from deceased Schmeul and Esther Agrostinak

and that the above-mentioned is not in the ability to provide a certificate of birth due to the fact that the archives have been destroyed during the war,

In view of this fact it ensues that the witnesses have testified with truthfulness and sincerity and we have set up this deed of notirety upon the demand of the above-mentioned and in conformity with resolutions of the Law in order to replace the certificate of birth in view of his contracting a marriage with Rachel NEMANOW residing at Brunoy and in order to form a file for emigration to the United States.

And after the reading, the said witnesses have signed with the applicant and with Usm Judge of Peace and the Registrar.

For DISPATCH  
Clerk Registrar

BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

REPUBLIC OF FRANCE )  
CITY OF PARIS ) SS.  
UNITED STATES CONSULATE GENERAL )

I, the undersigned, being duly sworn depose and say as follows:

1. My name is Schulim Bar. PEWZNER.....  
and I reside at .. 2. avenue du Petit Chateau, Brunoy, S. et. O, France

2. I realize fully that a visa for entry into the United States for permanent residence is not being granted me.

I will not attempt, if permitted to enter the United States as a nonquota student, to remain permanently or to apply to any authorities for a change in status nor for extension of stay.

When I have completed my course of studies, I intend to leave the United States and practice my occupation or profession abroad.

I realize that upon leaving the United States after my permitted stay I will not be entitled to any preferential status as a quota immigrant and that any application I may then make will be considered strictly under the laws and regulations then in force.

*Schulim Bar. Pewzner*  
( Signature )

Subscribed and sworn before me  
this .. 8th .. day of .. August .. 1950.

*Colette Meyer*  
Colette Meyer vice Consul of the United States  
of America at Paris, France

IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

Tel. Sterling 3-1127

ב"ה

CENTRAL YESHIVA  
TOMCHEI TMIMIM LUBAVITZ  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
(RABBINICAL SEMINARY)

הישיבה ומתיבתא המרכזית  
תומכי תמימים ליובאוויטש  
ברוקלין, נ.י.

19 GRANT SQUARE

(BEDFORD AVENUE COR. DEAN STREET)

BROOKLYN 16, NEW YORK

October 20, 1950

United States Immigration Authorities  
Pier West 44th Street  
New York City

Dear Sirs:

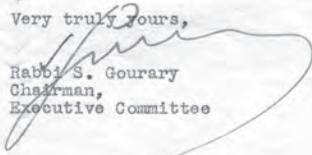
Mr. Schulim Ber Pewzner and his wife Rachel Pewzner are arriving Sunday, October 22nd, 1950, on the S.S. Saturnia, on their way to the Central Yeshiva Tomchei Tmimim Lubavitz of the United States of America where Mr. Pewzner has been accepted as a student.

Mr. Pewzner has been awarded a free scholarship by our Rabbinical Seminary. This free scholarship includes tuition, food, clothing, and dormitory facilities. As soon as they arrive in this country, Mr. & Mrs. Pewzner will be provided with living quarters and all the necessities of life.

We would deeply appreciate your releasing Mr. & Mrs. Pewzner without difficulties so that they may proceed to our school.

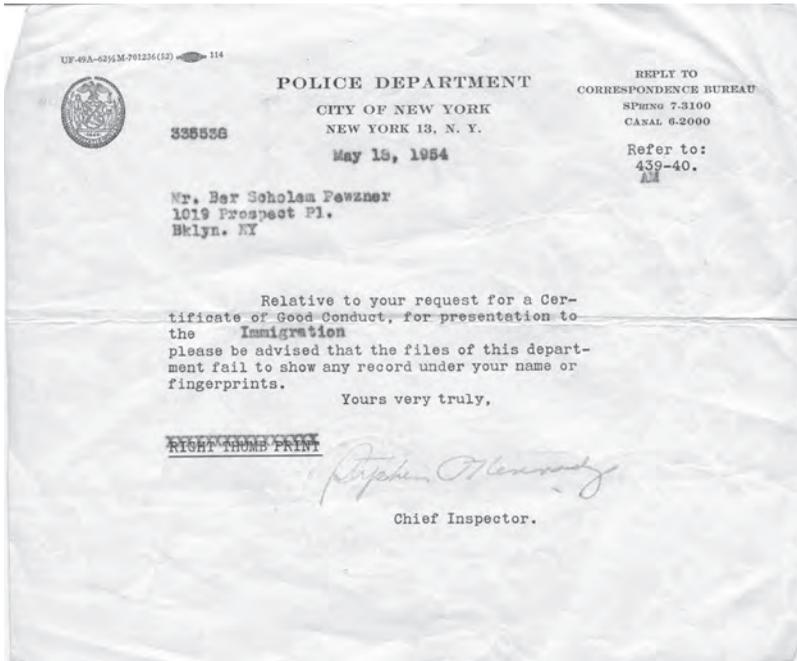
Thanking you for any courtesy you may extend to them, I remain,

Very truly yours,

  
Rabbi S. Gourary  
Chairman,  
Executive Committee

SG:B

BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER



# IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

HOMER E. CAPEHART, IND., CHAIRMAN  
JOHN W. BRICKER, OHIO  
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IRA DIXON, CHIEF CLERK  
A. LEE PARSONS, ASST. CLERK

## United States Senate COMMITTEE ON BANKING AND CURRENCY

June 2, 1954

Mr. and Mrs. Shulim B. Pewczner  
1013 Prospect Place  
Brooklyn, New York

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Pewczner:

I have your letter of recent date and the attached copies of your life histories. I fully appreciate your interest in becoming United States' citizens.

Unfortunately, it is highly improbable that a private bill introduced for your relief in the Senate at this late date would receive favorable consideration by the Senate Judiciary Committee during the current Session of the Congress. However, if a private bill introduced in the House of Representatives were to receive favorable action, it might well receive favorable consideration by the Senate prior to adjournment this year because it would not necessitate an independent investigation and study by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Therefore, I would suggest that an effort be made to obtain the introduction of a private bill for the relief of yourselves by the Congressman representing the district in which you now reside. In the event of its favorable consideration by the House of Representatives, I shall do whatever I can to obtain favorable consideration by the Senate.

With kindest personal regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,

  
IRVING M. IVES

IMI:sm

BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

(THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)


 No. 8398942

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**  
**IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE**

*Relation No.* 622692      **ORIGINAL**

*Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Date of birth* OCTOBER 2, 1926    sex MALE  
*complexion* FAIR    *color of eyes* BROWN    *color of hair* BROWN    *height* 5 feet 3 inches  
*weight* 143 pounds    *visible distinctive marks* none  
*Marital status* MARRIED    *Country of former nationality* POLAND

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.



*Schulim Ber Pewzner*  
(Complete and true signature of holder)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA    s.f.  
 EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

*Be it known, that at a term of the* \_\_\_\_\_ *District* \_\_\_\_\_ *Court of*  
 The United States

*held pursuant to law at* Brooklyn  
*on* DECEMBER 26, 1961 *the Court having found that*  
 SCHULIM BER PEWZNER  
*then residing at* 594 MONTGOMERY STREET, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK  
*intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the*  
*Naturalization Laws of the United States) had in all other respects complied with*  
*the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be*  
*admitted to citizenship, thereupon order that such person be and she was*  
*admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.*  
*In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this* 26th  
*day of* DECEMBER *in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and*  
 SIXTY ONE.

SIDNEY B. FEUER  
 U.S. District Court  
*By* \_\_\_\_\_ *Deputy Clerk*

It is a violation of the U.S. Code, and punishable as such, to copy, loan, photograph, or otherwise illegally use this certificate.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

# IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS



STATE OF NEW YORK  
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER  
ALBANY

NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER  
GOVERNOR

March 2, 1962

As Governor of the State of New York I congratulate you upon the occasion of your naturalization.

As an American citizen you are entitled to all the rights and prerogatives of our Constitution and its Bill of Rights. It is your duty as a citizen, and your responsibility as a human being to preserve and enhance the spirit of liberty and the dignity of the individual for this and future generations of Americans and for all freedom-loving men and women throughout the world.

I am delighted to extend a welcome to you as a citizen of the State of New York. Here I hope you will enjoy to the fullest the bounties of our wonderful country, and through your efforts strengthen our heritage of freedom.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Nelson A. Rockefeller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "N".

Schulim Ber Pewzner  
594 Montgomery Street  
Brooklyn, New York

# BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER



STATE OF NEW YORK  
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER  
ALBANY

NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER  
GOVERNOR

February 26, 1962

As Governor of the State of New York I congratulate you upon the occasion of your naturalization.

As an American citizen you are entitled to all the rights and prerogatives of our Constitution and its Bill of Rights. It is your duty as a citizen, and your responsibility as a human being to preserve and enhance the spirit of liberty and the dignity of the individual for this and future generations of Americans and for all freedom-loving men and women throughout the world.

I am delighted to extend a welcome to you as a citizen of the State of New York. Here I hope you will enjoy to the fullest the bounties of our wonderful country, and through your efforts strengthen our heritage of freedom.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Nelson A. Rockefeller".

Mrs. Rachel Pewzner  
594 Montgomery Street  
Brooklyn, New York

CHAPTER 6

# The Inside Story

## The Drama of Sholom and Dov

By all accounts, Reb Sholom Ber Pewzner was a deep personality. In the previous chapters, the effort was made to trace the early years of his life and to provide insight into his background. What will be presented here is a glimpse into how he himself wished to tell his story, in a manner that fits his unique perspective.

Although he never seemed to mention it to any of his children, Reb Sholom Ber once sat down to draft a sort of memoir. Rather than simply writing a simple autobiography, he actually sketched out an overview of a novel. His wish was clearly not merely to entertain, but to express the story of his own life, sharing the inner struggle which he felt characterized his youth. The fact that he at all wished to share his story shows on the depth of his character, and the story itself can really focus our view of who he was.

We were only left with the briefest of writings, but it seems like he wished to tell a tale of two young people, a Chossid named Sholom and a Misnaged named Dov. As will be translated from his notes, Sholom was set as a perfect boy and Dov a wild troublemaker. As will also be noted, the story was to have a happy ending; after much struggle, Dov became a Chossid as well. The story would express the transformative power of Chassidus while unwrapping a deeply personal story.

Most noticeable is the fact that the two characters in the intended book

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

are named for himself, Sholom DovBer Pewzner. The outlined drama seems to indicate that Sholom Ber viewed his life as the struggle and dialogue between these two characters, with his early life being an incredibly fruitful time of inner transformation. This drama is imaginable from the history that we have about Sholom Ber which seems to tell a similar tale. He was a child cherished by his parents, while also a troublemaker; a yeshiva bochur living with true Mesiras Nefesh, while also just growing up.

While the reader is encouraged to draw their own conclusions, it is very interesting to note that Sholom Ber associated many of his qualities with incredible potential for the positive with Dov, the born Misnaged. Even more gratifying, this potential for positive was realized, and indeed, throughout Sholom Ber's life, these incredible talents and abilities would serve himself, his family, and the Rebbe for the best.

It seems that he intended to include an actual autobiography as background for the book, a sort of introduction for the characters. He lists the different stages of his arrival to America with the briefest of descriptions, and while he wrote out ten numbers on the sheet, he only actually listed nine things. In his notes is the following list which has been translated to English:

1. **Ellis Island, one night in an imprisonment.**
2. **The Rebbe sends him a Sicha; what is its content**
3. **Walking by foot to the Rebbe's house** [770. The backstory is his walk from Manhattan to 770 on his first Shabbos in America, Shabbos Mevorchim Kislev 5711.]
4. **Meeting the family of the Rebbe Shlita (OBM)** [The expression of Shlita and of Zichron Tzadik LiBracha seems to refer to both the Rebbe and the Frierdiker Rebbe.]
5. **The prayer and requests at the Tziyon**
6. **Going to work with fish**
7. **The office** [This could be at the Yeshiva in 770 or at Balshon.]
8. **The general American style of things**
9. **The blustering busy feeling...**
- 10.

He continued, writing the following on a note card:

## REB SHOLOM BER PEWZNER - THE INSIDE STORY

**Books valuable to look into:**

**Rabbi Shuch whose son printed a commentary on davening.**

**HaNesia LiHaRebbe, someone had written something on traveling to the Rebbe, from Meir Weisport**

Below is the description of the characters, the cities in which the book was to take place, and the general storyline:

**Titled, The Book Chossid and Misnaged**

**Sholom the Chossid, Dov the Misnaged. Sholom is refined naturally, and he listens to his parents. Dov is a horrendous youth, very arrogant with a good head, very lazy, totally unrestrained and daring, who is all about putting others down. He doesn't need to learn; better to understand the natural than to strive to comprehend the supernatural.**

**Cities:**

**Kutaisi, Suchum, Poti, Kulash, Sedreri, Sudjuni, Samarkand, Lemburg, Pocking, Brunoy, New York.**

[These are all cities in Sholom Ber's life, and it must be that in them is where he felt this drama play out.]

As to the actual plot of the story, Reb Sholom Ber provided no detail. However, as many others do, he initially wrote out the end of the story:

**The great arousal brings Dov to a greater place of Teshuvah.**

**He gives himself over to the study of Chassidus and to the dynamic of Rebbe and chossid. He learns all day and sits through nights [perhaps at Farbrengens]. One night, he goes to the Ohel and gives himself over to the Rebbe with seriousness. In such a manner, his entire character becomes uplifted in the right direction.**

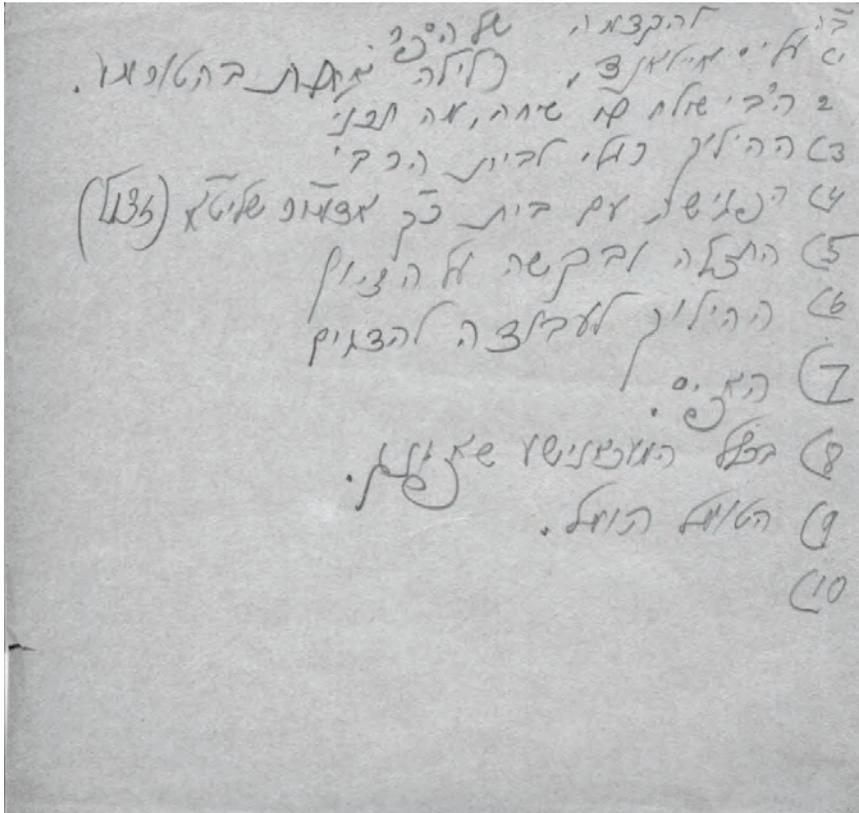
With these lines Reb Sholom Ber seems to outline the story of his inner victory. It was the events and circumstances which inspired him that allowed him to dedicate himself to the study of Chassidus and to cultivate a real bond with the Rebbe (who he had not met at the time). Apparently, the feelings of coming to New York, arriving to 770, and giving himself over to the Rebbe was particularly solidifying for his entire journey.

A most surprising line reads as follows: **"Sholom goes to the front, never comes back."**

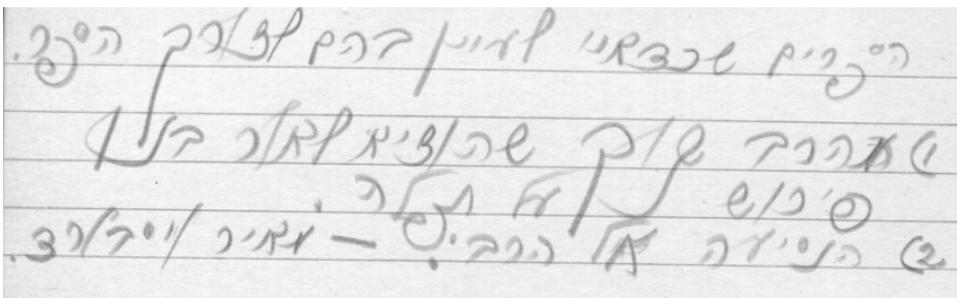
For some reason, he saw his innocent and perfect inner chassid to be

## BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION OF BERL PEWZNER

something that was somehow lost or left behind. He apparently missed that youthful innocence; he was glad that Dov underwent this important transformation, but his inner Sholom grew elusive.



*Sholom Ber's background to the story, the steps of his arrival in America*



*A list of relevant Seforim*







מזל טוב לבר מצוה

MAZAL TOV FOR THE BAR MITZVAH  
(TEXT OF THE REBBE'S HANDWRITING)

חן חן על השתתפותכם בשמחתנו

THANK YOU FOR JOINING  
US AT OUR SIMCHA

*The Pewzner Family*