

# *Teshura*

Wedding celebration of  
**Yoel & Chaya Mushka**  
Edelman

*MONDAY 8 SHEVAT 5783*  
*-SHNAS HAKHEL-*





Prepared by:  
Leibel Eidelman

*L'zchus the Chosson & Kalla with their families.*

*L'Ilui Nishmas:*  
*HaRav HaChasid R' Sholom ben R' Aryeh Dov*  
*olov HaSholom*  
Eidelman



## Foreword.

*B"H.*

We are humbly grateful to G-d A-Imighty for all the goodness which he has bestowed upon us, and for the great kindness he has granted us, the merit of celebrating the marriage of our dear children **Yoel** and **Chaya Mushka Edelman**.

In appreciation of all who have joined us in our celebration, - based on the conduct of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe who handed out *Teshura* -mementos to the participants of the Rebbe's wedding celebration - we would like to present you with this *Teshura* - memento.

This Memento contains a collection of works written by the great great grandfather of the *choson*, **Rabbi Chaim Mordechai HaKohen Perlow**:

- ***Chidushei Torah*** - notes written on the margins of his personal Gemara. Published here for the first time, (besides for a select few that were published in *kovtzei he'oros* over the past few years). Are his notes on *Maseches Pesachim*, and *Maseches Gittin* - the *Maseches* studied this year in Chabad yeshivas worldwide.
- ***Likkutei Sippurim*** – Selected translations of his *Sefer of Collected Chassidic Stories*:
  - The Foreword.
  - The Chapter of stories about the Previous Rebbe.
  - Notes about the author.

A special thanks to the brother of the *Choson*, *HaTomim HaShliach* Dovid Eliyohu Edelman for his efforts in deciphering and preparing the *Chidushei Torah* for print, and to Rabbi Choni Lesches for expertly translating the selections of the *Sefer Likkutei Sippurim*..

May G-d bless you and your family amongst all Israel with an abundance of blessings and above all, with the greatest blessing that we merit to continue this celebration, with celebrating the ultimate redemption – the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days!

**Rabbi Zaman & Henna Edelman - Rabbi Tzvi & Goldie Polter**



# *LIKKUTEI SIPPURIM*

*RABBI CHAIM MORDECHAI  
HAKOHEN PERLOW*

*NEWLY TRANSLATED FOREWORD AND  
SECTION TITLED 'THE REBBE RAYATZ'  
PUBLISHED IN HONOUR OF THE **CHASSUNA** OF  
**YOEL & CHAYA MUSHKA** EDELMAN*

*-MONDAY 8 SHEVAT 5783, SHNAS HAKHEL-*

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## FOREWORD

Although I do not consider myself to be a writer, it has become impossible to refuse the continuous requests of my fellow Chassidim — especially those of Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Groner — asking me to record the stories, anecdotes, and personal memories I merited to hear and experience during the brightest years of my life: the almost nine years I spent learning in Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim in the city of Lubavitch, from the beginning of 5664 (1904) to Adar 5673 (1913).



Rabbi Yitzchak  
Dovid Groner

In my estimation, there are plenty of other anthologies with similar content, but my friends are firm in their belief that my stories and recollections are particularly accurate, and merit a collection of their own. Keeping in mind the dictum of Rabi Yosi (*Shabbos, 118b*) “*Although I am not a Kohen, I will go up and duchen as a Kohen if my colleagues insist I do so,*” I will follow their advice and record my memories for posterity.



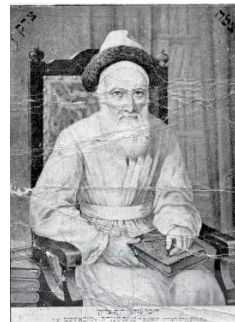
Rebbe Rashab

The bulk of the stories recorded here — aside from those I witnessed firsthand — I heard from my *mashpia* in Lubavitch, the famed Reb Shmuel Groinem (Esterman), one of the greatest *mashpiim* in the annals of Lubavitch. He was known by the acronym of his name: the *Rashag*.

Before being appointed by the Rebbe Rashab to serve as the *mashpia* in the central Yeshiva in Lubavitch, Reb Shmuel had headed the branch of Tomchei Tmimim in the city of Zhembin. The best and brightest

students were sent to this division. It was there that such *bochurim* were able to grow under his personal influence and care.

Reb Shmuel knew Zhembin well. He had been born and lived in the city, and it was there that he became deeply influenced by Reb Avrohom Halevi Landau, (known as *Reb Avremke Zhebiner*), a distinguished chassid of the Tzemach Tzedek. Reb Avremke originally hailed from the city of Kurnitz and, later in life, became the *rav* of Zhembin. During those years, the Rashag developed a very close bond with this great chassid.



Tzemach Tzedek

To give an indication of Reb Avremke's greatness, and the legendary reputation he had achieved for his vast knowledge in all areas of Torah – firmly establishing his reputation as one of the leading *rabbonim* of his time – I would like to relate something I did not hear personally from the Rashag, but was well-known in Lubavitch:

Once, when Reb Avremke was in *Yechidus* by the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe turned to him and said “What did you learn during this-and-this timeframe?”

Reb Avremke was known for his unusual *hasmodo*, but he felt embarrassed to admit how much Torah he had learned in this timeframe; he probably considered it to be a form of boastfulness. Instead, he gave the Tzemach Tzedek a much smaller report of what he had actually studied – detailing the number of pages he had learned in both Nigleh and Chassidus. Upon hearing the total, the Rebbe pronounced: “It seems that my Avremke is a *masmid*!”

The Rashag became a true *mekabel* of Reb Avremke, internalizing stories, sayings, and teachings from this great figure, effectively becoming the next link in the chain of the Chassidic tradition handed down from generation to generation. Reb

Avremke principally imparted a genuine *geshmak* in Chassidus – an inner feeling impossible to transcribe in the written word. Similar to etchings engraved in stone that last forever, this feeling of a *chassidisher geshmak* breathes life into a chassid, and animates all his deeds.

Although the Rashag succeeded tremendously in his role in Zhembin, the Rebbe Rashab installed him as the *mashpia* of the central Yeshiva in Lubavitch. This occurred in the summer of 5665 (1905), after the passing of the Rashbatz (Reb Shmuel Betzalel Sheftel), who had served in that role in the preceding years. As a result of this nomination, the Rashag and his family moved and settled permanently in Lubavitch.

Since I was studying in Lubavitch at the time, I was fortunate to hear many stories and oral traditions from the Rashag, which I will now try to put to paper. There are also other things I heard from *eltere* Chassidim in Lubavitch, and things I personally witnessed during my time there as well, which I will include here.

It is important for me to point out that over five decades have passed since that time, fifty years of great personal upheaval and change. Part of my suffering includes the time I spent incarcerated in prison for my religious activities and the six years spent doing backbreaking work in the *gulags*; there are not enough words to describe that trauma. In addition, I was involved in a serious car accident, when I fell under a moving car and broke both my legs. That accident occurred on *yud gimmel* Tishrei 5721 (1960), the day of the *hilula* of the Rebbe Maharash: in his merit, and the merit of all the other *Rebbeim*, I survived the accident and was able to make a full recovery.

Still, the culmination of all these events has undoubtedly left a mark on my memory, especially since I have never been known for a prodigious memory or for my writing skills. All I can do at this point is jot down what I believe to be accurate, even though I am

confident that many more things have been lost with the passage of the time and my memory gaps. Notwithstanding these setbacks, with the help of *Hashem*, I am confident that the recollections I have set down are, in fact, correct and accurate.

I would like to share with the reader the format I used when compiling this collection:

At first, I wrote my memories down as they came to me – without paying attention to their place in history – and later I arranged them chronologically, beginning with the Baal Shem Tov, followed by the Mezritcher Maggid, followed by the Alter Rebbe, and so on. These are followed by chapters dedicated to stories and anecdotes about Chassidim of great repute, followed by a section devoted to the students of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid. (The information in the latter section is very sparse, both because I did not hear much about them from my mentors and I did not try to commit them to memory.)

I am well aware of other printed works of fellow Chassidim with similar memories and stories, but I have refrained from copying what they have written. What purpose would that serve? I am not minimizing their worth; those *sefarim* are well known and there is nothing gained by quoting from others.

By the grace of *Hashem*, at least I have been blessed with a straight and categorical memory, which has allowed me to set down my recollections with precision, without confusing names and facts. With the help of *Hashem*, Who grants us all intelligence, I hope that in the future as well I will be able to continue living a long life with good health and clarity of mind, without the fear of knowing that inaccuracies have crept into this anthology.



Reb Schneur Zalman  
Duchman

Moreover, while preparing this collection for print, two of my friends – Reb Schneur Zalman Duchman and Reb Refael Kahan – published their own collections of *Sippurei Chassidim*, within a span of two months. To be honest, had I received their *sefarim* beforehand, I would have probably never set out to compile this work, but by now, I have already invested much time in transcribing my recollections and readying them for print.

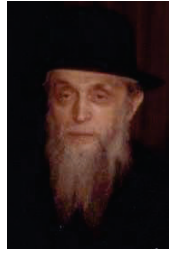
There will be overlap between my recollections and the above *sefarim* – particularly in regard to the recollections of Reb Refael Kahan, which contain a lot more material that is similar to what I have written here. Despite the apparent redundancy, I decided not to erase anything from my compilation, for two reasons:



Reb Refael Kahan

Firstly, we all have the same objective in transmitting our memories to the next generation. Secondly, there will always be slight differences in nuances, and every author will claim that their version is the correct one. Here too, I have found slight differences in the way we are retelling certain events. As I have already mentioned, over fifty years have passed since these events, and my memory is not what it used to be. As such, if any of my colleagues find mistakes in how I have retold certain events, I hope they will mention it to me, and I will make every effort to fix these mistakes in future editions.

The letters I received from Rabbi Hodakov, the secretariat of the Rebbe – encouraging me to finish writing my memories as quickly as possible – further bolstered my resolve to see this project to fruition. During this time, I also received a letter from the Rebbe, in which he added a few words in his holy handwriting, urging me to complete my writings and have them printed. Later, I received yet another letter from the Rebbe, once again with handwritten instructions to finish writing my *sefer*.



Rabbi Hodakov

Having received such instructions, I have no choice but to complete this endeavor, with fervent prayers to Hashem that the merit of all the *tzaddikim* about whom I write, and the merit of the *tzaddikim* alive today, combine to stand me and my wife in good stead – both in this world and the World to Come – to live a life of *nachas* and good health, amongst our Jewish brethren. Having arranged and completed this volume, I wait expectantly for the coming of the Redemption, *le'alter l'teshuva le'alter l'geula*, to greet Moshiach *tzidkeinu*, along with Jews around the globe and alongside all the *tzaddikim* mentioned in this book, speedily in our days.

*Chaim Mordechai ben Reb Dovid HaKohen Perlow*

P.S. My friends know me by the name Mordechai, but the name Chaim was appended after the abovementioned car accident.

This is an opportune moment to acknowledge the generosity of the children of Reb Moshe Zalman Feiglin, who have supported this project – even going so far as to produce copies of this book for a draft that could be sent to the Rebbe. May the merit of the *tzaddikim* in this book protect and bless them, their wives, their



Reb Moshe Zalman Feiglin

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-MONDAY 8 SHEV'AT 5783, SHNAS HAKHEL-

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children, and their families. May we merit the coming of *Moshiach* speedily in our days.

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# THE REBBE RAYATZ





## 1

It was *Yud Tes Kislev* 5673 (1912). That year, *Yud Tes Kislev* coincided with a Thursday, meaning the *farbrengen* would stretch throughout the night and continue into the morning of *erev Shabbos*.

For reasons unknown to me, the Rebbe Rayatz decided to host a *farbrengen* in his office at the Yeshiva, instead of his house. This office, situated in the Yeshiva courtyard, was not a large room by any means. Ten or twelve *bochurim*, myself included, were able to squeeze in for this *farbrengen*. So much time has passed since that time – over fifty years of upheaval and suffering – that I cannot recall much of what the Rebbe Rayatz said at this *farbrengen*, but we all said a lot of *lechayim*, and the *farbrengen* continued until six or six-thirty in the morning. At that time, the Rayatz suddenly looked at his watch and said, “I still have to write letters that need to go out with today’s post.” (The mailman made his rounds in Lubavitch around eight in the morning, emptying the various boxes scattered around the village; there was one such postbox attached to the house of the Rayatz.)

There was something pressing on my mind that needed discussing, but I had felt uncomfortable voicing personal questions at the *farbrengen*, so when the Rayatz stood up and left, I stood up to leave as well, as I began thinking how to approach him.

In order to explain my dilemma, some background is necessary:

In those years, the *mashgiach* in Tomchei Tmimim was Reb Yechezkel (Chatche) Himmelstein. By this time, he was already elderly and infirm, and designated *bochurim* substituted whenever he felt too weak to come to the Yeshiva. I was one of those appointed

to serve in his stead (after I left, my friend Reb Moshe Dovber Rivkin stepped into this role).

Now, the highlight of the week in Lubavitch was the *maamer*. Every Friday night, before *Kabbalos Shabbos*, the Rebbe Rashab would say a *maamer*. Every chassid yearned to be present. While the younger *bochurim* would have wished nothing more than to be at the *maamer*, their *seder* rarely afforded them the opportunity. They would be studying from the onset of Shabbos. Instead, a roster of sorts was arranged – one week a certain class would go, the next week another class would go, and so on. Discipline and *seder* were paramount.

Since that Shabbos would be directly following the Yom Tov of *Yud Tes Kislev*, I was debating whether it would be correct to make an exception to this longstanding *seder*, and allow the younger *bochurim* to come hear the *maamer* of the Rebbe Rashab. Still, I knew very well that the Rebbe Rayatz was forcefully against making any exceptions to the *seder* of the Yeshiva. With this in mind, and despite my great weariness after *farbrenging* the entire night, I resolved to stay awake until I could approach the Rayatz directly and ask for instructions.

After a few hours had passed, closer to the hour of eleven, I met the attendant of the Rayatz, Reb Tzemach. “Would it be possible for me to speak to the Rayatz for a moment?” I asked him.

“He is not here anymore,” Reb Tzemach replied. “You can find him in the dining room of his mother’s house. They are waiting for the Rebbe [Rashab] to come and join them in a meal; it is *Yud Tes Kislev*, and they will be eating together.”

I went to the home, opening the door a little to peer inside. There sat the Rayatz, a *sefer* in hand, waiting patiently for his father to arrive. “May I enter for a minute to ask something?” I asked.

The Rayatz looked up and motioned for me to enter. I entered, heart in mouth, and set forth my question – whether it would be proper to make an exception this week in honor of *Yud Tes Kislev* and allow all the younger *bochurim* to attend the *maamer* that night. The Rayatz immediately rejected the idea, explaining that the exuberance of too many younger *bochurim* would create a ruckus and disturb the *seder* of the *maamer*.

I came away from this short exchange completely thunderstruck: I had seen with my own eyes how the Rebbe Rayatz had stayed up the entire night *farbrenging* with us, speaking for hours and hours while consuming copious amounts of *lechayim* – yet here he was, conversing with me with a radiant face, devoid of the slightest indication of tiredness. This scene made such an impression on me that I could not hold myself back from repeating it to those who had been with me at the nightlong *farbrengen*; they, too, could hardly believe such a thing was humanly possible.

## 2

The Rebbe Rayatz often held a small *farbrengen* on *chol hamoed* Pesach and *chol hamoed* Sukkos. When I reached the older grades, during the last few years I spent in Lubavitch, I merited to be part of these *farbrengens*. Around ten or twelve *bochurim* were invited. During one of these gatherings, the Rebbe Rayatz commented, “It’s already been some time that older *bochurim* – some are twenty years old, some even older – have been coming to spend time here in Lubavitch.”

We immediately realized that the Rebbe was referring to the *bochurim* who had finished their army service and were coming to spend time in Lubavitch before going home; they were usually twenty or twenty-one years old.

“Although these *bochurim* spend a year or two in Lubavitch,” continued the Rebbe Rayatz, “they do not end up internalizing the truths of Lubavitch. People think the reason is because the time they spend here is inadequate for them to absorb the atmosphere.”

“This is a mistake,” averred the Rebbe Rayatz. “The reason they are not imbued with the truths of Lubavitch is because even during the time while they are here, they are thinking *I’m only here for a short time anyway*. This mindset prevents them from internalizing Lubavitch. Had they been thinking instead, *This is my home; I was born here and I live here; and upon my death, in the Beis Hakevoros of Lubavitch I will be buried*, then, even one day in Lubavitch would be enough for them to embody our ideals.”

[I later found similar language to this in the *Mishna* of *Maseches Makos*, where it discusses those who live in the Cities of Refuge. The *Mishna* states: *There shall be his dwelling, there shall be his death, there shall be his burial; just as the city admits him, so do the city boundaries admit him.*]

### 3

When the Rebbe Rayatz was younger, he was tutored by the Rashbatz (Reb Shmuel Betzalel Sheftel). Imagine his surprise when they were scheduled to start learning Chassidus, and the young boy refused to learn with his teacher!

Introducing the young Rayatz to Chassidus was not a random decision made by his teacher; obviously, he was following instructions of the Rebbe Rashab. “But I taught your father Chassidus!” protested the Rashbatz. “And I taught Chassidus to your grandfather as well!”

“I don’t want to learn with you,” repeated the young boy.

Exasperated, the Rashbatz went to consult with the Rebbe Rashab. “What should I do?” he asked. “Your son refuses to let me begin teaching him Chassidus.”

The Rebbe Rashab called in his son, saying, “Why don’t you want to learn Chassidus with your teacher?”

“Because I want to learn it with you!” replied the young boy quickly.

The Rebbe Rashab was well pleased with this quick retort. After this conversation, the two began learning Chassidus on a steady basis. (Later, the Rebbe Rayatz learned Chassidus with his *chavrusa*, Reb Elchonon Dov Marozov – and probably the Rashbatz as well – but the foundations were laid by the Rebbe Rashab. Undoubtedly there was something profoundly spiritual about this.)

Years later, the Rebbe Rashab told his son that he felt indebted to him for initiating this study partnership.

4

I personally heard from the Rebbe Rayatz that oftentimes, when he was in the middle of learning Chassidus with Reb Elchonon Dov Marozov, the Rebbe Rashab would suddenly enter the room and begin discussing the matter at hand, elaborating and clarifying the subject they were learning.

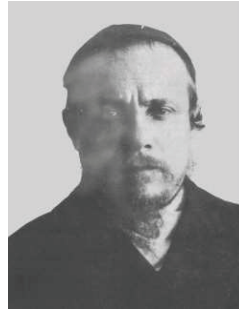
“These visits made such an impact on me that I later remembered every single detail,” said the Rebbe Rayatz. “Not only could I repeat the subject in Chassidus we were learning and all my father’s explanations, but I even recall at which table we were sitting, how the room was arranged, which side of the room my father sat, and which chair he used.”

Not content to rely on his memory alone, the Rebbe Rayatz would sit immediately after these visits and transcribe everything

that had just occurred. “Transcribing all these details fixed those visits into my memory,” he said to me. “They stand before my eyes for eternity.”

## 5

Reb Elchonon Dov Marozov also confided in me privately that he could not discern the outstanding qualities of the Rebbe Rayatz during the time they actually studied together. However, later, when reviewing the material again with the Rebbe Rayatz, he would always be shocked anew at the young Rebbe’s incisive understanding, and the way he methodically compartmentalized and structured every single line of the *maamer* they had learned.



Reb Elchonon Dov Marozov

## 6

During one of the abovementioned small *chol hamoed farbrengens*, the Rebbe Rayatz began belittling himself. We squirmed uncomfortably as he held forth in this manner for some time, berating himself aloud for perceived inadequacies. It was very difficult for us to hear the Rebbe Rayatz speak about himself in such a manner. Finally, one of the *bochurim* around the table could not stand it any longer and he blurted out, “But, after all, you are the Rebbe’s son!”

Instantly, the Rebbe Rayatz became very serious. “It is not your place to meddle with such comments,” he retorted sharply. “If you will continue meddling with such statements, then, we have nothing left in common.”

He repeated this statement a few times, casting a pall of deep introspection over the remainder of the *farbrengen*. (I believe it is important to mention that the *bochur* who made this statement was one of the finest students to learn in the Yeshiva, a *bochur* with deep intellect who excelled in his study of *Nigleh* and Chassidus. He later became the *rav* of a large city. For a student of his caliber, this statement was truly out of character, a mistake of sorts. He was later killed by the Nazis, *by"d*.)

## 7

The Succah in Tomchei Tmimim in Lubavitch was built in the courtyard, adjacent to the dining hall where the *bochurim* ate all year. Food was passed through the windows between the dining room and the Succah. Everything was organized meticulously— the same way the Yeshiva ran all year – and the Succah itself was nicely built, with a new floor and windows.

One year, a stone building was erected close to the Succah area. In theory it would have been possible to build the Succah the same way we did every year, but it would have caused undue hardship for all the wagons traveling in that area – including the horses and wagons that the Rebbe and his family used for travel. Although the Succah would only be standing for two weeks, it still seemed too long of a time to inconvenience the Rebbe and his family, especially back in those days when there was always the fear of a quick moving fire, and people kept an exit route ready to escape a conflagration.

Due to these considerations, construction of a Succah began on a new location, a short distance away from the main building of the Yeshiva, but we quickly realized that we would suffer from never-ending problems all Yom Tov unless we could find a way to return the Succah to its original location. The *bochurim* began brainstorming. Soon, we hit upon a solution: part of the courtyard led out into a small side street, separated by a thin fence of wooden

sticks. From this small alley it was easy to drive out into the main street, where the houses of the Rebbe and his family stood alongside the Yeshiva offices and the main *shul*. If we removed part of the fence, this would provide enough space to build the Succah in its original location, although it did compromise the Rebbe's freedom of movement somewhat.

As a matter of formality, we had to approach our dean, the Rebbe Rayatz, to get his permission for the plan. The *bochurim* decided that a group of three students should present the idea. They chose me to be one of this trio. The idea was a straightforward one; we all assumed the Rebbe Rayatz would approve of the change immediately.

I now faced a dilemma. Throughout all my years in Lubavitch, I made it a point to be mindful of what it says in Pirkei Avos, *Warm yourself by the fire of the sages, but be beware lest you be burned by their embers*, and I made certain not to get too involved with matters that would bring me to the attention of the Rebbe Rayatz or his father. I certainly was not looking forward to being part of a small group asking for scrutiny. "What do we need three for?" I begged off. "Two is enough."

The pair went to consult with the Rebbe Rayatz and almost a half hour went by before we saw them again. As soon as they saw me, they said, "You were right to slip away and not come along, but it was well worth it to hear what he told us."

Basically, they had stood there before the Rebbe Rayatz for the longest time, spelling out our plan in great detail, while he listened without uttering a word. Only after they had finished, did a smile cross his face, and he said lightly, "You cannot close at the same time as you want to open (i.e., not only do you propose to cut off our ease of access, you also want to destroy a fence?)."



The embarrassed *bochurim* realized that they had become so involved in the details of a problem that they forgot to look at the situation as a whole. The idea was dropped.

## 8

When the Rebbe Rayatz was just fifteen, his father appointed him to serve as his personal assistant and secretary. Despite his young age, he began filling the role of his father's emissary to rabbinical conferences, emerging as an effective spokesman and ambassador for Lubavitch and *Klal Yisrael*.

He once traveled to a rabbinical conference, accompanied by his teacher, the Rashbatz. Despite the vast disparity between them in age, the Rebbe Rayatz admonished him not to get involved in communal matters that were brought before them. "Your involvement should be as little as possible," he said, asserting the authority the Rebbe Rashab had invested in him.



Reb Yisrael Noach Belinitzky

I heard this from Reb Yisrael Noach Belinitzky.

## 9

In his capacity as the *menabel* of Tomchei Tmimim, the Rebbe Rayatz knew each and every *bochur* thoroughly, their strengths and their weaknesses. It once happened that a certain *bochur* sent in a note, requesting that he be allowed an exemption from the regular study schedule, so that he could learn the *halochos* of *shechita* and become a *shochet*. The Rebbe Rayatz knew very well that this was just an excuse; the *bochur* merely wanted to have a more relaxing study schedule.

Instead of a verbal reply, the Rebbe Rayatz wrote him back a note, telling him to “eat his fill” of *Sbas* and *Poskim* before thinking about becoming a *shochet*, and he could resubmit this request at that stage. The Rebbe Rayatz then added a few lines, advising the *bochur* to focus on rectifying his spiritual standing, *tikkun hanefesh*, instead of looking for an easy way out.

Later, when the Rebbe Rayatz saw this *bochur*, he continued discussing the matter verbally and mentioned the name of a certain *masmid* in the Yeshiva, asking, “Do you know why so-and-so did not ask me about becoming a *shochet*? Because he is so busy learning that he does not have time to think of other ideas!”

The *bochur* got the message.

# 10

Reb Simon Yakobashvili hailed from Kutaisi, the third-most populous city in Gruzia (Georgia). In 1916, a delegation of distinguished individuals from Gruzia came to the Rebbe Rashab and requested that a *shliach* be sent to them to oversee the *chinuch* of their children and strengthen *Yiddishkeit*. The Rebbe chose Reb Shmuel Levitin for this task. Kutaisi was the center of his activities, but his influence extended over the entire Georgia.

As a youngster, Reb Simon showed unusual promise. He was exceptionally talented and knowledgeable. He soon became an expert on the silkworm. Kutaisi was an important industrial center specializing in silk textiles woven in the local factories. Reb Simon’s expertise was noticed, and the government offered him a visa to travel to Italy and study their methods of extracting and producing silk.



(Italy is a major exporter of silk fabric throughout Europe.)

Back in those days, an exit visa from the Soviet Union was considered to be miraculous; fleeing that repressive regime constituted a form of *pikuach nefesh*. Although the government expected him to return home with his newfound knowledge, all his friends knew this was his golden opportunity to escape Communist rule once and for all.

Yet, as a true chassid, Reb Simon would not make a move without asking the advice of his *mashpia*, Reb Shmuel Levitin. The latter had already fled Kutaisi, so Reb Simon sent a message to the Rebbe Rayatz, asking for his advice and blessing. To everyone's surprise, the Rebbe Rayatz answered, "There is still time to think about Italy. Go to Nevel and learn in the Yeshiva." (Tomchei Tmimim had already been disbanded into smaller branches, including one in the city of Nevel.)

Reb Simon abandoned his plans and traveled to learn in Tomchei Tmimim in Nevel. It took him twenty-seven years to escape Russia, together with other *Anash* families fleeing the Soviet regime. While he was in Europe, he traveled to many countries, providing them with kosher meat and strengthening *Yiddishkeit*. As part of these activities, he finally reached Italy.

He later told me this story, adding, "The Rebbe's words, *You still have time*, were fulfilled in the end."

11

In the summers, the Rebbe Rashab often went to his vacation home in the forest near Babinovitch. The Rebbe Rayatz usually accompanied him. Every year, a group of *bochurim* traveled to the area as well, to assist the Rebbe; one year I was chosen to go. We

stayed in nearby Babinovitch. It was a short distance away and we were able to walk over on Shabbos without worrying about the *techum*.

I don't remember the details of how exactly it happened, but, one morning, I was standing in the vacation home, when the Rebbe Rayatz saw me and called me over. "Here," he said, motioning to a table with a few pairs of unwrapped *tefillin*, "Can you fold my *tallis* and wrap up my *tefillin* for me."

The Rebbe Rayatz then sat in a nearby chair and began conversing in communal matters with someone, discussing how to recruit a specific rabbi in Germany to help with a certain cause. I began working on wrapping the *tefillin* of the Rebbe Rayatz, gazing in fascination at all the pairs on the table. I wrapped both sets of Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam, and then I saw another two – but only the head *tefillin*.

The *tefillin* cover of one of them was labeled with the letters *Shin-Reish* – obviously referring to *Shimusha Rabba* – but the cover of the other *shel rosh* was blank, and I had no idea where to put this "pair." Hardly had I decided to ask the Rebbe Rayatz about it when I heard his voice over my shoulder, "The one with the *Shin-Reish* put to the right of the *tefillin* bag and put the other one on the left; both in the same bag." It was as though he read my mind.

12

During *Tisha B'Av* that summer, in the forest near Babinovitch, the Rebbe Rayatz cried so bitterly while saying *Kinus* that he had to leave the room. Concerned, his father sent some of my friends to see how he was feeling.

I noticed that the Rebbe Rayatz had dropped his handkerchief as he left the room, and I kept sneaking glances at it. When we finished reciting *Kinus* and everyone left the room, I went over and

picked up the handkerchief: it was soaked through and through with the tears of the Rebbe Rayatz, as though someone had submerged it in water.

By *Mincha*, we wanted to give the Rebbe Rayatz an *aliyah*, but the only one available would be with the third *aliyah*, *maftir* – which would go to his father. The Rebbe's attendant was a *Kohen* and so was I; he motioned to me that we should both step out of the room, clearing the way for the Rebbe Rayatz to get an *aliyah*, and that is what I did.

## 13

That summer, in the forest near Babinovitch, the Rebbe Rayatz once remarked to me, “Don’t be like those who fear *Hashem* as if He were a big rooster.”

Seeing my confusion, he went on to explain:

“There was once a traveling *maggid* who went around preaching to different communities. He once came to a village, where a large crowd formed to hear him speak. ‘It says *The Heavens are His chair and the earth is His footstool*,’ he exhorted them. “This means Hashem sits in Heaven and his feet extend all the way down here, to earth. Imagine a rooster that big! You would all be scared of him! That is how frightened you should be of Hashem!”

## 14

One year, during the time I spent learning in Lubavitch, *Yud Tes Kislev* fell out on a Sunday. (I don’t recall if the actual night of *Yud Tes* was Friday night and the *farbrengens* were scheduled for *motzei* Shabbos, or if the actual night of *Yud Tes* was *motzei* Shabbos.) The Rebbe Rayatz led a small *farbrengen* with around ten *bochurim* in attendance, and some of the Yeshiva’s *mashgichim* and *mashpi'im*. He

could only do this on the night of *Yud Tes*, because the grand *farbrengen* for the entire student body and staff would be held in the dining hall of the Yeshiva on the following night.

That year, the Rebbe Rashab was not in Lubavitch for *Yud Tes* Kislev. As such, the *farbrengen* was held outside the *yechidus* room. The Rebbe Rayatz came in and said, “I was thinking not to change out of my silk Shabbos *kapota*, but after I made *havdala* —” he motioned with his hand, as if to say that he could not bring himself to do it.

The *farbrengen* stretched well into the night. At one point, one of the *banholo* had the courage to ask the Rebbe Rayatz to say a *maamer*. With his trademark humility, he responded, “I can say a *maamer*, but I don’t know whether I can carry it to a satisfactory conclusion.”

The Rebbe Rayatz then began a *maamer* beginning with the words of *Eishes Chayil*, delivering such a profoundly deep discourse that even those around the table who were regular *chozrim* by the Rebbe Rashab – for example, Reb Meshulem the *chozer* – could not follow it. These were individuals gifted with the ability to remember and repeat *maamorim* word for word, yet they became completely flustered. (Drinking *mashke* at the *farbrengen* did not help either...)

In hindsight, I think this was why the Rebbe Rayatz said he was unsure if he could bring the *maamer* to a “satisfactory conclusion.” Yet, in his humility, he went ahead and said a *maamer* regardless of his feelings. This was typical of his humble nature.

The Rebbe Rashab once remarked to his wife, Rebbetzin Shterna Sara, “Our [son] is a tremendous *oived* and a truly humble person [who hides his greatness].”

## 16

When he was younger, before the outbreak of World War One, the Rebbe Rayatz ran a brokerage for people interested in purchasing large forests. He often traveled to Moscow to close on deals. When he was in Moscow, he stayed in the home of Reb Zelka Persitz, who also worked in this field. If negotiations ran into Shabbos, a *minyan* gathered to *daven* in Reb Zelka’s house, and the Rebbe Rayatz would say a *maamer*.

Once, the Rebbe Rayatz was in Moscow to close on a very important transaction involving a huge swath of forest land; his broker’s fee alone ran into tens of thousands of rubles. The negotiations dragged on until Friday, with the closing scheduled for Friday afternoon. This was in the winter, when *erev* Shabbos was very short, and the Rebbe Rayatz told both parties that the transaction would be concluded on *motzei* Shabbos in the presence of notaries who would prepare the contracts. He then returned to Reb Zelka’s house to prepare for Shabbos.

A half hour later, the phone rang. Someone was calling to speak with the Rebbe Rayatz. He came out of his room, took the phone, and listened carefully. After murmuring, “I hear you,” he placed the receiver back down, returned to his room and continued getting ready for Shabbos. Everyone in the house was curious who could be calling so close to Shabbos, but no one dared ask him anything.

That night, a *minyan* gathered in the house, and the Rebbe Rayatz conducted himself in exactly the same manner he always did, *davening* with them and saying a *maamer* afterwards. On Shabbos day,

he *davened* at great length as was his custom, and the remainder of the day ran completely on schedule.

After *maariv* and *havdala*, Reb Zelka approached the Rebbe Rayatz and said, “We need to go to the notary and finalize the deal.”

The Rebbe Rayatz just smiled and sat down to drink a cup of hot tea, as customary on *motzei* Shabbos. Reb Zelka was on edge, impatient to be moving, but his guest just sat there as if nothing was amiss. “We need to leave soon,” repeated Reb Zelka. “Otherwise, it will be too late and everything is closed on Sunday.”

The Rebbe Rayatz just smiled, leaving his host even more bewildered than before. After a few minutes, he again asked the Rebbe Rayatz when they could leave. “Do you remember the phone call on *erev* Shabbos?” the Rebbe Rayatz said in return. “They were calling to notify me that the deal fell through at the last minute; there is nothing to notarize.”

Reb Zelka looked at him in great astonishment. The Rebbe Rayatz had just lost the deal of a lifetime that would have netted him tens of thousands of rubles in profit – aside from the dozens of hours lost in negotiations and bargaining – yet he had not showed the slightest trace of emotion during the phone call, after the call, or during the entire Shabbos.

I heard this story from one of my friends, who heard it directly from Reb Zelka during one of his many visits to Lubavitch. After relating the incident, Reb Zelka turned to my friend and said, “When that happened, we all realized that the Rebbe Rayatz was attuned to a completely different reality. In addition, we realized that this forest brokerage was a front, a way to fool people into thinking the Rebbe Rayatz was interested in business. Really it served as a means to deflect attention from his true worth – an inner essence completely beyond our grasp.”



## 17

One year before Pesach, the cook in the Yeshiva kitchen was berating the *bochurim* for not washing the eggshells. “I have no time,” she complained. “I work so hard; why don’t you at least help out with the eggs?”

“We never heard of such a thing,” replied the *bochurim*. “Washing eggshells for Pesach?”

The cook was adamant; washing eggshells was part of Pesach cleaning. The perplexed *bochurim* decided to put the matter before Rebbetzin Rivkah. An exceedingly wise woman, the Rebbetzin was careful not to pronounce one side completely in the wrong, simply saying, “We don’t have that custom.”

Even so, some *bochurim* decided that there was no harm in listening to the cook. After all, did not everyone try to clean extra carefully for Pesach, with more *biddurim*? When word of this reached the Rebbe Rayatz, he showed great displeasure about the incident. “The *bochurim* want to rely on the cook instead of relying on my grandmother?” he asked.

The eggs stayed unwashed.

## 18

Back in those days, preparing a cup of tea was a complicated process: the samovar had to be filled, the water had to be brought to boil, everything had to be cleaned and prepared. One year, the day before *erev* Pesach, the Rebbe Rayatz asked one of the *bochurim* to prepare the samovar to be ready at three a.m., asking the *bochur* to keep the matter a secret.

The *bochur* did as he was told, and prepared the tea to be ready and piping hot at three in the morning. He served the Rebbe Rayatz a cup of tea, and stood there waiting, confident he would be asked to bring a second cup of tea or a piece of *mezonos*. In the end, the

Rebbe Rayatz drank only that one cup and made a remark apologizing for making the *bochur* work so hard for a single cup of tea.

Later, the *bochur* realized that although the Rebbe Rayatz heard a *siyum* (or made the *siyum* himself some years) he still fasted the entire day as a *bechor*. He had needed that one cup of tea before dawn to fortify himself for fasting all day. In fact, one year the Rebbe Rayatz actually fainted during the *seder*, having consumed a large amount of *marror* on an empty stomach.

The *bochur* kept this secret for many years and only told me of this incident much later in life.

19

There was a well-known disagreement between the Rebbe Rashab and the Rebbe of Kapust about how to run the *Kollel Chabad* charity that supported so many Chassidim and scholars in Eretz Yisrael. A Chassid by the name of Reb Chaim Eliezer Buchovsky became embroiled in his *machlokes* and, in the heat of the moment, made a disrespectful remark against the *Rebbeim*. The Rebbe Rashab was very upset to hear of the incident.

Later, Reb Chaim Eliezer deeply regretted his choice of words and made a special trip to Lubavitch, to meet with the Rebbe Rashab and ask for his forgiveness. To his dismay, the Rebbe did not want to see him.

While he was there, some *bochurim* approached Reb Chaim Eliezer and asked for a donation of *Kupas Bachurim* – a charity that helped poor *bochurim* get settled in Yeshiva, and supported *bochurim* learning in the *chadorim*. (The truth was that *bochurim* should not have been collecting money in the first place. There was a *gabbai tzedakah* in Lubavitch, but he was busy collecting for other causes and *Kupas*

*Bachurim* fell by the wayside; seeing this, *bochurim* began soliciting on their own.)

The Rebbe Rayatz was very displeased to hear that *bochurim* had taken a donation from Reb Chaim Eliezer. The latter was very involved in printing many works of the Tzemach Tzedek, and the Rebbe Rayatz had reason to consult with him about this issue. “Are we a separate entity from my father?” he asked rhetorically. “I also was interested in speaking to him! But if my father will not speak to him, then, we are not independent [and we have no connection to him either].”

## 20

After the *histalkus* of the Rebbe Rashab, this Reb Chaim Eliezer was extremely aggrieved to have lost the opportunity to secure *mechila* and remove the displeasure he had caused the Rebbe. He penned a lengthy letter to the Rashab’s successor, the Rebbe Rayatz, entreating him to “grant me *mechila* for your father.”

The Rebbe Rayatz wrote back, expressing incredulity at the suggestion that someone on this earth could grant forgiveness on behalf of the departed. Such a thing was infeasible. “Yet,” he wrote, “since my father is now in the World of Truth, if you will follow the Halachic guidelines of asking *mechila* with a true heart, then I am confident my father will grant you complete forgiveness.”

Following the instructions of *Shulchan Aruch* in this regard, Reb Chaim Eliezer traveled to Rostov, gathered a *minyan* of Chassidim at the *Obel* of the Rebbe Rashab, and asked for *mechila*.

I heard all these details from Reb Yitzchak Horowitz – *Reb Itche der masmid*.

## 21

One of the most distinguished students of Reb Shmuel Levitin in Kutaisi was a *chazan*, a *melamed*, and a distinguished *talmid chachom*. When the Communists came into power, they arrested this chassid for the crime of teaching young children Torah. During their interrogation, they began asking mundane questions – but the chassid realized this was a tactic to catch him off guard. He was ready when they quickly asked, “And who pays your salary to be a *melamed* to your students?”

His heart hammering in fear, the chassid answered blandly, “Students? What students? I wish I had students.”

His interrogators began going through his schedule. “Why do you visit a certain home every day?” they asked.

“They ask me to come every day and chant incantations,” he replied. (Actually, he went to learn with someone at that address).

“Your incantations work?” they smirked.

“I don’t know, but they pay me. I like free presents,” the chassid laughed. His interrogators also laughed, believing they were dealing with a simpleton. They began bantering with him, hoping to trip him up and confess. “Leave us now,” they finally said, expecting him to wait for them in the outside room while they discussed whether to jail him or release him.

The chassid left the room and walked right out of the building, careful to walk confidently and not show the slightest measure of fear. “Where are you going?” asked the guards.

“They told me to leave,” replied the chassid.

The guards at the door never imagined that someone in those days would have the nerve to just walk out the door without outright permission to leave. They let him through. (Usually, prisoners were told to wait in an inner chamber; the fact he had

miraculously been allowed to wait in the outer room also helped convince the guards that he was allowed to leave.)

Well aware they were searching for him, the chassid was careful not to return home. In fact, the police were at his house within a half hour of his departure. Instead, he hid at a different address for a few days, before buying a railroad ticket to the Rebbe Rayatz. When he arrived, he found out that the Rebbe Rayatz had been arrested and released, and was now in exile in Kostroma. Without thinking, he bought a ticket and took the train to Kostroma.

The Rebbe's helpers were beside themselves when this chassid appeared in Kostroma. "What are you doing here?" they shouted at him. "The Rebbe is under constant surveillance; are you trying to get him arrested again?"

"I'm here on business reasons," he dismissed them. "What I'm doing here is not your concern."

That Shabbos, the Rebbe Rayatz showered this chassid with attention and blessed him with the following advice: "Go to the large cities. Find a Jewish merchant willing to forge receipts in your name, as if to show that you started dealing in business. Get receipts proving you purchased merchandise from them and make sure these receipts show government approved licenses. Then go back home, go directly to police headquarters, and say, 'You were making fun of me with my incantations, so I took your advice and became a merchant. Now I earn my keep.'"

Saying this, the Rebbe Rayatz gave the chassid a small scrap of paper in his handwriting, instructing him to hand the paper to a certain individual by the name of Reb Boruch Sholom Kahn (or to his son-in-law). "Tell them to burn it immediately," he warned the chassid. "They can copy the instructions to a different paper if they want, but they must destroy my handwriting." (The paper had instructions to begin work on achieving the Rebbe's release after the conclusion of the Three Weeks.)

The chassid took the train to Moscow. When the train pulled into the main station, the chassid almost passed out in fright: he had never seen so many people, such commotion, so many strangers. Keenly aware he had to avoid the numerous police patrolling the station, he took a tram that went from the station into the city proper. Once on the tram, he noticed a fellow chassid with a silver beard sitting in his car. They glanced warily at one another, afraid to say anything, until the stranger asked in a whisper, "Where are you coming from?"

"Kostroma."

The stranger beamed with delight; someone who had met the Rebbe Rayatz recently!

Now it was the chassid's turn to ask, "What do they call you?"

"Boruch Sholom Kahn."

The chassid could hardly believe his ears. Like Eliezer of old, the first person he had encountered was exactly the person to whom the Rebbe Rayatz had addressed his note. "I have something for you," he murmured.

"Not here!" hissed the other. "Follow me, but at a distance."



Reb Boruch Sholom Kahn

The chassid followed him home and gave him the note. The next day, Reb Boruch Sholom invited him to a clandestine *farbrengen* to celebrate their successful efforts in freeing the Rebbe. "Even though the note said to wait until after the Three Weeks," they confided at the *farbrengen*, "this was if our efforts would drag out too long. But, with the help of Hashem, the Rebbe will be freed before that time." (And so it was. The Rebbe Rayatz was freed on the twelfth of Tammuz, turning that day into a *chassidisher yomtov*.)

“Our meeting on the train was truly miraculous,” said Reb Boruch Sholom. “I never, ever go on the train before *davening*, but that morning I had the inexplicable urge to take the train. I could not focus on anything else or find any peace at all; it was as though a force propelled me to board that train.”

For his part, the chassid found a few merchants in the city willing to help him with forged receipts showing he had done business with them. Papers in hand, he boarded a train home and went directly to his house. “What are you doing here?” his wife shrieked when he walked in the house. “The police keep coming here looking for you. Escape!”

“Don’t worry,” he said. “I am going to the police headquarters now, the Rebbe’s *brocho* will protect me.”

His wife started crying in fear; soon, his father and children were also in the house crying and arguing with him: how could he walk voluntarily into the lion’s den? It was sheer suicide.

The chassid, armed with the Rebbe’s assurance, ignored their pleading and walked directly into the police headquarters, presenting his identification papers to the guard and asking to be brought to his interrogators. The police looked at the guard in shock. “Did you catch him outside or did he come voluntarily?” they asked.

“He walked in voluntarily.”

“Why did you escape?” they asked the chassid.

“Escape? You told me to leave! I did what you said.”

“Where have you been all this time?”

“Here you go,” he said, thrusting his business permits in their face, “You had told me the government did not like people who work with incantations, so I took your advice and went to Moscow and began working in business.”

“You did well!” said his interrogators. “Our country needs businesspeople; we don’t need a *chacham*. The truth is that a worker is better than a businessman – but that is not the discussion now. It’s good you came voluntarily; had we caught you, you would have served ten years in forced labor. Go home in peace and become a worker for the Soviet cause.”

I heard the story from the chassid in person. Every year on *yud beis tammuz*, during the secret *farbrengen* to commemorate the Rebbe’s release, he would relate his personal miracle anew.

## 22

The Rebbe Rashab always traveled first class on the railroad, but the Rebbe Rayatz often traveled second class. While first class railroad cars were completely private, cars in the second tier had place for two. On one of his many trips, the Rebbe Rayatz had a companion on in his car who began asking him many questions; they quickly entered a long discussion. Finally, the other passenger could not contain himself and asked, “Forgive me, but who are you?”

“A *melamed*.”

“A *melamed*?” repeated the other passenger in surprise. “I know that a *melamed* teaches children, but your visage does not match that description.”

(Later, when the Rebbe Rayatz repeated this interchange, he added, “When he admitted knowing what a *melamed* was, it confirmed my assumption that he was Jewish.”)

Replied the Rebbe Rayatz, “If you are asking about my occupation, that is an entirely different subject, but if you are asking for my identity – in essence, I am a *melamed*.” He then began



describing his position in Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim and the workings of the Yeshiva. The other passenger became very animated, saying, “I didn’t realize how far removed I have become from my Jewish brethren. I’m so estranged that all this is a fascinating novelty for me.”

Suddenly the train whistle sounded and the train pulled into the station at Rudni, from where the Rebbe Rayatz would switch trains and continue on to Lubavitch. “I must come and see this Yeshiva,” said his companion, “but I can’t interrupt my trip just now.” He wrote down the name of the train station and instructions how to get to Lubavitch. He then took his leave of the Rebbe Rayatz, as though they were two friends delighted to have spent time in each other’s company.

When the Rebbe Rayatz came back to Lubavitch, he related this incident during one of his *chol hamoed farbrengens* and concluded, “There is no way to estimate the power of the *neschama*; sometimes it just awakens and ignites.”

## 23

There was a time in Lubavitch when the *hanbulo*, with the backing of the Rebbe Rashab, decided to give *bochurim* the option to learn *safrus*. For this purpose, they brought the *sofer* Reb Moshe from Beshenkovitz. He taught a group of *bochurim*, among them a grandson of the famed Reb Reuven, the *sofer* of the Alter Rebbe. The *bochur*’s name was Chaim Vilitziner. He had certain traditions in the family about *safrus* that were handed down from Reb Reuven, generation to generation.

Chaim Ezra of Cherkass also studied *safrus* then and stayed a *sofer* his entire life. Another student in the group, Avraham Aron of Sosnytsia – a settlement in Chernigov Oblast in north Ukraine – became a true *gaon* in these *halochos*, having completely mastered all

the intricate laws on the subject. I remember an episode when there arose a question about the *sefer torah* during the reading, and a famous *rav* and *gaon* in attendance took a look at the mistake and pronounced a ruling. This *bochur* approached him and asked for the reasoning behind this ruling, pointing out that the *halacha* was, in fact, the reverse. The *gaon* saw who he was dealing with and immediately reversed his position saying, “He is right.” He then engaged Avraham Aron in discussion about these *halachos* and came away deeply impressed by his erudition.

Another outstanding student in this field was Reb Meshulem, who later became a *mashgiach* in the Yeshiva for Chassidus. At the time of this story, he was still a young *bochur*, and became worried about this weighty undertaking. He decided to take his concerns to the Rebbe Rashab, explaining that he was extremely frightened to commit to this responsibility. Replied the Rebbe Rashab, “Don’t scratch where it does not itch.”

Despite this answer, Reb Meshulem could not handle the situation and he eventually stopped learning *safrus*.

## 24

The renowned chassid Reb Menachem Mendel Chein was the *rav* of Niezhin. During one of his many visits to Lubavitch, two *bochurim* – Refael HaKohen who later became a *rav* in Niezhin (he was murdered by the Nazis) and Gershon Chein from Rogatchow – went to speak to him in learning. After their discussion, the *rav* said to them, “I had an argument with the Rebbe’s son today (the Rayatz).”



Reb Menachem Mendel  
Chein

The *bochurim* looked at him in astonishment. Argument? Why would he be arguing with the Rebbe Rayatz? They understood he was being enigmatic.

“I was speaking to him in learning,” continued the *rav*, “and I saw that his memory is absolutely prodigious. I couldn’t hold back and I said to him, ‘*Gevald*, if only you were to apply your memory to the study of *Nigleh*! But he just laughed.”



Reb Gershon Chein

(The truth is that the Rebbe Rayatz worked very hard on concealing his exceptional knowledge. He was such a *hatzne’a leches* that people had no idea he spent hours every day studying *Nigleh* in great depth.)

## 25

When I was in Germany, I met a *rav* formerly of Krasna. A leading figure in those times, he was very involved in the intricate laws of *agunos*. During those war years, this terrible issue was very relevant to many women whose husbands did not return from the frontlines.

Later, when I had already traveled to Paris, I met him again – he was on the way to the United States – and we began conversing in the *dinim* of *agunos* and *mikvaos*. As we were talking, he told me about an interesting incident between him and the Rebbe Rayatz. (At the time of this writing, I don’t remember where the Rebbe Rayatz lived then.)

“I once sent the Rebbe a long letter that included a *pilpul*. Shortly after, I received a letter in return from the Rebbe’s *mazkeir* (I think he said it was Reb Chatche Feigin) that the Rebbe does not reply to matters in *Nigleh*.



“Since I had the great misfortune to be *Reb Chatche Feigin* childless, I then sent the Rebbe a *pidyon nefesh* asking for a *brocho* for children, and also for other matters. The Rebbe replied with detailed *brochos* on every subject – besides for a blessing for children. Once I got this answer, I understood that the matter was closed; it was ordained that I would remain childless.

“From then on, I began a regular correspondence with the Rebbe Rayatz, and he replied to all my letters in detail.”

## 26

After being released from Soviet imprisonment and subsequently freed from exile in Kostroma, the Rebbe Rayatz returned to Leningrad before leaving the country (he then went to Malakhovka, near Moscow). One day, he summoned Reb Pinchas Althaus, saying, “Please arrange a taxi and accompany me to the *mikveh*.”

On the way back from the *mikveh*, while sitting in the taxi, the Rebbe Rayatz said to Reb Pinchas, “Even the *goy* working in the *mikveh* knows all the details about my arrest and my release; he even knows I will be leaving the country.”

Once the Rebbe Rayatz brought up the topic, Reb Pinchas could not restrain his emotions. “Rebbe,” he implored, “since you brought it up, what will be with us if you leave?”

“I have thought the matter through,” the Rebbe Rayatz replied. “I have contemplated every detail; it is firm in my mind that I must leave the country.” (Or maybe he said, “*I thought about every one of my Chassidim in detail.*”)



Reb Pinchas Althaus

I heard this from Reb Pinchas Althause when he was here, in Melbourne, Australia, collecting money on behalf of Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim in *Eretz Yisrael*.

## 27

Two of the agents involved in arresting the Rebbe Rayatz were from Chassidic families. Lulav stemmed from the Lulav family of Riga, and Nachmanson was a Jewish lad from Nevel whose father used to visit Lubavitch (the Rebbe Rayatz mentions this in his memoirs, *Reshimas haMaaser*).

During the drama of the arrest, the Rebbe Rayatz kept his composure and even said to them in Yiddish: “Due to the current political climate, even those who arrest others can rest assured that their turn, too, will come!” (This is also mentioned in the memoirs).

Years later, they were both arrested, jailed, and executed. We can be sure that they remembered the holy words of the Rebbe Rayatz during their imprisonment.

## 28

Merely a week or two after his wedding, Reb Zalman Altshuler of Rogatchow was sent by the Rebbe Rashab to Kutaisi to serve as the shochet of the city and strengthen *Yiddishkeit* - a post he would serve faithfully for over fifty years. The Jews in that region consider themselves to be *sefardim*. Before he left, he entered *yechidus* and the Rebbe Rashab blessed him that he should always rule according to *halacha*, without any mistakes.

After the *yechidus*, he went to the office of the Rebbe Rayatz to take his leave. “What should I do in my free time?” he asked.

“Nothing,” replied the Rebbe Rayatz. “Only learning and *davening*.”

Years later, when I met him, he related this interchange with great emotion. “I always wanted action,” he said. “I wasted so many years of my life to communal activities and business ventures there – all of which collapsed in the end. Had I only listened to the Rebbe Rayatz and devoted my heart and mind to the pursuit of learning and *davening*, I would be a different person today. Now that I am elderly, it is too late for me to tap into the vigor of youth and achieve great strides in my learning and *davening*.”

I heard this from him in 5703 (1943).

## 29

When one of the best *bochurim* in the Yeshiva (he later became a *rav* in Azaritch) received a notice to appear before the draft board in Kremenchug, Reb Tzvi Gurary began using his contacts to have the order vacated. The *bochur* went to Kremenchug while Reb Tzvi worked tirelessly on his behalf. His efforts were crowned with success, but he had to raise about two-hundred rubles to bribe the officials who would exempt the *bochur* from serving in the army.

To this end, he sent a telegram to the Rebbe Rayatz, detailing his success and asking to have two-hundred rubles sent to Kremenchug. In reply, the Rebbe Rayatz sent a terse telegram, to the effect of, *I hope you can find a way to raise the money yourself.*

Reb Tzvi became so embarrassed. “What was I thinking to ask Lubavitch to pay, whether it is one-hundred or two-hundred



Reb Tzvi Gurary

rubles?” he thought quietly. He stored the telegram away, ashamed to show it to anyone.

Somehow, within an hour, people heard of this cause, and Reb Tzvi had enough to cover the two-hundred-ruble bribe, plus extra to give the *bochur* for spending money during his stay in Kremenchug and for the trip back to Lubavitch. He did tell the *bochur* about the telegram.

I heard this from the *bochur* himself.

30

One year (I think it was in 5666) during the Simchas Torah *farbrengen*, the room was filled to capacity. The Rebbe Rashab presided over the *farbrengen*, which was held in the home of his mother, Rebbetzin Rivkah. The room became so overcrowded that the pushing became unbearable. A few people began fainting; even the Rebbe Rayatz was on the verge of fainting.

Seeing the commotion, Rebbetzin Rivkah entered the room and said to her son, “You see yourself you can’t sit any longer; people are fainting already.”

“*Bobbe*, let us be,” said the Rebbe Rayatz (who almost fainted himself). “Why does it bother you? Whoever faints will wake up. We will take them outside to the front courtyard with the two wells [and revive them by pouring cold water on them.]”

“Please, let us be,” he repeated. “Father will not do anything against your wishes [and he will end the *farbrengen*]. Everyone will be whole and healthy.”

Rebbetzin Rivkah left and the Rebbe Rashab continued the *farbrengen*.

I personally witnessed this scene.

31

Regarding the seventh *perek* of *Tanya*, I heard in the name of the Rebbe Rayatz:

When the Alter Rebbe says that,

*Even though his sin has been incorporated into the three unclean kelipos, they can nevertheless ascend by means of true repentance and intense kavanah during Shema at bedtime, –*

this refers to concentrating deeply on *pirush hamilos* when saying the *Shema* at bedtime.

32

During the arrest of the Rebbe Rayatz, the first interrogation took place on Thursday night at ten o'clock. Interrogations were always held at night, to further confuse and terrify the prisoner. There were four interrogators waiting in a large hall.

The Rebbe began by saying he would like to relate a story. The interrogators placed their hands on the guns lying on the table, and said, "Answer our questions, nothing else! Don't try to mix in other matters."

"I'm accustomed that even *misnagdim* listen to my stories," the Rebbe answered calmly. Without further hesitation, the Rebbe began:

"A *maskil* and *apikores*, once visited my [great] grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek – "

Nachmanson interrupted: "In all probability an *apikores* like myself who does not believe."



“No,” answered the Rebbe, “the *apikores* in this story was well-versed in Jewish knowledge, while you are a simple ignoramus....

“This person,” continued the Rebbe, “asked my grandfather why it is that, when Mordechai sent word by Hasoch to Esther of Haman’s decree, the word *yehudim* (Jews) in the *Megillah* is spelled to with two *yud*’s; whereas later, when describing the miracle, *And for the Jews there was light*, the word *yehudim* is spelled with one?

“Replied the Tzemach Tzedek: “The two *yuds* correspond to the Inclinations, the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hora*. Both contain ten qualities of the soul, corresponding to the numerical value of *yud*. Haman’s decree was not directed specifically against religious *yetzer tov* Jews; he sought also to destroy irreligious Jews, who act with the *yetzer hora*. All were impacted by his edict.

“The visitor continued to ask, ‘If so, why in a later verse, *And the Jews in Shushan gathered*, we once again find a spelling of two *yuds*?’

“The Tzemach Tzedek replied, ‘Jews in Shushan, being in the center of all the events, were so profoundly influenced by both the danger and the miracle of *Purim*, that even irreligious Jews did *teshuva*.’

“The Tzemach Tzedek concluded, ‘The same is true of you; you will suffer greatly, then you, too, will repent.’

“The *apikores* came down with fever and suffered for three months, after which he became a true *ba’al teshuva*.”

The Rebbe concluded his narrative, adding, “When you will also suffer, you, too, will change.” (This exchange was printed in the memoirs of the Rebbe Rayatz’s imprisonment and printed in *Bito’an Chabad* volume 10, page 25.)

Whoever has any inkling of the ferocious, vindictive and punitive nature of the secret police cannot begin to fathom how the Rebbe Rayatz could maintain his composure in the face of such

monsters, especially once they grabbed the guns on the table. Such equanimity is beyond our understanding.

33

The Rebbe Rayatz once said that there are three *sheni's*: The *nefesh sheni*, the *cheder sheni*, Pesach *sheni*.

The nature of the *nefesh sheni*, the *neshama*, is explained in the second chapter of Tanya, *And the second soul is truly a part of G-d above*.

The nature of the *cheder sheni* was that a *chassidisher shul* was designed with a small, adjoining "second room," known as a *cheder sheni* for made for the chassid who wanted to *daven* while thinking Chassidus as he *davened*.

Pesach *sheni* carries the message that there is no such thing as "too late." One can always rectify things.

(I heard all this from my friend, Reb Yitzchak Dovid Groner, who heard it directly from the Rebbe Rayatz. Later it was printed in *Sefer Hasichos* 5701 with greater elaboration.)

34

One of the *bochurim* in the Yeshiva of Rostov utilized all his talents toward the pursuit of learning; a true *Tomim*, he spent many hours immersed in prayer. His charisma drew younger students closer to the study of Chassidus. He was a gifted speaker, and decided to use his talents to better the situation of the Yeshiva. This was during the war years, when hunger and poverty ran rampant. The *bochurim* suffered terribly, lacking even basic necessities. There was a certain merchant in Rostov who was doing well financially and this *bochur* began speaking earnestly with him, asking him to support the Yeshiva and the *bochurim*.

The merchant heard him out and then said, “Many years have passed since our wedding, but my wife and I are still childless. If you promise that in merit of this mitzvah of *tzedakah* I will have a son, I will do everything you ask of me.”

This *bochur* was so certain that helping the Yeshiva would open the channels of blessing for this individual, that he gave his assurance. Indeed, within a short time, this individual was able to achieve great things for the Yeshiva, bringing the *bochurim* a large measure of comfort.

Time passed and the merchant became very frustrated. Where is the child you promised me?” he accosted the *bochur*. “Liar! Trickster! How could you do such a thing to me?”

At a loss, the *bochur* entered the room of the Rebbe Rayatz to ask for his help. “*Na*,” said the Rebbe Rayatz, “one should not promise things he cannot deliver.”

“But I did this for the good of the Yeshiva,” the *bochur* said defensively. “The *bochurim* were suffering terribly.”

The Rebbe Rayatz merely repeated his earlier statement and the *bochur* understood it was the end of the discussion. He left the room but, from then on, his life became simply unbearable: Wherever he went, the merchant tagged along after him, weeping and shouting, demanding delivery of the “promised child.”

After some time, the *bochur* felt he could not take it anymore and, once again, he met with the Rebbe Rayatz, pleading for his *brocho*. “I am suffering on a daily basis,” he cried. “This person gives me no respite. I don’t know what to do.”

The Rebbe Rayatz finally gave his *brocho* and a son was born to the merchant and his wife within the year!

Merely two days before the Rebbe Rayatz was arrested and imprisoned, a chassid came to him with a *pidyon nefesh*. His wife had recently given birth to twins, but the birth went poorly; his wife was completely drained and the twins were so frail that there was a real concern for their health.

Weeks later, after the Rebbe Rayatz had been interrogated, threatened, beaten, and incarcerated, the authorities allowed him to visit his family at home for a few hours before being exiled to Kostroma. During those precious moments, he asked Chassidim for an update about the welfare of that mother and her twins!

This display of sensitivity after such a grueling, life-threatening imprisonment highlighted how the Rebbe Rayatz kept the interests of his Chassidim first and foremost in his mind at all times, even while locked in the cells of Soviet prison.

### 36

*I am recording this story on the auspicious day of Chof Daled Teves, the day of the histalkus of the Alter Rebbe. This year, 5725 (1965) marks one-hundred-and-fifty-two years since the histalkus.*

This incident occurred in the year 5673 (1913), on the one-hundredth anniversary of the Alter Rebbe's *histalkus*. A few days before *Chof Daled Teves*, the Rebbe Rayatz suggested that the *hanbala* and entire student body learning in Tomchei Tmimim should participate in a raffle that would send three Chassidim to the *Ohel* of the Alter Rebbe on this auspicious day. Everyone participated by donating one ruble.

Three Chassidim won the *goral*, having been chosen by the Yeshiva to represent them at the *Ohel* in Haditch. So much time has passed since this incident, that I do not remember clearly who the three winners were. Unless my memory deceives me, I do remember that one of them was Reb Moshe Rosenblum, who worked in the Yeshiva office and was the extremely talented editor of *Ha'Och* (a Lubavitch children's publication that ran from 1910 to 1914, with close to six thousand copies circulating throughout the country).



Reb Moshe Rosenblum

37

The following year, 5674 (1914), I was fortunate to spend *Chof Daled Teves* at the *Ohel* of the Alter Rebbe in Haditch, although I did not arrive from Lubavitch. At that time, I was learning in Kremenchug the entire winter with my *chavrusa* Reb Moshe Gurary (the son of Reb Nosson).



Reb Yisrael Neveler

I traveled to Haditch along with some others – Reb Meir Lobok and Reb Yisrael Neveler. Reb Meshulem came directly from Lubavitch, together with Reb Yechiel of Shchedrin and Reb Yehoshua Arsh of Dvinsk. These three were the winners of that year's *goral* in Lubavitch, and this gave them the opportunity to travel to Haditch.

As far as I know, that was the last time Chassidim were able to travel as a group to Haditch for *Chof Daled Teves*. World War One broke out a few months later, on *Tisha B'av*, leading to all the tragedies and casualties our brethren suffered from that point onwards. May Hashem redeem us speedily.

38

Having mentioned that Reb Yehoshua Arsh of Dvinsk won the *goral*, I want to add that his win was mired in contention. The journey to and from Haditch took an entire week, and Reb Yehoshua was a *Rosh Yeshiva* with two classes under his supervision – numbering close to one-hundred students. Some in the Yeshiva felt it was the height of irresponsibility to allow him to miss so much time and leave that many *bochurim* without a teacher.



Reb Yehoshua Arsh

For his part, Reb Yehoshua did not want to forfeit the opportunity to visit the *Ohel* of the Alter Rebbe, and he was ready to go to a *din torah* to defend his win.

The one who ultimately made the decision was – Rebbetzin Rivkah. Since he was allowed to participate in the *goral*, she averred, they were not allowed to take away his win from that selfsame *goral*.

(I heard this personally from him during that visit in Haditch.)

### 39

The Rebbe Rayatz was living in Rostov when the Communists came into power. One of the first acts of the new regime was to conduct sweeping searches in people's homes. Officially, they were looking for "counter revolutionary" material. In reality, they were confiscating cash, gold and silver utensils, jewelry, diamonds, and anything of worth. This was widely known.

When these agents came to the home of the Rebbe Rayatz, they began a thorough search, throwing his silver utensils and cash into a bag. Soon they found a wad of banknotes from the Czarist era, around two hundred notes in total. "I will not give this to you," the Rebbe Rayatz said, standing in defiance.

The officials looked at him in stupefaction: when they had confiscated his silver utensils, the Rebbe Rayatz said not a word, yet now he was protesting about what – devalued currency? “The small banknotes here are practically worthless,” they laughed. “Do you think the Czar is making a comeback and this money will regain value?”

“No, I am not thinking about the Czar returning to power. That is irrelevant. These *nikolaiskis* (that was the name of currency in the era of Czar Nikolas) have sentimental value for me. Before he sat down to eat, my father gave charity from the money in his pockets. These banknotes you want to take are the banknotes found in his pockets when he passed away.”



*2Reb Itche Der Masmid*

Two of the officers in the group were Jewish and they gave the Rebbe Rayatz a reassuring look. “Nikolai persecuted the Jews,” one of them said, “and he also persecuted righteous, upstanding Jews.”

They left without touching the money.

(I heard this story from *Reb Itche der masmid*.)

40

“My father never cursed anyone in his life,” the Rebbe Rayatz said, “including lowly human beings who caused him so much grief. I, however, have no choice but to curse these wicked people when I daven at his *Obel*.”

41

The writer of these lines served as the *mashgiach* in Tomchei Tmimim for a few months. There was a certain student in my

division who was adamant about being promoted to the higher *shiur*. In order to further his case, he became lazy and stopped learning. “If you would only let me join the higher *shiur*, I would learn day and night, nonstop,” he said to me.

I had my doubts; if he was not learning in the lower *shiur*, he would take that attitude with him to the higher class as well. In addition, it was unfair to the many *bochurim* better than him who might have deserved to join the higher class and were still in my division. They would feel slighted to see his tactics work.

As *menabel* of the Yeshiva, the Rebbe Rayatz sometimes came to check on the *bochurim*, both in the main *zal* and in the *shiur* rooms. Left with no alternative, I approached him and told him about my difficulties with this certain *bochur* (he came from a prestigious family and everyone knew him.)

“No!” said the Rebbe Rayatz. “He wants to be elevated to a higher class by merit of not learning? This is impossible. Only one who is truly learning is elevated to a higher class! Tell him to prove himself and do well. If he learns assiduously for some time, he will be allowed to go to the next level *shiur*.”

And so it was.



## A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Confined to the crowded “Pale of Settlement,” settled Jewish life was on the brink of collapse when the Alter Rebbe and his son supported the establishment of Jewish agricultural colonies. In 1815, the government granted their sponsorship, allowing the Mitteler Rebbe to establish Jewish agricultural colonies in the region of Kherson, which expanded greatly during the times of the Tzemach Tzedek. It was in these colonies that Chaim Mordechai *HaKohen* Perlow was born around 5649 (1889) to Reb Dovid Perlow and his wife.

At age fifteen, he was accepted as a student in Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim in Lubavitch, where he studied with such fervor that his friends nicknamed him *Mottel der masmid*. It was said that no less than the Rebbe Rashab himself advised others to take note and emulate the study habits of this *bochur*. He often spent between sixteen and eighteen hours a day in study, usually focusing on *Shas* and the halachic codifiers. These strenuous efforts bore fruit, as he later became renowned as one of the foremost *halachic* giants among *Rabbanei Chabad*. In addition, pursuant to a specific directive from the Rebbe Rashab, he committed all six orders of *Mishnayos* to memory, as well as many *maamorim*.

In 5672 (1912), he married his wife Shaina Baila, daughter of Reb Avraham Ber the *rav* of Seduva, a city near Kovno, Lithuania. The young couple settled there at first, moving back to the Ukraine six years later when Reb Mordechai became the *rav* of Beryslav, near Kherson, located on the right-bank of Dnieper river.

Their respite was short lived. Despite being nominated as a *Rosh Yeshiva* in Tomchei Tmimim of Kherson, widespread hunger at the time forced the couple to escape. They moved to the country

of Georgia where Reb Mordechai, together with his brother-in-law, became *rabbonim* for the Jews in their area.

From there, he moved to Shatili, a highland village, near the border with Chechnya, on the northern slope of the Greater Caucasus mountains. It was in Shatili that Reb Mordechai established a *cheder*, a Yeshiva, and a *mikveh*. Within a few years they moved again, this time to the village of Satchari, where he spearheaded a great awareness to strengthen *Yiddishkeit*, especially among the youth. The city boasted a famous weaving factory. When young Jewish laborers stopped coming to work on Shabbos, the authorities immediately realized this was due to the influence of the new rabbi. They imprisoned Reb Mordechai for over a year.

Upon his release, Reb Mordechai moved to nearby Kutaisi, where he immediately restarted his efforts for *Yiddishkeit*. After two years, the authorities arrested him again – this time sentencing him to ten years hard labor in the frostbitten *gulags*. During this difficult time, bereft of his beloved *sefarim*, Reb Mordechai understood why he had been instructed to commit *Mishnayos* and Chassidus to memory; he was able to study these works by heart. Miraculously, he was released after six-and-a-half years.

After World War Two, Reb Mordechai was able to flee the country and reach the displaced persons camp in Munich, Germany. In the aftermath of the war, a *Beis Din* had convened there to address many difficult and complex questions pertaining to *agunot*, *gittin*, and *chalitzah*, and Reb Mordechai was asked to join the rabbinic body. He presided alongside such luminaries as Rabbi Dovid Shapiro, former *Av Beis Din* of Warsaw, Rabbi Goldman of Krasna, and Rabbi Shmuel Snieg, chief rabbi of *Agudas HaRabbanim* in Germany. During that time, he wrote *Gett L'Maaseh*, which was later printed in 5730 (1970). Even while in the displaced persons

camp, he continued encouraging people to strengthen their *Yiddishkeit* and oversaw the building of a *mikveh*.

He later emigrated to Italy, where he became the *rav* of “Ohel Yaakov.” It was there he designed and oversaw the building of the first *bor al gabei bor mikveh*, copied from the original *mikveh* of the Rebbe Rashab in Rostov. He received many letters from the Rebbe, urging and encouraging him to increase his efforts in bringing more Jews closer to *Yiddishkeit*. These letters have since been printed in *Igros Kodesh*.

A decade later, in 5719 (1959), he and his wife moved to Melbourne, Australia, to be near their only son – Dovid Perlow and his family. Once again, Reb Mordechai became a revered figure in the community, serving as the *mashpia* of Yeshivas Oholei Yosef Yitzchak and a shining personification of the ideals of Chassidim of yesteryear.

In 5722 (1962) he began transcribing his memories for posterity, under the title *Likkutei Sippurim*. This project spanned a period of four years, during which he received letters from the Rebbe encouraging him to see the project to completion. Although the finished anthology was only printed in 5766 (1926), he sent the Rebbe an advance draft well beforehand. During the Rebbe’s *farbrengen* of *Yud Shevat* 5725 (1965), the Rebbe mentioned that he had received folios of the book – and then related one of the stories from the book!

In 1967, Melbourne’s Yeshiva Gedolah became the first yeshiva in the world to receive student *shluchim* from the Rebbe. These *shluchim* spent many hours *farbrenging* with Reb Mordechai and basking in the company of a *Tomim* who had learned in the original Tomchei Tmimim in Lubavitch.

Reb Mordechai passed away on Yom Kippur 5738 (1978). He was interred in Melbourne. May these stories serve as a merit for the elevation of his soul.