

SLICE OF LIFE

A Kentucky Calling: Chabad of the Bluegrass, Lexington, KY

With Rabbi Shlomo and Soshi Litvin



Rabbi Shlomo Litvin with United States Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky

I knew from a very young age that I wanted to be a shliach, carrying out the Rebbe's mission, just like my father.

Even though my parents opened a cheder when I was 8 years old, I was the only one of my peers who wore a yarmulka day in, day out, who kept strict kashrus, chalav yisroel, and Shabbos.

I remember waking up one night to a furious pounding at the door. It was 2:00 in the morning, but I couldn't help tiptoeing downstairs and peeking curiously through the banister at the uncanny scene below me. The visitor was poor Mrs. Hertz*, who'd recently been widowed from her husband of over 50 years.

She was dressed in pajamas and slippers, her eyes wide with fear and confusion. "My Samuel* didn't come home from shul tonight!" she wailed wildly, "Where is he? Where is Samuel?!" My parents gave each other a quick glance, and my mother took Mrs. Hertz's hand gently, coaxing her to the couch. She brewed a quick cup of tea, while my father sat across from her, speaking in a calm, even, gentle tone.

He talked about Mr. Hertz in the present,

speaking about how much he loved him. As Mrs. Hertz's face relaxed into smiles, my father gradually progressed to the past tense, describing how he missed Mr. Hertz. As he spoke, Mrs. Hertz followed this journey of loving her husband in the present... to missing him. The crazed look in her eyes mellowed into soft grief, and by the time her daughter came to collect her, she was back to herself.

My father sat still for some moments longer after she'd left, reflecting. He faced a large portrait of the Rebbe hanging on the wall opposite. To me, it seemed he had enacted a true miracle, drawing from the Rebbe's strength to guide the widow through her mental hardship.

I sat on the stairs, deep in contemplation, when my father found me there at 6:00 AM and sent me back to bed. I snuggled into my pillow with a newfound determination: I would grow up to be a shliach, just like my Tatty

"I wouldn't recommend opening a Chabad house on campus," the university president told us, steeping his fingers as he leaned across his desk. "There really isn't a big enough Jewish population to justify one."

"How many Jewish students would you say you have?" we asked.

"Nine," he answered confidently.

"We hosted a Rosh Hashanah party," the president explained. "It was well advertised, but only nine students came. I'm sorry, but it seems there just aren't that many Jewish students here."

At our welcome barbecue, over 100 students came, and we realized our new house was barely big enough. A few weeks later, at our Purim party, the attendees spilled into the yard and even onto the roof! By the next year, we had already moved to a bigger space, although we quickly outgrew that one too. Baruch Hashem, Chabad of Lexington was growing by leaps and bounds.

For a few years, I hosted a radio show in Lexington, speaking about Judaism, current events, and the Rebbe. One morning, a caller told me she lived in our former home.

"I just got the strangest package," she explained

on air. "Inside were thirty palm branches! When I looked at the label, I saw it was addressed to you."

I thanked her and immediately called my father. "Missing anything?" I asked.

"Actually, yes! I ordered lulavim for our community, but they still haven't arrived, even though the website says they were delivered."

"Well, I think I found them!" I laughed. "They were shipped to the wrong Rabbi Litvin!"

Baruch Hashem, this woman called my radio show, so Louisville had lulavim for Sukkos!

One morning, I read a bill proposing that county coroners with an unclaimed body could cremate instead of providing a burial. I immediately called the senator who authored the bill and explained the problem it would pose for Jewish people without friends or family. He listened patiently, then asked, "So what do you propose we do instead?"

I paused. Cremation was far less expensive than burial. "Whenever there is a Jew who passes away without friends or family, Chabad will pay for the burial," I answered.

"If you're sure about it, I'll include it in the bill."

The bill passed unanimously and was written so other states could easily adopt it.

After it became law, I called every county coroner and explained how it would work. They all agreed to contact Chabad so every meis mitzvah would receive kevuras Yisrael. One coroner asked, "Do you own a funeral home?"

"Not at all! I just want to make sure every Jew receives a proper burial."

"Even though you don't know them?"

"Especially if I don't know them. The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that every Jew is a brother or sister, even one we've never met."

"And you're going to pay for the burial?"

"Yes."

"Unbelievable," he said. "Absolutely incredible."

From DollarDaily.com / *Names changed to protect privacy

Ethics: Chapter 6

One who learns a single chapter, a single law, a single verse, a single word, or even a single letter from a fellow, must treat him with respect. For so we find with David, king of Israel, who did not learn anything from Achitofel except for two things alone, yet he called him his "master," his "guide" and his "intimate," as is stated (Psalms 55:14), "And you are a man of my worth, my guide and intimate friend."

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

14th of Elul, 5727 [1967]

Greeting and Blessing:

I duly received your correspondence, and may G-d grant that you should have good news to report in regard to the contents of your letters.

No doubt you remember the Alter Rebbe's [Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chasidism] explanation of the significance of the month of Elul, in terms of the following analogy: There are times when a king leaves his palace and goes out to meet his subjects in the field, when everyone, regardless of his state and station, can approach the king, and the king receives everyone graciously and fulfills their petitions. The days of Elul are such a period when the King of Kings is, as it were, "in the field." This is, therefore, the proper time to strengthen the adherence to the commandments of the King, and to receive a greater measure of the King's blessings.

Wishing you and yours a Kesivo vaChasimo Tovo [may you be written and sealed for good],

With blessing,

P.S. With regard to the question of Moshiach which you raise in your letter - I refer you to the Rambam, Hilchos Melochim, Chaps. 11-12 [Maimonides, Laws of Kings].

Enclosed is a copy of the general Rosh Hashono message, which you will surely put to good advantage.

9th of Elul, 5718 [1958]

Greeting and Blessing:

I received your letter of August 14th, containing the good news that you are pleased with the outcome of the court case so far, and, what is even more important, with the progress that you and your wife have been making towards complete recovery.

You do not mention anything about your business and your public work, which I take it as an indication that all is well in those departments.

Now that we have entered the month of Elul, when we say twice daily in our prayers Psalm 27, "G-d is my light and my salvation," etc., I trust that you will become increasingly aware that this is so in your case.

Wishing you and yours a Kesivo Vachasimo

Toivo,
With blessing,

20th of Elul, 5720 [1960]

Greeting and Blessing:

I received your two letters of August 22nd and 26th.

With regard to the question of the Rabbi who has left, and you ask my opinion about the candidacy of Rabbi [...], generally speaking, it seems that he is a suitable candidate. As for particulars, it depends what his duties would be, but surely everything could be arranged with the help of Anash.

With regard to the question of the merger between the two Shuls [synagogues], I do not think that this is a good idea. For one thing, there is the question of Nusach [prayer rite], and for another, this is the time when the number of Shuls should be increased rather than decreased. Furthermore, you write that the other congregation is "small-minded," etc., which seems to indicate that there would be room for friction, etc.

On the question of arranging an affair in behalf of the activities of Lubavitch, I do not see why people want to postpone it until Purim inasmuch as time is of the essence and the activities demand support and expansion all the time. Therefore, it seems to me that the sooner the affair is arranged, the better it would be. Even if it has to be connected with a festival day, surely Chanukah comes earlier, and, being for eight days, it offers an opportunity to select the most suitable day of the week for this purpose.

In this connection I might again recall to your mind the story of the fundraiser, who, on receiving a check to cover a pledge, rebuked the donor. When the surprised donor asked him why he deserved the rebuke, the fundraiser answered, "had you brought it earlier, I could have had another pledge from you since then."

As for your daughter's training to become a Hebrew teacher, you do not write how well this fits in with her studies at present. But the very fact that you ask my opinion on the advisability of her training for a Hebrew teacher at this time, suggests that it can be arranged so that her present studies would not be affected, and if so, it would be advisable.

To conclude on a word of thanks, I recently had the opportunity to view the film of the Lag B'Omer parade in London which you were kind enough to send me. It gave me much pleasure, and thank you very much.

Hoping to hear good news from you, and wishing you again a Kesivo vachasimo, toivo, including, of course, a greater improvement in your business affairs,

With blessing,

complained, 'Alm-ghty G-d: How can I possibly stand 600,000 men and 600,000 youths at the entrance to the Tent which is a plot of land that is only big enough to yield two seah of grain?' And G-d replied: '...So, too, in time to come, will I do the same in Zion: All the world's population from Adam until the Resurrection will come and complain about the shortage of space, and I will broaden it for them.' "

(To Live and Live Again by Rabbi Nissan David Dubov)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'Chaim Publication.

From the Archives

"There is a time and season for everything," King Solomon taught in the book of Ecclesiastes. According to Jewish tradition, there are various times throughout the day, week, month and year that are most appropriate for reflection and personal accounting: Each evening before retiring is the time to consider one's actions throughout the day. Every Thursday night one should reflect on the week that has passed. On the eve of every new (Jewish) month, one reviews the month and in the last month of the Jewish year one evaluates the entire year.

We have just entered that final month, Elul.

Elul is the time when we look over our deeds of the previous year and make a reckoning and appraisal of our personal growth and development.

There are many customs associated with the month of Elul. During Elul it is customary to have one's mezuzot and tefilin checked by an expert scribe (sofer). One is also enjoined to be more careful in the area of the Jewish dietary laws (kashrut).

From the very beginning of the month we greet friends and sign letters with the wish that we should be "written and sealed for good" and that we should have a "good and sweet year."

In addition, we add Psalm 27 to our daily prayers as well as increasing our recitation of Psalms in general.

With all of this, it is good to keep in mind the analogy of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism, that during the month of Elul "the King is in the field." This means that although at any time of year G-d is surely approachable by each and every one of us, He is even closer to us in the month of Elul.

As we are merely at the beginning of the month, let's not waste a moment. Let's get to work so that we will all truly have a good and sweet year, with the ultimate good of Moshiach NOW!

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning.

It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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