

MY ENCOUNTER WITH THE REBBE

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Roselyn and I arrived at 770 at 4pm on Wednesday, the day before Shovuos. As usual everyone was delighted to see us and gave us a warm welcome.

It seemed only like yesterday that we were standing here at '770,' complaining to Yudel (Rabbi Krinsky) about the condition of the apartment in Union Street. A year had now passed and we were once again standing in the office at '770.' This time we did not complain to Yudel - we could not even find him. He had taken the Rebbe to the Ohel.

We had been across to the flat and found that it had been taken over by hordes of squatters. All were busy cooking their own meals in the kitchen and the stove was black with old grease and oil. No one was interested in cleaning up the apartment - each one left it to the others.

Binyamin (Klein) told me that someone approached him many weeks ago and begged him for permission to stay there for one night only. How could he refuse? For one night? So he gave them the key.

The following day, Mr. Weinstein of the hardware shop was kept busy all day long making duplicate keys; brothers, sisters, cousins, friends and acquaintances were all invited to join this new commune in Union Street. They were very friendly and invited us to join them too. Although the fridge was full and we would have to partake of our own meals in the bedroom.

Binyamin was very pleased that we had now arrived, because up till now they had refused to budge in spite of entreaties, pleadings, and threats. Label (Groner) and Binyamin, in the absence of Yudel, were indeed helpful and things started moving. The first things to be moved were the squatters. Some were soon fixed up at various houses and the others promised to leave the next morning. We were left to tidy up the place (a gross understatement). We were pleased to notice that a coloured boy had made a start to clean up the rooms earlier on. We found a half filled bucket of clean cold water and a mop in the hallway. He obviously became discouraged by the squatters and left the job. As the next day was Yom Tov, we were now fighting against time. I rushed to Weinstein's and purchased another bucket, mop and plenty of powders and detergents. When I arrived back at the flat, I found Roselyn already scrubbing and cleaning and - a miracle - the colored boy had also returned and was helping too. By the time Yudel brought back the Rebbe from the Ohel at 8.00pm the place was looking a great deal cleaner and better.

Rabbi Chodakov had heard of our predicament and complaints - even our sleeping arrangements had not been finalized. He had consoled me by saying that Jews did not sleep at all on this night. "Yes, I replied, that is alright for **one** night, but we are here for 12 nights!"

After Mincha, Rabbi Chodakov rushed into the main office from the Rebbe's room and said, "Zalmon, the Rebbe is making a special Farbrengen immediately after Maariv (9.30pm) and it will be a short one." Well, well, this was an unexpected windfall, a wonderful surprise and pleasure. A Farbrengen on Erev Shavuoth!! **This was certainly something new.** I dashed to Union Street - a minute away - and found Roselyn already in bed. She was absolutely exhausted and 'all in.' Besides, for us it was now 2.30 a.m. so she was entitled to be tired with so much traveling and then working in the flat.

She was also entitled to be at the Farbrengen. So, within a few minutes we were again at '770.' The Rebbe was due to arrive in about ten minutes. The hall (or Shul) was already filled to overflowing - packed - jammed tight. I tried to force my way through the solid mass of boys and men, in order to get to my usual place. It was just impossible, especially as I was also rather tired. I needed to be at the peak of my physical condition to make any headway. I had to give up, admit failure and stand at the rear of the hall.

At 9.45pm the Rebbe arrived and almost immediately commenced a Maamer! So, instead of having this Maamer at 3.00am on the morning of Shavuoth, we were listening to it at a 'reasonable' hour, the evening **before Yom Tov**. Incidentally, last year the Rebbe omitted this Shavuoth Maamer altogether. So, we were probably being present at a new innovation.

After the Maamer, Label Gronor and other friends noticed me standing at the back and made active and aggressive signals and signs to me that I should go and sit in my usual place. So I did, by climbing onto the table, and walking on hands and heads - belonging to others, of course.

As it happens, Label was right, I should have gone to my usual place (!) at once because next morning Rabbi Dvorkin asked me why I came so late to the Farbrengen and even missed the Maamer!!

We then sang a couple of nigunim and the Rebbe gave a sicha about the modesty of Moishe Rabbenu. He was such an *onov*, he maintained that with all the help and guidance which he had received from Above, he should have done much better. In fact, another one in his place and with the same help **would** have done even better!

The whole Farbrengen took one and a half hours, Roselyn said it was wonderful - and just long enough, too - another five minutes and she would have been sound asleep!

Next morning, being Thursday, I was fortunate to have *Hagboh* at the Rebbe's minyan, when I also benched '*Gomel*.'

Yom Tov Maariv was at 9.00pm. I had told Tzvi Fisher and Lou Tiefenbrun (from London) that I would sing '*Vesomachto Bechagecho*' as the Rebbe was leaving the Shul after Maariv, and I was relying on their help.

Everything went even better than I had planned. As soon as I sang the first note my friends joined in and, in less than no time, about a hundred of us were singing and dancing in a huge circle and it went on for quite a while.

When I entered '770' next morning some of those men who had been dancing and singing with me the previous evening, asked me in Ivrit - "*Od paam?*" (Would we be doing the same thing today?) It was '*Tov Me'od*' last night, said another one kissing his fingers.

I learnt that they were Russian Jews from Georgia (Russia) and only spoke Russian or Ivrit. They had been sustained spiritually by the Rebbe all these many years and had remained devout and pious Jews only with the encouragement of the Rebbe. After leaving Russia, with their families, they had settled in Nachlas Har Chabad in Israel. They had now taken the very first opportunity to come to Brooklyn and to thank the Rebbe personally for all his help, material and spiritual, over the past many years. It was no wonder that they so spontaneously and joyfully joined with me in singing, dancing and rejoicing together with our wonderful Rebbe.

Quite a number of these Russians had settled in Brooklyn, too. At one place, I saw 20 young Russian boys learning and studying. I was told that ten others had already been integrated into the normal day schools. Most of them are good scholars. A boy of eleven who, two years ago could just about manage to read the Siddur, was today learning Gemora with Tosfos.

Another lad of ten was being prepared for his Briss - his non-Jewish father had been left behind in Russia.

A child of four refused to take off his Yarmulke at home (as he was so taught). His father and mother were so impressed that they have arranged to get married in a week or so - under the Chupa. In Russia

they had only a civil marriage.

I heard the story of the Russian who had a Mikvah in his basement. The police came along and saw his "tank full of dirty water," and said that it must be emptied at once. It was not hygienic. To prove his point he got a tumbler, filled it with Mikvah water and drank it all in front of them, proving to everyone that it was clean and satisfactory.

Our poor brethren certainly went through fire and **water** For the sake of their faith.

As expected, the morning (Yomtov) service commenced at 10.00am prompt. This year, there was no problem whatever about our 'usual' songs. As soon as I started '*Hoaderes Veho'emuna,*' the Rebbe banged his fist on his '*shtender*' - and that was all that was required.

I had developed a cold which affected my voice. I could just about croak (some said my voice was better that way!) Fortunately, my two assistants, Tzvi (Fisher) and Lou (Tiefenbrun) were on top form and helped me start the rest of our repertoire.

That afternoon, Tzvi brought me a small bottle of medicine, which was guaranteed to cure my cough. It contained 90% alcohol and one small teaspoon at a time was the limit. Tzvi said he always kept a bottle handy at his home. I suspect that he makes Kiddush on it - no wonder he is always laughing.

So far it had poured with rain all Yom Tov, and the thousand boys and men set off on their march to Boro Park at 6pm in the teeming rain.

Mincha was at 8.00pm and the Shul was almost deserted. I suppose the Rebbe was delighted to see only fifty people present at this minyan.

It was a pity and a shame that I had a bad cold and bad leg - if I had gone marching I would have had a much worse cold, two bad legs and one very annoyed and angry wife!

On the second day Shavuoth, we davened Mincha at 7.00pm and immediately afterwards we all washed and made Hamotzei. The problem was to find sufficient bread so that one did not make a *brocho levatolo*. Furthermore, as we had to bench on this later on, it had to be a minimum shiur. Normally, this is not a problem at all. I generally bring along a couple of loaves, plenty of cake and a great deal of fruit. But this year it was Shabbos and what little I had prepared beforehand was very soon 'swallowed up' by the very many who pleaded and begged for a 'crust of bread.'

At the Farbrengen I like to sit in front facing the Rebbe. (Who doesn't?) Since the Rebbe has widened his table on the dais - the platform - it is now impossible to see the Rebbe from my usual seat - as I have previously mentioned. So after ten years, I have decided to seek for myself another and better seat.

I did find what I thought was a very nice place - center block - and four seats from the front. The only trouble was (a) that someone was already sitting there and (b) this someone refused to move. I pleaded with him, begged and cajoled him to please move "just one seat nearer to the front" He remained adamant.

Of course, it was just too bad for him that of all the hundreds of people sitting at the tables, I had to just pick on him. It was not his fault, he seemed a nice chappie and I apologised for what subsequently happened.

But when he clasped his hands around the table leg and remarked that he always sat in this place all the year round and he would not budge even for me, who had traveled thousands of miles to be present at this **one** Farbrengen - then I became angry, and had no alternative but to accept his challenge. I heaved, and lunged. I used my feet, my elbows and my shoulders and - within seconds I

had sent my newly found friend and neighbour sprawling along the bench, I had gained my objective. My only casualty was a jacket button. But then, looking around '770,' one can hardly see one jacket or kapottie that has not suffered some casualty or some rip or tear in the continual fights for the survival of the fittest. Now, I can realise why I do not see any new kapotties at a '770' Farbrengen!

My new friend remarked that I must be a Kohen - I am not one - since I had such a temper. He then told me the old joke, "why is a Kohen always vexed? Because he washes, makes a brocha and benches - and gets nothing to eat!" He was very pleased that I laughed at this old joke and we became firm friends. Actually, more firm than I had anticipated, because having sat down I could not move. It seemed that in the event, I had **not** made a good choice of seat. The boys, who arrange the seating accommodation, are obviously standing up during the Farbrengen. The two forms (benches) in between the tables are pressed so tightly together that they cannot be moved even a fraction of an inch.

So, here I was. My left leg was jammed against the table leg and my right leg jammed against my neighbor's knee. My back and backside were stuck against my other neighbour. Both of these men had the habit of shaking their knee like a motorcar left with the engine running. No sooner had I managed to stop the front engine when the rear engine started. My teeth were chattering, my head was shaking, my legs were stiff with cramp and my voice was hoarse. It was impossible even to rise, let alone stand up for the Maamer. I just leaned on the table like a drunken man. It was lucky for me that the Rebbe had his eyes closed during the Maamer.

Afterwards, the Rebbe asked me why I didn't sing and jump up and down. (as I normally do when the Rebbe is 'conducting' with gusto) How I would have loved to oblige in more ways than one - I think someone should tell the boys to leave a little more room in between the tables. I am amazed that no legs or limbs are broken in the crush. Thank G-d our Lubavitch Chassidim are tough.

Glancing at the next table, I received a bit of a shock. I saw about twelve young **girls** - all with **long** hair and wearing light colored striped pyjama suits. They were also joining in the singing and saying LeChaim to the Rebbe. I realized, of course, that they must be boys. The Rebbe was encouraging them with warm friendly smiles. They stayed on right to the end of the Farbrengen.

Well, the Farbrengen had commenced at 8.00pm. At 9.10pm the Rebbe started the Maamer and finished it in 12 minutes! I could not believe it had ended, although I did flop back into my seat. Was this also a new innovation? I need not have worried, because about four hours later - at 1.20 am, the Rebbe gave us another Maamer, preceded **again** by the Mamer Nigun. This lasted the usual 30 minutes!!

I was then called to the platform by the Rebbe, who handed me a bottle of vodka to distribute amongst all those who had marched to Boro Park on the previous day. Bernard Perrin's turn was next, then Lou Tiefenbaum was also given a bottle. Well done England!

Another interesting episode occurred when the Rebbe announced that he wished to say LeChaim to the person who had served longest in a Russian prison. The Rebbe held an auction - **five** years - **ten** years - and the winner was he who had served for **eleven** years in a Russian jail.

A consolation prize went to the gentleman who had been sentenced to twenty-five years hard labor for teaching and studying Tanya with others, but after serving for only five years he was released on parole. He had lived in daily fear and dread of being re-arrested until he was fortunate to leave Russia for Israel.

The Rebbe referred to Shvuos as the time of *Matan Torah*, which we all call *Toras Moshe*. G-d chose Moshe to lead the Jews out of Egypt after observing how mindful he was in looking after the sheep of Yisro; not only caring for the sheep, but for the smallest and most tender of the lambs, and in spite of the fact that Yisro was at that time still a 'goy.'

Secondly, King David, who was born **and died** on Shvuos, was also a shepherd looking after the weakest animals with loving care and devotion.

Thirdly, the Baal Shem Tov, who died on Shvuos, spent his whole life and energies caring for the youngest and tenderest Jewish children. The Jewish people were often referred to as G-d's sheep. These three, our greatest leaders and shepherds, realized that their first consideration was to teach and care for the 'little ones' before anyone else.

The Baal Shem Tov in particular, had no time or inclination for so called intellectuals or Talmidei Chachomim - the children came first.

The Rebbe gave a moshul: If one wished to raise a building one had to lift it from the bottom. It was no use raising it from the center, the middle. That way there was no foundation and no future.

At 2.30am the Rebbe lead the bentching, and although it was five and a half hours since Yom Tov and Shabbos had officially ended, we still said 'Retzei' and 'Ya'aleh Veyovoh.'

We then davened Maariv, most people standing on tables, benches and toes of others. It was not even possible for everyone to turn towards *Mizrach*.

It was then announced that the Rebbe would make Havdola, after which all should file past the Rebbe in an, orderly manner gently and with decorum, and receive the *kos shel brocha* direct from the Rebbe's hand.

A strong appeal was made that this year, there should be no pushing nor standing on tables, everyone should file past with dignity. I was asked to get off the table, which I did, because I also wished to set a good example to the others. We in England are well trained to queue - which is a **sane** and sensible way of 'getting served.'

The Nigun - a cheerful exhilarating tune - was started and off we went.

The pressure of the boys was so great that it was now impossible to stand on ones own feet. I felt myself being pushed slowly but relentlessly forward - and right **past** where the Rebbe was standing above on the platform. To add to my distress, I noticed that many men and boys were committing the unardonable sin to an Englishman of jumping the queue.

To make matters even worse, another line had formed on the very tables which I had vacated only a short while ago. A couple of boys, supposedly organizers, had joined hands below these tables and allowed **no one** to jump up on these - **except** their own friends.

It was 2.30 a.m. and normally I would have been well satisfied to wait even for another two hours singing and watching, but Roselyn was waiting for me to take her home. It was considered pretty dangerous (to say the least) for a lady to walk alone at that time of the night (or early morning) in Brooklyn, New York.

So - *!@#?* - ?@#!* !?* -- !!! -- *%& ?£@#?! - well! - it was short, sharp and to the point - there was I back at the **same spot** which I had relinquished only ten minutes previously. I still held the large paper tumbler in my hand, very crushed, but still usable.

I am sure there must be a better way and a fairer method of organizing this *kos shel brocho*, without there being a free for all.

And meanwhile, amidst all this excitement, the Rebbe is carrying on, unperturbed and pouring out the wine into each and everyone's glasses or other containers.

It was soon my turn and I told the Rebbe that I had sixteen customers waiting in England for this *kos shel brocha*. "Very good" said the Rebbe, smiling, and started counting, "eins, tzvei, drei... fertzen, fuftzen and zextzen." My cup was now literally 'full to the brim.' This certainly made up for all my previous upsets and arguments.

On Sunday, the usual Kinus Torah took place. This year, for the first time, it was held downstairs in the large hall (Shul). Rabbi Mentlik, whose big day this was, had made sure that I would be speaking "as usual." "The Boys like it," he said. As was the custom, the Kinus Torah commenced at about 3.30pm after Mincha, and went on until almost time for Maariv (9.00pm). I will admit that most of the speakers were interesting - each had a stock of gemoras and other seforim for reference, and every year there was always someone who disagreed with their arguments and reasoning's and so started further arguments and reasonings. Unlike at the Rebbe's Farbrengen, men and boys were continuously walking in and out of the hall. The audience had changed over completely many times during the afternoon.

Rabbi Mentik ensured that I should listen to at least three pilpulim, two whilst I was waiting for my turn to be called up and one after I had given my talk. I could not insult the next speaker by immediately walking out after my address.

To save myself the trouble of preparing a paper I took the easy way out by reading out extracts from my last year's diary. They loved the section dealing with the Rebbe's 70th Birthday, on Yud Aleph Nissan. They lapped it up and enjoyed it immensely. They all clamored for copies of the Diary. I could have made a fortune!

And yet, a number of boys were disappointed that I had not told them a few jokes as I normally do. One cannot please everyone. Can one?

Once again we had the zechus to see our dear Rebbetzen. Really we had a double zechus, because we were fortunate to visit her at home twice, as we did last year.

Her house had just been re-decorated. It was very nice and bright. Our Rebbetzen also looked very nice and bright. She seemed much younger than last year - *kein ayin horah* - she oozes charm and graciousness. To quote an expression often used by the Rebbetzen - "*umberruffen*", and we feel proud and privileged to be again in her company.

She enquired about our children and grandchildren, especially regarding Susan - for whom we delivered another letter to the Rebbetzen. In her letters, Susan writes about and describes the daily and intimate happenings, which occur at home in Manchester.

We spent a very pleasant couple of hours - I read out extracts from my last year's diary, my Israel diary and parts of the one which I am writing now (I had brief notes).

The Rebbetzen praised my work (I hope it was not just politeness, she is obviously a real lady) and remarked that I had talent and a gift for writing. She recommended that I should have all my diaries printed in one volume. Rabbi Chodakov, Rabbi Label Groner and quite a number of others have also requested - nay demanded - that I should do this.

Time simply flew on our second visit. The two and a quarter hours seemed like 30 minutes and it was time for Mincha.

The Rebbe had written to me last year that although he had discontinued the dinners, "It's a **real** pleasure to see you at the davening and Farbrengen." "So," said I, "if the Rebbe has pleasure in seeing me at the davening, then I had better make quick steps to be at the Mincha Service at '770.'"

The Rebbetzen agreed and confirmed that the Rebbe does enjoy seeing me and **everyone** at the davening. Although it did seem that the Rebbe does not notice anyone, the Rebbetzen assured me that he saw everybody and it made him very happy indeed. It gave him much pleasure and “Farginigun.”

I went to see Rabbi Chodakov in his office at 5.00 p.m. He is a very fine outstanding man and scholar, extremely friendly and inspiring, as befits the Rebbe's personal secretary. In spite of several interruptions and buzzes on the telephone, I managed to spend an enlightening and pleasant thirty-five minutes, most exhilarating too. He made many suggestions - We should arrange shiurim for small groups of professional people, for instance, doctors and lawyers, in private houses. We should look after the small communities. Chaim Farro should work for youth. Does Avrohom work? (I should say he does and overtime for Lubavitch too.) I should put all my diaries together and make a small book. What is new in Manchester? Have you a Gemilas Chessed fund? Must have two guarantors for each loan, and so on and so forth.

I heard the following interesting story about A. D. Suffrin. He complained to the Rebbe that he was overworked and wished to give up some of his jobs. The Rebbe asked him his age. A.D. replied, “43 years old.” The Rebbe retorted that he was over 70 and had just established 70 new Mosdos and therefore A.D. should have founded 43 new Mosdos. Great excitement and frantic telephone calls were made to ascertain whether the Rebbe was joking - the Rebbe does not joke about such matters.

On Monday afternoon, I had the honour and distinction of meeting the Assistant Educational Director for Eastern Parkway. He wished to borrow ten dollars until Thursday! It was none other than my old friend B from Manchester who was studying at ‘770.’ I was delighted to hear that he was making such wonderful progress. In addition to this ‘directorship,’ which carried a small salary, he was also receiving \$50 a week from the anti-poverty welfare. Another \$15 a week was paid to him as a “pupil who could not speak English.” (At ‘770’ I cannot imagine that he ever will?!) Actually, nearly all this cash he received went to the treasurer of the Yeshiva. (**Not**, I repeat **not** to my friend B.) B is one of 110 boys learning at the new Yeshiva across the road (Chovevei Torah) which used to be a Shul. They have a wonderful library, but no books, so, “would I mind helping?!”

I was soon back into the old ‘770’ routine. Shacharis, at 9.30am was ridiculously late. However, after two weeks in Brooklyn I wondered why they davened Shacharis **early** at 9.30a.m. I was always late! On Monday morning the Rebbe was not present for Layening at this Minyan and a fellow who had yohrtzeit expected the third aliya. So young Mendlebaum, the acting Gabbie, called up a Bar-mitzvah boy! Oh dear, oh dear, what a rumpus, what a carry on! A Rav (everybody, even I, became a Rav in ‘770’) told him he had the priority as a yohrtzeit. The fellow rushed to Rabbi Dvorkin who, unhesitatingly and categorically stated that there was **no** Din Torah. Young Mendlebaum had done the correct thing except that he should have asked the Kohen to leave, and so satisfied both *chiyuvim*. Rabbi Dvorkin explained to me that the top priority for an aliya was always a Choson then a bar-mitzvah, third was for a Bris and only fourth was a yohrtzeit. He also pointed out to me that one should have an aliya on the Shabbos **before** his birthday (he was not a special *chiyuv* for his Barmitzvah Sedra at all). Also, Shabbos morning before a yohrtzeit, was the correct time for his *aliya*, not at Shabbos Mincha nor during the week.

I told Rabbi Dvorkin that every Yom Tov has its own peculiarities - Pesach we eat Matzo, Succoth we eat in a small, roofless hut, Shvuos we eat on top of the Kolel!

We were invited to come along to two weddings that evening. The only trouble was that we were not told where, nor when. We did hear afterwards that one took place in Philadelphia.

Normally, the Rebbe is *mekadesh* the *levona* immediately after Maariv, when Shabbos ends. This year, Shabbos coincided with the Yom Tov Farbrengen, so I was correct in my surmise that the Rebbe would come out for this mitzvah tonight, Monday, after Maariv.

Many men and boys had already performed this Mitzvah. There were also those two weddings taking

place, so there were only a few hundred boys present when the Rebbe came directly to the spot where I was standing, which was the nearest position from '770' from which the moon was visible.

Once again, I had the *nachas* to reply to the Rebbe's Shalom Aleichem, and the privilege of greeting the Rebbe with my own Shalom Aleichem, to which I received the answer Aleichem Shalom.

It was now nearly 11.00p.m. There was great excitement and singing. The Chosson and Kaloh were now standing under the Chupah - I was told that the wedding was called for 7.30pm - only three and a half hours late, not bad for some Lubavitch Chassidim.

I will never understand why they do not follow the example of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. When he promised to officiate at Hilary's marriage to Shmuel (which was incidentally the first time for four years and also the last time the Rebbe was *Mesader Kidushin*), he said the Chupah should be at 5.00pm. The Rebbe returned from the Ohel that day at five minutes to five, tired and hungry. Rabbi Chodakov thought the Rebbe would daven Mincha first. But no, at exactly 5.00pm the Rebbe emerged from the doorway and at that very same moment Hilary came up the garden steps at '770' and they met under the Chupa. That is what is referred to as good timekeeping.

The next day I received a very nice letter from the Rebbe. This is a 'rough' translation of the Hebrew:

(1) Regarding the diary, I have read it and again it finds favour in my eyes. I wish to add that your son-in-law, Rabbi Shmuel Lew is correct when he maintains that when you write your diary and describe a Farbrengen it is worthwhile to write at least about one of the points that were discussed.

(2) Regarding speaking to me personally before your departure (hitherto I have invariably had a Yechidus before leaving for home in addition to our normal one), in general you are quite right. In this instance however, there are so many people from Georgia, Bucharah and other places in Russia, who have waited for decades for this opportunity and who will be unable to come here in the near future. They are not accustomed to write to me and they are here for only a few weeks.

And if I were to fulfill the aforementioned good thing to speak with you personally in my room more than once, then Yechidus would last a considerable time. I am sure you will agree that these people should have precedence. I am sure you will understand.

Of course I understand! On Sunday night there were over 60 people to see the Rebbe, who was kept constantly busy from 8.00pm until about 5.00am. On Tuesday nearly 50 people kept the Rebbe fully and continuously occupied, without a break (except for Ma'ariv) until after 4.30am.

Those days (and nights) have now gone when I could spend two and a half hours at one Yechidus, and have an additional Yechidus for an hour and a half, before leaving for home. In the 14 years since I have been visiting our Rebbe the Lubavitch movement has grown enormously all over the world. Fifteen years ago in Manchester, one could count on the fingers of one hand the number of people who wrote to or communicated with the Rebbe. (I think this is also an exaggeration because after Rabbi Rein, my uncle (O.H.) passed away, I cannot think of even one person who wrote, let alone visited the Rebbe from Manchester.)

Today, still referring to Manchester, there are literally hundreds of men and women, boys and girls, who are continuously writing to, and actually visiting the Rebbe in Brooklyn. In my own family, during the past 12 months, Roselyn and I, Avrohom, Hilary and Shmuel and four grandchildren have been to see the Rebbe - and our family is small compared to others.

Multiply this all over the world and you can readily understand a quarter of the problem. This is the natural increase. The increase in the number of 'converts' to Lubavitch is on an even higher and greater scale and travel by plane is quicker, cheaper and more convenient. It is possible to visit the Rebbe for even just a few days, too. Look how many came last year for Yud Aleph Nissan, the

Rebbe's birthday. This huge Shul (or hall) has become much too small, whereas 14 years ago the little Beth Hamidrash upstairs was quite ample for all our needs.

The past year has also seen the growth of another modern invention "S.T.D." or dial your own number. It is a marvelous convenience. One lifts the telephone, dials 14 numbers and in a couple of seconds, one is in direct touch with '770' at only 25p a half-minute. **And everyone** wants only the Rebbe. All right, admittedly one does not speak to the Rebbe direct, but the Rebbe has to reply and give the advice sought, and so forth.

How one human being can cope with such a huge 'business,' is beyond anyone's understanding.

So when Label Groner tells one **not** to keep the Rebbe too long, one should take notice and not be selfish, for the Rebbe's sake and for the sake of everybody else.

It is now time for our Yechidus and we are waiting in the office, when who would walk in but my brother, Maurice and his wife, Ella, Carmella Maurice's Secretary, also from Israel. Carmella had no appointment with the Rebbe. She came on the off chance hoping she could be fitted in somewhere, sometime during the night. Label was a little cross. He had been refusing appointments for people all night and here comes Maurice and brings along a 'guest' too. This 'guest' Carmella, had also brought along her friend. Well, poor Label had to surrender to Maurice's persuasion and 'protection,' but he was not a bit pleased.

However, Carmella had some grave problems to discuss with the Rebbe. She went into the Rebbe's room, waited to kiss his hands. (a Sephardi custom I believe) She soon came out and burst into tears with relief and joy.

The waiting hall was crowded. There were very many Russians - one woman who had already seen the Rebbe at a previous Yechidus, was having a row with poor Label, She wanted to see the Rebbe again. "**No.No.No,**" says Label and that was final. Until we found that she had sidled into the Rebbe's room before anyone could stop her, as soon as someone emerged, she was in like a flash. Hershel Pecker's daughter was given a beautiful smile and a Siddur from the Rebbe.

It was now our own turn at about 3.00a.m. Label's warning not to keep the Rebbe too long was ringing in our ears. The Rebbe intended to go to the Ohel that day, fasting as usual. If Yechidus ended too late that morning it would not be possible for the Rebbe to have even a drink first. In the event we kept the Rebbe for only 20 minutes. This time we asked the Rebbe for a brocha for ourselves straight away, unlike on a previous occasion when we almost forgot. I reminded the Rebbe that last year he gave us brocha "*iber dem kop*" and we want the same again. The Rebbe expressed surprise, "have you **no** ambition?" and said we must have more this year. The Rebbe said I could thank G-d for arranging that I should meet Maurice at '770.' I asked for 3 bottles of mashkie for 3 Chosons, David Kessler, Avrohom Klyne and Arye Freedman. The Rebbe wanted to know whether I would take one bottle and divide it out in England. I said if the Rebbe insisted, I would do so.

The Rebbe asked about Sigmund Margulies and Mrs. Benson, who was acting clerk to the Shechita Board. "A woman? (No offence to Mrs. Jaffe,) but can she manage?" We discussed Lubavitch in Manchester, the new building, the concert and many other communal problems. He also advised me on business matters.

He sent regards to our children and grandchildren, and when I told the Rebbe that Yossi (8 years old) learns Mishna and Gemoro, the Rebbe asked "would Yossi come with you to Brooklyn?" When we told Yossi, he said he would be delighted, but Shmuel brought him together with Mendel, his brother.

On a previous occasion, two years ago, the Rebbe told me to **bring Yossi**, which we did. Yossi brought his brother, Mendel, who brought his father, Shmuel and all the family and so K.A.H. Roselyn was very busy. We had a few good laughs and took our leave from his presence. A good,

short but splendid Yechidus.

The final Shabbos of our stay had now arrived. Because Yom Tov was on Shabbos, we had therefore missed our 'ordinary' Shabbos. There were 5 Chassanim and for the first time since I have been coming to '770,' I did not have an Aliya - proves my point about tremendous growth of Lubavitch.

Thank G-D (and the Rebbe) there was a Farbrengen. At the last Sicho, the Rebbe spoke on Tzaischem Leshalom, quoting Beis Shamai in the perek "greet everyone with a happy smile." Actually Beis Hillel should have said this as Hillel always leaned on the side of Chessed, kindness, but we accepted this ruling from Shamai who was always stricter, to show us that it was **not** a kindness to greet our fellows with a happy smile, but a definite **duty**.

The Rebbe loves to welcome everyone who comes specially to spend Shvuos, time of Matan Torah, with him. Although we are leaving the Rebbe's presence, we are always connected spiritually, and please G-d, the Rebbe looks forward to seeing us, **personally** again next Shvuos.

He also spoke about mixed dancing at weddings. Marriage – "Harai at Mekudeshes Lee." The Choson says to his bride - you are holy to me, to me only and then sees one's wife dancing with other men. What kind of holiness is this? Holiness is separation - husband and wife are only for each other. Mixed dancing at weddings means no *Shechina* is present and no mazal for the future. It is contrary to what we wish the Choson and Kaloh.

Incidentally there were 3 sets of Sheva Brochas during this Farbrengen.

The Rebbe gave me 3 bottles of Vodka for the 3 Chasanim. Two Russians begged me for a small drop for their families. It was not mine, really, but how could I refuse. The Chasanim would be very happy to know what pleasure they had given to these people.

Roselyn complained bitterly about decorum in the shul, she could not hear the davening nor the layening. It was impossible to daven with *kavonah*. It was like a fish market. Woman chattering, girls jabbering, kids jumping about. She placed a paper towel on the bench to keep her clothes clean - so everyone stood on the paper towel. At the Farbrengen, it is just as bad. Roselyn said, "it is just too ridiculous, the 'natives' do not appreciate the Rebbe as they should."

Although we did not have the second Yechidus, the Rebbe approached us, as we were standing near the door ready to leave for home, and said with a lovely glorious smile, "*Fort gezanterheit un lost gerissen alemen in der heim*" (travel well and regards to everyone at home). So with this nice brocha for a safe journey, we left '770' well pleased with this year's encounter with the Rebbe Shlita.

A complete stranger had approached me in, '770'. He had read my diary at a friend's house. He enjoyed it because it recaptured vividly the whole atmosphere of Lubavitch. I feel therefore, that I should relate some incidents that happened during the course of the year.

For instance. At long last progress was being made with the publication of the Hebrew/English Tanya, to be printed by the Soncino Press, London.

In the previous English translation of the Tanya, there was a paragraph which referred to the 'souls of the gentiles' in a slightly disparaging manner. I suggested that the word 'gentiles' be altered to read 'idol worshippers or heathens.' Of course, I concluded, "I could not do anything without the Rebbe's permission."

I write to the Rebbe almost every fortnight, giving him all the news and reporting on events and progress in various spheres of activities. I must have had a particularly trying time with some mutual friend which I mentioned to the Rebbe.

Here is a verbatim copy of the Rebbe's reply to me. It seems I only get a letter from the Rebbe when I write something very controversial. It is even worth getting a 'bad' letter - always better than none at all. However, once and for always this letter should silence those critics who assert that the Rebbe does not give clear and concise answers to problems. There is nothing ambiguous about these replies - right to the point in no uncertain manner, slightly humorous, and a good scolding and rebuke for me.

B.H. 23rd Kislev 5733
Brooklyn, N.Y

To: Mr. Schneur Zalman Jaffe
Manchester, England.

Sholom uBrocho:

I am in receipt of your letter of Kislev 13 and previous correspondence.

To begin with a good thing, I was pleased to see your daughter and two grandchildren, G-d bless them before their return to England. No doubt she will convey my personal regards, and also report on the test of 'Shema Yisroel' which passed with 'flying colors.'

2) With regard to our mutual friend, I must again say that I am surprised that after all that has been said and done, a mutual understanding has not been reached yet. After all, all concerned have the same cause at heart, namely, to quote the Yud-Tes Kislev motto recently reaffirmed, *yofutzu maynosecho chutzo!*

I am confident that everyone concerned will be willing to make some concessions so long as it will lead to a more effective "dissemination of the fountains *chutzo*," including concessions in areas where one thinks to be entirely in the right. Obviously, the maximum co-operation is essential for maximum results. Yet though it is high time for resolving the differences, I see from your letter that the situation has not moved, in the right direction, at any rate.

It would have been futile on my part to mention this matter altogether, for if the said overriding principles are not effective what can my few lines accomplish? However, inasmuch as we have just observed Yud-Tes Kislev, the 'Rosh Hashanah for Chasidus and Chasidic ways,' and I am confident that everyone of us has been inscribed unto a Shone Toivo in Chasidus, I hope and pray that this included also the meeting of hearts and minds among all those that had still been divided before Yud-Tes Kislev. And if a personal effort is still required, we have the assurance of *yogato - umotzoso*.

3) Referring to your remarks about the translation of the concluding passage of chapter 1 of Tanya where it speaks of the souls of the nations of the world, raising the question of resentment that it might call forth in certain circles, and offering a suggestion in this matter - my obvious answer - if I may borrow your own phrase - "We cannot do anything without the Rebbe's permission." Meaning **of course**, the Alter Rebbe's, i.e. author's, permission.

Let me also add, with no offense intended, that your suggestion comes too late, for the passage has already been translated into Yiddish, English, French, and Italian editions years ago, in accordance with the intent of the author. Thus, there is no point to attempt to retract or forestall anything at this stage.

As a matter of fact, if any change were made, it would only accentuate the matter and provide an opportunity for anyone in any part of the world whose eye will catch it to make a 'fuss' about it.

A further point - and this is the crux of the matter: In our day and age, one does not have to be

a Chasid, nor even a Kabbalist (for the said doctrine of the Alter Rebbe is based on Kabbala and Talmud), nor even a confirmed believer - as long as one does not close one's eyes to the stark facts - to see what kind of souls the nations of the world have. For all the nations of the world were witnesses to what was going on in Germany and the countries it over-ran, yet remained indifferent. In the light of this, the words of the Alter Rebbe (incidentally not original to him, as mentioned above) may even be an 'understatement.'

To allay your apprehensions further, let me say this: If a goy wants to keep his feelings to himself and not make trouble (and there are such) he will not make an issue of it. If he is the kind of goy that wants to make trouble (and there are also such) he can create issues without looking for them in books, as in the case of the Blood Libel, which **you** cite in your letter.

I trust that you all had an inspiring Yud-Tes Kislev observance, and that the Fabengen here (which I am told was relayed also to M/C) did not completely rob you of a night's sleep on Motzoei Shabbos. The important thing is that the inspiration should be lasting and permeate each and every day of the year.

With blessing for good tidings in all the above and for a bright Chanukah and increasing light.

(Signed) *M. SCHNEERSON*

Another friend of ours who lived in the southern part of England wished to adopt a child. They already had a little baby girl of their own, but the doctors - the whole medical profession, told his wife that it was impossible for her to bear any more children. Here is the Rebbe's reply, dated 5728 (1968), 5 years ago.

By the Grace of G-d
3rd of Menachem Av, 5728

Greetings and Blessing:

In response to your telephone call and subsequent (undated) letter, the Rebbe replied as follows:

- 1) You should move to Manchester.
- 2) Concerning your inquiry about adoption.

You should pray to the Almighty in strong faith that He will bless you with your own healthy offspring.

Sincerely,
(signed)

Rabbi M. A. Chodakov

Our friend carried out these instructions and a few months ago they were blessed with a fine baby boy. The Bris took place in Lubavitch House, Manchester. Their first child is now a bonny girl of eight years old.

A local lady, Mrs. N, also phoned me regarding help in adopting a baby. She had been married for about six years and although the doctors in this case could find nothing wrong medically with this couple, they were not blessed with offspring. Rabbi Farro, the woman and I, all wrote to the Rebbe. In due course, the Rebbe replied direct to Mrs. N. The peculiarity about this letter was that it was written in **Hebrew** - yet the Rebbe always replies to **me** in **English** - Poor Mrs. N! What could she do? She

could not understand one word. Naturally, she went with it to Chaim Farro who, not only translated it, but explained the minutest details to her, all the aspects and regulations concerning *Taharas Hamishpocho*, which the Rebbe had stressed in his letter. The Rebbe added that Please G-d, in due course, if she kept this Mitzvah of 'Family Purity' then she would be blessed with loving her **own** Children.

The Rebbe is always thinking about us, about every Jew everywhere.

To strengthen the Yeshiva in Melbourne, six of the best boys who were learning in the Yeshiva in Brooklyn were sent to Australia, to study in Melbourne for a number of years.

The Rebbe saw them before they left America and told them to stop over in England, "How long shall we stay," they asked. "As long as possible," was the answer.

They intended staying for one day only in London, and then travel on via Israel. Fortunately, for us, their plane tickets had been delayed in the post and when they telephoned New York for instructions, they were told to visit Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow.

All the six boys - Aaron Eliezer Ceitlin, Yosef Kraimer, Yosef Yitzchok Chitrik, Sholom Baras, Sholom Spalter and Yaakov Reizes - arrived in Manchester on Thursday. They visited the Beth-Din, Schools, Yeshivas and other communal organizations, including the offices of the Jewish Telegraph.

Sidney Needoff told me that I must tell the Rebbe how he much enjoys the 'Thoughts of the week' printed every week in the Jewish Telegraph. In the evening, we held a Farbrengen, about 80 people attended and each of the six boys addressed us. It was an excellent function. The boys were outstanding, as someone remarked, "the Rebbe knows who to send."

Two of the Boys stayed over Shabbos and spoke in various Shuls, whilst the remainder either returned to London or went to other cities.

LAG B'OMER IN MANCHESTER

Lag B'Omer fell on a Sunday this year, so we had to follow precedence by holding a parade on this day. The Manchester parade and picnic arrangements were under the sole control and supervision of Rabbi Chaim Farro (Hakohen) - hereinafter referred to as 'Chaim.'

Over 1,200 children from the age of 6 to 16 years attended the march and over 1000 were taken to the famous Aintree Racecourse in Liverpool for a picnic, entertainment and prizes. It was a huge and outstanding success and all the children enjoyed themselves immensely. Hearty congratulations to Chaim for a magnificent job - well done.

However, let us have a little peep at what happened 'behind the scenes.' One can imagine that there was plenty of work to do and to organise. Although I was, in virtue of the position I hold, a member of this Lag B'Omer sub-committee, I did not attend any meetings. One good reason was that I was not invited until after the meeting was held. Actually, I was pleased because there was plenty of Lubavitch work to do - the big appeal dinner, progress on the new building and so forth. Besides which it was always interesting to hear the reports of these meetings second and even third hand. Top priority was leaders, boys and girls who were capable of looking after groups of children. One member asked Chaim how many leaders we had. "Oh," he replied, "I have a big long list." He certainly had a 'big long list,' but no leaders yet.

About 14 days before Lag B'Omer, Yechiel Vogel informed me that the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Dr. Jacobovitz, would be in Manchester on that day to induct a Rabbi into his new position. It would be a wonderful opportunity for the Chief Rabbi to address so many children and a great Zechus for these

boys and girls to see and listen to the Chief Rabbi. In any case, Dr. Jacobovitz had stated publicly when he took the office, that the youth came first. He was not particularly so interested in inductions or in opening new (or re-opening old) Shuls. We were gratified and honoured when he accepted our invitation to be present at the parade ground at 10.45am. I warned Chaim, "Don't let the Chief down, I have promised him 1,000 Children." Chaim worked hard, with publicity, good canvassing and mainly with the attraction of a galaxy of free prizes offered, including a trip to Israel. He was reasonably confident. We were all given our usual jobs, I was the Master of Ceremonies to ensure promptness and punctuality. Roselyn was put in charge of making the sandwiches. Bernard Perrin and his van were in charge of transporting the food and drink to Liverpool.

After Shabbos, at 11.00pm all the workers under the 'foreman,' Roselyn Jaffe, were gathered at Halberstadt's, the local Jewish butcher shop, and the work of making, cutting and packing 2,200 sandwiches was in full swing, until it was suddenly realized that the sliced loaves which we had ordered were cut too thick and instead of 16 Sandwiches to the loaf, we were making only ten. We sent Perrin to the bakers for more bread. He soon returned with another 65 loaves, all lovely and fresh, straight from the freezer. I was the cutter-in-chief. I can tell you it is no easy matter to cut frozen, hard bread. This accounted for only 800 sandwiches, and although Chaim advised us that this would be quite sufficient, we had too much salami left over that we again went to the bakers for a further supply of bread. At 1.00am we had the 2,200 Sandwiches made, 'packed and loaded' into Perrin's van. It was pouring with rain when we arrived at Lubavitch House to load the drinks, apples and biscuits. Chaim had borrowed a large flat lorry to make into a 'float' and there it was, standing disconsolately and pitifully all alone, unattended and very wet. If it was a 'float' (**ha!ha!**), it would have looked liked Noah's ark.

At 9.00 on Lag B'Omer morning, the rain was still 'pelting down,' accompanied by thunder and cloudbursts. In case it rained, it was our custom in the past to hire an enclosed van, which we could use as the 'registration office.' This, year, Chaim just did not bother. The 'float'? A boat would have been much more useful. At 9.30 it was still pouring with rain. But at 10.30, when the first busloads of children started to arrive, the rain suddenly and miraculously stopped altogether. Buses were arriving from all over the North of England - Liverpool, Blackpool, St. Annes, Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield and locally from Bury, Cheadle and Gatley and all districts of Manchester.

Another, but unwelcome, arrival was a telegram from the Chief Rabbi regretting his absence and wishing us every success. Great pity for the children.

However, Chaim must have prayed very hard, I hear that he was up all night, plus the Rebbe's brocha, so that at 10:45 the sun was shining beautiful and hot! Marvelous Dayan Golditch addressed a few words to the children and the police addressed a few words to me. We were causing a nuisance to the church next door (it was Sunday) with our loudspeaker and microphone and everybody shouting. Rabbi Farro and Dayan Kraus also added their contributions to the words of Torah and encouragement to the youngsters.

The J.L.B. (Jewish Lads Brigade) band were to lead the march, and a little stout girl with a big drum was to lead the band. Half the band, **Lads** brigade, were girls. Peculiar!

Half of the children had still not registered by 11.00. But I had my job to do, so with the drums banging and the bugles blowing and the banners fluttering, the procession started on its way. Hundreds of children marching was a great spectacle and a real Kiddush Hashem. I was last to leave the parade ground and saw nothing at all except the tail end of the marchers. We soon filled all the fourteen coaches and they went off to Liverpool. One coach had only a couple of hours previously come from Liverpool with Liverpool children. They attended the parade and now they were going back home via Aintree and the picnic first, of course.

Avrohom (my son, Rabbi Jaffe) had by now already arrived at the racecourse with his Netillas Yodayim gang and equipment - paper towels, bins and water tanks and quarts. They were well

prepared for the rush, but it was still chaotic. The sharing out of the sandwiches, apples and drinks which had been planned so meticulously to avoid confusion and a 'free for all,' became just that, and in a few minutes the 'cupboard was bare.' I noticed a couple of colored girls and one or two girls who looked decidedly non-Jewish, but they said they came with some of the groups.

Unlike on a previous occasion when we were picnicking in a public park, some young non-Jewish children came up to us for food and drink saying, "yes, we have put our hands in the Holy Water, now can we have some sandwiches?"

The youngsters had by now settled in the world famous Aintree grandstand and were waiting to *bentch* and to be entertained. Then we realised that we had only 500 cartons of orange juice to be given to 1000 children, with biscuits later on for a snack.

Now, where can one get 500 cartons of orange juice on a Sunday afternoon in Liverpool? Bernard Perrin and I dashed off in his van. His idea was to go 'pub crawling' until we had sufficient drinks. After calling at three public houses and two soft drink shops we could see that there was no future in this job.

Suddenly, I had a brilliant idea: In every city there **is** one place where one can obtain hundreds of drinks, in cartons, even on Sunday afternoon, the **milk dairies**, who supply milk **and** orange juice to their customers. I was told to turn right at the third street and you will find a Dairy. Off we went in the van, when about 5 yards from the traffic signals and in the center of the road, the van stopped dead. The engine just would not start again. We pushed it into the curb and another car came along and pushed into us. Within a few moments, over 20 cars were parked behind us, thinking we were stopped by the lights. Whilst we were waiting for the AA breakdown service, Bernard suggested that I walk to the dairy and get the goods. I walked up and down that 3rd street right and no one had ever heard of a dairy, when lo and behold a large lorry full of milk bottles, turned the corner. A few hearty and lung-bursting yells from me soon stopped this lorry and he told me where to find the dairy. The AA man had now arrived, gave the engine a tap and it started straight away. A lead had become loose, that was all. Before we had time to move, another car came behind us and again gave us a hefty 'push.' It was not our lucky day. We were lucky, however, with our orange juice and we returned in triumph to Aintree. But, we had missed the clown. We missed all the fun too, when the clown's girl assistant came out to do her act, almost naked. Chaim rushed on with her dressing gown. Have you ever seen a trick cyclist and juggler in a dressing gown?! Chaim was sobbing, "I told them **no** girls," he cried. The day had become beautifully hot and sunny. All went for a sail on the river and returned home in nice time to meet their parents. Next day I wondered why Chaim had a sore throat.

To be continued P.G