





# SLICE OF LIFE

The Chair We Haven't Used Since 1960



Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, longtime Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization, presenting the Rebbe with a bound copy of the L'chaim Publication.

My family left Russia in 1946 and settled in Paris, where we lived for seven years. In 1947, the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson, fled the Soviet Union and stayed with us for three months.

We lived in an apartment on the top floor of a large house in Paris, owned by our uncle, Rabbi Zalman Schneerson—my mother Yehudis Butman's brother and a cousin of the Rebbe. We had a dining room and two bedrooms, one of which became Rebbetzin Chana's. For years afterward, we still referred to it as "Rebbetzin Chana's room."

The Rebbe—then still known as Rabbi Schneerson—had moved to the U.S. years earlier. But in 1947, he traveled to France to reunite with his mother and bring her to New York. During his visit, he came to see her at our home twice a day, once in the morning and again in the afternoon. My mother would serve them tea and sometimes cake.

Our connection to the Rebbe's family wasn't only familial. During World War II, we had been living in Kyrgyzstan, where I was born, in the town of Frunze (now Bishkek). Not far away, in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, the Rebbe's parents lived for several months in 1944. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson had been

arrested by Soviet authorities for his rabbinic work and exiled to the region. His sentence was eventually lifted due to his poor health, and the couple moved to Alma-Ata, where he later passed away.

During that time, my father, Reb Zalman Butman, helped support the Rebbe's parents financially. When the Rebbe came to Paris, he approached my father: "Reb Zalman, I know you supported my father. I'd like to know how much it cost so I can repay you."

But my father declined: "Rabbi Schneerson, please don't speak to me about this. It was a mitzvah, and I don't want to give it away." As my father liked to say, he "merited" that the Rebbe didn't press the issue.

Shortly after the Rebbe's arrival, it happened to be my father's birthday—the first of Nissan. He asked the Rebbe for a blessing.

"You're in Nissan?" the Rebbe asked.

"Yes, today is my birthday."

"I'm also in Nissan," the Rebbe said. His birthday was on the 11th. "What year?"

"5663," my father said.

"I'm from 5662. So for eleven days out of the year, we recite the same chapter of Tehillim."

Before the Rebbe and Rebbetzin Chana returned to the U.S., a chassid named Reb Michael Lipsker organized a farbrengen. That night, the Rebbe asked for everyone's Hebrew and father's names and began analyzing each person's name in brilliant detail—drawing from Scripture, Midrash, and both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. Everyone was astounded.

My father, seated next to the Rebbe, said, "I once heard your father say, 'My son does better than me.'"

To which the Rebbe replied, "A father has to say that."

"And a son has to say that!" my father responded with a smile. That was the end of the conversation.

Before they left Paris, the Rebbe gave each member of our family a gift. For my father, he brought a newly printed Torah Or prayer book with a High Holiday machzor in the back—an

edition he himself used.

For my mother and Aunt Sarah, Reb Zalman's wife, the Rebbe purchased a complete set of fine dishes—service for twelve. We had never owned a full set before, and the Rebbe must have noticed. "Children," my mother used to say, "the Rebbe went to the store, chose the dishes, immersed them in the mikveh, and carried them up three flights of stairs to make sure we had proper dishes for our meals!"

Though most have broken over the years, a few pieces remain.

My brother Sholom Ber received a book of chassidic discourses. My older sister Leah got a stamp album. The Rebbe, during his stay, would save stamps from overseas letters and give them to her.

I received a tricycle—something completely new to us refugees. It had brakes and modern features. All my friends wanted to come and ride it.

We eventually arrived in the United States in February 1954. My mother called Rebbetzin Chana, who invited us over to her home on President Street in Crown Heights. That very evening, we were granted an audience with the Rebbe.

As we entered his office, he smiled warmly. "Children, I don't know if you remember me—but I remember you."

My mother often visited Rebbetzin Chana afterward, and I would come along, listening quietly to their conversations. When my mother passed away in 1960, Rebbetzin Chana came to our home for the shiva, as did the Rebbe and his wife, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka. The Rebbe stayed for the evening prayer and then spoke a few words.

In a shiva house, visitors traditionally wait for the mourner to speak first. So my father asked the Rebbe about the custom of reciting Kaddish sixteen times a day. The Rebbe responded with an explanation and then continued speaking for another twenty minutes.

We still have the chair the Rebbe sat on that evening. It's upstairs in our house, unused.

Rabbi Shmuel Butman was interviewed by JEM's My Encounter in 2011 and 2012.

## Ethics Chapter six

Great is Torah, for it gives life to its observers in this world, and in the World To Come. As is stated (Proverbs 4:22): "For they are life to he who finds them, and a healing to all his flesh." And it says (ibid. 3:8): "It shall be health to your navel, and marrow to your bones." And it says (3:18): "She is a tree of life for those who hold fast to her, and happy are those who support her."

## The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

B"H  
15 Sivan, 5711,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greetings and blessings,

I send my greetings to all the students of the graduating class who will be advancing to higher classes and programs in their holy program of education.

The summer vacation, the days of resting and refreshing one's potentials, are beginning. They are used to marshal new energies for the next semester that is coming.

You, dear children, must know that vacation does not mean an interruption – cutting oneself off – from study and education. A Jewish child cannot be without Torah study or Jewish education for even one day, whether in the summer or the winter. On the contrary, taking into consideration the many hours of free time students have in the long summer days, you should use them to solidly review the material that you have studied already and to prepare yourself to [advance] further on your way, the way of the Torah and its mitzvos.

In this way, you will – together with marshalling new physical powers – generate fresh spiritual powers. The two together, and particularly the spiritual powers, will make a person complete and healthy.

To you, Jewish parents, who always carry the dual responsibility as parents and teachers, you must remember that, especially during the summer, the entire responsibility [for the child's education] falls on you.

I send you my blessing that G-d will grant you, dear children, [together with] your parents, teachers, and educators, material and spiritual health, with much nachas, Jewish nachas, amidst tranquility for the body and tranquility for the soul.

With blessings for a healthy summer – in both a material and spiritual sense,

Shalom u'Brocho,

Vacation time is approaching, to release youth and children from Yeshivos, Talmud

Torahs, Day Schools, etc., for a long summer recess.

The importance of a restful vacation is obvious. However, certain aspects of vacation time should be examined carefully. Is vacation time a stoppage of study, or is it a transition from one form of activity to another?

In all living forms, there is no such thing as stoppage of life, followed by a completely new start, for a stoppage of life is death and cannot serve as a temporary rest period. There can be a transition from one kind of activity to another, but not a cessation or stoppage.

For example: The two most vital organs of our body are the heart and the brain. The heart is the principal seat of "physical" life; the brain is the principal seat of "intellectual" life. Because the heart and brain have supreme control of the body, they are termed the "sovereigns of the body." Now, these organs not only do not cease to operate in a living body, but they do not even undergo a radical change in their form of activity. The other organs of the body, though they may seem to be in a state of inactivity, as in the case of sleep, do not in reality stop working.

We find this in actuality – as during sleep, breathing is slowed down considerably, but is not stopped, for the "breath of life" must always be there.

Similarly in the case of students, boys and girls, studying our Torah, Toras Chayim – "the Law of Life," restful vacation does not mean interruption and stoppage of Torah and mitzvos, G-d forbid. It means only just another way of furthering their course of study, a period during which they renew their mental abilities and increase their capacities for more intensive study later on....

Therefore, the summer vacation should be utilized to its fullest to improve your studies in both quantity and quality. Let not a day pass without the "breath of life" provided by the "Torah of Life." Let everyone have appointed times for the study of Chumash, Mishnah, Gemora, and so on, each one according to his or her standard of Torah education.

At this time, I wish everyone who is resolved to use his or her vacation in this productive "living" way much success, both during their vacation, as well as on returning to normal activity in their studies thereafter.

With blessing,

## MOSHIACH MATTERS

"All flesh shall come to bow down before Me"

(Isaiah 66:23)

(Likutei Torah of Rabbi Shneur Zalman)

## 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

"As mentioned in the well-known prayer [recited in the Musaf service of Shabbat] 'Umipnei chatoeinu,' the only cause of the sad events in the past -- the Destruction and Exile -- was the neglect of Torah and mitzvot. Therefore, through rectifying and removing the cause, the effect will also be removed." (From a letter of the Rebbe at the conclusion of the "Three Weeks" of mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temples.)

This coming Sunday is the 17th of Tammuz, which begins the period in the Jewish calendar known as the Three Weeks or "Bein HaMeitzarim" ("Between the Straights").

In these next few weeks, as we commemorate the destruction of the Holy Temples and the beginning of our long and bitter exile, it is appropriate and commendable to strengthen and increase our observance of Torah and mitzvot. But we should do this with a unique outlook.

For, in a talk just months before his first stroke, the Rebbe stated that the Jewish people, as a whole, has already rectified the reason for the exile. At that time, the Rebbe was speaking specifically about "unwarranted hatred" which had caused the destruction of the Second Holy Temple.

The Rebbe, therefore, explained that by enhancing our ahavat Yisrael -- the love of a fellow Jew -- we would experience a foretaste of the unity and ahavat Yisrael that will be prevalent in the Messianic Era.

For, when Moshiach is revealed, the G-dly essence of everything will also be revealed. Thus, we will experience the true appreciation of our fellow Jew, and this will lead to true "love of a fellow Jew." The Rebbe also declared that "Teshuva [repentance] has already been done."

We have repented of our transgressions, the reason for the exile, and thus, at any moment, G-d can fulfill his long-overdue promise to the Jewish people and the world at large and bring the true and everlasting redemption.

At that time, according to our Sages, our days will be occupied with performing mitzvot and the pursuit of knowledge of the Divine through studying Torah, and especially the new insights into Torah that will be revealed by Moshiach.

May our additional mitzvot and enhanced Jewish knowledge tip the Heavenly scales and bring the Revelation 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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