



**ONE SPARK**

**AT A TIME**



לזכות  
 הבחור הנעלה התמים  
**מנחם מענדל שיח"ל**  
 לרגל יום הולדתו השמונה עשר ביום  
 כ"ט סיון ה'תשע"ו, שנת הקהל  
 לחיזוק ההתקשרות לכ"ק אדמו"ר,  
 ושיצליח בלימודו, לימוד הנגלה  
 ולימוד החסידות  
 נדפס ע"י הוריו  
 הרה"ת ר' שניאור זלמן  
 ומרת דבורה שיחיו  
 קפולן



# THE STORY OF MERKOS SHLICHUS



## THE PILOT PROGRAM

“It was a winter day in 5708,” Rabbi Leibel Posner related in an interview with A Chassidisher Derher. “I was a *bochur* studying in 770 at the time, when Rabbi Hodakov walked into the *zal* and summoned me. ‘We want to send you on a trip,’ he said, directing me towards the Merkos office (later known as the Rebbe’s room). The Rebbe—then known as the Ramash—told me that I was being sent on a mission to visit Jewish communities and tell them about the work that Merkos was doing, and show them samples of the new *sefarim* that were being published. The Rebbe gave me my itinerary for the trip—southern New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware—and before I left, I went into *yechidus* with the Frierdiker Rebbe.”

His trip was met with great success. He visited hundreds of Jews throughout the area and met with many public figures and rabbonim, with whom he would ‘speak in learning.’ When he returned, he gave over a report to the Rebbe and again went into *yechidus* with the Frierdiker Rebbe.

As it turned out, this was the pilot test for a new initiative. That summer, the Frierdiker Rebbe sent out a public letter directed to the “*Talmidei Hatmimim*,” where he called on them to contribute a part of their summer towards “visiting several places and inspiring the community.” What began as a small program, would eventually morph into a tremendous organization, with hundreds of *bochurim* traveling to all corners of the globe reaching thousands of Yidden.

But that was still far off in the future. Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky, director of Merkos Shlichus since the early 5740s, relates how it used to work in the early years, as he heard from Rabbi Hodakov.

Rabbi Hodakov would go into the Rebbe’s room with a world Almanac, a map, an American Jewish Yearbook, and a list of *bochurim* who had volunteered to go. After laying them all out on the table, the Rebbe and Rabbi Hodakov would plan each Merkos Shlichus itinerary one by one. The Rebbe was familiar with all the locations they were looking at. He knew which places could suffice with two *bochurim*, and which needed three; which cities had friends of Lubavitch or *hekdeishes* [hospitality houses] where the *bochurim* could lodge without a charge, and where they would have to stay in a hotel. The Rebbe even knew the best way to travel from one place to another—by train, bus, plane, car, etc.—and how to coordinate the trip in the most efficient manner. Working with the list of *bochurim* he would choose who should go where.

In the early 5710s, the *bochurim* would go in as a group for *yechidus* before they left, and throughout the summer, the Rebbe would often speak about Merkos Shlichus and how important it was.

Rabbi Hodakov walked into the *zal* and summoned me. ‘We want to send you on a trip,’ he said

## TRAVELING ON THE EDGE

The Rebbe would often give *horaos* to the *bochurim* before they traveled. One year, Rabbi Moshe Herson, who was born in Brazil and spoke Portuguese, was chosen to go on Merkos Shlichus to three countries in South America. His itinerary included visiting a few cities in Cuba, a few cities in Colombia, and Caracas, Venezuela. However, considering that this was taking place shortly after Cuba’s communist revolution by Fidel Castro’s, he was a bit concerned, and he asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* at his birthday *yechidus*, which took place around that time.

“The Rebbe looked at the letter,” Rabbi Herson relates, “but mentioned

## THE TOOLS

In 5710, a few months after Yud Shevat, Rabbi Moshe Groner and Rabbi Berel Junik went into the Rebbe’s room to receive a *bracha* for Merkos Shlichus. When they went in, the Rebbe asked them, “Where are you traveling?” They replied that they were going on Merkos Shlichus to Baltimore.

“*Furt gezunterheit* [travel in good-health] and be successful,” the Rebbe said. “You should fulfill the Rebbe’s *kavana*. You have the *koach* to do this, and when you utilize your *kochos* properly, you will have success, in all areas, both general and specific. Do you have a picture of the Rebbe? Carry it in your pocket.”<sup>1</sup>

When Rabbi Leibel Groner and Rabbi Eziel Chaikin had gone into *yechidus* several weeks earlier, the Rebbe instructed them too to carry a picture of the Frierdiker Rebbe, as well as a *maamar*, and also to say the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *kapitel* Tehillim, “in order that it should be absorbed by each and every one of us what the Rebbe demands from us.”<sup>2</sup>



RABBI YEHUDA KRINSKY (R) AND RABBI LEIBEL RASKIN ON MERKOS SHLICHUS IN FLORIDA.

nothing about the entire trip to Cuba, which had so bothered me. Instead, the Rebbe asked why we were only visiting one city in Venezuela. I didn't know what to say. My itinerary had been planned by the office in Merkos, and I had no idea why it was arranged the way it was. The Rebbe didn't wait for an answer, and said that, in any case, we should try visiting more than one city in Venezuela.

"After coming out of *yechidus*, I immediately went to my friend Binyomin Klein, who was my partner on Merkos Shlichus (and who would later become the Rebbe's *mazkir*), and we immediately began trying to change our tickets. We were unsuccessful, so we decided that we would figure it out once we get there. (It should be noted that the cities with concentrations of Jews in Venezuela are very far from each other, and it wasn't so simple to just hop over to the next place.)

"Our first stop was in Cuba, and to our utter shock, we were welcomed with remarkable friendliness. Turns out that the signature feature of the

revolutionaries and their leader, Fidel Castro, was a beard. When the government leaders and citizens saw us—*chassidische bochorim* with beards—they figured that we were supporters of the new government and welcomed us with open arms. When we walked around the city, we noticed people pointing at us and whispering that we were supporters of Castro. This enabled us to visit the local Jews without any issues and to fulfill the Rebbe's shlichus in the best manner possible."

As per their itinerary, the pair continued on to Colombia and visited a few places there; but they still hadn't figured out how to visit another city in Venezuela. As they were about to leave their hotel in Colombia to catch their flight to Caracas, they suddenly received a call. Due to mechanical difficulties, their plane would not be able to fly directly to Caracas, and would have to stop off in Maracaibo, another city in Venezuela, for about a day. And just like that the Rebbe's request was fulfilled! They spent a day

in Maracaibo visiting the Jews there, and then continued on to Caracas.

However, notwithstanding this story, policy was not usually relaxed regarding visiting dangerous countries; the Rebbe's concern for the *bochorim*'s safety was paramount.

Rabbi Shmuel Pesach Bogomilsky went on Merkos Shlichus nine summers in a row, from when he was sixteen—with a *chavrusa* several years his senior—until he was twenty four when he went alone. He was sent to countries and states throughout the world, from California to the Caribbean to Bolivia to Hong Kong, with a list of *chavrusas*: Rabbi Nachman Sudak and Rabbi Binyomin Klein א"ה, and רב לחט"א Rabbi Berel Shemtov, and others.

In an interview with A Chassidisher Derher, Rabbi Bogomilsky related:

"The way it usually worked in those years was that before the trip, one would prepare a list of places to visit and hand it in to the Merkos office for the Rebbe's approval. When I submitted the proposed itinerary for my final tour in 5723, the Rebbe responded in writing: '...Obviously, do not travel to countries or places where there is currently war...' (In addition, the Rebbe told me not to stop off in Eretz Yisrael if it wasn't on the way.)

“I spent the following period of time laboring over my itinerary, working it out to the smallest detail, and a few days before I left, the Rebbe instructed Rabbi Hodakov to call me in after *mincha*. It was unheard of in those years for the Rebbe to initiate such a *yechidus*, especially for someone like me—an ordinary *bochur* going out on Merkos Shlichus.

“When I went into *yechiuds*, the Rebbe asked if I had a list of the places I was planning on visiting. *B’hashgacha pratis*, the list was in my pocket and I gave it to the Rebbe. The Rebbe reviewed it for several minutes, marking it in several places. Then he told me that I shouldn’t travel to the places he had marked, which included Vienna, Austria and Saigon, Vietnam, since these countries were in a state of emergency. He also canceled several other destinations—Bangkok, Thailand; Seoul, South Korea, and Taipei, Taiwan—since there were tensions between them and the United States, and it would anger the US government.

“I also received another interesting *hora’ah*: My plan had been to fly from New York to Europe, then to the Far East and Hong Kong, and then on to California. But the Rebbe told me that since ‘you are my shliach,’ I should not interfere with the cosmic times of Shabbos, and I should therefore avoid crossing the International Dateline. Instead, the Rebbe instructed me to change my ticket to fly back through Europe, adding that since this is *tzedakah* money, if it will cost more than a hundred dollars, then I should continue with the original plan. [It should be noted, however, that other shluchim who crossed the dateline were not given the same directive. – Ed.]

“When I submitted my revised itinerary to the Rebbe, he made several additional notations. Next to India, he wrote that I should inquire whether I needed a vaccination before going there, and next to Rangoon, Burma and Indonesia he wrote, ‘Only if it is quiet there.’”

Over the years Rabbi Bogomilsky developed a *modus operandi*: “First I would start off with what I called ‘the general visit,’ which entailed getting in touch with one of the the local rabbis or lay leaders and asking him to arrange a gathering of the local Jews, before whom I would give a speech about Yiddishkeit and Torah and mitzvos. Afterwards I would visit each of the individual families in their homes and talk to them about more personal matters, like *kashrus*, *chinuch* of their children, lighting Shabbos candles, and I would also give them the opportunity to purchase *sefarim* of Kehos. These meetings often had very positive results.”

On one of his trips, in Barbados, he managed to do something a bit more unique: a communal *bris mila* operation, with eighteen participants(!), ranging in age from





three months to twenty two years. The Rebbe later commented to Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dvorkin that this was “למעלה מדרך הטבע”—“super-natural success.” The Rebbe also sent a special letter to the head of the congregation, addressing them with singular warmth, even asking him to convey regards to “all the families of *anash*” referring to them as “*anash*”!

The following year at *hakafos* on Simchas Torah 5722, before the *possuk* of *Yehi Chevod*, the Rebbe said that Rabbi Bogomilsky should announce the recitation of the *possuk* “פאר די קינדער וואס מען האט מל געווען אין א ווייטען

אינזעל - in honor of the children who were circumcised on a far out island.” He did so, and then the Rebbe recited *Yehi Chevod*.

Traveling to these far-flung areas brought with it a unique set of challenges. During the summer of 5726, for example, a strike in the airline industry shut down almost all flights, effectively grounding a good portion of Merkos Shlichus. (Others were able to travel using buses or trains.) There were still a few flights going out, but these were reserved for very prominent people with critical business to tend to. The *bochurim*

called the airlines to inform them that, as shlichim of the Rebbe, it was crucial for them to get on a plane. And, many times, it worked.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes the issues they were dealing with were quite bizarre. One summer in the 5730s, Rabbi Lipa Brennan went on Merkos Shlichus to Alaska, with the possibility of being in an area where it never gets dark. This presented an obvious dilemma—when should he daven *maariv*? He asked Rabbi Hodakov, who passed on the question to the Rebbe. The Rebbe answered that they should daven at the same time as the yeshiva ‘here’, in 770—*shacharis* at 9:30 AM, *mincha* at 3:15 PM, and *maariv* at 9:30 PM—and, then the Rebbe concluded, “וועלן זיי טראכען פון אוונט וועלן מיר טראכטען פון זיי—They will think about us, and we will think about them.”

Here, too, the Rebbe’s concern for the *bochurim* safety was evident. The Trans-Alaskan oil pipeline was being built at the time, a huge operation covering hundreds of miles of Alaskan wilderness, and there were Jewish workers scattered in various areas.

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The only way to reach these people was with a single engine plane, which is riskier than a regular plane since there is no backup engine, and Rabbi Brennan asked the Rebbe if he should go there anyway. The Rebbe's answer was no.

## REPORTING TO HEADQUARTERS

From the early years of Merkos Shlichus, every *bochur* was expected to submit a detailed *duch* of his activities, and he would usually receive a dollar from the Rebbe through *mazkirus*, (sometimes two dollars or more).

The Rebbe would look over the *duchos*. On one very detailed *duch*, written by Rabbi Binyomin Cohen and Rabbi Daniel Goldberg, the Rebbe commented: "ד"ר לדוגמא וראויים ליש"ר— It is an exemplary *duch*

and they are deserving of a special *Yasher Koach* for it". When Rabbi Pinye Korf and his partner wrote that they had met with Rabbi Soloveitchik in Philadelphia, the Rebbe asked, "האם דיברו עמו בחידושי תורה?" "Did they discuss with him *chiddushei Torah*?"

When Rabbi Shlomo Zarchi and his *chavrusa* were on Merkos Shlichus in Dayton, Ohio, they met with the principal of the local school, a *frummer* Yid, who was an important figure on the local Jewish scene. However, he told them that he was thinking of leaving for a more established community. Realizing that this would be a big blow to the local Jews, they attempted to persuade him to stay, telling him that it was his *shlichus* to support the community where he lived. Later on, when they got back to New York, they recorded this episode in their *duch* to the Rebbe.

A year later, Rabbi Zarchi was in Boston and a woman he met began telling him a familiar sounding story: Her son was a principal in Dayton, Ohio, and he had been considering moving to another city, when one day, out of the blue, he received a letter from the Rebbe telling him to stay. At that point Rabbi Zarchi realized that the *duch* wasn't just for the records; not only had the Rebbe read through every report, he had even followed up on them. This wasn't a one time anomaly; it was quite common for the the Rebbe to follow up with people based on the reports he would receive from the *bochurim*.

The Rebbe also wanted the *bochurim* themselves to follow up with the people they visited, to remind them about *yomim tovim*, send them matzos, etc. One year, shortly before Pesach, Rabbi Bogomilsky sent *mechiras chametz* forms to the people he had visited in the Caribbean. But then he realized that it wasn't so simple, as several people would almost definitely be eating from their *chametz* during Pesach, *r"l*, which would very possibly cancel their pre-Pesach sale. Was there any point in selling their *chametz*?

After posing this question to several rabbonim and receiving contradictory answers, he wrote a letter to the Rebbe laying out the different opinions and asking what to do. The Rebbe answered with an intricate halachic analysis, emphasizing that there absolutely was a point in selling the *chametz* of these people, and even proposed a new *nusach* to add to these forms in order to avoid any halachic issues.

As the years went on, the Rebbe gave various directives to the *bochurim* going on Merkos Shlichus. One was that every *bochur* should have an *inyan* in *nigleh* and Chassidus prepared to tell over to people. "The opening and beginning of their *kibush* [conquering] of the place, should begin with a *vort* of Torah and a *vort* in Chassidus, permeated with passion and liveliness and energy."<sup>4</sup> Another directive was that in order to go on Merkos Shlichus—the Rebbe's *shlichus*—every *bochur* needed to submit a note from *hanhala* about his level in learning, in both *nigleh* and Chassidus.<sup>5</sup>

## A RISKY ENDEAVOR

Merkos Shlichus is very risky. You take an impressionable, eighteen-year-old *bochur*, who ordinarily spends his entire day in the safe environment of the yeshiva, where his time is

## BEST PREPARATION

Rabbi Meir Harlig relates:

A *chosson* once told the Rebbe in *yechidus* that he will not be going on Merkos Shlichus because he had to get ready for the *chassuna*. The Rebbe answered: "וואס קען זיין א בעסערע הכנה צו די חתונה ווי פארן אייף דער שווערס? "שליחות?" "What can be a better *hachcana* for your wedding than going on my father-in-law's *shlichus*?"

**Jewish Peace Corps**

**Keeps Faith of Children Alive**

By David Miller

Hardly a year after becoming the world-wide leader of tens of thousands of Jews, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson reached an important decision. Although Judaism is not a proselytizing religion, he felt thousands of Jews the world over needed personal help in practicing their religion faithfully.

From his office at 715 Eastern Parkway in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, he established a "Peace Corps" to educate Jews in various parts of the world and to reawaken what he calls an "innate awareness" of Judaism.

In the ten years since founding the corps, followers of the *Chof Chof* - *Chof* - *Chof* - old Rabbi Schneerson, the "Lubavitcher Rebbe," have taken up posts in Europe, North Africa, South America, Australia and Israel in a missionary program unusual for Jews.



Rabbi Schneerson

acted recently that took of the group opposing Federal aid originally opposed the "Jewish Title" program, that permits one hour of religious teaching for public school children.

His public announcement was widely by Jewish leaders. To his followers, he is endowed with extraordinary powers of wisdom and perception. How will ensure to hundreds of many without his approval. To them, he is a guide in finding peace in the tumult of modern life.

The Lubavitcher movement had its beginnings in some from the small town of Lubavitch in Russia. The movement was founded by Rabbi Israel Meir Eliezer (1796-1850) and developed by Rabbi Sholom Zalman (1814-1881). In honor of Rabbi Schneerson, the students have called "Schneerson" to their walls.

In 1940, the still Rabbi, Joseph Isaac Schneerson, founded in New York, a state-recognized Yeshiva, from Communist oppression and the German bombardment of Warsaw.

**In Leningrad Prison**

His birth in 1889 and his unusual liberation from military confinement and a death sentence in a Leningrad prison in 1927—after intervention by former President Hoover and the

late Sen. William E. Borah, of Idaho—were commemorated Monday at the Lubavitcher center in Brooklyn.

In the ten years before he died in 1930, Rabbi Joseph Isaac Schneerson organized "Torah Missions" all over Europe. Founded a Hebrew-English publishing house and supported in the establishment of Jewish day schools.

At his death, his son-in-law, the present Lubavitcher Rebbe, continued the programs and a year later founded the Peace Corps.

Rabbi Schneerson is recognized as a distinguished Torah scholar and speaks a number of foreign languages. He spends fifteen or sixteen hours a day in his office supervising the numerous Lubavitcher organizations he heads and maintaining a varied world-wide correspondence.

From original loans to a dozen countries, millions of volumes of books and related literature—in seven languages—have been loaned to synagogues "Torah-time Judaism."

One recent project has been the founding of summer camps for Jewish children in the United States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, Italy and Israel, with more in the planning.

A major blow struck the Lubavitcher movement occurred in March, 1960, when seventy Mexican students were killed in an earthquake that took 1,000 lives in Acapulco, Mexico. The Lubavitcher school in Acapulco had an enrollment of 100 boys and three in attendance. The remaining twenty were transferred to another Lubavitcher school in Coahuila.

**"Devoted Shepherd"**

In the words of one old, Rabbi Schneerson is "a devoted shepherd who takes a personal interest in everything connected with the life and welfare of the individual Jew and the Jewish community."

"He is not affiliated with any party and participates in no politics, and therefore enjoys the reputation of a completely impartial authority. . . . He refuses to deal with his own personal attainment and selfishly strives forward in behalf of his brethren, leaving in mind even the material needs of the Jew in a remote village in a far-off country."

is born innocent, but he eventually grows up. A *bochur* learns in yeshiva for the first part of his life, and then he gets married. The story of our lives is really a series of steps in which we leave the place where holiness is more absolute, for a place where it's less stable, where fulfillment and holiness is more and more difficult to reach.

Why is this? If our goal is to become better, if our focus is on becoming more holy, what is the point of this seeming downgrade?

And the answer is that our mission is not all about ourselves. It is about purifying the world around us. That's why a *neshamah* comes down into the world, and why a *bochur* needs to go on Merkos Shlichus. True, a *bochur* belongs in yeshiva, but he cannot suffice with that. He must go out to the world and purify it, to find those far-out Jews and bring them closer.

And just as the *neshamah*—in addition to purifying the world—reaches new heights itself through coming down into the body, when a *bochur* goes on Merkos Shlichus he reaches levels far beyond anything he could have reached in yeshiva.<sup>6</sup>

"He can be in yeshiva, studying Torah and doing mitzvos, and working in *avodas hatefilla*, yet he will never reach the same level as when he "valgert zich" [wanders around] in a city on the Rebbe's shlichus. The *bochur* himself may not even realize what he has attained, but he has it on the deepest level of his soul."<sup>7</sup>

Aside for this risk factor, there is another peculiarity about Merkos Shlichus, which, unlike the above analogy to the soul, is unique to Merkos Shlichus.

If you ask random *bochurim* about their stories from Merkos Shlichus, they will probably recount a surprising success, about that person who they just happened to meet in the supermarket and who ended up putting on tefillin for the first time

filled with learning and davening and farbrenging, under the close supervision of the *hanhala*. You give him utter freedom—a rented car, a credit card, zero supervision—and send him on a road-trip, where he is exposed to the world in a way he's never seen before. He has no *seder*, no *chavrusos*, and hardly any *sefarim*. He is not a mature shliach, with a wife and kids; he is a *bochur*. Without

question, if the Rebbe hadn't initiated it, it would sound like an impossible feat.

But the truth is, as the Rebbe explained in a *sicha*, Merkos Shlichus isn't really all that unique in this regard. A *neshamah* has much more fulfillment and much less challenges when it basks in the glory of Hashem in Gan Eden; and yet it descends into a body. A fetus learns the entire Torah with a *malach*, and yet, when a child





MERKOS SHLUCHIM IN 5712, R-L: RABBIS DOVID RASKIN, OSHER MENDLOWITZ, ELIYAHU GROSS, YEHOSHUA WILANSKY.

in his life. Or a deep, meaningful conversation about the basics of *emunah* with a small town Jew. And, if you're lucky, they will even tell you about that newspaper interview they managed to obtain, and what *that* ended up looking like.

But if you frame the question a little differently—"What does Merkos Shlichus make you think of?"—the answer will be quite different. Then you will probably hear about the tiring hours of straight driving on the road; or the many heads peaking out from behind slightly open doors declaring that they're not interested in "The Orthodox." The creative ways of preparing food in cities where no fresh Kosher food was available.

There is a lot of down time on Merkos Shlichus; it comes with the territory. When you're visiting towns where the Jews are few and far in between, when you're seeking out people who are in places where they must be sought, there is a limited amount of time that you actually end up spending with people. Much more of the time is spent driving and calling.

Even when you do finally meet that lonely Jew, and even when you finally get your foot in the door, everything is still up in the air. He may just start crying about his newly uncovered memories about his grandfather in Russia. But more often than not it will be a simple, pleasant-enough conversation, hopefully focused on Yiddishkeit. And then, you're gone until next year's shlichim arrive.

This is all on a successful trip. On an unsuccessful trip, when the people on your list seem to never be home and your phone calls seem to always go unanswered, time can start feeling very long.

As the Rebbe once put it at a *farbrenge*:

"Among those who have just returned from Merkos Shlichus there are some that aren't satisfied with the success of their activities. [They feel like] here they weren't successful, there they could have done better, and in general, on paper they didn't accomplish any massive things (*gedolos viniflaos*). *Geirim*—they didn't make; Chassidim, *maskilim* or *ovdim*—they didn't bring back; and they didn't

even bring in a few thousand dollars... Everything is not how it should be."<sup>8</sup> Some may believe that "perhaps the whole trip wasn't even worth it."<sup>9</sup>

Here, the Rebbe says, is where you need to learn how to value the small things. Throughout the years, the Rebbe was constantly educating the Chassidim—and the Jewish world in general—about the importance of every single Jew; how no effort should be spared in bringing even one person closer to Yiddishkeit, sending shlichim to remote corners of the world to serve small and often neglected communities. But in this case the Rebbe was making a further point, that every action has infinite value, and you may never know its ultimate impact. "*Vibald az er hut getun, hut er gevis ufgetun*—If he **did**, he surely accomplished."<sup>10</sup>

The Rebbe spoke several times at length, and with remarkable vividness, about this topic, relating fascinating examples and anecdotes to illustrate this point.

"When a child comes home and tells his parents about how he met a *bochur* selling Talks and Tales—how this *bochur* tried putting it into his hands, but he refused, and how his friends laughed at this weird *bochur*, calling him names—when a child relates this to his father or mother, they are reminded of their parents. And in a single moment and a single instant [they can do *teshuva*]."<sup>11</sup>

Rabbi Moshe Feller stands as a classic example of what Merkos Shlichim can accomplish. Born to a very *frumme*, but not particularly Chassidic home, one summer vacation changed his life, when he met two *bochurim* who were visiting Minnesota. As he related<sup>12</sup>: "I hastily approached them and introduced myself as a yeshiva student, and asked them which yeshiva they were from. They explained that they were sent by the Rebbe to bring Yiddishkeit to

the Jews in this area. They carried briefcases of *sefarim* to sell to those they would meet. I actually recall that I bought the book “Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Memoirs” on the spot. I was blown away! I was very impressed by the mission these *bochurim* personified, and I decided to help them for the few days they were in my area.”

Following this encounter, Rabbi Feller started learning Chassidus and becoming closer to Lubavitch, ultimately being sent by the Rebbe back to Minnesota as a shliach.

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SHLUCHIM

Another point the Rebbe explained was that part of the success of Merkos Shlichus is concealed by its very nature: when a *bochur* goes on Merkos Shlichus, he’s going as a shliach of the Rebbe. So beyond what the *bochur* can accomplish with his own conversations, with his own intellect, there is a deeper element here—the *kochos* of the Rebbe that he is carrying with him, which affect the other person on a level far beyond intellect and consciousness.<sup>14</sup>

This dimension of Merkos Shlichus—the shlichus element—is responsible for “many *maalos*,” the Rebbe said. Among these are two which are practically relevant: First of all, it is impossible for you to fail. “When you go on the Rebbe’s shlichus, with the *koach* of the *meshaleach*, it is as if the Rebbe himself is going, and it is impossible for there to be any hindrances and obstacles.”<sup>15</sup>

But it also brings with it a grave responsibility: when these small-town Yidden see you, they don’t see you as you see yourself. Whether you view yourself as a middle-of-the-road *bochur* trying to do something good in the summer, or as an extremely *chassidishe bochur* going on *mesirus nefesh* for the Rebbe’s shlichus, they see you as something much bigger than all that—in their eyes, you represent Lubavitch and the Rebbe. “Everyone that sees you,” the Rebbe said, “will think that this is the appearance of a Lubavitcher Chossid, a Chabadnik, a *tomim*, a *yeshiva bochur* who is a *yarei Shamayim*. They will be left with the impression that this is how Chassidim, *tmimim* and *mekusharim* should act.”

“However,” the Rebbe added, “the Rebbe is the one who started this, and he is the one sending you on this shlichus. Therefore it is within the power and ability of every one of you to fulfill this shlichus. Not only will it not bring to the opposite of *kavod, chas veshalom*; to the contrary, we will receive news about the great impression that people had from seeing what a Lubavitcher *bochur* is!”<sup>16</sup>

## NEVER CHANGING

The above may also explain another element of Merkos Shlichus.

Merkos Shlichus has lasted quite a long time. Over the past seventy years, cultural movements have come and gone, giant companies have risen and fallen, entire generations have come and gone. Lubavitch itself has changed tremendously. In the early 5710s, the Rebbe was almost begging *bochurim* to go on Merkos Shlichus, explaining and re-explaining its critical importance. By the time the 5730s came around, as the new generations of *bochurim* grew up—people who understood the great



...A child comes home and tells his parents about how he met a *bochur* selling Talks and Tales—how this *bochur* tried putting it into his hands, but he refused... they are reminded of their parents. And in a single moment and a single instant they can do *teshuva*.

merit of being the Rebbe's shluchim—the Rebbe didn't need to ask anymore.

Generally, if something lasts for so long, it is because it has developed over time, reinventing itself with the ever changing clientele. This would seem to be especially relevant when

dealing with Jews: the Jews of the 21st century are nothing like those in the 1950s. The challenges, as well as the opportunities, are drastically different.

No longer does the dark fog of the Holocaust hang over our collective consciousness like a

recent nightmare, causing pain or anger or motivation or all of the above. Barely does your average Jew have nostalgic memories of the old country or remember snippets of Yiddish from his grandmother—but he is also not desperately trying to run away from the old *shtetl* past. Today, it is much harder to tap into someone's traditional, Federation-esque Jewish background. But, on the flip side, seeking religion is no longer something to be embarrassed of. Today's Jews are just a different breed than they were 70 years ago.

Yet, although the customer has completely changed, Merkos Shlichus has not changed at all. It may be true

## THE BOCHURIM'S PNIMIUS

As an example, I will tell you a story that happened several years ago:

Three months after the *bochurim* had returned from their trip...the Rebbe, my father-in-law, received a letter from the rav of the city, who was writing to give a *yasher koach* on the effect that the *bochurim's* visit had had on him, the rav himself.

He had been a rav in the city for a long time—ten or fifteen years—yet, until then, it had never occurred to him that he himself must do *teshuva*. We are speaking about an Orthodox rabbi, a *shomer Torah umitzvos*. But he was lacking in areas that are 'beyond the letter of the law,' and he was also lacking in his involvement with the Jews in his city; in demanding from them—and arguing with them—to increase their level of Torah observance. He thought to himself, "What do I need this headache for?" and various other excuses.

But then when the *bochurim* visited, and he saw their behavior and careful observance of Torah and mitzvos; and especially when he saw them getting up and speaking from the shul's *bima* with such *chayus* and warmth and energy—which was evident from their manner of speech and hand gestures—it finally dawned upon him that perhaps his behavior is not as it should be!

It took him a little while, a few weeks, to digest this, and to find the strength to truly recognize the truth. But once he absorbed this truth, he prevailed upon himself that from now on his behavior would be better. To this day, the *bochurim* themselves do not know that they had accomplished anything. Furthermore, their speech was not even directed at the rav. In their mind, he was doing great—the finest person in the city—the one that helped them in their activities to the utmost of his ability. They had no reason to talk to and be *mashpia* on him! The *bochurim* were speaking to other Yidden. But when the rav, standing on the sidelines, watched their activities, he was touched and affected, and was inspired to better his behavior.

And to add another point: the effect on this rav could have been a result of the *bochurim's* external behavior, how they projected themselves superficially. The rav could not have known what was going on deep inside the *bochur's* heart; it is quite possible that all the warmth and *chayus* the *bochur* exuded was only superficial. Deep down he was not really interested, thinking to himself, "When will these two or three weeks—which I was forced to dedicate out of *mesiras nefesh*—be over, and I'll be able to return to New York?"

The truth of the matter is, that *truly* deep in his heart [*penimius sheb'penimius*], the *bochur* wants and desires to do this activity [and this] helped that, in the end, the rav was able to prevail upon himself to be as he should.<sup>13</sup>

(*Sicha Chof Menachem-Av, 5711*)





## RIPPLE EFFECT

One of the *bochurim* once wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking about the point of affecting a small number of individuals on Merkos Shlichus. The Rebbe answered with a lengthy *maaneh*.

“There are several possibilities—all of them true—in this matter. A few of them are:

1) At times, they succeed in affecting someone in a way that they become a *tofe'ach al menas lehatfiach*, beginning a CHAIN REACTION [English phrase in the original].

2) [Other times,] they succeed more, by meeting a person who has extremely high *kochos*. And when they cause a difference in him—he works with his *kochos*. This can be compared to a small spark, which can ignite into an extremely large fire if it is brought close to a barrel of explosive POWDER. [As an example] see Yevamos 62, 2. [Rabbi Akiva had] 24,000 students, etc. and the world was desolate [after they died] until [Rabbi Akiva taught four other *talmidim*] etc. and they [established the Torah once more] etc. [Thus, 4 *talmidim* replaced 24,000.]

3) Besides for all the above, the psak din (Rambam Hilchos Teshuva perek gimmel halacha daled): If a person did one mitzva, he tipped etc. the entire world etc.

that there are now four hundred *bochurim* instead of ten, and that they might be taking cars instead of schlepping around on buses. But ever since the Rebbe sent Rabbi Leibel Posner on his little trip around New Jersey, the core of this type of shlichus has remained the same. Take a young *bochur*, set him down in a city for several days, and let him do his thing:

speak to people in their offices, talk to them at home, try to sell *sefarim* and mezuzos. There are no new programs, modern presentations or contemporary techniques.

Had Merkos Shlichus been like any other thing in the world, it would have had to change. But it isn't, it is much deeper. Perhaps the most common topic in the *sichos* about Merkos

Shlichus—both of the Frieddiker Rebbe and the Rebbe—is about the almost chemical reaction that occurs when a *bochur* meets, or is even seen by, another Yid. As the Frieddiker Rebbe put it, in the very first *sicha* on Merkos Shlichus: “When a *yungerman* comes into a city and speaks with another Yid, and squeezes his finger—*temimus* [sincerity] sprays out. The person who was *me'orer* him may not even know what he accomplished.”<sup>17</sup>

At its essence, Merkos Shlichus, and shlichus in a broader sense,<sup>18</sup> is not just about figuring out how to package Yiddishkeit in a way that is appealing to the modern Jew, or making Jewish values feel relevant in the current zeitgeist. It is about reaching the *neshamah* lying quietly beneath all the other layers, and which only needs a spark—an authentic spark—for it to be ignited. This may come in the form of a lively *devar Torah*, or it may just be the very sight of a Lubavitcher *bochur*. As the Rebbe blessed the *bochurim* before one of the trips “The trip should be...*hatzlacha mufluga* in all things that they will speak about, and even in the things which they won't speak about, but will be accomplished by the very fact that they are there.”<sup>19</sup> And in this area,



cultural and generational differences have no relevance. The *neshamah* of a Jew in the 21st century is exactly the same as his grandparents', and it reacts to the same fire, the same *bochur'ishe* warmth.

When looking at Merkos Shlichus over the past seventy years, some people see a narrative of exponential growth; others see a lesson in the value of a single Jew. But perhaps the most

powerful takeaway is the power of a single *bochur*. **T**

1. Yemei Bereishis p. 217
2. Ibid p. 205
3. Yoman of Rabbi Rabbi Shalom Ber Volpo, a *bochur* at the time.
4. Sichos Kodesh 5729 vol. 2 p. 310
5. Sichos Kodesh 5732 vol. 1 p. 546
6. Toras Menachem vol. 9 p. 69
7. Ibid. vol. 12 p. 124
8. Ibid. vol. 3 p. 266
9. Ibid. vol. 3 p. 263
10. Ibid. vol. 6 p. 101
11. Ibid. vol. 6 p. 102
12. A Chassidisher Derher Tammuz 5773 p. 22
13. Toras Menachem vol 3 p. 264
14. Ibid. vol. 14 p. 194
15. Ibid. vol. 3 p. 224
16. Ibid. vol. 3 p. 225
17. Sefer hamaamorim 5710 p. 192
18. See sicha Shabbos parshas Vayikra 5741
19. Toras Menachem vol. 14 p. 192
20. Ibid. vol. 3 p. 239

Leaving the *daled-amos* of the yeshiva walls in order to work in strengthening Yiddishkeit is a tzedakah for him [—the *bochur*—] as well, for it is through this that he will attain much higher levels in Torah learning throughout the entire year.

However, in order to receive this gain, he needs to go out and travel, and fulfill the shlichus in actuality, and not suffice with the *thought*, that, being that he is a Chossid and a *mekushar*, he's ready to go on *mesiras nefesh* and fulfill the Rebbe's shlichus!

The story is told that the Mezritcher Maggid once met a friend from his younger years, from the time before he became a *talmid* of the Baal Shem Tov. Even in those years, he would learn Kabbalah together with this friend and daven with the *kavanos* of the Arizal. Now, his friend asked him, "Why does your davening take you so long?" He explained his question: "I, too, think all the *kavanos* of the Arizal. Yet **my** davening doesn't take such a long time. Why does it take **you** so long?"

The Maggid didn't respond on the spot. Instead, he began inquiring about what was going on in his friend's life, what he was involved in, etc. The friend answered that his main occupation, *baruch Hashem*, was learning Torah; his *parnassa* comes from a store managed by his wife. Once a year, at the time of the big market [the *yerid*], his wife gives him a list of merchandise that she needs for the store, together with a bag of money, and he travels to the market to buy merchandise. Even during his travels, he doesn't rush; rather, he makes sure to complete his *shiurim* every day, and only then does he continue on his way. Thus, the trip takes him several weeks, after which he returns home and continues learning Torah.

The Maggid asked him: "I don't understand why you have to waste several weeks on traveling to the market; just stay in your room and imagine the trip

in your mind. You know the way very well, since you travel it every year, and you can easily imagine every detail of the journey: Now I'm at this-and-this stop; now I'm at the next stop; now I'm getting to the market, holding the wallet with all the money; now I'm buying the merchandise, as long as they don't cheat me... This way, the Maggid continued, you will be able to finish with the whole story in a few hours, instead of wasting several weeks"

"But," his friend replied, "I need the *merchandise!*"

Upon hearing his answer, the Maggid said, "The same is true with davening. When you need the merchandise, you cannot suffice with thinking *kavanos* for a brief time. You must go and be there at every place, and *that* takes much time!"

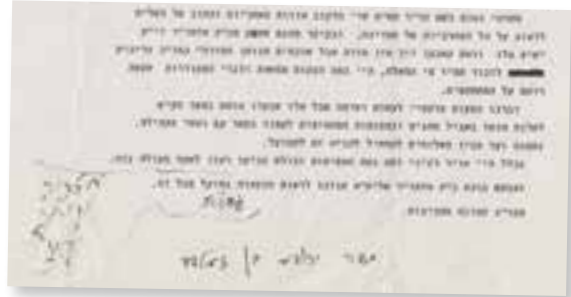
The same is true here: a person can sit in his own *daled-amos* and think about his *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe, and how he is ready to go on *mesirus nefesh* to fulfill the Rebbe's shlichus. To round it off, he can even imagine to himself every step of the trip: here he cannot obtain *cholov Yisrael*; here they aren't receiving him nicely; here they are laughing at the sight of a yeshiva *bochur* with a beard and *peyos*—and this way, he'll finish the entire trip (in his imagination) in a very short time, a half hour or an hour, depending on how good his imagination is.

But in order to obtain the "merchandise" he must go out and actually fulfill the shlichus! It won't help anyone to argue it out with Rabbi Hodakov, or with himself, that for this reason or another he cannot make the trip. Because all these arguments won't help him obtain the "merchandise"! In order to get the "merchandise," he must actually go out and travel, and work in strengthening Yiddishkeit and inspiring Yidden about fulfilling Torah and mitzvos.

(*Shabbos Pinchas*, 5711<sup>20</sup>)

In the early 5740s, Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky was appointed to manage and oversee the Merkos Shlichus operations. Over the years he received a number of horaos regarding the Merkos Shluchim. On one occasion he received an instruction that although Bochorim can continue to suggest the locations where they wish to be sent, a bochur who insists that he will only go to a destination of his choice, be told that he better remain home!

He has also agreed to publish a sampling of the ma'anos from the Rebbe that he received over the years. We are grateful for his sharing these with our readership.

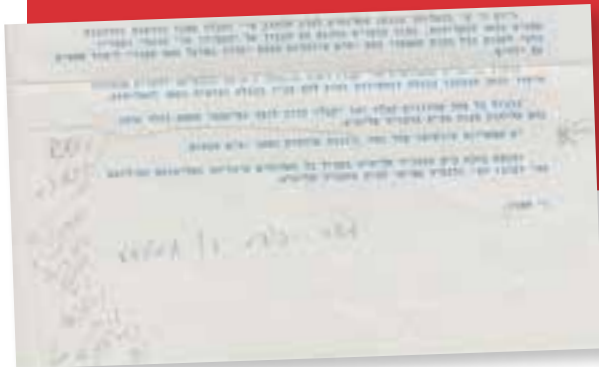


On a *duch* of a Kinus of all the Merkos Shluchim that went out in the summer, Rabbi Kotlarsky concludes asking the Rebbe for a *bracha* to see actual results from these efforts. The Rebbe added the word "גדולות", i.e. that it should be *great* results.

The Rebbe answered on the *duch*:

אזכיר עוה"פ עה"צ

I will mention this again at the *Tziyun*.

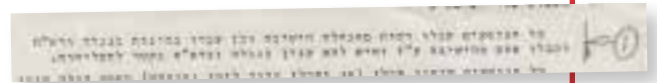


On a *duch* of the itinerary of bochorim and their shlichus for the summer of 5749, Rabbi Kotlarsky wrote that there is a possibility to send more groups of shluchim, to which the Rebbe added "כמה וכמה"—many more groups should be sent.

The Rebbe then concluded in his holy handwriting:

ומתוך שמחה וט"ל [=וטוב לבב] והזמ"ג [=הזמן גרמא]  
שנת הארבעים וכו'.

And with joy and good-heartedness, and it is a befitting time, entering the fortieth year [of the Rebbe's *nesius*] etc.



The Rebbe highlights a portion of a *duch* in which Rabbi Kotlarsky mentions that each of the Merkos Shluchim showed a note from their hanhola that they received permission to go, and that they were tested in their studies of Nigla and Chassidus. He also points out that they have prepared an idea in Nigla and Chassidus that they can share on their Shlichus.



Merkos Shluchim play a critical role in laying the groundwork for the arrival of a permanent Shliach. In a *duch* to the Rebbe written by Rabbi Kotlarsky of the itinerary of bochorim and their shlichus for the summer of 5751, dated 12-13 Tammuz, he specified four locations in which Merkos Shluchim would be scouting out the possibility of a new Shliach's arrival. The Rebbe's response to this *duch* was transcribed by one of the Mazkirus and is pictured here:

ויהא בהצלחה רבה וכו' ועד לאופן דנפלאות ובעל הגאולה בעזרם וכו'

אזכיר עה"צ

It should be with much success, etc. reaching a level of wonders, and the *baal hageulah* [of Yud-Beis Tammuz, the Frieddiker Rebbe] will be at their aid, etc.

I will mention this at the *Tziyun*.