

B"H

20 Cheshvan 5783

Shalom Uvrarcha!

This booklet is a tiny portion of a book entitled "Ani Yehudi" – "I Am a Jew", published on 5778 in Hebrew. The book is currently being translated into English.

The booklet contains a talk (*sicha*) from the Rebbe about *Geon Yaakov* - taking pride in being a Jew, a letter about preventing intermarriage and two special stories related to these issues.

Words that can help inspire the *pintele yid* (the Jewish essence) in every Jewish man and woman (even those who do not yet keep all 613 *mitzvot*), so that they will be proud of their Judaism and they will not break the chain (i.e., they will not marry a non-Jew).

Over the years, I have distributed brochures to many soldiers and others, about the importance of being Jewish. I noticed that the concept can positively affect and strengthen the reader's.

Hopefully this booklet will continue to have a positive effect on many new readers.

Ze'ev Ritterman

The contents of this booklet and the booklets we have distributed at previous conventions of Shluchim, as well as our books (and more), are available at the following website:

<https://torah-or-books.co.il>



972/586690770 - riterman770@gmail.com

"Mordechai would not Kneel and would not Bow Down"¹ (Mordechai, and every Jew)²

Seemingly it is unfathomable for Haman to desire to annihilate, to kill and to wipe out all of the Jews, including children and women in all of Achashverosh's territory because one Jew—Mordechai—did not kneel or bow down before him.

As is written in Megilla (3:5-6), "When Haman saw that Mordechai would not kneel or bow before him, Haman was filled with wrath. But he thought it contemptible to kill only Mordechai, for they had informed him of Mordechai's nationality. Haman sought to annihilate all the Jews, Mordechai's people, throughout Achashveirosh's entire kingdom".

Haman desired that everyone recognize his existence and his importance. In his Amalek-style *chutzpah* (Haman the *Agagi*), he could not bear the fact that there was someone in the world who considered him nothing. That there was one man who was unmoved by Haman, who was willing to endanger himself for this since he "violated the king's command," "since this is what the king commanded him [Haman]" that all would bow down before him. Then, when he clarified the reason "they related to him Mordechai's nationality"- they explained that the reason is not because Mordechai is rich or that he sits at the king's gate, etc, rather "because he told them that he was a Jew."

¹ *Megillat Esther* 3:2

² Edited and translated (free translation) from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's talk, on Purim 5726 (1966)

If this was the case, Haman understood that not only was he unimportant in Mordechai's eyes and that under any circumstances he would not bow down to him; rather this was a trait of all Jews, men, women and children in every place that they are: each and every one of them "will not kneel and will not bow down." Therefore, "he felt it was beneath his dignity to lay hands on Mordechai alone," since this would leave an entire people in whose eyes his existence was insignificant. Subsequently, he enacted the decree on everyone.

Every Jew has a soul, a part of G-d from above. Therefore, he does not wish to and is unable to be separated from G-d in an circumstance. With regards to most sins, the evil inclination (sometimes) misleads the person, telling him that despite his performance of evil deeds he remains a Jew. Yet, when this pertains to idolatry and similarly anything that completely negates G-dliness, the holy, Jewish spark arouses and the Jew is prepared to sacrifice his life to prevent being cut off from Judaism.

As a Result of the Darkness of the Exile, Unfortunately there are Jews who, because of the concealing darkness of the exile, feel inferior to non-Jews to the point that they insist on removing the division between Israel and the other nations—may their initiatives be foiled! In both directions: On the one hand they flatter the non-Jew and attempt to show him that they also behave as he does, without any difference. On the other hand they lie to the non-Jews and convince them that they can become Jews by a conversion which is not in accordance with Jewish law.

Accordingly, in addition to the seriousness of the matter and the astronomic destruction that is made by this in the order of the entire creation (as mentioned elsewhere at length), this behavior fails to engrace those who adapt it with

favor in the eyes of the non-Jew—quite the opposite—in this way, they make themselves “loathsome.”

When a non-Jew sees a Jew who is not embarrassed by his Judaism rather the opposite—he proclaims in public, with Jewish pride that he is a son of the Jewish people and follows in his father’s footsteps, his grandfather’s and his great-grandfather’s, etc. This arouses feelings of admiration and honor toward the Jew.

This is in contrast to what occurs when he sees a Jew who tries to please him saying, “don’t notice the fact that I have a ‘Jewish nose.’ This is no problem for me since I can do plastic surgery and reduce the size of the ‘nose’... The main thing,” the Jew continues to speak, “is that my life-style is similar to yours, that I feel affection for you till the point that, regarding marriage, I don’t mind (G-d forbid) to take a son from the ‘nation’ which my forefathers or my forefathers’ fathers did not know.” He will bring their contempt upon himself... in particular since he induces the non-Jew’s hatred.

Those who live with the misconception that it is possible to profit by flattering the non-Jew by registering as non-Jews, etc—in our generation, these people have realized just how absurd this idea is.

The Masters of the Land³

It was an emotional experience. A journey in time. The gates were already open. We were the first Israeli group, comprised of 22 young men, who entered a country whose gates had been hermetically closed for more than 70 years. The Soviet Union.

³ Translated from the book of Rabbi Moshe Orenstein – (*rosh Yeshiva of Tumchi Temimim* - Netanya) - "ABBA"- father (part 2: 26-43)

The cities and the streets were as we had imagined: old, mysterious, incredibly poor and even a little scary.

I will never forget the little light bulb that was meant to illuminate an entire terminal. They expected a lot of that one light bulb. So too, from the people who lived there. The last ones collapsed—they were unable to stand the pressure. They appeared as though they were lacking energy. These were people whose only ambition was to make it through another day.

We walked in the streets and could not stop thinking about the Chassidim who paced these same broken tiles (we had no doubt that these were not replaced in the last 70 years...) in exaggerated awe and fear. We felt as though the dilapidated floor on which we walked was purchased for us at great cost.

However, we quickly got adjusted to the scenery. After a short time, instead of fear, we felt a sense of ownership. We felt like masters of the land. We were *shluchim* (emissaries) of the Lubavitcher Rebbe! Some would call this “Chabad pride.”

We had been very enthusiastic before setting out as emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. We were not alone in this. There was also great excitement surrounding us; in 770 (Chabad’s Central Headquarters) there was a beautifully elaborate farewell *farbrengen* (chassidic gathering). A bus full of Chassidim and *Roshei Yeshivos* accompanied us to the airport. We even merited special attention from the Rebbe: a special note, special notice during the distribution of dollars [for blessing], a bottle of *Mashke* (vodka) during the *farbrengen* on shabbat and other similar examples.

My friend (today the Rabbi of Kfar Chabad), Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi, and I were selected as *shluchim* to the city of Kherson in Southern Ukraine.

The train ride from Moscow to Kherson lasted 24 hours and two minutes. In the train station we were very warmly greeted

by the heads of the Kherson Jewish community as well as several other dear Jews.

Maria

This occasion left an impression of slight embarrassment. We had no way to communicate with these lovely Jews. They went out of their way to express their love and joy, but there was no common tongue. Our Russian vocabulary was particularly poor. Maybe 20 single words (including “good morning” and “good night,” “yes” and “no”).

I promised myself that at the end of our time as *shluchim*, when we returned, things would be different. Indeed, at the end of three very busy months, many acquaintances came to the train station to bid us farewell. Nearly 200 people were there. I stood at the entrance to the train and delivered my biggest speech (in Russian...). I was full of inspiration... a speech full of pathos. Rabbi Ashkenazi also made an excellent speech in Russian.

In any case the first thing we had to do was to meet with the translator, Maria. It was obvious that without her it would be impossible to act. The Rabbis Mendel Mangel and Mendel Shemtov, who were the first *shluchim* to the place (we arrived immediately after they had left) had already been assisted by her excellent service. Maria was 70ish, charismatic and witty. She spoke Yiddish and she was at our side for three months from morning till evening. We rented a room for her in the hotel where we stayed. She was our connection to the world, particularly at the beginning. Everywhere in the city they called her the *perevodchik*... (the translator). The name Maria was forgotten. “Perevodchik.”

The Yeshiva of Kherson

After a month I decided that the time was ripe to open a Yeshiva. Although this turned out to be a challenge, I took it upon myself with fire and holy enthusiasm. I gathered eleven young men. Most of them were my age (20). Some were older than this. I found a cook. The kitchen was already standing and ready for the rest of our activities. I also obtained a small budget. For 100 dollars you could finance a Yeshiva of that sort for an entire week...

In the Yeshiva were *sdorim* (scheduled learning) as in any other Chabad Yeshiva. However the subjects learned were “slightly” different: *Chassidut* in the morning and evening, Hebrew language and reading, *Chumash* and some *Mishnayot*, Jewish law, many deep, soul conversations and above all were the *farbrengens*⁴.

A lot of *L’chaim* was poured there in the *farbrengen*. Many good fruits in the form of emissaries of the Rebbe and chassidim came out of that Yeshiva. I am certain that all of them were fruits of those same *farbrengens*. Very frequently we sat together until dawn.

Of course, in all of these *farbrengens* the “*perevodchik*” was present. Maria would sit next to me and translate. Though I could “babble” and shout a little in Russian, I needed Maria at my side. Imagine a 70 year-old woman sitting in a *farbrengen* with young men until six in the morning... At least twice or three times a week.

4. Farbrengen: (Yiddish). A Chassidic gathering together with the Rebbe or a *mashpia* (Chassidic spiritual guide). By the Farbrengens, Chassidim usually say *L’chaim* with a glass of wine and the like.

The Author of the Tanya⁵ Arouses a Storm

One morning in the second week of the Yeshiva's existence a dramatic event occurred. The Yeshiva was in a storm.

We were after a night of *farbrengen*. All of us sat together until late at night. I needed a great deal of self-discipline to get up the next morning and to teach in the Yeshiva. Though we started later than normal (as a result of the lengthily *farbrengen*), I was still extremely tired.

The poor Maria also made it to the morning class full of yawns after a long night of *farbrengening*. I started teaching the second chapter of the *Tanya*: "The second, uniquely Jewish, soul is truly 'a part of G-d above,'" I explained the content in simple Yiddish words.

Maria looked at me. She did not rush to translate. "Can you repeat what you said?" she requested in a tone that showed that she was certain that I did not say what she thought I said.

I repeated myself. Maria once more looked at me suspiciously: "Moishe, are you aware of what you are saying?" I answered positively of course. The suspicious tone and the manner in which we conversed only aroused additional curiosity in the young men. They all tried to clarify with Maria what I had said that so thoroughly threw her off.

I asked her to translate the words as they are. There was a moment of silence. Then they asked Maria to repeat my words. She repeated.

5. Tanya: The "written Torah" of the Chabad Chassidic thought, written by the first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812).

Vitali (today the Chassidic Rabbi Chaim Machlin who is one of the Rebbe's *shluchim* to Moscow). gazed at me with piercing eyes and said in Russian—that by that time I already understood: “Moishe, what's with you? You still haven't gotten over last night's vodka..? We have to teach you here how to drink...”

[A few years ago his sweet son, Avraham Boruch, came to learn here in the Yeshiva in Netanya (where I am the *Rosh Yeshiva*). In the first farbrengen— “when the king's heart was merry with wine”⁶ —I danced with him on the tables and related to the students the drama that his father had caused when he heard the Alter Rebbe's words on the loftiness of the G-dly soul... This served as a sign and a wonder for seriousness. Vitali took the Alter Rebbe's words seriously and with characteristic simplicity and now, more than half of a jubilee later, he sent his dear son to learn in a Yeshiva in the spirit of the author of the *Tanya*.]

Not Another Disagreement

That morning I was still unable to properly estimate the enormous *balagan* (mess) I had entered. Before this class there had been other noisy disagreements. In particular when we learned the end of Chapter One on the distinction between the animal soul of a Jew to that of a non-Jew. Everything the non-Jew does is only for himself and his personal good. In contrast to the Jew, the non-Jew does not have the potential of doing good without personal interest. This is what the Alter Rebbe concludes there. This had been very difficult for them to digest. Now, I thought to myself: “Okay, here's another disagreement.” But I was wrong. It turns out that I, like all *Lubavitchers*—who drink this phrase with our mothers'

⁶ Esther 1:10.

milk—apparently do not actually “hear” what we are saying: t-r-u-l-y “a p-a-r-t of G-d a-b-o-v-e”...

However, see what happens when people who have no Jewish background (I remember how we entered the synagogue with *Sefer Torah* in our hands and all those present asked us, “What is that?...”), and even more so those who have no Chassidic background hear such an expression. It sounds to them unreal and illogical and even strange. Us? A part of G-d?

I took a deep breath. I asked for silence and Asked that they let me explain. They were alert. I invested all of my energy to explain the idea. When you cut an apple, all of the quality of the fruit exists even in a small slice. I explained the difference between speech and blowing, between thought and speech and the parable of the father and his child (see *Tanya* chap. 2). But they still did not understand. They were unable to digest this.

I did not give up. I continued and spun the image between the father and son. The formation of the child, its beginning as a drop in the father’s mind. In the beginning, when the child “was” in the father’s mind, it still had no form. It had no existence until it underwent the entire process in its mother’s womb where its organs were created and developed. This is also the case with the G-dly soul. Its realization and development as it made its way down here, to be enclothed in a Jew’s body, this is a product of a long route that it made from above to below. In its essence, it is not considered an independent existence.

I requested that the enthusiastic students take five moments of silence in which they would try to digest these concepts. They did as requested. At the end of the five moments I requested an additional five. “Rebbe” (they heard this word

from Maria and it did not help hearing this from them...), they turned to me, “we do not feel a connection.”

Sasha Breaks up with the Shiksa⁷

This was the beginning of a storm that did not pass until we left. Even then in the moments before our departure, at the bottom of the train’s steps, Boris Steinman, the manager of the hotel in which we had slept during our stay, approached us. He had been very dedicated to us. He asked to speak to us at the side.

In an excited voice he related that his son Sasha and his non-Jewish girlfriend were no longer together. Sasha, thank G-d, had started going out with a Jewish girl. “This is in thanks to you. If you came to Kherson just for this, it would already be enough...” He said, and added with a wink as he warmly hugged us: “I still don’t know if we are part of G-d, but thanks to you my family feels closer to G-d...”

Neither Boris nor his son Sasha had any part in our Yeshiva whatsoever. We learned that the matter of a “part of G-d” went far beyond the limited *Tanya* class in the Yeshiva. This turned into the affair in question of the Kherson Jewish community.

A Shaking Farbrengen

In preparation for our return to 770, I increased the frequency of the evening *farbrengens*. We sat together almost every evening to *farbreng*. One particularly special *farbrengen* is engraved deeply in my heart. I remember it clearly, every detail—as though it happened last week.

⁷ Non Jewish woman.

When the students hearts was merry with wine (they drank *L'chaim* like water... this was a habit which was difficult to change), one of the group, Gregory, was his name, quieted his friends and requested to speak. Gregory was a very serious man. He may have been the most introspective and deepest of the students at that time. He was also the oldest.

“Rebbe, I want to tell you something about the G-dly Gregory...” This was the way he opened, with a overly-sarcastic tone. When wine goes in, secrets come out.⁸ He was already after much drinking. He started relating about his past. It is unpleasant, but this was a real can of worms... He cried and spoke from his heart. A great amount of pain was revealed. I was struck dumb. I thought I knew him. I was surprised to reveal that I really did not. I think that even his close friends were surprised. At the end of his speech he turned to me, “Nu, Moishe, do you still think that I am a part of G-d?”

Gregory only opened the flow. After him followed most of the others. Each one with his box in his hand. Each one tried to prove the absurdity of associating their souls with something G-dly. Most of the students who, as mentioned, were between 20-25 had already managed to marry (not all of them with Jews) and to divorce (and not in accordance with the religion...). It was a dubious custom common in the Ukraine—at least in the those days—to marry at the age of 20 and to divorce immediately thereafter.

I heard the harsh confessions of the students. Truly harsh confessions. I was shocked. I was their age and they had already been through entire “lives,” complicated and insane. My head spun. It was very difficult for me to hear about their twisted lives. I loved them and the outpouring of pain

⁸ See *Sanhedrin* 38a.

penetrated deeply into my heart and froze it. I did not open my mouth until the end of the *farbrengen*. I was wiped out.

Simchat Torah Kherson

The next day I decided to make another *farbrengen*. I decided not to reenter into the subject, rather to charge into the world of action. I came full of energy. I wanted to “atone” for the previous day’s difficult *farbrengen*. I made sure there was good food and even better alcohol. I passed out a lot of “*L’chaim*.”

When the time was right, I started to talk about circumcision. None of them were circumcised. Likely aside from us—the Rebbe’s emissaries—there was not a single circumcised man in all of Kherson... G-d forbid.

I asked that our farewell gift be the blood of circumcision. In other words, I asked for self-sacrifice.

The beginning was very difficult: "the splitting of the Red Sea". At one point I was ready to give up, but then came the first agreement. After the first young man they joined one after the next—another seven men. See what power there is in the first, in the *Nachshon* [the first of the Jewish people who jumped into the Red Sea in belief that it would split]. There were also several in the *farbrengen* who were still not ripe enough for such a serious decision. At the end of the evening an additional man accepted the decision to be circumcised. His agreement came with difficulty like that of the first. But, thank G-d, he joined in. When the first of the congregation’s workers came to work in the community center, a little after dawn, I counted nine men who agreed. We all started dancing like *Simchat Torah* because of the decision. One who has not seen this pure joy has never seen pure joy in his life.

In the middle of the *hakafot* (circles that are made with the Torah scrolls on the festival of *Simchat Torah*) I requested silence. I had also taken “a little” “*L’chaim.*” “Is the decision of several young men to circumcise themselves a normal thing? Is not dancing and rejoicing in the merit of this decision evidence of a Jewish soul and its awesome power?” I did not want to remind them of the phrase “part of G-d,” but they understood the message well.

One of the students, the “intellectual” of the group responded: “It is obvious that the soul of a Jew is unlike that of a non-Jew, the we have already internalized. But from that to a part of G-d, the path is still long...” I did not want to ruin the end of an amazing *farbrengen* with the same old arguments. We continued dancing until the morning prayers that were held at the regular time (10:00).

Nine Rebbes in the Hakafot

Permit me to take you out of the story for a moment to share a moving anecdote that was a continuation of this *farbrengen* of circumcision. During the *hakafot*, I got an idea.

In those days it was only possible to be circumcised in Moscow, and this demanded planning. Since we planned to fly a few days after the *farbrengen*, I raised the idea of choosing together the Jewish names that would be given to each one during his circumcision.

I told them that in the holy books it says that at the moment when a newborn is named during the circumcision ceremony (or during the Torah reading if it is a girl) its parents are injected with a form of prophecy. I suggested that since they are nine and we have nine Rebbes starting with the Baal Shem Tov and up until our Rebbe, our current leader, we would

write the Rebbes' names, place them in my hat and each in turn would pick a paper from the hat in order to "reveal" the name he would be called in Hebrew, the Holy Language.

This turned out to ignite my fine group's imagination. As infants they were not consulted about their names. They never thought that their opinions would be needed in this. Almost every one of them was dissatisfied with his parents' choice.

They started amusing themselves with the names and their nicknames. Instead of Adick, Sasha or Gregory, they would turn into Berel or Berush, Mendel or Zalman... Miraculously, they were excited about the idea.

We began immediately. After several moments each one already had a name: Yisrael, Dovber, Shneur Zalman, etc. In the coming days—which were our last days together—we tried practicing the use of the new Chassidic names in order to get accustomed to their use.

Divine Inspiration in the Streets of *Nachle*

A few days after we left the Former Soviet Union, the group of students traveled to Moscow and were circumcised one after the other. After the fact, we discovered that not all those who had agreed to be circumcised actually went. Various obstacles and unforeseen factors aroused and subsequently one or two students did not make it to Moscow and their circumcisions were delayed.

One of these was Adick. He had already managed to emigrate to Israel and to settle in Ashdod. My older brother, Rabbi Yakov Orenshtein, who lives in the neighboring Kiryat Malachi, kept up a long and deep connection with Adick. As a result the rabbi was able to convince him to fulfill the positive resolution taken in Kherson to be circumcised.

Adick turned to Rabbi Shalom Dovber Gorelick (ob”m) one of the heads of CHAMA⁹ in Kiryat Malachi. Rabbi Gorelick ran an umbrella organization that performed circumcisions. The time and place were set. The rabbi explained the procedure to Adick and verified that he had already decided on the Hebrew name in which he was interested. Adick responded that he had certainly decided—the name accompanies his for more than a year.

Adick was circumcised

The moment of naming arrived. “And his name in Israel will be...” Adick tried to say it, it was right on the tip of his tongue, but he was unable to remember... In this way a long minute passed. The pressure did not help, apparently it only made matters worse. Adick was unable to remember.

Not having any alternative, and without permission, Rabbi Gorelick announced: “And his name in Israel will be Shalom Dovber.” Adick broke into tears and almost fainted: “How did you know?” he shouted, “Yes, that is the name that fell-out in my lot, the name of the Rebbe Rashab [the fifth Rebbe in the dynasty of Chabad Lubavitch].”

Rabbi Gorelick, who now heard the story for the first time, got very emotional and immediately called me in my room (I was still learning in New York nearby the Rebbe) and in an excited voice requested to verify and confirm that this is the name that fell out in Adick’s lot. We were once more reminded of lottery and divine providence.

9 CHAMA - A Chabad organization who helps physically and spiritually the Jews of the former Soviet Union.

The Agent of Religion

Officially, the Kherson Jewish community was managed by two people. One was the Head of the Department of Culture and the other was the Head of Religious Activities. The state recognized them as representatives of the community and all of the permits and state funding passed through their hands.

The Head of Culture was Zev Shpund. A special guy. Intellectual. A journalist by trade. Very easy-going. It was very easy working with him. He also showed a lot of interest in religion, got closer to Judaism and even divorced his non-Jewish wife. Over time he flew to the Rebbe's courtyard and merited to see him. Today Shpund is one of the Rebbe's *shluchim* in Yafo Dalet, neighborhood in Tel Aviv.

The Head of Religious Activities, on the contrary, was a very difficult man. He was elderly, harsh, inflexible, suspicious and very unintelligent. We had no doubt that he was a KGB agent. To this day I have no doubt of this. His advanced age only increased his rigidity. To preserve his honor I omitted his name. Though the Agent of Religion (who was also married to a non-Jew and who had not the slightest idea about Judaism but made no effort to change this fact) was not the biggest genius he was also no idiot. He sensed that we were bypassing him and understandably did not appreciate this.

It always seemed to us that the guy cooked up evil plots. His main enmity was directed at Shpund. More than once he gave us the impression that he was ready to burn the synagogue (that was the only building belonging to the Jewish community) and subsequently give up his distinguished position and even his salary if Shpund would only be in the synagogue at the time...

[Around 150 years ago in Vilna lived a poor Jew who was called by all “Motke Chabad.” Before his marriage, he was called “Motke *Laytz*” (jester). However, when he married the daughter of a wealthy Chabad Chassid from Vilna, his father-in-law demanded that he change his name to “Motke Chabad.” A different version of the story claims that the “enlightened” Jews of Vilna had trouble accepting the marriage of the free-spirited *Laytz* to the daughter of a Chabad Chassid in particular and this was their method of punishing him: to turn his name to “Motke Chabad.”

In any case, “Motke Chabad” was known for his sharp tongue and his blunt perspective. He donated a great deal to the enrichment of the popular Yiddish folklore in Vilna.

Motke had a small house. Once a fire broke out and his house went up in flames. Motke stood by and smiled in joy. They said: “How can you be full of joy while your house burns down in flames?” Motke answered: “I am joyous because of the downfall of the fleas...”]

As for the Head of Religious Activities I cannot be certain that our suspicions were justified. In any case, we tried to appease him as much as possible and to make up for the disgrace with a great deal of honor.

“Talc Elokah Baibel Mamesh”

I shared all of this with you in order to illustrate to what extent was this man far away from anything Jewish.

Then, a few days before our departure, we met at the entrance to the synagogue. He asked if I was able to come with him to his office. Thoughts started bombarding my head: “What could he want? What did we do?” We went

together to his office. He called it a cabinet. Maria understandably accompanied me. He invited us to sit.

“Rabbi Moishe,” he turned to me in an almost begging tone which was completely untypical of him. “*Shto takoi* (= what is) talc elokah baibel mamash?” He intended to ask what was “*Chelek Eloka Mima’al Mamash*” [truly a part of G-d above]. I have no idea how he got to talc and baibel... Maria burst out in hysterical laughter. I felt very uncomfortable. She was also embarrassed by this, but was unable to control herself...

Her laughter was not as a result of the “talc” or the “baibel.” It was probable that she could make the same mistake. She laughed because to whoever knew him (I am uncertain that I succeeded in “passing on” his complicated personality) his interest in the *Tanya* was the strangest and most hilarious thing...

I related all of this to illustrate once more to what point this affair of the representation of the souls of Israel as a part of G-d above reached.

Logbook on the Table

After three months of acting as emissaries to Kherson, we returned to 770.

Kherson, it must be noted, imprinted its signature in us. We were made into Khersoners. In parenthetical note, I must point out that over time it turned out that even the Rebbe called us by a similar name before his secretary, Rabbi Yudel Krinsky (but about this at a different opportunity).

The Rebbe threw two kids (Rabbi Ashkenazi will forgive me...) to a remote hole and turned them into adults, capable of undertaking great responsibility. This was certainly preparation—both challenging and fascinating—for life.

Before the Festival of Shavuot in 5751 (1991), a few days after returning to the Rebbe's "courtyard," I sat to write a report for the Rebbe. This was a thrilling travel account, illustrated with photographs and numerous newspaper clippings. This was a long and detailed report that filled a thick, hard-bound notebook with my handwriting. I detailed the full and up-to-date picture of the various activities and of the situation of Judaism in all of the cities which we had visited—in particular from the city of Kherson.

I assumed that the Rebbe would be happy to receive a "picture" like this. There were also several engaging anecdotes in the journal that do not fit in here.

In the journal/report I did not relate even the slightest hint about the storm surrounding the "The second, uniquely Jewish, soul." I simply did not consider this the type of information that needs to be documented.

After a few days, I asked the Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Binyamin Klein (ob"m) if the Rebbe had replied in any way. He answered negatively, but he said that while all the other notes and books were removed after being read, this journal/report still rested on the Rebbe's holy desk.

Every week or two I would turn to Rabbi Binyamin and ask about the journal, and he always answered: "Still on the Rebbe's desk..." This continued several months until I stopped asking about it.

A Note "Fell from Heaven"

Over the years since acting as emissaries to Kherson in 5751 (1991), in *farbrengens* I recounted the drama that this single sentence of the Alter Rebbe created amongst the Kherson Jews. I related how this sentence sounded to ears that

did not grow up on messages like these. I wanted to emphasize the intensity of this sentence at the beginning of the second chapter of the *Tanya*: “The second, uniquely Jewish, soul is truly ‘a part of G-d above.’”

All those years I had no idea that I was relating only the beginning of the story.

Then out of nowhere came a big surprise. This was 30 years after the fact. *Shavuot* 5781 (2021). I arrived with the educational staff of the *Yeshiva* to celebrate the holiday near the Rebbe. And suddenly the circuit was completed.

On the first day of our stay, Rabbi Yakov Shalom Chazan tapped me on the shoulder and said, “I have an answer for you from the Rebbe.” No less!

I felt dizzy. Had I heard correctly?

I turned out that there are three answers—written in the Rebbe’s holy handwriting—that the Rebbe connected with a paper clip in order to send them to us. We never had the slightest idea of this. This was a complete surprise—like a note that fell from heaven.

“And my Deepest Appreciation if they will Act as Intermediaries who Connect”

Apparently these answers were written by the Rebbe in the month of Shevat 5752 (1992). This is understood since in one of the letters the Rebbe notes that “we are approaching the months of Adar”¹⁰ [which follow Shevat]. This means that my report laid on the Rebbe’s desk for eight or nine months.

¹⁰ The year 5752 was a *Shana Meuberet* (leap year), with two months of Adar.

The report was divided into six sections.

The sixth and last section was letters. Before we had left Kherson, we encouraged everyone who had any connection to us to write to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe answered two of these letters. In the third letter, which is addressed to us, the Rebbe emphasized that the other two letters were actually written to all those who had written and also to the “general population and the community” and the Rebbe requested that we pass this on to all “as though it was addressed to each and every one.” And he even added an unusual expression, “and my deepest appreciation in advance if they will be intermediaries who connect.”

The Rebbe does not desire that I act as a secretary and message bearer. To the Rebbe it is vital that we connect these people to him. Additionally, the Rebbe is interested in their hearts. Theirs, and also certainly in ours.

Imagine discovering such a special and intense answer from the Rebbe after 30 years. Since then I wander around like a drunk (and not from wine...).

Melts Like Butter after 25 Years of Estrangement

One answer was to Boris Steinman’s warm letter. He was the manager of the Prigat Hotel where we stayed. I previously mentioned his name. In his letter he enclosed the hotel’s key to the Rebbe. The Rebbe instructed him to learn from Mordechai the “*Yehudi*” (Jew) who did not bend his knee and did not bow down to non-Jews and even requested that Steinman assist his family in this.

It turned out that the dear Boris had emigrated to Hanover, Germany 25 years ago. Additionally, for various reasons (that

are irrelevant here), he became very difficult to reach. Despite many repeated attempts, no one from Chabad succeeded in entering his doorway. Consequently, since there was no alternative, immediately after returning from my trip to the Rebbe I flew with my wife to Hanover. Thank G-d, I fulfilled the Rebbe's request to be a connecting intermediary between the Rebbe and Boris and his family.

Immediately upon landing in Hanover, I called him. I related with great excitement of my arrival in Hanover in order to deliver a letter from the Rebbe. To our surprise, and to the surprise of the outstanding emissary of the Rebbe to the city, Ms. Shterna Wolf who accompanied us, Boris melted like butter. We *farbrengened* together for several hours. You could say that I still continue doing this on an almost daily basis.

I see the story of Boris' answer like a tale taken from the *The Collected Stories of the Baal Shem Tov*. But it is still too soon to relate his story. As of the time that this book was sent to press his story was still "happening." It was in progress. An amazing story about which we will relate, G-d willing.

"Dear Rebbe"

The subsequent answer was to the general letter that the community sent to the Rebbe. About 25 people signed this letter. I am unable to decipher all of the scribbled signatures but certainly they signed in the name of the entire Jewish community as they themselves note in their letter.

My friend, Rabbi Chaim Machlin (as recorder, the cause of the big drama...) recognized his signature there. Also Maria's signature is evident. It is easily singled out (on the top left). I recognized some additional signatures.

“Dear Rebbe,” the addressed him, “All the Kherson Jews heart-fully thank you for your concern for us that caused you to send the particularly special, young rabbis: Rabbi Moshe Orenshtein and Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi... The young rabbis Moshe and Meir gave themselves over completely to this labor... We wish to send our gratitude to Moshe and Meir’s parents for the education of such excellent children... We pray to the Creator of the Universe that He grant you good health and that the warmth of your heart will warm Jews in every corner of the world for many more years...”

I was embarrassed. Even now when I write this I blush when I quote the Jews of the community requesting of the Rebbe to “send our gratitude to Moshe and Meir’s parents for the education of their children.” It is good that I knew nothing of this at the time. They wrote in Russian and obviously did not share the contents of their letter with us.

The three answers came to me, as noted, as a complete surprise and in an unanticipated manner and were publicized in *Beis Moshiaich* magazine. I read them over and over and I continue to read them every day.

Expressly Unusual Answer

However the biggest surprise awaited with patience (as we said 30 years...) in the Rebbe’s answer to them. To the community. I permit myself to be a bother and to emphasize once again that the storm of the “G-dly soul” was not mentioned, not even by hint, in the report that I brought to the Rebbe. Nor was it mentioned in any way in the letter that the members of the community wrote to the Rebbe as you can see in the quoted letter.

Here is the Rebbe's answer:

And G-d should grant success to the entire congregation to advance higher and higher in physical livelihood as well as in spiritual matters. And we clearly see (according to the attached content) that the G-dly soul is active in them and it is truly a part of G-d above and therefore its virtues is tremendous.

Foremost, it is very interesting. They did not mention anything at all about livelihood. This despite the fact that all of them were extremely poor then. All of them were working hard to make it through each day. It was routine to witness long, winding lines of people waiting in front of a store with empty shelves. This was everyone's share. Nevertheless, they did not mention this at all. But the Rebbe, love of Israel, began by blessing them "to advance higher and higher in physical livelihood."

Obviously the most fascinating part is the continuation of the Rebbe's answer. Every year **hundreds** of similar letters of thanks and appreciation find their way to the Rebbe's desk from important figures and community leaders who regularly meet with emissaries of the Rebbe. I invite the readers to show me another example—a single solitary example of an answer from the Rebbe with such words as: "It is recognizable from their letter that they have a G-dly soul **and the G-dly soul is truly a part of G-d above.**"

There is no doubt that this is an **extremely rare answer.**

Winning Proof

This holy answer spread like fire.

Former students and many acquaintances who had participated in my *farbrengens* over the years and were presently exposed to this answer from the Rebbe sent me a bombardment of enthusiastic messages. The content of all the messages was the same: “The Rabbi sees? The Rabbi remembers the story that he told us in *farbrengens* about the drama in Kherson. Maybe after all the Rabbi did report this affair to the Rebbe..?”

So here’s the answer: As I already said I did not report a part and not a portion of a part of this affair.

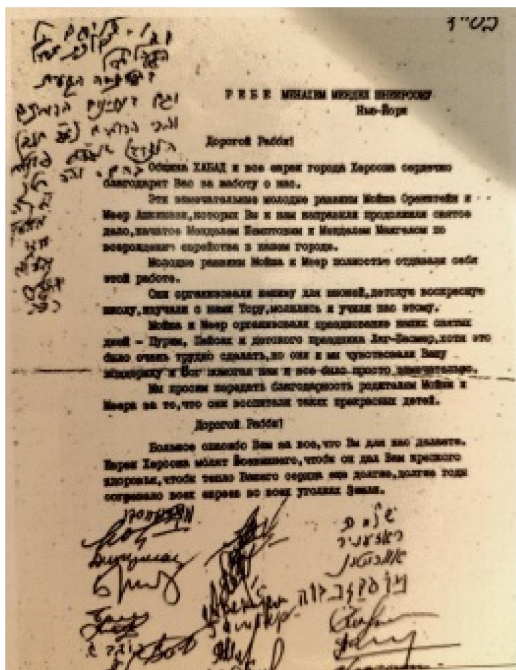
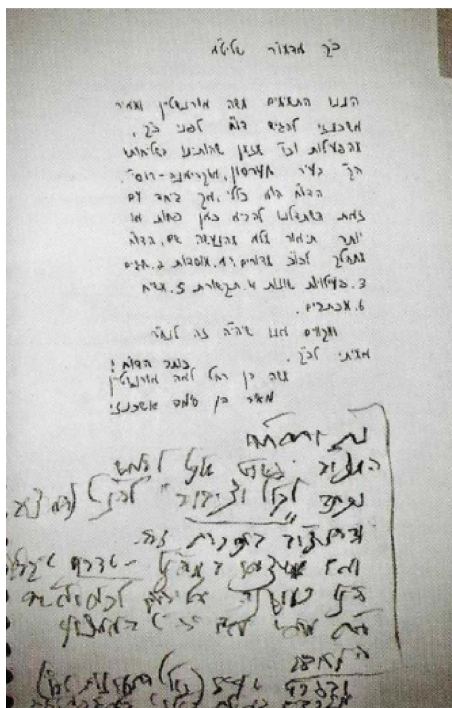
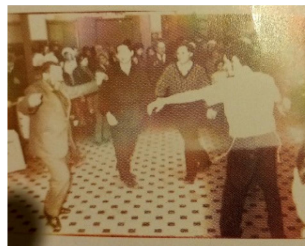
The Rebbe loves his people Israel, he consoles Zion, Jerusalem and Kherson—he found the unique way to encourage and uplift the broken and depressed spirit of these dear Jews. The Rebbe connected to the dialogs that were between us. This reality is as simple as it sounds. The Rebbe felt the pain of the “G-dly Gregory” and his friends.

The Rebbe essentially told them: Even after 70 years of Communism in which there was a cruel breach between Jews and their Judaism, you, the Jews of Kherson, express such strong feelings of thanks and appreciation for the fact that we sent you two young rabbis to to teach you Judaism—there is no greater evidence of the existence of the G-dly soul within you. **“And it is truly a part of G-d above.”**



Vitali (today the Chassidic Rabbi Chaim Machlin, on the right) and his brother.

"We have to teach you how to drink..."



The general letter that the community sent to the Rebbe and the Rebbe's answer

The note that was discovered after thirty years

Divorcing from the non-Jewish woman¹¹

This story took place in 5759 (1999). I called a wealthy Jew who lives in a European country and who donates to many organizations. I had met him years ago, he was always happy to assist Chabad's activities. I inquired as to his well-being and he requested that I write to the Rebbe to request for him a blessing in his business.

After our conversation, I sat to write to the Rebbe. I entered the letter into volume five of the Igrot Kodesh [letters from the Rebbe] and the letter to which I opened was in Yiddish on page 113. This is the letter as translated from Yiddish:

"I was shocked to hear that... lives with a non-Jew and it would be very advisable that upon the receipt of this letter he would meet his as soon as possible and will tell him that through this he brings disaster on himself and upon the non-Jewish woman. **Disaster in the most literal sense** and he should not allow himself to deceive himself with the thought that others also act in this way and that they are healthy. And in order to save himself and her as well, he should see to it that they break up as quickly as possible, and this affects both of them in body and soul. With blessing for good tidings on the above in the near future".

I already knew that this Jew who had requested of me to write to the Rebbe, lived with a non-Jewish woman and that they had children together.

11. I heard the following story from Rabbi Binyamin Nachum Zilberstraum, mashpia of Chabad in Jerusalem, The founder of Heichal Menachem and other institutions.

(it also published in Chabad Magazines).

I had a very difficult time deciding how to relate this message. This was an extremely sensitive topic.

Several years earlier, I had participated in a dedication ceremony for a new Sefer Torah that this Jew had donated to the Western Wall. Since then he had gotten closer to Judaism through his local Chabad Shliach (emissary). Personally, I had good connections with him and every time that I requested a donation for a Chabad institution he would donate with good will.

I was worried that if I related the Rebbe's words on such a sensitive matter, he would get very angry and would cut off our connection. Not long before this, I had spoken to his local Chabad Shliach who knew the man well and he said that on this subject there is no point in speaking to the man.

I consulted Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Havlin, the rabbi of the Chabad Community in Ramat Shlomo, Jerusalem and one of the managers of the Chabad Library Heichal Menachem, and he said that such a sensitive subject is impossible to discuss by phone, and that I was obligated to fly and speak to the man face-to-face.

I decided to consult Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu (ob"m) who this Jew very highly regarded, in order to hear the Rav's opinion as well.

I arrived during the public receiving hours in Givat Shaul, Jerusalem and related the story with all its details. The Rav asked to see the letter and, since it was in Yiddush, I translated it to Hebrew.

Rav Eliahu looked at me and said: "This is a heavenly mission, you must get up and travel to him immediately and relate the message." The Rav added: "When you relate the matter, tell him stand on your feet, just as Ehud ben Gera said to Iglon the King of Moab - Judges (3:20): "And Ehud came

to him and he sat in his 'cool' loft alone, and Ehud said, 'G-d's words I have for you, and he rose from his chair.' He should stand on his feet since you brings him G-d's word. As we see in the book of Ezekiel (2:1) the words: "And He said to me; "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I shall speak with you."

I went home full of thoughts, feeling the heaviness of the task weighing on my shoulders. I shared the story and the words of the Rav Mordechai Eliahu with my father Aharon Mordechai (ob”m).

He told me that I must take this task upon myself "and, G-d will be with your mouth..." My father (ob”m) also added that to the best of his knowledge, according to the last name of the Jew and according to the area of his origins, and relying on the fact that there are not many with this name in that area, the great-grandfather of the Jew was a great Torah scholar who published a book of Torah innovations about the Talmud and Maimonides. What's more, added my father with his great knowledge and expertise, the Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai, authority in Jewish law and Kabbalah, who lived more than 200 years ago and wrote more than 80 books) rained praises in one of his books on the great-grandfather of the generous man and testifies that he was "Sinai and wise and holy will they say about him," and he repeatedly praises the book and its author.

My father thought that if I tell the Jew about his family's origins and about the deep roots which are planted in Judaism—and essentially reveal to him who he truly is, maybe something inside would be awakened and he would accept the Rebbe's words the proper way. My father went searching for the book in a few libraries in Jerusalem. The libraries refused to lend it even for a short period because it was around 200 years old and therefore very valuable.

After much effort, my father found a library called the Yad Harav Nissim which agreed to lend him the book for only one day, with an open check for security if something would happen to it. When we succeeded in attaining the book, we interpreted this as a sign from heaven.

I called the rich, European Jew and requested to schedule a private meeting. He was surprised by the unusual request. Why was it not possible to make this meeting by telephone? I answered that this was regarding a very serious matter that must be discussed face-to-face. He accepted my request and we scheduled a meeting in the near future.

I took the books that my father brought me as well as the Igrot Kodesh since I wanted to show the man the Rebbe's letter that we had translated to English for him.

I landed in the local airport in the early afternoon and rushed to the direction of the Jew's office. I arrived at the exact time we had scheduled for the meeting and he received me with joy. Upon entering his office, he immediately requested to put on tefilin. While he was still adorned with tefilin, I related that since he had requested of me to write to the Rebbe regarding his business, I had done this and merited to receive a special letter in response that I myself would never have said to him. I explained that I would read the exact message of the Rebbe word-for-word.

He asked if it was alright for him to hear the answer wearing the tefilin or if he should remove them first. I thought to myself: what could be better than him hearing the answer while wearing tefilin, perhaps this would enable him to receive the message in the proper light.

As Rav Eliahu had instructed, I asked the man to stand with respect for the important this that I was about to relate, he stood and so did I. I decided to read the letter word-for-

word in its English translation. When I finished, I looked at his face and saw that he was very pale. I thought that what he was undergoing was similar to surgery, when the Rebbe's words penetrated into his most inner depths.

He was contemplative and requested that we go together to a kosher restaurant in the area since he wished to talk to me. We went to the restaurant, the atmosphere was tense. He said that recently he really was not satisfied with his non-Jewish wife and maybe the time had come to leave her. I was surprised that he accepted the words so calmly and said to myself: "Who is like your people Israel?"

I showed him the book that his great-grandfather had written as well as what the Chida had said about him and the man was very emotional to reveal that his great-grandfather had been a great rabbi and Torah scholar.

I told him that if this is the case, I can return to Israel since this was the reason for my trip. He requested to accompany me to the train and before we parted took 500 dollars from his pocket as a portion of my airfare. I was shocked by the strength of this Jew who, despite the words that I had said to him, even wanted to pay a portion of my ticket! Shortly thereafter, he called me and said that an argument had broken out between he and his wife and that they had made it to court. She—the shiksa—brought a picture of the Rebbe to the hearing and said that she was unwilling to live with her husband who was connected to the man in the picture... After this they separated.

The Jew continues to keep a warm connection with me and Chabad institutions with the understanding that the Rebbe and Chabad first of all took care of him.

A letter from the Rebbe - The disastrous consequences of intermarriage

Blessings and Greetings,¹²

I received your letter in which you bring up the subject of mixed marriages, may G-d protect us. Even though a great deal has already been said, written and published about the terrible disaster of mixed marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew, and most of it is very clear and obvious; nevertheless, due to the seriousness of the matter, I will in short review a few of the most basic points.

I don't have to tell you that any matter involving a Jew needs to be examined first of all from the perspective of the Torah, since our Torah, which is a law of life, is the guide for the Jew in his life and also the source of his life, not only in this world but also in the world to come.

Nevertheless, since I don't know to what extent the person in question will understand the importance of the Torah's perspective, and since I have the impression that it would be more useful to speak in terms of general human terms rather than religious ones, I will take that approach.

1. Statistics have proven in sufficient measure that intermarriage is one of the biggest catastrophes among people, not only for the Jewish spouse, but also for the second side involved. Since the two individuals come from such different backgrounds, a mixed marriage can lead to constant quarrelling and heartache, and the tragedy is even greater if there are children to grow up in the future in a household that is torn apart by such frictions.

¹². The letter was printed in *Kfar Chabad* magazine, issue 1210, and what appears here is a translation from a Hebrew version of the original letter.

Moreover, the statistics show only the “tip of the iceberg,” since many tragic cases go unreported and nor do they attract the attention of the public, since the sides involved are very much ashamed to admit that they made such a major mistake. This is especially true in cases when they were warned about the consequences, and they preferred to ignore the warnings.

2 . The statistics are not that surprising. In fact, it would be very surprising if the results were otherwise, when contemplating the fact that the two people come from origins and backgrounds that are not only different, as mentioned above, but also from antagonistic background, generations upon generations of persecution from one side, and victims from the other side.

5. One of most common arguments for defending the “justice” and the “freedom” concerning mixed marriages is that since both sides are adults, and they are prepared to accept the consequences etc., no one has a right to interfere and hinder them.

One single simple example is enough to show the error of this claim: consider a case in which a person is standing on a bridge and wants to jump off in order to end his life. He claims that he knows what he wants to do, and that no one has a right to interfere etc. It is obvious that in any civilized society, everyone in the vicinity would be obligated to try to stop that individual from carrying out his intentions. If necessary, the police department and the fire department would be summoned to prevent the possible suicide and use every possible means to save him from hurting himself.

6. If the two people involved have true feelings, not to mention a sense of simple fairness and honesty, then neither of them would want to get the other person involved in such a predicament, even if the risks were very slight. In fact, however, as already pointed out, the concerns are very

realistic and it is practically unavoidable that the mixed marriages have to end in disaster, both in the material and spiritual sense. Even if there are a few couples like these who appear to be happy and satisfied etc., it is very likely that this is no more than an external impression they wish to convey, because they do not want their inner discomfiture to be known to the public.

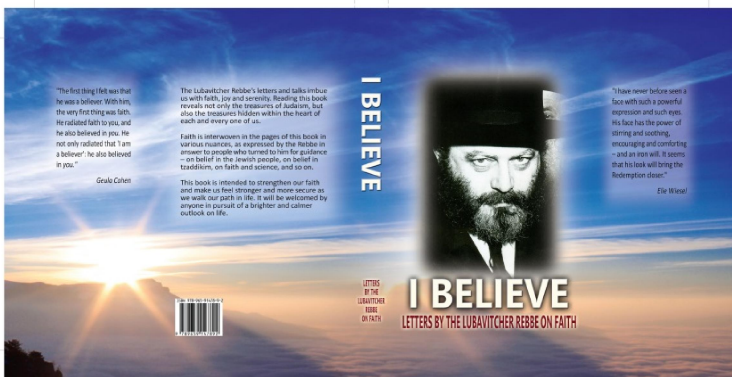
Much more could be said about all this, but I trust that this will definitely be sufficient.

I would just like to add that from a religious point of view, in terms of Jewish obligations and Jewish identity, intermarriage is one of the most serious sins, affecting the whole life.

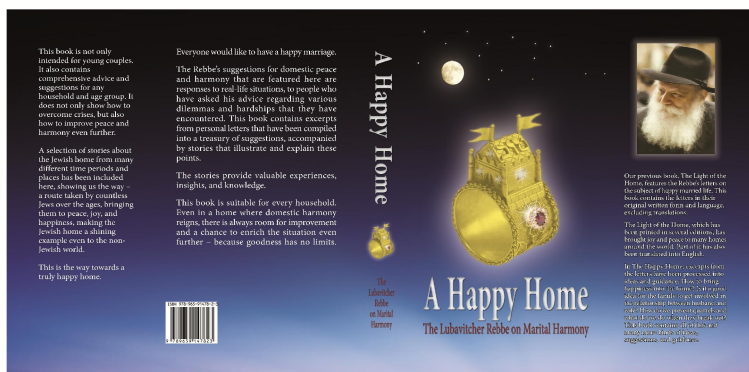
Moreover, although everything we have said is relevant to all the generations, it is even more true and more important in our own time, since the Holocaust has left us with a special legacy: it places an obligation upon all the Jews who survived to ensure that such a thing will never happen again. There are two methods by which our enemies attempt to destroy the Jewish people. One is by physical annihilation, which is what the Nazis, may their names be obliterated, tried to do. The other method, which is more sophisticated but no less catastrophic, is through assimilation, and especially through mixed marriages, may G-d protect us.

If so, a Jewish man who marries a non-Jewish woman, in addition to the destruction he brings upon himself and his partner, he also brings destruction upon the descendants, because the children who are born to a non-Jewish mother are not Jewish.

With blessings.



Letters from the Rebbe on faith, classified according to subjects: Belief in G-d, faith in the Jewish nation, faith and joy, belief and science, faith in times of trouble, belief in the coming of Moshiach, and more. In his letters, the Rebbe responds to the questions, dilemmas, and musings of our generation on matters of faith, and his words fill the reader with faith and security, joy and tranquility. 419 pages (available in *Kehot*, English and Hebrew edition)



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