

RABBI SHIMON GOLDMAN: A JEWISH SUPERHERO



In 770 next to the Rebbe (approximately 1990).

WHEN REB SHIMON GOLDMAN left this world on 29 Tishrei 5777, he was one of the last survivors of the group of yeshiva students that fled Europe during World War II and managed to find refuge in Shanghai, China. (See Selected Excerpts.)

Reb Shimon Goldman was born in 1925 in the town of Shedlitz (Siedlice), Poland. Though he came from a distinguished lineage of Gerrer *chassidim*, and was a descendant of the Chidushei Harim, he joined the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Vilna, and, after the War, the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Brooklyn, New York, in the days of the Friediker Rebbe. In 1949, he married Esther Gordon, whose father, the legendary *chossid* Reb Yochanon Gordon, was a *shochet* and the *gabbai* of the Rebbe's Shul in 770.

Reb Shimon Goldman was a qualified Rabbi and *shochet* but decided to make his living as the proprietor of a kosher butcher store, first in East New York and later on Coney Island Avenue between J and K in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. Still, he made time to be a dedicated *askan*, doing what his wife termed *kolishe arbet*, work for the sake of the community. He served on the board of the Lubavitcher girls' school, Bais Rivkah, operated a big Gemilas Chessed Loan Fund from his house together with his late wife, Esther *a"b* [see sidebar, Our Family's Gemilas Chessed], and also volunteered his time for a variety of other community services, including collecting *ma'os chittim* to be distributed by the Rebbe and serving as a member of the international Vaad Agudas Chassidei Chabad.

His commitment to Bais Rivkah was extraordinary. Reb Shimon Goldman, Reb Mottel Rivkin and, *ybl"ch*, Reb Gavriel Rubashkin formed a *vaad* which assumed the management of a school that was in serious crisis. Indeed, his children recall many "crisis meetings" at their home that stretched late into the night. *Baruch Hashem*, they succeeded in turning it around and stabilizing the school and it continued to run successfully for many years under their dedicated stewardship.

He was from the old generation. Although he spoke a fluent English, Yiddish would always remain his first language. He was renowned for his stories and *vertlach* and *niggunim*.

Sole Survivor

His son, Rabbi Yossy Goldman, writes, "I can never even begin to imagine what he must have felt like when he realized that he had lost his entire family in the Holocaust and that he was alone in the world. I did once ask him how he didn't lose his faith like many others who experienced such immense tragedy. He answered that he had always felt the guiding, protective Hand of G-d leading him from station to station, city to city, and country to country as he fled Europe.

That he never lost his mind, his faith, or his sense of humor is an unbelievable achievement and what made him a superhero to me."

Devoted Grandfather and Uncle

Despite his heavy involvement in community matters, his children and grandchildren remember his attentiveness and devotion to family. Having lost all his relatives during the war, he committed himself to rebuilding all that had been destroyed. At the *shloshim* for Reb Shimon Goldman, his grandson Yanky Bruk said:

"During my childhood, I don't think a week ever passed without spending time with Zaide and our beloved Bubbe. Following in my mother's [Chana Leah "Chancky" Bruk, *a"b*] footsteps, visiting Bubbe and Zaide was not only a delight, not only an absolute pleasure, but a responsibility. A grandchild should never live in close proximity to a grandparent and not give them the honor and respect they so rightfully deserve.

"For over a decade I had the *zechus* of visiting with Zaide almost every day and being his close confidant. Those thousands of hours will forever be etched in my heart. In my time with him I learned so much about life, love, honesty and integrity. Through good times and tragic times, like the loss of my mother and Bubbe, I was there with him and able to serve him. When something would break at 603 Empire, my father [Levi Yitzchak Bruk] was the first to be called. If he was unable to figure it out or unavailable, then it was me. From changing light bulbs to catching mice to figuring out where the leak was coming from, I had the honor of being my grandparents' fix-it man. When Zaide needed help in the butcher store I would often join my brother Yochanan and my mother and spend days with Zaide working in the store. He would compensate, although not as generously as Bubbe, but it was truly a labor of love. He was so appreciative that his grandchild was there for him in his time of need.

"He's not only the hero of *From Shedlitz to Safety*, he's the Zaide who brightened the lives of his family. The boy who was left alone in a very dark 1940s world loved his family with every fiber of his being."

The home of Shimon and Esther Goldman was a center of hospitality par excellence. There were always people for Shabbos and many who stayed much longer. Yossy says, "My mother once remarked that she didn't really need such a big house for herself, it was more for her grandchildren from abroad who needed accommodation."

As a teenager, Rische Deitsch had the honor and pleasure of living in the home (read: tiny apartment) of her aunt and uncle, Esther and Shimon Goldman. At the *shloshim* for her

uncle, she said:

"I can never know what it was like for him, what kind of herculean effort it took for my Uncle Shimon to get up in the morning and go to *daven*, go to work, be productive, often following a night of nightmares from losing his whole family to Hitler as a child... During the famous Eichmann trial in Israel he would wake up in middle of the night screaming '*Eichmann arauss!*'"

"I knew that my cousins were named after my uncle's immediate family that had all died in the Holocaust, *Hashem yinkom damam*. But I only found out the real story when I read the book *From Shedlitz to Safety* which he wrote after I was grown and out.

"The whole book was fascinating and heartbreaking and inspiring, but the scene that stayed with me most was the way the boys in Shanghai, all of them the only survivors of their families [as far as they knew, at that point], spent their days learning, busy, putting on a happy face. But then at night in their one-room dormitory, after the night quieted down and the room was totally dark, all you could hear was the sound of sighing and sobbing, mourning for their dead mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. It struck me then that my efficient, hardworking, friendly Uncle Shimon was once one of those sobbing boys. He didn't let it stop him from having the life that he had and accomplishing all that he did, with his family, with his *gemach*, with Bais Rivkah...

"As a teenager living in their house and going to Bais Rivkah, I once decided in the very wise mature manner of 15-year-olds that nobody really cared if I did my schoolwork or not, so why was I bothering? My parents lived far away and my aunt and uncle were, after all, only an aunt and uncle. So I decided to just stop doing homework, stop studying for tests, and see if anyone noticed. (The idea that my education was *for me* didn't enter my mind.)

"One week passed. Then two. And then I came home from school one day to find Esther holding a letter from Bais Rivkah saying, 'We regret to inform you that Rische Gordon is failing the following subjects...'

"Esther just stood next to that white formica table and showed me the letter, and said four words: 'Shimon was very upset.'

"That was all I needed to hear. I jumped for joy. *My uncle Shimon cared!* He was UPSET! I got right back to work and although I was never the greatest student, I passed my tests.

"Only now thinking back do I realize what a brilliant move that was of Esther, to just say that and no more.

"Fast forward 40 years. My daughter Mirel and I went to 603 Empire to interview Uncle Shimon for Mirel's book report on *From Shedlitz to Safety*. As Mirel asked questions, Aunt Esther intervened. Esther explained to Mirel that she,

Esther, had a great time at their wedding, she partied the night away. But when they got home she realized he was very sad and he couldn't get over it so fast, because he had nobody at that wedding. *Nobody*. It took her time as a young bride to understand her husband but finally she understood that after what he had gone through, all family milestones would be somewhat different for him. Every joy would be tinged with some grief..."

Grandson Rabbi Chaim Shaul Bruk, *shliach* to Bozeman, Montana, remembers, "At around the age of nine, I started a Shabbos ritual, which lasted until I left for yeshiva when I was 16. Early Shabbos morning I would head over to Zaide and Bubbe's house to spend the morning with them. I'd begin my visit by saying *brachos* aloud, as Bubbe and Zaide answered *amen* to each *brachah*. Bubbe would then proceed to serve me mouthwatering *babka*, *rugelach* and cheesecake, while I sipped on her famous tea with milk. Yet, the visit was really about my *chavrusa* with Zaide. I'd recap for Zaide the *Chumash*, *Gemara* and *Mishnayos* that I learned in school that week, but in addition, over the years, we read together the entire *Sefer Hazichronos* in Yiddish (*The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Memoirs* by the Friediker Rebbe). I'd read a paragraph or two aloud, and Zaide would explain how life was back in the *shtetl*..."

The Shlichus Ideal

Having finally rebuilt his family after the War, you'd think he would be dismayed to have his children move far away from home. Yet this was not the case. Reb Shimon Goldman believed strongly in the Rebbe's ideal of *shlichus*. In 1976, his oldest son, Rabbi Yossy Goldman, with his wife Rochel, were sent by the Rebbe to Johannesburg, South Africa (where they still are). When Reb Shimon and his wife Esther would talk about Yossy's *shlichus* and how much he was accomplishing in South Africa, it was with tears of joy. Of course, they missed him very much, but they knew he was where he belonged. On their many visits to South Africa, Shimon and Esther Goldman learned firsthand what *shlichus* looked like and were in awe of the Rebbe's revolution.

Chaim Shaul Bruk says, "Whenever he heard a *shlichus* story that involved a *neshamah* being inspired and coming, even an inch, closer to Yiddishkeit, he'd *kvell* from joy. He'd say to me 'Chaim Shaul, *der Rebbe hut gemacht aza groise zach...*' The Rebbe instituted such an amazing system to save souls."

Respecting Parents

When Reb Yochanon Gordon's wife Zisha passed away in



Left: Esther and Shimon Goldman at their wedding (1949). Above (L-R): Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman, Reb Gavriel Rubashkin, Reb Mordechai Rivkin, Reb Shimon Goldman, and Reb Shmuel Light, at a meeting for the benefit of Bais Rivkah (1973).

1957, he moved in with his only daughter, Esther Goldman. It was a tiny apartment but that was not a consideration at all. Esther's husband Shimon insisted that Reb Yochanon sit at the head of the table while he, Shimon, the *balabos*, sat on the side. Reb Yochanon's three sons (Nison, Sholom Ber, and, *ybl"ch*, Yisroel) were grateful all their lives to Shimon for the outstanding *kibud av* he showed their father.

Nearly a half-century later, when Esther passed away, Shimon immediately moved in with his only living daughter, Kraindy, and her husband, Moshe Klein. Moshe, too, tried to invite Shimon to sit at the head of the table, but Shimon refused. When Moshe pointed out that Shimon had given up his own place for his father-in-law, Shimon replied simply and humbly, "I'm not Yochanon."

Living in the shadow of his famous father-in-law, his own relatives not around, he never made a big deal out of himself because he truly didn't think he was anything special. But he was.

When his life story, *From Shedlitz to Safety*, was published in 2004, the back page had a photo of his 11 great-grandchildren at the time. He wanted to demonstrate that *he* had won,

not Hitler *yemach shemo*. When he passed away four months ago at the age of 91, he left well over 100 blood descendants, including over 80 great-grandchildren.

His funeral procession traveled from the chapel in Boro Park to Bais Rivkah where the students came outside and recited *Tehillim* for the soul of a man who had selflessly dedicated many days and nights over many years for their school's well-being. It then stopped for a few minutes outside 770, where hundreds stood to pay their respects. He was laid to rest in the Old Montefiore cemetery in Queens, New York, a short walk from the Ohel of the two Rebbes he had loyally loved and served. As he was being buried, his grandchildren softly sang his favorite *niggun*, called *Mimkomcha*, a *Boyaner niggun*. (To hear the *niggun*, visit nsheichabadnewsletter.com home page and click on "Reb Shimon Goldman's Niggun.")

Reb Shimon Goldman was pre-deceased by his wife, Esther, and his daughter, Chana Leah Bruk. He is survived by, *ybl"ch*, his son Rabbi Yossy Goldman of Johannesburg, South Africa; his daughter Kraindy Klein; and his son Shmuly Goldman, both of Crown Heights.

May his memory be a blessing.

Our Father's Gemilas Chessed

Yossy Goldman, Kraindy Klein, and Shmuly Goldman

The Gemilas Chessed Shomrei Shabbos was founded over 100 years ago in the Lower East Side. Our grandfather, Reb Yochanon Gordon, managed the fund until his passing in 1969.

The name is instructive. Gemilas Chessed Shomrei Shabbos. What, did they only give loans to *shomrei Shabbos*? No, but it was founded in the early 20th century when getting a job and keeping Shabbos were, sadly, mutually exclusive. "Hey, Goldberg, if you don't come in on Saturday, don't bother coming in on Monday either!" So *davka* those who displayed *mesirus nefesh* for Shabbos needed extra help. One of the few ways to be *shomer Shabbos* in those years was to open your own business, so aspiring small-businessmen would turn to the *gemach* for assistance.

The Rebbe later advised not to change the name.

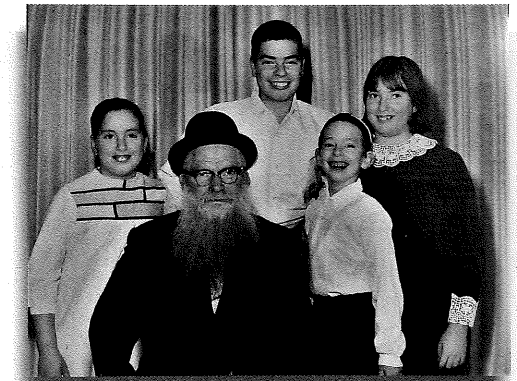
The Frieddiker Rebbe would write a letter each year to the *gemach*, blessing and praising them for their work. The Rebbe kept up the tradition and would enhance the letter with *divrei Torah*.

The Rebbe was given a full report every year including a balance sheet.

One time upon reviewing the balance sheet, the Rebbe wondered why there was still money left in the fund, even though it wasn't a large sum. He wanted to ensure that the money was being distributed and people were not finding it difficult to get a loan. In fact, legend has it that Zaide Yochanon then marveled that whatever he did, the Frieddiker Rebbe would always give him a big smile and *yasher koach*, and this Rebbe is so demanding!

When I (Yossy) was a teenager, I would often help Zaide Yochanon prepare his deposits for the next morning. Sometimes it was late at night, I was tired and wanted to go to bed. But if the calculation was even 25 cents off he insisted on getting it right. I remember once saying, "Zaide, here's a quarter. I'm going to sleep." His response was, "Nein! Es muz *shtimmen!*" (No, it must balance!)

Over time, although there was a number of directors including Rabbi Eli Nochum Sklar, Rabbi Berel Junik, Rabbi Binyomin Klein, and Rabbi Gershon Chanowitz, they mainly signed checks. The main, hugely demanding work and administration, and dealing with the public, was



Reb Yochanon Gordon with the Goldman children, L-R: Chanchy, Yochanon, Yossy, Shmuly, Kraindy (1965).

Zaide Yochanan's—all done from our house where he lived after his wife, Bubbe Zisha, passed away, from 1957 to 1969. When he was *niftar* our father took it upon himself to continue, also running it from our home.

The Rebbe would give an annual donation of around \$100 on the occasion of the annual *melaveh malkah* on *Motzoei Parshas Mishpatim*, when we read *im kesef talveh*, the *mitzvah* of giving interest-free loans to fellow Jews. After the passing of the Rebbetzin in 1988, this amount was increased to \$1,000.

At the Shabbos *farbrengen* preceding the *gemach fundraiser melaveh malkah*, the Rebbe would give *mashke* in honor of the occasion. He would insist that my father put on a *shtreimel* and say a *dvar Torah*. This was a continuation of a tradition of Zaide Yochanon. Both our grandfather and our father always shared a *chassidische maaseh* rather than say *Torah* in the Rebbe's presence.

In its heyday, the *gemach* distributed thousands of loans per year, with an annual turnover of more than two million dollars. People would knock on the door at all hours and were met with an unfailingly patient and kind response from my father or mother *a"h*.

We well remember the time one fellow, a monumental nudnik, called at 2 a.m. asking for a loan. Our father asked him, "You are calling me *now?*"

The man replied, "But I can never get hold of you during the day."

I (Kraindy) remember that he got the loan!

I (Shmuly) once spoke with our father about collecting debts people owed the *gemach*, suggesting that perhaps he should call seriously delinquent people to *bais din*. Our father's response was, "Absolutely not. People who can't pay back a *gemach* obviously don't have the money."

He would follow up with them directly, but refused to shame them publicly by taking them to a *din Torah*.

SELECTED EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK BY RABBI SHIMON GOLDMAN, "FROM SHEDLITZ TO SAFETY"

My Bar Mitzvah

I was only 12 when I traveled [from my home in Shedlitz] to learn in Stashov. This was an act of tremendous sacrifice for my parents, to send their son away from home at such a tender age, yet their commitment to Torah-true education overcame all other considerations.

I can still clearly remember the blue package that arrived just before my thirteenth birthday. A pair of *tefillin* lay inside, with a simply worded letter from my father. "I am sending you a pair of *tefillin*," the letter began. "Be sure to wear them every single day." He then wrote of other things and reminded me of the custom to receive an *aliyah* on my birthday or the closest possible time.

This, then, comprised the entire bar mitzvah "celebration"—a pair of *tefillin*, and an *aliyah*. No festivities, no piles of gifts, no fancy hat.

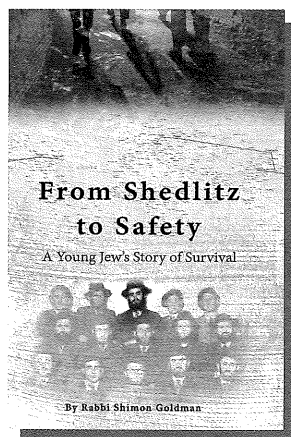
I Join Tomchei Tmimim

...I decided to continue my studies in the Warsaw branch of the already famous Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim. Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber Schneersohn (Rashab), the fourth Rebbe in the Chabad dynasty, originally established the yeshiva in Lubavitch, but by now it had moved to Otwock. A branch had meanwhile opened in Warsaw to teach younger students.

Tomchei Tmimim maintained high standards. They demanded much from their students, and it was quite difficult to be accepted into the yeshiva. I was tested by the administrator, Rabbi Zalman Gurary, and by the *Rosh Yeshivah*, Rabbi Hershel Reisman. After the test, Rabbi Gurary accepted me into the yeshiva and my joy knew no bounds. I spent two years in the yeshiva in Warsaw and then returned home to Shedlitz.

My Great Escape

After the Germans conquered Poland, they divided the



country between themselves and Russia, using the 480-mile-long Bug River as a temporary divider. The land on one side of the river belonged to Germany, while the Russians controlled the other side. Many, many Jews tried to cross the river and enter Russian territory. Though Jews generally despised the Russians and their Communist rule, many correctly realized that living under German command was far worse.

One day, I heard that the *nay* of the town, Rabbi Eichenstein, had decided to try crossing the river along with the Tzukers, a prestigious Gerrer family living in Shedlitz.

Upon hearing about this plan, I too decided to escape. I approached Rabbi Eichenstein and he gave his immediate approval, but my parents were not too thrilled when they heard my daring idea. "How can you do such a thing?" they asked in fright. "We can't let you go. You have no relatives in Russia; no one will look out for you. You don't even have any money. How do you expect to live?"

Yet, despite their objections, I resolved to go. I was never a rebellious child and I did not enjoy contradicting my parents, but I felt a powerful inner force urging me to get out of German territory if I expected to survive. Thus, I formulated a plan.

On the day we planned to leave, I got up as usual and packed all my belongings for the trip. My entire fortune consisted of a second shirt, which I wore over the only other shirt I owned. After my father left the house, I accompanied my mother outside, ostensibly to stand with her in the long lines of people waiting for a loaf of bread. I could feel my heart pounding furiously as we joined the end of the line and waited there, with more people arriving with every passing minute. And then, the second my mother turned her head away, I let go of her hand and bolted. I ran and ran, out of the line, out of the neighborhood, out of Shedlitz...

On My Own

We arrived in the village of Luninietz, Russia, to find it in a state of utter chaos. Russian soldiers marched the streets. Hundreds of Jews, refugees like ourselves, stood around in small groups, discussing the current situation and their available options. They analyzed the war effort continually, trying to evaluate where they could find a safe haven.



(Top) At the bar mitzvah of Shmuly Goldman in South Africa (1981). Shmuly is the son of Yossey and Rochel and is named after Shimon's father, Reb Shmuel Zanvil Hy"d.

(Above) Reb Shimon blesses his grandson Chaim Shaul Bruk at his wedding to Chavie Block (March 2006).

(Right) Reb Shimon Goldman with his bechor Yosef Yitzchok, one of the first boys to be named after the Frieddiker Rebbe. Yossey was born on 23 Shvat 5710 (1950).



Reb Shimon with his daughter Kraindy at her wedding to Moshe Klein (1975). Kraindy is named after Shimon's mother Menucha Kraindel Hy"d.



Reb Shimon with his daughter Chana Leah ("Chancho") at her wedding to Levi Yitzchak Bruk (January 1977). Chana Leah is named after two of Shimon's sisters Hy"d.



At the bar mitzvah of Chaim Goldman, son of Shmuly and Tzirl Goldman (Nov. 2000). Chaim is named after Reb Shimon's brother Hy"d. L-R: Shmuly, Shimon, and Yossy Goldman; Jerry Simon; Chaim.

Strong feelings of loneliness surfaced as I pondered my future. Where would I live? Who would care for me? Would I ever see my family again? How could I find a safe home in such an unfriendly world?

I decided to see if there was a yeshiva in Luninietz. Maybe I could stay there with the other students and not feel so lonely. I left the station and approached the first Jew I saw. "Is there a yeshiva somewhere around here?" I asked. "Of course!" he replied, pointing in the direction of the yeshiva.

I was pleasantly surprised to see so many *bachurim* from Poland learning in the yeshiva. Seeing that I was a refugee, the students befriended me and began trying to convince me to stay and learn in their yeshiva. "What's the point of traveling on to nowhere?" they asked. "Why not stay here with us?" I stayed.

After a few days, we heard exciting news: the Russians had decided they would return Vilna (now Vilnius) to Lithuania.

Upon hearing this latest development, we yeshiva students decided that Vilna would be far better than Luninietz. We began hearing reports of other yeshivos relocating to Vilna and this intensified our desire to do the same. I was a young boy, still traumatized by the escape and separation from my family, and the *bachurim* kindly helped me along every part of the journey. Vilna's borders remained wide open and we entered the city without difficulty.

The special days in Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim in Vilna forged my unshakable bond with Lubavitch. The warm *chasidische* atmosphere, the advanced level of study, the fervent prayers—all these imbued us with true spiritual bliss. During Sukkos [1939], I joined my friends on the streets, stopping passersby and asking them to recite the *brachah* over the *lulav* and *esrog*. In those days, these activities were not yet called *miutzaim*, but we did them anyway.

Our Bond with the Rebbe

Though life in Vilna seemed generally secure, we could not ignore the horrific calamities afflicting Polish Jewry. At the time we heard few details of the brutal Nazi war machine wreaking havoc across the country, but we understood that the once glorious Jewish community of Poland was facing systematic decimation.

During this difficult time, we continued receiving letters from the Rebbe Rayatz, now in Riga, infusing us with renewed enthusiasm and energy.

In one of his letters to us, the Rebbe wrote the following: "Surely you have all written to your friends—students like yourselves—in whatever place they may be, encouraging them to make haste and join you. May no obstacle or impediment block their way.

"Strengthen your trust in G-d. He will support you, bring success to your ways, and enable you to attain diligence in Torah and prayer. Send me a detailed list of the people you contacted, and continue writing to them—encouraging them to come quickly and join you. Make haste, for time is exceedingly precious!" (This letter was later printed in *Igros Kodesh* vol. 5, pp. 20-21.)

On the third day of Adar 1940, the Rebbe wrote again to one of the students, reiterating his heartfelt request that we communicate with our friends and convince them to join the yeshiva in Vilna.

Needless to say, we complied immediately with the Rebbe's request. Though the ensuing war had made communication with Poland nearly impossible, we managed to use underground methods of communication, contacting yeshiva students still learning in Otwock and informing them of the Rebbe's desire that they relocate to Vilna.

These letters made our longing for the Rebbe that much stronger, particularly when we realized that Vilna was becoming a more dangerous place for Jews. Matters became increasingly difficult when the Russians overtook Vilna, placing the city under Communist rule again. As part of the Russian empire, residents of Vilna now faced severe Communist restrictions, which made the idea of escape seem impossible. Not only was it illegal for Russian citizens to leave the country, but even foreign nationals could not hope to escape Communist rule.

Help suddenly came from an unexpected quarter. Rabbi Laibl Kramer—our administrator—contacted one of the many embassies in Kovno which, until then, had been the capital city of Lithuania, and discovered a crucial piece of information. Rabbi Kramer learned that we were eligible for special visas, which enabled the holder to use Russia as a transit stop on the way to another country.

Thus began a furious race against the clock, as we tried to



Shimon and Esther Goldman soaking up the *nachas* together at the wedding of grandson Yanky Bruk to Rivky Cohen (Sept. 2008).

secure visas from any country that would help us. Indeed, help soon came from an unexpected quarter—the Japanese embassy of Lithuania, also conveniently situated in Kovno. The Japanese consulate [a hero by the name of Chiune Sugihara] agreed to issue transit visas for all the yeshiva students.

Yet, a significant obstacle remained. As nationals of Poland, we needed to show our Polish passports, or the visas could not be issued.

Some of the students did, in fact, have this important document with them, and they were granted passports on the spot. However, some other *bachurim*—myself included—did not have the foresight to bring our birth certificates from home. Crushed with despair, I quickly wrote to my mother.

I did not have to wait long. Immediately upon receiving my letter, my mother went straight to the government office responsible for issuing these certificates, and provided them with my date of birth. The clerks issued a birth certificate. My mother quickly mailed the important document to Vilna and, when it arrived, I hurried off to the embassy in Kovno. The officer in charge examined the document carefully and, to my relief, issued a passport.

Meanwhile, as the departure date neared, another problem filled our minds. Where would we get the money needed to pay for the trip and other basic expenses?

Salvation came from faraway America. The Rebbe Rayatz and his son-in-law, the Rashag, who had arrived in the USA in March of 1940, began raising money for our cause, soliciting donations from the Joint Distribution Committee and other organizations. They sent the money to Vilna and, when the funds arrived, we bought tickets for the train that traveled from Vilna to the far eastern Russian city of Vladivostok. From Vladivostok, we hoped to board another ship and sail to Japan.

A few days before our departure, we received instructions from the United States to take along whatever religious items we could find—*tefillin*, *mezuzos*, large and small *talleisim*, *sidurim*, *machzorim*, and copies of the Rebbe's most recent *sichos* and *ma'amarim*. These religious articles were intended for *chasidim* in Russia, who suffered greatly under Stalin's regime. Jews (especially the religious) were subjected to continuous harassment, and it was practically impossible to obtain religious articles there. Hopefully, our packages could alleviate some of the shortage.

Russia

After many weeks of preparation, our scheduled date of departure finally arrived. We were traveling as Polish citizens—a paradoxical status, since Poland no longer existed as an independent country. Russia and Germany had long divided the country between themselves.

We left Vilna with mixed emotions. To be sure, we were traveling to a more secure location, but we felt pained at leaving behind our good friends and acquaintances—many of them Chabad *chassidim*—who faced certain death in Vilna. Anxious as we were about the fate of these people, it hurt us even more to sever the tenuous connection we still kept with our families stranded in Poland. Lithuania still maintained steady postal service between Vilna and Poland, and I often wrote letters home to Shedlitz. (In fact, I still have some of the letters my parents wrote back to me in Vilna.) Our departure would effectively cut us off from family and home, yet we realized there was no other alternative. We traveled from Vilna to Minsk to Moscow.

Though we stayed in Moscow for a relatively short period of time, the constant dread we witnessed left an indelible mark. We barely managed to exchange a few words with our fellow *chassidim*, yet we clearly felt their tremendous fear and despair. Their eyes were full of sadness; their faces heavy with grief. We discerned their overpowering desire to escape the Iron Curtain, especially now when they saw us succeed in leaving their country for the Far East.

After a brief stay in Kobe, Japan, we moved on to Shanghai, home to a large and prestigious Jewish population. The rabbi of the Ashkenazi Jews was Rav Meir Ashkenazi, himself a graduate of Tomchei Tmimim. A fiery *chossid* with a warm heart and strong bond to the Rebbe, Rav Ashkenazi supported, helped and guided us.

We arrived in Shanghai together with another great yeshiva—Yeshivas Mir. The yeshiva was headed by the *Rosh Yeshivah*, Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz, who, along with the eminent *mashgiach* Reb Yechezkel Levenstein, managed to bring the yeshiva out of the Nazi inferno practically intact. Though the Mirrer yeshiva arrived in Shanghai with many hundreds of students, while we only had a few dozen, the local Jewish population cared for us equally and did all they could to ease our relocation.

Behind Ghetto Walls

We lived in Shanghai for five long years. After the murderous attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese marched into Shanghai and took control of the city. Shanghai now lost its unique international status and, though it remained part of China, it became, in effect, a Japanese city. One of the first “innovations” of the Japanese was to turn our neighborhood into a ghetto, trapping many German Jews inside.

Those living in the ghetto were restricted to certain boundaries; whoever dared leave without authorization faced heavy fines and stiff punishment.

Despite ghetto constraints, we had food and a place to sleep, and we continued learning in our new quarters. Many Jews operated stores and businesses, including a plethora of Jewish tailors. Most importantly, our lives were in no danger. The Hongkou district remained populated by many Jews, so that the usual crowd on the street looked similar to any other Jewish community.

Our yeshiva continued as usual. The few boys who ran the yeshiva were among those fortunate enough to receive Canadian visas, and the responsibility now fell on Reb Shmuel Dovid Raichik. He consulted regularly with Rabbi Ashkenazi and other leading rabbis, ensuring that the yeshiva would remain open and operational. This was not an easy feat. The yeshiva incurred many expenses, and new problems cropped up every day, but Rabbi Raichik persevered and succeeded.

Rabbi Ashkenazi became our *Rosh Yeshivah* and gave frequent lectures on *Bava Metzia*, the Talmudic tractate we learned at that time. Mrs. Ashkenazi visited us often in the ghetto to ensure we had enough food and decent clothing. Her warm concern for our wellbeing really touched our hearts.

Crossing the Ocean

When the war was over, we left Shanghai with nary a backward glance. Immediately upon boarding the ship, we felt overwhelming gratitude towards Hashem for His kindness to us. As though in a dream, we watched our ship steam out of the port, hardly able to believe we were on our way to America, to our friends, to the Rebbe.

Upon our arrival, we immediately took a car to Tomchei Tmimim, hearts pounding with the anticipation of meeting our fellow students once again. Many students there had shared hard times with us in Vilna and Shanghai, and we couldn't wait to see them again. After that wonderful reunion, at long last we were told to be ready for *yechidus*. We spent hours in deep introspection, preparing for our meeting with the Rebbe Rayatz. That evening, at the appointed time, we all gathered in 770. What followed was so intense, so moving, that it still remains difficult for me to describe it on paper.

We all entered the Rebbe's room together, accompanied by our *mashpia*, Reb Shmuel Levitin. My emotions totally overwhelmed my faculties; afterward, I could not remember a single thing the Rebbe said to us. All I could do was look, and look again, at the saintly Rebbe, at the holy countenance that had infused us with strength and cared for our needs during all these difficult years.

The Rebbe Rayatz Makes a Shidduch

Reb Yochonon Gordon brought the Rebbe a chicken for *kaparos* every year, on the day before Yom Kippur. After the Rebbe finished the ceremony, Reb Yochonon would take the chicken, slaughter it outside, and then return to the Rebbe's room, enabling the Rebbe to perform the *mitzvah* of covering the blood. During those few minutes, the Rebbe showed Reb Yochonon special affection, addressing him as a person speaks to a close friend.

Reb Yochonon had a daughter of marriageable age, and as he entered the Rebbe's room [1947], the Rebbe Rayatz said to him, “Why aren't you thinking about a *shidduch* for your daughter? In fact, there are *bachurim* who arrived lately from Shanghai...”

Without getting into additional details regarding the ensuing conversation, let me just say that the Rebbe paved the way for my *shidduch* with Reb Yochonon's daughter. I can say with confidence that my father would have been extremely pleased with the *shidduch*... •



Standing, L-R: Yisroel, Sholom Ber, Miriam, Rozy, and Nison Gordon. Seated, L-R: Yochonon Gordon, Shimon and Esther Goldman, and Zisha Gordon.



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