

**“WHERE
DOES YOUR
INSPIRATION
COME
FROM?”**

SHLUCHA MRS. RIVKAH LEIBA
GRONER ANSWERS THIS
QUESTION IN A TALK SHE GAVE
AT THE KINUS HASHLUCHOS
5778 MELAVEH MALKAH.

MY INSPIRATION COMES from the previous generation...

Despite challenges, they did what they had to do, powered by the knowledge that the Rebbe was with them. I try, to the best of my ability, to do the same

I think of my father going on *shlichus* to Worcester as a *bachur*. True, it was only a four-hour drive away, but at that time this was a huge distance. My father drove a used car that often broke down. His cars had no air conditioning until the mid-70s. In those days, even phone calls were prohibitively expensive. Yet, I never heard my father complain. He was the Rebbe's *shliach* and had work to do.

I think of my parents-in-law. My mother-in-law traveled with six children by ship for two weeks coming to Australia. The oldest was nine and my husband Chaim Tzvi was the youngest, six months old. Her husband had flown already on his own when the baby was six weeks old. When my Shvigger was asked how her mother (Mrs. Bryna Konikov) had reacted to her only daughter traveling across the world with six children on a ship for two weeks on her own, my Shvigger replied, "My mother raised me that when the Rebbe tells you to do something, you do it! No matter how challenging it is."

I think of my mother's Zaide, Reb Yisroel Neveler. My mother raised us on stories about him. Because the Rebbe Rayatz wanted him to teach Jewish children Torah, he did so, despite being arrested, interrogated, imprisoned, abused and starved by the Communists. And yet when he came home from prison and saw that his children had been enrolled in a Communist public school (his wife had been told this would increase the chances of his being released), where the children were indoctrinated to believe that there is no G-d, *chas v'shalom*, he said in total sincerity, "I would rather go back to prison than have my children go to public school."

As a *chossid*, Reb Yisroel Neveler was committed, *lev vanefesh*, to the *chinuch* of Jewish children, to the point that during *hakafos* one Simchas Torah, the Rebbe Rayatz told him, "*Du bist azai vi a zuhn tzu mir.*" (You are like a son to me.)

From their lives, I realized that the *koach* to withstand the challenges, to

Rabbi Chaim Tzvi and Rivkah Groner at their wedding, Dec. 9, 1982 (23 Kislev 5743).



push through and achieve our personal missions, comes from the Rebbe.

They knew and we know that as his *shluchim* we were hand-picked for this mission.

It's for the good of the world, and it's also for our good.

I grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts. In those days, children of *shluchim* were not called *yaldei hashluchim*, there were no special camps for us, and no connections. We were simply called out-of-towners. No prestige in that name. Still, as unglamorous as it was, I knew this was the life I wanted as an adult. I wanted to be a *shlucha*.

Fast forward, and I'm engaged to my husband. We had both worked at camps around the U.S. and he more recently had been in South Africa. We spoke about going on *shlichus*. I liked the idea of somewhere warm. Florida? California? I had never even had a passport, so the thought of living in another country never entered my mind.

But, before we looked into anything, my husband-to-be told me that his father always asked his children to ask the Rebbe about coming to Australia.

The Rebbe had told all his siblings



Rivkah Lieba
Groner,
newlywed.

L-R: Miriam Paltiel
Gordon, Rivkah,
and Rebbetzin
Dvorah Groner.



so far not to go to Australia, my *chassan* continued, so asking was really just a formality, and so, JUST TO MAKE HIS FATHER HAPPY, would I agree to write in to the Rebbe asking about us moving to Melbourne? We debated whether to write our pros and cons, is it good or not so good to work in your parents' *moisad*, etc., but in the end we asked simply to go to Australia or not to go. Surprise! Our answer was "*lekabel hahatza'ah*," to accept the offer.

And so we made plans to leave about five months after our wedding and be in Kollel in Melbourne for two years.

There was no Google in those days, or I would have Googled Melbourne and seen that I was going back in time 30 years, with no 24-hour shopping;



Rivkah with her mother, Miriam Paltiel Gordon, on a visit to the U.S.

everything closed at 5 p.m. and nothing was open on Sunday except things called “milk bars” which were like today’s 7-11 stores. There were no packaged kosher products at all, no *chalav Yisroel* milk, cheese, yogurt, or ice cream; no pizza shops; bread came unsliced unless you requested it to be sliced. The colorful bills made me feel like the entire country was playing Monopoly, and there were no Xerox machines, only stencils. Oh, and everyone was exceedingly polite, all the time, even if you were about to drive on the wrong side of the road.

Instead, my young husband gave me one piece of information—it’s summer in January and winter in June. We were going to winter.

I cannot tell you how many gallons of tears were shed in the airport on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5743 (1983). My father was singing *Tyere Brieder*, my sister Rische was crying, my beloved young nieces and nephew were hugging and kissing me. All our belongings and wedding presents were stuffed into four suitcases and we were off!

First stop, Chicago, where my sister Zeesy came to the airport with her



The young couple joined the senior shlichim, Rabbi Yitzchok Groner and Rebbetzin Dvorah.

kids to say goodbye. More tears.

Then California, Hawaii, New Zealand and finally Melbourne. We didn’t *fly over* those places. We stopped in each and every one of them. That’s how it was in 1983.

Our early years of *shlichus* were blessed with working and living around my parents-in-law, Rabbi Yitzchok Groner z”l and *tbl”ch* my dear Shvigger Rebbetzin Devora Groner, may she continue to fulfill her *shlichus* in good health. If I felt anything was difficult, I only needed to hear from my Shvigger how it was when she came in 1959.

When we got to Melbourne in 1983,

phone calls were \$2 a minute and you could not dial direct, you had to book the call with an operator, and the phones were still DIAL phones. In the U.S., touch-tone phones had been the norm for years. But it (and everything) was still easier than it had been in 1959!

We resorted to letters, aérograms, small packages, and mailing photos, back and forth with my parents and my siblings. The mailman and I became very good friends. Once I figured out his schedule, I would go outside at the appropriate time and from down the block he'd wave at me letting me know if there was an aérogram or package for me.

Our two Kollel years ended. This time we wrote all our reasons on both sides of the question, to go or to stay. The reply came back, "*k'atzas yedidim maivinim.*" (According to the advice of close friends who understand.) We spoke to two respected community members and we were staying in Melbourne.

I was homesick, I was lonely, but I was also getting used to it. I made friends with other young mothers, some Australians and some fellow *shluchos*. I started teaching in Beth Rivkah. It was first grade, should have been easy enough, but wait! They didn't understand me!

One day one of my students raised her hand and said, "My mother said that you are allowed to say 'what' because you're American, but really it's rude. You're meant to say, 'I beg your pardon.'" WOOPS! Or in *Chumash Beraishis*, teaching the kids about *eisev* (grass), then asking them to show me the picture flashcard for *eisev* and no one seemed to know what grass was! So I learned to say graaaaahss.

It was not always easy. Actually, it was never easy.



Rivkah with her father, Rabbi Yisroel Gordon, at his 80th birthday (2010).



Rivkah with her twins, Yochonon, left, and Mordechai Avrohom Yeshaya.



The Groner family.

With time, I made friends, my family grew, I made trips home (in the beginning, New York was still “home”—not anymore), and my happiest times were when I had visitors in Melbourne. I am very grateful to anyone who ever made the trip to see me and please don’t ever stop.

Baruch Hashem, I have 11 children. I was pregnant in my teens, twenties, thirties and forties. It didn’t always go smoothly. I had miscarriages between each of my older children. After my fifth child, I again had a miscarriage.

By this point in time (1994), shortly after Gimmel Tammuz, Trans-Pacific communication had improved, we had fax machines and phone cards, and it was much easier to be in contact with my family in the U.S. Therefore, I knew that around the same time, my sisters also had miscarriages. I wrote a letter to the Rebbe. The letter I read in the *Igros* was about how saying *Chitas* brings good health. I decided to start saying *Chitas* no matter what, no excuses.

Within a few months, we all once again became pregnant and all of us had healthy children, *B”H*. My son (aptly named Menachem Mendel) is now 22 and has five younger siblings. In the 23 years since, only once did I have to catch up on *Chumash* the next day.

In my own personal struggles, far away in Australia, post-Gimmel Tammuz, the Rebbe was and is still with me.

I’ve worked hard these past 35 years to be happy when sometimes I could have been miserable. How do I do it, what keeps me going?

It’s something very essential to me. It’s my own connection, my own feeling that the Rebbe is always with me wherever I am and whatever is happening.

Over all the years in Melbourne, I’ve had various trials and tribulations, in my *shlichus* and in my personal life. The Chabad institutions of Australia have faced some painful crises, and we have had our own financial and health-related challenges as well.

I always felt that we’re here for a purpose. I am carrying out the *shlichus* that the Rebbe has for me. The Rebbe is with me. That doesn’t mean things are always easy or go according to my plan. I have learned to keep on keeping on.

Today in Australia, my *shlichus* looks very different than it did when I first arrived. I have joined the *hanhalah* of Ohel Chana (OC) Seminary. I no longer teach young children *Aleph Beis* and *Chumash*. My time is now devoted to taking care of the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of my OC girls, my 54 “other daughters.” Seminary is a pivotal point in a young woman’s life and I feel privileged to play a part in it as well as a tremendous sense of responsibility to my girls.

I now draw my inspiration from these girls, your sisters and daughters, the next generation of the Rebbe’s *shluchos*.

And now, since we are gathered together, *shluchos* from every corner of the world, let us take advantage of this tremendous opportunity, please. There are so many *shluchos* sitting here tonight who have been blessed with tremendous *brachos* including babies born, *shidduchim* found, and *yeshuos* of all types, from the *brachos* shared at last year’s *melaveh malkah*. So now, with no calculations and no further discussion, won’t you turn to your neighbor and with your whole heart *bentch* her with *gezunt* for her, for her whole family? *Bentch* her with the *brachah* of children, *shidduchim*, *parnassah*, *menuchas hanefesh*, *shalom bayis*, *hatzlachah* in her work and *Yiddishe chassidishe nachas* from her children and her spiritual children. And of course the biggest *brachah* of all: That the Rebbe should return to us immediately and lead us to the *Geulah—b’karov mamash* now. *L’chaim!* ❁

Rivkah with her father and father-in-law and baby, Esther Menucha Rochel, in Melbourne, Australia (2004).

