

Rabbi Levitansky receiving a dollar from the Rebbe

SHABBOS IN A GAS STATION

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It happened almost forty years ago. Rabbi Chaim I. Drizin, the Chabad Shliach in S. Francisco, received a call from a Reform temple in Sacramento, California. They wanted their kids to experience a truly Chassidic Shabbos, and they wanted to know whether he would run a Shabbos program out in the mountains at their camp. He said yes, on three conditions—that there be no open violations of Shabbos; that he would be in charge of arranging the food; and that there would be a *mechitzah* between the boys and the girls during davening, as is the custom in traditional synagogues. The Reform temple consented, and the Shabbaton was on its way.

Rabbi Drizin called Rabbi Avrohom Levitansky, *zichrono livrochoh*, and me, and asked us to take part. I live in Long Beach and Rabbi Levitansky lived in Simcha Monica, so we arranged to fly up north together in order to join Rabbi Drizin. We were very excited, as we would be providing 100 Jewish kids with a genuine taste of Shabbos.

There was only one problem. Rabbi Levitansky and I both had prior Shlichus commitments on Friday morning. Try as we might, we could not find substitutes or arrange postponements.

So, reluctantly, we scheduled a flight from Los Angeles to Sacramento that would leave at three o'clock.

The flight was less than two hours. We would arrive before 5:00 and Shabbos would begin at 7:00. A driver would be waiting, and we had been told that the campsite was about 40 minutes' drive from the airport, so we were confident that we would make it in time for Shabbos.

The Reform temple sent a teacher, Jack, to greet us at the airport and take us to the campsite.

As soon as we saw him, we asked how long it would take to get there.

"About two hours under normal circumstances," he said. "Normal circumstances?" we asked.

"I came here straight from work in my Corvette," he said. "We'll all have to squeeze in as there are only two seats, go to my dad's home and change cars." (For those who have never seen a Corvette before, there are two seats in front, for the driver and passenger, and a small place behind it to put some stuff.) "This will add half an hour," continued Jack. "We should be there in about two and a half hours."

In other words, we wouldn't be there until half an hour after Shabbos came in. Rabbi Levitansky and I looked at each other in shock. Now what?

We immediately loaded Jack's car with the wine, challahs, and prayer books which we had brought with us from Southern California. Rabbi Drizin, true to his word, had arranged for the rest of the food. After we loaded the car, Rabbi Levitansky said to me, "Sit in the front passenger seat."

I did—and then he lay himself down on the boxes of wine in the hatchback. From that prone position, he looked at our host and said firmly, "Jack, you're not going to pick up another car. We're going directly to the camp, and you've got to drive 90 miles per hour."

At first, Jack thought he was kidding. After a few moments, he realized just how serious he was.

He started the car and began to drive down the freeway. We kept screaming, "Faster! Faster! Faster!"—until he was indeed going 90 miles an hour.

After half an hour at this breakneck pace, he started to slow down again. "You can't slow down!" we exclaimed. "You can't slow down—keep moving!"

"There's a cop behind me," Jack said nervously. "What do you want me to do?" There was nothing we could do. A couple of minutes later, fortunately, the cop got off the freeway, and we started chanting, "Jack, Jack! Faster, faster!" Sure enough, he got back up to 90 miles an hour.

Editor's Note: At the *shloshim* of his dear friend and colleague, Rabbi Zev Kurtzman a"l, Rabbi Levitansky said, "The Chabad minhag is not to say a *hesped*. The *niftar* definitely would not want *hespedim* to be said. Therefore I will tell a story instead." And he proceeded to tell a story about Rabbi Kurtzman. In this vein, we are printing a story about Rabbi Levitansky as the *Rebbe*. Levitansky's children note that their father would often retell this story during Camp Shabbatons and he would stress and elaborate on it as only he could, in true Levitansky style. This story is a composite of the versions of Rabbi Engel and Rabbi Levitansky (as contributed by his children).

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Then he said, "There's a problem. We're on a freeway that's marked Highway 50/Interstate 80. I only wanted the 80—I don't know how I missed the turnoff. We're supposed to take the 80 to Auburn, but I don't know how I got us off the 80, and we've been going 90 miles an hour the whole time."

Rabbi Levitansky and I glanced at each other. What a nightmare.

"Pull over and check the map again," we said. "We can't afford a mistake." So Jack pulled over and consulted the map. He found the mistake—he had indeed missed the turnoff, about fifteen miles back.

"I can rectify the problem," he assured us. "I can stay on the 50 and take it to the 49, which also has an Auburn exit. That's the only way we have a chance to make up the time we lost."

"Go for it," we implored him.

The plan worked perfectly until we turned off the interstate and onto California State Road 49. In the beginning, it was a paved, wide two-lane road in middle of the forest. But then it became narrower and narrower, until it was almost a one-lane road. And it was going in bends around the mountain. To make matters worse, as we were going

uphill on this road we got stuck in back of a garbage truck. Now, a Corvette, even on such a narrow road, can hold the road and go quicker than a regular car, but this truck was going about 10 to 15 miles an hour, and it was getting later. Jack tried to go around the truck. But he couldn't see if there were other cars coming. Finally, we came to a stretch of the road that was straight for a few hundred feet. Jack stepped on the gas, swerved around this truck, and we were on our way again. By this time, the road had turned from a paved road to a dirt road, and we realized that it had been made for horses and buggies in the time of the Gold Rush, and had never been paved since.

By now, Jack understood the importance of getting us to the camp in time for the beginning of Shabbos, and we

were holding our breath. It was really scary—would we make it or not? Would Jack be able to keep the car on this narrow, winding road driving so quickly?

Suddenly it was 6:30. Shabbos would begin in only half an hour. Rabbi Levitansky and I started to talk about where we should stay for Shabbos, since we clearly weren't going to make it to the camp. About every two miles, there were houses in the forest. Should we knock on the door of one of the homes and ask to stay with them for the next 24 hours? Or should we just sleep in the forest?

Jack heard our debate. "You guys aren't serious?" he asked.

"We sure are serious!" I replied. "We don't drive on Shabbos."

"But there are a hundred kids waiting," he said. "They've never experienced a Shabbos. If you guys would just drive half an hour into Shabbos, they can have twenty-three and a half hours of Shabbos with you! This way, they'll have nothing."

We shook our heads. "The reason they asked for us," Rabbi Levitansky explained, "is that we believe in Shabbos so much that we would never drive on Shabbos. If we drove a little, it would invalidate everything we believe in. We

would have nothing to give those kids."

Jack got the message, but he was very unhappy as he realized he was the cause of our potentially having to sleep in the forest. So he kept driving as fast as he safely could. We didn't know exactly when Shabbos started in this part of California, but we figured that it couldn't be earlier than 7:00. We told Jack that at 6:59 we would get out of the car no matter what. Jack kept reassuring us that we'd get there in time.

At ten minutes to seven, we saw a sign—"Auburn six miles: population 3000."

We were ecstatic! How could we have gotten so close? Maybe he had the time wrong! We were so relieved, because at least now we could get to Auburn before Shabbos.

At exactly two minutes to seven, Jack pulled his car off that tiny state road 49 into the city of Auburn. We told him to drive into the gas station across the street and park behind the building.

"But we have no permission!" he protested. "We'll arrange it all!" we assured him.

We immediately took out three prayer books, our *talleim*, two big challahs, and two half-gallon bottles of wine. We closed the door of his car and announced, "It's Shabbos!"

With only a minute to spare, we had brought in Shabbos, here in the gas station in Auburn, California.

We then went to the gas station owners and explained our predicament. They were very nice to us and allowed us to leave the car there. It was now our intention to find the camp—maybe we could walk to it. We had high hopes—after all, Auburn was the exit we should have taken on the 80 freeway and we were in Auburn. How far could the camp possibly be? We started asking around the area, but no one seemed to know where the camp was. "Oh I know," the first person we asked told us. "It's 15 miles this way."

The next person: "No, it's 20 miles the other way!"

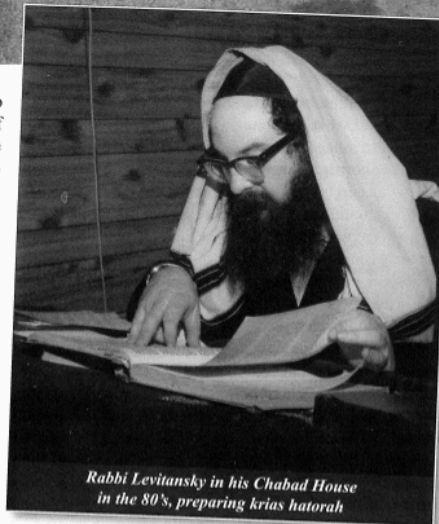
Obviously we couldn't rely on that information. Then the third person told us he knew exactly where the camp was—precisely 25 miles up this particular dirt road.

Twenty-five miles? First, Jewish law prohibits walking on Shabbos more than a certain distance away from a city or town, in unsettled areas. That's called the *techum Shabbos*, and it is calculated to be a distance of about 4,000 feet. Twenty-five miles was a lot longer than 4,000 feet. And even if we were allowed to walk the distance, we weren't exactly athletes. We wouldn't arrive until after Shabbos!

Suddenly we realized we needed to figure out some alternatives.

"I'll call the camp," Jack said. "I've got to let them know we're here."

"Please don't," we said. "Let's do a real Shabbos while



Rabbi Levitansky in his Chabad House in the 80's, preparing *krias hatorah*

we're here."

Jack thought it was crazy, but—fascinated by us and our determination, and wanting to see what happens next—he agreed. We went back to the gas station. It was time for Kabbolas Shabbos, the prayer to welcome the Shabbos.

I didn't know what we were going to do, but Rabbi Levitansky did. He turned to me and said, "Let's daven Maariv just the way they do it in the Chabad House—we'll sing at the singing parts, we'll dance at the dancing parts. It'll be great."

And that's just what we decided we would do.

I gave Jack a siddur and

said, "Please join us!"

"But I don't believe in G-d—it doesn't make sense for me to take part."

"Jack," we told him, "we promise that by the end of Shabbos you'll believe."

We started to daven Maariv. When we came to L'choh Dodi—the centuries-old song to welcome the Sabbath Bride—Rabbi Levitansky used a traditional melody from the Chabad House. Suddenly Jack went white. It was clear that something had affected him. He looked like he was going to cry.

"My grandfather used to sing that same melody," he said quietly, stunned.

From then on, he joined in wholeheartedly. After the davening, it was time to make kiddush. The only problem was that we had half-gallon jugs of wine, but no cups. We explained to Jack what the problem was.

"When you make kiddush," we explained, "you have to make it on a full cup of wine and drink at least half of what's in the cup."

Now, since we only had half-gallon jugs of wine, that meant that the three of us had to consume a quart of wine then and there! And we did! ("I make a royal kiddush on a barrel full of wiiittinne.")

Then we went back into the gas station to wash our

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hands for Hamotzi. The people at the gas station treated us very nicely. They may not have understood what we were doing, but I guess they saw that we were sincere. So we washed, and then we went back to our little corner behind the gas station to eat our Shabbos meal—wine and bread, bread and wine, wine and bread—and a lot of singing.

By now it was nine p.m., and what were we going to do about sleeping? We needed a place to lie down. Rabbi Levitansky suggested that we sleep on the hood of the car, being that the hood of a Corvette is very long. Two of us would sleep on the hood while the third would keep guard. Throughout the night, we'd take turns. I looked at Rabbi Levitansky and said, "Avremel, are you crazy?!?! Who knows what kind of people live in this place? I'm going to a motel to find a room."

Fortunately, right across from the gas station was a motel. We went in wearing our *talleisim*, since we didn't want to leave them at the gas station. I put on Rabbi Levitansky's tallis, and he put on mine, being that it was at night and we don't make a *brochoh* on the tallis at night. However, if you wear someone else's tallis, you are not obligated to make a *brochoh*.

"We're Sabbath-observing Jews," I explained to the lady behind the desk, who didn't hide her amazement at the garb—and the beards—of two of her three potential guests. "We need a room but we have no money on us right now. We do have enough money to pay you—it's just that it's in the car."

She looked out the window and saw the car we pointed to, parked across the street at the gas station.

"Tomorrow night we'll pay you," I said. "Is that satisfactory?"

She shook her head.

"I can't do it," she said flatly.

Jack got upset. He took out his wallet

and said, "I'll pay — give them the room!"

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We shook our heads.

"Jack," Rabbi Levitansky said, "we appreciate the offer, but we

can't take the room with you paying for it on the Sabbath, since you are as Jewish as we are."

"Here's my whole wallet," Jack told the lady behind the counter. "You can keep it until after the Sabbath ends tomorrow night. There is enough money in the wallet to cover the bill and plenty more."

The lady still looked doubtful. "I have to check with my boss," she said.

She went back to the office and after about half a minute we saw the door open a drop and an older woman (who was probably her mother) peeked out of the door for a second and then quickly slammed the door. A few seconds later the secretary emerged and said, "We can't do it."

We couldn't understand—it didn't make sense. We found out later that Auburn, California, was close to Reno, Nevada, one of the gambling capitals of the West, and many people who lost all their money in Reno would come through Auburn with sob stories looking for a place to stay. She thought we might have been in that category. Even with Jack's wallet in her possession, she wouldn't let us stay without paying.

So we left that motel and asked the people we met on the street whether there was a hotel nearby. We were in luck—there was a bigger hotel three blocks down the road. Rabbi Levitansky said, "Let me tell the story this time."

So we got into the hotel and Rabbi Levitansky explained to the clerk, "We're Orthodox Jews, we're rabbis. It's the Sabbath and we need a place to stay. We have the money—we just can't pay you until tomorrow night."

"Sure," said the man, as he took out a piece of paper. "Just fill out your information here."

"We can't," Rabbi Levitansky explained. "It's our Sabbath and we can't write."

The man looked pained—he wanted to do it, and we had the sense that he truly wanted to help us.

"I can't do it," he said sadly. "My boss is away for the next six days—I'm only the manager."

Now what?

Rabbi Levitansky again suggested that we go back to sleep on the car. "No way," I said. "I'd rather sleep in the prison here. At least there I don't have to be worried."

We asked directions to the police station and off we went. The police station was the size of one large room. It had three cells, two of which were occupied, and a counter where one stood and waited to talk to a policeman. When we walked in there was a woman officer sitting behind a

bulletproof window. When she saw us, her face turned white and she grabbed her desk.

"Yessss, how can I help you?" the policewoman asked. "I'm telling the story now!" Jack said firmly. He turned to the policewoman. "Look. These are Orthodox Rabbis. They don't drive on the Sabbath. They have the money to pay for the hotel, but they don't handle money on the Sabbath. Please help us."

Suddenly we heard the door behind us open and a booming voice said, "Can I help you?" Standing behind us was an officer that was about six feet tall. He had one hand on the doorway and the other on his gun (apparently ready to use it).

He looked us over. We were probably the first Orthodox Rabbis he had ever seen.

We explained the situation to him. After hearing our predicament he said, "We have three cells here, but two of them are taken. We've also got a bench, but that's about it."

Then he had an idea. "If you want, you can sleep in the main jail; they have room over there."

"OK," we said. "How do we get there?"

"No, no!" the officer said. "You can't go there yourself. In a few minutes the sheriff will be here, and he'll take you there."

"They also can't drive or ride on the Sabbath," Jack explained. "They can't do that."

"Maybe we can walk there and the sheriff will just drive next to us?" we suggested.

"Nope," said the officer. "It's about 15 miles from here. By the time you get there it will be morning."

As this discussion unfolded, we saw the policewoman in the back of the station working the phone furiously. Suddenly she ran up to the counter.

"I got you a place!" she exclaimed. "It's not so respectful for rabbis, but at least it's a place to lay your heads."

"What does that mean?" we asked.

"You'll see," she said. She knew if she had told us the truth, we would never have gone.

"How far is it?"

"Two short blocks away," she assured us. So we walked down to the place with her. When we came there, we noticed a neon sign that said "Traveler's Lodge," with half the words hanging on a hinge and burnt out. We figured, with a name like Traveler's Lodge it couldn't be too bad. As soon as we entered, we realized what she meant when she said that it wasn't a respectable place for rabbis. It was a bar. Music was

playing; people were drinking, shooting pool, doing whatever people do in bars. It turned out that there were four rooms upstairs for people who were too drunk to drive, or at least that's the story we were told. They gave us two of the rooms on the condition that we pay for them the next night. The lady behind the counter said to us, "Oh, you're coming from the police station. Here are your keys. Just go outside and use the steps to go upstairs; your room numbers are 13 and 14." The problem was that we couldn't carry the keys outside on Shabbos.

Jack turned to me. "What are you going to do now? You can't even turn on the light to see the layout of the room."

By now, he knew how we operated. "When you believe in something, it works," I assured him. I asked the woman at the bar, "Can you show us up to our room?"

"Sure," she said. She walked us upstairs (with the keys) and turned on the light for us!

After all this, Jack was intrigued. "What is this? Why do Jews believe in Shabbos?" He had so many questions. We talked until 2:00 in the morning and he was intrigued, impressed, and obviously emotionally moved.

By then he said, "Listen, fellas, I'm one of the teachers of the group. I can't just fail to show up. If you wake up and see that I'm not here, you'll know I went to the camp. I warn you, though: If the other rabbi also doesn't show up, I might just bring a busload of kids down to the gas station to experience Shabbos!"

Rabbi Levitansky and I said goodnight and went to sleep.

In middle of the night, we woke up to the sound of pounding on the door. **Bang Bang BANG.** "You stole my razor!"

Now we've been accused of a lot of things before, but never of stealing someone's razor. (Rabbi Levitansky would say this part while stroking his long beard.)

While this guy, who was obviously drunk, banged on the



Rabbi Levitansky was never far from the phone, fielding questions from around the world



Demonstrating the olive press on Chanukah

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door (which looked like it would break in a minute), we decided to try to escape from the room, because who knew what this guy would do. We then realized for the first time what kind of room we were in: the paint was peeling off the walls and ceiling, and it looked like the whole room would soon collapse. Although we were on the second floor, we ran to the window to try to jump out. To our dismay, the window would not budge; it had been painted over so many times that it just couldn't be opened. In the meantime, the drunkard was still pounding on the door screaming, "You stole my razor."

Finally, I asked him, "Which room are you looking for?" He told us number seven. "This is 13," we called back. "Oh, sorry," he said, and walked away. You can imagine that after that we didn't get much sleep.

At 7:00 a.m., we arose and knocked on Jack's door. No response. The lady behind the counter told us that Jack had left a little while ago to go back to the camp.

We thanked the lady and left the motel.

Rabbi Levitansky and I, wearing tallis and kapoteh, walked through the town of Auburn. Now, in broad daylight, we were the center of attention. People had never seen such a sight! They asked us, "Who are you? What's going on?"

We explained our situation as best we could, and then continued to walk to the gas station. And there we were in for a shock. Our siddurim, challah, and wine were missing. They had disappeared—someone had obviously taken them. The only thing that was left over was a small piece of challah in a bag on the floor. The challah and the wine I could understand—but who in Auburn needed our siddurim?

Keep in mind that this all happened on Shabbos Mevorchim—the day we bless the new month. It's the Chabad custom to say all of Tehillim on Shabbos Mevorchim. How were we going to do that without a Siddur?



Rabbi Levitansky engaged in *mitvto lulav*

"Well, how much of Tehillim do you know by heart?" I asked Rabbi Levitansky. He knew most of the Tehillim by heart.

Between the two of us, we said as much as we could of the entire book of Tehillim. We davened by heart, too. By now, it was almost 1:00 p.m. What do we do now? We needed something to eat, to drink—we had absolutely nothing.

Seeing our predicament, the attendant at the gas station said, "There's a restaurant down the block—I know you don't handle money so I'll pay for you." He knew about not handling money on Shabbos but had no clue about kashrus. We couldn't take him up on his thoughtfulness, of course.

Seeing that we wouldn't eat from the restaurant, he showed us a snack machine and a soda machine which were in the gas station. He said—almost begging—"Here, what can you eat? Please take whatever you want." He took a big chain of keys and started to unlock the machines. We took soda and pistachio nuts as the man begged us to take more. We made kiddush on the piece of challah and had soda and nuts for the meal. That was our Shabbos breakfast and lunch.

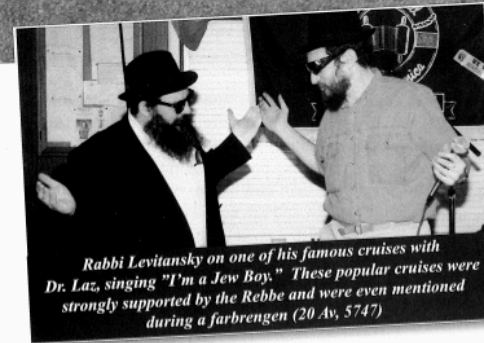
After we ate, we started to ask ourselves questions. Why in the world did G-d send us to spend Shabbos in a place with no Jews? Why would Divine Providence have us spend Shabbos in a gas station?

The two of us knew enough Chassidische stories to know that nothing in the world happens by chance, and there must be some purpose to all this. We decided that maybe there was a Jew in town whom we should meet. So we went to the phone book.

We could find the name of only one person who sounded Jewish—a woman named Esther Rose. We showed the station attendant the entry in the phone book and asked where she lived.

"She lives one mile down the road," he said, shaking his head slowly. "But I wouldn't go there if I were you. She's probably not even Jewish. And even if she is—with the way you guys look, she'll never let you in the house!"

We asked directions to her house and the man gave it to us. As we walked along the road, we entered a forest and were on the path in the forest. Rabbi Levitansky turned to me and said, "I don't know about you but I would rather not get lost in this place." So we turned around and started to walk back. We decided to ask the gas station attendant if there was a park nearby, and we would just spend the afternoon there. There was indeed a park, and the attendant



Rabbi Levitansky on one of his famous cruises with Dr. Laz, singing "I'm a Jew Boy." These popular cruises were strongly supported by the Rebbe and were even mentioned during a *farbrengen* (20 Av, 5747)

gave us directions. He promised to tell Jack, if he came back, where we were. On the way to the park, people kept asking, "Who are you? What are you all about?" One of the people we met happened to be a man who had been the postmaster general of Auburn for the last 40 years. "Are there any Jews in Auburn?" we asked. "What about Esther Rose?"

"I can assure you she's not Jewish," the postmaster general said. "We had a Mr. Cohen here who died about fifteen years ago, but that's the only Jewish person I know who lived in Auburn."

As Rabbi Levitansky and I sat in the park, we wondered again why on earth G-d wanted us to spend Shabbos in Auburn, California. What were we to accomplish there? We wondered whether the kids would come to the park. The park was quiet; no one was around. Since we didn't have a Sefer Torah with us, we started to discuss the *parshah*. Rabbi Levitansky turned to me and said, "Imagine that perhaps since the day that Hashem created the world, this place has been waiting for us to come and say words of Torah here!"

By 6:00, we stood up and headed back to the gas station. A car we didn't recognize, going down the street in the other direction, did a screeching U-turn. And out jumped Jack!

"Hi, guys! How was Shabbos? I want to tell you what happened this morning at the Shabbaton. I would have come back to you sooner, but Rabbi Drizin wouldn't let me!"

He was obviously bursting with a story, so we listened.

"The kids were supposed to have an introduction to prayer class this morning," Jack said, excited as could be. "I asked the rabbi if I could speak instead of him."

Rabbi Levitansky and I looked at each other. That was certainly unusual!

"I told those kids the way Shabbos really is!" he told us, and he was clearly a changed man. His experiences with us the previous night had given him strong feelings about

Shabbos and Judaism.

"I told those kids why they had to believe in G-d!" he thundered. "I told those kids why they had to believe in Shabbos!"

He went on and on with excitement, and then at 7:00 p.m., he said, "Great—hop into my car! You can drive now!" He told us that when he had told the campers the whole story, they didn't believe him that the rabbis were stuck in the gas station. "Please come with me now, so they'll see I wasn't lying," he begged.

We explained that Shabbos was 25 hours, not 24, so it didn't end until 8:00, and it was still too early for us to drive. Jack just shook his head in wonderment—there was so much that he didn't yet know.

We waited until Shabbos ended, and then we went to pay for the room at the bar. The lady at the bar told us, "You've got a good friend at the police station. She told me your story and she said she was so sure that you guys were honest that if you didn't come back and pay for the room, she would pay for it herself."

Well, when we heard that, we realized our next stop was the police station so we could thank her! Then we thanked the man at the gas station.

Only then did we head to the camp.

Once we arrived, we realized how fortunate we were that we hadn't entertained the possibility of walking there. It turned out to be a 35-minute drive, uphill on a dirt road. We would never have made it. When we arrived at camp, the kids were in the middle of a play. We made Havdalah. When the lights went on after the play, somebody screamed, "THEY'RE HERE!"

Then all the kids started singing, "*Haywaynu shalom aleichem*," to welcome us.

They sang with gusto as if we were heroes, returning

What's the point of teaching a song that would seem infantile to these older kids?

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It looked very strange—the kids all looking at each other, laughing, screaming, jumping, and pointing at each other.

from the battlefield after a great victory. In their minds, what we had done was an unbelievable sacrifice.

I then asked the teachers whether I could tell a story at the campfire that night, since we hadn't had the opportunity to interact with the kids on Shabbos. He agreed, and I told a well-known story about a 14-year-old boy in Czarist Russia who was drafted into the Russian army but wouldn't give up his religion. The story made a noticeable impact on the students.

"Now I understand your secret," Jack said to me as I concluded the story. "I teach them Judaism and I don't believe in it. You teach them and you believe in it, and look at the difference. They are literally eating out of your hands."

As we left the campfire, I announced, "Since we didn't spend Shabbos here and didn't have a chance to get to know any of you, we're going up to the mess hall to sing some songs. Anyone is welcome to join us."

It was late at night and we didn't know if anyone would show. Five minutes later, six teenagers walked in.

Then ten more. Then ten more after that.

Within ten minutes, all of the hundred teenage campers were in that room. We started singing songs, and then Rabbi Levitansky did what I thought was the most foolish thing—he started singing a song about keeping kosher.

Now, this is a great song for kids—if the kids are

eight, nine, or ten years old. But these were sophisticated 15- and 16-year-olds. The song went like this: "All the animals that I eat must chew their cud and have split feet. Kosher meat just can't be beat, so throw away that ham. Throw away that ham and bacon—I won't eat it, you're mistaken! I'm a Jew and I'm not fakin'—I want kosher meat to eat."

I was just shaking my head. What's the point of teaching a song that would seem infantile to these older kids? And what's the point of singing about kosher food in a region that has no kosher butchers? You're putting the kids in a dilemma, I thought.

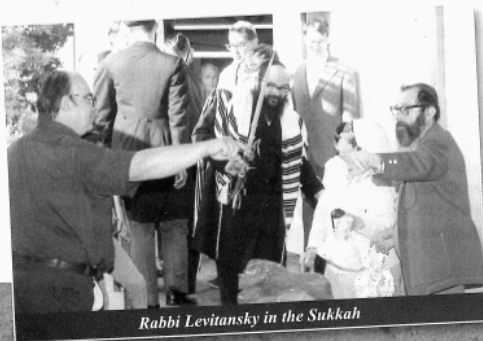
All of a sudden, the kids screamed out, "We wanna hear that song again!"

This was nuts! I then took the cue, jumped on a table and made an auction—"Who wants to hear this song three times?" I asked the excited crowd of kids. "Four times? Seven times? Eight times? Ten times?"

We ended up singing it fifteen times! By the time they were singing the song for the third or fourth time, they had developed comical hand gestures to go along with the words. It looked very strange—the kids all looking at each other, laughing, screaming, jumping, and pointing at each other. We sang the song fifteen times, and then we sang another few songs, and the evening was over. The chaperones were totally floored by what had just happened, and, frankly, so were we.

The kids went to bed, and Rabbi Levitansky and I were left with the mystery of why we had traveled all this way, spent Shabbos in a gas station and gone through all this just to teach some songs to these kids.

Quite a few years passed before we got the answer. I was invited to spend Shabbos in Park City, Utah, with a group from a "Conservaform" Temple. A young couple in their early 20's drove us from



Rabbi Levitansky in the Sukkan

Salt Lake City to the campsite. They were to be the chaperones on this trip. "Are there many people who keep kosher here in Salt Lake City?" I asked.

This was before a Chabad House was established in Salt Lake City.

"A few older families keep kosher," the husband said, "and so do we. We are the only young couple here who keeps kosher." This was very intriguing to me and I asked, "What makes a couple your age commit to keeping kosher in the middle of Salt Lake City?"

"I'll tell you why," the wife said. "It's going to sound like a crazy story. I once went to a Shabbaton and these rabbis who were supposed to come got stuck in a gas station. They came after Shabbos was over, and that night they sang this crazy song about kosher. The song began with 'all the animals that I eat' and ended with 'I want kosher meat to eat.' I was so touched by what they did," she continued, "that even though I was sixteen, and I couldn't keep kosher at home, I decided that when I had my own home, it would be kosher."

How shocked the couple was when I told them that I was one of the rabbis who had been stuck in the gas station! Now our experience began to make sense to me.

Not long afterwards, I was invited to speak to a confirmation class at a Reform temple in my city of Long Beach. The topic given to me was Jewish Traditions. When I finished the talk, I went to the administrator who had invited me.

"Listen," I said, always happy to find a new way to speak to kids. "We do more than give talks to students. We also offer Shabbaton programs to show the kids a traditional Shabbat. In fact, there is a Reform temple in Riverside that sends its students every two years to spend a traditional Shabbat at our Shul."

"I know you do," she said.

"How do you know?" I asked, curious.

"Before I came to Long Beach, I was the administrator of a temple school in Sacramento. Whenever we spoke to the students about the sleep-away programming that we were planning,

This poem was written in the year 5758 (Shnas Nachas) by Rabbi Levitansky, for one of his daughter's school productions.

Simcha Monica Nachas

To bring the Rebbe nachas is our goal
We therefore try to serve Hashem with our heart and soul
Thousands the shofar do hear
As we go for *tashlich* at the pier
Five hundred get rid of their *tzoros*
When they come to us, to shlog *kapporas*
Over eighteen hundred people, lulav and esrog shake
And hundreds, the *Leishev Ba'sukah brochah* make
On Chanukah all nations see our might
When five* public menorahs we do light
Purim brings thousands together, from far and near
With *matanos laevyonim*, *mishloach manos*, and Megillah to hear
You really feel that you have left Mitzraim
When the mitzvah of *achilas matzah* people are *mikayaim*
About Shavuot, we always dream
At the ocean it is *aseres hadibros* and ice cream
With *ahavas yisroel*, true love
We are *mevateil* Tisha B'av
On a thousand men a year, we put Tefillin
Distributing calendars and Neshek for the women
All this in Simcha Monica city
For those not there, it is a pity!

"This number has grown over the years. Last year there were about 25 public Menorahs in the city of Los Angeles. The Levitansky family avers that all the numbers in this poem are accurate and are not exaggerated for poetic effect. It was very important to Rabbi Levitansky A"H to keep count of how many people were convinced to lay tefillin, shake lulav and esrog, etc. each year, and he would encourage his children and students to keep those numbers growing.

SHABBOS IN A GAS STATION

Rabbi Avraham Halevi Levitansky, a"h, was sent on Shlichus to California forty years ago, together with his wife Rebbetzin Chaye Devorah *tichye*. In honor of the Rebbe's 70th birthday, in 1972, they moved to Simcha Monica to establish a Chabad House there. Over the years, the Levitanskys reached out to thousands of people of all walks of life, welcoming them into their home, their Shul, their lives and their hearts, with their unique manifestation of genuine Chassidic warmth and integrity.

Rabbi Levitansky was a true example of a Shliach. He was totally given over to the Rebbe and did his Shlichus with utmost dedication, joyously and with Chassidische *ahavas yisroel*. He loved Yidden and they loved him, and this was his secret to helping so many come back to the ways of Hashem. He had a special *chayus* in dealing with children, in Release Time, Hebrew school and Camp Gan Israel.

Rabbi Levitansky combined a broad base of Torah knowledge with a rare gift of penetrating insight and refreshing analysis. He was blessed with a keen ability to zero in on the core of any issue. Both scholar and layman alike sought his expert advice and illuminating guidance, which he selflessly shared, no matter the time of day or night.

He was the address for many Shluchos, N'shei Chabad, and women in general, who came to him with their *shaylos* in *taharas hamishpacha*. He answered these questions, regardless of the hour in which they were received, with the delicate care and sensitivity that these types of *shaylos* deserve. He was also very involved in promoting *ahavas yisroel*, helping to resolve disputes and *sholom bayis* issues. Rabbi Levitansky's love of every Jew and ability to rise above petty *machlokes* to devote himself to his Shlichus serve as models to all of us.

A raconteur par excellence, Rabbi Levitansky could regale a crowd with his wealth of stories, inspiring singing or simply by his warm smile and contagious laugh. He was a chossid of the Rebbe in its fullest sense, a true gem of a human being.

Rabbi Levitansky leaves behind his wife and a large family of children, many of whom serve as Chabad Shluchim all over the world. He also leaves behind thousands of admirers and students whom he inspired and shepherded. His students and children continue to uplift and change the world for the good, following in the footsteps of their beloved teacher.

On Sunday, the 10th of Sivan, Rabbi Levitansky was called back by his Creator, no doubt to assist in the collective Heavenly process of pleading for the Redemption on behalf of the Jewish People. As in his lifetime, we are certain that he continues to accentuate the positive aspect in each and every Jew, in his inimitable, signature "Levitansky style."

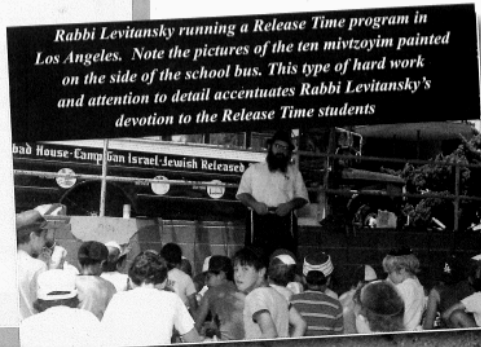
May his memory be a blessing.

they responded that it had better be as good as the Shabbaton that had taken place two years earlier, when two rabbis got stuck in a gas station. The kids learned so much about Shabbat and dedication to their faith that weekend. It was a most unbelievable experience."

I told her that I was one of the rabbis... and I'll never forget the expression on her face.

Rabbi Levitansky also has a postscript to the story: "One day I was sitting in Chabad House, when I walked a man with two kids. The second he saw me, he pointed at me and said, 'THAT'S HIM!!!!' I didn't know what I was going to be accused of, so I stood up and asked the man if I could be of any assistance. The answer that I got completely surprised me; he told me that today was the birthday of one of his kids. For a trip, the child had insisted that they visit the rabbi who had spent Shabbos in a gas station. The father of the boy was one of the students who were there, and he had told the story repeatedly to his kids."

And that's how my beloved friend Rabbi Levitansky and I came to our understanding of why G-d had brought it about that the two of us would spend Shabbos in a gas station. We realized that we had made a greater impact by spending Shabbos in the gas station than we would have had we made it to the camp in time for Shabbos.



Rabbi Levitansky running a Release Time program in Los Angeles. Note the pictures of the ten *mitzvot* painted on the side of the school bus. This type of hard work and attention to detail accentuates Rabbi Levitansky's devotion to the Release Time students



I live in Melbourne, Australia. On 19 Sivan, on a Friday night, my father passed away in New York. Two of my brothers, who also live in Australia, decided to fly to New York for the *levayah*. I wasn't sure what to do. I was worried about how my family would fare without me. In addition, we did not have money for the ticket, and I did not have a passport. I decided to stay in Australia and sit shiva by myself.

On Sunday morning, Devorah Rochel Herszberg and Devorie Reicher, at two separate times, came to be *menachem ovel*. They each asked me why I wasn't going to New York, and I explained my previously stated concerns. Devorie said to me, "Do you mean that if you had a passport and ticket you would go? And you could travel with us!" Devorie, together with my cousin Chanie Blesofsky, was traveling the very next morning!

At that moment, it all became clear to me and I said, "Yes, if I had a way, I would go."

Well, within two hours, Devorah Rochel and Devorie organized a ticket for me and made arrangements with the passport agency. Devorah Rochel drove me to the passport agency to pick up my passport from the lady who was WAITING OUTSIDE FOR ME! My sister-in-law, Shternie Engel, organized meals for my family for the two weeks I would be away, and Devorie called to ask me what my favorite foods were, as she was buying food for me for the trip. I just couldn't believe this.

My flight to Los Angeles was very good because I was with Devorie, Chanie, Orit Sheina Stern and Orit's sister. In Los Angeles it was discovered that there was no room for me on their flight. Orit's sister offered to change places with me, but

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