

*I grew
up in* **MEAH
SHEARIM;**





My HUSBAND *became a* LUBAVITCHER

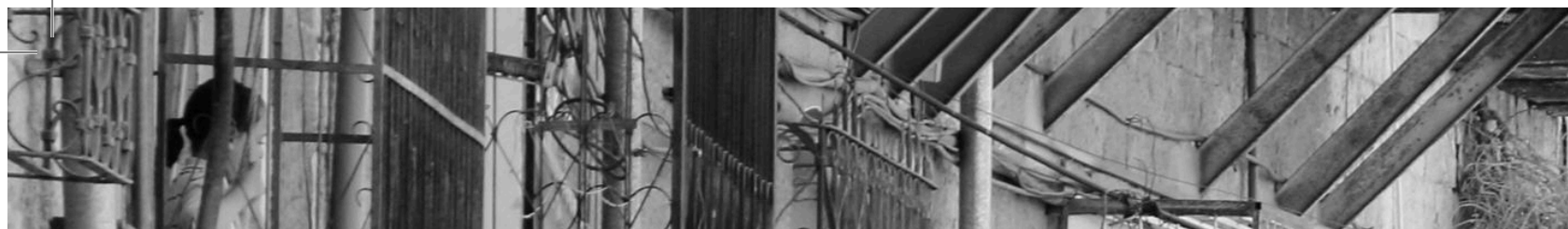
RIVKA AND MOSHE FARKASH

interview their dear grandmother

REBBETZIN ROCHEL FARKASH

shown here with her husband

RABBI YEKUSIEL FARKASH



Who were your parents? Please tell us a little about them.

My mother, Liba, was a fifth-generation Yerushalmi who lived in the Old City. She was the daughter of Reb Amram Blau—one of the founders of *Neturei Karta*. The *Neturei Karta* movement today is completely different from what it was when he founded it in the 1930s. *Neturei Karta*'s mission then was to fight against the secular anti-Torah agenda of Zionism.

The early Zionists wanted to create a state that didn't even mention Hashem's Name in its Declaration of Independence. They were cutting off the *peyos* of religious children and brainwashing them against Yiddishkeit in schools. This was what my grandfather was against. He led demonstrations and advocated for

Shabbos, *kashrus*, and *tznius*. He was arrested many times for things like standing in front of cars on Shabbos to prevent them from driving.

Despite his passionate convictions, he had tremendous *ahavas Yisroel* and was *mekarev* many Yidden to Yiddishkeit. He never rejected Yidden who weren't *frum*; he welcomed them into his home. In that way, we were Lubavitchers in spirit before we became Lubavitchers formally.

The current *Neturei Karta* movement, which allies itself with the enemies of the Jewish people who wish for our annihilation, is a disgrace to my grandfather's legacy.

My father, Reb Menachem Gromon, was from Warsaw, Poland. His parents were Chana Baila and Mordechai Gromon. They moved to Eretz Yisroel when my father was six. They lived in Yaffo, then Bnei Brak, and finally settled in the Old City. They left Bnei Brak because a *melamed* who taught their children said something in modern Hebrew— something like "Shabbat Shalom." My grandparents said, "We didn't

leave Poland for our children to learn *Tzionis*."

My father's parents were Sochatchov *chassidim*, but my father joined his brother Avraham and became a *chossid* of Reb Areleh, whose Chassidus is called Toldos Aharon. All of his siblings followed different Rebbeim, depending on whom and what they were exposed to.

My father, Reb Menachem Gromon, was a humble and learned person. He learned in many yeshivos, including the Lubavitcher Yeshivah Toras Emes in Yerushalayim.

My father would always recite *Mishnayos* when he walked down the street because the Frierdiker Rebbe said one should purify the air that way. At my father's bar mitzvah, his father was back in Poland on business, so his older brother gave him *tefillin* and a cookie and said, "Today is your bar mitzvah." That



Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash's maternal grandfather, Reb Amram Blau.



**Letter from the Rebbe, published in *Igros Kodesh*,
addressed to Reb Amram Blau in Elul 5716/1956:**

Peace and blessing!

It gave me pleasure to be informed by Rabbi Uriel Zimmer that, at my request, he visited [you, the honorable Reb Amram Blau,] and spoke with you face-to-face regarding the dissemination of the study of Chassidus in those circles and environments within your reach and influence.

Especially significant was the mention, during the conversation, of your lineage and roots, which were connected—and certainly also bound—to our holy Rebbeim, the leaders of our generation, among them the Tzemach Tzedek.

Holiness does not depart from its place; therefore, children and grandchildren merit beauty and wisdom, and so forth. And if this is true regarding physical beauty and wisdom, how much more so regarding spiritual beauty and wisdom.

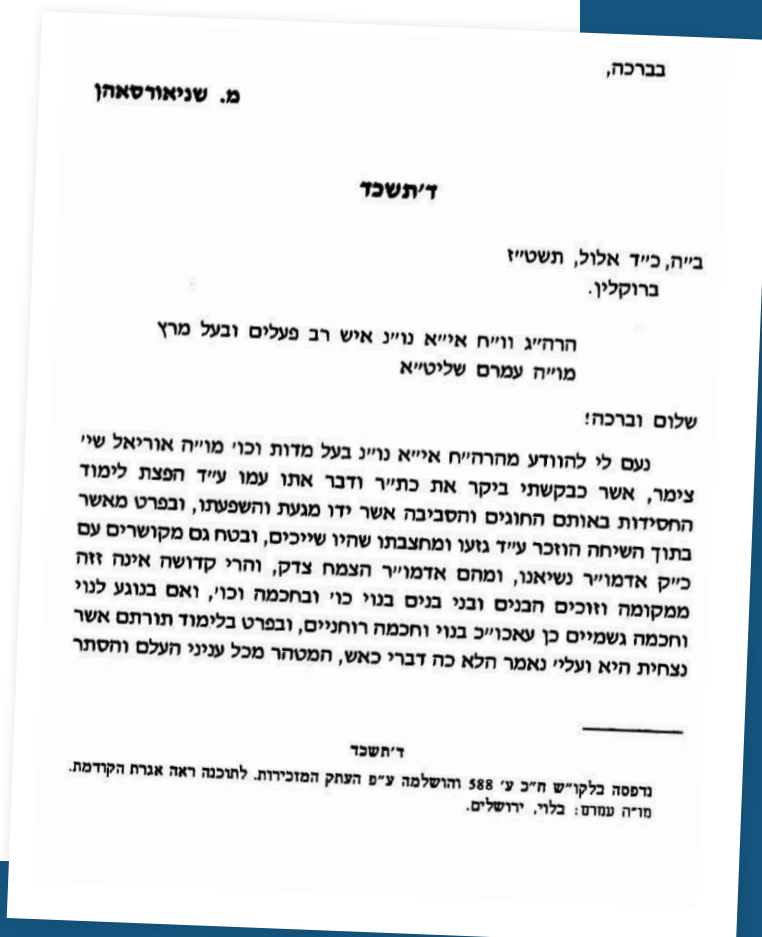
Particularly through the study of their Torah, which is eternal, and about which it is said, “Behold, My words are like fire”—a fire that purifies from all forms of concealment and hiddenness even more than purification through water. As our Sages state (*Sanhedrin* 39a): “The primary immersion is in fire.”

And since we now find ourselves at the end of the year, and in but a short time will enter a new year, therefore—based on the words of the Alter Rebbe in *Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 14—that each and every year there descends and shines from the Supernal Wisdom a new and renewed light, one that has never before shone in the higher realms, and from which the lower beings receive their vitality—

Therefore, I propose that it is most fitting that the renewal of the year, specifically beginning with Rosh Hashanah, should come about through strengthening the study of Chassidus among the public and in places where the public gathers—that is, in synagogues, study halls, and yeshivos where [the honorable Reb Amram Blau] has influence. For the Torah in general is both the light and the vessel through which one can receive and unite with the higher lights and spiritual influences.

It is understood that if it is possible to begin—even for one day during the year

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5716—how good and proper that would be, for a single day in a year is considered like a full year.

And I am confident that for someone such as yourself, further elaboration on the above is unnecessary.

May it be Hashem's Will that through the study of Torah and the spreading of the wellsprings outward—which is the preparation, introduction, and vessel for that which is written, “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea”—through the Torah of Moshiach, who will teach knowledge to all Yidden (which is incomparable to the Torah of today), as our Sages say in *Koheles Rabbah* (chapter 11, on the verse “if there be many years”)—this year should become the year of our true redemption.

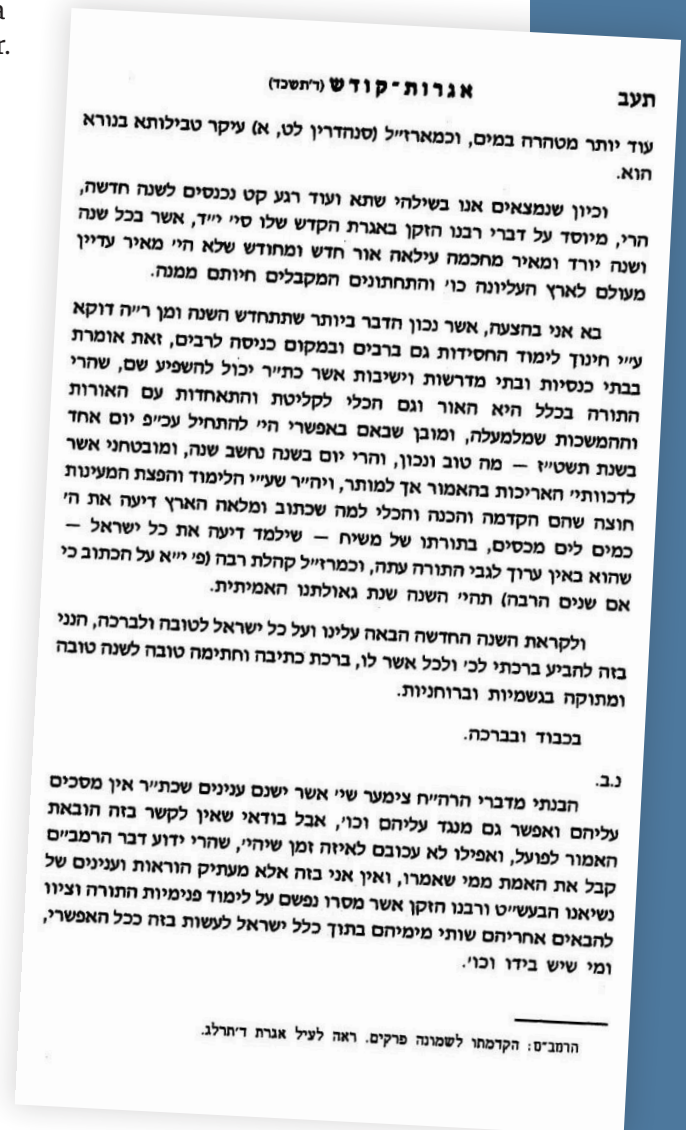
And in honor of the coming new year, which approaches us and all Yidden for goodness and blessing, I hereby extend my blessing to you and to all that is yours: that you be inscribed and sealed for a good and sweet year, both materially and spiritually.

P.S. I understood from your words that there are certain matters with which [the honorable Reb Amram Blau] does not agree, and perhaps even opposes. However, certainly this should not be connected to carrying the above into practice, nor should it cause any delay whatsoever.

For the teaching of the Rambam is well known: “Accept the truth from whoever says it.”

I am doing nothing here other than conveying the directives and teachings of our Rebbeim—the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe—who sacrificed themselves for the study of the inner dimension of Torah, and who instructed those who came after them, those who drink from their waters within *Klal Yisroel*, to do everything possible in this matter.

And whoever has the ability should act accordingly.



was it, nothing more. (Only in Lubavitch do the boys start putting on *tefillin* two months before their bar mitzvah.)

When my parents were 18, they got married. My mother took on her husband's Chassidus and became a follower of Reb Areleh.

My parents were married for ten years before having children. Once, on a *yoma d'pagra*, many people were asking Reb Areleh for *brachos*. Because of my father's humility, he found it difficult to ask for a *brachah*. Reb Areleh turned to him and asked, "Why are you not asking for a *brachah* like everyone else?" My father said simply, "The Rebbe knows what I need."

My mother was the opposite. She visited many *tzaddikim*, *kivrei tzaddikim*, and *tischen* to ask for *brachos*. She also went to the Kosel for 40 days in a row as a *segulah* for a child. One cold morning, she went to *daven* by the Kosel when almost no one was there. She saw the Zviller Rebbe and approached him to ask for a *brachah*. He told her to give some *tzedakah* for the *brachah*, so she did. Then he said, "*Du vest hobben, un hobben, un hobben...*" ("You will have, and have, and have...") He repeated it many times. Later, my father would say that for every "*un hobben*" they had another child. They ended up having ten children!

My brother, Shloimeh, was the firstborn. I was born two years later. All of my mother's children were born at home, and I never even knew when she was pregnant. (My mother always wore very loose clothing.) The midwife would come with a suitcase, and when she left there would be a baby. So I always thought the midwife brought the baby in the suitcase.

Can you tell us about your childhood?

I was born on 16 Adar 5708 (1948), when Eretz Yisroel was at war.

One day, my parents were at my *zaide's* house when a bomb landed nearby and debris flew into my mother's eyes. She had to go to the hospital. Since I still needed my mother's milk, she took me with her. She later told me she was glad to have me with her.

That same year, the Old City was taken by the Arabs, and my family was forced out of our home. We moved to the Katamon area of Yerushalayim, where we remained for five years. At the time, there was a first-come-first-served policy for acquiring homes abandoned by the Arabs in Katamon. But my father didn't want to take what wasn't his. So instead of finding our own place, we moved in with the Rabinovitch



The young Rochel Groman (circled) in her fourth-grade class picture in Bais Yaakov Hayashan in Meah Shearim.



The young Rochel Groman (circled) in her ninth-grade class picture in Bais Yaakov Hayashan in Meah Shearim.



Morah Rochel Groman speaking at a *chanukas habayis* for Bais Yaakov in Yerushalayim.



Rochel Groman as a teenager in Batei Varsha.

family (who eventually became our *mechutanim*).

After Katamon, we lived in Batei Varsha (the Warsaw Colony), which is now part of Meah Shearim. I learned in Bais Yaakov HaYashan, the same school my mother attended as a girl and where my daughters eventually studied as well. Today, I teach arts and crafts there. The school doesn't take any government funding, so there is no governmental or secular influence.

By the time I was seven years old, I could take care of my younger siblings while my mother went to shul on Shabbos. She would *daven* and come home early to make *kiddush* for us children because my father would stay in shul until late.

How did your *shidduch* happen?

When I was 15, my then-future husband, Reb Yekusiel Farkash, was learning in Katamon. One day, he missed a *minyan* at his usual shul, so he went to Reb Areleh's *minyan*. The *minhag* there was that when a new person came, he would receive an *aliyah*.

My father was the one who gave out the *aliyos*. He later said he recognized a special boy just by the way my husband recited the *brachah*. Soon afterward, my husband became a full-fledged Reb Areleh *chossid*.

His name was first suggested for me when my older brother was single. My parents wanted to wait for him to get married. A few months later, my brother got married, and someone suggested the *shidduch* again. By then we were both 18 years old. My husband was already an important *bachur* and the *gabbai* for Reb Areleh. My parents decided it was a good idea. I said I wanted to meet him before getting engaged, which was not always done.

My father asked his brother, Tuvia Gromon, if we could use the nice room in his house for our "date." My husband didn't have any decent clothing, so he borrowed some from a friend. It was not what you would consider a date today! We met for five minutes while our families waited outside the room.

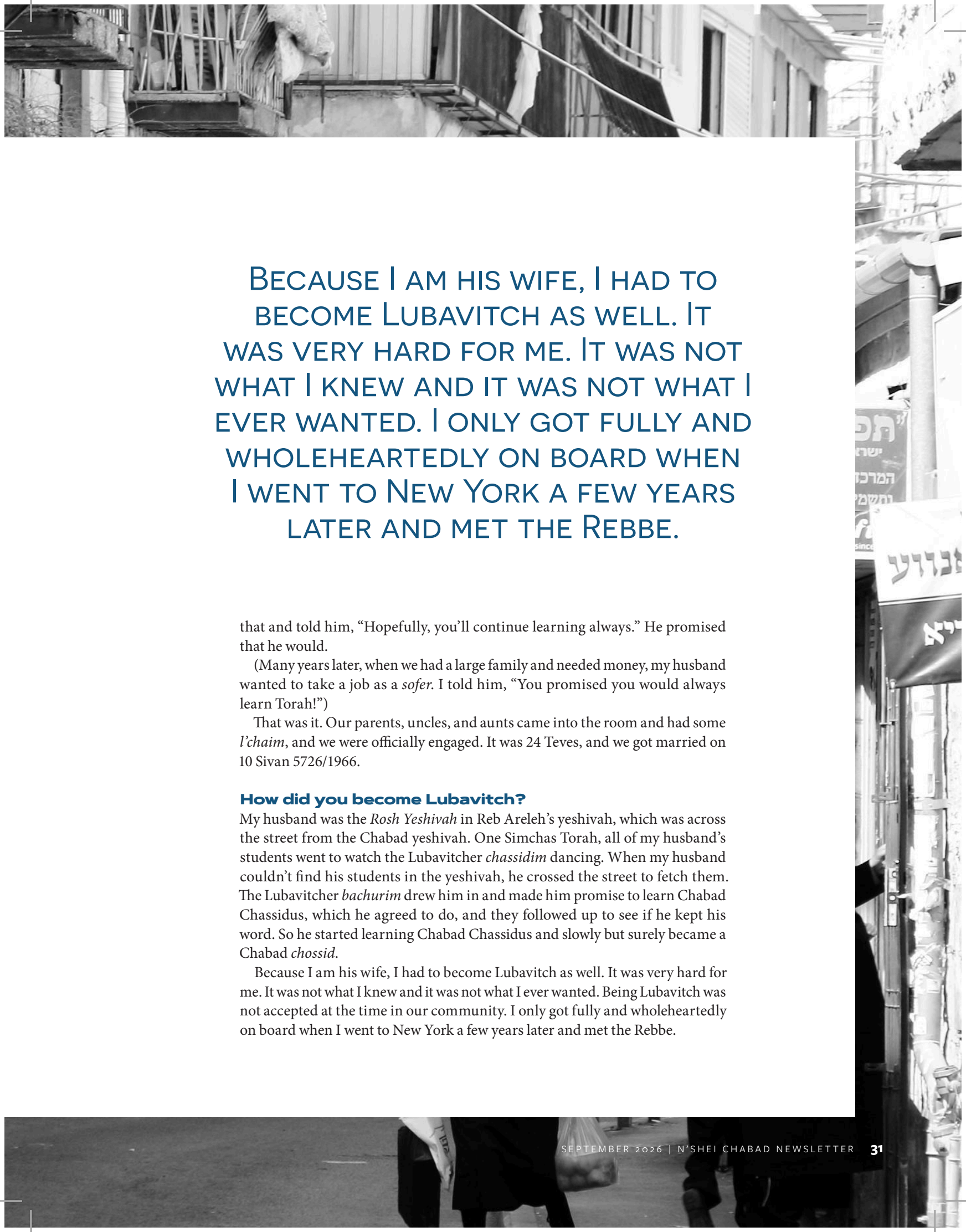
My husband said, "*Rabbos machshavos b'lev ish, va'atzas Hashem he sakum.*" (Many are the plans in a person's heart, but the Will of Hashem will be upheld.)

I asked about his learning, and he said that learning is the most important thing. I liked

Rabbi Yekusiel and Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash as a young couple.



Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash as a young *balabusta*.



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that and told him, “Hopefully, you’ll continue learning always.” He promised that he would.

(Many years later, when we had a large family and needed money, my husband wanted to take a job as a *sofer*. I told him, “You promised you would always learn Torah!”)

That was it. Our parents, uncles, and aunts came into the room and had some *l’chaim*, and we were officially engaged. It was 24 Teves, and we got married on 10 Sivan 5726/1966.

How did you become Lubavitch?

My husband was the *Rosh Yeshivah* in Reb Areleh’s yeshivah, which was across the street from the Chabad yeshivah. One Simchas Torah, all of my husband’s students went to watch the Lubavitcher *chassidim* dancing. When my husband couldn’t find his students in the yeshivah, he crossed the street to fetch them. The Lubavitcher *bachurim* drew him in and made him promise to learn Chabad Chassidus, which he agreed to do, and they followed up to see if he kept his word. So he started learning Chabad Chassidus and slowly but surely became a Chabad *chossid*.

Because I am his wife, I had to become Lubavitch as well. It was very hard for me. It was not what I knew and it was not what I ever wanted. Being Lubavitch was not accepted at the time in our community. I only got fully and wholeheartedly on board when I went to New York a few years later and met the Rebbe.



Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash and her baby Rivka (Ricky) at Sunday Dollars on 8 Kislev 5751/1990.
JEM photo ID#60102.

When did you have your first *yechidus* with the Rebbe, and what happened at that *yechidus*?

In 1979, when my husband and I had been married for 14 years, we decided to go to New York for Tishrei. We borrowed money for the plane tickets and left some of our children in the care of their grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

At first, I didn't enjoy it. I felt out of place. Then I went into *yechidus* with my husband and two children. The Rebbe didn't address my husband or the children, just me. He said, "You are a granddaughter of Reb Amram Blau. What he did in the world, we know about. What he accomplished with his family, we can see. Your grandfather was one in a generation and had *mesiras nefesh* in *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*. Reb Amram Blau wasn't fazed and did what needed to be done. So too, you should make a *shturem* among women so they should learn *maamarim* about *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*."

By showing me that he respected my ancestry, the Rebbe sensitively helped me embrace my new identity as a Lubavitcher.

Whenever a woman flew to New York and had a *yechidus*, after the woman returned to Eretz Yisroel, all the Lubavitcher women would get together to hear what the Rebbe had said. I told them what the Rebbe had told me about making sure women learned *maamarim* about *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*, so we started a Chassidus *shiur* right away.

Before I went into that *yechidus*, I was an anxious person. We had a small house, many children, and little money. I worried my kids would become modern. I worried for their safety. I worried about everything. When I started learning



Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash and her daughters receiving a dollar from the Rebbe on 9 Sivan 5749/1989. JEM photo ID#264561.

Chassidus, it brought me *menuchas hanefesh*. I became calm, and I am still that way today. Around the same time, my husband sent a letter to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe wrote back, among other things, “Obviously you are learning *Chitas*.” I applied this to myself and started learning *Chitas* as well.

Can you share any other experiences you had with the Rebbe?

By the time I came to New York the second time, I was able to enjoy Tishrei and all the *hakafos* in 770.

The third time, in 1988, I went by myself. I had recently lost a beloved child to illness, and I wanted to find a *shidduch* for my oldest son, Velvel. My husband suggested that I go to the Rebbe.

The day I arrived, the Rebbe was addressing women in 770. I went straight there and heard the Rebbe explain the concept that Hashem *lo yanum velo yishan*, neither sleeps nor slumbers, because he is actively caring for us in every part of our lives. I felt like he was speaking directly to me and addressing my worries. Before I left, I went to receive a dollar from the Rebbe. There were two thoughts on my mind: I want to find a *shidduch* for my son, and next time I want to be here with my whole family, not alone.

The fourth time I went to New York, both of my wishes were fulfilled. We came for my eldest son’s wedding, and the whole family was there together.



Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash clapping joyfully at the wedding of her grandson Moshe Farkash to Rivka Bryski (who interviewed her for this article).



Rabbi Yekusiel and Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash under the *chuppah* at the wedding of their grandson.

As a mother of 17 children, can you share your perspective on *chinuch*?

First and most importantly, you have to rely on Hashem. Remember that Hashem is always doing what is best for you, even if you can't see it at the moment. Today people like to think that if they do everything right, they can control the outcomes. *Men darf zich aroifvarfn oifn Oibershter*. We need to throw ourselves at Hashem and let Him run the show.

With that said, being a parent is a responsibility. As soon as you become pregnant, you have to realize that before, you were just a person; now you are a mother. That's bigger than being a person. You are an example for your children. You have to hold yourself to a higher standard than you did before. Don't leave your room in pajamas, or play the radio, or read non-Jewish books. My children never saw me being not *tzniusdik* in my own house, not even without socks.

Chinuch is proactive. It's not enough to have a *chassidishe* atmosphere; you have to be involved in your children's education. Be in contact with their teachers. When each of my children came home from school, I would *farher* them on what they learned. Once they started learning *Gemara*, they would review with my husband. I started washing *negel vasser* with my children when they were babies and always reminded them to say *brachos*.



How did you manage with so many kids? Especially when money was tight, how did you keep a happy atmosphere at home?

Having family support was the key. I lived near my mother and sisters, and we helped each other with cooking, babysitting, everything. If one of my children was being difficult, I would send him or her down the block to my mother. My mother had a sewing business, and she was often watching several grandchildren at a time while she sewed.

My husband learned in four different *kollels* to get four stipends. (He started learning at 3 a.m.) I worked in Bais Yaakov HaYashan to make ends meet. Our children never went hungry, but luxuries like meat were only eaten occasionally on Yom Tov. Despite everything, we taught our children to be grateful for what we had. They thought their bread and butter was the greatest treat in the world.

We also taught our children to *fargin*—to be happy for another Yid's success. Even if someone else had more than us, we didn't say, "Oy vey, it's not fair." We were glad they could enjoy life. Let there be enough good for everyone! *Lashon hara* was forbidden in our home and we educated our children to accept people the way they are.

Children reflect their parents. Parents set the tone for the entire home. If we are content with what we have and thank Hashem, they will do the same.

Can you tell us about your child with special needs?

My daughter Ricky, *a"h*, was born with Down Syndrome. I was shocked at first. But I knew that everything Hashem does is for the good. Soon I realized that she was the greatest gift from Hashem. She brought so much joy to our family. Her siblings loved and adored her. She was the glue that kept us close.

When Ricky was younger, she went to a school that wasn't Lubavitch. On *chassidishe yamim tovim*, she always wore her Shabbos clothes. When her friends asked her why, she would proudly educate them: "Today is Yud Tes Kislev..."

Even today, ten years after she passed away at the age of 27, we talk about her often and we still miss her. We listen and relisten to the recordings of her voice. At her *shivah*, we discovered how many lives she had touched with her pure love and kindness.

What are your thoughts about living with technology?

By now, it's everywhere, and it's hard to run away from it. There are those who choose to abstain from technology, but I want to be able to see my children and grandchildren who live all over the world. Instead of hiding from it, we have to learn to use it properly. We need to be careful with *shemiras einayim*. And we need *iskafya*—to control where, when, and what we consume online.

What are your thoughts on *hachnasas orchim*?

My mother, Liba, was the queen of *hachnasas orchim*. There was literally an open door without a lock. She took care of people from the neighborhood who

Letter from the Rebbe published in *Igros Kodesh*, regarding following the Yerushalmi custom:

Regarding your question about earning a livelihood in the future, obtaining employment, and related concerns:

Begin by conducting yourself in the manner of the *yakirei Yerushalayim* (the distinguished ones of Jerusalem), who—to the best of my knowledge—occupy themselves with Torah study and Divine service and, when the appropriate time arrives, concern themselves with *shidduchim* in a proper manner. Only after becoming engaged do they establish their path regarding future sustenance, in accordance with the *shidduch* and the circumstances of the bride's family.

You should conduct yourself in the same way, for it is premature to burden yourself now with distractions and *pizur hanefesh* concerning matters that will become relevant only in the future.

(*Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 15, p. 146)

were mentally unwell, and Holocaust survivors who were alone in the world. She would wash them, feed them, and comb their hair. It wasn't uncommon to find my mother and father sitting on chairs on the porch late at night because they had given their beds to guests. We grew up accustomed to the idea that there would be guests around all the time.

I can't live up to my mother, but I try. Having *hachnasas orchim* is a great *mitzvah*, but to sometimes not have guests isn't an *aveirah*. When you do it, do it with a good attitude and show your guests that they are welcome, without any resentment.

What are your thoughts about marrying off children?

Daven to Hashem, and when the time is right, hustle. It's not enough just to *daven*, and it's not enough just to be proactive—you have to do both. You can't waste time or be passive. Call *shadchanim*, and then call them again and again.

What advice would you offer to the mothers and grandmothers of today?

Prioritize *tznius*. “*Kol kevudah bas melech penimah*”—the beauty of a princess is within. Be a *bas melech*; be *eidel*.

In Mitzrayim, the Yidden were redeemed because of the *nashim tzidkaniyos*, the righteous women, who refused to adopt the Egyptian mode of dress. The same is true in our *galus*. We need to be *tzniusdik* in all ways—not only in how we dress, but also in how we act and speak.

I wish all readers of this magazine a *shanah tova umesukah*, filled with good health, happiness, *hatzlachah*, and *Yiddishe chassidishe nachas*! ❧



Rebbetzin Rochel Farkash and her daughter Sarah receiving a dollar from the Rebbe on 4 Sivan 5749/1989.

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