

## Praise for *Turning Judaism Outward*

“Wonderfully written as well as intensely thought provoking, *Turning Judaism Outward* is the most in-depth treatment of the life of the Rebbe ever written. The author has managed to successfully reconstruct the history of one of the most important Jewish religious leaders of the 20th century, whose life has up to now been shrouded in mystery. A compassionate, engaging biography, this magnificent work will open up many new avenues of research.”

—Dana Evan Kaplan, author, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*; editor, *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*

“In contrast to other recent biographies of the Rebbe, Chaim Miller has availed himself of all the relevant textual sources and archival documents to recount the details of one of the more fascinating religious leaders of the twentieth century. Through the voice of the author, even the most seemingly trivial aspect of the Rebbe’s life is teeming with interest.... I am confident that readers of Miller’s book will derive great pleasure and receive much knowledge from this splendid and compelling portrait of the Rebbe.”

—Elliot R. Wolfson, Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University

“Only truly great biographers have been able to accomplish what Chaim Miller has with this book... I am awed by his work, and am now even more awed than ever before by the Rebbe’s personality and prodigious accomplishments.”

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“A fascinating account of the life and legacy of a spiritual master. The author’s meticulous scholarship is matched by his love of Torah. This book will inspire many who already know about the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe and many others who don’t yet have that privilege.”

—Daniel Matt, author of the multi-volume annotated translation of the Zohar, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*

“This well researched and thoroughly documented biography by a leading Chabad scholar presents an integrated account of the life and teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Innumerable details are integrated into an account that brings to life the Rebbe’s teachings and influence, without hiding the paradoxes and controversies that were raised by his career.”

—Lawrence H. Schiffman, Edelman Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University; Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Yeshiva University

“A masterful work of scholarship, beautifully written, with new insight into the life of an introverted, brilliant scholar who created the largest and most influential outreach program in Jewish history.”

—Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO Orthodox Union Kosher

“A masterful and erudite biography of the ‘Rebbe’... All who are interested in the life of this remarkable man and leader will profit and be captivated by the work of Rabbi Miller!”

—Chancellor David Ellenson, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion

“Though two decades have passed since the death of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, his messages of love of Torah and for his people continue to inspire so many in the Jewish world. Chaim Miller’s meticulous and heartfelt examination of the “Rebbe’s” indomitable quests and profound successes will be eagerly read by all those desirous of learning about the life, learning, leadership and legacy of this remarkable rabbinic figure.”

—Jeffrey S. Gurock, Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish History, Yeshiva University; author, *Orthodox Jews in America*

“A desperately needed framework that can help anyone who heard about the Rebbe but had too many wrong mental models (and too many literary hindrances) to approach him culturally and spiritually.”

—Dr. Domenico Lepore, founder, *Intelligent Management*; author, *Sechel: Logic, Language and Tools to Manage any Organization as a Network*

“There are *tzadikim* whose lives are like the *Song of Songs*. The words and events are explicit and clear, but the mystery, the secret remains unsolved. Rabbi Chaim Miller has written a masterpiece depicting the remarkable life and times of the Lubavitcher Rebbe *z’ya*. While honest and bold, it respects the *sod*, the secret of the towering *tzadik* whose life’s song changed the world.”

—Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere, NY;  
*mashpia* at Yeshiva University

“Chaim Miller’s biography *Turning Judaism Outward...* is not afraid to engage the more complex and difficult questions about “the Rebbe’s” life. Using hundreds, perhaps thousands, of documents carefully footnoted, including sermons, official records, and letters, some only published in the past few years, Miller reconstructs the life of a somewhat iconoclastic Hasidic master.... In lucid, loving (but not overly apologetic) prose, Miller tells the very compelling story of a complicated life. I highly recommend it even for those who know little or nothing about the person or the world it describes.”

—Shaul Magid, Jay and Jeannie Schottenstein Chair in  
Jewish Studies, Indiana University/Bloomington

“An important contribution about an individual who inspired an extremely great number of people. This volume should be widely read.”

—Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet, Professor of Rabbinic Literature, Yeshiva University;  
author, *The Rav—the World of Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik*

“Miller’s new biography of the Rebbe combines several methods of description, testimony, and analysis. He offers a nuanced view of a complex and unique phenomenon in the Jewish religious world.”

—Dov Schwartz, Chair, the Interdisciplinary Unit and the  
department of Jewish Philosophy, Bar-Ilan University;  
author, *Habad’s Thought: From Beginning to End*

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# TURNING JUDAISM OUTWARD

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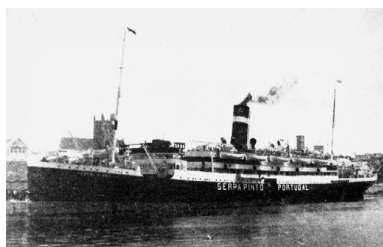
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## CHAPTER EIGHT

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# SURVIVAL

1939–1941



The Serpa Pinto

On Thursday, 19th September (eve of 17th *Elul*) 1939, the students of Yeshivat Tomchei Temimim in Otwock gathered through the night in a *farbrengen* to celebrate the founding of the first Lubavitch Yeshivah, forty-two years earlier. When morning broke, as they went off to immerse themselves in the *mivkah*, they heard the unmistakable sound of bombs dropping. Germany had invaded Poland.<sup>1</sup>

One bomb struck the Rebbe's own residence, but no one was injured. A few days later, the Rebbe's secretary Chaim Lieberman, who had managed to escape from Warsaw to Riga, wrote to Menachem Mendel and Moussia in Paris to inform them that Rayatz was alive and well. From Paris, Menachem Mendel spread the news to Yisrael Jacobson in New York, in a letter dated 11th October: "Mr. Lieberman has informed us that they have not been able to leave Warsaw. We are extremely worried about their safety."<sup>2</sup>

A few days later, Menachem Mendel was able to report more news to Jacobson: "I received today a letter from Mr. Lieberman and I hurry to inform you what he wrote to us. The Shmotkin residence in Warsaw, where my father [-in-law] was residing with the family, has been com-



pletely destroyed by a fire. Thank G-d, they are all well and safe.... I am certain, my dear Rabbi, that you are doing everything in your means to come to their assistance, especially to bring them out as soon as possible, considering their situation.”<sup>3</sup>

Jacobson was already on the case. In recent years, extensive details of these efforts have come to light, and the chronicle of events is a book-length story in itself. Through hundreds of letters and cables, Chabad managed to win support in the higher echelons of the U.S. government.<sup>4</sup>

This was quite an astonishing feat when one considers the limited resources at Jacobson’s disposal: He had no staff or supportive infrastructure; his English skills were limited, and he would often have his daughter assist him in deciphering correspondence. But he had the three essential ingredients of a successful Chabad activist: boundless love for the Rebbe, a good measure of tenacity and fine *ba’alei batim*, lay leaders to assist him.<sup>5</sup>

A key player from the German side was a distinguished officer in the German army named Ernst Bloch (1898-1945). Bloch was a *mischling*, a man of mixed Aryan and Jewish descent (his father was Jewish), and while Hitler had personally signed a document “removing” his Jewish blood, rendering him of pure *Deutschblütig*, there is no doubt that Bloch retained a deep sympathy for the plight of Jews. After intense diplomatic intervention, Bloch was assigned with the secret task of finding the Rebbe and leading him to Riga in safety—which is precisely what transpired.<sup>6</sup>

By mid December all the arrangements for the escape of the Rebbe and his family were agreed upon and funds had been received to cover all expenses of the rescue.<sup>7</sup> A Nazi wagon arrived, and Rayatz was ushered with his family, staff and possessions into the vehicle. As a ruse, Bloch screamed out, “OK, you pigs. Get in the truck and wagon,” so as to quell the suspicions of SS officers that looked on.

The trip was relatively uneventful, and the main challenge was to pass a series of SS checkpoints. One checkpoint outside Warsaw proved particularly challenging. The SS surrounded the wagon at gunpoint and demanded to know the “real reason” why these Jews were being transported to Berlin. With a gush of adrenaline, Bloch mouthed off a list of high-ranking officials with whom he was personally connected and threatened to have the SS officer arrested if he did not allow the group through. As the wagon passed through the checkpoint,

Bloch assured the Rebbe that they were going to be alright. “The SS is not Germany,” Bloch said.

By 15th December, the group reached Berlin, where they were forced to stay over Shabbat. But a sense of relief only came when on Sunday 17th December (5th *Tevet*) 1939, Rayatz finally crossed the Latvian border and reached Riga in safety with his family. He immediately penned a letter to Chabad followers worldwide, petitioning assistance for those still trapped in Poland.<sup>8</sup> On Wednesday, Rayatz wrote to Mendel and Moussia in Paris, informing them of his safe arrival in Riga. He mentioned that he would be traveling with his wife straight to a sanatorium for medical treatment, while Rashag and his family remained in a local hotel. The letter makes no reference to the terrible ordeals they had been suffering for the past few months and the miracle of being saved by a Nazi officer; all that mattered was that they were safe and “thank G-d, the *ketavim* are intact, and so is the library.”<sup>9</sup>

## II.

Already at the beginning of 1939, Rayatz had begun preparations for relocating his court to the United States, and his secretariat had requested that supporters in America begin to prepare visas for his family (his three daughters and sons-in-law), his close confidantes as well as ten to fifteen Yeshivah students.<sup>10</sup> In January 1939, Rabbi Yisrael Jacobson succeeded in winning the support of Senator William Borah (Idaho) who had been influential in securing Rayatz’s release from Soviet imprisonment in 1927. Borah’s office contacted the visa department on 12th January 1939, beginning the appeal for Rayatz’s family,<sup>11</sup> but the efforts soon came to a halt when the senator died in his sleep from a brain hemorrhage, seven days later.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1939, shortly before the war had erupted, Rabbi Yisrael Jacobson had visited Otwock and discussed the move with Rayatz, who was concerned if his health was good enough for the huge upheaval of relocation. Jacobson encouraged the Rebbe to move, promising to raise the necessary funds, and Rayatz agreed that “in about half a year, please G-d, we will come to America.”<sup>13</sup>

Menachem Mendel, it seems, had been reluctant to join Rayatz in America, and preferred to stay in France. In a fascinating letter penned by Yechezkel Feigin to Yisrael Jacobson about the matter, we get a rare,

firsthand glimpse into the future Rebbe's character and talents as they were perceived by senior Chabad Chasidim at the time.

There is another issue about which I wish to alert you, but it must remain a secret... so I ask you to please destroy this letter immediately in order that no one else should see it—but, in my opinion, it would be a good idea to do what is written here. I refer to the fact that the Rebbe [Rayatz] is suffering terribly [due to the fact] that Ramash [Menachem Mendel] is resisting coming to America. I saw that for Ramash, the matter is already decided, and you know his nature, how strong-willed he is. Therefore, I think, that besides the issue of the Rebbe's distress, which is extremely important, in my opinion, all the activities would be vastly improved if he were by the Rebbe's side. He also has a great talent for bringing the youth closer...

Perhaps, then, you could write to him the content of my letter, about his decision not to come to America, and write him a motivational message that his coming is so important for the Rebbe's honor, and it will, as a matter of course, be helpful in *hafatzat ha-mayanot* (the dissemination of Chasidut). But do not overstep the mark in your letter and imply that we are relying on him, because I already know his temperament—this itself will be a reason for him to decline. He doesn't feel capable of responsibilities like these. The main thing is that you should explain to him that his coming is important for the Rebbe's honor and to be a help in the activities. And stress that, with G-d's help, he will also have private time here to study Torah, for he has now already finished his academic studies and is involved only with holy matters.<sup>14</sup>

Many aspects of “Ramash's” character, which we have so far understood only by implication from his life decisions, are stated explicitly in this letter. First, we see how much he valued his independence and did not appreciate being pressured into any decisions. Second, we see that the Chabad establishment was aware of his great organizational talents, and appreciated his potential to inspire young Jews. Third, we see how he shied away from communal work, both due to the inevitable distraction from Torah study, and because he questioned whether it was something to which he was suited. Fourth, we see that his interest in secular studies was not an ongoing aspiration but it had been with a specific purpose, and now that this had been accomplished, Ramash shifted his interests exclusively to “holy matters.” Fifth, despite his res-

ervations about involvement in communal work, his love and respect for Rayatz trumped all other concerns; if Ramash would only appreciate how much his presence meant to Rayatz then he would be convinced to relocate.

With the escalating war, the dilemma of resettling in the “unkosher country” was speedily resolved. Staying in Riga was not an option for Rayatz, as it was clear that a Russian occupation was imminent and the Rebbe’s return to Soviet territory would be disastrous.<sup>15</sup> A network of Chabad activists in America set to work even before Rayatz arrived in Riga to secure visas for the Rebbe, his family and his staff.<sup>16</sup> In Riga, matters were delayed when on the Sabbath, 27th January (17th *Shevat*), Rayatz fell and broke his right hand and was in a cast for three weeks. His mother, who had just turned eighty, also had a bout of serious ill health, requiring an emergency operation to relieve an abdominal hernia.<sup>17</sup> Even when their visas for entry to the United States were finally received in early February,<sup>18</sup> the Rebbe’s party were not able to leave for another month. They eventually crossed the Baltic Sea in a small, eighteen-seat aeroplane to Stockholm on Tuesday, 4th March (25th *Adar I*), just three months before the Russian invasion of Latvia.<sup>19</sup>

From Stockholm, Rayatz and his party took the train at 10 p.m. that evening to Gothenberg, arriving at 8 a.m. the next morning, Thursday, 6th March (27th *Adar I*). They joined 523 passengers on the *SS Drottningholm*, which departed on a direct voyage to New York at 1 p.m. Rayatz occupied Stateroom 13 for the entire journey.<sup>20</sup>

Disembarking in New York, on 19th March (9th *Adar II*) 1940, to a large crowd of assembled Chasidim and well-wishers,<sup>21</sup> were: Rayatz, his wife, his mother, his nurse Mania Lotz;<sup>22</sup> Rashag, Chana and their son Shalom Ber; and members of Rayatz’s staff: secretary Rabbi Chaim Lieberman, as well as two administrators with whom Rayatz had worked closely in Latvia—Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Aizik Chodakov (1902–1993, and his wife Etel Tzerna, 1909–2006), and Rabbi Nissan Mindel (1912–1999).<sup>23</sup>

### III.

The notable absentees, of course, were the Rebbe’s younger two daughters, Moussia and Sheina, and their husbands. At the outbreak of

war Menik and Sheina Horenstein had been in Otwock, caring for the health of Menik's ailing father, Moshe (who eventually died in 1941), and, not being Latvian citizens, they were unable to journey with Rayatz from Poland. As citizens of a country conquered by the Germans, they were initially denied visas as part of Rayatz's group.<sup>24</sup>

Menachem Mendel and Moussia, on the other hand, had in principle been approved for immigration into the United States along with the Sixth Rebbe, since Chabad lawyers had successfully appealed to the U.S. government that the entire "Chabad hierarchy" needed to be welcomed to its shores.<sup>25</sup> While few fully-fledged Lubavitcher Chasidim resided in America, there were a purported 150,000 loose affiliates, immigrants or children of Lubavitcher immigrants who had become Americanized, but retained a connection with the movement. Many of them still made a point of following *Nusach Ari* (Chabad prayer rites), and convened at some 200 affiliated congregations across the country.<sup>26</sup> During the 1920s and 30s, through the work of Rabbi Yisrael Jacobson and the Kramer family, these scattered congregations and affiliates were unified under the umbrella of *Agudat Chasidei Chabad* (Union of Chabad Chasidim), an organization which became the instrumental force in the rescue of Rayatz and his family.<sup>27</sup> Chabad immigration lawyers argued that the Rebbe was no ordinary congregational Rabbi: his entire extended family and staff represented a "hierarchy" which was necessary to the survival of this significant segment of American Orthodox Jewry.<sup>28</sup>

Menachem Mendel and Moussia's problems arose from an earlier visa application which they filed with the consulate in Paris in November 1939,<sup>29</sup> which clashed with the "hierarchy" proposal filed by lawyers in New York the following month. Menachem Mendel and Moussia's initial application was for an ordinary quota visa entitled to Russian immigrants, citing Menachem Mendel's profession as an engineer. The "hierarchy" application, which included Menachem Mendel and Moussia with all of Rayatz's family, took advantage of a special exemption in section 4(d) of the 1924 Immigration Act which did not limit active members of clergy to the strict annual quota of 154,000 immigrants.<sup>30</sup> In effect, Menachem Mendel had concurrently applied for two different visas, each claiming different occupations.

The clash was so significant, that the New York lawyers were concerned that it could jeopardize Rayatz's entire application. Since the

Sixth Rebbe was initially in greater jeopardy, Chabad decided not to petition for Menachem Mendel and Moussia until Rayatz had arrived safely from Europe, in March.

Soon afterwards, things took a turn for the worse for all potential Jewish immigrants to the U.S.A. On 27th May 1940, the House approved President Roosevelt's proposed transfer of the Bureau of Immigration from the Department of Labor to the Department of Justice, a move aimed at tightening immigration policy. On the same day, the Senate Judiciary Committee encouraged the enforced fingerprinting and registration of aliens. The president's message was clear: immigrants pose a threat to national security due to the feared increase in "spies, saboteurs and traitors."<sup>31</sup>

The government clamp-down on immigration was apparently a cause of great concern for Rayatz, since on 29th May, the day after news of Roosevelt's reshuffle hit the press, Rayatz penned a *pidyon nefesh* (soul petition) to his father, asking him to intercede on High for the visa application of Menachem Mendel and Moussia.

Please arouse great mercy from the Source of mercy and genuine benevolence... for your granddaughter Chaya Mushka [Moussia] and her husband Menachem Mendel son of Chana, who are currently found in the city of Paris, France. Menachem Mendel is Nansenist—not a French citizen.... May God place good counsel in the hearts of the American Consul to grant them an American visa."<sup>32</sup>

The new legislation was of particular concern, as it represented the growing influence of Assistant Secretary of State, Breckinridge Long (1881–1958), a wealthy elitist and friend of the President who had been a major contributor to the Roosevelt campaigns. Long was a strong nativist and fervent believer in a restrictive immigration, especially for Jewish refugees, some of whom he imagined might be covert Nazi agents. With fourteen percent unemployment, he also felt that newcomers would take jobs away from Americans.

Long has been dubbed by some critics as the "American Eichmann" for actively preventing the immigration of as many as ninety percent of eligible candidates, which resulted in the death of 190,000 refugees. In a now famous memo to State Department officials, penned on 26th June 1940, Long recommended, "We can delay and effectively stop for

a temporary period of indefinite length the number of immigrants into the United States. We could do this by simply advising our consuls, to put every obstacle in the way and to require additional evidence and to resort to various administrative devices which would postpone and postpone and postpone the granting of the visas.”<sup>33</sup>

This is precisely what happened to Menachem Mendel and Moussia. While they had initially been pronounced eligible for U.S. immigration as part of Rayatz’s successful application for the Chabad hierarchy, on 5th June the American consul in Paris telegraphed Washington that the couple’s visas had been denied. The clash between the two different applications was provided as the obvious disqualification.<sup>34</sup>

The decision almost cost the couple their lives. From 10th May, the Germans had already begun their advance into Belgium and Holland. The “second act” of the Battle of France began on 5th June—the day the Schneersons were denied their visa—with the Germans striking southwards from the River Somme, towards Paris. As stateless refugees, Menachem Mendel and Moussia had nowhere to flee.

One option available to them was an offer from a sympathetic neighbor, to go into hiding in his chateau, located outside Paris;<sup>35</sup> but Menachem Mendel deemed it safer to flee southwards, away from the approaching Nazis. He packed a trunk with his most precious possessions: the books which he had received as wedding presents; the hundreds of letters of Rayatz which he had catalogued and prepared for publication; his folder of *Reshimot*, containing his Torah thoughts and customs of Rayatz that he had meticulously documented; the “unauthorized” photostated copies of Rashab’s discourses which he had made ten years earlier, and the notes on *Tanya* and indices of Chasidic thought which he had composed. Utilizing a personal connection to obtain a much coveted ticket, the couple boarded one of the last trains to leave Paris, on or before 11th June, joining the mass exodus of some 100,000 Jews who fled Paris before the German conquest of 13th June.<sup>36</sup>

It was the eve of the festival of *Shavuot*, and as sunset approached, the Schneersons had not yet reached their destination in Vichy. Years later, Moussia recalled how Menachem Mendel rented a horse and wagon, mounted on it the heavy trunk filled with his books, *ketavim* and their few possessions and, as the sun set, they continued to walk

to their destination. When Moussia could walk no further, she, too, mounted the wagon; but Menachem Mendel continued by foot, so as not to violate the festival laws in any way (even when it would have, no doubt, been permissible to do so).<sup>37</sup>

Many Paris Rabbis, including its Chief Rabbi, had also fled to Vichy, and make-shift synagogues popped up all over the town's two square miles.<sup>38</sup> There was even a tiny kosher restaurant owned by a Monsieur Mehler, which was well patronized by refugees, most of whom resided in hotel rooms where food preparation was difficult. The area was also flooded with some 40,000 Jews who had fled Belgium from the invading Nazis.<sup>39</sup>

We know that for the two months he was in Vichy, Menachem Mendel immersed himself in Torah, since he composed six long *Reshimot* during this short period, which fill some forty-three printed pages.<sup>40</sup> For the most part, the Vichy *Reshimot* follow themes in the weekly Torah portions and in all likelihood represent notes of lectures he delivered in the synagogue. What is immediately striking in the text is a complete lack of any reference to the troubles of the times; there is no hint that the ideas were penned by a man who was fleeing for his life from the Nazis. Instead, Menachem Mendel takes one or two ideas in the Torah portion and suggests an innovative twist, based on Chasidic thought. As ever, the discourses are extremely rich in sources, and, clearly lacking access to a library of Jewish books, the author leaves a number of references blank with a view to filling in the exact page numbers at a later date. Considering the circumstances under which they were written, the depth and complexity of the material is quite remarkable. As in the turbulent years of his youth, one gets the sense that Menachem Mendel found some comfort from the dire and hazardous situation by retreating into abstract thought.

#### IV.

Back in New York, by the summer of 1940, Rayatz was finally managing to become settled. Since his arrival in March, he had been living in temporary accommodation: the Greystone Hotel, in Manhattan's Upper West Side, room 539, on the fifth floor. After spending Passover in the quiet pastures of Lakewood, New Jersey, he declined an offer to re-



locate his court there, desiring instead to be at the heart of the Jewish community.<sup>41</sup> He set his eyes on Brooklyn, which was at the time home to one million Jews, constituting what was dubbed as “the largest Jewish community of any city in the history of the world.”

The *Building Committee for the Residence of the Lubavitcher Rabbi* struggled to find a well located property that would meet the needs of the Rebbe and his family. An urgent meeting was convened to review the various options, a few blocks from the Greystone Hotel in the home of Hyman Kramer’s friend David Tannenbaum on 100th Street. As the meeting reached full swing, Tannenbaum’s son-in-law, Hyman Brainson, who had just been out to see a movie with his wife, happened to drop by, and was surprised to encounter a “sea of beards.” Brainson, who worked as an assistant principal in a local school, was born and bred in Brooklyn and had lived there until his marriage in 1939, so he knew the district well. Dismissing all the committee’s property options as impractical, Brainson suggested that Chabad look into a large home in Crown Heights, which had recently been repossessed by the bank.<sup>42</sup>

While a handful of Lubavitcher Chasidim resided in Brooklyn, mainly in the Brownsville area populated by lower class immigrants, Rayatz had desired a location where his presence would make a greater impact. The upper-middle class district of Crown Heights, a coveted address for wealthy Jewish professionals, seemed perfect. In 1940, there was very little Orthodox presence in the neighborhood, and the community was dominated by the *Conservative Brooklyn Jewish Center*, which was considered the model American synagogue.<sup>43</sup>

One block away from this center, on the other side of the street, was Brainson’s proposal: an exquisite, 14,500 square-foot, three-floor, gothic-style mansion, lavishly decorated with imported Italian tile, heavy oak doors and copper doorknobs. The property served as the private home and medical clinic<sup>44</sup> of Dr. S. Robert Kahn (1899-1957), a graduate of the Long Island College of Medicine. Among his activities, Kahn conducted clandestine abortions, and in 1938 he was arrested on charges of manslaughter after one of his patients, a Bronx housewife, died as a result of an “illegal operation.” While he was released on bail (after bribing the judge) and eventually cleared of charges, Kahn’s woes did not end when, in 1939, he was found guilty of defaulting on income taxes, having declared only \$23,000 of his \$390,000 earnings during

1930-34. While he was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in jail, his clinic/home at 770 Eastern Parkway was soon repossessed by the bank.<sup>45</sup> The building was ideal for Rayatz as, besides having ample space for a synagogue, library, Yeshivah, administrative offices and accommodations for his family, it had wheelchair access and was equipped with an elevator. The *Building Committee for the Residence of the Lubavitcher Rabbi* managed to raise a down payment of \$5,000 towards the \$30,000 cost of the property, the rest being funded by a twenty-year mortgage. Rayatz agreed to provide \$200 per month in rent, and Rashag \$70 per month, for their private apartments on the second and third floors, so as to cover the mortgage payments.<sup>46</sup> A group of locals initially gathered to block the purchase, fearing that property values would drop if there would be an influx of Chasidim, and they even managed to garner support from Boro Hall, City Hall and local congressmen, but Rayatz took no notice of the general public's displeasure.

"Seven-Seventy," which would become an iconic address in the Seventh Generation of Chabad, was purchased by *Agudat Chasidei Chabad* on 16th August (12th *Menachem Av*) 1940, and the Rebbe moved in with his family around a month later, on 22nd September (19th *Elul*), shortly before the High Holidays. But the joy of re-establishing the court of Lubavitch was overshadowed by the chilling thought of Jews trapped in Europe. On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, Rayatz spent four hours reciting the evening prayer, drenching the covering of his *shtender* (lectern) with tears.<sup>47</sup>

## V.

Shortly after "770" was purchased, in the second half of August, notification was received in New York that Menachem Mendel and Mousia had fled from Vichy and had now settled in Nice, on the southern coast of France.<sup>48</sup> This was no doubt prompted by growing evidence that the French government of the so-called "Free Zone," which had relocated to Vichy, was collaborating with the Nazis.<sup>49</sup>

The couple found modest accommodations in Hôtel Rochambeau, 27 Rue Thiers, on the third floor. There they would remain for over nine months, until the end of May 1941, when all their immigration woes would finally come to an end. The hotel was run by an Algerian Jew and

his non-Jewish wife, who gave the Schneersons special treatment, saving sugar for the couple from the hotel supplies. But life in wartime was difficult: their accommodation was tight and, among other hardships, electricity was only available for a few hours a day.<sup>50</sup>

In a 1945 letter to one of his former acquaintances in France, the future Rebbe gave a positive spin to the struggles of the time:

Your letter awakened within me memories of the time we spent together in Vichy and Nice, each one of us in conditions to which we were not accustomed.

When a person is uprooted from his familiar setting, until he becomes accustomed to his new demands and conditions, you can detect in him patterns of behavior that reflect his inner nature—without the external protocol that society demands.

Frequently, these patterns of behavior reveal the hidden good within this person, of which he himself may have not been aware, it having been obscured by a “layer” of societal norms. He will be fortunate if he does not allow these patterns of behavior to become hidden again when he reaches a tranquil situation.<sup>51</sup>

One floor below the Schneersons resided Rabbi Yechiel Gertner (d. 1970), the fourth Rebbe in a dynasty of Polish Chasidut which originated in the small town of Lentshin, near Warsaw.<sup>52</sup> Menachem Mendel found there both a makeshift synagogue and scholarly friendship; he would engage the Lentshiner Rebbe in mammoth sessions of Torah discussion, lasting as long as four hours.<sup>53</sup>

While in Nice, we also know that Menachem Mendel gave at least one series of Talmud classes in a local synagogue, in tractate *Pesachim*. Notes of these classes have survived in his *Reshimot*, and it is likely that other *Reshimot* from this period also represent drafts of public classes, though we lack any personal testimony of attendees.<sup>54</sup>

Generally, Menachem Mendel and Moussia kept a characteristically low profile. When the future Rebbe was seen in the synagogue, few paid much interest to his presence.<sup>55</sup> Unable to communicate closely with Rayatz due to the war, Menachem Mendel and Moussia must surely have felt isolated. Though they did manage to receive some telegrams from New York via a neighbor, they must have been deeply concerned about the fate of Reb Levik and Chana, from whom they had received

no communication in over a year, and about Menik and Sheina, who were still trapped in Nazi-occupied Poland.

The Schneersons sat, waited and prayed. Before the Jewish festivals of 5701 (1940-1) which the couple spent in Nice, Menachem Mendel went to great lengths to procure an exemplary Italian *etrog* for *Sukkot*, and hand-baked *shmurah matzah* for Passover, which presented an enormous challenge during the war years.<sup>56</sup>

Distressing news kept flooding in.<sup>57</sup> On 13th November 1940, the State Department informed Chabad Attorney Henry Butler that the earlier decision to grant the couple non-quota visas had been overturned in the absence of sufficient evidence that Menachem Mendel had “been carrying on the vocation of a minister of religion.” Rather, evidence suggested that “he has been variously engaged as an engineer, a newspaper correspondent”—his work for the *Hatamim* periodical—“and a mechanic.” On 15th January 1941, Menachem Mendel was informed of the decision, which had been confirmed by the Nice consulate.

The young couple had their application transferred to the consulate in Marseille. While the precise reasoning is unclear, we know that the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HICEM), whom Menachem Mendel had petitioned for assistance, had an office in Marseille, and presumably had closer ties with the local consulate. During the final year that the Schneersons’ application was in process, HICEM facilitated the emigration of 2167 Jews from France, and the organization, together with its American branch HIAS, proved instrumental in the rescue of the future Rebbe and Rebbetzin.<sup>58</sup>

On 29th January, HICEM notified the young couple that “at our request” the consulate in Marseille had reassessed the file, and requested their presence for an interview to clarify “the complexity of the matter.”<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, Chabad lawyer Arthur Rabinowitz again petitioned the State Department for visas to be granted to the Schneersons and Horensteins, this time appealing directly to the office of the “American Eichmann” himself, Breckenridge Long.

Astoundingly, on 7th February 1941—10th *Shevat*, the very same day on the Hebrew calendar when Menachem Mendel would assume the leadership of Chabad a decade later—Long wrote a personal memo authorizing the issue of visas to both the Schneersons and the Horensteins! The historic document, which is preserved among the

*Breckinridge Long Papers* in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division,<sup>60</sup> reads:

Mr. Arthur Rabinovitz advises me that Rabbi Mendel Schneersohn's visa application was transferred from Nice district to Marseilles district, and he is now refused non-quota visa by Marseilles. We authorized issue of visa. Consul at Marseilles suggests immigrant visa. I see no reason why he should not be granted immigrant visa even though we authorized non-quota. As we have communicated several times about Schneersohn and there seems to be no objection, I see no reason why we should not communicate further to Marseilles on his account.

Also be advised that Rabbi Mendel Hornstein is still at Otzawick, Poland, and has not received his visa. I see no reason why he should not receive either an immigrant or a non-quota visa, probably an immigrant. As long as we have telegraphed about him before, you might check the reports and if necessary check again.

Please advise Mr. Rabinovitz about these matters.

B. L.

With written authorization from the highest U.S. official assigned to immigration, it was only a question of time before the Schneersons would receive their visas. The notification finally arrived a month later, on 13th March—the festival of Purim—via telegram to New York, and the couple had the visas in their hands by 17th April (20th *Nissan*).

Nevertheless, two obstacles remained. Menachem Mendel and Moussia needed to secure entry visas into Portugal, since Lisbon was one of the only remaining neutral routes of passage to the United States; and they needed to obtain tickets for the trans-Atlantic voyage.

On 3rd May, the couple received the worrying news that, due to a huge bottleneck of refugees seeking to depart from Lisbon, all Portuguese visas had been suspended until further notice. At every moment the situation in France was worsening for the Jews. As the Schneersons awaited their Portuguese visas, the first wave of arrests took place in Paris, as 5,000 Jewish men were swept from their sleep at 6 a.m. into Nazi custody.

Fortunately, the couple did not have to wait too long. On 24th May (27th *Iyar*), a telegram was received that the Portuguese visas had been granted. By the beginning of June, they were already on their way to

Lisbon,<sup>61</sup> but securing tickets for the trans-Atlantic passage would prove challenging.<sup>62</sup>

As he struggled to find tickets in Lisbon, on 11th June, Rabbi Menachem Mendel penned what would be his final *reshimah* in Europe, a five-page treatise on the obscure Talmudic teaching, “The Son of David will not come until a fish is sought for an invalid and cannot be found.”<sup>63</sup> That night, Mordechai Bistritzky—a Boyaner Chasid who had married a Lubavitcher girl, Shifra Lagovier, at a ceremony officiated by the Rebbe Rashab himself—entered into private audience with Rayatz in New York. Bistritzky’s parents-in-law, Levi and Ruchma Lagovier, had purchased tickets for the *Serpa Pinto’s* voyage the following day, 12th June. Unfortunately, the Lagoviers were stuck in Spain, unable to obtain visas to enter Portugal, and, having heard of Menachem Mendel and Moussia’s plight, Bistritzky offered to transfer the tickets to their name. Tragically, the Lagoviers never managed to make the trip and perished<sup>64</sup> in Auschwitz the following year, but through this noble gesture, the future Rebbe and Rebbetzin were saved, arriving in New York on 23rd June (28th *Sivan*), 1941<sup>64</sup>

## VI.

Others were not so fortunate. Rayatz managed to send U.S. entry visas for a number of his followers, but in many cases, to no avail.<sup>65</sup>

A year later, in July 1941, the Nazis occupied Latvia and set about exterminating Jews, often by grabbing them off the street, placing them in a synagogue and setting the building aflame. On 30th November (10th *Kislev*) 1941, Rabbis Yechezkel Fegin, Eliyahu Chaim Althaus, and Yitzchak *Der Masmid* Horowitz, three of Rayatz’s finest Chasidim, were burned to death by the Nazis in a Riga synagogue. According to one witness, they spent their last moments together dancing with a Torah Scroll, singing the tunes of *Simchat Torah*, the most joyous day of the Jewish year. News of the tragedy did not reach Rayatz until 1945; when he heard what had transpired, he collapsed on the floor, unconscious.<sup>66</sup>

The greatest personal tragedy for Rayatz was the failed rescue of his own daughter Sheina and her husband Menik Horenstein. At the outbreak of war, the couple had been in Otwock caring for Menik’s father, Moshe Horenstein, who was severely ill. They remained at Moshe’s side

until he eventually passed away on 27th March (28th *Adar*) 1941, at which point it was impossible to secure exit visas from Poland, even though entry visas into the United States had by then been successfully obtained.<sup>67</sup> It was only in 1949 that Ramash managed to verify that Menik and Sheina had perished in Treblinka in 1942, along with Menik's mother Chaya Mushka (who was also Rayatz's paternal aunt). Due to Rayatz's extremely weak health, he was not informed that the couple's death had been confirmed, though by that time he had surely given up hope that his daughter had survived the war.<sup>68</sup> The news hit Moussia hard, as she had been extremely close with her younger sister during the years spent together in France. "When my sister passed away, my whole world darkened," she said.

Back in Russia, Menachem Mendel's immediate family also suffered tremendous misfortune. On 29th March (9th *Nissan*) 1939, the Soviets arrested Reb Levik and took him away for imprisonment and trial for conducting "illegal" activities, such as building a *mikvah* and raising funds to support Jewish families. Chana was not permitted to visit her husband in prison for nine months, and seeing him for the first time she was shocked by how emaciated he had become through near-starvation. Found guilty of the charges leveled against him, Reb Levik was sentenced to five years of exile in the remote village of Chi'ili in Kazhakhstan. "You will have to forgive me," he said to his wife before departing on a one-month journey. "I am not sure I have the strength to survive the trip."

While he did arrive alive, Reb Levik was forced to spend the next years in abysmal conditions, most of the time isolated in a mosquito-ridden mud hut, which he shared with an unsympathetic non-Jewish couple. Chana paid extended visits and she too was plagued by starvation and a near-fatal bout of malaria. While he had no congregation to teach, Reb Levik's peace of mind was partially restored when Chana was able to prepare ink from some grasses with which her husband could pen his Torah thoughts. Having no paper, he wrote notes in tiny script in the empty margins of the few books that Chana had managed to bring with her. While the thousands of pages which Reb Levik penned in Yekatrinoslav did not survive, his exile notes did make it out of Russia and were published in four volumes in 1970.<sup>69</sup> For years, he had no contact with his children.

Most of Dnipropetrovsk's 90,000 Jews succeeded in leaving before the Germans occupied the city on 24th August 1941, and the total death toll after liberation by the Red Army two years later was about 20,000. In her memoirs, Chana recalled, "Thank G-d, none of our close friends had remained there."<sup>70</sup> However, during this time, when Reb Levik and Chana were in exile, they were forced to leave their son Berel behind.

In 1941, *Einsatzkommando* (subgroup) 6 of *Einsatzgruppe* (killing squad) C ordered the liquidation of Igren Psychiatric Hospital, a facility in the environs of Dnipropetrovsk (now part of the city), where Berel was residing.<sup>71</sup> Jewish patients were murdered first, led in groups into a large room where they were given lethal injections. According to Soviet documents, 1,000 patients from Igren were murdered in 1941-1942.<sup>72</sup>

There were further tragedies. In Nikolayev, on 20th December (20th *Kislev*) 1939, Chana's younger sister Miriam Gittel, still in her early fifties, died from an illness. Her husband, Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson (Reb Levik's brother and the Rabbi who had given *semicha* to Menachem Mendel), was heartbroken, but this was just the beginning of his woes. Half a year later, on 29th June (4th *Tammuz*) 1941, Shmuel was arrested by the Soviets and sentenced to three years exile in Tomsk, Siberia. Shmuel and Miriam Gittel's only child, Menachem Mendel, remained with his wife Genia in Nikolayev until the German's approach, and then fled to Türkmenabat, Turkmenistan in Central Asia.

While Meir Shlomo Yanovsky had already passed away in 1933, his wife, the maternal grandmother of both Menachem Mendel Schneersons, was still alive. Menachem Mendel and Genia, unwilling to leave their grandmother, planned to take her along with them; but already in her eighties,<sup>73</sup> Rachel was hardly in a fit state for a two-thousand mile journey. Some neighbors who were not Jewish kindly offered to take care of her, and she remained in Nikolayev. When the Nazis occupied the city, the neighbors faithfully hid Rachel away in their home, but, perhaps fearing Nazi intimidation, another neighbor informed the Germans of her presence, and she was taken away to be killed.

Shmuel Schneerson's heart was too weak to survive three years in Siberia, and he was released after a year and a half. He subsequently joined his son in Türkmenabat, but the ordeal had depleted him and he passed away shortly afterward on 8th December (11th *Kislev*) 1943, at the age of fifty-five.<sup>74</sup>



While the Seventh Rebbe never publicly bemoaned the loss of his family members during the war, there is one 1984 letter where he makes a brief reference to the passing of Rachel, Berel and others. In response to an individual who questioned G-d's reason for the Holocaust, the Rebbe wrote,

The only answer we can give is: only G-d knows.

However, the very fact that there is no answer to this question is, in itself, proof that one is not required to know the answer, or understand it, in order to fulfill one's purpose in life.

Despite the lack of satisfactory answer to the awesome and tremendous "Why?"—one can, and must, carry on a meaningful and productive life, promote justice and kindness in one's surroundings, and indeed, help create a world where there should be no room for any holocaust, or for any kind of man's inhumanity to man.

As a matter of fact, in the above there is an answer to an unspoken question: "What should my reaction be?" The answer to this question is certain: It must be seen as a challenge to every Jew—because Jews were the principal victims of the Holocaust—a challenge that should be met head on, with all resolve and determination, namely, that regardless how long it will take the world to repent for the Holocaust and make the world a fitting place to live in for all human beings—I, for one, will not slacken in my determination to carry out my purpose in life, which is to serve G-d, wholeheartedly and with joy, and make this world a fitting abode—not only for humans, but also for the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence itself.

Of course, much more could be said on the subject, but why dwell on such a painful matter, when there is so much good to be done?

While he was generally averse to mentioning personal misfortunes, in order that the questioner should not get the sense that the answer was too emotionally detached, the Rebbe added in a postscript.

Needless to say, the above may be accepted intellectually, and it may ease the mind, but it cannot assuage the pain and upheaval, especially of one who has been directly victimized by the Holocaust.

Thus, in this day and age of rampant suspicion, *etc.*, especially when one is not known personally, one may perhaps say —“Well, it is easy for one who is not emotionally involved to give an intellectual explanation...”

So, I ought perhaps, to add that I, too, lost in the Holocaust very close and dear relatives such as a grandmother, brother, cousins and others (G-d should avenge their blood). But, life according to G-d's commands, must go on, and the sign of life is in growth and creativity.<sup>75</sup>

Menachem Mendel Schneerson demonstrated a remarkable ability to put the past behind him and dedicate himself to constructive activity. His arrival in America in 1941 began what would be over a half-century of public work on behalf of the Lubavitch movement, building from a handful of survivors and salvaged manuscripts what would become the largest Jewish organization in the world. It is a story of remarkable vision, resilience and determination to which we now will turn.

## CHAPTER 8: SURVIVAL

1. Levine, *Poland* ch. 54. For the following see *ibid.* ch. 63; Rigg, *Rescued from the Reich*; Rachel Altein and Eliezer Zaklikovsky, *Out of the Inferno: The efforts that led to the rescue of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch from war-torn Europe in 1939-40* (New York: Kehot 2002); Rabbi Shimon Raichik, *From Poland to the United States: The harrowing tale of Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Raichik's journey from war-torn Europe to freedom* (Memento from the wedding of Moishy and Rivka Raichik, May 2013)
2. *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 1, p. 30. (A facsimile of the letter, which was written in French, is reproduced in introduction p. 24.)
3. *Ibid.* pp. 34-5.
4. Including: Senator to New York, Robert F. Wagner; Democratic congressman and Chairman of the House Rules Committee, Adolph J. Sabath (Illinois); Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Sol Bloom (New York); Justice Louis Brandeis, the first Jewish member of the Supreme Court; Attorney General Benjamin Cohen, one of Roosevelt's close advisors; and, most importantly, assistant Chief of the State Department's European Affairs Division, Robert T. Pell and his boss, Secretary of State Cordell Hull (whose father-in-law was Jewish).
5. Chief of the *ba'alei batim* and key partner in the campaign to save the Rebbe was Sam (Yekutiel) Kramer (1894-1986). The brothers Sam, Hyman and Abe Kramer were Americanized, clean-shaven sons of Lubavitcher immigrants, who had retained their Orthodoxy (a rarity at the time) and formed the backbone of *Agudat Chasidei Chabad*, generously giving their time and money to the cause. Sam Kramer graduated from New York University in 1915 and was admitted to practice law in New York State in 1917. After the first World War, he opened a law firm at 1133 Broadway, in Manhattan, and succeeded in winning some of the largest real estate interests in the city.

In October, Sam Kramer connected Rabbi Jacobson with the man who would prove to be

the mastermind of the rescue efforts: Washington lawyer and lobbyist Max Rhoadé. Rhoadé, who had been a lobbyist for the Zionist Organization of America in the 1920s, obviously felt some sympathy for the Rebbe's plight, but he was only convinced to take on the case due to his friendship with Kramer and on condition that he would be paid handsomely.

The crucial link between the Americans and the Germans was a close relationship between Chief of European Affairs Division, Robert Pell and Helmut Wohlthat (1893-1982), an expert in international industry and economics within the Nazi Party. (The two men had met at a conference in 1938 and had retained a working relationship.) On 3 October 1939, Pell requested the American consul general in Berlin to contact Wohlthat and see if he would be willing to assist in saving "one of the leading Jewish scholars of the world." Since U.S. relations with Germany were strained, and this request emanated from a very high office, Wohlthat welcomed the opportunity to restore some goodwill.

Helmut Wohlthat was one of a number of "ambivalent" Nazis whose hatred of Jews was imperfect and would occasionally come to their assistance. Another such German officer was Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-1945), head of the Abwehr, a small department of the war ministry which worked independently from the SS. Canaris, demoralized by Hitler's invasion of Poland, felt it was the beginning of the end of Germany. While he continued to work for the war machine, his doubts regarding Hitler no doubt opened him to be more sympathetic to the Rebbe's case.

6. Bloch's search for Rayatz was naturally complicated by the fact that no Jew was willing to tell a Nazi where the Lubavitcher Rebbe was to be found. On 25th November, Bloch finally found the correct apartment, but the person who opened the door denied any knowledge of Rayatz's whereabouts and the officers departed. The Rebbe, however, intuited that Bloch was to be trusted and told his family that if the officer returned they should cooperate with him. Bloch knew that he could not waste time; if the SS found the Rebbe first, the results would be disastrous. Convinced that he had found the correct apartment, Bloch returned with some soldiers and entered forcefully, breaking down the door. Knowing that the Jews had virtually no food, Bloch brought the Schneersons cheese, bread and sausages, and was offended and confused when his non-kosher gift was rejected.
7. Bloch was quite unprepared for Rayatz's insistence that he save an entire entourage—his wife Nechama Dina, son-in-law Rashag, daughter Chana, grandson Shalom Ber, his mother, Shterna Sara, and his secretary Rabbi Yechezkel Fegin. The German officer had been under the impression that he was going to escort one Rabbi. Negotiations ensued between Wohlthat, Pell and Rhoadé, and despite the greater risk and complications, Wohlthat eventually agreed to save the whole group.
7. According to the Kramers, this was a huge sum of \$75,000 (Milton E. Kramer, *The Kramers: The Next Generation* (Kramer Family Centennial Committee, 1995), p. 17).
8. *Igrot Rayatz*, vol 5 (New York: Kehot, 1982), p. 2.
9. *Ibid.* vol. 15, p. 361. Rayatz had successfully transported the *ketavim* with him, but all the other possessions he brought with from Otwock were destroyed in Warsaw. His library remained intact in Otwock. For details of the library's rescue see Rabbi Shalom Ber Levine, *The Lubavitch Library: a sketch of its history based on letters, documents and recollections* (Heb.) (New York: Library of Agudat Chasidei Chabad, 1993), chapters 8 and 11.
10. Letter from Rabbi Yechezkel Fegin to Rabbi Yisrael Jacobson 29th January (9th *Shevat*) 1939 (Levin, *America*, p. 167).
11. See Rigg, p. 229, note 8.
12. Toledo Blade, "Senator Borah dies; state funeral Monday," *Associated Press*, 20th January 1940.
13. Memoir of Rabbi Yisrael Jacobson in Altein and Zaklikovsky, p. 293. In a cable dated 21st December 1939, Jacobson mentions the figure of \$50,000 annually as the budget for the support of Rayatz's court (*ibid.* p. 171).
14. Letter reproduced in Harari, p. 135, from *Kfar Chabad* issue, 671 (24th *Sivan* 1995).

15. See Memo of Conference, Thursday, November 23, 1939, in Altein and Zaklikovsky, p. 110.
16. For the extensive correspondence see Altein and Zaklikovsky, pp. 164-270; Rigg, chapter 8 and 12.
17. Letter of Rabbi Yechezkel Feigin to Rabbi Shalom Posner, 21st February (12th *Adar* 1), 1940, (ibid. p. 10); *Igrot Rayatz* vol. 15, pp. 364-5.
18. Some time between February 8th and 13th. See Altein and Zaklikovsky, p. 257, 262.
19. Leibel Zisman (1930-2013), and his father Shraga Feivel Zisman, (1898-1944?)—a wealthy Chasid from Kovno, Lithuania—had been in private audience with Rayatz the last night before he departed from Riga. In his memoir, Leibel recalled the chaos surrounding the Rebbe's departure.

People were begging him to stay because so many people were waiting to see him and be blessed by him.... He told his secretary that his father—the Rebbe Rashab who had passed away some twenty years before—would not allow him to stay. He did not explain if his father came to him in a vision or a dream, but he insisted on leaving immediately with his whole family despite his mother's poor medical condition.

My father organized a human shield to keep back the crowd, as the ambulance pulled up to the building to take away the Rebbetzin [Shterna Sarah] on a stretcher. Everyone was crying, fearful they would never see the Rebbe again, and it was a very chaotic scene. (Leibel (Leo) Zisman, *I Believe: The Story of One Jewish Life* (New York: GJCF, 2011), p. 56.)

20. Joining the Rebbe on the boat were a number of VIPs: silent movie star, Anna Quirentia Nilsson (1888–1974); Russian aristocrat, Prince Serge Constantinovitch Belosselsky (1867-1951); and Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (1898–1976)—*New York Times*, 20th March, 1940.

The passage was fraught with danger. German submarines operated in the North Sea and the North Atlantic had already sunk hundreds of boats, including numerous passenger liners. Moments of uncertainty included: an overnight docking to fix mechanical problems, heavy fog, and inspection by two German submarines.

21. A diary penned by one of the travellers recalled, "The Rebbe *shlita* ascended to the upper deck, where he delivered a short speech thanking the captain and his crew for their gracious service. The pier and the entire area in front of the pier was filled to capacity with men and women. As soon as the Rebbe appeared, shouts of *Shalom Aleichem* could be heard, along with sounds of people reciting the blessing of *Shehechyanu* and the clicking of dozens of cameras" (The anonymous diary, which documents the trans-Atlantic trip in detail, appears in *Sefer Ha-Sichot, Kayitz* 5740, pp. 179-180.)

The following day, the *New York Times* reported that Rayatz "was met by Investigations Commissioner William B. Herlands, State Senator Philip M. Kleinfeld of Brooklyn, a committee of twenty-five Orthodox Rabbis and about 500 persons, who greeted him enthusiastically."

22. Sheina Matla (Mania) Lotz (1917-1992). In 1949 she married Yitzchak Rosin. See Eliezer Zaklikovsky, *Mekadesh Yisrael: Talks and Images at Wedding Celebrations 1943-1963* (New York: Kehot, 2000), p. 44; *Igrot Kodesh* vol. 28, p. 314.
23. Mindel's wife was in England at the time. See *Crown Heights Community Newspaper*, July 11, 2008, p. 4.
24. Rigg, p. 141.
25. When Rayatz was still trapped in Warsaw, activists in New York had already been working on attaining visas for the Rebbe's entire family. To facilitate the application in the absence of birth certificates, Menachem Mendel had sent Yisrael Jacobson legal birth dates and places of himself, Moussia and the Horensteins on 11th October 1939 (*Igrot Kodesh* p. 30).
26. Affidavit of Rabbi Yisrael Jacobson, March 21, 1940 (Altein and Zaklikovsky, p. 32). These figures may have been exaggerated for political reasons (see Rigg, p. 225, note 18). On the other hand, if we bear in mind that there were some two million Russian Jewish immigrants to the United States in the thirty years before the Bolshevik Revolution, and that Chabad had been

- a dominant force in Russia, the numbers may be realistic.
27. *Agudat Chasidei Chabad* was formed in 1924, for details see Levine, *America* ch. 4, 23. For a memorandum of affiliated congregations see *ibid.* ch. 26. For the history of the Kramer family's involvement with Chabad see Milton E. Kramer, *The Kramers*. The Kramers had also played a major role in coordinating American efforts for the rescue of Rayatz from Russia in 1927, and in arranging funds from the *Joint Distribution Committee* for Rayatz's work in the 1920's.
  28. See at length the Jacobson affidavit. Despite the extreme difficulty in obtaining visas for Jewish refugees at the time, which had been vastly curtailed by the 1924 Immigration Act, the authorities accepted the petition. In principle, the U.S. government granted permission for all the Schneersons to immigrate, but the visas needed to be ratified through consulates abroad, and this posed a number of obstacles. Rayatz had experienced a small delay from his petition being tentatively approved by the U.S. government to actually receiving his visas in the embassy in Riga (approval was cabled from Washington to Riga on January 12th or 13th (*ibid.* p. 231), but visas were only issued some time between February 8th and 13th.) but this was insignificant compared to the difficulties experienced by his children in Paris and Otwock.
  29. The application was supported by an affidavit from Mr. M. B. Hartan and prepared by the New York lawyers, promising financial support to the couple until Menachem Mendel would find a position as an engineer.
  30. Clause 4(d) stated that the quota did not apply to, "an immigrant who continuously for at least two years immediately preceding the time of his application for admission to the United States has been, and who seeks to enter the United States solely for the purpose of, carrying on the vocation of minister of any religious denomination, or professor of a college, academy, seminary, or university; and his wife, and his unmarried children under 18 years of age, if accompanying or following to join him." The quota for Russian immigrants in the original 1924 act was a mere 2,248 visas per year.
  31. *New York Times*, 28th May, 1940.
  32. *Igrot Rayatz* vol. 13, p. 274. Rayatz also petitioned that Menachem Mendel should not be called to fight in the French army, with which he had registered. See also *Igrot Rayatz* vol. 5, introduction p. 21.
  33. Goodwin, Doris Kearns *No Ordinary Time. Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 173. For the full memo see: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust/filmmore/reference/primary/barmemo.html>. For a biography of Long examining his role in immigration restrictions see: Neil Rolde, *Breckinridge Long, American Eichmann??? An enquiry into the character of the man who denied visas to the Jews*, (Solon, Maine: Polar Bear & Company, 2013).  
In his afterword to Robert Rosen's *Saving the Jews: Franklin Roosevelt and the Holocaust* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz writes, "Roosevelt's failure to fire Breckinridge Long, who was instrumental in delaying visas and causing the deaths of so many Jews, seems inexcusable to me, even in retrospect" (p. 499).
  34. Altein and Zaklikovsky, p. 329.
  35. See *Brief Sketch of the Rescue of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin in Kovetz 28 Sivan, Jubilee Anniversary* (Kehot: 1991), p. 12; interview with Mendel Notik (*Early Years IV*).
  36. Renee Poznanski (Nathan Bracher trans), *Jews in France During World War II* (Tauber Institute for the Study of European History and published in association with United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Brandeis, 2001), p. 24. Approximately one third of the Jews who fled later returned to Paris,
  37. Interview with Rabbi Shalom Ber Levine (*Early Years IV*).
  38. See Poznanski, p. 27.
  39. Poznanski, p. 24. Jews of all stripes flooded to the synagogues, not necessarily out of a fervent religiosity, but more in search of a sense of stability in these turbulent times. The synagogue

also provided a superb place to network and find out information which might be crucial to survival. Along with the other Paris Rabbis, Rabbi Zalman Schneerson (1898-1980) also fled to Vichy and he set up a small synagogue where his cousin Menachem Mendel now prayed and delivered Torah lectures. One lecture particularly impressed a Belgian refugee, Rabbi Aharon Gershon Sungolowsky (1901-1975), who went home and told his family excitedly about it. Aharon Gershon struck up a friendship with Menachem Mendel, and their two wives would journey together to Cusset, a village outside Vichy, to supervise the milking of cows so as to obtain *chalav yisrael*. Menachem Mendel's implicit trust of his Belgian friend came to light a year later when, in the absence of available wine for Passover, the future Rebbe relied on raisin wine prepared by Aharon Gershon. This was significant as the dietary laws of Passover are some of the most stringent in Jewish law (Interview with Joseph Sungolowsky (b. 1929) on *Early Years IV*).

40. *Reshimot* installments 49, 50, 102-3, 51, 13 and 23.
41. Levine, *America*, chapter 35; Rabbi Zusha Wolf and Rabbi Shimon Gopin, *Beit Chayenu 770* (Jerusalem: Heichal Menachem, 2004), section 2.
42. Personal communication with Arthur Brainson, 30th December 2013.
43. The 1920 building boasted a magnificent sanctuary, a large gymnasium, ladies' and men's social rooms, a banquet hall, dining and lounge areas, classrooms, a swimming pool and even a bowling alley. The synagogue appealed to the local community who were making huge sums of money in real estate, business, law and medicine, and wanted to develop an exclusive circle. The ethos was, "to show the world that one might be a Jew and enjoy life at the same time." (Samuel P. Abelow, *History of Brooklyn Jewry* (Brooklyn: Scheba Publishing Company, 1937), p. 73.) For more on the Brooklyn Jewish Center see David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "synagogue-center" in American Jewish History*, (Hanover, New England: Brandeis University Press, 1999), p. 247ff.
44. This is the stated use on the building's Certificate of Occupancy, dated 15th December 1938.
45. See *Reports of cases heard and determined in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York*, Volume 254 (1938), p. 798; John Harlan Amen, *Report of Kings County Investigation, 1938-1942*, p. 70; Charles R. Ashman, *The Finest Judges Money can Buy, and other forms of Judicial Pollution* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1973), pp. 89-90; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 27th January 1937 and 28th July 1938; *New York Times*, 14th and 28th March 1939.
46. *Igrot Rayatz* vol. 13, p. 303.
47. Levine *ibid.*; Wolf and Gopin *ibid*; Rabbi Avraham B. Hecht, *My Spiritual Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Private Publication, 2006), p. 104; Ashkenazi, *Otzar Chasidim—New York*, pp. 201-6.
48. The move took place some time between 17th August (13th *Av*), the date of Menachem Mendel's last *Reshima* (installment 13), and 30th August (26th *Av*), when Rashag wrote to Chabad immigration attorney Henry Butler, informing him that the couple had relocated to Nice (*Kovetz 28th Sivan*, p. 13). The couple's visa application was subsequently transferred to the consulate in Nice (*ibid.*).
49. Back in July, the Chief Rabbi of France, Isaïe Schwartz (1876-1952), had been banned from his usual privilege of broadcasting on the radio, and was warned that measures against the Jews were in the making. Still, it remained inconceivable to many that the French government, which had been so good to the Jews for centuries, would turn against them. Even after Rabbi Schwartz was refused an audience with Chief of State Marshal Philippe Pétain in August, Schwartz still believed that the Marshal was "above suspicion" and that it would be "unjust to say that we are dealing with a deliberate policy of hostility" towards Jews. These naive hopes were finally put to an end when, on 3rd October, the Vichy government passed its first discriminatory laws, the *Statuts des Juifs*, banning Jews from the army, the press, and from commercial and industrial jobs.

Fleeing to Nice, Menachem Mendel and Moussia placed themselves in a thirty-mile demilitarized zone, occupied by the Italians (following their attack on France in June). While

the Italian government was allied with Hitler, and had also passed anti-Jewish legislation in 1938, the implementation of these laws was lax, as Mussolini was far less anti-Semitic than Hitler, possibly due to the presence of many prominent Jews in Italy. Nice was therefore the safest option for Menachem Mendel and Moussia as they waited for Chabad lawyers to persist with the visa application.

50. Interviews with Yeshaya Gertner and David Bezborodka (*Early Years IV*).
51. Letter to Mr. Dov. Padover, dated the third day of Chanukah, 5705, in *Igrot Kodesh* vol. 2, p. 14.
52. Lentshin Chasidut was founded in 1821 by Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, a disciple of Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the "Seer" of Lublin (1745-1815).
53. Interview with Yeshayah Gertner. For a letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rabbi Yechiel Gertner, see *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 8, p. 184. Rabbi Yechiel's daughter married Rabbi Menashe Klein (1923-2011), who became an important postwar *posek* in America and enjoyed a close relationship with the Rebbe.
54. See *Reshimot* installments 1, 20, 144 and 150.
55. Interview with Joseph Sungolowsky (JEM, *Early Years*).
56. According to one testimony, Menachem Mendel traveled to Italy to fetch an *etrog* from the district of Calabria, which, according to Chabad custom, is considered the choicest source. Before Passover, he managed to obtain *shmurah matzah* from the Schmerling family in Switzerland through the assistance of David Bezborodka, who was permitted to travel abroad for his work, something extremely rare during wartime. (Bezborodka manufactured mirrors for use in French submarines.) See interviews with Rabbi Menachem Tiechtel and David Bezborodka (*Early Years IV*). Tiechtel recalls the Rebbe being in Vichy for Sukkot 5701, when, in fact, he was in Nice.
57. For the following see *Kovetz 28th Sivan*, pp. 10-15; Altein and Eliezer Zaklikovsky pp. 328-331; Levine, *Poland*, pp. 347-353.
58. For more on HICEM see Donna F. Ryan, *The Holocaust and Jews of Marseille: The Enforcement of Anti-Semitic Policies in Vichy France* (University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 137-40.
59. While in Marseille, Ramash *farbrenge*d for students of a makeshift Yeshivah on 15th *Shevat*. Reb Zalman Shachter-Shalomi (b. 1924), who was present at the gathering, recalls the content of Ramash's talk in *Yishmru Daat: Chassidic Teachings of the Fourth Turning* (Ohalah, 2009), p. 7ff. See also his interview in *Early Years IV*. For a further recollection of the Marseille visit see interview with Aharon Noach Blasbalg (*ibid.*)
60. Box 212.
61. *Igrot Rayatz* vol. 13, p. 331.
62. After Italy had declared war on the Allies in 1940, all Italian shipping routes had been closed and only three companies from neutral countries maintained transatlantic routes, two in Portugal and one in Spain. The Lisbon *Serpa Pinto*, which would later achieve iconic status for saving refugees, was an 8,000-ton Portuguese transport ship sailing under the command of Captain Americo dos Santos. With a capacity of 600 passengers, the 150-meter vessel made regular trips to Rio, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, saving some 7,800 refugees during the war.
63. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 98a.
64. Interview with Rabbi Leibel Bistritzky (1926-2013) in *Kfar Chabad* issue 1510 (2013).
65. Remarkably, while the vast majority of Polish Jews did not survive the Holocaust, many students of the Yeshivah in Otwock *did* manage to escape. At the outbreak of war, Rayatz encouraged the Yeshivah students to flee across the Lithuanian border, which still remained open, to the Lubavitcher Yeshivah in Vilna. A record of students from January 1940 from the Vilna Yeshivah lists forty-three names, most of whom had arrived from Poland. Rayatz and Rashag spent much energy seeking for an escape route for these students, and by the fall he had secured fifty-two U.S. visas for students in Vilna and Riga. By the winter a further seventy-two visas had been obtained. The planned escape route was via Japan, traveling through Russia, where the visas would be collected at the American consul in Moscow.



Ultimately, only thirty-eight of the students managed to reach Kobe, Japan in the spring of 1941. On arrival, they discovered that their American visas had been revoked as part of Breckinridge Long's campaign to restrict immigration; but all but one of them survived—some reaching Canada later that year, some to America after the war, and one student to Israel. Rayatz also managed to save his secretary, Rabbi Moshe Leib Rothstein (1900?-1967), who escaped from Warsaw to Vilna and eventually reached the United States via the Japan route, arriving in San Francisco in 1940. See Levin, *Poland* chapters 54-62 and *ibid.* pp. 357-360.

66. Rabbi Yisrael Alpenbaim, *Yirat Shamayim Otzaro, the Life of Harav HaChasid Rabbi Yitzchak the Masmid* (Heb.). (Kfar Chabad 1996: *Kfar Chabad Magazine*), pp. 277-281. For more on Zuber see Chana Sharfstein, *It Was Evening, It Was Morning: Scandinavia in the Aftermath of World War II* (Devora Publishing, 2012).
67. Letter dated 30th October (9th *Cheshvan*) 1941, *Igrot Rayatz* vol. 6, p. 55. For details of the efforts to rescue the couple see Levine, *Poland*, pp. 354-6.
68. *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 3, p. 161, 173. This was based on the testimony of Mr. Mordechai Unrad from Warsaw, who wrote to Ramash that he had been in Treblinka with the Horensteins. Unrad identified the *yahrtzeits* as Chaya Mushka Horenstein, 14th Elul; her son Menachem Mendel Horenstein, 25th *Cheshvan*; and his wife, Sheina (Sheina), the second day of *Rosh Hashanah*.  
See also diary of Rayatz from 1945 in Levine, *Treasures* p. 58.
69. *Likutei Levi Yitzchak* (New York: Kehot, 1970), 4 volumes. Reb Levik's arrest and exile was chronicled by his wife Chana Schneerson in her diaries (Tilles, *A Mother in Israel*).
70. Chana Schneerson Memoirs, installment 16.
71. See *Hayom Yom*, introduction. It is unclear whether he was a patient in the hospital or, like other Jews in the area, he was rounded up by the Nazis and taken to the hospital for execution. See, for example, Joshua Rubenstein, Ilya Altman, *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*, (Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 203.
72. Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 241; Yad Vashem database of murder sites in the occupied territories of the former USSR ([http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/murderSite.asp?site\\_id=446](http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/murderSite.asp?site_id=446)). A "page of testimony" filed with Yad Vashem by researcher P. Fazzini in 2009 lists Berel's murder as having taken place on 25th June 1941, whereas the Yad Vashem database of murder sites states that the Igren facility began to be liquidated in October.
73. While we do not know her date of birth, her oldest daughter Chana was born in 1880, so she is likely to have been born around 1860 or earlier.
74. Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky, interview with Genia Schneerson in 2007 ([http://www.col.org.il/show\\_news.rtx?artID=28210](http://www.col.org.il/show_news.rtx?artID=28210)—accessed December 2013).
75. Letter dated 23 *Shevat*, 5744 (January 28, 1984), published in *L'Chaim*, issue 313 (Lubavitch Youth Organization, 1994).