Mr. Nelson, a house painter, also lived in Brownsville. If I recall correctly, Mr. Nelson had also learned in Tomchei Tmimim in his youth. A warm-hearted and pleasant person, Mr. Nelson lived on Hopkinson Street, and was in great demand as a painter. Mr. Nelson was once hired to paint 346 Brooklyn Avenue — the building where the Ramash lived. One day, as Mr. Nelson left the building carrying two buckets of paint, the Ramash happened to walk out at the same time and tried helping Mr. Nelson carry his buckets. Obviously, the painter would not let go of the bucket, and refused to let the Ramash bother with the fresh paint. "Why do you care if I fulfill the *mitzva* of "you shall surely help him"?" asked the Ramash. Hearing this, Mr. Nelson conceded, and the Ramash carried a bucket of paint down the stairs for him.

Though the vast majority of Jews living in Brownsville were of Chassidic background, many other Jews lived there as well. *Yeshivas Chaim Berlin*, one of the first yeshivos in America, started in Brownsville. The yeshiva had an excellent reputation, and Jewish children from all over the city came to study at the yeshiva. Due to the lack of Chassidic yeshivos, many Chassidim sent their children there as well.

The Revolution

Meanwhile, the Rebbe Rayatz began laying the groundwork for Jewish Day Schools in America. Upon arriving on American soil, the Rebbe had proclaimed "America is not different!" and began working for the cause of Torah-true *Yiddishkeit* with such zeal and energy that it disconcerted many lay leaders and rabbis half his age. Various delegations met with the Rebbe Rayatz, trying to convince the Rebbe about the "futility" of his work and suggesting that the Rebbe conserve his waning health. Ignoring them all, the Rebbe

Rayatz proceeded with a systematic plan aimed at raising and educating American youth in the way of Torah and *mitzvos*.

First, the Rebbe's followers arranged *Mesibos Shabbos* gatherings, where Jewish children of all ages gathered every Shabbos to hear Jewish stories and songs. These informal weekly assemblies made an incredible impact on the otherwise apathetic Jewish-American youth, sparking an active interest in their heritage.

Building on the success of the *Mesibos Shabbos*, the Rebbe Rayatz instructed his followers to initiate a "Sunday School" program. In those days, before the advent of Jewish parochial schools, almost all Jewish children attended Public School, which did not schedule classes on Sunday. Energized and motivated by the Shabbos assemblies, droves of school children attended these Sunday schools. There they learned about the weekly Torah portion, heard stories of *tzaddikim*, and about practical Jewish laws and customs.

Having thus established a core group of students in many cities around the United States, the Rebbe Rayatz went on to start a veritable chain of Jewish Day Schools to better serve the needs of American Jewry. Stunned and awed, American Jewish leaders watched as, within a few years, the Rebbe opened schools in dozens of cities. Under the Rebbe's guidance, schools opened in Philadelphia, New Haven, Buffalo, Rochester, Worcester, Providence, Chicago, and many other cities.

Chassidim called these schools "Achei Tmimim," referring to them as "brothers" of Tomchei Tmimim. Reb Eliezer Weiler, a Chassid with a long beard, gave his soul to the project, devoting tremendous amounts of time and effort to make these schools succeed. Aside from boy's schools, additional schools were also opened for Jewish girls.

Tremendous manpower was needed to properly manage the expanding network of fledgling schools. The Rebbe thus turned to his Chassidim, sending many away from their comfortable New York homes in order to help direct these yeshivas in distant cities. As demand grew, the Rebbe asked older *bochurim* to join his army of teachers, administrators and principals. Many of my friends traveled to various cities and I was asked to join the staff of the new Day School in Buffalo.

Buffalo

In the 1940's, Torah-true Judaism was virtually non-existent in Buffalo. Though many synagogues boasted large congregations, most Jews did not practice all the *mitzvos*, and certainly not openly. Rare exceptions existed but, in the overall picture, the future of Buffalo Jewry looked bleak.

The situation of Jewish youth in Buffalo was a sorry one. Even those who came from so-called "religious" homes quickly abandoned their Jewish ways for the carefree pleasures of American life. I can think of only a handful of families — like the lawyer Shulgasser and his sons — who retained their *Yiddishkeit* and succeeded in raising religious children. Thankfully, our new Day School began turning the tide.

Before I arrived in Buffalo, Rabbi Tzvi Fogelman (today of Worcester, Massachusetts) ran the yeshiva. When I came, Rabbi Fogelman left to run the yeshiva in New Haven; Rabbi Moshe Yitzchak Hecht left to help the yeshiva in Worcester; and Rabbis Aron Popack and David Eidelman took control of the yeshiva in Buffalo.

I arrived at the yeshiva building on Butler Street, and Rabbi Popack immediately gave me a class of children to teach. I taught with heart and soul, returning home at night with my clothes drenched in sweat. "Don't exert yourself so much," my

new friends tried counseling me. "Take it easy with your classes."

I could not follow their advice. As a Chassid, I knew the Rebbe was counting on every one of us to make lasting inroads in Jewish education. I constantly repeated the maxim of our Sages, "Words that come from the heart, enter the heart." I knew I had to exert great toil and effort in order to truly instill in my students a lasting love of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Many Jewish residents of Buffalo watched the developments at our yeshiva with detached bemusement, still confident that one day the yeshiva would collapse and fold. "There's no future for the Torah way in Buffalo," people said to us time and time again. "*It simply won't work.*"

They were wrong. The yeshiva grew steadily as the classes expanded, accomplishing significant religious change in the city. To our good fortune, certain local Jews had faith in our project and worked hard to provide us with stable financial support. They remembered the spiritual grace of pre-war Jewry, and the warm, sincere homes of their parents, and they desired no less for the Jewish children of Buffalo. Reb Leibish Silberstein, the honorary President of the school, worked hard to raise money for our activities. He was ably assisted by two *shochtim* — Mr. Landau and Mr. Siggel — and a third individual who became the school secretary.

During my stay in Buffalo, I found time to visit the magnificent Niagara Falls, a natural wonder that can only arouse awe and admiration at the beauty of Hashem's Creation. At times, visitors to Buffalo would ask me to serve as their guide to the falls.

(Niagara Falls played an important role in the life of many refugees. These wondrous waterfalls lie on the border between Canada and the United States, and many refugees used this area as a point of entry into Canada. In those days, the

Canadian government imposed strict restrictions on refugees waiting to be admitted into the country. Many hapless Jews had visas waiting in the American consulate, yet were turned away at the Canadian border. In desperation, many Jews traveled to Buffalo and then to Niagara Falls, hoping to find a way into Canada to obtain their visas.

A certain individual, a wealthy Jew with a warm heart, found an ingenious way of assisting these unfortunate people. Using his private yacht, the wealthy magnate picked up groups of refugees at Niagara Falls, dressed them in lifejackets and swimming gear, and sailed them into Canadian waters. The businessman could trust no one else with this risky scheme; he alone ferried the refugees out of Buffalo and into Canada.

The magnate owned a private waterfront villa in Canada, where he brought his "guests" after the boat ride. Once there, the refugees changed back into regular clothing and left in small groups, trying to remain inconspicuous. Now that they were in Canada, the refugees made their way to the American embassy in Toronto, where they received the visas without question. Many refugees were thus able to settle permanently in the United States.)

Though many prominent rabbis graced the city of Buffalo, I will only mention Reb Dov Berish Tzukerman, a *gaon* and distinguished personality who possessed many outstanding characteristics. A Chassid of Belz, Rabbi Tzukerman was exceedingly pious and scholarly. He came originally from Galicia but, after the war, he left Europe and moved to Buffalo. The Rebbe held Rabbi Tzukerman in great regard and conversed with him in Torah matters.

Having grown up in Poland, I felt very comfortable at Rabbi Tzukerman's home and he always received me graciously. His home was graced with Chassidic warmth and vitality. His pious manner prompted me to improve my

personal spiritual growth and my study of Torah. Rabbi Tzukerman learned Torah day and night, constantly immersed in the holy books around him. He also proofread and reprinted *Chiddushei MaHari Kurkos* — an ancient commentary on the *Rambam*. I became very close with this great *rav* and he later participated in my wedding.

Jews from surrounding areas often came to consult with Rabbi Tzukerman on matters of Jewish law. Even residents of Rochester would drive all the way to Buffalo to speak with Rabbi Tzukerman regarding divorce cases and other complex issues. He presided over *gittin* and other complicated Halachic matters. I could always tell whenever Rabbi Tzukerman was scheduled to perform a divorce. From early on in the morning, he exhibited palpable strain and anguish — tortured at the thought of separating a Jewish couple, and anxious about properly fulfilling the many intricate laws associated with *gittin*. (Rabbi Tzukerman's son-in-law, Rabbi Sholom Rivkin, served for many years as the senior *rav* of St. Louis.)

Rabbi Tzukerman gave his rabbinical supervision to "High Great," a slaughterhouse in Buffalo where they *shechted* cattle. He arrived every day by bus and spent hours validating the sharpness of the slaughter knives and supervising the work. After some time, the local *shochtim* began convincing me to learn *shechita*, and Rabbi Tzukeman also persuaded me in this direction. I spent many months learning the necessary laws and practicing, until I finally received rabbinical ordination to *shecht* both fowl and cattle. At that point, I began working alongside the *shochtim* in the slaughterhouse. Since I did not yet have a family to support, the wage I received from the company was more than enough to cover my needs. I spent many months in the pleasant company of other *shochtim* and, in all, my stay was an enjoyable one.

Many people visited the established Jewish community in Buffalo. One day, we received a telegram from the Rashag, informing us of his intention to visit Buffalo to raise funds for the worthy cause of Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim. As chief administrator of the yeshiva, the Rashag often traveled around the country, soliciting donations to keep all branches of Tomchei Tmimim functioning in perfect order. In his telegram, the Rashag asked us to prepare a list of potential donors and to arrange appointments during the few days he would spend in Buffalo.

Indeed, after a few days, the Rashag arrived in town with Rabbi Predmetzki, the *rav* of a prestigious congregation in the Bronx. Rabbi Predmetzki was also the Vice-Chairman of the "Union of Orthodox Rabbis of America." Among his many other talents, the Lithuanian born rabbi was a fiery orator, famous for captivating large audiences with his spellbinding speeches. The Rashag, too, spoke skillfully, but Rabbi Predmetzki had special charm with potential donors, and the Rashag often recruited the *rav* to help the cause of Tomchei Tmimim.

Seeing these venerable rabbis alone aroused a sense of reverence. Whenever this distinguished pair entered the home of a donor, the host would listen respectfully as they outlined the unique character of Tomchei Tmimim, and often contributed far more than to an ordinary charity. Indeed, the Rashag's visit was incredibly successful. He and Rabbi Predmetzki spent the better part of the week visiting the donors on our list and they managed to raise significant funds for the yeshiva.

As the week drew to a close, Rabbi Predmetzki voiced his determination to return home for Shabbos. "Must you leave?" said the Rashag in anguish. "I had planned that you would

speak in various synagogues on Shabbos and continue fundraising with me on Sunday."

"I cannot stay for Shabbos," answered the rabbi. "I promised my wife to return home for Shabbos."

The Rashag could hardly believe his ears. Every dollar the collected was vital for the advancement of Tomchei Tmimim, yet the *rav* refused to stay in the city another day. He tried reasoning with Rabbi Predmetzki, but the *rav* would not reconsider. "I promised my wife already," he repeated. "I must be home for Shabbos."

Realizing he alone could not raise more money, the Rashag was left with no alternative but to join Rabbi Predmetzki and return to New York by train on Thursday night. Even in Buffalo, I tried very hard not to miss a Shabbos in 770, and I often took the Thursday night train back to New York, so that I ended up sitting in the same compartment as the Rashag and Rabbi Predmetzki. The eminent scholars were engaged in discussion, when the Rashag suddenly brought the issue up again. "Did we really have to leave?" he said. "Couldn't you stay over Shabbos?"

"But I promised my wife!" answered the *rav* in exasperation.

"What do you mean?" retorted the Rashag sarcastically. "Yes, your wife wants you to come home — so what of it?"

Hearing this, I could hardly contain myself. I gathered my courage, approached the Rashag, and asked his permission to say a few words. Recognizing me, the Rashag introduced me to the *rav*, and asked me to continue. "I once heard a *vort* from an elderly Chassid," I began. "In order to be a Chassid, a person must be ready and willing to rebuff three sorts of demands. (The Yiddish vernacular for this is *"a chosid darf hobin dray faygen"* — three figs i.e. three rebuffs.)

"The first mode of rejection should be toward himself. Whenever an individual feels an impulse to do something contrary to Torah, he must reject the impulse immediately and say to his evil inclination, 'A *fayg* to you!' Secondly, a Chassid must rebuff worldly inclinations. He should staunchly refuse to act in ways set by crass materialism, and, instead, give a *fayg* to this kind of mentality.

"The third *fayg*," I continued, "should be readied for one's wife. Whenever she presents a demand that is not in accordance with the advancement of Torah, the husband must be able to say, 'A *fayg* to you.'"

The Rashag brightened, nodding his head in appreciation. Later, whenever he saw me in Crown Heights, the Rashag would call out and say: "*Nu*, Goldman! What's doing with your *faygen*?"

Figures and Personalities

During my first years in America, I merited to meet a handful of Chassidim who had learned in Tomchei Tmimim when the yeshiva was still in the village of Lubavitch. These distinguished Chassidim radiated spiritual light; one could instantly detect their deep, essential association with Chabad.

Rabbi Avraham Elya Axelrod, the *rav* of Baltimore, was one such person. The purity of his face and brilliance of his eyes fairly shouted, "I am a *Tomim*!" It was immediately apparent that he stood on a higher spiritual plane, having internalized the teachings and deep philosophies of Chassidus Chabad. He looked inherently different than an ordinary rabbi. Looking at him, you could see a manifestation of Lubavitch and Chassidus. I am at a loss for accurate words to describe this individual and others like him, because it is nearly impossible to characterize such spirituality and refinement.