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HOW THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE BROUGHT ME BACK TO TORAH-(TO BE A LUBAVITCHER CHOSID)

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Z.Y.A., literally brought me back to the Torah and its Commandments, to be a Lubavitcher Chosid.

At first, it was through his shluchim, his representatives, Rabbi Yosse Hecht and Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz. Then, after I had made the decision to take on Yiddishkeit, Judaism, the Torah and its Commandments, the Rebbe did it himself when I moved to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, the Lubavitch World Headquarters.

In the year 5738, 1978, I met my first Lubavitcher Rabbi, just mentioned, an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, named Rabbi Yosse Hecht, in Madison, Wisconsin. Rabbi Yosse Hecht is the son of Rabbi J.J. Hecht, Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht. (The thing is that I grew up not knowing anything at all about Torah-True Judasim, the Torah and its Commandments.)

In January of 1978 I went to Madison, Wisconsin to attend the MBA program at the University of Wisconsin. One day, shortly after I got settled in Madison and started attending school, I got a telephone call from Rabbi Yosse Hecht. Rabbi Hecht was the representative of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Madison. He had a Chabad House on the University of Wisconsin campus. Rabbi Hecht said that he wanted to introduce himself to me and to see if he could help me out with my Judaism. So we arranged a meeting to discuss the matter.

Rabbi Hecht's Chabad House was, as I recall, on a small tiny street on the campus called Howard Place. It was a residential house that was converted into a Chabad House-Synagogue. Also, as I recall, my apartment was right on the lake, Mendota lake, on a small street named Iota Court. I vividly remember that the moment I walked into the Chabad House to meet with Rabbi Hecht, the very first thing I saw was a beautiful picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. At that time I didn't even know who the Rebbe was, but I knew that the picture was of some noted Rabbi, discovering sometime later that it was the Rebbe.. The Rebbe's picture gave me the impression that the Rebbe was a very holy man. Also, something else that I vividly remember that first time I walked into the Chabad House was that I walked right by the Aron HaKodesh, the Holy Ark with the Torah Scroll inside. And I remember vividly that I could sense at that moment that something very holy was inside that Ark.

At the meeting I explained to Rabbi Hecht concerning my background (really a total lack of a background) in Torah-True Judasim. I told Rabbi Hecht some of my personal feelings about G-d and such matters. Rabbi Hecht then suggested that I start coming to the Friday night Shabbos prayer services at the Chabad House.

I remember that at the first Friday night Shabbos prayer service I attended, it was a very warm and cozy environment in the Chabad House. The room was full with other College students like myself, and the experience was very new and revealing to me. It was literally the first time in my life that I ever attended an Orthodox Jewish Prayer Service. I took a prayer book and I tried my best to say the evening prayers along with everybody else.

After the Prayer Service, we all went downstairs to the dining hall to partake of the Friday night Shabbos Meal. Everyone sat around a large table and we did all of the Shabbos meal customs. Rabbi Yosse Hecht and his wife Raizy both sat at the head of the Table, and all of us College Students sat around the very long dinner table. There was a lot of very lively stimulating conversation with a very festive Shabbos spirit. And this is the way that it would be every Friday night for the duration of the school year.

So for a long time, about 8 months, I went to the Chabad House every Friday night for the Shabbos Prayer services, as well as eventually coming also for the Shabbos morning prayer services.

My going to the Chabad House for these 8 months was very revealing to me, because since I grew up my whole life to the age of 23 (which is when I first went to the Chabad House) not knowing anything at all about real Torah-True Judaism, over this 8 month period I gradually began to get a foundation and a true concept in my mind of what real Torah-True Judaism is all about.

However, all the time I was in Madison, Wisconsin at the Chabad House, I still had not taken on Judaism, the Torah and its Commandments. Rabbi Hecht put Tefillin on me several times and even lent these Tefillin to me to use (although I never really put them on myself). Also, one time Rabbi Hecht received a shipment of Torah and Chasidus books from New York. I looked through the books and picked one out that I asked Rabbi Hecht if I could borrow. It is called Kuntres Umayon, by the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber, the Rebbe Rashab. Rabbi Hecht lent me the book and it turns out that that was literally the first Chasidus book that I ever had in my possession.

Also, for a good while I attended a regular Torah class, one on one, with Rabbi Hecht and myself. I remember that we learned Pirkei Avos, the part of the Torah called the Ethics of the Fathers. I remember that Rabbi Hecht explained once to me that, in Torah, the character attribute of humility has a catch to it, meaning that one cannot recognize and think highly of himself for being humble because that itself would be a contradiction to the humility itself. With other character attributes one can be very aware of them and think well of himself, without being a contradiction, but not so with humility. Also, another very important thing Rabbi Hecht did was to suggest that I learn the Chasidic part of the Torah saying to me that it will give me an ariel view of the Torah. Also I specifically

remember the Mishnah that Rebbe Hecht taught me from Pirkei Avos where it says that it is better to be a tail to a lion, than a head of a fox.

One time, I remember that Rabbi Hecht very excitedly and hurriedly went over to turn on the radio to hear the news about what was going on when Israel invaded Lebanon and surrounded the PLO in Beirut. It very much impressed me as to how concerned Rabbi Hecht was about the cause of something so vitally connected to the welfare of the entire Jewish People.

Incidentally, Rabbi Hecht at that time was newly married to his wife Raizy, and had just had a baby girl, their first, named Sarah.

As mentioned above, I arrived in Madison around January. When Pesach, Passover came, of course I attended the seder at the Chabad House. I remember that I told the Rabbi there, when he asked me about the leaven I possessed, that I had a parakeet in my house that I fed it bird food. He told me to go down the hall in my apartment building and sell the bird and the food to the gentile to take care of it over Passover, to then eventually get the bird back after Passover. Which I did. This is because bird food is leaven which is forbidden to be eaten or possessed on Passover.

One time I was at Rabbi Hecht's house (not the Chabad House) on Shabbos afternoon. Rabbi Hecht, his wife Raizy and their daughter Sarah and I were sitting on the grass behind Rabbi Hecht's house. As we were sitting there, I pulled a few blades of grass from the ground. Rabbi Hecht told me not to do that because it was forbidden on Shabbos. This all reminded Rabbi Hecht of a cute story about the same thing. He said that one time a Rabbi went over to his student to tell him the same thing, not to pull the grass out of the ground on Shabbos. And as they were talking about it, and because it is human nature for some reason to reflexively pull grass out of the ground, the Rabbi himself started pulling grass out of the ground.

When I did start attending also the Shabbos morning prayer services, I remember that although we always had a lot of people at the Friday night Shabbos services, that many many times on Shabbos morning, we only had somewhere between 5 and 8 people and that we had to wait a long time sometimes to get a minyan, 10 Jewish men. And there were even many times that we didn't get a minyan and we had to say the prayers individually. And I do remember that all of the time every Shabbos there was never a minyan for the Shabbos afternoon service.

I also remember having Rabbi Hecht call me up to the reading of the Torah, on Shabbos morning, where I said the blessings and Rabbi Hecht read aloud the Torah portion.

One time, I remember, that for some reason I and a few other College students were eating the Shabbos meal at Rabbi Hecht's private home (which I already said that this was a different house than the Chabad House itself). Rabbi Hecht during that meal said something about the Jewish G-dly Soul and the animal soul that is in every Jew. (animal soul in the sense that this soul desires physical pleasure, not to mean that it is literally an animal). I remember thinking and saying to Rabbi Hecht

about this, who am I, meaning what is my true identity, is it my G-dly Soul or my animal soul? I don't recall Rabbi Hecht's answer. But, as I well found out years later after having studied Chasidus, the Chasidic dimension of G-d's Torah, that it is really true that every single Jew, without exception, has a dual nature and character. That a Jew's Essence, or inner core, is in fact His G-dly Soul. This is really a Jew's true identity. Its just that this G-dly Soul is covered over by his animal soul only externally and superficially. Where the G-dly Soul only wants in life to faithfully fulfill the commandments of G-d's Torah, whereas the animal soul only wants to fulfill its desire for physical pleasure even if it involves violating the commandments of G-d's Torah, G-d forbid. And, thus it is, that every Jew has to constantly fight to overcome his physical inclinations to faithfully fulfill the commandments of G-d's Torah.

An extremely important and interesting point that I must make is something concerning G-d's Divine Providence. Very briefly, the major point of G-d's Divine Providence, according to Rabbi Yisroel Bal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chasidic movement, is that every single detail of Creation is created and controlled by G-d. That the Bal Shem Tov says, for example, that a leaf falling off of a tree and blowing this way or that way is under G-d's complete determination and control. This means that every other single detail, and detail of a detail, of the entire Universe and Creation is under G-d's control, and that G-d is making everything happen every moment. So, it turns out that when I was a young boy and growing up in the City of Chicago, and I was about 11 or 12 years old, my parents sent me to a non-religious Jewish boys camp, named Indianola, on Lake Mendota (mentioned above) that was right across the lake from Madison, Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin. Little did I know at that time that about 12 years later I would meet an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosse Hecht, in Madison, Wisconsin and then later become a Lubavitcher Chosid of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to forever change my life.

Also, another extremely powerful and interesting point is that my Mother when she was growing up actually went to the University of Wisconsin for school, in Madison. Also, a little bit south of Madison, Wisconsin was a non-religious Jewish girls camp named Burr Oaks camp, run and owned by Bill and Yetta Rice two Jewish people. My Mother, Adele Klein (my father being Charles Klein) was hired by the Rices to be the director of that camp. Every summer after the girls camp was over, Bill and Yetta Rice turned the camp into a resort for adult Jews from Chicago to come up there and use the facilities such as horseback riding, boating, dining and socializing. My father used to go up to Bur Oaks then to the resort with his friends, and Bur Oaks is where he met my Mother. That is how he eventually married my Mother. And, to remember, this was all in the state of Wisconsin.

At the end of the summer, Rabbi Hecht suggested to me that I visit his Father's Bal Teshuva Yeshiva, Hadar HaTorah, (a school designed to introduce and educate young Jewish men about their eternal G-d-Given Jewish Heritage). At that time the Yeshiva was in its summer session up in the Catskill Mountains in New York State, whereas during the school year it is in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York, a half a block down the street from 770, the Lubavitcher Rebbe's synagogue

and World Headquarters of the Lubavitch Movement.

So, I went to Rabbi Hecht's father's Yeshiva in the Catskills for a short stay. When I got there, a Rabbi and some Yeshiva students welcomed me to the Yeshiva. It was at night. After getting settled, I sat down with a Yeshiva student to study something from Chasidus, the mystical part of the Torah.. After studying with him for a while, I decided that it seemed too mystical for me, so I immediately left the Yeshiva, and checked into a nearby Hotel. It turns out that years later I realized the big mistake I made in leaving because Chasidus is the Essence and Highest Holiest part of the Torah and it is the absolute foundation of G-d's Torah and Judaism. Shortly after that short stay at the Yeshiva in the Catskills, I returned to the same Yeshiva in Crown Heights, Brooklyn to receive my Jewish Educational foundation that has been with me for the last 28 years. Of course, that was after I accepted Torah, Judaism, on myself, which will be fully discussed further on in this article.

When I returned to Madison, Wisconsin and told Rabbi Hecht what happened when I went to his father's Yeshiva, he said to me that sometimes there is a little bird who is thirsty. And G-d in His Infinite Mercy brings a strong wind that carries this little bird to a river of water. The only thing that is needed is that the little bird should bend down his head to drink the water. Yet, for some reason the little bird can't even do that. That is how Rabbi Hecht described my going to his father's Yeshiva and then leaving right away. But, as I just said, that was all rectified very soon when I did return to the Yeshiva to learn for a number of years.

It turns out, that towards the end of the summer I decided, also obviously according to Divine Providence to go to law school the coming fall in S. Louis Missouri at Washington University Law School. When I told this to Rabbi Hecht he gave me the name of a Lubavitch Rabbi there who was also an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. His name is Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz. He told me that I should contact him when I got to S. Louis to be able to continue my Jewish involvement there.

I arrived in S. Louis Missouri to attend law school in about August or early September of 1978. However, when I got there I didn't immediately contact Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz. I was just interested in getting involved in my law school studies.

I remember vividly that when Rosh HaShanah of that new year came, 5739, I was thinking of where I should go for the Rosh HaShanah services. I thought that I could go to Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz or maybe to some Reform Synagogue. It turns out that I ended up not going anywhere. However, when Rosh HaShanah came I experienced something totally new and unique for the first time in my life which in retrospect was because of my 8 month involvement with Rabbi Hecht in Madison, Wisconsin. It was the day of Rosh HaShanah and I was in my apartment. I started to think about the fact that it was Rosh HaShanah and that this was a totally and thoroughly Jewish day. I became very emotional about it and I felt for the first time in my life a very powerful and essence-type connection to my being Jewish.

After that, I continued my law school studies and, at first, I did not contact Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz as Rabbi Hecht had urged me to do.

A few weeks or months later, one day, I got a letter or card in the mail from Rabbi Hecht. Rabbi Hecht asked me in the card about whether or not I had continued my Jewish involvement in S. Louis. I distinctly remember that reading the card I felt once again my strong connection to Rabbi Hecht and that Rabbi Hecht was rightfully expecting of me to re-establish my Jewish connection with Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz. However, right at that point I did not immediately call Rabbi Alperowitz.

A while later, about the time when I was to begin preparing for my first semester's final exam's, I did in fact get a very strong motivation to contact Rabbi Alperowitz. So, I called Rabbi Hecht in Madison and asked him for Rabbi Alperowitz's phone number. Rabbi Hecht gave it to me and I called Rabbi Alperowitz right away.

I told Rabbi Alperowitz about my involvement with Rabbi Hecht and his Chabad House in Madison, Wisconsin and that I would like to come for the Friday night Shabbos prayer services and meal. Rabbi Alperowitz immediately invited me for the next Friday night Shabbos.

Friday afternoon, shortly before the Minchah, afternoon, prayer service, I arrived at Rabbi Alperowitz's house. His wife told me that he had already gone to the local synagogue for the prayer services and that I should go there to meet him. So I went there. As I was approaching the front of the synagogue, Rabbi Alperowitz came over to me to greet me. The first thing he did was to look around on my head to see if I had a yarmulke on. Which I did have a yarmulke on, learning this from my experience with Rabbi Hecht. We went into the synagogue, and we said the afternoon prayer. Then Shabbos came in, and we said Kabbalos Shabbos, the service greeting the Shabbos queen, and then, after that, the rest of the Shabbos evening service.

After that, Rabbi Alperowitz and I started walking home to his house for the Shabbos evening meal. I distinctly remember that he put his arm around my arm as we were walking home. This greatly impressed me with the liveliness of Rabbi Alperowitz and automatically Torah-True Judaism.

We then arrived at Rabbi Alperowitz's house and greeted his wife, whose name is Susha. Rabbi Alperowitz had many children, kein eyin hora, however, he only had one, his youngest child, with him in S. Louis, his son Yekutiel, whose was then 8 years old. I don't recall if Yekutiel, who Rabbi Alperowitz and his wife called Kuti was with us at the synagogue or not. However, he must have been with us at the synagogue and on the way home, because every Jewish boy, especially one who is 8 years old, always goes with his father to the synagogue.

Then, we gathered around the Shabbos table and sang the traditional Sholom Aleichem song to start the Shabbos meal. Rabbi Alperowitz and Kuti made Kiddush, the sanctification of the Shabbos over wine, and then, we washed our hands in preparation for the Motzie, the blessing over the Chalah, the bread to start the Shabbos meal.

At the meal something that left a tremendous impression on me was the way that Rabbi Alperowitz, inbetween the conversation, was singing very soul-stirring and rapturous Chassidic songs (just the melodies without words). I could feel that his singing these Chasidic melodies literally touched my soul.

In retrospect, now, I can recognize that Rabbi Alperowitz must have known that I was ready for something in terms of spiritual advancement, to go higher. This was because of my 8 month involvment with Rabbi Hecht in Madison.

Rabbi Alperowitz that Shabbos night told me a number of extremely fascinating and soul-moving Chasidic analogies and concepts. Also, in retrospect, I can now clearly see that Rabbi Alperowitz has a very very high neshama, soul (Rabbi Hecht also). He has an uncanny ability to communicate directly to your inner Jewish essence, directly to your soul. Soul to soul. Also, and most importantly, it says in Chasidus that a Chosid is one existence totally with his Rebbe, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. This means that in a very spiritual, mystical and G-dly way the Rebbe acts through the Chosid. That also, the Chosid literally has the power and the neshama of the Rebbe inside of him. And that is why I gave the name to this article, "How the Lubavitcher Rebbe brought me back to Torah (To be a Lubavitcher Chosid)", even though, at first, it was through Rabbi Hecht and Rabbi Alperowitz. Because Rabbi Hecht and Rabbi Alperowitz, as well as all other Chasidim, are totally one existence with the Rebbe.

Now, to mention some of these Chasidic analogies and concepts that Rabbi Alperowitz told me that night- by far, the one that stands out in my mind the most is the one about the valuables.

Rabbi Alperowitz told me that once there were two Jews walking in the desert. As they were walking, they came upon some broken pieces of cardboard that had the word valuables written on them. The one Jew knowing that they were valuable picked them up to carry them on his way. The other Jew, not wanting to have the burden of carrying them, decided not to pick them up and carry them. So it was. As they journeyed through the desert they kept coming upon these broken pieces of cardboard that had the word valuables written on them. So the one Jew kept picking them up and carrying them and the other Jew didn't. Finally, they arrived at the place called G-d's Paradise where there was a big fence and a gate at the entranceway. There was a guard at the gate. He said to these two Jews that to get into G-d's Paradise you have to have the valuables. So, the one Jew got in when he gave the guard the valuables that

he was carrying. The guard told the other Jew to sit on the side. (However, I am absolutely sure that somehow eventually the other Jew also got into G-d's paradise, maybe because he had to go back and pick up the valuables.)

This is the analogy of Rabbi Alperowitz. I immediately understood the teaching of the analogy- that the entire life of a Jew in this world is like these two Jews walking in the desert. And that the broken pieces of cardboard with the word valuables written on them are the Torah and its commandments. That to study Torah and to do the commandments of the Torah may superficially seem to an uneducated Jew that they are just worthless pieces of cardboard. But that an educated Jew knows how valuable they are and that you have to pick them up and carry them as your burden to then gain entrance to G-d's Paradise which is after life in this world. (Although, the further matter is that any Jew who truly devotes himself to the Torah and its commandments during his lifetime comes to truly know and recognize that these broken pieces of cardboard are really the most precious diamonds that there could be, and you really feel it too.)

Rabbi Alperowitz also told me another analogy to the entire life of a Jew in this world- he said that there are 2 barrels and a pipe going inbetween them to connect them. The first barrel is like where the neshama, the Jewish soul, is coming from before it comes into a body in this physical world. The second barrel is like where the soul is going to after it finishes its work in this world. And the entire life of a Jew in this world is like the pipe connecting the two barrels.

Also, Rabbi Alperowitz said, the Rebbe Rashab, the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe described a Chosid as a lamplighter. That in those days of the Rebbe Rashab they had lamp poles around the city where a lamplighter would go around with a long pole and a flame of fire on the end of the pole to then light up the lamp poles. Rabbi Alperowitz said that the Rebbe Rashab said that a Chosid is like a lamplighter that he goes around and lights up the neshamos, the souls, of other Jews with the G-dly light, or fire, of G-d's Torah.

One more analogy that Rabbi Alperowitz told me, but which may have been in the coming weeks, was that the entire life in this world is like a play with play actors. That everyone is an actor. I immediately understood the very Chasidic lesson of this analogy in that G-d is the power that makes everything happen, and that all of the physical creations in this world just appear externally to the eye, but that the real true and inner force that drives everything is G-d's power that is in the creations.

So, then, the Shabbos meal was over, and it was time for me to go home back to my apartment. As I walked home and especially when I got back to my apartment that night on Shabbos, I greatly thought over all of the Chasidic concepts and analogies that Rabbi Alperowitz told me. As I was doing some things in my apartment and thinking over this Chasidus, the real truth dawned on me and I was facing the real truth of life for the very first time in my life- it occurred to me, totally based on the Chasidus

that Rabbi Alperowitz had told me that night, (as well as my involvement with Rabbi Hecht) that G-d is absolutely true, that the Torah is absolutely true, and that since this is so, I as a Jew MUST fulfill G-d's Torah and its commandments. In one moment I was faced with the challenge of a lifetime- I was faced with the CHOICE of taking on G-d's Torah and its commandments. I felt at that moment that I had a total total free will choice to take on the Torah and its commandments, and also that I was strongly strongly inclined to do so because of the absolute truth I had just realized about G-d and His Torah. So in one split moment, I did it, I decided to totally take on G-d's Torah and its commandments forever.

The next moment I was confronted with another challenge. Since I had just taken on the Torah and its commandments it was Shabbos. And I always liked to sleep with the lights out at night. And we are not allowed according to Jewish Law to turn lights on and off on Shabbos. However, all the lights were on in the house. So I left all of the lights on that night, and I went to sleep by somehow covering myself up.

The next morning I left to go to Rabbi Alperowitz's house and then with him to the synagogue, and I didn't have anything in my pockets, because the laws of Shabbos forbid to carry anything outside on Shabbos.

It turns out that that Erev Shabbos, Friday afternoon, when I first met Rabbi Alperowitz before the afternoon prayer service at the synagogue was Rosh Chodesh Kislev, the first day of the Jewish Month of Kislev. It was exactly one year after the Lubavitcher Rebbe had been healed from his heart attack and went home to his house from 770 the central Lubavitch synagogue. It was a great Chasidic Holiday of rejoicing and thanks to G-d for making the Rebbe better. Also, that night the beginning of Shabbos when I was at Rabbi Alperowitz's house hearing him tell me all of the Chasidus and then going home and taking on Torah, was Bais Kislev, the 2nd day of the Jewish month of Kislev. It was the day that exactly 9 years later the seforim, the Rebbe's and the Chasidim's books came back to 770, the central Lubavitch synagogue after the Didan Notzach victory of Haa Teves, the 5th of Teves a year earlier. The 5th of Teves was the day of the court victory deciding that the books stolen from the Lubavitch library really belong to the Rebbe and the Chasidim.

(To continue the story) When I arrived at the doorway of Rabbi Alperowitz's house, Rabbi Alperowitz and his son Kuti came to the door in order to go to the synagogue for the morning Shabbos services. Rabbi Alperowitz made a particular point of telling me to go with Kuti into the kitchen to sit down and eat some cake before going to the synagogue. Which I then did. (Years later I found out that the custom of Lubavitch is to specifically eat something in the morning before the Chasidus study and prayers in order to have more strength to learn and pray with. Even though, technically, in the

Code of Jewish Law, it says not to eat anything before the prayers. But, one of the 613 commandments of the Torah from G-d Himself is to listen to the enactments of the truly qualified Rabbis of every generation. And previous Lubavitcher Rebbes being the Moshe, the one top leader, of every generation enacted the Lubavitch custom to specifically eat something before learning Chasidus and praying. This is because according to the original provision of the Code of Jewish Law Jews at that time used to pray immediately upon awakening in the morning, and it wasn't difficult to pray without eating because it was immediately upon awakening. But, now, according to the Lubavitcher Rebbes when it is so important to learn Chasidus before the prayers in order to have the proper spiritual connection to G-d during the prayers, everyone to maintain proper health and strength for the prayers must eat something.)

Rabbi Alperowitz, Kuti and I went to the synagogue for the morning prayers. Even though I had spent a lot of time and had had considerable experience with Rabbi Hecht in Madison, Wisconsin, yet, in all, these very Jewish experiences of regularly going to the synagogue to pray were very new, exciting and revealing to me.

The next day after Shabbos, on Sunday, in my effort to further carry out my decision to take on Yiddishkeit, the Torah and its commandments, I began to do more commandments of the Torah. I had with me in S. Louis, the tefillin that Rabbi Hecht had lent to me, and also a pair of tsitsis that I hadn't been wearing. So, when I got up on Sunday morning, I took out the tsitsis and put them on for the very first time in my life. Then I also put on the tefillin as good as I could, and I said the morning prayers from a prayer book that Rabbi Hecht had lent to me.

Up until that time I had been eating in the College cafeteria on a regular meal plan. Now, I knew that I must eat kosher food. So I went to director of the cafeteria and requested to get only kosher food. It turns out that the College cafeteria at Washington University in S. Louis carried specially packaged kosher meals. So from then on I ate only kosher food at the cafeteria. Also, I remember that right nearby my apartment in University City neighborhood in S. Louis, there was a kosher butcher on Delmar avenue. So many times I went there and bought kosher salamis and matzah and used them for my meals in my apartment.

The very next Shabbos when I went to Rabbi Alperowitz for Shabbos, the second Shabbos of my religious life, I had my tsitsis on of course. I remember seeing Rabbi Alperowitz and his wife smiling so much at me seeing the tsitsis hanging on my pants.

Shortly after that, I called Rabbi Hecht in Madison and told him of the great news that I had accepted Torah on myself. Rabbi Hecht said that I now greatly needed to come and study Torah in his father's Yeshiva in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York, his father being as said above, Rabbi J.J. Hecht, Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht. Rabbi Hecht said that I needed

to study in Yeshiva to get a good foundation in Torah that I had never had. Also, Rabbi Hecht said that he wanted me to come to Crown Heights over Chanukah for a Pegisha, An Encounter with Lubavitch, which is a whole week including Shabbos of an introduction to Torah and Lubavitch that was presented by various distinguished Rabbis. So, I agreed to come, but that would only be a few weeks later.

During the next week or two, Rabbi Alperowitz invited me to come over to his house for a farbrengen, a Chasdic get-together in honor of Yud-Tes Kislev, the 19th of the Jewish Month of Kislev, which is one of the biggest Chasidic-Lubavitch Holidays in the year. It was the day that the Alter Rebbe, the First Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rebbe Shneur Zalman was redeemed and freed thus marking the victory of the Alter Rebbe's Chasidic movement and Chasidim. It is called Rosh HaShanah for Chasidus. It turns out that a year later after I had gone to Hadar HaTorah Yeshiva, Rabbi Hecht's father's Yeshiva, that I found out that Yud Tes Kislev, the 19th of Kislev is my birthday. I remember opening the calendar book that matches Jewish-Hebrew dates with English ones. When I saw the date of Yud Tes Kislev as my birthday I went through the ceiling (to say it in a dramatic way).

When I got to Rabbi Alperowitz's house for the Yud-Tes Kislev Farbrengen, Chasidic get-together, Rabbi Alperowitz was there, his wife Susha and their son Kutli. Also, Rabbi Alperowitz had invited the leading Litvishe Rabbis of the S. Louis community to his house for the Yud Tes Kislev Farbrengen. The Farbrengen consisted of a hook-up by the telephone to 770, the head Lubavitch Synagogue of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and the Chasidim in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York. Rabbi Alperowitz had the telephone hook-up wired to a set of speakers so we could all hear the Farbrengen by the Rebbe going on in 770. (Rabbi Alperowitz at that time taught Torah in one of the Jewish Religious day schools of these Litvishe Rabbis and that is how he knew them to invite them.) There were a lot of Litvishe Rabbis and Yeshiva students there at Rabbi Alperowitz's house for the Yud-Tes Kislev Farbrengen. Also, Rabbi Alperowitz had set up a large arrangement of long tables for the occasion.

It was literally the very first time in my life that I ever heard the Rebbe speak. The Rebbe spoke in Yiddish and Hebrew, so I didn't really understand anything other than the fact that the Rebbe was speaking about Torah. I vividly remember Rabbi Alperowitz standing on the side of the room (while everyone else was sitting down at the tables. I vividly remember the Holy look and shine coming from Rabbi Alperowitz's face as he listened to and contemplated the words of the Rebbe.

The Farbrengen lasted about 4 hours, starting at about 9:30 and going until about 1:00am or 2:00am in the morning. Somewhere inbetween all of the Litvishe Rabbis and Yeshiva students left. But, I stayed at Rabbi Alperowitz's house until the end of the Farbrengen. I remember that, even though I couldn't understand the words of the Rebbe, but I felt very attracted to the holy sound of the Rebbe's voice. The Rebbe's Farbrengens consisted of

many segments of very scholarly Torah explanations interspersed with many segments of very soul-stirring Chasidic niggunim, songs, (without words) that the Chasidim who were present in 770 were singing. When the Rebbe finished to speak and at the end of the Farbrengen, I then returned to my apartment.

During the next few weeks I remember another Torah explanation that Rabbi Alperowitz told over to his wife as we were standing in the lobby of the synagogue after the prayer service had ended. Not knowing much of Torah, I didn't understand it that much. But Rabbi Alperowitz said something about a special meaning of when Yaakov Avenu, our Patriarch Jacob was by Lavan, the father of Yaakov's wives. Lavan said to Yaakov (as recorded in the Torah) "Tov teetee osah loch ma'teetee osah la'eesh achar sheva emodee". Translated- (Lavan said to Yaakov concerning Yaakov's desire to marry Rochel, Lavan's daughter, "It is better for me to give her to you, than for me to give her to another man, dwell with me". Now, I don't recall the special teaching that Rabbi Alperowitz gave to this quote from the Torah, nor did I understand it at that time. But I recently asked Rabbi Alperowitz the meaning of that, and he told me as follows. (also explaining that this following Torah idea was told over by the Alshich (a very big Torah Scholar) in the presence of the AriZal, Rabbi Yitzchok Luria (also a very big Torah Scholar) in Tzvat, Israel about 500 years ago.) Yaakov wanted to marry Rochel, Lavan's daughter. Lavan was a Ramai, a liar and a cheater. And Lavan knew that he was going to trick Yaakov and give his other daughter Leah to Yaakov instead. So when Yaakov thought he was marrying Rochel, and Lavan put Leah in her place, and then Yaakov discovered Leah in the morning, Yaakov complained to Lavan about deceiving him. So Lavan claimed to Yaakov that when he told Yaakov tov teetee osah loch, that it is better for Lavan to give Rochel to Yaakov, the word teetee, tuf tuf yud, is the numerical value of 810, which when you add the 8 and the 1 gives 9. 9 is the numerical value of Leah's name lamed, aleph and haa which is 36, and adding the 3 and the 6 is 9. So Lavan claimed to Yaakov that he did in fact indicate to Yaakov that he would give him Leah for a wife. And the second part of the quote from the Torah me'teetee osah la'eesh achare, than for me to give her to another man, ma'teetee, is mem tuf tuf yud which is the numerical value of 850 which the name Rochel is raish ches lamed, that letters of the name Rochel added up are 238, added up again is 13, And the 850 value of ma'teetee is also 13. So Lavan also told Yaakov that he told him that he would give Rochel to another man. Although in fact Lavan did end up giving Rochel also to Yaakov for a wife.

In the coming weeks as I was starting to adjust to my new-found Yiddishkeit, Torah-True Jud;asim, I bought a beautiful metal napkin holder and I gave it to Rabbi and Mrs. Alperowitz as a gift and as a sign of my appreciation for their kindness.

Rosh Chodesh Kislev, the first day of the month of Kislev, that Friday afternoon that I met Rabbi Alperowitz in front of the Synagogue the first time and then that night Bais Kislev, the Shabbos night that I took on the entire Torah forever, was Parshas Toldos, the section that we read in the Torah called Toldos. I went to the Pegisha for Chankukah, the Encounter with Lubavitch, several weeks later about the week of the 25th of Kislev. During that time I continued my effort to begin my life anew in Yiddishkeit, the Torah and its Commandments.

I remember that I now started to say the daily prayers every single day three times a day which also included putting on my tefillin every morning, the tefillin that Rabbi Hecht had lent to me in Madison, Wisconsin. I also started to somewhat study the Torah book Kuntres Umayon, by the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rebbe Sholom Dov Ber, the book that, as I said before, Rabbi Hecht had lent to me in Madison, Wisconsin. I remember that when I was reading it that I had the impression that it presented to me very new ideas that I was not used to. This is because Chasidus explains the G-dliness and G-dly levels in the world and in Torah, and they are very esoteric and high ideas.

Also, as mentioned before, I continued eating only kosher food in S. Louis.

During that time I prepared for and took my final exams in Law School for the first semester.

I also remember that every Shabbos when I would go with Rabbi Alperowitz and his son Kuti to the local synagogue for the Shabbos morning prayer service, that since I didn't know hardly any Hebrew at all, when the Torah reader would read the weekly Torah portion from the Torah scroll, it was very hard for me to follow the Hebrew words inside of the Torah book that I had opened in front of me. But I did try my best.

One time I remember that Rabbi Alperowitz invited me over to his house for a class in the Tanya, the major and fundamental Classical Chasidic Torah book written by the Alter Rebbe, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rebbe Shneur Zalman. Rabbi Alperowitz taught me together with another Jew who was listening in on the telephone in Dallas, Texas. His name was Joe, and Rabbi Alperowitz was also trying to bring Joe back to Yiddishkeit, the Torah and its Commandments. I remember that the Tanya seemed to me to have very high ideas that I was not used to, however, Rabbi Alperowitz greatly explained the Tanya with his great Chasidic warmth and liveliness. Also, a number of times when I was at Rabbi Alperowitz's house he gave me copies of the Tanya in English to read on my own. I vividly remember that one of the concepts it talked about in the Tanya was the Infinite G-dly light that fills up all of reality. I remember trying to picture in my mind this infinite G-dly light that fills up all of reality, but it was hard to picture it because when I thought of light I naturally pictured physical

light. But I knew when I was reading the Tanya that G-d's Infinite Light is not physical. However, I was definitely very much attracted to the Tanya.

I remember that one Shabbos, Friday night, after I had returned to my apartment from having eaten the Shabbos meal by Rabbi Alperowitz, that I couldn't get into my apartment because I didn't have the keys. This was because on Shabbos we are not allowed to carry anything outside. And since getting into your apartment to be able to sleep is a matter of health, you are allowed to have a Gentile do the thing for you, even though for a Jew it is forbidden. So, I went outside and got a Gentile to come and force open the door to my apartment. So, thank G-d, I was then able to go into my apartment and get a good night sleep.

So it was. I made a great effort those first few weeks in S. Louis after I had taken on Yiddishkeit, the Torah and its Commandments, to make a good and solid beginning in my Torah life.

Then, the final exams were over, and the first semester of my law school was finished. So it was time for me to go back to Chicago and then Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York for the Pegisha during the Festival of Chanukah, the Encounter with Lubavitch. I was supposed to meet Rabbi Yosse Hecht and Rabbi Alperowitz in Crown Heights.

When I got back to my Parent's house in Chicago, I made the plane reservation to go to New York for the Pegisha. I arranged with Rabbi Hecht to meet him at the airport. When I got into the New York airport, Rabbi Hecht was there to meet me. We then drove back to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, the world-wide headquarters of Lubavitch.

When we got to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, we went into 770 the main Lubavitch Synagogue and the place of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's office. (It turns out that that day that I arrived in New York and met Rabbi Hecht at the airport and then arrived in Crown Heights and 770 for the first time in my life, was the 26th of the Jewish Month of Kislev, the Jewish year 5739. It was exactly 8 days after the 19th of Kislev, my birthday. So it was the day of my Bris Mila, my circumcision right after I was born.)

When Rabbi Hecht and I went into 770 it was right at Minchah time, the afternoon prayer service (about 3:15pm). Rabbi Hecht very much wanted me to see the Rebbe. So Rabbi Hecht brought me into the small synagogue within 770 (upstairs) (where the larger synagogue is downstairs). The Rebbe was actually in that room, the small synagogue, together with Rabbi Hecht and myself and a lot of other people. However, I could not see the Rebbe because there were so many people crowded around the Rebbe. So, Rabbi Hecht said to me to get up on a bench to see if I could see the Rebbe, and I still couldn't see him. So, it turns out that the first day I actually saw the Rebbe was the next day, Wednesday, the 3rd day of Chanukah, and the 27th of Kislev.

The next day it was again Minchah time (the afternoon prayer service),

about 3:15pm. This time Rabbi Hecht, Rabbi Alperowitz and I were downstairs together with a few thousand people in the very very large main Lubavitch synagogue in 770. We were standing half way between the Ark with the Sefer Torah and the Bemah where the Torah is read, in the middle of the room. I was standing then right next to Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz. All of a sudden everybody in the room made a large hush, to quiet everybody, because the Rebbe was just about to enter, and right at the same time, the crowd of a few thousand people split open to form a corridor for the Rebbe to walk through, all of this conduct happening because the Rebbe in truth is a King and that's how everybody acted towards him. When all of this happened (and remember this was the very first time in my life that I had ever experienced something like this) I was in tremendous awe of the Rebbe. My heart was beating very fast and I was very excited.

Then, the Rebbe came into my view and I saw the Rebbe for my very first time. The Rebbe's face had a very G-dly and powerful look. At that moment I was standing right on the edge of the corridor that went through the crowd of people, right next to Rabbi Alperowitz. So, the Rebbe walked right in front of me, as he went by, and then up to his special place on the platform that had been erected for Chanukah.

Then, we had the Minchah, afternoon prayer service, and then, the lighting of the Chanukah Menorah with the singing of Hanaros Halalu.

It turns out that that day, the 3rd day of Chanukah, the 27th of Kislev, which was the first day that I actually saw the Rebbe, was the 2nd Ge'ula Redemption of the Alter Rebbe, the First Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rebbe Shneur Zalman. Earlier in this article I said that I was born on Yud Tes Kislev, the 19th of Kislev, in the Jewish year 5715. Yud Tes Kislev was the first ge'ula redemption of the the Alter Rebbe. So, also, the first day that I saw the Rebbe (which in the Rebbe's book Hayom Yom says that the first day a Chosid comes to his Rebbe is considered to be his birthday) was the 2nd redemption of the Alter Rebbe.

Also, when I came into the small synagogue in 770 and I was in the same room with the Rebbe, even though I couldn't see him, that day was, as mentioned above, the second day of Chanukah and the 26th day of Kislev, which was exactly the 8th day after my birthday, the day of my bris, my circumcision. It is recorded in Lubavitch Torah books that the bris, the circumcision, of the Rebbe RaShab was also on the second day of Chanukah, the 26th of Kislev.

Returning to the story, so, on that Wednesday or Thursday, the 27th of Kislev, was the beginning of the formation of the Pegisha the Encounter with Chabad-Lubavitch in Crown Heights. A lot of young Jewish people like myself, who were either new to Judaism, or not yet religious, had come to Crown Heights for the Pegisha. Each one of us was assigned a Lubavitcher Chosid in the community to stay with at their house during the Pegisha for the purpose of lodging and meals. I remember that the Lubavitcher I was assigned to was Gil Hirsh, a wonderful person. Gil was married and had a lot of small children. He also had a flower shop in Crown Heights, which he still has to this day.

The Pegisha was led by a number of very big and distinguished Lubavitch Rabbis. The ones that I remember were Rabbi Shmuel Lew

from England, Rabbi Zalman Posner from Nashville, Tennessee, Dr. Yistchok Block, a Philosophy Professor from Canada, and a number of others.

The Pegisha consisted of seminars or classes introducing all of us to Judaism and specifically the Lubavitch way in Judaism. Most of the week from Thursday till Sunday, including Shabbos, we had these seminars, as well as prayer services and festive meals.

This was all very very new and revealing to me, since it was the very first time in my life that I had had a very thorough and involved explanation of the fundamental principles of Judaism in the Lubavitch mode of service. Of course, I had had all of my extensive experience in Madison, Wisconsin with Rabbi Hecht and in S. Louis with Rabbi Alperowitz, but this was much more extensive and thorough, especially because it was for most of a week. The speakers were fantastic, and in addition to being very instructive, they all had a great sense of humor and added that special element of humor and joy to their presentations. This is in keeping with the teaching of the founder of the Chasidic movement, Rabbi Yisroel Bal Shem Tov, who taught that the most important thing in Judaism is to serve G-d with joy.

One of the biggest things about the Pegisha that left the biggest impression on me was the tremendous G-dliness and spirituality of Chabad-Chasidus, the Chasidic part of the Torah that Lubavitch teaches. It literally opened up a whole new world for me, and gave me a new and fresh and totally G-dly-Jewish perspective on life and the world.

I remember that on the Shabbos of the Pegisha, for the Shachris, morning service, we prayed in 770, the Rebbe's central Lubavitch Synagogue, together with the Rebbe. It was very awesome and very inspiring to be together with such a holy person as the Rebbe.

One day, either before or during the Pegisha, I sat in on a class at the Yeshiva, Hadar HaTorah. The teacher was Rabbi Sholom Ber Veshedsky. Rabbi Veshedsky is a very big Torah Scholar, and a very warm, lively and extremely humorous person. I really enjoyed his class. It was the very first time that I ever attended an actual Torah class as part of a Yeshiva.

At that time when I sat in on Rabbi Veshedsky's class, I was at a very momentous point, where I was trying to decide whether or not to leave law school in S. Louis and come to study in the Yeshiva, Hadar HaTorah, Rabbi Hecht's father's Yeshiva, or to wait until the end of the law school year to come to Yeshiva for the summer. I was experiencing a lot of doubt about the matter and about what I should do. Rabbi Yosse Hecht strongly urged me to come to his father's Yeshiva right away, but it didn't seem to me to be such an easy thing to take a year off from law school in the middle of the year.

After I finished sitting in on Rabbi Veshedsky's class that day, and after the Minchah, afternoon, prayer service at Hadar HaTorah, the Yeshiva, I went over to Rabbi Veshedsky to consult with him about this matter of leaving law school to come to the Yeshiva. It really seemed to me that Rabbi Veshedsky was the kind of a person that you could really talk to and get good advice from.

I explained the situation to Rabbi Veshedsky, as mentioned above, about this doubt I had as to whether or not to wait until the end of the school year to come to the Yeshiva or to take a year off from law school and come now to the Yeshiva. Rabbi Veshedsky spoke very heartfelt words, and he put it in a very simple and straight-forward manner- he said that now I have a desire to come to the Yeshiva, and that I should take this opportunity to do it, because, if I waited until the end of the year I might feel different about coming. It wasn't so much the logic of what Rabbi Veshedsky said, rather it was the feeling of the real truth that he spoke with to me. That feeling of truth coming from Rabbi Veshedsky right then and there totally convinced me and totally took away all of my doubt. So, right then, I decided to leave law school and come to Hadar HaTorah Yeshiva for at least a year. (which, in retrospect, Rabbi Veshedsky has a very big part in my becoming religious, because even though I had already decided to take on Yiddishkeit, the Torah and its commandments, yet, since it was so crucial for me to get a foundational Yeshiva education, Rabbi Veshedsky's convincing me to do it greatly furthered my Jewish religious growth and development.)

Sunday came, and the Pegisha was over. It was now time for me to go back to Chicago and S. Louis and wrap up my affairs with respect to law school in order to come to the Yeshiva, Hadar HaTorah, to learn and get my much needed foundation in Yiddishkeit, Judaism.

I remember that I had a very strong determination to carry this thing through to leave law school to come to the Yeshiva. But I knew that it would be a very hard thing for me to tell to my parents, especially my father, because my father had a great desire for me to finish law school and become a lawyer. I knew that I would get resistance from my Father and Mother, and I was totally prepared to overcome it.

When I got back to Chicago, my Father and Mother were very much against my leaving law school. But they could full well see that I was totally determined to leave law school to go to Yeshiva. So even though they argued alot, in the end, they knew that my decision would stand.

So it was. I rented a car to go down to S. Louis to get my things together and bring them back to Chicago. When I got to S. Louis, I met with the Dean of the Law school at Washington University. I explained to him the situation that I wanted to take off one year as a leave of absence. He was very reluctant, but then he agreed. So, I packed up and brought my things back to Chicago in the rental car.

Then, I packed up again and I went back to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York to go to the Yeshiva.

When I got to Hadar Hatorah I got settled with a nice room in the Yeshiva and I started out in the first level introductory class, which was Rabbi Veshedsky's class.

When I started studying Judaism at Hadar HaTorah it was really

and totally new and first-time experience for me. All I knew were the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, and I really had no knowledge about Judaism, Torah, other than what I had learned in Madison with Rabbi Hecht and in S. Louis with Rabbi Alperowitz.

The daily schedule of the Yeshiva was as follows- 7:30-9:00 Chasidus, 9:00 to 9:30 preparation for the morning prayer service, 9:30 to 10:30 the morning prayer service, 10:30 to 11:15 breakfast, 11:15 to 1:00 class in the Talmud, 1:00 to 2:00 review of the class in the Talmud with a study partner, 2:00 to 2:15 the afternoon prayer service, 2:15 to 3:30 lunch, 3:30 to 5:30 more review of the morning Talmud class with a study partner, 5:30 to 6:45 the brief version of the Code of Jewish Law with a study partner, 6:45 to 8:30 dinner, and 8:30 to 9:30 the last period of the day, review of the morning Chasidus class with a study partner.

There were a lot of other young men like me at the Yeshiva who were new to Judaism and who had also come to the Yeshiva to get a foundation in Torah. However, many of the other Yeshiva students had been studying at the Yeshiva for a longer time than me and they knew a lot more than I did.

Rabbi Veshedsky was one of the best teachers I have ever had in my entire life. He was a very big Torah scholar and also and most importantly he was a very joyful person with a fantastic sense of humor. When he taught his classes, he taught the Torah material on a very high level of Torah scholarship but interspersed throughout the classes were many joyful and very humorous remarks. This made the learning extremely enjoyable because not only did we learn a lot about Torah, but it was a lot of fun too !!!!!

So this was the beginning of my one and a half years studying Torah at the Yeshiva Hadar Hatorah. This one and a half years of studying Torah at the Yeshiva was the rock solid foundation of my Yiddishkeit, my Judaism, up until and including the present day, and forever. (although my returning and studying at Hadar HaTorah part-time years later from 1985 to 1992 also greatly contributed to my foundation in Judaism.) The truth is that it is absolutely amazing as to what you can accomplish by studying and living at the Yeshiva in just one year full time. It is absolutely incomparably higher and greater than what you can accomplish by only going to selected Torah classes once a week even for a period of years. Jews must know that when they come back to Judaism they should really take off from what they are doing and go and study full-time in a good Yeshiva, preferably a Lubavitch Yeshiva.

However, my process of taking on Yiddishkeit, Judaism, even though I made the actual choice and decision in just one moment, yet, it took me about 5 to 8 years to fully go through the transition process of getting fully adjusted to Jewish religious life. It was a very gradual day to day experience of actually living Judaism and confronting all different types of experiences until I finally and truly learned what Jewish religious life is about.

So, I studied at Hadar HaTorah in Crown Heights, Brooklyn

for a year and a half. The Lubavitcher Rebbe and the World Headquarters of the Lubavitch movement were in Crown Heights, so I went to 770, the main Lubavitch Synagogue and I saw the Rebbe alot at Chasidic get-togethers, as well as the regular prayer services.. This year and a half was 1979 to 1980. I especially got to know the Rebbe when I moved back to Crown Heights in 1985 and lived there until 1992. During that period I went to many many Chasidic get-togethers (including the daily prayer services) with the Rebbe and the Chasidim (myself being a Lubavitcher Chosid) and I got a very thorough and high-level Lubavitch Education in Yiddishkeit, especially a very deep knowledge of Lubavitch-Chasidus, the Chasidic Dimension of the Torah.

So, this is the story of how the Lubavitcher Rebbe brought me back to Yiddishkeit, Judaism, first through his emmisaries, Rabbi Yosse Hecht and Rabbi Sholom Ber Alperowitz, and then through the Rebbe himself.