



PIONEERS OF BORO PARK by Yitzchok Shteierman

"To understand the present you must study the past." When one looks around at the burgeoning community — humming with Jewish life — that is Boro Park, it is hard to imagine that it wasn't always like this. Hamodia gives you a glimpse into Boro Park of yesteryear, and the personalities, institutions, and regular folk who comprised this "shtetl" in years gone by.

Harav Yoizef of Liska, zt"l Overflowing love in Boro Park of yesteryear

In the first part of this feature on Rav Yoizef of Liska — a leader who graced the community of Boro Park soon after escaping the inferno of the *Churban* — we noted the stock that Rav Yoizef descended from, *tzaddikim* who led the Liska court in Hungary. They were among the first *chassidische* Rebbes in all of Hungary.

His *lev tov*, which generated an overflowing love for every Yid that he encountered, including the many broken Holocaust survivors who inhabited Boro Park in those days, was legendary.

The current Liska Rebbe, Harav Tzvi Hirsh Friedlander, explained his father's decision to settle in Boro Park, something that was unusual at the time. Most of the *she'eiris hapleita* elected to go to the Lower East Side, Crown Heights or Williamsburg.

"It was very important to him to establish a shul that would allow him to somewhat resurrect the destroyed link and tradition of *marbitzei Torah v'Chassidus* of his holy *zeides* and enable him to continue the *mesorah* of his forefathers, *Hy"d*, whose tenure in Hungary had been brutally cut short.

"In hindsight, it seems the main reason that he came here, to Boro Park, was that he had cousins, descendants of the brother of the Tal Chaim of Liska, fellow members of the Friedlander family who lived there. They said that they would help him establish a *beis medrash* if he would come here.

"He initially attempted to rent a home, but when the owner realized that he was going to make a shul there, he immediately objected. That is when he realized that he would have to purchase a home. There was a real estate broker in Boro Park by the name of Reb Avraham England and he showed the



The Liska Rebbe dancing *mitzvah tantz* at the wedding of his daughter, *tbl"c*, Rebbetzin Pearl Gittel Leifer.



With Harav Moshe Feinstein at the *chasunah* of, *ybl"c*, the current Liska Rebbe.

Rebbe around some homes. "The tradition of his *zeides* of being careful with *hasagas gvul* and to have an *ayin tovah* strongly influenced his choosing of a home. There were various properties that he declined, for one reason: "This house is too close to other Rabbanim who have established themselves in this area; how can I take away from them?"

He eventually bought a house on 50th Street between 14th and 15th avenues, only after receiving assurances from the Chernobyler Rebbe, Harav Yaakov Yisroel Twersky, *zt"l*, (whose *beis medrash* was nearby on 49th Street, off 15th Avenue) that not only did he not object to his opening a *beis medrash*, but encouraged him to do so to help facilitate the growth of the community.

In fact, he even instructed one of his *mispallelim*, Reb Yaakov Hersh Bindiger, to *daven* in the newly estab-



Announcing a *yahrtzeit seudah* at the shul in Boro Park of yesteryear.



Dancing with his son, *ybl"c*, the current Liska Rebbe, at his wedding.



The Liska Rebbe walking a young man to the *chuppah*. The *chassan* is Reb Tzvi Yosef (Hershel) Spiegel, *z"l*, whose wife, Mrs. Leah Spiegel, *a"h*, was a descendant of the Tal Chaim of Liska.

lished Liska *beis medrash*, telling him "the Liska Rebbe's Rebbetzin is a *Kozhnitzer einikel* and so are you." This shows the relationship that existed between these two Rebbes. The first benches that he took for the shul were from the Eitz Chaim Yeshiva, on 13th Avenue and 50th Street (Solomon Plaza).

Indeed, his shul became a gathering place of healing for numerous Yidden from the surrounding area. His *drashos* were a confluence of exhortations to a life of Torah and *yiras Shamayim*, along with the trademark love with which he caressed their souls.

Harav Yoizef of Liska possessed a deep desire to bring honor to his holy ancestors and his every move was always informed by that desire. One of the notable accomplishments of Rav Yoizef was the publication of the commentary of his father on *Tehillim*, entitled *Shaarei Hayosher*.

He was also an exceptionally heartfelt *baal tefillah* who warmed the hearts of all those who came. On that first Yamim Nora'im, several *minyanim* came to hear the Rebbe, even from the most distant areas of Boro Park.

The following story summarizes the Rebbe's *ahavas Yisrael*: A Holocaust survivor who lived on the Rebbe's block once encountered the Rebbe on the street as he was returning from work without wearing his *yarmulke*. He described his potential embarrassment, realizing the Rebbe would see him, yet the Rebbe in his loving fashion had the ability to erase his discomfort by giving him his own *yarmulke* with an understanding smile.

The Liska Rebbe was very close to a number of Rebbes of his time, such as the Skverer and Satmar Rebbes. In fact, Rav Yoizef went to greet the Skverer Rebbe, Harav Yaakov Yosef, *zt"l* (who spent his first two



Ad announcing the publication of his father's commentary on *Tehillim, Shaarei Hayosher*.

years in America in Boro Park, and only later moved to Williamsburg) at the port. When he saw him coming off the ship with a simple frock, he immediately gave him his own *Rebbische bekeshe*. Thus, this was the first *bekeshe* that the Skverer Rebbe wore in America.

Forty-five years ago, on 28 Shevat, Harav Yoizef of Liska, at the young age of 52, suddenly returned his soul to his Maker. He had a sudden heart attack, eight years after suffering an initial attack, leaving behind a legacy of kindness and caring for a fellow Jew in Boro Park of yesteryear.

Today, Liska carries forth its dynasty with the Rebbe's son and successor, Harav Tzvi Hirsh Friedlander, the Liska Rebbe, *shlita*.

Hamodia encourages ideas and submissions to this column. Please email Boropark@hamodia.com.