

Rebbetzin Nechama Friedlander, the Liska Rebbetzin, A”h

HAMODIA STAFF

Rebbetzin Nechama Friedlander, the Liska Rebbetzin, was *niftar* last Wednesday at the age of 101.

Rebbetzin Nechama grew up in prewar Vienna, daughter of Harav Avraham Yehoshua Heschel Frankel, the Hivnov-Lubliner Rebbe, *zy”a*, and Rebbetzin Perel, *a”h*. Young Nechama could trace her lineage to *zy”a*, Harav Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apt, the Chozeh of Lublin, Harav Elimelech of Lizhensk, Harav Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, Harav Yisroel of Kuzhnitz and the Sar Shalom of Belz. The Hivnov-Lubliner Rebbe was also a *ben achar ben* of the Chacham Tzvi.

Nechama was the youngest of many children, several of whom died in childhood.

Her family ancestry was very much intertwined with the Belzer Chassidic dynasty and its Rebbes. In fact, her oldest brother, 18 years her senior, was Harav Shmuel Frankel, *Hy”d*, the son-in-law of the Belzer Rebbe, Harav Aharon Rokeach, *zy”a*. The family shared a close kinship with Belz. Young Nechama would often play with her nieces and nephews in the attic of the famous Belzer shul.

On a number of occasions, young Nechama merited to see the third Belzer Rebbe, Harav Yissachar Dov Rokeach, *zy”a*, who was *niftar* in 1927. She would often recall the final time she saw him, shortly before Sukkos, the year before his *petirah*, when the Chassidim lifted him up on a chair so he could hang the *sukkah* decorations. It was on that last visit that she merited to receive a personal *brachah* from the Belzer Rebbe.

After the *Anschluss*, it was no longer safe for Jews to live in Austria, and the Frankel family, being fortunate enough to possess passports, fled Vienna. Nechama’s brother Reb Sholom fled to Switzerland — where he joined another brother, Reb Zalman, who had been living there to recuperate from an illness, which would claim his life in 1940. Reb Sholom would be her only sibling to survive the war.

Rav and Rebbetzin Frankel, along with Nechama, fled to Munkacs, then part of Czechoslovakia and soon to become part of Hungary. She and her parents went to Munkacs, to be near her mother’s sister in Ungvar. While the Holocaust raged across most of Europe, the Jews of Hungary were spared until early 1944.

Nechama’s mother became ill in 1940 and was *niftar* in 1942. She was buried in Munkacs.

In November 1943, a *shidduch* was proposed between Nechama



Dov and Shmuel Lenchewsky

Hesped by Liska Rebbe, *shlita*.



Dov and Shmuel Lenchewsky

Hivnov Rav, *shlita*, giving a *hesped*.

and Yoizef Friedlander, son of the Liska Rebbe, Harav Tzvi Hersh Friedlander, *zy”a*, who was a grandson of the first Liska Rebbe, *zy”a*, also named Harav Tzvi Hersh, author of *Ach Pri Tevuah*.

As the family had a connection with Belz, the Hivnov-Lubliner Rebbe asked the Bilgoray Rav, Harav Mordechai Rokeach, *zy”a*, brother of the Belzer Rebbe, *zy”a*, to meet with the prospective *chassan*. The Rav conversed in learning with the young man and reviewed the four *semichos* he had received from Hungarian Rabbanim, and declared that the *bachur* was indeed an appropriate *shidduch* for a girl from such an illustrious family.

The *shidduch* was finalized in the presence of the Belzer Rebbe, and the Rebbe rose from his chair and said that he wanted to give three *mazel tovs*: one *mazel tov* to the *chassan* and *kallah*; the second *mazel tov* to the family, for it would now have, for the first time, the *yichus* of Liska; and the final *mazel tov* over the fact that this *bachur* is a *yerei Shamayim* and *talmid chacham*.

While the Belzer Rebbe and his brother the Bilgoray Rav were in hiding in Budapest, en route to Eretz Yisrael, Nechama, who was daring, was often dispatched to bring food to the Bilgoray Rav, who was in the hospital. Often, she was also used to facilitate matters pertaining to the Belzer Rav’s escape. She also merited to make the *lecht* on Erev Yom Kippur, which was a highlight for the Belzer Rebbe’s *avodah*. At that time, she received a *brachah* from the Rebbe for *arichas yamim*.

Eventually, the war reached Hungary, and the Jews knew it was only a matter of time before they would suffer the same fate as their brethren across Europe. Nechama managed — for a price — to join a car that was escaping Munkacs; its passengers intended to head for Romania, and eventually, England. Nechama paid for the smuggler and bid her father farewell. She left the home and watched as her father waved

goodbye in the doorway, and she stepped into the car. Shortly after they began driving way, Nechama became overcome with emotion, remembering her father standing in the doorway and waving goodbye. She asked the driver to stop, and she left the car, walking back home.

As she entered, her father looked up, and said, “*Chumele, vus tist di?*” (“What are you doing?”) She replied, “*Ich ken nisht iberlozn di Tatte allein; vas vet zein mit di Tatte vet zein mit mich.*” (“I cannot leave Tatte alone; whatever will happen to him will happen to me too.”)

In the spring of 1944, Nechama and her father were deported to Auschwitz, as were hundreds of Hungarian Jews. Her father was gassed immediately upon arrival.

Her *chassan* was hiding in Budapest disguised as a gentile; he had fake identification provided by Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg and Karl Lutz, the Swiss consul.

Following the war, Nechama traveled to Grossvardein, Romania, upon hearing that a son of the Liska Rav had survived the war. One day, the man of the house related an ironic story that had occurred that morning in shul. A young man who had also found himself in Grossvardein after the war had been called up to the Torah. When the *gabbai* called him “*habachur*,” the young man insisted that he be called up as “*habachur hachassan*,” as he had been engaged before the war. The people in the shul were all smirking; did the young man really believe that his *kallah* was still alive after the *gehinnom* of the Holocaust? But the *gabbai* indeed called him up as he requested, “*Habachur hachassan Yoizef ben Tzvi Hersh.*” The man of the house related that he had heard that this *chassan bachur* was the son of the Liska Rav, causing Nechama to turn pale, knowing intuitively that this was her *chassan*. And so it was.

They were married shortly thereafter, in the summer of 1945. Their first son, Tzvi Hersh, today’s

Liska Rav, was born the following year. The Friedlanders immigrated to America in the spring of 1947. They settled in Williamsburg for several months, before moving to Boro Park, where Rav Yoizef opened a shul, re-establishing the Liska chassidic court in time for Rosh Hashanah 1947.

Two more children would be born in America: a daughter, Rebbetzin Perel Gitel Leifer, and a son, the Hivnov Rav.

“She was a Rebbetzin in every sense of the word,” recalls Mr. Ezra Friedlander, a grandson. “She grew up in Vienna, a big city, so she had a very broad-minded, cosmopolitan view of the world, and she spoke many languages. Yet she was a classic Rebbetzin of yesteryear, and always steadfastly true to her upbringing. She was very proud of her lineage, and always had the image of her forebears in front of her.”

The Liska *beis medrash* was the center of the Rebbetzin’s life. She was very protective of the Liska name, and did all she could to ensure that Liska would continue to serve *Klal Yisrael* in America as it had as a Chassidic dynasty in pre-war Europe.

Rav Yoizef passed away suddenly at the age of 52. “For her, the clock stopped ticking on that day, 28 Shevat, 1971,” says Ezra. For the next 47 years, everything in her life was centered on her memories of her late husband.

Her oldest son, Harav Tzvi Hersh, a *yungerman* of just 24, stepped into his father’s shoes as Liska Rebbe.

Rebbetzin Friedlander became ill over a decade ago, and withdrew from public life.

She was *niftar* Wednesday morning, 22 Cheshvan, on the 91st *yahrtzeit* of the third Belzer Rebbe, Harav Yissachar Dov Rokeach, in the attic of whose shul she had played all those years ago as a child, and the vision of whom, placing decorations on the *sukkah*, she would always remember.

The *levayah* was held in the Liska *beis medrash* in Boro Park. She was buried next to her husband on Har Hamenuchos — in a plot he had selected decades earlier, as it was near that of Harav Aharon of Belz.

The Rebbetzin who had spent a lifetime impressing upon a her children, “Never forget our illustrious ancestors; always live up to the standards of your forebears,” is surely rejoicing with *nachas* in Gan Eden at the generations she raised, of *talmidei chachamim, bnei Torah*, and *bnos Yisrael*, all following in the path of their holy ancestors.