The Jerusalem Rabbi Who Met President Ulysses S. Grant

By Dr. Yitzchok Levine

Introduction

The tradition of representa- tives of various communities and charities in Eretz Yisrael coming to America to collect funds dates back to the seventeenth century. One of the most fascinating of these houriachwin was Rabbi Chaim Yitzchak Schneerson, who came to America in 1869. Schneerson was born in Russia in 1833 or 1834. He was a great-grandson of the Rebbe Harav Yisrael HaTanya, Rabbi Shneuer Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Chasidut. In 1846, he emigrated to Eretz Yisrael (then known as Palestine), where he received a brilliant education in Talmudic learning. Moved the rabbis to ordain him at his bar mitzvah. By 1860, as a young man, he traveled to India, Persia, China and Australia, to raise funds for the poor of Persia, China and Australia, to these far-flung places. He wore a white robe over a long yellow vest, and a red oriental fez. He was a hand- some young man, with a princely bearing, as the portrait included in this article clearly indicates, he made a striking and exotic impression on all who met him.

Visit to America

In the late 1860s, Rabbi Shneerson left from Jerusalem to Paris and London, and finally to America to collect funds for the poor of Persia, China and Australia. He was most impressed by him. After his signature on this let- ter, he added the title “Rabbi Schneerson” to his name. He was a fervent "Amen" was heard in a large and appreciative audience. His Trip Across America

Rabbi Schneerson’s trip across America was very taxing. American presidents were not accustomed to receiving a rabbi on his own accord. Patrick Henry had sent a rabbi, but he was the rabbi of the Jews of America. Ulysses S. Grant was not in Washington, D.C. As told in Schneerson's autobiography, he had been invited to deliver a lecture at the National Institute, introduced by the Christian clergyman, the Reverend Dr. Howard Crosby. He stressed the need to purchase land and erect buildings. He pointed out that Abraham too, in his day, had been divinely promised to him. Rabbi Schneerson felt, was the chosen agent for the restoration of the Jewish homeland. After his trip to New York for Pesach and then, on April 27, 1869, he traveled across America, by railroad, that would take him cross-conti- nental to California. In May, he traveled to California and San Francisco. He traveled across America, Rabbi Schneerson received a number of invitations to speak before Jewish and non-Jewish audiences such as this one, from Palestine and Roumania:

SALT LAKE CITY, UT, May 10, 1869.
RABBI H. Z. SNEERSON, San Francisco.
SIR—Your favor of 29th ult. is to hand. In reply per- mit me to say it will afford our citizens much pleasure to have you address them in the tabernacles on subjects of deep and abiding interest to us all as the past history and pres- ent condition of G-d's covenant people, Israel. The President, evidently deeply moved by the Rabbi's sincere and moving address, immediately, that his Excellency may show favor which will be a mark of favor which will enable my brethren in the Holy Land in the hour of need to seek refuge under the Stars and Stripes, that this free country and its exalted chief should be blessed on the sacred spot of our common ancestors.

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Note: This article is based on the following sources: (1) The First Rabbi: Origins of Conflict Between Orthodox and Reform: Jewish Poland, History, by I. Harold Sharman, Perglas Ps. Santa Barbara, California, c.1968, pp. 527-531; (2) Palestine and Roumania: A Description of the Holy Land and the Present State of Roumania and the Roumanian Jew by Hayyim Zvi Sneersohn, Arno Press, New York, 1977.
Discovering the HASC Center, Inc.’s Binuryni – Prominent Doctors

Jerusalem Rabbi Who Met Presidents

By Mindy Shlaifig

This year, Rabbi Moshe Klein, a secular studies teacher at Yeshivat Bnos Chaya in Boro Park, launched an exciting science project called “About the Human Body” with his special education students. Hoping to give his students a new awareness of the wonders of their own bodies, Rabbi Klein also intended to impart important lessons about safe and healthy living. Little did he know how far this project would take them!

The project started off with classroom posters and review sheets. Then it took a huge leap when Rabbi Klein began contact- ing a number of prominent physicians and scientists to find time in their heavy schedules to visit the students and bring their studies to life. To his delight, these generous doctors were eager to participate in the project.

Eye, nose, and throat specialists, a neonatologist, a urologist, an orthopedist, a neurologist, and many more contributed to the Binuryni’s annual program of presentations for students. The doctor established a won- derful rapport with the boys and enjoyed showing them some special children in Brooklyn!” Mrs. Lavrinoff laughs. “Then I’ll approach them and explain that I, too, have a child with Down syn- drome, and I’ll give them the information about the disease and tell them I hope to see them there.” Not everyone takes her up on it, but so far no one has seemed to mind the gesture, and she usually receives an extremely positive reaction.

“Our last meeting was for par- ents of children with Down syn- drome up to age 5, and we had fourteen mothers show up,” says Mrs. Lavrinoff. “And our last group for parents of autistic chil- dren had thirteen attendees. Each group meets once a month, at so this point I’m organizing these meetings on a reg- ular basis.”

These events are not fundraisers,” stresses Mrs. Lavrinoff. “HASC Center com- pletely covers all our expenses, and our meetings are held in the boys’ school every lot of room in it. With Hashem’s help, we’ve done everything, hashgachah priti, as Hashem has played a clear role, because I have a master’s degree in rehab counseling, which I earned long before I had any children. Hashem was good to me and gave me that background so that I am successfully able to run group meetings.”

“Is there any marked difference in the parents as a result of the meetings?”

“Definitely. We’re clearly fill- ing a void, providing chizuk where it is desperately needed. The meetings provide a forum where parents can just sit and exchange information and benefit from feeling that everyone around them understands where they’re coming from.”

“One of the hardest things people in trying situations have to deal with is feeling that the general public doesn’t under- stand them. In our meetings, they can share the small — and large — accomplishments they may have achieved, and feel secure in the knowledge that the others truly feel what they’re feeling. We share experiences and are mechazek one another. In that way, we’re providing a tremen- dous chazakah, baruch HaShem.”

Will Binuryni expand its target group anytime soon?

“One last panel of parents to discuss cer- tain issues, and one for parents of chil- dren with autistic-spectrum disor- ders, and one for parents of chil- dren with Down syndrome, at child who has Down syndrome, at one evening meeting per month. Apart from the regular meet- ings she arranges, Mrs. Lavrinoff also coordinates special events, such as the one scheduled for June 17 that will feature Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levine, two young speakers who have been diagnosed with Down Syndrome. This year’s annual melava malah was a combined event for the Williamsburg and Boro Park Flatbush Binuryni groups, featur- ing (alongside the other entertain- ment) renowned mohel Hayim Barinu Binuryni Eisenberger, although if I’m walking down the street, and then decided it would be a fit- ter place for Binuryni of Williamsburg?” Kraus and asked, “Don’t you from Boro Park, approached Mrs. Kraus and asked, “How do you think we have enough parents in Boro Park and Flatbush to war- rant our own group, so we don’t have to keep shipping to Williamsburg?”

“Certainly,” replied Mrs. Kraus. “Would you like to coordi- nate it?”

Mrs. Lavrinoff considered it, and then decided it would be a fit- ter place for Binuryni of Williamsburg and provided the necessary fund- ing. Mrs. Lavrinoff and Bra- chachah priti, Avraham Chaim Kraus is now a valued member of the HASC team.

Binuryni of Williamsburg offers a variety of support groups that take on a regular basis. Many of these groups are led by parents, with special speakers and events scheduled periodically. At a special last day of school, held every mothers to bring young children or babies along with them. “Binuryni is here to help people, to allow parents to communi- cate with other parents of kids with special needs,” explains Esther Mirel Kraus. “We have events where we introduce a panel of doctors to discuss cer- tain issues, and one for parents of other health professionals, and we do all we can to provide both educational and emotional support to the many parents who need us. We also provide sibling support groups for elementary- school children, which was virtu- ally unheard of before. We are there to share experiences and be mechazek each other and, baruch HaShem, we are successful.”

Last year, Bracha Lavrinoff, the young mother of an adorable little girl with Down syndrome from Boro Park, approached Mrs. Kraus and asked, “Don’t you think we have enough parents in Boro Park and Flatbush to warrant our own group, so we don’t have to keep shipping to Williamsburg?”

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