

B”H

Kinus Hashluchim Speech

*P’Nei Moshe K’Pnei Chamah, Pnei Yehoshua K’Pnei Levana*

It is an honor, unearned and undeserved, to stand here tonight before you at this incredible gathering.

I was talking to Rabbi Kotlarsky a few weeks ago, and I said to him – since I will be giving a speech at the banquet I’d like to invite my key *baalebatim*, my key supporters, to join me. And Rabbi Kotlarsky said to me: If I were you, I’d leave half of them home. *In posuk shteit - Vehoyo hamachaneh hanishor lifleito*. In case you bomb – at least you’ll be left with a few *baalebatim*...

I want to begin by saying *L’Chayim... L’Chayim* to my colleagues, my fellow Shluchim; *L’Chayim* to our beloved parents who are so much a part of who we are and what we do...and *L’Chayim* to our *baalebatim*, our Lay Supporters who are truly our partners in our work. I think I speak for everyone here when I say to you, our supporters, from the bottom of my heart - Thank you so much!

*L’Chayim, L’Chayim V’Livracha...*

When *yiden*, Chassidim get together – *bsheves achim gam yochad* – like brothers with one heart, this is called a *farbrengen*. Tonight is certainly a *farbrengen*...

I recently had the opportunity of meeting a man by the name of Jon Voight, while he was practicing for an upcoming film at the home of one of our dear friends, who happens to be here tonight. So I meet Jon, we talked for a while, and then I asked him if he would visit our Chabad House if was going to be in the area, perhaps for an occasion or a special event. –

(Needless to say I had every intention of clearing it with the appropriate parties)

– So Jon says to me: “Maybe, it’s something I would consider doing. You know what, if you’re having a *farbrengen* – I’ll be there!”

Unlike a speech, a *farbrengen* is when people connect, heart to heart, soul to soul. Chassidim say that - at a *farbrengen - einer shveigt un aleh heren...* One person is silent and everyone else listens. Or, to paraphrase, one individual reflects upon his feelings, in effect – converses with himself... the others overhear the conversation...

Another legitimate form of a *farbrengen* is where two Chassidim, perhaps two old friends, *redden zich up fun hartzin...* talk to one another, reminisce, recount, share personal feelings and experiences... while others sit around them and listen in, basically eavesdropping on the conversation.

In this spirit, I would like to ask our beloved parents and dedicated friends and

supporters... please - allow me the liberty of sharing some thoughts with my colleagues, my fellow Shluchim...

But please, by all means, feel free to listen in...

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*Teire Chaverim...* Dear Shluchim... The Kinus HaShluchim has been affectionately referred to as the *Rosh Hashana L'Shlichus*, the time when the Shliach looks back at the year past and looks forward to the year ahead... After witnessing the joyous dancing of earlier this evening, allow me to suggest the Kinus is also the *Simchas Torah L'Shlichus*...when we celebrate the *ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu*, the great fortune that we have to be the Rebbe's Shluchim.

However, taking a look at the calendar and realizing that yes, it's *tof shin samech daled*, almost ten years after Gimel Tamuz, and here we are, still in Golus... by all accounts – *ki vo moed... s'iz shon tzeit*... It's high time we say goodbye to this *finstere golus*, to the *yiddishe tzoros* and be reunited with Jews of past generations and of our own time who lived and died for their Jewishness...

*Ki vo moed*... it's high time that we celebrate the Kinus in Yerushalayim...together with our beloved Rebbe... And yet, here we are...It makes one wonder, why the joy? How the joy?

Or, as the Rebbe puts it in one of his talks, spoken on a Simchas Torah just a few years after the passing of his predecessor, how can we experience true joy on Simchas Torah when on that very day we read of the passing of Moses?

Nu, but we Jews are accustomed to paradox.

A fellow Shliach shared with me the following letter written by the chosid Reb Itche Goldin to his friend Reb Zalman Serobrinsky in Australia during the early years of the Rebbe's leadership. Listen to this amazing letter! And I quote – and I'll translate: "*Zalman, ein lecho musag hata'anug ka'asher mistaklim al chak adash. Roim, ah tzubrochenem freilichen ish eloki*". „Zalman, you can not imagine the pleasure one gets from looking at the Rebbe. One sees, a broken, yet joyous G-dly man”.

Or, as the Rebbe said in that Simchas Torah talk, even as the Haftarah speaks of the passing of Moshe, it tells Yehoshua and that generation of Jews, *Chazak Ve'ematz!* Be strong! Continue in the footsteps of Moshe and you can indeed celebrate. In other words, *Zaro Bachayim – Af hu bachayim*. Moshe lives on through his students.

*Pnei Moshe k'Pnei Chamah... Pnei Yehoshua K'Pnei Levana*...says the Talmud. Moses is like the sun shining radiantly of its brilliant light. His student Joshua, like the moon, is not expected to radiate his own light, but rather to reflect that of the sun, that of his teacher Moses.

None of us claims to be a Joshua. Nevertheless, collectively we represent the students of our Moshe, our Rebbe, the Moses of this generation. This than is the sacred task

with which we were charged. To be a reflection of the Rebbe, bringing the warmth and light that he radiated – to those around us.

I suggest that this is why people are so attracted to Chabad, and today more than ever. They are looking for the Rebbe in his Shluchim.

It's true, there's no denying, there's a lot of talent out there among the Shluchim. I mean, just take a look around the room here tonight, and you'll see many talented, charismatic, learned, even scholarly rabbis... intelligent, funny, witty, good looking, well spoken, well dressed, you name it... aleh males... But Chabad doesn't have the copyright to any of these qualities. They exist in every other group and organization as well. What we offer, our specialty if you will, what attracts people to our Chabad Houses rather than the sometimes much larger synagogue down the street, is one singular thing: People are looking for the Rebbe. Consciously or sub-consciously. They come to us to find - Rebbe.

Here's a striking illustration of this point: Zalman Shmotkin of Chabad Lubavitch Media Center spoke to me about a writer who embarked on a project to report on Chabad's outreach work, and as much as he tried to convince her otherwise, she made it quite clear – the focus of the book was going to be about the outreach activists, the Shluchim, not about the Rebbe per se. However, after 2 years of extensive research, including visiting Shluchim throughout the country and beyond, when she realized what makes these people tick, what is the wind beneath their wings, she came to a clear conclusion: No, these are not outreach professionals; No, these are not career rabbis. What are they? Quite simply: The Rebbe's Army!

I happened to give the book as a gift to one of my *baalebatim*. After reading the book, the man was literally upset with me. "You knew this man?! You were at a *Farbrengen*?! And you didn't take me to see the Rebbe?"

People just seem to identify, naturally, responding to the videos in a way that we didn't expect. People are sometimes moved to the point of tears from a visit to the Ohel, often without knowing why. People respond differently to a Chumash class when it comes along with the Rebbe's commentary. People want – Rebbe!

In the *Reshimos*, his personal diaries that were published in recent years, the Rebbe records a conversation he had with his father in law and predecessor about "*hashmeichel*" – the special smile that our Rebbes were gifted with. This smile was originally given as a gift to the Alter Rebbe by the Magid of Mezrich. The Rebbe writes there: *Ah neshomo d'atzilus, ah neshomo klolis, ah neshomo elyonah, hot dem shmeichel...* a high level soul, a lofty soul, possesses such a smile.

It is this special smile, unavailable anywhere else, that people are looking for in us. In our smile, they're looking for the Rebbe's smile. In our eyes- they're looking for the Rebbe's eyes, *dem rebin's kuk*. People are trying to grab a piece of Rebbe in us.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Pinson- today a shliach in Nice, tells the story of a young man who came into the Lubavitcher Yeshiva in France to ask for help when his car overheated. Before long he made friends with the Yeshiva boys. They began

studying Torah with him on a regular basis, and he eventually started observing mitzvahs and embracing a Torah way of life.

The young man was quite taken by most everything about Chabad and its teachings, with one exception. He had a lot of difficulty with the kind of reverence the Chassidim had for the Rebbe. And he shared his feelings with his friends at the yeshiva. So they said to him – “listen, we will shortly be going to spend the holiday month of Tishrei with the Rebbe in New York. Why don’t you come along with us, and you’ll have an opportunity to ask the Rebbe himself.”

He went to NY and eventually had his turn for yechidus, a private audience with the Rebbe. The yeshiva boys waited excitedly outside the Rebbe’s room to see what’ll happen. The guy walked out of the Rebbe’s room smiling from ear to ear, and with a look of overwhelming joy. He told his friends that he told the Rebbe his concern. “Why is it that the Chassidim literally venerate you...?” The Rebbe gave me this huge smile, and he said: “I love every Jew – *dibardont* – he said in French, overflowing! The Chassidim simply reciprocate that love”. Now it all made sense to him! What he was seeing was not some type of hero worship or anything else. It was simply love. Reciprocal love. Today this young man serves in the Rebbe’s army as a Shliach in France.

It is that love, *dibardont*, the overflowing, unconditional love of the Rebbe, that people are looking for when they walk in to our Chabad Houses. They are looking for the Rebbe, the *roeh neeman*, the faithful sheppard of his people...who unconditionally accepts and loves every Jew, every human being, no strings attached...who values and cares for each single individual much as he values and cares for the entire flock as a whole.

Journalist Jonathan Mark writing in the Jewish Week, in an article honoring the Rebbe’s 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday, just months before his passing, wrote, and I quote: “There are so many Chassidim and non-Chassidim who can’t imagine a world without this man, so many who fear that they might never be so unconditionally loved by a rabbi again. And that, without the Rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov’s sweet Chassidic promise of a leader and a place where all Jews are welcomed and loved would no longer be a fact but a legend, a once upon a time in Brooklyn.”

My dear friends, people are looking for that love, now more than ever. People respond to the Shliach because they see in him a tiny reflection of that love. That’s the secret to our success. That’s why people respond to us. That’s why our baalebatim support us.

You see, when a Shliach comes to a fellow Jew with the message of yiddishkeit, he is not reaching out to someone distant, and less significant. Rather, as the Rebbe once said: *efsher is yener gor shener far em*. There’s no question in the mind of every single Shliach in this room, that the Jew with whom he puts on T’fillin for the first time in his life, the Jew he helps light Shabbos candles for the first time in her life, that that Jew - may very well be far more precious in the eyes of G-d than the Shliach himself.

The Shliach doesn't see himself as being patient and gracious to give of himself to the less inspired Jew. Rather, he feels privileged to have the opportunity of sharing his knowledge of Torah with a fellow yid, his brother or sister, a prince or princess to our Father in Heaven, within whose heart burns a *neshomo*, a lofty, G-dly soul, a literal spark of the Divine.

*Pnei Yehoshua K'Pnei Levono*... What people are looking for is the reflection of the Rebbe in us.

During difficult times, in moments of tragedy, in Israel and around the world, when people turn to us for guidance, what they really want to know is: "what would the Rebbe say." They're looking for the Rebbe, the ultimate optimist; an optimism rooted in absolute bitachon, trust in Hashem. They're looking for the Rebbe, the comforter in chief, the singular voice of optimism during the six day war, Yom Kippur war, the gulf war.

We need to be the carriers of that message...

Of the Rebbe's leadership, directing us to see the hand of G-d in world events, difficult as this may be at times...

Of the Rebbe's vision of an ideal future...

Of the Rebbe's faith and the value he placed on each individual – that he or she is an integral part of the Divine plan, whose every mitzvah can and will help bring about that ideal future...

and of the Rebbe's promise, that these moments of darkness will soon give way to a bright, new glorious day; a day on which the sun will never set.

People are looking for the reflection of the Rebbe in us.

Rabbi Moshe Feller, a senior, well respected colleague, tells the story of a Jew by the name of Hy Applebaum who was very involved with Lubavitch in Minnesota for many years, but had never met the Rebbe personally. Hy was now very much on in years. Rabbi Feller came to visit him in the hospital after not having seen him in a while. The children said to the rabbi: "Our father is beginning to become forgetful. He may not recognize who you are." The rabbi approached the bed, and – in that special Rabbi Feller style – said: "Hi HY! Do you remember me?" The man looks up at him: "Of course I remember you! You... you're... Rabbi Schneerson..." Rabbi Feller considers that moment to be the high point of his more than 40 years on shlichus, the moment he was truly recognized for what he is: a Shliach; an extension of the *meshalaiach*.

And if so, the more I live with the Rebbe, the more I reflect these messages, the more successful I'll be. The more *mir halten zich bam klamke fun rebin*, the more I stay connected and inspired by learning the Rebbe's sichos and maamorim, visiting the Ohel or 770, taking the time for videos of ktuim, dollars, or keeping some tapes in my car... the less I represent my own attitudes, the more I represent the attitudes of

the Rebbe, the more I have to give. It's not unlike *lehavdil* in any profession. One has to constantly read up to remain current in his field. This is our field... This is what we offer... It's what keeps us competitive...

Plus if we can internalize this attitude it will help us get through the difficult times, the challenging days that get us down, which all know well, *zol nisht trefin vi s'treft zich*... because I'm never alone. I, along with 4,600 other Shluchim, am a reflection of the Rebbe, the meshalaiach. So I'm not on my own. The Rebbe is with me. All of the Shluchim are with me.

You know, for example the times when it's difficult to get people to come to a program. Every Shliach has a horrible memory of an event which was very poorly attended. How about an event where no one attended, absolutely not one single soul walked through the door. How many have had that experience? I have. It doesn't feel great.

(What's worse than no people showing up to an event? One person showing up to an event...)

Or the days which are difficult because of financial headaches. I've certainly had some of those. And I find myself running in the morning to cover the bank, and my mental computer is working overtime – who can I call this time? Which baalebos can I call upon to come through for me without me crying wolf or breaking the camels back?

As I'm rushing to the bank, the thought often crosses my mind: Right now, at this very moment, there must be hundreds of Shluchim dealing with the very same problem. So when I find myself offering up that involuntary prayer that I manage somehow to get through the crisis, I include my colleagues in that prayer as well. And it makes it much easier for me. I'm not alone. I'm part of a family.

And by the same token, when I celebrate on a legal holiday because the bank is closed, it's not just a personal Yom Tov for me. I can take pleasure in knowing that it's truly a national holiday, literally *ah yoma depagro* for fellow Shluchim from coast to coast.

A Shliach is standing in his Chabad House in some far flung corner with his tiny minyan... during Shofar blowing on Rosh Hashana... or at Neopolitan's march... and he begins to feel lonely as his mind wanders back to those glorious days... What keeps him going? What lifts his spirits at that moment? The knowledge that around the world there are another 4,600 Shluchim... just like him, doing their jobs *be'emuna* while at the same time wishing they were back in 770... listening to the Rebbe's *tkios*... dancing at the Rebbe's *hakafos*.

And when a Shliach is challenged with opposition, either because of a bad piece of PR on Lubavitch that just hit the press, or because of some local nudnick with too much time on his hands – he doesn't panic. First of all, he won't have to pay a shrink \$200 to have someone to talk to. At any time of day or night, all he's got to do is get onto Shluchim Achdus... and he's got 500 people to talk to... Think about it – which

shrink is available at 3 o'clock in the morning. And it's free... But seriously. Not just 500 people – 500 people who identify, 500 people who care.

And he won't allow the opposition to dampen his spirits because he knows who he is... He's not a one man show. *Kulanu bnai ish echad nuchnu*... He's part of a family... *der tzarske mishpocho*...the *mishpocho* of Shluchim... The Rebbe's Army...

And when he feels *aropgefaln* or inadequate because he's not as - quote - "successful" as he would like to be, he reminds himself that he's a Shliach, not an outreach professional, and that the success of a Shliach isn't measured by square footage of real estate, or by the size of the budget. If he is dedicated to reflecting the radiance and love of the *meshalaiach* to those around him, he's a major success! Besides, as a part of this family, the success of every other Shliach is also his success, and vice versa.

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My dear friends, As many of you know, there's nothing like spending a Shabbos near the Ohel, the resting place of the Rebbe. I really don't know how to describe it other than to say – it's like summer camp for Chassidic Rabbis... Truly amazing... Chassidim – young and old – spending 25 hours together in a spirit of joy and brotherhood, where every waking moment – which accounts for quite a large percentage of the time, since there are only enough beds for about 50% of the people – every waking moment is spent in prayer, study and inspiration.

I had the *zechus* of enjoying such a Shabbos on the eve of the anniversary of the Rebbe's birthday, last year. I happened to observe the activities of one particular senior Shliach, a man who is with us in this room tonight. Here's what I saw:

After spending long hours in intense study and meditation, followed by many more hours in inspired prayer, it was now approximately 5:00 PM, and the Shliach was just about ready for Kiddush. He went into one of the rooms of the Chabad House where a number of his very young grandchildren were playing. The children greeted him excitedly with shouts of "*zeideh! zeideh!*" Embracing them lovingly, he said to them in a loud voice: "*Kinderlach – ich vil eich epes zogen* – Children, I want to tell you something." At this point, my curiosity got the better of me. I needed to know – what will this Chosid, this Shliach, say to his grandchildren, on the eve of the Rebbe's birthday, after a day filled with Chassidic inspiration. I couldn't resist it... I leaned over and listened closely from behind the now closed door.

*"Kinderlach, Der Rebbe hot unz gegeben a groiseh matoneh*... Children, the Rebbe gave us a very big gift... *Ir veist* – do you know what that gift is? *Az mir hobin lieb aleh yiden*. That we love every Jew..."

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In thinking about tonight's speech, I asked myself, why was I being asked to speak to the Shluchim. Then I thought perhaps it's not that I am here to speak to the

Shluchim. More likely my task is to speak for the Shluchim, to act as Shliach Tzibur, representative of the Shluchim to our *meshal'aiach*... Rather than speaking to you, allow me, in closing, to say a few words on your behalf.

(There is a famous prayer recited on the High Holidays known as "Hineni" - in which the cantor describes in graphic detail his inadequacy to represent the congregation in prayer. Having said that, he then goes on to fulfill the task for which he was appointed):

In the name of all the Shluchim who are here, and many more who are not here but whose thoughts are certainly here, I want to say – thank you!

Thank you Rebbe for giving us the *zechus* of being your Shluchim... We feel like the luckiest people in the world...

Thank you for lifting us up, for enriching our lives, for endowing us with fulfillment, meaning, direction, purpose... Things the world is seeking, yearning, craving, you've given them to us on a silver platter.

Thank you for entrusting us with your mission of re-connecting our fellow Jews with their Father in Heaven. Thank you for making us part of the process of preparing the world for Redemption.

Like a devoted father, you showered us with love, while at the same time empowering us to be all we can be. You took us, ordinary individuals, and literally forced us to become elevated *mit ah tefach hecher* – just a little bit above the daily grind, by making our daily occupation and our daily endeavor - caring for the well-being of others.

You gave us the opportunity to be an extension of your hand, a reflection of your love, to bring another Jew warmth and solace and meaning and understanding, and to bring him or her home to their People.

Thank you for giving us the greatest gift of all – *az mir hobin lieb aleh yiden*... Thank you for teaching us how to love our fellow Jew...

*Adank Rebbe...*

Like our children sing: Until the day will come when once again our eyes will meet... We wait for that day, every day... when once again our eyes will meet... We wait for the *geulah* when we will be reunited with you – along with all the *neshomos* of all generations... *Oz yimolei schok pinu* – Then will our hearts rejoice fully, without paradox...when we'll be able to see your radiant smile once again...

Rebbe, we miss you... *Ven vellin mir zich shoin veiter zehn*...