



In The Mechitzah of The Sar Hatorah

**A CONVERSATION WITH
RAV URI TIGGER SHLITA,
MARAN RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY ZT"l'S
"PROOFREADER"
IN HONOR OF RAV CHAIM'S FIRST YAHRZEIT**

By Rabbi Gershon Hellman



Rav Uri Tigger has the unique distinction of being the handpicked proofreader of the sefarim of Maran Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l. In this capacity, he spent hundreds of hours over the years going through the sefarim with Rav Chaim. He had the rare opportunity to spend an inordinate amount of time in the presence of the Gadol Hador, and he shared an unbelievably close relationship with him.

As a remarkable *talmid chochom* with an expertise in all of Shas and Poskim, Rav Uri was a perfect choice for the task of going through Rav Chaim's *sefarim* with him. While one would never know it from seeing him and speaking with him, this unassuming *gaon* actually has a very unconventional life story. He was born into a completely secular home, but against all odds rose to become a great *talmid chochom* and confidante of *gedolei Yisroel*.

In honor of Rav Chaim's first Yahrzeit, The Shopper met with Rav Uri while he was on a recent visit to Lakewood to speak at the Project Inspire Convention, and heard about both his own fascinating life and his unique bond with the *Sar Hatorah*.

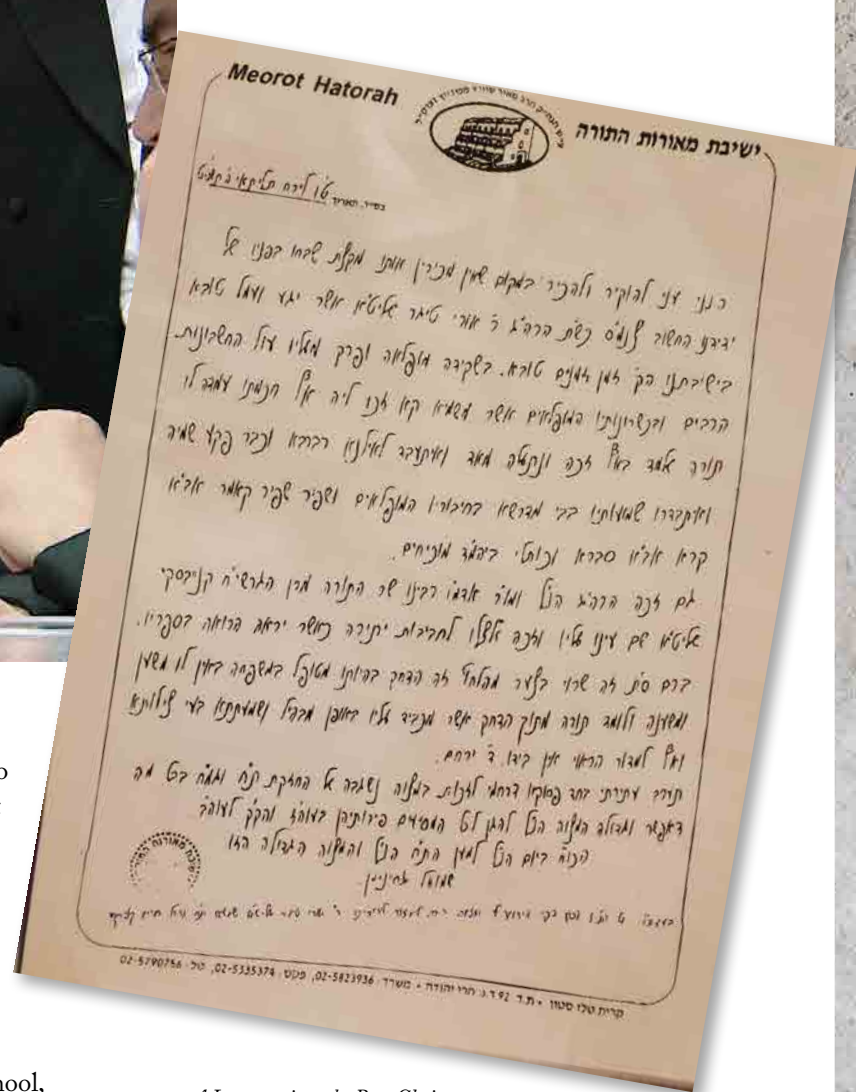
Rav Uri relates that his father had learned in Ponovezh and came from a completely *charedi* family. However, after his parents got divorced, his father's life started going



downhill. The bochur took the divorce very hard and began to slide in his Yiddishkeit. He became one of Bnei Brak's first "Shababnikim" and abandoned the religious lifestyle. He left yeshiva and started hanging around on the streets, eventually finding an occupation and going to work. After he got married to a secular girl, they moved to Tel Aviv and started a secular home. Rav Uri relates that until he was 11-years-old, the only traditions kept in his parents' home were not eating *basar v'chalav* and making Kiddush on Friday night – although

For his bar mitzvah, Rav Uri learned how to *lein*, and he became very good at it. At that time, the *baal koreh* in the shul the family was attending, who also served as the *gabbai*, moved to another neighborhood. The young Rav Uri was asked to take over the *baal koreh* duties, and he gladly did so. After a while, he also became the *gabbai* and was given the keys to the shul.

When he was in 9th Grade in a "tichoni" school, he lost interest in the secular studies that were



A Letter written by Rav Chaim about Rav Uri Tigger

"He felt that he had to make up for lost time, so he began to learn 21 blatt a day – 7 blatt each seder for three sedarim a day!"

the television was turned on immediately after Kiddush.

When Rav Uri was 11, his father's father was *nifter*. At that time, one of his father's old friends from Ponovezh came to see him and asked him, "Aren't you going to say Kaddish for your father? Even secular people do that!"

After some convincing, Rav Uri's father agreed. He began to go to a local shul in South Tel Aviv every day to say Kaddish. Very slowly but surely the family's lifestyle changed. The entire family began attending shul on Shabbos as well, but they still watched television afterwards and went to swim in the public pool.

"We would sneak out of davening early, change our clothes, and surreptitiously go to the pool, making sure no one from the shul saw us," he recalls.

After a while, the family concluded that it was improper to watch T.V. on Shabbos. Instead, they would use a VCR to tape their favorite shows and watch them on *Motzoei Shabbos*.

That was Rav Uri's start on his road to Yiddishkeit, and eventually to *gadlus b'Torah*.

taught there. He basically decided to stop going and, because he had the key to the shul, he would go there instead, let himself into the empty bais medrash, and learn Mishnayos all morning and afternoon.

"I didn't want my mother to find out that I was skipping school," he relates, "so I would show my face there about once a month. I never did get caught but at the end of the year I told her that I had stopped going."

At this point, Rav Uri was 15-years-old, and his mother agreed to allow him to go learn in a yeshiva the next year. He went to a yeshiva in Telshe-Stone, but says that he did not see success in his studies for the first three years he was there.

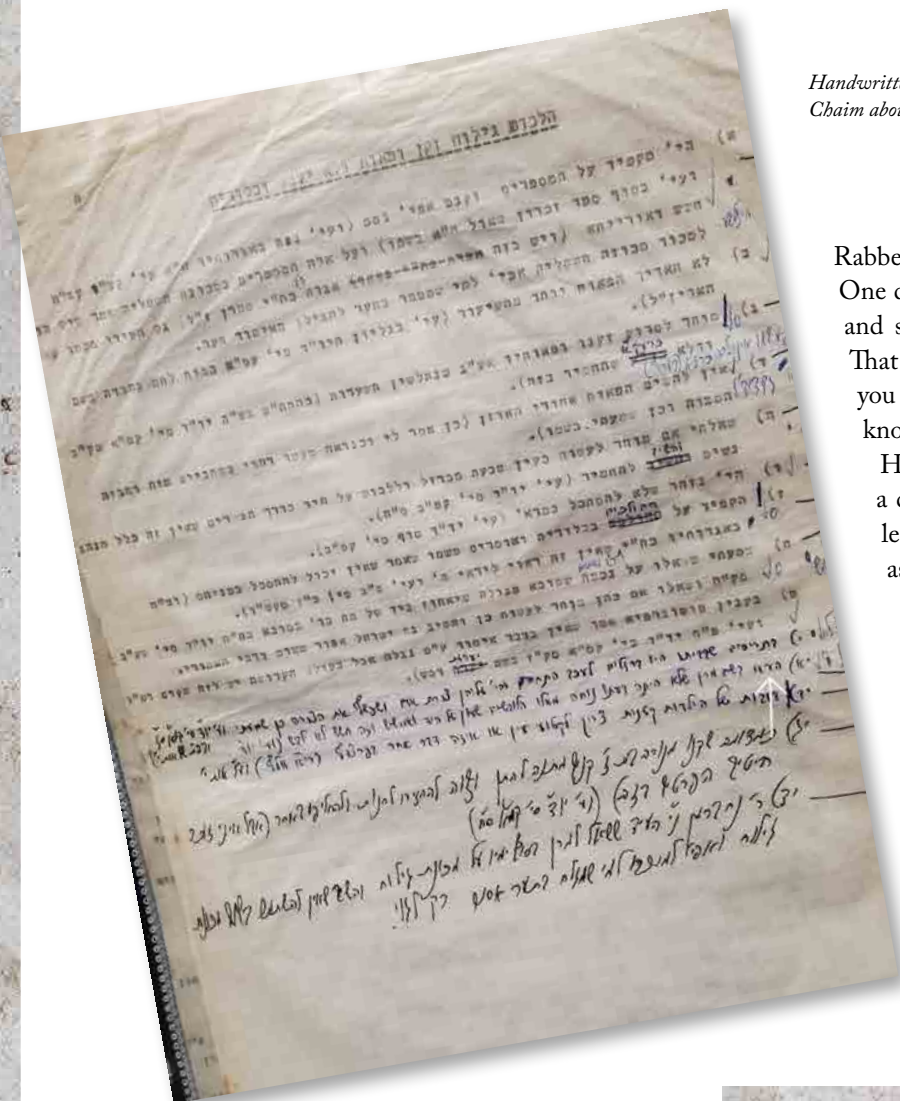
"I always knew that I wanted to learn," he says. "I was planning on starting to learn one day, but for those three years, I did not learn much. When I was 18, I got ahold of myself and began to learn Mishnah Berurah extensively."

He learned Mishnah Berurah numerous times from cover to cover and became an expert on Orech Chaim *halacha l'maisoh*, to the extent that even the



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Handwritten note from Rav Chaim about wristwatches



Rabbeim would ask their *shailoos* to him. One day, the Rosh Yeshiva approached him and said, “So, you want to learn halacha? That’s fine. But you should know that if you want to be a Rov one day, you have to know the basics. The basics is Shas.”

He told Rav Uri that he would make a deal with him – for every *masechta* he learned, he personally would test him to ascertain that he knew it well.

A fire was lit under Rav Uri and he began to devour *masechta* after *masechta*. He felt that he had to make up for lost time, so he began to learn 21 blatt a day – 7 blatt each seder for three *sedarim* a day! And every time he finished a *masechta*, he would be tested by the Rosh Yeshiva.

For the next half-year, he didn’t waste a moment, until he finished all of Shas for the first time.

One of the Ramim in the yeshiva Rav Uri was learning in

one of the primary *sefarim* he used. He had a number of questions and decided to write a letter asking all of his questions to Rav Chaim.

“I did not expect a response,” he says. “I had never seen Rav Chaim but I imagined him as a great, busy man who probably didn’t have time to write back to a small person like me. But I still sent it.”

He was happily surprised to receive a letter from Rav Chaim with answers to all of his questions. On the bottom of the letter, Rav Chaim wrote: “I enjoyed your *he’oros* very much. Please keep writing to me.”

So, Rav Uri wrote another letter with questions, and received another response with a similar comment on the bottom. After sending four letters, Rav Uri decided that the time had come to visit Rav Chaim in person. He traveled to Bnei Brak and arrived in Rav Chaim’s house after Maariv. A long line of men was waiting to speak to him, and he recalls standing on line for over half-an-hour before it was his turn.

When Rav Uri approached Rav Chaim, the Sar Hatorah asked him his name and he replied, “Tigger.”

“Tigger from the letters?” Rav Chaim asked.

“Yes, that’s me,” Rav Uri said.

“I have such a zechus to be able to sit and talk in learning with the Rov. Men come from all over the world to speak to the Rov for a minute, but I have the zechus to sit with the Rov for hours.”



was Rav Shmuel Greineman, a son of Rav Shmerel Greineman, who was responsible for the printing of the Chazon Ish’s *sefarim*. Rav Shmuel would deliver a special *shiur* once a week, which he called his “*Maasah Norah shiur*.” In this *shiur*, he would relate stories about *gedolim* and *tzadikim*. One of the *gedolim* he spoke about regularly was his cousin, Rav Chaim Kanievsky. The stories about Rav Chaim’s *gadlus b’Torah* especially spoke to Rav Uri and inspired him greatly.

Rav Uri decided that he wanted to study Rav Chaim’s *sefarim* but discovered that they weren’t available in *sefarim* stores and could only be purchased directly from the author. He asked Rav Shmuel to pick him up a copy of each of Rav Chaim’s *sefarim* the next time he went to Bnei Brak and, indeed, after his next trip, Rav Shmuel presented Rav Uri with a box full of Rav Chaim’s *sefarim*.

Rav Uri began spending a lot of time learning Rav Chaim’s *sefarim*. The *sefer* that grabbed his attention the most was Derech Emunah, which is written in a similar style to Mishnah Berurah, the first *sefer* he had mastered. As he learned Derech Emunah, he would write his *he’oros* in the margins.

Before his *chasunah*, Rav Uri studied the halachos of Shemittah in-depth with the Derech Emunah being

Rav Chaim then pointed to a chair and said, “Sit.”

That was the first time of many that Rav Uri sat in Rav Chaim’s home. On a subsequent visit, Rav Chaim asked him to look over some pages from a *sefer* he was preparing to check for mistakes, and he made a few edits. Rav Chaim appreciated his work and asked him to do it again on his next visit. After a few times of this happening, Rav Chaim asked him to start coming at a set time – not during the regular hours for *kabalas k’hal*, in order to proofread the *sefarim*.

And, before he knew it, Rav Uri had gained the title of “Rav Chaim’s proofreader.”

He was given a private spot upstairs in Rav Chaim’s home to work, and, whenever Rav Chaim wanted to put out a new print of one of his *sefarim* he would ask Rav Uri to look it over and fix any mistakes. Most of these *sefarim* were reprinted with the “*tikkunim*” in the back. For Sefer Shoneh Halachos, for example, the *sefer* was printed 10 times, with several *tikkunim* found by Rav Uri added in the back of the *sefer* each time.

Besides for the *tikkunim*, Rav Uri would also bring his *he’oros* on the *sefarim* to Rav Chaim, and would discuss them with him. He says that Rav Chaim agreed with his *he’oros* on the majority of occasions, and did not on a few occasions. He adds, “There were times when he



didn't agree, but he put my *he'arah* in anyway."

In one example, Rav Uri noticed that the *nusach* for Kol Chamirah in Yiddish, which is printed in one of Rav Chaim's *sefarim*, one word that is found in the Mishnah Berurah's *nusach* was missing. Rav Uri does not speak Yiddish fluently, so he told Rav Chaim that he noticed a missing word and wasn't sure if it was a mistake or not. Rav Chaim told him that the missing word was unimportant, and the way he had written it was the way people recite Kol Chamirah today. However, when the *sefer* was reprinted, Rav Chaim did include the missing word.

Rav Chaim would always offer Rav Uri payment for his work and would press him to accept, but Rav Uri steadfastly refused to take any monetary compensation. Rav Chaim would then ask him to at least accept money to cover his travel expenses, but he refused this offer as well. He would say, "I have such a *zechus* to be able to sit and talk in learning with the Rov. Men come from all over the world to speak to the Rov for a minute, but I have the *zechus* to sit with the Rov for hours. That is worth more than all the money in the world."

When Rav Chaim decided to print a brand-new *mahadurah* of Shoneh Halachos, with all of the ten editions of *tikkunim* included in the actual *sefer*, he asked Rav Uri to go over the entire *sefer* again. He said that because it is a *sefer of halacha l'maisoh*, every word is extremely important. Even one mistake could distort a halacha. Therefore, he asked him to review it four times, rather than just once. He then told him that he only was giving him the job if he agreed in advance to accept payment. If he wouldn't take compensation, he would not let him proofread the *sefer*. He said, "A job done for free is not worth anything. Therefore, you must allow me to pay you or I'm not giving you the work."

Rav Uri was forced to accept them money but he managed to return it to the family "through the backdoor." In this way, he continued his tradition of never keeping any payment for his work.

It is well-known that Rav Chaim, especially later in his life, would tell men who visited him to stop wearing wristwatches. When asked about this, Rav Uri explains that this actually was not Rav Chaim's *chiddush*; rather, it was something he got from his uncle, the Chazon Ish.

After the Chazon Ish's wife was *niftes*, the Steipler Gaon and his family, including the then unmarried Rav

Chaim, moved into the Chazon Ish's home to be with him. Rav Chaim was very close to the Chazon Ish and witnessed his holy *hanbagos*.

After the Chazon Ish's *petirah*, the Steipler asked Rav Chaim to write down all of the *hanbagos* he witnessed so that others could learn from them; however, Rav Chaim felt that he could not take that *achrayus*, and he demurred. After his father's *petirah*, however, he did write down the *hanbagos* he saw by the Chazon Ish in a pamphlet that he titled "Kuntres Hazichronos."

Rav Chaim showed the unpublished *kuntres* to Rav Uri but told him that it should not be printed during his lifetime. In one *se'if*, Rav Chaim writes that the Chazon Ish held that men should not wear watches because of a *chashash* of *bigdei isha*. Since this is a *safek d'ohraysia*, Rav Chaim was stringent in this regard.

Rav Uri relates that he discussed this with Rav Chaim numerous times and tried to convince him that although a wristwatch may have been considered a decorative piece of jewelry in the Chazon Ish's days, today even little kids wear watches and it is no longer jewelry. However, Rav Chaim would not budge from his position. Rav Uri explains, "For Rav Chaim, the Chazon Ish was like a *b'raisah*.

His words cannot be changed.

Anything he said was the way it is and we cannot do act differently."

I also brought up the topic of



names, specifically Rav Chaim's aversion to "new" names like Shira, and Rav Uri confirmed that Rav Chaim was opposed to the giving of modern names that had never been used in the past. He then surprised me by revealing that his original name was not, in fact, Uri; rather, he used to be called "Oren."

When Rav Uri finished his first *sefer* of correspondence with Rav Chaim, "Teshuvos Rav Chaim", he asked him for a *haskamah*, but Rav Chaim pushed him off. He asked several more times over the course of some time, but Rav Chaim still didn't give him one. Finally, after he asked for an explanation for the refusal, Rav Chaim said, "Oren is not a good name. In Tehillim, Oren is listed as one of the trees that were used as *avodah zarah*. You shouldn't be called by that name."

Rav Chaim suggested that he change his name to Aharon, but Rav Uri told him that Aharon was

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**“For Rav Chaim, the Chazon
Ish was like a b’raisa.**

**His words cannot be changed.
Anything he said was the way
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differently.”**

his father-in-law’s name. Rav Chaim then suggested the name Uri, which he called “a very good name.” After the name change, Rav Chaim gave his *haskamah* to the *sefer*.

It is also well-known that Rav Chaim would travel all around the country to serve as *sandek* at *brissim*; however, he never stayed for more than a few minutes. After the bris was over, he would leave immediately to head back home and fulfill his “*chovos*”. Rav Uri relates that when his wife was once in her ninth month of pregnancy, he wanted to make sure that Rav Chaim would serve as *sandek* if the baby was a boy. (Rav Chaim was generally not in favor of finding out a baby’s gender before birth.) He approached Rav Chaim and asked if he would be *sandek* if he had a boy and Rav Chaim said that he would. Rav Uri then pressed his luck by saying, “I also want the Rov to stay for the *seudah*.”

Rav Chaim said that he couldn’t do that as he didn’t have the time to spare, but Rav Uri insisted and said that he deserved it because of all of the work he had done proofreading the *sefarim*. Rav Chaim then thought for a few seconds and said, “It isn’t *nogea*. It will be a girl anyway.”

A few weeks later, Rav Uri’s wife gave birth to a girl. “There are many stories about *mofsim* performed by Rav Chaim,” Rav Uri says. “But those stories don’t really interest us. What is important to learn from is Rav Chaim’s *tzidkus*, his *kedusha*, and his amazing *gaonut*

and devotion to Torah. He knew Torah better than any computer. There are many stories about that. Stories like that are more important than stories about *mofsim*.”

Rav Uri adds that in Rav Chaim’s later years, he became more focused on matters of *kedushah*. He says that he has pictures of his children visiting Rav Chaim years ago while wearing short-sleeved shirts, and Rav Chaim didn’t say anything to him about it. In later years, however, he began telling people not to wear short-sleeved shirts or allow their children to do so. He also began telling people not to wear shirts with words, slogans or symbols on them. In those later years, he also began telling more visitors not to wear watches. He also changed the location of his chair, as he took on a *chumrah* not to sit in front of *sefarim*.

It is known that Rav Chaim would daven to forget everything besides for Torah. “His *moach* was *rak Torah*,” Rav Uri says. “He didn’t want to know anything else besides for Torah. I would sometimes tell him something about a matter unrelated to Torah and he would listen. Five minutes later, I would bring it up again, and he would have no recollection of it. It was like I was informing him of it for the first time.”

He also relates that he once was involved in a *chesed*

initiative and asked Rav Chaim to do something for that specific *chesed* project. The next time Rav Chaim saw him, he told him, “I fulfilled the *shlichus*,” and Rav Uri could see the relief on his face. He understood that Rav Chaim made sure to remember to do the *chesed* because it was a mitzvah, and as soon as it was done, he was relieved that he no longer had to remember it.

“Rav Chaim davened three times a day to forget anything besides Torah,” says Rav Uri. “I once asked him to explain this and he told me he had two reasons. 1. *Sefarim* say that when anything other than Torah enters the mind, it pushes out some *divrei Torah* to make room for it. He did not want that. 2. He said that he hears about so many people’s *tzaros*. People came to him all day to tell him about health, *parnassah* and other problems. If he had all these *tzaros* on his mind all the time, he would be unable to learn.”

Rav Uri concludes, “If one hadn’t seen these things with his own eyes, he would not believe it. But I saw it. Rav Chaim was not *shayach* to our generation. He was like the *gedolim* of many centuries ago.”

If anyone would like to hear more about Rav Uri’s work or to sponsor one of his sefarim, please call 732-609-6015.

