

A number of English and Canadian Yeshiva students, studying in Lithuanian Yeshivoth, are evacuated during World War II to Australia via Siberia.

From Kelme to Melbourne

by Shmuel Gorr

(Based on an interview with Rabbi Chaim Dov Ber Silver)

When on *Motzei Shabbos* June 21, 1940, at about two a.m., the cobblestones of the town of Kelme began to rumble, Rabbi Silver and some of the children rushed out to see what was happening, they saw Russian tanks rolling through the streets as the Russians had occupied the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia before the Germans. These were later annexed to the USSR.

It was understood that eventually the Communist regime would close down all the Yeshivoth and synagogues, but it was not thought that the Russians would initiate pogroms immediately, as the Germans would have done, had they arrived first.

Within a few weeks a letter arrived from the British Consulate in Kovno, asking the British students to come for consultations about their future residence in Lithuania. Then Western Poland included Mir, Kletsk, Bialystock, Grodno and Kamenitz, to which all the famous Yeshivoth had moved for security reasons. No one would have believed the Lithuanian Government to have been so weak as to collapse to the Russians, and this was why they had spread out in a number of Lithuanian towns.

This movement of the Yeshiva World brought some English and American boys and one from Canada to the Talmud Tora of Kelme. Once there they had decided to stay. Some who went off to Telz also were invited to the British Consulate in Kovno for consultations about evacuating British citizens from there if that would become necessary.

They travelled together to Kovno. The British Vice-Consul there was a Jew, Mr. Ramm, whose secretary told them that sooner or later the



Russians would close down all the consulates in the Baltic States, including that of the British. Therefore, if they should be in need of advice or protection they would have to go to the Embassy in Moscow, whose Ambassador was Sir Stafford Cripps who was an exceptional gentleman. The delegation was to meet him later in Moscow. However, the consultation took place at the British Consulate where they were told that the British Government had decided to evacuate them to Sweden for the duration of the War and asked if they were prepared to leave Lithuania. It was unanimously agreed to follow the advice given to them at the Consulate before returning to Kelme.

A few weeks later one of the group was called to Kovno and told that the plans had been changed: they might be evacuated to Canada. He was told to ask the group for their agreement and he returned with a positive answer. However, the British Government had to consider the security question, crossing the Atlantic entailed the danger of meeting U-boats which infested the Ocean. He also told them that the Consular people had decided against going to Sweden because it was too close to the War Zone.

Another problem was that of currency – the Swedish Kronen and the

English Pound. The Canadian dollar would have been better, but the security question was paramount. They were told that there would be another consultation with the British Government to inform them when they would be evacuated.

Immediately after Tisha B'Av the group received another call from the Consulate which informed them of a complete change in plans. The British Government had decided to evacuate them to Australia. The group also agreed to this and signed documents that they were willing to be evacuated there at the cost of the British Government by the Trans-Siberian Railway from Kovno to Vladivostok and then by boat to Australia.

They had by now become very puzzled and confused by the suggestion to go to Sweden, then Canada and finally Australia and were unsure if it was a wise step because even though the Russians had emptied shops, rationed everything, taken over businesses and replaced owners with Com-



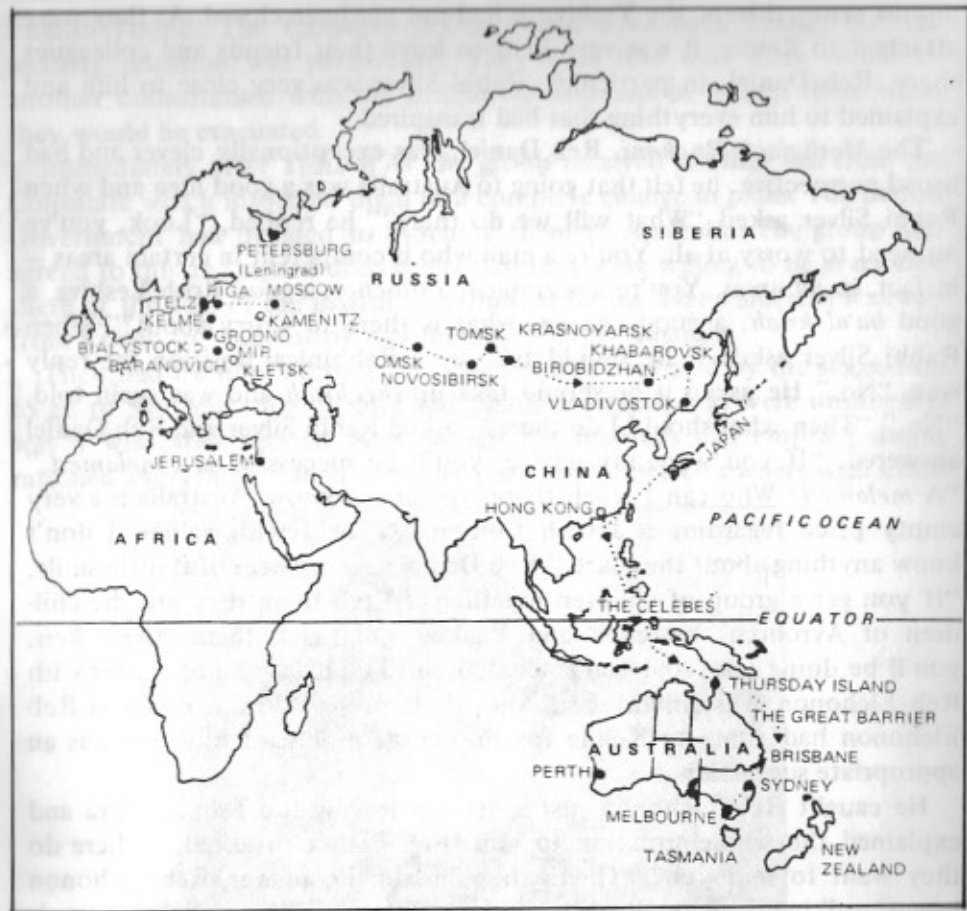
HaRav HaTzadik Daniel Movshovitch, Moshgiach Ruchani of Kelme.

unist sympathizers, the Yeshivoh had not yet been closed. As they were attached to Kelme, it was very hard to leave their friends and colleagues there, Reb Daniel, in particular. Rabbi Silver was very close to him and explained to him everything that had transpired.

The *Moshgiach Ruchani*, Reb Daniel, was exceptionally clever and had broad perspective; he felt that going to Australia was a good idea and when Rabbi Silver asked "What will we do there?" he replied, "Look, you've no need to worry at all. You're a man who is competent in certain areas — in fact, in all areas. You're a *musmach*, a *shochet*, a good Rosh Yeshiva, a good *ba'al kriah*, a good *chazan*, what is there to worry about?" When Rabbi Silver asked if he should take up a Rabbinical position the reply was, "No." He asked if he should take up *shechitah* and was again told, "No." "Then what should I do there?" asked Rabbi Silver and Reb Daniel answered, "If you want my advice, you'll be successful as a *melamed*." "A *melamed*? Who can I teach there? As far as I know, Australia is a very empty place regarding a Jewish Community or Jewish values. I don't know anything about the place." Reb Daniel gave his beautiful little smile, "If you get a group of children together and tell them they are the children of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov and teach them *Aleph Beis*, you'll be doing a lot and you'll succeed, but I'd advise you to confer with Reb Elchonon Wasserman about the whole project." In as much as Reb Elchonon had come to Kelme for the whole month of Elul this was an appropriate suggestion.

He caught Reb Elchonon just as he was leaving the Talmud Tora and explained the whole situation to him. Reb Elchonon asked, "Where do they want to send you?" Then, when he had the answer, Reb Elchonon began walking back and forth, and finally said, "Australia? Where is Australia? It's a difficult problem to solve. If Japan keeps out of the War, it's a good idea, not a bad spot at all, but if Japan enters the War, then there's danger. How will you get there? And, there's quite a lot of talk about Japan entering the War. Since it may be unwise to go there, let's talk it over again, but I don't know." Suddenly he said, "Don't ask me any more. I can't see anything. Whatever you do, let it be with *hatzlochoh* (success). But, remember one thing — wherever you may be, even in Australia, you will never be exempt from the pangs and pains of *Moshiach*. They follow you everywhere."

Between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur the group received a telegram from the Deputy who remained in the Kovno Consulate, informing them to prepare to leave on the Saturday after *Succoth* which was *Shabbos Bereishis*, "in the morning, from Kovno... on a train." When Rabbi Silver



started to say, "But Shabbos..." he was told "Don't ask questions. Get on the train, that's all."

The group spent the first days of Succoth in Kelme which was comparatively joyful, but they were very apprehensive about the future. On *Chol Hamoed* they left for Kovno, and upon arrival on the eve of Simchas Torah stayed at the home of Reb Gedalyah Dessler, the members of the group being dispersed among friends from the Slobodka Yeshiva. They spent Simchas Torah in the Mussar Shteibel in Kovno where their rejoicing was intense. Who would have believed then that it would be the last Simchas Torah they would ever spend in Lithuania, that it would be the final time they would see such good, warm friends? Friday morning Rabbi Silver was very restless and spoke to those who were to go with him, "I'm

very unhappy about the situation. Maybe we can postpone the train journey, at least until Sunday or Monday... so as not to go on Shabbos." He then decided to ask the Kovno Rav, a world famous *Poseik*, a *Shayla* (an Halachic question). The Kovno Rav, HaRav Reb Avrohom Dov Ber Cahana, was a venerable old Jew and listened carefully: "We'll have to get on the train on *Shabbos*." The old Rav rose from the table and gave a stamp with his foot, "*A zu shayla kumet du mir fregen?* (You come to ask me such a question?). All of you get on the train tomorrow, immediately. Don't you understand what's going on? It's *pikuach nefesh*" (A matter of life or death).

So the group boarded the train after their few belongings had been taken to the station on Friday afternoon by a porter who put them on board to avoid *Chillul Shabbos* (Shabbos desecration). It was eleven a.m. and that train would take them to Moscow via Riga. In the group were Rabbi Chaim Dov Silver, his wife Channah and their four children, Avigail, Elisheva, Hadassa and little Avigdor, six months old, and Rebbetzin Bluma Dessler, the wife of Reb Eliyohu Leizer Dessler and her daughter Henny in Kelme on a visit. As British citizens, they formed part of the evacuation group, as did Reb Shmuel Shechter, an ex-pupil of the Mirer Yeshiva who had been in Kelme and Reb Nosson Wachtvogel who was unmarried. Chava, originally from Poland was in Kovno; her father was a *shochet* in a village and it was suggested that she fictitiously marry one of the group in order to leave Lithuania, which she did by marrying Reb Wachtvogel. In addition there were Shmuel Bloch from Gateshead, England, and Pinchas Berliner who eventually remained in Melbourne where he married the daughter of Rabbi Super and became a *shochet*. Shelomo Davis, who is today a *maggid shiur* at the Telzer Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio, and Menachem (Monty) Moore were two other English members of the group. Chaim Gutnick, a Telzer pupil, eventually joined them.

On the long journey eastward the train passed through Riga and arrived at the Gorki Station in Moscow at nine a.m. the following morning. The Ambassador, Sir Stafford Cripps, was at the station to welcome them and remarked, "How lucky you are, I'm glad to have met you all." Then he added, "We have arranged everything and you will now board the Trans-Siberian Express on another platform."

They had been told that food would be provided on the train and specifically asked to have milk provided for the baby, Avigdor. The Russian agent of Intourist assured them that everything was prepared, with milk at every station. But the child did not have any milk until they reached Vladivostok, and on the ship it was condensed milk.

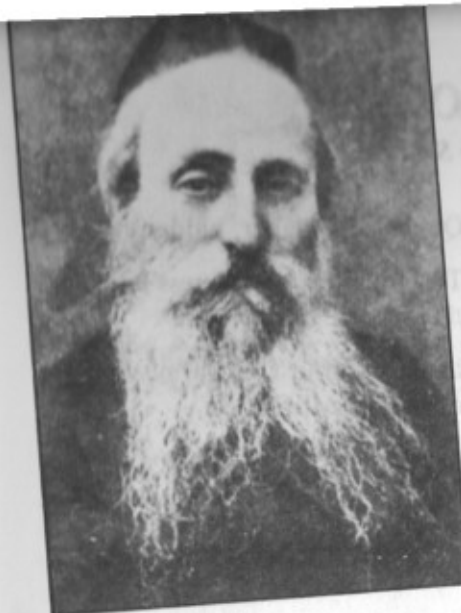
The train compartments were, of course, luxurious, and the group given

the "royal treatment." But food was a mockery. They chose whatever a Jew could eat from what was available: grapes, watermelon, sardines and tomatoes. At the end of each carriage was a place for a huge samovar from which the passengers could make hot tea, which they drank often to wash down the bit of food they had eaten.

The train passed through the famous towns of Omsk, Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoiyarsk, Biro-Bidjan and Khabarovsk until it reached Vladivostok. On the way they saw that although it was the end of October and beginning of November the grain had not been harvested. Thousands and thousands of acres of corn had been left to rot in the fields. When the train stopped in Krasnoiyarsk the group wanted to stretch their legs. Each carriage had a member of Intourist who was a Russian Secret Service Agent assigned to watch the group. The agent was a young girl who spoke several languages, including English. She never took her eyes off the group. Rabbi Silver got off the train at Krasnoiyarsk to stretch his legs in the bitter cold. The town was covered with snow and ice. From about twenty yards he saw a long line of people lined up trying to get hot water from the station tap, among whom were some fellow Jews. Desiring to talk to them he started to move toward them, but suddenly his sleeve was pulled by the young girl of Intourist, who told him to get back into the train. "You are not allowed to talk to anybody. If you don't get back into the train immediately, Sir, I'll have you arrested." He obeyed and the journey continued for nine days until they reached Vladivostok.

The carriages were immediately disconnected from the rest of the train and three army guards were assigned to each carriage: one at the entrance, one inside and one below to ensure that none of the group of 17 men, women and children would move until permitted to do so. In addition, there were 150 Lithuanian citizens of British descent on board with whom the group was to encounter trouble somewhat later.

When they asked the Intourist girl how long they must wait, she replied that "in an hour or so, we'll take you down to the quay and see you board ship." That was at ten p.m. At midnight there was no sign of anyone and neither food, nor water, either. The samovar had been disconnected and they sat there waiting. Suddenly, one of the group, Menachem (Monty) Moore, became quite sick. Several of the others approached a Russian soldier who was asked by Russian-speaking Mrs. Dessler for a doctor but to no avail. At two a.m. the soldier told them to get off the train and follow him to the quay to await further orders. They walked along the tracks until they came to the customs department where their few belongings were searched for money, books, gold or valuables. Whatever was found was confiscated. Then they were told to move on to the quay and prepare



HaRav HaGaon Avrohom Dov Ber
Cahana-Shapiro זצ"ל



HaRav HaGaon Reb Elchonon Wasserman

to board the *Hai Tung*, a Chinese passenger ship under commission to the British Government. It was to carry the British evacuees from the Baltic States. On board the Captain asked them if they had enough food. He knew they had been starving for the last five or six hours. At four a.m. the ship weighed anchor; suddenly the engine stopped and the ship dropped anchor in the middle of the harbor to wait, on special orders, for another British evacuee, a Rumanian Jew. The journey was finally resumed after two hours and when the voyagers settled down, a gentleman with a black beard approached them, saying "I'm a Jew also. My name is Michael Ruder." Rabbi Silver asked him what he was doing in Lithuania. He replied, "I was doing some special work there and I'm also an evacuee." He turned to Rabbi Silver and asked, "Did you study the Bible properly?" Rabbi Silver was somewhat taken aback and countered, "What do you mean? Of course..."

"Did you ever study the New Testament? Ah, my dear friend, then you don't know the truth." Rabbi Silver was astonished and told the group, "This blighter is a missionary. If he starts any business, we'll just chuck him overboard, and be finished." After that, Ruder avoided them.

(To be continued)

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PART TWO:

Our story thus far:

After a tedious journey across Russia on the Trans-Siberian Express the group boarded a Chinese passenger ship destined for Australia.

A certain incident that occurred in Lithuania before they left, became known only after they were all safe on board ship, and proceeding towards Australia. It concerns Reb Nosson Wachtvogel. He was a smallish person, and a very gentle soul. The group just could not figure out what was bothering him. He was white as a sheet and extremely quiet. Why was he so pale, and why so silent? His story eventually came out. It was connected with the way he had received his exit visa from the Russian N.K.V.D. during their occupation of Lithuania. When the group wanted to leave Lithuania, each one had to obtain an exit visa from the special department in Kovno. Each one was interviewed separately and one of their interrogators was a round-faced fat Jew.

Rabbi Silver first described his own interview as follows. There was another Jew on the bench in addition to the fat Jew and both were NKVD members who asked him why he wanted to leave.

Rabbi Silver: I was on my way to Eretz Yisroel, but because of the War, we couldn't get through. So, my goal is to join my parents in Eretz Yisroel later. Anyway I know you will close down all the Yeshivoth so we've nothing to do here.

The Interrogators: We won't close down the Yeshivoth. If you want to study, you can study here. Nobody's going to touch you; nobody's going to harm you. You have no real reason to leave.

Rabbi Silver: I've studied many years here and now my parents want me there. And, I want to be with them.

The Interrogators: Then, that's a different matter, but, why go to Eretz Yisroel? Why can't you go back to England, where you came from?

Rabbi Silver: I've told you before, my parents are there and that's why I want to go, and I feel that the Alm-ghty has given me this opportunity to get there at last.

The Interrogators: Who's the Alm-ghty?

Rabbi Silver: Don't you know who the Alm-ghty is? Have you ever heard of G-d? Look here, I'm not getting into any ideological discussion with you; there will come a time when you will realize and know who G-d is. Even Pharaoh in Egypt conceded that there was a higher power such as the Alm-ghty, and he had to give way to Him.

The Interrogators: Now we're going to talk about something very, very serious and I want you to consider it. When you get to Australia, we would like you to do some work for us there.

Rabbi Silver: Do you know what you're asking of me?

The Interrogators: Yes, and we'll pay you handsomely. You won't have to worry about a thing. After all, when you get there, what are you going to do?

Rabbi Silver: Listen, young man, you've no need to worry about my sources of livelihood. I've plenty of things to do there. I'll be a teacher.

The Interrogators: Alright, but I warn you of one thing. If you ever repeat this discussion to anybody... just remember that we've got the names of all your relatives here, and we shall deal with them and eventually get to you.

But Reb Nosson Wachtvogel's experience was even more frightening and complex. Once on board ship, he told them the whole story. Now Reb Nosson had eventually become a Canadian citizen and when the Russian interrogators learned of this, they wanted to keep him with them and offered him the job of being their agent, which he constantly refused. He told them he was only a Talmud student and had nothing to do with such matters. But they kept him incommunicado in jail overnight. Reb Nosson was strong enough to withstand all these threats and tribulations. Eventually, when they saw that they couldn't break him, they released him with the severe warning that they would take revenge on his relatives if he failed to remain silent. Still under the shadow of that grueling interview, Reb Nosson was in a noticeably somber mood.

Their first port of call was Hong Kong, the British enclave in China where the ship took on supplies. The Captain cabled the Jewish Community there, telling them that he had a group of evacuees who were very Orthodox Talmud students, as well as a few others on board and requested that they welcome them for the six or seven hours they would be there. He asked them to bring kosher food, as during the journey the group had eaten only boiled eggs, sardines and tomatoes.

A representative of the Jewish Community who came to the ship with some ladies took the evacuees by taxi to the Synagogue and its club on Robinson Road. There they were given a real welcome. Some clothes were provided for the children who were badly in need of them. The group was taken on a tour of



The Hong Kong Synagogue.

Hong Kong and then escorted back to the ship, which was then caught in the end phase of a typhoon, causing quite a number to become ill, including Rabbi Silver. They then passed through the squalid waters of the Equator, the Celebes, where the sea was like oil which the ship sliced through. Since the weather was warm they all slept on deck despite the soot from the ship's funnel and eventually landed at the first point of Australian territory, Thursday Island, to take on fresh water. Later they continued through the Great Barrier Reef to the Port of Brisbane, Queensland. On a Friday afternoon, they were told to disembark immediately and remove their pitiful luggage. Three waiting taxis took them immediately to the Synagogue on Margaret Street, arriving there in time for *Kabalat Shabbos*. There was barely a *minyan*.

Rev. Wollman took them to his home on Alice Street which was a large house not far from the *shul*, where Mrs. Wollman and her two daughters welcomed them, and they all sat down to eat fish (as Rev. Wollman had been told before hand that they would not eat meat). He had said, "I respect your wishes and



The Brisbane Synagogue (interior).

you'll have fish, vegetables, soup and compote. You can all rest assured that everything is strictly kosher in my house, even though you don't yet know me."

After their first normal *Shabbos* in a long time, Rev. Wollman accompanied them to the hotel where they first encountered signs of Queensland and its heat, and were warned by the hotel manager that if they didn't sleep under the mosquito nets they would have an unpleasant night. They heeded his advice.

The next morning they found a bigger crowd in shul of about two *minyoneim*. Each had an *aliya* with Rev. Wollman making them the central point of his *Shabbos* sermon. He said it was a unique event in the history of not only Brisbane Jewry, but of Australian Jewry as a whole, that a group of eminent Talmud students had arrived in Australia and that the Community would be well advised to learn whatever they could from the newcomers, to give them the honor and respect due them as they would be assets to the Australian Jewish Community in every way possible. He hoped they would decide to stay in Brisbane. After *Shabbos* a special welcome was extended to the group in the Community Hall where they were introduced to several members of the Community and Mr. Ravidell, a Russian Jew, chatted with Rebbetzin Dessler in Russian.

On Monday morning they picked up their luggage which passed through customs without problems.

A gentleman arrived and approached Rabbi Silver, "May I introduce myself? My name is Rettalick; We've heard that you came from Soviet-occupied Lithuania, and we're suspicious that there may be Russian agents on this ship. Do you know anything about it?" Silver reassured him about the group but could not speak for the other passengers.

After clearing their luggage the evacuees went into the city to one of the Australian Government offices which took care of them and advised that housing had been arranged for them on Abbottsford Road. It was a large, rambling mansion of about eleven rooms, rather an old place, but it was in good condition.

A week later they began to look around Brisbane and asked Rev. Wollman if there were any opportunities available. They inquired if there was a Talmud Torah where they could teach. Reluctantly he answered them, "Unfortunately we have only Sunday classes, and I'm the one who teaches there - very few pupils attend. So I don't think there's very much for you to do here." They asked, "So what do we do?" Then Rev. Wollman came up with an idea. "Actually, the real place for you would be Melbourne, or Sydney perhaps; but Melbourne would be better. We don't really know the precise situation there, so we'll have to find out. I'd personally like you to stay here. There are probably lots of things that you could help me with in the Community."

The months passed. Rabbi Silver was offered a job with the Government Censorship Board. It was during the Second World War, and as Rabbi Silver did not want to live on the Government grant if he could avoid it, he immediately accepted the offer. He started to work at the Censorship Board, and instead of working on *Shabbos*, he used to work throughout Saturday night. This was acceptable to the management and the postal authorities. Rabbi Silver remembered when two sacks of letters came in. The censorship authorities had found them floating in the water near Perth, in Western Australia. They had been thrown overboard from the ship *Mouretania*. At the time, it served as a military transport ship, and the A.I.F. (Australian Infantry Forces) were then being dispatched to the Middle East. This was prior to the battle of El Alamein, in North Africa, where it was hoped that General Montgomery would stop the German invasion, led by Rommel. The soldiers started to send letters back home revealing where they were going. This was of course absolutely forbidden. The letters had found their way into the Brisbane Censorship Office and were handed to Rabbi Silver to record every item contained in them. It was quite a job, and of course he could not do it all.

And then came Rosh HaShana and Rabbi Silver told the chief of the department that he wanted to be excused for the Jewish New Year. He explained that he couldn't work at all on those days. The chief cut him short, "Look here, your job is in jeopardy." Again he explained, "I'm very sorry but I can't do it." The chief again pressed him, "Well it's up to you." Rosh HaShana was on Thursday and Friday that year, and with *Shabbos* following immediately, it meant three days off work. "If you don't show up on Thursday morning, we'll

have to dispense with your services.” Rabbi Silver told him that he had no option. And so, after nine months on the Censorship board, Rabbi Silver was out of work. All this took place in the year 1941.

A few days later a telegram came from Hirsch Stone asking Rabbi Silver to come down to Melbourne for an interview. He discussed this with Wollman, who was happy with the idea. He even suggested that he stop off at Sydney briefly to meet Rabbi Porush of the Great Synagogue. Silver took his advice and made a stop at Sydney, for a short interlude. There, he met Rabbi Porush who welcomed him saying, “So you’re going to Melbourne; very good. It’s a pity we can’t have you up here.”

So, Rabbi Silver travelled on to Melbourne and was received by Mr. Stone. He was invited to stay over Shabbos and give a lecture. The Congregation was so pleased with it, that there was an immediate unanimous decision to elect Rabbi Silver as their Rav. Rabbi Silver was not entirely happy about the situation, but decided that it was the best he could do for the present. A gentleman came up and said to him, “Rabbi, with respect, tell me what are your leanings in the Orthodox Jewish world?” Rabbi Silver was puzzled by the query. The gentleman elaborated. “To which party do you belong?” Rabbi Silver answered, “I don’t belong to any party.”

“Do you have any sympathy with Mizrachi or the Agudah?”

“I’m quite impartial to politics. If a Jew is a *Ben-Torah*, and he respects and lives by the Torah, then I’m with him,” Rabbi Silver answered.

“What is your attitude to the Mizrachi?”

“They’ve got some good points...!”

“Oh. Have they?” The man snapped back.

Rabbi Silver then quipped, “Yes, I suppose so. Even the Agudah has good points.”

“What do you mean, **even** the Agudah? – **Only** the Agudah has got good points!”

Rabbi Silver was by this stage quite tired of the whole argument and finished it off saying, “Look, it’s a matter of opinion, and that’s my opinion.” Rabbi Silver immediately felt that the gentleman was on the Shul’s Board. The next day he was told that he was “not suitable.”

On the way back to Brisbane, he stopped off in Sydney again and went to speak with Rabbi Porush, who told him, “We may have a job for you on the Board of Education.” Silver said, “Very good. *Chinuch* is really my field.” Porush then said to him, “Incidentally, there’s a class on today. Would you like to take it?” Rabbi Silver agreed immediately. Rabbi Porush then introduced Silver to Mr. Bloom, who was at the time President of the Education Board. Together, the 3 men entered the Great Synagogue, where the classes were assembling. The class to which Rabbi Silver was assigned comprised about 15 children. He started to talk to the students putting out feelers to discover what they knew about this and that in *Yiddishkeit*. Then he started to teach them. He first taught them the *Brachas* over fruit, and then *Hamotzi* over bread, after first washing their hands and making the *Bracha* for that as well. Rabbi Porush and Mr. Bloom stood by watching. They told him afterwards that he had given an



excellent lesson, but “unfortunately, there is no opening at the moment.”

On returning to Brisbane, Rabbi Silver recounted the whole adventure to Wollman. It was agreed that Rabbi Silver would go along and “canvass” parents to see if he could organize a Talmud Torah. He spoke with some of the parents saying, “I’m very interested in teaching children here, and I don’t want any money for it.” The answers were all the same. They all had the same excuse. “The children have to have time to play and they’ve got homework too... and they do go to Sunday School. We don’t think so...” Rabbi Silver kept pushing, “I only meant twice a week; just twice a week.” They were adamant, “No.”

A week later another telegram came. This one was from Mr. Yoffe, President of the Brunswick Talmud Torah. As he had heard that Rabbi Silver was seeking a position he invited him to come to Melbourne as their Rabbi and teacher. Rev. Wollman advised him to accept. Off he went again down to Melbourne. The first thing they commented on was his hat. It was not suitable. As their Rabbi he would have to exchange his grey hat. “What? Wear a black hat?” Rabbi Silver

resented this but still what does a Jew not do for *parnossh* (a livelihood)? So he put on a black hat. He was there over Shabbos, so they invited him to give a *drasha*. It was *Parshas Sh'lach*, and he spoke about the *m'raglim* and about *Eretz Yisroel*. Reb Yosef Yoffe who sat at his side was almost in tears. He said to Rabbi Silver afterwards, "We haven't heard a *drasha* like that for years, you're a real Zionist." Rabbi Silver immediately replied, "Thank you very much, but I'm not a Zionist. I'm just an ordinary Jew who loves Eretz Yisroel and eventually, please G-d, I hope to get there." And, there and then, he was unanimously appointed Rabbi of the Brunswick Talmud Torah and Congregation. But Rabbi Silver was still uneasy about this Rabbi business and quickly asserted his intentions. "Look, I'm not interested in the Rabbinical position; I want the Talmud Torah. If you've got a Talmud Torah..." They told him they did have a Talmud Torah with 50 children. However, the hiring committee was not prepared to fulfill Rabbi Silver's religious expectations and his candidacy was cancelled.

Nevertheless Rabbi Silver brought his family down to Melbourne. Also Rebbetzin Dessler* and her daughter came to live with them. The house that Mr. Yoffe, President of the Brunswick Talmud Torah had rented for Rabbi Silver was still available and so, Rabbi Silver took the opportunity to bring the remainder of the group to Melbourne.



Rabbi Silver with Carlton Talmud Torah students.

*Rebbetzin Dessler was the wife of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler ז"ל who is featured elsewhere in this issue of *Yiddishkeit*.

One afternoon Rabbi Silver was strolling down one of the streets of Carlton (the old Jewish district of Melbourne), when he met a Mr. Mordecai Eizen, who asked him if he would like to join their Talmud Torah. The next morning, Rabbi Silver went along to the Talmud Torah, and to his delight, he saw that there was a real opening for which he could work. He saw that Mordecai Eizen had put enormous effort into the education of those children. And that was how Rabbi Silver started his Melbourne career at the Carlton *Talmud Torah* and came to fulfill the prophetic advice given by HaRav Daniel Movshovitch (See part one of the story in *Yiddishkeit* issue two).

Rabbi Silver had many pupils in Melbourne, a number of whom later went on to major Yeshivoth. He educated many, who later became the new generation, continuing Torah-true *Yiddishkeit* in this far-flung corner of the world. Rabbi Silver eventually fulfilled his original desire to live in Eretz Yisroel. After many years, he took his whole family to live in Jerusalem, where he was, and still is, one of the officials of the Vaad Hayeshivoth. One can always find him there involved in the concerns of the many yeshiva boys, who come for his counsel and guidance.

It was a long journey from Kelme to Melbourne and finally to Jerusalem.

Editor's Note: A Reader Responds. It was called to our attention that in Issue 2 of *Yiddishkeit*, a statement in "From Kelme to Melbourne" pertaining to Rav Nosson Wachtfogel – *menahel ruhani* of the greatest Torah center (Lakewood, New Jersey) outside Eretz Israel – requires correction. Regarding his wife, Rebbetzin Chava Wachtfogel, her father, Rav Shlomovitz, ז"ל was a prominent *rav* of the Polish city of Goninetz and the author of important scholarly works. His daughter was among the most outstanding pupils of the Krakow Seminary under Sara Schnirer. During the summer of 1940, a *shidduch* was arranged between Rav Wachtfogel and Chava. After their engagement *vort (t'noim)*, when the group in the story finalized their plans to leave Kelme, there wasn't time to organize a proper wedding. But the couple wanted to leave together and Rav Wachtfogel needed to list Chava on his passport as his wife. He asked the Kovno Rabbinate for a certificate confirming his marriage. Since the wedding hadn't yet taken place, the rabbinate, fearing the Russian authorities, refused to issue the certificate but decided that if the couple were to undergo *kiddushin*, they would be officially man and wife. This was no fiction. According to Jewish law, a marriage consists of *kiddushin* – the formal creation of the marriage bond, in which the bride receives her ring before two witnesses – and *nissuin*, done under the *chupah*, which symbolizes the beginning of the home. Because *nissuin* required a public affair and preparations, it had to be delayed until the couple arrived in Montreal, where Rav Wachtfogel's father was deputy chief rabbi. In the Talmudic period and earlier, these two stages were separated by up to a year. Therefore, Chava and Nosson were truly married by *kiddushin* before their departure.