



# **REBBE RESPONSA**

The Rebbe's English Letters

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The Beauty of Tznius

*Modesty During the Summer and Beyond*

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**Issue 113**  
**Balak, 5785**

## *A Word from the Publishers*

We hereby present *Issue 112 of Rebbe Responsa*, a compilation of letters originally authored by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in English, culled from the *Rebbe Responsa* app.

In this week's issue, titled *Strengthening Tznius*, we explore the Rebbe's guidance on maintaining Jewish standards of modesty, especially during the summer months when challenges intensify. Through these letters, the Rebbe reveals the profound beauty and strength inherent in tznius. The timing is especially fitting as we read Parshas Balak, where Bilaam's attempted curse transforms into the blessing "Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov – "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob." Our Sages teach that this refers to the tznius of Jewish homes, where entrances don't face each other to preserve modesty.

This issue also features a remarkable historic discovery: a newly uncovered letter from the Rebbe to President Harry S. Truman on his inauguration day in 1949. Notably, this letter was written two years before the Rebbe assumed leadership. It was previously assumed that the Rebbe started writing letters to presidents later in his leadership, making this discovery all the more significant.

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The Rebbe's English letters represent a little-known facet of the Rebbe's Torah, containing profound wisdom and practical guidance expressed in clear, accessible language. We encourage you to download the Rebbe Responsa app, which offers the only comprehensive collection of the Rebbe's English letters available to date. With over 5,000 organized by both topic and date, the app makes finding the Rebbe's guidance and opinion simple and accessible.

We take this opportunity to urge anyone in possession of English letters from the Rebbe to please consider sharing them with us. Every letter is unique – and may be exactly what someone else needs to see.

*The Rebbe Responsa Team*

## *The Beauty of Tznius*

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## *Historic Discovery*

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*Newly uncovered early letter from the Rebbe written to President Harry S. Truman in honor of his inauguration*

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# 1

## *Modesty During Summer Vacation*

*Strengthening tznius during the summer; Neglect calls for positive reinforcement; Uncompromising truth gains respect.*

By the Grace of G-d  
19th of Tammuz,  
5731 Brooklyn, N. Y.

To The Students of Rabbi Dr. Metzger's Class<sup>1</sup>

Blessing and Greeting:

I am gratified to receive periodic reports of your good activities, and recently together with your donations for the Tefillin Fund and Ezras Achim, for which receipts are enclosed.<sup>2</sup>

Inasmuch as everything is by Hashgocho Protis, and it came at this time, at the beginning of the summer vacation, I wish to take advantage of the opportunity to convey some timely thoughts to you.

I am confident that your efforts during the past year in the area of Tznius have had the desired results, and will continue to be felt. Nevertheless, on the basis of the saying of our Sages, "Encourage the energetic," I wish to send you a word of encouragement to continue your efforts in this direction, particularly during the summer season, when many of you will have special opportunities to make an impact on your surroundings.

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**Source:** Photocopy of the original.

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Dr. Alter Bentzion Metzger (b. 5693) taught Jewish studies at Stern College (undergrad women's college at Yeshiva University) and is the author of many articles and books on Judaism and Chassidus.

For the Rebbe's initial letter on Tznius, written to the class a year earlier, see the following letter.

<sup>2</sup> For information regarding the class's Tefillin Fund, see below, footnote 3. Ezras Achim was a covert Chabad-run organization established in 5726 (1964) to provide humanitarian and religious support for Jews in the Soviet Union, sending aid, religious materials, and clandestine emissaries.

I have had reason to mention before that when we see an increase in the area of the undesirable, it is an indication that a **special** effort should be made in the positive direction to offset the negative by a reinforcement of the positive. Our Sages of blessed memory expressed it by saying, בקעה מצא וגדר בה גדר. This means, according to the commentaries, that when one sees an area neglected in the community, the way to deal with the situation is not, as some misguided individuals might think, to accept the situation, or even make concessions, in the hope of not antagonizing, etc. On the contrary, it is necessary to make a special fence and additional fences, to close the gap. Experience has also shown that when one takes the road of concession, however well it may be meant, one only loses the confidence of the people whom one wishes to influence. On the other hand, by following unequivocally the road of uncompromising truth, one gains the respect and confidence of the people.

In the light of the above, I trust that each and every one of you will consider it as a special mission and message coming from the Torah, Toras Chaim, to take advantage of these vacation days and strengthen all the matters of goodness and holiness in one's own life, and in one's surroundings. I particularly urge you to continue your efforts in the area of Tznius which, although it is basically reflected in the manner of attire, concerns also general conduct, conversation, etc.

It is well to bear in mind that since G-d is the Creator of man, and since He expects one to fulfill a certain task, He provides the necessary capacity and ability to fulfill the task in the best possible way.

I send my prayerful wishes to each and every one of you for a successful summer in every respect, particularly in respect to the above mentioned endeavor, and may you have good news to report.

With blessing,

**M. Schneerson**

RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON  
Lubovitch  
770 Eastern Parkway  
Brooklyn 13, N. Y.  
HYacinth 3-9250

מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן  
ליובאוויטש  
770 איסטערן פארקווי  
ברוקלין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d  
19th of Tammuz, 5731  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

To the Students of Rabbi Dr. Metzger's Class  
Stern College

Blessing and Greeting:

I am gratified to receive periodic reports of your good activities, and recently together with your donations for the Tefillin Fund and Ezras Achim, for which receipts are enclosed.

Inasmuch as everything is by Hashgocho Protis, and it came at this time, at the beginning of the summer vacation, I wish to take advantage of the opportunity to convey some timely thoughts to you.

I am confident that your efforts during the past year in the area of Tznius have had the desired results, and will continue to be felt. Nevertheless, on the basis of the saying of our Sages, "Encourage the energetic," I wish to send you a word of encouragement to continue your efforts in this direction, particularly during the summer season, when many of you will have special opportunities to make an impact on your surroundings.

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With blessing, *M. Schneerson*

## 2

### *More Than a Dress*

*Chanukah's timeless message of strength to stand against depraved societal trends; Tznius impacts the entire Jewish people; More than dress, avoiding subservience.*

By the Grace of G-d  
21st of Kislev, 5730  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Miss Chaya Devorah Plotkin<sup>3</sup>  
50 East 34th St.  
Apt. 6H  
New York, N. Y. 10016

Blessing and Greeting:

I duly received your letter of the 14th of Kislev, with the enclosed Tzedoko, contributed by your group of girls. Enclosed are the receipts.

May G-d grant that the Zechus of the Tzedoko should stand each and every one of you individually, and all together, in good stead, for the fulfillment of your hearts' desires for good in all your needs.

I hope you will have an inspiring Chanukah, especially in the light of the fact that Jewish women had a significant role in the miracle of Chanukah, as you surely know. The women's contribution began with their self sacrificing determination to observe the laws of Tznius, and extended to the whole area of Torah

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**Published:** Photocopy of the original.

<sup>3</sup> The year before Rabbi Metzger's class received the previous letter, the Rebbe sent this detailed response to the class addressing tznius standards. The letter was sent to Miss Chaya Devorah Plotkin, a student in the class and treasurer of a tefillin fund they had established for the Rebbe's tefillin campaign. At the time, there was heated debate among the students about tznius standards expected of college students. Though Miss Plotkin had not written to the Rebbe about this debate, the Rebbe's letter was dedicated to this issue. The letter was shared with the class and printed in Stern College's internal newspaper (*Teshurah* Meizlish 21 Adar, 5777).

and Mitzvot. Be it remembered that in those days they were confronted with a trend which had swept not only non-Jewish nations, but unfortunately also a substantial part of the Jewish people, who called themselves "Hellenists," faithfully following the customs and fashions of the day as set by the Greek culture prevailing at that time.

An event in Jewish history, particularly one that has been eternalized by a Mitzva, especially for eight consecutive days, surely must provide food for thought, not only as an important historic event, but also, and especially, as one that has a pertinent and timely significance for our own day and age. This should also make it easier to overcome whatever difficulties there may be, whether real or imaginary, to do so with confidence, joy, and gladness of heart.

The message of Chanukah, for Jewish girls and women, is that they should not allow themselves to be influenced by the environment, even though they are "few" and "weak" (as mentioned in Al Hanissim), victory will be theirs if they assume a strong and determined posture, and the benefit of it will be not only for them, but for the entire Jewish people, indeed for all future generations, as was the case with Chanukah.

Surely it is unnecessary to elaborate to you at length as to the cult of the ancient Greeks, which was to worship physical strength and beauty, discarding all modesty, etc. So shameless they became in their conduct, that they ascribed the same obscenities and vulgarity to their pagan gods, as is well known from their mythology.

In the light of the above, the issue, insofar as Jewish girls are concerned, is not merely the length of a dress, whether it be longer or shorter, but the fact that following the trend of the non-Jewish cult means subservience to it all along the line.

Secondly, this is not a personal matter, where a Jewish girl can think it is a matter of her own to do as she please, but it has far-reaching implications involving other girls, and is indeed a matter of concern for all our Jewish people.

Thirdly, there is no basis to think that what can a girl do in the face of such a majority and a trend, etc. The message of Chanukah provides the answer in regard to all three mentioned points.



I hope and pray that those girls who have shown strength and independence in the matter of Tznius, will continue to do so even with greater strength, while those who have not seen the matter in the true light of the Torah until now, will begin to do so from now on, and will continue in the right direction, going from strength to strength, in accordance with the teaching of the Chanukah lights, which are kindled in growing numbers from day to day.

Although this letter has been addressed to you in reply to your letter, both your letter as well as the reply are, of course, intended in behalf of the entire group. I hope, therefore, that you will bring it to the attention of each and every one of the group, and that it will help you and them in your determination to show a living example to other girls and groups as to what the proper thinking and conduct of a Jewish girl should be. In this way we may be certain in the eventual victory of light over darkness and to the realization of Al Hanissim in our own time, to its very conclusion, "to give thanks and praise to Thy great Name."

Wishing you and all your friends a happy and inspiring Chanukah,

With blessing,

**M. Schneerson**

- 2 -

Miss Chaya Devorah Plotkin

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Wishing you and all your friends a happy and inspiring Chanukah,

With blessing, *M. Schneerson*

### 3

## *Where There's Resistance*

*Recent efforts of the yetzer hara to undermine tznius indicates its urgent priority; Jewish daughters have capacity to resist trending alien fashions.*

By the Grace of G-d  
5th of Adar I, 5730  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Miss ...<sup>4</sup>

Detroit, Mich. 48221

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your letter in which you write that you have been elected President of the General Organization of the Bais Yaakov.

Inasmuch as everything is by hashgacha protis, and G-d does not expect the impossible, it is certain that you have the capacity to carry out your new function in a satisfactory way.

Knowing your family, it is surely unnecessary for me to emphasize that the first and foremost objective must always be to strengthen and spread true Yiddishkeit in its observance in the daily life, as our Sages said — “The essential thing is the deed.” This is particularly true in the case of young people and students.

With regard to girls, there is also the additional aspect, based on the verse, “All the pride of the king’s daughter is inward,” (Tehillim 45:14). This means the great need to emphasize all aspects of tznius in dress, conduct, etc. Moreover, it has often been pointed out in our holy sources that if one is in doubt as to what activity should

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**Published:** *The Letter and the Spirit*, Vol 3 (Nissan Mindel Publications, 2016), p. 299. **Note:** Letters printed in *The Letter and the Spirit* are from the Archives of Rabbi Nissan Mindel, the Rebbe's personal secretary who was entrusted with writing up the Rebbe's orally dictated responses. The archive consists of secretarial copies that may not include final edits and corrections, or may include unsent letters.

<sup>4</sup> This letter was addressed to Dina Borenstein (née Avtzon).

have priority, it is sometimes only necessary to consider which one is under the greatest pressure of the yetzer hara. And inasmuch as we have seen recently how busy the yetzer hara has been to undermine tznius in regard to women and girls, this in itself is an indication that this area requires the most urgent effort. To be sure, it is not easy to fight the latest fashions, whatever they may be. Moreover, as mentioned above, G-d does not require the impossible and since he has laid down the rule of "All the pride of the King's daughter is inward," it is clear that every Jewish daughter, being a daughter of our Mothers Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah, has the capacity of not being influenced by alien ideas, alien not only to Yiddishkeit but also to the basic concepts of decency and morality. Strangely enough some mistakenly consider this to be their "freedom" whereas actually it is slavishness.

May G-d grant that you should have good news to report in all above, and that you should be successful in your practical efforts in this area, both within the immediate sphere of your influence as well as beyond.

With blessing,

By, (secretary)

## 4

### *Root-Like Modesty*

*Jewish mothers and daughters work like strong roots, supporting our nation unconcerned with exterior critique and trends*

By the Grace of G-d  
15th of Teves 5739  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

To All Participants in the 2nd European Convention  
of Lubavitch Women's and Girls' Groups

Blessing and Greeting:

...Finally, to pursue the analogy from roots<sup>5</sup> to one more significant point – one does not look for flashing color and external beauty in roots, nor are the latter concerned with what some people might say about their external looks, roots do their work humbly and modestly, indeed for the most part hidden from view altogether. Such is also the work of true Jewish mothers and daughters.

In a world where fashion and vogue hold sway, and where expediency often takes precedence over eternal values and principles, our worthy mothers and daughters are not concerned with what some neighbor or passer-by might say about the way they conduct themselves and their homes in accord with the laws of our sacred Torah and Mitzvos. If these appear “old-fashioned” to the onlooker with his “modern” ideas of “new morality,” and the like – we, Jews, take pride in our old-fashioned, yet always new and eternal roots, and we strive to become ever more root-like and truer to the primary roots of our Jewish people, whom G-d designated as a “Kingdom of G-d’s servants and a Holy Nation.”

With prayerful wishes to each and all of you to go from strength to strength in all above, and

With blessing,

**M. Schneerson**

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**Source:** Photocopy of the original.

<sup>5</sup> “Roots,” was the keynote theme of the convention, and of this letter.

5

*Women Set the Tone*

*Tznius and holiness in speech, thought, dress and conduct; Women  
set the standard; influence must reach distant circles outside  
mainstream Yiddishkeit*

FREE RENDITION<sup>6</sup>

By the Grace of G-d  
Lag b'Omer, 5730  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

To All Participants in the  
Fifteenth Annual Convention of  
Neshei Ubnos Chabad

Blessing and Greeting:

... Our Sages explain that Tznius and Kedusha must be observed in every aspect of the daily life, including speech and thought, and certainly in dress and general conduct.

In this area, especially, as in certain other areas of Jewish life, the Jewish woman and daughter set the tone and standard, as experience has shown. Our Sages often stressed that the future and happiness of children is largely tied in with the Tzniusdige conduct of the mother.

May G-d grant that your Convention - of which the main theme is Tznius - will implement the true ideals of Jewish womanhood in actual practice, and set in motion a far-reaching drive to make Tznius the pervading spirit in deed and in speech, which in turn depend on the sanctity of thought.

Moreover, as in all other activities where Chasidus demands that they be disseminated Chutz (outside), may the voice of your

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**Source:** Photocopy of the original.

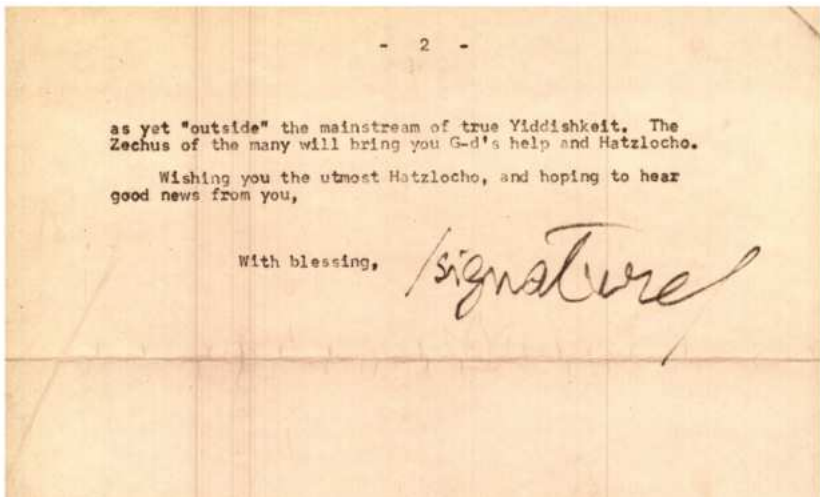
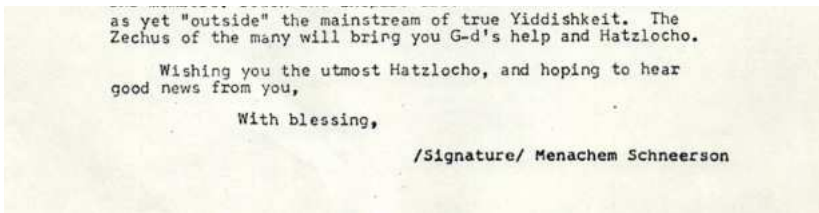
<sup>6</sup> Although this letter is presented as a translation, it was meticulously reviewed, and edited, by the Rebbe before being sent (as was the Rebbe's custom with all translated letters addressed to dinners and events). See the attached photocopy.

Convention and the living example of all your participants and members, reach and inspire also distant circles, which are as yet "outside" the mainstream of true Yiddishkeit. The Zechus of the many will bring you G-d's help and Hatzlocho.

Wishing you the utmost Hatzlocho, and hoping to hear good news from you,

With blessing,

/Signature/ Menachem Schneerson



*Note the addition of the word **"/signature/"** in the Rebbe's holy handwriting on an initial copy of the letter*

## *Historic Discovery*

### ***Dear. Mr. President***

*Newly uncovered early letter from the Rebbe to President Harry S. Truman in honor of his inauguration*

ב"ה January 20th, 1949<sup>7</sup>

The Honorable  
Harry S. Truman,  
President of the United States,  
The White House,  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Executive of the Merkos L'Inyonei to Chinuch and the numerous Jewish children in this country and the world over, to whose education and welfare this organization is dedicated, please accept our heartfelt felicitations and prayerful wishes on the occasion of your Inauguration.

To these, as to all children everywhere, a leader who regards faith in G-d, love for fellow-man, the championship of the underprivileged, and world peace and freedom as the foundations of a determined policy, is a truly Big Champ indeed.

May your term of office be a happy, peaceful and successful one, leading this country and the world at large to lasting peace and prosperity, with the help of the Almighty.

Very truly yours,

**M. Schneerson**

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**Source:** Photocopy of the original.

This letter was discovered in the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library by Rabbi Yosef Kramer with the assistance of a member of the Rebbe Responsa team. The letter was published in the *Teshurah* of the wedding of Menachem Mendel and Mushka Kramer (12 Tammuz, 5785).

<sup>7</sup> Corresponding to the 19 Teves, 5709.



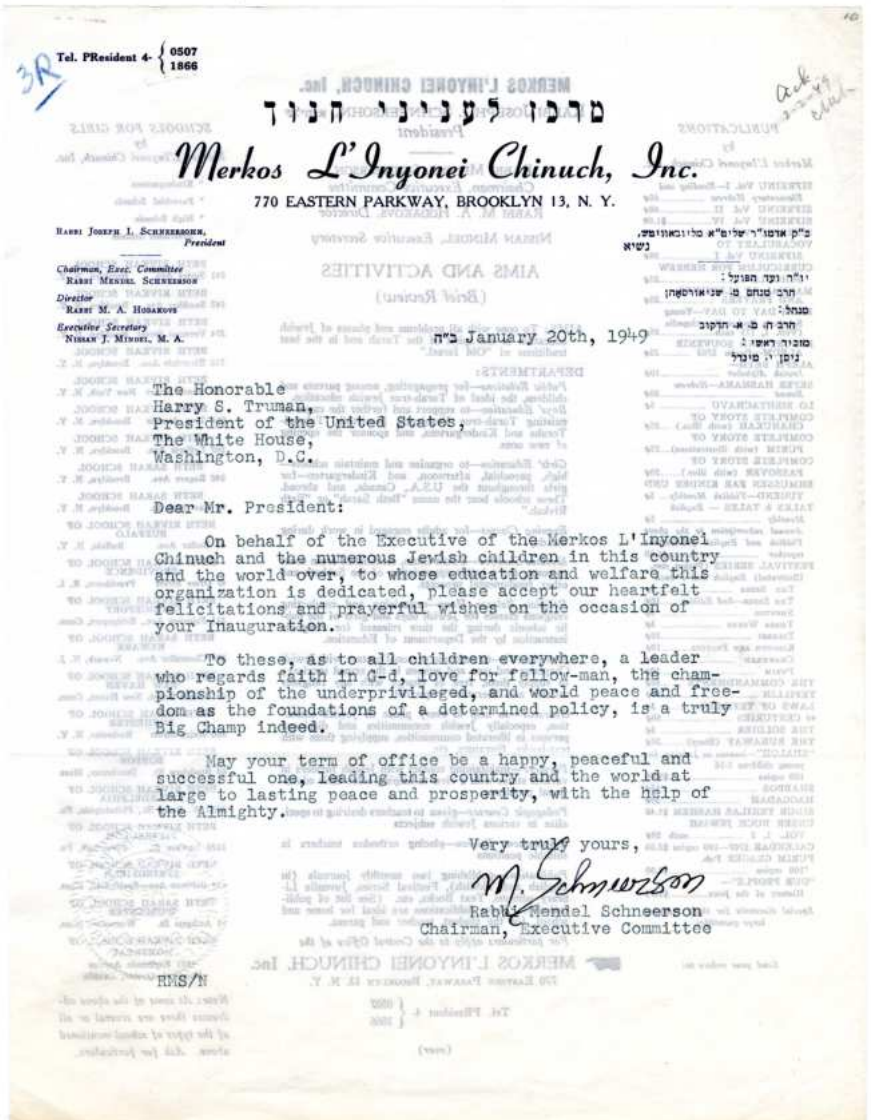


Photo credit: The Harry S. Truman Presidential Library

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My dear Rabbi Schneerson:

The kind congratulations you extend on behalf of those you represent pleased the President ever so much. Thoughtful letters like yours are genuinely appreciated by him and he asks me to express his thanks.

Very sincerely yours,

WILLIAM D. HASSETT  
Secretary to the President

Rabbi Mendel Schneerson, Chairman, Executive Committee, Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Inc., 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn 13, New York.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

February 2, 1949

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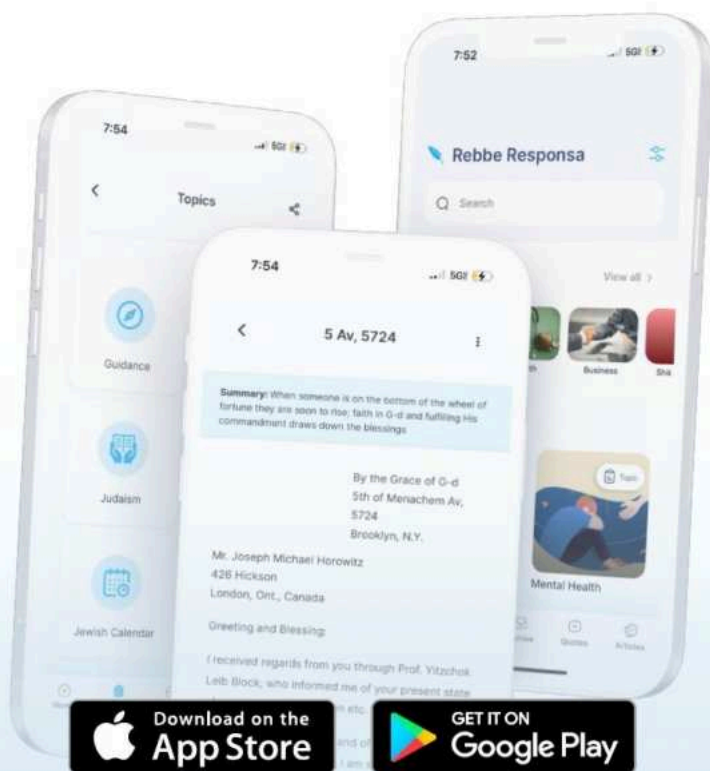
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*Reply from the president's office (letter sent to Rebbe (right), and carbon copy saved in the president's archive (left))*

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