

# Getting to Uman

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*Today it takes just a phone call to a travel agent to join the more than 35,000 people who spend Rosh HaShanah beside Rebbe Nachman's gravesite in Uman.*

*It wasn't always that easy.*

*Between World War II, when the Nazis made Uman "Judenrein," and the fall of Communism in 1989, Breslover Chassidim ventured to the tziyun (gravesite) at the risk of being caught and exiled for "religious subversion." Reb Gedaliah Fleer, the first American Breslover to penetrate the Iron Curtain and reach Uman in the early 1960s, describes the way it was:*

In 1948, eleven chassidim traveled independently to Uman to pray together with the Jews who had returned to that city after the Holocaust. This pilgrimage continued until the 1970s, when most Breslover chassidim were able to emigrate to

Israel.

Although they had reached the *tziyun*, Breslover chassidim still faced enormous difficulties to fulfill Rebbe Nachman's will. Every so often they were forced to change the location of their services, and Reb Yitzchak Zelig had to change his residence on several occasions. He was not frightened, however, since he was already an old man and the government usually did not bother with older Jews who insisted on remaining religious.



The chassidim traveled vast distances to reach the *tziyun*. By this time, most Breslovers lived in Tashkent, Bukhara and other remote regions, where the authorities more or less ignored the population's religious beliefs. The trip from Tashkent to Uman took almost a full week. Other chassidim lived even farther away in Prunzi, Georgia, not far from Uzbekistan. To avoid traveling on Shabbat, they would first journey to Tashkent (a distance of 400 km, approximately 250 miles) and from there to Moscow, Kiev and, finally, Uman.

Throughout most of the year there was no communication between the far-flung communities of Breslover chassidim. Just before

Rosh HaShanah, however, the chassidim would make their way to public phones (fearing that someone might be listening in on their home lines) and call Reb Michel Dorfman, the de facto head of Breslover Chassidut in Russia, to clarify the details of the upcoming *kibutz*. Reb Michel would send an inspiring letter to those who lived in remote areas, reminding them of the importance of spending Rosh HaShanah in Uman and encouraging them to join the *kibutz*, despite all the hardships involved.

*From "Against All Odds"*