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A Global Change

It was the custom of the **Lubavitcher Rebbe** to write annual general letters on the occasion of various holidays and milestones throughout the year. These letters were addressed to "all Jewish sons and daughters wherever they may be," and delivered an inspiring message pertaining to some aspect of the upcoming holiday. Although originally written in Yiddish, they were translated into various languages and disseminated throughout the globe.

The Hebrew translations to these letters were written by renowned author and educator, **Rabbi Tuvia Blau**. Because he was based in Israel, and internet and fax were not yet in use, the Rebbe did not review or edit these translations. However, when the Hebrew magazine *Kfar Chabad* began to publish the letters, the Rebbe would review every issue before publication and edit the letters.

Once, in the 1980's, after the Rebbe returned the magazine with the edits, Rabbi Blau and the editor of the "Kfar Chabad" Magazine, **Rabbi Aaron-Dov Halperin**, noticed something unusual. In the original Yiddish letter, the Rebbe used the term "Yid," ordinarily translated as "Jew," or in Hebrew, *Yehudi*. But wherever Rabbi Blau had used the term "*Yehudi*" in his Hebrew translation, the Rebbe changed it to "*adam*," person.

Rabbi Halperin could not contain his curiosity and called one of the Rebbe's secretary-attendants, Rabbi Leibel Groner, to clarify the matter. Rabbi Groner had no explanation. "This is most unusual to me, too."

Several weeks later Rabbi Halperin had to travel from Israel to New York. His flight had a stopover in Paris where he changed planes. During the first leg of his journey, until Paris, Rabbi Halperin found himself seated next to an Israeli-Arab Knesset member, **Muchmad** (Eng.: Mohammed) **Watid** of the Marxist-associated "Mapam" party (*Mifleget HaPoalim HaMeuhedet* -- lit. "United Workers Party"). They began to chat.

Rabbi Halperin relates:

"The purpose of his trip was to meet with members of the PLO in New York! We exchanged views on various political matters, although naturally we disagreed strongly. However, he knew how to present his views in a cultured and fascinating way. I realized that Mr. Watid was a brilliant man with a profound intellect."

"My biggest surprise came when Watid said to me, 'I must admit that I am captivated by the personality of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Although I disagree completely with his political views, I strongly admire him as a person. I regularly read his public letters which are printed in the newspapers, and his philosophical views, as they are interpreted for day-to-day life, are stimulating.'

"As I was digesting what Watid had just told me, he began to review for me the entire content of the Rebbe's most recent public letter, which was the very one which the Rebbe had us change the word "Jew" to "person!"

"By the way,' Mr. Watid told me, 'recently a number of party members had protested the inclusion of the Rebbe's letters in the party's Socialist-Zionist affiliated newspaper, *Al Hamishmar*, and almost secured agreement to stop printing them. I got up and argued that in spite of my fundamental disagreement with all the Rebbe's political stances, it would be a shame for this reason to deny thousands of readers the profound philosophical message in these letters, which speaks even to an Arab like me. My words were convincing enough to influence them to continue the printing!"

After Rabbi Halperin landed in New York, he went to the world headquarters of the Chabad movement, the Rebbe's synagogue in Crown Heights, Brooklyn (known by its address, 770). He went into the office of the Rebbe's secretariat and met one of them, Rabbi Binyamin Klein. He told Rabbi Klein about his experiences on the flight, and also shared the fact that the Rebbe had changed the word "Jew" to "person." They both agreed that probably the Rebbe foresaw that an intelligent non-Jew was being positively influenced by his letters, and decided to address them to "people" rather than "Jews."

Later that day, Rabbi Halperin composed a letter to the Rebbe about his in-air encounter with the Arab Knesset member. He gave the report to Rabbi Klein and asked him to give it to the Rebbe.

An hour later, Rabbi Klein found Rabbi Halperin and reported to him that the Rebbe had responded to his letter, without even reading it yet.

"I drove the Rebbe from his house to 770. The Rebbe asked me, 'What's new? Did someone just arrive from Israel?' I told the Rebbe that you had just arrived, and told him the story of your encounter with the Arab Knesset member. I also said that you were curious about the changes to the letter."

The Rebbe listened to the report with great satisfaction. At the end he smiled broadly and asked, "Did he [the Arab Knesset member] not realize that the letter was addressed to 'All Jewish sons and daughters'? That didn't bother him?"

Source: Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from
[//chabad4israel.org/oldevnt/2015/aarondovstory.shtml](http://chabad4israel.org/oldevnt/2015/aarondovstory.shtml)

Biographical note: **Mr. Muhammed Watid** (Arabic: محمد واتد, Hebrew: מוחמד ותד; 1 June 1937 – 24 September 1994) was an Israeli Arab politician who served as a member of the Marxist *Mapam* faction of the left-wing Labor party in the Knesset between 1981 and 1988. He was the editor of the Arabic-language version of the party's newspaper, "Al HaMishmar". After leaving politics, he managed and edited the "Kul al-Arab" newspaper, and later ran a public relations firm. In 1994 he was killed in a fatal traffic collision.

Connection: Seasonal--the 117th anniversary of the birth of the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Tuesday, 11 Nissan 5779 (April 16)