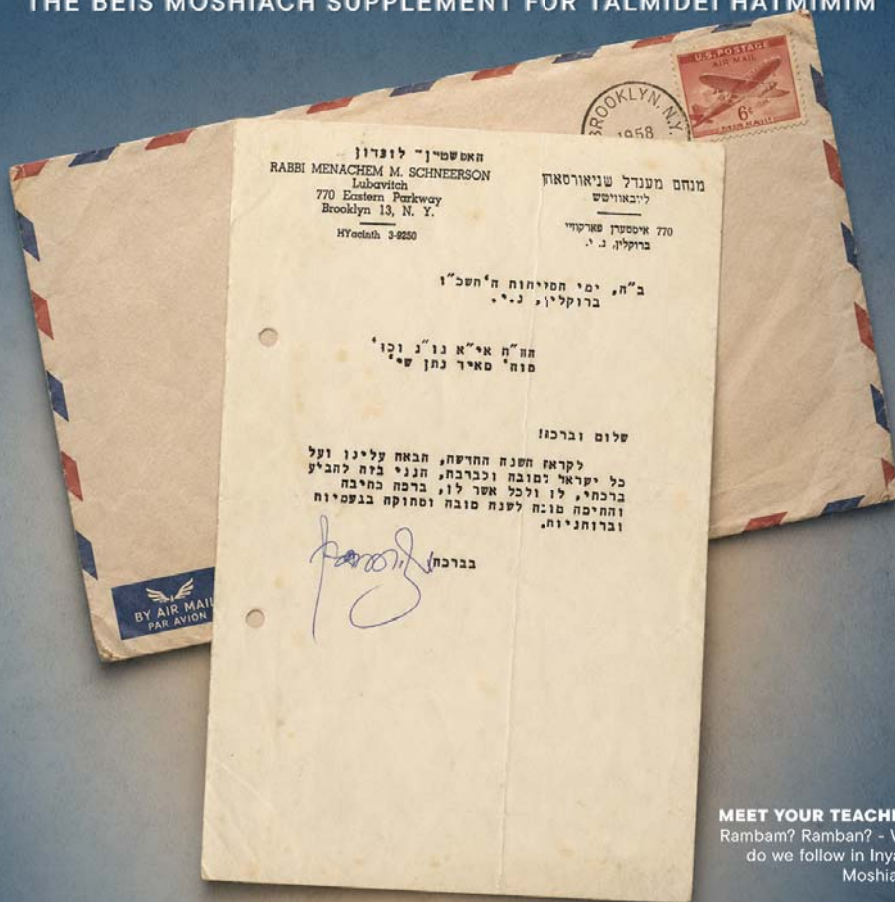


HATMIM

THE BEIS MOSHIACH SUPPLEMENT FOR TALMIDEI HATMIMIM



How Many Letters Did The Rebbe Write?

The Story of the Rebbe's Igros Kodesh

MEET YOUR TEACHERS

Rambam? Ramban? - Who do we follow in Inyanei Moshiach?

THE RED HANDKERCHIEF

Rabbi Tuvia Zilberstrom observed every detail of the Rebbe's tekios

THE REBBEIM & THE CANTONISTS

Toldos Chabad

LEARNING GEMARA "ALIBA D'HILCHASA"

A Talk with Rabbi Menachem Eizenman, Rosh Yeshiva of YTTL Poconos

A Bar Mitzva Boy's Search

Dvar Malchus

4



How Many Letters Did The Rebbe Write?

The Story of the Rebbe's Igros Kodesh

6



20

The Red Handkerchief

Rabbi Tuvia Zilberstrom followed every detail of the Rebbe's tekiot

Meet Your Teachers

Excerpted from the introduction to Inyano Shel Moshiach by Rabbi Shalom Dovber Wolf

28



38

Halacha Solidifies the Sugya

How learning 'aliba d'hilchasa' gives bachurim direction, clarity, and geshmak in iyun

The Rebbeim & the Cantonists

Toldos Chabad

48



BEIS MOSHIACH

Published by:
Chabad World Center
to Greet Moshiach

744 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, NY 11213

Editor:
Levi Liberow
Managing Editor:
Shraga Crombie

Hebrew Editors:
Rabbi M.M. Hendel
Rabbi Yaakov
Chazan

A Bar Mitzva Boy's Search



אור
לארבעה
עשר

On Yud-Alef Nissan 5736, at the very end of the farbrengen the Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach delivered an unusually brief Hadran on Mesechta Pesachim, because, in the Rebbe's words, "the hour is late, the crowd is tired, and it's a yom ha'maaseh, a busy day of deed." What follows is a short rendition of that Hadran, presented in honor of the thousands of tmimim around the world who are now starting to learn this Mesechta.

Mesechta Pesachim opens with a discussion on *hilchos bedikas chometz* stated in unusual wording: "אור לארבעה עשר בודקין" — "On the light of the fourteenth, one searches for chometz by candlelight" — even though the search takes place specifically at night, by candlelight and not daylight [see Sotah 21a, where "ohr" is generally associated with daylight].

The *mesechta* closes with the halacha that the father of the child recites *shehecheyanu* at a *pidyon ha'ben*.

What connects these two halachos—the opening *bedika* and the closing *bracha*—to one another, and to the *mesechta* as a whole?

Entering the Covenant

The answer lies in the general theme of Pesach itself: it is the time the Jewish people first entered into their covenant with Hashem. The covenant was finalized at *Matan Torah*, but the three-step process that led there—comparable to a *geirus*, involving *bris milah*, immersion in a mikva, and offering a *korban*—already began on the fourteenth of Nissan [some place this on the night of the fifteenth; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, pg. 125], with the *milah* our ancestors underwent before they could bring the Korban Pesach. This is why the

Gemara in Yevamos (46a–46b) derives the halachos of conversion from what happened to Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim.

Bar Mitzva as "Ohr L'arbaah Asar"

This same pattern repeats itself in every generation, in every Jew individually—at the *bar mitzva*:

A child's obligation in mitzvos begins after thirteen years, at "thirteen years and one day"—meaning, once he has entered his fourteenth year. That instant is reminiscent of our Mishna's *ohr l'arbaah asar*: the eve of the fourteenth, immediately once the thirteenth day is complete.

With that threshold comes *daas*—mental maturity, the capacity for independent understanding and judgment—and with *daas* comes responsibility for one's own *yetzer hara*, which is often described as *chametz*, (as in the passuk "*palteini ... mi'kaf meavel v'chometz*—save me from the hand of he who treats unjustly and robs" (Tehillim 71:4), because he is like the leaven that causes the dough to go sour and rise with self-importance and arrogance.

Just as physical *chametz* must be actively searched for in order to be destroyed, so too this spiritual "chametz" must be sought out specifically so that it can be uprooted.



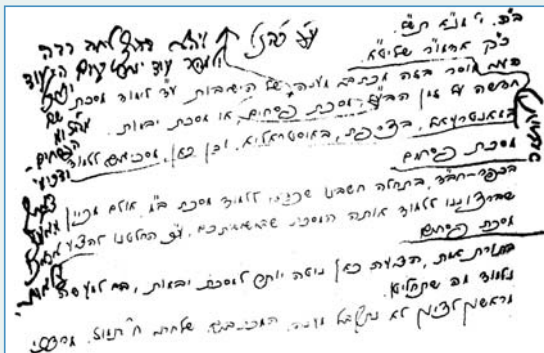
On Choosing Mesechta Pesachim

On 10 Menachem Av 5730 (1970), **Rabbi Mordechai Mentlik**, Rosh Yeshiva of Central Tomchei Tmimim at 770, wrote to the Rebbe transmitting the responses he'd received from yeshiva administrations regarding which mesechta of Gemara to study in the coming zman – Pesachim or Yevamos – noting that Montreal, France, Australia, and the local yeshiva had already indicated support for Pesachim:

ע"פ כהנ"ל [מסכת פסחים]
ויהא בהצלחה רבה

ולמהר עוד יותר קיום
היעוד ונאכל שם מהזו"מ
[מנ הזבח ומן הפסחים]
– ודכימי צאתך מאמ"צ
[מארץ מצרים] אראנו
נפלאות.

The Rebbe circled the
words מסכת פסחים
from the letter and wrote:



According to the above [it should be Pesachim] and may it be with great success, and may it work to hasten all the more the fulfillment of the promise, “and there we will eat of the zevachim and the pesachim” – and those of “as in the days of your going out of the land of Egypt, I will show you wonders” – i.e., the Korban Pesach of the times of Moshiach. ■

(Likkut Maanos Kodosh 5730, Maaneh 90)

From Darkness to Light

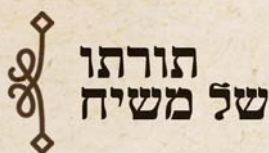
This is why the search is done specifically “by the light of a candle”—echoing the passuk that a mitzva is compared to a candle and Torah to light. The search happens in the dark, but its purpose is to produce light: the Alter Rebbe in Tanya (Likkutei Amarim, ch. 25), explaining the verse “וְגַם רָשָׁע לְיוֹם” וְרָצָה—“and also the wicked one, for the day of evil” (Mishlei 16:4)—writes that the wicked person’s very existence is only so that he may eventually repent and turn the day of evil into a day of light.

So “*ohr l’arbaah asar*” doesn’t describe only when the search happens, but what it’s for—and when done properly, the search is already the beginning of turning that darkness into light.

Search & Redeem

And yet, whatever the responsibility that comes with the light of the fourteenth, the mesechta’s close makes a further point:

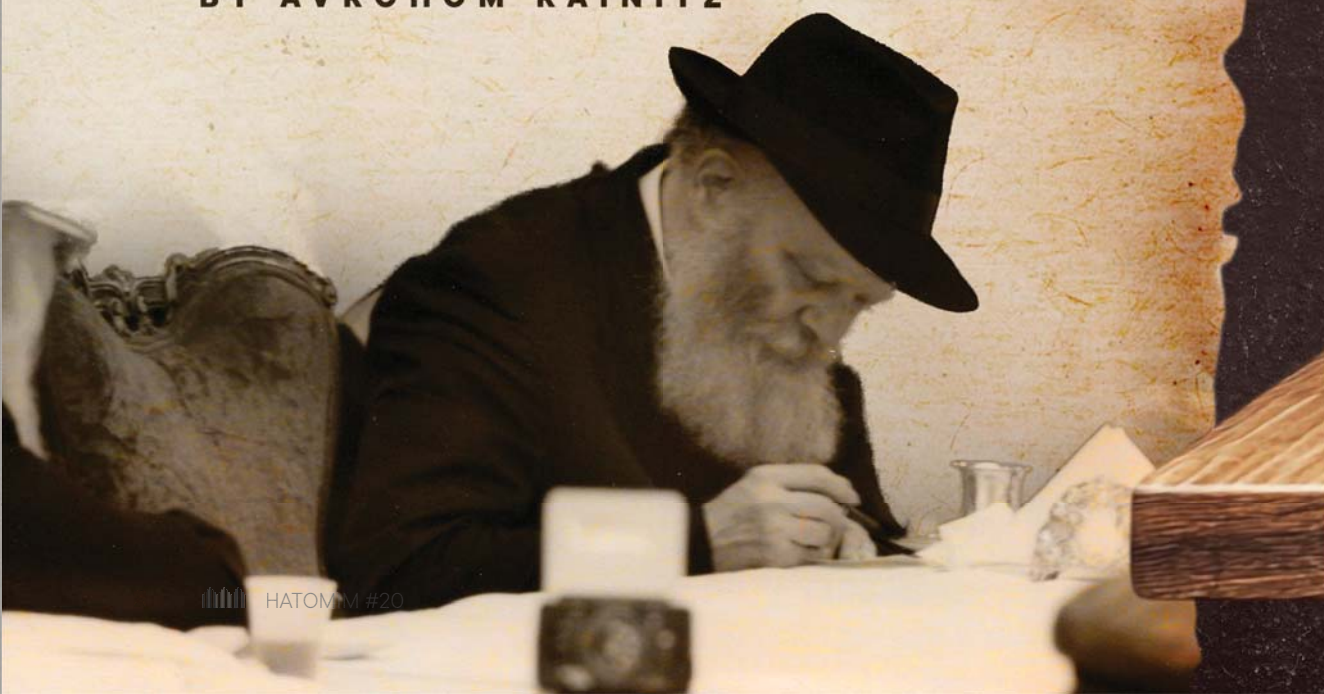
Regardless of how that search goes, a Jew remains Hashem’s child, and a father bears an obligation to redeem his child no matter what. That obligation is bound up specifically with joy: the *shehecheyanu* recited at the *pidyon ha’ben* is said only where there’s no element of pain, which is why it isn’t recited at the *bris* itself, but saved for that later, joyous moment. The two bookends of Pesachim answer each other: the searching a Jew is obligated to do is fulfilled, in the end, with a Father’s redemption—wrapped in joy. ■

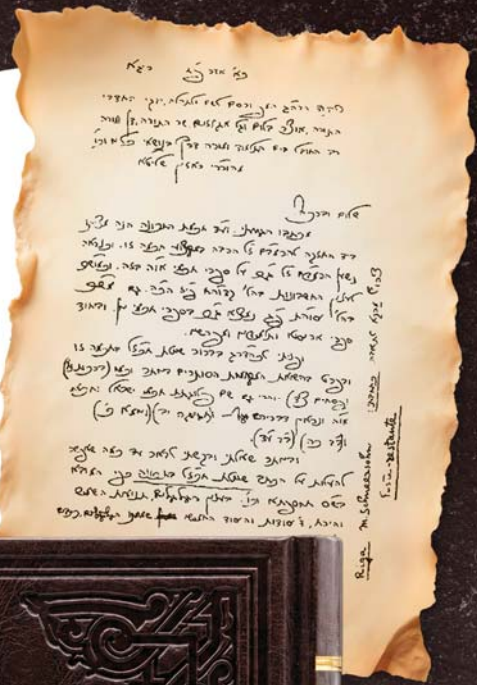


How Many Letters Did the Rebbe Write?

FIFTEEN THOUSAND LETTERS ARE PRINTED ACROSS FORTY-TWO VOLUMES — BUT THAT'S ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. RABBI SHOLOM YAAKOV CHAZAN OF OTZAR HACHASSIDIM, AMONG THE EDITORS OF THE MONUMENTAL SET AND THE ONE WHO BROUGHT IT TO COMPLETION, ESTIMATES AT LEAST ANOTHER TWENTY VOLUMES OF IGROS KODESH COULD STILL BE PRINTED. AND THAT'S NOT COUNTING THE ENGLISH LETTER ARCHIVE THAT IS NOW STARTING TO BE RELEASED

BY AVROHOM RAINITZ





Winter 5749. Within the walls of 770, a quiet, deep excitement was in the air. Ten volumes of the “Igros Kodesh” series of the Rebbe had already been published. Ten volumes of hidden light, thousands of holy letters written to Jewish men and women in every corner of the world and now, on the occasion of the appearance of the tenth volume, a special event was being arranged in 770.

Behind the scenes stood a small group of young, dynamic tmimim from Beis Chayeinu. Leading them were the brothers Rabbi Chaim and Yosef Yitzchok Greenberg, together with Rabbi Avrohom Simpson and the tamim Shneur Zalman Liberow, who took on the task of organizing the celebration down to the smallest detail: Liberow handled fundraising, Yoske Greenberg planned and edited the special commemorative booklet on whose cover, in the background, was printed the Rebbe’s own handwriting. Also brought into the effort was Rabbi Sholom DovBer Levine, chief librarian of the Chabad Library and editor of the series. Rabbi Yosef HaLevi Wineberg was chosen to serve as emcee.

In those years, some had worried that the Rebbe might not be pleased with a celebration centered on the sefarim. But on the Shabbos before the event, when the Rebbe was distributing wine for gatherings and farbrengens around the world, Rabbi Wineberg came up as well, and as the Rebbe poured for him from the bottle, the Rebbe said aloud, louder than usual: “Hatzlacha rabba.”

And so, on Sunday, 21 Adar I 5749, the gedolei ha’Torah and Chassidim from every circle gathered in 770, an event that brought the Rebbe great *nachas ruach*.

The celebration was extraordinarily successful and 650 volumes of the Rebbe’s Igros Kodesh were sold. The next day a detailed report and a photo album from the event were submitted to the Rebbe. The Rebbe wrote in his holy handwriting: “Received,” and added: “May you relate good news for the future, with an increase; and since this is a time when joy is increased, I will mention it at the *tziyun*.”

Those behind the event, the two Greenberg brothers, did not yet know that their uncle, their mother’s brother, would be the one who, decades later, would bring the entire series to its completion.

The Final Volume Arrives at 770

Decades have passed since that winter celebration. The series continued to grow, volume after volume, treasure after treasure, until now, when the 42nd and final volume of the series arrives at Beis Chayeinu—containing the Igros Kodesh from the years 5751–5752. Forty years of labor since the first volume was published on 11 Nissan 5747, and now, with G-d’s help, we have the complete series.

If the appearance of the tenth volume merited a magnificent event that brought the Rebbe such great *nachas ruach*, how much more so now, with the completion of the entire series! How happy we should be!

The one privileged to bring the series to its conclusion is Rabbi Sholom Yaakov Chazan, a member of the editorial staff of “Otzar HaChassidim” at Kehot Publication Society, who also serves as editor-in-chief of the weekly *Beis Moshich*.

Over the years, Rabbi Chazan has edited dozens of volumes of the teachings

of our Rebbeim published by Kehot, including volumes 22–42 of the Igros Kodesh series—about twenty volumes—which he took upon himself to edit up to this very day.

We spoke with him to hear: how did the series begin, what were the Rebbe's exacting instructions regarding the editorial work, and what did he witness over decades of this holy labor. And above all, what does the future hold, and what great tidings still await around the corner.

From 'Hosafos' to Likkutei Sichos to an Independent Series

"The birth of the general 'Igros Kodesh' series, containing the letters of all our Rebbeim," Rabbi Chazan relates, "came about through initiative from above through an instruction given to Rabbi Sholom Ber Levine, in a note the Rebbe wrote him at the end of Teves 5740, instructing him to collect the letters of the Alter Rebbe and print them. Over the following years, Rabbi Levine received dozens of instructions and holy responses regarding the editing of the letters series of our Rebbeim, until in Teves 5747 the series was completed, including several supplementary volumes.

"After finishing the printing of that series, it did not occur to Rabbi Levine to propose printing the Rebbe's own letters in an 'Igros Kodesh' series as well, since from 5722—when volume 2 of Likkutei Sichos was printed—the Rebbe's substantive letters had been printed in 'Hosafos' to the Likkutei Sichos volumes. These letters were obtained by members of the Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos who possessed collections of holy writings, or from the recipients themselves; and occasionally

the Rebbe himself handed over a copy of one of his letters for publication.

"It's important to stress here how precious this printing was to the Rebbe. Before each volume, when the finished sefer was brought for the Rebbe's final approval, the Rebbe would also review the letters in the 'Hosafos,' and on rare occasions would even add and correct them in his own holy handwriting.

"In the foreword to volume 15, the committee members appealed to the public to send in letters they had received from the Rebbe, 'to benefit the many.' The Rebbe added there, in his own handwriting, after those words: 'And thanks are hereby given to each of them, for the merit of the many depends on them.' And regarding the phrase 'we appeal with an urgent request,' the Rebbe corrected and added: 'doubled and redoubled.' Just two words, yet how much they reveal about how dear this matter was to him.

"Still, there was always a shortage. When volumes 12–13 came out as thin volumes, the Rebbe expressed his surprise, and when the vaad members replied that there weren't enough letters, the Rebbe instructed the secretariat to pass along some of his own letters to them. This happened again and again; in 5743, before volume 22 of Likkutei Sichos, the committee wrote about the difficulty of gathering letters, and the Rebbe replied: 'Let them gather from the secretariat those that are suitable and give them over [for publication].'"

Then came the turning point. "Before volume 25 of Likkutei Sichos there was a shortage again. Rabbi Shneur Zalman Chanan, director of the vaad, approached the Rebbe's secretary responsible for the



RABBI SHOLOM YAAKOV CHAZAN

letters archive, Rabbi Sholom Mendel Simpson, and asked him for substantive letters. Rabbi Simpson brought the request to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe instructed him to check whether the archive held suitable letters, and to show them to him. He selected a bundle of letters from 5718 and brought it in to the Rebbe.

“And here, through an initiative from above, it happened. The Rebbe instructed that the bundle be given not to the committee, but to Rabbi Sholom Ber Levine, the chief librarian, in order to publish the Rebbe’s letters as part of the *Igros Kodesh* series of our Rebbeim. On Tuesday, 16 Adar 5747, Rabbi Levine received the bundle, with a note in the *ksav yad kodesh* attached: ‘To Rabbi Sholom Ber Levine—worth clarifying, and as soon as possible: 1) What is worth publishing

from the enclosed. 2) To proofread further, and especially to add references. 3) To actually publish it.’

“Rabbi Levine, who until then had had no involvement in publishing the Rebbe’s own letters, did not understand what this had to do with him. He inquired with the vaad members, and asked the Rebbe in what format to publish it, as a special *Igros Kodesh* series of its own, or as ‘Hosafos’ to *Likutei Sichos* as before. The Rebbe crossed out the second option,

emphasized the first,

and added: ‘He should inquire with R’ Sholom Mendel Simpson, who supplied this bundle, and who has many more.’”

When the vaad members heard of the Rebbe’s instruction, they handed over to Rabbi Levine their entire archive of letters. From then on, a race began. “From the Rebbe’s replies, Rabbi Levine understood that the Rebbe wanted the first volume ready by 11 Nissan, his birthday,” says Rabbi Chazan. “The Rebbe wrote to him: ‘Speed up the publication as much as possible,’ and added: ‘and this relates to the Pesach preparations—haste.’ Rabbi Levine put in all his effort, and within just nine days he already had the first proofs in hand. And for 11 Nissan 5747, the first volume was published.”

Rabbi Chazan himself joined the work years later. "I joined in 5752," he recounts. "I had returned from Brazil, and Rabbi Levine, who had just returned from Russia around that time, asked me to assist him. Starting from volume 21, I did nearly all the letters and added all the supplements—and from volume 22, published in 5753, I took over the editing entirely." In this role, Rabbi Chazan upgraded the series, adding detailed cross-references and indexes, as the Rebbe had instructed.

The Rebbe's Concern for Privacy

With the appearance of the first volume, a sensitive question arose that would affect the entire series: how does one publish letters written to individuals without violating the privacy of those who had opened their hearts to the Rebbe?

"Right from the start," Rabbi Chazan relates, "the Rebbe gave Rabbi Simpson rules for which letters to print. Among other things, he instructed that letters containing anything that could harm other groups or communal workers should not be printed; and that before sending anything to print, it should first be brought to the Rebbe for approval."

At the heart of the matter was protecting the privacy of the recipients. "When Rabbi Simpson asked whether it 'would be possible to remove the names,' the Rebbe crossed out the word 'possible' from the question and added in his own hand: 'and to omit any matter that is not appropriate.' In other words, not just names, but any private matter that was inappropriate to publicize."

And here a tension arose that lasted a long time. "Rabbi Levine wanted to

edit the letters the way he had edited the previous series, by freely reviewing the archive itself so he could decide what to omit and how to explain each letter. But Rabbi Simpson argued that this was highly sensitive, private material, and that without explicit permission he could not hand over the original letters, certainly not the letters people had sent asking questions of the Rebbe.

"When the matter was brought before the Rebbe, the Rebbe marked Rabbi Levine's name and wrote: 'It is worth helping him, provided it is permitted according to Jewish law to fulfill his request.' Since the halachic ruling follows the ban of Rabbeinu Gershom, which forbids reading someone's letters without his knowledge, Rabbi Simpson understood from this that, despite wanting to help, he was not permitted give Rabbi Levine the personal letters people had sent to the Rebbe."

Rabbi Simpson reported back to the Rebbe how he had explained this to Rabbi Levine, and the Rebbe responded briefly: "If so, what is the question?!" And when Rabbi Levine wrote that he could not edit as before without free access, the Rebbe replied: "It is not understood at all how it would be permitted for [Rabbi Simpson] to give (free access) when the writer of the letter (or the like) forbade it!" And to his request to edit "in the manner I edited the previous volumes," the Rebbe added: "If it will be done differently, if the notes become fewer, can the letters not be published?"

"This was not easy work," Rabbi Chazan admits. "Rabbi Levine received photocopies from which the non-publishable sections had already been removed, and he wanted the editing to be perfect—for every letter to include

an explanation of what question it was answering. He even wrote to the Rebbe that the work was proving difficult for him. The Rebbe replied to him with a bracha: 'There is no need to wait for my review... for since this is a time for increase, it may be assumed that he will publish something proper.' And to his request to receive the letters without censorship, the Rebbe replied: 'I have already answered.'"

And so the editorial process for the remaining volumes was set: Rabbi Simpson would gather material from the archive, photocopy it, remove from the copies anything unsuitable for publication, and pass the bundles to the Rebbe for review and approval; the Rebbe would then pass them on to Rabbi Levine, and when the book was ready, the Rebbe would approve it by dating the foreword.

"When you look at all this," Rabbi Chazan concludes, "you understand that the omissions were never meant to hide anything. On the contrary, they reflect the Rebbe's personal concern for the privacy of every Jew who turned to him. The Rebbe protected everyone's dignity, even while opening his treasures to the public."

'The King Squanders His Treasures' — Didan Notzach and the New Channel

Here we pause and ask: why then? What happened in Adar 5747 that suddenly led the Rebbe to instruct that his own letters be published, something he himself had previously been hesitant about?

"Of course we cannot know *daaseylon*," Rabbi Chazan qualifies what follows, but he offers his impression: "On 10 Teves 5747, during the Didan Notzach

celebrations, the Rebbe thanked those who had come 'to participate in rejoicing over the good tidings of the increase in printing the manuscripts of our Rebbeim and its dissemination, etc.' On the surface, there had been no special increase in the printing of new sefarim at that time, and this calls for explanation.

"In those days, at the farbrengen of Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, the Rebbe again spoke about the printing of new sefarim, saying that when a new sefer, kuntrus, or maamar is published, everyone must study it and he emphasized that it is not enough that some people study it; rather, each and every person must be able to say, 'This book, kuntrus, or maamar was printed for my sake!'

"It is possible that already at that time the thought had 'arisen' in the Rebbe's mind [similar to what the Rebbe said of himself when, on Yud-Tes Kislev 5737, he instructed that Hemshech Ayin-Beis be published, saying the idea had already arisen in his mind back on Chof Cheshvan] to publish his own Igros Kodesh series, a series that brought special joy to all Chassidim and in which the personal connection to each and every individual is emphasized."

And in this lies a special *chiddush*. "All of the Rebbe's teachings were printed as a result of the Chassidim's own initiative. But the Igros Kodesh series came through an initiative from the Rebbe himself. The Rebbe was the one who gave the instruction."

And as to why specifically then, Rabbi Chazan says: "On Purim 5747, the Rebbe spoke about a lacking in devotion and the *hiskashrus* between Chassidim and the Nasi HaDor. During that period there were also several incidents reflecting

a lack of proper *hiskashrus*, following which the Rebbe withdrew his *nesius* from various *mosdos*.

“Perhaps one could say that specifically against the backdrop of this lack of *hiskashrus*, the Rebbe granted the Klal Yisrael a new channel to strengthen *hiskashrus*, i.e. the publication of thousands of his letters, open and accessible to all. If in the past a Chassid would enter for *yechidus* and receive the Rebbe’s guidance on every detail of his life—now, with this work placed in the hands of every individual, each Jew can open the letters and find the Rebbe’s guidance there.”

This, he says, is the meaning of the expression “the king squanders his treasures”: “In wartime, as victory approaches, the king opens his hidden treasuries and distributes them to the soldiers actually fighting. So too the Rebbe distributes his hidden treasure, his thousands of letters, to all the people of this generation, who take part in the War of the House of Dovid, to bring about the complete victory of the revelation of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach.”

But there is a further depth here. What, in essence, is a “letter”; and how did the Rebbe overcome the hesitation he himself had once felt?

When a ‘Letter’ Becomes a ‘Sefer’

“The *chiddush* of the letters, compared to the *maamarei* Chassidus,” says Rabbi Chazan, “is that in them the Rebbe brought the loftiest levels of Chassidus down into the realm of the mundane: livelihood, health, business. As the Rebbe said in the sicha of 15 Shevat 5748, that even in

optional matters there are instructions within the Chassidus of the Nasi HaDor; and in particular, as is known, that the revelation of the ‘*yechida*,’ the essence of the soul, comes specifically through engaging with worldly affairs outside of oneself. It is a rule in Chassidus: the higher something is, the further down it descends.

“The Rebbe explained in the sicha of Erev Rosh Hashana 5744, regarding the printing of the Alter Rebbe’s *Igeres HaKodesh*, that the nature of a ‘letter’ is that it is intended from the outset to be sent elsewhere, far from where it was written. Thus, the entire purpose of a letter is to act upon the world, i.e. upon the place to which it is sent.

“And here,” he continues, “lies the distinction between a letter and a *sefer*. As stated in Torah Ohr: ‘A *sefer* is eternal, never to be nullified; but a letter is written only for the moment, not meant to endure.’ And this was the *chiddush* carried out by the sons of the Alter Rebbe. They gathered the scattered holy letters and printed them, turning a ‘letter’ into a ‘*sefer*,’ a fixed work for all generations.”

And on this point, Rabbi Chazan emphasizes, “the Rebbe passed this same judgment upon himself. In volume 33, a response is printed that the Rebbe wrote in 5741 to Rabbi Avrohom Kotlarsky, who had collected the Rebbe’s letters and arranged them into a kind of ‘*sefer*,’ and asked for a *bracha* and approval. The Rebbe replied to him: ‘Of course the intention is a good one, but it is understood that in publishing letters written to individuals (most of them), there is great responsibility, especially when many are gathered together into a collection or *sefer*, etc. and the responsibility falls on me. There needs to be a committee, and

not a single individual, to decide what to publish.’

“The Rebbe himself was hesitant,” he stresses. “And yet, six years later, in 5747, it was the Rebbe himself who instructed that his letters be printed as a series. In other words, the Rebbe set aside the very hesitation he had raised, and took the responsibility upon himself.

“And there is a profound *remez* in this,” he adds. “It is explained in Torah Ohr that a letter corresponds to the sefira of Malchus, ‘a letter is sent from world to world to carry out the will of the Sender.’ And the Rebbe himself is the aspect of Malchus. So this is not merely a collection of letters. It is Malchus itself, sent out into the world to act upon it. The Nasi is the ‘head’ and ‘heart’ of Yisrael, drawing down *chayus* to each according to his own capacity, while at the same time conveying the very essence of that *chayus* equally to all. And so every letter is, in a sense, a private audience for every Jew—regarding every aspect of his life.”

15,000 letters, and That’s Just the Tip of the Iceberg

When we asked Rabbi Chazan to sum up the Igros Kodesh series in numbers, he said: “In total, about fifteen thousand letters have been printed so far. But that’s just the tip of the iceberg. The Rebbe wrote many tens of thousands of letters. All the ‘ordinary’ letters: a bracha for a bar mitzva, a wedding, a change of apartment, are not in the series at all. That alone is tens of thousands of letters.

“Take a simple letter: ‘Go to a doctor, check the mezuzas, give tzedaka before lighting candles, talk to friends.’ Blessings for surgery, blessings for healing—tens

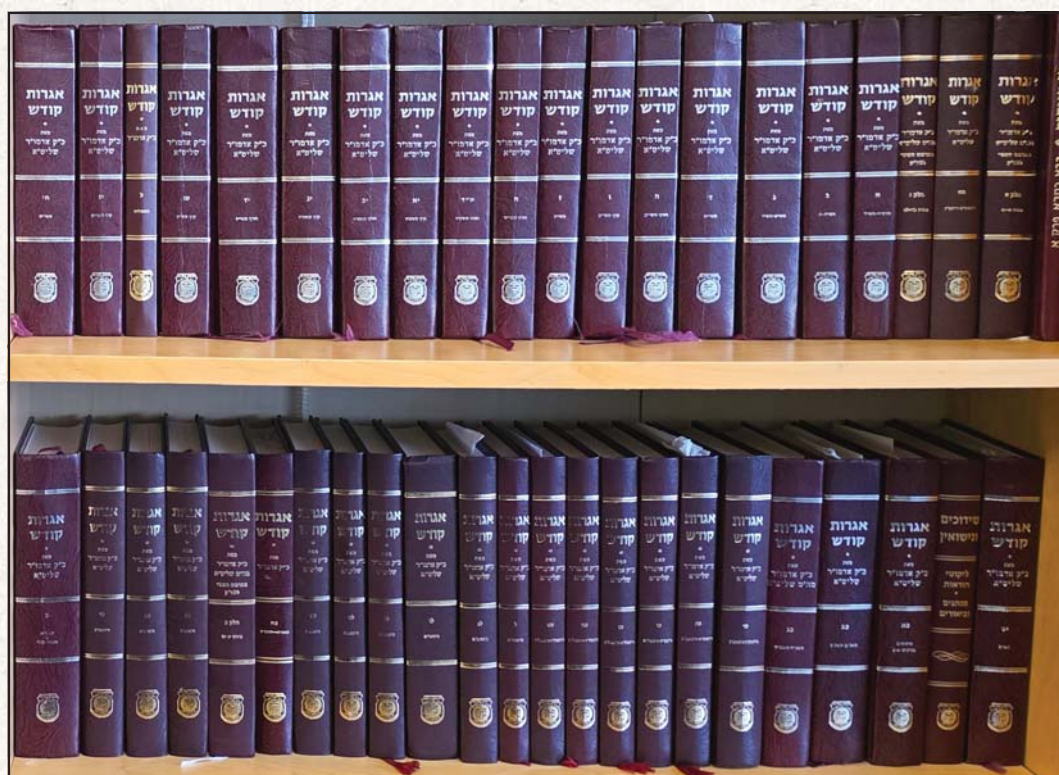
of thousands like that. Usually there’s nothing novel in them for the public, so they aren’t printed. If there’s a special instruction, the instruction gets printed, but the ‘standard’ letter itself—tens, maybe hundreds of thousands—stays outside the series.

“And all this,” he emphasizes, “is only from the archive of letters in Hebrew and Yiddish. We haven’t even touched the English ones yet, and there too, there are tens of thousands of letters. I already see this from the books starting to come out in English. So what’s printed is only a small percentage of the whole.”

Impressive as these numbers are, they aren’t the main point. The main point is what lies behind them. “When you see all this,” says Rabbi Chazan, “you see for the first time the scope of the Rebbe’s activity, how the Rebbe encompassed the entire world. How people from every corner of the earth wrote to the Rebbe. Nothing like this existed in history. Even among the great leaders of Israel who came before, rabbanim and leaders, there was always some limitation, a geographic or communal boundary. But a scope like this, encompassing the entire world, literally, never existed.

“And don’t forget,” he adds, “this was before there was [modern] communication. There was no internet, no publicity, and yet, from the very first years, you already see the whole world in contact with the Rebbe, asking him questions of life and death. The Rebbe’s name had already become known in the world, and people already trusted him. This was so almost from the beginning of his leadership.”

That’s the visible, numerical scope. But the deeper we went into the data,



one puzzlement kept surfacing, one that Rabbi Chazan himself returns to again and again throughout the conversation, almost against his will, as if he cannot let it go: how did the Rebbe manage all this in twenty-four hours a day?

“Consider,” he continues, “that in those days there were also *yechidus* three times a week, later twice; whole nights, not half an hour. And trips to the Ohel. And Torah study. And tefilla. And thousands of *farbrengens*. You do the math in hours and it simply doesn’t add up.

“The Rebbe’s holiness and greatness and his wondrous conduct toward all the people of the generation across the whole world—that we can’t grasp anyway. But even the Rebbe had twenty-four hours a day. He didn’t have thirty-five. What the

Rebbe accomplished in one day would take other people weeks!”

And it’s not only the quantity that’s astonishing, but the depth behind every single letter. “People think that for an ‘ordinary’ letter the Rebbe just signed off,” says Rabbi Chazan. “That’s not true. The Rebbe read every letter, corrected it, added to it. Let me give you an example I see with my own eyes in the secretariat’s copies: a father informs the Rebbe that a daughter was born to him, and asks for a bracha. The secretary types the letter and prepares it for mailing. Two days later the name arrives. But the letter has already been printed! So they hand the Rebbe a note, and the Rebbe adds in his own handwriting, on the secretariat’s copy, to add to the letter: ‘and she shall be called in Israel, so-and-so, may she live.’ In other words, the Rebbe read that same letter

twice. And that's the most ordinary letter, one you wouldn't even pay attention to."

Even the smallest details showed the same care. "Many times the Rebbe mentions a name in the middle of a letter, say 'his *mechutan*, Rabbi so-and-so,' and adds in his own handwriting 'may he live.' One word. Or a comma the Rebbe adds where needed. Tiny things, which reveal how measured every letter was."

From this scope, one can also learn from its flip side: this was a pace that even the secretaries, flesh and blood, could not always keep up with and that fact itself is further testimony to a quantity beyond the natural.

"Something that would naturally take whole weeks—you see it happen in a single day. You see it in real life, in black and white, across thousands of letters; this is an *Ish Elokim*."

"From Founding the Institution, to the Fifth Floor"

From the scope and the history, we move to what's revealed from within the letters themselves and here, says Rabbi Chazan, a surprise awaits anyone who hasn't studied them.

"People think the Rebbe only gave brachos to the heads of institutions," he says. "That's not true. The Rebbe actually managed the institutions himself. You see the scope in the letters, how the Rebbe is involved in every single institution, how he determined how to build an institution and how to run it. The Rebbe gives you here a complete *derech* for how Chabad was built, literally from the start. These are institutions the Rebbe built, from the foundations up to the fifth floor.

"And note," he emphasizes, "this isn't about 'authority' or *mussar*. The Rebbe didn't just hand out reprimands. The Rebbe guided the directors in the right direction, laid the foundations for how to build an institution and how to run it. Whoever wants success has a map here."

As an example he points to one letter. "An institution wrote to the Rebbe asking for money. And the Rebbe responds with astonishment: 'I am surprised. You write that eight hundred thousand remains in the fund. How is there money in the fund? Usually one operates at a deficit! And if you have that much in the fund, why should people donate more to you?' See how the Rebbe, in a few words, teaches you how an institution should be run."

But here the question arises: most people aren't *askanim*. What relevance does all this have to them?

"First of all, the Torah is eternal," Rabbi Chazan answers. "If the Rebbe wrote it there's a lesson in it. You see the Rebbe's *askanus*, and essentially you can learn from this the Rebbe's outlook, what mattered to him, what he emphasized, what he overlooked. You can apply that to your own life, including through communal activity. Second, nowadays, every other Chassid is an *askan*... In Chabad there are thousands of *mosdos*; the shlichim alone number about seven thousand, alongside institution directors in communities. And every institution has a parents' *vaad*, various boards. Even if you're not an official director, you're involved in an institution. Half of Chabad today is involved in communal work, even those who never asked for it. So don't you want to know what the Rebbe advises, how to conduct yourself? Look in the *Igros Kodesh* and you'll know."

From here he also explains, tentatively, why the Rebbe chose to print the letters in chronological order. “If you were to arrange the series by topic, half the letters wouldn’t get printed at all, because they don’t belong to any defined topic. Rabbi Levine asked about this at the start and requested arranging it by topic like in *Likkutei Sichos* and the Rebbe explicitly chose chronological order, like the letters of the Rebbeim. And there’s a simple reason for this: this way you see the development. How an institution began in a given year and how it developed; and how the scope of the Rebbe’s own work grew from year to year. When the letter is complete, not cut into five topics, you see the whole picture.”

The Letters That Moved Him

Of everything he’s seen over the years, says Rabbi Chazan, one thing struck him in particular. “The Rebbe,” he says, “is in the category of ‘his head in the heavens and his feet on the ground’ toward each and every person. As it says of Yehoshua, that he could match the spirit of each and every person. In *yechidus* we weren’t present, we don’t know what happened there. But in the *Igros Kodesh* you see it openly. Suddenly, on the very same page: one letter on a deep scholarly matter, an entire Talmudic topic and right next to it, a letter to a small child. ‘Matching the spirit of each and every person’—that’s exactly it.”

When we asked Rabbi Chazan which letter moved him in particular, he pointed to a few, and all of them, he says, reveal the same point.

“Take a small child,” he begins, “who writes a question to the Rebbe: why is the Amida called ‘the standing prayer’ when

we stand during other parts of the tefilla too? The Rebbe doesn’t send him off to ask this simple question to his teacher, but descends to the child’s level and answers him, that in this part everyone stands and emphasizes in his own handwriting: ‘even adults who find it difficult.’ A relevant answer for a child.

“But what struck me,” he continues, “is what the Rebbe adds afterward, one line: ‘surely you will be a living example for your friends.’ A child in class! The Rebbe doesn’t just answer him. He immediately ‘grabs’ him, and turns him from a *mekabel* to a *mashpia*. That he should be a good boy, that through his conduct he’ll influence his friends. Here you see how the Rebbe, as a *manhig Yisrael*, draws out the pintele Yid from every single person.”

From there he moves to another letter that moved him, the letter to Mr. Burg. “It was printed in *Beis Moshiaich*,” he recounts. “Burg wrote a letter to the Rebbe, and the date was Yud-Beis Tammuz, the Chag HaGeula. And the Rebbe opens: ‘I received your letter... and I am quite surprised that you don’t mention at all that today is the Chag HaGeula.’

“As if the Rebbe is complaining,” he says with emotion. “You write to the Rebbe a letter on Yud-Beis Tammuz and don’t mention at all that it’s the Chag HaGeula? Burg wasn’t an official Chabad Chassid, and yet the Rebbe seems to want him too to live Yud-Beis Tammuz. With the Rebbe there are no *chochmos*. The Rebbe instills expectations in him: ‘I expect of you to live Yud-Beis Tammuz the way I live it.’”

“This is the thing,” he sums up, “that you see throughout the *Igros Kodesh*. The Rebbe doesn’t settle for giving an answer. In every letter, and with every person, he searches for how to elevate him, not just that he should receive a response, but that

he himself should become a mashpia. The Rebbe draws out the pintele Yid from every Jew.

“Take the year of *Ka’n* [*kuf-nun* - 150 years since the passing of the Alter Rebbe],” he says. “In that year, in almost every letter, the Rebbe mentions the year *kuf-nun* whether in the date or within the letter, and sometimes both. It didn’t matter who the Jew was. The Rebbe, as it were, says everyone should live ‘the Shnas *Ha’kuf-nun*.’ It’s not only the Rebbe who lives this way; the Rebbe wants the whole world to live this way. It’s not ‘I’m a Chabadnik, I farbrenged on Yud-Tes Kislev and Yud Shevat.’ With the Rebbe, it’s for the whole world, even for people who never heard of these special dates.”

“What the Rebbe ‘Lives’ He Demands of the Whole World”

That same personal attention to every individual, says Rabbi Chazan, extends to the ends of the earth.

A clear expression of this are the general letters. “Starting from the 18th of Elul 5710 [1950],” says Rabbi Chazan, “the Rebbe writes ‘To the sons and daughters of Israel, wherever they are.’ This is the first expression of his becoming leader of the entire generation—not just of Chabad.

“And the Rebbe expected genuine engagement with these letters,” he continues, pointing to a response printed in one of the volumes. “The Rebbe writes to someone who apparently complained that he wasn’t receiving responses from him: ‘Several times a year I wrote to him, and at length, through the letters that open with “To the sons and daughters of Israel, wherever they are”... and never has word reached me from them as to the

content of my letters; and when I inquired from the side; the answer was likewise: “not known.” In other words, a general letter is a genuine letter meant for every single Jew, and should be treated as such.”

And there are letters that are both general and personal at once. “There’s a wonderful response,” he recounts, “in which the Rebbe reveals his inner intention in sending these letters. It was written to a rabbi who had complained that he received, as a response to his letter, what he called a ‘chozer,’ apparently because it was sent to many others. The Rebbe answers him: ‘The complaint against me... that I sent him a letter that he calls “chozer”... is because I hoped, first, that he has an interest in matters of Torah; second, that he would want to know what I am “engaged with” at that time; and third, that he would study the matter, including the references, in order to convey it, in the proper wording and explanation, to the people of his community, he being the only one in his community, and perhaps in all of Johannesburg, who received this circular letter.’

“In other words, even a ‘circular letter’ is not just a piece of paper; it’s a *shlichus*.”

The Complete Edition— Every Letter in Its Place

During our conversation, when I ask Rabbi Chazan how it feels to be finishing the series, he surprises me with dramatic news: we’re not finishing—we’re starting!

To my great surprise, he explains: the series is indeed ending but a new undertaking begins immediately. The new, complete edition of *Igros Kodesh*.

“What’s the good news in the new edition?” I ask, and Rabbi Chazan answers immediately: “First of all—that

every letter will be in its proper place. Think of an ordinary person who wants to look up a specific letter, say from the 11th of Nissan of a certain year. He opens volume 1 and doesn't find it. Goes to volume 21 and maybe it's there, in the supplements. Then to volume 43. A normal person gives up right at the start; even someone well-versed gets confused.

"In the new edition every letter will be in its correct chronological place and you'll find it immediately. Beyond that, we'll add references and notes to the early volumes, which weren't there in the first edition."

The heart of the new project is gathering the supplementary material and that's an enormous undertaking. "We need to collect everything from all sorts of sources," he says. "Over the years, thousands of new letters were published in various compilation books, in *teshuros* distributed at simchas, and so on. I alone have several boxes full of supplementary letters. By my count, we're talking about at least twenty additional volumes of supplements."

And when people cite a passage from Igros Kodesh, how will they reference it? "Just like with all the sifrei Chassidus we publish in a new, expanded edition," he



THE SECRETARIAT

answers. "You write 'new edition,' with the year of publication noted: '5786 edition.' That's how it's done with all the sefarim."

Rabbi Chazan is aware this is an enormous project. "We're talking about perhaps seventy volumes," he says quietly. "It took forty years to produce the previous series and that was with everything already assembled. In the new edition, everything needs to be gathered anew, from every source: copying, searching, checking, verifying, volume after volume. If we manage to put out three volumes a year, that's twenty years of work ahead of us."

And amid the sheer scale of the task, there's also hope voiced. "I hope," he says, "that within a few months the first volume of the new edition will see the light of day." The first out of seventy. A first step on a long road, the whole of which is the revelation of the treasures of the Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach, for the entire Beis Yisrael. ■



דברי ימי
החסידים

What the Rashag Told Me About the Red Handkerchief

RABBI TUVIA ZILBERSTROM FOLLOWED EVERY
DETAIL OF THE REBBE'S SHOFAR BLOWING —
AND BUILT THE BIMA THE REBBE STOOD ON

INTERVIEWED BY MENACHEM ZIEGELBAUM





Rabbi *Tuvia Zilberstrom, a Yerushalmi by birth, came to the central yeshiva at 770 for the Kevutza year in 5734 (1974) and remained in Beis Chayeinu until the summer of 5738 (1978). Today he serves as Rav of Heichal Levi Yitzchok in Shikun Chabad, Yerushalayim, and as Mara d'Asra for Anash of Shikun Chabad, and is widely known as a lecturer and mashpia. We spoke with him about Rosh Hashana, the essence of the day, and what he saw in the Rebbe's presence.*

It's erev Rosh Hashana. Let's begin with a question that has been asked many times and still needs answering: what is the essence of Rosh Hashana?

A Jew has to ask himself a pointed question: do you truly accept Hashem as King over you?

Kabbolas ol is expressed, of course, through a person's deeds—and the Rebbe Rayatz illustrates this in his Rosh Hashana maamarim with a *mashal* about a man going to a job interview.

Anyone going to a job interview dresses in his best clothes to make a good impression on the man who might hire him. But our fellow arrives in shabby clothes. "Is this how a person comes to an interview?" they ask him. "I have nothing better," he answers. "Once I get my first paycheck, I'll certainly buy something nice." A man who thinks he can show up as he is, in torn and dirty clothes, will not be hired. He will be taken by the lapel and put out the door.

And the *nimshal*: you come before Hashem and say, "Our Father, our King, we have no King but You." Is that true? The burden of proof is on you. In what clothing did you arrive? Launder your old clothes and mend them. You had no

money for the laundry? Go down to the river and wash them yourself—"though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap." Chassidus explains that this washing is done with the tears of teshuva: "O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river, day and night." Are your clothes torn? Take a needle and thread and sew them. But a person does not come to the gate of the King dressed in rags.

Among the broader public, Yom HaDin is felt to be the heart of the preparation for Rosh Hashana. In the world of Chassidus we speak of something higher still: the *binyan ha'malchus* that takes place at the sounding of the shofar.

The Shofar Blowing at the Rebbe — Unforgettable

The peak moment of the coronation is the sounding of the shofar. How should a person prepare for it?

The Chassidic maamarim explain that the *kabbolas ol malchus shomayim* a Jew awakens within himself during the shofar blowing is precisely what draws down the bracha for a good year—in life, in children, and in parnassa.

The Rebbe Rayatz relates that the Baal Shem Tov told the author of Degel Machaneh Efraim that when the shofar is sounded above, prosecuting forces rise to accuse, and our holy Avos—Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov—together with all the shepherds of Israel, come forward to defend their children. When a person here below resolves to accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven, he strengthens the hand of those advocating on Israel's behalf.

There are many *kavanos* in the blowing of the shofar. First, of course, one must

learn the halachos in order to blow correctly. Beyond that there are general intentions and more particular ones. The Shelah HaKadosh describes every halacha of the shofar in terms of a person's avoda—and even he writes that a person needs the tzaddikim to elevate his *tekios*.

You yourself were present at the Rebbe's shofar blowing over many years. Can you share some of what you saw?

The scene is unforgettable. Chassidim have held from time immemorial that a person should hear the *tekios* from tzaddikim, from men of spiritual stature. The passuk does not say “fortunate is the people who **sound** the *teruah*”—any young boy can produce a blast—but “who *know* the sound,” *yodei teruah*. And who is more a knower of that sound, with everything the word implies, than they?

Through all the consecutive years I merited to be in the Rebbe's presence in Beis Chayeinu, I followed the entire order of the shofar blowing closely, and every detail is etched in my memory.

With the Rebbe, the shofar blowing was a complete avoda. He would first spread a white cloth over the bima, and over it a second white handkerchief with red dots, which everyone called “the red handkerchief.” On these he placed



RABBI TUVIA ZILBERSTROM RECEIVING LEKACH

the shofars he used. This second cloth appeared in public only twice a year—on Rosh Hashana for the *tekios*, and on Yom Kippur, when he wore it around his neck for the entire day.

A Chavrusa With the Rashag

During my years by the Rebbe, I merited to learn b'chavrusa with Rabbi Shmaryahu Gurary, the Rashag, the Rebbe's brother-in-law and son-in-law of the Rebbe Rayatz. I tried, as best I could, to ask him the questions only he



RABBI TUVIA ZILBERSTROM RECEIVING KOS SHEL BRACHA

could answer. He told me that the red handkerchief had come down to the Rebbe from the Rebbe Rayatz, who had received it from his father, the Rebbe Rashab, who would hold it in his hand while saying *maamarei Chassidus*.

It is known among Chassidim that when a Rebbe says a maamar and speaks of lofty spiritual matters, he is not merely describing them—he is there. He therefore needs some physical point of contact to keep him bound to this lowly world. So it was with the Rebbe: before saying a maamar at any farbrengen, he would take out a particular handkerchief and hold it throughout. How do I know it was a particular one? Because during the farbrengens the Rebbe held one handkerchief that he used to wipe his face,

but when the time came for the maamar, he would draw a different handkerchief from his pocket and hold that one alone.

The handkerchief that had passed from the Rebbe Rashab to the Rebbe Rayatz served the Rebbe for another purpose entirely—on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. And we do not know why.

To return to the *tekios*: before the shofar blowing, the Rebbe would fold the edge of the lower cloth over the four corners of the red handkerchief. Why? We do not know. But the sichos of the Rebbe Rayatz record that the Rebbe Rashab did the same.

On these cloths the Rebbe laid the three shofars in his possession, and covered them with another white cloth. He would

then take the silk cloth in which all the shofars had originally been wrapped and wrap everything together. According to halacha, the shofars must stay covered during the preparations and during the bracha.

What I have described was chiefly the order of the second day. On the first day it was not quite the same—and the accounts of our Rebbeim likewise record that the emphasis on these details fell mainly on the second day.

On the bima the secretaries would set several paper bags filled with the *panim* that Chassidim had sent to the Rebbe or brought themselves. When the Rebbe finished his preparations, with the bundles lying before him, he would draw his tallis over his head and face and cast himself, as it were, into those *panim* and into the requests of Klal Yisrael contained in them. At those moments his entire holy body trembled, and at times weeping could be heard. What passed there only the Rebbe saw and knew—which decrees to annul, which *hamshachos* to draw down for the coming year.

We were young bachurim, and we saw the elder Chassidim around us preparing themselves to hear the *tekios* from the Rebbe, gathering their concentration. It left a deep mark on us.

When the Rebbe finished this avoda of preparation, he would rise—his face forbidding, his eyes red—lift the tallis to his forehead, and burst out with the declaration “*Lamenatzeiach livnei Korach mizmor*.” Then he would lower the tallis over his face again and cast himself down upon the bags, while the entire zal said the mizmor seven times with great feeling. When they finished, the Rebbe would lift the tallis once more and begin the

pesukim in a sweet voice, with a special tune.

Then came the brachos and the *tekios* themselves. The Rebbe would set the shofar he intended to use in front of him, so that it would be ready and there would be no interruption between the bracha and the blast. At the same time, halacha requires that the shofar remain covered during the brachos. So he would turn it toward himself with only the tip protruding, and rest his hand over it beneath the covering.

He would also arrange his tallis, lifting it and tucking it behind his ear, so that the sound of the shofar would reach his ear directly, with nothing in between. Only once complete silence had settled over the Beis Medrash would he begin the brachos. During the *tekios* themselves, the Rebbe held the shofar with the wide end facing upward, and to the right. It was the practice in the big zal that the gabbai would call out before the blowing, to remember: “*Vu men shteyt un far vemen men shteyt*—one must know where one stands, and before Whom one stands.” That announcement went through everyone like a tremor.

Who stood beside the Rebbe during the shofar blowing?

Apart from the secretaries, the gabbaim and the *makri*, no one stood on the Rebbe’s bima unless the Rebbe had invited him, for reasons of his own. At times the Rebbe would turn to see whether those he wanted beside him were there—first and foremost his brother-in-law the Rashag. In the years after the Iron Curtain opened, he asked that the guests who had come out of Russia stand beside him, apparently as advocates, as men who

had shown mesirus nefesh through long years in Soviet exile.

What was the atmosphere at 770 on Rosh Hashana?

Tense—during the *tekios* and throughout. It is known that our Rebbeim barely spoke on Rosh Hashana. Even the Rebbe barely spoke at the seudos on the first night, since, as the sefarim explain, the judgment is severe then. But once the maamar had been said at the farbrengen on the second day, it was as though the tension broke.

I will never forget one year when the Rebbe came in for the Rosh Hashana farbrengen, washed for the farbrengen, and then—before saying the maamar, which was most unusual—sent for one of the Chassidim, R' Yehoshua Winter, and gave him a piece of challa. That Chassid was gravely ill with a malignant illness and had not spoken for half a year. I remember the fear that took hold of us when we saw the Rebbe calling for him even before the maamar. He lived on for several decades. We understood it as an announcement: the decree is annulled.

A Place Fit for a King

As another kind of preparation for Rosh Hashana, Rabbi Zilberstrom tells a second story.

It was 29 Elul 5734, the morning of Erev Rosh Hashana 5735 (1974). After Shacharis and Hatoras Nedarim, I saw the Rebbe wrapped in tallis and tefillin—a rare sight in those years, since he appeared in shul in tallis and tefillin only on the yahrtzeits of his father on Chof Menachem Av and his mother on Vav Tishrei, on Yud Shevat, and on Erev Rosh Hashana, Erev Yom Kippur, and at Mincha on Tisha b'Av.

After davening, the son of the gabbai R' Yankel Lipsker asked me to help him set up the bima on which the Rebbe stood during Tishrei. It had been introduced only the year before; until then the Rebbe had stood on the floor during the tefillos. The work amounted to dragging over three heavy tables that stood beside the farbrengen platform, which from then on would serve as the Rebbe's place for tefilla.

I couldn't hold myself back. "These are tables," I protested. "This isn't a bima fit for the Rebbe." He shrugged. "This is what there is." I dared to ask whether I had permission to make it beautiful, in a manner befitting the Rebbe, and he agreed.

I threw myself into it. I took wood and sawed until I had framed the tables and given them a dignified shape. Then I noticed that the carpet the Rebbe stood on covered less than a quarter of the podium.

I walked over to Kingston Avenue, where one of the Chassidim had recently opened a carpet store, and I dared to ask him for a carpet large enough to cover the whole thing. I picked out a royal red. "Who's paying for this?" the shopkeeper asked. "You are," I said. He was stunned by the *chutzpa d'kedusha* of a customer he had never met. He thought about it, and I kept working on his conscience—it would bring bracha to his business. In the end he said he would consider it and told me to come back in an hour. When I returned he gave me a yes, and threw in golden corner-pieces as a bonus, for the honor and glory of our father, our king, our Nasi.

Now the work grew heavier. I was cutting not only thin strips of wood but metal fittings to size, and it was exhausting. Not one of the many tmimim there helped me. They couldn't understand what I

Chinuch and Influence

Rabbi Tuvia Zilberstrom serves as Rav of the shul and beis medrash Heichal Levi Yitzchok in Shikun Chabad, Yerushalayim—a magnet for tens of thousands of the city's residents who come to be warmed by the light of Chabad Chassidus—and as Mara d'Asra for Anash of Shikun Chabad.

He was born in Yerushalayim on 9 Cheshvan 5715 (1954) to Rabbi Aharon Mordechai Zilberstrom, an educator and author, and Mrs. Miriam Zilberstrom. He was educated in Yerushalayim and at Tomchei Tmimim in Kfar Chabad. In 5734 (1974) he traveled to the central yeshiva at 770 for the Kevutza year, and stayed on after the official year ended, remaining until the summer of 5738 (1978).

During his years in Beis Chayeinu he was deeply involved in communal and individual matters. Among other things, he was one of those who built the Rebbe's permanent bima for tefilla in the southeastern corner. In 5737 (1977) he assisted Rabbi Nissan

Mangel in preparing the English Tehillas Hashem siddur for print, and merited to bring the Rebbe lists of corrections, which received the Rebbe's approval and were incorporated into later editions.

After his marriage in Adar 5738 (1978) he learned in the Tzemach Tzedek kollel in the Old City of Yerushalayim, while serving on the editorial staff of the Kovetz Yagdil Torah, published by the kollel's members.

After receiving semicha he became a rebbi and educator at the Toras Emes Talmud Torah in Yerushalayim and at its yeshiva ketana and yeshiva gedola. Over the years he became a widely known lecturer and mashpia, giving shiurim in halacha and hashkafa to large audiences.

He has shared with thousands what he witnessed and followed closely in the Rebbe's presence. Fifty years on, he can still be moved to tears recounting some of it. ■

wanted with such labor, least of all on Erev Rosh Hashana. Everyone was busy securing himself a good spot for Yom Tov, from which to watch the Rebbe's avoda during the tefillos, the *tekios*, the Maftir. I had decided to give up a spot of my own so that the Rebbe would have a place of honor. At one point the work nearly ground to a halt. Then a bachur, a mekurav, came over and begged me for my hammer. I was glad—finally someone had come to help. But he said: "I'm no

craftsman like you. Just give me the *zechus* of driving in a single nail into the Rebbe's bima."

What can I say? That one sentence gave me new strength. Ten minutes before Rosh Hashana came in, there stood a fine podium with a royal carpet, and the Rebbe stood on it that Rosh Hashana and for many years afterward.

cont. on p. 63



Meet Your Teachers

THREE PRIMARY AUTHORITIES SHAPE EVERYTHING WE UNDERSTAND ABOUT MOSHIACH: THE RAMBAM, WHO ALONE CODIFIED IT AS HALACHA; THE RAMBAN, WHO READ THE REDEMPTION THROUGH CHOCHMAS HA'EMES; AND THE REBBE MELECH HAMOSHIACH, WHO SHOWS THAT THE TWO ARE NOT IN CONFLICT AT ALL — TORAH ACHAS, ONE TORAH, REVEALED AND HIDDEN AS A SINGLE WHOLE. IN ORDER TO LEARN THEIR WORDS PROPERLY, IT IS INVALUABLE TO HAVE THEIR PERSONALITIES AND THEIR APPROACH STANDING BEFORE US

**EXCERPTED FROM THE
INTRODUCTION TO INYANO SHEL
MOSHIACH BY RABBI SHALOM
DOVBER WOLF**



Three primary authorities shape everything we understand about Moshiach: the Rambam, who alone codified it as halacha; the Ramban, who read the Redemption through chochmas ha'emes; and the Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach, who shows that the two are not in conflict at all—Torah achas, one Torah, revealed and hidden as a single whole. In order to learn their words properly, it is invaluable to have their personalities and their approach standing before us.

The Talmud Yerushalmi teaches that one who recites a teaching in the name of its originator should see it as though the originator stands before him.¹ At first hearing this seems a matter of honoring one's sources, but the deeper meaning reaches further. In learning a Sage's Torah one does not merely acquire information; one forms a bond with the soul of that teacher, a bond that crosses time and place. Nor does it mean picturing his appearance. It means entering his world—his character, his approach to Torah and its application to life. When one grasps something of who the teacher was, the teaching itself is illuminated in a way that detached study never achieves.

Nowhere does this hold more true than in the study of Moshiach.

The Rebbe stated it as clearly: the avoda of galus (exile) is complete, Moshiach is as good as already here, and what remains is for us to open our eyes, receive him, and begin living with that reality now. And a man cannot recognize what he does not understand. He may stand before it and fail to know what he is looking at.

So the question is not whether to learn but where to begin.



The subject has stirred the deepest hopes of the Jewish people for millennia, and countless teachings and insights on the subject have been offered across the generations. Which voices can guide us authoritatively through the complexities?

While acknowledging the contributions of many great minds throughout the generations, we return again and again to three towering figures: the Rambam (Maimonides, 1138–1204, active mainly in Cairo), the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194–1270, who taught in Gerona and spent his final years in Eretz Yisrael), and the Rebbeim of Chabad—culminating especially with the Rebbe, the Nasi of our generation. These are the authorities whose words shape our understanding and resolve our questions.

Before we open a single *sugya*, then, we need to understand something about the teachers themselves. Why do their words carry such weight? What gives them their authority on this subject?

What follows are not biographies; that would require volumes of their own. They are meant to place the originator of the teaching before the reader's eyes.

The Rebbe: Our Primary Guide

Convention would have us begin with the earliest of these masters and proceed forward in time. We begin instead with the one nearest to us. But we will actually start from the end, from “the maamarim and Likkutei Sichos of Nesi Doreinu.”²

Why so?

There is a principle that runs through Jewish tradition like a golden thread: there is no generation without someone like Moshe,³ and the Gemara even states, remarkably, that Moshe Rabbeinu did not die.⁴ The reason for this lies in what Moshe was—not merely a great teacher or a prophet, but the conduit through which Hashem’s Torah entered the world, a function that never ceased. In every generation someone stands in Moshe’s place, someone through whom the Torah of that generation is revealed. This is the role of the Nasi. And Hashem does not simply repeat the same Torah in every generation; each era receives its own revelation.

The Rebbe, the Nasi of our generation, is therefore the one through whom the Torah of our time is revealed. His insights and his approach to every subject occupy a special place for us, his students and contemporaries⁵—not because we regard earlier authorities as less, but because he is our Moshe, standing at the interface between Heaven and earth in *our* time, making the Torah relevant to our generation’s unique challenges and missions.

There is a further dimension that makes his teachings crucial here specifically. The Baal Shem Tov taught that the word אור, “light,” has the same numerical value as סוד, “secret.”⁶ The one who knows the *raz*—the inner essence of a matter—is the one who can make it shine as *ohr*. This is what Chassidus does for Torah at large: it reveals the *pnimiyus* of every subject, and once the inner essence is understood the outer details resolve as they never did before. Which matters especially for fundamental questions of *emuna*, belief in Moshiach’s coming among them. These are not technical halachic questions;

they bear on the purpose of creation, the meaning of Jewish existence, the ultimate destiny of the world. Without the insights of Chassidus we would lack the tools to grasp what is at stake.⁷

A Lifetime of Focus

Another thing to consider in this regard: Moshiach is not a theme the Rebbe adopted later in life, or one that grew on him over the course of his *nesius*. He described how, from the day he went to cheder and even before, the vision of the future Geula (Redemption) began taking shape in his consciousness⁸—not a vague hope but a living picture of a world.⁹

The Gemara tells us that the halacha follows Rav in *issurim* and Shmuel in monetary matters.¹⁰ Not because either Sage was limited to one area, *chas v’shalom*, but because each had a recognized expertise there, so his ruling in that field carried decisive weight.¹¹ We can say something similar here: the “halacha” follows our generation’s Nasi in matters of Moshiach.¹²

This is not academic specialization, like of a scholar who happens to research one field extensively. For the Rebbe, Moshiach is not a subject of study. It is the central reality of his life. As he defines it himself, belief in Moshiach is the most comprehensive matter in Yiddishkeit,¹³ the essential point in the life of every single Jew¹⁴—expressed in constant urgency and a down-to-earth demand that the Geula be brought into the world below ten handbreadths. He sees bringing Moshiach as his life’s work.¹⁵

The Tanya explains that true comprehension effects a *yichud nifla*, a wondrous unity, between the mind and the concept it grasps; the more fully a

person is united with his subject, the more deeply he is able to reveal its inner truth. So when the Rebbe speaks of Moshiach, we are not hearing one more learned opinion, we're hearing from someone who Moshiach and him are an organic entity.

The Rambam: From Moshe to Moshe

When you study the Rebbe's talks on Geula, something becomes apparent immediately: he returns again and again to the Rambam. Not exclusively, but the Rambam occupies a central, foundational role. Why?

To understand this, let's preface that the Rambam addresses the topic of Moshiach in four places—the Commentary on the Mishna in perek Chelek, Hilchos Teshuva perek 9, Hilchos Melech HaMoshiach at the close of the work, and Iggeres Teiman—and one might expect a single author to repeat himself across them. He does not. The Rebbe dwells at length on the differences, showing that they are not inconsistencies but different levels of describing one reality.

Near the Rambam's tomb in Teverya there's an inscription dating back at least several hundred years: "From Moshe to Moshe, none arose like Moshe." This is no hyperbole. He was the Moshe of his generation in the most literal sense—the one through whom Torah was transmitted to his time, and a leader whose influence sent reverberations through every generation after him.

His Mishneh Torah is itself almost miraculous. Torah *sheb'al peh* had been developing for over a thousand years since the churban (the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash), sprawling across Mishna,

Gemara, Medrash and the Geonim, much of it in difficult Aramaic and full of contradictions requiring resolution. The Rambam took all of it and produced a comprehensive code stating the *halacha l'maaseh* (the practical ruling) in every area of Jewish life—rendering Torah *sheb'al peh*, as it were, a written Torah accessible to everyone¹⁶—so authoritative that the Shulchan Aruch counts him among its three main sources. Nor did he only collect laws; he thought deeply about the principles underlying Yiddishkeit and expressed them with a clarity unmatched before or since. To this day, when a Jew says *Ani Maamin*, he is reciting the Rambam's formulation.

The Only One Who Made It Halacha

But there's something unique about his treatment of Moshiach specifically, something that sets him apart from every other sage before or after.

He is the only one who addressed Moshiach and Yemos HaMoshiach (the Messianic era) as a matter of halacha.

Great minds in every generation discussed Moshiach, offering interpretations, expounding medrashim, developing frameworks—profound and influential work, but commentary and philosophy, not *piskei dinim* (halachic rulings). The Rambam did something else entirely. Within Hilchos Melachim, the closing section of his legal code dealing with the laws of kings and wars, he wrote two final chapters that came to be known as Hilchos Melech HaMoshiach. Not a philosophical appendix, not speculative theology, but *psak*: this is what we are required to believe, this is how he will be recognized, this is what will come to pass.

The Rebbe notes a crucial principle: wherever the Rambam's classical mefarshim (commentators)—the Raavad, the Kesef Mishneh and others—did not dispute a ruling, we assume they agreed with it.¹⁷ Since they did not challenge (most of) his laws about Moshiach, those laws stand as accepted halacha. This gives his words a weight no other source can claim. Not one opinion among many that we are free to accept or reject, but established halacha, binding on the entire Jewish people.

He was stark about the stakes, too. He established belief in Moshiach's coming as one of the Thirteen Principles, and wrote that one who does not believe in him, or does not await his coming, denies the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu. Denying Moshiach, according to the Rambam, is equivalent to denying the entire Torah—its a belief basic to Yiddishkeit as belief in Hashem Himself.

800 Years Sealed

For 800 years after the Rambam wrote Hilchos Melech HaMoshiach, these laws remained sealed. Not physically—the text was available, studied, copied, printed—but the deeper meaning stayed locked.

When you look at the Kesef Mishneh, who has a plethora of commentary to offer on nearly every thought of the Rambam, you find that on perek 11, halacha 1, he writes only this: that this perek and the one after it are good tidings of emuna concerning the coming of Moshiach, and he has nothing to explain in them.¹⁸ A few short comments follow, and that is all.

Consider what that means. Scholars who expounded every nuance of the Rambam's laws and traced the source of every ruling arrived here and, in effect,

laid down their pens. Not for want of learning—they had not found the key. They could read the words; the depth of what he was saying eluded them. The questions accumulated, the difficulties mounted, and the laws remained, to a certain extent, sealed.

Then came our generation's Nasi.

The Rebbe did what eight centuries of scholars had not: he penetrated to the Rambam's inner intent, grasping the organizing principle that makes everything else fall into place. And as the Baal Shem Tov taught, one who knows the secret of a thing is able to illuminate it. What had been obscure became clear; what had seemed contradictory revealed itself as different facets of one coherent vision. One watches it unfold as one watches a puzzle solved: at first the pieces appear random, and as they are set correctly a picture emerges that one cannot imagine having missed.

There's a well-known approach to studying the Rambam called "Rambam according to Rambam"—that he created a complete, integrated system, and to understand any topic you need his entire worldview. The Rebbe's approach to Torah is *Torah achas*: all parts of Torah, revealed and hidden, legal and mystical, fit together as one whole, different dimensions of the same Divine truth, like body and soul. So when the Rebbe learns Rambam, we might call it "Rambam according to Chassidus."

This may seem strange at first. The Rambam lived centuries before the Baal Shem Tov; how may we read him through a lens that did not exist in his day? The Rebbe does not address the question directly. He demonstrates the method, and the results speak for themselves:

long-standing difficulties disappear, passages that seemed to contradict each other harmonize. And crucially, he isn't offering mystical readings that float above the text. In many cases he is explaining the Rambam's *pshat*¹⁹—what the Rambam actually meant when he wrote the words.

To the Rebbe the difficulty does not arise. Torah is one. The Rambam was

.....

For 800 years after the Rambam wrote Hilchos Melech HaMoshiach, these laws remained sealed. Not physically — the text was available, studied, copied, printed — but the deeper meaning stayed locked.

.....

expressing truths that Chassidus would later articulate in its own language, and when we use Chassidic concepts to understand him we aren't imposing something foreign—we're revealing what was always there. In fact, only through Chassidus can we truly learn "Rambam according to Rambam."

The Ramban: Another Moshe Arises

The principle of an ever-present Moshe holds across the generations. A

generation after the Rambam, another Moshe arose—Moshe ben Nachman, the Ramban. Like the Rambam he dealt with the full breadth of Torah, and like the Rambam he devoted significant attention to Moshiach's coming, chiefly in Sefer HaVikuach, Sefer HaGeula, and throughout his commentary on Torah.

One thing stands out immediately in his works: his tremendous respect for the Rambam. Living a generation later, he refers to him simply as *HaRav*, the Rabbi, without needing to specify which. Everyone knew. And yet he disagreed with him on numerous significant issues—including, crucially, matters of Moshiach, Yemos HaMoshiach, and *techiyas ha'meisim* (the resurrection of the dead).

How could he hold the Rambam in such regard and yet differ from him so fundamentally? Because the two proceeded from different starting points. The Rambam's approach was largely philosophical: he engaged deeply with *chochmas ha'chakira*, rational investigation, and his descriptions of Yemos HaMoshiach often emphasize what can be grasped rationally, what accords with natural law. The Ramban, by contrast, based his understanding on Kabbalah, which he called *chochmas ha'emes*, the wisdom of truth, and which he saw as revealing dimensions of reality philosophy could never reach. No rejection of reason—he was himself a brilliant logician and halachist—but he understood that there are realms of Torah truth beyond what rational analysis alone uncovers.

The clearest example is the question of death in Yemos HaMoshiach. The Rambam indicates that people will still die then, and that even after *techiyas*

ha'meisim death will eventually return—his reasoning being philosophical, that the neshama is constrained by the physical body, so its truest state is freedom from bodily limitation. The Ramban, from Kabbalah, holds that death will be abolished entirely. No one will die again, ever. Ultimate perfection is not the neshama escaping the body but the body itself elevated and refined until it can fully express the neshama without limitation.

How to Navigate Between Them

A practical question therefore presents itself: when the two disagree—which is not infrequent—how are we to decide?

The path forward is not as simple as selecting one authority and following him throughout. Both are giants upon whose shoulders we stand. The principle is as follows. The Geula has many dimensions—an external redemption and an internal one, the redemption of the body and the redemption of the neshama—and Torah likewise: *Nigleh* (the revealed aspects, including the bulk of halacha) and *Pnimiyyus* (the inner dimensions taught in Kabbalah and Chassidus). Different dimensions of Torah address different dimensions of the Geula.

The Rambam, in his halachic code, focuses on the external: what the Geula will look like in practical terms, what *Moshiach* will do, how society will function. The Ramban, from Kabbalah, focuses on the inner. Both describe one and the same future reality from differing vantage points—which means that in most instances they are not contradicting one another at all. They are complementing one another, each supplying the portion of the picture the other does not emphasize.

This is the Rebbe's consistent approach: not to pick one and dismiss the other, but to show how both are true, each in its own dimension.

Think of describing a building. An architect's blueprint shows you the structure and how it will function; an artist's rendering shows the beauty and how it will feel inside. An untrained eye may perceive contradictions; a builder knows how to bring both visions together. The Rambam gives us the blueprint, the Ramban the vision of what it will feel like to live in it, and the Rebbe combines them into one whole.

And where they genuinely conflict, we ask what manner of question is before us. If it concerns the external, halachic framework—the practical “what will happen”—the halacha usually follows the Rambam. If it concerns the inner meaning at the deepest level, the halacha follows the Ramban and the Kabbalistic tradition flowing from him—the Arizal, and after him the Chassidic masters, culminating with our Rebbeim, who consistently rule according to the Ramban in these areas.²⁰ The question of death falls into the second category: it is not *halacha l'maaseh* for here and now but the ultimate spiritual state of the Geula. So we follow the Ramban. Death will be abolished completely.

This is part of what the Rebbe means by *Torah achas*.²¹ The Torah is not a collection of contradictory opinions among which we take sides. It is a multi-dimensional expression of a single unified truth. Both the Rambam and the Ramban were gazing upon the truth of the Geula; that they described it differently does not mean that one was right and the other wrong. It means the truth is deep enough to encompass both.



The teachings reflect the teacher. *Anochi*, the first word Hashem uttered at Matan Torah, Chazal tell us, is an acronym for *ana nafshi kesavis yehavis*—"I have given and written Myself to you."²² When a Sage writes and teaches Torah, he too is giving us something of his own essence.

This is why we have devoted this introduction to the personages of our teachers and not to their teachings alone. When the Rambam defines Moshiach's qualities, he is showing us what he himself

aimed for. When the Rebbe describes Moshiach's mission, he is describing the mission he took upon himself. So as we study their words, let their presence stand before us. We are not merely analyzing texts. We are joining ourselves to souls—learning from teachers who did not only study the Geula but lived it, who did not only hope for Moshiach but worked with every fiber of their being to bring him.

With Hashem's help, let's begin. ■

Excerpted from the introduction to Inyano Shel Moshiach by Rabbi Shalom Dovber Wolf.

1. Talmud Yerushalmi, Shabbos 1:2.
2. Sichas of Tazria-Metzora 5751, where the Rebbe introduced the concept of learning about Moshiach.

3. See Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 69; Bereishis Rabba ch. 56.

4. Sotah 13b. See Likkutei Sichos vol. 26, the first sicha on Parshas Shemos.

5. See the talk of 2 Iyar 5710: "For us, there is nothing higher than this."

6. Cited in HaYom Yom, entry for 6 Elul.

7. See the essay Inyanah Shel Toras HaChassidus, that Chassidus is a foretaste of the Torah of Moshiach.

8. Igros Kodesh vol. 12, letter of 11 Nissan 5716.

9. See, however, sicha of Chol HaMoed Pesach 5749 (Hisvaaduyos Vol. 3 p. 118), how this matter became ever more urgent to the Rebbe after his arrival in America.

10. Bechoros 49b, and sources cited there.

11. Rosh, Bava Kamma ch. 4, sec. 4. See also Likkutei Sichos vol. 16 p. 9ff., where the implication is that Rav "lived" the realm between man and G-d, and Shmuel the realm between man and his fellow.

12. See Sichas of Tazria-Metzora 5751: "All the books are filled with this matter... and particularly in the Torah of the Nasi of our generation."

13. Dvar Malchus, Shabbos Parshas Chayei Sarah 5752.

14. Dvar Malchus, Shabbos Parshas Toldos 5752.

15. See Dvar Malchus, Shabbos Parshas Vaeira 5752.

16. See Likkutei Sichos vol. 26, the sicha for 20-24 Teves.

17. Likkutei Sichos vol. 5 p. 149.

18. Wording of the Kesef Mishneh, beginning of ch. 11 of Hilchos Melech HaMoshiach.

19. See Hadran on the Rambam, 5749, note 67. For a striking example, see the Hadran of 5746 on the material abundance described in Hilchos Melech HaMoshiach.

20. See Dvar Malchus, Shabbos Parshas Bo 5752, sec. 8, and sources cited there; and the talk of Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar 5727.

21. See Kuntres Halachos Shel Torah Sheb'al Peh (Simchas Torah 5752), at its conclusion.

22. Shabbos 105a, regarding Hashem Himself; "the righteous are likened to their Creator."



Everyone else was securing a seat while you were doing hard labor. Did you lose out?

Boruch Hashem, I still found an excellent spot, and I saw the Rebbe through the entire davening, including the Haftorah and the tekios.

How did Rosh Hashana with the Rebbe usually end?

On the second day there was always a farbrengen that bridged Rosh Hashana and the weekday that followed. That year, Rosh Hashana 5735 (1974), the Rebbe spoke about the practice of our Rebbeim, our Nesiim, of adding a moment of the weekday onto the days of Rosh Hashana—literally a moment of time. Small in quantity, the Rebbe explained, but great in quality: it gives every person the strength to carry Rosh Hashana forward into all the ordinary days of the year.

After *birkas ha'mazon* and Maariv, the Rebbe began distributing *kos shel bracha*. He started on one side and then turned to the other, and a moment came when he stood ready to pour and no one had yet come forward. By *hashgacha pratit* I was standing near the table. The Rebbe looked at me. I didn't know what to do. He kept looking at me, until I understood the hint and ran for *kos shel bracha*.

I went searching for an empty cup and couldn't find one—those in charge hadn't begun handing them out yet. All the while the Rebbe stood there with the cup tilted, ready to pour, still looking at me. In the end he poured wine for me into his own cup, the one standing on the table—the cup from which they would pour into the goblet for Havdala, and from which the

Rebbe drank at farbrengens—and said *l'chaim*. I reached to take it, and the Rebbe tilted his hand and poured into it again.

To this day I don't know whether that was a token of thanks for the bima, or some other *zechus*. But there is certainly an obligation that comes with it.

One Deed Tips the Scale

A last thought as we go into Rosh Hashana.

The Rebbe often quoted the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva, that a person should see himself as balanced on a scale, and the whole world balanced along with him. The Rambam writes this specifically about Rosh Hashana: a man should see himself as evenly weighted, so that by a single deed, a single action, he tips the scale—himself and the entire world—to the side of merit. That, the Rambam writes, is why people rise for Selichos and give *tzedaka*. They are tipping the scale.

The Rebbe applied this *psak din* not only to Rosh Hashana but to every day of the year and every step a person takes. I remember the Rebbe once saying that even if a Jew does not take seriously what his own deed does to him, let him at least consider what it does to the world, and take responsibility accordingly. One deed of yours can tip the whole world toward *zechus* and bring salvation and rescue.

There is no shortcut around Torah and mitzvos. A person is not asked to do great things. He is asked to do what belongs to him, at his own level—each man in his own portion, improving the part that is his. ■

Halacha Solidifies the Sugya

How learning *aliba d'hilchasa* gives bachurim direction, clarity, and *geshmak* in *iyun*

WE SPOKE TO RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL EISENMAN, ROSH YESHIVA OF TOMCHEI TEMIMIM OF THE POCONOS, ABOUT THE UNIQUE APPROACH TO LEARNING GEMARA THE YESHIVA HAS DEVELOPED: LEARNING ALIBA D'HILCHASA. "IT'S NOT PLAINLY GEMARA ALONGSIDE SHULCHAN ARUCH, AND NOT HALACHA L'MAASEH EITHER — IT'S USING THE POSKIM'S GUIDANCE TO UNDERSTAND THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SUGYA ITSELF."

INTERVIEWED BY RABBI MOSHE KESSLER

When I reached out to interview Rabbi Aizenman, Rosh Yeshiva of the Chabad Yeshiva of the Poconos *Zal*, he was happy to talk—but he made it clear from the outset that this was not about him.

The focus, he insisted, should be on the yeshiva—the bachurim, the learning, the challenges, and the responsibility of preparing Chassidishe bachurim for life.

At the center of his approach is a very specific method of learning *aliba d'hilchasa*. As he explains, this does not mean turning *seder iyun* into a study of *Shulchan Aruch*. Rather, it means studying the *sugya* by following the guidance of the *poskim*, identifying a central *din* in the *sugya*, and routinely setting aside time to focus on the Rambam and the Alter

Rebbe's understanding of the *sugya*. In his experience, this approach is most effective in allowing a *talmid* to see what the *sugya* is truly about.

In his view, this gives *talmidim* something many are missing: **direction**. Every *sugya* contains multiple topics discussed simultaneously; many major and minor questions can be explored in each of these topics, but it is impossible to explore every question that arises. An inquisitive *talmid* will raise many questions that require further inquiry, and each has the potential to lead him to fascinating learning. However, not all questions will lead the *talmid* to a clearer understanding of the central *din*. Often, after investing much time and effort into one of these inquiries, a *talmid* is left with



a feeling of disappointment—or worse, failure.

In this conversation, Rabbi Aizenman discusses the roots of this approach, the place of *lomdus*, the difference between Mesivta and Zal, and practical ways a yeshiva can help a *bachur* gain a *derech* in learning—the skill of entering a *sugya* with confidence.

The Derech Explained

Tell us about the yeshiva and your role as Rosh Yeshiva.

I have been teaching Gemara for thirteen years, but eight years ago, after observing the challenges bachurim were facing and discussing these issues with my brother, Reb Shneur—who was successful

in his teaching in Yeshivas Toras Emes in Yerushalayim—I developed a new *derech ha'limud* tailored for our *talmidim*: we started learning *aliba d'hilchasa*.

I want to be clear about what I mean by *aliba d'hilchasa*, because it can mean several entirely different things. It doesn't mean we turned *seder Gemara l'iyuna* into *seder halacha b'iyun*, or some other new *limud*. On the contrary, I believe this *derech* restored the lost glory of *seder iyun*.

The main idea is that the learning is guided by the *din* derived from the *sugya*. Although every question we encounter should be noted, we try to distinguish between *ikar* and *tafel*—between issues of primary and secondary importance. One may ask: who are we to decide what is *ikar*? Well, that is where the *poskim*

guide us—are the *poskim* discussing this particular problem? What they do discuss becomes *ikar* for us, and we try to go as deep as we can in that discussion. That, I believe, is where the clarity we are looking for can be found.

How would a talmid beginning a sugya know what questions are discussed in the poskim?

That is a great question! I'll answer it after explaining the idea behind the *derech* a bit more.

One of the most important foundations of this *derech* is the Alter Rebbe's ruling in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (1:6) regarding the extent of a father's obligation to teach his son. The Alter Rebbe explains that one must teach his son the entire Torah Sheb'al Peh, but adds:

ובזמן הזה שכל התורה שבעל פה היא כתובה
לפנינו אין צריך לשכור מלמד לבנו שילמדנו
כל התורה שבעל פה, אלא שילמדנו להבין
היטב בתלמוד ברוב המקומות, גם בהלכות
וסגיות העמוקות, עם רב הפוסקים ראשונים
ואחרונים, ויעמידנו על עיון ההלכה למעשה,
שיוכל לעיין בעצמו, לתלמוד ולהבין ולהורות
כל הלכה למעשה מתוך עיון בתלמוד ופוסקים
ראשונים ואחרונים...

"Nowadays, since the entire Oral Torah is written down before us, one does not need to hire a teacher for his son to teach him the entire Oral Torah. Rather, he should hire a teacher to teach him to thoroughly understand the Talmud in most places—including the deep *sugyas*—along with most of the *poskim*, *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*. The teacher must teach him the skill of *iyun ha'halacha*, so that he will be capable of learning it on his own..."

We see from here that a primary job of yeshivas is to provide every *talmid* with the skill of *iyun*. Nothing less.

In reality however, only a tiny percentage of *yungeleit* in *kollel* are learning in a way that resembles the style of learning the Alter Rebbe describes here, and by then time is short. For most bachurim, this kind of *limud* is completely foreign. So the question is: why should a bachur go through his main yeshiva years without being trained to learn a *sugya* this way?

The Alter Rebbe's words are clear, but are bachurim in Zal ready for this level of study?

Yes and no. Obviously, the vast majority are not ready to practice this kind of learning to its fullest degree. But are they capable of being guided in this way? I would say—they are! And far more in this *derech* than in any other!

That was my main reason for developing this *derech* in our yeshiva. I saw how bachurim were lacking meaning in their *iyun* learning. *Seder iyun* is supposed to be the strongest part of the day—proven by the fact that the time allotted for *iyun* is the longest and best hours of the day. But for many, it becomes the hardest part of the day, and sometimes the most boring.

Iyun is what makes a yeshiva. *Iyun* is where a bachur's learning is transformed—and most importantly, where the bachur himself is transformed. Without properly learning Gemara *l'iyuna* for multiple years, one is an *am ha'aretz*, who *me'ikar hadin* is not counted for a *zimun*. There are no shortcuts.

Did you just say that you can only be counted in a zimun if you learn Gemara l'iyuna?

Yes, but in practice this is not done. The Alter Rebbe rules (199:3), based on the Gemara in *Berachos*:

עם הארץ אין מזמנים עליו. ואפלו קרא ושנה, ולא שמש תלמידי חכמים, להקשות ולפרק להבין מתוכם טעמי המשניות על בורים — הרי זה עם הארץ לענין זה. ועכשיו מזמנים אפלו על עם הארץ גמור, כדי שלא יהא כל אחד הולך ובונה במה לעצמו, שאם היו פורשים מהם — גם הם היו פורשים מן הצבור לגמרי.

“One does not include an *am ha'aretz* in the *zimun*... Even if he knows all of Tanach and Mishna, but did not ‘serve Torah scholars’—to ask questions, resolve difficulties, and clearly understand from them the underlying reasons of the Mishna—he is considered an *am ha'aretz* regarding this matter.

The Alter Rebbe continues:

“However, nowadays, we include even a complete *am ha'aretz* in the *zimun*, so that each person will not go and build a platform for himself. For if [the scholars] were to separate from them, they [the unlearned] would also separate from the community entirely.”

Learning Gemara *l'iyuna* is the *shimush talmidei chachamim* required to leave the category of *am ha'aretz*. As long as one did not study Gemara *l'iyuna* for multiple years in yeshiva, this is what halacha says about him, even if he knows much Torah.

The situation today needs to be addressed, since even a *talmid* in our yeshivas for multiple years may not be spending them learning Gemara *l'iyuna*, which is the primary difference between yeshiva learning and non-yeshiva learning.

Why do you say that many bachurim in yeshivas today are not learning *b'iyun*?

A good *talmid* can prepare for the *shiur*, hear the *shiur*, review *mefarshim*, know many *marei mekomos*, and still walk away asking: What did I actually gain?

Advanced *talmidim* can enjoy the depth of the discussions, but even for them the learning doesn't always feel grounded. For average *talmidim*, the problem is more pronounced—they feel that *iyun* is a non-starter. In a good scenario, they don't give up; they try, moving from one *mefarsh* to the next, without feeling confident about what they are discussing.

Then there are the many bachurim who have already given up. I have met capable bachurim who claim—*iyun* is just not for me.

But isn't that the reality? Not everyone is cut out for *iyun*!

I don't agree. All bachurim enrolled in Zal are able, in one way or another, to learn *l'iyuna*. And that's where learning *aliba d'hilchasa* changes the experience.

Most of the difficulty, in my opinion, stems from attempting to teach more material than the *talmid* can handle. There isn't enough time to both prepare the *sugya* on a simple level and attempt deeper learning. Another issue: the questions addressed in *shiur* are not always tailored for the *talmidim*. Many are too complex and require introductions the *maggid shiur* may not be prepared to provide.

“Halacha Structures the Sugya”

However, when we limit our focus to one *din* and make an honest attempt to understand how it is derived from the *sugya*—its roots and branches—the



RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL AIZENMAN

discussion develops intuitively. Everyone can join, and enjoyably.

Not every bachur can delve into every part of the *sugya* or every *Tosafos*, but everyone can appreciate gaining clarity in the central *din*. Those bachurim who lack the skill to study every *Tosafos* should focus on the parts of the *sugya* and the *Tosafos* that directly clarify the central *din*.

Is this *derech* tailored specifically for bachurim who struggle with *iyun*? What about those who thrive learning a Rashba or a Pnei Yehoshua?

The bachurim who excel in *iyun* are the first to gain from this *derech*. I'll make three points:

a) Bachurim want to learn the skill. The Alter Rebbe says the teacher's job is to give them that skill. They need a *derech* they can trust and acquire for lifelong

learning. A *maggid shiur* can point out a fascinating Rashba here, a *P'nei Yehoshua* there, but when a bachur leaves yeshiva, he will not be inclined to learn the Rashba. However, if he consistently learns a *sugya* with the Rosh, Ran, or even the Rambam, he will be inclined to learn that way for life.

b) Many bachurim who thrive in *iyun* feel it is an enjoyable luxury. They are not sure why it is critical. That is terribly wrong. Look in *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 2, p. 566—"everyone must have a set time for learning Gemara *b'iyun*!"—and it is not referring to bachurim.

If a *talmid* doesn't understand why the *mefarsh* he's learning is critical to the *sugya*, why is he learning it? To learn "another opinion"?

The focus on the *din* presents the Gemara, Rashi, *Tosafos*, and *mefarshim* in a way that they are all connected. Many comments of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* no longer seem like *chiddushim*, but like obvious possibilities. Once a bachur sees that, now he's learning—and if he learns this way for a few years, he will be transformed.

c) There is another reason for why even the best *talmidim* connect specifically to this kind of learning: bachurim in Lubavitcher yeshivas have a special *yiras shamayim*. When they hear "halacha" or "Shulchan Aruch," their interest spikes. They feel relevance to real life. When they hear that this *sugya* is the source of a *din* in Shulchan Aruch, it connects them.

Similarly, when a bachur is presented with a Rambam on the *sugya*, he feels a deep connection—it's the Rebbe's Rambam; it's the Rebbe's *takana*.

So when we set aside time—usually Wednesdays—to learn the Rambam related to our *sugya* and try to see how he understood the Gemara, it is engaging and makes the whole *sugya* feel more relevant. We go back and forth between Rambam, Rashi, *Tosafos*, and others—seeing how each read the *sugya* in context of the Rambam, identifying advantages to each *shita*, and finding the *nafka mina*.

Comparison to the Maharal's Derech

This sounds similar to the *derech* of the Maharal, who emphasized learning Gemara with the Rosh because it brings the *sugya* toward halacha.

That is true—the Maharal wrote against teaching *Tosafos* to young *talmidim*, suggesting it would have been better to print the Rosh on the side of the Gemara rather than *Tosafos* (*Nesivos Olam*, *Nesiv HaTorah* ch. 5). But the fact is that by *hashgacha pratis*, *Tosafos* were printed on the side, and the *minhag* is to teach *Tosafos* to young *talmidim*.

The same applies to what the Maharal wrote (*Gur Aryeh Vaeschanan*, *Tiferes Yisroel* ch. 56) about teaching according to the order in *Pirkei Avos*: *ben chamesh l'mikra*, *ben eser l'mishna*, *ben chamesh esrei l'Gemara*. That first *talmidim* must acquire the entire Tanach, then the entire Mishna, and only afterward Gemara, so that a person builds the foundations of Torah knowledge before entering Talmud.

But the *minhag* does not follow the Maharal, and the Alter Rebbe defends the *minhag* at length (*Hilchos Talmud Torah*

1:6). This order depended on the reality of those times, when *Tanach* wasn't printed with *nekudos* and *taamim* the way we have it today, and *Mishnayos* had to be learned by heart. Today, with printed *sefarim* readily available, that order of the Mishna in *Avos* doesn't apply. Rather the *minhag* that the Alter Rebbe mentions is that a child is taught Chumash (and not *Nach*) with special emphasis on the *pesukim* that discuss the 613 *mitzvos*. It seems from the Alter Rebbe that the obligation of teaching one's son is to teach him *Chumash* and *Gemara l'iyuna*, that's it.

My *shver*, Rabbi Chaim Shalom Deitsch, told me that as a child in Etz Chaim Yeshiva in Yerushalayim—which followed the precise *seder* instituted by Rabbi Shmuel Salant almost 200 years ago—they went directly from Chumash to Gemara, with no separate *seder* of *Mishnayos*.

I understand that there is a Zilberman *derech* today that attempts to follow the Maharal. A *talmid* who goes through that system can come out with tremendous *yedios*, but the question isn't only how much a bachur knows—it is whether he understands. Does he understand the way Chazal speak? Knowing how to learn means to understand that Torah She'b'al Peh cannot be understood at first glance. He will be missing the *libun hilchasa* that takes a person out of the category of *am ha'aretz* according to Shulchan Aruch siman 199, as mentioned before.

So actually, the traditional *derech* for the past few hundred years has been what the Alter Rebbe describes and defends, not exactly what the Maharal suggests. What we do in yeshiva is in line with the traditional *derech*: we are not substituting *Tosafos* with the Rosh; rather, we are teaching *Tosafos* in context so we do not drift away from the main point.

But you are still making a valid point that this *derech* attempts to address some of the issues that the Maharal raises (although it should be noted, that the reality nowadays is only remotely related to the kind of study that the Maharal was bemoaning).

Kovetz Meforshim vs. Lomdus

How can you say your *derech* is traditional? Yours is very different from the *derech* of lomdus known in yeshivos. Take for example Reb Yudel Eber's shiurim—there is an emphasis on deep lomdus and amkus over halacha l'maaseh. Doesn't moving toward halacha risk losing some of that passion and depth?

This *derech* isn't a move away from lomdus—I believe it is closer to the true *derech* of the great Roshei Yeshiva. What made them great teachers was the way they pointed out the *ikar* of a *sugya*. They didn't chase every possible question until the *sugya* became scattered; they emphasized one or two points, and through that they could take a complicated *sugya* and show exactly what it depends on.

According to my understanding, before the war, the common style of learning was simpler in terms of how many *mefarshim* were used—it was similar to what I'm describing. It centered on Gemara, Rashi, *Tosafos*, the Rosh, the Ran, and the advanced learners attempted to learn the Rambam as well. The *kovetz mefarshim* did not exist, and most *talmidim* didn't have access to a Rashba. They learned what was printed in the Vilna Shas.

So learning a *sugya aliba d'hilchasa* doesn't mean giving up lomdus—it means the lomdus is guided. The halachic

structure helps identify the *sugya's* central issues: what the Gemara is dealing with, what the *Rishonim* are arguing about, and what practical difference it makes. That itself produces deep lomdus.

The Rebbe writes in a letter to Reb Shmuel Plotkin praising his father, Reb Avrohom Elya's, *chiddushim*, dated 24 Teves 5723: "May it be His will that these *chiddushim*—both in their substance and in their style—strengthen the recognition among all students of our Torah, the Torah of Truth, regarding the manner of study: that the truly desirable and genuinely good approach is learning with *yashrus* (honest straightforwardness) and *shakla vetarya lasukei shmaatsa aliba d'hilchsa, halacha l'maaseh*, and in the language of Chazal, when explaining a difference of opinion among our Rabbis, "*mai beinaihu?*" and "*l'mai nafka mina?*"

The Rebbe continues: "My intention is: not like the two other approaches—the empty, futile pilpul, about which the earlier Rabbis already cried out and rejected; nor to suffice with exceedingly subtle, hair-splitting conceptualizations that yield no *nafka mina* and no halachic conclusion. For in such methods, the true determination needed to identify the correct reasoning is lacking. Rather, they must choose the straight and proper path described above—as is, of course, evident from the introduction of the sons of the Alter Rebbe, to his *Shulchan Aruch*, and as explained at length in *Kuntres Eitz HaChaim* by the Rebbe Rashab, of blessed memory, from chapter 28 onward."

Mesivta vs. Zal

Why do you think many yeshivas today don't learn this way?

I'm not entirely sure what the *derech* of learning is in yeshivas today. I have met

some very promising young *maggidei shiur*, and I believe their success is partly due to their study of halacha in *kollel*.

I can only speak from my own experience. When I was a young *talmid* in yeshiva, I rarely encountered this kind of *limud*. I think that our yeshivas in recent decades have emphasized a Mesivta-style approach. What I mean is that there is a significant difference in how a person thinks at age fourteen or fifteen versus eighteen or nineteen.

In Mesivta, the goal is building fluency—reading a Gemara correctly, familiarizing the *talmid* with the Gemara's way of thinking. The *maggid shiur* should teach with a pace: every Rashi, every *Tosafos*, thorough but without delving too deep. He should point out all the obvious questions, but answer only a few, leaving the *talmid* with an appetite for more.

But Zal is different. By Zal, even if a *talmid* is lacking skills, his mind has matured. He finds less meaning in sharp points and more meaning in seeing the *sugya* as a whole—identifying the *ikar*, understanding how the *Rishonim* read the Gemara, and how those readings lead to different conclusions. An average bachur who continues in Zal with the same *derech* he learned in Mesivta—many details, many calculations, without training to see the *sugya's* central structure—will not feel as connected to his learning as he did in Mesivta.

This is a well-known problem: many bachurim lose enthusiasm for *iyun* when rising to *Zal*. I believe this is at least part of the reason.

Where It All Began

What originally got you interested in learning Gemara *l'iyun aliba d'hilchasa*?

When I was learning in Toras Emes, we learnt the first *perek* of *Pesachim* with Rabbi Chaim Shalom Deitsch, who is also my *shver*. We would learn the Gemara and *Rishonim* and then try to see how the Alter Rebbe learned the *sugya* and resolved the problems.

That year opened my eyes. When you learn the Alter Rebbe carefully, you see he isn't just giving a *psak*—he's illuminating the *sugya*. After we finished the first *perek*, Rabbi Deitsch took us to the third *perek*, *Eilu Ovrin*, which contains major *sugyos* in *hilchos taarovos*, so we could continue seeing the Alter Rebbe's *chiddushim* in that area. A few years later, when I was learning *issur ve'heter* for *semicha*, I found it very helpful to have had many *yesodos* from *Pesachim*.

I had good *maggidei shiur*, and they taught well, but this was different. They say in the name of the Avnei Nezer that studying the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch and *Kuntres Acharon* gives one a *derech* in learning, and one who has open eyes can see how the Alter Rebbe answers many of the questions Reb Akiva Eiger raises—through his precise wording and order, and the way he brings the halacha hints to a deeper understanding of the *sugya* itself. That's the kind of *shiurim* we heard in *Pesachim* that year.

That's the ultimate, in my opinion.

In Practice

Practically speaking, how do you guide the bachurim through a *sugya*? How does it actually work?

Truthfully, I don't think I can fully describe the learning program in our yeshiva, but I'll give a general outline.

First of all, I provide the initial guidance. Before we learn a piece of

Gemara, I look at the general outline and try to find a beginning and end point for that week's learning. Sometimes the *sugya* cannot be covered in one week, so I allot two weeks in advance. I peek into the Rosh, the *Ein Mishpat*, and the Rambam and Tur referenced there, which all help me choose one central *din* to focus on. I then give a title for the upcoming week's learning. I believe the title helps the *talmidim* not lose sight of the *din* we are trying to clarify.

I suggest to older *talmidim*, who are leaving yeshiva and will be learning on their own, to do the same—plan their weekly learning quotas and topics in advance. Some of it is guesswork, so modifying the quota and topic is sometimes necessary as the learning proceeds, but nevertheless I find it to be a very helpful tool.

Additionally, there is the proper order of learning. The Gemara (Shabbos 63a) says *ligmar v'hadar lisbar*, which plainly means that first you learn, then you understand. Or in other words: first learn what is explicit, and only afterward what is the underlying reasoning between the lines. The Alter Rebbe brings this principle *l'halacha* in *Hilchos Talmud Torah*.

After a *talmid* has a basic knowledge of the *sugya*, he is encouraged to open one or more of the *poskim*—let's say the Rosh (which I think is beneficial for most *talmidim*)—and learn it on a basic level. After gaining clarity in the *din* found in that segment of the Rosh, he should go back to the segments of Gemara, Rashi, and *Tosafos* most relevant to the Rosh's discussion. Then the *lisbar*—the deeper understanding—begins. Automatically, he pays more attention to details, often finding a hidden *nafka mina* regarding that *din* found in the Rosh.

At this stage, the focus of the *sugya* becomes clearer to the *talmid*, and it becomes easier for him to distinguish between primary and secondary concepts.

How do the *talmidim* cover so much material—Gemara, Rashi, *Tosafos*, and *poskim*? Isn't that too much?

You're right. There are weeks when most *talmidim* will only learn the *poskim* in *shiur*, while on their own they focus on Gemara, Rashi, and *Tosafos*.

Still, I try to design the weekly learning quotas so that an advanced *talmid* who utilizes his time can go through the entire week's quota—Gemara, Rashi, and *Tosafos*—with a basic understanding, meaning without avoiding apparent difficulties but not yet dwelling on them, all within the first two days of the week. We call this learning *gefet*—an acronym for *Gemara, Pirush Rashi, Tosafos*. After that, I advise learning the quota again and again, each time a bit deeper, for example opening all the citations in a *Tosafos*.

Whenever Rashi or *Tosafos* references another Gemara, I show the bachurim exactly where to look—it shouldn't remain a vague citation. Many times, those background Gemaras open up the entire *sugya*.

Interestingly, opening the Gemaras that *Tosafos* quotes is not only beneficial for understanding *Tosafos*—it's sometimes the key to understanding the Rambam. A halacha in the Rambam may seem awkward until you look at the Gemaras *Tosafos* brings and realize that the Rambam is also reconciling the two Gemaras *Tosafos* is dealing with—but not in the way *Tosafos* does.

Then, I advise looking into *Tosafos HaRosh* and *Tosafos Rabbeinu Peretz*. Some *talmidim* are *shayach* to learning a

Maharsha or Maharam Shif, and I point that out. All of this is outlined in a small paper all the *talmidim* receive at the beginning of the week.

We also have different tracks for different levels—not every bachur can learn the same amount of material. So we created a system: one quota for Gemara and Rashi for everyone, but different levels for which *Tosafos* to learn. The most important *Tosafos* relating to the central *din* is required for all.

Conclusion

What would you like to say in conclusion?

I would like to quote a letter of the Rebbe dated 22 Kislev 5712 (*Igeres* 1302): “...It is well known what is written: ‘Hashem made man upright, but they sought out many calculations.’ For many, many generations, people learned Torah without entering into numerous ‘calculations’ about what manner of study should be arranged to be most successful and most in line with the principles of *chochmas ha’chinuch*, the study of education, and so on. Yet in recent times, newcomers have arisen who delve deeply into various systems and strategies—and the results of these methods are the very opposite of what one would reasonably hope for. For in earlier generations there was a great desire to learn Torah without excessive cleverness, and the knowledge of Torah grew—both in quantity and in quality. Whereas with the style of learning that follows all those rules, the number of learners has diminished, and their desire has diminished as well, and so forth.”

The Rebbe says here that the main thing is not so much the *derech* of learning. The main thing is to arouse a true desire to

learn Torah. That itself can lead a *talmid* to true knowledge of Torah.

Rabbi Aizenman’s *derech*—a *talmid* guided by the *din*, moving back and forth between Gemara and *poskim* until the *sugya*’s structure becomes his own—is ultimately in service of something greater. This comes across in the words of the Rebbe at a *yechidus klalis* with Talmidei Hatmimim, 30 Tishrei 5752 (*Hisvaaduyos* vol. 1, p. 213): “When one looks at a true *bachur-yeshiva*, one must see his true reality: that his whole existence, his whole world, his whole life, is Torah. In the words of the Rambam at the close of his work, describing the future era, all impediments will be nullified, and everyone will be free to occupy themselves with Torah and its wisdom—‘like the waters cover the sea.’

“The one who learns becomes so included and nullified within the Torah that one no longer perceives his own existence, only the existence of the Torah—just as one does not see the sea itself, only the water covering it. This mode of learning is loftier even than the *yichud nifla* the Alter Rebbe describes at the start of Tanya: there, the *talmid* is united with the Torah; here, his very existence becomes wholly enveloped within it. And beyond conducting himself this way, a *talmid* must influence his friends—his *chavrusa*, or a larger group learning together—so that they, too, reach this same *shleimus* of ‘like the waters cover the sea.’”

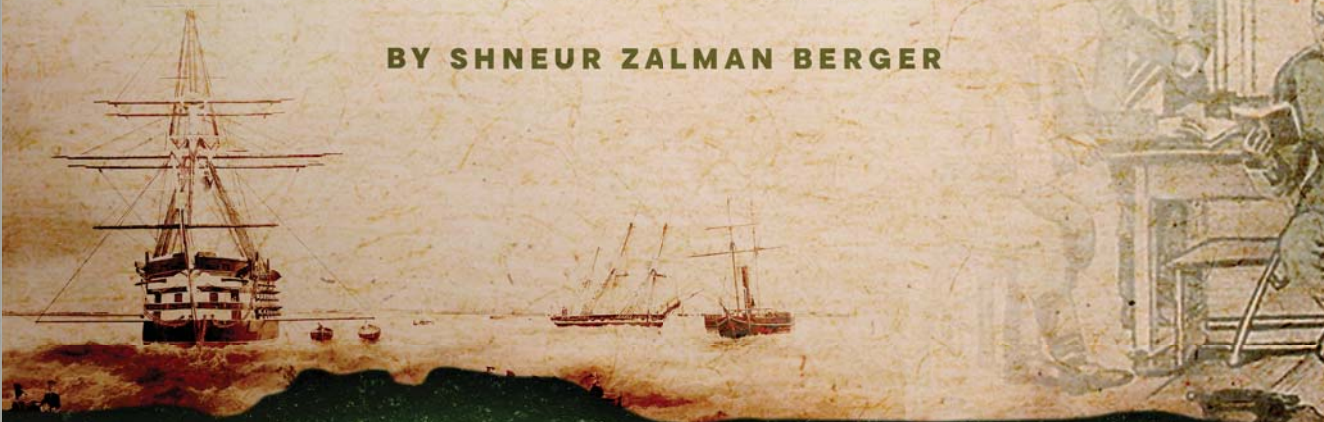
That, in the end, is the purpose of a *derech* in learning: not merely to make a *sugya* click, but to make a *bachur*—quite literally—a vessel for Torah itself. ■

אבות החסידות

The Cantonists: *Stolen at 9, Faithful at 40*

FORETOLD BY THE ALTER REBBE FOURTEEN YEARS IN ADVANCE. FOUGHT BY THE MITTELER REBBE, WHO TRAVELED TO HADITCH TO DAVEN FOR ITS ANNULMENT AND NEVER RETURNED HOME. ANSWERED BY THE TZEMACH TZEDEK WITH A RESCUE SOCIETY. THE HISTORY OF THE INFAMOUS CANTONIST DECREE, AND EVERYTHING THE REBBEIM AND CHASSIDIM DID TO ANNUL IT — AND TO REDEEM AND STRENGTHEN THE BOYS IT HAD ALREADY TAKEN

BY SHNEUR ZALMAN BERGER





200 years have passed since the Cantonist decree promulgated by Czar Nicholas I, a tyrannical ruler known as the “Iron Czar.” Nicholas was known as an autocratic ruler. He forcefully suppressed any call for liberalism or reform within the empire. He believed that absolute rule was the best form of government, and from this he concluded that “re-education” of the Jews was necessary.

About thirty years earlier, the Third Partition of Poland had taken place, and millions of Jews were annexed to the territory of the Russian Empire. Following this, a law was passed allowing them to receive exemption from compulsory conscription in exchange for a tax payment. The Jewish population was one of the few populations in the empire that enjoyed this privilege. This arrangement passed easily since the army itself opposed conscripting them anyway, believing that young Jewish men were unfit to serve as soldiers.

The situation changed in 5587 (1827), when Czar Nicholas I, a devoted militarist, decided to cancel the exemption for the Jewish people except for notables such as rabbanim, wealthy merchants, and community heads. His motives were to strengthen equality among his subjects and his desire to assimilate the Jews among the Russian population. He also expected that the young conscripts would become economically useful after completing their military service.

In addition, his hatred for the Jewish people played a role, as he sought to convert the young Jews to Christianity and educate them to be loyal to the rule of the Russian Czar.

Upon the publication of the initiative and the beginning of the conscription plan, spiritual leaders, along with Jewish community activists, were called upon to fight fiercely against the terrible decree that had descended upon them. Rabbanim and *askanim* everywhere worked, both in Russia and in other countries around the world, in various ways to nullify the evil decree.

Rabbanim everywhere treated the decree with great severity. In many communities, the rabbis instructed community members to save 75 percent of their expenses, in order to send funds to the central fund of those working to annul the decree, for the purpose of paying bribes and gifts.

After great efforts, 200,000 rubles were collected for this fund, an enormous sum, and most of it was transferred to Senator Novosiltsev, who was responsible for the legislation.

The efforts bore no fruit. Czar Nicholas was intent on his goal and he bypassed the accepted legislative system, deciding unprecedentedly to intervene personally and issue the terrible order to conscript the youths against their will.

According to the government order, the duty of conscription fell upon the leadership of the Jewish communities in the settlements, and they were required to conscript the Jewish boys and send the quota set for that community to the Russian army.

Since the Jewish parents opposed sending their sons to the army and hid them during conscription periods, the community leaders were forced to abduct Jewish children in order to fill the conscription quota. For this purpose, the community hired people from within

the community (called “chappers” — “catchers”) whose job was to kidnap children and hand them over to the Russian army. When the kidnappers failed to lay their hands on young boys designated for conscription, they would kidnap and hand over to the authorities even children under 12, declaring that they were older.

These men raided Jewish homes and hiding places known to them and kidnapped young boys from there. Some were kidnapped while innocently walking in the street and their families never had the chance to say goodbye to them.

The kidnapped children were transferred to some building in the city or town for a waiting period until the quota was filled and their transport to the army camps was organized.

Every kidnapping became a terrible tragedy. Wails and screams of family members, as well as of the boys themselves, pierced the air. Often, parents and family members accompanied the kidnappers with their abducted child all the way to the building where they were held. Every single day, family members came to the place of detention, crying and weeping without respite, but to no avail. On the day the children were taken out en masse, all the families came to accompany the convoy of the abducted. And the cry of the Jewish families rose to the heavens.

Initially it was determined that the boys’ age would be 12 and up, but eventually the age was lowered even further (see sidebar). The decree set the term of service for the Cantonist soldiers until they reached the age of 43.

From the very beginning, the abducted children were sent for “re-education” to



MAAMAR OF THE MITTELER REBBE ABOUT THE ‘TAKING OF SOLDIERS FROM THE JEWS’

Christian villagers who were instructed “to re-educate them.” In these homes they suffered hardships and were forced to work on Shabbos and eat non-kosher food. Their tender souls could not bear all of this.

As if that were not enough, these young boys were conscripted for a period of 30 long years while army commanders made sure to completely sever them from the Jewish communities or their families.

Mesirus Nefesh of Children

Initially, the conscripted children were not required to convert and they were even promised that they would be allowed to observe their faith. However, beginning in 1843, army commanders began processes of forcing the Cantonists to convert. Many of the children refused adamantly, and the order given was to



THE SOLDIERS' SHUL IN TOMSK. SOON, IT WILL BE RENOVATED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

force them even if it involved severe cruelty, such as submersion in river water or being tied inside a sack. Sadistic actions were taken against the boys. Some managed to withstand the scheme, but many could not endure the cruel torture and converted under duress.

Those who still refused to convert despite all the harsh torture suffered a campaign of abuse from their commanders. At the same time, the commanders offered financial bonuses to those who agreed to convert.

A Heavenly Revelation Before the Histalkus

The terrible decree began already in the days of the Mitteler Rebbe, but the one who led the main struggle against the terrible decree was the Tzemach Tzedek.

In fact, the Alter Rebbe had already prophesied this decree some fourteen years before it was issued. In a letter the

Alter Rebbe sent to Rabbi Moshe Meizlish during the Napoleonic War, he hinted at this with a harsh prophecy: "And this shall be a sign for you, that within a short time the delight of your eyes shall be taken," hinting here at his own passing, and immediately afterward he added: "and they will begin to take soldiers from among our *acheinu Bnei Yisrael*."

The decree went into effect toward the end of the Mitteler Rebbe's *nesius*. In the days when they began forcibly conscripting boys, the Mitteler Rebbe traveled to the *tziyun* of his father, the Alter Rebbe, in Haditch, where he prayed for the annulment of the decree. On his way back to Lubavitch, he fell ill and stayed in the city of Niezhin.

A truly awe-inspiring, trembling sight occurred about a week before his passing. The doctors who examined him saw him lying lifeless and wondered how he was even alive. One of them, a perceptive man, said that if he were permitted to

speaking words of Chassidus, he would immediately rise with new *chayus*...

And indeed, as soon as the doctors permitted it, he rose with a burning face and asked that a place be arranged for him to sit. The Chassidim gathered until the house was completely full. "Now I will tell you news I have never revealed before," said the Rebbe—but then, as if by some *maaseh satan*, an incident occurred that disrupted everything. The hat of one of the Chassidim standing near the Mittlerer Rebbe suddenly fell upon the Rebbe. At that very moment, the Rebbe stopped speaking words of Chassidus, seeing in this a sign that Heaven did not want him to reveal what he had intended to reveal...

The Rebbe therefore stopped the maamar he had wanted to say, and began instead to speak about the fact that that very week they had begun taking soldiers from among the Jews for the army.

"I knew this seven years earlier, when I was at the grave of my father [the Alter Rebbe]. I saw then a great accusation against the youths who are 'haters of Israel' [a euphemism referring to the Jewish people], and my spirit was broken within me. I understood and knew that this would certainly come to pass. Later, at the time of my daughter's wedding, many people gathered around me—elders and youths, learned and understanding—to hear words of Chassidus, and I rejoiced with them with very great joy until the light of morning. I thought then that the decree had been annulled.

"Afterward, when I went to rest a little, my father [the Alter Rebbe] came to me and said: 'Why are you rejoicing over these young people who have gathered around you? Did you not know of the accusation that is growing stronger?' Immediately my

spirit broke within me, [knowing] that he certainly meant the taking Bnei Yisrael as soldiers."

The Mittlerer Rebbe suddenly closed his eyes in deep concentration and began to say a Chassidic maamar that opened with the words, "To understand the matter of taking soldiers from Israel by the hand of gentiles." In this maamar, the Mittlerer Rebbe explained that when there is such a decree and nevertheless a Jew manages to perform a mitzva with *mesirus nefesh*, this brings about tremendous *nachas ruach* from the fulfillment of that mitzva.

The "Resurrection of the Dead" Society Springs into Action

As mentioned, the Mittlerer Rebbe passed away shortly after the beginning of the decree, and the spiritual as well as material burden of the struggle fell upon the shoulders of the Tzemach Tzedek.

As a leader standing at the burning front line, the Tzemach Tzedek stepped forward to lead the campaign, whether through spiritual or practical means, to annul the terrible decree, or at least to reduce the scope of the conscription. He even spoke sharply about Czar Nicholas I, calling him "a *kelipa* that forgot it was created."

The Tzemach Tzedek established a committee called "Chevras Techiyas HaMeisim" ("Society for the Resurrection of the Dead"), which worked to reduce conscription quotas as well as to free children who had already been kidnapped, through bribery. The society also worked to free children by registering them in army records as having died.

Among those involved in rescuing the kidnapped children was Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua of Kalisk, a merchant in the city of Kazan, who managed to befriend the local officials. For eight years he worked to rescue children and succeeded in redeeming hundreds of Jewish children, until they managed to track him down through a Jewish merchant who posed as his friend. In this way they managed to incriminate him, and he was thrown behind bars.

In addition, the society worked to send shluchim to places where the kidnapped children were gathered, in order to encourage and strengthen them to remain faithful to the observance of Torah and mitzvos. The fact that the army commanders did everything to sever the boys from their communities and families made this encouragement all the more like dew of life sprinkled upon the children.

Over the years, as conditions for the Cantonists eased somewhat, some soldiers managed to reach Lubavitch and be received for *yechidus* with the Tzemach Tzedek. The Rebbe, for his part, encouraged and strengthened them, and blessed many of them with long life and years.

Throughout those years, halachic questions concerning the sensitive situation of the Cantonists were brought before the Rebbe, and in this area too he sprang into action to provide halachic answers to remove doubts. In the responsa of the Tzemach Tzedek, several questions relating to these matters are discussed, but the answers were written in hints and codes out of fear of Russian censorship.

The authorities, to put it mildly, did not like the Tzemach Tzedek's activity on behalf of the soldiers. Because of this, they

made sure to station a senior government official in the town of Lubavitch whose purpose was to monitor the Rebbe's activities.

In 5602 (1842), the Rebbe's activities came to the attention of the governor of the Vitebsk district, and together with the aforementioned official they consulted with each other and decided to bring him to a conference of rabbis in S. Petersburg in order to trap him in his own words, making it easier for them to brand him a rebel against the king and remove him.

The Cantonists Jumped Into the River

The Rabbinical Conference held in S. Petersburg took place in 5603 (1843), and was convened by the Russian Minister of Education and the Minister of the Interior. Leaders from all streams of Judaism were invited to the conference with the intent of forcing all participants in the assembly to sign their agreement to substantial changes in laws concerning the Jewish people, such as an absolute prohibition on the study of Chassidus, imposing a requirement for Jewish children to study general subjects according to a government curriculum, and more.

Not many rabbis were invited to the conference, only one representative rabbi from each stream of Russian Jewry: the Tzemach Tzedek from the Chassidic stream; Rabbi Yitzchok of Volozhin from the Lithuanian stream; Mr. Betzalel Stern, a school principal in Odessa representing the Maskilim; and Mr. Israel Halperin, representing the merchants. Participation in the conference was not optional but mandatory.



JEWISH CHILDREN (CANTONISTS) SERVING IN THE ARMY

During the conference, the Ministers of the Interior and of Education attempted to make changes to the Jewish religion according to the demands of the Maskilim. They did not shy away from any means to carry out their scheme, despite the protests of the gedolei Yisrael.

Beneath the surface, the authorities schemed to keep the Rebbe in S. Petersburg permanently, so that he would be far from the important Jewish communities, in order to limit or perhaps even prevent his influence on Jews throughout Russia. However, it was precisely the Cantonists who caused the authorities to order him to leave the city immediately.

And here is what happened:

At that time, a large group of Cantonists was stationed at the naval base camp in Kronstadt, near St. Petersburg. When they heard of the Rebbe's arrival

in S. Petersburg, they approached their commanders with a request to be allowed to invite the Rebbe to speak before them.

The commanders forwarded the request to the Minister of War, who, for some reason, decided to approve it. He passed the request on to the civil authorities, who also agreed to grant it, believing that the great honor the Rebbe would receive on that occasion would "buy him off" into doing as they wished...

The Rebbe, who never missed an opportunity to strengthen the Cantonists, immediately replied that he was willing to fulfill the soldiers' request on any weekday to be set for it. The permits were arranged, preparations were made, and on one of the first days of the month of Menachem Av 5603, the Tzemach Tzedek arrived, accompanied by about



Even Today There Are Cantonists

The Rebbe MH'M related in a farbrengen on 13 Nissan 5745, about the influence of the Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek not only on the Cantonists themselves, but even on the Russian government of that time:

Although all the affairs of the Tzemach Tzedek are eternal and contain lessons for every single Jew until the end of all generations, nevertheless, there is a special significance to the story of the Tzemach Tzedek's influence in the matter of education. And within this itself, as mentioned, it is a story that contains something novel and exceptional even compared to other Nesiim.

In the days of the Tzemach Tzedek, the government issued the "Cantonist decree." They seized young children from their parents and conscripted them into military service for 25 years or more, with the intention of thereby completely severing them from Jewish life.

These Jewish soldiers, even though they received no Jewish education and for many years were distanced and cut off from anything related to Torah study and mitzva observance, had tremendous mesirus nefesh to remain faithful to the Jewish religion, and even during their military service managed to arrange various religious matters.

The early Chassidim related (some of it heard directly from the Rebbe Nasi Doreinu) that during the Tzemach Tzedek's stay in Petersburg (the capital city in those days) at the well-known assembly of rabbis, a company of Jewish soldiers stationed in the city of Kronstadt

(a fortress city near Petersburg) learned of this, and they approached their commanders with a request to be permitted to invite the Tzemach Tzedek to address them.

The army commander granted the soldiers' request and sent to ask the Tzemach Tzedek to fulfill it, and of course the Tzemach Tzedek agreed. The Tzemach Tzedek visited them and delivered a maamar before them. [It may be suggested that the maamar he said to them at that time is the very Yiddish maamar of the Tzemach Tzedek (beginning with the words "Machisi" and "Shema Yisrael") that we still have today.]

In this story we see the Tzemach Tzedek's "authority" over that country, despite it being a mighty state and one that oppressed the Jewish people, far more than other countries, in a manner for which we find no parallel even with the Alter Rebbe or the Mitteler Rebbe.

With the Tzemach Tzedek, the order was reversed: the Tzemach Tzedek did not have to petition the military commanders for permission to visit the Jewish soldiers; rather, the opposite. The military commanders came to him with a proposal and request that he visit the Jewish soldiers and address them.

In other words, not only was there no persecution on the part of the government against the saying of Chassidus, but on the contrary, the government itself took an active interest in the spreading of Chassidus, and this specifically among soldiers under its own

fifty Chabad Chassidim, at the army camp in Kronstadt.

Since it was close to the month of Elul, the Rebbe took the opportunity to speak to the soldiers about the theme of teshuva. He quoted teachings of Chazal from the Medrash on Eichah and explained it to them in Yiddish, emphasizing the self-sacrifice of the Jewish people for their faith and Torah. He also encouraged them with words of inspiration and strength for the observance of mitzvos, and concluded by saying that it is every person's duty to pray for the peace of their homeland and its leaders.

The Cantonists were deeply moved by these special words and were strengthened

by them. Only a few weeks passed before they requested that the Rebbe come to them a second time. This time, Cantonists from other locations joined the request as well, and the army authorities agreed to this request too.

Meanwhile, a high-ranking government official came to the Rebbe's residence and told him that his appearance before the Cantonists had caused a great scandal in the army, and that from then on, the government ministers were "keeping an eye" on his actions. The warning was transparent. Nevertheless, the official informed the Rebbe, when the Cantonists arrived, they would gather in the square inside the Peter and Paul Fortress [the

command, under military discipline and obedience, which is far more strict than the kabbolas ol found in civilian life.

Furthermore, through the delivery of this maamar, this teaching was revealed in this lowly physical world in an open manner that endures until the end of all generations, for this maamar is still studied to this very day.

And all of this was accomplished in a manner of freedom, at least relative to the standing and condition that prevailed in those days (and certainly relative to the situation faced by the Alter Rebbe and the Mittlerer Rebbe).



Indeed, we live in lands of comfort and live amid prosperity and nevertheless, there are Jews who, for various reasons, find themselves in the condition of "Cantonists" r'l, with regard

to their Yiddishkeit, enslaved to their evil inclination.

And in fact, their situation is far worse since, in their own view, they are "free," while in truth they are "Cantonists"... How great is the enslavement when "servitude is dressed up as freedom"!

And from this, the lesson from the above story of the Tzemach Tzedek is:

We must know that even these "Cantonists," from the inner depths of their souls, "request" that someone come and explain to them matters of Torah and Yiddishkeit... for this is the essential nature of a Jew, and because of this, regardless of his outward conduct and visible condition, he is a fitting vessel for the loftiest matters of Torah.

very place where the Alter Rebbe had once been imprisoned], and there he would speak to them.

Indeed, at the beginning of the month of Elul, about six hundred Cantonist soldiers gathered at the fortress in a moving assembly. They came dressed in their pressed uniforms, polished shoes, and military caps on their heads. The Rebbe delivered a maamar Chassidus in a style they understood well, and it aroused tremendous emotion in them. Many of them, considered tough soldiers, wept upon hearing the words.

The Rebbe concluded his words with the following moving statement: "When the question arises of conversion, *chalila*, every Jew must give up his very life, and even when the Czar himself commands conversion, one must be *moser nefesh* and not obey him!"

Given the warning the Rebbe had received, these words were extremely harsh, essentially directed against the king and the monarchy itself. Yet the Rebbe did not flinch!

When the Rebbe finished, fifteen men stepped forward from the crowd and said in a bitter voice: "Rebbe, we are beaten and afflicted Jews. We cannot learn and we know nothing. We cling only to faith, and know only the words of the weekday, Shabbos, and Yom Tov tefillos, the Birkas HaMazon, and a few chapters of Tehillim."

The Rebbe looked warmly at the hundreds of soldiers standing before him and said:

"A Jew who believes in the blessed G-d, Creator of the world Who watches over His creatures, Who gave us Torah and mitzvos, and who prays, blesses, and recites the words of the tefillos and

chapters of Tehillim, is truly a strong and healthy Jew. Be healthy in body and soul, and may the blessed G-d return you healthy to your homes."

When he finished speaking and wished to return to his lodgings, dozens of soldiers asked their commanders for permission to accompany the Rebbe, and they were granted it. The soldiers felt a sense of closeness to the Rebbe and wanted to warm themselves a little more by his great light. Thus arose the remarkable scene of the Rebbe walking from the fortress courtyard to his lodging, deeply moved, accompanied by dozens of Jewish soldiers who had been kidnapped from their homes as tender children and forced to serve for long years in the Czar's army.

In the evening, several distinguished Chassidim gathered to visit him and hear his impressions of the soldiers, who, even after decades of service in the Czar's army, had not extinguished the Jewish spark in their hearts.

The Tzemach Tzedek began and said: "The Cantonist decree is similar to the war of the Greeks, which was also a spiritual war. It is impossible to fathom the preciousness and importance of the tefillos and Tehillim that they recite, whose level is immeasurably higher than those who pray according to the kabbalistic intentions of the Arizal. Their avoda is done with *mesirus nefesh* and simple faith, without any admixture of intellectual considerations.

"When Moshiach Tzidkeinu comes, he will take special delight in these Jews, *baalei mesirus nefesh*. The greatest scholars, like Rambam, who attained emuna through intellectual comprehension,



THE CANTONIST SHUL IN ROSTOV

will be amazed at how these simple Jews attained such elevated spiritual powers.”

The Rebbe’s tremendous influence over the Cantonists led the authorities to the conclusion that they must prevent his influence on the soldiers. Because of this, they informed the Rebbe that he must leave S. Petersburg within a few days and return to distant Lubavitch...

Five years later, the Russian Czar visited the naval base at Kronstadt. During that visit, Cantonist soldiers who had heard the Rebbe’s words at the time were presented before the Czar, and they demonstrated their military skills before him. When the Czar asked for their names, their commander began listing them, all distinctly Jewish names. The Czar’s face flushed with anger. He realized that his outstanding soldiers were Jews who had preserved their Jewish identity,

including their Jewish names. He ordered the soldiers to convert immediately.

Several of them approached the Czar and said: “Our lord the king, may his glory be exalted! About five years ago, the Rebbe of Lubavitch visited us, and he told us that it is forbidden to convert, even if the Czar himself commands us to do so. The Rebbe told us to give up our lives if we are forced to convert!”

The Czar did not have time to react, and before his astonished eyes, the Jewish soldiers leapt into the river flowing nearby, and drowned ...

The Survivor, Father of the Wilschansky Family

Every child who was abducted and forced into military conscription represents an entire world, he and his

offspring, and his offspring's offspring, forever. One need only look, as a single example among many, at the distinguished Wilschansky family, which includes roshei yeshiva, shluchim, and *askanim*, all descendants of one of the Cantonists who was abducted.

Rabbi Betzalel Wilschansky *a'h* (grandfather of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok *a'h*), told the story:

"When my grandfather was a small child, he was seized along with the other Cantonists. They were all placed in a small, dark room that no light entered. His mother, who was short in stature, dressed

herself in an extra layer of clothing and went to the authorities in tears. She said she wished to say goodbye to her son before he was taken away for decades.

"The official's heart was moved with compassion for her, and he allowed her to enter the room where the children were being held against their will. She went inside and dressed her son in the girl's clothing she had been wearing, wrapping his head in a kerchief. Since he had no trace of a beard yet, he left with her while it was still dark outside. He looked like a girl, and the guards did not recognize him as one of the abducted children. In this

A Wondrous Dream and a Moving Yechidus

One of the elderly Jewish residents of Moscow was Reb Yitzchok Lebedov who, as a child, had been a Cantonist and endured harsh torments because of his faith in Hashem.

At the mere age of nine, he was torn from his parents' home in Polotsk, in the Vitebsk region, and brought to the Cantonist camp in Smolensk. The journey by which he, along with dozens of his companions, was transported from Smolensk to Vladimir took an entire year. For ten years, he and dozens of his companions were tortured with the harshest afflictions in order to force them to convert. About half of the children could not endure it and died. He survived.

After his release from the army, decades later, he arrived in Moscow and found Jews from his hometown of Polotsk and from Vitebsk. He began

learning to read and understand Lashon HaKodesh and after about a year he was able to understand a passuk of Chumash on his own.

In time, a Chassid of the Tzemach Tzedek, Reb Nosson the Melamed, came to the city. He was a warm-hearted Jew who was accustomed to davening at length, and who found favor in the eyes of the community in Moscow through his classes in Chassidus and his chassidic melodies.

Many years later, in the year 5657 (1897), during a Chassidishe farbrengen in Moscow, Reb Yitzchok related his remarkable story to those present: "Reb Nosson showed special affection toward the Cantonists, and he would tell us stories from the Gemara and the Medrash, which we greatly enjoyed. Reb Nosson knew my father, Reb Shlomo the Pot-maker, who knew

way she managed to smuggle him away from the cruel fate awaiting him in the Russian army.

“Without delay, she traveled immediately to the Tzemach Tzedek, and asked his advice on how to escape further. The Rebbe instructed that they travel with him to the end of the Dnieper River, and they indeed traveled to Kherson (located near where the Dnieper flows into the Black Sea). He stayed at the home of a relative, and remained there until his marriage.”

The child who was saved grew up and married, and a son was born to him,

Rafael Wilschansky, who later became one of the prominent Chabad Chassidim in Kherson, the great-grandfather of the Wilschansky family.

Another son who was saved from the fate of the abducted children was Moshe Leib Laine, head of a large Chassidic family. He was born around the year 5585 (1825) in the town of Beshenkovich. His family name was later changed as a result of the Cantonist decree.

The law stipulated that an only son to his parents, as well as in certain other exceptional cases, would be exempt from army conscription. There were Jews who

all six Sedarim of the Mishna by heart and who would recite Mishnayos while standing in the marketplace with his pots. He likewise knew my grandfather, Reb Chaim Elya the Baker, who was a Chassid of the Alter Rebbe. Once, Reb Nosson said to me: ‘Listen, Itche! It is such a great pity for the souls of your father and grandfather—they were great scholars and Chassidim, and you are an *am ha’aretz* (ignoramus)!’

“These words touched my heart deeply, and I wept greatly. When I came home, I took a Tehillim and throughout the entire night I recited Tehillim with a broken heart and copious tears. Toward morning I fell asleep and saw my father in a dream, saying to me: ‘Go to the Rebbe, and it will be good for you; Itche, go to the Rebbe!’

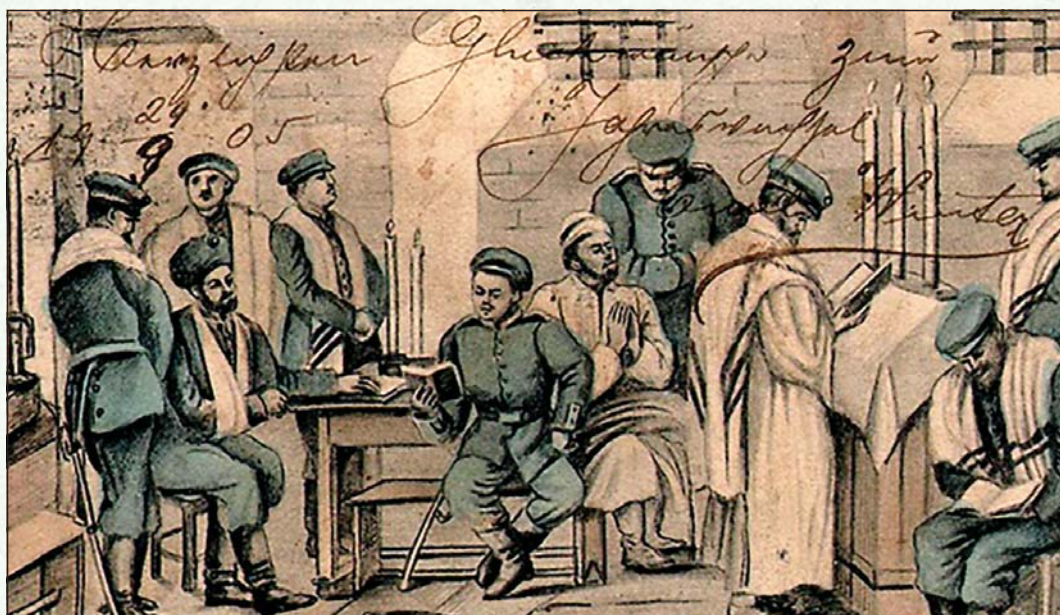
“When I told this to Reb Nosson, he told me not to tell anyone, and to hasten to fulfill my father’s words. A

few weeks later I set out for Lubavitch to the Rebbe and I told him everything, that I had been a Cantonist and that we had been subjected to many torments. Upon hearing this, the Rebbe sighed and his eyes filled with tears.

“‘I knew your grandfather Chaim Elya the Baker and your father Shlomo the Pot-maker well,’ said the Rebbe. ‘Both of them were great Chassidim. May Hashem help you become a Chassid as well. Study each day the daily portion of Chumash with Rashi, and also the *Kav HaYashar*, and recite Tehillim with the *Maamados*.’ And the Rebbe blessed me with length of days.

“When I told Reb Nosson what the Rebbe had said, he instructed me that no one should know of it. And from then on he began to teach me Chassidus.”

(From the book “Lubavitch, Ha’Ayara shel Chabad”)



JEWISH SOLDIERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARMY DAVENING ON THE YOM HA'DIN.
A POSTCARD FROM 5665.

managed to register their son as belonging to a different family in order to obtain an exemption.

During the abduction campaign, the child Moshe Leib was also seized by force, but his family members claimed to the officials that the child was not a biological son but an adopted one, and as proof of this they presented a document showing that his family name was "Laine" and not "Chein" [the document was altered as follows: the Russian letter "Ch" (X) looks like this: X. Whoever was responsible for the forgery erased the upper tips of the letter, making it look like the Russian letter "L": Λ, and thus his family name was changed from "Chein" to "Laine"].

The officials accepted the claim, and little Moshe Leib was released to go on his way; from then on, his family name remained "Laine." Later, his son Chaim Dovid Laine asked the Rebbe Maharash whether it would be worthwhile to restore the original family name to "Chein," a

name attributed to greater sanctity, going back centuries. The Rebbe Maharash replied: On the contrary, since a miracle had been performed for his father through the change of name to "Laine," they should continue to hold onto it as their family name forever.

'A King Who Puts to Death' and the Decree Was Annulled

For nearly thirty years, this terrible decree persisted, casting a heavy shadow over the lives of Russian Jews. Throughout this entire period, the Tzemach Tzedek worked in every possible way to have the decree annulled and to support all efforts, whether in evading conscription or in helping soldiers who had already been conscripted.

The decree continued until shortly after the death of the Czar. Regarding the death of Czar Nicholas I, who initiated

and carried out the Cantonist decree, the following is told:

In the month of Adar 5615 (1855), the well-known Chassidim Rabbi Hillel of Paritch and Rabbi Peretz Chein had *yechidus* with the Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek. R' Hillel told the Rebbe that in that particular year, three conscription dates had been set, unlike other years

.....

Throughout this entire period, the Tzemach Tzedek worked in every possible way to have the decree annulled and to support all efforts, whether in evading conscription or in helping soldiers who had already been conscripted.

.....

in which there were only two. R' Peretz interjected, saying, "We have a Rebbe [who can help]." They remained in the Rebbe's room as he stood to daven Maariv and when he reached the words "a King who puts to death," he said them aloud.

A short time later, they heard the ringing of bells coming from the nearby streets, and they understood that something unusual had happened.

The Rebbe asked several times: "What is heard in the street?" Later they heard that Czar Nicholas I had been killed.

In the summer of 5616 (1856), his successor, Czar Alexander, announced the

annulment of the decree. Nevertheless, those who had already been conscripted continued to serve until the end of their allotted term. But even then, the Tzemach Tzedek continued to work on behalf of these soldiers. After his passing in 5626 (1866), his son and successor, the Rebbe Maharash, continued the work on behalf of the Cantonists.

Czar Nicholas I's main goal had been the "re-education" of Russian Jewry, but this did not produce the results he had hoped for. On the contrary, the decree only stirred up Jewish resistance against the Russian government.

Shuls of the Soldiers

The Russian authorities granted special rights to Cantonist soldiers who had completed their military service. This allowed them to live in the large cities where Jews were otherwise forbidden to reside. Thanks to this, communities of discharged Cantonists developed in Russia's large, central cities. In several places, they even built magnificent shuls for themselves.

The Rebbe Maharash worked in unique ways to strengthen the communities of discharged Cantonists. Over the years, Chabad minyanim also developed within these shuls. Just recently, the authorities in the city of Tomsk informed the Jewish community, headed by the shliach, Rabbi Levi Kaminetzky, that the authorities would take care of restoring and renovating the local shul that had been established by the Cantonists. ■

Sources: Igros Admor HaZaken, Beis Rebbi, Toldos Admor HaEmtza'i, Toldos Admor HaTzemach Tzedek, Likutei Sippurim, Chasdei Yisrael, Toldos Chabad B'Petersburg.

לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר
מלך המשיח שליט"א



לז"נ

הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' צבי הירש
בן הרה"ח ר' בן ציון ע"ה
נלב"ע ז"ך אלול ה'תש"מ
ומרת רבקה בת הרה"ח ר' צבי ע"ה
נלב"ע כ"ט תמוז ה'תשס"ב

שפריצער

נתרם ע"י בניהם - יבלחט"א -

הרה"ת ר' שמואל
והרה"ת ר' יעקב מרדכי שיחיו
שפריצער