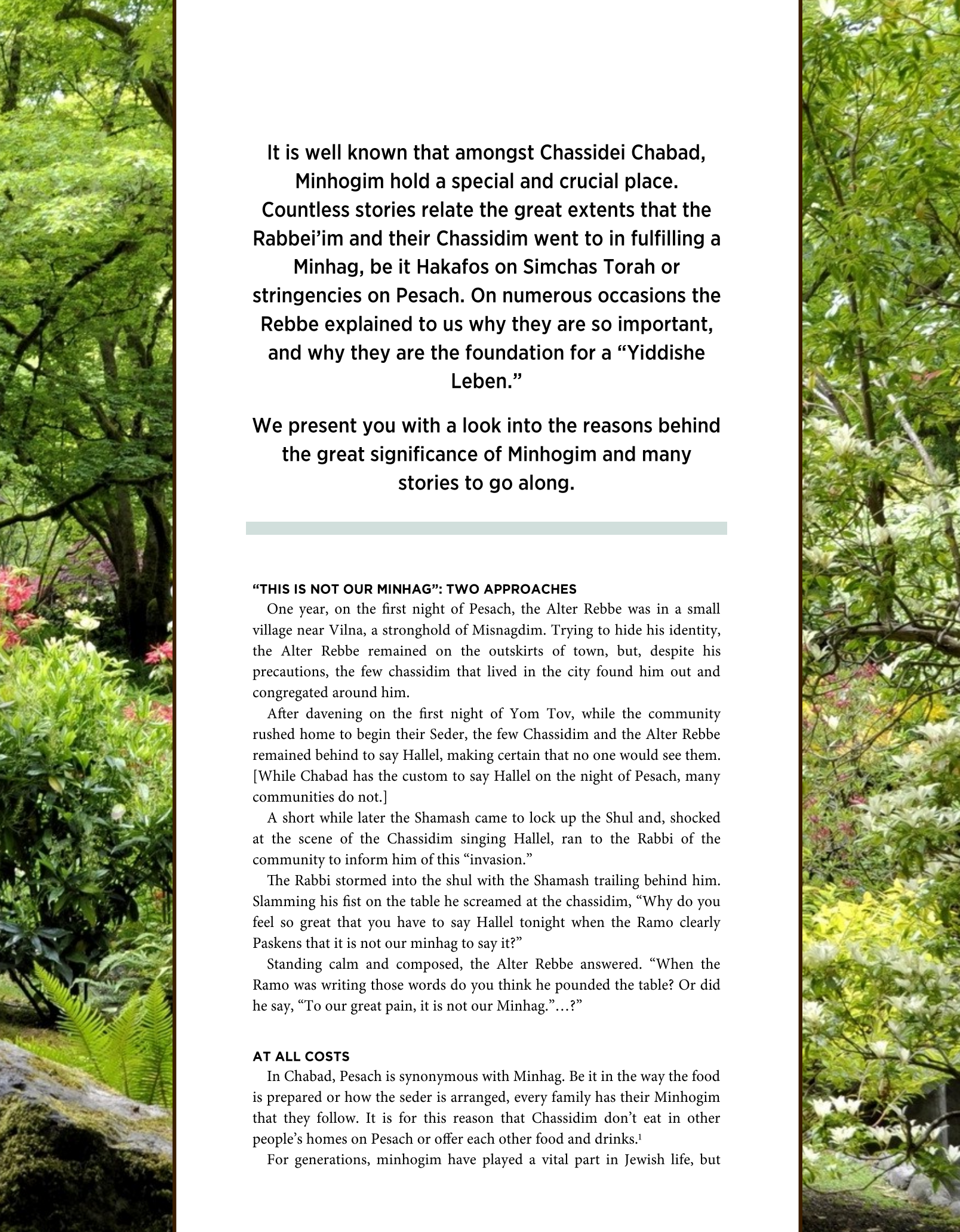


A lush Japanese garden scene. In the foreground, a grey stone path curves through a garden. To the left of the path is a low stone wall covered in moss. To the right is a grassy area with a wooden fence made of bamboo poles. A large, dark rock sits on the grass. In the background, there are many trees and bushes, including a large tree with red leaves on the left and a large tree with green leaves on the right. A wooden trellis structure is visible in the background. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

A Way of Life...

*Which part of a child's
education leaves the
strongest impression?*

*What reason did the Rebbe
Rashab give for the way we say
Modeh Ani?*



It is well known that amongst Chassidei Chabad,
Minhogim hold a special and crucial place.
Countless stories relate the great extents that the
Rabbei'im and their Chassidim went to in fulfilling a
Minhag, be it Hakafos on Simchas Torah or
stringencies on Pesach. On numerous occasions the
Rebbe explained to us why they are so important,
and why they are the foundation for a "Yiddishe
Leben."

We present you with a look into the reasons behind
the great significance of Minhogim and many
stories to go along.

"THIS IS NOT OUR MINHAG": TWO APPROACHES

One year, on the first night of Pesach, the Alter Rebbe was in a small village near Vilna, a stronghold of Misnagdim. Trying to hide his identity, the Alter Rebbe remained on the outskirts of town, but, despite his precautions, the few chassidim that lived in the city found him out and congregated around him.

After davening on the first night of Yom Tov, while the community rushed home to begin their Seder, the few Chassidim and the Alter Rebbe remained behind to say Hallel, making certain that no one would see them. [While Chabad has the custom to say Hallel on the night of Pesach, many communities do not.]

A short while later the Shamash came to lock up the Shul and, shocked at the scene of the Chassidim singing Hallel, ran to the Rabbi of the community to inform him of this "invasion."

The Rabbi stormed into the shul with the Shamash trailing behind him. Slamming his fist on the table he screamed at the chassidim, "Why do you feel so great that you have to say Hallel tonight when the Ramo clearly Paskens that it is not our minhag to say it?"

Standing calm and composed, the Alter Rebbe answered. "When the Ramo was writing those words do you think he pounded the table? Or did he say, "To our great pain, it is not our Minhag."...?"

AT ALL COSTS

In Chabad, Pesach is synonymous with Minhag. Be it in the way the food is prepared or how the seder is arranged, every family has their Minhogim that they follow. It is for this reason that Chassidim don't eat in other people's homes on Pesach or offer each other food and drinks.¹

For generations, minhogim have played a vital part in Jewish life, but

amongst Chabad Chassidim, the Rebbeim have stressed the importance of minhogim even more so – even when it required Mesiras Nefesh.

Right before the Rebbe Rashab was Nistalek and his physical condition had deteriorated, he nevertheless did not waiver on his commitment to even the smallest details of a Minhag. Similarly, on Shmini Atzeres 5738, after suffering a heart attack, the Rebbe still refused to make Kiddush and drink outside of the Sukkah, which on Shmini Atzeres is only a minhag.

And to quote the Frierdiker Rebbe's words in his historic Sichah at the train station when he was being taken to exile, and, though he knew that government officials were listening to his every word, nevertheless, he called to each and every Yid², "We are obligated to announce publicly that all that is connected to our religion, to the Torah and Mitzvos of the Yidden - and their **Minhogim**³ – no one can force his opinion, and no power of coercion can be allowed to subject us..."

It is no surprise then, that one of the most well-known and popular Divrei Torah by Chabad Sedorim is why we say Matbilen first in Mah Nishtaneh; it is incredible to see young children share this idea of the Rebbe and proudly proclaim how important a Minhag is.

What is the importance of Minhogim?

ANOTHER PART OF TORAH

The Frierdiker explains⁴: "All Minhogim were given to Moshe by Sinai – just as all the other parts of Torah. In each generation different ideas and

chiddushim are revealed, and so too with Minhogim; in the right time, according to the Divine Will, the Neshoma of a certain Tzaddik revealed and guided the Yidden in a specific Minhag.

"This includes all the details of each and every Minhag."

It is known that the Pnei Yehoshua was in the middle of writing a sefer that brings a source in Torah for all Minhogim. Sadly, he never finished writing it, and it is said that had he

the Frierdiker Rebbe relates in the name of his father, the Rebbe Rashab⁶.

"With the coming of Moshiach there needs to be Teshuvah. When one learns Chassidus he knows for what he needs to do Teshuvah, but when one doesn't learn Chassidus he doesn't know what he needs to do Teshuvah for. The same thing applies to Minhogim; being that one doesn't have such feeling for them, one needs to be extra cautious with them."

IT IS INCREDIBLE TO SEE YOUNG CHILDREN SHARE THIS IDEA OF THE REBBE AND PROUDLY PROCLAIM HOW IMPORTANT A MINHAG IS.

finished it Moshiach would have come.⁵

The Ramo in Shulchan Aruch writes that it is "forbidden to quash or ridicule a Minhag." And the Maharil writes in Hilchos Yom Kippur that "one needs to heed to Minhogim even as Chazzan, as well as to the Niggunim that are customarily sung." He adds a story where he had changed the Nussach in a particular Shul while being Chazzan on Rosh Hashana, and on Yom Kippur that year his daughter died R"L.

LOOK OUT!

In a certain sense, Minhogim deserve extra caution because it is possible for people to sometimes think, "oh, it's not such a big deal, it's only a Minhag." As

It is for this same reason that in a certain sense, and in specific circumstances, we see extra stringencies placed on Minhogim more than Halachos.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

Chassidus and Kabbalah⁷ teach us an even deeper aspect of Minhogim, in which they are greater than Halachos (in a certain sense) and have a stronger impact.

Let us begin with the educational aspect and the answer to the – by now – all famous question of why we say Matbilen first. The Rebbe explains that this is because the Minhogim leave the greatest impression on a child; it is the



Minhogim that **constantly** remind us of how we Yidden are different than Goyim.

True, we do many Mitzvos all the time, but they only distinguish us for the time being. When we eat in a Sukkah on Sukkos we clearly show how we are different, but what about when we are not eating? Rather it is Minhogim that leave a permanent and continuous impression – for example, wearing a Yarmulkah and Tzitzis (originally wearing a Yarmulkah was only a Minhag but now it is the accepted practice – the same goes with Tzitzis: Halocha does not require us to wear a four cornered garment but it is now the accepted practice) – and therefore tremendous emphasis should be placed on Minhogim in the education of children.

The Frierdiker Rebbe relates how⁸, starting from a young age, he was educated to recite Modeh Ani in the mornings by placing one hand across from the other and to bend his head forward. One time he asked his father the reason for this Minhag. The Rebbe Rashab replied, “In truth I should not answer you, for one should do what he is told without asking ‘why’, but I instructed you to ask me anytime you have a question.”

The Rebbe Rashab then called in his attendant, Reb Yosef, and asked him, “How do you say Modeh Ani in the morning?” to which Reb Yosef replied, “I put one hand across from the other and bend my head forward.”

“Why do you do it like that?” Pressed the Rebbe Rashab.

“I don’t know. When I was a young boy they taught me to do it like that.”

The Rebbe Rashab then turned to the Frierdiker Rebbe and concluded, “You see, he does it because that is what he heard from his father, who heard it from his father, right back to Moshe Rabeinu and Avraham Avinu the first Yid. We need to fulfill things without asking ‘why’!”

The Frierdiker Rebbe protested. “But I am still a young child.”

“All Yidden are young,” the Rebbe Rashab replied. “It is specifically when

AT ANY COST

At the outbreak of World War II, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin were in Paris, France. A few days before Shavuos, 5700, at great personal risk, with the help of a high-ranking official who had been acquainted with the Rebbe in Paris, they managed to board one of the last trains leaving Paris. Successfully evading the German patrols, they arrived in Vichy on Erev Shavuos just as the sun was setting. Just a few days later, the German soldiers marched into the city of Paris.

They remained in Vichy for approximately two months. But after a while, the Nazis established a government, based in Vichy. With an anti-Semitic government as such in close proximity, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin were again forced to flee the city. They then moved to Nice, a coastal resort in the southern part of France. Despite the fact that Nice was occupied by the Italian Fascist government allies of Germany, it was relatively safe for Jews. Despite its relative security, the Rebbe was careful to remain indoors, in hiding, except when actually necessary. The Rebbe also used an alias, “Avram” in his telegrams to the Frierdiker Rebbe.

As the Yom Tov of Sukkos 5701 approached, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin were still in Nice. Rabbi Shmuel Yaakov Rubenstein, a prominent Rav from Paris, was also in Nice at that time. A short while before Sukkos, the Rebbe approached Rabbi Rubenstein with a Halachic question: would it be permissible for him to put his life in danger in order to comply with a mere Minhag? The Rebbe wished to obtain an Esrog from Calabria, Italy in accordance with the age-old Chabad Minhag. In order to get hold of one, he would have to sneak across the border from France into Italy; an undoubtedly hazardous task! Rabbi Rubenstein replied that Halachically this can be considered absolutely out of question; one would have to suffice with reciting the blessing on a regular Esrog.

Not long after, the Rebbe went missing for a few days. As it turned out, he indeed ventured the daring journey, and upon his return, his face was beaming as he held his “prize”; a Calabrian Esrog! Needless to say, the Rebbe happily offered his Esrog to all of his fellow Jews in the city of Nice, enabling them to perform the Mitzvah to the best efficiency.

[Yemei Melech Vol. 1 p. 519. See Sichas Chof-Av, 5719; Toras Menachem Vol. 26 p. 193.]



one grows up does he realized that he is in fact still young.”

Some might think that at such an important age, a child’s education should be centered on important things like Halochah and not Minhogim. But in truth, Minhogim are Torah, as the axiom states: “*Minhag Yisroel Torah Hi*,” and as well, instilling in children the things that

Mitzvos are not merely things that Hashem wants us to do but rather it is through them that we connect to him. The word Mitzva comes from the words ‘*Tzavsa V’chibur*’ – a connection – that’s what Mitzvos are all about: Yidden connecting to Hashem.

Certain Mitzvos are spelled out clearly in the Torah. Others were only hinted to

It is also for this reason that right before the Geulah Minhogim are of extreme importance. For once again, because of their greatness they have the power to bring Moshiach.¹⁰

As the Frierdiker Rebbe says [freely translated]:¹¹



IT IS THE MINHOGIM THAT CONSTANTLY REMIND US OF HOW WE YIDDEN ARE DIFFERENT THAN GOYIM.

have a lasting impression will ensure they remain steadfast to the rest of the Torah.

As the Rebbe says,⁹ “By going in this way and having Messirus Nefesh for Minhogim, and giving over to one’s children that they are Torah and they should live their lives in their light, one has Hatzlocha in their [children’s] education and causes them to have things that are even greater than nature.”

THE BIRTHDAY PRESENT

Chassidus explains the greatness of Minhogim through a Moshul of the relationship of a father and son.

There are times when a father will give his child direct and precise instructions, for instance, “Do well in school” or “Be careful when crossing the road.” On other occasions, he will hint to his child that he is expecting something of him – perhaps by saying, “Your bedroom is quite a mess,” and he is meaning that the child should clean his room.

And then there are those times when a father will remain totally silent. For example, a father won’t mention to his child about his upcoming birthday in the hope that the child will be thoughtful enough to buy him a present – such a gesture must come from the child on his own initiative.

us – perhaps through an extra letter or superfluous Possuk in the Torah. And then there are those things that Hashem didn’t mention to us at all, yet, as His children, we know this is what our Father wants.

Now, think about it: which of the aforementioned “duties” take precedence?

Disobeying an express order will certainly have harsher consequences than merely failing to catch a hint. And most certainly, forgetting a father’s birthday is not a crime. And so, theoretically, Mitzvos – as they are expressly written in Torah – would take precedence.

But if we focus on the “connection” aspect, it is clear that the Minhag expresses the father-son relationship in its most deepest capacity – the Minhag is the birthday present.

It is because of their greatness that they are not clearly stated; they are too great to be a ‘command’, as is the case with Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin for example. This also explains the tremendous joy by Hakafos, because seemingly, the mitzvah to be happy applies throughout the entire sukkos, yet by Hakafos – which is only a Minhag – we see a new level of joy, and we are told it adds a crown to the Torah.

The Baal Shem Tov established certain Minhogim for the Yidden. He sacrificed himself to ensure that they became rooted in all Chassidisher families for generations to come. And with these Minhogim we will greet Moshiach.”

May this happen speedily now! ■

1. See Hayom Yom for 20 Nissan.
2. Gimmel Tammuz 5687, he said this in the name of his father the Rebbe Rashab.
3. Bold formatting was inserted for emphasis and does not appear in the original.
4. Sefer Hasichos 5701 page 128
5. This was heard from one of his Talmidim.
6. Sefer Hasichos 5696 – Winter of 5700 page 112. See there for the full story, in which they were discussing the importance of keeping Minhogim.
7. In the seforim of Reb Levik, the Rebbe’s father, one can find explanations for various Minhogim according to Kabbala. Such as; why we don’t eat ‘*Kitniyis*’ on Pesach.
8. Sefer Hamaamorim 5710 pages 243-244
9. Likkutei Sichos Chelek 2 pages 522-524
10. There are many Pismamim which explain the greatness of Minhogim in general and Minhogei Chassidim in particular, here we have included a general explanation of these ideas, but certainly does not serve as a substitute for them.
11. Sefer Hamaamorim 5709 page 171