




A Cradle of Greatness

NIKOLAYEV AND ITS CHASSIDIM





מוקדש לחיזוק ההתקשרות
לכ"ק אדמו"ר
בקשר עם יום הבהיר י"א ניסן
נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל
וזוגתו מרת חנה שיינא
ומשפחתם חיל' מושקא, לוי יצחק,
רבקה מאריאשא, ברכה,
יקותיאל זוסמאן וגיטה שיחיו
גנזבורג
שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר
לטאראנטא, קאנאדא



With the approach of Yud-Aleph Nissan, we present the story of the Rebbe's birthplace, the city of Nikolayev, Ukraine. It was the Rebbe's hometown for only six years, but it has a storied career in the annals of Chabad history. Rabbanim from the Rebbe's family, famous Chassidische characters, and countless niggunim and stories — many of which were passed down first-hand by the Rebbe himself.

Mume Leah's Intervention

Nikolayev was born out of war.

For centuries, the Russian and Ottoman Empires had been at each other's throats. In a strategic move in 5549* (תקמ"ט), the Russian government established a shipyard to service the navy in the nearby Black Sea. People began to settle near the shipyard, and it soon morphed into a cosmopolitan city which they named Nikolayev.

Many Jews moved to the city as well. Twenty years after its founding, Czar Nikolai I — who took great interest in the city — approved the appointment of a Reb Efraim Zalman to be the city's rav. He personally met with Reb Efraim Zalman and commented that he was “*razumne*,” a shrewd person. The name stuck, and he was henceforth known as Reb Efraim Zalman Razumne.

Not much is known about him. He was a Chossid of the Alter Rebbe, and is best remembered for writing the *hanacha* of the *maamar* the Alter Rebbe delivered at the Shabbos *sheva brachos* of the famed *Zhlobiner chasunah*.¹

The original Jewish community in Nikolayev was short-lived. In 5589* (תקפ"ט), an expulsion order was handed down to the Jewish community which declared the city outside of the Pale of Settlement. Local authorities were able to delay the implementation of the decree for five years, but in 5594* (תקצ"ד) the Jewish community was expelled.

A small group of Jews managed to remain, thanks to an unusual individual known as Mume Leah. She was a Jewish woman married to the non-Jewish Military Governor of Nikolayev, Admiral Aleksey Greig. She had helped set up her nephew, Reb Sholom Yishaya Rafalovitch in the business of ship-building, and he had become quite wealthy. Although

she had left the faith of her ancestors, she maintained a connection with the Jewish community; she was known to send large sums of money to the *Heiliger Ruzhiner*, and became famously known throughout Russia as *Di Mume Leah*. When the Jews of Nikolayev were expelled, she arranged for special permits for Reb Sholom Yishaya and his workers (including Reb Efraim Zalman Razumne who lived in Nikolayev until his passing some 25 years later).²

Under the Guise of Pier Workers

Around the year 5610* (תר"י), a thirty-five-year-old rabbinic personality joined the community in Nikolayev. His name was Harav Avraham Dovid Lavut. A Chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek and close student of Reb Hillel Paritcher, he had previously served as the rav of Romanovka, a nearby settlement. Today he is remembered as the great-great-grandfather of the Rebbe.

“Reb Sender [Reb Sholom Yishaya's son] invited³ Harav Avraham Dovid to be the rav and *moreh tzedek* for the community,” the Rebbe wrote about his ancestor. “Slowly, the Jewish population grew, as Reb Sender obtained residential permits for many Jews, listing them as pier workers. Upon the advice of the rav, those included *talmidei chachamim*, *shochtim*, *melamdin*, and so on.”⁴

The city quickly became a thriving Jewish community once again, with many of its residents of Chabad extraction.

The leadership of the community remained in the Rebbe's family throughout its existence. Harav Avraham David Lavut was succeeded by his grandson, Harav Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, who served as rav for over 40 years. He was succeeded by his son-in-law Harav Shmuel Schneerson, who served as rav until his arrest, exile



THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT. NIKLAYEV IS CENTERED ON THE BOTTOM.

and untimely passing in Turkmenistan in 5704*. [See next section for more about these personalities].

The Heartbeat of Nikolayev

Many famous Chassidim families settled in the area. One well-known individual was Reb Asher “*Nikolayever*,” Reb Asher Grossman — a prominent Chossid of the Rebbe Maharash and Rebbe Rashab. Other notable Chassidim were members of the Althaus and Charitonov families. (Emanuel Harusi, a grandson of the Althaus family and a nephew of Reb Asher, wrote a fascinating account of his memories, and several stories are included in this article).⁵

Uniquely, Nikolayev remained a bastion of Lubavitcher Chassidim even after the passing of the Tzemach Tzedek, when many Chassidim left to follow the Rebbes of Kapust, Niezhin, and Liadi. The rav himself — Reb Meir Shlomo — was a *yoshev* in Lubavitch during the time of the Rebbe Maharash.

The Chassidim of Nikolayev were known for their joy and their *breitkeit*. In a letter to Reb Shmuel Betzalel Althaus, the Rebbe concludes by

wishing him with “...*simcha, kiminahg Nikolayev v'ansheha me'az*, with joy — in the age-old tradition of Nikolayev and its inhabitants...”⁶

Nikolayev also became known as a center of Chabad *neginah*.

“One of my father [Reb Shamshon Charitonov]’s earlier memories,” relates Reb Sholom Charitonov, “was sitting on Reb Meir Shlomo’s lap and being asked to sing a niggun.”

Many of the city’s Chassidim were talented *baalei menagnim*, and they would often bring new or adopted *niggunim* to the Rabbeim in Lubavitch. Over 60 of these beautiful melodies have been preserved to this day. Many of the Rebbe’s *niggunim*, as well, have their source among the Chassidim of Nikolayev.

As in the age-old Chabad tradition, the Chabad Chassidim didn’t just have a regular shul.

“In Nikolayev there were *two* shuls,” the Rebbe said. “Chabad, and *shpitz* Chabad.”⁷

In the memoirs of Emmanuel Harusi, he adds some color to the description. “There was the shul of the Chabad Chassidim,” he writes, “and in addition, a minyan-room named *shpitz* Chabad, which served as the ‘strike force,’ the *palmach* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s dedicated Chassidim.”⁸

Emmanuel also describes a visit to the home of the rav for a special event:

“One fall evening, my uncle⁹ appeared with his carriage and took me to the home of the rav.¹⁰ A large group of Chabad Chassidim had gathered to hear a talk of the rav’s son-in-law, himself a prominent rabbi in a different city and important Chabad leader [referring to Harav Levi Yitzchok, the Rebbe’s father]. I stood at the doorway of the living room. It was packed with bearded men who filled the entire space to capacity. The table and bench in the hallway were piled high with coats and furs. I saw the speaker, an erect, pale young man,

quickly enter the small antechamber and take a drink, and then return to the main hall to begin his address. He fixed his eyes at a distant point in the ceiling, above the audience, and began to speak... I don’t know how long he spoke. I soon got tired, climbed onto a pile of coats, and fell asleep.”

Small But Determined

The decades before World War I brought massive change to the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and many abandoned the faith of their ancestors. New movements — Socialism, Zionism and others — swept the youth of the Jewish communities.

In a letter from one anonymous Tomim living in Nikolayev to his friend in Schedrin, he complains that the local situation was unfortunately no different.

“I have no friends with whom to share my thoughts. The street is engulfed in the darkness of ‘freedom,’ which has spread its wings throughout the youth of our nation...”

“To add salt to injury, the Russo-Japan war has conquered everyone’s attention. Men, women, young and old have abandoned everything to follow the news. Even in the shuls, politics has set its wings around the

oven. Everyone has an opinion about which side is right. One person sides with Japan, which has a better navy and brilliant tactical maneuvers. Another person sides with Russia due to its massive strength. As they speak, the door swings open and someone rushes in — ensuring that he is first to share the latest news, that the Japanese have sunk ships in this or the other fashion...”

However, he does mention one positive element of his stay in the city: “The revelations of Levik” — an apparent reference to the Rebbe’s father — “when he reveals his inner depths to *yechidei segula* on Motzei Shabbos...”¹¹

A core group of Chassidim banded together to preserve Yiddishkeit and Chassidus.

“The Jews of Nikolayev,” writes Emmanuel Harusi, “were careful not to profess their Judaism publicly, and spoke Russian on the street. Soon, the Russian language infiltrated their homes... However, there was always a group of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s dedicated followers — small but determined — who proudly portrayed their Yiddishkeit with their *tzitzis* and *peyos*.”

Following the lead of the Rebbe Rashab in Tomchei Temimim, the



SHUL OF HARAV AVRAHAM DOVID LAVUT.

local Jewish community invested great efforts in establishing a Jewish school that would educate their children in the time-honored Jewish fashion.

The children's magazine of Tomchei Temimim, known as *He'och*, lists many names of Nikolayev children who participated in its challenges and donated to its cause. A number of them even traveled to Lubavitch to enroll in the yeshiva themselves.

War, Revolution and Famine

The years following World War I brought profound misfortune over the city. The Bolsheviks took over, and their policies brought a terrible famine in Ukraine.

"I have a letter from Reb Elya Chaim Althaus of Nikolayev," the Frieddiker Rebbe writes to a supporter from Boston, "where he writes that in Cherson, people are dying daily — *Hashem yishmor* — from the terrible famine, and in his own city, Nikolayev, too. He sent a list of names; it is absolutely shocking..."¹²

Many of the Jews — and Chassidim — moved away from the city, and the Communists made every effort to

stamp out any vestige of Yiddishkeit that remained.

When Harav Meir Shlomo passed away, his son-in-law Harav Shmuel Schneerson remained active in the city, working alongside his older brother Harav Levi Yitzchok in Yekaterinoslav, to keep the flame of Yiddishkeit alive. In a letter to Harav Levi Yitzchok before Pesach, he describes his efforts to arrange for the large-scale baking of matzah before Pesach, and other matters of Yiddishkeit.

"After great efforts, the head of the bakery agreed to speak to me, but he hasn't promised to bake matzah. When I spoke to him about *kashrus* and the necessary preparations, I wasn't pleased with his response. I am deeply afraid that they won't do it properly, and *chas veshalom*, our efforts will be for naught... From the workers union, we have yet to receive a permit [which would allow Jews to abstain from work on Shabbos] but they did promise to send it.

"The situation is not very good," Harav Shmuel writes, "*v'laHashem hayeshuah...*"¹³

Harav Shmuel was soon arrested and exiled for his "criminal" offenses.

The End of an Era

During World War II, thousands of Jews fled the city when the front lines approached the area. When the Nazis entered the city at the end of 5700*, only 7000 Jews remained. Among them was the Rebbe's grandmother, Rebbetzin Rachel, the wife of Reb Meir Shlomo, who was too old to travel and was hidden by her non-Jewish neighbors.¹⁴

The Nazis rounded up all the Jews into a ghetto. Rebbetzin Rachel was betrayed by an anonymous informer and rounded up by the Nazis as well. After a short while, they were marched out of the city and killed, *Hy"d*.¹⁵



KSAV HISKASHRUS TO THE FRIERDIKER REBBE. THE FIRST SIGNATURE IS THAT OF HARAV MEIR SHLOMO YANOVSKY.

A small number of Jews remained in the city throughout the Communist years, but Jewish life was dormant.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain, Yiddishkeit began to come back out into the open. A number of *bochurim* and *shluchim* began to visit the city and rekindle the sparks.

Rabbi Shalom Dovber and Nechama Dina Gotlieb arrived as permanent *Shluchim* in 5756*. Since then, they have established a thriving shul, a *mikveh*, a kindergarten of 50 children and an award-winning school of 100 students. There is also a yeshiva, a *kolel Torah*, organizations for the needy, *Tzivos Hashem* youth groups, women's groups, and activities for all ages.

Once again, to paraphrase an earlier quote, "a group of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's dedicated followers — small but determined — walk the streets proudly portraying their Yiddishkeit with their *tzitzis* and *peyos*."



A FUNDRAISING LETTER FOR YESHIVAS TOMCHEI TMIMIM, SIGNED AND STAMPED BY RABBIS YISRAEL EISENSTEIN AND MEIR SHLOMO YANOVSKY.

Love, Commitment and Self-Sacrifice Force THE RABBANIM OF NIKOLAYEV

THE FATHER OF THE COMMUNITY HARAV AVRAHAM DAVID LAVUT

Harav Avraham David Lavut was born in 5575* (תקע"ה), and grew up in the colony of Romanovka, where his parents settled at the behest of the Mittlerer Rebbe. The Tzemach Tzedek appointed him to lead a *kolel* in his hometown, where he remained until his appointment in Nikolayev.

He lived through the *nesius* of four Rabbeim. He was 13 at the *histalkus* of the Mittlerer Rebbe (although it is unclear if he saw him). He was a dedicated Chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek and the Rebbe Maharash, and in his older years, of the Rebbe Rashab, with whom he corresponded extensively.

When the Rebbe published his *sefer, Kav Naki*, in 5710*, he included a short biographical sketch based on the stories he heard from his mother, Rebbetzin Chana, and newspaper reports from that era.

Harav Avraham David worked hard to improve the physical and spiritual welfare of the Yidden in the entire region, and for many years to come was remembered as the father of the Jewish community. "He breathed new life into the spiritual life of the local community," the Rebbe writes. "He enacted many *takanos* in matters of public behavior and *shmiras hamitzvos*, which were kept long after his passing. Thanks to his efforts, the entire Cherson region became a place of Torah and *mitzvos*."

After his passing, on 18 Iyar 5650* (1890), he was eulogized in the national Jewish newspaper, *Hamelitz*:



WITH THE SIDDUR TORAH OR IN HAND, THE REBBE LEAVES THE SHUL AFTER HATORAS NEDORIM.

29 ELUL 5739; LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 191868

“Nikolayev has lost a great man. He was famous for his broad Torah knowledge and sharp mind, and his excellence in *shaalos u'teshuvos* in *halacha*. His *tzidkus*, uprightness and purity of heart endeared him to his flock, who supported him throughout his 40 years of leadership...

“Being a dedicated and trustworthy individual, he was appointed by the government as the rav of Nikolayev and 40 colonies surrounding it. For his 20 years of service, the government honored him with two medals, one of gold and one of silver: One for his dedicated service, and a second for his personal efforts to help the colonies during an outbreak of illness.

He personally arranged for hospitals, doctors and medication to ensure the wellbeing of the inhabitants.

“The entire community honored him one final time, and accompanied his *aron* all the way to the cemetery with tears and broken hearts...”

Harav Avraham David wrote five *sefarim*, which are all held in high esteem.

- Kav Naki — a guide for rabbanim in *gittin*.
- Nesiv Hachaim — glosses on a popular *halacha sefer* where Harav Avraham David notes all the Alter Rebbe's disagreements.

- Beis Aharon V'hosafos — an index of every *posuk* in Tanach and every place *Chazal* mention it. This *sefer* has the Rebbe Maharash's *haskama*.
- Siddur Torah Or — an edition of the Alter Rebbe's siddur that corrected the errors of previous printings.
- Shaar Hakolel — explaining the Alter Rebbe's *nusach*. The Rebbe said that many of its teachings were actually based on the Rebbe Rashab's responses to Harav Avraham David's questions.



FIRST PRINT OF BEIS AHARON VEHOSEFOS, STAMPED AND SIGNED BY HARAV AVRAHAM DOVID. NOTE THE HASKAMA OF THE REBBE MAHARASH.

EXEMPLARY AHAVAS YISROEL HARAV MEIR SHLOMO YANOVSKY

Harav Meir Shlomo¹⁶ was the grandson of Harav Avraham David Lavut, son of his daughter Beila and Reb Yisroel Leib Yanovksy, who was a *rosh yeshiva* in Romanovka.

He was raised in his grandfather's home, where he learned from him and basked in his presence.¹⁷ Being that Reb Yisroel Leib predeceased Harav Avraham David, the latter asked the community to appoint his grandson, Reb Meir Shlomo, as his successor.

"Harav Meir Shlomo excelled in his Talmudic knowledge," the Rebbe writes in the introduction to *Kav Naki*, "and in his Chassidus and his excellent *midos*. And — like his grandfather — he loved peace and fled from honor, and the community wasted no time to fulfill Reb Avraham David's last request." He served as the *rav* of the city until his passing, on 23 Elul 5693* (תרצ"ג).

As a young man after his marriage, he was a *yoshev* in the court of the Rebbe Maharash for several years. The Rebbe once spoke about the impact these years had on the *yoshevim*, and on his grandfather in particular:



"This period in Lubavitch served as the foundation for the home they built for the rest of their lives. In addition to the value of the *yoshevim* years themselves, it also 'imprinted' their identities afterwards. In our case, the *ba'al hayahrtzeit* [Harav Meir Shlomo]'s entire *rabbanus*, *piskei dinim*, *yiras Shamayim* and so on, were all 'imprinted' with the *hashpa'ah* that he received as a *yoshev* by the Rebbe Maharash."¹⁸

Rebbetzin Chana once shared an anecdote with Reb Berel Junik which exemplified his *yiras Shamayim*.

"My father would sell *esrogim* to supplement his small rabbinic salary. After a buyer would be ready to purchase an *esrog*, my father would encourage him to inspect it again, to ensure that it was truly a *hadar*. With this type of behavior, many *esrogim* would remain unsold, but to him, the most important thing was that the buyer received a *mehuderdike* *esrog*."

Rebbetzin Chana shared a similar anecdote in her memoirs:

"My father truly exemplified, 'What's mine is yours and what's yours is yours.'¹⁹

"I recall that as soon as he would receive his monthly salary, he would immediately make a calculation of how much was needed to support his sisters, brother-in-law and brother. There was always someone who needed assistance. He first deducted what had to be given to them, leaving only a small portion for his own family. We always needed a loan to make it through the month. This was how my father conducted himself throughout all facets of his life."²⁰

Reb Meir Shlomo was also a talented *baal menagen*. Chassidim passed down two beautiful *volochs* that he would sing, and in addition, the Rebbe taught *Rachamana D'anei*, which Rebbetzin Chana identified as his *niggun* as well.

Reb Avraham Dov Yanovsky, the Rebbe's cousin, once shared the following story about Reb Meir Shlomo's *voloch*:

"A message once arrived to Reb Meir Shlomo, that Harav Levi Yizchok in Yekaterinoslav was severely ill.

"Reb Meir Shlomo became very serious. With one foot on a bench, he began to sing his famous *voloch*, in the sweetest, most beautiful form. When he finished, he said earnestly, 'If something is *bashert* to happen to him, I want to be his replacement...'"

[For more about Harav Meir Shlomo, see the section about the Rebbe's childhood in Nikolayev.]

THROUGH THICK AND THIN HARAV SHMUEL SCHNEERSON

Harav Shmuel was the Rebbe's uncle from two sides: he was the brother of the Rebbe's father, and he was married to the Rebbe's mother's sister, Rebbetzin Gittel.

He was well-known for his brilliant and lengthy *divrei Torah*. At every *farbrengen*, he would share a *pilpul* in *nigleh* and then explain it according to Chassidus. One time, a listener challenged him to speak without preparation. Harav Shmuel accepted the challenge, and on the spot delivered a *pilpul* on a randomly selected *sugya*.

Following his marriage to Harav Meir Shlomo's daughter, he became his father-in-law's right hand man. While Harav Meir Shlomo was the spiritual leader of the city, Harav Shmuel ran many of the day-to-day affairs, and was even elected as the 'official' rabbi of the city.

From letters that have come to light in recent years, we learn that Harav Shmuel was very close with his nephew, the Rebbe. He granted the Rebbe his first *semicha*, and he was also the one who shared with him the details of the celebration in



CHERSON STREET, NIKOLAYEV, CIRCA 1860



Yekaterinoslav on the evening of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's wedding. The Rebbe also kept a close connection with Harav Shmuel's son, also named Menachem Mendel, and wrote him letters which were preserved in the Rebbe's *reshimos*.

During the years of Communism, Harav Shmuel fought hard to keep Yiddishkeit alive in an increasingly hostile environment. After the passing of Harav Meir Shlomo, he was the last standing rabbinical figure in the city.

Unfortunately, the end of his life was rife with misfortune. Rebbetzin Gittel passed away at a relatively young age in 5701*, and shortly afterwards, he was arrested by the Communist government for his illegal activities and sentenced to exile in Tomsk, Siberia. He remained there for two years, until he was released due to failing health.

The war was raging and it was no longer possible to return to Nikolayev. He joined his son in Turkmenistan, where he fell ill and passed away on 10 Kislev 5704*.

A Cradle of Greatness The Rebbe in Nikolayev

This article would be wholly incomplete without a section of the Rebbe's youth in Nikolayev. Better

'Conflict' at the Rebbe's Bris

The Rebbe's bris took place at the home of Harav Meir Shlomo on Chol Hamoed Pesach, 18 Nissan, 5662*. It also marked Harav Levi Yitzchak's twenty-fourth birthday, and he spoke about its significance in his address.²¹

Reb Asher Nikolayever, who obviously attended the celebration, declined to partake of the *seudah*, in keeping with his custom to eat only in his own home on Pesach. Harav Meir Shlomo commented, "In truth, I should take you to task. But what can I do to you since I owe you my life?"

He was referring to a story of many years prior.

Typhus was raging when Harav Meir Shlomo fell ill and was taken by authorities to the typhus quarantine camp outside the city, where patients were essentially left to die. Completely isolated, the patients languished in depression and despair. Harav Meir Shlomo watched as the people around him died one after the other, abandoned and alone.

Reb Asher was determined to help. Each day, he would stand beneath a window of the camp and read loudly the 11th chapter of Iggeres Hakodesh, "*Lehaskilcha Bina*." The powerful letter describes how "...no evil descends from above and everything is truly good," and provides the tools to view one's own suffering as a blessing in disguise. He was unsure if Harav Meir Shlomo could even hear him, but Reb Asher returned every day for 30 days to read to him.

Against the odds, Harav Meir Shlomo recovered and returned home. When he was able to meet Reb Asher, he thanked him profusely, saying that the daily reading of Tanya infused him with new strength each day, enabling him to overcome his illness.²²

said: The entire impetus for this article was the Rebbe's childhood in Nikolayev. Nikolayev is the birth city of the Rebbe, and the Rebbe and his family lived there until the Rebbe was six years old when they moved to Yekaterinoslav.

The following is a collection of stories, anecdotes and interesting items about the Rebbe's childhood in Nikolayev:

Rebbetzin Chana Recalls

In her memoirs, Rebbetzin Chana includes the following details about the Rebbe's childhood in Nikolayev:

I recall the years when he grew up, from early childhood onwards: When he turned two, he was able to ask the Four Questions, although his mode of speech was like a child of that age.

When he turned three, he was, first of all, quite simply very beautiful, with long blond locks, which I stored away on leaving home in 1940. They were lost, together with all our other possessions.

When I walked with my son in the street, people would notice him and stop to gaze at him.

During the 1905 pogroms in Russia, we were among a group of women and children who hid in a pharmacy. It was dangerous for us to be discovered. Other children of his age or even older were crying and making noise. But he controlled himself to the extent that not only didn't he cause any problems but also influenced other children to be quiet.

The people there, and the pharmacist, who kept on coming in to check on us, spoke about my son with amazement. He was just three years old at the time.

Before the pogrom, my son would walk around at home calling out [in Russian] "An end to the autocracy!" He had heard people mouthing this slogan, and seemed to understand that Jews, too, were suffering as a result. I

remember how my father, of blessed memory, was fearful that he might be overheard, and told him to stop saying it.

Subsequently, he started his studies in *cheder*, which continued until we commissioned special teachers to teach him at home. What a pleasure that was!

There was something special about him. At every turn, we seemed to find reason to take pride in him. Not that he desired to be noticed. On the contrary, he always tried to avoid that. But his personality just evoked respect.²³

From Cheder, and Even Before...

In a letter, the Rebbe once shared the following sentiment:

From the time I was a child attending *cheder* and even before, the vision of the future redemption began to take form in my imagination; the redemption of the Jewish people from their final exile. A redemption of such magnitude and grandeur, that through it the purpose of the sufferings, harsh decrees, and anguish of exile will be understood.²⁴

Summer Visits

The Rebbe continued to visit Nikolayev with his family even after their move to Yekaterinoslav.

Once, the Rebbe wrote:

"For several years, I spent the final weeks of summer in Nikolayev. I stayed with [my grandmother] and she cared for me."²⁵

Batsheva Althaus, Reb Elya Chaim's daughter, recalled the Rebbe's visits:

"Every Simchas Torah, Rebbetzin Chana would travel with her three children from their home in Dnepropetrovsk to Nikolayev to visit her father, Harav Meir Shlomo.

"She and her children would usually visit us. I remember that people would speak about the fact that



her oldest was different from other children. For example, on Simchas Torah, I remember that he would dance energetically, like the older Chassidim. In fact, even more than them."²⁶

The Rebbe's Picture

Shortly before the Rebbe's *upsherenish*, Rebbetzin Chana arranged for a photograph to be taken. She subsequently sent the picture to a relative in Eretz Yisroel.

By the time she arrived in America, all her belongings had been lost, including the picture. However, one of the *shluchim* to Eretz Yisroel in 5716* visited this relative and brought the picture back upon the Rebbetzin's request.

The Rebbetzin mentioned it to the Rebbe during a visit, and the Rebbe commented, "*Mistame iz dos geven uhn a kappel*—it was probably without a *yarmulke*."



NIKOLAYEV CITY HALL, CIRCA 1906



NIKOLAYEV CITY HALL TODAY

In subsequent publications, a *yarmulke* was added.

Memories of the Zaide

In the Rebbe's Reshimos, he writes that he learned the *niggun* of *Lechatchila Aribet* — which the Rebbe would often ask to sing at farbrengens — from his grandfather.²⁷

On several occasions, the Rebbe recounted the following story about his grandfather:

“My grandfather was a *yoshev* by the Rebbe Maharash for a number of years. Later, he was appointed *rav* in Nikolayev, a city where a number of residents opposed Chassidus at the beginning of his leadership...

“When he told them about the Rebbe Maharash and how he conducted himself, people came to him with a complaint: How is it acceptable?

“The Rebbe Maharash used two gold watches. All of his utensils were made of gold: For snuff he had a golden snuff box, to hold cigarettes he had a golden cigarette case. Everything was made of gold.

“They asked, how is it acceptable?

“We are in *galus*, they continued, and one can use silver and gold for *tzedakah*, so does he really need to insist on using gold utensils even on weekdays? Even when he needed to

Only a Nikolayever

Mrs. Reba Sharfstein shares the following story:

When Rebbetzin Chana came to America, she lived with the Rebbe and Rebbetzin for a short while, and then moved into her own apartment.

My mother, Mrs. Chaya Fraida Kazarnovsky (wife of Reb Shlomo Aharon and daughter of Reb Asher Nikolayever) was very close with Rebbetzin Chana. They had lived in the same courtyard in Nikolayev and they would speak quite often. Living in a new country, the Rebbetzin would often ask her practical questions, and my mother would assist her.

On the first Erev Shabbos in the Rebbetzin's new apartment, she happened to mention to my mother on the phone that this Shabbos will be a bit lonely for her, as she wasn't accustomed to living alone.

Soon after that phone call, my mother finished preparing all that was needed for Shabbos and went to spend Shabbos with Rebbetzin Chana.

When the Rebbe heard this, he smiled and said, “*Nor a Nikolayever vet dos ton*—only a Nikolayever would do that.”

write and sign, it was with a gilded pen and pencil...

“My grandfather listened to these complaints passively, and then responded, ‘Fools! Who do you think gold was created for? For the non-Jews? Or for Jews like me and you? If gold exists, it is for a *tzaddik* to use. Otherwise it wouldn't have reason to exist!’”²⁸

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Strike Force

FAMOUS CHASSIDIM OF NIKOLAYEV

“ASHER DER SHOCHET” REB ASHER GROSSMAN 'NIKOLAYEVER'

“My uncle Asher,” writes Emmanuel Harusi,²⁹ “was a trusted Chossid of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. When the Rebbe sought out a wife for his son, he heard about one young woman, a Schneersohn herself, who lived in Bessarabia. The Rebbe turned to Uncle Asher and asked him to travel there and give his opinion. After his trip, he wrote to the Rebbe about his good impressions, and that was enough for the Rebbe to approve of the match.”³⁰

Reb Asher Nikolayever *“shochet u'bodek”* was one of the most prominent Chassidim of the Rebbe Maharash and the Rebbe Rashab, mentioned many times in their correspondence. Whenever the Rebbe Rashab would reach out to the Nikolayev community, the letter would be addressed to Reb Meir Shlomo and Reb Asher. He was also a *baal menagen*, and two *niggunim* are attributed to him.

Despite his prominence, he was treated in age-old Chassidic tradition. “The *shochet* Reb Asher was called ‘Asher der Shochet,’” the Rebbe once recounted, “without the title ‘Reb.’”³¹

One of his most famous achievements is the printing of a new and improved Tanya, which corrected the countless mistakes that crept into the old editions. (On the last page of the *sefer*, he tried to include a poem in praise of the Rebbe Rashab, but his plan was foiled at the last minute when the Rebbe Rashab heard about it and instructed him to omit it.)

He also made many edits to his personal Likutei Torah, and they served as the blueprint for the Luach Hatikun which the Rebbe published in 5719*.

“Uncle Asher had many qualities,” writes his nephew. “He was straightforward and honest to a fault, with *yiras Shamayim* and unquestioning *temimus*. He carried his Yiddishkeit proudly, like a soldier. He was afraid of no one. If he saw an injustice, he would speak out forcefully, whether it was a Jew or not.

“One time, a government official inspected the slaughterhouse. Apparently, he didn’t receive the bribe he had hoped for, and began to cause trouble for the *shochtim*. Reb Asher approached him with his characteristic self-assurance and spoke to him forcefully. Hearing what he had to say, the official bid a hasty retreat.”³²

[For more about Reb Asher, see *A Chassidisher Derher*, weekly issues 70 & 72].

FLOWING HEART & FLOWING PEN REB ELYA CHAIM ALTHAUS

“One morning, while riding the speed-train on the Charkov-Moscow line, Reb Elya Chaim took out his tallis and tefillin and began to daven. During a stop, an armed soldier walking down the aisle was infuriated by the sight.

“‘Stop this immediately!’ he yelled. ‘This is not a *zhid* synagogue!’

“The soldier straightened his mustache and left the train, stationing himself haughtily on the platform. A minute later, the train began to move. It was summertime, and Ukraine had



an abundance of watermelon. As his window passed the soldier, Reb Elya Chaim grabbed a half a watermelon and sent it flying in his face...”³³

Reb Elya Chaim Althaus was a colorful personality. He was a successful businessman, talented *baal menagen*, gifted writer, and no small jester. But above all stood his dedication and love for the Rabbeim, which earned him the title *yedid beis Rebbe*.

The Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe carried out all sorts of missions through Reb Elya Chaim and his brother, Reb Binyamin. They were major donors to Tomchei Temimim and important figures who championed the interests of the Rabbeim in the broader world.

Perhaps most notable among them is Reb Elya Chaim’s shlichus to effectuate the *shidduch* of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin. Reb Elya Chaim also served as the Rebbe’s personal *shomer* on the wedding day, later writing down his experiences in a powerful and quite visionary way.

* 5719-1959, 5690-1929,



REB PINYE ALTHAUS ACCOMPANIES A DELEGATION OF RABBANIM ON THEIR VISIT TO KFAR CHABAD.

Two other letters describe additional important events: The arrest and release of the Frierdiker Rebbe, and the events of Tishrei 5690* in Riga, when the Rebbe led (or refused to lead) the Chassidim during the Frierdiker Rebbe's travels in the United States.

In Nikolayev too, he served as an important member of the community, having a vast network of contacts among Jews and non-Jews. During difficult times under Communism, Reb Elya Chaim established factories which created many jobs for his fellow Temimim and other Jews as well. When he himself was arrested and threatened with a death sentence, a non-Jew who had previously been a recipient of Reb Elya Chaim's kindness repaid the favor by obtaining his release.

And when the news of the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus* arrived in Nikolayev and the Chassidim gathered to accept the *nesius* of the Frierdiker Rebbe, it was Reb Elya Chaim who wrote, with his warm heart and overflowing quill, a meaningful *ksav hiskashrus* in the name of the entire community.

During the Frierdiker Rebbe's *nesius*, Reb Elya Chaim moved to

Leningrad to be close to the Frierdiker Rebbe. When the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia, he followed a short time later, settling alongside him in Riga.

When the Nazis overran Riga, Reb Elya Chaim was rounded up into the shul and killed along with the entire Jewish community. An accomplished life was tragically cut short.

[For a full description of Reb Elya Chaim's life, see *A Chassidisher Derher* — *Cheshvan 5777* pg. 18, "Of Heart and Quill."]

HOW IS THE REBBE DOING? REB PINYE ALTHAUS

Reb Pinchas Todros, or Reb Pinye, as he was affectionately known, was from a younger generation in the Althaus family. He was the son of Reb Binyamin, Reb Elya Chaim's older brother, a well-known Chossid in his own right.

Reb Pinye shared the following about his childhood in Nikolayev:

Whenever a Chossid would return to Nikolayev from a visit in Lubavitch, local Chassidim would ask him excitedly, "What was the *maamar* delivered by the Rebbe?" Pinye's father, Reb Binyamin, on the other hand,

would first ask, "How is the Rebbe feeling?" or "Whatever happened to the leak in the Rebbe's home? Was that taken care of?" Only afterwards did he inquire about the Chassidus the Rebbe said.

Reb Pinye was of the last generation of Chassidim in Nikolayev. During Communism, he remained at the Frierdiker Rebbe's side, acting as his personal secretary in running the mammoth underground organization.

Aside for his talents in *askanus* and his very much loved persona, Reb Pinye was known for his staunch dedication and love for the Rabbeim. Before the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia, Reb Pinye received a *bracha* to see the Rebbe once again, and indeed, nine years later, he managed to escape the Soviet Union and emigrate to Eretz Yisroel. It took several more years, but for Tishrei 5710*, he was reunited with the Frierdiker Rebbe.

In Eretz Yisroel, he became a leading *askan* and had a hand in establishing all of the Chabad institutions on the Rebbe's behalf. He didn't have an official job title, but at one Sukkos farbrengen the Rebbe declared him his 'officer.' He developed Chabad's relationship with Zalman Shazar, and he had a close friendship with the Rebbe's brother Reb Yisrael Aryeh Leib.

Two months after his untimely passing in 5723*, the Rebbe spoke about him at the Yud-Beis Tammuz farbrengen, with a voice choked with tears:

"One of the people who had a big part in bringing about the release of Yud-Beis Tammuz was Pinye. Considering the close attention he received from the [Frierdiker] Rebbe, we can assume that he is currently participating in a Yud-Beis Tammuz farbrengen..."³⁴

[For a full description of Reb Pinye, see *A Chassidisher Derher* — *Sivan 5775*, pg. 16, "A Friend of Every Jew."]

A TRADITION OF SONG THE CHARITONOV FAMILY

Among the families of Chassidim that have stood out in Chabad memory is the Charitonov family.

Reb Avraham Charitonov was a *yoshev* in Lubavitch during the time of the Tzemach Tzedek and Rebbe Maharash, and later became a *shochet* — and one of the leading Chassidim — in Nikolayev.

During the *nesius* of the Rebbe Rashab, a dispute arose among Chabad Chassidim [the details are not documented] which led the Rebbe Rashab to write specific instructions for the conduct of the Chabad shul. Among the instructions — which include a ban on all *misnagdisher maggidim* — is the rule that “the only *chazanim* for Yomim Noraim should be Reb Avraham *shu”b* and the likes of him” — a testament to his high regard in the Rebbe Rashab’s eyes.³⁵

He was blessed with a profound talent in *neginah*, and a number of his tunes are included in Sefer Haniggunim.

Reb Avraham had many children, all of whom were well-known Chassidim, *talmidim* in the Rebbe Rashab’s Tomchei Temimim. Many of them were *baalei menagnim* as well.

One notable son was Reb Aharon. He composed many famous *niggunim*, such as the Yud-Beis Tammuz Niggun and “*Ashreinu Mah Tov Chelkeinu.*”

Most notable is his composition which the Friediker Rebbe loved deeply — the Beinoni.

Another son was Reb Sholom. He filled his father’s position in Nikolayev, where he would also often *chazzer* Chassidus in shul. The story is told that he received permission from the Rebbe Rashab to add his own explanations in the delivery.

Both brothers — and many others in the family — passed away during the difficult years in the Soviet Union,



REB AVRAHAM CHARITONOV

but Reb Sholom’s son, Reb Shamshon, survived. He was also very musically talented. One of his earliest memories, we said earlier, was Reb Meir Shlomo asking him to sing a *niggun* while sitting on his lap. After years of wandering in underground yeshivos in Russia, Reb Shamshon managed to come to America, where he recorded many of his family’s *niggunim* for posterity. **T**

1. *Tzaddikim Veyididim* chp. 11. The Zhlobiner Chasunah was the famous wedding of the grandchildren of the Alter Rebbe and Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, described in many sources. See “*Di Zhlobiner Chasunah*” by Rabbi Yochanan Gurary,
2. *Oholei Lubavitch* issue 1 pg. 46-7.
3. It is possible that he was first appointed as a *moreh tzedek* and only later as *rav*, following the passing of Reb Efraim Zalman, around 5620. See “*Takanos Chevras Shas Nikolayev,*” *Yagdil Torah* issue 68 pg. 54.
4. Preface to *Kav Naki*.
5. Emanuel Harusi, formerly Novograbelsky, was a nephew of Reb Elya Chaim Althaus. His

memoirs of Nikolayev, published in the Barada Teshura of 3 Teves 5779, paint a fascinating picture of his family and the Chassidim of the city.

6. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14 pg. 332.
7. Shabbos Parshas Tzav, Shushan Purim 5714.
8. *Ish Ivri b’Nikolaev*, published in *Chadashot Ben Ezer*.
9. Reb Elya Chaim Althaus.
10. Reb Meir Shlomo.
11. *Yagdil Torah* Year 5 pg. 245
12. *Igros Kodesh Admur Harayatz, volume 14* pg. 202.
13. *Archiyon Levi Yitzchak* pg. 43.
14. See *Haktzarim — Harabaniot* pg. 263.
15. *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, pg. 1613
16. All the unsourced details are from Teshurah Geisinsky, 23 Elul 5768.
17. From the Rebbe’s *hakdama* to *Kav Naki*. It was previously assumed that he moved into his grandfather’s home after his father’s passing, but that has proven to be incorrect. His father passed away many years after his marriage. See *Kfar Chabad* issue 956.
18. Shabbos Nitzavim-Vayelech 5746, *Toras Menachem Hisvaaduyos* 5746 vol. 4 pg. 438.
19. *Pirkei Avos* Perek Hei.
20. *Rebbetzin Chana’s* memoirs number 29.
21. *Early Years* pg. 22.
22. The account of Reb Mendel Futerfas. Based on chabad.org/4678123.
23. *Rebbetzin Chana’s* Memoirs, number 33.
24. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 12 pg. 414. *Early Years* pg. 26.
25. *Sefer Hasichos* 5750 vol. 1 pg. 63. *Early Years* pg. 60
26. *Early Years* pg. 60
27. *Reshimos choveres* 14.
28. *Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan* 5742. *Ashreinu Audio*, Sich 3, minute 35:17.
29. *Barada Teshura*, 3 Teves 5779, pg. 60. Reb Asher’s sister was Riva Althaus, the matriarch of the Althaus family.
30. This refers to the *shidduch* of the Friediker Rebbe with *Rebbetzin Nechama Dinah*, who was born in Kishinev. See *Igros Kodesh Admur Harashab*, letters 741 and 747.
31. *Toras Menachem* 5714 vol. 1 pg. 250.
32. All unsourced details can be found in *Toldos Chabad B’Rusia Hatsaris*, pg. 212.
33. *Barada Teshura*, 3 Teves 5779, pg. 78.
34. *Toras Menachem* vol. 37 p. 157.
35. *Igros Kodesh Admur Harashab* vol. 1 pg. 277.