

# L'Chatchila Ariber!

*The Rebbe Maharash*

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ONE OF THE MEGILOS WRITTEN BY THE REBBE MAHARASH

**I**n the Rebbe's *sichos*, a very common refrain is the need to accomplish one's *avoda* in a manner of "*Lechatchilah Aribet*." This line, the Rebbe often explained, originates from the Rebbe Maharash who personified this *sefer avoda*.

The Rebbe often spoke about the Rebbe Maharash and often asked to sing his *niggun*. In fact, the Rebbe personally printed the Rebbe Maharash's biography, *Sefer Hatoldos Admur Maharash* – the only Rebbe for which he did so.

Although comparing and evaluating the conduct of a Rebbe is beyond our purview, Chassidim have often noted the many similarities between the style of the Rebbe and the Rebbe Maharash.

In honor of Beis Iyar, "*Tiferes Shebiferefes*," the birthday of the Rebbe Maharash, A *Chassidisher Derher* presents the following overview and description of his *nesius*.

## Ushering In A New Era

“Hashem desired the souls of the *tzaddikim*, my father the Rebbe, on Wednesday evening, 13 Nissan 5626\* (תרכ"ו). The *aron kodesh*, the light of the Jewish nation, was taken into captivity. May the dwellers of the dust rise and sing, and him among them, and share with us the wonders of Hashem’s Torah...”

With these words, the Rebbe Maharash inscribed the news of the Tzemach Tzedek’s *histalkus* on the *pinkas* of the *chevra kadisha* of Lubavitch. After close to 40 years, the sun had set on the *nesius* of the Tzemach Tzedek. The Rebbe Maharash, his youngest son, was chosen to be his successor.

The choice wasn’t a simple one.

The Rebbe Maharash was young, not yet 32 years old. He had always kept a low profile, while his five older brothers were each well-known and highly esteemed among Chassidim. One brother was known for his vast knowledge of *nigleh*, another for his deep understanding of Chassidus, and yet another for his passionate and inspiring davening. Indeed, in the years following the Tzemach Tzedek’s passing, the brothers moved to other towns where they led Chassidim of their own.

The Rebbe Maharash, on the other hand, was unpretentious in spiritual matters. He didn’t profess his knowledge of *nigleh* or Chassidus during his early life, and even when he became a Rebbe and began speaking Chassidus, he rarely spoke *nigleh*. His davening appeared to people as simple, without the external trappings of excitement.

During a discussion after the Tzemach Tzedek’s passing, the Rebbe Maharash presented his thoughts on a certain matter according to *halacha*, and his brother Reb Yisroel Noach—

famous for his brilliance in *nigleh*—expressed his shock and amazement.

“Where did you get this? You are so young!” he exclaimed.

“You are old in your own years,” the Rebbe Maharash responded. “But I am old with father’s years.”<sup>1</sup>

As a youngster, the Rebbe Maharash was known to be somewhat mischievous. Even as an adult, the Rebbe writes in *Reshimas Hayoman*,<sup>2</sup> he did not conduct himself like his brothers. The Tzemach Tzedek’s elder sons would entertain the visitors to Lubavitch and review their father’s Chassidus in public, but the Rebbe Maharash would not speak Chassidus publicly, and was known to be a *freilicher* person.

However, in the last years of his life, the Tzemach Tzedek had instructed all of his sons to deliver *maamarim*, and the Rebbe Maharash had begun to do so.<sup>3</sup> More and more, Chassidim began to acquaint themselves with ‘the Rebbe’s youngest son.’ And before his passing, the Tzemach Tzedek wrote a note to the Chassidim saying, “You should listen to him [referring to the Rebbe Maharash] just as you listened to me.”

After the *histalkus*, there were various discussions and disagreements between the Tzemach Tzedek’s sons that were brought before a *beis din* of three highly esteemed Chassidim. At the end, the Rebbe Maharash was chosen to be his father’s *memaleh makom* to sit on his seat in the town of Lubavitch.<sup>4</sup>

News did not travel fast in those days. On 8 Av, one Chossid in the town of Pleshtzenitz wrote the following in a letter to his friend, Reb Avraham Chaim Rosenbaum:<sup>5</sup>

“We haven’t heard much, but last week, we received a letter from Reb Meir Amstzizer... He writes that he met Reb Yosef Kremenchuker arriving from Lubavitch, and he showed him *tzetzlach* from the Rebbe... from those notes it is very clear that the Maharash<sup>6</sup> should be the Rebbe.

“Reb Yosef related that one individual came to the Maharash and complained that he was completely destitute. The Maharash attributed his problem to a failing in his *avodas Hashem* based on a certain *possuk*,<sup>7</sup> and ultimately, the person admitted to that failing.”



ARTIST'S SKETCH OF LUBAVITCH

“After receiving his letter, we felt encouraged and enthused. We said *lchaim*; may Hashem give us the merit to follow the correct path.

“Most of the *olam* is following the Maharash. They are recounting amazing things...”<sup>8</sup>

## A Close Connection

As a child, the Rebbe Maharash would spend a lot of time with his father, the Tzemach Tzedek. Aside from his regular studies in *cheder* and with private tutors, the Tzemach Tzedek personally taught him a variety of subjects, such as Kesuvim and Tanya, and when he grew older, they learned Kabbalah and Chakirah for hours at a time.

By the time he was seven or eight years old, he was fluent in the entire Chumash and much of Nach, and was learning Gemara with Tosfos regularly. He started listening to his father’s Chassidus, and soon began transcribing his own *hanachos*.

He also had the luxury of talented older brothers: When he was 10 years old, his brother Reb Yisroel Noach would learn *nigleh* with him, and his brother Reb Boruch Sholom taught him how the Alter Rebbe would *lein* the Torah.

He was first married at a young age, only 14 years old, to Sterna, the daughter of his brother Reb Chaim Shneur Zalman, but she fell ill and passed away only three months after the wedding. To comfort the Rebbe Maharash, the Tzemach Tzedek gave him a room adjacent to his own, allowing him to enter his room at any time. During the years that followed, he spent even more time with the Tzemach Tzedek. His second marriage, to Rebbetzin Rivka (a granddaughter of the Mittler Rebbe), was in 5609\* or 5610\*, some three years later.<sup>9</sup>

He would also spend time with the elder Chassidim. “Even as a child,” he



THE ROUND TABLE MADE BY THE REBBE MAHARASH

related to his son, the Rebbe Rashab, “I found favor in the eyes of the senior Chassidim, and they would share their stories with me.”<sup>10</sup>

One elder Chossid, Reb Yitzchak Aizik of Vitebsk, had been one of the earliest Chassidim of the Alter Rebbe. He paid close attention to the Rebbe Maharash and shared with him his many memories of the previous Rabbeim. Later, this same Chossid gave the Rebbe Maharash *semicha*.

## A Smile of a Rebbe

Throughout his life, the Rebbe Maharash suffered from a painful and debilitating illness. Yet, despite his suffering, he always kept an upbeat appearance and never displayed his difficulties.

“I never met anyone that suffered as much as my father,” the Rebbe Rashab once expressed himself, “and yet he always had a smile on his face.” A beautiful smile, the Rebbe Rashab noted, that had G-dly qualities to it; a smile that only a Rebbe has.<sup>11</sup>

Several interesting artifacts remain from the Rebbe Maharash, such as a beautifully written Megillah and a round table that sits in the Rebbe’s room. The doctors instructed him

to engage in physical activity, and he therefore made those items. In the town of Lubavitch, there was also a large candelabra which was the Rebbe Maharash’s handiwork. It would be set up each year at the bochorim’s *seder*, but it was lost over the years.

The Rebbe Maharash was extremely punctual. Every day had a specific schedule, and he would often be after Shacharis by eight in the morning.

He took two trips to the fields each day. During those trips, Chassidim would sneak into his room and copy manuscripts of Chassidus, while posting a guard at the door to warn them of his return. Among those Chassidim would also be his own wife, Rebbetzin Rivkah. The Rebbe once noted that the Rebbe Maharash definitely realized that people were copying his *ksavim*, but instead of allowing them to copy them legitimately, he preferred it to be in secrecy. “Because certain things need to be undertaken with trickery, like the *brachos* of Eisav by Yaakov...”<sup>12</sup>

## A Different Hanhaga

President Zalman Shazar once sent a collection of manuscripts of the Rabbeim to a graphologist to analyze

## Numbers

The Rebbe Maharash loved numbers and calculations. Reb Abba Person once asked him how many times we bang our chest during *Al Chet* on Yom Kippur, and from his response, they discovered that you are supposed to beat your chest also in the words “*slach lanu, mechal lanu...*”

(*Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 206. *Sefer Hasichos* 5705 pg. 9.)

## Childhood Stories, Recounted by the Rebbe No Surprise

In *Reshimas Hayoman*, the Rebbe writes the following two stories about the childhood of the Rebbe Maharash:

The Rebbe Maharash was born on 2 Iyar 5693\* (א"תקצ"ג), the *sefirah* of *Tiferes Sheb'Tiferes*.

When he was seven years old, the Tzemach Tzedek once tested him on his learning, and he did very well. His teacher was impressed, and said to the Tzemach Tzedek, “Ah, what do you say? He’s doing well!”

The Tzemach Tzedek responded, “Why are you surprised that *Tiferes Sheb'Tiferes* is doing well?”

When he was 10 years old, he learned in a group of four children: The Rebbe Maharash, and his nephews Reb Shlomo Zalman—son of Maharil—of Kapust, and another two grandchildren of the Tzemach Tzedek.

The Tzemach Tzedek once came in to test them, and the Rebbe Maharash posed a question. His friends answered the question, but he refuted their answer. The Tzemach Tzedek answered the question, but the Rebbe Maharash asked a question on his answer.

The Tzemach Tzedek then said, “When you get older...”

“When I get older, I will ask better questions,” the Rebbe Maharash replied.

The Tzemach Tzedek remarked, “It wasn’t for naught that his *bris* was on *Tiferes Sheb'Netzach*.”

(*Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 283.)



the handwriting. When the Rebbe read her conclusions about the Rebbe Maharash, he wrote his comments to Mr. Shazar, noting where the graphologist was correct, and where she had erred:

“I was impressed that in several points she hit the mark, especially where she writes that the author clearly suffered during his lifetime both physically and spiritually, and those experiences strengthened him.

We know from family tradition that he suffered terribly from a young age, but was nevertheless always seen with a smile on his face, receiving people graciously.”

The Rebbe goes on that he was surprised when a most characteristic feature of the Rebbe Maharash was not mentioned:

“From the very beginning of his leadership, the style of his relationships [with Chassidim] was

clearly set out: when asked for his opinion, he would reply with a few short words. This was in contrast to the Rebbes before and after him, who would often explain their directives; along with their regal persona, there were also elements of closeness [with their Chassidim].”

The Rebbe writes a similar point in *Reshimas Hayoman*:

“As a Rebbe,” the Rebbe writes, “he behaved *b’romemus* [elevated



ZITSHREI 5737, LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 205043

THE REBBE LEAVES THE SUKKA AFTER A LEKACH DISTRIBUTION WITH THE REBBE MAHARASH'S HEMSHECH "וככה תרל"ז" IN HAND. THE REBBE WAS OFTEN SEEN LEARNING THE REBBE MAHARASH'S MAMARIM ON SUKKOS.

and removed] even with the elder Chassidim, and even with his sons. The Tzemach Tzedek was accustomed to consulting with his sons and with his daughter Devorah Leah, but the Rebbe Maharash did not do so.

“However, there were instances when he had long conversations with people in *yechidus*. There were also occasions that he went out to the courtyard and conversed with the townspeople.”<sup>13</sup>

Another unique characteristic of the Rebbe Maharash's leadership was the deep connection the Chassidim felt to him. All his Chassidim were fiercely dedicated. Regardless of their status, they had a strong feeling of *hiskashrus*, in contrast to the Chassidim of his brothers and even the Chassidim of his father, the Tzemach Tzedek. His Chassidim would treasure every word that he uttered; every Chossid, learned or not, was able to repeat segments of

a *maamar* that he had heard during his visit to Lubavitch.

Some Chassidim were great *baalei avoda* and *haskalah*, while others were simple *baalei batim* or villagers (some of whom the Rebbe Maharash would call, “My *baalei ahavah* and *yirah*”). Yet the Chassidim he taught was always relevant to all. Simpletons would be able to understand the basic message, while the learned Chassidim would see



THE MATZEVOS OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK AND THE REBBE MAHARASH AS THEY WERE FOUND IN 1944\*, WHEN REB BEREL LEVY TRAVELED THROUGH SOVIET RUSSIA ATTENDING TO THE KEVORIM OF THE REBBEIM.



THE OHEL OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK AND THE REBBE MAHARASH AS IT LOOKS TODAY. A SIGN EXPLAINS THAT THE PLACEMENT OF THE NEW MATZEVOS, WITH THE REBBE MAHARASH TO THE LEFT, WAS BASED ON ORAL TRADITION, WHILE THE ORIGINAL STONES WERE LEFT AS THEY WERE FOUND WITH THE REBBE MAHARASH ON THE RIGHT.

its profound depth—which even they often had difficulty understanding.

When the Frierdiker Rebbe was 12 years old, he witnessed Reb Zalman Zlatopolsky and Reb Yehuda Leib Hoffman arguing over the meaning of a *maamar* the Rebbe Maharash delivered 15 years earlier. “They spoke with such excitement,” the Frierdiker

Rebbe described, “it was as if they had heard the *maamar* just moments earlier.”<sup>14</sup>

### Ganging Up With the Capitalists

The *nesius* of the Rebbe Maharash coincided with one of the most difficult periods for Yidden in Czarist

Russia. The government constantly created new decrees to hamper Jewish movement and to make life difficult for the Jewish communities. In the years before the Rebbe Maharash’s passing, a wave of state-sponsored pogroms spread throughout Russia, wreaking terrible destruction. Indeed, in the decades that followed, hundreds of thousands of Jews fled Eastern Europe and settled in the United States and elsewhere.

Throughout his life, the Rebbe Maharash worked tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of the Jewish people. His communal activism began long before his *nesius*. When the Tzemach Tzedek decided to cease his attendance at the rabbinic conferences called by the government, he sent the Rebbe Maharash—then in his early twenties—in his stead.

He would make frequent trips to S. Petersburg to meet with government officials. He would also travel abroad, to Italy, Germany and France to meet with wealthy Jewish bankers. He developed an interesting tactic: He would ask those Jews to withhold loans to the Czar until he improved the condition of the Jews.

Such endeavors were dangerous, and his trips were always presented as visits to doctors and spa towns. Indeed, when the Russian government heard about his strategy, they were furious. In one conversation with the Minister of Interior, things came to a head when the Rebbe Maharash calmly informed him that the Jewish bankers had written to Lubavitch asking whether to approve loans to the Russians.

“What did you reply?” the minister asked.

“I haven’t answered yet,” the Rebbe Maharash said. “I’m waiting for the government’s response...”

The minister grew angry. “Lubavitcher Rebbe! Are you issuing a threat to the Russian government?”

“You don’t need to see it as a threat, but you should not take the matter lightly. Many non-Jewish capitalists will join them, because the barbarism in this country is an offense to all humanity.”

The minister turned the conversation to the government’s greatest fear—and therefore, the greatest possible offense:

“Will the Lubavitcher Rebbe ignite a revolution together with these capitalists?”

The Rebbe Maharash didn’t take the bait.

“The government will bring this revolution upon itself, as a result of its terrible neglect of the country...”<sup>15</sup>

## Higher than Measure

In our generation, one of the most famous attributes of the Rebbe Maharash is his renowned statement, “*Lechatchilah Aribet*.”

די וועלט זאגט, אז מ'קען ניט ארונטער, גייט מען אריבער. און איך זאג אז לכתחילה אריבער—People say that if you cannot go under, go over. I say, from the outset, go over.”

The Rebbe repeated this idea countless times throughout the *nesius*, drawing many lessons for a Chossid’s everyday life. During one *farbrengen*, the Rebbe noted how this theme—the idea of behaving higher than *medidah* and *hagbala*—was apparent in many aspects of the Rebbe Maharash’s *nesius*.

“It is apparent in his Chassidus,” the Rebbe explained. “Each *maamar* is a microcosm of many *maamarim*, containing a vast amount of ideas. However, they are written concisely; the Rebbe Rashab often writes at length to explain just one line of his father’s *maamarim*.<sup>16</sup>

“It is also apparent in his conduct: The Frierdiker Rebbe famously said that the Rebbe Maharash had many *Baal Shem’ske* stories. There were many stories of *baalei teshuva* he made as well.

## The Story the Rebbe Chose for Basi Legani

In the Rebbe’s first *maamar*, Basi Legani, he recounted stories about the *ahavas Yisroel* of the Rabbeim. For the Rebbe Maharash, the Rebbe shared the following:

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe recounted a story of the Rebbe Maharash several times.

The Rebbe Maharash was in a healing-spa, and he made a special trip to Paris, spending a significant period of time there, in order to meet an unsuspecting young man in a hotel.

He went over to him and said, “Young man, *yayin nesech* defiles the *neshamah*.”

This young man had been playing cards.

The Rebbe Maharash returned to his room, and the young man found no rest until he visited him. Eventually, he raised a G-d-fearing, observant family.

It is well known that time was very precious to the Rebbe Maharash. His recital of *maamarim* was brief; the [Frierdiker] Rebbe would relate that at times, he would have concluded davening by eight in the morning.

Nonetheless, he traveled to a distant city for the sake of one young Jew who knew nothing about Yiddishkeit, who had no apparent connection to the Rebbe Maharash.

[While relating the story, the Rebbe noted that all the details of the full story are already printed and available. See *Sefer Hasichos* 5705 pg. 30-31.]

(*Ashreinu Audio, Yud Shevat 5711, Maamar, min. 25:00.*)

“And likewise in his personal life: His home and furnishings were all very beautiful. This was the case even during the lifetime of the Tzemach Tzedek and with his support — even while the Tzemach Tzedek himself lived very simply.”<sup>17</sup>

## Maamarim of Lechatchilah Aribet

The Rebbe Maharash would deliver a *maamar* each week, either before Kabbalas Shabbos or on Shabbos morning, and would also transcribe his words in writing. In the early years of the Rebbe’s *nesius*, the Rebbe wanted the publication of the Rebbe Maharash’s Chassidus done as quickly as possible, so *sefarim* were published as photocopies of the handwriting of Reb Shmuel, the copyist of Lubavitch. Over the years, those *sefarim* were

typed and redone, and today there is a large set of his *maamarim* which the Rebbe named,

“Likutei Torah — Toras Shmuel.”

To give us a glimpse into the *maamarim* of the Rebbe Maharash, we turned to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Gourarie, the *meshpia* of Yeshivas Lubavitch Detroit:

“As is true with every Rebbe,” says Rabbi Gourarie, “the *maamarim* of the Rebbe Maharash have their own unique style. On one hand, his *maamarim* are relatively short and quite simple. He cites many *maamarei Chazal* and *Midrashim* and explains them according to Chassidus, and doesn’t engage in lengthy explanations as often as the Rebbe Rashab and Mitteler Rebbe do.

“At face value, Chassidim would say, it seemed that he was ‘talking



## What Did He Look Like?

An age-old question among Chassidim has always been whether there is a photo or painting of the Rebbe Maharash.

No known image exists. Various sketches and paintings have been attributed to him, but none have been proven as authentic.

However, the Rebbe shared the following two stories—one about how he looked, and the second about the impact his image made—that can give us a small taste of his presence.

## When a Chossid Fainted

The Frierdiker Rebbe looked very much like his grandfather, the Rebbe Maharash. To the extent that when he came to Eretz Yisrael during his famous visit, decades after the passing of the Rebbe Maharash — there were Chassidim in Eretz Yisrael who had seen the Rebbe Maharash, and when one of them entered for a *yechidus* with the Frierdiker Rebbe he immediately fainted.

He was asked, “Why did you faint?”

He responded, “He looks just like the Rebbe Maharash!” He had fainted from [the shock of] the sight of the Rebbe Maharash — whom he hadn’t seen for many decades.

*(12 Tammuz 5745. Ashreinu Audio, sicha 4 min. 3:33. The Rebbe often cried while relating this story.)*

## A Look of Reverence

People felt in awe of the Rebbe Maharash. It was surprising, because he always had a smile on his face. Even though he suffered terribly [the Frierdiker Rebbe said that it is difficult to imagine how much he suffered], he still always had a smile. Even during the lifetime of his father, the Tzemach Tzedek, when he was less formal than his brothers, people were nevertheless very reverential in his presence. It wasn’t because of something that he did; it was automatic.

This was also the case with non-Jews. He once arrived in a town and the village elders came to greet him with bread and salt, but when they beheld his holy image, they all ran away.

*(Toras Menachem 5712 vol. 1 pg. 23.)*



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to his crowd.' The majority of his Chassidim were simple people, and the Rebbe Maharash ensured that his Chassidus would always have a clear message which they could understand.

"On the other hand, a closer look at the *maamarim* reveals many amazing *chiddushim* in Chassidus. The Rebbe Rashab once said that he needed to prepare a *hemshech* for the upcoming Rosh Hashanah, and he based it all on a few lines in a *maamar* of his father.

"These profound *chiddushim* are not presented as *chiddushim*, nor are they explained at length. In a very '*Lechatchila Aribet*' style, the Rebbe Maharash seems to 'drop' a thought of Chassidus on the learner, leaving him to figure it out on his own.

"In 5640\* (ת"ר"ם), Reb Shlomo Zalman of Kapust and the Rebbe Maharash had a famous argument whether the אותיות הרשימו were affected by the צמצום [the full argument is beyond the scope of this article]. The Rebbe Maharash held that they were not affected. But what is interesting to note is that the Rebbe Maharash's only writing regarding the entire protracted argument is in a small segment of a *maamar*, '*Matzah zu*,' that year. It was the Rebbe Rashab who later discussed it and explained it at great length.

"The Rebbe once noted an interesting fact about the *hemshechim* of the Rebbe Maharash: Other Rabbeim commonly began their *hemshechim* on Rosh Hashanah, but the Rebbe Maharash often begins on Pesach.

"The key to understanding this point lies in the unique *avoda* of Tishrei vs. Nissan. During Tishrei, a person strives with his own *avoda*, but on Pesach, we receive revelations from above. The Rebbe Maharash's *hemshechim* begin on Pesach for a very simple reason, the Rebbe said. Because he personified '*Lechatchila Aribet*.'"

## The Niggun of Lechatchila Aribet

The Rebbe Maharash's *niggun*, which the Rebbe often sang at *farbrengens*, is famously known as '*Lechatchila Aribet*.' This name was actually given by the Rebbe; previously, it was more commonly known as "*Eintz, tzvei, drei, fir*," or "*Niggun ein sof*."

In *Reshimos* (*Choveres* 14), the Rebbe notes that he learned the song from his grandfather, Reb Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, who had been a *yoshev* by the Rebbe Maharash.

Regarding the source of the tune, the Rebbe Maharash related that he once saw musical notes written in the back of a Kabbalah sefer called *Hon Ashir*, and those notes inspired the tune of his *niggun*.

(*Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 43.)

The image displays ten staves of handwritten musical notation in G-clef, treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are written in Hebrew below each staff. The lyrics are:
   
1. שִׁי בִי נִעְמֵס כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
2. כֹּחַ כֹּחַ כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ אִשְׁטֵל דְּדִי חַס אֵל
   
3. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
4. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
5. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
6. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
7. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
8. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
9. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ
   
10. דַּחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ וְדַחַשׁוּב כֹּחַ

THE NOTES FROM HON ASHIR

# A Firsthand Account

In the early years of his *nesius*, the Rebbe encouraged many elder Chassidim to transcribe their memories from the Rabbeim and Chassidim of old. Even people who no longer considered themselves Chassidim were requested to send in—and publish—their memoirs.

One such request went to Mr. Tzvi Har-Shefer, formerly Lokshin, who grew up in the town of Lubavitch during the Rebbe Maharash's *nesius*.

"I would be very interested to see your memoirs," the Rebbe wrote to him, "because I am collecting historical material about Lubavitch, and especially regarding that era—the times of the Rebbe Maharash and the beginning of the Rebbe Rashab—of which there are no accounts."<sup>18</sup>

Almost no firsthand accounts remain of the Rebbe Maharash. In those days, Chassidim considered it unbecoming to transcribe one's personal life story; it was viewed as a *maskilish* thing to do. By the time the Friediker Rebbe and Rebbe encouraged Chassidim to write their memories, almost no Chassidim who recalled the Rebbe Maharash were alive. The Rebbe's letter to Mr. Har-Shefer was written over 70 years after the Rebbe Maharash's *histalkus*.

Mr. Har-Shefer wrote one such article about his memories (in 5714\*, apparently before the Rebbe's letter).

Remarkably, the vast majority of biographical details and descriptions in his article concur with the Friediker Rebbe's *sichos* and with the Rebbe's Reshimas Hayoman.

In the following segment, we bring a selection of his descriptions.<sup>19</sup>

## My Memories of Lubavitch

Like most remote Russian towns, Lubavitch did not have a train station or post office. However, that was where the similarities ended. Our town had a constant stream of visitors who came to consult with the Rebbe and they brought life and excitement to the Rebbe's courtyard and all the surrounding streets.

The *chatzer* was at the center of the town and it was surrounded by many hostels. It had a large hall, which would be opened for special occasions like Rosh Hashanah or a *chasunah* in the Rebbe's family. Nearby was the regular, smaller *zal*, and the Rebbe's home.

Many years have since passed, but I still remember his noble appearance. He was taller than average, with a wide forehead, a red beard, and piercing eyes that expressed wit and wisdom. He had a broad build that added to his regal image.

The Rebbe was blessed with many talents: a phenomenal memory, an incisive mind, and a quick grasp of

any subject. He was well-aware of public affairs; he corresponded with his wealthy Chassidim and whenever a new *gezeirah* appeared on the horizon, he knew about it immediately.

The [Rebbe] Maharash would speak Chassidus on Shabbos morning,<sup>20</sup> in the *zal* adjacent to his home. A table would be set up near his door, and the outer door of the *zal* would be shut; the *shamash* would stand guard, not allowing anyone to enter or leave. At the assigned moment, the entire hall would fall silent, and everyone would rise and crowd closer to the Rebbe's place. The Rebbe would sit on a chair, surrounded by his family members and the senior Chassidim. Silence reigned in the room as everybody held their breath and focused on the Rebbe's words. He would begin quietly, but slowly his voice would rise and cut through the room. He would become more and more animated, as everyone focused intently. At the height of his excitement, he would often repeat these words of Tehillim and explain them:

“מי לי בשמים ועמך לא חפצתי בארץ—I don't need your *Gan Eden Ha'elyon* or *Gan Eden Hatachton*, rather, כלה שארי כל הולכי—I want You, and You alone...”

During Yomim Tovim, the Chassidim would demand an addition between Mincha and Maariv. The Chassidim—especially the young

ones—would sit near the Rebbe’s door, singing the Alter Rebbe’s niggun with passion. If they weren’t answered immediately, they would sing it again and again, until the Rebbe was ‘forced’ to give in and come out to the Chassidim, despite his illness.

Each day, the Rebbe would receive the many guests who came for his guidance and blessing. Many *rabbanim* too, would be among the visitors, twirling their *payos* and waiting nervously in line for the moment that Levik the Gabai would grant them entry.

It was very tiring work. The Rebbe would travel outside the city afterwards, to refresh himself and spend time meditating with his own thoughts.

The Rebbe would personally read the *haftarah*. He would daven in his room near the shul, and would enter the shul to read *maftir* in his special voice.

On Rosh Hashanah, he would blow the shofar. The room would be very packed. The entire crowd would become like one large body, with only heads dividing between them. Everyone stood with the fear of the *Yom Hadin*; the room would fall silent, and then the Rebbe’s voice would pierce the air: “*Min Hameitzar...*”

For *tashlich*, all the guests would accompany the Rebbe with a joyous

song. The young Chassidim would create a large circle around the Rebbe, his family and the elder Chassidim.

Another special moment was the drawing of *mayim shelanu*. Amid great singing and joy, we would go down to the river. The Rebbe himself would lower the bucket into the water. The next day, the Rebbe would personally mix the dough and hand out pieces to be rolled into matzah. In the evening, many Lubavitch townspeople would hurry to finish their *seder*, to watch the Rebbe conduct his *seder* with his family.

One of the greatest moments was Yud-Tes Kislev. The Rebbe would retell the story in all its detail, about the *machlokes* with the *misnagdim*, the Alter Rebbe’s arrest and liberation, and the miracles that occurred throughout. The Chassidim would say *l’chaim* and even grab *shirayim*.

In his final year, the Rebbe became ill, being only 48 years old. Prominent doctors were called to operate, to no avail, and he became increasingly weak. Tehillim was recited in all of the shuls, and the *kivrei tzaddikim* were visited. That Rosh Hashanah, Chassidim were terribly dejected when someone else blew shofar instead of the Rebbe.

On the evening of 13 Tishrei, we heard that the situation was very bad, and the next day he passed away. His

*aron* was made from the table upon which he would say Chassidus. The *levaya* was very large; no resident of Lubavitch was absent, and Chassidim even managed to come from nearby villages. They broke a wall of the Ohel, and interred him near his father, the Tzemach Tzedek. **T**

1. *Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 37
2. *Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 209.
3. *Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 283.
4. *Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 284. For more about this period, see *Derher Shevat* 5779 pg. 22, “Memaleh Mekomo.”
5. For more about this Chossid, see *Derher Shevat* 5779 pg. 30, “The Life of a Chossid.”
6. The sons of the Tzemach Tzedek were already known by their acronyms during the Tzemach Tzedek’s lifetime.
7. Mishlei 6:26.
8. *Toldos Chabad B’Rusia HaTsaris*, pg. 194.
9. *Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 249.
10. *Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 26.
11. *Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 319.
12. *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 2 pg. 514-515.
13. *Reshimas Hayoman* pg. 209 and pg. 272
14. *Sefer Hatoldos Admur Maharash* pg. 83-84.
15. *Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 60
16. See *Heichal HaBaal Shem Tov*, issue #40, pg. 134.
17. 13 Tishrei 5739, *Sichos Kodesh* 5739 vol. 1 pg. 65-68
18. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 12 pg. 38.
19. The article was printed in *Haavar*, issue 2. Republished in *Teshura Barada-Guberg* 5779.
20. The Chassidus on Shabbos morning was only during the summer months. See *Sefer Hatoldos* pg. 43