



# A Chossid for Generations

REB SHMUEL DOVBER (BORISOVER) LIPKIN

*The Friediker Rebbe writes:*

*“The first time I saw the famed Chossid, Reb Shmuel DovBer from Borisov, the renowned maskil and outstanding oved, was in the summer of 5647, when I was only seven years old. My father (the Rebbe Rashab) would refer to him as the Rashda”m, an acronym for Reb Shmuel DovBer Miborisov.*

*“I still remember his appearance, manner and voice. When I met him, his hair and beard had already turned white and his appearance bespoke a man of eminence and distinction. He had large brown eyes that radiated wisdom and character, and when he spoke, in his usual guttural voice, he would stress his words in a pleasant manner.*

*“In my father’s house there were two rooms with windows overlooking the garden. I stayed in one room while the Rashda”m, when he visited Lubavitch, would stay in the other.*

*“Seeing the way my father treated the Rashda”m, and being impressed by his manner and appearance, I mustered the courage to ask him to relate some chassidisher stories. During the length of his stay, which was about seven weeks, I heard many stories, many of which I still remember today.”*

Reb Shmuel Ber was born in 5568, in a village near Borisov. At age thirteen he went to study in the Minsk Yeshiva where he was accepted into the higher Shiur. He studied there for four years and traveled back to his parents. On his way home he visited his uncle in Tchachnik and later recounted his experiences to one of his Talmidim:

“In Tchachnik I met a group of young men studying Chassidus diligently. Occasionally, when I would come to the Beis Medrash to study Gemara, a few of them would approach me and discuss the topics that I was



learning. At that time, I was still quite arrogant and presumptuous about my learning and I constantly tried to prove myself through my Pilpulim. However, my haughtiness soon turned to shame and within a couple of weeks the chassidim had managed to peel off the thick hide I had grown in my years in Minsk.

“They began teaching me Chassidus and I began to see the world in a different light. I learnt diligently and conscientiously, and soon became close with the Mashpia, Reb Mordechai.

“Reb Mordechai was originally from Horodok but the Alter Rebbe had sent him to be the Mashpia in Tschachnik. Reb Mordechai took me under his wing and for the next year and nine months, we learned together in the Cheder Sheini of the Lubavticher Minyan, which also served as his own room.”

#### **YECHIDUS WITH THE MITTELER REBBE**

Rashda”m continued:

“While I was in Tschachnik, the Mitteler Rebbe was released from prison [5587]. The Yungerleit felt an urge to travel to Lubavitch but Reb Mordechai advised against it, warning that it may yield unwanted attention from the authorities. A few weeks later though, we found out that the Mitteler Rebbe was planning to travel to his father’s Ohel (the Alter Rebbe) in Haditch, and he would be passing through Zhlobin and Homil. I, together with nine other chassidim, decided to travel to one of these cities, and one night in the month of Av we secretly left Tschachnik.

“After a week of travel we reached the city of Zhlobin where several hundred chassidim from surrounding areas had already gathered to glimpse the Rebbe. To our dismay, we found out that the Rebbe was staying in an inn just outside Zhlobin and would be in the city for only one day, and due to the strain of his travels, he would not say a Maamor or hold Yechidus.

“To my great fortune, Reb Meir Tzvi, the Meshares, allowed me to help him with basic tasks, like bringing water to the Rebbe’s lodging and other similar jobs. In the evening, I overheard the Mitteler Rebbe davening Maariv in his room and when the Meshares brought the Rebbe his cup of coffee I was even able to look in and see the Rebbe.

“I waited outside the Rebbe’s room that entire night in case there be another opportunity to glimpse the Rebbe’s holy face and indeed, at three o’ clock in the morning, I

had another opportunity. The Meshares entered the Rebbe’s room to open the windows and just at that moment, the Rebbe passed through the room in which I was standing. The Rebbe looked at me with a piercing stare that both exhilarated and terrified me. Afterwards, I knew the Rebbe would return through the same room, but I lost my courage to stand there and hid behind the door.

“In the morning, after Davening, Reb Meir Tzvi informed me that the Rebbe had asked after me. He told the Rebbe who I was and where I was from, and he remarked that the Rebbe may possibly call me in. Hearing this, I became nervous and was unable to concentrate on any one thought. I began saying Tehillim and shed tears shamelessly.

“Reb Meir Tzvi later approached me with the Rebbe’s instruction that I enter his room. My legs became numb like jelly and only with Reb Meir Tzvi’s assistance was I able to enter the Rebbe’s room. Choked with emotion, the only words I managed to utter were, “I want to be a chossid,” and I began to cry. The Rebbe responded, “Chabad is Haskalah, Havanah and Ha’amakah, and with diligence and effort you will become a chossid.” And he added, ‘May Hashem grant you long life.’

“When I left the Rebbe’s room, Reb Meir Tzvi told me not to divulge to anyone what had just taken place. My secret, however, lasted only two days after I arrived back in Tschachnik. Reb Mordechai approached me while I was learning in the Beis Midrash and said that he felt I emanated a pure spirit. He commanded me to tell him what had transpired while I was away and I revealed everything to him.”

Rashda”m once remarked that although he didn’t merit hearing Chassidus from the Mitteler Rebbe, he nevertheless labored over the Maamorim and he was even able to detect where the Rebbe had coughed or motioned whilst having said the Maamor.

#### **BY THE TZEMACH TZEDEK**

Rashda”m married his cousin in Tschachnik and, for the first five years of his marriage, his father-in-law supported him so he could continue studying under Reb Mordechai’s tutelage. In 5592, when the Tzemach Tzedek was in Minsk, Rashda”m traveled there with Reb Mordechai and a large group of chassidim. It was the first time that he merited seeing the Tzemach Tzedek.

In Elul of 5596, Rashda”m travelled to Lubavitch for

the first time. Though still quite young, Rashda”m had already acquired a reputation among the chassidim and the Tzemach Tzedek’s sons showed him great respect during his first and subsequent visits. From the Tzemach Tzedek himself, Rashda”m merited tremendous kiruvimm, was witness to unique sites, and received special attention.

On one such occasion, during the night of Simchas Torah, 5614, Rashda”m dozed off in the Tzemach Tzedek’s house. After a short while he awoke and wandered into the next room. Suddenly the door to the Tzemach Tzedek’s room swung open and the Rebbe rushed out in a hurry. Rashda”m watched as the Tzemach Tzedek approached the house of the Rebbe Maharash and knocked on the window.

When they passed through the room where Rashda”m was standing, he overheard the Tzemach Tzedek say to the Rebbe Maharash, “The Zeideh (Alter Rebbe) agreed to come learn a mishna from Maseches Sukkah in the manner in which they learn in Gan Eden,” and together they entered the Tzemach Tzedek’s room. Rashda”m approached the door, managed to hear a few words, and then fell into a deep sleep. The next afternoon the Tzemach Tzedek seemed very worried and said: “A youngster that eavesdrops behind the door receives a slap and his children become ignorant.”

#### A QUESTION IN ETZ CHAIM

Following the histalkus of the Tzemach Tzedek, chassidim were somewhat divided over which of his sons should succeed him (excluding Reb Baruch Shalom who abstained from Rabbonus). At the time, there was a youngster by the name of Reb Shmuel Gronem—he later became the mashpia of Tomchei Temimim—who did not know who to turn to until he came to Borisov and conferred with Rashda”m.

“Listen carefully, Gronem,” Rashda”m said. “It is true; they are all the Rebbe’s children—Kulom Ahuvim, Kulom B’rurim, Kulom K’doishim—but there is just one scene I would like to describe to you and then you can make your decision.

“Once, while in Lubavitch, I heard a Maamor from the Tzemach Tzedek that I had difficulty understanding. It was a particular passage the Rebbe quoted from Etz Chayim that was troubling me and I presented my prob-

lem to the other chassidim. When no one was able to resolve my concern I approached the Rebbe’s sons. Each of them offered an explanation but I wasn’t satisfied with their answers.

“It was already quite late so I decided to go back to where I was staying. As I was walking past the Rebbe Maharash’s house I noticed a light in the window. It didn’t occur to me to approach him with my question as he was the youngest of the Rebbe’s sons and was very reserved. But when I saw the candle still burning at this late hour, I became curious to find out what he was do-

## THE CHASSIDIM HAD MANAGED TO PEEL OFF THE THICK HIDE I HAD GROWN IN MY YEARS IN MINSK

ing.

“The Rebbe Maharash’s house was in the courtyard of the Tzemach Tzedek’s house and was built in an affluent manner, with windows high up off the ground. I climbed up onto the window, peered inside, and saw the Rebbe Maharash sitting with an Etz Chaim open to the same passage that was bothering me!

“Seeing this, I decided I must go ask him for his thoughts on the Etz Chayim, so I climbed down and knocked on the door. “Who is it?” the Rebbe Maharash called from inside, and I answered, “It’s me, Shmuel Ber.”

“The Rebbe Maharash replied that he would be a moment and after what seemed a long while, he finally opened the door. He invited me in to sit at the table where he had just been learning and I noticed that the Etz Chaim was gone and French, German and Russian newspapers lay in its place.

“The Rebbe Maharash asked what was bothering me so late at night and I told him about the difficult Etz Chaim. He looked at me with surprise. “They say you are very clever,” he began, “so I am quite surprised that you have chosen to come to me with such a matter.”



“But I didn’t allow for him to fool me and said, “Listen, if you will speak with me, good, but if not, I will make sure that tomorrow the entire town of Lubavitch will be discussing what I just saw from the window. I saw you learning Etz Chaim and I know that these newspapers are just a show.”

“The Rebbe Maharash responded with a smile and he began to discuss the Etz Chaim with me. We sat together the entire night and in the morning I left with admiration and excitement.”

Rahsda”m finished: “This is all I wanted to tell you. Now do as you see fit.”

Needless to say, Reb Shmuel Gronem traveled to Lubavitch and became a chossid of the Rebbe Maharash.

#### WHAT IS A CHOSSID?

Rashda”m travelled often to the Rebbe Maharash. Once, at the end of a long conversation, he asked what the essence of a chossid is. The Rebbe advised that he should ask his question to the Rebbe Rashab, which sur-

prised Rashdam because by that time, he was already counted among the elder chassidim and the Rebbe Rashab was still quite young.

The Rebbe Maharash explained.

“I wake up early every morning. One time, I sent my attendant to see what my son was doing. He returned with news that the Rebbe Rashab was sitting in front of a Siddur with an Abudraham and Nach, and was translating the Siddur for himself, word for word.

“This is a chossid,” said the Rebbe Maharash. “Someone who, despite prominent qualities and virtues, could limit himself to studying the simple meaning of the words of davening.”

#### A MAN OF WORDS

The wedding of the Rebbe Maharash’s son, Reb Menachem Mendel, took place in 5642. Thousands of people converged upon Lubavitch, among them prominent Rabbonim and chassidim, including Rashda”m.

The grandfather of the Kallah, Reb Shimon Sofer (son



A RECENT PICTURE OF THE COURTYARD OF THE HOMES THE REBBEIM DWELLED IN, IN THE TOWN OF LUBAVITCH, RUSSIA.



of the Chassam Sofer and known as the Michtav Sofer), was late in coming and the Rebbe Maharash refused to come out to the Chuppa until he arrived. After two hours of waiting, the Chassidim approached Rashda”m and asked him to prevail upon the Rebbe to come out to the Chuppa, despite the absence of Reb Shimon Sofer.

Rashda”m went in to the Rebbe Maharash and said: “It is well known that in every generation there is a Tzaddik Elyon and a Tzadik Tachton,” and he proceeded to specify the Tzaddik Elyon and Tzaddik Tachton of each generation until he came to the Tzemach Tzedek.

## WHEN I LEFT THE REBBE’S ROOM, REB MEIR TZVI TOLD ME NOT TO DIVULGE TO ANYONE WHAT HAD JUST TAKEN PLACE

“The Tzemach Tzedek in his generation was the Tzaddik Elyon and the Chassam Sofer was the Tzaddik Tachton. If so, being that we have the Tzaddik Elyon (the Rebbe Maharash), why must we wait for the Tzaddik Tachton?”

The Rebbe Maharash replied, “I always knew you possessed a tongue.”

### THE WAGER

When he arrived in Lubavitch for the wedding, Rashda”m went directly to the Rebbe Maharash with a question that had been plaguing him. The Rebbe resolved his questions and he hurriedly turned to leave, as it was growing late and he had not yet davened. The Rebbe Maharash called him back, opened a siddur, and said, “Come look at this mistake.” Rashda”m put on his glasses and searched both pages without finding any mistakes. “There are no mistakes here,” he said.

“Let’s make a wager,” the Rebbe Maharash suggested.

Being quite certain, Rashda”m pledged three bottles of Mashke towards the Chasunah festivities if he was proven wrong. The Rebbe Maharash agreed and, with a broad smile, pointed out that the number on the right page was not in sequence with the number on the left.

The Rebbe Maharash then made another suggestion. “Tonight, the Chosson will be making a Siyum on the entire Mishnayos and my Mechutan, Reb A”Z Ginsburg, will be there. He loves a good challenge and he will be happy to make the wager with you. Set the price at eleven bottles of Mashke and when you win, you will have enough to pay up your pledge with much profit on the side.”

And so it was...

### THE ELTERE CHASSIDIM

Rashda”m merited having a very special relationship with the Rebbe Rashab as well. The Frierdiker Rebbe writes that after Shavuous in 5649, his father said to him: “One must spend a great deal of time with the Eltere chassidim. I am much older than you and still, when Reb Shmuel Ber Borisover and others would come for a few weeks to Lubavitch, I would spend most of the next year involved in all that I had discussed with them.”

### THE TRUE DEPTH OF A STORY

The Rebbe Rashab related a story.

“On Yud Tes Kislev 5637, my father recited a Maamor on the Possuk, “Pada B’shalom Nafshi,” followed by two stories. Apart from Rashda”m, those present didn’t understand the depth of the stories and afterwards, the chassidim focused only on reviewing the Maamor. Rashdam, however, concentrated on the stories. On Thursday afternoon, I visited Rashda”m and during the two hours that I spent with him, all we discussed were these two stories and the meaning they held.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe sums up the life of Rashda”m with the following words:

“The Rashdam lived a life of Torah, Avodah, and dedication to the chassidim’s spiritual needs. He fulfilled what the Mitteler Rebbe told him, *“toil and you will become a chossid,”* and Hashem fulfilled the Mitteler Rebbe’s Brachah for Arichas Yomim. Although it is not clear, it is said that he passed away above the age of eighty in the year 5649.” ■