

לזכות  
הת' זלמן יודא שיח' וולבובסקי  
והת' מנחם מענדל שיח' וולבובסקי  
לרגל הגיעם לעול מצוות



# "והיו עיניך רואות את מוריך" SEEING OUR REBBEIM

A historical sketch of the portraits and photographs of our Rebbeim

"אמר רבי, האי דמחדדנא מחבראי, דחזית' לרבי מאיר מאחורי, ואילו חזית' מקמי', הוה מחדדנא טפי, דכתיב והיו עיניך רואות את מוריך." (עירובין יג. ב.)

*"Rebbi said, I am sharper than my colleagues because I merited to see the back of Rebbi Meir. Had I merited to see his face, I would have been even sharper. As the novi Yeshaya states, "Your eyes shall behold your teacher." (Eruvin 13b)*

The best way to learn Torah is through hearing it directly from one's Rebbe while seeing him in person. Afterwards, while reviewing or repeating the Torah, it is crucial to envision the Rebbe's holy face, to remain connected to the source in order to succeed in understanding the Torah more deeply.

This is true with regard to every Torah from every Rebbe to every *talmid* in every generation. Even if one is learning Torah from a Rebbe he has never seen, the Rebbe's essence is invested in his Torah and through proper study and meditation one can achieve this level of attachment and understanding.

In more recent times, as accurate portraits have become more common and especially with the advent of photography, we have been granted the gift of experiencing the benefits of "envisioning the face of the *baal hashmuah*," even generations later. The Rebbe explained on several occasions that through an "accurate portrait" one can access these benefits in a more practical way.

When the Rebbe was preparing the set of S'dei Chemed for publication in 5709\* he sought to publish a photo of the author in the *sefarim*.<sup>1</sup> Years later, the Rebbe instructed that the photo of the Rebbe Rashab be published in the *sefer* of Hemshech Samach Vov, a photo of the Friediker Rebbe in some of his Sifrei Hasichos<sup>2</sup>, and that the photo of his father Harav Levi Yitzchok be published in the *sefer* Likkutei Levi Yitzchok.

Following is a historical sketch of the portraits and photographs of Rabboseinu Nesieinu.

# Baal Shem Tov and Mezritcher Maggid

There is a tradition from the Rebbeim that there is no portrait of the Baal Shem Tov.

Several times people asked the Rebbe about the famous portrait that is popularly presented as the Baal Shem Tov and the idea was firmly rejected. On Sukkos 5726\*, during the Yom Tov meal in the Frierdiker Rebbe's sukkah, Reb Yankel Katz from Chicago mentioned that he recently saw portraits of several *tzaddikim* including one purported to be of the Baal Shem Tov, and he asked the Rebbe if it is real. The Rebbe responded that the portrait is of a different "Baal Shem" who lived in Germany, and there is certainly no portrait of the Mezritcher Maggid.

In the winter of 5742\* Reb Yisroel Mordechai Kozominsky wrote to the Rebbe that the Encyclopedia Judaica claims the alleged portrait of the Baal Shem Tov is actually a "Baal Shem" that lived in London. In response the Rebbe verified that it was certainly not the Baal Shem Tov since according to tradition there were 13 (or 12) noticeable strands of hair (ג' תיקוני) in the Baal Shem Tov's beard.<sup>3</sup>

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## Alter Rebbe

The portrait of the Alter Rebbe was featured on the fifth page of the second edition of *Hatomim*, published in honor of Yud-Tes Kislev 5696\*. It was the first time this photo was published in a Lubavitch publication and many Chassidim wondered where it originated from and if it was accurate. Two years later, in the eighth edition of *Hatomim* published in honor of Yud-Tes Kislev 5698\*, the editors responded to the many inquiries by publicizing segments of the Frierdiker Rebbe's diary relating to the history and tradition of this portrait. Following is a synopsis of *Hatomim* vol. 2 pages 379 - 382:

During the winter of 5615\* the Tzemach Tzedek received a message from the authorities that in six weeks time the Ministry of Interior will host a conference on the issue of publishing Hebrew books translated into Yiddish for Jewish children. Since the Tzemach Tzedek was a prominent participant of the famous conference of 5603\*, they requested that the Tzemach Tzedek attend this conference as well, as it pertained to the same topics as the previous one.

The Tzemach Tzedek did not wish to attend and he was not in the best of health at the time. Dr. Heibenthal happened to be visiting the area and he was called to the Tzemach Tzedek. When he saw the invitation to the conference, Dr. Heibenthal immediately composed an official letter explaining that the Tzemach Tzedek could not leave home until the spring and was in no condition to travel to S. Petersburg at the time.

The Rebbe Maharash and the Chossid Reb Aharon Bilinitcher were appointed to represent the Tzemach Tzedek at the conference and they were guided on how to fulfill this mission properly.

"One of the assistants to the Deputy Interior Minister," related Reb Aharon, "was a young nobleman approximately 30-years-old. During the meetings he was very respectful to the Rebbe Maharash and it was obvious that he was intrigued by him.

"Between the fourth and fifth meetings there was a five day break and the nobleman requested an audience with the Rebbe Maharash. He came to the hotel and they were in the room for over two hours. Later the Rebbe Maharash told me that he was an artist and wanted to draw a portrait of the Rebbe Maharash."

His artistic talent was hereditary since his grandfather had a unique appreciation for art and had accumulated a massive private art collection. He continued sharing that there was a portrait in the collection of a grand rabbi who had been arrested on charges of high treason and his grandfather, who was one of the main interrogators, commissioned an artist to draw a portrait of the rabbi and after the case was closed he added the portrait in his private collection.

The Rebbe Maharash was intrigued by this information and asked him for permission to peruse through the art collection and see the portrait of the rabbi. He readily agreed and two days later, the Rebbe Maharash and Reb Aharon paid a visit to his home.

They were shocked to discover that the portrait of the rabbi was that of a saintly man, and the Alter Rebbe's name and father's name (from Liozna) were clearly written in Russian under the portrait! The date of the portrait was 1798, which was the year the Alter Rebbe was imprisoned in S. Petersburg at the Petroplavosky fortress.

The Friediker Rebbe heard this story from the Chossid Reb Avrohom Dov Babroisker (who heard it directly from Reb Aharon Bilinitcher) together with his teacher the Rashbatz on Monday, 20 Teves 5656\* and on Friday night during the Shabbos meal by the Rebbe Rashab the discussion was all about the Alter Rebbe's portrait and its history.

Reb Chanoch Hendel commented that the Alter Rebbe's portrait can be found in Tanya<sup>4</sup> and the Rebbe Rashab greatly appreciated this heartfelt *Chassidisher* expression. There was much discussion between the elder Chassidim at the table how the Alter Rebbe's second son Reb Chaim Avrohom bore a striking resemblance to the Alter Rebbe, as was evident in the similarities between the portrait and how they remember him before his illness.

On a different occasion, the Rebbe Rashab said that he heard from the Rebbe Maharash that the Tzemach Tzedek would often say, "When I look at my uncle Reb Chaim Avrohom I see the Zeide (the Alter Rebbe). His face is almost identical to the Zeide's face."

The next day during the *kiddush* at the home of Rebbetzin Rivka, the Rebbe Rashab asked her if she remembered the episode of the Alter Rebbe's portrait when the Maharash brought it to Lubavitch and what the Tzemach Tzedek said about it.

"Yes," she replied. "I clearly remember all the details as if it happened yesterday. I can envision the entire episode as if it were happening now."

"If it is not a bother, please relate the story to Yosef Yitzchok (the Friediker Rebbe)," the Rebbe Rashab requested. "I want him to know the story first hand."

She happily agreed and at a later date shared the details with the Friediker Rebbe.

When the Rebbe Maharash returned from his trip to S. Petersburg, he reported his discovery of the portrait and the Tzemach Tzedek expressed his sincere wish to see the portrait.

In 5619\* as the Rebbe Maharash prepared for a trip to S. Petersburg, the Tzemach Tzedek asked him to find the nobleman and either purchase the portrait for even a thousand ruble or at least to arrange for an expert artist to copy it.

The Rebbe Maharash was in S. Petersburg for a month but the nobleman had disappeared and the Tzemach tzedek was painfully disappointed.



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During 5621\* the Rebbe Maharash was again in S. Petersburg and shared with Professor Berthenson that he was searching for a nobleman with a large art collection who used to live at a certain address. Months later Professor Berthenson notified the Rebbe Maharash that he tracked down the nobleman and in the summer of 5622\* the Rebbe Maharash paid him a visit. After much difficult negotiations, the nobleman agreed to lend the portrait to the Rebbe Maharash for a month only after he gave him a deposit of ten thousand ruble.

Reb Yisroel Chaiken traveled back to Lubavitch with the Rebbe Maharash with the sole purpose of handling the valuable package. One day the Rebbe Maharash shared the details of the story with Rebbetzin Rivka and said that the Tzemach Tzedek allowed him to show her the photo on condition it was kept secret.

The portrait was in the Tzemach Tzedek's home for two weeks. Every day, except for Shabbos, the Rebbe Maharash would lock the door of the Tzemach Tzedek's room and place the portrait on the table. The Tzemach Tzedek would wear his Shabbos clothing, hat and gartel and gaze at the photo for a long while.

"When the portrait of the Alter Rebbe was published I recognized it well," concluded Rebbetzin Rivka. "I could tell that it was a copy of the original I had seen years earlier, but I shared this information only with your father (the Rebbe Rashab). And now I am sharing it with you."



# Mitteler Rebbe

During the above mentioned Yom Tov *seuda* in the Frierdiker Rebbe's sukkah on Sukkos 5726\*, the Rebbe said: "We have portraits of the Alter Rebbe and of the Tzemach Tzedek. A portrait of the Mitteler Rebbe doesn't exist even in fantasy."

At the farbrengen of Yud Kislev 5744\* the Rebbe addressed in a fascinating way the fact that the Mitteler Rebbe is the only Rebbe of Chabad for which we have no portrait nor accurate likeness to compare to.

*The Yerushalmi states* יהא רואה בשם אומרה יהא רואה כל האומר שמועה בשם אומרה יהא רואה—*When quoting a Torah teaching one should envision the Torah teacher standing before him.*

*Although it is impossible to do so in a physical sense when learning the Chassidus of the Mitteler Rebbe since we have no portraits of him, nevertheless there is certainly a way to fulfill this instruction of Chazal as well.*

# The Tzemach Tzedek

A certain non-Jewish artist wished to draw a portrait of the Tzemach Tzedek but knew that the Rebbe would never allow it to happen in a standard fashion since he was opposed to having portraits of himself being drawn.

It was in the later years of the Tzemach Tzedek's life that this artist arrived in Lubavitch for Shabbos and when the Tzemach Tzedek was saying a *maamar* to the Chassidim, he positioned himself at a vantage point where he could gaze upon the Rebbe's face and commit his holy figure to memory.

At the conclusion of the *maamar* he rushed back to his lodgings with his eyes mostly shut so that he would not forget even one detail of the Tzemach Tzedek's face and immediately set to work on his canvas.

The fact that the portrait is a rendition of the artist's view of the Tzemach Tzedek on Shabbos, explains why the robe, gartel and hat are all white, since that was how the Tzemach Tzedek dressed on Shabbos.

When the Tzemach Tzedek saw the portrait and was told how it came to be, he was pained that it was done on Shabbos but found consolation in the fact that the artist made several errors.

1. The left side of the Tzemach Tzedek's robe overlaps the right side, when in truth he always wore it in the opposite fashion as is customary in Chassidish circles.
2. The Tzemach Tzedek is portrayed as holding a *sefer* in his right hand. But in the original portrait the *sefer* is drawn in a way that clearly opens left to right when a *sefer* written in Lashon Hakodesh obviously opens from right to left.

(In the portrait that was published by Kehos in 5713\* these errors were corrected.)

The Rebbe once referenced this story at a farbrengen and said, "The portrait of the Tzemach Tzedek, which according to some accounts was allegedly drawn without his knowledge."<sup>5</sup>

This original portrait served as the basis for many other portraits and was first published in Russia in 5647\*. In the winter of 5698\* the Frierdiker Rebbe received a photo of the Tzemach Tzedek from his grandmother Rebbetzin Rivka as a gift and she told him that that specific copy is the most accurate depiction of the Tzemach Tzedek. (M<sup>2</sup>Beis Hagnazim page 260).



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK REVERSED SO THE KAPOTA IS CLOSED RIGHT-OVER-LEFT, PUBLISHED BY KEHOT IN 5713.



ORIGINAL PAINTING OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK.

# The Rebbe Maharash

Since he was unable to visit the *Ohalim* of the Rebbeim in Russia after being banished from there two years earlier, the Frierdiker Rebbe visited Eretz Yisrael on his way to the United States in the summer of 5689\* in order to visit the *mekomos hakdoshim*.

During the ten day historic visit, the Frierdiker Rebbe made an indelible impression on the Jewish community of Eretz Yisroel, greatly strengthening the Lubavitch community there and laying the groundwork for elevating the level of *hafatzas hamaayanos* there as well.

A Chossid of the Rebbe Maharash who had immigrated to Eretz Yisroel from Russia decades earlier entered the Frierdiker Rebbe's room for *yechidus* and immediately fainted. When he recovered somewhat he explained that the Frierdiker Rebbe was identical to his grandfather the Rebbe Maharash.

The Rebbe repeated this story, with great emotion, several times at farbrengens and once concluded that although there is no known portrait or photograph of the Rebbe Maharash (although some claim one does exist but it has never been publicized), we can imagine his appearance based on the similarity to the Frierdiker Rebbe.<sup>6</sup>

# The Rebbe Rashab

Although photography became somewhat available to the masses during the time period of his *nesius*, the Rebbe Rashab was very particular not to have his photograph taken.

One Rosh Hashanah, when the Rebbe Rashab would lead an entire parade of Chassidim to the river for *tashlich*, two non-Jews from a nearby town who had seen the impressive event in a previous year, brought a camera the next year and photographed the Rebbe Rashab. The Rebbe Rashab was pained by this and, from then on, instead of going to the river for *tashlich* other arrangements were made in the *chatzer*.

When the Frierdiker Rebbe recorded this incident he expressed, "I will not deny that I would be very happy if the photograph came out nice..."

However, there was one time that the Rebbe Rashab did pose for a photograph.<sup>7</sup> It was in Rostov in the year 5680\*. Due to the revolution, the entire Georgian government was headquartered in a hotel in Rostov and one of the employees, a Jew named Mr. Schreiber, davened in the Rebbe Rashab's *minyan* on Rosh Hashanah. He told the Chassidim that the entire Georgian government planned on fleeing Russia by ship to Turkey. Several wealthy Chassidim considered joining the escape to Turkey and suggested that the Rebbe Rashab and *beis harav* join.

At first the Rebbe Rashab agreed to the idea and in order to prepare a visa a photograph was needed. The Rebbe Rashab posed for this photograph in his *yechidus* room, and it was later widely published many times.



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A short while later the plan was canceled without explanation and everyone stayed in Russia.

Although this was a real photograph of the Rebbe Rashab, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka always expressed her disappointment that since the photograph was taken at a very difficult time period it does not properly reflect the way the Rebbe Rashab looked. In 5746\* Rabbi Nochum Kaplan drew a portrait of the Rebbe Rashab wearing a *spodik* based on the descriptions of Reb Avrohom Mayor. The Rebbetzin corrected certain details of it and was very satisfied with the finished product.

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## The Frierdiker Rebbe

Reb Moshe Groner was an avid collector of photos of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Whenever he found a new photo, from private collections or newspaper archives, he would bring it to the Rebbe and the Rebbe would look intently at the photo, inquire about all of the details of it and write them on the back of the photo.

In the summer of 5751\* a Chossid sent a rare photo of the Frierdiker Rebbe to the Rebbe and speculated that the photo was taken in 5680\*. The Rebbe responded:

נת' ות"ח ת"ח. ובפרט שע"ע לא ראיתי דוגמתה. לכאורה (פוטו מ) ציור ביד (ע"פ זכרון) ולכן ריבוי השערות מצד ימין למעלה).

*I received it and many thanks, many thanks. Especially since I have not seen anything similar. It is probably a (photograph of) a painting (that was done based on memory). (This explains the abundance of hair on the top right side).*

The Frierdiker Rebbe is the first of our Rebbeim that we have a large collection of photos of. Aside from the fact that photography had become widely available

and photographs were taken at public events with great frequency, one of his family members owned a camera and was able to photograph frequently. We therefore have a wealth of photographs of the Frierdiker Rebbe in many different settings.

During the Frierdiker Rebbe's imprisonment in Shpalerka he would daven at great length every day. One Shabbos morning the prison guards wanted to take his photograph, as was standard procedure for every prisoner. When they entered the cell, the Frierdiker Rebbe was in middle of davening with the tallis covering his face and all their efforts to catch his attention failed.

When they returned some time later, the Frierdiker Rebbe was still in middle of davening but his tallis was not covering his face. When he saw them enter with a camera he waved them away and they left in great fright. Afterwards they returned and tried to explain that he was obligated to have his photo taken right away, but he vehemently refused to be photographed on Shabbos.

After Shabbos the Frierdiker Rebbe allowed them to photograph him, but first he put on his *rabbonishe* hat and made his tzitzis very visible. They tried to convince him that this will all not show in the photograph but the Frierdiker Rebbe insisted that if they want a photo of him, they will have a photo of who he truly is...

There are also various videos of the Frierdiker Rebbe that were recorded in America during his first visit in 5689\*-5690\* and later on as well.

On 16 Adar 5709\* the Frierdiker Rebbe became a naturalized American citizen in 770. The Rebbe arranged all of the details of the historic event and hired two professional photographers and a videographer to document the proceedings. When the photographers arrived, the Rebbe escorted them into the Frierdiker Rebbe's *yechidus* room and set one up on each side of the Frierdiker Rebbe's table so that the photos would be taken from both angles.

As they set up their equipment and lights, the Rebbe requested that the lights be dimmed as much as possible so as not to bother the Frierdiker Rebbe.

The Rebbe chose 20 photographs from that event to be published in a special album and they became the most widely publicized photos of the Frierdiker Rebbe that we have today. About one of these photos the Rebbe said, "Dos iz der Rebbe..." - "This is the Rebbe"<sup>8</sup>

Photos of the Frierdiker Rebbe were disseminated in various ways to Chassidim around the world and there were some photos behind the Iron Curtain which Chassidim cherished and held dear for many years. When large groups of Chassidim managed to escape Communist Russia after World War II the Rebbe sent them photos of the Frierdiker Rebbe as well.



THIS PHOTO WAS COPIED AND SHARED BY MANY CHASSIDIM WHO REMAINED IN RUSSIA.



THE PICTURE ABOUT WHICH THE REBBE SAID, "DOS IZ DER REBBE."



# The Rebbe

Photography in the era of *dor hashvi'i* may seem to many as routine, but in truth, for many years the Rebbe did not allow it on a large scale. When the Rebbe arrived in the United States and started participating in *simchos* of *anash* he typically avoided the eye of the camera, at times turning to the other direction or raising his hand to cover his face.

The first known photo of the Rebbe after the formal *kabbalas hanesius* on Yud Shevat 5711\* is from the wedding of Rabbi Leibel Posner and it became the only official photo of the Rebbe available to the media and was used in all Chabad publications. In the early 5720s\* the Rebbe chose an updated photo which was the only one officially available for the next 10 years.

In the capacity of his work with Lubavitch News Service, Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky once asked the Rebbe which photo to provide to the media. The Rebbe said it does not matter as long as it is a photo with a smile.

In the early years Mr. Harry Trainer was essentially the official photographer of the entire New York *frum* community. He was hired to photograph almost every wedding and was granted permission to photograph the Rebbe since he made a *parnassa* by selling those photos.

Once while the Rebbe was saying a *sicha* at a wedding in Gold Manor, Mr. Trainer took a photo and some Chassidim gestured to him that he should take many more. After three flashes from his camera, the Rebbe paused the *sicha* and said, “I think three is enough...”

When the Rebbe started to be *mesader kiddushin* only at *chuppos* that were held in the courtyard of 770, Mr. Trainer was notified by *mazkirus* that he may snap only one photo, but over time he requested permission for more and was allowed to take three photos each time.

*Anash* yearned to have more photos of the Rebbe. *Bochurim* once handed a camera to a young boy and asked him to snap a photo as the Rebbe walked out of the small *zal* after one of the *tefillos* on the way to his room. Before the child was able to take the photo, the Rebbe had already confiscated the camera and handed it to the child's father. Another time when a child



THE PHOTO USED BY LUBAVITCH NEWS SERVICE IN THE 5720S.

COURTESY OF KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY



A PHOTO USED BY LUBAVITCH NEWS SERVICE IN THE 5730S.

COURTESY OF KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY



THE REBBE ASKS A PHOTOGRAPHER IF HE HAD STUDIED TANYA THAT DAY.

YOSSI MELAMED VIA JEM 125381

stood in the front hallway of 770 and snapped a photo of the Rebbe as he returned from a *chuppa*, the Rebbe instructed that the camera be confiscated until he was tested in learning by his principal.

The first time the Rebbe officially allowed a photographer to document an event in 770 was during the festivities of Yud Shevat 5730\*, at the *siyum* of Moshiach's Sefer Torah on Erev Shabbos, as well as the *farbrengen* on Motzei Shabbos. The photographer produced 120 photos of the events and the Rebbe commented, "I thought he would take just a few pictures..."

As the years progressed it became clear that while those who made a living from photography were welcome to take photos in 770, the Rebbe strongly disapproved of *bochurim*, children and *anash* doing so. Several times the Rebbe asked *bochurim* or non-professional photographers that were holding cameras if they had learned *Chitas* that day.

During the *farbrengen* of Chai Elul 5739\* the Rebbe asked Reb Yoel Kahan to ask a Yid standing nearby taking pictures if he learns Tanya. Even after he responded that he does, the Rebbe took out a pocket size booklet of *Iggeres Hateshuva* from his breast pocket and handed it to Reb Yoel to learn a few lines with the Yid and then allowed him to continue snapping photos.<sup>9</sup>



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# Harav Levi Yitzchok

In a previous edition, we featured the story of the two photographs of the Rebbe's father, Harav Levi Yitzchak.

For many years, the only known photo of Harav Levi Yitzchok was the one taken shortly before his *histalkus*. The Rebbe noted that his father's face in this photo is hardly recognizable, after enduring so much pain and suffering.

After the Iron Curtain fell, a new photograph was discovered in the KGB file of Harav Levi Yitzchok taken shortly after his arrest. The Rebbe instructed that the two photos be published side by side in the *sefer Toras Menachem—Tiferes Levi Yitzchok*, demonstrating the extent of his father's suffering and *mesirus nefesh*, and his ever-flowing wellspring of Torah that never ceased, despite it all.<sup>10</sup> **T**

9 SHEVAT 5730. YITZCHOK BARASH VIA JEM 109664



REB YOEL KAHAN RECEIVES THE IGGERES HATESHUVA FROM THE REBBE.

1. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 3, #512.

2. *Sefer Hasichos* 5700 and 5701

3. *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 19 page 531.

4. See the Rebbe's explanation about the *Mittler Rebbe* from Yud Kislev 5744.

5. *Sefer Hasichos* 5750 vol. 1 page 193.

6. *Hisvaaduyos* 5744 vol. 1, p. 539 see note.

7. *Ibid.* 5750 vol. 2 page 50 note 67.

8. *Album America Iz Nit Andersh* page 71.

9. Published on *Living Torah* Disc 41,

Program 162; [chabad.org/574975](http://chabad.org/574975).

10. *The Telling Picture*, *Derher* magazine, *Menachem-Av* 5773.