



The MEZRITCHER MAGGID



A Reinvigorating Vision

“My holy father appeared to me in a vision today...”

It was the second day of Shavuos 5521* (תקכ"א). A day earlier, the Baal Shem Tov’s leading students had marked the conclusion of the first year without their revered Rebbe.

His absence was profoundly felt. The excitement and passion the Baal Shem Tov had imbued in his *talmidim* and Chassidim were slowly ebbing away and the students feared that the newly minted Chassidic movement would dissolve in the face of the pressures of its opponents.

It was in that climate that their new Rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov’s son Reb Tzvi, stood up and made his declaration.

“Today, my father appeared to me and said, “The heavenly entourage that always accompanied me has moved today to accompany the holy and awesome Reb Berenyu ben Reb Avraham. Therefore, pass the leadership to him in the presence of the entire *chevraya kaddisha*. He should sit in my place, and you, my son, should sit in his. Know that you will be successful; *u’pi shnayim b’rucho* [double the spirit of his predecessor].”

Saying this, Reb Tzvi turned to the Maggid, wished him *mazal tov*, and gave him his cloak and his place. The Maggid seated himself at the head of the table and the *chevraya kaddisha* immediately stood on their feet, ready to hear Torah from their new Rebbe.¹

Reb Berenyu

Precious little is known about the early years of the Mezritcher Maggid. His birthday is unknown and even his age is in doubt. (The Rebbe attributed this lack of knowledge to the *pnimius* of his *talmidim*, who were too busy receiving his Torah to inquire into trivial matters.) According to a tradition passed down by Reb Shmuel Gronem, the celebrated *meshpia* of the yeshiva in Lubavitch, the Maggid was older than the Baal Shem Tov. According to traditions passed down among Chassidei Chagas, he was several years younger.

The Maggid’s father, Reb Avraham, had no apparent connection to Chassidus. The Rebbe once noted² that the Maggid was the only one of the *nesi’im* that didn’t have a childhood background in Chassidus (the Baal Shem Tov’s and the Alter Rebbe’s fathers, on the other hand, did have a connection to Chassidus—albeit

a hidden one). From a young age, his father noticed his significant talents and assiduousness and began searching for a place of higher Torah learning for his son.

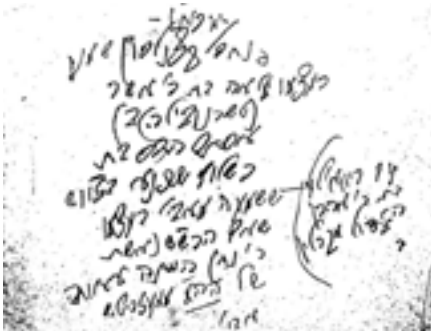
At first, he studied Torah under the tutelage of Reb Dovber [Berish] Halbershtat, the rav of Lukatch. When he grew further in his learning, the rav suggested his own father-in-law, Reb Yehoshua Falk—the Pnei Yehoshua. For several years the Maggid learned Torah in his yeshiva and reached significant heights under his tutelage. He also gained significant knowledge in Kabbalah.

According to the Ruzhiner³ tradition, he married Rebbetzin Keila, the daughter of Reb Sholom Shachne of Turtchin, and continued learning with the support of his father-in-law. However, the wheel of fortune soon turned, and the Maggid chose to eke out a meager living as a *melamed*.

The Rebbe's Relation

There are several notes in which the Rebbe transcribed notable or interesting facts that he heard from individuals during *yechidus*. One such note is regarding a previously unknown family relation of *Beis Harav* to the Maggid, through Reb Shalom Shachne, the father of the Tzemach Tzedek:

"Pinchas Katzenelson from Yerushalayim heard directly from Leah, daughter of Reb Asher (Chernobler) son of Esther Hadas, the daughter of Reb Shalom Shachne's second marriage to Riva'le, the daughter of Reb Aharon Hagadol of Karlin, that she personally heard from her father that the mother of Reb Shalom Shachne (the wife of Reb Noach) was the sister of the Mezritcher Maggid."



The First Meeting

The accounts of how the Maggid first encountered the Baal Shem Tov are many and varied.

According to Shivchei Habesht, the suggestion to visit the Baal Shem Tov came from the Baal Shem Tov's *talmid*, Reb Mendel of Baar, who enticed him with the possibility of a cure for his ailing leg.

According to the version of Sipurim Noraim cited in Sefer Hatoldos, the Maggid was drawn to Mezibuzh after the Baal Shem Tov met with the Pnei Yehoshua in two cryptic encounters where he revealed his powers of *ruach hakodesh* and asked him to instruct the Maggid to come to him.

A third version is brought in Keser Shem Tov,⁴ which cites the story in the name of the Maggid himself:

Hearing about the Baal Shem Tov's reputed powers, the Maggid decided to visit and see the phenomenon for himself. He spent several days on the road, and began to regret the *bitul Torah* it entailed.

Upon arriving in Mezibuzh, the Baal Shem Tov received him and began to tell him strange stories about his travels. "I once ran out of food for my non-Jewish wagon driver... I once ran out of food for my horse..."

The Maggid was very disappointed. He told his attendant to be ready to leave at daybreak. But at midnight, he was called back to the Baal Shem Tov.

"The Baal Shem Tov asked him *pshat* in a teaching of Etz Chaim," the Rebbe repeated the story.⁵ "The Maggid suggested several interpretations but the Baal Shem Tov said that they didn't reach the full depth of the meaning. 'Well, how do you interpret it?' asked the Maggid. The Baal Shem Tov began to recite the Etz Chayim with passion and enthusiasm and the *malachim* and *yichudim* mentioned in the teaching filled the room.

"Afterwards, the Baal Shem Tov told the Maggid that his interpretation was correct but it

was missing the passion and enthusiasm. With that message, he ‘hooked’ the Maggid.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe recounted⁶ that this first meeting took place only eight years before the Baal Shem Tov’s passing, in 5512* (תק”ב). He didn’t settle in Mezibuzh. According to a tradition passed down from the Ruzhiner, the Maggid visited the Baal Shem Tov only two times, both—apparently—for an extended period of time.

A New Style

Within a short period of time after the Maggid assumed the *nesius*, the centers of Chassidus throughout Europe were reenergized.

The Maggid had a different modus-operandi than the Baal Shem Tov. While his predecessor traveled constantly, the Maggid remained stationed in Mezritch. And while the Baal Shem Tov dedicated much of his time dealing with cures, *kameios*, and uplifting simple Jews, the Maggid gathered promising *talmidim* from throughout Europe and taught them the most profound teachings of Chassidus.

“The Baal Shem Tov traveled from town to town,” the Rebbe explained,⁷ “teaching Chassidus to the most simple people. In order for them to understand, he lowered the concepts to their level, through stories, short *vertlach*, and so on—containing the deepest secrets of the Torah.

“The Maggid, on the other hand, spoke Chassidus openly, without stories etc. And he spoke it to his *talmidim*, Torah giants, not for the general populace.”

The Torah of the Maggid was so intense that his *talmidim* were unable to listen through the entire duration. The only ones who would be able

to maintain themselves until the end were Reb Mendel Horodoker and the Alter Rebbe.

“On one occasion,” the Rebbe repeated in the name of the Frierdiker Rebbe,⁸ “the *hispaalus* was so intense that the Maggid came out again and delivered another Torah on the verse, אנוכי עשיתי ארץ ואדם עליה בראתי, explaining that the fundamental purpose of creation is for the 613 mitzvos to be fulfilled here in this physical world.”

New Achievements

Originally, the news had spread that the Baal Shem Tov’s work was falling apart, but now the efforts to spread Chassidus doubled and tripled, with the Maggid’s *talmidim* spreading far and wide. The number of his great *talmidim* was double that of the Baal Shem Tov’s (either 60 or 120), and they reached much further regions than their predecessors in the previous generation.

“The Maggid added the concept of *gute Yidden*,” the Rebbe once noted⁹ when asked about the Maggid’s *chiddush* over the Baal Shem Tov. “The Baal Shem Tov would travel to places with his *talmidim*, but the Maggid *sent* his students to the different locations, and gave them special *kavanos* [for their place].”

After six months of learning in Mezritch, a new *talmid* would be sent back to his hometown or to a new location, where he was tasked with spreading the message of Chassidus with a special emphasis on reaching the *lomdim* of the city. These *talmidim* set up fully independent centers of Chassidus where they attracted Chassidim of their own. The center of Reb Aharon Karliner, for example, was so popular even during the lifetime of the Maggid, that Chassidim in general were dubbed *Karlinim*, a name that stuck for quite some time afterwards.

In the case of the Alter Rebbe, as the Frierdiker Rebbe recounted, when he returned from Mezritch to Vitebsk after his first visit, he shared many teachings from the Maggid with the group of students that were already gathered around him. He also changed certain customs: In their private *minyán*, simpletons hadn’t been

The First Torah

“The Zaide,” the Alter Rebbe said, referring to the Baal Shem Tov, “loved simple Jews dearly. During my first days in Mezritch, the Rebbe the Maggid said, ‘The Rebbe—the Baal Shem Tov—would often say: *Ahavas Yisroel is ahavas Hamakom. Banim atem laHashem Elokeichem, when you love the father, you love the children.*”

(*Hayom Yom 24 Av*)

permitted to daven at the *amud* but now the practice was discontinued.¹⁰

The Maggid set up his *talmidim* in places where he knew they would have maximum influence. His first shluchim to Lithuania, a great center of learning in *nigleh*, were *gedolim* in *pnimius haTorah* but they experienced significant difficulties in their shlichus. Afterwards, the Maggid sent students who were great in *nigleh* as well, such as the Alter Rebbe, and Chassidus began to make significant inroads in those areas too. Within five to six years of his leadership, Chassidus had spread throughout a large expanse of Eastern Europe.

A Growing Problem

The growth of the new movement frightened its opponents. Many of the leading Torah scholars of the day opposed the newfound emphasis on *avodas hatefillah and ahavas Yisroel*. Additionally, Jewish affairs were tightly controlled by community leaders and the idea of separate shuls and Jewish infrastructures presented a significant threat to their monopoly.

Initially, the opposition was muted. During the Baal Shem Tov's generation, the opposition was small and largely ideological, and even during the first 10 years of the Maggid's leadership, when Chassidus made much greater inroads, the opposition didn't take on an ugly form.

But 5530* (תק"ל) marked a turning point. Around that year, as the Frieddiker Rebbe related in a famous letter to the Rebbe,¹³ Reb Avraham Kalisker began teaching students a new approach to *darkei haChassidus* which entailed severe exercises in *bittul*: They would publicly humiliate themselves, wear simple clothing, do somersaults and daven with wild motions. He had a group of very talented young men who disregarded their own dignity and often went out of their way to deride the *misnagdim* as well.

The antics of these Chassidim played into the hands of the *misnagdim*, who grabbed the opportunity to put an end to this increasingly bothersome new movement.

For the first 10 years of his *nesius*, the Maggid had been living in the town of Mezritch, where he held the title Maggid of the city. He also was—for some period of time—the official Maggid of nearby Koznitz as well. However, at some point before 5532* (תקל"ב), for reasons unbeknownst to us, the Maggid moved from Mezritch to Rovno (his hometown, according to some accounts), which was some 40 kilometers west of Mezritch.¹⁴

During the winter of 5532* (תקל"ב), with the persecution of Chassidim becoming stronger, the Maggid sent his *talmidim* to attempt to resolve the *machlokes*. The Alter Rebbe traveled to Vilna with Reb Mendel Horodoker to meet with the Gaon, but to their disappointment, he refused to receive them.

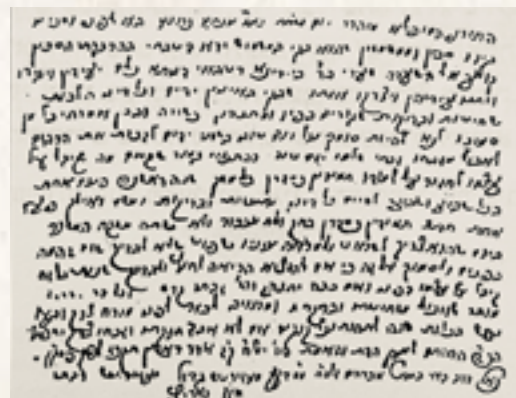
Afterwards, the Alter Rebbe traveled with Reb Avraham Kalisker to Shklov, where a debate was held on the merits of Chassidus.

Shklov was a disappointment as well.

Although the questions about Chassidus were answered adequately, the questions posed to Reb Avraham about his Chassidim's conduct were not.

In a letter, the Alter Rebbe described the aftermath of the debate.

"He [Reb Avraham] had no answer for [his students' behavior]. The Shklov rabbis wrote and informed the Vilna Gaon who came to the conclusion that Chassidim should be treated as *apikorsim* who humiliate *talmidei chachamim*, and that the somersaults are a form of *avodah zarah* [this is a reference to the *cherem* declared on Chassidim].



KSAV YAD KODESH OF THE MEZRITCHER MAGGID

Defining the Differences

During the Maggid's *nesius*, Chassidim began to take on a number of distinct *minhagim*. It was during these years—notably during the end of the Maggid's *nesius*—that Chassidim became more distinguishable from other Jews in many ways.

Perhaps the most significant of those changes was the widespread adoption of Nusach Ari (Nusach Sefard), under the Maggid's instructions.

The Maggid's *beis medrash* also was the source of new *piskei halacha*. Although there is almost no *nigleh* recorded in the Maggid's *sefer*, *Maggid Devarav L'Yaakov*, we know that there was a strong emphasis on *halacha*, especially on practical *halacha l'maaseh*.

The greatest example may be the Maggid's appointment of the Alter Rebbe to formulate an updated and enhanced version of the Shulchan Aruch. The *halacha sefarim* of the day were already hundreds of years old and the Maggid wanted a *halacha sefer* that was up-to-date and would provide final rulings and clarification to the many questions that arose since the *piskei dinim* of the Beis Yosef and Rema had been published.

Similarly, the only known *haskama* written by the Maggid is to *Halacha Pesukah*, a compilation of *halacha l'maaseh* for the laws of Yoreh Deah.¹¹

We know of several *piskei halacha* that can be attributed to the Maggid himself.¹²

Matzah Shruyah

“Over the past 20 years,” the Alter Rebbe writes, “a *zehirus* has spread through the holy nation of Israel, to hurry the kneading of the dough. Sometimes, the kneading isn't completed well, and therefore some flour may be left on the matzah.”

The Alter Rebbe doesn't identify the source of the custom, but his *talmid*, Reb Yitzchok Eizik of Vitebsk, writes that the custom stemmed from “*Raboseniu*, our teachers of Mezritch.”

Doubly-sharpened Chalaf

The Alter Rebbe was a notable proponent of the doubly-sharpened shechita knife. His brother, Reb Yehudah Leib, wrote about the source of the custom:

“Our first rabbis to introduce it were the famous *shochtim* of Mezritch with the support of the great Maggid and, following his lead, all of his students.”

This was a flashing point in the controversy between Chassidim and *misnagdim*, which stemmed not so much from a halachic point of view but from pure animosity. In the Alter Rebbe's own words:

“When Reb Chaim Volozhiner visited our region in 5563*, he told several prominent members of the community, not from *anash*, in the name of his Rebbe, the Chossid [the Gra] ז"ל that there is no prohibition on the doubly-sharpened knives from Gemara or *poskim*. If he forbade the use of those knives, it was as a *harchaka*, similar to the other *harchakos* and *gezeiros* that were said as a שגגה מפ"י—the השליט—a mistake from the mouth of the ruler; in the year 5532* (תקל"ב) [regarding Chassidim] as literal *apikorsim*...”

Over the years, as more *rabbonim* and *poskim* began to learn about the Maggid's *chalaf*, they quickly understood its halachic benefits. Today, the Maggid's *shechitah* is the only *shechitah* accepted throughout the Jewish world.

Selling Chametz after the Zman

Will the sale of chametz after the *zman biur* protect the individual from transgressing *bal yera'eh*?

According to the Maggid's *talmid* Reb Yitzchok Eizik of Koritz, “there was a similar story in Mezritch... and I heard from the Maggid in the name of [his teacher] Reb Berish that a similar story took place during his *rabbanus* in Lukatch, and he leaned towards *heter* because the *goy* acquired the chametz.”

A Sircha

A major controversy arose between Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev and the other *rabbonim* in his city regarding the *hechsher* of a certain *sircha*. When the Alter Rebbe visited Berdichev after Reb Levi Yitzchok's passing, the question was brought to him. In his response, where he supported Reb Levi Yitzchok's position, he attributed it to a discussion he had with the Maggid:

“In the summer of 5532* (תקל"ב), when I was in the home of the Rebbe in Rovno, he agreed with this opinion, and brought the following proof from Gemara...”

“From Vilna they wrote to Brod, where they published the Kuntres *Z'mir Aritzim* [a hate-filled polemic against Chassidim] that summer.

“All the *tzaddikim* of Vohlin [a region in Poland] suffered greatly and could no longer remain in their homes. They all gathered to Rovno, to the home of Rabbeinu Hagadol, to come up with a solution.”¹⁵

The Alter Rebbe and Reb Avraham Kalisker also traveled to Rovno following the debate in Shklov. Knowing that the Maggid was disappointed in his behavior (to put it mildly), Reb Avraham remained at the edge of the city until the Alter Rebbe arranged for Reb Mendel Horodoker to plead on his behalf before the Maggid. When the Maggid did receive him, he rebuked him severely.

However, the deed was done. The constant persecution was the new reality for all Chassidim, not just for Reb Avraham Kalisker and his *talmidim*, and the matter needed to be resolved.

The continuation of the story is recorded in Beis Rebbe:

Among the *talmidim* gathered in Rovno was Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev who at that time was the rav of Pinsk. In his absence, the *misnagdim* in his city appointed a new rav by the name of Avigdor, who later became infamous as the *mosser* of the Alter Rebbe.

Afraid that Reb Levi Yitzchak would return to demand his post, Avigdor attempted to chase his family out of the city. In distress, they dispatched a letter to Rovno.

When the *talmidim* read about the persecution of their colleague's family, they suggested that the letter be read before the Maggid during the Shabbos *seudah*. Reb Levi Yitzchak indeed read the letter but the Maggid didn't respond.

On Motzei Shabbos, the *talmidim* gathered for a meeting. In desperation, they decided that there was no choice but to declare a *cherem* against the *misnagdim*, based on the *psak din* in Shulchan Aruch regarding someone who was unlawfully put in *cherem*.¹⁶ Nine *talmidim* were present, and they convinced the Alter Rebbe to join, thereby achieving the necessary *minyán*.

That night, the tapping of the Maggid's crutches was heard approaching the room.

“My children, what have you done tonight?”

The *talmidim* admitted that they had reached the breaking point.

“You should know,” the Maggid said, “that with this you have lost your head,” intimating that he would soon pass away.

“But what you have gained,” he continued, “is that whenever there will be a *machlokes* between Chassidim and *misnagdim*, the Chassidim will gain the upper hand, יד החסידיים על העליונה.”

I Need the Merchandise

The Mezritcher Maggid had an old friend from before he became a *talmid* of the Baal Shem Tov. This friend once met the Maggid and asked him why he davens for so long.

“I also think all the *kavanos* of the Arizal,” he said, “yet my davening is not nearly as long as yours.”

Instead of answering his question, the Maggid asked him what he does for a living. He answered that his wife owns a store and earns a comfortable living, so he is free to learn Torah. Once a year though, he has to travel to the wholesale market and buy products to keep the store stocked. Of course, even while on the road, he never misses his regular *shiurim* so the journey ends up taking a few weeks.

“I don't understand,” said the Maggid, “why travel all the way to the market and go through all the trouble? Wouldn't it be easier to just imagine you were traveling, and then imagine you were buying the merchandise, and imagine you were coming home? That way, you can be done in a couple of hours instead of a few weeks!”

“But I need the merchandise!” his friend answered.

The same applies to davening, explained the Maggid.

“I need the merchandise.”

The Rebbe explained many times that the Maggid meant: If you wish to have the positive impact of the *kavanos*, you need to actually reach and attain all the levels you are contemplating about, and that takes a long time!

(*Toras Menachem* vol. 3, p. 239, et. al. *Reshimas Hayoman* p. 391).

A First Hand Account

Segments of a description from a visitor to Mezritch:

“A young man who had been initiated into the society of Chassidim, and who had had the good fortune to have spoken with its leaders face to face, passed through the place where I was staying. In an attempt to seize the opportunity, I asked the stranger to explain the organization of the society, how one became a member, etc.”

The Chossid explained to the young man that anyone who strives for perfection was already considered a Chossid. The *tzaddikim*, he said, could see straight into one’s heart and discover what was hidden inside it. He also mentioned that they didn’t compose sermons. They saw themselves as *bottul* to Hashem, and hence, Hashem would speak through them as long as they didn’t add anything of their own.

“The stranger’s description delighted me; so I asked them to share some of these divine teachings. He pressed his hand to his forehead, as though waiting for inspiration from the holy spirit. Then he turned to me, and with a solemn expression and arms sticking out of their sleeves, he began to speak...”

The Chossid related several *toros* of the Maggid [which are actually included in *Maggid Devarav L’Yaakov*].

“I couldn’t help but admire the high quality of these thoughts and I was impressed with the ingenious exegesis supporting them. The stranger’s account of the movement fired my imagination, I wanted nothing so much as to have the good fortune to be part of such a praiseworthy group. And so, I decided to travel to Mezritch, where the leader, Ber, lived.

“The journey took several weeks. After resting a while, I went to the leader’s house, hoping to be introduced to him immediately. I was told that he couldn’t speak with me just yet. But I was invited to share a meal with him on Shabbos together with other guests, who had also come to visit him. I would then have the good fortune of speaking with the holy man in person and hearing the most exalted teachings directly from his mouth. In other words, our meeting was to be open to others, but it would have individual parts meant just for me, and I should therefore consider it as a special audience.

“I arrived on Shabbos for the festive meal and found that a large number of important men from all over the region had gathered for the occasion. The great man finally appeared, cutting an impressive figure, dressed as he was in a white robe. Even his shoes and his tobacco container were white. He gave each one of the arrivals *shalom*, that is, the great man greeted each of them.

“We sat down to eat, and a solemn silence reigned during the meal. After we had finished, the leader sang a celebratory, spiritually uplifting melody.

“He held his hand in front of his forehead for a few moments, and then began to call: Z. From H.! M. from R.! S.M. from N.! — the names and places of residence of all the new arrivals, something that astonished us more than a little.

“Each of us was asked to recite a verse from Tanach. We did this. Thereupon the leader began to give a sermon, taking the verses we had recited as the text. Even though they were completely unconnected verses from the different books of Tanach, he linked them together with such artistry that they seemed to form a single whole. Even more extraordinary was that each of us felt that the part of the sermon dealing with his words contained something referring directly to his own pressing personal concerns. Naturally we were amazed.”

Rosho Ketem Paz

The Maggid's final months were spent in the town of Anipoli. The Alter Rebbe and many of the *talmidim* were still present.

In the days leading up to the *histalkus*, he shared several *divrei Torah* with his *talmidim* and with the Alter Rebbe individually. [These were shared by the Alter Rebbe at the *shalom zachar* of the Tzemach Tzedek. The Alter Rebbe's son, Reb Chaim Avraham, later recounted them to the Tzemach Tzedek's oldest son Reb Baruch Shalom, who shared them with the Raza and the Rebbe Rashab. The Rebbe Rashab, in turn, shared them with the Frierdiker Rebbe in the year 5666* (תרס"ו) who transcribed them in his diary.¹⁷]

During one conversation on Sunday, 17 Kislev, the Maggid told the Alter Rebbe that during a person's final three days, he sees only the *dvar Hashem* in physical matter.

On Tuesday, Yud-Tes Kislev 5533* (תקל"ג), the Maggid was *nistalek*, and buried in Anipoli.

The following story is recorded in Beis Rebbe:

A disagreement arose between the local *chevra kadisha* and the *talmidim*, regarding who would have the merit to participate in the *taharah*. A *din Torah* ensued, and the final ruling was that the *chevra kadisha*, along with any *talmid* who was a member of the *chevra kadisha* in his hometown, would carry out the *taharah*.

The Alter Rebbe, as a member of the Liozna *chevra kadisha*, was permitted to participate. A raffle was held over who would do the *taharah* of the Maggid's holy head, and the Alter Rebbe won.

When they brought the Maggid's *guf* to the *mikveh*, the Alter Rebbe said:

"Our *chachamim* said, גדולים צדיקים במיתתן, יותר מבחייהן—*tzaddikim* are greater after their passing than during their lifetime.' Our Rebbe should *tovel* his own head in the water."

And that is what happened. The Maggid bent over and *toiveled* his head in the water three times. **T**

1. See Toras Shalom pg. 83, Hatomim 140-142.

2. Toras Menachem 5745 vol. 1 pg. 243.

3. Reb Yisrael Ruzhiner was a great-grandson of the Maggid, and many anecdotes about the Maggid were passed down through his family.

4. Os 424.
5. Shabbos Parshas Noach 5721, Sichos Kodesh ois 4.
6. Sefer Hasichos 5704 pg. 130-131
7. Likutei Sichos vol. 3 pg. 874.
8. Sichos Kodesh 5721, Simchas Beis Hashoevah os 6
9. Yoman of Reb Moshe Slonim, *Lubavitch Sheb'Lubavitch*, issue 5 (14).
10. See Sefer Hasichos 5709, pg. 291.
11. *The Great Maggid* pg. 171
12. All of these examples are collected in *Toldos Chabad B'Rusia Hatzaris*, pg. 13 and on.
13. Hatomim Issue 2 pg. 156
14. *Toldos Chabad Brusia Hatzaris*, pg. 13 and on.
15. *Igros Kodesh Admur Hazakein* pg. 344.
16. Yoreh Deah, siman 334 se'if 39.
17. Sefer Hasichos 5703 pg. 155.
18. *Shnei Hameoros* pg. 60.
19. *Igeres Hakodesh* siman 25.
20. *Toras Shalom* pg. 47

On A Journey


The Baal Shem Tov once asked a Chossid to convey his regards to the Maggid, who served as a poor *melamed* at the time. With great difficulty the messenger found the Maggid's small and neglected home. The visitor found him seated on a rough block of wood, with his students seated on planks of wood supported by similar blocks of wood. The only other furniture in the room was a wooden table.

Since the Maggid was in the middle of teaching, the visitor agreed to return later. When he did so, he found the scene changed. The pupils had gone; the "table" had been converted into a "bed;" the Maggid was still seated on the block of wood, studying alone. The visitor could not hide his astonishment at the conditions in which the great rabbi lived.

"Do you have nicer furnishings with you?" the Maggid asked.

"In my home you will find a chair, a bench, a bed and other home furnishings. Obviously, while on a journey it is different."

"Indeed," the Maggid answered, "on a journey things are different." (In other words, our time in this world is merely a journey for the *neshamas*, and overindulgence in materialism is unnecessary.)



Words of the Living G-d

Thirty years after the Maggid's passing, a controversy arose on the topic of Chabad Chassidus. Reb Avraham Kalisker accused the Alter Rebbe of straying from the true path of Chassidus. The Alter Rebbe, on the other hand, publicly defended himself, asserting that his Chassidus didn't diverge whatsoever from the teachings he had received from the Maggid and his son, Reb Avraham Hamalach. His claim was fiercely supported by Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev.

The basic disagreement was about the role of intellect in the life of a Chossid. According to Reb Avraham, a Chossid's task was to strengthen his simple *emunah* and reach *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem* through *dveikus* to a *tzaddik*. The Alter Rebbe maintained that every Chossid had a personal responsibility to contemplate matters of *Elokus* and reach *ahavah* and *yirah* on their own. For this reason—to provide a Chossid with the tools for *hisbonenus*—the Alter Rebbe expounded extensively upon the concepts of *Elokus* described in the Kabbalah of the Arizal.

When examining the Maggid's teachings, Chassidus Chabad may indeed seem to be an aberration. Some *talmidim* do record statements of the Maggid about the importance of personal *hisbonenus*, but those statements are not found in his *sefarim*. And while the Maggid did base his Torah on the Arizal's Kabbalah (as opposed to the Baal Shem Tov, who rarely referenced them at all), it takes a comparative back-seat to the main corpus of his teachings, which focus on “*avodah*” and “*mussar*.”

This discussion never really ended. Through the generations, there has always been a stark difference between the styles of Chabad and Chagas Chassidim. A casual observer would automatically assume, based on the external appearances, that Chagas Chassidim were the true heirs of the Baal Shem Tov and Maggid.

However, a closer look at the writings of the Maggid's *talmidim* reveals a different picture.

The Maggid's Torah was recorded by his *talmidim*—primarily Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev—and passed around in manuscript form for several decades. Later, these manuscripts were brought to print by various individuals under different names: *Maggid Devarav L'Yaakov*, *Or Torah*, and so on—but their contents all closely resemble one another.

When comparing those teachings to the *sefarim* of his *talmidim*, the stark differences are inescapable. Each of the Maggid's *talmidim* has a different focus. Kedushas Levi is not similar to Noam Elimelech, and Maor Einayim is not similar to Panim Yafos. In many aspects, their teachings seem to contradict one another.

In a practical sense as well: The Chassidus practiced in Karlin did not resemble the Chassidus of Amdur, and neither of them resembled the Chassidus of Chernobyl. In truth, almost no *talmid* can be described as a “direct successor” to the Maggid.

These differences point to a striking phenomenon: The Maggid managed to attract and retain *talmidim* who were profoundly different from one another. Yet, despite their differences, the teachings of the Maggid served as the basis of their own unique paths in Chassidus.

One *talmid*, Reb Zev of Zhitomir, describes how this unique ability was evident even in a single Torah delivery: From a Torah said before a large gathering of people of all ages and styles, he writes, each individual found a personal lesson and individual message. In a different entry, which perhaps sheds light on this phenomenon, he writes that the Maggid's Torah was delivered with complete *bittul*, as a conduit for the words of the *Shechinah*. "There were times we saw with our own eyes, that *Shechinah medaberes mitoch grono*, they were not his words at all."

Clearly, the Maggid's ideas left space for wide interpretation and application, and no *talmid* or another can be justly accused of misrepresenting his teachings.

However, with regards to the Alter Rebbe, there is another important factor involved. We find that the Maggid held personal discussions with some select *talmidim*—namely, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev and the Alter Rebbe—where he taught them concepts that he didn't speak of publicly.

Reb Levi Yitzchok transcribed his personal conversations, and they were later printed in *Kedushas Levi* and *Maggid Devarav L'Yaakov*. There, the Maggid dwells at length on topics associated with Kabbalah which are not found in his regular writings.

A close inspection of the writings of the Alter Rebbe and his students reveal that he also received many teachings from the Maggid in a similar manner. His demand for personal *hisbonenus* and the resulting focus on the Arizal's Kabbalah are all clearly attributed to the Maggid and his son Reb Avraham Hamalach.

"I personally heard from the [Alter] Rebbe," writes Reb Eizik Homiler, "that *the Maggid of Mezeritch told him in the name of the Baal Shem Tov... to delve into the concepts which bring a person to ahavas Hashem...*"¹⁸

"It is impossible to properly understand [the concepts of Chassidus]," the Alter Rebbe himself writes elsewhere, "without prefacing from the writings of the Arizal . . . as I received from my Rebbes..."¹⁹

A long list of uniquely Chabad concepts are linked directly to the Maggid. These include concepts such as the difference between *Atzmus* and *ein sof*, the meaning of *ein aroch* and the interpretation of *tzimtzum shelo kipshuto*, to name just a few.

From these *maamarim*, many of which were published only in recent decades, it is clear that the Alter Rebbe's Chassidus indeed had a firm foundation in the Torah he received—albeit privately—from the Maggid. As Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev attested, "We all ate from the same plate in Mezritch, but the Litvak [the Alter Rebbe] took the *smetene* [the fattiest portion]."²⁰

The Maggid gave over these concepts to the Alter Rebbe as *nekudos*, and he expanded upon them greatly "after Petersburg," when he returned from his imprisonment with a newfound liberty to spread the *maayanos* of Chassidus.

In a famous letter published in Hatomim, the Frieddiker Rebbe compared the progression from the Maggid to the Alter Rebbe to the growth of flax and its ultimate refinement into fine cloth. Although the first stage is the growth of the rough product, the ultimate goal is for the production of a much more developed and refined result.

In another *pisgam*, he put it as follows:

"The Baal Shem Tov taught how one *should* serve Hashem. The Alter Rebbe taught how one *could* serve Hashem."

The above segment is based on an essay in Heichal Habaal Shem Tov, Tammuz 5764, pg. 45, by Rabbi Nochum Grunwald.

Rebuilt & Restored — The Maggid's Resting Place

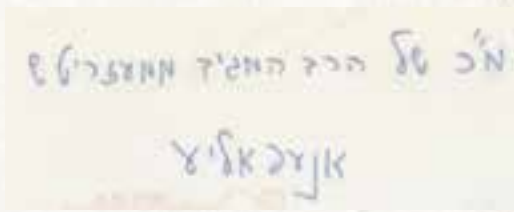
For generations, the Maggid's Ohel in Anipoli, Ukraine, was a treasured place for the Jews of the region. “There are three *Ohalim* next to each other,” the Rov of Anipoli described in 5664* (תרט"ד), “that of the Maggid, Reb Zushe, and Reb Yehuda Leib Hakohen...¹ Only special people are allowed into the Ohel itself, after immersing in the *mikveh* and removing their shoes.”²

Before Reb Aharon Chazan (a Chossid from Russia) immigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 5726*, he visited Anipoli where he was horrified to discover that everything had been uprooted, aside for a few holes in the ground from the sticks that had held up the small wooden *Ohalim*. He asked the rov of nearby Slavita³ to help determine the exact location of the graves and convinced a local Jew—Reb Boruch Shuchat—to arrange for a new *matzeva*.⁴

He left Russia before hearing any results. During a visit to the Rebbe for Yud Shevat 5730*, Rabbi Chazan (along with the Skulener Rebbe) arranged for a *yechidus* to discuss the issue with the Rebbe. The *yechidus* did not materialize, but Rabbi Hodakov asked him to write up a detailed plan — how much it would cost to rebuild, who would do it, and so on — which he would present to the Rebbe.⁵ We do not know what came of this plan, but we do know that the Rebbe opposed the rebuilding of the Baal Shem



THE SLAB OF CONCRETE POURED OVER THE THREE KEVORIM, AS PHOTOGRAPHED BY REB BEREL LEVY IN 5744.



BACK OF THE PICTURE AS GIVEN IN TO THE REBBE



A LETTER, WRITTEN IN BASIC YIDDISH, FROM A LOCAL JEW TO REB AHARON CHAZAN DETAILING THE ATTEMPTS TO REFURBISH THE SITE.

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CHAZAN FAMILY ARCHIVES

Tov's Ohel, out of an abundance of caution for the safety of the Jews of Russia (however, a basic *matzeva* did exist for the Baal Shem Tov).⁶

As it turned out, Reb Boruch Shuchat had been partially successful. He had bribed a non-Jew to obtain building materials and had begun to restore the *matzeva*, but government officials had stopped the work after a layer of cement had been poured. When one of the local Jews had claimed that it was his grandfather's burial spot, the officials had responded, "We know better than you who is buried there." The Slavita rov was called for a full-night interrogation, and warned that the work should not continue.⁷

It was many years before a proper Ohel was built. In the years of 5749*-5751*, Reb Dovid Nachshon and Reb Avi Taub made a series of journeys — with the Rebbe's guidance — to rebuild all the *Ohalim* of the Rabbeim. In Anipoli, a basic monument had been installed by Karliner Chassidim. With the guidance of a local Jew, Reb Dovid and Reb Avi erected a full Ohel (which has since been refurbished and expanded by other organizations) and exact *matzeivos* were built based on diagrams from Rabbi Chazan. The full text of the Maggid's *matzeiva* was obtained from Sefer Hatoldos.

After the trip, they brought the key of the new Ohel to the Rebbe.⁸ Finally, in 5751* — some 50 years after it had been destroyed — the Maggid's Ohel had been reinstated.

1. Several other prominent Tzaddikim were buried nearby as well.
2. Haskama to *Menoras Zahav*.
3. Rabbi Yitzchok Gedalia Liberzon. Rabbi Liberzon led a small shul in Slavita throughout the years of the Soviet Union, and was the main caretaker of the Maggid's tziyun. His daughters were also instrumental in the rebuilding of the Ohel.
4. *Hama'avak Vehanitzachon* pg. 253-4.
5. Skulener Rebbe's letter to Rabbi Chazan (chabadpedia page on the Maggid), account of Rabbi Yaakov Chazan.
6. *Guidance From the Rebbe* pg. 78. But see also *Hiskashrus* issue 957 pg. 9.
7. Letter from a friend of Reb Boruch to Rabbi Chazan, 1980. (Chazan Family Archives).
8. See *Yoman 13 Cheshvan 5751*.



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REB DOVID NACHSHON AND REB AVI TAUB GIVE THE REBBE THE KEY TO THE MITTELER REBBE'S OHEL, 3 TEVES 5750.



MEASURING THE AREA TO DETERMINE THE ACCURATE LOCATION OF EACH OF THE KEVORIM, SUMMER 5750.



REFURBISHING THE MATZEIVA, CHESHVAN 5751.



BUILDING THE OHEL, CHESHVAN 5751.



THE COMPLETED MATZEIVA AND OHEL, SIVAN 5751

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THE MATZEIVA AND OHEL TODAY, AFTER RENOVATIONS IN 5779.

