



A Chassidische Village

LIFE IN SHTZEDRIN

(Based on the Frierdiker Rebbe's sicha - Shabbos parshas Shemos, 5702)

The Tzemach Tzedek cared deeply for the financial well being of Russian Jewry, and encouraged many people to take up agricultural and other groundwork on the Russian countryside.

To better assist them, the Tzemach Tzedek purchased 3,500 "desiate" of country land in the Minsk region, which included open space, forest, and rivers. The land was bought from Count Shtzedinov and the village was named after him.

More than three hundred Jewish families soon settled in Shtzedrin where the Tzemach Tzedek distributed the land to them free of charge. There they enjoyed a steady income, and for part of the year they were free to learn Torah.

Each family was given a piece of land to build a house, breed animals and build farming structures.

Shtzedrin residents enjoyed government privileges including a 200 ruble loan to be repaid over time.

The Tzemach Tzedek split the 3,500 desiate into two. All open space and part of the forest—a total of 1,700 diaste—were designated for settlement. The rest of the forest—1,800 diaste—was sold to a wealthy Chossid from Bobroisk, Reb Efrayim Yosef Golodetz. The Tzemach Tzedek sent part of the profits to Colel Chabad in Eretz Yisroel and kept part for his tzedaka fund.

Some of Reb Efrayim Yosef's family moved to Shtzedrin to run his lumber business.

Aside for the rov, the *shochet*, and the *melamed*, Shtzedrin also had a *mashpia*, Reb Yerucham Fishel Yanovitcher. He was later replaced by another *mashpia*, Reb Yisroel Moshe.

Reb Yisroel Moshe was a wise and beloved man, a *lamdan* and a *baal middos tovos*, and he was deeply *mekushar* to the Tzemach Tzedek.

For a few decades after his marriage his father-in-law supported him while he learned. He then became a *melamed* until, about ten years after founding Shtzedrin, the Tzemach Tzedek appointed him *mashpia* of the colony.

At farbrengens, there was always one *vort* from the *mashpia* that was the pillar around which all the talk and stories revolved. This *vort* was eternally etched in the hearts of everyone there.

Reb Yisroel Moshe was a well thought-out individual, and a very punctual person. He expected everyone to attend the fixed learning sessions on time, and would reprimand anyone who wouldn't show up.

He also had a way with words. When he would discuss with people the purpose of life, they would leave broken and downtrodden, foolish and worthless in their own eyes.

He could describe people or stories so clearly it was as if he drew a painting.

He was mild tempered, didn't speak harshly or shout, and spoke to every person on his level. He would speak to people of their weaknesses in a way that every word would strike a deep chord in their hearts and bring tears to their eyes.

A Chossid by the name of Reb Avrohom Dov ben Reb Yermiyah told me about his uncle, Reb Leib Yitzchok. He was a Chossid of the Alter Rebbe and was well versed in Nigle and Chassidus. He was a businessman, working first in a big store in Hommel and later as senior manager of Reb Efrayim Yosef's estate in Shtzedrin.

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While living in Hommel he was a student of Reb Aizik Hommler. He was one of the first to come hear Chassidus from Reb Aizik and would speak with him in learning, both *nigle* and Chassidus. Reb Aizik said: “You can speak with Reb Leib Yitzchok. He has both an “*ozen shoma’as*—a listening ear” and an “*ozen milin tibachen*—an ear that can judge words.”

Reb Avrohom Dov learned in Lubavitch from his bar mitzvah until age seventeen, and whenever he had free time he would go to his uncle Reb Leib Yitzchok.

Reb Leib Yitzchok would be *mekarev* his nephew, telling him of his childhood years, his teachers, and what and how he would learn.

Reb Leib Yitzchok’s father, Avrohom Dov’s grandfather R’ Elya Shaul, was *baki* in sedarim Nashim and Nezikin of Gemara with Tosfos—he knew it almost by heart. He was a tailor—his worker would sow and he would sit in the corner of his store learning.

He was a *misnaged* but mixed out of *machlokes* and didn’t take any sides. He had a childhood friend called Reb Tanchum Shlomo, the Maggid of Beli, who hated Chassidim. He was on the Vilna *Beis Din* of Reb Shmuel that put the Mezritcher Maggid in *cherem*.

Reb Leib Yitzchok learned for years by this Reb Tanchum Shlomo and was affected by his hate. *Be’hashgacha pratis*, his two best friends—

brothers—became Chassidim and he followed them.

Reb Leib Yitzchok was very fond of the *mashpia* Reb Yisroel Moshe who in turn treated him with great respect.

He would come to all farbrenghens. He would tell of his days before he became a Chossid, his early days as one, his first *yechidus* and stories of the Mittlerer Rebbe’s times. He had a strong impact on his listeners.

Reb Avrohom Dov said that Reb Leib Yitzchok gave rich explanations of Chassidus, in a clear, concise manner. His explanations were accompanied by stories that not only added clarity but etched his teachings into the the minds and hearts of his listeners.

Reb Avrohom Dov also described the Mashpia Reb Yisroel Moshe’s farbrenghens: “When the *mashpia* spoke, you could close your eyes and you forget where you were. You could imagine that you could see or have been transported to the place the *mashpia* described. His words made a great impact.” **1**

