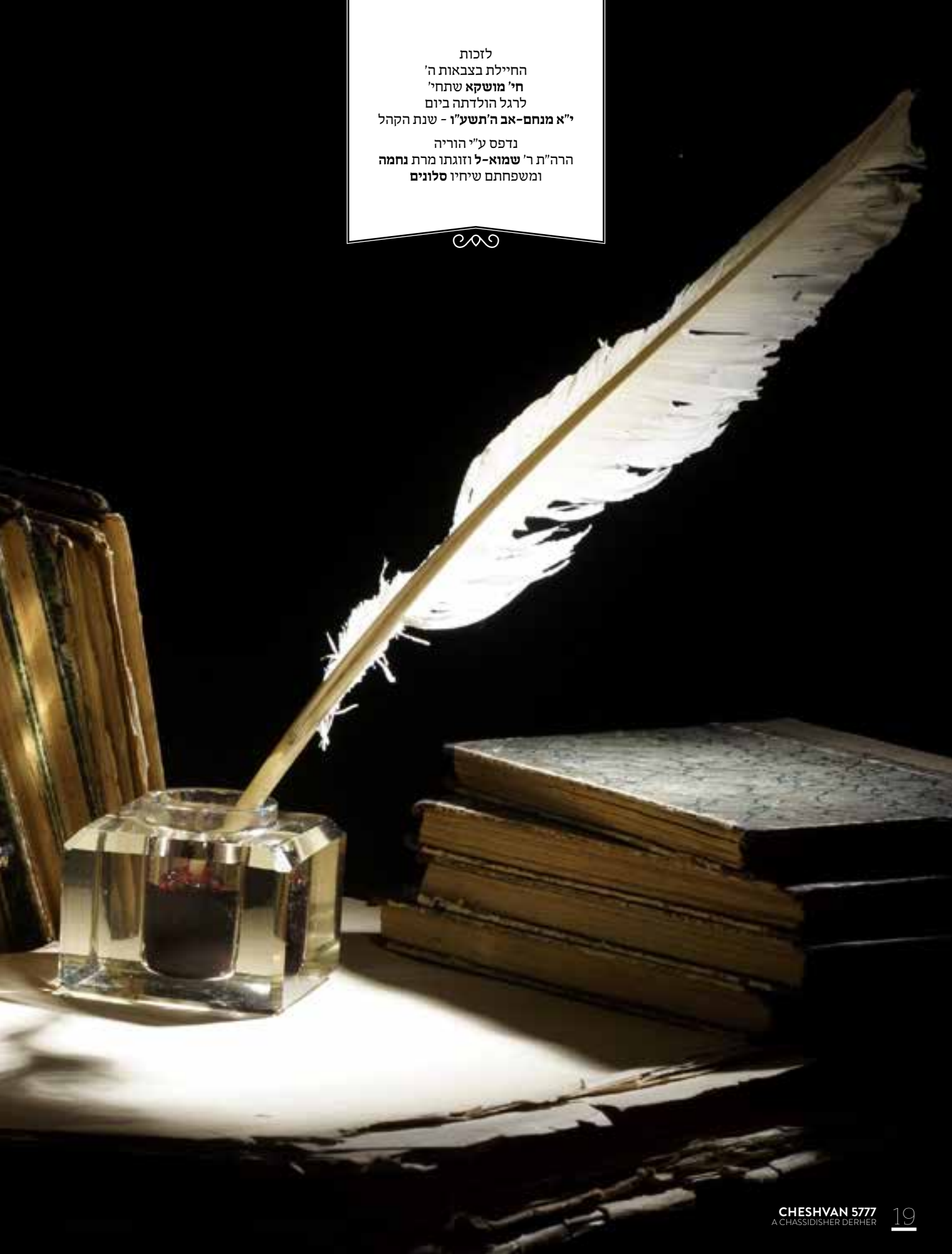


# OF HEART AND QUILL



REB  
**ELIJAHU CHAIM**  
ALTHAUS

לזכות  
החיילת בצבאות ה'  
ח' מושקא שתח'ל  
לרגל הולדתה ביום  
י"א מנחם-אב ה'תשע"ו - שנת הקהל  
נדפס ע"י הוריה  
הרה"ת ר' שמואל-ל וזוגתו מרת נחמה  
ומשפחתם שיחיו סלונים



**“MY BEST OF FRIENDS,”  
“A YEDID OF OUR  
HOUSEHOLD,” IS HOW THIS  
CHOSSID IS DESCRIBED BY THE  
FRIERDIKER REBBE. THE REBBE  
REFERRED TO HIM AS “YEDID  
BEIS REBBE, THE WELL KNOWN  
CHOSSID.”<sup>1</sup>**

**While there were many illustrious Chassidim who lived during his time, Reb Eliyahu Chaim Althaus—known as Reb Elye Chaim—stood out as unique. Blessed with an endearing *breitkeit*, his character personified the complete dedication and heartfelt love of a Chossid to his Rebbe. His love was reciprocated by the Frierdiker Rebbe, and the entire *beis harav*; he merited an unusual closeness and was entrusted to carry out the most intimate and complex of tasks on the Frierdiker Rebbe’s behalf.**

**A combination of a wide heart and a flowing quill, the prolific letters of Reb Elye Chaim have allowed us a glimpse into the world of the Frierdiker Rebbe during the fateful periods of his leadership, when Lubavitch was straddling between worlds—weathering hardships and celebrating rebuilding—giving us a backdoor entrance to the events that so altered the future of Chabad Lubavitch forever.**

**As we will see in the coming pages...**

JEM, 2708



THE REBBE, IN THE PERIOD OF THE REBBE AND REBBETZIN'S CHASUNA.

## THE SECRET NODAH B'YEHUDAH

Reb Elye Chaim was once visiting a town for Shabbos, when he heard that a traveling *misnagdisher maggid* would be delivering a sermon on Shabbos afternoon. Arriving at the shul some time before the *drasha*, Reb Elye Chaim asked the *shamash* if the sefer *Nodah B'yehuda* was available. The *shamash* searched for it on the bookshelves, but was unable to locate it.

Meanwhile, the shul filled up, the speech commenced, and then, at the height of the *pilpul*, with the *maggid*

soaring in his *gaavah* and pride, Reb Elye Chaim cut in.

“The *Nodah B'yehudah* says otherwise...”

The *Maggid* was flustered; the shul was thrown into a tumult. Needless to say, Reb Elye Chaim had no factual basis for his statement and had simply wanted to break into the unbearable *gaavah* and *chitzoniut* of the *Maggid*, accomplishing it in his bold and humorous way.

This *breitkeit* and boldness was Reb Elye Chaim's trademark approach to everything he would do and everyone he would meet.

## DEEP ROOTS

Born to the prominent Althaus family of Nikolaev, Reb Elye Chaim was raised in a setting that gravitated strongly to Lubavitch and the Rabbeim. His father, Reb Pinchas, was a Chossid of the Rebbe Maharash, and his entire extended family was well known for their warmth, *chassidishkeit*, and dedication to the Rebbe.

After learning in Tomchei Temimim in Lubavitch for a number of years, Reb Elye Chaim was sent by the Rebbe Rashab to strengthen Yiddishkeit in the town of Dobranka, near Gomel, in 5678 (תרע"ח). In that distant town, when the news of the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus* reached him, he is reported to have fainted [see sidebar]. Three years later, he traveled to join the Frierdiker Rebbe in Leningrad, and from that day, until the Frierdiker Rebbe moved to Poland, he remained part and parcel of the scene in Lubavitch.

For Chassidim coming to the Rebbe, Reb Elye Chaim was the embodiment of *hiskashrus* and dedication. When Reb Yisrael Jacobson arrived at the home of the Frierdiker Rebbe on Erev Rosh Hashanah 5685 (תרפ"ה), and noted—to his consternation—that not a single bench was to be found in the room where the *tefillos* were scheduled to take place, he turned to Reb Elye Chaim questioningly, and exclaimed, “Reb Elye Chaim, it's Erev Rosh Hashanah, and there is nothing for the shul.” Reb Elye Chaim looked at him, and replied with the same words, just in a factual tone; “Yisrael, it's Erev Rosh Hashanah, and there is nothing for the shul.”

Reb Yisrael related that Reb Elye Chaim's no-nonsense reply opened his eyes, and matured him by ten years.

“He had meant to say, ‘From whom are you demanding? One should demand only from himself..’ In my

eyes he filled the image of an *eltere* Chossid, totally dedicated to the Rebbe, and as one who educates the young to dedicate themselves as well, that they too should feel responsibility for the the Rebbe's *inyonim*.”<sup>2</sup>

At one point in time, the Frierdiker Rebbe was not feeling well and was having difficulty speaking. One of the elder Chassidim farbrenged during

## IS IT TRUE?!

Reb Elye Chaim's daughter related:

When my father lived in Dobranka, Reb Itche *der masmid* would visit from time to time, and during those visits, my father went out of his way to honor him and make him comfortable.

About one month after the Rebbe Rashab's *histalkus*, Reb Itche came by. My father had already heard the news. When Reb Itche was getting off the wagon in front of our home, we ran to tell my father that Reb Itche had arrived. My father went outside to the stairwell in front of the house, where Reb Itche was standing at it's bottom step. Reb Itche immediately asked him,

“*S'iz richtig ader nit*—is it true or not?”

My father did not answer him. Instead he let out a deep sigh.

Reb Itche asked a second time,

“*S'iz richtig ader nit?*”

This time my father's head bent towards the stairwell.

When Reb Itche asked a third time, my father fell onto the steps, hit his head, and lost consciousness.

that time, with his typical broad Chassidisher manner. Reb Elye Chaim couldn't bear the sight.

“The Rebbe cannot speak, and you speak so well!?!”

## HIS LETTERS

Reb Elye Chaim was blessed with a flowing pen. His long letters, to the Frierdiker Rebbe, to his children, or to his friends, bring events he describes to life, and make the reader feel as if he is present in the situation, watching the happenings unfold. Reading those letters, one is able to vividly grasp his heartfelt character, and his intense love for the Rebbe.

In fact, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote to him numerous times encouraging him to put his talent to better use; pushing him to write more stories and descriptions of Chassidim that he had known in his youth. Once, upon receiving a letter from Reb Elye Chaim, the Frierdiker Rebbe responded, describing the great pleasure he had derived from his vivid descriptions and even went so far as to quote his words and expound upon them. In letters to the editorial board of *Hatomim*, the Frierdiker Rebbe encourages them to specifically request that Reb Elye Chaim describe a certain event about which they were reporting.<sup>3</sup>

## LEAD UP TO ARREST

As the years moved on, the government began to intensify its effort to eliminate all vestiges of Yiddishkeit in the Soviet Union. The Frierdiker Rebbe responded in kind, and the secret operations continued as usual, and with even more vigor.

Reb Elye Chaim was no outsider to these events. Looking for someone with the discretion and willpower needed to be involved in his clandestine activities, the Frierdiker Rebbe had chosen him to run the mammoth operation of underground

*chadarim*, and he was thus intimately involved in all of the ‘underground’ activities of the Frierdiker Rebbe. In fact, all of the mail that would be sent to the Frierdiker Rebbe would be received through two homes: Reb Chonye Marosov and Reb Elye Chaim Althaus.

In a letter to his children after Yud-Beis Tammuz, Reb Elye Chaim describes the events leading up to the arrest, and among them, the memorable farbrengen of Purim 5687 (תרפ"ז).<sup>4</sup>

“Knowing about the Rebbe's many hardships, which—we understood—allow him no rest at night, while during the day he must stand in constant battle with those opposing him, we expected that at that Purim *seudah*, he would share his inner concerns with us, as Purim was usually a time of revelations. Instead, what we saw was totally unanticipated, unlike anything we had ever seen.

“The Rebbe spoke openly, sharply, and passionately. He wept, his face flushed with emotion, and in his voice was an intensity one had never heard before. We actually witnessed an outpouring of soul, so intense were his feelings.

“At midnight, in the midst of the *seudah*, the Rebbe abruptly stood up, pulled at his shirt to reveal his heart, and pounded hard with his fist on his bare flesh, and called to me to come closer to him.

‘E-l-y-e C-h-a-i-m, E-l-y-e C-h-a-i-m!’ he called out. ‘I told you to write harshly last year, but you did not listen, and this is why there has been so much suffering all year. After Shabbos, you shall write a letter to all the cities and villages with these words: ‘We had a Rebbe, and he left us his son to guide us, and the son has instructed us to write in his name that anyone handing his child over to the school of the Yevsektzia will not live through the year, *chas veshalom*.’ Will

you write this? Remember well what I say to you!

“He repeated these words again and again, pounding upon his chest. His fiery words brought an intense fear upon all of the assembled. One of the elder Chassidim begged the Rebbe to stop, but to no avail.”

## GREATER THAN YUD-TES KISLEV

A few weeks after the arrest, the Frierdiker Rebbe was banished to Kostroma, and he chose Reb Elye Chaim to accompany him on the journey, along with Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka.<sup>5</sup> Their stay was cut short; after just ten days, the Frierdiker Rebbe was informed that he was free to return home. When Reb Elye Chaim heard the news—he had accompanied the Frierdiker Rebbe to

the police station that day—he was so excited that his face first turned white, then red. The Frierdiker Rebbe was afraid that something would happen to him, so he hit him on the back to calm him down.

That day the Frierdiker Rebbe penned a letter to Reb Elye Chaim, in which he notes a fact that underlines Reb Elye Chaim’s closeness to him: Reb Elye Chaim was the first of the Chassidim to see the Frierdiker Rebbe as he was being taken off to prison, and he was also the first one who merited to wish him *mazel tov*,

upon hearing the good news of his liberation.

One week later, back in Leningrad, Reb Elye Chaim wrote a letter to the Chassidim in America, sharing with them his feelings about the Frierdiker Rebbe’s release:

“...On Tuesday, Yud-Beis Tammuz... the Rebbe was redeemed in peace. This day will be set for generations as a day of celebration and happiness. It is a remembrance to the day of Yud-Tes Kislev, and it is possible that this day is even greater, for this miracle is greater than the previous

**“WE HAD A REBBE, AND HE LEFT US HIS SON TO GUIDE US, AND THE SON HAS INSTRUCTED US TO WRITE IN HIS NAME THAT ANYONE HANDING HIS CHILD OVER TO THE SCHOOL OF THE YEVSSEKTZIA WILL NOT LIVE THROUGH THE YEAR, CHAS VESHALOM.”**



JEM 102371

one. The perpetrators in this case were Yidden, men of free choice, and they didn't only seek to uproot *Toras Hachassidus*—they attempted to uproot *Toras Hashem* in general, and to extinguish the flame of Yiddishkeit, *chas veshalom*.

“However, Hashem watched over Yosef Hatzaddik, and watched over the entire Jewish nation, bringing them salvation, and saved the Rebbe from the wrath of those who seeked his harm. It was on the same day that his light began shining on this world [i.e. the Friediker Rebbe's birthday], on Yud-Beis Tammuz 5640, that the sun shone brighter.”

In midst of all the excitement, Reb Elye Chaim didn't lose touch, and remembered that they are still in the Soviet Union, and the NKVD still swore retribution.

Finishing off the letter, he implores the Chassidim of the United States and Canada to keep this fact in mind:

“But my dear friends, after all we have seen with our own eyes, we must take to heart the Gemara oft repeated by our Rebbes, that ‘a miracle does not occur every day’ and that ‘one does not rely on a miracle.’ We are not yet tranquil, and our joy is incomplete.

“There is still a sadness buried deep in our hearts. We are not aware how the salvation suddenly arrived, from here or from there, and why it suddenly turned for good. Therefore, the terrible fear from the past will continue to haunt us for the coming days. For who knows what a new day will bring?

“Who knows which way the wind will blow, which side of the political world will turn upon the Rebbe. Although he has absolutely no connection to politics, enemies have learned who this great man is, and they saw his great esteem in the eyes of the Jewish people who are spread out in all corners of the world, who revere him and the very mention of his name.

We are afraid lest an *ayin hora* take hold of him, lest they set upon him and treat him like a plaything for, *chas veshalom*, some terrible purpose.

“Therefore, a holy responsibility rests with us, and with our brothers and friends, to fulfill the *maamar Chazal*: ‘A wise man needs a guardian, and should not walk alone in the dark.’ Stand prepared at your posts to know always if the Rebbe is well and what his situation is. Do not turn from the ‘crown of our heads and the delight of our hearts’ for one moment. Stay in unison with our life-source at all times and with Chassidim around the world in general. For his sake, beg mercy from our Father in Heaven day and night. May the merit of his forefathers, our holy Rebbes, guard him against all evil, so that he shall not be suspected for that which he has not trespassed, and that all of the winds in the world shall not move him from his place, *chas veshalom*.”

## SHADCHANUS

Aware of his dedication and capabilities, the Friediker Rebbe entrusted delicate issues into the hands of Reb Elye Chaim. What could be more significant than being chosen to act as the middleman between the Friediker Rebbe and Horav Levi Yitzchok, to bring the *shidduch* of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin to fruition.

When the wedding finally took place years later, Reb Elye Chaim was chosen to be the *shomer* of the Chosson, and in a letter to Chassidim in Russia, he describes his experience in great detail.

“Regarding your requests and the requests of *anash* to inform them of details of the wedding in Warsaw of the Rebbe's daughter, I will not hold back anything from my good friends. Perhaps I was created just for this and for this reason I was sent away from my friends, so that I could relate to you—and so that Anash of our

country who shared in the *tzaddik's* sorrow and saw his “*churban*”—will know of all the glory, which by the kindness of Hashem our Rebbe *shlita* merited now in its ‘rebuilding.’

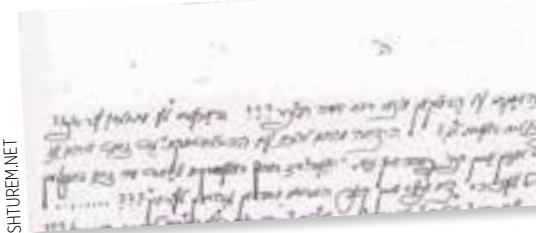
## IN WARSAW

“On Monday the thirteenth of Kislev, at seven in the morning the train slowly pulled into the Warsaw station.

“The *chosson* entered my compartment and suggested that I travel with him to the hotel, saying that this is what the Rebbe wanted. Naturally I didn't waste a moment. The two of us quickly left and made our way with difficulty from the train. It was not easy to push our way through the masses of people surrounding us. When an acquaintance greeted me, I did not reply.

“Sadly, due to the confusion and haste, I did not merit to see all the wondrous goings on at the Rebbe's compartment which I was told about later. Truth to say, however, my reward was doubled because I was with the *chosson* for the entire twenty four hours before the *chupa*. I came to know with absolute certainty that he has not changed at all as far as his great fear of Heaven and certainly it will draw good will from Hashem. His davening, saying *Tehillim*, learning *Reishis Chochma*, and his saying *krias shema she'al hamitah* were for me a source of great pleasure and *nachas*.

“I also merited to see the letter the *chosson* received from his father the *gaon* and Chossid Horav Levi Yitzchok, in honor of the wedding.



SHADCHANUS

# THE REBBE'S SON-IN-LAW, THAT SILENT ONE WITH THE SILK GARTEL SHLITA, GAVE THE FIRST CRY FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS HEART, AND IN HIS WAKE FOLLOWED ALL OF THE CHASSIDIM.

At length, he explains the special quality of the third day of the week, which is when the *chupa* will be. It is based on Kabbalah and from the little I understood I was overwhelmed and awed by his great knowledge and the truth of his words. He concludes by saying that the future *geulah*, too, will take place on the third day of the week, as it says in the verse, 'On the third day He will raise us up and we will live before Him.'

"I greatly enjoyed the letter because it has been some time since I heard his eloquent exegesis on Kabbalah which, as you know, is his custom.

## THE WEDDING DAY

"The following day, the day of the *chupa*, we went to the *mikveh* before *shacharis*. After davening he learned and I ate. Then, at the appropriate time, the *chossan* davened *mincha* and said the lengthy *vidui* before the One who knows the secrets of the world with great concentration and pouring out of his soul in a low voice.

"This awesome and frightening sight, with nobody there but me and him, two people as distant from each other as east is from west, for his thoughts are not my thoughts.

"Can you, my dear [friends], picture and describe for yourselves what I felt during this long period of time? I sat in a corner of the room, watching this young man, who in a few hours will become the son-in-law of our Rebbe, from whom he will build—in the future—an everlasting Jewish home, and no secret is hidden from him... and also from you.

"Did I myself not cry? Did I not join him in his prayer, in his pleading and asking for mercy from the depths of his heart? Don't I know that my destiny as well as that of my children to follow, are dependent on the ways of this praiseworthy young man? When Hashem will find his way pleasing, He will raise up the head of this *tzaddik* and even his enemies will make peace with him. 'His path is a path of life,' and 'he will protect the paths of his Chassidim'—for this I surely wept. The gates of tears are not locked, and certainly our prayers were accepted before the Master of all, and he will succeed with great success on the straight path which our fathers, our Rebbeim chose, and the *tzaddik*, as well as the Chasidim, will see and rejoice in him.

"I said to myself that I should praise and thank Hashem for everything I was able to see, for before me stands Mendel ben Levik, who, it is well known, was born and raised in purity and holiness and who constantly fears Heaven. As of today, all I see is fear of Heaven. I examined his deeds inside and out, and I found not one flaw. He is complete in *nefesh*,

*ruach*, and *neshamah*. He possesses his own great learning in addition to the merit of his saintly forebears.

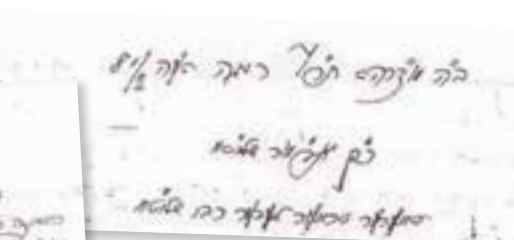
"True to say, I see for myself a young, precious lad, an outstanding scholar, one who truly fears Heaven, wearing a silk gartel, sitting and fasting, learning *Reishis Chochma* all day, his immersion and davening are truly intended for the sake of Heaven, for you know that he is naturally far from doing the slightest thing for outside appearances. And even if he is aware of what is outside of himself in secular matters, he also knows how to differentiate between holy and mundane and he hasn't, *chas veshalom*, profaned his holiness in the slightest way. What else can I say?

"Along with these thoughts, I contemplated those who came before him, generation after generation and found none better than he. I see only good. I rejoiced with this thought as though I would with a treasure and I said thanks to G-d for his goodness."

## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Unlike most Chassidim at the time, Reb Elye Chaim seems to have had a keen understanding in the significance of his actions. Reading the letter carefully, one is clearly able to see that he saw in this *shidduch* the continuation of *beis harav*, and the solidification of the future of Lubavitch.

While in these letters this message is somewhat subtle, it seems that in Reb Elye Chaim's home this was clearly understood. Reb Elye Chaim's daughter Batsheva overheard in her parent's home that on the evening that the *shidduch* was closed, the Frierdiker Rebbe spent the entire night with the Rebbe, imploring him to promise that he would fill his place after his *histalkus*.<sup>6</sup>



A LETTER FROM REB ELYE CHAIM TO THE FRIERDIKER REBBE, MOTZEI SIMCHAS TORAH 5690.



## תשרי תר"ץ

In these letters to the Frierdiker Rebbe in New York, Reb Elya Chaim describes the events of Tishrei 5690 in Riga, where, in the Frierdiker Rebbe's absence, the Rebbe had begun to reveal himself ever so slightly:

B"ה<sup>7</sup>, Motzei Rosh Hashanah 5690, Riga - 8:30 p.m.

At this moment I have arrived from the chambers of the Rebbe *shlita* to my room, I have turned on the lamp and the room has filled with light.

I sit at the table, with no one else in the house, my thoughts floating from America to Russia, and in the middle, Riga, Leningrad, Rostov, Lubavitch... My heart pounds with emotion and I ask myself, where am I? Where is our holy Rebbe? Where are my family members? I am wandering throughout the world; I feel lost; my world has been thrown upside down...

I merited to spend Rosh Hashanah in Lubavitch, in Rostov, in Leningrad, to spend Rosh Hashana by the Rebbe. The *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah by the Rebbe requires no elaboration; it is well known and etched in the hearts of all Chassidim who merited it; 'Ohel', 'Erev Rosh Hashanah *pidyonos*,' 'the Rebbe's *maariv*,' 'tekiot,' 'maftir,' 'Chassidus,' 'yechidus,' 'farbrenging with Chassidim.'

There were many years that I did not merit it, and I remained in my city, in my home, in my shul, and then, there as well, everything was organized, and in its proper place. There was a time to daven, to hear Chassidus, as per the custom of *anash* in their respective towns.

This Rosh Hashanah, of תר"ץ, was different than all other Rosh Hashanahs. It was unique, different in all its ways, and I can't manage to grasp its character.

I am by the Rebbe for Rosh Hashanah, but without the Rebbe...

I picture in my mind that during these moments, at nine o'clock—it is possible that during these very moments our holy Rebbe is reciting the *haftarah*, "מרחוק", "ה' נראה לי, על כן משכתך חסד" in New York...

A great fear falls upon me, and trembling grips me, as I picture the Rebbe's 'tzubrachtenkeit' this Rosh Hashanah in America; the Rebbe's *mekuravim* are spread throughout Russia, in the depths of Siberia; the Rebbe's family is in Riga, and the Rebbe is in America... Gevald!!!



## DER SHTILINKER MIT DER ZEIDENEM GARTEL

I will describe the occurrences of Rosh Hashanah in short:

We came before dawn on Erev Rosh Hashanah to recite *selichos*. At five o'clock, the Rebbe's son-in-law came down as well. I did not have the temerity to command the start of the recital without the presence of the Rebbe *shlita*, and we all stood quietly, broken and sorrowful, and how we awaited that perhaps, soon the door will open, and the Rebbe *shlita* will enter, and from his place he will motion to us to begin.

The first one that could not hold himself in while quietly reciting Tehillim, and broke out into tears, was the Rebbe's son-in-law, that silent one with the silk gartel *shlita*, gave the first cry, from the depths of his heart, and in his wake, followed all of the Chassidim.

I saw that crying alone is no *seder*; I banged on the *bima*, and sent one of the elder Chassidim to lead the prayers. We did not hear one word, just weeping until the morning.

We had tremendous pleasure and satisfaction from the davening of the Rebbe's son-in-law, Reb M"m *shlita*, who, during the first *maariv* of Yom Tov, davened for more than two and a half hours, shedding many tears and cries from the innermost recesses of his heart. In general, his conduct on Rosh Hashana was wondrous. I closely observed his *tevilos*, davening, the way he spoke and ate, drank and slept, and I thank Hashem for the great kindness he has done to our community.

He categorically refuses all of the honors usually given to the Rebbe *shlita*. The Rebbetzins encouraged him, not once or twice, and I also tried, speaking with him earnestly at length, urging him to be honored with *maftir* or to recite the verses before the shofar is blown, until I realized that he genuinely didn't desire any of this.

The Yom Kippur davening finished later this year in the Rebbe's *minyan* than ever before, for the Rebbe's son-in-law became totally absorbed in his *tefillos* and oblivious to anything else during *neilah*. A nice while passed before he awoke from his reverie. All of us were filled with pleasure from this very pleasing wait. Before *maariv* we concluded with Napoleon's March like every year, but in every strain we sensed that everything we do without the Rebbe is as though we are only imitating; as Chaim Meir [the Rebbe's aid] says—'artificial.' The

element of truth and the lively enthusiasm, is somehow lacking. Why? I do not know. But certainly it is so.



## SUKKOS

Though I have not yet returned to my full strength after the strain of the last two days of Yom Tov, and from all the dancing I am still shattered, there is not a whole limb in my body... I am unable to withhold the good, the gratification and true pleasure from the Rebbe, who is beloved and dear, for even one moment. I must give satisfaction at the earliest opportunity, while I still stand in a state of great feeling of joy and pleasure; that I merited to see the rising glory of the Rebbe's household with my own eyes, exalted in spirituality and holiness, may we only merit that it should not cease till the coming of the redeemer.

I thank Hashem for his kindness that he did for me, paying me in accordance with my deeds. I was the first who merited undeservingly that the Rebbe should reveal to me, in a private audience during the summer of 5683 (תרפ"ג), that which was hidden in his pure heart, his early intention—that it was his desire to give his precious and beloved daughter that she should be the wife of this man about whom I will now speak. I am the only individual from amongst all of the closest Chassidim, who saw his toil, his pain, how he spilled his blood like water, his tremendous humility—unintentional and intentional, his tremendous patience—revealed and hidden, throughout the five years during which his head, the leader and prince of Israel [a reference to the Frierdiker Rebbe] was constantly between two mountains of burning fire<sup>8</sup>.

I was the first representative and I was chosen then to make the first step to bring him from Yekatrinoslav to Kislovodashk,<sup>9</sup> and now too, I am the one who merited to see the building of this everlasting edifice. And now too I saw wonders that I never imagined nor aspired to, Hashem has shown me on this occasion. For that which I will now relate, not only do I not exaggerate, but I only reveal a very small portion of the abundant good that we merited to enjoy, I and all the Chassidim here during this Yom Tov...

One night of *Simchas Beis Hashoevah* the Chassidim gathered in the Rebbe's sukkah and Ramash sat with us; we heard many beautiful things from his mouth and it was very pleasurable for all of us...

On the night of Shemini Atzeres there was a grand *kiddush* in the Rebbe's sukkah, to which all the Chassidim came, until late into the night, and Ramash, with overwhelming humility and without in any way making himself noticeable, drank a lot and spoke for a few hours without pause—words of Chassidus combined with Midrashim, Kabbalah and *gematria*, in the fashion that he received from his father. His words were sweet and appealing for my ears to hear and all of those gathered were tremendously impressed.

The next day the news spread throughout the city of all that he spoke and his wonderful abilities, and, as is the way of the world, there was much exaggeration, but for the good, such that all the questions and veils were removed. Each man commented to his fellow, 'You see, the Rebbe took a son-in-law befitting to him,' and even the critics were forced to concur against their will.

In the wake of these reports, many more people gathered the next day for *hakafos*, before which the older Rebbetzin [Shterna Sarah] made a *kiddush* in the room of Reb Chatche Feigin. Ramash sat at the head and spoke for four hours straight! I sat everyone at the table very orderly, rabbis on one side, wealthy laymen on the other, and gave each individual a place befitting to him. The brothers Valshanik, the brothers Chefetz, and Vekslir—the father of the young Vekslir—who is very quiet like his son, a great critic and considers himself to be a great intellectual. He came the first night to hear with his own ears, to confirm what he heard in Berlin of the greatness of the Rebbe's son-in-law, and he stayed until two o'clock in the morning with all the Chassidim. He left very impressed and told me, 'In my entire life I never saw or heard of such a thing! Happy is the one who bore him!' I heard similar statements from everyone.

The *hakafos* were carried out with much dancing and joy, with singing and gladness of heart.

Similarly, the next day approximately one hundred men gathered by about 11:00 am and we left three hours after midnight. In other words 3:00 am. The Yom Tov meal was set up in various rooms, we sat down to eat at about 4pm and we *bentched* at about midnight. For all those eight hours Ramash did not move from his place, and the entire time he spoke warm words, arousing *teshuvah* and *avodas Hashem*. He often mentioned the Rebbe's name with great respect 'I heard from the Rebbe, may he be well...' 'The Rebbe, may he be well said...' How good and how pleasurable it was for me to hear all this! Happy are we that we merited this. ▶▶▶

## SEEING THEM OFF

Wednesday, Parshas Lech Lecha.

I have now arrived from the train station, to escort, together with the rest of *anash*, the Rebbe's son-in-law, the Rebbe's daughters, and grandson, on their way out to Berlin.

"How pleasant and sweet it was to see the honor and respect that was accorded to the Rebbe's young son-in-law. There are no words to describe the great name that he has acquired for himself during his recent trip here in our city.

It pains me greatly that the Rebbe never saw it, and will never see it, for whenever he is in the presence of the Rebbe, he nullifies himself as a flame before a torch. He is a crown of glory for the Rebbe *shlita*, and he will be able to pride himself with him, with Hashem's help, forever.

"Believe me dear Rebbe, I would not exaggerate if I said that I do not know him. His fear of heaven grows from hour to hour *mamash*, all quietly, without any external showing, all in an exalted manner.

I was informed that he fasts twice a week, learns much Chassidus, the Chassidus of the Rebbe *shlita* and of the Rebbe Rashab. *Halevay* that we should merit to hear him review the Rebbe's Chassidus every Shabbos...

Almost a year later, another batch of letters, this time written to the Frierdiker Rebbe, bring out the same message:

In the month of Av 5689 (תרפ"ט), the Frierdiker Rebbe embarked on a year-long journey, first traveling to Eretz Yisrael, and then moving on to the United States. When Tishrei 5690 (תר"ץ) approached, Reb Elya Chaim found himself spending Tishrei in Riga with the Frierdiker Rebbe's family, without the Frierdiker Rebbe, who was then in America. In a series of letters to the Frierdiker Rebbe in New York, he describes the events of Tishrei.

During the month of Tishrei Chassidim got a glimpse into the greatness of the Rebbe, who revealed himself ever so slightly, and farbrenged with the Chassidim, guiding them throughout the entire

month. Reb Elye Chaim's excitement gushes from his letters as he expresses his pain from being so distant from the Frierdiker Rebbe on one hand, and his excitement from watching the Rebbe and experiencing his leadership and spirituality, on the other. [See sidebar for parts of these letters].

## IN RIGA

When the Frierdiker Rebbe moved to Poland in 5693, Reb Elye Chaim remained behind in Riga, where he was one of the prominent Chassidim in the community.

During that period, Chassidim continued to daven in his home, with a *minyán* that was nicknamed "the Rebbe's *minyán*."

There was a young man, a *baal tzedakah*, who was in *aveilus* and davened at the *amud* during those prayers, but since the *minyán* began

**REB ITCHE  
DER MASMID  
OPENED  
THE ARON  
HAKODESH,  
TOOK OUT A  
SEFER TORAH,  
AND DECLARED:  
"WE HAVE  
THE ZECHUS  
TO SACRIFICE  
OUR LIVES  
AL KIDDUSH  
HASHEM,  
AND WE MUST  
THEREFORE BE  
HAPPY!"**

at ten-thirty in the morning, he threatened to daven in a different shul.

Reb Elye Chaim told him, "What is the difference between a stepson and a biological child? A son doesn't desert his father, even when his father hits him or chases him away, but a stepson might act differently.

"Similarly, we Chassidim often argue and yell, but the peace between us returns to its original state, and no one thinks of leaving.

"You however, act otherwise..."

When the Frierdiker Rebbe created *Achos Temimim* to educate and inspire the daughters of Chassidim, he appointed Reb Elye Chaim, along with Reb Mordechai Chafetz and Reb Avraham Eliyahu Asherov, to be the "*shloshes haro'im*" ("three leaders") of the Riga chapter.

## NAZI OCCUPATION

When the Nazis entered Riga, Reb Elye Chaim remained stranded in a death trap.

On Yud Kislev 5702, the Nazis conducted an *akztieh*.

Reb Elye Chaim's daughter related that when the Nazis knocked on the door, her father pushed his wife into the bathroom, where the Nazis didn't find her. Reb Elye Chaim himself was led away, although not before wrapping himself on his *kittel* and tallis.

The Nazis herded many Yidden into the shul, and gathered even more around the shul to watch the gruesome spectacle.

From outside, the Yidden saw how Reb Itche *der masmid* opened the *aron hakodesh*, took out a *sefer Torah*, and declared:

"We have the *zechus* to sacrifice our lives *al kiddush Hashem*, and we must therefore be happy!"

With that, he placed his hands on the shoulders of Reb Elye Chaim and Reb Chatche Feigin, and they began dancing to the tune of the *hakafos niggun*. While they were dancing, the Nazis burned the shul to the ground...

This description reached the Frierdiker Rebbe at the close of the war, when one of the spectators wrote the entire tale in a letter. Upon reading it, the Frierdiker Rebbe lost consciousness.

A difficult and tragic end to the life of a giant of a Chossid. The heartfelt letters he penned will forever give us a look into the occurrences of *Beis Chayeinu* in some of the most trying moments, as well as those of joyous

celebrations. His keen intuition made him one of the first Chassidim to catch an early glimpse of the Rebbe's bright light, and to realize what the future held in store for Lubavitch. In his own words:

"Don't I know that my destiny as well as that of my children to follow, are dependent on the ways of this praiseworthy young man? When Hashem will find his way pleasing, He will raise up the head of this *tzaddik* and even his enemies will make peace with him."

השם ינקום דמו.

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

1. Kovetz Michtovim Tehilim
2. *Zikaron Livnei Yisrael*, page 97
3. The letters brought here are excerpts and translations, which do not do true justice to

the beauty of the original *Lashon Hakodesh*. Some of his letters have been published. See *Kovetz Lchizuk Hahiskashrus* issue 23 and 28, and the additions to *Likutei Dibburim - Lashon Hakodesh* vol. 5.

4. The following excerpts are based on the translation published in "The Heroic Struggle" by Kehot Publication Society, 1999 (pages 255 and on).
5. Reb Michael Dvorkin preceded the Frierdiker Rebbe's arrival in Kostroma by a few days (See *A Chassidisher Derher*, Sivan 5776).
6. Interview with *Kfar Chabad* magazine issue #634
7. Some of the translations here are taken from "Chabad Revisited" by Rabbi Eli Rubin. For additional parts of the letter, see *A Chassidisher Derher*, Tishrei 5774 p. 16.
8. Presumably a reference to his prosecution at the hands of the communists in the USSR.
9. Regarding this meeting see the letter dated Friday of Parshas Pinchos 5683 (1923), printed in the Frierdiker Rebbe's *Igros Kodesh* vol. 15, page 30-2.



THE HOUSE WHERE THE FRIERIDKER REBBE RESIDED IN KOSTRAMA.



RIGA, LATVIA.