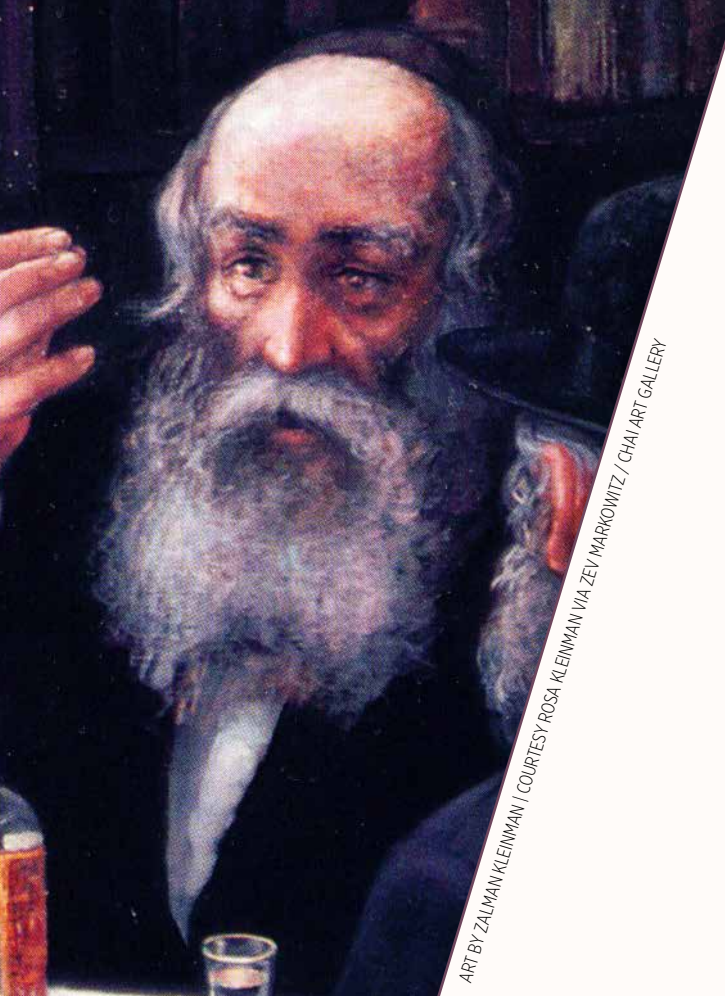


HALFA

REB HILLEL PARITCHER

REBBE

BY: RABBI ZELIG KATZMAN



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לזכות
מרת חיה מושקא תחי'
לרגל יום הולדתה י"ט מנחם-אב
נדפס ע"י ולזכות בעלה
הרה"ת הרב שלום דוב בער וילדיהם שיחיו
שוחאט

REB MOSHE MEIZLISH, REB MEIR REFAEL'S, REB AIZIK HOMILER, REB PESACH MALASTOVKER, REB ZALMEN ZEZMER...

These individuals have earned a revered place among the most distinguished Chassidim in the formative years of Chassidus Chabad, disciples of the Alter Rebbe, the Mittlerer Rebbe, and the Tzemach Tzedek. They inspire awe, embodying the essence of Chassidus Chabad, and continue to elicit admiration in Chassidim in modern times, sparking a desire to emulate their ways. But even in this gallery of greats, one figure towers above the rest. In terms of his saintliness, his lofty stature, and the esteem accorded to him by the Rabbeim, both in his lifetime and after his passing, he is not merely another member of this group; he is in a league of his own. Reb Hillel Ha'Levi Molisov of Paritch, holds an unparalleled place in Chabad lore, celebrated in the sichos and writings of the Rabbeim. Reb Hillel, lauded by the Tzemach Tzedek as a "half-Rebbe", led a life rich with lessons. His story is one of a chossid whose pursuit of truth and holiness elevated him to the greatest spiritual heights, and whose dedication to sharing these values left a lasting impact on everyone he encountered.

Biographical Outline

The story of Reb Hillel's life¹ begins in 5555 (1794), in the Russian town of Chomets, where his father, Reb Meir, served as Rov. Reb Meir was a devoted Chossid of Reb Nochum of Chernobyl, and later his son, Reb Mottele.

Hillel Molisov was an unusually gifted child, gaining mastery of Shas and Poskim by the time of his Bar Mitzvah; he had also become proficient in Sifrei Kabbalah, a unique feat even then, when proficiency in Shas and Poskim was relatively common. His *hasmadah* was legendary. As a teenager, he would daven with the *kavanos* of the Arizal. His piety and scholarship were recognized by all, and he quickly became known throughout the region as the "Illui of Chomets".

When Reb Hillel reached the age of twelve, a wealthy businessman approached Reb Meir with a marriage proposal, seeking to wed his daughter to the young boy. Reb Meir, who did not wish to proceed with the shidduch, felt uneasy about rejecting it outright, so he asked for a dowry of twenty thousand rubles, assuming that it would be rejected.

Initially, the *gvir* laughed at him, saying: "Who gives such a large sum as a dowry?" But his wife insisted that they must have Reb Hillel as a son-in-law, to the point where she was ready to throw her jewelry out; for what was her wealth worth if she could take such a man as a husband for her daughter!

Eventually, the businessman acquiesced and committed to the dowry. At this point, Reb Meir was unable to extricate himself from this situation and agreed to the match. Reb Hillel was not yet Bar Mitzvah, so he did not wear Tefillin, and was known as "Chol Hamoed", due to the fact that during davening he would wear a Tallis without Tefillin.

Reb Hillel was a dedicated student of the great Tzaddik, Reb Avrohom Dov of Avrutch, Av Beis Din of Zhitomer and author of the sefer Bas Ayin. Reb Hillel honored him throughout his life and spoke of him with great reverence.

When Reb Hillel first encountered the teachings of Chassidus, he began studying them diligently, feeling that Chassidus was a *biur* on Kabbalah.

After he had begun studying Chassidus independently, he encountered a great Chossid of the Alter Rebbe, Reb Zalmen Zezmer, who was passing through

Chomets. He went to his lodging, along with a friend who shared his thirst for Chassidus. When they entered Reb Zalmen's room, they saw him bedecked in Tallis and Tefillin, reciting Shema Yisroel with great fervor. They were gripped by a sense of awe, recognizing the *dveikus* Reb Zalmen was experiencing, and they knew they had come to the right place. Reb Hillel's *talmid*, Reb Dov Ze'ev Kozevnikov of Yekaterinoslav, related that whenever Reb Hillel repeated this story "Tears would stream down his face..."

When Reb Zalmen finished davening, he became aware of their presence, and asked how he could be of assistance. They expressed a desire to travel with him to the Rebbe, and Reb Zalmen agreed to take one of them. Reb Hillel was chosen, and thus began a lifetime of *hiskashrus*.²

[On another occasion, Reb Hillel encountered Reb Zalmen on Parshas Zachor. He perceived in Reb Zalmen an unusually passionate hatred towards Amalek, and he asked him what motivated it. Reb Zalmen responded "The place from where I got it—you cannot get it, but in Lubavitch, from my Rebbe (the Mittlerer Rebbe), you can get something similar..."].

When Reb Mottele Chernobyler heard of Reb Hillel's plans, he was deeply upset, and said something ominous: "He (Reb Hillel) will yet 'lie on his back...'" During Reb Hillel's journey to Lubavitch, his wagon flipped over and he landed on his back. Nevertheless, he got up and continued on his way, ultimately reaching Lubavitch.

When Reb Hillel first entered *yechidus* (in Elul of 5574), he expressed worry about Reb Mottele's *kepeidah*, and possible repercussions. The Mittlerer Rebbe calmed him, saying, "If he is indeed a Tzaddik, he is a good person and does not wish you harm. If, on the other hand, you believe that he cursed you, then he is not a Tzaddik, since a Tzaddik does not curse. Thus, his words have no power over you, and you should not be afraid".

The Mittlerer Rebbe then asked him what exactly Reb Mottele said. Reb Hillel repeated his words. The Mittlerer Rebbe remarked: "While traveling, it sometimes happens that a wagon flips over, and the person on the wagon winds up lying on the ground, facing upwards. There is nothing to be afraid of, you have already received your punishment." Seeing the open *Ruach Hakodesh* displayed by the Mittlerer Rebbe, Reb Hillel was at peace. He remained in Lubavitch for the

next few months, where he soon was recognized as one of the greatest young Chassidim.

His Encounters with the Alter Rebbe

Although the first Rebbe Reb Hillel merited to encounter was the Mittlerer Rebbe, he did have a few indirect encounters with the Alter Rebbe.

When he was young and living in Chomets, Reb Hillel learned that the Alter Rebbe was due to come to Chernobyl, and he hastened to travel there, in the hopes of setting his eyes on the renowned ‘Maggid of Liozna,’ as the Alter Rebbe was then known. He arrived at the inn where the Alter Rebbe was staying, but due to the immense crowd, he was only able to hear the Maamar, but not see the Alter Rebbe.

Disappointed, Reb Hillel decided on a bolder course. The next time the Alter Rebbe visited the area, he found out where the Alter Rebbe was staying, and hid under the bed in the Alter Rebbe’s room. He intended to

remain there until the Alter Rebbe entered the room, after which he would emerge and present the Rebbe some questions on *Maseches Erchin*, which he was then studying.

After waiting for a while, the Alter Rebbe finally entered the room. Before he could crawl out, Reb Hillel was shocked to hear the Alter Rebbe say in his customary singsong tone: “When a young man has a question in *Erchin* [the *Masechta* deals with evaluating persons and property for the purposes of *Hekdesh*], he should first evaluate himself.”

Astonished by the open display of *Ruach Hakodesh*, Reb Hillel fainted on the spot. He was found and resuscitated long after the Alter Rebbe had gone, thus missing his final opportunity to meet the Alter Rebbe. Several months later Napoleon invaded Russia, making travel arduous and dangerous. On 24 Teves the following year, the Alter Rebbe was *nistalek*.

When the Rebbe repeated this story, the Rebbe explained the relevant lesson for all of us³: “*Erchin* is something that is not based on *sechel*. According to the *Halachos* of *Erchin*, we evaluate the age, not the qualities of the person, which vary vastly. Everyone of



CHASSIDIC COLONIST EXAMINING HIS VINEYARD.

the same age has the same worth. Someone might ask: ‘My whole life has been invested in Torah and *avodah*, giving Hashem pleasure... Accordingly, my years have much greater worth than those of someone else who behaved differently. If so, how can we have the same worth!?’ Regarding this, it is said that when someone has a ‘question in *Erchin*’—he must first honestly evaluate himself, and the question will vanish on its own.”

Shlichus to the Colonies

After the devastation wrought by the Napoleonic war throughout Russia, the Mitteler Rebbe spearheaded an effort to encourage Yidden in Russia to move to the Kherson province in Ukraine, where there was ample opportunity to support themselves by working the land⁴.

Initially, the Mitteler Rebbe himself desired to visit the new colonies annually, and did so in 5576, for a period of five months. However, seeing the impact the trip had on his health, the Mitteler Rebbe decided to send a *Shadar* to represent him in the future. For this task he chose Reb Hillel, who continued to visit these colonies for the duration of his life, several months each year.

The Mitteler Rebbe tasked him with “sowing *ruchniyus* and reaping *gashmiyus*”, i.e. collecting Tzedakah while sharing words of Chassidus and *hadracha*. He also empowered him to give *brachos* on his behalf, and many miracles were brought about through the *brachos* of Reb Hillel.

His Greatness

The Rebbe Maharash said: “My father (the Tzemach Tzedek) said [about Reb Hillel]: “He is half a Chossid... because his other half is a Rebbe.” This unique statement sheds light on the great esteem in which Reb Hillel was held by the Rabbeim.

In our generation as well, the Rebbe accorded Reb Hillel great reverence. When Reb Peretz Mochkin told the Rebbe in *yechidus* that the arrival of a certain Chossid in 770 would be the equivalent of Reb Hillel Paritcher coming to the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe

exclaimed in surprise: “Like Reb Hillel!?” underscoring his unparalleled stature in the eyes of the Rabbeim.

Rabbonus

Several years after coming to the Mitteler Rebbe, Reb Hillel was appointed Rov of the small town of Paritch, a post he filled for many years and that has become synonymous with him.

Some time later, Reb Boruch Mordechai, Rov of Babroisk, announced that he would be emigrating to Eretz Yisroel. There was a lot of discussion as to his possible successor. Reb Hillel’s *mashpia*, Reb Zalmen Zezmer, asked Reb Hillel to ask the Mitteler Rebbe in *yechidus* whether the post would be appropriate for Reb Zalmen. When Reb Hillel raised this with the Rebbe, the Rebbe responded, “No, you will become the Rov of Babroisk”. This took many years to materialize, as

WHEN A REBBE SAYS A MAAMAR

The following story about Reb Hillel was related by the Rebbe on several occasions:

Once, after the Tzemach Tzedek delivered a Maamar, the Chassidim had an argument as to what was the exact *p’shat* in the Rebbe’s words; Reb Hillel offered one explanation, while others differed. When they asked the Tzemach Tzedek, he explained the concept contrary to Reb Hillel’s approach, but Reb Hillel still stuck with his way of understanding.

“When a Rebbe says a Maamar,” Reb Hillel explained, “the *Shechinah* is speaking through his voice; it’s as if we are receiving the Torah at Sinai. But once the Torah is given to us, we are given the authority to understand it with our own human intellect...”

(*Toras Menachem* vol. 5, p. 124, et. al.
See *Sefer Hasichos* 5697 p. 165.)

Reb Boruch Mordechai ended up staying in the city for many years, until 5615, after the Tzemach Tzedek had already become Rebbe. At that point, Reb Hillel was appointed the Rov of that much bigger city, a post he filled until the end of his days.

Minhagim and Hiddurim

Reb Hillel's profound *Yiras Shomayim* was reflected in his scrupulous observance of Shulchan Aruch to the letter, and often far beyond that.

Reb Hillel adopted a new *hiddur* every year on his birthday, a practice that the Rebbe later popularized and promoted for all Yidden.

Reb Hillel was extremely vigilant in maintaining his standard dress, never adopting modern trends and styles. He explained that this was due to a note he possessed from Reb Pinchas Koritzer. Reb Pinchos cited the Midrash about the Yidden in Mitzrayim, who were redeemed because they did not change their clothing (as well as their language and their names). Reb Pinchos concluded that in the times immediately prior to the coming of Moshiach, there will be a similar temptation

for Yidden to adopt the styles of modernity, and the Yidden will be redeemed in the merit of the select few who do not succumb to this temptation. Reb Hillel said that he felt obligated to adhere to this, as he was the one who possessed the letter.

Another well-known example: Reb Hillel would use any pretense to say *Shir Hama'alos* before bentching, as opposed to *Al Naharos Bavel* (which is said on days when *Tachanun* is recited). He would always find some reason – a Bris, a *siyum*, a Seudas Mitzvah, or a guest – to be able to recite *Shir Hama'alos*.

On one occasion, he was unable to find a reason to say *Shir Hama'alos*. His students thought that perhaps this time he would “give in” and say *Al Naharos Bavel*. Instead, he exclaimed, “In honor of *Al Naharos Bavel*, an extremely rare guest, we must say *Shir Hama'alos!*” And so it was...

His Sayings

“One who has a *chush* (a sense and appreciation) in *neginah*, has a *chush* in Chassidus”.

“A *hiddur* Mitzvah that someone takes upon themselves refines him, enabling him to understand Chassidus better.”

Once, Reb Hillel was participating in a *farbrengen*

1. THE FIRST SEFER OF REB HILLEL TO BE PRINTED WAS 'LIKKUTEI BIURIM'; EXPLANATIONS ON THE MITTELER REBBE'S MAAMARIM. IT WAS PUBLISHED ONLY A FEW YEARS AFTER HIS PASSING.



2. THE FIRST 'PELACH HARIMON' ON SEFER BEREISHIS WAS PRINTED IN 5647 BY REB HILLEL'S GRANDSON. THE SEFER, AS WELL AS THE ENSUING SEFORIM IN THE SERIES, WAS LATER PUBLISHED BY KEHOS.



in a dark attic. Another chossid walked into the room and remarked on how dark it was. Another chossid responded, “Don’t worry. Soon, your eyes will adjust, and it will not seem so dark anymore.” Reb Hillel said, “One should never become accustomed to darkness and mistake it for light.”

Before Reb Hillel became a chossid, he would learn Nigleh with a Chavrusa throughout the week, and on Shabbos, before Kabbolas Shabbos. Then they would wrap themselves in Talleisim, and learn Kabbalah all Shabbos.

Reb Hillel later said of that time: “Until we learned Tanya, we both thought that we were Tzaddikim Gemurim. When we began to study Tanya, we recognized that ‘*Halevai a Beinoni*,’ we would be lucky if we reached the level of a *Beinoni!*”

Seforim

Although in general reciting Chassidus is the function of a Rebbe, there were some outstanding Chassidim – especially in the first few generations of Chassidus

Chabad – who would say their own *maamarim* and *biurim* in Chassidus. The Frierdiker Rebbe said that although in general one should be careful to only learn Chassidus of the Rabbeim, he did “look at” the Chassidus of Reb Hillel.

The primary Sefer of Reb Hillel is *Pelach Ha’Rimon*, which contains *Derushim* on the Parsha, the first volume of which was printed in 5646 (1886). It currently covers the first four Chumashim and Shir Hashirim, while the volume on *Devorim* is still being prepared by Kehos.

Most of the *maamarim* in this set are essentially the *maamarim* of the Mittlerer Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek with explanatory notes, indicating what parts are the original *maamar* and what are Reb Hillel’s explanations. In the Rebbe’s introduction to *Pelach Harimon*, he writes that Reb Hillel’s Chassidus is an accurate representation of the original words of the Rabbeim, and can be studied as such.



REB HILLEL'S TZIYUN.

Niggunim

In light of the above-cited saying of Reb Hillel that having a *chush* in *neginah* is related to having a *chush* in Chassidus, it is not surprising that Reb Hillel himself was a prolific compiler and composer of *niggunim*. Many of these *niggunim* have come down to us and are printed in Sefer Ha’Niggunim under various names.

One unique *niggun* connected to Reb Hillel is called the *Zhebiner Kop*⁵. It was composed by his friend Reb Pesach Malastovker, who sent it to Reb Hillel as a gift when he was not feeling well. Reb Hillel had the custom to sing three *niggunim* before he would say a Maamar. When he received this *niggun*, he said “In honor of Reb Pesach, I should sing his *niggun* first. However, since another one was already chosen, I will sing it third, as a *hakdama* to the *maamar*, thus according it the proper respect”.

The Quintessential “Oived”

The Rebbe Rashab once said to the Frierdiker Rebbe in *yechidus*:

“Reb Aizik Homiler is a *Maskil*, Reb Hillel Paritcher is an *Oived*.”

“*Haskalah* and *Avodah* are two worlds, and a *Maskil* and an *Oived* are two different characters, which existed from the creation of the world. The [Alter] Rebbe came and connected these two worlds and characters.

“Reb Aizik was an incredible *Maskil*, who devised *meshalim* that highlighted the precise meaning of the *Haskalah* that he was teaching, in addition to being a great *Oived* in *avodah she’blev*.”

“Reb Hillel served Hashem with his *guf*, to the point that his *guf* perceived what it must do. Just like the mind is a vessel to intellect, and the eyes a vessel to sight, so too was Reb Hillel’s *guf* a vessel to that which one must do. In addition to all this, he was a great *Maskil* who explained the deepest ideas with robust explanations.”⁶

Histalkus

In summer 5624 (1864), Reb Hillel was again making his rounds of the Kherson colonies. His student Reb Mordechai Yoel Duchman relates: “On Tisha B’Av, he was visiting the city of Nikolayev. After he broke his fast, he spoke in a manner that conveyed that he knew he was about to be *nistalek*. He requested that they summon a wagon and immediately transport him to Kherson. This was on a Thursday night, and knowing of Reb Hillel’s custom not to travel Friday afternoon, they paid a driver extra to drive through the night. They arrived the next morning, and Reb Hillel passed away the following Shabbos, Parshas Nachamu, 11 Av 5624.”

Chassidim surmised that the reason Reb Hillel wished to be in Kherson at the time of his *Histalkus* was because it was then under the control of the Ottomans, whose empire included Eretz Yisroel.

It is related that on the Shabbos of his passing, Reb Hillel requested that a minyan daven in his room, as he couldn’t go to shul. When the minyan reached the words of “*Yotzer mesharsim v’asher misharsav kulam omdim be’rum olam*” (“He creates servants who stand at the heights of the world”) he was *nistalek*.

Another anecdote: During his final visit to the Kherson colonies, a woman asked Reb Hillel for a *bracha* for a son. Reb Hillel gave her a *bracha*, and the woman asked what she should name her future son. Reb Hillel said “Name him Hillel”.

The woman was bewildered, as it is not customary to name after someone who is still alive. During her pregnancy she received the news of Reb Hillel’s passing, and his meaning became clear. **T**

1. For a book-length, comprehensive treatment of Reb Hillel’s life, see “Farbreng with Reb Hillel Paritcher” by Rabbi Shalom DovBer Avtzon (2023-second edition).

2. Migdal Oz, page 237.

3. Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, p. 400.

4. For a full description of this effort, see “Fields of Faith,” Derher Adar I, 5784.

5. Sefer Haniggunim vol. I page 27-32.

6. Sefer Hasichos 5706-5710 page 418.