

FIELDS OF

FALL



By: Rabbi Mendy Greenberg

Throughout the generations, the Rabbeim encouraged Chassidim to work the land. Here is the story of the kolonyes, the agricultural colonies of the Chassidim, from the times of the Alter Rebbe to the present day.

THE

The KOLONYES



לזכות
הגה"ח הרב אברהם ליב
וזוגתו שיחיו שוחאט

שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר למדינת
ונצואלה מאז שנת תשמ"ה
לרגל מלאות ארבעים שנה לנישואיהם

The Dowry

When the Alter Rebbe's *shidduch* with Rebbetzin Sterna was being discussed, the prospective *chossan* made one condition: that he be given free reign over the 5,000 gold coins offered by his father-in-law, Reb Yehudah Leib as a dowry. Within one year of his wedding, the entire sum was spent on the purchase of land, livestock and agricultural equipment for the purpose of settling Jewish families on agricultural colonies.

Large tracts of land were settled near Vitebsk with the Alter Rebbe's funds, and the Alter Rebbe would occasionally give speeches promoting agricultural work over business and trade. He would also visit the residents, encouraging them to set times for Torah learning.¹

At the time of his marriage, the Alter Rebbe was only fourteen years old, but incredibly, it wasn't the first time he was promoting agricultural work. Reb Moshe Ivansker told the Alter Rebbe's son, Reb Moshe, that he had witnessed the "*Liozna Iluy*," a young boy of eleven years old (!) standing on a wagon at the Liozna fair and exhorting the people to abandon trade and work the soil.

The context for the Alter Rebbe's speech was the expulsion of the Jews from Prague a short time earlier. Prague had been one of the most important Jewish cities, and the region surrounding Liozna saw increasing numbers of refugees streaming in, all in need of housing and employment.



A JEWISH PEDDLER TREKKING THROUGH VILLAGES IN POLAND. CIRCA 5670.

The Alter Rebbe's father settled many of them on his estate outside Liozna.²

This was only the beginning of the Rabbeim's extensive efforts to promote agricultural colonies, the famous *kolonyes*.

The Shtetl Myth

Our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, were all shepherds. For many centuries in Eretz Yisroel, Jews tended to fields, raised livestock, and lived an agrarian lifestyle. *Terumos* and *maasros* were given from fields, *korbanos* were offered from livestock, and *bikkurim* from orchards. Life revolved around the seasons and harvests.

However, things were quite different 1800 years later, when the Alter Rebbe gave his speech on the wagon. For hundreds of years, Jews in Europe had found their primary source of livelihood in trade. Land ownership was often off-limits to Jews, and most crafts were protected by the local non-Jews in artisan-guilds. Instead, Jews turned to trading; peddlers bought and sold items in rural areas, while more successful merchants transported higher quality goods from France and England to Eastern Europe. The most successful managed to obtain government contracts to provide equipment for entire armies.

This was particularly important in the Kingdom of Poland, where the Alter Rebbe was born. Every self-respecting shtetl had a market day; Jews were the dominant force in moving goods throughout the country and in the entire service industry that surrounded it, like roadside inns. Jewish families dotted the length and breadth of the land, often just one family in each village, serving as the connection between the village and the outside world.

It sounds strange to the modern ear, but even in the "ancient" shtetl, Jews generally did not tend to fields or raise animals. With the encouragement of the Rabbeim, however, that began to change.

The Journey to Berdichev

During the Alter Rebbe's youth, a dramatic geopolitical event took place. The Kingdom of Poland—notorious for its unstable structure and weak leadership—was gobbled up by the surrounding countries of Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Unfortunately, most Jews suddenly found themselves in Russia, under the notoriously anti-semitic Czars.

Jewish livelihood took a very strong hit. The Kingdom of

Poland had been economically free, but Russia set up strict border laws blocking free trade, and the Pale of Settlement locked the Jews into a small geographic area. Corrupt officials now demanded exorbitant bribes to allow passage. The Russian government saw free trade as a bad thing—a way for Jews to profit from the poor peasants. In some instances, they banned items altogether; the Czarina Catherine once declared the import of paper illegal, because she feared that paper—and therefore books—would educate peasants, and lead to revolt.

In this climate, thousands of Jews lost their livelihood. But that was only the beginning. Soon, the government issued a series of bans directly restricting Jewish livelihoods, most significant among them the ban on leasing taverns and selling vodka, a staple of Jewish livelihood for centuries. Soon, Jews were banished from villages and entire rural areas, and forced to settle in the cities and larger towns, where it was becoming harder and harder to earn a living.

Despite the suffering, some of the *talmidei haMaggid* saw a silver lining in the situation. It was exceedingly difficult to lead a religious life in the remote villages, and some tavern-keepers were known to get very comfortable with the local non-Jews and weaken their connection to Torah and Mitzvos. When Chassidim wrote to Reb Mendel Horodoker about the decrees, he recommended that Jews leave the villages in any event, and Reb Boruch of Mezhibuzh likewise did not see village dwellers in a positive light.

The Alter Rebbe saw things differently. Seeing the suffering of his Jewish brethren, he embarked on a journey throughout Russia in the year 5570, at the age of 65, raising money for the banished Yidden and working to avert the decrees.

“During the trip,” the story was often told, “the Alter Rebbe and Reb Moshe Vilenker suddenly felt drowsy and dozed off. This was quite unusual, and when they woke up, the Alter Rebbe said that a *neshama* had visited him from the supernal realms and told him that the *gezeiros* were due to the *kitrug* of Shabbos against the village Jews.

“What do you think we should do?” the Alter Rebbe asked Reb Moshe.

“Perhaps we should return home?” Reb Moshe replied.

“I don’t think so,” the Alter Rebbe said. “The villagers are those who provide food for traveling Jews. They provide a place with Tallis and Tefillin where travelers could daven... If there is a problem with Shabbos, we need to deal with it separately.”

The Alter Rebbe saw the taverns in a positive light and

endeavored to mitigate the decrees, even traveling to Petersburg to meet with government officials, but the situation continued to worsen. Another solution was needed.



THE APPROXIMATE TERRITORY WITHIN THE ‘PALE OF SETTLEMENT’ IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE PERMITTED BY TSAR ALEXANDER I FOR JEWISH AGRICULTURAL COLONIZATION IN THE TIMES OF THE ALTER REBBE.



SOME OF THE COLONIES ESTABLISHED ALONG THE DNIEPER RIVER. NOTE THE RUSSIFIED SPELLING OF NAHAR-TOV AND SDEH-MENUCHAH AND THE COLONY OF ROMANOVKA WHERE REB AVROHOM DOVID LAVUT WAS RAV.



The Esrog Campaign

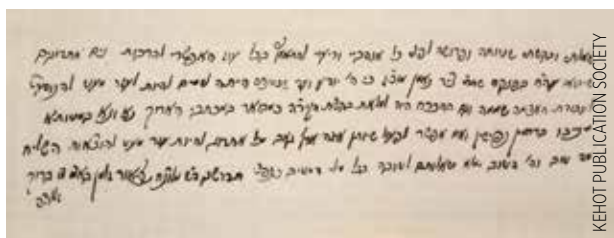
Realizing that tens of thousands of Jews had been left without homes and livelihoods, the government allowed for the establishment of agricultural colonies in Southern Ukraine which were able to contain thousands of Jewish families. The government even provided horses for the journey and permission to graze the animals in government owned fields along the way.

The Alter Rebbe encouraged families to make the move, and a widespread effort began in White Russia to support the effort. Some communities, like Vilna, demanded that all jewelry be donated towards the new settlements. Other communities made donations of *sifrei Torah* and *sefarim*.

The largest effort was the *esrog* campaign; a communal tax was enacted on *esrogim*, and the money raised was funneled to the settlements. There was a fear that—due to the tax—fewer people would purchase *esrogim*, so the Alter Rebbe sent out a *michtav klali* asking that Chassidim make every effort to buy as many *esrogim* as possible, “to help those traveling to settle the barren soil.”³

Over the next few years, numerous colonies were established in the Cherson—Nikolaev region. Due to their Jewish nature, many of them had genuine Hebrew names (with translations being used in official Russian documents), such as Nahar-Tov, Yifei-Nahar, and Sdeh-Menuchah. Over the next few decades, some twenty-two colonies were established in the area.

Among the colonists was Reb Yehudah Leib and Feiga Lavut and their young child Avraham Dovid—the Rebbe’s great-great-grandfather. He would later become the rav of the Chassidim in the area and patriarch of the Rebbe’s family, many members of whom served as Rabbanim throughout the colonies and nearby cities.⁴



THE ALTER REBBE'S MICHTOV KLOLI REGARDING THE ESROG CAMPAIGN.

Achdus

Imagine you were one day taken from your home and settled near a barren field, given some equipment, and told, “Go ahead, it’s all yours.”

The Jews settling in the colonies came armed with hope and determination, but with little experience. Agriculture is a very difficult field of work; the labor is intensive, and one is dependent on the seasons and unpredictable weather.

Soon after the colonies were established, messages were sent back—it wasn’t going well. It was difficult to learn the trade, the work was backbreaking, and they weren’t seeing success. People were starving.

Hearing about the crisis, the Jewish communities of Lithuania and White Russia did something unprecedented: An ‘*Achdus*’ campaign was declared by both Chassidim and Misnagdim to alleviate the plight of their brethren. It was just fifteen years since the peak of the conflict, with the arrest of the Alter Rebbe, and now, everyone joined hands. Reb Chaim Volozhiner led a committee alongside Reb Pinchas Reizes, appointed by the Mittlerer Rebbe, and an urgent letter was sent to all communities describing the difficult state.

A new tax was declared: Every Shabbos eve, before the candle lighting, a coin was to be put into a pushka for every candle being lit. If you owned a silver *leichter*, you were obligated to give two coins per candle. If you were too poor to light more than two candles, you were exempt from the tax.⁵

As the years passed, the situation improved. Seven years later, the Mittlerer Rebbe wrote a *michtav klali*, praising the colonies.

“I personally saw during my visit to the steppes how Yidden enthusiastically work the land with their wives and children... They are well-fed and happy with their lot; they learn Torah and work in a holy manner... It may not provide them with riches to buy fancy clothes and jewelry, but they are very comfortably provided for. It was very positive, in my opinion.”

The Mittlerer Rebbe encouraged *anash* to continue settling the colonies, adding that if people don’t know how to work the fields, “you could hire non-Jewish hands to work for the first two-three years, until you learn the work yourself.”

Recognizing that some looked askance at this form of labor, the Mittlerer Rebbe explained: “Don’t look down at such work, *chas veshalom*. On our land, in Eretz Yisroel, our entire livelihood came from fields and orchards—those who were wealthy had many workers—so why should we be worse than our forefathers, even if we live in foreign lands?”⁶

The Half-Rebbe of the Colonies

One day, the Mittlerer Rebbe summoned a young chossid, just twenty three years old.

“Imagine to yourself,” the Rebbe said, “a *yishuvnik*, a farmer, standing in the field with his yarmulke and tzitzis, plowing the earth and davening to Hashem. He doesn’t need help from other people to make a living; he makes a living by lifting his eyes to the heavens and feeling Hashem’s presence.”

The chossid, Reb Hillel Paritcher, had a powerful sense of imagery, and in his mind’s eye saw thousands of Jews tilling the soil bedecked in yarmulkas and tzitzis. The image was so compelling, he decided to travel to them.⁷

For many years, Reb Hillel visited the colonies every Av and Elul to inspire the Yidden working there.

Reb Hillel was no ordinary “*shadar*.”

In those days, the Rabbeim would send messengers known as *shada*’r, (*shluchei d’Rabannan*) to repeat Chassidus and collect *ma’amad* funds from Chassidim throughout Russia. Chassidim used to joke that there were three types of *shadar*: Some focused on teaching Chassidus while agreeing that the money be sent in the mail. Some focused on raising money, and said that the Chassidus would come in the mail. And then there were the ‘real’ *shadars*, who made sure that the *ma’amad* was raised, and taught as much Chassidus as they could.

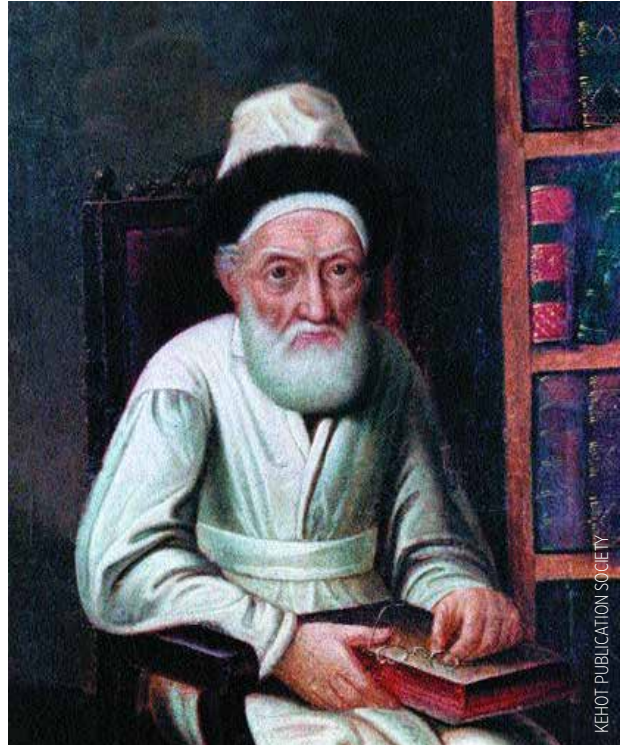
Reb Hillel was of the third type, and more. To the simple, hardworking Jews of the colonies, Reb Hillel was the image of a real tzaddik, a person of genuinely holy stature, but who truly loved them and cared for them. They would greet him by the thousands.

“Reb Hillel was a very warm person,” the Friediker Rebbe related, “and he was *mekarev* every Jew and every Jewish child. He loved to say, ‘a *Yiddishe yingele*...’ When he looked at a Jewish child, he saw only his *neshama*... You couldn’t find *gaavah* or *gasus* ten miles around Reb Hillel.”

During one such visit, Reb Hillel was saying a *maamar* to the large crowd gathered outdoors—there was no room that could hold them all—when he noticed that some were weeping. Reb Hillel was a profound *maskil*, and even his ‘easy’ *maamarim* were difficult for the audience to understand. They were upset.

Reb Hillel paused, and said the following:

“For a Sefer Torah to be kosher, ink and a quill is not enough. There needs to be parchment—and the ink of the letter needs to be completely surrounded by the parchment.



You cannot imagine the joy in heaven when Yidden simply come together; that is the parchment upon which the greatest Sefer Torah can be written.”⁸

Even many years after his passing, Reb Hillel’s name was repeated with awe and reverence in the colonies; stories were told and retold about his visits, and many families named their children after him, in gratitude for the indelible impact he had on them.⁹

Honored Citizen for Generations

In the days of the Tzemach Tzedek, a unique colony was established in White Russia, near Minsk, named Schedrin.¹⁰ As a testament to its uniqueness, a description was published about it in a Jewish newspaper during the lifetime of the Tzemach Tzedek.

The description was written by Chaim Yeshinovsky, who went on a journey criss-crossing all of Jewish Russia. When he arrived in Schedrin, he asked the people about the colony, and they told him its history: “We are farmers. When



Czar Nikolai's announcement about available lands was made public, our Rebbe, 'Reb Mendel Lubavitcher,' gathered us to this estate which he had purchased personally... Our Rebbe also built us a shul where we daven every morning and evening, and among us are those who learn Torah, Mishnah and Gemara."

The entire colony was considered the private property of the Tzemach Tzedek, who purchased it with the help of one of the wealthy Chassidim. Lots were divided and given to Jews who were willing to settle there and work the land, and it became a source of income for many families. Within several decades, thousands of Jews lived there.

This colony had a unique status. It was the only town in the

entire White Russia which did not contain a single non-Jewish resident. There were some temporary Shabbos-goys, but otherwise, it was a purely Yiddishe, Chassidische shtetl. "In this village," another article describes it, "they know nothing of the *shkotzim* who frighten Jewish children in all the other Jewish towns. It was said that Schedrin is, itself, Eretz Yisroel..." In Russia of those days, this brought a distinct disadvantage—market-fairs were held on Church holidays by non-Jewish entities, so the absence of non-Jews meant no market-fairs. Nonetheless, the town retained its nature.

Reb Zalman Shimon Dvorkin learned in Tomchei Temimim in Schedrin, and would describe the character of one of its inhabitants, Reb Itche Nochum the blacksmith, who was a learned Jew, knowledgeable in Chassidus, with profound *yiras shomayim*. In the winter, he would go to mikvah in a hole in the icy river. Reb Zalman Shimon said that he would spend hours watching Reb Itche Nochum fix metalware and horseshoes, while his lips constantly moved with words of Chassidus. When his children wanted him to move to America in his final years, the Frieddiker Rebbe said to them, "But who will remain there?!"

In later years, *maskilim* tried to open a school in Schedrin, and the Rebbe Rashab wrote an urgent letter to stop it. "Your land and your city are under the banner of the Rabbeim," the Rebbe Rashab reminded them. A city personally founded by the Tzemach Tzedek should not, *chas veshalom*, fall prey to the *maskilim*.

The town of Schedrin served another important purpose: Since the times of the Alter Rebbe, the Rabbeim and the Beis Harav lived under threat. As public figures, the government—sometimes the local government and sometimes the national government—would try to pressure them; sometimes they wanted the Rabbeim to support the *maskilim*, sometimes they wanted their children to serve in the army 'as an example for other Jews,' and so on. Being a prominent figure in Czarist Russia came at a cost.

To relieve some of the pressure, the Chassidim used Schedrin to promote the Tzemach Tzedek to the status of "Hereditary Honored Citizen."

The law stated that if one owned large properties and settled them with workers, he could become an "Honored Citizen" who was freed from taxes, exempt from the draft, and given several other privileges. Crucially, it also included the right to travel throughout the Russian empire (Yidden were usually confined to the "Pale of Settlement"), which would allow the Rabbeim to travel to Moscow and Petersburg on behalf of Russian Jewry.



מישא לעיפת, ובתנפשי נפשי מעט מעמל הדרך, אמרתי: מה טוב ומה נעים המקום הזה, ושלשה אנשים עומדים לפני, עכרים אתם אדוני הגידו נא לי מי אתם פה ומה לכם פה כי עיר שצדקת לא שמעתי בלתי היום, ויענו לי האנשים עובדי אדמה אנתו מעת יצאה הפקדה בחסדי אדונינו הקיסר ניקאל אי ע"ה לתת לאחיו ב"י אדמה לעבד בה ולמצוא מנוח לנפשו, אסף אותנו אדונינו הרב הגאון ר' מענדל על לובאוויצער ויתן לנו חסישור הזה שקנה במימנו כספו ויאמר ק"ל לכם אדמה קחו לכם איש איש חלק בארץ לעבד אדמה, חוקי ירכם והתאוו במלאכתכם והי יברך אתכם כמעשי ירכם, ונשמעה לדברי צדק אלה באנו הגה וכל איש מאתנו לקח שדה חלק לנהלה לו, ונעבד בה אנתנו נשנו ושמנו, והי השב והמשיב הריק שפעת ברכתו כמעשי ידיו אין מחסור לנו, גם בנה לנו הרב אדונינו בית תפלה ונהלל בה כוקר ועיב; גם תודתנו לא נעזבה מאתנו, ובין אנדונו נמצאים אנשים לופי תורה ויהלקי לנו ולבנו ידעת תורה משה גם משנה וסרא — בין אדוני נמצאים בעלי מלאכות חיישים סנדלרים וכל מעשי ידי עמן — לא כן אנתנו כשארי עובדי אדמה עת לעבד אדמה עת להתפלל עת ללמוד תורה — בקהלתנו לא יבוא המוכיח להכות לנו לכל גשחת יין, כי שנות י"ש לרפ"ה הוא לנו, הן ידענו אשר אבילה ושתיה יחוק הגוף והנפש, וכל המוסף יותר מדי אך למהר הוא ויוק הגוף והנפש, אנתנו לחנו במשקל נאכל ויין כמעורה נשתת וחסדי אלהינו לא נשכח, הן ידענו אכי אבותינו אברהם היה עובד אדמה, ויהו גם הוא סבנים אורחים וירושה הוא לנו מאכות אבותינו לעבוד אדמה ולדעת נכרות ברא יחד, ולעת שבת והוריה לו" וכעשני דבריהם אמרתי אין טוב בארץ כי אם לעבד אדמה ולראות ברכה כמעשה ידיו להיות שמה בהלקי, זה עשו וזה טוב.

(תחמשיך יבוא)

דברי היים יאשינאווסקיא תושב עיר באברויסק

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL

A DESCRIPTION OF A VISIT TO SCHEDRIN PUBLISHED IN THE JEWISH NEWSPAPER HAKARMEL IN 5622, DURING THE LIFETIME OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK.

So, wealthy Chassidim arranged for the purchase and settlement of Schedrin under the Tzemach Tzedek's name, allowing him and his descendants to receive this status—which remained in effect until the Communists took over.¹¹

He Doesn't Need Help From Others

Why were the Rabbeim so committed to the idea of agricultural colonies?

At a most basic level, it was a practical choice. Doing business in those days was very risky; in the modern era, there are insurance policies for disasters, protocols for careful investing, and the option of bankruptcy in case of failure. But 200 years ago, none of that was true. One could not know if a venture would be successful, and it was difficult to ascertain whether a potential investment was a scam or not. If someone fell into debt, he would often need to flee the country to avoid arrest or harassment.

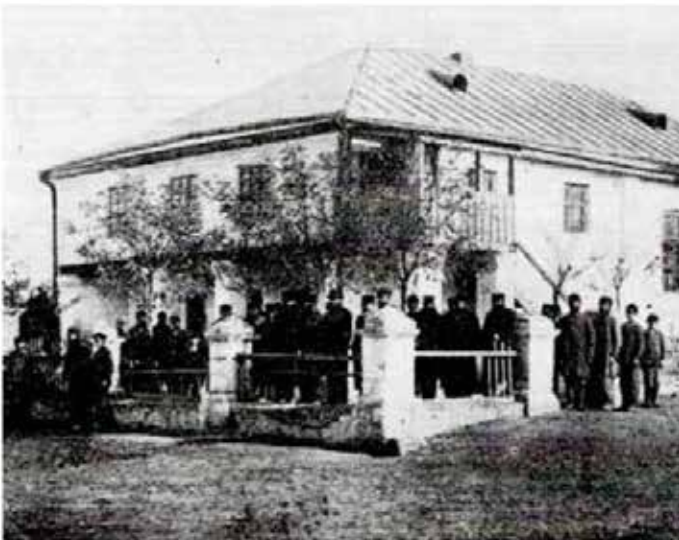
In his public letter, the Mittlerer Rebbe described the state of affairs in stark terms: “There are few options to earn a livelihood, and there are countless paupers everywhere, to the extent that the vast majority of people are wandering on distant journeys [in hope of earning a living]. This is all due to a lack of real jobs—many are accustomed from a young age to waste their time, and very few run stores and taverns. Very few are craftsmen, and those who have a sum of money, end up losing it [in failed business ventures].”

Working the land was, to an extent, more stable. You owned a piece of land, worked it, davened to Hashem for good weather, and that was it. There were fewer factors that could wreak havoc on your work. It would also lessen anti-semitism among government officials, who viewed the Jews negatively for their perceived focus on business.

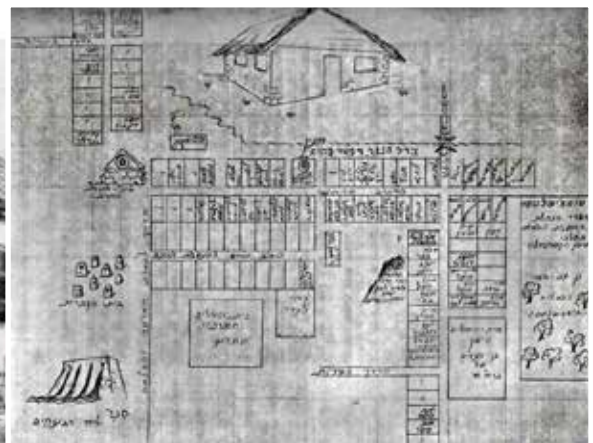
There was also an important spiritual aspect. When a person is involved in trade, his entire mind is consumed by it. He is constantly trying to imagine what could go wrong and how to resolve it. He is occupied with business trips that could go on for weeks and months. But owning a field—while the work was difficult—meant that a person's mind was more free to serve Hashem. After a long day at work, he could settle into the Beis Midrash and learn Torah, with nothing else to occupy his mind.

Another *ruchnius'diker* aspect was mentioned above. The Mittlerer Rebbe told Reb Hillel: “Imagine a *yishuvnik*, a farmer, standing in the field with his yarmulke and tzitzis, plowing the earth and davening to Hashem. He doesn't need help from other people to make a living; he makes a living by lifting his eyes to the heavens and feeling Hashem's presence.”

A person working the field sees Hashem in his life far more than someone involved in trade. When trading, you might assume that your salvation could come from having the right partner. But when working the soil, you are dependent on the weather—and there is no mistaking the hand of Hashem there.



THE SHUL IN YEFEH NAHAR.



A MAP OF THE COLONY OF NAHAR TOV DRAWN FROM MEMORY BY FORMER RESIDENT ISRAEL BETZER.



One Hundred Years of Colonies

For generations, the colonies preserved their Chassidisher character. Most of the residents were simple Jews who ended their learning at Bar Mitzvah, but nevertheless retained the Chabad *lachluchis* (heartfelt style) and considered themselves dedicated Chassidim of the Rebbe. There were always those among them—usually the *klei kodesh* (rabbis, teachers, etc.)—who kept an active connection to the Rabbeim in Lubavitch, even making the occasional journey there.

Someone who visited the colony of Nahar-Tov later described the davening there: “The shul was full of people; the peasants were dressed nicely, while the *klei kodesh* even wore kapotes. It was a noisy davening—they all davened like Yidden, they weren’t standing like *golems* who don’t ‘know what they are doing.’”

Shortly after the Rebbe Rashab officially accepted the *nesius* in 5654, he visited the colony of Romanovka. It had been many years since the Rebbe Maharash’s last visit, so the impending visit generated a lot of excitement. People came from all the surrounding colonies, and when the Rebbe Rashab’s carriage appeared, they unhitched the horses and

personally drew the wagon the last 20 kilometers into town. Accompanying the Rebbe Rashab was Reb Dovid Zvi (Radatz) Chein, who described later how broken the Rebbe was by the *kvod* he received and said: “I wish that I would feel the same *tzubruchenkeit* on Erev Yom Kippur and at Ne’ilah”.¹²

During the Rebbe Rashab’s *nesius*, Zionism began to spread. Messengers would go to towns and cities asking Jews to support the new *kibbutzim* in which Jews were working the land in Eretz Yisroel. When one such messenger arrived in Nahar-Tov, he was at first welcomed with open arms; as farmers themselves, the locals thought highly of the idea, and began making regular donations and attending his talks.

But then, a *chossid* happened to travel to Lubavitch, and the Rebbe Rashab heard about the new cause. A short time later, a letter came from the Rebbe explaining that the new movement encouraged the abandonment of Torah and Mitzvos, and would have an adverse influence on their young.

That put an end to the meetings and donations. The majority of the *kolonist’n* refused to associate with the messenger, and his efforts quickly died out. By his own description, the *kolonist’n*—despite their simplicity—were very committed to Torah, and saw the Rebbe as the person who would protect their children from the new ideologies.



SOME OF THE PAINTINGS BY ISSACHAR RYBACK WHO VISITED THE COLONIES IN 5686 AND PUBLISHED THEM IN HIS BOOK “ON THE JEWISH FIELDS OF THE UKRAINE.”

A New Frontier

For close to one hundred years, the colonies of Cherson—as well as Schedrin—continued to thrive and grow. But then, the brutal hand of the communist regime was extended upon them as well. Yiddishkeit was outlawed, the shuls were shut down, and in some instances, the Jews were chased off the land altogether. In the area of Cherson some new colonies were established for Jews, but Yiddishkeit was obviously not part of the picture.

Several decades later, the Frierdiker Rebbe saw an opportunity to establish a new colony—this time in Eretz Yisroel.¹³

In 5708, Zalman Shazar (later President of Israel) had a *yechidus* with the Frierdiker Rebbe on the evening before the United Nations vote on the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Yisroel. During the *Yechidus*, the Frierdiker Rebbe broached the topic of founding a Chabad village in Eretz Yisroel.

The idea of a Chabad village had been circulating among Chassidim in Eretz Yisroel for several years. At the time, the Chabad community in the Holy Land was small and scattered, and Chassidim believed that a centralized location would improve their physical and spiritual situation. The end of World War II added a sense of urgency as hundreds of Lubavitch families were stranded in displaced persons camps in Germany and Austria.

Ultimately, a location was found: an abandoned Arab village near Lod called Safiriyya. As the plans began taking shape, the Frierdiker Rebbe directed many to make their way to Eretz Yisroel. At the end of Nissan 5709, the Frierdiker Rebbe sent Rashag to Eretz Yisroel to survey the situation and assist in settling the refugees. Several weeks later, shortly after Lag B'omer, he was joined by Reb Avraham Pariz who brought a Sefer Torah from the Frierdiker Rebbe.

The Frierdiker Rebbe also sent a letter, containing the “charter” for Kfar Chabad:

“Baruch Hashem, Friday, Erev Shabbos Parshas *Ki Savo'u El Ha'aretz, V'shavs Ha'aretz Shabbos Lahashem,*

“As you settle in the Holy Land, you must contemplate and internalize the fact that Divine providence has brought you to the land *'asher einei Hashem Elokecha bah*, which the eyes of Hashem are upon, from the beginning of the year through its end, and you are now present in the palace of the King of kings, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, at every moment.

“This Sefer Torah should serve as a constant reminder to lead your lives along the path shown to us by the Rabbeim, to educate your children without compromises, and to spread

your light to the rest of the Jewish people, guiding them on the path to G-dliness: Torah study with fear of heaven and scrupulous fulfillment of the mitzvos. This should be done in a loving manner, stemming from *Ahavas Yisroel* and Chassidisher *middos*.

“May each of you be a light illuminating the current exile, until Hashem will redeem us.”¹⁴

The official inauguration of Kfar Chabad took place on Yud-Beis Tammuz 5709, at a grand farbrengen that included prominent officials, led by future Prime Minister Levi Eshkol.

The Agriculture

When the village was finally settled, the surrounding fields were raffled off and the Chassidim began to work the land.

Like the early Russian *kolonist'n*, the Chassidim in Kfar Chabad were city people; they had lived most of their lives in urban environments and had no experience whatsoever with agricultural work. But they nevertheless got to work and tried to learn.

The sight of long-bearded religious Jews toiling in the fields and raising animals went against the stereotypical image of religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel, and was often praised by government officials.

Because of this unique image, many government officials were willing to lend a hand. Some equipment was provided, and teachers were hired to show Chassidim the ropes. The wife of one prominent official spent many days in Kfar Chabad teaching the women how to plant vegetable gardens. Everyone got busy planting wheat, barley, corn and more.

To their consternation, the first year's harvest was very poor, and the second year wasn't much better. The next year, 5712, was *shmitah*, so the workers spent their days in shul—learning, davening, and farbrenging, hoping the coming year would yield something better.

Another challenge was bands of Arab marauders, who would sneak over the border from Jordan or Gaza, and kill, maim, and steal at will. Small villages located in middle of vast orchards and forests were prime targets.

Notwithstanding all the setbacks, the inhabitants persevered. Month after month, year after year, they slowly built up the town, and with the Rebbe's *brachos* they began to see success.

As a town founded upon the ideals of Chabad, the Rebbe held the spiritual state of Kfar Chabad as a primary concern.



“When the city was founded,” the Rebbe noted in a letter in 5712, “my father-in-law, the Rebbe said ‘*az di zach firt er alein*—he is personally managing this project,’ and therefore, all the affairs of Kfar Chabad need to be approached from the standpoint of his *ratzon*; it is no private matter.”¹⁵

The Rebbe viewed Kfar Chabad as much more than a private colony. The Rebbe emphasized that “*Ufaratzta*” in Eretz Yisroel must emanate from Kfar Chabad. In a *yechidus* with Reb Boruch Gopin, the Rebbe described it as “the *ir habirah*, the capital city.” There “*hert men uhn giluy Elokus*—one perceives a revelation of G-dliness.”

At the same time, the rural, agricultural nature of the village remained paramount. At one point, only half of the families in Kfar Chabad were involved in agriculture, and a proposal arose to move them to a new site, while Kfar Chabad would become a more “normal” community. The Rebbe dismissed the idea; “I hope and trust—and in my opinion, there is no other option—that the main occupation in Kfar Chabad include agriculture. Not as a secondary matter, but as a primary one. If there are families who—for whatever reason—are not suited for agriculture, there are surely enough families who are... They should make every effort to specifically engage in agriculture. Everything else should be supplementary to that.”¹⁶



During a Pesach farbrengen in the early years in America, the Frieddiker Rebbe was explaining the value of *horovanye*, difficult toil: “Chassidus believes in abilities that were developed by the person—not ones he was born with. Chassidus places the entire weight of one’s *avodah* on toiling with his

body and soul.”

To explain this idea, the Frieddiker Rebbe quoted a saying of the Chassidim of old that hearkened back to the image of the *yishuv'nik*, the simple Jew—like those of the colonies—who toiled for his livelihood with simple faith in Hashem:

“An old *yishuv'nik* is better than a young *iluy*.”¹⁷

1. Reshimos of the Frieddiker Rebbe.
2. Likkutei Dibburim vol. 3 p. 936.
3. Igros Kodesh Admur Hazaken p. 359.
4. See Derher Elul 5781.
5. Igros Kodesh Admur Haemtza'i p. 295.
6. The information in the previous three sections is based on “Girush Hakfarim B'Rusya,” Heichal Habaal Shem Tov Issue 13.
7. Sefer Hasichos 5704 p. 83.
8. Sefer Hasichos 5704 p. 148.
9. Many details about the colonies are collected in “Chassidus Chabad Umoshvos Cherson” by Shlomo Baradah.
10. Details about Schedrin were collected in “Admur HaTzemach Tzedek Rochesh Karka b'Shedrin” by Reb Yehoshua Mundshein.
11. Igros Kodesh Admur HaTzemach Tzedek p. 130.
12. Reshimas Hayoman pg. 252.
13. For more about Kfar Chabad, see Derher Tishrei 5779.
14. Ibid p. 167.
15. Igros Kodesh vol. 6 p. 257.
16. Igros Kodesh vol. 7 p. 72
17. Likkutei Dibburim vol. 3 p. 427



KFAR CHABAD IS FOUNDED ON THE ABANDONED ARAB VILLAGE OF SAFIRIYYA



CHASSIDIC FAMILIES TEND TO THE SOIL, 5710.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL