

LUMINARIES

Personalities
in the
Rebbe's Torah

By:
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לע"נ
מרת גאלדא מרים בת ר' חנניה ע"ה
שיפרין
נלב"ע י"א ניסן ה'תש"פ
תנ"צ'בה'

נדפס ע"י בנה
הרה"ת ר' אליהו חזקתו מרת
רבקה ומשפחתם שיחיו
שיפרין

The Maharal

Maharal and Chassidus:

Throughout history, our nation has been blessed with Gedolei Torah and Roshei Bnei Yisrael to guide us in every generation. They protected us and taught us the word of Hashem. Each *Nossi* was uniquely suited to his generation and its special mission.

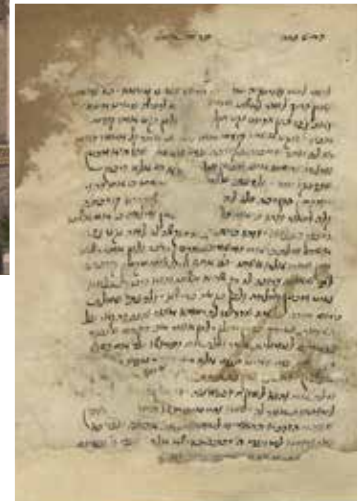
Some had a message that proved timeless, making an impression that is still with us today. Select few have had a profound influence on Chassidus and Chassidim.

One such *Nossi Yisrael* was the Maharal, scion of the royal house of Dovid Hamelech and - ancestor of the Alter Rebbe and the *Beis Harav*. The *Shalshelas Hayachas* in Hayom Yom begins the Yichus of the Rebbeim with the great Gaon – the Maharal of Prague, and then lists seven generations of descendants until the Alter Rebbe.¹

The Maharal's special connection to Chassidus can be seen in his Torah as well, which is a unique fusion of Kabbalah and Chakirah, teaching the esoteric part of Torah in a concealed way. The Rebbe also quotes Chassidim as saying that in Tanya, when the Alter Rebbe writes that it is based '*mipi sefarim umipi sofrim*', the *sefarim* in question



POSTCARD OF THE MAHARAL'S SHUL FROM THE PERIOD BEFORE THE WAR.



A 'DRUSH' ON PARSHAS EMOR IN THE MAHARAL'S HANDWRITING.

are the works of the Maharal and the Shelah.²

The Maharal's uncovering of *Primiyyus Hatorah* was not limited to his *seforim*. He supported the learning of Kabbalah and taught his students the secrets of the Torah. When Reb Eliyahu Baal Shem founded the first Yeshiva where the learning of *Pnimiyyus Hatorah* was officially part of the *seder*, he was attacked by those who opposed the study of Kabbalah and was driven out of Germany. The Maharal went to inspect the Yeshiva and was very impressed. The Maharal and his sons became supporters of Reb Eliyahu Baal Shem, who eventually moved his Yeshiva to Prague.³

While his generation was not ready for the *giluy* of Chassidus, the Maharal played an outside role in preparing the Jewish community as a whole and the Torah world in particular, for the upcoming Chassidus revolution.

Interestingly, another connection we find between the Maharal and Chassidus is the date of his passing – Chai Elul, 5369. Eighty-nine years later, the Baal Shem Tov was born, and forty-seven years after that, on the same auspicious day, the Maharal's great descendent, the Alter Rebbe, came into this world.

Becoming the Maharal

Rebbi Yehuda Livai was born in the year 5272 (1512) in the city of Posna (Posen). His father was an illustrious scholar named Reb Betzalel. The Maharal was a descendant of Reb Livoi Hazaken from Vermaiza (Worms), who was a descendent of Dovid Hamelech.⁴

The Maharal spent his formative years learning in the greatest Yeshivos of the time. From age 12 to 16, he learned in Premishla in the Yeshiva of Reb Yaakov Polak, founder of the Pilpul style of learning. After Reb Yaakov left Premishla, the Maharal set out on "*galus*" (wandering) for two years - visiting different Talmidei Chachomim and growing in learning, while hiding his own immense wisdom.

Following his years of Galus, the Maharal spent seven

years learning in Posna at the Yeshiva of Reb Yitzchok Kloiver, grandfather of the Maharshal, Reb Shlomo Luria. In Posna, the Maharal met the Maharshal, who was two years his junior, and with whom he would learn for the next decade.

After Reb Yitzchok's passing, The Maharal (age 26) and the Maharshal (age 24) traveled to Cracow to study in the Yeshiva there. There, they met the young Reb Moshe Isserlish (the Rama), who was just eighteen at the time, and they proceeded to learn together for the next three years. At that point, the Maharshal left Cracow, while the Maharal and the Rama stayed together for another two years.⁵

At age 32, the Maharal returned to Prague and married his long-waiting Kallah, Perel, daughter of Reb Shmuel Raich – a successful merchant from Prague. They had been engaged when she was a young girl of six, and the Maharal a boy of ten. Shmuel Raich supported the Maharal during his time in Yeshiva, keeping in touch with and waiting for the Maharal for the next twenty-plus years.

As a young Kallah, Perel knew that her Chosson was a great Talmid Chochom, and wanted to be able to keep up with him in learning. She studied with diligence, becoming a great Torah scholar in her own right. When she was 14, the Maharal prepared an exact seder of learning for her to follow in his absence. At that point, the Maharal felt she was too young to marry, and asked permission to go to Yeshiva for a few more years.

During the Maharal's time in Posna, Reb Shmuel Raich's business hit a rough spot, and he lost his entire fortune. He sadly wrote to the Maharal saying that he could no longer hold up his part of the deal – the *Nadan*, and if the Maharal wanted, the shidduch could be called off. The Maharal responded that he did not care if the family had money or not, and as long as Perel was willing to wait a bit longer for him to finish his learning in Cracow, he was fine continuing with the shidduch.

In the year 5303 (1543), war broke out in Bohemia (in which Prague was located), and Prague was overrun with soldiers and officers. At the time, Perel had opened a small store where she sold baked goods, among other items. With the meager income that her store provided, Perel supported her parents, and eventually also her husband.

One day, an officer appeared at the store and ordered a large amount of food. Since he had no money with him, he asked Perel if she would be able to give the goods to him on credit, and he would pay for them when he returned a few

days later. Perel explained that she was running out of the means to keep the shop open, and needed the funds. The soldier gave her a garment, telling her to keep it as collateral until his return. Should he not return, the garment would be hers to keep.

When the soldier did not return, the Maharal suggested to Perel that she check the garment for sewn-in diamonds and gold, since during wartime it was common practice for soldiers to hide their valuables in that way. Lo and behold, a small treasure was found, putting the Raich family back on their feet and allowing her father's newly flourishing business to support the Maharal's family from then on.⁶

Maharal of Prague

The city of Prague was one of the greatest Jewish centers of the time, with numerous prominent Shuls and Yeshivos. The Jewish quarter was filled with Jews of all types. The markets were run by sharp and upstanding shop owners and traders, the study halls with wise and studious *Talmidim* and *Rabbonim*. Additionally, there were several wealthy and powerful Jewish merchants and brokers who served as the Kahal's board members.

In a city the size of Prague, with the number of movers and shakers that the Jewish community produced, there were differing factions and opinions on a host of issues, and any leader who would take control of the city would need to be a strong unifying force.

The Maharal was the voice of Torah, he stood steadfast for Torah's values and stayed committed and dedicated to his community's welfare, both physical and spiritual.

From the Reshimos of the Frierdiker Rebbe, it seems that a few years after the Maharal got married, at age 35, he was appointed head of the Rabbonim in Prague. He seems to have held this position for the next decade at least.

The Maharal was a partner in two small businesses, and that is how he made his living. He donated the wages he received from the community to the upkeep of the Yeshiva that he had founded.

[It is interesting to note that in many histories of the Maharal, he is said to have held the position of Rov of Prague for a very short time. The rest of the time, they have him either as Rov in Nikelsburg (20 years) and Posna (twice, for several years each time), or just as a private citizen living in Prague. From Sefer Hazichronos, however, it is clear that he



THE FLAG OF REB SHLOMO MOLCHO.

SEAT OF THE MAHARAL IN THE ALTNEU SHUL IN PRAGUE.

was Rov in Prague for the majority of this time.]

As head of the Rabbonim, the Maharal led the Kehillah's religious affairs, answering Shailos, establishing a Kloiz (see below), running the Beis Din, and writing Teshuvos to fellow Rabbonim and Kehilos.

The Maharal ran the community from the famous Altneu Shul - also called the Maharal's Shul. Interestingly, this shul was visited by the Frieddiker Rebbe and the Rebbe Rashab. The Frieddiker Rebbe recounted that at that shul he saw a Sefer Torah written in the days of Ezra.⁷ The Rebbe mentioned the Shul as well, with regard to the flag hanging in the shul, the flag of *haKadosh* Reb Shlomo Molcho.⁸

Hanging on the wall in the Altneu shul is a list of *minhagim* and *Takanos* that the Maharal instituted for his Kehillah and for the Jewish people at large. The Maharal also founded the Chevra Kadisha of Prague, putting in place many *minhagim* and *Takanos* for them and forming the model that Chevra Kadishas follow to this day.

Throughout this time, the Mahral continued to write his many *seforim*, elucidating and clarifying various areas of *hashkafa* and Halacha, with his novel perspective and language.

The Maharal wrote and taught in a unique way, using different parts of Torah, and creating his own special "voice." The Maharal's Torah is steeped in Kabbalah, yet is written and explained in the language of Chakirah. On that note, it

is interesting to point out that the Rebbe explains that the Maharal's Pirush on Rashi, the Gur Aryeh, is based in *Sod*.⁹

The Maharal's Kloiz

Additionally, the Maharal founded his own Yeshiva called the "*Kloiz*". The name was meant to distinguish his Yeshiva from the growing Pilpul movement that had been taking root in Yeshivos across the region. The Maharal was adamantly opposed to the Pilpul style of learning and wrote against it quite sharply.

The style of Pilpul has the student discuss the sections of Gemara and topics in theoretical and often hypothetical ways. On the one hand, this allows the *Talmid* to exercise their analytical mind, but it often leads him on a path to nowhere, not bringing him to "*asukei shmata'sa aliba d'hilchesa*," finding the correct *psak halacha*.

The approach of Pilpul ("Chilukim") was propagated by Reb Yaakov Polak and spread throughout Yeshivos in the following generation, with many Talmidei Chachomim embracing the new style of learning. While numerous Gedolei Yisrael spoke against Pilpul, many supported it to some extent. In Kuntres Eitz HaChaim, the Rebbe Rashab quotes the Maharal and concurs with his opposition to Pilpul.

Maharal and the Kaisers

The Maharal's reputation spread across the Jewish community and beyond. He corresponded with some of the leading gentile minds of his time, including monarchs, priests, estate holders, and astronomers.

At the time, Prague was the seat of the 'Holy Roman Empire', and the Maharal made several visits to its castle, where he met the rulers and princes of his day. The Frieddiker Rebbe tells a beautiful story about how the Maharal assisted the princes Ferdinand and Maximilian and saved the Jewish community of Prague. In later years, we hear of the Maharal's meeting with the Emperor Rudolf, successor to Maximilian.

At one point the Maharal solved a complicated mathematical problem that had been bothering a certain prince. The prince was impressed and invited the Maharal to stay for a week, during which the Maharal opened his eyes about everything from the sciences and philosophies to the secret of the Jewish people's survival. This led to a friendship between the Maharal and the Jewish estate managers and both dukes and the royal family.

While the emperor and his family were decent and courteous, the Christian clergy pressured them into ordering the expulsion on Jews from Bohemia and Moravia.

Thanks to the Maharal's influence at court, and after sending an influential Jewish *askan* named Mordecai Tzemach to the pope in Rome, the decree was finally annulled.

It is interesting to note that the story took place in the years 5317 - 5320 (1557-1560), and the Maharal is described as head of the Rabbonim of Prague, at the age of 45.

Thirty years later, the eccentric and wise Kaiser Rudolf became emperor. He was a studious and curious man, and not very religious.

The Kaiser was friendly toward the Jewish community and a strong admirer of the Maharal. The emperor's door was always open to the Maharal, and they sat together for many hours, the Maharal sharing his wisdom with the enlightened king.

The Christian leadership was bothered by Rudolf's enlightenment and his relationship with the Maharal. They arranged for three cardinals to be sent by the pope to inspire the emperor to distance himself from the Maharal. Part of their plan was to create a public debate between the Maharal and the cardinals.

Knowing what the outcome would be, the emperor saw



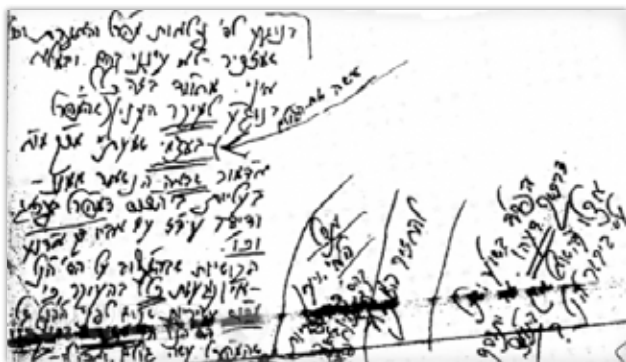
REAR OF THE THE ALTNEU SHUL, SHOWING RUNGS LEADING TO THE ATTIC WHERE THE REMAINS OF THE GOLEM ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN STORED.

this as a great opportunity to prove the Maharal's greatness compared with the backward church. He invited political leaders and influential academics from all over to witness the debate and made sure to have everything recorded by professional scribes.

The debate lasted ten days, in which the Maharal obliterated the arguments of his opponents. The loss was so crushing, that the cardinals tried stopping the transcripts from being made public. Happy to prove his point, the emperor refused and proceeded to publicize the entire polemic for all to see, causing much embarrassment to the clergy.

Seeing the danger this could cause the Jewish community and himself, the Maharal left Prague for three years, spending the 5352 (1592) in Posna. In his absence, his son Betzalel took his place, with instructions that, on certain complicated questions, he should confer with his mother, the learned Perel.

Speaking of the miracles associated with the Maharal, the Rebbe refers to a debate between the Maharal and the Kaiser, likely a reference to this story.



A HANDWRITTEN NOTE BY THE REBBE ABOUT THE MAHARAL'S CREATION OF THE GOLEM.

ובהנוגע לעיקר הענין (שהמהר"ל עשה את הגולם) - בעצמי שמעתי מכ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר שראה הנשאר ממנו - בעליית ביהכנ"ס [בית הכנסת] דמהר"ל בפראג. ודיבר עד ז' [על דבר זה] עם אביו כ"ק אדנ"ע [אדמו"ר נשמתו עדן] וכו

The Maharal even seems to have met Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler, two world-famous astronomers that Emperor Rudolf had brought to Prague. Additionally, his *talmidim*, the Tosfos Yom Tov and the Tzemach Dovid were also quite knowledgeable in these areas. The latter worked together with the famous astronomers and wrote Seforim about astronomy and Jewish History.

The Golem

It would be amiss to have a column on the Maharal without mentioning the Golem.

In a sicha on Chai Elul 5730, the Rebbe mentioned that in the days of the Maharal there were open miracles, and whenever it was necessary, things went in a supernatural way. As an example, the Rebbe brings the story of the debate. (See above) Perhaps another expression of the higher-than-nature we find in the Maharal is the famous Golem.

While there are many legends and stories about the Golem, most cannot be corroborated. Still, we know that the Golem did exist.

In a *ma'aneh* to someone who questioned the Golem's existence, the Rebbe wrote that we know that there definitely was a Golem, as the Frierdiker Rebbe went up to the attic of the Alteneu Shul and saw "its remains". The Rebbe also explained that even if the source of the stories (*Nifalos Hamaharal*) are fictional, it doesn't change the fact that for generations before the book was printed everyone (including non-Jews) knew

that the Maharal created a Golem.

The Golem was created through special Kabbalistic formulas to help guard and protect the Jewish people of Prague. Eventually, the Maharal decided he was no longer needed, so the Maharal had him interred in the attic of the Alteneu Shul. The Maharal ordered that no one be allowed in the attic and it has remained off-limits until today.

When the Frierdiker Rebbe was a child, he visited Prague with his father. The Frierdiker Rebbe bribed the *Shamash* of the Shul, and climbed a ladder to the attic where the Golem was located. When the Rebbe told the story in 5710, the Rebbe said that he had asked the Frierdiker Rebbe what he saw and didn't receive an answer.

The Rebbe Rashab scolded his son, and later told him that he had to do months of work to ensure that the Frierdiker Rebbe wouldn't be harmed.

The Rebbe mentioned the Maharal's miraculous nature in connection with the rescue of Rav Yitzchak Hutner, a distinguished Talmid Chochom who was very involved in the Torah of the Maharal. In the summer of 5730, Rav Hutner was on a plane that was hijacked by terrorists and was taken captive. The Rebbe invoked the Maharal's *zechus*, saying that those who occupy themselves with the Maharal's Torah (Rav Hutner) should be saved in his merit, in a way that is higher than nature. Rav Hutner and the other hostages were freed within a few days.

Takanaos And Minhagim Of The Maharal

The following is a quote from a *sicha* of the Frierdiker Rebbe:

"The Maharal of Prague was the great *Ilyu* (prodigy) of his time - a *Ge'on Hageonim* in both the revealed and esoteric parts of Torah, as well as Jewish philosophy. He was talented in Music (*baal chush in neginah*) and gifted with all types of knowledge (*baal kisharon*). He was a kind and pleasant person (*baal middos tovos*), and above all an amazing educator and mentor who ingrained *minhagei Yisrael* in *Bnei Yisrael*."¹⁰

The Frierdiker Rebbe related that in Lubavitch they were very insistent on following *minhagim*, especially *minhagim* of the great Tzadik, the Maharal. The *minhag* the Frierdiker Rebbe was referring to, was to light three candles over the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*: A *Teshuva Licht* for Shabbos Shuva, as well as a *Lebedige Licht* and *Neshama Licht* for Yom Kippur¹¹.

Additionally, in Sefer Hazichronos, the Frierdiker Rebbe mentions the *minhag* of reciting Parshas Haazinu before davening as a *Segulah* for clearing one's heart, and that saying it often is a good *segulah* for *parnassa* and long life.¹² Another *minhag* known from the Maharal's Shul was saying *Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos* twice on Erev Shabbos.¹³

The Maharal was also known for the special emphasis he put on the "Nusach" of davening, the tunes and melodies. The Maharal would appoint *Baalei Tefilah* who were earnest and devoted, and their heartfelt devotion could be felt in their singing.

The Frierdiker Rebbe recounted that one year, the Maharal felt that the Yidden needed better tunes to daven with. He performed a *she'eilas chalom*, and received our current Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Nusach from on high.

The Nusach is referred to as the Skarobover *niggunim* and have spread across the Jewish world. The Tzemach Tzedek explained that these tunes granted from *Shomayim* at the behest of the Maharal are the same as those used in the Beis Hamikdash.¹⁴

On the topic of the Yomim Noraim, the Rebbe writes in Reshimas Hayoman, that in Lubavitch there was a Shofar that had belonged to the Maharal, which apparently was very long. At some point, a *sedek* (crack) appeared, and it could no longer be used for *Tekios*.¹⁵

The Tzemach Tzedek said that the Chinuch, guidance, and *minhagim* that the Maharal established within the Jewish people are even greater than the Seforim he wrote — comparing it to the difference between writing and engraving. The latter is greater since it can never be erased.¹⁶

Lesson from The Maharal

Another famous *minhag* begun by the Maharal was to give *kasha* to birds in honor of Shabbos Shirah.

The Frierdiker Rebbe describes that the Maharal instituted that every year the Shabbos of Beshalach – teachers would bring the children to the Shul's courtyard for Shabbos Shirah.

The Maharal would tell them that this was the parsha of *Krias Yam Suf*, and had the teachers tell the children the miracles that happened at *Krias Yam Suf* and how the children plucked fruit from the trees that grew out of the walls of water and fed the singing birds. He would then instruct that the children be given *kasha* with which to feed the chickens and birds.



THE TZIYON OF THE MAHARAL AND HIS WIFE PERL IN PRAGUE. NOTE THE SYMBOL OF A LION IN THE TOP CENTER OF THE MATZEVA.

The Maharal would then *bentch* the children and their parents that they merit to grow up *L'Torah, l'chupa, ul'maasim tovim*.¹⁷

The Rebbe explains that we learn a very powerful message from the Maharal in this story. The Rebbe contrasts the Maharal's greatness and the importance of his Torah study and his time, and the fact that the Maharal created a special *minhag* just to get the children excited about *Krias Yam Suf*. The Rebbe explains that herein lies the greatness of the Maharal – he did not just stay in his room working on his *seforim*, but rather went out to the courtyard with all the children and established a beautiful and simple *minhag* – displaying the true role of a Jewish leader, to impress upon even small children the beauty, joy, and importance of Yiddishkeit. In addition, he would give the precious children a *bracha* that they grow up as honest Jews.¹⁸ **T**

IN HIS TORAH

”כאשר יצאו ישראל ממצרים קבלו הטוב בעצם, עד שהיו ראויים בעצמם להיות בני חורין מצד מעלתם, וזאת המעלה עצמית לישראל, שהם ראויים להיות בני חורין מצד עצם מעלתם. ודבר מקרי לא יבטל דבר עצמי כלל, כי עדיין על ישראל המעלה הזאת, שהם בני חורין בעצם, עם השעבוד במקרה.”

”כי אחר שהוציא הקב”ה את ישראל ממצרים, ונתן אותם בני חורין, ולא עוד אלא אף מלכים, שנאמר ”ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש”, זה השם הוא לישראל בעצם, והמעלה והחשיבות שיש בזה לא נתבטל בגלותם, שהוא במקרה. ולפיכך אומרים חכמי ישראל ”כל ישראל בני מלכים הם” אף בגלותם.”

גבורות ה' פרק ס"א

There is a famous concept explained by the Maharal that the Rebbe spoke about many times: Yetzias Mitzrayim changed the Jewish people's essence – once Hashem freed the Yidden from Mitzrayim they could never again be enslaved. Their essence is now that of Bnei Chorin – free people, and even the darkest of circumstances cannot take that away.

The Maharal connects this idea to “Kol Yisrael Bnei Melochim Heim”, all Yidden are referred to as kings and princes – proving that even in galus – Yidden are royalty and impervious to repression and slavery.

The Rebbe explains that the difference between Galus Mitzrayim and the later galuyos was that Mitzrayim was the essence of negativity and therefore the complete antithesis to Yidden and Yiddishkeit. The other galuyos, on the other hand, were off-shoots and expressions of evil, not evil itself, and therefore they can't fully counter the essence of the Jew.

This is why in our current galus our minds and hearts can be tainted and our bodies can chas v'shalom be harmed, but our neshama – our etzem cannot be touched.¹⁹

1. Hayom Yom, Pg. 4. Mentioned in the Sicha of Chai Elul 5730.

2. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Tavo, Chai Elul 5730; Toras Menachem vol. 61, p. 212.

3. Sefer Hazichronos part 2.

4. Legend has it that he was born on the first night of Pesach, stopping a blood-libel with his birth.

5. Sefer Hazichronos 2.83. In many of the works on the Maharal, historians believe that he learned on his own because he seldom

quotes anyone as his teachers. In Sefer Hazichronos it is clear otherwise.

6. Sefer Hazichronos. Other sources vary in the details of this account.

7. Chol Hamoed Pesach 5691 – day 2.

8. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Tzav, Shushan Purim 5714; Toras Menachem vol. 11, p. 161.

9. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Chayei Sarah 5732; Toras Menachem vol. 67, p. 218.

10. Sicha 13 Shevat, Beshalach, 5702.

11. Sicha Yom Beis D'Rosh Hashanah 5704.

12. Sefer Hazichronos, Chapter 29.

13. Igros Kodesh 3, p. 76 (22 Shevat 5709).

14. Leil Shviei Shel Pesach 5698.

15. Reshimas Hayoman – Rosh Hashana 5695.

16. Sicha 13 Shevat, Beshalach, 5702.

17. Ibid.

18. Sicha Motzei Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 11 Shevat 5721; Toras Menachem vol. 30, p. 52.

19. Likkutei Sichos vol. 32, Chag Hapesach (Seif 8).